Snake In The Grass

by Jaspre_Rose

Summary

Severus Snape reveals his true loyalties. This fic is mainly set at the safe house he and Harry are sent to and shows the journey from hated enemies to... well, something quite different from that. Mature rating for later chapters.

Spoilers: it will eventually contain potions-induced male pregnancy.
It was almost midnight and a stormy evening at that, but of course it was. His life couldn't resemble a Muggle horror film any more if he tried. He had no one but himself to blame, too, and that needed.

Severus pulled his cloak closer around him and closed the gates to the school behind him, scowling at the rain hitting him in the face. It was truly much too cold and miserable out for September. On any other night, he would be in the middle of preparing for the next day before earning a broken sleep in a cold, hard bed. This night, however, was a Wednesday and Wednesdays always meant a meeting with the bane of his existence. Surprisingly not Harry Potter, though the boy does cause enough trouble to be in second place for the title.

No, Severus was meeting with the Dark Lord that evening. If ever anyone deserved the honor of being called the bane of Severus’s existence, it was that monstrous and revolting creature he once pledged his loyalty to. How could he have been so stupid? Any Slytherin of worth never pledges himself to be used by another. Never mind the fact that he’d been pressured into service by his new friends at the time, the same friends he cannot even look at without sneering now. Gods, his past was one horrible choice after another, wasn’t it?

Severus shook himself out of his heated thoughts and tried to focus on something more calming so he didn’t end up splinching himself while apparating. It was no surprise he settled on Lily. When Severus arrived in front of his destination, he took a moment to ground himself, to remember what she’d said to him two days before the Dark Lord had found her. He hadn’t seen her for so very long and then he had only showed up to tell her he had sentenced them all to death. There had been tears in his eyes. He had been so miserable, he hadn’t cared that Potter had watched him cry.

"Severus, I know you didn’t know it was Harry he wanted. There’s nothing else I can say about that. Just promise me something. Please."

"Anything."

"If anything ever happens to James or me, I want you to promise me you will do everything in your power to keep Harry safe. No matter what. If I must die, I will accept it with a smile if it means he will still be alive when it’s over. Promise me. Please, Severus. Promise me this. He is my son."

He does this for her son. The little twerp. Right. Good. Game face on.

"You’re on time," Lucius announced minutes later, breaking into his thoughts. Severus looked up and nodded sharply. When Lucius turned and began walking away, Severus finally fell into step with the man.

"How are you and your wife?"

"Narcissa has been talking about wanting another child."

Severus’s brows rose. “Is that really the wisest decision right now?”

“She is insistent.”

“Have you given in to her demand?”

“You know I have never been able to tell her no for too long.”
“You have, then.”

“I didn’t necessarily say that.”

“But you hinted at such.” Severus scrubbed his forehead and muttered, “this all will blow up at any moment, Lucius.”

“I am aware… and there are ears everywhere around here,” Lucius murmured and then raised his voice back to a normal level. “Maybe you can come ’round the house tomorrow and try to talk some sense into her. The Dark Lord will want all of his servants to be in peak condition for the battle.”

“Not that he needs any of us,” Severus replied confidentially, though perhaps louder than he needed. After all, around here, someone was always listening. Best make sure they didn't strain themselves eavesdropping. “He could singlehandedly win the coming battle without breaking a sweat.”

“I appreciate your confidence, Severus,” Voldemort hissed, surprising Severus and Lucius with his sudden presence. “Won’t you join me in my chambers?”

Lucius bowed to Voldemort and slowly backed away while Severus inclined his head once and apprehensively followed behind the evil bastard. What he’d been sent to do tonight was more than risky. It was nearly suicidal. One false step could end him and the entire mission. Naturally, though, he only appeared the picture of calm. He’d had years to practice hiding any sign of emotion at all and he was relatively confident his mask wouldn’t fail now. It couldn’t.

“I have missed you, my lord,” Severus remarked respectfully, kneeling in front of the ornately carved high back chair the sadist was sitting in. “I am honored to be in your presence this evening.”

“You may stand,” Voldemort returned. “I have been told you have formulated a plan to get the boy here without compromising your position at Hogwarts.”

“I have indeed, my lord.”

“Tell me.”

Severus sneakily pulled in a deep breath and nodded. “I realize you may not like it to begin with, my lord, but there are many benefits to the plan of which I am about to speak.”

“Do not speak in riddles, Severus.”

“I propose we approach the boy’s family.”

“They are Muggles,” Voldemort said slowly, disgust etched deeply into his every facial feature. “Have you forgotten such information? No, Severus, I refuse.”

“I have not forgotten, my lord. I have spent a very long time thinking about this plan, going over it repeatedly. It is foolproof. We approach the boy’s family and tell them we are distant relatives of some sort to the boy. The uncle will not even ask for proof, because he is a stupid Muggle. From what I have gathered, if we were tell him that if he brings Potter directly to us that he will never again have to deal with the brat, he will be exultant. He will jump at the opportunity with no thought. That fat oaf would be more than delighted to rid himself of that pestilence once and for all. Indeed, he may even enjoy watching Potter die.”

“I count you as my most loyal servant, Severus, so why would you bring me a useless plan?”
Voldemort turned away from Severus, nose in the air. “It’s disgusting. I will not deign to think of it any longer.”

“My Lord, think of the positives.”

“I am clearly repulsed. Why do you continue speaking?”

“For your sake, my lord. They are necessary to draw him in. Potter may not like his family, but he would never suspect them to be loyal to your cause to eradicate him from this earth. Once in their care, he will have dropped his guard completely.”

“I’m going to wretch. I begin to doubt you, faithful servant.”

“I remain unchanged. However, how easy would it be? Potter would be shocked if his own relatives brought him to you to be finished off, once and for all, as he deserves. He may feel too shocked and betrayed to have the wits to try and fight you at all. He will be at your total mercy.”

Voldemort curled his lip in a pleased sort of way, no matter that it left his audience feeling a little sick. The image was comparable to that of a dead cat trying to scare the wits out of humankind with a ghostly hiss issuing forth from its cold lips.

Well, no. It was worse.

“I begin to see the brilliance of your plan, my dear Severus. You must return to that hellhole of a school now, but we will plan his demise tomorrow night.”

Severus bowed his head. “Yes, my lord.”

Still bowing his head reverentially, Severus backed up to the door and smoothly entered the hallway. With the door finally closed behind him, Severus shuddered and looked around for Lucius. He had to walk down three corridors before he found him.

“How did it go?” Lucius asked, interested, though a bit coldly. Severus surreptitiously glanced around the room and noticed a few distorted shadows by the window. Nodding minutely, he chose his words carefully.

“It went exactly as I had hoped. The Dark Lord could not be more pleased with my plan.”

Lucius sat up. “He truly went for your ridiculous plan?”

“Since our lord has chosen to go through with this plan, Lucius, I would not call it ridiculous unless you wish him to hear what you think of his plans… for that is what it is now.”

“I would not. You make a very good point. I spoke before I thought and I apologize.”

“It is quite all right,” Severus replied and again glanced over to the windows, pretending to gaze outside rather than trying to sense who was over there. Giving it up, he turned his eyes back to his friend. “I must be getting back to Hogwarts before the rain worsens further. When would be a good time for me to speak with your wife?”

“If you can manage to pull yourself away from your classes,” Lucius said sarcastically, sporting a thoroughly amused look only Severus could see, “I’m sure we both would enjoy your company for lunch.”

“I believe I may be able to get away. That is, of course, if none of my students manage to kill
themselves and I’m being questioned by the Ministry.”

Lucius chuckled. “It’s a good thing you deal mostly with our little Slytherins, then, isn’t it?”

“Yes. I’ll have no worries from them.” Severus paused and cleared his throat. “Anything to pass on to your son?”

“A letter from his mother and a word of advice from me.” Lucius pulled a thick letter and a scrap of paper from his cloak pocket and pushed it across the table. Severus promptly scooped them up and tucked them into his inner jacket pocket for safekeeping. “Also, tell him I wish to meet with him this weekend for lunch. I’ll be taking him to London so clear that with the school tomorrow if you would.”

“It would be my pleasure.”

Severus and Lucius gave each other one last look before parting ways, Lucius strolling to the liquor cabinet on the other side of the room and Severus going out the French doors to apparate. When he was once more standing in front of Hogwarts, his shoulders stooped and his steps slowed. Sinking to his knees in the mud, he felt like he was being suffocated. It was a long time before he could make himself stand, Lily’s words repeating over and over his head.

“…promise me you will do everything in your power to keep Harry safe… keep Harry safe… keep Harry safe…”
“You have no idea what you’re talking about, Ron,” Harry huffed. “Just shut up.”

“What is wrong with you? You know he’s a traitor and you’re sticking up for him? Have you lost your mind?”

“I don’t like him just as much as you, Ron, but that doesn’t mean I think he’s a “traitor” or anything. A git, yes, but not that. He’s proved it many times.”

Ron looked baffled. “I just don’t get you anymore, Harry. The guy I used to know wouldn’t be defending Snape!”

“I just know things you don’t!” Harry yelled back. "Okay?"

“Okay? Oh, so you’re hiding things from us now?? What’s next? Are you-”

“Honestly, you two,” Hermione interrupted calmly. “Professor Snape isn’t a traitor, Ron. You’ve seen more than enough proof of that. I’m getting tired of hearing this same argument all the time. And you, Harry. I don’t know why you’re still arguing with him. You know he’s not going to change his mind just because we say anything.”

“Hermione,” Ron exclaimed, sounding wounded.

“Ronald,” Hermione mock replied in a similar tone. “Harry, you’d be wise to change the subject now and just keep doing it whenever Ron brings this up again. Now, you two should be studying. We have an exam in Transfiguration on Monday.”

“It’s only Friday, Hermione.”

“Do not argue with me, Ron, or I’ll write your mother. She said she wanted to know every time you started slacking on your schoolwork and I gave my word to inform her every time you did.”

“Mr. Potter,” Minerva said from the portrait hole. “The headmaster would like to speak with you.”

“Telling you more stuff you’ll keep a secret from us?” Ron asked snarkily. Harry rolled his eyes and hurried from the room. Once in the hallway, he didn’t see Minerva anywhere and frowned to himself. Finally making it to the head office, Harry calmed himself with a deep breath, distractedly headed up the moving stairs, and knocked.

“Come in, Harry.”

“Hey, Professor.”

“Why did you invite him?” Severus asked. “He doesn’t need to be here.”
“He does, Severus,” Albus said without further explanation. “Please sit, Harry. Tea?”

“Yes, please.”

“Severus?” Albus quirked a smile when Severus merely snorted disdainfully. “Coffee, then?”

When Harry was finally comfortable in his chair and drinks had been distributed, Severus stared at Albus for a long and silent moment before narrowing his eyes in irritation. Albus looked up and nodded.

“My apologies, Severus. I was lost in my thoughts. You fed him the idea of using Harry’s family?”

Harry scoffed. “Family.”

“Harry, please,” Albus spoke calmly. "Severus?"

Severus looked up to the ceiling, quite obviously cursing to himself.

“Of course I did,” he finally answered. “Two days ago, as we discussed. We finalised plans yesterday night.”

“And you are prepared to expose yourself as a spy? The plans we made would leave no doubt in Tom’s mind as to your loyalty.”

“I am prepared, Albus.”

Harry looked at Severus and noticed for the first time how tense he seemed. He was really going through with this?

Damn. He almost felt bad for him.

“Good. Then we need to prepare the safe house. I am the only one who knows of its existence. You can be assured of your continued safety.”

“How comforting,” Severus drawled.

“Severus.”

Harry fidgeted and looked between Severus and Albus a few times. “Where’s he going? You never really said anything about that, Professor Dumbledore. You only said I would learn about it soon enough.”

Severus slowly turned his suspicious gaze from Harry and pinned them on Albus’s own suddenly not-as-twinkly eyes. If Harry hadn't known better, he'd swear Albus looked like a child caught with its hand in the cookie jar.

“Albus?” Severus asked tightly. Harry frowned worriedly at Severus, wondering what he was thinking. “No, surely not. Albus, explain.”

“My dear boy,” Albus began and then frowned himself. “Severus, I’ve changed my plans since we last—”

“If you suggest what I think you’re about to, I will strangle you with my bare hands. I swear it on my own mother’s grave.”

Harry gasped in shock, sincerely wanting to know what he was missing. Would someone just tell
him what that was?

“It won’t be as bad as you think,” Albus soothed. “You may think of it as a welcome vacation.”

Harry cleared his throat. “Erm, I’m still here. Can I know what’s going on?”

“I will not. You cannot make me,” Severus growled after a long moment of staring at Harry contemptuously. “Do not ask this of me. Haven’t I done enough already, Albus? Do I not deserve some peace?”

“Severus, you’re being childish. You will do this. All of our futures depend upon it. There are many of Tom’s unmarked followers here at-”

“Yes, I am aware of that,” Severus spoke slowly. “What I am not aware of is why I have to take him.”

“What?” Harry demanded, clueless, but he was getting a very bad feeling in the pit of his stomach.

“With the news that you’ve left the school, his unmarked followers will not hesitate to go after Harry and we cannot follow him every second of every day, Severus. Someone would eventually miss something, which might put Harry in danger. If Harry’s no longer at the school, Tom will begin using his time and energy searching for him instead of preparing for the inevitable battle. It gives us an advantage.”

Oh, no. Albus was trying to send him with Severus to the safe house! He wouldn’t survive even a week… Oh, he was so screwed.

“And if the Dark Lord discovers Potter’s location?” Severus drawled, looking pleased when Albus looked slightly annoyed by his tone. “What, then?”

“I will know instantly. The wards at the new location are as strong as Hogwarts.”

“But what about school?” Harry grimaced and looked between Severus and Albus. “And no disrespect meant, sir, but hasn’t Voldemort passed by Hogwarts’s wards before? A couple of times, actually…”

“Not without my immediate knowledge.”

“Huh. So Quirrell?” Harry asked thoughtfully. “You knew about that, right?”

“Tom didn’t have a corporeal body at the time, Harry. Trust me, you will be safe.”

“Erm, sorry to interrupt again, but-”

“For Merlin’s sake, Potter, shut up. Albus will know if the Dark Lord finds us. I will be there to stave off his violence until further help arrives. He will be only too eager to face a “traitor” before going after you. It will give you time to escape.”

“I forbid either of you engaging him in the unlikely event he discovers your location.”

“If he shows up, would you rather we sat with our wands up our-”

“Severus!” Albus barked, looking surreptitiously at Harry to check for any signs of shock. Meanwhile, Harry was desperately trying not to laugh. The urge to do so was making his throat feel tight from exhaustion and he couldn’t suppress the yawn that finally slipped free of his mouth. “In the highly unlikely event that Tom discovers your location and further shatters the wards, you are
to activate the emergency port keys I will personally be making for you. You will instantly be transported to the edge of the Forbidden Forest.”

“Why can’t we just go to Grimmauld Place? No one knows where it’s at, sir,” Harry pointed out logically. “Well, besides the Order and it’s mine now… Not that anyone would care if we stayed there.”

Albus shifted uncomfortably and Severus rolled his eyes.

“Because we think there’s a mole in the Order and no one can know where I am or I’ll die,” Severus huffed. “Albus will be the only one who knows of our location.”

Albus nodded sadly and then frowned at Harry when he yawned again. He shouldn’t have tried so hard not to laugh earlier.

“Oh. I didn’t even know. So if Voldemort finds us?”

Severus hissed at the use of Voldemort’s name and Albus gave the older man a stern look. “I will know if you happen to be in danger, Harry.”

“Oh.” Harry yawned again and wiped his watery eyes. “When do we leave and what am I supposed to do about school?”

“Perhaps you should rest for now, Harry. I need to talk with Severus some more and I’m sure you need some time to mentally prepare. I will find you when it’s time. Together, Severus and I will formulate a plan. You go rest.”

“But, sir, I’m not tired.”

“Then go spend some time with your friends before you leave. You will undoubtedly miss them dearly during your absence and will regret not spending as much time as possible with them before you leave.”


“I also advise you to pack for a long absence,” Albus continued, much more quietly. “Clothing, books, whatever will entertain you. Also pack all of your schoolwork. I’m sorry your safe house isn’t very youth-friendly in its entertainment.”

Against his will, an image flashed into Harry’s mind and he ducked out of the office without saying another word, though he started laughing quite raucously once the door closed. Harry didn’t hear Severus’s slightly amused snicker, but he did hear Albus asking what he’d said that was so funny. It only seemed to cause even more laughter to bubble up from his belly. By the time he’d returned back to Gryffindor Tower, he’d almost forgotten about having to leave. Naturally, though, Hermione had to drag up painful, new memories.

“Harry, what did Professor Dumbledore want to talk about? Was it about the war?”

He frowned. “Yeah. I’ve gotta tell you guys something and it won’t be easy…”

“He’s gay.”

“No. Professor-” He let that thought catch back up to him and snapped into focus. “What?”

“You were gonna say you’re gay, right?” Ron continued. “You seemed nervous and that’s the
“No, that’s not what I.” Harry sighed. “You think I’m gay, too.”

“Obviously he doesn’t,” Hermione soothed. “He’s just being stupid. You know that’s just my personal opinion. Were you and Professor Dumbledore talking about the war, Harry? What’s going on? You look like you just got some really bad news.”

Harry shook his head. “I did. Would you guys mind a walk by the lake? I think we need to speak in private.”

Hermione and Ron shared a troubled look and then nodded. Ron and Harry parted ways with Hermione so they could dispose of their book bags and pick up some heavy jackets. Once together again, they hurried outside and started walking towards the lake.

“So spill. What’s going on?” Hermione asked. “The look on your face is really worrying me. You look like you’re about to cry.”

“I’m getting sent to a safe house.”

“What?” Ron bellowed, outraged. “Why? What’s wrong with here? This is the safest place in the world!”

“Except for all those times Voldemort’s snuck in here, you mean,” Harry muttered. “Snape fed some idea to Voldemort about using my family to bring me to him.”

“I told you he was-”

“Shut up, Ron,” Harry said, more than agitated. “Dumbledore told him to do it. Point is, Voldemort’s going to find out where Snape’s true loyalties lie when his Death Eaters are ambushed by the Order so he’s going into hiding.”

“What does this have to do with you, Harry?” Hermione pushed, looking like she might already know exactly what was going on.

“Some of his followers are here. They’re just not old enough to be marked yet so Snape can’t stay here.”

“And?” Ron said this time. “What about you?”

“Dumbledore’s sending us to the same safe house. Snape, so no one will kill him. Me, for that reason, too, and to keep Voldemort busy looking for me instead of making battle plans.”

“Do you think Voldemort will do that?” Hermione asked sceptically and Ron nodded in agreement. “It seems a little farfetched, Harry.”

“Yeah, don’t you think he’ll just send everyone else to look for you while planning what he needs to?”

“I do, but I trust Dumbledore. He usually seems to know what Voldemort’s thinking so I’m just going to go along with it.”

Ron grimaced. “Oh.”

“Well, that’s wise. Right?” Hermione said after a while. “If anyone should know how to predict some of his movements, it would be Professor Dumbledore.”
Harry sighed. “Yeah.”

“Do you know when you’re getting sent off with the git, mate?”

“No and I have no idea how long I’ll be gone, but I need to pack for a long trip.”

“Oh, no…” Hermione said and started tearing up. “Really, Harry?”

“Yeah,” Harry repeated dully. “I should probably go do that, I guess.”

“We’ll help you. I know a few spells that will shrink things down and others that make things weightless. It helps whenever I’m packing up at the end of the school year. You’ll be able to pack more books and whatnot.”

Harry glumly nodded.

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Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy bowed low, their chests brushing the floor, and both hoped the Dark Lord would not take his anger out on them, as well.

“What of you, Malfoys?” Voldemort hissed. “Are you traitors, as well? You had always seemed especially close to that back-stabbing monster.”

“Never, My Lord,” they replied in tandem. Lucius continued, “I would die for you, My Lord, as would my wife. Given the chance, I would delight in killing him slowly.”

“Unless I find him first, Lucius,” Narcissa immediately spoke. “I placed my whole family’s trust in him, My Lord, and this is how he repays us all. I feel disgraced to even know his name.”

Silence—well, except for the pained cries and groans of the injured Death Eaters—reigned in the quiet room. Finally, a gravely hum sounded and footsteps moved away from them. Voldemort sat in his chair, studied the prostrate forms of the Malfoys, and then happily looked at his faithful healing themselves. Narcissa peeked up at the Dark Lord and then around the room. Not one of them offered to heal anyone else. Not even spouses.

That—more than their vehement assurances of faithfulness—seemed to lighten his mood a fraction. Just when Lucius and Narcissa began to worry for their safety and were aching from their positions, they heard a clap and each tamped down the urge to jump.

“Come,” Voldemort bade in an oily voice. “Come close, all of you. I see things clearly now. Malfoys, stop kneeling. It doesn’t befit my truly most faithful companions.”

“We are honoured to be called such, My Lord,” Lucius said reverently. He was ignored.

“I was admittedly blinded by Severus Snape’s duplicitous actions. I laid my trust in him, as did you, Narcissa, and you, Lucius, and see where it got us. No more will that happen. Lucius, Narcissa, from now on you will be monitoring not only every single move your fellow followers make, but each other’s moves. Your loyalty to me is greater than your loyalty to each as husband and wife, correct?”

“Yes, My Lord,” they replied again in tandem.

“And can I trust you are telling me the truth?” he asked curiously. “Should I put you both to the test?”
“Yes, My Lord. Anything.”

Voldemort smiled. “Narcissa, call your son. Lucius, stand in front of me and give me your wand.”

Narcissa hurried from the room, swallowing thickly and trying not to sick herself, and soon found Draco packing his bags. Oh, why had he come home for a weekend visit?

“Draco,” she croaked and he turned cautiously. “He’s called for you.”

He nodded once and silently followed her from the room. Back in Narcissa’s once beautiful ballroom, she saw Lucius standing wandless in front of the Dark Lord. Draco quickly surpassed his mother and knelt in front of the Dark Lord, never once giving his father a look.

“My Lord,” Draco said worshipfully. “My mother informs me you have again called upon me. I am honoured to be in your presence.”

“Merely being in my presence?” Voldemort asked, sounding amused. “Are you really?”

“This is no mere honour, My Lord. This is the greatest of honours.” Draco paused a very brief moment and lowered his head. “Please forgive me for arguing. I was not thinking.”

“No. Narcissa, I am absolutely charmed by your young son. What is his name again?”

“Draco, My Lord.”

“Draco,” Voldemort repeated. “Come stand to your father’s left side. I am testing your mother’s loyalties. It should be good fun.” Narcissa emotionlessly watched her son obey without delay. She met the Dark Lord’s eyes and waited for instruction. “Woman.”

“Yes, My Lord?”

“Perform the Cruciatus Curse on your husband.”

Narcissa raised her wand. “Crucio.”

Lucius screamed and dropped to his knees. Moments passed and Narcissa wondered if the Dark Lord intended for her to stop. She looked through her husband’s agonised expression and focused on the seconds slipping by. Much longer…

“Stop, Narcissa,” Voldemort demanded and Narcissa stopped at once. “I am impressed by your obedience. Most would have stopped when they began to worry about their partner’s sanity.”

“My Lord, you did not tell me to stop. If it was your wish for me to torture him to insanity, I would have.”

“Excellent,” he replied sibilantly. “Draco, do you think we should test your father?”

“It is hardly necessary, My Lord. My father speaks of nothing but you and how proud he is to be doing your good work. His favoured form of punishment when I step out of line is the Cruciatus Curse and it is because of you, My Lord.”

The Dark Lord smiled and looked at Draco.

“And why is that, young Draco?”

“In October 1987, you told him nothing works better as punishment than the Cruciatus Curse. He
has always remembered and has told me the story many times.”

“I see. I wouldn’t want to harm my precious Narcissa, either. Very good point, Draco. Lucius, perform the Cruciatius Curse on your son.”

“Yes, My Lord. Crucio.”

Though outwardly calm, Narcissa felt horror course through her as Draco silently fell to his knees and clenched his jaw. Lucius had a small smile on his face, something the Dark Lord noticed immediately.

“Stop, Lucius,” he said moments later. “You have proved yourself and your son is telling the truth, I see. Did I truly tell you this was the best form of punishment?”

“Yes, My Lord. In October of 1987. The next day, Draco broke his mother’s favourite vase. It was the first time I performed the Cruciatius Curse on him.”

“I do not recall informing you of this, but I appreciate your dedication.” Voldemort turned his attention to the others in the room. “Many of you could learn from Lucius’s dedication and loyalty. He is so faithful, he still remembers and practices things I told him many years ago. Very good, Lucius. I am pleased with you.”

“Thank you, My Lord.”

Draco slowly stood, pulled in a deep breath, and bowed his head to the Dark Lord. He nodded back and gestured for him to walk away. Narcissa forced herself to keep her hands and eyes from Draco as he came to stand beside her.

“Come, Lucius. I would like your company. Narcissa, attend your son. I need my followers in top form and I do believe he broke his wrist when he hit the floor.”

Narcissa bowed herself out of the room, dragging Draco with her, and spared a glance to her husband before the door slammed shut.

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Ron grit his teeth and tossed down the newspaper. He glared at the offensive article, unable to believe that pestilence had found out Harry’d gone in the night- just last night!- and had time to write up a rubbish article about it in time for today’s edition.

“Harry Potter, Boy-Who-Ran… Away With Professor! by Rita Skeeter”

“Ron, stop reading it,” Hermione gently commanded. “It’ll only make you mad.”

“Oh, I’m madder than hell, Hermione. How did she know he’d gone? And what is this bollocks about? Harry wouldn’t run away, especially with Snape of all people!”

“Lower your voice, Ron. Everyone will hear.”

“Let ‘em. This woman’s saying Harry ran off with Snape and she’s making it seem like they’re, you know, having sex together! Harry’s not gay and even if he was, Snape would be the last guy he’d let touch him.”

Hermione quietly cast Muffliato (a spell created by Severus Snape himself) and leaned forward once the spell had taken effect, ensuring they could speak openly without being overheard.
“I understand everything you’ve said, Ron, but you heard what Professor Dumbledore said. It would be best if we don’t acknowledge the article. Acknowledging it and not being able to defend Harry’s absence will only make people fear that Harry’s given up his destiny. Right?” Ron started to argue again, but she held up a hand. “I don’t like it any more than you do, but Professor Dumbledore is right. If people begin to think Harry’s run away, more people might join Lord Voldemort out of fear for their lives and the more people he gets, the weaker we become.”

“I know that,” Ron huffed. “I just hate this… and that stupid cover story about him finishing his schooling with a friend in Romania—home schooling of all things!—is just flimsy. Why, all of the sudden, would Harry decide he’s gonna take off and stay with Charlie? That, more than Snape’s disappearance at exactly the same time, should’ve sparked the gay rumours.”

“Really, Ron?” Hermione sighed and rubbed her forehead. “We’ve no choice in this. He’s gone, Professor Dumbledore has already given an official statement for Harry’s whereabouts, and there’s nothing we can do about it except go along with it.”

“Yeah, I guess… Be risky to go against Dumbledore’s story now, huh?”

Hermione nodded.

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Enough was enough.

Draco Malfoy stepped out of the shadows of his common room, purpose in his eyes, hand tight on his wand. He silently watched the group of seventh year girls sitting on the couch. They were all oblivious to his presence, that much was obvious.

“I agree with you,” one was saying. “He’s ugly as sin, but I’d bet he’s packing a nice dick in those tight trousers of his. Have you ever looked when he was leaning over? Just hangs and…”

“Mhmm. And from the rumours, it’s little wonder why he always targeted Potter. If that shite’s true, they’ve been shaggin’ for months now and they did need to pretend things hadn’t changed.”

“Yeah, well, their acting sucked. I always suspected they were together.”

“You did not.”

“Did, too.”

“Is it bad I’m jealous? All that power, intelligence, age…” The girl fanned herself and rearranged her legs underneath her. “I mean, if the thought is hot enough to help me, you know, at night, imagine what Potter’s experiencing right now.”

“Fucking hell, you bitch. Am I the only one that needs a shower now?”

A couple of the girls laughed and Draco clenched his jaw. Severus was now a known traitor, but he was still his godfather and he refused to idly stand by while he was defamed. No, he wouldn’t listen to this bullshit any longer.

“Who do you think usually does what? I see Professor Snape—”

Draco strolled up, interrupting the girl’s words and purposefully letting his wand dangle. They all gave him serious looks and he cocked a fair brow.
“You all should be ashamed you’d even for a moment believe he’s run off with fucking Potter, as if that waste of life is worthy of a Slytherin. If I ever hear you discussing him in such a way ever again, I will be most displeased. You do not want that, I assure you.”

The girls nodded, looking terrified, and he looked between them all for a few moments before walking off. Seemed news of his new allegiance with Lord Voldemort travelled fast. He wondered who was to blame. Probably Crabbe and Goyle, the idiots he was forced to constantly be around.

In his dorm room, his personal house elf was waiting with a silver tray in hand. He suspiciously glanced around the room, took the letter from his parents, and stared at the elf. The thing handed over the other item on the tray- a note- and silently waited.

Draco,
Please come to my offices at once. Professor McGonagall will be waiting to escort you up.
Professor Dumbledore

“Fine. Leave my presence.”

The elf popped away and Draco tucked his letter into his pocket. Best get this meeting out of the way. It wouldn’t do, after all, to keep the old man waiting long.

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“I simply cannot believe this, Filius,” Pomona quietly said, again looking around to make sure they weren’t being listened to. “That story Albus fed us about Harry Potter finishing his schooling with Charlie Weasley is an absolute load of rubbish. I’d wager my entire pay from this year that young Harry’s with Severus right this very moment.”

“As would I,” Filius said gravely. “The boy is of an age that his libido and sexual preferences would be well-established and I’ve never known him to give any of the Weasley children a stray look. Albus’s story doesn’t add up. What drew Harry there? Certainly isn’t Charlie Weasley. I’m almost certain the boy’s never met him and we all know he’s told Minerva he wanted to look into Auror training following the end of his education at Hogwarts.”

“Indeed!” she readily agreed. “And did you notice how Albus was much too quick to point in another direction when people began asking about Harry and yet he made no mention of Severus’s disappearance? No, surely they are together.”

“I believe they are, as well,” Septima whispered, having snuck up behind them. Filius and Pomona jumped and looked at her. “It is true. Everything in me is saying Severus is with that boy this very moment and I have been thinking about it. What if their very public hatred of one another was simply an act to throw people off their trail?”

“Do you really think so?” Filius asked a bit too loudly. “No, surely not, Septima.”

“Surely so, Filius. I don’t believe they ran off spur of the moment. It isn’t Severus’s style. No, I think they planned this. Have been planning this for a very long time.”

“But Severus wouldn’t have a dalliance with a student, no matter the school laws. It doesn’t make sense, but we all still believe he left with Harry. How?”
“That’s it!” Pomona exclaimed. “He wouldn’t have a dalliance with a student… which is why they ran.” Septima nodded. “Perhaps he couldn’t fight the attraction any longer.”

“My thoughts exactly.”

“It would make sense,” Filius agreed. “And there was that article in today’s paper.”

“Oh, yes.” Pomona eyed the both of them. “You saw that, too?”

Septima sniffed. “Of course I did. That flea can get anywhere and hear anything. I’ve no doubts she embellished a few points, but-”

“Yes,” Filius hissed, straightening. “Skeeter must have somehow overheard them planning to run and waited to submit her story for the day we finally noticed they’d gone. It explains why there’s no explanation for his absence, why we all feel deep down that the two are together, and how Skeeter was able to write up an article so quickly. After all, they were both at dinner last night and no one can write up such a long article in one night.”

“Exactly.”

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“Albus, this is getting ridiculous. I just heard a staff member discussing the “real reason” Severus and Harry disappeared at the same time. He even claimed he had proof, reciting a number of times Severus had personally told him how much he enjoyed his almost nightly “detentions” with Harry.”

“People will talk, Minerva.”

She arched a brow. “He was discussing the matter with half a dozen Gryffindors and at least twenty avid Slytherins.”

Albus shrugged ever so slightly, sat back in his chair, and gestured for Minerva to sit. She did, looking sour, and he shook his head.

“Minnie, you mustn’t pay attention to gossips. I’m sure Argus didn’t mean to make his stories sound so provocative.”

“You knew.” She drew in a deep breath and then sharply pushed it out. ”No, I shouldn’t be surprised, but I am.”

“It is my job to know. Now, no more talk of this. I need you to collect Harry’s schoolwork and I must be off to a meeting with Remus and company. Would you please have all of his work here by evening’s end?”

“Of course, Albus, as you wish.”
Twelve Days Later

Severus groaned for at least the twentieth time that morning. Flinching, Harry waited for the next complaint to come, as it always did.

“Do you have to wear that outfit again, Potter? One, you were wearing it yesterday and it is most likely very dirty by this point. Two, it makes you look like a flamboyant and possibly colour-blind pillow biter. Do you like having that image ingrained in my mind?”

Harry grit his teeth and calmly looked up from his book. Severus’s sneer grew when Harry bestowed a beatific smile on him.

“You don’t like my outfit?”

“No,” Severus said flatly. “No, I do not.”

“I have a suggestion that may help the both of us, then. Would you like to hear it, sir?”

“If it ensures I never see that outfit again, yes.”

“Well… if you don’t like my outfit… and you don’t ever want to see it again,” Harry said slowly, looking thoughtful, and paused. His next words came out as sweetly as he could force them. “Then close your eyes.” He tacked on an impertinent, “Sir” on the end just to piss him off.

Severus growled low in his throat. “You irritating monster, I don’t like being stuck here with you, either, but intentionally provoking each other will accomplish nothing.”

Harry just looked at him like he was stupid for a moment. “You started it, Snape.”

“You clearly heard my opinion of that outfit yesterday. That you are wearing it again today tells me you’re doing it to start a fight. Stop acting like a child and face facts. We are stuck here until further notice and don’t have the luxury of fighting now. I swear, you’re just like your father. No, you’re a perfect amalgamation of your father and his little lapdog, Black. Ready to pick fights and act childish, no respect for-”

“I am nothing like my father,” Harry spat.

“No,” Severus agreed. “I suppose you’re not. You’re worse.”

“There are worse things I could be or do, Snape, such as being an embittered old git that nobody trusts or likes. There are even worse things I will deal with you accusing me of being, but do not liken me to my father,” Harry said quietly, disdain clearly written on his face. “And do not call me a child.”

“You think me the embittered old git?” Severus laid his book down and steepled his fingers. “Your father and Black were the reasons I became this way. You may thank them for that if you don’t survive this war.”

“I knew it! You don’t want Voldemort to lose, do you?”
“Do not say his name and think, you stupid boy!” Severus snarled. “I could have given you to the Dark Lord many times over if I wanted him to succeed. It is because I want him to fail that we- the both of us, Potter- are here in the first place! Keep your mouth shut and use whatever vestiges of intelligent thought remain in your head before speaking. I have Albus’s trust and that is all I require, boy.”

Harry got up and swept out of the room. In the past nearly two weeks, they’d had that argument approximately seven and a half times. It always started and ended the same, i.e. Severus started insulting him, his father, and godfather and ended with Severus yelling at him for getting them locked up in an underground safe house in the first place. Which, by the way, is wrong. It was Severus’s decisions, not his, to show his true loyalty to Voldemort.

Today had been strange, though. For the first time ever, Severus had veered into Voldemort territory… and blamed their current imprisonment on the both of them.

Shaking his head in confusion, Harry entered the only bedroom in the place and sank onto one of the tiny beds. He had no idea who created this safe house, but they didn’t really think about it well. Granted, usually people sharing a safe house would be relatively friendly (nobody would think about having to house a man such as Severus Snape with anyone else under the sun), but one bedroom? And these beds were ridiculous! They were so tiny, cold, and hard.

Harry groaned and miserably stretched out on his designated piece of rock. How did Severus deal with sleeping in his bed? Narrowing his eyes, Harry reached out a foot and managed to toe the other bed in the cramped room.

It was soft!

Harry shot up on his bed and reached over to press harder on the bed with two hands. A few shoves later, it dawned on him that maybe the other man had used a simple cushioning charm. Feeling like the simpleton Severus always accuses him of being, Harry cast a cushioning charm on his own bed and flushed in irritation. He’d been suffering for nothing! Of course there’d be a magical solution for the bed and of course somebody wouldn’t have mentioned it to him.

Git.

Eventually, a loud rumble pulled Harry from a light doze. Realising he’d missed lunch first because of their argument and then later because of his sulking, Harry rubbed his belly and silently made his way to the kitchen. Upon reaching the safe house that first day, Severus had been horrified to find they had to cook for themselves. Harry hadn’t really cared. At least this way he could eat the food he cooked instead of watching everyone else eat it.

Severus had burnt his baked potato and charred both of their steaks, though Harry is still unclear how that last happened since he’d only been out of the kitchen maybe five minutes and returned to find two pieces of charcoal in Severus’s hands. Seeing the disaster the kitchen had so quickly become, Harry had promptly and forcefully kicked Severus out, saying he’d worry about cooking for the duration of their stay if Severus could promise he wouldn’t constantly criticise his meals.

Severus said he’d rather starve. Harry realised he meant it, too. He’d been living on toast and an assortment of beverages since that night and sure enough, when Harry entered the kitchen, there he sat with a piece of half-eaten toast and a cup of tea.

Ignoring the other man’s presence, Harry set about boiling a few skinned potatoes and frying the chicken he’d set out that morning. Severus continued munching on his toast, but that suited Harry just fine. As long as he was out of the way and not criticising his every move, Harry could deal
with sharing the same room. It got lonely down there, after all, and any company (even the surly professor’s) was better than nothing. When the potatoes were soft, Harry drained them and set them in a large bowl. After quickly checking the chicken and flipping them over, Harry pulled out some milk, butter, and pepper and set to work making mashed potatoes.

After stirring the potatoes once more just to be sure he’d mixed everything, Harry put a warming charm on them and shifted his whole attention to the chicken. Homemade fried chicken was the best with a cornmeal, sugar, and pepper batter... slightly sweet crunchy outside and yummy, erm, chickeny inside.

“You’re salivating on your poultry.”

Harry gave Severus a strange look a short moment before cracking an amused smile that lit up his eyes. Unable to help himself, a snort escaped him.

“That has to be the funniest thing I’ve ever heard you say, sir.”

Severus looked annoyed and merely took another bite of his toast. Surveying the slice of bread as surreptitiously as he could, Harry noted Severus was getting adventurous. Today’s dinner had butter and some of Harry’s cinnamon-sugar on it. Ha. He knew he’d like it. Casually flipping a piece of chicken, Harry peeked at Severus again.

Wasn’t he hungry? It didn’t matter to him if he ate or not, really. More for him. It was just... it was obvious he didn’t know how to cook- which, by the way, was the most hilarious and backwards thing Harry’s ever heard. What kind of potions master as skilled as Severus didn’t know how to cook?

Frowning abruptly, Harry tried to remember where he was going with that thought. Oh, yeah. It was obvious he didn’t know how to cook. It was just as obvious that Severus was getting burnt out on toast - oh, ha ha - so why didn’t he just give in and eat some of his food? It wasn't like he was poisoning it or anything. For Merlin’s sake, he was eating it, too!

“If you dawdle about much longer, won’t you burn your poultry?”

“Huh? Oh!” Fanning away the smoke caused by a small piece of chicken that was much too crispy now, Harry saved the rest of the chicken and put it on a plate. “I, er, made extra in case you wanted to maybe eat actual food. You can just disregard that tiny piece of really crispy chicken... Unless that’s how you like it.”

Severus’s stomach chose that moment to make itself known and Harry lifted both brows. Clearly, the toast wasn’t as filling as he’d like to pretend it was. Obviously. Severus pressed his lips in a thin line and shook his head.

“I will survive without the food you burned tonight.” Harry almost smirked at that. Still touchy, wasn’t he? “Perhaps another piece of toast will-”

“Oh, for the love of Merlin, Snape! I’m not going to poison you or think less of you if you want to eat the food I made. Not everyone can cook, you know!”

“I am perfectly content with my toast. Do not mistakenly believe forcing your pigswill on me would be “helping” me with anything, Potter.”

Did he just go out of his way to irritate him needlessly? In rapidly building frustration, Harry grabbed a cooler piece of chicken from the first batch and held it in front of Severus’s face.

Severus smacked Harry’s hand away. “Get that out of my face.”

“No. Take a bite,” Harry said, a little angrier. Severus tried turning his head, but Harry followed with the chicken and smiled triumphantly when Severus’s stomach growled loudly. “Take a bite, Snape. I’m tired of seeing you act like a petulant child!”

“I never a-”

Harry shoved the small piece of chicken into Severus’s mouth and forcefully pressed both hands over his lips, having to lean against the older man for leverage and struggle with him for a few moments. He didn’t even worry about the spit and scrape marks he had on his hand from so roughly forcing food into Severus’s mouth. He was too busy to.

“Chew it.” Severus didn’t move a muscle. He merely kept glaring at Harry, his arms awkwardly pressed backwards by Harry’s chest. Harry didn’t even think he was breathing now. “Chew it, Snape!” When Severus still didn’t move, Harry narrowed his eyes. “You’re acting as stubborn as Sirius. He wouldn’t have-”

Severus had already begun chewing when Harry said Sirius’s name. There was no way in hell he’d allow Harry to compare himself to one of the men he hates more than James Potter and Harry used that knowledge to his full advantage. When he’d finished chewing and had swallowed, Harry removed his hands and looked down expectantly. Severus shrugged dismissively.

“You need cooking lessons. That was appalling.” Severus narrowed his eyes and spoke through clenched teeth. “Now get off my lap before I break you in half, boy.”

Harry looked down in horror, saw his groin pressed tightly against Severus’s lower abdomen, and jumped up like his arse was on fire. How the hell did he manage to do that? Shaking his head to clear his thoughts away, he crossed his arms over his chest.

“I, er, I think you liked the chicken. Admit it, sir.”

“I’ve had much better. Your poultry leaves much to be desired. It’s cold and bland. It also left a metallic taste in my mouth.”

“I’m sure,” Harry scoffed.

“That insipid batter only serves to mask the true flavour of the meat.”

Harry smirked amusedly. “I daresay you’d like to continue so by all means…”

“It is hardly worth the effort you went through, Potter. I shall stick with my toast and be done with this entire conversation.”

“Would you like to try the mashed potatoes, too? You never know. I may need your creative criticism. Is the chicken really that detestable?”

“Yes.”

“Oh. Well, I suppose I’ll just have to throw it out, then. What a shame. I really thought you might like some hot food tonight.”
“My toast is plenty hot.”

Harry sighed. “But toast can’t really best a good old-fashioned home-cooked meal, can it?”

“This isn’t our home and you only made greasy poultry and unseasoned tubers. Neither belong in any proper meal.”

“Did you just refer to a potato as a tuber merely to annoy me?”

“Yes.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “They’re seasoned, you know.”

“I don’t care. You eat that… assemblage of unsavoury victuals and leave me in peace.”

“I’m tired of fighting you about this.”

Harry spun around to glare at his food for several minutes while Severus smugly returned to his tepid tea and cold toast. Just as he was getting up to put his dishes in the sink, Harry turned back around with two plates of steaming food, placed one in front of Severus, and sat across from him with the other plate.

“I’m not eating this slop.”

“You will.”

“You are delusional if you believe I would deign to eat any of it. Besides, I’ve no idea where your grubby little hands have been today.”

Harry shrugged, began eating his food, and didn’t react when Severus pushed the plate away. The fact that the man was still sitting down meant his iron will was cracking. Yes, he would be eating well tonight… and soon, if his protesting stomach had anything to say about it.

“It’s delicious. Damn, I’ve really outdone myself on these potatoes. Sure you don’t want some?”

“Absolutely positive.”

“Then can I have yours? I’m gonna want some more.”

“No, you may not, you little glutton. It is my plate whether I choose to consume it or not. Should you desire a second serving of what you claim is potatoes, you may happily get off your arse and get them from the counter.”

“But if you’re not going to eat them, I’ll just end up scraping it all into the trash. I’m just saving myself some work, really.”

With his eyes glued to Harry’s, Severus picked up his fork, licked the mountain of potatoes he scooped up, and plunged the utensil back into the middle of the pile. He even swirled the fork around a few times to make sure he got it stirred in completely. How unexpectedly childish of the man. It was actually amusing.

“Still want them, Potter? I just contaminated them with my spittle.”

“I don’t care about spit and yes, I do want them. Look.” Harry held up his plate, pointing at the empty space where his potatoes once were. “I’m already out. Give me yours.”
“No.”
“But-”

Severus, looking as calm as ever, shoved his index and middle finger into the potatoes and wiggled them around. Harry, his mouth full of chewed-up chicken, felt his jaw drop open in surprise.

“Still want them?” Severus asked dryly. He looked pleased with himself.

“Why did you just do that?” Harry paused barely a second and eyed the potatoes. “Yes. Let me have them. Hope your fingers are clean.”

“I am not giving you my potatoes.”

“Then you may as well eat them.” Harry stood up and scooped more potatoes onto his plate. When he turned back around, he noticed a small amount of Severus’s potatoes had disappeared. “Do you at least want something to drink?”

“Cold tea.”

“You already have cold tea,” Harry said patiently. “Something else?”

“A frothing glass of spiced mead, then.”

Harry huffed and stabbed a piece of chicken with his fork. Severus was really getting on his nerves now.

“All we have is tea, coffee, juice, and your smuggled liquor. You know that. Coffee?”

Severus narrowed his eyes. “How do you know about my liquor?”

“You’re not bothering to hide the smell before coming to bed. Unless, of course, you always smell like alcohol before bed. Is it a cologne or something?” Severus didn’t answer him and Harry sighed quietly. “I’m going to make some coffee. If you’re nicer than usual, I’ll let you have some of the pie I made to go with it.”

Severus merely gave him one jerky nod, but did not otherwise respond. Harry shook his head and began eating his second plate after starting the coffee, congratulating himself on not laughing when he’d called Severus “nice” in a roundabout way. That was like saying Albus Dumbledore was a frickin’ sex god or Vincent Crabbe was an intelligent and sexy kind of guy (which, um, eww).

“Could you just give up already? I don’t care if you eat my food and I’m not going to go around gossiping about it. I just don’t care. Eat before you waste away.” Severus’s lip curled, but Harry held up a hand before the man could speak, something he’d seen Hermione do countless times.

“No, don’t, Professor. I know you’re hungry. Eat or don’t, it’s your choice. I just thought I’d let you know it isn’t a sin to find food appealing every once in a while and that no one could blame you for wanting to eat it, especially since you weren’t the one that had to labour over everything. Take advantage of that.”
Two minutes later, after Harry had shifted his gaze to his own plate, Severus took a small bite of his chicken and refused to look in Harry’s direction at all. Harry chose not to comment upon it, sure it would incite Severus enough to never again eat anything he made. A few more minutes after that, Harry silently placed some coffee and a slice of pumpkin cream cheese pie in front of Severus before serving himself the same.

When Severus had finished everything but his coffee, Harry collected the dishes and started washing them up in the sink the Muggle way.

“Lavabit,” Severus finally spoke. The washcloth in Harry’s hand pulled away and began washing the frying pan on its own. Harry looked at Severus curiously. “It’s a simple household spell, Potter. I’m not surprised you’ve never learned it, though.”

“I didn’t have access to spell books growing up, sir. How was I to know of that?”

“It’s simple Latin.”

“And I obviously know a lot of that,” Harry remarked, sitting at the table again.

“Quite, actually. Most incantations, whether they be spells, curses, jinxes, hexes, or charms, are some form of Latin.”

“I guess.”

Severus downed the last of his coffee, levitated the mug to the sink, and walked to the door. Pausing briefly, he addressed the doorjamb.

“Your pie wasn’t as repulsive as it appeared.”

Harry smiled widely at the empty space where Severus was just standing.

“You’re welcome.”

Maybe now the man wouldn’t be so grouchy.

Chapter End Notes

The chapters will start being longer from now on!
Three nights after convincing Severus to eat, Harry stepped out of the shower and pulled in a deep breath in an effort to keep awake a while longer. He was so sleepy and couldn’t wait to climb into his soft, warm bed. Smiling, Harry quickly pulled on some pajama bottoms and hung his towel up to dry.

No matter how many times Severus snapped at him about drying charms, sopping towels dripping on the floor, and possibly broken necks, Harry would keep doing what he wanted. Towels always felt softer after a good air dry and not even he was clumsy enough to trip and die on a water puddle so he knew Severus wouldn’t.

Harry stumbled down the short hallway to the bedroom, pulled off his glasses just in case, and walked in. If that man was in any state of undress, it would be better if he was blind when he realized it. To his surprise, though, Severus was already in bed, stretched out on his back with his hands under his head and his legs crossed at the ankles.

He was fast asleep! Harry looked to the clock and furrowed his brows. It was only ten o’clock. Tentatively wandering over, Harry studied him closely, looking for any obvious signs of death.

“Stared your fill yet, Potter?”

Harry almost jumped out of his skin. He quickly stepped back moments before Severus cracked open one eye.

“Sorry, sir. Just making sure you’re still alive. Erm, it’s only ten. Are you going to bed?”

“Since I am currently lying supine in my bed, I would say the answer is obvious.”

“Oh. Right.”

“Stop gawking at me and extinguish the lights if you are finished.”

Harry shook his head, waved his wand to put out the lights, and climbed into his bed. Why was Severus going to bed so early? Was he getting sick? No, on second thought, he didn’t think so. He’d seemed fine all day.

Wait a moment.

“Oh… I get it. You’ve run out of alcohol, haven’t you?”

“I appreciate your pathetic attempt at mockery, but I have not emptied any bottle yet. I am merely ready to sleep. Shut up.”

Harry stared out into the black room for a long moment. “Do you have bottles that magically refill themselves, then?”

“I am attempting to find a measly eight hours of peace from you, boy,” Severus said, sounding harassed. "Why are you so determined to prevent my quest for unconsciousness?”

“I was just curious.”

“Stop.”
Harry turned to face where the wall should be, his back to Severus. Then…

“Seriously, why are you in bed already?” Harry twisted around the other way, his lower body still facing the wall. “Usually you spend another hour in the kitchen drinking. I hear you come in.”

“Because I desire sleep at an earlier hour tonight,” Severus tiredly grumbled, already halfway there. “Don’t make me use a gagging charm to silence you. I will.”

“Gagging charm?” Harry asked interestedly, sitting up in bed.

“Aren’t you tired?” Severus hissed, consciousness taking hold of him once more. “Or is this just another way you’re trying to get under my skin?”

“Sorry, sir.”

“Shut up.”

Severus shifted in his bed and Harry vaguely wondered how he was laying now. Flipping over onto his stomach, Harry made himself more comfortable and started to doze lightly. He was startled awake when Severus cursed loudly.


“Now I cannot sleep. Thank you very much, you annoying brat.”

“It’s not my fault you’re acting weird.” Severus growled something unintelligible and started riffling through his bedside table. Harry leaned up on his elbows and faced the general direction of the other man’s bed. “Need a light?”

“I am more than able to procure a light on my own should I have need of it. However, I know what I am looking for by feel alone.”

What was he searching for? Harry knew Severus’s wand was under his pillow and- though Merlin only knows why- a dagger was under the mattress. All of his books were in the living room…. What did he keep in his bedside drawers that he could possibly need in the dark? Better yet, what did he need to help him get to sleep, since he obviously wasn’t going anywhere? Harry’s face twisted up in dawning horror.

“Oh, God, please say he’s not going to wank… He’d better nip that in the bud right now. If that man was going to wank to get to sleep, he’d do it in the shower like he did! He was just a bloody pervert if he thought Harry was going to lay in the bed next to his and simply listen to him without saying anything.

“Erm, sir, you’re not going to… uh, what exactly are you looking for over there?”

All movement abruptly ceased on Severus’s side of the room. Moments later, wand-light lit up the room; Severus had a repulsed sneer on his lips.

“Certainly not whatever your depraved young mind is thinking. I was looking for a sleeping potion. Have you been moving my things about?”

Harry sighed in relief. “No, I haven’t.”

“Hmm.” Severus gracefully climbed out of his bed and left the room, taking the light with him.
When he returned, he placed a half-empty vial on his bedside table and settled down on his bed. “Nox.”

“Goodnight, sir.”

“Shut up.”

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Early the next morning, Harry groggily rolled out of bed and trudged to the bathroom, never once opening his eyes. Without a thought, he walked into the bathroom and caught sight of Severus stepping out of the shower.

“Oh, God!” Harry yelled, immediately covering his eyes and trying to walk backwards.

“Potter! What the hell?”

“I thought you were still in bed! Oh, God, my eyes.”

“Get out,” Severus growled dangerously.

Spinning, Harry dropped his hands and ran for (his life) the door. He headed back to the bedroom to gather some clothes and ducked into the spacious closet to change. It had happened again! This was at least the sixth time since coming here that Harry had caught Severus naked.

Dammit! Harry scrubbed his eyes and pulled in a deep breath. Why couldn’t he remember to knock first?! Better yet, why couldn’t Severus remember to lock the bathroom door?

Harry finished dressing in no time at all and headed to the kitchen to make breakfast. Surely a hot breakfast on such a chilly morning would be apology enough. He really didn’t want to acknowledge the incident further than that.

When Severus finally joined him in the kitchen, Harry placed a plate of food in front of him and prepared him a mug of hot coffee, made the way Harry had noticed Severus liked it, oddly similar to the way he took his own coffee. Sitting down and studying Severus’s impassive face a moment, Harry decided it was safe to speak.

“I hope you like scrambled eggs.”

“They are eggs. Any way is acceptable, though I’m sure you’ve destroyed them somehow.”

That probably meant he liked them. Indeed, Severus took a large bite of the fluffy eggs when he was sure Harry was paying attention to the sugar he was stirring into his own coffee. Harry waited until Severus had chewed and then looked up.

“I didn’t know if you preferred ham over sausage so I made both.”

“I can well see that.” Crap. Did he not like either? “I suppose you will want to keep the ham for some disgusting concoction later. Feel free to take this away from me.”

Severus gingerly held out the ham with his knife and plopped it on top of Harry’s eggs. He liked sausage more than ham or at least in the morning. Read that loud and clear.

“I’ll throw it into ham and bean soup, I guess.”

“Do whatever you desire. You will no matter what I say or wish.”
“Did you want one of the apple muffins I made?”

Severus cocked a brow and wordlessly accepted one from the plate Harry held out to him. He tentatively took a bite—only after Harry had done the same with another, of course, to show it wasn’t poisoned—and set it aside.

“I have said it before, but you need cooking lessons to spice things up. That was positively bland. Dreadful so far, Potter.”

Okay so he’d noticed the cinnamon. Pretty sure he liked it, too.

“Is the coffee all right?” Harry asked some minutes later. Looking up, he saw Severus was already watching him and swallowing a mouthful of coffee he’d sipped moments before. “Sorry.”

“If your aim was for the coffee to taste like mud, you’ve more than succeeded.”

He was more than happy with the coffee, then. Harry sighed and straightened just enough to glance into Severus’s mug. Yep, almost empty. Barely containing a pleased smirk, he cleared his throat.

“What should I make for lunch?”

“I care not. You’ll do as you wish, I’m sure.”

Back to the shower thing? What had he even said to make him keep mention… Well, bollocks. ‘Oh, God, my eyes’ had actually escaped his mouth, hadn’t it? Looking at Severus confirmed this without a doubt.

“Sorry, sir.”

“Not necessary, though unexpected. What you cook doesn’t concern me in the slightest.”

“Not the food. I meant about this morning.”

“What are you jabbering on about?”

“I said I was sorry for this morning.”

Severus focussed on his plate of food, thinned lips the only sign he gave of his irritation.

“You would do well to remember yourself, boy. You will not be repeating this morning’s events without punishment in the future. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, sir.”

Harry hunched down in his seat and poked at his ham with a fork. His waning appetite returned full-force when he saw Severus take another bite of his muffin.

“Absolutely dreadful,” Severus commented to himself and Harry snorted quietly.

“I was thinking about making some beef stew…”

“You’ll bollocks it up somehow, I’m sure of it.”

He liked the idea? And holy crap, he’d just said bollocks. Ha ha!

“Do you like sandwiches with stews? I could make some cheese toasties or something…”
“Who am I to stand in your way? Do whatever you desire, Potter, and stop asking me questions. Your voice is quite annoying and is well on its way to giving me a headache. Really, you do have quite a piercing and effeminate voice for supposedly being a male. One day, I fear, I’ll have to ascertain your sex just to set my mind at ease. Merlin.”

Ooh, yeah, he really liked that. The insults were usually longer or repeated when he really liked something. Harry couldn’t help the satisfied grin that came to his face.

“Right.”

Maybe the bastard wasn’t so bad after all.

“You look like an idiot doing that.”

Urgh! Just kidding.

***

“Potter!” Severus barked. Emerging from the bedroom and trudging to the beginning of the hallway, Harry sleepily rubbed his eyes and stared. “The headmaster has again managed to send your schoolwork. You may as well get to work and stop lazing about like the spoiled princess I suspect you truly are.”

Harry groaned and collapsed behind the desk seemingly placed in the living room for that very purpose. After blankly staring at the stack of assignments for a long moment, Harry decided he probably needed something stronger than tea to wake up. When he finally returned, incidentally holding his second cup of coffee of the day, Harry settled down and started working on his Transfiguration from the past week.

When he got to the next subject, he frowned.

“Sir?” Severus looked up from his book and quirked a brow. Harry vaguely noted he didn’t look as cantankerous as usual. “How exactly are you assigning schoolwork if you’re not at the school? Been meaning to ask.”

“Albus has obviously found someone to cover my classes until we’re allowed to return to the school. Use that pathetic excuse of a brain before asking ridiculous questions, boy.”

“Ah. I just wondered why this looked so familiar. Sorry.”

Suddenly looking very suspicious, Severus drifted across the room to look over Harry’s shoulder.

“What has that fool been- this doesn’t follow my notes at all! For Merlin’s sake, this is fifth year review.” Harry studied Severus’s outraged expression while the older man moved even closer and thumbed through the assignments. He was radiating heat, which was strange and actually somewhat pleasant. “You will not be doing this. Start on page 274 and work to about…” Severus licked his thumb, flipped through Harry’s book, and studied the potion listed on a page near the middle of the book. “312. I suggest you take notes for now so you can do the actual assignments later.”

Harry grimaced irritably and watched Severus move out of the room. Right as he’d finished his notes and dropped his quill to shake out his cramping hand, Severus strode back into the room with a wax-sealed sheet of parchment addressed to ‘Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster.’ He tucked it into Harry’s stack of completed schoolwork, nodded sharply, and sat back down on the couch.
Grinning about not being the one on the other end of the man’s ire for once, Harry tried to imagine what the headmaster was about to read. None of it would be good, that was for sure.

Much later, closer to six o’clock, Harry threw down his quill in relief and happily watched it roll off the desk. He’d finally finished a week’s worth of assignments and now all he wanted to do was eat… a lot.

“I’m going to make, erm, chicken pasta if you’re hungry.”

“I should care why, Potter?”

So he didn’t like the idea of chicken pasta tonight.

“Or maybe a big salad.”

“Do as you wish and stop telling me.”

All right. A salad was more acceptable, but Harry wanted more than a salad. He was a meat-eating man, not some veggie-loving animal.

“What about lasagna or something?”

“Does it look as if I wish to continue discussing this with you? I am not someone you can blither to every time you find yourself wanting conversation, Potter. Leave me be and be off to whatever it is you do.”

Lasagna definitely. He really likes that.

“You’re right.”

At the door, Severus cleared his throat, catching Harry’s attention and halting his progress from the room.

“Don’t botch up the lasagna if that is what you are determined to make.”

Harry smiled all the way into the kitchen.

***

“Potter, if you do not get out of there this instant, I will barge in there and relieve myself regardless of your presence in the shower!” Severus yelled through the closed bathroom door. "I will not urinate in the kitchen sink like some idiotic schoolchild!”

“I’m almost finished!” Harry yelled back. “Merlin.”

Seconds later, the door banged against the wall and Severus swept into the room. Harry, with one hand still on his erection, carefully poked his head around the shower curtain and met Severus’s gaze. Severus narrowed his eyes, turned his back, and began urinating in the toilet.

“If you continue staring much longer, Potter, I will have to accuse you of perversion. I warned you, did I not?”

Severus flushed the toilet, smirked when Harry disappeared briefly, and began washing his hands. When Harry reappeared, he was glaring almost as darkly as Severus usually does.

“I’m just shocked!” he said angrily. “I didn’t think you’d actually come in here. What if I’d been in
here doing something private?”

“Is that not what you’re doing? No normal male spends this long in the shower unless he’s relieving his base urges.”

Harry’s mouth fell open. “I-

“You may as well finish,” Severus spoke while closing the door. “After all, I won’t need the bathroom for the rest of the night.”

“But-

Harry stared at the closed door and blushed. Severus knew what he was doing? Wait! He’d just told him to finish?


Still feeling highly embarrassed and now self-conscious, Harry quickly brought himself to completion and felt weird about it. Bracing himself on the wall when he was finished, he let the hot water wash away his mess. There was no getting around it. The man was just a pervert!

After Harry climbed out, towelled off, and dressed, he crept out of the bathroom. His luck really wasn’t the best. Severus was in the bedroom and settling down in his bed when Harry froze in the doorway.

“Did you dry your towel?” Severus asked. He carefully tucked his wand under his pillow before meeting Harry’s eyes. “Do not look at me like that. If I have need of the bathroom in the middle of the night, I do not wish to break my neck on a puddle of water.”

“Erm, yeah,” Harry lied.

“Humph.” Severus leaned back on his pillows and crossed his arms underneath his head. Harry avoided looking at the man’s arms, though he did still wonder how he even had muscle, and turned towards his bed. A few moments passed in silence before Severus spoke again. “I suppose I should ask. Did you clean up your mess?”

Again, Harry froze, this time with his bed linens in hand. Pervert!

“It washed away, yes,” he managed to say, his face flaming. Severus cracked open an eye, looking quite amused.

“I was referring to the water you enjoy trailing across the bathroom floor, Potter. Though, I must say I am grateful you took care of that other… concern, as well.” Severus let out what could be mistaken as a quiet chuckle of amusement and made himself comfortable again. “Good night, Potter. Hope you sleep well indeed tonight.”

Harry groaned and threw himself into bed, no longer wanting to sleep right now but feeling sleep beckoning nonetheless. Damn his hormones.

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“Good morning, Potter,” Severus greeted jovially. “Did you, ah, sleep well last night?”

Harry let out a quiet whine and continued stirring the oatmeal. “I slept well enough, sir. Did you sleep well?”
“Not as well as some, I’m sure. What’s for breakfast this morning?”

“Ham, sausage, bacon, scrambled eggs, fried eggs, toast, muffins, pan cakes, mushrooms, beans, tomato slices, and oatmeal. There’s also coffee and hot tea.”

Together, Severus and Harry surveyed the buffet spread throughout the kitchen. Severus cocked a brow and gazed at Harry.

“Is there a reason you’ve made such an array of food for just the two of us? Are we expecting guests this morning?”

“I cou-ooked, because I felt like cooking.”

“Were you about to say you couldn’t sleep?”

“No. I said I cooked.”

“No, you were,” Severus accused. “You said cuh-ooked, not coo-ooked. Why couldn’t you sleep?”

“I wasn’t going to say that.”

“You’re lying.”


“Did you have a nightmare?”

“No.”

“Are you having visions of the Dark Lord’s movements again?”

“No,” Harry repeated more irritably and shoved a plate in Severus’s hands. “It’ll get cold, sir.”

The two set about piling food on their plates and then ate, all accompanied by an uncomfortable silence. They had quickly finished breakfast and had switched to drinking tea (Harry) and coffee (Severus) once the dishes were done. About an hour after silence came between them, Severus cleared his throat.

“Are you sure this had nothing to do with the Dark-”

“Yes.”

“Potter.” For the first time in his life, Harry looked up and saw his professor, the invincible and emotionless Severus Snape, looking awkward and uncomfortable. “Does your strange behaviour have anything to do with…” The man cleared his throat. “Uh, with what happened last night?”

Harry tensed and didn’t respond, but it was answer enough. When he couldn’t stand the silence anymore, he looked up hesitantly. Severus was rapidly stirring his coffee, seemingly unaware of the liquid sloshing over the brim.

“Sir, your coffee-”

“Is fine.” Severus finally focussed on his mug and banished the spilt coffee. “You’re aware you are a teenager and supposedly a male at that, correct? Surely I don’t have to explain this to you.”

Harry looked offended. “Of course I know I’m a guy! What about it?”
“If you hadn’t pleasured yourself at least once during our incarceration, I would have questioned both your sanity and your ability. Well, I suppose I would have questioned your sanity more so than usual. You do frequently act like you haven’t a brain. The point is, Potter, nearly every living being on this planet strives for sexual release. There is no exception to that truth. Stop acting like a teenaged girl caught with her hand down her panties, because it’s frankly pathetic and more than a bit off-putting.”

Whoa. Severus just said panties.

Shaking from his mind the images of Severus striving for his own ‘sexual release,’ for he had implied he also… erm… strives, Harry thought about what he’d said. Granted, it was more than liberally peppered with the usual sarcastically biting remarks, which was really no surprise. However, he’d take it, because it had been surprisingly helpful. Also, he needed brain bleach to remove the memory of Severus saying panties. Ugh.

“Thanks, I guess.”

Severus nodded once, stood up, and carried his coffee with him to the door. He paused and gave Harry a penetrating look. Harry was at a loss to explain it.

“It may also help your overly fragile mind to think about utilising a silencing charm, as well, to quieten your sounds of pleasure from the rest of the house.” Harry gaped in shock and Severus pushed the door open with his boot. “I think it’s time you were made aware these walls are as thin as parchment.”

Harry groaned and heard an answering quiet chuckle moving through the living room. Another chuckle from a man no one was sure could even laugh! Incredible. Banging his head on the table, Harry wondered if he could get away with poisoning a potions master’s food.

Bloody unlikely, knowing his luck.
Straw in the Wind

Severus exited the bathroom with a large cloud of steam and swept past Harry in the hallway. Pointedly ignoring the man’s newly acquired jaunty step and bare feet, Harry refused to acknowledge what the man may or may not have just been doing in there.

He’d only been smoking. A pipe! Yeah, he was smoking a pipe. The steam was just smoke…

Except it smelled like shampoo and a slight hint of cologne in the bathroom. Guess he had been showering. Never mind, though, because he probably just wanted to try to obliterate all the grease on his head or elsewhere.

Groooossss. Now he had a mental image of Severus scraping grease off of his naked body! Sickening. He steadfastly shook the picture from his mind before he could spend two more seconds thinking of the man’s body. Harry wished he could go without a shower, just in case his professor had been wanking. EWW, MENTAL IMAGE AGAIN! Urgh.

Staring at the mirror, Harry scowled at the grimy image reflected back. Flour dusted his chin, most of the exposed skin of his hands and arms were stained blue from the blueberries he’d crushed for juice, sugar syrup was caked into the creases of his elbows, bread batter was making his hair stand on end from when he’d unthinkingly ran his fingers through his hair (he’d nearly ruined half a dozen loaves before realizing he needed to wash his hands… again), and grease was splattered across what was once his favorite shirt.

This! he mentally screamed. This is what happens when you spend an entire day in the kitchen for nothing. Literally nothing! Christmas was still a long way off and there were no approaching holidays. He’d just been so bored, he’d started cooking and hadn’t stopped until his protesting feet and back had cried for relief.

Harry looked at the shower fearfully. He could do this. He could take a shower without thinking about what possibly transpired in there. There was no definite evidence he’d wanked in here, after all. Right? Harry’s eyes swept the entirety of the shower stall before he nodded. Yeah, no evidence. Harry stripped out of his grungy clothes and hesitantly stepped into the shower.

He just wouldn’t think about it. No big deal. He honestly didn’t know why it was bothering him so much, anyway. He shared only a few shower stalls at Hogwarts with the entire male Gryffindor population. They all assuredly wanked in the shower- they sure as hell didn’t do it in their beds- and Harry had never questioned it or even spared a moment’s thought on the subject.

Yeah, but Severus was a man.

He wasn’t some fellow student or anything. He was a man and his professor. He was older, more experienced… and stuff. He didn’t have to wank himself to sleep every night; he could have somebody else do it. If he tried that and got caught, Minerva would have his arse on a silver platter. Harry frowned and thought about it. He decided it just felt different knowing he was standing in the same place a man might have just wanked in. Because, really, it was super different when it was a man, instead of another guy like him. Right?

Er, right?

Oh, God! So Severus probably was just touching his prick in here. Harry made a face. Ewwwwww. Again, Harry shook his head to dispel the memory of Severus jauntily strolling past
him. Oh, gods, he had been wanking in here, hadn’t he?

Harry gagged and lathered shampoo into his hair, hoping the bread batter would break up with the first wash. He needed to think about something else so he could get through this shower without any more mental images or disgusting thoughts. He could think about food. It was a safe topic. He could plan the meals for the next week or maybe think about the schoolwork the headmaster would be sending soon. He should probably spend some time thinking about the brewing war with Voldemort, but that was always a bad idea right before bed.

After rubbing some more soap onto his washcloth, Harry furiously scrubbed the chocolate from his navel, wondering how the hell it had gotten there in the first place. Did he just swan around half naked without his own consent or even any memories? If that was the case, he and his professor have some serious talking to do. Harry rinsed out the washcloth again and caught sight of Severus’s shampoo. Grumbling, Harry attacked his thighs next. An image of Severus from that afternoon rose in his mind. He’d looked irritated about something, frustrated enough to make his brows stay permanently furrowed for most of the day.

So that’s what sexual frustration looks like in a man.

Ewwwwwww. Gross, no, this was Professor Snape, Captain Snarlybritches.

Harry started scouring his arms with his nails, hoping to scrape up the sugar syrup enough to wash them again, because they still felt sticky. He struggled to keep his mind on anything but his professor, but was having a rough time. He didn’t want to think about Severus possibly standing in this exact spot with his hand wrapped around his-

GOD! That did remind him, though, that it had been a few days since he’s wanked himself. An idea began running through his mind while he lathered up his hair yet again, having just spotted a chunk of bread batter dripping from the top of his head. Maybe if he wanked, he’d stop thinking about his professor doing the same. Harry hoped it worked.

By the time approximately ninety-five percent of his body was relatively sticky-free, Harry was fully hard. Feeling oddly naughty and expecting to get busted at any second, enjoying the thrill from that, Harry grabbed his prick and steadily worked himself to the brink. It felt wrong somehow to be wanking in the same shower Severus had just had an orgasm in.

Remembering Severus’s suggestion, Harry quickly cast a silencing charm. While he stroked himself, he looked around the shower stall and idly wondered how Severus had done it. Did he lean against the back wall and use two hands or did he brace himself up under the spray with one hand and use the other to get off? That was a normal question to have, right?

A sudden horrifying thought occurred to him: what if Severus had noticed the abrupt silence coming from the bathroom? Were the walls really parchment thin? If they were, it would be like a flashing neon sign saying ‘Harry Potter’s wanking again! Feel free to have that image in your head- oh, and good night!’ Oh, God! Severus probably knew what he was doing in here, then.

No, Severus had just been wanking in here and Harry hadn’t noticed it. Severus must have used a silencing charm, too. A man makes noise when he comes, right?

Dammit, this was so wrong. He was wanking in the same shower another man had literally just been touching himself in, had come in, maybe even moaned his pleasure and groaned his release in. No, Severus would growl, wouldn’t he? He’d never realized how weird it was knowing a man who actually growls… and Severus did, that was sure. Harry had heard him do it a couple of times, usually when he was in Harry’s face and-
Harry shuddered through his orgasm, crying out in surprise and pleasure when it seemed to hit him without any warning. He braced himself under the hot spray and watched the water wash away his come. He felt thunderstruck, horrified, and ashamed. He’d just come in the same shower stall Severus had recently came in and all he could think about at the time was what his professor sounded like when he came.

What had he done?

Simply recalling it made his skin crawl. Next time, he was going to have to think about someone else, even if it was Ron or Hermione. Thinking about your friends isn’t as bad, because at least they’re someone you can stand (even if Harry could never be attracted to either of them in any way so maybe that wasn’t that helpful. Not that he could ever be attracted to Severus).

When he could finally move, Harry sluggishly climbed out of the shower and was soon trudging to the bedroom. As he was climbing into bed, he marveled that Severus was actually asleep… and not his pretend sleep, either. He could tell the difference by now. Harry snorted derisively and curled around his stomach. The man had definitely wanked in the shower.

Regardless of his disturbing thoughts, he was soon drifting off to dreams filled with Severus extolling the virtues of self-love while demonstrating how to get the job done right.

Harry had woken up in a cold sweat at three o’clock and hadn’t fallen back to sleep until six.

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Severus slammed his book onto the coffee table and glared at Harry. “All right, Potter, I demand you tell me what your problem is. You’ve been slinking around for the past three days looking like you’re afraid of your own shadow. Have you seen something we need to be informing Albus of?”

“No, sir,” Harry mumbled, still unable to meet his professor’s eyes. “Just a nightmare.”

“A vision nightmare or a normal nightmare? Be specific, boy. Did it involve the Dark Lord?”

“No, it didn’t. Just someone I kind of know. Don’t worry about it. Do you want some more tea?” Harry asked and pointed at Severus’s empty cup. Severus was about to start harassing Harry again, but the arrival of his expected schoolwork brought him up short. “Oh, assignments. Guess I’ve gotta do them.”

“Potter,” Severus said in a low voice. Harry looked up fearfully, his eyes not quite meeting the other man’s. He wasn’t stupid enough to think he wouldn’t try to search his mind for the answers Harry wasn’t giving him so he strengthened his Occlumency shields like Severus had taught him. After a tense moment, Harry heard a quiet huff. “You mentioned tea?”

“I did, yeah. I’ll get some.”

“Don’t bother. If you’re making coffee, though, I will accept a mug of the positively slipshod substance you’ll inevitably produce.”

Harry hurried into the kitchen and set about preparing coffee. He was glad Severus hadn’t followed him, to be honest. What was wrong with him? Harry stopped and ran a hand through his knotted hair. Why was his hair so tangled? And so what if he’d had a nightmare about Severus and the guys? It didn’t matter, the real man wasn’t involved in any way (thank Merlin), and Harry was acting too jumpy. Once more reminding himself it was just a nightmare with no basis in reality, Harry sucked in a deep breath and let it out slowly.
After preparing two mugs of coffee prepared eerily the same way, Harry turned around and almost dropped them on the floor. Severus was standing there behind him, leaning against the kitchen table, and looking unreadable. Harry briefly focused on his crossed arms, unconsciously looked at the hand Severus had favored in his nightmare, and then met his eyes for a millisecond before looking away again.

Oh, yeah. The man had been a spy for longer than he’d been alive. He could move silently when he needed to, couldn’t he? To distract himself from staring at Severus’s hand any longer, Harry walked over and held one of the drinks out, ignoring the sloshed coffee drying onto his hand.

“Your coffee, sir.”

Severus grasped the wrist attached to the hand holding his coffee, guided it to the table, and held it there until Harry let go of the mug. When Harry looked up in surprise, Severus narrowed his eyes.

“What ever your problem is, Potter, I expect you to deal with it as soon as I leave the room. Your behavior is exceedingly infuriating and is ruining the small bit of peace I have left in my life at the moment. If you cannot handle yourself, I will not hesitate to find out what your problem is and deal with it accordingly. Do you understand me?” Severus spoke firmly, his voice making Harry feel cold. Harry rubbed the goose pimples on his arms, swallowed, and briefly met the man’s eyes.

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. When you’ve finished addressing your problem, you have schoolwork to complete. Perhaps it will ensure me a few more hours of silence.”

“Fine.”

Severus swiped his mug from the table and stalked out of the room. Harry finally pulled in a breath- his lungs felt tight- and sank in to a chair at the kitchen table. Severus was right. He needed to get his mind back in control.

Close to an hour later, Harry walked out of the kitchen and settled himself at the desk. He could feel those dark, dark eyes boring into him, but he didn’t acknowledge it. He merely sat up straighter in his chair, took a sip of his refilled coffee, and debated upon which subject he should work on first. He knew the moment Severus looked away from him, too, but that didn’t matter. Now he could relax.

He had assign- a letter?

Harry looked at the letter, lifted his eyes to Severus, and then focused on the letter once more. It didn’t say who it was from. It was to him, though. Hmm. Debating a short moment, Harry finally decided to open it. If it was with the rest of his assignments, it must be from the headmaster or someone else just as trustworthy. Opening the letter, Harry first noticed a smear of what suspiciously looked like blood in one corner. Unbeknownst to him, he let out a quiet gasp of fear that gained Severus’s attention.

Harry,

I am so very sorry to tell you this, but your aunt and uncle have been killed. It seems news was passed around at a Death Eater meeting that they might know where to find you. Your cousin has not been found, but we hope for the best. Somehow the Dark Lord discovered a way to track them when they were not under protections cast on their house. You and Severus will remain where you
are hidden until we can get you both out of there. You have no choice in this matter. Your location will not let you leave yet, Harry. I cannot send much detail at the moment, but I will tell you this: we have almost accomplished our goal. You either know already or will be informed shortly of the whole situation, so I will not discuss it.

I wish to let you know of something else. Hermione and Ron tried to write you, but their letter disintegrated when it came too close to the house. The owl is fine. They fear they will not survive the war and have decided to wed. Their ceremony will be at the beginning of November. They send their love and hope you all will soon be rejoined once more.

I also have something I wish to say, Harry, just in case I do not survive the war. You are a strong, brave, kind young man—truly a perfect Gryffindor if ever I saw one. If I were to ever have had a child, I would have hoped for them to have your heart and mind. I love you as much as I loved your father, if not more for your unfailing kindness and the many sacrifices you make without complaint. If I do not survive, I hope you will remember what I’ve said and always keep it close.

Stay strong. This will be over soon and then we will all be free.

Remus

Harry felt tears prick his eyes and reread the letter twice. His aunt and uncle, though he hated them, were dead. It hurt that they’d died because of him. Hermione and Ron were marrying and he wouldn’t be there. Remus loved him more than he’d loved his dad… and didn’t expect to live much longer. Was everything really that bad out there? How many people were dying right now? How many had died since they’d been here?

Swallowing thickly and quickly pulling a serene memory to the front of his mind, Harry reminded himself he couldn’t be upset by any of this. He couldn’t afford to lose control of his mind for even a second, because it would give Voldemort a chance to slip in. The slightest slip-up on his part would be disastrous and could mean they all lose their lives. Then his parents, his aunt and uncle—everyone—would have died and fought for no reason.

“Very good, Potter. Now clear your mind,” Severus spoke over Harry’s shoulder.

Harry shivered violently and was thankful for the perpetual heat coming off of the man close behind him. He didn’t even look up at him. He merely handed the letter up and worked on clearing everything from his mind. Harry sighed, locked away the last of his unsafe memories (including his recent nightmare), and opened his eyes. Severus handed him the letter, moved back to the couch, and picked up his book. Harry rubbed the spot on his hand where Severus’s fingers had brushed his and slowly looked back down at his assignments.

The two spent the rest of the day in silence.
Harry sighed deeply.

He’d had that nightmare again. He’d been running late to Potions and had been surprised when he showed up, because there were no girls in class that day. Severus had started out the class with a warning that no notes would be taken on the subject, but plenty of them would do well to remember what they heard for future reference.

Harry furiously scrubbed a huge pot in the sink, trying to think of anything else under the sun, but it was either the nightmare or Voldemort. He set the pot on the drying rack when he realized it was already spotless.

God, they’d all listened to him going on and on about “masturbation” and the “proper” techniques. Nobody else had questioned what it had to do with potions class and why a professor felt the need to discuss it in the first place. Then things got really weird. Well, weirder. Severus had waved his hand and everyone’s clothing shifted out of the way. Harry had been the only one who hadn’t immediately latched onto his prick. Rather, he just stood there in shock, his now-throbbing erection hanging out of his pants for the entire world to see. How and when had he gotten hard?? Why, too? And why was he still thinking about this? Urgh!

Bracing his arse against his desk and telling everyone to stand in a circle, Severus began demonstrating to everyone what he said was the “official procedure to bringing oneself to orgasm” and urged them to copy his movements. Harry caught himself mindlessly stroking himself and forced his hands away. How could something that was usually so incredible sound so clinical and detached when he said it? When Severus gently rolled his balls in his hand, his breath had hitched. Naturally, so had everyone else’s, including Harry’s. Again pulling his hand away, Harry watched everyone around him.

Cursing profusely, Harry withdrew his hand from the hot soapy water and wiped off his newest wound. Just great. He’d sliced his hand pretty deeply by the looks of it. Merlin, it hurt.

The dream had ended with everyone coming at the same time, aiming at a target on the floor that hadn’t been there when Harry had last looked down. He always found himself watching Severus at the end and their chorus of moans was what always woke him up.

Harry dizzily clutched the counter with his good hand and looked down at his wound. Fuck, he’d really cut it bad. How had he not noticed he was losing that much blood? It had already started soaking into his rolled shirtsleeves. No wonder he felt so dizzy. The cut started right at his wrist and ran diagonally across most of his palm.

“Um, sir?” Harry called out weakly. He didn’t receive any answer and was starting to get nervous. He needed to sit down. Collapsing into a chair, Harry clamped a hand over his wrist. His hand and a lot of his arm felt numb. “Professor!”

Severus entered the kitchen moments later. His irritated scowl morphed to shock when he spied Harry’s bleeding hand.

“What the hell have you done, Potter?” Severus yelled, quickly standing in front of Harry with only three large steps across the kitchen. “Did you do this on purpose?”

Harry dumbly shook his head and watched Severus as he seized his hand and tried to stop the
bleeding with a spell he’d never heard of. The man looked as if he were moving in slow motion. He conjured some clean towels, gauze, and some unknown potions and sucked in a deep breath once all of the blood had vanished.

“Whoa,” Harry murmured. It was really deep. How had he done that?

“This is going to sting,” Severus said angrily and carefully poured a purple potion on his hand. Harry cringed and intently watched the potion bubble up. That more than stung, dammit. Another potion followed that, but Harry thankfully didn’t feel anything from that one. A third caused a searing pain to rush up his arm and settle in his chest, feeling like a molten ball of fire. Harry saw steam rising up from his cut at the same time the feeling returned to his arm.

“What was that?”

“A potion to heal your wounds and redirect blood flow until you drink this.” Severus thrust the fourth and final vial into his hand and glared darkly until Harry swallowed every last drop. “Keep your hand bandaged.”

“Okay,” Harry replied weakly. He felt like such an idiot.

“Did you purposefully cut yourself? Do not lie to me. Your cut was much too precise and deep to be accidental. One centimeter further and you would have bled out before you could call for me.”

“I didn’t,” Harry repeated with emphasis. “I guess my hand just slipped or something.”

“You cannot afford to let your hand ‘slip,’ Potter. Our world’s survival depends solely on you. Are you truly so selfish-”

“I didn’t do it on purpose!” Harry pulled in a quick deep breath. “Like I said, my hand just slipped. I was distracted. I won’t let it happen again. Besides, if I wanted to do that, I wouldn’t have called you in here to help me.”

Severus obviously didn’t believe him. He summoned his book from where he’d dropped it in shock and sat down at the kitchen table. Harry turned to finish washing the dishes, but stopped at the sight of so much of his blood tingeing the dish water scarlet.

“Lavabit,” Severus intoned in a quiet murmur. “You will not wash the dishes by hand again. Do you understand me?”

Harry sighed in defeat, ran fresh dishwater, and then joined Severus at the table. The man was glaring at him, waiting for an answer.

“Sure.”

“I was looking for ‘yes, sir.’”

“Okay.” Harry flexed his aching hand and focused on his bandage. “Thanks, you know, for helping me. I’ve never really thought I was going to die before.”

“Are you quite sure?” Severus asked in a strange voice. Harry looked up and screamed.

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“Potter!” Severus bellowed, roughly shaking Harry’s shoulders.

“NO!”
Harry shot up straight in his bed and frantically tried to escape his knotted sheets. He only succeeded in tangling himself up more and managed to punch Severus in the nose when he bent down to physically restrain Harry.

“Incarcerous!” Severus said loudly, standing again, and Harry stilled as ropes bound him. He still had a wild look in his eyes and was breathing heavily. Severus tossed his wand on his bed and looked down at Harry. “Potter?”

“My hand. Please. Let me see my hand,” Harry begged, looking close to bursting into hysterical tears. Huffing, Severus waved his hand and the ropes disappeared. Immediately lifting his hand close to his face, Harry surveyed the undamaged skin and nearly sobbed in relief. “It was just a nightmare. God, it was just a nightmare.”

Harry wanted to shout out his relief. It had just been a nightmare. He hadn’t cut himself. Severus-Harry looked up and blinked- wasn’t wearing a shirt. He shook his head. That doesn’t even matter and why was he even noticing in the first place? Ugh. Severus hadn’t turned into- A look of abject horror and terror crossed Harry’s face as he thoughtlessly reached out and pulled Severus down. Confused, Severus didn’t brace himself and fell onto Harry’s bed on his back with a quiet oof. Harry straddled him, keeping him pinned to the bed with his entire body, and pointed his wand right between his eyes.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing, Potter?” Severus growled. “Get off of me.”

“Don’t move or I will not hesitate to hurt you,” Harry commanded. Swallowing his fear, he tentatively reached out his other hand to gently poke Severus’s cheek. “How do I know you’re actually you, Snape?”

“You’re still alive. Were I merely using my body as a disguise, I would have killed you the first night you fell asleep or perhaps moments ago when you manhandled me onto your bed.”

Still running his hand over Severus’s face, Harry shook his head. That dream had been too real. He’d felt the pain, the weakness, and the terror.

“I want to make sure. Polyjuice Potion can, even with an advancing serum, only last a maximum of ninety minutes.”

“I’m not laying in your bed with you on top of me for ninety minutes. Get off of me and stop being stupid.”

“I need to know you are who you appear to be.”

“Potter, I am not laying down on your bed with you straddling me,” Severus said slowly, finally holding completely still and talking through clenched teeth. “For the next ninety minutes. Get. Off.”

“NO,” Harry said louder. “I need to know.”

“Then give me a question only I would know. Use your mind, Potter. What’s a question you could ask the real Severus Snape and only expect him to know the answer to.”

Harry bit his lip and stared down at Severus. “Can you cast a Patronus?”

“That is an elementary question, Potter.”

“Just answer it.”
“Yes, I am able to cast a Patronus.”

“Can you cast wandless spells?”

“I am quite proficient in wandless spell work. There’s not many spells I cannot do wandlessly.”

Harry looked confused and cocked his head to the side. Severus seemed to perfectly understand the silent question. “I prefer the welcoming warmth of my wand in-hand when I cast a spell. These questions are not very difficult. Anyone could know the answers.”

“I didn’t mean for them to be difficult.” Harry leaned back on Severus’s lap and froze when the man groaned and gripped his hips tightly, holding him still. “Did I hurt you?”

“No, but I would not repeat that move if I were you, Potter. Next.”

“I want you to cast a wandless Patronus,” Harry demanded, still not moving from the awkward position he was being held in. Severus’s mocking sneer slipped away, being replaced by a grudging respect.

“Very competent. What if the spell I cast is not a Patronus? With you so close to me, you will have no way of escaping.”

“I’ll risk it.”

Severus nodded and began to wandlessly and wordlessly cast a disarming spell. When Harry smoothly counterspelled it with only a dark glare at him, Severus smirked. He also looked a little proud, but it was mostly just in his eyes. Harry still saw it.

“Very good.” Severus again lifted his hand and, once again wandlessly and wordlessly, cast a Patronus. They watched Severus’s doe romp around the room before disappearing with a wave of his hand. “Satisfied?”

“Yes.” Harry climbed off of Severus’s lap and noticed the man was moving awkwardly. “Did I hurt you when I pulled you down?”

“No, I’m fine.”

“Did I hurt you when I was on your lap?”

“Potter, shut up and go to bed,” Severus grumbled, heading down the hall to the bathroom. When he returned a few minutes later, Harry was sitting up in his bed. “Oh, g- Why are you still awake?”

“I’m sorry, sir.”

“You didn’t harm me.”

“No, I meant for punching your nose. It was bleeding.”

“I am well aware of that. I was never gladder to have foregone a shirt.” Settling into his bed, Severus turned his back on Harry and almost immediately started getting drowsy. “Incidentally, Potter, we will be discussing that nightmare in the morning.”

Harry frowned and then nodded in the gradually lightening room. He didn’t want to say it, but it was already morning. Roundabouts five o’clock if his guess was right (he couldn’t see the clock).

“Erm, night, sir.”
“Potter. Shut up.”

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It had started out exactly the same way it always had. He’d been running late to Potions. By now, he didn’t feel any surprise when he opened the door to the classroom and saw no girls. There was the usual ‘no notes taken, remembering for the future’ spiel from Severus.

Harry furiously scrubbed a huge pot in the sink, trying to think of anything else under the sun. It was either the nightmare and wanking or Voldemort and everyone around him dying. He set the pot on the drying rack when he realized it was already spotless.

Why did this seem so familiar?

Severus had talked for simply an eternity, everyone’s clothing had shifted around, and the usual ensuing shock had arrived. Like always, Severus braced his arse against his desk, everyone moved to stand in a circle, and together they all wanked. There was his usual unawareness of doing the same, sudden realization, and embarrassed halt. Lots of dispassionate talk and hitched breathing followed. The dream had morphed there, though. Severus hadn’t finished himself off like everyone else did and their moaning didn’t wake him up. Shortly thereafter, the room had emptied, leaving just the two of them.

Harry wiped some soapy water onto his jeans and took a sip from the hot tea on the counter beside him. He couldn’t understand why the nightmare or whatever it was had morphed.

Severus had beckoned Harry forward with a single finger, not even bothering to speak to him. In a daze, Harry had stumbled towards him with his prick still hanging out. Turning them and pressing Harry up against the desk with his body, Severus had proceeded to stroke both of their erections at the same time. It had felt amazing.

Harry tossed a spatula into the rinse water and plunged his hands back into the water to search for the last fork he knew was in there somewhere. He wondered if it felt that great to rub two pricks together like that.

The dream had ended before either of them could come or even speak to each other. Right before he’d woken up, the Severus in his dream had plunged his tongue inside his mouth. Harry had been moaning in his dream one second and then coughing the next when he saw the real Severus standing over him in a temper, snapping at him about his wet towel attempting to kill him and asking if he’d enchanted it to wrap around his ankles the way it did.

After he killed Voldemort, he knew he had some serious thinking to do. No straight guy dreamt about stuff like that, right? He didn’t have time to worry about it right now, though. Really, he needed to be focusing on the best way to take Voldemort out and keep him locked in hell for the rest of eternity…

Cursing profusely, Harry withdrew his hand from the hot soapy water and wiped off his newest wound. Just great. He’d sliced his…

“Um, sir?” Harry called out weakly, suddenly very afraid. This was almost exactly how his nightmare the other night had been. At least he wasn’t bleeding as bad right now. Still, it freaked him out. “Professor!”

Severus entered the kitchen moments later. His irritated scowl morphed to shock when he spied Harry’s bleeding hand. It worried him that he’d expected that.
“What the hell have you done, Potter?” Severus yelled, quickly standing in front of Harry with only three large steps across the kitchen. Harry shuddered, feeling terrified now instead of merely afraid. “Did you do this on purpose?”

Harry shook his head and closely watched Severus as he seized his hand and tried to stop the bleeding with the same spell he had heard in his dream. Thankfully, Severus didn’t look as if he were moving in slow motion. Pushing Harry down into a chair, Severus knelt in front of him to better work on him.

“Fuck,” Harry murmured. It was still pretty deep, but at least nothing was numb. “Um, sir?”

Severus looked up from Harry’s rapidly improving hand and looked furious. He shook his head and continued inspecting the wound. Conjuring a bandage, Severus quickly wrapped it and stood back up. This kind of silent fury was never good. It usually foretold a lot of ensuing pain and headaches.

“Keep your hand bandaged.”

“Okay. Um, sir?”

“What?” Severus spat, still looking furious. Harry was pretty sure he might know why.

“I didn’t do this on purpose.”

“I should hope not.”

“Remember that nightmare I had the other day?”

“Yes. Why?”

He was still speaking in clipped sentences. Oh, yeah, definitely super mad. At least he wasn’t yelling yet.

“We never talked about it.”

“You wouldn’t talk about it and I don’t care enough to forcibly pry the truth from you. What of it?”

“Well, this.”

“What?” Severus huffed. He crossed his arms over his chest and glared down at Harry. It was unnerving and Harry couldn’t speak for a moment. It was enough to make Severus’s jaw tick.

“Speak, Potter.”

“I meant… it was just like this. I was in here doing the dishes, cut my hand, and…” Harry sucked in a sharp breath, stood up quickly, and backed away. He slowly looked up at Severus and let out a relieved breath. “You’re still you?”

“You’re making no sense, Potter.”

“I, uh… well, in my dream, I was in here doing the dishes when I cut my hand. It was deep and there was blood everywhere. A lot of it was the same. Your expression, what you said when you first came in, telling me to keep my hand bandaged. You said that if I’d been cut one centimeter further, I would have bled out before you arrived and…” Harry stared at his bandage a long moment, remembering everything. “You turned into him at the end. I’d just said I’d never really
thought I was going to die before and your voice changed. You asked me if I was quite sure and when I looked up…”

“Ah, your reaction upon waking that evening is much more understandable now. Incidentally, you will not be washing the dishes by hand anymore since you cannot even avoid injuring yourself with your hands in a harmless sink of soapy water. I thought you were childish, Potter, but I am ashamed I did not realize it was because you were literally a child.”

“You also told me I couldn’t wash the dishes in my nightmare.” Severus stared at Harry a long moment. Remembering something else from his nightmare, without looking away from Severus, Harry summoned Severus’s book from the floor and handed it to him. “You dropped your book, too.”

“Did this nightmare appear to be different in any way? Perhaps more lucid or, conversely, somewhat indistinct?”

“It seemed real. I felt everything.”

“Hmm.” Severus looked at the sink and lifted an eyebrow. “Lavabit. Your schoolwork has arrived.”

Harry shook his head slowly and trotted off to the living room. Severus spent a long moment studying the kitchen, banished the fallen blood on the floor and the edge of the sink, and then followed behind.

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Four Weeks Later

“Potter,” Severus called throughout the house. “Where have you gone off to?”

“The kitchen,” Harry replied listlessly. He dragged himself into the kitchen doorway and blankly watched Severus.

“Ah, still acting like this, I see. Fine. Your holiday assignments have arrived. You also have a letter from the headmaster.”

Harry accepted the letter without comment, ghosted back into the kitchen, and placed it on the counter. He didn’t want the ham for dinner to burn… or something. He was unaware of having an audience as he moved about the room at a snail’s pace. He stirred the potatoes, checked the ham in the oven, buttered a few rolls, and added a pinch more sugar to some peas while thinking about how depressing this Christmas was. It almost made him want to be back at Privet Drive, blissfully unaware of how many people’s lives would be lost until he eventually lost his own. Sadly, though, that was impossible. His aunt and uncle were dead and Dudley… God only knew what had happened to him. Harry sighed when he realized he had no other distractions. After blindly scooping his letter up, Harry opened it and shakily pulled the letter out.

Harry,

With all of my heart, I wish you could join us for the Christmas holidays. Your continued absence at Hogwarts has put a damper on the season and indeed the whole year. However, you are much safer with Severus right now. I hope your stay at your current residence has brought you both closer together. It would do an old man’s heart some good to see his two favorite men on friendly
terms. I wish to apologize for not contacting you personally these past few months, dear boy. We have been nearing the end and I regret that our distraction meant I could not personally keep you informed of everyone’s safety and news.

I deeply wish I did not have to inform you of this development, child, and I only hope Severus will offer his own form of comfort, however small it may be. We have finally managed to locate your cousin. I am so very sorry, Harry. There was nothing we could do for him. Please know he will be laid to rest with his parents in Little Whinging. If you wish to have them moved elsewhere, we will arrange for that.

Remus ran into a bit of trouble with some fellow werewolves while attempting to protect your aunt and uncle from advancing Death Eaters, but he was rescued by Order members shortly after the attack. He has been living at the castle since the night he arrived. I believe that night is also the same night he wrote a letter to you. He is doing much better and says he misses you every single day. He expects you to write him a letter as soon as you are able and have the desire. I will be able to pass along any other letters you write, though they will be destroyed upon being read. We cannot risk any information getting misplaced or stolen by the wrong people.

You are aware your dearest friends wed not too long ago. The young bride is currently expecting, though she isn’t making it known for fear of being targeted. She also wished for me to tell you that she hopes you will consider undertaking the role of godfather when the time is appropriate and her husband wholeheartedly shares her wishes. They both hope you are faring well and will be sending you a letter shortly. The young Mrs. Weasley wanted you to know she is already three months along or, as she put it, thirteen weeks.

Your young Herbology-loving friend, Neville Longbottom, has embraced the holiday season quite charmingly. He and some of your fellow students have decorated large portions of the castle with various propaganda urging others to join the side of the light. I might also add he’s placed small bewitched boughs of mistletoe at almost every corner and doorway here, many of which are nowhere near his banners. It appears he has been working with the three remaining Heads to ensure those who exchange a holiday embrace underneath the boughs enter into an unbreakable magical contract to aid the light in any way they can. Though, I have been assured multiple times by the four, those drawn into the contract will not be forced to fight if they do not wish to do so. I would be telling an untruth if I said I wasn’t proud of his determination. He, much like yourself, is a true Gryffindor at heart.

Our dear mischievous twins have sought shelter at Hogwarts, which was freely given them. They, along with many of their friends and contacts on the outside, have created a base of operations in a small area of the dungeons in which to work. I cannot discuss their mission at the moment, but know they are all completely safe.

I have not talked to the rest of your ‘family’ lately, but they have moved into your godfather’s old home. I meet with Arthur and Molly at least once a week to ensure their mission is going along smoothly. Molly has asked me to pass along a message to you: Even if you’re not currently attending classes, you had better be doing your homework, because she will find out. If she also finds out you have lost any weight, you will be hearing about it. If Severus has harmed you at all, she expects you to tell her the truth about it. Incidentally, I informed her Severus would never harm you. Would you believe she laughed at me? I remember I was being perfectly serious. I surely didn’t consider it a joke. Ah, well. You know the woman’s sense of humor is a bit odd. She also said she knows you’re acting despondent about being there, but she fully expects you to buck up and enjoy the holidays. Everyone else will be doing that, so you had better, too.

Although I would not have worded her message in such a forceful way, young man, I agree with
her (except for her little tease about Severus). Your assignments have been completed perfectly so I won’t dwell on that. However, I do wish to stress you cannot afford to lose weight. You are much too thin as it is. Any additional weight lost would only result in weakening your body. If you are unhappy and it is affecting your eating habits, please discuss your predicament with Severus. He is not the warmest of creatures, I am aware, but he will assuredly help you if he knows what is wrong with you. As for the Christmas holiday, you should be aware that we may be in the middle of a war, but it won’t affect anything. Hogwarts has rearranged herself to accommodate everyone so we can have a safe celebration this year. Indeed, our first arrivals will be here later this week. You needn’t let worry ruin your festivities. Smile, be happy, and enjoy it. I know we still have twenty-one days until Christmas, but the Christmas season is meant to be enjoyed as long as possible, don’t you think?

I will endeavor to pass along any new information as it comes and please do not be discouraged if I cannot contact you often. Know I think of you every day and miss you quite more than even I had expected. When the time comes, I will write to let you know our plans for bringing you out of your location. Do not expect that time to be too soon. Our force is currently working to defeat as many of Voldemort’s followers as possible before you have to face him. We are unquestionably making our way through the mass, though it is taking longer than we like.

Again, I implore you to forget about all your worries until after the holidays. I know how depressing life can become when all you can do is ponder dark thoughts on your own, Harry. This is why, more than ever, we all need to find pleasure and contentment while we are still able to do so. Consider this a vacation from real life, dear boy, and use the time accordingly. Perhaps simply letting go of your worries and enjoying yourselves is exactly what you both need right now.

Rubeus passes his love on to ‘his plucky young friend’ and reminds you to read the book he bought you last Christmas. It is blatantly obvious he misses you, possibly more than myself! I will keep you in my heart and my mind until next we speak. Be well, be strong, and talk to Severus if you need to.

Albus Dumbledore

Harry carefully folded up the letter, set it back down, and continued moving about the kitchen. He was already in a better mood! He couldn’t wait to write Remus and read Hermione and Ron’s letter. Harry fondly thought about the headmaster and the Weasleys. Wow, Hermione was going to have a baby. It was mind-blowing! And Ron was going to be a father!! Damn, that was just weird. Ron was still young and stuff. Hermione, at least, acted her age. And Neville…

Harry shook his head, frowned at his pie, and decided it needed a little longer to cook. Of course Neville would somehow bring plants in as a secret weapon type thing. He didn’t often get credit, but Neville really was a devious-minded genius sometimes. Who would have thought about using Christmas plants in that way? While pulling the ham from the oven, Harry thought about Molly Weasley. He didn’t know how she did it. Something was wrong with him and she knew it. It was weir-

The ham sailed out of Harry’s hands when it hit him the last of his living family had died. Not even realizing the ham had levitated to the counter in front of him, Harry doubled over the sink in physical pain and felt utterly alone for the first time in his life. A second later, he started throwing up. Everyone he’d ever cared about- even the Dursleys, which barely counted- died because of him!!!

No. Harry furiously shook his head. They all died because of…
“Voldemort,” Harry growled, his words taking on a serpentine-like hiss. “When I find him, I am going to torture him in every way I can think of. Then I am going to kill him as painfully and slowly as possible. When I’m finished with that useless snake, they won’t even recognize the remnants of his body.”

“I’m sure the rest of the world appreciates your resolve, but you wouldn’t be able to live with yourself if you carried through on your promises.”

Harry slowly turned to eye Severus, who was seated at the table. When he caught sight of Harry’s face, Severus looked slightly surprised before his calm expression returned.

“I am serious. I’m going to hell so I might as well have a bit of fun with him first. When it’s over, I can always deal with myself. After all, I don’t need to live once I’ve completed the only thing I was born to do.” Harry’s harsh laugh still had a hint of a hiss to it, though he didn’t notice. “It would be your wet dream come true, Severusssss... Harry Potter, dead at his own hands. Poor weakling couldn’t handle the darkness in his soul, could he?”

Looking truly troubled, Severus stood and cautiously moved closer. “Potter, think of something else for a moment. Your ham perhaps.”

“My ham!” Harry cried out. He missed the relieved expression that came to Severus’s face in his hurry to turn. “Oh, my G- What?”

“I saved it when you dropped it. Potter, can you tell me what you were feeling?”

“When? Just now, I was anxious about my ham. Before that, I was feeling depressed and angry about…” Harry swallowed thickly and blinked his eyes. “And before that, I was happy and kind of confused, but that doesn’t really matter.”

Severus pursed his lips together and waved Harry back to what he was doing. Occasionally, while he was moving about the kitchen finishing dinner, Harry would look over at Severus’s squinty eyes. He was thinking exceedingly hard about something. Seriously. If someone’s eyes are squinting and their brows are pulled that far down, their brain must be hurting.

“Potter, do you remember what you said about ending the Dark Lord’s life?”

“When? I’ve said lots of stuff about it.”


“Oh. Um, no… What did I say? Wait. When? Was I asleep?” Harry looked abruptly appalled. “Have you been listening to me while I sl-”

“Shut up, boy. Between getting sick in the sink and worrying about your ham, you said something about finishing the Dark Lord off. Do you not remember it?”

“No… What does that mean?”

Harry felt scared. What had he even said about Voldemort? Wait. If he didn’t remember talking about him, he might actually be swanning about the house half naked, too! Memory loss, right? It would explain how he’d gotten chocolate in his navel a few weeks ago and why he didn’t - what the hell is he even thinking about that for right now? He focused on Severus and saw the man was rubbing his jaw line with the pad of his thumb, back to thinking. Suddenly looking up at Harry, Severus looked blank.
“I have a theory, but I could be completely wrong about it. I am going to give you a command, Potter, and I don’t want you to misinterpret it or think I’m being perverse. If my theory is correct, it is necessary you do this.” Severus took a deep breath. “Before I discuss anything with you, Potter, I need you to go take a shower, bring yourself to a sexual release, and re-erect your shields.”

Severus looked down at the table, his lips pursed again. Harry’s jaw dropped as far down as it would go, as it had ever gone. Did he just hear that right? No, surely not. Why was he thinking about sex right now? It had never messed with his head this bad before. His potions master wouldn’t have...

“Excuse me?” Harry asked, unsure if he should be embarrassed for thinking he’d heard what he thought he did or afraid that Severus might truly have said it. “I don’t think I heard you right, sir. Could you repeat it?”

“You heard me clearly. Go take a shower, bring yourself to a sexual release, and re-erect your shields. Only think about that which might make you release faster. A sexual release is the fastest thing to wipe everything from your mind and make it impenetrable against outside forces. If I am right, your mind will again be safe regardless. If I am wrong, no harm has been done and you’re no worse for wear. Go, Potter.”

“You want me to go wank in the shower?”

“Since you are apparently five years old, yes, I want you to go “wank” in the shower.” Severus gave him a patronizing look and dropped his voice to a grumbly mutter. “… difficult to say pleasure or masturbation. Some things will never change.”

Harry’s face colored. Should he be listening to him or was Severus taking the piss? But when had he ever joked about anything, much less getting off, and especially with him? Harry’s eyes slipped down to look at Severus’s cool expression. What would he look like if he was telling a joke? If he really laughed or smiled, would his face crack? Harry had to smother a laugh at the thought. Yeah, he probably would and shit, he’s looking at him.

“Sir,” Harry spoke before Severus could. “Um, are you having me on right now?”

“Have I ever, Potter?”

“Seriously?”

Severus sighed. “Yes, I am being perfectly serious. You don’t recall having a conversation about the Dark Lord minutes ago and I believe I know why. Go to the bathroom, masturbate, and then return so we can discuss my theory. I will not hesitate to force you to come if needed, Potter. Don’t mistake that.”

Harry was more than surprised. Maybe scandalized. What was an appropriate feeling in this situation? Alarm? Disbelief? Slight excitement? Probably just because he was about to get off and his body knew it. Yeah, that must be it. And oh, my God. He was being serious! Wait. What?

“Force me, sir?”

“If I must, I will. However, I’m sure you would prefer that didn’t happen. Believe me, I wouldn’t enjoy it, either, and it wouldn’t be anywhere comfortable. Go.”

A sick thrill coursed through him. Feeling slightly dismayed or something, Harry realized he wanted to know exactly how his professor would force him. Could he even do that? It wouldn’t be rape- maybe- or would it?
“How exactly would you force me, sir? Wouldn’t Dumbledore kill you if he ever found out?”

Severus cocked a brow. “I have my ways and I believe Albus would forgive me if he knew the circumstances.”

“Yes, but how?”

Severus glared at Harry a moment and then set his book down. He met Harry’s eyes.

“I would bind you and forcefully stimulate you with my hand until you released. It wouldn’t be a pleasant occurrence for either of us, Potter, and I’m sure you don’t want to be so exposed when you lose all control. Now go before I lose my patience.”

“And you’re serious? You want me to go-”

“Yes.”

“Oh.”

In a daze and with a flaming face, Harry walked to the bathroom and started the shower. His professor had just commanded him to wank. It was wrong on so many levels, but Severus had said it was necessary. He didn’t have a choice. Either way, he’d be getting off soon. Best just to get it over with as quickly as possible and on his own terms, right?

Shucking his clothing and stepping into the shower, Harry realized this was the first time he’d ever wanted to purposefully disobey Severus. He could just say he couldn’t get it up, because he’d been too embarrassed or something. To his surprise, though, his prick was already hardening. Harry shrugged, telling himself he was a teenaged guy and got hard at the slightest mention of the weirdest things. Still, it would be easy to lie about it.

Maybe he should just wash his hair first. It would be like any other shower.

He really didn’t want to do this. Oh, gods. Severus knew without a doubt what he was doing right now. He’d told him to do it. Harry rinsed his hair and wondered if maybe he could just get away with not doing it and just saying he did…

No. He’d know, wouldn’t he? He was a man. Men probably knew all sorts of things a young guy like him didn’t. Harry grabbed his erection and stroked gently. He probably has years and years of learning to pick out the signs of someone who had recently come. Urgh. How many times had he seen Harry and known? Did he ever wonder if someone else had helped him or did he just assume it had been literally one-handed? He probably did. That bastard! Harry wanted to stop, go out there, and lie about coming just to spite the man. But…

He’d know and if he caught Harry lying to him, he’d carry out his threat. Harry moaned as he ran his palm over the dark head and sped his hand up a bit. That’d be so embarrassing. How would you be able to look at anyone after they’d tied you up and made you come against your will?

Harry reached down and tugged at his tightening balls. If he was being forced, he didn’t want to come too soon. He definitely knew Severus would never let him live it down if he’d come after only a few minutes. Thinking about Severus, though, made him curious. What would it be like? Obviously, he wouldn’t enjoy it apart from the getting off thing… he’s just curious if Severus knew how to do it. Was making another guy come just like making yourself or was there more of a technique to it?

Was Severus even gay or anything? Did he have any experience doing that sort of thing? Harry
honestly couldn’t decide. Maybe not. That could have been what he meant when he said it wouldn’t be pleasant… Maybe. Although, he did seem like the kind of man who would be secretly turned on by guys. He was always so angry, which could be his way of hiding his frustrations… Then again, he’d never seen Severus looking at anybody like that.

Huh. Maybe he was asexual instead.

Still stroking himself, Harry considered what it would feel like. He almost wanted Severus to force him just so he could have an answer. He was back to his original questions. Did the man know how? Was it basically the same? Harry closed his eyes, leaned against the back wall so he wouldn’t trip and fall, and tried to picture it. It was a testament to his annoyingly persistent curiosity that he was imagining it at all.

He’d mentioned it wouldn’t be anywhere pleasant and he was currently in the kitchen so that worked. He would have to be at a relatively comfortable height so Severus’s arm wouldn’t get tired too quickly. The counters would be out, then. Maybe the kitchen table? Okay, yeah, that worked. What was next? Binding. Harry flashed back to the last time Severus had bound him. It was the night he’d had his nightmare about being cut.

Harry shuddered. He barely managed to suppress a moan when he thumbed his slit. Ropes. Okay, nothing too thick… Perhaps he would use thin cords instead. It’d be easier to maneuver around them, right? Yeah. Harry swallowed and imagined himself spread out on the table, bound down and utterly helpless. That sadistic bastard would make sure he was unable to move… maybe even make it hard to breathe, too. Harry concentrated on what the Severus in his fantasy was doing. Naturally, he couldn’t see too much from his spot on the table, but he saw enough. It kind of did look similar to doing it himself, but then again that made sense. He’d never seen it in real life. Severus wasn’t saying anything. He stared down at his task, never once slowing or faltering. Was the man right-handed like his imaginary counterpart? He had this little dip between his eyes where his brows were pulled down in concentration, too.

Harry found himself watching Severus’s jaw when the man’s hand sped up, his own hand unknowingly copying the action. His jaw was clenched. Why was it clenched? Was touching him really that distasteful? He supposed it was. If he’d been doing the same to Severus, he’d be doing more than just clenching his teeth together.

Harry moaned loudly and concentrated on stroking himself quickly. Gods, it felt great.

What was he going to do when Harry started coming? No matter what he did, it was going to make a mess. Severus hadn’t really thought about that, had he? Harry snickered to himself. He was better off just letting Harry take a shower and do it himself. What if his come got on Severus? The man was, after all, starting to lean over him. Was he getting worn-out? Hmm. Maybe it really was tiring doing this to someone else…

Harry gasped when the Severus in his mind latched his thin lips around his erection and sucked while his hand swiftly pumped up and down faster and faster. Harry, both real and fantasy, came with a surprised shout. His body couldn’t move. It felt like he really was tied. His eyes still tightly closed, Harry imagined his come pulsing into Severus’s mouth. Why was the man jerking like that?

As the pleasure started to ebb and his hand slowed, Harry imagined Severus bracing himself up over his groin. He was saying something. Gods, his professor had come… in his trousers. It made him uncomfortable thinking about it.

Harry opened his eyes, quickly washed his body off, and soon joined Severus in the kitchen again.
He didn’t spend any more time thinking about what he’d thought about in the shower. It was better that he’d done it himself, because he didn’t want Severus to touch him like that at all.

After checking his food and wondering how it hadn’t burned while he was gone, Harry sat across from Severus at the table. Severus calmly finished the chapter he was reading, bookmarked his place, and focused on Harry. Harry’s face heated up as the man studied him briefly and then nodded.

He really did know the signs!

“Have you also re-erected your shields?”

“Um…”

“Do it.” Severus waited for Harry to open his eyes again before continuing. “My theory, Potter, is that you’re inviting the Dark Lord into your thoughts-”

“No, I’m not!” Harry interrupted. “Why would I want to do that?”

“As I was saying, you’re inviting the Dark Lord into your thoughts subconsciously. A few recent incidents, such as your lucid and prophetic nightmare about cutting your wrist and hand or voicing dark thoughts about the Dark Lord with no memory afterward, all seem to have one thing in common. Tell me, Potter, before these incidences, were you thinking of him?”

Harry furrowed his brows and thought. Before his nightmare, he’d been thinking about ways he could kill Voldemort. He’d been thinking of the same right before his supposed dark thoughts voiced themselves. He wished he could remember what he’d said. Thinking about it, he remembered getting sick in the sink one moment and then the next, Severus was suddenly standing close to him. He didn’t even remember him coming into the kitchen.

“Yeah, I was thinking about ways I could kill him.”

“I suspected as much. It would appear he has found a way to penetrate your mind when you think of him. Perhaps, though, he can only accomplish this when you’re conspiring to find ways to defeat him. Have you noticed any strange behavior after simply thinking of him?”

“No… erm, have you?”

“Plenty of strange behavior, but I believe that is simply who you are.” Harry bristled, but Severus didn’t acknowledge it. “I do not care if you like what I am about to tell you and I fully expect you to comply with my orders with a minimal amount of whining. I realize it will be difficult for you.”

“What is it?”

“You are not to spend any time devising ways to defeat the Dark Lord. Leave that to-”

“No!” Harry yelled. “If I’m expected to be willing to sacrifice my life, I think I should have a say in how I do it!”

“Again, Potter, I do not care if you like it. You are not to think of it. I also believe you should strive to avoid any thoughts pertaining to him in general. However he’s managed to worm his way in, the likelihood that he may return and make you cause terrible harm is great. Indeed, now that you’re aware of this, he may return at the first moment you’re not on guard and cause you to take your life. I’ve seen him do as much too many times.”
“But I clear my mind every day and-”

“Unfortunately, I believe your efforts aren’t going to make much of a difference in this particular matter. Do not think of him at all, continue to clear your mind every morning and night, regularly lock away any memories that you don’t want him to see, and keep yourself focused on subjects that are harmless.”

“I’m locked away while everyone else is out fighting and now you’re telling me all I can do is a lot of mind training and puttering around the house like a bloody housewife?! God, this isn’t even fair! I should be out there fighting, too!”

Harry fumed for a few moments and then finally saw Severus. It was shocking, for he no longer looked like his usual collected self. When Severus spoke, his voice sounded as deadly as his expression appeared.

“You are being an irrational child, Potter. Your job right now is to lay low and stay alive. I shouldn’t be surprised you wish to disobey direct orders. You believe being out there would be helpful, but you would be playing with the fates of every witch and wizard in our world. Albus didn’t want you to know this, but I didn’t agree with him. He wanted to protect you,” Severus sneered and Harry tensed, wondering what he was about to hear. “The Dark Lord has given orders for you to be brought to him dead or alive. If you are already dead, he will bind your soul to the afterlife so you can never return to kill him. That is why you are currently locked up in this blasted prison, not to keep him busy looking for you. If you are alive, he will kill you. I suggest you discontinue these thoughts before the entire world is left to his mercy. Do you understand me?”

Harry dumbly nodded and stood to finish their dinner. He knew Severus was telling the truth and it irked him to no end. There was no logical way for reasoning away an escape attempt now when the truth was stated in such a way. If he left, everyone would have no hope for the future. The world may as well bow down to Voldemort if he so much as walked out the front door… well, the front door they didn’t have. The truth was, as Severus had pointed out in not quite the same words, he was stuck playing the bored housewife for a man he couldn’t stand at all until others told him it was time to kill or be killed.

He would just have to take it lying down like a good little housewife. Pffft.

That didn’t mean he had to like Severus very much right now. The man was a bastard most of the time with no social skills to speak of and didn’t know how to give a compliment (even his attempts at compliments were toned-down insults!), but he didn’t have to talk to him like that. Merlin, he felt like a useless, selfish sod now! Harry sent a scowl Severus’s way and started mixing some honey into the small butter dish set out for the rolls. Bloody arsehole.

Harry blinked when the image of an actual bloodied arsehole flashed through his mind. He almost knocked over the bowl of peas in shock, but quickly caught them at the last minute.

“Ew.”

Why on earth had he just had that mental image? It was disgusting! Where had it even come from? And why would an arsehole be bloody? Harry had a disturbing thought, then. From… sex? Uh, does anal sex usually leave- WHAT???? Why was he thinking about anal sex??

Harry let out a distressed whine and stabbed a large knife into the ham.

“Problems, Potter?”
“None you want to know about, I assure you.” Harry shuddered delicately. “Are you ready to eat?”

Severus arched a brow. “I have been waiting on you. Dinner would have been much sooner if you’d hurried through your little adventure in the bathroom.”

Harry flushed. He should have known Severus would make fun of him no matter how long he spent in the bathroom!!! The bastard had probably been out here laughing the entire… Oh. No.

Had he forgotten a silencing charm?

“Sir?”

“What?” Severus asked dismissively.

“Erm, did I….” Oh, God. He would have heard everything, too! Harry blanched and peeked at his professor. “Did I forget a silencing charm?”

“Yes, I do believe you did.”

“Oh, fuck,” Harry whispered.

“Language, Mister Potter.”

Mister Po… Mist… Mister Potter? OH, GOD. Nonononono!!!!!!! He knew he shouldn’t have tried picturing it. He knew it! Why had he even wanted to? Oh, yeah, his annoyingly, persistently troubling curiosity!

“Did I say anything… weird?”

“Are you truly asking me what you said during your masturbatory session? Should you not know better than I?” A small smile appeared on Severus’s mouth, quirking up the corner of his lips. “Better yet, are you worried you might have said something you would rather not be heard? Hmm. I do so wonder what it could be.”

“Is that a yes?”

“Indeed.”

Harry swallowed. “What… was it?”

“Would you really enjoy listening to me recount what I heard while you were pleasuring yourself, Potter? I honestly do not think you would survive the incident. Perhaps we should forget this conversation and sup, hmm?”

Oh… GOD… it must be really bad. What had he said? He frankly couldn’t remember saying anything!!!! Like, at all! Harry had to take a deep breath to calm himself down.

“Sir, I think I’d like to know what you heard.”

“Are you quite sure you wish to tread down that path, Potter?”

Severus had a strange look in his eyes. Maybe laughter? Harry shuddered in embarrassment and nodded.

“Yeah. I kinda need to know.”
“Very well. The first thing I heard was ‘maybe I should just wash my hair first.’ It was followed some time later by a loud shout of ‘that bastard!’ Were you cursing me?”

“Yes,” Harry replied, not lying. He’d said those things aloud? Hmm.

“I can understand that. Let’s see... there was a lot of moaning- you have a set of lungs on you, by the way. I feel like I have a headache brewing- and some very telling sounds. Almost immediately afterwards, you said, and I quote, ‘gonna come too soon.’” Severus looked amused and momentarily cut his gaze to the right. “I will make no comment upon that. Purely for your sake, you understand. It was soon followed by ‘...like making yourself or...’” His gaze came to Harry; eyes locked on his, he asked, “Do you honestly not know how to pleasure a woman, Potter? I’d have thought you, of all people, would have the necessary experience.”

Harry ducked his head and groaned. “Please continue, sir.”

“Hmm. Next, I heard ‘always so angry.’ I admit to being slightly curious about that; however, I truly do not wish to know. Then you said, ‘kitchen table.’” Harry groaned louder and wished he could just obliviate himself. Would that work? “The next took me by surprise. I fortunately only heard snippets, but I heard enough.”

“What did I say?” Harry asked, terrified Severus’s name might have slipped out. Damn his curiosity!!!!!!

“‘Ropes… thin cords instead.’ I never took you to be a deviant, Potter.” Severus let out a sound that eerily resembled a breathy snort. “You also muttered ‘hard to breathe’ and then ‘oh, yeah. Mmm.’” Harry again shuddered. Gross. His professor had literally just said the way it probably sounded when he did it. In fact, his voice had even dropped lower! “I almost felt the need to call out that you’d forgotten your charm. However, this gives me plenty of blackmail material should I ever need it.”

Forget an obliviate spell. He wanted Severus to put him out of his misery. His professor should do something nice for once in his life.

“Anything else?”

“Oh, yes. ‘...going to make a mess’ drifted in here before too much longer. You also snickered at one point. Had you just looked down at yourself?” Harry grumbled and peeked out of the shelter of his arms. Severus was full-on smirking and had his arms crossed over his chest. “I’ll take that as a possible no. You also gasped and said ‘Gods! Yeah, suck me.’” Why the hell was Severus... oh, dear God. His professor had just said ‘yeah, suck me’ in that weird voice of his!!!! WHAT?? Ron would never believe this. “It was quite obvious that you released shortly after that. The dead assuredly heard you cry out. Again, you have a set of lungs on you, Potter.”

“Please just kill me,” Harry mumbled.

“I will do no such thing. Now, if you’re done hiding in your arms, might we consume the undoubtedly sub-par food you’ve prepared for the evening meal? It pains me to admit this, but I am quite ravenous and would even eat that giant oaf’s rock cakes right now.”

Harry couldn’t make himself look at Severus the rest of the evening. He decided to avoid him the next few days. No, the next week. Yeah, that sounded better.
Christmas Cheer

Harry glided around the kitchen, cheerfully humming a Christmas carol under his breath. He wished he had a Muggle radio laying around so he could hear all of his old favorites again. Never mind that, though. Christmas was so close now! He’d been impatiently waiting for this day to come all month. It was baking day! He had been in here since early that morning baking up a furious storm. Every little sweet thing, really, that he would wish to consume from now until after the new year started had been made. Pies, cakes, breads, candies…

Still humming and now smiling, Harry danced over to one rack of cooling breads he’d been working on thus far. He proudly surveyed the different loaves of pumpkin, banana, chocolate chunk, cinnamon-apple, and spiced sweet potato breads. They all smelled so appealing. Harry cocked his head to one side when his stomach rumbled and realized he’d missed lunch.

What had Severus eaten? Had he even eaten? Harry felt guilty for a moment, because they had both also missed breakfast and Severus must be starving now. At least he’d had a chance to pick at his sweets here and there. Severus hadn’t been given the same luxury.

Realizing his thoughts, Harry dismissed the feeling irritably and looked at the clock. Oh, it was only eleven. Thank Merlin. Hurrying to the fridge, Harry looked inside and debated what he should make. He scowled at the ham he’d made five days ago (he refused to think about the rest of that day), pulled it from the fridge, and banished it with a wave of his wand. Still holding his wand, he realized this was the first time he’d touched it all day. Oh, the joys of doing everything the Muggle way…

Harry smiled and decided he’d keep things simple today. When he was finished preparing everything, he wiped his hands on his apron and checked the temporarily-clean table one more time.

Of course, everything looked great.

“Hey, Snape,” Harry called out lightly and pulled his apron off. By the time Severus entered, Harry was already sitting down. “Time to eat.”

Severus gazed around the room wide-eyed, studied the table a moment, and then sank into his chair. He briefly looked up at Harry before looking down at their lunch again. Harry watched him, almost smiling at the man’s obvious surprise. As he watched, Severus tried a bite of the cheesy soup and sneered.

“You’ve used too much onion for this to be enjoyable. It’s revolting.”

Harry took a sip of his spiced iced tea to hide his amused expression. “I’m sorry you feel that way.”

“Hmm. Are these bits of bacon in here?”

“Yeah.”

“Appalling.”

Before he could stop it, Harry snickered quietly. Somehow, Christmas being so close put him in a great mood. Even Severus’s usual insults were amazing.
“And is this a piece of potato or a rock?”

“It might be a rock. I’m not too sure, though. You know how I love adding non-food items to my meals,” Harry replied teasingly before spooning more soup into his mouth. Damn, it really was great. After a moment of thought, Harry tore apart a roll and popped a piece in his mouth. Yummm. When the silence stretched enough to catch his attention, Harry looked up to see if Severus was even still in the room. He hadn’t moved and was watching him with a mix of confusion and something else on his face. “What?”

“Have you been smoking asphodel?”


“Sadly. Muggleborns claim it’s better than Muggle marijuana. As for why, you’re acting strange and have been cooking all day. What of ginger root? Perhaps you have been sniffing a little here and there.” Harry looked at Severus like he was insane. “Yes, many people do it. Perhaps you were smoking mallowsweet inst-”

“I haven’t been doing anything. Why do you think so?”

“You’re acting strangely content and smiling every three seconds.” Severus’s eyes narrowed. “You haven’t been huffing any-”

“No! Merlin. I’m just excited for Christmas, Professor.”

“Hmm.”

Harry and Severus both turned their attentions to their food after that. After about ten minutes, though, Harry couldn’t hold it in any longer.

“Sir?”

“What?”

Harry almost smiled. The man sounded so grumpy, which contrasted with the look on his face right now. During the prolonged silence, Severus lowered his spoon and glared.

“Oh. Um, why would I have been sniffing ginger root? I can understand the others, because they relax you or clear your mind, that sort of thing. The ginger root, though… doesn’t it do the opposite of that?”

“Quite.”

“Well, then why-”

“Absolutely no reason.”

Harry frowned and finished the last of his second bowl of soup while he thought about what all he’d said before Severus had brought up all that stuff. Was it… Harry carried his dishes to the sink and peeked over his shoulder at Severus. Was it what he said about using rocks instead of potatoes? It must be. He couldn’t think of anything else it could be.

Without much thought, Harry scooped up Severus’s dirty dishes, placed them in the sink, and incanted the washing spell. He turned back around with mugs of the coffee they usually had with dessert and set them on the table. Moments later, he returned with two large slices of cinnamon-
apple bread. Just as he’d placed one of the plates in front of Severus, Harry finally looked around.

“Oh. I didn’t think. Um, did you want the cinnamon-apple bread or did you want something else? You did want a dessert, right?”

“Of course I didn’t want one of your desserts, Potter. If I manage to force this disgusting lump of half-cooked poison down, it will be a miracle.”

“So the cinnamon-apple is great with you?”

Severus stared suspiciously and Harry’s lips twITCHed. This was the first time he’d ever verbally interpreted one of Severus’s “insults” and was curious to hear what he’d say. Blame his bravery on the Christmas cheer.

“If it weren’t this, it would be something equally distasteful. I suppose I will settle for this.”

“You like it, then. Did I use too much cinnamon?”

“I have never said I like anything you present to me and yes, you’ve most unquestionably used too much cinnamon.”

Harry merely took a sip of his perfectly-doctored coffee, a small smile stealing across his lips.

***

The next morning, Harry pushed his blanket off and decided he needed a long soak in the bath. His body was a little sore from being on his feet all day yesterday. While walking to the bathroom, he thought about finding Severus and asking if he had any massage oil he could use.

He quickly decided against it. Merlin knows Severus would twist his explanation and make it perverted somehow.

Knocking on the bathroom door didn’t herald Severus’s presence in there so Harry pushed the door open. He should have knocked louder, yeah. Severus, more than visible through the half-closed shower curtain, had his head resting against the arm he had braced under the shower spray. Harry watched the water wash away the soap on the man’s chest and hoped to hell he wasn’t wanking. He didn’t need the image that early in the morning. He couldn’t help but look, though…

He wasn’t.

Severus was simply leaning against the wall and letting the water rinse him off, his free hand hanging down at his side. Realizing what he was doing, Harry clapped a hand over his eyes and cleared his throat loudly. He heard the shower curtain close promptly.

“Why are you in here, Potter?”

“I have to pee and you yelled at me last time I went in the sink.”

“That is because dishes, not urine, belong in the sink. If you must, relieve yourself and then leave. Do not flush or I will kill you when I’m done in here.”

“Yes, sir. Thanks.”

Harry kept his eyes covered until his back was turned. He was in the middle of emptying his bladder when the water shut off and the curtain opened. Harry tensed, quickly finished, and washed his hands. He was glad to find Severus was already in a towel when he turned to flush.
“Bathroom’s yours if you wish to shower,” Severus called over his shoulder, already halfway out the door. Harry watched him go, shook his head, and stripped. He was lying in a tub half-full of foamy water when the door opened again. “I forgot to shave. Keep your curtain closed, because your skinny arse is the last thing I need to see.”

“Can’t you do that with a spell?” Harry asked through the curtain he’d just wrenched close.

“If you desire a shoddy shave, yes. However, I prefer otherwise.”

“Have you always shaved by hand?”

“Obviously,” Severus answered dryly.

“Who taught you?”

Severus let out an irritated grumble and didn’t answer. Harry sat up in the bath, turned off the tap, and peeked around the curtain. He’d always just used the spell and wondered how men shaved the Muggle way. He’d honestly never seen anyone do it.

“Are you going to stare at me the entire time, Potter?”

Harry looked away from the blade poised at Severus’s neck and grimaced embarrassedly when he caught the scowl Severus was aiming his way.

“Sorry. I was just curious.”

“Might I suggest you close your curtain and do whatever it is you were planning to do before? I assure you, I won’t be in here too much longer. Until then, you’ll simply have to suffer the lack of privacy.”

“I wasn’t going to do anything! Besides, I wouldn’t wank while you were in here. I was just going to soak a bit. I’m sore.”

“I do not recall implying you were about to do anything other than bathe,” Severus said strangely. Harry peeked around the back of the curtain and saw he was shaving under his chin. Well, really, it was almost his neck area. Under-chin? Whatever. Strange indeed.

“It sounded like that’s what you were saying.”

“Perhaps to one whose hormones are always affecting his thought processes.”

“That would be me, right?”

“I rest my case.”

Through the curtain, Harry heard the blade tap against the side of the sink. “Why did you start where you did?”

“Because I chose to. Shut up and do something.”

“Like what?”

“Bathe,” Severus replied derisively.

“I’m waiting for you to get done.”
“Then think of something else. I’m currently a bit busy.”

“Like what?” Harry asked again.

“You’re a teenaged boy. Think of women. Surely you have numerous pretty women hiding off in the shadows. Think of them if you’re so intent upon not actually bathing, though you are, in fact, in the bath.”

“Sir, pretty women?”

“Yes, pretty women.”

“But—”

“Potter,” Severus growled. “Do you want me to accidentally cut myself? Would it make you happy to see my blood?”

Harry felt sick to his stomach and couldn’t resist the urge to wrap his arms around himself.

“No.”

“Then stop making me talk to you. I’m holding a blade right now and it is quite sharp. The results could be deadly if I’m cut in the right location. Think of something and leave me in peace.”

A few silent moments passed. Harry heard the blade tap the sink and stuck his bottom lip out petulantly.

“I don’t have anybody waiting in the shadows.”

“Dammit, Potter. Episkey. Tergeo.” Harry ripped the curtain back and looked at Severus, who was using his wand to clear the blood away from his throat. Blood drizzled from a slit right across his Adam’s apple. “What did I tell you?”

“Sorry. I didn’t think you would actually cut yourself!”

Severus grumbled something indistinct and continued shaving, unaware of Harry’s silent watching. When he was finished, Severus rinsed his face and used a towel to pat it dry. He went to hang the small towel up and noticed Harry. Both eyebrows rose and he quickly looked away.

“Potter, did I not tell you to keep the curtain closed because I did not wish to see your skinny arse? While thankful I did not see your arse, I now know without a doubt that you are indeed a male.”

Harry flushed and pulled the curtain closed. “Pervert.”

“I am not the one sitting in the bath with the curtain open, thereby exposing my entire body to his professor.”

“Why’d you even look over here?” Harry asked loudly.

