As Long as You're Mine

by BurningSlowly

Summary

Dating didn't have to be this unnecessarily complicated.

The war is over. The Dark Lord is gone forever. Harry Potter had saved the wizarding world, yet life doesn't always turn out the way one expects it.
Can Harry and Severus figure out a way in the world in which they hadn't thought they would've been a part of after the war?
With close friends at their side Harry thinks it is possible.

*part 3 to The Cure series

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Severus had been in a void of sorts. It resembled the nightmares he use to have, but somehow it felt completely different. Everything around him was nothing. There was no invisible walls or screams like in his previous nightmares. He didn’t know how long he had been here or even where here was. Maybe this was where people like him went when they died. Somehow he knew that he was dead.

Noise broke through silence slowly then all at once. He had no way of knowing what any of it meant. They were just sounds not words or anything that gave him an idea of what was going on. Sight followed with as much unclarity as his hearing. Both senses had gone unused in the void and re-acclimating them was difficult. Blurs and noise had consisted his new waking world. He hadn’t an inkling of who he was or what had happened to him.

Time moved oddly now that he was free from the void. It was as if every time he blinked it was another day, another week, or another month. Soon both his hearing and sight settled to something that he could functionally use. A woman came to him, her arms folded over her chest as she gave a huff. She looked displeased. He had no idea why she would be displeased with him.

Had he done something before he had gone to the void?

“Welcome back Severus.”

He frowned at the sounds that were steadily translating to speech.

It took a while for him to understand her words. He tried to speak but something prevented him from doing so. And then there was the discomfort of pain around his neck and a stiffness in his body that he hadn’t realized until the woman had made him attempt to speak.

Why couldn't he speak? Why did everything hurt so much?

His frown deepened.

It seemed as though the woman understood as she spoke again. “Don’t worry you will soon be back to your snarky self in no time.”

He blinked his eyes and saw himself practicing talking in a tedious slow pace. Blinking again he found himself walking on shaky legs. Another blink and he now could walk and speak as confidently as a toddler. Then there was the woman, Pomfrey, who spoke to him about things that he had little recollection of. Most of the time she said names that sparked something in his mind, yet he didn’t fully know who these names were.

“Harry is waiting for you.” Pomfrey smiled at him.

Suddenly he woke up.

Severus re-situated himself trying to gage where he was now. The light coming in slivers told him he wasn’t in the void. The lack of plain walls told him that he wasn’t in Hogwarts infirmary. He was back at his home on Spinner's End.

He had been dreaming or more accurately recalling past events.
Removing himself from the bed he moved into the bathroom. He glanced at the mirror focusing not on his face but the dull pink scars on his neck. This action had become somewhat of a routine since Pomfrey had let him out of her care. It was as if his mind was trying to make sense of everything or perhaps it was trying to find a moment that he had forgotten along the way.

Regardless, these memory-based dreams weren’t the worst. When his memories of the war had first returned to him he was plagued with vivid dreams of Nagini tearing at his throat mercilessly. In those dreams he could even smell his own blood as it covered his surroundings until there was nothing left of him. Pomfrey had to change his bedding from the cold sweat he had broken out in and gave him calming drought each time he woke.

Now that his memories and more importantly, his mental barriers were back the nightmares were easily dealt with. Nightmares of his death weren’t new occurrence. It mattered little if in dreams it was his father or Nagini who ended his life. He refused to let nightmares of The Dark Lord sending Nagini to kill frighten him. The Dark Lord no longer existed. He no longer had power over him.

He ran a hand through his hair, sighing as he caught a glimpse of his face. Not even his freedom from Voldemort or having his name cleared of crimes could improve what the years of stress had done to his looks. Typically he wouldn't care about such thing, but his frown lines coupled with his marred skin wasn't the most welcoming sight.

He thought back to weeks prior where he had emerged from the infirmary with the determination to be there for Harry after a year’s absence. That memory was crystal clear.

If life was a story things would’ve ended with him in the happy embrace of Mr. Scamander, Mr. Graves, Draco and Harry. Life didn’t just freeze at a particular happy moment in time like that. Life moved on whether the people who had held onto him for over an hour wanted it to or not. Eventually they parted and he was promptly dragged to the Great Hall. He had faced a teary eyed Minerva, but the witch knew better then to hug him. He had used up all his patience for a tight embraces at that point.

The amount of attention he got was unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and unwanted. Yet he endured the welcome backs and stares from students and co-workers alike. When Minerva had asked if he would like his old teaching position he politely declined, at least he thought he had refused it politely. It was hard to keep his agitation under control when he had gone from seeing only Pomfrey for an entire year in a small blank room to being bombarded by a large crowd. Exhausted from it all, he had somehow managed to convince everyone that it was safe to let him return home alone. The moment he apparated back to Spinners End he had managed to make it to the couch before dropping from the emotion and social exhaustion.

A week flew by and with the promise to talk to Harry at every given possible moment he set his life back together.

It was surprisingly easy getting back into his routines. The only addition was the lengthy talks with Harry, which consisted more of the young man asking questions like “Did you eat?” or “How was your day” than anything else, not that he mind at all. He’d never mind talking with Harry.

It seemed odd how quickly he had regain semblance of the life he had. Then again, he had always operated in the same way for years that not even returning from death could throw it off. There was potions to brew. There was a kitchen to restock. Even laundry that he needed to wash. Books that needed dusting and rearranging. Not to mention informing the Ministry that he had actually survived the war so that he could get his official affairs in order. Each of these tasks had been checked of his mental list as soon as possible. Things were more or less back in order. Nearly all was back to how things were before and yet he felt that something was off. Something in his life
was missing.

Having enough with his reflection he moved on through his morning routine.

Routines kept him sane.

As he settled onto his chair sipping his tea he picked up the Daily Prophet. Granted it wasn’t the finest literature in his vicinity, even so there was much he needed to catch up on in the wizarding world. Opening up the paper from it’s twine he cringed at the headline.

_The Boy Who Lived Again Fallen Into The Arms of Ex-Death Eater?_ read the headline of the Daily Prophet. Newt couldn't help smile at the picture just below of Mr. Snape and Harry kissing in one of the many walkways of Hogwarts. Based on the looks of it this moment must’ve happened before they had found out that Mr. Snape was alive. He paid no attention to what the actual article said. No matter who the story had been written by it would certainly be missing the truths of the two’s relationship. Nevertheless seeing the image warmed his heart.

It had been a long time since he’d seen the two embraced in such a way. How Mr. Snape had survived after all was still a miracle he thanked Merlin, and several other deities, day after day. Just the thought that Mr. Snape had come back brought tears to his eyes.

"Something particularly grand about today's paper?" Percival asked as he set their breakfast onto the dining table.

He turned the paper to face his husband. He watched Percival’s eyes scan the words.

"The title could use improvement, though no doubt such a headline would sell papers" Percival commented as he sipped his morning coffee. "I wonder if he will try to burn every copy in existence."

Percival had a point. Mr. Snape definitely wouldn’t view today’s paper the same way he did. He could almost see Mr. Snape swiftly moving through the streets setting each paper ablaze as he marched to wherever the Daily Prophet operated from.

"You think Mr. Snape will be upset if we saved this picture?"

Percival gave a smirk. "The better question is which scrapbook will it reside in."

They both laughed, knowing full well that they had a obsession with scrapbooking for several years now.

A small cry from beside them called his attention. Laying the paper down he moved over to his son, who just woke. Darion’s eyes sparkled the moment he recognized him making Newt smile wide. He still couldn’t believe how much Darion had grown. Both Harry and Mr. Snape had missed much of his son’s quick development, but now they would be there. Harry had promised to drag Mr. Snape to visit them. It would be an understatement to say he couldn’t wait until then. Percival had to stop him from sending an invitation every day. According to his husband both Mr. Snape and Harry needed time to settle, but it had been weeks since he’d seen the pair and he wanted to spend time with them. Weeks after a most miraculous reunion was far too long.
“Soon.” Percival said as he took another sip. “Soon they’ll be ready to pay us a visit.”

“When is soon?”

Percival gave a small smile before shaking his head.

For some reason Harry felt like today was going to be a great day. Pulling open the curtains let in light, illuminating the small bedroom of his new apartment. It had been a few weeks since he had graduated from Hogwarts. Recalling that fact reminded him why he was in a good mood today.

"He's alive." He smiled to himself. Severus was alive.

Saying those words and knowing how true they were eased the tension and the pain that he had carried every day through the prior year. It was almost as if last year hadn't happened, that somehow he'd skipped over his final year of school and ended up right at this very moment. Of course there were things in his life that reminded him of what happened; this apartment being one.

He had moved from Grimmauld Place shortly after graduating. Apparently McGonagall was ruthlessly holding back the press while he was in school so the moment that he tried to go out into any wizard-populated area shortly after graduating the stalking press had quickly bombarded him to recount his tales of defeating Voldemort. He thought they had enough after the trials and his rude interviews, but his name sold papers. Although he knew that Grimmauld Place was secured the rumor that he lived in that area had already brought over several witches and wizards with cameras poking around. Having that attention made the possibility of Voldemort sympathizers knocking down his door very likely. So moving was the best option. He had helped Remus strengthen the wards around the house before he left. Luckily no one had yet broken in or found out where he was currently staying.

Another thing that reminded him that time had moved on was his dreams. Some were nice dreams of reuniting with Severus where they would kiss and hold each other for hours, while others were horrible visions of watching Severus dying in his arms. When the nightmares came Draco would rush in from next door and tell him that Severus had come back until he stopped sobbing. He was glad that Draco had agreed to be his roommate. He wasn't sure if he could handle living completely on his own.

He wondered if Remus felt lonely back in Grimmauld Place. No matter how many times he asked if Remus wanted to join them the man would say that he was alright. Harry wished that Sirius somehow managed to conquer death too. There was no coming back from the veil for Sirius.

A knock came from his door. "Are you awake yet?"

He tugged the door open. "Morning?" he asked looking at Draco, who was fully dressed for the day and not in pajamas like he was. He was sure that he hadn’t overslept. "Are you going somewhere?"

"Some of us have places to be. I can't spend all day lounging around."

"Why not? It's so much fun." He smirked.

Draco rolled his eyes. "Come on, I made breakfast."
"Please don't tell me you came to get me because you almost burnt the kitchen down to the ground."

"I'll have you know I've been practicing using that muggle bread device." Draco huffed as a light tint of pink graced his cheeks.

"Toaster. It's called a toaster" he smiled.

Draco had been so fascinated by the toaster when he bought it about a week ago. A complete loaf of sliced bread had been sacrificed on the first day he had demonstrated how it worked, most of which was burnt beyond recognition.

It was a pleasant memory that differed greatly from the time the Dursleys had instructed him on how to make toast. Every burnt mistake he had made under the Dursleys' instruction had been hurled at him with screams of him burning the bread on purpose before he was thrown into the cupboard under the stairs. All of Draco's burned toast however, was crushed and sprinkled into the small flower box that he'd set up upon the third day of living in the apartment.

"What do you care if the kitchen burns down anyways? You have enough money to buy a new one" Draco pointed out in an embarrassed huff.

Draco was right of course. Now that he was eighteen he had full access of both the Potter and Black accounts. Each account had sufficient funds in them; more money then he'd ever know what to do with. They could've bought a mansion with such money, but a small apartment in the muggle side of London was far more comforting than living like a king.

"Do you want a new kitchen?" he asked slightly serious.

"I was kind enough to make food so come and eat it or I will intentionally set something on fire." Draco warned turning to move into the dinning area, which was simply a counter space that protruded from the kitchen with two stools.

Following after the blond he hopped onto his stool; Draco had previously demanded that they be very clear over which items belonged to who.

The plate in front of his seat had two pieces of beautifully toasted bread and a perfectly square piece of butter on top. It looked like the toast on commercials. If he didn’t know how much Draco worked to perfect the simplest things he would’ve accused the blond of using magic.

"It looks amazing Draco! Thank you."

Draco smiled proudly. “Next I want to master pancakes.”

“We could make some for dinner tonight. Unless you are going out with Blaise.” He nudged Draco’s arm a little. “Or you could invite him to join us for pancakes.”

“Have you invited Snape over yet?” Draco shot back.

Neither of them had invited anyone over to their apartment. It wasn’t as if they were worried about them being tracked or anything like that. Simply their small apartment had been in a constant state of change. The paint color of the sitting area alone had been changed by Draco at least five times.

He looked around their apartment assessing its current state. It seemed presentable enough. They had decent sitting furniture in the living area and the kitchen was stocked with the essentials. Because of Draco’s perfectionism and his own upbringing their apartment was probably the
cleanest home owned in their neighborhood. Those things alone were components that made their apartment seem good enough to invite people over.

“We should have a housewarming party.”

“I’m not sure.”

Draco always said that whenever he suggested they invited people over. No matter how many times he assured the blond that he wouldn’t go inviting the whole Wizarding World to see their apartment, Draco always shot down any attempt to bring anyone by. Not even Remus had seen what they done to the place since they moved in.

Harry placed a hand onto Draco’s and looked at him in the eye. “Is this because of the kitchen?” he asked in a mocked serious tone. “Do you think they will be offended by how tiny it is?”

“Idiot.” Draco scoffed as he flung Harry’s hand away.

“Say the word and we can get a better kitchen, no fires required.”

“I’m not going to burn down the kitchen” Draco asserted. “I just...”

“Would you still feel this way if we were living in a mansion?”

Harry knew living here was a shift for Draco. His friend had lived in a large manor for most of his life when he wasn’t at Hogwarts and Grimmauld Place was ten times the size of their current apartment. Draco hadn’t complained about the size or the location once over these weeks, but maybe he had been silent about it bothering him. It wasn’t as if Draco shared his own mentality of seeing anything being bigger than a cupboard under the stairs as spacious.

“It’s not about that.” Draco said firmly as he bit into his own slice of toast.

“I promise not to be so much of a third wheel if you invite Blaise over. You can have sleepovers, just use silencing charm and all that.”

Draco’s face bursted into a scarlet color that made even him embarrassed. Draco had always been more ahead of him in that department of relationship, but he doubted that the blond had yet to take that step.

“We shouldn’t be having this sort of conversation so early in the morning.” Draco looked at the clock on the oven. “Madam Pomfrey will be livid if I’m late.”

“I guess we will come back to this conversation later then.”

“Much later.” Draco said sternly, grabbing his satchel before moving towards the fireplace.

“Have a good day.”

“You should go bother Snape” Draco suggested before tossing floo powder down.

Blaise stood waiting at the floo network of the Ministry. Finally the person he had been waiting for arrived. Draco looked as pristine as ever as he stepped out of the green flames.
“Good morning” he greeted as he noted how everything from Draco’s buttoned shirt to polished shoes was perfect.

“Good morning. When do you have to be in the office?”

“In half an hour.” He could almost curse the fact that he had been allowed to work within the Ministry. The time schedules were already ridiculous and he’d only been apprenticing for a month. He knew that he could make a difference in their world if he worked hard and climbed up the ladder, even so it was an annoyance how often his schedule interfered with spending time with Draco. “We could get some tea before you have to be at Hogwarts.”

“I have a portkey for right outside their wards so we don’t have to rush.”

He reached out to take Draco’s hand, which was easily accepted. Hand in hand they walked towards one of the nearby cafes.

“Have you eaten?” he asked.

“Only toast.”

“Have you at last mastered the muggle way to make it?”

“I did.”

He smiled at Draco’s pride.

It was such a simple thing, yet he couldn’t help adore the way Draco seemed to light up once he accomplished things that were previously so hard. For as long as he knew Draco, he was always reading ahead and practicing to master things. Draco was as hard of a worker as one could be. Blaise knew that trait was going to allow his boyfriend to become the best healer possible.

“What is the next task?”

“Pancakes. I think I should master that within a week or two.”

“I can’t wait until I’m invited to eat breakfast at your place.”

“You will be waiting a long time.” Draco said matter of factly, but he caught the tint of pink on his boyfriend’s cheeks.

It took Harry a little while to gather the courage to go bother Severus as Draco suggested. It still felt like he needed a reason to call Severus, well a reason besides just wanting to see the man. That reason was all he had for the past two weeks. He needed another excuse. Before he could decide on one he heard Severus’s voice coming from the talking mirror.

“Harry?”

He followed the voice which seemed to be coming from the living area. He had no idea where he had left the mirror there. Sometimes Draco would purposefully hide it from him saying that they should talk in person. Other times he would misplace it all on his own.

“Harry?”
“I hear you.” He spoke loudly in case he had left the mirror in a drawer. It wouldn’t be the first time he found his mirror laying around with the silverware or his stationary. “Just wait a minute” he said as he overturned the books laid out on their small coffee table. There was no mirror there. Huffing he moved to the couch, crouching down to peer underneath revealed nothing.

“Say something Sev. I can’t find the mirror.”

“You sound very close.”

Tearing the couch cushions off he finally found the mirror. Severus image looked at him shaking his head. “You should take better care of your things Harry.”

“Not everyone can be as well organized as you.” He smiled at the way Sev’s lips quirked up.

Plucking up the mirror he flopped onto the side of couch that still had cushions on. “Good morning.”

“Good morning Harry.”

“I’m glad you called. And not just because your call helped find my mirror.” Severus’s mouth turned to a thin line. “What’s wrong?”

“Have you seen the Daily Prophet?”

“You still read the Daily Prophet?” He tried to tease but Sev’s face remained unamused. He shook his head. “I stopped reading a while ago they never have their facts straight. Most of the time it’s nothing but bollocks.”

“Language.” Sev scolded.

He chuckled. “You know it is true.”

Severus still looked genuinely upset. He was sure that it couldn’t be as bad as to have such an effect on the man. It was only the Daily Prophet after all.

“What did they say this time? Something about me being the new Dark Lord again?”

“Worse” Severus said flatly.

“Worse?” He thought about what could be worse than being thought of as a threat to all wizarding kind, but came up blank. “Do you mind if I floo over? Whatever it is we can fight against it.” Harry doubted it was as bad as Severus thought it was, but it gave him a decent enough excuse to go visit Sev.

“Let me open up my floo connection.”

He smiled brightly at the way Sev didn’t fight to keep him out. Perhaps it was because he had already been to Spinner’s End before. Memories of going through boxes of Sev’s items screamed to be replace with something happier. It had been only a few weeks living with the knowledge that Severus had survived the war and yet he was more than willing to let those weeks cover up all the pain the past year had left. That pain needed to be covered up. He needed to forget it.

He took a breath as he moved to the fireplace, pinching a small handful of floo powder. This would be only the second time he had been to Spinner’s End. This time however he wouldn’t be going to face ghosts. He was going to see Sev. Severus was going to be there, alive, when he stepped
through this fireplace. Severus was alive. Alive and waiting for him.

“Ready?” Severus’s voice asked from the mirror still in his other hand.

“Ready. I will see you soon.”

Sev nodded and then the mirror dimmed to black.

A smile tugged on his lips as he called out his location before being swept into the green flames.

Severus watched as his fireplace burst to life one second and the next Harry was standing there. Harry’s wild locks still defined direction and a light dust of soot covered his person. There was quite a lot of soot probably due to the lack of visitors. Seeing Harry standing in front of him made his heart pause for a moment. It was something that happened quite often since their reunion. At first he had thought it an ill effect of his delayed healing at the end of the war, but had later determined it to be merely nerves. It was unsettling to admit, if only to himself, that he could feel even a sliver of nervousness in Harry’s presence. He knew very well the cause. It was because Harry knew that he loved him. He had said those words thinking it were his lasts, but the time he spent healing away from everyone proved to himself how strong his love really was for the younger man.

“Sorry about the mess.” Harry said as he dusted off his clothing.

He shook his head as a sign for Harry not to worry about it and to refocus his mind.

“So what is so horrible about today’s paper?” Harry asked with that smile that made him glad to ever bare witness to.

He gripped the paper in his hand a little tighter, though carefully enough that it wouldn’t completely ruin the thing before Harry got a chance to read it. Severus couldn’t understand why he even wanted to bring this to Harry’s attention. It was a stupid article. Maybe it was because it was about them. Their names had graced the papers multiple times since the end of the war, just never like this. The headline and the following article was crude and made him feel completely out of sorts. To top it off having a picture of such a private moment displayed for all to see was the very definition of horrific to someone who prided privacy above all things like himself.

“Sev?” Harry stepped closer trying to find if he was truly here in this moment.

Severus couldn’t figure out how to break that nasty habit of running away into his mind. He knew it worried Harry whenever he did such a thing, but relying on such a mechanism to get him through hardships in his life was hard to break. So many years all he had to rely on was his own mind.

“Hey,” Harry gently took a hold of his hand.

He gave a gentle squeeze to let Harry know he was in the present moment.

“Would you like some tea?” he asked trying to bring a semblance of this being a simple conversation with Harry.

“That would be great.”
With a flick of his hand he set his kettle to go about the proper process of boiling water. Normally he wouldn’t waste magic on something so minor, right now however he didn't want to leave Harry alone even for a moment to mull about the kitchen. He hadn’t forgotten what Draco told him when he recounted coming to his childhood home with Harry. It pained him to know that both Harry and Draco already had sad memories of this place. It was possible that this house fed on such things. Merlin knew the horrors he had gone through in this place. So many times in his life had he thought about moving, break down this house brick by brick, or a combination of the two and yet somehow he never could let himself let go of this house. A large part of him was stuck in this house. The events that took place here had shaped him as well as his life up until this point.

A flicker of sadness passed through those emerald eyes as they glanced around his living room.

Softly he moved his thumb over Harry’s hand hoping to soothe the pain away. Pain that he had unknowingly created while he was recovering. If only he had recovered faster then he could’ve saved both Harry and Draco from false grief. Neither of them should’ve had to experience that.

“Let’s sit.”

Harry nodded as he guided the younger to the couch. They sat side by side, their hands not breaking their hold. He cursed every moment in the past he had to let Harry’s hand leave his. Having been back in his home for the past days trying to re-configure a life which he defiantly remained alone had been difficult. They had spoken every day since his ‘spectacular emergence from the dead’, or so that’s what the Daily Prophet had called it about a week or so ago. Speaking through mirrors as they individually tried to make something of their separate lives would never be enough. He almost thanked today’s bloody paper for an opportunity to be physically together once more. Severus knew that he was still rather stubborn and unsure about being with Harry. That was one reason why today’s paper had bothered him. All the horrible things he thought about himself was relayed in the article; everything from his questionable actions leading up to the war to his Death Eater status. None of it was new ,but it was there in plain text with a photograph for the whole world to see and judge. From experience he knew the world judged harshly. Right or wrong ,truth or fiction, sometimes it didn’t matter at all. Sometimes the way you looked or one mistake made gave permission for the world to view you in a horrible light forever.

“Are you ever going to let go of that paper?” Harry chuckled nervously.

Relinquishing the paper Harry’s hand slipped from his own so that the younger could better read. He studied Harry’s face for anything as those emerald eyes scanned the fine print. Without a warning Harry started laughing, not a little chuckle,but a full outburst as if he had been reading the world's best joke. Stunned he didn’t know what to make of the reaction.

“You think this is bad?” Harry asked as he clutched the sides of his stomach, letting the paper fall to the ground.

“This is bad” he said picking up the paper and rereading it. There was nothing humorous about the article in the least. He furrowed his brows at the picture of him kissing Harry.

“I’m sorry Sev I don't see the problem at all.”

“You don’t see the issue with everyone in wizarding Britain, perhaps the whole wizarding world, having photographic evidence of this ?” He waved the paper around.

“Sev.” Harry’s tone grew serious. “There is nothing wrong with this .” Harry motioned between the two of them.
“If I dared risked receiving regular owls I’d be swimming in death threats.” He retorted just as serious.

“You don't believe that.”

“I know without a doubt a good chunk of the wizarding Britain alone would not accept what is clearly displayed here” he muttered looking at the paper again. “And who had gotten the chance to take this picture in the first place?” He was starting to feel on edge. He didn’t want anyone to start harassing Harry about this headline. He would rather disappear than let Harry suffer because of a ill placed kiss. He had been so stupid to show that level of affection in the open. At the time however, it felt that it was the right thing to do. It had been the right thing to do. He had to prove that he was alive and...

Two hands cupped his face bringing him eye to eye with Harry. “I love you Sev.”

His hands found home on Harry’s. Old habits wanted him to spout the list of reasons why they wouldn’t be together but he had already said those same three words to Harry; I love you . Taking back those words wasn’t something he were capable of. He loved Harry ,still that did nothing for the negative thoughts that had been a constant in his life. With Harry besides him the negative voices had dimmed to a whisper. One day perhaps he wouldn’t have them at all.

Harry smiled as he slipped his hands free from Sev’s face. No matter how many times it happened, he adored the way Sev would freeze whenever he said I love you. Those words would always bring Sev back to him from his thoughts.

“So the whole world might know. What does it matter any ways? All the important people in our lives are already knew I was in love with you before today’s paper. It is old news if you think about it that way.”

“All the important people?” Sev cocked an questioning eyebrow.

“Of course! Newt, Mr. Graves, Ron, Hermione,” he counted all the important people in his life on his fingers. “Those last two really came around to that fact. Draco of course is like our number one supporter. Remus figured it out for himself when,” He paused and for a second. He didn’t want to think about what had led to the moment he talked to Remus about Severus. Quickly he continued. “The Weasleys knew since last last Christmas, or Molly and the twins figured it out and the rest caught on afterwards.”

Severus looked even more concerned. He returned his hands to Sev’s. This action seemed to calm them both.

“Everything will be fine.” He gave a squeeze of Sev’s hand. “Forget about the Daily Prophet. Let’s just enjoy that tea you promised me.”

Severus nodded. With one hand movement the tea appeared before them. The other hand intertwined with his.
It wasn’t until just past lunch time that Percival had his attention pulled away from spending time with Newt and Darion by an eagle perching itself on their windowsill. His mood dropped at the sight of the proud bird that held out a talon clutched around a gold leafed envelope. Newt silently marveled at the bird as he cautiously removed the envelope. He knew the sender and he message even before opening it.

“I need to take care of this” he whispered before he went off to the empty room in their rented home.

They had been here since they were allowed out of the safehouse, yet this room didn’t have a single item in it. There had been no need for the room’s use until now. Moving about the room he transfigured a sturdy mahogany desk and a comfortable chair. Only once he situated his desk with several fountain pens and necessary stationery did he open up the letter.

The emblem of MACUSA shined brightly as the sun caught it from the nearby window. Pressing his thumb to the emblem the envelope unfolded neatly.

	Dear Mr. Graves,

Expect a series of owls within the next few days.

I am sure you have not forgotten protocol during your absence.

Sincerely,

Seraphina Picquery

President of the Magical Congress of the United States of America (MACUSA)

No sooner did he lay the letter down on his new desk did he hear a tapping from his window. Waving his hand, the window opened letting the first owl in. Soon after another, and another, and another owl arrived. Twelve owls arrived minutes within each other leaving his desk with only a sliver of space available for use. Carefully he tidied his papers into neat stacks. Now he had a third of his desk to work with.

A tiny cry stopped him from diving straight into his work.

Darion’s cry reminded him of a promise he’d made to Newt a long time ago. He’d promised to be there for his family. He’d sworn that he wouldn’t let work overshadow what was truly important in life.

He had promised.

Percival knew the well-bred business side of him was barking to get this work done at this very minute, but he needed to remember he was a father. Forcing himself to leave his desk he moved to exit the room. Trying his hardest to not to look at the stacks of papers, he made up his mind to try get some of the work done when Newt slept tonight.

“Percival?” Newt’s voice called from the living room.

Securing the door shut and locking it he went to his husband.

“Everything alright?” Newt asked rocking Darion in his arms.

“Da.” Darion babbled.
Percival scooped up his child. “Yes everything is fine.”

Draco smirked at the Daily Prophet. The picture of Harry and Snape was mildly entertaining, though his imagination at what their reactions would be was far more interesting.

A ringing pulled his attention from the paper and back towards the infirmary doors which McGonagall was strolling through. He was glad that she had stayed on as headmistress. There was no one better who could fill the role in his opinion, and it was a bonus that he didn’t have to fight to remain as Madame Pomfrey’s apprentice as he might’ve with a new headmaster or headmistress.

“Good afternoon.” McGonagall smiled.

“Good afternoon Headmistress. If there anything I can help you with?” He glanced over McGonagall quickly but noticed nothing that may have required medical assistance, then again he was still new to this. “Madame Pomfrey just stepped out to speak with Professor Sprout.”

“I only wanted to check in with you.”

“I have been rereading the texts Madame Pomfrey assigned to me and have taken inventory of our stocks.”

McGonagall gave a small smile. “Are you ready for the school year?”

“I’m sure that I could handle the students if that’s what you mean. I assisted Madame Pomfrey during my spare time last year.”

“I am aware of your volunteering, however I suspect working full time here will be vastly different. Just make sure that you take a break every now and then. If you’re anything like your godfather you’d work yourself into exhaustion.”

“Yes headmistress.” He decided it was best not to mention how Madame Pomfrey had already lectured him about that last year. Exhaustion caused more harm than good when it came to healing spells. Spells meant to heal needed tight concentration and depending on the severity of injury, lots of magical energy.

“I do hope you take that to heart.” Her eyes dropped to the newspaper he had been reading. He still thought about how he’d raised his middle fingers to her back when Harry and Snape had first kissed in this very infirmary. “How are they?”

“Same as always I suppose; stubborn and clueless.”

“That does sound like them.” McGonagall looked at her watch. “I must be going. I wish you luck with this upcoming year.”

“You as well.”

“I will see you at the Head Table for the welcoming feast tomorrow night.”

He nodded.
Despite how much he wanted it, Sev didn’t try to snog him. For some reason he had imagined that once he had told Severus not to worry about the words in the Daily Prophet that they would snog. That didn’t happen. Not even once did Sev come close to kissing him.

Instead they had spent time talking. He chatted at length about the Quidditch World Cup that was going to be taken later in the year, which led them straight into lunch. After eating some simple sandwiches Severus talked about the recent book that he had picked up. He tried his best to follow along yet most of the things Sev said flew far over his head. It didn’t matter though because the sound of Sev’s voice was soothing and had a lightness to it that lacked when he was lecturing. Even though the man wasn’t bouncing up and down or speaking rapidly like he had when talking about quidditch, Harry knew the lightness in the tone meant he was excited. It was almost silly to think that Severus could be so excited about talking of a potion text.

As they talked he noticed the body warmth and the presence of Sev, which he couldn’t get from talking through their mirrors. Being able to really see the man and feel him besides him made a world of difference. Having Sev so close made being back at Spinner’s End fine. Focusing on Sev kept the hurtful memories at bay. Never again did he want to be in this place without Sev. Never.

He turned his attention back to the subtle changes in Sev’s face as he spoke. “This is nice.” He hadn’t noticed that he said those words out loud, interrupting Severus until he realized why that silky voice had suddenly stopped.

He blushed as Severus gave his trademark eyebrow raise. Lowering his gaze he checked his watch. Instantly he frowned at what he saw.

“What’s wrong with your watch?”

“Yeah.” He shook his wrist but nothing changed. “It can’t be this late.” He turned over his wrist to show the face of the clock to Sev.

Severus leaned forward to study the watch. “That is the correct time.”


Harry looked at his watch again. Time always seemed to sneak up on him whenever they talked, but today it flew much faster than usual.

“Plans for the evening?”

“Hardly. I wanted to get an early start on dinner tonight.”

“Are you celebrating something?”

“Not really. Draco starts working at Hogwarts full time tomorrow. Since he has to attend the welcome back feast tomorrow night we would have to celebrate today. I wanted to throw a party or something but he shot me down point blank.” If Draco ever gave him the okay to let people in the apartment he was going to invite Sev at any given excuse. The thought of cooking together again was a real possibility now that...

“What’s on the menu?”

“Pancakes. Draco wants to learn how to make them. He’d mastered toast just this morning.” He smiled.

“Cooking is an important skill to have.”
He nodded. “Do you have any plans for tonight?”

“I’ve been getting back into the practice of brewing. Tonight perhaps I will work on something simple.”

“Knowing you ‘something simple’ would be an advance potion that no seventh year could possibly brew.”

Severus smirked. “I didn’t study potion for years for nothing.”

Harry smiled before looking at his watch again. “I really have to go check to see if I have enough ingredients for dinner,” he sighed. “If it’s going to be anything like teaching Draco how to make toast I’m going to need a lot of batter.” They both stood from their seats. “Thank you for letting me spend time here.”

“You’re welcome.” Severus held his gaze and he could feel his heart pick up pace a bit.

“Could I... Could I come back sometime?”

“Yes.” Severus paused for a second. “Though call me ahead of time so that I can make an effort not to be held up in my lab.”

“I don’t mind helping out if you ever need it” he offered as they moved towards the fireplace.

“I will keep that in mind.”

“I should go.” Harry remained staring at the fireplace. He didn’t want to leave. It felt so long since they had occupied the same space physically. “I should go.”

“Then go.” Sev teased holding out the jar of floo powder.

He shifted on his feet. Going back to his apartment didn’t seem all that great right now. Why couldn’t Draco just allow him to bring guests? In a heartbeat he would’ve dragged Sev into a pancake showdown.

“You will never leave at this pace.” Sev scoffed. “No sense in denying the inevitable. There are pancakes that require your attention.”

“Before,” Harry bit his lip.

“Yes?”

“Before I go,” he could feel his cheeks pink. He wanted to ask for a kiss. Should he ask?

“What is it Harry?”

“If we get some good pancakes I’ll bring some over.”

“Am I to be your guinea pig?” Severus eyed him suspiciously.

“It’s just pancakes.” he chuckled. “I promise not to experiment with food until I’m invited to cook with you here.”

“You won’t get such an opportunity if you remain standing there.” Sev motioned with the floo container.
“You’re right.” He slowly took a pinch of the powder in his hand. “Bye Sev.”

“Goodbye Harry.”

Severus went straight to the newspaper that he had left under the coffee table the moment Harry was gone. It was still bothering him. Without Harry there to distract him his mind recited the article with alarming accuracy. **Everything will be fine** Harry had told him that but he still held doubts. He looked at the paper once more focusing solely on the image. Silently he watched himself kiss Harry, it reminded him of looking into the mirror of Erised. For as long as he lived he wouldn’t forget than image.

“Fine” he muttered as he crumpled the paper. Things would be fine between them. If he did as Harry said, if he just ignored the papers things would be fine. And if the Daily Prophet was going to pose as a problem he might just use his skill set to correct that problem.

Harry said it would be fine. He believed in Harry. Yes, things would be fine.

“So how was Snape?” Draco asked with a smirk as Harry came out of the floo.

When he had come back to the apartment to see several couch cushions overturned he had searched for Harry only to find the place empty. Slight aggravation over the couch quickly disappeared as he readied himself to tease his roommate.

“He was a bit put off by today’s paper.” Harry sighed. “Have you seen it?”

“This one?” Draco lifted up the Daily Prophet.

Harry’s eyes widened slightly. “He will kill you if he ever sees that you bought a copy.”

“He was that put out?” Draco looked at at the paper. “I think this picture is rather flattering.” He wiggled his eyebrows suggestively.

“I think if I didn’t go over he would’ve gone on a mission to obliterate anyone who read today's paper. He didn’t like how our relationship was splayed all over.”

“Problems of dating a celebrity.”

Harry plopped down onto the couch. “How was your day?”

“Not bad. I should be able to survive the year.”

“Make sure that my sick bed remains intact” Harry reminded.

“I’m surprised they haven’t taken it for a Potter museum yet.”

“Maybe we should open up the museum ourselves.” Harry chuckled.

“It would make a profit” he mused. There really was a market for all things Harry Potter related out
there. It would be a decent way of sticking it to those darn fanatics.

“So dinner. I was going to surprise you, but since you are here,”

“You don’t have to go through the trouble.”

“We should celebrate a little. It’s nothing really. If you’re not too tired from work we can try out pancakes,”

“Actually Blaise asked me out for dinner tonight.”

“Oh, that’s fine.” Harry noticeably deflated. “You should go. We can make pancakes another night.” Harry pouted.

“Harry,” He looked into the pouting man’s eyes. “I was going to go regardless of what you said.”

Harry stuck his tongue at Draco. “You suck. I left Sev’s so that we can have a nice pancake catastrophe and you decide to go out with your boyfriend.”

“Oh, forgive me from pulling you away from mindless chatter.”

Sometimes Draco was such a prat.

“Maybe you can convince Snape to take you out on a real date.” Harry raised his hand to interrupt but Draco continued on without a beat. “Before you say a word. Spending hours talking through that mirror doesn’t count as a date.”

It didn’t? Their talks had to amount to a date. Sometimes they spent hours in front of their talking mirrors.

A real date.

He hadn't realized that they hadn’t gone out on a single date, which missed the whole point of being in a relationship wasn’t it? Draco and Blaise had gone on multiple dates, mostly dinners in restaurants where Draco had to dress his finest. Harry didn't need lavish dinners he was more than content to talk with Sev and enjoy actually getting to know one another without war or anything else looming overhead. Today fit his limited definition of a date, but Draco didn’t think so. Draco was more experienced in dates then he was.

Maybe he should’ve suggested to Sev that they should go out. But he wasn’t ready to face the press head on so soon. He’d have enough of the press when the ministry trials were underway after the war.

He told Sev that things would be fine. Things would be fine.

Actually going out would give the papers more of an excuse to bother him wouldn’t it. As much as he would like to show the world that he was happy with Severus, he couldn’t make the decision on his own. If Sev wanted to keep out of the public eye forever he would go along with it. He really didn’t need to make a huge announcement to confirm what was shown in today’s paper.

“Look, now that the word is out you could actually go out on a date. A real date.”
“I wouldn’t know what to or even where to go. I never been on a date before.”

“I could help you out with that. After my date.”

“Way to rub it in my face.” Harry pushed Draco from the couch, but the blond barely moved. “You will tell Blaise that I said hello won’t you? I would say it myself if you let him visit.”

“Not yet.” Draco said far too quickly. He really didn’t understand why Draco was so against it.

“Are you worried he will get jealous of how happy we are living together?” he smirked.

“Cute of you to think that.” Draco teased tapping his hand. “I’ll keep you in mind if things ever go south.”

“I am honored to be up for consideration. Drarry forever.”

“Drarry?”

“You know it’s our couple name. Draco + Harry= Drarry”

Draco shuttered. “Should I be worried that you thought about this?”

“I didn’t come up it.” he said throwing his hands in the air. “You don’t remember it floating around Hogwarts when we became friends?”

“I do remember people thinking we were shagging because one of us has the tendency to say and do things that can be misinterpreted.”

“So it’s my fault?” He batted his eyes and took one of Draco’s hands.

“Precisely. Why would you bring up this stupid Drarry nonsense now?’

“Because I want you to think of me when you’re on your date. Think about leaving me here all alone.” Harry awkwardly ran his hand over Draco’s cheek

Draco rolled his eyes. “Go use your brain power on something more productive then trying to ruin my date.”

Harry slumped in defeat. “I’ll try.”

“Stupid Gryffindor. Straighten up the apartment at least.” Draco shook his head as he left to get ready for his date.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 2: September 1st

September 1st had at last come and Draco was riddled with nerves. Starting today he would be responsible for the health of students of Hogwarts. That was an odd thought in itself. It wasn't something he had thought possible until a year prior. Majority of his life had been planned out by his parents, namely his father, since he was born. That life plan had consisted of taking the Dark Mark, supporting The Dark Lord, getting married off to some pureblood witch who would later provide him an heir, and working in the Ministry.

He looked at the faded shadow of the Dark Mark that blended into his pale forearm.

It was one thing that he had done according to his father’s plan. Everything else was as far separated from it as could be; he fought for the light during war, took up an apprenticeship with Madame Pomfrey and was still dating Blaise Zabini, who was a wizard not a witch. His father would’ve been disappointed in him. No his father was disappointed. His father would forever see him as a failure.

“What do I care” he muttered to his barely noticeable mark.

This was something he had tried to shake, but the wanting for his father’s approval sometimes snuck up whenever he doubted himself. Right now he was a huge bundle of doubt. Draco knew that he was far better off as he was now then how he would’ve been if he followed what his father had set out for him. If he had done everything expected of him it still wouldn’t have been enough. His father had made it rather clear during their battle in midst of the war how much he was detested.

Hard kicks came from his door. “Harry” he groaned at the insistent noise.

“Come on open the door.”

“Do it yourself” he shot back as he smoothed his hair in the mirror.

“Hands full” Harry spoke just as grumpily.

With a wave of his wand he opened the door. “Wizards remember” he stated at the wide-eyed look Harry gave him from across the room.

“Still takes hands to magically open a door.” Harry sassed back. He turned his attention back to the mirror. No matter how much he messed with his clothes or hair it wouldn’t matter, but it calmed him somewhat. “I’m starting to worry if the students will be able to handle getting treated by you” Harry humphed. “Your bedside manner isn’t great today.”

He heard a thunk. Turning from the mirror he saw a spread of toast, eggs, bacon, mash potatoes, sausage, hash browns, fruit salad, and oatmeal.

“Why did you make all of this?” Looking at the food made his stomach churn a little. This anxiety was worse then when he had to prepare for a game of quidditch.
“Because someone didn’t let me celebrate the official start of your job last night. Also, I want to make sure you eat something before heading over.”

He looked over the food again. “When did you even get up to make all of this?” Last night he had gotten back to the apartment late from his dinner with Blaise. Harry hadn’t been up when he checked in on his roommate. Thankfully there hadn’t been any midnight terrors as it would’ve added to the nerves and worries about working overnight at Hogwarts.

“4 am? Not too sure. I made a cake too, but that’s for later.”

A cake? He couldn’t help think that his parents wouldn’t have gone through any of this trouble. There certainly wouldn’t be an unnecessary celebratory cake. Harry was just the type who did things that wasn’t necessary. Even so he did appreciated it.

Although he didn’t feel like eating everything Harry had made, he joined his friend besides his desk where the small feast laid out.

“You don’t typically get up until much later” he pointed out as he took some fruit salad.

“That’s when I don’t have to do anything.”

“You haven’t had much of anything to do lately besides chatting it up with Snape” he teased.

“When I was living with the Dursleys... Nevermind.” Harry made a move to grab some bacon.

Talk of family was always like that between them. Harry didn’t like sharing much about the Dursleys as he did about his own parents.

Parents.

He didn’t like thinking about them today. It was best not to think about how they were doing in Azkaban. If he thought about it he would feel guilty for testifying against them. Thinking about them led to wondering how horrible the dementors were. Azkaban had to be terrible. All he knew about the place was rumors. Would his parents survive being there? Had his parents survived? Could he write to them? What would he write to them about? He had so many questions. He knew Sirius Black had been in Azkaban, he could ask Harry if the man told him anything- No. No, he wouldn’t open that wound. It would be too cruel to do such a thing to Harry now that he was more-or-less back to his usual annoying Gryffindor-ish self. He had to stop thinking about Azkaban. Had to stop thinking about his parents all together.

“Are you ready?”

“McGonagall asked me the same thing yesterday. I really don’t think it will be that crazy.”

“Unless you got someone who is after my record of infirmary visits.” Harry grinned, crumbs of toast falling onto his plate.

“Merlin, I don't want to even think of who would be reckless enough as you.”

“Would be a Gryffindor.”

“As if that were up for debate” Draco chuckled. Harry muttered something into his oatmeal that he didn’t catch. “What are you going to do today? I won’t be back for dinner and I might end up staying the night if any first years do anything stupid. First years always do something stupid.”
Harry looked to be thinking really hard about his question. “First, I might sneak into your room and jump on your bed-”

“I will not resist to hex you if you destroy my goose feather duvet” he cut in right away. It was one of the few luxurious items that he had left. He wasn’t sure if he would be able to sleep without it.

“I promise I won’t.”

“I don’t want to take any chances. Go bother Snape.”

Harry bit his lip.

“What’s wrong? It’s not as if you haven’t constantly fought to be in the same room as him before.”

“I blame you for pointing out that we haven’t gone on a date before. Now I can only think about going out and well... It’s not that easy bothering him in person anymore. I can’t just show up-”

“Merlin’s beard!” He sighed. “It’s not like Snape is gone anymore.”

There was a deafening silence that followed his words. Harry looked like a frozen statue with his eyes unblinking and his hands caught in mid air as he was about to take a bite of his toast. All light had drained out of Harry’s eyes, but before he could say anything Harry spoke.

“You’re right.” A forced chuckle escaped his friend.

“Harry,”

He hadn’t meant to bring it up. It was an unspoken agreement that they would pretend that Snape had never died, or that they both thought he had. Not a word was to be spoken about the visit to Spinner’s End or the past year of on and off tears. Harry wanted to forget all of that and he didn’t blame him for it.

They didn’t have to think about that anymore. Snape was alive and with that returned the way Harry would shine at the mention of his godfather’s name.

Some days it was just so frustrating to see the two still move about the same circle as before. Snape had survived and after the painful year without him he wanted Harry to be with the man as much as possible. Snape had to be suffering through that year apart as well; he knew it even if the man wouldn’t tell Harry that. Snape and Harry deserved time just to be a couple, but both of their reputations had already threw their personal life into the public eye. For as much as he teased about Harry being famous, having the whole world rain judgement on a barely started relationship wasn’t something he wished on anyone.

Things would be different if Harry was raised to use his reputation as he had. From young Draco knew the horrible things people thought about his family. One of the few lessons his father had actually taught him was how to turn things in his favor. The Malfoys were feared for their ‘rumored’ allegiance to the Dark Lord so his father used that fear to coerce many to his own bidding. There were still people currently in the Ministry that feared the Malfoy name. If he decided to he could use the connections that his father had set up. Even though his fortune was revoked there was still debts that he could cash in on his father’s behalf. If he had Harry’s fame he would’ve used it far more than Harry ever did. Saving the Wizarding World put quite a number of people in Harry’s debt, but Harry wasn’t the sort to cash in debts. The only time Harry had used his fame was to get him, Blaise, and Snape cleared of charges, which hadn’t been easy in the slightest.

Draco knew he shouldn’t think about that time. Not today. Not now.
“Eat” Harry insisted. “It’s going to be a long day. Maybe I’ll just sneak in with you back to Hogwarts.”

“I will not be brought into one of your half-baked schemes on the first day of term.”

“Kill joy.”

Percival had told him that soon Harry would pay them a visit, but soon wasn’t yesterday. And as the early morning mail had already come and went without a single letter from Harry he was sure that soon wasn’t today either. Newt was furthest thing from the poster child for patience right now, he couldn’t help it. The only moments in his life that he’d been patient was when working to rehabilitate creatures who had been abused and chained up by horrible smugglers. Helping build trust between physically and emotionally wounded creatures required bounts of patience. When it came to things that excited him, however he couldn’t keep still. The thought of having Mr. Snape and Harry over excited him to no end. Patience was running low. He had gone from waiting years to see the two men, to seeing them every few hours, to barely seeing them again.

He wondered if his antsy behavior was annoying Percival. Newt didn’t intend to be annoying, most people just found him to be so. Annoying, strange, and meek were the more common descriptors he had heard others use to describe him many times before. Percival never once described him using those words, but there were times Percival had called his actions frustrating.

Admittedly, having to deal with his tendency to get caught up in situations involving extensive cleanup after magical creature disturbances would be frustrating. After he had been permitted to assist Percival’s team on cases several years back, the MACUSA had created a special set of documents to report anything that he did. A whole stack of documents just to report on his actions. He always did a lot of things that weren’t really Auror-like so the reporting was always lengthy. Often he wondered if he posed more trouble than help to Percival’s team whenever he assisted, but every time he voiced that specific worry Percival would tell him it wasn’t a trouble at all. If he was in Percival’s shoes he definitely would’ve thought of it as trouble.

At least right now he wasn’t causing any mayhem to report. Maybe that’s what that eagle was about the other day. There was no way that the eagle came from anyone else but the MACUSA. Madam President was most likely inquiring if he had lost a creature or something. He wouldn’t make that mistake...more than twice. He had made sure to strengthen his locks on his travel case every few months just incase. On top of that when he went to feed his non-human friends he made sure to have roll call; Percival had been kind enough to make the list.

Newt looked to the hallway to see if Percival was coming, but his husband was dealing with another letter in their spare room. His thoughts circled back to the anticipation he had for Harry’s visit. Soon wasn’t coming fast enough for him.

“How do you think I’m annoying” he whispered to Darion, who was crawling in his playpen.

Darion’s large hazel eyes stared at him as if to look for the meaning of his words. Then Darion smiled and outstretched his small hands to him.

He offered a single finger, which Darion quickly caught and begun to move his hand side to side.
“That’s a no right?” he smiled.

“A. Aan.” Darion babbled.

Newt lowered his voice. “If I wrote to Harry you wouldn’t tell Daddy would you?”

“Da. Ahn.” Darion’s head wobbled in a way that looked like he was saying no.

“Good.” He smiled as he pulled a parchment and one of Percival’s pens he had left lying about after completing this morning’s crossword puzzle.

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**Love Potion or Imperius Curse?**

*Recent poll over the rumored relationship between Savior of the Wizarding world and Ex-Death Eater underway.*

*Cast your own vote now!*

Below the words were two columns that were growing up and down. It appeared that love potion was currently in the lead. Severus scowled at the damn thing. It would figure as much that love potion would be the perceived cause of Harry’s spontaneous attraction to him. He was a potion master so of course the masses would think it easy and highly plausible for him to have drugged Harry with a powerful love potion. Never would he do such a heinous act.

He had half a mind to march into the office of the Daily Prophet and straighten things out before it got truly out of hand, yet approaching this would make it worse would it? Despite all the hypothetical situations of how to reprimand the Daily Prophet staff had popped into his head last night, logically he knew that acknowledging to head of the Daily Prophet that it upset him gave those who wrote garbage for a living the power in this situation. He would rather stick his hand in boiling water than relinquish any power to these dunderheads. The best strategy was to not engage. Yes, not engaging was for the best however, that didn’t make the words bother him any less.

The blatantly idiotic theories of why he was rumored to be with Harry wasn’t necessarily what bothered him. What bothered him was the way others were reacting to it. The Daily Prophet seemed to go wild with this story pushing out nearly an entire paper on the subject. There some lengthy pages dedicated to anonymous comments supposedly mailed into the Daily Prophet from the day prior. Many were less than pleasant to read. One comment went as far as to claim that Harry would’ve been better off killed by the Dark Lord than to be in any sort of relationship with him. Severus doubted the writer would have the gall to send that message in if it weren’t for the anonymity. He’d like to see this unnamed commenter go head to head with the Dark Lord.

“Sev?” Harry’s voice interrupted his thoughts.

Picking up his talking mirror brought Harry’s cheerful face into view. As of late he brought the thing about everywhere he went. Harry’s random calls didn’t confine to any schedule or routine so it was always best to be prepared to answer as soon as possible.

“Hello Harry.” He kept his voice and facial expression neutral as he spoke. There was little sense in bringing attention to the paper as he had done the day before.

Harry’s smile always seemed to widen and his eyes lit up whenever he answered. Only Harry looked at him like this.
“You’re not about to brew anything are you?”

“No. I finished a batch earlier.”

“Good. Open up your floo connection?”

He was use to commands in the form of a question. This particular command wasn’t something he mind.

Moving to the fireplace he waved his wand around in intricate patterns allowing the hardly used floo to once again allow Harry to come through. Taking a step back he watched the fireplace sputter green smoke and then Harry all but toppled out of it. Immediately he stifled his laughter.

Harry smiled as he attempted to wipe the soot that had left dark smudges on his glasses. “Hope you don’t mind I came for some tea.”

“Something wrong with your kettle?”

Harry shook his head. “Not at all.”

Casting a cleaning charm, Harry and his living room rug was now no longer covered in soot.

“How much of a disaster was the pancakes?” he asked as he once again set his kettle to go about boiling water for their tea. If this was to become a daily occurrence his potions would suffer but he would get to spend time with Harry.

“Oh, we never got around to them. Draco, he’s such a jerk. He up and left me to go on a dinner with Blaise. Had to settle for something small last night.”

Mentally he noted how Draco and Mr. Zabini was progressing with their relationship. He didn’t want Draco to get hurt again if the two decided to end things. Not that it was his place to have a say in the matter anyway.

“Did you eat?” Harry asked as he found a comfy position on his couch.

He wasn’t sure if he had. One meal a day was sufficient. It wasn’t as if he had to keep up his energy to act as spy any longer. Not having that role eased some weight off of his shoulders. Old habits kept him from the recommended 3 meals a day rather than his busy work schedule. In this household he rarely ate all that more than he did during his time at Hogwarts. If Harry was going to visit him more often he probably should put more thought into the limited food he bought.

“I am not hungry.” There was no sense in lying about his pitiful eating habits. He had lost his little appetite after reading today’s Daily Prophet.

“Okay.” Harry’s eyes seemed to remain focused on him. Usually the curious Gryffindor would let his eyes wonder all over, but he hadn’t done much of that the day prior either. Perhaps it was the bad memories.

His own eyes drifted to the copy of the Daily Prophet he had recently abandoned. Harry’s eyes followed his path and frowned.

“You are still bothered by it?”

“You can’t just make a claim that things would be fine and expect the world to follow suit.”

“I’m banning you from reading this rubbish. It messes with your head.”
Harry promptly moved to the snatch the newspaper, tossed it into the fire and returned to the couch besides him with a triumphant glint in his eyes. It was the same look he had when he caught the golden snitch.

“Now that there’s no more of that we can get back to enjoying time together.” Harry placed his hand in his.

He looked from the tender touch to Harry’s face. It was ridiculous for a man like him to internally fall apart at the words Harry spoke or the soft gentle caress. Before Harry there had been no one who looked at him like this; looked at him as if he actually mattered to someone. Aside from his late mother no one in his entire life had claimed to love him. It still felt like a risk to give weight to the word love. It was a huge risk to let that particular word be held close to his heart. Believing in love wasn’t something he could have done before Harry.

With his free hand he carded his fingers through Harry’s hair. Emerald eyes seemed to grow in size from the simple action.

As foolhardy a risk it was to believe in love he swore he could see it every time those emerald eyes glimmered or when he received radiant smiles. If he had told his past self where he stood today he wouldn’t have believed it for a second. He wondered if he would ever believe that he was really here, alive, free of the Dark Lord and with someone saying that said they loved him. Logic told him that things weren’t going to be easy receiving love from Harry. Nothing was ever easy in his life. The greater world may not accept love between them but he had.

“Stop worrying about everyone else. This life is our own Sev. It’s ours to do with as we please. The war is done. We played our parts in it so now we get to live the way we choose. I choose to be here with you now. You don’t have to answer to anyone but yourself now Sev. What do you choose?”

What did he choose, that answer was easy. He knew what he chose the moment the unknown stirrings of his heart had been given a name. There was increasingly less excuses for him to hide behind. Their dynamic had changed. No longer could he hide behind secrecy due to the war or proclaim that they were teacher and student. As always it was just himself who stood in the way of openly expressing his choice to remain at the young man’s side for as long as he was allowed.

Harry felt heat creep up his neck onto his cheeks as he sat holding Severus’s gaze. They had been over this so many times that he had jumped straight past all the things that would typically move them in never ending circles. Severus was here, alive, and he loved him; that was all that mattered to Harry. If he needed to he would help Sev fend of death threats and sneering onlookers. Strangers opinions of him didn’t matter. He saved the world and that should’ve been enough for them. He wasn’t going to let anyone dictate his life anymore. If that meant being blacklisted by newspapers again then so be it. They would survive anything written. It was just words.

“What do you choose Sev?” he asked looking straight into those dark eyes. He could tell that Sev was trying his best not to occlude and that meant the world to him. It would be far too easy for Sev to push him away. Of course he wouldn’t let himself be separated from Severus again. If he could he would remain besides the man at every minute of everyday.

Slowly their faces inched closer. The thruming of his heart quickly grew in volume as Severus brought their lips together. His hands slid back into his long hair as he let Sev show him exactly what his choice was. Sev’s hand snaked around his head cupping the back of his neck to better steady it as he leaned in deepening the kiss. Somehow the kiss remained chaste aside from the extra pressure. He pulled Sev closer so their chests were flushed together. He didn’t want to let go
even as air became a necessity.

When they pulled away Sev flashed him a smirk that held pride but almost a tinge of possibly embarrassment. He could only goofily smile at the man he loved so much.

“I’ve forgotten about the tea.” Sev sounded almost alarmed as he moved his hands about allowing their floating cups and kettle to lay out in front of them.

He was tempted to tell Sev to forget the tea and continue snogging, but he knew anymore would be far too much too soon. Instead he settled for scooting close as he fixed his tea with some milk and sugar.

///

Harry sighed breaking the calm silence that had been placed after they had finished their tea. “What’s wrong?” Severus asked, unsure what brought on the sound.

“Today is the first day of September.”

“I do possess a calendar.” He had been aware of what day it was ever since Harry had mentioned celebrating Draco’s return to Hogwarts the night before.

“It just kind of hit me you know.” Harry sunk back onto the couch as if his body had grown suddenly very heavy. “Start of term. They’ll have new students at Hogwarts.” Harry paused, eyes trained on his ceiling. The action made him somewhat self-conscious of the gaze, but reminded himself that Harry was not looking for foundation flaws of his old house.

“You mentioned that Draco was going to attend the welcome back feast.”

“Yeah, he couldn’t get out of it.” Harry sounded disappointed.

“No one gets out of the welcome back feasts.”

“No even you.”

“Yes, not even I.” Albus had been very firm about his attendance at the welcome back feasts despite all his complaints on how it wasn’t necessary for him to be there.

“Do you feel weird for not going back? I feel weird about it.”

“Understandably so. You had been there for several years.”

“But you’ve been there forever!” Harry rebutted, taking his eyes off the ceiling.

Severus frowned at his word choice. He had been there significantly longer than Harry not forever. “You make it sound as though I predate the Hogwarts.”

“You know what I mean. Don’t you miss it?”

Did he? It was true that he had been at that school for a a large portion of his life. Its significance in his life changed throughout the years but it always felt more like a home then Spinner’s End ever could. There were memories of all sorts within the stone walls of Hogwarts. Not everything was bad when he resided there, most was but not all. Memories of greeting Darion into the world and
sharing a kiss with Harry besides the lake stood out as the few happy memories he’d made. One thing was for certain he wouldn’t miss the way others despised him, first as a student then as a teacher. Returning from the dead wouldn’t change the minds of those who always felt a strong loathing for him.

“Perhaps I miss frightening the first years.” he smirked. “Reducing house points and making unaware idiots jump were perks of the job.”

“You frightened more than just the first years” Harry chuckled. “If you ever feel like it you could still say ‘10 points from Gryffindor’.”

“I might if the mood strikes me.” Severus half smiled.

///

Sitting at the head table was so odd Draco thought as he settled into one of the many chairs. Only a year ago he was sitting with the students of his class. There was a lot of familiar faces on the tables below the slight rise of the head table. He caught the eye of Evyn, the young witch that had begged to be resorted last year. She gave him a little wave. Unsure if it would be appropriate to wave he settled for giving a very Snape-like nod of acknowledgement. The witch had come into her own last year, forming her own tight knit group. It made him glad to see his old house table buzzing with excitement just as much as the other houses. That sort of enthusiasm had lessened severely the year prior due to the war.

Rolf Scamander and Luna Lovegood, who was a year behind him, still could be picked out from the Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw crowd. On the Gryffindor table he kept trying to spot Harry in the mix, but Harry wasn’t a student anymore.

It was all so odd. Had Snape felt this strangeness when he first became a professor?

“You’ll get use to being up here” Madame Pomfrey whispered.

He wasn’t so sure that he would, still he nodded.

“Remember that they look up to us to guide and assist them.”

Her words weighed on his mind as the group of first years were led into the Great Hall.

///

Harry was over the moon with how today had gone. He didn’t at all mind how he had spent another day just talking with Severus. It might not qualify as a date by Draco’s standards but he didn’t care at all. Severus clearly chose to be with him. Without a doubt they were together. All thoughts of a ‘real’ first date could wait.

His smile widened as he noticed an owl with a letter perched on the coffee table. He wondered if it was Draco checking in on him. Plucking the letter he turned it over to look for the Malfoy seal, but there was none. Regardless of what happened to the other Malfoys Draco still used the family’s crest on letters. He hadn’t thought about Draco’s family in a long time. Draco seemed to be doing fine without them. But how fine could someone be without their parents? If he learned anything by befriending and dating a Slytherin, some people could hold back their pains far more than he could. Either Severus or Draco could be severely in pain and he wouldn’t know if they decided to shut him out.
Harry shook his head. Why was he thinking about that now? Everything was fine. Draco was happy doing something he cared about and dating Blaise.

Ignoring the way his mind was starting to sink back into darker thoughts he tugged the letter open. Instantly he felt better as he read:

Dear Harry,

How have you been? I wanted to invite you over for a playdate with Darion.

Percival said I should give you and Mr. Snape some time to get settled before I wrote.

Are you settled? I can’t wait to see you two again. Darion is waiting to spend time with you.

Sincerely,

Newt

Moving quicker than he had ever moved while not on a broom, he grabbed some stationary and scribbled a reply.

Hi Newt,

I would love to come over. Let me know when. I’ll be sure to bring Sev along.

-HP

“Take this to Newt right away please.” He instructed as he tied the letter to the owl’s leg and set her off into the distance.

Chapter End Notes

Hello everyone.
It's been a while but I'm trying to work on this story to update more. The tricky part is keeping it light.
I hope you are enjoying it so far.
Also if you are celebrating Happy Holidays!
Percival glanced at the digital clock that laid on his side of the bed. 1:00 am. Newt slept besides him soundly with only soft breathing sounding the space between them. The idea of leaving their bed to go tackle the mountain of paperwork left a foul taste in his mouth although, he rather do this than to get locked up during the day. That had nearly happened when another series of owls had come for him after breakfast. He'd promised to put family first.

Silently he moved, applying pressure to the mattress with his hands as he eased off slowly so the sudden spring wouldn’t wake his husband.

“Occamy,” Newt mumbled in his sleep. “They’re...choranaptyxic.” Newt rolled over with a smile on his face.

Percival had a difficult time not to whisper to his sleeping husband how much he loved him. He had a harder time not kissing every freckle along that beautiful face and returning to their bed. Work needed to be done.

Slipping from the room he entered their spare one. Several silencing spells were put in place so that his own noises wouldn’t disturb the peaceful sleep that took place beyond it.

He faced the stacks of paper sizing it up as though they were his most recent opponent. There was more daunting piles back when he was in his real office a month prior to them leaving America to be here for Harry. The forms he had to send in to request his leave alone was close to half of what laid on his current desk.

Sitting down at his desk he picked the nearest file and began reading.

An hour and a half later he heard Darion’s cries. Quickly he went to his son.

“Shh. You are okay” he whispered as he pulled Darion from his crib. “I’ve got you.” He rocked gently as he moved back into the soundproofed impromptu office.

Darion gave him a questioning look as he entered the room.

“Don’t tell mommy that I’m working.” He dimmed the lights in hopes that it would help settle Darion back into sleep.

Darion didn’t want him to get anything done as he preferred to be rocked. Bouncing on the knee while he sat at his desk was not going to cut it tonight. Every time he tried to reach for a paper Darion would fuss.

Summoning Darion’s sippy cup from the kitchen caught Darion’s eyes. Shaking the sippy cup, Darion reached out his hands to the drink. Those little hands grasped the handle straightaway placing the sippy cup into his mouth. With his son occupied he attempted to return behind his desk again.

Darion squirmed in his arms as his little feet trying to kick the paper out of his hand.

“Mercy Lewis.” He stood up right away. “I’m glad to be a wizard.” he chuckled as he levitated a
few documents in front of him as he continued to rock his son. Reading important documents while constantly moving back and forth wasn’t the best, even so he wasn’t going to deny his son the comfort he needed to head off back to sleep. “You are a lot less handful than your brother” he mused as Darion chugged his sippy cup with a content look on his little face. When Credence cried in the night it took far more than just a sippy cup and a little bouncing. He had a myriad of memories of sleepless nights trying everything known to man to get the wailing to stop.

He placed a kiss onto Darion’s head.

The knots of nervousness released Draco around 3:00 am as the Hogwarts infirmary stood as empty as it was after the welcoming back feast. He had constantly rechecked the stock of stomach soothing potions and Dreamless Sleep potions ever since he’d left the Great Hall. According to Madame Pomfrey those two potions were the most commonly used on the first night. He had to agree as there were a few student he saw stuffing their faces so full at the feast that he expected them to either roll out of the room or promptly grow sick. Looking at the Dreamless Sleep potions he thought about Harry.

