Eye of the Dragon, Hair of the Cat

by corvus draconis, Dragon and the Rose

Summary

[HG/SS] Hagrid bred some of his ‘armless animals together to “help” the Potters defend themselves from the Dark Lord. It does not end has he hoped.
Magical Mixed-Up Breeding

A/N: Lots of stuff on my plate and needed fluff to go!

Summary: [HG/SS] Hagrid bred some of his 'armless animals together to "help" the Potters defend themselves from the Dark Lord. It does not end as he hoped.

Beta Love: The Dragon and the Rose, Dutchgirl01, Flyby Commander Shepard

---

Eye of the Dragon, Hair of the Cat

Crackity Crack Fic of Crack by Corvus Draconis

"Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could, they didn't stop to think if they should."

Dr. Ian Malcolm, Jurassic Park

---

The fierce Scottish winter storm was pelting the castle and grounds with hail and sleet that decided half-way down to instantly freeze upon impact, covering Hagrid's hut and makeshift barn in a thick sheet of ice.

Rubeus shoved the barn door open with one brawny shoulder as he hauled a fresh deer carcass over the other shoulder. A blast of humid air from inside practically blew the icicles off Hagrid's face. When he pulled his head back, it froze again, coating his head with ice again.

He grunted and threw the carcass into the barn, and before he could even manage to close the door, the deer was torn to pieces by a shimmering, almost-invisible movement, broken up only by a snarling manticore standing protectively over his hidden mate and—

Chkir!

A tiny chirp-like noise came from the nest of lichen as a small tangle of manticore wings and scorpion-like tail unfolded from a distinctive leonine mane of fur. Yet, what should have been a human-like face was more like a draconic snout, and the leathery bat-wings were multi-coloured and shifting in hue like the skin of a chameleon.

Chkkkir! Mrrrowl!

Fuzzy kitten fur and bright honey-coloured eyes mixed together as the manticore licked its progeny over. A long tongue wrapped around the cub and righted it from the other direction as the body of a large faerie dragon tended her offsprings from the other side.

Ch'chi'chkkkir!

The fuzzbucket rolled around and batted at air.
"Ey nao, there's what we be wantin'," Hagrid clucked his gruff approval. "A right proper 'lil beast that'll 'elp in the war." He tried to reach down and pluck the little beast up, but the mother fae dragon laid open his hand from index to wrist with her teeth while the manticore shaved off his bushy beard with one swipe of his claws.

"Oi! Lay off, then! You know me, now, you do. I'll have none of that 'ere."

The bloodletting caused the young cub to hiss and spit in response. The parents then growled angrily and ganged up on Hagrid, pouncing him to the floor and snarl-swat-biting him all over in unison.

Meanwhile, the little cubling darted out the door between Hagrid's legs and into the icy white fury of the Scottish winter storm.

Severus was glad of the cold. The wintry cold was unforgiving in Scotland, and his Muggle upbringing gave him ample experience in making an igloo-cum-snow cave— the only place safe from the stupid Marauders.


N.E.W.T.s were done, and soon they would all be leaving to begin their careers, but Potter, Black, Lupin and Pettigrew— they could all go rot in hell. Not a single day went by without their constant torments, and while they were all guilty of not letting things go, four to one was hardly fair in any book other than in the *Sacred Book of Gryffindor Versus Slytherin*.

It seemed like the only time he could escape them was when he was far from Hogwarts— Hogwarts proper, at least. It seemed like anytime he tried to hide within Hogwarts, they could find him.

They always knew when he was alone. Never, ever, did they target him when the other Slytherins were around to back him up.

Severus made sure the charms on the side of his snow cave were strong to prevent the light from showing from inside. Nothing ruined hiding like a fire. He sighed, rubbing his shoulders with his hands.

Lily was going to marry Potter.

Potter!

Why did he even care? She'd made her feelings plain. She could forgive James but not him. Why is it those supposed "toerags" could get forgiveness after years of bullying, and he could not for a single word said in anger and humiliation?

"For once, it would be nice if someone actually trusted me," Severus muttered, poking the fire with a stick.

Ssskrk!

Severus' eyes widened as half of his smoked fish suddenly disappeared with a series of crunching noises.

**Sr. Crk. Srk.**

Severus picked up the fish on a stick and examined it.
Thump.

Something heavy landed in his lap, and Severus froze as a bright orange tongue wrapped around the fish and pulled it off the stick.

Severus blinked as the fish completely disappeared, and something kneaded his lap, dangerous close to the family jewels. Then, as a warmth spread into his body from something—living—began to materialise. A small, draconic snout framed in a lion's mane, an amazingly prehensile scorpion-like tail that was warmly wrapped around his wrist, a soft fuzzy belly, tawny fur, and oversized paws that seemed too big for its body. Wings—like that of the larger, reptilian dragons—unfolded and flapped as the little beast flopped on its back and made itself right at home. Cognac eyes stared into his, and he could see hints of rainbows shimmering in—

He was falling.

Falling so deep and long into the very Abyss.

The little beast yawned and closed it—no her—eyes.


Severus slowly drew his hand across the creature's oh so mixed up features—so terrifying yet remarkably soft and warm. He could feel a flood of contentment coming from the little beast, and he felt it fill in a void deep inside himself that he hadn't realised was there.

Before he could even stop it, he was asleep by the fire with the beast cuddled in his arms and close to his chest. The almost-invisible threads of magic were weaving around their souls.

Severus woke up with a problem. He was pretty sure it was a problem. He was in a tangle of wings and legs. There was a female chimaera of obvious mixed beast heritage, a cubling draped across his—snout?

Since when did have a snout?

Paws…

Retractable claws…

Wings…

Bloody hell, a scorpion-like tail.

Batbatbat.

BatBATbat!

The female chimaera was pouncing, bouncing, batting at his tail, making gleeful chirping noises.

Getcha. Getcha. Getcha. GOTCHA!

The stream of thoughts from the cubling were strong, filled with instincts. She chewed on the stinger on his tail, fussing and lashing her tail with abandon.

Rap! Rap! Rap!
The cubling dove under his wing with a terrified squeak.

Severus felt his ears flatten back against his skull.

"Hello, Mr Snape. I am Amelia Bones. I am here with my friend, Alastor Moody. If we could please come in and talk to you?"

They were knocking on a snow cave… well, at least she was asking, Severus thought to himself.

"Come in," he said and promptly wondered how he was even able to talk with a snout instead of a human— anything.

A head of reddish-blonde hair entered first, on hands and knees. She came as a larger fellow— the infamous Auror Alastor Moody— draped in a heavy leather jacket that smelled of woodsmoke and the pub.

"Cozy," the older woman said with a warm smile. She seemed completely nonplussed. "Severus, I presume. Your name came up on a very special list. The kind of thing that happens once in a lifetime for certain special wizards and witches. I've see a few names pop on it, and all of them are very talented people that just happen to be blessed with serendipity."

The cubling poked her head out from under Severus' wing.

"Hello there, little lady," Amelia cooed.

The cubling looked up at her larger guardian and gained some bravery. She padded up to Amelia and sniffed her foot. Alastor moved his leg, and the scraping sound caused the cubling to spike up her fur and she disappeared in a shudder of colour as her natural camouflage ability set in.

"Aw, lassie, I'm sorry," the growly Auror apologised. "I didn't mean to scare you." He pulled out a savoury smelling bundle from his jacket and exposed a gunny sack with smoked jerky in it. He gingerly handed a piece to "thin air".

A long, orange tongue wrapped around the jerky and dragged it into an equally fluorescent mouth as the rest of the cubling suddenly reappeared. She made loud smacking noises as she worried on the tasty offering, growling and fussing in obvious pleasure.

FWOOMP!

She playfully pounced Alastor, knocking him down onto the snowy floor and sat triumphantly on his chest, rising and falling with his breathing.

The Auror grunted and slowly rubbed under her chin, earning him a soft purring squeak. "Well, aren't you quite the little charmer?" he chuckled.

She stuck her snout into his gunny sack, seeking more of the tasty meat, and her tongue came back with about five more pieces. She puffed a cloud of multi-coloured "something" into his face.

Alastor's hair grew into a thick lion mane and his pupils changed into slits.

Mrrowl-chirp!

She batted his face with her clawless paws, thumping her velvety paw pads into his cheeks.

She pounced into Amelia's lap and rubbed up against her, smacking her scorpion tail into her like a lash.
"Hello, little one," Amelia said, gently rubbing her ears.

The little beast worried Amelia's hand in her snout, her baby teeth pressing against her skin as her raspy tongue slid across her skin. She puffed a cloud into Amelia's face, and Amelia's hair grew out into a thick mane.

Amelia sighed running her (were those claws on her fingertips?) through her new mane.

"Thank you, my dear. You must have a bit of Nundu in you. Manticore. Fey dragon— perhaps a few other things, hrn? A true chimaera. Someone has been very, very naughty around here." She turned to Severus. "And I see she wasted no time in finding herself a lifemate."

Severus paled, his fur standing on end.

"Someone she trusts with her life and to guide her, protect her."

Severus seemed to relax even as he wallowed in startled confusion.

"It's quite an honour— they instinctively pick those who can protect them the best. They also tend to — bind themselves quickly, lest the would-be protector escape."

Severus cocked his head.

Amelia scratched her thick mane idly. "Apparently not limited to the mane and claws." She rubbed the cubling's fuzzy belly. "And what is your name, little lady?"

The little beast chirp-mrowled sweetly, wrapping her tail around Amelia's wrist.

"I'm here to offer you a job with us, Severus," Amelia said as the cubling crawled all over her and tried to bite her mane and her newly emerged pointed ears. "Come work with us at the Department of Mysteries, complete your mastery in potions— I hear you are quite the gifted young potioneer already— Let's see. The terms, hrn—" She dug for a scroll.

"Twelve hours a day, three days a week, with alternating weekends for work-related obligations. The rest of your time is free to fill with an apprenticeship, if you so choose, and perhaps a hand-signal training class for you both. We provide private quarters for all our employees and the standard oath of secrecy for job related knowledge. Any patents you create while under our employ must be offered to the DoM first for supplying our agents, but the compensation for such things is, as I understand, much more than merely competitive. There is paid vacation and benefits package, employee lotteries for vacations to different countries, discounts for most shops in Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade, custom tailoring from the Spider's Weft, and— well, I could go on all day."

She lay the open scroll down on the floor of the snow cave as Severus pressed his snout toward it to read it more clearly.

His eyes scanned the parchment quickly, widening as he progressed.

*Secrets.*

*Knowledge.*

*Power.*

*Prestige.*

He might as well have been offered a bottomless bowl of Slytherin catnip, the very finest on the
planet at that.

He pressed his paw onto the contract parchment, and magical ink spread under his mark of paw pads.

**POUNCE!**

The exuberant cubling landed on the parchment, leaving a series of splatter prints.

Severus' mouth closed around her, and she went limp, allowing him to move her off the parchment as a lioness would move her cub.

Amelia was smiling at him with just the hint of fangs thanks to the wily chimaera cubling's mutagenic breath. She signed the parchment, and Alastor did as well as witness— his signature barely even recognisable as human language.

"How is it that I can speak?" Severus asked, plunking the cubling down. She immediately pounced Amelia's lap.

"I'd imagine she doesn't want to limit you," Amelia said.

"But, she's just a cubling."

"A very *special* cubling."

She looked up at Amelia and pounce tackled her new mane and growled, dangled, batted, and clung to it, spewing a thick cloud of magic as she did so.

Amelia and Alastor sneezed together and suddenly gained a stunning black and red striped scorpion tail.

Alastor shifted his weight so he didn't sit on his brand new tail in a painful manner. "Ach, if this keeps up, we're going to need Animagus lessons to remember how to look human."

Amelia chuckled, rubbing the cublings belly and pinning her down with a paw and then letting her up. The cubling squeak-mrowled happily, even happier than she had been.

"Is this… normal?" Severus asked.

"For her, most likely," Amelia said. "I have to say, I've never experienced it personally— until now."

"You seem to take it well," Severus noted.

Alastor grunted. "Never had the pleasure before now, but— I can completely see why those that have had it are such devoted people. You can't help but be dedicated when something trusts you so intimately."

Severus' wrinkled snout relaxed as his ears flicked. "I understand." He watched as the bundle of fur and stinger tackled Moody's mane and pulled him down, play stinging his neck where it bounced harmlessly off thanks to the thick mane.

She chirped at him, clambering up on his head and flopping there like a bear rug.

Alastor's eyes rolled up to stare at her.

Crk!
"Has she give you a name yet?"

Severus frowned. "Nothing yet."

"Hrm, well, I'm sure she'll pick something," Amelia said with a smile. "On her own time."

The cubling purred loudly and fell into Alastor's lap with a squeak.

Alastor picked her up and set her down proper on all four legs, but she tripped over her wings and landed arse over teakettle onto her tail with a protesting squeak.

Severus grasped her firmly by the nape of the neck and dragged her back between his paws and gave her a good grooming over. He froze, realising he was doing something he wasn't exactly accustomed to doing— normally.

"Will this be permanent?"

"First order of business will be Animagus training. Rather, reverse Animagus training in your case. Same idea, only you become human as your form. It's included in your beginning training package."

Amelia smiled. "We may be sharing a class at this rate."

"At least I'm not a fluffy bunny with lop ears and a twitchy pink nose," Alastor said with a grunt.

"The horror," Severus said dryly.

"It'd be like you wearing sappy flowers and pastels."

Severus narrowed his eyes at the older wizard. "I happen to to like colour, just not like I was attacked by a Maypole festival."

Alastor snorted. "I suppose that's fair enough." He was quiet for a while. "I'll admit, I never thought you'd be the type to impress such a beast. I had you pinned as a ruddy Death Eater whose compassions ran only to Dark magic and evil hexes."

"Tell me, Mr Moody," Severus said between fangs. "How exactly would you know where my 'compassions' lay?"

Alastor's eyes furrowed, and he was silent for a moment. "Some trainees mentioned you a few times, stuff they heard from some friends of theirs."

"Black and Potter, perhaps?"

Moody's eyebrows raised at that. "Not directly."

Severus was silent, but the cubling immediately tensed and hissed, giving her best growl.

"I'll admit I was wrong to judge ye on the opinion of others. A person can lie," Moody replied, "but this kind of bond cannot."

"So you're saying you're actually a compassionate bloke under all that leather and scowl?" Severus replied dryly.

Amelia laughed. "He's got you there, Alastor."

"Shut it, you," Moody groused, reddening slightly.
The cubling ferociously mauled his footwear, sinking her baby teeth into his toe cap and the vamp of his boot. The sole made a strange squeaking sound, like someone was beating on a rubber duck.

The telltale sound of footfalls on the snow made the cubling freeze.

"I know he's here somewhere, Prongs," a voice said. "The map never lies."

"But he's not even on the map. The map doesn't extend this far."

"Well he disappeared around here, so we just find him. I bet I can find the greasy git with just my nose. His stupid never-washed greasy hair has a distinctive scent. Remember, he deserves to know his place."

There was a low thud as legs hit the ground with a chaser of vigorous panting and sniffing.

"We should check the map again," a nasally voice said.

"He's not showing up on it, Wormtail, or we wouldn't be out here searching the snows for his greasy git-ness."

The snuffling outside the cave got louder.

"The map!"

"What, Wormtail?!"

"The map!"

"What about the bloody map?"

"It's gone!"

"What do you mean it's gone, Peter?!"

The voice that may have been Peter's made a whiny sound. "It's not my fault!"

"Oi! Come 'ere ya wee beastie!" Hagrid's distinctive bellow broke through the pitiful whining.

There was a loud thud as something landed on the ground. "I got the stupid beast!" the nasally voice cried. "Give me back my map, you stupid little vermin!"

There was a sudden sharp yelp followed by a gurgling, inhuman scream.

The inside of the snow cave was suddenly far too small as an outpouring of combined primal magic burst outward and three brassed-off chimaeras leapt from the snow, snarling.

The blackest chimaera snapped his jaws around the hands that were throttling the cubling in an attempt to get the parchment out from her jaws.

**SNAP!**

**KKKRRRRRCCCKKK!**

Peter screamed shrilly as both his hands were cut cleanly off at the wrist.

A black, scruffy-looking dog leapt upon the black chimaera, snarling and biting, ripping into the
chimaera's nose and ears, attempting to rake his claws against the beast's vulnerable belly.

Or what he thought was vulnerable—

Instead, his claws scraped against slick, hardened scales.

Meanwhile, the cubling spit and hissed while she belched out a large cloud of sickly greenish-brown vapour right into the snarling dog's face.

The black chimaera flung the dog away while doing a half rear and rear kick that sent the dog careening into none other than James Potter.

The dog's body was convulsing as he whined, yelped, and cried out in pain. His body was jerking and twisting into the world's first giant guinea pig.

James' eyes filled with terror, desperation, and absolute hatred as his mind tried to pick a spell—any spell—that might help him.

Suddenly, he locked eyes with the black chimaera, and something clicked.

"Snivellus," he snarled. "Crucio!"

The beam hit the beast straight to the face, and it let out a horrible roar.

"Drop that wand, Potter," Moody barked, his craggy face practically a seething mask of bad news all wrapped up in a beast's mane.

"Under section five on the use of Unforgivable curses, you are under arrest, James Potter," Amelia said, her scorpion tail primed and ready.

James looked like he was contemplating rebellion just as two highly irate parental beasts: a fey dragon hybrid and a mostly-manticore landed on the wizard and began to tear him to pieces, scream by bloody scream.

Amelia and Alastor linked paws. "Immobulus!" they shouted together, freezing all the combatants in mid-mauling, including the giant guinea pig that was attempting to run away, and the crawling, crying Peter Pettigrew who seemed caught somewhere between man and giant rat—a rat with no front paws.

Amelia wrinkled her nose. "This is going to be a lot of paperwork. I hate paperwork."

"Tch," Alastor snorted. "You're not the one who has to explain to ruddy Scrimgeour why two of our supposedly best incoming trainees are going to have to stand in front of the Wizengamot."

He scratched behind his ear with his hind leg, his scorpion tail lashing in annoyance before sending multiple spells using his venom barb as a wand—one to bind the three that had been on a mission to find Snape, some to staunch the bleeding, one to summon assistance, and one that summoned a flask from somewhere, which he proceeded to guzzle into his snout.

The harsh, distinctive scent of strong espresso coffee wafted from the flask.

The cubling, her mouth full of soggy, drooly parchment, pounced on his fully transformed snout and dangled from it, legs and tail and wings all aflutter. The cubling's parents gave the three chimaeras a good sniff over and thorough examination, not so unlike two parents interviewing a potential new babysitter. They seemed satisfied and quickly calmed down from their earlier rage.
The cubling licked eagerly at the end of the coffee flask, making odd faces at the strange taste and smell. Her body, which had shifted partially into her background, returned to fully visible, her trauma of having been caught fading with her distraction.

Amelia picked up the parchment with her paws, her eyebrows rising as she saw the names swirling (slightly hampered by cubling drool) on the map of Hogwarts. While their current position was considered off the map, just outside the borders, it was clear that everyone else was shown in intricate detail. Her eyes narrowed.

"Well, suddenly things are becoming much clearer about how the odd reports of being stalked at Hogwarts came about." Amelia's expression was especially dour, made even more so with her new snout and fangs.

The cubling pounced Amelia's tail to amuse herself, and the fey dragon wrapped her up in her mouth and carried her a few feet over to groom her over. The protesting cubling surrendered to her mother's attention with a sad chirp.

"The chances of having both a hybrid fey dragon and an almost-manticore coming together to create our little mistress of adorable charm are pretty slim in the wild. The potions that allow for that are— not exactly easy to come by. Some are even crafted via Dark magic, depending on the individual potioneer. The Darkest ones have human blood in them, usually taken under duress from a powerfully magical family— or from a family that desperately needs the money and doesn't want anyone to know it."

The cubling chirred, wriggling her front paws to bat at her mum's snout.

"Does that mean she may be part human too?" Alastor asked, brows furrowing.

"Most likely," Amelia sighed. "It will make her very special indeed. Had she not bound herself to Severus as early as she did, she could have easily gone feral— but with nothing human to anchor her natural predatory instincts. Between the three of us, we should be able to contain her more vicious elements and temper it with her intelligence. Manticores are highly intelligent predators with no qualms about killing and eating humans— it is only our bond with his progeny that protects us as members of the family unit. It is kind of like members of a lion pride or a wolf pack that all tend the children of the breeding pair. The more eyes the young have to watch over them, the more likely they will survive to adulthood."

"Seems like she did most of the choosing," Severus said, scratching his ear with one hind foot.

"That tends to be the way of things with highly magical creatures." Amelia tilted her head. "We'll have to make room for them at the DoM. They won't respond well to being parted from their cubling so early on— though, I do wonder where they were hiding before this."

The male almost-manticore head-thumped into Severus, knocking him over and laying down beside him, seemingly quite content.

"So, what about the breeder?"

Alastor shook his head. "Doesn't seem to be a true part of this mutant crew. If they had, she or he would be here the moment the little lass started screaming her head off in distress."

Suddenly, Hagrid came crashing through the brush. "Oi! There you are ye wee troublemaker!" He threw down a potion bottle, and a glowing green gas filled the clearing. "Going to train you up to keep those boys safe for DUmbledoire, I am."
All of the four-legged creatures choked and sputtered, growling and snarling as they attempted to leap to the attack, but the potion was strong—strong enough to take them all out of the running.

As the cubling went still, her paws no longer twitching as her body collapsed into total limpness, the four adult beasts went even more berzerk, but their bodies wouldn't respond to their impotent rage.

As Hagrid reached down to take the cubling into his hands, he secured a metal collar around her neck.

\textit{Crack. Crack-crack! CRACK!}

\textit{Heeeerrrrrrrrrrriiüüiik!}

The roar of a great beast broke the silence as four people dressed from head-to-toe in robes the colour of the full moon.

\textit{Heerrriiiüccck!}

The great reptilian beast roared again, beating his wings to fan away the cloud of potion fog.

One of the figures patted the beast, and it rubbed up against their hand like a cat.

"Halt," another said in a hissing, barely human voice.

When Hagrid showed no sign of listening, having already taken off back towards Hogwarts.

"I said \textit{HALT}!" the figure repeated loudly, and the winged beast promptly took off after Hagrid's fleeing back.

The beast zoomed after the errant half-giant at top speed, great talons already outstretched. It screeched, claws sinking into Hagrid's thick coat as he reached the wall around Hogwarts. Hagrid grabbed the gate and pulled himself through, and the beast roared as the wards kept it from pursuing — Hagrid having freed himself from his coat to get to the other side.

He cried out in relief as he made it to "safety". "There you go, ye little tyke. We'll get back home. Train you up for Perfesser Dumbledore's special protective detail, yea-\textit{OW}!"

Blood trickled down Hagrid's hand and he got a facefull of steamy pink breath as the woozy cubling fell to the ground— and instantly vanished from sight.

"\textit{NO}!" Hagrid cried as his hands groped in vain for the invisible cubling.

There was a soft \textit{pop} as something invisible squeezed through the bars of Hogwarts' front gate.

Five pairs of glowing beast-eyes stared through the gates as the cubling dangled from her dad's mouth, tucked safely behind his incisors. Their bodies radiated a tangible wave of hatred.

Hagrid blinked, staggered, and made an odd sound in the back of his throat as jellyfish-like tentacles grew out of his back to sting his own arse, his arms and legs turned into flippers, and his head turned into that of a newt.

The heavily-robed people at the gate scratched their heads under their hoods and exchanged strange looks. Amelia and Alastor licked their snouts simultaneously.

"Can we give the paperwork to one of the trainees?" Alastor muttered. "I don't want it."
Amelia eyed Severus.

Severus growled, fur standing on end.

"Not that trainee," Alastor swiftly added.

Severus narrowed his eyes, his stinger tail relaxing slightly.

The great white-winged beast eyed one of the robed figures, and everyone stared at the pointedly singled-out victim.

"Aw, man," the figure whinged. "Why is it always me?"

---

**Wizengamot Boggles Over Randomly Transfigured Defendants**

The Wizengamot has been scratching their heads after an exceedingly strange incident that took place outside Hogwarts' School of Witchcraft and Wizardry involved four students, two illegally bred hybrid beasts, a chimaera cub, a half-giant—

Gamekeeper Rubeus Hagrid is being charged with illegally breeding dangerous beasts in an alleged attempt to create a creature to protect the lives of some of Albus Dumbledore's most favoured former students— specifically: James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, and Peter Pettigrew.

While Remus Lupin was not present during the incident in question, Messrs Potter, Black, and Pettigrew were caught in the act of tracking a fellow student via an illegal enchanted map that, we are told, displayed the current location and activities of all persons within the castle proper, staff and students alike.

Unforgivable spells, unregistered Animagus status, animal abuse, malicious bullying and stalking with criminal intent are all on the docket, and that isn't even including multiple counts of illegal breeding without a permit from the Department of Regulation of Magical Creatures are among the number of charges that have been brought against the parties involved.

The infamous Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore is being called in to explain why his gameskeeper was breeding creatures illegally for his use, but so far the Headmaster of Hogwarts vehemently denies having ever given Mr Hagrid permission to do so.

Regardless of Mr Dumbledore's involvement, the DRMC is investigating Hogwarts castle and grounds for any other hidden creatures that may be involved in the creation of the two beasts that attacked the boys when they were out stalking a fellow student.

The boys were all grievously injured when Peter Pettigrew attempted to grab something from a captured cubling's mouth, triggering the cub's panic and causing her to frantically cry out for her parents. The three humans who formed a bond with the cubling, underwent a sympathetic transformation and instinctively attacked the boys even as the infuriated parents descended upon them and began to tear them to pieces.

Due to a cloud of transfigurative vapour the frightened young cubling expelled, Mr Black was transformed into a giant guinea pig, and Rubeus Hagrid was transformed into something too bizarre to be described, Mr Potter was severely mauled by two adult chimaeras and Peter Pettigrew was relieved of both hands by an angry chimaera guardian.

A number of memories have been submitted to the Wizengamot, and Wizengamot member Amelia Bones has recused herself from the vote due to having personally witnessed the event.
The status of Mr Potter and Mr Black, who in line to be trainees with the Aurors, remains uncertain as even if they are found not-guilty of crimes that would harm their job prospects, Mr Black is currently a guinea pig, and Mr Potter is attempting to regrow multiple limbs and bones while undergoing intensive antivenin therapy for manticore envenomation.

The next Wizengamot session on this matter will be held on Friday.

For the first time since he could remember, Severus woke up to a warm bed next to a warm body, and without the gut twisting feeling of dread. The sleepy bundle of stinger, wing, and fur stirred against him lazily, laying against his belly with her paws extended to knead his chest.

The mother fey-dragon hybrid, which Alastor had named Zoë, stuck her head over the mattress, plucked up the sleepy cubling, and carried her off to perform the morning cleansing ritual. The father-manticore, dubbed Gruffydd, let out an impressive leonine yawn, showing off all of his pointed teeth from his favourite sprawling point: a gnarly-looking ancient yew tree that had been expertly arbormanced to become the central pillar of the room.

It was quite odd, he figured, to be so comfortable sharing a forest "lair" with multiple dangerous beasts, but when he saw the great tree, the waterfall bath and shower, a small spring for the cubling to lurk and play in, and even a winding creek that offered colourful fish to chase and bat at— he had to feel on top of the world compared to his shared dorm at Hogwarts and the pitiful little room back at Spinner's End.

Exceptions were made with regard to his quarters due to his unique cohabitation needs—both Gruffydd and Zoë were not going to sleep out of earshot of their cubling, and the cubling was definitely not going to sleep without her Severus.

She'd made that abundantly clear on the very first night.

She was quite content to share custody with Amelia and Alastor during the day, but sleep time was always Severus-time, no exceptions.

It was so very surreal to have someone— the furry little lady of the wing and breath— that found him trustworthy.

Even his one-time best friend couldn't give him that.

Lily's face during that last Wizengamot session—

Merlin, she'd been so pale.

Weeks and weeks of trial and evidence and records and memories—

She had rested her shaking hand on her abdomen during the reading of the verdict, and it didn't take much to put two and two together and come up with pregnancy, even without her toying with the invisible band on her left ring finger.

Married and pregnant.

Married to a wizard convicted of casting Unforgivables in front of three witnesses, two of whom were utterly beyond reproach, even if no one wanted to believe Severus Snape.

After the Wizengamot, they were far more inclined to believe him, thought. He may have been a right git to most people. He may have even asked for some of what he got by attempting to find
reasons to get the Marauders in trouble, but he had hardly asked for constant hounding four to one.

Lupin had at least tried to make amends after the Shrieking Shack by not tagging along with his mates when they went Snape hunting.

Lupin had been brought in to have memories extracted about the small matter of the infamous "Marauder's Map" created by "Messrs Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, & Prongs."

No one, not even the great Albus Dumbledore could find a loophole to get them out of trouble for creating a highly illegal tracking map. Being unregistered Animagi only made it worse. As for Lupin, since their main defence on creating the map was to avoid detection as they went out on full moon nights as Animagi to keep their werewolf friend company, he was being dragged in as an accomplice, a werewolf, a danger to others, and a host of other things he didn't quite deserve.