“It is a basic principle of human behavior. No matter what sexual preference a human may have, when a naked body presents itself, the eyes will inevitably be drawn to the sight. It is an involuntary reaction to seeing unclothed flesh, no matter how appealing or hideous that flesh is.”

“That doesn’t make sense.”

“Let me see if I can explain it differently. You walked in the bathroom earlier and did not merely
go about your usual morning routine. No, you immediately spotted me bathing.”

“I… looked away.”

“For that, I am immensely grateful. Now do you understand what I am saying?”

“Yes, I think so.” Harry stared at the taps and shook his head in confusion. He didn’t even know why he’d stared at Severus so hearing the man’s explanation did little to no good. “You didn’t mean to?”

“Potter,” Severus sighed. Harry pictured him shaking his head.

Moments later, the bathroom door closed with a quiet click. Harry opened the curtain wide, pulled the plug, and climbed out of the emptying bath. At least his aching muscles and feet felt much better. He could actually wash off tonight. Now to fix breakfast.

An hour later, Harry finished setting the kitchen table and called out for Severus to join him. Obediently, Severus entered the room and placed a book Harry had never before seen on the table. He eyed both it and Severus curiously while serving himself a simple breakfast. They were having slices of pumpkin bread, scrambled eggs, and sausage for breakfast in anticipation for Christmas’s heavy meals. Severus seemed to be enjoying his food. Oddly, he hadn’t yet opened his book…

During the quiet meal, Harry’s mind drifted off to tomorrow. Tonight, he would begin setting out the various pots, pans, and utensils he’d need to use tomorrow morning and afternoon. The food was already separated so he’d just have to pull things out as he went. Harry glanced over at the full counters and snickered. He was taking his role as bored housewife seriously.

Severus’s dishes levitated past his head, pulling his attention away from the food. “Sorry. I was lost in thought.”

“An unprecedented event, that. Would you like a headache reliever?”

Harry narrowed his eyes. “Anyway, did you want a refill on your drink? There’s more food.”

“I have had my fill of your unexceptional offerings. I will have to content myself with more sludge.”

The longer Severus went without opening his book, the more preoccupied Harry became with it. What was in it? Harry quietly prepared Severus another cup and set it down on the table.

“Sir, this is really bothering me. Why haven’t you opened your book yet?”

“Because I was eating.”

“What’s it about?”

“You are more than welcome to look. I was on page 116 or 117. I can’t remember which, but don’t lose my place.”

“Are you sure?”

Severus nodded and calmly sipped his coffee. Without questioning why the man was being so approachable today, Harry accepted the book from Severus’s outstretched hand and opened it to page 117. His eyes were immediately riveted to the sight of a naked male spread out on a table, his entire body on display. The image was going to be burned in his head all day, he just knew it. Just
when he managed to pull his eyes away, he saw a female in the same position on page 116. Harry was pretty sure he could draw a picture of her… lady parts. He looked away quickly and met Severus’s eyes.

“Does my explanation make more sense now?”

“You… you planned this? You knew I’d want to look inside?”

“Of course I did.”

“What if I hadn’t wanted to see that? It’s too early in the morning to-”

“You did not understand my explanation when I used you as an example so I used an academic publication to stress the point.”

Harry frowned in confusion, looked back down at the book, and blanched when he saw the notes ‘cadaver’ and a series of numbers under each picture.

“Oh, my God. They’re dead.” For the second time that morning, Harry felt sick. “Ew, no. No, no no. Snape, no!”

“Potter, you’ve seen dead bodies before. Stop acting like Brown.”

“Brown?”

“Miss Brown.”

“I wasn’t acting like Lavender.” Harry unwillingly looked down again, swallowed thickly, and closed the book. “They’re dead.”

“It is a Muggle human anatomy schoolbook. If you’ll look closely at the photos, you’ll see-”

“No! No, thank you, sir. Erm, why do you have it?”

“I find the subject interesting.”

“And you just so happened to pack this book with the rest of your things?” Harry asked in disbelief. "Are you serious?"

“Why would I not?”

“Why would you? That’s just weird.”

“I beg to differ. Also, I might point out it helped pass half a week of my time.”

“You read this entire book in half a week?”

“Read it again, yes.”

Harry looked disgusted. “Sick.”

“I do not judge your leisure activities. Do not judge mine.”

“But I don’t sit around reading gross books.”

“No, so far you’ve moped around, completed schoolwork, cooked, written a few letters, and pleasured yourself on a daily basis. Most of which you have, I should tell you, done without a
silencing charm.”

Harry flushed. “I’ve done other stuff.”

“Like what?”

“Well, I’ve slept, I attacked you once, and… and, um, I… uh…” Severus looked smugly triumphant and Harry scowled. “I read a book, too.”

“A book? Hmm. That is something. I do believe sleeping, as well, is noteworthy.”

“Not going to comment upon me attacking you?”

“When?”

“That night I had a nightmare.”

“Ah. I could have easily overpowered you, but you were perturbed and wanted answers. Clearly. Otherwise, you wouldn’t have so eagerly jumped into my lap.” Severus looked away, smirked, and lifted his mug to his mouth. “For the second time, I should point out, since we’ve come here.”

“I didn’t jump into your lap.” Harry blinked and then narrowed his eyes. “You couldn’t have overpowered me. I was holding you down.”

“I assure you, I could have if I’d had the desire, Potter.”

“You could not,” Harry argued. “I’m not a wimp, Professor. I would have been able to keep you there.”

“I’m not going to argue about this. It would have been remarkably easy.”

“No, it wouldn’t have.”

“It would, Potter.”

“Prove it,” Harry challenged.

“Prove what?”

“That you could do it.”

“You want me to prove that I could overpower you? How exactly do you wish to accomplish that? I can’t imagine you would be amenable to-”

“Lay down somewhere and get comfortable. I’ll get back on and attempt to hold you down.”

Severus’s brow lifted considerably. “Are you jesting? I’m not going to go lay out somewhere so you can-”

“Because you know you can’t do it,” Harry announced triumphantly and Severus’s eyes narrowed. He abruptly stood up, to Harry’s confusion, and pushed his chair in. “Where are you going?”

“Follow me, Potter.”

Harry wordlessly followed Severus to the bedroom and watched in growing surprise as the man removed his shoes and robe, settled down on his own bed, and beckoned Harry with one finger.
Unable to comprehend what he was seeing, Harry stared at one of Severus’s sock-covered feet.

“You’re really going to do this?”

“You’re the one who seems to think he needs proof that I can, in fact, easily overpower you. I’ll even give you a few minutes before I do anything.”

“You’re not going to be moving.”

“Believe what you want. Come here.”

Harry kicked his shoes off, crawled over Severus’s body, and allowed the man to position him in a way that wouldn’t damage anything. True to his word, Severus leaned back on the pillows, clasped his hands together over his belly, and closed his eyes. After a moment, he reached up and fluffed his flat pillow.

“What are you doing?”

“Relaxing. I sure as hell don’t want to be staring up at you the entire time. Seeing your face above me would be detrimental to my endeavor.”

Harry scowled. “And the fact that you can feel me up here means nothing?”

“It is easy to pretend your body belongs to someone else, Potter. After all, I’m not looking at you at all.” Harry was offended. That bastard! He wasn’t completely ugly. He shifted a little, trying to make himself more comfortable and wondered if Severus would give him a clue before he tried to fight. Severus hadn’t opened his eyes, but Harry saw he was smirking. “I would suggest you stop moving around on my lap like that. It’s positively obscene.”

“Um, wow.” Did he really mean that the way it sounded? Because gross. “Did you-”

“Are you almost ready, Potter, or do you need a few more moments to prepare yourself?” Harry blushed. What the hell was wrong with him? Nothing! Absolutely nothing, but… it sounded kind of sexual. Right? Eww. No, hold up a minute. When two guys have sex, who does that? Like, if a guy was going to get it, would he- “Potter?”

Harry shook his head and looked down at Severus’s face. “Erm, what?”

“I asked if you were prepared.”

“Uh. For what?”

That ever expressive brow was back. “To do what we’re in here to do.”

“Wha- oh!” Harry felt a blush that must be made of fire rush over his face, burning him. Of course. What they were in- “Sorry, was thinking of something else.”

“Obviously. Though it is a little worrying that you chose to drift off while astride a man. Are you ready?”

“Wait.”

Harry leaned over to hold Severus’s shoulders down and clamped his knees tightly. He was prepared to fight his hardest. Severus looked from Harry’s face to his hands and then back to his face. He looked highly amused and casually snaked his arms out from under the spot Harry’s abdomen had been holding them down.
“Now are you ready?”

“Yes. Try your-”

Severus easily grabbed both of Harry’s wrists and rolled. Harry landed on his back with his legs still around Severus’s hips and his hands now pinned to the bed. He sucked a deep breath into his tight lungs, sagged onto the bed, and looked up at Severus in shock.

“I do believe this is where I say I told you so. Is that the correct saying?”

“You just-”

“What?”

“But I was…”

“I told you, Potter. Easy.”

“But…”

“Admit it. I was right.”

“No.”

Severus smirked. “Then try to get away.”

Harry tugged his hands, which were held fast by Severus’s own. He looked down between their bodies and grumbled. Severus’s prick was touching his, the back of his thighs were laying on the front of Severus’s thighs, and his knees were still tucked up from before they’d flipped over. His feet were currently dangling down and brushing the other man’s calves. If he arched his back and stretched a bit, he could almost touch the bed. But if he did that, he pressed his prick against Severus’s belly and Severus’s prick grazed his arse. Why were they so close? Harry looked from their brushing bodies up to his hands. Maybe the way Severus was holding him down was easier this way? No, don't think about sex again, pervert! What was wrong with him? Stretch, fight, something!

“God.”

“Oh, come now, Potter. Can’t you get away?”

“Yes.”

“Then do it.”

“I can’t when you’re holding my wrists like that.”

“Would you like me to let go?” Severus asked, smirking proudly.

“Yeah.”

Severus released Harry’s wrists and braced himself up, his hands on either side of his shoulders. As he did so, he scooted up the bed a bit, but didn’t sit up any. They were really close right now. Urgh. Harry stared up at him, feeling like he could probably draw his professor naked based upon what all he could feel against him right now. Embarrassing.

There was no way he could even try to fight and retain his dignity. Harry thought about it as
quickly as possible, something Remus had taught him to do. If he tried to touch the bed again by
arching and pushing down his legs, they’d rub pricks at some point. So not happening. If he spread
his legs a little and tried to flip them back over, he would be way too exposed for his comfort. Even
more so than right now. Right. If he tried to rear up and push Severus onto his back, Severus would
probably be able to just push him back onto the bed… and accidentally come down with him.
Yeah, that would suck. Harry wasn’t stupid. He knew the man had enough muscle and weight on
him that having him fall on top of him would hurt like a bitch. Every scenario he thought of led to
some sort of embarrassing situation, usually with their pricks being in contact somehow.

Severus had him pinned too effectively. And he wasn’t even holding him down anymore! Gods, it
was infuriating.

“I can’t,” Harry admitted in defeat.

“No? You haven’t even tried. You’ve only wriggled about, weakly tried to pull your hands free,
and thought long enough that I thought you might be developing a headache.”

“Every scenario I thought through led to nothing. I wouldn’t be able to get free like this and still
look at you afterwards.”

“Are you quite sure?”

“Yes.”

“And you’re sure you couldn’t get free?”

Harry studied Severus’s face, glad his glasses prevented the ends of his dangling hair from getting
in his eyes. Severus had just been in this position. He’d gotten free, hadn’t he? He’d grabbed his
wrists and rolled. He could try that… Yeah, right. Unfortunately, he didn’t think he could get free
unless he broke Severus’s nose. Erm, again?

“Sir, have you ever had your nose broken?”

“Excuse me?”

“I wasn’t being rude. I was just thinking I probably couldn’t get free unless I broke your nose and I
was wondering if it’d be the first time.”

Severus harrumphed. “No, it wouldn’t be the first time. Is that how you would attempt to get
free?”

“Yeah. It’s the only way I can think of.”

Harry narrowed his eyes, thinking quickly. He could always do something really shocking that
caused the man to rear back on his own merit, like straight up grab Severus’s cock. He could
always scrub his hands afterwards, right?

“It wouldn’t work. Breaking my nose, in fact, would only result in me holding you down harder
while my blood dripped onto your face.”

“Ew. That’s gross, Professor.”

“Quite.” Severus sat back on his heels and seemed to study him for a long minute or so. “The next
time I tell you something, perhaps you’ll believe it. Unless, of course, you enjoy having your pride
repeatedly wounded.”
Severus nodded and climbed off the bed. He was tying on his left shoe when Harry flew off the bed and tackled him with an angry war cry. They hit the floor in a pile of tangled limbs, exchanging a large number of curses and grunts while they wrestled. At one point, Harry got his face shoved into Severus’s other shoe and Severus got his arm bit. Harry even banged his head on Severus’s chair, though he doesn’t exactly remember how that happened. He was in the process of trying to restrain Severus when the older man managed to pin Harry to the floor and sat on his belly. Harry uncomfortably realized the man’s groin was mere inches from his face and immediately froze, lest Severus scoot forward any more.

“What were you attempting to accomplish with that foolish move, Potter? It’s a miracle you didn’t break my neck or injure my back.”

“Element… of surprise,” Harry gasped and tried pulling Severus’s hand from his neck. “Sir, can’t breathe.”

Severus loosened his hand, but didn’t move much else. “Natural reaction to getting jumped. The next time you attempt something like this, I may just kill you regardless of your purpose to the world. Do you understand me?”

“Yes.” Harry tasted blood in the back of his mouth and swallowed, trying to ignore the tinny taste. “Am I bleeding?”

“Yes. Are you finished with this endeavor?”

“Yes.”

“Very good.” Severus stood up gracefully, hiked a leg up onto his chair, and stared down at Harry while tying his other shoe. “Get off of the floor. You look ridiculous sprawled out like that.”

Harry groaned when he was on his feet again. His head was pounding. What the hell had he done to it? He decided bending over might just make it worse so he forewent his shoes and padded out of the room in only his socks. In the bathroom, he gaped at his bloodied face. It didn’t even register in his mind that Severus was soon standing right beside him.

“How the hell did I do that?”

“If I’m not mistaken, your head encountered the corner of my chair when I released your bite-hold on my arm.” Severus lifted up his wounded arm and showed it to Harry. “I’m not going to get rabies from this, am I?”

“I’m not an animal.”

“You could have fooled me, Potter.” Harry flinched when Severus held his wand up to his temple. “Episkey. Tergeo. Incidentally, your shirt may be ruined.”

“Hopefully not. I’ll send it to Dobby and see if he can fix it.”

“Personally, I think you should leave it as is. Perhaps it will be a reminder not to go for round two when your opponent isn’t even aware of your intentions, especially if you had just assured them your struggles were at an end. It’s a move extraordinarily like something your father would have done. I would know.”

Harry grimaced apologetically. “I wasn’t thinking about it like that, sir.”
“You just didn’t want to admit defeat and it cost you another blow to your pride.”

“And my head.”

“Indeed. Now, haven’t you something to be doing?”

“Yeah.” Harry grinned for what felt like the first time all day. “I have to cook.”

“Oh, dear Merlin. The boy’s cooking more of his disgusting foodstuffs. I may never survive this imprisonment.”

***

While Harry was in the middle of cleaning the oven to make sure it’s in tip-top shape for Christmas day, Severus strolled into the room, cleared his throat, and tapped the counter with his knuckles. Harry looked up at him and furrowed his brows.

“What?”

“Growing up, it had always been a tradition for me to open a gift on Christmas Eve. I don’t care what you do tonight, but I’m upholding that tradition this year regardless of our stay here. You’re more than welcome to join me, but don’t expect me to enjoy it if you do.”

Harry almost smiled. “Thanks, sir, for that generous offer.”

“I wasn’t being generous.”

“Okay.”

“Potter, stop smiling at me like that. Get rid of that look.” Severus paused and narrowed his eyes. “Yes, that one.”

Harry merely snickered.

***

That evening, Harry padded out of the bathroom barefoot, silently walked through the living room, and again checked on his Christmas pudding. To distract himself from thoughts of his family, Harry placed some coffee items, two thick slices of warmed apple-cinnamon bread, and a pot of coffee onto a tray. He studied the tray briefly, nodded, and carried it out into the living room. Dinner had only been about three hours ago, but Harry wanted something to do before they opened their Christmas Eve gift. It still blew his mind that Severus had told him about a tradition from his childhood. It was nice of him to share it, though. It had taken his mind off of everything, which is why he’d probably done it.

“I brought a snack if you want it,” Harry announced, placing the tray on the coffee table. Severus peered over the top of his book.

“It’s a miracle I ever sleep with the amount of coffee you force on me.”

“Would you like tea instead?”

Harry had honestly never thought about it. Tea was nice, but he’d noticed early on in their stay that Severus much preferred coffee and since he was already making it for the man, he never bothered to make tea for himself. It seemed like a waste of time, really, because he liked coffee, too.
“No, coffee will be fine.”

“Oh, okay.” Harry made up their coffees, sat a bit away from Severus, and eagerly took a bite of his bread. It was delicious. “So, about this tradition of yours…”

Severus pursed his lips and Harry started to say something about not meaning to pry, but was interrupted before he could say a word.

“What of it?”

“Oh. Um, are there any guidelines on what kind of gift you select? I mean, if you wanted to open the biggest one, could you?”

“No. You select one of the smaller gifts, preferably from someone that means a great deal to you, and open that one. My mother would always select mine and I hers. It’s a meaningless tradition, but it is one that has always annoyingly stuck with me.”

“What about your dad? Did you ever pick his gift, too?”

Severus’s face hardened. “He spent the holiday at the local pub. I demand you stop asking questions now.”

“Sorry,” Harry mumbled. “Well, you should go get your gift, I guess. You did still want to do it, right?”

“I can’t very well pick my own, boy. I suppose since you’re the only other person here, I shall pick your gift and you can pick mine. It won’t be the same, but it’s better than nothing. Try to pick something nice for me.”

“Um, I’ll try to not be insulted by any of that, sir.”

Harry grumbled under his breath on his way to the tree and dropped to his knees to study the gifts. He felt Severus near him, presumably doing the same, and tried to decide which gift he should pick for him. Severus made his decision rather quickly and Harry momentarily watched him head back to the couch. He could always just pick one of his gifts for Severus. He’d wanted to give him something for Christmas so he’d asked the headmaster to pick up a few things for him. They weren’t much, but it was better than nothing. Besides, his professor had helped him with a bunch of stuff in the short time they’d been here and he deserved them. His decision made, Harry plucked up one of the smaller gifts and slowly headed back to the couch. He hoped Severus wouldn’t think he was weird for getting him anything.

“Have you made your decision or are you changing your mind?”

“Huh?”

“You’ve yet to sit down. I thought you might be indecisive.”

“Oh, uh, no.” Harry plopped down on the couch and pulled his legs underneath him. “Here. I found one for you.”

Severus took it from him and arched a brow at the gift. Harry immediately realized he hadn’t written who it was from, but that was probably for the best. He doubted Severus would open it if it said it was from him. Severus, his brow still arched, handed his own choice to Harry without looking up. Harry looked down after another moment and felt shock course through him. It was from Severus! Severus had gotten him a gift! Wow. He glanced at Severus quickly and saw he was
watching him now, as well.

“Are you not going to open it?”

“I was waiting on you.”

“This is my tradition. You will be going first.”

“If you insist,” Harry replied excitedly and began ripping the paper from his gift.

“You seem so terribly bothered by that,” Severus said dryly.

“I’m just mustering enthusiasm for your sake, sir.”

Severus snorted. “Right.”

“…this is awesome. Thanks.” Harry eyed the framed and weathered photograph in his hands, a photograph of Severus and Lily on his parents’ wedding day. “Why are you giving me this?”

“I have a copy elsewhere. Enough questions about it.”

Harry grinned a little. “I like it. Thanks again. So are you going to open mine?”

“Yours?”

“Erm, yeah. It’s, uh, from me. You’ll open it still, right? I asked Professor Dumbledore to pick it up for me so it’s nothing bad. I promise.”

He still didn’t know how Albus had managed to get the gift not only to the safe house, but had put it in Harry’s bedside table with a small note.

“Albus picked it up for you? Hmm.”

Severus eyed his gift, obviously expecting it to bite. Harry rolled his eyes and settled back to wait. If Severus took much longer opening it, he fully planned to stare at his mother’s picture some more. He was saved from further contemplation by Severus ripping the gift packaging off in one long sweep. Harry looked on in awe, wondering how he’d gotten that good. It took him several rips and tears to unwrap something! That’s not even fair. While he watched, Severus opened the gift box still in his hands and calmly surveyed the prize within. Harry didn’t need to see the cloak pin to know it would have the crest of the Snape family engraved on it. Albus had assured him many times that Severus would at least find a use for it. He was honestly nervous, though.

“I wasn’t too sure if it was the right crest, but I asked Professor Dumbledore to make sure it was the right one before he-”

“How did you come upon the idea of purchasing this?”

“Erm, I, uh… I did it on my own, actually. Hermione thought you’d like a potions master crest instead, but… um, do you like it? If you don’t, I can always-”

“Stop your worried prattling, boy. I was just asking a simple question. I did not mean to imply I didn’t appreciate it.” Severus picked the cloak pin up and eyed it carefully. “I am just surprised a boy of your age would first think up and then further consider a gift such as this.”

“Is it the right crest?”
“Yes, it is. Even if it weren’t, Albus would know immediately and ask for it to be engraved correctly.” Severus placed the pin back in its box and lifted his chin a bit. “It is acceptable.”

“So you like it?” Harry asked, his lips curving up in a shy smile.

“It is acceptable.”

“Okay. I like my photo, too.”

“I am aware. Your reaction told me as much.”

Harry leaned back into the couch and ran a finger over the frame. He contemplated everything he would be doing tomorrow morning. The casserole was all ready for the morning, he’d baked the muffins during dinner, he wouldn’t have to make any more bread for their lunch, the turkey was ready to put in the oven in the morning, the pudding was fine…

“Hmm.”

“What are you contemplating over there? I can smell your brain smoking.”

“Tomorrow’s food. Big breakfast, some slices of bread for lunch, and a huge dinner. Sound good?”

“I wouldn’t say it sounds good.”

“No, you’d probably say it sounds acceptable or something along those lines, right?”

“Perhaps. Will I be forced to spend time with you tomorrow or will you allow me to celebrate alone?”

“Did you honestly have to ask, sir?”

“I suppose not.”

The two settled into silence that was starting to feel awkward. Maybe he should just go to bed… except it was Christmas Eve and it was only approaching nine. He could have some hot chocolate! It had been forever since he’d had any and it would give him something to do. Harry smiled and trotted into the kitchen. Wait. Severus might want some, too. Right? When he turned to go ask if Severus wanted any, he jumped.

“Why do you keep doing that?” he asked, hand over his heart. “I could have had a heart attack just now.”

“You’re exaggerating again.”

“No, I wasn’t. Do you want some hot chocolate?”

“No, I don’t. You know I hate the stuff. I’ll take more coffee, though. I will return shortly with my mug.” When Severus returned a minute later, he was holding his coffee cup and a bottle of wine. “It would seem Albus has sent our Christmas offerings early.”

Harry took the coffee mug from Severus, fixed him a new cup of coffee, and surreptitiously watched him put the wine away. He wished he knew how to open it. He’d just have to wait for tomorrow night, he guessed. Harry sat down at the table, pushed Severus’s coffee over, and leaned back in his chair.

“Sir?”
“What?”

“Thanks.”

“You’re making me uncomfortable, Potter.”

“Sorry.” Harry grinned. “I’ll try not to do that in the future.”

Severus scoffed. “Sure.”
“Happy Christmas, Professor!” Harry called happily. Severus blinked open one eye, closed it, and somehow managed to glare with his eyes closed. “Oh, come on. Aren’t you gonna get up?”

Again, Severus opened an eye. He glanced at the clock and growled, but Harry didn’t seem to notice the man’s mood. He was bouncing in place and smiling widely.

“Potter, it is only six in the morning. Go back to bed, cook some more, take one of your special showers, do something. Just leave me alone.”

“I’m not sleepy, I’ve already been cooking, I don’t want to, I just want to eat and open presents, and I don’t want to do it alone.”

“Too bad. You’re not a child, though you act like one ninety-five percent of the time. Surely you can enjoy your holiday alone.”

“But I’m not alone. I’m spending it with someone who won’t get out of his bed!”

“I know at least thirty-four ways I could kill you right now, Potter. Go away.” Severus sighed quietly when all he heard in response was silence. Harry sat down in Severus’s chair and stared so hard, he almost forgot to blink. Quickly, Severus was roused from almost being asleep again by the feeling of being watched. “Potter, you’re still in here, aren’t you?”

“Yes. I’m just gonna wait for you to get up. Don’t rush yourself or anything. I’ll be here waiting.”

“Your filthy arse is sitting on my chair, isn’t it?”

“It’s not filthy. I took a shower this morning.”

“Explains why he doesn’t want to fondle himself,” Severus grumbled. Harry chuckled and continued to watch him. He didn’t bother telling him he hadn’t done anything of the sort. It was funnier this way. “Is it really too much to wish for a lay in this morning?”

“Yeah,” Harry replied loudly. “It’s Christmas!”

“I know.”

Harry found himself staring at Severus’s face again. It was obvious he wanted to go back to sleep but couldn’t do it with an audience. His brows furrowed as Severus frowned.

“What time did you go to bed last night?”

“One.”

“You stayed up drinking that late?”
“Yes.”

“So you’ve only had five hours of sleep.”

“Yes.”

Ignoring Harry’s eyes boring into him, Severus rolled over and buried his face in one of his pillows. Harry almost smiled. It reminded him of how Ron does the same every time he goes to bed too late. Toeing off his shoes, Harry studied Severus seriously. He’d only been asleep five hours and he’d been drinking last night. Harry wondered how much he’d had. He must be exhausted if he didn’t want to get up for breakfast.

Maybe he’d let him sleep a few more hours. Breakfast could always be warmed up again, right?

“Hey, Professor?”

“Potter, please,” Severus said quietly. “Don’t.”

“I was just going to say I’d let you sleep a few more hours before bothering you again.”

Severus grumbled softly and Harry sat there a while longer, wondering what he’d do. He really didn’t want to eat or open his presents alone. He hadn’t been lying about that. Severus may be a frustrating and callous bastard, but celebrating with him beat doing it alone. He could take a small dose of sleeping potion and have a nap until Severus woke. Harry remembered seeing a bottle in the bathroom and headed down the hall. He had to dig in one of the two cabinets by the bath, Severus’s cabinet (he’d rather not ponder why he had even looked in there before), and successfully procured the bottle he’d been looking for.

It was strong. By the time Harry had made it back to the bedroom, he was ready to pass out ASAP. He stripped off his shirt and jeans, threw them into Severus’s chair so they wouldn’t get wrinkled, and fell face-down on his bed.

Four and a half hours later, Severus wrestled Harry onto his back and poured a bit of liquid down his throat. Harry’s eyes immediately flew open as he started coughing. Severus crossed his arms over his chest and glared at the almost-naked figure below him.

“You took some of my sleeping draught, didn’t you?”

“Yeah.” Harry sat up and rubbed his eyes. He had no idea what had happened to his glasses. “You needed sleep.”

“And you did, as well?”

“Not really. I just didn’t want to get bored.”

“Hmm. I suggest you clothe yourself.”

Harry looked down and seemed surprised to see he was wearing only his boxer shorts. He wordlessly summoned his clothing and quickly dressed.

“Are you hungry?”

“I am now, yes. I have no doubt you slaved away all morning on what are now cold victuals barely fit for swine. However, I’m hungry enough to eat it without complaint.”

Harry paused in zipping his jeans and grinned at Severus. “Does it count if you complain about the
food in the same sentence you said you weren’t going to complain about it?”

“Of course not.”

“Naturally.” Harry pulled on his shoes while Severus watched and then stood up straight. “So Happy Christmas.”

“You’ve already said that.”

“I know, but you were barely awake the first time.”

“It would be a first, I assure you.”

Harry almost didn’t get it. He was halfway through the living room when he stopped, almost tripping over the table, and felt Severus run into him. His professor immediately grabbed him up around the waist, preventing a nasty trip to the corner of the coffee table. Harry turned as much as he could in Severus’s arms and laughed.

“Did you just make a joke?”

“I most assuredly did not, Potter.”

“You did.” Harry’s grin widened, displaying a large number of his teeth. “Oh, my God. This is amazing. Quick, how are you feeling right now? Is this your first joke?”

Severus gave him a black glare and shoved him away. “I did not just make a joke, you insolent brat.”

“Was it your first?”

“It wasn’t a joke. I was being quite serious. And just because I do not tell you jokes doesn’t mean I haven’t before. I can’t stand you, boy, so why would I waste my time sharing something like that?”

“Sure.”

Still grinning, Harry entered the kitchen and set about warming up the food. Soon, he was sitting across from Severus and happily eating Christmas breakfast. He occasionally stole a look at Severus, grinning each time he caught him munching contentedly at something else. He’d always loved making Christmas breakfast, especially if his aunt and uncle let him have some of the leftovers.

He’d made the usual: fluffy scrambled eggs, sausage links, bacon slices, oatmeal with peach chunks in it, apple slices with a cinnamon syrup baked onto them, muffins (blueberry and strawberry this Christmas), and a breakfast casserole with eggs, bread, sausage, cheese, and onions in it. He wanted to go all out and make hot chocolate with their usual tea and coffee, just like Dudley always had liked, but Severus hated hot chocolate and Harry didn’t like it until late at night.


“You know, my aunt used to love that oatmeal. She once heard the recipe from her friend and made me prepare it for breakfast. She loved peaches.”

Severus looked up from his bowl in slight confusion. “Fascinating.”

“Mmm. Naturally, she never learned to make it. Honestly, she was a horrible cook. She burnt her, Dudley, and Uncle Vernon’s toast for years before they decided cold cereal would be sufficient.
until I learned to cook. At least you can make toast.”

“Is there a point to your uninspiring monologue?”

“Not really. I was just thinking about how much Dudley used to love hot chocolate for breakfast every Christmas morning and it reminded me of Aunt Petunia’s favorite oatmeal.”

Severus studied Harry for a moment before looking back down at his food seriously. Harry poked at his casserole and then decided he wanted to save it for last. He had some of the apples instead and almost smiled. It tasted pretty good. He decided to save those for last and dug into the casserole. Uncle Vernon had liked the casserole. He’d always, without fail, had at least two big servings.

Maybe he should go visit his aunt, uncle, and cousin’s graves when the war was over. They were horrible and Harry probably wouldn’t miss them much, but they were still family. He could go see them after visiting his parents, right? It wouldn’t really be that big of a deal to stop by in Little Whinging, toss some flowers on their graves, and get out of there.

“The apples are too spiced, but they are at least slightly more edible than this casserole.”

“Thanks. Uncle Vernon used to love the casserole.” Again, Severus looked at Harry closely. His head minutely cocked to the side at whatever thought he just had. He looked away before Harry could get nervous. “Anyways… I was thinking lunch could just be a slice of one of the breads and tea or something, since dinner’s gonna be pretty big. I wanted Christmas dinner to be tonight… What do you think?”

“I suppose the idea has merit, though I dearly wished I wouldn’t be forced to sustain myself on what you continually claim is food.”

“We still have pumpkin, chocolate chunk, and cinnamon-apple. I made more of those, because they’re my favorites. I can make a banana or spiced sweet potato loaf if you want one of those, though.”

“It wouldn’t be worth the effort, Potter. I may as well eat one of the others. Hopefully, they’ll run out before too much longer.”

“All right.”

Harry crumbled a piece of bacon onto his eggs. Yeah, that is how eggs should be eaten. He had a large forkful almost in his mouth when he stopped and looked at Severus in awe. It took him a few long moments, but he finally realized Harry was staring. Quickly swallowing, he scowled at Harry.

“What?”

“You said please.”

“I have never said-”

“This morning. You did, sir. I remember it.”

“I do not recall doing such a thing.”

“You did. It was right after you turned over onto your stomach. You said ‘Potter, please don’t.’”

“Again, I do not recall doing such a thing.”
“You did. Wow. You actually know how to say please.” Harry looked mesmerized. “And you said it to me. Whoa.”

“You look ridiculous doing that.”

“I’m in shock. I can deal with looking dumb. You said please.”

Severus’s eyes narrowed. “Have you opened your gifts yet, boy?”

“No, but hearing you say please is probably a better Christmas present than anything under the tree. Merlin, I literally can’t believe it.”

“You’re bordering on rude, Potter.”

“Sorry. Erm, you have presents, too, Professor.”

“I’m not surprised.”

“Who are they from?”

“Various persons. Feel free to go open your gifts when you’ve finished.”

“You’re not going to open yours, too?”

“Are we back to you refusing to do anything without me today?”

“Well, yeah. It’s Christmas and you’re the only other person in the house, even if you’re… um… you. Why would I want to do anything alone? Not to sound stupid, but it’s just lonely here otherwise.”

“I hate to inform you of this—” Severus’s expression told Harry it was quite the opposite. “—but I’m intent upon bathing after the meal. You’ll have to do it alone.”

“I’ll wait for you to finish.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

“I’m not. I don’t have anyone else to celebrate with, Snape, and I’ll think about everyone that’s dead if I have to do it alone.” Harry’s voice dropped to a whisper, his face reddening in an irritated embarrassment. “It’s pathetic, but I can’t help thinking about it.”

“I’ve noticed.” Severus swept up from his seat. “I don’t wish to witness any more of your dismal emotional display. Open your gifts or don’t, I care not.”

“Fine.”

Harry watched Severus leave and picked a muffin into tiny pieces. His mean comments were easy to understand when they were discussing food and stuff like that, but he honestly never knew what the man meant when emotions were involved. God, he was such a loser. He truly had no one to spend time with anymore and was desperate enough to want to spend Christmas with a man who possibly hates him more than Voldemort does.

Harry sighed deeply and realized he wasn’t hungry anymore.

He really needed to go visit all of his family when the war was over. Only, of course, if he survived it. Right now, he wasn’t even sure he wanted to. What kind of life did he have waiting for him?
This was just a small preview of the future. Sure, he’d give everything to killing Voldemort. That was a given. He’d never had a choice nor had he really wanted to fight it. Who’s to say, though, that he couldn’t just slip away when that was done? Yes, he loved everyone and he was sure some of the people in his life would be upset, but he had nothing to look forward to at the end.

Ron and Hermione were married and starting a family; their focus would be on their immediate family once the baby came. Remus was probably gonna get with Tonks one day. Even Severus would be able to feel their chemistry sparking every time the two shared the same room. The headmaster had enough on his plate that he didn’t need to worry about him when Voldemort was gone. His entire family was dead. Even if he’d entertained the rare fantasy of reconciling with them and being happy, it was impossible now. The Weasleys, as much as they said they loved him, would always be their own family. Harry always felt like he was in the way when they spent time together. All of the rest of his friends would be marrying off and having babies. The worst was…

Harry wasn’t sure what he wanted from life or what was appropriate to want. He sure as hell didn’t even know what sexuality he was anymore. Surely if he were completely straight, he would be spending all of his wanking time thinking of girls and wouldn’t be having strange dreams involving wanking circles and whatnot. He also wasn’t positive he had a future after everything was to be all said and done. He might die at Voldemort’s hand… or he might just disappear after the final battle and join his parents as soon as he could.

Harry pushed his plate away, pulled his glasses off, and let his head fall onto his arms on the table. For the first time in a long time, he wanted to cry… for his lost family, for his hopeless future, for everything. It wasn’t fair. Why did he, out of everyone in the entire universe, have to be the one destined to defeat a maniacal dark lord? It was impossible. Could he just end things now and leave the responsibility of killing Voldemort to someone else?

“Potter,” Severus called from the living room. Harry lifted his head and blindly looked at the door. “Potter, get your sulking arse out of the kitchen and get in here.”

Severus was calling for him? Harry felt around for his glasses and started to stand, still thinking about what he should do with his life. It would be easy for him to find a way down here. They may be far below ground, but there were all sorts of things laying about… knives, sleeping potions…

“Erm, I’m… coming. Hold on.”

“What?” Harry asked, irritation tingeing his voice. Severus poked his head into the kitchen, hair wet and hanging around his jaw, and glared at him.

“Lose the attitude, brat. You have presents to open.”

“Presents?”

“Yes. You were the one who wanted to open them, were you not?” Severus disappeared. “You have one minute to get in here.”

Happiness chased away his dark thoughts almost as quickly as they had come. Harry felt a smile sneak across his face and happily went into the living room. Severus had brought the desk chair closer to the tree and was currently sitting in it, glaring at the presents littered underneath. His depressing thoughts immediately forgotten, Harry sat cross-legged in front of the fireplace and started digging through the presents eagerly.
“This one’s for you. Oh, so is this- and, oh, a bunch of these are yours.”

“I do not care. Open your presents.”

“You have to open yours, too. It’s Christmas.”

Severus looked even surlier. “Are you quite sure I have to?”

“Well, yeah.”

“Fine. Give me whatever you’re holding.”

“Awesome.”

Harry handed it over and watched him open it, a smile still on his face. If for only this year, he had someone he could spend time with… even if the man wasn’t really that nice or anything. His presence and willingness to be around him on Christmas, however churlish he may be about it, was comforting. When Severus had his gift unwrapped, he held it up to Harry and frowned deeply, his displeasure made more than clear by the action.

“Happy now?”

“Yes. Do you like it?”

“It is the same gift that oaf sends me every year. One would think after finding his gift in the staff waste bin every year, he would stop sending it.”

Harry studied Hagrid’s tin of rock cakes apprehensively. “He likes you, sir. It just his way of being nice and he's not an oaf.”

“Open your gifts, Potter.”

Harry chose a gift at random and laughed. It was another for Severus.

“It’s for you.”

“Then set it aside and find one for you.”

“But-”

“Potter, I’m losing my patience. Open your gifts. I will deal with mine later.”

Harry opened three of his own gifts before he spied Severus’s bored expression. Picking up two of the man’s gifts, he moved to his knees and crawled closer. Severus’s eyes focused on him and unerringly watched him approach. Harry wondered what he was thinking, because he looked weird. His brow was even cocking up a bit.

“It’s your turn, sir. It doesn’t feel right doing it alone.”

“You won’t stop until you’ve gotten your way, will you?”

“Probably not. It’s not in my nature to quit.”

Severus growled quietly and snatched both presents away. The first, from Minerva, was an old textbook about ancient magic. Severus actually seemed appreciative and carefully set it on a nearby table. The second, from Filius, was a full history of Slytherin house. Severus seemed less
than impressed with it and tossed it onto the couch, not even blinking when the pages hissed and flapped around like an angry snake. Harry found himself snorting and hissed a command at the serpentine hissing coming from the book. The book snapped shut of its own accord and lay silent and still.

“You,” Severus commanded. “And you can have that bit of rubbish Flitwick sent me.”

Well, alright. Harry moved back to the tree, pulled the rest of the presents closer, and passed Severus a present every time he found one for himself. In silence, the two opened every single present. When there were no more to be unwrapped, Severus banished the wrapping paper and stood slowly, one of his knees popping. Harry suddenly felt bad. Had he been uncomfortable this entire time? His knee didn’t usually pop unless he wasn’t comfortable.

“Why didn’t you say anything?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Your knee. Does it still hurt?”

“It is no concern of yours, Potter.”

Severus gathered his small collection of gifts and drifted down the hall. Harry followed behind and caught him gently rubbing his knee.

“Why didn’t you say something?” he repeated. “We could have moved the couch or something. I don’t know. You didn’t have to bother your knee.”

“My knee has nothing to do with you. Stop talking about it. Change the subject.”

“Fine. Um, I was gonna start cooking dinner around noon… did you want to have an early lunch or would it bother you to eat while I’m moving around?”

“I will survive either way. Barely, given the state of your so-called food, but I will.”

Severus placed all his gifts, excluding the book from Minerva and the bottle of spiced mead from Albus, into a small bag in the back of their closet. When he emerged, Harry noted with dismay that he was favoring his sore knee.

“Sir, are you sure your knee is okay? Don’t you have a potion laying around here for it?”

“Yes, Potter, I do. However, I do not need it. I am perfectly fine.”

“You’re limping.”

“I am not.”

“You are.”

“It is merely a wound from the first war. It occasionally acts up.” Severus pursed his lips and walked out of the room. Again, Harry followed him. “Quit staring at it. My knee isn’t bothering me.”

“It clearly is, sir. Can’t you just take something for it?”

“Does it bother you that an old man is feeling his age?” Severus snarled quietly, settling down onto the couch and glaring at Flitwick’s gift. Harry blinked and didn’t know what to say. “Leave me
“alone. Go entertain yourself somehow, boy.”

“No. It bothers me that a war hero—”

Harry stopped himself when Severus levelled a glare at him. It was one of his old glares, the kind that Harry swore could kill small children if they got caught in the crossfire. Rather than continue, he decided he’d attempt to read the book Hermione had given him. Snagging it up from the floor by the rest of his gifts, Harry curled up on the opposite end of the couch. He wished there was another couch or something in here, because Severus seemed less than pleased to be sitting so close, but there was nothing he could do about it.

Huh. The book was actually pretty interesting. It was all about Muggle myths and legends with small paragraphs describing the magical cause of each. He particularly liked the one about Santa Claus. He’d never be able to look at Albus or anyone else that old without wanting to laugh. Imagine, a string of old wizards posing as an amazing gift giver just to flaunt their magic quietly in front of Muggles! Had the headmaster ever posed as the man? Oh, and the one about the monster that lurked around the Amazon River was priceless. It was really just a volatile-minded ancient wizard who still haunts the water in his animagus form. Hilarious!

Before he knew it, it was approaching one o’clock. Frantically jumping up from the couch and worrying about the dinner that would assuredly be late now, Harry glanced at Severus and summoned a small blanket from the bedroom. Carefully removing the book still clutched in the man’s hand and covering him with the blanket, Harry made sure he didn’t wake him up. It was just his way of saying thanks for dealing with him today. That’s all.

He busied himself with cooking and knew when Severus joined him in the kitchen around four-thirty. He didn’t say anything, but Harry still knew he was there. Without turning around, Harry started the coffee Severus liked after taking a nap and carved a thick slice of bread from the pumpkin chocolate loaf. He’d noticed he liked that one the best. After wordlessly placing the bread and a mug of coffee in front of Severus, Harry focused on finishing dinner. He was hungry, too, but he wanted to wait for dinner. He wondered if Severus’s knee was any better.

Despite starting an hour late, dinner was ready at exactly five o’clock. Harry stood back and surveyed his work proudly. The turkey he’d had cooking most of the day, a mountain of buttery mashed potatoes, Brussels sprouts, cranberry sauce, mushroom stuffing, gravy, and parsnips all smelled delicious. Harry checked yet again on the Christmas pudding he’d made about a month ago.

It was fine. He needed to stop worrying about it. He couldn’t help it, though. It was a special thing to him. The pudding was one of the only things he’d ever learned about his grandmother. One day, Aunt Petunia had accidentally mentioned it and then told him the recipe her mother always used to make back when Harry still tried to impress her. He’d never seen her look so… sad. Yet again, he wondered when she’d passed away. He’d never known her.

“Are you planning on actually eating any of that or will you continue staring at it like an imbecile?”

“We’re eating. I was making sure I didn’t forget anything.”

“As if it would be missed.”

Harry snickered and handed Severus a plate before getting the wine out and setting it on the counter. He was pleased to see Severus took a little of everything. Well, he took a huge serving of the cranberry sauce…
“Could you open the wine? I don’t know how.”

“You can’t shave and you’ve no idea how to open a wine bottle. Potter, please tell me you know how to tie your own shoes.”

“You can’t equate the three, sir. I taught myself to tie my shoes, but I’ve never attempted to open wine or shave right. Knowing my luck, I’d put someone’s eye out with the cork or slit my throat the first time I get startled. Merlin knows how bad that would be.”

“Perhaps I just see them as gestures of adulthood. Quite fitting, then, that you’ve no idea how to do them.”

Harry scowled. “Are you going to open it or not?”

“Aperi,” Severus incanted with a flick of his wrist. When Harry glared at him, Severus wasn’t fazed. “We don’t have a bottle opener.”

“You could have told me that so I could do it.”

“You’re the one in charge of the kitchen. I assumed you would have noticed, since you’re puttering around in here three times a day. Accio two wineglasses.”

Severus handily caught each glass, ignoring the incredulous look Harry gave him. Harry watched Severus pour wine into each glass, the bottle pulled up about eight inches from the bottom of the glass. Curiously, he took the glass Severus held out to him before Severus placed his own on the table. Harry looked into the glass and to Severus’s untouched one, shrugged away his question, and levitated his wine to the table so he could finish serving himself. When he was seated across from his professor, Harry started cutting up his turkey and kept his eyes down.

“Hope you like everything, sir. Happy Christmas.”

“Yes, yes. Happy Christmas, boy. Now, would you kindly shut up? I am attempting to enjoy my dinner.”

“Of course.”

Those sentences, those right there, were even greater than hearing Severus say please. He’d gotten a Happy Christmas and an almost compliment that wasn’t somehow laced with an insult. He’d even take the part about being told to shut up, because he’d said it in the form of question! God, greatest Christmas ever. Harry grinned widely and stayed silent.

“You look absurd. What could you possibly be smiling about?”

“Nothing, Professor.”

“Do I have food on me?”

Harry laughed and Severus’s eyes narrowed. “No. I’m just in a good mood now.”

“It’s ruining my dinner.”

“Says the man with half his plate already gone.”

“Why, you little-”

“More turkey?”
“If I am forced.”

“Forced?”

In a light and happy mood, Harry laughed again and served more turkey to both of them while Severus huffed. Christmas dinner, for the most part, wasn’t as horrifying as Harry had imagined it would be back in September. He’d been imagining that one or both of them wouldn’t even survive this long. It was surprising, really.

“I insist you stop smiling like that. It’s making my skin crawl.”

“Hmm.”

“Potter.”

“What?”

“Stop.”

“Okay.”

“Potter!”

Definitely not as bad.
 Poor Severus reveals some of his past. Harry has a nightmare.

“If you are going in there to do more than urinate, allow me to use the toilet first,” Severus called out. Harry, with one hand on the doorknob, looked at him. “Unless, of course, you enjoy my presence while bathing yourself… or whatever your plans are for in there.”

“Fine,” Harry replied, waved a hand at the door, and sidled over to the couch. “Feel free.”

That morning, he’d been talking to Severus about his plans for New Years while the man shaved. He found himself watching carefully, noting how close the shave was and being jealous. Wistfully, Harry again reminded himself that he needed to learn when the war was over. If he accidentally killed himself while doing it, he wouldn’t have to worry about Voldemort still being on the loose.

“Bathroom’s all yours, Potter.”

Harry looked up, his thoughts about the way Severus shaved interrupted, and nodded. He was soon climbing into the shower stall and enjoying the hot water coursing over his skin. He immediately thought about Christmas. The depressing crap he’d thought about after Severus left hadn’t come back to him and he was thankful. It was a little unnerving to realize he’d been thinking of killing himself without any emotions. Should he tell Severus about that? Harry shuddered. Severus had come out of nowhere and announced it was time to open gifts. Funny how it made the idea go up in smoke. Huh.

And he isn’t old.

Well, not that old. Right? Mum and Dad would be thirty-seven so Severus must be close to that. That isn’t old. He’s just ridiculous. He hoped his knee hadn’t been bothering him lately. He’d almost forgotten about covering Severus up while he was sleeping, too. He’d looked so tired… and had never said anything about it. Harry wondered what Severus had thought when he’d woken up alone and covered in the little blanket Harry usually kept on his bed. He hadn’t noticed it laying around, but then again, he hadn’t been looking.

Christmas had just been a great day. Harry still remembered Severus’s grouchy mood that morning. He abruptly remembered that Severus had been shirtless again. He’d forgotten. When he’d turned over, Harry saw scars crossing his back. How did he get them? His back had more muscles on it than his did. When he was a fully-grown man, would his back look like that? Harry snickered at the thought. Probably not. He was scrawny. And wow, it still blew his mind…

“Potter, please,” Severus said quietly. “Don’t.”

Something about the way he’d said it was… yeah, it would probably always stay in his memories. Possibly because it was the nicest thing he’d ever said to him. Well, apart from hearing Severus tell him Happy Christmas, receiving maybe the only real almost compliment he’d ever heard from the man, and being asked (rather than commanded) to shut up. There was a big difference between the two in the case of one Severus Snape.
Oh, God. Harry had actually been teasing him! And Severus hadn’t killed him!!

“You look absurd. What could you possibly be smiling about?”

“I’m just in a good mood now.”

“It’s ruining my dinner.”

“Says the man with half his plate already gone.”

He’d actually said it, hadn’t he? What was that about?

“Why, you little-”

What would he have said?

“More turkey?”

Why did he stop him?

“If I am forced.”

“ Forced?”

Harry again marveled that he was alive and shook himself into action. He’d just been standing there under the water, thinking. Severus must really love Christmas to have forgiven him… unless he’d taken something for his knee and it made him loopy. Had his knee still been bothering him when he woke up? That reminded him, he also needed to figure out how he could be able to overpower someone if he ever got trapped on his back. While Harry lathered up his unruly hair, he drifted back to the day he and Severus had fought. Had his knee been bothering him then?

Harry kicked his shoes off, crawled over Severus’s body, and allowed the man to position him in a way that wouldn’t damage anything. True to his word, Severus leaned back on the pillows and closed his eyes.

“What are you doing?”

“Relaxing. I sure as hell don’t want to be staring up at you the entire time. Seeing your face would be detrimental to my endeavor.”

Arsehole. Like the time it happened, Harry scowled.

“And the fact that you can feel me up here means nothing?”

“It is easy to pretend your body belongs to someone else, Potter. After all, I’m not looking at you at all.” Harry was still offended at that. The bastard! He knew he wasn’t anything special, but he wasn’t completely ugly, either. Surely he had his own attractive features, right? “I would suggest you stop moving around on my lap like that. It’s positively obscene. Are you almost ready, Potter, or do you need a few more moments to prepare yourself?”

Harry was positive now that he’d been alluding to the fact that if he continued, Severus would have gotten hard. It blew his mind how often the man would say stuff like that and he wouldn’t even catch it until much later. What would either of them have done if he’d gotten hard? Would they continue, even though he would be hard? How weird would that be? It reminded him, though, that he still had an unanswered question. Who the hell was in charge of preparing for anal sex? And what was there to prepare? Well, obviously it had something to do with the arse, because there’s no
way anyone’s prick would fit in there without doing something to it. Like, what is involved in that preparing thing? Harry shook away his thoughts and rinsed his hair, letting his thoughts drift again…

“Uh. For what?”

“To do what we’re in here to do.”

Harry can’t believe he’d thought Severus was referring to sex for a moment. See, his curiosity was a dangerous thing! He could have said something he didn’t even mean had he not remembered why he was straddling Severus. Erm, well, that sounded bad… even to himself.

“Obviously. Though it is a little worrying that you chose to drift off while atop a man. Are you ready?”

It was still worrying him.

Severus looked from his face to his hands and then back to his face. He looked highly amused and casually snaked his arms out from under the spot Harry’s abdomen had been holding them down. It all made sense now. He’d taken advantage of Harry’s concentration to free one of his weapons. Hmm. Wait, that sounded bad. Um, he- oh, never mind. No one else is listening to his thoughts. He knew what he meant and that’s all that counts.

“Now are you ready?”

“Yes. Try your-”

Severus easily grabbed both of Harry’s wrists and rolled. Harry landed on his back with his legs still around Severus’s hips and his hands now pinned to the bed. He sucked a deep breath into his tight lungs and looked up at Severus in shock.

Only now could he truly appreciate how bad that looked. Their bodies had been so close, most of them touching, and Severus’s hands had Harry’s wrists pinned together. The only thing that was missing to truly make it an obscene image was a lot of bared skin. How had he not noticed at the time? Oh, yeah. He’d been busy. Harry paused in washing his chest and thought about the way they’d been laying. Is that what it would look like if two guys had sex? How exactly would things… match up? Obviously he didn’t care, but he was curious (damn curiosity is always popping up at the most irritating times).

Severus had looked savage and dominating. It was terrifying thinking about it now, but at least he knew he’d be safe if someone ever broke in here. The man could be an animal when the moment called for it. That, too, sounded bad. Harry shivered. He had also looked comfortable holding him down… How often did he get a chance to do that? Male or female? Both? Huh.

“I do believe this is where I say I told you so. Is that the correct saying?”

“You just-”

“What?”

“But I was…”

“I told you, Potter. Easy.”

“But…”
“Admit it. I was right.”

“No.”

Severus smirked. “Then try to get away.”

*Harry tugged his hands, which were held fast by Severus’s own.* Harry still can’t believe how strong Severus is. He doesn’t look it, but he really is. His knees had been pointed skyward, his socked feet dangling down (he could still remember being embarrassed that he was trying to reach the bed and was unable to), their thighs resting against each other… for Merlin’s sake, their pricks had been touching, because they were so close. They had even rubbed a few times when Harry tried reaching the bed. Well, his prick had been on Severus’s belly and Severus’s prick had touched his arse. It was more of a brief rub than anything. Not bad, right? Wait.

Shit, it had touched his arse and he hadn’t said anything!

“God…”

Wait, he’d actually said that. Why had he said it now? Harry shrugged and scrubbed the back of his neck.

“Oh, come now, Potter. Can’t you get away?”

“Yes.”

*Severus had released his wrists and braced himself up, his hands on either side of his shoulders.* Actually, thinking about it, his thumbs had been touching him. Was it on purpose? Would he have grabbed him again at the first sign of trying to get away? *He had scooted closer to him, too. Like, close enough for him to feel the heat hitting his arse.* Not the usual heat, the hotter heat on the man’s prick. *Had* he been getting turned on and just not showing it?

Fuck, the bathroom was really hot. It’s hard to breathe in a hot, steamy bathroom. Who knew? Harry panted and turned the water down to cool the air a bit. It didn’t help him breathe any better, but he did feel marginally cooler. Maybe.

He remembered getting distracted and asking if Severus had ever broken his nose. Now, he realized how weird it was to ask that while the man was still pressing him into his bed. Why hadn’t he just given up and then asked? Damn curiosity. Harry swallowed tightly as he remembered the look in Severus’s eyes. It wasn’t a look he’d ever seen before and had been there the entire time he’d towered over him. It was close to his child-killing glare, but not as mean. It still felt like it could burn someone, though. In his mind, Harry saw Severus rearing up and bending over to put his shoes on. Harry had thoughtlessly tackled Severus and ended up getting the shit choked out of himself.

Harry swore he could feel Severus’s hand around his neck, tightening the way it had then. With a muffled cry, Harry jerked forward and came, unaware that he’d even been hard in the first place. He belatedly lowered his hand and stroked himself through the last of his orgasm, trying his hardest not to make any noise. He couldn’t help the small moans that escaped, though.

“You forgot your silencing charm,” Severus called. Harry thought he sounded like he was in the kitchen.

“Um, yeah, sorry…”

Fuck! Where had that come from? Not that he’s complaining about coming without having to do
anything, but it was just weird that he hadn’t even been thinking of anything that would get him hard to begin with. He’d just been thinking of Severus. He’d last been thinking of…

Harry rinsed himself off and thought about being choked. Was that what had done it? He hadn’t actually been afraid… he knew Severus wouldn’t… Huh. The best way he could describe it was to say he was conflicted. Digging any deeper into what he’d felt at the time and if it had really affected him that much would be weird, wrong, possibly even questionable. Best just to push it to the back of his mind, maybe even lock it up to never be seen again.

Yeah, he’d do that… and think about something else.

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“Potter, this is the sixth time today that I’ve caught you touching your neck. Do you have a sore throat?”

Harry snatched his hand away. “No, sir. I… it’s nothing.”

“If you’re getting sick, I do not wish to catch it, as well.”

“I’m not getting sick.”

Severus crossed his arms over his chest and glared at Harry. Behind the desk, Harry had nothing he could hide behind and gave Severus a guilty smile that did nothing to convince him he wasn’t lying.

“I was just, uh, feeling it,” Harry lied. Severus did not look impressed nor did he believe him.

“Feeling… it?” Severus repeated slowly. Harry shivered and furrowed his brows in confusion at the action.

“Yeah. Erm, I was just curious where the muscles and everything are.”

“Obviously, Potter, I am not buying this bullshit you’re trying to sell me. Surely you must know that.”

“I’m not sick, sir.”

“Very well. Quit playing with your neck. It’s distracting.”

“How?”

“I keep seeing you moving over the edge of my book. Stop or I will bind you tight enough that you can’t move.”

“Possibly even breathe?”

Slowly, Severus’s eyes met Harry’s again. Harry swallowed, looked away from Severus, and tried not to think about that. It was weird and reminded him of the time he had imagined Severus doing just that. Gross. Yeah, gross. His ever-irrepressible curiosity, though, made him want to ask…

“It could happen, I suppose, if you were being annoying enough.”

“With what?”

Severus, still watching Harry, arched one brow. Slowly, a malicious smirk travelled over his lips,
growing larger until a twisted close-mouthed grin had replaced it. He cocked his head to the side and regarded Harry strangely. “I’m sorry, Potter. Could you ask that question in such a way that I could understand it?”

“Uh, I asked with what? Like, what would you use?”

“You are asking me what I would use to bind you, correct?” Severus checked. Harry nodded and Severus looked like he was trying not to laugh. He clasped his hands together and rested them on top of the book covering his lap. “Oh, I’m not picky. Which would you prefer, rope or thin cording?”

Harry groaned in embarrassment. He’d really been asking for that one, hadn’t he? Meanwhile, Severus was smirking down at his book. The arse.

“Just pretend I never asked, okay?” Harry asked, hiding his face in his arms. Severus turned a page and let out a breathy laugh.

“If that is what you desire, boy.”

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“Sir, I have a question.”

“What is it?”

“Could you look up from your book a second?”

“That would imply that I care enough to do so, Potter.”

“Please, Professor.”

Severus huffed and looked up. He looked irritated. Go figure. “What?”

“Do you remember that day I bit you?”

“I assume you are referring to the day I proved you couldn’t possibly restrain me if your life depended on it. What of it?”

“Well, um, when you choked me…”

Looking suspicious, Severus straightened in his seat and set his cup of tea on the coffee table. He studied Harry closely and then dropped his eyes to his neck. Again, his eyes lifted to meet Harry’s.

“I did not injure you. Why are you bringing it up?”

“Oh, I know you didn’t hurt me or anything. It’s just…”

“What is it, Potter? Spit it out.”

“Erm, you weren’t going to hurt me, right? You had control the entire time?”

“Of course I did.” Severus rolled his eyes. “I am more than acquainted with knowing where the divide between a restraining chokehold and strangulation lies.”

Harry shivered in slight, but real fear. Had Severus ever crossed that line before? Had he done it on orders or… on his own? He wanted to ask, but first he had to know.
“Are you sure?”

“If I had wanted you dead, you wouldn’t have made it off of the floor on your own. Since you are currently standing in front of me, it is safe to assume I had total control over the situation and wasn’t going to allow you to die.”

He couldn’t help it. Harry took an involuntary step back and felt horror and panic race through him, along with an inappropriate and unwanted thrill. Severus was watching him closely, obviously waiting for his response. Harry swallowed, brushed his unruly hair out of his face, and nodded.

“Oh, um, okay.”

“Is that all?”

He wanted to know, but he didn’t. God. Should he just ask? Did he really want it confirmed? He wouldn’t be able to sleep again if he knew and he sounded like he knew exactly where that line was…

“Uh…” Harry pulled in a deep breath and shakily let it out. “Have you ever…”

“Potter, do you have a question that pertains to you?” Severus asked, a dead look in his eyes. “If not, go.”

“Oh.”

“Yes? No?”

“How many?” Harry whispered fearfully. Severus clenched his teeth, picked his book back up, and began reading. “Professor?”

“No, Potter, I am not answering that.”

He’d killed someone by choking them. Probably a bunch more since he wasn’t saying how many. No. He’d…

“You had control.”

“I’ve already told you that.”

“I was telling myself that, sir.”

“Go away,” Severus snarled.

Harry gladly vacated the living room and huddled down into his bed. He was freezing and could only think about it. What had Severus looked like while he was doing it? How had he done it? How many people were there who had lost their lives to him like that? Were there both males and females? Was it anyone he had personally known? Were they people who had trusted Severus?

“Oh, God,” Harry whimpered, shaking. He had to keep reminding himself that Severus wouldn’t have hurt him. He knew when to stop. He had control. He felt like an idiot, curled up in bed and freaking out. Severus would never hurt him, but his mind just wasn’t getting the memo. He’d deal with the blow to his masculinity later.

Almost an hour later, just as Harry had calmed himself down, Severus sighed from the doorway. Harry tensed and waited to hear what he’d say.
“Twenty-three.” Harry sat up and moved to the farthest corner of his bed. His expression didn’t shift as Severus stepped closer, but his breathing did speed up. Severus stopped and looked down at the floor, his head held high. “Twenty-two of those were on orders while I was at meetings. I had no choice, Potter. Albus doesn’t know the full extent of what being a spy in the ranks means and I’ve never told anyone. I have no doubts your fears of any possible repercussions should I hear you told others of this will contain your tongue.”

“You didn’t want to do it?”

“Every time, I wanted to save them by simply apparating us away. I had to keep reminding myself why I couldn’t do that.”

Harry tucked his chin down, his eyes studying Severus’s shoes as he thought. It didn’t even occur to him that Severus was opening up in a way he’d never seen. He was more worried about something else Severus had said.

“What about the other one?”

Severus stared at Harry until he looked up. They locked eyes for a moment before Harry looked away. Moments later, Severus cleared his throat.

“The second to last meeting I was forced to attend, I was commanded to watch a young Muggle woman be raped and murdered. She reminded me too much of my mother and I snapped.”

“You killed her?”

“No, I later killed the man who attacked her,” Severus said, a hard look coming to his face. “That is the only one I will never regret, Potter. Remember that.”

“Oh.”

“Are you quite done with this now?”

“I don’t know.”

***

He was having a nightmare that someone was strangling Severus and he couldn’t do anything to stop it. All he could see from around the corner of the bed he lay broken and bloodied beside was the top of Severus’s head and hair jerking about, a faceless man straddling him and cackling at the desperate attempts he was making to catch his breath.

Harry woke up abruptly, letting loose a scream at the top of his lungs that was full of terror and would shortly wake the dead.

Seeing Severus, he launched himself out of his bed and tightly latched himself around his waist, dragging Severus down to the floor when his strength gave out on him. He started crying frantically in remembered fear, curling around Severus and holding on tightly with an unshakeable hold. God, he was still seeing it in his mind!

“Potter, it was just a nightmare. Stop soiling my shirt. I can already distinguish two-” Severus stopped and huffed. “Now three body fluids. I do not appreciate having your snot wiped on me.”

“It was so real!” Harry sobbed. “I couldn’t stop it! I couldn’t…”
“Stop blubbering. Merlin, boy, this is embarrassing.”

“You didn’t see it! It’s still in this room, Snape.”

“Clearly it wasn’t real, since the only thing going on in here is this horrific little episode of yours. I insist you stop and do not wipe your nose on me again. Drool and tears are one th-”

“You were… oh, God…”

As Severus tensed, Harry shook and refused to open his eyes. He was still crying, though not as hysterically. Severus was right. It wasn’t real… but God, it had seemed so real. Thankfully, though, it hadn’t been like the nightmare he’d had about cutting himself. He’d felt pain in that one, but hadn’t felt anything in this one. It wasn’t going to happen. He wasn’t going to be forced to watch him die… Harry took a shuddering breath that seemed to stop his crying. However, he couldn’t make himself let go yet. This was so embarrassing, but he tried not to think about that. He may not like Severus much, but he didn’t ever want to watch him die.

“Are you quite finished?”

“Yeah,” Harry replied shakily. He held on tighter when Severus tried shaking him off. “Sorry I woke you up.”

In the ensuing silence, Severus leaned against the side of Harry’s bed and again tried shaking him off, though they both knew it would be pointless to try. Harry merely managed to slide further down Severus’s chest, his cheek now pressed to his sternum. He could hear the man’s heartbeat, a comforting thumping in his ear. It was steady, strong, there. He wasn’t dead.

“May I ask what happened?”

“Some man without a face got in while you were taking a nap in the living room. I didn’t really know that, but I knew somehow. He’d hurt me enough that I couldn’t move or use my magic to call for help. It was all so fast, it seemed like a blur.”

Severus again tensed and looked down at Harry’s face. “Was this a prophetic dream, Potter?”

“No, thank every single god in the universe. It didn’t feel like the other one.”

“Mmm. What else? How was I involved?”

“You…” Harry’s eyes felt wet again. “He attacked you when you realized what was going on and ran in here. All I could see was your head jerking around madly right over there.”

Severus and Harry leaned over a bit to look at the patch of carpet Harry had pointed at. Harry shuddered and Severus pursed his lips.

“Is that all?”

“He was choking you. He really wanted you to die and I couldn’t help you at all.”

“It wasn’t real, Potter.”

Harry nodded and squinted. “What time is it?”

“Seven. I thought someone had gotten in when I heard you screaming like that from the bathroom.”

“Sorry.”
“Would you kindly release me so I can get up from the floor?”

“No.”

“Potter, let go.”

“Uh, kay. Yeah.”

“This moment would be nice, boy.”

“I’m trying.”

Severus grasped Harry’s fingers and, one by one, pried them from his shirt. He held the first hand down when Harry tried grabbing on again and worked on releasing the other hand’s grip. When he had both hands off of him, Severus stood and pulled Harry up by the hands.

“Go back to sleep.”

“I can’t.”
Sins of the Professor

Harry sipped at the coffee he’d made for Severus, who was still in the shower. It had taken a little over two weeks and nine more nightmares for him to be able to finally sleep through the night without seeing Severus die. Things were finally back to the way they were supposed to be. Well, the way they were before.

Contemplating the loaf of bread he’d cooked when the last nightmare had woken him in the middle of the night, Harry felt thankful. He hadn’t had any for over five days now and the last time, he had quietly roused himself before things could get too horrible.

“Is that supposed to be my coffee, brat?”

Harry inwardly laughed at Severus’s grumpy face and shook his head no. Severus knew he was lying and scowled fiercely both for being lied to and for having his coffee stolen.

“Oh, fine. Yes, it was. You were taking too long and it was gonna get cold. I’ll make you a new cup.”

Severus grumbled and sat in his chair, frowning at the slice of pumpkin-chocolate chunk bread before him. He had never said anything, but Harry knew that he loved it the most of all the breads he’d made thus far. While Severus had been luxuriating in the shower (and Harry had an inkling of why he was in there for so bloody long), he had sliced up thick chunks of bread and made omelets with three types of cheese, onions, tomatoes, and sausage crumbles in it.

It smelled delicious and Severus’s stomach seemed to agree. “Are you attempting to make me an overly corpulent man, Potter?”

“It’s my job as the bored housewife,” Harry joked and slid one omelet in front of Severus. He grinned at his own omelet and then focused on Severus. “Oh. It was supposed to be a joke, sir. I forgot you hadn’t had your coffee yet. Why would I want to make you fat?”

“I’ve yet to discover the reason, but I believe it is what you are striving for.”

“Breakfast is good for you.”

“I would desist my investigation if you didn’t cook too much at every meal. The metabolism of an old man is nothing compared to that of a younger man. Your waistline might not be suffering, but I feel mine thickening every day.”

“Your waistline is not thickening, as you call it. I haven’t noticed any weight gain. Believe me, I catch sight of you undressed often enough to know.”

“If you would but knock on the bathroom door-”

“You don’t answer!”

“Also, you could consider knocking on the bedroom door.”

“It’s my bedroom, too. I’m not going to knock just because you can’t think to change in the closet.”

“I shouldn’t have to.”

“Then choose the bathroom as your dressing room.” Harry grimaced. “And think about knocking if
you suspect I may be in there."

“First of all, Potter, I do knock. Every time. Several times. Especially this last time. I did not want another incident like the time before last occurring.” Harry blushed horribly. Severus had literally caught him prick in hand, wanking with the shower curtain open because it was hot in the small stall. He wished that was as bad as it got. “When you didn’t answer, I felt it safe to walk in. Quite obviously, I was wrong.”

“I didn’t hear you.”

“That is not my fault. Rather, I should say, discovering both of those incidents were not my fault.”

This last time, he’d been wanking over the toilet when Severus walked in. Since the toilet is maybe thirty centimeters from the door, Severus had immediately focused on him… right as Harry had started coming. Severus had been too shocked to look away from his prick and Harry had been too shocked to look away from Severus.

Harry blushed brightly and couldn’t meet Severus’s eyes. “Obliviate me, please.”

“I will not do that. Perhaps you’ll learn a lesson from this… incident.”

“What do you suggest, then? Should we hang up signs to say we’re inside?”

“It might help,” Severus replied dryly.

“I was kidding. Knowing my luck, they’d malfunction right as you needed in and then you’d just yell at me. You yell at me enough as it is.”

“You deserve it. Especially for that.”

“Did I? How is it my fault if-”

Severus lifted a hand. “You could have aimed the other way, Potter. Do not speak of it anymore.”

“You didn’t even like that shirt. I’m sorry. Besides, it was washed!”

“I burned it. Every time I wore it, that is all I would be able to think of.”

“You burned it?”

Harry snickered at first. As the memory kept replaying in his head, his snickers morphed into full-blown laughter. By the end, he had tears running down his cheeks and stuck in the forefront of his mind was the image of the stunned/horrified look on Severus’ face when he realized his shirt was covered in a goodly amount of Harry’s come.

“I’m thrilled you find that so particularly amusing.”

“I’m sorry. It’s just…” Harry laughed again and had to force himself to stop laughing long enough to speak. “How often does something that horrific happen?” Harry clutched his aching sides and laughed harder for a long moment. “ Seriously! It’s so bad that it’s hilarious!”

“If I had been the one covering you with my bodily emissions, I doubt you would be laughing, Potter. Imagine that and perhaps you’ll understand.”

“Emiss…”
Harry did… and choked on his bread. He blanched, satisfying Severus’s apparent thirst for revenge, but for an entirely different reason than the professor believed.

He actually wanted it to happen.

Not because he liked Severus, of course, because that would be really super gross. He was a guy and his parents age. Oh, yeah, and he was rude most of the time and his professor on top of all of that. He just wondered what it’d feel like to be, you know, covered like that. He wasn’t interested in guys. He was just curious. Plus, he kind of wanted to see Severus get off. Not because he liked him… or even guys in general. It’s his damned curiosity. His curiosity was making him wonder if Severus really looked the way his mind thought he did during orgasm. Yeah, his curiosity. That’s it.

Man, his curiosity was annoying.

“Potter, I sincerely hope you’re not still picturing it.”

“Huh?”

Severus had a strange look on his face. “I said I sincerely hope you’re not still picturing it.”

“It got stuck.” Harry closed his eyes, shook his head, and missed the shrewd look Severus gave him. “So, uh, how’s your breakfast? Do you like the omelet?”

“It is acceptable.”

Harry started shaking his head in agreement, froze, and looked at Severus in amazement. In return, Severus cocked a brow silently.

“Did you…” Harry’s eyes were darting around, trying to process what he’d just heard. “You just… um, okay. Wow.”

“You seem surprised, Potter. It’s not an uncommon sight, I admit; however, this instance has me curious.”

Harry’s head snapped up. “Uh, yeah. Curiosity. Weird thing, right? Um, I was just trying to figure out what’s going on. Either that omelet was the greatest thing I’ve ever made and you just couldn’t hide the compliment in an insult or you’re dying. Please tell me it’s the first.”

“It is whichever allows you to sleep through the night without waking me up.”

“That’s not comforting. Oh, God! You’re dying, aren’t you?”

“Don’t be ridiculous. Why on earth would I be dying? Also, don’t you think I’d spend my last days doing something remotely entertaining? Sitting around and reading, while enjoyable, is not how I pictured my last days on Earth.”

“How exactly do you see your last days on Earth?” Harry asked.

Severus chuckled darkly, sipped his coffee, and set his mug down. He briefly looked into Harry’s eyes, smirked, and again looked away. Harry was unsure if he even wanted to know anymore.

“Honestly, Potter, none of it is appropriate for a schoolchild to hear. You should thank the stars that I’m not dying and that is all I will say.”

Harry cursed his damnable curiosity for really wanting to know now. No, he didn’t want to know.
He *needed* to know if it was so bad the man refused to say it in front of chil… Wait!

“I’m not a child!”

“ Took you that long to process it?”

“No, I was just busy thinking about the rest of the crap you said.”

Severus pulled a cocky smirk more befitting Draco Malfoy than himself and popped a piece of bread into his mouth. Harry scowled and debated throwing something at the man. Newfound cordiality or not, that would piss him off and Harry wasn’t sure he wanted to do that knowing his skilled ability to kill with only his hands. Harry shuddered and Severus arched a brow.

“Cold, Potter?”

“No.”

“Hmm.”

“Okay, I really want to know. What would you do?”

“I will not be telling you that.”

“But if you don’t tell me, I’m just going to keep imagining stuff,” Harry complained. “And each scenario will only be worse than the last.”

“I daresay that anything you conjure up with your limited brain capabilities would be nowhere close to anything I would want to do. I suggest you entertain yourself someway else.”

“But-”

“No.”

“Please?” Severus merely looked unimpressed and Harry narrowed his eyes. “Fine! I’ll just keep asking you if the next thing I’ve come up with is close. I’ll do it. It’ll be all your fault, sir, for the things I think up. You’ll be the one corrupting my mind! You might as well just tell me.”

“No and even you are not foolish enough to do anything of the sort, Potter.”

“You said none of it was child-appropriate?”

“Are you honestly going to attempt this?”

“Yes.”

Severus shook his head and sent his dishes to the sink. “I would not suggest it. No matter what you do, you shan’t be getting an answer from me.”

“I’ll just pay attention to your reactions then.”

“What reactions, Potter? Apart from anger, have I ever reacted around you?”

“Yeah, actually. A bunch since we’ve been here. Usually it’s disgust or something, but I’ve seen others on your face.”

“Then I wish you good luck,” Severus replied sarcastically before sweeping from the room. Harry
watched him go and then set to work thinking.

***

“Does drinking profusely and suffering hangovers count as child-inappropriate?”

“I don’t know, Potter. Do your friends drink profusely?”

“No, not at all… and we’re not children.”

“When we return, I will be subtracting fifty points from Gryffindor. Possibly fifty each from Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff for good measure.”

“That’s not even fair! And you didn’t answer my question.”

“I am well aware. I told you I would not be giving any answers, did I not?”

Harry grumbled.

***

“Hey, Professor.” An angry grumble sounded from inside the darkened bedroom. “I have another one. You awake?”

“No.”

“You sound like it. Do you want to hear it?”

“Is it as ridiculous as the harem of willing women you suggested, Potter?”

“I thought that was a good one,” Harry replied irritably. Severus had given him hell at least once a day since he’d suggested it. “I could see you wanting to, you know, do it.”

“How mature.”

“Do you want to know?”

“No.”

“Too bad. You’re obviously awake so I’m going to tell you.”

Harry stayed silent. Despite his words, he didn’t know if he could actually suggest it. It was too close to…

“Well?”

“I…”

Severus shifted in his bed and a light came on a moment later. “You have already disturbed my sleep. You may as well tell me.”

“Erm, well, have you ever heard of breath play?”

“Breath… play?” Severus promptly looked thunderous. “Are you trying to be funny, boy?”

“No. Hermione suggested it.”
“Why is that bint telling you anything of the sort? Isn’t she married to your best friend? I never took you to be the type of man to consort with-”

“I asked her for suggestions,” Harry mumbled. “I was just as shocked when she wrote that.”

Severus gave Harry a piercing look. “Go back to bed before I show you where exactly that thin divide between restraint and death is, Potter.”

The light flicked off and Severus spent a few moments tossing around. Harry didn’t move for the longest time. Eventually, he sighed.

“Sir, is that one of them?”

“No answers. You know that.”

“Are you sure you know where that-”

Quick as a flash, a hand wrapped around his throat. In terror, Harry started tossing around and was stilled when Severus tightened his fingers. The man’s voice came out in an angry hiss.

“Potter, I suggest you drop this entire subject now. It is none of your business what I would do during my last days on earth and I can’t believe I allowed you to continue as long as you have. If I am or am not interested in choking someone during intercourse, it is only my concern. It is inappropriate for you to keep asking about it. Go to sleep.”

The hand released his throat and Harry sucked in a deep raspy breath. He couldn’t believe Severus just did that! Like, for real did that! What if he hadn’t been in control of himself and… Harry let out a quiet whimper and moved to the far wall, as far away from Severus as possible.

“Night.”

“You were in no danger.”

Harry was startled enough to rear his head back and slam it against the wall. Moaning in pain, he clutched his head and squinted into the dark. He now knew Severus was still standing right beside his bed, but he couldn’t see him.

“I thought you were in bed.”

“I was waiting to see if you would do something like, oh, hurt yourself somehow while you’re cowering from a man who wouldn’t hurt you. Have you injured yourself?”

“No.”

“Then how do you explain that moan?”

“Maybe I was touching myself,” Harry snapped.

“If I ever catch you touching yourself in here, I will bind your hands to the headboard until I awaken in the morning. Do not doubt that.”

“Look, I’m obviously fine, you’re grouchy, and I’m tired of talking to you. Can we just sleep?”

Severus sniffed. Harry couldn’t tell if it was annoyance or amusement. He frankly didn’t care. That bastard had choked him. He didn’t even want to be in the same room as him. In fact! Harry grabbed his blankets, pillows, and wand and moved to the door. He brushed past Severus on his way there.
“Are you seriously moving to the living room?”

“Yes.”

“…bloody dramatic child.”

“…murderous bastard.”

Harry swept out of the room. He made it maybe halfway down the hall before he was flung into the wall and held there by two hands on his clavicle. Harry grabbed them with his own hands, fearing Severus was really going to strangle him this time.

“Tell me, Potter, do you enjoy reminding others of the sins they’ve committed because it makes you feel superior? Do you think I enjoy having so much blood on my hands?” Harry squinted up, realizeing he’d forgotten his glasses, and Severus leaned further down. “Listen to me, boy, because I’m only going to say this once. For the rest of my life, I will bear a reminder of my sins, even if they were committed to bring an end to that monster. It is something I will never be able to escape. I do not need anyone, especially you, constantly harking on about them.”

Severus roughly pulled his hands from Harry’s tight grip and Harry watched him move back to the bedroom. When the door slammed shut, Harry frowned and realized that had been the most passionate thing Severus had ever said to him. Guilt swamped him, nearly choking him more effectively than a pair of hands could.

He felt horrible for every awful thing he’d ever said about Severus. The man was obviously suffering daily and he never even thought twice about bad-mouthing him.

He didn’t sleep that night.

***

Harry finished his Transfiguration essay and set his quill down. It had been three days since Severus had even acknowledged his presence. The morning after that night, Harry had made breakfast, but Severus never showed up. At first, Harry had been afraid Severus had left him here alone, but the man had finally shown himself around eleven.

He was back to eating toast.

Harry mentally cursed himself for being a heartless bastard, the very thing he used to accuse Severus of being. How could he not have noticed? It was obvious now, thinking back over everything. All of the drinking, the emotionless mask, the sleeping potions, the odd sleeping hours… Harry pushed away from the desk and stalked to the kitchen. Severus didn’t even react to his angry stomping.

In the kitchen, Harry stared at the dishes from breakfast. Another meal he’d made, another meal Severus hadn’t eaten, another meal he’d only picked at, another meal essentially gone to waste. Besides being upset about hurting Severus like that, Harry was worried the man wasn’t eating well. After only three days of eating toast, he’d begun to lose weight again. Had it really only been almost two weeks ago that he’d been complaining about putting on weight?

Harry ran his hands through his hair in agitation. He had to make it up to him somehow. He needed to apologize, too. God, they were probably the two hardest things he would ever do and that was including defeating Voldemort. Severus deserved them, though. Even while being constantly tortured by that mark on his arm, he’d helped Harry through his nightmares and… with, well, every time he’d ever needed it.
How should he do this? He wanted his unwilling companion back, even if he had to be completely humiliated to do it. This place was too damn lonely without someone to talk to. It made him think of things like his dead family, feeling totally alone, his hopeless future, Voldemort, and ending his own life when the war was over… He’d even had a gruesome image flash through his head during his shower yesterday. He had been thinking he could just borrow Severus’s razor and be done with it all. Why should he have to be the one to save the world? He was only seventeen!

Thankfully, he’d shaken himself out of that.

Harry pulled in a deep breath and realized he’d gotten himself sidetracked again. Maybe he should mention this to Severus if he ever talked to him again. He’d never had such dark thoughts before and was worried it was another of Voldemort’s machinations. Hadn’t Severus mentioned something about Voldemort getting into his head and making him do the very thing he’d been entertaining lately?

Okay. First, he had to take care of his problem with Severus. Then, he could worry about himself. But how?

Almost three hours later, Harry pulled his apron off and tiredly surveyed the kitchen. This much was taken care of, at any rate. He needed a quick shower before he tried the next part.

When he was freshly showered and dressed, Harry padded out into the living room barefoot. He anxiously studied Severus’s profile and hoped he’d at least get him to start eating again. Sitting on the couch didn’t seem to faze Severus at all. The man was extraordinarily good at ignoring people. Harry swallowed thickly and pulled in a deep breath.

“Um, sir?” Like he expected, he didn’t get even an eye blink. “I know you’re still really mad at me and I understand I deserve it, but I was hoping I could convince you to eat something other than toast. I’m worried, because you’re losing weight. I know it’s my fault and I’m sorry. Well, I’m sorry about more than you not eating, but…” Was Severus even listening to him? “I never even bothered to wonder what it was like for you. I shouldn’t have said any of it and I \textit{am} sorry. You don’t have to talk to me, but can you eat?”

After a few minutes, Severus silently stood up and walked into the kitchen. Harry felt one weight lifted off his chest. Okay, so he’s planning to eat, but is he eating toast? Harry hurried to the kitchen and stopped at the last minute, instead calmly gliding through the door. Severus was sitting at the table, once again reading his book. He didn’t have anything in front of him.

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Thank Merlin.

Onto one plate, Harry piled more food than Severus could probably eat and set it in front of him. He’d cooked the things he’d noticed Severus liked the most. Roast chicken, carrots, Brussels sprouts, mashed potatoes (he’d gotten Severus to admit he liked them mashed one night after roasting them), and plenty of the fluffy rolls. Harry almost kicked himself when he realized he’d forgotten something and quickly grabbed the bowl on the counter. When he placed it in front of Severus, the man stared down at the bowl and raised an eyebrow, but still didn’t look at him.

“It’ll taste good with the chicken, I promise.”

Still no response. Harry sighed and fixed a plate for himself. Hopefully Severus would eat well, if nothing else. This was one step closer, right?

At the end of the meal, Harry collected Severus’s dishes and quickly placed a dessert plate and coffee mug in front of him before he could run out of the room. He couldn’t decide between the
pumpkin-chocolate chunk bread Severus had loved or the pumpkin cream cheese pie he’d caught the man sneaking into multiple times.

He’d made both.

To Harry’s relief and happiness, Severus ate both desserts. He never looked up once, but he also didn’t simply leave. Maybe he couldn’t. The desserts were good, after all. He’d just placed his and Severus’s dirty dishes in the sink when he heard Severus stand. He was surprised when he didn’t hear the door immediately creak open. He looked over his shoulder to find Severus staring at him distastefully.

“The cranberry sauce was too thick, you annoying, little bastard.”

Harry turned around again, smiled down at the filling sink, and had the urge to hug him.

“I’ll keep that in mind for next time.”

Severus harrumphed and left the kitchen. As soon as he was gone, Harry slumped over the sink and shook his head. He’d never been happier, he was sure.
“God dammit, Potter! Try a locking charm next time!” Severus bellowed, backing out of the bathroom with his eyes covered. “What the hell are you even doing?”

“I was, er… um, I don’t exactly know.”

“You don’t know what you’re doing?”

“Well, not really. It was something Hermione told me to do,” Harry replied sheepishly. “I forgot what this is called.”

“Are you sure your relationship with her is purely platonic?” Severus asked dryly. Harry noted he still wasn’t walking away and laughed at the question.

“Yeah. She just suggested I try this.”

“Potter, I will gladly admit I didn’t see much apart from your naked arse… again, but you looked questionable at best. Please tell me your hands aren’t exploring any orifice or reproductive organ at the moment.”


“Even for a male used to the sort of thing, randomly shoving things up one’s arse isn’t recommended without the proper tools and preparation. Or in general, depending upon the object.” Severus shook his head, still looking horrified, and closed the door. “I’ll leave you to whatever you’re doing.”

“Wait!”

Harry was actually surprised when Severus opened the door again, one hand still clamped over his eyes.

“What? And hands in the air.”

“They are. Erm, it’s kind of an embarrassing question.”

“Does it have anything to do with what you had better not be doing right this very moment?”

“Uh, no. Well, kind of, but not really. Like at all, but a little.”

“Potter,” Severus sighed. “Is it of a sexual nature?”

“…yes?”

“Why do you expect I’ll answer you? We don’t particularly like each other all that much so I won’t
“Want to waste my breath.”

“You’re the only other person here and I can’t just go asking someone like Dumbledore.” Both Harry and Severus shuddered at that. “I just thought you could tell me or give me a book about it… or something. I’d ask Hermione, but then I’d just picture her and Ron and feel like a pervert.”

“What is your question?”

“It’s something Hermione wrote about.”

“Why am I not surprised? What is it you’re wishing to know about?”

“Well, um, there’s two things. She didn’t really explain them, you see, and I’ve never heard of either of them. I’m just curious about what they are.”

“To the point, Potter. I don’t wish to be standing here all day.”

“Okay. The, uh, first one is… um, called intercrural sex?”

Severus rubbed his forehead. Harry saw his eyes were tightly closed and his brows wrinkled up. “It’s a form of non-penetrative intercourse where a male… thrusts… between his partner’s thighs. It is something Mrs. Weasley no doubt wishes her young husband had done.”

The poor man looked deeply uncomfortable.

“So is it just sex?”

“Not as you’re thinking. The penis doesn’t… Potter, the male would thrust between- I told you it was non-penetrative, you idiot. That means there is no penetration at all.”

“Oh.” Harry thought for a moment and gasped when he got it. “Oh! So you’re saying you just kind of rub-”

“Please spare me your interpretation. What is the other?”

“Something she called frotting.” Severus choked on his own spit and Harry froze when the man actually opened his eyes to stare at him. He didn’t even think to cover himself. “What?”

“Frotting or frottage?”

“There’s a difference?”

“Not too much in the technique. Which was it?”

“Frotting. Why?”

“You’re sure it was frotting?”

“Yeah. I can still see it in her letter. It was frotting.”

“Potter, frotting is a non-penetrative form of intercourse where two males achieve orgasm by usually, but not always, rubbing their genitals together.”

“Oh,” Harry said weakly. “And what’s frottage in case I got it wrong?”

Severus sighed. “Assuredly you have. Frottage is similar, but is the term male-female relationships
“Huh. Wait. What about female-female? Shouldn’t they get their own term?”

Severus huffed. “They do, you naïve moron. It’s called tribadism.”

“Is it the same thing?”

“Yes.”

“What exactly are they rubbing together? I don’t get it. I mean… how?”

“Do I really have to explain this to you?”

“Well, who else is going to do it? Do you want me to go ask Dumbledore or McGonagall? Maybe Hooch would know.”

“Albus and Minerva would either have a heart attack or give you detention for the rest of your life if you even dared to ask. Rolanda is well aware of the definition of tribadism, but I forbid you from ever asking her the mechanics of it.”

“But what-”

“Usually it’s direct contact between their vulvae, Potter. Surely you’ve seen one before.” Severus huffed and managed to shoot a glare towards Harry through the spaces of his fingers. When had he re-covered his eyes? “Are you finished asking about crude subjects?”

“Yeah, I think. Wait, no.”

“Oh, dear God above. Help me.”

“There’s just one more Hermione mentioned and didn’t explain. What’s anilingus?”

“Why the hell is anyone, let alone your married and expecting friend, giving you these terms?”

“I don’t know. It just came up.”

“Came… Potter, if you wish to enrich yourself, I would suggest getting a detailed book. I’m not going to explain anything else to you. Honestly, I might end up having nightmares already.”

“But I won’t be going out for a really long time. How am I supposed to order a book when-”

“It isn’t necessary to know any of these things until after we’ve been freed from this torture cell. You can surely wait until then.”

“I’ll just try to find it. Do we have a dictionary around here?”

“Why would we have a dictionary laying about? Do you use one often?”

“Not really, but I figured you might have packed one since you like reading the weirdest stuff.”

“As humorous as your assumption was, I do not read dictionaries and I most certainly did not pack one.”

“Can’t you just tell me? You told me the other two.”

Severus dropped his hand and glared, again ignoring the fact that Harry wasn’t hidden behind the
shower curtain at all. Harry raised his brows and looked expectant.

“If I have nightmares about this, Potter, I will be waking you up every single time.”

“That’s fair.”

Severus shook his head and huffed, his eyes closed once more. “Anilingus is exactly what it sounds like: sexual stimulation by contact between the mouth and anus.”

“Oh, so… OH, MY GOD,” Harry cried in horror. “You mean like…”

“Yes.”

“Gross! Why the- ewww. Herm- ewwwww!”

“I’m leaving before you think of anything else.” Severus turned for the door and hissed. “I’m seeing it. Damn that boy. Nightmares are inevitable now…” Severus got further down the hall and Harry could still hear a few things he was muttering. “…resignation… St. Mungo’s… eat a bar of soap when I see her…”

Since when had Hermione become such a… Ugh. Mental images. Though it had felt good, he no longer wished to continue this perineum rubbing thing she’d told him about. The mood had been successfully ruined. Harry shut off the water and climbed out.

How the hell would that even feel good?

He pitied the people who actually had to go down there with their mouths. It probably tasted really gross and felt bad for everyone involved. How could it not? Harry shuddered. What was the point?

And how exactly had Severus known about all of that sex stuff?

Hmm.

***

Harry looked up from the letter Remus had sent him that morning and stared at Severus. Engaged in an update from his stand-in at Hogwarts, Severus didn’t notice. Harry again looked down at the small addendum at the end of the letter. Severus’s birthday was 9 January and he never said anything?

Frowning, Harry penned a quick letter back to Remus and tucked it into his completed schoolwork. Albus would pass it along so he wouldn’t worry about it anymore. What he had to think about, though, was how he’d bring it up. Did Severus want a cake or anything? Why hadn’t he said anything?

Well, he felt like shit.

It was almost the middle of February! Valentine’s Day was in just five days. He hadn’t said anything at all and Harry hadn’t even known. He would have done something or at least said happy birthday for it.

“Sir?”

“I am clearly in the middle of something, Potter.”

“Why didn’t you tell me about your birthday?”
“I feel old enough without some brat reminding me I’ve aged another year.”

“You’re not really that old.”

Severus looked up from his letter and presented that ever-sarcastic eyebrow, perfectly arched to show his disdain. “I am now thirty-eight. That is old in my book.”

“Dumbledore’s well over a hundred,” Harry reasoned.

“Yes and I’m only a few seventy or so years from being his age.”

“But that’s more than twice the amount of time you’ve even been alive. Really, you’re kind of young when you think about it.”

“I am not young.” Severus focused on his letter again. “Not even close.”

“Kind of.”

“Is there a reason you are asking about this? I can well imagine you doing it just to irritate me. Is that it?”

“No. I just wondered why you never said anything.”

“We are back to me feeling old enough without some brat reminding me I’ve aged another year.”

“There must be a difference in feeling old and actually being old, then.”

“Potter,” Severus grumbled. “Shut up.”

“Well, happy belated birthday, sir.”

“You’re making me feel older by the minute.”

Harry studied Severus closely. Despite sounding bad-tempered that he’d brought it up, the corners of Severus’s mouth almost seemed like they could be turning up. Was he smiling? Better yet, was he smiling because he’d said happy birthday or was there something funny in his letter?

“Is that letter good?”

“Positively irritating. This fool doesn’t even know the difference between powdered Hellebore and syrup of Hellebore. Their usages are radically different. Touching this piece of rubbish makes my skin crawl.”

“Even I know the difference between hellebore powder and syrup and I suck at Potions.”

Severus spared him an agreeable nod, but never took his eyes from the paragraph currently making his eye twitch. A moment later, his lip curled in anger. He was telling the truth. Maybe he was smiling about him, then. Harry grinned down at his desktop and started plotting. He could still do something for him, right? After all, he hadn’t known and Severus had never said anything. Could he really be blamed for not celebrating?

“What do you think you are doing?”

“I’m heading to the kitchen to make dinner. What sounds good?”

“Your beef stew isn’t as poisonous as everything else you make.”
“Right. I’ll try to limit the poisons I throw in, then.”

“See that you do.”

“It’ll be difficult, but I’ll try.”

Severus grumbled and Harry snickered on the way to the kitchen. After a moment of thought, he warded the door shut. If Severus tried breaking in while he was working… well, it would be easy for Severus to get through the ward, because Harry wasn’t anywhere that talented or anything. At least he’d have some sort of warning, though.

An hour and a half later, right as he’d finished everything, his ward told him someone was trying to get through. Harry leaned back against the counter, crossed his arms, and waited for Severus to dismantle it. Sooner than he expected, Severus was in the kitchen, his eyes sweeping the room and his wand in hand. Seeing no danger, he scowled at Harry and tucked his wand away.

“Why the hell did you ward the door?”

“I was working.”

“Working on dinner requires—” Severus finally noted the stew, toasties, and what was obviously a birthday cake arranged on the table. “I thought I told you I don’t want some brat reminding me of my age?”

“Maybe it’s my birthday cake.”

“You were born 31 July, Potter. I don’t even like you and I know it. The whole wizarding world knows your birthday.”

“Everyone deserves a birthday cake now and then. I never see you get one and I didn’t even tell you happy birthday so—”

“I beg to differ. You have, in fact, told me happy birthday.”

“It doesn’t count, because it was belated.”

“You didn’t qualify. You just said you hadn’t.”

Man, he was stubborn and always determined to win even if he clearly had no case.

“Doesn’t matter. Ready to eat?”

“No.”

“Well, okay. I guess I can just start singing if you aren’t ready yet. Ha—”

Severus cast a slight hex at Harry’s mouth and looked proud of himself when he seemed to gag on his own words. Harry waited for Severus to remove the hex and scowled, but Severus merely held his head up high.

“If I don’t have to hear that ever again, I will consume this filth.”

Harry grinned and sat down across from Severus. “Deal.”

“You still look like an idiot when you do that.”
Like the last three nights, Harry woke up abruptly at four a.m. and looked around the silent room. There was no sign of what had again woken him up from a deep sleep, but tonight he wasn’t going to drift back to sleep without answers.

There the noise was again. It was like an odd irregularly-sounding clinking. Now he knew why the weird sound had appeared without explanation in his dream about Quidditch. They had sounded like the occasional rattle of chains in his dream, which had been disconcerting to say the least.

Harry quietly slid out of his bed and padded over to Severus’s bed. He tentatively reached out, dropped his hands, and frowned. It was cold and empty. Grabbing his wand from his nightstand and slipping his glasses on, Harry lifted his wand up next to his head and silently lit the room up. Severus wasn’t anywhere in here. Checking, he soon found the closet was as empty as the rest of the room. He quietly slipped out of the bedroom and began a slow search of the entire living space they shared.

He found Severus in the kitchen.

“Sir?”

Severus didn’t look up from his intense study of the table. He merely poured himself another finger of whiskey. Harry moved forward and extinguished his wand light since the kitchen was lit by a few candles. He placed a hand on his professor’s shoulder and then let go when the man roughly pulled his shoulder away.

“Go back to bed, Potter,” Severus said quietly, his voice oddly even for this time of night and the amount of liquor he seemed to have already had (judging by the smell). “It is too early for you to be up.”

“Are you okay?”

“Does it appear to be so?”

Harry watched Severus take another long swallow of his drink and frowned again. “Is there something I can do to help?”

“Yes. You can go back to bed and leave me in peace. It is too early for you to be up.”

“But-”

“Mister Potter, I tire of this bizarre display of disquietude.” How did the man still manage to talk like that while drinking? “Return to your bed at once and go back to sleep. Do not concern yourself with my habits.”

Harry stepped back a few steps. Severus seemed to forget his presence almost immediately, his eyes back to studying the wood grains of the table. Unable to explain why he persisted, Harry took a deep breath and spoke in a gentle tone of voice.

“Did you have a nightmare, sir?”

“I thought I told you to go back to bed, boy.”
Emotionless. Flat. Nothing of the man he knew in there right now. Harry shivered a little bit. “You did.” Insight hit Harry forcibly. “You haven’t been sleeping well the last three nights, have you?”

“It is none of your concern. Go to bed.”

Harry left the kitchen, walked to the bathroom, and pulled one of Severus’s sleeping draughts from the cabinet. Severus’s random moments of irritability and sluggishness the last three days made so much more sense now. He can’t believe he’d snapped back every time the man had said something bordering on rude. Of course he’d seemed rude. He wasn’t sleeping! Entering the kitchen once more, Harry wordlessly set the vial down next to Severus’s hand and left the kitchen. He crawled into his bed and tried to will himself back to sleep.

His mind wouldn’t stop thinking until Severus slid into his own bed twenty minutes later. Harry sighed quietly, curled over on his side, and drifted off to sleep the moment Severus’s soft snores sounded through the room.

***

Severus clutched his coffee in two hands and continued watching Harry curiously. Harry ignored the eyes boring into him, nearly burning him with their intensity, and continued his Valentine’s Day experiment. This had been going on for over an hour, beginning shortly after he’d penned a quick letter to Albus, and he wasn’t having much success beyond the few he’d gotten in the beginning.

“God, it’s just- I will do this. Resistance is futile, you little bastards,” Harry grumbled quietly. “I will always win.”

Again, he picked up a single roasted coffee bean and tried getting the melted chocolate around the entire thing in an even layer. Impressed with himself, he carefully set the bean down next to the others and smiled viciously. Yes, now he was getting somewhere.

“Potter, you realize you are conversing with inanimate objects, correct? Is that not the first sign of mental instability?”

“It worked, if you were paying attention. I’m not losing my mind or anything. I’m just determined to do this.”

“Why are you even ruining coffee beans in the first place?”

Harry’s jaw dropped in horror. He spun around, stared at Severus like this for a few long moments, and then clutched a dried bean between two fingers. He deposited it in front of the man, stepped back, and watched him expectantly.

“Try it.”

“I am not eating that. It hasn’t been brewed yet.”

“It’s supposed to be candy. Just try it.”

“I will not.”

“Please?”
“Has that ever worked on me?”

“Uh, yeah. One of the most recent times was when I asked about those things in the shower.”

“Ah, yes. Yet another memory I have attained of you fondling yourself in the shower. My mind, I’m surprised, is still intact. Merlin knows how.”

“Can you just please try it? Maybe if you knew how awesome it is, you wouldn’t keep staring at me like that.” Severus didn’t change expressions and Harry pointed at him. “Yes, just like that! Please?”

Severus’s lip curled moments before he popped the candy into his mouth. He chewed, made a face, and swallowed. He looked like he was trying to swallow feces instead of a small sweet.

“That was truly appalling.”

“I can tell.”

Harry smirked and decided not to comment upon the way Severus was licking his lips. He turned around, continued dipping the beans (with increasing success), and had to shake that image from his mind. It was hilarious. Harry had actually discovered something the stoic man loved! Loved enough to lick his lips! He wanted to grin, laugh, or something.

“It is nearly three o’clock. Surely you’re not going to keep doing this all evening.”

“I’ll feed you, don’t worry.”

“Feed me, Potter? Poison me is a more apt description.”

“You say potato-”

“If you say peach, I will smack you, too.” Harry slowly turned to look at him, confusion evident on his face. “My godson says the same thing. It is infuriating.”

“Someone likes you enough to name you their son’s godfather?”

“You’re lucky you’re on the other side of the kitchen or I would throttle you.”

“Oh.”

“Are you going to keep reacting like this every time I mention something like that?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, sir.”

Harry turned around and immersed himself in his work again. Once or twice he ducked down and checked the casserole he had in the oven, but he couldn’t face Severus yet. He’d had his throat in that man’s hands a few times already and he hadn’t died yet, but it was still scary that he could so easily die if the man was determined he do so.

“Potter,” Severus spoke. Harry tensed, but didn’t turn. When had Severus moved so close to him? He was right there behind him, so close his hair had ruffled when the man spoke. “You are being absolutely ridiculous. You’re being worse, I daresay, than Longbottom on a bad day.”

“I’m not doing anything.”

“Then why have you yet to face me?”
“I wasn’t aware I should be spending any of my time looking at you, sir. It generally just annoys you, right?”

“That has never stopped you before.”

Was Severus actually disgruntled by this? It sounded like it…

“Maybe I’m just trying something new. Self-preservation if you will.”

“I don’t believe that,” Severus said much more quietly. “In fact, I know you’re lying. You are a creature of habit, Potter. You don’t change up your routine unless something provokes you enough times to make you deviate. Is it that you know I’ve killed before? Is that why you react like this when the subject presents itself?”

“Does it really matter, Professor?” Harry asked tightly.

“If you enjoy feeling hunted, then no. I don’t care either way to be honest. Suffer, if that is what you enjoy.”

“I don’t feel hunted.”

“Hmm. I don’t suppose you would even know what being hunted would feel like, would you?”

“Sir?”

Severus made an indecipherable noise, stepped away, and refilled his coffee mug. Harry briefly peeked over his shoulder and spied the man stirring in some milk and sugar before once more focusing on his coffee beans. Surprisingly, he only had a few more to go. When he ducked down to pull the casserole out of the oven, he saw a pale hand flash out of his periphery and almost jumped. Glancing up, Harry realized one of his coffee bean candies was missing and suppressed a small smile through sheer force of will.

“Are you almost done there, Potter? I never took you for a masochist, but seeing you bending over and holding your face in front of a heated oven is quickly changing my opinion.”

Harry swiftly stood upright and blushed. “No, I was just lost in thought.”

“It’s a miracle you’re still alive, boy. How often do you find yourself drifting off at the most inappropriate moments?”

It was a rhetorical question, but Harry still thought about it. A lot while cooking, in the shower, pinned to the bed by his professor, washing the dishes, standing in front of an oven, eating, trying to block out his professor’s clinking liquor bottles during hard nights, before bed, doing homework, reading books, reading letters, straddling his professor, getting dressed, collecting his dirty laundry, peeing… really, at the most random times ever. He even does it sometimes while he’s wanking! How is that even possible? Shouldn’t his mind be completely focused when his hand’s on his prick?

“Too much, I’m thinking.”

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Harry groggily opened his eyes and tried pulling his sore arms back to his sides. Panic set in right as he realized his arms were secured to the headboard. He couldn’t move them!
“Snape!” Harry yelled out angrily. “Why am I tied up?”

“Do you not enjoy the bindings I’ve chosen?”

Harry squinted through the dark and saw Severus sitting in his chair, looking for all the world like he was sitting in a small leather throne. That’s weird. He shouldn’t have been able to see that. Were his glasses on after all? Had he left them on? Glancing above him, he saw thick cords (or maybe really thin ropes) laced around his wrists and the wooden slats of the headboard.

“Why am I tied up? I didn’t do anything wrong. I was just sleeping.”

Severus rested his right ankle over his left knee and steepled his fingers, looking up at Harry strangely, intensely. His eyes felt like they were burning him. For a while, he didn’t say anything.

“You once asked me if making another man find his release was just like making yourself or if there was more of a technique to it.”

“When have I ever asked you that?”

Severus smirked. “I am willing to show you how.”

“What?” Harry tugged at his bonds and again found them immovable. He scowled at his professor. “You woke me up in the middle of the night to get me off?”

“I had nothing to do with you waking. I was merely sitting here when you woke yourself. Perhaps it was your subconscious mind warning you of your impending… situation, hmm?”

“Seriously, this isn’t funny.”

“I never suggested it was. I apologize if I made you think otherwise.”

Harry’s eyes bugged. “Are you feeling all right? Have you been drinking, Professor?”

“Certainly not.”

“Um, sir, can I ask you something without you laughing at me?”

“If you must.”

Still Severus didn’t move. He merely focused his fiery gaze on Harry’s eyes.

“Can you cast a wandless patronus for me?” Severus smirked and was soon waving away the last wisps of his patronus. Harry swallowed thickly. One question down. “Can you let me go?”

“Not until I’ve finished.”

“Are you being serious?”

“I would never joke about this, much less with you.”

Severus stood, approached the bed, and ran a hand over Harry’s thigh. In response, Harry jerked and stared up at Severus with a wary grimace.

“Sir, don’t. Um, we should just go to bed, yeah?”

“No, I don’t think so. You have a question and I’m going to provide you with an answer.” Severus
gently tugged Harry’s pajama bottoms down, looked proud of the lack of pants below, and pushed his shirt up under his chin. “Your skin is so smooth. Do you realize that?”

Harry bit his lip and furiously thought. “Erm, have you taken a bad batch of sleeping potion?”

“Have you ever known a sleeping potion to be so destroyed that it renders it as an aphrodisiac of some sort?”

“No, but… I’m sure it can happen.”

“If you ever discover one, I hope you’ll inform me.”

Harry shivered and again tried to get free. To his mortification, he realized he wasn’t trying that hard anymore. He watched Severus’s hand trail back down his chest and lightly scratch at the tops of his thighs. Yet more goose pimples popped up.

“Sir, let me go. We’ll go back to bed and everything will be forgotten.”

“That is not going to happen. You once wondered if I was even capable of doing this to you. So far, and I need not remind you that I’ve yet to touch you intimately, you seem to be enjoying it. Indeed, your flesh is already swelling…”

“My…” Harry spied his prick, hardening from the strange touches of Severus’s fingertips. “Um, that’s-”

“Shh,” Severus commanded as he finally brought his hand up to Harry’s burgeoning erection. “Accio lubricant.”

“You keep lube around here?”

“What did I tell you, boy?”

“I’m just surprised. What are you using it for? Are you actually gay or something?”

“Are you, Potter?” Severus calmly asked in return. Harry looked away from Severus’s eyes and watched that hand, which was currently rubbing a slick liquid along his prick. “Have you ever been touched by a man?”

“No,” Harry replied a little shakily, watching that pale hand glide up and down smoothly. His tongue felt glued to the top of his mouth. The silence was broken maybe two or three minutes later.

A hand gently tugged his balls back down.

“You’re going to come too soon. It would be embarrassing for you, would it not? Tell me something.”

“Why should I?” Harry gasped quietly. Severus continued stroking him, giving him a weird look. On someone else, it would look almost… affectionate.

“Have you ever been touched by a woman?”

Harry tried not to blush. “No.”

“What a pity. You don’t even know what you’re missing, do you?” Severus released him abruptly and seized his wand. “Incarcerous.”

Harry squeaked when ropes appeared and literally tied him to the bed. He could see the ropes
disappearing into random slits in the mattress. How had the slits gotten there?

“Um, sir… why-”

“You were moving too much.” Severus twisted his wrist and Harry wanted to arch, but the ropes held him fast. He settled for whimpering pitifully. “You’ve no choice. You will lay there, incapable of moving at all, and accept everything your body is feeling. Does the feeling of being powerless frighten you?” Harry felt his erection twitch and groaned quietly. “No, I can see it has quite the opposite effect on you. How strange. I’d imagined the reverse being true. I must confess I am pleased.”

“Sir, please…” Harry’s plea gurgled as Severus gently wrapped a hand around his throat, his other hand still stroking. He wasn’t even sure what he was begging for anymore. “Don’t…”

“Shh, boy. I won’t hurt you. You were the one who first brought up breath play, were you not? Does this thrill you or alarm you?” Harry swallowed thickly, his airway starting to be compressed tightly. He could barely get any air in now and his belly was feeling tingly. God, was he really getting off from this? He should be terrified! “Do you enjoy this?”

Harry felt impossibly hard. He looked at Severus with pleading eyes and felt his eyes roll into the back of his head when the man squeezed his erection with a firm hand and swiped his head through the liberal amount of pre-cum beading up on the head. He was so, so, so, so, so close. Oh, please. God, just…

“Sssss,” Harry tried to say. He wanted to ask Severus for more. Where had his deviancy come from?

Straddling Harry’s thighs, Severus began stroking him at a faster pace, his entire body covering him. Harry tried pulling in air, but his throat was too constricted. God, it was so wrong, but felt so goddamned amazing and hot and he didn’t want Severus to let go and… Gods, but he needed him to.

“You’re almost there. I can sense it,” Severus purred quietly, his voice rasping against Harry’s neck. He nipped lightly at the sweat-slicked skin and licked over the red patch. “Fuck, boy. The way you smell, taste, sound… you are an aphrodisiac.”

“Nnnh,” Harry whined.

“Almost there, boy.”

Severus’s fist began flying over Harry’s erection, his eyes taking on a strange gleam. Right as Harry began tightening up from the first wave of pleasure, a mere second or two before his erection began to pulse, Severus released his chokehold on Harry’s neck and banished the ropes. Sucking in a deep breath, Harry screamed in pleasure and arched up, clinging to Severus’s shoulders throughout his entire orgasm. Severus reared back onto his heels and held him against his body, rubbing one hand down his back and the other milking him through in the tight space between their bodies. Harry collapsed onto the bed when it was over and saw Severus’s belly was covered with come.

It was an erotic image and he swallowed thickly.

“That was the hottest thing I’ve ever experienced…”

Harry looked around and noticed the room getting fuzzy. He blinked in confusion. What-
“Oh, fuck.”

Harry was so shocked, he didn’t bother lowering his voice. Severus, standing next to him, looked livid, tensed, demanding answers. Dazed, he realized that the Severus that had tied him to his bed and made him come so expertly was only a dream.

FUCK.

“It is five-thirty in the morning and you just woke me up with a scream that closely resembled a goddamned banshee. What is your problem?”

“Nothing,” Harry breathed.

“Did you have a nightmare? Was it prophetic?” Harry blushed fiercely and Severus sighed in realization. “Is that all? Merlin. Potter, I will not yell at you for having a wet dream. At your age, it is unavoidable and you are old enough to handle cleaning after yourself in that event without alerting me. You might consider sleeping with a silencing charm around you from now on so this doesn’t happen again.”

Severus sleepily trudged back to his bed and fell down in a heap, landing on his stomach and his head only partially on his pillow. He was asleep before Harry could even say anything more. All the way over in his own bed, Harry could smell the alcohol wafting off of the obviously exhausted man. How late had he been up drinking this time? How had he not been startled awake by the sounds?

“Sorry,” Harry whispered belatedly.

The next morning, Harry woke early and showered, the water scalding him. Afterwards, he hurried to the kitchen. He was starving and wanted breakfast to be ready by the time Severus woke up. He had given last night’s dream a lot of thought since waking. While it had been hot, he’s almost sure he would never want that to happen in real life. The choking and rope thing, that is. It had been too… just too much. And he simply didn’t know what to think about the guy-assisted orgasm. It was hot- really hot- and that was confusing as hell.

It took Severus another two hours to rouse himself, shower, and slouch into the kitchen. Harry instantly felt worse than he had before. How long had Severus been asleep when he woke him up? How long was he up last night? Surely he didn’t get enough sleep last night. For once he wasn’t being mean when he noted to himself that the man looked like shit. His movements were also not as smooth and fluid as they usually were. Compared to him, though, he was still a hell of a lot more graceful than most.

Damn, he envied him.

Harry decided it would be wise not to speak until Severus was feeling much better. He gently placed a full plate of food and a mug of coffee in front of him, walked to the bathroom, and soon returned with an energizing potion and hangover cure. The vials made a small clink as he placed them beside Severus. Without much thought to the action, Severus tossed both back and visibly looked better in a matter of seconds.

“You’re improving on the coffee,” Severus muttered and scooped some scrambled eggs onto his fork. Harry frowned at his still slightly shaking hands.
“Thanks.”

“I didn’t need either of those.”

“No offence meant by this, sir, but you looked as terrible as you were probably feeling.”

Severus grumbled and shook his hand. Harry felt ridiculous for worrying about it so much. Man, that dream had messed his brain up. He was ready to blame it on his curiosity screwing with his mind in an unhealthy way, but he couldn’t seem to convince himself. He certainly didn’t like Severus- gross- but maybe he liked guys and Severus had just been in the dream since that’s who he sees on a daily basis. It made sense. Maybe. Unless his mind was trying to tell him that his thoughts were stupid. Using the ropes, choking, and Severus- three things he didn’t actually like- were a way to make that clearer. Oh, yeah. That sounded much better, more realistic, and genuinely plausible.

Harry sighed.

“I see smoke coming out of your ears. You shouldn’t think so much; it’ll overload that poor excuse of a brain, much like it is doing right now. Whatever dilemma you’re suffering under cannot be that difficult to deal with.”

Harry looked up at Severus curiously. Was he right? Was he thinking about it too hard? His dream might have just been what it was: gaining sexual relief from the most prominent things on his mind. Undoubtedly, Severus and choking never strayed far from his mind. How could they, honestly? Thinking of Severus could have reminded him of his threat a while back and it also tied into the restraint, as Severus once mentioned… Hmm.

“Yeah, I think you’re right. Definitely makes sense. Erm, thanks.” Harry rubbed his eyes and drank some coffee. “How are you feeling now?”

“I do not participate in small talk, Potter. We are inmates in this torturous hellhole, not roommates.”

Had Severus ever had a roommate? What would it be like to have the man as a roommate? Harry snorted derisively. Obviously it would be just like this, except he’d be a willing roommate. He bet it would be weird.

“I was just asking if you’re feeling better. I didn’t realize it would offend you.”

“Do not snap at me, boy, and stop asking me ridiculous questions.”

“I didn’t snap at you.”

“You did.”

Harry opened his mouth and then closed it when a thought struck him. Was this Severus’s way of discussing his emotions? Logically, it was probably just his professor’s way of being surly to an easy target. Abstractly, though, it might be his way of saying he doesn’t feel too keen… Harry peeked at Severus’s carefully neutral expression and wondered if he was right. Naturally, the man wouldn’t be feeling too great, but was it more than that?

“Sir, is everything fine?”

“You’re ruining my breakfast.”
Either he was an emotionless prat that only wanted to be grouchy or something was really bugging him and he was determined to keep it hidden like he had done for years and years… and years.

“If you want to say anything, I’ll listen. You listen to me-”

“Potter, we’ve been down here since September. It is now the middle of February and still we have received no word of how long we have left. You will have to excuse me if I occasionally get frustrated.”

Harry digested the words Severus spat at him and could only focus on one part of it. What kind of frustrated? Maybe the man just needed to get laid so he’d stop being an arsehole. He was just trying to help, for Merlin’s sake! Harry banished the sarcastic thoughts, but they came back almost immediately. No, Severus had been talking about simply being locked up here… with him.

“Am I really that bad? I mean, I’ve fed you and tried to be-”

“You are not my wife, boy, so quit acting so offended when I’m less than appreciative of what you do around here.”

Harry threw his napkin on the table and jumped up in righteous indignation.

“I never said I was your wife, you bastard! Merlin only knows you’re so sour all of the time you couldn’t even attract one. God! Why do I constantly waste my time trying to be nice to you when you put me down at every turn!? Fuck!” Harry yelled while stomping through the kitchen and living room. He really had nowhere to go so he walked into the bedroom and slammed the door. An ominous silence settled through the house, making him feel cold yet again.

That bastard… he was so fucking impossible! Why did he always have to act like he was the worst thing he’d ever encountered? Time and time again he’d swallowed his pride, his anger, his past with that prick and time and time again, at almost every turn, the man found some way to put him down. Harry seethed in the bedroom until he’d calmed down enough to relax. He soon drifted to sleep.

He didn’t eat the rest of the day and Severus didn’t come to bed that night.

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Harry scrubbed splattered grease from the stovetop and glared when none of it seemed to be coming up. Behind him, he heard Severus thumbing through his book and still felt irritation bubble up within him at the man’s attitude. It had taken them nearly three weeks to get past their argument. Like, three whole weeks. It was almost the second week of March.

At least they were both eating together again and could exchange somewhat civil comments back and forth. Still, though, the anger liked to bubble up at the most inopportune times.

He was just so difficult to handle sometimes! They had been living in close quarters for five, almost six months now, but that didn’t seem to matter to Severus. Frustrated about everything, Harry hurled the washcloth into the sink and pointed his wand at the stove. Every infuriating thing he kept thinking about came to the forefront of his mind, affecting the strength of his spell.

“Scourgify!” he growled loudly. Incredibly shocked, he surveyed the polished surface of the stove gleaming back at him, almost clean enough to reflect his face.

“Feeling a tad crotchety this afternoon, Potter?”
“A bit, if you couldn’t tell,” Harry replied through his clenched teeth.

“I’m ashamed to admit how surprised I am that you are in such a foul temper because of another inanimate object.”

“I’m not mad at the stove.”

“I am aware, though I’ve no idea what could have possibly built your ire this time, boy.”

“Stop calling me a boy.”

“Then grow up and stop acting like one.”

Harry glared at the sink until he heard Severus get up and leave.

“Git.”

“I heard that.”

“I meant for you to!”
Okay. It had actually taken an additional two weeks for them to get back to normal. Harry smiled thoughtfully and looked at Severus. He was careful to make it look like he was completely entranced in the book Hermione had given him for Christmas. Besides being a good cover, he really did like it and was actually reading it again! Well, in the moments he didn't get distracted. What was Severus reading right now? Was that little crease in his forehead growing because he didn't like it?

Man, he must be really bored if he’s watching his professor read a book instead of reading his own.

“Is there a reason you are staring at me, Potter?”

Harry jumped and then blushed guiltily. When had Severus noticed? He was still looking down at his book! Had his eyes even looked his way? Severus finally focused on him and his brow arched up even more in the growing silence.

“Oh, um, no. I was, uh, thinking about this-” Harry airily waved his hand at his book, which was opened on his lap, and Severus again buried his nose in his book. “I guessed I just stared off.”

“Next time, look towards something else. You’re disrupting my reading.”

“Sorry ‘bout that.”

Grinning, Harry looked at his own book, but he couldn’t make much sense of the words there. He honestly didn’t know what was happening to either of them. Severus’s barbed words didn’t sting as much as they used to and his irritation with the man (excluding his weird blow-up) was starting to be about little things.

In fact, his blow-up had been about a little thing. Looking back, he was angry because his professor acted like… oh, God… like he really couldn’t stand him. Oh, God! He was acting like the easily spurned girl in this situation! He… he… oh, God…

Harry sighed and ran his fingers through his hair. He had raged because Severus always responded to his being nice with a bad attitude. How is that time different from any other time? Seriously, even his veiled compliments are insults so wouldn’t it make sense that he would use that same attitude when talking about everything else?

“Sir, is everything fine?”

“You’re ruining my breakfast.”

“If you want to say anything, I’ll listen. You listen to me-”

“Potter, we’ve been down here since September. It is now the beginning of May and still we have received no word of how long we have left. You will have to excuse me if I occasionally get frustrated.”

Whoa. He had actually told him without him having to bug him more than two times. Severus had told him everything that was bothering him enough to make him drink more than usual and, like an idiot, he hadn’t even listened to him. He was just so focused on himself…

“Am I really that bad? I mean, I’ve fed you and tried to be-”
“You are not my wife, boy, so quit acting so offended when I’m less than appreciative of what you do around here.”

Dammit. He was so angry at the time, he didn’t even realize that was exactly what he was acting like. Harry dropped his face into his hands and groaned. He had been acting like the bored and offended housewife he’d willingly become! OH, GOD…

“I never said I was your wife, you bastard! Merlin only knows you’re so sour all of the time you couldn’t even attract one.

Why would he have said something so cruel? It was partially the truth. The man was frustrating at the best of times and supremely, insurmountably difficult at the worst of times, but he didn’t deserve to hear that… Did he? No. If Severus had been the one yelling that at him, he- Harry’s face scrunched up. He couldn’t even imagine Severus acting like that. Still, Severus would never have said that. So he really was the girl, the one who liked to use all of their ammunition when their temper explodes. And, God, it gets worse.

“Why do I constantly waste my time trying to be nice to you when you put me down at every turn!?”

He felt like such an imbecile. How appropriate was it that he felt exactly like the word Severus loved throwing at him? A bitter laugh escaped Harry. He deserved feeling so cold when he stomped a- Harry shot straight up. He had felt cold. What did that mean? Every time he’d felt cold around here, no matter how many blankets he piled on… what were the common causes?

Well, obviously Severus first. What else? Okay, most of them involved Severus and choking. Harry couldn’t contain his shiver. What else?? Their big arguments, too, right? Yeah. Yes! What does it mean?

“You’re staring again.”

Harry briefly bit his lip. “I’m trying to figure something out. I think it’s pretty important, too.”

“You look like you’re in pain.”

Harry was already back in his thoughts. Though he was still staring, he didn’t see Severus lay his book down and regard him intently. What was the reason thinking of those things made him feel like that? Anger? Harry shook his head impatiently. No, that wasn’t it. He’d been angry, but that wasn’t the only thing… was it…

“Whoa.”

“It would appear you’ve reached some conclusion. Dare I ask what’s on your mind?”

Wow. He felt bad. That was it, wasn’t it? Every time they argued or he shuddered when choking came up, he felt bad? Why? The man didn’t have a choice in any of it, even the arguing. He’d initiated the fights and… Harry looked at Severus, really looked at him, and sighed.

“I am so sorry.”

Suspicion etched itself onto Severus’s features. “What have you done now?”

“Nothing. I’m just sorry.”

“Potter-”

“Are you feeling well, Potter?” Severus stood and walked a bit closer. “You don’t look fevered, but-”

“I’m not sick or anything. What sounds good? I didn’t realize it was already five.”

“Is it? Hmm.” Harry continued staring at Severus until the man huffed. “You will decide for yourself what to cook. I neither care what you choose nor have I any claim to demand anything. It’s all poisonous and your work, boy, not mine. Stop asking me.”

“I just wanted to know…” Harry almost snorted. Of course. “That is, sir, can you tell me what you think is least poisonous of the things I make?”

Severus’s eyes narrowed. “The lasagna didn’t kill me.”

Was that one of his favorites? He’ll have to remember that.

“What about dessert or anything?” Think! What does he like the most? Oh! “I could make a pumpkin cream cheese pie or maybe we could have the last of the pumpkin chocolate-chunk bread I made yesterday morning.”

“I didn’t immediately regurgitate the pie you’re speaking of, true.”

Severus looked really suspicious now and Harry had to bite his tongue hard enough to taste blood in order to contain his laughter. Suspicious old man.

“I’ll call you when it’s ready.”

“Potter, are you sure you’re not ill?”

“Perfect health,” Harry announced while entering the kitchen. Severus poked his head around the kitchen doorway and cleared his throat to catch Harry’s attention.

“How long do I have before I’m forced to walk to my own death?”

“Less than an hour, I think.”

“Humph.”

Harry smiled yet again.

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Almost an entire week.

Harry set his fork down and took a sip of his hot coffee. He’d really outdone himself on this cake. Even Severus wasn’t spewing any cutting comments at the moment. Okay, so he also loves cherry chocolate layer cake. Got it. Back to his original thought… It had taken almost an entire week for Severus to stop acting suspicious every time he did something nice for him. Honestly, it was a relief not seeing those narrowed eyes directed at him anymore. Well, as much.

As he watched, Severus scooped another bite of cake, swirled it in the creamy cherry gloop that had fallen to his plate, and literally licked all of it off his fork. There was no denying it. The man
really loved it. He wasn’t even pretending to barely stomach it.

Hell, he was licking his fork! Harry vaguely wondered if he’d lick the plate, too. It was a miracle he hadn’t done the same. Severus would never let him live it down. He could hear it now. He’d go on and on about being an animal, bring up how he bit him during their fight, and then threaten to force him to eat his food from the floor if he continues.

“I am well aware that you are staring again, boy. I will temporarily blind you if you don’t desist now.”

“I’m just thinking. Sorry.” Harry gestured to his plate and looked away. “Continue.”

Severus let out a grunt and swallowed some coffee. “The headmaster sent me a letter earlier today. I believe you were elbow-deep in cake batter at the time.”

“What’d he have to say?”

“We have at least another few months in here,” Severus growled quietly. Harry ignored it. “He didn’t have time to write you a letter, but wanted me to pass along some sickening messages. I would rather cut out my tongue than repeat them.”

“Before that, can you tell me if he said anything about what’s going on out there?”

Severus genuinely looked surprised at his question. “The fighting is at a stand-still right now. For reasons he did not disclose, the Dark Lord hasn’t been active so tracking his followers is nigh impossible. Their numbers are slowly being decimated, but there hasn’t been more than a handful caught since December. It’s lowering morale among the Order.”

“Did he mention anything about Hermione? She’s only six months in, right?”

“Young Mrs. Weasley?” Severus scratched his forehead, lost in thought. “She ran into a bit of trouble and is on bed rest until the birth. I believe she’s being sheltered at Hogwarts.”

Harry sat up straight. “Is she okay? What happened?”

“I have no idea, Potter. If you weren’t aware, I’m stuck down here with you and only know what Albus sends me in short letters. I didn’t have more than twenty sentences at most in this last missive. You will just have to write and ask yourself.”

“I will. What were you supposed to tell me?”

“My tongue, Potter, would not survive. I do not wish to say.”

“Please, Professor? I guess you can always just let me read your letter…”

Severus’s lip curled. “I will tell you. He said you cannot lose weight, though I have no idea where that titbit came from. He hopes you had a wonderful Christmas, instructs you to continue finding pleasure and contentment in each day- not that you’ll have a problem with that, and wants you to know he thinks of you and misses you every single day.”

Harry smothered the grin Severus’s disgusted face caused him to get and cleared his throat. “Is that it?”

“Unfortunately, my life is not that blessed. Your friends and my fellow colleagues miss you, though Merlin only knows why. Albus was particularly vehement that I allow you to talk to me if you
need to.” Severus frowned mightily in Harry’s direction and Harry took a large swallow of coffee to keep a laugh at bay. “My godson has sent word that you are to be nice and I cannot kill you from built up frustrations until the war is over. The last is the message to be well, be strong, and talk to me if you need to. I did not believe that particular phrase needed to be added in more than once.”

“That last was from the headmaster. He said the same to me in his last letter. Who’s your godson?”

“You will discover the answer if you but think. I will not dignify that absurd question with a response.”

Harry sat back in his seat and cast a warming charm on his cooling coffee. He studied Severus closely while thinking. Who does Severus favor the most out of everyone back at Hogwarts? It would have to be someone he could stand,… so basically a Slytherin. He would also have to be someone who still went to school, because it would be suspicious if he were still talking to the headmaster and not going there. He probably also was related to someone Severus ran into often, but that would mean he was a Death Eater or a Death Eater’s son. That didn’t make sense, though, because Severus was the only one who seemed to be disloyal to him. Harry was proud he’d avoided mentioning the monster’s name, even in his thoughts. Severus had drilled that much into him. The blonde prat had always been Severus's favorite, that he could remember, but that really didn't make sense.

“The only person I can think of is Malfoy. Who is it?”

“Draco.”

“Yeah, I figured. There’s not a bunch of Malfoys running around the school right now. Who is it?”

“It is Draco, you twit.”

“But- what? I don’t understand. Why’d he say you couldn’t kill me until the end of the war, then?”

Severus cocked a brow. It was at a dangerous height and Harry instantly felt cowed. “Potter, Draco is as loyal to the Dark Lord as I am. He meant exactly how his message sounded. I couldn’t kill you until the war was over.”

“So… wow. Malfoy isn’t… one of them… I always thought he’d follow-”

“You do not know him,” Severus replied simply.

“Guess not.”

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Harry got his own letter almost a week later. He opened the letter and seemed confused as he started reading.

Potter,

I was instructed to detail the happenings at the latest meeting of the Order of the Phoenix since I will not be participating in the coming attack. Granger Weasley is still on bed rest and demanded I tell you she has a few long months left. Her husband is not in the number for the coming fight. That infuriating werewolf has been hounding the lot of us for information on your well-being, declaring my godfather unfit to care for you. He is still living, but not for long if he continues speaking of.
Severus in such a way. The headmaster is well enough to be his disgustingly cheery self. Really, how you like him is beyond my comprehension. Longbottom is annoying, but his stupid idea of using all manner of plant life to increase our numbers is surprisingly working. The rest of your ragtag Weasley clan is alive, though I’m amazed. Their stupidity rivals yours at most times. The coming attack is scheduled for some time this weekend. I am not permitted to discuss anything beyond that.

You had best be treating my godfather the way he deserves. I am not ignorant of how you feel about him. Knowing how you used to act around him, you are probably being as rude as possible to him. Let me warn you so you know what to expect. When this war is over, I will not hesitate to kill you for everything you’ve said or done to him. He will tell me. He’s never lied to me, especially when it concerns you. Watch yourself, Potter, or you won’t survive our next meeting.

Malfoy

Harry slowly lowered his letter and looked at Severus for what felt an eternity. He didn’t even know how to process any of that. Whatever expression was on his face almost made Severus spill his tea in surprise and barely-concealed amusement.

“Potter, you look as if someone just announced you were born a female.”

“I got a letter from Malfoy.”

“It led to this strange emotion of yours?”

“Yeah. He… You can read it.”

Harry stood up, approached Severus, and handed the letter over. Severus quickly skimmed through the letter and actually chuckled once or twice towards the end. He handed it back and left to refill his tea. Harry followed slowly and saw the man leaning against the counter.

“It would appear my godson feels a bit strongly about me, would it not?”

“I’m not being rude,” Harry defended. Severus rolled his eyes and sipped his hot tea. “I’m not!”

“I am well aware of that fact, boy. I am as surprised as he will undoubtedly be, but do not fret your pretty little head. He won’t harm you. After all, he would never raise his hand to anyone so… effeminate and nurturing.”

“I’m not a girl, Snape.”

“No, but you are remarkably reminiscent of the housewife you once claimed yourself to be. It’s unnerving at the best of times.”

“That’s the only thing I can be right now, especially since I’m not getting much schoolwork to pass the time anymore,” Harry grumbled and petulantly crossed his arms over his chest. “I’ve never heard you complain.”

“I wouldn’t, would I? When all is said and done, you prepare the both of us three meals a day, constantly have tea or coffee on hand, prepare little munchies to satisfy hunger between meals, and regularly clean this hellhole with your own hands when you’re bored enough. What would I have to complain about when I don’t need to do any of it?”
“I don’t…” Harry’s mouth dropped open. He did do all of that! But he didn’t do it because… “No.”

“You’ve even become particularly adept at pinpointing the times when I’m drinking alone late at night and rush in to demand I stop and go to bed.” Severus stirred a bit more milk into his tea and sighed when he took a sip. “You’ve your female companion to discuss everything with, including intercourse, and always find some potion to aid in whatever you believe is ailing me at the moment. You are constantly getting out of sorts when I don’t seem appreciative enough of something you’ve said or done. Really, I wouldn’t be surprised if you threw a fit in the event that I forgot your birthday. No, you’ve nothing to worry about. My godson will not be harming you. He will probably smell the change in you before you’ve a chance to open your mouth.”

Severus strolled from the kitchen, smirking at the thunderstruck expression on Harry’s face. Harry merely watched him go.

How had any of that happened?

***

Harry blindly reached out and felt around the shower. Not finding what he wanted, he wiped the water out of his eyes and looked around. Where was his bloody shampoo?

Oh, yeah. He’d emptied his last one and was meaning to grab the next one from the closet. Apparently he’d forgotten. He knew he should have listened when Severus told him to stash that stuff in his cabinet in here.

Sighing, Harry stepped out of the still-running shower, wrapped a large towel around him, and grimaced. His towel was so large, he had to wrap it under his arms if he didn’t want to step on it while he walked. Normally, walking around with a towel covering his waist and chest wouldn’t bother him, but Severus’s words from three days ago still ran through his mind. How had he never noticed he acted like such a girl sometimes? Dammit, he wasn’t a woman. Screw Severus and his weird thoughts.

Harry stumbled when he remembered his latest dream… in which he literally had been screwed by his professor. It was much more graphic than the dream where he’d been tied up and jerked off. He blamed it on being told the man thought he was a woman and let it go, but the damned dream kept coming back. Harry pushed open the bedroom door and didn’t even blink when Severus paused in zipping up his trousers and glared.