Harry could handle being alone couldn’t he? His stupid roommate would be fine. Even so he couldn’t help think about the nightmares that still plagued Harry. If he had a patient that had vivid night terrors at least he could help them.

“Malfoy get some sleep.” Madame Pomfrey said handing him a warm thick blanket. “Remember-”

“Exhaustion won’t help anyone.”

“Exactly. If anyone comes in we will know.”

He nodded.

“Malfoy.”

Draco sprung from the bed at Madame Pomfrey’s voice. “What’s going on? Is someone-”

“Relax Mr. Malfoy” the medi-witch motioned with her hands to take in a calm breath. He complied with the nonverbal cue. “Nothing is going on. The students are most likely still asleep.”

“Alright.”

“You have survived your first night. Things should be a bit smoother moving forward.” She smiled. “I suggest that you go to the Great Hall and get some breakfast. According to the course schedule Minerva gave me, the first years are taking Potions and Charms this morning. If anyone acts like I think they will we could expect at least one patron this afternoon. Take breaks while you still can.”

Darco moved to the bathroom. He looked somewhat haggard as Harry typically did when he woke up. His blond hair had lost it’s refined look and his clothes although spotless were rumfulled. This had to be remedied.

The Great Hall was nearly empty when he entered.
“Draco” the singsong voice of Lovegood called to him. His eyes fell quickly onto the Ravenclaw who had decided to dawn a strange looking necklace that seemed to be made out of several different materials that shimmers and changed color.

“Good morning.”

“Would you like to sit with us?” Rolf Scamander asked, inching over even though there was ample room if he did want to join them.

“I won’t be staying long. I have to be back at the infirmary before any student decides they need to pay madame a pomfrey a visit.”

“It’s odd you know, seeing you up there.” Lovegood said with a tilt of her head towards the head table. “Odder still not to see certain professors.”

He took a good look at the head table. Only McGonagall, Hagrid and Professor Sprout were sitting there this morning. Snape wasn’t going to join them among the head table again this year. This time it wasn’t because Snape was thought to be dead. Draco wondered what his godfather was going to do. For as long as he knew him he was a professor, although it didn’t take a genius to know that he didn’t exactly love teaching Potions.

“I hoped that my grandparents would come back to teach.” Rolf sighed into his oatmeal.

“It had been more entertaining around with them” he agreed.

Hagrid caught sight of him and gave a small wave. There was so much strangeness to being waved at by the half giant. He had made things so difficult for Hagrid after the hippogriff incident. Without Harry around he wasn’t sure how others would react to him. Madame Pomfrey would have to speak to him but no one else from the staff had to unless it was for a medical purpose.

“I should go and talk to Hagrid. It is best that I know what creatures he decides to introduce now so I can prepare.”

“Wait Draco.” Lovegood stood up.

“Did you need something?”

“Here.” Lovegood reached behind her neck to unlatch the bizarre necklace and held it out to him.

Unsure what to do he stared at the jewelry, if it could be called such a thing. Rolf was motioning for him to take the thing. Hesitantly he held a hand out.

“It’s for good luck.” Lovegood explained. “Thought you might need it.”

“Thanks.” He tried not to appear put off by the thing. It was rather... well ugly. If anyone else had given it to him he'd expect it were a prank.

“You don’t have to wear it as a necklace. It can be a bracelet.”

Lovegood was definitely too weird for him.

Lovegood twisted the necklace around his wrist a few times finally latching it together.

Tucking it into his sleeves he moved towards the head table.

“Nice of ‘er to give ya that.” Hagrid mentioned.
He hid the unsightly thing further up his arm as he ate.

Before he finished his meal a owl dropped down delivering a letter. Right away he opened it.

_Dear Draco,_

_May the new wave of students possess enough brain cells to keep from blowing themselves up in Potion class so that you will not be overwhelmed with workload on your first day._

_Sincerely,_

_Severus Snape_

A smile spread across his face which he quickly turned into a smirk. Carefully he folded the letter and tucked it into his pocket.

The ugly bracelet that Lovegood gave him slid slightly. Mentally he laughed to himself at the different approaches people used to encourage him on his first day.

“Percival?” Newt yawned as he turned over. “Percival” he reached out a hand only for it to meet the empty space besides him. Stretching he let out another long yawn.

“Good morning.” Percival’s voice reached his ears before he saw his husband walk into their bedroom.

“Was Darion up all night?”

“He went down after a half hour.” Percival placed Darion on the bed besides him.

“Good morning.”

Darion patted his face as if to get him to wake up.

“Aaa. Da.”

“What are you trying to tell me?” He scooped up Darion so now that they were face to face.

Darion touched his cheek so that he was looking at his son’s hazel eyes.

“Da. Da. aa da.”

“What about daddy?”

“Aa da a.”

He looked to Percival, who just shrugged. “You are better understanding him than I am.”

Darion pouted.

“Sorry.” Darion patted his knee. “Why don’t we go and get something to eat? You can tell me all about it then.” Darion began to bounce a little.

“He seems to like that idea.” Percival chuckled.
Percival felt a little betrayed as Darion continuously babbled during breakfast. The phrase ‘da’ which they both was used to refer to him was used every other incoherent word. Darion was clearly trying to tell Newt that he was working last night. Newt was listening intently to ever babel trying to piece together what Darion was saying. He wasn’t going to worry Newt with the paperwork he had still to do.

“Percival.” Newt whispered as Darion stopped babbling long enough to messily eat his pureed breakfast. “I still have no clue what he’s been trying to tell me.”

Percival held back a laugh. “Today promises to be a nice day we should go out.”

“Umm..” Newt looked at the window quickly then down.

“What are you hiding?” he asked leaning over the table.

“Nothing.”

“Mma aa.”

They both turned his attention to Darion, who had started to cover nearly all his face in the pureed squash Newt had made.

“Are you all done?” Newt jumped at the distraction.

Darion scooped a handful of the food into his mouth. “Ma aa” he said hitting the table side closer to Newt.

“Are you trying to tell me something about mommy?” he asked looking curiously at Newt’s face, which was trying to not look guilty. It made him feel better that Darion wasn't only relaying his secrets.

“Mmmaa aa.” Darion continued to tap the table leaving messy finger impressions on its surface.

“Darion do we have a new creature friend in the house?”

Darion shook his head.

“We don’t do we?” He asked looking directly at his husband.

“No.”

“No one escaped did they?”

“Nope.” Newt said proudly.

“Good.” As long as it wasn’t creature related he didn't have to worry about whatever it was Newt was hiding. “I see no reason why we shouldn’t enjoy the beautiful day.” He reached over the table to lift up Newt’s face. Newt leaned forward bringing their lips together.

For as long as he could he would delay his work to be with his family.
Without the necessity of going back to teach at Hogwarts, Severus found himself attempting to stick to his typical summer routine. From morning to late afternoon he would brew potions he knew would be commonly used in Hogwarts infirmary. Afterwards he would leisurely read or if he could handle the off chance of socialization he’d take a walk. If he remembered to eat cooking and cleaning took up a few minutes of his day.

But there was almost no need for him to continue just as he would. Hogwarts didn’t need him any more. There was a new Potion Master already formulating lessons, which he had dreaded teaching year after year. Someone else was going to fill in just as in the year prior. The routine which gave him semblance of normality was unnecessary. Still he once again went into his lab and prepared his work station. If he didn’t brew what else could fill up the long stretches of time?

These days seemed longer than usual. When he was teaching there seemed to be hardly any time to brew every little potion, grade papers, instruct students on how not to blow up a cauldron, patrol the halls, attend Death Eater meetings, or speak with Albus.

Albus.

Severus didn’t like these long days; it gave too much time for regrets. He carried around far too many of those.

He looked expectantly at the talking mirror that rested besides his pestle and mortar. Harry would call him soon.

Should he call Harry?

Harry had only stopped by for two days it was unreasonable to think that Harry would come over every day. When Harry was here he felt that he still had some role left. With Harry badgering him with endless chatter his mind would momentarily forget all the regrets that he carried around. For every moment they were together he felt like someone else, someone better, someone worthy of the “I love you’s” and hands intertwined. More than anything he wanted to be what Harry deserved but the negative voices that had grown to be his lifelong companion remained and screeched once Harry’s warmth left his side. In this house his father’s voice echoed loudly as if it were infused within the very walls. And there were new voices, ones of people he never met but words he had read over and over in the Daily Prophet.

“Focus” he muttered to himself.

He needed to keep brewing if only to lessen the imaginary voices long enough for Harry to call. Just long enough so that he didn’t give the voices more fuel by reading the garbage sprouted in the Daily Prophet again.

Severus took some petals placed it into his pestles and began finely grinding them. Focus. All he needed to do was focus on brewing.

When Harry woke it was far later than he wanted it to be. The time on his watch read two in the afternoon. He’d completely lost his chance to invite Severus over for lunch. So many possible plans were now tossed out the window.

“Draco!” He fumbled out of bed. “Draco! Why didn’t you wake me up?” Scrambling he put his glasses on and looked around his room for his talking mirror. Flipping his blankets over and
shaking them didn’t help him find it. “Draco If you took it again.”

There was no response. “He’s at Hogwarts” he sighed. He knew Draco was at school helping Madame Pomfrey. Draco was probably bandaging up some poor first year and here he was sleeping way past noon. What exactly was he doing with his life?

He didn’t want to go down this train of thought right now. Severus. He wanted to see Severus.

“Where is that stupid mirror?”

He lifted up his pillow but it was empty. Checking the dresser and the bathroom turned up nothing. Finally he found the mirror titering on the edge of the couch’s arm.

“Sev. Sev” he called out to the dimmed surface.

“One moment.” Severus said gruffly.

He could see Sev’s profile clearly due to the low bun his hair was in. Without that curtain of hair hiding the man's face he could see just how taut his cheekbones were and the way his nose dipped into its hook. The image of Severus so focused made his heart beat pick up. His eyes studied the slight changes on Severus’s face as his eyebrows knitted in concentration then soften with something along the lines of satisfaction. As Severus bend over a thin strand of hair fell loose from the bun. Harry thought it cute how the strand was pushed away with the back of Severus’s hand in a way that proved it was a practiced action. Broadly smiling he silently watched the way Severus moved.

After another minute Severus waved his wand over the cauldron and turned towards him.

“If you’re busy I could call again later.”

“Any later and I would be starting another potion.” Severus took in his appearance. “Did you only now wake?”

Harry tried to smooth out his hair. “Draco is usually my alarm clock.”

“You can’t rely on others to rise at a sensible hour of the day.”

“I know” he pouted. “What are you working on?”

Severus looked at his cauldron. Harry wondered if he had forgotten what he was brewing, but that was a ridiculous thought. Severus probably had a methodical list of brewing that he followed.

“Draught of Peace.”

“Is it almost done?” He tried to peer over the cauldron but that was impossible with the way Sev’s mirror was angled.

“How exactly should the Draught of Peace look like when it is complete?” Severus asked in his lecture voice.

“Turquoise.”

“Correct Mr. Potter.”

“Does that mean Gryffindor is awarded points?” He joked.
“No.” Sev smirked.

“It was one of the hardest potions you ever taught us. I doubt I could ever make it properly.”

“It is a difficult process that to the untrained can be rather anxiety provoking.”

“By the time you finish brewing you’re going to need to drink it to calm down.”

Severus let out a muffled chuckle. “How many drops of Hellebore?”

“Is this a test?”

“Perhaps.”

“Am I allowed to come over if I get it right?”

“No reference allowed.”

Harry chuckled. “Okay. Hellebore?” He thought back trying to remember back to when he brewed it. He needed to get this right. “Exactly seven drops!”

“Well someone did retain something I taught.”

“Do I get to claim my award now?”

“Very well.” Severus sounded indifferent but he could see the half smile clearly.

“I’ll get ready and head over.”

Severus watched as Harry abandoned the mirror, rummaged through his drawers and ran into what he assumed was the bathroom before he was able to let the connection cut.

A silvery vapor rose from his cauldron signaling that it was finished. Carefully he set aside to cool off. Severus looked around his lab noticing that it wasn’t in the best state since he had brewed potion after potion while waiting for Harry’s call.

Securing the door behind him he climbed the steps from the basement.

Harry fumbled out of the fireplace. His shirt was misbuttoned and Harry didn’t even bother to brush his hair as a large chunk of it stood directly up in the air.

“There was no need to rush over.”

“I should’ve been here ages ago. Sorry for oversleeping.” Harry tugged on his misaligned shirt.

“We didn’t have a scheduled meeting.” He stared at Harry’s shirt.

The drastic misalignment of buttons were bothering him. His fingers were itching to straighten it out. The way the last two buttons in particular were bunched was driving him insane as Harry kept tugging the edge of his shirt into place. If Harry didn’t properly fix this he was going to snap. This needed to be fixed.

Stepping closer he reached out for the stubborn clothing. He quickly freed the first button and placed it in its correct place. As he was about to do the same to the next he felt Harry’s breath hitch
beneath his touch. Wide emerald eyes looked at him with something that he hadn’t seen before. They both stood frozen with his hands gripping Harry’s shirt. Harry’s face was turning a bright red.

Severus quickly dropped his hands. “Fix your shirt. I’ll go make tea.”

Harry’s face blush deepened. “Okay.”

Severus left as Harry started to realign his buttons.

Disgusting unloveable mistake.

He shouldn’t have acted on his compulsion. He didn't have a right to lay a hand on Harry like that.

Who would want to be in a relationship with a vile man like Severus Snape?

Only a love potion could be the cause!

You’re undeserving of love.

Harry potter would be better off dead than be with the world's slimy-

He banged the kettle to drown out the voices that were rising up. He hadn’t intended...

Slightly smaller arms laid on his. He tensed at the sensation before he eased.

“Sev.” Harry whispered placing his head against his back for a second. “You don’t need to apologize.” Harry guided him to turn to face him. “Look.” Harry blushed as he did look over him. “No harm done.” Harry bit his bottom lip as though preventing himself from saying something. “I have an idea.”

“What sort idea is it?”

“I have a few actually,” Harry bit his lip again. “For now why don’t we make a late lunch early dinner. I doubt you ate anything yet.”

“I don’t have much food in the house.”

“You don’t need much to make pancakes.” Harry smiled.

“Very well.”

Percival noticed that Newt was constantly looking at the sky as they laid out a picnic onto their back lawn. Newt had to be expecting something. He’d thought Newt would jump at the chance to go into town but he had been adamant about staying close to the house. As much as he wanted to trust his husband that a creature hadn’t been on the loose Newt’s actions concerned him. He tried to wrack his brain on what creature that flew might have escaped. There was Billywigs that could’ve easily slipped out unnoticed.

“A!” Darion squealed pointing to the sky.

His heart returned to a calm when he realized it was a normal bird flying overhead. The fresh air felt so good after spending two sleepless nights at his desk. Darion seemed as delighted with the
outdoors as Newt was. When his son wasn't pointing out birds in the sky he was grappling at the ground, laughing at how the wind moved the long blades of grass moved.

“Look at that cloud!” Newt pointed out to the oddest shaped cloud. “Doesn’t it look like a niffler?”

He turned his head to the left and the right but he couldn’t make out what his husband could see. Perhaps he lacked the efficient amount of imagination to find pictures in clouds. They only looked like clouds to him.

“He.” Newt took his hand and setting it to point into the sky. “Right there,” Newt moved his hand in a circular motion. “That’s the niffler’s head. And there is his bill and that's the body.” Newt smiled fondly back at him.

“I see it now.” Slipping his hand down Newt’s he leaned closer.

Newt blushed moving in closer. Newt pressed his lips onto the beauty mark on Percival’s left cheek. He enjoyed the soft scratching of Percival’s light stubble taking place.

“I love you.” Percival smiled.

“I -Darion!” he pulled back from Percival to stop their son from putting an earthworm in his mouth. “That creature has feelings Darion. Give mommy the earthworm. Please.” He held out his hand.

“mm.” Darion didn't want to give up his new discovery.

“We need it to be kind to all living things. Give it to mommy.” Percival said with a hint of sternness to his voice.


“You are hurting it.”He pointed to the worm. “Ouch.”

Darion looked at the worm in his hands with tears in his eye.

“It's alright.”Percival picked up one of Darion’s empty baby food jar and transfigured it into a clear bug container. Newt smiled as he handed the container over and dug up some soil to place inside.

“It'll be happier in here.”

Darion looked at their encouraging nods. Their son's small hand released the worm into the container and laughed at the way it wriggled.

“Looks like we did get a new creature friend after all.”Percival smiled.

“I love you.”

Harry couldn't help smiling as they moved about the kitchen. At first it was slightly awkward with the both of them trying to make the batter without communicating with the other. It really didn't take two people to make the simple pancake batter but Harry enjoyed every moment he could
‘accidentally’ brush his hand over Severus’s in the process. After that button incident he wanted Sev to touch him more. Wanted more kisses. He hadn't figured out how to accidentally kiss Sev yet.

Currently he was left staring at the low bun Severus had yet to get rid of. Severus held a similar concentrated look as he had while brewing when he poured a particularly measured amount of batter into the hot pan.

“Harry.”

“Yes?”

“Focus.” Harry looked down at the bowl of batter he had been mindlessly stirring. Some of the batter had spilled over onto his hand.

Severus scoffed. “Must you always be this much of a scatterbrain.” Severus teased.

Harry slowly began to reach for Severus with his batter covered hand.

“If you dare attempt what you are currently thinking-“ Severus threatened without looking at him.

Those words were encouraging his rebellious side to definitely splatter some batter onto Sev. “Are you going to send me to detention if I do what you think I’m trying to do?” He moved a little closer as he spoke.

“I do have several cauldrons that I could make you scrub.” Severus said sternly, which was not at all threatening as he placed the finished pancake onto a large plate.

“I already said that I would help out with that didn’t I.” He smiled.

“Accio.” Severus muttered sending the bowl of batter out of Harry’s hands to him. “Go wash up.”

“Fine.” he laughed as he moved over to the skink.

Severus watched Harry at the corner of his eye. There was no telling if the younger man was going to cause any mischief.

Strange. It would take Merlin knew how long before seeing Harry in his house became a more commonplace occurrence. He wanted that.

“You really don’t miss it?” Harry asked suddenly as they took a seat.

Racking his brain over their last conversations, he realized Harry must’ve been talking about Hogwarts.

“I feel I have dodged a lengthy year of dimwitted students who rather focus on anything besides their lessons.” He busied himself with cutting his pancakes. He didn’t fully care to talk about Hogwarts again. “I for one am glad to leave the mess of the inevitable incidents in potion class in someone else's hands. If you are so keen to go Minerva would be delighted for a visit.”

“Would you come with me?”

“No” he said quickly.

Last time he couldn’t get out of Hogwarts fast enough. He had no right to go back... not after...
Harry thought about a visit. With Draco working at the school he would have a decent excuse for a visit. But going back would mean dealing with the first years looking at him in or the older students snickering about him being with an ex-professor. Maybe it was too early to deal with that. No one gossiped more or took as much stock in the Daily Prophet as the students of Hogwarts.

“I think Draco would be angry with me if I popped in and stole the spotlight. Besides I like being here so much more.”

“This place hasn’t a fraction of what Hogwarts offers. What possibly could you-”

“It has you.” Sev turned away from him. Harry wondered if he was embarrassed. Sev tended to get short with him whenever he thought the man was embarrassed.

“Eat so you can stop pestering me.”

He smiled to himself as he watched Severus dig into the pancakes out of his peripheral vision.

Percival was in his makeshift home office when yet another owl dropped by. Sighing he stood up feeling the creak of his spine from the prolonged sitting. If he had known the amount of paperwork he would still be receiving from the MACUSA he’d rather return to his office in Manhattan then let it clutter his temporary home. It was a real wonder that anything got done in his department nowadays. Working so hard after being freed from Grindelwald's grasp allowed him to have a leave this long. Still it wasn’t his fault that they had got entangled between a war or had made friends halfway around the world.

Sighing he looked at the calendar. In bold red was the date he was expected to be back in New York for a meeting with Pickery.

Some days he longed for New York, but nothing was there for him besides a desk with his name on it and bumbling coworkers, who seemed to have given up on respecting paternity leave.

He filled a shallow dish with some water for the owl as he retrieved the letter in its talons.

Without looking he tossed it amongst the rest of papers that were steadily getting thorough.

He glanced at his wrist watch; half past 3:00 am. With today’s additional owls it appeared as if he hadn’t made a dent in his work.

“Mercy Lewis” he muttered stretching out his tired body.

A knock came from the door. “Percival are you in here?”

There was no use hiding it any more. With a wave of his hand the door opened. Newt stood with Darion in his arms.

“I saw the light on when I went to get Darion’s sippy cup.” Newt’s eyes glanced over his desk.
“What is all that?”

“MACUSA,” he said flatly looking over his stacks.

“Oh,” Newt continued to skim the stacks, a tint of worry creeping into those sapphire eyes.

Newt couldn’t possibly be as calm about standing in this room as his husband appeared. He watched as Percival leaned against his desk, which was covered in neat stacks of documents. Percival’s sleeves were rolled up, and a grimace on his face as he took another look at a thick folder in his hand. Nothing about Percival could be read as out of place as his exhaustion was hidden rather well under the years of practice of presenting as the head of his department. After spending time out of New York, returning to Hogwarts, and having a child Newt forgotten that sooner or later Percival would have to resume his job. It worried him a little because it felt like he had to start sharing the man with others again.

When they were both teaching it hadn’t been a problem at all. Both of them were only co-teaching for a short time at Hogwarts. Percival returning to the MACUSA on the other hand would take away large moments of their life together. Just looking at this pile of paperwork was evidence enough. He knew Percival was going to always set time aside for him and Darion, but that would cost his husband late nights and early mornings to combat the timezones. Of course that was if they remained here. *If*. They had already been gone far too long.

“Come here Newt.” Percival spoke softly opening his arms up.

He latched onto them without having to be told twice. He shrunk a little to better nuzzle Percival’s chest. A small huf of laughter escaped his husband before a light kiss was placed on his forehead.

“This is hardly anything. I will have it done before Mr. Potter decides to take up that offer of visiting Darion.”

“You know about that?”

“You think I wouldn’t notice an owl carrying a letter not involving MACUSA business.”

Percival’s hand moved through his hair soothing him nearly instantly. “I can handle a little paper work.”

He nodded.

“Go back to bed Newt.”

“You don’t have to sneak off at night. You need to sleep too.”

Percival looked at the desk then back to him. “Let’s all go back to bed.” Percival dimmed the lights as he led Newt out of the room.

Chapter End Notes
Happy new year!
May everyone have the best year ever.
Huge thanks to all who support my works.
Dear Harry,

I’m so glad that you can come over! Percival and I will make lunch. I really can’t wait to see you. Yesterday Darion found an earthworm. Percival says that our little one is going to be just like me when he grows up. Right now we are allowing Darion to take care of the worm. We’ve yet to come up with a name for Darion’s pet. We can discuss names when you come over.

The figure enclosed is a Portkey set to activate at noon.

If tomorrow at noon doesn’t work we can do another time. Let me know.

We are all waiting to see you and Mr. Snape again.

Sincerely,

Newt Scamander

It was a no brainer that he wanted to visit Newt and Mr. Graves as soon as possible. Harry turned the dragon figure as he readied his reply.

Without having to hide his work from his husband and with explicit permission to do so, Percival was able to tackle the staggering paperwork in the daylight. If he worked with breaks here and there to be with his family he would finish it all in perhaps two days. He wasn’t sure when Mr. Potter was going to come over but he had told Newt that he would get this done before then. He had to get it done. The sooner he got the work done the sooner he could go back to being fully committed to his family.

“This needs to get done” he muttered as he picked up the next file.

Newt smiled at the way Darion still obsessively stared at the earthworm they had adopted yesterday. Perhaps with very little encouraging Darion would follow in his footsteps. He couldn’t wait until Darion was old enough to go on crazy adventures all over the world looking for creatures.

A tapping sound from the window echoed in the relative quiet of their living room. An owl tapped his break against the glass. The brown barn owl gave a little hoot as he opened the window.

“Hello. You’re not for Percival are you?”

The owl hooted again sticking out the single letter in its talons.

“There’s some water and food in the kitchen if you need it” he said as he took the letter.
The owl just hooted and flew back into the sky. For a moment he watched the owl shrinking into the distance. Turning his attention to the letter he was very relieved to see that it didn’t bare any MACUSA markings. The letter was from Harry. Nervously he opened it. Within seconds he was filled with excitement.

“They’re coming!” Newt exclaimed as he waved the letter he’d just recieved. “Darion!” he moved to his son. “They’re coming. Aren’t you excited!”

Darion smiled at him. “Ma ahha.”

“You’re going to have so much fun today!” He lifted Darion and spun around. Darion let out an adorable laugh as they moved in a circle. Smiling he placed a kiss to his cheek. “Come let’s tell daddy the good news!”

“Da.”

“Yup. Daddy.”

Nuzzling Darion he carried his son down the hall. At this moment he wanted to do nothing more than burst into song at the top of his lungs to let Percival know. Being obnoxious would go against the promise that he wouldn’t disturb Percival for a few hours to get some work done. “Percival?” He cautiously stuck his head through the ajared door. Their extra room resemble more like Percival’s office in New York.

Percival looked up from his paperwork with a smile.

“Did someone want to say hello?” Percival instantly abandoned his papers, moving to pluck Darion from his arms.

“Da.” Darion said reaching out to touch Percival’s face. Darion scrunched up his face while running his tiny hands over Percival’s face.

“I know I have to shave.” Percival laughed.

He stepped closer to kiss his husbands prickly face. It was a shame that neither Darion or Percival appreciated the sensation of Percival’s stubble.

Percival was very aware of how Newt lingered the kiss to feel his stubble. No matter how Newt appreciated his scratchy face he wouldn’t let himself grow out a beard. He thought beards were untidy and the last time he had donned one was due to the fact that he had been kidnapped by Grindelwald.

“Everything alright?” He asked noticing the letter in Newt’s hand.

Newt’s eyes shined as bright as polished jewels “They’re coming!” Newt feverishly jumped up and down. It reminded him of a small child barely containing themselves before opening a gift.

“Who?” he feigned ignorance. There were only a few people in this world that Newt would be that animated at the news of their visit. And there was no mystery who would have wrote to paying them a visit in the first place.

“Mr. Snape and Harry!” Newt exclaimed joyfully. “They said that they are going to come over for a play date!”
“When?”

“Soon.” Newt flashed him a smile.

Percival chuckled. “I deserve that. When are they actually coming?”

“This afternoon!” Newt took a second to look at the room, undoubtedly trying to see how much paperwork he had managed to complete. “...Is..Is that okay?” Newt’s voice sounded soft as if he were expecting a scolding.

He had told Newt that he would be able to finish all of his work before Mr. Potter had scheduled a visit and now it seemed like that wasn’t going to happen. He’d only been able to manage so much the previous nights. It mattered little however as he wouldn’t deny either his son or his husband a visit. Heck, he deserved a break and he couldn’t think of anything better than chatting with Mr. Snape while Mr. Potter entertained Darion. The last thing he would do was scold Newt for such a anticipated visit.

“Don’t worry about this Newt.” He motioned to the stacks upon stacks of papers. “What time are they expected to be arriving?”

“Noon.”

He smiled warmly at Newt. “That gives you just enough time to ready the scrapbooks” He ran his hand over his stubble. “And gives me enough time to properly shave.”

Harry was nervous. He had a very short time to convince Sev to accompany him to visit Newt and Mr. Graves. He’d asked Sev if he was busy today (luckily he wasn’t) but he didn’t mention the family. After everything he felt like it was time to visit them. They hadn’t seen each other for some time. Hopefully Sev would agree.

Severus had to agree. There wasn’t enough time to debate due to his late waking again. Marching to the floo he tossed the powder and stepped out of the fireplace in Spinner's End.

The living room was empty.

“Sev?” He started towards the basement where he knew Sev’s lab was. The whole house was eerily silent. “Where are you?”

“Behind you.”

“Dam it!” he yelped, clutching his chest at the sudden jump.

Sev smirked wickedly.

“Really you don't have to be so quiet. Could you make noise like the rest of us.” He tried to take in a calming breath.

“Forgive me” Sev smirked.

Harry shot him a half-hearted glare. “I don’t think you are sorry at all.”

“I admit I found some amusement in the display of you jumping at the sound of my voice.”
“Git .”

“Brat.”

“Sev....” he bit his bottom lip.

“What is it? Have you come to rope me into some ill thought out scheme of yours?”

“In a way yes” he chuckled. “I have a portkey.” He held up the small figure of a dragon that Newt had sent with his letter. Severus was looking at it with a suspicious look.

“I don’t have the proper equipment to deal with dragons.”

“You know that we wouldn’t go dragon hunting.”

“Do I?” Sev quirked a brow. “It is a possibility if we are planning on visiting Mr. Scamander.”

Harry smiled at the brilliance of Severus knowing exactly who would give him this sort of portkey. Looking at the dragon figure he wondered if Newt would invite him to visit a dragon, not that he really wanted to. No he definitely had enough of dragons in his life.

“It won’t be my first time dealing with a dragon if that does end up happening” he reminded with a grin.

Severus crossed his hands over his chest. “That is not as comforting as you may think.”

Harry turned the dragon figure in his hand. “They wanted us to go visit Darion.”

“With Mr. Graves around I suppose we should be safe from running into fire breathing creatures.”

“So you’ll come with me?”

“If you rather I stay-”

Harry grabbed Severus’s hand placing the dragon figure between their hold firmly. “We are going together. They want to see you too. Neither of us have been out of the house for a while.”

“Must you be so insufferable?”

“I thought that was a trait you liked about me.” He smiled at the way Sev’s lips fought not to form a small smile.

“When are we expected?”

“At noon.”

Severus turned over Harry’s wrist to glance at the watch. “11:58. Cutting it close aren’t we Mr. Potter.”

Harry laughed as he intertwined their hands more comfortably around the portkey. The figure began to rattle in their hands as the time drew near. Mentally he counted down the last minute. He flashed Severus a smile right before he felt the tug at his navel and the world around them waved into a different place.
Severus had to settle Harry as their feet found the cobblestone path that once was the wooden floor of his home. He had been pulled along on this venture without any time to prepare. Draco’s words about Harry’s spontaneity should’ve been heeded.

“Thanks.” Harry’s smile was even more radiant in the sun then his dim house.

It had been so long since he had been outside.

Suddenly he remembered that the Daily Prophet was out to catch the both of them together to sell more scandalous papers. Trying not to appear too obvious of this concern he looked around. Much to his relief there were no houses around. Their new surroundings looked to be effectively secluded with wide stretches of wild grass leading to a forest that seemed to encircle the only house that the cobblestone pathway led to.

“Come on!” Harry tugged his arm urging him to follow the path. Together they walked the short path. The moment the front door opened Harry ran to Mr. Scamander who had Darion in one arm balanced on his hip and captured Harry in a half hug with the free one.

“It’s so good to see you again!” Mr. Scamander said cheerfully.

“I forgot how big Darion was. Can I?”

Mr. Scamander handed his son to Harry with a wide smile. Harry looked as enamoured by the child as when Darion was a newborn. Darion was equally enjoying Harry’s company as he tried to pull off Harry’s rounded glasses.

“Mr. Snape!” Mr. Scamander caught him in a full hug which he just awkwardly allowed.

“You don’t have to be so tense Mr. Snape.” Mr. Graves said from the front door. “Several barriers were set up weeks ago to ensure no one could come here unless invited.”

That eased him enough to offer a pat on Mr. Scamander’s back before their hug ended.

“Come on in.” Mr. Graves motioned with his hand to enter. Harry bounced with elation as he went in with Darion in tow. “It’s a pleasure to have you here.”

Severus wasn’t sure how to interpret Mr. Graves’s words. It wasn’t as though he expected to be suddenly ambushed, but he had this need of being on guard. Perhaps it was because this was the first time he was visiting another’s home for the sole purpose of spending time together. The times that they spent in each other’s companies it had been at the comfort of his own personal chambers back at Hogwarts. Now he found that he was in the position of trying to figure out the rules within this new environment. There had always been some sort of rules to moments of socialization that he had to figure out before he made a fool of himself, which was one thing he highly intended not to do.

Harry on the other hand seemed perfectly at home in the Scamander-Graves household. The younger man had no trouble whatsoever taking Darion and settling in the light gray couch that sat parallel to the strange enclosure that housed what appeared to be Darion’s toys. Of course Harry would be so calm, the young man never held regards to rules or had to worry about social cues growing up.

Severus lacked that luxury. Mr. Graves surely would’ve expected him to know how to be a proper guest. Should he have brought something? Lucius had often chastised him about not bringing anything when visiting the Malfoy manor. This was hardly like visiting the Malfoys, for one the Malfoys would never greet him as kindly as these two had. Perhaps it wasn’t a custom for this
family to expect anything from visitors. Still he felt at a disadvantage not being in a place that he
knew.

“Would you like a tour of our home Mr. Snape?” Mr. Graves asked.

“It would be hardly a lengthy tour” he commented noting the pair hadn’t magically expanded the
inside of the house as he would’ve expected. “If you feel compelled to show every inch of this
place it matters not to me.” He made sure to sound as disinterested as possible. A tour would
alleviate some of the uncertainty.

“Will you be joining us?” Mr. Graves asked Harry, who currently was attempting to step over the
low fencing of the enclosure in the middle of the room.

“I’m fine.” Harry said then quickly added “unless you think I should come with you.” Harry
looked directly at him.

He scoffed ignoring the presumption that he needed to be accompanied as if he were a helpless
cild. “Mr. Scamander please see to it that Harry remains in that enclosure during my absence. We
wouldn’t want him to get into any mischief resulting in this being the first and only visit to your
home.”

Harry narrowed his eyes at him. Mr. Scamander looked between the two with a very confused look
on his face.

“Mr. Graves please see to it that Severus lightens up. Remind him that he’s among friends.”

Percival shook his head at the two wizards. Poor Newt seemed lost at the two’s words. “We won’t
be long. I would appreciate it if the state of the house remained as it currently is.”

“What do you two think we could get up to while you are gone?” Mr. Potter asked sounding
almost offended.

“Trust me when that I speak from experience when I say a lot” Percival said casting a quick look at
his husband.

Newt blushed deep red. “We won’t do anything.”

Pleased with that promise he gestured for Mr. Snape to follow him into the house.

“It is modest living three bedroom, two bath” he said as they went about the tour. Mr. Snape was
looking at everything as though he were a house inspector. The action didn’t bother him in the
slightest, though he would consider it to be rude if anyone else had glared at his home.

Soon he was leading Mr. Snape outside. It was another beautiful afternoon, one that he might’ve
missed if not for the visit.

“Our backyard is rather spacious due to the lack of neighbors, although Newt wouldn’t mind if a
friend or two decided to build nearby.” Mr. Snape would pick up on the hint. This place was
unbothered by either the muggle or the wizarding world. Both Mr. Snape and Mr. Potter could do
with a bit of that. And if either of them fell in love with the spacious planes of grass and majestic
mountain peaks in the distance he wouldn’t mind one bit to live next door to the two.

“It appears rather secluded.” Mr. Snape noted.
“There's a town about a thirty minute walk. We didn’t want to be surrounded by too many people just in case Newt decided to let something from his case take a stroll. And Darion is still young.”

“Your son has indeed grown.”

“You haven’t seen him much since your disappearance.”

He looked to see Mr.Snape’s reaction, but there was none. The man was presumed dead for a year; that had to invoke some sort of reaction. Mr.Snape’s face nor mannerisms gave away anything to how he may perceived his false death. Mr. Potter may have a better read on the man, even so Mr.Snape didn’t appear to be hiding his thoughts on the matter rather was lacking thought.

Sometimes Percival thought about how he had been thought of dead after Grindelwald had been apprehended. Sometimes he wondered what would’ve transpired if he hadn’t been found. And sometimes he could feel the flicker of anger he had felt chained in that dark place left to be forgotten.

How couldn’t Mr. Snape have even a miniscule reaction to being dead? To be thought dead perhaps was nearly monotonous to someone who had countlessly risked his life day in and day out as Mr. Snape had. Or it was possible that Mr. Snape had already gotten over such a thing during his absence. He couldn’t say what was it either way. Mr.Snape was far more closed off then he was.

“Both Mr.Scamander and Darion appear well.” Mr. Snape continued as if he hadn’t spoken.

“Newt has been waiting for your visit ever since Mr. Potter’s graduation. Even with all this to ourselves,” he motioned to the the wide fields of grass, the forest and the mountains around. “it’s been a constant questioning of when you two would come. I prevented my enthusiastic husband from sending numerous invitations so that you may settle a little.”

Mr. Snape nodded in way that he read as appreciation.

“Mr. Potter and yourself appear well too. One would hope that means our gift hadn’t gone to waste.”

“Your gift has been used several times for effective communication.”

“I’m pleased to hear that.” He really was. After such a emotional reunion it would’ve been heartbreaking to know that Mr.Snape hadn’t tried to at least speak with Mr. Potter. In addition he had noticed the increasing nastiness of the articles concerning the two wizards. He hoped that that hadn’t deterred Mr.Snape yet again from being with Mr. Potter.

Newt settled into the playpen that he had to extend to fit both himself, Darion, and Harry.

“Darion this is Harry. Remember? Can you say Harry?”

“Ah. ah-a-h.”

“Harry.”

“Ah-a-ah.” Darion repeated.

“We are trying to get him to say more.”Newt said to Harry. “Darion show Harry your new friend.”

“Ah-a-ah.” Darion smiled lightly tapping the glass of his earthworms’ container.
“Wow.” Harry exaggerated his voice while looking at the earthworm wriggling through the soil. “You have a very cool friend Darion.”

“Da ma a ah ab.” Darion’s smile broadened.

“Yes daddy and mummy helped you” he translated to the best of his ability.

“Newt says that you still haven’t named it.”

Darion looked at the worm appearing to be thinking hard about something. “Ba!” Darion exclaimed.

“Ba?” Harry asked looking to him for an explanation

It was a new combination of sound for his son, which made him very happy.

“Ba.” Darion repeated pointing to the worm.

“Ba is the worm’s name?” he asked making sure he understood.

“Ah!” Darion nodded.

“That would be a yes.”

“That’s a great name.” Harry waved at the earthworm. “Hi Ba.”

“Ba. a Ba.” Darion mimicked the way Harry waved.

“I wish we could’ve come sooner.” Harry mentioned as Darion remained caught up in waving to his friend. “I’ve been held up in my place for what feels like decades.”

“You’re welcome to come over whenever you want.”

“It would be great to come bother you every now and then to give Sev a break.”

“Are things okay with the two of you?” He sort of expected the two to be less sarcastic to one another. Although that was just a part of their personalities.

“Not to brag.” Harry looked to be rather proud of himself. “but we’ve been spending lots of time together at his house and talking on our mirrors. Draco says that all we do is talk.” Harry rolled his eyes. “All he does is go on fancy dinners with Blaise.”

“Does that bother you? Not going out.”

“Not really. It’s not like I have much to compare it to. I haven’t been on a first date. I want to... It’s for the best that we don’t go out though.” Harry lowered his voice into a whisper “It's because of the papers.”

“They haven’t been nice at all.” Newt agreed.

Harry wasn’t shocked at all to know Newt had read the papers. He, on the other hand, was avoiding reading anything about himself or Severus. It was all rubbish after all.

“I don’t want the Daily Prophet to ruin what Sev and I have. Draco says that we should just make a
public statement, but the things in the paper...” he shook his head. Severus wouldn’t like him
telling anyone, not even Newt, how the paper affected him. It pissed him off how it attacked
Severus’ confidence in their relationship.

“Maybe... you shouldn’t do anything yet but...you shouldn’t hold back just because it makes others
uncomfortable. There is nothing wrong with you loving Mr. Snape. Absolutely nothing.”

“Thanks Newt.”

He looked back at Darion, who was still transfixed on the earthworm. Darion was so big. He knew
he saw him at his graduation even so, when he thought about Darion he still pictured a newborn. In
his mind Darion was still this tiny thing that had again sparked his amazement at magic. Now
Darion was old enough to move around and show interest in things. Not reaching out to Newt after
the war was still a huge regret he carried around inside.

“I’m sorry that I shut you out last year.”

“Harry,” Newt looked directly at him. It always was shocking whenever Newt looked someone in
the eyes. “It’s okay. We understood why. No one can truly live if they are constantly looking back
at the what ifs. Darion won’t remember anything from his first year of life...What’s important is
the time that both you and Mr. Snape can spend with him now.”

A few tears trickled down his cheeks. Hastily he wiped away; he shouldn’t cry. If he cried then
Newt would think something was wrong. Nothing was wrong. Everything was fine. He was fine.
Newt, Mr. Graves, and Darion was fine. Severus was fine. Severus was alive and they were all
together again. They all could be happy now.

“Harry?”

“I’m sorry.” He took off his glasses to better rid himself of tears.

“Ah-a-ah?” Darion crawled over to place his tiny hands onto his knees. He tried his best to give
the small child a smile, but he still wanted to cry. “Ah-a-ah.” Darion repeated softly as he crawled
into his lap. Harry bent down to hug Darion. His heart pulled at the way Darion’s little hands tried
to grasp him.

Harry slowly pulled away from Darion. Those large innocent hazel eyes were silently asking what
was wrong. Darion couldn’t understand, he was too young. No child should understand what he
was feeling. Without Voldemort around he was sure that children just like Darion wouldn’t have to
come to understand all the pains he had.

“Thanks Darion.” He smiled at the little boy.

“Harry.” Newt’s soft voice was too gentle, it made him want to properly burst into tears.

“I should go wash my face” he said hastily. “Where is your bathroom?”

“Around the corner.”

“I’ll be back okay Darion.”

Darion tapped the back of his hand.
Newt didn’t know what to say to Harry as the young man gently placed his son back onto the blanketed ground of the playpen and left down the hall.

Harry didn’t have to feel guilty about not being around Darion last year. The prior year was so overwhelmed with grief. How could he ever blame Harry for not reaching out to them when they were reminders of a time thought to be have gone forever. All that time crying and holding out for a miracle, although that had come true in the end, wouldn’t be easily forgotten. And he didn’t even have an idea of the horrors that Harry had to personally face during the battle of Hogwarts. Things reported in the papers could only go so far. It was much in the same as when he had to report to Percival about the death of Credence Barebone. As much as he loved Percival, his husband wouldn’t truly know what it was like to be so helpless pleading for Aurors to spare the life of someone they only viewed as a dangerous Obscurus.

“Ma.”

“He’ll be okay” he whispered. “Sometimes people get sad and that’s okay.”

He would’ve preferred to let Harry get all his emotions out in a deep sob then push it away.

“Do you know Mr. Potter's future plans are?” Mr. Graves asked as they walked around the perimeter of the house so he could see the strength of the barriers.

“I haven’t asked.”

“You haven’t?”

It wasn’t a topic of conversation that Harry had yet brought up. Was he supposed to ask? Was that a part of being in a relationship with someone? What would it matter if he did ask? It wasn’t as if he had a say in Harry’s future. All he could do was focus on the problems at hand, namely the Daily Prophet. If the Daily Prophet didn’t grow bored of the scandalous idiotic dribble on Harry’s lapse in sanity for dating him then Harry might not even have a future to think about. Severus itched to read what else nonsense had been written. He wouldn’t. Reading lies wasn’t helpful in the slightest.

He looked at Mr. Graves.

Had he read the articles as well? What did this man think about them? Did the printed lies sway the American’s view of him?

Unlovable.

Disgusting.

You were better off dead. Dead. Dead. DEAD.

“Mr. Snape?”

He pinched the bridge of his nose. Breaking down from these aggravating voices was not going to happen. Letting Mr. Graves see him in a similar state once was enough for a lifetime.

“Mr. Snape.” Mr. Graves placed a hand onto his shoulder. “What is it? You don’t have to hold back. We are friends aren’t we?”
He remembered all the times Mr. Scamander and Mr. Graves spent with him and Harry at Hogwarts. Remembered the conversations, the scrapbooks, the moments of laughter among the couple that filled his once empty dwelling. The married couple were the closest things he had to friends in his life. These friends didn’t care at all about his reputation. From the moment they met they had pushed him and Harry together. Two people unwilling to let him remain stuck in his stubborn ways. He owed much to the couple.

“It’s alright to let a friend see you not at your best.”

As if those words released a glamour, Severus noticed the tired look of the American's face, the barely visible lining under his eyes, and the slight patch of stubble that had been missed in recent shaving. These were all the first signs of overwork that he had been acquainted to many times over. Severus had no idea the cause of this stress colored appearance. Mr. Graves didn’t at all grow exhausted during their time of working on Defense against the Dark Arts lessons. Right now however the man looked to be fastly approaching to the type of exhaustion himself had experienced during his last year of teaching.

“You noticed haven’t you.” Mr. Graves signed pushing back his hair, Severus spotted a few more white hairs. “MACUSA has been writing.” Those simple words seemed to explain quite a lot. “I’m glad that you and Mr. Potter have come. We could really use a distraction as perhaps you two as well.”

“The Daily Prophet.”

Mr. Graves nodded. Of course, Mr. Graves would know about the papers.

“As easier said than done it is to pay the articles no mind you must ignore them Mr. Snape. “ Mr. Graves turned, the light highlighting the new white hairs.

“You do not have to concern yourself with what is written on my character. There will always be those who will make every effort to promote slander. I am use to such things.” Mr. Graves seemed to want to say something but he quickly spoke “What of this MACUSA business?”

The mention seemed to age the man once more. Severus could make out even the slacked bunching of his tie and the wrinkles on his forehead. Seeing Mr. Graves in such a state made him more uncomfortable than when he'd first stepped into the home. This man should've been thriving in unbothered bliss with his family.

“Madame President had always expected me to come back. I had lost count of the days,” Mr. Graves looked at the house. “I have to go back to New York soon. Newt is already worried about the stacks of work in my office.” When Mr. Graves faced him again worry was evident on his face. “I don’t know how to tell him that I will be leaving.”

“Is that safe?”

“Darion is one, soon to be two. He doesn’t need my magic constantly anymore. But he is too young for apparition. I’ll have to leave both of them behind...”

“Mr. Graves.” He placed a hand onto Mr. Graves’ shoulder the same way that he had done moments ago. “I’d be willing to assist you in any way I am able to.”

“Thank you. You don’t know how much I appreciate that.” Mr. Graves smiled. “And the same goes for you too. We will be there to help when you ask.”
Severus thought that the couple had done more than enough for them. It was because of their lessons on Combined Magic that Harry had been successful for defeating the Dark Lord and he had a theory that it was in part their Combined Magic that he hadn’t died on the battlefield as many had believed.

**You were better off dead** his father’s voice whispered in his head.

“Let’s go check to see that your husband hasn’t been roped into any mischief.”

Mr. Graves chuckled. “I think it would be more so the other way around.”

“Mr. Scamander where did Harry go?” Mr. Snape’s voice asked making Newt jump.

“He’s in the bathroom.” He motioned to the living room “No fires. Nothing out of place.”

Percival smirked at his response.

Carefully Newt lifted his legs over the walls of the playpen as he carried Darion.

“Ma a a bb.”

“Do you want to say hello to Mr. Snape?”

Darion stared at Mr. Snape with a face that could be interpreted as deep thought. Newt wondered if his son was trying to place where he had seen the man’s face before.

“S. s.” Darion tested out the new sound. “s-Sa!” Darion burst into a laugh reaching out his hands towards Mr. Snape. “Sa. ah-a-ah.”

“Yup Mr. Snape and Harry.”

Darion was leaning further and further from him trying to grasp Mr. Snape’s arm.

“How about some lunch?” Percival swooped in.

“Ma!” Darion tapped his chest.

He laughed at his easily distracted son. “Alright. Could you help me Percival?”
“As if you have to ask.” Percival smiled pressing a kiss to his cheek.

Severus inferred from the way he was abandoned by the couple that he should go seek Harry. Mr. Scamander didn’t appear troubled, but he felt a need to check in on Harry. The tour of the house made it feel less like he was sneaking around in unfamiliar territory. Years of spying kept his mind busy taking note of the smallest things like which floorboard creaked or what doors were shut. The silencing spells could be felt on one of the doors which was serving as Mr. Graves’s office. There was a side of him that was tempted to break in and collect as much information as he could before being found out, however there was no need for that. MACUSA information wasn’t important for him to know. There was no one he had to report to anymore. He wasn’t invited here to spy.

“Oh,” Harry exclaimed as he exited the bathroom. “Sorry. Were you waiting-”

Severus looked first for signs of injuries, but found none. Next he reached out his magic just enough to test Harry’s Magical Core. Everything seemed fine.

“Don’t tell me you want to go already Sev. We’ve been here only a few minutes. Did Mr. Graves say something that upset you?”

Severus stepped closer. There was a wet spot on Harry’s cheek. Behind thick glasses he could make out a hint of puffy eyes. “It looks as though you were crying.”

“I wasn’t.”

A lie. This was a lie. Why was Harry lying to him? What happened between him and Mr. Scamander?

“Harry,” he began but was stopped when Harry placed a hand onto his chest right over his heart.

“Come on Sev,” Harry’s smile didn’t reach his eyes. “Let’s go join our friends. If we don’t they’ll think we are up to something.”

He tried to speak again. Doing so was somehow difficult with Harry's hand resting above his heart. It wasn’t only the weight of Harry’s hand that he focused on it was the way their magic was attempting to reach out to one another.

“Let’s go eat with them...Just like before.”

“Different surroundings” he pointed out. The uneasiness of this fact crept up again.

“The place shouldn’t matter when you’re surrounded by people who care about you.”

“Do we need to send a search party for the two of you.” Mr. Graves’ voice called from, one would presume the kitchen.

“If you aren’t planning to do anything,” Harry’s eyes looked at his lips. “Then we should go.”

He placed his hand over Harry’s as he stepped closer. There was a noticeable spark between their magic. “We will not be doing anything while in another’s home” he spoke with a finality that his heart wished to reject.

With a quick turn he left catching Harry mutter “git” to himself.

The rest of their visit went well. Whatever had seemed to bother Harry was no longer a problem.
The dulled look in Harry’s eyes didn’t occur once while he chatted with Mr. Scamander about quidditch as Mr. Graves attempted to feed Darion mashed food that didn’t look at all enticing. Mr. Graves seemed to regain his youth when he engaged with Darion.

Over his year spent away from everyone recovering he had dim recollection of what it was like to be with the couple and Harry in the same room. The longer he sat watching Harry and Mr. Scamander smile at each other and Mr. Graves combat Darion smudging pureed food against his crisped shirt, he found himself lacking the overwhelming sense of otherness he often had when dining in the Great Hall or at the Malfoy Manor.

This visit was completely last minute and somewhat overwhelming to readjust to, however he mentally made a note to let Harry drag him to every visit from here on out.

Chapter End Notes

It's my birthday so I had to put up a chapter!
I hope everyone is enjoying the fic so far. I'm still working to balance out my want for angst with the happy fluff I know this series is in desperate need of.
As always thank you for sticking with all this.
Next update should be in March. Until then have a wonderful day and a great week. :)
After seeing how well Mr. Graves and Mr. Scamander were doing Severus felt as though he had to do more in regards of his relationship with Harry. Brewing the day away could only push aside the things he needed to face head on for so long. For all the talks he had with Harry they didn’t discuss the future. He had ideas of his own place in the world but what of Harry? Harry was still young with the whole world for his to explore and yet as far as he knew Harry hadn’t done anything since graduation. There had been no mention of what Harry wished to pursue out of life.

If he had even a fraction of opportunity or riches Harry had at his age he would’ve long gone from Spinners End, that had once been a large goal of his younger years.

Severus looked at the cracked tiles and the peeling walls. One could hardly call this disheveled house appealing. Today it looked far less like a house compared to the still vibrant mental images of the Scamander-Graves home. There wasn’t much he could do about that. No matter how much he put into fixing up this house it wouldn’t resemble anything close to that home.

Pushing thoughts of home improvement aside, he opened up the flimsy wallet he had used for the past several years when in the muggle world.

There wasn’t much money in it. There rarely had been a moment in his entire life when he had carried more than a few pounds. A few pounds were more than enough for what he had planned for today. He had a little sum of wizarding currency, but for what he planned to do he didn’t want any trace of his steps in the wizarding world. Growing up muggle sometimes proved to be a blessing in disguise. For one he didn’t have to worry about any wizards coming to his home to personally attack his character or deface his property; there would be a lengthy list of those who would’ve tried such a thing. If this outing were to gather some ingredients for brewing he would have little choice to head off to Diagon Alley. He didn’t need to go near any heavily wizard populated area today.

He looked himself over quickly to make sure that he didn’t stand out. A long coat took the place of his more preferred robes. Underneath he wore a long sleeve button up and dark pants; all perfectly muggle. He looked to the talking mirror that had rarely left his side since he promised to talk to Harry nearly every day. Today he wouldn’t bring it along. Having a pocket mirror that could be used as a means of communication was as about non-muggle as could be. If he were caught talking to what others would perceive as his own reflection he would be fighting off police trying to escort him to somewhere with padded walls. This was one thing he couldn’t risk. For today he didn’t want to resort to using any magic that could trace him to his destination. He had already told Harry that he would be busy all day. Despite this, a part of him wanted Harry to accompany him on this trip.

“Not today” he reminded himself.

Harry couldn’t know about this. Picking up the aged tote bag that was barely holding together with the help of magic he headed out. He gave a glance around him as he locked the door both with his key and a muttered spell. The neighbors didn’t pay him much mind in all the years he had been living there, most people kept to themselves. Spinner’s End wasn’t exactly the vision of a tight knit community, but the muggles that lived around were hard working individuals.
It had been a long time since he’d last walked down this road since he could apparate in and out whenever he wanted to leave his home. Walking reminded him of his mother.

There was always some light in his mother’s voice when they walked into town. They often had to walk fast to make sure that they made it back in a time his father defined as acceptable. From young he had learned how to keep up with her quick strides that made it seem like she were gliding across the broken pavement. She would point out things to him along the way...

“That right there is Ms.O’hear” his mother’s voice spoke with a tint of cheer to it, something he rarely heard, as he passed by an old lady. “She gave us some bread last week. A very kind lady.” (Too kind. The old woman had died before his mother from a heart attack during a burglary) “and look over there,” his mother pointed to a path that led down away from the houses. “beyond that path you’ll come across a stream that connects to a lake. I like that stream reminds me of the Babbling Brooke.”

“Babbling Brooke?”

“Voices in the water that talk nonsense, it’s funny I use to-” his mother quickly stopped as if her lips were suddenly sewn tight.

“Will you take me? I’d like to see it,”

His mother’s eyes widened. “Don’t mention I told you about it to your father” she whispered in a frightened tone.

“You didn’t-”

“Promise me” she interrupted gripping his shoulder so that they were looking at one another. Genuine fear shone in her eyes. “Promise me you won’t say a word.”

“I promise” he said right away.

“Good.” Her grip eased and her face softened. “Look there’s the bus.”

“Why don’t we ever go on it?”

“...Come on if we hurry we might be able to beat the rush.”

Pushing away the memories Severus stepped onto the bus. It was odd to think about his mother outside of her dying days. Paying the fee he moved into the back of the bus. As the bus began to move he could almost see the image of his younger self trying to keep up with his mother.

His mind drifted during the duration of the ride.

When his stop came his mental walls were once again reinforced, but the aged tote bag, the one his mother used, grew heavy despite it being empty. The feeling was ignored as he approached the sight of the large public library ahead. He'd come here for a very important reason.

There was a peace to this place that he hadn’t felt in a while. Perhaps it was the silence perforated with hushed voices and turned pages that reminded him of the days Lilly Evans use to bring him here. Libraries gave a sense of safety ever since she had introduced him to it. He’d learned a lot from this place. Over the years he’d gone down nearly every aisle. Today he’d go down one he hadn’t any interest in before.

If Severus were anything he was a logical studious man. Right now he lacked adequate knowledge
on a particular subject and so as any logical person would he came to conduct research. He moved
down the aisle that read **nonfiction: self help** and skimmed to the shelf that read **relationship/dating advice**. Plucking every third book for a decent sample size he placed the neat stack onto an empty table.

One particular title caught his eye the *Thrill of First Love*. Out of the all the books he scanned this one appeared to be the most straight forward text. Straight forward was exactly what he needed. He tossed it and a few others into his bag. During check out he kept his face still as stone in a disinterested yet stern look so that the elderly woman wouldn’t dare ask him what his intentions for such books were.

“Thank you for coming to the library” she said as he suppressed the urge to hastily toss the books and make a run for the exit.

Giving a nod of acknowledgement he walked with purpose out of the library clutching his bag tight. At the bus stop it felt like everyone could see what sort of books he was carrying around. Severus knew it was his paranoia that made him tuck his bag of books closer to his person and scowl into the road as he waited for the bloody bus to arrive. If someone did see his selection of literature what could he do? It was a very odd thing to be paranoid about. It wasn’t as if he were harboring anything illegal. Maybe he would’ve felt better if he was.

He forced a calming breath.

Research. This was research just the same as looking up on the effects of Billywig wings use in potions. There was no shame in researching any topic. The twisting of his stomach was something that not even looking into Dark Arts made him feel.

He wanted to apparate. The bus was taking too long. If he just found a empty place he could apparate safely into his house beyond the reach of curious eyes. The threat of somehow being tracked kept him as he was staring at the road.

As far as Draco viewed it, everything seemed to be going well at Hogwarts. So far there was no big rush of injured students to the infirmary that he had to see. Most of the time he spent going over medical texts that Madame Pomfrey liked to test him on or checking and rechecking their stocks of medicinal potions. Madame Pomfrey told him to take advantage of the down time, but frankly he was bored. Not having anyone come in yet was a good thing since it meant that the students weren’t out there deliberately injuring themselves still, he wanted to get this over with. What if people were not coming in because of him? Last year when he was shadowing the medi-witch he didn’t do that much, but now he would be incharge if Madame Pomfrey ever needed to be pulled away. What if the students didn't want to face the chance of being in his care? He was a *Malfoy* after all.

A vibrant image of his father popped into his head, he could clearly see the upturned nose at his current profession. How could he use his family's reputation in this situation? People wouldn’t want to seek healing from someone they feared. Plus he was still young, only a year older then the oldest students.

A chime pulled him from his thoughts. Someone had entered the infirmary he could hear the clink of at least two people's footsteps. Sticking his head out he caught the sight of McGonagall.
Madame Pomfrey came out from one of the private rooms in the back as he stepped fully out of the office.

His eyes caught the sight of a boy that followed behind McGonagall so closely that he almost didn’t notice him. It was easy to tell that the student was out of place. The first year looked to be a mix between terrified and in awe. It reminded him much of Harry.

As the two witches chatted he kept an eye on the first year. There were some noticeable bruising peeking out from his collar and his clothes seemed not to fit quite right on his body. His mind flashed to a conversation he had with Harry once about his muggle relatives giving him barely anything to eat. He did his best not to jump to conclusions.

“Draco could you take care of his check up while I talk further with the Headmistress?”

“Yes Madame Pomfrey.” He nodded to the medi-witch before addressing the first year. “Right this way.” He gestured to the first year keeping his tone soft and comforting as Madame Pomfrey had taught him back when he was volunteering at the infirmary.

The first year gave a small nod, eyes glued to the floor as he followed to a free bed away from the two witches.

Draco was confident that he could handle the medical aspect of a check up, even so he felt a tinge of nervousness for doing one without Madame Pomfrey standing directly besides him. Drawing the curtains around them for privacy he gave another quick glance at the boy. The boy started to pick at a hole at the edge of his jumper.

“There’s no need to be worried.” The boy stopped his nervous movement and looked at Draco with a questioning look. “What’s your name?”

“Matthew Jones.”

“Could you tell me what’s wrong? The more you tell the better I can heal you.”

Jones looked off towards the fading silhouette of the two witches.

“I could cast a silence charm so they won't hear us” he offered.

“You can do that?” Jones asked with wide eyes.

With a nod he cast the spell. “There now they can’t hear us. Soon you will be able to do spells like that too.”

“Maybe.”

“You will. It’s an easy spell that you’ll pick up in no time.”

He motioned to Jones to remain still as he did a basic scan over him. The scan showed that nothing was broken. Another scan to check the boy for any internal bleeding also came back negative.

“I’m not sure I am suppose to be here” Jones muttered.

Draco blinked once before catching Jones’s meaning. “You think you don’t deserve to be at Hogwarts?”

Jones nodded. “Because you’re muggle born?” he asked trying to sound sensitive.
“You can tell?” Jones’s face paled.

Jotting down the results of his scan so that he didn’t have to see that fear he answered. “I can”

He didn’t want to go into how his father had taught him early on how to detect who had weaker magic than them or the distinction of Purebloods and muggle borns. “Being muggle born doesn’t matter, you can still accomplish great things here at Hogwarts.”

Jones shook his head “I was normal and now... magic.”

Never in his life had Draco heard anyone sound as downhearted about having magic.

“You’ll get use to it. You might enjoy not being ‘normal’.”

“I definitely don’t like it.” Jones shook his head harshly. “I don’t want to be here. I don’t want this. I hate magic.”

“If there's a problem the Headmistress can help I could help you. Are other students bullying you about being a muggle born?”

He felt like a huge hypocrite for saying these things. It wasn’t that long ago that he had promoted how stupid and disgusting non pure wizards were. The things he said and did before becoming Harry’s friend still hung in the air whenever he spent time with the Golden trio. It was even hard not to say the word muggle born in the harsh way his father often spat.

“No.”

Draco figured it was time to be a bit more forward. “I can see the bruises. Where are they from?”

“I,”

“I can't help if you don't tell me.” He tried again to be gentle.

“If it were bullies I could handle them.” Jones pulled down his collar enough to show off more of the bruise that mostly rested across his clavicle. “I did this to myself, well my magic did.”

Accio-ing some salve he sought permission before applying it onto the bruises.

“What do you mean by your magic doing this to you?”

“It’s been horrible. I can't control it at all. If I try to do anything magical it just seems to backfire splendidly.” Jones winced as he pressed the salve over his clavicle. “This bruise is from flying lesson. I did as instructed said ‘up’ and the broom whacked me so hard I tumbled back,” Jones started picking at his jumper again. “the whole class laughed.”

“Magic doesn’t settle until we grow up a bit. That’s why we have to go to school to learn how to wave a wand or brew potions. Your magic might be reacting to your feelings of inadequacy and wanting to go back to ‘normal.” Jones’s eyes remained on the hole in his jumper. “Having magic is your normal Jones. It is a gift that should be honored and cared for.”

Jones looked to be thinking his words over before giving a nod.

“Have more trust in your magic. In the meantime you build a better connection with your magic be extra careful in potions class. And use this salve on any bruises. It also works for burns.”

“Thank you.”
“You’re welcome.”

“What’s your name?”

He stilled for a second. He wasn’t sure if he should give his real name or a fake one. Malfoys history with muggle borns were the furthest thing from clean. All it would take was a little search to find out just how horrible the Malfoys mistreated those less than them. His family name could destroy any trust between him and this first year. Then this first year would tell every other first year leading to a slippery slope resulting in students not feeling safe enough to get their injuries looked at. Draco wasn’t sure if he could afford that right away.

“You can call me Draco.”

“Thanks Draco.” Jones smiled.

In his heart he knew that he had made the right decision to become a Healer. In a few years he hoped to help people without worrying about his namesake.

“Ugg.” Harry groaned as he stared at the ceiling from his freshly carpeted rug.

Severus had called earlier saying that he would be extra busy today due to their visit yesterday. Already he had cleaned the apartment twice without magic. Draco was still at Hogwarts so he couldn’t go bother his roommate.

The cake he had made for Draco had yet to be eaten. Harry contemplated on popping over with it and surprising Draco. He really shouldn’t though. Going back to Newt’s wasn’t an option either. It wouldn’t do to become a pest to that family too soon.

“Is this really all I have?” he asked out loud to the empty apartment.

He didn’t want to be a bother still he felt restless being left alone. This was worse than when he lived with the Dursleys. Back on Privet Drive he may have been starved, belittled, and shoved into a cupboard under the stairs, but he had people in the house providing him something to do. In this apartment he didn’t have to scurry around as to not upset his aunt or uncle. If he slept the day through there wasn’t anyone to yell at him until they were blue in the face. It wasn’t as if he wanted to go back with the Dursleys. From young he had longed for the day he would escape from the Dursley’s thumb. But without their constant belittling, without the routine classes at Hogwarts, without the constant closeness of the friends he made, and without the need to fight a Dark Lord what was left?