The Wizengamot ended up sending Lupin to a werewolf-run sanctuary located on Christmas Island learning how to co-exist with the wolf and preserve the swarms of crabs from the invasive yellow crazy ants—something only magic could do when Muggle methods had all met with bad outcomes. Lupin, having no choice, agreed, but there was hope that if he did manage to make peace with his wolf and finish the conservation project, he could return to Britain.

As for Potter, Black, and Pettigrew—well, none of them were going to become Aurors anytime soon, if ever. Potter had used an Unforgivable curse, so once he healed up, he was looking at a minimum of ten years in Azkaban just for that alone. That was before the unregistered Animagus shenanigans was sorted out as they counted incidents when said Animagus forms were used to get away with malicious mischief, thievery, and other purely selfish pursuits. His unborn son or daughter wouldn't be seeing him until they were well into their own Hogwarts career.

Severus saw the look of shock and panic in her green eyes—hopes dashed, dreams sundered, ideals shattered into tiny bits. The ugly truth had finally sunk in, too. Severus hadn't lied to her, and she had accused him of being the kind of person who could never be "of the light" as if surviving in Slytherin was somehow automatically condemning to one's soul.

Lily hadn't really noticed him since the incident—physically that is. She'd been trying to contact him, but Severus had a pretty good feeling that she wasn't ready to have lunch with a chimaera, cubling chimaera, almost-manticore, and hybrid faedragon.

Pretty sure.

Almost positive.

She hadn't been able to handle him, after all, and that was the purely human aspect.

The Homomagus lessons had been going pretty well, so far, but for the moment, all he'd managed to do is become bipedal and develop somewhat hand-like paws instead of pure paws. Alastor had a pristine human arse with a scorpion tail, and Amelia had a sphinxlike human head framed by a mane on her quadruped body.

Oh well, he figured. Pobody's nerfect.

He almost felt sorry for Lily—almost.

She had made a huge show of sullying his name for being around "the likes of Mulciber and Avery" and making sure everyone in the school know he could never, ever be forgiven. She could forgive Potter and marry him—have his child.
Not him, though.

Never him.

Well, if she couldn't forgive him as a human, he wasn't holding his breath waiting for her to come apologising to a beast—and even if she did, how sincere could it possibly be after she had shown her true "forgiving" nature with Potter?

Oh, how the mighty had fallen from grace—her perfect man who had ascended from toerag to love of her life and then suddenly descended into a prisoner of Azkaban for upwards of two decades.

POUNCE!

A frisky cubling interrupted his train of thought by applying herself directly to his forehead.

He pried her off and scowled, but she opened her snout in a wide grin as she playfully battèd at his chin.

He softened. She looked up at him with such trust—such faith. He couldn't let her down.

For Severus, being trusted was a far more powerful thing than any drug. It wasn't like people were lining up to trust someone who was undoubtedly destined to go bad, as many a Gryffindor believed.

Perhaps they would've been proven right, had it not been for a certain cubling that had more faith in him than the whole of Hogwarts combined. He had been, up until the point of meeting her, been ready to go drown his sorrows at the Salty Hag in Knockturn and contemplate taking up the offer Lucius had given him to meet someone who could supposedly get him the apprenticeship he had so desperately wanted.

Only now— he didn't need Lucius Malfoy's string-laden favour pulling.

What a relief that was. He didn't need more favours owed.

The cubling used his snout as a springboard to pounce her father's face, clinging to it like a four-legged arachnid or a gecko. It was so hard to tell with her.

"Roisinn," Severus said, furrowing his dark brows.

The cub simply purred and exhaled a cloud of purple mist. Her father's fur abruptly turned dark purple. The manticore seemed tolerantly resigned to her antics as he thumped his progeny down between his paws and groomed her over thoroughly.

Severus padded over to his dresser and attempted to brush out his mane into order. Someone had been drooling in it. Maybe, he thought, he should just attempt a shower—

But damn if his hair wasn't perfectly glossy—and silky to the touch, not greasy at all.

He poked it with one finger and then tugged on it. His mane fell into place flawlessly as if a team of expert barbers had descended upon it and soaked every strand in concentrated Sleekeazy's.

"Roisinn," he called, beckoning the cubling.

She wriggled free of her father's huge paws and bounded towards him.

"Slobber into this vial for me, will you?" he asked.
She stared at him, and he felt a tingle in his mind as she poked around his head looking for what he really wanted. Satisfied, she wrapped her mouth around the vial and salivated into it copiously.

The faint scent of apples and spice wafted towards him.

Severus picked her up and caught the vial. "How does one who stuffs her face into a pile of dead rabbits smell so strongly of warm apple pie?"

Roisinn chirred, tail wagging back and forth in a lazy figure eight.

"If you pish apple cider, I don't want to know," Severus muttered.

At the word pish, Roisinn hopped down, bounded over to the industrial-sized litter box, and proceeded to empty her bladder forthwith.

No, Severus decided. Her pish distinctly smelled of black raspberry jam. What a furry little enigma she was.

Severus corked the vial and pocketed it.

He now had the perfect idea for his mastery project.

Rufus Scrimgeour had a problem.

Roisinn had his favourite quill in her mouth, and she was holding it hostage for belly rubs.

Sighing with feigned annoyance, he rubbed her fuzzy belly and regained his quill and then promptly relieved him of the bacon from his sarnie.

The entire Aurory had broken out in manes— literally. The furry mischief maker had breathed love upon anyone who she believed "worthy" of protecting her, blessing them with immunity to her stinger, a thick mane to pounce and maul at will, and the undeniable compulsion to protect her at all costs.

Scrimgeour didn't mind, really. If anything, he was starting to realise that Aurors with manes were by far verifiably trustworthy and very effective intimidators. There were certain unseen benefits too: more strength, stamina, hardness, resistance to being cursed or hexed. There wasn't complete immunity, but any resistance was good when a spell should be fatal but turned out to be just a pain in the wherever-it-hit-you.

She was a real charmer, the little beast. She was an unnervingly good judge of character, and she could tell an undercover agent who was pretending to be a criminal versus the real thing— curling up in the lap of a guy that looked like the Darkest Wizard in Europe and hissing and spitting ferociously at the immaculately groomed visitor to the Auror's office.

At first, Scrimgeour had thought her mad, utterly barking mad. He'd rushed out with apologies and a medical team to treat the bites and scratches only to find out the wizard had two wands. One for public consumption and one tucked up the sleeve Roisinn had bitten and stabbed with her stinger tail — a wand dripping with so much Dark magic residue that it was amazing no one had sensed it before, at least until they found the hidden sheath heavily inscribed with concealing runes.

Well— it had been.

The chimaera's attack on it had broken down the enchantments as her anger-fueled saliva mixed with
venom from her stinger melted it down.

Oops?

Lord "Evil" was now in Azkaban enjoying Her Majesty's pleasure and— ahem— hospitality.

Plus, erm, a fine set of pink bunny ears and a swine tail as well.

Alastor and Amelia already had her training to be a sort of sniffer-beast— the kind of beast that could sniff out even Dark magic that was under concealment. She had a talent for it when she wasn't stealing his quills and bacon and an indeterminate amount of belly rubs.

She was a brilliant little beast, that was for sure. He had the sneaky suspicion she was mimicking everything she saw, and that included their intensive Homomagi exercise sessions.

Roisinn could easily get out of places that required the use of hands.

Hell, she could get out of places that lacked doors, so who was he fooling?

Bloody furry Houdini.

He had no doubt at all that if she truly wanted to get somewhere, she'd simply will herself there, much to her beast-parents' consternation. The challenge for her was to do it "like a normal beast with paws."

Savage and Proudfoot took turns reading her various books from the library— everything from *Dark Magic's Withering Curse* (which detailed the horrid after effects of using it too often) to Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale*. She really loved Shakespeare, and the Aurors had started calling her Lady Hermione after the queen found in the pages of *A Winter's Tale*.

Regardless of the name, and she responded to many, she gave every indication of truly loving the written word. Sometimes, Rufus would catch her staring intently into a book almost as if she was reading it herself.

At times, he felt certain she was reading it.

Kingsley gave her the oddest books to stare at: Arithmancy and You, Debunking the Prophecies: Real or Imagined, Conspicuous Consumption: Are We Really Chimpanzees? I'm Nundu, Are You? and other bizarre titles.

He was a strange wizard, that Kingsley, sharp as a tack but rather quirky.

*Kerplunk!*

Roisinn sat in Kingsley's lap, peering over the side of the desk with her paws on the edge. There was a witch on the other side of the desk, filing a report.

"Some crazy witch Imperiused my husband!"

"Some crazy witch," Kingsley repeated slowly. "Can we perhaps be a bit more specific, please?"

Rufus chuckled to himself. There were, after all, a surplus of crazy witches of late. Some were decidedly more mental than others.

"Please describe what happened," Kingsley directed, as Roisinn stared at the witch from her comfy perch.
The witch was a little distracted by Kingsley's lush mane.

Rufus had to admit, with perhaps just a touch of jealousy, that Kingsley wore the look really well.

"Some witch with loads of wild dark hair shoved me down in Diagon Alley, whispered something in my husband's ear, then his eyes went all glassy and he just followed her into Knockturn Alley. I was too afraid to follow him."

"Sandra, love, could you please work with Mrs Greenbrow here and come up with a rendering of our crazy mystery witch?"

"Sure, Kings," a young Auror said, getting out her art tools. "If you'd come with me, ma'am?"

Mrs Greenbrow seemed to be ignoring her in favour of staring at Kingsley.

Roisinn bared her teeth, taking the scents on the witch into the back of her mouth. She chirped up to Kingsley as her claws made long shreds of his desk calendar.

"Mrs Greenbrow."

"Y-yes?"

"May we have your cloak from where the witch shoved you?"

"Oh, um, yes, of course." She quickly sloughed off her cloak and placed it neatly on the desk before going off with Sandra to get the artist's sketch completed.

Kingsley placed a swift preservation charm over the coat to protect both its condition and the scents upon it.

Roisinn wrinkled her nose, sneezing violently.

"She's right, that thing stinks," Proudfoot said doubtfully. "Not sure you'll get anything useful on that."

Kings sighed. "Better than nothing, mate. Lady Hermione here has a really great nose."

Roisinn chirped sweetly and rolled over on King's much-abused desktop calendar.

He placed a hand-paw over her, using it to roll her around like a log of biscuit dough. She purred in approval, opening her snout in play as her colours shifted and she blended into the objects on his desk.

"Oh no!" Kings said in mock horror. "Where did she go?"

The cubling reappeared, batting at him as if to say, "Here I am, silly!"

"There you are!" Kings smiled, snuffling her with his face. She grabbed onto his mane and stung his neck playfully, his mane doing its job and protecting him from the overzealous stinger.

Kings wrapped his paw-hand around her scruff, and she settled instinctively, calmly awaiting transport.

He picked her up and carried her under his arm towards the arboretum where the little lady could frolic to her heart's content before work demanded its due.
Scrimgeour chuckled and shook his head. Who ever said being an Auror was boring?

"Please, may I come in?"

Severus said nothing, his black eyes unfathomable and his expression set like stone.

"Please, Sev. People are watching."

He narrowed his eyes. "I seem to recall you rather enjoyed letting me stand in the hallways letting the hecklers think everything you wanted them to."

The redhead winced. "I suppose I deserved that. Please, Sev." Lily rubbed her abdomen, perhaps unconsciously, staring down at the floor.

The public door to his living quarters emptied out into what were the DoM's "official" residential flats— the kind of thing you wanted people to see on the outside when someone asked where you lived. The truth was rather more exotic, and Severus knew that most people, even magical people, didn't exactly want to know that dangerous creatures lived so close to them.

Even if said dangerous creatures were perfectly civil, thank you very much.

Well, except for Her Lady of the Fickle Breath and the Overactive Stinger. She was a downright menace to civility by skipping it over and going directly to casual, blatant affection or whatever emotion she felt at the time. Lucius would have been appalled by her directness.

Lily had always been direct, too, yet somehow the cubling would always defuse a situation. Lily, however—

The neighbours were staring— unknownst to Lily, they were all Unspeakables— and they regarded her with the kind of suspicion anyone knew what happened in the Wizengamot would, but knowing the entire situation with Roisinn made his relationship with the fluffball public knowledge amongst the DoM. His trustworthiness had, ironically, gone from likely Death Eater to utterly beyond reproach.

The irony wasn't lost on him.

"Come in then," Severus said, opening the door. She stared at the ground the entire time, not even taking notice that his physical appearance had undergone a few overhauls.

Had she ever really noticed him, he wondered.

He tapped the gem on his hidden collar to activate the glamour. He hadn't expected anyone but the DoM at his door, least of all Lily Potter. Oh how his life had changed where he didn't look over his shoulder every minute of every day for someone to come and attack him to the back, front, or whatever side was facing.

He hadn't quite gotten the Homomagus thing down, yet, and showing up as a bipedal chimaera wasn't a great way to browse the grocery for spotted dick or haddock for fish and chips— or great your ex-best friend who couldn't handle the thought of Dark magic let alone a few "interesting mutations."

"Tea?" he asked, deciding that he was still a red-blooded British bloke where tea lubricated every awkward social situation.
"Please," Lily said, looking up at him for the first time, if but for a few seconds.

It was lunch time, and he realised he was quite hungry, which meant His Lady of the Bottomless Stomach would desire food too. Growing cublings were voracious. He also realised that Zoë had disappeared completely from her perch, having decided camouflage was the better part of valor. Gruffydd, thank the gods, was sleeping in the cradle of the huge centerpiece tree, content to sleep since Roisinn wasn't pouncing his tail again.

Those two he could feed later, after Lily left. Last thing Lily needed to see was two hybrid beasts tearing apart a carcass and then regurgitating the meal for their cubling. Instincts and all that— even when she was perfectly capable of tearing apart food herself since day one.

He was glad that he could suppress that particular instinct and just hand her a turkey leg or whatever-you're-eating-I'm-eating-too-right-now-thank-you-very-much.

Roisinn was perched on the counter, the tea container in her maw. She was way too smart for her own good. Little know-it-all.

He placed his hand on her head and ruffled her, and she peered up at him, perhaps boggling at his glamour. She probably thought he looked mighty strange without all of his normal mane, tail, and everything else. Then again, maybe she was seeing through it and wondering why he had two faces at once. One never knew with her— she was far too intelligent for her own good.

He took the tea tin from Roisinn and set it aside, putting the water over the hearth to heat up as he set the kettle aside.

Roisinn watched the fire, every so often she'd bat at it. Thankfully, her dragon heritage made her fire-proof, or at least so resistant that nothing burned her. Even better, nothing set her on fire, so she couldn't just wander off, covered in flames, to go and set the curtains on fire.

Thank Merlin for that large favour. Flaming cublings and burning down the flats would just— yeah no.

Deciding that lunch was probably a good plan against cubling teeth on his ankle, he pulled the haddock out from the charmed ice-box. "You up for fish and chips?" he asked, not really caring if she wanted any.

The sound of Lily's stomach growling was loud enough to startle the cubling. She jumped at the sound and growled and hissed but was completely unsure which direction to face.

"Yes, please," Lily said in almost a whisper, trying to keep the desperate tone from her voice.

"There now, you fearsome beast," Severus tutted, lifting her up and putting her over his shoulder. She flopped there like a sack of grain and just about as heavy. She purred and chirped, content to be a window dressing and ride his shoulder around. He dreaded when she got bigger and tried to do the same.

Severus mixed up the batter, dipped the fish, and set it into the fry oil. Roisinn peered in from his shoulder, making chirring sounds as the colour went from white to golden brown. She batted his ear to make him look at the cooking chips, and he rubbed her chin as he took the first round of chips out of the oil. He passed a bit of the fish to his cling-on gargoyle, and carried the plate over to Lily.

Lily, again, didn't want to make eye contact, but thankfully the glamour covered his paw-hands. He could just hear the screaming— as if being a Death Eater reject and all that hadn't caused her to shun him the first time wasn't bad enough.
"Bitter? Me?" he chided himself.

Lily tore into the food that was still piping hot, drinking the tea like her mouth was immune to heat like Roisinn and his was...

They were freaks, exceptions to the natural order. What was her excuse?

He narrowed his eyes. He walked over to the cabinet and pulled out a vial, returning to the place she was sitting and placing it down by her plate. "Drink this."

She stared at it with a panic. "W-what is it?"

Severus narrowed his eyes. "Forgotten basic potions already?"

He couldn't help the bitterness. How many times had he helped her with potions? Sure, she was better at charms and at silly stuff like making sodding fish out of lily petals, but potions knowledge was like self defence. One should always know what one was putting into their body. The fact Lily didn't seem to know that troubled him.

Lily had set her jaw, and to her credit, did not respond to his ribbing with her typical overly emotional explosion. "I can't tell, Sev."

Knowing she wasn't going to pick it up and sniff it as he would, he finally relented. "Prenatal vitamins," he said. "And a nutrient booster with some extra protein, calcium, and calories."

Roisinn sent him a mental image of Zoë visibly laden with another cub.

"Yes, love, just like your mum with a cub," he answered.

The beast chirred with approval, sending him an imagine of another baby chimaera playing with her.

"No, love. Human babies are much more fragile."

Roisinn let out an unhappy chirp, sulking a bit.

Lily looked up, but she frowned, seeing nothing. Roisinn had camouflaged herself again.

Great, he thought wryly. Now she thinks I'm talking to myself. As if I need even more foibles in her eyes.

Lily looked at the potion as if it were a viper primed to strike.

Severus closed his eyes and sighed. "You still don't trust me. Fine. Don't drink it. Maybe prayer will prevent your baby from suffering from various malnutrition-related birth defects."

He turned from her and went back to cooking his lunch.

Severus heard rather than saw her taking the potion, his improved hearing could not confirm when people were talking about him behind his back. He could imagine her face turning redder than her hair as her green eyes practically burned holes into his back.

With a gesture, he had the tea pouring itself and floating off toward Lily and distributing itself around the table. He said nothing as he sat opposite her.

He gave Roisinn a large plank of fish as he dug into his lunch. The hungry cubling made it disappear quickly.
"Did you just throw a piece of fish over your shoulder?" Lily asked.

"Whyever would I do that?"

"Well, it looked like—"

Severus gave her a highly arched eyebrow, and, flushing, she went back to her food.

"Hey, what happened to my fish?"

"You ate it?"

"No, I didn't."

"What exactly are you saying?"

"I'm saying something nicked my ruddy fish!"

Severus tried to avoid smirking as he heard the sounds of frantic chewing coming from under the nearby cabinet.

_Cheeky little minx._

Severus moved one of his fish planks over to her plate. "Perhaps that one will not float off into the ether whilst unattended."

Lily flushed, scowling, but she tore into it hungrily enough that Severus recognised it for what it was: genuine hunger.

Merlin knew he was all too familiar with that in his own life.

He allowed her to eat and drink the tea—all of the tea. He tried not to stare as she did so. He'd done much the same when he had his first meal in his new residence, savouring every morsel like he hadn't eaten in years. It wasn't that Hogwarts hadn't fed him well, but it had been his first meal in his new home. _His_ home, not his father's or mother's. Not a dorm shared with others, no. There was something very cathartic about finally having his own place, even while sharing it with three Hagrid refugees.

Were they roommates, coworkers maybe? Bah.

He half expected Alastor to come bursting through one door and Amelia from the other, ready to smother the little miscreant with all the love one cubling could possibly handle. That would just blow Lily right off the couch.

"So," he said after she had practically licked the plate clean. "What did you need?"

To her credit, Severus realised, she wasn't denying that she had a need. That insult would have closed the door on her request super fast.

"Since the trials, I've been living with my in-laws," she said quietly. "But something's really wrong with them, Sev. They're wandering around the house in total confusion. The house-elves are beating themselves silly with pots and pans—they can't do anything without being told by the masters of the house. They won't make any food—they won't even let me try to make food. They're not eating anything—the stress of the trials just really took it all out of them."

She wrung her hands in her lap. "I'm so scared, Sev. This isn't how it was supposed to turn out."
Severus' posture stiffened at that. "And how was it supposed to turn out, Lily?"

"I was so much in love, Sev. Really in love. He was so sweet and kind. We had a future ahead of us. He was devoted to me. I knew there was no way he could have done such horrible things like they said. There was no way. He could be so cruel."

Severus stiffened, having still not separated himself from the past between himself and Potter's gang of bullies. How many times had he supported Lily while she complained about "that toerag, Potter" only to have her repudiate him for the boy-who-made-his-life-a-living-hell. He couldn't even call him man, no matter if he managed to get it up and get Lily pregnant.

Getting a witch pregnant was hardly a judge of maturity. Anyone who said otherwise was a complete fool to be filed away with witches (or wizards) who believed douching after coitus somehow prevented pregnancy. Severus found it astounding how many idiotic ways people came up with to prevent pregnancy only to realise that didn't work in real life.

Lick. Lick. Lick.

Roisinn was licking his hand-paw, and he could feel his blood pressure lowering. Lily had dug her grave, and she had to lie in it. His life no longer relied on orbiting her— not anymore. He had someone who truly relied on him, now, and had gifted him the most genuine proof of that belief in him.

Perhaps beasts truly were the key to less stress. But what if you were the beast?

He realised Lily was still babbling on while he was busy introspecting. He was trying to tune out the Potter this and Potter that. Love him so much. Can't believe it. Still don't believe it. It can't be true. Blah, blah, blah.

Why was she here, anyway? If she believed coming to him to get Potter out of Azkaban was ever going to happen, she had a long icy path to Niflheim before that was going to happen. She could just stick her hand right into the Suneater's mouth, while she was at it. See how that fared for her.

Snape frowned again. Still the bitterness.

Yet, the image of Roisinn sauntering up to said Suneater and convincing him to cuddle amused him. If anyone could take on the world wolf with pure brave guile, it would be Roisinn.

Lily sneezed, and for a moment, her skin seemed to shift into a pattern of horrifyingly familiar purple spots.

Oh, hell no.

No, no, and more no.

Severus stood up with a cry, hastily banishing himself to the other side of the room.

"Sev?"

"Stay right where you are, Lily," Severus said. He had a Patronus going out far faster than he'd ever summoned one before. It seemed so easy, now, after having met Roisinn. The feeling of genuine trust— her belief in him.

He blinked as the shape of a certain chimaera zinged off to warn Amelia. If his suspicion of what Lily had just exposed him to was correct…
Healers dressed in deep green robes and personal protective gear Apparated in along with Amelia herself. Wands were out, waving quickly.

"SEV?!" Lily cried, completely unravelling. She tried to stand up and come closer.

"Do not move," Severus said quickly.

Kzzzzsshtkkk!

Roisinn sneezed, breaking out in purple spots.

"Fuck." Severus swore succinctly as he felt her forehead, and it was already burning up.

"We're already infected too, Amelia," Severus said. "Lily's in-laws have the dragon pox, she caught it from them."

"Shite," Amelia hissed. "Healer Robinson. I want this place quarantined as of now. No one in or out, not even a house-elf. Any supplies must be brought in via floo. None of us can leave until we are cleared or have taken the potions and are cleared."

"Yes, ma'am!"

The healers scurried about like a swarm of bees.

"Severus?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Are you well enough to brew the necessary potions by yourself? I don't want to bring anyone else and expose them to this if I don't have to."

"Yes, but I'll need a mask to keep from sneezing into the cauldron."

One of the healers promptly threw a mask at him, and it wrapped itself around his face like an octopus.

"WHAT IS GOING ON?!" Lily screeched.

"Sit down, Mrs Potter," Amelia said severely. "You've just exposed an entire room to highly contagious dragon pox. I will need a list of everywhere you have been since you were exposed to it or anyone you even think may have been exposed to it."

"Don't be silly, it's just a cold—"

"It's most definitely dragon pox, madam," Robinson stated firmly. "For most humans it can incubate for up to a week or more—but for anyone with draconic blood, the effects of the disease manifest almost instantaneously."

KSSSHHHKT!

Zoë's loud, flaming sneeze came from her perch on in the tree.

Gods, he hoped the manticore didn't have dragon blood in him somewhere.
The tree was on fire.

Well, fuck.

"Fireproof everything," Amelia barked the orders as the floo activated and a crate of ingredients came in along with a box of premade emergency potions.

"Thank the gods," Amelia said, distributing them to everyone. "Drink up. Severus, if you would please give Roisinn and her parents their doses?"

Severus nodded.

"You first though," she cautioned.

"Yes, ma'am."

Severus sneezed under his mask, sighing heavily after. He chugged one of the potions, and closed his eyes as he waited for the urge to sneeze napalm subsided.

"Gruffydd," he called, putting out the tree. "Come down here and take your medicine before you set the Ministry on fire."

Fssshytt!

The manticore sneezed again and landed down beside him. His nostrils were dripping with flaming mucous.

"Lovely," Severus said, waving the bottle. "Open wide. It's for your own good."

The manticore looked dubious, but obediently opened his mouth to allow Snape to pour the potion in. He wrinkled his muzzle at the unpleasant taste, but the flaming boogies dried up, the purple pox faded, and Gruffydd hacked up large ball of noxious purple mucous that spontaneously caught fire and disappeared.

"Well, at least I didn't have to clean that up," Severus muttered.

The manticore went back into the tree, and Zoë promptly fell out of the tree, kicked out by her now-well mate to go get herself dosed.

Love was real, Severus decided with no little amusement.

Zoë sniffled miserably, dripping flaming napalm snot, and she practically licked the entire bottle clean with her tongue in her enthusiasm to be rid of her mysterious and annoying ailment.

She, too, coughed up a huge ball of purple yuck, and it, too, neatly disposed of itself.

Snape had to admit that potion was pretty damned effective.

Roisinn sneezed, setting his hair on fire, and he scowled at her.

The cubling sniffled pathetically, dripping and flaming unhappily.

At least it wasn't from both ends, he decided. Thank the gods.
He got out a dropper and pulled up a partial dose for Her Ladyship, and looked her in the eyes.

"You really need this, love, so please don't be a pain in the arse about it, hrm?"

Roisinn looked utterly miserable, but she opened her mouth and waited patiently.

He put the dropper into her mouth and shot the potion into her cheek. She wrinkled her snout in distaste and swallowed. Her pox made strange fizzling sounds as they dried up and scabbed off, and then she, too, evicted all the purple nastiness from her body.

How the bloody hell did that much mucus come from a body so small, he wondered. Nasty.

Roisinn seemed greatly relieved to be free of her funk, and she crawled up onto his shoulder with her rear end on his front shoulder and the rest of her draped over his shoulder and back. She was snoring peacefully within seconds.

He took her over to her private nesting bowl bed and gently lay her inside, tucking her in under a layer of warm shed wool from Gruffydd and gathered moss and soft fibres from Zoë.

"Mrs Potter, I am afraid that you will not be able to leave here until we are absolutely certain that the disease has fully cleared your system," Healer Robinson said firmly. "Full humans have a longer recovery time because the disease takes longer both to set in and get out, as they say."

"Why can't I take the same potion as you?" Lily asked.

"It is the same potion," Healer Robinson explained patiently.

"Then why aren't you staying here too?"

Amelia was tapping her fingers rather loudly on the windowsill. "Because, Mrs Potter, no one here in this room is fully human, save for you."

"W-whut?" Lily stammered, her green eyes going very wide.

"I fear nothing more can be said without you taking a Wizarding Oath, and even then, all that you learn here must be sworn to absolute secrecy. The only reason we are making an exception to this for you is because you must cohabitate with us here for an undetermined amount of time."

"More Oaths? I'm sick of all this secrecy!" Lily exclaimed, exasperated.

"Then you leave us with no other options," Amelia said icily. "We will have the Obliviators come once you are well enough to be transferred to St Mungo's, and then you will be returned there."

"Oblivia— no!" Lily cried. "I'm pregnant!"

Amelia raised a brow. "And? The Obliviator teams are highly precise. Your foetus will not be harmed in any way, shape, or form."

"You can't possibly know that for sure!" Lily said, clutching her abdomen.

"It is a very simple matter, Mrs Potter," Amelia said. "Lives here depend on absolute secrecy. You brought a highly contagious, often fatal disease into our living quarters, touching and possibly infecting gods only knows how many people on your way here, and you can either voluntarily take the Oath to preserve our secrets, or we will remove what you cannot be allowed to remember upon leaving this place. Before that, however, we must insist that you detail everywhere you've been for
the last week to determine how many other areas may have been infected."

"Healer Robinson," Severus said, removing the face mask once the potion took effect. He promptly hacked up a lung, or so it seemed, as a purple mess was evicted from his bronchial passages and promptly disintegrated.

"I do hope that is the last of that," he muttered.

"Yes, one or two purges is usually the norm, Severus," the healer reassured him. "Now that you've had it in your system, you'll still feel like crud for a few days while your body develops the immunities, but the potion will keep you from the worst of it, thankfully, since you got the dosing quick enough—and you aren't human, which actually helps in this case."

Severus nodded grimly. It wasn't how he wanted Lily to find out, but he'd honestly expected it back at the trial since he had been there—fully beast—watching the entire fiasco unfold.

Denial, he realised, was far, far more powerful. He should have known considering he'd denied that there wasn't something more to keep their childhood friendship from going to pot over one hateful word. That Lily still denied that Potter could do such "horrible things" told him how deep she had been—

Suckered?

Or else simply deluding herself.