“By all means, barge on in.”

“I forgot my shampoo, I’m not wearing my glasses, and you’re already dressed. I didn’t see anything.” Harry knelt beside one of his bags in the closet and started digging around inside. Extra socks, a spare toothbrush, more socks… “Besides, it’s not like I haven’t seen it before.”

“You may have seen it all before, Potter, but you needn’t continue seeing it,” Severus spoke from the doorway of the closet. “What are you searching for?”

“I told you I forgot my shampoo. Why do I have so many pairs of socks in here? I don’t even wear any of them! I’m not even sure they’re mine.” After a curious look at a pair of mismatched socks that he was sure most definitely wasn’t his, Harry started emptying his bag in anger. Severus walked into the closet and reached up to a shelf above him. Harry looked up, trying not to notice how the back of his head brushed Severus’s thighs, and frowned. “What are you doing?”

“Collecting your shampoo. You placed it on the shelf so you wouldn’t forget where you put it.”
Severus set something down, zipped a bag back up, and dropped the shampoo bottle into Harry’s hands. “You really have the worst memory.”

Harry watched Severus walk out, stood up, and fixed his towel. He could hear Severus leave the bedroom and quickly followed.

“All even including Neville’s memory?” he called down the hall, just managing to see Severus disappear around the corner.

“Yes,” Severus called back. “Go finish your shower. Parading around the house in a wet towel is not acceptable.” Harry stuck his tongue out and entered the bathroom. “And do not stick your tongue out like a child. Merlin, boy.”

Harry snickered.

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Harry closed the bathroom door so quickly and quietly, Severus didn’t even have a chance to notice he was there. Bracing himself against the door, Harry pulled in a shuddery breath. For the first time in his entire life, he saw something he never thought he’d ever see and it blew his mind.

He’d finally caught Severus.

His professor wasn’t wanking like he does, either. Gods, no, he’d literally been… thrusting… into his own hand. He was braced under the shower spray. Still was. That answered one question. He’d always perversely wondered how the man did it. Oh, God. His hand on his prick… he was pretty big. How had he never noticed before? He’d have to try it that way sometime. Severus had honestly looked like he was in ecstasy.

Fuck.

To distract himself from how kind of surprisingly hot seeing that was (yep, probably not as straight as he thought he was), Harry headed to the kitchen and decided to make some coffee. Maybe even find something for a snack. He needed to think of something else. Anything else. After a brief moment of thought, he pulled out a plate and mug for Severus, too. It irked him that Severus thought he was being a good little housewife by doing stuff like this, but he’d been doing it all along. Why stop now?

Besides, doing this kind of thing made him feel weird. A good kind of weird. A really good kind of weird.

He honestly didn’t know how to explain it right, but he liked preparing food or washing the dishes just to see how Severus would react to it. Maybe he was doing it to goad the man somehow. He’d certainly enjoyed the creatively rude compliments about his food. This could just be a part of it. Hopefully.

By the time Severus joined him half an hour later, Harry was reading one of the books Severus had recently lent him. He was completely spellbound by the book.

“I made coffee and there’s some leftover cake if you want some,” he announced distractedly. He knew Severus could serve himself well enough so he wouldn’t have to put the book down.

“Humph.”
Harry looked up and frowned. “What?”

“Enjoying that book?”

“Yeah. It has a way of explaining potions-” Harry stood up and started preparing a mug of coffee for Severus while talking. “-that makes sense to me. For instance- Hold on.” When the coffee was perfect, he set the mug down in front of Severus and picked up the book again. “For instance, here it says that most ingredients can be grouped by one common function, but that those functions can easily be swayed by the introduction of another.” Harry looked up and focused on Severus’s face. “I mean, you’ve been teaching us that for years, but this gives you examples to make you see. It’s really interesting.”

“I thought the same thing.” Harry handed Severus the slice of cake he’d set out for him earlier. “However, I also found it to be written like a lexicon of instructions for the less intelligent. Are you gaining any more insight from it?”

Severus took a bite and licked his fork. Harry nodded and leaned against the table, book in hand. “Yeah. And here!” Harry excitedly tapped a passage in the book. “I loved this. It explains the difference between the methods of everything, from dicing and chopping to fine and coarse powder. They even have pictures. I never thought I’d be so entertained while learning. Seriously, you know how much trouble I have doing any of that. I’m pretty sure most of the time I mess up a potion, it’s just because I can’t tell the difference, you know?”

“I concede you have a point there, Potter. Do you honestly think you might be able to improve your potions ability now knowing what to do?” Severus sipped down some coffee and Harry took his seat again. “Or will this be yet another thing to go flying out your ears?”

“I’m pretty sure I could do it, Professor.” Harry stared at the book, took the last bite of his cake, and pushed the plate away. “Yeah, I bet I could.”

Severus levitated his and Harry’s empty plates to the sink, refilled his coffee, topped off Harry’s, and sat back down. He studied Harry for a few minutes and then cleared his throat. “Once you’ve finished reading that book, I suppose I could allow you to read another book of mine. I have plenty.”

“Really? Do you have anything as interesting as this one?” Harry looked up from the book and abruptly grimaced. “Just not that anatomy book.”

“I have a few I could bear to let you read. If your grubby fingers destroy them, I can always make you replace them. Nothing lost.”

Harry truly smiled at the strange change in his professor. “I would if I destroyed them, yeah. What kinds do you have? I’ve already finished this one. I was just going back and reading over a few things I really wanted to remember.”

“You can follow me if you want another. I shan’t waste my breath naming their titles.”

Harry followed behind Severus in a daze. The day really was an awesome one when it came down to it.

***

Later that night, Harry gingerly placed his newest borrowed book down on his desktop and
stretched. He had been plenty surprised when Severus had lent it to him. After all, it was the ancient magic textbook Minerva had given to Severus for Christmas. It was really interesting, though, so he’s glad Severus suggested it. There was one section he was completely enthralled with. It was all about love magic. He didn’t even know that kind of thing existed and wondered if he knew anyone who had ever enacted one of the spells. There was even a bit about the love spell Severus said his mum had unknowingly cast when she died.

Harry cleared his throat and pushed himself out of his chair. He didn’t want to think about that. He spied Severus half-conscious on the couch and almost smiled.

“Professor, I’m going to go take a shower and then make lunch. Any requests?”

“Silence… and possibly the chicken casserole.” Severus hadn’t opened his eyes yet and Harry couldn’t help staring. He looked really sleepy. “That is, though, if you can swear to avoid throwing in whatever toxins you added last time.”

“I can maybe manage that.”

Severus grunted in response. Harry quietly left the living room and hurried through the cleaning part of his shower. It had been a few days since he’d last wanked and he really wanted to come before he embarrassed himself somehow. Knowing his luck, he’d do it in his sleep again. He still felt bad about waking Severus up.

Rinsing himself off, Harry cast a silencing charm over only the shower stall. He had learned a smaller space to concentrate the spell usually meant it stayed the entire time rather than dissipating when he got distracted. While stroking himself, his mind drifted back to the day he’d caught Severus in here. Sometime in the past three weeks, the truth had started slowly dawning on him. He hadn’t wanted to face the music, so to speak, but seeing Severus in here just a few days ago seemed to bring things to a head.

Yeah, he was interested in guys. Like Hermione said, it wasn’t shameful or anything. It’s just what he likes. And Severus is a guy. He doesn’t have to be attracted to a guy to find the image of him getting off really hot, right?

No. Not at all. That small dilemma finished, Harry relaxed into his memory of that day.

Harry sighed and set his book down. He knew he shouldn’t have had so much to drink this morning. He had to pee again and Severus had only been in there a short while. Hopefully he wouldn’t take too long. Another ten minutes passed before he decided he really needed to go. He couldn’t wait any longer and Severus would kill him if he caught him going in the sink one more time.

Trotting to the bathroom, Harry considered knocking, but decided he couldn’t wait. He pushed the bathroom door open and felt everything in his world switch to slow motion. His eyes immediately locked on Severus, who was bracing himself up with one arm underneath the spray of hot water rinsing away the soap on his body. His eyes fell down and locked on Severus’s prick in all its wonderfully large glory.

Even more incredible than having actually caught him doing it was the mind-boggling sight of Severus thrusting himself into his cupped hand. Harry watched the beads of water run down his chest before looking below once more. The man looked absolutely powerful and dominant. Fuck, even when he was getting himself off, he still had to penetrate something. Harry shivered and kept stroking, his breath coming in small gasps. Severus would never be a passive or submissive partner, would he? Severus’s muscles bunched and jumped as he thrust in and out of his fist, his
face completely unlined and his mouth open. If he listened close enough, he could hear a quiet rumble of pleasure in the back of the man’s throat. Gods…

Harry realized he was still staring and quickly and quietly pulled the door closed. Was his heart beating that fast when he closed the door? He was already so close, which was really embarrassing, and he decided he’d think about the rest of that day to cool down a little. He’d already relived the best parts…and could just go back when he was ready to come.

Severus joined him in the kitchen half an hour later.

“I made coffee and there’s some leftover cake if you want some.”

“Humph.”

“What?”

“Enjoying that book?”

“Yeah. It has a way of explaining potions that makes sense to me. For instance, here it says that most ingredients can be grouped by one common function, but that those functions can easily be swayed by the introduction of another. I mean, you've been teaching us that for years, but this gives you examples to make you see. It’s really interesting.”

Harry swallowed thickly and his hand sped up. He’d really just gotten up and served Severus, hadn’t he? Man, he’s a good little housewife…

Oh, God. Severus. Licked. His. Fork!

“Yeah. And here! I loved this. It explains the difference between the methods of everything, from dicing and chopping to fine and coarse powder. They even have pictures. I never thought I’d be so entertained while learning. Seriously, you know how much trouble I have doing any of that. I’m pretty sure most of the time I mess up a potion, it’s just because I can’t tell the difference, you know?”

“I concede you have a point there, Potter. Do you honestly think you might be able to improve your potions ability this coming year now knowing what to do?” Gods, Severus had his lips pressed against that cup. What would those lips feel like on him? “Or will this be yet another thing to go flying out your ears?”

“I’m pretty sure I could do it, Professor. Yeah, I bet I could.”

Severus levitated his and Harry’s empty plates to the sink, refilled his coffee, topped off Harry’s, and sat back down.

Oh, God. He’d refilled his drink and he hadn’t even noticed until now? Before Harry could think more about that, he tightened and came against the shower wall with a breathless cry.

“Your charm wore off halfway through,” Severus called out sleepily.

“I really tried this time!”

“I don’t honestly care either way, Potter.”

Harry gripped under his breath the entire time he dressed. Of course his charm had worn off! He couldn’t do anything right, could he? When he got to the living room, he immediately noticed
Severus wasn’t there. Where… Harry kept on trotting through the living room and poked his head into the next room. Oh, he was in the kitchen.

“Want some coffee?” he asked. Severus looked absolutely grumpy, though it was more endearing than annoying. Harry paused with one hand in the coffee beans. Now where the hell did that thought come from? He peeked at Severus, lifted an eyebrow, and shook his head. Was the man pouting? “Sorry.”

“You woke me up from my nap,” Severus grunted. “Yes, I want coffee,”

Harry almost snorted and had to resist the urge to say, ‘coming up, dear’ in as cheeky a way as possible. He may play the housewife, but he sure as hell wasn’t his wife or anything. Saying something like that when Severus was in such a grouchy mood would get his head torn off before he could blink even once. Carefully, Harry poured some coffee into the two mugs he’d set out, mixed in some milk and sugar, and placed one in front of Severus. He left his coffee sitting on the counter so he could finish making another pot of coffee.

“You said the chicken casserole?” Harry checked after a few minutes, already pulling food out of the refrigerator. A grumble and a loud sip was his only answer. “Salad?”

Grumble mumble. “Yes.”

Another glance showed Severus frowning mightily at his coffee, his bottom lip almost pushed out a bit. He really was pouting.

“Maybe you should go finish your nap, sir.”

“I’m already awake.” Severus took another sip of coffee and moved his leg enough that it popped. Harry instantly lowered his knife and narrowed his eyes at Severus. Was his knee bothering him? Another pop gave him his answer. “Stop glaring at me. I’m not leaving. I want to make sure you’re not poisoning my food.”

“Is your knee bothering you?”

“Do you remember our little discussion about you playing the housewife, Potter? You’re doing it again. Quit mothering me. I’m fine.”

Harry knew his knee was bothering him. It wasn’t outrageous that he wanted him to take something to make the pain go away, was it? No, it was downright considerate of him.

“I don’t care if you think I’m doing it again. Your knee is bothering you, isn’t it?”

“No.”

“I know it is.”

And Severus had the nerve to call him a stubborn brat! When Severus merely shook his head, Harry left his knife sitting on the counter and headed back into the bathroom. Grabbing the right vial and returning to the kitchen, Harry set it right beside Severus’s mug and glared. He hoped his glare was saying he’d force him to take it if he didn’t willingly do it himself.

“I don’t need this.”

“Yes, you do. I’ve heard two pops. Take it.”
“I don’t need it.”

“You do, sir.” Another more-muffled pop sounded and Harry’s eyes further narrowed. “I heard that.”

“You heard nothing.”

When the fourth pop sounded and Severus still didn’t touch his pain reliever, something inside Harry snapped. He scooped up the vial and literally jumped on Severus. Unfortunately, he wasn’t counting on the chair to tip backwards. Severus grabbed one of Harry’s hips with one hand and his back with the other and held tight on the way down. Harry barely managed to cup Severus’s head before it contacted the floor. Ignoring the horrible pain radiating through his left hand, he pulled the cork out of the bottle with his teeth and struggled with Severus to get some down his throat.

“Get off, Potter,” Severus growled, twisting his head away. Harry squirmed around on his lap, firmly ignoring the way the man’s prick was laying heavily against his arse.

“I won’t. Besides, you’re still holding me, sir,” Harry replied just as irritably, still struggling to get him to swallow some of the potion. “God, just take some of this! It’s for your damned knee!”

“I don’t need any. Get off of me!”

“No!”

Severus pushed Harry’s chest up with one hand and swiftly managed to get him in a sitting position, though Harry fought the entire time. With barely any effort, Severus wrenched the vial from Harry’s hand and set it on the ground beside him.

“Yet again, I find myself with you on my lap, Potter. This is quickly becoming a rather disconcerting habit of yours. Is it not enough that you’re taking your unofficial role as housewife a little too seriously that you now feel you have to molest me at every turn?”

“My aim wasn’t to end up in your lap, sir. It was to get you to take some pain reliever,” Harry said tightly and then blinked, his face momentarily relaxing. “I’m not trying to molest you, either.”

“Throwing me to the floor and forcing me to absorb the impact of your fall was supposed to encourage me? You’re lucky I didn’t crack my head open.”

“First of all, sir.” Harry held up his sore hand and shook it. “My hand absorbed that fall. Second of all, could you just take the potion?”

“I do not need it.”

“You do,” Harry insisted. “Your knee has been popping. Whenever your knee pops, I know it’s bothering you enough to hurt.”

Severus narrowed his eyes. “How long ago did you strike upon that revelation?”

“November.”

Severus studied him for a few long moments, picked up the vial, and swallowed the rest of the liquid in the bottle. Harry leaned back against Severus’s legs and sighed.

“Now I’ve taken my medication, would you kindly get off of me?”

Harry looked down at the hand still clutching his hip, at the fingers curled into his waistband, and
gave Severus a pointed look. Without a change in expression, Severus released his hold and gestured to the left with one finger of his freed hand. Cautiously, Harry got to his knees and tried to push up onto one foot. He couldn’t really do it, to his embarrassment, because he was trying not to somehow crush Severus’s groin. Sighing exasperatedly, Severus grabbed Harry’s arse and pushed him up when Harry tried again. Harry squeaked in shock and almost fell back down, but stopped himself. Soon, he was on his feet and hiking a leg over Severus’s body so he could move to the side.

“Do you need help?”

“No. Move.” His way clear, Severus twisted his leg to the side and was on his feet faster than Harry thought possible. “Do not do that again, boy.”

“It got you to take your medicine, didn’t it?”

“No, your annoying observations urged me to take that potion. I didn’t need it.”

“You did.”

“The point is moot. Even if my knee was bothering me, it won’t be now.”

“You needed it,” Harry mumbled, going back to his casserole.

“Potter, shut up.”
Harry folded the six-page letter Hermione had sent him that morning, laid it on the coffee table, and scrubbed his burning eyes. She’d given birth yesterday morning and was worried, because the baby was nearly two months early, but Poppy had assured them all that Rose was in perfect health. Ron hadn’t been able to be there and neither had he.

“How appalling. I’ll be teaching another Weasley in eleven years. My day has officially been shot to hell.” Harry didn’t say anything; he just kept staring at his letter. Severus closed his book and looked over. “Out with it, boy. What the devil is your problem?”

“It’s nothing. Just thinking about the future.”

“Never fear, Potter. You’ll be bringing your own spawn into the world in no time.”

“Bloody unlikely,” Harry muttered.

“What was that?”

“Nothing.”

Severus narrowed his eyes. “You must surely know by now that I am well aware of when you are attempting to blatantly lie to me.”

“It’s not important, sir. Are you hungry?”

“It’s only two o’clock.”

“A snack, then?”

“No.” Severus paused, glanced over at the innocuous letter that had soured Harry’s mood so quickly, and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Potter, what is the problem? Are you not happy the youngest Mrs. Weasley birthed a child? I would have thought you’d be dancing around with joy when you discovered your little companion was finished with her pregnancy.”

“Of course I’m happy…” Harry sighed heavily. “I haven’t been there at all this year and they’ve gone on with their lives without me. I’m happy for them, I swear it, but it’s just… I… They won’t have any spare time when I get out. They’ll just keep moving on with their lives and I’ll be left behind as the Boy-Who-Killed-An-Arsehole or the Boy-Who-Finally-Fucking-Died. They have their family already and…”

“Firstly, language, boy. Secondly, pitying yourself is undignified. Thirdly, you all had to grow up at some point. They just have a remarkable head start on you.”

“Not now, sir, please. I know what you think of my maturity and stuff. You don’t have to keep telling me, especially today.”

“For perhaps the first and most likely only time in my life, I am not referring to your level of maturity in this, Potter. Your life has been put on hold until it’s safe to leave. You’ve lost a year, but they haven’t. Stop acting like.”

“If you say a woman near her time, Snape, I’ll hit you.”
“I wasn’t, though I’m tempted to do so now. Would you really hit the only one who’s been listening to you bitch and moan about another person having a child while you’re not? That doesn’t seem very intelligent to me. Like I said, I’m tempted.”

“I wasn’t bitching about Hermione having a baby while I’m not. I’m…” Merlin, he had been, hadn’t he? Kinda. Think fast! “I’m just worried about my future.”

Severus arched a brow. “As I said before, you’ll be having your own before too much longer, I’m sure.”

Unbloodylikely.

“Sure, I guess.”

“Potter, have you finished reading my book on ancient magic?”

“No yet. Why? Do you want it back now? I can go get it…” Harry squinted his eyes in thought. “I think I left it in the bedroom.”

“No, I don’t wish to have it back until you’ve finished it. I merely wondered if you’d gotten to the end.”

“No yet. I’m almost done, though.”

“Hmm. Well, reading should be a suitable distraction from this strange mood of yours, correct?”

“Good idea.” Harry managed half a smile. “Thanks, sir.”

“It’s easier to keep the little housewife happy,” Severus remarked seriously. “Otherwise, I don’t get fed and pampered.”

Bastard! Still, Harry couldn’t help but fully smile. He’s not funny at all… except… Oh, dear Merlin! Is it really, truly happening? Is Severus joking with him?! Quick, before the mood goes back to normal. Say something!

“Damn right you don’t, sir.”

“Language, boy.”

“Darn right you don’t?”

“You forgot sir.”

Harry’s smile grew, threatening to make his cheeks ache.

***

Numbly, Harry put Severus’s book down and looked around the rest of the empty bedroom. He’d gone to bed hours ago and had tossed and turned, still thinking of his lonely future. Since he still had the room to himself, he had decided to read. Now he knew why Severus had randomly asked about his progress through his ancient magic text the day before last. The section he’d mentioned, the very last section in the book, was all about fertility magic. Male fertility magic.

Like, carrying babies kind of fertility magic. There’s magic out there to help guys have babies on their own!
There was a lot of things Severus had said or done during their stay in the safe house that had left his mind blown. Plenty. Just… this was probably the most mind-blowing thing he’d ever brought up, though. Harry looked back down. Spells and potions allowing single males (gay or straight) to be successfully implanted with a baby, others allowing male-male couples to conceive naturally… not that any of them truly looked appealing. God, that wizard’s face looked horrifying. How much pain was he feeling in that picture?

And where was Severus? Shouldn’t he be coming to bed? Eyes narrowed, Harry strained his ears. If he was up drinking, there would be hell to pay.

Harry scrambled out of bed, ignored his house slippers and robe, and stalked out the door. He pulled up short when he found Severus on the couch. How long had he been there? Dear gods, he was asleep. Harry snuck closer and was relieved when he saw there wasn’t any alcohol in sight. Man, Severus was deeply asleep. He had yet to wake up.

Tentatively reaching out a hand, Harry placed it on Severus’s shoulder and gently shook him. He untensed after a moment.

“Potter?”

“Sir, you should come to bed. It’s late and sleeping on the couch will only hurt your back and, well, your knee.”

Severus let his hand go and placed his book on the table. “What time is it?”

“It’s, um…” Harry peeked at the clock on the far wall. “A little after three a.m.”

“Why are you awake right now?”

“I couldn’t sleep. Why didn’t you come to bed when you got tired?”

“I wanted to finish this chapter,” Severus mumbled and slowly pushed himself off the couch. Harry frowned when his knee quietly popped twice. “I suppose I appreciate you waking me up this once. Go to bed. I don’t need anyone holding my hand to make sure I get there.”

Harry looked undecided and started leading the way to the bedroom. “Will you be okay? Maybe you should take something for that sore knee.”

“Again with my knee?”

“Yeah.”

Severus ducked into the bathroom and Harry, though he didn’t even know why, waited for him. When Severus exited the bathroom, he scowled at him.

“I told you to go to bed.”

“I’m just waiting. Maybe I have to pee.”

“Do you?”

“No.”

“Brat.” Severus entered the bedroom first and noted his book laying open on Harry’s bed. “Did you finish it?”
“Yeah. It was… interesting. Did you know about that? The guys thing, I mean.”

“I did, yes. As I have said before, you will be having your own children before too much longer. You’ve no excuse.”

Harry watched Severus settle into his bed before doing the same. He extinguished the lights and sighed.

“Speaking of children, sir…”

“Don’t ask.”

How did he know he was going to ask?

“Why, though?”

“I would never do that to any child, nor would I carry one myself.”

“But you’re not really that bad and I’m sure there are people who would do it for you.”

“Would you bring a child into this world if you were a spy within the ranks of the most dangerous dark wizard of this era?”

“Okay, I guess I can see that, but what about the other? What about now?”

Severus sighed. “Potter, I’m not discussing this further. Go to sleep.”

“Why do you do that? Just as you’re actually starting to talk to me, you shut down. It’s frustrating.”

“As frustrating as a schoolboy butting into the business of a grown man on a daily basis, I would think. Can you never be happy with the small titbits I give you?”

Harry swallowed his pride. If he was going to get an answer, he was going to have to do it… and he really wanted an answer.

“Sir, remember that discussion we keep having about me being the little housewife? I guess I’m just trying to stay in character every time I bug you for more than you’re giving me. I really want to know.”

“Dare I ask why you’re so determined to have an answer out of me?”

“I want to know. We’ve been here since September, sir. That’s almost eight months now and I don’t see an end in sight. We’ve come so far already. Is it really that hard for you to answer another simple question?”

Harry stopped talking and listened to the tense silence in slight trepidation. He was honestly expecting the man to start yelling at him or to maybe smack the living daylights out of him. He wasn’t expecting, though, for Severus to snort after a moment.

“You really are as relentless as a bloody woman, Potter. If I hadn’t unwillingly collected the evidence of your masculinity myself, I would be questioning your gender altogether.” A small chuckle sounded through the room. “You realize you just admitted to shouldering the role of an annoyingly persistent housewife and then keeping it up beyond the household duties you’ve undertaken? I was only jesting when I argued everything you do equates to your effeminacy.”
“I know, but it’s kind of the truth.” Who knew living with an actual grown man instead of a bunch of Gryffindor boys would warp him so quickly? “I mean, thinking about it, I am kind of… the housewife… in this situation. You… sit around being a studious and grumpy man and often listen to me talk. Or at least I think you’re listening. You are listening to me, right?”

“Rarely.”

Harry grumbled. He was pretty sure Severus was lying about that. At least he hoped. “And then I cater to your every need for food and stuff, I pester you for almost everything, make you take medicine when you refuse, and get onto you for drinking so much. I’m the housewife, as much as it pains me to admit it.”

Except it was kind of thrilling to think of being a ‘housewife’ for his current housemate. He wanted to continue describing his duties just to feel that little thrill in his belly some more.

“Barring the extravagant marriage ceremony I would have had to pay for, of course, I would have to agree with you. You assuredly bitch enough to be my wife and I’m also not being intimate at the moment… dear Merlin, Potter, I didn’t wed you when I was once drinking, did I?”

Harry laughed. “No, sir. I’d like to think you’d remember the ceremony.”

“Assuredly I would have remembered. No, you play the part worryingly well, but you are not my spouse. I don’t honestly think such a union would survive longer than a year.”

“I don’t know.” It was Harry’s turn to chuckle. “We’ve made it eight months. That’s more than half a year. Closer to a year if you squint right.”

There was a long silence and Harry wondered if he should tell Severus that was obviously a joke when Severus quietly sighed.

“I have never trusted anyone enough to carry my child. Now go to sleep.”

The smile disappeared from Harry’s face. He turned on his side, facing Severus’s bed, and frowned. He wanted to say something, anything, but nothing sounded right. Eventually, he settled on letting it go.

“Thank you, sir. Good night.”

“I’m sleeping, Potter. Shut up.”

Some things never change.

***

Harry woke around nine o’clock the next morning and shook himself into activity. After checking that Severus hadn’t startled awake when he accidentally kicked the man’s sturdy leather chair, Harry slipped out of the room and took a quick shower. That done, he grabbed a pain reliever from Severus’s bathroom cabinet and carried it to the kitchen. His newfound enjoyment over being designated his professor’s temporary housewife urged him to play the role perfectly. Until they got out of here, he’d keep doing it… especially if it got the always surly man to open up more, maybe even joke around. Harry arranged an empty coffee mug on the table, set the sugar canister beside it, and the potion vial on the other side. Satisfied, he donned his robe and started cooking.

Severus joined him close to an hour later. Harry turned around and furrowed his brows at what he saw. Severus was walking stiffly, his knee popping every few steps, and he had his jaw clenched.
He must really be in pain. He was not going to pretend he doesn’t need that damned potion today. Harry silently met him at the table, shoveled the potion into his hand, and worked on making his coffee the right way. Severus promptly swallowed half of the contents of the bottle and re-corked it.

“For once, I’m not going to say I didn’t need that.”

“I’m glad.”

“Hmm. What have you made this morning?”

Harry looked up suspiciously. No insults yet? Severus was more than alert this morning. He’d had a shower and a pain reliever. He certainly wasn’t half-asleep still. What was going on?

“Are you dying?”

“Do you keep asking that question because you wish for such an occurrence or are you merely trying to irritate me to death?”

“Neither. I’m genuinely worried. You have yet to insult me in some way.”

“I can always think of some really offensive remarks if you wish it, Potter.”

“Not really, no.”

“Then stop being so preposterous. What have you prepared for the morning meal?”

“Uh, scrambled eggs, sausage, and a roll. Did you want anything else?”

“No.”

Harry gave Severus a strange look. Seriously, what was going on with him? While the eggs finished up, Harry set out some honey butter, blueberry preserves, and salt. He occasionally glanced over at Severus, who had immersed himself in a book that Harry hadn’t even seen him bring in. Where had it come from? Did he ever do anything but read? Harry snorted, scooped a healthy amount of food onto each of the plates, and sat at the table. Severus stared down at the food a long moment, spread some honey butter on his bread, and took a bite.

“Dreadful. There is not nearly enough honey in this butter.”

Feeling foolish, Harry nevertheless let out a sigh of relief. He cut up his sausage and heard Severus’s fork clink against his plate.

“Everything to your liking, sir?”

“Not even close. These sausages don’t appear to be fully cooked. Honestly, boy, how long have I had you cooking in here? I would have thought you’d pick up the concept of thorough meat preparation by now.”

Severus hasn’t had anyone in here cooking. Harry chose to do it himself so they would survive. Still, the way he said that was pretty awesome. It satisfied some strange part of his mind that wanted someone to order him around. Man, he was kind of sick sometimes, wasn’t he?

“I’m sorry you feel that way. What of the coffee?”

“You’ve made better. Though, I admit, I am glad it’s not as muddy as it once was. It only took you
“half a year to improve.”

He loves it! Harry wanted to laugh gleefully. He stopped himself, though, and looked at his coffee. Maybe he’d had too much already? This was… what?… his third cup of coffee. Hmm. And what had Severus said? Oh, wait, yeah.

“I’ll continue striving to perfect it.”

“You might as well not bother, Potter. There seems to be no hope for your cooking skills, nor for your coffee brewing.”

“It’s my job, sir. I’ll try harder.”

Severus stared at him strangely. “Very well. See that you do, boy.”

What was that look about?

“Of course, sir.”

That strange look came back in full force.

***

“You have the worst timing, brat,” Severus complained. Harry, standing in the kitchen doorway, leaned against the door jamb and stared at him. “I’m serious. I don’t want to put my book down. I’m nearly to the interesting part.”

“Then how are you planning to eat, sir? It’s already one now. Are you gonna sit in there forever and go without?”

“You could always bring me lunch.”

Harry blinked. “Are you kidding me?”

“No. Why on Earth would you think I was? Was it something I said?”

“You want me to bring your lunch out here just because you don’t feel like getting off the couch and leaving your book alone for half an hour tops?”

“Yes. You may eat in here, as well, if you wish. Oh, stop giving me that look, Potter. For a month straight, I’ve had to deal with your annoying prattle about little Rose Weasley and how you think it’s unfair you couldn’t say goodbye to your friends now that your schooling has come to an end. I think I’ve done a remarkable job about not maiming you for any of that so you may repay my kindness by serving lunch in here for once.”

Harry rolled his eyes, turned his back on Severus, and re-entered the kitchen. It wasn’t cool that he was bringing up Harry’s eagerness about being a tiny human’s godfather just to deflect away from his desire to sit on his arse and read all day long. And Severus would be upset, too, if he hadn’t been able to say goodbye to his friends at the end of his seventh year at Hogwarts. After all, once seventh year finishes and everyone starts making their own way in the world, they weren’t likely to run into each other ever again… or at least very rarely. That last day at Hogwarts was a big deal and he’d missed it. Harry soon walked back into the living room and gave Severus a look. The man was now sprawled across most of the couch with his book opened and resting on his chest.

“You look comfortable.” Severus nodded. Harry silently handed him a glass of iced tea, placed his
own on the coffee table, and passed out their lunches and dessert. “Will you at least sit up to eat lunch? Merlin.”

“If it will stop your complaining, yes, I suppose I can.”

“Thank you.”

“Do shut up.”

Harry should have expected it. He really should have. As Severus was sitting up, he heard a muffled pop. It had been about a month and a half since they’d last fought about Severus taking a pain potion. They’d been due for another go and of course it would be today, when Harry had actually been trying to stay in a good mood.

“Sir.”

“What?”

“Your knee.”

“What about it?”

“It’s popping again, sir.”

“I haven’t the foggiest of what you’re talking about.”

Pop, pop, pop.

“I heard that.”

“You’re hearing things.”

Severus leaned closer to the table. CRUNCH P-POP.

“You should take a pain reliever for that knee,” Harry said tightly. “I insist, sir.”

“And you should eat, boy, and stop worrying about my knee.”

Pop, pop, C-C-CRACK, pop.

“Oh, come on!” Harry cried. “That time, it sounded like something broke. You can’t keep pretending it’s not happening.”

“I very well can,” Severus immediately argued. “Now sit down and eat. Albus is constantly saying you cannot afford to lose weight, which will happen if you miss many meals.”

Harry strode to the bathroom, grabbed a pain potion, and returned. He held out the vial, but Severus cocked a brow and sneered at the bottle. Harry shook the bottle a little, but Severus pushed Harry’s hand away and grabbed up his sandwich.

“Please take this,” Harry said patiently. Honestly, it was like talking to a toddler! “It will make you feel better.”

“Go put that back in my cabinet and then come join me for lunch.”

“Do we really have to go through this again?”
Severus had already proved he could overpower him, but it was better to try.

“You know to try would be pointless, Potter.”

Harry again tried to hand Severus the bottle, but when the man again pushed his hand away, he pulled in a deep breath. He then calmly removed their plates and cups from the coffee table, put them on the desk, and stood right in front of Severus. The man scowled, arms crossed over his chest, and kept looking between Harry and the sandwich Harry had stolen from him.

“Please, sir, take your damned potion. It’s for your own good.”

“No.”

“You’re acting like a child.”

“You’re acting like the wife I don’t have.”

“You would be so lucky to find someone like me,” Harry retorted. “Your potion.”

“You sanity?”

“That fine. Just take a little for my peace of mind. I know you’re hurting and as irritating as you can be, I still don’t want you to suffer. Please.”

“I’m not swallowing any of that potion so get it out of my face.”

Three more deep breaths did nothing to calm him down. Harry nodded, tightly clutched the vial, and launched himself at Severus. They careened back into the couch and Harry—surprising the hell out of both of them—soon gained the upper hand. He tightened his legs around Severus’s thighs, uncorked the potion, and did his best to ignore the way they were rubbing together as he struggled to get some liquid in Severus’s mouth.

Well, all that did was piss Severus off. Big time.

In the next moment, Harry found himself flat on his back on the couch, Severus towering over him. He pulled his right foot off the floor and tried to reverse their positions again, but Severus held fast. Feeling impotent and annoyed beyond belief, Harry quickly came up with a new plan. He would slip some into Severus’s afternoon coffee. Severus had said it was odorless and tasteless, after all.

“You are the most frustrating man in the entire world.”

“I’m glad you finally figured that out.”

Severus went to sit up, but jolted back down. Harry frowned at him in confusion and leaned up on his elbows to see the problem.

“What’s wrong?”

“I’m caught on something.” He tried twice more to pull away from Harry and then slipped his hand between their bodies. “Don’t move, boy. I’m trying to figure out what I’m stuck on.”

Harry felt inappropriately amused by this new situation they were in… until Severus’s hand repeatedly brushed his prick, trying to tug some piece of clothing free from somewhere. Maybe Severus really didn’t know what he was doing to him.
“Sir, lean up a little. I’ll bet I can see.” Severus momentarily scowled, rolled his eyes, and leaned back as far as he could. Still on his elbows, Harry immediately spied the problem and swallowed. Someone wasn’t going to be happy. “Your jacket’s caught on my zipper… and the fabric’s tearing.”

Severus let out an indistinct growl and again tried to free his jacket. After the seventh time Severus’s hand brushed his groin and Harry again had to tamp down on a shiver, he pressed a hand against Severus’s chest. Mental note: these denims needed to go.

“What?”

“Let me? Because all it really feels like you’re doing isn’t really helping the situation with your jacket.”

“Am I further ripping the fabric, then?”

“Um. Yes. Yes, you’re ripping the fabric.”

“Very well. You try.”

Since he didn’t have to worry about bracing himself up with one hand, Harry had both hands to work with and thought that would get them somewhere. He slowly tried to disengage the fabric from the zipper. When that didn’t immediately work, he spread his legs a little, sat up a little more, and leaned closer to Severus. Surprise, surprise. That didn’t work, either.

“Sir, move with me.”

They scooted until Harry was leaning against the arm rest and Severus was sitting on the couch with one leg underneath him. Like this, Harry was better able to see the snagged fabric, but learned he still couldn’t free the material. He groaned in frustration and let his hands fall to his belly.

“No luck?” Severus asked. Harry shook his head and Severus sighed. “Move with me now.”

They stood and pivoted so that Severus was sitting down with Harry in his lap once more. Harry awkwardly tried to figure out what to do with his arms and settled with crossing them behind his head.

“This is getting to be ridiculous, sir.”

“Shut up… and you’re in my light. Move your arms.”

“Oh. Hold on.” Harry wavered a moment before grabbing the back of the couch. Severus leaned forward and abruptly huffed, shooting Harry a look. “Still?”

“Yes.”

“Oh… Okay.” He wrapped his arms around his back and watched Severus work on the material for a few minutes. “Man, it’s really stuck in there. Just rip it out already, sir. You can always buy a new jacket.”

“This is my favorite jacket and I have yet to find a suitable replacement for it.”

“You mean there’s no other one like this?”

“Exactly.”
“Damn.”

“Potter, could you try leaning back a little more? Maybe if I could see the whole of your zipper, it would be easier to remove my jacket.”

Harry did try to lean back, but immediately began to fall. Faster than the blink of an eye, Severus had tightly clutched his arms and held him up, probably to save his precious jacket from being ripped any more.

“Thanks.”

He received a grumble in return. Severus’s eyes focused on his jacket and his mouth turned down into a deep frown. Harry sighed. There was nothing for it and the table was close enough… Might as well let Severus try this last attempt before they gave up, ripped the jacket, and magically mended the material. Of course, as with any mending, they’d be able to see it if they looked, but it was better than nothing.

But still.

“I suppose I should—”

“Sir, did you really think having me lean back would help you free your jacket?”

“Of course I did, but you saw how well that worked out.”

Harry took a deep breath. “Alright. I have an idea. Hope it works.”

“What have you in mind? We’ve tried everything, Potter.”

Harry shook his head. What he was about to do had better earn him a day of nice, non-sarcastic conversation or at least one conversation where Severus actually listened to him instead of just pretending to. Harry leaned back and quickly braced himself up on the edge of the coffee table before he could fall, his back arching just a little to avoid pulling the jacket.

He kind of enjoyed Severus’s nearly inaudible gasp and the way the man seemed hesitant to touch him.

“Well, Snape? Get to work. I’m not gonna stay like this forever.”

Within a minute, Severus freed his jacket and pulled Harry back up into a seated position on his lap. Harry took a moment to inspect Severus’s jacket, nodded at the almost unnoticeable tear, and climbed off. He grabbed Severus’s potion, fully intending to slip it into the man’s coffee, but Severus caught his wrist.

“You might as well give that to me.” Harry froze, wondering if Severus somehow knew his plan. “It doesn’t much matter now if I take it and my knee has become very sore after rolling around on the couch with you attached to me.”

Harry’s mind went to a very naughty place, but he covered it well by handing over the potion and doing his best to look skeptical.

“You’re not gonna banish it, are you? Because if you do, I might just kill you, sir.”

“No, I’m taking it. See?” Severus did indeed swallow a goodly amount of the potion and handed the vial back. “Return that to its proper place, boy, and then hurry back. I’m still hungry and you
took away my lunch.”

Harry snickered to himself. That man.
“Only a few days until my birthday, Professor. Do you have any plans for me?”

“Hmm?”

“My birthday.”

“That is coming up, isn’t it?” Severus looked up from the newspaper they’d found on the table that morning. “If you behave yourself between now and then, I may let you live a little longer. Would that do?”

“Yeah. Great.”

From his seat on the other end of the couch, Harry eyed Severus a long moment and hoped his sneaky cushioning charm helped prevent his knee from bothering him. He was glad Severus hadn’t seen him do that, because the man would throw an absolute fit, he was sure. He was about to go back to studying the Quidditch book Ron sent him the day before, but stopped when two letters popped into existence on the pages of Severus’s open book. He leaned closer to Severus and tried to read the names.

“You’ve a letter here, Potter.”

Harry eagerly grabbed it from Severus’s fingers. He was too excited to worry about their fingers brushing or how hot Severus’s hand felt. Months ago, he’d gotten used to the strange heat that radiated off of the man and now barely noticed it at all. Ripping the letter open, Harry tucked his feet underneath him and read.

Harry,

I regret you won’t be able to join us for your birthday celebration this year, but I have arranged for something special to be delivered to both you and Severus. I hope you can forgive me for keeping you there this long. It is for the best, as you’ve mentioned to me in your previous letter. I’m glad Severus helped you understand that. Now, your little surprise will not be arriving until the evening of your birthday. I think I’ll warn you not to prepare any sort of meal that night, but that is as much as I will give you. As a little treat to you, I’ve let some of your loved ones add their messages to this letter. Happy birthday, my boy, and know that you’ve not too much longer to go at the safe house. I would say you’ve only a month or two left at most. Again, happy birthday!

Albus Dumbledore

Harry!
I just want you to know I miss you so much and it’s heartbreaking only being able to talk with you through letters, but it’s really for the best. I know you’ve probably been told that by everyone, but it’s the truth. I’m sorry you’re stuck there with Professor Snape, since I know how you both feel about each other, but he really is the best person for the job. If the safety of the house is ever breached, he is the one person I would want there with you. He knows what he’s dealing with, you know. Little Rose says hello to her godfather and cannot wait to meet you! She is growing up so fast, Harry. I can’t wait for you to come back. Oh, dear. Please ignore that splotch on the paper. I cannot control my emotions yet and am still crying at the drop of a hat. Tell me, have you thought more about that thing I’ve been telling you about? You remember my last letter, right? If you are, I know it wouldn’t change anything about the way I feel about you. In fact, I think I’d enjoy having someone like you around to talk to more often. Also, I was curious. What did you mean by what you said about Professor Snape? You said something about drinking and marriage, but I couldn’t understand it much. It honestly didn’t make much sense. Could you explain it?

Oh, and happy birthday, Harry! Professor Dumbledore won’t let me send your present just yet (he says it’s too big), but I’ll keep it waiting here. In its place, I’ll be sending something else. You’ll be getting it on the evening of your birthday apparently.

I love you so much, Harry, and I miss you.

Hermione

Harry stood up, intending to go to the kitchen for some drinks and maybe a little snack, but got sidetracked. He stopped in front of Severus and gasped when he hit the second line of Ron’s note.

Hey mate,

Mione and Rose are doing well. Almost lost my arm in the last skirmish, but it’s fine now. Madame Pomfrey managed to save it, though I occasionally lose the feeling in it. Really, it’s kind of cool. I see my wife- Merlin, I love saying and writing that!- already left you a bit of information so I won’t go on too much. I had to make her stop before she spilled what we got you for your birthday. What is she talking about Snape for? Has that greasy git done something to you? Me and my brothers will tear him apart. Just let us know when. Ginny says hey. She had to run to Diagon Alley with Mum or else she’d be here.

Ron

Harry,

I miss you every day. It’s hard to believe you’re already approaching your eighteenth birthday. Your parents would be so proud of the brilliant young man you’ve become. I’m honored to be considered one of your friends, Harry. I hope Severus is treating you well and that you haven’t lost your mind from boredom. I’ll endeavor to send some more books for you to read, I swear it. If there’s anything else you want, just let me know. I’m sending along a little something. Albus assures me you’ll be able to get it, though he refuses to say how. Most strange. Happy birthday, young man, and attempt to enjoy your birthday, will you?

Remus
Harry,

I don’t think I’ve ever written a letter to anyone before. I’ve never had anyone to write to, you
know? I think it’s appropriate my first would be to you. We’re all doing our best to get you home.
The headmaster promises we’re getting closer and closer. Pass on a hello to Professor Snape, would
ya? He’s not as scary when he’s not here. You know, that idiot they got in to cover his classes first
changed the rules so I got to take seventh year potions- ME!- and then didn’t teach me anything. I
think Professor Dumbledore fired him. Hope you have a great birthday and that you like my
present. It’s probably a good thing Luna wasn’t here to write you, because you’d never understand
it. Basically, she says hi, she hopes you return soon, and have a good birthday. At least, I think
that’s what she was saying.

Neville

OY!

Mum’s furious she won’t see you this birthday, mate, so beware. She might try to send you all sorts
of advice, presents, and a year’s worth of nagging for your birthday. Mione told us what she’s
trying to convince you of. She swore us to secrecy so no one else knows yet, which is good. Hope
you enjoy our presents. Just don’t, uh, open them around Snape. He might not appreciate them
much. Or maybe… You know, I’ve always wondered. Is that git gay or not? I can almost imagine
him being so sour from getting something shoved up there all the time. Eww, George, mental
image. Anyway, innocent young Harry, enjoy what our depraved young minds have sent you for
your birthday. Don’t forget your silencing charms and happy birthday, pet!

Fred George

P.S. Our part of the letter’s charmed to be read by only you so no one else knows what we said.
Cool, huh? We’ll teach you the charm later, because we want to know what you thought of our
gifts!

Potter,

I have absolutely no idea why I’m being forced to write to you. I don’t even like you and only care
that you stay alive long enough to take out the Dark Lord, but still I’m here. Try not to whine too
much about spending your birthday alone and remember my threat. I will kill you, Potter, if you
harm my godfather in any way. He’s all I have left. Happy birthday. Know that I was forced at
wand point to write that so don’t let it go to your head. Treat Severus right or you’ll regret it.

D. Malfoy

Harry,

I’m having Hermione write out my letter for me. The quill’s a tad too small for my hands, you
know? I’m sending you a few gifts for your birthday. The headmaster wouldn’t let me send a few
of them, but you’ll like the others. Happy birthday! Miss you every day.
Hagrid

P.S. Harry, this is Hermione now. I forgot to tell you we chose Fleur for Rose’s godmother. We’re hoping to have a small ceremony after everything’s done and we’ll need you both to work together on a few things. More details later!

Harry,

Filius, Pomona, and I wish to extend warm wishes for a wonderful celebration. I understand the trials you’ve most likely experienced living with Severus, young man, but he is the best person to be with right now. Despite his cruel behavior, he truly is a talented and intelligent man. He will protect you if the need arises. I would suggest you just stay out of his way and keep your head down. We all hope you won’t be there too much longer. Enjoy your birthday, young man.

Minerva McGonagall

Once more and then I will let you go. Happy birthday, dear boy, and we all hope you enjoy it immensely. Molly and Arthur pass on their love and hopes for a wonderful birthday. I hope we can reunite sometime soon. Take care of yourself and feel free to utilize Severus in any way if ever you need him.

Albus Dumbledore

Harry lowered the letter, smiling widely. That was perhaps exactly what he’d needed right now. He needed to remember to steer clear of anything the twins send him, too. He must remember that. He was supposed to take care of himself and use Severus if he ever needed to, huh? In any way? Heh heh. Oh, Albus, you accidentally perverted old man.

“Is there a reason you’re still standing in front of me?”

“Yeah. Did the headmaster tell you he’s sending something for my birthday?”

“No, but I shouldn’t be surprised.” Harry frowned at Severus’s snappy tone and then remembered he hadn’t gotten the same. “Is my presence required?”

“Well, yeah. I mean, it’s just the two of us here and I did celebrate your birthday with you…” Harry frowned and sourly added, “After I found out about it, that is.”

“Your point?”

“Yes, I’d like your presence.” Severus merely gave him a grumpy grimace and went back to his book. “Erm, Remus is going to send me more books.”

“It will ensure you don’t destroy mine. That is the best idea I’ve ever heard.”

“I haven’t destroyed any of yours. Um, Neville says hi.”

“Why should I care if one of your fans tells you ‘hi’ or not?”

“No, sir. He wanted me to tell you he said hi. Like, as in hi to you.” Severus abruptly looked up
with narrowed eyes. “Also, whoever was teaching Potions is horrible. Neville was forced to do seventh year potions, but he thinks Dumbledore fired the guy.”

Severus sighed. “I told Albus it was a bad idea. Anything else? You’re currently cutting into my reading time.”

“All you do is read as it is.”

“Thin line, Potter. Also, I am not duty-bound to spend a certain percentage of my day interacting with you.”

That was perhaps the first time he hadn’t shuddered when Severus referred to that thin line… Harry felt proud of himself.

“Malfoy wrote me to again warn me about being nice to you and McGonagall wrote, too.”

“Minerva wrote you?”

“Yeah. She said something about understanding how much I’m suffering here with you and that I should keep my head down or something.”

Severus glared at the letter still clutched in his hand. Before Harry could blink, Severus was reading through the entire letter, ostensibly looking for… oh, yeah. He found it.

“That bloody bint. I’ll destroy her when next I see her.”

Harry pretended he hadn’t heard Severus’s angry mutterings. “Weird about them forcing Malfoy to write, huh?”

“No one forced him to do anything, Potter.” Severus tossed the letter down on the table and focused on his book. “Nor would they have held him at wand point until he wished you happy birthday. Use your limited intelligence, boy. Why you continually persist on acting a fool will forever boggle my mind.”

Coming from Severus, that was as good as saying he was actually quite intelligent. Harry beamed, making Severus’s glare darken.

“How silly of me, sir. That must be another thing I should work on.”

“Have you recently hit your head?”

“Uh, no. Why?”

“Curiosity.”

***

“You’ve missed one, Potter.”

Harry looked at the present Severus was pointing at and flushed. “Erm, I’m saving that one for later. I felt it was safer to. It was something Fred and George sent.”

“Perhaps you should hold off on that one until we leave. Albus would have both our heads if we destroyed the place.”

“Yeah, probably,” Harry agreed. “How do you like the meal?”
“This poor excuse of poultry is more unpalatable than your own.” Severus stabbed the rubbery chicken and sneered. Harry, meanwhile, was grinning. He just knew Severus loved his food! “Is this really the food they’ve been serving at Hogwarts all these years?”

“I think so. Tastes like it, at least.”

“It is truly appalling. I don’t think I can even stomach it. In fact, I might be sick.”

“I have to agree with you, sir.” It really was bad. How did anyone think he’d enjoy this? “Should I warm up some leftovers or something?”

“I think for once I would prefer to consume your bland victuals. If you wouldn’t mind, do away with this before I banish it to hell.” Harry laughed, tossed both of their dinners into the waste bin, and was soon placing warmed up beef stew and freshly-made toasties on the table. Severus sniffed his bowl and ate a spoonful before Harry could sit down. “Loathe as I am to admit it, this is much better.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“I wasn’t complimenting your cooking. Do not mistake that.”

“Of course not.”

Like hell he wasn’t. He as good as admitted he loved it. How long was he enjoying Hogwarts fare before deciding his food was better? Years. Ha!

“Stop smiling.”

“I’m not.”

“You are still smiling. I said nothing to merit your joviality.”

“Are you sure you don’t read a dictionary every now and then?” Harry joked. Severus grumbled around a mouthful of his toastie and swallowed quickly.

“Being well-educated doesn’t mean I sat around reading a dictionary for years, Potter. I merely have a well-developed vocabulary. Perhaps, though, you should consider reading a dictionary. It might help you.”

“I’m just saying… not everyone uses words like joviality, emissions, or disquietude in everyday conversation…. Especially when they’re drinking. Think about it. It sounds like you read a dictionary.”

“I assure you, I do not.”

“Have you ever?”

“What did I just say?”

Harry threw his hands up and then grinned. “You read a thesaurus instead, don’t you?”

“No, not that there is much difference between the two.”

“There is, too.”

“Potter, I firmly believe there is very little difference between the two. They both, whether through
a direct definition or by giving like expressions, give you a meaning for any particular word. They are similar, but not precisely the same.”

“You say potato, I now say peach.”

Severus’s lip twitched. Harry was almost stunned to realize he was trying not to smile.

“I suggest you never let Draco hear you say that.”

“I won’t, believe me. That would be too weird.”

***

Oy!

Fred and George here. You better have opened your birthday present by now or there will be hell to pay, young man. We’ll write Snape and tell him to open it for you. Can you imagine the look on the git’s face if he were to see it? Merlin, it’d be priceless, though we’d both pay a hefty sum to see it! Mum says hello (Dumblyfore won’t let her in here, because she was complaining about you never writing her and you being in trouble or something like that). Moldywort is still not coming out to play so we’re thinking the summer is gonna be great. Well, except for you not being here, too. Hope you and the bat don’t kill each other. Enjoy our gift, mate.

Your lovers

Harry- George can have you. I don’t really want you, mate. Sorry about that, but you know.

Erm, I don’t really want you, either. That’d be like wanting our ickle Ronniekins.

Well, all right then.

The men you wish you could have!
The Attack

Harry cried out as a hand clamped over his mouth and started struggling against whoever was holding him, hoping Severus could hear him. How had someone gotten in without them knowing? Without Albus knowing?

Like a flash of lightning and a prayer answered, Severus ran out of the kitchen and abruptly stopped in his tracks, his wand drawn. He stared at Harry’s eyes for a long moment, looking faintly shaken by whatever he saw in them. Harry struggled again, now giving Severus a pleading look.

What was he waiting for?!

“Weasley, if you do not let him go this instant, I will ensure you lose both of your arms within the next twenty seconds.” Severus tucked his wand back up his sleeve. “What the hell did you think you were doing? Did you not spare a moment to consider he’d be terrified to be grabbed like that when he just saw me walk into the kitchen?”

Harry spun as his captor released him. “Ron! What are you- why are you all here?”

“What do you mean grabbed like that when you just walked into the kitchen?” Ron lowered his voice. “Mate, does he do that often?”

Harry ignored him. Their living room, which had been empty just moments before, now contained a number of people. Ron stood right in front of him and Hermione and presumably baby Rose, Minerva, Albus, Draco, the twins, Remus, Molly, and Filius all stood near the fireplace. They were all wearing similar expressions of astonishment. What do they look surprised for? He was the one who just had the crap scared out of him! Albus collected himself first and stepped forward to speak, two packages in his hand. Ron drifted back to Hermione, still looking at Harry unhappily.

“We stopped by to spend a bit of time with you, Harry, and you, Severus. It was risky, but we became worried when neither of you wrote any of us back. It has been nearly two weeks with no response.”

“Oh,” Harry sighed. “Okay. Sorry I reacted like-”

“You needn’t apologize, Potter. One of them should have had the forethought to warn us of their imminent arrival.”

Harry turned to meet Severus’s eyes and shook his head, a smile the others couldn’t see firmly on his lips. He almost laughed.

“Dictionary, sir.”

“Shut up, boy.”

“I see you all are well,” Minerva spoke up. Harry jumped and looked back at the others.

“Sorry. I’m being rude. Uh, someone want to conjure some chairs or something while I get drinks and stuff?” Harry again looked at Severus, this time expectantly. Severus huffed and, after a dark glare at the lot of them, started conjuring furniture. “What sounds good? Coffee, tea, snacks? We’ve got it all.”

“Then bring it all,” Ron decided, finally grinning.
“I’ll help you, Harry. Ron, want to hold the baby?” Harry smiled brilliantly at Hermione and gave her a tight hug. They disappeared into the kitchen, leaving the talking crowd behind them. “So Harry, tell me everything. Have you figured anything out?”

“Yeah, I did.” Harry busied himself with starting the coffee and tea and then met her eyes. “I am.”

“I am so glad you finally figured it out, Harry.”

“You hear someone pushing the idea off onto you for years, you finally have to figure out if it’s true or not.”

Harry and Hermione shared a quiet laugh. A moment later, Hermione drummed her fingers on the table.

“What else? What was that with Professor Snape?”

“What do you mean?” Harry genuinely didn’t have any idea what she was talking about. “He didn’t do anything bad, did he?”

“No, Harry. He looked like he was going to rip Ron’s head off.”

“I think he warned he’d be going for his arms, right?”

“Harry.”

“I don’t know. Probably just got irritated Ron did that. Why did the git do that?”

“Fred told him it’d be funny.”

“Of course.”

“Oy! How long does it take you two to grab stuff?”

“Ronald, you’ll wake the baby.”

“Oh. Sorry, Rose.”

When the coffee and tea was done, Harry quickly piled a few uncut cakes, pies, and a dish of candies onto a large tray and then put the coffee, tea items, plates, silverware, and cups on another. Together, he and Hermione came back into the living room. Ron was already drooling at the sight, Fred and George quickly doing the same when they caught the scents of Harry’s desserts.

Harry set the trays on the coffee table, poured himself and Severus some coffee, and sliced up two slices of the warmed cherry chocolate cake. He didn’t even realize what he was doing until he passed a mug and plate to Severus and earned a raised brow from Draco. Severus didn’t think twice about accepting the two and eagerly began cutting into his dessert.

“Who wants coffee?”

“I’ll take what Severus has,” Draco spoke up quickly, eyeing Severus’s strange behavior. “I’m sorry. I can’t hold it in anymore. Severus, are you licking your fork?”

Severus froze and looked up. “Of course I wasn’t. And I wouldn’t suggest you indulge yourself on this. It’s absolute rubbish.”

Molly, Hermione, and Minerva looked outraged. Even Remus looked irritated. On the couch
opposite Severus and Draco, Harry snorted and poured out some coffee.


“Why are you smiling? Severus was just being absolutely rude,” Molly spoke, giving Severus a dark look. “He should apologize.”

“No, he wasn’t and shouldn’t. Do you want some coffee?”

“For Merlin’s sake, someone answer him so he’ll stop asking,” Severus groused. “It’s his job to entertain you all.”

“Now Severus, you both live here for the moment and-” Albus began. Harry shrugged, halting the headmaster’s gentle voice.

“He’s telling the truth.” Severus and Harry met each other’s eyes. “I know Hermione will want tea, right?”

“Of course. Harry, are you-”

“Here you go, Mione. Ron?”

“Just give me whatever, mate. I’ll help myself to the desserts.”

Harry quickly doctored some coffee and handed it over.

“Maybe you should go last on dessert, Ron. I want to make sure everyone else gets something.”

Harry looked up at Draco and noticed he was having a quiet conversation with Severus. His eye twitched. “Erm, uh, Malfoy. Dessert?”

Draco’s brow arched, perfectly reminiscent of the one Severus always directs at him, and Harry was a bit irritated by the sight. “I believe I wanted the cherry chocolate… unless there is something around here a little less messy.”

“The pumpkin cream cheese pie isn’t as dreadful as the rest and won’t get everywhere.”

Harry glared at Severus. “Don’t let him lie to you, Malfoy. They’re all good. Which did you want?”

“The cake, I suppose.”

Minerva poured herself a glass of tea and then got another for Albus. “Harry, I didn’t know you could cook.”

“You would never hear it from some people, but I’m under the impression it’s better than what you all are eating at the school.” Everyone looked at Severus in varying stages of surprise. Severus glared back and slowly continued chewing his cake. Harry snickered and passed off the coffee he knew the twins liked. “Professor Flitwick, tea?”

“Yes, indeed.”

Harry passed some tea down to Filius and Molly. “Remus, I’m sorry. I literally have no idea what you’d want.”

“Coffee is fine.”
Halfway through pouring, Harry froze and looked around. He quickly finished pouring coffee, scooted the sugar and milk down the table, and shot back into the kitchen. Chocolate coffee beans. Severus loved them. Everyone else would, too. He just knew it. When he returned, Severus was the only one who wasn’t questioning his strange actions.

“Harry, are you quite all right?” Molly asked. Ron, Fred, and George were too busy chewing the cake slices they’d helped themselves to, but they were watching in concern. Well, they looked more euphoric than anything. Still, there was concern in there somewhere. Kind of. Maybe.

“Yeah. I just forgot something. It’s a candy I’ve been working on. I’m pretty sure I’ve perfected the recipe, too. Try it.”

Everyone but Draco grabbed one of the chocolates and popped it into their mouths. Severus surreptitiously pulled a handful from the candy dish in front of him, glared at Harry’s barely-hidden smirk, and shoved a few of the beans into Draco’s hand.

“Just eat them,” he muttered.

“This is pretty good, Harry,” Remus complimented. “Coffee bean?”

“Yeah. I came up with the idea one morning after not getting a lot of sleep the night before.”

Fred choked and had to drink some coffee to get his candy down. “Does this have anything to do with the letter we wrote you for your birthday?”

“Wha- Oh.” Harry blushed vibrantly, earning himself everyone’s attention. “No. I’d had a nightmare.”

“Ya sure?”

“Yes. Shut up, Fred. Mione, can I finally hold my goddaughter?”

Hermione beamed and handed little Rose over. Harry cradled her gently against his chest and smiled at the drowsy infant.

“You’re a natural,” Hermione sighed.

Molly nodded vigorously. “He is. Will you ever have your own, Harry, or is that not in your plans?”

“It’s a possibility now,” Harry conceded. He stroked Rose’s plump cheek and smiled softly. “You’re a beauty, little one.”

Harry pecked up at everyone, smiling more when he saw everyone talking amongst themselves, and landed on Severus’s gaze. He looked strange again. It was a look he’d literally never seen before. What was he thinking? When he realized Harry was watching, he turned back to hear whatever Draco was saying. Harry watched him a moment longer and then dropped his eyes back to Rose.

“Dear boy, are you listening to me or has that little angel effectively stolen your complete attention?”

“Close,” Harry sighed and looked up at Albus. “What did I miss?”

“I was tentatively suggesting we all stay for supper. Since we’re already here and we haven’t seen
you both in so long, I-"

“Yes! Merlin, yes. I’ll cook something really great. You’re technically my guests right now, anyway.” Harry bit his lip and stared at the table a long moment. He knew what Severus loved, but would everyone else go for it? “Mione, could you take Rose? I need to go put the chicken on.”

Hermione grabbed the baby and Molly leaned around Minerva to talk.

“What are you expecting to cook?” she asked. “Will you need any help? There are plenty of us here.”

“It’s a secret and that’s not necessary. I think you’ll like it.”

“Potter,” Severus said gruffly. “Try to limit the amount of poisons you throw in tonight.” Molly wasn’t the only one who again looked outraged. “After all, you’re serving to people you might not want to kill. It’s not like you’re serving only me. I am apparently another story.”

“Limit the poisons. Got it,” Harry agreed lightly. “Anything else? I should avoid the salmonella, too, right?”

“If you are able to.”

Harry ignored the incredulous crowd and disappeared into the kitchen. He quickly got the chicken (well, plural - chickens) roasting and realized he should probably prepare everything now so it would be easier to cook closer to supper time. He poked his head around the kitchen door and then caught sight of Severus, who looked terribly irritated.

“Um, Professor, could you come here just a minute?”

“Which professor, Harry? There are five of us in here,” Remus reasoned, chuckling.

Harry blinked. “Oh, yeah. I meant Snape.”

“Oh, yeah. He was getting super annoyed. Harry looked at Severus and tried to hide his grin. If he was short-tempered already by their guests, he was doing the right thing.

“Because I asked nicely, of course.”

Severus’s lip curled, just like Harry knew it would. “A better reason, boy.”

“I need your help?”

“Try again.”

Harry straightened his shoulders and approached, a malicious smirk on his lips. Stopping beside Severus’s chair, he bent down and whispered in the man’s ear. “Thin line, Professor. Wouldn’t want that getting out, would you?”

Severus was out of his chair in but three seconds flat, glaring the entire way to the kitchen, his hand wrapped too tightly around Harry’s wrist. Once there, he pushed Harry into the kitchen ahead of him and slammed the door shut. Harry cast a silencing charm over the room before motioning for Severus to speak.

“Is there a reason you were so determined to get me in here, you obnoxious little shit?”
“I needed help chopping something and figured I’d ask you to help.” Severus’s dark mood faltered and Harry lifted his chin. “I could hear you cursing all the way in here. You really don’t like being around people, do you?”

“…Shut up, Potter. What do you need me to do?”

“The carrots please. I shaved off the gross outsides when they came in and I’ve kept them in the fridge since so all you’ll need to do is cut them.”

Severus began smoothly chopping the carrots into even pieces and briefly focused on Harry halfway through. He watched a short moment and then continued chopping.

“Potter, what are you making for dinner?”

“Roast chicken with cranberry sauce. You liked them together so quit giving me that look. I’m also making candied carrots and mashed potatoes. I have three full loaves of pumpkin chocolate-chunk bread. Remember? I made them the other day. I was thinking we could have that and whatever is still out there for dessert.”

Severus harrumphed. “Are you sure they deserve all of this trouble? And do you really want to waste one of the more edible samples of your desserts on those swine?”

“It doesn’t really matter. They may be used to Hogwarts food, but we’re not anymore. We’re eating my food.”

“Be stubborn, then.”

Harry rolled his eyes. Yeah, he was the stubborn one. When the carrots were all chopped and put back into the fridge, Severus washed his hands and moved to the table to clean his work area. That’s when Harry heard it. That infernal popping noise.

“Professor, did I just hear your knee pop?”

“Don’t start with me, Potter.”

“It did. I know I- I just heard it again!”

“There are witnesses here. Do not start with me.”

Harry threw his own knife down onto the counter and stormed out of the kitchen, the bathroom his destination.

“Harry, what’s wrong?” Hermione called out worriedly.

“Mate?”

“It’s fine.” Harry walked back past them and silently entered the kitchen. “Take it now or we’ll just have another fiasco, sir.”

“I’m not taking that.”

“With all due respect, sir, I will not hesitate to force this down your childish throat. Honestly, who fights about this kind of thing more than you? Not even toddlers, I swear.”

“I’m not taking that.”
“I will attack you, sir. Can you imagine how well that would go down? There are people here, like you said. The silencing charm would fall, they’d hear us, come to investigate, and see me sprawled out over you. Do you want everyone, especially your godson, thinking you’ve done nothing but shag me since we got here? I’ll even make it seem like it’s nothing new to me. I’m very good at acting when I need to be.”

“You wouldn’t dare.”

Harry’s eyes grew innocently wide as he strolled over to stand in front of Severus and clutched the front of his robe. He batted his lashes and made himself comfortable against the frozen man’s body.

“Wouldn’t I?”

“I insist you move away now.”

“Why would I want to do that? You’ve never told me to do it before-” Harry leaned in and dropped his voice to a whisper. “Severus.”

Severus shoved Harry away, uncorked the bottle, and swallowed some of his pain potion without another argument. He glared at the triumphant look in Harry’s eyes and slammed the vial onto the counter.

“I’m done in here, Potter. If you ever do that again, I will castrate you with my bare hand.”

“Told you I could be believable.”

Severus snarled as he exited the kitchen. He could hear the people in the living room asking a multitude of questions, but Severus stayed silent. Moments later, Hermione and Molly entered the kitchen. Molly spoke first, holding Harry at arm’s length.

“Everything all right?”

“Yeah.”

“What are you doing in here? You’ve been gone a while, Harry.”

“Just getting a few things ready. I’m done now, actually.”

Once back in the living room, Harry couldn’t keep the proud smirk from his lips. He heard Severus snap at someone and laughed.

“So Harry. What is this mysterious dinner you’re making?” Ron asked avidly.

“Nothing special, really. Candied carrots, my mashed potatoes, and roast chicken with cranberry sauce.” Draco’s cup smacked down on the table sharply. “I was thinking pumpkin chocolate-chunk bread and this stuff for dessert. Lots of variety.”

“That sounds wonderful,” Minerva enthused. “I’m sure most of us will be appreciative.”

Albus nodded along happily. “Sounds delightful.”

“Potter, any particular reason you’re making cranberry sauce? Isn’t that a Christmas thing?”

“Everybody likes cranberry sauce. Plus, it’ll taste good with the chicken.”
“Severus, don’t you like all of those things?” Draco whispered.

“What of it?”

“Nothing, I suppose.”

Soon, Harry was pulled off by the twins. He occasionally looked around them to see what everyone else was doing and had to adjust his hold on the two packages Albus had given him earlier. Remus was conversing with Severus seriously, but grinned every time Harry looked at him.

“Dear Harry.”

“Tell us.”

“Did you get the chance—”

“To use our gifts yet—”

“Or have you been—”

“Waiting for someone—”

“To help you?”

“It’s only been two weeks, guys. I haven’t even opened it yet. And did you practice that? Like the timing and everything?”

Fred and George both looked outraged. Fred spoke.

“No. Take us to it. You need to open it and we want to see your face when you do.”

Harry looked around. “But everyone else—”

“Will be fine.”

“It’s in the bedroom, but I don’t think Snape—”

George hooked one arm around him while Fred did the same. They began steering Harry down the hall to what they figured must be the bedroom.

“Potter, where exactly are you taking those two?”

“I’m being forced to open the last of my birthday presents. Remember the one I forgot?”

Severus abruptly looked sour. “I thought we decided not to open that until we were allowed out of here?”

“It’s not a prank,” Fred called, pushing George and Harry into the bedroom. “Where is it, Harry?”

“I’ll get it. Stay here.” Harry disappeared into the closet, stowed his packages, and heard Severus muttering something in the living room. “Erm, George, you’re on the professor’s bed.”

George leapt up like his arse was on fire and Fred dissolved into raucous laughter. “Is there grease on me? Quick, what does my hair look like?”

“His hair’s not greasy. Quit being a prat, George.”
“Open it,” Fred demanded, punching his brother in the arm. George wiped his expression and joined him on Harry’s bed. Harry, meanwhile, dropped into Severus’s chair. “Now!”

“Impatient, aren’t you?” Harry opened up his gift, looked inside, and felt his jaw drop. “Do you honestly expect me to use any of this stuff? I mean, I just figured out…”

“Potter,” Severus called down the hall.

“What?”

“Get your filthy arse off of my chair. I know you’re sitting on it.”

“I am not.”

“You are, too. Do not lie to me and move. I will make you if you don’t.” Harry moved and scowled at the closed bedroom door. “And stop scowling at me. You look ridiculous when you do that.”

“Whoa. How did he know?”

“I literally have no idea.”

“And tell that annoyance to keep his arse off of my bed. I’m going to have to disinfect the thing now.”

Harry opened the door and glared. “Do you have some sort of monitoring system in here? I knew you were a pervert.”

Two or three people in the living room gasped, but neither of them paid them attention. Severus merely narrowed his eyes.

“Of the two of us, boy, I am not the one who could be accused of perversion. I merely know how you three are. Stay out of my chair and keep them off my bed.”

“Fine.”

Harry slammed the door and purposefully plopped himself on Severus’s bed.

“Get your arse off my bed.”

“No!”

“Harry!” Ron yelled loudly. Harry had enough time to look at the door before Severus strode in, grabbed Harry, and physically threw him on his own bed.

“Stay off of my bed, Potter. It’s bad enough you’ve been on it twice now. Do not make it a third time.”

When Severus left, Harry saw the twins smirking at him and instantly felt wary. “What’d he say, Harry?”

“It’s not what it sounded like.”

“Maybe he didn’t need these, George.”

George sniggered. “Please, Fred. This is Snape you’re talking about. The old bat probably can’t
even get it up, let alone knows how to have sex.”

“Stop it. Stop being rude.” Harry glanced at the door fearfully. “And he can hear you, George. These walls are really thin.”

“I seriously-”

“GEORGE WEASLEY!” Molly bellowed.

“I tried to tell you.” Harry edged out the door just as Molly barged in. Fred quickly followed, looking horrified, and cast a silencing charm on the door. “He’s in so much trouble.”

“Yeah, she’s probably tearing him a new one. You really weren’t kidding.”

“No. Learned the hard way how thin the walls are.” Harry sat down and looked around. Severus was glaring at nothing in particular, Minerva and Hermione were pink-faced and avoiding looking at anything, and Ron was quietly snickering. Albus, meanwhile, was shaking his head disapprovingly. “Hey, where’s Re-”

A loud wail followed by a crash sounded from the bathroom. Harry hurried over, closely followed by Ron and Fred. They looked inside and saw Remus slumped on the floor.

“Remus?” Fred asked.

“Are you okay?”

“You left your towel sopping wet and dripping onto the floor, didn’t you?” Severus asked behind them. Harry turned and grimaced at him. “What have I told you? He could have snapped his neck, Potter.”

“I forgot. Merlin. Are you all right, Remy?”

“Pain potion’s in the cabinet to the left. The red vial.”

Harry looked curiously at Severus. The red vials were pain potions, too? Maybe the purple was a specialized kind just for his knee. He’d have to ask.

Remus stood up and retrieved the vial of potion. He swallowed it down and then finally answered.

“I’m fine, Harry. You really should cast a drying charm on that thing. I’m glad it was me instead of Albus or Minerva, though. Merlin knows they’d verbally rip you a new one.”

Minerva’s laugh sounded from the living room. Fred looked appalled.

“You really can hear through the walls. Blimey.”

“Quite well,” Severus agreed. He disappeared before Fred could look behind him.

“Tell me you didn’t, Harry.”

Harry blushed. “He doesn’t know how to knock.”

“He actually meant he doesn’t know how to answer. I know how to knock… multiple times… loudly.”

Fred almost hit the ground from laughing so hard. Harry, his face flaming, quickly strode into the
kitchen. He was surprised to see Draco in there.

“What are you doing in here, Potter?”

“This is my kitchen. What are you doing in here?”

“Ensuring you’re not trying to poison any of us. What do you mean it’s your kitchen?”

“I’m not telling you that.” Harry looked skeptically at the half-eaten bread in his hands and then cocked a brow. “And that’s bullshit and I know it. You better not let your godfather see you eating that.”

“Why is that?” Draco asked irritably.

“It’s one of his favorites. He might just break your finger. He always gets the first slice from a fresh loaf.”

“I sincerely doubt that.”

“Fine. Don’t believe me.”

“You never answered me.”

Harry stared at him a long minute, his eyes narrowed. “Escaping.”

“Hmm.” Draco shoved the last morsel of bread into his mouth, quickly chewed, and swallowed it down with the last of his coffee. “That was disgusting. I can’t believe Severus has had to deal with this for so long.”

“In Snape speak, you loved it.” Draco looked suspicious and Harry dismissively waved him away. He concentrated on the loaves of bread laying on the counter. “Almost eleven months of only seeing one person will make sure you know what they’re really saying no matter what words are coming out of their mouth. I know.”

“So what he said about the cake he ate…”

“It’s his favorite and was subtly warning you away from it. I’m surprised you didn’t immediately recognize that.”

Harry leaned against the counter when he didn’t hear Draco leave. The two stared at each other for a long moment and then Draco opened his mouth. It took him another long moment to speak.

“I still don’t like you.”

“I still don’t like you.”

“Your face makes me ill.”

“Your face makes everyone ill.”

“Remember my warning. Don’t get in his way or piss him off.”

“We have an arrangement. It’s much better if he doesn’t get in mine.”

Draco gave him a jerky nod and swiftly left. Harry followed behind at a slower pace and sat back down on the couch. Molly and George joined their group shortly thereafter. Harry looked away
from Severus’s gaze and smiled widely at Hermione, who instantly passed Rose back to him and started talking about babies, the future, and daycares. Remus, Molly, and Minerva occasionally added some comments in. Even Filius and Albus seemed interested in the subject. After an hour or so of everyone taking turns talking to him, Harry passed Rose to Ron and retreated to the kitchen once more to begin supper in earnest. He had just transferred the boiled potatoes to the sink when he thought he heard something. He listened for a moment and then shook it away, thinking it was something in the living room.

“Boy.”

Harry jumped and spun around, glaring at Severus. “Why did you sneak in here? It’s like you want me to hurt myself when I’m in here cooking!”

“On the contrary, that is the last thing I wish to do. You’re so incompetent, I’d have to be the one to heal you.”

“Did you want something?”

“More sludge, if you have any left.”

Severus sat at the table and stared at his empty mug. Harry tried and failed to conceal an amused smile and stole Severus’s cup from his hands. He poured in more coffee, stirred sugar and milk into it, and carefully handed it back.

“You’re getting tired already.”

“I’m not tired in general. Just of people.”

“Lots of people, right?”

“Am I the sort of person who appears to enjoy company, Potter?”

“I’m not actually an idiot, Snape, no matter what you think. I can tell you’re irritated and what’s causing it. Bread to go with that?”

“I knew it. You are, in fact, attempting to make me an overly corpulent man.”

Harry snorted and slid a slice of bread towards Severus. “You figured me out.”

“You say the words with such sarcasm, but I honestly believe them to be true.” Severus took a bite of bread regardless of his complaining and stopped mid-chew, glaring at his plate. He swallowed thickly and sipped some coffee. “This isn’t the first slice of the loaf, is it?”

“Your beloved godson managed to break into it,” Harry replied, still mashing his potatoes. “I told him you’d probably break his finger if you found out.”

“That little ingrate. I let him come to my home- for the moment, of course- and he repays me by stealing my food.”

Harry turned around to look at Severus, his face twisted up in suppressed laughter. “You’re right, sir. Well, except about it being your food. I do have a job around here. Remember? I have a certain title...”

Severus leaned back in his seat and crossed his arms over his chest. Harry recognized the stance. Severus was prepared to fight.
“Firstly, I’ve already cast a silencing charm over the kitchen so you needn’t speak in riddles. None of those vultures can hear you. Secondly, you may be the, ahem, lady of the house, but you would do well to remember you’re preparing the food for me. That would make it my food, would it not?”

“Possibly, sir, if you were the one to provide the food for me to cook. As it is, it just pops up when I send a list off to the headmaster.” Harry abruptly scowled. “And I’m not a lady.”

“I would grant you that argument were I not the one who originally set it up this way… and you might as well be.” Harry’s jaw dropped open and Severus smirked. “Really, Potter, you look obscene. I don’t trust half of those house elves to prepare decent food. I arranged for food to be sent here. Therefore, you impish brat, I am the one providing the food.”

“You… wow.” Harry rubbed the back of his neck. “I guess I don’t really have an argument, then.”

“Indeed you do not. Now, be a good little housewife and finish dinner for me.” Severus laced his fingers together behind his head and smirked victoriously. It was a good look on him. “Staring at me won’t get anything done.”

“Severus, are you- Ah, there you are.”

“Minerva, come in. You can join me in my temporary haven of silence. Whoever thought it wise to bring so many Weasleys to one place is obviously unintelligent.”

Minerva sat down to the left of Severus and nodded. “That would be Albus’s doing. Harry, might I have another cup of tea?”

“Yeah. Give me a second.” Harry washed the potato grime from his hands and refilled her glass. “Milk or sugar?”

“Not necessary. It would only ruin the flavor of this tea. It really is quite exceptional.”

“Thanks.”

Severus gave Minerva a calculating look and took a slow sip of coffee. Harry gave him a weird look and then started mixing milk into the mashed potatoes.

“I must say I am surprised to see you two getting along so well, Severus.”

“I was sworn to keep him alive. I’ve done my best so far.”

“I can tell. You almost attacked Ronald earlier when he grabbed Harry here.”

“If Weasley had any intelligence, I wouldn’t have had to react in such a way.” Severus looked up at Harry, who had paused, and glowered at his smile. “Potter once had a nightmare of someone breaking into our safe house somehow. After a prophetic nightmare came true shortly after he had it, I was more on guard than before.”

“Yes, but your reaction time was remarkable. Harry was only restrained perhaps all of ten seconds and then you were there.”

“I would have been faster, but that imbecile left his shoes in the middle of the kitchen. Again, Potter. You did it again.”

“I didn’t think you’d be running over them. You never have before.”

“I’ve told you to expect the unexpected. Always expect that I’ll have to run over them, you brat.”
Harry sighed and gave the potatoes one last bit of butter before deciding they were done. No one would believe him, but Severus wasn’t being mean. Harry kept sneaking peeks at Severus, who was having a friendly conversation with his Head of House. It was obvious he liked her. They were being pleasant and all… Harry wiped his hands on his apron, took it off, and started to leave the room.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

“I’m going to go sit down. The chicken isn’t done yet and the other stuff is on monitors.”

“Sit down. If you go out there, you’ll just lose track of time or ignore the alarm on the chicken.”

Harry snorted and sat down at Severus’s right. Minerva smiled at Harry and stood up, her gown looking as unwrinkled as ever. “I think I’m ready to face the masses yet again. I’m sure you’ll let us know when supper’s ready.”

“Well, yeah.”

“Potter,” Severus admonished.

“What?”

“You’re being disrespectful.”

Minerva chuckled and left the kitchen. A hush fell over the living room that soon picked back up in volume. Severus leaned forward on the table, braced himself up on his elbows, and took a long swallow of coffee.

“Tired?”

“No thanks to you. If you’d be a little more careful in the morning, I wouldn’t have to worry about you waking me up by tripping over all and sundry.”

“If you wouldn’t stay up drinking so late every other night, you wouldn’t need to lay in as much every morning.” Severus and Harry exchanged glares. Predictably, Harry looked away first. “It’s true and you know, sir.”

“You are one of the very, very few who know why I drink so much. Regrettably, you are the only one who knows how much I drink. Do not berate me for my coping methods. It’s the only way I stay sane.”

“I know,” Harry replied quietly. “I just don’t like it. It’s not healthy.”

“Neither is feeling suicidal over past actions, Potter.” Severus was sounding really tired these days. How had he not noticed? Wait. Suicidal? “I doubt it would ever change.”

“I don’t really know what to say.”

“Perhaps you can say you’ll consider your words next time you feel like getting onto me for drinking.”

“I can’t do that. Drinking isn’t an answer for anything, sir. Surely there’s another way-”

“Despite what you may think, I don’t need to please you. I will continue doing as I wish, because it
is what works.”

Harry slowly stood up, pushed in his chair, and left the kitchen. Severus was immediately behind him and managed to pull him back into the room before too many people had noticed they were even there. He pressed Harry up against the wall and held him there.

“Let me go, Snape.”

“Stop acting like I’ve hurt your feelings, Potter. Nothing I’ve said warrants your stomping away in a little snit.”

“Maybe you’re just too indifferent to realize it, sir, but you are extremely talented at making everyone around you feel like shit without even trying. I was only trying to be nice and you’ve managed to be a complete… arse… about it.”

“Yet again, boy, you’ve gotten mad because I’m not being as receptive as you wish. Do you never think? Have we not had this argument before?”

Harry bit his lip and forced himself to think. Severus wouldn’t be forcing him to stay there if he didn’t want to end the argument before it got worse. Clear as crystal, the argument Severus was referring to came to mind.

“Potter, we’ve been down here since September. It is now the beginning of May and still we have received no word of how long we have left. You will have to excuse me if I occasionally get frustrated. You are not my wife, boy, so quit acting so offended when I’m less than appreciative of what you do around here.”

“I never said I was your wife, you bastard! Merlin only knows you’re so sour all of the time you couldn’t even attract one. God! Why do I constantly waste my time trying to be nice to you when you put me down at every turn!? Fuck!”

“Yes, we have.”

“More, Potter. Think.”

Think about what? Well, obviously Severus must have opened up sometime in their conversation. What… OH. “I just don’t like it. It’s not healthy.” It wasn’t healthy, but… “Neither is feeling suicidal over past actions, Potter. I doubt it would ever change.” Harry’s heart clenched at the memory. He looked up at Severus and then slumped forward, his head on Severus’s chest. It was an entirely subconscious action, but he realized why he’d done it when he heard Severus’s heartbeat thumping in his ear. He was surprised the man didn’t immediately push himself away.

“Sorry, sir. You just… infuriate me so quickly. I can’t help it.”

After another long moment, Severus pushed Harry back and sat down at the table. “I look forward to the day when we don’t have to keep doing this, Potter. It’s exhausting.”

“Do you want me to get an energizing potion?”

Severus rubbed his forehead. “Yes, actually. You know where they are?”

“I’ll be right back. Drink your coffee.”

“Mmm.”
Harry hurried from the room and smiled apologetically at everyone on his way past. With the vial in hand, he moved back to the kitchen and in a successful attempt to stave off questions, Harry announced dinner was almost ready. He then slipped backwards into the kitchen and handed the potion to Severus.

“Here. How late were you up last night?”

“Too late it would seem.” Severus swallowed the potion and directed a weak glare (by his standards at least) at him. “Do not tell anyone that just happened.”

“Who would believe me?”

“Absolutely no one. Also, I will be thinking of a suitable punishment for you.”

“What did I even do?”

“You loudly accused me of being a perv-”

Before Severus could finish, Harry’s alarm on the chicken went off. Harry crossed to the stove and pulled them out, surveying both with satisfaction.

“Finished.”

“That looks and smells disgusting, boy.”

“I know. How will we ever survive?”

“It will be a miracle, that is for sure.”

“Can you conjure more chairs for everyone? I don’t think they’d like eating around the coffee table.”

“If you can ensure none of the Weasleys sit beside me.”

Harry stole one of the carrot slices and popped it into his mouth. Merlin, that was tasty. “I’ll try. I can’t guarantee they won’t sit next to whoever will be to your left or right, though.”

“Do your best.”

Staying long enough to make sure Severus was actually conjuring chairs, Harry stepped to the doorway and cleared his throat. It seemed to get everyone’s attention well enough.

“Time to eat, guys. Come help yourselves.”

“Potter, you will continue sitting in that seat. Draco will be on my other side. I want to keep an eye on you both.”

Harry’s brows lifted in surprise. “Are you sure? I could just sit at the other end of the table, sir.”

“I’ve made up my mind. Get your plate and sit down.”

“It’s rude to serve myself first,” Harry argued as everyone filed in. “Have you never wondered why you always go first?”

“No, I haven’t. Sit down. Draco, you will be on my left. I don’t trust either of you not to embarrass yourselves- and me, by proxy- if no one is watching you.”
Harry sat down, grimaced, and watched everyone start making up plates for themselves. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw that Draco looked disgusted.

"Are you quite positive I have to sit that close to him?"

"Yes." Severus leaned back. "Go serve yourself before Weasley takes it all."

"Oy, there’s plenty left!” Ron grouched and then lowered his voice. “Git."

Quickly, Harry looked at Severus for his reaction. Minerva sat down beside Albus and did a double-take at Harry’s proximity to Severus, but didn’t say anything. Remus, however, frowned.

"Harry, do you want to come sit next to me?"

"It’s all right, Remy.” Ron plopped down beside him and grinned. "If I move over there, Ron might have to sit beside Snape."

Severus’s expression made it perfectly clear that would be the last thing he’d want. Remus smiled and inclined his head.

"Alright."

When everyone was served and seated, Severus started to stand, but Harry held up his hand. He silently made up their plates, making sure there was more than enough cranberry sauce on Severus’s plate, and placed their plates on the table. Filius, Remus, Albus, and Minerva were chatting happily at the end of the table while Ron and Molly eagerly discussed baby Rose. Harry smiled at everyone, including Severus (yes, it earned him another glare), and then eagerly dug into his food.

"Harry, why did you… erm, never mind."

Harry looked at Hermione and tilted his head. What had he done this time? He wasn’t doing anything out of the ordinary, was he? Severus seemed as bewildered by her question.

"What’d I do?"

"Nothing," Hermione quickly assured him. "Never mind. This is great."

"Thanks. I think."

He was distracted from everyone’s murmured approvals by the look on Draco’s face. He froze, his fork halfway to his mouth, and stared back. Draco briefly glanced at Severus before looking down at his own food and arching a brow.

"Potter, have you forgotten how to eat? Perhaps the youngest Mrs. Weasley can aid you in your endeavor."

Harry ignored the few angry mutterings coming from down the table and sipped his drink slowly enough to annoy Severus.

"I was just thinking,” he finally said.

"I believe we’ve discussed this before, but you tend to drift off at the most unusual times."

"What sort of times?” Draco asked curiously. Thankfully, his voice was pitched low enough that only a few could hear him.
“Yeah,” Ron added. “When?”

“Moments such as this, Weasley,” Severus replied dryly. “Or with his head in the oven.”

Molly and Minerva gasped, giving him horrified looks, and Harry glared darkly at his fork.

“I didn’t actually put my head in the oven, guys. I was only pulling a casserole out and thought of something I wanted to remember. Snape is purposefully making it sound worse than it was.” Harry dropped his voice and faced Severus. “Are you going to bring up the cutting incident next? I mean, what the hell are you doing? Don’t make me angry, Snape. I know you won’t like it.”

“Would you like me to bring it up, boy? After all, they should know what happened.” Severus paused. “And I’ll deal with whatever you choose to do to me later. You’re the only one who seems to dislike toast and I have slept on the couch before.”

“So you’d be alright with sleeping on the couch night after night?” Harry challenged. “Do you really think we need to go down that road? I mean, what happens every time your knee acts up? What do I have to do to you?”

“Something entirely unnecessary and inappropriate.”

“What?” Ron asked loudly.

“Stop it, Snape.”

“Severus? Harry?” Severus and Harry looked away from each other and studied the surprised looks on everyone’s face. Albus frowned and continued. “My dear boy… what was that you just said?”

Harry groaned and smacked his head down onto the table. “Nothing.”

***

While flipping pancakes with one hand, Harry slowly sipped his orange juice and blinked tiredly. They both hadn’t slept well last night. Severus had been up drinking late and Harry found it hard to sleep without anyone else in the room. At the table, Severus turned another page in his book and glanced up when Harry cursed.

“You touched the pan again, didn’t you?”

“The pan’s doing it on its own, sir. I keep trying to avoid it.”

“Honestly,” Severus huffed. “How the devil are you still in one piece?”

“If the whole world would stop trying to kill or harm me, I wouldn’t have anything to worry about.” Harry slowly twisted around in the ensuing silence and blushed at the way the corners of Severus’s lips were just barely curled up. “Okay, yeah, I know that sounded bad. You know what I mean, right?”

“Paranoia, Mr. Potter?”

“I’m not… Urgh! Sausage or bacon?”

“Subtle… and bacon.”

Harry nodded, pulled some bacon slices from the fridge, and threw them into another frying pan. “I’m glad we got to see everyone last night.”
“Isn’t constantly craving small talk a rather feminine trait? You play the housewife, boy, but the
gods made you a male for a reason. Being in the same room with you might be somewhat
enjoyable if you just don’t do that.”

“Guys like to talk, too, sir. You’re just saying that stuff because you want to assert your dominance
or whatever. You know, like shut me up as quickly as possible by being the big bad boy.”

“Firstly, I am not trying to assert any dominance. One could merely cursorily survey us and know
which a dominant male is and which… leans towards submission, obedience if you will. Secondly,
I am not a boy; I am a man. I haven’t been a boy in many, many years. I was attempting, though
Merlin only knows why, to salvage what little dignity you have left by suggesting you change the
subject. Moreover, if I had wanted to shut you up, I would have done so. Where did you even hear
such a ridiculous thing?”

“Hermione.”

Severus merely stared at him a moment before saying, “Are you one-hundred percent positive your
relationship with her is platonic? The more I hear from you about this child, the more I believe
you’re lying to me.”

“She’s my friend, she’s married, and I’m not interested in her, sir. We’re friends… just friends. It’s
like you and McGonagall, you see?”

Severus flinched. “Now I’m seeing images I would have rather died before ever seeing. Thank you,
brat.”

“Um, wha- Oh, my God! Now I am, too!” Harry furiously rubbed his temples in an effort to dispel
the images (didn’t work) and squinted at Severus. “Why did you even say that?”

“You’re the one who started it.”

“And like any other male in the universe, you immediately blame it on the wife… Well, me in this
case.” Harry froze and abruptly grinned. “Doesn’t that also mean I’m right?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Two universal truths: a man will always blame someone else if he’s wrong and a woman is
always right, even if a man is positive he’s right.”

“Potter, when was the last time you touched yourself intimately?”

Turning to fully face Severus, Harry ignored their food and gave him a look, completely shocked
Severus would ask such a personal question.

“What the bloody hell does that have to do with anything?”

“Simple. I’m trying to ascertain if your penis has magically transformed or if you’ve simply
forgotten you’re a male.”

Oh, jeez. Harry rolled his eyes. “I’m a guy, Snape. I know that and so do you. I was just saying…”

“That you frequently act like my wife instead of the male student I was forced into captivity with? I
see where you’re going with this.”

“I wasn’t going to say it like that.”
The git.

“I’m sure I was close enough.”

“You’re impossible.”

“Hmm. I take great pleasure in your analysis of my conduct.”

Harry huffed, prepared two plates of food, and carried them to the table. He carelessly slid Severus’s towards him and set about doctoring his breakfast. Syrup on the pancakes, crumbled bacon on the scrambled eggs, and… where was his coffee? He knew he’d made a cup after finishing his orange juice. Didn’t he? Before he could move, Severus set a cup of coffee at his elbow and returned to his seat.

“Thanks.”

“Humph.”

He almost snorted. Severus was acting like he’d been gravely insulted. Poor baby.

“I appreciate your sacrifice. Making a cup of coffee is difficult, I know.”

“Shut up, Potter.”

Gods, that man was ridiculous. “Any plans for today?”

“What have I been doing for the last eleven months?”

“Reading books, snarking at me, eating my food, complaining about everything, and being grumpy.”

“You forgot being patient with ‘your showers’ every day, suffering your abrupt hormonal fits, and being forced to interact with you when you’re being needy. Merlin, Potter, you really are a woman, aren’t you?”

“That’s not funny.”

Severus smirked. “I found it entertaining.”

“You would.”

They spent the rest of breakfast in silence. When it was over, Harry refreshed their coffees and walked into the living room. Severus, already seated on the couch, accepted his mug without comment. Harry took up residence on the opposite end of the couch and opened the book Hermione had brought him during their visit. He was glad she remembered he’d asked for one in his last letter. He found it highly amusing and hoped Severus would eventually notice it, maybe even-

“Potter, nooo.”

“Sir?” Harry looked up, already grinning. Severus covered his face with both hands and sounded like he was trying not to chuckle.

“Please tell me that’s not a dictionary.”

“Oh, this old thing? Why, yes, it would appear to be.”
“Idiot.” Dear gods, that had sounded almost affectionate! Harry marveled at the man’s tone. “Don’t let me distract you. Enrich yourself. Perhaps one day you may even be able to have an intelligent conversation with one of your equals. That would be… what?… a rock, right?”

“Uproarious, sir.”

“Congratulations on your newest word, boy. I wish I could say I’m proud, but alas…”

“Yeah, yeah. It would devastate your reputation.”
“Is there any particular reason you’ve made so much food?”

“It’s our anniversary, sir.” Severus’s lip curled and Harry rolled his eyes. “No, I’m not being weird. We’ve been here a year and I got depressed so I cooked.”

“Oh. I see.” Severus sighed. “Has it been a year already?”

“Yeah.”

“Potter, what is this?”

“Cherry cobbler, sir. You do like cherry cobbler, right?”

Of course he does. For once, he wanted to thank Draco. That snarky note he got the other day was actually good for something.

“It’s not often I find a cobbler worth noting. I doubt yours is any different.”

Harry smirked. “We’ll see. How about dinner first? Don’t the mashed potatoes look super buttery tonight?”

“I don’t like your cooking.”

“And doesn’t this roast look moist and smell amazing? I slaved away on it. I didn’t want it to taste bad, you know.”

“Wasted effort,” Severus said and sniffed disdainfully. Harry decided not to point out that he’d been sniffing a little too close to the cobbler for that sniff to bother him.

“Oh, and what about the corn, sir? It’s sweet, just like you like it.”

“It’s corn no matter how you prepare it, Potter.”

“Oh! I almost forgot your presents!”

Severus looked confused and blindly accepted the plate Harry held out. “How on earth did you procure me a gift… and why?”

“I asked Dumbledore to pick it up for me back in February and to charge it to my account. I sent a note to take with him just in case.” Harry scooped two presents off of the counter and thrust them towards Severus. “They were for your birthday, but they took forever to be finished and then Dumbledore wouldn’t send them. He insisted he personally bring them.”

“That solves the mystery of the packages he arrived with during everyone’s visit.”

“Yup. Open them.” Grimacing, Severus took the gift and held it out like he expected the package to explode. Harry sat down across from him and smiled eagerly. “Come on.”

“Should I be worried?”

“No. Dumbledore picked them up, remember? Open them!” Once the smaller package was open, Severus merely stared inside the box. When his brow arched up, Harry leaned forward worriedly.
“So?”

“You bought me protective gloves?”

“Yeah. I’ve never seen you brew, but I figured you must wear something when you do, sir. I hope you like them. They’re graphorn hide. The guy I was writing to said they’re tougher than dragon’s hide and repels a lot of spells. Guess if you didn’t need them for brewing, you could just wear them for whatever.”

“Indeed.” Severus lifted them out of the box and studied them carefully. “They appear to be well-made. Who was this man you were conversing with?”

“She told me about him in one of her letters. Well, it was more like a small note from Malfoy, but still. Dumbledore assured me he knew him and that I could trust him. Some guy named Marcus Able. He’s apparently the cousin of the owner of Borgin and Burkes.”

“I know Able. How did you manage to convince him to make these for you?”

“I explained they were for someone who would benefit from the use of them. He didn’t ask any questions. He only said he could make them, he wouldn’t charge me full price because of who I am, and he would even add a few more protective details.”

“You bought these for a lowered price? My, I’m a lucky man. The boy I’m sworn to give my life for if needed gave me cheap gloves.”

“I did not!” Harry responded loudly. “I requested he still add the extra protections, but paid the price every other person would have to pay. I don’t like taking advantage of people just because I’m Harry Potter. I’ve never liked having people give me things. I didn’t do anything to deserve it.”

“You’re actually telling me the truth.” Severus looked surprised, which was insulting. “I suppose I must apologize.”

“Accepted. Open the other one now. You’ll like it, I promise.”

This time, Severus opened the package much faster than the previous gift. He looked up at Harry incredulously.

“You must be joking, Potter.”

“Why? I thought it looked nice.”

“It’s a leather-lined cloak. Merlin, I’m already imagining the expense… What hide was used?”

“Leather is nice, sir, and this one is tastefully made. Dumbledore even liked it. He considered getting one of his own, though I couldn’t really see him using it. I mean, it’s black. It isn’t any shorter than your other cloak- I checked- so it shouldn’t be that big of a deal.”

He was rambling. He knew he was rambling. He only managed to stop said rambling by slapping both hands over his mouth. Severus sucked in a deep breath, most likely to calm himself.

“What type of hide was used, boy?”

“Erm, graphorn.”

“Grap-” Severus’s eyes opened wide and the box hit the table. “Are you out of your mind?”
Graphorn hide is much too bloody expensive to waste your money on! Gloves, okay, but a cloak? What were you thinking?"

“That you’d like it and I have more than enough money to waste? It’s a nice cloak and it’s tougher than dragon’s hide so it would take a lot to hurt you while wearing it. It also has added protections to keep the brunt of most spells and curses from hitting you. I thought you’d appreciate it, if nothing else.”

For a few long minutes, Severus kneaded the bridge of his nose while shaking his head. Harry pushed his food around and kept peeking at him in an effort to figure out what he was thinking. He hoped it was good.

“You are an idiot, Potter. Do you truly understand how much something like this costs?”

“Yeah. I saw the receipt when it arrived. I burned it, though.”

“Knowing a purchase of this value, you still wish for me to keep this? It’s much too expensive.”

“I wouldn’t have given it to you if I didn’t want you to keep it. I mean, when we get out of here, I’m almost positive Dumbledore’s going to make sure you continue protecting me, probably even when I have to face that bastard. You’ll be too worried making sure I stay alive long enough to find him, you might be caught off guard. That’s where the cloak comes into play. Hopefully it’ll help you.”

“I must say I’m astounded you would care.”

Brows furrowed, Harry asked, “Why wouldn’t I?”

Severus met his gaze; Harry was hard-pressed to describe the look Severus gave him. Several seconds passed during which time Severus studied him before he finally looked down at his new cloak and Harry found he could breathe again.

“Perhaps I should have said I’m astounded you would care enough to spend the many, many, many galleons you did on this.” Severus poked the gift box in front of him. “It was assuredly enough to have been used as a down payment on a new home.”

“I wouldn’t know, sir.”

Severus ran two of his fingers along the silky, black fabric on the outside of the cloak and finally hummed. He again met Harry’s gaze and nodded.

“It is a satisfactory gift. I will endeavor to keep it in one piece. Would that satisfy you?”

“Yes, it would.”

After that, the two slipped into silence. They both slowly ate their meal, lost in their own thoughts. Harry was glad Severus liked his gifts. Also, if he caught Severus eyeing the cobbler one more time, he might actually break a rib from keeping his laughter inside. He’d used his mother’s old recipe for cobbler. It had been one of the very few things Remus had been able to remember about her, probably because it was such an exceptional recipe. He’d already had a small slice from the second cobbler he’d hidden in the fridge. All the time he’d spent cooking the thing had better be worth it, too. He liked it, yes, but it wouldn’t mean much if Severus didn’t like it, too. It would hurt worse, because it had been his mum’s recipe. Sighing, Harry saw Severus look at the cobbler yet again and his sigh morphed into amused laughter.
“What seems to be the problem?”

“Nothing, sir. If you’re done, I’ll take your dishes and get you some coffee while you start on that cobbler. Only if you’re finished eating, though. I wouldn’t want to rush you.”

“I’m finished.” Harry nodded, hurried to get them both coffee, placed both cups on the table, and returned with only one plate and fork. Severus eyed them and arched a brow. “Have you forgotten something, Potter?”

“No, I don’t want any. I’m too full right now. Looks like that’s all for you, sir.”

“Is it poisoned?”

“You’re the potions master. You tell me.”

“Hmm. Nothing that I can note. I still want to see you try a bite, just to make sure you’ve not added anything undetectable.”

“Why would I poison the cobbler, sir?” Harry sipped his coffee and looked at Severus over the rim of the glass. “Frankly, it would ruin the cobbler and I don’t want you to die.”

“A bite, Potter.”

Severus held out his fork, a large bite of cobbler already balancing on the tines. Harry rolled his eyes, grabbed Severus’s fork, and put the whole mound of cobbler in his mouth. He handed the fork back, chewed, and swallowed. After taking a large swig of coffee, he opened his mouth to show Severus he had indeed swallowed it all and wasn’t just cheeking it. Severus nodded and proceeded to eat the slice of cobbler on his plate. Harry watched him closely.

“And?”

“It isn’t dreadful,” Severus replied, his eyes glued to the bite of cobbler he was chasing around his plate.

“Do you like it?”

“I could perhaps stomach some more of this, but I doubt I could do much more than maybe another slice.”

Harry snorted. “So I should throw away the other cobbler in the fridge?”

Wait a second. That wasn’t even an insult. Holy shite! Severus’s head quickly lifted. He set his fork down with a loud clack and narrowed his eyes. Harry met his gaze and smiled widely.

“There’s another one in the fridge?”

“Well, yeah. I didn’t know how much you’d want of that tonight and I figured I’d better make another so we have something to snack on for a few days.”

“Hmm. Forethought isn’t one trait I thought you possessed. I’m vaguely impressed.”

When Severus had finished and Harry had cleaned up the kitchen, they both headed into the living room with cups of hot coffee. Curling up on the couch, Harry started reading a book he’d borrowed from Hermione. When Severus hissed quietly and stretched out his stiff leg, Harry held up his wand and silently summoned the vial of pain reliever still on top of the desk. He’d known Severus would need it. He handed it to him without looking up from his book once.
“I told you reading at the desk would be a bad idea.”

“I have never listened to you before. I wasn’t going to do it, then.”

Harry still hadn’t looked up from his book. “You listen to me all the time. Take your potion and quit whining. You remind me of Lavender when you do that and it’s just wrong.”

“I should wash your mouth out with soap, you insolent little monster. Never compare me to Brown again unless you want me to kill you slowly.”

Severus pushed out an irritated huff of breath at Harry’s continued silence and swallowed a bit of potion. While still blindly staring at his book, Harry wondered how often Severus needed that very potion before coming here. True, it wasn’t often he needed it, but still… his knee was really messed up. Harry finally looked at him.

“Sir?”

“What?”

Snappy arsehole. “How did you hurt your knee?”

“The first war. Surely I’ve told you that.”

“I mean, what happened to it?”

“Why do you keep asking me questions like this? It’s irritating.”

“I’m playing the bored housewife, remember? I’m supposed to push for details. It’s what you expect.”

“What I expect from you and what I desire most are two completely different things.”

Man, same thing here. Wait, no, what? Harry shook his head to get rid of that thought. It had no place in this conversation.

“Please?”

“Groveling will get you nowhere.”

Wanna bet? Harry shook his head, wondering why the hell he’d thought that, too.

“Would the headmaster know? I could write him.”

“He doesn’t know the full circumstances. I have never told him and he would never believe me even if I did.”

“I’ll tell you something if you tell me.”

“I would rather pierce my eardrums with a rusty ice pick.”

Harry slouched and then quickly sat back up. Severus eyed him suspiciously and closed his book.

“I promise I won’t tell you anything if you tell me.”

“I have a better compromise.”

“What?”
“If I tell you this, you are forbidden from asking any more personal questions of me for at least a month.”

“Deal. What is it?”

“During the first war, I was subtly undermining a duel between Minerva and Bellatrix. I had just diverted a curse of Bellatrix’s own making, a vicious one that would have decimated Minerva’s skeletal frame, when your dogfather blasted me with a curse that shattered my knee. His aim was always laughable at best. He was aiming for my ribs, which I needn’t necessarily point out would have pierced my lungs and my heart. Poppy completely repaired it, but it was never the same, as you well know. Satisfied?”

Harry shivered. Sirius had done that and all Severus had been doing was trying to save Minerva! He felt sick to his stomach and had to remind himself that Sirius never truly trusted Severus. It didn’t excuse him, though.

“Yeah. Well, not because of your… You know what I meant.”

“Barely. Shouldn’t you be doing something? Reading, perhaps?”

“I don’t know that I can anymore. He could have killed you, sir.”

“He didn’t.”

Harry just stared.

***

“You’ve a letter,” Severus called through the bathroom door. Harry quickly flushed, washed up, and exited. “Two, actually.”

“It’s about time. We haven’t heard from anybody since they visited. Do you think it’s Dumbledore telling us we can leave?”

Severus looked up from his letter. “I doubt your letter will say anything of the sort if it is like mine.”

Harry frowned grumpily and settled behind the desk to read.

Hey, mate!

We were just writing to see how you liked your new toy! If you haven’t used it yet, we’re both terribly insulted you didn’t like our gift. It’s not like a Muggle toy, you know. Not that we’ve ever seen one, but we’ve heard things. When you get this one in place, it takes the shape of the man you’re fantasizing about. Come on and use it already! It cost us a small fortune, but it’s the least we could do for our business partner and friend.

Let us know what you think of it. We also want to know who you thought about while going at it!

I’m telling Mum you wrote that, George.

Shut it, arse, or I’ll tell Harry about

Anyway, we love you! Be a good boy and use your toy!
Don’t forget the silencing charm!!!

Fred

George

Harry’s brows rose. Good Merlin. Who knew Fred and George would be so persistent about him using a toy, a toy they knew he would shove up his arse? Sometimes he wondered about those two. He folded their letter up into a small square, pushed it deep into a pocket of his denims, and opened his other letter.

My dear boy,

I know I have said it once before, but you have just a few more months to go.

“How many times is he going to say that?” Harry groused. “It seems like that’s all he ever says when he writes. ‘Just a few more months.’”

“Mmm.”

Voldemort’s followers have again recently come out of hiding. We’ve received information from a reliable source that says a series of attacks are planned so we have devised our counterattacks accordingly. It won’t be too much longer before you can come home.

On a lighter note, I must say I thoroughly enjoyed our impromptu dinner party. Already I miss your cherry chocolate cake. I might wish to request such a delight for my next birthday. I am beyond thrilled you’re doing well, Harry, but is Severus being pleasant enough? I sadly admit, fool that I am, that I had high hopes you two would be able to come to some accordance, but it appears nothing has changed. It is devastating. I apologize for continuing to keep you there, but it is for the best.

We all send our love and regards.

Albus Dumbledore

Albus couldn’t tell everything had changed between them? Harry honestly didn’t know what to make of that… well, he guessed he could see it. A little, but not much. He didn’t know exactly when or how it had, but everything was different now. Completely. Obviously.

The professor he’d come here with a year ago would have killed him on the spot if he’d asked about frotting or frottage or whatever its name was. Merlin help him if he’d ever consider asking that professor about licking someone’s arse. He wouldn’t have survived. This one hadn’t even batted an eyelash… even when his eyes had been opened in… in incredulity.

Thank you, dictionary.
No, things had changed. Why couldn’t anyone else see it? He’d called Severus a pervert in front of everyone, for God’s sake, and had survived. Yeah, Severus hadn’t even noticed it at the time. He’d merely turned the tables and accused him of perversion instead! Harry snickered and looked up. Severus was staring at him like he didn’t even know who he was.

“Sir? Is everything all right?”

“I am so ashamed.”

“What have I done now?”

Severus shook his head, his eyes closed. “Not you, boy. For once, I am ashamed of myself.”

“Why? What did you do?”

“I will quote it, for it is written here word-for-word. It is something I remember saying.” Severus held up his own letter. “‘Weasley, if you do not let him go this instant, I will ensure you lose both of your arms within the next twenty seconds. What the hell did you think you were doing? Did you not spare a moment to consider he’d be terrified to be grabbed like that when he just saw me walk into the kitchen?’”

“I never thanked you for that, you know. What’s wrong with it? Did you use the wrong word or something?”

“No, you idiot. It essentially sounded like I cared if you’d be terrified or not.” Severus tossed the letter onto the coffee table and ignored Harry’s quiet laughter. “I am disgusted. Appalled. No! Revolted that someone could have misconstrued my words.”

“Don’t you think you’re being a little dramatic, sir? It wasn’t that bad. I bet no one even remembers it… and if they do, their first thought wouldn’t be close to ‘oh, I bet he cares about Harry’ or anything. They all know how it is with us.”

“Do they, Potter? Do they really know or have my words mangled their once appropriate thoughts?”

“You really need to calm down. You’re sounding as crazy as I do sometimes.”

“Good Merlin, now I’m turning into the blasted boy. This is dreadful. I might as well kill myself now.” Severus gave Harry an exasperated look. “Merlin help me.”


“I’m a Snape, brat. I wouldn’t allow myself to seriously consider it for longer than a minute at most. Stop being so ludicrous.”

“Comforting.”

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“I’m not sure about this.”

“What is the problem now, boy?”

Harry eyed the desk apprehensively and pointed at the small cauldron and pile of potions ingredients to one corner. Severus furrowed his brows, came to stand next to Harry, and studied the things for a moment.
“You’re brewing a potion.” Severus glanced down at him. "Why?"

“I got bored and thought I might try. Maybe it’ll be different than when I was in school, you know.”

“What exactly is the problem? I still don’t understand.”

“Well, what if I blow the place up?”

Severus pulled his hand back to his chest after having almost smacked the back of Harry’s head. “Need I remind you that you’re currently cohabiting with the same man who taught you this very subject for years? I will notice if you’re making any mistakes.”

Cohabiting. Yeah, he knew they’d been living together this entire time and it was all innocent, but didn’t the word cohabiting have certain… connotations to it? Harry felt that same weird swoopy feeling he sometimes gets when he’s cooking dinner or folding Severus’s laundry.

Cohabiting. Ooh, there it was again.

“I guess,” Harry said at last. “Uh, but what if I do something wrong and you just so happen not to be paying attention right that very second?”

“Based upon the selection of ingredients you have laid out, there are only three potions you would be able to brew and none of them can be messed up enough to cause any sort of explosion, even if you start salivating into the cauldron or unknowingly drop a hair.”

“Are you sure?”

“You’re beginning to remind me of Longbottom again.” Severus held out his hand and clutched the book that smacked into his palm moments later. “You remember my idiot-proof guide to potions? You claimed you learned some things from it and now is your chance to put your knowledge to the test. Get to work.”

Harry took the book and flipped to the section on cutting, etc. He wanted to make sure he didn’t mess it up. For some reason, it was important he brew this potion right. Harry peeked down at the instructions for the potion and skimmed through it. Okay, he had to dice first, mash instead of grind, and then he had to thickly chop…

“What’s a Fortuna Draught?”

“A more advanced version of Felix Felicis. The ancient version, you would say.”

“Oh, yeah. It says that here. Sorry.”

Again, Harry checked his book and started preparing each ingredient the way he was supposed to.

“It might help you to clear the desktop and sanitize it. You wouldn’t want to contaminate your potion before you’ve even started, would you?”

How did he even know what he was doing? Severus wasn’t even looking at him! He had a point, though.

“Good idea.”

Severus’s suggestion taken, Harry started working once more. He was at the point where the potion would only need continuous stirring for five minutes to finish when he felt Severus standing
behind him.

“You’re stirring too fast. Slow down a bit.” Harry slowed his hand and continued watching the potion. It was gently bubbling, just as it should be. “Slower, Potter. This is a delicate potion, not a bowl of cream needing thickened.”

“You don’t even know how to thicken cream, sir. Are you sure?”

“Potter, do you remember the ice cream you made this past Halloween? You kept saying you had to stir it in such a way for some reason I didn’t care to listen to.”

He knew Severus hadn’t been listening to him! How often did he do that?

“Yeah. Why?”

“Think of this potion as your ice cream. In fact, the pace should be the same, if I remember correctly. Would you want to stir your ice cream as you are stirring now?”

Harry’s movements immediately slowed, becoming smoother. “No, it’d make it too thick.”

“Precisely.”

“So now I’m doing it right?”

“I’m not surprised you cannot recognize it, but you are indeed.”

“Cool. It’s kind of fun, you know?”

“Whatever happened to reading your dictionary? Did nothing stick in your inferior little brain, boy? Speak right.”

Harry screwed up his face and bit his lip a moment, thinking hard. Severus crossed his arms and waited for the translation.

“What I meant to say, sir, is this engrossing discourse and your stimulating new teaching method has had some unexpectedly gratifying results. I find myself being riveted in a way I would never have foreseen. I am frankly intrigued and desperately hope my arduous endeavors will have effectuated an unadulterated potion even you could not contemn or decry as inadequate.” Harry briefly grinned at his potion and then faced Severus. “This is cool and kind of fun.”

“Do you not feel better about yourself now?” Severus paused, pushing out a sharp breath. “I suppose I am impressed by your word choices.”

“Thanks, sir.”

Severus leaned over Harry’s shoulder to check on the potion’s progress and nodded. Harry focused once more on his task— as well as he could, anyway— and kept reminding himself to treat it like his ice cream. Right as he was finishing, Severus let out a derisive snort.

“You’ve been holding onto your new words for a while now, haven’t you?”

Harry flushed and refused to turn. “No.”

“I can tell you have.”

“Why do you think so? And why would I do anything like that?”
“I’ve truly no idea, but your words sounded almost rehearsed. Did you use all of your brain capacity keeping those words in mind, Potter?”

“No, I didn’t,” Harry immediately argued and then grimaced when Severus smirked victoriously. How did that infuriating man always just know? “Fine. Yes, I was remembering them.”

“Strain yourself overly much?”

“I’ll say yes, because it’s what you expect.”

“Don’t be so sure. I’m positive I’ve told you this before, Potter, but what I expect from you and what I desire are two radically different things,” Severus said thoughtfully and Harry looked puzzled. Severus abruptly stepped back and cleared his throat. “Your potion has been completed satisfactorily and the safe house is still standing in one piece. Congratulations would be in order had you not just finished your seventh year of schooling.”

“I’d probably die of shock, anyway, so I’m glad you’re not doing anything like that.”

“Brat.”

Harry shrugged. “It’s my job.”

“Speaking of your various jobs, when were you planning to feed me more of your toxicant filth?”

“Are you hungry now or can you wait another hour?” Harry snickered at Severus’s noncommittal grunt and then blinked a few times when he heard a quiet rumbling. “Was that your stomach or you growling?”

“I would say it was some part of my anatomy, since it doesn’t appear to have come from you.”

“I’ll go make something quick. Is spaghetti good or should I make something faster?”

“Prepare whatever you wish,” Severus grumbled and then his voice became almost inaudible. “I’m sure Rubeus’s death cakes are still around here somewhere…”

Harry laughed. “Sandwiches and leftover potato salad sound better?”

“Marginally.”

A grin was still playing along Harry’s lips when he called Severus to dinner ten minutes later.

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Oh, dear merciful Lord… Harry couldn’t look away. It was such an unexpected sight to see, he doubted he’d be able to stop staring unless forced by some unnatural event.

Severus had an erection. A big one.

It’s a good thing he was still asleep. If he were awake and saw Harry staring, Harry would so be dead. Man, he felt so immature, but it couldn’t be helped! He honestly had only half-considered Severus and his sex-life maybe once or twice. Well, more if he were being totally honest with himself, but still… There’s a difference between seeing an erection in all its untouched glory and an erection disappearing into a man’s hand repeatedly. This… gave a more accurate picture of-

“Is there a specific reason you are currently ogling me?” Harry’s eyes darted up to Severus’s face right as the man opened his eyes. “It isn’t a holiday or anything of the sort so I don’t know why
you felt the need to wake me like this.”

“Sorry. I was, um, thinking about stuff and I guess I just focused on you.”

Severus cocked a brow, turned his back on Harry, and went still once more. A moment later, he spoke. “When you finally drag your arse out of bed, you might consider doing your homework.”

*Homework?* Harry smiled. “Sir, I’m not in school anymore.”

“Ah, that’s right,” Severus grumbled. “Then go learn something you didn’t… already… know.”

“Okay.”

Severus must still be mostly asleep. Had he been dreaming about Harry’s school days or perhaps the schoolwork he’d been sent after coming to the safe house?

“You’re still staring.”

“Oh, sorry.” Did he have eyes in the back of his head? “Erm, I’ll make breakfast when you’re up.”

“Pancakes.”

Harry’s smile morphed to a silly grin.
He’d been up for hours, but it felt like days. Gods, his feet ached. Harry wiped flour from his face, unknowingly smudging even more on him in the process, and glanced at the clock. Merlin, it was a little after nine in the morning! Why hadn’t Severus gotten up yet? Harry quickly washed his hands off, dried them on the towel he swapped from the counter, and trotted out of the kitchen. Pssh. The man had the gall to accuse him of being lazy! Yeah, right.

Harry was confused when he didn’t find Severus in bed, because he hadn’t heard him get up. Pausing outside the bathroom door, Harry listened for any noise at all and pushed the door open when he heard nothing. He tried to tell himself he wasn’t disappointed when Severus wasn’t in the shower and that the slight panic he was feeling was ridiculous. Severus was probably just digging around in their bedroom closet. Harry forced himself to calmly walk back to the bedroom and head into the closet.

Nothing.

Okay, so he was definitely beginning to panic. Maybe he’d just missed him when he walked through the living room. Harry practically ran to the living room and stopped. His heart was beating erratically now. Was he in the kitchen, then?

Erm, no.

After two more complete searches of their small home area, Harry mutely collapsed on the couch. Severus wasn’t there at all. What had happened to him? His wand and outer robe was gone, but everything else was still there. Had Voldemort summoned him somehow? Was Severus hurt? Dear God… Was he dead? What had happened? How did he leave? Did Albus know? Of course he did. How could he not know Severus was gone? And why the hell wasn’t Albus here helping him right now? Harry shook in terror and shot to his feet. First, he needed to turn off the oven and stovetop. After that, he was going to write Albus a letter and demand he come or he was going to find a way to leave and then where would the world be?

Harry’s breath was coming in short gasps as he hurried to the kitchen to turn everything off. If he had actually been able to sleep last night, maybe he would’ve been around to hear Severus’s leaving. Okay, letter next. Harry hurried back to the living room, still wearing his apron, and froze when he saw Albus and Severus stepping out of the floo. Disregarding how ridiculous he probably looked for doing this, Harry threw himself at Severus and held tight.

“I thought you’d somehow been summoned by that arsehole, because I couldn’t find you and I searched everywhere, but you weren’t here and—”

“Potter, you moron, I left a note. It’s still on your desk. I can see it from here.”

Harry pulled away from Severus and looked at the desk. He scowled at it and then Severus, but paused when he spied the copious amount of flour and batter now marring the front of Severus’s black robe. He wiped his hand down his cheek and seemed confused by the flour that came off on his hand. Albus laughed, pulling his attention away from his hand.

“This is indeed wonderful, Severus. I’m glad you two have managed to bury your hatred. However you did it, and believe me when I say I don’t need to know the details, I’m pleased. Allow me to congratulate your relationship’s new development.”
“You perverted old codger,” Severus muttered and magically removed the mess from himself. “Potter, I suggest you go take a shower. Albus and I will be in the kitchen. I haven’t eaten yet and I can survive without, but I’m sure he’ll want to eat something.”

“I’ll be just a few minutes,” Harry called back, already closing the bathroom door. “Help yourself to the coffee.”

Five minutes later, after the fastest shower he’d ever had, Harry breathlessly paused before the kitchen door. His panic finally being tamped down just moments before, Harry found it easier to breathe. He wondered what Severus had written him. He’d read that note later. For now, he had breakfast to serve. Harry pocketed the note, smoothed down his unruly hair, and entered the kitchen with a smile. Albus and Severus both looked up at him upon his entry. Albus was smiling amiably, but Severus looked irritated.

“You hair, as usual, looks appalling.”

“Now Severus-”

“Are you hungry, Headmaster?” Harry interrupted. “I made plenty.”

“How early were you up, boy?”

“Five-thirty.”

“Why?”

“I am a bit hungry, yes, Harry. I would appreciate a little something if you wouldn’t mind.”

“I wanted to cook, sir. Coming right up, Professor.”

“It’s taken you this long to realize we were gone? It’s half past ten. I’ve been gone since six.”

Harry handed Albus a plate piled high with food and gave him a happy smile. When he shoved a plate at Severus, he scowled darkly. Severus returned it evenly. Albus tucked into his food, staring at the two avidly.

“I realized you were gone at nine. Sir. I had no way of knowing you’d left a note. You weren’t sitting at the desk so I didn’t walk up to it. I was too busy imagining you being tortured to death. In case you were wondering, I had a great morning. Thanks for asking.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Harry saw Albus look to Severus. He would have snorted if he wasn’t so irritated.

“Potter, you’re being ridiculous. How would the Dark Lord have summoned me from this place and do you really think I couldn’t hold my own against that monster if I were? You really think I’d go so easily? You’re delusional.” Severus sipped his coffee and huffed. Albus looked between him and Harry. “And I have never asked you how your morning has gone. Why would I start now?”

“I was worried about you! Merlin only knows why. Bloody hell, Snape, I searched the entire place and you weren’t here. You could be at least a little understanding, you know? Do you even care about how I felt?”

“Hardly, boy. You’re irrational at the best of times, but now you’ve more than eclipsed that. What is wrong with you?”
“I was freaking out! What would you do if you realized I wasn’t here and you didn’t have any idea where or when I’d gone? Huh?”

“I would have searched for a note of explanation, though you doubtless would have forgotten to write one.”

“And that’s another thing! Why didn’t you just come tell me you were leaving? Why take the time to write a note when you knew I was in the kitchen? It would have been much easier to just walk in and say ‘hey, brat, I’m leaving.’ But no… you left a bloody note.”

“If I had walked into the kitchen and said ‘hey, brat, I’m leaving,’ you would have had a panic attack and begged me to stay. It was easier, believe me, to write a note.”

“I would not have! I would have asked where you’re going and when you’re coming back. You’re making me sound like a fucking woman, Snape.”

Albus, his eyes as wide as they could possibly go, took a sip of the tea Severus had made him and blindly forked some eggs while staring at Harry. The other two didn’t notice this, though, because they had already forgotten he was there.

“I am not making you sound like anything but what you act like. Did you expect me to come in, give you a kiss on the cheek, and soothe your worried mind?” Severus scoffed. “You’re not my wife, Potter. Stop acting like it.”

Albus dropped his fork, but Severus and Harry ignored him. Instead, Harry threw his fork at Severus, who luckily dodged it. Severus’s glare increased ten-fold.

“I never said I was your wife, you bastard! Lord knows you couldn’t attract one. She’d commit suicide in a year!”

“Watch yourself, Potter. I could attract whomever I wanted and I have ways of keeping alive and happy what I deem is mine. Haven’t you gotten enough of accusing me of being unbearable? I’m getting tired of it.”

“If you wouldn’t irritate me so much, you arse, I wouldn’t keep bringing it up.” Harry huffed and pursed his lips while accepting the fork Severus handed him a little more forcefully than needed. “Thank. You.”

“Shut up, you idiot. You’re just having another snit because I didn’t think of you or some bullshit like that. I honestly never know what you’re talking about. I know God gave you the anatomy of a male, but he gave you the heart and mind of a temperamental woman. Why must I be cursed?”

Albus’s head snapped in Harry’s direction. Harry paused in pouring syrup on his pancakes and pulled in a sharp breath.

“Why must you be cursed? Why must you be cursed? The only one who is cursed here is me, sir. I am the one who has to deal with you always acting like you don’t even care about others. I was just worried about you and-”

“Oh, dear Christ on high. If it will get you to shut up, the next time I leave, I swear on my mother’s grave to inform you personally at least two hours before the fact. Twice. No, thrice. Now will you stop screeching at me like an enraged banshee?”

“Yes, I will. That’s all I wanted in the first place. If you’d even thought about me for once, we wouldn’t have had this entire argument, I wouldn’t have been panicking for over an hour, breakfast
wouldn’t have been temporarily turned off, I wouldn’t have yelled at you—” Harry pushed his breath out and got a tight hold on his emotions. “Thank you.”

Severus shook his head. “I didn’t realize it was that time of the month. Should I sleep on the couch, boy?”

“Maybe and I might stop cooking for you if you don’t stop implying I’m a woman, sir. That or I’ll start slipping poisons into your coffee.”

Albus choked on a bite of sausage and Harry and Severus focused on him at long last. Albus waved them off. “No, no. Forget I’m here. Don’t mind me. I’ll be fine. Continue your conversation.”

“No, we were being rude. I’m sorry, sir. Snape just—”

“Do not insult me yet again or I will strangle you slowly regardless of Albus’s presence.”

“I was going to say you just bring out the worst in me, but apparently you also bring out the worst in yourself without any help.” Harry lowered his voice to an irritated huff. “Git.”

“Shut up, brat, and eat your breakfast before it gets any colder.”

Albus looked between the two. “Are you both finished, then?”

“With his ranting? Yes, we are. I don’t know which is worse, his ranting or his singing. They’re equally appalling, Albus.”

Harry narrowed his eyes. “Pity. I was planning on singing to you for your next birthday. A fitting present, right?”

“You do that and I will hex you.”

“He’s violent, Headmaster. Are you sure he should be staying here?”

“Are you purposefully trying to get under my skin, Potter?”

“Why would I do that, sir? Do you want another muffin?”

“He’s also trying to make me fat, Albus. Tell him to stop.”

“My goodness, Severus,” Albus said lightly. “Surely he would listen to you if you’re so opposed to it.”

“No, he won’t.”

Harry laughed and quickly ate his breakfast. He was enjoying the company, but he was still feeling a little shaken from this morning. It still bothered him that Severus had left without telling him what was going on, but he should have expected it. Where had he gone to? What had he done? Harry looked up at Severus furtively. He hadn’t gone to meet up with anyone, had he? Would it have been the first time he’d done it? Harry rubbed his forehead and decided he wasn’t very hungry. He scraped his plate into the waste bin and walked out of the kitchen and to the bathroom.

After he’d flushed the toilet and washed his hands, Harry pulled Severus’s note from his pocket and opened it carefully. He wouldn’t put it past Severus to somehow jinx him with a simple note just to get back at him for some supposed offence he’d committed in the past… well, ever. To his surprise, it wasn’t as short and terse as he expected.
Hey, and no jinxes!

Potter,

It is approaching six o’clock right now. I believe you are in the kitchen, but it is easier for me to write a note. I wouldn’t want to disturb whatever you’re doing in there, because then you would start buzzing around me and I don’t desire a headache this early. Albus and I will be departing in precisely five minutes and will not be returning until after ten at the earliest. I need to purchase a few things and finally blackmailed Albus into freeing me for a few hours. We will be in Diagon Alley, you annoying brat, so don’t worry your little head. You are not obligated to save me any breakfast.

Try not to harm yourself.

S. Snape

Incidentally, you left a mess in the bedroom. Perhaps you could clean up a bit while I am gone.

When Harry returned to the kitchen, he was smiling again. Widely. He directed the smile at Severus, who frowned suspiciously, and then turned it on Albus. Who knew Severus Snape could be downright civil at six in the morning? He was definitely framing that note. Maybe he’d hang it in his bedroom when he had his own house. He silently took Severus’s mug of coffee, doctored it perfectly, and poured more tea into Albus’s cup. He then sat down at the table with his own refreshed coffee.

“So Professor Dumbledore, what are your plans for today?”

“Well, Harry, I had planned to have another Order meeting before the holidays began in earnest and I felt like today would be a wonderful day for it. However, being back with my two favorite boys makes me want to linger a while longer. I hope neither of you mind.”

“Of course we don’t,” Harry replied. “You know, I did have a big lunch planned, too. You could stay for that if you wanted.”

“I would be delighted.”

“I’ve even already made the dessert for lunch so I don’t have too much left to do. Actually, I finished decorating the cake right before I realized someone was missing. It’s in the fridge right now. It has to stay cool or it’ll melt.”

“Oh, and what is this cake?”

“It’s a surprise, sir.” Harry grinned. “Did you two have fun in Diagon Alley?”

“I see you read my message,” Severus noted dryly.

“Short letter,” Harry corrected. “I did, yeah. I remembered it when I was in the bathroom. Did you guys have fun? Were a lot of people there? Anyone we know? Find anything interesting?”

Severus rolled his eyes. “Never, always, possibly, and of course not.”

“Okay… Can I please have the extended version now, Professor Dumbledore?”
“Severus and I enjoyed ourselves immensely. Sadly, Severus had to wear a glamour the entire time, but he did seem like it was entertaining. He was disguised as a sprightly young man of seventy so he didn’t get approached more than once or twice at most. However, I came across quite a number of witches and wizards I hadn’t seen in some time. Why, I found Miss Luna Lovegood and her father almost immediately. They were searching for some odd creature. It was one I had never heard of. And, of course, I ran into Molly and Arthur. They had Rose with them today. You wouldn’t believe it, but Molly does like to talk. I didn’t have the chance to ask about Ronald and Hermione’s little vacation. I ran into Kingsley when Severus ran into some bookstore- you know, that young man probably owns more books than even I do. Perhaps you should ask if he has any interesting ones you can borrow.” Albus took a breath and Harry and Severus shared a look. “Minerva was out today. She and Filius were in the very cauldron shop Severus popped into. Goodness, that reminds me. Severus, did you find that cauldron you mentioned?”

“No.”

“Pity. I’ll have to see if I can look around for it. Back to my story, Harry. We ran into plenty of people, many that you do know. I’m sorry you could not have joined us today, my dear boy. It was enjoyable and Severus did manage to purchase quite a number of things. I don’t even know half of the things he bought, but he shouldn’t need to go shopping for another six or seven months.”

“What all did you need, sir?”

“That is none of your business,” Severus replied in between sips of coffee. “Have you heard enough or should he continue? If you asked, I’m sure he could give you a thorough play-by-play on both of our actions this morning. I’m almost positive he’d even mention the little itch I had on my palm inside Gringotts.”

“That was actually a bit amusing. He just kept scratching it and I told him to stop. He was only making it worse. He finally realized he’d been bitten by a few of the magical punkies that like to hang about the entrance to Gambol and Japes. I’ll be surprised if he doesn’t have some sort of mark from all that scratching. Really, Severus, you do need to trim your nails. They could hurt someone.”

“I could hurt someone, Albus. My nails could not.”

“Wait,” Harry exclaimed suddenly. “You went inside Gambol and Japes?”

“Of course I didn’t, Potter. You’re not stupid enough to believe I would. Why would you even ask that?”

“I don’t know. I guess I just got excited that you might have an actual human side.”

Severus huffed. “Idiot.”

“Young Fred and George would never forgive Severus if he went into another joke shop, anyway, Harry.” Albus chuckled fondly. “No, we had stopped outside Magical Menagerie, but we apparently stood around too long. I can’t think why I wasn’t bitten.”

“Because you’re wearing repellent of some kind. I can smell it on you almost as clearly as I can smell cherries on Potter. Boy, did you make that cherry chocolate cake?”

“You can smell the cherries?”

“Cherry chocolate cake?” Albus asked at the same time.
Severus stared at him a moment before looking back at Harry seriously.

“Did you make that cake?”

Harry giggled most unusually. Severus loved that cake, that was for sure. “Does it matter if I made that cake or not?”

“Yes, it does. No playing around, Potter. Did you?”

“I might have.”

Severus quickly licked his bottom lip. “Did you or didn’t you? I don’t want a might have.”

Harry grinned. “You really want to know, don’t you?”

“Stop toying with me. I’m asking, aren’t I?” Severus paused briefly. “Albus dearly loves that cake. He would be more than pleased for it to be served as dessert.”

“Professor Dumbledore would? Huh. Well, all right.”

“What kind of answer is that?”

“Oh, sorry. Yeah.”

“Yeah what?”