Harry rolled on to his side.

Thinking about these sort of things wasn’t helping. Boredom, this was just boredom. He shouldn’t have to go into some existential crisis when he was left alone. All his friends surely didn’t question everything in their lives like he started to. He had written to both Hermione and Ron already, which added to the sheer boredom of waiting around.

He sighed.
Severus breathed a sigh of relief when he returned to the seclusion of his room back at Spinner's End. He scattered the books about his desk and sat the talking mirror within reach. If there was an emergency he wanted to be able to respond right away. He almost wished for an emergency to take him away from facing these embarrassing books, but he needed to conduct research. This was highly important. He picked up the book titled *The Thrill of First Love*.

“Do it for Harry.”

He flipped to the first chapter entitled: *So you’re in a relationship*. He snorted at the lack luster title.

*So you’re in a relationship congratulations!*

Severus felt odd being congratulated by a book still he read on.

*Being in a relationship shouldn’t be a complicated thing however we know that it can be unnerving and scary if you feel as though you have no clue at what to do so the following will help give some pointers. Only pointers. This shouldn’t be ‘used to the t’. Every relationship is different, yet here are some basic tips that anyone can use in a pinch.*

*Dating is about building connection with another person so it goes without saying that communication is important.*

That first point made him feel rather confident. He had talked a lot more with Harry these past weeks than anyone he ever interacted with in his life.

*Talking to one another isn’t just enough. Allow for each other to share things beyond common interests.*

He smirked thinking that so far he had done as the book stated. Harry constantly shared about things like Quidditch, which he didn’t really care for but didn’t mind listening to. He had spoken about potions and literature that Harry knew very little of. He read on.

- **Location:** The first date can be perceived as intimidating, but if you already enjoy this person’s company a change of scenery shouldn’t erase that. Nerves are normal so don’t fear them and don’t let it dictate how well your date goes. Dating is fun. Go somewhere that you both enjoy like the zoo or aquarium.

Severus couldn’t help think that must’ve been the first place Mr. Graves had taken Mr. Scamander when they had begun their relationship. It was easy to envision the two enjoying their time at a zoo, but he couldn’t see himself in that particular setting. Truthfully he couldn’t see himself in any setting aside from the usual places he visited. The short list of places he frequented was here, Hogwarts and Knockturn Alley.

Knowing that he would have to come up with a more suitable location later he read on.

- **Alcohol:** Don’t over do it on the alcohol. Drinking can ease nerves, but too much can easily send the wrong message to your date and it clouds your judgement.
• Emotional availability: be vulnerable. Past relationships may have not been the best, however do your best to not bring along those issues into this new relationship. Be open and build real connections.

• Show interest in your partner. No one likes to be left in the dark. Be an attentive date. ask questions, listen to what the other person is saying. Don’t forget to talk yourself! Relationships are a two-way street. Answer some questions that your partner asks with honesty.

For a deeper dive into these tips read on.

Severus Accio-ed a fresh quill and a parchment. This was only the first few pages and already he felt that he needed to take in-depth notes.

Harry couldn’t take it anymore. He was going crazy with boredom and loneliness in this apartment. Sure he could go outside to preoccupy his mind, but he didn’t want to risk the Daily Prophet.

Gripping his mirror he called out “Sev?” He felt guilty for calling when he promised not to bother Sev today.

“Hello.” Severus greeted. Although Severus’s attention was very much elsewhere, Harry was happy that he had answered his call.

“Still busy?”

“Research.”

Single word answers didn’t help the feeling that he was starting to become a nuisance. Couldn’t he go one day without disturbing Severus? Of Course he couldn’t. He needed to see Sev; needed to talk to him so that he could see and hear for himself that Severus was alright. When would this constant need for confirmation end? How many times did he have to tell himself that everything was fine? How many times did those words not ease the tightness in his chest that had carried over from last year? No matter the words he told himself or the moments he spent with Sev now it didn't fully rid him of the feeling. Why? Why did he have to be stuck with this? Couldn’t he forget and move on?

“Sorry. I’ll leave you alone.”

“Is something wrong?”

“No.” Nothing was wrong he was being a pest. Couldn’t he see how busy Sev was right now?

Severus began to scribble something quickly before turning his attention to him. “Are you sure nothing is wrong?”

“I’m just lonely...I would invite you over to my apartment but Draco still has the no guest rule in effect. He’s so adamant about the apartment being perfect before we let anyone in. Not even you” he sighed.

“My godson can be rather-”

“Indeed.” Severus’s smirk brightened up his mood.

“I don’t get it Sev. The apartment has furniture. He’s redone most of it twenty times over. It’s not like we’re living in a cardboard box.”

“Home presentation is important to purebloods. It’s to show they have the means to maintain a household. The way a house is presented tells a lot about those who live in it.”

Harry thought about what Sev said. “So that’s why he won’t let Blaise over?”

“Both Draco and Mr. Zabini are purebloods in a relationship and are already eighteen. Most pureblood families at this point in time would encourage marriage. It’s suffice to say that Draco wants to make the best impression possible. Although you share ownership Draco needs to present his ability to run a home far more now that he doesn’t have his own estate.” Sev scanned the book infront of him as he spoke.

“Do you think Blaise cares about that stuff?”

“I cannot comment on that as I don’t know Mr. Zabini’s thoughts on such matter. This would be a test of sorts to see if they could eventually live together.”

“It sounds complicated. I’m glad im a half blood.”

“As am I. Pureblood formalities weren’t something I cared to acquire regardless of its necessity.” Severus turned another page.

“There are more rules aren’t there?”

“Far too many to list. Though Draco could answer your questions if you asked.”

“Alright.” Severus’s attention was settling back onto the books he could see laying about, but couldn’t make out a single word. Sev looked so busy he shouldn’t have bothered him. “Good luck with your research.”

Sev nodded and then the mirror turned black ending their conversation. He was alone again.

With nothing better to do he closed his eyes and fell asleep.

“Harry?”

Harry sprung to the sound of Draco’s voice. At full speed he got up to his feet as Draco was dusting off his coat. Without a word he threw himself into his roommate in a harsh hug.

“Potter are you trying to break my arm off or something!” Draco yelped as he was crushed by his ridiculous roommate.

“Welcome back.”

Draco sighed shaking his head. “You shouldn’t be this excited to see me.” It actually felt nice to
return to this sort of welcome.

“Did you miss me?”

“Not one bit.” Draco pried Harry off.

“What’s that?”

Draco looked at the bracelet wrapped around his wrist. Harry would be quick to spot the darn thing right away. “Lovegood gave it to me. It’s dreadfully ugly.”

“And yet you’re wearing it.” Harry smirked.

He should’ve gotten rid of it. “She said it was for good luck I figured I could use it.”

Harry smiled. “Are you going to stay long?”

“Has it been that bad without me here? I thought you would be constantly all over Snape.”

“Well we did go visit Newt yesterday, but Sev said that he wanted to be left alone to work today.”

“Work?”

“Research.” Harry shrugged. “Don’t ask me any more, you know how rubbish I’m at that subject.”

“No disagreement here.”

It worried him a bit how much Harry was trying to maintain his attention. He figured that being stuck in the apartment all day wasn’t the best thing for Harry. On one hand he knew the things in the Daily Prophet was keeping Harry from going out, but there was definitely something more to it. The Daily Prophet garbage was just an excuse. Even Harry himself said that they had written worse things about him in the past.

“I just remembered that you promised me a congratulatory cake.”

Harry’s eyes brightened up. “Wait here!”

A few seconds later Harry came with a two layered cake covered in white frosting with the word congrats in green icing.

“You sure it’s still good?”

“What do you think I poisoned it or something?”

“If you did I would know.”

“Madame Pomfrey taught you that?” Harry asked as he cut the cake.

“Snape did.” He let out a little huff of laughter at the way Harry’s eyes widened with childlike wonder. Harry loved to hear more about Snape. The way his roommate would occasionally fish for information on his godfather was much better than the way they had gone about last year barely even mentioning the man. “I think I was about seven or eight when he taught me.” He could still picture the way Snape would tower over him as he looked over two identical filled goblets and had to determine which was tampered with. “Snape made it a mission of his that I knew how to detected a handful of poisons before I went off to school. I’m not sure if it was just paranoia or that my father had some plot to kill me.” He shouldn’t have said that.
In the darker parts of his mind so many thoughts still ran rampant about his father. He wasn’t sure how much of his parents he knew. After the Battle of Hogwarts and the trials he had even less clue about those who had brought him into the world. The hatred displayed from his father... had that always existed? Had his parents always wanted to be rid of him?

“What do I care” he muttered softly to himself as he scooped a piece of the cake into his mouth.

The sweet moist chocolate cake helped.

Harry looked at him expectantly. “So...”

“Well it is still edible.”

Harry smiled as he began to eat his own slice.

“Thanks.”

“You know this would be ten times more fun if you let me bring people over.”

“No.” He took another bite.

“If this is because you want to impress Blaise I don't think you need to worry. The apartment is great. Blaise won’t care that it's not some mansion right? He doesn’t seem that concerned with pureblood traditions.”

“You’ve been talking to Snape about pureblood traditions?”

“Not really. He said something about you showing that you can maintain a household and something about encouraging marriage. Sounded kind of silly.”

“There's rules that I have to follow Harry. You may think it’s silly but they do matter.” Draco shoved another bite into his mouth. Even though he could consider himself disowned from his family there was pureblood traditions that had to be maintained. It rubbed him the wrong way how Harry made it seem like he could just turn his back on years of inbred rules. It was more than enough that he was defying so much of what his family would have approved of. If his father had seen him in this state... in this dreaded tiny apartment... Why did he still care what his father thought?

“I just don’t get why you can’t invite your boyfriend over without it being a huge deal.”

Harry didn’t understand and yet he was right. Blaise often said that he didn’t mind where he lived.

“You've been to his house and you’ve gone on many public dates. Please Draco let people come see the apartment.”

He looked at Harry, those pleading eyes didn’t hold the swaying power that it might have on others. Harry could make puppy dog eyes for hours and it wouldn’t matter. The rules of his pureblood heritage mattered, but so did his friendship. From now on he would hardly be at this apartment. Working at Hogwarts would keep him busy and Harry wouldn’t always have the sense to go with his other friends or Snape. Harry was just as capable of hiding away from the world as Snape was. There wasn’t anything he would give away so that Harry didn’t remain housebound. He wouldn't let Harry wallow away alone in this apartment like he had last summer at Grimmauld Place. Nothing close to last year would be repeated.

“Fine.”
“Fine?”

“You may have people over.”

“Yes! Another flawless potter victory.”

“Stupid Gryffindor.” He shook his head taking another bite.

Chapter End Notes

Finally got a laptop so I'm going to work to put up more chapters now. Thank you for being so patient. I want to finish this story by may at the latest so wish me luck.
Friends

Although Harry wanted to bring everyone into their apartment for a party he wouldn't. Draco would just as murder him if he did set up an over the top surprise party. It wasn't as if he could pull together a last minute party anyway. Ron and Hermione were busy at the Ministry and Sev was conducting research. Maybe he could get Mr. Graves to agree to bringing Darion and Newt over one day. Draco would love to spend time with the family.

“You got some mail” Draco said tossing a letters onto his lap.

He looked up at his roommate, medical tome in his hand. Harry wanted to comment that weekends were no time for studying but he wouldn’t. Draco was just one of those people who you shouldn't comment on their study habits. Luckily Draco wasn’t as laser focused as Hermione. Hermione would be down right cross if he suggested as much as a five minute break. Draco on the other hand could be talked into taking things easy for a minute or two.

Draco turned his page. “Are you planning to spend the day with Snape?”

“No.”

“No?” Draco turned his questioning eyes to him.

“He’s doing research.” He didn’t even try to convince himself that Severus would have completed whatever had captivated his attention the other day. Who could complete research in a day? Besides he needed to get better at giving the man space. The last thing he wanted was to be tossed out of Severus’ life for being such a pain in the arse. He could let the man be for at least another day or two. “Besides,” he plucked the heavy book from Draco’s hands. “you are here.”

Draco smirked. It had been a long time since they had talked to one another in a false flirty tone. “You flatter me, but as I have pointed out many times,” Draco flicked him in the forehead. “we are only living together because you begged me to.”

He chuckled as Draco snatched the book back, careful to keep note of what page he was on.

Living alone wasn’t something he was ready for, but with Draco’s job he’d have to get use to being by himself for at least a little while. Severus’s definitely wasn’t going to offer up his home any time soon. Not that he really wanted to stay at Spinner’s End. That house...

“Look,” Draco said placing the tome aside. “I gave you permission to bring people over so that you aren’t driven to Merlin knows what when you are left alone.”

“He wanted to know what was going on at Hogwarts. Hogwarts seemed like such a long time ago. Of course he knew there was still a handful of familiar faces within the stone castle of a school, even so going back even for a visit... What did his other friends think about the papers? Had the Daily Prophet even been sent around the student body yet? McGonagall would most likely work hard to keep such things from infiltrating the school just as she’d done the previous year. Still that didn’t account for the students who had read the earlier issues before coming to school. Word of mouth was almost as daunting as having a physical copy of the paper. Perhaps the rumor mill would twisted the story about him and Severus in unrecognizable fashion from what the papers actually printed. Not that he would know. Nor did he care that much. The Daily Prophet had been printing nonsense about him for so long he didn’t think much could get under his skin anymore.
His mind drifted to Sev. Sev had been hurt by their words. No matter how well the man hid such a fact. Harry wondered if Sev’s research was somehow related to the Daily Prophet. Maybe Sev was planning something horrible for the reporters and didn’t want him to have any knowledge about it. He shook his head, chucking to himself. He’d gladly get back at reporters like Rita Skeeter.

“What is it?” Draco asked.

“Nothing.”

He looked to the letter Draco had tossed at him. The scribbled addressed letter to him was from Hermione. He’d forgotten that he had sent out a letter to both Ron and Hermione the other day asking how they were.

Harry,

I was a little surprised to receive your letter. If you’re available today we can meet up. Say the Leaky Cauldron at 2? I’ll make sure to bring Ron along.

Hermione Granger

Draco tried not to be nosy, but it wasn’t his fault that Harry had opened the letter in a way that he could see the message clearly. It came as a relief to see that Granger had written. Harry actually reading the letter was a very good sign. After the war Harry wouldn’t even look at anything mailed to him. It hurt to see all those letters from Mr. Scamander having to be sent back because Harry had refused to take it.

Harry read it twice before looking at him again. “Would you mind if I went out?”

“Oh, so now my presence isn’t good enough for you.” Draco rolled his eyes.

“I’m meeting up with Hermione and Ron you could come too.”

“I’ll pass.” Things between him and the trio was more cordial than they had been, thought he knew that there would always be that rift. He hadn’t always been a key person in Harry’s life; at least not a positive one. He wasn’t part of the tight knit clique that the three had formed from the age of eleven. Now he meant a lot more to Harry, as for the other two...they could do without him. It wasn’t as if he and Harry was joined at the hip any way.

Harry needed time to return to the comfort of his fellow Gryffindors. Throughout last year he done as best as he could to be there for Harry. The perceived loss of Snape made it so hard to push Harry to be even a fraction of who he used to be. It was Harry’s other friends that helped bring back semblance to that year. That horrible year.... “ I have to study.”

“Sure study. You’re going to invite Blaise over while I’m gone aren’t you?”

“I will not” he said truthfully. He had bent the rules for Harry and Harry only. He still wasn’t ready to bring Blaise over.

“You’re so boring.”

“Go out. I’ll probably be the first taste of fresh air in months.”
“You’re not completely wrong” Harry laughed.

Severus rubbed his tired eyes. He’d spent the whole night reading the self help books he’d borrowed cover to cover, writing and reworking notes as if it he were going to lecture about it in the morning. Knowledge of this subject in no way, shape, or form would ever be permitted to leave the confines of this room.

Pinching the bridge of his nose he didn’t dare take another look at his jumbled notes. It was time for a break.

There were far too much that he had reread without pulling any understanding out of it. Contradictory information littered the books he had brought from the public library.

Flexing his tired fingers he decided it was best to at least give his body the bare minimum of a drink of water. He wasn’t sure if he had managed to get a daily meal yesterday. He was use to not eating. His stomach would go days without anything before he felt the remotely sensation of hunger. Today he could feel something as he poured a glass of water. There was something off. Perhaps he was hungry.

A hoot from his window pulled his attention from the possibility of eating. The owl practically tossed the rolled up newspaper at him and flew off. The sight of the newspaper instantly made his mind click to what was off. Harry hadn’t contacted him at all today.

His hand longed to reach out for the paper and read its contents. Maybe something happened.

*I ban you from reading this rubbish* Harry’s voice echoed in his mind.

He snickered at the memory.

There was no sense in waiting around all day. Harry would show up when ready. One of the traits the young man hadn’t grown out of was his continual pestering.

Abandoning the newspaper he returned to his research.

Harry felt like there was a million ants crawling across his skin as he readied to meet up with Ron and Hermione. He’d barely seen them since graduation. Smart Hermione hadn’t wasted a moment junping at the chance to work within the Ministry. If he remembered correctly she was at the department of Magical Creature Care working to propose a law on working conditions for house elves. Ron, who had already completed boot camp, was shadowing some senior Auror. Both of his friends were keeping busy building careers while he...

Harry wiggled his fingers and toes trying to get rid of the unpleasant prickling sensation. This action didn’t help in the slightest.

“Relax it's only Ron and Hermione” He reminded.

He probably wouldn’t have been this anxious to spend time with his closest friends if Draco had allowed for guest to come to their shared apartment before.
Tapping the talking mirror in his coat pocket helped ease the prickling sensation somewhat. Bothering Severus in the middle of research like yesterday wouldn’t happen again. Today he could make it through a day without Severus. It just felt wrong to leave the house without the ability to communicate with Severus.

“If you don’t hurry you’ll be late” Draco said while Harry stared at the fireplace.

He hadn’t really been out too much over the past months. If it weren’t for his friends he probably wouldn’t have even tried to step foot back into the Wizarding World so soon. If he didn’t get out of the house he would permanently be glued to the couch - something Draco had pointed out many times before.

“Last chance to join me” he offered.

“I must decline.”

Pinching some floo powder he tossed it in the fireplace calling out “the Leaky Cauldron.”

The floos were much less soot covered in the Leaky Cauldron than at Severus’ house. Harry guessed it was due to the constant use in this building that served as a bar and a source of lodging for many traveling magical folk. It made him feel special to be perhaps the only one who could floo into Sev’s house.

“Harry Potter” Tom the pub owner greeted in a hushed tone under the noise of clinking glasses and idle chatter of the patrons.

“Sorry for not sending a message ahead of time.”

“No worry at all. Your friends are waiting” Tom motioned with his eyes upstairs. “Room eleven.”

“Thank you.”

“Anything for you.” Tom grinned before wobbling away to tend to other patrons.

Harry kept his head low so the people around who weren't already pissed drunk wouldn’t recognize him. The last picture he’d seen in the Daily Prophet was a little old now and didn’t really show off his face. His long hair that touched his shoulders helped provide somewhat a big enough difference that he hope wouldn't let him be picked out right away from the crowd. Luckily not a single person turned to give him a second look as he hurried up the stairs.

Room eleven was far too quiet to have Ron and Hermione inside. He doubted that Tom would mix up the room; it was the same one he had been given before Third year when he’d ran away from the Dursleys. As soon as he opened the door he heard the two discussing something in a slight harsh tone.

Wizards remember Draco's voice scoffed at his idiocy.

When he wasn’t in school or at Diagon Alley he often forgot about magic. Sometimes it felt like the whole Wizarding World was some fantasy he had created back when he was eleven years old.

“You would think that they~” Hermione grumbled.

“Oi! Harry is here!” Ron interrupted whatever Hermione wanted to say.

The two of the quickly crossed the short distance of the room to hug him. Without hesitation he
returned the hug.

“Can't tell you how good it is to see you two.”

“Really good to see you Harry” Hermione gave another tight squeeze before pulling back. “You’ve been doing alright? Eating? You look a little sleep deprived.”

He laughed at her mother hen greeting. “I have been eating and I always look sleep deprived.”

Hermione gave him a look that he didn’t even bother to interpret.

“How is Ministry work?”

“Fascinating,” Hermione’s eyes sparkled. “I’m learning so much everyday.”

“Sounds like paradise for you.”

“I think her sense of paradise would be to be forever locked in an endless library” Ron commented.

“That would be nice” Hermione sighed with a dreamy look on her face.

Harry chuckled at his friend’s love of learning. If he had even a bit of her enjoyment in school he would've done so much better academically. “And how's being an Auror Ron?”

“Not official yet, still shadowing Auror Piksel.” Ron looked like he was fighting back a laugh. “I don't know how anyone could take him seriously with a name like that. He's a good fellow. By December I should be on my first official case.”

“Nothing too intense I hope” Hermione said snapping out of her day dreaming.

“Auror Piksel really thinks it's important to take it slow with newbies. The first thing he said was ‘I don't care if you have been through a dozen wars you are going to do things the right way’. There was this other Auror who wanted me on the field right away. Piksel refused. I learn a lot from the guy. You'd like him Harry if you decided to join us.”

The prickling sensation came back as if he were standing over an ant hill. He needed to change the subject.

“You really must pick something to do Harry.” Hermione scolded. “There's so much that you can do. Don’t waste your education. I for one plan to-” he stopped listening to Hermione’s words.

This was a conversation that he didn't feel too keen to be apart of right now. It hadn’t been that long since graduation. He could hold off getting a job for a little longer. There was still a heaping pile of gold in his Gringotts account so he wouldn't starve. But Hermione was right, she usually was. He had to do something. Shouldn’t he?

“He’s got enough to worry about right now, right Harry” Ron’s words confused him.

He looked to his friend wondering what exactly he should be worrying about.

“Mate,” Ron said slowly as if he were unsure that he wanted to be the bearer of bad news. “You’ve seen the papers haven't you?”

“What papers?” he asked unsure if Ron meant the Daily Prophet or if other papers had jumped on the scandal publication train. He really hoped that they had moved on from him and Severus already. There had to be at least one or two of Voldy supporters roaming around that they could
report on.

Ron turned slightly pink as he spoke “The Daily Prophet’s been completely nutters lately. Didn’t
know much until a day a ago. Caught some coworkers talking... Piksel doesn't let me read the
paper, says that it’s unreliable watered down information ‘only trust official reports’ he tells me.”
Ron nervously turned to Hermione “You've read the papers haven't you?"

Hermione shook her head. “I have better things to read then the stupid Daily Prophet.”

Ron started to pick at his nails. Dropping his head and his volume Ron continued “Nasty things
they're saying about you being with... you know...”

“You don't have to whisper and you can say his name” he said a bit forcefully.

“Right.” Ron continued to pick at his nails.

Hermione walked to the door “I’m going to see if I can grab a copy downstairs.”

Without Hermione the room turned silent. Ron still picked at his nails which were quickly
shrinking so that the tips of his fingers became little nubs. Harry didn’t like this silence or the way
Ron was going at his nervous habit.

“Ron?”

Ron shook his hands to stop from picking at them.

“You know Severus and I...”

Ron started to pick at his index finger.

Was this topic still off the table? Ron had brought up the papers. Maybe Ron just wanted to warn
him. How much at work did Ron hear? Aside from the first article Sev showed him Harry was
clueless about the way the paper chose to account the way he and Sev were together. But what did
it matter? Ron and Hermione would know that it was lies. They knew the truth. They knew how
much he loved Severus. If last year was any indication...Last year- last year they hardly said a
word about Severus...Only Draco had really let him talk about Sev when...Ron hadn’t even been at
school...

No. He shouldn’t think about that. Last year never happened. It was easier to think it never
happened.

“Don’t read into what those papers say. Remember all the lies about me in fourth year or when
they called me crazy for thinking Voldy was back? They’d do anything to sell a paper.”

Ron nodded. “Reckon they forged that picture too.”

There was no need to clarify what picture. It had to be the one of him kissing Sev. Any other
picture wouldn’t invoke this sort of reaction. Ron looked so uncomfortable picking at his nails yet
again. Ron had been trying his best about his relationship. Two years prior he had even wished Sev
a happy Christmas. Ron had even appeared relieved when Sev came back at graduation. Other
than that however not much had changed had it. Neither Ron or Hermione brought up their
relationship. All this time Harry thought they were too busy to ask but for all he knew they weren't
as ready to face the fact that he was with Severus as he thought.

“Ginny,” Ron said suddenly.
Hearing that name made his stomach drop. Ginny was very verbal about not liking Severus. At one point in time he wouldn’t have paid a second thought to the things she said, heck he’d said similar things before he knew the truth about Severus. But the way Ginny was unapologetically livid towards the slight idea of Severus even visiting the Burrow gave him little hope for what Ron was about to say.

“Ginny, she took one look at the paper and nearly went mad. Fred and George were no help whatsoever. Thought it was funny how angry she got, they duplicated the picture and stuck it all over the house. Mum went off at them for ages, guess she was the one who hid the paper in the first place..”

This should’ve been a humorous tale that they both laugh at but Ron looked worried.

“Told her that the photo was forged. Didn't want her to think that it was true. You know how she can get. If she thought you were a poof, thought you were like that with him-”

“But I am Ron” he gritted through his teeth. The dismissive way Ron was talking upset him.

Ron looked up from his hands, his face very pale “Shh. Don't say that” Ron whispered.

“Say what?” Harry didn’t lower his voice at all. “Say that I am gay or that I am dating Severus?” Ron’s fearful eyes caused him to raise his voice. “SAY THAT WE SOMETIMES KISS JUST LIKE ANY OTHER COUPLE.”

“Harry quiet!” Ron’s voice wavered as he looked to the door.

“There's a silencing charm on the room remember. It's only the two of us. You're acting like you rather I say that it was all doctored, that my relationship is as fake as you tell Ginny” he fumed.

“It's not that. You know it isn't” Ron croaked.

“Do I?” He glared at his best friend.

“I haven't said anything horrible about him” Ron shot back.

“I doubt you said anything nice about him to Ginny.”

“I didn't want her blabbing to make things worse.” Ron defended, no longer concerned with his finger nails.

“I don't care what your sister or the entire world thinks. You’re my best friend I care what you think but if you-” Harry pulled out his wand and Ron did the same.

“I managed to get a copy-” Hermione stopped at the sight of the two of them glaring at each other with their wands drawn. “What’s going on?”

“Harry thinks we are having a row. Acting like I went and sold him out to the press or something. There were plenty opportunities to do so. I didn't say a word back when we were in school and I didn’t go running my mouth when Snape was gone either.”

Gone the word struck him, stripping him of anger and replacing it with sorrow. Snape gone. He needed to go. He had to see that Severus was still here. He had to be still with him. Severus was alive. His throat was feeling tighter and tighter. It was getting hard to breathe.

“Harry” Hermione’s voice sounded so far away. Why did it feel like he was slowly sinking
underwater? “Harry!”

“Mate?”

Trying to maintain control of himself was more and more difficult as his friend’s voices coming in and out. The only words that he could hear so clearly were the ones in his head. **Snape gone. Gone. Gone. Dead.**

“Stop” he whimpered clenching his eyes shut.

“Harry,” Severus’s voice wheezed.

Panic gripped him as he opened his eyes. Severus was staring up at him, the flicker of life barely hanging on. Something wet was covering them. Blood. Too much blood.

“No!” He pressed both hands hard over the gaping wound on Severus’ neck. “Not again! I’m not going to lose you.”

Frantically he looked everywhere around them. There was nothing except the lifeless form of Voldemort laying in front of them. Sobbing he pressed closer to Severus. Voldemort began to stir slowly rising with an evil glint in his red eyes.

“Death of your loved one has revived me.” Voldemort’s smile made him want to vomit. He brought Severus even closer. “Even in death he serves my purpose.”

Turning away from the horrific red eyes he looked at Severus, but he was no longer there.

“Farewell Harry Potter,” Voldemort hissed gleefully. “Send my regards to that filthy traitor” Voldemort pressed the jagged end of his wand to Harry’s temple.

With a gasp Harry jolted forward. The light overhead cast a dim shadow around him further disorienting his blurred surroundings.

“What did you do!” he heard someone’s harsh whisper.

“I keep telling you I didn’t do anything” came another voice.

“Ron? Hermione?” He rubbed at the pain in his head.

There was sounds of shuffling before his glasses were handed to him.

“You fainted.” Hermione said her voice sounding both worried and angry. “I wasn't sure if we should call someone.”

He was actually glad that they hadn’t called anyone. He hated for anyone to make a fuss over this. It was just dreams. There was always nightmares.

“Do you need this?” Ron asked holding up a vial of purple potion. Right away Harry recognized it as the very same potion he’d taken for his damaged magical core.

“You still carry that around?”

“Hermione told me you were all healed up, but you never know.” Ron carefully tilted the potion back and forth. Harry wondered if Ron had spent the last year thinking that he was as ill as he had been before. Last year they barely spoken and now had done little more than fighting. Shame curled in his chest as he watched the worried glances of his friend.
“I don’t need it. Thanks though.”

Ron nodded and placed the potion back into his pocket.

“Should we let Draco know? He-”

“I’m fine.” He interrupted. “I think I’m just a little under the weather.”

Hermione pursed her lips.

“I’m fine” he repeated.

Both of his friends sat at opposite sides of him. Their warmth helped the chill that had settled in from the nightmare.

“If it makes you two feel better I’ll ask Draco to give me a scan when I go back.”

“It might be stress.” Hermione asserted. “Ron wasn’t kidding about the nastiness.” He only now noticed she had a bunched up Daily Prophet in her hand. “Some of the things they are saying... Anyone would stress over this.” Hermione crumpled the paper a little more.

“I’m sorry for what I said Harry.” Ron’s face was as guilt stricken as he felt. “I didn't mean to make things worse.”

“I’m sorry too. Let’s forget about it. I don’t want to return from our first meet up in forever with Slytherin green hair again.”

“Not my finest work.”

“Not at all.” Hermione agreed. “At least you have matured enough to properly apologize right away. I wouldn’t be able to handle not getting to see the two of you on my limited time off.”

“Same” Ron pulled him into a hug.

“Maybe I could talk to someone at the Ministry. Surely this is grounds for harassment or defamation of character. I’ll do some research. There has to be something-”

“Thanks ‘mione, but it’s just a paper. I can handle it.”

“Are you sure?” Ron asked.

“It’s best not to give in. Remember Rita Skeeter?”

Hermione took a heavy angry breath. “Don’t get me started. She-”

Halfheartedly he listened to Hermione go off about the woman who would write anything except the truth. They each recalled how annoying the reporter had been, which led them to talk about other annoying people they had come across. Hermione was quick to voice her distaste for Professor Trelawney, who outright dismissed her ability to see the future in their Third year Divinations class. Ron pointed out that the worst person they had ever encountered was Umbridge to which both of them agreed. None of them had pity for how she was locked up in Azkaban on several charges including child abuse.

“What about Lockhart, now he was a first class pain in the arse.”

“But he was well...”Hermione blushed.
“I don’t see what you saw in that idiot. He had no brains at all” Ron grumbled.

“Could you blame me? I was thirteen. And he seemed well, like every version of a white night.” Hermione sighed. “He wrote so well and that smile…”

Ron was visibly turning a shade of deep purple.

“He was a complete fraud who thought I wanted to share the spotlight” he jumped in before Ron said something that was going to get him on Hermione’s bad side. “I bet if his memories weren’t wiped he’d claimed that he single handed defeated old Voldy. I wouldn’t mind actually if he stole my fame. At least then I could have a normal life.”

“Too bad he couldn’t even hold his own against pixies” Ron added.

“Alright looking back, he was a mess.” Hermione smiled taking Ron’s hand.

They laughed. Real laughter that he hadn’t shared with these two since before the war.

Hermione glanced at her watch “I have to get back to the Ministry.”

“Me too.” Ron and Hermione exchanged a silent conversation between one another. “You’ll be alright mate?”

“I’m fine. Go. I’m going to go home and rest.”

Harry thanked the owner and waved goodbye to his friends as the floo powder hit the ground.

The apartment stood empty when he stepped out into it. A note was left on the coffee table saying that Draco would come back soon. Shuffling out of his soot covered coat he pulled his mirror free from his pocket. For another moment he stared at it the dim surface not wanting to disturb Sev again. He could wait til tomorrow to call. He could...

“Harry?” Severus asked the mirrored image of Harry struggling to focus on something.

The day had nearly come to an end and not once had Harry called him. He should’ve given the younger man more space. The relationship books agreed that spending every minute of everyday together was not the best thing to do. Severus too agreed on the matter. He had been such a private person, one who thrived in total isolation, but ever since Harry and the Scamanders he’d grown used to having his isolation interrupted from time to time. Not even hearing Harry’s voice for a split minute made him feel odd. He’d felt unable to properly distract his mind. The supposed ‘rules of love’ as one of his texts called it didn’t help prevent him from thinking about Harry. So like an idiotic child with no restraint he had at last caved into calling.

“Sev!” Harry’s broad smile was almost enough to vanish the longing he had wrestled with for the past several hours.

“You have recently returned from leaving your apartment” he stated taking in the way Harry looked. Harry’s eyes grew a little. “There’s still soot on the bridge of your nose” he said taking pity on Harry’s curious mind.

Harry hastily wiped his face. “Better?”
He nodded.

“I went to see Hermione and Ron today.”

That information didn’t surprise him all that much. It was about time that Harry went to pay the two a visit.

“Do not report any mischief you have committed in the past hours. I don’t want any excuse for the Ministry to knock on my door.”

“What could we’ve possibly gotten up to that would require a Ministry visit?”

“You underestimate your ability for reckless actions” he smirked at the mischievous glint in Harry’s eyes.

“We didn’t do anything I swear” Harry chuckled. “We only talked about school; recounting all the annoying people we’ve dealt with.”

“I image I made that list.”

“Nope. You were beaten out by Lockhart.”

Severus grimaced at the name. He hadn’t heard that name in some time and for good reason.

“That man made everyone’s IQ drop every time he spoke” he sneered.

The abhorrent man had made quiet the impression when teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts in Harry’s second year. “None of the staff cared for the overzealous egomaniac.”

“And yet you put together a dueling club that year” Harry pointed out.

A smile tugged on his face. “How could I pass up the opportunity to humiliate him in front of the majority of the student body?” Harry smirked. “The idea of a dueling club was commendable given the attacks. It could’ve been an important way to ready the students. It was a shame that the buffoon couldn't defend against a simple *Expelliarmus.*”

Harry burst into a laugh. “One of the best moments in my life was seeing Lockhart falling on his arse.”

“Language” he warned halfheartedly.

“If it weren’t for the snake Draco had conjured I would've gotten to see you beat Lockhart over and over.”

“It came as a shock to all when you spoke to the snake.” Severus wondered exactly why they were going down memory lane. It wouldn’t be the first time that Harry had led him through random topics of conversation. There were times he could sense that everything was being said except for whatever it was Harry really wanted to say.

“You don’t have to tell me that. People were afraid of me for months.... You know, I wonder what things would've been like if I was sorted into Slytherin. Do you think we would've been closer sooner?”

He was unsure of what would’ve happened. No one could’ve known what might’ve been. He was having enough difficulty with what things were like between them as it was now. Surely at the start he would’ve been just as aggravated around a near clone of James Potter running through Hogwarts. “It would've been easier to keep an eye on you if you were my house.”
“If you could’ve picked any house would you pick Slytherin?”

“I suppose I could’ve seen myself joining Ravenclaw.”

“Definitely could see that. You’re always buried in some sort of book. I bet you are having withdrawals from your research now.”

Before he could assure Harry that wasn’t the case he heard Draco’s voice yell out “Potter!” followed by Harry dropping their means of communication.

“I’m not your house elf Potter” his godson’s voice snapped.

Harry came back into view. “Forgot to clean up the soot” Harry explained before a rushed wave goodbye and the mirror turning to black.

Severus looked back upon his research.
After fainting while hanging out with Ron and Hermione in addition to getting scolded by Draco for leaving the living room soot covered, Harry was more than ready to escape to Spinner’s End. But he wouldn’t. Severus just had to be knee deep in his research. There wasn’t much good he could do if he just popped into Severus’s floo and he really should spend some time with Draco. After today he wouldn’t see his roommate for long stretches of time.

“And what is famous Harry Potter going to do today?” Draco asked when he stepped into the Living room.

“I was thinking of tossing every Galleon I own at whatever I think would drive you crazy” he smirked at Draco “you know, make some mischief.”

“I don’t think you need resorting to spending your fortune on useless junk to make mischief.”

“What did you have in mind? And don’t say studying, you did that yesterday. Any more and you’ll be another Hermione.”

“How dare you insult me” Draco gasped dramatically falling over the couch’s edge so that his head was now on Harry’s lap.

Laughing he cradled Draco’s head.

“What did you do yesterday with Granger and Weasley?”

“Just talked. They didn’t have much time to really hang out.” He thought about how rubbish he had made things by snapping at Ron and fainting. For the first time in a long time he thought about Ginny. The things in the paper were one thing, but Ginny brought a whole new possible mess.

Draco stared up at Harry. Somethings wasn’t right. Yesterday he’d expected Harry to be unbearable giddy after the visit with his Gryffindor pals but there wasn’t much change. If anything there was a hint of worry that was returning at this moment. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing”

Draco gently tapped Harry’s face. “You’re doing that horrible habit of biting your lip”

Harry released his teeth’s grip on his lower lip. “It’s Ginny.”

Draco rose from his position to sit next to Harry properly.

Ginny Weasley. As far as from what he recalled, she was the one who had been practically the leader of the Harry Potter fan club. Of course there were others like the Creevey brothers, who admired all things Potter while they were in school, but Ginny Weasley was something else. Draco could say with certainty that he never cared much for her. She was just always so whiny and hot tempered. Although the age long blood feud between the Malfoy and Weasley family or the rivalry between Slytherin and Gryffindor house may have colored his recollection of the witch.
“Don’t tell me, you’ve realized that you’re completely in love with her and have planned to run away together” he teased.

Harry’s face scrunched up in disgust. “I would never. I’m gay remember.”

“Glad to hear it.”

“Ron told me that she was livid about the stuff in the Daily Prophet.”

“I thought you didn’t care about the Daily Prophet.”

“I don’t. They write anything. But Ginny can be well...”

“I’ll keep an eye on her if you want me to.”

“No. It’s okay.”

“You’re sure?”

“Forget that I even brought it up.”

“You know, you should rub your relationship in everyone’s face. Give them something to really talk about.”

“Maybe.”

Groaning he tapped Harry’s face again to stop that stupid lip biting habit. “I’m so sick of _Harry Potter and the stubborn lover_.”

Harry shoved him.

“Mr. Malfoy” Madame Pomfrey’s face formed in the fireplace.

“Yes” with urgency he moved closer towards the fireplace.

“I need you.”

“I’ll be right over.”

With a nod Madame Pomfrey’s face disappeared from the flames. As he stood up Harry handed him his satchel. Hesitantly he pull the strap of his bag over him.

Draco wasn’t sure when he’d see Harry again now that he was going to be spending nearly every moment at Hogwarts’s infirmary. This was going to happen, they both knew it and yet he wasn’t sure if it was all for the best to leave Harry alone. From experience he knew that Harry didn’t do well alone. Allowing the Gryffindor to bring people over would help that wouldn’t it?

“Draco-” He could see the faintest of concern on his roommates face.

Not for the first time he pulled Harry into a hug that the other desperately needed. This wasn’t a goodbye forever, yet they both knew what could happen while apart. Draco blamed the sentimental gesture on all the time they had just the two of them working through events of the last year. That year they needed each other so much, if nothing more than to curse at the empty spaces left by those who lost their lives. Draco felt that he had begun to move on, still he worried about Harry. As he separated from the hug he reminded himself that Harry wasn’t alone, that he had Weasley, Granger, Mr.Graves, Mr.Scamander, and most importantly Snape to help him out.
Harry didn’t know when he would see Draco again. He couldn’t expect Draco to pop up any time he wanted. Draco had a life too. Draco had a job and a boyfriend. Even though he knew this he was afraid of being alone.

“Don’t forget to abuse your new ability to invite people over.” Draco reminded.

“I’ll be sure to throw wild parties.”

“I’m sure your friends would enjoy that.”

Draco was right he had friends. There was people who would be there if he just asked.

“Write me.”

Draco nodded. “I expect development between you and Snape the next time I’m here.”

“Good luck at Hogwarts.” Harry flashed Draco a small smile as he stepped into the green flames.

Severus glanced at the Daily Prophet laid on his windowsill. Against everything that told him not to give it a second thought, he found himself removing the twine wrapped around the rolled paper. Harry’s name sprung forward as soon as the paper unrolled.

Harry Potter Spotted in Leaky Cauldron

*Harry Potter was spotted yesterday afternoon at the Leaky Cauldron meeting with Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. Reason for this meeting is unknown though it is possible that Mr. Potter’s closest friends are concern for his well being. Ron Weasley, currently on track to becoming an Auror, and Hermione Granger, a worker within the Ministry, may be working to save Mr. Potter from the clutches of Death Eater Severus Snape. There has been no sighting of Harry Potter prior to this meeting. Notably Harry Potter hasn’t pursued a career after his graduation, when at this time Death Eater Severus Snape was found to not have perished in the Battle of Hogwarts a year prior. It is not a far jump to assume that the Imperius curse ...

He read no more on how supposedly he was the reason Harry hadn’t been out in the Wizarding World. Perhaps he should send an anonymous letter to the Daily Prophet to inform them that Harry was strong enough to throw off the Imperius curse in his fourth year.

Setting the paper aflame he watched it curl then scatter.

Reading the Daily Prophet was not helping him be a better person. It didn’t make him into the person Harry deserved to be in a relationship with. So why was he always tempted to subject himself to this? Was it some sick twisted need of validation that he hoped to come across? Severus knew better. There wouldn’t be a day when the world accepted the fact that he was in love with Harry. The world rather believe that he was still the wretched Death Eater out to corrupt the light’s most precious tool.

Taking the last gulp of his morning tea he retreated to his lab. He needed to do some brewing.
Harry waited exactly two hours after Draco had returned to Hogwarts before he called Severus. With the promise of being useful within the lab Severus agreed that he could come over. The lab already had a full shelf with completed potions lined up and some cauldrons in need of a scrub when he arrived. Harry wondered just how much brewing Severus completed in a day as Severus continually stirred whatever he was currently working on.

He didn’t mind helping Severus out by scrubbing cauldrons. In some strange way he liked the fact that it reminded him of detentions in Hogwarts. It still felt odd being stuck with the knowledge that he had graduated and wouldn’t be going back to school.

“Have you decided on what you want to do?” Severus asked a few minutes into his scrubbing.

“What do you mean?”

“I meant,” Severus gave the cauldron another quick stir. “What are you going to pursue in life?”

“You” he said quickly with a mischievous smile.

The faintest of snorts left Sev as he shook his head. “Occupation wise you brat.”

“Can’t I scrub cauldrons here forever?” he groaned as he scrapped at a particular difficult clump of whatever it was.

“It would be a waste of your potential. Not to mention there wouldn’t be a Potion Master out there who would get away with letting the Wizarding World’s Hero scrub cauldrons for a living.”

“I think it would be a fine fitting job since I have years of experience from detentions” he pointed out.

Silence followed leaving their sounds of work to occupy the space. Harry bit his lip wondering if he had somehow upset Sev with his comment. Quickly he recognized that Sev had simply shifted his focus back onto his brewing.

“There must be something.” Sev moved to finely chop the root on his cutting board.

“Sure there is. I mean,” He scrubbed the difficult spot harder. “I just don’t know what that something is right now.” Why was everyone concerned that he hadn’t jumped into a job? “For so long it was just focusing on school and fighting Voldy. Now I don’t have either and I’m a little...stuck? Lost maybe.” He continued to focus on scrubbing instead of the sense of nothingness that had snuck in over the past week or so.

It almost seemed ironic how so much of his life he wanted to be ‘just Harry’ not the Chosen One and now that he was done being the Chosen One he didn’t know how to be just Harry. He hadn’t expected to feel so lost after killing Voldemort or finishing school. He’d rather return to the Dursleys than to be asked what was next in his life. He had education and fighting experience, but that didn’t help him figure out what he actually wanted to do.

“I understand.” Sev’s words helped ease the nothingness. It was always a weight lifted from him when he knew it wasn’t only him who felt this way. “Do you know what you’re going to do?” he asked.

“In a few years perhaps I could have a shop somewhere.” Severus once again started to stir the brew. “For now I plan to keep brewing simple potions to begin mail orders and,” Severus took a quick glance at him “conducting research.”
“Even you have things figured out” he sighed. He had hoped that Sev was just as lost of what to do as he was. It seemed like everyone had things put together.

“I am a planner Harry. You don’t think I could survive as a spy for as long as I had without thinking things through did you?”

He shook his head.

“You have the luxury of time to figure things out for yourself. Not everyone has fame to fall back on.”

Harry looked down at the spot he had at last managed to clean. Even though Severus hadn’t spoken those words cruelly he felt a pang in his heart. For all the trouble his name caused him wasn’t it in his right to take a little advantage of his fame? If he wanted to he could write a book about his life, maybe even seven books, and sell them to every magical folk in Britain. Not that he would ever do that. For one, he lacked the patience to actually write a book and he rather die then become like Lockhart.

Die.

His eyes lifted to Severus, who had seamlessly returned to work mode sprinkling in a pinch of what looked like flobberworm bits. He watched as Severus moved about the cauldron swiftly all without making a noise aside from the bubbling of the potion itself. Even under the heat of the brewing Severus’s collar remained buttoned to its highest point. It was hiding the scars that Nagini had left behind. Scars that he hadn’t been allowed to see even once.

Death.

Severus had been so close to death. Harry thought he had died. He'd gone a painful full school year believing that he would never see him again. Severus was alive now. They both had won against death, but only Sev seemed to have gained control of life after it. Guilt sat in the pit of his stomach. There were so many who didn’t get a second chance of life. It was childish to complain to Sev about feeling like he had lacked a purpose. Knowing how childish it may seem didn't help him not feel that way though. How was he suppose to force together a life for himself when he never truly had one to begin with?

As he bottled the last of his brewing Severus noticed just how quiet Harry had been for the past few minutes. He couldn't help the habit of tunnel vision that came over him whenever he worked. Brewing had to be dealt with delicately. Simply tossing ingredients into a cauldron like some of his past first years wouldn't be conducive to a proper potion. Looking up after the hour of brewing he noticed the very clean cauldrons lined up perfectly. Harry, however was missing from the room. The young man was so quiet he hadn’t realized he left.

Upon exiting his lab he quickly found the missing man in the kitchen.

“Oh, you’re done.” Harry beamed as he fiddled with something.

“I see you have made yourself comfortable in my kitchen” He comment noticing a few cabinets that had been left ajar.

“I... I was going to bring you down some lemonade.”

“Lemonade?”
“Don’t look at me like that. I found this in your cabinet.” Harry drummed his fingers against the large white plastic tub that had a brightly colored label reading instant lemonade mix. “Muggle instant lemonade.” Harry laughed as he looked at the nutrition facts. “Merlin! This stuff would rot your teeth.”

He wanted to counter with some reason behind having such a teeth rotting substance in the house. He could lie about not purchasing it, but lying about sweetened drinks hardly mattered. Instead he took a cup of the lemonade, noting the color before taking a sip. It tasted terrible.

“How much did you use?”

“Is it too sweet?”

“Not sweet enough.” he deadpanned accio-ing the tub over to shovel two more spoonfuls into the mix.

He lifted a questioning brow at the way Harry was staring at him with his jaw open. He took another sip, this time it was the right amount of sweet.

“I thought you bought it as a joke or something.” Harry laughed grabbing his own cup.

He suppressed his own small smile as he took another sip.

Truthfully he had bought it because it had reminded him of Albus. The old coot had the audacity to hook him on those darn lemon drops within his fourth year of teaching. Ever since receiving a horrible stomach ache from the combination of so much lemondrops and tea he had sworn them off for good. Despite that Albus still kept trying to offer them at any given chance.

Albus... He deeply regretted killing the man. Logically Severus knew that he had done it for the sake of saving Draco from staining his hands with blood, even so taking a life weighed heavy on his conscious whenever he allowed his mental barriers to ease. It mattered not that Albus asked him to do it. Yes Albus would’ve died even if he hadn’t cast the killing curse, but the elder wizard’s death seemed senseless. There was so many lives that he couldn’t have saved.

He took another sip of his drink.

Severus knew that if he wanted to speak with Albus he could go to Hogwarts and sit amongst the other magical portraits of previous Headmasters. Apologizing to a portrait wouldn’t relieve him of guilt or sin. He wouldn’t return to Hogwarts. He wasn’t ready to see the old coot boxed into a frame. He wasn’t ready to eat real lemon drops again. Strong instant lemonade mix would suffice to fill the place of the deceased Headmaster.

“Who knew you’d have such a sweet tooth.” Harry commented still giving him a look of disbelief. “If I found out sooner maybe Gryffindor could’ve bribed you with something from HoneyDukes. “

“No one would have believed you” he smirked “And bribery wouldn't have prevented points lost for mishandling ingredients in my class.”

“Fair enough. Tell me what’s your favorite sweet?”

“I try not to indulge my habit.”

“Because of your reputation?” He refused to comment. “Well you don’t have to worry about that now. It’s not like I’m going to pass the information on to anyone. Tell me your favorite sweets.”
“Very well.” He paused to think. It was such a silly topic to actually put thought into. No one would’ve dared ask him such a thing before as it fell on the line close to small talk, which he loathed. But this was Harry, who tended to be curious over every little thing. “If I’m picking solely from HoneyDukes stock I’d say chocolate frogs or candy floss.”

“What about muggle desserts?”

He snorted at the way Harry seemed genuinely interested in this topic. “If only you were this interested in potions.” Harry blushed. “Muggle sweets is a larger pool of options. Though if I had to pick top two it would be cheesecake and mint ice cream.”

“Really?”

He pressed his lips in a thin line. He didn't want to be judged on something so arbitrary as his sweet preferences.

“Mint is my favorite too.”

Emerald eyes locked with his. Gently he rubbed his thumb over the back of Harry’s hand.

Harry wanted to be closer, far closer to Severus than they were. If they separated his mind would take in the surroundings of the old worn house around them, reminding him of the moments he spent with Draco digging through boxes of Severus’s things. If Harry didn’t keep his eyes on Sev he was afraid that the man would disappear. If he didn’t keep him within arm’s reach he wouldn’t be able to hold Sev again.

He focused on the way Severus’s thumb moved over the back of his hand. Focused on the light tickling sensation that came with the action. This was Severus right here. Severus was alive and touching him gently. Harry wanted more.

“Kiss me” he whispered in a needy voice.

“I didn’t realize that I now take your orders” Severus whispered in a teasing tone.

“Kiss me Sev.”

Severus moved their drinks aside as he leaned in. Harry held himself back from jumping to capture those lips. He needed Severus to kiss him. When they kissed deeply he experienced the overwhelming joy he felt when he found out Severus was alive. Kissing, touching, just being near Severus helped heal that pain of loss he was so desperate to forget.

Severus’s lips pressed to his with an ounce of hesitation before sitting more firmly against him. Harry closed his eyes as Severus cupped his face. Those long fingers holding him in place as he sought to feel more. Harry opened his mouth in a silent beg for Severus to enter. Severus must’ve understood as his tongue slipped into his mouth. For the first time their tongues fought for the space between them. He’d never kissed like this before so he let Severus take control. Their kiss tasted of the overly powerful sweet instant lemonade but he didn’t mind at all. He was drowning in the sensation. His heart beating so fast against his chest, the sound echoing in his ears. More. Harry needed more. Snaking his hands around he pulled at the hair tie that held Severus’s hair in that low bun he’d gotten use to seeing whenever he brewed. Strands of long back hair cascaded around them from the angle Severus tilted them back. Encouraged he let his hands clasp the first button of Severus’s high collared shirt.
“No.” Severus breathy said breaking them apart.

Harry’s heart dipped painfully as if he was falling off his broom from fifty feet above the ground.

“No.” Severus repeated letting his hands let go of Harry’s face.

Quickly he enveloped Severus into a hug. He didn’t want Severus to run away. He needed Severus to be close. “No” he said just as breathlessly holding tight.

Severus didn’t pry him off as they caught their breath. For the next couple minutes they remained in this position. Harry listened to Sev’s heart attempting to calm down the part of him that wanted to cry out at the physical separation.

“I love you Sev.”

Severus knew he was still rejecting an important part of their relationship. Even the darn self help books would say so, yet he couldn’t let this happen. He loved Harry too much to rush this. Selfishly he didn’t want that aspect to be the thing that drove them apart. It was very possible that one day it would. But they had yet to even go on a first date. This level of intimacy wasn’t something he could allow yet.

“Harry,” he held the younger man close as the rest of his words froze midway. He wanted to repeat the words ‘I love you’ but it was suck. He loved Harry and Harry loved him but the isolated neglected man he’d always been inside was skeptical. For every move forward his pessimistic side would agree with the voice of his father that hovered around more dreadful than a ghost, shouting how this wasn’t meant for an unlovable disgusting waste of a being like him. But he did love Harry. For all the constant looping he put them through he did want the things that Harry sought out from him. That’s why he was conducting research. That’s why he was letting Harry pull him more and more out of his comfort zone. There was still so much against them; the Daily Prophet, ex Death Eaters, the past , maybe even the whole world. Why did dating have to be so complicated?

He pulled back just enough to see the pleading look on Harry’s face. With a gentle hand he lifted Harry’s chin. There was something still so sad in those eyes hidden behind the rounded framed glasses. It was something far more than being denied the intimacy the younger man craved he could tell it from the way Harry gripped him. He wondered if loving Harry was hurting the young man more than he knew. If he were someone else Harry wouldn’t have to face so much.

The mere thought of Harry being broken up inside yanked at the internal need to protect and shelter the younger man.
For someone as broken as himself to want to help Harry was almost laughable. Severus knew far too little of what it took to truly be with someone. Research from books was merely a start.

“I forgot” Harry suddenly brightened with a smile that eased him somewhat. “Draco finally agreed that I can have people over the apartment.”

“So you finally pestered him to the point that he agreed to let you do as pleased” he shook his head.

“Pesterimg seems to be the only way to get what I want with certain Slytherins.” Harry smirked.

He returned the smirk. “I will not be so easily manipulated.” He teased a finger to slide down the edge of Harry’s chin down his neck. Harry physically shivered in his arms.

“Git.”
“I will await a proper invitation to your apartment. Knowing you, you’ll plan to throw some horrible party.”

“A party that you will be dragged to.” Harry’s eyes filled with a fiery determination that he scoffed at.

“Is that so.”

Harry’s hands shot up into his hair guiding him closer so that their lips once again was mere centimeters apart. They both fought to not bridge the gap, a poor attempt to see who would break first. Harry seemed to be putting up a good fight resisting, though he wouldn’t be the one to lose.

“I already told you that I wouldn’t be manipulated.”

Harry kissed him on the tip of his nose. Pulling away Harry gave a wide smile as if he had gotten exactly what he wanted. Although Severus made no verbal agreement he was sure that when the day came he would end up in Harry’s apartment.

Severus was about to finally turn in for the night when the alarms of his wards sounded. Quickly and quietly as he could he rushed downstairs with his wand at the ready. The intruder had come in from the floo, which meant that they would be stuck within his fireplace due to a strong spell he had cast to make sure that no one accidentally or otherwise floo-ed in while he was unaware. He would’ve been a fool to not expect at least one attempt on his life after the news of his spectacular recovery from death was printed. It was about time someone tried to break into his house.

Creeping into the living room he could hear the muffled panic of the intruder. Without any lights on the pitch black gave him an upper hand as he knew the layout. Severus was sure once he apprehended the intruder that he would be able to force out how they had managed to find out that his floo was now operational.

With a silent spell he freed the intruder following it up with a body bind spell. When he heard the light thud onto his carpet he lit the room.

Laying face first on the ground was not a former Death Eater, but Harry dressed in his striped pajamas.

“Reckless” he sighed freeing the spell.

Harry stirred, rising himself up onto his knees. “What was all that for?”

“You were the one who thought it wise to sneak in at three in the morning.”

“I thought you would still be up.”

“I was, which is why I didn’t cast something far more dangerous.” He reached out a hand to help Harry stand. “Visits paid at three am rarely stem from good intentions.” Gently he guided Harry onto the couch.

Harry rubbed his knees.

“Why were you up this late?”
“It was nothing. I shouldn’t have come to bother you.”

“You wouldn’t bother me at this hour if were nothing.” He could guess the reason but preferred to let Harry tell him.

Harry bit his lip. “...Draco is at Hogwarts...It’s too quiet there... Could I sleep here tonight? Please just this once.”

There was a hint of unease on Harry’s face. Although Severus wasn’t completely okay with the thought of Harry spending the night in this horrific house he didn’t want to send the younger man away to deal with whatever had kept him up. Spinner’s End never provided a sense of safety to quell his own nightmares.

“Just this once” he agreed.

“So, the couch?”

“No, unless it’s your intention is to freeze. The fireplace is highly unreliable.”

“Oh, so the second bedroom?”

Severus stilled. “Did you go into that room?” He had secured the door to the second room years ago but Harry and Draco might’ve disturbed it. It was something that he hadn’t checked. Going in that room was something he hadn’t faced in over decades.

“No. I...I have been in your room... Sorry.”

“You don’t have to apologize. I was...away when that happened,” Harry looked down at his hands. He had to say something. “It’s a relief that the whole house hadn’t been redone in awful Gryffindor colors.”

“Did I ever tell you about the time Draco tried to make everything I owned red and everything he owned green so that we wouldn’t mix our things up? Charmed everything not just plates, even the sides of the couch. It was like Christmas had vomited all over the apartment. You would’ve loved it” Harry chuckled. “Draco knew it was awful and tacky so it was all fixed in a matter of minutes.”

“You’ll find neither of those colors in my home.” He smirked as he left the couch, silently conveying that Harry should follow.

“Yeah. I notice the lack of Slytherin pride.”

He chose not to say a word about what his father did to his school things back when he was a student. If he did have anything remotely magical looking his father would bind his hands together and destroy the object right in front of his eyes, which was followed by a ruthless beating. It had always been a challenge to sneak in potions or salves to treat his mother’s injuries during summer break. And his textbooks had to be stashed in a twisted oak tree far from his home to prevent them from being ripped beyond repair.

With much reluctance he let Harry into his bedroom.

“You reorganized your shelves” Harry noted.

It was peculiar that Harry picked up on that. It was in some part distressing to think of someone else having been in his room. Growing up he hadn’t even thought to invite over the one friend he had made. Who would’ve wanted to visit his home back then? This room had been so small and
bare, there hadn't been toys to share only his small collection of muggle books which were ratty since his mother could only ever afford the books that were about to be tossed into the trash. Some of his books had pages missing and scribbles in it as if it were given to an infant to do with as they pleased. When he no longer had to worry about the law or his father he had expanded his room to accommodate all the books he could acquire.

“You’ve read all of these?” Harry asked while caressing the spines of the book with a sort of tenderness that for some inexplicable reason caused his heart to drop.

“Yes.”

Watching Harry in his room was something along the lines of peering through a pensive. He felt that he was just a visitor in the moment observing. It was a strange reality from what he always believed his life would look like. Despite the way their relationship had changed he still couldn’t truly envision how Harry’s presence in this house would work. There was too many memories fused in the very foundation of this house, which he didn’t like Harry stumbling upon. Knowing Harry it wouldn’t take long until that happened.

“Do you prefer a certain side of the bed?” Never in his life had he asked that question.

“I don’t mind at all...I tend to sleep on my left side since it was the only way to face away from the light that streamed through the crack in the cupboard door.” Severus was sure Harry hadn’t meant to say that.

“Have you been thinking about them? The Dursleys? Is that’s what keeping you up?”

“A little. They kind of always pop up here and there in my dreams.” Harry spoke towards the books.

Dreams. Severus remembered the tears and screams of agony the last time he witnessed Harry’s night terrors. Harry had already been prone to them even before the war; he could only imagine what took place in those dreams now. Only fools would believe that Harry's nightmares would leave him so easily. Severus knew from experience that certain things stuck with you only to come out in at the night when mental barriers were weakened.

“It doesn’t bother me.”

Unsure of what to say he nodded.

“Lets get some sleep.” Harry flashed him a sad smile. “Unless you want to stand here for the rest of the night. I like your night shirt.”

Feeling self conscious of having his legs exposed he moved to the bed and conjured more pillows. Strategically he placed a few pillows down the middle of the bed.

“Really?” Harry laughed.

“I would feel more comfortable with our own space.”

“Okay.” Harry shrugged moving to the bed.

Taking up the left side of the bed, Harry swiveled to the vacant right side.

“Nox” he whispered plunging the room into darkness.
“Goodnight Severus.”

“Goodnight Harry” he said over the growing sound of his heart.

Focusing on the darkened ceiling he laid there stiff as a board. The knowledge that Harry was in his bed was going to keep him up. He had planned to wake up early anyways, perhaps he would escape to his lab once Harry drifted off.

Harry turned towards the pillow wall. They were only fluff and fabric yet he had a feeling that it was much more to Severus. He wouldn't complain about it. Stumbling in at three am was already pushing it. Not once had Severus offered him to spend the night. Harry didn’t want to make Severus uncomfortable in his own house like this. This house was plenty uncomfortable for him as it was.

He listened for breathing just beyond the pillows so that he could know the other man was there. Severus was too quiet. Harry turned the opposite way. In the darkness he could make out the shape of the bookshelves lining the wall. The silhouette made his throat go dry. Last summer he’d traced the spines of some of those books thinking that the tinge of magic they had was all he had left of the man he loved. The dryness in his throat was increasing. Pressure build up in his chest, threatening to pull tears from his eyes. No, he wouldn’t cry. Quickly he turned to the pillows shutting his eyes tight in an attempt to focus on Severus’s silent breathing. Severus was alive. Alive. alive. alive. He repeated that mantra over and over in his mind. Severus was too quiet. Why couldn’t the man make noise like a normal person?

“Sev” he whispered hoping that he didn't sound on the brink of tears.

“Yes Harry?”

Hearing Severus’s voice let some of the tension in his chest lax. Those two words freed up the heightened lonely fear he had felt.

“I can’t sleep.”

He could feel the bed dip from Sev’s movement. “Do you need a Dreamless Sleep Potion?”

“No. Please could you just say something.”

“What am I supposed to say?”

“Anything...” Harry slipped his hand under the pillows to the other side.

“This defeats the whole purpose of the wall” Severus whispered as he took Harry’s hand.

With their fingers intertwined Harry had to fight the urge to cry and toss the pillows aside. Sev was here. Alive, alive, alive. Somehow it was so hard to believe that at night.

Long fingers interlocked with his own seemed to shuffle him closer. A pleasant hum of magic moved into him. Instantly he felt his magic connect with Severus’ bringing in a fuller sense of calm.

Although it had been his own action Severus cursed the pillows that prevented him from pulling
Harry into his arms. With his magic connected to Harry’s he felt whole. Nothing in this world made him feel as complete as being with Harry did. And these pillows were interfering with that, but he didn’t dare give in to the growing urge to disregard his own self imposed rules.

“Goodnight Harry” he whispered.

“Goodnight Sev.”

When Severus woke up he was greeted with a wild haired Harry Potter pressed up against him. All pillows that served as a wall had been tossed from the bed in the night. Scoffing he took note of how inefficient the attempt at separation had been. Figuring that Harry would like to eat once he too woke Severus slipped from the bed.

After breakfast he handed a vial to Harry. “Dreamless Sleep.”

“Thanks,” Harry looked at it. “I should probably buy some so that I don’t show up so late at night for something so silly.”

“It isn’t silly” he said sternly.

There was nothing silly about having one’s subconscious bring about horrific images. He knew more than most of night terrors. People without such experience would think it silly or worse try to beat it out of a person, as his father often did when his mother couldn’t quiet him. He wouldn’t deny the clear effects of Harry’s nightmares as some would.

“Come.” Sweeping out of the room listening to Harry’s heavy steps following behind. He led them to his living room stopping by the hearth of the fireplace.