The lines were a bit blurry, he had to admit.

If it hadn't been for Roisinn and the DoM, he'd never known what someone having your back felt like. He'd never have known what true—contentment was.

"I'll prepare the guest room," Severus said. "Standard protocol?"

"Aye," Amelia answered him from across the room. "You can give me a list of any extra supplies you will need or use, and I'll make sure you're reimbursed for all your trouble. That and what time you needed to brew the potions."

"Yes, ma'am," he responded with a nod.

Gruffydd thumped a huge paw against Amelia's head, saying a lazy hello, manticore style. He was extremely mellow for a man-eating beast, but Severus figured it was because it was because Roisinn liked humans—well, most humans—and she didn't appreciate daddy eating the guardian pool.

Then again, the beast was getting regular food, comfortable lodging, and free cubling sitting, so maybe he knew a good thing when he had it. Hagrid's accommodations were admittedly—questionable.

It was clear that both the manticore and fey dragon appreciated comfortable lodging over being stuffed into a barn, and from the photos in the DRMC record, it was amazing the two even fit. Fey dragons, at least, had the ability to be as large or small as they wished, but manticores were not very subtle. Gruffydd wasn't just a manticore, either—Hagrid had been very naughty, indeed.

Merlin could only guess the exact combination that had went into Roisinn, and there had been multiple tests on her, him, Alastor, Amelia, and even Zoë and Gruffydd.

"You're a chimaera, Mr Snape," the analyst had finally said.
"Obviously," Snape had replied with a curled lip.

_Idiot_, he'd added mentally.

Severus pressed his palm against the ornate tapestry of a lounging family of Nundus hanging on the far wall, and it shimmered into a door even as a room full of potion ingredients seemed to "budge over" to expose a spare bedroom. He swiftly moved his wand in a few economical movements, and fresh linens, pillows, and a plump quilt flew in to neatly make up the bed.

Severus looked at the pristine grey sheets and instantly knew Lily would not approve. Still, if she wanted to contaminate his living space with her— nauseating taste in colour, she could bloody well do it with her _own_ wand.

"This will be your room until your pox clears up, Mrs Potter," he said stiffly. "I would ask that you do not touch anything in the potions room or even go inside it. There are ingredients and potions there that could adversely affect your pregnancy."

"I didn't forget _everything_ about potions, Sev," Lily snapped.

"Well then, madam, please forgive me for caring," Severus said, his face going from neutral to cool in a blink. To Amelia, he said calmly, "I'll be in the lab starting the next batch of dragon pox cure."

He disappeared behind the tapestry and the wall seemed to solidify completely behind him.

_Chirrrkssk!_

Roisinn had awoken, and she leapt down out of her sleeping bowl. She bounded over to the wall and growled, her stinger lashing back and forth. She scrunched up her snout and glared, concentrating fiercely, and her paws turned into small hands— human hands.

She traced something on the side of the stone, and the door formed in the stone. Quick as a whistle, her paws were back, and she darted into to the next room, the door closing and disappearing behind her.

"What the _hell_ was that?" Lily squeaked.

Amelia's lips turned upward in a rueful smile. "Proof that Mr Hagrid was a very, very naughty boy."

"Does that mean what I _think_ it does?" Healer Robinson asked, frowning.

"Mmmhmm," Amelia confirmed. "Hagrid used a very shady, very illegal potion for his own equally illegal custom breeding program, which resulted in… her."

"The magic in the blood potion? That's ancient family magic. Dark blood magic!"

"Human blood, aye," Amelia said. "Highly magical blood to be precise. It was once used in magical adoptions before the modern spells did it without the bloodletting, back when pureblood families wanted their adoptees to literally be a part of the family. Using it for beasts is a strange use— perhaps in order to bind the parents' inherent magic together to create our lovely Roisinn. I don't think he realised exactly what went into making such a potion. If he did— well, let's just say I wonder which magical family's bloodline was in that potion."

"Wasn't there a really big scandal awhile back at Mungos, where some berk was going around stealing the blood of certain high-profile patients and selling it for profit? Highly magical blood. All cream of the crop, as they say."
"Given Her Ladyship's mixed pedigree, she could be a mixed bag or simply luck of the draw. We will have to do a trace, but maybe it's better if we don't. Finding out will not change her bond with those she has chosen, and she will not appreciate being displaced. Better have her make that choice herself when she's ready for it, and I have no doubt she will tell us when that is, just like she does with everything else."

"She's going to be so spoiled," the healer chuckled.

Amelia waved him off. "She deserves a little love. Out there she would be exploited. Here she can grow on her own schedule, and she will be probably be brewing master-level potions with Severus."

"The little b east brews?"

"Mhmmm."

"But she's— she's only— She's not even a year old!"

"What is going on?!" Lily cried, frustrated and not following the conversation at all. The stress, however, caused her disease to take advantage, and the pox began to spread all over her skin.

"Mrs Potter," one of the other healers said. "We need you to calm down. Can we move you to the room? Any stress you—"

"Calm down? I'll bloody well calm down when you start explaining!"

"If you continue to overstress yourself, the pox could spread to your baby before your antibodies can get to the foetus," the healer cried out in alarm. "Please, Mrs Potter!"

Lily paled at the mention of her unborn baby, and immediately followed the healer to the room Severus had set up for her.

The elder healer, Healer Pearl Paddington, walked in after, shooing the visibly nervous younger one off to tend to his duties on the other side of the bed. They helped her into it and brought up the blankets to keep her warm.

"Now, as Healer Robinson so kindly explained, humans are a bit more vulnerable to dragon pox. Dragons just get a rather nasty cold with flaming mucus, lots of sneezing, and itchy spots. Humans, however— well, they incubate it for a week or more, meanwhile it's highly contagious and spreading—it they get very feverish with malaise and respiratory problems, as you can easily imagine, flaming sneezes are not good for a human with normal healing. Now, we have a sedative that can help you relax and it won't pass to the foetus. It will help you rest and let your body make the antibodies you need to fight the disease off. We have other potions for you too, when your body is ready, to help buffer your immune system, but that has to wait for the initial potion to work its way through."

The healer patted her head with a cool cloth.

"Now, my name is Pearl. Pearl Paddington. Like the bear. You just call for me if you need something, my dear, and I'll work on getting you some food. Your job here is simply to rest in this case. Normally we want people to keep moving around and all that, but we want the least amount of stress on you as possible. Dragon pox is quite tenacious, I'm afraid."

"But, how could I possibly have a dragon disease," Lily said, sniffling.

"You might as well ask how you get the flu, dear," Pearl said. "Even influenza doesn't originate in people, often animals like birds and swine. Diseases jump species quite often, so it's not at all
unusual. Magic just makes things—complicated. So does age. Dragon pox can be fatal in our elderly."

"But, I've been around the Potter family, and they aren't breaking out in spots—"

Pearl stopped her. "You live with a larger family?"

"Well, not really. Just my in-laws."

"Are they older than a hundred?"

"I don't see what that has to do with—"

Pearl gave Lily a look.

"Yes, they are older than a hundred."

Healer Paddington gestured to another healer in the other room. "Rose, I need you to send a request to send an emergency high risk pox-team to the Potter estate."

"Ma'am," the other healer replied, with a curt nod.

Lily pulled on her arms in a shiver. "Why can't I ever have a normal, happy life?"

"Severus, thank you very much for coming," the elder healer said as she welcomed him into her office. "I'm Healer Paddington."

Roisinn stood on Snape's shoulder, looking down her snout at the healer as if evaluating her for a great prize.

"And hello there, little one," she added. "This must be Roisinn."

Krrrk?

Roisinn's nose was working overtime, and she snuffled the healer's hand.

Pounce!

The cubling was in the healer's arms and rubbing against her with a deep, thrumming purr.

"Apologies," Severus said. "She's insufferable."

"Insufferably adorable," the healer said with a laugh. She was instantly compelled to succumb to the lure of the fuzzy cubling belly.

"I wanted to thank you for helping with those potions and ask if you needed anything for your quarantined house-guest."

Snape shook his head. "Unless you mean a greater variety of food and better entertainment options for a witch than dreary potion making and even more study outside of Hogwarts."

"Oh, dear. I suppose she has the pregnancy has her craving all sorts of odd things."

"Odd doesn't even begin to cover it," Severus said.

Roisinn sneezed, startling herself. She looked around with wide eyes, as if hoping she wasn't going
to have to drink a potion for sneezing again.

"She wants anchovy and black olive pizza from this specific hole-in-the-wall Muggle place in East Anglia. She wants Walker's prawn cocktail crisps— with ranch dressing, sweet pickles, and a bowl of rainbow sherbet with crushed chocolate digestives… for breakfast. Pickled eggs, chips with curry sauce, cottage cheese with ginger marmalade, and Turkish Delight for dinner. Can I be honest that I'm going to be quite happy when she's out of my flat and able to take care of herself?"

Healer Paddington just chuckled. "Oh, Severus. Pregnancy is a mixed bag. Sometimes we crave the oddest things and yet sometimes we are terribly nauseated and everything makes us want to lose our lunch. At least we are out of quarantine, even if she is not. Never been so happy to be considered non-human, hrm?"

Severus sighed, petting Roisinn's ears. "I have noted the benefits, yes. I can't say that I'd recommend purposely mutating yourself to obtain such benefits, but I certainly won't argue with the happenstance positives."

Pearl chuckled. "Yes, well, I wouldn't exactly recommend being a dragon bear either. Master Morgan would probably argue that being a dragon bat is infinitely better than anything. Good old Manfred. He'd have you think our children will take over the world. Roisinn might give them a run for their money, I think."

The cubling was chewing on one of Pearl's writing quills and rolling a tea cup between her paws like a barrel.

"I cannot decide if it's pure brilliance or wily charm," Severus confessed.

"Can't it be a bit of both?" she replied with a mischievous smile.

"Dangerous combination," Severus said wryly.

"Well, I'll have Amelia given the authorisation for emergency pay on your part, and I'll send the notes to Master Morgan to formally clear you of any thoughts of skiving off just to avoid study." Pearl smiled and winked.

Severus grunted. "He wants me to keep to myself until Lily is cleared, just to be sure I won't be spreading to any of his younger charges. He'll be glad to know I'm not twiddling my thumbs."

"As if my husband would ever let you, even under quarantine, hrm?" Pearl teased with a grin.

Severus snorted. "Homework via Floo and Patronus."

"Well, it looks like Mrs Potter is improving, if a bit slowly. Being pregnant isn't helping her situation. Perhaps a few more weeks, and it will be clear of her system."

Roisinn hissed, tearing into a cloth napkin and rendering it to shreds.

Pearl frowned, placing her hand on the ornery little cubling. "Do you not get on, pet?"

The chimaera playfully bat at her and mock-mauled her hand. She bounced up and placed her paws against Pearl's face and let loose a golden cloud of vapour. As it cleared, Pearl sported a thick mane of silver.

"Oh dear," Pearl said, running her hand through her new mane. "Manfred will be very pleased."
Severus flushed at that, his pale skin turning a bit pink.

"Have you been keeping Her Ladyship from Mrs Potter?"

Snape nodded. "Yes. They don't quite get on. Roisinn seems to see her presence as an unlawful
encroachment on her territory. She can't get into Lily's room, and that makes her rather— cranky."

"Yes, well, despite what our little darling thinks," Pearl said, "she can't go everywhere. She probably
wouldn't respond well to Mrs Potter's emotional fluxes during pregnancy either— but we can't be
sure. She is very perceptive, but also a bit quick to judge. She relies on her first impressions, and she
may not always meet people in a safe and stable emotional environment."

"Pregnancy being among the most unstable, unpredictable emotional well of insanity," Snape
muttered.

Roisinn sneezed in agreement, her stinger tail burying into the healer's mane as she did her best to
imitate an writhing anaconda.

"Is anyone immune to your charms?" Pearl asked the cubling.

*Shirk?* Roisinn chirred.

"Lily," Severus said with a heavy sigh. "She'd be utterly hysterical if she had to wear a mane."

"Does she know about your glamour?"

"Know and accept are apparently two very different things," Snape answered, eyebrows furrowing.

"Not everyone can accept what we are— it is why we live with like minds here in the DoM and not
out there where a war is brewing over something as immaterial as blood status."

Snape nodded grimly. "I'm very glad such a place exists for us."

"And we're glad to have you, Severus." Pearl smiled genuinely. "Go grab yourself some lunch at the
cafe on me before you go home. Consider it a thank you for bringing me those potions early. Be sure
to feed the little darling too."

Snape snorted. "Thank you, ma'am."

"Now shoo," she said cheerily. "Thanks again."

Severus nodded and swept from the room, Roisinn bounding along right behind him with excited
leaps and pounces.

Severus glowered at the chip-stealing cubling. "Oi, miss. You have your own plate."

Roisinn chirred, wagging her tail back and forth as she clearly enjoyed whatever was on his plate
too.

"Here you go, lad," the motherly witch said as she sat down a tray. "Today's special is chicken curry
with potato samosas and garlic naan. And here's a nice steak and kidney pie for our little lady. Oh,
and our favourite sticky toffee pudding when you're ready for it."

Severus' eyes widened at the growing list of tasty foods that he'd never even imagined outside of
Hogwarts. Always before, Spinner's End was the bottom of the barrel when it came to food.
Roisinn chirped her thanks from the booster chair she was sitting on. She and her asbestos mouth dove right into the hot pie, getting the gravy all over her snout.

The elder witch laughed. "What a little charmer."

"Table manners could be a bit better."

She smiled at him. "I've seen much worse from humans, believe you me." She nodded and walked back to her counter.

Severus eyed the enthusiastic cubling's gravy-soaked snout. "I can't even imagine a person eating worse than a baby beast— at least you're very young and have an excuse."

Roisinn looked up at him, swiftly licking the gravy off her snout with her long orange tongue.

"And you're pretty adorable too."

The cubling chirped and went back to her food in a slightly more ladylike, less starving manner.

"What is that?" Lily asked from inside her warded room. She had moved into a chair and made herself busy reading, but save for occasional trips to the restroom, she was pretty much resting as directed by her healers.

Beside her was a pile of Daily Prophet newspapers, all detailing the virulent outbreak of dragon pox that had swept the nation. There had been a distressing number of fatalities due to individuals not taking the disease seriously until it was too late— some choosing home remedies to solve their problems over seeking out a good healer's care.

St Mungo's was swamped to the point where an entire ward was filled with dragon pox patients, all under quarantine due their highly contagious status. Master Healer Paddington was working almost day and night between the DoM, Ministry, and St Mungo's, and Severus had never had less time and more money than he had at that moment.

Pearl Paddington had sponsored his work in combination with her husband Manfred Morgan in developing a vaccine, Muggle style, from none other than those beasts that had been afflicted. That had healer traffic coming in and out of Snape's quarters at all hours to perfect, draw blood, brew, test, modify, and rinse, lather, and repeat.

The end of almost a month of work had accumulated into the first dragon pox vaccine for the highly virulent strain that Lily had unknowingly carried. While the vaccine would only work against that particular strain, they had perfected the first magical vaccine that could be administered via magic and potion for those for the magical world— a society that shunned Muggle methods as being worse than the plague.

Severus' reputation as a budding potioneer of the highest caliber was spreading far and wide amongst those that knew their potions, even while the normal populace was slower on the uptake of such news.

The elder Potters had been, thankfully, rushed to St Mungo's and treated before it became fatal; however Abraeaxas Malfoy had not been quite so fortunate. He had refused treatment, making a scene and bellowing that his superior pureblood genes would protect him. He would not, he had made quite clear, take a treatment devised by the impure and tainted.

Severus had idly wondered how well Lucius had been taking it and if his fellow Slytherin felt the
same as his father.

Snape turned his head to look at Lily, his thoughts running off to gambol with cublings. "What do you mean?"

"That... creature. What is it?" Lily asked, pointing at Roisinn.

The chimaera cubling froze in the midst of playing with Severus' bootlaces, instantly sensing that she was being stared at.

"This is Roisinn." Severus picked her up and cuddled her. The cubling happily drove her stinger into his mane of thick fur and clung to his head as she did so, chirring happily.

"But what is it?"

"She."

"What is she?" Lily asked, frustrated.

"She's a refugee from Rubeus Hagrid's unauthorised breeding experiments," Snape answered.

"She's from Hagrid?"

"No, she's because of Hagrid." Severus eyed Lily with a grim furrow of his dark brows. "He used a potion to breed her, intending to give her to P— to your husband and his cron— ah, friends— to protect them from the Dark Lord. He, however, didn't seem to realise that when you breed a highly intelligent magical hybrid, you cannot predict who they will choose to trust, if they even do so at all."

"She was meant for us?" Lily asked, eyes widening. "She's going to protect my family?"

Severus realised his one-time friend was entirely missing the point.

"No," Snape said. "She made her own choice to leave Hagrid and decided she and her parents should have a different family."

Lily frowned. "But she was supposed to go to us. To protect us."

Severus watched Lily rub her abdomen more frantically.

"No one is going to find or attack you here," Severus said calmly.

Lily rubbed faster. "You can't know that, Sev."

"No one is going to find or attack you here unless you've broken protocol and told someone you are here," Severus corrected.

Lily rubbed her abdomen even more quickly.

Severus' eyes seemed to darken. "Who did you tell, Lily?"

"Nu-no one!"

Severus stood, and for a moment, his emotion surged. His glamour flickered, unable to withstand the flux of emotionally charged magic. For a moment, his hair rose, writhing as energy crackled around him.
"It was just Marlene! She wanted to make sure I was safe!"

Severus ground his teeth together.

"And the Order too, so they wouldn't worry!"

"Who, exactly, is in this… Order?" Severus asked, quietly seething.

"I—"

Severus glowered at her.

"I can't say!" Lily blurted.

"Can't or won't?"

"Can't!" she cried.

"Did they give you anything?"

"Lily shook her head."

"Are you lying to me?"

"Nu-no!"

Severus closed his eyes, his shoulders slumping. "I see."

He turned his back to her. "You never really did trust me, did you, Lily?" he asked, his voice but a whisper.

"The magic called to you. Seductive. Irresistible. Yet even as you were drawn to it like a moth to flame, you could never understand why I was drawn to any magic, including that which was deemed unacceptable to you and your Gryffindor ideals. You, of all people, should have understood that magic is not something you can bottle in a jar and put a label light or darkness upon it, lest your sister Petunia be right and you just one more "freak" in the world. Yet, you will forgive her. You will forgive someone who made it his personal mission to torment me ever since the Hogwarts Express, but you will not trust that I never wished any harm to you."

Severus rolled his head in a full circle, realigning his spine with a slight popping noise. "I realise now that my best friend was a mere childhood dream— my wish for a better life idealised with you as a centerpiece." His jaw tightened. "I was a fool."

"How long do I have before they come bursting through and put their wands to my throat?"

"Sev—"

"How long, Mrs Potter? How long before the cavalry comes busting in?"

"Right about now," a voice said as a wand tip was thrust hard up against his carotid artery. "Just give me a reason," the voice hissed. "Any reason."

"I'm betting you don't need a reason," Severus sighed. "I wouldn't touch that if I were you, Fabian. You shouldn't touch anything that isn't yours."

There was a click as a hidden switch was triggered, and the protective wards surrounding Lily's
room came down.

"Your funeral," Severus said calmly, not moving.

"Shut it, Snape," the wizard who had his wand to Snape's neck ordered. "We know all about you and your unholy infatuation with Lily. She told us how you wouldn't leave her alone. How you wouldn't take no for an answer. How she was afraid to confront you and needed Dumbledore to make sure she had a safe way back in case something happened. Gideon, get Lily out of that room. We're leaving."

"I wouldn't," Snape said, his eyes flicking to the nearer door.

"What are you hiding?"

"Nothing you want to meet."

The wand pressed deep into his neck. "Open it. Now."

"I don't have the key. So sorry."

He jerked Snape by the collar and slammed him face first into the door. "Open it."

"No."

"Open the fucking door, Snape!"

"I do not have the key."

"You're lying."

"I am not."

"Alohomora!"

The door flung open wide as Snape fell flat on his face, prostrate, as Gideon, Fabian, and Lily went staggering in together, landing in a tangled heap in Amelia Bones' and Alastor Moody's shared tea room.

Both witch and wizard had their wands pointed directly at the trio's heads.

Kssshrrrkkk!

The cubling sneezed on the pile up, and a cloud of purple and pink sparkles engulfed them. She wrinkled her nose, pawing at it with her paws as if to rid herself of some foul stench. She bounded back over to Snape and headbonked him, making concerned sounds.

His arm reached around her and pulled her close.

"Fabian and Gideon Prewett," Alastor growled. "You stupid sods are both under arrest for breaking an official disease quarantine, assaulting an apprentice of the Ministry, breaking and entering, attempting kidnapping, conspiracy, and I'm reserving the right to tack on even more charges as I think of them."

"Mrs Potter," Amelia bit out, her expression grim. "We will have a warrant to search your person and belongings for homing magic beacons and unauthorised Portkeys. The three of you will be moved to Mungo's, where you will detained and treated in a sealed isolation ward for the remainder
of your recovery."

"Oh," Gideon said.

"Shite," Fabien said at the same time, as the cloud of bright colour engulfed them both.

Amelia pressed a button on the nearby desk.

"Yes, ma'am," a voice crackled from elsewhere.

"Send the Alpha Obliviation Team and the SR-71 Unspeakables Unit B to my location at once."

"Right away, ma'am," the voice confirmed, as the static disappeared.


Unspeakables dressed in their full regalia— white robes and full face masks— apparated in one after the other.

POUNCE!

One cubling attached herself to one Unspeakable in particular, rubbing against them.

They stroked her fur and wings as she did her very best to bury her stinger into their neck— in the most loving way possible.

"You, gentleman, have chosen the wrong door to break down," Amelia said, her eyes flashing with dangerous fire. She turned to the Unspeakables.

"Stun them, Obliviate them, and get them to Mungo's in whichever order makes you happiest."

The pink and purple cloud finally dissipated, exposing two tiny ginger and white kittens perched on top of Lily Potter's head.

"Mew!" they cried together.

The Unspeakables all stared and then looked at Amelia.

Amelia shook her head. "I'm wondering how Mrs Potter didn't get dosed with that magic."

Lily opened up her mouth, making every effort to lose her cool with the most dramatic scream possible—

Only it came out as the soothing sound of wind chimes in a gentle summer breeze.

Alastor rubbed at his hair. "Well, that answers that. I reckon."

"Mew!" the twin kittens protested.

Crack. Crack. Crack.

The Obliviation team arrived and looked mighty confused by what they found.

Amelia and Alastor exchanged glances. They extended their hands and shook them together.

Amelia looked utterly victorious as Alastor grunted.
"Fine, I'll do the paperwork on this one, but the next oddball calamity is all yours."

Amelia smiled.

Victory.

---

Some time later…

Two ginger kittens found themselves being nearly cuddled to death by two ginger-haired and freckled twins.

"Fred, stop chewing on that poor kitten's ear!"

"George! Stop beating that kitten against the sofa!"

"I swear to Merlin, Gideon and Fabian, if you ever change back into human beings, I'm going to curse you into the next century!" Molly screeched.

An older Weasley child had a serious look of contemplation on his face as wandless accidental magic stunned the twin toddlers. William Weasley picked up the exhausted kittens and carried them off to his room for a bit of peace and quiet.

Forgotten on the side-table, an official-looking parchment from the Ministry collected dust:

Mr and Mrs Arthur and Molly Weasley,

Due to a raid on one of the Ministry residences, your brothers Gideon and Fabian were exposed to transformative Wild Magick and have unfortunately been turned into domestic shorthaired cats.

Due to the crimes for which they have been convicted, a special collar has been fitted for both, and they will be required to be brought in twice a year to confirm the enchantments are stable. Failure to bring them in will have then brought in to a holding facility, where they will live out their sentence of ten years.

Under the terms of their modified sentence, they must remain in your home at St Ottery Catchpole. Should they escape, they will be caught and transferred to a formal holding facility.

Chiiirk!

Roisinn was on her back, happily soaking in the belly rubs of her visiting Unspeakables. Each one was, by default, intimidating in their concealing robes and masks, their uniforms so distinctive that anyone who saw them tended to give them a wide berth. Many believed them to be Death Eaters, not wanting to look at them too closely. Others believed that the Dark Lord had stolen inspiration from them in creating his Knights of Walpurgis and their skull-like masks and black robes.

Unspeakables, however, always wore white robes, their eyes covered with a blindfold, or so it seemed. Their mouths were sealed away with half-masks— the reason the job carried the name Unspeakable. Muggles had long since integrated them into their lore in various places, the most notable being the lady Justice that appeared throughout the judicial system, harkening to a time when the weighing of the heart or soul was a common belief and concern to those approaching death.

To those that didn't know them, they were the most mysterious people in the Wizarding World.

Roisinn, however, didn't care about such things. She made friends everywhere she went, distributing
manes to her favoured like one would bring wine to a dinner event. To those that knew her, it was a blessing, for her typical, happy greeting was to wrap herself around her loved one's face and bury her stinger into their neck region.

It was love, at least for her.

No one with a mane was complaining—at least in the DoM and the Aurors' various offices.

"So, what will happen to her?" Severus asked, seemingly weary of everything. His eyes seemed to carry more weight, the dark circles around his eyes attesting to the stresses he was carrying.

Roisinn placed her paws in special places on the Unspeakables hood, and the uniform's mask fell away as the hood lowered, exposing a surprised face underneath.

"You little devil," he laughed.

"You can't hide from her, Kingsley, and you know it."

"At least in private. She seems to know better in public." He snuggled the cubling, and she purred and wriggled and patted his face with her paws.

"It would be hard for people to come to terms with genial Auror versus mysterious Unspeakable, hrm?" Severus asked.

"Undoubtedly," Kingsley answered. "As for Lily Potter—" the wizard frowned. "She unwittingly exposed a nation to the most virulent and dangerous disease, and then she brought in a summoning beacon to the bowels of the Ministry just in case things went bad. Maybe that wouldn't be so hard to understand, at least in today's war looming, but—"

Kingsley sighed heavily. "I don't know, Severus. Maybe it's the pregnancy talking. My mum said she did some really odd things when she carried me. Stormed right out out into the wild and wrestled a lion."

"What?"

Kingsley laughed. "She won, too."

"Why would one go and try to wrestle a lion of all things?"

Kingsley shrugged. "Pregnancy does odd things to the brain, my friend. Most people get away lucky with just strange food cravings, back pain, and having to sleep on their side, hrm?"

Severus grunted. "I had her on such a pedestal, Kings."

"We tend to. Our first loves are powerful things. They don't have to be the person we end up with. It doesn't make it less significant." Kingsley sighed. "My first love was hot and obsessive. Oh, I thought she was the ground and sky. I orbited around her like she was my sun. And then she told me she was getting married to some fancy wizard from the Netherlands. She disappeared from my life after I helped her pack—I was so pathetic."

"I'm sorry."

Kingsley had slumped a little, but Roisinn started playing in his lap and making a right nuisance of herself. She squeaked and fell limp, exhausted, her hyper energy spent.

"How is it this little creature can make me feel better when years of introspection wouldn't?"
"It's her talent," Severus said, playing with her stinger tail with his fingers.

The tail slithered around his wrist and she clung upside down like a bat from his arm, swinging back and forth as she yawned and wrapped herself with her wings.

"Her parents seem utterly chill about you having her all the time," Kingsley said.

"Her chosen are extended family, all which are 'allowed' to take care of her. If it were strangers, they'd be busting through the walls," Severus replied, smirking in amusement.

"So, why didn't they attack when you had unexpected guests?" Kingsley asked.

"Roisinn was calm. They were watching. If she'd been in true distress, they'd have mauled them to death, most likely."

Kingsley nodded.

"I'm happy they picked up on my not trying to fight back," Snape admitted. "I really didn't want to christen my first place in the blood of idiots."

Kingsley laughed heartily. "Severus, you're something else."

Thump.

A large manticore head landed in Kingsley's lap, very unsubtly requesting ear rubs.

Kingsley laughed and obliged, gaining a rumbling purr from the beast.

"Some man-eater," Kingsley observed.

"Probably more so if you were some idiot trying to break in while I or one of us, at least, wasn't here."

"How is your Homomagus meditations coming along?"

"Still using the glamour," Severus said. "I practice every day, but it's surprisingly hard to remember what being human was like when it was associated with the worst times of my life."

"More like you don't want to remember, eh?" Kings said.

"Hn," Severus said. "My memories are clear but— associated with nastiness."

"Well, I wouldn't give up. It will serve you well to not need the glamour, even if you do have it on you for Muggle areas just in case."

Severus nodded. "I think Roisinn has been paying a bit too much attention to my meditations," he said. "Have you noticed that she can transform parts of herself like— paws into hands?"

"You're serious?" Kingsley sputtered.

"She did it right in front of Amelia."

Kingsley seemed thoughtful. "There is something uniquely powerful about her— almost too intelligent as if she was born into this life knowing exactly what she wants."

"Well, that's unlikely, because why would she have chosen me first?" Snape said. "Of all the people
in Hogwarts—OW!"

The cubling dug her stinger into his bicep, unimpressed.

"Good thing you're immune," Kingsley said as the cubling jumped over to his lap and flopped down on it, snubbing Snape in a very feline manner.