Albus chuckled and Harry grinned much wider. “Yeah as in yeah, I made the cake. If you’d prefer something else, though, I-”

“I’ll eat whatever you lot are having.”

“Well, I’m eating fresh cobbler so…” Severus’s face went slack at that news and Harry took pity on him after a moment. He knew Severus would never be able to choose. “I could just serve both of them to you guys and let you choose whichever you want.”

“I think that sounds excellent,” Albus replied, looking at Severus’s unchanged expression. “Dear boy, is he going to be all right?”

“I don’t know. He’s never done that before.”

“That’s worrying. Severus?”

Severus blinked. “I’m perfectly fine. Quit talking about me.”

Harry snorted and stood up to check on the roast he’d put in the oven earlier that morning. For once, his over-eagerness would pay off.

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“Boy, I nearly forgot.”

“Forgot what? Need a refill?”

“No. Come here.”

Harry doubled back into the living room, figuring his own coffee refill could wait a little, and looked at Severus curiously. When the man started searching through the desk, Harry cocked his
head to the side.

“What are you looking for?”

“I happened to find something for you when Albus and I went out last week. I’d forgotten to give it to you.”

He literally did not know how to react. Severus had thought about him while shopping and then had bought something he’d found?

“What did you find?” he finally settled on. That was a start. “Or is this a mean joke?”

“I am quite serious. Here.” Severus unearthed a package wrapped in brown paper and held it out. Harry quickly walked to him, grabbed it up, and stared at the twine twisted around the box. “Well, open it if you’re going to, Potter. Merlin. It’s not going to bite you.”

Harry carefully unwrapped the package and sucked in a breath. In his hands, feeling much heavier than mere moments before, was *Fertility and Conception: An Inclusive Guide for Male Mothers.* After staring at it for a few long moments, moments that truthfully felt like an eternity, Harry looked up at Severus with what he hoped was a confused expression.

“Sir?”

“I found your handwritten notes in the back of my book when you returned it. This book is a bit more up-to-date and should be more helpful if you ever decide to have your own child.”

A slow smile spread across Harry’s face. “I’d wondered what I did with those notes. This is… this is really great, sir. Thank you so much.”

“Those potions and spells are not meant to be played with,” Severus replied sternly. “They help create life or pave the way for such. They’re not to be used for pranks or anything similar.”

“I know. I’m not going to mistreat any of the information in this book, sir.” Harry almost laughed. Thankfully, he hid it by looking down. “I appreciate this, sir. I’m surprised you thought to buy it.”

“Yes, well, it caught my eye when I was looking for a few books for myself. This isn’t a big deal, boy. Don’t make it one.”

“No, sir. Thank you.”

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“Potter, I know you’re staring at me, but I’m not getting out of this bed for at least another half hour. You will just have to deal with the boredom… and stay away from my sleeping potions. I’m never again wrestling a rousing draught down your throat.”

“Fine. I’ll just go read. You are planning on getting up, right?”

Severus grunted and turned over onto his stomach so Harry grinned lopsidedly and quietly left the bedroom. Breakfast was ready, but it could be kept on the warming charms he’d already thought to cast on everything. He’d known Severus wouldn’t want to get up, but he at least had to try, right?

Settling back down on the couch, he pulled his opened book onto his lap again and picked up where he’d left off. The book Severus had gotten him was more informative than he had first thought. It was a really thoughtful gift. Who knew Severus had it in him?
Harry was lost in his own little world, studying a potion that would regulate the hormones coursing through a pregnant male body while also curing the problems with said hormones making it difficult to get an erection, when he heard Severus tumble out of bed. He paused and carefully listened until he was sure Severus was okay before going back to his reading. It was a good thing he had this book. When he decided to have a baby, he’d need a lot of these potions. He’d never have thought being pregnant would affect his ability to have sex. That didn’t happen to women, too, did it? Maybe he’d ask Hermione.

“Enjoying that book?”

“Yeah. It’s really interesting. Did you know when a guy gets pregnant, the way he has orgasms changes completely?”

“Is that so?”

Harry briefly paused. Had he really just said that to Severus? He shook his head.

“Yeah. It says right here that they’ll be dry and are able to happen much more frequently than usual, though not as quickly as a girl could. How quickly can a girl go again?”

Severus smirked. “Depends, really. Some almost immediately, some not for several long, long minutes.”

“Really? Huh.” Harry shook his head. “There’s a lot of potions in here that I think you’d be interested in, if only because they’re really complicated. This one I was just looking at has a lot of things in it I’ve never even heard of.”

“Such as?”

“Something called Epimedium or however you-”

“Epimedium grandiflorum.” Severus crossed his arms over his chest. “Commonly used to boost libido, create a more impressive erection, and curb involuntary ejaculation. Less commonly used for weak back and knees, joint pain, weak bones, mental and physical fatigue, and memory loss. It is quite a useful plant.”

“You just spouted all of that off without thought, didn’t you? I shouldn’t be surprised. You are a Potions Master, after all. Are you hungry, sir?”

Severus pursed his lips and studied the clock on the wall for a long moment. Harry surreptitiously watched him, finally realizing he’d been staring at the man’s slightly-exposed neck. Harry shook his head—again (seriously)—and managed to meet Severus’s eyes when he looked back at him.

“I don’t know about hungry, but I could try to stomach something at the moment.”

“Good. The food’s been done for a while now.”

Harry stood up and started leading the way to the kitchen. He still had his book in-hand. Huh. He could probably get away with-

“Are you planning to eat with your nose in that book?”

“It’s interesting enough,” Harry said thoughtfully and then placed the book on the kitchen counter. “But it’d be rude to read during the meal, I know.”
“I’m glad I managed to find a piece of literature you would enjoy.”

“It’s great.”

Harry smiled at Severus’s indifferent shrug and started cancelling the warming charms on everything. Severus stood beside him and surveyed everything with a critical eye.

“Am I to serve myself, then?”

“Of course not. Go sit, sir.” Severus sat and Harry shortly joined him, for once sitting in the seat beside him rather than at his typical seat at the other end of the table. He caught Severus looking at him, brow cocked, and frowned. “What?”

“Why are you sitting there?”

“I don’t know. This seat was closest and I’m really hungry this morning.” Harry imitated Severus’s cocked brow. “Afraid I’m going to ruin your breakfast?”

“Why, Potter, I think you’ve finally reached my level of snarkiness. I’m honestly proud. I think I’m rubbing off on you.”

Harry snickered. “Really?”

“You perverted brat. All you seem to think about is sex. I’m surprised Albus hasn’t yet put you on a permanent regimen of contraceptive potions.”

“That would imply Professor Dumbledore knows what I’m thinking about most of the time. Speaking of contraception, though. There was this potion in my book I wanted you to look at. I just had a few questions about it.”

Almost a minute later, Severus asked, “Do you plan to ask these questions or stare at me like you’re brainless?”

“Oh, sorry.” Pull yourself together! Stop staring! Harry reached behind him to grab his book and flipped to the strange potion he’d found earlier. “Uh, what exactly is an uterotonic agent? I mean, what does it do?”

“It can be used in a number of ways.” Severus’s brows furrowed. “The agents encourage the start of labor, urge contractions following miscarriage, induce an abortion, or reduce the chances of hemorrhaging after childbirth or an abortion has taken place.”

“I don’t get it. How exactly is a contraceptive potion using something that causes that stuff? It kind of sounds like there has to be a baby involved already.”

“Exactly. I believe you were looking at an abortive potion rather than a contraceptive, Potter.”

“An abort- what? No! Why would a book about male pregnancy have abortive potions in it? What if I’d been pregnant and accidentally took that?”

“One would hope you wouldn’t be taking or looking for contraceptives if you were already pregnant, idiot.”

“Still… that’s just wrong.”

“Perhaps, but not everyone disagrees with abortion. Indeed, there are even situations where those most against it would be clamoring for just such a potion.”
“None that I can see, sir. It’s murder no matter how you look at it.”

“Let’s pretend for a moment, Potter. Imagine I raped you this very moment, on this same table, and you realized in a few weeks that you were pregnant. Would you want to carry my child knowing that it was the product of rape? Would you like the daily reminder that I so easily overpowered you and took away your basic right to say no?”

“It wouldn’t be the baby’s fault so why should I kill it? I’d rather go after you, the man who raped me, than anything else. I’d keep the baby.”

“Very well. Say you didn’t know who raped you. Perhaps it was a faceless Death Eater in the heat of battle. To him, he thinks you’re going to die anyway so he may as well have some fun with you first. Yes, there are a number of… inclined… individuals within the ranks so don’t give me that look.” Severus cleared his throat. “Weeks later, long after the dead have been buried, you find yourself vomiting over the toilet and your growing fear is confirmed later that day by a simple spell. Do you abort then?”

“No.”

Severus leaned back and pulled his coffee closer. “You are either a much stronger man than I originally imagined or you’ve no idea how you would react and are simply sticking to your decision.”

“I don’t know how hard it would be, that much is true, but I wouldn’t abort the baby. I couldn’t do it. If any of that happened to you, sir, what would you do?”

“I would abort, Potter. Can you imagine me bearing a child? My temper alone would be worse than it ever has been, including the times you’ve been involved.” Harry laughed weakly and Severus gave him a slightly indulgent smile. “All joking aside, I wouldn’t become pregnant in the first place. My body has been through too much trauma in my years as a Death Eater and then spy. It is no longer hospitable for growing a child.”

“I’m sorry, sir. I didn’t know.”

“It truly doesn’t matter. I am not the type of man who would welcome childbearing with open arms. You, however, seem to have been born for the role.”

Harry scowled at Severus’s smirk and went back to his breakfast. A minute later, though, he dropped his fork and grinned widely at the man. Severus cast a suspicious glance his way.

“You called me a man.”

“I most certainly did not.”

“You most certainly did,” Harry retorted. “You said, ‘a much stronger man’ earlier. You think I’m a man, not a child. Don’t you?”

“No. You’re a child.”

“Then why’d you call me a man?”

“I didn’t. You imagined that.”

“Nope.”
“Potter. No, stop it. Stop grinning. I didn’t say that. I didn’t. You stop grinning right this second, you little shit. Stop it. I’m warning you. Alright, fine. You had your chance. One. Two-”

That stinging hex was definitely worth it.
The One with Cuddling

“You have some packages.”

Severus put the items down on the kitchen counter and Harry closed his pregnancy book, frowned, and turned the heat down on the bacon.

“Why?”

“There’s a letter, as well. Perhaps it will explain.”

Severus sat at the table and Harry brought his gifts over. There was a letter and two packages wrapped in black paper without any sort of identifying tag saying who gave it to him. His frown deepened. He felt immensely comforted when he saw Severus had a few things, too. Looked mostly like books, but that did look like a picture frame he was unwrapping. Who sent this?

Potter,

Just checking to see if Severus is still alive. He hasn’t answered my last letter and I’m rightly suspicious of that. If you’ve annoyed him to death, I’ll be coming for you as soon as possible. Also, these are for you. Your wolf wanted you to have them.

D. M.

Well, that was weird. Why didn’t Remus just write him instead of Draco?

It was a picture, though this was of what looked like everyone he’d ever met. He held it up to Severus and patiently waited for the man to notice. When he finally did (and Harry was sure he purposefully avoided looking up), Severus didn’t look surprised in the least.

“You knew they were taking this picture?” Harry asked incredulously.

“I was the one who suggested it. I’m tired of seeing you mope around like a kicked puppy whenever you think I’m not paying attention.”

“Really? That’s actually… kind of nice. It’s weird.”

“I can easily set that photograph ablaze, Potter.”

Harry tucked it behind himself. “Not necessary. Thanks.”

“It wasn’t from me. You needn’t tell me thank you.”

“Right.”

Of course not. Harry eagerly unwrapped the last picture and felt the smile immediately drop from his face. It was of Remus and Tonks, smiling and waving at him, and Draco Fucking Malfoy stood right in between them both. While his grin could most aptly be described as shit-eating, Tonks was smiling radiantly and Remus was giving Draco confused and uncertain looks every few seconds before looking out of the photo with a grimacing grin. Remus always had been good at that.
awkward looking expression. At the bottom of the frame, a note was held on by a temporary sticking spell.

Potter,

Your werewolf mated. He wanted your friends to tell you he took an unexpected honeymoon and didn’t have time to write, but they didn’t want to tell you. Something about caring about your feelings. You really are a woman in a boy’s body, aren’t you? Enjoy being “related” to me, Potter. He married my cousin. Hope your day goes to hell with that information. Anyway, I hope you enjoy this as much as I enjoyed taking it!

Draco Malfoy

“Oh. My. God.” Harry collapsed to the floor and stared at Draco’s note. This couldn’t be true. “No.”

“What seems to be the problem?”

“Malfoy… ‘s family. Ish.”

“Excuse me?” Severus took the photo frame from Harry’s hands and quickly skimmed through Draco’s note. He cocked a brow. “The wolf finally married. I can’t say that I’m surprised.”

“Did you know?”

“Of course I did. Albus mentioned it, but I would have thought Lupin had told you everything.”

“I haven’t received a letter from him in ages,” Harry mumbled.

“This is hardly the end of the world. Draco may not like you much and you may see him more often now, but you’re not actually related. Why are you acting so heartbroken?”

“Remus didn’t tell me. Hermione didn’t tell me. Fred and George didn’t tell me and they tell me everything! You didn’t even tell me. I had to hear it from Malfoy.”

“Why would I bother to mention it? When you never said anything, I had assumed you didn’t want to discuss it so I left it alone.” Severus looked down on him and his brows furrowed. “Get off the floor. You’ll make yourself dirty.”

Harry frowned. “I swept last night. I wish they’d told me. I could have at least congratulated them, you know? Wait.” Severus rolled his eyes. “Are you related to Malfoy in any way?”

“No, I’m not. I’m not related to any magical family you know, actually. My father was a Muggle and the Princes married into magical families elsewhere.”

“Oh. Okay.”

“Worried you were somehow ‘related’ to me, as well?” Severus asked dryly.

“No. I’d just wondered before and this all brought the question back to mind.” Harry sighed heavily and pushed himself to his feet. “This sucks.”
“Are you sure you didn’t fancy the wolf?”

“Probably as much as you fancy Dumbledore,” Harry muttered and Severus immediately looked disgusted. “Yeah, that’s how I felt.”

“You have problems, boy.”

“Yeah, I’m locked up underground and no one tells me anything anymore. I have to find out updates on Remus from people like Malfoy!”

“Tell me something, because I’m honestly curious.”

“What?”

“What is bothering you about this? Is it that you are related in name only to your school rival, that Lupin didn’t tell you he was in a relationship, that no one told you about it until he was already on his honeymoon, that it was Draco who gave you the news, or is it that you missed yet another important event in the life of someone you care about?”

Harry walked off and frowned to himself for a really long time, focusing on the bacon he was frying up for breakfast. What was bothering him so much? Yeah, he didn’t like Draco much, but he must not be that bad. They hadn’t killed each other, after all, when everyone had visited. And just because Remus was related to him now didn’t mean he’d constantly be around when Harry visited. He could understand his friends not wanting to be the one to tell him Remus had gotten married, too. They wouldn’t want to upset him too much. Remus should have told him, yeah, but he guessed he knew why he hadn’t. If he’d been the one getting married while Remus was the one locked up underground, he wouldn’t have wanted to say anything. He would have, true, but he wouldn’t have liked it much. It would feel like he was rubbing it in his face, but Remus would still have liked to know if he were in Harry’s shoes. Harry sighed.

“The last one, I guess.”

“You cannot be held responsible for missing any of these events, Potter. It is for the best that you’re here. They all know and understand that.”

“Doesn’t mean I like it. I’ve missed so much!”

“And you can make up for it after this is all over. You’ll have plenty of time to do so then. Now stop pouting and act like a man. I will not tolerate you trying to blubber on my shoulder or- God forbid- ask for some comforting action that I would not give you.” Severus held up the photo of Draco, Remus, and Tonks. “Your wolf doesn’t look very happy. This is a stunning photograph of my godson, though. Would you object to it being placed on the mantle?”

“If by mantle you mean in the fire, then no,” Harry muttered.

“At least he was nice enough to send you this photo. It’s more than you can say of yourself, Potter, because I’m positive you wouldn’t have done the same.”

“He only gave me this to torment me! You know he did, too.”

“If you do not appreciate the gift he’s given you- a gift of your whatever he is on his wedding day, a day that you missed- act like a bloody Slytherin and get under his skin instead of letting him know he succeeded in annoying you. Merlin, boy. You’ve told me you were almost a Slytherin, but I have yet to see any proof of it.” Severus held out his hand and caught the book he’d silently summoned. Harry secretly thought the door flapping open and closed was amusing. Merlin. “And
read this. It may help you figure out how to play the game Draco’s playing with you.”

“This isn’t a game, sir. It’s war.” Severus loudly exhaled, exasperated, and Harry sullenly turned the book around. “WHAT? This has to be a joke.”

“I assure you it is not. That book is an actual publication I obtained in Diagon Alley, another thing you might be able to get some use out of. On my last trip, Albus pointed this out and I couldn’t resist purchasing it. I thought you might learn to appreciate it.” Severus almost chuckled. “Go ahead and take a look.”

Wait a moment. Severus found not one, but two things for him when he had snuck to Diagon Alley with Albus? That was… worth thinking about later, he was sure.

Harry quickly flipped to a random page in The Subtle Guide to Being Slytherin: Overcoming Gryffindor Impulses, Fighting Hufflepuff Tendencies, and Quelling Ravenclaw Desires and gaped. The page detailed exactly how one goes about achieving the perfect cocky Slytherin-esque smirk of disdain.

“You must be joking. You teach your Slytherins how to smirk?”

“Of course I don’t. A true Slytherin doesn’t need to be taught such trivial things.”

“I don’t know how to respond to this. Part of me actually wants to read it, but another part of me wants to run away screaming.”

“Ah, yes. That would be your-” Severus leaned forward and read the title. “Hufflepuff tendencies, I would presume.”

“I’m not a Hufflepuff.”

“Yes, but if you’re not a Slytherin, you’re everything else.”

Harry glared.

***

“I’m making potpies for dinner,” Harry called into the living room. Severus grumbled back at him and Harry snickered quietly. “What do you want for dessert?”

Grumblemumble. “Mm. Potspee.”

“Sir?”

Grumblemumblemumble. “Shudipter.”

“Professor, could you wake up?”

Severus finally gave up and raised his head. “Wha’sit?’

“What do you want for dessert?”

“I said pie.”

“No, you said potspee, which isn’t a real dessert... or anything at all, actually. Unless you were saying potpies. Even then…”
“I meant pie.”

“Ah. Could you also translate shudipter for me?”

“Shut it, Potter,” Severus grumbled, already trying to fall back asleep.

Harry snorted and quietly closed the kitchen door. He set about dicing as many vegetables as he could. They both really did like vegetable-packed pies, though Severus would probably happily devour them even if they were just meat, gravy, and potato… Harry caught himself staring at his knife and shook his head. He’d told Severus that reading until three in the morning would be a bad idea. Did he listen to him? Noooo. No one ever listens to Harry Potter, because he doesn’t know what he’s talking about.

“That man’s an idiot.”

“I will thrash you, boy, if you ever again call me an idiot.”

Harry jumped and guiltily looked at the kitchen doorway. Severus was standing right there… and looked wide awake. Had that all been an act?

“Uh, sorry, sir. Why are you awake? I thought you were taking a nap.”

“I find it difficult to sleep when someone keeps snorting and laughing at apparently nothing. I gave up after twenty minutes. What are you doing in here that is so amusing?”

“Twenty minutes?” Harry surveyed the rather large piles of chopped food and laughed nervously. “Ah, well, at least we’ll have leftovers… I was just thinking about, erm, it sounds kind of lame, actually. I was thinking about the food.”

“The food?” Severus replied acerbically. “It can’t be said you don’t know how to entertain yourself, I suppose.”

Harry grimaced a little. “Yeah. Sorry.”

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Slowly, Harry drifted to consciousness. He felt warm, safe, and happy. It wasn’t a strange occurrence, true. No, the fact that he didn’t remember falling asleep was the strange thing. Harry blinked his eyes open once and closed them, only to have them shoot back open a second later. His head was in Severus’s lap!

Carefully, Harry looked down at himself and then up at Severus. Aww. He was asleep, too. That was kind of cute. Erm, just a little, though. This was Severus he was thinking about, after all. When was the man ever ‘cute’ besides, well, right now? Harry remembered them talking for a little bit after dinner and then reading from their own books for a while. When had he gotten covered up with a blanket? And what time was it? Harry wanted to fall back asleep, but Severus might not appreciate that. His hair brushed Severus’s hand, which was laying on his thigh, when he turned to look at the clock. It was four in the morning! No wonder he was so tired!

Harry really was going to move. Honest. Just… it was so warm and he felt so… sleepy…

When Harry again woke up, it was seven in the morning. Severus was still asleep, but they had moved. Somehow, Severus had ended up stretched across most of the couch and Harry had moved with him, only his head was now cradled against Severus’s stomach. And oh, he was laying
between Severus’s legs. He had a really strong heartbeat, too. Did his sound like that? Harry almost snorted when he saw Severus’s left leg hanging off the couch. Actually- yep, his foot was on the floor. Where was his other… oh, down at the other end of the couch.

It was really warm now. God, the man was a human furnace!

How should he go about getting off the couch without waking Severus? It would have been easy when only his head was on him, but he was kind of pinning Severus down now. If he moved, Severus would wake up and yell at him. Oh, well. Nothing for it, right? As gingerly and slowly as his nerves could stand, Harry pushed himself up. He froze when Severus grabbed him and held on tightly for a long moment. Little by little, though, his hold slackened and Harry decided to hell with it. When Severus let him go, he jumped off of the couch and held his breath.

Aside from a little eye flutter and some grumbling, Severus didn’t seem to be aware of much. Harry sighed quietly, pulled the blanket back over Severus’s body, and trotted to the bathroom. Harry froze in the middle of brushing his teeth and grinned stupidly with the realization he’d been cuddling with Severus. Oh, that was rich! He couldn’t wait to tell Ron. Ron would pee himself when he heard! But… Severus might not appreciate him telling anybody. Really, he hadn’t even been awake for any of it. He might think he was just lying about it if he ever heard and then Ron would either believe Severus over him or think Severus was a big jerk.

Well, Severus was, but still.

Oh, well. He just wouldn’t tell Ron about it. It really wasn’t that big of a deal. Besides, Hermione would be furious if he made Ron pee himself. Rose probably does enough of that for a legion of people. How often did babies need changed, anyway? Huh. He bet Hermione was the one who had to do it, even though she’d probably been hounding Ron to help. That reminds him that he could probably tell Hermione about this, though. She wouldn’t go gossip about it or anything, right? She might even be able to fill in the blanks he still had from last night. Sure, he’d slept great-wonderfully, in fact- but he didn’t even remember going to sleep or if Severus had still been awake when he had. He honestly doubted Severus was still awake at the time, because he wouldn’t have still been there this morning if he had been…

“Why didn’t you wake me up?” Severus growled, walking into the bathroom with his eyes half-closed. Harry again froze, eyes comically round. “For someone who spends most of his time nagging me to come to bed, you were more than cavalier about my whereabouts last night.”

Should he say he didn’t make it to his bed, either? How well would that go over? One look at the back of Severus’s tense shoulders said it wouldn’t be a good idea.

“I’m sorry, sir. I don’t exactly know what happened last night.” Harry quickly finished up at the sink and grabbed a pain reliever for Severus’s knee. He hadn’t even thought about that! God, it was probably aching and stiff. Bad housewife! He should have gotten Severus up sooner! “Here, take this, sir. It’ll make your knee feel better.”

“Potter, my knee isn’t bothering me.”

“Sir, you spent the night on the couch.”

“I am aware, though I don’t know why I was being punished this time,” Severus muttered to himself and moved to wash his hands in the sink. Harry cracked a smile. That was a joke! “Get that out of my face. My knee isn’t bothering me.”

“Your knee always bothers you after sleeping on the couch all night.”
“Do you hear anything, boy? Any popping? Am I walking stiffly? No. Leave me alone and put that up. I don’t want you spilling it everywhere.”

Harry cocked his head to the side and then raised his brows in surprise. His knee wasn’t acting up? How weird. He would have thought…

“Yes, sure. Are you hungry?”

“I haven’t had breakfast yet.”

“So that’s a yes.” Severus gave Harry a very mean look and Harry held up his hands in a placating gesture. “You’re right. Sorry. You need coffee first.”

“Humph.”

Harry left Severus to shower in peace, hurriedly dressed, and scampered to the kitchen to make breakfast. While making omelets close to overflowing with all sorts of delicious titbits, Harry’s mind drifted back to this morning. He was still grinning and humming contentedly when Severus joined him after a short period of time. Still humming, Harry gave Severus freshly-brewed coffee and continued watching their omelets. They were going to be delicious, he just knew it. They were packed full of cheese, mushrooms, sausage, onions… Yummy. The omelets seemed to finish rather quickly. Maybe they were afraid of Severus’s grumpy mood. Harry smothered a snort and peeked at Severus. He didn’t seem amused. Sighing, Harry tossed one onto each of their plates, grabbed the basket of muffins he’d made the day before, and wandered over to the table. Severus, his elbows on the table and cup in hand, watched Harry with an almost imperceptible frown.

“Has the coffee not kicked in yet, Professor?”

“I slept on the couch.”

Grumpy pants.

“I know. Again, I’m sorry. I don’t know what happened last night.”

“Humph.” Grumblemumble. Mumblegrunt. Harry thought he heard ‘incompetence’ somewhere in there. “These omelets look as if they could feed an army, Potter. Why are they so big?”

Harry blinked down at their plates. Huh. They were kind of big, weren’t they? It would seem he’d gotten a little carried away.

“I really have no idea. I guess I was distracted.”

“Obviously. That happens a lot with you, I’ve noticed.”

“Muffins?”

“Coffee?” Severus asked at the same time. Harry snickered quietly and refilled Severus’s mug. Grumblemumble.

“What was that?” Grumblemumble. “What?”

“I said pass the muffins,” Severus groused stiffly, enunciating every single syllable.

“You’ve no complaints yet? Professor, did you fall off of the couch this morning? What is wrong with you?”
“It’s too early.”

“Is it?”

Harry stole a glance at the clock on the wall behind Severus. It wasn’t that early. Severus had gotten up much earlier. He decided not to mention that, though. Instead, he just began eating. If Severus was going to be grumpy, Harry would let him wallow in it for a while. When he finished breakfast, he stood up and started running the dish water. He still wasn’t allowed to wash the dishes by hand so he contented himself with getting everything in the sink. He felt more than heard Severus walk up behind him. Ignoring him, Harry added more soap to the water and looked out the enchanted window over the sink. They may be who knows how far below ground, but they still had a nice view. The same rolling hills, sunshine, and small swaying trees he was staring at used to be one of the things he’d love to occasionally glance up at while scrubbing some pot or other… Too bad Severus demanded he use that washing spell now.

“I had an odd dream last night, Potter.”

“Hmm?”

“Indeed. It is rather unexplainable.”

“What happened?” Harry asked, sneaking his hands into the water to wash Severus’s plate. “Was it of anyone I know?”

“I would rather not discuss it at the moment. Tell me something, boy. Did you sleep in your bed last night?”

Harry’s hand slipped and his knuckles smacked the bottom of the sink. “Erm, of course I did. Where else would I have been?”

“I asked myself the same thing.”

Don’t turn around. Don’t turn around. Don’t… Severus was giving him a piercing look. Dammit.

“Why would you do that?”

“In my dream, you were doing something you wouldn’t normally have been doing,” Severus replied carefully. “I wanted to ensure my dream and reality were not connected.”

“Well, what was I doing? Honestly, I didn’t do anything wrong, sir. I was just sleeping last night.”

“As you were doing in my dream. Odd.”

Oh. Severus was giving him that strange look. Again.

“Sir?” If Severus remembered, he would have hurt him by now… Erm, right? “What did I do in your dream?”

“You slept, as I said.”

“Um, okay.” That really didn’t explain Severus’s look, then. “How was that weird?”

“You weren’t sleeping in your bed,” Severus said thoughtfully. Harry turned around and let his face screw up. Severus didn’t know. He couldn’t know. “In fact, you weren’t alone at all.”
“Oh, er, that’s weird. Was I in yours?” Harry asked lightly, hoping to think up some distraction. “You’re the only other one here, you know, so I don’t know who else it could have been.”

“Oh, Hmmm.”

Don’t turn around. Don’t turn around. Don’t turn around. God dammit! “So? Was I in your bed?”

“Close enough, yes.”

“Huh. Well, again, that’s weird.” Harry laughed nervously and reached back into the water. How did he only have one or two more dishes to go? Severus would kill him when he realized it! Change the subject! “What sounds good for lunch?”

“Hmm? Oh. I don’t care, Potter. The kitchen is your domain, not mine. You’ll figure something out.”

“Just asking if you had any preference.” Harry surreptitiously let out the drain at the bottom of the sink and bit his lip. “Any plans for today?”

“I’m going to ponder this odd dream. It felt extraordinarily realistic.” Harry bit his lip harder and finally turned. “Also, brat, don’t think I didn’t realize you just washed the dishes by hand. You could have cut yourself again.”

“There was only one knife,” Harry argued. Severus pulled it from the drying rack and held it up. “This is more a machete than a kitchen knife.”

“It’s not that big.”

“You almost killed yourself with a knife much smaller than this, boy.”

“So? I didn’t kill myself then or now. See?” Harry held his arms up. “I’m fine.”

“For now. I don’t trust you not to find a way, though.” Severus tucked the knife into an odd drawer. “Leave it in there.”

“But that’s my best cutting knife!”

“You will survive.”

Harry waited until Severus strolled from the kitchen and then muttered under his breath, “Git.”

“I heard that.”

“Maybe I meant for you to!”

“You’re not that stupid.”

“You seem to think otherwise,” Harry muttered. Severus opened the kitchen door and cocked an eyebrow.

“What was that?”

“Erm, nothing.”

“All right.”
“Git.”

“I still heard that,” Severus called from the living room.

“With bat-like hearing, sir?”

“Do I look like a bat to you? You’ve seen me unclothed plenty of times, Potter. Any bat wings I’m not aware of?”

Harry blushed. God, that’s all he needed to be reminded of. Severus did these things on purpose, didn’t he?

“Shut up, sir.”

Severus chuckled darkly.

***

Hey,

Did anyone tell you about Remus? He and Tonks got married a while back if you didn’t know. I guess he’s still on his honeymoon, because I haven’t seen him. Tonks wants everyone to call her Dora now. It’s kind of weird, but I guess I get it. Who’d want to keep going by their maiden name if they were married? I feel bad that I haven’t gotten a chance to write you since last Christmas, Harry. I’m really sorry. Professor Sprout and Professor Dumbledore have had me busy doing a few things for the Order and the greenhouses. Honestly, I haven’t gotten a chance to do much. I’m lucky if I get enough sleep every night! Tell Professor Snape I said hey. I hope things are all right with you two. If you write me back, I promise to make time to write you, even if it’s while I’m eating breakfast at six in the morning. I really don’t have much going on right now, but I’ll think of something to tell you. I miss you, Harry. The school and everything’s not the same without you.

Neville

Harry smiled, folded up Neville’s letter, and tucked it into the back pocket of his denims. He’d be writing Neville back tonight. He’d missed talking to him. He opened his next letter and sighed.

Harry,

I think you should know I’m currently writing this letter locked away in our bathroom at Hogwarts. Incidentally, we do actually have a private apartment here. Isn’t it exciting? Anyway, Ron’s tending Rose so I don’t think he’ll try to figure out what I’m doing, but I just want to be safe. I have to admit to some great amount of shock. At first, I didn’t think I’d read your letter right and had to go back through it carefully to make sure. You and Professor Snape really slept on the couch together? What’s more, you actually slept in an intimate position? Harry, I’m disappointed with you! Professor Snape was your professor. You’re not supposed to be fraternizing with him! What were you even thinking? WERE you thinking? You may be out of school, but it’s wrong somehow.

Now that I’ve gotten that out, how was it? Was it really nice? You said you woke up with your head on his leg once and then on his tummy the second time. Is he as physically cold as Ron is always claiming he is? Though, now that I think about it, I do wonder how and why Ron seems to think Professor Snape is physically cold. I’m beginning to wonder if my husband is the one who
started those rumors about Professor Snape being a vampire, after all. Maybe it’s only my overactive imagination, but I’ve always thought Professor Snape would be a little flabby, too. Is he? Did you like waking up on him, Harry? I know you realized you’re attracted to males just a little while back, but did the professor have anything to do with that? Do you like him? I don’t think he would be too bad of a catch. Sure, he is or at least used to be downright nasty to you sometimes, but he almost killed my husband for terrifying you and I saw how you both acted around each other. Have you ever thought about that day? When we got back to Hogwarts, Draco kept going on and on about how things were scarily different between you. Most didn’t see it, but I think I did. I don’t think I need to remind you that some of the things you’ve said in our past letters don’t really make any sense, either, unless there’s something going on with you two.

I’m rambling. I apologize. Tell me, does he know? What did he say about it? I just want to know everything about what happened! You didn’t put nearly enough detail into it. What kind of friend am I if my best (and gay!) friend doesn’t want to open up to me? This is supposed to be the way our relationship works, right? I mean, we share things with each other that our husbands or boyfriends would be furious to learn about, especially sex! Please write me back as soon as possible!

Also, this is purely curiosity on my part, and I swear I won’t tell anyone… Have you ever had an inappropriate thought about him? Does he look as good in your fantasy as the man in mine?

Love you,

Hermione

P.S. Please don’t tell anyone I said that! Ron and Rose would say hi if they knew I was writing you. ©

Harry laughed, a blush spreading across his entire face. He can’t believe Hermione just said and asked all of that. He couldn’t believe she was encouraging him to think about Severus like that! And did she really ask him if he’d ever thought about Severus in that way? Wait. She’d thought about Severus that way? Is that what she’d just told him? Oh, he didn’t like that. It was weird. She was only supposed to think of Ron like that. And she wanted details of his fantasy Severus?

Well, he’ll give her one better. His fantasy Severus (er, whatever fantasy he may be in, which was probably a small, unimportant one at the back of his mind) was based on the real one so he’ll tell her about the times he’d seen Severus naked. If he just so happened to detail a few things, it wouldn’t be his fault, would it? It would serve her right for asking him about it.

And did she call him flabby?? Harry harrumphed and trotted to the kitchen, his letter still clenched in his hand. He needed a strong cup of coffee before writing her back.

“Sir.”

Severus looked up from his cold tea. “You look like you just received bad news. What’s happened?”

“Ah, nothing with the war. Hermione just told me something that kind of irritated me, though I don’t know why it did, because it’s not like I care or even particularly have a right to care. I don’t care so there. And why should I care? She can think whatever she wants, right? I can’t choose who she thinks about or what she thinks about them.”
“You’re doing it again,” Severus commented, his brows furrowed. “Not making sense seems to be one of your favorite things to do.”

Harry sighed. “Coffee?”

“It would be more appetizing than this frigid tea you made me for breakfast hours ago.”

The two were quiet for a long moment. Harry slamming one of the coffee mugs on the counter pulled Severus’s attention from his study of the table.

“And she was just positively rude. I mean, they were things I used to say. Well, one of the things were, because I’ve never noted anyone’s body type aloud- I mean, that’s just mean- no, worse, rude. Right? Would you go slinging around comments about whether you think someone’s chubby-oh, I’m sorry. She said flabby- or anything? And it was out of the blue! I’m going to have to talk to her about being rude, even if she’s talking just to make me see stuff I don’t want to. Merlin, why are women so annoying?”

“Careful, Potter. Women are the reason we’re both here today. Besides, you wouldn’t want your opinions reaching your future wife, would you?”

Harry gave Severus a weird look, folded up Hermione’s letter, and tucked it into his pocket. He thought he’d been kind of obvious. Nice to know he was hiding his sexuality so well. And wasn’t he the one always saying he acts more like someone’s wife than potential husband? The man was just confusing.

“Yeah. Right.”

***

Harry,

Wow. I guess I still didn’t believe it until you confirmed it. You and Professor Snape really slept on the couch together? It blows my mind, Harry. I could never imagine him being so willing to be close enough to you to make it easier to fall asleep against each other. I bet it was nice to wake up with someone there. You said it made you feel warm, safe, and happy? Hmm. Have you ever considered that you might, in fact, like Professor Snape? Sure, it’s nice to wake up with someone else, but I wouldn’t feel the way you did unless I liked the man. When you say he’s really hot all of the time, do you mean temperature-wise or… you know? Having that sentence clarified would be helpful in understanding you. If you’re talking about his body temperature, how do you know he’s hot all of the time? Do you just go about running into him when you need warmed up?

All jokes aside, I’m sorry I offended you. I didn’t mean to talk ill of the professor, I just wanted to ask what his body was like. Which brings me to my next point…

YOU’VE SEEN HIM NAKED???

Dear Christ above, I had to fan myself after reading your little description of Professor Snape! Is he really that endowed or are you having me on? It would explain why he’s always swooping around like that! He can’t help but to try to counterbalance gravity. Oh, dear. Ron’s looking at me strangely. I should probably stop giggling like an innocent schoolgirl. He calmed down when I said I was writing you and wants me to say ‘hey, mate’ for him. Answer me, please. Is he really that fit? I wish I could see that for myself, Not because I’m interested in him, mind you, but because I truly don’t think I believe it. Now don’t bite my head off! It was a serious question. I really wanted to know if Professor Snape helped you realize yourself. He’s not that unattractive. Really, I find him
nice looking. If I wasn’t married, I’d still have a passing thought for him. And that man’s voice. Whoo, it can do some powerful things! Even after marrying the love of my life and having a baby, I still found myself wanting to obey that voice when I visited. Do you feel the same way about it or am I just being awfully strange? I am glad, though, that you liked waking up with him.

Yes, Draco is still going on about you two. It’s a little funny, because he always looks lost when either of you are brought up in conversation. Just this afternoon, I mentioned wanting you to come home and he just drifted away. He finally asked if I’d heard news from either of you and wanted to know what was going on there without him to stop you both from doing whatever it is you do.

You think Professor Snape knows? Did he not say anything beyond mentioning his strange dream? I wish I could know what is going through his head every time he looks at you. Don’t you? What do you mean he thinks you’re straight? Harry, it’s so obvious you aren’t! I’ve known for years. How could he not know? Perhaps he’s just saying that because he doesn’t want to get his hopes up. What if he really likes you?

Also, I think I should point out that your willingness to fall back asleep on top of him and noticing his heartbeat anytime you’re that close to him is telling, don’t you think? I won’t be the one to tell you what it could mean. Just think about it, Harry.

Love you,

Hermione

Harry shook his head in confusion. The woman doesn’t make any sense! What did she mean ‘it was telling’ and she wasn’t going to tell him? Sighing, Harry started his reply immediately.

Dinner could stand to be a few minutes late tonight.
"No way." Harry again checked Neville’s letter, lowered it, and grinned at Severus. “So you’re telling me you actually recommended the substitute professor accept Neville into seventh year potions?”

“No, Potter, no. No, you misinterpreted me,” Severus immediately argued. “I said I recommended he reconsider the criteria for admitting seventh year students. At no point did I say he should accept Longbottom. Never. Not once did those words come from my mouth.”

“Yeah, but Neville was the only one who didn’t make it into the class that needed it for his future. Like, out of all the seventh years.”

“A happy coincidence for him, I’m sure.”

Harry smiled softly. “I think it was really nice of you, sir.”

“You don’t believe me, do you?”

“No.”

Severus rolled his eyes and held up his cup. “If you think I’ve been so nice, quit torturing me with this tea shite and make me some coffee.”

“You really not like tea?”

“It is not that. I simply do not desire tea at the moment.”

“Or ever it seems.”

“Hogwarts is not known for its fine coffee selections, boy. This coffee has been hand-selected by myself and I do not know how much longer we truly have here. For all we know, Albus will call us home tomorrow. I do not want to forgo any opportunity to drink coffee that doesn’t taste like the substance one might lick from the crack of a Thestral’s arse.”

Harry perked up. “You like my coffee?”

“How did you infer that from anything I just told you?”

“You just said you ‘don’t want to forgo any opportunity to drink coffee that doesn’t taste like the substance one might lick from the crack of a Thestral’s arse’ and, I mean, it sounded like you implied mine tastes better.”

“Only because I selected the coffee beans myself.”

“You know, you wouldn’t have said that when we first got here, sir. It would have sounded too close to a compliment. I bet your godson would be speechless if he knew. Maybe I should write him again and let him know.” Severus’s expression immediately went blank and Harry frowned in confusion when the man stood up. “Professor?”

“I have a letter to attend to, Potter.”

“Did I say something wrong?”
“As I’ve mentioned, I have a letter to attend to. I don’t wish to further waste my time with senseless chatter.”

Severus swept from the room and Harry sagged into his chair. What had he done wrong now? Severus had to have known he wouldn’t actually write Draco, especially to tell him something about him. They had this weird living arrangement going on right now and no one, even Hermione, would really understand it! Why the hell would he risk Draco telling anyone his suspicions? Albus would be down here in a second with half of the Order, just to make sure nothing weird was going on. They’d all be apoplectic.

Bastards, the lot of them.

Distracted by his thoughts, Harry didn’t realize he’d stood up and started a pot of coffee until the aroma wafted up to him. He looked down at the pot of coffee and frowned again. Did Severus still want some? Harry tentatively pushed open the kitchen door and looked out, but Severus was nowhere to be seen. Deciding he wouldn’t somehow risk incurring the man’s wrath by interrupting what he was doing, Harry sat back down at the table and stared at the soggy tea leaves in the bottom of his glass.

What had just happened here?

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A dark chuckle of pleasure escaped Severus’s lips and Harry looked up in shock. That’s the most sound he’d heard from him in three whole days!

The only responses he’d gotten from him were nods and the like, but never so much as a grunt. Harry had begun to worry that he had gravely offended him somehow. He’d revisited the memory of their last conversation a lot, but he still had yet to figure out what he’d said or done wrong.

Harry silently studied Severus. Who could he be talking to that would make him sound like that? Maybe he was imagining things, but it had sounded kind of… sexual. No, he couldn’t have imagined it.

“Um, sir?” A grunt in response. Not very promising. “Is everything okay?”

“Mmm.”

That was almost kinda maybe a word. Okay so that was a good sign. Who the hell could have written a letter that made Severus start speaking to him again? Oh, God. What if Severus was talking to this person with the intent to sleep with them? If he’d been the one writing a potential lover, he’d be in a good mood, too.

No!

That would make things so awkward down here, right? Plus, it’d be weird, because he’d always be wondering what it was like for a professor to strip the teaching persona and just get down to what comes naturally. What kind of woman is Severus interested in, anyway? Please say he’s not talking to any kind of woman. Even Molly. Molly is still a woman. She has woman parts, woman parts that Severus parts could interlock with.

GROSS!!!!!!!!!!!!

No, wait. Molly wouldn't cheat. She loved Arthur.
“Are you talking to Professor Dumbledore?” Please say yes. Full titles always seem to open him up- Damn that man’s grunting! So that’s a no. “Professor McGonagall?” Grunt. “Are you talking to Remus? How is he?” Sharp grunt of irritation. Undeniably not even close. Think, idiot! Who would he possibly be talking to? Oh! “Malfoy?”

“Yes,” Severus replied tenderly. “The brat’s teasing me.”

What? How was he supposed to take that? What was Draco even saying to him? Severus looked… intense. It gave him the shivers. Nice shivers. Wait a minute. He’d seen that look before, always in his dreams and whatnot. Harry’s eyes widened. Oh, dear God, no! Severus wasn’t reading a… naughty letter… from Draco, was he?

He could deal with Severus wanting a lover, but he’d never be able to be civil with the man if he took Draco Malfoy as a lover!

Hold it. Severus wasn’t gay. True, he’d never stated his sexuality, but it was obvious he preferred women. He’d known about women’s orgasms. It had seemed like he knew that from personal experience and he’d even given him a cocky smirk before answering.

But there was always rule 13 in Being Slytherin: Slytherins are known for their sexual education and prowess. If one is not familiar with the many different aspects of sexual relations, it is suggested one studies and then practices as much as possible. It is humiliating for a Slytherin to be largely unaware of or inexperienced in relationships of this type.

Did that mean Slytherins practiced all aspects before deciding what they wanted? What did that mean? Was Severus straight or gay? Bisexual? Either way, Harry really wanted to know what was in that letter. Maybe he’d be able to read it when Severus went to bed… Or he could just ask. Severus might tell him.

“How was that good letter?”

“Quite.” Dammit, what was he saying to him? “Enjoying the view, Potter?”

“Huh?”

“You’re staring again. Rather, you haven’t stopped staring at me in days. I didn’t realize anything I have been doing was so fascinating as to deserve your perusal.”

“Sorry. You just… never mind.”

Severus shrugged and went back to his letter. Every little affectionate smile and stifled chuckle only made Harry more curious. How in the hell was anything Draco was saying this amusing? Urgh. As he watched, Severus smirked one final time, headed over to the lit fireplace, and calmly threw his letter on top of the flames. He (and Harry, of course) watched the letter burn to mere ash before turning around.

“I see you’ve taken a break from your letter writing again.”

“I was just wondering why you burned your letter. You never do that, even with Dumbledore.”

“It contained some information I wish to keep between myself and Draco for now. I would be rather displeased if it found its way into anyone else’s hands.”

“Oh. Um, all right.” Just ask, you coward! You know you really do want to know. “Erm, are you and Malfoy, um, you know…”
Severus’s eyes narrowed. Harry stopped talking and fiddled with his shirt sleeve. After a long silence, Severus cleared his throat.

“Were you truly attempting to ask if Draco and I are sexually intimate with each other?”

“Yeah.” Harry swallowed, expecting Severus to throw something at him any second now. This was too personal! He should have known. “Uh, are you, sir? If you are, I promise I’ll stop talking about him like I do.”

Severus snorted. “I would actually pay a large sum of money to see you attempt such a thing, Potter.”

Harry’s stomach dropped. Oh, Gods! Why did he have to pick Malfoy of all people? Malfoy was just… such a prick! Severus could do so much better. Severus sat down on the couch, leaned back, and stroked his right thumb over his jaw. He was obviously lost in thought, but Harry couldn’t let it go. He finally braved another question.

“Are you saying you’re shagging each other, then? Well, I mean, making plans to…”

“Hmm.” Severus gave Harry a penetrating look. “Possibly as often as you and Lupin.”

“I’ve already said I don’t-” Harry started to respond irritably and paused. “Oh. So you’re not?”

“Generally, when one is a godfather for almost eighteen years, one develops paternal feelings for the child. I would sooner sleep with Minerva on a sober night than engage my godson in relations. It’s disgusting to even consider otherwise. What the hell goes on in your brain sometimes, boy?”

Harry blushed and looked away. And EWWWW!!!!!! Now he was seeing Severus shagging Minerva. It was stuck. In his head. And wouldn’t. Go. Away. TORTURE!!!!! Harry knocked against his forehead, but nope. Still there.

“Um, nothing I want to talk about with you, sir.” Harry gagged a little bit. Minerva bits. “Believe me, you don’t want to know.”

“That is probably very true. I pity the children you may one day beget. I hope they do not inherit your disturbing thought processes.”

“Me, either. Ew.”

Severus gave him a strange look. “Don’t tell me. Ever. If you’re looking this appalled, whatever you’re thinking can be no good.”

Harry nodded and the two lapsed into a long silence. Harry tried to concentrate on his letter to Ron, but Severus kept distracting him. Oh, the man was just reading a book about what looked like Muggle mathematics. How boring. No, it was thoughts about Severus that kept distracting him. Finally, Harry laid his book down.

“May I ask a question?”

“It sounded like you just did. However, congratulations on your newfound use of the word ‘may’ rather than ‘can’ when asking a question.”

Severus didn’t even look up at him. Please say he wasn’t going to go back to ignoring him again!

“Thanks. Another one, then.”
"You may ask me as many questions as you like, Potter, but I might not answer any of them.” Severus’s eyes flickered up to him before going back to his book. “Go ahead.”

“Okay. Um, is there a reason you ignored me for three days?”

“I didn’t ignore you at all. Anytime you spoke to me, I responded.”

“Never verbally,” Harry pushed.

“My mind was preoccupied with other things. If you were offended by my non-verbalization, you are much too sensitive for your own good.”

He still wasn’t looking at him. Harry huffed, jumped up, and headed to the kitchen. Know what? He didn’t care. If Severus wanted to be a prick, he was more than welcome to do so. He, on the other hand, was just going to ignore it. Let’s see how Severus liked it.

Ah, yes. Coffee and Severus’s favorite pumpkin cream cheese pie. Harry briefly considered taking Severus some, but rejected the thought immediately. No, he was going to stay in here, have his snack, and... what? What could he do in here besides sulk? Oh! Well, duh. He could finish his letter to Ron and then start on one for Hermione.

Harry breezed back into the living room, grabbed ink and fresh parchment, put Ron’s half-finished letter on top, tucked a clean quill behind his ear, and came back into the kitchen. He felt proud of himself. He hadn’t looked at Severus once. Making himself comfortable at the table, Harry started his letter and slowly worked his way through his snack. He had to use Hermione’s ink-erasing spell a few times when he wrote down something and immediately changed his mind about putting it in, but writing was relaxing for the most part. Except when he erased something and put it back in the letter a few sentences later. That was kind of irritating.

Oh, to hell with this.

Harry quickly finished Ron’s letter, put Hermione’s on hold, and decided he’d go read his male pregnancy book. He had been meaning to mess around with a few of the spells and potions, anyway. He knew some of them could be taken years before they were even needed. They were probably meant for men who eventually wanted children and/or just wanted to be ready when the time came. Whatever. That sort of applied to him.

When Severus entered the kitchen and began preparing himself a cup of coffee, Harry used all of his willpower not to look at him. Instead, he signed his letter, sealed it with the powerful nonverbal spell Hermione had told him about, and left the room with it in-hand. He placed it in the usual spot they received letters, pulled his pregnancy guide from the desk, and padded back to their bedroom. He felt childish, but he just didn’t want to see Severus right now.

The man was such a bastard sometimes.

By the time four hours had come and gone, Harry had found two spells and one potion he wanted to try as soon as possible. One spell would permanently change his internal body structure, adding a uterus-like area he’d need when he finally wanted a baby. He found that particularly cool, because it would expand when it was needed and then just remain kind of shrunken (according to the diagram) until conception. There was a potion that did the same, but the spell seemed easiest and more palatable to him. Although, the book warned that the spell would cause the most intense pain of the two options. Harry decided to stick with the spell, though. Pain was nothing new to him and potions never tasted good. The taste lingered for hours.
The other spell could be cast as early as a wizard’s childhood and ensured that man’s body would begin providing nutrients and whatnot to any baby he conceived. According to the book, it was a really useful spell and was highly suggested, because unless a wizard is actively trying to have a baby, he wouldn't really know he was pregnant for months.

He’d just cast those two spells together, but he might wait a few days for them. He really wanted to work on this potion... like right now.

It was the best, the most exciting. The book listed four different variations of the potion, but they all did the same thing: they realistically simulated a pregnancy. If he took the potion, his belly would swell up, his hormones would feel crazy at the oddest times, he’d be able to experience the ‘sexual release’ difference… everything! The part he liked best about the potion, though, is that it would last for a week. It looked like the best way to make anyone understand what pregnancy was really like.

Harry wanted that potion now.

He studied the four potions and realized he probably had all of the necessary ingredients. Thankfully, whoever their potions professor was last year had been an idiot and had decided to send a potions kit to keep at the safe house. It had been packed with a lot of things that hadn’t even been mentioned in their seventh-year books so it wouldn’t be hard for him to do one of these.

Which one, though?

He was almost positive he wouldn’t appreciate doing first the potion that would make him feel thirty-four weeks along and the six weeks one wasn’t far enough along for him. He wanted to be able to feel and see as much as he possibly could, after all. Would he have a belly at twelve weeks or should he just be safe and go with the twenty-one weeks? Twenty-one weeks was a bit far along… That was what? Five-ish months, right? Well, it was over halfway. Hmm. Yeah, he’d do that one first. Harry smiled and jumped off of the bed. Hurrying to the living room, he almost ran Severus over in the hallway, but didn’t stop to check if the man was still intact.

“Sorry,” he called back, forgetting he was pissed off at him.

He needed to double check he had the right ingredients and whatnot. He would start the brewing tonight if he had everything the potion required. With the book in one hand, Harry started laying out his cauldron, brewing paraphernalia, and several piles of ingredients. He once more checked the book, eyed the mess he’d made of his desktop, and grinned. He’d start this after dinner. By any luck, he’d look and feel pregnant in the morning.

Hopefully Severus didn’t have a coronary when the coffee kicked in after breakfast.

Chuckling and gleefully imagining Severus’s reaction, Harry trotted to the kitchen to quickly make up something for dinner. He knew the moment Severus entered the kitchen behind him, but he didn’t say anything. If the man was done being a prat, he’d have to be the first one to say something.

Oh, and he did.

“Potter, do you somehow require a menstruation alleviator?”

“Excuse me?” Harry asked, offended. “What the bloody hell?”

“Bloody hell would be the correct term, actually.” Severus closely studied Harry’s stomach, furrowed his brows, and shook his head. He looked immensely disturbed. “Have you found a way
for men to suffer through a monthly menses? Is that what is wrong with you?”

No wonder Severus was single. He’d never make it out of a relationship alive!

“Did you actually hear the words that just came out of your mouth, Snape? I mean, do you know how offensive you are being?”

“I’m not trying to be offensive at all,” Severus disagreed carefully and Harry protectively crossed his arms over his chest. “I can swear to that.” Severus held up both hands. “On my life.”

“Then explain how asking a guy if he needs something for that isn’t offensive, sir. I really wanna know.”

“You’re taking offence at every three words I say. You spent four hours locked away in our bedroom and I can only assume you were sulking about something I wasn’t even aware that I had done or said. You felt slighted when I didn’t speak to you for three days, though we’ve gone much longer without talking. You’re currently elbow-deep in melted chocolate, which you were just eating with a spoon. And—” Severus leaned forward on the table and again eyed Harry’s stomach, this time apprehensively. “Most of the potions ingredients you have laid out on the desk are for a well-known alleviator of uterine cramping, bloating, and pain. I assure you, I wasn’t being offensive. Terrified you’re becoming a woman, yes, but not offensive. I wouldn’t risk it until I knew what the hell is going on.”

“Really?”

“You realize you just asked that in a small, hopeful voice, right? Potter, tell me you haven’t messed around with some potion that can enable a gender switch. The truth now, boy.”

“Potions can do that?”

Severus sighed in relief and relaxed into his chair. “That’s a no, then. Might I ask what exactly you are preparing to brew?”

“Would it have been so bad if I had taken a potion like that?”

“No,” Severus replied slowly. “I daresay your dating life would be more active at the very least. What potion are you preparing to brew?”

“Erm, well, I’m not sure I’ll even do it right the first time…” Harry turned away from Severus and avoided eye contact. “Just one of the potions in my pregnancy book. Nothing too bad.”

“Indeed. Which potion will you be attempting?”

“I’m going to do it no matter what you say, sir,” Harry warned.

“As long as you don’t somehow maim or kill yourself with it, I don’t care what potion you’re brewing.”

“Are you sure?”

“Potter, you’re worrying me again.”

“Sorry. Erm, it’s a pregnancy simulator.”

“Oh, dear God. This is so much worse than you becoming a woman,” Severus groaned. “You do realize that you will, in effect, be chemically pregnant for a week straight? You cast a pregnancy
test spell, it’ll show positive. That is how realistic those simulators are, boy, and there isn’t any potion you can take to reverse the effects. If we get called back to Hogwarts tomorrow night to face the Dark Lord, you will be doing so as a pregnant man. Are you prepared for that?”

“Yes, but I don’t think we’re getting called home yet, sir. I’m not worried about it. Besides, even if we were to have gotten called home, it’s not like I’m actually carrying a baby. It’s not real. I just want to know what it feels like.”

“Very well, but if you get dizzy and fall or unexpectedly wet yourself, I reserve the right to taunt you mercilessly. Also, if your emotions start annoying me, I will not hesitate to hex you. Do you understand and accept these terms?”

“Sure, whatever. I’m going to start brewing right after we eat.”

“Just remember what I said. Don’t maim or kill yourself in the process. Albus would have my head and the world would be doomed. What stage of development will you be undertaking?”

“Twenty-one weeks. I didn’t want to be too early on or too far along. This way, I’ll be able to feel what it’s like to lug around a belly and everything. I mean, there was a twelve weeks, but I’m not sure…”

“You don’t believe you would be showing at twelve weeks? You’re quite scrawny. I can almost guarantee you’d show.”

“I’m just playing it safe. I’d hate to spend the time working on the potion for me to only get some of the effects. I want to know what it’s really like, you know?” Harry pulled their burgers from the skillet, set them on a plate, and pulled out some leftover potato salad. After a few minutes of silence, he again faced Severus and nervously asked, “You don’t think it’s weird I want to do it?”

Severus looked up from the table, cocked his head, and furrowed his brows.

“Do what, precisely? You use that phrase for quite a few things. My answer would vary.”

Harry blushed. “Take a pregnancy simulator.”

“No, I don’t think it’s anything of the sort. I actually believe it’s a wise decision. It’s better to know beforehand if you can handle everything a pregnancy entails before you wind up with a positive result, is it not?”

“Yeah.” Harry smiled. “Yeah, it is.”

“Mmm. Also, the timing of your decision is perfect. If you were to take the potion while anywhere but here, The Daily Prophet would undoubtedly have an article posted about it within a day.”

“Oh, yeah, well… good thing I’m doing it down here. Anyways, I’ve got burgers, potato salad, and some sliced vegetables here. Is that all right or do you want anything else?”

“That will do.” Severus retrieved the pitcher of iced tea from the fridge and poured their drinks. When he sat back down, he had the last of some apple pie. “I found dessert.”

Harry laughed and gave Severus a plate. That man could be such a bastard sometimes, but he knew how to smooth things over and make him… well… happy.

Whoa.
Harry nervously fingered his vial of potion and eyed the kitchen door. He’d been putting off taking the pregnancy simulator for a few days. Almost twelve now. Huh. He really didn’t know why, but he supposed maybe he was scared. What if he didn’t like being pregnant? What if he made a fool of himself? Severus would never let him forget it. What if Albus called them home unexpectedly? How in the hell would he explain being five months pregnant when he was still a virgin? What if he got depressed when the potion wore off, because he really did like being pregnant?

Oh, this was ridiculous!

Before he could talk himself out of it, Harry swallowed the entire contents of the vial and shakily set the vial down. Merlin, that tasted disgusting. Maybe he should sit down while the potion took effect. Yeah, good idea. Harry quickly checked the food, turned everything on low, and sat in his seat. He didn’t feel anything for the longest time. He almost moved to check if maybe he’d somehow accidentally taken the wrong potion when he felt his jeans get really tight, too tight, and ow, his stomach was still expanding. Harry grimaced in pain and immediately reached down to unbutton his jeans. Even though he knew what to expect, he got startled at the sight and feel of his large belly. As he unbuttoned his denims, his stomach rapidly finished ballooning and he stared down in awe.

Wow. This was… he liked it. A lot.

A relieved breath escaped him. Thank God. Now he really needed to put on something else. First, though, he needed to check the food again. It’d been a few minutes since he’d taken the potion, after all. He didn’t want it to burn. That taken care of, Harry shuffled back to the bedroom and tentatively opened the door. Severus must be in the shower, then. When Harry got into the closet, he stopped in front of the full-length mirror and smiled.

His pants were unbuttoned over a large belly and his shirt wasn’t quite big enough to cover everything so there was a fair amount of his skin on display. It looked amazing. Yeah, he really liked being pregnant. He was a little out of breath right now and all he’d been doing was walking, but it wasn’t uncomfortably bad. He could deal with it. Harry started digging through his clothes. Okay, this shirt was slightly bigger than the one he was wearing. Oh, and these pants didn’t have a button. They did, however, have a huge hole in the front of them. Couldn’t let Severus see his bits. Why did he even still have these?

Harry seized a thick pair of pajama bottoms and studied them. These might do. Harry quickly pulled them on and grumbled. Still a little tight, but they were the best he had at the moment. Hey, and the shirt matched. That’s good, because he didn’t want to be as big as a house and look ridiculously unmatched.

Once back in the kitchen, Harry turned the coffee on and contemplated everything he’d made for breakfast. It didn’t seem like nearly enough now. There were already scrambled eggs, sausage, and rolls. By the time he heard Severus turn the shower off, he’d managed to cook some bacon and oatmeal, sautéed mushrooms, and chopped up a fresh tomato. A whiff of coffee made him realize he should probably make himself some tea. They had some around here that Hermione claimed used to help her nausea all the time. God, was the coffee somehow already burnt? Harry divvied up a little of everything for him and Severus, held his breath while preparing Severus a cup of coffee, and took a hurried sip of the tea he’d just made. Ah, much better…

“Merlin, Potter. A little warning would have been-” Harry turned to Severus, who promptly stopped talking. “Is your stomach on display for a reason?”
Harry smiled timidly. “None of my clothes really fit. I didn’t really think about it until my jeans were too tight. You should have seen my shirt.”

“I can’t imagine it was much better than what you’re currently wearing.” Severus’s eyes swept over Harry’s clothing. “Your pajamas look a little too tight, as well.”

“They are, but they’re the biggest thing I have. Good thing this only lasts a week, right?”

Severus looked appalled. “You plan to wear those a week straight? You’ll smell horrible.”

“I’m sorry, sir. I don’t really have anything else.”

“You should have thought about this beforehand.”

“I—” Harry’s eyes started watering and Severus immediately started looking apprehensive. Harry rubbed one eye. “I’m sorry. I didn’t think about it.”

“It’s fine. Just don’t cry. I don’t honestly think I could handle it this early in the morning. I haven’t even had coffee yet.”

“Then drink it. Better yet, eat and drink at the same time. Your food is getting cold.”

Harry was in the middle of eating his own breakfast when his stomach started jerking. His eyes widened comically, catching Severus’s attention. Focusing on his belly, he stared in awe and slight horror. He could actually see his stomach move. This was kind of creepy. It’d be one thing if a baby were doing that, but there wasn’t anything in there doing that.

“It’s the potion.” Harry briefly glanced up at Severus, though the man wasn’t looking at him. He was watching his belly. “It’s contracting your internal skin and tissue, making it look as if a fetus were moving within you. You can actually tell the difference if you look closely enough.”

“It’s weird.”

“It’s part of the potion. You were warned to expect everything, were you not?”

“Yeah, but I didn’t think that included this.”

“Besides being distressed about having a nonexistent child kicking you, what do you think of it? Is it a feeling you could handle?”

Right. Think about the reason for doing this. Good one, Severus. Could he deal with this? Okay, pretend there was a real baby in there… Harry smiled.

“Yeah, I think I could. Thanks for reminding me why I’m doing this.”

“Hmm.” Severus finished his coffee, stood up, and refilled his glass. “Do you need a refill yet?”

Harry blanched. “Please keep that away from me.”

Severus frowned, looked at the pot, glanced at Harry, and finally snorted in understanding. He returned to his seat and smirked.

“Are you enjoying your increased sensitivity to smell?”

“And my newfound dislike of coffee, thank you very much.”
“How will you ever manage without coffee for an entire pregnancy when it finally occurs? I would have thought you’d already be a bit hysterical without it, knowing of the amount you consume on a daily basis.”

“It’s fine. My tea is great. I’ll live without it.”

“I suppose we’ll see. What have you planned for the day?”

“Well, I was going to write a few letters and clean the bathroom, but I think I might take a nap first.”

“Of course.” Severus rolled his eyes. “Have you written up our grocery list?”

“Sent it off yesterday. You don’t remember?”

“Why would I pay attention to when you send off for groceries? I’ve other things to do with my time than watch you.”

Harry shrugged, frowned at his half-eaten breakfast, and stood up slowly. He dumped the rest of his food in the waste bin, emptied his cup into the sink, and turned to Severus.

“I’m going to go lay down. Will you wake me when it’s close to lunchtime?”

“I suppose I have no choice in the matter.”

Harry yawned. “You could always let me sleep through, but then you’d probably just eat toast.”

“There’s nothing wrong with toast.”

“Except it’s not as filling as an actual meal.” Harry scratched his belly, yawned once more, and tugged his shirt down. “I’ll see you in a bit.”

“Fine.”

He didn’t make it further than the couch. Collapsing and groaning in pleasure, Harry curled up on two-thirds of the large couch, braced his head on the armrest, and promptly fell asleep.

Much too soon, he was awakened by a hand shaking his shoulder. It wasn’t gentle, but it wasn’t rough, either. It was just annoying. Harry shook it off and opened his eyes. Severus was kneeling over him a bit.

“What?”

“You were the one that wanted to wake up before lunch. It is now fifteen minutes before noon. Would you like to sleep longer?”

“Oh.” Harry sat up slowly and yawned. “No. I’m getting up. Does cheesy chicken pasta sound as good to you as it sounds to me?”

“I don’t care what you make.”

“All right.”

Harry quickly stood up and got a little light-headed. That was weird. Severus’s arm immediately wrapped around him and steadied him. Harry raised his gaze to Severus’s and frowned.
“Are you attempting to crack your skull open on the coffee table, boy?”

“I just got dizzy. That’s never happened before.”

“You’ve also never been ‘pregnant’ before. I warned you dizziness could come into play.”

“Oh, yeah. You also said you’d taunt me about it.”

Severus let him go, stepped back, and crossed his arms over his chest. “And I shall be doing so. Just not when your hormones are still likely to induce an hysterical fit.”

“You’re such an understanding man,” Harry said sweetly and Severus rolled his eyes. “I have to pee. Would you do me a favor?”

“It depends upon the favor you wish to ask of me.”

“Could you cut up the chicken I have thawing in the sink? I don’t want to randomly get dizzy again and lose a finger or two.”

“When you state your request in such a way, I have no choice but to comply. To do otherwise would be intolerable.”

“Thanks,” Harry called over his shoulder, already closing the bathroom door behind him. “Be out in a minute!”

Inside, there was a pile of clothing on the counter with a note on top. Curious, he picked up the note and smiled at the familiar handwriting.

Brat,

I will not have you moaning and groaning about ill-fitting, smelly clothing all week. You are to wear these and only these items of clothing until your pregnancy simulator has worked its way from your system.

S. Snape

When he finally made it to the kitchen a few minutes later, he knew four things. One, he really loved his new, borrowed clothing. They were so comfy! Two, he loved having an actual reason not to wear underwear. He’d always shied away from going without them, but now he felt he might just burn all of the ones he owned. Three, he couldn’t wait to test out the sexual side of pregnancy he’d read about. He was sensitive everywhere and he liked it. A lot. Four, Severus Snape was secretly a sweet guy. Who the hell would have thought? Hermione was totally finding out about this. Eventually. He wanted to relish this experience for a while before telling anyone.

“Thank you so much, sir. You don’t know what this means to me.”

“Your bathroom adventure took you long enough,” was all Severus said, though he looked uncomfortable. “I’ve cubed your chicken and have the pasta cooking.”

Harry bit his lip and looked at the pan Severus pointed at. “Oh, erm, that’s nice of you. Have you been stirring the pasta?”
“Of course I have. I also added salt to the water prior to adding the pasta. It creates a higher boiling temperature, thereby ensuring a faster and more thorough preparation. I’ve noticed you don’t do the same. Have you a reason?”

“I… uh, no. I taught myself to cook. No one’s ever told me that.” Harry tested the pasta, drained it, and rubbed his lower back. Man, it kind of ached. “If you can’t cook, how did you know that?”

Severus shrugged. “Self-taught Muggle Chemistry lessons.”

“Naturally. Why did I even ask?”

“I’ve truly no idea. After studying your Slytherin guidebook, one would think you knew of a Slytherin’s unspoken passion for learning.”

“Yeah. Guess I wasn’t thinking.”

Harry quickly fried up the chicken, mixed it into the pasta, and scattered copious amounts of cheese shreds on top. While he stirred, he rubbed his lower back with his knuckles. After staring at the food a long moment, he tossed in some of the peas left over from dinner two nights ago and left it to heat completely. Disregarding Severus’s presence, Harry leaned over on the counter and groaned.

“Is your back hurting overly much?”

“A little. It keeps moving between my stomach and back. It’s kind of dull, but I know it’s there.”

“Are you going to survive?”

“Maybe.” Harry turned pleading eyes on Severus. “Would you do me a really big favor if I promise to do something for you later?”

Severus leaned forward on the table, clasped his hands underneath his chin, and studied Harry intently. His eyes narrowed after a bit.

“What exactly would you be doing for me later?”

“Anything.”

“Hmm. Let me first hear your request.”

“Distrustful Slytherin,” Harry mumbled and then once more gave Severus a pleading look. “Will you rub my back, sir? Please.”

“You would agree to do anything I ask in return for a simple back rub?” Severus asked incredulously and Harry nodded. “Very well. I am amenable to the situation. When do you wish for me to-”

“Now, please.”

“Turn around and bend over,” Severus instructed. Harry complied as much as his belly would allow and hid his blushing face in his arms. Had Severus ever said that in… a different circumstance? “Pull your shirt up. I despise the feeling of material rubbing against my fingertips.”

Harry really did try, but first his shirt got caught on his belly and then it just fell right back down again. He heard Severus huff impatiently moments before his hand was smacked away and his shirt was pulled up to mid-back. When Severus’s hands finally began kneading his back, Harry
groaned in relief and scooted back a bit so his belly wasn’t near the counter. Laying his chest on the cool counter, Harry closed his eyes and pulled in a deep breath.

“Thank you so much, sir.” Severus grumbled and continued massaging his lower back. Harry wasn’t about to complain. He really was excellent at it. Where had he learned to do this? “Feels great.”

“So I’ve been told.”

“Really?” Despite his internal command not to, Harry tensed. Still, it was an opening to the question he’d just had. “By who?”

“Oddly enough, your mother.”

“Really?” he repeated. “My mum?”

“Yes.”

“What was she like?”

Severus continued rubbing and stayed silent for a while. “She was kind, intelligent, and a daily pain in my arse.”

“What?” Harry felt his eyes prickle. Damn hormones. “So you didn’t like her?”

“Of course I liked her. She was the best friend I’d ever had.” Severus took a deep breath and let it out in a quiet huff. “She just often forgot I was her best friend, as well, rather than her child. She was always nagging me about something. Now that I think about it, you both are quite similar at times.”

“Really?”

“Yes. It’s a rather frightening thought.”

Harry laughed shakily. Those damned tears were actually leaking out of his eyes without his permission! What insolence.

He had a good reason to cry, though. Whether Severus realized it or not, he’d just told him the best thing he’d ever heard in his entire life. Severus, who had known his mother since childhood and probably knew her the best of anyone she’d ever known, had just told him that they were alike.

“Thank you,” Harry whispered.

“Potter?” Severus’s hands froze. “Oh, Merlin. Are you crying?”

“It’s just the hormones.” Like hell they were. He’d be crying either way, he was sure. “Sorry.”

“Hormones. Right. Is your back sufficiently soothed or must I continue?”

“Just a little more?”

“You are a greedy child.” Regardless of his snarking, Severus kept rubbing his back. “Will your pasta burn?”

Harry blindly reached a hand over and shut off the heat.
“No.”

“Brat.” A few minutes later, Severus finally pulled his hands away. “I suggest you straighten slowly. You wouldn’t want to get dizzy, would you?”

“Not really, no.” Harry handed a plate to Severus. “Here. Serve yourself, sir. I’ll get the drinks.”

“No. You take care of our plates. I’ll grab our drinks.”

“Sir, you essentially cooked. I should do the rest.”

“Potter, you cooked. I just boiled pasta.”

“Sir, seriously, I-”

“We shall not be discussing this any longer. I am older than you, more intelligent than you, and will win if you continue to argue with me. Serve the food.”

“Fine.”

Obnoxious and occasionally wonderful prick. They silently moved around the kitchen, Severus setting out drinks and silverware and Harry serving their food. Harry sat in his usual seat, waited for Severus to do the same, and then dug in to his food.

“Mr. Potter.”

Harry lowered his fork at Severus’s serious tone and frowned. Uh oh.

“What did I do?”

“You have done noth-” Severus abruptly glared. “What have you done?”

“Nothing! You just sounded like I was in trouble. Whatever it is, I didn’t do it this time!”

Severus hid his face in his hands and kind of looked like he was… silently laughing! What?

“You are an idiot, Potter,” Severus spoke, voice muffled. “But that was highly amusing… and I forbid you from telling anyone I just said that.”

“Right, okay, yeah. So what’s going on, sir, if I didn’t do anything wrong?”

“Well.” Severus finally lowered his hands. “This morning, while you were napping, I received a letter from Albus. We are to be having a guest stay with us for a short time.”

Harry looked down at his large belly in a slight panic and then down further at the lounge bottoms Severus had lent him.

“Erm, when?”

“Sometime this afternoon, it would seem.”

“Sir?”

“Hmm?” Severus asked distractedly. “What is it?”

“Uh, have you warned them about… this?”
Severus looked up from his plate and cocked his head to the side. After a moment, his eyes took on an odd gleam and he smirked mischievously.

“No and neither do I intend to tell him it’s not a real pregnancy. He is going to suffer a while for his cheek.”

“Um, who is it?”

“Next question.”

Harry harrumphed. “How long will ‘he’ be here?”

“A week or two at most. Then again, we were only supposed to be here six months tops.”

“Sir, who is it?”

Severus sighed. “My godson.”

“What? No!”

“You cannot control who seeks shelter at the safe house, boy. One of the last things I gave him was a note warning him of the suspicions rounding the Death Eater meetings, but he clearly did not heed my warnings and was discovered. He is staying and that is final.”

Harry crossed his arms over his chest, though they were actually more like resting on his belly, and strove to look as grumpy as Severus. He didn’t really succeed.

“I’m not giving up my bed. If you try to make me, I’ll let you starve. You’ll be back on toast, sir. Don’t force me to do that to you.”

“Withholding your services because one of my family members- a family member you don’t like, at that- is staying with us? What’s next, will I be sleeping on the couch? Forced to beg on bended knee for admittance to my own room?”

“Maybe. Keep it up and see what happens.”

Severus smirked. “You will make someone the perfect wife one day.”

“Until then, I’m stuck with you, right?”

“Sadly, yes.”

“I’d say I’ve never heard you complain about it, but it’d be a lie. You’re really not gonna tell him it’s a fake pregnancy?”

“No, I won’t be and neither will you. He deserves to stew for a few days. I want him to suffer, to constantly wonder why I’ve not told him you’re expecting my child, for that is who he will assume fathered the child.”

“Alright. Erm, why?”

“To remind him I could do worse than what he accused me of in his last letter.”

“And by worse you mean be with me?” Harry asked sourly. “Thanks a lot.”

“That is not at all what I meant, boy. By worse I meant I could be in an intimate relationship with
his school rival and not even hint at it… or tell him I’m going to be a father and he knows if I ever became a father, the relationship would either already be serious or would shortly become so. As I said, he will suffer.”

Harry grinned. “He’ll either be heartbroken or furious.”

“You are not to enjoy his punishment.”

“Oh, but I will and I’m still not giving up my bed. You’ll have to.” Harry shrugged. “Or share.”

“I will not be sharing my bed.”

“I didn’t say with me!”

Severus gave him a look. “Neither did I.”

“I thought that’s what you meant… and you just sounded horrified. It bothered me,” Harry said pitifully. “Sorry.”

“As much as it pains me to interrupt this disturbing… whatever it is, I felt I should before you two kiss and make up.”

Harry visibly startled and swung his gaze around to Draco. Severus turned to him, too, looking superbly calm.

“Draco, come in. I didn’t expect you until later this afternoon.”

“Clearly.”

“I’m assuming Albus didn’t accompany you.”

“No, but he did want me to give you this letter.”

Severus quickly read through the letter while Harry and Draco blankly stared at each other. Harry hunched down in his seat and maintained eye contact, his eyes narrowing a little when Draco began to scowl. Paper and a fist hitting the table broke their shared gaze.

“This will not do. Albus has added a room next to ours and expects me to move in to it.” Harry enjoyed the swoopy, flippy feeling in his belly that the word ‘ours’ had caused and waited with bated breath. What was he thinking? “I see nothing for it. If I allow you two to room together, only destruction would occur. Draco, you will take the new room.”

Harry tamped down on a victorious chuckle as Draco swung his eyes to Severus, looking stunned.

“Why shouldn’t Potter take it?”

“For two reasons, Draco. One, I do not trust him not to find a way to maim himself without supervision.” Harry rolled his eyes. “Two, we will have to move his things back when you again leave. It is simply easier to have you occupy the new room.”

We? Harry almost smiled and was happy someone else being around wouldn’t mess things up too much. Oh, and his pretend baby now had a pretend father. Harry rubbed his belly and looked between the two men opposite him. Severus seemed to be winning the staring match. Finally, Draco gave up.

“I suppose if you wish to continue rooming with the prat, be my guest.”
Severus’s chin came up. “It is quite the opposite, Draco. This has been my home for over a year now so feel free to be my guest. Have you eaten yet?”

“Home?” Draco looked confused and glanced between Harry and Severus a few times, brows furrowed. Severus merely sipped his iced tea and arched a brow in impatience. “Not yet, no. Oh, and Potter? We found out Percy Weasley was a traitor to the Order. Thought you’d like to know.”

Harry gasped and felt his eyes start to tear up.

“Stop it right now,” Severus spoke, giving Harry a look. Harry wiped his eyes, awkwardly climbed out of his chair, and waddled to the counter to prepare Draco a plate of food. “Sit down, Draco. Not Potter’s seat, boy. Are you trying to vex me already? Merlin.”

“I’m assum… ing… Potter?”

Finished with Draco’s plate, Harry turned around and looked expectant. Well, in more ways than one. Severus snapped his fingers in front of Draco’s eyes with no response. Harry waddled back to the table, set Draco’s food down, and gratefully dropped back into his seat.

“Yes?” Harry prompted, dragging the word out, after another minute. Draco was staring at the top curve of Harry’s belly. “Snap out of it, Malfoy.”

Draco shook his head. “Are those, er, Severus’s pajama bottoms?”

“Why?” Severus and Harry asked together.

“Curious,” Draco replied, his voice breaking a little in the middle. “Who’s-”

“You forgot his drink,” Severus interrupted. “Do you expect him to go without?”

Harry sighed and pushed himself out of his seat again. He placed an empty glass by Draco’s untouched meal, poured in some tea, and glanced at Severus.

“Would you like a refill while I’m up?”

Severus held his empty glass up in response. Harry tried to take it from him, but Severus held fast and raised both brows. Giving up, Harry poured tea into the glass and put the pitcher back into the fridge.

“I would like some sugar in this.”

Already back at his chair, Harry paused and frowned at the man.

“You usually do, but the sugar is right in front of you.” Severus scowled at his glass and Harry sighed before going back over to ‘fix’ Severus’s tea. He’d be thrilled that Severus was still doing this even though Draco was here if his back wasn’t aching so badly. “Is that any better?”

“It’s still bitter,” Severus said after a sip. “It’s appalling. Now sit down before you fall. Draco, grab his plate and tea.”

Harry sat down to Severus’s immediate left and watched Draco dazedly move his things. Harry dug back into his food, watching Severus and Draco look at each other several times when they thought the other wasn’t paying attention.

“You’re pregnant?” Draco finally asked. “I mean, I’m not seeing things, right?”
Harry began to answer, but Severus held up a hand and shook his head at him. Harry closed his mouth, briefly quirked his brows, and Severus faced Draco.

“He doesn’t want to discuss it, Draco. You understand, don’t you?”

Draco furrowed his brows and then slowly nodded.

***

Later That Day

Harry dropped onto the couch and cursed his nonexistent bladder.

“What is this now, six times since lunch?” Draco asked disdainfully. “Perhaps you should have been a little more careful.”

He scowled at the annoying blonde bastard and jumped when Severus tapped his arm.

“What are you fixing for dinner?”

“I don’t know,” Harry said after a moment. “I’m not feeling picky right now. Does anything sound good to you?”

“I wouldn’t say anything you make sounds good, but your attempts at lasagna are almost palatable.”

“Fine.”

Severus looked up sharply.

“Why did you just do that? How did I offend you?”

“It would just be nice if, for once, you weren’t such a complete arsehole.” Harry frowned and felt his eyes prickle. “I’m sorry. Please forget I said anything. Does lasagna, salad, breadsticks, and strawberry pie- baked with a lattice top crust- sound good?”

“Strawberry pie?” Severus asked in interest and then quickly tamped down on it. He shrugged carelessly. “You can make breadsticks? Why have you never mentioned it before?”

“I didn’t think you liked them so why waste my time?”

“For your own benefit?” Draco suggested and Harry shot him a nasty look. “What?”

“I’m over here,” Severus reminded Harry with a huff. “Merlin.”

“Do you want breadsticks, sir?”

“It depends upon your method of making them. Are yours stick thin or rather thick?”

“Thick is usually best, but it’s whatever you… er, both… want.”

“Thick,” Severus decided without once looking at Draco.

“Alright. In that case, I should probably go make those up early so…” Harry drifted off and stared at Severus. He was excited about the pie, wasn’t he? “I’ve never made strawberry pie here before, have I?”
“Indeed you have not.”

He was excited! Harry almost clapped. Yet another dessert he could make for his… for Severus. Man, he must be slacking if he hadn’t recently made something that inspired this much enthusiasm from merely hearing it mentioned. Well, that was going to change as soon as possible.

“I’ll make two just in case, all right?”

“Do whatever you wish, Potter, and stop telling me.”

Oh, yeah, he was really excited.

“I’m not particularly fond of strawberry,” Draco groused quietly.

“Then don’t eat it, Malfoy.”

“Stop it now. I will not have my godson and house- my- the cook irritable all night. He could do any number of things to our food, Draco, that I wouldn’t even dare to dream about. Hold your tongues, the both of you.”

He almost said housewife in front of Draco! Harry smiled widely at Severus and then tried- and failed- to get off the couch. Three times.

“Help?”

Severus snorted, stood up, and hauled Harry off the couch with one arm.
“Snape! Please!” Harry’s toes curled as he yet again pounded on the door. “I really have to pee!”

“You were in here just a few minutes ago,” Severus grumbled. “Do you really have to go or are you simply trying to annoy me?”

“Please!”

“Get in here, then, and hurry up with it.” Harry ran into the bathroom, shoved his borrowed clothing out of the way, and barely managed not to pee in or on the clothing. “How are you still going? It hasn’t been that long since you last relieved yourself.”

“Twenty minutes, I know. You were laying out your razor and whatnot that time,” Harry sighed as he finally finished and pulled Severus’s clothing back into place. “I’ve just been so thirsty this morning.”

Harry trotted over to the sink to wash his hands and chuckled. Severus opened the shower curtain, which drew Harry’s nearly avid attention. Good God above, that man looked good when he was wet… and holy crap, he was feeling a little, ah, stiff. Severus wiped off his face to better see Harry and glared.

“What is so funny?”

“I finally remembered not to flush.”

“I think I really would have killed you this time had you flushed. Therefore, you more so than I should be thankful for your conscientiousness.”

Harry waved a hand back towards Severus as he slipped from the bathroom… and right into Draco’s path. Draco took one look at the now suspiciously silent bathroom, Harry’s face, his belly, and then the living room before shuddering and continuing on. Harry blushed violet and decided to go make breakfast.

Fifteen minutes later, Severus joined him in the kitchen. Harry looked first at him, then his hands, and turned back to what he was doing to hide a smirk. He knew Severus had been wanking! Oh, gods… he’d been doing that before he walked in. Harry had to calm himself and his tightening belly with a really deep breath. After a glance at Severus’s still wet hair, he needed two more.

Damn, he was so turned on right now… by Severus? Odd.

“Are you going to make it, boy?”

Gods, his voice was so low and raspy right now. Harry shivered and filed this away for later fantasizing during his own shower.

“Coffee, sir?”

“You ask this question every morning. Do you expect my answer to ever change?”

“Not really, no.”

“Then you needn’t ask. Just give me coffee.”
“A little grumpy, aren’t we?”

“No. I’m just waiting for the housewife to figure out the way I like things in the morning.” Harry cast the door a wary look and Severus scoffed. “Please, boy. I wouldn’t have mentioned it if he could hear. My silencing charms happen to hold no matter what I do.”

“Oh. Well, I’m just surprised you’re mentioning it. Of course I know how you love your mornings. You want silence, lots of coffee, good food, a better book, and even more silence.”

“How well you’ve learned. I believe I’ve already said this, but you will make a lovely little wife one day.”

Harry snorted. “I don’t know whether to be offended or not.”

“I would be offended if I were you. I do, you must know by now, think of you as a woman in a male’s body.”

“Git,” Harry grumbled quietly.

“I thought you were supposed to worship the ground I walk on, not insult me at every turn.”

Harry crossed his arms and laid them on top of his belly. He gave Severus a thoughtful look before shaking his head and laughing.

“No, sir. If Mrs. Weasley is right, a husband is supposed to worship the ground his wife walks upon. She’s the one who usually cooks, cleans, and bears the children, after all.” Something flickered in Severus’s eyes and Harry gasped before moving closer. “Oh, I’m so sorry, sir. I didn’t mean to bring that up!”

“Nonsense. Stop hyperventilating. Talking about children doesn’t bother me. Where is my coffee? You’re being quite slow this morning.”

“I’m sorry,” Harry replied with a small pout to his lips. He quickly made up a cup of coffee for Severus and turned to hand it to him, but froze. Severus was studying him strangely and Harry swallowed. “Sir?”

“Hmm?”

“Your coffee… Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Severus said and quickly looked up to Harry’s eyes. “I was lost in thought.”

Draco breezed into the kitchen right then, stopped in confusion, and blinked. He moved his head back into the living room and knocked on the kitchen wall moments after Severus surreptitiously waved away his silencing spell. Draco reappeared and shrugged.

“Morning, Severus.”

“Good morning, Draco. Did you enjoy your first night here?”

“Yeah.” Draco grabbed the mug of black coffee from Harry’s hand, refusing to look at him even once. “How was your night?”

“It was relaxing. Satisfyingly so.”

“Ugh.”
Turning, Harry rolled his eyes and tried to ignore the conversation still going on in the background. He found it to be easier than he thought. The ‘baby’ was kicking again, prompting him to wonder why Severus had been staring at him like he had been a few minutes ago. Maybe he should mention it to Hermione when he finally told her about the fake pregnancy, see what she thought about it.

“-and since I’m being forced to room on my own-”

Harry clued back into the present and realized Draco’s voice was annoying him to no end. He could barely focus on what he was actually saying.

“I have told you why you’ve been given your own room, Draco. I would have thought you’d be happy to be sleeping alone rather than in the same room with Harry Potter. Unless, of course, you feel he’s playing house with the wrong man.”

His name sounded kind of erotic… no, straight up obscene when Severus said it…and he was getting turned on again. Damn Sever- No. No, hold up. WHAT?

“I don’t know how I’m even supposed to respond to that. Have you lost your mind?” Harry seconded that thought. “Why would I- er, playing house?”

Severus smiled in a way Harry had never seen, locked eyes with Harry a moment, and then let his gaze drop down to his full belly. “Mmm. Is breakfast almost ready? I’m quite ravenous this morning. I can’t imagine why.”

“It’s yours?” Draco asked in horror. “I thought you were just screwing him! It’s actually yours?”

“How else would you explain him being pregnant? I thought the answer would be obvious to you, Draco.”

“Oh, great Merlin’s ghost. But- no!”

“No?”

“Surely he’s had friends come visit. I know he wouldn’t have…”

“Wouldn’t he?” Severus asked strangely and looked from Draco to Harry, his gaze lingering and eyes briefly narrowing. “No, he’s not had any visitors apart from your last visit.”

“There! Maybe one of the-”

“Um, these walls are as thin as parchment,” Harry interrupted. “Also, nasty. They’re like family. That’d be like saying you and-”

Severus loudly cleared his throat. “I think he understands what you’re trying to say. There was not one time we couldn’t hear what you were saying, brat.”

“You heard what Fred, George, and I were talking about?”

“It was all quite vague.”

“Oh. It wasn’t anything bad! I-”

“No! Just… no. It had to have been one of them,” Draco said desperately. “Please tell me-”

“Even if we hadn’t heard him continuously talking, Draco, he has an incredible set of lungs on
him.” Harry blushed, Severus smirked at him, and Draco groaned. “He’s also horrible about
keeping his silencing charms in place. We would have known.”

“I’m also twenty-one weeks in,” Harry commented. “You guys visited after I conceived.”

Severus nodded. “Quite right. We didn’t feel it was an appropriate time to tell anyone so we kept
the news to ourselves. We’ve known quite a while now.”

“He wants it to be a surprise,” Harry said, warming up to the story. “He knew I wasn’t ready for
anyone to know and he didn’t want to stress me out too much.”

“Indeed I didn’t. Whether he births a boy or girl, the child will be heir to both the Snape and Potter
fortunes. We can’t risk him miscarrying. You understand, I’m sure.”

“No. Oh, Merlin, no. Severus, please,” Draco flat out begged. “You would have said… well,
something! Right?”

“I clearly didn’t, though.”

“But… but you…”

When Draco fell silent, Harry snickered and started making up plates for the three of them. While
Draco stared at Severus in an odd cross of astonishment and horror, Severus bundled up a napkin
and threw it at him. Harry turned, mouth opened in shock by Severus doing such a childish action,
and gave him a look.

“I know what you’re doing over there, boy. Stop it and feed me.”

Draco remained noticeably silent after that. Even when he caught Severus intently watching the
‘baby’ kicking Harry’s belly, he didn’t say a word. No, he just blanched and looked away. Harry
smiled widely and quite enjoyed his breakfast… of eggs, peanut butter, sauerkraut, and bacon.
Draco had merely gagged at the sight and pushed his food away.

Ha.

***

Harry yawned widely and tried to figure out what had pulled him from sleep.

He sat up and shoved his glasses onto his face, automatically reaching for his wand. The bedroom
was as black and silent as a tomb so he doubted it came from within. Sliding out of bed, Harry
slipped on his house slippers and attempted to tie his house robe on, but it was too small now.
Instead, he grabbed Severus’s and hoped the man wouldn’t wake up and see.

Well. That hope was all shot to hell. Severus’s bed was empty, which meant Severus was awake
and out there, most likely with Draco. It was the middle of the night, but that was hardly surprising.
The moment he opened the bedroom door, he saw the hallway and living room lights ablaze.

This was getting ridiculous. Draco and Severus were mock-dueling in the living room for the
second night in a row and it was only four in the morning! Draco had only been here two nights!!
When did they ever frickin’ sleep? He was grateful Severus had cast silencing and light-shuttering
charms so he could keep sleeping, but this was getting to be a habit he didn’t like. What if they hurt
themselves or destroyed the house? That’d teach them both, wouldn’t it?

Harry silently padded down the hall and through the living room, seemingly uncaring that spellfire
was shooting around him. Somewhere glass shattered and showered all over the carpet and Draco shot a nasty hex too close to Harry, which Severus returned. Harry simply walked through it all easily, hands on his belly, and entered the kitchen.

“Wait a moment, Draco.”

“By all means, go check on your girlfriend.”

“Draco,” Severus warned and then poked his head into the kitchen. “We woke you up again.”

“Yup.”

Severus harrumphed and disappeared. The duel started back up as soon as he was gone and Harry grumbled to himself. Might as well make some coffee. They would need it. He’d probably have to go back to sleep when the duel was over.

How long had Severus even slept last night? When had he gotten up and how hadn’t he made any noise? In a sleepy daze, Harry started the coffee and prepared some bread dough. He may as well make some bread for breakfast since he had the time this morning. They hadn’t had any in a while, too, so it was worth it.

What felt like an eternity later, Draco stumbled into the kitchen, clutching his side. Severus followed behind, looking unhurt. Harry had to control the urge to ask if he was injured. The secret housewife in him wanted to rush to him and check him all over while the intelligent part of his brain told him to remain where he was. Instead, he merely grimaced at Severus and wordlessly pointed at the two coffees he’d just made up for the two of them.

“What’s that smell?” Draco asked curiously, still rubbing his sore side. “Pie?”

“Bread,” Severus responded immediately and spun, narrowing his eyes. “I get the first slice, boy. You’re lucky I didn’t break your finger for cutting into it first when you were last here.”

Draco glared harshly at Harry, but Harry only shrugged in return. “He figured it out on his own.”

“Indeed. What flavor is it?”

“Pumpkin chocolate chunk. Your f-” Harry yawned and heard his jaw click. “-favorite. Why were you up dueling so early again?”

“Draco needed the practice.”

“You’re going to hurt yourselves one day.”

“Why would you care?” Draco asked. His voice wasn’t as harsh as he’d probably like, but he did look really tired. “You’d probably think it was funny.”

“Shut up, Draco,” Severus spoke into his coffee mug. “It was merely an observation he made. You needn’t constantly think he’s waiting for your downfall.”

Draco looked amazed. Harry shrugged again when those pale grey eyes focused on him and pulled the bread from the oven. It was perfect, of course. He tiredly cut out a thick slice and levitated it to Severus. Draco’s soon followed. Taking his own slice in hand, Harry trudged to the table and collapsed in the seat directly beside Severus. He didn’t think he could make it to his own seat. He was exhausted.
“I hope you weren’t expecting much. I’m too tired to make anything else right now.”

“You’re ruining my breakfast, Potter.”

“Oh, ha ha. Just eat.” Harry pushed away his bread chunk until it was beside Severus’s right hand and swallowed a fair amount of juice. He’d eat when he was a little more awake. “How did the duel go?”

“Draco lost.”

“I did not. I just…”

“He was flat on his back with my boot on his chest and his wand in my hand,” Severus announced, eyeing Harry’s bread. “He lost.”

“Sounds like it.”

“Are you not going to eat that?”

“I’m too tired to. I got woke up.”

“How? I cast a silencing charm on our bedroom.”

Our. That almost made Harry smile. Also, the smell of coffee was both making him feel nauseous and making his mouth water.

“I have no idea. I guess I sensed I was alone… or that two guys were fighting in the living room.”

“Perhaps you should wait until later in the day to challenge me to a duel, Draco. We wouldn’t want little Potter to worry his pretty little head again, would we?”

Draco chuckled, but Harry still gave Severus a grateful look. Getting rid of the insults, he could tell Severus was apologizing in his own way and assuring him they wouldn’t duel again while he was asleep.

“Thanks. I’m going back to bed. Eat more bread if you’re still hungry.”

“Very well. Oh, and brat, is that my house robe?”

“Mine’s too small. I didn’t really have a choice about borrowing yours.”

“Wouldn’t be the first time, I believe,” Severus lied smoothly, quickly gave him a look, and then let his eyes fall to his belly. “And how is my child this morning?”

“Sleeping, like I should be. Are you coming?”

Draco groaned and Severus looked immensely pleased.

***

Exactly twenty-nine hours later, Severus and Draco were kicked back on the sofa with their boots on the coffee table. Harry, still wearing the cooking apron he’d been wearing when slaving away in the kitchen that morning, was currently cleaning up the bathroom. Well, no, it was more like he was gathering up their dirty laundry to wash… not that he could really pay attention. Most of his attention was focused on thinking about Severus and that prat of a godson of his.
They hadn’t even said hello to him that morning.

His irritation spiked the longer he gathered Draco’s dirty socks and pants from the floor. The belly from his fake pregnancy made everything extremely difficult, those bastards in his once clean living room were either oblivious or uncaring, his back had ached constantly since he took that damned pregnancy potion almost three days ago, he felt like he was starving, the entire house had been a mess every single day since Draco’s arrival, he was exhausted and more than a little cranky by this point, and he was gonna castrate two particular men in the very near future if they kept ignoring him until they were hungry and wanted him to cook for them.

Then there was the fact that he’d stupidly cast those two pregnancy spells that morning– the one to provide nutrients to the baby if he got pregnant and the other to start growing a permanent male womb and conception pathway– while still being ‘pregnant’ and already uncomfortable, because he was an idiot apparently. The ache in his belly from that spell was only getting worse as time passed, which put him in an even blacker mood that was being soured further by the second by those ingrates in the living room. Harry growled and threw a boot into the rubbish bin. If Draco wanted it, he should have put it in his room.

“I’d better go. You stay here. It would be safer, I think.”

Fucking Severus. His voice was bloody irritating. Why was he even talking? They’d been in there quietly reading all morning. Talking wasn’t necessary for that.

And oh, yes. That living room was next and if they dared complain about anything– ANYTHING!– he was leaving them to fend for themselves for dinner and barricading himself in the bathroom with the toy Fred and George had given him and the leftover cherry chocolate layer cake Severus doesn’t know they still have.

Actually, that sounded lovely. He could get off and then recuperate with a bath and cake. Course, he’d probably eat the cake right out of the pan since he was still chemically pregnant and didn’t give a damn, but whatever.

Severus was standing in the doorway when Harry turned around with a full laundry basket balanced on his hip. He scowled and shoved past Severus, who immediately started following him.

“What do you want?”

“What have I done to offend you this time?”

“What are you talking about?” Harry grumbled, entering the laundry room and tossing their dirty clothing in to the washer. Severus’s eyes narrowed as he watched. “I’m not in the mood, Snape. Don’t give me that look.”

“Why are you doing his laundry?”

“Because.” Harry paused to get his temper under control. Damn pain, damn irritation, damn fake hormones. “I do your laundry. Why not do the son’s while I’m at it?”

“He’s not your son. Put his laundry in his room.”

“Does he even know how to do laundry?”

“We will find out.”

“No. It’s already in the wash.” Harry closed the lid and started the machine. “But you can let him
know this is the last time. Next time I find his clothing on the bathroom floor, I’m burning them. I swear it. If he wants clean clothes, he can either put them in the washer and wash them himself or *nicely* ask me to do it for him.”

“Very well.” Severus crossed his arms over his chest. “Back to my original question. What have I done to offend you this time? What is wrong now?”

“What makes you think anything is wrong?”

“We’ve been living together for over a year now. I know the signs.”

“I’m fine.”

“Now I *know* something’s wrong. Tell me.”

“No. I’m fine.”

“Mhmm. Believable, Potter.”

*Potter.* He didn’t know why, but hearing his name- his bloody last name- pissed him off and something inside him just snapped.

“Actually, no. You know what? Keep your boots off the coffee table. I don’t care if your socked feet are on it, but anytime you put your boots up there, it takes me hours to make the wood look like new.” Harry wiped his hands on his apron and pointed an accusatory finger at Severus. “And another thing. If I’m slaving away making sure you and your godson are well-fed and happy, the least you could do is say hello to me or say… something!… during each meal. Also, I’m going to *kill you* the next time I wake up to you two dueling. Do you know how freaked out I get when I realize I’m alone and then hear fighting in the living room at four in the morning? The second night it happened, Snape, you all but promised you’d not do it and what happened anyway? You did it again last night! The same day you promised! Well?”

“You could have condensed that down to one relatively simple sentence.” Harry’s hands curled into fists and Severus nodded. “Fine. No boots. Hello. No late night duels.”

“I’m serious, Snape.”

“May I ask what has gotten into you?”

Harry sighed. “This spell-”

“What have you done?” Severus interrupted quickly, tone sharp, and cast a silencing charm for privacy. Harry shook his head in exasperation. “A verbal response, boy.”

“Well… um… I’m currently in the process of creating a permanent womb and conception pathway and it hurts- feels like it’s getting worse, actually- so everything’s making me a little… grumpy.”

Severus’s eyes widened in shock and then took on that same strange gleam he’d had when recently eyeing his stomach. He glanced down at Harry’s belly- again- and nodded, eyes lingering.

“That explains a lot. Perhaps you should go lay down while it’s forming. Since you can still stand, I’m assuming it’s only just started.”

“Do you mean it’s gonna get worse or it’s gonna be a while?”

“Yes.”
He knew he hadn’t been imagining the increasingly painful ache growing in his belly. No. No, wait a second.

“Which one?”

“Both.”

No!

“Of course. Alright. Can you remember to switch over the laundry? I don’t want it to smell sour.” Severus waved away his charm. “Yes, I think I can manage to do that much, brat.”

“Thanks. I’ll make sure I’m up in time to cook dinner.”

“Don’t trouble yourself. We’ll just have toast or leftovers tonight.”

“Oh, God! It’s gonna be that bad?”

A sharp pain shot through his stomach before Severus could respond. Harry gasped, eyes falling shut and hands clutching his stomach, and Severus pulled him out of the room and down the hall to their bedroom.

“Severus, what’s going on?”

“Nothing, Draco.”

“Doesn’t look like nothing. Is something wrong with him?”

“No. Lay down, don’t get up unless it’s necessary, and call if you need a pain potion.”

“Yes, sir.”

Severus stood in the doorway while Harry tossed his apron onto Severus’s chair, stripped down to his borrowed pajama bottoms, and settled on his side in the middle of the bed. Harry watched him shut the door and tried to take a nap. He was tired, after all, and he hoped he wouldn’t feel the pain if he was asleep. He wondered if this was anything like the start of labor, decided he didn’t want to think about that at all, and started thinking about his future instead.

He was asleep a few minutes later.

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“Don’t you dare wake him up, Draco. I don’t want to hear him whinging.”

Harry looked around his hospital room. Why was Severus talking to Draco? He was sure he’d made Severus promise Draco wouldn’t- Oh. There he was. Why the hell was he here? Who let him in?

“I can understand you being protective of the guy you knocked up, Severus, but I’m not eating toast for dinner and he’s been asleep for hours. If he gets pissed off, you’ll just have to deal with not getting any for a while.”

Why was he talking about toast? Harry gingerly rubbed the rapidly healing stitches in his abdomen and tried to sit up. Oh, hell, that hurt like the blazes. No, better not.
“Get out of our room this instant.”

“Two beds? You make him sleep in his own bed? I never took you to be that sort of man, Severus.”

Harry started waking up and realized he’d been sleeping. That made so much sense. Merlin knows he’d never let Draco Malfoy near his delivery room, especially on the very same day he had a baby.


“I don’t see this as a bad thing. Quit lazing about, Potter. It’s shameful.”

“Time’s it?” Harry asked, looked at Severus, and then rubbed his eyes. “And did you remember the laundry?”

“Seven o’clock and yes, brat. I told you I would handle it. Is everything alright now? Are you finished?”

“Yeah and I’m sore as hell.”

He actually appreciated Severus’s concern. It was nice. Harry tried rolling out of bed and gave up halfway through. He was too tired and sore to do it himself. If they wanted him to get up, one of them would have to help him up.

Draco rolled his eyes, glanced at Severus, and made a face. Surprising everyone (himself included, judging by his expression), Draco grabbed Harry’s arms and heaved him up.

“You weigh nothing, Potter,” Draco said disapprovingly. “Are you trying to harm my godfather’s child by not eating enough?”

Severus pressed his lips together, but Harry still saw the smirk before it disappeared. He snorted.

“Now is that something he would allow, Malfoy? Let me go.” Using his belly, Harry shoved Draco out of his way and grabbed the shirt Severus held out. “You were serious about toast, weren’t you?”

“I was.” Those two words made Harry’s throat feel tight. What the hell was happening to him? These hormones were making him crazy. “However, since you’re awake and standing on your own two feet, you may cook… if you wish.”

“How generous you’re being. I’m glad you switched the laundry, but did you by chance take it out of the dryer when it was done? And have you kept your boots off the coffee table?”

“Yes, dear,” Severus replied sarcastically. “And I even had a talk with my godson all on my own. Is there anything else?”

“You must be hungry. You’re getting grumpy.”

“I am not, to both of your accusations.”

“Sure.” He forewent his shoes, instead walking to the kitchen in his socks, and tied his apron on as he went. “What doesn’t sound horrible for dinner?”

“Why don’t you ever cook to suit your own preferences?”
“Shut up, Draco,” Severus snapped. “I’m certain your fried chicken won’t kill me. I’ve hidden the toxins so…”

“Luckily enough, I have chicken thawing. It’s all we have at the moment. Forgot to add meats.”

“I’ll take care of it. The last time you sent off for groceries, we received mostly chocolates and candies.”

Harry flushed. “You cannot hold that against me.”

“I’ll do what I wish. What will you be serving with the chicken?”

“Carrots, potatoes-”

“Mashed?”

“Well, you don’t really like them any other way, sir, and I’m not picky. Rolls, too? Fluffy ones, yes, before you ask.”

“I suppose there aren’t many ways you could ruin dinner tonight, though-”

“You’re sure I’ll find a way. I know.”

Severus harrumphed. “What’s for dessert?”

“I’ll think of something.” Yeah, like the cherry chocolate layer cake Severus still doesn’t know is hidden at the back of the fridge. When he looked up from the chicken and saw Severus and Draco silently sitting at the table, he almost laughed, but covered it well by clearing his throat. Severus met his eyes. “Did you want something?”

“No.”


“No.”

“Liquor?”

“Is that how he ended up pregnant?”

Severus glared. “No. Shut up, Draco. I don’t want anything.”

“Did you need something, then?”

“No.”

“…Alright.”

Brilliance struck after Harry turned around and began preparing the chicken batter. Severus hadn’t gotten a snack earlier! That meant Draco hadn’t, either, because he’d been asleep at the time and neither Severus nor Draco apparently realized Harry’s mid-afternoon snack kept them from being ravenous by the time dinner rolled around.

Merlin, it was almost cute how helpless those men were sometimes. Yes, both of them. Surprising, he knew.
Harry wordlessly put a cranberry and white chocolate muffin in front of both Severus and Draco, made up some coffees for them, and started a new pot of coffee. When next he turned back to them, only one or two minutes later, both muffins were gone and there were absolutely no crumbs on the tabletop. He laughed and Severus’s brow arched.

“What exactly is so funny, boy?”

“Absolutely nothing, sir.”

***

Harry jumped when something hit the other side of the kitchen wall with a resounding bang. The sound of a falling wall shelf and breaking glass scared the hell out of him. Hurrying to the door and wiping his hands on his apron, he looked out.

Crumpled against the base of the wall was Severus, blood all over his face, and he wasn’t moving.

Harry’s chest felt tight as he dropped to his knees and Shakily checked him for any obvious injuries. Aside from a gash on his scalp that was bleeding heavily, he seemed fine. Harry grabbed his wand, unaware of anything else in the room, and put Severus’s head into his lap, his cheek against his belly.

“Episkey,” he incanted and quickly followed it with, “Tergeo.”

Without releasing Severus’s head, Harry looked up. Draco was standing beside him and wringing his hands. Harry scowled and Draco immediately spoke.

“Is he all right?”

“Did it look like he was all right, you idiot? You’re lucky you didn’t break his neck! What spell did you use?”

“I mispronounced a simple tripping charm. Oh, Merlin, is he-”

“Shut up, Draco. Your voice is killing me right now.” Severus loosely grabbed Harry’s wrist, which was still lightly pressed to his head, but didn’t move much else. He gradually opened his eyes and focused on Harry’s face before looking at Draco. “You’re an idiot, boy, but I’d remember that spell if you actually need to duel later on. It’s quite effective.”

“I am-”

“Your voice, Draco,” Severus groaned. “Tell me, brat, am I bleeding anywhere? Have I broken anything?”

“You didn’t break anything, but you did have a gash on your head. I took care of it.”

“That would explain why my head feels like it’s slowly splitting open.”

Merlin, he still had blood in his hair. It made Harry feel sick to his stomach.

“Can you move, sir? Maybe you should lay on the couch for a bit. I’ll get you a pain reliever.”

“I’m not crippled, Potter. I can get my own pain reliever.”

“But you won’t,” Harry argued quietly, helping Severus up. “Every time you need one, I have to practically force it down your throat.”
“How?” Draco asked. He was ignored.

“I don’t think I’ll be able to struggle much, boy. Stop acting like a damned frantic woman. It’s annoying.”

“Oh, shut up and sit on the couch. I’m not a bloody woman.”

“Thank Merlin,” Draco whispered, shuddering. “Then again, maybe you are.”

Again, the other two ignored him.

“Do not tell me to shut up or I will tan your hide.”

“With what? And while I’m pregnant? Yeah, I didn’t think so. I’ll do it again if I need to, sir. You’re only aggravating your headache by continuing to talk, you know.” Harry hurried back from the bathroom and handed the pain reliever to Severus, who took it without complaint. “Will I need to get a hold of Madame Pomfrey or anything? What if you have a concussion?”

“I had Draco run a scan while you were dawdling in the bathroom. I’m fine.”

Harry sighed in relief. “Should I hold off on lunch?”

“Why would you want to do that?” Severus asked loudly. He clutched his head a moment later and slowly relaxed as the potion kicked in. “You did that on purpose.”

“Yeah, I did. I told you that someone was going to get hurt if you kept doing this, but no one listened to me. What do I know, right?” Harry scoffed and Severus glared weakly. “It’ll teach you, won’t it?”

“Probably not.”

Harry’s eye twitched.

***

“Oh, hell!” Draco yelled and swiftly pulled the bathroom door shut. Harry poked his head around the shower curtain and then quickly rinsed away the soap on his body. When he exited the bathroom, he heard Severus talking loudly.

“-completely inappropriate, Draco! You deserve to have him beat you for just walking in on him. He was in the shower, you idiot.”

“I forgot to knock!” Draco yelled back. “Urgh.”

“Did you see anything you shouldn’t have?” Severus demanded irritably. Harry pressed himself against the wall and continued listening. Why would he care? “Speak.”

“No, thank Merlin. I could see his… body’s outline. You know, besides his belly, he’s scrawny. Is he eating enough? Taking potions for the baby?” Draco gasped. “I didn’t see anything else, though, Severus. I swear it. Merlin. The curtain was closed.”

“That’s a first,” Severus muttered. He continued louder, “That’s good, then. He would be impossible if you had.”

Since when?
“Believe me, if I had seen anything, I’d be begging for an Obliviate.”

“You wouldn’t have to beg long, if at all.”

Harry decided he should just show himself now before Severus said anything else he couldn’t understand. Severus immediately noticed him and nodded, his jaw still clenched in annoyance. What was going on with him?

“Is your head doing alright, sir? You’re looking a bit pale. Do you need another potion?”

“No, boy. I’m fine.”

Harry nodded and turned to Draco. “You need to learn to knock, Malfoy.”

Draco groaned.

***

Severus barely paused before continuing to shave. Harry stood at the doorway for a long indecisive moment, shrugged, and strolled to the toilet. He angled his back to Severus for a little privacy and started relieving himself.

“I’m absolutely thrilled you’ve decided my privacy is of no import, boy,” Severus drawled sarcastically. “We’ve reached a level of intimacy I never wanted.”

Finished, Harry pulled up yet another borrowed pair of Severus’s pajama bottoms and waited for him to move a bit so he could wash his hands.

“I really had to go and since the shower wasn’t going, I felt it was safe to come in.”

“I could have been unclothed.”

“But you weren’t, not that it matters much anymore. Anyways, you’re only shaving, sir.” Harry turned the water off and wiped his hands on a towel, eagerly watching the razor make another smooth trail over Severus’s cheek. “I still don’t know how to shave.”

“One would think after watching me this entire time, no matter how much I hate it, you would know by now.”

“It’s not the same as being taught.”

“Hmm.”

“Hey, Sever… uh, Potter?” Harry spun to face the doorway. Severus briefly looked in the mirror at Draco, as well, and then continued shaving. “What are you doing in here?”

“I, er…”

“He had to urinate. I threatened him with death if he ever relieved himself in our kitchen sink again.”

“That’s disgusting,” Draco hissed and then his face went slack. “He went with you in here?”

“I didn’t watch,” Severus snapped. “Not that it’s any of your concern what we do together, Draco.”

“Yeah, but… you don’t pee in front of people unless you’re serious with them. Are you and Potter
really that-”

“He turned his back on me, you nincompoop.” Harry snickered and dodged the hand Severus whipped at him. “Get out of here, brat, and make my breakfast. I’m hungry.”

Harry ducked around Draco and heard him talking all the way in the kitchen.

“You really do just boss him around, don’t you? Bloody prat deserves it, I’m sure.”

Harry snorted this time and started the process of boiling eggs. Severus doesn’t boss him around. He’s not an idiot. That was his way of saying he was hungry. He wouldn’t have forced him to do anything until he was ready, like always. Draco really didn’t know what their ‘relationship’ was like at all.

Twenty minutes later, Harry went back to the bedroom to change. He was pulling one of Severus’s shirts on, his bottoms riding low underneath his belly, when the bedroom door opened.

“Close your eyes, Draco.”

“Why the hell is he in here?” Harry demanded, yanked the shirt on, and glared crossly. “I wasn’t expecting anyone to just barge in.”

“This is my bedroom, too. Always expect that I’ll ‘just barge in.’”

“Why, so he can put a show on for you?” Draco muttered under his breath. He was roundly ignored.

“It's one thing to expect you to just barge in, sir, but this isn’t his bedroom.” Harry waited and snapped his fingers when Severus’s eyes dropped to his belly. “Up, up! Eyes up! Well? Why's he in here?”

“I don’t honestly remember. Draco?”

“You were going to show me some book McGonagall gave you.”

Harry picked up the ancient magic text from his side table. He’d borrowed it again right before Draco had gotten there. He handed it to Severus and pushed his way out of the room.

“Potter!” Severus called. Harry circled back through the living room to the head of the hallway. Severus held the book up. “Are you finished with this?”

“I’ve already read it once.”

“That isn’t what I asked.”

“I’m done. Don’t worry about it.”

Harry walked back through to the kitchen. He heard Severus muttering to himself and smiled.

***

Severus ducked his head into the kitchen and stared until Harry looked up from the letter he was penning at the table. It was to Hermione so he’d needed his privacy. Severus knew that.

“What?”
“Do we have any more pie lying around?”

“Pie?” Harry cocked his head and twisted around to stare at the fridge a moment. “I think so. It’s strawberry, too. You want some?”

“No, I was just asking, Potter.”

“You don’t have to be so sarcastic about it. Would you like coffee or anything with it? What about Malfoy?”

“We both would, I believe. I’ll return when you’ve finished that smut novel for your married friend.”

“How could it be a smut novel if I’m not doing anything, erm, smutty?”

“You’re not at this very moment, no,” he said pointedly, “but I’d like to think you’d have plenty of material to write about if you so chose.”

Harry nearly smacked himself. Duh. Draco could hear them.

“Very, very true, but you know I don’t tell Hermione about the stuff we do.”

“I’m glad to hear that.” Severus disappeared. “Call me when you’ve finished.”

Harry sighed, quickly finished his letter, signed it with love for everyone, and sealed it. He’d send it when Albus sent them their next set of letters. Which was actually really annoying. There should be a way to just send letters any old time they wanted. Harry placed a generous piece of pie on two plates, warmed them, and grabbed the pot of coffee he had perpetually warming on the counter.

“I’m done. You can come in… unless you don’t want this pie anymore.”

Severus immediately returned. “I want that pie.”

Harry chuckled and pointed at Severus’s usual place at the table as Draco entered the room. A distinct pop sounded as Severus sat. Draco frowned, looking around, and the older man stoically ignored the way the pop seemed to echo through the abruptly silent room as effectively as he ignored the look on Harry’s face.

“What was that?”

“I didn’t hear anything. What did it sound like?”

“A pop.”

“I heard it, too,” Draco added.

“How strange. I do believe your imaginations are toying with you both.” Pop. “Can you believe we’re about to celebrate another Halloween in this dreary place?”

“Professor, your knee is bothering you, isn’t it?”

Draco looked horrified. “That was you? Gods, are you falling apart?”

“Shut up, Draco. How does my knee relate to Halloween, boy? I was clearly discussing-”

“Yeah, I know what you were discussing, sir. Why do you constantly avoid taking anything for
“Another vocabulary word, Potter?”

“No. Maybe.” Draco snorted at the look Severus gave Harry. “Is there some way I can get you to take a pain reliever without me harassing you about it? Honestly, I’d probably die of shock if you just once took something for your knee without me asking.”

Draco gave him a look. “Why do you care?”

“That isn’t funny. I would starve if you died. Not to mention you’d be taking our child with you.” Severus gave him a look. “And I don’t think I need to add what would happen to the rest of the world upon your early demise.”

“I know. I was just kidding. And no, you wouldn’t. You’d go back to eating toast.”

“According to you, that is an unacceptable meal.”

Draco kept looking back and forth between Severus and Harry as they talked, brows raised.

“It is, but if I’m dead, you’d have no choice. It’s not like you listen to me, anyway.”

“Don’t I? Hmm.” Severus set an empty vial on the table and stared at it, exaggerated confusion on his face. “I wonder why I took this before entering the kitchen. How odd. I know it’s for my knee and you are always nagging me about taking it when I have need of it, but I apparently never listen to you. How do you explain this?”

“What?”

Harry somehow found the will to close his gaping mouth. “You took that on your own?”

“Well, look at that,” Severus drawled. “You’re still alive. Mere moments ago, you claimed you’d expire from shock, yet you’re still alive. Did you expect me to take this on my own, then?”

“Never in a million years, sir.”

Severus smirked. “Of course not.”

“What just happened here?”

“Shut up, Draco.”

“Did you just call him Draco?”

Harry flushed. “No.”

“You did.”

“He definitely did.”

“You were hearing things. I wouldn’t call him Draco. Gross.”

Severus grinned crookedly. “You did, Potter.”
“No, I didn’t.”

“Mhmm.”

“I didn’t!”

“You did, Potter.”

“Shut up,” Harry ground out, purposefully avoiding calling Draco anything. “Annoying prat.”

“Aw, he’s getting flustered. Perhaps we should go easy on him, Draco.”

“Nope.”

“Will you two stop picking on me?”

Severus snorted and sipped his coffee.

***

“Happy Halloween, erm, Eve,” Harry called out to the two men in the living room. “I’ve just had my shower and assume you’ve eaten the breakfast I laid out. I’ll be busy preparing some things for tomorrow so don’t interrupt me too much today, okay?”

“Potter, Severus and I wouldn’t waste our time on you. Stop being so vain.”

“Leave the coffee on,” Severus murmured to his book. “I’ll be in to get some in a bit.”

Harry glided happily into the kitchen and huffed at the empty coffeepot. He started another pot of coffee with no small amount of irritation. Ingrates. They could have at least taken it off the heat. If he hadn’t gotten in here when he did, the pot might have exploded and then where would they be?

Never mind that, though. He had Halloween stuff to do!

An hour later, Harry heard Severus enter the kitchen for more coffee. Severus waited patiently behind him before coughing slightly to announce his presence. Like Harry didn’t know he was there. Pssh.

“Hold on.” He was slicing into an abnormally thick-skinned pumpkin when the knife slipped and gouged a deep channel across the side of his arm. “Dammit!”

“You idiot,” Severus growled. He immediately grabbed the top of his forearm in a tight enough grasp to make Harry wince and started healing it. “Why do you feel the need to cut yourself with every knife you’re holding, boy?”

Harry saw blood had dripped onto his belly- ooh, onto Severus’s borrowed shirt- and felt a little faint.

“I obviously didn’t do that on purpose, sir.”

“You’re going to need a blood replenishing potion for this.” Harry looked to the floor and swayed. That was a lot of blood. “You’re done with the blasted pumpkins.”

“I wasn’t carving them for the fun of it, you know. Jack-o-lanterns are nice, but I really needed the pumpkin stuff inside.”
“Give me the knife and go get one of the grey vials from my bedside table.”

Harry paused and sent Severus an odd look. “Why do you keep blood replenishers in there?”

“Potter.”

“Fine. I’m going.”

Harry trudged through the living room, subconsciously rubbed his arm, and got rid of the blood splattered on the shirt he was wearing. Draco looked up and snorted.

“Cut yourself, little boy?”

“Shut up, Malfoy.”

“Aww, but you called me Draco yesterday.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Draco, get in here. I have a job for you.”

When Harry returned to the kitchen, Draco was scowling and vanishing the last of the blood from the floor. Harry bit his lip to contain the smirk wanting to escape and put the vial on the counter.

“How much should I take?”

Severus glanced up from his project and eyed the vial. “A swallow or two. I would measure it out, but I’m a bit busy. A little extra won’t hurt you, brat, even in your current condition.”

“You didn’t have to do that, sir.”

“You needed the pumpkin intestines and you’re banned from touching any other knives here.”

“So what happens the next time I need to cut something?”

“As long as it’s not yourself, I will gladly take over the task.”

Harry saw Draco roll his eyes and had the urge to throw something at him. Luckily, he contained himself. Instead, he busied himself with filling up Severus and Draco’s coffee mugs and setting out warmed slices of leftover blueberry pie. When Severus smelled the pie, he hurriedly finished emptying the pumpkins and sat at the table to indulge himself.

Just to be an arse, Harry waited until Severus had the first bite of pie on the way to his mouth and then cleared his throat loudly. Severus looked over and narrowed his eyes when he saw Harry waving the knife.

“Sir, I need you to do one more thing for me.”

“What is it?”

“Can you peel all of these potatoes?”

Severus eyed the potatoes and growled quietly. “Do your job, Potter. You’re not banned anymore, but don’t cut yourself again or I’ll beat you.”

How easy it was to get out of trouble these days. Also, that was another allusion to his housewifely
duties. Harry was proud of himself.

“Thank you, sir.”

“Shut up, boy.”
Harry gently rocked back and forth in his rocker and continued rubbing the baby’s back. The child on his chest, he instinctively knew, was his own child. He felt like he knew she was only eight or nine months old at most. A girl with a dark tuft of hair and long lashes laying on her cheek, currently fighting sleep like a determined chubby-bodied warrior… She looked and felt perfect in his arms.

His little Lily.

“I thought you’d gone to bed.”

Harry craned his neck around, searching for the owner of that deep calming voice. He smiled at Severus as the man sat down in the rocker beside his own. What was he doing here? Severus extended the warm mug in his hand. Harry took it with one hand and sipped from it without question.

“I’m trying to get her back to sleep,” he eventually answered. Severus nodded and held his arms open.

“Let me try. Take a break and drink that tea.”

“Careful with her head.”

Severus took the baby from his arms and simply held her to his chest, rubbing her back off and on. Lily’s quiet snifflies died off slowly, leaving the two in amiable silence. Harry looked away from his daughter and surveyed the land around them.


This is what he’d always dreamt of. A child of his own, company he could spend time with without worrying about ulterior motives, the perfect house and land… Harry wondered who else shared this wonderfully-secluded oasis with him.

“You should go to bed.”

“I will. I just want to enjoy the quiet a little longer.”

“Go. You need your sleep. I’ll put her to bed.”

Harry sighed quietly and slowly stood up. He felt warm and happy from watching the way Severus carefully cradled Lily to him, waiting for him to open the door for the two of them. Harry padded after him, following the man to the nursery he knew would be upstairs. Severus was so gentle with her. His hands could exert so much force, could end someone’s life in a moment, but you would never know it from watching them together.
“You’re so gentle with her.”

“I thought you went to bed.”

“No. I wanted to watch you.”

Severus smiled an actual smile and eased Harry out of the nursery. After casting a monitoring charm, Severus pulled Harry close and pressed a soft kiss to his lips. Harry completely relaxed and wanted to hold on forever. Who was this man? When Harry leaned back, Severus’s hand slipped in between them, his fingertips trailing across his flat belly.

“You’re not showing yet.”

The little flutters Harry felt in his stomach seemed to be chasing the fingers rubbing his skin. He smiled down at his belly and then up at Severus.

“I feel him. He’s trying to play with you already.”

“You’re giving me a son now?”

“Yes,” Harry whispered.

“Perfect,” Severus agreed just as quietly and captured Harry’s lips in a longer kiss. When he finally allowed Harry to breathe again, Severus steered them to the master bedroom. “Go to sleep and do not argue with me. You need your sleep right now. We have the rest of our lives for all sorts of carnal activities. Tonight, though, you will sleep.”

Harry laid down without argument and started to fall asleep with Severus holding him close. Gently, he touched his stomach and felt eyes on him. He expected Severus to berate him about sleeping again so he waited with a smile on his face.

“Potter,” a voice hissed. Harry tensed, his smile fading away, and refused to open his eyes. “Open your eyes, little boy.”

“No. Please don’t do this to me.”

“Potter… open them for me, please.”

“Go away. You can’t be real.”

When the incredible heat behind him abruptly turned cold as ice, Harry twisted around and sat up quickly. One hand went to his belly, the other fist at his mouth to keep his heart-wrenching screams inside. Severus, his perfect husband, the father of his beloved children, lay glassy-eyed and lifeless beside him. Blood poured from him in rivers, staining their bedding, marring his pale skin. Voldemort stood above Severus’s body, a malicious grin on his gnarled lips.

“I’m very real, Potter. I’m everywhere. You should know this by now. Come to me, boy. I will take care of you better than this traitor could. Come to me… Your life is mine.”

As Voldemort stretched his ugly bony hand out, Severus’s blood still dripping from the sharp talons, Harry screamed in terror. The baby’s monitor started going off, a baby shrieking in pain and laughter from an insane witch sounded from the hall, and then everything went black.

***

Harry launched himself from his bed and right on to Severus, who hadn’t even had a chance to
move from his own bed, and held him tight enough to hurt his own hands from the force. Draco rushed into the room, wand drawn, and looked thunderstruck.

“What’s going on with him? What happened?”

“Potter, calm down. It was only a nightmare. Let me go. This is ridiculous!” Severus said loudly. “Let go, dammit, and get off!”

“Lily. You. Monster. Blood,” Harry disjointedly screamed at the same time. Severus tried pulling him off a brief moment and then stopped. His hands fell to his sides as Harry’s wracking sobs continued. “It was everywhere!”

“He had a nightmare, Draco. The Dark Lord, boy?”

“Yes,” Harry cried. “He got in my head. I don’t know how. He ruined everything! It was perfect and then he came in!”

“Loosen your hold, boy.” It shouldn’t have been possible, but Harry managed to hold on tighter. “That is the exact opposite of what I told you to do, idiot. What happened in this nightmare? What am I telling Albus?”

“It wasn’t anything like that.” Harry hiccupped. “I was married and pregnant. He just showed up and ruined everything.”

Severus looked at him strangely and Harry wiped his eyes with one hand. He almost enjoyed the fish out of water look on Draco’s face. He kept looking between Harry and Severus. Nodding thoughtfully, Severus pried Harry’s other hand off and pushed him up. Even though still slightly hysterical, Harry noticed at least he wasn’t straddling Severus this time.

“Draco, leave us. Go back to bed. We’re fine.”

“…Okay. Do you need me to get anything for… uh, him?”

“No, but thank you.” Draco nodded confusedly and left the room. “Potter, you should go back to sleep. There’s nothing you can do about this nightmare except clear your mind.”

“I don’t want to see that again, sir. I would see it, too.”

“Go to sleep and do not argue with me. You need your sleep right now.” Harry sucked in a sharp breath. His dream Severus had said the very same thing! “Oh, for God’s sake. If you’re going to act like a child and refuse to sleep, could you at least move so I can go back to sleep?”

“Um, maybe.”

“I knew you both didn’t actually sleep apart,” Draco said from outside the door.

“Go to bed, Draco, and quit listening at our door or we’ll put on a show that will turn your hair white.”

After they heard Draco literally flee into his room, Harry scooted over maybe a total of an inch and watched Severus stretch out on his back again. When the man actually seemed to drift off, regardless of his presence there, Harry moved to the far edge of the bed and curled around his stomach. He’d been so happy with his babies and… humph. Harry wiped a stray tear away and sniffed deeply. Just then, Severus reached out an arm and pulled Harry closer, but not inappropriately so. There were at least six inches between them.
“Clear your mind, boy, and stop sniffling like a blasted infant. I fully expect you to move when you’ve calmed down. Do you understand me? Until then, quit lying on my blankets.”

Harry slowly relaxed, cleared his mind, and then knew no more.

***

The next morning, Harry was really warm when he woke up. It was nice, but… What? He knew this feeling. Wait. It was only extreme shock freezing him into inaction that made sure he didn’t jerk when he realized that he was still in Severus’s bed, Severus was still in bed with him, they were really close together, and he had a large pale arm thrown over his waist.

Oh, Gods, Severus would have an absolute conniption when he woke up!

Harry forced himself to breathe evenly and think rationally. He needed to get out of Severus’s grasp before the other man woke, because he really didn’t fancy getting his head ripped off for something he didn’t even do! Seriously, he didn’t pull Severus’s arm over him. He needed to move, though. On the other hand, it was really warm and comfortable and it wasn’t like Severus was trying to molest him. He was just sleeping. He could just pretend he hadn’t woken up yet, right? Or maybe he really should go back to sleep. That way, when Severus noticed what was going on, Harry wouldn’t have to witness the appalled fit he will undoubtedly throw. Yeah, it was much safer that way. Last time something like this had happened and Harry had moved, Severus had almost immediately gotten up.

No, yeah, go back to sleep.

He was trying to settle back to sleep without moving too much when his arm slipped from under the covers. The cold bedroom caused goose pimples to spring up on the flesh almost immediately and he mentally cursed, but didn’t dare pull his arm back in. If Severus was anywhere close to being awake, that would give him away. He was stunned when the arm draped over his waist reached out, pulled the blanket back up, and settled over him again.

Was Severus awake?

Since they were already so close, Harry didn’t even have to try hard at all to hear Severus’s breathing. It didn’t tell him much, given that the man breathed deeply all the time, but he reasoned that Severus would be breathing quickly (no, angrily) if he were awake. So asleep he was, then. Thank God.

Try as he might, sleep wouldn’t come. Harry wished and willed it to happen, but the longer he stayed underneath Severus’s arm, the more awake he felt. It was confusing and strange and wonderful… Inexplicable. Yeah, Harry decided that was a better word. Again, he thanked his dictionary. Gods, he was losing it. There he was in the bed of the man who’d been his professor for seven- er, six- years after having a bad nightmare the night before… and all he could do was think about his word choice!

Dear Lord Almighty.

Oh, gods, and now he was mentally cursing like some old schoolmarm! Hey, another good word. Man, he was on a roll today. What?! Okay, he needed to get out of there. Severus was making him lose his mind.

Oh, shit.

“Severus. Ugh.” His eyelids cracked, Harry looked up in time to see Draco slap a hand over his
eyes. “I didn’t need to see that.”

Severus pulled in a deep breath and pushed it out.

“Dammit.” He pulled his arm away from Harry, slowly got out of bed, and pulled the blanket back over Harry. “Maddening brat.”

“What’d I do? I was just making sure you guys are okay. It’s nearly noon and you’re both still sleeping.”

“Is it really?”

“Yeah. That’s why I finally decided to see what was going on. I didn’t hear anything except breathing so I thought it’d be safe to come in. Er, were you… cuddling?”

Harry willed himself to hold still and breathe deeply, evenly, but he still felt two pairs of eyes on him and it made him nervous.

“That’s an absurd accusation, Draco. Of course I wasn’t.”

“Looked like it. You were spooning.” Draco snorted and Harry could hear Severus collecting things from the closet. “Do that often?”

“That is none of your concern, Draco. Get out of our room.”

“Fine. I’m going, I’m going.”

Harry waited until the bedroom door closed and then crawled out of the bed as quietly as he could. After distracting himself from thoughts of Severus by being extra absorbed in his dressing, his nightmare from last night was back on his mind. In fact, it was in almost a blind daze that he trudged to the kitchen, made coffee, prepared lunch, and served them all. Belatedly, he realized he’d served coffees to Draco and Severus and completely missed himself so he poured out three glasses of iced tea and sat back down.

“Pass the sugar.” “I’m sorry, sir.”

“You’re sorry about what?” “You wanted the sugar?”

“What have you done?” “Does it taste bad?”

Severus and Harry looked at each for a long moment. Draco started chuckling.

“Let me explain some-” “I’m sorry. You first.”

“Stop it.” “Sorry.”

“Potter.” “Sorry!”

“Potter!” “You…oops.”

Draco was chortling by now and Severus held up a hand to end their little game of talking at the same time.

“Why are you apologizing, boy?”

“About you having to be locked up here. With me, you know.”
“Is that really all you are fretting about?” Severus asked exasperatedly. Draco scoffed and Severus and Harry both gave him a look. “Boy?”

“Well, yeah, and constantly being stuck with only me for company. I mean, before this place, you probably had a life with- I feel bad. Sorry. My nightmare and everything just made me think about it, I guess.” Harry stopped and dropped his voice to a whisper. “Just… sorry.”