“Ready to get rid of me already?” Harry laughed in a hollow tone that didn’t sit well with Severus at all.

Taking Harry’s hand he smirked.

Harry looked at him with questions clear on his face, yet he didn’t say a word. Instead he focused his magic towards Harry’s. This sort of physical contact wasn’t necessary for what he was going to do, however the pain he’d heard in Harry’s voice seconds earlier demanded a certain closeness. The joining of their magic sent a tingling sensation traveling up from his fingers all throughout his body. Relief sparked in emerald eyes. For a moment they let their magic just remain there entangled in a comforting sensation between their connected hands like it had the night before.

Of course he knew they shouldn’t allow for their magic to build up like it was beginning to do now. Their lessons of Combine Magic hadn’t completely escaped him. It was nearly miraculous to think that he still possessed such an ability after nearly dying.

Taking out his wand he readied to let the flow of their magic towards what he wanted before the build up between them resulted in exploding his house, not that he’d mind too much. If it weren’t for Statue of Secrecy of the Wizarding World perhaps he would like to see such an effect.

Harry remained quiet as he pulled their magic maneuvering it with his wand as though painting the hearth. When he was done slowly he broke their connection.
Harry swayed a little once Severus’s magic left his own. Exhaustion nearly brought him to his knees. Looking at Severus who wasn’t swaying at all, he wondered if Sev was just stronger to not feel it or just darn good at hiding it, either way he was jealous. Having better sense than to wait to fall over and make a fool of himself he sat back on the couch. The lack of gravity trying to pull him down allowed him to enjoy the warmth tingle from having his magic intertwined. Smiling he watched Severus dropped a little more than usual into his armchair.

“What was that about?”

“I have just added your magical signature to this house. It’ll allow you to floo in without issue or if you wish to apparate inside.”

Harry couldn’t stop his jaw from dropping. This was as much as a declaration of love from Severus. His heart fluttered.

“I know that I have opened up myself to far more of your pestering.” Severus smirked. “I however would prefer it that when you need my assistance my door is open to you.”

“You're constantly helping me”

“At this point I believe it to be some Pavlovian response.”

Smiling he shakily walked towards Severus. Using the sides of the armchair as support he leaned forward.

“I love you too Severus.” Severus met his lips.

Chapter End Notes

Hello,
Hope you all are enjoying the story. I am pushing for these two to get a move on already.
Thank you for your support.
Until next time.
Weeks passed with the Harry and Severus falling into a new routine of him brewing while Harry tidied his lab. It was comfortable to have Harry’s presence there and when Harry determined it was time to eat they would take a break. Some times Harry would tell him about his friends and he’d listen to the pride Harry had for his friends accomplishments all while a tinge of what might be considered shame flashed in the young man’s eyes. Harry didn’t need to be ashamed for not acquiring a job right away, although Severus thought that having an occupation would help Harry sort out what he really wanted. Scrubbing cauldrons and sharing meals couldn’t be all Harry wanted from life.

Learning from his mistake weeks prior Harry called Severus to let him know that Mr. Graves had sent him a letter requesting that they come over before floo-ing to Sev’s house. Spinner’s End was slowly becoming a more comforting place, at least Sev’s lab was. Spending hours together made it easier to return to his lonely apartment at the end of the day. Draco wrote sporadically checking in to which he’d report that things were the same as it was, which often resulted in a letter or fire call where Draco told him that he should do more then talk and scrub cauldrons with Severus. Severus too encouraged him to get out of the house now and a then.

Dusting off himself he wondered why he couldn’t emerge out of a floo for once without looking like a mess. This wouldn’t be a problem if he apparated, yet the sensation of apparating was still not a welcomed one.

“Hi” he smiled at Severus sitting in his armchair, turning his attention from the book that was in his hands.

“You cut your hair.”

“Yeah,” Harry ran a hand through his shortened hair. Earlier he’d decided that he should get it done. “Reporter snapped a pic before I got away. Tomorrow's headline will read: Hero cuts hair to impress his rumored lover.” He truly hoped that by appearing here and there within the Wizarding World that the Daily Prophet would get bored of his mundane life instead of writing ridiculous theories like he was captive- a story Ron had summarized in a letter a few days ago.

Severus scoffed, placing the book down. “Did you cut your hair to impress me?”

“As if you would be impressed by a stupid haircut.”

Severus stood, a hand moving to run through his hair as if to inspect it but Harry knew that Severus wanted to touch him just as much as he wanted to be touched. There were times like this that they each jumped at lame excuses to touch one another. “It looks good.”

Harry felt his cheeks heat up a little. “Give it a day. My hair never cooperates. I envy your straight hair.”

“I have a list of unfavorable physical characteristics which has empirical evidence to backup” Severus said in a matter-of-fact tone.
“Funny I don’t see anything unfavorable” Severus scowled. Balancing on the edge of his tip toes he placed a kiss onto Sev’s nose. This was one of his new favorite things to do. The small action kept Sev from voicing more self-deprecating thoughts.

“Come on,” He pulled the dragon figure Portkey out of his pocket.

When they arrived at the Scamander home the sense of calm about the place was somehow even more palpable then the first time. He could get use to such a sensation.

“Welcome!” Mr. Scamander greeted just as enthusiastically as ever.

“Where’s Mr. Graves?” Severus asked noting that the American was not leaning in the doorway with a smug knowing look on his face.

“He’s inside working.”

He wouldn’t bring up anything Mr. Graves had said the last time they visited. It wasn’t his place to know whether Mr. Graves had informed his husband about the trip back to New York.

Darion happily moved his little hands around. “Sa. Sa. ah-a-ah!”

“Hello Darion.” He inclined his head towards the child.

“Sa. Sa!” Darion moved his hand more excitedly.

Mr. Scamander was looking at him with a fond smile. He still wouldn't go as far as to hold the still rather fragile child. He couldn’t see how Mr. Graves was dealing with the reality that he would have to be separated from this child.

“Mr. Snape?” Newt tilted his head. “Is there something wrong?”

Mr. Snape had that look, the one when someone knew something he didn’t and was unsure if he should be told. It reminded him a bit of Tina. Tina always had that sort of look, especially whenever he’d been asked to assist MACUSA.

Mr. Snape’s quirked a brow.

“How have you been Newt?” Harry asked before Mr. Snape could say anything.

“I’ve been well..Percival has been rather busy in his office so I don't get to go out much.”

“I don't mind going into town with you” Harry volunteered right away.

“No...I meant,” he looked to make sure Percival wasn't around and continued speaking in a whisper. “There’s a friend that I would like to visit.”

“By friend you mean a creature don’t you Mr. Scamander.”

“Well...” He nodded. “They don’t live far. Just up the mountain...”

“Let's go!” Harry jumped to his feet. “It sounds fun, right Darion.”
“Ah-a-ah!” Darion laughed.

“Not so fast.” Mr. Snape spoke in the same way he heard many times back at Hogwarts.

“Don't you want to go on an adventure?” Harry asked with a smirk.

“Not particularly considering how the last adventure went.”

Newt bowed his head lower. He shouldn’t have suggested anything, but he really was itching to go on the next great adventure with these two. He knew that Percival had invited them over to help distract from thinking about how more and more time Percival was spending in that office. Newt had let time slip without complaint because he knew it wasn’t something that Percival could avoid. MACUSA wasn’t something that could be brushed off.

“What creatures would we potentially be visiting Mr. Scamander?”

“Graphorns. They’re not dangerous!”

Mr. Snape looked to be weighing the pros and cons. He had to act fast before his chance of getting out beyond his backyard was gone forever.

“I could possibly get you some Graphorn horns if we go.” Mr. Snape eyes stared at him for a quick moment. “This time of year the younger ones shed their infant horns. It’s similar to how humans lose baby teeth. They would work just as well in potions wouldn’t they?”

“They would.” Mr. Snape thought for a second. “You are certain that there is no danger?”

“I wouldn’t put my son in danger. They are kind creatures.”

“Very well. Seek permission from your husband.”

“I’ll let him know right now!” Newt scurried to Percival's office.

Percival was on his cell phone. Seeing Newt he held up a finger to get him to wait. “Excuse me a moment.” Whatever Percival was working on had to be serious if he were calling someone all the way back in America. “Is everything okay?” Percival asked pressing his palm onto the phone.

“Yeah. We are going to go out with Harry and Mr. Snape for a little bit.”

“Alright. Don't forget to wear your coat.”

He smiled. “I'll see you soon.”

“Take your talking mirror too.”

“I will.”

Percival looked quickly at the office around him. There was still a stack of papers in need of his husband’s attention.

Newt quickly kissed his husband’s cheek. “Good luck with work.”

“I will make this up to you when you return.”
“I’m having second thoughts of approving this trip.” Severus spoke loudly over the wild winds of the mountain top.

“Just think of the potions you’ll be able to make.” Harry yelled back as the edges of the Hufflepuff scarf he was borrowing from Newt fluttered in front of his eyes. Harry tried to fight the scarf with one hand as the other was occupied with carrying Mr. Scamander’s case. Harry had insisted that he’d be put incharge of it.

“The winds will die down once we are over there” Mr. Scamander pointed towards a cut through the mountain.

Why were they even here? Why had he agreed to accompany them on this?

“This is close to child endangerment” he muttered once they made it out of the wind’s path.

“Darion is fine, aren’t you.” Mr. Scamander smiled.

He looked at the wrapped up one year old whose hat had slid to cover his eyes.

“Ah. aa ma” Darion wiggled in the baby carrier that was secured around Mr. Scamander. Mr. Scamander pulled the knit hat back into its proper place. Darion giggled as he tugged the hat back down as if this were some new game.

“How much further do we need to go?” He asked still watching the two pull at Darion’s hat.

“There’s a spot where they like to go. Harry can I have my case?

Harry dutifully brought the brown leather case over.

Mr. Scamander made quick work of popping it open and sliding in. Severus, concerned that a creature would attempt an escape, stared at the case. Mr. Scamander reappeared with several ropes, harness and helmets for all of them.

“What exactly are you planning to do with that?”

When I returned these Graphorns back to the wild years ago I wanted to make sure that they were safe from poachers.” Mr. Scamander started to unravel some rope. “We’ll have to repel a little.”

“Why not apparate?”

“It’ll frighten them.” Mr. Scamander motioned Harry to come close. “Plus I have to adjust the wards to let you two in.” Mr. Scamander helped Harry into a harness.

“This is starting to look more and more like a dangerous idea.”

“Nonsense.” Harry said letting Mr. Scamander moved about him.

Newt adjusted Darion so the little one was now on his back comfortably secured.

“I should have alerted Mr. Graves myself. He wouldn’t have agreed if he knew. I wouldn’t have-”

“Stop it. Breathe in some fresh air” Harry scolded.

“Here, let me help you Mr. Snape with your harness.”

He held his tongue as Mr. Scamander came close with his person to adjust the harness. He rather
not fall due to unsafe harness than complain about discomfort.

Harry held his laughter as the way Severus was awkwardly secured in his harness. The bright red ropes bunching his black robes. He didn’t know why Sev insisted on such wardrobe. Merlin, he wanted a camera to capture the way Sev’s face was fighting not to snap at Newt, who tightened the rope.

Newt looked over their harnessed and ropes once more before speaking. “I’ll head down first so I can adjust the wards. Just follow my steps and there will be no problem.”

“Doubtful” he caught Severus grumble under his breath.

“You don’t mind taking my case do you Harry?”

“Not a problem.”

Newt took the handle of the case securing it to his back.

“I feel like a turtle” he laughed making slow moments with his restricted legs.

Severus didn’t look at all pleased at his joke.

“The trick to repelling is to keep a steady hand behind you like this” Newt modeled holding the rope’s end “You can either take it slow and walk down backwards or do small jumps.”

They nodded and Newt headed towards the edge of the cliff.

Newt tugged the anchored rope tree time, these supplies were heavily charmed with protection spells so he had the utmost faith that they all would make it down the side safely.

As his feet found the edge of the mountain side adrenaline rushed through him. It felt so long to be as on an adventure like this.

“See you at the bottom” he smiled. Kicking off from the edge he caught the stunned looks of his companions in the split second his whole body swung in the air before his feet connected back to the rocky side.

“You okay back there?” He asked as he settled his feet.

Darion laughed.

“Few more jumps to go.” He kicked off again.

“I swear if Darion gets hurt from this ill thought out venture...” Severus muttered under his breath.

He looked over at Harry. Harry looked just as excited as he was at the suggestion of this trip. There should be some faith in Mr. Scamander’s abilities, but he couldn’t help think of all the things that could go wrong. Things had gone wrong the last time. Of course that hadn’t been the Magizoologist’s fault. “I’ll go next. If you fall I’ll cushion you.”
“Thanks Sev but I'm a lot stronger than last time we were on a mountain.”

Harry was right. “Don’t do reckless things like Mr. Scamander.”

“Reckless is my middle name.”

Severus scowled as he planted his feet firmly on the edge and tightly gripped the rope behind him.

“I’ll be right behind you.”

Not wanting to delay the inevitable he began his slow walk down. Mid way he kicked off like Mr. Scamander had done.

“You see it's not so bad” Mr. Scamander greeted when he reached the flat ground.

“You ready to catch me Sev?” Harry called down to them.

To be safe he placed a strong cushioning charm on the ground and kept his wand ready. He watched the small form of Harry take to the edge. His heart skipped as he readied for Harry’s first move. As Harry kicked off his grip tightened on his wand. Closer and closer Harry got and then paused about a two feet from the ground.

“What’s wrong?”

“Catch me!” Harry leapt from the side but the rope didn’t follow. The idiot must’ve unlatched his harness.

“Imbecile!” Out stretching his arms he caught Harry just in time.

Harry begun to laugh, his eyes sparkling. “You caught me.”

“Next time I will think twice about doing so.”

Harry continued to laugh as he wrapped his arms around the back of his neck. “I haven’t felt this much adrenaline in a long time.” Harry pulled him close “Thank you for catching me.” Harry kissed him on the tip of his nose.

A ‘click’ went off besides them.

Severus’s eyes shot to Newt, who hid behind the camera in his hands. Newt ran through the wards disappearing .

“We should follow” Severus grumbled.

“You don't want to stay like this?” He glanced at Severus’s lips.

“I will not reward your rash adrenaline junkie behavior.” Severus bent so that Harry’s feet touched the ground.

“Fair enough.” Taking Severus’s hand they ran through the barrier.

They both looked at Newt oddly as the magizoologist cupped his hands in front of his mouth and let out strange sound that to him sounded like a cow mixed with a whale. They both knew better than to stop whatever it was Newt was doing. It was best not to chance anything by interrupting.
“They must be coming from far away” Newt said waiting a few seconds before continuing with the noise. The ground started to shake beneath them as a cloud of dust steadily approached them. Newt turned back with a wide smile.

“Harry reach into my case and pull out the two buckets hanging on the side.”

He did as he was told. Newt’s case amazed him. Sticking his hand inside he felt the handle of a bucket. Tucking half of his body into the case he caught the handle of one buckets and begun to yank it out. It weighted quite a bit. He could feel Sev’s hands holding him steady so that he wouldn’t fall head first into the case. Using both hands he lifted the large bucket that smelled rather awful. Chopped up raw meat sat in the bucket. It made him a little queasy, even so he didn’t dare let go of the handle.

“What is this for?” Severus asked Newt as he helped him out of the case.

“It’s rude to show up without a treat” Newt said easily taking the heavy bucket from him.

Severus quickly snapped the case close as if he were certain that if he didn’t something would pop out. “Anything we should know about these creatures Mr. Scamander?”

“Don’t run. They are peaceful creatures, but their appearance can be off putting to some. If you run they might think you’re playing and chase you.” Newt unlatched Darion from his back and handed the infant to Harry. “Percival wouldn’t like it if Darion smelled like meat.”

Newt rolled up his sleeves just as the Graphorns halted right in front of them. These creatures were odd looking; they were purple-ish grey, large humped backs, with tentacles sticking out of its face.

Newt happily raised a hand towards the larger Graphorn’s tentacled face, the creatures made a small grunt.

“Good to see you too.” Newt looked at the other Graphorns”You have a wonderful family. I’m so proud that you’re doing well.”

The Graphorn grunted again nudging Newt’s hand.

“If there are any young ones ready to lose their horns my friend,” he pointed to Mr. Snape “would like to help.”

The Graphorn let out a lower long wail followed by some grunting.

“They are good people I promise.”

The older Graphorn motioned its head to a little Graphorn that came up to about the height of Newt’s ribs.

“Thank you friend.”

The little one came forward hesitantly. Newt called to the young one in a soft grunt while dipping into the bucket to offer a small portion of the raw meat. The tentacles of the little one’s face tentatively reached for the meat in his palms. “Go on and take it.” Slowly the tentacles wrapped around the food and consumed it.

“There you are.” He fed another portion of meat while stroking the Graphorns head.
“Mr. Snape if you would be so kind to toss some meat to the others, this little one will give you its horn.”

He kept his eyes on the young one as he heard Mr. Snape reach in the bucket followed by the thud of a large hunk of meat hitting the ground a little further away.

“Alright,” he focused on the young one’s horn that was barely hanging on to its head “you’ll feel a little tug okay.” With one good tug the horn separated with a crack. The Graphorn tilted it’s head feeling the change of weight. “Thank you.” He petted its head.

“Mr. Scamander!” Percival’s voice rumbled low so that he wouldn’t frighten the Graphorns.

Newt remained staring at the youngling, who looked at him as though it were unsure if it should stay or go. Through his magic he could feel his husband getting closer and closer.

“Mr. Scamander you will turn around this instant and look at your husband.”

Sheepishly he smiled at Percival.

Percival’s hair had been side swept by the harsh winds and there was a blotch of ink on the edge of one cuff. He was looking everywhere except Percival’s face that he knew was going to highlight how much trouble he was in.

Percival had gone crazy with worry when he read the note Newt left saying exactly where they had gone off to with Darion. No matter how distracted with work he was becoming he should've done more to keep Newt from running away at the first sign of freedom. How long had he known just how much his husband hated being confined to indoors.

“I thought you were going to go into town. That’s what I agreed on not this.” He had to fight to keep his voice stern and low. It would be foolish to startle a herd of Graphorns by shouting.

Newt lowered his head trying to look innocent but he wouldn’t fall for it; not this time. Newt was a grown man who understood the reasons behind this deception.

“Mr. Snape, you approved of this?”

“It was my understanding that you had given permission for this outing.” Mr. Snape eyed Newt like the troublemaker his husband was.

He saw Newt’s shoulders rise and his heart clenched at the thought his husband was going to cry. Instead of crying Newt whistled towards one of the Graphorns and took off running towards the creature. Before anyone knew what was happening Newt mounted the Graphorn, riding off as easily as riding a trained horse.

“NEWTON ARTEMIS FIDO SCAMANDER!” He ran after his husband. “Come back here!”

“No!” Newt laughed.

Newt whistled a second time and the next thing he knew he too was on the back of a Graphorn. It took a second to steady himself on the creature. “Help me get my husband and I’ll reward you” he told the creature.

Off they chased his laughing husband. Every time he got close Newt would slip just out of reach at
the last moment.

“You are going to be in so much trouble when I catch you.”

“If you can catch me.”

He could barely hang on or guide the creature in the direction he wanted. For Newt it was as easy as breathing. Newt had far more experience with this sort of thing, even so he wasn’t going to go down without a fight.

Harry watched the two on the backs of Grahorns running around. It looked like a lot of fun. He wouldn’t try it out with Darion in his care. Riding a creature of that size had to be more difficult than simply riding a broom.

“Idiots” Severus muttered.

Adjusting Darion onto his hip he took Sev’s hand. Sev rose a questioning brow but didn’t remove his hand.

Newt was going to prolong the scolding for as long as he could. This Graphorn was up for these little games which made it all that easier to be kept out of Percival’s reach. Percival seemed to have gotten tired of it as he heard the whip crack of apparation followed by Percival appearing behind him. The sound made the Graphorn jump sending both of them sliding off. Percival tucked him close as they rolled to the ground. There was nothing left to do but laugh as the Graphorns continued to chase each other unaware that their riders were gone.

“Newt,” There was hardly any anger left in his husband’s eyes. “you will properly talk through all adventures with me before bringing our one year old son along understood.”

“Yes.”

“Good. When we get home I will impound your case as punishment.”

“You can’t” he pleaded.

“You hardly respond to other punishments.”

Newt turned his face away. He had done this to himself. If he hadn’t run maybe his husband would’ve gone lighter on the punishment.

“Come on.”

He didn’t resist as Percival lifted him up.

Mr. Scamander appeared to be sulking when he returned with Mr. Graves. Both were now covered in dirt and dust.

“Gentlemen the next time you volunteer for my husband's hasty thought out plans do make it a point to bring me along.”
“They aren’t dangerous” Mr. Scamander spoke softly.

“I know, but you were still reckless. Darion is young even friendly beasts can get rough sometimes you know that.”

Mr. Scamander nodded.

“Let’s go” Mr. Graves said.

“We’re going home already?” Mr. Scamander shrunk.

“No.” Everyone looked to Mr. Graves. “We are going to set up camp somewhere that doesn’t smell like raw meat.”

Mr. Scamander broke into a wide smile that Mr. Graves returned. Severus had the impression that these two hadn’t seen that much of one another in the past few days due to Mr. Graves’s work.

“One night.” Mr. Graves outstretched his hand and a small bag flew into it. “I could use the break.”

“Are you two going to stay?” Mr. Scamander looked at them expectantly.

He looked to Mr. Graves to assess if their company would be interfere with the family. Mr. Graves gave a small nod, which he interpreted as an invitation.

“Perhaps it won’t be a horrible idea to join you.”

As if they did this every day they all helped set up the tent. That suspicious case held more than just creatures as it seemed to have nearly everything for their camp. Though he hadn’t come without a few items of his own.

“Good to see that you haven’t lost your sense of perpetration Mr. Snape” Percival commented as Mr. Snape pulled out several items from his own small bag and laid it on a transfigured table. It brought on a sense of pleasant deja vu.

“I have learned to be prepared for any outcome” Mr. Snape said as he laid out more things, Percival suspected most of the vials were potions for treating injuries.

“And how exactly are your preparations of courting Mr. Potter going?”

Mr. Snape’s head shot up to glare at him. “I am not courting Harry. Courting is a Pureblood practice, which neither I nor Harry are.” There was a beat of silence. “We are dating, which is an entirely different thing.”

“My mistake.” He smirked. This was the first instance where the stubborn man had admitted to being something to Mr. Potter. It was only a matter of time before the two got to the point that marriage would be possibility. “Then how is dating going?”

“That is a personal matter.”

“You wouldn’t willing engage in this conversation if you didn't want to hear my thoughts on the subject.”

“Do not assume you know all of my motivations solely because you have spent a year within my
Mr. Snape watched Mr. Potter as he helped Newt occupy Darion near the tent.

Mr. Snape muttered something that he couldn’t catch.

“What was that Mr. Snape?”

“I’ve been doing some reading and have difficulty pursuing the theories into action.”

“Well, some theories are better off adapted. Certain theories did not apply while I was dating Newt.” Mr. Snape didn’t seem all that soothed by his words. Love was a funny thing that didn’t adhere to a strict set of rules. That had to be difficult for Mr. Snape to deal with. “Things will happen naturally if given the opportunity. Newt would agree that it's best not to fight the nature of it.”

“It’s not that easy.”

“Men like us have difficulty with things that lack reasoning, unfortunately love operates in such a way.”

As soon as the sleeping arrangements were done inside the tent Harry decided that he should test them out. The two large mattresses laid a few feet apart and upon a decent inspection, that consisted of rolling around, he found that they were as soft as he remembered. Tonight he was going to share the large mattress with Sev without any nonsense of pillow barriers.

“They’re as perfect as I hoped” he said reluctantly rising from the mattress. “You could’ve been a great transfiguration teacher.”

“I only can do the same spells that I’ve practiced for years.” Newt bent down to place Darion on the opposite mattress. Darion wobbled a bit as he moved across gleefully babbling. “What’s wrong Harry.”

“It’s nothing.”

“Are you sure? It seems that you have something on your mind for a while.”

There was no sense in lying to Newt. Maybe Newt could help.

“I thought that this was supposed to be the part where everything ended nicely, you know. Like an epilogue to a good book where all is well. But I feel like I'm doing the same thing. It's as if I’m stuck in this loop. Everything is going in circles. I try to be useful when I go bother Severus but I’m so rubbish that I just clean cauldrons all day. I don’t mind it but maybe I should. I think that I’m the only one who doesn’t have a set plan for life.”

“You’re still young.”

“I don’t like people saying that I’m young. I’m an adult now” he groaned.

“I meant that you have so much life to look forward to.”
“After defeating Voldy there's not much greater thing I can do.”

“You don’t have to do something greater than that. Do what you want. Life can be as boring or as exciting as you choose.”

“That’s it. Aside from being with Sev I don’t know what I want in life... I want to do something. I don’t just want to sit around all day watching everyone else move on with their lives.”

“My brother Theseus is an Auror. He wanted me to join the Ministry ... to me that seemed like the furthest thing from what I wanted. One of my greatest fears was to have a desk job... You should see Percival’s desk” Newt shuddered.

Harry looked at him expectantly.

“After I got expelled I spent several gloomy months at home. My parents weren’t fond of me not finishing school but they loved me too much to kick me out. They tried everything they could to do to get me back to school or get me a job... I was lost. When Theseus joined the war effort I followed mostly because it was something. But once that was over I was back to being lost. Theseus ended up a war hero while my role was significantly minor...For a while there was this constant comparison between us. More than ever I felt so different from everyone else as more as more strangers would thank my brother for all he’d done. I was proud of him of course, but Theseus often tried to get me to be more normal... Later I made up my mind to travel on what little funds I had managed to collect. My brother thought I was running away...maybe I was.” Newt stared at Darion. “I began to study creatures. It wasn’t all easy. I ran into unfriendly people. Interacting with people was never my strongest suit...What I mean by all this is, we’ve all been where you are now. Not everyone has an idea of what they want to do with life. I don’t think even Seers could accurately tell you where life will end up. For now enjoy the things in life. You don’t have to know exactly what you want to do today or tomorrow. Even if you don’t know a year or two from now it’s okay.”

“Thanks Newt.” He hugged Newt tightly. “I’ll send Mr. Graves in... unless you don’t want him to.”

“I don’t think he’s as mad anymore...He was scared..I can be very sidetracked by mythical creatures.”

“I’m sure Mr. Graves doesn’t see that as completely a bad thing.”

Out of the tent flaps he saw Sev in font of a cauldron just like he had been back when he was still ill. Even though he was dying at the time he had enjoyed being the four of them away from everything. It felt so peaceful to return to a sense of nothing trying to pull them in every direction. And this time they had no worries of anything out to get them. Nothing was going to interrupt the happy peace, no angered creature, no damaged magical core, or old Voldy.

Catching Mr. Graves’s eye the American nodded heading towards the tent.

“Hey,”

“Is the tent secured?” Severus asked, eyes focused on his work.

“Don't worry I’m sure Mr. Graves will check it over.” He leaned over the cauldron bubbling water. “What are you making?”
“I was thinking stew. Mr. Scamander was gracious enough to give the necessary ingredients from his case.”

“Stew sounds great. Too bad we don't have an oven I would’ve made some fresh bread to go with it.”

“Next time I will pack an entire kitchen for your sake” Severus sarcastically drawled.

Laughing he inched to stand side by side Severus. “Hand me some vegetables. I’ll help out.”

Severus pushed aside a space on the table to properly chop up the vegetables right. Whenever they brushed up against each other Severus did not automatically jump away or make excuses to run off. It was a testament to how comfortable they had grown into this relationship. When their eyes caught one another it was so hard to look away. The way Severus looked at him, with a magnetic pull unobstructed by the self imposed mental barriers was something he wanted to experience every day of his life.

Emerald eyes were binding him in place though he felt no reason to fight against it. How could eyes leave him frozen in time like this? To be looked at by shimmering eyes that struck his heart with longing enveloped him in a warmth he thought impossible merely a few years prior. Was this a lovers stare like his stupid self help books had mentioned? It was a strange thing to think as he continued to hold Harry’s glance.

Lover, a simple word that he didn’t think would wind itself into his personal vocabulary, but there it was. He was in a relationship with Harry. They were dating, though one could argue that was an incorrect statement as they had yet to go on a single proper date. He was aware that he needed to fix that issue, but it wasn’t as simple as the self help books made it out to be.

“Ouch” Harry winced snapping them both out of the hypnotic state. Harry quickly stuck his finger into his mouth. “I can’t believe I did that” Harry grumbled around the injured finger in his mouth.

“Perhaps I should ban you from using knives. Clearly you can’t be trusted not to be distracted while holding sharp objects.”

“It’s your fault for being so distracting.”

He scoffed. “Let me see your debilitating injury” he teased pulling Harry’s’ hand close. It was barely a nick on the pad of his index finger.

“Do you think I will survive?” Harry joked.

Shaking his head he pulled out a muggle first aid kit from his enchanted bag.

“No potions?”

“This hardly requires a potion. A simple band aid will suffice.”

Dabbing on a alcohol swab to clean the cut Severus quickly dressed the wound.

“For something so small it hurts so much” Harry hissed.

“Deal with it” he said placing the first aid back. “I’m not sure what we will run into while spending the night so I won’t use anything until it becomes necessary to do so.”
“I already asked and Newt says there's no giant lizard creature for miles.”

“That’s one less thing to worry about I suppose.”

Percival joined his husband and son on one of the large mattresses after checking over the tent’s construction. Newt laid on his side watching Darion scurry back and forth on the bedding. He took to lie on the opposite side so that Darion wouldn’t fall off. He reached a hand over to his husband that was nearly immediately taken.

“Thank you for letting us stay the night.”

“You're still in trouble for not telling me where you were taking Darion.”

“I know...”

He moved closer to Newt. “I know you didn’t intend to give me a heart attack... I would be besides myself if anything happened to you and I wasn’t there...”

“Percival.”

“It was impractical to think that you would be fine with being confined to our home again.” He turned to the tent flap hearing the other’s voices. “They seem so happy to be away from it all. So do you.” Percival tucked a curl behind Newt’s ear. “We should make it a goal to camp out more. Darion would like that don’t you think?”

“Yes” Newt said sounding breathless as the space between them lessened. Their lips met.

The night was filled with an ease that Severus had come to expect while in their company. Even his usual concern about what might seek out their campsite in the middle of the night fell away with the idle chatter that the other three men partook in. Darion called to him on more than a few occasions, waving his tiny hand. Each time he did so Mr. Scamander would look at him through long curls with a pleading gaze and each time he would not give in to the increasing demands of the little one to be held.

“Sa. Sa.” Darion Scooted himself closer.

“You should just listen to him” Harry teased as he flopped onto the large mattress besides the infant.

The fact that there were only two mattresses in the tent had not come as a surprise at all. Harry’s want of what he deemed as a ‘sleepover’ had been suggested more than once before. Severus was certain that the younger man had given up waiting for a direct invitation, although he thought opening his wards and Floo connection to Harry at all times of day and night had been direct. If it brought relief to them both he didn’t mind the shared space. For the briefest of seconds he thought to make a show of complaining about the sleeping arrangements for tonight, but there was no reason to. Mr. Graves and Mr. Scamander had no problem with them being close, the two more than not encouraged it with the approval nods he received when he sat close to Harry at dinner time. Darion was singularly focused on getting Severus to carry him to notice anything else.

“SA. Sa.”
“I will not carry you no matter how much you ask” he told the child who was crawling over Harry’s back to get to him.

Darion’s large eyes looked at him, his cheeks a little puffed and red. “Sa. Ah-a-ah. Sa.”

Severus wasn’t sure if the tone of Darion’s voice was frustration or determination.

“I will not be spoken to in that tone young man.”

Darion rolled off of Harry’s back with a little laugh.

“Don’t be rude” Harry scolded Severus scooping up Darion.

“He should learn some manners”

“Right you are” Mr. Graves chuckled with a spark of joy in his eyes as he held onto Mr. Scamander’s hand. “I don’t remember Credence ever being this way.”

“He was more reserved as a child” Mr. Scamander said.

“I am going to check the wards one last time before we turn in” Mr. Graves said, planting a kiss to Mr. Scamander’s forehead.

“I’ll come too.”

“You are far too trusting of who you leave your son with.”

“You need to trust yourself more” Mr. Scamander said in a soft voice.

How could he trust himself with anything as fragile as an infant? Darion couldn’t be frightened into making the right decisions like he could with the adolescents he had taught. Anything could harm a small child, especially on a cold mountain top. No one else seemed to realize this, Darion the least of all.

“We won’t be long.” Mr. Graves said leading his husband out of the tent.

The separation would be beneficial for the married couple. Mr. Graves could take the time to tell Mr. Scamander about the trip to New York.

“You really don’t want to hold him?” Harry asked rocking Darion a little in his arms.

Seeing Harry like this always sparked the memory of the image he had with Harry holding his own child. The things that his heart did at the image was at times unbearable.

“I will not.”

Darion yanked Harry’s glasses. “You’re missing out.”

“Yes, I am missing out on having my faces tapped and hair pulled” he drawled.

“Oh stop being a git.”

“Sa.”

“Come on.”

“You are as bad as he is and he’s an infant” he pointed out.
“Just once? Look we are sitting surrounded by the fluffiest mattress known to man so what’s to worry about?” Emerald eyes shone. Darion's large eyes too pleaded.

Letting out a disgruntled sigh he straightened his back. “I give in to you far too much.”

“I don’t think you give in enough.” Harry flashed a pleased smile.

“Come,” he instructed to the child.

“Sa?” Darion asked looking from Harry to him.

“Yes” he sighed outstretching his hands. "Come."

Excitement burst from Darion as he practically lept from Harry’s grasp towards him. Severus held back throwing up some cushioning charms at the sight of uncoordinated wobbling.


Discomfort or perhaps it was nervousness left his palms a little more clammy as they had been prior. The journey was less than a foot away yet Severus found himself trying to hurry Darion along so that he didn’t have a heart attack. Darion almost toppled head first into his lap managing to catch himself in time. Finally Darion took his hand letting out a squeal of joy.

“You can do it.”

With Harry’s encouragement he let Darion settle into his lap. Darion screamed even louder. If it weren’t for the huge smile he’d thought he somehow injured the child.

“What happened!” Mr. Graves asked flying in through the tent flap with Mr. Scamander in hand.

Both parents faces lit up as Darion let out another happy squeal. Looking around the tent he couldn’t tell who was more excited about this. Mr. Scamander broke off to retrieve something from his case. Harry beamed up at him while Darion made to grab his hair. Catching Mr. Graves’s eyes he sought assistance to be freed but to no avail. What Mr. Scamander had gone to fetch was the camera. A frown automatically plastered onto his face at the first ‘click’.

“Make sure to get Mr. Potter in the photo” Mr. Graves helpfully reminded the giddy Magizoologist.

Harry scooted close to him, smile never fading. Another ‘click’. Darion’s grip of his hair was pulling his head down uncomfortably, yet it was more bearable to have his neck at an odd tilt than these photos.

“Here let me help” Harry said carefully freeing his hair from the death-grip of Darion. Another ‘click’. Darion’s fingers carded through his hair pulling it into a high ponytail.

“I think it is time for Darion to be returned to his parents”

“We should at least have a picture of all of us together first” Mr. Graves insisted taking the camera from Mr. Scamander.

“I’m never going to be talked into this again” he mumbled.

“Then it’s a good thing we are going to have photos to commemorate this day.”  Mr. Graves smirked.
The second the camera ‘clicked’ he tossed Darion back into Mr. Scamander’s arms. Everyone laughed.

“I am adamant of this being the last time I carry a child.”

“Wait until you have one of your own”

His eyes narrowed in a glare at Mr. Graves. He didn’t dare to look towards the other two.

“I think it’s time for lights out.”

Percival looked out at the pink hue sky. It was only a few minutes when he felt someone move to stand besides him.

“Up early Mr. Graves?” Mr. Snape asked.

“Unfortunately I find my mind elsewhere this morning.” Turning he looked at the man.

Just that morning he’d seen how close he’d pulled Mr. Potter towards him in his sleep. That protective affection had brought up thoughts of his own need to protect Newt. He had to tell his husband about returning to New York yet every time he made one excuse over the other so that he wouldn’t break his husband’s heart.

“I would like your assistance Mr. Snape. The day after tomorrow I must go back. I know that it asks too much of you and Mr. Potter to spend time with Newt and Darion while I’m away,”

“It is not as much as you think.”

“Are you saying that you’ve come to enjoy our company?”

“It is by far the most bearable.” Mr. Snape smirked. “Have you told your husband?”

“I don’t wish to ruin the enjoyment of this adventure.”

Mr. Snape gave an understanding nod. “I didn't appreciate the comment you had last night.” Mr. Snape said after a while.

“I will not apologize for believing that you capable of fatherhood.”

“That is a role that I cannot have.”

It was too early to push this further. Clasping a hand onto Mr. Snape’s shoulder he looked out into the waking mountain landscape.

Not long after the others woke did they break down the tent. The trip back was light. With the promise of seeing each other soon they separated ways. Severus knew that Mr. Graves would return to his home office to prepare for his trip. Two days seemed so anxiety provoking, which he didn’t dare let his mind linger on. Mr. Graves had to deal with his own work as did he.
“I’m refreshed yet tired” Harry yawned minutes after the portkey dropped them back his home on Spinner’s End.

“Then you should return to sleep.”

“If it wasn’t so early I would think of something clever to say.” Harry yawned again.

Smirking he grabbed his container of floo powder holding it out to Harry.

“Planning on being busy today?” Harry asked eyeing the container of floo powder.

“There are a few things I would like to take care of. We are due to visit Mr. Scamander in two days time.”

“Really?” That news was enough to wake him up.

“Yes.”

“Then I should leave you to your research.”

“You should.”

Smiling he took a pinch of the powder tossing it into the hearth of the fireplace.

“Before I go would you kiss me?”

Severus moved closer. Those long fingers gilded against his cheek to lift his head. He held his breath waiting for a teasing remark.

“Gladly.” Sev whispered. Before he could even registered that word lips were pressed onto his.

The pressure remained to light. Far too light. He wanted Severus to deepen their kiss, but if that happened he’d never make it back to his apartment.

“Goodbye Harry.”

“See you soon.”

Sev stepped back, watching him as he settled into the fireplace. With a final look at the smirk on Sev’s face Harry called out for his apartment.

Chapter End Notes

Hello,
I meant to put this up earlier this week, but got a tad busy. Thank you for sticking with this story. At the latest I plan to have it done by July 31st 2019. I’m eager to finish up this story and come up with other adventures. :) Currently I have three stories on the back burner so I hope that when the time comes to address them that they will evolve like this story has.
“Not good” Draco shook his head taking notice that their inventory was dwindling faster than the year prior. Nearly all their medical salve was gone due to a bunch of students burning themselves left and right this year. In fact, there were a lot more incidents in general with students coming back from Potions class.

A painful groan pulled him from his inventory check. Another second year was clutching her hand while being escorted by Luna Lovegood. Over the past few days Lovegood had brought in first years with similar injuries. This second year seemed to have a much worse injury than the previous week’s patients. Her hand was covered in frightening boils as if she had placed her hand directly into acid.

“Potions class?” he asked knowing very well no other class would result in such injury.

The second year tearfully nodded.

“Don’t worry he’ll take care of you” Lovegood spoke in her dreamlike voice to the second year.

He was grateful for Lovegood’s encouragement. There were still students at Hogwarts that remembered him as being the prat-ish bully he had been before Harry helped him become his own person. Having this strange yet calm Ravenclaw helped ease the concern some of the students had about being treated by him.

Smiling at Lovegood he offered the second year a potion for her pain. The second year looked to Lovegood who absentmindedly played with her cork necklace. Taking the potion Draco was able to fix up the second year’s hand good as new. In a hurried thanks the second year left. Draco expected Lovegood to follow but her large eyes were looking off somewhere else. It took him a while to get use to her daydreaming stare.

“Perhaps I should add on to it.” Lovegood mused, eyes shifting to Draco’s wrist where he still kept her ugly necklace wrapped around. “Doesn’t seem to be working right.” Lovegood plucked one of her radish earrings and motioned for his hand. Giving in to her strangeness he let her twist the decorant radish to his gift. Another ugly addition, but he was grateful that she cared.

“That should do it.”

“Thank you.”

It wasn’t five minutes later that yet another student entered the infirmary. Draco had enough. Once he was done healing the scarred tissue he floo-ed into the Potions’ office in a rage.

“What are you doing to your students Snape?” he snapped as he stepped out into the room from the fireplace.

“Excuse me?” yelped a short man who had tossed his papers in the air out of fright.

Draco was shocked by the changes made to the office. A horrible neon yellow had painted over the bare walls. The large bookshelves were littered with glass figures instead of books or potion ingredients. He sneered at the disheveled desk which had several small glass figurines around the
rim. There was an urge to knock the glass horse that teetered on the left corner of the desk.

“W-What do you want?” piped up the man who looked to be unsure if he should pick up his scattered papers or dash behind his desk.

The man that now occupied this office didn’t look like much at all. His clothes were awkward shades of color as if they were hit too many times with a cleaning charm. And his wild mustache was simply distasteful.

“I want to know,” he tried to stop himself from looking around the office since it was making him both nauseous and angry. “I want to know why there has been a recent influx of injured students coming from your classes.”

“What do you care Malfoy” the man spat.

Hearing his last name drip with disgust filled him with even more rage than he had moments ago. He stood tall glaring at the man over the edge of his nose as if he were nothing more than a cockroach, just as his mother would’ve. “You must know my father since I would be sure to have remembered you.”

The man pinked muttering something that was without a doubt not first year friendly. Clearly, this dolt was not going to work with him. If this sorry excuse for a professor already had his mind made up about him there was no sense in continuing this discussion.

“As a medi-wizard in training it is in my interest to find out what is harming our students” he cut in the man’s muttering. “Perhaps the next time I will report to Headmistress McGonagall before inquiring.”

Pulling a page out of Snape’s book he turned on his heels and stormed out of the office.

The more Draco thought about the new Potion professor the more enraged he became. The man was unremarkable; that was probably why he didn’t recall seeing the stupid man at the welcome feast. He couldn’t believe someone like that was teaching Potions this year. Even Slughorn was more competent and hadn’t dared to change anything about this office last year.

Trying really hard to push the interaction from his mind he went back to his tasks around the infirmary.

“Mr. Malfoy!”

He winced at the harsh tone. Madame Pomfrey was looking at him with daggers in her eye. Whatever he done he was certainly in big trouble for it.

“Care to explain yourself.”

“I’m not sure which of my actions are worth explaining.”

“I just had to pick a Slytherin.” Madame Pomfrey muttered as she wiped the back of her hands against her apron, it was a nervous habit of hers he’d noticed last year while volunteering.

“What is wrong with Slytherin?” he asked defiantly.

“What’s wrong,” she said in an icy tone. “is that sometimes you don’t realize that you can’t go around threatening people. You aren’t Snape. You are still an apprentice with no power among the professors.”
“You’re making it sound as if I crucio-ed the man. That pitiful excuse of a teacher can’t even keep his students from burning themselves. Merlin help us when he tries to let them brew anything advance.”

“Be that as it may, you can’t threaten professors. Who do you think supplies this infirmary?” She didn’t give him any time to respond. “Potion Master’s take on the responsibility.”

“That dolt is not a Potion Master. It’s his lack of oversight that causes us to have to use up the last supplies an actual Potions Master brewed for this school.”

“Well, now professor Moore is choosing not to help supply us.”

“Who needs him.” He huffed.

“The students do Mr. Malfoy.” Madame Pomfrey said in a serious voice that showed she was managing her anger. “As a healer, you need to learn that just because you don’t agree with someone doesn’t mean you can outright express that. Our job requires compromise. If we don’t have relationships with Potion Masters then who would be able to give us potions we need to properly treat patients? I can’t possibly brew all the time and neither can you.” She sighed. “Your immature approach to this issue has potentially cost many students their health.”

Her words cut. He had been so angry at the shabby looking professor that he hadn’t thought about its effects. Madame Pomfrey was right his actions hadn’t been at all thought out. Their stock was dwindling. Students wouldn’t keep themselves from harm all year long. They needed potions, which Hogwarts couldn’t get from St. Mungos until a necessary contract was drafted. Madame Pomfrey had previously told him how complicated it was to make lasting contract with St. Mungos. He should’ve known better than to open his mouth.

“I..”

“Wasn’t thinking.” Madame Pomfrey finished, her hands resting on her hips. “This stunt of yours shows me that you still have a long way to go young man.”

He felt so small under her piercing gaze. “What can I do?”

“I want you to go Mr. Malfoy.”

“What?” His heart plunged into the squirm of his stomach. If he was let go now who would give him a chance? He was a Malfoy. He had bore the Dark Mark, it mattered not that it was only a short period of time that he did. If he couldn’t continue with Madame Pomfrey there would be no one to help him form a career. If he couldn’t continue on as a Healer what would he do?

“I want you to go home Mr. Malfoy.”

Draco didn’t know what to do. On one hand, he wanted to snap at the medi-witch on the other, he wanted to grovel for a second chance. He enjoyed healing people, it made him feel that he could slowly write the wrongs of everything he and his family did. The work was hard and tedious, yet it was something that he had sought out for himself. It was something that made him useful.

He’d fucked up. He wouldn't grovel and he wouldn’t yell at the injustice of it all; that would only prove to Madame Pomfrey how childish he could be. Still the bubble of anger simmered adding to nausea overcoming him.

“I understand.” His voice was empty.
“While I try to sort out the mess you’ve put us in you be sure to study on proper scanning techniques and how to mend bones. I need you ready for Quidditch injuries when you return.”

His mood lifted at the words “when you return”. He looked at the medi-witch trying to see if he had misheard. The stern pinch in her face had softened now that her initial anger had passed although he wouldn’t say a word in case she changed her mind.

“If Mr. Potter isn’t busy I suggest practicing on him. Merlin knows how he’s doing medically wise. That boy was such a constant patient I half expect to find him lying about here.” Madame Pomfrey looked over the empty infirmary then to Draco. “I’ll send you a letter.”

Draco nodded, collected his things and started the walk past the school’s barrier.

Blaise laid the requested files onto his superior’s desk wishing that it was far more exciting than just standard reports. Working in the Ministry should’ve been something he was proud of, something that he could actually contribute to his world.

“Run these by Kathrine” spoke his superior without glancing up.

A courteous “thank you” would be asking too much of these wizards. No complaints would ever leave his mouth in this place. With an unseen nod, he took the file over to where Katherine sat. Blaise was sure that had his own decisions been different that he wouldn’t be in this position. Be it this or Azkaban he would choose this.

A knock stopped him from returning to his own pitiful desk.

“They need you to cover visitation duties” the witch said without preamble.

This occasionally happened. It was as if the other members of Ministry preferred to keep him busy with remedial tasks than anything noteworthy.

Following the witch back to the atrium he was left to walk the wand inspection station that all visitors were required to visit. At least working at visitation meant that he could speak, albeit it was the scripted speech that grew tiresome. Still, he preferred it over moving papers across the room between his ‘co-workers’. This job was simple; weight the wand, register it, check latest spells cast, then return it. A flying monkey could do this, but if there were such things what would he do?

A small group of wizards appeared. “Welcome to the Ministry of Magic...” he continued on with his scripted routine, clearing all three, wishing them a pleasant day.

His smile broadened at the next wizard who arrived. “Welcome to the Ministry of Magic-”

“Do you have to give me the whole speech?” Draco smirked handing over his wand.

“All part of the job.”

“Why are you here?”

“They needed some help” he said turning away to weigh Draco’s wand.

Blaise knew a fair amount of Purebloods who would be horrified to be at such a lowly position, but he neither had the reason or right to complain. This was not beneath him in the least just as he didn’t view Draco any lesser than for living in an apartment with Potter.
“And what would be the purpose of your visit?”

“Can’t you read?”

Blaise turned around to read the fine print on Draco’s visitation badge. “To visit Blaise Zabini.”

“Here you are Mr. Draco Malfoy.” He handed back Draco’s wand. “Have a pleasant day.”

Draco looked around, for what Blaise guessed was other witches or wizards coming to register their wands. Blaise knew that it was going to be a slow day. They rarely let him work on an actual busy day. Not that he was usually chatty or anything on the job. Blaise assumed that the higher-ups didn’t want too many people knowing that he was working within the Ministry.

“What’s wrong Draco?” It was too early for Draco be out of Hogwarts. Portkey or not Draco wouldn’t pop over when there had to be a million things at the infirmary to do. Noticing that Draco was also carrying his satchel added to the idea that this wasn’t just a visit to say hello.

“When do you finish work today?”

More than anything he would like to say right now and run away, however leaving work wasn’t something he could do. “Another thirty minutes or more if they leave me here.”

“I’ll wait. It’s not like I have anything better to do now.”

It wasn’t only Draco’s words but the way that Draco’s face looked somber that made remaining at this position intolerable. If it weren’t for the rules of no public displays of affection at work he would kiss Draco.

Reaching over he took Draco’s hand. “I’m glad you came here.”

“The minute you are done we are leaving.”

Draco sat watching Blaise greet a few more visitors before a witch came to take his place. The thirty minutes had dragged on so that he was more than ready to floo elsewhere. Taking Blaise’s offered arm they left the Ministry.

“Are you hungry?”

“Not particularly”

Blaise pulled on his arm to get him to stop walking. The concern on Blaise’s face was more than enough to grant him permission to really talk. For more than thirty minutes he had wrestled with what he was going to say.

“I messed up.”

“What do you mean?”

“I might’ve threatened the new potions professor” he said pulling Blaise along so that they could be further away from nosy magical folk.

“Why would you do that?”

“Because so many students have been coming in with burns and other injuries that could easily be
avoided. I had to confront him about it” he decided to not mention the part where he forgot that it was no longer Snape’s office he had stormed into. If Snape was still teaching then this wouldn’t have happened. He wouldn’t have been asked to leave for any stretch of time; he’d still be at Hogwarts helping heal students.

“You don't think the students are just clumsy?”

“Clumsy or not it's the Potion professor’s responsibility to make sure they don't lose a hand or fall unconscious due to fumes. Even Slughorn checked in on the students now and then to make sure nothing would blow up in their face. I can't believe they let someone like him be a professor. You know how dangerous this it! The arsehole didn't seem to bother with anything. He needs to be sacked.”

“Draco, as horrible as it is no one is going to be like Snape.”

Draco scowled. Why did everyone think that was the problem? That wasn’t the problem. Of course no one could replace Snape.

“You know that we can’t fight against everyone.” Blaise looked down at his hands.

“Something happened at work?”

“No. I’m keeping my head down. You should do the same Draco.” Blaise’s hands knitted tightly together.

They each had to face prejudice based on their perceived roles in the war but Blaise had it by far worse. Ministry officials without a doubt wouldn't take Blaise’s attendance well. Blaise was low ranking despite his families connections. Draco knew Blaise was going to work up without any insider help. That didn’t guarantee that people in the Ministry would see Blaise in any better light. How many wanted to send them off to Azkaban? How many times did he have to hear others mention his Death Eaters status? Draco feared that kind of reaction at work yet so far there was only one professor who was trying to use that fact against him. At Hogwarts, he had Madame Pomfrey and McGonagall on his side. Who was there to support Blaise at the Ministry?

“I’m sorry.”

Blaise shook his head. “No. You are right to have gotten mad. I would kill to tell some of my coworkers off... You can’t stoop to their level. You have to show them that you are beyond what they think you are.”

“Is there anyone-”

Blaise smirked. “I ran into Hermione Granger the other day. She just wanted to chat about the amazing resource books the Ministry had. She will be disappointed to know that I won’t show up for lunch.”

“I wouldn’t think she was your idea of a good lunch date.” He felt better knowing that Granger was willing to socialize with Blaise.

“She isn't so bad. I’d take it over living with Potter.”

“Oh this again” he rolled his eyes. “Your jealousy would be refreshing if you didn’t bring it up so often.”

Blaise chuckled. “It is not completely unwarranted. Potter is always at the back of your mind.
Perhaps I should just ask you to move in with me.”

Draco scoffed “And what of your mother?”

“She adores you, in fact, she insists on inviting you to dinner.”

“With or without the makeover?” He joked recalling that night they had been on the town in drag with Ms. Zabini. That moment felt like years ago.

“Whichever way you’re most comfortable.” Blaise cupped his face.

Draco pulled back.

“What is it?”

“Nothing.”

“Are you dying to go back home to Potter?” Blaise teased.

“What if I can never become a Healer?”

“I want to tell you that one arsehole won’t matter, but sometimes it does... We’re Slytherins aren’t we? Ambitious and cunning that’s how we will get by. And if all else fails I can always rely on the old adage of throwing money at the problem.”

“I wouldn’t let you waste money on a worthless man like that.”

“There’s always convincing Snape to go back”

“I don’t think there’s much that would convince him to go back... The Ministry-”

“Can be fickle and filled with old men who won’t let any new ideas be heard, but isn’t the worst. For now, I will do what they want while working with Granger on the side. She has some big ideas that I’m sure will be met with a lot of internal backlash. Once she becomes Minister then I won’t have to be at visitation..”

Draco thought those words over. They had to do what was necessary to move past their individual setbacks. “I should check in on Harry, it’s been a few months since I last saw him.”

“May I escort you home?”

Draco didn’t have to think long about it. Harry was right, he didn’t need to uphold all the Pureblood traditions to satisfy Blaise. It was about time he let Blaise see his current living.

“Yes.”

The spark of green flames pulled Harry’s attention to the fireplace.

“You’re home?” he asked looking at Draco. According to their letters, Draco wasn’t supposed to visit until at the end of December for Winter holiday. Harry was sure that he hadn’t accidentally spent an entire half a year sitting in this living room.

“I am” Draco said tossing his things onto the ground.
“Did-” his question was interrupted by Blaise stepping out behind his roommate.

Draco gave him a look that said ‘stop gawking’ as Blaise dusted his shoulders.

“Hello Potter.”

“Hi...” he looked to Draco still wondering if the blond had intended to let Blaise come in. The eye rolling told him that it was okay. “Hi.” he smiled. “I’m glad he finally gave up that stupid tradition thingy.”

“That tradition thingy has been followed by Pureblood families for centuries, though I am glad that I finally get to see your apartment.” Blaise soaked up the surroundings.

“I hope that someone didn’t leave a mess in my absence” Draco shot him a look.

“Nope it’s all clean. I just came back from Newt’s not too long ago.” Harry looked to Blaise. “Should I offer a tour of the place or something?”

Blaise shook his head “I was only invited to bring Draco home. Unless you are inviting me to stay for tea.”

“Do we still have tea?” Draco asked Harry.

“I’ll go make some.” Scampering away to the kitchen he glanced back at the two. It was laughable how proper the two were trying to be. Distinctively he remembered watching the two making eyes at one another while over food in the Great Hall at school. Now the two were making a point not to stand too close. Purebloods were strange.

“You said that you were at Professor Scamander's home,” Blaise said nodding thanks as he set down the tea for all three of them.

“I went with Severus. We spent the night in the mountain, Newt was showing us some Graphorns.” Harry glanced at Blaise unsure if mentioning Severus was not allowed around the Slytherin.

“How is Snape?” Blaise smirked.

Hearing someone other than Draco asking about Severus's wellbeing made him happy. “Still scowling and complaining like usual.”

“It’s good to hear that he’s well.”

“Currently he’s working on some potion research. I’ve been scrubbing cauldrons to help out.”

“It’s important to keep busy” Blaise said sipping his tea.

Harry nodded. “Speaking of busy, why are you here Draco?”

“Last time you had no problem with me being here” Draco huffed.

He looked to Blaise who gave a barely noticeable shake of his head.

“Well if you are here tomorrow you can join Severus and me to Newt’s place. I’m sure Newt would love that. Oh, you too Blaise.”

“As much as I would enjoy that I have work tomorrow. In fact, I should head back home.”
Grabbing the empty cups he bustled them into the kitchen to give the two some privacy. When the sound of the floo spurted he turned back.

“What happened?” he asked flopping down on the couch beside Draco.

“I don’t want to talk about it.

“Does it have to do with Blaise?

“No. it’s work related.”

“Whatever happened, that you don’t want to talk about, will work out.”

“It better or I’ll be here more than just a couple of days” Draco grumbled.

“Cheer up” he said playfully pulling at Draco’s sleeve. "At least he didn’t say he hated your decorating choices.”

Draco tugged his sleeve out of Harry’s hand. “There’s nothing wrong with my decor.”

“Come, I’ll teach you how to make some cookies that we can bring over tomorrow.”

Percival patted himself on the back for a job well done. His home office was no longer a horrifying mess of piled paperwork. It had taken him long exhausting days that were broken up by Newt’s insistence of being freed from the office for a few hours and that reckless adventure his husband had brought Darion on. Now his desk was perfectly ordered. Each stack was carefully categorized based on what type of incident report and who it involved. Based on all his paperwork there had been a hefty amount of things going on back in Manhattan while he was away. Word must’ve got out that he wasn’t in New York for so many incidents to occur.

“A full year's worth.” He was so relieved that he had completed reading through them all before his meeting with Madam President. His mind was housing far too much information that he was desperate to be rid of so that there would be ample room to house more precious memories of his family.

“Percival?” Newt’s head peeked behind the door.

“Come in” he beamed.

“You look exhausted.” Newt pressed a gentle hand to his face.

Turning his face he placed a kiss to Newt’s palm. “Nothing a good sleep can’t cure. How’s Darion?”

“He’s resting.” Newt looked around his office. “Are you done?”

“Nearly” he yawned.

“You’re tired. I could help you.”

“You’re not permitted to view MACUSA information.”
Newt laughed. “You say that as if I haven’t seen a few things I shouldn’t have before.” Newt smiled as he plucked a form from the top of one of the stacks.

In a second the whole thing came crumbling down knocking the other stacks that sat next to it. All his hard work destroyed in a blink of an eye. He was exhausted. He hadn’t even managed to properly fit the important documents into secured envelopes since he wanted to check it a third time before sending them off. He glanced at all the scattered parchment knowing it would take too long to sort them which meant he wouldn’t have enough time to read through each one efficiently.

There was so much paperwork. Paperwork that others of his department could’ve handled. Paperwork that constantly bombarded him. Paperwork that he had been freed from for an entire year. Paperwork that might’ve gotten lost on the way from such a long flight from New York. Paperwork that he was frankly sick and tired of. Paperwork that needed to be pristine when presented to Madam President when he returned to New York. Paperwork that his husband had messed up.

“Out.” He muttered harshly. His anger was rising. He hadn’t felt this overwhelmed in a long time. It had been a mistake to leave New York. It had been a mistake to remain here when he could’ve been back at MACUSA handling everything the correct way the first time.

“P.”

“Leave my office this instant” he snapped magically slamming the door open.

Newt’s heart sunk instantly at the show of force. Even if he apologized right now Percival was not going to hear him. For the first time in years, he didn’t see his husband, father of his two children, standing in front of him. Looking at this aggravated man surrounded by papers all he saw the businessman who he had previously thought Percival to be; someone so consumed by the workload that he missed out on what life had to offer. A shrewd businessman who cared only for these papers was in the place of his husband. Percival’s anger felt like a flame to his skin. Shrinking back he tearfully left Percival to the clean up of the office.

Escaping to the living room, he saw that Darion had woken from the short nap. "Accio case." He had to get away from Percival’s anger. “Come Darion,” he tried not to let his hurt seep through his words but wasn’t successful. Darion gazed at him with large questioning eyes. Turning his head away from his son he tried to get rid of the tears that were creeping up. Placing the case down he opened it. “You’ll help me take care of the creatures won’t you” he flashed a sad smile.

“Ma ba.”

“Good boy.” Picking up Darion he strapped him onto his back and descended into the case.

It took more than two hours to get things back in order in his office. It had taken everything not to set the office on fire. If he hadn’t controlled himself he would be under ten times the amount of paperwork. Once all his finished work was sealed and bound to ensure another mishap wouldn’t occur he slumped against his chair. Relief was quickly blindsided with the realization that in his anger he had snapped at Newt. Sighing he ran a hand through his hair. It had been a long time since he’d said anything remotely harsh to his husband. Kicking Newt out of his office on top of his upcoming trip wasn’t going to be solved with a simple apology.
“Newt?” he called out as he opened his door. Everything in the house stood quiet. “Newt?”

No response.

First he checked the bedroom, it was empty. The bathroom, the kitchen, even the living room was empty. The pit of his stomach felt like he had stones in it. He knew how sensitive Newt was to negative feelings. Newt would’ve tried to put as much distance between him as possible.

His mind swam with endless locations Newt might’ve ran off to before he noticed Newt’s case sitting right besides Darion’s playpen.

“Please be there.” He knocked on the top of the case gently. He knew that the sound would be much louder on the inside. He waited but the case didn’t open. He knocked once more.

Newt’s ears tingle at the knocking from outside his case that echoed like loud thuds around them. The Mooncalfs he was feeding crooked their necks at the sound. Even Darion seemed to be wondering why he wasn’t rushing off to let Percival in like he typically would.

“They’re still hungry” he told Darion helping his little one reach into the food tin they scooped one last handful and let the pellets go.

Darion smiled at the way the Mooncalfs started jumping up to nab the food.

“Next we should check up on,” he was trying to think of the furthest creature from the entrance. “The Diricawls. You’ll like them Darion they are cute birds.”

“Ber?”

“Bird” he corrected gently as he continued through the separation curtains into the next habitat. “Since Diricawls teleport they are hard to find.”

“Just like a certain wizard.” Percival now stood in front of them. His husband always could track him down no matter what.

“Da.” Darion reached out his little hands towards Percival. Without looking at his husband he handed their son over. Even though he couldn’t sense any more anger from Percival he kept a distance.

“Newt.” He kept his face down. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have been so angry. Please forgive me.”

He still didn’t look or move.

“I had no right to act the way I did. You wanted to help. Newt...”

He could feel Percival trying to reach his magic out to him to prove that there was no anger left, but he was still so frightful of the searing feeling when Percival had snapped at him.

“How can I make it up to you?”

The desperation to make things right was thick in Percival’s voice. Percival would do anything. If he asked for something as ridiculous as a house on the moon Percival would somehow achieve it.

“Do you want me to leave you?”
He shook his head. They had been away from each other far too much lately. That distant was going to get worse.

“What must I do?”

There was one thing that he had thought about not just for the past two hours alone with Darion, but every minute since Percival had mentioned it. “Let me come with you back to New York.” He looked straight at Percival.

“I would love to whisk you away, but what of our son? Darion is too young to apparate and it’s too late to request a Portkey. Mr. Potter nor Mr. Snape would be able to properly babysit alone.”

Percival had thought about this too.

“There’s Draco..”

“I don’t believe for a minute you would leave Darion to return to the city.”

“Da. ma.”

Percival was right. He wouldn’t be able to leave his son even if he did have someone to look after him.

“I-” He moved closer to Percival. “I-I don't want you to go.”

Percival’s hand rubbed his back. “It's only business.”

That’s what he was afraid of. Percival could return to his desk only to get lost behind another mountain of paperwork. If he didn’t go to New York he was afraid that Percival wouldn’t come back to them.

“I will come back Newt.” Percival placed a kiss onto his husband’s forehead “I promise.”

“How long...how long will you be gone?”

“Only a few days. The issue is bringing all of this paperwork along with me. It’s taking far too long to send it owl by owl.”

“I can help with that” Newt offered.

“What are you thinking Mr. Scamander?”

“I can create more space in your suitcase like I did with mine. Making extra room is easy.”

Percival sighed, the puff of air tossing his hair. “If I find one of your creatures my case you will be sleeping on the couch for a week” his husband teased.

He wasn’t going to do anything like that and risk getting yelled at again. “No mythical creatures. I promise.”

“Good.” Percival continued to run a hand alongside his back. “You know that I care for those creatures, but it will not do to return to New York only to have another creature incident.”

“I know.”
Percival woke up the next morning with dread sitting in his chest. Today he would be leaving for New York for two days. Two whole days without his family. The only thing that made it okay was that Mr. Snape had agreed to watch over them. Then again he was still worried based on the last time he had left his husband in the hands of Mr. Snape and Mr. Potter. Newt had additionally promised not to go on adventures in the mountains or woods nearby.

“Newt” he whispered.

“Percival” Newt muttered into the pillow beside him.

“I’ll be leaving soon.”