"Still hurts like hell," Severus said.

"She's part feline, part super-flexible scorpion, part Nundu—and all ornery. Aren't you, little love?" Kingsley asked, snuggling the cubling.

Roisinn purred, wrapping her tail around his neck and dangling from his mane. She flapped her wings against Kingsley's face.

"Fickle beast," Severus said, rubbing his arm.

A pair of large jaws materialised and pried the cubling off Kingsley.

Roisinn instantly went limp, allowing her mum to carry her off, her only protest being a soft, disappointed meow-chirp.

"There is something about her. Like the memory of a dream," Snape said. "She feels like— someone I should have known, but I can guarantee I have never known a chimaera cubling in my life."

"Previous life, perhaps," Kingsley said thoughtfully. He looked sombre. "Sometimes you are just meant for someone, and we don't always get it right. Something happens. Someone throws in a monkey wrench. Wars. Born into the wrong family. It's almost as if the universe shakes us up, wondering if we'll still meet up if the conditions aren't perfect. But, if there's one thing I believe in," Kingsley continued, "it's that things that are supposed to be will be, one way or another."

"I'm not sure if that is uplifting or depressing, Kingsley."

Kingsley laughed. "Uplifting, most assuredly. Face it, of all the people she could have run into, she made a beeline to the bloke hiding out in an ice-shelter, bonding to him so it alerted our head boss of us, who brought herself and Alastor there within minutes— insuring that both she and you, and well, us, are all taken care of beneath the wings of the DoM. Your most painful tormentors were exposed and sent to Azkaban. To me, Severus, that was karma come to collect. You may have done your share of trying to get back at them, but after having seen the memories, it's clear it was you against the world and—" Kingsley sighed.

"Dumbledore."

"Yes," Kingsley said. "I wouldn't have believed it until I saw the memories. The fact you couldn't even say anything about it until Her Ladyship's bond bumped that compulsion out—"

"I—" Severus looked down, thoughtful. "I never gave the beasts the credit I should have. Every class I had with Kettleburn just told me they were the reasons you'd lose fingers and limbs. This thing with Hagrid only makes me glad he hadn't bred up a dragon and had it imprint on him."

"Makes you wonder, hrm?" Kingsley said. "She's obviously attached to her parents, but she is able to bond with more than just them. The chance that such an ability would pass to her from her very random parents. Maybe karma isn't something so far-fetched, but perhaps something even greater is at work here."
"Greater than kharma?" Severus asked.

"The great equaliser," Kingsley said.

Severus seemed thoughtful, and then his eyes widened. "Death."

"Have you ever read the *Tale of Three Brothers*, Severus?" Kingsley asked.

"No." Severus tilted his head.

"Death was tricked by three wizard brothers, and He was forced to give them three gifts: the most powerful wand that ever was, a stone that could bring back the dead, and a cloak of invisibility," Kingsley summarised. "They returned to the lands of men proud and confident in their arrogance, but all but one died shortly after. Only the coward, the brother with the cloak of invisibility, lived in hiding all his life only to pass the cloak on to his son before he died. It is said, not in the story book, that a great imbalance in the world came into being when the brothers tricked Death— not that they tricked Him, but that they forced Him to give them items from His domain— things that never belonged in the mortal realm. Death, they say, is seeking to eventually right that injustice— not for the dishonour or the shame of being tricked but for the balance of the world and the chaos caused by His Hallows being loosed upon the world."

"Things that should never have left Death's domain." Severus' eyebrows furrowed. "But how might that explain Roisinn?"

Kingsley shrugged. "If you wanted to ensure that the appropriate people had the necessary tools to set things right, why not gift them with the world's most enigmatic cubling?"

"Shouldn't she have come complete with a game plan?" Severus muttered.

Kingsley chuckled. "What fun would that be?"

"The kind of fun that results in a successful outcome," Severus said.

"Killjoy," Kingsley said with a cheeky grin.

"That's me," Severus confirmed.

Gruffydd took that precise moment to snatch Severus up by the nape of the mane and drag him off to bed.

"It seems I'm being told it's bedtime," Severus said dryly. "Night, Kingsley." His black dragonhide bootheels scraped on the floor as he was unceremoniously prey-dragged to bed.

Kingsley laughed uproariously at the highly amusing sight of the younger wizard being hauled off like an errant cub.

"Goodnight, Severus," Kingsley finally managed after catching his breath.

*YOINK!*

One cloaked fey-dragon grabbed Kingsley up by the legs and and carried him off to the communal nesting bowl.

"GAH!" Kings cried.

As Zoë tucked Kings into the nesting bowl, Roisinn snuggled up in between him and Severus as her
parents wrapped their bodies around them both.

"Justice," Severus said with a smirk, closing his eyes.

Kingsley sighed deeply as he closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep.

________________________

End of Chapter One

________________________

Spiders whisper in background.

"Hey, where are the spiders?"

"Maybe they were frozen in the Arctic Freeze of Doom."

"Coldest kind of doom, for sure."

"Well, maybe they'll thaw out in time for the next chapter."

"Maybe."

Shifty eyed whispering commences.

"Hey, if Roisinn adopts us, will we get manes and a stinger too?"

"That would be cool!"

Spiders scurry off to make friends with the chimaera cubling.
Chapter 2

**Summary:** [HG/SS] Hagrid bred some of his 'armless animals together to "help" the Potters defend themselves from the Dark Lord. It does not end as he hoped.

**Beta Love:** The Dragon and the Rose, Dutchgirl01, Flyby Commander Shepard

**Warning:** Graphic violence, Dementors, and Azkaban

---

**Eye of the Dragon, Hair of the Cat**

**Chapter Two**

Crackity Crack Fic of Crack by Corvus Draconis

"*Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could,*

*they didn't stop to think if they should.*"

Dr Ian Malcolm, *Jurassic Park*

---

Roisinn pounced on the scurrying movement, her paws slamming down first as her mouth closed upon her victim—

"*Eeee! Don't eat me!*" a little voice squeaked.

Roisinn sat down, licking her snout with her orange tongue as she released her hostage.

The slobbered-on arachnid hastily groomed itself back into order, and its body poofed into extreme fluffiness. Multiple pairs of eyes glinted back at her.

They regarded each other with mutual wary curiosity.

Roisinn licked her paws and lightly bopped the spider on the abdomen.

"*Eee!*"

The spider skittered to the right.

*Bop!*

It skittered to the left.

*Bop! Bop!*

"*Please don't eat me!*"

Roisinn picked the spider up in her mouth and trotted away, the spider wriggling its legs in protest from in between her teeth.
"Well... I guess I'll come with you then—" the spider finally squeaked in surrender.

"Severus."

"Hn?"

"When did you gain spiders?"

"Hrm."

Severus looked over to where Roisinn was playing a rousing game of bop the spiders with a clawless paw. The clutter of fluffy, multi-coloured spiders was all squeaking in different tones, and he could swear he heard the tune Sovay squeaked out between them.

The spiders plucking strands of silk over a sounding board making it sound like a guitar only made the observation even more surreal.

Severus arched a brow. "To be fair, we started with just one, and she attracted— friends."

"She?"

"Thisbe," Severus said. "Her friends are— as of yet— unnamed."

A blue-grey spider skittered by, a small bucket stuck to its head. It clunked into a vase, and the flowers tipped out as they spilt onto the floor.

"'Cept for that one, "Severus said with a sigh. "That's Bucket."

The dragonbat yawned, all fangs and found himself to be the new and improved nesting bowl of one chimaera cubling and a clutter of fluffy arachnids.

Roisinn imitated his yawn, showing all her teeth just like he did.

Manfred touched noses with the cubling, and she squeaked, playfully whumping her paw into his muzzle.

"Careful, you'll end up with a mane," Severus said with a sniff.

"They are rather stunning," Master Morgan confessed. "My Pearl looks quite wonderful with one."

Snape regarded his master with something akin to tempered tolerance.

"I suppose."

"You don't think so?"

"I'm not allowed to think on such things."

Manfred guffawed. "I suppose you're correct. I would hate to have to murder my own apprentice for making googly eyes at my wife."

Snape shook his head sharply. "No."

"So you're saying that my mate is unattractive."

"NO!"
"So you _HAVE_ been looking at her."

"Not like _that_!" Severus insisted, his mane standing on end.

Master Morgan chuckled.

**WHAP!**

A shimmering white bear paw swatted the teasing dragonbat upside the head. "Behave, husband."

Manfred made puppy eyes at his mate. "Aww."

Pearl gave her mate a quick kiss before exiting to the next room.

Severus shook his head as Roisinn bounded after her, toppling and sending the clutter of spiders flying off in many directions.

"Eeee!" they cried. "Wait for us!"

"Don't leave us here to be eaten!"

"We hate being eaten!"

"Will weave soft linens for safety!"

"Maybe a robe or two!"

"Or a dozen doilies!"

The clutter disappeared after their cubling.

Manfred scratched his neck with his wing thumb. "Who are we to question insecure and strangely adorable spiders here at the DoM of all places?"

Bucket bumped into Manfred's foot, the shiny silver bucket obscuring all of his eyes. He gave a sad squeak of distress.

Manfred picked the pail-cursed arachnid and popped the bucket off his head.

The spider looked at him with scared eyes. "Don't eat me!"

"No worries," Manfred reassured. "I'm not a spider-eater."


"How is it you seem unnaturally attached to that pail?"

"It's a curse," the spider said. "A crazy person saw me and hit me with some sort of beam, and now every time I pass a bucket, it slams down on top of me. Always resizing just large enough to get stuck on my head. Sometimes my head and my abdomen." Bucket sighed heavily. "On the bright side, most things can't eat me through a pail."

Manfred rubbed Bucket's abdomen, and the spider let out a pleased thrum.

"Ooo, I like that."

The spider proceeded to make himself at home on Manfred's shoulder with a contented squeak.
"You're always making new friends," Severus said with a heavy sigh. "You're just as bad as Roisinn."

"As great as," Manfred said proudly.

"Debatable," Severus muttered.

Morgan chuckled. "You're still worried about your friend."

Severus frowned. "Obviously not my friend."

"That doesn't exactly erase the fact you thought she was," Manfred said.

"I can't believe she actually thought Roisinn was supposed to go with her as protection, even after all that happened. It bothers me that she would think just because Hagrid meant her for Potter that it would be okay to have her. She doesn't even know. Snape curled his lips.

"That, and I think Her Ladyship would rather eat a pickled toad than being forced to cohabitate with anyone." Morgan looked towards the planter where a leaf had been ever-so-carefully chewed around the thorns. "Or even my poor thorny dragontail plant."

"Don't forget you have to sit your potion proof exam tomorrow," Manfred reminded. "It's one of the few times they don't even allow familiars into the place. Apparently someone, somewhere, used their familiar to cheat on an exam at one point, so now none of them are allowed in. Mind you, coming in with Roisinn, Zoë, and Gruffydd— and maybe a clutter of spiders— all at the same time would probably go over much as you'd expect."

Severus snorted. "Why they need me to prove I actually brewed the dragon pox vaccine potion seems a little short sighted considering I already did so many batches and taught others how to."

Manfred shrugged. "Normally they would take a master's word for it, but alas, someone is being a rather painful stick in the mud at the office. I think her name is Dorkass Umbitch."

Severus spat his tea. "Dolores Umbridge?"

"Yeah, same thing."

Severus cleared his throat, knowing that his master was not the type to easily forget names.

"She's been sticking her grabby little hands into every regulation, showing a severe distaste for non-purebloods, children, beasts, and creatures of all kinds." Morgan wrinkled his nose.

"If she ever saw the DoM's true face, she'd probably explode," Snape said.

"Mmm. Quite probably." Morgan shrugged. "I'm about to after seeing her obnoxious rampaging pinkness causing havoc around the Ministry. Good thing our glamours are damn powerful. I'd imagine getting a good look at the likes of us would have her trying to make up all sorts of interesting new laws. Worse comes to worst, I can go out in an Unspeakable uniform and intimidate the living hell out of her without saying a single word."

Severus snorted. "You love doing that even without a reason."

"It's a gift," Manfred admitted without shame.

"How did you end up a dragonbat of all things? I can at least blame Roisinn, but what's your excuse?"
Morgan itched his ear with one wing. "Back when Pearl and I were both apprenticing under Master Kensington, he had another apprentice—Apprentice Moreau. He was working on his master's project, and was convinced that he could make a potion that could give you the best survival traits of animals without turning them into them."

"I'm guessing that went well," Severus said dryly.

"It exploded when he found out he was allergic to bear dander." Morgan wrinkled his nose. "He sneezed into the cauldron at the most critical stage. Pearl and I, Jackson, Giles, Angus, and Rebecca—we all turned into something dragon plus one. Poor Jackson is probably the worst off of our lot, being a ruddy dragon-shark."

"That's not exactly something you can comfortably sit in a lounge chair as," Severus observed. "At least he wasn't a hagfish?"

"That would be, arguably, even worse," Morgan admitted.

"At least he's currently enjoying the aquatic highlife guarding the waters around Azkaban," Morgan added. "If there is such a thing as a highlife guarding Azkaban. He claims he loves it."

"Whatever happened to Apprentice Moreau?" Severus asked.

"Rumour has it he became a unique, highly virulent strain of dragon pox and was locked away in containment in a highly secure research lab in the very deepest bowels of the DoM. If that's true, I don't know for sure. I tend to think he's actually a dragon-flea, locked up for pretty much the same reasons," Morgan said. "Gods only know what hideous thing he might be a carrier of."

Severus suddenly went very still. "Master, what if it was his work that went into that potion that Hagrid somehow got his hands on. Set all of this into motion?"

Morgan hmmed. "Magical blood potions have existed for a very long time, especially for wealthy pureblood families who wanted to ensure their wives or husbands were of pure blood or wanted their adoptees to share the same blood. Moreau did not intentionally use human blood as a binder. He was far more interested in beasts and their natural resilience. His work was hardly repeatable, as his own unique body chemistry went into that sneeze. It is far more likely that this Hagrid person got his hands on an old pureblood bloodline insurance potion. I can only guess how. Those are both incredibly rare and hideously expensive. They are not just idly given away. Unless—"

Morgan slowly rubbed his chin. "Someone in the family was trying to sabotage it from within and ensure no one outside the blood could join their family. Hard to say. I can't imagine any pureblood family being happy with either that action or the fact they have a familial relationship with a chimaera."

Severus set down the paper he was reading. "Any reason sounds overly complicated to me."

"Unfortunately, yes," Manfred replied with a brief roll of his eyes. "Blood purity and blood magic have always been rife with such drama."

"Much like the war—I'm definitely on the hit list for the blood supremacists, now." Severus frowned. "Even with the glamour, I doubt such people cannot simply read the Prophet and learn all about the extensive trial."

Manfred nodded. "In Slytherin, you must have been treading a delicate line between acceptable prejudice and real."
Severus winced. "My hatred for my drunken bastard of a Muggle father helped me fit into the common attitude towards Muggleborns, yes, even at the expense of my own heritage."

"She's changed you."

Snape tilted his head. "More like— given me a much-needed wake-up call, I think. I was convinced the only way to escape my father was by smashing him into the dirt where he belonged."

"Many prejudices start with one slight," Manfred said slowly. "Much like cancer, it spreads little by little until it grows entirely out of control. It might even start out with perfectly justifiable reasons, but they feed on our fears and our hatreds— our own hidden insecurities. The outcome is often still misguided, but that kind of hatred is what drives wars and feeds the fear that keeps the war engines going. Look at that ruddy fool, Abraxas Malfoy. He refused any and all that he termed to be dirty, impure treatments, and he may have died still firmly believing in his delusions. The question is, does the rest of the family share them? Or has his death caused a kind of epiphany like Roisinn did for you?"

Snape furrowed his brows. "I haven't spoken to Lucius since graduation. It is hard to say. Occasionally, I see him in the Ministry, but he either does not see me or is intentionally trying not to."

Manfred nodded. "He is very much in the public eye— for that reason alone I suspect that if he was more sympathetic, he could not dare to show it. There is, of course, the chance that he is much as his late father was. It would be hard to say for sure."

"As much as you probably don't want to care about this," Morgan added, rubbing at his itchy chin, "I would be more concerned about your former classmates in Azkaban. Most prefer not to think of such things, but they put quite a few people away while in training— people who, unlike you, have absolutely nothing to lose in murdering them should the opportunity arise."

Snape closed his eyes. "I find it hard to scrape up any modicum of pity for the likes of Potter," he said. "Especially after he both saved my life and then tried to take me out himself. Seven years of being constantly stalked and tormented hasn't exactly improved my opinion of him either."

"Even greater people than us would find that quite difficult, I fear," Manfred observed. "Most view the deeds that result in one landing in Azkaban as unspeakably sordid affairs, not fit to be talked about even behind closed doors. Those who end up there find that nothing they do can possibly be seen as worse, and who bloody cares if the criminals off each other in there to the public's favour?"

Snape grunted. He wrinkled his nose as he felt the inner tug of the old life debt— the curse of his life being saved by one of his most hated enemies.

He frowned harder, his snout wrinkling into a snarl and then relaxing. "Very well, Master. I will require a day off."

Manfred nodded. He sipped his tea and sighed. "You are already far more than they will ever be, Severus. What you do now can only prove it— or leave it hidden away in solitude."

The Dementors, James realised, were getting highly irritated by the lack of a satisfying richness to their feedings. Perhaps, they had savoured his pain and agony more than the others. They didn't bother him if he wallowed in a pit of despair, but the moment he thought of Lily or the sheer happiness he would feel while wringing Snivellus' scrawny neck—

But when the cell door opened, James realised that the Dementors were actually holding back. The
cold wasn't as frigid, and he had... guests.

"Tch," a gravelly voice tutted. "How the mighty have fallen off their shining broom of Gryffindor righteousness."

A few figures made their way into James' cell, and while they were wandless, they didn't seem to think that was a problem.

James' eyes widened as he realised they were pulling out wands made of what appeared to be either the bones of small animals, desiccated celery stalks, or overly-salted carrots wrapped in human hair and some sort of wispy, unnatural-looking thread— makeshift enough to serve a crude purpose, should they actually work.

"Crucio!"

James fell backwards, slammed hard against the far wall as his body arched in agony. His spine bowed and felt as if his spine would break right then and there.

Yes, apparently, the crude wands were good enough. Maybe it would never be enough to power an Apparate out of the heavily-warded Azkaban, but it would be and was just enough to send out an effective Cruciatus curse.

The makeshift wand shattered after one use, but James' torture was far from over. Each of his unwelcome visitors apparently had a one-use wand specifically for his pleasure.

"Crucio!"

"Crucio!"

"CRUCIO!"

James screamed out in agony until his scream became utterly silent, his vocal cords making no sound as he continued on in a soundless wail.

Even when the agony eased, if but for a moment, the kicking began, and even the shoeless heels connecting to his abdomen triggered blossoming pain beyond what he believed possible.

They grabbed his solitary sheet, and tied it around his ankles, dangling him upside down from the singular sconce. The fire burned, unable to set anything to flame due to the enchantments, but it was still hot— the sole source of heat in the chilled cell.

James felt his feet writhing in agony, and he frantically strained to free himself.

His vision was getting blurry. He couldn't focus. He felt the tip of a stone-sharpened by repeated grinding against Azkaban's hard and despair-soaked floor— press against his neck. The tip pressed in, drawing a bead of blood as it started a slow drag against his flesh.

"We'll make you bleed slow, Potter," one voice growled lowly. "We may never leave this place, but you'll pay in blood and pain for your crusades against our families."

"I was never a Dark wizard," another said, "but I decided, since you made me out to be one, I would become one just to make you bleed."

"You left my wife and son without a father."
"I don't really have a reason but to see you writhe."

"Yes, we really don't need reasons in here of all places. We are already damned."

"We may disagree on things, but we can agree that you—oh, you deserve every last bit of pain we can give you."

"Thankfully, the Dementors seem to agree with us."

The group gathered around James, their malevolent auras wrapping around him as surely as a noose.

James coughed, blood trickling down his mouth, across his cheek, and into his eyes as he dangled helplessly.

"Lily," he whispered, his hazel eyes going glassy.

"Callin' out to his dirty Mudblood whore," one of the voices sneered.

"Pathetic."

"Couldn't even keep his wee little todger in his pants until after Hogwarts."

"Well, I hope his child grows up thinking its father was a bloody Azkaban flunkie who couldn't even survive the stress."

"It's going to be fun when we see her visit to find all of her dreams crushed," another voice gloated.

"You are hardly an innocent in this, are you, Potter?"

James made a whimpering wheeze in the back of his throat.

"We can take off his bollocks," another suggested with a disturbing leer. "He won't be needing 'em anymore, eh?"

"Why stop there?"

The group of convicts startled, spinning to see a tall, slim figure dressed from head-to-toe in relentless black, a goblin silver "collar" shining around his neck.

"A warden!"

"There are no wardens, you blithering ninnyhammer! Get him! We outnumber him!"

They rushed him, but his form shimmered and disappeared. The prisoners toppled over each other like dominoes. The one with the shank attempted to make good on his promise and shove it deep into Potter's neck, but a venom-loaded stinger suddenly thrust through his back and up past his ribcage. A maned snout materialised in the gloom as a sickly yellow-green fluid dripped from each wickedly sharp yellowed fang.

A miniature maned snout materialised from the larger beast's shoulder and belched a bright orange cloud into the wizard's face before leaping onto his face, wrapping around it like an overzealous octopus, and buried her stinger into the man's neck. He fell backwards onto the floor, convulsing as venom and magic cloud worked together to devastating effect.

She looked up to the larger beast, perhaps for approval of her accomplishment.

The black-clad beast picked her up, cuddling her close as she scrambled onto his shoulder and
"vanished" in a blur.

The group of prisoners scrambled up and attempted to rush him yet again, but the chimaera side-steppe, his tail whipping out like a lash and tripping every one of them. His wing flipped out and slapped them collectively upside the head, knocking their skulls together with a tink, tonk, dink, and a donk.

A shadow moved behind him as he lay one paw on the nearest wizard's neck to check for a pulse.

**Scrreeeeekkkkk!**

One enthusiastic cubling schlucked his face in a suctioned, gecko-sticky embrace to the face as her stinger burrowed deep into his throbbing carotid artery.

The man fell to the floor, twitching spasmodically.

"Hey there, wee lassie," the familiar gruff voice of Alastor Moody said as he opened his hands to her.

The cubling perked her ears to the Auror's familiar tones and happily pounced him, wrapping herself around his head and burrowing her stinger into his mane with a loving croon.

"Yes, yes. lass, I love you too," Moody muttered, prying her off his face so he could see. "Savage, get Potter down from that sconce and get him over to Mungo's. Proudfoot, Beauchamp, transfer these ruddy ingrates to the high-security holding cells at the Aurory. McFadden, I want you to scan and save memory threads of every cell they escaped from, and get Grissom and Mayhew to secure every single cell, one by one, on this entire floor. We'll secure all the others one by one as we get more of our people over here."

"Severus."

The black chimaera snorted, looking up.

"Good work. Take Our Fuzzy Lady here and go debrief with the Head Boss of Us and Master Morgan."

Severus nodded silently and extended his arms to Roisinn.

The cubling chirred unhappily, not quite done hugging Alastor's face.

Alastor snuggled the cubling, rubbing her snout and gently prying her off himself with a *ttthhhhk* noise. "There you go, my Lady. I'll see you later."

Roisinn swung her tail down and thumped into Severus' arms, wrapping her tail around his maned neck and anchoring herself with her stinger.

A team of green-robed healers came in, each carrying a Patronus lantern on a and wearing the distinctive goblin-silver collars that allowed them to pass through the formidable wards of Azkaban. They worked with Savage to stabilise James Potter's body as quickly as possible.

"He's going to live," the one healer finally said. She placed four glowing stones around him, activating them with a touch and trace of her finger. "The transport-ward beacon is stable. Let's Apparate him out."

"Four, three, two—"
They were gone.

**Azkaban Inmates Attempt to Murder Imprisoned Potter Scion,**

**Two Dead**

A group of Dark wizards that had been sent to Azkaban for war crimes involving the rise of You-Know-Who, attempted to maim and murder former Auror Trainee James Potter.

The prisoners, who had managed to craft wands out of found materials and leftovers from their meal trays, accosted Potter in his own cell and used these wands to torture him before resorted to physical violence and threats of worse.

Mr Potter was found beaten and hung upside down from a room sconce with evidence of being inflicted with multiple Cruciatius curses. He remains in critical condition at St Mungo's.

The prisoners that organised and participated in the revolt are being retried for their latest crimes before the Wizengamot on Wednesday morning, and they are set to be transferred to Nurmengard to serve the remainder of their sentences.

Additional renovations are currently being implemented at Azkaban prison, along with a new policy involving the charming of uneaten food items to banish themselves to a food disposal facility after a pre-set time to prevent prisoners from using food to craft any new hedge-wands.

Dementor guards will now be supplemented by a rotating group of Auror wardens who will be shifted in and out on a regular basis. Cells will be carefully examined and changed out regularly, and new improved magic-dampening rune wards will be engraved and set to add to the established ones.

Rumour has it that a few cases that sent certain persons to Azkaban are now being re-opened after an investigation into the incident at the prison revealed that some of those involved had been sent there on personal prejudices, assumptions and past deeds rather than facts and may instead be the victims of a miscarriage of justice. Whether this was due to a deliberate misrepresentation or manufacturing of information or simply the result of a shoddy, substandard investigation., we at the Prophet will be closely watching these retrials with great interest and will report the results to you as they are made available.

James awoke painfully and felt the thrum of powerful wards on the bed on which he lay. He looked around, and noticed the absence of the scent of salty sea air and caught the soft hint of grass and leaves mixed with potions and disinfectant.

His father sat in a nearby chair with a Prophet in his hands. He folded it and looked at him. "Son."

"Father."

"Not content to leave trouble behind you, hrn?" his father said. "You would have died had it not been for your friend."

James blinked, confused. "Sirius saved me?"

"No," Fleamont Potter replied with a stifled yawn as a house elf popped in with a much-needed tea
"That talented young potioneer from the Ministry. Saved your mum's life and my life as well. Saved your wife and the baby too. From the dragon pox. The baby dodged quite a curse for sure. Lily's been through a bit of an ordeal these last few weeks. When we got sick, she was exposed too, and she unknowingly spread it to numerous other people at Gringott's, Diagon Alley, and the Ministry before they realised she was a carrier. Healer Paddington at the Ministry and Healer Steele here at Mungo's told us that we are all exceedingly lucky to be alive. If he hadn't recognised the symptoms, we'd all be dead—maybe half of Wizarding Britain too. Old Abraxas Malfoy wasn't quite so fortunate and ended up kicking the broom. A few of the old families are a bit less now than they had been. We're still here, though, thanks to your friend."

"Dad, I don't know any potioneer from the Ministry."

"Don't be silly, James," his father answered, sipping his tea. "He's the newest Apprentice of the Master Morgan. People would often bring their children into the Ministry to pass him by just in the hopes that he might find them promising."

James was silent.

"Your mum once tried to get him to take an interest in you. Dressed you up very nicely and paraded you out at the market. You knocked over an entire fruit display of mangoes and a crate of papayas as well. You didn't exactly make a good impression with fruit bits and juice all over your face and hands. Your poor mum was utterly mortified, of course."

"He's a remarkably commanding figure, your friend," Fleamont went on. "Such fathomless black eyes and a large Roman nose. He looks not unlike your great-great-grandfather, Hardwin. Same focused glare, just like his portrait, hah. Ancient Roman name too: Severus."

"SNIVELLUS?! You've got to be joking me, dad. There is no fucking way that bloody SNIVELLUS saved anyone in my family!"

Fleamont's jaw tightened in anger and he sat up much straighter, his hazel eyes flashing. "Now you listen here, and listen well son," he snapped. "That fine young man saved all of our lives. Saved your life as you were being set up to die in Azkaban. He saved me, your mum, your wife and your unborn baby. If you can't put two and two together and figure out precisely what that means, then I have to wonder if you actually learned anything in that school."

James' face reddened. "You need to get checked out! You could've been poisoned by that slimy git!"

"Don't be ridiculous, son," Fleamont said, giving James a narrow-eyed glare of rapidly dwindling patience. "The very best healers in Mungo's have assured us that we're the healthiest we've ever been. They've all worked very hard to save most of magical Britain. He could have very easily pulled on life debts to every family."

James' head jerked up. "Life debt?"

"Yours, however, was right there out front. But he said that he didn't want it. He said if I wanted to know why I should ask you about one particular full moon night during your sixth year. What happened?"

"It was nothing, dad," James said, looking shifty. "I just got him out of, uh… a bit of a sticky situation, that's all."

"Don't forget that I've known you all your life, James. I always know when you're lying, and I knew when you stole from me too," Fleamont said pointedly.
James' eyes widened.

"I had always hoped that you'd eventually get all the nonsense out of your system and come back like the prodigal. The trial just seemed to confirm to your mum and I that we'd let you off far too easy. We should have brought the hammer down so much sooner. Questioned you sneaking out the upstairs window on your brooms with that sneaky Black chap. We didn't, and that was our failing —" His father narrowed his eyes at him. "But our personal failings were not the only ones. We may have spoiled you terribly—"

"Dad—"

"But you made your own choices, son, and your mum and I had a very long talk with Mr Dumbledore after you were sent to Azkaban." Fleamont sighed. "Seems my family cloak found its way into Dumbledore's custody. Don't really remember ever letting you take it. See, the cloak will always come back to me since I never gave it to anyone. Imagine his surprise when it floated to my hand."