“I didn’t have a life with anyone before this, idiot boy. I never had the time and I insist you quit assuming things about me. It’s annoying. Now, stop acting so pitiful and pass me the sugar. I want to sprinkle some on my toast.”

Harry’s face fell. “I made toast?”

Severus’s lips twitched. After a moment of struggling, a chuckle escaped. Another moment or so passed and the chuckle became a muted laugh. The laugh became a few sniggers before Severus could clamp his hand over his mouth. He quickly controlled himself again and nodded. Draco looked stunned by the outburst and looked between Harry and him several times.

“You made toast, Potter. I must say I’m pleased. I’ve sorely missed it.”

“You just ruined my day,” Harry grumbled. “Again,” he added in a whisper and pushed the sugar over. “Here.”

“Thank you.”

It was Harry’s turn to look stunned. He and Draco made a pair.

***

Harry curled into his corner of the couch, edged his socked feet a little closer to the heat radiating off Severus’s thigh, and smiled. He went back to the Slytherin history book Filius gave Severus last Christmas and snorted when the book hissed something about him not being sneaky at all.

“Potter, if you continue to snort and giggle to yourself much longer, I will hold you down and run a scan on your mental functions whether Severus likes it or not.”

“Shut up, Malfoy. This book is just hilarious.”

“I found it amusing,” Severus agreed, “but not so much that I ever felt the need to chuckle. Mind explaining the cause of your good humor?”

“It keeps saying the funniest things.”

“Did you really just say the book is talking to you?” Severus and Draco shared a look and then Draco stood, wand in hand. “Severus, hold his arms.”

Harry cast a stinging hex his way. “I’m not losing it, Malfoy. The book is literally talking to me. Can’t you hear the hissing?”

“You mean those are actually words?” Draco checked. “You’re not losing it?”

“Well, yeah, they are. I wouldn’t have said the book was talking otherwise. That’d just be weird.”

Severus looked curious. “What could it have possibly been saying? It’s a book, for Merlin’s sake.”

“Well, just now, it told me I’m turning the pages too hard. A bit ago, it was saying I’m not sneaky.
Before that, it was complaining about the “malarkey” put on its pages. Oh, and now it’s getting irritated that I’ve stopped reading.”

Severus looked a tad amused and Draco arched a blonde brow.

“And you found that entertaining? Severus, are you sure he’s all there?”

“Yes. Boy, tell me, if you ask the book a question, can it answer you or is it simply telling you random things?”

“Like is it programmed or alive?”

“I suppose you could use those terms,” Severus allowed. “I would have used sentient.”

Hey, he knew what that meant. Thank you, dictionary.

“I don’t know. It’s usually just saying random things.”

Draco leaned back in his chair. “You could always check, Potter. Ask it a question, see if it responds.”

“Alright. Fine.”

“Ask who wrote this drivel,” Severus suggested. “My bet’s on a Hufflepuff.”

Harry asked the book who wrote it and the book hissed back angrily, the pages erratically flapping and giving him a paper cut. He sucked the finger into his mouth to soothe the cut and let the book finish its little snit before looking at Severus... who was staring at his finger with an odd expression on his face. He yanked the finger out of his mouth and grimaced.

“Sorry. Paper cut. You were right. The book obviously freaked out when I asked and started going on about how much it hates Hufflepuffs, especially the “brainwashed, imbecilic trollop” who wrote him.”

Severus finally looked up. “Him?”

“It identified itself as a him. I think it thinks it’s Slytherin himself. Kept going on about “my legacy” and “my students” and whatnot.”

“You should ask.”

“And risk another paper cut if it gets pissed again? No, thank you.”

“Do it,” Severus demanded. “I’m interested to see what it thinks. I’d ask myself, but I wasn’t blessed with the ability to speak to snakes.”

“Blessed? Every time I talk to anything snake-like, people think I’m the devil himself.”

“Not Slytherins. Slytherin’s heir at one point, perhaps, but never the devil.” Harry gave Draco a look and Draco shrugged. “We know about the devil, Potter. You’re not that bad.”

“My God, that sounded like a compliment. Quick, Malfoy, say something rude.”

“Fuck you, Potter. See what happens when I try being civil, Severus? He acts like a complete-”

“Draco, boy, both of you be nice. I’m getting tired of this. Boy, would you want your child
knowing how rude you’re being? Would you want your child to be as bad?"

“No.”

“Then stop and I’m still waiting.”

“Fine,” Harry replied, dragging the word out. He asked the book if it was Slytherin and literally chuckled at the response. “No, it doesn’t think it’s Slytherin, but it was honored someone mistook him for so regal a man. It says it is merely a part of Slytherin in that it tells of his legacy, even if about half the facts in the book are only true if one were to get rid of the embellishments.”

“Interesting.”

“Mmm.” Harry set the book down on his knees and looked at Draco. “I’ve been thinking about this for days now. Why exactly are you here? Snape never told me.”

“Is it your business to know?”

Severus rolled his eyes. “He will make it his business to know. I must admit, I don’t quite understand the circumstances that led to you being here, either.”

“As I’ve told you, Percy Weasley is a traitor to the Order. He sold me out to Greyback, who in turn told the Dark Lord. My mother and father, loyal as they may be to the Dark Lord, hid me before the Death Eaters could collect me from Hogwarts.”

“Two spies out. How many more will go?” Severus murmured. Harry looked between the two seriously. “Your cover story?”

“I’m on the run, never to return to England. Albus says when the coast is clear, I’m to return to the castle and stay there no matter what. I’ll be helping the Weasley twins with their rather interesting project.”

“Do you know what it is?” Harry spoke up.

“Not yet. Sometimes, I’m almost positive the headmaster doesn’t, either.”

“Wait.” Harry narrowed his eyes and looked at Severus. “Sir, did you just say something about other spies?”

Severus clenched his jaw. “I’m out of coffee, Potter. Have been for a while now.”

“You did, didn’t you?” Harry leaned up and looked at the full glass he’d given Severus ten minutes ago. “You’re not even close to being out of coffee. Who is it?”

“Privileged information. I am only one of three who know, besides those persons.”

“Are they… do you think they’re safe right now?”

Draco cocked a brow. “Of course. They’re not the ones who were labelled traitors.”

“What I meant, Malfoy, is if they’d joined the ranks sometime since the return of Vol-”

“Potter, remember.”

“Since his return, wouldn’t it only make sense for that person to get a lot of attention now that two spies had been found out?”
“You’ve nothing to worry about, brat,” Severus muttered. He downed the rest of his coffee and held the cup up. “Now I’m out.”

Harry decided to let it go. If Severus didn’t want him to know, he wouldn’t push.

***

This was the final day of his pregnancy potion and Harry had mixed feelings about it. He was happy he’d be able to get back to his pre-“pregnancy” routine and that he wouldn’t have to keep worrying about his stomach making everything— even wanking— twenty times harder than it should be. On the other hand, he’d grown fond of the belly and would miss it a little, he’d miss that strange look in Severus’s eyes every time the man looked at him when he thought no one was watching (Who knew Severus Snape liked kids? No. One. Ever.), he’d definitely miss torturing Draco with their fake relationship, he would totally miss the whole orgasm thing, and he really didn’t want to give Severus’s clothing back. Maybe he wouldn’t if Severus didn’t say anything about it.

Since today was the last day, Harry had decided to milk it and had begged Severus to let him help brew his new supply of pain potions. Severus had readily agreed, which kinda surprised him since Draco was in the shower at the time and couldn’t hear them, but he wouldn’t question it.

Apart from one dizzy spell when he’d quickly bent over to catch the stirrer he’d knocked off the desk— and Merlin, how that’d incited Severus and surprisingly Draco into fits that resulted in a lot of yelling from both men about being careful— and that incident involving his belly and a spilt cauldron, everything had been relatively smooth sailing. The longer they worked, however, the clumsier he realized he had become. When Harry again fumbled and then dropped a packet of herbs, Draco shoved Harry towards Severus.

“I’ve had it. I thought helping you would be relaxing, Severus, but he’s ruining everything. If you want him to keep helping, keep him by you.”

Harry’s eyes began watering and both Draco and Severus looked wary. Blasted fake hormones.

“I’m sorry, sir. I can’t help it. I’m still not used to my belly and I know I’m being clumsier than usual, but I just wanted to help you and—”

“Boy, stop crying and come here. You’re becoming hysterical and I will not deal with that. Perhaps if I teach you now, if we’re still here when this lot runs out, you can do this next time with my supervision.”

“Really?” Harry asked, deeply touched. “Thank you, sir.”

“Shut up and come here.”

“Yes, sir.”

Fifteen minutes after that, Severus handily caught the empty vial Harry knocked off the table and then sighed exasperatedly. He stood behind Harry, his arms at Harry’s side, and guided him. Well, he was basically brewing the potion himself now, but eh. Draco was oddly silent and that was a bit worrisome.

“If you ever tell anyone of this, boy, I will slowly kill you with my bare hands and I specifically forbid you from telling the youngest Mrs. Weasley. Do you understand me? You, too, Draco.”

“No one would believe me if I did, Severus. I’m not even sure I believe it and I’m seeing it
happen.”

Harry leaned back against Severus’s chest and followed along. Like always, the man was warm. He was grateful, because he was freezing today and having Severus’s hand on his, stirring the potion the correct way, was calming. If he weren’t standing, he could easily see himself falling asleep. Harry shook himself and blinked a few times. He’d woken from a nap only an hour ago!

This could be a hug if he were facing the other way.

Harry laughed and focused on the potion once more. One of the ingredients for the potion was Epimedium- he’d recognized the plant even though no one had bothered to identify it for him- and, after a few minutes trying to recall the memory, he finally remembered Severus had said it was used to boost libidos, erections, and hinder involuntary ejaculations. Why was it being used in a pain potion? Oh, wait. He also said it was less commonly used for weak backs and knees, joint pain, weak bones, mental and physical fatigue, and memory loss. Right. Oh. Right.

“Sir?”

“What?” Severus asked while still smoothly guiding Harry’s hand. “Don’t fight me. Follow what my hand is doing. I don’t want this potion to be ruined.”

“Sorry. Er, do you often use Epimedium, sir? I mean, I know it helps with sexual stuff, but…

Severus’s hand clenched around Harry’s own and immediately relaxed again. “Are you implying I have a sexual dysfunction that requires medicinal aid, Potter?”

“No.” Harry turned to see Severus more clearly and his belly bumped his hip. They had Draco’s attention. “You once said it was used for weak backs and knees, joint pain, weak bones, mental and physical fatigue, and memory loss. Earlier, when we started, I recognized it- from my book, you know- and I just wondered if you’ve had to use it a lot over the years… well, besides in this potion.”

“Hmm. I’m surprised you correctly inferred that. Yes, I’ve had to use it quite a bit after meetings and, as you know, it is a main component of this specialized potion you so enjoy forcing on me anytime my knee starts acting up.”

“Oh.” Harry turned back to the potion. His eyes widened seconds later. “Wait. Does that mean you-”

“I’m not answering that.”

That explained Draco’s reaction when they first started brewing, the red cheeks and shifty eyes. Harry had wondered about that. Poor Severus hadn’t seemed much better off at the time.

Oh. Oh, God! No. How many times had he forced that potion on Severus? Did he get turned on every time he took it? Maybe there was something else in the potion that counteracted that effect. Surely Severus wouldn’t keep taking it if he got hard every time he did, right?

“Okay, yeah. That’s it. You wouldn’t take it if… er… so there must be something in it that keeps your libido from reacting. Am I right?”

Severus sighed, clearly giving up. “No, you aren’t. You’re not even close. There is nothing in the potion that keeps my libido from responding to such a strong aphrodisiac. If anything, the Tribulus terrestris, added to enhance circulation and blood flow to the body and the afflicted target, only exacerbates the problem. Are you satisfied or would like to hear more?”
“Wow. I didn’t know… Why didn’t you ever say anything? I’d have stopped bugging you about taking it if I’d known it bothered you like that.”

Severus cast a silencing charm around them and turned his face away from Draco’s view.

“There was absolutely no way in hell I was going to tell you my pain reliever gave me an erection. It was bad enough I knew I was in that state because you forced my potion on me. I wasn’t going to let you know what I was off doing following every time you started acting like the pushy little wife I don’t have.”

Harry bit his lip. Severus had leaned down beside Harry’s ear to say that last bit, because he’d needed to do something related to the potion, though he hadn’t noticed what. He’d been distracted by the warm breath blowing against him and couldn’t lie to himself. He could get used to hearing that voice in his ear a lot more.

It was time to change the subject. He’d only embarrass himself if he continued down this road and Severus already seemed uncomfortable. Stop focusing on Severus’s hands!

“Thanks for helping me instead of telling me to go away.”

Severus nodded and banished his silencing charm. Harry settled more into Severus’s chest, his back nearly flush now with Severus’s chest, and smiled. After a few, silent minutes, Harry leaned forward to look into the cauldron and Severus wrapped an arm around his chest.

“Careful now, boy. I don’t want you to ruin this batch, as well. I might just beat you this time.”

“So what were you two discussing?” Draco asked curiously. “Birthing plans, perhaps?”

“Our evening’s entertainment.”

“Oh, are we doing something fun?”

“Yes, we are.” Harry again leaned into Severus’s chest and looked up at him as best he could. “You, however, are not invited.”


Harry sniggered and slowly stopped paying attention to Severus and Draco’s conversation as his mind went to a very naughty, very wonderful place. Before his potion wore off, he was gonna have to take another shower and he might have to break out the toy Fred and George gave him. He’d been slowly getting used to having things penetrate him and tonight felt like a good night to finally try. Oh, Gods, he couldn’t wait. Images of various men- weirdly, including Severus- flashed through his mind. Tonight could be the greatest night of his life so far.

“Potter, you just salivated on my hand, much like a small child would.” Draco snickered and Severus huffed. “Perhaps you should go eat a snack while I finish this up.”

Harry’s face heated up. “Oh, my God. I’m so sorry, sir. I didn’t realize…”

“A snack, boy. Go. I will finish this.”

“Sorry.”

When Harry got to the kitchen, he realized he was getting hard, which was super embarrassing. The longer he spent trying to will it away, the harder he got. When Severus came into the kitchen ten
minutes later and brushed up against his back while grabbing a cup from the cabinet above Harry’s head, Harry shivered and Severus naturally noticed. He turned him around, studied his face, and then checked his forehead for fever.

“What’s wrong with you? Are you becoming sick?”

“Nothing’s wrong. Why?”

“You’re acting strangely. I demand to know why.”

“My, er, belly is feeling really…it’s weird. Is it supposed to be this hard?”

“What?”

Harry impulsively grabbed Severus’s free hand, lifted his borrowed shirt, and pressed that hot hand against his skin.

“Is it supposed to be this hard?” Gods, was that his voice? It was so low! “Is this normal?”

Frowning, Severus put his cup down and used both hands to feel along Harry’s belly. He even wrapped an arm around Harry to inspect his back.

“It doesn’t seem to be abnormally tight or, as you put it, “hard” at all. Is it uncomfortable?”

Severus’s hands were still on him. It felt amazing.

“No. I’m just not used to my skin feeling so tight, I guess.”

“Hmm.” Severus dropped his hands. “Do you believe you can handle this?”

“Oh, yeah.” Wait. Did he mean the pregnancy stuff or the Severus touching him stuff? Either way… “I could live with it.”

“Good.”

He’ll say.

***

They. Were. Duelling.

It was 1:30 in the bloody morning and they were dueling. Severus had forgotten a silencing charm, apparently. Harry was gonna kill them both.

And oh, gods! His belly was gone! How sad. Harry frowned and tightened the drawstring of Severus’s sleep bottoms. At least seeing him belly-less might shock the hell out of Draco enough to stop the duel. Harry stomped into the living room and both men froze, eyes immediately locking on his livid expression.

“What the fuck have we talked about?” Harry yelled. “It is 1:30 in the damned morning!”

“P-P-Potter?” Draco stuttered. “What happened to the baby? Severus, look at him!”

Severus’s eyes flashed to Harry’s flat stomach and then his eyes.

“You were dueling, Malfoy. I went into labor after we went to bed and I thought we had a while to
go, but I was wrong. I had it on my own. Severus wasn’t there, because of this! Are your dueling skills so abysmal you need daily practice!!"

“You had the baby?” Draco asked in a small voice. “Severus, he…”

Severus’s brows rose. “What was it?”

“A boy, but since you apparently don’t care about me or the promises you make me, I’m keeping the child.”

“You can’t do that!” Draco exploded and Severus looked taken aback by Draco’s reaction. “It’s Severus’s child, too. His heir. If you try to keep him from the child, we’ll bring this matter before the entire Wizengamot. They’ll rule in his favor. He’s established, has a great job, has plenty of experience with children. You’re eighteen and homeless. When all is said and done, you’ll have no rights to the child whatsoever.”

“Calm down, you idiot. I wasn’t actually pregnant and I was supposedly only five months in. Also, I think you should know I would never do that to anyone, especially Severus. He doesn’t deserve that.”

Severus looked staggered by what Harry said and gave him a small, genuinely nice smile. Harry reveled in the moment and then turned in time to see Draco sinking to his knees. His wand slipped from lax fingers and skittered across the floor.

“You weren’t pregnant. That was all a joke?” Draco asked quietly and then repeated himself, sounding enraged, “That was all a joke?”

Harry gave Severus a worried look, forgetting for a moment that he had been pissed off at him and Severus.

“It wasn’t a joke, Draco. It was a reminder.”

“A reminder? This was about my letter? Severus, no, this was cruel. Despite the carrier being… him, I was truly happy for you. You’ve always wanted a family and I thought you were about to have one. I was willing to try to be civil with him, because I thought he was what you wanted, that he made you happy.”

“Me?” Harry checked incredulously. “You thought I made him happy?”

“And everything you’ve done together since I arrived has been an act? You really had me fooled. You were so affectionate when Potter was around and you know what’s the worst thing? I’m not even mad at him for this! Congratulations, Severus. You’re an asshole,” Draco spat and climbed to his feet. “I forfeit the duel. Good night, Potter.”

Severus silently watched Draco leave the room and then turned to Harry, who was frowning sadly.

“I’m sorry, sir. I should’ve let you tell him. I was just so mad about the duel and he said all that stuff about the baby…”

“No. I honestly didn’t believe Draco would react like this.” Severus crossed to the couch and dropped into his favored spot. In the silence, Harry padded over and sat directly beside him. “I’m ashamed to admit I thought he’d simply learn his lesson and move on. Not once did I consider he might be this angry with me.”

“Should you go talk to him?”
“No, I doubt he would welcome my presence right now.”

Harry leaned back and studied Severus’s leg, which was a mere three inches from his. He’d been dueling in his sleep bottoms. How… unexpectedly cute. Severus sighed, let his head fall back against the couch, and closed his eyes.

It was obvious the man was hurting. It was less obvious what Harry should do about that. He’d give a lot to get rid of that frown line between his brows.

“How do you want a drink or maybe a snack?”

“No.”

Harry bit his lip. Strike one.

“Are you in any physical pain? Do you need a potion or anything?”

“No.”

No snarky comments about mothering him? Oh, he was in really bad shape. Strike two. Rather than get a third strike and be out, Harry stood and held out his hands. Severus opened his eyes and stared at them like he thought they might bite.

“Come on, sir. It’s been a rough night for you and I think the best thing for you right now is some sleep.” Several seconds passed and Harry was about to lower his hands when Severus grabbed them. Harry tugged him off the couch and immediately let go. “I’ll follow behind. I’m just gonna get the lights.”

Severus nodded, walked to their room, and disappeared inside while Harry extinguished the lights and cleaned up the dueling mess. Draco’s forgotten wand went into the little back pocket in his (er, Severus’s) sleep bottoms. He stopped in the bathroom for one of Severus’s sleeping potions and headed further down the hall to Draco’s room. Hearing nothing within, he tentatively raised a hand and knocked.

“Go away.”

Harry heard movement from their bedroom and then silence.

“Malfoy?”

Draco huffed. “What do you want, Potter?”

“Two things. One, do you need anything? Potion, ice, drink, so on.”

“No.”

“Okay. Two, I have your wand. Do you want-” Draco opened the door, snatched up his wand, and slammed the door. “You’re welcome.”

“Don’t push it, Potter. I still hate you.”

“Same.” Severus and Draco harrumphed at the exact same time and Harry smothered a chuckle. “Right. Well, night.”

He entered his bedroom and handed Severus his sleeping potion.
“I don’t need this.”

“You do. Now shut up and take it, sir. If you’re lucky, I won’t get on to you about tonight’s broken promise.”

“Potter, I’ve just hurt Draco. Don’t. Just give me a free pass this once.”

Something seemed odd about that, but Harry couldn’t quite put a finger on it.

“I’ll consider it. Your potion, sir.”

Severus obediently took some potion and got into bed. Minutes later, he was out like a light. In his own bed, Harry thought about the night and how it had suddenly taken a really bad turn.

As he was drifting off to sleep, his eyes popped open… and then narrowed.

***

It was 7:15 AM.

Harry walked around and proudly surveyed his work.

The Muggle coffee maker seemed to be unplugged and the pot hidden, the mess from the duel was put back out and worsened, Harry had used the last two pieces of bread and purposefully burnt the toast for Draco and Severus, he had put out lukewarm water to drink, and it seemed that every single piece of Severus and Draco’s dirty clothing was piled on the couch.

He sat down at the kitchen table and looked at his breakfast. His plate was piled high with fluffy eggs, sausage links, tomatoes, two buttery breakfast rolls, and mushrooms. He also had the last slice of Severus’s favorite pie on the side, more to torment Severus than out of any desire to eat it. He picked up a hot, perfect cup of coffee and took a sip as both theirs and Draco’s bedroom doors opened, nearly in sync.

“Where is he?”

“Shh. Already up.”

“Have you heard any-“

“What the hell?”

“These are still dirty! Severus?”

Severus and Draco pushed through the kitchen doorway and stared as Harry calmly swallowed a bite of his hot breakfast and then sipped some of his coffee.

“Ah, I see you’re awake. Good morning, you two.”

“What is going on, boy? The living room’s a mess, our clothes are- breakfast isn’t- coffee?”

“Oh, silly me. I must’ve made breakfast for two other lying, manipulative snakes!” Harry said, starting calmly and ending accusatively. “Did you truly think I wouldn’t catch on?”

Severus readjusted his stance. “What do you mean, brat?”

“I’m talking about that little show you and your godsnake put on last night, that’s what. Did you
think I would be so upset by your fight that I would forget the dueling? Did you really, honestly
think I wouldn’t see through that admittedly genius but ultimately pathetic act? Oh, Snape, you
almost had me, too, but I figured it out.”

“What the hell is he going on about, Severus?”

“I’ll come back to you in a moment, Malfoy.” Harry stood, walked to Severus, and shoved a finger
into his chest. “You, Snape, you knew my potion would wear off sooner than I thought it would.
You were counting on it in case I again caught you dueling in the middle of the night. You
arranged the whole thing with Malfoy, warned him in advance, and then played your parts
perfectly.” Harry stepped closer to Severus and got right in his face to whisper, “But I know you
better than you think I do.”

“Highly unlikely,” Severus drawled. “And you sound insane, boy.”

“Do I? No, I don’t think I do. See, the Severus Snape I know would never let himself appear weak-
even just emotionally- in front of anyone, particularly me. The man I know wouldn’t miscalculate
any situation, especially one involving Malfoy. I am so ashamed of you. I was trying to be there for
you in your time of need, but you were just playing me. You really are an asshole.”

Severus seemed stunned and unable to respond. Harry turned to Draco next, who held up his hands
and uneasily eyed Severus.

“Don’t start in on me, Potter. It wasn’t my idea.”

“No, I know that. It would take someone with years and years of using manipulation and deception
to get what they want to be able to think up something so despicable. You, however, are just as
guilty. Tell me, Malfoy, how long did you know the pregnancy was a fake?”

“Three.”

Severus looked over. “Draco.”

“Days?”

“No.”

“Mmm. Yesterday, then. PM?”

“AM, when I woke Severus up.”

“Shut up, Draco. You’re not helping matters.”

“Snape, you would do well not to speak just yet.”

“Do not talk to me in such a manner, boy. I will do as I please. I’m still your elder and-”

“Think of all I do on a daily basis, of everything I do around here, of how many times we’ve
spoken and shared things, of the times I’ve done my best for you and tried to make you happy, of
how pissed off I am right now then rethink what you just said.” Severus fell silent, his jaw
clenched in true anger, and Harry rounded back on Draco. “You played along with his idea,
probably listening avidly as he confessed and then plotted, and I’ll bet half a dozen galleons you
were thrilled I wasn’t actually carrying his child.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, you lunatic.”
“Mhmm. You didn’t care if I got angry, but you knew of some of the things I do for him. He’s undoubtedly mentioned something in a letter or in passing. You didn’t want me to stop taking care of him so you went along with it. Oh, you played your part well enough, but it was too heartfelt. That was both your and Severus’s downfall. You’re Slytherins.”

Severus looked irritated. “And what’s that supposed to mean?”

“You barely show emotion with your own families, let alone around someone like me. I barely know you nor do I ever wish to, Malfoy, but I still saw through your performance. Leaving your wand behind was good, too. So angry you left your wand? Very good. Made it almost believable. That little bit about not even being mad at me? Ensured you got your wand back and made me feel like I needed to fix things between you, which would have happened- grudgingly on your parts, naturally- shortly after breakfast… if I was as gullible as you two think I am.”

“You don’t believe Draco was upset with me?”

“Obviously not,” Harry remarked, sounding eerily like Severus. “And you should know I will forgive you… tomorrow. Today, you can fend for yourselves.”

“What?” two voices exclaimed.

“Yes, it is rather cruel, isn’t it? Clean up after yourselves, eat this blackened toast since I won’t cook anything for you today, do your laundry, and so on. Fold it all and put it away on your own, because saving it and hoping I’ll do it tomorrow would be foolish. I won’t be touching any of that laundry until it’s been cleaned and then worn again. If you don’t do it, it will sit in the laundry room until we leave this place. Now, please, either sit down and join me for breakfast or leave and starve.”

Severus and Draco stared at the black toast for a very long, quiet minute before taking their seats. They both took a bite and grimaced, but kept eating. When they finished, they washed it down with water… which Draco spat out.

“This is disgusting. It’s warm water.”

“Yes.”

“You couldn’t even have given us cold water?”

“No.”

“He’s really pissed, Severus.”

“I am aware of that, Draco.”

Harry finally finished his extravagant breakfast and quietly sipped at the last of his coffee. He glanced at Draco and then met Severus’s eyes.

“You are aware what you both did was really wrong, aren’t you? Playing on people’s emotions is low, sir.” Severus nodded sharply. “Do you understand what I mean when I say I never want to repeat last night?”

“Yes.”

“And in the future, when you agree or promise to do or not to do something, will you uphold that agreement or promise?”
“Yes.”

“That’s all I wanted from you in the first place. I never took you to be a man who went back on his word. Guess I was wrong.”

“I am a man of my word, Potter.”

“To everybody but me, apparently.” Severus’s frown deepened. “It’s still early. If you start cleaning now, you might still be able to have most of your morning free.”

Harry left the kitchen, went to his bedroom, and Severus and Draco got busy cleaning.

“He even hid the coffee pot,” Severus noted. “I don’t know where he keeps anything in here.”

Harry smiled and stretched out on his bed.

“Looks like we’re on toast and water. Is this really a fitting punishment for what we did? I mean, Severus, this is torture.”

“Hmm.”

“I don’t even know how to do laundry. Do you?”

“Why do you think I had Potter doing mine?”

“Oh.”

Severus hadn’t had him doing anything. He’d gotten tired of Severus complaining about his laundry piling up and had started doing it himself. Harry decided to let it go. Severus was already having a bad day.

Around nine o’clock, Harry roused himself from a slight doze when all he heard was silence from the two men living with him. Curious, he got up and walked into the living room. The room was spotless and they’d even rearranged the furniture a bit. He could hear the washing machine going, prayed they’d not done anything too drastically terrible to the items inside, and continued on into the kitchen. They were sitting at the table drinking cups of hot tea.

“The living room looks nice,” Harry commented and got out a glass for some iced tea. “I hope you haven’t messed up the laundry too badly.”

Severus harrumphed. He looked so grumpy and Harry sighed.

“Can you at least return the coffee pot? Severus knows how to make that.”

“You could have fooled me. He lived on tea and toast for weeks when we first got here, though I did catch him a few times sneaking coffee I’d already made. I’ve yet to see him making a pot.” Harry sat at the table and leaned back into his seat. “Have you both learned your lessons?”

“We’ve learned you can be cruel, you’re not gullible, and I hate you more today than yesterday,” Draco replied. “Good enough?”

“Sir?”

Severus scratched his nose. “I should treat you like an emotionally-fragile teenaged girl and not play upon your emotions if I don’t wish to starve to death, no matter that your food is barely fit for swine.”
“Correct.”

Severus and Draco continued sipping their tea. When they’d finished and left the room, Harry waved his wand. That morning, he had made breakfast for all of them, put Severus and Draco’s under a heating charm, and then hid them with a simple Notice-Me-Not. Harry collected the plates, put them on the table, and then removed the last two spells he’d cast that morning. What looked to be the unusable coffee maker was actually a transfigured bread box. Thank you, Minerva, for being diligent about his class work. Unfortunately- or maybe not, considering the reaction he’d gotten- for him, he hadn’t been trying to omit the coffee pot. That was just an awesome bonus. The real coffee maker had been hidden by the Notice-Me-Not and was still turned on. Harry prepared three mugs of coffee, put one each at Severus and Draco’s seats, and then sat back down in his seat with a cup of his own.

He cleared his throat loudly. Twice.

“Did you need something, boy, or are you choking to death?”

“Could you both come here for a minute?”

“Why, so you can lecture us again?”

Harry remained silent and, as he knew they would, Draco and Severus came to investigate. They both were too curious. They stopped and looked at the hot breakfasts and steaming coffees on the table.

“I forgave you,” Harry said calmly. “Roundabouts the time you both started eating that toast, actually. I can’t believe you thought I’d make you go an entire day fending for yourselves. That would have been too mean, because I used the last of the bread this morning.”

“You were playing us?” Draco looked irritated. “You’re a git, Potter.”

“You did the same to me. Turnabout’s fair play. Are you hungry or not, Malfoy? Because I can easily get rid of your food.” They both sat in their seats, carefully surveying their food, and hesitantly began to eat. “Incidentally, did you destroy our towels and whatnot?”

“What are you talking about?” Severus asked, lowering his fork. “What towels?”

“The things on the couch this morning. Did you ruin them when you put them in the washer?”

“Those weren’t towels, dumbarse. They were our clothes.”

“Are you sure about that, Malfoy? Pretty sure your dirty clothes are still in your room.”

“What?” Draco asked dismissively and then, as realization kicked in, yelled, “What?! You’re telling me-”

Harry smirked. “Yeah. Don’t ever try to mess with me again.”

The two men stared at him, looking shocked and irritated. Harry strolled from the room, coffee cup in hand, and sat down on the couch. He sipped his coffee, grinned to himself about his little victory over those two “sneaky” bastards, and put his socked feet on the coffee table.

Oh, yeah. Today was going great.

***
Harry awoke to the feeling of being grabbed from his bed.

His eyes flew open as Severus clamped a hand over his mouth and pulled him to the hidden corner where the wall and the closet met. It was the perfect place to hide in plain sight. Anyone coming through that door wouldn’t see them until it was too late... so what was going on? Was this another of his and Draco’s little dueling things? If so, someone was really going to die this time.

“My wards detected a presence here that isn’t any of us. Unfortunately, I cannot yet tell if it’s friend or foe.”

Harry swallowed thickly and pressed his chest up against Severus’s back for a brief moment of comfort. When he pulled away, he grabbed a handful of Severus’s shirt and waited. Severus seemed calm and his heartbeat was steady, but Harry’s was completely erratic.

Oh, no.

“What about your godson?”

“Draco can take care of himself. He was awake when the wards signaled someone’s imminent arrival. Shh.” Severus waited a moment. “Cave inimicum.”

Right as the spell indicated the intruder was friendly, the bedroom door flew open. There, smiling jovially at them both with Draco at his side, stood Albus Dumbledore.

“Severus, my boy.”

“Albus, you are a dead man. Why the hell are you here so late at night?” Severus stepped from his corner and dragged Harry with him. Harry refused to let go of the man’s shirt. He was still frightened. “I could have just killed you without a second thought.”

“You wouldn’t have used any damaging spell until you checked my intent. I well know you. As for my being here, I’m bringing young Draco back to Hogwarts with me. We needed to do this in the dead of night, regrettably, so we wouldn’t be spotted emerging from the Forbidden Forest.”

“And you didn’t think to warn any of us? Had I known it was only you coming through the wards, I wouldn’t have pulled Potter from his bed or left my godson to his own devices.”

“I’m sorry to have caused you such terror, Harry. Letting Draco defend himself, though it is the last a godparent wishes to do, was what you were supposed to do. You’re to keep Harry alive, Severus, even if it costs a little pain for others. If he dies, there would only be much worse to face.”

“Comforting,” Draco drawled.

For once, Harry felt bad for the blond. Severus had just chosen him over Draco and Albus was acting like it was perfectly fine. Yet again, he hated himself.

Severus’s shoulders tensed for a moment and then he elbowed Harry. Hard. Looking around, Harry gaped. Had he said any of that out loud?

“Yes, you did say that out loud. All of it. Everything from me choosing you over Draco to hating yourself, idiot boy. Quit feeling sorry for yourself.”

“I wasn’t. I was feeling sorry for-”

“If you say me, I’ll hex your bollocks to Turkey,” Draco warned and Harry narrowed his eyes. ”I
Severus stepped in front of Harry and glared at Draco, who lowered his wand. “Now. Albus, can you explain to me this inability you seem to have about writing first?”

“I am much too busy, Severus. I believe I send these things and then it turns out I haven’t.”

“It’s a miracle any of us are still alive,” Severus replied dryly. Harry snickered quietly, but Severus still heard and again elbowed him. He wished he’d quit doing that. “You are taking Draco back, but I assume we’re both being left behind.”

“That wasn’t a question.”

“No. I didn’t honestly expect an answer, either. Are your forces actually making headway or am I doomed to live with this boy for the rest of my life?”

“The way I see it, Severus, you’re living a fine life right now. Goodness, I wish I had to ‘suffer’ Harry’s cooking every day. I could die a happy man.”

Harry grimaced, feeling a little grossed out, and was glad Severus was still in front of him to cover the expression. He clapped a hand over his mouth to keep his thoughts to himself, because he so didn’t want to say aloud that being the little housewife for a man you could get off to (and indeed have gotten off to) and then being the little housewife for Albus Dumbledore would be two completely different situations. Seriously, one is just a messed up, gag-inducing thought. No, he’d stay with Severus, thankyouverymuch.

 “…Right,” Severus spoke slowly. “Albus, I don’t wish to be stuck down here the rest of my life, either, nor do I wish to die a happy man only because of the boy’s cooking.”

Harry was laughing so hard (and quietly, thank Merlin), he leaned into Severus’s back and held onto him to stay upright. That so reminded him! What would Severus do if he were dying? Severus shrugged him off after a moment. He’d missed a good chunk of the conversation, that was obvious, because they were talking about something else entirely when Harry clued back in.

“Severus…” Albus looked back from the hallway and frowned at Severus. “I thought you were moving into the new room.”

“Had I done so, Albus, neither of them would be alive today. For Merlin’s sake, they got into an argument the other day about who should have the last slice of apple cobbler.”

“You made apple cobbler, Harry?”

“It was good.”

“It’s a shame I missed it.”

Harry silently nodded and yawned. Severus pulled Harry out from behind him and pushed him towards his bed.

“I’m not going to deal with you whimpering and whining tomorrow because you didn’t sleep well. Go to bed.” He turned back to Albus. “With any luck, he won’t mention this at all.”

Severus ushered everyone out and closed the door on Harry, who was only too happy to be left
alone again. He collapsed onto his bed and tried to make himself go to sleep. He didn’t have to try too hard, to his surprise.

He didn’t even hear Severus re-enter the room ten minutes later.
“Are you going to stay up late with your drinking? If you are, I might need a sleeping potion to keep me asleep, sir. I’m exhausted. I can’t keep getting woken up in the middle of the night like I have been. I mean, now that Malfoy’s gone, I’m sure it won’t be so bad, but… you know.”

Severus’s brows furrowed. “I haven’t had anything of the sort to drink in some time, Potter. Have you truly not noticed?”

He hadn’t been drinking? Well, now that he thought about it, it had been a long time since he’d caught Severus sneaking back to bed and reeking of alcohol… Had he been having nightmares, then? He said he drinks to keep them at bay. He even said he drinks to keep from thinking suicidal thoughts! Oh, GOD! He hasn’t been thinking about it, has he?

“You’re not doing that because of me, right? If it helps your nightmares, do it, sir. You once said-”

“I haven’t needed to drink, idiot.”

“Oh.”

That was mind-blowing. Why wasn’t he drinking anymore? Oh, he was happy Severus wasn’t, but he truly wondered what had stopped the nightmares and depressing thoughts. Had he started coping in a different way? As he was thinking, two letters appeared on the desk with a pop. Severus got there first and held up a pink-colored letter.

“It seems the youngest Mrs. Weasley has written again.”

Harry eagerly collected the letter, opened it up, and began to read.

Harry,

Draco has been sulking since he returned two days ago. What on earth did you do to him? Anytime we mention you or Professor Snape, he gets quiet, doesn’t speak to anyone, and then sulks by himself the rest of the day. Oh, Rose is cooing this way. She knows when I’m writing her godfather. She’s so adorable. Anyway, I’m writing to let you know everyone is doing well and I’ve just found something you might be interested to hear about. It’s a protection spell- well, from harm. I promise I will let you know more about it in my next letter, but I just wanted to let you know about that and to ask something.

When I was speaking to Draco last night, he was telling me about something he and Professor Snape were doing and… well, Harry, he made it sound like you were pregnant. Now, I don’t want to go assuming things, especially about things you haven’t done or maybe just not told me about, but I want you to know I’ll be here for you, no matter what is going on there.

I wish I could add more right now, but Professor Dumbledore called a meeting. I’ll write you again as soon as possible. Write me back!

Love you,

Hermione
Hermione thought he was really pregnant. Should have seen that coming. After Draco left, he’d completely forgotten to tell her he was taking that potion and of course Draco would open his mouth and let it slip. He’d have to remedy that as soon as possible. And oh. She probably thought it was Severus’s, too. Huh. He’d have to write her after a bit.

“Dumbledore called another meeting. Hermione didn’t say what it was about.”

“Albus did. There’s soon to be an attack made on the Malfoy’s summer home. Apparently there’s a small contingent of Death Eaters using it as a temporary headquarters right now.” Severus looked up from his letter and pulled his brows down in concern. “Your followers are going to be involved. The infant is being sent here for a time, before and after the fight. A few days, it would seem.”

“What?!” Harry bellowed. He was at Severus’s side in seconds, trying to read around his arm. He only caught snippets of the letter, but it didn’t seem good. “They can’t go off to that fight. They won’t return!”

“They have been training for this since the beginning of sixth year. They know what to do and what will only get them killed, Potter. You sound insane. Merlin, boy, calm down.”

“And Rose is coming here why? If that fight is so easy, why is she being sent away from Hogwarts?”

“Perhaps her parents wished for the child to be with her godfather for a while and are taking advantage of the brewing fight,” Severus suggested and Harry sighed. He did have a point.

“That would be Hermione, then.”

“They should be here soon.”

Harry nodded and sat down on the couch. He nervously twisted his hands and kept looking between Severus and the fireplace. His gaze again turned to Severus and the letter right before the floo flared and out stepped Hermione, Ron and the baby, and Albus in a procession. Harry immediately jumped up and enveloped his friends in a tight hug. When he pulled away, feeling ridiculous for being teary-eyed, he saw Severus and Albus talking quietly.

“Please tell me Severus is right. You’re just taking advantage of this easy fight by sending her here. That’s all it is, right?”

“Mate, did you just—” Hermione elbowed him hard and glared. “Erm, never mind.”

“Yes, of course, Harry,” Hermione said before he could ask about that. “Your last letter sounded so wistful when you were speaking about Rose. We just wanted her to spend time with you. You shouldn’t be worried about this fight. We aren’t.”

“Thank God,” Harry sighed. He pulled Rose from Hermione’s arms and briefly smiled at the baby. “How long will I have her?”

“You mean how long will we be gone? I don’t know, Harry, but it shouldn’t be long. Everything will be fine. Just you see.” Hermione hugged him again and was smiling through tears when she pulled away. “Merlin, we’ve missed you. I see you don’t look any different.”

“I’m not. Promise. But you guys have?”
Ron smacked him. “Duh.”

Harry laughed and rubbed the back of his neck, switching Rose over to perch on one hip. He smiled at his two friends and accepted another hug before turning to Albus. He was waiting by the fire, smiling at them all.

“I hope you and Severus enjoy having a little one underfoot for a while, Harry.”

Ron looked sick and Severus snarled.

“Get out of here, Albus, before I decide to hex you into disability.”

“Come on, you two. We’ve plans to finalize,” Albus announced jovially. “Have fun, you two.”

The man must have balls of steel to enjoy annoying Severus. Harry liked it. With one final hug and teary goodbyes, they were gone. Rose didn’t even seem to notice her parents leaving. She was having too much fun pulling Harry’s hair and cooing behind him at Severus. Slowly, Harry turned towards Severus and frowned sadly.

“Oh, buck up, Potter. You’ve got a child to care for.”

“You’re right. Sorry.”

Harry spied the suspiciously small diaper bag on the couch and narrowed his eyes. He hefted the weightless bag onto his shoulder and trudged to the bedroom to put her things away. To his surprise, a cradle was set up between their beds and a changing table was beside Severus’s leather chair. He looked at them and shook his head. He should have known Albus would have gotten them here without telling anyone how. Rose cooed loudly and started bouncing around so Harry pulled her off and threw her up into the air. She squealed with delight as he caught her and repeated the move.

“You’re going to make her sick.”

Rose let out a warbled laugh and reached for Severus. To his credit, Severus merely took three steps away from the infant instead of yelling at her for such a blatant display of emotion. Rose pouted and ducked her head into Harry’s neck.

“You’re fine, Rose. Ignore him. He’s just a big meanie.”

“That isn’t my child. I don’t want to hold it.”

“It is a girl and her name is Rose, sir. She just wanted to be friendly.” Harry set Rose down on the bed and opened the diaper bag. His eyes widened at what looked like an entire nursery shrunk down and stuffed in the bag. He snorted. “Gods, Hermione, you really overdid yourself, didn’t you?”

“That will last you maybe an entire week,” Severus spoke over his shoulder.

“There’s way too much stuff in here. Look at all-”

“A week, Potter.”

“I doubt it.”

***
“Nape, Nape, Nape, Nape, Nape,” Rose chanted as Harry carried her to the kitchen. Like he had for the past week or so, Severus magically opened the door and laid his wand back on the table after Harry entered the room. He carefully set the baby in her high seat while Rose continued to say, “Nape, Nape, Nape, Nape.”

“Can’t you shut that child up?”

“Nape, Nape, Nape.”

“She’s saying your name. You do it if you want her quiet. You know she’ll just ignore me now you’re around.”

“Nape, Nape, Nape.”

“Nape is not my name, brat.”

“Nape, Nape, Nape.”

“She can’t say esses yet. She’s really trying her hardest, sir.”

“Nape, Nape, Nape.”

Severus huffed and finally looked at Rose. “Child, what seems to be your problem?”

“Nape!” Rose cried happily, her little hands reaching for Severus. “Nape, Nape, Nape.”

Severus eyed Rose carefully and then gently pulled her from her high seat. He gave her another calculating look, shook his head exasperatedly, and pulled the baby close. She curled against his chest and loosely grabbed a lock of his hair.

“Nape, Nape, Nape,” Rose quietly gibbered. She was asleep in three very short minutes.

“It occurs to me that her father would likely die of a brain aneurism if he ever saw this,” Severus remarked quietly. Harry paused in his dicing and grinned at the two of them. “I’m glad you find that so entertaining. Some friend you are, boy.”

“You’re just acting so gruff about a little girl wanting to sleep on you. It’s funny, sir.”

“For who? She never wants to sleep on you. I’m beginning to believe I know why she refuses her naps until I’m around. She’s trying to drive me insane. Her father put her up to this, I’m sure of it.”

“Ron didn’t do anything like that. You’re really warm. Babies like that.”

“Of course children like to be warm, but I am anything but. I’m a cold bastard with a very bad attitude. Children should fear me, not flock to me when they decide it is an appropriate time for a nap.”

Harry laughed.

“You’re not cold. You apparently don’t realize it, but you put out a lot of heat, sir. If I were a baby, I’d want to nap on your chest, too. Also, you were right. I have to wash some of her clothes later on. We’re already out of jumpers and it’s been- what? a little over a week. Day or two more than? It’s ridiculous.” Harry paused in the silence and turned to face Severus. The man had a strange look on his face, though he was positive he’d seen this one before. But where? “What? What’s wrong?”

“Heat, Potter?”
“Well, yeah. Heat. Is that weird to say?”

“Hmm, not for you, I suppose.” Severus rearranged Rose more comfortably on his chest. “Also, I told you one week, did I not?”

“Rub it in, sir. Hope you feel better about yourself.”

“With infant drool on my collar, I doubt I could appreciate myself much at the moment, but the small triumph of proving you wrong does indeed satisfy me.”

“I don’t even know how to retort to that,” Harry replied honestly. “So I won’t.”

“That is probably wise.”

***

Harry jerked awake when the small body on his chest suddenly disappeared. Shooting up on his bed, he looked around frantically and saw Severus tucking Rose into her bed. He tiredly watched one of Severus’s shirtsleeves unroll and pulled in a deep breath.

“What time is it?”

“Eleven o’clock. You shouldn’t be sleeping with an infant on your chest. You could have smothered her.”

“I woke up as soon as I felt her body move. I wouldn’t have smothered her.” Harry paused. “A.M.?”

“No, P.M. You’ve both been out since her bath. Might I suggest you go clean yourself, as well? Frankly, Potter, you smell like sour milk and it’s turning my stomach.”

“Sorry,” Harry mumbled.

He climbed out of bed, checked on Rose, and trotted to the bathroom to shower. Ten minutes later, he returned to the bedroom with his hair still slightly dripping and smiled gently. Severus was passed out, his clothes still on. Had Rose gotten him up early this morning, too?

Oops.

“Stop staring at me. It’s bad enough having that little monster doing it all the time.”

Oops again. “Sorry.”

“Quit apologizing. It’s annoying.”

“You might want to change.”

Harry covered his laugh with a cough and climbed back into bed. After slipping on pajama bottoms and ignoring Harry’s eyes on him, Severus extinguished the light wandlessly and laid back down. A sleepy-sounding “Nape” cut into the ensuing silence and Severus groaned.

“Go to sleep, Rosie,” Harry whispered. “Nape’s sleeping.”

A little sniffle and tussle were the last sounds to be heard before the three lost their holds on consciousness.
“I should skin you alive for just barging in here like this, you idiot,” Severus growled loudly. “What would Potter think if I woke him up to confess I’d killed his brainless friend, hmm?”

“I wasn’t thinking! And what do you care?” Ron replied a little too loudly and Harry slowly opened his eyes. “Honest, Mione, this isn’t my fault. How was I to know they’d be asleep? It’s four o’clock in the bloody afternoon.”

Severus pointedly cleared his throat, though it sounded more like a growl. “Lower your voice. I’m sure you would hate for your child to awaken after such a short slumber.”

“Really, Ron, think next time,” Hermione huffed quietly. “What were you thinking when you decided coming in here and yelling was a good idea? Also, I thought you assured me Professor Snape wouldn’t be taken off guard again, Professor Dumbledore.”

Harry gently rocked the child stirring on his chest when Severus’s grumbling startled her awake. After smiling at his friends, Harry turned to see Severus giving him a grumpy look.

“You know how things are, sir. And hey, Ron even managed not to get his arms threatened this time.”

“No, just my skin,” Ron muttered. "Much better, yeah."

“Ah, Harry, my boy. Don’t tell me Severus made you take care of little Rose the entire time,” Albus spoke warmly and Harry smiled at him.

“No, sir.” Harry laughed. “He actually helped a lot.”

“With what?” Ron asked quickly.

“That’s so kind of you, Professor Snape,” Hermione enthused. “Thank you.”

“Harry, with what?”

“Shh,” Harry whispered.

“We both appreciate your letting Harry see Rose, Professors. They really do love each other. You can tell just by looking at them.”

Severus harrumphed and Albus’s eyes twinkled happily. “I would say your daughter had a fine time, Mrs. Weasley. The happiness of a child is nothing to thank others for.”

Severus harrumphed again, louder this time. Harry tried to smother a laugh because he sensed what was about to happen. He had been too loud.

“Nape,” Rose babbled while trying to eat her toes at the same time.

“Bloody hell,” Ron whispered, flabbergasted. “Did she just…”


“Nape.”

“Can you blame me?”
“Nape.”

“Oh, dear Merlin. Potter, I’m not doing it anymore. Give that beast to her parents.”

“Excuse me?” Hermione asked irritably. Severus stood up and started backing away, his eyes on Rose the entire time. “What did you just call my daughter?”

“Nape, Nape, Nape.”

Albus chuckled and Harry joined in after quickly studying Ron’s green-tinged face, Hermione’s brewing anger, and Severus’s obvious attempts to escape Rose.

“Severus, this is delightful!” Albus commented lightly. “The child positively adores you.”

“No, she doesn’t, Albus. She’s trying to drive me mad.”

“Nape!” Harry stood up and received a black glare from Severus before the man disappeared into the kitchen. Deciding not to push him, Harry handed Rose to her mother. Instantly, the little girl cooed quietly and somehow managed to wrap most of her small body around Hermione’s neck. “Mummy.”


A derisive snort came from the other room, making Ron pale further, and Harry laughed harder. Albus clapped his hands together, winked at Harry, and swept everyone towards the floo. They remained long enough for Harry to sprint back into the room with the diaper bag in hand.

“Here! Sorry everything’s dirty. I didn’t get a chance to wash them.”

“It’s all right, Harry.” Hermione hugged him and forced her dazed husband to do the same. “As you can see, we’re fine, but we’re still a little tired and just want to get home. Sorry we’re already leaving.”

“It’s fine. You guys be careful, okay?”

“Of course,” Hermione’s voice drifted back through the flames.

Harry watched Ron stumble after Hermione, the diaper bag over his shoulder, and tried not to feel depressed again. Albus paused before the fireplace, smiled warmly at Harry, nodded at a point over his shoulders, and disappeared. Harry turned slowly and sighed when he saw Severus sitting on the couch again.

“Now they’re gone, I’m going back to sleep. Wake me up when you get hungry.”

Severus scoffed. “You don’t need to mother me. Surely you got that out of your system.”

“Not even close, sir.” Harry stretched out on two-thirds of the couch and closed his eyes. “It’s only gotten worse, I think. You’ll just have to suffer with it until it’s ‘out of my system,’ as you say.”

“Merlin help me. Get your feet off of me, Potter.”

Harry mumbled tiredly, but didn’t move. Severus sighed and shoved his feet away. It didn’t register in Harry’s mind that he was gentle about it.

***
Harry woke around nine o’clock. Blearily, he looked around the darkened living room and frowned. Severus hadn’t woken him up? Harry sat up on the couch, sucked in a deep breath, and noticed the sliver of light coming from under the kitchen door. He snorted, rolled his stiff shoulders, and trotted to the kitchen. Severus had better not be eating toast or he might just throw something at him. He pushed the door open and pursed his lips.

“How did I know I would find this going on?”

Severus looked up from his toast and arched a brow. Harry crossed his arms over his chest and again shook his head with exaggerated exasperation. After rinsing his mouth with coffee that at best could only be tepid, Severus cleared his throat.

“Excuse me?”

“I knew you’d be eating toast.”

“There is nothing wrong with toast. Why must you constantly persecute it? Perhaps I simply love toast more than the average person. Is it so strange I chose to eat a slice when you’re unconscious since you never let me have any?”

“That’s because you spent the first two, three months here eating nothing but toast, sir. You’re lucky you didn’t starve.” Harry ducked his head down to peek into the fridge and pulled out leftover meatloaf after a moment of perusal. “Do you want actual food?”

“Potter, I demand answers.”

“Answers to what?”

“One, why do you constantly force your poisonous filth down my throat?”

“You can’t cook, I can, and I’m not a bad cook. I’m usually already cooking for myself so you may as well eat some, too.”

“I will accept that answer for the moment, though I might later point out you cater to my tastes more than your own. Two, why do I still feel like you’re attempting to fatten me up like a pig doomed to market?”

“Maybe I’m planning to use you in some sort of potion later on and it says you’ve gotta be a bit flabby, hmm?”

“I am not flabby, nor have I ever been.”

“Of course you’re not.”

“Potter, I’m not flabby.”

“I was being serious. I know you’re not, sir. I’ve seen you na- without a shirt.” Harry blushed and turned back to the fridge. “Merlin.”

“I would appreciate you not telling anyone that.”

“Who would even believe me?”

“If I’m not mistaken, Albus already believes I’ve defiled you multiple times. Assuredly, he would believe it as soon as it fell from your mouth. He would see it as irrefutable evidence that I’m lying to him. It’s ridiculous, really.”
Harry banged his head on the inside of the fridge and cursed loudly. He swiveled around to face Severus, his face probably looking as incredulous as he felt.

“What?”

“What did I say?” Severus repeated confusedly.

“What did you just say?”

“Ah. Never fear, Potter. I quickly disabused him of the notion.”

“Oh.” Harry pushed his breath out. “Okay.”

“What is causing this reaction? Do you not wish others to know of your inclinations towards men or are you acting oddly because it is me he believes you’re fornicating with?”

“Neither, sir.”

Wait, what? How did Severus figure it out? Last he’d checked, Severus hadn’t known.

“Then explain yourself.”

“That kind of stuff is just private,” Harry muttered. “You have reasons for not advertising who you do- er, who you go with, probably for the same reason. Everybody’s too interested in my life as it is and I don’t want them to know any more than they already do… even Dumbledore.”

“I concede you make a point.”

“Thanks.”

“Mmm. I suppose if you’re going through the trouble of heating that rubbish, I will force myself to consume some more of it. I haven’t much hope, but it mayhap taste more edible the second time around.”

Harry rolled his eyes and gave Severus one of the plates.

“Dinner is served, sir.”

“My toast looked more appealing.”

“If you say so.”

“I just did.”
“Boy, mail call.”

Rushing into the living room, Harry eagerly grabbed the letter from Severus’s hand and tore open the wax seal. He immediately recognized it as Hermione’s personal stationary. After quickly skimming it, Harry looked up at Severus, his mouth hanging open. Severus paused in sipping his coffee and raised a brow in question. Harry jumped back into the letter before the man could ask him questions and reread the entire thing.

Harry,

You might recall from my last letter before Rose came to visit you that I told you of a protection spell I found. I’ve been researching different ways you can end this and have pinpointed at least three dozen possible spell combinations. We will discuss that at a more appropriate time.

The spell I mentioned in my letter, though, is one I particularly think you might appreciate. It is called the Enchantment of Intention. I realize this won’t be useful until you’ve left the safe house and found someone to help you, but this ritual could give you a bit of protection on the day you face off with Him.

Have you ever heard of sex magic, Harry? The ritual I’m talking about isn’t very complicated, to tell you the truth. It’s so simple, I’m almost positive many witches and wizards act out the appropriate ritual quite often. In fact, I believe Ron and I did when Rose was conceived. The ritual merely calls for sexual intercourse, the exchange of the promise or protection you desire, and the sealing of the pact with a kiss. With Ron and I, we wished for happiness and love for however long we may live. Since Rose was conceived during it, I can only imagine it extends to her. The ritual works best with someone you love or care for so maybe you can ask Fred or Neville to help you. I don’t want to say too much about that, but I believe they may be more than willing to aid such an endeavor.

Oh, honestly. Ron has been badgering me to add that it has the added benefit of you losing your virginity before you face possible death. Never fear, I punched him for even saying that. You won’t die, Harry. I just know it.

Also, you should tell Professor Snape that Rose has done nothing but talk about him all day. She saw a picture of him in the newspaper and she started going on and on about him. If I’m not mistaken, I believe Ron actually fainted! He denied it, said he’d fallen asleep, but I don’t buy that.

Anyways, Harry, I have to go. Rose has a check-up and we can’t be late for this one, too. Write me back!

We love you,

Hermione, Ron, Rose

“Professor, have you ever heard of sex magic?”

Severus looked surprised. “Yes, I have. How have you ever heard of it?”
“Hermione.”

“Again with that chit?”

“Oh, stop. She was telling me about a really simple ritual that could give me some protection or something.”

“Do you realize how ridiculous that sounds? A sex magic ritual that could give you some protection.” Severus chuckled briefly and then looked serious again. “Is she perhaps speaking of the Enchantment of Intention?”

“How did you know?” Harry held up his letter and looked at the other side as he asked, “Can you see through the parchment?”

“No, you twit. Most sex magic rituals are highly complicated. Since you referred to it as ‘really simple,’ only two came to mind. Since one is a very dark spell whose purpose is to end an enemy’s life, I knew it had to the other.”

“Yeah, that was it. I wondered- Whoa, hold up a minute. There’s a-”

“I’m not discussing that.”

“Okay so tell me about the other one.” Severus glared at him and Harry added, “Please, sir?”

“The Enchantment of Intention may be ridiculously simple to enact, but you must have strong feelings for whomever you couple with for the ritual to even work. When I say strong, I don’t just mean you have to love them. You can strongly despise someone or be strongly repulsed and it will still work. There just needs to be strong emotion involved and the intensity of the feeling must be exactly reciprocated, even if one is strong love and the other is strong hate, or the strength of the protection will be diminished.”

“Oh. So if I were to sleep with someone like… um… Malfoy, for instance, it could work even if we both hate each other.”

“Yes, I believe I just said that.”

“So what if I slept with someone like Lavender?”

“Miss Brown?”

“Well, yeah. She’ll mount any willing guy and fool herself into loving them at the time. Believe me, she’s tried many times. Will it still work, even if she’s faking?” Severus’s glare intensified and Harry blushed. “Never mind. I think I get it. Strong love with strong love, strong love with strong hate, strong hate with strong hate, and avoid Lavender.”

“Exactly.”

“Have enemies ever done the spell? I mean, enemies that hate each other as much as he and I hate each other?”

“I do not think the ritual would be able to withstand the hatred, honestly. It would be interesting to see what two such enemies would work together to bring about, though, wouldn’t it?”

“Yeah.” Harry grinned a little. “It would. Oh, and sir, I forgot to tell you. Rose apparently misses you and keeps saying your name around Ron and Hermione.”
“Does she? I cannot imagine why. How does your friend respond to hearing his daughter say my name?”

“According to Hermione, he gets really quiet and moves around in a daze. I wish I could see that.”

“It would certainly be memorable, I’m sure.”

“Yeah, today, Rose saw your picture in the newspaper- no, Hermione didn’t mention why you were in there, but I’ll ask.” Severus nodded. “So she sees you and starts going on about you, apparently, and Ron actually passed out.”

“That is incredibly amusing.” Severus’s lips curled up. “Thank you for that, boy. Now can you fetch my coffee and book from the kitchen?”

“Uh, why can’t you do it?”

"My knee is a little stiff this morning and I don’t want to aggravate it. I’m trying to stay still for as long as possible.”

“If you need your potion, you should take it.”

“You’re not going to jump in my lap and force me this time? I’m astonished.”

“After finding out what your potion does, sir, no, I’m not gonna force it on you. I just think if it’s hurting you, you should take some. I won’t judge you.”

Severus rolled his eyes. It was more impressive than when Harry did it. How annoying. “I said my knee was stiff. I didn’t say it was bothering me badly.”

“Yeah, but for you to mention it all, it must be hurting.”

“There is a difference between being stiff and hurting enough to need immediate relief.”

Both of Harry’s brows rose. He didn’t quite manage to suppress his chuckle. “Well, yeah. Even I know that, sir.”

“You have to be the most inappropriate person I know… and I know Albus Dumbledore, boy. Why does it seem that at every turn, I find myself discussing something of a sexual matter with you?”

“I’m a guy in his teens and I usually have sex on the brain. Also, the people I usually talk to have healthy sex lives and let me know about it, ask advice- though Merlin only knows why, and generally just gossip about it.”

Severus’s brows pulled down. “Do they really?”

“Oh, yeah. Ron and Hermione, Neville, Fred, George, Mal- Well, that might’ve been a lie. Don’t know. Anyway, yeah, lots of people having sex. I’m living vicariously, according to Hermione.”

“By Mal, did you mean my godson, Draco?”

“Yup. Don’t know any Mals and he’s the only Malfoy I talk to, sir.”

“My godson has had intercourse?”

“Er, no, I said I’m pretty sure he was lying about it. Claimed it was with Luna, of all people.”
“Ah, I wouldn’t be too sure he’s lying, Potter. I would write him to ask, but that’s not usually something you wish to discuss with a parent or godparent…” Severus’s eyes suddenly met his and narrowed. “But you could write him back and ask or simply write to Ms. Lovegood for the truth.”

“Why?”

“I wish to know if he has truly lost his innocence.”

“Sir, I really don’t think-”

“Potter, please.”

That was maybe the second or third please he’d ever gotten from the man. Holy shit! He was serious.

“Fine. I’ll write them both. Satisfied?” Severus nodded and looked away. “Are you sure you really want to know, though, sir? If he has, wouldn’t that mean you have to face the fact that your godson’s growing up? Isn’t that something parents and the like dread?”

“It is,” Severus allowed.

“And you’re sure you want me to find out?”

“Yes.”

“You asked for it.”

***

Dear Luna,

This is Harry. I recently received

Malfoy,

I find it hard to believe that

Luna wouldn’t have

Hermione,

I really need to know something. Malfoy wrote me a snotty letter the other day claiming he’d recently slept with Luna and I can’t make myself ask Luna if it’s true or not. I most certainly won’t be writing Malfoy back to ask. My question is: do you know if that’s true or not? You know I don’t really care who my friends sleep with, even if Malfoy is a git of epic proportions. It’s Snape. He wanted to know so badly if Malfoy had actually “lost his innocence” that he asked me to write them both. He even said please! Any information you could give me would put his mind at ease.

And enough of that. How’s my goddaughter? How are you and Ron? Neville? McGonagall? Everyone? Has Dumbledore mentioned when we’re getting out of here?

Shite. Snape’s knee is acting up and his medication isn’t an option anymore. Gotta try something
new. Alright, well, I’ve gotta go beard the lion- er, snake. Oh, whatever. Sorry my brain’s all over the place today. Didn’t get much sleep last night. Oh, and don’t worry. I’ll respond to your letter after dinner tonight. Hopefully I get done before our letters get collected.

Love you,

Harry

Harry sealed his letter to Hermione, discarded his aborted letters to Draco and Luna, and stood up from the desk. Without any useful potion to get rid of Severus’s pain, he was going to try massage and nothing Severus said would keep him from at least trying.

As Harry moved towards Severus, who immediately became suspicious due to the look on his face, he picked up the oil he’d set out earlier. Standing right in front of him, allowing him no chance of an escape, his eyes narrowed.

It was on.

***

Harry,

Your letter couldn’t have had better timing! I let Ron go out with the guys last Friday night so he was more than willing to let me have a girls night out yesterday and, oh, did I get the dirt! I still can’t believe it.

I suppose you will never believe this, but Luna and Draco have been dating since he returned to Hogwarts! She told me he’s a different man now, not like the guy we all used to know and I have to agree with her. He has changed a lot since we were in school together, Harry. Why, just yesterday, I saw him helping Professor McGonagall pick up some books she dropped. It seems he’s been staying in Professor Snape’s private rooms and Luna, obviously, has been staying with him almost every night.

And… They finally had sex a few weeks ago! Can you believe it?! Luna had wanted to do it about two weeks after they got together, but Draco is the one who wanted to wait. Isn’t he just the sweetest? There’s so much more I want to say, add, and ask, but I have to go. Rose is getting another tooth and she is not feeling well.

Ron says hi and he misses you. Rose would, too, if she wasn’t so fussy. She keeps calling for you and her “Nape Nape.” You might consider telling Professor Snape. It might make his day. Write me back! Oh, and the twins told me to tell you that if you haven’t used their present yet, they’re disowning you. I won’t ask.

Love you!

Hermione

Oh, dear. Severus would not be happy. Harry went into the bedroom closet, put Hermione’s letter in a box with the rest of his letters, and silently wondered how he was going to do this.
“Boy, must you?” Severus complained, trying to unroll his trouser leg over Harry’s hands. Harry ignored him and his efforts. “You’ve done this the past two days and it’s getting ridiculous. My knee hasn’t even been sore today. I think you simply wish to put your hands on me, most likely in an effort to annoy me to death. You and that child are in cohorts, aren’t you?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, sir, and your knee’s not sore ‘cause I’ve been massaging it every day. Admit it. This was a good idea.”

“No.”

“Have you needed to take some of your potion lately? Have you felt so much as a twinge since I’ve started doing this?”

“…no,” Severus repeated, sounding grumpy, and slowly relaxed. “I couldn’t help noticing you received correspondence this morning.”

“From Hermione.”

“But not Draco or Ms. Lovegood?”

“No.”

“I see.”

Harry poured a little more oil into his hand and moved to the back and sides of Severus’s knee. Silence reigned in their living room for several minutes.

“Sir? I did actually, uh, find out the truth, though. Hermione talked to Luna herself and then told me. Are you sure you want to know, no matter what really happened? Wouldn’t it be better not to know anything at all?”

“Yes, I do and no, it wouldn’t.” Severus pulled in a deep breath. “Is Ms. Lovegood’s innocence still intact? Has Draco become a man?”

“They did have sex,” Harry finally forced himself to say and Severus tensed. “According to what Luna told Hermione, they’ve apparently been dating since he got back to Hogwarts and she wanted to have sex a couple weeks in, but he wanted to wait. Hermione seems to think that’s “the sweetest” and says Luna’s been staying with him a lot.”

“Dare I ask where?”

“Your private rooms.”

Severus harrumphed. “Wonderful. Is that all the youngest Mrs. Weasley told you?”

“No.” Harry cracked a grin, trying to lighten the mood. “Rose is getting another tooth, is really fussy, and keeps calling for me and her “Nape Nape.” Hermione thought you’d like to know.”

“Surely not.”

“Surely so. I told you Rose liked you. I’d show you the letter if I thought it’d help you believe it.”

“Go retrieve it, then.”

“Are you serious?”
“Yes.”

Harry stood and quickly returned with Hermione’s newest letter. When Severus finished reading the whole letter, his mouth was sitting a bit crooked… almost as if Severus was trying to hide a smile! Harry grinned at him.

“Told you.”

“Yes, you did. Also, brat, I suggest you write the Weasley twins and lie through your teeth if you’ve no plans to use their gift. It seems they’re getting impatient.”

Harry flushed. “Should do, yeah. Good idea.”

“Mmm.”

***

It’d been forever since Draco had sent him that photo of Remus and Ton- er, Dora and he still hadn’t done anything to get back at him. Well, honestly, he’d forgotten until earlier when Severus had asked him if he was any closer to getting revenge. As his mind wandered, Harry’s Slytherin guidebook slipped through his fingers a bit and hit his lap.

Harry again looked at Severus and rolled his eyes. The man was dozing with a mug of coffee clasped between his fingers. Seemed that massage he’d gotten earlier had been more effective than Severus wanted to admit. How badly had his knee been hurting today? His eyes dropped to the coffee mug once more. He was almost positive Severus only did that to make him wonder if he was sleeping or not.

He’d reach over there and poke him, but he’d like to keep his fingers far away from him if he was actually asleep. He’d learned the hard way Severus sometimes bites in his sleep. It was the last time he’d ever been brave enough to poke him. Good thing he’d made it out of his bed and off the couch without any marks those times they’d slept together.

Seriously, what kind of man bites in his sleep?

Harry would hate to see one of Severus’s ex-lovers or whatever. Well, huh. Maybe Severus never let them stay over. He didn’t really see Severus being rude enough to kick someone out of bed as soon as he’d gotten off, but he wouldn’t keep anyone around for long if he did bite in his sleep. Harry really wanted to ask Severus, but that would be as intelligent as asking Moldywort why he doesn’t have a nose.

Harry snickered and reminded himself to thank Fred and George for that nickname. He’d learned that he could think of him if he didn’t use his actual name. Indeed, he’d been thinking of a way he could somehow bind the monster’s soul to hell that afternoon and he hadn’t had any bad thoughts or anything.

“Learning anything useful?”

Jerking in surprise, Harry looked over at Severus again. The man hadn’t moved an inch, but appeared to be wide awake. Had he been faking that little nap or had he been too caught up in his own thoughts to notice him actually waking up? How did he wake up? He’d never paid any attention.

“Erm, I guess. I don’t exactly know if I can use any of it just yet, but it’s better than nothing.”
Did he wake up all at once or did he slowly wake up? Ron took almost an hour to be a functioning human being. He knew Hermione could be awake and alert in mere moments. How did Severus do it?

“Everything in that guidebook can be used on a daily basis. You simply must not be thinking broadly enough.”

“I am, too. I just haven’t thought of anything yet.”

“Now I understand why you were placed in Gryffindor.” He'd been wondering why? “You couldn’t even scheme to save your own life.”

“Excuse me, but do you not recall that little dueling incident when Malfoy visited? I can scheme, but not quite on Malfoy’s under-my-skin, I-want-to-rip-his-head-off kind of level. I want this to be perfect. Give me time. It’s hard work turning a lion into a snake.”

Severus arched a brow. Remaining completely silent, he conjured a stuffed lion, transfigured it into a stuffed snake, and held it out for Harry to see. “You’re making it harder than it is, Potter. Use your imagination.”

Harry grabbed the snake from him and put it in his lap with a loud huff. Severus re-warmed his coffee, took a sip, and smirked with satisfaction at Harry’s flustered expression. Harry felt compelled to speak, to say anything, when Severus’s smirk ratcheted up another degree. Words tumbled from his lips when Severus’s brow arched.

“It’s- it’s not as simple as transfiguring something into something else, you know, Snape.”

“Is that not precisely what you are attempting to do? By the little effort I have seen on your part, I believe you want Draco to continue besting you at every turn. I suppose if you are satisfied with that, by all means continue doing whatever it is you’re doing. It seems to be working as well as you evidently wish it to.”

“I don’t want Malfoy to keep bugging me, sir. I just don’t know what to do.”

“Use your admittedly poor Slytherin instincts, Potter. Turn the tables on him and get under his skin so thoroughly, he’s having nightmares of what you might do next. However, if that is too difficult for you to do, simply put that book away and go back to being the bored, little housewife you so enjoy being.”

Harry’s eyes widened. Did Severus know he liked it or was he just saying that to irritate him? Wait. He’s a Slytherin. Of course he was saying that to be annoying. He was about to retort when he caught a flash of movement and heard a quiet pop. Looking at the desk, he saw a single letter. He approached the desk and felt apprehensive when he saw George’s handwriting.

“It’s, uh, for me.”

“Mmm.”

***

The toy the twins had sent him lay beside him, looking menacing. It was thin and not too wide, but it would still probably hurt. Hopefully it wouldn’t be too bad.

When he felt more than ready to brave his toy, instead of the usual random pick out of an assortment of plugs and whatnot the twins had also given him for his birthday, Harry lubed the toy up and started the shower. With any luck, Severus wouldn’t even question what he’d already been doing in here for so long. Don’t think about him and don’t think about this. It’s just like the other times, except this time he was going to play with himself. Harry grimaced. Man, that made him sound like such a little kid.

Keep your mind focused!

Harry couldn’t help that he apprehensively eyed the toy. More and more, it was looking like the ultimate torture device. All right. Stop thinking now! A nervous sigh escaped. Once in the shower, Harry began the adjusting process. He would slowly work the toy in until he felt uncomfortable, pull it back a bit, and then repeat the process after a long pause. Just don’t think about it. Go again. Stop. Breathe. Pause. And again. Mind cleared. Pause. Relax. Breathe. Now go yet again. Without much warning, the toy smoothly slid the rest of the way in.

Good.

Kneeling on the shower floor, Harry quietly incanted the levitation spell that would both keep the toy suspended at that height and hold it steady while he moved on it. Where had George even learned that spell? Did he even want to know?

No, no, no, no, no!!!! Quick, someone else before the toy changes! Harry’s mind flashed to the time he’d caught Severus masturbating and he felt ashamed that he didn’t even attempt to think of anyone else. The toy slowly morphed its shape to mimic Severus’s erection and then stilled once more. Harry bit his lip to contain a pained groan and stoically ignored the burning from the toy’s change in width and length.

This was wrong. This was sooo wrong. He should change it… but gods, it felt nice and it wasn’t like he was actually taking advantage of anyone. The truth was that a toy was in his arse, not some professor who would go ballistic if he knew what the toy did and who he would only very technically be getting off because of. So really, it wasn’t wrong and he wasn’t doing anything bad. Severus wasn’t ugly or whatever so it wouldn’t really be that weird if he closed his eyes and pretended he was actually boffing him, right? He didn’t fancy him, either. He’s just a name and a face to go with the cock in his arse. Yeah, that sounds like a good story. He'll stick to that.

Pushing away his increasingly disturbing thoughts, Harry slowly and gently rocked on the toy to get used to the feeling. Not bad, he supposed. It felt more odd than anything else, though. Maybe he should close his eyes. It might help him focus on what he’s supposed to be feeling if he’s not staring at the shower wall. Yeah, think of… well, think of Severus. A simulation of his prick was in his arse, after all.

Oh, much better. Still not what he was expecting…

Harry opened his eyes and imagined Severus laying right below him. Huh. That’s not right. Harry cancelled the levitation spell, shifted his position a little, and replaced the spell. He tested the new placement and wondered how exactly this was pleasurable. The most he’d felt so far were brief flickers of something unexplainable that made his stomach clench. It just felt like he needed to use the toilet again. Exasperated with himself and the damn toy, Harry squeezed his eyes shut and began imagining what Severus would be doing if he were there. A little thrill went through him at the fantasy he was weaving. As it continued, that thrill only became more intense. For not the first time, Harry was grateful for having such an active and realistic imagination.

“Oh, Merlin… It, uh, it – it may help if you lean back a – just a little more, Potter. As it is, I doubt
you’re doing more than, uh, brushing past your prostate.”

“Oh, gods!”

Harry reared back in surprise, moaned at the intense stab of pleasure, and looked at the doorway. Holy hell! Severus’s eyes were covered, but he must have seen something! Fuck! Severus cleared his throat uncomfortably.

“I still need to make use of the toilet. You, don’t move a muscle while I’m in here. Don’t even breathe.”

Good gods, was Severus blushing? He wasn’t the one who should be embarrassed about this! After all, Severus hadn’t been the one caught riding a toy! Oh, dear Lord… that image was just wrong. Even if Severus were to ever become gay, Harry couldn’t honestly see him taking such a passive role. The image gave him the creeps, actually.

“What exactly is a prostate?”

Already back at the door, Severus didn’t turn to him. “An extensive section in my old anatomy book will tell you everything you need to know.”

“But-”

“Potter, does this situation not seem completely inappropriate to you? Stop talking to me.”

Severus tried leaving the room yet again, but Harry stopped him. “Sir, what is wro-”

“I am your sole protector right now, you currently have a toy shoved up your arse, and I am still in the same room with you,” Severus growled loudly and finally swept out of the room.

“Sorry you had to see this!” he called back, his voice shaking.

He really should get out right now, but he really wanted to get off from this, just so he could say he had. Fred and George would never let him live it down if they found out. So yeah, good idea. He’ll just get off and get out. Hmm. Did Severus’s suggestion have any merit? Should he keep doing what he’d told him to?

Good God on high, yes, yes, he should.

Harry held himself up on one hand, started rocking back onto the Severus look-alike quickly, and stroked himself to a climax that hit him much faster than expected. Breathing heavily, Harry cancelled the levitation spell, retrieved the toy, sat back on his heels, and looked around the bathroom with dazed eyes. Yeah, that incredible orgasm and this sated feeling coursing through him were worth every single embarrassing, uncomfortable minute. Did that feel better with a real man? Would he ever find out or would he die before he could get the chance?

He needed to stop thinking about it.

Climbing out of the shower proved to be a somewhat difficult task. His legs were kind of shaky and his sore arse demanded he stoop for a while. The weird ache did eventually fade, though. Finally, Harry managed to make it out of the stall and dressed as slowly as possible. He wasn’t looking forward to seeing Severus so quickly and hoped he’d fallen asleep by now. Maybe he should just hide away in Draco’s old room for the rest of the night. Surely Severus wouldn’t feel the need to hunt him down or anything. Feeling ridiculous, Harry peeked out into the hallway and let out a silent gasp of relief. The living room, kitchen, hallway, and bedroom were all pitch black. That
meant Severus was already in bed and hopefully on a fast track to falling asleep.

Okay, so he’d sleep in their bedroom tonight.

Barely daring to breathe, Harry tiptoed to the bedroom and grimaced when the door opened with a loud creak. He held completely still and blindly stared towards the approximate location of Severus’s bed. Nothing. Harry decided not to tempt the squeaky hinges any more, left the bedroom door cracked open, and quietly hurried to his bed.

Almost there. Almost… Yes! Now to just get in without making a sound…

“Why on earth are you sneaking into your own bed? Surely you don’t still believe monsters live under your bed.”

“The only monsters I fear don’t live under beds, sir. I, uh…” Harry pulled the blanket over his face. “I didn’t want to wake you up after… earlier. I wanted to wait for morning to hear my punishment.”

“Potter, I’ve caught you masturbating too many times during our stay. The method you use may vary from time to time, but there is always one goal and that is to achieve a sexual release. I cannot possibly fathom why you expected retribution now when you have never been punished any other time.”

Harry’s head poked over the top of his blanket. “Because this was a completely different situation than the others.”

“It was masturbation, you twit,” Severus replied sleepily. “It wasn’t different in the least.”

“So you’re not mad?”

“Resigned is a much better description.”

“Oh, okay. Um, thanks, sir.”

“If you will be so kind as to shut up, boy, I would appreciate it. I am exhausted and have nightmares of this most recent occurrence to attend to.”

“Erm, sorry.”

“Potter.”

Despite his lingering embarrassment, Harry smiled up at the ceiling. Who would have thought Severus could be so cool sometimes? Certainly not him. Maybe Dra-

A malicious grin crossed his lips. Oh, he’d just gotten a brilliant idea. Draco had used Remus to get under his skin so he would somehow use Severus to return the favor. Hadn’t Draco said Severus was the only thing he had left?

Harry quietly chuckled.

Tomorrow, he would begin plotting. Perhaps he might accidentally let it slip that Severus himself had taught him the correct way to properly stimulate his prostate… and it had been immensely satisfying, if he caught his drift. No need to mention Severus himself wasn’t actually involved more than giving him a word of advice… well, and the bit about inspiring the toy, too.

Victory would be his.
Severus sat his tea down, pushed his half-eaten snack away, and contemplated Harry’s obvious distraction.

“The feeble smirk stealing across your mouth worries me. Are you once more attempting to plot against someone?”

Harry raised his eyes to meet Severus’s and laughed. “Oh, I’m doing more than attempting, sir. I’ve a basic idea of how I’m going to get back at Malfoy for that picture. I’m just considering a few details right now.”

“And what have you devised?”

“Well, Se- Snape,” he corrected. Dear Gods, had he really almost called him by his first name? That was the first time he’d done it, but still… it was odd. “I can’t tell you. I mean, you talk to Malfoy all the time. You’d tip him off that something was up. Rule number seventeen, never trust anyone.”

Severus looked slightly impressed. “I see you’ve been reading Being Slytherin too much. At least you’re retaining something, though it’s troubling that of all things, you chose to remember the correct way to display and employ qualities similar to myself and your school rival. Are you dissatisfied with life as a Gryffindor?”

“Hey, you’re the one who got me that book.” Harry shrugged. “I’m just using the information to my advantage to mess with Malfoy’s head in return.”

“Dear Merlin, the boy’s already becoming a Slytherin, isn’t he? I’m honestly proud.”

“Of me?” Harry asked loudly.

“No. Of myself. I’ve managed to change a Gryffindor into a Slytherin. Godric must be rolling in his grave.” Severus smirked and swirled the small amount of tea in his glass. “And you were the one who said it was difficult to change a lion into a snake.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re rubbing off on me.” Severus snorted. Harry briefly recalled the day Severus had said the same, Harry had reacted, and Severus had said something about him being more inappropriate than Albus Dumbledore. Oh, how the times had changed. “Anyways, guess it’s not too hard to change.”

“As I said. Now tell me what you’re planning.”

“I already said why I can’t and won’t tell you, sir… or at least not yet. You’ll find out soon enough.”

“Why do I feel a keen sense of foreboding right now?”

“Probably because you should.” Harry laughed and held up his empty glass. “More tea?”

“Why exactly did you prepare tea? I was beginning to expect coffee all the time and then you switch things up.”

“I guess for that reason. I don’t want to be too predictable. You don’t like it.”

“Never change yourself for the sake of someone else. It’s belittling.”
“But isn’t that what you’re kind of trying to do? I mean, you gave me a book called The Subtle Guide to Being Slytherin: Overcoming Gryffindor Impulses.”

“I gave you that book in jest, Potter, though I’m pleased to find you enjoy it so well.”

“Did you want some coffee instead, sir?”

“You’re changing the subject.”

“Well, I was trying,” Harry said lamely. “Where were we?”

“I gifted you a book in jest and you mistakenly thought I meant for you to change.”

Harry frowned. “You didn’t give the pregnancy one to me in jest, too, did you?”

“No, that was a spur-” Severus coughed. “Excuse me. A splurge. I felt you deserved some type of reward for keeping yourself out of the Dark Lord’s clutches for more than one year and when I saw it in Diagon Alley, I thought it would be a reasonable reward.”

“Sir, did you almost say ‘spur’ as in ‘spur of the moment’ just now?”

“No, I most certainly did not. Why the hell would I have said anything resembling that? Also, I don’t truly think it needs to be said, but I would not buy you a gift at the spur of the moment. Doing such would imply-”

“That you care,” Harry teased, smiling. Severus glared at him and swallowed the last dregs of his cold tea. “More, that you care about me and knew I’d love and treasure that book.”

“That is an utterly preposterous supposition, Mr. Potter.” Severus leaned back in his chair. “How absurd. It’s just a book.”

Harry’s grin widened, crinkling his eyes. Severus glowered at his empty cup and didn’t look up at Harry, even though he knew Severus could feel him staring and grinning at him.

He was totally telling Hermione all about this.
"So it’s almost Christmas again. We only have a month or so…”

“I am well aware of that fact,” Severus commented dismissively. "What?! Lord, this book is ridiculous. Salazar was not the product of a coupling between man and beast. Makes sense a bloody Hufflepuff wrote this.” Severus looked up. “Oh, yes. I suppose I’ll be forced to spend it with you, correct?’"

“Well… yeah. If I spend the holiday alone, I’ll end up thinking about all sorts of depressing things. It happened last year.”

“I wasn’t away from you for more than twenty minutes last year.”

“I know. When you went to shower, I didn’t think you were going to spend any more of the day with me and I started thinking about Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia, and Dudley, which only made me think of everyone dying because of me. I got angry and wondered why I had to be the one to kill that bastard when someone else with more training would be better for the job. Naturally, that made me think about how easy it would be to just finish it all and let someone else take care of him.” Harry refused to look up from his own book. “I forgot to tell you about that, I guess.”

“So it would seem,” Severus replied tightly. “Potter, you are an idiot. I told you that allowing yourself to think of the Dark Lord could open your mind to his manipulations. You don’t normally think of suicide so don’t you think you should have mentioned it when you started having those thoughts? Have you thought any more about it?”

“Not much.”

“Idiot. Was there actually a point to bringing up the Christmas holidays?”

“We’re not going home until the spring, are we?”

“I do not foresee us returning to Hogwarts until the snow melts, no.”

“That sounds about ri- that’s not what I said. Do you know something I don’t?”

“Of course I do.”

“Well, what is it?”

“Think, Potter. Our most recent letters have stated the snow has begun to fall. The Dark Lord is not going to sully himself with common weather problems. No, he will wait until the snow has melted to withdraw from wherever he’s hiding himself. Naturally, that means Albus won’t have need of either of us until after that point.”

“You make us sound like some piece to be played at the right moment.”

“That is exactly what you are, Potter. I’m just your protector. I’ve told you as much before.”

“Yeah, but it’s different when you say it like that,” Harry mumbled. Severus looked up from his book and arched a brow, looking confused.

“Are you pouting?”
“No.”

“Potter, you’ve known all along that you wouldn’t be allowed to face him until the end. It isn’t your time yet so you’ll be staying here. What is your problem?”

“Nothing.”

“Oh, dear Merlin. Go bake something so you can stop pouting and, if it makes you stop this, I’ll even deal with your horrid singing.”

“Gee, thanks, Professor.”

“Be off with you. Make my ears bleed while you throw together some sweet you’ll inevitably cram down my unwilling throat. Just stop.”

Harry grumbled the entire way to the kitchen. He grumpily stared at the counter, daring his cooking implements to cross him and further foul up his day. He started singing the first thing that came to his mind while working.

“Oh you may not think I'm pretty, but don't judge on what you see. I'll eat myself if you can find a smarter hat than me,” Harry sang. It had the benefit of being the only thing he knew Severus would hate to hear right now. “You can keep your bowlers black, your top hats sleek and tall, for I'm the Hogwarts Sorting Hat-

“Potter, no.”

“And I can top them all,” Harry sang a little louder. He heard a snort in return.

“You couldn't top anything if you tried, boy, whether it be a male or your class’s grade roster.”

Harry laughed quietly, surprised by Severus’s unexpectedly naughty remark, and started mixing the dry ingredients needed for a few loaves of bread. In the living room, he heard Severus throw his book down and then all was silent. Harry assumed Severus had found another book to read since he wasn’t in here for coffee yet. After a while of silently working, he continued where he left off with his song.

“There's nothing hidden in your head the Sorting Hat can't see so try me on and I will tell you where you ought to be.”

“Potter, shut up. I changed my mind about your singing.”

“You might belong in Gryffindor,” Harry said in his regular voice, sticking his head out the kitchen door. “Where dwell the brave at heart. Their daring, nerve, and chivalry set Gryffindors apart.”

Severus threw his empty coffee mug at the door and Harry ducked back into the kitchen. He reappeared moments later and looked at the broken cup in horror. Severus smirked.

“Problems?”

“That could have hit me!”

“I did tell you to shut up, Potter.”

Harry harrumphed, picked the jagged pieces up, and carried them back to the kitchen. It was a slow process reassembling the cup piece by piece, but he finally did it. He gingerly set it in the sink and scowled when the damned thing shattered back into the random pieces it had just been in.
“You might belong in Hufflepuff, where they are just and loyal. Those patient Hufflepuffs are true and unafraid of toil- unlike someone I know,” Harry bit out angrily. Severus chuckled in the living room, irritating and exasperating Harry at the same time. Yet… he was smiling. “The cup is unfixable, sir.”

“I don’t care. I warned you. Surely we have another cup around here.”

“Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw if you’ve a steady mind, where those of wit and learning will always find their kind,” Harry sang to himself while digging through the cabinets. He found a Slytherin green cup and snorted. He nearly jumped out of his skin when Severus strode up behind him, plucked the glass from his hands, and studied it with a raised brow. “It’s appropriate for you, I think.”

“Hmm. I believe you left off with ‘or perhaps in Slytherin,’ correct?”

“Oh, I can’t remember anything about the Slytherins in the song. I try to avoid thinking about them at all costs. “ Harry pulled the broken glass from the sink and threw it in the waste bin. “They’re all kind of bastards, anyway,” he added in a whisper. “Oh, and I’m making bread.”

“Continue your song. If I’ve been forced to listen to that pathetic prose about the weaker houses, I’ll at least hear Slytherin.”

“Fine,” Harry huffed and started magically mixing different ingredients into the six big bowls on the counter. “Or perhaps in Slytherin you’ll make your real friends. Those cunning folk use any means to achieve their ends.” Harry paused. “Literally any means, sir. You’re all kind of ruthless.”

Severus nodded once. “Continue.”

“So put me on! Don’t be afraid! And don’t get in a flap! You're in safe hands, though I have none, for I'm a Thinking Cap!” Harry finished, smiling happily from the memory of hearing that song the first time. He caught sight of Severus rubbing his ear in an exaggerated way and laughed. “It wasn’t that bad.”

“It was dreadful. This time, I’m being honest. Never sing again. Better yet, don’t sing until you face the Dark Lord. Your singing could prove useful in his downfall.”

Harry snorted. “You have to be the most charming person I’ve ever met. Seriously, how do you attract anyone when you say stuff like that?”

“Plenty of people are attracted to the truth.”

“I find that hard to believe. Is that really how you attract people, sir?”

“Merlin, boy, you’re thick. If I wanted to attract someone, I wouldn’t insult them in any way, shape, or form.”

“But do you know how not to insult someone?”

“Of course I do,” Severus replied dryly. “Are you planning on making coffee any time soon?”

“How?”

“You make coffee all the time. Surely you haven’t forgotten.”

“Not that,“ Harry replied and moved to start the coffee maker. “How do you do it?”
“Need pointers, little boy?”

Harry huffed. “No, I don’t. I just don’t think you can do it, sir. No disrespect or anything meant, I just have never seen you… be nice.”

“How are you still alive if I’ve never been nice? There have been days I could have happily killed you.”

“I honestly don’t know how I’m still alive. Are you going to tell me? Oh, wait. Do you date, sir? If you don’t, I can understand…”

“Are you trying to be funny?”

“No!” Harry replied vehemently. “I just meant I can understand if you don’t want to talk about it, because… well… you know.”

Severus’s eyes flitted to the counter behind Harry. “How many bowls do you have on the counter right now?”

“Six. Why?”

“Hmm. Not anymore.”

Harry spun and exclaimed wordlessly. One of his bowls had tipped over and spilled into the sink. Not one bit of that mix was left! Dammit, it was the apple cinnamon, too. He’d have to do that one another day. Harry’s attention was effectively stolen and Severus triumphantly began to pour himself some coffee. Harry blinked confusedly when Severus pushed a second mug of coffee towards him.

“What’s this?”

“It is a liquid intoxicant commonly known as coffee.” Severus cautiously sipped from his own coffee. “It’s quite hot. If you burn your mouth, warn me first so I can watch.”

“You’re kind of a git sometimes, Professor.”

“Be careful. I take that as a compliment, Potter. Don’t tell your little friends this, but I do so love it when I hear that wonderful accolade being freely thrown about in my presence. Warms me to the pit of my stomach.”

Harry opened his mouth several times to say or ask something, but stopped each time. He couldn’t decide how he wanted to answer. Was Severus being serious or not? The man wasn’t helping, either. He was just standing there looking as calm as always and sipping his coffee.

“Erm, sir, are you being serious or… um, not?”

One corner of Severus’s lips quirked. “I’m being quite serious. It gives me a daily sense of accomplishment and pride to know I can so effectively ruin my students’ day by merely being present. Letting my frustrations with their incompetence show only adds to the persona that I am, in fact, an unpleasant bastard. The terror I see on the faces of small Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws is almost orgasmic.”

“What?” Harry asked, though he had no idea how. He was sure he’d been too shocked to even move. “You just… I don’t understand you.”
“That is a relief, Potter. Incidentally, I was lying about most of that. You are quite gullible.”

“What exactly were you not lying about?”

“A few things. You’ve forgotten your coffee. Is it not prepared to your liking?”

Harry shook himself, took a slow sip of coffee, and spluttered. Hot! Harry half-heartedly glared at Severus’s chuckling, blew on the drink, and swallowed another sip. Oh, God, it was perfect… and still too hot.

“No, it’s great. Thanks. It’s still hot, by the way.”

“I’m well aware. Finite incantatum.”

“What spell was it, a liquid fire spell?”

“A permanent heating charm.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Git.”

Did Severus hear how almost fond that sounded? Hopefully he didn’t.

“I thought we had just finished discussing this.”

“Maybe I just wanted to warm you up,” Harry explained thoughtlessly. “You claimed the word warmed you to your belly, after all, and it is a little chilly in here.”

“I seem to recall you once mentioning I put out a lot of heat. Does it not seem a little dangerous to want to increase that heat with you standing so close to me? What if you were to be burned?”

A blush stole over Harry’s face. He absolutely refused to turn around again. Severus didn’t mean that the way it sounded. He laughed nervously.

“I’m serving one of these loaves for dessert. I can serve it with cream if you want.”

“Hmm,” Severus hummed amusedly. “See that you do.”

“Of course. So you never answered me earlier. Was I right to assume you don’t spend time dating or anything?”

When Harry felt that familiar heat behind him, he turned his head and looked up in confusion. Severus was staring over his shoulder at the various bowls and loaf pans sitting out and looked for all the world like he hadn’t even heard his question. Harry swallowed and tried not to focus on the spicy smell coming from the man or the way they were standing so close together. Instead, he focused on slowing his own heartbeat. Why was it beating so fast? Looking down at the bread mix he was clumsily pouring into one loaf pan, he felt Severus move even closer before a pale hand came from nowhere and a single finger dipped into the batter.

Harry’s vision narrowed to the finger that disappeared into Severus’s mouth and the tongue that licked the finger clean. Harry shivered when the man let out a pleased hum that seemed to vibrate in his chest.

“Pumpkin chocolate chunk, correct?” Severus asked in a warm voice. “My favorite. You are spoiling me today, aren’t you? Good boy.”

“W-what?” Harry stuttered. Severus placed his arms on either side of Harry and braced himself on
the counter, his chest gently pressing against Harry’s back. Harry could feel Severus’s breath ruffling his hair. “Um, sir?”

“Call me Severus. There is to be none of this sir business right now,” Severus commanded lowly and Harry choked back his shock. One of Severus’s hands lifted and two fingers circled the rim of another bowl. “Tell me,” Severus whispered. “What is this going to become?”

“Just chocolate chunk,” Harry answered quietly. He couldn’t look away from those two fingers. They were the most fascinating things in the entire world. Severus slowly stirred in spare mashed banana, scooped up some of the batter, and held it up to Harry’s lips. His other arm wrapped around Harry’s body so his hand could cup underneath the spoon.

“Would you please taste this for me?”

Without a coherent thought in his head anymore, Harry placed his hand over Severus’s and tried the batter. “‘s great.”

“I’m glad to hear that. It would have tasted so much better if you had mixed it, though.”

“Really?”

“Mmm.”

“That is my job in our relationship,” Harry replied shakily. “The, er, housewife… kinda… for want of a better word.”

“My housewife.” With his hands clutching the counter once more, Severus kept Harry captive. He skimmed his lips over Harry’s neck, paused over his pulse, and licked the warm skin. “You are truly an exquisite little housewife, too. I may never relinquish you.”

“Oh?”

“Yes. You’re mine now… Harry,” Severus growled into Harry’s ear. Harry quietly groaned as his knees locked up. It was either that or hitting the floor because his legs refused to hold him up any longer. And how embarrassing would that be? Severus turned him slowly, disturbing his thoughts, and looked down at him with a thoughtful smile. “You won’t fight me on this?”

“Um… what?”

“Hmm.” He pulled Harry as close to himself as possible and kissed along his jaw. “You won’t fight me on this.”

“Um, no?”

“Ever?”

Harry couldn’t even move, let alone speak, although he let out the most embarrassing sound in the whole world. Severus straightened abruptly, stepped away, and readjusted his shirt. Harry, looking and feeling completely dazed, looked at Severus inquisitively. Severus merely smirked and picked up his coffee.

“That, Potter, is how I attract potential lovers. I am a Slytherin. I adhere to a set of rules while still taking advantage of any situation as I see fit. You were distracted and didn’t see any of it coming.”

“What?” Harry asked loudly when it dawned on him what had just happened. “You’re a bastard!”
“Am I?”

“No,” Harry sighed. “What rules were you talking about?”

“One, flattery will get anyone everywhere. Two, establish control as soon as possible. Three, demand the answers you desire to questions you ask, but never be rude about it. Four, impress at least once with some common skill. Five, sexual temptation will smooth over any awkward lulls.”

“When you spell them out like that, you sound like an arrogant prick.”

“Perhaps, but did I behave as an arrogant prick? It’s all in the method, Potter.”

“Still… kind of arrogant for you to think you can just go round acting like that.”

Severus leaned against the counter and watched as Harry refreshed both of their coffees. He cleared his throat and waited until he had Harry’s unwilling (and embarrassed) attention.

“I never think I have the right to go around acting upon my urges, brat. It is not how I was raised and I would never lower myself enough to act like a depraved beast. As a well-bred gentleman—Stop laughing before I maim you, boy. As a well-bred gentleman, I would obviously wait until I have a clear indication of reciprocal interest before doing anything resembling what you just saw. I’m insulted you think otherwise.”

“Oh. Sorry, sir. So… how exactly did you use your rules? And do you use every single one every time?”

“Of course I do. Our short performance was liberally peppered with flattery; I never skimp on that. I established dominance over you and our entire interaction before I even began speaking. I made sure you never felt intimidated. I demanded answers to my questions without being disrespectful to you. I could tell you were undeniably impressed with the banana and chocolate bread batter I created so don’t attempt to lie to me.”

“And the other?” Harry blushed. Severus cocked his head and watched him a long moment before inclining his head once.

“In this case, the intimate touches weren’t really needed to jumpstart anything or to distract you from any verbal fumbles I might have made. They rarely happen, I admit, but they do happen all the same. You were suitably preoccupied enough by what I was saying before I started any of that. However, I wanted this to be as realistic as possible to show you I do, in fact, know how to attract a bed partner.”

“Well, you convinced me,” Harry muttered, blushing again (or blushing still; he couldn’t tell). “Thanks, I guess, for showing me. I did want to know.”

“My pleasure.”

Harry highly doubted that, but kept silent.

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It turned out choking was an effective wake-up call in the morning.

In a slight panic, Harry turned his head and spat out whatever he’d been choking on. He took a deep breath and looked down so he could investigate the cause of his near-death experience.
What the hell?

 Appearing completely innocent, though Harry knew well enough of their almost-crime, three popcorn kernels were laying on the mattress beside him in a small puddle of spit. Looking over accusingly, Harry saw Severus sitting on the edge of his bed, an eyebrow arched in a silent dare to say anything.

“Oh, good. You’re awake,” Severus greeted blithely. “You received a letter this morning. Naturally, you weren’t awake to see the arrival yourself.”

Harry sat up on the bed and ignored every single thing Severus had just said. “Did you throw popcorn kernels into my mouth just to wake me up?”

“Why would I do such a thing?”

“I have literally no idea. It’s kind of immature. You could have just- Never mind. Who’s my letter from?”

“Considering the profuse utilization of multicolored hearts, I would say the youngest Mrs. Weasley. Then again, perhaps you have yourself a little lover stowed away who desperately wanted to remind you of their presence. Who am I to judge?”

“I don’t- What? Do you have a lover stowed away somewhere?”

“I wasn’t implying I had a lover, merely that I don’t care if you do.”

Severus stepped into the closet to change. Harry nodded and began crawling out of bed, but stopped. “You didn’t answer me, sir.”

“I’ve gone over this before. I thought once was sufficient.”

“No, you haven’t.”

“Indeed I have. You once implied I might have had a life with someone before being locked up. Though I’ve had many relationships over the years, I was not involved with anyone at the time. I have told you that.”

“But are relationships the same as lovers?”

“As an adult, I see no difference between the two. As a child, I’m sure you do.”

“I’m not a child. Could you stop saying that?”

Severus momentarily peeked out of the closet. “You are a child. That is a fact.”

“For one, I’m almost nineteen. For two, I’ve never been allowed to be a child.”

“It does not change the fact that you are still a child. You are all of sixteen, correct?”

“No, I’m not,” Harry huffed. “I’m eighteen, Snape. I literally just said that. Plus, Malfoy’s about my age.”

Severus, when he appeared, looked surprised. “Are you really?”

“Yeah. How else do you explain us being in the same year?”
“Hmm. Still a child in my book.”

“I’m old enough to be allowed to do adult things so I’m not really a child. Right?”

“No, you’re still a child. You don’t have the freedom to do as you please, do you?”

“I have enough freedom,” Harry mumbled. “Well, except being locked up here, that is. Well, huh. Are magical laws different from Muggle ones? I didn’t even think about that until now.”

“What laws are you asking of? Obviously magical and Muggle laws would have some big differences. Have you seen my belt?”

“It should be where you left it, sir. I try not to touch your stuff too much. I like having all of my fingers.”

“You better not be touching my things at all. What laws, Potter? I don’t want to be having this ridiculous conversation all day.”

“Well, am I old enough to live on my own?”

“Yes, by both standards.”

“Oh. Can I… um, are magical laws stricter about sex?”

Severus coughed. “What do you mean? And have you seen my left shoe? I left it right here by my dresser and now it’s not here. Did you move it?”

“Your shoes- well, one of them that I can see- are by your chair. And I meant I’m still old enough to do it with an adult, right?”

“That is correct. However, I firmly believe if you’re incapable of saying ‘have intercourse’ or anything along those lines, you shouldn’t be allowed.” Severus scoffed and lowered his voice. “Child.”

“Oh.” Harry silently stared at the empty room, though his eyes flashed to the closet once or twice. He swallowed thickly and wondered if his next question would come out right. “So if I wanted to have sex with, say, Remus, could I?”

A muffled crash and swearing that would make a sailor blush sounded from the closet. Harry tensed. Was Severus okay? Was he about to be hexed for that question?

“Reparo,” Severus muttered. “Are you interested in being intimate with Lupin? You must remember he’s married. To a woman.”

“Ew, no. He’s like the father I’ve never known.”

“It pains me to say this, but he’s actually a much better man.”

“Noted. I just said Remus, because he’s the first adult guy I trust that I thought of besides you and it’d just be weird if I said you. I mean, you’d probably hex me before I got the whole question out, right?”

“I’m in the closet, Potter,” Severus reasoned. Harry snickered loudly and Severus huffed. “Not that closet, idiot boy. I’m actually in a closet. How could I maim you if I’m all the way in here?”

“You’d find a way, sir. I know you would.”
“Hmm. I don’t think I would waste my time with you.” Severus strolled out of the closet and plucked his other shoe off the floor. He quickly pulled it on and spent a few more moments adjusting his clothing before facing Harry. “To answer your previous question, such a liaison would not be illegal, no. It would, however, be revolting.”

“Why? There’s nothing wrong with two guys.”

“Spare me the end of that sentence. I was alluding to the almost familial relationship you have with Lupin. Perhaps I wouldn’t have broken anything, though, if you had instead used William Weasley or Marcus Flint.”

“But they’re both a lot younger than Remus,” Harry pointed out. Severus gave him a long look and then nodded.

“Very well. Gilderoy Lockhart took a rather keen liking to you. Would he be a better example?”

“What? No! That’s disgusting! Please tell me you’re taking the piss.”

Severus smirked. “No, Potter, I’m not. That annoying ponce had a rather active imagination and subjected the lot of us to his daily musings on your person. He once made Albus blush- Albus, of all people- with a particularly lewd comment about your mouth. I thought it was quite an impressive accomplishment myself. I nearly congratulated him.”

“I’m going to have nightmares,” Harry moaned. “That’s really gross. Why did you tell me that?”

“For that very reaction, boy. Happy early Christmas to me indeed.”

“How did my mouth even come up in conversation? Don’t professors have other things to talk about?”

“Mmm. I remember it like it was yesterday. I was telling Albus of your incessant need to talk during my lessons.” Severus scowled at him. “And Lockhart piped up with a rather detailed suggestion of how he could shut you up. If you were curious, he did paint a pretty picture of you. A very, very pretty picture, boy. You would have been flattered, I’m sure.”

Harry shuddered. “I’m going to be sick.”

“Oh, Potter, I thought you would be interested.” Severus’s face clearly said otherwise. That arse!

“What a shame. Incidentally, your letter is on the kitchen table.”

“You’ve already eaten?”

“No, of course I haven’t. How did you strike upon that thought? I was merely starting the coffee. Merlin only knew when you were planning to drag your arse out of bed and I desired coffee above all things this morning.”

Severus left the bedroom and Harry stuck his head out into the hallway. “I’ll be out in a few and then I’ll make breakfast. I’m just gonna get dressed and whatnot.”

“I care not, Potter,” Severus called back.

Harry harrumphed and closed the bedroom door.

Wait. Severus actually made coffee for once?? Incredible.

Ten minutes later, he skipped out of the bedroom. He was in a wonderful mood despite their
disturbing conversation about one of his old professors. Christmas was coming up and he’d made peace with spending another Christmas with only Severus, he had a letter from Hermione, he could sleep with whomever he wanted (well, as long as they wanted to sleep with him, too), and nobody was dying today. When he entered the kitchen, he gave Severus a wide smile and immediately started pulling food out of the refrigerator and cupboards.

While mixing up some things for his special scrambled eggs, Harry saw a pale hand extend a full mug of coffee towards himself. Well, that was odd. Severus didn’t often fix him coffee. In fact, the last time he had, he’d only done it to play a trick on him. It was usually him fixing coffee for the both of them.

Harry took it from Severus’s hand, suspiciously studied Severus’s eyes, and cautiously took a small sip. The hot coffee curled happily in his belly, warming him up. He hadn’t realized it was so cold in their subterranean safe house until that very moment.

“Thank you.”

Severus nodded, summoned Harry’s letter, set it beside his coffee cup, and moved out of the kitchen. Harry could hear him tinkering with the fireplace and smiled yet again. Man, today was a great day. He quickly poured the egg mix into a pan, set it to cook somewhat slowly, and grabbed his letter. He laid the thinner letter down without even glancing at it and unfurled Hermione’s letter. It was the longest letter he’d ever received from her and he was positive he knew why.

Harry,

OH DEAR LORD ABOVE!!!!! Professor Snape really did all of that??? May the gods have mercy on my soul, but I couldn’t help being a bit, you know, stimulated by all of that! He really showed you how he lures in lovers?? I would have absolutely fainted! How did you not? He’s already so magnetic, mysterious, I don’t think I would have survived!!!! Oh, my. I need to calm down. He told you to call him Severus? He spoon-fed you bread batter? Oh, my God! He asked you to PLEASE taste something?! I know this was just a pretend situation, but he said you were his? No, I don’t think I would have fainted. I would have melted! His what exactly, Harry? It sounded like he was implying you were his husband or something. That’s obviously not it, I know, but like I said, it’s what it sounded like. “Mine.” That’s all he said? Are you leaving anything out?

You felt his lips on your neck and you didn’t take advantage of the moment to kiss him? Even if you hate each other, I would have kissed him if I had been you! I suppose if only so I could say I’d done it. What did it feel like having him touch you like that? My neck is a sensitive area as it is so I enjoy that kind of thing, but did you? And he licked you? Gods… All I am saying is if Professor Severus Snape had held me like that and said he may never let me go and I was exquisite, pretend or not, I would have jumped him. I don’t know how you didn’t, Harry! I bet his voice was pitched low, too, wasn’t it? And oh, gods, he called you Harry! What did your name sound like coming from him?

You sang to him? That’s really cute, but… HE SANG TO YOU???? Oh, my gosh. I was speechless when I read that! It doesn’t matter if it was the Sorting Hat’s song and he only sang one short line. He sang to you! Does he have a nice singing voice? I’ve always wondered what it would sound like. Is that strange? Wow. I might have to actually get a hold of a pensieve now so I can visit and view the memory of that. Well, and the memory of you know what! Knowing how alluring his speaking voice is, I bet his singing voice was… Woo. I cannot believe he told you to continue singing! Surely that means he doesn’t dislike your singing as much as he claims, right? When he said you couldn’t top anything, did he mean that the way it sounded?
Okay, Ginny is staring at me like I’ve lost my mind so I’m changing the subject. Honestly, how was I to know I was laughing so loudly? You’ve called him Severus before, too. It was only once that I know of and was the day we picked Rose up. Ron even heard you, but I made sure he didn’t ask you about it. If that was something you and the professor had decided on to separate the past from the present so living together would be easier to deal with, I didn’t want him drawing attention to it and causing strain between you two. Do you mean to tell me you’ve never called him Severus before? Hmm. That is interesting indeed. I wonder what it could mean.

Anyways, I’m glad you and Professor Snape are getting along so well! Little Rose has called for “Nape” a few times this morning. It positively worries Ron that our daughter might like the one professor he can’t handle. It’s terribly amusing! Thank you for teaching her that. Rose’s tooth finally came in so she’s over the fussiness for now… until another starts coming. Teething. It’s never-ending. Would you tell Professor Snape that Rose has been carrying around a painting of him all morning? See, Draco happened to overhear Rose singing “Nape, Nape, Nape” at dinner last night and thought it would be funny to torture Ron a little by giving her a small picture of Professor Snape. Well, she’s had it for almost twelve hours now and absolutely refuses to give it back to Draco. Believe me, Draco tried, but Rose threw an absolute fit! She definitely gets her temper from her father. Oh, how cute. Rose has fallen asleep on Professor Snape’s painting. Well, her head’s on the painting, but you understand what I meant.

Also, Harry, I’ve been thinking about something. Do you remember the Enchantment of Intention? I think you should consider doing that as soon as possible. None of us know when Professor Dumbledore might call you home and it could be in the middle of battle! I couldn’t bear to lose my best friend so we’ve all been trying to come up with every single thing that could help. Even Draco thinks you should do the ritual, Harry. Please just consider it. I’m sure Professor Dumbledore would allow you a visitor… if you weren’t interested in asking Professor Snape. Oh, dear. I’m blushing. It’s terrible, too. Ron keeps asking what I’m telling you, but I don’t think you’d appreciate me telling him. Harry, Professor Snape’s not actually our professor anymore. It wouldn’t be wrong to ask him and, as I’ve thought for a while now, I’m almost positive you like him. You know how I mean. Please think about it?

I have to go. I’m running behind for Professor Dumbledore’s meeting. Honestly, how was I to know? Nobody told us until five minutes ago.

Sorry, mate. She’s gotta-

He didn’t see anything. Promise. Love you,

Hermione

Harry slowly lowered Hermione’s letter and stared at the wall for several moments. She did have a point about the ritual, though involving Severus would probably be a really bad idea. Simply considering asking him was a really bad idea. Harry cleared his throat, took the third page from Hermione’s letter, and folded it up tightly so it’d fit into the impossibly tiny side pocket of his denims. He skimmed the bottom half of the second page and was relieved to note it only mentioned Hermione had been thinking and then asked if he remembered the Enchantment of Intention.

That wasn’t the part he wanted Severus to see, after all. It was the bit above it about Rose. He used the twins’ privacy spell to hide the part of the letter that mentioned him calling Severus by his first name- just in case Severus really wanted to read it for himself- and then went into the living room. The fire was already blazing and Severus was seated at the desk, writing a letter.
“Sir, Hermione wrote me-”

“Shocking.”

“Right,” Harry said, snickering a little. “Well, she gave me an update and I think you might want to hear it.”

“Why?”

“It involves your godson and my goddaughter.”

Severus looked up in interest and put his quill down. “What is going on?”

“Seems he heard Rose singing your name at dinner last night-” Harry sat on the edge of the desk and Severus leaned forward, eyes on the letter. “And he thought it’d be funny to give Rose a small painting of you just to annoy Ron.”

“That’s my godson,” Severus said proudly. “I’m even willing to overlook the outrageously mistaken belief he can freely give away my belongings with no retribution.”

“Yup. Anyway, she’s apparently had it for twelve hours, Hermione said, and absolutely refuses to give it back. She said Malfoy tried getting it back, but Rose threw a fit. Oh, and Rose has been calling for you this morning and fell asleep on your painting.”

“Has she really?”

“Yeah. You may never get that painting back. Seems she really likes you, sir.”

Severus looked pleased. “I hope your goddaughter is sorted into Slytherin, Potter. She’s already shaping up to be a good child.”

“Because she likes you or because she’s tormenting Ron by liking you?”

“We’ll go with both.” Severus actually flashed him a smile. “Do you mind reading aloud what the young Mrs. Weasley wrote you regarding the child? I wish to revel a moment.”

“Sure.” Harry laughed and held up the letter. “’Little Rose has called for “Nape” a few times this morning.’”

“Ridiculous nickname.”

“If it’s so ridiculous, why are you trying not to smile?” Harry challenged and Severus glared at him. “’It positively worries Ron that our daughter might like the one professor he can’t handle. It’s terribly amusing! Thank you for teaching her that. Rose’s-‘”

“Are you to blame for that?”

“Of course not. You are. If I had taught her, she would have tried saying sir. You’re the one who insisted she learn to say Professor Snape, which is completely insane. She can’t even say much of anything, sir. Anyways, Rose’s tooth finally came in so she’s over the fussiness for now… until another starts coming. Teething. It’s never-ending.”

“I suppose I will write Draco with a potion to soothe her gums for next time. He can brew it for the child.” Harry looked shocked, almost dropped his letter, and Severus scowled. “What?”

“That…” No, best not mention it. When Severus was being sweet, he always got annoyed when
Harry pointed it out. “Would you tell Professor Snape that Rose has been carrying around a painting of him all morning? See, Draco-”

“I insist you finish your statement. That what?”

“Nothing. Okay, alright, that was a brilliant idea,” he quickly lied. “I never thought to ask.”

“Humph. Continue.”

“Draco happened to overhear Rose singing ‘Nape, Nape, Nape’ at-”

“It’s still ridiculous. Nape, indeed.”

“She can’t say esses yet, sir. I’ve told you that. ‘at dinner last night and thought it would be funny to torture Ron a little by giving her a small picture of Professor Snape.’”

“Now that was the brilliant idea.”

“Sir.”

“Continue.”

“Well, she’s had it for almost twelve hours now and absolutely refuses to give it back to Draco. Believe me, Draco tried, but Rose threw an absolute fit! She definitely gets her temper from her father.”

“Yes, it’s certainly terrifying.”

Severus snorted derisively and Harry gave him a look that said he wasn’t amused. Severus rolled his eyes and waved for him to continue.

“I’m almost done, sir, so could you not…”

“Yes, yes.”

“Thank you. ‘Oh, how cute. Rose has fallen asleep on Professor Snape’s painting. Well, her head’s on the painting, but you understand what I meant.’ That’s all she wrote about it.”

“How extraordinarily absurd that child is. I am not that painting.” Harry smothered his grin. He’d known Severus secretly loved that Rose always napped on him. “What now? How was that amusing? It is fact. I am not that painting. What is the allure?”

“It may not really be you, but the painting you can still talk. I’m sure the snarky things you were saying sounded so much like the real you, Rose decided the painting was good enough for a nap.”

“I thought we were operating upon the belief that my “heat” drew the child in for naptime. Were you mistaken?”

“Well, no. I still think that, but I’m sure your voice played a small part in relaxing her. She might not have the, er, heat and heartbeat, but she still has the voice and maybe she equates your voice with naptime, as well.”

“Hmm. Are you cooking eggs this morning? The ones with cheese and whatnot in it?”

Harry shot off the desk in alarm. He’d forgotten he’d been cooking! He rushed off to the kitchen to stir his eggs, berating himself along the way for getting caught up talking about his goddaughter.
He shouldn’t have sat on the desk. Their laidback positions had made him lose his head for a moment.

The eggs had started sticking to the bottom of the pan and one small area was really bad, but they would be edible. Harry quickly fried up some sausage, made some toast (only because he’d heard Severus muttering about it in his sleep last night and he couldn’t wait to see his face), and then set out butter and preserves. While making up some coffees for the both of them, Harry thought about the approaching Christmas. If they were celebrating another one here, he would have to start a big grocery list for the holidays and he needed to do the Christmas pudding within the next two weeks.

“Severus Snape,” he sang, purposefully sounding horrible. Severus walked into the kitchen, looking appalled, and Harry grinned at him. “Good morning, sir. Did you enjoy that?”

“No. That was horrible. Why did you sing like that?”

“Don’t I always sound horrible?”

Severus blinked. “Yes.”

“Right.”
Juggling Secrets & Guests

Chapter Summary

Harry finally makes a decision.

He’d been giving this a lot of thought the last four, five weeks.

It was true Christmas had been roughly three weeks ago and, as Severus had once said, they’d likely be stuck there until after the snow melted for spring, but he had to do something. Harry closed his eyes.

Hermione had been getting more and more persistent about the Enchantment of Intention. She’d even recruited some people to her very secret cause and he’d received letters from them all, each person demanding he go through with the ritual. At first, it was just Fred and George, who had written their own letters and then sent one jointly.

Then, after Christmas had passed and Harry had avoided writing Hermione back, he’d received letters from Ron (and he was still embarrassed about the stuff he’d written in that one), Neville, Ginny, and even Draco.

Draco Bloody Malfoy.

Yeah, Hermione was serious now. In her last letter, she’d given him an ultimatum. He’d needed to decide what he was going to do and soon or she was going to find a way to get here with a guy willing to help him with the ritual. He’d immediately written back and promised he’d give it some thought and let her know when he decided what to do.

Well, he’d decided.

“Sir, can I ask you something without you killing me before I’ve finished the question? It’s kind of… serious.”

There, easy enough. He’d gotten that question out.

“It depends. You may as well ask first and face the consequences later. Be a good little Gryffindor and use that much-vaunted bravery I keep hearing about. Merlin knows you’ve no hope of ever being a Slytherin.”

No going back now. Even if he chickened out, Severus wouldn’t let him. That was the problem with nosy Slytherins. He’d keep pressing and pressing until Harry confessed.

“Erm, okay.” Harry took a deep breath and fiddled with his shirtsleeve. Severus looked suspicious and sat up on the couch. “Can you maybe, um, help me complete a, uh…” Harry’s voice dropped to a whisper. “Protective sex magic ritual? Um, please?”

“Excuse me?” Severus asked menacingly and snapped his book shut. “I’m well aware you’re friends with the entire Weasley clan and you might be used to pulling all sorts of pranks on others, but I’m not a man anyone can make a fool of, Potter. Just what were you hoping to accomplish with that ludicrous question?”
“I swear this isn’t a prank, sir. I was being completely serious. I’ve been thinking about this specific ritual for months. It was the one we talked about a long time ago. Remember?” Harry asked desperately. He knew he was blushing and silently cursed himself. “With it, as long as we’re both alive, we can draw strength, power, and protection from each other when we really need it. I want to do the ritual, sir. That’s why I asked you. I wasn’t joking.”

“And why did you think it would be a wise idea to come to me with this? There are many other options you can consider once you return to Hog-”

Harry whimpered quietly and rubbed his forehead in distress. Severus immediately stopped talking and stared at Harry with a mix of so many emotions on his for-once expressive face. One of the few Harry could discern was uncertainty so he tried again. What could it hurt? He really needed Severus to help him with this. He felt he couldn’t ask anyone else nor did he want to.

“With my luck, he will be there waiting for us as soon as we arrive at Hogwarts, sir. I won’t have a chance to go through with the ritual then and I need every bit of help I can get. Let’s face it. I have little to no chance of facing him and surviving otherwise. I haven’t really had too much training since we’ve been down here and the only thing that seems to have kept me alive this long is you. My stupid sheer luck doesn’t even factor into that.”

“Boy, what you’re asking, though, is much more than-”

“I’m asking you as the man who is sworn to protect me, can you please help me once again and do this for me? I know it’s a lot to ask of you and you’re not even attracted to guys, but I know you’re a good man and you wouldn’t hurt me that way.” Harry swallowed and looked down at his fingers. “And I know it will make it easier for you to keep your eyes closed, sir, and I understand. I’m not bothered by that. I just need you to help me. I don’t know who else to ask so can you please forget how much you hate me and just… help?”

When Severus didn’t answer him and merely walked away from the couch, his destination the bedroom, Harry visibly deflated. Well, that plan was all shot to hell. He should have known Severus wouldn’t be able to do this for him. He couldn’t blame him. Even if a battle were raging when they returned to Hogwarts, he’d just have to find someone else and beg them to quickly go through the ritual.

If nothing else, he knew one of the twins (and possibly Neville, as Hermione had said) would be able to close their eyes and do his part for the war. Harry tensed up when Severus placed a hand on his shoulder a few minutes after he’d left the room.

“I will need to brew a few potions beforehand and some of the ingredients are slightly difficult to procure. I wouldn’t normally need them, but you’ve been playing around with that pregnancy book I gave you and we don’t want to risk any unexpected situations.” Severus cleared his throat. “It could take anywhere from days to weeks before we are able to enact the ritual, Potter. It should give you some time to consider a better candidate than me.”

“I’ll stick with you, sir. I trust you and I know for a fact that you’re not doing this because you want to get into the pants of the Boy-Who-Lived. I can’t say that for many others. And I’m nothing special, but I don’t want my first time to be with someone wanting to sleep with fame, you know? And I know you won’t hurt me when it’s time. You’ll know by then what to do to make sure…” Harry blushed and shrugged. “Thank you for this.”

Severus nodded, sat at the desk, and began penning a short missive. “Albus will need to be aware of the vague circumstances, if for nothing else than to help me collect the necessary ingredients for each potion. I assume you do not object to his knowing?”
“No, I expected it, sir. Um, you said potions, as in more than one. What potions exactly?”

“A strong contraceptive potion, an abortive potion in case the contraceptive fails, and a libido enhancer. If either of us cannot reach a sexual release, the ritual won’t take. It’s better to be prepared for such an occasion.”

Harry honestly didn’t think he’d need it, but decided not to say anything. It was clear the libido potion was for Severus, anyway. Harry sighed and not wanting to think about why it hurt so much that Severus wasn’t attracted to men, that he wasn’t attracted to him, he left the room. He knew Severus was straight. He knew that. It wouldn’t bother him. It was enough that Severus was willing to help him with the ritual. That would always be enough.

He needed something to preoccupy his hands and mind. His hand paused above the canister of coffee beans as a thought struck him.

Why the bloody hell would Severus need to brew an abortive potion? Sure, he’d been messing around with his book and there was always a chance he could get pregnant now (though unlikely), but Severus was out of his damned mind if he thought he’d take something to kill a baby.

Their baby.

His old nightmare came rushing back to him, Lily’s screams of terror and pain buzzing through his head and the image of Severus’s body lying in their bed making him feel sick. Oh, God. Harry threw up in the sink and then sank to the floor in a boneless heap. No. Hell no. Severus would have to literally go through him first if he wanted their child to die and he wouldn’t be able to do that, because he needed to live long enough to kill that bastard ruining his life. He’d be able to keep their child alive, after all. Ha!

Wait, no. No, they didn’t even have a child. Harry sighed in relief. Whatever contraceptive Severus chose would probably be the strongest one known to magical man. He wouldn’t have to worry about fighting for their child. Thank God.

“Are you all right?” Severus asked in a strangely subdued voice and Harry looked at the door. “I heard you getting sick. Did it have anything to do with the ritual?”

“No. Well, kinda. Thinking about it just got me thinking about the war and everything and I guess I got overwhelmed for a moment. I don’t want any more people to die. I wish I could just leave and kill him right this second.”

Something in Severus’s eyes flickered briefly before being replaced with utter blankness. “That is not an option. Are you going to spend the rest of the evening on the floor?”

“Maybe.”

“Very well. Albus responded to my letter.” Harry furrowed his brows and Severus nodded. “I was impressed by his haste, as well. He understands the situation perfectly and will not be asking either of us any questions about it.”

“That’s a first... but good. I couldn’t handle Professor Dumbledore asking about my first time, no matter the circumstances leading up to it.”

“I well understand. I will be leaving early tomorrow morning and will not return until I’ve obtained everything I possibly can for your potions. I can tell you I won’t be finding everything I need, but Albus will be spending much of tonight and tomorrow speaking with some of his contacts who might have a few of the more difficult items. Do not expect me ho- back until much later tomorrow.
night. Indeed, don’t even wait up for me like I know you’re already planning to do.”

“Should I make you breakfast or anything?” Harry asked in a small voice. Gods, what was wrong with him? “I can do something fast, if you’d like.”

“I suppose I wouldn’t object to your offer.”

Harry nodded and looked away from Severus once more.

“What time?”

“Six o’clock. Merlin, boy. Stop acting so ridiculous. We’re going to be performing a protection ritual, not marching off to war.”


“Would you like me to change my mind?”

“No,” Harry nearly yelled. “No, please don’t.”

“Then stop acting pitiful. Start acting like yourself again or I will assume you no longer wish to perform the ritual.”

“Sorry, sir.” Severus huffed irritably and Harry shot him a look. “I tell you sorry all the time. That’s not pitiful.”

“But it is very annoying.”

“Now you’re the one acting weird.”

“I most certainly am not.”

“You most certainly are.”

“Boy.”

“Sir.”

Severus remained silent a moment. “Very good. If you consider this as what it truly is, boy, a simple protection ritual to keep both of us alive during the coming battle, you will find it easier to meet my eyes when I’m speaking to you and to carry on with life as you have been the past eighteen years. If, however, you’re simply thinking of this as you foisting intercourse on your professor from your old school days in order to keep yourself alive later on, you will undoubtedly keep acting timid and strange around me. It is your decision which you choose.”

Huh. Don’t think of it as sex and act normally or think of it as sex and feel awkward? Severus had a point. If he didn’t think of it as sex, he wouldn’t really have a reason to feel awkward at all, would he?

“You probably just saved me a lot of time avoiding you. Thank you so much. You’re amazing.”

“You have no idea yet, boy,” Severus said with this little smirk on his lips. Harry flushed. “Oh, do relax. I was just poking fun at you, brat. Seriously, we won’t be having intercourse. We will be performing a ritual and it might look like intercourse, feel like intercourse, but it will not be. Alright? As far as I’m concerned, it doesn’t have to count as your first time if you’re not comfortable with that.”
“You’re being really understanding about this.”

“Yes, well, I don’t completely hate you, boy.”

The ‘not anymore’ wasn’t stated, but Harry still heard it. He nodded at Severus, got off the ground to finish making a pot of coffee, and heard Severus sit at the table.

“I don’t completely hate you, either,” he said a few moments later. “Just so you know.”

“That is comforting, I suppose.”

Harry grinned. “While you’re in a good mood, can I ask for something?”

“You’ve yet more to ask of me?”

“Yes.”

“Why do I feel I’m not going to like this?”

“It’s nothing bad. I just wanted to have Rose come stay again, even for just a few hours, if Dumbledore allows it. Can I? I mean, would you be okay with that?”

“I suppose I can suffer through. If she gets to be too terrible, I’ll barricade myself in Draco’s old bedroom.”

“Thank you so much.”

“You’re welcome, you spoiled brat. Speaking of my godson, though, I forgot to tell you I received a strange letter from him yesterday evening.” Harry frowned, eyes on the coffee dripping into the coffee pot. Had Draco said something about the ritual to Severus? He must’ve made a noise, because Severus continued, “Have you lately received any correspondence from the youngest Mrs. Weasley?”

Harry turned, curious. “Um, I got what amounted to a short note yesterday. Why?”

“Did she not mention anything… noteworthy?”

“…no,” Harry said suspiciously. “Why?”

“Draco seems to think she’s expecting again and even listed a few incidents that seem to corroborate his suspicions. I was merely curious if you could confirm or deny his accusations.”

“What?! Well, I haven’t heard one way or another, but you can bet I’ll be sure to ask.”

“Hmm. Once you’ve received a response, I think I would like to know if Draco was right or not.”

“Oh, I’ll have plenty to say if he was right, sir. Like for instance, why did your prat of a godson know before me? In fact, I’ll be right back.” Harry left Severus coffee-less, went to the living room to retrieve parchment, ink, and a quill, and returned to the kitchen. “I’m writing her right now. When you see Dumbledore tomorrow, can you ask him to give her my letter?”

“As I will be seeing her myself, I will personally deliver it.” Harry stopped pacing and gave him a questioning look. “Albus is having a meeting tomorrow morning and has requested I temporarily return to Hogwarts to attend. To appease my own curiosity, I will wait until she has written a response.”
“Thanks. Will you tell me what the meeting’s about?”

“Once I know myself, I will determine if it’s any of your concern and act accordingly.”

“Good enough, I guess.”

“Mm. Coffee first and then write, boy.”

Harry hurriedly prepared them some cups of coffee, slid Severus a fork and plate with a slice of last night’s apple pie, and put their coffees on the table. With Severus content with his snack, Harry dove into his letter-writing.

Hermione,

I needed to write you immediately. What is going on up there? I literally couldn’t believe what Malfoy wrote in his letter yesterday. That blonde brat told **Severus** (Please ignore that) Snape that he thinks you’re pregnant. According to **Sev** (Again, PLEASE ignore that) Snape, he “even listed a few incidents that seem to corroborate his suspicions” and I know you’d tell me something that big so what’s going on? Why is Malfoy telling **Snape** he thinks you’re pregnant?

Love you,

Harry

P.S. He’s gonna wait until you write me back so don’t give him a weird look. He’s also gonna read your letter so watch what you write.

P.P.S. I want to see my goddaughter again. If you don’t mind, can you see if Dumbledore would be okay with letting her come down for even just a few hours? Maybe you could stay this time, too, and Ron.

P.P.P.S. Just wanted to say I love you guys.

Harry finally put down his quill, folded and sealed up Hermione’s letter, and passed it to Severus. He glanced between it and his pie, slid the letter away, and kept eating. It almost made Harry laugh. That man was serious when it came to snacks.

“Will you be travelling with Dumb- Professor Dumbledore tomorrow, sir?”

“No, I will be alone. I mentioned earlier he would be in contact with various persons regarding the more difficult ingredients to procure. He also has to worry about the meeting. He will not have time to follow me around like one would a small child.”

“You’re going it alone?”

“I believe that is what I just said, yes.”

“Can you do something for me, then?”

“I can agree to listen to your request, but I will not agree to anything until you’ve told me what you wish for me to do.”
“Fine. Please be careful.” Severus looked surprised by his request. “I’m being serious, sir. There are probably a bunch of people out there that would still love to hurt you or… you know.”

“Your concern is oddly touching. Stop it.”

“Oh, is that weird?” Harry asked teasingly, trying to lighten the mood. “Harry Potter cares if Severus Snape lives or not. What is the world coming to?”

“Worse, Severus Snape hasn’t killed Harry Potter for his unbelievably cheeky manner after living with him for over a year. Indeed, what is the world coming to?”

Harry grinned at the man, delighted to see Severus wasn’t doing a very good job at hiding his mirth, and picked up his coffee.

“You know, sir, I think it gets worse than that.”

“How could it possibly get worse?”

“The very worst, a Weasley loves Severus Snape so much, she uses him as her own personal pillow when it’s naptime.”

“I can do one better, boy. The utmost worst thing ever, Severus Snape is agreeing to let a Weasley stay in his temporary home so Harry Potter won’t be a whiny brat.”

“Ah, but there’s the crowning jewel. Severus Snape is secretly a softy and loves a tiny Weasley as much as she loves him.”

“I resent the implication that I-”

“You say what you want, but I know how you really feel, sir.” Severus glowered at his nearly empty cup and Harry took pity on him after a moment. “I won’t tell anyone, not even Hermione, and as far as everyone else is concerned, you’re only letting her stay to get under Ron’s skin.”

Severus harrumphed and finished off his coffee. Harry silently refilled the glass and when he turned back around, he was startled to see Severus grinning crookedly at the table. It was small and disappeared the moment he knew Harry was looking, but it had still been there. Harry sincerely wanted to know what he’d been thinking about and what had caused that smile.

“What are you preparing for dinner?”

“I was thinking about doing something different for dinner. Hermione sent me some recipes she found and I was wanting to try one or two out.”

“Oh, Merlin help me. You’re really going to poison me now, aren’t you?”

“No.” Harry rolled his eyes. “If I was planning to poison you, why would I have asked for your help with the ritual and then told you to be careful?”

Harry was proud he only felt a little awkward bringing the ritual up. It wasn’t sex.

“I have no idea.”

***

Harry slowly woke up and looked at his bedroom ceiling in confusion. The last thing he remembered was reading on the couch and waiting for Severus to get home from his trip. Why was
he in bed? Had he put himself here? He looked over and saw Severus’s bed, empty and made, and frowned. Had he not come back last night?

He crawled out of bed, saw he was in the pajamas he’d borrowed from Severus long ago during the pregnancy potion experiment, and really felt confused since he was wearing denims and a sweater last night. The moment he opened the bedroom door, he realized Severus had indeed come home and had cast a spell on their bedroom door sometime this morning, because his entire house… area… was full of people and they were all very loud. He padded out barefoot into the hallway and the noise stopped momentarily.