The morning sun had yet to even breach their bedroom, but he needed to apparate nearly halfway around the world. This would be one of the hardest mornings of his life.

Newt nodded, eyes not looking directly at him.

“I’m going to shave.” Newt didn’t respond to his words.

After letting Newt work to extend his case to hold all his paperwork last night there was a lingering silence between them. He knew how it hurt his husband that he was leaving. Two days might as well be two years based on the pain it caused them.

It was a matter of autopilot that allowed him to shave and dress in his finest business suit as his mind lingered on the family he was leaving behind.

“Newt-” When he returned into the bedroom Newt was gone and the crib was silent. The sense of abandoning his family grew heavier as he went into the living room. Newt’s case was on the ground besides the couch. Tapping lightly he wondered if he should go back down and search the habitats for his family just like he’d done the day before. The time on his watch reminded him that he had to begin his long journey. Madam President’s patience only lasted so long.

“I’m leaving. I’ll be back. I love you.”

Percival found his briefcase sitting near the front door, his coat and blue scarf hung perfectly beside it. There was a note sticking out of his coat’s pocket.

_Have a safe trip._

_Love, Newt_

With one last look towards Newt’s case he left.

Three pair of hands held the dragon figure serving as a portkey. Arriving at Harry’s apartment Severus hadn’t expected to see his godson there. If he wasn’t mistaken Quidditch would be leaving the Hogwarts infirmary busy with injured arms or bruised faces. Knowing Pomfrey she wouldn’t let Draco go on holiday this early in the school year. Silver eyes refused to look at him more than for a few moments, adding to the conclusion he had come to seconds after seeing the blond.

Something had happened at Hogwarts. By the lack of fearful headlines or a firecall from Minerva it had to have been something strictly of Draco’s own doing. He would not broach the subject at this
“Ready?” Harry asked with an excited smile.

Both Draco and himself nodded. With a tug and a pull the three were on the ever-growing familiar path leading up to the house. Immediately they grasped Harry, preventing the Gryffindor from face planting onto the ground.

“Thanks” Harry laughed straightening himself. “I don’t get how I’m the only one who is affected by it so bad.”

“Is that their house?” Draco asked looking up the path. “It does seem like a place Mr. Scamander would live.”

“It’s a nice house. Wait until you see the inside.” Harry beamed.

Together they walked the path reaching the front door. Severus was mildly concerned to not have the grand welcome with Mr. Scamander at the front door trying to pass on his son when he knocked.

He knocked a little harder with no answer. “Mr. Scamander?”

Mr. Graves had told him that they were coming. All of this was arranged.

“Perhaps he’s still sleeping?” Harry offered an explanation.

Withdrawing his wand he signaled for the two to do the same just in case. There would be no chances taken. If there was trouble on the other side of this door they would be ready.

“Alohomora” he whispered. With a click the door unlocked. Pushing his way inside the distinct lack of noise put his nerves on edge. There was no way that a single parent with a young child wouldn’t create even a little noise.

“Don’t let your guard down” he informed the other two in a hushed tone. The scrape of their shoes against the floor told him that they were in position. All three of them had faced war, which gave confidence to their ability to handle whatever laid in this silent house. Taking the head of their formation he silently moved wand casting revealing charms as he scanned for threat. A piece of parchment caught his eye.

Thoughts of a ransom note thankfully dashed as he read in Mr. Scamander’s clear and unworried handwriting.

Dear Mr. Snape and Harry,

I’m sorry that I didn’t stay for your visit.

Darion and I won’t be back until Percival returns.

Don’t worry we are safe. Please don’t worry about the house, everything is taken care of.

Oh, Credence is taking care of my creatures so don’t worry about that either.

I feel terrible about not being there after you agreed to look after me, but I couldn’t stay.

Help yourselves to some tea or food for all this trouble.
Attached to the letter was a single photo of him holding Darion surrounded by the child’s parents and Harry. “It appears that our visit is no longer necessary,” he said handing the letter over to Harry.

“Really?” Harry pouted as he read the letter. “Sorry Draco.”

“You don’t seem that concerned,” Draco stated glancing over the letter that Harry snatched. A knowing smirk flashed his way as Severus stashed the photo within the folds of his robes. There was no need for these two to rub such an embarrassing photo in his face.

Looking from the letter Newt left behind he had so many questions, the biggest one was the lack of worry he saw in Severus. In a way, it was unsettling to see the man completely calm over the fact that Newt and Darion had vanished. He almost expected Severus to send for a search party or at least complain about the disappearance. But there was no reaction and Harry knew it wasn’t because Severus didn’t care about them.

“Do you know something we don’t?’

Severus shook his head. “Only a hunch.”

“A hunch?”

Turning on his heel, Severus made to leave the unoccupied house.

“Where are you going?” Harry asked.

“We were invited here to watch over Mr. Scamander. Since there is no Mr. Scamander or Darion then I should go tend to something.”

He could hardly blame Severus’s one track mind. If he let Severus go tend to probably the research he’d been conducting then that meant the research could be finished sooner.

“Meet back at our apartment for dinner” Harry called after him.

A nod and a crack of a whip later Severus was gone.

“Well, I guess it’s just you and me, Draco.”

Draco rolled his eyes. “Lucky me.”

Percival looked out at the city skyline. There was comfort in returning here. New York City, the place he had been born and raised. The only home he’d known for several years before fate had him cross paths with Newt Scamander. Ignoring the pang of sadness that would accompany him throughout his visit he rounded the corner from the apparition site.
Percival approached the glorious old Woolworth building that hadn’t changed all that much over the years. It was back to work with the MACUSA. Tilting his head at the acknowledgment of the doorman he entered the building. The bustle of this place hadn’t seemed to slow down either.

“Mr. Graves?” asked one of the many secretaries of this building as he walked up the lengthy stairs.

“Yes” he flashed her his ID.

She smiled shifting a few files in her hand. “I’ll send a notice of your arrival.” Keeping up with him she scribbled a memo and sent it off. “I was told to give you these files.” Not missing a beat she handed him two files to which he in turn signed her documentation that he received it. “Have a good day Mr. Graves.”

The way the secretary went off to continue her route truly made him realize how much things had been business as usual since his leave of absence. In his more horrific dreams he’d imagined MACUSA to be a whirlwind of mislabeled files with small fires breaking out as the Aurors wept through the chaos.

“Mr. Graves!” an Auror named Jackson greeted with a salute. The action was highly unnecessary, though Jackson was still new to their department. “Good to have you back sir.”

“I appreciate the warm welcome. Though I am not too-”

“Mr.Graves” another Auror appeared. “I can’t believe you came back!”

“And now that I’m back I expect for work to get done” he said sternly.

“Yes sir” both Aurors turned tail back to their desks.

Swiftly moving to his office he shut the door. In any second Madam President would speak with him. Sighing he looked around his office. The appearance showed that no one had touched his things in a year. Had he been a simple Auror his things would’ve been packed away in a box. Tossing the new files onto his inbox he slumped into his seat. With a groan he readjusted his seat, it felt not as comfortable as the one back at home...home. On the edge of his desk sat a framed picture of his family, one that needed to be updated. In the photo Newt held up a three-year-old Rolf. Credence stood next to him, everyone was filled with joy.

“Only a few days” he whispered touching a gentle finger to Newt’s image. Glancing at his case he longed to be rid of all the papers Newt had helped him with yesterday.

Yesterday had been a disaster. He should’ve told Newt about this trip earlier. The only true consolation was that Newt and Darion wouldn’t be alone. Mr.Snape and Mr. Potter would provide some amount of distraction.

A knock pulled him from his thoughts

“Enter.”

“You are here!” Tina gawked at him.

“Ms. Goldstein do you have business or have you come to determine the rumor of my arrival true?”

“Sir,” She slid the door closed behind her. “I’m glad to see you’ve made it back.” Tina’s eyes
roamed his office.

“Newt is not here” he said in a hollow voice.

“I can’t believe that you would let him out of your sight” she chuckled, her eyes still scanning as if Newt would appear at any second.

His hand hesitated to grab his pen. Work. He needed to work so that he could return to his family. “If you don’t have business please leave.” He motioned to the door.

Tina didn’t move. It had been years since she was the impressionable Auror who viewed him as the strict authority figure he’d been. They had grown into rather close friends since Newt had become entangled in their lives. Out in the open she would still show the same level of respect as any other Auror in MACUSA, however when alone their status didn’t exist.

Slowly Tina walked towards his desk, something in her face set off the tension of guilt within him. “Did something happen to Newt?”

“No he is safe back in Europe”

“Mercy Lewis I thought...” she sighed in relief.

“Do you think I would be here if something had happened to my husband?” If anything happened to Newt he wouldn’t be able to get out of bed let alone return to work. Regret for leaving Newt behind pricked at his heart.

“I haven’t seen you this tense in years” Tina said taking the seat across from him, her eyes focusing on his face.

“My tension stems from a year's worth of work that was meagerly taken care of.” He slammed his case onto the top of his desk. Every part of him screamed to return home, but that couldn’t happen until he finished what he came here to do.

“I..” Tina’s words caught as she stared at his case.

The case started to rock a bit back and forth. Checking his surrounding, everything else laid motionless canceling out the possibility of an earthquake. What was moving came from inside his case.

“What is in your case?” Tina asked her wand at the ready.

The end of his wand was pointed at the case’s opening as well. “I swear Newt is going to hear it from me if he snuck anything in here.”

The case jiggled and hopped before the top popped open. Slowly a hand raised out of it, an all too familiar human hand. A second hand followed, next the guilty face of his husband appeared. “Mr. Scamander. What are you doing here?”

“I couldn’t let you return alone.” Newt looked up at him through his bangs.

“And you just left our son at home?”

“Of course not.” Newt shimmied up a bit more so that Darion’s head peeked out from behind his shoulder.”

Sighing he grabbed Darion and rested him on his hip before offering a hand to Newt. Newt shook
it off, freely jumping out of the case onto the top of his desk. Percival wasn’t too happy about the shoe imprints that his husband left behind as he quickly got off the mahogany desk.

“Newt! It’s so good to see you again!” Tina rushed to him. Shyly he smiled at the way she was looking him up and down. When he and Percival left New York he was still sporting a large baby bump.

“Hi Tina.”

“So you had another son?” Tina looked at Percival carrying their son.

“Darion.”

“Darion?”

“A friend supplied the name.” Percival said placing a kiss to Darion’s cheek.

“May I hold him?”

Newt remembered how protective of their first son Percival had been. If you didn’t ask permission you were asking to get hit with wandless magic. It had taken a very long time for his husband to quell his overprotectiveness.

“Of course.” Percival handed Darion over.

“Hi Darion. I’m Tina.”

“Na?”

Tina looked at Darion with a small smile.

Looking away from Tina, Darion’s eyes wandered all around Percival’s office. “Ah-a-ah? Sa?”

“They are not here.”

The squeaking of the enchanted mouse notes settled onto Percival’s desk.

“I must go” Percival reached for him “and Newt,”

“I know.. Tina will watch me.”

“Not what I was going to say” Percival smirked. Placing a quick kiss to his cheek Newt could feel the overwhelming relief from his husband. “We’ll talk later.”

Newt nodded.

“Take care of them Ms. Goldstein” Percival said as he left.

“Only you would be brave enough to smuggle yourself into MACUSA through the Director of Magical Security’s briefcase.” Tina laughed as he nibbled on the crust of his sandwich.

The cafe not far from the Woolworth building had changed since his departure. Many things looked different while at the same time remaining exactly the same. Only being back a few
minutes felt like he hadn’t left at all. Tina looked the same as the day he told her they would go to Europe. Explaining how he had to travel to deliver a magical plant to save a young man’s life, who he hadn’t mentioned before had been tricky. Tricker must’ve been Percival’s negotiations to leave New York for the length of their stay. Newt wondered if Percival had mentioned to Madam President that he had co-taught at Hogwarts while away; somehow he didn’t think that would be something Madam President would’ve liked.

“So tell me how was your trip. It amazes me how much time flies.” Tina mindlessly stirred her coffee.

Looking back towards the building he spoke: “It was well.”

“That young boy did he?”

Snapping back to Tina he gave a confident smile. “He’s perfectly healthy and a great friend.”

“Good I was wondering if that or the war had forced you to stay there.”

Frantic letters from Tina and Queenie had come into his possession shortly after they had been allowed out of the hideout. Reassuring his friends that things were alright was easier in person than through paper that took a bit of time to reach them.

“After we delivered the plant to an old friend Percival and I took up a co-teaching job.”

“Teaching?”

He smiled fondly reflecting on that time. “Percival taught Defense Against the Dark Arts and I helped with Care of Magical Creatures.”

“That’s amazing! So that’s what you’ve been doing now?”

“No. Darion was born just before the Battle of Hogwarts so we went into hiding. Harry and Mr. Snape-”

“Wait. Harry as in the Harry Potter?” Newt nodded. “Mr. Snape wouldn’t be Severus Snape would it?” Newt nodded again. “How is it that you get to know the most interesting people?” He shrugged. Tina stirred her coffee again.

Newt wondered just how much news about the war had come overseas. If he had to bet he’d say that Tina kept all sparse information about it. For one thing, he knew that the New York Ghost wouldn’t run any stories about Mr. Snape and Harry’s relationship.

“Did you enjoy teaching?”

“I thought it was great.”

“The kids weren’t mean to you were they?”

Newt chuckled. At times Tina sounded like an overprotective mother. She was always concerned about he was being treated within the MACUSA when he first assisted them.

“I know, you don’t have to say it.” Tina plucked Darion up from his highchair.

“I wish I still had a young one at home.” Tina cooed. “The grandchildren are already too old. And the glamour charms I have to use to appear the proper age is a bit of a pain.”
Newt couldn’t imagine the struggle that came with having to hide your identity to your own family. Tina, however, was just strong in that sense. She didn’t care what she needed to do to keep her family safe. Newt remembered when Modesty, the young girl Tina had adopted many years back, had grown into a wonderful mother. Tina loved her grandchild as much as her adopted daughter but with the law against Muggles and magical kind integrating it was difficult. Both Tina and Queenie had fought to bring up a case to MACUSA to pull back on such a backward law, which eventually was successful. Within America Muggles and magical folk could now integrate; have relationships, families, friends, but there were still strict limitations on the secrecy of their world.

“He doesn’t talk as much as Credence did” Tina stated as she bounced Darion on her knee.

Newt had noticed that as well. When Credence was born everything seemed to go faster, his speech at a year old was babbling but more understandable than Darion’s, and his firstborn had learned how to walk quickly, even magic was quick. “You don’t think..”

“She’s probably just a late bloomer.” Tina smiled reassuringly.

“We should go back.”

“Already dying to see Percival?”

Newt blushed.

“It’s cute that you still get embarrassed about seeing your husband” Tina teased as she stood.

Severus approached Grimmauld Place with trepidation. No longer could he simply floo into the building now that the Order of the Phoenix had been disbanded. Well, that wasn’t exactly the truth. A more accurate description would be that it had dropped down to himself and one other member: Remus Lupin. Not that the Order was all that much necessary with the end of the Dark Lord.

It seemed like a terrible idea to return to this place. There were plenty of memories here, not all too great. Most of the memories were covered in a thin layer of anxiousness that he hadn’t the luxury of expressing right now. How long had it been since he’d stepped foot in this house? He couldn’t recall. Without any more delay, he made it to the front door. With a singular knock, the door pulled open to reveal Remus Lupin.

_Werewolf sense of smell_ he reminded himself.

“Hello Severus come in.”

Lupin looked healthier from the last time he saw the man. Vaguely He could recall the man covered in dirt and blood saying something that he hadn’t a chance to understand before his hearing had left him. Thinking about his near death could be saved for later. Right now he needed to keep his wits about him to deal with the flood of memories etched into Grimmauld Place.

“Was there something you wanted to talk about? I haven’t heard of anything within the Ministry. Last I checked they had gathered most of the Death Eaters.”

“I have not come about news of that nature,” he said stepping further into the house.

“Then what is it? You typically just owl me my Wolfsbane.”
“That was before,”

“Before?”

“Before I altered the potion just enough so you could maintain even more control over yourself in that form” he said quickly not wanting to admit right away what he really needed to speak with the man about.

“Thank you.” Lupin took the Wolfbane he had brought along. “It means so much that you are willing to brew it for me. When you were gone I had to use other’s Wolfsbane..it wasn’t the best stuff. I was worried out of my mind that there would be another incident where someone caught me changed and there wouldn’t be anyone to stop me if things got out of hand.”

He barely managed to hold back a flinch. Every so often he’d think back to when he was attacked by Lupin’s werewolf self.

“Don't rely on others potions. Most on the market are watered down versions which halfwits concocted to sell at thrice the price. It is my intention to remedy that once I get a storefront.”

“I know some who would be more than grateful for that. In the meantime how much do I owe you?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?” Lupin’s eyes settled on him in shock. “You’ve sent me my potion even after I had ran off and you won't let me pay for preventing me from becoming a vicious killing animal?”

“You needed your potion.” He didn’t do those things to put Lupin in his debt. The reason he had kept up with the supply was to ensure the man caused no one else harm in his werewolf state.

“And you need to make money so you can buy ingredients to make potions don’t you?”

“Very well.” There were certain ingredients that he couldn’t grow in his backyard.

“I will take payment for this dose.” Seeing that Lupin was going to object he continued to speak “There is also something I must ask of you.”

“Is it Order related.”

“No.” Relief filled Lupin’s face quicker than humanly possible. “It is more of a personal matter.”

“Oh.” Lupin was clearly caught off guard at his words. In fairness, it wasn’t as if they were friends. Things up until this point had been predominantly businesses like. Neither had divulged personal matters while working in the Order together. “Would you like some tea?”

He was about to decline but thought tea would be useful to hide how rattled he was about what he planned to discuss.

“That would be acceptable.”

“Kreacher?”

With a crack the house elf arrived already with a tray of tea and biscuits in hand.

“You must offer tea first” the house elf grumbled as he set the tray down.
"‘You’re right. Thank you, Kreacher.’

The house elf disappeared.

“I have forgotten how outspoken Kreacher was.”

“So did I.” Lupin softly chuckled. “Had an earful when I came back. I don't think he would forgive me for leaving this place without a master.”

He’d known about Lupin and Black’s relationship since his time in the Order. It was thanks to the werewolf that Black had mellowed over the years enough for them to work for the Order in a civil manner most of the time. It was also through Lupin that Kreacher, the once viciously prejudice against all non Pureblood, had been rehabilitated. The two had been close to a perfect picture as Mr. Graves and Mr. Scamander when Order business wasn’t looming overhead. Admittedly, he didn’t care to see the two, who had bullied him in their student days, appear so happy. Once he’d released the belief that Sirius Black had been responsible for betraying the Potters he was able to make some peace with witnessing their happiness.

“What personal matter did you want to discuss?” Lupin asked pouring milk into his tea.

“Harry,”

“Is something wrong?” Lupin asked jumping to his feet.

“Lupin,” he spoke sternly as if to a first year who had interrupted his class “calm yourself. If it were a pressing matter I would not have dilly-dallied with pleasantries.”

Lupin settled back in his seat. “Sorry. I know you wouldn’t sit around if Harry was in trouble.”

“Precisely. Harry is in no danger. His physical health has been stable, though I assure you I keep an eye on that fact.”

“Ever the vigilant.” Lupin smiled into his cup.

“I have come today because what was printed in Daily Prophet as of late.”

“I see.”

He cleared his throat once. “It has come to my attention that Harry had spoken to you about me.” He couldn’t help speak formally, it helped keep his feelings at bay to speak of facts. It was a fact that the Daily Prophet had printed a scandalous image of him with Harry and it was a fact that Harry told Lupin they were something.

“You mean about the two of you.”

If he were a man who blushed Severus was sure he’d be scarlet red. “Indeed. Since my...return I have not completely honored his want of acknowledgment of our relationship. I am unfamiliar with the proceedings of such things.”

Merlin he didn’t want to be here completely spelling out just how naive he was about being in a relationship with someone.

“Are you here for permission or advice?”

Unable to effectively speak his fingers twitched around his teacup.
“I don’t see why you’ve come to me. I might be considered a part of his family, but you don’t need to seek my permission... I ran out when things got rough...”

“All members of the Order saw how much it affected you to lose Black.” Speaking of Black in this house made him uncomfortable. Not once in the time since Black’s passing did he mention the man to Lupin. What happened to Black was a tragedy.

“I’m sorry” Lupin whispered.

“For what?”

“For everything. The past. I don’t think I properly apologize for all of that.”

The past. A mere years ago he would’ve laughed at how all the things he had endured as a student because of the pack of Marauders would be chalked up to just “the past”. But he was somewhat different now. The times of his youth didn’t weigh as heavy on him as it once did. “I won’t say what you that you have nothing to apologize for. Your inaction back then didn’t lessen the effect of pain brought onto me. I, however, am trying to move on from the past. I’m told no good comes out of holding onto those things. I intend to remind myself of that constantly now that I’m back.’

If he was more accustomed to talking others like Harry he would’ve given Lupin a comforting pat on his shoulder. But he wasn’t like Harry. He couldn’t just outright hug Lupin, to do such would go against the nature of their relationship.

“I may not have liked Black but no one deserved to die like that. And you don’t deserve to live with the guilt of what came from that loss.”

“Harry was right. You’ve changed.”

“In what way?”

“This way. I never thought we’d ever come close to putting the past behind us. Even when working in the Order it was as if the past was hanging over our heads without either of us acknowledging it. Sirius- he hated the way he’d treat you. He didn’t know how to gain your forgiveness. He didn't believe you would accept his apology.’

“At the time I'm not sure I would’ve.” Death changed perspectives. Settling the cup down he stood. “If you require my assistance send a firecall.”

“I’m glad that you came back. It was hard to see Harry pretend that things were alright. It was like every day he was forcing himself to exist. Not even when he was suffering from his damaged magical core did he appear as lifeless as he was when you were gone.”

Guilt skewered his heart at confirmation of what his death had done to Harry. “Know that I long for nothing more than to make up for that time.”

“That’s all the permission you need then. Take care of him Severus.”

“So how is the research going?” Draco asked as he took up a spot on the couch in the apartment some time later. He looked at his godson with a quirked brow.

“Harry said that you were conducting some research. Is it for an experimental potion?”

“Yes” he said a bit too quickly.
Draco looked at him with suspicion. He kept his face neutral. If Draco knew the true nature of his research there would be no end of pestering from his godson.

“You don’t have to be so secretive about it. Unlike Harry, I do understand potion concepts.”

He scoffed. “That as it may be I was not invited over to discuss potions.”

“Then what is left to talk about?” Draco’s smirk made him rethink creating some made up experimental potion.

“We could discuss your occupation” he offered. It had been a little while for Draco to settle into working at Hogwarts with Pomfrey.

The mischievous glint in Draco’s eyes fizzled out. He quirked his eyebrow again. Draco looked to the kitchen then back to him.

“Do you think that I’ll be a good Healer?”

He didn’t know where the self-doubt was coming from. Draco was talented in potions and based on what Pomfrey had told him during his year of recovery, his godson was progressing well as a Healer.

“It’s just...would they accept my help or would they take one look at my name and make assumptions. I want to become the best Healer in Europe, but how could I do that if no one would be my patient?”

In part he understood. Making the Malfoy name synonymous with healing would take a great deal of work.

“Draco,” he placed a hand onto Draco’s shoulder. “you will do great things as a Healer. Do not forget what you have already done. You will accomplish greatness despite your name. You’ve already helped heal Harry.”

“That was because of your notes.”

“My notes which, Pomfrey can attest, is not always clear English.”

Draco smirked. “I must have a knack for decoding your work then.”

There was so much that he should say to Draco. He lacked most of the words that should’ve been said. “If I haven’t said it prior, I am proud of what you have accomplished.”

The glassy-eyed look Draco was now giving him made him almost regret saying the words. Fulfilling the role of an actual godfather was still somewhat new. He didn’t have to hide the fact that he cared about Draco, but he still rather not explain the unshed tears to Harry who was in the kitchen. Luckily Draco’s eyes returned to normal.

“Harry’s definitely rubbing off on you.” Draco chuckled. “He baked me a cake for my first day.... I have been working for only a short time and I already messed up.”

“How so?”

“I did something completely stupid. I, well according to Madame Pomfrey, threatened the new Potion Master.”

He scoffed at the idea of Draco threatening anyone.
“There were so many students getting injured in potions class that you’d think Hagrid was teaching it. The last student I treated would’ve needed new hands if she had come in a minute later. ”

“You confronted him” he stated piecing together how Draco might’ve reacted. He would’ve done the same. Just knowing that someone incapable of teaching was currently ruining the art of brewing at Hogwarts was almost enough to pay McGonagall a visit. Perhaps that was her intention. The old feline wasn’t capable of manipulation as Albus.

“I did and the Potion Master threatened not to help supply the infirmary” Draco’s face was now a cross between anger and worry.

Severus was halfway to livid but wouldn’t let it show. He’d been providing potions for the infirmary throughout the years of his teaching. It was part of the job description. Every Potion Master that ever taught at Hogwarts was required to assist the infirmary. Most produced potions elsewhere wouldn’t be nearly as good, though may at this point be more potent than the brewing done by the useless ignoramus Draco was telling him about. His fingers twitched to take his wand and make this lesser professor see the error of his ways.

“Madame Pomfrey is trying to sort it out” Draco whispered.

Knowing Pomfrey she would do whatever she could to set things right, however, he didn’t think it right at all to have to rely on someone who clearly didn’t concern themselves with students safety. Severus knew that in his own classes over the years there had been accidents, most Longbottom related, but he strived to keep students from losing limbs. Despite his rather cruel reputation he had cared a great deal for the students, a fact that he wouldn’t outright say. Looking at the dejection on Draco’s face he knew what he was going to do.

Newt tugged the chain that his wedding band had hung for several months. He couldn’t sleep with the sounds of the bustling city outside of their New York apartment. It had been his idea to be a stowaway and already he was regretting leaving. He missed the calm silence, the smell of fresh air, more importantly, the friends he’d left behind. If he apparated- no he had to start getting used to the city. New York wasn’t a bad place at all. There was many things about the city that was intriguing. In all his years he had come to discover a lot of the concrete jungle and its inhabitants. Plus Tina and Queenie were here too. The plan had always been to return. New York was their home. No, it wasn’t the city’s fault that he was restless.

“Newt?” Percival yawned, at last returning home. Percival had been pulled from one meeting to the next during the day. “Is Darion-”

“He’s still asleep” he whispered still playing with this ring. He wouldn’t complain. He had to do what was best for Darion best for his family. New York would be his home once more. They had raised Credence here, spent wonderful years in this city. This apartment would be enough until Darion got a little bigger. Besides Percival had allowed Credence to go to Hogwarts instead of Ilvermorny. That could be the same for Darion too. New York would work even if he longed to be elsewhere.

“Newt?”

“I’ll be back to bed soon.”

A heavy sigh escaped his husband. Firmly keeping his eyes on the silver band sliding back and
forth on the chain, listening to the sounds of Percival moving about the darkened apartment. “Mercy Lewis.” Even without looking he could tell that Percival was running a hand through his hair. A soft thud accompanied Percival as he took up space beside him on their couch. Out of the corner of his eyes, he could see Percival’s hands knitted together. It was an action that conveyed Percival was thinking of the right words to use at this moment.

“I shouldn’t have come.”

“Why did you?” Percival gently asked.

“I’m afraid” he answered honestly.

“Of what?”

“That I will hardly see you anymore now that we are coming back. I’m afraid that you’ll forget that we exist.”

“Newt” Percival placed a hand gently over his. On the back of that hand, he saw Percival’s own wedding band secured around his finger. Not once in all their years together had that ring ever been removed. It was something he often reflected over when separated. “Tell me what you want Newt” Percival spoke gently.

“I ...I don’t want to be selfish.”

“You are the least selfish man in the world Newton.”

“I...” he couldn’t bear to say the words.

“Tell me” Percival reached up to run a hand through Newt’s hair.

“I don’t want to live in New York anymore.”

It was a selfish thing to ask. Percival adored New York, showing off nearly every inch of it whenever they had a free moment together. This city had been Percival’s home since a child. Now it sounded like he’d didn’t care about that. But he did, he cared very much. He cared that Percival liked the constant coming and goings of city life. And he cared that Percival didn’t stop him from going off when he longed to be surrounded by nature. He cared that Percival let himself be dragged to zoos or aquariums week after week, date after date because that had been where he felt the most comfort.

Percival chuckled. “Is that all?”

“I don’t want you to work for MACUSA, but that’s asking for too much.”

“Madam President would lose her mind if I wasn’t at her service.” Newt ducked his head lower. “Newt look at me,”

With difficulty he did.

“I know my business manner has done a disservice to our family... New York was where I was raised. I didn't think I’d see much of anywhere else besides here and Ilvermorny. Business was in my blood, to be a Graves man you had to conduct business in some form. I had little desire to branch out from the place that had been expected of me... until I met you. You were so different from everyone I had ever met, so unbothered by what was to be expected of anyone. I fell in love with the wildness that shown in your eyes and freedom that came from your smile.” Percival
capped his face. “We could live here or Timbuktu for all I care. Where you are is where I will always want to be. I hope the same is for you even though these past weeks haven’t been the best.”

“Of course I feel the same.”

“Good,” Percival smiled running his thumb against Newt’s cheek. “Tomorrow I will speak to Madam President about retiring.”

“I don’t want you to give up your job. You worked so hard.”

“It’s a fine job that demands far more than I’m willing to give up. I need to be more there for you. Be there for our family.”

“But you enjoy working and your coworkers,”

“I admit I’m not one for sitting around all day. How about I ask for a different position, one with far less paperwork.”

Newt kissed Percival pulling him closer.

“There is nothing I wouldn’t do for you Newt” Percival whispered, his breath hot against his ear. “I’ve been thinking of how to break the news to Madam President since the night of our fight. Besides I planted the seeds for Mr. Snape to become our neighbor.”

“Really?”

“Up to him to agree to the offer.”

Newt leaned into Percival, his head resting comfortably against his chest. “I love you.”

“I love you too. Now let’s get back to bed.”

Chapter End Notes

It has been far too long! Summer is approaching so I’m going to get this story done. Thank you for keeping up with the craziness. Until the next time, have a wonderful day/week.
First Date

Dear Mr. Snape,

Newt and Darion are safe with me in New York. I’m sure even you have figured this out before I discovered that my reckless husband had smuggled himself back into America with me. There are a few things that must be dealt with so I must prolong our stay in New York. We shall return as soon as possible. In the meantime don’t forget about our talks on Mr. Potter.

Sincerely,

Percival Graves

The letter confirmed the hunch he had upon reading Mr. Scamander’s letter. Severus didn't think that the Magizoologist would’ve run into the mountains rather find some way to be with Mr. Graves. Time had passed since discovering the empty home but even his anxieties could find no evidence to anything other than the two reuniting somewhere far away.

In the meantime don’t forget about our talks on Mr. Potter.

Severus scoffed as he reread that line. As if he could forget their talks. Taking the letter back to his room Severus wondered if opening up to receiving owls would become a nuisance. The possibility of being sent obnoxious postcards from New York was rising as he made his way up the stairs.

Shaking his head he placed the letter next to the photo Mr. Scamander had left him. Hardly had he seen a photograph of himself, nor did he really care to, but this photo was growing on him in much the same way the Scamander family had. Each time he glanced at it he noticed different things, like the way Mr. Scamander’s eyes flickered towards Mr. Graves, who took his hand. Or he saw how close Darion had gotten to putting a handful of his hair into his mouth. This morning he noticed the way Harry’s smile grew in a silent laugh. Seeing that smile urged him to do more for their relationship. The question was how to ask Harry out on a date.

After their talk, Draco had asked if he could assist in brewing a few things. Severus knew it was to keep his godson’s mind occupied. Addressing Draco’s problem was far easier for him than how to broach the subject of taking Harry out on a date. The need for potion supply could be an advantageous way to spend time together other than in his lab. Taking Harry to Knockturn Alley would offer fewer stares, but he wanted more for them.

With Harry he constantly fought the building wants that had once been completely unthinkable for him to experience. Ten, he had shared ten wonderful kisses with the young man. Since the very first he’d kept track, mentally filing where and why the kiss occurred. If there were anyone strong enough to pass his mental shields to take a look at this mental filing he would claim research. Keeping track of kisses was easier than tallying the times Harry said: “I love you”. The younger man said it often, yet his own tally of the same words remained at one. Only once he had said it. It wasn’t easy words for him to voice.

Severus summoned his self-help books opening the book to where his bookmark had laid prior.

When to know to say I love you. Severus looked at the chapter with mistrust. The text had provided basic scenarios but most of these didn’t seem at all right. Harry would use these words far more than the prompts of this book. Under all these examples it read These are guidelines. When you
Severus worried if he wouldn’t be ready to say it again. The first and only time he had spoken those words he had been so desperate to let Harry know that he did love him. A dying man hadn’t the need of worrying about voicing what he felt.

Severus reached out to touched the marred skin on his neck. He was no longer a dying man. Although he didn’t hold the belief of rebirth, through his unique circumstances he had to admit that he wasn’t completely unaffected. Even Remus Lupin had pointed out that he changed. If he was already changed shouldn’t that change be for the better?

A letter bearing the Hogwarts wax seal arrived exactly ten minutes ago yet all Draco could do was look at it with trepidation. Madame Pomfrey said that he would be back to assist with Quidditch injuries, even so, he was unconvinced that things would simply work themselves out. Even Snape said that Pomfrey would see to it that the students were taken cared for, but that didn't necessarily mean that he still had an apprenticeship. For all he knew the best course for treating the students would be to toss out the person who threatened the supplier of potions. Not knowing what Madam Pomfrey would do had set him on pins and needles these past few days. Brewing alongside Snape had helped a little. Draco supposed that he could try work within the Ministry if everything failed. Working with Blaise would be alright even if they were stuck at the bottom of the hierarchy. There had to be people in the Ministry that would still fear his namesake enough to give him at least something. No, he didn’t want that. Healing people was something he was sure to dedicate the rest of his life to. If not at Hogwarts where could he go?

“What you got there?” Harry yawned. His roommate was still clad in his pajamas despite the time of day. “A letter?”

“How did you solve that mystery? Weasley might be right to suggest you become an Auror.”

“Ha. ha.” Harry stretched moving into his bedroom without permission. “You’ve been so snappish since this vacation.”

Vacation, he had lied about the reason for not being at Hogwarts. Although he doubted Harry really believed him when he said that Madam Pomfrey wanted him to rest up a bit before Quidditch really took off. Draco wasn’t ready to admit the truth.

“Aren’t we going to Snape’s in five minutes?”

“I get ready fast” insisted Harry, restraining another yawn.

“Your lack of appearance is not doing any favors towards your stagnation with Snape.”

“One, I can’t very well go snogging Snape while you are around. Two, I don’t need to dress up nice to scrub cauldrons. And three,” Harry raised his finger in a rude gesture.

Draco scoffed. “Well, I can’t help it if I’m better at potion work then you are.”

“Here’s an idea you do the brewing while Sev and I spend time together.”

“As if he would leave me alone in his labs. I am curious as to what research he has been conducting. We haven’t been brewing anything out of the ordinary.” Harry pouted as he always did when the topic of research came up.

“I think that’s code for avoiding me.”
“I don't think so.” More and more he was noticing how Snape looked at Harry while they brewed or when they were called away to eat. “I could not go today if-”

“No he needs your help. I'll go get ready” Harry yawned leaving his room.

With Harry gone, Draco looked back to the letter. Holding his breath he tore the wax seal.

Dear Draco Malfoy,

I would like you to return to Hogwarts as soon as you're able.  
The issue of potion supplies has been resolved. You are most fortunate to have someone looking out for you, however, I expect less cheek in the future.

Sincerely,

Poppy Pomfrey

Receiving a letter from Madame Pomfrey welcoming him back made him almost tear up. Not having to give up on his apprenticeship filled him with an emotion he couldn't put a single name to. Rereading the letter he knew who she had been referring to.

With letter in hand, Draco rushed by Harry’s room “Where are you going?” Harry asked tugging a new t-shirt on.

“I'll meet you there” he said making his way to the fireplace.

Stepping out of the fireplace into Snape’s sitting room he zipped down to the lab. Snape’s eyes looked to him, his fine cutting laid out for the brewing he had agreed to help with like the days prior.

“News Draco?” Snape asked pointing to the letter in his hand.

“You did something didn’t you?” The edges of Snape’s mouth lifted into the smallest smile he’d ever seen. “You-”

“Unfortunately you will still have to deal with the imbecile professor. That is simply the price for working at Hogwarts.” Draco looked at Snape still unsure what to say. “I have come to an agreement with Headmistress McGonagall” Snape carried on laying out potion ingredients meticulously. “I shall carry on the task of solely providing for the infirmary. I have already sent a considerable amount of potions that I believe would be of assistance this morning.”

“What about your research?”

His question seemed to catch Snape off guard. “That is still in development,” Snape said quickly.

Regardless of what this mysterious research was Draco knew it was important. For Snape to put it aside to brew potions for Hogwarts...“I’ll replace the potions somehow, I’ll-”

“Have you not spent the better of your days trapped in this lab brewing alongside me?” Snape smirked.

A sympathetic ear was the most he’d expected when he spoke to Snape. No one would’ve helped him, his father would’ve definitely not lifted a finger. Yes, his father would have watched him sink in his failure. Sink far down and despise ever being associated with a disappointment like him. Snape, Snape was different. Draco thought back to all that Snape had done during the years he
attended Hogwarts. Wasn’t the man always helping others from the shadows? Hadn’t he supported him even when he knew there would be no thanks? Providing potions for Hogwarts yet again wouldn’t be as a monstrous task as the one the man had completed in the Astronomy Tower the night...that sacrifice had been all for his sake.

Snape took the letter from his hand, eyes glancing over the words. “It says that you are expected as soon as possible best not let Pomfrey wait.”

“Thank-”

Snape shook his head as if the words were not at all necessary. Feeling rather Gryffindor-ish he hugged Snape. Hugging his godfather was something he hadn’t done since his return from death. Hugging hadn’t been a thing between them, yet it felt right to do so. Snape’s hand rested on his shoulder. There weren’t enough words to convey how grateful he was to have this man in his life again.

Rushing through getting ready to catch up with Draco resulted in Harry walking into a scene that he was not in the slightest prepared for. Draco was hugging Severus tightly silver eyes shut so tight that Harry was sure he was fighting back tears. There was only one instance that he recalled the two ever hugging; that had been after graduation. Seeing these two hug worried him. Had someone died? Had Lucius Malfoy escaped Azkaban? If so why would someone from Hogwarts tell Draco that? Had Lucius gone to find Draco?

“What happened?” Harry asked in a tight voice.

Breaking the hug immediately Draco spoke “Nothing.”

It had to be something. These two wouldn’t hug over nothing. Before he could say another word Severus whispered something to Draco, who left the lab.

“What was that about?” Harry asked unsure if he needed to chase after Draco or not.

“Seems that you’ve corrupted my godson with Gryffindor affection” Severus smirked stepping closer.

“Everything is alright isn’t it?”

“There’s nothing to worry about. Draco simply had to return to Hogwarts.”

“Oh,”

Emerald eyes glanced around the lab. It was just the two of them now. Funny enough it was as if neither of them knew what to do with themselves after Draco’s abrupt departure. Minerva had been more than willing to give duties for providing stock to Hogwarts over to him, even hinting at sacking the current professor so that he could take up the position yet again. Severus hadn’t expected Pomfrey would summon Draco over as quickly as she did. The Matron had to have a soft spot for his godson.

“You haven’t started anything have you?” Harry asked a little worry lingering in his voice.

“I have not.”
Harry began to nibble against his lower lip. He was about to comment on the nervous habit when a sharp determined look was fixed onto Harry’s face as though he had made up his mind. “Would you like to go to dinner with me at the Leaky Cauldron?”

Severus stood staring at Harry watching the pinked cheeks give away nervous embarrassment despite the determination of emerald eyes.

“How about dinner?” He heard himself ask.

“Like a date” Harry confirmed.

A date, that took some time to sink in a little regardless of him thinking along the same lines earlier. Going on an actual date was still a new concept. As much as he would’ve preferred to be the one to initiate their first date, Severus knew that he would more than likely go mad trying to smooth out every possible outcome of an outing together resulting in never asking Harry out. With Harry in charge, this was out of his control which simultaneously calmed and aggravated his anxiety. What would Harry plan from them? Harry probably had more of an idea of what a date consisted of than his own version based on self-help text. Only when Harry blinked did he realize he had unconsciously raised his Occlumency shields leaving a rather statue-esk posture unresponsive to Harry’s question.

“What time?” He finally asked.

“Meet at my place at Six? We can apparate there together” Harry beamed.

Not trusting his voice all that much yet he nodded.

“I’ll see you then.”

Harry whipped out of Spinner's End faster than he'd ever moved in his life. His heart was growing louder pace as he tumbled into his apartment. He'd done it! He’d asked Severus out for dinner! When Severus’s eyes had glazed over he’d prepared for an endless list of excuses as to why they couldn't go out. A list of counter remarks were swimming up in his mind during the silence. Severus had accepted this date! They were ready for this he was sure of it.

Occupying the butterflies in his stomach he ruffled through his closet. Thanks to Draco he no longer had oversized hand me downs from his cousin anymore. Plucking a nice crisp button-up he thought about how Draco had helped him out the first time he was permitted to have dinner with Severus in his chambers. Smiling at the memory he pulled out some slacks laying it on the bed next to the shirt wondering if it was good enough. Why did Draco have to go back to Hogwarts now?

“At least it’s not a t-shirt and jeans.” he glanced at the wall that separated his room from Draco’s.

Would Draco know if he borrowed something more posh looking? Harry shook his head it was only the Leaky Cauldron and posh clothes weren’t him at all. An hour after fighting his hair and twenty minutes debating on fixing his eyes so his glasses wouldn’t give away his identity too quickly, he began cursing himself for setting their date so late.

Severus did not fuss with his hair or contemplate which dark bottom up he should wear. His looks weren’t going to miraculously change if he did either of those things. There would be no wowed
transformation like the one Ms. Granger had presented at the Yule Ball several years before. Instead, he used the ample time before his date strengthening his control on his emotions. Tonight he wouldn't abide his deceased father's voice to ruin anything. A date. Why was even thinking that word made his stomach flip somewhat unpleasantly? This was only Harry. They had eaten in each others company many times before. For hours they'd talked and occasionally kisses. His heart picked up tempo.

Knitting his eyebrows together he forced himself to focus. Scolding himself not to go through his relationship notes he took a breath, ebbing his anxieties, sinking back into a meditative mode. He knew the tips by heart after reading and rereading. This was dinner, a date, which the books were clear not to make out to be a life or death situation. He scoffed thinking he’d rather be in such situation, he’d at least would know how to react in one. Checking his watch as he’d done now and again the time was five till six. The shields of his mind were stronger now than it might've been prior. Dressing in a lighter gray button up he made sure that the scar on his neck wouldn't be visible. A pair of black boots, a long black coat and one quick check of his pouch of wizard currency on his person then he apparated nearby Harry’s residence.

Briskly he walked up to knock. In the seconds it took for Harry to answer he wondered if he should've bought something; he recalled one of the self books mentioning bringing flowers. Seldom did any mention of plants herbology or otherwise came up during their talks. If he were to bring something Harry would have preferred anything Quidditch related. Arriving with Quidditch equipment in place of flowers would look positively silly.

“You’re here.” Harry smiled as radiant against the dim lighting of the sun beginning to fade.

“It is six” he smirked.

“You could've used the floo.”

“I thought this more appropriate than appearing in your living room with you unprepared.” Based on the speed at which Harry answered the door and the wrinkle in the middle of Harry's shirt he could safely assume that Harry had been ready for a while sitting nearby.

“Ready?” Harry asked closing the door behind him

“Yes.”

They walked shoulder to shoulder down the road. Harry seized his hand once he deemed the apparation spot clear.

“You do know how to apparate don't you.”

“I do,” Harry flushed.

Severus looked to their intertwined hands as he settled Harry out of apparation. Despite the act of hand holding not being inherently offensive and something he craved at this moment, he wasn't sure if it was appropriate. Both of them being in public together after the Daily Prophet had run wild with their remarks created doubt. No- there was no room for doubt tonight. Still, it wasn’t in his nature to intentionally hold another’s hand or pull them close when there were so many prying eyes around. He was a careful man. Being careful had helped him survived well until...

Harry held onto Sev’s hand for as long as he could after apparation. Pulling Sev across Diagon Alley hand in hand was an option resting on the edge of his mind, ready to send the necessary
signals, yet he thought to not pressure Severus out before they even got close to their dinner. With a light tug he released their joined hands motioning Severus to follow him. There didn’t seem so many people out tonight. Turning to look back at Severus he tried not to laugh at the way his face was pinched and eyes narrowed in a glare. If anyone dared to look at him Harry was sure they'd turn to stone. The whole picture of the two of them together admittedly had to be humorous right now. Severus looking like he was set out to hex the next person who they came across their path coupled with his stifled laughs. The Leaky Cauldron cut through the silence of their walk with rowdy chatting and cups clanging.

Tom the owner had wobbled by “Right this way.”

Severus looked at him suspiciously

“He is a friend,” he said following Tom to a table as secluded as one could have in a semi-crowded tavern.

“Just motion for me to come over when you are ready to order” Tom said before wobbling away.

“Cheers!” came from the table a few feet away. He had a suspicion they were having some kind of drinking contest.

“It’s not the Three Broomsticks but their food is good” he said suddenly nervous.

“You frequent this place?” Severus asked looking around maybe looking for an escape route.

“Not really. Fudge basically bound me here before third year because of Sirius...” Why was he talking about Sirius now? “The food is good” he said hiding away behind the menu. His eyes glanced the words over and over and over but retained nothing. Another loud “Cheers!” from the group sounded. Deciding hiding behind a menu all night would guarantee a bad date, Harry lowed the menu. “You know what you want?”

Following Severus nod, he raised his hand. Tom wobbled to them took their orders and left.

“You know they had Firewhiskey on the menu.”

A memory of Newt Scamander saying “you shouldn't drink alone” floated across his mind. He almost missed the meek wizard's attendance. Having Mr. Scamander around would surely make this evening more normal. If Mr. Scamander and Mr. Graves were here would it sufficiently ease his growing discomfort. Every inch of his face felt far too pinched even by his typical scowl standards. Scowling deliberately went against the rules of those stupid dating books. How was he not supposed to scowl when there were loud dunderheads and he spotted a nosy witch whispering something. The possibility of someone overhearing them if he dared broach a subject made him twitch. The Daily Prophet would soon jump at them not to mention- the spiraling train of thought stopped at Harry nervous look. Dates should be fun that's what books taught him. He needed to try more.

“Don't tell me you're nervous” Harry whispered. The comment made it very difficult not to Occlude. “Sugar?”

He didn't understand. If this were to be a new nickname he was going to shut it down.

“Sugar” Harry repeated pointing at the small pile of packet sugars that he'd been unconsciously reorganizing.
“There’s nothing wrong with a little order.”

“Cheers!” chimed the group in the background.

Harry burst into a laugh. “I don’t get why we were both so tense.” Harry glanced at the rowdy group. “We should be more like that.”

“Disturbing others in a drunken stupor?”

Shaking his head Harry flashed a smile. “No, just enjoying the evening.”

“Very well.”

“What we need is a topic of conversation. It bothers me that we’re just sitting in silence.”

“I’ve come to realize I’ve talked exponentially more while with you than anyone ever in my life.”

“You make it sound like a bad thing” Harry teased.

Once they got to talking and their diners arrived everything fell like it was getting on the right track. Neither of them paid mind to the other patrons. It was practically perfect. The second that thought emerged his head however, one of the drunken wizards stumbled by. More than anything Harry wanted to snap at the way the stranger was squinting at him. Some recognition must’ve hit as the man's eyes widened.

“Yous” he slurred "yous har-harry oit-tter a’nt yous"

Harry wanted to shrink behind the table. They had been so close to an undisturbed evening. Without warning the stranger called “It's him” to his buddies before offering a sweaty hand. Begrudgingly he shook the offered hand. Throwing an apologetic look towards Severus, who narrowed his eyes at the stranger.

"I had to thank yous” the stranger slurred shaking his had a little too much.

“Harry Potter!” another drunken wizard came forward.

One by one, the rest joined still holding their tankards. The shorter one in the middle was swaying in a way that conveyed standing was extremely difficult. Hopefully, the drunken wizards would thank him quickly so that he could finish up his date. If they were lucky enough he could find some sweets to apologize. Severus was adamantly not drawing attention to himself, silently leaning back watching the group.

The man jumped back as if Severus just appeared."I know yous” the man spoke in a deep growl. “read about you.”

“If you read about me then you don't accurately know me.” Severus stated dully sipping some water. The shift in the atmosphere was palpable.

“I do know you!” the stranger's face turned purple. ”What you did.” The babbling man drew his wand shaky then looked to Harry. ”I read he put some sick love potions on youos”

“He didn’t” Harry snapped.

“Imperius curse” another wizard offered joining the first with his wand drawn.
Severus watched the uncoordinated wands “Put that away before someone gets hurt.”

“That a threat?”

“Merely a statement. Your wand is pointed the wrong way.”

Harry looked past the wizards to find Tom in hopes to break this up before either of them had to resort to using magic.

“You drunken imbeciles do not have any truth of facts nor the right to know it. Your feeble alcohol ridden minds have brought you over to disturb us who don't wish to be disturbed. Kindly leave.”

The four shook “You’re a murderer.”

“And yet you thought it wise to approach me?” Severus sneered.

The wizard’s tankards rattled. Harry could see Tom coming over to them now. In the split second Harry looked away the wizard tossed his drink at Severus. Beer dripped down Severus’s face The glass tankard half shattered by his feet. Recognizing his mistake the drunk wizard stumbled back. Severus stood straight, eyes glittering viciously at the wizard but not moving.

“What's going on here?” Tom harshly whispered to not draw even more attention over to them.

Tom looked to him but he was able to look away from Severus. Their date was without a doubt completely ruined.

“I'm so sorry about this Harry.” Tom turned to the four. “I should've cut you off. Out. OUT.” Tom pushed the four away.

Harry stood unable to say a word, watching the remains of the beer tossed at Severus roll off the edges of his face. In deafening silence, Severus waved his hand over himself wandlessly drying himself up. Then Severus made a different hand motion over the tankard that formed back together.

Stopping Severus from putting a single coin of the table he spoke: “I'll pay.” Tossing money onto the table he followed Severus out the back of the Leaky Cauldron.

“Sorry.”

“You are hardly responsible for that lot.” Severus regretted the bitterness in his voice.

It truly wasn’t Harry's fault that the night had taken a turn it was his own. He could have remained quiet blended into the background as the drunkards appeared for handshakes with the Savior of the Wizarding World. He shouldn’t have bothered to engage at all. Up until then, they had been doing fine. Admittedly he was far more tense dining out off his home but it hadn't been torturous. If it weren't for the drunkards he would've considered it to be a successful first date. By the standards of his notes on the subject they had been doing well conversion wasn’t strained. He even resisted the temptation to calm his masked nerves with alcohol or silence the other rowdy patrons. In the end, he had ruined things though. And by the looks of Harry biting his lower lip, he wasn't helping that fact at all. Returning to conduct more research was his initial thought. If he saw Harry back safely then he could do just that. No, he needed to say something. Hadn’t he promised himself that he would try be a better lover?
Harry was calling it quits. Somewhere in the Leaky Cauldron, he’d left behind all his plans to brave the wizarding world again with Severus at his side. With that instant of beer splashed in Severus’s face, Harry saw the possibility of continuing the night wash away. Who would willingly go out with him when they were going to have drinks tossed at them? If he called it a night now then they could reclaim something of their night together. It was laughable to think that he could have a normal dinner date.

“Let's go back to my place you can floo home from there.” Without looking he took Sev’s hand. Just once more he wanted to hold it out in semi-public.

“Is that what you want?”

No it wasn’t. He wanted to turn back time just enough to stop from being recognized, turn back time so that he could enjoy a shared dessert with Severus. If he went back he would find his Gryffindor bravery? Being with Severus wasn't wrong or embarrassing, but Harry knew that tomorrow's paper would echo the disgust and anger of that drunk wizard. He didn’t want to lose Sev because of arseholes who took fiction as fact. “Yes.”

The hollow “yes” from Harry reflected his own dejection at how the night was turning out. “I’ll apparate us nearby.”

Harry glumly nodded.

With a pull at his navel, the back of the Leaky Cauldron shifted then stilled into the darkened corner a few feet from Harry's apartment. Harry slumped against his chest as they appeared. The younger man clutched at his shirt to steady his uncoordinated feet before letting go. The darkened sky reminded him of their fourth kiss under the stars beside the Great Lake. Things between them always seemed far easier when away from prying eyes.

“Would you like tea when we get back?” Harry asked without looking at his face. “You probably bad enough to drink tonight” he answered his own question.

This was a test more than ever he had to balance on the line of being brash or concede to this being how the night ended. The self-help books held nothing to aid his plight. There hadn't been a chapter on what to do when your very presence invites negative attention. A younger version of himself would’ve taken to dismissing the whole idea of fixing tonight. Returning to Spinner’s End once they made it back to Harry’s apartment would be the worst possible choice.

Chancing a glance at Severus’s face didn't give any clue to what he was thinking. He wondered why Severus hadn’t left yet. A part of him wanted Severus to stay while the other screamed for a moment to properly feel mortified over what had occurred back at the Leaky Cauldron.

“It was horrible” he mumbled.

“Hardly a horrible evening” Severus scoffed.

“And what would be worse than tonight?” he muttered still not convinced that this didn’t qualify as a horrible date.

“You are aware that I’ve spent time in the company of people like Bellatrix Lestrange. Her idea of a good time was torturing anything that moved.”
Harry thought torture was a very low bar to have passed. “It's getting late.”

“Are you kicking me out already?” The words had been his own only a few mornings ago. Severus moved towards him those onyx eyes not as shielded as they had been earlier. “If you wish for me to leave I will. Know that our next date will be more thought out.”

“Next date!” Harry looked at any sign of Severus’s face to prove that he was only joking. “I thought,”

“That I would shut myself up in my lab forever? It was a thought” Severus whispered stepping a little closer. “One should apply multiple trials to get an accurate reading.”

“You talk about it like research.” His eyes were glued to the way Severus moved closer and closer.

Thin lips pressed to his. A kiss too light. Severus must’ve thought so too as strong hands tilted his head back further. Gripping handfuls of Severus’s shirt he pulled, letting them both fall unceremoniously onto the couch.

“I thought you were kicking me out” Severus smirked glancing at him from above.

“Stay the night ” he begged. Reaching up Severus’s arms he took hold of the sharp edges of his face. “Stay please.” Onyx eyes appeared to grow even darker in their held gaze.

“I will have to leave in the morning. Pomfrey is expecting a delivery.”

“Alright but that means no stupid pillow barriers.”

With Severus’s nod, he led his lover into the bedroom. Tonight hadn’t ended up as horrible as he thought.
Howlers

When the sun rose on Harry’s apartment Severus woke to wild tresses obscuring his vision. In sleep the younger man’s grip held him firmly in place. If it weren’t for his promise of preparing the Pomfrey’s order he would gladly remain where he was. There was work to do and by the looks of it, Harry would be out for a few more hours. Slipping from the bed he wordlessly closing the curtains to let Harry rest peacefully. Seeing Harry all alone in bed, his pajama shirt risen enough to show his navel was testing his restraints. It was still too early for that. Not that Harry had been all too subtle with hints for more than kissing before bed. Resisting taking more steps towards intimacy with Harry was a steadily growing issue. Before his body could react to such dangerous thoughts he floo-ed to his house.

Brewing kept his mind off what he had walked out on. The time in his lab had been thankfully successful enough to end earlier than expected. Sending off the order he spotted this morning’s Daily Prophet waiting for him. There was a myriad of reasons to stay away from the paper. It was self-destructive to pay any more attention to their words. As if mocking his decision not to read it, the twinned paper began to smoke. Carefully he untied the charring paper. Howlers upon howlers were stuffed between the paper. Their smoking was in warning that they should be opened. There was barely time to set up a silencing spell around his living room to prevent his few neighbors from hearing the racket before a high pitch scream erupted from the first letter.

“HOW DARE YOU! YOU DISGUSTING WRETCH!”

“RELEASE HARRY POTTER FROM YOUR CURSE!” Another howler exploded, its message overlapping the first.

“YOU SHOULD BE SENT TO AZKABAN!” screeched yet another.

There were so many howlers. He had to get rid of them. Risking singeing his fingers on the smoking pile he tore one howler after the other. Despite their collective screams aggravated his ears he kept tearing them open. Bright red letters were all repeating the same words alternating in only order and ferocity. A mass of bellowing letters floated in front of him, some actively trying to spout their spite directly into his face. One by one the letters let out a thunderous “DIE!” before cascading into minuscule confetti.

With the last letters shreds falling to the ground, silence returned to Spinner’s End. Clutching his head he fought to shut away the collective boom of threats echoing in his ears. Locking away everything the best he could, he set to clean the piles of bright red paper scraps scattered all over.

The small tremor in his hand frustrated him. It was only howlers, only words he’d heard a million times. Hadn’t he expected this? Shouldn’t he have gotten over reacting to shouts in his face? Steadying his hand he picked up the Daily Prophet. Today’s issue featured a picture of himself and Harry at the Leaky Cauldron relaxingly talking. It wasn’t even remotely as scandalous as he’d thought to result in the ambush of howlers. The headline simply read: Relationship of Wizarding World Savior and Death Eater Confirmed! Severus knew that their date would be reported on, yet the vicious malice behind howlers in his paper was uncalled for. They hadn’t even held hands on their date and still the threats were pouring in. This would only be the beginning.

Scooping up the newspaper and confetti-like remains, Severus tossed it into his fireplace. The tremor in his hand lessened as he continued to watch the fire crackle. Once he regained full control he’d call Harry.
For perhaps the first time in years, Harry woke with joy soaring in his heart. Last night’s date had taken a turn but Severus hadn’t demanded that it would be the end of dates nor did Severus runoff. It was the very opposite, Severus had said that they would go on another date. Also, he had slept over. Not even the fact that he had woken up to an empty bed dropped his mood. To be fair it was already way past noon and Severus said he had to send a package to Madam Pomfrey.

Reaching over he picked up his talking mirror. Severus should’ve finished his work by now. “Good morning” he smiled at that indifferent face.

“Afternoon.” Severus corrected with a hint of a smirk. “If you are able to pry yourself from the confines of your bed you are welcome to join me for some tea.”

“And biscuits?”

Severus smirked. “Very well.”

Giddily he ended the call throwing on a clean pair of pants and shirt before moving through the floo. “You forgot your shoes.” Severus pointed out his bare feet as he stepped into the man’s living room.

“It’s not like I need them. Unless we are going somewhere.” Going on their promised next date couldn’t come soon enough.

“After tea and biscuits, we could take a walk.” Severus set down two cups of tea, turning to head back into the kitchen.

Distracted he reached for his cup of tea. Clang. “Great going” he grumbled looking at his fallen cup. A trail of spilled tea was running from the carpet’s edge under the armchair Severus always occupied. “Accio rag” he called out.

A small barely stitched together rag flew into his outstretched hand. Bending down he dabbed at the trail. Following it under the armchair he laid onto his stomach to check that he’d got all the mess. Something poked out from the rag as he pulled it out from underneath the chair. Curiously he plucked the shred of soaked paper. The bright red piece didn’t seem to have been left there for long. No matter what he did with the wet paper wouldn’t form back together. Pulling out his wand he whispered “Lumos” lighting up the dark shadows of the furniture. Another red piece bigger than the one he had laid on one of the back legs.

“Howler?” he mumbled to himself.

“Harry?”

Jerking he hit his head on the chair’s edge. Rubbing his head he moved out from beneath the furniture.

“What are you doing?”

Keeping the red paper pieces tucked into the rag he looked up at Severus. Severus rose a questioning brow but waited for him to say something. “Sorry I spilled my tea.”

“Ever so determined to destroy my house I see.” Severus observed the spot where he’d spilled.
“I...”

“It’s of little concern to me” Severus said setting down the biscuits.

Harry tried to not react to the questions in his head. “I’ll just throw this away” he said gripping the rag.

Severus helped himself to the filled cup of tea as Harry moved into the kitchen before he tossed the rag into the trash bin he looked at the second piece of paper. One side was the same bright red on the other was written in neat script: disgusting. This had to be a howler. Harry couldn't think of how it had gotten into Severus’s house. Severus had mentioned he didn't allow ordinary owls to come in. Maybe there was a way to send howlers through like some horrible special delivery service. Regardless of how they got in, he didn’t understand why Severus hadn't mentioned it?

He looked at the word again. disgusting. It would be silly to think that someone had sent a howler over the taste of one of Severus’s potions. This had to be about them being together. Their love wasn't disgusting at all and he was going to prove it to Severus before one measly howler made him think otherwise.

Severus noted that it was taking Harry longer than reasonable to simply to throw an old rag away. Harry had no reason to feel guilty or responsible if his floors were damaged from the spilled tea. What was one more stain or squeaking floorboard to this place? It was hardly a step up from what Grimmauld Place had looked like when the order started using it. The sound of Harry’s steps drew his eyes upward.

“Have you managed to find your way back through this large house” he teased.

“Ha. ha” There was a hint of something on Harry’s face that resembled determination. As the younger man positioned right in front of him Severus was unsure of what that determination was for.

“What-” His words were all too quickly washed away by Harry’s lips meeting his.

Far too much concentration was needed to not spill his tea from the surprise attack. Harry broke the kiss, a mischievous smile playing on those lips. Setting his teacup down Severus pleaded for his heart to act properly. Harry's lips looked darker then they had been just seconds ago. His brain searched for a reason behind the kiss. He understood their actions of close proximity like while cooking together that led to kissing. But this kiss was too out of the blue. Such spontaneity begged for more.

Harry launched again bringing their mouths together. Without the cup occupying his hand, he slid them from Harry’s backside upwards to cradle his head. He felt the movement before he realized Harry was now straddling him on the armchair. The sensation of Harry over him deepened his want of the younger man. He had to remain control of himself, however, the moment Harry slipped his tongue into his mouth he couldn't remain completely motionless. With ferocity, he fought back the dominance of the space between the space of their mouths. His tongue ran up across the roof of Harry’s mouth inducing the younger man to squirm within the grasp. He did it again learning the way Harry leaned further in silent begging for more.

Merlin, he wanted to continue kissing like this. Thoughts of tasting more of Harry was not helping his growing need. Stop this had to stop. Each time he pulled Harry pushed. Any more and he wouldn’t be able to stop. Did he even want to stop? Why should he? No. Not yet. Regaining some
of his thought he maneuvered Harry back.

“Harry” he spoke breathlessly.

Harry looked up at him with half-lidded eyes. Those lips were an even darker shade of red, so full, so...

“Sev.” Harry moved enough so that he could feel something pressing into his lower stomach. Knowing all too well what that something was made his own slacks feel increasingly restricted. This was a point where he could give in to his body's demands or fight against it. “Sev” Harry's whispers sounded so wanton. He tried to think of something, anything; the stupid self-help books, the thought of Neville Longbottom causing an awful explosion in potions were barely helping as he could feel Harry moving their bodies together.

“I want you Sev.”

Merlin’s beard he hadn't meant to become this in need of Severus’s touch. Harry had only wanted to snog until breathless but the way Sev’s tongue moved in his mouth left him unable to hold back. When he felt the pressure of Sev’s cock rising beneath him his mind quickly shifted courses to a different type of want. The want for the next step in intimacy had always been there for him. Sometimes he doubted if Severus wanted it, but this was proof right?

“Your hormones are in need of control” Severus huskily whispered in his ear.

“So do yours,” he said moving his hips invoking a grunt from the man below him. Severus gripped his hips before he could try to move them together again.

“Dam it Sev” he groaned at the loss of friction. There wasn't a way for him to hold out for much longer. How the fuck Severus could control himself in a time like this was beyond him. Abandoning shame he reached for his pants. Getting off overshadowed everything at the moment. Severus hands stilled his. “I don't have control like you” he snapped. “Either help or go” he hissed. His jeans were far too tight.

As clear as day Severus was fighting hard with himself. Harry didn’t understand the constant need for Severus to fight something that they both wanted. “I want you to touch me.” Clear lust flashed in those onyx eyes. “touch me” he pleaded.