James' father steepled his fingers. "I do not know what punishment is most appropriate for you, son. You are a grown man, now. You have a wife and an unborn son who both rely on you, yet you are now unemployed and unemployable—you have no honour, and your sentence spans a decade. You have shamed us and your wife—and Lily herself has managed to draw the ire of quite a few families, albeit indirectly, by unknowingly infecting them with dragon pox and even breaching the security of the Ministry."

"Yet," Fleamont continued inexorably, "Severus Snape proved himself to be a most gracious and honourable young man, and I think you should think on that a while before you dare refer to him by that childish, disgusting nickname. As it is, now that you are awake, I am going to Gringotts to transfer the rights for Sleekeazy's to our saviour. It is the very least I could do."

"But, Father—"

Fleamont Potter stood up. "I am glad you are alive, my son, but right now, I cannot even stand to look at you. You mum will be here a bit later to check on you."

With that, Fleamont Potter swept from the hospital room in a flurry of pewter silk robes.

[Advert in the Daily Prophet]

Sleekeazy's and Sleekeazy's Supreme Now Available!

Having a perfectly dreadful hair day? Having a ho-hum hair day?

Sleekeazy's and the new formulated Sleekeazy's Supreme are available to bring order to even the most insufferably untamable hair.

While the original formula is still as good as it ever, for those who want their hair to look stunningly healthy and remain perfectly in place for both the simplest and most elaborate styles, the new and improved formula can be used to create hair that behaves so well, it could win best of show all on its own!

For those with terminal bedhead, three drops of each formula mixed together before bed promise a perfectly groomed look for everything from short hair to even the bushiest mane from the moment your head leaves the pillow.
Give it a try!
Your hair will thank you!

Chii'rrrk!

Roisinn purr-wiggled into Fleamont's lap as he signed the papers in front of Head Goblin Hasterfang.

The goblin was trying to keep a straight face but wasn't quite successful. Roisinn had charmed her away across every bank table, run off with four out of ten quills, and stolen three of the lunch sarnies, and relieved them of an entire jar of goblin-made sour cherry jam.

No one was complaining—especially not the goblins sporting gloriously fluffy yet still intimidating manes.

"Hey there, little lass," Fleamont cooed.

Roisinn wiggled her little bum and wrapped her stinger tail around his wrist, using her wings to flap and whap his face playfully. He tickled her belly, and she gave him a gentle puff of purple and gold sparkles to the face. After it dissipated, Fleamont sported a new bright white mane with a halo of gold-green sparkles.

Fleamont signed the parchment in front of him, pouring the sealing wax onto the contract and pressing his signet ring into it. Severus did the same, only the enthusiastic cubling pressed her paw into the warm wax too, getting her pads imprinted into the cooling seal along with Snape's imprint.

The overseeing goblin pressed his seal into poured wax and signed below it, earning himself a paw to the face and a wing about the head. His thick "mane of acceptance" protected him from her exuberant expressions of love.

"The trust will remain in place for the child when he is of school age, during which withdrawals will be allowed for schooling, clothing, supplies, health needs, and a personal stipend each week. Once their N.E.W.T.'s have been sat with an achievement of A and better, the trust will accessible in its entirety. If by some stroke of misfortune, he is beset by poverty, the trust will be able to be accessed for necessities of life to be supervised by Fleamont and Euphemia Potter, and if they are unavailable, then Severus Snape."

Mrrrrk! Hiss!

The cubling lashed her tail back and forth.

"And my Lady Roisinn," the goblin corrected.

Roisinn, appeased, purred loudly in response. She forgave the goblin's unintentional blunder by rub-bumping up against him, gently thwapping her stinger into his side.

"Thank you for your kind consideration, Severus," Fleamont said warmly. "I know you did not have to set aside anything for a child that is not yours."

"The child is but an innocent, even if the parents could have made— far better choices all around."

Fleamont and Severus shook hands. "Thank you so much for what you've done for our family, Severus," he said. He patted him on the shoulder. "And for what you didn't do, as well."
Severus’ lip quirked slightly. Then he nodded his head briefly in acknowledgement before the goblin clapped his hands and ordered a formal luncheon to be served to seal the dealings with fine food and drink and convivial company.

Harry trembled as he staggered to the place where his best female friend had pushed him off to face his destiny.

"Go, Harry!" Hermione had yelled. "We'll cover your back!"

"We—?"

Severus Snape stood beside Hermione, a stream of blood trickling down his neck and his wand levelled to cover Hermione's back. Hermione, her sides heaving with the strain and mounting exhaustion, struggled to remain standing up straight. Snape stood as a solid, powerful presence behind her, and she seemed to draw in strength from his reassuring proximity.

They moved seamlessly, and at that moment, Harry realised everything he had assumed was just one more blindness.

Hermione gazed into the potion master's eyes, and Harry saw something flicker across the dour man's face.

Harry could feel the pull of strong magick in the ground beneath his feet, swiftly drawing toward them.

"Run, Harry," Hermione mouthed, her brown eyes filling with liquid fire.

Severus used his wand to slice his arm directly across his Mark, and blood dripped, and the surge of magic flared even greater.

Hermione's hand wrapped securely around his arm, her fingers closed around it. "Ad impediendum motum per marcam."

Harry ran towards Hogwarts as the nova of magic spread outward. Death Eaters were falling around him, clutching their arms as a strange, crippling paralysis took each one, leaving them open to being dealt with by the opposing side. The unmarked started to waver in their resolve, attempting to flee.

He saw Molly turning Bellatrix Lestrange into atoms— it was all he could describe it as—as many more fell. The tide was turning all around him, and he knew what he had to do: find Tom and bring the war to an end.

He would confess, much later, that he didn’t remember exactly what happened between finding Tom Riddle and finally facing him one-on-one. There was falling and flying together in a fierce battle of wills. The final spell seemed to go on forever, the rush of magic as he felt Nagini meet her end, and the feel of his own power finally gaining ground against Tom's malevolent roiling Darkness.

By the time Tom's body had transformed to a man-shaped mound of oily grey ash, blowing away like so much dust in the wind, Harry's overwrought brain decided to go on holiday as he crumpled into a heap, his body somehow ending up curled in the foetal position.

Harry barely even registered the significance when the cheering began.

There were cheers erupting amidst the anguished wailing, joy and grief mixing together creating an
emotional cacophony. But Harry was far too weary to pay attention. Was it over? Was it finally done? Was Tom Riddle really vanquished, this time for good?

Harry vaguely heard Ron and Molly wailing too, but his exhaustion was soul-deep. It could wait.

"He can't be dead! He just can't be!" Molly wailed.

"I can fix this," Ron said.

"Ron, what the hell are you doing?"

"Fixing this!"

"What is that?"

"People think I don't pay attention to stuff, but I do," Ronald snorted.

Harry grunted. What was he hearing?

Then he heard someone coughing weakly.

"Fred!" George cried. "I thought you were dead!"

"Fred! OH FRED!" Molly wailed, bursting into tears of relief. "Thank, Merlin!"

Something itched and niggled at Harry's brain.

He'd dropped the Resurrection Stone in the forest—

Hadn't he?

Wait, no.

He hadn't.

"Take this, Hermione. I need you to make sure no one ever finds it, Can you do that for me? If something goes wrong— maybe it will help you."

Hermione's expression was dour, but she nodded in agreement. "Of course, Harry."

"What?! No! Think of what we could do with it!" Ron protested.

"Dumbledore gave it to me, Ron," Harry said. "I need her to make it disappear, and you two need to get back to the castle. This is between me and Tom."

"Don't do this, mate," Ron protested. "Just think of what we could do with that!"

"No, Ron. It wouldn't be right. Remember the story? It drove the second brother mad. It was never meant to be kept in the hands of the living. None of the Hallows were." Harry set his jaw. "I have to go. And Hermione— thanks."

Hermione nodded grimly and headed off into woods.

Harry's weariness started to lift as he realised Hermione and Snape had been the ones to give him the opening he needed to take care of Tom Riddle, once and for all. Then he'd given her the resurrection stone to dispose of.
How in Merlin's name had Ron managed to get ahold of it?

He quickly staggered to his feed, running toward the Shrieking Shack where he had last seen Hermione and Snape making their stand.

"What did you DO, Ron?!

"Saved my brother."

"At what cost?"

Harry stared at the bodies of the dead lay scattered around the shack. The walls of the shack were demolished as evidence of something large and angry had pushed its way in. Severed limbs of a great beast littered the ground as ichor dripped from the walls. Hermione and Snape were entwined together in death, the huge, vicious-looking stinger of some great, unknown beast having burst through their chests.

They had not died quietly—

Harry recognised the signs of Sectumsempra all too well.

Their bodies were utterly impaled— back to back— as he had last seen them standing to cast the spell that would allow him to face Voldemort unchallenged by his minions. Weakened by their combined effort to help Harry, they hadn't had much left to face the sudden attack of some unexpected beast—

What was it?

It was more terrifying than anything he had seen in the Tri-Wizard tournament— far larger than that bloody blast-ended skrewt or the Sphinx, even with its head laying in sections on the floor of what remained of the shack. For a moment, he saw them dangling in the air, impaled as clear as if he'd been there. The scene was beyond ghastly— a remnant from having used the Resurrection Stone before facing Tom the first time.

A freckled hand moved into the frame, yanking the beaded bag from Hermione's belt. It ripped, tearing open and all the contents came flowing out to soak in the spreading pool of blood.

Two fingers picked up the stone, leaving the rest untouched. "Fred is worth way too much to just let this rot away somewhere. Not like you need it anymore. Sorry, but our Fred was meant to live. And you and the greasy git here? Ugh, disgusting."

Harry's head jerked up as Hagrid's outraged wail broke the vision.

"Whut? NO! Ballsbridge would never hurt 'Ermione! He would protect them, he would!"

"Rubeus Hagrid, you are under arrest for the murders of Hermione Granger and Severus Snape," an official voice— Kingsley's?—said. "And for the illegal breeding of dangerous magical creatures without a permit."

"He was on our side," Harry cried brokenly, crumpling next to the pair as he tentatively touched Hermione's small, cold hand. "They were the ones that made our victory possible."

"Kingsley," Harry said grimly, his voice barely a whisper. "Hagrid may have bred the beast, but it had help getting here."
"What are you doing, Harry?" Ron blurted.

"I gave the Resurrection Stone to Hermione to protect it. You were the only other person who knew," Harry said, tears in his eyes. "Then, not long after, Fred miraculously comes back from the dead. There is only one possible way that could have happened, Ron."

"Wot, you want Fred dead?"

"Of course not!"

"Then stop talking, Harry!"

"Hermione and Snape are dead!"

"And Fred is alive!"

A piercing shriek came from Hogwarts, and they all went running— it was Molly's scream.

When they came to a halt, Molly was wailing as Fred and George were locked in a stranglehold together. Both were unmovng.

"H-he," Molly choked out. "F-Fred said he wanted George with him! A-and— and—" Molly wailed and sobbed over the still bodies of her twin sons.

"N-no! I fixed it! I FIXED IT!" Ron screamed, falling to the ground beside his dead brothers.

For a moment there was only the sound of his hysterical keening as he rocked back and forth, the last shreds of his sanity giving up the ghost.

Harry had Hermione and Snape laid to rest together, just as they had died. Determined to not permit a tragedy like this to ever happen again, he buried them with the Cloak and the Wand and the stone that had been retrieved from Fred's stomach.

He had the coffins charmed unbreakable and sealed without a seam, with their headstone proclaiming, "The Price Was Too Great, Let No One Part Those Who Gave Their Lives That We Might Live. May Death Find Them Worthy Equals."

Harry finally made his weary way home to sleep, but the very next morning, the old squib gravedigger reported having seen a skeletal figure standing over the sealed coffins. When Harry arrived at the scene, the heavy stone sarcophagi were gone— the bodies of Severus Snape and Hermione Granger had vanished with them.

All that remained was a was one marble headstone that read: United in death, reunited in life.

Etched in shimmering aether was the symbol of the Deathly Hallows.

---

James lay on his spartan cot at the Gringotts dormitories. The mattress was comfortable, oddly enough, but it was a small bed. Even his bed at Hogwarts had seemed better. He fingered the goblin silver collar around his neck— the mark of his sentence.

No magic for the next ten years.

The goblins had, begrudgingly, given James a job cleaning up after the vault dragons— a job that
required the utmost attention to detail lest you lose your life. The dragons trusted no one, or so it seemed.

Since Azkaban was a death sentence for him due to its inhabitants wanting him dead—even after the original attackers had been moved to Numengard—the only option he had was hidden away and work off his debt to society.

Still, the goblins at least provided him a place to sleep that wasn't the floor, clean (if very drab) clothing, and three meals a day that didn't taste like it had the soul sucked out of it.

It was clear that none of the goblins trusted him.

Once a week, provided he did nothing to revoke the privilege, he was allowed a visit from his wife, and Lily ran both hot and cold in his presence. Her once unshakable faith in his being on the "right" side had turned into a trembling uncertainty.

She, too, was suffering as a pariah—a dragon pox Lily—who may not have been the start of the infection, but unwittingly spread it to a great number of people from Gringotts to Diagon Alley.

Still, if she hadn't gone to see Snivellus—which she claimed was about attempting to convince her former friend to advocate for James' forgiveness and release—the pox could have killed his parents and quite possibly Lily and his unborn baby.

What actually happened after she went, however, had been utterly Obliviated from her mind. It was just like her to be stubborn about something and get herself Obliviated. Now, he'd never know what really happened when Lily had managed to find Snivellus and the reason why his wife's voice had been transformed into (admittedly soothing) wind-chimes.

Now, he couldn't use his influence on Snivellus either. The pull of the Life Debt was neutralised, so he could no longer sense where the git was anymore.

Fuck, did that mean his father was right?

Snivellus had saved his life? His family's lives?

Impossible!

His father was delusional.

The Life Debt might be gone, but Snivellus would never save him unless the git wanted something—

No way.

No how.


What the hell was that?!

James cautiously opened the door to the dorm's hallway only to see a swoosh of black move by followed by goblins carrying a number of odd, even eerie-looking lanterns set on long metal poles—

Down to the dragon-guarded levels.
Others were looking out their doors too, curious as to why the goblins were bringing people down the dorm-levels—a place usually reserved for curse-breaker flats, hired non-goblin help, and—people like him: indentured servants.

The only exit out was guarded by—ironically—an enormous Cerberus, a dragon, and a goblin-door—the kind that guarded the greatest vaults on the very lowest levels. Only being of full goblin blood could get you through alive and unscathed, and it was guarded by a constant flow of harpy tears. No spells could withstand it.

He knew because he’d tested it to try and neutralise his collar only to get a draconic muzzle-to-face introduction to Brutus, Hilda, Snarl, and Foamy. Worse, he realised that the goblin silver of his collar contained the core of the real collar that restricted his magic, so that entire adventure had almost ended his life and all for nothing.

It was clear that the only reason there were no Aurors in Gringotts was because of their varied, inventive, and invariably fatal failsafes.

"I'm sure you'll find your improved vault measures are well-suited to your specifications, Apprentice Snape," the head goblin of the group said. "Your master left us very specific instructions to ensure the standard DoM enchantments were set alongside our own."

"Thank you, Gnarlgnash," Snivellus' distinctive voice immediately made James' hackles stand up and bristle.

"During the daylight hours, we would take you out the main way," the goblin explained, "but our dragons are trained to attack any and all comers that dare approach that direction once the main doors are sealed shut at night until the morning gongs ring. The back ways are the only safe access points—well, as safe as one can be when entering any area containing dragons."

James peered into the darkened corridor, his eyes having trouble adjusting between the bright lanterns and the surrounding stygian darkness.

"Potter, Carfus," one of the goblins snapped, having seen them, somehow, even in the gloom. "Bring the carts down to the vaults with us."

"Yes, Master Harshfang," James could hear Carfus saying automatically.

The Sycophant.

James curled his lip in derision.

"Potter!" the other goblin beside Harshfang snapped.

Gritting his teeth, James went for one of the side carts and began to pull it along behind them.

Snape didn't give him so much as a cursory glance.

How dare he hold himself above anyone else, the greasy, insufferable git!


Something slid along the floor, but he could see nothing.

There were so many things he wanted to say, but the goblins tolerated insubordination with something almost medieval in the way of correction. His comfortable but spartan bed would be
removed. His food rations would be changed to hardtack and gruel (if he was lucky), and he would be planted somewhere in the middle of the working area with a literal ball and chain so others could see his shame.

No, he couldn't afford to say what he so desperately wanted to.

If he managed to keep his trap shut, he would have three warm, filling meals a day, a comfortable bed to sleep in, access to healers, and—most importantly, perhaps—monthly visiting rights.

The cart squeaked noisily as he pushed it behind.

Two carts? James thought. *What would that lousy git possibly need to move out in two carts?*

The trip down to the lower levels required the use of the secondary rails and a lift that creaked and sounded like it was a break and crash down before actually getting anywhere. Even knowing it had not and having used it many times, it was still unnerving.

The secondary way in was antiquated, and James believed it was on purpose. It wasn't made for the public, and the number of people who were allowed to access the bank after hours through the back ways was numbered on one hand.

Snivellus, though?

Sqqqkkkk!

Thump.

The elder goblin was flat on his back on the lift. A scorpion-like tail materialised in the gloom before the rest of a strange mismatch of creatures showed up afterwards.

Skiiirrr!

The beast cuddled the elder goblin, snuggling up to his ridiculously thick mane.

Since when did goblins have manes? He never saw such things until recently, James thought.

The lift came to a stop, and Snape relieved the goblin of his creature attacker and gave the goblin a hand up. Even more surprisingly, the goblin took it, accepting a human's assistance being something almost unheard of at Gringotts.

They rolled the carts and attached them to the railcar, all piling in, yet again. The strange beast stood up on the seat in front, paws on the rail, mouth open, and tongue lolling out the side of its mouth as the wind flapped the loose skin of her cheeks.

By the time they went through one of the Thief's Folly waterfalls, the rail came to a stop at what would be the lowest levels where two of the bank's most infamously vicious dragons, Lilith and Ichabod, guarded the vaults within.

At least, that is what should have greeted them.

*Shiiirrr*

The furry little beast sprang up off the rail cart and bounded right up to the dragons, rubbing up against their feet and muzzles. The vicious dragons rumbled and pawed at the interloper and caught it between their talons only to have her ooze out like a liquid and dart up their forelegs and back.
The dragons moved aside, as clearly as if bidden to by a command and far faster than when driven by the rattles.

With a vague sense of déjà vu, James realised he knew the beast. It was the same one that had caused the downfall of his life.

He snapped his head over to look at Snape, and saw the dragon snout framed in a lion's mane— still damp with Thief's Folly and harpy tears.

Snivellus' head turned to regard him, but he was utterly silent, even serene. Those familiar, black eyes had become fathomless and unreadable, no longer a window to his well-deserved pain.

And he deserved pain— not being able to wear that look of cool detachment currently plastered on his face—

The vault was a good few minutes long trek away, and the goblins used their lanterns to light the braziers as they went deeper within. They passed the ancient vaults of many a wealthy pureblood family— the Blacks, the Lestranges, the Rosiers. Ancient vaults for equally ancient families.

"How is your newest goblet, Elder Harshfang?" Severus' voice broke the silence. "On the mend, I hope?"

"Thankfully, Apprentice Snape, your potion has done wonders," the elder goblin said with a grimace of teeth— a sign of respect James could not help but notice. "We hear about chicken pox for the Muggle humans, dragon pox for the magicals, but goblins have always had to be wary of cockatrice pox. Your vaccines and potions have made our goblets both resistant to the disease and quick to recover. We certainly cannot complain."

"I am most gratified to hear it, Elder Harshfang." Snivellus' voice was smooth, like velvet, lacking the tremble of rage it had once always had. "I will be sure to share the good news with my master."

The little beast landed on the vault door with a chirp, wings flapping. Paws went into special grooves in the door, and it lit up with runes. Two goblins inserted keys on opposite sides of the door as Snape traced an intricate pattern on the door's surface— a pattern so dizzying that James felt it slipping away as he watched.

Then, as if that wasn't enough, Snape placed his hand— **PAW?!**—in the middle of a circle of runes and it lit up the rest of the door.

The door rumbled and grated, rolling to the side. The little beast bounded in, making happy noises and sending golden coins flying in all directions as it ploughed through.

"Okay, I think that pile over there will be fine for the other vault. I already signed the parchments for the interest program through the goblin network. It should be enough to last a sane person through the entirety of their school career, provided it is not immediately needed for some urgent purpose."

Snivellus was planning for a kid?

_Impossible_, James thought.

"I will leave the formalities of moving it to you, as the vault has already been set in an more accessible area?"

The goblins nodded. "Indeed. Potter, Carfus, start loading the carts for the upper vaults."
Carfus started to work immediately, purposely keeping his head down and trying not to look to hard as to what was in the vault. James couldn't help but look around to see countless books, papers, and coffers.

A huge goblin silver statue of a chimaera in Grecian style stood in the middle of the vault, surrounded in copious piles of coins and priceless gems.

How the hell did Snivellus get so much money? The boy who couldn't even get a single set of robes that fit him properly?

The little beast came tromping back with a gem clutched between its jaws.

"Ahh, what do you have there?" the elder goblin said.

"A vault destroyer!" the other goblin gasped.

"If I may, Apprentice Snape?"

The dark clad wizard nodded in assent.

Harshfang plucked the gem between his fingers and pulled out a small crystal jar with some sort of opalescent fluid in it. He plopped it in and closed the lid.

The gem fizzled inside, bubbles forming—

**SPLOOSH!**

The "gem" turned into a crystalline beast that was all teeth and mouth as it tried to get out of the jar.

"Looks like someone tried to tamper with your vault," Harshfang said with a disdainful sniff. "Vault destroyers look just like typical gems or coins, settle in with your treasure, and then eat it. We normally catch such things before they get in our vaults, which makes me want to check to make sure there are not more in here. Perhaps there were eggs mixed in with some payments. If that is the case— someone out there likely has a serious infestation, and is probably not very happy."

Snape's eyebrows furrowed, but he said nothing. He nodded to the goblins, baring his teeth in respectful thanks.

Harshfang clapped sharply, and the goblins adjusted the lanterns and pressed them into the stone using their own earth magic. The lanterns turned a bright, blinding, neon green. There was the sound of cracking, like the bursting of a great many shells, tiny screeches, and then a series of organic-sounding pops.

"Roisinn," Severus said quietly. "Stir them up, please."

The beast bounced, bounded, pounced, and then dove headlong into the treasure, stirring up piles of galleons and gems. Shiny things flew about in all directions, but every so often the beast would come bounding back and dutifully place a particular gem or coin into Harshfang's clawed hands.

Gnarlgnasn placed each one in a treatment jar, and his younger assistant then placed that in front of one of the special lights. The beast within instantly went still and shattered into shimmering dust at the bottom of the jar.

"I do apologise, Apprentice Snape," Harshfang said. "It is not common for anything like this to sneak past our initial inspection process."
"I take it the eggs are more insidious in nature?" Snape asked, frowning slightly.

Gnarlgnash nodded. "Eggs look more like pebbles, and easily pass as common debris on carts. They can be transferred from one vault to another if the carts are not fully cleaned. I can offer no excuses for our lapse—"

Snape lifted one hand. "I do not blame you. If anything I have learned most recently is that natural adaptations and evolutions can be powerful things to counter, and anything that has specialised in eating treasure must have had a long history of trial and error."

"They are adapted to areas, fortunately," Harshfang said. "The Egyptian ones tend to stick out here in Britain. The Norse, Mesoamerican, Australian, and others all have different looks about them. They are all weak against the lights, thankfully, which makes me think that the breach happened when someone made a private deposit and the carts were not properly cleaned and checked."

The elder goblin scowled, which somehow made him look more stern.

_Skkirp_

Harshfang picked up the cubling and cuddled her. "Not your fault, My Lady."

The beast rumbled happily, puffing a cloud of purple into the goblin's face as she rubbed against him. As the cloud dissipated, Harshfang had an even thicker mane, and Roisinn celebrated by burrowing her stinger into it playfully.

"I will check to see who was on duty the day they moved your vault from above to the lower levels, Apprentice Snape," the elder goblin said. "We will, of course, reimburse you for anything that disappeared due to being eaten from the official record."

Snape tilted his head. "Of course. Thank you."

"Carfus," Gnarlgnash said. "Take that cart up to Vault 778. Potter, take your cart up to Vault 687. You are not to leave until one of the other goblins lets you in and allows you to leave."

"That's my family's vault," James said as Carfus wheeled his cart out.

"Yes, and?" Gnarlgnash replied, scowling. "Who do you think is paying for your creature comforts and healthcare while you are here? It is not coming from your and your wife's vault, I can promise you that."

Harshfang grimaced. "Amongst the goblins, it is family or the master's responsibility to fund room and board in the dormitories. Under the Wizengamot provisions, all you were allowed was what you would have had in Azkaban: a floor roll and a blanket and daily gruel. It was by Apprentice Snape's hand that you were allowed the standard bed and regular meals as the other residents that you would not stick out as an outsider and thus be singled out. Your father agreed to allow Apprentice Snape's payments to come from his vault every year to satisfy the familial clause."

"You?" James spat at Snape. "Why would you help me?"

Snape's face was strangely stoic. "Perhaps, Mr Potter, I would rather your wife have a healthy pregnancy without the added stress of being denied the opportunity to visit you or having her face the fact that you would be sleeping on the cold stone floor and have but a single pair of striped clothes to your name. Perhaps, the thought of having you singled out and murdered here or anywhere else is distasteful, even to one such as me, whom I am sure you are convinced would think
otherwise. Perhaps, I did it to prevent you from being conveniently erased to allow someone we both know to get away with certain other things he would prefer not to become public knowledge. Or, perhaps, it was simply the right thing to do to ensure you do the best work you can so you will manage to be there for your child in some capacity before he graduates Hogwarts. Maybe I know well what it's like to have a father who was never there for me."

"Take your pick," Snape said coolly. "I'm sure you'll make up your own mind, regardless."

James' lip trembled as his fist clenched. *It's because of you that I'm in this place, you arrogant son of a bitch.*

CHOMP!

"Yeow!" James cried, jumping up and down as he tried to rub his foot.

The insufferable beast had mauled his foot, right through his boot. He glared at it, and saw something in its cognac eyes. Shifting power and intelligence. For a moment, it was no beast he was staring down but something else.

He thought he was imagining it, but the more he looked, he thought he saw a change from innocence to intelligence, and it was more than some feral cunning. There was fury and reasoning mixed together in a dark, focused glare. James felt a shiver go down his spine as the realisation there was much more to the little beast than he had previously thought.

*Yoink!*

Snape's hand came down and picked the little beast up, and the moment was broken. The beast went limp in his hand and wriggled up against his chin and chest with happy purrs and chirr-squeaks.

The elder goblins gave James a silent glower, and James hastily took the cart and moved back out of the vault.

The goblins bared their teeth and sighed. "You are not obligated to support him," Harshfang said. "We can put him on the standard plan from your Ministry."

Severus shook his head. "I would rather him at least be able to rest comfortably so there is no excuse for unfortunate accidents caused by excessive fatigue. He's no good to his wife and future child as a dead man."

"Why do you care what happens to him after all he has done to you?" Gnarlgnash asked, visibly perplexed.

"The Potter child is an innocent," Snape answered quietly, stroking Roisinn on the head between her ears. "I know what it is like to be— unable to connect with one's own parents. If I can prevent that— give the child a fighting chance at a normal relationship with its parents, then it is well worth the effort."

"Your concern for family is like that of a goblin's," Harshfang said, baring his teeth with respect. "You care for the future of the young, regardless of the parent."

Severus tilted his head. "My father was a bastard, though even now I wonder if he was that through and through or it was because he felt he was betrayed by his wife and his son for being magical— something he could never be. For the longest time I blamed him for every pain I experienced growing up but now I have come to realise that we were all in some pain. Doesn't make it right to abuse a child, but if I can prevent it happening with Potter's child, then perhaps something good can
come of what happened to me."

Roisinn chirred, her tail wrapping around Snape's neck so she could dangle like a baby spider monkey.

"Thank you for keeping a watch over our vault," Severus said after a deep sigh. "We truly appreciate the hard work you have done to transition us from the old vaults to the newer one."

Roisinn chirr-squawked in agreement.

The goblins nodded. "It was an honour in the trust you give us to settle your matters, Apprentice Snape."

Severus quirked his lips. "It would be unwise to dismiss centuries of money magic within the Goblin Nation." He bared his teeth in respect.

The goblins laughed. "Very wise, for a human," they chuckled.

"Though, thankfully a bit less human than most," Harshfang said with a wink.

Snape laughed and nodded.

A cubling head was peering over the counter to stare intently as he sliced a series of wild mushrooms. Her nose quivered with curiosity, and her tail bounced back and forth like it was mounted on a spring.

Snape put two mushrooms in front of her. "One of these is poisonous."