Severus looked him up and down, nodded, and continued talking to Albus as the noise picked back up. Before he could actually look around, Hermione flew at him and attached herself to his entire body.

“Are you okay? Did it already happen?”

“What are you talking about?”

Hermione pulled back, her eyes red and teary. “I might have overheard Professor Dumbledore and Professor Snape talking yesterday morning before the meeting. Professor Snape was saying you’d chosen,” she said carefully. “And, well, those aren’t your pajamas. Oh, Harry, are you alright? Do you need to talk? We can go somewhere private. Maybe your bedroom. Oh, was he gentle with you? I didn’t mean to pressure you into it before you were ready, I just-”

“Hermione, it hasn’t happened yet. Yes, whatever you heard yesterday was the truth so there’s that, but it’s gonna be a while. Remember that book he gave me?” Hermione nodded, her eyes widened suddenly, and she nodded again a little faster. “I need special potions and I’m in these, because he leant them to me during Draco’s stay for that one potion I brewed. I, uh, don’t actually remember how I got into them last night, but I must’ve done it.”

“Oh, I’m so relieved, Harry. I really thought I’d pressured you into it before you were ready and when we got here this morning and Professor Snape was in a good mood and you weren’t around, I got so upset and started crying and not even Rose could make me smile so she’s-”

“Breathe,” Harry interrupted. “It’s okay, Hermione. Why is everyone here? And where is my goddaughter?”

Severus cleared his throat and Harry turned. Rose was hugging his leg with both arms, feet planted on top of his toes, and Severus did not seem happy. Harry knew he was actually reveling in the attention, though.

“Mrs. Weasley, it took your daughter exactly three seconds to latch onto my leg the moment your husband put her on the floor.” Severus lifted his leg and Rose held on for all she was worth while giggling loudly. Harry covered his mouth and quietly laughed. “Could I trouble you or the brat to remove the child from my person?”

Harry hurried over, scooped Rose up, and felt awed.

“She’s getting so big, Hermione! Se- Snape, you’re lucky. If I had Rose trying to climb up my leg, I’d be a happy man.” Hermione ignored Severus’s grumpy-sounding grumble and smiled at Rose. Harry bounced her up and down a few times, making Rose giggle, and then turned part of his attention back to Hermione. “You never did tell me why everyone’s here.”

“The official reason is that my father and mother are soon to arrive at Hogwarts and Dumbledore
felt it was safer for all of us to vacate for a while,” Draco said from Severus’s side. When had he gotten there? And had Albus really left without saying goodbye? “Really, we’re all here just to visit.”

Harry looked at Severus for further explanation.

“Lucius and Narcissa are meeting with Albus to ask about Draco’s disappearance. Since Lucius and his wife have yet to formally be named Death Eaters by the public, Albus cannot give a good reason to deny them access to the school. He claimed that’s why we’re being forced to shelter this lot for the day.”

“So they’re really just here for another visit and Dumbledore’s using the flimsiest of excuses thinking it would keep you from getting annoyed about everyone intruding on your solitude?” Severus cocked a brow and then slowly nodded. Harry adjusted Rose and nodded, as well. “Well, that makes sense. What time is it?”

“Eleven o’clock in the morning.”

“Slept late,” Harry noted.

“I did tell you not to wait up for me.”

“I know. Is there coffee already going?”

“Who do you think I am?”


“There are two ways to interpret that, sir, but I’m not sure I should say either right now.”

“Wise.”

“I know. I’ll be right back, Hermione.”

“Well, hurry back, Harry. We all want to see you.”

He smiled to her. With Rose still on his hip and playing with the collar of his t-shirt, Harry headed to the kitchen. He sensed Severus following behind him and had his suspicion confirmed a moment later when Rose said, “Nape” into Harry’s ear.

“Did you eat breakfast?”

Harry didn’t bother turning when all he got in response was silence. He knew the man had been following him and he wasn’t going to second guess himself. He began pouring them both a cup of coffee and right as he’d begun to add sugar and milk one-handed, he heard a grumble. Had Severus expected him to turn?

“No.”

“Not even toast? Why, I’m surprised, sir.”

“At first, I was being polite and waiting for you to wake up. When our guests started showing up at half past nine, I didn’t have much time to.”

“Oh. Hold on. I’ll make you something real fast.”
Severus grunted and waited for Harry to give him the other cup of coffee he’d been working on. That done, Harry took a sip of his own coffee, made a loud kissy noise that elicited giggles when he kissed Rose’s cheek, and pulled out some eggs and sausage from the fridge. He began frying both up in a frying pan with Rose balanced on a hip and then reached for some rolls from dinner two nights ago. Rose pressed her open mouth against Harry’s cheek, getting drool all over the place, and “kissed” him back. He grinned at her and bounced her up and down while flipping the eggs in the pan.

“You are amazingly adept at multitasking.” Harry jumped, making Rose giggle, and briefly glanced at Severus. He’d truly forgotten he was in there. “You will make a good father one day... or, ahem, mother.”

“You’re hilarious, sir. Last I checked, I had certain bits and bobs that would make it impossible to be anyone’s mother.”

“Nape, Nape, Nape. Nape, Nape, me.”

Rose disappeared from his hold and Harry again glanced behind him, smiling when he saw Severus giving Rose an exasperated look and settling an arm underneath her bottom. Rose wrapped her arms around Severus’s neck, sprawled across his chest, and went limp. Her eyes were open, but they most likely wouldn’t be for much longer.

Severus caught Harry looking and frowned.

“You shouldn’t have a child that close to the stovetop.”

“So that’s why you took her away.”

“Yes.”

“The only reason? It had nothing to do with her saying your name?”

“She was saying my name simply because she saw me coming up behind you both.”

“And you didn’t somehow sense it was naptime?”

Severus’s eyes narrowed. “Again, I only took her away from you, because you were so cavalier about her safety.”

“Right. We’ll go with that.”

Harry took their food off the heat, divided everything between two plates, and handed a plate to Severus. He grabbed two forks and his plate, attempted to take Rose away, and raised his brows when Severus didn’t let her go.

“If you wake her now, she’ll be fussy and I don’t wish to listen to a crying child all day. I’ll suffer this humiliation.”

Harry grinned, nodded, and walked to the doorway. “Hey, guys. I’m just gonna quickly eat breakfast and then I’ll be back. Anybody want anything?”

“I think we’re all good for now,” Hermione answered. “We can surely wait until you and Professor Snape finish eating.”

He quickly glanced between everyone. Huh. The twins, Neville, Luna, Draco, Ron, Hermione,
Charlie- Wait, WHAT? He’d get the story later- and Blaise Zabini. Again, WHAT? Another story he needed, it seemed.

“…Alright.”

As Harry closed the door, he could hear Ron asking what happened to Rose. No one answered, but he did hear a voice that sounded suspiciously like Draco telling him to shut up. Was Draco aware of Severus’s secret soft side? He sat at the table and Severus almost immediately looked at him.

“I take it you just saw who all is in our living room, didn’t you?”

“Yeah. Charlie?”

“Just recently had his leg shattered on a mission. He’s still recovering and has been at Hogwarts’s infirmary to keep everything quiet. Albus moved him here today so Lucius and Narcissa wouldn’t see him when they searched the school, which we all know they will insist upon. The less the Dark Lord knows, the better.”

“Makes sense. Let ‘im think he’s winning. And, erm, Zabini?”

“He joined the Weasley twins a week after we came here and has been working with them ever since. For a time, Draco lost his friend, because Blaise thought Draco was truly a Death Eater.”

“Okay. Cool.” Harry took a bite of his eggs. “Any idea what they’re working on?”

“I don’t think we should risk letting you know too much just in case we have another slip.”

“Yeah, good idea, much as I hate it.”

“Mmm. Do you still have some of that apple stuff? What was it, butter? Jelly?”

“Yeah. Hold on.”

He knew Severus had loved that stuff. Another recipe to keep from that stack Hermione had sent him. When he finished eating a couple of minutes later, Severus silently handed Rose over and stacked Harry’s dirty plate under his with a garbled promise to put it in the sink when he was done, as well.

“Harry, come sit by me,” Hermione bade the moment she saw him. “Scoot over, Ron.”

"Hold on, hold on. I'm scooting, woman. Jeez. Stop hitting me."

"So you're doing the ritual."

He knew she was fishing for more information, but he didn’t want to talk about it.

“Yes.”

“Do you wanna talk about it?”

“No.” She knew he was doing the ritual with Severus, but it wasn’t sex and he would bet a dozen galleons that she would try to make it into something more than it was. “This conversation is over.”

Draco leaned forward, looking less unpleasant than usual. “Who’d you get, Potter?”
“None of your business and that conversation is over.”

Luna was nodding along and Harry smiled at her, secretly wondering why she chose Draco Malfoy of all people.

“Does Severus know you’ll be having company of that sort?”

“Um, he’s made plans for that day.” Harry said carefully. He could only assume Severus hadn’t told Draco for a reason, whatever that may be. “Again, it’s none of your business.”

“Whatever you do to ensure you win the war is everybody’s business.”

“Lower your voice, Malfoy. Rose is sleeping and your godfather’s going to be so mad if you wake her up.”

“I want to know the name of the poor bastard you’ve gotten to agree to this, Potter.”

Hermione frowned. “Draco, you leave him alone. Battle plans and whatnot are our business. Whatever he does to ensure his protection during the battle is none of our concern.”

“Yeah, but I’m sure he’s told you everything. Why not share with the rest of us? What’s with the secrecy, Potter?”

“Because whom he’s chosen to do the ritual with is for him to know and us to never find out if that’s what he wants,” Blaise commented. Harry, surprised by the support, smiled at him. “He already has the whole world knowing everything about him, Draco. Let the guy have some peace.”

Ron nodded. “Yeah, let Harry keep that much of his life private.”

“I agree,” Neville added quietly. Luna was beginning to look like a bobblehead. Had Draco broken her? “He doesn’t go nosing into your business.”

Draco snorted. “That’s a lie. I was informed he wrote Granger—er, Weasley asking about my business concerning Luna. Turnabout is fair play.”

“I wasn’t asking for me,” Harry argued. “I didn’t give a damn what you did or with whom you did it.”

“Then why’d you write to her and ask if she knew anything?”

“Because your godfather wanted to know, you annoying prat. He asked me to find out the truth.”

“Severus somehow knew what I’d written you and asked you to find out if I’d really had sex with one of your friends? I don’t believe you.”

“Yes, Draco, I did,” Severus said from the kitchen doorway. “He mentioned it and I wished to know the truth. Now leave the brat alone. Unless you wish to volunteer to help him with the ritual, stop trying to figure out who he’s asked.”

“But—”

“What did I just say? If he’s to be expected to risk his life to save all of yours, Potter deserves at least a little privacy in return.”

“Why do you care?”
“Shut up, Ron.”

“But Hermione-”

“Ron.”

“Humph.”

Rose sniffled and Harry rocked her in his arms; Severus looked for all the world like he wasn't watching him, but Harry knew better. Draco was looking around at everyone and cast suspicious eyes at most of the men. Harry wanted to taunt him, but Severus would get irritated with him. Besides, that’s not the sort of behavior he wanted Rose to learn.

Severus sat in the only seat left, the one right next to Harry, and picked up his book from the night before he’d left. He then promptly ignored everyone.

“So tell me, guys. What’s been going on up there?”

“Well, Draco and I have been dating for a while now,” Luna said happily. Harry squinted, trying to find any traces of drugs or spell work. Hermione elbowed him when she realized what he was doing. “He’s wonderful, Harry. You would like him if you got to know him.”

Severus snorted disdainfully.

“You heard about Charlie, right?” Ron asked after staring at Severus. “Got his leg shattered.”

“Yeah, I did.” Harry pointed at Severus, who was still ignoring everyone. “He told me. Sorry, mate. Is it getting any better?”

Charlie made a face. “It hurts, but Poppy assures me it’s nearly healed. I have to keep taking pain potions, though, which sucks.”

“Like the one you have to take?” Harry asked Severus in a very quiet voice. Without needing to ask twice, Severus nodded. How much was he actually paying attention? “Ooh. Sorry, mate. You might try a daily massage instead. I’ve heard it helps.”

“You’ve heard no such thing,” Severus argued.

“Might as well have,” Harry calmly retorted. “How much of it was shattered, Charlie?”

“The knee down. I’m never gonna be the same. Poppy told me as much.”

Severus nodded almost to himself and spared Harry a look.

“Probably,” Harry voiced after giving Severus a look of his own. He wasn't even pretending to ignore them now. “You should try massaging it every day with some oil.”

“I’ll try anything, Harry. That potion…”

“Yeah, er, I’ve read about it.” Hermione giggled and Severus was abruptly glaring at Harry. “In a book, you know. Um, she’s been drinking, sir. That’s why she’s laughing. The massage, if you do it every day, Charlie, should make sure you don’t actually need the potion unless it’s really sore and painful.”

“Thanks, Harry.”
“Welcome.” Severus was still glaring at him and Hermione was smiling and pointedly not looking his way. “Zabini, er, Blaise? Not sure what to call you. Nice to see you here. I’ve heard you’ve been working with- Wait. Where did the twins go?”

Severus’s dark eyes quickly stopped boring a hole into him as Harry stood up. Everyone was looking around, but Fred and George were nowhere to be seen or heard. Hermione rescued her drowsy daughter.

“Go, boy. Find them before I decide to.”

It took Harry less than a minute. They were in the bedroom and gave him perfectly innocent looks when he slammed the door open.

“Nape.”

“What,” Harry asked pointedly, "do you think you are you doing?”

“Nothing,” they replied in tandem.

“Nape, Nape.”

“Uh huh.” Harry crossed his arms over his chest. “What are you really doing?”

“Nape, Nape, Nape.”

“Well…”

“George,” Fred warned. "Don’t you dare.”

“Nape, Nape. Nape, Nape!”

“He’s doing the thing Mum always does, Fred. Look at ’im.”

“Nape!”

“George,” Harry prompted. “What are you doing?”

“Oh, just hand her over, Mrs. Weasley.”

“We were… setting up- Harry, could you stop looking at me like that? I feel like I’m about to get in trouble.”

“Ron, stop it.”

“You might be.”

“Aw, Harry, me and George were getting your room ready. We figured sex with a guy was nothing new for Charlie and he can just close his eyes if he gets too creeped out by it being with you-”

“He’s actually gay? Since when? ’Mione, why didn't you say anything?”

"Shut up, Weasley. That's Potter's concern, not yours.""Except he’s never really been that close with you so maybe it won’t be weird at all and since we’re all here today, you might as well-”

"Quit glaring at Draco, Ron," Luna's dreamy voice drifted towards them. "He was just telling the
truth."

“I’ve already asked someone and they’ve agreed. We’ll be doing the ritual in a few weeks. Dumble-”

“Ah, old Fumblydore is helping them get down here. I’d wondered, half thought Snape might be escorting him, but that’d be a huge mood-killer so never mind.”

Ron started laughing and then started choking.

“Fred Weasley,” Harry scolded loudly, “you take that back right now.”

“Professor, stop!”

“Or at least put Baby Weasley on the floor first,” Draco drawled. “Save your child, woman.”

“Er, sorry?”

Harry’s brow arched. “Like you mean it, Fred.”

“Merlin’s tits, Snape! You almost killed me.”

Harry briefly glanced at the door. “You were saying, Fred?”

“Sorry, mate. Really. Didn’t know you’d get so upset.”

“Fred.”

“I’m sorry!”

“Better.”

“Who is it? Me and Fred are dying to know.”

“That’s no one’s business but my own. Now clean this up, get rid of whatever you’ve done in here, and come back to the living room.”

“Yes, sir!”

“Also, guys, remember this isn’t just my room so don’t assume you can barge on in any old time you please.”

“Oh, that’s right. Snape’s over there, innit he?”

“Yeah.”

“It’s not your god-arse doing it, is it, Malfoy?”

“Ron,” Harry warned. “I’m only going to say this one time so everybody listen to me. Fred, George, you, too. I’m tired of the insults aimed at Se-Snape. We all know that man is maddeningly – purposefully - irritating a lot of the time and he can be truly difficult sometimes, but he’s kept me alive this long at great personal risk. He’s a good man. An arsehole sometimes, yes, but also a good man. The next time I hear someone talking shite about the man who’s supposed to keep me alive when we leave here will be hexed with the first thing I can think of. Do you all understand what I am saying?”
Harry looked around to get everyone’s word. Draco and Severus were giving him looks, Blaise was looking down the hall (presumably at the twins), Hermione was grinning smugly, Ron looked flabbergasted and gave him a quick nod when Harry’s eyes narrowed, Luna… well, she looked a wee bit dazed and confused, and Neville was shrugging. That hadn’t really applied to him and they all knew it. Harry turned to get the twins’ acquiescence and saw they were already nodding seriously when his eyes found them.

“Harry, I think I would like some tea now,” Hermione spoke up. “I’m sure everyone else would love some, too, but I know that’s your kitchen…”

Harry sighed. “Would you like to help me, Hermione?”

Hermione was off the couch and childless in seconds. Harry sent Severus another glance, noting the man’s expression hadn’t changed, and led the way to his kitchen. Hermione trotted after him and cast a silencing charm when they were inside.

“Harry! That was so sweet of you. Do you have a crush on Professor Snape?”

“No, of course not. Don’t be ridiculous, Hermione.”

“Then what was that just now?”

“He’s a good man and deserves a little respect.” Harry started the coffee maker. “Hardly anyone acknowledges he’s a genuinely good, kind guy. I mean, he’s such a good guy, Hermione, your daughter treats him like a pillow and he lets her. He doesn’t deserve to have everyone talking badly about him. If you all got to know him, you’d find out what I mean. I mean, I catch him smiling or laughing and whatnot all the time. A bad guy can’t do that without it always being at someone else’s expense, right?”

“Harry, I know that, but I’m not sure Ron… Well…”

Harry sighed and put the kettle on. “I’m guessing here, but he started strangling Ron when Ron laughed at Fred’s little ‘joke’ about Severus killing the mood. Am I right?”

Hermione jumped up onto the counter and leaned toward him conspiratorially. “Yes. If you ask me, Harry, my husband completely deserved it. He should never talk about his best friend’s crush that way.”

“He’s not my crush.”

“Oh, that is a bit juvenile, I suppose. Is your man any better?”

“Hermione,” Harry begged.

“No, then. Lover? Er, what else fits?”

“Hermione, please. You’re making it weird. He says it’s just a ritual, not sex, and I agree with him. Quit doing this. Please.”

“Ah, that explains so much. You’ve informed your friend of my participation in the ritual. I thought you might actually keep this much to yourself, boy, but I see I was wrong.”

“Se- Dammit. Snape. What are you doing in here? How did you get in without us noticing?” Severus kicked off the doorjamb and approached Hermione. “Sir? Are you really not going to answer me?”
“Professor?”

“Young Mrs. Weasley, fortunately for you, I don’t find myself wanting to kill you every time you open your mouth. However, I can promise you that would change if Draco learns of this before I can personally tell him. I have never told him of my inclinations and I don’t want him to learn of it from someone else. Do you understand me?”

Hermione turned wide eyes to Harry, who felt just as shocked. Severus was… inclined? SINCE WHEN?

“Uh, yes, sir. I won’t say a thing. That’s why Harry told me, you see,” Hermione rushed to explain. “He knew I wouldn’t tell anybody and I’m sure you can understand how he might need someone to talk to about this. I mean, sure, it’s not sex, but he will still be… you know… for the first time and I’m sure it’s a little nerve-wracking. Especially considering how he’s going to have sex, the reason he’s doing it in the first place, the possible complications from having sex after getting your book, the man he’s having sex with, the sheer fact he’s a virgin having sex for the first time, so on and so forth. He needed someone to talk his fears over with, Professor.”

Severus’s eyes met Harry’s. He gazed at him for several long moments, glanced back at Hermione, and nodded.

“I understand how he might, Mrs. Weasley, and I have no problem with you being there for him as long as you are the only one who knows of my participation. After I have told Draco, you could shout it to the world for all I care, but until then…” Severus drifted off and pointedly stared at Hermione. “Do you understand what I might do to you if you disobey me?”

“Yes, I think I have an idea.”

“Sir, go easy on her. She’s not going to tell someone and threatening her is just annoying me. I trust her with my life. You can surely trust her with your secret for now.”

“Very well. My trust, once lost, is never regained. Remember that.”

“I won’t let you down, sir.”

Severus sharply nodded once at Hermione, met Harry’s eyes again, glanced at the tea service, and then left the room. Hermione exhaled when the door shut and turned to Harry with wide eyes.

He nodded. “I know.”

“He’s gay, Harry, or at least inclined.”

“Again, I know.”

“Draco still doesn’t know.”

“Got that.”

Hermione jumped down. “Are you okay? You look like you’re in shock.”

“I think I might be. I’ve thought this entire time that he’s straight. Hell, even after he agreed to the ritual, you and I both did, Hermione. I never thought…”

“Me, either, Harry.”

“Nape.”
“Rose, no.”

“Nape, Nape, Nape! Dada, Nape,” Rose cried and then screamed, “NAPE!”

“It’s not different,” he told her. “It isn’t. It’s still the same.”

“Yes, of course. Just because he’s interested in men doesn’t-”

Harry smothered near-hysterical laughter, his face screwing up, and Hermione’s expression turned sympathetic. She gave him a hug while he had his weird little freak out. He didn’t even know why he was freaking out. He just was.

“Hermione-” Ron complained, barging into the kitchen. “Rose won’t- Mate? What’s wrong?”

“I can’t stop laughing,” Harry gasped. “I don’t even know why.”

Through the tears in his eyes, he could see everyone in the living room staring at him through the open door. Severus was nowhere to be seen.

“Are you crying?”

“Ron, if you didn’t actually need anything, get out.”

“I… oh, yeah. Uh, Rose is having a fit ‘cause she wants Snape, but he’s in the bedroom. What do I do?”

“Shut the door, first of all, and then try to calm her down, Ron. I’m a little busy in here with Harry.”

“No,” Harry said breathlessly. “No, I’m fine. I don’t even know why I was laughing.” His laughter returned a moment and he noticed everyone in the living room seemed a little concerned. Worryingly, even Draco. He was laughing, right? “I can’t explain it.”

“Er, I’ll just, uh-”

“Bring her to me,” Harry decided, wiping his eyes. Merlin, he had been laughing, right? Right?

“Okay. Um, are you sure, though?”

“Ron, he wants Rose so let him have Rose.”

“Be right back.” Ron returned half a minute later with his squalling daughter and handed her off. “Good luck, mate.”

“Now why are you crying, Rose?” Harry asked, bouncing her around. Rose’s screams quietened just a little, but she still had tears running down her face. “Is it ‘cause of Nape?”

“Oh, don’t bring him up,” Ron groaned. “That’s what started it.”

“Rose, your Nape didn’t leave. He’s just… taking a nap. If you keep screaming, won’t that wake him up and make him as sad as you?”

“Nape,” Rose replied tearfully. “Nape Nape, me.”

“Aw, honey. Nape’s sleepy. You can cuddle with Harry instead. See what I’m doing? Mummy and
Harry are making tea for everyone.” Rose, still watery-eyed, looked at the tea service he was pointing at. Her cries were dying down to sobs and hiccupping breaths. “Now look at that pretty girl. Say hi, Mummy.”

“Hi, Rose.”

“Mummy,” Rose said, her head moving enough on Harry’s shoulder to see Hermione. “Nape Nape.”

“It’s his naptime, baby.”

Without looking, Harry knew exactly what part of Rose’s body was rubbing against his shoulder and he just silently shook his head. Baby snot was worth it if the aforementioned baby wasn’t crying anymore. But why couldn’t he be like Severus and only ever get baby drool on his collar?

Ron and Hermione were having a wordless conversation and Harry busied himself with thinking about tea while Rose started drifting off in his arms.

“Ron, could you grab eleven of those mugs from the cabinet and put them on that wooden tray on top of the fridge?”

“This tray?”

“Yeah... and actually, give me that green cup. That’s Snape’s cup. I’ll put our tea and coffee, milk, and sugar on this tray.”

“Do you have anything to eat?”

Harry looked at the time and saw it was approaching noon. Of course it was and everyone was still here, which meant he’d either need to make lunch or let his guests starve.

“I’ll get you guys set up with tea, put Rose down somewhere quiet, and then come cook.”

“Good idea. Tell us what to do.”

Hermione and Ron soon carried the trays to the living room and Harry headed off to the bedroom. When he opened the door, he saw he was right. Severus had gone to lay down and was stretched out on his back in the middle of his bed.

“Sever… ah,” Harry said, Severus cracking open an eye halfway through. “Wow. There really is no back-pedalling on that one, is there?”

“No.” Severus closed his eye and Harry gently settled Rose into the middle of his own bed, surrounding her with all of his pillows. Severus then tossed him his extra pillows and Harry finished his pillow barricade. “Did you need something?”

“I’m about to make lunch for everyone and I wondered if you were going to eat, too. I know you just had breakfast ‘bout an hour ago, though…”

“No. I returned very late last night and didn’t sleep long before our guests arrived so I will remain in here while you sup. However, if you remember, you may wake me in two hours… and make sure there’s coffee made.”

“Yes, sir.”

Severus crossed his ankles and settled back into his bed with a deep breath. Harry quietly closed
the door and crept down the hall.

“Harry, may I watch you cook?” Luna asked. “I’ve never learned and I think it might be fun.”

Draco’s expression soured. “Luna, I don’t want to watch him cook.”

“She didn’t say you had to,” Neville pointed out reasonably. “I think it’d be fun watching, too. I’ve heard you’re really good, Harry, and I want to see how it’s done.”

“Are we all going to have a little cooking lesson?” Fred asked cheerfully. “George?”

“Let’s, Fred.”

“It’s just cooking, guys. It’s nothing special.”

“Yes,” Blaise agreed, “but from what I’ve heard in passing, your culinary skills are such that even Professor Snape, who is not easily impressed, cannot get enough of your cooking.”

“No, I think I said Severus barely manages to eat what he’s given,” Draco tensely commented. “At no point did I say Severus couldn’t get enough of it.”

“No, but it’s true,” Ron told him. “You know it’s true, too. Remember when we were all here the last time? You said he licked his fork when Harry gave him that one cake, whatever it was.”

Blaise’s brow rose. “Professor Snape licked his fork, Potter?”

“Er, yeah, but in his defence, that cake is delicious. You can’t help but to lick your fork when you have it.”

“Hmm. I think I would very much enjoy having some of that. Is it difficult to make?”

“Well, not really, but I’m not too sure if we have everything I’ll need to…” Harry trailed off, thinking, and grinned. “I might, actually. That explains the extra cherries we got in the other day. I’d wondered why we got so many when I only put a few on the list for ice creams sundaes. Think someone was hinting.”

Hermione giggled. “Perhaps Professor Snape would enjoy having some today, too.”

“Hermione.”

“The cake, Harry,” Hermione said pointedly, ”is apparently very good. It might make him happy and after Ron’s little choking incident earlier, I think we can all agree he might deserve a little spoiling.”

Charlie nodded. “Yeah. Like you said, Harry, he’s not a bad guy. You should do it.”

Harry wondered if Severus could hear them. Then again, he was sure he couldn’t. When he was in the bedroom earlier, he hadn’t heard anyone in the living room. Severus had probably cast a silencing charm so he could nap.

“Allright. I’ll make it, but don’t get in a mood if supper tonight is not as impressive as that cake and if Dumbledore tries taking you before then, you’ll just have to convince him that staying through lunch is a good idea.”

“We’ll take care of that,” George promised. “You just worry about cooking, our dear man.”
“Your dear man?” Draco asked, meaningfully looking between Harry, Fred, and George. Even Blaise and Luna gave Draco a sickened look. “Well, it would make sense he wouldn’t want to tell anyone if he’d chosen both of you for the ritual.”

“Don’t be disgusting, Draco,” Blaise finally said. “I barely know him, but I do know he would never do something so depraved for a ritual such as that.”

“Right. Malfoy, why does it bother you that you don’t know who I’ve chosen? Of everyone in this room, only one person knows who it is and nobody else is trying to figure it out. Hell, I don’t think they even care.”

“Because it doesn’t add up, that’s why. Severus hasn’t mentioned the ritual at all in his letters and I’m sure he would have said something if you were writing all the inclined men that you knew, trying to recruit someone. If I didn’t know better, I’d swear Severus himself was helping you. In fact, still knowing better, I sometimes catch myself wondering.”

“Is that what you want to hear, Malfoy? Do you want me to tell you he’s helping me, that he’s gonna be the one with me when I do the ritual? Because if that’s what you were looking for, I can’t tell you that.”

“So it’s not him.”

“What did I just say? Keep your nose out of my business.”

Draco huffed and sat back in his spot on one of the couches. Hermione gave Harry an approving nod, smiled at Ron, and took his hand. Harry entered his kitchen with the nearly empty tea and coffee pots, took a few deep breaths to calm himself down, and started a new pot of coffee. When that was done, he began pulling food out of the refrigerator. Things for grilled sandwiches and potato salad went by the stove, cherries went on the counter, and vegetables to be cut up went onto the table.

While he was looking through the pantry for everything needed for the cake, he heard Severus grunt in pain. He immediately froze and listened for more, but didn’t hear anything. He must have been alright, then. Probably just banged his elbow or something.

After dumping the ingredients for the cake onto the counter, he realized he’d forgotten the chocolate he usually melted down to drizzle on top. He again went to the fridge, ducked down to look in the back of the fridge, and heard the kitchen door quietly open and close. He half-expected it to be Draco so he turned with a scowl on his face. It instantly melted away when he saw Rose tottering towards him.

“Haw-haw,” she said, arms stretching towards him though she was across the room. “Haw-haw, me.”

“Well, hello, gorgeous girl. How did you get out of your pillow fort and passed your parents? Is Nape still sleeping?”

“Nape Nape, me.”

One of Harry’s questions was answered when Severus tiredly shuffled in moments later, his eyes still closed. Harry grabbed Severus’s coffee cup from the counter, put it into one of the man’s hands, and guided him to the coffee maker.

“Sir, why are you up?”
“Firstly, that little runt clawing at my trouser leg slid out of your bed, managed to climb onto mine, and then threw her entire body onto my groin. I fear I might not be able to perform ever again.”

At the same time, Harry heard “Hermione, sit back down” and “close your mouth, Draco” from the living room. Eyes wide, he looked between Severus’s groin and Rose.

“Secondly, my silencing charm doesn’t hold well when I’ve started falling asleep so I kept hearing snippets of conversation from the living room and it was annoying enough to keep me awake. Thirdly, I heard mentions of cherries and cake, put two and two together, and figured out you are making your cherry chocolate layer cake. Judging by the ingredients on the counter, I was right. Fourthly…” Severus paused, frowning, his eyes finally opened. “There are six Weasleys in my current place of residence and that, more than anything else I’ve mentioned, was nightmarish enough to keep me awake.”

“Oi!”

“Shh,” someone- maybe Hermione- hissed. “Oh, wait a moment. That’s me, too.”

A single laugh escaped Harry. “I think they’re eavesdropping on us.”

“Hard not to when their lives pale in comparison to ours,” Severus said evenly, smirking at his coffee. There were a number of outraged gasps and squawks from the next room and Harry silently laughed, fist in front of his mouth. “Well, I’ll make an exception for this small human attached to my leg, because she merely wishes to be in my presence to annoy me to death, not to listen to every word I say in the hopes I’ll give her some good gossip.”

Severus moved his leg around a little and Rose giggled shakily.

“Nape Nape.”

“There you go. There is one Weasley you like.”

“Hmm. And the former Ms. Granger is acceptable as long as she doesn’t spill a certain secret that she shouldn’t.”

“She gets it, sir. Merlin.”

“So that’s who knows who the guy is.”

“You already knew that and she’s sworn to secrecy,” Harry called through the door to Draco. “So don’t go getting any ideas.”

Draco harrumphed and Harry peeled Rose away from Severus to put her in the high seat that had magically appeared when his back was turned. She fussed until Severus gave her one of the two muffins he’d snagged from a bowl on the counter.

Harry gave him a look and Severus narrowed his eyes, obviously daring him to comment. He kept his mouth shut.

Before too much longer, people began trickling into the kitchen in pairs. Hermione (with Ron in tow) was unsurprisingly the first to arrive and took up residence on a bit of counter beside Harry. Ron unwillingly sat at the table as far away from Severus as possible. The high seat’s proximity to Severus’s chair didn’t escape their notice, but all Hermione did was smile; Ron, on the other hand, made a face and pointedly kept his eyes on his daughter’s face.
Rose’s muffin was all over the place. Severus didn’t hesitate to reach out and brush the crumbs from her cheeks and nose. Harry felt a small smile curl his lips.

“So what are we doing here?” George asked, slinging an arm around Harry’s shoulders and turning them so he could look down first into the pot of boiling potatoes and then at the sandwiches in the skillet. “Bet I could do this.”

“You won’t be trying,” Fred said. “You never did learn how to cook.”

“Right.” Ron snorted. “But neither did you.”

Hermione made a noise and Ron flushed. Harry winked at her in response.

“If you’re planning to stay, Draco,” Severus said, “sit down.”

Draco did only after spelling his chair to be wide enough to seat both him and Luna. Harry and Severus exchanged a look and Hermione directed one of her own at Harry when he turned back to the potatoes.

“Don’t look at me like that, Hermione,” he murmured. “I don’t want to hear it.”

“All I was doing was looking.”

“I’d appreciate it if you didn’t. I know what you’re thinking… and just don’t, okay?”

“What is she thinking, then?” Draco demanded. “Is it about the ritual?”

“Let it go, Draco. I wasn’t joking earlier. If you so much as mention the ritual one more time from this moment on, I will assume you wish to volunteer to help him enact it.”

Harry glanced back, saw the serious expression on Severus’s face, the indescribable expression on Draco’s…

…and then glanced over and met Ron’s eyes.

Ron slowly looked at Severus, back to Harry, and his mouth fell open. He blinked, looked between Draco, Severus, and him one more time, and then glanced down at the table. A second later, a disbelieving laugh escaped him, a sound that caught everyone’s attention.

“What’s so funny?” Fred asked.

“Just figured something out,” Ron replied, shrugging. “Still trying to process it.”

Hermione bit her lip and looked at Harry, Harry looked at Severus, Severus momentarily held his eyes and then looked at Draco, and Draco looked between Ron and Harry. Rather than ask if it had anything to do with the ritual, as Harry knew he wanted to do, Draco merely pressed his lips together and stared at the table. Charlie hobbled into the kitchen a few seconds later, rested on his crutches, and took in the atmosphere of the room.

“I don’t know what’s going on in here,” he said, “but I think this is the part where someone randomly starts talking about something completely off the wall. Nice diversion tactic.”

“You’re right,” Hermione briskly agreed. “I’ll go first. I’m pregnant again. I’m four months gone now.”

Severus quickly looked over at him and Harry was so distracted by his expression that he burnt his
hand on the hot pot of potatoes. Rose shrieked when she heard Severus begin to mutter about clumsy brats.

“Nape!”

“Okay…” Ron bashfully rubbed the back of his neck. “Well, that was gonna be a surprise for you later, Harry, but I’m guessin’ Mione changed her mind.”

“You’re pregnant again?” Harry asked. His eyes flickered again towards Severus before he looked between Ron and Hermione. He smiled widely. “That’s amazing! Congratulations, you guys.”

Hermione nearly smothered him with a hug and Harry laughingly returned it… until her arms tightened and his laugh cut off. He waved his arms, trying to get her to let go, but she was crying happily into his shoulder now and didn’t seem to notice. Severus’s eye twitched.

“He’s not breathing, woman. Let him go before you kill him.”

“Oh, my gosh.” Hermione leaned back and wiped her cheeks. “I’m so sorry, Harry. I’m just so happy. I’ve been trying to figure out how to tell you for months now and you have no idea how difficult it was to get everyone here to keep it to themselves.”

Draco scowled, but Luna grabbed his hand and he calmed. Marginally. Harry briefly wondered how Hermione had gotten him to keep quiet so long. Months, right? Had he told Severus, then?

“So you’re saying everyone knew?”

“Yes. So when Professor Snape gave me your letter yesterday, I had to explain the whole situation to him. I didn’t want to tell you in a letter, because it wasn’t fair you had to learn about Rose in a letter and I didn’t want you to find out about this one the same way.”

“So you knew?” Harry asked Severus, who nodded slowly. “And you didn’t say anything?”

“Why would I, boy? She’s not carrying my child so it wasn’t my news to share.”

Ron groaned.

“Stop it, Ron. Guess I can see that, but you could’ve said… something.”

“I begged him not to and then I came up with the brilliant idea of-” Hermione bit her lip and Harry looked from her to Severus. “Oh, I might as well confess. I suggested we all should visit since Professor Snape was already coming back. Your parents told Professor Dumbledore they would be arriving sometime next week.”

“So you’ll all be back next week?”

“Yes! Isn’t it great?”

Harry didn’t need to look at Severus to know he probably looked irritated as hell. It was no secret he didn’t like having company and now they’d be entertaining people again next week.

“Sure is. Sir, would you like some more coffee?”

“No. I think I’d like you to retrieve the bottle of spiced mead from our bedroom.”

Harry gave him a weird look. He’d finished that bottle of spiced mead- a Christmas gift from last year- towards the end of March. That had been the night Severus had fallen asleep at the kitchen
table after drinking the last of it. He could still remember the panic when he'd awoken the next morning and Severus hadn't been in bed.

What was Severus trying to tell him?

"Er, alright," he said slowly. "If I don't find it, you might come help me look in the closet."

Severus nodded and Harry left the room, still confused. Maybe Severus just needed to talk to him, but didn’t want everyone butting in. It made sense to him, because if he’d been trying to tell him something in code, he’d failed big time.

He didn’t bother looking for any sort of bottle at all. Severus walked in to the room a minute later, closed the door, and held his hand up to the door. Harry envied his casual use of wandless magic.

"You’re wondering why I had you come back here for nonexistent liquor."

"Well, yeah. What’s so important that you had to talk to me right this second?"

"There’s something I have to tell you, boy, and you’re not going to like it."

Harry frowned. "You changed your mind about the ritual, didn’t you?"

"Don’t be stupid. When our guests leave for the evening, Draco and Blaise will be remaining with us and Charlie Weasley will be staying until much later, when Albus can collect him and take him elsewhere."

"Uh, why?"

"I didn’t want to mention this in front of everyone, because I am the only one with this knowledge. Albus will be making the announcement when it’s time for them to leave and he will be the one giving explanations. I was previously informed that Lucius and Narcissa will be in residence at Hogwarts for the next two weeks under the guise of awaiting their son. To send Draco and Weasley back to that would be disastrous."

"Why are they even waiting at Hogwarts? And why’s Blaise have to stay? He’s not on the hit list, too, is he? And - no, wait. What about everyone else?"

"Lucius and Narcissa are in possession of correspondence supposedly from Draco himself claiming that he will be sneaking back into the country sometime within the next two weeks and will be rooming at Hogwarts."

"If that were actually happening, he’d be ambushed the moment they saw him, wouldn’t he?" Severus didn’t respond, didn’t so much as make a face, and Harry sighed. "Okay. So Blaise?"

"He’s been named a target. It is no secret that Blaise and Draco were close while in school and the Dark Lord is under the impression that Blaise will point him in Draco’s direction."

"Right. Of course. Stupid question, I guess. Next, why can’t Charlie stay here?"

"It was his own request to be moved. He would prefer to room at Grimmauld Place."

"Instead of here with us," Harry finished. "Right?"

"I believe the words I inadvertently overheard were, word for word, “I refuse to stay in the same place with that giant snake and his brats, Harry Potter for company or not.” Albus agreed to move him elsewhere."
“Charlie said that? I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. I’ve been called worse than a snake, as you’ve been called worse than a lion.”

“When you think of it like that… So what about everyone else? Isn’t staying at Hogwarts a bad idea with the Malfoys around?”

Severus spent several long seconds staring at him. Harry honestly couldn't tell if he was thinking about what he'd said or was debating calling him an idiot for not seeing something obvious.

"No," Severus finally answered. "They will be safe. The only reason Weasley is leaving Hogwarts is because he still needs to be in the infirmary. He cannot stay in the safe zones with the others."

"If he's supposed to be in the infirmary still, why is he here?"

"I suppose he either broke out of the infirmary and snuck here…” Severus paused and arched a brow. "Or Albus brought him here to lie low. Which do you think?"

"The second," Harry said, flushing. Of course. He eventually would've thought of that on his own. "One last thing. Why did you have to tell me all this right this second?"

“Because there are certain things you need to keep in mind as the day progresses. One, any attempts the Weasleys make to send your goddaughter here within the next two weeks must be nipped in the bud. Suggest a date further in the future if Mrs. Weasley will not take no for an answer. While Draco and Blaise are here, we will not be receiving guests or correspondence.”

“Right. Thanks for giving the heads up.”

Severus nodded. “Two, if Albus is able to procure the last of the ingredients I need, it will be very difficult to keep Draco in the dark if he happens upon the stockpile. Blaise, though he might not automatically recognise the ingredients as those belonging to the various potions we need, will still eventually figure it out. You will need to figure out how you will be responding to their questions tonight and throughout their stay, Draco’s more so than Blaise’s, I’m thinking.”

"You volunteered to brew the potions, because you're so bored with just me for company."

"Don't be ridiculous. I'm never bored these days."

"And they know that?"

"Yes. Draco asks often enough for him to clearly see through that lie were you ever to speak it.”

“Can’t you just give Draco a talk later and then we won’t have to hide anything?”

“Three,” Severus said instead of answering. “If we are going to- You just called him Draco. My word, I didn't know you had become so fond of him.”

"I did not."

"You most certainly did." Severus smirked. "I must remember this moment."

"Stop it," Harry groaned. "I didn't say that."

"You did," Severus said in a singsong voice. "My, my, my. I haven't the words to describe how I'm feeling. Is the little housewife finally coming around to my godson?"
Harry frowned deeply. "You were saying?"

"Oh, very well. If we are going to need a fresh supply of groceries or anything else, you need to make up your lists before Albus arrives. You well know I wouldn’t have been able to warn you around the others without drawing suspicion and it takes you ages to compile even a short list.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “I think we’re going to be good for a few weeks, but I’ll go ahead and write down some stuff. I mean, we won’t have to worry about the delivery until the Malfoys are gone.”

“On the contrary, Lucius and Narcissa will not be arriving until much later this evening. They do not want to draw too much attention to themselves.” Harry snorted. “If we’re going to need anything at all during their stay, you need to send a list with Albus tonight. They will be delivered before Lucius and Narcissa arrive at Hogwarts.”

“Oh. I get it now. Alright. Anything else?”

“Just one more thing, though this is more of a general request while Blaise and Draco are here.” Severus gave him a look. “If you feel the need to fondle yourself and absolutely cannot overcome the urge, ask me to cast your silencing charm. I don’t want our guests to know how often you’re sullying our shower.”

Harry gaped like a fish and Severus’s brow cocked. He had to literally shake himself to be able to snap out of his shock.

“Do you really expect me to come to you and ask you to do that? I mean, you’d know without a doubt I was in there…”

“I know anyway,” Severus said dryly. “Every single time, in fact.”

“I’ve really been trying to get my silencing charm to stick, but it always stops…”

“Before you do, yes.”

Harry huffed out a laugh, taken by surprise. “Something like that.”

“Can you promise to ask me, boy?”

“No, I don’t think I can. That’d be really embarrassing.”

“So would having Blaise and Draco discuss your masturbatory session, one that takes place in a shower we all share. You might never hear the end of it.”

“That is a very good point. Fine. I’ll ask you, but I won’t like it.”

“I don’t care. Now you may return to the kitchen. I will rejoin you shortly.”

“Well, what do I say about the mead?” Severus pulled open the bottom drawer of his bedside table, picked up a glass bottle, and held it up. Harry frowned. "Where'd that come from?"

"I found it in one of my trunks a while back and stashed it here in case I needed to find it again."

"...Which you haven't needed to do, right?"

"Right."

"Oh."
Severus's brows rose. "Go. Too much longer back here with me and you'll set Draco to thinking."

"Bet he's already started. Probably the moment you told me to come back here."

Severus shrugged and Harry quickly but quietly hurried back to the kitchen. When he pushed the door open, it connected with someone with a loud, sharp smack.

"Dammit," Draco hissed. "Watch what you're doing, Potter."

"Stop trying to eavesdrop, Malfoy."

"Thought you were looking for spiced mead. Funny how you're not carrying any..."

Severus's voice carried to them, "That's because it's my liquor, Draco." He entered the kitchen and placed the bottle on the counter. "I don't trust him not to pour it down the drain."

"I wouldn't do that," Harry disagreed.

"Now you wouldn't." Severus arched a brow, daring him to disagree further, and Harry let it go. If he wanted to think that, fine. "Are you planning to serve lunch sometime before the smallest Weasley gnaws her arm off?"

Harry paused on his way to the sink and looked at Rose. She had her fingers in her mouth and was watching Severus with devoted fascination. Harry snorted.

"Seems she doesn't care about eating."

"What?"

"She's staring at you."

Ron muttered something under his breath and whatever it was had Neville elbowing him.

"Oi," Ron complained and then muttered, "What'd you do that for?"

"You heard Harry earlier."

Harry sighed. If he was lucky, before too much longer, he could get everyone settled down with food while he worked on the cake. Then they'd be too busy to complain about their company and he wouldn't get irritated.

He just had to work faster.

***

Over dinner that night, long after all but three of their guests had left, Harry found himself watching Severus interact with Draco and Blaise. The man was genuinely interested in what they had to say and even smiled a few times. Half the time, Severus didn't even listen when he spoke. He couldn't contain the little bit of jealousy curling in his belly. Thankfully, Charlie broke his train of thought before it could become any pettier.

"So how are you doing down here? Doesn't seem like much fun. What do you do all day?"

"I read a lot. Then there's cooking and stuff." Harry shrugged. "I don't get bored so that's good."

"How do you not? I'd go crazy." Harry shrugged again and Charlie sipped his tea, eying him much
too carefully. What was he wanting to hear? "So everything's okay down here? I mean, I could stay, keep you company."

That had Severus's attention.

"He has plenty of company, Weasley. You needn't trouble yourself."

Charlie's brow quirked. "You? Yes, I'm sure he enjoys talking day in and day out to a man who publically hates him, good guy or not."

Oh, so that was what Charlie was digging for.

"No, it's alright," Harry said before Severus could speak again. "Like I said, it's not bad down here. Snape’s a good house mate. Er, roommate? I don’t know. He’s okay."

“Really?” Blaise asked curiously.

“Yeah. Surprised me, too.”

“You’re not funny, brat.”

“Oh, and all this time I thought I was.”

Severus scoffed and Draco rolled his eyes. Charlie frowned and looked between the three of them.

“So you’re really alright? I don’t need to stay?”

“If you want to stay, you don’t have to go. We won’t turn you away. More’s the merrier.”

Severus looked like he wanted to argue with that sentiment.

“Oh, no,” Charlie rushed to say. “No, I have no desire to stay. I was only planning to if it seemed like you needed me to. But you’re really okay? You’re not just saying this ‘cause Snape’s in here?”

“No, I’m not,” Harry asserted. “Merlin. Did Ron put you up to this?”


Harry huffed. “I appreciate the concern, but it’s completely unnecessary. More chicken, sir?”

Charlie finally looked away from Harry and arched his brows when he saw Severus’s angry expression. Neither man said anything and Blaise and Draco looked between the two of them. Harry kept his eyes locked on Severus’s, holding the plate of chicken up, and Severus finally sighed after several tense seconds.

“No,” he said, eyes still on Harry’s, jaw clenched. “I would, however, appreciate if you curbed your… friend’s… comments from now on."

“I barely know him,” Harry said honestly. Was he seriously acting territorial or had he imagined the inflection in his question? “You can ask him yourself if you don’t believe me.”

“It’s true,” Charlie agreed.

Draco coughed subtly to get Severus’s attention. By the time he looked at his godson, Draco looked appropriately confused.
“What does it matter if he does or doesn’t?”

“It doesn’t.”

“Right. Guess I imagined that, then. Did anyone else?”

“Draco? Shut up.”

Draco held up his hands and Harry frowned at his dinner roll. He knew he hadn’t imagined it.

“Anyways,” Blaise said after the silence stretched until it became uncomfortable. “You sure you don’t want to stay? It’d probably give Potter here someone to talk to more often. Three Slytherins, one Gryffindor. He’s gonna need the distraction.”

"I really don’t mind,” Harry insisted and met Severus’s gaze. “You’re good conversation sometimes. When you’re not, you know, grumpy.”

Severus gave him a sour look.

“Ah, well. If he’s fine without me, I definitely will not be staying. I have no reason to. Wouldn’t want to get in the way around here.”

And now what the hell was going on with him? Harry peeked at Draco to see his reaction and knew something was definitely up just judging by his reaction. Draco looked speculatively at first Harry and then Charlie before turning to study Severus. Harry risked a glance at Severus and almost choked on his green beans. Was he smirking and just doing a bad job of hiding it?

“Would you be getting in the way? Hmm. Perhaps not. As the count stands,” Severus said thoughtfully, “we have two bedrooms and five men in the kitchen. The boy’s rooming with me and I can only imagine Blaise will be rooming with Draco. Who would you like to room with?”

Was this some weird pissing contest? If so, Harry didn’t understand why it was happening. Draco seemed unsettled and Blaise looked like he was trying to work things out. If he did, good for him, because he personally sure as hell wouldn’t be figuring this out anytime soon.

“You’ve again pointed out why I should leave.” Charlie sat forward, his elbow brushing Harry’s wrist, and looked at Severus with his head cocked to the side. “It makes me wonder why you’re so determined to make me leave.”

“You are too suspicious, Weasley. I was stating facts and asking your preference on the rooming matter. That’s all. Why would I want you to leave? We cannot control who seeks shelter here. Can we, boy?”

Severus’s gaze suddenly met his and Harry started. Why was he dragging him into this weird… whatever it was?

“Well, no. You actually said that when you told me Malfoy was staying with us that one time.”

“Hmm. So I did.”

“Ah,” Charlie said slowly, eyes narrowing a little. “I see. I didn’t expect that.”

Blaise and Draco shared a look.

“What exactly is going on right now?” Draco finally asked. “Weasley doesn’t want to stay, but you’re trying to get him to?”
Not even close. Severus was trying to run him out of here as quickly as possible; Blaise seemed to agree with Harry’s revelation. But why was he doing that? Charlie wasn’t a bad guy.

“Um, sir?”

Severus again looked at Harry. “What?”

“Can I talk to you in the other room for just a minute?”

For once, Severus didn’t argue at all. He simply stood, exited the room, and Harry followed a second later. He shrugged when he saw Blaise and Draco watching, questions in their eyes. When he entered the living room, Severus was standing by the fireplace and looking at him expectantly.

“You wanted to talk about something?”

“Yeah. What’s going on with you?”

Severus held up his hand, as if to say nothing, but his eyes darted to the kitchen door. Spell work, then?

“Nothing is going on with me, Potter. Why do you ask?”

“Why are you trying to run Charlie out of here? You just said you can’t control who comes here so what’s up?”

“I’m not trying to do anything of the sort,” Severus disagreed. “If you were paying attention to what I said, I was actually attempting to persuade him to stay with us.”

“So I was wrong?” Harry asked skeptically. “You do want him to stay?”

“As was stated, it will be a little cramped, but I’m sure you’ll appreciate his presence. I can’t have you fighting with my godson during his entire stay so Weasley being around would be… a most welcome distraction, I should think.”

Was he wrong, then? Had he mistook the situation in the kitchen? Severus looked completely serious now so maybe he had. Harry cast a silencing charm just in case Severus hadn’t been casting one before and looked at him carefully.

“Did you change your mind about the ritual? Is that why you’re doing this?”

Severus gave him a surprised look. “Again with this? Why would you think that?”

“Well, you don’t like the Weasleys- except for Rose... and Hermione maybe- and yet you’re trying to get Charlie to stay. Is there a reason for it?”

“None at all. I merely thought you might appreciate his presence.”

“I don’t believe you,” Harry told him a moment later. “Sorry, but I don’t. I think Blaise thought the same thing, that you were trying to get Charlie out of here. Is there a reason? Do you know something I don’t?”

“Potter, what earthly reason would I have for wanting to get rid of him? Hmm?”

“I don’t have a clue. I mean, it’d be one thing if you were acting like this ‘cause you and me... but that’s not- I don’t know. You’re not making sense and even Blaise and Malfoy are picking up on it. So what’s with you?”
“Perhaps I am distrustful of him. One Weasley was already proven to be a traitor. Who’s to say there’s not another in the family?”

“You’re kidding, right? Never mind the fact that his leg is ruined for life from fighting, um, him. Nope. Ignore that and yep, he totally is a traitor. Let’s sic the Order on him.”

“I do not appreciate your humor.”

“I don’t appreciate you acting weird. Stop it. Charlie’s not bothering you and even if he were to stay here, nothing would change.”

“Are you quite sure?”

Ahh. So was that why Severus was acting like this?

“Did anything change when Malfoy stayed? I dislike him as much as you seem not to like Charlie.”

“It’s not the same.”

“Why? Because Charlie’s gay? You think if he stays, I’m gonna start mooning over him and stop doing my job?”

“I don’t know, boy. If you found yourself mooning over Weasley, would you?”

“You should know better, Snape. Of course I wouldn’t stop.”

“How should I know? The only man who has visited for a long period of time has been Draco. You haven’t had opportunity to prove you wouldn’t start acting like a fool.”

“Oh, my god. You are jealous. You think I’m just going to leave you and all my duties behind if he stays. Admit it.”

“That is a completely untrue and utterly laughable claim to make, boy. Do you truly believe that?”

“Fine. If it’s not true even a little, maybe I should go tell Charlie I need him to stay. Obviously you-”

“You will do no such thing.”

HA! He bloody knew it.

“You can’t control who seeks shelter at the safe house,” Harry quipped. Severus scowled and Harry sighed. “Seriously, this whole thing is ridiculous. Even if Charlie stays, I’m not going to start liking him like that. He’s not my type. Plus his family’s like family so…”

“When have you had time to establish a type?”

“That’s what you choose to say? My God, Snape. Have you been drinking?” Harry started for the kitchen, but stopped. “Are you done acting like this? It’s just really weird and you’re worrying your godson. Not that I care much about him, but you do.”

“If it will soothe Draco’s mind, I suppose I will desist my attempts to get Weasley to stay,” Severus said, head held high. “By all means, let’s send him off to Grimmauld Place to live alone. I don’t care. I truly didn’t want him to stay.”

“Obviously.”
“Yes. My dinner is growing cold. Will you be standing there all night?”

Harry rolled his eyes, turned his back on Severus, and forced a cheery grin as he breezed back into the kitchen.

"Hello. Sorry that took so long. Would anyone like a drink refill while I'm still up?"

Severus snorted and reclaimed his seat. Harry automatically refilled his glass before moving on to the cups Blaise and Charlie held up. Draco ignored him, too busy staring at Severus. After refreshing his own tea, Harry sat down and silently began eating again. Draco huffed a moment later and put his elbows on the table.

"So are you really not going to answer me?"

Severus spared Draco a quick glance. "I am finished discussing the matter."

Draco grinned and ate his last bite of dinner.

"This is really weird," Draco grumbled. "I'm not the only one who thinks that, right?"

"No," Blaise quietly stated, "you're not."

Charlie cleared his throat. "What's the verdict? Do I need to stay or can I go?"

"Like I said, Charlie, you can stay if you want, but I'll be fine if you don't. I promise I'm not being abused when we're alone. I would have said something by now."

Merlin. How many more times does he have to answer questions like this before he gets it?

"There's my answer. I'll be leaving then."

"What a pity," Severus commented, voice dripping sarcasm. "I was so looking forward to your company all hours of the day and night."

Had he sort of paused before saying ‘and night’ there at the end? If so, why? Charlie tensed and shot a nasty glare Severus's way. Harry pointedly cleared his throat.

“…I think this is the part,” Harry said loudly, using Charlie’s words from earlier that day, “where someone randomly starts talking about something completely off the wall.”

"Longbottom's got a thing for men," Blaise immediately stated. Harry jerked in surprise and directed his gaze down the table. Draco was suspiciously staring at him. Again. "No, it's true. I believe he might be bisexual, but I've never thought to ask."

Severus’s brows rose. Harry already knew about Neville, of course. He was simply surprised Blaise had so quickly taken him up on his suggestion.

"Wow. Okay, so that's something. Totally nailed the off the wall thing. Anyone else?"

Draco glanced between him and Severus. "Are we really doing this?" Severus nodded and Draco's brows furrowed. "Ehm, alright. Dumbledore has a new obsession with walnuts. They're in everything he eats now."

Blaise chuckled. "He even attempted to add them to his tea."
"That's... weird. Good one."

"Fred and George opened a new store in London."

Harry's brows rose. "Um, that doesn't seem like a good idea."

"They've been getting a lot of business," Charlie explained. "Undetectable by muggles. You know."

"Oh. Cool."

"Have we finished with this now?" Severus asked. "You've successfully calmed down certain guests and I've tired of this whole thing."

Harry shrugged. "Might as well be. If there was something important I should know, someone would have said it by now."

"Yes, I would have."

Draco gave Severus a weird look and they all fell silent, finishing up their dinner (or drink, in Harry's case) without broaching another topic.

He could already tell this was going to be a long two weeks.
Blaise slipped into the kitchen and Harry briefly looked up from Severus's book before taking a sip of coffee and returning his attention to the page before him. Blaise had a gash running down his side, blood seeping into his shirt, and was cursing violently as he healed himself.

It was their first full day at the safe house and nearing the afternoon so of course the three Slytherins were practicing their dueling. Harry hadn't bothered to complain when Severus had warned him earlier. Rather, he'd thrown a mean look his way and entered the kitchen. He'd been in there since, not even speaking when one of the three would come in to take a break, because there hadn't been a point. If they wanted to kill themselves, let them.

When Draco came sliding into the kitchen on his back, Harry turned a page. When Severus cursed long and loud upon being hit with some obviously painful spell, Harry refilled his coffee. When Blaise returned yet again to get some water, Harry started a new chapter. When Severus limped into the kitchen and groaned while sitting, Harry lowered his book.

When he saw the blood soaking through his shirt, Harry dropped the book on the table and hurried over.

"Don't touch it," Severus warned, slapping at his hands. Harry pulled them out of reach and then succeeded in getting the man's shirt open. He gasped and pulled his wand from his pocket. "Stop it. I can heal myself, boy."

"But you're not. You're just sitting there." Harry silently ran his wand above the jagged gash and Severus didn't stop him. "Who did this?"

"Blaise. He's an excellent dueler. I'm quite proud of his expertise, in fact. It's taken years for me to teach him everything I know."

Harry ducked down and checked both of Severus's legs. There had to be a reason he was limping.

"If he's so good, why is he still practicing?"

"Without practice, one's skill at anything begins to wane. Take your duties around here for instance. I've been in here several times the past three hours and you've not once offered me a beverage."

"Oh, is that my job? I wasn't aware."

"Left ankle." Severus narrowed his eyes. "You're upset."

"Here?"

"No."

"How about-"

Severus jerked in pain. "There. I do believe it's fractured. I'll need to brew a potion later. Now why are you upset?"

Harry used a temporary bone-mending spell on Severus's left ankle and then looked up, brows raised.
"Am I?"

"Am I mistaken, then?" Harry shrugged and moved away from him. "I knew it. What is the problem?"

"Nothing."

Severus pulled in a deep breath and stared at him a moment. He then shook his head, buttoned his shirt, and furrowed his brows.

"Tell me what is wrong. Why are you upset? Who is to blame?"

"No. No reason. No one."

"We didn't awaken you with a duel so that cannot be it. Draco has minded his tongue, likely because he doesn't want to starve so again, that cannot be it. Has Blaise angered you?"

"No."

"Mm. Have I angered you?"

"Nope."

"But I have found the culprit. Annoyance, then. Have I annoyed you?"

"Not today."

"Insulted you perhaps?"

"Not today."

"Have I irritated you?"

"Not today."

"Do you feel I have somehow slighted you?"

"Not today."

"Very well. It must be... about the duel. You were rather pleasant this morning and even asked what I desired for today's meals. You weren't acting like this until three hours ago so that must be it. A duel in general wouldn't incite you, but perhaps my allowing the duel to take place in the house would. Am I correct?"

"Close."

"Close," Severus repeated. "Is it that I'm allowing the three of us to duel without possible medical aid being available if necessary?"

"Nope."

"Did you expect me to ask your permission before I did what I wished, just as I always will?"

Harry scoffed. "No."

"I'm relieved. Truly. I must admit I have no idea why you're acting so pissy, brat."
"I'm not."

Harry picked Severus's book back up and began reading. He heard a disgruntled huff, but didn't look up.

"You might consider telling me why you're upset."

"I'm not upset."

"Right," Severus drawled. "Tell me."

"I'm not upset." Severus kept glaring at him- he could feel it- and Harry sighed. "Resigned, yes, exasperated maybe. Until you're done trying to kill yourselves in my home, however temporary it may be, you're on your own with getting drinks and shite. I'm not helping you do it."

"Just when you think I need healing..."

Harry glanced at Severus, shrugged, and returned his attention to his borrowed book. Blaise and Draco barreled into the kitchen at that moment and sat at the table while making an absolute racket.

"Want to go another round?" Blaise asked. "Draco finally got the best of me and I feel I need to practice a little more."

"Git."

"I feel dueling anymore today will upset Potter more than he already is."

"So?"


"Seriously, he doesn't look upset to me and what does it even matter?"

"I simply do not wish to deal with it right now, Draco. Have you two straightened the living room? Potter cleaned just this morning, you'll remember."

Silence settled over the kitchen and Harry nearly looked up to see what was going on.

"Um, yes," Blaise finally answered. "Yes, it's clean again. Unless we- did you banish the blood on the wall?"

There was blood on the wall? Whose?

"Yeah. It's gone."

"Good. Boy?"

Harry waited another few moments and then put his book down so he could grab some coffee for Severus. Why did Severus never practice dueling with him? He needed the practice as much as- if not more than- those two. It did no good being locked up down here if a simple spell took him down during the final battle. Maybe he'd ask sometime why they never practiced together.

"Malfoy? Er, um, Blaise? Coffee?"

"Why did you call him by his first name?"
"Because I don't hate him."

"Just me and Severus."

"No, I don't hate him, either."

Severus sighed. "Stop it right now."

"What? I don't hate you."

"Yes, I am aware of that. If you two cannot be civil, don't speak to each other."

Harry shrugged.

"I would like some coffee, yes, unless tea wouldn't be too difficult to make," Blaise spoke, eyeing him closely. "No one seems to know where anything is in here, otherwise I would do it myself."

"Tea," Harry said and grabbed the kettle from a cabinet. "Malfoy?"

"Coffee. Whatever beans you've found, Severus, make excellent coffee. It's the best I've had in a while."

"He knows," Harry commented. He caught Severus's grumpy look and chuckled. "Oh, sorry. No, it's terrible coffee. Mud-like. What was it? Just slightly better than licking a thestral's arse, right?"

"Shut up, brat."

Harry grinned. "Fine. Still want chicken tacos for lunch?"

From the corner of his eye, Harry saw Draco sit up straight and look his way.

"I wouldn't say I want-"

"Chicken tacos?"

"One of the recipes the young Mrs. Weasley recently sent him, I believe. Have you tried them?"

"She made them when she was knocked up. Well, the first time."

"Were they palatable?"

"They weren't repulsive."

So he really liked them. Hmm. Wonder if Severus will, too.

"I suppose you can continue your plan to make them, then, boy."

"While I'm thinking about it, what sounds good for dessert tonight? You never said. I used the cherries on the cake so cobbler's out, but maybe strawberry pie?"

"Strawberry pie," Blaise mused. "I've never tried it. Is it good?"

"I think so. I'm sure Malfoy and Se...nape would say something else."

Blaise gave him a look and Harry knew he'd heard his almost slip, but he didn't say anything about it and Harry was glad of it.
"Well, if they can't think of anything, you could do the pie. Strawberry's one of the few I haven't tried yet and I'm curious."

"Strawberry pie," Severus said, "seems to be in order."

"Lattice top okay or do you like more crust on your pies, Blaise?"

"Ehm... Severus?"

"Lattice."

"What he said, then."

Harry nodded and grabbed the thawed chicken from the sink, the cutting board from the cabinet above the counter, and his favorite knife.

"Please do not sever any fingers today, boy. I'm in no mood to deal with that, either."

"You deal with it?" Draco asked curiously. "Doesn't he know how to heal himself?"

"Shut it, Malfoy."

"Brat," Severus warned. Harry rolled his eyes and kept chopping up chicken. "Your coffee's growing cold, Draco. I suggest you drink up rather than asking me pointless questions."

Blaise snickered.

***

"...lying on the couch with you, though."

"Lower your voice, Draco. Potter's sleeping and I will not have you waking him up and putting him in a foul mood. He's positively whiny when he's woken before he's ready."

"Fine, but why's he sleeping by-"

"He was already lying there when I entered," Blaise explained. "Severus arrived soon after and sat in his normal seat. Potter just stretched out more. What in Merlin's name are you even thinking?"

"I wish I knew."

"Might I suggest you stop thinking in general? It may give you a little peace." Harry rolled from his belly to his side and yawned. "Boy?"

"Mmm?"

"Are you awake?"

"Yeah."

"Are you truly awake or sleep talking again?"

"Maybe."

Severus snorted. "Brat, open your eyes."

"Don't wanna."
"Sounds awake to me."

"I am. Whaddaya want?"

"Why are you still sleeping? You've been unconscious for hours."

"Didn't sleep well last night."

"Why?"

"Do we even want to know?"

"Draco."

"Boy?"

"Bad dreams. Not Him."

"That is reassuring. Nothing prophetic, then?"

"Nah."

Harry slowly opened his eyes and blinked a few times. Blaise was looking at him, brow arched, and Draco was presumably staring at Severus.

"He's had prophetic dreams?"

"One of the Dark Lord's machinations," Severus replied. "We've gotten it under control, though."

"Yep," Harry agreed.

"Dumbledore never mentioned this. For that matter, neither did you. Why not?"

"Is it any concern of yours, Draco? I assure you I didn't withhold this information to keep you in the dark. I merely felt it was Potter's concern only and you needn't be bothered with something you couldn't personally take care of."

"Yeah, but in your letters, you tell me everything. You never even hinted at this."

"Draco, I do not give you a detailed account of my entire day. If I were to write you about everything that happens around here on a daily basis, you would stop reading my letters. I tell you what you need to know and withhold that which is none of your concern."

Harry looked at Severus curiously. Severus considered his whole bored housewife thing to be none of Draco's concern, he knew, but what else hadn't he been telling Draco?

"What else haven't you told me?" Draco pushed, voicing Harry's own thought. "About a new relationship perhaps?"

Severus stilled. "Don't be absurd, Draco."

"Well, it'd make sense. You're already keeping important things from me. What's one more thing?"

Blaise was staring at his clasped hands, brows furrowed, and Harry frowned at him. Draco was making a point of not looking at him and instead stared unwaveringly at Severus. Harry glanced at Severus, too. He had an arched brow and thinned lips.
"Don't you think I'd tell you if I embarked on any sort of new relationship, Draco?" Severus paused and briefly looked over at Harry. "Especially one with him."

"Maybe not. You keep enough to yourself."

"Have you ever known me to withhold any information that specifically affects you?"

"Well, no, but last time I was here, you and Potter did act pretty cozy. You forget I caught you in bed. Maybe it wasn't an act."

Harry's eyes widened.

"What?" Blaise spluttered. "You caught them in bed together?"

"Potter had a nightmare and wouldn't get out of my bed. Bear in mind that at the time, he was under control of a pregnancy simulator and was incredibly hormonal. It was easier to surrender a portion of my bed than to argue with him."

"Pregnancy... simulator?" Blaise asked curiously. "Alright. I think I'd like to hear the story behind that one later. So he was in your bed and-"

"He slept beside me. That is all, Blaise. If I recall correctly, I did tell him to leave my bed when he'd calmed down. I'm assuming he fell asleep before that happened."

"And you did, too?"

"Obviously. It was very late."

Blaise met Harry's gaze and briefly narrowed his eyes in thought. Then, a slow smirk came to his lips.

"Oh, wow. I should've guessed."

"Point of this whole thing is," Harry announced and sat up. "Malfoy is so crazy, he's begun to be suspicious of you, sir, Blaise better just keep his mouth shut, and I... Well, I didn't do anything."

"This time. You will, though."

Harry snorted. "Because I want to have you yelling at me? Right."

"Why should Blaise keep his mouth shut? What do you know?"

"I know nothing," Blaise answered Draco's question calmly. "Potter's as crazy as you."

Severus cast a suspicious look between Harry and Blaise.

"I'm not crazy."

"You were just accusing your godfather of being in an intimate relationship with Potter."

"For all I know, maybe he is. Maybe he's attracted to men and just hasn't told me." Severus jolted, but Draco didn't notice. Harry did, though, and gave him a worried look. "He apparently has no qualms about keeping things from me."

"So Severus didn't tell you about Potter's nightmares and naturally you jump to them having a secret relationship. Right. That makes sense."
Harry shifted uncomfortably.

"Things would make more sense," Draco stressed. "Even you've picked up on the way they act around each other, Blaise."

"I was merely asking if they'd put things in the past to make their present a little more tolerable. You'll remember Hermione Weasley wondered the same. I wasn't meaning to make you think I thought they were shagging each other. Besides, if Severus was interested in men, he could choose a hell of a lot worse than the man who's prepared to die for us all if need be."

Severus glanced between him, Blaise, and Draco. Meanwhile, Harry snuck a peek at Severus before focusing on Blaise once more. What was Blaise talking about? Harry was positive he'd figured out about the ritual, but had he seen something to make him say that stuff? Like any of the housewife stuff? Had he seen that? If so, was he trying to say he was cool with it— even though it didn't mean anything to him or Severus— or was he just thinking too hard about this?

"-hates him. If he was going to suddenly come out of the closet, why choose him?"

"Well, as far as that goes, I don't know. I have no idea what... inclined men find attractive about other men, but I'm sure Potter's got some of that down. I mean, he's willing to face death to save the world—"

"Please be a little more dramatic."

"That is what he is doing, Draco. He also stuck up for Severus to his own friends so he must be somewhat kind, though it's true I don't know his motive for doing so. He's an excellent cook, he can do his own laundry, and knows how to clean without magic... which is saying something. He's at least passably brave to be able to hold his own against, er, Him as many times as he has. All I'm saying is there's enough there, right?"

"Since this conversation doesn't seem to involve either Potter or me, I'm going to take my mid-morning coffee in the kitchen."

"I'll join you," Harry decided. "It's a little weird out here for me."

"See," Draco nearly yelled the moment they were out of the room. "Severus leaves, Potter inevitably follows. They're still rooming together even though there have been two bedrooms since I left. Potter pees with Severus in the room, for hell's sake."

"Coffee?" Severus asked.

"Yeah."

"Perhaps it was easiest simply to stay where they were after you left. No reason to move things around when everything's perfectly fine where it's at now. And they've been down here for a while and most of that has been on their own. I'm sure they're used to needing to be together for company."

"Snack, too, sir?"

"And I needn't point out you urinate with me in the bathroom, as well. Do I need to worry you've developed—"

"Not right now."
"That's not funny, you prat."

"What worries you more-" Blaise began.

"Pass the sugar," Severus said, eyes on the kitchen door. Harry tapped his arm and held up his coffee, which already had the right amount of milk and sugar.

"-that Severus might be interested in men-

"Thank you, brat."

"-or that he might be interested in Potter?"

"Which is just stupid," Harry said towards the door. "Welcome, sir."

"I wouldn't care if Severus slept with the entire gay male population of England. I care that he might want Potter."

Severus's expression was indescribable. It was kind of like a mix between amusement, shock, horror, and worry, but not. Again, indescribable.

"Why, though? Of everyone, I'm sure Potter would be the best choice he could make. After all, he wouldn't be doing it for Severus's fame, a passing grade-" Harry snorted. "-or his money."

"Whatever there may be left when I've finished replacing the furniture you've sullied in my quarters at Hogwarts, he means."

"We always left," Draco said after a moment. "It'd be weird if we stayed."

"Incredibly and I'm glad of it." Harry smirked and Severus scowled at him. "Are you quite done with this strange topic, Draco? It's simply ridiculous. You sound ridiculous and that is disappointing."

"No, but I will change the subject if you're not ready to confess anything to me."

"Do you really think he has something to confess? Hmm. Well, if there is something he hasn't told you," Blaise mused, "I'm not so sure it's what you think."

There was silence for several long seconds.

"…Am I really the only one that thinks this?"

"Nobody else said anything when we all came down."

"Maybe it is all in my head," Draco murmured. "After all, I haven't seen Severus often in the year or so since he left… He could’ve changed."

"I think they both did. If you’ll notice, they’re both still alive and the house isn’t destroyed. I think the Severus and Potter that came down here would have killed each other by now if they hadn’t changed. Think about it."

"Basically a survival instinct?"

Severus finally relaxed.

"Yeah, I think so."
“So I really am making something out of nothing. That’s what you think?”

“Yes.”

“Well, if you really think so, I suppose I’ll let it go.”

Severus looked at the ceiling and mouthed, "thank you." Harry frowned at him and realized he actually felt bad for Draco. At some point, he was gonna learn about the ritual. It wasn't a relationship, but it would probably be enough for Draco to freak out all over again.

"Any more coffee left?"

"Uh, yeah," Harry replied distractedly, "but I'm not bringing it to you so get in here."

"As if I truly expected you to, Potter. Merlin."

***

When Harry woke up the next morning, the beginning of Draco and Blaise's third day with them, Severus was sitting on the side of his own bed and staring at Harry with his hands clasped together in his lap. Thinking he'd slept late again, Harry conjured the time and frowned. He focused on Severus once more and rubbed the pillow crease from his cheek.

"It's only seven and I just woke up so why are you looking at me like I've already done something wrong?"

"It has been nearly five days since you last touched yourself, brat, and I demand to know what's wrong with you."

Harry jolted up in bed. "What?"

"You have never before gone this long without one of your special showers. I want to know why. Are Blaise and Draco's presences putting you off?"

Harry stared at him for what felt like a long time. Had he seriously been sitting there waiting for him to wake up just so he could ask why he hadn't gotten himself off? This was too weird. Was he still dreaming? Harry pinched himself and jerked. Nope, he was awake.

"I, uh, just haven't felt like it."

"You haven't felt like it or you're too embarrassed to ask me for a silencing charm?"

"Well, a little of both, I guess."

"Both statements cannot be true unless the idea of asking me for a charm is partially why you haven't felt like it. Are you afraid I'll judge you for doing exactly what you've been doing since day one? Isn't it a little late to be worrying about that, boy?"

"I just didn't wanna annoy you. Plus, Malfy and Blaise being here is kinda messing with me."

"Hmm. It may comfort you to know they're both still asleep. If you wished to take a shower, now would be the ideal time to do it."

Harry blinked. "...Okay? This is really weird, sir."

"Potter, I'm merely trying to make my life easier. When you go longer than two days without
"When we first arrived, you would become tense and quarrelsome. You did something wrong, I was blamed. You burnt your hand on the stove, I made you do it. The coffee was old, the world was out to get you. Lately, you're more likely to follow me around talking my ear off or to sit there silently staring at me. I'm not sure which is worse."

Harry flushed. "I don't do that."

"You do."

"Are you lying?"

"No."

"Oh. I've never noticed."

"Clearly," Severus drawled. "So for my own peace of mind, will you please go take a shower? I nearly killed you last night when we were preparing for bed. Never have I had anyone follow me from the kitchen to the bedroom, into the closet, back to the bedroom, and then to the bathroom, where that same person sat on the counter and stared at me and talked away while I attempted to brush my teeth."

"Oh," Harry repeated. He seriously hadn't even noticed. How long has Severus known he does that? "Sorry. I didn't realize I was bothering you that badly."

"That is because you didn't ask."

***

About an hour later, Harry was whistling and bustling about the kitchen making breakfast while Severus eyed him with a cup of coffee in hand.

"You are in an annoyingly cheerful mood," Severus noted.

"Yes, I am," Harry agreed. A door opened down the hall and he wondered if the guys were finally getting up. "Want bacon, sausage, or ham? No, wait. You don't like ham for breakfast. Never mind that one."

"Why bother asking? You're already cooking a little of all three."

"So I know which to serve you, of course."

"Hmm. The sausage." Severus took a slow sip of coffee and furrowed his brows. "Why aren't you attempting to talk my ear off?"

"I'm too busy whistling."

"I would rather the talking than the whistling. You're tone deaf."

"Oh, I am not," Harry retorted as Blaise and then Draco entered the kitchen. "Good morning, you sleepyheads. Hungry?"

"What did you do to him?" Draco asked Severus. "He's even more annoying than yesterday."
Severus snickered and Harry looked at him in horror. He'd noticed, too? Did Draco know what it had meant?

"I haven't done anything to him, Draco. The boy is simply in a good mood."

"And cooking for an army," Blaise pointed out. "Looks good, though."


"If you find it so terrible, you can cook for yourself, Malfoy."

Harry smiled goodnaturedly, mostly just to mess with Draco's head, and grabbed some plates from the cabinet.

"Okay, I think I actually agree with Draco now. He's acting really weird. Seriously, what have you done, Severus?"

"I haven't done a thing. Bacon, ham, or sausage?"

"What?"

"For breakfast. The boy's going to ask shortly so I-"

"Yep, he's done something. You don't change the subject unless you're guilty. Blaise, now do you think there might be something going on between-"

"No," Blaise huffed. "When has he ever kept something like that from you?"

"Never," Draco grumbled.

"It almost sounds like he's disappointed there's nothing going on," Harry pointed out cheerfully. Severus looked stunned by his statement and Harry snorted. "Please try not to look so appalled. I was joking."

"It wasn't funny," Draco said coldly. "And of course I'm not disappointed. Don't be stupid."

Severus was staring at his godson almost like he didn't know who he was and Harry, just preparing to divide food among their plates, paused to frown at him. Before anyone could catch him looking, though, Harry dove back in to his work.

"Er, uh, ham, sausage, or bacon, Blaise? Malfoy?"

"Severus doesn't like ham for breakfast," Draco informed him, as if he didn't know. "So why make it?"

"Because Blaise might. You might."

"But not you?"

Harry shrugged. "It's alright. Better in soup or something, though."

"Hmm. Bacon and sausage."

"Just ham," Blaise commented and then apparently surprising himself, judging by his expression, said, "Thanks."
"You're welcome." Harry turned and smiled at their plates. A Slytherin—besides Severus—had told him thanks. Awesome. "Does anyone want any muffins or rolls? We still have some left over."

"Which muffins are they again?" Severus asked. "If they are the blueberry streusel, no. If, however—"

"They're the banana nut chocolate chip."

"Ah. Yes, one of those."

Harry grabbed two of the muffins—Severus's favorites—and put them to one side of his plate.

"...Right," Draco said quietly. "Roll."

"Regular or honey butter?"

"Severus?"

"Honey."

Harry gave Severus his plate, grabbed the dish of honey butter from the fridge, and soon delivered Draco's plate. When he realized Blaise hadn't answered, Harry turned with a frown. Blaise was directing a frown of his own at Draco.

"Blaise?"

"Hmm?"

"Muffin or roll?"

"Oh. R- What type of muffins were they?"

"Are you alright?"

"Distracted by my thoughts," Blaise explained. "The muffins?"

"Banana nut chocolate chip."

"Okay. Muffin."

Harry frowned at him a second longer and then turned to grab their breakfasts. He slid Blaise's to him and sat down with his own.

"Oh, yeah." Harry stood back up. "Drinks?"

"Sit down, boy. They are able to find their own beverages. You needn't wait on them hand and foot."

"But I'm already getting myself one and it looks like you need a refill," he said pointedly. "So drinks, you two?"

Severus harrumphed and Harry bit his bottom lip to stop a smile. Gravely wounded, he was.

"Coffee for both of us," Blaise answered smoothly when it became clear Draco was too busy staring at his godfather once again. "Draco, what is wrong with you this morning?"

"Nothing you want to hear about," he muttered. Louder he said, "Nothing."
"Ah. You're suspicious again."

"Perhaps."

Harry and Severus shared a look. After a moment, Severus sighed quietly and nodded imperceptibly. Harry returned it with a small, tight smile. Glad they'd gotten that taken care of.

"Draco, after the meal, I feel we should have a private discussion about this suspicion of yours."

"Fine."

Blaise twisted around to look at Harry and then nodded when he found an answer to whatever question he was thinking.

"While you're doing that, I think I should see how badly Potter, Harry's dueling skills have become."

"I would prefer you not, Blaise," Severus immediately spoke up. "He hasn't dueled at all since we've been here and I would like to be present when it happens. I wouldn't know how to begin explaining to Albus if you accidentally kill him."

"If it would make you happy."

Realizing he'd just been staring, Harry quickly handed off Blaise and Draco's coffees, refilled and fixed up Severus's coffee, and sat back down with his own coffee.

"So before I forget..." Or things become too awkward to ask later. "What does everyone want for dinner tonight? I feel like making something special."

"Make whatever you want, boy. It likely won't matter much."

"I want pot pie," Draco announced suddenly. "Like Mother used to have made. Do you remember, Severus? You could tell him what's in it."

Harry's brow rose. It was interesting having Draco ask for something. That never happened. "Beef, chicken, or pork?"

"Make beef," Severus replied. "I'm finished with this, boy. Draco, when you're done, meet-"

"I'm done," Draco interrupted. "For now, at least. Potter, don't throw out my breakfast in case I'm hungry later."

Harry looked to Severus. "Should I save yours?"

"You may if you wish."

Harry nodded and watched Severus follow Draco from the room. Blaise cast a silent spell at the door and then turned to him.

"Is he going to tell Draco what's going on?"

"Yes."

"Odd how Draco thinks you two are together, but doesn't even suspect that Severus is the one doing the ritual with you."
"I thought you'd figured it out."

Blaise nodded. "But you and Severus aren't together."

"No, we're not."

"...do you want to be?"

"I knew it!" Draco screamed. "Bloody Merlin's damned sweaty mother-fu-"

A door slammed shut and Harry jumped. Blaise, concerned, looked at the kitchen doorway.

"Draco, I didn't feel the-"

Another door slammed shut, abrupt silence followed Severus's words, and Harry and Blaise shared a look.

"Draco must've cast a silencing charm on the bedroom. I wonder when that happened. I do hope he's not angry. Though, I do think you were right earlier."

"About what?"

"When you were joking about Draco being disappointed. Now don't give me that look. I know him well enough to know when I see disappointment in his eyes."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"You think he was disappointed."

"I do."

"That me and Snape-"

"I know you want to call him Severus. You might as well. No one's here to hear you."

"You are."

Blaise smirked. "You didn't deny it, though."

"Shut up."

"Yes, to answer the question you didn't finish, I do. It's no secret Draco wishes his godfather would find someone to make him happy."

"And he thinks I could do that?" Harry asked in disbelief. "No way. If anything, he'd think I'd make him miserable."

"No," Blaise mused. "He knows better. He's noticed how well you take care of Severus. They are the same reasons I voiced before. You feed him, make sure he has clean clothing, you willingly admitted to we three Slytherins that you don't hate him, you stuck up for him in front of your own friends regardless of how they might've reacted, you treat him with respect now, you find comfort in his, er, bed... and Draco's even worked out how exactly you keep Severus out of pain."

"What?"
"Really now," Blaise huffed. "Draco's not an idiot. He knows about Severus's knee and you weren't exactly subtle when discussing that massaging bit when we all visited as a whole."

"Oh, he noticed that, did he?"

"Yes. Perhaps he's willing to overlook the fact that you're a man and, well, you if it will make his godfather happy."

Harry frowned. "How can you be sure, though?"

"Draco told me as much."

Harry jolted (seriously, second time of the day?) and nearly fell out of his chair. Literally. Using the hand he had on the ground, he pushed against the ground and righted himself in his chair once more. Blaise was giving him a shrewd look.

"Are you... um, did he really say that?"

"Yes."

"Wow."

"Mhmm."

"Did he suspect... about Sn-Severus?"

"That he was gay? Most definitely. He's been trying to convince me nightly since we arrived. As I said, he's willing to overlook a lot in order to make Severus happy."

"Not that it matters. He wouldn't want me, but I am worried about him. Because he's a good man, I mean." Harry huffed. "What I really mean is Malfoy's not gonna hate him when Severus finally finds someone, is he? Because it's a guy, that is.

"As long as Severus is happy, he won't care." Blaise stood to get his own coffee refill and cleared his throat. "Why do you think Severus wouldn't want you?"

"I'm me," Harry replied slowly. It seemed obvious to him. Time for a subject change. "You said something about dueling?"

"And Severus said something about not doing it without him."

"Oh, that's right."

"You can't get away from him, can you?" Blaise smiled kindly. It was odd. "But never mind that, because you clearly don't want to talk about it anymore. Since we still have the time, care to tell me about the pregnancy simulator incident Severus mentioned?"

"What about it?" Harry asked uncomfortably.

"I see direct questions would be better than asking for an explanation. Why take the potion in the first place?"

"I wanted to."

"You planned to carry your children, then."
"Still do."
"Huh. Seems experiencing it didn't put you off to the idea. Did you enjoy it?"
"Yeah."
"Did Severus?"
"I don't know. Don't think so."
"I might ask sometime. For my own amusement, of course."
Harry rolled his eyes. "Of course."
"How did it come about that Draco caught you in bed with Severus?"
"I had a nightmare."
"Clearly a bad one," Blaise said, searching his expression for something. "Did he try to get you out of his bed?"
"Well-"
"-then I'm happy for you," Draco suddenly said. "You have my blessing. Pursue... whomever."
"I have no intentions of pursuing anyone at the moment, Draco, but I am glad you've such an open mind. This conversation was long overdue."
"Yeah. Just do me a favor and keep the kissing and everything to yourself. I don't wanna see it."
"As if I would truly allow you to witness such a thing, Merlin, Draco. Where is your sense?"
"I was just saying."
"Yes, I know what you were saying. Boy."
Harry looked at Blaise, stood up, and walked to the kitchen doorway. He tentatively looked out and was immensely relieved Draco didn't look disgusted or mad as hell.
"Yeah?"
"How long ago did the coffee go off?"
"Ehm." He had no idea and glanced back into the kitchen for some help from Blaise, but he only shrugged. "I don't know."
"Were you planning to make some anytime soon?"
"You could both use a cup, huh?"
Severus just nodded.

***

Three days later, Harry was in the middle of switching their clean clothing from the washer to the dryer when the laundry room door quietly opened. He was expecting Severus or perhaps Blaise, who had become actually friendly since he'd first showed up, so he was understandably surprised
to see Draco standing in the doorway.

"What do you want? As you can tell, I am obviously busy."

Harry held up a pile of clothing to make his point and realized Severus's pants were visible. He hurriedly stuffed everything into the washer. Draco didn't speak until he'd turned back to him.

"I demand to know what your intentions for Severus are."

"What are you talking about?"

"I've been thinking logically. You two have been here alone for quite a long time now so I knew there must be a reason he's decided now to tell me about his preference for men."

"Maybe he just felt it was time."

"Don't give me that. There must be a reason he confessed and no one else has been around to make him feel the need to do such a thing. So tell me. What are your intentions?"

One of Harry's brows arched. "Alright. I intend to start dinner in about an hour and then I fully intend to feed him. Is that good enough?"

"I think you know what I mean, Potter." Harry shoved past him and Draco followed him down the hall to Severus's and his bedroom. "Answer me. I'll not have you hurting him. Do you actually care for him or not?"

"Malfoy, I'm going to take off my pants," he said calmly, expression blank. "Seriously. You follow me into our bedroom, they're coming off."

"I don't believe you."

"Alright."

Harry headed towards his bed, smiled when he didn't hear footsteps following him, and prepared to lie down for a nap before he started dinner. However, that happy plan was shot all to hell when the bedroom door slammed open.

"It's just that I know your type. You people use whoever you can and- What are you-"

A cry of distress and revulsion ripped from Draco's throat. He hurriedly slammed the door shut and, after pulling his pants and jeans back up, Harry stretched out on his bed once more. A moment later, Severus chuckled.

"He did warn you, did he not, Draco?"

"Are you two-"

"I'm beginning to think you want him and me to be more than roommates."

"Don't be ridiculous. Of course I don't."

Harry drifted off smiling.

***

Blaise tapped his wand against his thigh.
"You've done this before. Tap into your memory, get in the right mindset, and let's go again."

"Do you know how long it's been since I've had to fight?"

"Yes. You clearly haven't practiced."

"Not since I've been down here."

They both cast a glance at the kitchen door. Severus was on the other side.

"Yes, well, until recently, I would have said that was impossible. Again."

Blaise flung his hand up and Harry easily blocked his move. It gave him the confidence to fight harder and soon, they were both giving the duel everything they had.

Not that it meant much. Unlike him, Blaise had kept his skills sharpened; he hadn't, unfortunately, so it was no surprise when Blaise won. Harry shuffled into the kitchen and healed the jagged cuts on his shoulder as he leaned against the counter.

"Good fight, Blaise."

"Thanks."

Severus cleared his throat. "How badly did it go?"

"Well..." Harry looked over at Severus. "As badly as you expect. I lost."

"Hmm. We'll have to save a bit of time each day to hone your skills, boy."

"I was going to say the same," he agreed and then stopped. "I thought your godson was in here."

"Apart from meals, I haven't really seen him since you exposed yourself to him this morning. I have no idea what he's doing."

"Oh. That's weird. You guys didn't fight, did you?"

"Not that I'm aware of, no." Severus took a sip of coffee and eyed his shirt. Specifically, the patch of blood staining his shirt. "You'll need to take care of that mess. Your shirt is ripped and bloodied and I recall you saying it's your favorite."

"I should, yeah. Be right back."

Harry walked out of the kitchen, through the living room, and down the hall leading to the bedrooms. When he walked into his room, he was incredibly surprised to see Draco asleep on Severus's bed. He honestly didn't know what to make of it and wasn't sure if he should wake him up or not. Why was he in here?

After changing his shirt, he walked to the side of Severus's bed and reached out a hand to shake Draco's shoulder.

"Wha?"

"You're not in your bed."

"Yah..."
A second later, a snore slipped from his mouth and Harry shook his head. He carefully tended to his shirt, headed back to the kitchen, and gave Severus a look upon entering.

"I found your godson."

"I heard you speaking, but you were remarkably quiet. What's going on?"

"He's sleeping." Harry paused and Severus gave him a curious look. "In your bed."

"When he was younger and felt troubled, he used to sleep in his parents' bed," Severus said fondly, eyes on the table. "I've lost count of the times I caught him napping there. I even found him underneath his father's desk a time or two and on his mother's favorite chair by the fire in the library."

"Huh. Wonder what's bothering him."

"It could be anything, boy." Severus finally looked up and Harry, upon looking away from him, realized Blaise had been in the kitchen this whole time. "Were you getting coffee?"

"Yeah. Want a refill?" Harry caught Severus's nod and turned to Blaise. "Tea?"

"I'll have coffee. There's no tea made and I'd like a drink now."

"Well, you don't have to have coffee. There's cold tea in the fridge and some juice, I think."

"A warm drink, I should have said."

Harry shrugged. Severus excused himself while Harry started fixing up their coffees and grabbing a snack for everyone. He returned just as Harry was sitting down and he had Draco in tow.

"I was waiting to speak to Severus and I fell asleep," Draco blurted out. "I wasn't being weird."

"I didn't think it was weird either way. I'd sleep on my goddad's bed if I could, too."

Draco looked suspicious, but didn't say anything. Severus rolled his eyes and turned his attention to Harry.

"He wants coffee, boy, if it wouldn't be too much to ask."

"Nope. Needed to brew a new pot anyway, but that last cup was in the way."

"Humph."

Was Draco embarrassed? Was that why he looked so grouchy and hadn't said anything besides his hurried explanation? Oh, how cute. Was he too proud to admit he felt safe in Severus's bed? Hell, he did, too, but Severus definitely wasn't his godfather.

Whoa. No thinking about Severus's bed. For one, he'd probably be there again before this was done (because he really doubted Severus wanted to do the ritual in Harry's bed) and they'd be doing a lot more than sleeping. For two, thinking Severus's bed made him feel safe was bad. Very, very bad. Shouldn't even be contemplated kind of bad.

"Well, I can room with him if Draco wanted you to stay with him for a while. It's not like he'd annoy me to death."

"You prat," Draco grumbled. Harry frowned and looked at everyone. What had he missed? "I
wouldn't say no, I suppose. At least you don't talk in your sleep, Severus."

"Is that what you want, Draco?"

Draco opened his mouth to reply, but then saw Harry looking at him. He snapped his mouth shut and shrugged. Severus looked over; he caught and held Harry's gaze for a long moment and then turned back to Draco to nod.

"You don't mind rooming with me until either we leave or Draco gets sick of Severus, do you?"

"If that'd make them happy, I'm cool with it." He had Severus's attention again and looked at him while he said, "But I'm not moving out of our room, Blaise. It wasn't my idea to switch roommates."

"Makes sense to me," Blaise agreed. "You're an early riser, aren't you?"

"Depends. If I go to bed my usual time and I don't have nightmares, yeah, I am."

Blaise frowned. "Have you been having nightmares?"

"I haven't noticed," Severus cut in. "You usually thrash about in your bed."

"Just little ones. They're no big deal."

Severus frowned deeply.

"So you're basically an early riser," Blaise fretted. "You don't make a lot of noise, do you?"

"Er, well, Se-nape's never gotten up from all the noise."

Even Draco seemed to have caught that almost slip this time. He was giving him a suspicious look, Severus had cocked his head to the side and looked curious, and Blaise- oh, Merlin- was smirking.

"That's good to hear," Blaise said belatedly. "So I will be able to sleep."

"Did he just-"

"Don't let him fool you," Severus interrupted Draco. "He could wake the dead. Has, in fact, if I'm to hazard a guess."

"Potter almost just-"

"Oh, stop it, sir. I have not."

"But Severus, he almost-"

"Draco," Severus snapped. "What did he almost do?"

"He almost called you Severus."

"Did he? Blaise, did you hear that?"

"No, sir. I heard Snape."

"As did I. Boy, did you almost call me by my given name?"

What was going on? Oh, Merlin! Was he covering for him? But why was that necessary?
Awesome, though, that Severus thought he was worth the trouble. Wait, no! He couldn't think anything he did was awesome.

"Er, you'd just smack me if I ever dared to so no."

Severus's eyes narrowed. "Yes, I'm sure I would. As you can see, Draco, you must have been imagining it."

"No, I don't think so."

***

"Blaise, are you gay, too?"

Harry accidentally launched a cut of steak across the room and Blaise slowly turned to Draco with slightly narrowed eyes. Severus just stared at his godson, still holding his fork in front of his mouth.

"Don't you think I would have told you by now, Draco?"

"So you're not?"

"Is there a reason you're asking?"

"You didn't answer my question. You are, aren't you?"

"Of course I'm not. Not even a little so don't ask." Draco closed his mouth again. "We've been friends for so long, I would have told you long before now."

"Severus is my godfather and he didn't."

Severus winced and Harry frowned at him sympathetically.

"Yeah, because he's your godfather. It wasn't necessary for you to know. I'm your best friend. Well, again."

"Yeah, but-"

Blaise huffed. "Best friends tell, parental figures do not. I mean, you wouldn't want to know about any of Severus's conquests, probably not even their identities, but you'd be pissed if I didn't tell you about all of mine in detail."

Draco nodded. "Good point... So you're not."

Even Harry groaned.

"No, I'm not. Where is this even coming from?" Blaise's brows rose. "Are... Oh, Merlin. Are you?"

"No! I just thought it was strange how quickly Potter gave in to you moving into his room. I wondered if there was a reason."

"There was. He did it to make you two happy, you idiot."

The moment the words were out of Blaise's mouth, Harry knew Draco had set him up. It wasn't about Blaise being gay or not. Draco knew he wasn't, but he'd planned this well. It was about him and Severus yet again.
"I see," Draco said, smiling victoriously. "And why would he want to do that?"

"Because I happen to be a nicer person than most people out there," Harry replied. "Good old martyr me."

"So it was a sacrifice losing Severus."

"It's a sacrifice knowing I may lose my life someday. It's a sacrifice for your godfather, because he had to haul a bunch of stuff into your room and still has to come to mine to dress. It's a sacrifice for Blaise, because he has to dress in your room since he refused to move his stuff."

"But for you? What did you lose in this deal?"

Harry frowned at him. Did he want the truth? Well, fine.

"I lost someone who sleeps lightly enough to know when I'm having a nightmare and then bothers to get out of bed to wake me up so it doesn't keep going on and on. Now eat your food before it gets cold."

"Is that all you lost?"

"Oh, didn't I tell you? I lost my lover. Snape's been boffing me silly all over the house for ages now," Harry said sarcastically. He rolled his eyes and gave Draco a look. "I know what you're fishing for and I have to say you're not being subtle at all. So much for being a good Slytherin."

Blaise snickered and Severus wasn't being obvious about rubbing away his grin, but Harry still saw. Draco glowered at him and grumpily sawed through his steak. It seemed a bad idea doing that blind, but he knew Draco wouldn't listen to him.

"You'll cut your fingers off," Blaise warned. "Stop glaring at him and just eat."

Draco harrumphed.

***

Severus was still up when Harry trudged out of the kitchen later that night. He'd just finished putting away the dishes from supper and snack, sweeping the floors, baking a loaf of bread for breakfast, and washing those dishes. Until he'd seen Severus, he'd been planning to shower and head to bed, but those plans naturally were pushed aside. Collapsing on the other end of the couch, he grabbed up a book he'd borrowed from Severus after dinner that night and began to read a little. He'd strangely (perhaps not so strangely) missed his roommate since he'd moved in with Draco and was content to spend a little time with him, even if they didn't talk, which Severus soon did.

"You look tired."

"I am. Why are you still up?"

He turned a page and kept his eyes on his book. Severus folded the paper Albus had sent that evening presumably when the Malfoys weren't around.

"I wanted some time to myself. My godson's been following me around like a lost puppy all day. Haven't you noticed?"

He nodded. "I knew you'd slipped something into his bedtime cocoa."

"Saw that, did you? Yes. He's driving me mad."
Harry lowered his book and looked over. Severus was already looking at him.

"Sorry. You could just tell him to quit."

"I cannot. He misses his parents and he finds me a suitable replacement."

"Hard not to. I mean because you're his godfather."

"Of course. Are you enjoying that book?"

"It's interesting." He hadn't lied. **Chronology of Magical History** was actually pretty cool. "Thanks again."

"Hmm. What were you doing in the kitchen for so long?"

"Chores, baking some bread, that sort of thing."

"Bread? What kind?"

"Apple spice. We're out of pumpkin at the moment."

"How tragic." He actually looked like he meant it, too. "What are you planning to serve with it?"

"I don't know." Harry scratched his chin. "What sounds good?"

Severus made a face. "Nothing sounds good."

"Yeah, yeah. What's the least poisonous?"

"I'm not hungry. I don't know what I'll want."

He couldn't stop his smile and Severus glowered. He wasn’t actually claiming his food was toxic, was he? He just didn’t know what he’d want, right? Awesome.

"You could tell me in the morning," he suggested. "Bet you'll know then."

"Assuredly. Will you want one of your special showers in the morning?"

"Yep."

"Were you planning to ask or were you going to go without?"

"I was going to go without."

"I figured as much. Are you really that embarrassed to ask for my assistance?"

"How would you feel if you had to ask me for help every time you wanted to have a special shower as you put it? Wouldn't you be embarrassed?"

"Not particularly, no."

"You're lying."

"I am not. If you would like proof, I'll inform you the next time I plan to have a, ahem, special shower of my own."

"Yeah, do it," Harry demanded. "I bet you won't."
"Fine." Severus's eyes narrowed. "I will, brat."

He wouldn't. He'd bet money on it.

"We'll see about that."

***

The next afternoon, Harry was sitting at the table with the three Slytherins in residence. Harry and Blaise were discussing the book Severus had lent him and Harry was actually enjoying the discussion, Draco was reading an old quidditch magazine, and Severus was reading a thick tome about mathematics. When the conversation between Harry and Blaise paused for a moment so they could sip their coffees, Severus calmly closed his book and stood up. Harry naturally looked up, a questioning look aimed his way.

"I'm going to take a shower, brat." He gave Harry a pointed look and smirked. "Make sure there's coffee made when I'm done."

Harry gaped and Severus strolled out of the room. Draco immediately swiveled his gaze in Harry's direction, but Harry had snapped his mouth shut before Draco could see.

"Why did he just tell you he was going to take a shower?"

"We like to keep each other informed. Safer that way."

"Why?"

"In case we have to pee or something."

"You can't tell me his statement was common courtesy. I saw the look he gave you."

"Since you're so sure something's up, what do you think he was telling me?"

He'd never guess, which is why Harry found this so amusing and was teasing Draco.

"Perhaps he was inviting you."

"Do you really think that or are you just hoping?"

Draco spluttered. "Why the devil would I hope for such a thing?"

Harry shrugged. "Maybe you just want him happy and don't care who does it just as long as they do."

Draco shot a glare at Blaise.

"Hey, don't look at me."

"Right... I don't know what that was about," he lied, "and I don't care. I'd have wanted my godfather happy, even if it was with you. I'm assuming you feel the same way."

"Firstly, that's disgusting. He's a wolf and, you know, not Luna. Secondly, why? You'd really be okay with him being with someone like me?"

"Uh, yeah. It's just like with you and Luna. I can't stand you, but I won't complain about your relationship, because you're the guy she wants and you make her happy."
"It's as simple as that for you?"

"Yeah."

"Hmm." Draco sat back in his chair and frowned at the table, clearly thinking hard. After close to ten minutes of silence, Draco said, "I do feel the same way as you."

Blaise's brows rose and he glanced at Harry before looking back at his best friend.

"Yeah, I figured."

"Theoretically, if you were interested in him, I wouldn't attempt to persuade you to leave him alone."

"Theoretically, if I was interested in him, you wouldn't change my mind."

"Humph. He's a good man."

"I know."

"He'd take care of you for as long as he lived, even if the relationship didn't last." Draco paused. "And perhaps beyond that, actually."

"Again, I know."

"Are you interested in him?"

"Do you want me to be, Malfoy?" Draco simply stared at him and Harry arched a brow. "You must be desperate to make sure he's found someone if you're trying to get me involved with him."

"No, I just want him happy."

"Who says he's not?"

"No one," Draco admitted. "But I'd still feel better if he had someone... Even if it's the most spoiled, annoying, self-righteous prat in the whole world."

"I thought we were talking about me, not you."

Draco scowled and Blaise hid a smile by taking a long sip of coffee.

"Are you not attracted to him?"

"You're really starting to worry me, Malfoy. Seriously."

"Is that a no? I mean, I know he's not the most attractive man in the world, but he's the most loyal man anyone could ask for. He's also intelligent, responsible with his finances, he's an excellent potions master, and has created a few spells currently in use. He's a talented duellist, owns his own home, and would welcome children with open arms... if that's the sort of thing you're into, which I think it is if your pregnancy potion stint meant anything. He's also prepared to give his life to make sure you keep yours long enough to save the world. He could give that job to anyone else."

"I know all of that, Malfoy."

"And?"
"And anyone would be lucky to be with him. He'll make someone very happy someday."

"But it won't be you."

"Draco," Blaise said quietly, "why are you focusing so much on Harry? It's like you want him to be the one with Severus."

"Potter, you can leave the room. I need to inform Blaise just how stupid his question was and some of the language isn't appropriate for women to hear."

Harry rolled his eyes and wandlessly tipped Draco's cup of coffee into his lap in retaliation as he left the room. He heard Draco yell angrily and then silence abruptly fell over the kitchen. Harry smiled. He was glad he'd been practicing that one.

With nothing else to do, Harry settled on going back to the bedrooms. What else could he do? He'd left his borrowed book in the kitchen. A few minutes after entering the bedroom and stretching out on his bed, Severus walked in and he wasn't wearing anything but a towel. It was hard not to stare.

"Ah, there you are, boy. Did you get evicted from the kitchen?"

"Sure did. Enjoy your shower?"

"It was satisfying. Thank you for asking." Severus smirked and entered the closet. "I will be changing in here so unless you wish to see me unclothed, stay in there."

"I've seen it all before, sir."

"Do say that a bit louder. Perhaps my godson might hear you this time." In a lower voice, Severus asked, "Why shouldn't we have a little fun with him?"

Leave it to a Slytherin. Harry heard a distant, "hear what?" He started laughing silently, but quickly managed to calm himself down.

"You're right, sir," he said louder. "I do like being on my back."

Severus appeared in the closet doorway already clothed in a pair of trousers.

"How would you know?" he asked quietly, looking amused, and then said in a normal tone, "Do you really?"

"I don't yet," Harry whispered, mainly to himself. He raised his voice once more. "Shouldn't you know by now?"

Draco had by now crept from the kitchen to the bedroom and Harry could hear him breathing outside the door. When had he shut it? Wait. Had he shut it? He didn't remember doing it.

"Say my name," Severus mouthed.

"Snape?" Harry mouthed back. Severus gave him a look and Harry silently laughed again.

"Severus, are you even listening to me?"

"Hmm? Oh, no. What did you say?"

"You never listen to me."

"I do, too."
"Oh, yeah. What'd I say this morning about the eggs?"

Severus looked surprised. "I honestly don't remember."

"Ha!" Harry cried genuinely, momentarily forgetting about teasing Draco. He knew Severus never listened. "I have proof now."

"Of many things, yes." Severus glanced at the door and slyly smiled Harry's way. "While my godson's occupied- He is, isn't he?"

"Yeah, he's lecturing Blaise about something."

"Good. While he's occupied..." Severus walked to the door and carefully grabbed the handle. "Why don't you join me in bed? It's been too long since we've..."

Severus whipped the door open and Draco literally fell into the room. Harry's laughter finally escaped and Severus looked down at his godson, his lips curling just the slightest.

"Oh, hello, Severus," Draco said with as much grace as he could considering he was climbing off the floor. "I didn't know you were in here."

"You did," Severus disagreed. "You were hoping to catch us together. The boy's right, I believe. You do seem like you want us to be an item."

Harry smiled to himself. He'd known Severus had been listening... His eyes widened. While he was touching himself in the shower? How often had Severus listened to him talking to himself, maybe even singing while doing that?

"That's just absurd, Severus." Draco's cheeks were a guilty red. "I don't want him to be with you at all."

There was a snort from the kitchen.

"Of course you don't. The boy's probably the worst human being in the world."

"I suppose he does have at least one good quality. He hasn't managed to kill you with his cooking yet."

Severus obviously caught onto what Draco was doing, trying to get him to admit an interest in Harry, just like he'd been doing to Harry about Severus earlier. He arched a brow.

"Go away, pest," he said. "You're bothering me. Boy, go with him. I know you didn't start more coffee."

"Coming right up, sir."

"You called him Severus before."

"He also invited me into his bed," Harry retorted. "Both of those things never happen unless we're trying to teach you a lesson."

"I didn't invite you into my bed the last time. You threw yourself at me."

"So everything I just heard wasn't real?"

"Are you kidding?" Harry asked. "Have you looked at me lately? I'm not exactly the kind of guy to
inspire thoughts like that."

"Ah, but according to Draco, appearances aren't everything. After all, I'm not the most attractive
man in the world, but I have many qualities that make up for my unfortunate appearance."

"I didn't mean you're ugly. Just that you're not dashing."

"Malfoy, you're straight. You don't know what a dashing man looks like. Now go. You're blocking
the door and your godfather has to finish getting dressed."

Draco stepped out of the way, Harry started walking down the hall, and Severus shut the door
behind them.

Upon reclaiming his seat in the kitchen, it occurred to him that Severus hadn't been in the shower
too long. Had he been too embarrassed to go through with it?

Oh, he'd be asking. Just as soon as he could get him alone. There would be much taunting if he
found out Severus hadn't touched himself.

***

The moment Blaise and Draco entered their bedrooms, Harry cast a silencing charm and rounded
on Severus.

"You didn't do it, did you?"

"What did I supposedly not do?"

"Take a special shower. You didn't do it."

"I most certainly did and I enjoyed every minute of it."

"You weren't in there all that long," Harry informed him. "You lied to me. Why? To make me feel
less hesitant about asking for your help? To win?"

"I had need of my pain potion after breakfast. That is why my shower didn't take very long. I was...
in a state."

"Oh." That explained so much. And then he felt immensely guilty. "I haven't even thought about
your knee since they arrived. How much has it hurt? Oh, I haven't massaged it or anything."

"No, you haven't."

The guilt worsened and Harry stepped closer.

"Does it hurt now?"

"Not at the moment."

"Has it been bothering you a lot lately?"

"The spare bed in Draco’s room is incredibly stiff and uncomfortable. Even with a cushioning
charm, it is difficult to find a comfortable position in which to sleep."

What could he do about that? Harry sat on the edge of the sofa and frowned at Severus while
thinking as quickly as he could. Suddenly, an idea came to him that could just work.
“Sir, have you thought of sleeping in my bed?”

“Excuse me?”

“My bed. It was one of the original beds here, not one that was hastily added, so I bet it’d be marginally more comfortable. We could switch the beds.”

“You’d willingly give up your bed so I wouldn’t continue to have knee pains?”

“Well, yeah. It’s not like I can barricade you in the bedroom to rub your knee and I know you wouldn’t let me do it in front of your godson or Blaise. Plus, I can sleep on a couch just fine so if that bed really is that bad, I won’t be too upset about sleeping out here every night. It’s not like they’re going to be here forever.”

“You make some very good points,” Severus allowed. He inhaled deeply and then slowly let his breath out. “Very well. If you are willing to temporarily part with your bed, I would be willing to at least try it.

“We can move it tomorrow.”

“There’s no need. We can move it tonight.” Harry furrowed his brows and Severus dusted off his sleeve. “I drugged Draco again. He won’t be waking up.”

“Why’d you do that?”

“While he hasn’t been following me everywhere today, he has been rather melancholy and I cannot handle it. I felt he might be happier being asleep.”

“Sir, I will be the first to admit I don’t like your godson very much, but he doesn’t have his parents around anymore. That’s bound to make anyone feel a little down. I should know. Drugging him all the time isn’t going to help him much.”

“I am aware it isn’t the best or healthiest option, boy, but I have no idea what I’m supposed to do with him. I’ve never dealt with this type of situation.”

“I know, but you want to be a dad, right?”

Severus looked at him, shocked, and it finally occurred to Harry just how much Severus seemed to be opening up to him right now. He briefly wondered if he’d taken too much of his pain medication and had been high all day. It was the only explanation for the way this conversation had gone.

“Yes, Potter, but you knew that,” Severus said a little coldly. “What has that to do with this?”

“Well, without his parents, you're all he has. He’s basically your child now. You have to do what no one did for me and treat him like your own son.” Severus silently stared at him and Harry pressed on. “So if Malfoy was really your son, sir, what would you do if he was upset about something?”

“You're serious?”

“Yeah. What would you do? It’s alright. You don’t have to tell me. Just think about it, okay?”

“I daresay I will think of little else. Are you still willing to switch our beds?”

“Yeah. You ready?”
Severus nodded and followed him down the hall. Blaise woke up a few times while they were moving mattresses around, but he fell back to sleep each time without asking questions. Draco slept on. When everything was situated, Harry and Severus both went to the bathroom to brush their teeth. Severus, poor guy, patiently brushed his teeth while Harry attempted to simultaneously talk and brush his teeth. Most of his words came out a garbled mess.

“I mean, they won't be here too much longer so it’s not like you really have to handle Draco’s clinginess too much, although you’re probably secretly enjoying his attention,” he was saying… or at least attempting to. “And even though I said I couldn’t barricade you anywhere to massage your knee, I still think I need to start doing that again. You were really benefiting from it before. Maybe we could both settle down in the living room each night after Blaise and your godson go to bed. What do you think?”

Severus removed his toothbrush from his mouth. “You’ll choke if you continue talking with something in your mouth.”

“See, I heard you only choke if you get your mouth too full.” Harry paused and then embarrassment nearly overwhelmed him when he realized what he’d blurted out. “I’m so sorry, sir. I don’t even know where that came from and I especially don’t know why I just said that to you. Please don’t yell at me.”

“I won’t be yelling at you.” Severus snorted and shook his head. “It is surprising how often you say something genuinely humorous.”

He ran his toothbrush under the tap and Harry slowly finished brushing before pulling his toothbrush out to do the same.

“You never answered me. About your massage, you know.”

“Hmm. If I tell you not to bother, will you fight me?”

“Yeah, probably.”

Harry snagged Severus’s toothbrush and put both of their brushes in the small holder on the counter.

“Then I have no choice but to agree to cooperate with your plan. I’d hate to wake Draco up and have him catch us with your hand up my trousers. He might misinterpret what he was seeing.”

Harry chuckled. “Sometimes I wonder about him, sir. It’s like he’s decided I'm the right person for you and he doesn’t care what you or anyone else thinks about it.”

“I had noticed. I honestly do not know what to say.” Severus rinsed his mouth out and wiped his face when he was finished. Harry took his turn and snagged the towel out of Severus’s hands with a grin. “Rude brat.”

“If I'm so rude, why do I see your lips starting to curl up right there… and there?”

Severus pushed his hand away. “They’re not curling. Your vision is clearly worsening. You need a new eyeglass prescription.”

“Sure I do, sir.”

“Get your arse off the counter and get out of here. I need to relieve myself.”
Harry sighed. “Well, if you’re gonna twist my arm about it.”

“Get out.”

Harry laughed as he left the bathroom and Severus rolled his eyes. Neither of them bothered to close the bathroom door, but since Harry wasn’t planning to peek and they both knew that, it was not really a big deal (except maybe it kinda sorta was). As he was waiting for his turn, Blaise ambled out of the bedroom and shuffled down the hall with his eyes closed.

“Blaise?”

“Mm.”

“Are you awake?”

“Mm.”

Blaise was just standing there, eyes still closed. Harry poked him and heard Severus washing his hands.

“Blaise, come on. If you’ve gotta go, you have to wake up, because I’m not helping you.”

“Mmm.”

Severus exited the bathroom and quickly took in Blaise’s appearance.

“Is he actually awake or is he sleepwalking?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t think he did sleepwalk. Your godson never said anything.”

“Blaise,” Severus said, tentatively taking his arm in hand. “Do you need to relieve yourself?”

“Mm.”

“Can you get there by yourself or do you need the professor to help you?”

“I'm not your professor anymore, boy.”

“I know, but I didn’t want to call you Snape, Severus is too familiar, and the sir would have sounded stupid.”

“I see your dilemma. I suppose I’ve been called worse than a professor.”

Harry shook his head—oh, that man—and helped Severus guide Blaise into the bathroom. When his bare feet touched the cool bathroom floor, Blaise seemed to know what he was doing. He successfully pulled away from them, bumped into the toilet, and began to push down his pajama bottoms. Harry hurried out of the bathroom with Severus on his heels and leaned against the wall once more.

“Think he’s still sleeping?”

“I haven’t the foggiest. I have honestly never heard of sleep-urinating except, of course, where bed-wetting has been involved.”

Harry laughed quietly. “Think that’s what that is? He has to pee so badly, but doesn’t wanna wake up so he makes himself walk all the way to a bathroom and just goes?”
“He certainly doesn’t seem awake.” The sink turned on and Harry glanced around the door frame. Blaise was washing his hands, albeit clumsily, and Harry waited to see what he was going to do next. Severus leaned around him to see what was going on. “He’s actually washing his hands. Hot water’s on, there’s the soap. Merlin. Blaise, are you awake?”

“Mm.”

“I can't tell if he is or not,” Harry confessed. “Say something outrageous to see if he reacts.”

“No.”

“Fine. I will. Blaise, I was about to get shagged stupid over the back of the couch, but I promise me and Severus will be quiet. Wanna join—” Severus smacked the back of his head, but there was no reaction from Blaise. “Why did you hit me? Didn’t hurt much, but still.”

“It seemed appropriate. You once claimed I’d hit you if you ever said my name and I didn’t wish to disappoint.”

“I think I’m more upset about being smacked than I would’ve been about being proved a liar. Oh, here he comes. Grab his other arm.”

Severus reached for Blaise and helped Harry guide him to their bedroom. After settling him back down in bed, Severus walked into the closet to find something to wear to bed. Harry shucked his shoes, jacket, and shirt. Severus was rooting around in a bag on one of the shelves when he stepped into the closet.

Harry grabbed the bottoms he’d worn to bed last night and wiggled out of his denims, using his foot to toss them into his dirty clothes pile. Severus happened to see and sighed.

“One of these days, you're going to trip yourself up doing that.”

“At least it’ll be amusing for someone.” Severus passed him a shirt he’d found and Harry briefly glanced at it. He was about to pull it on when he realized it wasn’t his shirt. “Sir, could you pass me one of my sleep shirts? This one must be yours.”

“It was mine. However, it has always been much too short and I'm tired of it cluttering my bags.”


“Mmm. Are you planning to stand there until morning? I’d like to change into my pajamas.”

“Again, your body’s nothing I haven’t seen before.”

Severus narrowed his eyes. “You needn’t constantly see it.”

“I'm gonna be seeing a lot more of it before we leave,” Harry muttered, “but you're right. Sorry. I guess I'm getting tired. I'm not thinking too clearly. Or I'm thinking too much.”

“Ah. Yes, well, while what you say is true, I wish to point out that you will be seeing my body while we enact a ritual. At no time will you be seeing my body while we have intercourse, because that’s not what we will be doing. Correct?”

“Right. It’s not sex. It’s just a ritual. You said so.”

“Yes, I did,” Severus agreed. He turned towards the wall and commanded quietly, “Now go to bed,
boy.”

“Night, sir.”

“Yes, yes, go.”

Harry grinned and traipsed out of the closet. He collapsed on his bed, pulled his blankets over him, and took a quick sniff of the cologne on his shirt. Severus exited the closet a few minutes later and turned off the lights as he left the room. Before the door closed, he heard Severus pause and Harry sat up in bed.

“Did you need something?”

A brief silence followed his question.

“Goodnight, brat.”

Harry was sure his smile should have lit up the room.

“Night, sir.”

***

“Sir, while your godson’s in the shower, I wanted to ask you how things are going.”

Severus glanced up from the paper that had arrived at some point before any of them had woken up that morning. He frowned, laid the paper on the table, and studied his expression for a moment.

“I need an explanation. What exactly are you asking about?”

Harry huffed. “With you dealing with him. You know, the no parents, sad all the time thing. How’re things going?”

“Oh, that. I’m surprised you made it two days before asking.”

“Over two days now and it’s getting longer every second you don’t answer me,” Harry hinted. “You’re not doing so well, are you?”

“It is to be expected. I am not a very warm, nurturing man. Perhaps this is a sign I shouldn’t reproduce.”

“I really can’t think of a way to say this without being disrespectful so sorry, sir, but you sound stupid. Just because your first time trying to figure things out doesn’t go well doesn’t mean you shouldn’t have kids.”

“You don’t think so? Then what do you think?”

“I think it just means it takes two. I mean, I’m not trying to co-parent or anything. That’d be really, really weird.”

“Then what exactly are you trying to do?”

“I’m just saying that even single parents have at least one other person in their life that’s willing to be there for them. Maybe I can help you since you don’t really have many other options right now. I’ve got experience with not having parents and I’m his age. Convenient and helpful, me.”
“Hmm.” Severus stroked his chin and cocked his head to the side. “What do you suggest I do?”

“Well, today, he’s been shadowing you again. Blaise and I can make ourselves scarce so you and your godson have some time alone, because I think that’s what he needs right now. Ask him to do something with you and let him know you want it to be just the two of you. Is there something you both used to do together when he was little?”

“When he was ten, I started teaching him about potions and showed him a few dueling moves.”

“Er, younger.”

Severus frowned. “I taught him to balance on his broom when he was six.”

“Little younger.”

“Younger?” Severus scoffed. “I used to read to him once a week until he turned four. Is that young enough for you?”

“Yes! Read something to him. Maybe you could say-”

“I thought you were offering helpful advice.”

“I am.”

“You're not, actually.”

“Sirius was never into it, but Remus read to me once.” Severus seemed surprised by his admission and Harry shrugged. “It was nice. I could sit back and imagine everything he was saying while being able to spend time with someone who was close to my parents. I miss him.”

“Oh, please not you, too, boy. I can't even handle Draco.”

“I'm fine. I was just saying I missed him. It’d be strange if I didn’t remind you every once in a while.”

“I suppose.”

“After lunch, find something you know he’ll enjoy and then invite him to listen.”

“And if he laughs in my face and calls me an old, sentimental fool?”

“Then you have free reign to punish me however you see fit. Just don’t maim or kill me… and, um, make sure I can still have kids when you're done.”

“If I were ever to punish you, I would not choose sterility. Merlin.”

“I'm glad to hear it. Before me and Blaise make ourselves scarce, I'm gonna grab some stuff to take to the bedroom.”

Severus’s brow rose. “Such as?”

“Oh, you know, a few snacks, some drinks, a book or two, that sort of thing. Don’t know how long you’ll be reading and I don’t want us to starve. Warn me before you ask him, though, so I can get coffee started and our stuff put together.”

"I will, but I doubt your snacks will be necessary."
He and Blaise had been in their bedroom for hours now. Every time one of them came back from a bathroom trip, they'd inform the other that Severus was still reading. The few times he'd run to the bathroom, he hadn't seen Draco anywhere, but Severus wouldn't be reading aloud if he was alone.

"It was a brilliant suggestion," Blaise suddenly stated. Harry looked away from the spot on the wall that he'd been staring at and saw Blaise's book open in his lap. "Really, it was. I think it's exactly what Draco needed. The alone time, I mean. I didn't know Severus used to read to him."

"Neither did I until he told me."

"Well, it worked. I saw Draco smiling the last time I was out. He's happy again, if only for now."

"I had to work on Severus- I mean Snape- for a few days, but he finally listened. He's got to treat Malfoy like his own son if they want him to, I don't know, get over it? Having Sirius kinda helped with Mum and Dad... and Remus really helped with all of them."

Blaise nodded. "Who were you trying to help more, though, Severus or Draco?"

“Both of them. Malfoy’s miserable about his parents, Se-nape- oh, screw it. Severus is bothered by Malfoy’s behavior. Neither of them were happy. I had to help.”

“Out of a sense of duty to help other ‘parentless’ children or to make Severus happy?”

Harry frowned. “I just had to help.”

“Alright. You don’t have to tell me. I was merely curious. Whatever your motive, I appreciate what you’ve done for him, Harry. He really is a good friend and I couldn’t stand seeing him so upset. What you saw was just the tip of the iceberg.”

“I guess if I was in his shoes and couldn’t see my parents anymore, but I knew they were alive out there somewhere doing all this terrible stuff... well, I’d probably be a mess.”

“He is. Then you add not being able to see his girlfriend to the list and it just gets worse. Having Severus has helped him, though. He’s less miserable now than he was at Hogwarts before we left, but he’s only been dating Luna a few months.”

Harry nodded. “Yeah, I can see that. A godfather you’ve had all your life is bound to outdo a girlfriend of a few months, especially if the godfather…”

“Is Severus, yes.”

“I wasn’t going to say that.”

“But I still knew you meant it,” Blaise replied, small smile on his lips. “You really do like him, don’t you?”

“He’s a good man. Of course I like him. Can't hate him anymore after seeing what kind of man he is.”

“That’s not the kind of emotion I was talking about. You’re attracted to him on some level. I don’t think you’re quite sure how you feel about him, but you do feel something for him, even if it’s just quiet respect. Though I think the way you always subconsciously find your way to him says a lot.”

“He’s just a good guy.”
“Plus there’s the ritual. Of anyone you could have chosen, you swallowed your pride, doubts, and most likely your fears to ask Severus to help you. I know it’s just a ritual and you could have asked anyone to help, but Hermione has let it drop that you’ll be having sex for the first time and you chose Severus. Do you see what I’m saying? You chose him to be your first.”

“Has Hermione recruited you to her crazy theories club?”

“No, she hasn’t. Why? Does she say the same thing?”

“Not yet, but she will.” He could almost guarantee it. She’d already tried to once, but he’d cut her off. “Severus said it wasn’t going to be sex and if I didn’t want it to count as my first time, I didn’t have to think of it as that.”

“He said that? Really? Oh, Draco’s going to want to know that.”

“I don’t know if you should tell him. I told Hermione and when Severus found out she knew about the ritual, he threatened her.”

“But Draco didn’t know about his preferences at the time so he was unsurprisingly worried about Draco hearing anything.”

“Yeah. I wonder if Severus is planning to tell Malfoy about the ritual.”

“He already did.” Harry looked up from Blaise’s bedspread in surprise. “That’s why Draco’s been hounding you about Severus so much. According to Draco, after Severus told him about being attracted to both sexes, he confessed to being the man you’d chosen to help enact the ritual.”

“He told him? Why hasn’t Malfoy said anything?”

“I don’t know, but I think he already knew Severus was the man. He just didn’t want to think about it, because Severus had never told him he wasn’t strictly heterosexual.”

“So that’s why he’s been trying to get me and Severus together. I thought he was losing his mind.”

“He’s quite sane. He just sees things like I do. If you think Severus is worthy enough to literally trust with your life and therefore the fate of the entire world, then a relationship between you two would be something to behold, something that would likely last until death… perhaps beyond death if one of you can’t move on without the other.”

“Do you both really think that?”

“Yes. He was the one who first said it, but I agreed wholeheartedly.”

“Huh.”

“You seem surprised.”

“Well, I am. I hadn’t thought about that before.”

“Which part of what I just said?”

“That trusting Severus with my life meant I’m also trusting him with the fate of the entire world. It’s true, though, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”
Harry nodded. "Yeah. Pass the tea?"

"That doesn’t seem to bother you."

"It doesn’t."

Blaise looked at him curiously while silently passing over the small pitcher of tea. He’d found that pitcher earlier while searching the cabinets for something to hold their tea, because he hadn’t wanted to take all the tea to the bedroom. What if Severus or Draco had wanted some?

“I don’t hear Severus anymore.” Blaise and Harry shared a look and then climbed off their beds. Blaise stuck his head into the hall and looked around. “There’s no one in the living room.”

Were they done, then? He hoped so. Selfish as it was, he’d missed Severus and hoped they’d finished dozens of times after that first hour, though he’d never admit it to the crazies living with Severus and him.

“Should we go looking? What if they’re just getting drinks?”

“I don’t see the book out. Can you see it?”

Harry crept down the hall and looked at the bookshelf. The book he’d seen Severus choose was back on its shelf.

“I think he’s done.”

“Good,” Blaise breathed. “I’ve wanted a cup of coffee for hours now.”

“Mmm and something sweet.”

“Pie? Cake? What leftover desserts do we have?”

“I don’t even know anymore. With you guys all living here, I never know what’s still in the fridge and what’s been eaten. It’s amazing how much food you three put away.”

Harry entered the kitchen and looked around. Draco and Severus were drinking cold tea at the table. Draco was smiling at the wall while Severus’s gaze was trained on Harry before he’d even looked his way.

“We’re finished if that’s what you two wanted to know.”

“Yeah.” Harry glanced over. “No coffee,” he noted. “I’m away for a few hours and you don’t even bother to start a new pot. Shameful.”

“That’s supposed to be your job, boy. We both have our duties around here and I have fulfilled mine so far this month.”

Harry snorted even as he felt a thrill rush through him. “Right. Blaise, sit down. I’ll get a pot going and then see what we have stashed away.”

“If we have anything at all with chocolate on it, I want it. The more chocolate, the better.”

"Oh, no," Draco muttered to himself. "They're back."

“Got it. If we don’t, I have chocolate of all sorts. We can figure something out.”
“What do you mean by all sorts?”

“Literally all sorts, Blaise. Chips, chunks, syrup, straws, shavings, bark, truffles, fruit-stuffed, candy-stuffed, salt-covered, cinnamon-dusted.”

“Where are you even hiding all of that?” Blaise asked in amazement, eyes on all of the cabinets. “How have I never seen any of it?”

“You’ve never asked to see my baking pantry. It used to be the regular pantry, but the longer we stayed here, the more baking stuff I ordered, because I needed it. Well, at one point after Christmas, I got bored and decided to rearrange everything. I cleaned out the cabinets and pantry, stocked all the baking goods in the pantry, and put all the other stuff in these cabinets.” Harry grinned at Blaise, somewhat eager to show someone else his baking collection. “Want to see it?”

“I’d often wondered where you hid everything,” Severus mused. “Why did you never mention it?”

“I did once, but you weren’t listening to me. Like you never do.”

“I listen to you all the time.”

“You listen, but you don’t **hear**.”

“That statement doesn’t even make sense, brat.”

“It does to me. Blaise, my baking pantry?”

“I believe I need to see this treasure trove of chocolate.”

“That’s *my* best friend,” Draco grumbled to Severus as Harry and Blaise headed to the pantry.

“He’s not trying to steal him away from you, Draco. He’s just showing him a pantry. I admit some interest in it myself. I had no idea it existed.”

“You would if you listened to him.”

Harry glanced back just in time to see Severus throw Draco a withering look. He grinned.

"Oh, my dear, sweet, merciful, chocolaty Heaven. I'm never leaving this place, Draco. Make yourself comfortable."

"What makes you think I'd stay here with you?"

"And what makes you think I'd let him?" Harry added.

"If your goddaughter can visit, boy, my godson can, too."

"Yeah, visit. Do you want Rose living here?"

"Is this powdered chocolate?" A can snapped open and Blaise sighed. "It smells delicious."

"I can't even imagine the horror," Severus replied. "I'd be dead within a month."

"That's kinda how I feel about yours."

"Don't you mean to say 'ours,' Potter?" Draco snarked. "Merlin, you two act like an old married couple."
"He should be so lucky," Harry joked and Severus looked at him in outrage. Draco arched a pale brow.

"How dare you-

"Why do you look mad? I only meant you'd never have to do housework another day in your life. I definitely didn't mean whatever you're thinking."

Severus harrumphed and Harry snorted.

"Chocolate-covered mmmphhmpphh mmmpph."

"What is that he's eating? Have you been hiding candies, brat?"

"No. I have literally no idea what he's eating." Harry peeked into the pantry and laughed. "I guess I forgot to empty the candy bowl." He looked back at Severus. "He just finished the last of the chocolate-covered coffee beans."

"He could have saved some for the rest of us, even if they are little balls of poison.

"There were only five left," Blaise said with his mouth full. Frowning, Harry fully stepped into the pantry. What was he eating now?

"You found the test batch of whipped chocolate."

"Mhm."

"Are you actually planning to try everything?"

"Mhmm."

"You'll make yourself sick."

"I'll survive."

"I could just make a cake. If you wanted one, all you had to do was ask. I don't mind baking and stuff."

Blaise paused and then thoughtfully traced the lid on a jar of chocolate sprinkles.

"As much chocolate as possible?"

"I didn't know you had such a sweet tooth."

"I don't usually so when the cravings do hit, I become desperate."

"I'll try to use as much chocolate as I can," Harry promised. "Now will you get out of my pantry before you eat everything?"

Blaise snorted and left. Harry cocked his head to one side and started grabbing ingredients at random.

"He's baking a cake," Draco remarked, "and it's not for you, Severus."

Harry paused and listened.

"I heard, Draco. It's not his job to cater to my every whim."
"Since when? That's all I've ever seen him do here," Draco pushed. "Even when he was pregnant and cravings were supposed to be ruling his meal choices."

“I’ve never seen a pregnant male,” Blaise commented. “I wonder if Harry would be willing to take another potion so I can see what it’s like.”

Blaise fell silent and Severus and Draco apparently didn’t know how to respond. When someone finally spoke, the subject had changed back to the previous topic.

“I heard you say something about your jobs, Severus. What are they? Is serving you one of his jobs? Why? What do you do in return?"

Holding his breath, waiting for Severus’s response, Harry wasn't sure whether he wanted him to own up to their living situation or not. It'd be hard to explain the housewife stuff without Draco taking it seriously.

"Our jobs are none of your concern," Severus finally replied. Harry blindly grabbed a squat jar of chocolate syrup to drizzle over the top of the cake. "Boy, what are you planning to make for dinner?"