This was ridiculous. Harry was pleading. Pleading to be touched by him. Lust spoke to him, sending visions of Harry whining in pleasure. Harry wanted this. With permission he could touch every part of his lover, watching him become undone. But he needed Harry to understand that going down this road could change things.

“Sex changes things” he hoarsely whispered.

“Love you” Harry countered as if that were the only reason that mattered. Wasn’t it the only reason that mattered?

Reason snapped at the admission. Hands with a mind of their own released Harry’s erection from the tight jeans he’d been so desperate to be rid of. The warmth and weight to the cock in his hand were not nearly as erotic as the way Harry gasped as he took hold. Emerald eyes growing wide then closing in a relieved sigh. If he looked elsewhere he wouldn't be able to keep the remaining shred
of control. Not that he cared to look elsewhere right in this moment. To look away would be a
shame. Harry’s face was changing from every slight movement his fingers made. His own cock
begged to be freed of their confines but he focused on Harry’s pleasure. Harry, whose lips parted a
fraction at the stroke down his cock. Harry, whose eyes were now fighting to stay open as he
picked up his speed. Harry, whose chest rose and fell back arching for more when he slowed his
hand's work. The sheer beauty of Harry at this moment would forever stick with him.

“More” Harry whimpered at the all too slow pace of Severus’s hand up and down his cock. This
had to be a dream. A wondrous dream. But even in his most vivid dreams, Severus wasn't this
careful, this gentle, or this attentive to him and only him. Severus was actually touching him. A
moan flew from his mouth as a second hand toyed with his balls. He wouldn't be able to last long at
this rate. Lust wasn't the only thing he saw in onyx eyes, there was care and a hint of something sad
that had yet been stamped out. The pressure in his lower abdomen warned that he was about to
cum.

“Sev” he gasped.

Severus brought their lips together in the most tender kiss ever experienced. When it ended there
was another emotion on his lover’s face. His heart swelled at the love in that expression.

“Harry” the whispered name sent him over the edge. His whole body shook as those hands
continued to move through his orgasm. Never looking away from each other he rode the rush of
everything in his body going momentarily numb. A cleaning spell did quick work of the mess
before his pants were redone. Everything in his body felt like jelly yet he didn't forget that Severus
had been hard too.

“Sev you-” He was fighting to keep his eyes open.

Severus smirked at Harry. There was a sense of twisted accomplishment at seeing Harry in such a
hazy stage. His own cock demanded attention but he wouldn't force reciprocation. Witnessing
Harry’s pleasure was more than enough.

“It’s alright” he whispered pushing a stray curl back.

“But,”

He shook his head. “Another time.”

“Once I regain feeling in my legs” Harry yawned, eyelids dipping lower.

Letting out a singular laugh while running fingers up and down Harry’s back. Lips rose to press a
kiss under his chin and then Harry closed his eyes.

Blinking Harry looked up at the ceiling of Severus’s bedroom. Anger built in his chest. Severus
had allowed him to fall asleep. It was unfair to Severus to take care of himself after what those
hands had done for him. Harry shivered remembering every detail. No, this wasn’t the time to
replay that wonderful moment. Stomping out of the bedroom he found the man reading.

“Of course you’re reading” he huffed.
“I saw no reason to do anything else while you were indisposed.”

“Git.” His eyes glanced at Severus’s lap, his erection was nowhere to be seen. Harry was sure that if he managed to get Severus in the mood once he could do it again.

“I took the liberty to fetch your shoes and coat.” Severus motioned to the front door. “I had promised a walk.”

Harry was torn between going out and trying to return to the moment before he had fallen asleep. Severus was on guard now. No sneak attacks would be successful. Thoroughly disappointed that they were not going to pick up where they had left off, he went over to his shoes.

“Where are we going?” he asked knotting his laces.

“Muggle area.” Taking Severus’s offered arm they apparate away.

As usual, Severus had to steady him as their feet touched the new ground. A small smile quirked on Severus’s face as he adjusted his skewed glasses. The realization that this was their second date hit him as they walked through the unfamiliar quaint town. Aside from the obvious lack of magical flare it reminded him of Hogsmeade.

“Would this be acceptable for our first stop?” Severus asked as they came to an ice cream parlor.

Beaming he pushed through the shop’s door. Checkerboard flooring led them to the front counter.

“Welcome” greeted an old man who only had a small clump of hair remaining at the center of his head. “Let me know when you’re ready.” The old man turned his back to pour more sprinkles into a container.

The glass cased held several flavors all which were perfectly muggle. Harry was grateful that there wasn’t any Bertie Botts Every Flavor Bean ice cream. Severus looked that he had his mind set on their shared favorite mint ice cream. Scanning the above menu Harry searched for the biggest size available so that they both could share. A collage of children’s faces smothered in chocolate and caramel made a small pyramid on the far wall.

“Excuse me, what’s that about?” Harry asked the older man at the counter.

“Ah, that’s the winners of our sundae competition. Hadn’t had a winner in a while. No shortage of people attempting.”

Severus studied the sugar-filled faces on the wall. He knew what was going to happen before Harry spoke.

“I think we could beat this thing Sev.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure” the old man chuckled. “It’s twelve scoops of ice cream: vanilla, chocolate, strawberry, topped with caramel, chocolate fudge, two bananas, whipped cream, and sprinkles. You must finish the whole thing within thirty minutes for individuals or twenty if you attempt it together.”

Severus started to make some mental calculations of how quickly they would have to eat to complete the task. “We’ll do it together.”
“I’ll have it ready for you in a jiffy.” The old man moved with unprecedented speed. Taking a seat Severus watched the progression of the sundae’s construction. Harry was still eyeing the winner’s wall.

“Is it crazy that I’m a little nervous? Have you ever done this before?”

“No” he answered honestly.

Harry’s hand took hold of his. “We are going to win this.”

“Why are you so determined to win? Planning on putting sundae competition champion on your resume?”

Sheepishly Harry smiled.

“Here we are,” the old man said setting a large dish with a thud. “Twenty minutes.”

Two spoons were placed in their hands. Severus gawked at the monstrosity before him. They should’ve talked about strategy. The old man fetched a kitchen timer out of his pocket.

“When this goes off spoons down. Ready?” No, they weren’t ready. “Begin.”

Harry attacked the side of the mountain shoveling a spoonful. “He said go” Harry mumbled with his mouth full of chocolate ice cream.

Methodically he took to the other side’s top. If he could just work from the top down at a decent pace that should work. Harry didn’t seem to care at all for a plan of action as his spoon kept carving through the middle of his side. Trusting that Harry wouldn’t cause a cave in he continued on his layered process. However, when he realized that five minutes had already passed without making a notable dent in the sundae he decided to disregard such strategy.

Chomping down on the first frozen bit of banana Harry glanced at the timer five minutes had passed. He was positive that they could do this but based on Severus’s side he wondered if he’d overestimated their ice cream eating abilities. As he was about to say something Severus began eating at a faster pace.

Ten minutes to go and Harry’s teeth felt like they had turned to little ice cubes. His tongue couldn’t differentiate the flavors he continuously put them into his mouth. Neither one of them had paused to say a word or take a sip of water that the old man had provided at the eight-minute mark. They were both solely focused on this albeit silly task. Somehow he felt so close to be working together towards a silly goal.

“Six minutes to go. Not sure if you boys will make it.”

Both doubled their efforts scooping up the somewhat soupy concoction of various toppings that sat near the end. They would show this old man that they would be amongst the few winners. It didn’t matter that his mouth was frozen or his belly ached. They were going to win.

“Two minutes.”

There was still a large glob of strawberry ice cream melting between them. Harry wasn’t sure he could do it. He had been slowing down for a while plus strawberry was his least favorite flavor. “One minute boys.”
This was it. They were going to lose because he’d saved the worse flavor for last. The spoon shook in his hand.

“40 seconds” the old man called.

Severus snatched the dish away from him. With a look of pure hatred towards the glop he forced it into his mouth as the old man continued to count down.

“30 seconds you have to finish it all.”

Grimacing Severus tipped the remains into his mouth. “26.25.24…”

“Done!” Severus exclaimed slamming the dish down. For the first time ever he saw Severus not at all neatly put together. Clumps of whip cream stood at the end of his hooked nose and chocolate smeared across his chin. Somehow a few rainbow sprinkles had caught in his hair. Harry laughed knowing that he had to look twice as ridiculous if this was Severus state.

“We have to eat it all” Harry licked the cream off Sev’s nose.

The old man took out his Polaroid camera. With a flash, their victory had been secured. “Congratulations boys! Made it with a few seconds to spare.” The old man shook the photo. “Best that you rest for a bit. Looked like you hadn’t come up for air.”

Harry laughed while Severus distrustfully glanced at the now empty dish that had congratulations you survived written on the bottom.

“A great photo” the old man smiled showing off the image of Harry kissing Severus’ nose. Both of their faces just as messy as the other winners. “Up on the wall it goes.”

Severus watched their photo join the others.

“We did it.” Harry slightly groaned rubbing his belly.

The motion brought up the memory of Mr. Scamander’s rounded abdomen simultaneously with the image of Harry holding a child. Now wasn't the time to think about that.

“It’s all thanks to you” Harry smiled at him. “I couldn’t have taken another bite.”

The ache in his own stomach was worth the sacrifice to see Harry so filled with joy in this moment. He smiled.

“That’s why I wanted us to win.” Harry pointed to their photo. Despite looking thoroughly disheveled they were genuinely happy. Perhaps this was the only photo that didn’t have him scowling angrily at the camera. It was a pure image trapped in the moment of victory. Their happiness would remain a testament to others for however long this establishment lived. Now he understood that Harry’s desire to win was for that reason. In this moment he wanted to say the words he hadn’t said in a long time. “Harry, I l-”

“Wait right here.” Harry hobbled back to the counter talking animatedly to the old man. Hastily Harry scribbled a few things on a paper before returning it. While distracted Severus magicked a copy of the image.

“What was that about?”
"I filled out an application for a job here. Before you ask, I did put sundae eating champion under qualifications."

He chuckled.

"You said that I couldn’t be a professional cauldron scrubber so this is the next step."

"This is your big next step in occupation?" Checking that no one could see he cast a cleaning spell on Harry.

"You're not thinking of the big picture. I could bring over tubs of mint ice cream when I visit."

"I’m sure giving product to employees is not a common business practice."

“Well,” Harry leaned over plucking bright colorful sprinkles out of Severus’s hair that he’d missed. “Maybe I’ll get a discount or something. It is a step isn’t it.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Severus smirked. It was comical to imagine just how relaxed Harry seemed by the idea of working in an ice cream shop. The Daily Prophet would have a cow if they knew what minimum wage job Harry Potter the Wizarding World Savoir had applied for. “it is a decent first step.” Severus could see Harry doing far more than this place, but he reminded himself that Harry had time and money to allow frivolities that he himself hadn’t been given. An earlier version of himself would’ve resented that, however right now he appreciated that Harry had freedom. A simple muggle job would do well to occupy Harry’s time while allowing for their continual visits.

“So where to next?” Harry beamed wrapping his arm around his own.

“I think a nice walk is warranted after the copious amounts of ice cream we digested.”

“That sounds good” Harry absentmindedly rubbed his stomach again. Feeling much heavier he led Harry out of the shop. A fair breeze greeted them as their feet trotted along. Feeling rather pleased that they hadn’t stumbled into inebriated wizards to damper the evening Severus took Harry’s hand. Keeping his eyes ahead he intertwined their fingers in a way that had become second nature. Further down the lane, they looked at the shop windows. Compared to magical shops in Diagon Alley he thought they wouldn’t be as appealing but neither of them had this sense of time to enjoyably explore their surroundings. No one gawked at their close proximity nor did passersby whisper in acknowledgment of who they were. That made their time together all the more perfect. He thought to try tell Harry that he loved him; instead he let Harry pull him into shop after shop.

The sun was lowering in the distance as they made it out of the last store at the end of the lane. He’d scoured for some sort of little trinket to get them to remember this perfect date by but nothing had appealed to him. Harry wished there was a place that he could’ve bought a camera from.

“There is one place I wanted to show you if you aren’t too tired” Severus said. Harry looked to their hands which hadn’t been separated since leaving the ice cream shop.

“I don’t mind at all.” Around a secluded corner they apparated. Sunset gave off beautiful shadows through the trees above them. It was a little wooden area not at all dense as the Forbidden forest but gave cover for their sudden appearance. “Where are we?”
“Not too far from Spinners End” Severus said leading him out of the covering.

“A playground?” he asked looking from the swingsets to the spinner in the center. The last time he had been to a playground he was seven and Dudley’s little gang took turns dunking his head into the sand.

Severus moved across the padded ground to the swing. There was almost a serene look on Severus’ face as he sat in the swing. Taking up the empty swing he joined him.

“This was where I met your mother.” A sad smile rested on Severus’s face.

He didn’t know what to say so he swung a little on the back of his heels. Severus rarely talked about his childhood. There was much he didn’t know about his lover’s life. Severus had always been a mystery that he pieced together a little more every day. Even the things he knew, like Lilly being his friend at one point, still had missing chunks. He hadn’t wanted to bother asking Severus over every detail that he could offer.

“The Evans use to live just beyond there.” Severus pointed in the direction over a small hill. “They moved not too long after Lilly’s third year at Hogwarts.”

“How did you two meet?” he asked wanting to hear more without prying.

“Typical story of a runaway,” Severus looked off. “My father had too many beers. My magic knocked him out after he got in a few good thumps so I ran off. Lilly stumbled onto me sitting here in the diming evening... She was one of the first people to ever talk to me kindly. She had this goodness about her,” Severus turned toward him “so do you.” Harry felt a few tears well up inside of him.

Severus caught the glistened unshed tears in Harry’s eyes. Wondering if he shouldn’t have brought him to this place he reached over to take Harry’s hand.

“Thank you” Harry said dabbing his eyes with a free hand. “I know it’s not easy to talk about her.”

“How would you like to hear more?”

Tearfully Harry nodded.

“She was a wonderful friend...” Gently they rocked in their swings as he recounted some of his memories with Lilly. The more he spoke the more he thought about his younger self, how alone he’d been. Harry had vanished that loneliness. “Harry,” Right now he could say it. If he said that he loved this reckless young man Harry would know that he was the reason for the changes within his life. What would he be if it weren’t for Harry’s love? “I” he barely uttered.

“This has been one of the best days of my life.” Harry’s eyes sparkled as they fell onto him. “Our first date should’ve been this perfect.”

“A rocky start is more in tune with how we are.” Removing himself from the swing he offered to help Harry stand.

“I’m glad we are past all that.”

“As am I” he whispered while leaning closer. Like magnets, their lips found each other. His hands sought solace in Harry’s unkempt hair while hands pulled him closer. The three words he’d been
trying to say echoed in his mind at the quick intake of breath when they broke apart I love you.
“Mr. Zabini you are in close connection with Harry Potter are you not?”

Blaise didn't know how to respond. No one had talked to him aside of orders within the Ministry, excluding Granger, since he got here. Many people didn't trust him. In part it was the knowledge that the Dark Mark had once lived on his skin. On top of that those who had been at his trial knew he had poisoned Potter (at least that got him out of coffee duty like other lower ranking members). He fought not to give them a reason to bring up his mistakes.

“Yes.”

“Excellent. We have been trying to send a letter to him but wherever he is living the owls are unable to reach.” The man held out a very official looking letter.

“Sir, why would you give me this instead of Hermione Granger?”

“Oh no. I wouldn’t dare deal with Ms. Granger, bit of a ...well let's say a bore. Constantly droning on about House Elves and the likes.” The man checked his watch. “Best be off. If you wish to give it to Ms. Granger than that is fine as well.”

Blaise looked at the letter in his hand. At least he knew it wasn’t a summons to court or anything, no one would've trusted him with such an important letter.

Masking his sigh he stepped into the lift. The lift was empty aside of a few hovering paper airplanes that took interdepartmental memos around the Ministry. He looked at them starting to feel that he was practically on the same level in the minds of Ministry workers. With this letter in his hand he was a glorified errand boy. Blaise could kid himself about how everyone had to start from this bottom level and grow gradually, but he wouldn’t. There just were things against him actually contributing more to the Ministry.

When the lift doors open he walked with purpose to the office responsible for Magical Creature Welfare.

“Come in” Granger’s voice called at his knock.

As to be expected, Granger was surrounded by books upon books. He was sure that someone with her brain could’ve been in any department yet she chose this one, which status wise was only a few steps up from Arthur Weasleys’ department.

“Oh, Blaise. Is it lunch hour already?”

He smiled. Every once in a while the frizzy hair bookworm would eat with him, but he wasn’t about to walk her from the office to grab lunch. “No. I came to deliver a letter.”

“A letter?” Granger pressed a bookmark into what she was reading. “I already received my mail.”

“Technically it’s not your letter, but I was charged with the task to deliver it.” He handed the letter over. “Apparently it hasn’t been able to reach Potter’s residence.”
“This is about the Ministry Ball. I can’t take this.” Granger shook her head sticking the letter out again. “I’m sure to misplace this. Besides, you’ll see him before I do.”

“Wouldn’t he prefer you to give it to him? You are one of his closest friends.”

“You’re Harry’s friend too you know. Besides, it’ll give you an excuse to visit the apartment.” Granger grinned. “You can use our floo so you don’t have to make the trip to the lower level.”

“Thank you.”

Blaise stepped out of the green flames to the living room of Draco’s apartment. Based on how quiet things were he should’ve sent a message of his arrival ahead of time. Then again he was only here to drop off a letter. Something caught his ear as he was about to pull Potter’s letter from his pocket. It sounded a lot like crying.

“Hello?”

The sound was coming from Potter’s room. “Potter?” The sound paused before erupting into a loud wail. “Potter!” he burst through the door.

Potter was wailing in his sleep. Draco had mentioned that Potter had bad dreams but he had yet seen someone react to bad dreams like this. Watching Potter was like witnessing someone being brutally strangled in their sleep. “Potter!” He pinned down Potter’s ankles, he wasn’t about to risk getting punched in the face or kicked. Frenzied arms fought off the imaginary threat as Blaise tried to get him under control. “POTTER!”

Potter’s eyes opened wide, frightened and full of tears. “Draco?” Potter’s voice was hoarse.

He released his hold as he stepped away. “It’s Blaise.”

“Sorry.” Potter began wiping his face. “I wasn’t planning on falling asleep.”

Blaise noticed the vial of what was probably Dreamless Sleep sitting on Potter’s nightstand. Potter still looked shaken. Red rimmed eyes and pale face made him understand why Draco often brought up the Gryffindor during their dinners together. There was still a streak of jealousy toward the closeness Draco and Potter had, but he hadn’t forgotten how things were a year ago. The concern for Potter was completely warranted.

“I’m fine,” Potter said.

That same line had been spoken many times last year too. Last year he hadn’t initially known the reason behind the deep sadness that hung over Potter. Like many other students, he just suspected survivor’s guilt. That was in part true. It didn’t take long before he knew the true reason why Draco would leave the Slytherin Dormitory to take night walks with Potter or why the Gryffindor showed up unannounced in his invisibility cloak.

“Your dream... was it about Snape?” Potter’s face fell, his eyes turning glassy again. Blaise tried to think of what his mother would’ve said in this situation.

“Forget about this” Potter muttered.

“That’s what Dreamless Sleep is about, isn’t it? Forgetting.” Potter’s head moved in a small nod. “Right now it feels better to forget but there would be a piece of you missing. We have to learn from the past, the pain, the mistakes,”
“What if the pain is too much?” The hollowed sound Potter made sent a chill up his spine. It had been some time since he’d seen Potter in this state. When he visited the Gryffindor was usually filled with excitement, but this was what was being held under the surface.

“Forgetting doesn't change that. It doesn't fix a thing. All this time you've been fighting to forget haven't you? Repressing it. Right now you are not that far off from how you were last year.” Potter’s eyes took on the look of horror. The unspoken rule to never mention the depressive year had been shattered. Blaise needed to do it. Draco wouldn’t. Draco’s connection with Potter, the shared pain they experience, was too strong for them to pick at old wounds. Both of them wanted distance between that time and now. By the looks of it Potter was having a harder time in doing so.

“We can't always tell the bad things to fuck off. A mind healer-”

“I don’t need that” Potter said quickly.

“I think you do if you’re relying on potions to push it away...Draco still worries about you.”

“He shouldn't be and neither should you.”

Blaise sat on the edge of the bed looking at Potter. “I poisoned you. I did awful things and I won't let myself live that down. As much as I wanted to I can’t forget it.”

Potter shook his head. “I forgave you.”

“I still haven’t forgiven myself. How could I? It doesn’t matter that I was manipulated or I didn’t know what would do. I still did it. No amount of potions helped to forget what I did or after the war.” Potter’s eyes watered. “I had to get help to somehow move forward. It’s not the same I know-”

“Then tell me.” Potter snapped leaking tears. “If you have the answers tell me. How do I move on? How do I just go about life like a normal individual without thinking about the times we didn't have? Thinking of the moments stripped away from us. Thinking about moments that might end suddenly. How do I stop seeing his dying face when he’s not right beside me? You can take your advice and SHOVE IT! I’M FINE. I’m fine. I’m fine. Everything will be fine. And what are you even here for Blaise? What do you care when you have a normal relationship with Draco?”

“You’re right. I don't have a say in anything because I'm just Draco’s boyfriend. It's not as if I was one of the few people who had an idea of what Snape meant to you. I could not possibly hold any concern for you. I'm only some guy that Draco cried to day in and day out about the losses he experienced because he felt you already had enough to deal with last year. Fuck!” He rose from the bed barely keeping his voice from rising. “I'm just some person in the background in all of this, aren’t I? Just a classmate that happened to be around trying his hardest just like the rest of your friends to keep you from sinking further into grief for an entire year. You don't have to take my advice. You didn't ask for it.”

“I’m sorry I...” Potter looked up at him. Even with the passing of time things had continued to be rough on the Gryffindor. Blaise hadn’t been so caught up in his own world to not notice the *Daily Prophet* or hear gleeful whispers about the best ways to send something worse than howlers to Snape. Potter did deserve things to be normal, to be unbothered by what others thought, even so, Blaise had no power in making that a reality.

“We all have our own fuck ups to deal with. Everyone carries something shitty inside. That shouldn't make us feel broken beyond repair or turn us into arseholes but sometimes it does.” Taking a deep breath he handed over the envelope. The Ministry is inviting you to its ball to honor heroes of the war.” Potter looked at the invite. “You want everything to be “fine” then go ahead
and be the hero the world wants you to be. If you want to fix things then talk to Snape, tell him what’s going on.” He turned to leave.

“Blaise,”

“I’ll see you at the ball.”

Harry looked in the mirror checking for the millionth time that his eyes still didn’t look red or puffy. He felt guilty for snapping at Blaise for trying to help him. Worse he felt horrible that the nightmares of Severus dying had continued even though life had moved on from that day. Even though he had gone on dates the dreams continued. It was unfair to be able to spend an amazing time with his lover only to return home to down a Dreamless Sleep potion so that he wouldn’t have to see the one he loved die over and over. Without repressing them his dreams got more vivid, building off the events he had adored, twisting them into darkened shadows.

All of this should’ve been over by now. Shouldn’t? Shouldn’t he be able to enjoy the moments where Severus led him down the street hand in hand without later imaging that hand slipping into a pool of blood? Shouldn’t he savor the tiny smiles that were only meant for him without remembering secret howlers or the little things that they hadn’t talked about? No matter how many times Harry told himself that year without Severus didn’t happen his mind still couldn’t let it go.

But he didn’t want to go to a mind Healer. No one was going to see the hurtful things in his head. There had been many bad things, most stemming from his times at the Dursleys, but he’d always bounced back. Resilience had been a hidden strength that he hadn’t realized he had until he really looked at everything in his life. Getting shoved into a cupboard filled with spiders, starved, neglected, taunted, belittled, beaten again and again for eleven years had somehow dwindled to nothing in his mind. Friends he made at Hogwarts had gotten him past all of that and helped him through his deals with Voldemort and school. Having his Magical Core damaged, an affliction that could kill, was another thing he had bounced back from with the help of others. And yet this, witnessing Severus dying, believing that he was dead for so long, was something he couldn’t move past. That reality hung in the back of his mind waiting to pop up once he was away from everyone. It made no sense. Severus was here. Severus was alive, well, and they were in love. They went on dates, had slept beside each other, been intimate; still when he closed his eyes the pain-stricken memories haunted him.

Deciding that he could repress his nightmares a little longer, Harry glanced at the letter Blaise had delivered. It had been an invitation to the Ministry Ball saying that he would be awarded the Order of Merlin First Class for his defeat of Voldemort. He could bring a guest. Of course he would choose Severus, but he was afraid that his lover would say no.

Severus felt much better now that he had reworked his wards in addition to canceling his subscription to the Daily Prophet. The house was once again freed from howlers descending on him like a pack of wolves. It also pleased him that the letter from Mr. Graves he’d received earlier hand brought good news about the two in New York as well as another picture of Darion.

Darion seemed to be growing steadily with every image. Mr. Scamander nor Mr. Graves needed to know that he had begun a small collection of the images they’d sent. If he received a few more he might be tempted into buying a scrapbook. For now they lived in between the pages of his favorite book.
A light hum across his magic brought his attention to Harry’s arrival. Sure enough he saw the young man heading towards the lab. Curiously he reached out his magic towards Harry’s. From the small length of distance Harry realized quickly that he was behind rather than in the lab. Harry’s magic connected to his just long enough to feel like they were right beside one another rather than feet apart. This renewal of their magic seeking each other had grown since their relationship had progressed. Smiling Harry moved to the couch where he shortly joined.

“I thought you were going to enjoy some rest after work” he said studying the way emerald eyed grew when he inched closer.

“I was until Blaise showed up.”

“I was under the impression that Draco was still at Hogwarts.” He hadn’t received word that Draco had caused more infighting at the castle. Pomfrey wouldn’t have thought twice to send a letter regarding his godson’s attitude.

“He is. Blaise was dropping me off something. I guess your wards are a little too good at keeping mail out.” Harry smiled pulling out an envelope that had been torn open very unneatly. After receiving a shower of howlers he persuaded Harry into letting him strengthen wards at the apartment to prevent another incident from occurring there. “It’s from the Ministry” Harry said handing the letter over. “They’re throwing this ball,”

Scanning the letter he found the words he knew would appear sooner or later. “Order of Merlin First Class. That is an achievement.”

“Sure it is. Not like it’s some way to gain Potter support of the Ministry” Harry grumbled.

“No doubt they’ll want to parade you about all night” he teased handing the letter back.

Huffing Harry stuffed the invitation back into his pocket. “I don’t need some stupid award.”

“Most would fight at all costs to receive one. It would be unwise to let it slip away.”

Severus knew Harry didn’t want this. Harry lacked the sin of pride that he had accused him of in his youth. Receiving an Order of Merlin could be life-changing for anyone with pride. For Harry it would just be another title like Chosen One or Boy Who Lived that would be played up for the gains of everyone outside of Harry himself. The young man didn’t need more fame. A medal wasn’t going to make his place in war any better. It wouldn’t wash away the loss of what he faced. It wouldn’t give back all that was taken from him.

Severus moved closer, resting a hand onto Harry’s knee. “You should accept it if nothing more than to have something to put up on the wall.”

“Would you come with me? I can bring a guest.”

“I’m not so popular with the Ministry crowd.” Severus was sure there would be a few in attendance who wouldn’t think twice to poison his drink or spit in his face if given the chance.

“I haven’t always been their favorite either.” Harry’s hand took hold of his.

“Yes, but you lack a dark past and possess a more cheerful disposition then I do.”

“So you won’t go?”

“I won’t leave you to those in the Ministry alone.” Severus punctuated his statement by kissing the
scar on Harry’s forehead. The very scar that had bestowed fame to a simple boy who was forced to carry the weight of the world.

The Atrium of the Ministry had been transformed in a way that could only be accomplished by magic. The large room was extended to house the crowds of bustling wizards and witches who were directed to tables that filled the floor leading up to a large stage housing a podium. A banner swept overhead welcoming them. The effects of war still lingered in the amount of Aurors standing guard checking guests for dark magic artifacts. Harry couldn’t help glance at the nervous pinch on Draco’s face as they moved through security. Harry knew Draco often worried about the Dark Mark, but all that was left at least on Draco’s forearm was an imprint only noticeable if one got really up close. Past security checkpoint he saw a screen hanging down showing off images of the work effort after the war. Images of Hogwarts being rebuilt set his limbs a little heavier.

“I’m surprised they haven’t put up a statue in your honor Chosen One” Draco muttered sarcastically as an image of Harry appeared on the screen. Having Draco around made the night better even with the sarcasm.

“Give it time the night is still young” Blaise smiled appearing on their left.

Harry was glad that Draco’s date had found them so fast. With such a large crowd he thought they would be scanning the sea of people for hours before finding each other.

“Where’s Snape?” Blaise asked.

“Waiting to make an entrance” he shrugged. When the floo had ignited several minutes ago he had been surprised to see Draco step through with a message from Severus promising he would come as soon as he dealt with something but for them to go on ahead. Harry was beginning to wonder if that was an excuse.

“Zabini old boy, I just ran into your mother- oh,” A man wearing a silver robe turned to Harry. “Harry Potter. A pleasure to meet you. I’m so glad that you attended” the man’s eyes flickered to Draco.

“This is my friend Draco Malfoy” he introduced emphasizing the fact that they had arrived together. Tonight would be the first time that Draco, Severus, and himself had gone to a public event. That is if Severus showed up.

“Of course, of course” There was a little nervousness in the man’s voice. “I must be off for now.”

“Must’ve been an old pal of my fathers” Draco spoke through a clenched smile as they returned the hurried wave of the stranger.

“I believe it was my presence that affected him so” Severus’s voice came from behind, causing all three of them to jump.

“Sev-”

Severus strolled past them as if there were far more interesting things at the complete opposite end of the room. Draco shot him a look that he shrugged off.

“Ladies and gentlemen, witches and wizards “ the Minister’s voice boomed through the place. “Please take your seats.”
Harry tried to follow Draco and Blaise only to be stopped by an Auror. “You’re seat is over in the front, Harry Potter.” The Auror motioned to a table filled with unknown Ministry members. Before attempting to get out of sitting with complete strangers Harry noticed that Ron and Hermione were also seated on that front table.

“Go on Savior” Draco said shooing him away.

Harry didn’t see why the two couldn’t join them at the front table or why Severus had disappeared.

“I would like to thank all in attendance.” The Minister continued not all concerned that not everyone had yet made it to their assigned table. “Tonight we honor those who risked their lives against He Who Must Not Be Named. In the wake of the Battle of Hogwarts efforts have been made towards a brighter future for all. It is in no small part of those we honor tonight that we are blessed to have such a future.”

“Blaise,” Harry whispered as the speech continued. “Please don't tell me I have to give a speech or something”

“If you do try to sound somewhat intelligent” Draco whispered through the side of his mouth.

“Harry Potter,” the Auror motioned to the front.

“I’ll see you later.”

“We’ll keep an eye out for Snape for you.” Blaise smiled as Harry was finally carted off to the front.

Severus watched as an Auror guided Harry further from where he saw his godson and Mr. Zabini sit. He knew that the Ministry wouldn’t have dreamed of leaving the Boy Who Lived to sit with people he knew and not a group of bigwigs. The consolation was that whoever planned the seating arrangements had included the whole Golden Trio. But Severus knew that Harry had wanted him to be by his side tonight and so far he had been doing a great job of that. It wasn’t as though he were trying to be cruel, it was just the knowledge of the hundreds of eyes on him. Stupidly, selfishly, he thought that arriving a little later, giving some space would lessen the appeal for others to disrupt tonight. Already he felt several scrutinizing eyes on him. It didn’t take legilimency to know what was going on in those people’s minds. Still he longed to be besides Harry as he’d promised.

Glimpsing over to his godson he contemplated joining them. There was an open seat and they did like his company, yet he didn’t want his presence to influence the way others viewed them. Both had enough to manage without his attendance at the table. Taking a breath he focused on the new Minister. The words spoken didn’t sink in, no one could captivate his attention as Albus once did. Adjusting his collar his mind drifted to the Scamander family in New York. According to the letter he’d received they would return soon. If they had been in attendance tonight would he still be lurking in the corner like the social pariah these people viewed him to be? Mr. Graves would’ve forced him to join in. He would give his left arm to be with the unencumbered family sharing a firewhiskey right now.

“I have a surprise” Blaise whispered into Draco’s ear as the announcer walked along the stage.

“A surprise?”
“You’ll see.” He smirked before turning his attention to the Minister.

“Progress has been made in the short time since the defeat of You-Know-Who. The Ministry has round up many who fought on His side. Things destroyed have been rebuilt better and stronger. Unfortunately, there were lives that were lost.” A moment of silence filled the room. “Each one of us were touched by the war. Some said goodbye to family and friends. In the end we were victorious. Which is why I would like to honor those who have done the Wizarding World a great service. First, I would acknowledge the men and women who worked tirelessly to tend to the injured after the war.”

Names of Aurors, medical staff and fellow students who fought at Hogwarts were called up one after the other. After each received pins and rounds of applause Harry waited on the edge of his seat to be called up. There was simply no way that the Ministry wasn’t going to save the Chosen One’s award for the grand finale of the evening. Clapping along with the crowd Harry was desperate to try come up with something to say if the Minister forced him to speak instead of ushering him off the stage like the others.

“What is this surprise?” Draco whispered as Neville Longbottom walked up to receive his pin thanking him for his service. Neither of them had realized the number of fellow students in the crowd until they all had gone up to be acknowledged.

“Not yet” Blaise smirked.

Draco didn’t like surprises. There had been enough surprises in his lifetime, most that weren’t too great.

“Draco Malfoy” his name was called.

Blaise shook his head. This wasn’t the surprise. Walking up to the podium he blocked out all focusing on getting to the destination without looking like a fool. At least there were some people clapping for him as the Minister spoke his thanks pinning a medal that was the size of his thumb. Nodding thanks he went back to the table.

“Blaise” he harshly whispered as the Minister called Pansy Parkinson.

Blaise smirked clapping loudly for his friend. More names were called ending with Blaise being called up. Blaise rose with every fiber of confidence as if he received awards every day.

“What did you do?” Draco asked when he returned.

“I don’t want to spoil the surprise just yet.”

“You alright mate?” Ron asked as Harry bit his lower lip.

“I just want this to be over with” he whispered.

Towards the back he could see Blaise and Draco whispering something to each other. He was happy that they were acknowledged for their help in the war, though he was sure he caught a mischievous wink from Blaise to Hermione on his way back. Thinking about that could wait.
“What if they ask me to talk?”

“Don’t worry” Hermione smiled. “I wrote a little something.”

Harry took the long scroll reviewing it, but he wouldn’t be able to give this speech. No one could give this speech beside Hermione. It was far too rigid with more facts than he could ever pull off as coming from his own recollection.

“As long as you say something they will be happy. You did save the world after all” Ron said giving him a pat on the shoulder.

“I would now like to present the Order of Merlins. Hermione Granger, Order of Merlin second class.”

Hermione rose, her dress robes sparkling as much as her face as she retrieved the large silver medal. “Minerva McGonagall, Order of Merlin second class.” It was surprising to see McGonagall here, he thought that she wouldn’t have come now that she was Headmistress at Hogwarts. McGonagall beamed at Hermione as she stood beside her with the same medal. “Ronald Weasley, Order of Merlin second class.”

A loud cheer from the other Weasley's couldn’t be contained as Ron a little clumsy went up to receive his award.

Harry bit his lip hard sure that his name was going to be called next. A quick glance found Severus sitting in the far back of the room. Why couldn’t they have been placed on the same table at least? Why hadn’t Severus stayed beside him? What was he going to say when his name was going to be called? What would Severus tell him to do? Severus said that he would come with him to this event, which technically he did, still he would’ve felt less like a tightly twined ball of nerves if Severus hadn’t kept his distance tonight.

Severus’s eyes connected with Harry's in a split second from across the room. Even from this distance, he could sense the worry rolling off the younger man. He scoffed at the thought of receiving awards appearing more frightening to Harry then facing an insane dark wizard. The best he could do from here was give an encouraging nod. All Harry had to do was walk up to receive the award and pose for the trigger happy photographers.

“Severus Snape-” the Minister’s voice echoed through the atrium.

The whole crowd turned to him. Unsure of what occurred he remained still as a mannequin. A microscopic pin could be dropped and still be heard with this deafening silence. Even the Minister of Magic seemed shocked at the name he had just read out. It had to be some mistake.

“Severus Snape, Order of Merlin second class” the Minister voice still didn’t sound too sure.

This was a mistake. It just had to be. Gliding through the room he caught every shocked face he passed.

A whistle belonging to none other than Draco Malfoy spurred on clapping from Harry. Harry was standing clapping his hands so hard together as though he were trying to fill the room with the sound. More claps joined him from his Slytherin students in attendance, followed by the Weasley family with the exception of the youngest Weasley. Walking further he saw Minerva and the rest of Harry’s trio clapping. It was by no means a thunderous applause yet his heart swelled at the pride sparkling in emerald eyes as he stood to receive his Order or Merlin.
“This is your surprise isn’t it” Draco smiled.

“I used a little help” Blaise winked at Granger.

“You gave him an Order of Merlin.”

“He deserved it. If it wouldn’t be too suspicious I might have given us one as well.”

Gripping Blaise by the collar he pulled his boyfriend into a kiss.

“And of course Order of Merlin first class to Harry Potter for defeating You Know Who.” The Minister said quickly after Severus’s medal had been bestowed.

Sweat clung to Harry’s palms as he neared the podium. The gold medal weighed far heavier than it should’ve as the Minister moved aside motioning for him to speak. He should’ve known this was going to happen from the start. He could’ve put together some stupid speech earlier. Should he just read off from Hermione’s speech? So many faces were looking at him expectantly. The only ones who weren’t were Draco and Blaise sharing a snog. His face turned a little red. A spark of magic danced on his fingertips. Turning his head he caught the small nod from Severus.

“Hello,” he thought that was a decent start. “Thank you for this honor.” The Minster smiled at him, which he took as a good sign. The images of the screen above shifted to Hogwarts again. “I wished I knew I was going to be speaking tonight. I don’t really have a speech prepared.”

The room laughed.

“I may have been the one who cast the final spell that stopped Vol-” Several people flinched. “I mean You-Know-Who, but it wasn’t just me on that battlefield. Those you’ve seen here tonight were only a few who had fought for this world. Collectively we fought against a mad man hell bent on dividing our world. It couldn’t have been just me out there. From the very beginning, I hadn’t gone through it alone. I couldn’t have gotten anywhere without the strength of my friends, “ He looked to Hermione and Ron then to the others in the audience. “or the teachings of my professors,” McGonagall gave a little nod. “or the guidance of Dumbledore.” The screen flashed to an image of the late Headmaster. “But there was one person who had been fighting beside me the entire time and no one really knew until the end, Severus Snape.” The room grew a little quiet again “I-” Severus looked like he was trying not to scowl while conveying a message. “I wouldn’t have been able to defeat Volde-” The audience flinched, “sorry, You-Know-Who without Severus’s assistance ... as Dumbledore's spy. I am overjoyed that he stands with the rest of us tonight. At the time many of us believed that he was only a Death Eater, but he had been protecting as many as he could while leading us to believe that. Without his information, many more lives would’ve been lost. I.” Severus looked a little pale so he decided to just end his speech there. “umm. Thank you.”

The audience clapped a bit awkwardly as the Minister took back over the podium “Now let’s feast.”

Before he could say a word Severus had disappeared.

Severus could feel his cheeks burn and his whole face felt tight as the room of eyes looked to him
as Harry’s speech came to an end. He was embarrassed, which was an emotion he hadn’t experienced in some time. He had to get out of this situation. Only when he was alone would he let the mask of indifference fall.

Pushing to the back of the room he caught the heated glare of Ms. Ginny Weasley. Receiving pure hatred made him feel normal again. Dealing with being despised was far easier than to deal with embarrassment. Such a poor glare hardly was enough to be intimidating. The youngest of the Weasley brood’s hatred mattered on a miniscule level. There was very little that she could do to him. His own prospects of a legitimate business were already thinned by his own reputation, though he supposed that the new medal pinned to his chest would balance out things if only a fraction.

*That is until they revoke it. Who would award a worthless piece of shit like you?*

The thought almost made him take off the Order of Merlin before they called for him to rip it off his person in front of everyone. Yes, that made more sense to the turn of events. This was a ploy, a set up to knock him down publicly. After all this time there had been no inkling of gratitude for the role he played in the war. Aside from McGonagall, Pomfrey, and Harry he didn’t think anyone else who knew of him would ever as much acknowledge he had been on the light side the entire time. To acknowledge such a thing would be to acknowledge that the world didn’t constitute in defined rigid black and white, good or bad, as many wished to believe. This had to be some mistake.

The crowd didn’t disperse as he made his way towards the refreshment table as they had when he’d arrived. On the contrary now many were coming near him. Scowling, he faced the group. All he wanted was a drink. Until this award was stripped from him he had to be somewhat kind, not hexing them out of his way would be all the kindness they deserved. And if they did dare plan to publicly humiliate him he would go against such kindness.

“Congratulations Mr. Snape” an elderly gentleman sporting a putrid yellow robe said.

He nodded.

“Can’t think of anyone more deserving after Harry Potter himself of course” A woman in an aquamarine robe said with a smile. She was lying through her teeth. They all were.

“Of course.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he could still see Ginevra Weasley glaring at him. At least the girl was brave enough to openly show her hatred, he preferred it to the false niceties. He gave her a curt nod before turning away.

A drink. He needed a drink. It would’ve been for the best if he hadn’t run off from Harry. How stupid could he be for letting his emotions lead to this. More people went to him holding out their hands to be shaken. Severus couldn’t understand how a medal had miraculously changed their perspective about him so quickly. If he took it off would they go back to cursing his name and actively avoid being five feet from him? It was tempting to test that hypothesis as he began shaking hands halfheartedly.

“Severus,” Pomfrey said pushing through the small crowd. He was glad to see her. “Come, there are a few people I want you to meet.” He frowned at that. He had enough of meeting people. “Come along.” Pomfrey gave him no chance to hide out in a dark corner for the rest of the evening by pulling him along.
A gaggle of witches were talking animatedly about something when they approached. Severus noticed that they all had been granted a bronze medal with red and white striped ribbon placed above their hearts, it was the honor given to those who had tended to the injured of the war. His spine straightened as he tried to make his displeasure not as noticeable. These women were worthy of respect.

“Poppy wasn’t lying at all” giggled a witch, who clearly had a few drinks already. “She’s been going on and on about you since before they pinned that thing on.” She pointed to his Order of Merlin.

“Proud as if she raised you herself” added another witch, more sober than the last, though her face was flushed.

He quirked his eyebrow at Pomfrey. Severus reasoned that it was the flow of alcohol in everyone’s system that prevented an outright uproar of his presented honor, and it was Pomfrey’s coddling that allowed civil conversation amongst these witches.

“Oh hush” Pomfrey swatted the witches. “Forgive them. Usually these ladies are a bit more together.”

“We are not on duty and have been worked to the bone Poppy. I think that we deserve one night of enjoyment” spoke up the redhead in the middle. “Here,” she plucked two drinks from a tray balanced on a house elf’s head and handed them each a glass.

A drink was welcomed still he went about his usual methods to test for poison.

“Ain’t our position to poison ya” said a blond in the group swaying a bit.

“Old habits” he said slightly feeling self-conscious.

“Poppy tells me you are rather gifted in potions” the redhead said.

“The youngest Potions Professor at Hogwarts-” Pomfrey said.

“Yes. yes. You told us that” the blond rolled her eyes.

The redhead ignored the two as they began bickering. “So what are you up to these days now that You-Know-Who is gone?”

“I have been providing potions to Hogwarts.”

“Is that all?”

“It keeps me occupied.”

“Ah,” she took a sip from her drink. “Do you think it occupies you enough? I couldn’t imagine only brewing commonplace potions.”

“I enjoy the art of brewing. I do set aside time for less commonplace potions.”

“Like what?”

“I’ve perfected a potion for lycanthropy to help the drinker maintain a sound mind after transformation.”

The redhead nodded attentively. For an odd reason he got the impression that he was being
interviewed rather than contributing to small talk. If that were the case he decided it best to mention another potion he had worked on. After all, he best make use of the fact he had already been talked up by Pomfrey.

“I have also been making adjustments to a potion I created to minimize the effects of those with damage magical core.”

The redhead’s jaw dropped. “You can’t be serious.”

“Serine we’re going” the tipsy blond called.

“Here” Serine handed him a card.

Taking the card he thanked Serine, watching as the gaggle moved on with Pomfrey in tow.

“Look who we have here” Parkinson stood dressed in a very fine tailored floor-length dress of ocean blue. Her hair was waved and even was sporting a face of light makeup. Blaise hadn't seen her so dressed up since the Yule Ball.

“Where's Greengrass?”

“Daphne is fixing her makeup. I came over to see your sorry faces.”

“Pansy” Greengrass had a spring in her step as she approached their table. Her long hair was halfway up with strands framing her face. She wore a sequined black dress and a pearl necklace that belonged to her late great grandmother. Greengrass only wore it on special occasions.

“Oh,” she said noticing who Parkinson was talking to “I do hope we are interrupting something” she smirked.

“As a matter of fact-”

“No one cares Malfoy. You see two beautiful women before you and don't offer either a chair. Have you not been taught better?”

“My mother would be appalled at my lack of manners.” He got up and pulled a chair for both of his friends, who smirked triumphantly at Draco.

Parkinson looked at Draco up and down. “I think we beat them to it”

“What are you talking about Parkinson” Draco asked sounding both bored and irritated.

“You’ll be the among the first to know,” Greengrass fiddled with something on her hand. These two were always dragging out news just to make others anticipation grow.

“You are going to drive my date insane if you don't get on with it” he insisted.

“Maybe that's our intention” Parkinson smirked.

Greengrass smiled brightly as she outstretched her hand onto the table. Right away he noticed an old ring brandishing the Parkinson family crest. His stomach dropped while simultaneously he felt a rush of excitement for the pair.

“Stunned speechless” Parkinson proclaimed triumphantly. He turned to Draco, who’s eyes looked
at the ring then to Parkinson without glancing at him. As purebloods they knew exactly what the exchange of family rings meant.

“Congratulations” Draco’s voice felt empty.

“Don’t be so jealous” Parkinson huffed.

“How did you convince your mother to allow this?” he asked.

Parkinson’s mother was strict by the books sort of woman who had not exactly enjoyed the fact that her daughter was dating a witch. She hadn't been cruel, more so tended to ignore the fact that her daughter was queer.

“Well, I said we could go about properly courting or we would elope. She didn't like the second option much. If she rejected my options I would have threatened to court Malfoy.”

Draco chuckled. “My parents would have adored you.” Draco turned to Greengrass. “You honestly want to court this” Draco motioned with a tilt of his head.

Greengrass laughed. “A silly little ring is just to make what we have official. There will be an announcement in the papers.”

“Unless Potter takes up a whole issue of the Daily Prophet. The reporters will be cornering him and Snape soon enough...I’m very curious as to who started that rumor.”

“Those two couldn’t possibly be a thing.” Parkinson rounded on Draco. “You’re a friend of Potter. Know anything?”

“I wouldn’t say a word to such a loudmouth if I did.”

“I’m crushed you wouldn’t trust me” Parkinson said taken aback.

“We can find out from elsewhere,” Greengrass suggested rising from her seat. Both he and Draco rosed as well out of ingrained manners more than necessity.

“We’ll send you an invite to the bonding ceremony” Parkinson teased.

The four of them exchanged curt bows and he watched as the two walked into the crowd hand in hand. When he looked back to Draco he seemed more interested in the drinks on their table than he had been before his friends came over.

“Do your friends ever get better?” Draco asked taking a long sip of his champagne.

“They can be a hassle to deal with.”

Parkinson always said things to intentionally and unintentionally get under people's skin. She thrived on drama. What could create more drama than rubbing her courting status in their faces? Still, he was happy for them. Their bonding ceremony would be sooner than he probably expected.

Jealousy clawed at Draco. Drowning this feeling in champagne was not helping. Seeing that ring, knowing that those two were fulfilling courtship made him want to drink. Courtship was important to Purebloods, most of all for his family. Not wanting to think about them tonight he took a second glass.
“Draco are you alright?”

“I figured that this is my chance to make use of their hospitality.” He drank a little slower. The last thing he needed was to make a scene in front of Ministry officials.

Tonight was a night of celebration. Snape had received an Order of Merlin thanks to Blaise, wasn’t that more important than the fact that Parkinson and Greengrass had “beaten them” to official courtship?

“Come,” he stood from the table. “Best to make some small talk.” Drink in hand he felt very much like his mother as they chatted with anyone willing.

“Blaise.” Ms. Zabini called them over. She was working the crowds just as well as anyone else. “I think I will return home early, but please come talk to these fine gentlemen.” She pushed her son forward.

“Your mother has told us much about you Mr. Zabini” One man in a dark maroon robes spoke.

“I’m going to get another drink” he whispered to Blaise before walking off.

“Wrankspurs got to you?” Lovegood’s singsong voice asked as he found the champagne. “You don’t look yourself right now.”

“I guess I should’ve worn your gift today. Might’ve kept them away” he laughed deciding not to pick up the glass after all.

“You shouldn’t worry you know” Lovegoods’ large eyes looked to Blaise. “Everything will work out in the end.”

“Thanks.” Glancing down he noticed that her shoes were missing.

“They just ran off.” Lovegood shook her head. “One second here next gone.”

“I’ll help you find them. I could use something to do.”

“You can’t miss them.” Lovegood said pulling a clip in the shape of a squid from her hair. One of its tentacles blinked orange. “Rolf gave me this. Should help our search.”

“Where is he now?”

“Oh somewhere.” Lovegood said staring at the blinking hairclip.

Draco wanted to ask about Mr. Scamander and Mr. Graves. Last he heard they had gone to New York. Lovegood was still dating Mr. Grave’s grandson so maybe she knew something. He wouldn’t ask though.

Searching the atrium without causing too much attention was actually easy. Most of the attendants were already tipsy while others were into their own discussion. There had been one close call where Lovegood had nearly trampled an elderly witch’s toes.

“Oh,” she pointed over the room to the fountain. Neon periwinkle heels floated in the water. Rushing over Lovegood fished them out. Casting a drying spell she pulled the heels on as if they might run off again. “Thanks for all your help. I should find Rolf.” Lovegood slipped the clip back in her hair but plucked one of the beads on the tip of her shoe. “Give this to Blaise.”

“Okay.”
Lovegood skipped off. Dealing with her oddness was still a work in progress but he knew her heart was in the right place. Clutching the bead he went off to find his own date.

If the talks of his greatness or overly excited handshakes were a pain in the arse before Harry received an Order of Merlin being tossed into the thick of it now was truly unbearable.

“Excuse me I need to go” he said for the millionth time as he tried to get through the ever-growing fan crowd. There were people who wished him well, clapping him on his back while others were more forceful with what an honor the award was and vocal about what that meant for him. The award didn’t mean anything to him still he wasn’t going to let it be picked off him as one drunk guest had previously tried.

“Marvelous isn’t it?” he caught someone whisper as he squeezed by. “I wasn’t sure about the things in the paper. Really who could believe it.”

“But you saw it didn’t you? That way he was looking at him.” A second hush voiced buzzed.

“Really look at him though,” the first pointed to Severus, who was no doubt searching for a place away from the mobs of wellwishers.

“Not much of a looker but he must have something to nab Harry Potter.”

“Smarts. Couldn’t have been a spy without them.”

Harry pressed on a little more giddy after overhearing something positive about his lover. Peering through the gaps of people moving around him trying to see which corner his lover had decided to occupy.

He found that familiar scowling face trying to escape the party. “Sev!”

“Harry” Severus said, a nervous twitch in his face.

Harry frowned as Severus took a step back. “Are you alright?” he tried to take Sev’s hand but Severus’s eyes were scanning the crowds. “It’s not nice to just leave” he teased hoping that Severus would lighten up. “How about I find something to drink?”

“Mr. Potter!” a reporter sprinted to them, camera in hand.

“Mr Potter is it true that you are being courted by Severus Snape? What is your relationship? Our readers want to know.” “You can’t deny that we had something” he chuckled. “Chemistry was always there. We were bound to either kill or snog each other. I’m glad we ended with the later of those options” he smiled at Severus who turned to leave. The reporter hastily scribbled his words.

Severus was quickly leaving the atrium. Those long legs striding faster than his own steps could effectively keep up. “Sev!” he called out but Severus didn’t slow his pace at all.

Jogging he finally caught up. Now that they were away from the main party he thought that Severus would ease yet he remained rigid in all his movements.

“Stop.” Gripping Severus’s sleeve they finally stopped by the lift.

Severus froze at the touch. How could Harry be so ready to say such things about them to the
paper? Embarrassment had to be evident on his face. This emotion had to be controlled.

“Why did you say that?”

“It’s the truth isn’t it.” Harry smiled slipping his hand into his. “We’ve been dating for a while now.”

“It’s not that simple. Just because I have this,” Severus glanced at their Order of Merlins. “It
doesn’t make life easier.”

“You know if I wanted the easy way out I would’ve been the hero they wanted. I wouldn’t be
friends with Draco and be dating some girl.”

Severus scoffed. “I worry that your knack of talking without thinking will be detrimental.”

Harry pulled him close. “And I worry that your tendency for pushing me away is ruining a
wonderful party thrown by our good friends in the Ministry” he drawled sarcastically.

Severus reached to cup Harry’s face. “Do you wish to return to the party?”

“You know, I think I’ve had enough partying for one night.”

“Wasn’t it you who said that it was not nice to just leave?” he smirked.

“I changed my mind” Harry laughed pulling him into the lift.

As the lift brought them down to the visitor's entrance of the Ministry Harry itched to pounce on
Severus. Only the thought of Severus never speaking to him again if they got caught in a position
at the Ministry of Magic stopped him from doing so. Out of the red telephone booth that led to the
Ministry they stepped into the night.

“Would you like to return to your place?” Severus asked comfortably holding his hand.

“Could I sleep over tonight? I have a feeling that Draco and Blaise are going to get wasted on the
free booze.”

“That would be the majority in attendance as well.” Severus looked back.

“They’ll be fine.”

Nodding Severus held his hand a little firmer. In twisting shadows of colors, they apparated into
Severus’s house.

Away from hordes of socialites, Severus relaxed against the headrest of his bed. The Order of
Merlin, his Order of Merlin, laid in his hand. It was unthinkable to be awarded this highest honor.
Internally he debated being suspicious or proud of owning the medal. If he chose to believe that he
had received this in response to his work as a spy then he felt worthy of the good that Harry was
bringing into his life. If this award in his hand was true perhaps the Wizarding World wouldn’t
criticize Harry’s choice of a lover. This was a sign that he was worthy of what he had.

“When will you believe that medal won’t suddenly turn into a pile of matches?” Harry teased.

Not saying anything he slipped the award into his nightstand drawer. Harry’s award had already
been stashed there prior to the younger man getting ready for bed. Setting his eyes on his lover he
recognized that Harry had forgo his usual pajamas in favor of one of his nightshirts. The sight of Harry dressed in his clothing sent a feeling of possessiveness. Forcing himself to not soak up the way Harry’s bare legs moved across the floor he shifted on the bed. Ever since the first time Harry saw his own legs he had opted to wear loungers and a high collared shirt when Harry decided to sleep over. The change in sleepwear was somewhat uncomfortable yet watching Harry’s movements he realized it would provide more modesty.

“You alright Sev?” Harry asked slowly crawling onto the bed, his nightshirt lifting to show his thighs.

Dryness filled his mouth. Harry had been forcibly hinting at more intimate affection for a while. Images of Harry’s face filled with lust had been archived into his brain since the first time he touched him. But Severus never allowed himself to feel that pleasure from Harry. It was a line that Harry was testing very much tonight. A line that he desperately wanted to cross.

Clearing his throat he responded in a gruff “yes.”

“You seem distracted,” Harry said smugly shifting just so that the outline of his cock could be seen beneath the thin fabric.

Averting his eyes he thought of the hushed condemnation he overheard at the Ministry Ball. Their words were all too easily drowned out by Harry’s presence so close to him, body heat matching his own flushed skin. “What do you want?” He tried to sound irritated but thought those words came out more desperate.

“I thought it was obvious” Harry motioned with his eyes to the edge of his nightshirt that had ridden up a little more.

“Sleep attire alone does not contribute to consent.”

“So,” Harry shifted allowing more skin to show. “if I decided to go to bed without anything on,” Harry’s eyes looked to his cock then back. “You wouldn’t touch me?”

“With some level of difficulty, I wouldn’t” Severus could feel his cock straining against his loungers.

“What do I have to do?” Harry asked crawling closer. “Do I have to drink Felix Felicis before you let yourself take me?”

Harry felt like the sexiest thing alive from the way Severus’s body showed signs of interest in what he was offering. A small part of him had wondered if he wasn’t appealing enough since they hadn’t taken this step yet. That fear could be put to rest as clearly tonight’s outfit had enticed his lover.

“Touch me” he whispered hoping that all the resolve Severus had would wash away.

Severus’s eyes flickered to the nightstand drawer. Something warry showing in onyx eyes.

“Severus,” Looking into dark eyes he intertwined their hands. “You don’t need a dumb medal to be worthy of me. I loved you when you didn’t have it remember. I love you flaws and all.”
Breath had restored in Severus’s chest just in time to understand the significance in Harry’s words. “If,” he licked his dry lips. “If I do anything that you are not comfortable with you’ll tell me immediately to stop.” Harry nodded leaning back into the mattress. Nervousness coiled within him yet he kept his face devoid of any emotion.

“Please don’t occlude.” Harry pulled him so that now he was looking directly into enlarged Emerald eyes.

Not Occluding in a moment like this was nearly impossible. There was still a part of him that feared what emotions would rise up onto his usual stone-like face. Hands in his hair guided him closer. Their lips met tenderly. Charting the familiar space between them he relinquished his hold on his mental barriers. Holding emerald eyes he slowly pulled the nightshirt off. Without the material to obscure, he could see flushed tan skin. Letting his fingers skim down the willing body beneath him Harry’s mouth parted slightly. He’d touched Harry before but not like this. Every span of flesh, every curve was somehow new as if Harry’s body were a blank map that he had to fill with sight and touch.

Remaining still was an impossible task with the way Severus was caressing him. This was far more intense than the first time Severus had touched him. He wished Severus would touch his cock, but the man was deliberately running his fingers everywhere besides there.

“Accio lube” Severus whispered. A small vial flew into his hand.

“So you have thought about this.” His smugness was answered only with Severus coating a finger in the contents of the vial. Instinctually he spread his legs for his lover. He may have not had sex before but that didn’t mean he was completely naive. Just the thought of what was going to happen next made his cock twitch in anticipation.

“You are sure-”

“I am.”

Leaning Severus kissed him slowly before a tongue plunged into his mouth. Something cold circled between his entrance. Severus continued to kiss him as a slicked finger slowly pushed through the ring of muscle. The way Severus’s tongue ran over the roof of his mouth served ample distraction for a second finger to enter him.

Moaning, he watched Severus take in the sight of him. The fingers within him did not move until he nodded. Skilled fingers belied the worry on Severus’s face. Unfrightened Harry laid in the sensation of mixed pull and push within his magic seeking far more than the slow strokes dealt out by long fingers inside of him. Minutes passed of Severus’s fingers stretching him, every slight movement inside was watched over by concerned eyes. Harry wanted more.

“Stop,” Harry gasped as finger curled upwards to press on a secret bundle of nerves that left his body tingling. True to his word Severus stopped his motion. Much to his chagrin Severus removed his expert fingers. “Sev” he groaned at the empty feeling holding onyx gaze he spoke “stop holding back. I’m ready.” The restraint Severus operated in was leaving the man. Harry could see it clearly in the way those eyes roamed his exposed flesh hungrily. Weakness in his arms didn’t prevent him from freeing the knot of Severus’s pajama bottoms. The tented fabric in front of him sent another wave of excitement.

“I want this in me,” he said pulling down the restrictive clothing. Harry hadn’t seen any one’s cock
as big or long as the one before him now. The size of it made him a little self-conscious.

“Harry,” Severus’s voice croaked.

Looking into onyx eyes he spoke “Accio lube.” the bottle flew into his hand. He was going to make Severus feel as good as he already had made him. Mind made up he poured a decent amount in his hand. Replaying how Severus had first touched him he re-enacted the rhythmic paced handjob.

Merlin! Nobody had touched him like this in so long. Past experiences were so impersonal which ended before he reached completion. Harry’s hands stroking him was clearly a new skill that the younger man was quickly mastering. Too soon those hands removed their touch. Harry leaned back onto the mattress his cock standing at full attention. Spreading his legs Harry dripped lube down his lower half, a trail sliding over his entrance.

“Please Sev.”

Such a wanton sight would be the end to any man regardless of how strong their self-control was. “Breathe,” he said as he lined up his cock to the slicked entrance.

Gasping he felt Severus’ tip enter him. “Breathe,” Severus instructed again. How could he breathe? Knowing that Severus was slowly entering him had left him unable to inflate his lungs.

“Harry,” Severus grunted making no move with his hips. Ghost light fingertips ran up and down his outer thighs. Air resumed filling his chest when Severus’s fingers traced his sides. Feeling himself open up Severus’s cock pushed in a little more. Fingers didn’t stop their comforting dance as little by little he took all of Severus’s length.

“You’re huge” he moaned at the sensation of being filled. This was worlds away from having Severus stretch him with his fingers.

“Are you alright?”

“Kiss me.”

Severus heeded the demand. Heated tongues fought yet Severus had enough composure to not wildly pound into him. Not that he would mind it at all. His body tingled in want for motion. Magic caressed his as Severus begun to move slowly. Entangling his magic with Severus’ he pushed back. A hiss sounded between them but he couldn’t say who it had come from. The strange sensation of his lower body was building into wonderful pleasure.

Not hurting Harry was at the very front of Severus’s mind as he moved. Tight heat surrounded his cock in the most delightful sensation. Dilated emerald eyes showed that Harry was starting to feel good. Selfishly he wanted to make him feel even better. Angling his hips he thrust a little harder.

“Ahh!” Harry’s body lifted a fraction off the mattress. “Again..” he panted. “Do that again.”

Complying he aimed for the younger man’s prostate again.

“Yesss.”Harry’s knuckles whitened at the grasping of the bed sheets below.
Again and again, he hit that sweet spot with increasing speed. Beads of sweat gathered on his back but he refused to remove his shirt. He didn’t want Harry to see the scars of war on his body. Harry’s body held a few scars, though none were as deep as the ones he bared. With tanned skin flushed one could hardly see them. Leaning down he kissed Harry’s lightning scar, the only mark that stood out.

“Sev-” Harry bit on his lower lip. “I want you to.. I’m-.”

Words were unreachable only grunts could communicate that he too was close to climaxing.

Panting, moans, grunts filled the room like a piece of strange music punctuated by the creaking of the bed as Severus sped up in a delicious speed. Harry was going to go over the edge and this time he was going to take Severus with him. Managing to move his legs he hooked them behind Severus. The motion pushed Severus impossibly deeper into him. With a joined moan he felt Severus’s cum shoot into him while his own climax rang through. The long wait had been worth the moment their eyes found each other, their magic connected in a way that echoed the joining of their bodies. For several minutes they remained as they were, staring at one another neither one willing to separate their magic or body.

Tiredness forced his legs to lower themselves back to the bed. Unbreaking eye contact Severus removed himself to join him lying beside one another. Every emotion imaginable moved through those onyx eyes. So many unspoken words resting between them and it didn’t matter at all because Harry knew that this was how it would be from now on. Never before had he felt so close to Severus than in this moment of afterglow. There would be no misunderstanding about how they felt in this space of time. There would be no awkward discussion, no fight, only peace of having this missing part of themselves finally filled. Nothing was going to take it away. He wouldn’t let it.