Both looked perfectly identical if but for one having just a slight greenish tint.

Roisinn carefully snuffled each specimen, and then bopped the green-white mushroom with her paw, sending it careening into the fireplace.

"Good thing you were correct, little demoness," he muttered, slicing the rest of the mushrooms. "These special mushrooms are very expensive potion ingredients."

Roisinn chirred, sniffing at him, tilting her head up cutely as if to say "Like I ever would" or "Psh."

Snape soothed her ears affectionately. "Never be too cocky, love," he said softly. "We can all make mistakes."

Roisinn wagged her tail and seemed to smile up at him.

Whether she believed him or not was pretty hard to tell, but she did seem to be listening. She then snuffled her way through the pile of wild mushrooms and sorted them out by size and toxicity, leaving the deathcaps in a neat, distinctly ostracised pile all by themselves.

"Show off," Snape muttered with no little amusement, as he completed the final stir of his potion.

He scratched under her chin, earning himself a few tender licks and a playful mock-mauling.

Snape gathered the deathcaps into a small box, sealed it up with twine and green wax, and then swiftly addressed it to the DoM's poisonous flora identification class.

The moment his quill left the parchment label, the parcel and Roisinn disappeared with a FOOP!
Snape stared at the empty void where his familiar and the parcel used to be.

Roisinn's parents weren't showing signs of alarm. Gruffydd's tail was flicking from the center tree, and Zoë was sprawled lazily around the room with her body matching all the bookshelves and chairs with unnerving accuracy.

**POOF!**

Roisinn was back with a picnic hamper full of warm ginger biscuits clasped in her jaws. A small parchment note dangled from the edge of the lid.

Severus plucked it up and opened it.

*Severus,*

*Thank you for the deathcaps. They will be perfect for our class. My wife insists you enjoy these as our thanks. We won't tell if you don't share.*

*Master Mayfree*

*(his seal, the Aconite flower)*

Severus patted Roisinn and took a ginger biscuit out of the hamper and passed it to her. Her bright orange tongue wrapped around it and she promptly made it disappear. She chirped happily and wriggled, bouncing around the counter until she "fell off" and then continued her frantic zoom around the chambers like her tail was on fire.

She ran half way up the wall, vaulted off, bounded across the floor, climbed up her yawning father's tail, swung off, and then ploughed beneath her mum's warm wings, disappearing under her natural camouflage.

Zoë's quizzical, whirling orange eyes seemed to float in mid-air before they disappeared under their concealing lids.

Severus chuckled, realising he was utterly content with his lot and glad of it. It was odd having such casual pleasures as a commonplace thing, and even more strange to feel so… satisfied.

Stranger still, his income was impressive and steady, his patent work, contracts, and side potions were already quite lucrative. His wide array of investments through Gringotts were already producing substantial dividends too. He had more than enough funds to ensure that Roisinn and her parents were *very* well-provided for— and then there were the super-helpful spiders who were always eager to add to their comfort and convenience in any way they possibly could.

If anyone had told him this would be what his future held, he would have surely laughed in their faces.

*Along with gaining a few rather obvious mutations—*

There was a time when having anything else that singled him out would have sent him into convulsions of horror, but he was starting to realise that it was truly a gift having been adopted by a chimaera cubling. If it hadn't been for her, so many other things could have gone pear-shaped.

*Mew!*

*Mew, mew!*
A Kneazle mum was perched on his window with her litter of baby moggies. A tortoiseshell, a brown and grey tabby, one pure white, and a bright orange and white kitten tumbled over her as she systematically punted them off the sill only for them to climb their way back up again.

Tired of their constant badgering, the Kneazle simply walked through the pane of his window and lay on the other side, making herself right at home on top of his bookcase as her kittens were forced to make do without the open milk bar.

Cheeky creatures.

Dangerous place for any unknown creature to wander into, Severus wondered if the Kneazle mum had a death wish or if it was just common feline arrogance to think they could get away with anything and everything.

Roisinn seemed perfectly fine about sharing her lodgings with random beasts and animals; it was the human element that had to be looked, sniffed, poked, and chewed on to make sure they were eminently trustworthy.

Thinking on that, maybe it was common feline arrogance because they could get away with everything. Somewhere in there, Roisinn was part giant disease-breathing feline and manticore, and she got away with the most of all with her wily guile and outrageous charm.

She was also growing— like a weed. When it was convenient for her, that is.

Hell, he didn't know how fast chimaera cublings grew. Wild leopards matured at two to three years. Snow leopards took around four. Nundus— magic always seemed to make things a bit more complicated.

Fey dragons, depending on the size, could take a year or more just for the smaller ones—

This was why he never really got into Care of Magical Creatures. There were too many "well, unless" situations involved compared to potions. He had no desire to be the next Kettleburn, who kept losing random limbs, or Hagrid, who obviously didn't know the difference between his own arse and a hole in the ground when it came to dangerous creatures and how not to piss them right off.

_Foop!_

It was raining cublings as Roisinn fell into his arms from above him with the distinctive _pop_ of Apparition.

She snuggled into his mane and purred, smug and successful.

_Snape frowned at her. "What have you been learning, young lady?"

_PurrRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR##
Goblin Nation knew it—

But did she know it?

Roisinn showed no sign of paying any attention to his mental musings, clearly preferring a good snuggle against his maned neck. He sighed and decided it was probably best not to read too much into his lovable little freak of nature… after all, he was one too.

For better or for worse— for richer or poorer, right?

Wait… wasn't that something else?

Snape slowly rubbed at the bridge of his nose. Same thing, really. Marriage. Familiar bond. Bond of chimaeric mutantism.

But when he looked into her lovely cognac eyes, he couldn't help but feel profoundly grateful for the gift he had been given.

"Sev."

"Russ"

"Sever."

"Russ."

"Severus."

Roisinn looked at him, clearly pleased with herself before disappearing in the cloak of her natural camouflage.

Severus' eyes widened.

What the hell had just happened?!

"All the food is gone."

"What?"

"Every last morsel."

"Even the puzzles on the ceiling?"

"Even those."

Amelia sat back in her chair, rocking to and fro, deep in thought. "I see."

The young wizard who was resetting the puzzles and adjusting them, and unbeknownst to him, a certain blur of excitable cubling was moving along behind him, opening the latches, nicking the fruit, meat and fish jerky, candy, biscuits, and other tasty "baits" out of each setup.

When he finally finished, he sat down, wiping the sheen of sweat off his brow.

Roisinn was already sat on top of Amelia's stomach, licking her chops.

Amelia laughed and laughed and laughed as Roisinn purred heartily in clear satisfaction.
"Are you convinced yet?" Master Morgan asked, idly itching his ear with his wing thumb.

Amelia sighed. "You mean does the trail of neatly alphabetized books, perfectly brewed potions, logic puzzles relieved of their food, and postal mail delivered with flawless accuracy prove anything?"

Manfred snorted. "She delivered a postal owl along with its letter. That really doesn't count."

"I think that counts for extra points, Manfred," Amelia said, grinning.

Morgan grunted. "I'll give her points for cheek."

Roisinn promptly pounced Manfred and curled up on his chest, clinging to him like a gecko.


Morgan dropped the mug of tea he was nursing as Amelia's shaking hand reached into a desk drawer for the whisky.


Severus calmly flipped the page of the journal he was reading, a small quirk of the lips the only sign of his amusement as both Master Morgan and Amelia Bones proceeded to completely lose their marbles.

Lucius idly fingered the stone he had been given by the Dark Lord after it had been given to him by one Albus Dumbledore. He had no idea what it would do. Albus had said it would help level the playing field. The Dark Lord said it would do the same thing—after a judicious bit of tampering, that is.

Now, whatever the thing was actually supposed to do, that was something no one else seemed to know. Lucius most definitely didn't know

Now, all he had to do was—

Well, he wasn't really sure how he was going to do it.

The DoM was the most well-guarded area in the entire Ministry. Meeting up with Severus now was about the same likelihood of lightning striking—well, knowingly meeting him. Unspeakables were walking about all over the place. Only damn it to Hades, they all looked alike!

He couldn't even tell by the body language because they all stood alike too. It was almost as if Severus was bloody everywhere, that same still brand of brooding, though, was unique to Severus Snape.

Lucius dug his nails into the skin of his left arm.

The curse of his father's malice to ensure the Malfoy heir was on the "right side."

Right side, his left—

Lucius curled his lip. His beloved wife was pregnant, and now they were all in danger.

A foul taint now lurked under his skin, slowly insinuating its way into his mind. He wasn't alone in his own head anymore and that secretly terrified him.
His demented sister-in-law, on the other hand, was positively ecstatic about it, rolling around on the floor in her blissful insanity.

Things were swiftly deteriorating, though.

The Dark Lord wanted him, Lucius Malfoy, to be his resident spy at Hogwarts. He wanted him to "defect" to Albus, making up a suitable story about his family, and pretending to be on his side.

It was killing him.

Could it be... guilt? Or was it something more?

Getting to Severus was going to be hard enough.

"Looking for something, Lucius?" came a familiar low rumble of a voice.

Lucius startled. Gods, had it been so long that Severus' voice had that effect on him?

It sounded like the bloody growl of a great beast. Cripes.

"Severus," Lucius said, trying to regain his composure and suave.

"There is something called the post, Lucius," Severus said, his black eyes as fathomless as ever. Gone were the minute wrinkles of distress that had peppered his every expression. Gone was the desperation Lucius had once thought would be the easy way to get Severus to agree to meet with the Dark Lord— because the Dark Lord was interested in him for his potions talent.

Still was, most likely. Any and all contacts to power interested the Dark Lord. Power. Influence. Chains of servitude.

Lucius could not fathom a world without the political dynamics of power, yet Severus had apparently freed himself from the future yoke of the Dark Lord thanks to— Potter?

Severus did not wait for him to say more, instead he simply walked toward the living quarters— the one place Lucius purposely tried to avoid because looked akin to a slum. To think of living in a place where more than one family lived in close quarters outside of a school boarding situation. The very thought made Lucius shudder with disgust.

How could Severus living in such— ugh.

The flats were all sardine-packed with similar frontages. Every building, save for the number on the brick or the decoration of their flower box, looked virtually identical.

Lucius felt his skin crawl as a young child ran by him, having not even the sense to give him the right of way. The boy giggled as he ran toward the centre park.

"Children, Lucius," Severus said, not even bothering to turn around. "They don't know ranks here, only those they know and those they don't."

Lucius, who had never been unaware of status at any point in his life, scowled. One did not just "lose" status in his world. His family was never perceived as common.

When they stopped at one door out of many, moss had grown into the numbers, making it even less discernible than the other doors. Severus pulled a key from his robes and opened the door, wiped his boots at the door, and then stepped in. Lucius followed, looking around, but the hall was small and nondescript.
Severus had his boots off at the door and walked — barefoot.

Lucius' eye twitched.

"Boots off at the door, please," Snape said smoothly. "I assure you the floors are clean enough to eat off of, and I want them to stay that way."

Lucius tried not to panic.

"There are house slippers here if you want them." Snape turned slightly. "If you want the custom touch, you can sit on this chair here and put your feet on the stand."

Lucius wasn't quite sure what Severus meant about custom touch, but as he removed his boots using his wand, he sat on the chair to the side. It was, oddly, very comfortable, not at all what he expected.

As he put his feet up, though, a clutter of drab-coloured spiders appeared and skittered over his feet, stripping him of his socks and using their legs to measure up his feet. Others took to scrubbing his feet down with soap and water, another rubbed lotion in, and the rest wove a pair of the most comfortable silk slipper-socks he'd ever known in his life right onto his feet as he waited.

"Job's done!" they announced together and poofed out of sight.

Lucius wiggled his toes, utterly flabbergasted.

He stood and walked around the door where he had seen Snape disappear, and his jaw practically hit the floor.

The middle of the room has an enormous tree spanning upward, the branches curving up across the ceiling. Natural light filtered in from "somewhere" making it look like dappled sunlight through a dense forest canopy. The light in the room was diffused but not so overly dim that he had to squint, but his eyes had problems adjusting to the light and dark combined. He knew that Severus was somewhere in the room, but his eyes refused to make him out.

Thump.

Hisss.

Something bumped into his legs and hissed at him, and he wasn't sure if it was the serpent, dragon, or feline kind.

"Roisinn," Severus said, his voice only slightly louder. "He is our guest."

Hisss.

Someone did not seem to agree.

Feeling awkward to say the least, Lucius offered a slight bow. "If it pleases you, my lady, may I sit?"

The distinctly unfriendly hiss turned into a grumbling rumble and seemed to fade off as Lucius cautiously sat down, praying to Merlin he wasn't going to inadvertently sit on a viper.

"Your lady of the house?" Lucius asked carefully.

"One of two," Severus said. "Tea?"

"Please."
Severus tinkered in the kitchen area, a surprisingly beautiful natural wood and glass cabinet set with a Connemara green marble countertop. The tea kettle was deep emerald green with— was that spiders on it?

Snape poured the tea in front of him after placing the loaded tea tray on the coffee table. He dropped in two sugar cubes and a dollop of milk, stirring before handing it to him along with a plate of freshly spider-baked biscuits.

"You cook?" Lucius asked, quirking a brow.

"Don't be ridiculous, of course, I cook," Severus said. "However, these biscuits were baked by Roisinn's eight-legged, hyper, super-helpful culinary arachnids, not to be confused with the sewing and weaving kind that assisted you at the door."

"What?" Lucius boggled, his hand freezing at his mouth.

"Roisinn recruits arachnids that do her every whim."

"Severus, make sense please," Lucius demanded. "I don't see anyone here with you, and you make it sound like you live with a family."

"Well, I do, technically."

Lucius gave him a look, automatically eating the biscuit and realizing that it, in fact, tasted absolutely delicious.

"Why are you here, Lucius?" Severus asked, cutting away the chaff with his usual bluntness.

"I have a problem."

Severus' eyebrow arched. "Do tell, but kindly do me the favour of dropping whatever it is you're carrying from wherever it is you got it into that pail by the settee, please."

Lucius startled, unnerved with having Snape's razor awareness turned on him.

A plate with crab cakes was floating in front of him. He could have sworn, just for a second, that he saw eyes staring into him as it happened.

"I'm losing my mind, Severus," Lucius said, dropping the stone into the bucket of— was that goo?

The stone's magic exploded out into the goo, but the goo absorbed it, turning into a solid block.

Lucius' eyes widened. "That was most impressive."

"The Misuse of Magical Artefacts Division wants the formula, but my boss refuses to allow it outside the DoM until they agree on a suitable fee for its use. The ingredients are quite expensive, and some of them hard to come by as well."

"Yet—" Lucius trailed, "you have a bucket here in your flat."

"I brew it," Severus said, chuckling. "Of course I have some here."

Lucius frowned at the pail. "I was supposed to give it to you."

"And so you did."
"I have no idea what it was supposed to do."

"We'll know soon enough," Severus said.

"What?"

"Whenever the pail is used, a charm sends a record of whatever it neutralised to the Dangerous Magical Artefact records office in the DoM."

"You trust them?"

"They have every reason to do their jobs and do them well," Snape responded.

Lucius fidgeted, knowing that there was at least one agent of the Dark Lord in the DoM. It was how the Dark Lord knew that he had to get his claws into Snape, even now. Because of—

"If you are thinking Rookwood, Lucius," Severus said, sipping his tea. "He won't be bothering anyone for a long time, if ever again."

Lucius startled. He knew? How?

"Rookwood is now a rather spooky-looking tree in the atrium," Snape said. "I believe you passed him on the way in."

"He— what?" Lucius managed to get out.

"Augustus met with a rather woody demise— though I suppose he is still living, technically," Snape said, utterly calm. "He makes a better tree than a human being, as many would agree."

Lucius stared at the neutralising bucket. "He's gone?"

"Well, not gone but not exactly singing the praises of animal abuse or people for that matter," Severus said, his eyes flicking to the bows of the trees.

"A tree?"

"A rather sad excuse for a tree, but still, a tree."

"How?"

Severus set out a bowl and spooned some clotted cream into it.

Within seconds, a bright orange tongue was eagerly flicking over it. Two glowing cognac eyes followed after, then a mane, a stinger-tipped tail—

"What—" Lucius mumbled.

Those eyes held him in a battle of wills, but he found himself unable to hold the gaze. He turned his gaze away.

Chrrrk!

The cubling had clotted cream all over her snout, and she rubbed it up against Snape's chin.

"Oof, yes, thank you very much," Snape said, pushing her off.
Chirrup!

She stood on his knees and placed her paws on his chest, giving him a whuff of bright orange breath that smelled distinctly of apricots.

Snape flopped her on her back and rubbed her stomach, and her legs pumped and kicked in ticklish delight.

"What—is that?"

"She, Lucius," Severus corrected. "She is a chimaera. Not the Greek kind, mind you, but a mixture of beasts created by one Rubeus Hagrid."

"Hagrid," Lucius growled in a low hiss. "He was breeding things together for precisely what reason now?"

Roisinn hissed, her tail lashing back and forth angrily at the mere mention of Hagrid's name.

"To protect Dumbledore's chosen few, what else?"

Lucius scowled. "He created a chimaera to protect Potter and his merry band of heathens?"

"Didn't quite work out to his desires," Severus said. "She escaped, claimed me, Moody, and Madam Bones, most of the Gringotts elder goblins, the Aurory—"

"Claimed?"

"It's a lot like being owned by a cat— only far more proactive on her part," Snape said. "Those she judges worthy become her protectors— but it is a bit shady as to the particulars of who is protecting who on any given day. Rookwood attempted to pin me against a tree and warn me to be ready to choose the "right" side. That was when Roisinn used Rookwood as a human scratching post and her parents each took their pound of flesh from his arse, and I might have breathed into his face in anger."

"Breathing is hardly the same as taking chunks of flesh out of someone's arse, Severus."

"It's much worse when it involves emotion," Snape said meaningfully.

Lucius' blond brows creased together in confusion. "Explain, please."

"I don't think you'll take it well."

"Severus…"

"No, Lucius. I am, in fact, being quite truthful," Severus replied seriously. "I don't think you'd take the truth terribly well."

Lucius frowned. "I can take the truth, man, just tell me!"

"Rookwood was stopped by a highly evolved sense of Nundu breath that responds to the intense emotional charge picked up around it."

"You have a Nundu?"

"No. Well… not exactly."
Lucius gave Severus the silent, judging eyebrow with an accompanying unblinking stare.

Severus sighed and tugged at his collar, pulling out a stone "donut" with runes carved into it. As his hand touched it, swallowing it, there was a rush of warmth and Severus fell onto all fours as a great, pitch-black chimaeric beast.

*Sssssssstttttthh… thud.*

Lucius was sprawled on the floor, passed out completely.

Spiders caught the teacup and placed it on the table.

The huge black chimera seemed to frown deeply as Roisinn promptly scrambled up on top of Lucius' head and did a happy dance.

Severus rubbed his chin with his forepaws and sighed. "Well, *that* went slightly better than expected."

-Chirup? Roisinn rolled over on her back and pawed at him, still balancing on Lucius' unconscious head.

"Bathtime, miscreant," Snape said, grabbing ahold of the cubling between his jaws and placing her between his paws. Then he groomed her over from head to tail until she was squeaky clean and floofy.

Roisinn purred happily.

"That's exactly what you wanted, wasn't it?"

She purred even louder.

Snape sighed. "You have me wrapped around your little stinger, don't you?"

Roisinn head-bumped into his chin and drove her stinger into his thick mane.

Snape clucked at his cubling and lay his head down on top of her. "Be still. We need a nap."

Surprisingly, she settled almost immediately.

Snape's eyes closed even as a clutter of spiders drew a silken afghan over them and Lucius.

---

Lucius had downed about four cups of extra-strong Scottish tea before he was able to stay conscious enough for conversation, and that was only after Severus put his glamour back on.

Severus realised that his "true form" had some sort of strange obfuscating aura about it that prevented Lucius from being able to focus on it without either passing out or completely forgetting what he saw. It made him wonder if the four-legged chimera had a different sort of protective aura over the bipedal form he had worn for some time. Maybe, he thought, he was just growing into his newfound abilities. It was hard to tell precisely what Hagrid's foolhardy tinkering had ultimately done to Roisinn and her parents as well as himself, Alastor, Amelia and everyone else in their ever-expanding circle of, well... weird.

Lucius had finally managed to coax some attention of the non suspicious variety out of Roisinn using his seemingly preternatural charm. Severus suspected it was because Lucius had a poor opinion of Lily as well as Hagrid, and that was something Lucius and the cubling could both fervently agree on.
Severus was still somewhat torn on the subject of Lily. She was his only childhood friend before Hogwarts and one of the few he had before their final falling out. Sure she tried to make up to him so he would drop the charges against her husband, but there was that part of him that said she was looking out for her future child in a world that frowned on single mothers and convicted criminal parents in equal measure. That didn't even include Lily's public shunning as Dragon Pox Lily where witches pulled their children away from her in social settings lest she unknowingly infect them with some other dread disease.

Somehow, his Hogwarts shaming didn't seem quite so bad by comparison.

Now that was a revelation.

"So you're saying…" Lucius said slowly as if carefully navigating a conversational minefield, "is that Hagrid made a her parents out of gods know how many illegal breedings to have her, which he needed an even more controversial magic bonding potion to accomplish— and he created a chimaera the likes of which the gods are probably taking notes."

"That is the long and short of it, yes."

Lucius drank more tea, practically guzzling it down. Unconsciously, he was petting Roisinn behind the ears and under the chin, and she was soaking it in with approval.

The lure of the fuzzy yet strangely armoured cubling belly was too powerful to resist.

Roisinn was gnawing on Lucius' arm, her drool and baby teeth scratching into his skin along with her claws. She wasn't doing it hard enough to really hurt him, but she was getting excited at having a new chew toy to play with.

Lucius was gazing on her with a glazed, relaxed expression. The little creases that plagued his pseudo-permanent scowl disappeared.

Severus frowned as he noticed Lucius was bleeding, and he tried to reach for Roisinn to get her to desist her maulings, but Roisinn only clung tighter, her stinger threatening to peg his hand or arm.

Blood as dark as ink trickled down Lucius' arm.

Wait.

Snape quickly summoned a mage-light with a gesture drawn with his fingers and a snap of his thumb and index finger.

Brilliant natural light focused on Lucius' arm, wrapped in a cubling embrace with her teeth grazing his skin. Roisinn glared at him, squinting at the light, but the blood—

It wasn't blood at all.

It was an oily black sludge as dark as ink but as thick as gravy. Where it dripped down onto the floor rug, the rug melted away as if touched by acid.

Lucius had the most blissful expression on his face…

Snape watched as the strange, writhing tattoo on his arm seemed to drain out like someone had drilled a hole in a glass to let the wine out. The sludge seemed to writhe outward in an escape with no plan but to leave and fast.
Roisinn dropped to the ground and drove her stinger into the muck.

*Stab.*

*STAB.*

*STABBBBB!*  
The muck fizzled and bubbled, a strange screaming noise coming from the puddle. Undeterred, Roisinn breathed on it, forming a dark purple cloud of emotionally-charged karma disease over it. The puddle seemed to vibrate violently before it vanished, leaving only a burnt crater in the carpet where it had puddled.

"Gods, Severus, whatever did you put in this tea," Lucius said dreamily.

Severus pulled out his wand and sent a Patronus to his master and the Head Boss of You even as he pulled a strand of his own memories out into a vial. "No one was going to believe the story without it.

Roisinn sat on her hind legs and began to groom herself assiduously, licking her paw and drawing it over herself. It was as if she had no care in the world.

Severus had a sneaky suspicion that there was nothing remotely without purpose in the chimera cubling, and he said a silent prayer to the gods for not binding her to the likes of Potter and Black or even Rubeus Hagrid.

He had no doubt at all he'd have been dead if that were the case— and they wouldn't have needed a reason. She would have picked up on their petty, personal hatreds and killed whatever they wanted.

Innocently, too.

Or maybe not.

He picked her up and cuddled her, and she instantly went limp in his arms, purring madly.

Maybe she wouldn't have bonded to them at all—

She seemed utterly too intelligent to be so easily imprinted on blind prejudice or she would have bonded to Hagrid right from the start.

Instead, she had escaped him and run—

Straight to *him*, the infamous Snivellus "Greasy Git" Snape—

Did that mean she could see something in him that even he couldn't at the time? Was it simply pure dumb luck?

Roisinn looked so adorable and innocent— it hardly seemed that she could be so deliberate.

Was it even *possible* to be both innocent and deliberate?

Her parents were, or rather could be, murderous creatures. All signs pointed to manticore man-eating and the Nundu-part of the fey-dragon as being deadly by all accounts, not that the mother fey dragon wasn't fully equipped to defend her family.

Lucius snort-snored awake, his eyes widening as Alastor and Amelia came floating through the floo
"Hullo, Mr Malfoy," Amelia said as she jutted out her chin at the Unspeakables that had materialised like ghosts. "I hope you don't mind us checking to make sure your arm and the rest of your body are suffering from no ill effects?"

Lucius blinked slowly. "What?"

"Our Roisinn seems to believe you are worthy of a second chance," Amelia said.

The Unspeakables were performing wand movements over him and his left arm, especially.

Lucius tried not to pass out in instinctive fear of their countenances. It was ingrained in every wizard and witch since childhood that the Unspeakables were worse than boogeymen.

The Unspeakables hissed to each other, their goblin-silver gauntlets extending like claws over Lucius' arm.

The cubling pounced the nearest Unspeakable and clung to their front like a gecko. She wrapped her tail around their neck and clung.

The Unspeakable pulled a raspberry jaffa cake out from their pocket, and the cubling munched on it contentedly, making happy squeaking noises.

"What is going on?" Lucius asked. "What have you done to my arm?"

He pressed his fingers into his skin, frowning. He tapped his head with one hand, the lines on his forehead creasing. "He's gone. That terrible presence. It's— gone!"

Lucius clutched his left arm, scratching at it with a deliberate motion. "I hope you're writhing in the Underworld, father," he spat.

"Old Abraxas?" Alastor asked, perplexed. "What does he have to do with your arm?"

"He ensured I would be on the "proper" side." Lucius wrinkled his nose in clear distaste. "He made it quite clear that he would arrange for my wife and future child meet a— sticky end— if I did not comply with his wishes."

Alastor smiled mirthlessly. "Pureblood patriarchs have a very long history of ruling their families through the use of manipulation and coercion. Yet, it seems as though no one thinks to break the cycle of it."

"When all of your family's history and vaults are tied to a certain reputation, breaking free of it could mean cutting your family off from the funds it relies on," Lucius said, his face grim. "No one wants their loved ones to suffer because of one's own personal choice to rebel."

Alastor's expression darkened. "So you bought into the game for money."

Lucius clenched his fists. "Yes. And to protect my Narcissa and our future child. Narcissa comes from the Black family, which is even more notorious for the promotion of pro-pureblood interests than the Malfoys ever were."

Lucius' knuckles turned white. "Neither I nor Narcissa are accustomed to a life of poverty. You have no idea how much fear that prospect strikes into anyone from the old families."

"Surely not poverty as talented wizards and witches."
Severus stood. "I think what Lucius is trying to say is that even our highest paying jobs would be but a drop in the endless bucket he is used to pulling from for small things like— very expensive wine."

There was an edge of bitterness in Snape's voice, and Roisinn flattened her ears to her head.

Roisinn looked back and forth from Snape to Malfoy, her brows creased and her tail lashing with conflict. She tugged on Snape's robes and tried to drag him close to Lucius. She then tried to pull Lucius closer to Severus, but both men were being adamantly stubborn.

She furrowed her brows as her frustration grew, her tail lashing a little more violently. Venom dripped from her stinger, and pegged Snape deep into his calf, right through his thick robes. Her teeth made a beeline for his knee.

Amelia lunged quickly, scooping up the irritated cubling in her arms and soothing her against her mane. "There now, lass. Sometimes it takes a while for people to get over themselves."

Roisinn purred against Amelia's warm mane, completely ignoring both Snape and Malfoy in favour of Madam Bones' cuddles.

Severus winced, rubbing his stabbed calf. "That bloody hurt!"

Lucius seemed torn between relief and conflict, his expression shifting from wrinkled to pinched to resigned as he rubbed his temples with his fingers.

"Severus," he said. "I never meant to hurt you with that comment. Truly. I realise that I've been raised to be accustomed to wealth and finding it terrifying that I'd have to worry about it. It may not be a logical or even rational part of me, but I truly did not mean for it to sound like those who work hard for their galleons are any less as people. It is simply very hard to come to terms with my own fear for the financial welfare of my family— which I know most people would scoff at if they realised just how much our family still had."

Severus, closed his eyes for a moment, setting his jaw stiffly. He walked out of the room. "I need some air."

Lucius winced, holding his left arm where the Dark Mark had once lain as his personal scarlet letter of shame.

"Gods, I'm an idiot," Lucius said after taking in a deep breath.

"You're both idiots," Roisinn chirped so utterly clear and in unmistakable. English that Amelia practically dropped the cubling.

Lucius sat down hard on the couch again, Alastor took a really big swig of his flask, and the Unspeakables started to frantically write in their notebooks.

At that very moment, a mother fey-dragon's bright orange tongue encircled her cubling and dragged her off into invisibility.

"What just happened?" Lucius asked in a shocked whisper.