"What do you want?"

There was a heavy silence from the kitchen. Harry hurriedly grabbed a few more things and then scooted out of the pantry, using his foot to close the door behind him. Draco was pointedly staring at Severus, though Severus was doing a good job of ignoring him. Blaise looked between the two and cleared his throat.

"Since he's not going to answer, may I request something?"

"Er..." Harry peeked at Severus for some sort of answer, but his features could have been carved from stone. "Yeah, sure. What sounds good?"

"Besides the chocolate, of course, I've found myself wanting barbecued chicken that has this slightly spicy sauce on it and- oh, I can't remember where I've had it."

"I could make barbecued chicken," Harry mused. "I haven't had to cook any since Dudley wanted some for his birthday that one time. How old was he? I can't remember. It was the year I got to join him so maybe- oh, right. He was turning ten."

"Who is Dudley?"

"A deceased relation that deserves no further thought," Severus said, looking right at him. When he finally turned his gaze away, Harry pulled in a deep breath. "What will you serve with this chicken?"

"Potato salad," Harry decided. "It sounds really good right now."

Blaise nodded. "I have to agree. It's surprising how skilled you are in the kitchen for being so young still."

"Is he as skilled in the bedroom, Severus?"

Harry flushed and Severus looked at Draco, seeming thoroughly unimpressed.

"I wouldn't know, Draco, nor is it my business to."
Though he really wouldn't mind. For practice! That was it. He just wanted a little practice before this life-changing ritual took place. That was all.

(Oh, who was he kidding?)

Wait.

"Sir, I just thought about something... Remember what I asked you to do a while back? I didn't think-

"You're talking about the ritual Severus agreed to help you with," Draco commented. "Don't act surprised. I already know."

"I know you know and you're not the only one or even the first." Severus nodded. "Now shut up. Sir, how long does that... last?"

Severus actually snickered! At him!! He wished he could have recorded that. One day, he'd get a photo or something. He would.

"That depends, boy. Are you asking of the ritual itself or the protection afforded by the ritual?"

"What? The-" Oh, he was laughing, because- Ooh, that- Harry glowered. "The protection, of course, sir."

"Of course," Severus repeated, still amused. "It will naturally wear away over time unless the ritual is repeated."

"Oh, okay."

"I am curious about something," Blaise spoke up, "and you, Severus, seem to be knowledgeable about this sort of thing. Are there more permanent protection rituals out there?"

"There are, yes, but none I'd recommend you try."

"Why's that?" Draco asked, intrigued.

"They are rather dark in nature."

"Ah. Got it." Draco turned to Blaise and smirked. "You've gotta find yourself a girl... or a guy. I won't judge."

Blaise cocked a brow. "Why do you say so this time?"

"Obviously so you can do the ritual. If Potter and Severus are doing it, we should, too. I know Luna would be all too willing.-"

Severus clamped his hands over his ears and hummed quietly. Harry immediately stopped working on his cake, made up a cup of coffee, and grabbed Severus's arm to drag him out of the kitchen. He scowled at Harry, but continued following him. Harry put the coffee on the table, left him standing there, and cast a silencing charm on the kitchen as he entered the room.

Severus did not return.

"Yes, I agree, Blaise, but you've got to try. Potter was able to find someone to help him- and I'm not going further into that- so I have no doubt you'll be able to find someone."
"Someone who feels as strongly about me as I do them, correct?" Draco hummed in agreement and Harry continued mixing ingredients in a large bowl. "That shouldn't be too difficult, I suppose."

"Potter's bosom buddy once hypothesized it should be more effective if the mutual feelings were strong and positive." Draco suddenly paused and frowned at Harry, who saw. When he realized Harry was looking, he arched a brow. "Perhaps you should find someone else, Potter."

"I'll be fine with your godfather. Keep your nose out of it."

"I want my nose well away from it, thanks. I was just saying..."

"Are you about done talking about this?"

"Getting uncomfortable?"

"No, but your godfather was. You basically chased him out of here."

Draco looked at his empty seat and seemed genuinely surprised to see Severus gone.

"When did that happen?"

"You'd just brought up Luna."

"Well, why did he leave?"

"You can't be that stupid. If you were a godfather, would you want to think about your godson having sex, Malfoy?"

"I'd be proud."

"No, you wouldn't. Just try to be him for a second. Years pass and you come to think of your godson as a stand in for the children you don't have..."

Draco frowned deeply. "Shut up, Potter."

"Are you done?"

"...Yes. We can finish this later, Blaise."

Harry waved his hand. "Sir, you can come back in. He's done talking about it."

"What was that?" Severus entered and sat down. His cup clinked against the table and Draco continued, "Potter, what was that? You waved away a spell, didn't you?"

"No, there was flour in the air."

"Did you cast a silencing charm on the kitchen?"

"He couldn't have," Severus spoke up. "His charms never keep."

Draco scowled. "Well, did you hear anything?"

"No. I was humming with my hands over my ears," Severus replied with dignity.

"Then why do you have a book? And how did you hear Potter give the all clear?"

"I grabbed it on my way back and I didn't. I guessed you'd tired of the conversation."
"But I didn't. Potter made me stop."

"And you did?" Severus asked. "How unexpected. Exactly how much chocolate will be in that cake, boy?"

"Well, there are chunks in the cake batter and I'm covering the top in frosting, shavings, and syrup. Think that's enough?"

"Too much," Severus said at the same time Blaise said, "Most definitely enough."

"It'll probably be repulsive no matter how much chocolate is in it," Draco said and then sniffed. "It will be a miracle if you can stomach any, Blaise."

"I actually enjoy his cooking, Draco. He's quite talented and you're not dead yet, are you?"

"Yes, well, I haven't been here all that long."

"Severus has and he's not dead."

"No," Draco agreed, eyeing his godfather. "But he is getting tubby."

"Excuse me?" Severus thundered.

"He is not," Harry cried over him. He'd seen Severus shirtless often enough to know that. "Quit being such a sulky brat. Just because your best friend doesn't hate my food doesn't mean you get to take shots at your godfather."

"Why do you care?"

"Life's easier if we keep each other happy. It's not like we can escape when we get angry."

Severus nodded his agreement.

"I told you they'd worked out something to make things more bearable down here," Blaise commented. "Though I personally think everyone would get along a lot better if at least you and Harry called everyone by their first names."

Draco glared. "Why is Severus exempt?"

"He used to be our professor."

"You both use each other's first names."

"He's been calling me Blaise since you and I became friends years and years ago."

"Long before you first went to Hogwarts," Severus added.

"By that point, it would have been weird if he'd suddenly started calling me Mr. Zabini all the time."

"I guess, but why shouldn't he call Potter by his first name? And why should I?"

"Severus used to be his professor. You're the guy who keeps butting into his sex life."

While Draco was left to stew in his thoughts, Blaise faced Severus and leaned an elbow on the table. Trying to look busy with the cake, Harry watched the two as best as he could with his
peripheral vision.

"What do you think? My argument makes sense, doesn't it?"

"It is an... interesting argument."

"But true, right? I genuinely think you'd both likely be able to better move on from the past and be happier here together if at least Harry called you by your first name."

"I wasn't aware me being called by name would make either of us happier."

"I bet it would. I've had other things on my mind and haven't really noticed. What does he call you now? Still just Snape?"

"He calls me sir. I haven't a problem with that."

"It's a bit impersonal, don't you think? I can't imagine you like being called sir all the time."

"I'm not. You and Draco call me Severus every day."

"And soon, we'll be gone."

"I'll suffer through it, Blaise."

Harry carefully eased the cake pan into the oven and started working on the frosting.

“What do you think, Harry?” Suddenly pinned by three sets of eyes, Harry froze. “Do you think you’d be able to call him Severus more often?”

“Uh, I don’t know. Sir just kind of rolls off the tongue.”

“How about this? You try it for a day,” Blaise bartered. “If nothing really changes, you can go back to the way things were. If, however, you start to feel more comfortable around each other, you could start using his first name more. Does that sound reasonable?”

Severus eyed Blaise suspiciously, Harry frowned at the table, and Draco slapped a hand down.

“I think it’s brilliant.”

“Oh, now see?” Harry said, looking up. “If he thinks it’s a good idea, I'm definitely not doing it.”

Severus scowled at him. “And I think for that remark, boy-”

“I'm sorry. Do you actually want me calling you Severus all the time?”

“I wasn’t going to say that. I was going to demand you apologize.”

“To him?” Harry checked. “No way. You know as well as I do that he’s gone barmy so if he’s backing up this plan, it’s either a very bad idea or he’s going to use it for some nefarious purpose.”

“Excellent word choice,” Severus unwillingly pointed out. “I still believe you should apologize for being so rude.”

“I wasn’t being rude.”

“To my godson, you were.”
"I was not. If it had been anyone else I'd said that about, you'd have agreed."

"I deny that."

"You would, wouldn't you?"

Severus harrumphed and Harry, remembering there was coffee and neither Blaise nor he had gotten any, set to work making up two mugs. As an afterthought, he made one for Draco and passed out the coffees. Severus seemed pleased.

"Good enough, boy."

"I wasn't doing that in apology. It's instinct. Someone's without a drink, I have to remedy the situation. Nothing else."

"If you wish to save face, I'll allow your pathetic explanation to go unchallenged."

"Would you like to eat dinner, sir?"

"I can always eat toast."

"You can't. No bread."

"Leftovers, then."

"Alright... Just don't be too surprised if I clean out the fridge later."

"I've kept myself alive this long. I'm sure I would find something to eat without your assistance."

"You could try."

Draco solemnly intoned, "I now pronounce you husband and wife. Severus, you may kiss your bride."

Blaise chuckled, Harry's body temperature rocketed up several degrees, and Severus wandlessly and silently sent Draco's chair tipping backwards. Unfortunately, Draco bumped his head against the floor and was rubbing the back of his head when he climbed to his feet.

"Not quite sure I deserved that," he said and then winced. "Ow."

Blaise grinned, clearly amused. "I would've done the same, Draco, if I was Severus."

Harry scowled at Severus and Blaise and immediately stood behind Draco, pushing him into a chair while checking for any bleeding.

"Get a pain potion, Blaise. They're in Severus's cabinet in the bathroom. I'm sure this is going to hurt soon."

"It already does," Draco muttered. "Stop touching me."

However, his actions didn't quite back up his words.

“Stop talking.” Leaning back in his chair, naturally closer to Harry's exploring hands, was the exact opposite of an unwilling patient. "I don't see any blood, but does this-"
"I've got the potion."


"Am I bleeding? Can you see brain matter?"

"Don't be such a baby," Harry replied. "You hit your head, because you didn't think to protect it during your fall. It's not like anyone came rushing in here with a battle axe. Merlin."

"They might as well have. I never thought my own godfather would injure me in such a way."

"And I never thought my school rival would pronounce us a married couple. Now shut up and drink some of this. And you should just be glad he got to you first. I'm not the one that wants to see you have kids someday."

Draco glowered darkly.
When Harry woke up that morning, a mere three hours ago, he'd felt something was wrong. He told himself he was being stupid and then, when he saw that Blaise was already awake and in the kitchen, he'd thought maybe that was why he'd felt the way he had. Perhaps Blaise being awake had caused the bad feeling, not any sense of foreboding. He really should've paid more attention to his internal voice, the one that had been screaming, "Wrong! Wrong! Wrong!"

Harry calmly turned off the shower before he'd done more than wash his hair, toweled off, and carefully stepped from the shower. He dressed in Severus's old pajamas, the ones he'd never planned to give back, and then strolled barefoot to the kitchen. When he got there, an entirely rational urge to inflict harm upon someone came over him and he slammed the door open, banging the wall and knocking a picture to the floor. Severus began to choke on his coffee, Draco sighed resignedly, and Blaise looked surprised. Harry knew it was an act.

"What the hell?" Severus said after finding his breath. "Why, boy? Why again?"

Harry crossed his arms over his chest. "I don't know, sir. Why don't we ask Blaise what happened? After all, I'm sure he's the one that spiked my juice this morning."

"You're fatter than last time," Draco muttered.

"Don't make him cry, Draco, or so help me, I'll-- I'm not putting up with hysterics again."

"I wasn't hysterical last time. The nightmare thing doesn't count."

Severus's eyes fell to Harry's enlarged stomach and Harry copied him. His irrational rage had disappeared, but he was still irritated. He hadn't even had time to prepare for this.

"You do look further along," Severus noted. "The thirty-four week potion, then. You claim this is Blaise's fault?"

"Yeah. You didn't see me brewing the potion, did you? And he was already awake when I got up this morning."

"Why would he slip you a pregnancy simulator of everything he could have chosen?"

"Just yesterday, before your godson turned into a giant baby, Blaise said something about wondering if I'd take a potion so he could see a pregnant male. Remember?"

"Yes, I do," Severus said slowly. He turned suspicious eyes Blaise's way. "What have you to say for yourself?"

"Oops?"

"You'll have to do better than that, Blaise. You have no idea what you've done, no idea of the monster you've created."

"Hey!" Harry cried. "Don't take it out on me, sir. This isn't my fault."

"Blaise?" Severus prompted.

"My hand slipped?" Severus and Harry, as one, stared at Blaise, who fidgeted. "I was curious and since he's already done it, I didn't think it'd be a big deal."
"But thirty-four weeks?" Harry whined. "Could'n't you have chosen any of the other ones? I wouldn't have minded those."

"Well, Draco once mentioned you were pretty far along and I wanted to see it."

"Yeah, twenty-one weeks. Far enough to show."

Severus sighed. "There's nothing we can do now. Taking one of the other potions in the hopes it would change the weeks measurement would do nothing except make you ill so don't even consider it."

"So I'm stuck like this? I'm miserable."

"It is to be expected," Severus said as gently as he knew how. "Were this a real pregnancy, you would be six weeks off from giving birth."

Harry sagged into the chair closest to Severus, his own chair too far away for comfort, and drooped against the tabletop. That proved to be a bad idea. The belly made breathing a little difficult when he was slumped like that. Sitting up straight, then.

"At least I wasn't dressed when the potion kicked in this time. I might've passed out from the pain, probably would've hit my head somehow, and then died."

"His blood would have been on Blaise's hands," Draco commented, eyes on his best friend. "That's pretty heavy, man."

"Oh, shut up, Draco."

"You both shut up. Do you need a nap?"

Harry realized Severus was talking to him and looked up. Thirty-four weeks in, the man still looked good. Really good.

"I want some tea. I was looking forward to actually getting a cup of coffee if I could keep you fiends out of it long enough, but that's not a possibility now."

"I'm sorry. I wasn't aware you would be this upset."

"I'm not really. I was planning to try this potion sometime in the future. You saved me the hassle of brewing it, right?" Blaise looked unconvinced and Harry sighed. "I'm not mad. It's alright. Just don't be an insensitive prick and I'll be okay. These two know what to expect. Just ask them if you're not sure what to do about something."

"What does he mean?"

"Like if you see him crying..." Draco suggested. "Anywhere really or you- Merlin forbid- put your shoes on the coffee table."


"Right... Just stuff like that."

"Alright."

Harry heaved himself up and Severus grabbed his arm when he tottered a little.
"What are you doing?"

"Making tea. I really want some now that I mentioned it. Remember that kind Hermione sent me?"

"Yes. Are you nauseated?"

Harry almost smiled. Severus had been listening when Harry told him about the tea. That was a rarity.

"Well, no. It just tastes really good."

Severus cocked a brow. "You are incredibly odd."

"Have you ever tried it, sir? It's really good. I bet you'd like it."

"I will stick with coffee."

Harry shrugged. "Your loss. Does anyone want anything while I'm up?"

"Are you quite sure you're capable of doing this?" Severus asked. "You look unsteady on your feet. If you were to, say, become dizzy and hit your head on the stove, for instance, I would be the one punished for your death."

"It's the belly. I'm not used to it. I mean, it's a lot to counterbalance, but I can handle this. It's my job."

"That's not quite your job, boy."

"I know." Harry smiled sweetly at him. "However, I have guests here. Which means...?"

"You make a valid point. Very well. If you ever wish to take a break, you may volunteer Blaise since he is the one that got you into this mess."

"That makes it sound like it's mine," Blaise said, frowning. "I don't like it. Take it back."

His expression further soured and Harry nodded.

"Understandable, I guess, but it's not actually a baby. There's no other father. It's just a potion, Blaise. Merlin."

"There's a ball in my stomach. I'm tasting bile now."

Draco made a face. "That's disgusting. He didn't mean to imply you're the other father, Blaise. Stop being weird."

"I'm just imagining how bad it'd be if this were real."

"Um, I don't ever see that happening," Harry said honestly. "Not with you, at least."

"Why?" Draco demanded. "There's nothing wrong with Blaise. He's attractive, attentive, and would be able to financially support you for as long as you wanted to sit on your arse, which would probably be for life."

"Well, he'd first have to be gay and I'd have to be attracted to him like that. Then I'd have to forget to take a potion that is supposed to prevent this sort of thing," he said, pointing at his belly, "from happening. Finally, we'd have to have sex, after all of that other stuff happened first. Like I said, I
"But you do want children and Blaise has excellent medical records on file. He doesn't have a history of any major diseases or cancers. He-

"If I may interrupt," Severus commented, looking amused. Harry leaned against the counter and watched him speak. "Draco, you sound as if you're attempting to sell your best friend to the boy."

"I am not."

"What is it about him? You've so far tried to join him with both Blaise, your best friend, and myself, your dearest godfather. Is there something about the boy that you respect or- Merlin help us all- actually appreciate?"

"No."

"No, I didn't think so, but perhaps there's a bevy of good qualities you've found in the boy. Yes," Severus said thoughtfully, "that would explain so much. You've decided he's a good catch so either of us will do. However, that does bring me back to a point the brat made. To my knowledge, your friend isn't gay. Are you keeping secrets, Blaise? None of us would judge you."

Severus looked even more amused than before and Harry grinned.

"No," Blaise said slowly, clearly enunciating his next words, "I am positive I am not gay."

"No, I didn't think so," Severus commented.

"Malfoy, I'm beginning to wonder about you. You keep thinking everyone else is gay. Is Luna just a cover?" Harry made a face. "That would explain literally everything."

"I'm not gay, you idiot. I enjoy-" Severus again clamped his hands over his ears and hummed loudly while Draco went on to give them a very detailed, very lewd account of what exactly he enjoys. "So there. Not gay, am I?"

The only sound to be heard was Severus's humming, though Harry was sure his upset stomach should've been making some sort of noise. Harry wobbled over to the table, tapped Severus’s arm, and he looked up, his eyes on Harry's mouth.

"He's done now. You can stop."

Severus nodded, dropped his hands, and frowned mightily at the kitchen table. Draco looked astounded.

"It really bothers you that badly?"

"I've told you before how he feels," Harry groused. "Your parents aren't an option anymore- I'm sorry, by the way. It sucks, I know- so Severus... Ah. Oh, well. He's all you have now. He's a stand in dad. Would you wanna hear your son talking about sex?"

Draco frowned. "No. My sons would learn to keep their exploits to themselves. My daughters, however, would remain virgins their entire lives, because no man would surely be good enough for them and just hell no to them finding a man to..."

Draco fell silent and his face screwed up. Severus spent a moment staring at him, shared a look with Harry, and glanced at Blaise. He was smirking.
"Now that he's taken care of..." Harry carefully wrestled Severus's empty coffee cup from his hands, scooped up Draco's, and grabbed the cup Blaise was holding out. "Lunch isn't for another two hours. Well, hour and a half. Does anyone want a snack?"


"Blaise?"

"I'm not hungry."

A few minutes later, Harry passed out coffees and his tea, returned to the counter for their snacks, and then reclaimed the seat he'd taken earlier beside Severus. He placed a plate of toast in front of Severus and then took a bite of his own.

"You're actually allowing me to have toast?" Severus asked incredulously and then looked down. An incredulous sound escaped him. "You've a slice of your own. Are you feeling ill?"

"No, it just sounded good and you haven't had any in a while."

Draco snorted and Harry casually leaned back just enough that Severus couldn’t reach around behind him to physically harm Draco.

"You better cool it, Draco,” Blaise muttered.

"Sir, just eat your toast. After snack, I'm going to start working on lunch and dinner so I’d like to have the kitchen to myself."

"I'm sure my godson and his friend can make themselves scarce."

"You're going to stay in here, aren’t you?"

“I’ve explained this before. If you were to become dizzy and hit your head on something, I would be the one punished for your death. I will not allow that to happen.”

“Nice to know you care so much,” Harry replied caustically. “Really, sir, it’s a wonder no one’s snapped you up yet.”

Draco gave Blaise a pointed look.

“Don’t start with me, boy. I'm not fighting with you again.” Harry shrugged, his irritation already evaporating, because he was too miserable to keep it up. Severus furrowed his brows and studied him. “What exactly is wrong with you?"

“Nothing. Everything.”

“Do explain.”

“My feet are swollen, it feels like something’s sitting on my chest and stomach, and my back’s already hurting from trying to lug this stupid stomach around everywhere. I'm really tired all of a sudden and just want some coffee, but I can smell it on your breath and it’s turning my stomach. There’s other stuff, but I don’t feel like going into the rest of it.”

"Go sit on the couch and put your feet up."

"But what about lunch?"
"We will handle it. Go."

"But I was gonna-"

"Merlin, Potter. Shut up and listen to him so we don't have to deal with you."

Harry's eyes stung and he sent a stinging hex Draco's way in retaliation. Severus pushed out a sharp breath, shot a quelling look at his godson, and pointed towards the door.

"Er..." Harry looked between his belly and Severus's face. "Help? I really don't think I'll get out of this chair a second time."

Severus briefly furrowed his eyes and then snorted. He stood, grasped both of Harry's arms, and helped him up. Harry swayed momentarily, centered himself, and smiled gratefully. He wasn't blind to the expression Draco directed towards Blaise, but he chose to ignore it. Whatever he'd supposedly imagined happened wasn't worth asking about. Harry went to take a step back, but realized Severus was still holding him. Brows furrowed a bit, he tugged his arms and Severus quickly let go.

"Go, boy. If you need something, call for Blaise."

Yeah, he wouldn't be doing that, but nodded anyway. Once he was in the living room, he sat on the couch with a groan, situated his legs on the couch cushions, and laid his head against the arm rest. He was in no mood to nap- probably would never be comfortable enough to ever again sleep- so he held up his hand. He'd been practicing his wandless magic, but he was nowhere near Severus’s skill yet and he'd definitely never wandlessly summoned something from this far. He hoped it worked.

"Accio parchment. Accio quill."

He waited and waited and was about to sigh in defeat when he heard the whistling sound. Oh, yeah. He'd put his parchment and quill in his bedside table the last time he'd used them (to write up a grocery list almost two weeks ago). Parchment and quill zipped into the room and smacked into his hands, the quill hitting the floor and the parchment fluttering down after it. He grunted as he rolled enough to reach them.

Alright. So he could do that now. Now he was going to write Hermione. She'd definitely like to know about everything that'd happened since everyone had left last time.

He was asleep- and drooling on himself- five minutes later.

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"Where exactly would the baby come out?"

Severus looked down the couch and arched a brow. Harry, with Severus's foot laying over his thigh (and his other foot trapped under his legs so Severus couldn't escape), looked back expectantly. He continued rubbing his knee and Severus sighed deeply, sounding very put upon.

"The child would be delivered via cesarean section. Where exactly did you believe the child would go? You weren't born a female so a vaginal birth would be impossible."

"Well, I didn't know. That's why I asked."

"Hmm. Are you about done with this? Your stomach keeps hitting me and it's irritating."
"You mean Blaise's baby is kicking you?" Harry joked. "Sorry. He's mean, I guess. Nothing like yours."

"The same child you apparently birthed alone and at only five months along. No wonder I haven't heard it lately."

Harry's face fell. "That's not funny."

"Oh, calm yourself. The child wasn't real so talking about its unsuccessful birth shouldn't bother you."

"But that sort of thing happens everyday," Harry said quietly, sniffing. "It's just really sad. I don't wanna think about it."

"You are too sensitive."

"What if that actually happens to me one day?" he asked, admitting a fear he'd kept quiet until now. "It'd destroy me."

"Boy, I don't do emotions. You know this."

Harry sighed. "I know. I wasn't really expecting you to say anything. I'm just worried about it."

"You're not pregnant."

"I know."

"You needn't worry about it today. Now may I have my leg back? You're no longer massaging me."

"Yes, I am."

"Dancing your fingertips across my knee is not a massage." Severus bent his leg at the knee, trying to get away from him, but Harry merely followed him. "What the blazes are you doing?"

"I told you I'm massaging you."

"No, you're molesting me. There is a difference."

"Now the back of the knee," Harry sang. Severus flicked his lips and Harry pulled his head back. "Stop it."

"Don't sing."

"I don't sing badly."

"You do," Severus argued. Harry wobbled a little, balanced on his knees as he was. Severus put an hand on his chest and pushed back. "You needn't continue. I'm fine. Sit down before you fall and injure me somehow."

"Even if I was to fall completely on top of you, sir, it wouldn't be a disaster. I don't weigh any more than I did two days ago."

"You do, actually. You forget you were just sitting on my leg and I still have no feeling in the abused limb."
Harry blushed. "No, I don't. I weighed myself this morning."
"I'm telling you the truth, boy. You are heavier."
"And I'm saying I'm not."
"You are, but I'm not surprised. After everything you've eaten today..."
"I was hungry! Don't be a git."
"Ah, the warmth in my belly," Severus said, smirking. "Say it again, won't you, boy?"
"That you're a git?"
"Beautiful. Yes."

Harry suddenly remembered the time Severus had been teasing him, saying something about how he liked being called that. Was he actually joking around with him? Probably, but when? Then or now?
"Fine. You're a git."

Severus's lips curled into a crooked smirk.
"Again, boy. I never hear it anymore and I'm sure you can understand how brokenhearted I am."
"Right." Definitely joking now. Harry let go of Severus's knee and, while still straddling the man's leg, rested his side against the back of the couch. "You're a git. A giant git of epic proportions. The gitiest of all gits."
"Is that the best you can do? I'm feeling a bit cold, brat. Warm me up."

Harry shuddered and then nodded.
"You, sir, are a knight in blatant gititude."

Severus chuckled. "Am I?"
"King Git more like, actually."
"I don't know. Being a knight in blatant- ah, what was that? Gititude? Yes, now that had a certain charm to it."
"Too much responsibility as a king, right?"
"Need you ask?" Harry snorted and Severus finally tried pulling his leg away once more. "Might you surrender my leg, boy?"
"I guess. I swear it's like you don't want me sitting on you, sir." Harry rolled his eyes and leaned up on his knees so Severus could free himself. However, Severus didn't move. Confused, Harry looked away from Severus's leg and met his eyes. "Sir?"
"Would you like to?"

Harry's stomach clenched.
"What?"
"For the ritual," Severus replied in a low, quiet tone. "You've never intimated which position you would prefer."

So Severus had been talking about sex, just not what he'd first thought... not that the ritual was going to be sex or anything. It was a ritual, not sex.

Yeah, bullshit. It was sex. Merlin, his first time, too.

"Um, I don't know. What do you think?"

"I think you should decide on your own. I will also need to know where we will be doing the ritual."

"What do you mean where? Shouldn't we do it here?"

"On the sofa?" Severus asked caustically. "Do you want me to be in pain by the time we've finished?"

"No! Oh. You meant... I get it now. Right. I'll think about it."

"See that you do. One more thing, brat." Harry looked at him curiously and Severus cleared his throat. "At some point, I will need to know what you expect of me."

"...what?"

"Again, for the ritual. Kissing, a massage, oral, anilingus..."

"That last one will definitely not be necessary." Severus smirked, but stayed silent. "Guess I have to think about that one, too."

He already had.

"Very well. I will expect an answer once Draco and Blaise have left. Will that give you enough time?"

"By tomorrow night? Probably."

"Excellent. Now get off of me." Harry didn't move and Severus arched a brow. "Unless you'd like to do the ritual now and risk a pregnancy."

"I was thinking." He hoped his thoughtful frown was convincing. "I've never kissed a man."

"That's hardly surprising. You didn't figure out your sexual orientation until we came here."

"Yeah." He wasn't getting it. "I want to, though. Kiss a man."

"I see. Is that your pathetic way of saying you'd like kissing to be involved?" Harry shrugged, embarrassed, and Severus simply said, "Ah."

“I was just saying I’d never-”

He couldn’t comprehend what was happening. Severus’s hand was holding the back of his neck, he was sprawled across Severus’s body, and their lips were touching. It seemed like a kiss, but he wouldn’t willingly kiss Harry. Before he could pull away to ask what was going on, Severus pushed him back a fraction.
“You're either very inexperienced in general,” he said against his lips, “or you’re terrible at this. Both are incredibly shameful.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “You kissed me?”

“What did you think I was doing, brat?”

“You could’ve warned me.”

“Yes.”

“Could we try one more time?”

Severus exhaled. “Once more and then I believe you’ll know if you’d like this to be a part of the ritual.”

“Does that mean we’re going to try everything else so I know?” Harry joked.

“Shut up.”

“I was joking, sir. Sorry. But really, one more? A good one maybe?”

This time, when Severus kissed him, Harry knew it was coming and immediately started kissing him back the moment their lips touched. With Severus reclined against the armrest, him now straddling Severus’s thigh, his bladder full, and the stupid ginormous fake baby belly between them, it was far from a perfect situation. It was downright awkward. It was also incredible. He smelled so good, felt so good, tasted so good. Before Harry was ready, Severus nipped his bottom lip and pushed him into a kneeling position. Harry just stared, lips parted, for a long time.

“You’re still on top of me,” Severus said an eternity (or maybe a minute) later. “You might want to stop gaping like an idiot and move. My godson could awaken at any time and see us.”

“He already knows we’re going to have sex.”

“I thought we were going to be performing a ritual,” Severus said calmly, eyes on him. “That is what you asked of me, was it not?”

“Er, no, yeah. We’re doing a ritual.” All he got was a nod so Harry kept talking, hoping a joke would get him to stop looking up at him like that. “Guess that kiss was just really, really good. Rattled my head for a second.”

Thankfully, Severus smirked and finally lost that weird expression.

“Yes, I’ve been told I am particularly skilled. However, I wasn’t aware I had the power to rattle minds.”

“Well, you do.” Harry shrugged, attempted to get up on his own, and then just decided to lie against the back of the couch. “Don’t let it go to your head. If I let you up, will you help me get up?”

Severus let out an odd, amused sound. “You’re still having troubles standing on your own, I see.”

“I think you mean I haven’t stopped having troubles. Doesn’t help this couch likes to swallow people.”

“Please be a little more dramatic. Lift your hips a little more, brat. I don’t wish to maim you.”
“Now,” Harry added.

“Yes. Lift.” Severus slid his leg free, the toe of his boot accidentally grazing the cleft of his bum, and Harry tried to ignore the heat swamping him. Blush or arousal? While he continued lying there watching, Severus swung around on the couch, put both feet on the floor, and looked at him. He seemed surprised by how close Harry was and reared his head back a bit. He then frowned. “Why are you looking at me like that?”

“I wasn’t looking at you in any specific way, sir. I was just looking.”

“Hmm. Are you ready for bed?”

“I’m sleeping out here, but I have to pee first. That’s why I needed up.”

“Of course. Why exactly aren’t you sleeping in your bed?”

“It’s really uncomfortable and my back was killing me when I woke up this morning.”

Severus looked down the hall and frowned. He grabbed Harry’s arm, helped him off the couch, and pulled him down the hall. Harry entered the bathroom and relieved himself – near ecstasy for someone with something crushing their bladder. When he had finished getting ready for bed and exited the bathroom, he was surprised to see Severus standing right outside the door. He was even more surprised to see Draco rubbing a pillow crease from his cheek, his blonde hair rumpled and sticking up every which way.

"You and Draco are switching beds tonight."

"He's okay with that?"

Draco mumbled something, still looking half asleep, and Severus rolled his eyes.

"He was ready to switch roommates yesterday, but we never got around to moving things around."

"Oh. Cool. Thank you so much."

Draco again mumbled incoherently and drifted passed Harry into the bathroom. The door shut and something smacked the wall. He really wanted to check to make sure he was alright, but Severus shook his head.

"He's leaning against the wall. He'll likely make a mess." Harry made a face and Severus sighed. "I will handle it. Go to bed."

"Okay. Uh, which room?"

“Draco’s.”


Severus nodded and Harry plodded off down the hall. Once in the room, he had no idea which bed he was supposed to be in. He thought he might be able to recognize the bed he’d had for over a year, but apparently that wasn’t true. Shrugging, he chose one at random and curled up in the center of the bed.

As he made himself comfortable (oh, see, he could get comfortable so this was definitely his), he heard Severus moving around in the next bedroom and Draco complaining about the lights. It made him smile for some reason.
Severus’s deep, rhythmic voice was the last thing Harry heard before sleep captured him.

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“I do not have time to worry about this, Draco.”

The harsh tone to that sentence jolted Harry to consciousness. He blinked and looked around the room, looking for the man who’d said the words, but he was alone.

“But-”

“In case you have already forgotten, Albus will be here soon and neither of you boys are packed. There’s also the brat’s chemical pregnancy to handle and I still have to inform him of my plans. I haven’t the time to worry about where he slept last night.”

While Severus had been talking, Harry had slowly rolled to the edge of the bed. He took a breath, grabbed the headboard, and heaved himself up.

“He slept in your bed, though.”

“It is his own bed, Draco, and I assure you I wasn’t in it with him last night.” Harry shoved down Severus’s old pajama bottoms and nearly missed the toilet in his rush to pee. “Do both of you at least know where all of your belongings are?”

“I do.”

“Same.”

“That’s something, I suppose.”

“Guess so.”

After drying his hands off, Harry exited the bathroom and headed to the kitchen. When he entered, Draco’s gaze rose to meet his. Perhaps seeing where Draco’s attention was directed, Severus slowly turned in his chair and looked him over.

“You're finally awake.”

“Morning, sir, Blaise. Er, Malfoy.” Harry glanced around, trying to evade the three sets of eyes on him. “So why are you guys just hanging around the kitchen? There’s nothing made.”

“I awoke early this morning,” Severus replied, still watching him. “I had a number of things pressing on my mind.”

Harry met his gaze. “I’m sorry. What’s going on?”

“Albus finally remembered to send word. He will be here sometime in the next few hours to collect Draco and Blaise. He also has several letters for both of us and a majority of the items I required from him.”

“Oh.” Harry briefly bit his lip. “What about the rest?”

“I will need to leave for a time to-”

“Are you trying to get yourself killed?” Harry interrupted. “Risking it once is fine, I guess, but twice? Why can’t Albus- er, Professor Dumbledore do it?”
Severus arched a brow. “If you had let me finish, brat, you would have heard me tell you that I will need to leave for a time to meet with a friend in my personal chambers at Hogwarts. They have been collecting the items Albus and I could not. He will incidentally be there with me so any requests to be careful will be unnecessary.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I am. Merlin. Stop acting strange.”

“I’m not,” Harry said honestly. “You’re the one acting strange… and Draco, I will smack you if you smirk at me one more time.”

“He wasn’t even looking at me!”

“Call it mother’s intuition,” Severus commented, a smirk tugging one corner of his lips. Harry found himself staring and mentally shook himself. “Were you planning to cook breakfast or am I allowed to have toast?”

Allowed? Harry shivered.

“You’re not having toast. Not without me, at least, and I don’t want any right now. I actually don’t-Malfoy, I- Oh, dear Merlin.” Harry looked at Draco in horror. “I called you Draco!”

Draco grinned irritatingly. “Yes, you did. I'd wondered how long it’d take you.”

“I'm gonna be sick.”

“Well, isn't this lovely! Seems my future godmother's finally coming around to me.”

"Draco," Severus said warningly.

"What? Isn't that true?"

"No, it isn't."

"But you are planning to shag and he already acts like your wife." Harry's eyes widened and he shared a look with Severus. What all had he seen?! When had he seen it? "Who's to say you won't continue shagging and someday figure you might as well get married since you're already getting free sex and food out of the deal? It very well could happen. At least you know he'd take care of the house and your general well-being, Severus."

"I fondly remember the days he wouldn't even share the same room with me," Harry stage-whispered. "I'd rather have those back."

"You don't enjoy my godson's pathetic matchmaking attempts?"

"Do you?"

"Actually, I find them quite amusing." Severus gave him a thoughtful look. "We have something to discuss when we have the privacy."

"Should I be worried?"

"Perhaps preemptively angry."

"Oh, this should be good."
"Well, he wants kids," Draco informed Blaise. "Perhaps Severus's infertile and wants him to know."

Severus and Harry both looked at Draco like he was insane.

"I'm not infertile," Severus snapped at the same time Harry irritably said, "he wouldn't choose me to have his kid, you idiot."

Draco arched a brow. "How would you know if you're infertile or not? Do you have a child hidden away somewhere? Or perhaps the results of a fertility test?" He paused and glanced at Harry. "Or maybe a pregnancy test?"

Severus glared, genuinely looking furious, and Harry elbowed Draco.

"Knock it off, Malfoy."

"If Harry was pregnant," Blaise mused, "the potion wouldn't have worked. Nothing at all would have happened to him."

"Indeed," Severus agreed tightly. "Now change the subject."

"Fine. How about we go back to talking about your marriage. For the wedding, I'm seeing-"

Harry just managed to avoid the painful-looking hex Severus threw Draco's way.

Served him right.

***

"Severus?"

"In the kitchen," Harry called back and continued piling barbecued pork on Severus's plate. "I hope Professor Dumbledore's alone."

"I don't. I want everyone to see this."

"Stop it, Draco." Severus booted the chair next to his away from the table and pointed. "Sit down, brat. Blaise will pour our drinks." Draco started snickering and Severus added, "as will Draco, since he finds Blaise's punishment so funny."

"Well, what have we here? Harry, did you-" Albus paused and briefly looked taken aback before a large smile quirked his beard. "You cooked lunch. May I join you?"

"Blaise spiked my orange juice with a pregnancy simulator," Harry calmly explained and held out a hand. As had become routine, Severus grabbed hold and helped him up. "Thanks, sir."

"Mmm."

"Why in Merlin's name would you want Harry to take such a potion, Blaise?"

"I've never seen a pregnant male and he's taken one before."

Oh, the explaining Severus might have to do later. Harry didn't envy him.

"That is very interesting," Albus said, eyes on Severus. "Well, I suggest we eat quickly. We all have things to do today and I'm sure Harry would like to get us out of his hair."
"I would like a nap," Harry tentatively said, "but I'm not trying to run anyone out."

"You should. It's not like you want or need Draco around all the time." Blaise grinned. "Me on the other hand? I'm pretty good conversation and I'm not crazy."

Harry chuckled. "Oh, shut up."

"This is perhaps the first time I've ever agreed with Potter," Draco commented. "Shut up, Blaise."

Blaise snorted. As he and Draco began snarking back and forth (and Harry couldn't tell if it was real or not - Slytherins), Harry became aware of the quiet conversation going on between Severus and Albus. Whatever Albus was saying was deepening the little dip between Severus's brows. When Harry passed a plate to Albus and reclaimed his seat beside Severus, both men leaned back into their chairs.

"Thank you, Harry. This looks delicious."

"It's a touch spicy," Severus noted. "He thought it sounded good."

"Maybe I did, but it didn't stop somebody from eating two huge servings of it," Harry retorted. "How long will he be gone, Professor Dumbledore?"

"Harry, I'm no longer your professor. You may call me Albus." Harry just kept staring and Albus chuckled. "Very well. I have no idea if he has other plans, but our meeting shouldn't take too long."

"About how long?"

"Potter, are you worried my-"

Severus stealthily cast a spell Draco's way to silence him and then calmly scratched his chin.

"That's odd," he noted. "Brat, I will be gone as long as I need."

"But dinner..." Harry gestured to the oven, where a roast was slowly cooking. "Will you be back in time for that?"

Severus sighed. "I believe I will."

"Good. I hate eating alone."

Twenty minutes later, Harry found himself standing beside the fireplace while Blaise and Draco double-checked their belongings. Severus had already put on his jacket and cloak - something Harry was having trouble ignoring. If he was having that meeting in his personal quarters, why did he need his cloak? He was gonna get himself ki - Nope. He wasn't going to think about it.

"Did you remember your toothbrushes?" Harry suddenly asked. They'd still been in the bathroom before lunch.

"Yeah. I grabbed Draco's and mine earlier."

"Okay. What about that book you brought, Malfoy?"

"In my bag."

Harry nodded and suddenly stopped. "Oh, the house shoes. There are a black pair in the laundry room and-"
"Packed them," Blaise interrupted.

"What about your house robe, Malfoy? You left it in the bathroom this morning. Did you pack it?"

"Yes, Mum."

Harry glared and stepped towards him, but Severus caught his arm and yanked him back.

"Do not harm my godson. Draco, leave him be."

"Come along, boys," Albus urged. "We'll be late, Severus."

"We're coming. Brat, don't move around much. You don't want to hit your head and bleed out, do you?"

Harry shuddered. "Yeah, I'll miss you, too."

Severus rolled his eyes. "I'll go ahead to my chambers, Albus. I need to take down the protections on the floo. Come along when you can."

"Of course."

"Bye, sir."

Severus nodded and disappeared.

"Oh, I have to pee," Draco announced. "Be right back."

"Minerva will be waiting for you, Draco. I would wait, but I must hurry."

Draco waved him off - how rude - and hurried to the bathroom. Blaise tightly gripped the strap of his bag and headed to the fireplace. He briefly glanced back to toss a quick goodbye over his shoulder and then was gone.

"Harry, my boy."

Albus grabbed his hands and smiled. "No matter what has been said to you, I think you look radiant. Hopefully I will live long enough to see you like this again."

Harry laughed. "You mean pregnant?"

"Yes. Now enough of that. I can see it's making you uncomfortable."

"Not that. I just am in general. This belly..." Harry shook his head and let his arms fall when Albus finally let him go. "How's everything going up there?"

"My sources say we're close, Harry. You'll be coming home soon."

"Do you actually mean that this time?"

Albus chuckled. "Truly, I do. I cannot wait to have you both back. Your absences have affected us all."

"I really don't know what to say, sir. I'm sorry."

"No, don't be. I must be going. Remind Draco that Minerva is awaiting his arrival. Do you still have the emergency portkey I made you?"

Harry briefly thought of the ink bottle in his bedside table.
"Yes."

He really should start carrying that on him in case he ever actually needed it.

"I'm glad. Now goodbye, young man. We will see you shortly."

With a smile, Albus was gone... leaving him alone with Draco. Suspicious, Harry glanced at the bathroom door and then headed to the kitchen to start washing the lunch dishes. He was halfway there when Draco breezed back into the living room.

"Ah, Potter." Draco hitched his bag over his shoulder and grinned. Merlin, how he wanted to punch his stupid face. "I wanted a word before I went. Despite you and Severus's denials, I know something's going on between you two and-"

"There is nothing-"

"There is. Blaise overheard your... intimate moment on the couch the other night and informed me of it while we were packing." Harry's eyes widened and Draco smugly continued, "as I was saying, I know something's going on and I will be enlisting your know-it-all's help in putting the wedding together."

"We're not getting married, you prat."

"And if you happen to conceive," Draco continued as if Harry hadn't spoken, "then I fully expect to be notified at once. Severus is my godfather and the only guardian I have now so if I'm to have a new mummy and a little brother or sister, I'll need to prepare."

Draco laughed.

“You know that’s not how it works, you idiot. I don’t become your mum or godmother or anything.”

“Close enough. Mum.”

“Get out of here!” Draco disappeared into the floo, still laughing his head off, and Harry paced into the kitchen. "Merlin, I hate that gitty, annoying, bloody..."

It dawned on him then that he was once again all alone in the safe house and that worried him. Pulling his hands away from the kitchen tap, Harry exited the kitchen and hurried to the bedroom. He wanted to keep his portkey handy in case someone other than Severus came through the floo. It was gonna be a long day.

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At least two hours passed before Harry remembered Severus said something about having letters. Looking away from the fireplace, he glanced around the room and finally spotted two piles of letters and a box sitting on the desk. It took three tries to get himself off the couch, but he managed in the end and was feeling quite proud of himself. He’d have to tell Severus.

Harry scooped up the pile clearly meant for him and looked through them. Hermione, Neville, Rose – what? That’d be interesting. He wondered if Severus had one, too. The twins, Hermione again. Harry’s brows pulled down. Theodore Nott? How…? And one more from Hermione.

Shuffling back to the couch, he tried to decide which he’d read first. He shrugged and decided he’d
Hello again, Harry!

Now that Rose is asleep (and my husband with her), I have time to write, though I know you won't receive this until the Malfoys leave Hogwarts. I'm so glad we were able to spend some time with you. Oh, so many things happened today. I don’t even know where to begin! Though, to be honest, most of my thoughts have one thing in common – you and the professor.

I don't think either of you really realize how often you both respond to the other, even if it's with just a look. You're so in tune to each other! I think it's sweet, Harry.

Now, I'm being perfectly serious. I was paying attention, you see. Professor Snape had moments today where he seemed to be completely immersed into his thoughts and many times his disregard for the conversation was bordering on rude, but the moment you would start to talk, he’d snap out of it and immediately respond to you in some way. Many times, yes, it was with merely a look, but it was much more than even his own godson got!

And did you see the look Professor Snape gave you after you got onto Ron and the others about how they treat him? My goodness, Harry. It was like he was close to snogging you right there in front of everyone! Oh, how I wished he would have. No, I wouldn’t have watched, but I would have been cheering you two on.

He hadn’t looked close to snogging him. At best, he looked perplexed. Perhaps he was wondering why Harry was even wasting his breath when that was the sort of thing Severus had been dealing with all these years. That thought irrationally pissed him off. He was right to say something. Severus deserved better.

I really do believe you should think about being friendlier with Draco. I'm positive Professor Snape would be incredibly happy if he knew the two most important men in his life got along well!

Harry sighed deeply. She would never stop, would she? Until she had irrefutable evidence that he and Severus were never gonna happen, she would keep trying and trying. Merlin, it was exhausting just reading this stuff.

Draco really has changed, Harry. He’s lately been kind to everyone, truly seems to care about Luna and her continued safety, and has even volunteered himself to be a part of the guard around you during the final battle. See? He’s changed. He’s willing to die to protect you.

Now I must force myself to think about what happened. Are you alright? I know finding out Professor Snape’s interested in men, as well, was a shock for you, but are you okay now? I didn’t really want to ask with Ron and Rose in the room so I must content myself with writing it instead. I'm so sorry the news upset you as much as it did.

Please talk to me if you need to. I really do want to know. Were you so upset because you were hoping he could somehow end up being with you one day? It would explain so much, Harry!

Oh, and Ron is still upset he didn’t know you were interested in men. He kept frowning through supper and I finally promised him a bit of oral before bed tonight. And wouldn’t you know? He
snapped right out of it. Well, he pretended to. I could tell he was still upset. I thought you were going to tell him. Why didn’t you?

Incidentally, in case you were wondering, Ron did figure out Professor Snape’s helping you with the ritual. When we returned to our apartment earlier, he asked me if it was true, but I didn’t say anything. You see, Rose thankfully chose that moment to throw a fit. She misses her Nape. You might pass that along, which I think you always do even if I don’t suggest it.

Anyways, Ron’s been up for a few minutes now and is getting suspicious about what I’m telling you. I’ll write again when I can. I’ll have time to finish my thoughts then.

Love you!

Hermione

That woman. Harry shook his head, folded her letter back up, and grabbed what he assumed was her next letter. He again frowned at Theodore’s letter and opened Hermione’s second one.

Hey,

I don’t have that long before Rose wakes up from her nap so excuse the sloppy handwriting. I just wanted to ask about one or two things and then talk about a few things before I’ll be willing to let the other night go.

Has Draco learned of Professor Snape’s inclinations and participation in the ritual? If he has, I hope he’s alright with everything.

Have you noticed how protective Professor Snape is of you? Obviously you must remember the time my husband stupidly surprised you and got threatened by the professor, but do you remember how he snapped at me when I hugged you?

I totally approve of him, Harry. If he ever shows the slightest interest, jump on that, won’t you? The chance, I meant, but if you wanted to count the professor… Well, I’m sure you and I wouldn’t mind you doing that, too.

Surprised, Harry’s brows rose and his mouth dropped open. Hermione! He’d have to remember to scold her for that remark. Merlin. Though, he supposed it was nice to have support like that.

I truly love how much you rely on each other, from needing a further explanation of something or about someone to needing physical help with things. I’ve noticed you both seem quite willing to lend a helping hand (tongue, ear) when needed.

Oh, darn. Rose is sniffling. Nope. Just a false alarm.

As I was saying, you rely on each other. What all do you do for each other? I’ve always been curious about that. I’m glad I have an opening to ask.

You know him so well. Don’t think I didn’t hear what you said regarding Professor Dumbledore’s
explanation regarding our visit. Really, you know him a lot better than most of us do. What’s he 
really like? Personality, habits, favorite foods, daily routine? That sort of thing. Is he nice to you? 
Does he read a lot or does he talk more? What do you guys talk about if you do? I'm curious, that’s 
all. What do you guys do all the time? Seems like an incredible amount of time to have to fill. I'm 
sure books and conversation only entertain for so long.

Harry narrowed his eyes. Yeah, he caught what she was trying to do. She was good, too. He almost 
didn’t catch it. Did she think something was going on between Severus and him, as well, and he 
just wasn’t telling her?

Oh, Harry! I love that Professor Snape jokes around with you. I’ve never even seen him do that 
with Draco (though I will, of course, ignore the fact that I’ve never spent much time with just the 
two of them). Does he do that often? Do you find him funny? Does he laugh at your jokes, too?

Brows furrowed, Harry turned the parchment over and checked the back, but there wasn’t any 
more writing. Why hadn’t Hermione signed the letter? She always did. He curiously reached for 
the third letter from Hermione, opened it up, and nodded.

Sorry about that, Harry. Rose had woken up, but I'm back now. It's been about a week (Ron got 
sick) so my memory is a little fuzzy. I'm trying to remember what I was going to say next, but it’s 
gone now. That’s okay, though, because I’ve been thinking about something (well, two 
somethings) for a few days and I think I’d like to write about it.

Harry, Professor Snape treats you almost like you’re his life partner and I simply could not be 
happier about that. Have you noticed? He really seems to care about you and about what you think. 
That’s what I think he would call you, by the way. His life partner. It just sounds so mature. I like it. 
You do the same, you know. I always hear “our living room” or “our bedroom” or “our guests” 
when he’s talking about the safe house. You again do the same.

You almost called him Severus and he didn’t sound bothered by it. He merely asked if you needed 
anything, which leads me into my next point. He lets you spoil him with good food and better care, 
much like one’s husband would. Ahem.

He did seem particularly happy to find out you were making his favorite cake, did he not? He 
asked you to wake him up from a nap. I suppose he simply said you could if you remembered, but 
still, Harry, he gave you permission to disturb his sleep and only asked for coffee in return.

Hermione seriously sounded barmy. Did she ever actually pay attention to any of the stuff she 
wrote down before she decided to send it off? Probably not, otherwise she’d likely be embarrassed 
by how ridiculous it all sounded.

And oh, God forbid I forget to mention breakfast! Harry! He went without breakfast the morning 
we arrived, because he wanted to wait for you! He could have had toast! He said he was being
polite! For your sake!! Oh, Harry!

Oh, my! Harry rolled his eyes and pushed out a breath. Every single sentence in that paragraph had an exclamation point. He’d be making sure she was aware of that. He hoped she felt a little shame. Just a little. It was kinda funny, after all.

And I simply adore his hinting for cherry chocolate cake, Harry. That is too cute for words. Do you like that cake, too, or do you make it just for him?

What was that about emptying his liquor down the sink? Professor Snape said something and, I mean, it sounded like you’ve done that before. Did he used to drink too much and you’ve stopped him? Oh, Harry! Do you love him? I would be so happy if you told me you did!

Did you see him looking worried about you when I said I’m pregnant? Harry, I think he really cares about you! Maybe you should make a move on him.

Okay. Hermione had officially gone mad. What other explanation could there be for that utter craziness he’d just read? Harry reread the small paragraph and shook his head. Nope, it was still there so he wasn’t hallucinating.

And I know I saw him looking worried, but why would he be worried about you when I told you I’m pregnant? I know you want children, but I didn’t realize it was badly enough that my announcement would hurt you, Harry. If that is the case, I am so very sorry. Why did you never say? I could have broken my news in a better way.

I do wonder. If you and Professor Snape get together, how would that affect your individual relationships with Draco? I'm sure it would be awkward for Draco, having his schoolmate be in a relationship with his guardian, but I wonder what would happen between you and Draco and between Professor Snape and Draco. What do you think?

He really does love children, doesn't he? Or perhaps he just loves Rose. I can't tell yet. I wonder if he'll love your children.

Oh, dear. I never seem to have enough time these days, Harry. Professor Dumbledore’s called a meeting and it’s starting now. I’ll speak to you later.

Love you! Write me back as soon as you get these letters.

Love, Hermione

Harry pinched the bridge of his nose and instead of mentally listing exactly how many ways Hermione's letters had gotten stuff wrong or had just been more matchmaking (and was that happening too much of late?), Harry decided to pick up Theodore's letter. He quickly broke the seal and frowned as he read.
The twins are in the infirmary. Nothing serious. The thing they'd been working on blew up. Minor burns, etc. They'll survive. They just wanted you to know and asked me to write for them.

- T. Nott

Since when had Theodore been on their side? Harry had always kind of assumed he was neutral in everything. He'd have to ask Severus. He quickly fished out the twins' letter.

Harry, our dear man!

We are feeling so much better. Everything's healed up nicely and we're once more hard at work. We wanted to apologize again for what we said about Snape. We didn't know it'd piss you off so badly. Guess he must be a good guy if you're sticking up for him. We'll try to remember that.

We heard from Charlie the other day. He says he’s bored all the time and he shouldn't have left your place, because at least there's people to talk to there. Don’t worry. We gave him some hell for ya. Prat shouldn’t have left. Surely living down there isn’t that bad. I mean, you’re alive and seem happy and Snape isn’t

He just means you’re getting along great. That’s all.

Yeah. Anyways, we’re sneaking out to Hogsmeade later. We’ll try to send some butterbeer later.

Fred                         George

P.S. Never mind. Fred drank them all.

Harry – I was trashed. I got thirsty. Sorry, mate.

A grin started tugging at Harry’s lips. He loved those two. It seemed they were always going out of their way to make him smile and he definitely appreciated the effort they’d taken for him (even if Fred did drink all of the butterbeer).

Harry glanced at the letter from Rose and started to reach for Neville’s, but stopped. What could be in that letter from Rose? He had a feeling Hermione was to blame, but why use her daughter? Was she worried he wouldn’t open another letter from her? He snorted and gently broke the wax seal on this letter.

Dear Harry,

This is obviously Hermione, but Rose hasn’t stopped talking about you and Professor Snape all day so I asked if she’d like to write a letter to you. My sweet, little girl is talking a mile a minute now.

She says Nape, Nape, me, Haw Haw. Want Nape. Want Haw Haw. Well, it sounds more like “won,” which I believe is incredibly adorable.
Oh, dear. I laughed and I wasn’t supposed to. Rose is pouting now.

She wants to come visit you and Professor Snape. I told her I’d have to ask you before we show up. I don’t think she quite understood why we shouldn’t drop in without warning, but she nodded like she did anyway. She’s so intelligent, Harry.

She says she loves her Haw Haw and she loves her Nape Nape. It seems you’ll just have to share her. Please disregard that ink smudge. I’m not crying, I promise.

Harry smiled widely. Rose said she loved them? Both of them? Oh, Severus would be hearing of that as soon as he got back. Harry looked at the fireplace and frowned. When would that be? Soon?

Oh, how cute! Harry, do you remember that little backpack we gave her not too long ago? She’s trying to pack it. So far, she has exactly three nappies, a shirt, and her teddy. She’s serious about wanting to visit her Harry.

Oops. I’m being called to help pack. We’ll let you go for now, Harry. Love you!

Love Haw Haw. Love Nape.

Hermione   Rose

His cheeks were starting to hurt from smiling so much. Harry stared at the scrawled name beside Hermione’s. He had no doubt she held Rose still and did that hand in hand, but it was still getting framed.

In fact, this entire letter might be getting framed. Alright. Yes, he’d decided. This letter and the short letter Severus had written him the time he’d left without warning (the git) were getting framed and hung in a place of honour in his new house. Possibly here, as well.

Still smiling, Harry grabbed up the letter from Neville and quickly started reading.

Hey, Harry

Haven’t gotten to write in a while. I’m still busy all the time so it’s hard. I’m writing this while waiting for the shower to heat up. Hope that doesn’t bother you, but it’s my only free time! In all seriousness, I hope you and Professor Snape are doing alright. Tell him I said hey, won’t you?

From what Albus was saying at our last meeting, it sounds like you’re coming home soon. None of us can wait. It’s been weird not having you around. It’s wrong, Harry. Oh, I saw your names in the paper the other day. It was nothing important. Just someone wanting information on your whereabouts. They’ve filed you and Professor Snape as missing persons at the Ministry.

Well, my water’s hot. I better get in there before there’s none left. Sorry I couldn’t write more. I really only wanted to say I miss you and can’t wait for you to come back. I’m doing fine. Nothing’s really changed here at Hogwarts so I don’t really have anything else to say.

Right. Water. Bye, Harry!
Neville was such a sweet guy. Harry counted himself lucky to have a friend like him.

Harry was intending to write everyone back, but he couldn’t. He gave up after three lines of the first response – this to Hermione – because he kept looking up anytime the fire sparked too loudly. Why wasn’t Severus back yet? Had he gotten in trouble? Had something happened while he was gone? Had he been ambushed?

Right. He couldn’t keep sitting in here and staring at the fireplace. He had to get up and do something. His eyes lit up. He’d bake!

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The next morning at five o’clock, Harry was rolling out of bed before he was fully conscious. Severus had never come back and only exhaustion had stopped his panic last night. Why had he been gone so long? Was something wrong?

He cracked their bedroom door and didn’t hear anything. Creeping down the hall, he saw a handful of cloaks tossed over the desk and relaxed. His renewed panic evaporated as he saw the note laying on top of Severus’s cloak. He grabbed it and headed to the bathroom to relieve himself.

Brat-

I’m perfectly fine. You needn’t panic, as I’m sure you’ve been doing. I meant to send word last night, but Albus was asleep by the time I was done. I’m in possession of the last of the items I need for your potions. My friend was not able to find one or two things, which explains my long absence. We had to visit a few people and call in a few favours to get them. After, my friend, his wife, and I had dinner and caught up. Don’t fret. I wore a glamour.

I hope that deflates your anger, you little princess. I’m in the kitchen and we have guests. I suppose you could join us once you’ve awakened. I do hope you read my note first this time.

I also found a book I think you might enjoy. Don’t destroy it. It is in my cloak. Kindly put it away before our guests see. You more than I will appreciate you doing such.

Severus

Harry smiled and left the bathroom. Severus had left him another short letter and apart from that jab about being a princess, it did make him feel better. He could kiss that man. Curious, he felt around Severus’s cloak and found a book-shaped lump in the left pocket. Pulling it out enough to read the title, surprise caught his voice a moment and then he barked out a sharp laugh.

Severus had brought him a book titled My Husband’s A God by Anthony H. Greenbaum. He wondered what this book was going to say and curiously flipped to the first page.

“My husband absolutely loves me,” the author wrote. “Don’t get me wrong. He just sometimes forgets how often I pamper his spoiled arse. I cook for him, clean our home, have birthed each of our children, and still the man doesn’t understand why I nag him about little things. Sometimes I
swear it’s like I married a child.”

Harry again laughed – much quieter this time – and put his new book in the top drawer of the desk. He’d definitely be reading that book. He couldn’t believe Severus had gone through the trouble of bringing him that.

Putting his hands on his potion-induced belly, Harry traipsed to the kitchen and breezed inside. He froze mid-step and almost hit the floor (the belly again apparently hadn’t gotten the memo to stop). Remus and Tonks sat at the table, Rose sat in her high seat, and Severus sat in his usual chair. Remus and Tonks were looking at him with varying degrees of shock. His goddaughter was babbling away and eating an apple.

“Thanks for the letter, sir.”

“It was a note,” Severus disagreed. “I’m surprised you thought to look.”

“I learned from last time.”

“Harry,” Remus finally said. “You… I hadn’t heard…”

Of course Severus hadn’t thought to warn them. He looked at the man in question and he subtly smirked. He was proud of himself! The arse. Harry glanced back over, getting ready to explain, and that’s when he noticed Tonks’s belly.

“You’re pregnant?” he asked accusingly, feeling incredibly hurt. “Why didn’t anyone tell me?”

“You’re pregnant, too,” Tonks shot back, still sounding shocked. “Why didn’t you tell Remy?”

“Oh, no, I’m not.” Stupid fake pregnancy hormones. He felt close to tears. “I was slipped a pregnancy simulator when Blaise and Malfoy were here. I would have told you if I’d been pregnant. Remus. Why didn’t anyone tell me? Severus?” His gaze moved back to the man. “Did you know?”

“Did he just-” Tonks whispered.

“I did not. I assure you, brat, her pregnancy was quite a surprise to me, as well.”

“Why, Remus? I never hear from you anymore, I had to learn about your wedding – and I didn’t even know you were dating Tonks – from Malfoy, and now this? I hear more from him,” he said, pointing Severus’s way, “than I do you and he’s not one to openly gush about his life!”

Severus’s smirk grew and he rested back in his chair, arms folded over his chest.

“I’ve been busy, Harry. Truly I have. I wasn’t purposely trying to exclude you from anything.” Harry sighed and sat down in the chair Severus kicked away from the table. “I’ve not had much time to see anyone lately, especially Dora. This… just sort of happened.”

Remus briefly glanced between him and Severus, brows slightly furrowed, and then focused on him again.

“Is that all, Remy? You’re not hiding anything else from me?”

“No, Harry. I swear I’m not.”

“Well, that’s something, I guess.”
Remus nodded and again looked between him and Severus.

“So what’s new in your life, Harry?” he asked curiously, his calm tone sounding a bit forced. “Anything I should know about?”

Harry glanced at Severus and got a slight nod in return.

“Yeah, actually. I'm gonna be doing a sex magic ritual to protect myself during the battle.” Remus froze and didn’t look away from him. “Hermione was looking into this kind of thing, apparently, and she thought it’d be a good idea. I did, too, so… Remy?”

“Lupin?”


“I am,” Severus replied. “Obviously. Who else would he ask?”

“Is there a reason you asked him?” Remus asked quickly, snapping out of his thoughts. “Not that he’s not a very good man or anything. That’s not what I was saying, Harry. I swear it wasn’t.”

Severus looked incredibly amused.

“I wanted him to. That’s why I asked.” Severus was looking at him oddly now and Harry refused to look over. Instead, he unflinchingly met Remus’s gaze. “Anyways, I’m gonna assume I can’t ask what you’ve been doing. Probably something to do with him, right?”

“You mean Vol-”

“Don’t say his name,” Severus warned angrily. “His mind has already been breached several times by the Dark Lord simply because the boy was thinking about him.”

“Ah. I didn’t even know.”

“How would you? He hasn’t heard from you in months, Lupin.”

Severus was enjoying himself too much. Harry decided to nip that in the bud. He didn’t want Severus to push Remus away. He was the only pseudo-father figure he had left.

“Sir, it’s okay.”

“I’m merely saying something to prevent you from pouting. You’re incredibly annoying when you do that.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “I’m not going to pout.”

“Haw-Haw,” Rose screeched, apparently having just noticed him. There was mushed apple all over her. “Haw-Haw, me!”

Harry chuckled, stood up with some difficulty, and pulled her from the high seat.

“My goodness, sweetheart. You’re an absolute mess. Did Nape give you an apple?”

“Mummy.”

“It’s Snape, boy.”
“I bet she still can’t say esses. What did she call you earlier?”

Severus grumbled. “Nape.”

“Well, let’s get you cleaned up. Now you’re at Harry’s house you’ll get spoiled. How long do we have her?”

“Albus plans to return after their mission tomorrow.”

Harry turned, Rose clutched to his chest. “What mission?”

“Haw-Haw.”

“There is to be a surprise attack on the Goyle-”

Rose fidgeted more. “Nape-Nape, me.”

“Loosen your hold, boy.” Harry did and noted the surprise on Remus’s face, the way he was looking at Severus. “As I was saying, there is to be an attack on the Goyle compound. Albus does believe we will be leaving soon.”

Severus began to say more and glanced Remus’s way. He stopped, closed his mouth, and narrowed his eyes.

“Right. Um, well, have you all eaten breakfast?”

“Yes, brat, we have.”

“At the school?” Severus sourly nodded yes. His food was better and they both knew that. “Should I make something, then?”

“No, of course not.”

“Fine. Did Rose eat?”

“Your friend claimed she ate, but the way the child devoured her apple, I would think not.”

Harry shrugged. “She’s probably still hungry, then. Coffee, sir? Remus? Tea, Dora?”

He received a few nods and a grumbled response from Severus, but he didn’t pay much attention to what he’d said. After starting the coffee and tea, Harry set to work cleaning Rose off. She squirmed and shrieked while he did and placed a big, wet kiss on his cheek in thanks the moment he was done. Then, naturally, she wanted nothing else to do with him. After all, Severus was in the room.

“Nape! Nape-Nape, up!”

Harry looked excited. “She just said a new word! Not too long ago, Hermione wrote me a list of the words she already knew and that wasn’t one of them.”

“I will be more impressed when she can say my name properly.” Severus picked Rose up and settled her onto his leg. Her hands immediately smacked onto the table and he edged them away from his paper. “While you’re standing, you might consider finding the child a cup of some sort. She didn’t arrive with one.”

“Really? That’s odd.” Harry opened the cup cabinet and felt his eyes widen. An entire shelf of
mugs and cups had been replaced with little plastic cups in a variety of colours and designs. “Um. I found her a cup.”

“We had children’s cups? Have we always?”

“Er, no.” Harry opened the cabinet door wider and enjoyed Severus’s reaction. “Yeah, that's what I thought.”

“So,” Remus said suddenly, “you two seem friendly.”

Harry and Severus shared a look.

“Yeah, we are,” Harry agreed. “Well, something like that.”

“That’s good.”

“You’re just friends, though, right?” Dora continued.

“Uh, something like that,” Harry repeated. “I mean, we’re not together if that’s what you wanted to know.”

“Oh, good.”

Harry irritably looked at her. “Why?”

“I’ve no doubt,” Severus said, “she is thinking of the age difference between us. Perhaps she thinks anything more than thirteen years is too much.”

Dora scowled at him and Harry sent a look Severus’s way, silently begging him to stop.

“I think she’s simply concerned,” Remus commented in a placating tone. “It is true we haven’t seen you both a lot – or at all in Dora’s case - since you came here and I’m sure things have changed drastically, but we both still remember how… volatile you used to be around each other.”

“We’re not anymore,” Harry replied, shrugging. “We haven’t fought in ages, actually. Never more than verbally, I mean, and that’s never about anything important.”

“I suppose that is true, though he does his best to nag me to death.”

“You always deserve it, sir.”

Severus began to argue back, but Rose wiggled around and poked Severus’s nose.

“Nape-Nape, no. No bad. Love Haw-Haw.”

Severus looked astounded and Harry laughed. He never thought he’d see the day Severus Snape got reprimanded by a tiny little girl.

“I love you, too, Rose.”

***

Minerva was the last through the floo, having just sent Remus and Dora ahead, and Harry gratefully dropped onto the couch. Severus was sitting on the other end of the couch doing a poor job of pretending to read his book when Harry knew he was really watching Rose’s every move. Rose again pushed a scribble drawing away from her and began coloring another picture. Merlin
only knew what they were supposed to be, but he loved them all the same.

"I'm glad they came to visit," Harry remarked. Severus looked at him and shrugged. "Don't be like that. I'm really happy."

"It doesn't take much, does it?"

"Sir, please. I almost thought..."

"What?" Severus asked, closely looking at him. "That he didn't care about you any longer?"

"Kind of."

"Hmm. That's absurd. The wolf has taken an odd liking to you. Everyone can see that."

"Even you?"

"Yes."

"Huh." Harry thought about that and furrowed his brows. "Did you have anything to do with them coming?"

"Why on earth would I bother?"

Harry grinned. "That's what I want to know. Why would you bother? It couldn't be for me."

"Of course not. It was for me."

"So you did have something to do with it."

"If you will stop talking about this, I'll gladly tell the series of events."

"Deal. Spill." Severus gave him a sour look and Harry snorted. "Please?"

"I just happened to find Lupin loitering in the tapestry room. He decided to come for a visit."

"But that can't be the whole story," Harry pressed. "Did you say anything? Why did he just randomly invite himself and Tonks?"

"I believe she goes by Dora now."

"Oh, who cares? We both know who I meant."

"I recall you saying you would stop talking about this."

"Nape," Rose announced loudly. She then scrambled onto the couch using Severus’s trousers for leverage and fluttered a drawing in his face. "I dwaw."

Severus pushed Rose’s hand far enough away that he could actually see the drawing.

“Child, what am I looking at?”

Harry leaned over and saw... Oh, dear. He snickered. All black rectangle, black triangle, small triangle in a circle.

“I think she drew you, sir.”
Rose shrieked and excitedly bounced around. Severus jolted forward and let out a loud grunt as Rose’s foot landed on his manhood. Harry covered his mouth and gave him a sympathetic frown. After setting her on the couch between them, Severus breathed deeply for a moment and then looked back at the drawing. He was abruptly scowling.

“I am incredibly insulted. My nose isn’t quite that large.”

“Artistic license,” Harry said dismissively, secretly hoping it’d get the scowl to go away. “I’m sure she’s not drawing exactly what she sees. I mean, did you see the one she did of me?”

Severus retrieved a square of parchment from the front of his book, unfolded it, and held it up. Rose grabbed his free hand and Harry tried not to notice her rubbing her cheek against his fingers. He couldn’t quite ignore, however, the way Severus was letting her.

“Do you mean this drawing?” Harry looked from Rose to Severus to the drawing and back. Was he planning on keeping that one? Why? “Are you going to answer or stare at me like a brainless twit?”

“Um…” Harry glanced at the drawing – a brown and blue rectangle with a belly at least six times the size of the Harry drawing, which was exaggerating his belly a bit much – and nodded. “Yeah, that’s the one.”

“Hmm. I believe I see what you mean now, brat. You are certainly large at the moment -”

“Hey!”

“- but you aren’t quite this big. I suppose the same must be applied to this creature’s unfortunate nose.”

“I should hang them up. Display Rose’s best art yet.”

“I forbid you from hanging that –” Severus glanced down at Rose and seemed surprised she was snoozing, mouth pressed against his hand. “When did that happen?”

Harry shrugged. “You were talking and she didn’t take a nap earlier. It was bound to happen.”

“…right. As I was saying, I forbid you from hanging that terrible drawing up.”

“I think it’s cute.”

“I'm sure you do. Why don’t you put this child in a more comfortable spot?”

“Because I'm the one with the ginormous belly right now and it’s difficult enough walking anywhere. Put a sleeping child in my arms…”

“You do make a valid point.” Severus paused. “How annoying.”

Harry snorted.
It's finally time for the ritual. Much as I love writing the fun stuff, it isn't graphic. It didn't fit the story. I'm sure you can imagine how it went, though.

It had been three days since his pregnancy simulator had worn off and Harry was getting anxious. Severus had told him they would be waiting until he wasn’t “pregnant” to do the ritual and he’d agreed that was best. Though he hadn’t said it, he didn’t want his first time to include a ridiculously huge belly. For many reasons.

Well, it’d been days now – three! – and Severus still hadn’t said anything about the ritual. Not even yesterday when Harry told him he wanted to do the ritual in Severus’s bed. He’d just nodded and kept reading. Didn’t spare him so much as a glance.

Severus chose that moment to limp into the room, one of his potion vials in hand. He sat on the other end of the couch and glanced over after a moment, but didn’t say a word. He pursed his lips and Harry frowned.

"Are you okay?"

"I’m in physical pain.” Severus took a deep breath and tried several times to speak, his mouth opening and closing. Finally, he cleared his throat and asked, “Would you try… massaging… my knee? If possible, I would like to avoid using one of my pain potions. I need to brew more, because I'm currently running low.”

Harry barked out a sharp laugh. “What hurt more – your knee right now or asking that question?”

“My knee,” Severus muttered. Harry was immediately worried. He must obviously be in pain, which hindsight, yeah, probably. He wouldn't have asked for a message if he didn't hurt badly.

Harry slid off the couch, crawled over, and summoned the oil he'd been using lately. Severus held himself rigid as Harry began working on his knee and eventually dropped his head to the back of the couch. Harry glanced up and saw him swallow and tense a bit.

"Why are you in so much pain today?"

"I don't know. It could be the massages I've missed the last few days. It could be chasing after your goddaughter-"

"She hasn't been here in days, sir."

"Hmm. It could be that I slept on the couch the night before last and you skipped my massage the-"

"Last few days, yeah, I heard you. I told you to come to bed, but you didn't listen."

"Why would I?"

"Why wouldn't you?” Harry retorted. "You know what sleeping on the couch does to you.”
"Humph."

Harry concentrated on Severus's knee for a while, his mind spinning back to the ritual. He bit his lip - surely Severus would tell him when it was time - and then gave up with a sigh.

"Sir, I wanted to ask something."

"And yet you haven't asked a thing," Severus pointed out.

"Yeah."

"Am I to guess, then?"

"Well, no..." Harry cast about for a way to ask and struck upon an idea. If he asked about the potions, it might get Severus to decide on a day. "It's just... ehm... could you brew the potions today?"

Severus stilled and looked down at him.

"You want me to brew the potions... for the ritual?"

"Um, yeah."

"Today."

"Yeah."

"Very well." Severus finally looked away and briefly furrowed his brows. "I will start this evening."

"Great."

A short time later, just as Harry had gotten to the back of his knee, Severus straightened up and shook him off.

"I'm sufficiently soothed and will be showering shortly. If you need to make use of the bathroom, do it now."

Harry nodded and stood up.

"You alright, sir?"

"Perfectly, yes. Go."

"Alright..."

What was going on with him?

***

" Actually, can I watch?"

Severus paused and glanced over at him for long enough that Harry started fidgeting. Finally, Severus frowned and readjusted his hold on the box of potions supplies.

"Not half an hour ago you said you wanted to sit on the couch and wait for me to finish brewing. What has changed?"
"I don't know. I just wanna watch. I've only seen you working a few times, you know."

"You'd like to watch me brew?" Severus asked suspiciously. "Hmm. I suppose since these are mostly for you, I will allow it. However, I have some rules."

"I expected that. What are they?"

"One, do not touch anything. Two, do not prattle endlessly. Three, do not fidget. If you break my concentration, your potions may be affected and I'm sure you don't want that."

"Deal. Don't touch stuff, talk much, or move."

"Close enough. Sit down."

"Thanks."

Harry quietly sat in the chair behind the desk and watched Severus sanitise the desktop before setting up his work station. Three cauldrons were lined up in the center of the desk, a large array of ingredients divided up in front of them.

Severus then rolled up the sleeves of his shirt, pulled his hair back with a leather tie, and left the room. Judging by the sounds coming from the bathroom, he was washing his hands. He'd never thought to do that when brewing. Was Severus just being extra careful with the potions or was that something every master did? When he returned, Harry watched him take up a position on the other side of the desk.

"I've mentioned the three potions I'd be brewing." Harry nodded. "I'm positive you cannot determine which potion is which based upon the ingredients beside each cauldron. Am I correct?"

"Yeah. Though..." Harry again looked down and pointed at a familiar plant. "That's the stuff you use in your pain potion. That one's going to be the libido potion, isn't it?"

"I'm impressed. Yes, it is. The cauldron in the middle will hold your contraceptive potion."

"...so the last one is the... that..."

He couldn't even say it. Instead, he frowned in distaste and Severus quietly huffed.

"The abortive, yes."

"Right."

He wouldn't be using that. Even if it did somehow become necessary, though it was really unlikely. That contraceptive would probably be strong enough to keep a legion of people from getting pregnant with just one drop. He smothered a snort. As Severus began working on all three potions at once, which was mind-boggling considering how much was going into each potion and how intricate the stirring patterns were, Harry leaned up a little to see what he was doing.

"I hope you're prepared," Severus suddenly remarked. Harry jumped and looked up curiously. "This particular contraceptive is most effective if imbibed within a few hours of being brewed."

"Really? So you mean after this is done, we should..." Severus's eyes briefly met his before his gaze returned to the center cauldron. Harry shivered. "Oh. Well, alright. Are, uh, will you be ready?"

"I already knew how today would end the moment you asked me to brew these. I am sufficiently
prepared."

Harry shrugged. "Cool."

"Are you worried?"

"I think I'm more worried about what I'll make for dinner."

Severus spared him an amused look. "You would naturally be more concerned about your wifely duties, wouldn't you?"

"But sir, if I was - hey, I'm not a girl!" Severus chuckled and Harry rolled his eyes. "If I was your wife, wouldn't this be kinda one of my duties, too? Well, not the ritual, but the actions involved... you know."

"I'd like to think any wife of mine wouldn't consider it a duty, but a privilege."

"That sure of yourself?"

"I've had plenty of feedback over the years, brat, and it's all been positive. Yes, I am."

"Huh. So what do you want for dinner?"

"Do you know? The one thing you haven't managed to completely destroy was the potpie you made for my godson. It actually took a few hours for the crippling stomach cramps to set in."

"Oh, ha ha, sir." Severus made a face and Harry thought about potpie. "That does sound good, though."

"Mm."

"Think it'll make much difference if we eat first?"

"Would you prefer to? You never said."

"Um, well, I don't know."

"Let us eat first," Severus decided. "By the time this has finished, it will be relatively late in the day. We can have a late supper and then retire for the evening. Would that be acceptable?"

"Er, yeah."

Merlin. In a few hours, he was gonna be having sex for the first time. With Severus.

"Do you still want to do the ritual in my bed?"

"Yeah."

Severus nodded. "Would you feel more comfortable showering before bed?"

"What do you mean?"

"To put yourself at ease."

"You mean like..."

"No, brat, I don't. I meant what I said. To put yourself at ease, to calm down."
"Oh. Um, no. I'm not really that nervous." A little, actually, but having something Severus-shaped in his arse was no new thing (thank Merlin for his magical toy) so he was more excited than anything. "Thanks for suggesting it, though."

"Mm. I suppose now would be the ideal time to give me a list of your demands."

"My what? Oh. Yeah, I never got around to that, did I?"

"You did not, no."

"Um, kissing still."

"I had assumed so. Oral? Massage?"

"Do you often massage people you're about to sleep with?"

"If they wish me to, yes. Do you?"

He hadn't repeated it was just a ritual. Was that significant?

"Not really... and I don't think I'd last if... you know... the other one... because I've never..."

"You've never received oral?"

"No."

"Do you not wish to experience it?" Harry shrugged, his face surely as red as a tomato, and Severus glanced up from the abortive. "It may help you relax. As annoying as you are, I would still hate to harm you in such a way."

"It's not like I haven't had... er, well..."

"Ah. You're correct, of course. You have penetrated yourself before."

Harry shivered. "Yeah."

"So you know to keep relaxed and to breathe," Severus said, closely studying him. "Correct?"

"Yeah. I can even, er, prepare myself if you don't want to."

"I would prefer to do that myself. My partners usually require a little more stretching than others to be able to accommodate my size."

Oh, he knew that very well. That first time his toy changed sizes... Merlin. But its not like he could tell Severus about that so he just shrugged.

"If you want."

"And which position would you like to be in?"

"On my back," Harry immediately replied. "Unless - I mean, do you have one you like best?"

"On your back will be fine."

That didn’t really answer his question, but it was good enough, he guessed. A little while later, Harry sank back into his seat and peeked up at Severus.
“How long after should I get out of bed?” Severus arched a brow, but kept his attention on the potions. “I meant so you can have your bed back.”

“If I must be honest, I will most likely fall asleep soon after we… after the ritual is completed. I truly will not know what you do or when you do it.”

“Oh.” Harry paused and then awkwardly cleared his throat. “Ehm, sir?”

“What?”

“When we’re, um, doing the ritual, could you maybe… um, call me Harry instead of something else?”

“You want me to call you by your given name?” Severus asked, looking surprised. “Did I hear that right?”

“If it wouldn’t be too much trouble, yeah, I do. I mean, I, uh, don’t want the memory of my first time to be… well, you know what I mean.”

Severus nodded, brows furrowed. Harry looked away from his dark eyes and stared at the potions bubbling away in front of him. He belatedly realized he’d just admitted for the first time – to Severus, at least - that he considered this his first time. He wondered what he thought about that.

“Will you be calling me by my given name, as well?”

“I don’t know.” Harry suddenly grinned, trying to move beyond the awkwardness. “Will you slap me again?”

“I suppose I can contain myself if you wish to, brat.”

“I think I will, then. It’d feel weird calling you sir when you're… you know.”

He was so eloquent. Severus seemed amused, though, which made him feel better about that little shortcoming.

A few minutes later, Severus started ignoring the libido potion and Harry wondered if it was done or it was supposed to simmer a while over the contained fire he’d conjured. Two or three minutes later, the contraceptive was roundly ignored. Another minute saw the same for the abortive. Severus looked in the cauldron holding the libido potion and glanced up.

“Now would be a good time to start working on dinner, brat. Once these have simmered, they must completely cool before I can bottle them. We’ll have plenty of time to eat after that.”

Harry nodded. “See you in the kitchen.”

Severus copied his nod and Harry forced himself to leave the room. Now that the time had come to the do the ritual, he almost wished he had a little bit longer to go. It wasn’t that he was nervous much. It was just… after they carried out the ritual, he wouldn’t have that to look forward to anymore.

Well, that was fine. If this was the only chance he got to sleep with Severus, he was damn well going to enjoy it.

***

Long after they’d both finished dinner and refused their desserts, Severus cleared his throat, stood
up, and left. Before Harry had time to do more than stand up, as well, he’d returned with two vials. He passed them off and watched Harry look them over.

“Which one is which?”

“The vial in your left hand is your contraceptive. The vial in your right is the libido enhancer.”

“Right. Thanks.”

“I suggest you take the contraceptive now and the libido enhancer when you're preparing to join me. I will be in the bedroom.”

“I’ll hurry.”

Severus nodded and left the room without a word.

Scowling, he tossed the stupid vial of libido enhancer in the trash and started cleaning up the kitchen as quickly as possible. How Severus thought he’d need it was beyond him. He was the one who’d gone out of his way to ask Severus for help with the ritual! If he’d needed something like this to do it, wouldn’t he have simply found someone else to help him?

Merlin, that man was thick… or perhaps he just had really bad self-esteem. He’d have to figure out which.

Before too much longer, Harry found himself in the bathroom. His contraceptive was on the bathroom sink beside the pain reliever Severus had almost taken earlier that morning. He smiled as he remembered Severus actually suggesting Harry try a massage first. It was now one of the many memories he had of Severus that he was sure he’d always remember.

Curious, Harry balanced his toothbrush on the sink’s edge, took his glasses off, and squinted at his reflection. Did he look more attractive like this? Well, without the squinting. Would Severus think so? It’s not like he could wear his glasses while they were, uh, “doing the ritual,” right? That’d be weird, he was sure.

Harry picked his toothbrush back up and tried to obliterate any microscopic trace of tonight’s dinner. It wouldn’t do to have Severus stop kissing him because he didn’t taste right. He’d likely hope to die of embarrassment and then the memory of tonight would be permanently marred for the rest of his life.

Once he realized he’d brushed all of his teeth, gums, and tongue at least three times, he forced himself to stop. Too much longer and he’d start bleeding. Plus, Severus might fall asleep.

That got him moving. He quickly washed his face, hopelessly fought to smooth his hair, and reached for his contraceptive. Naturally, without his glasses, he was blind so both the contraceptive and Severus’s pain potion tipped over and rolled into the sink. He huffed and reached for them. Squinting again, he saw one of the vials had emptied and had a brief moment of panic until he realized it had been Severus’s potion that he’d accidentally emptied. Thank Merlin. What to do, though?

Well. Harry stealthily glanced to the door, strained his ears to hear anything, and then picked up the empty vial. After another glance at the door, he carefully tucked it into the bottom of the wastebasket. If Severus asked where it went, he’d lie through his teeth and say he didn’t know what he was talking about.

After swallowing his contraceptive – and gods, did it taste terrible – and relieving himself, Harry
briefly debated stripping at least his shirt and socks off, but he knew his body wasn’t all that attractive. So, after scowling at his toes, he stripped his socks off and left the rest of his clothes on. If Severus didn’t mind his scrawny body, he could be the one to take his clothes off.

Just to be sure he didn't walk into any walls, he slipped his glasses back on his nose and left the room. When he entered their bedroom, he saw Severus sitting in his chair and staring at his clasped hands. He looked up at him with an expression Harry had literally never seen before - it was like a strange mix of sadness and excitement - and he’d been sure he’d seen them all by now. By the time Severus reached him, he looked so intense and focused that Harry couldn’t contain a little shiver of excitement.

Without warning, Severus pulled Harry onto his toes and sealed their mouths together. After a moment of shock, he eagerly started kissing back and only became aware they had been moving when his calves hit the edge of the bed. Severus pulled his head back and Harry realized his hands were in Severus’s hair.

"Would you feel more comfortable removing your own clothing?"

"No, you can."

Severus's brow arched, but he didn't say anything. He slowly ran his hands down Harry's sides and then up his back, drawing the hem of his T-shirt up as he went along. Harry was only a little nervous when Severus started working on his denims and pants, which both soon joined his shirt in a pile at the side of the bed.

"Make yourself comfortable," Severus said, eying him head to toe and working on his own shirt. "Center of the bed, reclined against the pillows for now. Do not cover up."

Harry's stomach clenched in anticipation and he rushed to obey. He started to drool when Severus lost his shirt. His mouth went dry when Severus's hands fell to his trousers. He lost his breath when he saw he was naked underneath.

"You're not wearing pants."

It was all he could think to say. He was sure he'd regret it tomorrow.

"No, I'm not," Severus agreed. "I didn't bother replacing them after my shower this afternoon."

So all day he'd been walking around like that?

"Merlin."

Severus smirked, walked around the bed, and knelt down beside him.

"You'll need to spread your legs," he said as gently as he could. "I won't immediately begin preparing you, but I would like to be close."

"Could you maybe say my name first?" Harry asked, feeling a little embarrassed. "This'll be the first time I do that and it's a little..."

"Uncomfortable. Yes, I understand. It can wait."

Severus straddled Harry's thighs and leaned forward. Merlin, his body was against his, touching him everywhere. He was so warm. Harry raised up and pulled Severus completely on top of him, clumsily catching his lips in a kiss that felt like it was mostly teeth. With a grunt, Severus pulled
back a bit and changed the angle.

"Sorry," Harry mumbled against his lips. "I'll work on it."

Severus blew out a breath and reared up.

"I think you would enjoy this more if you weren't so focused on trying to please me, brat. For now, for your first time if you so choose to consider it such, just do what feels best to you. You'll learn to please your partner with time."

"Okay."

Severus shook his head, his expression almost looking fond. This time, when he kissed him, Harry just let go and felt.

He loved a little tongue anywhere on him, yeah. He shivered when his neck was nipped... moaned when nails lightly raked over his sides and legs... rocked his hips up when his lip was sucked and nibbled... sucked in a breath when he felt an oiled finger slip along his bum... dug his nails into Severus's back when that finger entered him... begged for another when it wasn't nearly enough... and then another... and another. Finally, he was just begging.

"Patience," Severus reprimanded. "I don't want to hurt you."

"You won't," Harry insisted as Severus conjured a small pillow, which he tucked under Harry’s bum. "Please, Se... Severus. Please-"

His begging ended with a husky groan and he bore down as Severus gingerly eased himself inside.

"You're doing good, but keep breathing."

"Breathe."

Right. Breathing was important.

When Severus was fully seated, he stilled and braced himself on his hands.

"Just get used to me," he coached. "I know I'm a bit bigger than you're used to."

“I feel great,” he said truthfully. “No pain at all.”

“Truly none? Are you lying to me?”

“None and no, I'm not. Why would I lie? You’ve got something shoved up my arse, sir,” Harry said shyly. “I mean, um, S...Severus. You’d think if it hurt, I wouldn’t lie about that, right?”

Severus’s brows rose. “I believe I’ve underestimated the toy I once caught you playing with.”

Harry blushed. “You don’t need to talk about that incident. Your expression alone… Merlin.”

“I was understandably surprised. I'm sure you would have been, as well, were you in my shoes.” Severus slowly pulled his hips back and easily slid forward once more. “If at any time you become uncomfortable or something hurts, stop me immediately.”

“Promise. Now can you actually move?”

“Say my name,” Severus said against his neck.
“Severus.”

Harry felt Severus’s lips curl and then he finally started moving the way Harry had always fantasised. He quickly caught onto Severus’s rhythm and moved with him.

“Excellent. Now rotate your hips a little. Grind against me if you must. I can take it.”

"Merlin, yes."

Oh, he knew how to do that. Many sessions with his toy had taught him exactly what to do to get him off fast. There was just one thing... Severus must have sensed what he wanted. He moved closer and closer until Harry had no choice but to wrap legs around his waist and then he leaned down to kiss him.

It was just as thrilling (and sexier) as the first time they'd kissed.

When Severus pulled back to let them breathe, he reared up onto his knees and slowly ran a hand down Harry’s chest, flicking a nipple here and then thumbing his navel distractedly.

“You're so thin,” he at last commented. “Instead of concerning yourself with fattening me up, you should expend your energy doing the same for yourself.”

“I'm not really that thin.”

“You are. I could play your ribs like a xylophone.”

Harry chuckled a little breathlessly. “I felt your ribs that one time I was on you in here. Well, and your hips.”

Severus’s eyes briefly slipped closed. When they opened, his pupils were wider, nearly obscuring his dark brown eyes. It was shocking… and so hot.

“To you I freely lend my life force,” Severus said in a deep voice, “to protect you, to give you strength to continue if death approaches. Repeat it.”

They were doing it already?

“To you I freely lend my life force to protect you, to… to give you strength to continue if death approaches.”

“You graciously lend your life force to protect me, to give me strength to continue if death approaches.”

“You graciously lend your life force to protect me, to give me strength to continue if death approaches.”

“Should my demise come too swiftly…”

“Should my demise come too swiftly,” Harry repeated, confused.

“I relinquish you of your promise so you may live another day.”

Harry stared at him until Severus met his gaze. He arched an eyebrow and Harry frowned.

“I relinquish you of your promise so you may live another day.”
Severus caught his lips for a rough kiss, sealing their pact. As he slowly gentled his actions and increased the pace of his thrusts, Harry grasped Severus’s shoulders and made a mental note to ask about that last part of the ritual when he got up tomorrow.

But first, he had to make it through the night.

***

The next morning, Harry woke up in Severus’s bed all alone.

Frowning, he reached out and patted the other side of the mattress. As he’d dreaded (expected), it was ice cold. Harry climbed out of the bed, hastily dressed in the first clean clothing he found, and plodded off to the kitchen. He felt the need to draw in a deep breath before entering the kitchen. He didn’t know what kind of mood Severus would be in this morning and that scared him.

“Ah, brat,” Severus greeted. “It’s about time you got up. It’s going on eleven now and you’ve a letter here.”

Harry furrowed his brows. He was acting perfectly normal. That was a good thing, but it was like yesterday hadn’t even happened for him. Had he somehow made himself forget? In the continued silence, Severus looked up and gave him a questioning look.

“Why were you up so early?”

“I could counter that with a question of my own. Why were you asleep so long?”

Harry frowned now. It wasn’t possible to obliviate yourself to forget just one memory, right?

“Er, well, after last night… I guess I was just tired.”

“I see. That reminds me.” Severus patted his jacket and unearthed a potion vial a moment later. “This is for you. I forgot to give it to you yesterday evening. Thoughtless of me, really.”

“What is it?”

“The abortive potion.”

“Oh.”

So he hadn’t forgotten somehow. He was just really good about carrying on like normal. Then again, maybe it hadn’t been as big a deal to Severus as it had been to him.

“In six days, if the contraceptive potion failed, that will enable you to terminate the pregnancy.” Severus looked away from him and focused on the newspaper in front of him. “You can test yourself at that time… preferably without me being present.”

“Why?”

“If you conceive, I have no desire to know. Once you take your abortive, the child will be of no importance to either of us.” Severus picked up his coffee mug and took a small sip. “By the way, I’ve made coffee.”

He honestly didn’t know what to make of that. Any of that. Well, except the coffee.

“Okay.”
Why wouldn’t he want to know? He couldn’t decide if Severus meant he didn’t want to know because he really thought he’d take the abortive and thereby ruin Severus’s current chance of being a father (and how heartbreaking would that be if it happened?) or if he meant he didn’t want to know because Severus didn’t even wanna think about him being the other parent of his child.

Harry looked down at the abortive and scowled. Never gonna happen. He would never take the damn potion.

He headed to the bathroom with purpose. If Severus just thought he was using the bathroom, he couldn't barge in and prevent him from getting rid of that damned stupid potion that not even Merlin himself could make him swallow. Harry waited a moment, flushed the toilet, emptied the potion into the sink, ran water over it, and threw the bottle in the trash.

There. Severus never had to know. The arse. Possibly. Depended upon what he was actually telling him earlier.

Still. He was an arse for even bothering to brew the abortive. So there. He was an arse.

***

Five days passed and nothing changed between them. Severus still called Harry a brat and generally acted like usual. Harry still "puttered" around the house and pretended to be annoyed when Severus would call him the perfect housewife. The morning of the sixth day following the ritual - just one more day until he could test himself - started rather abruptly for Harry. One moment, he'd been fast asleep and dreaming of a quaint little cottage by the sea with plenty of children in the yard and no dark wizards marring the peace. The next, he was staring up at Severus in confusion.

"Sev'rus?" he asked sleepily. "Wha's wrong?"

"Albus just firecalled. Why he chose to call this early in the morning I'll never know, but we should count ourselves lucky I was awake."

"Ehm, 'kay." Harry closed his eyes again. "So why'd you wake me up?"

"We're leaving."

Harry was suddenly wide awake and quickly sat up, narrowly missing Severus's chin by a hair.

"We're leaving?"

"Yes, we are."

"When?"

"The day after tomorrow. We'll need time to collect our belongings, pack what we wish to keep, and get rid of those we don't."

"Oh, this is..." Harry paused while crawling out of bed. Sad. This was sad. He'd never again spend so much time with Severus once they left. How... "Terrible."

"This is terrible? How exactly?"

"Yeah. We've been together this entire time and then we're just gonna... separate. It's gonna be terrible... and really, really hard... getting used to being alone. I mean, it's not like I can stay with
Ron and Hermione." Harry looked at Severus. "Where will you go?"

"I will return to my personal chambers. Apparently, they've been closed off. According to Albus, that greatly annoyed the first stand in professor he found."

"Oh." Harry couldn't even find that funny. "So where will I go?"

"Albus has been preparing a guest apartment for your use. Your goddaughter and her parents have one, as well, if you'll recall."

"And that's another thing," Harry said, throwing down the shirt he'd slept in last night. "What're we gonna do about Rose?"

Severus frowned. "I'm not following."

"Don't pretend you don't know how she feels about you, sir. She loves you. It's going to kill her if she can't come see you."

"She will see me, brat. Just because you and I won't be staying in the same rooms anymore doesn't mean she'll never see me."

Harry slightly relaxed.

"So you think I'll still see you, too?"

Severus remained silent for a long moment and then sighed. "Yes, you idiot. Why wouldn't you?"

"I don't know."

"Get dressed. We've work to do and I'm hungry."

Harry finally let a smile come to his lips.

"I bet it's gonna be weird not having my cooking every day, huh?"

"Merlin help me. I just realized we'll be going back to Hogwarts fare. I won't survive."

"I knew you loved my food!"

Harry started dancing around and only laughed when Severus loudly denied it. The poor guy gave up after a minute and sunk onto his bed.

"I demand you stop. You cannot dance."

"I may not be able to dance or sing according to you, but I can cook and you love it."

"Merlin and the coffee," Severus said, rubbing his forehead. "Back to tea and dubious sludge."

Harry stopped dancing when he got a brilliant idea. An inspired idea. An epic idea. Almost on par with his potions idea the day they did the ritual. He'd have to find a magical coffeemaker first (stupid muggle technology not working at Hogwarts and making his life even more difficult), but if he ever wanted a reason to stop by and see Severus, a hot cup of coffee not made by a house elf seemed to be a pretty good one, right?

He smiled and for the first time felt okay with leaving. He wasn't thrilled, but he'd survive.
Harry plopped onto the couch and looked at Severus.

"So you think we've got everything?"

"I certainly hope so. Albus and Minerva will see to it that our own items are put in the correct rooms."

"So why couldn't we go with our stuff?"

"Albus is waiting for nightfall. We can't be seen walking across the grounds in the middle of the afternoon, now can we?"

"Well, if I'd known we were going to be staying, I wouldn't have sent most of the food off with my stuff."

"You're taking the food?" Severus asked, looking curious.

"Can't leave it here. It'd go bad. Besides, you heard them. I have a kitchenette and Pro... er, Minerva – that's weird - said she could change my cooker into a full size."

"So what did you leave here? You said you sent most of the food, which implies you left something."

"None of the baking stuff is left, I know that. I think it's just unimportant pantry items."

"Nothing too extravagant, then."

"No, but we've already had lunch and-"

Three sudden sharp cracks of apparition sounded from the bedrooms and Severus moved fast as lightning. As the bedroom door was blasted off its hinges, Severus simultaneously pulled Harry into his lap and yanked a chain from his neck.

Once the world stopped spinning, Harry realized he was splayed over Severus's chest and had the incredible urge to vomit so he hurriedly stood up and moved away until the urge became too much. Severus was immediately beside him, wand in hand and attention on the forest.

When Harry was finished, he banished his sick and wiped his mouth. He looked around, shaky hand over his mouth, but heard nothing. Severus clearly cast a nonverbal spell and then frowned deeply, his eyes on Harry.

"Are we alone?" Harry mouthed.

"We're not in danger, but we're also not alone. There are students out of the school and we must get to Albus as soon as possible."

"Maybe we should cast a glamour," Harry suggested, "and just hope no one's paying close attention."

"We've no other choice. Right, then. Hold still."

Twenty minutes later, after shocking three students and hurrying away before any of them could
really see if Harry Potter actually was standing in front of them, Harry and Severus barrelled into Albus's office and damn near scared Minerva to death.

"What in the world are you doing here?"

"Where's Albus?" Severus asked instead. "The safe house-"

"He's just-"

"Ah, I am so happy you remembered your portkeys," Albus said from the door, looking frazzled. "I knew the moment it happened. Three unknown presences arrived at the safe house and the next moment, both of you blinked out of existence." Albus gestured at the clock behind him, which had three hands. As Harry watched, the hands disappeared. "We must have just missed each other on the stairs."

"They found a way into the safe house, Albus?" Minerva asked, looking worried. "We must strengthen the wards and protections around the school. Surely if they found the safe house, they must suspect Severus and Harry returned here."

"I've just finished doing so, Minerva. Calm yourself, my dear. There will be an announcement at dinner for the students and I will be casting a little spell I've been working on." Albus looked pleased with himself. "All communications will be shut down and the owls are being sent off as we speak."

"What is this spell?"

"We cannot hide you in this school, Severus. Someone would eventually find you. The spell is to ensure no harm befalls either of you within these walls."

"That is all well and good, but the first time an unmarked student finds a way to get word out-" "A student being able to tell anyone of your location would cause you harm, would it not?"

And that was the brilliance of Albus Dumbledore. The man had created a spell that would not only keep them safe, but would also keep anyone from saying they’re at the school. Harry was amazed.

“So why close down communications if your spell is so helpful?”

Good question.

“It wouldn’t do to tip off a relative or a friend if responses to certain questions seem stunted. Better there be no communications than suspicious communications.”

Harry nodded his agreement and Severus nodded sharply just once before meeting his gaze. Harry frowned at the look on his face.

“Albus,” Severus said, attention still focused solely on him, “are we free to go?”

“Yes, of course. I'm afraid I cannot escort you both. Minerva and I have a lot of work to do before the meal. You remember where Harry’s rooms are?”

Harry looked at Albus in surprise. Severus had seen his rooms? When?

“I do. Come, brat.”

Minerva looked irritated.
“He’s just worried, ma’am,” Harry explained while Severus tried to drag him out of the room. “Should we come to dinner, sir?”

“Not tonight, dear boy. I would like to cast my spell before you two show yourselves too much.”

He barely had time to say, “okay,” before he was being pulled down the stairs. At the bottom, Harry yanked his hand free. “Could you be gentle? What’s wrong with you?”

“Did you remember to pack everything?”

“Um, we’ve already gone over this. You were sure-”

“Including any books, clothing, or, say, potions I might have given you?”

“Books? Po-” Harry stopped walking and looked at Severus curiously. “What are you talking about?”

“Just answer my question. Did you pack everything I have given you?”

“Everything I still have, yeah,” Harry said, thinking of the abortive he’d happily dumped down the sink days ago. “Why? Did you pack everything I gave you?”

“Yes.”

“Well, that’s good. Feel like dinner at mine?” When that question caught back up to him, Harry blushed deeply. “I mean, not like- It’s just- We’re not- I am cooking for myself, too, after all so…”

“I believe I might join you. I’d rather have your poison than Hogwarts fare.”

Harry smothered his grin. “Wanna maybe stick around until dinner starts? I’m sure by then the spell will be cast and it’ll be safe for you to walk all the way to the dungeons by yourself. Which way?”

“Left. That’s a wise idea. I suppose I should. If you begin to annoy me, I’ll simply risk death and leave.”

“You could read something. You never did read that last book you gave me.”

“Which book would that be? I’ve forgotten.”

“My Husband’s A God.” Harry rolled his eyes. “I don’t know what you were trying to say.”

“I wasn’t trying to say anything. I thought you might enjoy it. Judging by your inability to put the book down once you started reading, I’d say I was correct.”

Harry smiled. “It was pretty good. In a way, I kinda feel like the guy who wrote it.”

“Down.” Harry started down the staircase they’d come to and Severus asked, “Why do you believe so?”

“The whole book is about this guy who breaks his back making sure his husband is ridiculously spoiled with good food, an immaculate house, and clean clothing. He birthed all of their children and does so much stuff on a daily basis.”

“Hmm.”
“And then there’s this guy’s husband. He sits on his bum when he’s not at work and has the gall to say his husband nags too much when he’s asked to do simple stuff like pick up his dirty socks or bathe one of their children.”

“You do have a tendency to nag,” Severus replied, looking amused. “I see what you mean.”

“You don’t see yourself in that, do you?” Severus scoffed. “Hardly.”

“You wouldn’t.”

“We’re not married, brat, and have no children…” Harry furrowed his brows and peeked up, but Severus wasn’t looking at him. “That I know of, that is. We also no longer share a home so you needn’t concern yourself with my laundry, meals, or rooms.”

So that was why he asked about potions earlier. Did he want to know if he’d tested yet? He still had a whole day before he could test. Surely Severus remembered that.

“I guess.”

“I did my share around the safe house, did I not?”

“You did some. For the most part, though, I swear you were trying to annoy me to death. The late night duels, complaining about my food, boots on the coffee table.”

“Will you never let that go? I haven’t had my boots on the table since you had your little hissy fit during Draco’s first stay.”

“It still annoys me. I mean, who even does that?” Severus gave him a look and Harry huffed. “Right. It’s in the past. I suppose since you-”

Harry jerked forward and turned to see why Severus had suddenly grabbed his arm.

“You talk too much. We’re going behind that tapestry.”

“Um, why?”

“It’s a shortcut to your apartment.”

“Oh. Okay.”

Harry followed Severus into the shadowy passage behind the tapestry. Soft torch light flickered as they walked, making their shadows dance a strange tango on the stone walls, and their footsteps seemed to echo in the enclosed space.

“Why aren’t you talking?”

“You said I talk too much.”

“You do so you not talking is strange. Say something… you.”

“We could have roast chicken for dinner.”

“And there it is. By all means, brat, continue. I’m sure you’ll rattle off a full menu if I stay silent long enough.”
Harry waited a beat. Well, it was the last time he’d be able to play the little housewife for Severus… He sighed. That sucked.

“I’m thinking roast chicken with cranberry sauce and mashed potatoes. How do you feel about carrots?”

“They are carrots.”

“So maybe green beans? Or something else? I can throw bacon into the beans. Onions, too.”

Severus looked thoughtful. “Yes, do that.”

“Allright. What sounds good for dessert?” Severus didn’t respond and Harry snorted. He hadn’t honestly thought Severus would fall into that trap, but he had to try, right? “I meant what won’t kill you? How about… cherry cobbler?”

“I might again survive your cobbler. It didn’t kill me last time.”

Harry smiled to himself. He’d miss this. Severus cautiously stepped from the passageway after a quick spell and then guided Harry down the hall. Severus kept his hand on his lower back and Harry’s smile grew.

“Rolls? Biscuits? Or, ooh! Toast?”

“Why on earth would you serve toast?”

“It sounds good.”

Severus blinked. “Did you hit your head when we landed in the Black Forest?”

“Maybe on you. Why?”

“You ask me why? You persecuted my poor toast most of the time we spent together and then tell me it sounds good. Did you not think that through before you asked?”

“If you don’t want toast, we won’t have it. Well, actually, I might just to annoy you. Feel better?”

“Don’t be cheeky, brat.”

***

A full twenty-four hours passed before someone other than Severus showed up at his door. That Hermione hadn’t come sooner was a mystery.

"I see you don't have my goddaughter with you," Harry said by way of greeting. "For shame, Mrs. Weasley."

"Oh, it's so strange hearing you say that." Hermione collapsed on his sofa and patted the cushion beside her. "I didn't bring Rose for a reason, Harry."

"Yeah, I thought so."

"So it happened, didn't it?"

"The ritual, you mean."
"Yes, of course, Harry. What else would I mean? Details."

"Hermione, I'm not going to-"

"Oh, you probably want to respect the professor's privacy, don't you? Do you not even want to talk about it?"

"Well, I mean..." Harry sighed. "It was incredible, Hermione. I won't go into details, but... he's amazing."

"I can imagine," Hermione replied, stupid grin on her face. It, however, quickly disappeared. "But are you okay?"

"Yeah. Why wouldn't I be?"

"Because you love him, of course."

"You sound as crazy as Malfoy."

"Do you think you're pregnant?"

"No, I don't. Severus brewed my contraceptive."

"That doesn't mean anything. Any number of-"

"Hermione, I'm not. Stop. You sound insane."

"Very well. If you don't want to talk about that..." She paused and looked at him again, but he just shook his head. "Oh, fine. Then tell me what happened with you two. No details, just... a summary."

"We shagged, we did the ritual, we kissed, we came. Good?"

"Oh, Harry, please! Were you on your back or was he? How many times did you kiss? More than for the ritual? Did either of you, ahem, explore each other's bodies? Was it everything you thought it'd be? Was he better than your fantasies? Was he better than mine?"

Merlin help him.

***

"What are you doing here?" Severus asked curiously. "And how did you find my rooms?"

"Magic, sir." Severus did not look amused and Harry sighed. "I brought some fresh pumpkin chocolate bread and a full pot of coffee. All I ask in return is a safe haven."

"Very well. Come in, then." Harry hurried inside and Severus shut the door behind him. "I see you've survived training."

"So far. Are you ever planning to train with me?"

"Perhaps. Judging by the time you must have spent baking bread and brewing coffee, I would say you're not in physical danger. Why seek protection here?"

"Hermione found out about the ritual a week ago and won't leave me alone. Well, when we're not training, that is. She's as mad as your godson."
"I see."

Harry sat on a plushy chair and sighed.

"I didn't give her details, though she really wanted them. Just so you know."

Severus settled down on his sofa.

"That's disturbing. Yet more information about your friend that I desperately wish I hadn't heard."
Severus cleared his throat and tore a chunk of bread from the loaf. "My godson has been no better. It's a miracle he's not here right now."

"Getting worse, is he?"

"Yes. His newest obsession is wondering about your impending motherhood."

"I'm not a girl," Harry automatically replied and then realized exactly what Severus said. "He thinks I'm pregnant?"

"He wonders if you are. I've assured him any possible pregnancy has already been dealt with."

"Huh. I haven't even tested myself. Probably shouldn't let him know that, though, right?" Severus became utterly still and Harry frowned at him. "What?"

"Why haven't you yet tested yourself?"

"Don't know. Haven't really thought about it."

"Potter, your abortive will become useless after a certain period of time. Surely I told you that."

"I remember. I'll test myself soon, I guess." Harry shrugged. "You said your godson's been asking?"

After a long silence, Severus said, "He has asked me about it no less than twelve times and has even threatened to visit you."

Harry looked up from the battered coffee table - those looked like boot scuffs, damn him - and cocked his head.

"What did I do to deserve that?"

"He wants to hear the truth from you about our supposed relationship and, naturally, to learn of any possible offspring resulting from our... ritual."

"He thinks we're hiding all of that?"

"Yes. I've lately found myself wondering if Lucius dropped Draco one time too many or if perhaps Narcissa simply babied him too much."

Harry thoughtfully looked at Severus.

"He was your best friend, wasn't he?"

"Draco?"

"No, Lucius. He was your best friend."
"He was. Why do you ask?"

"I guess I'm just trying to figure out why I've never heard you talk about him. I mean, you two must have been close enough for him to ask you to be his son's godfather and for you to accept. It must be hard losing your best friend. I'm sorry."

Severus looked like he was about to say something important, but sighed and when he spoke, all he said was, "I cannot speak of this. At this time, there is more to worry about than my feelings regarding Lucius."

"...did you love him?"

"Of course not," Severus said icily. "You're surely not stupid enough to believe so."

"I didn't mean like that, sir."

That was a lie and they both knew it, but he had to cover himself somehow.

"I'm sure."

"Well, it'd make sense," Harry said defensively. "If you loved him, I could see why you wouldn't want to talk about him... and you were a spy for so long, I'm sure it's easy enough to hide behind some sort of mask. That's why you never seem bothered. You're hiding it."

Severus studied him a moment and then crossed his arms over his chest.

"And my being in love with him is the only explanation you can come up with?"

"Well, I did consider for a bit that maybe Lucius was one of the last spies and therefore you knew you'd be friends again someday," Harry said, eyes on the coffee table again, "but surely Draco would've known if his own father was also a spy."

"Perhaps not."

"Yeah, I thought about that, too. What sort of spy would you be if everyone- Oh, damn. I called him Draco."

"Yes, you did." Severus gave him an amused look and prepared himself a cup of coffee with a conjured mug. "My godson will be very happy to hear it."

"Don't tell him, sir. You'll only encourage him."

"What's my silence worth, brat?"

"Anything," Harry replied without hesitancy. "Name it."

"Well, it is a bit... untidy around here."

Harry smothered a smile.

"That's hardly surprising considering you went from having a live in maid to-"

"Precious little housewife," Severus corrected. Harry rolled his eyes.

"Right. To being alone. If you can promise not to tell Dra- Damnit!" Harry shook his head and drummed his fingers against his thigh. "What else?"
Severus smirked. "My laundry, I think."

"Might as well get the table while I'm at it," Harry muttered. "You've had your boots up there, haven't you?"

"Gladly, yes."

"See, you're still trying to annoy me to death. Admit it."

"I am."

"Some husband you'd make."

Severus chuckled.

***

The next evening, a knock sounded at his door, which was worrisome since he wasn't expecting anyone. Harry curiously crept closer and strained to hear anything.

"Harry," a familiar voice called, "I know you're in there. Open up, mate."

Harry swung open the door and smiled.

"Hey, Ron. Come in. What's up?"

"It's Hermione's night to get Rose to bed so I thought I might come hang out until the meeting."

"There's a meeting? Am I supposed to go?"

"Well, yeah."

"Oh." Harry frowned and joined Ron on the sofa. "No one told me."

"That's 'cause it was my job to tell ya. Got any food around here?"

Harry grinned. "We just had dinner an hour ago."

"Yeah, an hour," Ron stressed. "Mind if I...?"

"Go ahead."

Ron leapt up and headed to Harry's small fridge.

"So how ya doin'? Heard ya shagged Snape already."

"Er, yeah."

"Thought so. Hermione filled me in on some things, but not everything, mind." Harry again felt guilty he hadn't told Ron more over the year or so he'd been gone. "You don't have to look at me like that. Whatever makes you happy, mate. I won't judge ya and if ya wanna have kids someday, why shouldn't ya?"

"You are so much cooler than everything thinks you are."

"Shut it, prat."
Harry laughed. "Sorry."

"So... ya knocked up, then?"

"What?"

"You heard me, Harry."

"Ehm, didn't even check." Ron looked at him like he was stupid and Harry fidgeted. "What?"

"You had sex with a man, you can get pregnant now 'cause of that book Snape got ya, and you didn't think to check?"

"Why would I? I mean, how many times did you and Hermione, you know, before Rose came along?"

"Ya got a point there, but mate, that tea Hermione sent... Took once for this new one." Harry gave him a worried look. What about his tea? What was wrong with it? He loved it. "Yeah, Neville said the leaves and stuff come from a plant potions masters use in fertility potions. She didn't tell you?"

"Oh, Merlin..."

"So you should probably check just to be sure."

"Yeah."

"I wouldn't worry if I were you, though. Malfoy said you drink coffee like we breathe air. Probably didn't have time to try that tea."

No, because whenever he wasn't drinking coffee, he was drinking that tea. He wasn't sure if he said that out loud, though.

"You gonna get up?"

"Mmm. No."

"Harry, you okay? You're looking a little pale."

Harry's eyes widened. Was he hyperventilating? "I'm fine."

"Gonna do the test?"

"Yeah."

"Now?"

"Maybe."

"Should I go get Snape?"

"No. I'm not even sure he'd wanna know. Maybe. I don't know. He was being all mysterious."

"Alright. So do the test and figure him out later. You know the spell, right?"

"Yeah. If your wife set me up-"

"Don't kill her. She's pregnant, remember? Though I'm thinkin' a good tongue lashing would be in
Ron waited several long moments and then rolled his eyes. He held out his wand and pointed it at his stomach.

"Gravitate revelo."

Smoke plumed out of the tip of Ron's wand and drifted into the air. After a moment, the smoke began curling around itself.

"That's so cool," Harry murmured. "Hermione teach ya?"

"Yeah. I got to test for the new one. Watch."

The smoke twirled around another moment and then settled into one word. Ron worriedly looked at him, but Harry was stuck staring at the slowly dissipating word.

"That can't be right, can it?"

"Erm..." Ron lowered his wand. "No, it is. Uh, now should I go get Snape?"

Harry jolted. "No."

"What?"

"I don't know if... Ron, he wanted me to... Thing is, he brewed me an abortive. Even though I once told him I'd never abort, the stupid sod brewed me an abortive."

"Is it still around here?"

Harry scowled at him. "I dumped it down the drain and I don't regret doing it. I don't even know if he'd want to know, 'cause he was perfectly fine with me taking that potion."

Ron whistled. "He has a right to know, though. You don't know for sure. He might want the kid."

"He has always wanted children... but I doubt he'd choose me to..."

"Don't be stupid, Harry. What's wrong with you? You're the best guy out there, you know."

Harry gave a weak smile and slumped against the couch. Ooh, that Hermione. Had that stupid tea somehow canceled out his contraceptive? He had taken the contraceptive, right?

Now that he thought about it, it had tasted a hell of a lot like...

Oh. Oh, jeez. Seriously? Harry started laughing, despite the situation.

"I... am such... an idiot."

"What? It isn't your fault you-"

"No, Ron, you don't understand. I took the pain reliever. Oh, I'm so stupid! I should have wondered
why they tasted the same. It's 'cause they were."

Unable to help himself, he laughed again. Ron looked really worried, probably for his sanity.

"What're you talking about?"

"That night, I knocked over two vials. Severus's pain reliever and my contraceptive. At the time, I was positive I'd dumped the pain reliever, but..."

"Oh, no..." And like that, Ron was laughing. Guffawing. Chortling. He was *hysterical*. "Only you would be that clumsy, Harry!" More laughter. "No contraceptive at all and then that fertility tea? Boom, pregnancy!"

Ron's words turned into gibberish as he kept laughing. Harry finally sighed, his lips quirked to one side, and rolled his eyes.

"You can stop anytime, Ron. It isn't that funny."

"It really is."

"You're a great friend. Know that?"

"Sure do, mate. How 'bout another snack 'fore we go?"

"You are a pig."

Ron grinned.

***

Half an hour later, Harry entered a classroom in the dungeons and looked around. Ron was outside telling Hermione the results of the test so he was left alone to find a seat. Severus was already sitting at one end of a long table and he automatically headed that way. The moment he got close, Severus tipped his head up and arched a brow.

"What are you doing here, brat?"

"Sitting with the man whose pants I washed and folded yesterday."

"You are unbelievably cheeky."

Harry grinned self-consciously and slid into a chair.

"So how are things going with your godson? Is he still having moments where he's sad and stuff?"

"You wish to talk of my godson?"

"Well, he's kind of your kid right now. I mean..." Harry furrowed his brows. "I mean now. I don't know why I said that."

Severus gave him an odd look, the "I'm proud of you" look, though that didn't make sense.

"And you care about those whom I deem important?"

"Well, yeah. How's everything going?"

"He's still a pain in my arse and I truly miss the days I had only you for company."
"Ooh." Harry gave him a sympathetic smile. "I wasn't aware he was that bad. No sadness, though, right?"

"No. Thankfully, he has moved beyond that behavior."

"Good, good."

"Potter," Draco announced, claiming the seat next to him. "I demand to know what exactly is going on."

"Your godfather and I were just discussing you."

"Not that, though I'm pleased you care so much about me. I meant why are the Weasleys discussing children? Why is the woman crying?"

"Hermione's crying?"

Harry started to stand, but Severus yanked him back down.

"She is pregnant, Draco, and is therefore quite hormonal. I'm sure she and her husband were simply discussing her own pregnancy and she found herself a touch emotional."

That probably wasn't it at all.

"But then why-"

Harry turned to him and gave him a nasty look, which shut him up.

"If I am or am not pregnant is none of your concern. If he's going to be a father, I'm sure I'll tell him at some point. Until that happens, if I so much as hear you ask someone else about it, I'll_hex you so fast, you won't see it coming. You're really getting on my nerves and I think Severus is probably two seconds away from disowning you so let it go."

"Merlin, Potter," Draco said approvingly. "Touch hormonal, are you? Sounds like he's pregnant, Severus. I knew you had it in you."

Severus moved faster than Harry. He had only enough time to blink and then found himself pressed against Severus's side, his wand in Severus's right hand and Severus's left hand on his shoulder.

"Don't harm him. Draco, if you are unable to sit there without provoking him, you will move. I'm in no mood today, boy."

Draco looked stunned. "Okay. Sorry."

While he was grateful Severus had gotten onto Draco, Harry also felt a little bad for him. It was clear Severus never called Draco 'boy' and he could actually see a touch of hurt in his eyes. Oh, Merlin. He felt guilty. Yep, no denying it. He must be pregnant. That was the only explanation he had for feeling like this.

"Oh, Harry," Hermione cried. Severus released him, but Harry didn't move. "Ron just told me! I'm so happy for you and so, so excited."

"About baking the cake, she means," Ron loudly added, "for the baby shower, Harry. She's glad you accepted."

Severus's suspicious expression softened and Harry sighed. He hadn't wanted to announce it in
front of everyone. Severus deserved to have the privacy to accept or refuse the baby, after all.

"Ehm, we'll talk about the cake later, Hermione. Not right now, okay?"

She seemed to realize what he was trying to say and nodded.

"I'll catch you in the morning, alright? Draco, come sit by me. I've some questions."

"Hermione," he said waringly.

"It's not about the cake. I don't want to talk about it until you've decided what you're going to do."

Harry snorted. "Makes sense."

She grinned and led Draco away, poor Ron trudging after them. Harry saw Severus turning toward him and he looked up.

"You're baking a cake for the shower? When did they ask you to do that?"

"Erm, Ron stopped by an hour ago."

"Hmm. It's the strangest thing, brat, but I seem to remember young Mrs. Weasley discussing her reservation with a talented cake maker for the shower. She was telling Longbottom it took weeks to set up a meeting."

He was still suspicious. Either he really wanted him to be pregnant and hoped he wouldn't abort (and possibly had forgotten what he'd said regarding that) or he was terrified he'd gotten pregnant. Harry sighed.

"Sir, when the meeting's over, we need to talk."

"Impossible. I have plans I cannot cancel tonight."

"Oh."

"They're with the same friend whom attempted to procure our potions supplies."

"Oh," Harry repeated a little more cheerfully. "Well, I guess it can wait, then."

"You're not ill?" Severus checked. Harry shook his head no and the older man relaxed. "Then it can wait."

"Alright."

***

Doubt set in the next morning.

He'd previously worried Severus truly didn't want to know if he'd gotten pregnant and his dream last night seemed to confirm he would, in fact, never want to know. His dream - nightmare - had been a painful montage of memories slapped together. He was forced to relive every mean, hurtful moment that'd ever happened between him and Severus so that by the time he was reliving that morning after they'd had sex, Severus's words had taken on a definite meaning.

He woke up with a pain in his chest and a resolve to do this on his own, since it was clear he'd gotten carried away at the safe house.
Of course Severus wouldn't want to know about the child. He'd made that clear.

Of course Severus hadn't wanted to do the ritual. He'd helped him out of a sense of duty.

Of course Severus might be angry when he eventually figured out Harry was pregnant. He'd likely demand to know what happened to the abortive.

The only thing that remained unclear was how Severus felt about him. Was there any way he could maintain this awkward truce between them? He honestly couldn't handle it if Severus ever turned back into the Snape he'd once known.

Merlin, he missed him and it'd been less than a day.
Old Habits & New Routines

Feeling utterly exhausted, Harry collapsed on his sofa and clumsily healed the gaping cut on his thigh.

Damn his training, damn Draco Malfoy, and damn his reaction time.

No, he was grateful for everyone's volunteered time helping him better himself for battle. He was just so tired all the time.

Hermione assured him being tired was normal right now, but Harry hadn't realized it'd be this bad and now that he was training and dueling every day, he felt absolutely drained by bedtime. He supposed he should just be glad he hadn't been seriously injured while dueling. Yeah, that was a positive. Sure, he was reduced to crawling into bed each night at eight, but his baby was alive and healthy.

That reminded him. He had something he needed to do tomorrow. No, not tomorrow, but soon. He wasn't ready to tell anyone else yet. Hermione and Ron knew about the baby. He could wait another week or so to find a mediwitch or mediwizard to handle the many appointments Hermione promised him he'd have. Maybe if he bribed Poppy somehow, she'd agree to bring someone in under the guise of thinking ahead for the battle… just in case it happened here (which seemed likely since Albus had their spies working on subtly turning him this way).

Actually. Harry sat up on his sofa, his exhaustion forgotten. He needed to go see Poppy now.

He pushed himself up, his body unwilling to stand without help, and hurried to his door. He surreptitiously slipped into the hallway and rushed off to the infirmary. No one was about and it dawned on him that it was probably getting late. Great. He didn’t need anyone seeing him entering the infirmary, because it would only start rumors and Severus might hear a few and get suspicious again.

When he finally made it, Poppy seemed surprised to see him.

“What can I do for you, Mr. Potter?”

“I’ve just had a brilliant idea, Madam. Can we talk privately?” Poppy looked around, nodded, and gestured to a door at the back of the room. Harry preceded her into the room and flopped into a chair. “Alright. How much do you know about what the headmaster’s up to?”

Poppy’s brows rose. “Are you perhaps referring to his willingness to use the school grounds for battle?”

“The students will hopefully be gone by the time it happens, but yeah.”

“Something in me says it won’t be that much longer.” Poppy frowned sadly. “Please continue.”

“You’ve been working this infirmary a long time, right? Let’s say you were getting to an age when you might need a helping hand.”

“Are you implying I am an aged woman, Mr. Potter?”

Harry barked out a sharp laugh. “No, but that’s why I said ‘let’s say…’ See, my idea is to bring in a mediwitch or a mediwizard under the guise of helping you, when in reality-”
“Their sole purpose will be to aid the injured during and after the battle,” Poppy finished, eyes bright. “Oh, Mr. Potter, that does make me think. I could bring in any number of individuals. Why, I could have a slew of witches and wizards in need of training for their medical licenses.”

Poppy covered her mouth and seemed to be lost in thought. Harry smiled widely. He was glad she thought his idea worth that much.

“As for the students,” Harry murmured to himself, “I'm sure I could think of something.”

In fact, he was positive he would.

“Thank you, Mr. Potter. If I may confide in you a moment, I have been incredibly worried about Albus’s plans ever since I first heard them. You’ve removed a burden from my shoulders that I couldn’t shake before.” She gave him a warm smile. “If there is ever anything I can do for you, you need only say the word and I will do it.”

“Actually…” He sighed and looked away. “There is one thing you could maybe do for me.”

“Just name it, dear.”

Harry swallowed.

***

Severus’s scowl fell away the moment he saw him.

“Brat?” He glanced down the hall. “Why are- You have coffee. Get in here.”

Harry grinned and strolled into Severus’s living room. He knew that’d work. The man moved to his kitchenette and grabbed two cups, but Harry hurried after him and put the coffee on the counter.

“Hey, sir? I actually brought this whole pot down for you.”

“What?”

“Well, I mean, I can have coffee whenever I want. You can’t. Not unless you start coming to my rooms every day.” Harry shrugged. “I just thought I’d be nice and let you have it all.”

“Is it poisoned?”

Harry glared. “Poison the man who’s volunteered to stick to me like glue during the battle so he can watch over me, which is the same man I lost my virginity to. Did you actually think about that before you asked?”

“You still consider that night your first time? Hmm. I thought by now you would have changed your mind.”

“Not a chance. Drink up. It'll get cold.”

“I'm a wizard, you idiot. It’s nothing to reheat the coffee.”

“Doesn’t taste as good that way, but I know.”

“Very well. Heating charm.” Severus cast the charm on the coffee and seemed to savor that first sip. “Merlin, how I’ve missed this.” Harry stifled a pleased smile and Severus huffed. "I swear that sludge they have in the staff room is the same pot I brewed before we left for the safe house. It’s
revolting. You would be outraged.”

“Seems like you’re outraged enough for the both of us.” Harry settled on a little barstool and leaned on the counter. “So let’s see. The last time I talked to you, you had plans with your friend. How’d that go?”

“His wife is finally expecting again,” Severus said, suddenly irritated. He stood on the other side of the counter, rested one forearm on the countertop, and directed his gaze Harry’s way. “Before I revealed my true loyalty, I specifically warned her about trying for another child, but she clearly didn’t heed my warnings.”

“Well, having a baby right now wouldn’t be the worst thing she could do,” Harry said, uncomfortable. “What does her husband think about it?”

“The bloody fool’s over the moon. Of the three of us, I seem to be the only one with any sense. In fact, brat, you have more sense than both of those idiots put together.”

“Sir, I understand things aren’t good right now, but why are you so angry about it?”

Severus pulled his forearm up from the countertop and crossed it over his chest, his index finger tapping out a beat on his bicep. He took a sip of coffee and shook his head after several silent moments.

“I cannot.” He shook his head again, sighing. “I cannot tell you why I’m so angry. I was sworn upon pain of death to keep certain information to myself.”

“So even if you were willing to risk it, I wouldn’t let you tell me anyway.”

“I'm relieved my life means something to you, brat. Yes, though. However, if you would but think, I'm sure you could figure it out. Much as you’ve pretended in the past, you're truly not an imbecile.”

Holy hell. Severus had just given him an actual compliment. He beamed, feeling ecstatic.

“Okay. Let me think about this. Your friend… and his wife… obviously knew you before you outed yourself as a spy. And she’s pregnant with at least her second child.”

“It is her second,” Severus confirmed, watching him.

Harry nodded and thought hard.

Someone he was close enough with before to warn against trying to have a baby. Someone he still sees now, even after turning his back on Moldywort. Someone who was willing to help Severus collect all the ingredients he’d need for the potions they needed for the ritual so someone he was close enough with to at least feel comfortable enough mentioning sex. Ooh. Okay, that was a good one. Someone Severus wouldn’t mind mentioning sex in front of, someone he was close to, someone…

Someone who might possibly be a spy just like Severus was. Someone whose wife is probably a spy, too. Someone… Severus considers a close friend - a best friend. Someone Severus doesn’t seem to miss as much as he’d miss Ron if their supposed loyalties kept them apart.

Someone whose son was an annoying prat bent on destroying his sanity.

That was it, wasn’t it? Before their last meeting, Harry had said something about Draco being
Severus’s kid *right now* and had then corrected himself, not knowing why he’d said what he’d said. Severus had looked proud of his verbal slip at the time. He remembered that.

“Oh, Merlin.”

“Have you figured it out, then?”

Harry looked at Severus, but he looked at best mildly bored with the conversation.

“Are you the only one who knows about them?”

Severus’s gaze sharpened. “Them?”

“Yeah. I think so.”

“Hmm.” Severus’s look turned calculating. “Just whom do you think my friend is?”

“Your best friend, sir. Everything makes more sense now.”

“And if your supposition happens to be true, just what would you do with that information?”

“Take it to the death, of course. It’s not my secret to tell. Not even to their son. Besides, they’re both doing something incredibly risky just to give us the upper hand in battle. I wouldn’t risk their lives for anything, sir, even if I sometimes want to smack the stupid grin off their son’s face sometimes.”

“Yes, well, if you’re correct, brat, you’ll have known long before him. You may take comfort in that.”

“I’m glad you’re not confirming or denying, sir. It’s safer that way.” Severus nodded agreeably and Harry rested his chin on his palm. “You know, I went to Pom-er, Poppy the other day. I had a really good idea and she actually agreed with me.”

“What was this idea?”

“Soon enough, I think you’ll find a bunch of witches and wizards logging hours for their medical licenses up in the infirmary. Poppy has a friend at St. Mungo’s that finally convinced her to help out.” Harry grinned. “My idea was just maybe one or two, but she came up with that training bit.”

“I see. That’s truly an excellent idea, brat.” Severus’s top lip briefly curled. “Stop making me compliment you. I despise it.”

Harry laughed. “Sorry. I also might have come up with an emergency plan just in case term’s still in session when the battle starts.”

Severus leaned forward and furrowed his brows.

“Have you been clearing your mind every day and erecting your shields?”

“Yeah. Haven’t had a hint of anything for a while now.”

“Perfect. What is your other idea?”

“Well, the Room of Requirement. Our unnamed spies will be able to give us something of a warning, right? Few days, few hours, few minutes. Something, right?”
“Yes, they will.”

“Good. Doesn’t matter when, but when we get the warning, we move the students out. If it’s a few
days, good. If it’s a few hours or a few minutes, we rush them into the Room of Requirement.
We’ve done it before, you know. Made a passage that went straight from Hogwarts to Hogsmeade.
I don’t know Rosmerta that well, but surely the other Dumbledore could be trusted to evacuate the
students, right?”

“Firstly, I direly wish you were still my student, because I would be subtracting so many points for
what you just told me. Secondly, why was a passage to Hogsmeade needed?”

“Ehm, I don’t wanna talk about it.”

Severus glared a moment. “Troublesome little sod. I pray your children are as bad if not worse than
you were as a child. Your idea has potential, though. Have you informed Albus yet?”

“No, I wanted to come see you.”

“Why would you wish to do that?”

“You were always there before and I’m having trouble being alone now.” Harry looked away from
Severus’s piercing gaze and thoughtfully frowned at his clasped hands. “I’m alone in my room
when I’m not training, sleeping, or cooking.”

“You still cook?”

“Yeah. Feel free to stop by some time. I’m still used to cooking for both of us so there’s always
plenty. Actually, you could stop by anytime and be able to feed yourself a full course meal with
just the leftovers.”

“That is a rather pathetic story, brat.”

Harry shrugged. “I told you I’m having trouble getting used to it. I made potpie last night.
Chicken.”

“Your beef was less hazardous to my health.”

“Yeah, you said you liked that one better.”

“I have never said those words in my life.”

“Fine.” Harry grinned. “You implied them.”

Severus rolled his eyes. “You are absolutely ridiculous.”

“I try.”