_I love you_, the words spoke in his mind wanted to slip out. Severus didn’t dare disturb the comforting silence between them. Wordlessly he spelled them clean, pulling Harry into his arms. Breaking the spell of eye contact he gave in to the need to card his fingers through the slightly damp hair. Studying the way Harry’s eyes closed and exhaled in a comfortable sigh he continued. This was something that only Harry could give him; this feeling of completeness. Fear of seeming weak for wanting to hold his lover was absent. Reddened lips pressed to his cheeks then the tip of his nose. Caressing Harry’s back the younger man drifted off into sleep. Flicking his hand he set a spare blanket to cover them.

“I love you” he whispered. Promising himself that he would say these same words when they both woke the next day he closed his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

I meant to update this forever ago. Thank you for your patience. :) Originally this chapter was going to take place earlier on leading to the whole "break up" trope for Harry and Severus where they realize how much they miss each other etc I wrote out a whole arch revolved around it but thought that this particular story was better without it. Changes like that have resulted in a little delay, but my eye is still on the goal of completing this story. I hope that you all have enjoyed the journey
so far.
Until next time have a wonderful week/ month!
“Everything alright?” Blaise asked finding Draco holding something.

“Lovegood told me to give this to you.” Draco placed what looked like a bead into his hand.

“What is it?” he asked turning it over for any sign.

“I don't think its anything bad, she’s always giving me little trinkets.” Draco glanced at his watch.

“I must get back.”

“Then allow me to escort you out.” Taking his hand he led Draco out of the Ministry. Neither one trusted the floo networks not to be tracking tonight's comings and goings. He took a step back to give Draco room to apparate. “Goodnight.”

With a pop sound, Draco was gone. He waited for a moment before apparating home as well.

The lights of the Zabini manor still were on which meant his mother was waiting around for him. She had given up on pretenses of pretending she wasn't making sure he got back home each time he went out.

“I’m back” he announced pulling his coat off.

“How was the rest of the evening?” his mother asked, eyes scanning him. He’d noticed how his mother checked him over every time he came home. Sometimes he wondered if she worried that one day he would be tossed into Azkaban without her being notified.

“It was good.”

“Only good? Last time you went out you said something along the lines of ‘I don't think I could ever grow tired of spending a night with Draco’” his mother tacked on some kissing noises of her quote just to rile him up. He couldn’t help thinking of the way the night had ended more abruptly than usual.

“It would’ve been better if Parkinson and Greengrass hadn’t come to gloat.”

“Gloat? You also got recognition tonight.” She looked at him with pure pride. “Though I heard Mrs. Parkinson was trying to be all hush hush about some party she was pulling together.”

“Parkinson and Greengrass are officially courting.”

“I must send congratulations to them and their families. First thing in the morning. Yes, it's much too late now” she said looking at the time. “We should wait for the official announcement shouldn’t we.” His mother beamed as if it were her friends who were courting. “It has been a while since the last courting... eighteen... that’s truly amazing. Of course, Mrs. Parkinson would want to do things properly. Aren't you happy for them? This is huge news!”

“I was..am. I am happy for them. I wasn’t sure if Mrs. Parkinson would accept Greengrass.”

“Oh, that woman may seem like a stick in the mud but that’s a persona. She wants her daughter to be happy.” With growing excitement that went against the very late hour, his mother continued “I
expect all the formalities to be adhered to from now on. Maybe I should invite her for a luncheon. I rarely get to host. Remember it's important to celebrate the great things in life.”

“Mother, I have been dating Draco for a while—”

“Is your anniversary coming up?” She summoned her datebook. “We could make dinner for that too or maybe something smaller? No Draco is so busy, you both are.” She flipped through her datebook. “Perhaps if I pick the right date we could combine the two? No, that wouldn’t work.”

“Mother I would like to ask for the Zabini family ring”

Excitement went out like a fire being doused with water. His mother straightened her back standing tall, the datebook hung to her side. “You are too young to ask for the family ring.”

“I’m eighteen which based on traditions—”

She chuckled a little. “You should know that I care not of tradition. You should be focusing on building a career.”

“Mother,” he bent down on his knees “ please grant me the family ring. I will not present it to Draco. You’re correct we are both still setting out careers in order. The men you introduced me to tonight are willing to give me a try in a little higher position. It’s not much but I have every intention of courting Draco properly once things are settled. Grant me your blessing.”

His mother’s stance grew stiff, her face was solid stone as she spoke. “As head of the Zabini family I decline your request” she spoke flatly with a commanding voice he’d only heard a few times growing up.

“Mother please” He lowered his head begging that she would grant him her ring.

“No. You know my stance on this matter. I have denied your request and now it is time to sleep.”

He kept his head down as he listened to his mother’s fading steps. Since his friends had mentioned their courting he knew that this was how asking his mother would end.

That night as he laid in his bed he overheard his mother weeping. He could easily see her clinging to the family ring, the one thing left of his father. It had been a while since he heard those sobs that seeped into him filling his heart with sorrowful guilt. Hadn’t he put her through enough?

Stripping the bedding from himself he walked the darkened halls. Tears pricked in his eyes as her sobs rang out. He didn’t knock when he reached her door, he didn’t want any excuse for her to turn him away. Her sobs quieted when she heard the door click but there was no hiding the fact that she had been crying. Her puffy eyes looked away from him as if ashamed to have been caught looking like this. A locket holding the picture of a man he vaguely remembered laid open on the bed. That had been his father. The father he lost when he was too young, the father they rarely talked about, the father whose last name they had carried despite the other men who married his mother.

“Didn’t I teach you a man should never enter a lady’s room unannounced” his mother’s voice sounded strange as she held in her tears.

Kneeling beside her he took his mother’s hand. “Mum. I’m sorry.” Her hand gripped his a little tight. “I won’t ask again.” Her grip eased. “I promise to never ask again.”

“I want so much for you. I'm afraid...” her other hand clasped the locket.
He laid his head onto her lap. “I shouldn’t have brought it up.”

“I know how those girls are, rubbing it in your face. I’m sure they wouldn’t have if they understood…”

Not knowing what to say he nodded. There were always secrets he kept from his friends. Most of the time they found out, they were two very cunning witches after all. Regardless of their lack of tac at times they had remained loyal even when he had taken on the Dark Mark. He thought about the exchanging of his two friends’ rings, courting, marriage; he couldn’t have that due to his familial curse. One more secret he had kept from Draco; only this time it was his own will that prevented him from speaking about it.

Daylight broke through the gaps in the curtains of his room as if it were designed to illuminate Harry’s sleeping face in a heavenly glow. Severus didn’t know if he would consider Harry an angle, but his lover had brought about miracles. Watching the way Harry’s mouth curled into a lazy smile set off a feeling deep in his soul that made him feel whole.

How many times would he view this scene and still feel as if it were a dream? The things this view did to his heart would never cease. Slowly he leaned forward to press a feather-light kiss on Harry’s forehead. He recalled the first time he’d seen Mr. Graves do a similar thing back in Hogwarts, back then he was convinced that he wouldn’t ever be blessed with a moment like that. Yet here he was lying with someone whom he loved.

“I love you” he whispered pushing aside the pesky strands of hair that fell over peaceful resting eyes.

Harry shifted in his sleep closer. Wrapping his arms more comfortable around his lover he allowed them to rest for a little longer.

“What is on the schedule?” Harry asked lazily from the bed at his already fully dressed lover. According to Severus, they had been laying in bed together for more than enough. Harry had wanted to argue that he would be just as happy to live the rest of his life tied up in the sheets beside Severus.

“You have work. Or have you forgotten?”

“Right” he groaned starting at the ceiling. “I don’t want to leave this bed.” A soft chuckle drew his eyes back to Severus. “Don’t you want to come back into bed?” he asked spreading out against the mattress so that only some of the blanket covered his body.

“I also have some business to handle,” Severus said not even looking disappointed. “If you get ready quickly we may have time to spend together before your shift.”

Not needing to be told twice he flung the sheets off. Moving to crawl off the bed he felt an ache in his body. Freezing he shut his eyes at the slight pain. “Are you alright?” Severus must’ve rushed to him as his voice was so close to his ear.

“I’m alright. Got up too fast.”

“Take this, it’ll ease the body aches.”
“Thank you.” he downed the offered potion. It tasted of herbs thrown into a blender with a pinch of earthworms. Bad tasting as it was he could feel the effects of it soothing his body right away.

“Better?”

“Much.” He kissed Severus’s cheek.

“I’ll wait downstairs.”

With a crack, they apparated to the same road that Severus had led him down on their second official date. The memory alone made his heart soar. “You must be hungry,” Severus said bringing them to a stop to a cafe they hadn’t paid much attention to the last time they were here. “Starving” he pulled Severus into the cafe. It was just as quaint as the ice cream parlor that he was now working at. A line of five people were picking items from the large overhead menu. Catching Severus scanning the available seating he offered to get the order.

“Here we are,” he said several minutes later placing down two cups of tea and a couple of scones.

Severus eyed the cup he held out to him. “I already added milk and tons of sugar to yours. You didn’t think I wouldn’t remember how you like it after all the times we had tea together” he smiled.

Harry stared at Severus’s hands studying how those fingers gripped his cup. Fingers that had done things to him that were not polite to speak of in public. He followed the motion as the cup was brought to Severus’s lips. Then the cup was lowered to reveal those thin lips which had turned the slightest shade darker from the heat of the tea. Lips that he wanted to kiss again.

“Harry?” he jumped at his name.

He felt his cheeks tint. “Sorry I was spacing out.”

“Did you sleep alright?”

“Yeah” suddenly he found himself hyper-aware of the Severus proximity. It felt so immature to keep himself from jumping the man at the moment their hands touched.

“You haven’t touched your tea.”

Quickly he tilted the cup to his mouth thoroughly burning his tongue. Severus shook his head at his yelp.

“I am concerned for your customers.”

“I’m not so clumsy at work.” He protested. Severus simply took a bite of his scone. “I really am not.”

There was a ringing in his ear that was not all due to the various noise around them. Severus knew it was his wards on Spinner's End. Someone must’ve been trying to get into his house. Already he went through possible things that someone would steal. There were a few potion ingredients that weren’t that easy to come by, most of his books wouldn't interest anyone other than a potion master and his personal items were about as worn as the very house. There was nothing worthy of stealing. Even his Order of Merlin wouldn’t fetch so much on the black market. Maybe it was someone from the Ministry looking for him, he rather not return if that were the case.
“So then I told Hermione ...Sev? Everything alright?”

He nodded despite the continuous ringing. Running off to check his house in the midst of spending time with Harry wasn't advisable. Harry would get the wrong impression and if he voiced his none too concerned about his house being ransacked Harry would be worried. Severus was going to remain here and let the ringing play in the background.

The ringing hadn't stopped when they left the cafe as he expected it to. If it was a visitor they should've been long gone by now. A thief surely would’ve noticed the lack of value in his home as well. Something was off.

Harry sighed signaling that they had made it to the storefront of the ice cream parlor.

“Did you want to come in for a bit? We got a new flavor today.”

If it weren’t for the intruder he would take the offer. “Perhaps another time.”

“I thought you'd say that” Harry pouted “is your business so important that you’d turn down ice cream.”

Business. He’d have to send word to Serine that he would be late for their meeting if he planned to take care of this intruder. “It is.”

“You’ll probably be too busy tonight so I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Bright and early.”

“Not too early” Harry kissed him on the cheek.

Waiting until Harry waved from inside of the parlor he watched his lover settled behind the counter. The warning of his broken wards pulled him to action. He needed to ensure that his house was secured. Stalking further away to a secured apparition site he wasted no time returning to Spinner's End.

A scream made him think that he had been seen popping into existence but the cause of fright turned out not to be himself. There was a crowd of muggles huddled around his house. Pushing through there were few firefighters yelling for everyone to stay back. Behind them was a towering flame which their water couldn't seem to drench. The flame had to be magically induced.

“Stay back” instructed a firefighter her face covered with ash.

“The house was empty” informed a second firefighter coming out of the inferno.

Severus watched the way his house began to flake as the flames danced in orange and reds. There was nothing worthy of stealing in his house but there were things worth saving like the pictures the Gramanders had given him. The magical fire wouldn't stop until everything was destroyed or fought off with stronger magic. These muggles held no chance against it. Slipping from the group he apparated into his backyard without interruption. Sparing a second for a disillusionment charm he set to battle the intense flames.

Two exhausting hours of him throwing spell after spell all while avoiding firefighters left the remaining crumbles of his house. The braved men and women clasped each other on the back convinced that it had solely been their work that prevented the whole block from bursting into flames. Soon the firefighters shrunk out of sight. Without the flaming tower, his neighbors had already returned to their unburned houses. Lacking the strength his disillusionment charm faded,
yet he scraped together enough magic to fix the front door for basic privacy. This horrid house that was filled with less than fond memories was now bare bones of seared wood. The living room rug that he once spilled his father's drink on (consequently receiving a beating so brutal he had scars) was no more than a char mark on the floor. The walls were blackened some still emitting a little heat. The fireplace was completely caved in. The armchair, couch, coffee table no longer existed pointing to this being the flames origins. If he had returned quicker perhaps he could have saved them. Inspecting the kitchen the walls were too blackened, the window’s smashed shards littered the floor. Descending to the basement level he found the lab undisturbed. Seeing his weeks work still intact helped him continue his tour of the damaged house. The ashen steps leading to the second floor protested his weight so he hovered to prevent them from falling apart. Scorch marks littered every surface upstairs. In his bedroom, only the books he had spelled fireproof greeted his return home. The bed was in shambles it was almost laughable the sorry state his already old house was. How many times in his youth cowering in the corner of this very room had he wished to set the place aflame? How many times had he cursed having to return to this place over and over?

The hoot of an owl sounded as the animal fell onto the remains of his bed with an envelope in its beak. “A letter to gloat?” The owl dropped it, flying off.

Dear Severus Snape,

We have been informed of the magical fire at your residence.

In accordance with the Statue of Secrecy, we remind you not to fix all damage straight away...

The letter turned to ash in his hand. This house wasn't worth the magical effort to rebuild, not that he really could at this moment. Leaving his room he approached the forbidden room. It was the one room he hadn't stepped in for years. The wooden door was swollen from the heat. The door hesitated to grant him entrance. Memories could only serve him to what this place once looked like. Very foggy memories came back as he forced his way in, these memories were more so in the form of audio of shouting than visual recalls. As things were now the bed was motheaten. Curtains were torn and splotched where the sun had bleached it. Frames of pictures had fallen to the ground. Cautiously he picked up one. In the photo, his mother’s face was maliciously scorched while his own burnt in a neat round circle that hadn’t been a result of this recent fire. His father's face glared at him with the very rage he had in life. Feeling his hand tremble slightly he tossed the picture not caring at the snapping sound it made when it hit the ground.

One plank of flooring remained unbothered by the surrounding destruction. Touching it he felt residual magic so faint that it could have only been placed by his mother.

The board didn’t budge with a revealing charm. Prying it the muggle way only resulted in wasted energy that his exhausted body had little left of. What was under here wasn’t guarded by a simple spell, this was stronger magic. Snatching a shard of glass he pricked his finger. With drops of blood upon the floorboard, it glowed then faded. His mother had hidden this with blood magic, magic that would’ve been highly difficult for her to accomplish with her damaged magical core.

Tugging the board easily now it popped open. The space beneath wasn’t massive at all, his mother would have been able to magically expanded it in her dwindling health. Inside was a folded picture and a small purse.

Reaching into the small hole he pulled out the folded picture. It was an image of him standing in front of the Hogwarts express for the first time. He could only imagine how hard his mother had to keep his father from finding it as even the mention of magic would throw him into a rage. Aside from the centered crease, the photo didn’t have any other damage, which spoke to the care his mother had carried it with. For a second time, he reached beneath the floorboards to pull out the
small purse. It was far too light. Inside was a solitary ring and a note:

Severus my baby boy,

I sincerely hope this will be of use to you one day. It's the last reminder of my family. I know I haven’t given you the best life, but I have always loved you. I wish I had been stronger. I’m sorry.

Standing on unsteady legs he left the room. His eyes never left the curve of his mother’s handwriting as he returned to his charred room. This is what she had left him; on the day she’d died her last action had been to hide the Prince’s family ring for him.

“Potter” came a voice from the fireplace rousing Harry from his sleep. “Potter” the voice came again. Tired he grumbled hoping that the voice would just be quiet. Wasn’t it bad enough that he hadn’t been able to spend another night with Severus? Why did he have to receive a firecall when he was napping? “POTTER!” Jumping up he spotted Blaise’s head in the fire. Even in flame form, Blaise’s urgency was visible.

“I’m here” he rushed over to the fireplace.

“Oh good, you are safe. Is Snape with you?”

“Safe? Severus isn’t here. What happened?”

“I heard that there was a fire at his residence-”

“That's all he needed to hear.” The firecall ended with a wave of his wand. Snatching a pinch of floo powder he tossed it at the fire. “Severus Snape's house” he yelled, as usual, the flames rose covered him. But as soon as he said those words he was spat out back into his room. Worried he accio-ed his coat and apparated. Harry had meant to apparate into Severus’s house but much like the floo connection, he was buffered into the street looking at what once was Severus’s house. The house hadn’t looked that well put together to begin with, still the noticeable tumbling bricks and black scorches increased his fears. Had he been too late? When had the fire broken out? Why had it broken out? Was Sev-

“Sev! Sev!” His heart hammered in his chest as he rushed in. If Severus was- if he got caught in the fire. If -if. He couldn’t lose Severus not now not after last night, not after feeling that nothing could tear them apart. Never again-

“Sev!” he cried, tears blinding him to the surroundings that looked nothing like it had a day ago. “I shouldn’t have let him go.” Frantically he made it up the rickety staircase that nearly gave out under him multiple times. “Sev!” he croaked.

At long last Severus appeared in front of him. Severus was ashen, his hair clinging to the sides of his face and forehead as if he had run a marathon. He looked weak but alive.

“Severus” he collapsed into renewed tears pulling him into the tightest hug he could muster. “Severus the fire-”

Hands cupped the back of his head. “It's only a house.”

Severus didn’t understand. How could he not? All the things his mind had worked up in the last minute- the unspoken things.
“When I heard about the fire I thought..” he gripped Severus’s shirt too tightly.

“Harry,” he spoke.

“You died Severus!” Harry’s tears flowed down his face so much that he didn’t even attempt to wipe them away. His heart froze at the anguish on Harry’s face.

“Harry,”

“I thought you were dead.” The word punched a hole through him. “Last year I... You... You didn’t just go on holiday or missed dinner in the Great Hall like you usually did. I spent a whole year thinking that I would never see you again. You died and when that comes up you just say that you went away. You practically died in my arms. You died! Everyone wants to forget that. I want to forget that because it hurt so much! It hurt waiting for you, knowing that you wouldn’t be there. When you came back... I was so happy, but I fear losing you every time. You were dead!... I would've never been able to talk to you again... I had no living portrait of you. I had nothing of you. I wasn’t even told if or where you were laid to rest. I spent so many nights sobbing, wishing that you would come back. I can’t forget that year especially when we haven’t talked about it or someone just mentions that time as you were gone... Sometimes I think that you don’t even care that you almost died!”

There it was, words that they had silently agreed to never bring up. He had died. He’d left Harry to suffer in grief. Just as he had when...

Like a horrific movie, a sequence of events ran through his mind. Phantom pain in his neck made his high collar unbearable. Emerald eyes followed his motion as he reached for the piece of fabric that was steadily choking him. Instead of loosening the suffocating feeling he pulled Harry closer. The younger man gripped handfuls of his shirt. Heart frantic, mind rushing with repressed memories, and throat tighter then he’d ever felt his magic pulled them.

Wind against the back of his neck told him they had apparated. Despite not coming for a while these new surroundings were familiar. Taking Harry’s hand he led the younger man. It was not a mistake that his magic had brought them here, to his mother.

Eileen Prince’s grave sat under a large tree near his childhood home. It was an unmarked grave, no formal tombstone to prove she had been laid to rest here, at least it appeared that way to any Muggle. When he was old enough to use magic outside of school he had made a tombstone for her and hid it under strong glamours. She never deserved to be left unrecognized. His mother was abandoned by her wizarding family long ago, leaving no room in the family plot for her to be buried. And in the Muggle world there were no records of an Eileen Prince.

“Where are we?” Harry’s voice cracked, tears still glistening behind rounded frames.

Taking a deep breath the glamour of his mother’s grave faded away.

“This,” Harry’s voice shook.

“Yes,” he said dropping down to sit beside the small tombstone. His fingers traced the carved name in the rock. There were no dates, he hadn’t wanted to recall the specific date when he had lost his mother. Yet he knew it as well as his own name.

“Sev?” Emerald eyes looked to him; frightened, sorrowful eyes.
“You are right Harry,” he said looking away from that grief-stricken face. “I didn’t care about my death... How could I care when all my life I believed that this was all that my life would result in?” He motioned to his mother’s lonely tombstone. “No matter what good I did, no matter how much I repented for my actions... I had believed that my life wouldn't have mattered enough to affect someone when I was gone. If my father had not died before me he wouldn't have as much thought to put me in the ground... I had been ready to die alone, left forgotten.”

“Severus,” At last he turned back to Harry. The younger man was shaking. He’d done this to him. A part of him, the part that still spoke of never the fading loneliness he deserved since young, didn’t understand the deep grief for him reflected in emerald orbs.

“Show me,” he said, each word feeling as difficult as it had been when he first began to reclaim his ability to speak. Tearful emeralds gazed at him not understanding what he was asking.

He should’ve done this months ago. From the very moment he returned they should’ve spoken about the hardship, the gut-wrenching pain that they both faced. Harry was right he had died. When he came back he hadn’t thought to give that much thought. All the time trapped in isolation trying to heal so he could see Harry again had blinded him to what the man he loved was facing in that time alone. Grief was not a stranger to Harry. Grief had run throughout the younger man’s life and he had added to that. Never acknowledging that it existed so that they could move on.

Reaching he placed his hands to the side of Harry’s face. “Show me” he repeated.

Through his abilities of Legilimency he reached into Harry’s mind. A rushing flow of memories swept him along. Amongst them was the memory he was seeking. There was Harry covered in ash and blood looking down at Severus’s motionless body lying among the countless others. Draco was shaking his body now screaming as Harry looked on.

With great force, Harry pushed him from his mind. “Don’t” Harry shook in his hands.

Harry needed to show him more. It would be easier for him to show him than speak about it. They both had been ignoring this for too long. Neither would truly heal without confronting this.

“Harry,” Harry’s defenses weakened enough for him to renew their connection this time he pushed his own hazy memory of waking up after the war not knowing what happened. In the memory he was laying on white sheets splashed with blood, frightened desperate to seek anything to numb the throbbing of his reopened wound.

The phantom pain in his neck doubled when they broke again. Gasping he reached for his collar again. In all this time he never allowed himself to revisit those memories.

“Sev” Harry’s voice came out in a low whisper. Emerald eyes went to his collar again.

Not pushing Harry away was extremely difficult as Harry's hand dared to push the top button of his collar loose.

Constantly covering up the scar they both knew he wore had given him some control over not letting the mental anguish take over. For so long he’d been unwilling to let Harry see how vulnerable, how weak he'd been. Fighting against the instinct to flee he remained. Harry wouldn't view the scars as a weakness as he did. Opening his eyes he looked directly into Harry’s. Permission was being asked. Permission to continue, he needed to allow himself to be open to this young man in a way that they both had always needed.
Harry waited for a nod or the hands stiffen a willing to touch him push him away. Onyx eyes not truly on the edge of occluding held his graze. Harry pulled his hands away only for Severus to bring them back to the edge of his downturned collar brim. There was a vulnerability about Severus as Harry freed the button until he could push the collar open. Kissing Severus, he put his hand onto the uncollared neck. Severus shuttered exhaling a long breath. For so long they’ve danced around this, the scars from that horrible night.

The large scar stood out even against Severus’s milky white skin. Clear fear registered on Severus’s face while he eyed his marred flesh. Words lacked between them yet there was something at this moment. Tenderly he kissed the deep scar. Something wet trickled down Severus’s skin. Harry looked at his lover, silent tears were streaming down his usually indifferent face. Tears that didn’t come from physical pain but something deeper. His heart clenched at the sight. Under everything, Severus had been just as broken inside as he had been all this time. Renewed tears sprung from within him.

“I'm here Harry.”

In Harry’s mind, he saw his grief-stricken lover eyes swollen with tears as he searched for him endlessly at Hogwarts, overheard the conversation shared between him and Draco.

“I’m here” Severus repeated clenching him closer.

Severus pushed all his cherished memories one by one along with their connection. Memories of them talking, of kissing. Memories of the things he said or did that earned him radiant smiles. Funneling so much happiness into his lover to replace all the empty pain.

Chapter End Notes

Tomorrow is the first of July so I have to get a move on with this fic. There's only editing to get through now. To all who have come along on this journey thank you. May you have a wonderful day/ week/ month.
Mr. Scamander had wasted no time after receiving news of the fire at Spinner's End to return to England to offer up his home. When Mr. Graves pointed out that Severus should have his own home the American insisted on working to build one for him. Never had he imagined doing a home improvement project with the couple yet they were day after day building up a sturdy building until it was time for him to either return to the Scamander house or Harry’s apartment for the night. Naturally being cuddled at the Scamander household while his new house was put together resulted in discussions with Mr. Graves ever so carefully slipping in relationship advice disguised as home improvement decisions. Darion was thrust upon him more than previously whenever he wasn’t otherwise occupied. No longer could he get by with a halfhearted excuse not to hold the child. Although he wouldn’t outwardly tell either Mr. Scamander or Mr. Graves, he’d come to enjoy being their guest. According to both wizards, however, he was more like a distant family member than a guest. Regardless of his status, he thought that it was asking much of them to let him reside and assist in his new house’s construction. The married couple never let him voice such complaints.

Harry too spent a few nights with the Scamanders, he promptly denied sharing a bed with Harry whenever that happened. The younger man sometimes was too much of a temptation. In midst of construction, he’d feel his magic take hold of Harry’s more frequently than not; this provided a stronger foundation to the house but often left him wanting to toss Harry into the nearest private room to fill the physical closeness that lacked from their intertwined magic. Only out of respect did he not fall head first into temptation once the house structure was secured and rooms had doors.

Being faced with a blank slate, there had been long weeks of fighting over whose house this was as the married couple assisted with the enchantments on the rooms whenever he was preoccupied with the rest of the house. Mr. Scamander had been caught trying to turn one of the available rooms into an actual rainforest, which Mr. Graves encouragingly stated it would help relax him. Harry was no help at all sneaking off to make suggestions of his own whenever he’d arrive after work. Severus was perfectly comfortable with a little shack yet he ended up with a three bedroom house (with a lab) in the middle of nowhere sharing the mountain view only with the married couple as neighbors. There was ample space between their homes, far different from the claustrophobic manner his previous residency had. If it weren’t for the promise of attending dinner every now and then he would’ve had to deal with a horrible crying fit from not only Darion when the day had come to leave the Scamander house.

“Harry,” Severus whispered into Harry’s ear. There was no response from the sleeping man.

It had been a while since Harry had unofficially moved in. All of it started with the house repairs leading to nights spent together, a few leftover clothing, a toothbrush beside the sink and then it was as if Harry had never owned an apartment of his own elsewhere. Not that he was complaining. There had been only one place he’d called home before. Hogwarts had provided more than Spinners End but it still came with struggles that left him an outcast. This house was different, a blank canvas that had no horrific memories carved into the structure. The efforts of the Scamanders, Harry, and himself fused within it made the house more than mere walls. Here was peaceful, safe without the need of his paranoid hypervigilance. Severus knew that this could be a home. A home that welcomed him. A home that he wanted Harry to be a part of. One day he hoped to officially make that offer.
“Wake up.”

“ug.” Harry groaned as he emerged from sleep.

“You need to wake up.”

“Do I have to?” That groggy voice whined.

He chuckled. “Wake Up.” He repeated gently shaking Harry from sleep’s grasp.

“Morning.” Harry stretched occupying every available space on the bed. “What time is it?”

“Nearly 7 am.”

Slowly Harry rose from the bed, hair sticking out every which way as his eyes remained closed. Severus wondered if the young man thought not opening those bright eyes would allow its owner a few extra seconds of sleep. No such luck this morning. Gently he shook his shoulder.

“Why?” complained Harry. On sleepy legs, Harry stood with his eyes still closed. The sleep driven walk of one not yet in the world of fully conscious caused Harry to bump into the frame of the door leading to the bathroom.

“Bugger off,” Harry muttered offering the door a rude gesture.

Severus freely smiled at the morning antics. Harry emerged from the bathroom, his night shift halfway tugged off his body and toothbrush in his mouth.

“Do you require assistance?”

Sleepy eyes opened just a crack. An index finger pointed to a very unamused face. “I hate you” the monotone voice spoke.

“You have to wake sometime.”

“I didn’t want to be woken up so bloody early. Early mornings should be reserved for two things” Harry said sticking out two fingers. “Severe emergencies and breakfast in bed.”

“So to be clear I should only wake you if The Dark Lord comes back?”

“No need to wake me for that.” Harry smiled.” I can defeat him in my sleep with you beside me.”

“Understood.” Bending down he placed a kiss on the lightning scar.

Mindful of the toothbrush in his mouth, Harry nuzzled against Severus's forearm, which now only held the faint traces of the Dark Mark. They were both free from the grasps of Voldy and the after-effects of the war. They now could have a life for themselves. If only he was free to sleep in. If he were to lay down he’d be lost to the world for several more hours.

“No dozing off” Severus reprimanded.

“Why so early?”
“Your adoring public awaits.”

“I thought you’d be the one to tell my adoring public that they can bugger off.”

“I know how much your ego thrives off the attention.”

Too tired to come up with a witty comeback he shuffled back into the bathroom. Being forced to get up so early was not his favorite thing. But if he wanted to spend quality time with Severus before work he had to wake up. Besides Severus had made it abundantly clear when he first began to spend more nights in this new house that there would no sleeping until noon allowed. In a grumpy slump, he went about completing his morning routine.

“Good morning” he greeted more animatedly as he entered their kitchen several minutes later.

“Good morning” Severus greeted glancing up from a potion textbook laying beside his own meager breakfast of toast.

It had only been a few months since this place had been put together, even less time had he spent living here, yet he could consider this house as much as his as it was Severus’s. Together with Newt and Mr. Graves they had made it brick by brick. And the fact that Severus hadn’t yet kicked him out was a clear sign that he was welcomed to share a claim on this place. Living with Severus was different than living with Draco. Draco was always quick to make clear divisions between their things and their spaces. Severus didn’t act like that. It was very easy to think of things as theirs rather than his or Severus’s. Since the fire at Spinner’s End, they had grown closer. Throughout the construction of a new home for Severus they’d learned far more about one another. When nightmares of the war came he no longer relied on potions to get him through it, neither did Severus. They talked and sometimes Severus would rub his back when all he could do was cry.

“Your breakfast will get cold” Severus motioned to the plate of eggs, toast, and bacon.

Smiling he slid into the chair beside his lover. Scooping a forkful of scrambled eggs he thought of how perfect things were shaping up to be.

“Eat,” Severus said flipping his page.

Taking a bite he had to fight not to make a face. Something about his eggs tasted off. It wasn’t terrible, Severus had never once served him eggs that had shells in it or was burnt. There was just something... He took a smaller mouthful it tasted as though sour sugar had been sprinkled onto it, which made no sense whatsoever. Side glancing at Severus he tried to see if this was some joke. Severus’s eyes were scanning the text before him too intent on its meaning to judge his reaction. If Severus wanted to play a trick on him, something that would be highly out of character, he’d be watching with a smirk on his face. Or maybe he was just faking disinterest. There was only one way to test it.

“Sev?” He held up a forkful of eggs to Severus. Severus’s brow rose at the wavering fork in front of him. “You should eat some eggs too.”

“Very well.” Severus leaned forward taking the forkful into his mouth. Harry watched for anything, any slight facial quirk, however, there was none.

Unconvinced he lifted another forkful to Severus. The second was taken again without complaint or reaction. Offering up any more would make it seem suspicious so he tried another forkful. It still tasted off. As much as a sugar junkie Severus secretly was Harry was sure that sugar in eggs was
crossing the line. Trying hard not to frown at the tiny clumps of perfectly yellow scrambled eggs left over on his plate he bit into his bacon. It tasted just fine, so did his toast.

Something about the way Harry was looking at his plate seemed like he was about to wage war against the scrambled eggs Harry hadn’t fed him. Severus thought it odd that Harry had offered up some eggs this morning. It was as if Harry was expecting a reaction from him when he was eating but they were just eggs nothing worthy of feigning a reaction. Overthinking this morning’s eggs wasn’t going to lead to anything beneficial. In the time they had lived together he quickly learned that every instance was not worth over analyzing. Eggs were just eggs.

“What are you working on today?” Harry asked pushing away the plate.

“I have been asked to send a few samples of my work to St. Mungos.”

“That’s great!”

It was. After the fire, he hadn’t the time to properly correspond with Serine. In truth, he had delayed correspondence in case she had been too inebriated to recall her offer or that if the fire to his house had somehow alerted her to whom she potentially would be working with. If someone had set fire to his house after he received an Order of Merlin what would occur once he started publicly assisting St. Mungos? These cultivated worries had been spoken with Harry a few times in between arguing over the color of the wallpaper. In the end, Serine was thoroughly excited to see his work.

“I expect to be done in time to pick you up from work.”

“I’m starting to think you enjoy picking me up because it gives you an excuse to indulge.”

Severus smirked. “If you prefer to apparate back alone-”

“Git” Harry chuckled taking his plate to the sink.

Picking up his own plate he followed.

“Don’t be late in picking me up,” Harry said as he readied to apparate to work. “If you are late I’m cutting off your sprinkle privileges.”

“Have I ever been late?”

Racking his brain he couldn’t think of a single instance. It was always him who showed up a bit later than agreed.

Severus stepped closer adjusting the frames of his glasses to sit a bit straighter. “I will be there.”

A promise. The same promise Severus made every time he went off alone. Just the simple promise to be there when he was done with work or that Severus would return if he needed to do business elsewhere helped. When he was at work the image of their ice cream covered faces on the winner's wall eased any instance that he thought something might happen to Severus while he was away. Their new house was filled to the brim of protective magic from all four of them that not even the
Minister of Magic himself could enter easily.

“I’ll see you later then.” Nodding Severus moved back. With a tug at his navel, he apparated away.

Work had been steady today. The shift in temperature surely had to contribute to the number of customers. Harry glanced at the gaggle of teenagers cheering on one of their buddies who was clearly failing to complete the sundae challenge.

“Could you go take care of the boxes in the back?” Mr. Wymer, the owner, asked laying both hands against his back.

“Are you alright?”

“Just not as young as I use to be.” Mr. Wymer smiled. He shooed him away as the front door chimed to another customer.

Slipping into the back he went to work managing the medium boxes. Upon opening the first box a wave of nausea hit him. The many colorful sprinkles that laid in the box couldn’t have been the cause, they were just sprinkles. Taking a breath he forced down the wave of sickness. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw one of the containers lift from the box on its own before smashing into the ground. Frightened he scurried to the container.

“Thank Merlin.” he sighed noting that the plastic hadn’t cracked.

“Everything alright I heard a crash,” Mr. Wymer asked poking his head in.

“Sorry I dropped one.”

“Happens to the best of us.” Mr. Wymer disappeared back to the front.

Looking at the container he wondered what happened. It had to have been his magic. But why? The last time he had done unconscious magic... a sinking feeling filled his stomach.

“No it was an accident, just an accident” he muttered to himself as he carefully pulled the other containers out of the box onto the back shelves.

Severus apparated nearby Harry’s workplace exactly five minutes before he was expected.

“Welcome-” Harry’s face radiated at the sight of him walking in. "How did things go?”

“Well as expected” Severus smirked.

“Does that mean we are celebrating tonight?” Harry asked leaning over the counter, eyes sparkling.

“We’ve been invited to the Scamander’s this evening.”

“Sounds perfect.” Harry turned to move to the back room. He caught Mr. Wymer in the corner waving Harry away with a smile. “Let's go,” Harry said grabbing his hand on the way out. Together they strolled through the town before apparating back to their home.
Harry felt his feet give out a little when they reappeared in front of their house. “I’m going to take a shower before dinner.”

“That might be for the best” Severus smirked pointing out some ice cream on his shirt.

“You could...join me” he muttered.

“What was that?”

“Nothing,” he said leaving a kiss on Severus's nose before running off to wash up.

Harry couldn’t stop looking at himself in the bathroom mirror. For the first time in his life, his body actually held some weight. Time at the Dursleys had affected his eating habits for years. The lack of nutrition hadn’t shaped his torso far different than his Quidditch teammates, something which he desperately hid during his first years at Hogwarts. Now though he actually looked somewhat filled in. Gently he pinched at the fat on his sides. It was a barely noticeable change, but it gave him an odd sense of glee. A knock at the door stopped his musing.

“Harry?” Severus called from outside the door.

“Yes?”

“We are going to be late. You know Mr. Graves values punctuality.”

“Coming.” He slipped on some pants. He was excited to get together with Newt and Darion. Little Darion. Even thinking about Newt’s baby made him burst into a wide smile.

Newt bounced on his feet waiting for Mr. Snape and Harry to arrive.

“Everything is ready,” Percival said kissing him on the cheek.

Smiling he stared at the door. Darion was blissfully playing nearby.

“Staring at that door won’t make them come any sooner,” Percival whispered into his ear. Lips pressed to the crook of his neck.

His husband’s mood had greatly improved since their return from New York. There was just a matter of a few things ‘ironing themselves out’ according to Percival. A lack of mountains of paperwork in Percival’s home office was more than enough to assure him that things wouldn’t spontaneously turn into chaos. Percival was ever as present from the moment they had worked side by side constructing Mr. Snape’s new home to lazy days at home. There was no need for Percival to sneak off in the dead of night to get work done or disappear for hours in the day. They were two parents working together bringing up their son. Freedom in Percival had never made his husband appear so attractive and based on the way he was currently being held and kissed his husband felt similarly towards him.

“Percival,” he whined as lips sucked lightly on the juncture just below his Adam's apple. Craning his neck he saw that Darion couldn’t care less how affectionate his parents were being.

The single rapped knock at the door made him jump.
“Come in,” Percival spoke without a hint of shame. Turning away to hide his reddened face he listened to their guests enter.

Severus watched as Darion waddled towards them.

“Sa.” Darion babbled reaching his hands upwards towards him.

Darion tugged at the edge of his robes. Once he’d sworn to never hold this child again but that halfhearted threat wouldn’t come to fruition. With feigned reluctance, he placed his hands around the sides of little Darion and lifted him.

“Sa.” Darion squeaked pressing his tiny hands against his face.

“You’re looking well, Harry.” Newt smiled once he felt his face wasn’t so obviously red.

“So do you.” Harry smiled at the way Mr. Snape was feigning displeasure at having Darion gently patting his face.

Newt couldn’t help glancing back at Harry. They looked very happy together. All throughout working on the house next door he saw the many moments where the two were completely enamored with the other. Newt was beyond happy for the two that everything seemed to be going well. Very well if what his instincts were telling him were accurate.

“Thank you for having us over.” Mr. Snape said fighting off little hands trying to grab a hold of his hair. Harry was already pulling his long strands free from tiny hands.

When Darion started to fuss about losing his preferred plaything Newt took him back.

“What is the reason for tonight’s dinner?” Mr. Snape asked as they settled down beside the dining table.

“There doesn't need to be some grand reason to have dinner although,” Percival flicked his wand so that they all had classes of sparkling cider. “I propose a toast to all that has gone well for us.”

Percival flashed him a look that made his face turn a little red.

Severus looked at Mr. Graves with a raised brow. He had to admit that things were rather well since his house had burnt down but there had to be a reason for sparkling cider.

“Officially I am no longer the Director of Magical Security.”

“And that is something to celebrate?” Severus asked while Harry helped keep Darion from grasping his cup.

“Of course it is. I have less obligation to MACUSA so that I could be with my family and neighbors.” Mr. Graves smiled proudly at him. “I believe that is worthy of a toast.”
He nodded noting the true happiness that the man's face held. In unison, they raised their cups.

“I have good news,” Mr. Scamander said raising his cup. “I've begun working on another book. There's more about creatures that everyone could learn about.” The Magizoologist bounced with excitement. Severus was sure that they would all get an earful about facts on beasts for the next upcoming months.

They toasted.

“No do you have any news, Mr. Snape?” Mr. Scamander asked, sapphire eyes peeking up from long bangs to look between him and Harry with nearly as much excitement as he'd witnessed the man look at a pair of Graphorns.

“I do.” He said purposefully delaying the news. "I've accepted an opportunity working with a member of St. Mungos staff full time.”

“That’s great!” Harry chimed lifting his cup in their third toast.

“What about you Harry?” Newt’s eyes glimmered with hope at the new exciting changes in his life.

There was nothing at work that changed but that came with working at an ice cream parlor not much changed a side of the flavor of the week.

“I don’t...umm..At work, this one teenager was trying to beat our sundae eating competition but failed so I guess Sev and I are still the current reigning champions.”

“Long may you reign.” Mr. Graves smiled lifting his cup in a toast.

Newt’s eyes still looked at him as if to expect more but joined in on the toast.

“Sa. ah-a-ah. Mama. papa.”

“Well said son.”Mr. Graves beamed. “To family and friends.” They rose their cups in a toast once more.

Chapter End Notes

Four more chapters to go!
I swear this story doesn't want to end, but it does eventually.
There have been many spots where I wanted to stop it, but I think the way things do end is more or less what I wanted. Definitely a more uplifting last chapters than Time Heals.
To everyone, a big thank you for everything.
The night at the Scamander’s ended as they always did with endless offers to stop by whenever they pleased and pictures snapped of him and Harry with Darion, soon to be added to the various scrapbooks. And now the morning light came into their room.

Harry shifted awake without any need of his words like the day before. For some reason, Severus felt as though something was different about Harry. He glanced at the unruly hair that had yet to be tamed, that hadn’t changed a bit. The semi-warped glasses laying on the nightstand hadn’t changed either despite him constantly pointing out that Harry would go blind if he didn’t get a proper frame. Looking past the frames he looked into Harry’s tired eyes. There wasn’t a sign of a nightmare but he could tell Harry’s mind was elsewhere.

“Good morning.”

Harry blinked at him before moving off the bed towards the wardrobe. He watched as his lover grabbed his clothes and moved quickly into the bathroom.

Hearing the shower turn on he let the events replay in his mind trying to figure out what was bothering him. Within seconds he realized that it must’ve been the lack of a good morning drenched in grogginess that was upsetting.

This wasn’t the first time Harry hadn’t said those words. He thought back to one of their first fights and the silent treatment that had followed. He threw his recollection back trying to note any instance that he might’ve unknowingly upset Harry. Living with someone wasn’t always easy. Being so used to spending time alone he sometimes blew up over the stupidest things. If he recalled correctly their first fight had been over the placement of things in the kitchen. A ridiculous fight that highlighted just how immature they both could be at times.

Severus finished buttoning up his shirt just as the water stopped. He still hadn’t come up with any clues as to what had brought on Harry’s silence this morning. They hadn’t argued last night or at all last week. Harry wasn’t the sort to hold grudges over things beyond a set period of time. Unlike himself who could hold onto the pain felt years pass, Harry tended to wind down quickly over their petty squabbles after a few hours at most a day. They had both worked on communicating what led up to heated words racketball between them. Everything had been practically perfect and now something was off.

Sighing he looked at the bathroom door and left to make some breakfast.

Harry stared at the showerhead as it leaked out the last few drops of water. For some reason, he didn’t want to move from this spot. His mind felt foggy. He blinked when his eyesight was starting to dim from the prolonged staring. First, it was yesterday’s accidental magic at work now this.

“What is wrong with me?” he asked the showerhead.

The shower head dripped a few more drops in response.
He gave a small chuckle knowing full well how mental he'd look asking the inanimate object. Drawing the curtains he toweled himself off within the tub, it had been one of Sev’s rules. He had thought it to be silly when Severus had broached the subject after the first time he’d spent the night. Of course, Severus went into lecture mode about the dangers of a wet bathroom floor.

“Will he ever not be paranoid?” he stepped out of the tub onto the cushioned mat.

He smiled to himself as he dressed thinking about how he had managed to stealthily move in with Severus. Life perhaps was perfect now. “Yes completely perfect.” he smiled at their toothbrushes besides each other.

Everything was perfect from sharing a bed to the goodnights and the good mornings spoke to one another. A lightbulb went off in his head. “I didn't say good morning back.”

He ran out of the bathroom not caring how askew his clothing was. He needed to tell Severus good morning before he thought they were fighting. Practically tripping down the stairs he rushed to the kitchen.

Severus stood with his back towards him cooking eggs over the stove. He watched as Severus moved to turn the heat off and dish out equal portions of the eggs onto two plates which already had bacon and toast. Severus moved so silently appearing lost in thought as he set the hot pan to cool off. And then he turned around, their eyes meeting and Harry nearly forgot why he had rushed down for.

“Good morning. Good morning. Good morning.” he said quickly as he wiped the droplets away from his face.

Severus arch an eyebrow as he looked over Harry. “Have you forgotten how to dress?”

He smiled at the playful tone. Peace had been restored. “Sorry. My mind seemed to be going off on its own this morning.”

“How is that any different from any other day?” Severus smirked as he bridged the gap between them.

His heart quickened instantly as Severus’s fingers combed through his damp hair. Opening his mouth to ask for more Severus answered the unspoken question placing his lips gently onto his. He opened wider allowing Severus’s tongue to slide in. He moaned as Severus’s tongue stroked his. He pulled at the back of Severus’s shirt pushing him closer. Long fingers cradled the back of his head as the kiss deepened. It felt like his legs were going to give out from this kiss.

Far too soon for his liking Severus pulled back ending their kiss. Onyx eyes reflected the lust that he felt, but Harry knew that he wasn’t going to be taken in the kitchen or thrown on the couch- that was another one of Severus's rules that he didn't see the point in.

“We should eat our breakfast,” Severus said sounding normal not even out of breath.

“I hate that self-control of yours” he muttered.

Harry would be lying if he wasn’t disappointed that Severus didn’t take every opportunity to make him writhe in pleasure. He could feel himself half hard from the memory alone.

“I need to do brewing today.”

“It can’t wait?” Harry asked slowly adjusting his shirt trying to plead with the lustful side of his
“No.” Severus almost audibly gulped. “I need to finish the last batch for the infirmary.”

Despite his need, he nodded and stepped away just enough so they weren’t touching. “You are amazing to still brew for Hogwarts even though you don’t work there anymore.”

“It isn’t as if I’m doing it for free.” Severus said picking up their plates and moving into the small dining room. “It’s simply business.”

“Don’t pretend that you prefer being the only one to stock Madam Pomfrey’s shelves.”

“I suppose you’re right.” He smirked before taking a bite. “Once I’m done,”

“I’ll deliver it straight to Madame Pomfrey.”

“Thank you.” Severus says almost sounding relieved.

Severus had asked him to do this days in advance, even so, his lover must’ve been unsure if he would go back to Hogwarts. “Why don’t you want to come with me to deliver it?”

“I shudder to think Minerva had taken on some aspects of being in charge of Hogwarts which I don’t care for, namely the small talk over tea.”

“You don’t have to be so worried over small talk and tea. You do just fine when we visit Mr. Graves and Newt.”

“They are completely different,” Severus said taking a sip from his cup.

“I don’t see how.”

“I don’t care to return to Hogwarts.” The way Severus spoke with a definitive tone made Harry ease off the subject. They were still not there yet. Severus wouldn’t let the death of Dumbledore go no matter what he said. Sometimes Severus would talk about it but that was the extent for now.

“Alright.” He took hold of Severus's hand as he began to eat. “Thank you for breakfast.”

Severus nodded. “I should be done in an hour or so.”

“Okay.” Squeezing his hand he let go.

Harry looked at the eggs remembering how they hadn’t tasted great the day before. Pecking around them he managed to delay finish eating before Severus excused himself to the lab.

Once the coast was clear he discarded the untouched eggs. Wanting to join Severus in the lab he reached for the doorknob but it shocked him.

“Merlin!” he shook his hand. It was much stronger than a simple static shock. Using the edge of his shirt as a buffer between his hand and the medal he tried the knob again. Another shock ran up his arm. Pulling away he looked to his redden hand. This was crazy. There was no shocking spell on this door which meant that this was his own doing. Why was his magic doing this? Frustrated he tried again only to feel his magic snap inside of him again, this time knocking a little air out of him.

“You win” he panted.

Settling on the couch he closed his eyes focusing on the rhythm of his breathing. Painstakingly he
felt around his magical core, like he had done so all those lessons ago, trying to suss out anything odd that could explain what just happened. Minutes passed and he felt it, a little spark that if had a physical form would be the size of a pea. Something was there.

Draco could help him. Until he found out what was going on he wouldn’t say a word to Severus.

The hour had passed aggravatingly slowly without the sound of Harry scrubbing cauldrons in the background or helping to chop ingredients. There was hardly any time to overthink why Harry hadn’t come into the lab. Harry was off this morning possibly tired from the previous day. Harry did have a tendency to spend an exuberant amount of energy while in the company of Darion. Merlin knew his own energy was zapped from entertaining the small child all night long.

Securing the potions that Harry was going to deliver to Hogwarts he double checked his list to ensure there was no need for a second trip.

“Harry,”

Harry was sitting on the couch eyes closed. If it weren’t for his straightened back he might’ve thought Harry had fallen asleep.

“Oh, hi.”

“If you’re tired...” he didn’t know how he was going to end that sentence. These potions had to be delivered but he wouldn’t force Harry to go. Still, returning to Hogwarts himself still felt wrong. Terribly wrong. He had no right to return after...

“I’m fine.” Harry stretched. “Is that everything?”

“Yes. Are you sure-”

“I think I will go pester Draco for a little while when I get there.” Harry mischievously smiled.

“Do try not to give him any additional stress.”

“I thought that was the point of us being friends.” Harry laughed while securing the enchanted bag Mr. Scamander had gifted him for this particular purpose as a housewarming gift.

Still unable to shake off the feeling that something was different he took Harry’s hand. A spark ran through their joined hands, a spark that compelled him to move closer but Harry pulled away seemingly not to have noticed the flicker of magic between them.

“I will see you later” Harry quickly kissed his cheek before disappearing.

Harry appeared on the outside of Hogwarts’ wards. The castle had regained its charm that had been lost not too long ago. Everything had been rebuilt stronger. Over the past few months, he felt like he too had been rebuilt stronger. Which is why he needed to see Draco about this sudden change in his magic.

“Oh, great” Draco groaned when he saw Harry enter.

“Aren’t you glad to see me?” He pulled out the batch of potions.
Draco inspected each vial as he took them from him. “I’m glad to see that you didn’t damage anything on the way here.” There was a pause as Draco looked at him. “There’s something else?”

“It’s nothing just... I’ve been feeling strange. My magic is a little off.” Harry could see it in Draco’s eyes, the same worry that he had. Had the damage to his magical core somehow returned after all this time? Was there some time limit before he started to get weaker again? “It’s probably nothing,” he said flashing an unsure smile.

“Come,” Draco said without preamble.

“I still can’t believe you are nearly a Healer” Harry teased as he flopped onto the bed of the private infirmary room.

“Dealing with your sorry arse made me realize that I was capable of becoming a Healer. I thought what could be more complicated than dealing with Harry-fucking reckless- Potter?” Draco knew it was going to be difficult getting people to trust him because of his last name, but he had made many gains here.

“Glad I could point you in the right direction for a career.”

Draco rolled his eyes before taking a closer look. Harry did look a little sick. There was a slight paleness to his face, though that could be due to nervousness. “Describe what your feeling so I can assess you better.”

“It really isn’t bad at all. I’m just feeling odd.”

He really doubted that Harry would bring it up if it was nothing. Truly he hoped that it was nothing, just some fluke. But he wouldn’t leave it at hopes, it was for the best that if Harry was suffering from effects of his damaged magical core that they knew right away. “Let me run some tests.” Harry paled. “Don’t worry I won’t do anything invasive...at least not right away” he smirked.

“You could work on your bedside manner.”

“Noted” Draco said moving his wand around in several patterns. The first scan came back normal. He moved on to a more in-depth scan that could detect magical cores. There was something off so he tried again. The same result appeared.

“What is it Draco?”

“I haven’t seen this kind of reading before,” he said summoning a large book that he studied from.

“Is that a good thing or a bad thing” Harry awkwardly chuckled.

Until he knew for sure he didn’t want to say anything. Flipping page after page he found something that matched his scan readings. “Let me try this scan.”

Harry nodded before closing his eyes tight. In complicated movements, he waved his wand muttering the spell written in the book in front of him. A shimmering blue light emitted from Harry. Consulting his text he flipped to the what the blue shimmering meant.

“Merlin!”
“Draco?” Harry asked worry in his voice.

Words had escaped him as he checked his reading again. Blue shimmering light indicated...

“Don’t be a prat just tell me.”

“You’re pregnant Potter.”

Harry’s eyes shot open searching his face if it was a joke. “You-”

“I’m not joking.” He turned the book to Harry pointing at the result. “This means you’re pregnant.”

“I...I’m” Harry’s face couldn’t decide to smile, laugh, or cry as Harry placed a hand onto his stomach.

“You’re a few weeks” he noted unsure about how to act if Harry didn’t decide on what emotion to feel.

Harry’s mouth settled in a small smile. “I’m...” Hands continued to move over the flat stomach happily.

“Should I start arranging a baby shower?”

Harry’s hands stilled a brief moment of realization contorted into fear. “I have to go.” Harry jumped off the bed.

“Harry. We should talk about this, there are some potions that you’re going to need.”

“Potions?”

“Prenatal potions.”

Harry’s eyes darted from his stomach to the door. “Severus is expecting me to come back.”

Draco knew Harry needed time to process this. “Come back tomorrow at nine and I’ll have the potions ready for you.”

“Okay...”

“I promise I won’t say a word until you-”

Harry pulled him into a tight hug. “Thank you, Draco.”

Pregnant. Pregnant. Harry couldn’t believe it. Joy thrummed through his very being as he raced back to the house. He wanted to share the news but at the same time, he felt unsure. They hadn’t talked about having kids. Would Severus want kids? If he focused on how he used to toss out backhanded comments in class and complained about there no longer any worthy minds to mold the signs would point to no. But if Harry focused on how Severus interacted with Darion then it was possible that Severus wouldn’t mind having a kid. But what if Darion was a special exception? After all, he had named the child.

He looked down at his stomach ever so slightly fuller than usual. He couldn’t feel anything yet, but he knew there was a tiny life beginning inside of him.
Draco huffed as he tossed his satchel on the floor of his apartment. Toeing off his shoes he lazily accio-ed a Granny Smith apple from the small kitchen. It had been a long day even before Harry had paid him a visit. He bit into the apple unsure of what to do about Harry. Being silent about this news was not going to be easy at all. And he knew for a fact that Snape didn’t do well with surprises. But he had promised Harry that he wouldn’t say a word. Depending on how long Harry wanted to hide this they would have to come up with some excuse so that he could give the necessary prenatal potions. Snape would identify them in mere seconds if left in the bathroom cabinet. There was no sense hoping that Harry would tell Snape right away.

He took another harsh bite of the apple. “He loves to make things so complicated.”

The concept of Harry being pregnant wasn’t too difficult to wrap his head around since they had joked about it back when Newt was still carrying Darion. Still, neither he nor Harry had expected it to happen so soon.

He touched his own flat stomach feeling the tinges of envy. Shaking his head he summoned one of his medical tomes. He needed to read up as much as he could on wizarding pregnancy. He doubted Harry would go to anyone else for medical assistance right now. It was probably for the best considering how the Daily Prophet still jumped at the chance to write about the famous Harry Potter. If Snape was going to find out he would be told by Harry himself and not the less than legitimate paper.

Harry was nervous. Severus hadn’t been home when he returned from Hogwarts. Apparently, Severus had been called to St. Mungos to meet with the one of the Healers, Serine he was sure that was her name. By the time Severus had returned he was already fast asleep.

He tried not to look at himself during his morning shower. The temptation to touch his stomach nagged at him, but he worried that once he started to indulge in the action he wouldn’t be able to stop. He had to hide his joy and concern about being pregnant from Severus until he could figure things out. It felt wrong to hide something of this magnitude, still, it didn't feel like the right time to tell Severus. The timing was all wrong. Severus was busy with potions for Hogwarts and St. Mungos. To top it all off they hadn’t even begun to broach the subject of possibly having children. Harry thought it was stupid of him to think that he might not be among the few wizards who could bear children. He should’ve known that this would happen. Things always just happened to him.

He ran a hand through his wet hair. Amongst the guilt, he felt undefiable joy at a life forming inside of him.

He startled at the knock on the door. "Harry?"

“Yes?” he called out over the falling water

“Are you alright?”

“I am.” Quickly he shut off the water.

“Are you sure?”

Covering himself with a towel he opened the door a crack to prove that he was still in one piece,
physically at least. “I'm one hundred percent sure.” He smiled hoping that it was as convincing as he needed it to be. Severus had to believe that nothing was on his mind.

Concerned eyes looked over his face but his lover didn’t say a word. He tugged at the towel hoping that he was sufficiently covered. For some reason, he thought Severus would be able to tell right away if he didn’t cover up.

“I should get dressed,” he said feeling himself blush as he carefully moved past to the wardrobe.

There was no need to look to know those dark eyes were watching him. He tried not to think about his every move so he could act as normal as possible. As he pulled on his clothes careful not to let an inch of his skin show as he did so, he wondered what Severus was thinking.

“You’re going to working at St. Mungo's today right?”

“They have the proper facilities to do large brewing, which offsets the fact that some of the staff are still imbeciles.” He chuckled, knowing only Severus could view professional healers the same way he viewed first-year potion students. “Today I, unfortunately, have to lecture.”

“Good.”

“Good?” Severus raised an eyebrow.

“I meant, I’m going to hang out with my friends today after work so I didn’t want to just leave you here alone.”

Severus moved closer. He could feel his heartbeat speed up as his lover stood before him and reached out to tuck some hair behind his ear.

“I will be busy nearly all week. It would be wise to spend some time out of this house.”

“Are you implying that I just sit around all day?” he teased.

Severus smirked. “If left to your own devices I have no doubt you would.”

He shivered as Severus’s hand cupped his face before a tender kiss was placed on his lips. Something within him sparked, like butterflies in his stomach but stronger. The sensation prevented him from reciprocating the kiss the way he wanted to. There was no telling if Severus would feel the same spark and question him over it.

“If possible I will send a message to meet up for lunch.”

“Alright.”

Severus gave him on last small grin before leaving him alone.

Severus left the room though didn't move too far. A loud sigh that escaped from Harry increased the concern he had moments ago. Severus stood by the wall of their bedroom for a moment. Without a word he spelled the wall to appear transparent so that he could watch Harry. He knew very well this was a huge invasion of privacy. He only wanted to check up on Harry. Just this once he would spy on Harry.

There was something bothering Harry. He wouldn't put on any added pressure to whatever Harry was mulling over. Even so, he wanted to get to the bottom of Harry’s sudden distance so that he
could soothe him. He watched for a moment longer as Harry pressed the back of his hands to his eyes as if to prevent himself from crying. Unable to stand the sight he let the wall return to normal. Descending the stairs silently he processed what he witnessed. Pinching some floo powder he thought once more about returning to Harry’s side before leaving for St. Mungos.

The morning’s events repeated over in his head as he briskly walked to the lab where he was assigned for the week. No matter what moments he focused on he couldn’t determine what could’ve possibly upset Harry. Perhaps it was something that happened the day prior. Perhaps it was something among Harry’s friend group, it wouldn’t be the first time he witnessed friend drama affect the young man.

*Perhaps it’s you* the negative voice in his head whispered. *Maybe you make him uncomfortable. Maybe he doesn’t love you anymore.* Those thoughts made him falter his stride. *He doesn’t love you anymore. It was a matter of time before he realized that you were unlovable filth.*

There was no time to think about that as he entered the lab.

“So happy that you could join us” griped an elderly witch, who had a pinched face.

He lifted an inquisitive brow at the woman’s tone and comment. He was hardly tardy. Several work benches were empty. “Pardon?”

“Don’t think for a moment that you are doing this hospital any favors by being here.”

He disregarded her words moving past to set up his items on the front work table. He had taught far too many rowdy students to let this woman bother him. This woman didn’t back off however as he went about carefully taking the necessary ingredients and laying them out in a precise manner.

“I find it disgusting to have you here” the woman huffed. “No matter that your crimes were cleared you are still a murderer. A Death Eater. No one would dare trust your work to heal them” she spat. “The things the *Daily Prophet* wrote about you, aren’t you at all ashamed of yourself?"

His hands never stilled in their task as she spoke, they did prod at the truth he had carried around. There would be more than a handful of people who would forever see him that way. Some days he saw himself nothing more than a murder. There were times he thought about Albus. Although the cursed Headmaster wasn’t the only life he’d taken. He had assisted in killing many people in the past. Not for one minute did he not carry that knowledge as if it were firmly implanted in his soul.

He looked up at the woman with a harsh glare. “If you do not care for my presence you may leave now” he spoke firmly and neutral. It reminded him much of his days teaching potions at Hogwarts. As strange as it was not to have that profession anymore he wouldn’t go back to it, not even if Minerva begged him.

The woman huffed turning to take her seat at the front of the room staring directly at him. Such a childish response was laughable. Turning his back he wrote the ingredients list onto the chalkboard. Several people trickled in the room and took their seats silently. Some he spotted began diligently copying what he was writing. As he finished the ingredients list Pomfrey stepped into the room.

“Shouldn’t you be at Hogwarts?” he asked.

“It has been a slow year since Mr. Potter graduated. Don’t worry I left things in young Malfoy’s capable hands.”
He felt a burst of pride at her statement. He knew how hard Draco worked alongside Pomfrey. Draco too had to prove that his namesake didn’t define who he was or what he could accomplish. Severus was sure that based on the ambition Draco tackled things he might surpass a majority of these veteran Healers any day.

“It has been so long since I’ve had the pleasure of attending a lecture.”

“Do not get overly excited Pomfrey.” He glanced at the elderly medi-witch who was still glaring at him. “I will be as brutal as my reputation during this short venture, though my presence is not welcomed.”

Pomfrey flashed a smiled before taking a seat.

Harry walked up to the Hogwarts infirmary under his invisibility cloak. Getting noticed by every student and stopped to answer every little question wasn’t something he was willing to do today. He had a lot on his mind. There were a few occupied beds in the infirmary today.

“Mr. Jones I swear just because Madame Pomfrey isn’t here doesn’t mean you can come here to ditch classes.” Draco snapped at a Slytherin.

“But my stomach-”

Draco rolled his eyes. “You have been complaining of your stomach for days and every time I assess you there has been nothing wrong. Your lying is atrocious.”

The Slytherin blushed “I-”

“Go to class. Come back when you’re actually ill or injured.” Draco let out an exhausted sigh.

Harry caught the way the younger wizard hopefully glanced back at Draco before leaving.

Draco moved over to the other patron of the infirmary for the day. He was glad that there were so far only two people who came in while Madame Pomfrey was out. It didn’t seem like the best idea in the world to leave him, but it worked out in Harry’s favor. Glancing at the watch Madame Pomfrey had given him upon her departure he checked the time. “9 o’clock.” Harry was supposed to be here soon. He looked back to the witch laying on one of the beds.

“Ms. Evynl. You should be able to return” he handed the witch a cup of water.

“Thank you” she whispered.

“In the future be more conscious of your surroundings.” She nodded handing back the empty glass which he banished.

He paid the witch no mind as she scurried away. Now that the infirmary was empty he could relax somewhat. As he cleaned the bedding for the next student a soft thud caught his attention. Whipping his head around he readied his wand with a hex on his tongue to face the culprit of the sound. The emptiness pulled away to reveal his friend.

“You could’ve used the floo” he sighed lowering his hand.

“I didn’t want to run the risk of Sev finding out that I came here.’
“Come, let’s go to the back room.”

“You seem to be doing well.”

“Those two were nothing.”

“That Slytherin boy,”

He sighed. “He’s constantly in here. One day it’s a headache then it’s a stomach problem. At first, I was really concerned that he had some sort of illness. I wasted so much time on someone who just wants to spend time here. He’s an idiot.”

“He has an obvious crush on you.”

“Like I said an idiot.” He could feel his cheeks pink at Harry’s confirmation of what he suspected. “Idiotic Slytherins are not my favorite combination.”

“You like it don’t you” Harry teased playfully nudging his arm.