"I think you've been served," Alastor said with a straight face.

A clutter of spiders appeared on the couch with a fresh pot of tea and biscuits.

*Looks like they could really use some refreshments.*
Especially him.

Yeah, blondie looks pretty knackered.

They placed the tray on the arm of the couch, pinning it in place with silk and threw themselves off the edge.

Tally ho!

Bonsai!

My life for Aiur!

The spiders disappeared in a flurry of scurrying.

Lucius poured himself a cup of tea and drank it down.

Meanwhile, a spider with a bucket crawled over to where Snape was brooding in the Atrium and dumped the entire bucket of ice-cold water on his head. The bucket, which apparently been enchanted to hold much more water than its size implied, had enough water to make its own waterfall.

Jerkface! the spider said, storming off into the undergrowth.

Severus hadn't moved an inch as the frigid water dripped down his hair, soaked his favourite robes, and pooled all over the floor.

Severus closed his eyes and sighed heavily. "Abso-fucking-lutely wonderful."

A young witch passed him by, did a perfect spit take, and then backtracked. She threw her arms around him and embraced him fiercely.

"You look like you really need a hug!" she announced.

Severus, dripping and accosted by a young witch he couldn't just yell at or throw away from him, slumped in defeat.

"Thanks," he muttered.

Later that night, Alastor lay on the couch half asleep with an energy-sucking cubling snoozing peacefully on his chest, snuggled up tightly to his mane.

Amelia sat in the next room between Lucius and Severus, mediating between them during their hot and cold conversations, something Alastor admitted he was not the best wizard to handle that job.

He tended to yell first and cuff people about the head rather than accept less-than-stellar behaviour.

Severus had, admittedly, calmed down once Lucius basically outlined everything he knew about the Dark Lord’s plans— where, why, who, and hows.

There would be a great many arrests, Alastor was happy to admit, but they would also need large and well-prepared Auror squads on standby and patrolling the streets lest there be trouble. There was still the matter of whatill-effects the Dark Lord would have thanks to cubling interference with Lucius.
There was also the matter of the enchantments the office had recorded on the stone Lucius had brought with him. Whatever Dumbledore may have put on it originally, the Dark Lord had made it into a Portkey—probably meant to either separate Roisinn from Severus or subvert Severus by force without his beast-family to assist.

It would be up to the tracker-tracers to see if they could glean any more detailed information out of the stone's enchantments, and the outlook was spotty. They might be able to trace the signature of energy to the creator, but Albus was also involved—making teleportation to a trace more than a little risky.

Oh, but how great it could be to have a hundred Aurors just show up at the Dark Lord's supper table and take out the elite core of Death Eaters and the Dark Lord—

If those same Aurors showed up in Dumbledore's office, however—Hogwarts' wards could tear them to pieces.

Well, that was why the Unspeakables got paid the big galleons—he would trust them to figure something out without getting more people killed.

Roisinn purred and rubbed up against him once more, her stinger tail slapping into his face a few times before she jumped down to the floor and padded off into the next room, radiating sleepy vibes.

It was bedtime, and her nightly rituals were practically written in stone.

Alastor chuckled.

Ah, to be owned by a chimaera cubling. Heaven help the world when she grew up.

---

**A/N:** Brainstorming with FawkseyLady over an initial idea that prisoners in Azkaban would make makeshift wands like Muggles would make shanks lead to the scene in the prison. Beware writers on caffeine and Naprosyn at 2 am.

**A/N:** I will be starting a new job and adjusting to a new shift, so updates are going to be pretty sparse on all fronts as my writing time will be small, and my window to speak with my betas even more evil than they are now. I'm totally excited to be starting a job in the field I have studied for, but I'm also scared to death. LOL. Thank you for all your love, support, and reviews. I may not reply to every one, but I appreciate every single review.
Summary: [HG/SS] Hagrid bred some of his 'armless animals together to "help" the Potters defend themselves from the Dark Lord. It does not end as he hoped.

Beta Love: The Dragon and the Rose, Dutchgirl01, Flyby Commander Shepard

Warning: Graphic violence contained within. Blood and gore included.

Eye of the Dragon, Hair of the Cat

Chapter Three: Uitkijken Wat Je Zegt

Crackity Crack Fic of Crack by Corvus Draconis

When we're growing up there are all sorts of people telling us what to do when really what we need is space to work out who to be.

Ellen Page

Bellatrix was not amused that someone had moved into the lower level vaults that only old pureblood families deserved to be in. She couldn't help but notice the ancient, unfilled vault had suddenly become lit—and the stupid reptile would retreat to the back to lay beside it.

The goblins had warned her not to go further lest the dragon feel cornered and attack despite the rattles—she, of course, had told the un-human to watch his tongue. One should always be silent around one's betters.

As she used a spell to shove the goblin who was taking too long to get out of her way to the side, she stormed into her vault to deliver her special parcel to the back of the vault. She rewove the hexes to make sure her vault would bury anyone stupid enough to enter the Lestrange vault who wasn't a Lestrange, anyway.

When she came out, the goblin worked to close the vault door, favouring his side where she had slammed him into the wall with her magic.

She ignored him, moving closer to the new vault to get a look at it.

There was a little beast playing with the dragon, crawling all over it, batting and feinting. The dragon was oddly tolerant of her antics, pinning it down randomly and then letting go.

Bellatrix narrowed her eyes. The little beast had a collar with various charms on it, but one she could recognise quite easily—the crest of the Malfoy family.

What were Lucius or Cissy up to that required adopting a beast?

It was probably her sister getting all soft-hearted over warm eyes and a tender lick—just like those stupid Crups she had loved so much as a child. Well, she'd taken care of that right fast as she strangled every single pup and then set the mother-bitch on fire while practising her curses.

Father had praised her most excellent curse-work.
As well he should have.

Cissy should know better than to adopt stupid animals. Instead, she should "adopt" a slave and at least have the satisfaction of being able to curse and beat them senseless whenever they did something wrong.

People always made better sounds when they were being beaten. They tended to last longer before having to replace them, too.

The little beast jingled merrily as it bounced, little chimes on her collar tinkling soothingly. The dragon seemed eager to play, even to the point of ignoring Bellatrix in favour of its playmate.

Bellatrix smiled cruelly and aimed her wand at the disgustingly cute example of why furry things were only fit to be worn.

She gleefully cast Fiendfyre towards the ludicrous little beast and cackled as the creature let out a high-pitched shriek.

The dragon reared up on its hind legs, wings flapping, and its tail slammed against what had looked like a statuary but turned out to be a gong.

Even as the fire roared, shaped into the form of a snake with a dragon's head, the real dragon demonstrated precisely why they were still the preferred guardians of the lower vaults by blasting the Fiendfyre with its own fire and wing buffeting the flames back, back, back—

The goblin that was closing Bellatrix' vault door quickly dove out of the way, and the fire was driven into her half-open vault just as the portal door closed and locked.

The inside of the vault seemed to scream, the walls and ground shaking violently

"NO!" Bellatrix cried. "Get that door open now!" She grabbed the goblin by the neck and flung him at the door.

The goblin attempted to flee down the corridor, and Bellatrix pointed her wand at him.

"IMPERI—"

CRACK!

The sound of flesh tearing and bones snapping hung in the air before Bellatrix looked down to see that her wand was missing—

And both her arms up to her elbows.

A crimson-faced manticore with a mane of fire-like fur shook the two arms (one still holding the wand) in his mouth and flung them away only to have the dragon behind him blast the detached limbs with white hot fire.

A glowing set of eyes materialised before her as the head of a protective mother fey-dragon became solid and terrifying as her great maw opened— so orange that it was blinding— and countless dagger-like teeth unfolded in rows of natural weapons.

CRACK!

The mother fey-dragon shook Bellatrix Lestrange's body viciously like a rag doll and flung her into
the gong with loud, reverberating **CLANG** as vault security arrived to find themselves fashionably late to the party.

The furless, smoking cubling chirped with annoyance as her mother pinned and licked over her body and its now-exposed shining, protective dragon scales.

"So, she's Fiendfyre proof," Lucius said as he held an ancient Greek amphora.

Severus expression was pinched. "Can we go one day without some sort of drama?"

Roisin chirped, having been released from the prison of her mum's talons and cleaning session.

Severus pointed one finger at her, frowning.

**Shhkkrrk?**

"I'm blaming you."

The chimaera cubling purred loudly as all her fur swiftly grew back in the fluffiest way possible.

Lucius and Severus exchanged glances.

"I'm not quite positive, Severus, but I'm pretty sure Hagrid is a mad genius when it comes to breeding."

Severus closed his eyes and shrugged. "Gods help us if he actually bred things **without** his sheer dumb luck—and I'd call him more of an idiot savant than a mad genius."

Roisin chirred and pounced her dragon friend's muzzle again as they resumed their play and Bellatrix' charred limbs smouldered away until they were only oily black ash.

Lucius' eyebrows creased. "Either way— I wonder if what they say is true about Fiendfyre, given how it is supposed to destroy anything."

"Stories **do** tend to get overblown," Severus noted. "None moreso than the stories told of fantastical spells."

Lucius shrugged. "I guess we'll see when they open up the Lestrange vault."

"I doubt they will open the doors without a mass Protego," Severus commented.

"I believe they weave that into the doors by default," Lucius replied. "Goblin-magick, that is. While none of the pureblood families would admit this publicly, the goblins have the kind of strong earth and protective magic that makes their permanent enchantments very strong."

Severus hrmed, but said nothing. "Still doesn't help if they open the door."

Lucius grunted. "I suppose."

**Fip!**

The cubling disappeared through the closed goblin door.

"The **hell?**" Severus started to run forward, but Lucius held him back.

"Trust that if she could go in, she can come out," his friend warned.
Severus looked extremely dubious.

_Foop!_

The cubling popped back in from the other side and shook shook shook like a wet, muddy canine over a pristine white carpet. Droplets of molten gold and silver flew in all directions, coating the cobblestones with superheated but cooling metal. She then ran around in circles creating a molten metal mandala with her gold and silver pawprints. She screeched to a halt at Severus' feet and looked up at him hopefully.

Snape sighed, picking her up.

Lucius chuckled, screwing his face into a more serious expression as he folded his arms across his chest.

"Shut it," Snape said.

Lucius' lips twitched, but he said nothing.

Roisinn purred and purred and purred, burrowing her stinger deep into Snape's thick mane.

_Crreeeeeeeееeeeেееееееeee BOOM!_

The heavy door on the Lestrange vault rolled open as a blast of gold and silver slag roared out of the vault along with smaller debris like half-melted candlesticks, statues, and unidentified molten globules of melted and charred objects blew out of the vault in a horizontal blast.

The blast coated the entire cobblestone walkway with gold and silver. The molten residue flowed into the cracks, moving around the stones and enveloping the entire path down between the vaults with metallic shimmer.

The inside of the Lestrange vault glowed red-orange even as it cooled, looking more like the maw of a great, mythological beast come to swallow victims and drag them to the Underworld.

The entire inside was seemingly empty— plated in a thick layer of gold and silver.

The goblins were gathering along with the guards and a handful of authorised Aurors.

"What the bloody HELL is going on down here?" an elder goblin roared.

The other goblins, desperate to avoid being blamed, pointed to a now-golden metallic spider with a shining gold and silver bucket on its head.

The arachnid sighed and scurried up Severus' leg, up his chest, and hid in Roisinn's mane.

---

**Bellatrix Lestrange Apprehended, Arrested, and Azkabaned!**

_The wife of Rodolphus Lestrange was convicted of multiple acts of murder and use of Unforgivable curses as the Wizengamot closed last night. Her list of heinous crimes, which she did not even bother to deny, were so long that multiple scrolls had to be written and read before the trial could even begin._

_She pleaded guilty proudly in front of shocked Wizengamot members, many of whom seemed physically ill due to the sheer depravity of her actions._
Bellatrix Lestrange was sentenced to life in Azkaban with no chance of parole, with her being subject to the Kiss if she shows any indication whatsoever of stepping out of line during her incarceration.

Neither Rodolphus Lestrange nor his younger brother, Rabastan, were present at the trial.

Roisinn sprawled in the middle of Moody's desk, batting at the ink blotter and making it rock back and forth. Her stinger waved back and forth, spearing random insects with instant death.

"Aren't you the little pest patrol?" Scrimgeour asked, picking the cubling up and rubbing her soft belly fur.

Roisinn purred and opened her jaws wide to feign attacks, stabbing his mane with her stinger in happy revelry.

Rufus pulled out a bright red-bellied fish and dangled it, and the cubling snatched it up with glee, chewing on it enthusiastically.

"Spoiled rotten," Moody chuckled.

"Hmph," Scrimgeour said, having earned himself a fish-breathed cuddle with Her Most Adorable Fluffiness.

Roisinn chirp-squawked, clawlessly thumping Rufus' face with her paw pads, looking utterly cute and charming.

"Such irresistible appeal should be illegal," Moody grunted, even as his hand reached over to rub the cubling's ears. "Not to forget that most if not all of the Auror ranks have sprouted manes."

"It does protect us from her parents," Rufus noted, wrinkling his nose. "They're the ones who keep taking arms off people."

"Isn't Severus the one who took off Pettigrew's arms?" Moody asked.

Scrimgeour shrugged. "Did we stop counting when armless Death Eaters started bleeding a trail across the Ministry gardens?"

Moody chugged down a large mug of tea. "Yes."

"To be fair, some of them were legless as well," Severus pointed out, finishing up the tall pile of paperwork, scrolls, and formally sealed parchments.

"Oh, huge difference there," Moody muttered.

Roisinn thumped as she hit the ground on all fours and went bee-lining towards a large skittering beetle. Her mane was poofed with her excitement, and she tore up the ground in her scramble to get after the tasty, crunchy snack on the go.

The beetle took flight, panicked to get out of range, but was hampered by the cubling's ability to fly. She tore after the fleeing insect, her teeth clacking so very close—

**THUMP!**

Roisinn gave a startled squeak and yelp as she ploughed headlong into someone's legs as they entered the Aurory. She disappeared in a poof of camouflage as the woman tripped forward and
landed flat on her face.

As the woman pulled herself back up, the entire Aurory went silent as the already nasty expression on the witch's face seemed to twist into a truly hideous scowl.

"What is the meaning of this?" she demanded. "This is an Auror's Office not some equestrian course! What or whom did I trip over? I demand to know who put something invisible in the middle of the path!"

"Ms Umbridge," one of the younger Aurors objected, "No one left an invisible anything in the way. The hall and office are swept out thoroughly, multiple times a day!"

The woman's face seemed to flow and scrunch into remarkably toad-like proportions. She stepped right up into the Auror's face and snarled at him, "I don't believe you!"

A dazed beetle wriggled frantically, its multiple legs caught in Umbridge's mousy brown curls.

Umbridge's eyes grew comically wide as air was sucked deep into her lungs and she blew a gasket as a shrill screech of hysterical horror came spewing forth from her mouth. She flailed her arms, beating on herself to get the insect off. She then pointed a wand at herself—

"Bombarda Maxima!"

"NO!"

Aurors went diving in all directions. Desks exploded. A wall collapsed. The water cooler blew up, showering everyone with water and shards of glass. Scrolls and random bits of parchment rained down from above as paper aeroplanes fell from the air, knocked wildly off course. Glass cracked and flew outwards as the panic-driven wave of force continued out into the street.

As the dust and debris cleared, the Aurors found themselves looking at a giant golden tortoise beetle body, pink wing coverlets and a short woman's upper body fused to it. At the shoulders, however, there were two necks and heads—one of a toad-faced woman and the other a woman with a distinctive head of tight blonde curls and red-rimmed glasses.

Both heads started screaming hysterically as one hand from one side tried to beat the ever-living piss out of the other side's head.

The mutant beetle-mutant flung itself out the open window and onto the London street, and Muggles went screaming off into the distance.

Severus, still sitting and having not moved, finally finished writing on one of his parchments. Then he dispelled the shield he had hastily erected around himself and his desk.

Scrimgeour coughed and brushed himself off. "McDonald, call in the Obliviator teams, pronto. Fitzgerald, get the healers."

"Right, Boss."

"Got it, Boss."

"Moody, you fill out the report what just happened."

"What the fuck am I going to put on it?"
"Make something up," Rufus said, rolling his eyes. "I have to go report to the Minister, and I'm probably going to have to submit memories because there are no words to adequately describe this total sodding cockup."

Moody cringed. "Have fun, Boss."

Scrimgeour wrinkled the corner of his lip in a scowl and stormed out of the wide debris field as the Obliviator teams Apparated in to wrangle the resultant Muggle panic.

Severus pet the cubling in his lap. "You're so insufferable."

Roisinn just wrapped herself around his arm and purred.

**Ani-WHAT-a-gus?!**

You don't even want to know the possible reasons why the Department of Magical Law Enforcement ended up sending out the Obliviators to clean up after an incident in downtown London. Some report a giant bug with a woman's upper body. Some say a two headed ogre was fused to an insect. No two stories seem to match up, save in the bizarreness of it.

The official story is that Madam Umbridge of the Ministry of Magic was visited the DMLE at the exact time of one Ms Rita Skeeter, and they collided in a "perfect storm" of accidental magic."

Whether this is true or not remains to be seen, but the Wizengamot seems to believe that the memories extracted from both victims due to their inability to do it themselves, prove that much more was going on in both witches lives than either were admitted previously.

Many people have been relieved that something other than the war was brewing up trouble in the Wizarding world, but some are worried that this incident was just one more indicator of the war's cold touch wrapping around us all.

"Are you sure it's safe to have Roisinn set loose upon a children's playground?" Severus asked as Kingsley sat on the schoolyard fence with him.

"She's perfectly civil with children. She keeps her claws in, doesn't breathe on the innocent, and is apt to simply cuff misbehaving sprogs as her parents do with her when she gets too excited." Kingsley smiled. "She keeps her stinger to herself too."

"Not around us," Snape said wryly.

"Well, we all have manes for a reason, my friend."

"Hn," Severus replied.

Roisinn was on her back and pumping her legs with excitement as the children rubbed her belly. Thanks to her glamours she looked sort of like a very fluffy long-haired Kneazle—quite a large one at that. She had been growing so fast in the last few months that she looked almost more like a large lynx or a small leopard. The kids didn't seem to care about that, though.

She even tolerated them trying to pick her up and carry her like a stuffed potato sack.

"Master seems to think that these children may be in danger. They are having a shut-in party tonight, and he doesn't want anything bad to happen to them," Severus said.
Kingsley grunted. "Master Morgan is hardly one to be an alarmist. If he believes they are in danger, then they are."

"I agree," Severus said. "I just wonder in what way."

"Well, it is a full moon tonight," Kingsley noted. "It could be as simple as not wanting Greyback to think these children are easy prey."

Severus twitched. "Why is I never think werewolf first? Even after—"

Kingsley sighed. "It's hardly something anyone would think first, Severus. The fact you were put in such a situation at the age you were, well, I'm glad you don't think werewolves are the first suspect, really. Not like Madam Umbridge or Lyall Lupin, who both seemed hell-bent on making all werewolves unemployable."

Severus wrinkled his nose. "I've found a lot of my old hang-ups somehow seem less important with Our Lady of the Wriggling Stinger in my life."

Kingsley smiled. "She is a true wonder, isn't she?"

Severus nodded. "I never imagined myself the kind of person who found that being a chimaeric beast was preferable to being a pureblood. As a boy, I dreamed of being powerful and belonging to a family that people feared."

"Your father inspire that?"

Severus nodded. "My father's true calling seems to be inspiring hate. To this day, I wonder why my mother ever— well, I suppose it doesn't matter now. To this day, she utterly refuses to leave Cokeworth."

"Cokeworth?" Kingsley whistled. "Wouldn't be my first choice of a place to raise a family, I'll be honest."

Snape sniffed. "Many there have no other choice. We could have moved, though, if Da hadn't drank all of our money up and sold everything of value in the house to get even more cheap alcohol."

"Sounds like a real prime example of a singularly horrible human being," Kingsley said with a shudder of distaste. "Perhaps it's a good thing that he didn't have a wand and magic to make it even worse."

Snape's eyebrows raised. "You bring up a very disturbing point." He tilted his head and caused his neck to crack as the bones realigned. He used one hand to rub his neck. "My master does not usually send me out on assignments blind."

"Perhaps Master Morgan believes this to be an appropriate test of your abilities."

Snape arched a brow. "Do you truly believe that?"

Kingsley shook his head. "I cannot claim to be able to read Master Morgan's mind, my friend. However, it is his job to both teach you and gauge your skill sufficient for you to be prepared for wherever he sends you. Do you not trust him?"

Severus jolted. "I— of course I do."

"Then, we must trust that he wouldn't send both of us out here with Her Furry Ladyship unless he
knew we were ready for it." Kingsley nudged him with his elbow.

Severus’ eyebrow twitched. "I suppose."

The black-haired wizard stared at Roisinn as she charmed the little troublemakers into behaving on the playground by petting her instead of beating each other silly to get the best toys. She wriggled free and bounded over to the lonely-looking child, making sure to flop on them. The children would be drawn to come back to her and accept that she wanted to be with the other child too, and so the lessons came and went— cubling style.

"She's an old soul," Kingsley said, smiling. "I have to wonder if there is a witch under all that fur and scales. Not just from that potion Hagrid used— but the true soul of someone whose purpose was cut short or incomplete and was given a new form to complete some greater task."

"Have you been hitting the weed, Kingsley?" Severus asked, eyebrows furrowing.

Shacklebolt snorted. "Do me a favour. You do realise I work for the DoM and the DMLE?"

Severus chuckled. "You work for the DoM. You appear to work for the DMLE."

Kingsley sighed. "Touché."

The sun was starting to dip lower, casting longer shadows from the playground.

"You ever been at a lock-in, Severus?"

Snape snorted. "In Cokeworth? That could be fatal."

Shacklebolt hrmmed. "True. The children seem to look forward to it."

"Children look forward to being squashed together in sleeping bags on a hard floor and sneaking biscuits and crisps in the cover of darkness," Severus said. "It's amazing we ever survive childhood."

"Many magical folk believe that accidental magic in children exists to keep them from dying due to minor acts of stupidity, but I happen to think that magicals get themselves into even more trouble because of it."

Severus stared at him. "Speaking of magic, how is it that you manage to blend perfectly into every magical and Muggle setting?"

Kingsley laughed. "I like the differences and revel in them."

Snape, who was dressed in a neutral charcoal cardigan and black trousers, shook his head at Kingsley's earthen yet brightly-coloured clothing. He managed to make walking look good, and sitting was no exception.

The bell rang to bring the children in, and Roisinn wriggled free from the pets and rubs and herded the children indoors with head-bumps and clawless bats. The teachers chuckled from the door as the children reluctantly filed inside.

The teacher dressed in a pretty floral dress waved at the two wizards before going back into the building. Kingsley waved back, and Severus heaved a sigh, looking the other way, discomfited.

"You really don't like female attention, do you, Severus?" Kingsley said.

Snape frowned, silent.
Kingsley nudged him gently. "It's all good, Severus. The female is a mystery to us lowly mortal men, both exotic and utterly baffling."

Roisinn hopped into Severus' lap, kneading and purring madly, letting off a golden cloud of magic in a soft belch that smelled suspiciously like salmon.

Severus rubbed her ears and ran his hand down her back and up her tail.

She wagged her stinger in approval and flopped across his and Kingsley's laps with a long sprawl.

"You're getting much bigger, love," Kingsley said. "She could take on a leopard now."

Severus furrowed his brows. "I swear she just decides to grow. This morning she wasn't quite this size."

Roisinn yawned and squeaked, closing her eyes in an impromptu doze.

"If only we could all just roll over and take a nap when we were tired," Kingsley said with a touch of wistfulness.

"We are chimaeras," Severus said. "Who would really argue with us?"

Kingsley laughed. "There is that— but I don't really want to test out our nifty new glamours by being discovered by a bunch of curious children."

A clutter of spiders appeared bearing hot tea in Muggle-style paper cups with cardboard rings. They deposited their drinks on the wall along with a small picnic basket and disappeared.

"Damn useful, that lot," Kingsley said.

Severus grunted. "No sense of privacy either."

They sipped their tea together, silent save for the cubling's soft snores.

Night fell like a sudden ambush, the sun disappearing under the horizon with an unexpectedly fast crash.

"The seasons are rather moody around here," Severus observed dryly.

"Much like the man," Kingsley replied. "The Boss likes to say that Mother Nature is off her potions."

"I think I agree," Severus said.

The full moon was hidden behind a dark, ominous cloud, giving it a pretty silver halo.

Suddenly, Roisinn was awake and fully alert, her fur standing on end. Her fangs were bared in a fierce grimace.

Kingsley and Severus stood at once, quickly summoning Disillusionment around them. They grasped the pendants around their necks as a soft wind blew in, masking their scents.

Severus put his hand into Kingsley's, using his fingers to make the silent signs.

Kingsley moved his into Snape's and signed back. Snape placed a hand on Roisinn's back, concentrating on what he wanted her to do. The cubling stilled, ears still twitching, but she pressed
into his legs in response.

"I smell 'em," a gravelly voice said.

"Ripe for the killin'?"

"Perfect for the biting," the other voice said sharply. "We want them to turn, we're not here to eat them."

Other voices grumbled in displeasure.

"There will be other nights for eatin'.'"

"The clouds are blocking our fun," another whinged.

"Not for long," the gravelly voice said with smug anticipation. "Soon, we'll get to have our fun. Those Ministry sheep will lose their precious little lambs, and some of them will turn into wolves. They think they can hide their children away in a Muggle village, pretend it's just some ordinary school, hah! This will send them a message they'll never forget. The moon is our message, but those who survive this night will join our number come the next full moon."

There were multiple cries of agony as the full moon finally slid out from between the concealing cloud cover, and both Severus and Kingsley grasped their pendants almost immediately, sending out a silent call for backup to the DoM.

The pained cries reached a fevered pitch, mixed with the distinctive tearing and shifting of tendons, bones breaking, twisting, and reshaping themselves. The human cries the began to turn to a cacophony of growls, whines, yelps, and howls.

Roisinn growled lowly, her stinger dripping an eerie glowing venom. Snape and Shacklebolt put a calming hand to her back, and she quivered but stilled. There was a werewolf jumping up onto the sill of an open window, crawling in.

Scrambling and scratching sounds hit the wall. Paws appeared at the lip of the wall, and then the wolfen shape quickly leapt up after, the shaggy silhouettes bathed in silvery moonlight.

A dark blur came towards Severus, and Roisinn was already in the air. She wrapped herself around the lupine's head and buried her stinger into the neck just under the skull.

The werewolf gave a yelp as its body twitched uncontrollably then went still.

Another leapt, but Snape and Kingsley were standing back to back. The unlucky werewolf went down hard in a blaze of fire and electricity as both wizards hit the werewolf at the same time. The scent of ozone and burnt fur filled the air.

*Found us somehow,* Snape signed into Kingsley's hand.

They dropped their disillusionment, and went full on offensive, throwing spells at every werewolf they could see.

**THUMP!**

A loud roar reverberated as one brassed-off manticore slammed full tilt into an attacking werewolf and snapped his jaws around the werewolf's head, ripping it clean off the beast's shoulders as his claws ripped down from neck to groin, spilling its internal organs all over the ground.
Zoë materialised and promptly attacked the werewolf attempting to jump through the window. Her dagger-like teeth severed the body into three pieces, and she shook her head violently, letting each bloody piece fly off in a different direction. She hiss-roared and disappeared under her camouflage once more.

The werewolves, maddened by the smell of fresh blood and humans, attacked even more viciously, seemingly paying no heed to their own danger.

Zoë and Gruffydd matched their blood rage with sheer protective ferocity— Zoë in stealth and Gruffydd in pure, savage fury.

In-between vicious slashes and the flames of spells, a furious Roisinn launched herself at any and all comers who dared get too close to "her" people, practicing her sting and release technique with her own version of a mighty roar, which might have been even more impressive had her parents not had their own to compare it to.

Gruffydd's ferocity, however, seemed to increase exponentially with each attack, and he buried his stinger so deeply into the leaping werewolf that it went completely through one side and out the other. His fangs ripped into the werewolf's neck shortly after, and then he shook the creature's body harshly until the werewolf went completely limp. To add insult to the injury, Gruffydd breathed disease into the werewolf's face— just in case the other mortal wounds weren't enough.

Severus stopped a pale, white werewolf from leaping on Gruffydd as the manticore hybrid spun and impaled the beast with his stinger. The stung and fire-burnt werewolf let out a pained yelp and fell hard to the ground before Gruffydd savaged his would-be attacker again— and again— and…

A grey and silver-haired beast that was even larger than the rest let out a baying howl before leaping toward both Kingsley and Severus, murder in his very soul as infection slaver dripped from every tooth. Behind him, more werewolves ran to assist, driven by their curse to attack, bite, and infect.

Roisinn was suddenly perched on their shoulders, and she took in a deep breath—

**FWOOOOOOOOOM!**

A bright chartreuse cloud of magic surrounded the werewolves as they leapt right into it even as Kingsley and Snape side-along Apparated only a stone's throw away.