“I’m sure you do.” Severus smirked and cast a glance at the coffeepot. “It may take me a while to
drink all of this on my own. It could be well past lunch by the time I finish.”

Harry sat up straight. “I could cook. I mean, I really don’t wanna leave without my coffeepot.”

“It seems neither of us have a choice, then.” Harry grinned widely and Severus prepared himself
another cup of coffee. “If there is no way of preventing you from cooking, I suppose I will allow
you to acquaint yourself with my kitchen.”
His damn cheeks were hurting from smiling so much. Maybe he could somehow get Severus to agree to let him cook more often. No, he just needed more pots of coffee. There! For each pot, he’d demand to cook in return. Harry glanced at Severus as he rounded the counter. And not a moment too soon. Severus was looking a little thin these days.

“Your knee!” Harry cried, stopping so abruptly that he almost tipped onto his face. He was momentarily dizzy and clutched the counter to steady himself. “I haven’t even thought about your knee since we left. Oh, sir, have you been doing anything for it?”

“I have been doing enough.”

“Alright. Can I pee?”

“Not unless you learn to correctly ask a question.”

“May I use your bathroom?”

“Door on the left.”

“Thanks.”

Harry trotted down a short hall, really did pee (which he didn’t have to do until he was actually in the bathroom), and then washed his hands. After, he sifted through the trash can and found an empty potions vial. Uncorking it, he confirmed it was, in fact, one of Severus’s pain potions. Well, that settled that. Even if he had to sneak his way into Severus’s rooms, he’d be returning. The poor man had probably restarted a nearly daily regimen of pain potions the day they arrived. As he was walking back to the kitchen, he saw a little hall table with a book on top…and on top of that book were the protective gloves he’d once given Severus for his birthday. He smiled happily.

“You were nosing about, weren’t you?” Severus asked the moment he rejoined him. “Don’t bother lying, brat. Were you looking for something in particular?”

“An empty vial,” Harry said, deciding to own up to it. “And I found it. You could have said something. I’d still have rubbed your leg, because it was helping you. Why didn’t you say something?”

“One of these days, I simply must find our marriage certificate.”

Harry frowned. “What?”

“You’re still acting like the wife I don’t have, brat.” He snorted and Severus shook his head exasperatedly. “What I choose to do in my rooms is my own business.”

“Fair enough, but do you really like having to swallow a potion every day to keep your knee from hurting? Especially a potion that, uh...” Harry used his index finger to point down and Severus merely stared at him. "Surely having me touch you long enough for a massage isn’t the worst thing to ever happen to you.”

“Top ten.”

Harry snorted. “I'm sure.”

“Fine. Top twenty.” Harry slowly grinned and Severus arched a brow. “Perhaps thirty. I can’t be certain.”
“Understandable, yeah. After all, you’ve had a lot of bad stuff happen to you in your life. Living with me over a year, being sorted into Slytherin… You poor man.”

“You cheeky brat.” Severus turned around, but not fast enough to hide the beginning of a small, amused smile. He opened a small refrigerator and peeked inside. “Were you still set upon making lunch?”

“How else am I to continue fattening you up?”

“I insist you stop that. I might someday become so corpulent, I will be unable to keep pace with you during the battle.”

Harry bit his thumbnail. “Yeah.” How far along would he be during the battle? What would Severus say when he found out? “What do you want for lunch?”

“I don’t particularly care. As long as it isn’t your fingernails, I will survive.” Harry dropped his hand and grimaced at Severus. “I’ve never before caught you biting your nails, brat, so I have no idea why you chose to do such a thing now.”

“I’m just worried about the battle.”

“Don’t be. You’re still training every day-”

“How did you know that? At the last meeting, I told everybody I’m training every other day.”

“Yes, you did. You train on your own in the Room of Requirement on your off days.” Harry frowned at the countertop. How had he figured it out? “As I was saying, you’re still training every day, your training partners are never the same person so you cannot become complacent, and we’re working on a battle plan that will account for every possible thing that could go wrong and are mapping alternatives. There is no way you can fail. I more so than anyone else will not allow that to happen.”

Harry met his gaze. “Why?”

“My survival hinges upon your own,” Severus replied, “and I am much too young to die.”

Severus’s serious expression was promptly replaced with a crooked smirk.

“Gee, thanks, sir. Love you, too.” Harry froze and made a face. “Er, sorry. That… just kind of slipped out.”

“Clearly. I didn’t take it as a serious declaration, brat, so you needn’t make that face. Merlin. I think I know you better than that.”

“Er, right, yeah. So… what’s in Severus Snape’s refrigerator?”

“Oh, I know how to play this game.” Severus leaned a hip against the counter. “The first opponent’s move is always this: you stand on two feet behind your seat.”

Harry grinned, stood up, and triple tapped the tip of his wand against the chair back.

“Okay. What next? What does the second opponent do?”

“The second opponent issues a command.”

“If the first opponent doesn’t obey, what’s the penalty?”
“Starvation,” Severus replied dryly.

“Boring. So what command are you issuing?”

“This time… Hmm. I think I’ll say ‘Harry Potter, take eight steps around the counter.’”

Harry complied and looked up.

“So what’s the second opponent’s move now?”

“This is simple. The second opponent must always keep away from the first opponent. One moment. Let me get into position.” Severus walked around the counter to the chair Harry had abandoned and Harry smothered a grin as he pulled the chair away from the counter. “Alright. The first opponent’s move is- What the blazes did you- Oh, you little sod.”

“So you didn’t like my note, sir?”

“Ha. I knew I’d get you out of my way. Hugs & kisses. Your precious little housewife,” Severus read aloud and then looked up. “You’re absolutely hilarious, brat.”

“You had it coming. Like I wouldn’t see through that game shite.” Harry snorted and started looking in the refrigerator. “You don’t have anything good in here.”

“You mean you can’t work your wifely magic and prepare something for my lunch?” Severus leaned back in his seat and linked his hands behind his neck. “My, I didn’t see that coming at all.”

Harry kept his eyes on Severus and called out, “Dobby!”

Severus furrowed his brows and a pop sounded through the room.

“Master Harry Potter sir!” Dobby greeted. “What can Dobby be doing for Master Harry Potter?”

“Can you bring me some carrots, potatoes and onions? Can I also have a spare hunk of beef from last night’s dinner?”

“Right away, Master Harry Potter sir!”

Moments later, Dobby returned with the food he’d requested and left without a word. Harry gave Severus a smug look and began his work. He noticed with no small amount of glee that Severus seemed incredibly surprised and slightly put out by Harry’s move.

“I do believe,” he said as he turned on the small cooker, “that I am winning so far.”

Severus harrumphed. “I didn’t expect you to do something like that.”

Harry laughed. “You never do, sir. The food should be done by the time lunch rolls around. Are you enjoying your coffee?”

“I left my coffee by you so no, I am not.”

Harry picked up the cup and handed it to Severus. He in turn nodded his thanks and Harry smiled. He quickly finished dicing the vegetables, arranged everything in a pan, seasoned the beef, and poured a bit of gravy over everything. When he was finished, he silently refreshed Severus’s coffee and poured himself a glass of juice.

“Tell me again why you’re not drinking any of this coffee.”
“I can have some anytime I want, but you can’t. I’m being nice by letting you have it all.”

“Ah, that’s right.” Severus carefully sipped his coffee and then quirked his brows down, his gaze trained on his cup. “It has been strange since our return. At times, I have caught myself wondering why it is so quiet in here and then I remember. I can only assume it has been worse for you.”

Harry nodded. “This morning, I made bacon, eggs, and toast for breakfast and turned to see your reaction, but then I felt like an idiot when all I saw was my empty living room.”

“Again with the toast?” Severus asked curiously. “You went from persecuting it to embracing its deliciousness so quickly. Why could you not have had your change of heart while we were still imprisoned?”

“I’d say based on the crumbs on your counter, you’ve had plenty of toast lately.”

Severus briefly glared at the crumbs Harry was pointing to.

“Yes, well, Hogwarts fare isn’t as filling as it once was.”

“You got used to better food.” Harry hoisted himself onto the counter by the cooker and took a sip of juice. “Have you seen Rose lately?”

“No, I haven’t.”

“Neither have I. I’ve been too busy getting my arse handed to me in training that I rarely see anybody.”

“She is your goddaughter. Make the effort.”

“I will. We’ll come visit.”

“I care not if she sees me.”

Severus looked away from Harry, which made Harry grin. He was lying.

“Right. Well, she cares if she sees you so you’ll just have to deal with it somehow, sir. Sorry.”

“I’ll muddle through, I’m sure.”

“Mmm. So when are you going to join me in training?”

“Are you quite certain you want my help? I’ve had many years to perfect my technique. It could be a bit much to handle at first.”

Harry almost laughed. Truer words have never been spoken. Now wasn't the time for inappropriate comments, though.

“I’d say that out of everyone who could help, you’d be the best. You were a spy a really long time so you probably know how best to counter the curses and everything. You know how they think, how they fight.”

“Very astute, brat. Is this your attempt to butter me up?”

“Is it working?”

“Somewhat.”
“Then yes.” Harry grinned and Severus just rolled his eyes. “Oh, I know. How about a trade?”

Severus cocked his head. “Interesting. What sort of trade are you thinking?”

“I’ll do something for you every time you volunteer to help me train. Leg massage, cleaning your bathroom, anything.”

“Hmm. Throw in a pot of coffee, as well, and we have a deal.”

“Great. Deal. A favor and a pot of coffee for each time.”

Severus nodded. “That is acceptable. You may inform your young Mrs. Weasley that her assistance tomorrow night is unnecessary. She shouldn’t be dueling whilst pregnant anyway.”

A twinge of guilt shot through him.

“Yeah, of course. What are you gonna have me do? I can get a start on it and get out of your hair for a while.”

“Surprisingly, you aren’t annoying me too much right now.”

“Fine. I can save it for later.” Harry looked at the floor and took another sip of his juice. He furrowed his brows as a thought came back to him and he sighed, attention darting back to Severus. He was already looking at him. “Sir?”

“What?”

“Does your godson know about his future brother or sister?”

Severus looked surprised. “No, he doesn’t and I don’t plan to tell him. That will be his parents’ job.”

“Oh. Damn. I kind of feel bad for him.”

“Why?”

“He’s gonna be a big brother and he doesn’t know it.”

“Even if I were to tell him, boy, it wouldn’t do him any good. His parents aren’t on our side.”

That he thinks.

“Right.” Severus nodded after staring at him a moment and Harry let out another heartfelt sigh. “I still feel bad for him.”

“Then stop thinking about it and don’t you dare tell him.”

“Are you kidding me? Even if I wanted to be that cruel, he wouldn’t believe me if I told him something like that.” Harry hopped down from the counter and peeked at Severus while ostensibly looking for something in the fridge. “Did you really think I would?”

“Of course I didn’t, but I still wished to warn you against the idea if ever you have a sudden change in character.”

“Right. Not gonna happen, sir.”
“I’m glad. You may close my refrigerator now. I know you’re not actually looking for anything, brat. I know you better than you think I do.”

“I doubt it.” Harry closed the door and awkwardly avoided Severus’s gaze. “Do you want me to make a dessert, too?”

“I don’t care one way or the other, but I would like you to tell me what you’re hiding from me.”

Harry met and held Severus’s gaze, disbelief curling in his belly. He couldn’t possibly suspect, could he? Would he even care if he told him? Probably not. After everything they’d ever said and done to each other… No. No, there was no way Severus would want to know.

“I’m not hiding anything from you, sir.” He smiled as best as he could, his chest aching for his unborn child’s sake. “Or at least nothing important.”

Severus studied him a minute. “If you say so.”

“I do.” Harry’s smile grew into a forced grin as an idea struck him. “I was just distracted. Talking about Draco’s unborn sibling got me thinking about the cake for the baby shower. I was looking in the fridge to get some sort of inspiration. I mean, staring at leftover ham inspired that cherry chocolate cake you like so much so I thought I’d give it a go.”

“You realize I know you’re lying to me, don’t you?”

“Oh, fine. I was bothered you’d think I’d really stoop so low as to tell your godson about the baby when I know full well it’d only hurt him. I don’t hate him that much, sir. How could you think I’d do something like that?”

That lie had tripped off his tongue smoothly enough that Severus actually seemed to believe this one. A little. There was still a little distrust in his eyes, but it wasn’t full-blown suspicion like before. He could handle that.

“I wasn’t aware I had hurt your feelings. At times, I forget you’re actually a teenage girl.”

“I’m not a girl,” Harry immediately replied. “Sometimes I swear you want me to be with as much as you call me one.”

“I certainly have no wish for you to be a female, brat. You merely act like one ninety percent of the time I’m around you.”

“Maybe it’s you, then, because no one else has told me I act like one.”

“I wasn’t aware I had the power to completely change your gender merely by being in your presence.”

Harry snorted. “More like you just say that to annoy me.”

“You happen to think I enjoy annoying you a bit too much. Every time I turn around, you mention something else I’ve done to annoy you.”

“Then stop doing annoying things and I know it’s not all in my head, sir. You already admitted you put your boots on the coffee table just to annoy me.”

“It’s my table. Why shouldn’t I?”

“It’s uncivilised!”
“Just whom do you think I'm trying to impress?”

“No one. Clearly.”

Severus’s eyes narrowed. “What is wrong with you? Why are you acting like this?”


“Have you tried a sleeping potion? It will help ward off the bad dreams.”

“How often can you take those?”

“Typical potions? Three or four times a week. Mine? Every night. I had to create a better potion considering my previous line of work.”

Harry frowned. “I'm sorry you had to go through that.”

“Since tonight is your free night, I suggest you go to bed early. Not many would put up with your tempers without retribution.”

“Surprising you do… you know, since we used to hate each other.” Severus nodded once and finished his coffee. “You don’t anymore, do you?”

“Hate you? Not completely, no.” Severus’s lips quirked up and he refreshed his coffee. Harry snorted. “My rooms and laundry are still in order due to your last visit so instead of a chore, you could make something for Draco and me.”

“You mean food?”

“I suppose I should have said that. Yes, I meant food. I’ve promised to have dinner with him at least once a week and he was kind enough to remind me yesterday that it’s been a while since we dined one on one.”

“Well, I could make his favorite pot pie and your favorite cake.”

“No to the pot pie. Yes to the cake.” Severus kept his attention on his empty coffee cup and Harry pulled it from his grasp. “Not too long ago, Draco mentioned how much he missed his mother’s chicken pasta dish. You could make some sort of pasta dish, I suppose.”

“If you’re willing to help me get it right, I don’t mind attempting her recipe.”

“For Draco’s sake, of course.”

“No,” Harry disagreed, “but he’ll like it all the same.”

Severus was looking at him now, but he said nothing for the longest time. Eventually, Harry placed his refilled coffee mug back in front of him and Severus stood up.

“I feel like reading. You may join me in the living room when you grow bored in here.”

Harry smiled and watched Severus walk into the living room area. It took him less than a minute to join him on the couch. He should have known leaving the safe house wouldn’t change too much if he went about things in the right way. He would definitely be visiting more often.

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“Go ahead, Rose,” Harry coached. “Knock on the door.”

He stepped right up to the door and held her out. She proceeded to slap at the door with both palms and started giggling happily, apparently quite proud of her help. Harry surreptitiously knocked twice at the door while settling her on one hip. Severus opened the door a moment later and seemed surprised when he saw Harry’s company.

“I wasn’t aware you were bringing a friend.” He stepped back and gestured inside. “Come in.”

“Sape!” Rose cheered loudly and Harry grinned. “Sape Sape!”

“She’s learned her esses, I see.” Harry’s grin widened as Rose was rescued from his hold. “Child, it’s Snape. Say it. Snape.”

“Sape!”

“Snape.”

“Sape.”

“Or Severus,” Harry added helpfully. Rose looked at him and frowned, her little mouth working.


Rose pouted and Harry’s chest hurt.

“It’s okay, sweetie. It took me a while to figure out how to say it, too.”

“Liar,” Severus muttered. “I have everything set out in the kitchen.”

“This should be interesting.”

He wondered what all Severus had forgotten. He led the way into the kitchen and smiled at Rose’s gibberish and Severus’s responses.

“I have no idea what you’re saying,” Severus said. Rose shrieked happily and said something that sounded like, “Mwawpah tea.” Severus merely replied with, “I see. It still sounds like nonsense, child.”

Harry chuckled.

“Okay,” he said as Severus settled on a stool with Rose on one leg. “These are the kind of noodle she uses?”

“They appear to be, yes.”

“Alright. Would you happen to have her recipe anywhere?”

“Who do you think I am?”

“I thought not. Do you remember what this pasta tastes like?”

“Like pasta.”

Harry leaned against the counter, looked down at the small (and undoubtedly incomplete) array of food, and pursed his lips in thought. Suddenly, a brilliant thought struck him.
“Dobby!”

“What can-”

“No time, Dobby. Sorry. I need you to do something for me. Do you remember all of Narcissa Malfoy’s recipes?”

Severus looked shocked.

“Dobby be knowing all of Mistress Malfoy’s recipes, Master Harry Potter sir.”

“Excellent. I need you to try to remember a recipe for chicken pasta.”

“I remember, Master Harry Potter sir,” Dobby said eagerly. “Dobby be learning it a long time ago, Master Harry-”

“Dobby, please. Can you get everything I’ll need? I’ll figure it out once I have everything.”

“Right away, Master Harry Potter sir.”

“Thanks, Dobby.”

The elf popped away and Harry met Severus’s gaze. Rose was playing with his fingers.

“I hadn’t thought to ask the elf.”

Dobby returned that moment with a large box of various items. Harry took the box from him, thanked him yet again, and started unpacking the box once Dobby had left (after, of course, several Master Harry Potter sirs, thanks, and adoring comments). When he was done with that, he looked everything over. Carrots, more chicken, the same pasta Severus had put out, garlic cloves, and fresh peas.

“Does this look like everything?”

“Yes. I had forgotten about the vegetables. It’s been a while since I’ve had it.”

“It happens. What did Narcissa usually serve with this?”

“A salad and a fresh loaf of bread.”

“Homemade bread? Did she ever put cheese or garlic on it? I can make a garlic butter to drizzle on the slices.”

“The pasta was the only thing that never changed so do whatever you think will taste best.”

“You know,” Harry said, smiling, “we’ve come a long way from the days when you wouldn’t even open your mouth for a piece of fried chicken.”

“At the time, I wasn’t certain you weren’t trying to poison me.”

“You know better now, though, right?”

“Naturally. I haven’t died yet, have I?”

“No, you haven’t, though you have said it’s been a close call a time or two.”

Severus smirked and Rose smacked her hands on top of Severus’s. He twitched his hands and she
smacked them again, shrieking loudly. Harry laughed.

“She loves you, sir. There’s no denying it.”

“I suppose there isn’t any use in attempting.” Severus quickly turned one of his hands over, caught up a small hand, and Rose’s giggles brought a large smile to Harry’s lips. “Do you have an idea how that pasta is to be assembled?”

“A small one. The carrots and peas were mixed with the pasta and chicken, right?”

“Yes.”

“Was the chicken cubed, sliced, or something else?”

“Narcissa would always have the chicken sliced diagonally so as to produce somewhat thin, ovoid pieces.”

Harry held his fingers apart. “‘Bout this wide, you think?”

“Close, yes.”

“Would she serve those on top of the pasta or on the side?”

“Always on top with this sauce poured over everything.”

“So the vegetables and pasta are mixed together, the chicken’s put on top, and then a sauce is poured over everything. Did I get that right?”

“Yes.”

“Well, there’s a little down. Do you remember what this sauce tasted like?”

“I wouldn’t know where to begin explaining.”

“Okay. First thing’s first. Was the sauce kinda clear or not?” Severus looked uncertain of what he wanted to say and Harry quirked his brows. “That’s not really helpful, you know. Was there stuff mixed into the sauce? Perhaps the garlic?”

“Yes,” Severus said, his brows smoothing. “There was garlic in it. I remember. It tasted like garlic. It was also a white sauce.”

Harry closed his eyes and shook his head. Of course it was a white sauce. That would make sense. He opened his eyes and nodded.

“I think I know exactly what I’m doing now. Let me get everything going and once the sauce is finished, I’ll let you test it. If it needs something else, I’m sure you can figure out what’s missing.”

“Very well.”

While Severus entertained Rose, Harry carefully diced carrots, created a little mound of peas, threw away the empty pea pods, and sliced a test piece from the chicken. He held it up for Severus to see.

“Does this look right?”

“Exactly right, yes.”
“Perfect. Did she fry, boil, or bake the chicken?”

“…bake?”

Harry chuckled. “Okay. We’ll bake the chicken and just hope that’s right.”

“My godson will appreciate your effort, brat. I hope you’re aware of that.”

“I know. I also know he’ll never tell me.” As much as he knew Severus was using his godson to express his own appreciation. “Did you happen to gather everything I needed for the cake?”

“When we were staying at the safe house, I noticed you kept the cherries and whatnot in the refrigerator. I assumed there must be a good reason for it. Those items are on the top shelf. The rest is in the cabinet above the sink.”

Harry shot a look his way and threw the carrots and peas into small pans to cook.

“And you got everything I told you I’d need?”

“Of course I did.”

“Just thought I’d ask.”

An hour later, Harry slid the pasta and vegetables into the oven to stay warm, checked on the chicken, stirred the sauce thickening up on the stovetop, and then closely studied his cake from every angle. It was perfect. He’d even gone out of his way and stuck chocolate-covered cherries around the outside before drizzling the whole thing in chocolate. Severus couldn’t take his eyes off of it.

Harry carefully put the cake in the fridge, stirred the sauce once more, and then leaned against the counter opposite Severus. Rose was doodling on a spare piece of parchment Severus had unearthed from Merlin only knew where.

“Where did the crayons come from?”

“I haven’t the foggiest.”

Harry stared at him a moment. “You’re lying, aren’t you?”

“Why would I do that?”

"Just seems odd you happened to find crayons when I know for a fact they weren't in Rose's pockets. That's a new outfit, you see."

"Hmm. Strange."

Harry smiled at him. "So when did you realize you love Rose?"

"How long will it take the food to finish? Draco will be here within the hour."

Harry grinned knowingly, but let Severus change the subject.

"I'd say another fifteen or so minutes. You'll need to check the sauce again just in case it got too thick."

"Unlikely."
"Probably, but isn't it better to be safe than sorry?"

"You're asking a man who was locked up for over a year by that same logic."

Harry chuckled. "I was right there with you, sir. Remember?"

"Hard to forget it, boy."

"Oh, should I be flattered?"

Severus scoffed. "No."

"Sure."

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“Come on, boy,” Severus snapped. “I know you can do better than this.”

“I know. One... second.”

Harry doubled over, his arms braced on his knees, and gasped for breath. Severus had been running him hard the last three hours and didn’t seem ready to ease up. All he needed was a breather. Couldn’t Severus just give him that?

“Get up.” Severus shot a stinging hex his way and Harry yelped. “We’re not done. Remember. I’m a faceless Death Eater and we’re in the middle of the battle. If you give me the slightest opening, I will take you down and make the Dark Lord’s job that much easier. Now fight me.”

Harry heaved a deep breath, straightened his shoulders, and miraculously blocked the shot Severus sent his way. He didn’t even have time to smile about it, though, because Severus was already casting an immobilising spell. Harry dove out of the way just in time, grabbed the edge of a table to keep himself from hitting the stone floor, and retaliated with a flaying curse after calling out a warning.

Since he was expecting it, Severus easily diverted the curse towards the drapes on a nearby window and held up his wand. Harry immediately sagged against the table and sucked in a deep breath.

“That was much better. I’m impressed by your handiwork.” Severus directed his gaze to the drapes and Harry was immensely surprised to see the fabric in tatters. “That would have taken some power. I’m glad you’re taking this seriously... and I thank you for the warning. Dealing with the wounds from that would not have been a pleasant experience for me.”

“I didn’t wanna hurt you,” Harry explained seriously. “It’s why I warned you. And you know, I’ve learned more in the last three hours than my past three sessions put together. I should be thanking you.”

Severus ignored his thanks. “I’d figured as much. The others are likely having a difficult time seeing passed their friend and saviour. I, however, only see an inexperienced wizard in desperate need of help. Are you sufficiently rested or do you need more time?”

Harry held up a finger and looked down at the floor, trying to get his breathing under control. He hadn’t noticed it much before, but even though he was more vulnerable now with the whole pregnancy thing, he was also much stronger. It was really working in his favor.
If he could start training with Severus more, maybe he’d also be able to stop taking so many breaks. The others really had been going too easy on him. Well, that’d have to end.

“All right.” Harry stood up and faced Severus head on. “I’m ready, sir. Give me your best.”

Severus smirked and quickly shot a curse his way.

***

Two days later, Harry woke up with a massive headache. It took him almost an hour to work up the nerve to get out of bed. He grabbed one of Severus’s old headache relievers from his bathroom cabinet, brushed his teeth, vomited into the toilet when the taste of the toothpaste got to him, and then rinsed his mouth with tepid water.

By the time he’d gotten to his kitchenette, he just wanted to write off this entire day and get back in bed, but he couldn’t do that. He had things to do. Resigned, Harry pulled out some juice and jumped when someone pounded on his door. He grabbed his wand from his pocket and listened.

“Brat, if you take much longer to answer, someone may come along and I’ll be forced to make niceties. Do not do that to me.”

Harry chuckled, briefly pressed a hand to his forehead, and pulled open the door.

“Good morning. Feel like breakfast and coffee?”

Severus arched a brow. “You were cooking?”

“I was about to. Come in.”

Harry stepped back and Severus stepped passed him. When he turned towards the kitchenette, Severus’s back stiffened and Harry frowned at him in confusion, which only increased when Severus relaxed and casually sat on one of the two stools.

“You mentioned coffee?”

“Yeah,” Harry replied, wondering what that’d been about. “I was just about to start some, even though I’m kinda more in the mood for hot tea this morning.”

“And why’s that?” Severus asked seriously, not looking away from him. “You always start your day with coffee.”

“I woke up with a headache and coffee only ever makes that worse,” Harry easily explained. “What sounds good for breakfast?”

While Severus stared down at the countertop, Harry grabbed the headache reliever and swallowed some. He saw Severus briefly glance up, but then he was back to thinking.

“I suppose whatever you wish to make will be fine. I didn’t actually stop by to have breakfast.”

“Was just an awesome perk, then?” Harry laughed. “If you didn’t want fed, why did you come? You never visit so I know it can’t be that.”

“You’ll be training again this evening and Minerva has asked me to fill her spot. She has to supervise a detention after dinner and won’t be able to make it.”

“That’s great. I learn more when it’s you helping me, anyways.”
“I’m sure you do.” Severus paused, stared at him for several long seconds, and then furrowed his brows. “Are you planning to make coffee at some point today or are you going to continue staring at me?”

“Sorry. My headache just went away and I think I started falling back to sleep.” Severus didn’t look amused and Harry sighed. “Didn’t even try tea this morning, did you?”

“Can you tell?”

“Yes. You’re grumpy. Hold on.” Harry hurriedly prepared a pot of coffee and turned the machine on. “It’ll be a few minutes and then you’re welcome to all of that.”

Severus nodded. “I was thinking about… my friend… this morning. You did surprisingly well with my situation with Draco.”

“Oh, hey, yeah. How are they doing? And how is he?”

“Draco is fine and I don’t know.”

“I’m sorry. What’s going on?”

“What does one do when one has wronged a friend’s wife?”

Merlin. Was he actually asking for advice?

“Isn’t she your friend, too?”

“More like a very friendly acquaintance.”

“Ah. So it’s more like you’re friends, but you don’t go out of your way to see each other.”

“That’s a more apt description, yes.”

“Right. So what’d you do?”

“The coffee has finished brewing.”

Harry glanced behind him at the counter and nodded. After perfectly preparing a cup for Severus, Harry handed it off and put on the kettle. He then walked to the fridge, opened the door, and briefly looked at Severus.

“What’d you do, sir?”

He randomly grabbed food for breakfast and set it on the counter. As he began looking in the cabinets for pans, Severus sighed.

“You remember I was not quite pleased to hear of her pregnancy.”

“Oh, no. Sir…” Harry looked up with an egg in hand. “Please tell me you didn’t tell her what you were thinking.”

“Unfortunately, I cannot.”

Harry sighed. “Well, what did you say to her?”

“All I said was that bringing another child into the world whilst in the middle of war was an
incredibly stupid-"

“No,” Harry groaned. “Why? Would you have said that to me?”

“I spoke before I thought my words through, boy. I did not knowingly try to cause her distress.”

“Alright. So what did she say?”

“She brought up my participation in the ritual and said some things I will not be repeating. Suffice it to say that the things she told me scandalised her own husband.” Harry winced. “He has since informed me she feels terrible for what she said, but is quite unwilling to speak with me at this point in time.”

Harry sighed, put down the egg he was still holding, and rubbed his temples.

“Okay. You didn’t react well to her pregnancy, she didn’t react well to your reaction, and now she’s mad at you. Is that everything?”

“Yes. After she left, I didn’t have much chance to make things worse.”

“And what about your friend?”

“He’s keeping out of it. He understands where I’m coming from.”

“But he’s also excited about having another baby. Plus, you know, he can’t say anything without either his best friend or his wife getting angry with him.”

“Exactly.”

“Have you tried… I don’t know… maybe writing her a letter?”

Severus scowled. “How is one letter going to fix this?”

“Well, it probably won’t, but then you’d have a chance to tell her everything you didn’t get to say then. Like how you only said what you said, because you’re worried about her possibly becoming a target once she starts to show.”

“That is an excellent point.”

“And how you brewed a contraceptive and an abortive for me, a guy who doesn’t understand the idea of abortion, because you didn’t want the same to happen to me… even though it meant another chance for you to finally become a dad was shot all to hell. That is, if I were to take the abortive.”

Severus looked at him a long moment. “Would she even read my letter, though, brat? She is still very angry with me.”

“She’s probably more hurt than angry, sir. I mean, yeah, she’s angry, too. I would be. But…” Harry shrugged. “See what I’m saying?”

“Yes. Gods, I’ve messed up. I’ve upset and angered a pregnant woman.” Severus looked at the ceiling. “All of those hormones. Merlin help me. She’ll never let me forget this.”

Harry snorted. “Sorry. You should write her a letter, sir. It’ll at least start the process. With any luck, she’ll write back and you’ll know how to go on from there.”
“Until I put my foot in my mouth once more.” Harry nodded and Severus glared at him. “Are you going to cook, boy, or should I leave?”

“No, stay. Please. I'm cooking.”

“Very well. I've noticed you haven’t been joining the school for meals. Do you cook every meal?”

“Hmm. Expend the same energy as I've been doing for each meal for over a year or join the rest of the school for food that doesn't taste as good. It’s a close call, but…”

“You are such a brat.”

“Yup.”

“What did you decide upon for the meal?”

“Scrambled eggs, sausage, and leftover muffins. Yes, your favorites.”

Severus cocked his head in thought. “I suppose I won’t be starving today, then.”

“Nope. I'm having roast pork for dinner tonight. If you wanted to stop by later, we could eat and then go train.” Harry didn’t look up from the eggs he was stirring in his favorite frying pan. “I mean, we do both have to eat and since you’re gonna be training with me anyway…”

“Dinner wouldn’t count as the favor?” Severus asked suspiciously.

“No. Consider it a bonus this time.”

“Very well. What time will I need to be here?”

“Say about… six. We could eat, have some coffee or something when we’re done so our food can settle, and then head off.”

“That sounds acceptable.”

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Harry's vision swam and then righted itself in time to see Draco casting a rather vicious hex his way. Harry quickly sidestepped the curse, shook his head to try to get rid of his dizziness, and misfired a petrificus totalus. It harmlessly hit a clock on the wall and Draco lowered his wand.

“What in Merlin’s name is wrong with you, Potter? Why aren’t you taking me seriously? Severus says you were learning things, but I haven’t-”

“Shut up, Draco. I'm feeling dizzy. I need… accio chair.”

“Why are you dizzy? I didn’t hit you with anything that could cause dizziness.”

“I think I hit my head,” he lied. He sure as hell didn’t want Draco wondering about the possible causes behind his dizziness. “Just give me a second. I'm dizzy.”

“If that’s all it is, stop being a baby and get up. Severus wouldn’t go easy on you. I'm not either.”

“Okay, okay. Hold on. A second.”

Harry shook his head, stood up, and tightly grabbed the back of his chair. He swayed a moment,
took a deep breath, and focused on Draco as he pushed his chair away. It hit the wall with a bang and Draco’s tripping charm hit him in the chest. Harry staggered back and immediately threw a random spell Draco’s way.

Draco cursed a mean streak and Harry looked up to see him banishing blood from his stomach. What spell had he used?

“Potter, you idiot. Look what you did to my shirt!”

“Why didn’t you notice there was something wrong, Draco?” Severus snapped. “What if you had mortally injured him? He could have been hemorrhaging and you-”

“Why are you so furious?”

“We’ll be discussing this later. Open your eyes, brat.”

Harry furrowed his brows and realized his eyes were, in fact, closed. When had that happened? He’d just been looking at Draco’s shirt and then…

“What happened?” he groaned, eyes cracking open a bit.

“You collapsed,” Draco informed him. “You kept saying you were dizzy and needed a second. Remember?”

“I remember that and I remember looking at your shirt, because it was bloody, but then… this.”

“As Draco said, you collapsed,” Severus remarked. “He mentioned you might have hit your head.”

“I don’t even remember that. I remember feeling really dizzy so I guess I must have hit my head. I sat down, stood up, and… you hit my chest with some spell,” Harry told Draco. Severus cast a very dark look at Draco, who held up his hands. “I think it was the tripping spell. I took a step back and cast a spell of my own.”

“Yes,” Draco agreed, “and then collapsed.”

“Huh. Do I have a bump or anything?”

“No, you do not.” Severus held out a hand. “Get up. You’re done for the evening. You will need supervision to ensure your head injury isn’t worse than the spell claimed. I will give you a choice of your Weasley friends or the infirmary.”

Harry dusted himself off and scowled. “I don’t need a babysitter.”

“Be careful or I will volunteer myself. You are going to be watched. It is for your own good.”

“At least with you, I won’t be babied.”

“I will also include my godson. Do you want Draco’s company, as well?”

Harry uncertainly looked at Draco and then thought of Hermione’s mothering instincts, which had been thrown into overdrive lately. He then thought of the hard beds in the infirmary and Poppy’s overprotectiveness. He’d be literally babied with Hermione or treated like glass with Poppy.

“Yeah, still worth it, sir. I really don’t want to be watched by either of them.”

“Very well. Draco, get the door.”
Harry suddenly found himself floating along beside Severus. He huffed and crossed his arms over his chest.

“You know, I can still walk.”

“This way, I can be certain you won’t be standing if your dizziness returns.” Severus guided him through the door and Draco smirked down at him. Harry gave him a rather rude, two finger salute and Draco’s mouth dropped open. “I saw that.”

“I did nothing.”

“Lying is unattractive, Potter.”

“Careful, Malfoy. I could be your stepgodmother someday. I’m sure I could find a house with a nice attic.”

“That isn’t funny.”

Severus chuckled. “Perhaps the next time you feel like teasing the brat, you’ll remember that he’s become quite adept at giving as good as he gets.”

“I blame you for that.”

“You probably should,” Harry agreed. "I certainly don’t learn anything helpful from you.”

“Or much at all, I’m thinking. Severus has told me what it was like being your professor.”

“Hmm. I’m surprised he could even remember back then, what with being pampered and shagged as much as he was.”

“It was once, Potter. Severus wouldn’t have gone to bed with you more than that.”

“Are you quite certain? I remember being in his bed quite a few times. The subject of marriage and children even came up a time or two.”

Severus smirked and led the way around a turn in the hall. Harry floated along behind him and grinned up at Draco.

“I don’t believe that.”

“Sir, speaking truthfully, did we discuss marriage and children during our stay in the safe house?”

“More than a time or two, yes.”

“Together?”

“I believe it was discussed.”

“Ha. I knew you wanted to be with my godfather. Now, I’m thinking a silver and emerald wedding, in honour of our Slytherin colours.”

“See, I was thinking more black and silver, in honour of Severus’s hair, which is my favorite thing about him.”

“Severus doesn’t have any grey hair.”
“That you can see.” Draco gagged and Harry started laughing so hard, he had to hold his belly. “I’m kidding. He doesn’t have any grey hair, Malfoy.”

“You are just sick, Potter.”

“Why? Because I was discussing his chest hair? What on earth did you think I was talking about?”

Draco’s glare just felt so good to him.
Harry carefully knotted the string around his paper-wrapped bread loaf and smiled as he added a little bow to the knot. He glanced at the other six loaves he'd baked in celebration of reaching seven weeks and shook his head. He’d figure out whom would be receiving those later. Severus might be getting another, to be honest. He was looking a little skinny the last time he’d seen him.

Glancing at the clock, Harry sighed and headed to the bathroom for a quick shower. He only had an hour before he had to be there and he’d wanted something to eat beforehand. Somehow, Harry made it to the meeting with fifteen minutes to spare. He proudly set the wrapped bread loaf in front of Severus and claimed the seat beside him with a big smile.

“What is this?”

“I made too much bread. Thought you might like some.”

Severus sniffed the package. “But what is it? I cannot tell.”

“Pumpkin chocolate chunk. If you’re nice, I might just have another somewhere in my rooms.”

“When am I ever not nice to you?”

Harry grinned. “You’re just saying that so you have even more bread saved up for your breakfasts. You have to prove you're nice to earn it, sir.”

“Very well. A week ago, you told my godson that I have grey hair. I do not appreciate being made to feel older than I already feel, but I didn’t kill you. Therefore, I am a very nice man.”

“Eh, good enough. Could have just said something nice about me.”

“What is there to say? Oh, I suppose I could say your cooking doesn’t kill people. Would that suffice?”

Harry rolled his eyes. “You’re really bad at giving compliments. I hope you know that.”

“Or perhaps I am simply unversed in giving a proper compliment since many never earn such from me.”

“So you’re either really stingy with your compliments and only give halfhearted ones when you feel you have to say something.”

“Or everyone else is useless and not worth my time.”

“My,” Harry replied seriously. “And I've just earned a compliment from you so I must be the opposite. What is the opposite of that? Useful and worth all your time?”

“Do tamp down on your ego, boy. I fear you're about to explode.”

Harry smiled. “Thanks, sir.”

“Stop looking at me like that. I said nothing to warrant your happiness.”

“Sure you did. I just got one of those rare and super coveted Severus Snape compliments.” Harry glanced around as he began to say something else, but saw Draco and Remus watching them. “Er,
“What?” Severus asked, dark-eyed gaze covertly darting around the room. “Why did you just say hello?”

“Your godson and Remus were watching us, but they both looked away when I said that. I don’t know why, though. Is there something on my face?”

Severus studied him. “Nothing that I can see, but you are an incredibly strange person. Perhaps that is why they were staring.”

“You’re hilarious, sir.” Severus shrugged and Harry furrowed his brows. Neither Draco nor Remus were looking. “Hmm. Wonder what that was about. I’ll ask Remus later. Oh. Speaking of later, I’m making pot pies for dinner. Tonight’s my off night from training.”

“Yes, I know. Why did you stop training every night?”

“I just couldn’t do it, sir. I was so tired all of the time. I’d started going to bed at eight, sometimes even seven at night. It was killing me.”

Severus frowned. “Are you becoming ill?”

“No, the nightly training just took a lot out of me.”

“Interesting. Was there a reason you told me about your pot pies?”

“Oh, yeah. I wanted to see if you were interested in dinner. I could bring it down to your rooms. You could even invite Draco if you wanted… not that I want him there, but he deserves to eat well, too, every once in a while.”

“I suppose I wouldn’t say no, then. Draco, I’m sure, wouldn’t decline dinner, either. Will it be just you joining us?”

“Well, yeah. Did you want me to bring Rose? I know it’s been a while since you’ve seen her. I can’t even remember how long it’s been.”

“Nearly two weeks.”

Harry grinned. “Did you want me to bring Rose, then? She’s been asking for you, you know. Every time I visit her, she looks around like she expects you to pop out of the woodwork or something.”

“That’s hardly surprising. For most of her life, she never saw you without me.” Severus glanced down the table. Hermione, holding a snoozing Rose, was talking to Minerva about Merlin only knew what. “If you wish to bring her, I wouldn’t fight you about it.”

“What’s this?” Draco asked, sliding into the free chair beside Severus. Why had he moved? “Are you two planning a naughty rendezvous for later? And who is she? Severus, he’s actually okay with you bringing in a woman?”

“Actually,” Harry said tightly, “we were talking about having my goddaughter join us for dinner and I will permanently maim you if you ever say anything like that about my goddaughter ever again.”

“Oh, gross. I really have to start eavesdropping better.”
“Better, Draco, stop being so perverse. The brat’s cooking pot pie for dinner and invited you and his goddaughter to join us. If you behave, I may allow you to join us.”

“So… I have a new sister. That’s cool.”

Harry froze and looked at Severus, who was giving Draco an unreadable look.

“What are you talking about, Draco?”

Please not about his mum… Oh, Merlin! Or about him!

“Well, I’ve got my godfather and he’s got himself a nice lady… who has her own goddaughter.”

Draco grinned widely and Harry attempted to launch himself at Draco, but only managed to nearly fall into Severus’s lap. Severus, meanwhile, was doing his best to physically keep Harry from actually walking over him to get at Draco. They were gathering attention, he was sure, but he didn’t care. He was going to kill him.

“Boy, get off of me and sit back down. You’re not going to harm him for being stupid.”

“Hey!”

“One punch wouldn’t hurt him much, sir. Just let me…”

Severus pushed against Harry’s lower belly in an effort to get him off and Harry immediately bent double to avoid hurting the baby. Would that have hurt the baby? Severus stopped and looked at him.

“What happened? Did I injure you?”

“Way to go, Severus.”

“Shut up, Draco. Boy?”

Harry sat back down. “I’m fine. I just realized how stupid I was being for wanting to harm your godson for being really stupid. It didn’t seem worth my time.”

“Indeed,” Severus said suspiciously and then shook his head. “Well, I’m glad you figured it out.”

Harry nodded.

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"Remus, wait up!"

Back momentarily stiffening, Remus slowed to a stop and finally turned to face Harry, a smile on his face.

"Harry," he greeted. "I'd stay and chat, but I need to get back home."

"What's going on? You were just running from me, Remus. You saw me trying to get your attention before you left the meeting."

Remus grimaced and looked away. Brows furrowed, Harry studied him for any clue as to what was going on with him.
"Do you realize how close we are to the full moon, Harry?" Remus queried quietly.

"It's... What? Tomorrow, right?"

"Yes."

"So... you don't feel good? Do you need a potion or something?" Remus stared into his eyes for long enough for Harry to give him a curious look. "Remus? Talk to me. You're starting to worry me."

"Do you know?" Remus asked hoarsely. "Do you know what I can sense in you? I don't want to tell you if you don't know. I don't want to be the one to have to tell you, Harry."

It took a second to hit him.

"Oh, Merlin. You... can sense the...?"

"You know?"

"So do you, then, right?"

Remus's gaze briefly darted to his stomach and then back to his eyes. The rest of him could have been carved from stone for all he moved.

"Yes."

"I... I think we should talk, Remus."

Remus merely nodded.

***

By the time Harry woke up the next day, it was already eleven o'clock in the morning and he felt incredibly sick to his stomach. He couldn't bring himself to brush his teeth - damn toothpaste triggered the vomiting most of the time - and instead settled down for a bland breakfast of dry toast and water.

Good Merlin, why did he feel like shite this morning?

Some fresh air would help, he decided. Harry pulled on his shoes, pocketed his wand, and thankfully slipped from his room unnoticed. He'd already had a few run-ins with unmarked students and was grateful for Albus's protection spell, but he'd rather not risk running into any of those students again and he definitely did not want any of them to know where his rooms were. Better safe than sorry.

Harry smiled as he recalled Severus's little retort when he once said the same words to him. He shook his head. It was surprising how much he really missed living with that man.

Well, perhaps not so surprising. Severus had actually become a good roommate/housemate once they'd gotten over their animosity. He missed someone being around and given a choice, he'd want Severus back. He was just so interesting and yes, occasionally snarky, but he was also secretly a really sweet guy and knew how to make him feel better, even when it felt like he was being a giant, insensitive prat at the time something was going on. He was also a pretty good guy to practice his so-called wifely duties on. If one thing was for certain, it was that his cooking skills were not lacking.
Harry snuck out a rarely used door and quietly closed the door behind him. Since discovering this door a few weeks ago, he'd made use of it quite often. It was freeing to be able to leave whenever he wanted without a bunch of people immediately demanding to know where he was going and if he was taking somebody with him. Severus had many times been the one to bust him. Unlike the others, he usually made him turn back around instead of letting him go outside. The jerk. Merlin, he missed him.

He needed to stop thinking for a while. Smiling, Harry sat down by the lake and took a deep breath. The air felt clean. Kinda smelled like fish, though, which was gross. Weird senses.

He happened to look to the left and froze. That was... a kelpie. How the hell did a kelpie get into the lake?? Still looked somewhat like a horse, though its usually rushy mane was more like wet weeds. Odd. He hadn't known there were different kinds of kelpie. Harry inched back from the lake edge and the kelpie swam closer. In return, he completely removed himself from the creature's reach and stared at it.

It was just watching him. This situation was a bit creepy for his taste.

As long as he didn't get into the water, he'd be safe. Harry edged closer and stared. The kelpie in turn swam all the way to the water's edge and moved its head around, its large, black eyes unblinkingly focused on him.

"Er, hello. You're slightly terrifying. No offense meant, kelpie."

He received a chirping croon in response.

"Make that really terrifying."

The kelpie stopped swaying its head from side to side and laid its upper body on the bank of the lake. It then started crooning and staring up at him. Against everything he'd ever been taught, Harry reached out a hand and gingerly stroked the creature's scaly head. After a second, he quickly snatched his hand away and waited.

Shockingly, the kelpie crooned again and moved closer, now almost out of the water. It stretched out near Harry's legs and looked up. It almost reminded him of a cat in that moment. Harry's brows furrowed as he studied the animal. What exactly was it doing? He'd never heard of a kelpie doing this. Granted, he wasn't Hermione and hadn't read every book in the library so maybe it had happened before.

More of that strange crooning was coming from the creature again and Harry smiled despite knowing what a kelpie would do given the opportunity. After realizing that what very little of the kelpie's body that was now in the water meant it probably wouldn't be strong enough to pull him under right now, Harry began rubbing the creature's body like he would a cat. After all, it really did remind him of a cat. He smiled when it crooned in response to the petting. Definitely like a cat.

"You know, you're quite a looker."

Another series of happy croons.

"Seems you know it, too." The kelpie wiggled around until it was completely out of the water and Harry frowned. "I knew kelpies didn't need to stay in the water to stay alive, but why would you just leave the water entirely? This doesn't make sense."

The kelpie stretched and wiggled until its scaly belly was in view. Harry daringly ran a hand over it and flinched until he realized the kelpie was crooning, not trying to eat his hand.
"That's pretty cool," he told the animal, almost chuckling. "You like a good belly rub, too. Maybe you're part dog, too."

His heart nearly stopped when the kelpie let out a terrifying screech and flew back into the water. His heart still hammering, he looked at the water and only saw ripples. It was then he heard the pounding footsteps. Someone was coming. Things suddenly made more sense.

He hadn't offended the kelpie, even though he knew that was impossible, anyway, because it wasn't like it could understand what he was saying. No, whoever was coming had frightened it.

Harry pushed himself to his feet and was frowning mightily by the time he turned around. Severus, followed by Draco and Ron, was running towards him and looked furious. Oh, great. What had he done now?

"What the blazes did you think you were doing petting a kelpie?" Severus demanded angrily the moment he was at his side. "I know you're not completely stupid, boy, so answer me."

"How did you even see me? Were you spying on me?"

"Mate, first years came in telling everyone Harry Potter's petting a kelpie. You alright?"

"Huh. To answer your question, sir, the thing was just lying there and crooning. It'd actually come out of the water and don't they need to be in water to kill?"

"This is true," Severus allowed. "How exactly was the kelpie acting?"

Harry shook his head. "Doesn't matter. I'm obviously fine, guys. It wasn't trying to hurt me and you've all probably scared it out of its mind! You should be ashamed."

Harry gave them a look he hoped conveyed his displeasure. Draco scowled, Ron looked appropriately ashamed, and Severus nodded once, his lips thinned. Harry then started up to the school alone and Ron caught up with him after a moment.

"I'm sorry, mate. I didn't think you knew what you were touching. I was worried about you."

"Ron, why would I randomly pet something if I wasn't sure it wouldn't hurt me?"

"I don't know. Maybe you were bored."

"Ron."

"Yeah, that sounded lame to me, too."

Harry snorted.

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“What the devil are you doing just standing outside my chambers?”

Harry glanced behind him and smiled awkwardly. Severus’s brow arched higher.

“I was just getting ready to knock.”

“It takes you five minutes to figure out how to knock?”

“Er, no. I was, um…” Harry scratched his head and made a face. “Where have you been?”
“I don’t see how that is any concern of yours,” Severus said dismissively and opened his door, “but I was meeting with a friend. Are you going to continue standing there or are you going to come in and tell me why you’re here?”

“You’re prickly today.”

Severus’s lips thinned. “My friend’s wife absolutely refuses to hide her pregnancy, which—”

“But that’d make her a huge target if anyone figures out about her!”

“Yes, it would. Why are you here?”

“Well, I’m worrying about your friend’s wife now. Before, I was gonna ask for a headache reliever.”

“You could easily procure the same reliever from Poppy, boy. I brew everything for the infirmary and you know that.”

“Your rooms are closer than the infirmary.” Severus gave him a look and Harry nodded. “It is, sir, and my head really hurts.”

“Oh, just sit down.” When Severus swept back into the room, he passed over a vial and went to put on tea. “Don’t drink all of that or you’ll be feeling no pain ever again.”

“Well, that’s the nicest way I’ve ever heard it said.”

“I wasn’t trying to be nice, brat. I was being honest. You would literally feel no pain, even as your bodily systems shut down one by one.”

Harry shuddered. “And there’s one from the other end of the scale.” Severus rolled his eyes, turned to face the kettle, and Harry watched his back for a few moments. “I can go make some coffee if you want.”

“I just imbibed a great deal of my friend’s coffee.”

“Are you okay?”

“For the love of god, boy, don’t start. I’m not in the mood for you to misinterpret my words. Not right now.” Harry slumped on the couch, wrapped his arms around himself, and started thinking. In the silence, Severus turned and gave him a look. “What? You’re not going to argue or throw a hissy?”

“Do you want me to?”

“You always have before.”

“That didn’t answer my question, sir. Do you want me to? I’m sure I could work up a good fit if you keep it up.” Severus narrowed his eyes, but remained quiet as he turned back to the tea kettle once more. “How’s your godson?”

“Another subject I currently do not wish to discuss.”

“He’s still acting annoying, then?”

“What did I just say?”
“Alright. I’ll let it go.” Harry silently cursed the arse in his head and then sighed. “Are you hungry? I haven’t eaten yet and-”

“Then go back to your rooms and cook.”

“Did you already eat?”

“No. I have no desire to eat, either, so don’t bother.”

Harry clenched his fists, bit his bottom lip, and reminded himself Severus hasn’t had a good day. He shouldn’t snap back at him, even though the stupid hormones racing through him kinda made him want to pick up the statue on the mantle and hurl it at Severus’s head. Snarky git. He was just about to get up and leave when he noticed Severus had placed an extra cup beside his own. Eyes suddenly stinging, he relaxed back onto the couch and took a deep breath.

“Well, if you don’t want to talk about your friends and your godson, you’re not hungry, and you’re in a bad mood, what do you want to do?”

“I want to sit and drink my tea in silence.”

To keep calm, Harry again looked at the extra tea cup.

“Alright.”

Severus looked at him, seeming perplexed, and quietly prepared their tea. Harry noticed when his shoulders finally relaxed from their tense set. He rubbed his stomach a moment and almost confessed about being pregnant, thinking maybe thinking about that would take his mind off all of the Malfoys, but Severus chose that moment to turn back around and he chickened out. He mentally berated himself, because he’d already established Severus wouldn’t want to know so why was he going to say anything? Hmm? That pathetic excuse he’d thought up was just that: pathetic.

“What’s wrong with you?” Severus asked bluntly. “You’ve been acting strange from the moment I found you standing outside my door, but now you’re also looking strange. Are you ill?”

“No, just scolding myself.”

“Dare I ask?”

“Probably not a good idea.”

“Hm, yes, I assumed so.” Severus looked away and cleared his throat. “If your mind is set upon cooking, I haven’t much on hand. You may as well go back to your rooms.”

“I can have Dobby bring me some stuff.” If he was changing his mind, Harry didn’t want to push him. It’d been two whole days since he’d seen the man, after all, and he still wasn’t used to being alone. Plus, he did owe him for the headache reliever. Rather than answer, Severus shrugged unhelpfully. “I could make pot pie or something.”

“Is that what you want or are you simply saying what you think I want?”

Harry paused a moment. Severus had never before called him out on that. He wondered why he chose to do it tonight.

“I don’t know. It was just a suggestion.”

“Hmm.”
Harry got to thinking about it and the more he thought, the more he realized he really, truly, now desperately wanted fried chicken. Oh, and mashed potatoes. Ooh, and sweet, buttery corn… and toast. Oh, gods, how he wanted some toast. He grinned and Severus gave him a look.

“I want chicken. Dobby!”

“Master Harry Potter, sir, Dobby put the-”

Knowing he was about to say something about the baby books, Harry quickly interrupted him.

“Thank you, Dobby. I want to cook, but Professor Snape doesn’t have anything in.”

Dobby perked up. “What can Dobby be getting Master Harry Potter, sir?”

“Chicken, potatoes, corn, bread, and probably some butter. Actually, a lot of butter.”

After Dobby had come and gone, Harry looked at Severus expectantly.

“I already told you I’m not hungry.”

“But you haven’t eaten and it’s gonna take a while to cook everything. You might be hungry when I’m done.” Severus just stared at him. “If you wanted the pot pie, you probably shouldn’t have made me think about other food. I didn’t realize how much I wanted this stuff until you vetoed the pie.”

“I didn’t veto the pie. I merely asked if that’s what you wanted.”

“Well, sir, that was your mistake. Hope you can deal with chicken.”

Severus gave him a grumpy look. “Get out of here. The sooner you finish cooking and eating, the sooner I can have some peace.”

Harry snorted and walked over to the kitchen area of Severus’s chambers. He got busy cooking and kept munching on slice after slice of buttered toast. After the sixth slice, Severus entered the kitchen and looked Harry over head to toe.

“What?”

“Are you quite sure you’re not ill? You’re eating toast again.”

“I wasn’t sick the last time I had toast.”

No, just pregnant. The thought made him grin.

“I knew it. There’s something wrong with you.” Severus pulled out his wand and Harry threw his hands up. Severus's brows furrowed in confusion. “I was just going to scan you and see what’s wrong with you. I have cures for most common illnesses here in my chambers.”

“I’m not sick, sir. Jeez. I just wanted some toast.”

“You were binging on toast, boy.” The toaster chose that moment to spit out another piece of perfectly golden toast and Severus, his eyebrow arched, pointed at it. “That would be your seventh piece. I’ve been counting.”

“I'm sorry. Did you want some, too?”
“No, but I would like to know what’s wrong with you. I demand answers. Right now.”

“There’s nothing wrong with me.” Harry rolled his eyes and got a thought. “Why do you think I keep eating toast? Please tell me your godson doesn’t have you thinking I’m pregnant or something.”

Severus’s lips thinned. “No, Potter, I don’t think you’re pregnant. I think you’re ill.”

He’d called him Potter. These days, he only did that if he was closing himself off again or he was furious. Harry gave him an apologetic look.

“Sir, I’m not sick and there’s nothing wrong with me. I swear it.”

Severus narrowed his eyes and maintained eye contact, but Harry didn’t feel any brush against his mind. He was honestly surprised Severus hadn’t even tried.

“Very well. If you’re positive you’re only eating so much toast simply because you’re strange, I’ll let it go.”

“Strange,” Harry muttered, turning from him. “The man used to eat toast merely to avoid eating my food and he thinks I’m strange for wanting some now.”

“You realize I can still hear you, even with your back to me, don’t you?”

“You do.”

“I see. So you’re purposefully being disrespectful.”

“Yep.”

There was a long moment of silence and then Severus sighed.

“I suppose some things will never change.”

Harry twisted to give him a quick grin. “Yep.”

“Brat. I suppose I should let Albus know you broke in and cooked. He’ll need to know I won’t be attending the meal this evening.”

“I didn’t break in and cook. You let me in. Even held the door! You're such a gentleman.”

“I will never admit that.”

“But we both know that’s how it happened.”

“Shut up and finish your cooking, boy.” Harry could hear the amusement in Severus’s voice as he readied the fire for calling Albus. Harry sang two words from the school song when a piece of wood went sailing passed him. “No singing!”

“Sorry, you git.”

“I'm standing by the fire. Attempting to warm me at this point in time is unnecessary. Perhaps you’ll time it better next time.”

Harry chuckled to himself. He was glad he was in a much better mood now.
Four and a half days later, Harry finally had some free time. He and Severus were supposed to be training that night, but that was still hours off and he wanted to see that kelpie again. Casting a glamour over himself, Harry slipped from the school and strolled towards the lake at a leisurely pace. When he got close enough to see, that strange kelpie was already waiting at the very edge of the shoreline.

"Hello," Harry called cautiously and removed his glamour. He received a croon in response and smiled. "I'm sorry you got scared last time."

The thing crawled out of the water and patiently waited for him to get the rest of the way there. Harry lowered himself down and the kelpie wiggled ever closer.

"What are you?" Harry asked quietly and watched the animal lay its snout on his leg. It promptly closed its eyes and Harry arched his brows. "You may be a kelpie, but you don't act like it."

It hummed a warbly, wet sound and kept its eyes closed. Harry tentatively stroked a finger over the creature's head and pulled his hands back quickly. Realizing it wasn't moving, but rather its skin was changing, Harry watched in awe as its skin became beautiful, shiny, black scales.

"Wow."

The kelpie briefly opened its eyes and Harry was immediately captivated by the large, turquoise eyes glittering back at him.

"Oh, those changed, too. How pretty. But, um, why? I don't understand you. Your kind are violent and dangerous, but you're acting like a big, ole' baby."

He snorted, unbelievably amused by what he'd said, and the kelpie rolled to its back, its head closer to his stomach now.

"I think I should name you. I've never had a pet before. I had Hedwig, I guess, but I never thought of her as a pet. She was... she was a friend."

The kelpie crooned, rubbing the very tip of its nose against him, and Harry sighed.

"I'm not saying you're gonna be my pet, but I would like to be able to call you something other than 'the kelpie that acts like a kitten,' you know."

Harry daringly ran a finger over the kelpie's belly and didn't get a response whatsoever. He rolled his eyes good-naturedly.

"It's just ridiculous the way you're acting. I've never heard of a kelpie doing this. We're taught you guys are vicious and devious, you lure in the unsuspecting, and you can only kill if you're in water and then here you are coming completely out of the water, willingly giving up your ability to protect and feed yourself, and you don't even seem fazed. It's weird. No, like I said, it's ridiculous."

The kelpie only had a chirp to say to all of that. Harry snorted again.

"Well, maybe you deserve a ridiculous name. I need a little ridiculous in my life, actually. Everything's gotten too serious what with Vol- no, I can't even think it or he might get back in - I meant with Him and the baby and everything."

The kelpie stretched, moving more into his lap, and closed its eyes again. The thing was sunning
himself. How amusing.

"Yep, gonna have to go with ridiculous, then. How about... Kitty?"

Eyes closed, the kelpie let out a quiet, airy hiss.

"Alright. Not that. Clearly. What do you think about... um... Fluffles? It's the most ridiculous name I can think of."

He didn't get any reaction and Harry couldn't decide if that was a good thing or not. He decided to test it.

"Fluffles?"

One large, bright eye cracked open and Harry grinned.

"So you don't hate that one, then. Well, guess you have a name. I just realized I'll have to think up baby names, too. Don't worry, though. I'll make sure whatever I choose isn't as ridiculous as yours. I'm only two months in. I have time."

An honest to God snore was the only answer he got.

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"Mate, can I crash here for the night?"

Harry frowned for a moment, rubbed his face, and then glanced at the clock.

"Ron, it's one o'clock in the morning. Shouldn't you be in bed?"

"I was in bed," Ron muttered and walked passed him when Harry stepped out of the way. "I got kicked out."

"Why? What did you do?"

Ron snorted. "I didn't do anything. Mione's getting pretty big these days and she's always been a restless sleeper."

"She literally kicked you out of bed," Harry said, finally getting it. "Really?"

"Really. Happened with Rose, too. She gets to a certain point and then suddenly needs a huge bed all to herself for the rest of the pregnancy."

"Ron, all I've got is a couch. I don't think that'll be too comfortable for the next few months, but you're welcome to try."

"I'm not asking to stay here that entire time." Ron yawned and conjured a blanket and pillow. "I just wanna wait 'til morning to break out my old cot and get it set up."

"Oh. Well, alright. If you need anything, I'm sure you know where everything is by now."

Ron nodded and fluffed his pillow. "Got anything in the fridge?"

"Leftovers from the last few days. Take whatever you want. It'll save me having to clean it all out later."
"Thanks, mate. Sorry I woke you up."

"That's alright. I am gonna go back to bed, though, because I'm exhausted."

Ron nodded and Harry trudged back to his room. He was asleep a minute later.

***

"Potter!"

The yell finally snapped him out of sleep. The odd thumps he'd heard whilst dreaming must have been the banging he could still hear rattling his door.

"I'm coming," he called and forced himself to get up. "Quit your knocking. I said I'm coming."

Ron must have left already, because he didn't see or hear him anywhere. Harry yanked his door open and scowled at Severus.

"Wipe that look off your face, boy. It's three in the afternoon and no one has seen or heard from you since yesterday. I came to see if you were still alive."

"Clearly, I am." Harry pushed the door open wider and gestured inside. "Come in?"

"Why were you still in bed? You missed appointments with both Poppy and Albus. The youngest Mrs. Weasley has been fretting for hours. You were supposed to see your goddaughter today, which is another thing you didn't bother showing up for."

"How did you know about my appointment with Poppy?"

"She has been asking the staff if anyone has seen you. Why were you supposed to see her? If you were lying to me about being ill, I will not be happy."

Harry gave him a look. "Shocking."

"Boy," Severus said warningly. "What is wrong with you?"

"Ron woke me up last night. Hermione literally kicked him out of the bed last night - she was sleeping and it's apparently not the first time it's happened - so he came here asking to sleep on my couch."

"Ah. Suppose you stayed up late talking and carelessly didn't set an alarm. How irresponsible."

"Coffee?"

"Yes. You're an adult, boy. You have responsibilities, which means you cannot simply blow off an entire day sleeping."

"If you're just gonna keep lecturing me, I'm going back to bed."

"How are you still tired?"

"I'm not, but I've got a sleeping draught stored away somewhere. Actually, it's probably with all the other potions you've given me." Severus glared at him and Harry shrugged. He was sassy and/or grumpy without coffee in the mornings, too. "Are you done berating me now?"

Severus didn't immediately say anything so Harry walked into the bathroom to relieve himself.
After glaring at his toothpaste when he was finished, he used a sanitizing spell on his mouth and threw the tube into the trash. After a moment, he pulled it back out and tucked it into the back of a drawer.

Upon leaving the bathroom, he found Severus blocking the way to his little kitchen. Harry sighed and somehow managed to squeeze past him. The silence wasn't broken until Harry placed a mug of coffee in front of Severus and started digging through his refrigerator for something to eat.

"Will you not be drinking any, boy?"

Harry paused and glanced over at Severus.

"No, you can have it all. I can have some whenever I want. You know that."

"I never see you drink it anymore and you don't have a favorite mug sitting out like you did at the safe house so I know you haven't been drinking coffee, boy. What's the real reason you aren't having any?"

Harry shrugged and turned back to the refrigerator in order to hide his expression from Severus.

"I've been on a tea kick lately. I want it about as much as I usually want coffee."

"Ah. That would explain it, I suppose."

"Guess it would. You hungry?"

"You don't have time to fritter away with your normal nonsense, boy. You have missed appointments and a disappointed goddaughter to attend to."

"And they're all gonna wait until I've eaten," Harry pointed out, just a touch annoyed, "and I was trying to be nice by attempting to invite you to join me. If, however, you're gonna act like a sod, you can just sit there and watch me eat. Or go. Whatever."

"My, you're in a mood this morning."

"Maybe because I accidentally slept way more than I expected to, woke up to you banging on my door and yelling at me, and then had to put up with you lecturing me about something I didn't mean to do while I'm already feeling guilty about it."

Severus sniffed. "No one had seen you, boy, and you never went to see your goddaughter. I truly began to believe you'd managed to kill yourself by being your normal clumsy self. Imagine how I felt standing in the hall waiting for an answer from you. I was afraid I would have to explain to Albus you'd doomed us all by doing something stupid."

Harry opened his mouth, fully prepared to tell Severus exactly what his hormones wanted him to, but he stopped and really thought about what Severus had said instead of flying off the handle like he'd done time and again at the safe house. It all boiled down to the fact that Severus had been worried about him. Been so worried, in fact, that he had come banging on his door for Merlin knows how long until he'd finally let Severus know he wasn't dead.

A sudden lump in his throat presented itself in its usual awkward way, making it difficult to swallow or speak for a moment.

"You're right. I'm sorry. I should have set an alarm. I'm sorry I worried everybody. I'll... I'll show you what wards I have set on the door so the next time this happens, you don't have to be outside
so long. Again, I'm so sorry.”

Severus looked surprised and didn’t seem to know what to say. Eventually, he settled on, “I took the liberty of rescheduling your appointments and the youngest Mrs. Weasley wished me to tell you she and her offspring will be gone until this evening.”

“Oh. You rescheduled them?”

“Yes. I still do not know why you wished to meet with Poppy, but I did indeed reschedule both. You will be meeting Albus tomorrow morning at nine-thirty and Poppy has an opening at two-thirty.”

“Okay. Thanks, sir.”

Severus nodded and looked away from him. “What plans have you today now that your schedule has been cleared?”


“For what purpose? Surely whatever information you are searching for is something with which I can assist you.”

“I wanted to read about kelpies,” Harry said honestly, which (of course) Severus didn’t seem to believe. “It’s true, sir. I wanted to read about them, maybe see why a kelpie would completely leave water when that’s its only way of protecting itself. I mean, they’re only dangerous when they’re in water and the one in the lake completely emerges from the water.”

“Very well. I do believe you. Hurry and eat. I will be escorting you. Despite Albus’s spell, I do not entirely trust these halls and you in them.”

Harry hid a smile. “Thank you, sir. I never knew you cared so much.”

“I don’t,” Severus said gruffly, “and you’re not stupid enough to think I do.”

“Right. Sure.”

“Boy.”

“Sir?”

Severus sighed. “Shut up and keep your opinions to yourself.”

“It’s more than an opinion,” Harry sang quietly.


Harry chuckled.

***

“Well, I read up on your kind, Fluffles,” Harry announced a few days later. “I didn’t particularly feel like feeding you a human so we’re gonna try some chicken instead.”

The kelpie, again sporting its beautiful black scales and turquoise eyes, wiggled around on Harry’s legs and kept snouting at the tied bag in his pocket.
“Oh, can you smell that?”

Harry chuckled, pulled out the leftover chicken, and set it in a pile on the ground beside him. The kelpie looked gravely wounded by such an action and kept looking back and forth from Harry to the chicken.

“Alright. If you insist.” After piling the chicken on his leg, the kelpie eagerly tore into the chicken and let out snorts and grunts as it gulped down its meal. “Merlin, I think you like that.”

He received a strange, gutteral sound in response. It was pretty cute.

Once done with its meal, the kelpie seemed content to stretch out on Harry’s legs and let the sun warm its skin. Harry gingerly rubbed a finger along its belly and was rewarded by the kelpie stretching out further, its head cuddling into his flat stomach.

“You have to be the most pitiful creature I’ve ever seen, you know. Look at you acting like a giant baby. What happened to kelpies being these murderous things, huh?”

The kelpie, who had been crooning and chirping at him, started rubbing its head all over his stomach. Frowning, Harry watched him a moment and felt a lightbulb go off.

“Oh, wow. You can sense the baby, can’t you?”

The chirp he received for that was loud, emphatic. Perhaps it could understand him to a point.

“I never even thought about the possibility,” Harry murmured to himself. “I’ll have to look that up later. Maybe that’s why you’re acting like this.”

The kelpie caressed Harry’s stomach with its wet head and then stopped to croon into his belly button. Harry chuckled a little at that, mostly because it was funny, but also because it did sort of tickle.

“I might ask Hermione about you.”

The kelpie didn’t seem to be paying attention and Harry shrugged. He hadn’t expected the thing to answer, anyway.

“You go right ahead, then. I won’t bother you.”

A warbly croon again directed into his belly button had him trying not to chuckle.

***

Harry crashed into the floor hard and smacked his head sharply against the marble beneath him. Severus was instantly crouching over him and checking his body over.

“I demand an explanation for your foolish stumbling, boy,” Severus snapped. “Clumsiness only explains so much. What is wrong with you tonight?”

“It was on the tip of his tongue. It really was. Severus was looking at him in barely masked concern and the urge to confess he was carrying their child almost tripped off his tongue. That the baby was
the cause of his dizziness. He opened his mouth...and his sanity kicked back in.

“I'm fine, sir. I just didn’t sleep much last night. I guess it’s messing with me.”

At least Severus wasn’t looking at him with narrowed eyes anymore. That was something.

“Judging upon the sheer number of incidents in which your clumsiness seemed to be heightened lately, I would assume you haven’t been sleeping much at all since we returned to Hogwarts. Starving yourself of sleep will not help you defeat the Dark Lord, boy. In fact, it will lower your chances and I will not have that. Either you remedy this situation or I will. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, sir,” Harry said seriously. He knew Severus wouldn’t refrain from using a health check spell to ascertain he wasn’t ill if he decided to handle the situation himself and that the spell would reveal the baby. That would be very bad. “I’ll take care of it.”

“Good. Now get up. We’re not yet finished for the night.”

Harry groaned and heaved himself off the floor. Time to have his arse handed to him again. Some way to celebrate reaching ten weeks.

***

Four days later, Harry had company that was honestly starting to get on his nerves.

“I don’t care, Ronald,” Hermione said hotly. “You never even met the man. I’m not naming our son Alred!”

“But ‘Mione, he was my-“

Sighing, Harry again looked up.

“You two have been arguing for an hour now.”

“Longer,” Ron muttered.

“What sort of example do you think you’re setting for Rose?” Since Rose was currently sitting on his back and using him as a horse, Harry was certain she didn’t even notice her parents arguing, but they didn’t know that. “Just settle on a name you both like instead of arguing why your name choice should be used.”

“I don’t think Alred is a bad name,” Ron stated.

“And Timothy is a beautiful name,” Hermione added.

“Allright. I have as many hormones in my body as Hermione does now,” Harry stated bluntly, “and I’m tired of hearing the arguing. If you wanna keep it up, go ahead and leave. I’ll just be holding onto Rose until you’re done.”

“He does have a point,” Hermione voiced. “Though he was incorrect about one thing. Harry, you actually do have more hormones in your body. You require more since you weren’t born with a natural womb and the necessary hormones that would enable pregnancy in the first place.”

Harry just stared at her. He didn’t particularly care either way.

“That’s fascinating,” Ron said, staring at Harry’s body like he was trying to see the womb
Hermione had been speaking of.

“It is, isn’t it? We’re sorry, Harry. We didn’t mean to anger you. Ron, let’s try what Harry said.”

While the two went on to discuss the matter of their son’s name, Harry went back to playing with Rose. He was no longer her horse. No, now he was to be her house and no, houses weren’t supposed to laugh when little humans tickled them. It was hilarious.

“All right!” Hermione cried suddenly, looking excited. “Oh, I just thought of it, Ron. What do you think?”

“All right Weasley,” Ron said, shaking his head. “Yeah, I like that.”

Harry paused, grinning, and looked back and forth from Hermione to Ron. Had they finally decided?

“Harry,” Hermione began.

“Yes!” Harry cried. “It’s about time. That’s a good name.”

“I know!”

“Now for a middle name?”

“Ron, give it up, man. She’s not gonna allow Alred.”

“Actually…” Hermione smiled sweetly at Ron. “I’m fine with Alred for a middle name. If you still want it, Ron.”

“Do you mean it, ‘Mione?”

“You deserve it for putting up with me.”

Harry rolled his eyes. Arguing one moment, being insufferably sweet the next. Merlin.

***

"Harry?" a familiar voiced loudly whispered. "Am I seeing things?"

Harry turned around and smiled at Hermione.

"Well I'd hope not. What are you doing here?"

"I was looking for a lexicon of defensive spells. I think the better question is what are you doing here?"

"I'm trying to figure out why that kelpie is acting the way it is. I've been looking for weeks - a couple months, actually - and I haven't found anything useful. I've looked through everything they have here about kelpies and there's nothing. Far as I can tell, a kelpie has never been documented acting this way."

Hermione settled a stack of books on the one free corner of the table and sat in a seat beside Harry.

"How exactly is it acting?"
Harry quickly explained the kelpie’s behavior and added that he’d begun visiting it every day.

"Not once has it acted violent, Hermione. It just doesn’t make sense. Like I said, it lets me pet it. It comes completely out of the water and just… lays there like a big baby or something."

Hermione looked confused. “I honestly don’t know what to say, Harry. This is very strange. I promise I’ll ask around, though, and I’ll do my own research. I want to know why it’s acting like that.”

“Me, too. Thanks, Hermione.”

“You’re welcome. Just be careful. Please. I’m uncomfortable with you being around it.”

“I know, but it’s not hurting me.”

“I know, Harry, but what if… What if He is controlling it somehow? He could be luring you in and then will let it go when you least suspect it.”

Harry simply ignored her.

***

The day Harry turned fourteen weeks, he received a knock at his door early in the morning. He was understandably wary since no good news could come at that hour.

He was surprised to find Hermione on the other side of the door and she was smiling at him.

“I was gonna ask if something’s wrong,” Harry began, gesturing for her to enter, “but you’re smiling so it can’t be bad.”

“Not at all, Harry.” Hermione’s smile widened. “It took me almost two weeks, but I finally figured out why your kelpie has been acting the way it is.”

“Great,” Harry enthused. “Want some tea while we talk?”

“Please.”

Hermione quietly waited while Harry prepared water for their teas and warmed up something for them to nibble on. When he was done, he brought everything to his small living room and sat on the couch beside her.

“So what have you found out?”

“I didn’t find anything in the library, which I had expected since you had claimed you’d exhausted every text on kelpies.”

“Okay. So?”

“I happened to be thinking about our magical creature professors last night. Since Hagrid has been gone for months settling his brother elsewhere, it fell to Firenze.”

“Why didn’t I think of him?”

“I almost didn’t, either. Anyway, I visited him last night after the evening meal and he had some interesting news indeed.” Hermione took a sip of her tea and smile. “According to him, kelpiefish, as he called them, can become docile around the expectant.”
“Really? You’d think that would’ve been documented if it’s happened before.”

“Well, from what I heard, it’s rare. The kelpie sort of bonds with the expectant and its appearance changes when around its human.” Hermione lowered her tea and looked excited. “He told me once a kelpie bonds with an expectant human, it remains that way with its human until the day it dies, Harry. Isn’t that fascinating?”

“Wow. Yeah, it is. Did he say why a kelpie does that? I mean, was I just randomly chosen?”

“Unfortunately, Firenze didn’t know much more. He’d only heard of the occurrence from elders when he was younger. He’s never personally witnessed it.”

“Well, it’s still pretty fantastic, even if I don’t know why it chose me to bond with.” Harry thought about that a moment and swirled his tea around. “So it’ll be like that until it dies.”

“With you, yes, and the child.”

“Really?”

“Yes. They’ll still be dangerous to other humans, of course, so it wouldn’t make a suitable pet, but it will be docile with you and the baby. Oh, I wish I could see the way it is with you.”

“I named it,” Harry chuckled. “It liked Fluffles for some reason.”

Hermione giggled. “That is absolutely ridiculous, Harry.”

“That was the point. I needed some ridiculousness in my life and it liked it. It just kind of… stuck.”

“One day, I want to see a memory of you two together. I’d like to study its behavior.”

Harry shrugged. “Sure.”

***

A week later found Harry babysitting Rose, though in all truth, he’d stolen her from Ron and Hermione, because he’d missed her so much. Harry was just settling down at the table for snacktime when Severus walked through his door without so much as a knock. Harry stared at him in surprise and then glanced at the door.

“Either you’ve forgotten how to knock or you thought I’d died again.”

“Do not be absurd. I came to speak with you about your training.”

“I don’t train until tomorrow.”

Whatever Severus might have said after that was interrupted by Rose shrieking and frantically waving her arms. Chuckling, Harry freed her from her seat, set her on the ground, and watched her barrel towards Severus as fast as her legs would carry her. When she reached him, she nearly pulled his trousers off trying to climb into his arms. Severus picked her up and looked at Harry, who was smirking at him.

“It was merely to keep my dignity intact. I wouldn’t have picked her up otherwise.”

“Now I know why you barged in.”

“I didn’t barge. I don’t barge.”
“You barged,” Harry pressed. “You knew Rose was here, didn’t you? What, did you see her parents without her? Did you ask if I had her?”

“No, I came to talk to you about your training.”

“Which isn’t until tomorrow and which your godson already volunteered to help with.”

“He won’t be there tomorrow. I will be. I felt the need to inform you of such.” Harry’s brow arched higher and Severus’s eyes narrowed. “Do not look at me like that, boy. I have already informed you why I stopped by. Now I may leave. Take this child away.”

Harry ignored that. “Have you eaten yet?”

“Why?” Severus asked, trying to keep Rose’s hands out of his face. She really wanted to pet his cheeks. Severus ducked his head back and got a couple fingers up his nose for his effort. Harry stoically contained his amusement, which was a good thing since Severus chose that moment to look at him. “Help maybe. The child’s turned into an octopus.”

Harry couldn’t contain his laughter anymore. He simply disregarded Severus’s brewing annoyance until he was done.

“You may as well give up. It’s a thing that started this past week.” Harry shook his head. “Just let her do her thing. She should be good once she’s done it a few times.”

Huffing, Severus stopped trying to deflect Rose’s hands. She immediately caressed his cheeks, planted what looked like a wet kiss on the end of his nose, and smiled. She then loosely hugged him around the neck while Severus wiped his dripping nose with one hand, an indescribable expression on his face.

When Harry finally stopped laughing and put his glasses back on after wiping his wet eyes, he saw the sour look Severus was giving him.

“Has she been eating bananas?”

“There’s a good chance I’m slap-happy right now,” Harry said between bouts of renewed laughter. Severus pinched the skin directly below his nose and sniffed deeply, which set Harry off again. “Okay, okay. I'm sorry. I'm good now. I'm just so glad I witnessed that. You reacted so much better than Ron did.”

“Am I supposed to be impressed?” Severus drawled.

“Thankful more like. She’d just finished eating mashed boiled egg when she did that to Ron the first time.”

Severus directed a look down at Rose and readjusted his hold on her body when she finally released his neck. His gaze abruptly moving to the wall behind Harry, he reached up to his neck with one hand, wiped at the spot with a blank expression, and held his hand up so Harry could see the mashed banana all over his palm.

Merely chuckling now, because he couldn’t be sure Severus wouldn’t smack him for laughing at him yet again, Harry hurried over with a wet washcloth and wiped at his neck. Severus cocked his head to the side while Harry cleaned the area and then held his hand still when Harry was ready to clean the last of the banana mess off him.

“When she first did this to you,” Severus spoke when Harry was done, “how did she bless you?”
“With spit. She hadn’t eaten recently for me.”

“Mmm.”

“Anyway, have you eaten?”

“Again, why?”

“I have a roast cooking and I was wondering if you’d like to join me for dinner.”

Severus hummed to himself and looked down at Rose, who was fiddling with the ends of a lock of his hair.

“I suppose I could join you. I have no prior plans scheduled for the evening.” Severus finally looked back at him and Harry almost smiled at the slightly wistful expression that promptly disappeared when Severus saw he had his full attention. “Perhaps dinner tonight could be my favor for helping you train tomorrow.”

“It doesn’t have to be, though,” Harry replied, mentally filing away Severus’s expression for later pondering. “It could just be a gift or something.”

Severus shrugged. “Unnecessary. My quarters are not currently in need of your housewifely attentions.”

Harry grinned. “Are you sure about that? If I went down to your place right now, would I agree?”

“I haven’t had much opportunity to mess anything up in my rooms lately.” Harry frowned and Severus followed him to the small kitchen area as he continued, “I’ve spent most of my waking moments since your last visit in meetings or honing my own skills in mock duels with other members of the Order. Indeed, it feels as if I haven’t had any time to merely relax and scuff up my coffee table.”

“You absolutely incorrigible bastard,” Harry muttered to himself and Severus smirked, looking completely unrepentant. “I don’t know why I bother. You’ll never change.”

“Oh, come now, boy. If I ever did change, you’d not know what to nag about first. You would be utterly lost.”

Harry snorted. “I only do it because I care, sir.”

“I don’t believe that for one moment.” Perhaps tired of her squirming, Severus set Rose on the floor and watched her run back to the toys scattered around Harry’s coffee table. His non-scuffed coffee table. “Has she grown in the short time since I last saw her?”

“Yes, she has,” Harry declared proudly. He set a coffee mug in front of Severus and studied his profile until Severus abruptly faced him once more. “She’s growing so fast. Much too soon, she’ll be in school and I’ll be in Azkaban for beating up some teenaged boys for looking at her too long.”

Harry mock-sighed and Severus chuckled under his breath.

“I’m not quite sure that’s a justifiable reason for inflicting harm on minors… no matter that I understand perfectly.” Harry met Severus’s gaze and Severus rolled his eyes. “I didn’t sleep well at all the first year after Draco started dating. I commonly woke up in a cold sweat wondering if he was being safe or if I would have to welcome another Malfoy to Hogwarts in eleven years’ time.”
Harry shuddered. “That’s horrifying.”

“I am well aware.”

Harry looked at Rose’s itty bitty baby body and frowned mightily, his eyes widening as a growing horror filled him. She was beautiful. Once she reached her teenaged years, she would be breathtaking. She’d be a beauty. Every boy would be clamoring after her, crushing on her, lusting after her, pursuing her, and trying to one day get into her…

“No,” Harry moaned and covered his face. “No, no, no, no! I don’t want to go to Azkaban.”

When he dropped his hands, he saw Severus looking at him, his brows furrowed.

“What?”

“One day, some little scumbag is gonna try to get into that little baby’s knickers and then I’m gonna get thrown into Azkaban for castrating the kid with my bare hands.”

Severus nearly spat his coffee out. After swallowing the sip in his mouth, he dropped his hand and gave Harry a look.

“Why did you do that to yourself?” he asked, genuinely sounding distressed. “I refused to think about it until Draco was at least sixteen. Rose is still a small, toddling child, you idiot. What is wrong with you?”

Elbow propped on the counter, Harry dropped his forehead onto his palm and shook his head.

“I have no idea. Maybe I’m a masochist.”

“You’re something,” Severus allowed, sounding his normal self once more, and took another sip of his coffee. “I suggest you discontinue any thoughts about her teenaged years. They will only drive you mad.”

“I’ll try. I need to distract myself.” Harry glanced around and caught sight of the basket of strawberries beside the sink. “I’ll make a pie! That always helps take my mind off things.”

“I’ve never noticed.” Severus studied him a moment and briefly furrowed his brows. After a minute head shake, he picked up his coffee mug. “What sort of pie will you be making?”

“Strawberry.”

Severus honest to God, Merlin, and everyone else out there licked his lip.
“Are you truly still sleeping, brat?” Severus’s voice cut through the silence. Harry opened his eyes and saw his bedroom ablaze with light. Frowning, Harry looked around and spotted Severus walking towards him. “I’ve been talking to you for almost twenty minutes. Did you not hear me?”

“No, I didn’t.” Yawning, Harry sat up and rubbed his cheek a long moment. When he opened his eyes again, he saw Severus was pulling clothing out of his closet. “What’s going on? Oh, God, no. It’s happening, isn’t it?”

Severus gave him an odd look. “We have a meeting. Nothing is happening yet. Calm yourself.”

“Okay,” Harry sighed and relaxed. He immediately tensed back up. “Why are we having a meeting so late at night? If nothing’s happening, why couldn’t this meeting wait until later?”

“We’ve had correspondence from our spies and Albus would like to address it immediately.” Severus handed over the clothing he’d collected from the closet. “Get dressed. The meeting starts in fifteen minutes.”

“But if it’s not-”

“I wouldn’t lie to you about something of that magnitude, boy. Nothing is happening. Now get dressed before I’m forced to take you to the meeting wrapped in your bed clothing.”

Harry briefly debated letting that happen, but then decided against it. Two days ago, he’d discovered he was developing a bit of a tummy and if he somehow managed to step on the end of his blanket and exposed himself to the rest of the meeting, there would be no denying it. Before Draco could even piece it together and begin to get suspicious, Severus would know what his slightly rounded tummy really meant.

“If you want, there’s some apple spice bread by the coffeemaker you can have.”

“I suppose if I avail myself of your filth, I won't have to suffer a Hogwarts breakfast in the morning.”

Harry nodded and exhaled quietly when Severus left the room just like he’d been hoping. Halfway out of bed, Harry tugged the blanket up to his chest when Severus popped his head around the door jamb. Severus merely cocked a brow at his behavior.

“Thirteen minutes. Hurry up or you’re wearing those sheets.”

“I'm hurrying. Go eat.”

Harrumphing, Severus retreated from view and Harry dressed in record time. He self-consciously tugged his shirt and jacket down as he shut off his bedroom light. Severus, having managed to polish off an entire third of the loaf of bread, was swigging cold tea when Harry entered his small kitchen area.

Harry spent a moment looking at the bread and then took in the look Severus was giving him that dared him to make a comment. Rather than do just that, Harry shrugged and poured a small glass of juice, which he quickly downed.

“Are you finally ready to go?”
“Yeah. Wanna take that with you?” Severus gave him a look and Harry snorted. “Rather, you’re taking that with you, sir, and I don’t want to hear you argue about it. I know you don’t want to, which is why I’m telling you to and I’ll just whine if you don’t and then you’ll have to hear the whole thing and really, do you actually want to put up with that? Wouldn’t it be easier just to take it without arguing? There. Did I miss anything?”

“You forgot the part about being an incredibly annoying pain in my arse, but I believe that was it.”

“That’s not the way I remember things,” Harry mused, casually shooting Severus a look while wrapping up the bread. “In fact, I’m pretty sure I was the one taking the contraceptive.”

Severus choked – Harry assumed on his own tongue, because there wasn’t anything in his mouth—and looked up incredulously. Grinning, Harry watched shock, then intrigue, then pride, and ultimately just a small smile flit across Severus’s features.

“I simply cannot believe you said that.” Harry winked and Severus cocked a brow. “What on earth has gotten into you? I’ve never known you to act quite like this.”

“Well, I would say I’ve only ever had one other person in me, but…” This time, Severus’s teeth sunk into his bottom lip and it occurred to Harry he might be trying to contain his amusement. “Are… are you trying not to smile? Severus Snape. Smiling at me, Harry Potter. The world must be ending.”

“Oh, shut up.” God, he sounded fond! Of him! Was the world actually ending? Was he even awake? Ow, yes. “We must be going. We have a meeting to attend and boy?”

“Yeah?”

“Do contain your inappropriate comments while we’re there. I needn’t remind you Draco will be in attendance and he would welcome the opportunity, I think, to misconstrue anything you say.”

“If you insist,” Harry said with exaggerated huffiness. “Merlin. If anyone’s a pain in the arse…”

Smirking, Severus held open Harry’s door and then set about resetting his wards. Curious about his smirk, Harry gave him a look and Severus quite literally grinned at him. It was as shocking as it was arousing. Surprisingly.

“I heard plenty from you that night, but never once a complaint. Suppose you must have enjoyed this pain in the arse more than you’re letting on. Perhaps you are a masochist, after all, boy.”

Harry spluttered a moment and watched Severus begin to walk away from him. He quickly caught up to him and looked up at him in awe. Severus merely continued to look ahead and blindly reached out to pull Harry away from the pillar he’d been about to walk right in to.

“Thanks,” Harry said distractedly, still looking at Severus. Severus looked down at that.

“Oh, look at that. He does know how to speak. I was beginning to think I’d shocked you into speechlessness.”

“Well, I was shocked. That was just downright naughty coming from you, sir. I didn’t know how to take it.”

“Mm. I expected as much, but you got there in the end.”

It took him a full minute. They were walking through the door of the room they were meeting in
before Harry actually caught Severus’s joke, but by then, it was too late to say anything. He settled
for laughing disbelievingly and thoroughly enjoyed the self-satisfied expression on Severus’s face,
which, yes, startled quite a few people around them.

Upon sitting in the chair Severus nodded at, Harry made himself comfortable and looked around.
Severus was to his left, the chair to his right was empty, as was the chair directly across from him.
Dora and Remus, along with Fred, George, and Blaise were gathered at one end of the table. A few
faces he vaguely recognized from his early years at Hogwarts were settled around them. At the
opposite end of the table, Hermione and Minerva were deep in conversation while Albus stroked
his beard while listening to whatever Theodore was telling him. His attention, however, seemed to
be entirely on Ron, who was drooling on the table in front of him. Harry vaguely noted the faces in
the crowd by the windows, most of them being professors and recent alums of Hogwarts.

A jaw-cracking yawn brought his attention back to the fact that he’d been fast asleep when Severus
woke him up a little bit ago. Maybe he’d just close his eyes while he waited for the meeting to
start…


Harry swallowed roughly and forced his eyes open wide. The next time he blinked, it took forever
to open his eyes again. A sharp elbow encouraged him to open his eyes and sit up straight. Severus
gave him an annoyed look and Harry grimaced apologetically. He pointedly held up his wrist to
explain it was late and it wasn’t his fault he was tired. Brow cocked, Severus grabbed his arm and
moved so his watch was directly in front of his eyes. Frowning, Harry realized it was only nine
o’clock. Releasing his arm, Severus directed his attention back to Albus while Harry rubbed his
arm and glanced around. Draco and Hermione were among the number who had noticed their
interaction and both of them looked incredibly interested. Ron, too, Harry noticed was looking at
them from the corner of his eye.

After another yawn, Harry tried to focus on what Albus was saying. Something about something
coming or happening or… Harry jolted and looked at Severus to see if he’d noticed he’d drifted off
again, but he was just staring at the table in front of him.

Where he once would have thought his expression was blank, Harry could now see the barely there
tenseness to his jaw, the slight tightening of his eyes, the too stiff set to his shoulders. He was
worried! Harry looked around and saw a large number of those in the room were similarly, more
expressively worried. What had he missed?

“For now,” Albus was saying, “all I can tell you is to prepare yourselves. When I have more
information to give, we will reconvene.”

Albus sighed deeply, nodded once, and turned away. Minerva followed him from the room and
Harry immediately noticed most everyone looking at him. Some – like Severus and Draco – were
super subtle about it, but others – like Hermione and Ron – weren’t hiding it whatsoever.

“We’re leaving,” Severus said after a moment. Harry waited a moment and then went to follow
him. He was starting to become unnerved by everyone’s attention. What had he missed? Had
Albus said something about him? Why did Hermione look close to tears? Harry saw Draco trailing
him, but he never made it passed the door. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw the blond standing
guard at the door. Why was he making a getaway?

“What happened?”

Oh. He asked that aloud. Well, good.
“You fell back to sleep.” Severus didn’t need to tell him that. He already knew he fell back to sleep, thanks. “We received information the Dark Lord is preparing to strike.”

Harry tensed up and Severus grabbed his arm to keep him from tripping. Terrified, Harry spun towards him and clutched his wrist.

“How are you this calm?”

The moment the question was out of his mouth, Harry wanted to kick himself. Severus was far from calm. He’d seen his worry at the end of their meeting. That wouldn’t have just disappeared. Severus gave him a long look and Harry frowned apologetically.

You should go back to bed. We will train tomorrow evening. Be ready by seven.”

Meet me at my room at six?” Harry questioned hopefully. “Free food.”

“We will dine after your training session,” Severus decided after several silent seconds. “That is most important now.”

Harry nodded, a lead weight in the pit of his belly.

***

“What is the matter with you? I’ve been wanting to kick myself out of bed every day this week!” Severus yelled. “You must stop this foolishness or you will not survive the battle and then we will all be doomed.”

Was it possible to feel more than thoroughly cowed?

“I really didn’t mean to, sir. I didn’t. Like I told you before, I was gonna just wait for you, but…”

Severus ran his fingers through his hair as he paced in front of the couch. Arms wrapped around himself, Harry watched him spin and head back towards the fireplace. Honestly, he didn’t think he’d fall asleep in the hallway. He thought Severus would have a coronary when he woke him up by shouting at him about his stupidity.

He could practically see steam pouring out the man’s ears. Harry decided it’d be wisest to remain silent until Severus had paced out all his anger. For the past hour, he’d listened to Severus yell at him every few minutes. He understood it. Really, he did. He wasn’t even tired when he’d leaned against Severus’s door.

After another fifteen minutes, Severus sat down in an armchair and finally looked at him.

“You will tell me what’s going on with you right now or I will force the answer from you,” Severus said in a quiet voice. “Explain to me why you fell asleep in an unsafe place at two in the afternoon. Are you ill?”
Harry sighed and looked down at his lap. Should he admit the truth or should he lie?

“I couldn’t go back to sleep after the meeting last night.” Harry found himself lying. “I tried. I really did. I even took a sleeping potion, but it didn’t work.”

“Why could you not sleep?

“…I’m scared. Now that the time’s come, I’m afraid to face him. I don’t think I’m anywhere close to competent enough to defeat him and that scares me. Not that I may die, but that I might fail everyone else.”

Hey, that was actually true.

Severus was silent for long enough that Harry finally looked up from his lap. Severus had his arm on the armrest of his chair and was staring at the wand in his hand. He continued eying the wand for perhaps thirty seconds longer and then locked gazes with him.

“I understand your concern. You will rest here for a few hours and then we will go train.”

“Alright.”

Severus carefully laid his wand on the armrest, taking extra care to position it just so, and a flash of emotion flitted across his face. Harry wondered if he was just as worried about his ineptitude. In the end, having Severus guard him would do little good during the battle if he personally couldn’t fight. They should have been training all along!

“We will intensify your training,” Severus announced after some minutes. “You will be training nightly from now on. You will give 100% to every session and will not take a break until you absolutely cannot go on. I don’t want to overwork you, but you will not have the luxury to stop once you’re facing Him and I need you to become strong enough to fight through it.” He and Harry shared a look, one that left Harry a little breathless. “Do you think you can handle that?

“Yes. I’ll try. I will.”

Severus nodded, stood, and conjured a pillow and blanket for him.

“Rest for now. When you awaken, we will go.”

Harry nodded and watched Severus pace the room until exhaustion claimed him.

***

Harry groaned in pain, one hand on his ribcage, and looked to the left of his bed.

Hermione was sitting in the chair directly beside him and was holding his hand while worriedly listening to Poppy explain why exactly bed rest was still necessary even though his ribs were already healing themselves. An idiot could tell them he needed bed rest because healing broken ribs hurt like a bitch. Standing against his bedroom wall, Severus had his arms crossed over his chest and was glaring at Draco, who was standing in the doorway.

“How exactly did this happen?” Hermione asked yet again. “Harry, tell me. What happened?”

“The blond idiot threw his tripping spell at my chest again.”

Severus’s glare increased tenfold and Draco actually backed out of sight. Harry heard him heading towards the living room and hoped he’d hidden all the baby books. Blanching, Harry looked
around for any evidence he’d missed and, mistaking the cause of his behavior, Hermione struggled to her feet.

“Poppy, is there nothing you can give him for the pain?”

“No, there isn’t.”

“A simple pain potion would be sufficient,” Severus offered. “If you have none in stock, it’s but a few minutes’ work.”

“I’ve already taken more than I probably should have,” Harry lied and Poppy gave him a sharp look. Thankfully, Severus also looked at him and missed her look altogether. He saw Hermione shake her head at Poppy; the older woman naturally relaxed.

“Are you trying to overdose, idiot boy?” Severus snapped. “If you kill yourself, I will find a way to bring you back just to throttle you. The entire world is depending upon you. Stop being stupid.”

“It just hurts,” Harry gasped, deciding to ignore everything Severus just said. “Ah, God. I hate your godson sometimes.”

Severus shot another glare at his bedroom door.

“While I’m sure he didn’t actively attempt to injure you, he will no longer be training with you. You will be training with only myself from now on.” Harry nodded and curled around his ribs. “We cannot afford for you to be injured every time you train. Not with an imminent attack.”

“That is all well and good,” Poppy said, “but for now, he needs rest.”

Severus nodded and remained where he was. Sighing, Poppy packed up her belongings and looked over at him.

“Make sure he doesn’t try to get you out of that bed until you are completely healed. You’ll know when.”

Harry nodded. Severus remained silent until she’d left the room and then turned to him.

“Whilst confined to your bed, I want you to practice your wandless nonverbal magic. If you are disarmed during the attack, I need you to be able to defend yourself.” Harry looked at him in surprise and saw Hermione do the same. “I may be there to guard you, boy, but don’t rely on me. There’s always a chance I might fall before He does. Do you understand me?”

“I understand what you’re saying, but I refuse to accept it.” Severus gave him an annoyed look and Harry shrugged. “Besides, realistically, if something happens to you, I won't be far behind you. You know their fighting style the best. If the worst happened, you’d probably be the second to last person left out of our whole group and I’d have no hope on my own so…”

“Regardless, you must try. Now get to practicing.”

***

“Close the door.”

Harry flicked his hand, sighed, and repeated the move a bit grumpily. The door slammed shut and Severus rolled his eyes.

“I mean, it closed, didn’t it?”
“Turn on the light.”

Hand held out in front of him, Harry cast his spell and gleefully watched the light turn on.

And then off.

Frowning, he turned it back on.

And off.

And on.

And off.

Brows furrowed, he caught the slight curl at the corners of Severus’s lips and gasped.

“Stop it. I thought I was doing that.”

All hint of joviality dropped from Severus’s face.

“You must never forget you’re not the only one who knows wandless nonverbal magic, boy. Just because a witch doesn’t raise her wand doesn’t mean you’re not moments away from death.”

Harry shuddered.

“Thanks for that.”

“I am here to help you survive the end of the war. I am not here to coddle you.”

“You’re right.”

Severus looked surprised. “I keep expecting you to throw a hissy and call me a bastard for being mean to you.”

“I learned to hear what you’re really saying.” Harry shrugged and enjoyed the expression on Severus’s face. “More.”

“Very well. Make your bed.”

“I'm still in it.”

“And?”

Harry sighed.

***

The day he reached eighteen weeks, all Harry had wanted to do was enjoy a little sunshine now that he was off bed rest. What a joke.

“Come on, Fluffles,” Harry coaxed. “She won't hurt you.”

The kelpie’s mouth opened in a near silent hiss and Hermione gave him an uncertain look before taking another step closer. Shrieking, the kelpie dove into the water and two eyes soon drifted to the surface. In minutes, it was crawling back onto the shore and, naturally, immediately noticing Hermione’s presence.
This same thing had been going on for the last twenty-six minutes.

“She won’t hurt you,” Harry insisted as Hermione took one more step closer to him.

Again, Fluffles dove back into the water and again, was soon crawling onto shore and freezing in place.

“Seriously? You’re gonna make me do this again? She’s my friend. One of my best friends. I trust her.”

Back into the water it went. More freezing water was soon being dripped onto skin being heated by the June sun. However, when Hermione took another step, Fluffles didn’t immediately dive into the water. Instead, it began hissing, but stayed in place. When Hermione took another step, putting her within reach of Harry’s hand, Fluffles growled and backed away from her until it was hunkered down over his crossed ankles. Its talons dug into the dirt as its butt began moving back and forth. It reminded him of a cat readying itself to pounce. Hermione froze and watched the kelpie press its entire body against his ankles. Harry could feel its heart pounding and tried to rub a comforting hand over its head. It hissed until it realized who was touching it and then leaned into Harry’s hand with a croon, but kept its eyes riveted on Hermione.

“What... what do I do? I don’t want to frighten it.”

“Maybe it needs to see me touching you.” Hermione nodded and held out a hand, which immediately set Fluffles on edge. Its head tilted back, incidentally displaying the tips of its razor-sharp teeth, and a growl could be heard coming from its barely opened mouth. It was shaking back and forth so quickly, it was almost vibrating. Carefully, Harry reached out a hand and grabbed a hold of Hermione’s hand. Fluffles stopped growling, but didn’t tilt its head back up. It did, however, keep watching and Harry tentatively nodded at the chair beside him. Moving as slowly as possible, still holding his hand, Hermione sat down and only froze once when Fluffles darted up to press itself to Harry’s knees and again tilted its head back to show the tips of its teeth.

By the time she was fully seated and not holding Harry’s hand anymore, she had actual sweat on her forehead.

“That was nerve-wracking.”

Harry laughed and looked down at Fluffles, who was currently pressed against his belly, its talons hooked into his clothing to keep it in place. Harry couldn’t be sure, but he thought its gaze might be riveted to Hermione through the small space between his arm and stomach. He’d move, but every time he tries, Fluffles temporarily tilts its head back and looks at him with that toothy look until it realizes it’s just him moving his own body and then goes back to looking at Hermione.

“Now that you’re finally sitting-”

“After almost half an hour,” Hermione added.

“Sorry.” Hermione shrugged. “Anyway, what’s going on?”

“I originally came out here to tell you Dora’s gone into labor.”

“What? We should be inside. We should-”

“Relax, Harry. They’re not even here. We received a firecall earlier. Remus says he’ll let us know when the baby’s here.”
Harry harrumphed and leaned on his elbows, the blades of grass tickling his skin. Fluffles directed that toothy look at him for a few seconds, blinked its black eyelids over those beautiful turquoise eyes Harry just loves, and then went back to watching Hermione intently. Harry began stroking its head a moment later and it actually closed its eyes halfway, though, of course, it didn’t look away from Harry’s company.

“You know,” Harry said thoughtfully after a while, “you won’t go much longer.”

“It’s all I’ve been thinking about since I heard about her.”

“Are you scared?”

“Yeah,” Hermione admitted quietly. “It’s not like I haven’t done it before, but the closer the birth gets, the clearer I remember last time. It was hard and it hurt and I’m scared.”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t be there.”

Hermione ignored Fluffles’s loud growl and put her hand on Harry’s shoulder.

“You’re here now and it wasn’t your fault you weren’t here last time.” Harry nodded and Hermione soon had both hands back on her belly. “Are you scared?”

“Terrified,” he replied, smiling, “yeah, about a lot of things, but what can I do about it?”

“Oh, Harry. If you want to talk…”

“I’m alright.”

Hermione remained silent a moment. “Ron told me he stopped by to talk to you yesterday.”

“Did he?”

“Why don’t you want Severus to know, Harry? He has a right. That child you’re carrying is just as much his as it is yours. It’s his heir, too. Even if he doesn’t want to be involved in the child’s life, he needs to know if only so his fortune doesn’t pass to Gringott’s when he passes.”

Harry felt distinctly sick at the thought of Severus… Merlin’s pants, he couldn’t even think it.

“I know. I know he needs to know, but I’m not entirely sure I should tell him.”

“He’s going to figure it out, Harry,” Hermione said gently. “You’re already starting to show. Eventually, he’s going to notice what you’re hiding under your baggy hand-me-downs and then he’ll be furious you didn’t tell him. Or worse.” She paused. “He’ll be hurt you didn’t trust him enough to tell him you were pregnant.”

“I’ll think about it,” Harry said seriously. “I promise. I really will think about it. Okay?”

“That’s all I can ask.”

***

The next day, Harry was on his way down to Severus’s quarters with leftover beef pot pies and coffee when Ron sprinted passed him, his features a blur.

“Sorry, mate,” Ron yelled. “’Mione’s in labor! Gotta go!”
Harry nearly dropped his offerings. His trip to Severus was promptly forgotten in his haste to go…

Where?

Where was he supposed to go?

Where was Rose?

Was Hermione delivering in the school?

Did she go elsewhere?

Where?

St. Mungo’s?

Where do magical people give birth?

Where was she?

Where was Rose?

Had Ron taken her? No, assuredly not.

Where was his goddaughter??

“Calm down,” a voice cut through his roiling thoughts. “Damnit, let go of these. Sit down. Now look at me.”

Harry slowly came back to himself and realized he was sitting on his living room couch. Severus was kneeling in front of him and had the pot pies and coffeepot on the floor beside him.

“Hermione’s in labor,” Harry explained. Surely that explained it. Explained what? Had Severus asked a question?

“You need to calm yourself down before you begin hyperventilating again.” Severus looked into his eyes. “Albus found you bumbling around the infirmary looking for your friend. You were still holding what I assumed was coffee and food meant for me.”

Harry took a deep breath and then another while looking at Severus.

“How did I…?”

“I have no idea, but Albus said you were so panicked about not being able to find your goddaughter, you could barely speak in coherent sentences. Keep breathing. Just focus.”

“Where’s Hermione?”

“She’s already left. She was never going to give birth here at the school, boy, so stop frowning like that. You knew you wouldn’t be able to attend the birth. However, you are one step closer. This time, you’re actually aboveground during the birth.”

Despite the situation, Harry cracked a smile and Severus finally released his arms. He obediently sucked in a deep breath when Severus gave him a look and then slouched into the couch cushions.

“Where is Rose?”
“She is in my chambers. Had you used your head instead of running off in a panic, you might have found her a lot sooner.”

“Why do you have her?”

“Simple. When your friend realized she was in labor, she made Weasley bring her to me.”

“And Ron didn’t fight that?”

“His wife was in labor and told him to do something. Do you really think he’s stupid enough to ignore a direct order?”

Harry snickered. “Not by a long shot.”

“Are you sufficiently calmed now? May I return to my chambers?”

“I’m coming with you, aren’t I?”

“Is that for me?” Severus asked, gesturing at the items on the floor beside him.

“Yeah.”

“And your goddaughter?”

“I have something she can eat.”

“Hmm. I suppose the small human will eventually want to see you. You may join us if you wish.”

“How kind of you to share my goddaughter.”

***

“It’s been two whole days and she’s still in the hospital,” Harry fretted. Severus, sitting on the couch with Rose gracelessly sprawled across his legs, calmly took a sip of his coffee. “Something had to have gone wrong. That’s the only explanation.”

Harry jumped back to his feet and nervously paced to the kitchen, back to the couch, and then once more to the kitchen where he began scrubbing at a miniscule spot on the counter.

“You have already received news that Hugo Weasley is alive and healthy and that his mother is doing well. Unless the hospital was attacked, nothing has gone wrong.”

“Oh, God!”

Rose jumped, but didn’t wake up. Harry attacked the already spotless stove and Severus sighed loudly.

“You are incredibly annoying. I insist you stop it.”

“You are being really insensitive.”

“And you are being ridiculous. There is nothing abnormal about your friend’s stay in the hospital.”

“How would you know?”

“Your mother was in three and a half days with you. Narcissa had nearly three days. This is nothing. Now shut up and stop whining before you wake her up. She didn’t sleep well last night
and I think you know why."

“Like I asked to have a nightmare."

“You should have left her here with me.”

Harry forced out a long, loud huff to get rid of his irritation.

“At least you slept on the couch. I’d forgotten what it was like having someone wake me from a nightmare.”

“And I’d forgotten what it was like to have a toddler throw her entire body on my manhood. I think the added element of her terror from your tossing, turning, and crying waking her up in the middle of the night really added something to it.”

“I'm sorry. But why hasn't she come back?”

Severus groaned and shook his head.

***

Less than twenty-four hours later, Severus pushed Harry through Ron and Hermione’s door and left without a word. It took less than a minute for Hermione to hand over her new son.

“He’s so handsome,” Harry whispered. Hugo continued sleeping and Harry tucked one finger into his tiny hand. “Oh,” he breathed. “He’s so tiny. I feel like I’m gonna break him if I’m not careful.”

Hermione softly chuckled. “You won't, Harry. Don’t be silly.”

From his spot on the floor, Ron let out a loud snore before snuffling and then smacking his lips.

“Guessing he didn’t sleep much.”

“He’s been awake nearly forty-eight hours. He was busy letting everyone know.” Hermione sighed and looked at the door. “I wonder how long it'll take everyone to start showing up. Will they even try with the attack so imminent? To be honest, I hope not.” Harry looked at her in surprise and Hermione laughed. “All I want to do is sleep.”

“I understand that.”

“Before you know it, you’ll come to understand exactly how I'm feeling.”

Harry gulped.

***

The next evening, Albus called for a meeting that was mandatory for anyone who hadn’t given birth within the last week.

While waiting for everyone else to arrive, Harry shuffled over to the small table by the door and made up a coffee for Severus and a tea for himself.

“What are you doing?” Severus asked. “Is that tea?”

Harry shrugged. “It sounded good.”
“Hmm. Still on the tea binge, I see.” Harry nodded and blew on his hot beverage while watching Severus give the tray of desserts a look. “They never set out snacks. Why did they choose to do so tonight?”

Chuckling, Harry tiredly returned to the table and scooped up the cupcake he knew Severus was eyeing. Without saying a word, he sat back down beside him and passed off the cupcake. Severus gave him an approving nod – something he’d never seen him give anyone else - and took a bite of the chocolatey dessert.

Ron and Draco (plus a few others like Fred, George, and Remus) were openly watching them, but Harry opted to ignore them. Instead, he leaned forward and fell into a light doze. He didn’t notice when Ron sat beside him or when Draco made a racket sitting on Severus’s other side. It wasn’t until Severus gently elbowed him that Harry even sat up. While rubbing his side, he looked around.

“What’s going on?” Severus silently nodded at Albus, who had entered the room and was standing at one end of the long table. “Oh. Thank you.”

Less than a week.

He was going to attack in less than a week. Their spies couldn’t give a more exact date, but it was more than they’d had the day before. Less than a week, though.

Harry hunched down over his belly and frowned. He could feel the knot of the protective womb already, even while sitting down, and it reminded him of the new reason he had to succeed. If he failed, the world was doomed, yes, but if he failed, his child would never be born. He would beat this bastard once and for all. He never had a choice in it, but now he would be fighting for the survival of his own young and that would make him dangerous.

That knowledge gave him the inner strength to calmly listen to everyone around him making plans for either his victory or defeat. Truthfully, no one was even looking at him, but he was alright with that. Well, Severus was looking, but that wasn’t as strange as it once might have been. Did they even think he was going to survive? Harry looked at Severus once more and held his gaze for quite a long time before dropping his gaze to his tea cup. Severus silently reached out a hand and Harry felt his cup warming up as he wandlessly reheated his cold tea. As Severus pulled his hand away, he briefly touched his shoulder and Harry felt a knot in the back of his throat. He gave Severus a grateful nod and then just stared at the table.

He had to survive if only for his… no, for their child. Severus had to survive for both of them. Harry swallowed a mouthful of tea and again looked at Severus. He was listening to what Albus was saying, but spared Harry a quick, suspicious glance after a moment. It almost made him grin. He honestly couldn’t remember why he’d kept it secret so long. He was a good man. After holding baby Hugo, he’d come to a decision regarding his own child. Even if Severus decided he didn’t want to be a part of their child’s life, he did still deserve the chance to make his own choice. However, the timing was an issue. Should he tell him before they face Him? After? When should he tell Severus?

“Tell me what?” Severus asked under his breath, staring at Albus. Gods, had he asked that- and said his name! - out loud?

“I have an idea that may sound crazy,” Harry lied and realized seconds later it wasn’t so much of a lie, because he had been considering asking him about it. “Later.”

Severus nodded at Harry and elbowed Draco (who was asking what they were talking about) to shut him up.
After that, Harry started dozing again and more than a few times felt himself being nudged off of Severus’s arm. Half awake, he felt Severus push him over to lean against Ron. However, shortly afterwards, Harry was leaning against his warm side once more.

When he finally woke up, thanks to Fred knocking something onto the floor by the dessert table, Harry looked up at Severus and saw him tight-lipped and glaring at everyone and everything.

“Severus,” Albus commented. Severus nodded and Harry, cursing his inability to stay awake during meetings, wondered what he’d missed. Albus directed a warm smile at him and nodded. “Harry.”

Harry smiled back and wondered what he’d missed that was making even Draco look at him almost kindly.

“They don’t envy you,” Severus said as they walked towards their chambers, “and most of them hate you’ve been put in this position, a lot of them don’t trust I’m part of your guard, but they’ve finally reached a point where they can do nothing more than protect you and each other and hope you end Him before too many casualties pile up.”

Harry swallowed thickly. “It’s that time, huh?”

“You heard him, did you not?” Severus asked quietly. “We have less than a week.”

Harry’s stomach twisted and Severus remained silent as they walked.

“Well, no sense fretting about it, right? What sounds good for dinner?”

Severus stared at the floor a moment, swallowed, and then met his gaze before pointedly rolling his eyes.

“Nothing you make sounds good. It’ll be a miracle if I can force any of your filth down my throat.”

Harry almost wanted to cry. Bless that man for playing along.

He needed that right now.
“Let’s go!” Severus barked, letting himself into Harry’s chambers without so much as a knock. “Meeting. Now.”

“Is it time? Did you brew the potion?”

“It’s not that time. It’s time to meet the last of our spies.”

Harry’s eyes widened and he glanced down at the cake he’d just finished making. Ever since he’d learned the time was coming to face off with Him, he’d been going out of his way to make Severus’s favorites just in case they were the last things he ever did/made. Severus was in such a hurry, he hadn’t even noticed yet.

“Uh, let me grab some shoes.”

“You should also wash your hands so you don’t come to the meeting stinking like – Bring the cake. I very well may die in a few days. I might as well indulge beforehand.”

“Don’t talk like that,” Harry snapped while stepping into his shoes. “You’re not going to die.”

“Bring the cake, brat.” Severus paused and briefly narrowed his eyes. “As long as it’s not poisoned with the usual, that is.”

Harry really tried to make any sort of comment, it didn’t even have to be a joke, but all he could muster was a sad smile. On the way to the meeting, Harry cleared his throat and had to swallow once or twice before he could speak.

“You know, uh, my birthday’s coming up.”

Severus looked at him. “Obviously. Why are you telling me?”

“Because, you know, you have less than a month to plan something for my birthday. Next week, when, um, when we’re not so busy, you should start looking around for a birthday present.”

“What makes you think I have any desire to make plans for your birthday, you greedy brat, let alone to buy you a gift?”

“Isn’t that what you do for the person who used to feed you and do your laundry?”

“And molest my person on a daily basis,” Severus groused.

“If you had let me in every once in a while, it wouldn’t hurt. Now you’re back on the potions and probably feeling really uncomfortable all-”

“Boy.”

“What? I’m just saying.”

“Look at me.” Harry did and Severus shook his head. “Stop this. I have no intention of dying anytime soon. That means you will not be dying, either. This is unnecessary. Stop trying to say goodbye.”

Harry sighed shakily and nodded. “Okay.”
“Boy used to read a dictionary,” Severus sighed, shaking his head and looking into the middle distance. “Where did it all go?”

“It got pushed to the side so I could make room for better information.”

“Like chicken taco recipes?”

“Exactly,” Harry laughed. He surreptitiously wiped at his eye as Severus opened the door to their meeting room. A number of people were already in the room and they all momentarily stopped talking when they walked inside. After a moment, the noise level returned to normal and Severus gestured to some seats near the desserts table. Unlike their last meeting, it was empty save a coffeemaker, a tea kettle, some cups, sugar, and cream. While Severus conjured plates and cut the cake, Harry set about getting their – Nope. First, he was going to make a new pot, because this smelled so burnt, he wouldn’t be surprised if the coffee had actually solidified in the coffeepot.

Now he was going to get them some coffee and tea. Severus made no mention of his tea, but he did arch a brow. It remained in place until Harry started passing out pieces of the cake. By the time the meeting was ready to begin, there were only three small slices of cake left. Having already had a piece three times the size of everyone else, Severus eyed the remaining cake as the door opened once more.

Harry had never seen Draco so pale as when he saw his mother and father walked into the room. Ignoring everyone else’s shock, Severus put another piece of cake on his plate and used a cherry to swipe up some chocolate syrup. Harry watched Lucius and Narcissa watch him the entire time before exchanging a glance with each other.

By the time Severus was done with his cake, he needed a refill. The moment he placed his empty mug on the table, Harry scooped it up and went to refill it. It scared him that this could be the last time he got to play the housewife for him.

When Harry returned to the table, Severus took his coffee and frowned at him until Harry smiled awkwardly. He quickly looked beside him, but Hermione and Ron were having a private conversation. With nothing else but Severus’s now suspicious glare to look at, Harry looked beyond him at Draco, who was staring at his parents even though they were too caught up in conversation with Minerva to acknowledge Draco was even there.

When Albus entered the room a moment later, Harry discovered he’d have two days. Two.

***

The next morning, Harry arrived at Severus’s chambers before the sun had even come up. Perhaps not as surprising as it was, Severus was already awake. He didn’t say a word as he stepped back to let Harry in. Indeed, he remained silent as he followed him to the kitchen and watched him set three large bags’ worth of groceries on the counter. Eventually, however, when Harry began summoning and conjuring dishes and his coffeemaker, Severus spoke up.

“Are you moving in until after the attack?”

Harry looked at his coffee table (that was suspiciously covered with a blanket) and sighed.

“We went a lot longer than a day the first time around.” Severus sucked in a deep breath and Harry sagged. “Sorry. I didn’t sleep last night.”
“That cannot happen tonight. You must be well-rested. He cannot have any advantage over you.”

“Force me if I can’t?” Harry asked. “Seriously. Even if it takes a punch to the face.”

Severus furrowed his brows. “A potion would be much easier and less bloody.”

“I was only making a point.”

“Hmm. You never answered me.”

“Do you mind?”

“Needy brat.”

“Three meals, snacks, and unlimited coffee. I’ll even tidy up in here,” Harry offered. “One last time playing your housewife in exchange for letting me sleep down here tonight.”

“Why? Do you think the urge will have disappeared on Thursday?”

“We have to get through Wednesday first,” Harry reminded him. “Even if we do survive-”

“When.”

“Fine. When we do survive, I won’t continue living here. My job will be done. I’ll have to go live somewhere else. I won’t be around to annoy you anymore.”

That was what upset him? Harry could see the thinned lips, the sad glint in his eyes. That was Severus Snape upset. The possibility of both of them dying tomorrow hadn’t saddened him, but the fact that Harry would have to leave Hogwarts if he beat Him tomorrow is what did it. He couldn’t believe it.

“I suppose I can withstand your presence for one more night,” Severus said after letting loose an almighty huff, “as long as it means I get coffee whenever I want.”

“And food.”

“Yes.”

While Harry busied himself with starting a fresh pot of coffee, Severus picked through the food stuffs on his counter.

“What foods are we having?”

“I realized when I was packing this morning I never once made pancakes at the house. We’re having some today.”

“Curious. I never noticed you never made them.”

“You didn’t know what you were missing.” Severus gave him a look and Harry grinned, trying to get into the housewife mood, but something was missing. “For lunch, we’re having beef stew and cheese toasties.”

“Poisonous slop.”

And that was what he’d been missing. Harry shook his head and genuinely grinned, feeling much better.
“For dinner, we’re having roast chicken with cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, and green beans with onions and bacon.”

“You’ll ruin it.”

Harry snorted. “I'm so sure.”

They both remained quiet while the coffee finished brewing. Once it was done, Harry fixed up a cup for both of them and left his sitting on the counter while he began working on breakfast.

“After breakfast, I will begin working on the potion.”

“Do you really think it has the potential to help or am I just being childish and you’re for once being too nice to tell me?”

“When have I ever been too nice to tell you I think you’re being childish?”


“I'm sure I have and if I haven’t, perhaps I was merely thinking it.” Severus briefly looked (exaggeratedly) thunderstruck. “My God. You were wrong. I was being too nice.”

Harry chortled. “Sorry, but… Merlin. Anyway, you think it could work?”

“It has the potential. They’ll be more focused on finding Harry Potter. They honestly won’t expect you to do anything except run in wand blazing. I'm not saying it’ll be a walk in the park to bypass the inner circle, but it’s easier to disregard a strange man if he isn’t the one you’re looking for.”

“Good. We’ll test it tonight, then?”

“Better safe than sorry.”

“It’s by that same logic,” he said, trying to impersonate Severus. Severus actually chuckled a little and Harry grinned. “Alright. Breakfast and then you’ll start brewing while I clean up. Do I even want to know why there’s a blanket on the coffee table?”

“Not at all, no.”

Harry groaned.

***

An extended version of polyjuice. Harry stared at the vial in Severus’s hand and marveled. The entire war could be won because of an early-education potion.

“You must swallow all of it,” Severus instructed. “It’s not supposed to taste pretty so don’t complain.”

“But if I swallow all of it, what will I use tomorrow?”

“I obviously brewed a double batch, boy. Merlin.”

“Oh. Okay so just down it?”

“As if you don’t know how to work polyjuice potion.”
“But it’s an extended version. It could be different.”

“Barely.”

“Well, here goes.”

A full minute passed by. Harry counted the ticks coming from the magical clock in the living room. The moment it reached sixty ticks, Severus looked between Harry’s face, his stomach, and the empty potions vial in horror.

“Boy.” Severus swallowed thickly. "Did - did you forget this potion cannot change the appearance of someone who is expecting a child? Most potions of the sort do not work on the expecting, because they'll harm the fetus.”

“Oh, I forgot.”

Harry’s eyes belatedly widened and he looked at Severus in a panic. He knew. He had proof. Well, shite. That wasn’t how he’d wanted to break it to him, but at least he had an answer to when he should tell him. Harry sighed. Typical.

“But… what of the abortive? I saw you take it.”

“I’ve told you before that I would never abort a child, sir. When did you see…” Oh, right. He’d had a giant headache and Severus had been acting kind of weird that… Oh. “Right. The day you stopped by for advice about your friend’s wife.”

“Yes.” Severus looked him over, his gaze quickly meeting his after studying his tummy. “I saw you take the abortive.”

“No, you saw me take one of your old headache relievers. It somehow got mixed in with my stuff. I had a headache. I’m sorry you were under the impression that vial held something it wasn’t.”

Severus’s eyes narrowed. “So why didn’t you inform me of your pregnancy?”

“You told me you didn’t want to know,” Harry said grumpily. “Why would I tell you?”

“When have I ever said that?”

“I still remember it like it was yesterday. You said - and I quote – “If you conceive, I have no desire to know.” Did you really-”

“Potter, you idiot!”

Harry gave him a dirty look. “Don’t call me an idiot.”

“Then stop acting like one,” Severus snapped. Harry frowned deeply and Severus kneaded his forehead a moment. “I meant I didn’t want to know that you’d be aborting the child. I most certainly didn’t mean I didn’t want to know if you decided to keep the child.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You cannot be this stupid.” Severus rubbed his forehead and sat at the table. “You are carrying my child, boy, and I’ve always wanted to be a father. You know that.”

“Yeah, but-”
“And while I would be willing to risk harm protecting a select few, there aren’t many I would willingly stake my life and health on.”

“…the ritual.”

“Exactly.”

“You trusted that I wouldn’t get you killed.” Harry slowly smiled. “You did the ritual, because you trust me.”

Severus gave him a serious look. “I sincerely hope I haven’t foolishly placed my trust in you. If you fail, the entire world is doomed.”

“Yes, yes, I know… Wait! So that means… you trust me.”

Which was a big deal. Humongous, actually.

“Yes.”

“How long have you trusted me?”

“Why do you wish to know?” Severus studied him a moment and then shook his head. “You still remember, don’t you?”

“You said you’ve never trusted anyone to carry your child.”

“I meant it.”

“But things change?”

Severus smirked. “Obviously. When we were first sent to the safe house, you still thought you weren’t interested in men.”

“Git.”

“Again with the name-calling.” Severus’s smirk was growing. “Is now really an appropriate time?”

“What? Not going to pretend you like it?”

“I do, but that’s a discussion for another time. We’re getting away from our original discussion. Tell me again. Why did you not take the abortive?”

“Yet again, I will never abort. I meant it back when we first discussed it, I meant it when Ron did the test for me and asked about it, and I mean it now. I won’t do it.”

“Weasley cast the pregnancy test spell for you?” Severus frowned. He looked genuinely put out. “Never mind. So because you were certain I wouldn’t want to know, you simply didn’t tell me I was going to be a father. Is that correct?”

“Yeah.”

“And what were you planning to do when you started showing and I put two and two together?”

“I hadn’t thought that far.”

Severus nodded. “Who else knows?”
“A couple people…”

“Such as?”

“Poppy, Ron, Hermione, Remus.”

“Myself.”

“Yeah.”

Severus dropped his head into his hands and didn’t so much as move for several minutes.

“I’m going to be a father.”

“Yeah.”

“You’re pregnant.”

“Yeah.”

“You didn’t tell me.”

“Yeah. Sorry.”

“And nobody knew you were pregnant when we were making battle strategies so you’ll be carrying yourself and our unborn child into battle without a plan.”

“Er, yeah.”

“And we don’t have a contingency plan to use if He somehow discovers your pregnancy and uses it against you.”

“…yeah.”

Severus sighed deeply and walked closer to him. After receiving a nod, Severus put his hands on Harry’s stomach, sucked in a sharp breath, and slowly pushed it out.

“I will do absolutely everything in my power to ensure you and the child survive. Do not doubt me.”

“I never really do.”

“Good. And if I tell you to do something, I mean for you to do it. Do you understand me?”

“…okay…”

“Even if it means you might need to leave me to deal with something on my own.”

That he couldn’t and wouldn’t agree to.

It was gonna be a long night.

***

Everywhere around him, people were falling, but he couldn’t spare a moment to check if they were friend or foe. Behind him, Draco yelled something and a dark figure flew passed him and connected sharply with something solid. In front of him, Remus tackled a Death Eater with an
angry war cry and both men went somersaulting into the woods behind them. To his right, Severus was blasting spell after spell at Death Eater after Death Eater. To his left, Ron screamed in rage and Percy fell onto the ground at Harry’s feet. He could hear Ron’s anguished cries and wished he could help.

He, however, couldn’t stop for anything. They’d made it to the inner circle and while his guard was clearing the way for Harry and keeping him from getting attacked from all sides, he was facing off with Lord Voldemort himself. At some point after the battle, he’d have time to be proud of how he’s keeping Voldemort busy enough he didn’t have time to attack Severus or Draco for their turncoat ways.

However, that time was not now.

In quick succession, Voldemort hit him with three spells that disarmed him, knocked him onto his back, and pierced his chest with debris from what remained of a window.

A loud, buzzing chirping in his ear distracted him for only a minute. Clutching a hand to one heavily bleeding wound, Harry held up his hand and saw Voldemort step into his line of sight, the sun hidden behind his body. Behind him, the water of the lake began rapidly lapping the shore and Harry hoped whoever had fallen in wasn’t someone on their side, because he hadn’t fed the kelpie that day.

The world started going black as he readied himself to cast one final spell. The chirping behind him reached a fever pitch, he cast his spell, and then he knew no more.

***

When he was abruptly thrown into consciousness by the sound of Molly Weasley crying out, Harry groggily grabbed his shoulder. He’d been healed, but there was still blood everywhere and he felt so weak, he couldn’t move much for several moments. Severus was nowhere to be seen and neither was Voldemort.

As his last memory played back through his mind, Harry began to cry. All he remembered was the Killing Curse and half a dozen other curses coming at him, the Kelpie chirping angrily in his ear, and blackening vision.

If he was still alive, that meant their child…

Pure anguish coursed through him and he weakly sat up. He had nothing else to live for. That bastard was going to die for what he’d done even if Harry had to go with him.

Unfortunately, he was so weak from blood loss, he couldn’t even make it to his knees.

“Harry? Harry!” Hermione fell to her knees beside him and hugged him tightly. “He’s alive! Arthur! Tell—”

A crowd of faces he was well familiar with gathered around and then there was Severus in the middle of it all hauling him up from the ground, smacking him none too gently, and then crushing him to his chest. Quite a few people gasped and Harry could only imagine the glare Severus was leveling at them at the moment. One of Severus’s hands momentarily disappeared, but then returned to its spot on his lower back. A relieved sigh and a tighter squeeze followed the action.

“You damned idiot, I could kill you right now! I told you to run! Stop crying. You’re fine.” Unsurprisingly, Harry kept crying and Severus leaned back enough to give him a little shake. “Listen to me. Can you hear me? You… are fine. Do you understand me? I just checked. You’re
fine.”

Harry hiccupped. “You did?”

“Yes.”

“Everything?”

“Yes.”

“And you?”

Severus rolled his eyes. “Clearly in one piece, though incredibly pissed off you didn’t listen to me.”

“Everyone else?”

“Alive for the most part, thanks to Albus’s planning.”

“Your godson?”

“Is with Albus. I'm surprised you cared to ask.”

Relief unlike any he’d ever felt swamped him. Feeling boneless, Harry sagged against Severus and nodded before shuddering and trying not to start crying from the remembered pain of thinking he’d lost the baby.

“Can you walk on your own, Harry?” a young mediwitch asked.

“He’s not going anywhere, but he needs blood replenishers. Now. Weasley.” Red-eyed, George and Fred came over. “Take your dead. You needn’t stay.”

“Who...?"

“Percy,” George said, his voice breaking.

“I'm sorry.”

“We need medical assistance out here now. Critically wounded are over there. You lot, look for survivors. Lupin, check in with Albus, see if he needs us. If not, we’ll continue handling this front.”

Remus nodded and ran towards the Forbidden Forest.

“Can I take him from you?” a mediwizard asked. “He looks like he needs immediate assistance.”

“I’ve already healed him. He’s not moving. Now get out of my way. I have to repair this wall and I don’t want to knock out a training mediwizard with a piece of stone.”

After that, everyone stopped asking Severus if they should take him away. Harry was honestly impressed. The man was acting like he wasn’t completely hanging off him. He still hadn’t regained his full strength even after taking twice as much blood replenishing potion as he thought he needed.

“Everything seems to be in order here,” Severus commented to himself. “The dead are being collected, the injured are being tended to, the school is repaired, the prisoners are confined... I’ll take you back to the school. You need to lay down. I can tell you're still weak.”
“No,” Harry argued. He began to push away from Severus, but realized that’d be a bad idea halfway through. Instead, he began to look around desperately. “Where is it?”

“Where is what?”

“Fluffles! The kelpie. Where is it?”

“You have got to be kidding me.” Severus gave him a dark look. “After all of that, seriously?”

“YES! Where is it?”

Severus let out a long, exasperated-sounding sigh. “It’s in the lake, probably enjoying the Dark Lord’s intestines as we speak.”

“The…” Harry sagged a moment. “Ah. So I didn’t kill him?”

“Oh, no, you did.” Harry looked up and was taken aback by Severus’s silently proud expression. It was more pronounced than usual, though most observers probably wouldn’t be able to tell it was there. He could, however, and that was all that mattered. “Your killing curse hit him the same time your kelpie friend dragged him under.”

“Really?”

“Yes.” Severus looked away from Harry’s belly and glanced behind him at the lake. “I actually thought the damn thing was going to fly out of the lake there at the end. It really didn’t like the Dark Lord being so close to you. Did you truly not hear it?”

Harry grinned and almost looked at the lake, but caught himself. He had no desire to see what the inside of Voldemort looked like.

“So… so I did it, then?”

“You did it,” Severus said quietly, sounding relieved. “It’s finally done.”

“And he’s gone for good this time, right?”

“We’ve already cast the appropriate spells to keep him at rest.”

Harry could have kissed Severus.

In fact…

Apart from a few gasps and one very suspiciously-Draco-Malfoy-sounding gag, Harry and Severus’s first (and hopefully not last) public kiss was perfect. Harry finally pulled away and shyly smiled at Severus. Hermione was the first to react - she whooped excitedly and started laughing, something both Ron and Draco frowned mightily about.

Harry could only laugh with her, relief and happiness bubbling up in his chest, as Severus rolled his eyes at the lot of them.

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