“It’s nice to be appreciated, although I’m hardly tempted to break up with Blaise to entertain a stupid crush.”

“How is Blaise?”

“Let's focus on you for a moment.” He gestured for Harry to move to the bed, he checked over the small table of potions he had laid out earlier as Harry sat at the bed’s edge. “I’ve been reading up.... you are sure that you don't want anyone else to help?”

“I trust you Draco.” Harry took his hand as he looked over at the table. “How are you hiding this from Madame Pomfrey?”

“You are very lucky that I'm in charge of inventory and that I can brew. I'll have to replace what I took but from now on I can make your potions... You know Snape would-”

Harry shook his head. “I can’t tell him. Even if you convinced him that it was for someone else he’d ask Madame Pomfrey and-”

“For the record, not telling him is a bad idea. A very bad 100% Gryffindor idiotic idea.” Harry frowned. Draco squeezed his hand. “That being said, I am going to support you. You have to be the one to tell him. For now,” Their hands separated. ”take prenatal potions.”

“Do you think they will taste any good?”

“Have you known any potion to taste decent?”

“Only one.” Harry sighed extending his hand to take the first vial. He snickered at the way Harry grimaced. “You think I would’ve gotten used to taking potions by now.” Exchanging the empty vial for another Harry downed it in one go.

“How are you feeling?”

“Like I need to aggressively wash my mouth, other than that nothing new.”

“Let me know if anything changes.”

“Thank you, Draco. I really appreciate all of this.”
Especially the sneaking and lying.”

“Being sly and cunning is a Slytherin trait isn’t it?”

He shook his head. “Lie down.”

Harry didn’t question the instruction nor when Draco lifted up his shirt enough to bare his stomach. Tentatively Draco's hands hovered millimeters away from his skin. He remained quiet watching the determination on Draco's face. He could feel the lightest of sensations over his stomach almost like a light tickle as Draco waved intricate patterns over him.

“Do you want to see your child?” Draco asked. Unsure of what Draco meant by that he nodded. Draco walked to fetch a small monitor, it was probably one of the most muggle looking devices in the infirmary. Another series of complicated waves and a whispered spell created an image on the screen. He couldn't make out a single thing in the white stippled lines against the black background of the image. The lines seemed to move in a way that reminded him of water.

“See here?” Draco pointed to a small swirl of white lines. “That right there is your baby.”

“My baby?” His heart faltered at those words. This odd mesh of lines on a screen was going to grow into a small human being. His own child. Overwhelming joy filled him. All his life he wanted a family of his own. A real loving family that resembled the Weasleys and nothing like the Dursleys. Tears sprung from his eyes. Draco took hold of his hand allowing more tears to fall. “Is it stupid how much I love this baby already?”

“Not at all.” Draco smiled. That simple statement told him that Draco was truly here for him. “Do you want a picture of this?”

“You can do that?” Draco nodded. “I do but...” He bit his lip

“I can hide it in your room back at the apartment.” Harry nodded. “Maybe you could start a scrapbook like Mr. Scamander. If you talk to him he could help you out more than the texts I’m reading.”

Harry nodded again. Nodding was all he could do since he couldn't believe it. Draco told him yesterday that he was pregnant but it didn’t seem as real as right now. Looking at this image made everything so real. As real as him being a wizard. He would do anything for this child. He would give this child all the love possible in the world.

“I thought that was wonderful,” Pomfrey said at the lunch break.

Severus could only raise an eyebrow at her praise. “If you think this was wonderful then you are an easy person to please.”

“You should know that I enjoy a good challenge and after working with you for years I have no reason to doubt your skills.”

He smirked at the way she shot a disapproving look at the sour old bag he had taunted throughout the lesson. Such taunts could've been avoided if the bitter woman had been as diligent in grasping his lecture as the others.
“Theory of this magnitude can be difficult to grasp for imbeciles.”

The old woman gave another nasty glare as she left.

“I wonder if she will return for your next lecture.”

“I would be unaffected either way.”

Pomfrey smiled again. She’d grown to smile at him much more since the days locked away in the infirmary. “Would you like to get some lunch?”

“You do not need to concern yourself with my eating habits.”

“Indulge me this one time.”

“Very well.” He knew that Pomfrey would be insistent until he agreed. After spending a whole year in her care he couldn’t deny her something as simple as lunch. He had not been the easiest patient in the slightest.

“I will wait for you outside.”

He nodded as he packed his old tattered notebook away he scribbled a quick message for Harry. He may be indebted to Pomfrey, but he still didn't feel comfortable in a one on one lunch meeting.

A ringing floated around Draco’s head alerting him that mail had arrived. “I’ll be right back,” he told Harry, whose face still had tear streaks. The letter sat on top of Madame Pomfrey’s desk in a bin where the house elves were instructed to place them since owls were not allowed in the infirmary. Looking over the envelope it didn’t appear to be an important document or a potion request form. It was a small note which was addressed to Harry. He smiled at the familiar flourished writing of Snape.

“What is it?” Harry asked when he returned.

“It’s for you,” he said handing the note over.

“For me?”

“Just read it will you.”

Harry,

I have been dragged into lunch with Madame Pomfrey.

We will be at the cafe near St. Mungos if you care to join us.

- S.S.

“So?”

“He’s going to have lunch with Madame Pomfrey.”
“Must be a cry for help if he's sending you a message” Draco peered over the message. Harry bit his lip. “What’s wrong?”

“I agreed that we would have lunch if he was able.”

“So then go join them.”

“I can’t what if Madame Pomfrey takes one look and knows. She’s seen me so many times that she would have to know. What would happen if she congratulates me and starts asking questions in front of Sev? It could end up a disaster.”

“You don't want some big reveal in front of a bunch of strangers?” Draco teased.

He pouted at the way Draco was making light of this problem.

“I don’t think anyone can tell just by looking.” Draco’s words didn’t quite help. “You need to respond to him, just say you're having lunch with a friend.”

“Okay,” he sighed. He hated avoiding the man he loved, but he couldn’t risk it.

“Or you could chance it.” Draco held out some parchment and ink.

“Not yet.”

“Then let him down gently and we can go eat out on the lawn for a bit. Fresh air is important.”

“Why do I have the feeling that you are going to be nearly as overbearing as Madame Pomfrey?”

Draco shrugged. “Comes with being a Healer.”

Severus gripped his tea while he waited to receive word from Harry. Pomfrey was skimming the cafe’s menu. Based on the impression of the tea he was sipping, the cafe was a decent establishment. The place seemed popular with both local residents and hospital staff. Although it didn’t feel crowded he was increasingly uncomfortable with those around him. And he was still concerned about this morning. An owl flew in, perching itself on the edge of their table. He frowned as he took the letter.

_Sorry. I'm already on my way to lunch with a friend have fun with Madame Pomfrey._

- hp

Sighing he slipped the note into his pocket. Harry enjoying time with his friends was important even if that meant he was stuck in an awkward lunch.

“Disappointed?” Pomfrey asked with a hint of a smile. “It’s fine to feel that way. How is he?”

Severus raised a suspicious brow at the woman. It may have been her intention to find about Harry from the start.

“Don’t look at me like that. Who else would you be sighing over?”

“Many dunderheads tend to elicit such a reaction from me.”

“If you say so” she smiled before sipping from her tea.
He could have prolonged a debate in the middle of a cafe, but the effort would be a complete waste. She knew how he felt about Harry perhaps more than anyone. When he had woken after the war Harry’s name had been the only thing he had managed to croak out with a sore voice. The thought of Harry was something she had used to push him to become whole again.

“I do peruse the *Daily Prophet* on occasion” Pomfrey smiled.

How could he forget about the pain in the arse that was the *Daily Prophet*? The dam newspaper would snap a picture of the simplest thing and promote it as if it was something newsworthy. It was through severe threatening and wards that kept reporters away from approaching him in public that way they often did to Harry in the past.

“Harry is fine” he finally spoke. “He remains independent of potions for his recovered magical core; he has not once expressed any issues.”

“That’s good to hear, but that wasn't what I meant” she looked at him as if he were about to tell some well-kept gossip.

“You must be an imbecile if you think I will disclose any more about Harry, especially in public.”

“Would you prefer if I asked about how you’ve been?”

“No, I would prefer discussing how well Draco is doing.”

Pomfrey tipped her cup momentarily disappointed in his lack of divulging his private life. “Draco is a great help. I couldn't ask for a more diligent apprentice. I admit I had doubts in the beginning. There is a lot to becoming a Healer that many are unable to move on past. He has proven me wrong to be doubtful. He works very hard to grasp what I teach him, he practices whenever the opportunity arises, and he doesn’t complain about remedial tasks as I suspected he would. I was thinking maybe after he gains more experience I could retire.”

“You can't be serious.”

“I think that he would do well. But that will be years from now I suppose.”

Harry still felt guilty about not joining Severus for lunch. He rested his hand over his stomach. It was so odd expecting something to be different about himself. Draco talked him through some things he had read up on, but he hadn’t started experiencing any of it. He felt as he always had, maybe a little more tired. He looked over at Draco, who was trying not to outright stare at him. He sighed.

“I need to get back to the infirmary. With my luck, Mr. Jones will be back with an injury that needs to be tended to.”

Harry wasn’t sure if he would be allowed to hang out all day with Draco. He wasn’t sure when Madame Pomfrey would be back.

“You can stick around a little longer” Draco offered while helping him up.

“It’s fine. I think I will go home.”

“Can you make it on your own?”
Harry glared at Draco. Talking and having lunch was nice but this overly sweet act had to come to a stop. “Same rules apply as when my magical core was damaged. No pity. No overly caring. None of that.”

“If you want me to be a prat then so be it. Get out of my sight Potter.” Draco snapped and he felt much better. “Go home and relax then talk to Snape, Healers orders.”

He nodded.

“And try not to do anything stupid on your way back.”

“I’ll try” he chuckled.

“I’m deadly serious” Draco held his hand a little tightly. “If I find out you are off doing loops in mid-air or anything I will lock you up.”

“Yes mother.”

Draco huffed indignantly letting go of his hand.

“I will see you again tomorrow ferret.”

“Make sure you are on time.” Draco jabbed a finger at his shoulder. “Do not make me track you down to take your prenatal potions.”

Harry remained staring out at the lawn as Draco walked away. As much as he knew Draco was right he was still hesitant to go back. Going back meant possibly telling Severus and he wasn’t ready for a big discussion. He lost track of time until a voice called for him.

“Mr. Potter?” He turned to Headmistress McGonagall. It felt as though he were caught out after curfew. “I thought it was you. What brings you to Hogwarts?”

“Visiting.”

She looked at him discerning if he really was here to visit. “In that case would you care to take a walk that is unless you have to be elsewhere.”

“I have some free time,” he said silently thanking Merlin for a decent excuse to prolong returning.

“It won't take long” McGonagall assured him as she moved past him. They remained following along the empty lawn. Harry wondered if the students were still in class or if McGonagall had done something to keep them away once she knew it was him standing by himself.

“I wanted to know how you were doing,” she said looking down at him. “I have missed your presence since you graduated.”

“Really? I thought you'd be happy not to have to worry about a trouble maker like me losing points for Gryffindor left and right.”

“I always miss the mischief makers.”

“Even the twins?”

“Oh yes. Their pranks were a hassle to deal with and they never took detention seriously but no one could argue that they didn't bring excitement to this school” she smiled.
“You’re right” he chuckled thinking back to all the pranks the Weasley twins had played while he was at Hogwarts.

“I am always curious to see what life my students lead after school.”

For a moment he thought about telling her about his unborn child. He wouldn't though, not until he spoke with Sev. “Things are well. I visit Newt and Mr. Graves now and then to have a playdate with Darion. And I’m living with Severus.” he blushed.

McGonagall smiled broadly.

“Life is a little dull I guess now that I don't have to fight dark lords or face exams.” He ran a hand through his hair. There was a feeling like he should say so much more but that really was the summary of his life right now. “Um... I work at an ice cream parlor.”

“Do you enjoy it?”

“I do. It’s not a job that many would expect me to have but that’s kind of what makes it special I guess.”

“Well, if you ever feel inclined to join the Hogwarts staff I know a position you would be great at.”

He looked up at McGonagall with wide eyes. “Really?”

“Yes. I had hoped that you would become a teacher shortly after graduation but we never got around to discussing that possibility.”

“I...” He didn’t know what to say. He never thought about working at Hogwarts. After graduating he’d been overwhelmed with regaining lost time with Severus. And then life had sort of taken him from lazing about at his apartment to working with Mr. Wymer and living with Severus. He did miss Hogwarts, but attending classes with friends was very different than teaching.

“Am I even qualified to teach?”

“Far more qualified to teach Defense Against the Dark Arts than Lockhart ever was.”

How could he not laugh at that? McGonagall too giggled before composing herself.

“I have every confidence that would do well teaching. If you have any issues with making lesson plans I’m sure Severus would be willing to assist.” McGonagall smiled. “Just something to think about for the future.”

Silently he nodded, still unsure what to make of this offer.

“It has been great to see you Mr. Potter. Please tell Severus I said hello.”

“I will.”

Draco was rechecking over the inventory when the floo sparked to life. At first, he thought Harry might have forgotten something, it wouldn’t be the first time, so he didn't pay any mind to the footsteps behind him. When hands covered his eyes he finally stopped his counting.

“You are interrupting my work” he feigned annoyance.
“For good reason,” Blaise said as he removed his hands from Draco’s face.

He smiled at his boyfriend. “What reason would that be?”

“I wanted to see you.”

“That is your good reason?” Draco shook his head.

“It’s all the reason I need.”

Blaise smiled at the way Draco’s cheeks tinted. “You have seen me so I guess you can go back.”

“If that is what you want...” He took a step forward enclosing the already tight space between them. It was obvious that neither one of them wanted to be apart. Both of their jobs kept them from seeing each other as frequently as he wanted.

“If you leave I will hex you without hesitation” Draco threatened in a whisper.

He captured Draco’s lips in a heated kiss and hands pulled him closer encouraging him to continue. His own hands slid down Draco’s back stopping at his hips.

“Stop” Draco gasped as they broke apart.

The sound of their panting breaths filled the room for a moment.

“Sorry,”

He had not intended to rile up Draco like this, perhaps it had been too long since they last had been like this.

“If Madam Pomfrey caught us I would be out on my ear.”

“Then join me for dinner tonight.”

“A formal dinner?”

“Just the two of us maybe at a pub. Although my mother would enjoy your company at our dinner table again.”

“I finish work about at seven tonight.”

“I’ll pick you up.”

“Blaise, tell your mother that I will make myself available for dinner.”

“I will tell her. At this moment I don't want to leave.”

Draco pushed his chest away. “You better unless you want to be put to work.”

“Tell me what needs to be done.”

“I guess you could help with inventory before you leave.”
Not having Harry show up for lunch coupled with the negative voice in his head pointing out this morning’s events on top of lecturing didn’t help Severus’s mood at all. Admittedly he had been snarkier than necessarily towards the elder medi-witch who had made abundantly clear that he wasn’t welcomed.

Once he was done with the lecture he gathered his things and left. It was only when he returned home did he begin to feel himself unwind. Lecturing bitter old Healers wasn’t all that different from reckless third years back at Hogwarts. It was tempting to go back to his habit of nursing a Firewhiskey, yet he refrained. He didn't need the drink not when Harry was there to calm him simply by asking how his day was.

Dusting off the extra floo powder he scanned the living room for Harry. There was no sight of his lover. A frown plastered over his face at that fact.

“He’s out with friends” he reminded himself feeling foolish over the unnecessary spike of jealousy.

Setting off to the kitchen he put the kettle on. The floo flared to life at the precise moment the kettle whistled. Quietly grabbing a second cup he levitated the tray into the living room.

“Tea?”

Harry flashed him a meek smile. “Thank you.”

He noticed the careful way Harry sat onto the couch and the not too subtle way his lips caught under his teeth. Emerald eyes peered into the cup, as though studying its contents.

“Harry?”

“Sorry. How was your day?”

If Harry wanted to avoid whatever was bothering him he wouldn’t push right away. “Aggravating although there was no worry about cauldrons exploding.”

Harry gave another meek smile.

“Pomfrey missed your presence at lunch. I have a suspicion she wanted to check on your health.”

“I don't doubt she would’ve jumped at the chance to scan me and prescribe potions.”

“She cannot help assess people though I rather have her as a student than a Healer.”

Harry fiddled with his cup.

“How are your friends?” he asked wondering if Weasley or Granger had said or done something to upset his lover.

“They are fine....” Harry fiddled with his cup a little more before speaking again. “McGonagall offered me a job. She said I could teach Defense.”

“Is that what you want?”

“I never thought about it. What do you think?”

“You are asking the wrong person,” he said leaning further into his armchair. “Albus more or less forced me into teaching and my role as a spy didn't allow forming meaningful connections with students or other professors.”
“Do you think I could do it?”

He took some time to think, using all he knew about Harry to come up with a more informed answer than yes or no. “I think that your youth and reputation would pose a challenge at first, however, you would do well. You have shown strength in not only the subject of Defense Against the Dark Arts but leadership as well. Ultimately it is your decision.”

Harry seemed to think his words over, nodding to himself, but there was no sign of the younger man having his mind made up in either way.

“Is there anything else that happened today?”

Quickly Harry shook his head.

“If you do decide to teach I will help in any way I can, but tell Minerva that I will not return to my position.”

“You really wouldn’t want to go back? Wouldn’t it be lonely if I stayed at Hogwarts?”

“I think I could manage.”

“So you wouldn't miss me?”

“I didn’t say that.” Severus quirked a smile moving closer so that his knee lightly touched Harry’s.

Harry jumped slightly at the contact, he hoped it wasn't as noticeable as he thought it was. Somehow he’d gotten in his head that Severus would be able to feel the baby at the slightest touch. Carefully he cupped his mug as he looked at his lover’s face, there was a quick flicker of emotion before Severus pulled away.

“I still need to put things back in my lab.” Severus paused, standing in front of him for a brief second. “I will be up to prepare dinner shortly.”

Severus appeared as put together as ever while he retreated to the lab, but Harry could tell the man was hurt. Why wouldn’t he when he’d been actively avoiding Severus all day? They should be talking about the baby, their baby, but he wasn’t ready to face anything that might shatter the nearly perfect reality he had being with Severus. Feeling horrible he pulled his legs up and held them for comfort...Comforting himself this way was something he hadn’t done in a long time.

Severus took longer than usual to get his things lab back in order. He was avoiding the worry of being shut out all day. The negative voices were unrelenting and based on today's events they held validity. Although it had not been his intention to make Harry uncomfortable, the way he’d jumped at the slight touch was more than enough to prove that the action was unwelcomed. He didn't want to lose Harry.

Why did it feel like he was losing him?

He couldn't tell if it was his past experiences that colored today’s oddities or not. The strongly held belief that he was unworthy of love crept in his heart like a freshly hatched parasite. Harry had been the only one to have ever romantically loved him. To lose the love Harry had given him would leave him no better than the bitter vicious person the world had always viewed him to be.
This change had to be his fault.

Harry knew he couldn't push Severus away like this. It was so silly to let this happen. He faced Voldemort for crying out loud. He had battled Death Eaters, fought against slander posted in the popular *Daily Prophet* multiple times, and survived an illness that would have certainly kill him if it weren't for Severus. Despite all that he wasn't ready to face this. He couldn't help feeling frightened to talk about this. If he ignored the guilt it would go away.

Sluggishly he moved about the kitchen until he heard the barely audible steps behind him. He had to hide the truth better, he did know occlumency. Just until the timing was better he could hold onto his secret.

“I’m sorry” Severus’s low whisper was like a vice grip on his guilty heart.

“You didn't do anything wrong” he said with conviction.

“I’m sure somewhere along the line I did.” Severus looked crestfallen leaning against the opposite wall.

“You-you didn't. I'm just off today.” He shook his head. “I promise. Come join me” he stuck out his hand, Severus took it immediately.

For the rest of the evening, things went as they normally would. They exchanged stories about their day, to which he was glad that there was no dramatics in Harry’s friend group. Minerva’s offer popped up again. Seeing as it was occupying Harry’s mind he encouraged him to talk to his friends about as well.

When his hand brushed up against Harry’s as they cleaned the kitchen he didn't jerk at his touch. And when they slipped into bed Harry had kissed him.

It seemed as though all was right once again between them. That everything he had been thinking was just another round of his subconscious anxieties working overtime.

As he shut his eyes he listened to the easy breathing of his lover beside him. It was a small whisper that pulled him from the arms of sleep “I’m sorry.”

Chapter End Notes

I had been tempted to end this story after Harry broke down and Severus showed him his mother's grave, but my muse refused for things to end there. So the story took this turn, which means it probably will follow the way many expect it to. In fact, this particular chapter was originally going to be the beginning of *As Long as You're Mine*, but I felt that more had to be flushed out before these events could happen. I can't help think that I crammed so much into this series, yet I've enjoyed creating it. Hope you all have enjoyed reading it.

Big thanks to everyone who left kudos/comments!

Soon this story will be complete. :)
Draco double-checked his satchel when he made it to St. Mungos. Quill, ink, parchment, and books on wizard pregnancy charmed lighter were all accounted for. Being back was almost as unnerving as Hogwarts but he didn't need to return to the rooms he’d witness other survivors of the war occupy. Today's visit would be more nerve-wracking as he had been granted an appointment with the only wizard pregnancy healer at St. Mungo's. Draco looked at the directory trying to find the maternity ward. *Maternity Ward: Blue line* read the sign. He was thankful for the colored lines on the floor as he navigated his way.

“Good morning” the receptionist greeted as he made it into the office.

“Good morning.”

“You may go in he’s ready for you” the receptionist motioned.

With an awkward smile, he stepped through the door. The interior of the office had several pamphlets against the wall under a sign that read *Questions? Take one.* He snorted at it. There was an abundance of questions in his head at the moment.

“Hello Mr. Malfoy.” The healer looked to be about fifty, though guessing magical folks age wasn't always an easy task. The man's hair was cut short in a style that faintly reminded him of Mr. Graves, thought this man's hair was a dirty blond. His eyes were an odd shade of silvery blue. The room held a nice warmth that came across as relaxing. “How can I be of assistance?”

“I would like to know more about wizard pregnancy.” Draco pulled out his books and parchment.

“I see you've been reading up. It's always important to educate oneself before tackling something life-changing.” He nodded. “So what clarification do you need?”

Draco thought it best to start with the basics of the whole thing. “For one, how can someone tell if they are able to have children? The minimal text is unclear.”

“There wasn't a universal physical indicator when most of these texts were printed. Many thought it was some strange occurrence that gave the ability, while others believe it required a sort of blood magic ritual. Wizard pregnancy has been around nearly as long as wizards have existed, admittedly in a very low percentage. The secrecy behind it doesn’t help provide accurate text. In some parts of the world, it is regarded as a miracle, in such places the knowledge is passed on to selected few. It took years for me to gain the privilege of such knowledge and I only was able to learn because I possess the ability to bear children. Unfortunately, I have limits onto what I am able to pass on Mr. Malfoy. I am however able to run tests to see if you are able to carry children.”

“Really?” Draco blinked at the man.

“We could run those tests today if you would like.”

He hadn’t thought of getting himself checked out. Would this man believe that he had truthfully come here to gain knowledge for a friend? Probably not. But did he want to know if he could have kids? What if it just confirmed that he couldn’t? That sliver of unknown excitement would be gone forever. Then again he didn't want to find out the same way Harry had. It would be better to be prepared. It would help curve his medical curiosity. Wasn't it better to know for certain than to remain ignorant?
“Are these tests invasive?”

“If you want the most accurate result it will require more than a single wand wave, but nothing that wouldn’t last more than a few minutes. If you have other questions we can go over those first.”

Draco could nearly slap himself for going off course. Getting this appointment was for Harry's sake not his own. “Besides prenatal potions what else would be required for a healthy child?”

“Contact with a partner is key. For growth and simple bonding purposes. It helps the child recognize their parents magical signature, affection is important for healthy kids. Having a strong bond emotionally and physically with your partner helps dramatically reduce the risk later on in pregnancy. In cases I’ve seen, lack of connection impeds on a smooth birth.”

Draco hastily wrote down everything the Healer said as he asked more and more questions. This would be the only time that he could meet so he had to make the most of it for Harry’s sake. The parchment that he had brought barely fit everything as he had to write smaller and smaller.

"With all that in mind would you care to take be tested today?"

Draco looked to the Healer. This felt like a once in a lifetime opportunity. He looked to his notes, those were for Harry but if there was a chance that one day he too... "Yes."

"Results should be sent to your home within a few days." the Healer said when all was done.

Having a physical and magical core tested wasn’t as horrible as he previously anticipated. With the knowledge he gained he felt more confident to assist Harry.

As he adjusted the newly added weight of the many pamphlets inside his satchel he caught a glimpse of a familiar black blur.

“Draco,” Snape greeted. He hoped he didn't look as guilty as he felt. “Didn’t expect you to be here.” Snape was assessing him.

“I was doing research.” Snape’s face looked less tight at his answer. “I thought it best not to let my brain rot from performing the same healing spells. What are you doing here?”

“I was pulled in for a request to speak about my research on the cure for damaged magical core. Perhaps you could speak as well.”

“I only followed your instructions and kept notes of the uptake.”

“Keeping records is important to the process. Your assistance was invaluable.”

The guilt he felt for hiding things increased tenfold at the small pride-filled smile his godfather had.

“How are things with Mr. Zabini?” Severus kept his voice low so no one would overhear. He didn't want to upset his godson by letting his question go overheard.

“Didn't think you had interest in my relationship” Draco said shuffling his satchel again.

“I was merely inquiring about an important aspect of your life. I have no interest in details a simple good or bad will suffice.”
“We do our best to make time together. You know how work can get.”

Severus pressed his lips into a thin line. Work here and brewing at home constantly got in the way of him being more attentive to Harry. It wasn't enough to just occupy the same space. Perhaps Harry felt neglected, maybe that was the reason for the moments of distance he felt from his lover. “It is good to hear that things are well.”

“Speaking of Blaise,” Draco smiled. “He asked me to officially invite you to a formal dinner at the Zabini household....” Draco’s excitement noticeably diminished. "Unless you are too busy. Working with St. Mungos now you must be extremely busy. It's alright if you can't come. It's not important.”

It took a second to understand the sudden shift in Draco’s demeanor. The reason was Lucius Malfoy. Draco’s father often revoked promises for Quidditch games and important events at the last minute. Lucius never treated promises to Draco as important, but Severus did. Draco asking him to dinner with the Zabini's was in the following of meeting the parents in courtship. Mr. Zabini might’ve been planning to propose at this very dinner; it was the epitome of an important event.

“You know very well of my distaste of formal dinners,” Draco’s face turned blank but in silver eyes he saw clear dejection. “However as this dinner is important to you I will be there.”

“It’s really not—”

“I’ll be there Draco.” He placed a hand onto Draco’s shoulder. “All I require is a date and time.”

Draco nodded. “It’s this Friday at 6 o’clock.” Draco looked to his watch. “I have to get back.”

He looked at his godson once more. Something was still off, still unsaid. Draco’s Occlumency shields were strong today. Perhaps it was about the dinner. “Take care of yourself. You never know when the next round of imbeciles will flock to the infirmary.”

“I already have regulars. You take care too.”

Severus nodded then left.

Draco waited until he made it back to his apartment before he let down his Occlumency shields. He had to keep his mouth shut until Harry talked to Snape.

“Potter better hurry his arse up!” A chuckle caught his attention “Blaise! How long have you been here?”

“Long enough to make tea.” Blaise smiled filling up a second cup.

Sliding off his satchel he joined Blaise. “Thank you.”

“So what has Potter done now?”

“I promised not to say.” He sipped his tea.

“You will tell me all about it in a matter of time” Blaise smirked.

“Unlike your friends, I don’t possess the need to run my mouth. I can hold Harry’s secrets.”
Blaise leaned in close. “Let me take Potter off your mind for a little while” he whispered running his hand over Draco’s.

“I would like that very much.”

The second Draco set his tea aside their lips crashed together. It had been a while since they had been like this. Work had left little room to be together. He didn't have the luxury to complain if he weren't careful, if he didn't work to perfection he could lose his job. He needed to be in the Ministry. Most of the old men in politics needed to change their ways. It was only him and Granger up against them.

Blaise deepened the kiss as Draco leaned forward against the couch. Not wanting to break the kiss he followed the motion until he was practically on top of him.

“Before I forget,” Draco panted. ”Snape has accepted your invitation to dinner this Friday.”

“That’s perfect. It would be a nice change for my mother to have someone to talk to instead of pester ing us.”

“You adore your mother.”

“Not as much as I adore you.” Balise smiled bringing their lips once more together.

Severus looked at the Zabini household it was as large as the Malfoy Manor had been, but the atmosphere held a different feel. His mind couldn’t help compare the too or recall the last time he had been invited to a formal dinner. Draco had been a wreck at the time right now however, he looked the right amount of nervous. If his hunch was correct this was indeed a very important dinner. “Are you ready?” he asked laying a comforting hand onto his godson’s shoulder.

“I am.” Draco took a shaky step forward but the second step came with the trained prestige strut that Draco fell into when in the presence of Purebloods.

A house elf opened the large doors to reveal the lady of the house precariously poised at the top of the staircase. If Harry was here he would’ve asked him to guess how long Ms. Zabini had stood there for the dramatic entrance. The edge of his mouth quirked yet he held back the laugh.

“Good evening gentlemen.” They both bowed. “Welcome Snape to our abode. Draco, always a pleasure. Come, Blaise will be glad that you showed up. Tell me, Snape, what do you think of my home?” she asked as she took his arm leading the way.

The lavish surroundings gave off a feeling of deep care to them rather than the Malfoy Manor where everything was placed precisely so that Lucius could boast if it caught someone’s eye. “It is welcoming.”

Ms. Zabini smiled allowing him to pull her chair out before taking his own seat directly beside her. Ms. Zaibin was as much unlike Narcissa as he could imagine. She appeared more free in her role as head of the house. Narcissa always went about things as though ready to strike at anything that went wrong. For Ms. Zabini this important dinner came with ease. Young Zabini too appeared to be put together as they ate the beginning course. All around it was more relaxed then dinners with Malfoys.
For a split second, he gave thought to Lucius’s wellbeing. Lucius had never been a friend yet, he knew the man a long time, had stood beside him in fights...it was odd to think that in some way he had taken over Lucius place at this table. Here was where Draco’s father was supposed to sit, Narcissa would’ve occupied the empty spot to his left. In an ideal world, the two parents would’ve exchanged pleasantries leading to the final approval of tonight’s purpose. Severus knew that those two wouldn’t have approved if Mr. Zabini proposed courtship this night. Lucius would adversely deny the possibility. This night wouldn’t come to pass if the man wasn’t in Azkaban. Even though it was for the best that Severus stood in for a parental figure tonight he couldn’t help feel odd about it. No, this shouldn’t be odd he was Draco’s godfather and he wanted the best for the young man beside him.

Draco’s heart was racing throughout dinner. Every now and then he glanced at Blaise waiting for anything that would tell him that his boyfriend would ask permission from Snape to court him. Draco was sure that Snape would agree. Once Snape agreed he could say yes and be as happy as Parkinson and Greengrass. Truthfully he wouldn’t mind setting up a lunch with the two so that he could rub in the fact that he was courting Blaise as they had. Harry would also get a bit of teasing too. Not that Harry had ever cared about his Pureblood traditions he still wanted that symbolic confirmation that one day he would marry Blaise. One day he would be a Zabini instead of a Malfoy. Ms. Zabini would be a caring mother in law, already she took care of him. And maybe just maybe a year or so after marriage they could try for a baby.

In his mind everything was right, the right people were here tonight, dinner was a little more posh than the other times he’d visited, and everyone looked perfect. He had noticed Snape had made effort to not show up in his long black robes, rather a little dresser one. All that he was waiting for now was Blaise to bring up courting. That’s all he needed to do so Draco didn’t understand why he was taking so long. Why he didn’t look at all nervous, or why his mother still wore the family ring on her finger. Perhaps Blaise would make a show of asking her for it.

“Everything alright dear?” Ms. Zabini asked. “Is your food not up to your standards?” The house-elf peeked his head out from the kitchen door at her tease.

“No it’s perfect. I was lost in thought.” He started to play with his own family ring. Even though he had possession over the ring since his parents were sent to Azkaban he hadn’t once worn it. But tonight if Blaise proposed courtship then they would follow the tradition of exchanging rings.

Ms. Zabini caught the ring on his finger. Suddenly her demeanor changed to more formal. “Forgive me I didn’t realize this was an ambush.” Ms. Zabini’s eyes shot to her son. “I didn't mean to give the wrong impression by inviting you tonight.” Draco looked to Blaise unsure of why Ms. Zabini wasn’t teasing Blaise to get on with the proposal like he thought she would. “My son knows my stance on this.”

“Mother,”

“There will be no big announcement tonight or any night forward” she spoke with harsh finality. Draco felt Snape tense beside him as Blaise paled.

"Mother,"

"Draco," Ms. Zabini sat straighter as she lifted her wine. “Have you ever thought about what truly happened to my husbands?” Her lip quivered before the wine tilted into her mouth. “We are cursed.”
Cursed? He didn’t understand.

“We don’t know if it will affect us” Blaise protested.

“I won't run the risk!” she snapped. “You’ve experienced loss” her tear-filled eyes flickered to Snape then back to him. “Imagine how broken Blaise would be if he lost you. You’d get married have a few happy months, maybe a few years then you would die. I can’t let him face that.” She set her napkin onto the table. “Feel free to finish up without me.” she stood.

As customary, they stood as well. Draco was stiff. Mr. Zabini couldn’t look at them.

“I will speak with her,” he spoke into the silence leaving the two alone.

Severus found Ms. Zabini in the fine garden. Her well-tailored dress now had dirt clinging to the edges at her feet. All her self imposed proper posture missing slightly as she plucked a flower from the hedge none too gently.

“I could assist” he said remaining a few feet apart in the off chance she decided to fling hexes at him for overstepping.

“I have been through Curse Breakers, Potioners, Seers; everything I could think of to weaken this curse. Each one claimed to be better than the last, they promised me that they could end it, but here we are...” She plucked another flower. “I don't want my son to go through the pain...”

He risked a few steps closer. “Nor do I for either of them.”

Ms. Zabini let out a strangled laugh. “How interesting you are.” The flower twisted in her fingers. "I've brushed elbows with the Malfoys at many events throughout the years; never once got the impression they cared for their son, but you do. Someone stoic caring for another that isn't blood is a rare trait among those I've interacted with. Being without someone who cares is a difficult thing to endure.” She played with the petals of the flower. “ Do you believe in miracles?”

“After my own circumstances, I have opened to that possibility.”

“I remain a skeptic, however, you did heal a damaged magical core, something once thought to be impossible, isn't that a miracle onto itself?”

Severus looked at Ms. Zabini. Underneath the beautiful woman was endless fear. He understood what it was like to hide pain behind a mask. For years he heard the rumors about her widow status. The Malfoys had been forthcoming on gossip of the Zabini family. Their distaste on the same level of the blood traitor Weasleys. If rumors were true she wouldn't care if the curse took Draco’s life. Draco wouldn't be allowed company with the young Zabini if she was only after fortune and prestige as many believed. Whatever this curse was it was clear that it had affected Ms. Zabini deeply.

“Give me time to research to determine if a miracle is possible.”

Tears fell from her eyes yet her voice was strong when she spoke: “Thank you, but I can’t allow you to do that.” She walked further into the garden leaving him to stare at the fallen rose she had picked.
Blaise remained standing in his spot mortified of what took place tonight. He should’ve said something before. He...

“You never told me about the curse,” Draco said. "Is it true?"

“It is.” He looked down ashamed of himself. "Every man my mother married dies...she believes it can be passed down...."

“I thought that...That tonight...I thought we would be courted officially... I thought you wanted to ask for Snape's acceptance.” Draco's fist tightened into balls. "I thought we were doing things the correct way.”

“We can’t marry.”

“Instead of telling me you let me embarrass myself in front of your mother. In front of my godfather!” Draco's voice croaked.

“Draco,” he took a step forward.

“Thank you for dinner. I will be leaving now.” Draco bowed then turned away.

Draco wasn’t going to spend another second in front of Blaise right now. Like hell was he going to break down here. A curse; another thing getting in the way of him and Blaise. If his father was here he’d laugh himself to insanity. Had his father known of the Zabini curse? There had always been rumors but never confirmation to why every male head of the Zabini house passed. Was that why his father hadn’t accepted that he was involved with Blaise? No. Draco wouldn’t give his father the credit. His father didn’t care for him, he wouldn’t have saved him from a curse. Lucius Malfoy’s hang-ups over Blaise had been as ever prejudiced as the status of blood. Still, he felt like this was punishment for not being a good son. If he just was normal, if he'd done what he was told from the beginning...

“Draco.” Snape’s voice returned him to the present.

“I’m leaving,” he said not carrying if Snape would go with him or not.

“I will apparate us.”

He didn’t argue. Apparating in an emotional state could be disastrous. He’d seen horrible splinching from those whose minds weren’t focused in the midst of apparition. Blinking he realized they’ve already apparated but it wasn’t his apartment. They had arrived on the pristine path to Newt Scamander’s house.

“Why?” he asked. He wanted to be alone. He wanted to cry in peace. He was done being humiliated.

“Because you should speak to someone more capable of comforting you right now than me.” He stared at Snape. “I will do what I can about.”

“OH SO YOU CAN FIX EVERYTHING!” he blew up at Snape. It wasn’t the man’s fault but he couldn’t help it he was embarrassed, pissed off, and felt as helpless as he had always been told he was.

"Draco,"
“You know you have as bad of a hero complex as Harry!”

“You don’t want my help?”

Conflicting thoughts of hugging and hexing this man came to mind. Draco could see how hard these things still were for Snape. They were still learning how their relationship worked. Before Snape could only help out in discrete ways. His father hated the thought of him being close to Snape. His father—why was it that he still thought about that man? Why was he ready to lash out at Snape when he was just trying to help?

He took a breath. “You’ve done so much for me already.”

"But not nearly enough" Snape said softly.

Being taken cared of so much should’ve been horrifying. He was old enough to take care of himself, to fight his own battles, yet he’d missed the silent strength that Snape had always provided for him. Snape had always did his best to put things in perspective, to comfort in a way all his own. Being with Harry had strengthened that immensely. Neither of them could take what had transpired at the Zabini residence. Coming here was not just for him, the way that Snape looked to the house like a safe haven told him so. Those two served as much of an emotional support system for Snape than he did.

Taking a breath he began the walk towards the quaint house. Snape silently followed behind. They’d only just walked through the wards when Newt appeared in front of them. Draco wondered if Snape had sent off a letter ahead of time saying they were coming or if Newt could sense them. Either way he went straight to the freckled wizard who held out his hand. Snape did not follow as Newt led him away but he knew Snape would remain to watch over him. By a large oak tree Newt knelt down. For a long time neither said a word only listening to shifting of leaves.

“Did he tell you?”

Newt nodded. “He wanted to make sure I understood if you decided to talk.”

“He knew that I would.” He glanced at the tall dark silhouette in the nearby distance. “I feel so stupid!” he began to pick at the grass. “I was so sure that Blaise was going to seek permission to court me. I,” he pulled more vigorously at the weeds. He wanted Harry to be here so that they could duel one another, yet he rather not add more to the Gryffindor’s problems. “He never told me about the family curse.”

He thought about what would happen if he defied Ms. Zabini and eloped. He wanted to imagine a beautiful wedding that made even the most prejudice wizards jealous but all he could think of was Ms. Zabini’s words: You’d get married have a few happy months, maybe a few years then you would die. Dying wasn’t something he’d thought about in a long time. Not since Snape came back did he consciously think about it. You’ve experienced loss. Imagine how broken Blaise would be if he lost you. Nothing could make him want to see Blaise broken, especially the way Harry had been at the loss of Snape.

“I still... I still want to be with him but,”

“Is marriage all that important to you?” Newt asked gently.

Marriage had been a thing heavily discussed at home. There had always been talks about finding the right witch to uphold the Malfoy name and produce an heir. Despite not seeing the marriage of his parents as a perfect thing he had wanted it. Growing up he was sure to be forced into marriage
with any witch that met his parent's standards, but with them unable to reject the love he had for Blaise he’d been sure that there was nothing stopping them.

“I'm a Pureblood too. My family wasn't happy that I didn't follow any traditions. I didn't graduate from Hogwarts, I didn't become an Auror or war hero like my brother, and I wasn’t attracted to witches. My life didn’t lack because I didn't hold up traditions that everyone else seemed to do easily. As I learned about the world I got to see how different things were beyond what I was told all my life.” Newt took hold of his hand. “You don’t need the title of marriage to remain together. It doesn’t make what you feel for each other any less. Even if you can't get married you can have everything else.”

Severus remained watching over the two while occasionally looking over to his house. The lack of lights on proved that Harry was already asleep. The sound of footsteps alerted him to his godsons’ approach. Silver eyes were still a little red, but he felt assured that Mr. Scamander had met his emotional needs far more than he ever could.

Looking at Draco he wanted to say something, to make a promise to never stop until he found some answer to this problem. He would devote all his spare time to making sure his godson was happy. If Draco just asked he would start right away. It couldn't be as hopless as a case as Ms. Zabini believed. If he saved Harry from the same death as his mother then he could do this for Draco.

“I’m going to deal with this my own way.” Draco spoke. “You don’t have to find some potion to fix all of this alright. I'm sure you could but you have other things to focus on other things.”

“Other things?” he asked.

“Like Harry.” The way Draco was looking at him resparked his unease at the change he felt between him and Harry. Dealing with Draco's problems for a second time would not help strengthen his godson’s independence. And taking on another load of work wasn't going to bridge the gap that was steadily growing between himself and Harry.

“I can manage my own love life” Draco smirked halfheartedly. “I will be fine. It’s time you take more care of your life.”

Severus nodded.
Harry breathed a sigh of relief as he settled himself out of the fireplace of his old apartment. It had been a week since he’d found out about his pregnancy. A week of successfully hiding it from Severus.

“You shouldn’t be that relieved to be sneaking around” Draco chastised as he laid out the prenatal potions.

“I know.” Earlier in the week they decided that it was best for him to take potions at the apartment instead of running the risk of getting caught by Madame Pomfrey.

“What did you tell him this time?”

“Same thing, that I’m visiting a friend. I do have a good handful of friends.”

“Not the time to rub in that fact” Draco grumbled.

“Can’t help that I’m popular” he teased hoping to get the blond to lighten up. For whatever reason Draco was more on edge today.

“Popular until these friends who you are leaving in the dark find out and are tempted to do something about this habit of secrecy.”

“I-” a wave of exhaustion hit him.

Draco moved quickly to steady him, his silver eyes looking worried.

He felt so tired and sick now.

“You can't keep this up the baby needs Snape’s magic. Avoiding him isn't going to help.”

“I still don't know if-”

“Talk you dolt. It's not like he will bring up the subject himself. You think he’s going to out of the blue ask if you want to start having kids?” Draco passed him a potion. He downed it right away.

“Give me your hands.”

Draco wasn’t able to connect his magic to his like Severus could but with the need for a secondary source of magic to keep him and the baby stable, Draco had found a way to help him. Quickly they learned that Draco could offer some magical energy to counteract some of the side effects of not getting too close to Severus, but it was never enough. He still felt so exhausted but at least he could stand afterwards.

“How long do you think you can keep this up?” Draco panted.

“Is nine months too ambitious?”

Draco glared in reply. “I swear I will tell him if you don't.”

“But,”

“If anything happens I will personally hex Snape’s balls off and help you make it to term.” Draco held Harry’s hands tightly.
“Today. I will talk to him today.”

“Good. Do you want me to be there?”

“I want you too but I have to do this on my own.”

“Floo over if you need to.”

“I will.”

Butterflies swirled in his stomach as Harry exited the floo. Today he would tell Severus. He would sit him down or maybe make something to put him in a better mood. Harry was sure that if he made a few sweets that could put his lover in a good move.

Smiling to himself he dusted off the access soot. Clearing the smudge on his glasses he noticed Severus had been silently sitting watching him.

“Oh, hi.”

Severus looked at him, his face inscrutable. “I knew this day would come.” Severus spoke after a long pause.

“What are you talking about?” he asked moving to place a hand on his shoulder.

Severus brushed it off. “There had to be a day that you would wake up and realize that this wasn’t what you wanted. I’m a proud man.. I will not ask you for details or to stay any longer than you wish.”

Harry stared at him utterly confused at what was being said. Had the world suddenly gone mad?

“You’ve always deserved better than me.”

Those words bothered him, especially with the absence of a Daily Prophet or a howler that often sowed doubt into his lover. “There is no one better than you Severus,” Severus refused to look at him.

“If you are going to leave then just leave.”

“After everything, you would let me go?” He was going to call his bluff right here.

“I would if it's the right thing to do.”

“It’s not the right thing to do.” He took hold of Severus’s hand. “I am not about to leave.”

“You say that and yet your actions for the past week speak otherwise.”

“That wasn’t...I mean.” He bit his lip.

Severus looked at him a flicker of anger and hurt in his eyes before the mask of indifference took over. “You expect me to believe that when you’ve been running off with your ‘friends’ more than usual.”

“Am I’m not allowed to hang out with friends?”
“Of course you are allowed. I never wanted you to be trapped!” Severus pinched the bridge of his nose. “I tried to check up on you and neither Granger or Weasley knew where you were. They hadn’t seen you all week.”

He bit his lip harder. If he could just come up with an excuse then they wouldn’t have to continue this talk. This isn’t how he wanted to tell Severus. He wanted him in a good mood. This was all wrong.

“You seem disgusted by my touch lately.”

He moved close brushing their bodies together. “Does this feel like I’m disgusted?” he asked moving his hands over Severus’s chest moving downwards.

“Don’t be crass.” Severus whispered, sounding defeated.

He knew Severus needed an explanation. A week had passed and still he wasn’t sure if Severus was ready to know. What if Severus didn’t want this? He couldn’t kill his unborn child. No matter how much he loved Severus he couldn’t do that. If necessary he would choose this child’s life over Severus’s love no matter how much that would hurt.

None of that had to be faced right now if he didn’t tell the truth. Maybe he could distract Severus. He could tell Severus that he was hanging out with Draco and just hide the reason behind it. Hide everything for only a bit longer.

Severus’s masked indifference was crumbling to reveal betrayal. They were so close, but he could feel how closed off Severus was, it was like being miles apart from one another. He hadn’t felt that in a long time. He didn’t want to hide things from him. He loved Severus. It was stupid to think that he could go behind the man’s back like this.

How did he think he was going to hide it? What was he supposed to say when he started showing? Severus wouldn’t have believed he was getting fat for no reason.

He could feel a lump in his throat. It hurt so much to keep things from Severus.

“Is it someone else?” Severus asked letting the pain seep through his words, striking Harry in the heart.

“No. I love you Severus.” Tears broke free from his eyes. “I...I wouldn’t” he sobbed. He hadn’t even thought about what conclusions Severus would’ve jumped to with all his sneaking around.

“Then why do you look so guilty?” Severus whispered voice sounding on the edge of breaking.

“Because... Because.” He slumped down onto the couch. He covered his eyes not wanting to see how Severus was looking at him.

“Harry,” Severus’s voice came from right in front of him.

Tentative hands covered his own as he still shook with tears. Severus thought that he was cheating. He had hurt the man he loved. For so long he’d known about his fears of him finding someone else and running away. For so long he’s watched as Severus tried to be the best version of himself so that he could prove to himself that he was worthy of their love. And he hadn’t given that a single thought for an entire week.

An entire week he spent avoiding time with Severus that would lead to touches that he’d cherished and held conversations that mattered far too little to either of them, acting like strangers instead of
lovers. Of course, Severus would have interpreted it as him falling out love, that he’d somehow changed his mind of all this. That was the furthest from the truth.

“Harry,” Severus kneeled beside him. “I’m sorry if I made you feel unloved.”

Harry shook his head. “You didn’t. I love you so much it’s...I’m...impregnant” he sped through the words before going stiff.

“Repeat slowly.” Severus encouraged wanting nothing more than to once and for all find out what had been bothering Harry for the past week.

No matter how hard he tried all week the gap between them had never closed. It hadn’t mattered if he set aside his work to spend time with Harry as his lover had disappeared for hours supposedly off with friends. Finding out that neither Granger or Weasley knew where he’d been all week had thoroughly convinced him that Harry had found someone else that he didn’t think about any other reason behind his actions.

“I. Am...p-pregnant.”

“What?” he asked unable to make sense of the words Harry was saying.

“I’m with child. Your child.”

Slowly he got up from his kneeled position so that he could sit beside Harry.

“Are you terribly angry with me?” Harry sounded so young. So worried.

“Incredibly” he said flatly, causing Harry to flinch. “How could you hide this from me?”

“I,” Harry stared at the ground. A long pause settled between them, the first uncomfortable silence since they started living together.

“I wasn’t sure what you would want to do. I was worried that,” Harry’s hands gripped one another harshly, his knuckles turning white. “That you wouldn’t want a child.”

He released a breath he hadn’t known he was holding. “You want to keep this child?”

“You,” Harry’s hands gripped tighter. “You don’t have to worry about a thing...I already lived without you once...” Severus’s heart clenched painfully in his chest. He knew of the times Harry would lay his head onto his chest to hear that his heart was still beating. “...I don’t want to be without you but...but” he sobbed. “...Draco said that he would help... I can go live with him again.”

“Are you sure this is what you want? A child?” he asked tentatively.

Despite the knowledge that several of Harry’s classmates have already gotten married or started a family, he couldn’t help think of Harry as being too young to have children.

“I don’t want you to lose what is left of your youth.”

Harry had grown up far too fast. Nothing typical had happened to this young man all his life. When the war was over he had thought Harry would have spent time reclaiming the freedom that he had lost. But this... Unknowingly he had forced Harry into something too early. After everything, after trying to take things slow and offer Harry time to create whatever type of life he chose...
“I’m not a first-year anymore Severus.” Harry’s words were barely choked out. “You don’t have
to... If you don’t want to see me, us-”

“Stop.” He said prying Harry’s hands free of their death grip. Emerald eyes still filled with tears
gazed at him. His heart couldn’t take the suffering Harry was feeling. He had left Harry to deal
with a decision of this magnitude all by himself. “Harry” he spoke softly to keep the young man
from running off with those horrible thoughts. Him of all people knew what it was like to deal with
negative thoughts. “I would be a complete fool not to want this.” Gently he pressed his hand onto
Harry’s stomach.

“Are you sure?” Harry’s voice cracked.

“I have a confession,” he said hoping that his next words could help heal the damage done to their
relationship. “Do you remember when you first saw me staring at the mirror of Erised?”

Harry nodded.

“It wasn’t my mother who I saw that night. I saw you standing beside me carrying a child.”

“Why didn’t you tell me that before?”

“It took time to come to terms with my deepest desire was to start a family with you,” He pushed
back some Harry’s hair from his eyes. “I couldn’t handle it if you didn’t want the same. After all
this time I couldn’t believe you would want to spend the rest of your life with me.”

“Fucking idiot.” Harry buried his face into Severus’s chest. Severus held him unable to believe that
this was happening.

“Who else knows?”

“Only Draco I swore him to secrecy.”

“Then I propose we should break the news to our neighbors.”
Their home had been prepared for the guests that would be arriving. The whole Weasley Brood was due in any minute. Mr. Scamander was already chatting with Harry in the living room as Mr. Graves and Draco assisted him setting up the large tables on the lawn. A banner reading Congratulations suspended in the air. A smile tugged on his face looking at the beautiful set up. He was more than thankful that Mr. Scamander's taste in party decor was simple.

A crack sounded. Before Severus knew it Remus Lupin was running towards them. Resisting the instinct to pull his wand out he remained still as Lupin put his arms around him. Unable to stop it the man picked him up and spun once before he was put down. The whole action left him shocked.

“I can’t believe this!” Lupin eyed the banner. “I wasn’t sure if this wasn’t some joke.” Lupin’s eyes sparkled in the light. Severus had to double-check that the moon hadn’t suddenly shifted from quarter to full. The possibility of this werewolf coming to tear him limb from limb was still at the back of his mind. “Where is he?”

“Harry’s in the house.”

Lupin beelined it to the house. Both Mr. Graves and Draco looked to him but he gave no thought as he set more things onto the elongated tables.

“I am going to go check on something inside” Draco said hurrying away.

Now it was just himself and Mr. Graves.

“How are you doing?” Mr. Graves asked.

“I,” he lowered his voice so that the werewolf in his home wouldn’t overhear. “I am unsure of how well a father I will be... I didn’t have an exactly great role model.”

“Mr. Snape,” Mr. Graves placed a hand on his shoulder. “They don't give you a book on how to raise a child. It's about learning as you go. Things won't be perfect. Mistakes will be made. We’ll help where we can. As long as you don't run away from them that's what matters.” Mr. Graves tapped his shoulder.

“I won’t run away.”

“It looks like the rest of the guests have arrived.” Mr. Graves said moving to greet the Weasleys.

The wave of redheads greeted the American as though he were a long lost cousin. His need for isolation was growing again. It was ridiculous considering these people had come to congratulate Harry on his pregnancy. They knew Harry was carrying his child. There was no reason to expect backlash from this crowd. No reason to have this feeling of not belonging.

A tug on his magic turned his attention onto Harry beaming across the way at him.

“There you are Severus!” Molly Weasley greeted with arms stretched out. He took a step back. “Don’t be that way.” She swatted his hand with the edge of the package she was holding. “Harry is
an honorable Weasley which means you are as good as family. I don’t let any family deny my hugs.”

Reluctantly he let himself be hugged. This wasn’t going to be the last hug he received tonight, that realization wasn’t too bad.

“Speaking of family, where is the youngest Weasley?” he asked noticing the lack of death glares at this party.

“She was in a foul mood so I thought it best to leave her at home. Don’t worry about her Severus tonight is your and Harry’s night.” She patted him far too much on the back.

Peering over her head he wordlessly pleaded with Harry to free him from this attention. Harry laughed but started to walk to him.

“Oh, Harry!” Molly exclaimed pulling him into a hug. “This is amazing! Do you know the gender yet?”

“Not yet” Harry’s face tinted pink. Taking Harry’s hand he pulled his lover away from Molly’s roaming eyes over Harry’s stomach.

“I think I hear someone calling me.” Molly smiled running off to the chatting guests.

“How are you doing?” Harry asked leaning into him.

“I’m fine.” He glanced back to make sure the others weren’t gawking.

“Severus they all approve of us. Including,” Harry placed Severus’s hand onto his stomach.

Soon it wouldn’t be as flat as it was now. Soon he would be able to feel his growing child. Mr. Graves had already filled his head with the wonders of experiencing a baby’s first kick.

“Harry,”

Harry smiled. “Yes?”

A few more cracks of apparating sounded, “More of your friends have arrived.”

Longbottom, Lovegood, Granger had arrived with Mr. Zabini in tow.

“Congratulations Professor Snape” Longbottom awkwardly smiled.

“I’m no longer a professor but thank you Mr. Longbottom.”

“Harry!” Granger ran right to them stretching her arms to almost impossible lengths to hug both of them. “I am so tempted to hex you for only telling us now!”

“Be careful Ms. Granger I will not stand idle if you continue your threats.”

“You are lucky to have someone so protective.” Granger chuckled.

Ron Weasley joined them. Bewildered eyes looking from Harry to him. It reminded him of the moment when Harry had kissed him in the infirmary in front of everyone, but this time Weasley was more amazed than disgusted. “You really are...”

“I am.”
“I... Woah. Congratulations!”

Harry began to tear up. “Thanks.”

Relinquishing his lover to the rest of the trio to catch up he decided it best to disappear into the house. Another crack momentarily paused his destination. Pomfrey and Minerva had appeared with a few gifts in their hands. Not thinking of what was going to become of Hogwarts with Draco, Pomfrey, and Minerva missing was very difficult as he watched Mr. Graves show the two where to place the gifts.

“Congratulations Snape” said Mr. Zabini. The young man looked a little out of place glancing around.

Against everything telling him otherwise he hadn’t dived into research about the Zabini curse or interfered with his godson’s affairs, which meant Zabini had to been invited by Draco himself.

“Draco is inside.”

“Thank you” Zabini said moving into the house.

Promising not to interfere he approached his new guests. It was merely good manners that he at least say hello.

“Thank you for inviting us I’m sure Severus wouldn’t have” Pomfrey said to Mr. Graves when he arrived.

“You two should be doing your jobs not leaving Hogwarts vulnerable to attend a party” he said looking at the small tower of gifts.

“Oh hush” Minerva waved off his concerns with a flick of her hand. “This is an important party. The students are perfectly fine without us for a little while.”

“Because students are only capable of bodily harm during proper school hours.” He rolled his eyes.

“If you have a concern you’re more than welcome to return.” Minerva smiled.

“I decline your offer.”

Minerva reached a hand into her bag. “I hope you don’t mind there was someone who wanted to be here tonight.” She pulled out a living portrait of Albus.

Eyes that twinkled behind half-moon glasses gazed at him. “Severus my boy.”

There was a prickling of tears that he would under no circumstances allow to fall here. Avoidance of Hogwarts was in part to prevent this meeting.

“It seems like there’s much to discuss. Minerva if you would be a dear,”

Minerva waved her wand so that the portrait now floated along without assistance. He took a step back.

“There is something I need to see to” he spoke flatly.

“I shall accompany you,” Albus said floating after him.

Silently he walked away from the party with the blasted portrait following whistling a tune that
sounded like various nursery rhymes mixed together. It was something that Albus would’ve done if he were actually here.

“Even now you are a nuisance” he groaned.

“I am the same as I was in life although more boxed in.” Albus smiled. “Congratulations. It seems that you’ve found the happiness that opening your life to others bring.”

He looked over at the floating lanterns and the silhouette of the party guests. A party that was put together by people who had nearly relentlessly supported him and Harry. A party to celebrate happiness but did he truly deserve that?

Looking at Albus all he could feel was guilt. “Albus,”

Twinkling eyes settled onto him once more in that all-knowing look that he had both hated and missed. “There is nothing for you to say, my boy. You did well. You deserve this happiness.”

Severus knew if Albus had a body he would’ve held him, making him feel like a child. Despite the choking sensation in his throat, he wouldn’t shed a tear.

Draco overlooked the large turkey in the oven, Newt said that when the timer went off he had to pull it out. There was less than a minute left so he waited.

“Do you need help?” Blaise’s voice startled him.

“Blaise? You’re here?”

He couldn’t believe it. Blaise had actually come. Dealing with Harry’s secret pregnancy and work left little time to see him, all purposeful of course. They’ve talked since the embarrassment he’d faced that night through letters but he had needed time to reflect on what was important. He loved Blaise so he couldn’t just end what he had with him. Newt was right he didn’t need to marry Blaise to be happy or see their relationship as legitimate. There was far more that they could have together.

“You invited me. If you don’t want me here I can-”

“No, stay.” Draco took Blaise’s hand.

“I will take over Draco” Newt said taking the turkey out of the oven.

Nodding he let Blaise pull him into the attached room. It felt like it had been years since they had been in the same room.

“Draco,” Blaise said as they sat down. “Since that night I’ve been reading about the curse.”

“Tonight we shouldn’t talk about that.” Draco looked towards the back door. Outside he could hear Harry’s laugh. “It’s Harry’s night.”

“I know,” he squeezed Draco’s hand lightly. “That’s not why- I...I couldn’t...”

“It doesn’t matter. Come let’s join the others.”
"Yes, you should join them" Lovegood suddenly appeared. "There will be cake!" she added with a smile.

"Luna you shouldn’t eavesdrop." Draco scolded.

"Oh that’s right I forgot. Do you still have the thing I told you to give to Zabini?" Lovegood blinked at him with big owl eyes.

"I don’t think-"

"I kept it,” Blaise said pulling out the random bead.

"You did?"

"I wasn’t sure if it would be a horrible mistake to lose it.”

Lovegood took the bead from his hand then urged Draco’s tacky bracelet off. Draco handed it to her unable to give him an answer to what she was doing. Lovegood muttered a few spells including one to enlarge the bead to twice its size.

"Now you have to re-tie it.” she instructed. Blaise did as he was told. The bracelet shimmered as he latched it back onto his boyfriend's arm. She dreamily smiled before skipping away.

Unexplainable joy filled him as if someone had scooped out all his problems and disintegrated it.

"Do you-"

"I have no idea what she did.” Draco smiled. “Somehow I feel like everything is going to be okay.”

"Me too.” Blaise kissed Draco.

Severus looked at the crowd laughing over Albus’s recalling of the last party he’d attended. Mr. Graves continued to look at him somewhat concerned for his withdrawal when Minerva and Pomfrey had attempted to make more small talk as they took their seats on the elongated table. Lovegood skipped from the house to join the table. Draco and Mr. Zabini still had not joined the rest. He shouldn’t have left them. No, Draco didn’t need him. But he wouldn’t begin without Draco here.

“Mr. Snape?” Mr. Scamander asked noticing that he was the only one who wasn’t laughing.

“Sev?” Harry turned to him.

All eyes were on him now. Beneath the tables his hand trembled slightly. How was he supposed to act in a situation like this? The back door of the house opened with a light clunk catching the other’s attention for a moment. Draco and Mr. Zabini happily joined the rest of them.

“Now that everyone is here,” he stood up. “I would like to thank everyone for coming this evening.”

So many smiling faces looked at him. This moment felt more important than any that had come before. He gulped. The beating of his heart was moving too fast, there were too many prying eyes, too many things that could go wrong, yet he blocked all that out.

“There was a time that I would hardly envision myself surrounded by others much less individuals that I’ve come to consider my friends.” Mr. Graves and Mr. Scamander flashed him a smile. Little
Darion giggled. “Your attendance here is invaluable for Harry,” Harry took his hand. “I too am grateful that you are here.”

He looked to Draco who nodded encouragingly to continue. It wasn’t like him to give a speech but he felt he had to get out some words before...

Emerald eyes shining in the dim lights from above pulled at his already speeding heart.

“I know that I don’t deserve this.”

“Sev?” Harry gripped his hand hard as if he was going to disapparate on spot.

“Please let me speak.” Harry nodded. “I don’t deserve all that you’ve given me. All of this,” he motioned to the silent guests. “I wouldn’t deserve a single ounce of this if I didn’t ask you right here,” He dropped to his knee. “I love you, Harry James Potter.” Tears welled up in emerald eyes. “As long as you’re mine I will protect you and all who you call family. I will do what’s in my power to be the man you see me to be. I make a vow stronger than an unbreakable vow to be beside you regardless of what life determines to throw at us next.” He lifted his mother’s family ring. “Will you marry me?”

Harry stood motionless looking at Severus. The ring in his hand caught the light, gleaming against the modest stone. It had belonged to Severus’s mother, an heirloom that his lover had worn around his neck ever since the fire at Spinner’s End. This couldn’t be happening he was going to wake up any minute. Or this was a prank. His eyes shot to the twins who like the rest of the Weasleys looked on with wide eyes. Luna was off in her own world admiring the fireflies that had emerged. The Scamanders’ smiled at him.

“Well,” Draco asked. “Are you going to answer him or are we all going to remain here watching you gawk for hours?”

His friend’s words propelled him into motion. Tears burst from him as he choked out a “yes” and the ring was slipped onto his finger. Falling to the ground beside Severus, their lips meeting as hands held onto him. A loud whistle from Draco spurred on thunderous clapping from all in attendance.

Chapter End Notes

This is it. I can't believe this is the end. It seems like it has been so long.
Thank you to everyone who read this series since the beginning. For every kudo and comment thank you so much!

End Notes

Ah, So it begins again. I still got major doubts about writing this third part, but here's chapter one. Like I said, I'm going to shoot for a lighter story this time.
I still don’t have a functional laptop so forgive the usual mistakes. To everyone who has read "The Cure" and "Time Heals" thank you so much! I want more than anything for this continuation to be the best it can be.

If you celebrate, Happy Thanksgiving! Right now I can promise a few more dates of updates. I make it a goal to always update on these dates so they are my deadlines as of now. Future updating dates: Dec 25th, Jan 1st, and Feb 26th I don't know how long this continuation will be so thank you in advance for reading through long chapters and whatnot.

Side note: I watched Crimes of Grindelwald on opening night and it had some decent parts, but I was hoping for more inspiration. What did you all think?

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