**Crack!**

**Crack!**

**Cr-Crack!**

Aurors Apparated in, wands brandished even as a group of Unspeakables arrived where Severus had first sent his Patronus. All of them put up magical barriers the moment they arrived, ready for anything—

The cloud of magic faded to expose a pile of tiny Crup puppies, so young that their eyes were still closed and they blindly searched for their nonexistent mother, eagerly seeking to nurse.

The Aurors and Unspeakables exchanged confused glances even as they started to focus on the not-so-little pieces of gore left by the combatants.
The door to the building opened to expose a group of serious-looking children wielding wands.

"The real children were evacuated to the Ministry," a child who looked no more than five reported. "Is the scene clear?"

The Unspeakables sent out a pulse of exploratory scouting magic as the Aurors did the same with their own traces.

"Site is officially clear, ma'am," one Auror said.

The Unspeakables seemed to hiss something, their voices twisted by their uniform headgear.

The children waved their wands, and transformed into adult versions of themselves— save for the scruffy-looking boy who turned into a smug-looking dragon-bat.

"Told you they could handle it, Amelia," Master Morgan said proudly.

Kingsley turned to Severus. "Told you he would never leave you high and dry, Severus."

Severus arched a brow. "Colour me corrected."

"As long as it's black?" Kingsley retorted, grinning widely.

Snape huffed. "Indeed."

Roisin bopped one of the Crup puppies on the head with a clawless swat.

The ex-werewolf gave a squeaky puppy cry, sounding utterly helpless and piling on its impromptu littermates. The cubling hissed at the puppy, apparently unconvinced that the Crup puppies were well and truly harmless.

Severus picked her up and grunted. "I think you've grown even more," he complained as she headbonked his chin and purred, her stinger tail wrapping thoroughly around his glamoured mane as her stinger hooked into his thick undercoat. She groomed the blood off her snout before disappearing from sight.

A nearby Auror looked a little green around the gills, having noticed that the ground and the wall of the building were painted liberally in blood and entrails, pieces of werewolf, and half-chewed remains.

Gruffydd yawned, blood and pieces of flesh still stuck between his teeth, seemingly unconcerned. His stinger tail rolled into a tight ball and then released completely and then rolled up again as his ears twitched forward and to the side to catch the sounds around him.

"Y-you call this under control, Snape?" the Auror stammered. "Your beasts are bloodthirsty homicidal creatures!"

Kingsley frowned at the man, noting the Auror was one of the few without a mane— something quite rare of late.

"Do you see them eating the corpses? I didn't see you advocating anything short of killing curses against werewolves the other day at the meeting, Ackersby."

The Auror flinched. "That's different. Humans are rational beings."

"Not always," Amelia pointed out, stepping in before the argument turned hostile and one of the
beasts took offence. "We wouldn't be in the middle of a war if humans were all rational."

Ackersby turned very red, but wisely remained silent. "Yes, ma'am."

**Thump!**

Something invisible landed on the young Auror next to Ackersby. Roisinn materialised, giving happy squeaks and a buried stinger into the now-giggling Auror's mane. She purred madly and rubbed her chin against his.

"Oof, hello there, Lady Hermione," the Auror said, chuckling as he used her formal nickname instead of of the much shorter "Roi."

She perked at the name and loved on him even more.

Ackersby looked on warily at the growing cubling, obviously caught somewhere between disgust and nervousness.

"You're getting a bit too huge for cuddles, pet," the younger Auror said, laughing. "Good thing you gifted me some extra strength with this fluffy mane."

Roisinn purred her sincere approval as if all was going to plan, affectionally burying her stinger into his mane.

"Carstairs," Amelia said. "Could you please go walk the grounds with Our Lady of the Super Effective Stinger and make sure we don't have any other survivors?"

"Yes, ma'am," the young Auror said with a smile and drew his wand before walking off, a playful Roisinn in tow.

Severus shook his head as Gruffydd padded along behind the Auror, keeping an eye on his cubling and her human guardian at the same time.

"Well, it's certain that no one is going to get the drop on Carstairs."

Amelia chuckled. "Indeed."

Manfred shuffled up, wing walking over to his Apprentice and Kingsley. "Good job, Severus," he said. "You've earned your weekend off."

"Thank you, Master," Severus said, bowing his head.

Ackersby paled at the sight of the great dragonbat in all of his glory, glamour-less and completely shameless.

The dragonbat bared his fangs and yawned, seemingly oblivious to Ackersby's extreme discomfort.

"You and Kingsley can go with Amelia for your debriefing once we finish cleaning up this mess. Be sure to put copies of your memories in for the Pensieve, and make the proper notes."

"Yes, Master," Severus said.

"You handled yourselves very well. The Wizengamot loves it when the evidence falls right into their laps, even if does so in the form of an unexpected litter of Crup puppies," Master Morgan said.

He itched one ear with his wing thumb. "All of the real children were safely evacuated via Floo, so
there will be no complaints from their parents, even though had we not been here— they'd have been in far greater danger. Logic rarely falls in place whenever children are concerned, hrm?"

Severus sniffed and looked down. "Not hardly, no." His expression hardened as he recalled a carrot-haired woman surrounded in equally carrot-haired children walking through the Ministry simultaneously spoiling her children and then screeching at them when they didn't behave—a dichotomy that didn't quite make sense to him.

Then again, he figured, his childhood wasn't exactly a shining example of perfection, either.

"Alright, everyone," Amelia's voice rang out over the yard. "Let's get this place cleaned up so the kids have somewhere to play tomorrow. Remember to submit your memories to Master Morgan when you're finished with your quadrant. Alright? Excellent."

The group set to work in a flurry as Ackersby stood unmoving, seeming to ponder life's mysteries.

"Now, Auror Ackersby," Amelia said.

The Auror startled and hurriedly set off in his designated direction, though whether it was Amelia's nudge or Master Morgan's low growl that got him moving, well, that was anyone's guess.

"I don't trust that one," Manfred said, wrinkling his muzzle.

Amelia sighed. "His family comes from a long line of distinguished Aurors, but I have to admit his heart doesn't seem to be into it. Scrimgeour wants to give him a decent chance to find inspiration, but— maybe I'm just being too critical."

Morgan shook his head. "I do not think so. You can't help but notice he is one of the few Aurors that hasn't rated a mane from our lovely Roisinn. Even Crankshaft in Accounting managed to sprout a mane, and no one seems to like him but Roisinn."

Amelia arched a brow. "Well, Martha Meadowes from records once said he's a real softy under that crotchety exterior, but no one really believed her."

The Unspeakables came up first, handing Manfred their vials before bowing out and disappearing in an almost silent Disapparate.

Amelia shook her head. "Show offs, the lot of them," she muttered.

Morgan gave her an all-fangs grin. "You picked them, milady."

Carstairs returned with the required vial and the body of a stunned werewolf, who had somehow managed to not only be Crupped but also remain fully intact and alive. "Found this one in the well, boss," he said.

"The well?" Manfred asked, his muzzle wrinkling. "That's new."

He waved his wand to ensure the werewolf remained muzzled, bound, and unconscious. "I guess we'll see who he is in the morning."

"I'd imagine he survived because the well was pretty narrow—at least small enough to make the manticore and the dragon less likely to pursue." Carstairs scratched his head. "He's lucky he didn't drown. I purified the water, just in case."

"Good work, Carstairs. Go ahead and take him to the holding cells and make sure everyone knows
to keep their hands out of the bars. The last thing we need is lycanthropy in the Aurory."

"Ma'am," Carstairs relied with a bow, setting his hand on the werewolf's back and disappearing with a crack.

As Kingsley and Severus returned next, levitating a net full of disembodied werewolf parts, they gave Amelia a silent look of resigned weary as they handed Manfred their vials.

"Drop those off at the Aurory, and get a good shower and sleep. We'll do the debriefing in the morning."

"Ma'am," Kingsley and Severus chimed together and disappeared with a dual crack.

Amelia shook her head. "Now we wait for the regular folk to finish now that our overachievers have all checked in."

Manfred let out a cackle that sounded more like a screech. He pulled a thermos out from under one wing. "Might as well have some tea."

Amelia stared at the thermos with curiosity. "Muggles have their own magic, don't they?"

Manfred grinned. "Best kind is the tea-preserving kind."

The pair perched together on the wall, waiting for their charges to finish as a certain, purring cubling kneaded their laps and sprawled out over them.

If either of them wondered where she had come from or why she wasn't still with Carstairs, neither of them asked.

Roisinn, smug as always, wasn't telling.

Roisinn yawned widely as she sprawled in the main water fountain in the middle of the Ministry Atrium. Banned from potentially interfering in Severus' practical testing, she had been prevented from entering the exam hall, and it had taken all of her self-control to not jab the irritating guard at the door with her stinger and bite his nose.

Especially his nose.

She preferred large noses. They felt better when her paw thumped against them. They were more solid— more real.

Small noses begged to be nipped.

Unless they were on children.

They belonged on children because children were small, just like their noses.

Ooooh!

Was that a butterfly?

She chased the blue butterfly around the atrium, careful not to swat it out of the sky. It was much too pretty to eat. Butterflies were for admiring, after all, not eating. Spiders were for friends— well, certain ones, anyway. Beetles were pretty tasty, except for that one.
Staying away from giant beetles with human torsos and multiple heads sounded like a really good idea.

Roisinn figured that beetle-thing tasted utterly foul.

It had certainly *smelled* foul, that's for sure.

The butterfly flew up and away, and Roisinn ended her game despite her wings. Boundaries were to be respected, after all.

She waved her tail back and forth.

The butterfly alighted on her stinger, and she froze.

Aww, it came back!

She gazed upon it, content to watch it open and close its wings.

"Incendio."

The butterfly burst into flames, crumping in the heat as its wings turned to ash and fell with its body to the ground.

Roisinn stared, uncomprehendingly— utterly stunned as her friend and playmate was no more.

"Stupefy. Incarcerous. Petrificus Totalus."

Roisinn fell over, stunned— too distracted by her beautiful friend turned to ash to even protect herself. Her eyes turned up to see a sharp-featured wizard with a cruel sneer on his face, yet the rest of him was strangely handsome— a strange balance she did not like at all. She didn't much like being pinned either.

"So, you're the one causing such a fuss and bother amongst what is mine," the wizard growled. "You don't seem so impressive to me, beast." The wizard sneered at her. "But I still had my connections here at the Ministry, and without you and the failing exams I have arranged for the boy to get, I will call all who defy me to heel just as a beast should."

Roisinn growled and spit, but was unable to move. Her stinger dripped with venom, but it too, could not move.

"I think we'll start by taking away your little toy," the wizard said, pointing his wand at her stinger. "Diffind—!"

**SCHHHHHLUCK!**

A larger and more massive stinger tip emerged from the wizard's chest, dripping with blood and venom, just missing the heart, but leaving the man impaled below the ribs.

He stared down at the paralysed cubling, wondering how she had managed to move, only then realising it hadn't been the beast at all—

Not the *right* beast.

The atrium was suddenly full of beasts and people, all with manes like a lion. Their eyes were all glowing with magical fire. Some fell on all fours into beast shape— some stood as a man but remained bestial in form. The humanoid ones had their wands out, the beasts had primed, dripping
stingers cocked and aimed.

Muzzles parted to expose lines of dagger-like teeth. Glowing orange inner mouths seemed like portals to hell itself.

The manticore that had impaled him nudged his cubling over and over, licking her frantically until she stood up shakily.

He growled and nudged her closer to the wizard, encouraging her.

Roisinn gained her feet slowly, unsure, but her stinger swung back and forth.

The larger head of the mother fey-dragon materialised, her snout nudging her offspring up to steadier legs. Both parents encouraged their cubling to stand for herself.

Roisinn found her footing after a minute and refound her her anger. She pulled on the hate emanating from the wizard and empowered herself. She launched at his head, stinger burrowing into the wizard's neck as her body latched onto his face. Her snout clamped onto his all-too-perfect nose as her magical breath shot straight up his nostrils and enveloped him in a bright glowing cloud of magic as his body slid off her father's powerful stinger tail.

Roisinn bounced off the wizard's face, hitting the ground a few times with protesting squeaks of annoyance before skidding to a halt at the feet of a pitch black chimaera with mane to spare. His tail wrapped around the cubling and moved her onto his back as he bared his fangs at the fallen wizard.

A chocolate brown chimaera with a black mane rubbed up against the other as his stinger tail gently nudged the cubling to check her status.

She chewed on the tip of the stinger playfully, having already chosen to distract herself with her cherished ones over the trauma of having been captured and almost-maimed.

The wizard that had attacked her, however, was having other problems at the moment. His body was being encased in a multitude of thin filaments.

"You cannot defeat the Dark Lord Voldemort!" the wizard cried. "I am immortal! I am forever!"

The filaments surrounded him completely in an opaque crystalis, and it thrashed around wildly before going eerily still. Then, just as the audience of chimaeras were ready to move again, the cocoon split down the middle, and a plethora of exotic butterflies in varied colours and patterns came spilling out even as a lush green carpet of grass liberally speckled with beautiful wildflowers sprouted outward from the open cocoon and spread to cover the entire floor of the Ministry atrium.

From where the cocoon was, the ground trembled and sank as a small pond and waterfall formed, filled with a wide variety of colourful tropical fish darting to and fro. The cocoon itself shuddered and shattered into pieces, forming into a small mangrove habitat that stretched into a forming marine pool. A miniature coral reef emerged from the bottom of the pool as anemones unfolded and small clown fish played hide and seek amongst the stinging tentacles.

Chirping and squeaking heralded the arrival of a bevy of river otters who happily took up residence in the brand new freshwater and saltwater ecosystem.

Beautiful forests of gillyweed swayed in the water, shimmering with their own magic as they cleaned and oxygenated the water.

A school of sea-unicorns—sea horses with shining, pearlescent horns—darted in and out of the coral, sometimes bursting up from the water with a joyous whinny before diving back in,
disappearing amongst the weeds.

The chimaeras all sat down and exchanged silent looks of disbelief.

A dirty-blond chimaera with a black eyepatch grunted. "Well, that takes care of that, yeah?"

Roisinn gleefully charged into the water and paddled her way around, sticking her head under the water to admire the fish.

Severus flicked an ear. "No one is going to believe this outside of the Aurory and the DoM."

Amelia scratched her ear idly. "I think we've all definitely earned our holiday bonuses at the end of the year, yes?"

If anyone disagreed, no one was saying.

---

**Whose War Is It Anyway?**

No one is quite sure if they believe that You-Know-Who has truly given up. The rash of attacks have simmered down both in our beloved Wizarding world and in the Muggle world.

Strange rumours have been spreading that You-Know-Who has met his end from everything as epic as a great battle fought single-handedly against a hundred wizards and witches at once to him choking to death on a chicken bone. No body has been found, so speculation and rumours continue to far outnumber any evidence proving any of the stories to be true or false.

Albus Dumbledore has cautioned the magical public to remain vigilant to the possibility of You-Know-Who's return even if he supposedly died; however, after the incident at Hogwarts with the gameskeeper, Rubeus Hagrid, illegally breeding creatures that were a danger to the students, many are less apt to take everything Albus Dumbledore says as gospel. Others question just how Mr Dumbledore would even know such things.

Dumbledore, who is still under observation by the ministry while holding his post at Hogwarts, has kept a low-profile until mention of YKW's possible forfeit of the war.

Incidents of magical violence to wizard, witch, and Muggle alike have still been reported, but sightings of YKW have been fraught with confusion and rumours over positive identification.

One thing is for certain, however. Incidents at the Ministry have gone down significantly, and the effectiveness of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement has never been so high. Surveys from hundreds of individuals have said that satisfaction with the Auror response has been excellent, and over fifty percent of the wanted posters have been taken down due to apprehension.

Even if YKW is still out there, crime seems to have taken a plunge, and shops in places such as Diagon Alley have soared due to large infusions of people who feel they are safe enough to shop again.

As for places such as Knockturn Alley, this paper has been unable to report as to a rise or fall of crime.

---

Roisinn chirped and leapt onto the counter, her stinger tail swinging back and forth like a pendulum. The bartender smiled, rubbing her under the chin as he slipped her a piece of corned beef. The cubling chirred in approval as she chewed her tasty prize, keeping a steady watchful eye on her
human companions.

Lucius, who had sprouted a rather impressively regal platinum mane, was attracting lustful glances from nearby witches, much to Narcissa's growing consternation. Thankfully, Lucius' gaze wasn't the wandering kind, even with his talk of business around the tavern table.

A large spread of food and drink littered the surface of the table, and all of them were taking their time to pick through it as they spoke of the business at hand.

Roisinn thumped as she bounced back over to the table and purred-pounced into the booth.

Narcissa eyed the cubling rather warily, her hands going to cover her swollen abdomen.

Roi gave a disappointed chirp and sulked, slinking over to slither into Lucius' and Severus' laps instead. Her increased size made the appearance a bit comical until the charmed collar took over and shrunk her down to a more publicly acceptable size.

"She won't hurt you, Narcissa," Lucius said, frowning as he rubbed the cubling's wings.

Narcissa shook her head. "Our baby could be coming any time now, Lucius. I don't want to risk anything harming it."

Severus' brows knit together, but he said nothing. His and Lucius' ears swivelled as a nasally voice ordered more sherry from the bartender.

"Don't you think you've had enough, Sybill?" the bartender said with a sigh. "I can send for the SASS (Safe Apparating Side-Along Service) to take you home."

"I ordered more sherry," the voice demanded truculently.

The bartender frowned but carried over another glass. "This is the last one, Sybill. I don't want to be responsible for you splinching yourself or falling into the river on the way home."

"Psh," the voice answered, and the sound of guzzling came shortly after.

"Do you think she's the one?" Severus asked quietly.

"Undoubtedly," Lucius replied, curling his lip.

"She sounds like a blithering idiot," Severus scoffed, his voice barely a whisper.

"Also undoubtedly," Lucius agreed.

Roisinn had her ears pinned tightly to her head, showing her obvious displeasure at the witch's voice.

"Lu-sheousss," an intoxicated voice drawled as a sherry-soused witch threw herself on his robes. "I knew you would see the error of your ways and come find me!"

Lucius' perfectly immaculate, silver-tipped, pointed ears flattened into his mane, even as his mane seemed to stand straight up. "Madam, kindly release my person at once."

"Nonsense, Darling," the knackered witch replied. "I'm sooo glad you're here to tell your soon-to-be-ex-wife that we are truly meant for each other!"

A furious Narcissa started to go for her wand—
THWACK!

A cubling's stinger buried itself deep into the witch's underfed bum, and the inebriated woman went tumbling backwards onto the floor as dozens of tiny sherry bottles flew out of her pockets and spilt out over the walkways.

Roisinn promptly disappeared, cloaking herself completely.

Sybill sat straight up, her eyes very wide. She looked around the room, the heaviness of her insobriety now completely absent.

"What—" she stammered. She immediately lunged for a sherry bottle and quickly drank it down.

Another.

Another.

The floor was littered with sherry bottles, but Sybill was still stone-cold sober.

"No, no, no!" Sybill cried. "I need a firewhisky!" She stood and slammed coins on the bar.

The bartender eyed her rather strangely, then shrugged and poured her a shot.

Sybill drank it down and burst into tears. "Nooooo! Give me a wine. The whole bottle!"

"Sybill, you've already had—" the bartender started to say, confused by her lack of intoxication and desperation when only a few minutes previous she had been out of her mind drunk.

Sybill accioed a wine bottle from the shelf and opened it, guzzling it down so fast that the wine dribbled down her face.

She waited.

She remained steady as a rock and completely untipsy. Then she suddenly made a dash for the loo, the sounds of her worshipping the porcelain god heralding her body's response to the sheer alcoholic overload.

Yet, when she came out, she was eerily steady on her feet and lacking any other sign of intoxication.

A elder wizard walked in to the tavern. "Ahh, I believe I'll have a strawberry cordial please," he ordered.

"Albus!" Trelawney cried, throwing herself on the wizard's robes. "You have to help me!"

Dumbledore's blue eyes grew very wide. "Sybill? I told you, I don't think you're a good match for our Divination position."

"You have to help me! The sherry doesn't work anymore! I can't stop those terrible visions!"

Dumbledore frowned as Sybill, who was liberally covered in fur shed by one highly-irritated cubling, created a dense cloud of long and short hairs with her frantic graspings at Albus' violet silk robes.

"Ah-ACHOOO!" Dumbledore sneezed with a magic-laced boom, and the entire tavern was tossed catty-wampus on one side. Wizards, witches, plates, napkins, drinks, chairs, and tables ended up plastered on the far wall.
"Ah-ah-AAAAAACHOOOOO!" Dumbledore sneezed again, blowing out the entire back wall of the Hog's Head Inn.

A herd of terrified goats were scattered about just outside the tavern, all wide-eyed and bleating in panic.

A white and grey bearded wizard stormed out of the backroom covered in uncooked chips, celery, whisky, and a scowl. "Brother, I believe we need to have some words."

"AHCHOOOO!"

Aberforth and Sybill went flying out the downed wall and into the night. There was a dull thud and terrified bleating shortly after.

"ACHOO!"

Crash!

Maanaah!

"AAAACHOOO!"

Crashhhh-CRASH. Maaah! Crash.

"AH-AH-H-CHOO!"

Maaaaaahhhh! (Crash)

The bartender pulled a wicker basket off Roisinn's head and plucked an apple off her stinger as Lucius and Severus exchanged concerned glances.

They hastily downed their drinks in one long gulp and slammed the empty glasses down on their (miraculously still intact) table.

A lantern fell to the ground behind them, bonking the poor cubling on the head.

Roisinn hissed and spat as her stinger pulverised the offending lantern until it was perforated with stinger-sized holes, turning it into a makeshift watering can.

Narcissa scooped the cubling up and cuddled her tenderly, stroking her ears, no longer worried about the safety issues inherent in having Roisinn around her future baby.

Roisinn slumped and purred softly, draping her furry self over Narcissa's swollen abdomen. Her eyes closed with contentment as Narcissa's fingers gently rubbed under her chin and around her ears.

---

**Freak Allergy Blows Terrified Goats All Over Hogsmeade**

Last night, part of Hogsmeade was blown apart and infested with terrified goats due to a freak situation involving a sudden, severe allergic reaction.

Sybill Trelawney had some sort of strong allergen attached to her clothing, and her attempt to beg aid from a visiting patron of the Hog's Head Inn, one Albus Dumbledore, resulting in him suffering from a magically enhanced sneezing attack that levelled more than a few walls in Hogsmeade.
The goats, which had been peacefully resting outside of the Hog's Head Tavern, ended up just about everywhere in the city from the fountain to the roof of Honeydukes.

Hogsmeade will be partially shut down for the next few days in order to fix the damage done and remove the contamination the goats caused while being blown about the city.

As for what exactly caused Mr Dumbledore's most astonishing allergy attack, St Mungo's is understandably reluctant to test it without a well-warded safe room, as no one wants the destructive event from Hogsmeade to reproduce itself inside St Mungo's.

If anyone had ever doubted Roisinn's keen protective instincts, the pile of savagely mauled Death Eater bodies in front of baby Draco's crib at St Mungo's seemed to prove that she was a highly devoted nanny-beast.

The poor midwives took to the scene quite badly at first, thinking Roisinn had murdered innocent guests— at least until their tattoo-Marked arms were revealed for all to see.

Those that hadn't been stung, mauled and breathed on by the enthusiastic cubling found themselves facing said cublings' guardians as well as her parents, none of which were allowing any shenanigans on their watch.

Narcissa, who had slept through twelve attempted assassinations and woken up more than once to multiple mauled corpses in front of her beloved infant son's bassinet, began to suspect that St Mungo's wasn't such an unsafe place to have a child, after all. At least while a certain very protective cubling was around.

Perhaps, Narcissa suspected, Lucius hasn't been so wrong in befriending a half-blood so openly after all.

It wasn't that Severus hadn't been a true friend—

No, it had been the unspoken stigma of his support of Severus and then have him totter off and not accept the Dark Lord's mantle during a time when taking the "right" side was all-important to the safety of your family.

Then again, she was starting to suspect it was they who had unfortunately chosen the wrong side.

Her sister, of all people, had met an armless fate in Azkaban, and she had been one of the Dark Lord's most fervent supporters. Narcissa knew that her sister, despite their shared childhood moments that weren't of the mad variety, would have undoubtedly been first in line to "punish" Lucius for not staunchly clinging to the banner of pureblood supremacy for her beloved Dark Lord, had she not thankfully been dealt with before such things came to light.

Not that it had saved their family from being targeted by straggling Death Eaters who hadn't realised their Dark Lord had been vanquished by being transformed into a nature preserve—

Everything he hadn't stood for: peace, beauty...

Even stranger, every Death Eater the cubling neutralised seemed to gift her with a growth spurt, and she was getting quite large indeed, somewhere between a manticore-Nundu-fey dragon-something mix.

The cubling's parents were starting to chill a bit more, allowing her to seek out her own adventures without them— so some extent. Despite her size, mum and dad were like most parents and weren't
quite ready to let their baby grow up without them until they were sure, oh so very sure, that she could take out a dragon on her own in her sleep.

Narcissa could relate. Draco wasn't going to be unsupervised until he could do the same.

Or maybe go to Hogwarts.

Narcissa's eye twitched.

Maybe.

Draco seemed to be a pretty mellow baby once he realised he wasn't getting anywhere with Roisinn around. She was also a dutiful attendant, using those hands of hers to pin him down, change his nappies, keep him from rolling off surfaces, or whatever mischief babies could get into as they defied their age.

Babies were trouble.

Magical babies were extra trouble with a side of pure magical randomness.

The house-elves kept trying to pop in and check on Draco at the hospital, but Roisinn would growl at them and cock her stinger every time they tried.

Dobby had been so frightened he fell into a bed tray and knocked over her breakfast and tea.

That had irritated Roi even more, and she looked ready to take the elf by the ears and shake him senseless.

Dobby hadn't been back—

It was probably for the best. Dobby liked to drop things. His attempts to "do good" usually ended up with him covered in sauce or with a pail stuck over his head.

Or their great, great, great, great, great grandmother's favourite bone china teapot.

Truly, it was a bonafide miracle that Dobby survived having broken it once— fortunately magic had been able to fix it as good as new.

It might have been because Roisinn's clutter-squadron of uber-helpful arachnids bound the struggling elf in a silk cocoon and stuck him to the ceiling with his fingers bound together and unable to snap.

It had made Lucius less apt to destroy and defoliate their beloved garden— if anything because he had been laughing far too hard to manage it.

The spiders had eaten very well that night, feasting on a giant bowl of premium grade, fresh and juicy lacewing flies.

No, Narcissa hadn't even come close to suspecting that befriending Severus Snape would have led to so much happiness, warmth and security. A time of war was hardly a span in which to contemplate such positives, after all.

But when Roisinn was set loose in the manor, many ancient evils that had been far too powerful to dispose of without alerting the wrong kind of people simply gave up the ghost and "died" after Her Lady of the Potent Stinger impaled everything from cursed books to enchanted sculptures with her unforgiving tail. The beast was ridding the Malfoy family of many generations' worth of cursed and detrimental artefacts with just a few passes through the estate.
Some of them had even been her not-so-dear sister Bellatrix' "gifts" to the family: artefacts she had cursed specifically to spy on them. There had been no way to dispose of them without bringing down the wrath of her sister upon them all—

Well, *that* wasn't a problem anymore.

Things were going so well now that when she heard that "the Potter witch" was having "problems" in her last trimester, she was almost— *almost*— going to ask Severus if he wanted them to assist Lily with her pregnancy.

The Malfoys and the other elder magical families had been giving birth to generations of magical babies, and they were well aware of the unique quirks that could happen, and *did* happen in the last month or two before the baby came screaming out (sometimes with their magic full on in a temporary blast before going dormant.) Why it worked that way was still very much a mystery to paediatric healers.

It wasn't that Lily would cause actual harm to her own child in her ignorance, Narcissa believed, but instead that she would suffer needlessly as the baby's magic tried to decide whether it was going to coexist peacefully with mum or try to make its own mark on the world a bit too early.

Narcissa weighed pity together with concern.

From what she'd heard, Mrs Lily Potter had not been left alone and destitute. Lord and Lady Potter had said they would ensure their grandchild had a good start in life.

They, unlike Lily, had often come by for tea and dinners with herself and Lucius. The elder Potters and Severus had become quite close after he had saved their lives, and in becoming close to Severus they had mended some old bridges with the Malfoys.

Seeing as how they were one of the few families that had not suffered strange losses of life and limb in the war, the masses were starting to rethink their previous opinions regarding the Malfoy family. Narcissa's fears had been transformed thanks to Severus' befriending of one furred and scaled cubling and her commanding and growing family of protectors.

Af if her original nuclear family hadn't been enough—

Gruffyd was defying all manticore lore and legend by allowing little Draco to pull on his tail and yank on his mane. The only indicator of "stop it" was a flash of fangs, leonine style. Oddly, baby Draco seemed to have a good idea of what *that* meant, and he'd flop over and play with own his toes instead. Narcissa had to admit that as far as babysitters went, no one was getting anywhere near her baby son without being stamped onto the pre-approved list.

Who was managing the list, however, was anyone's guess.

She just wished Draco would stop trying to suck on the tip of the stinger end of his bestial guardians —

Madam Bones assured her that, at least in this case, the stingers were only as poisonous as the owner needed them to be thanks to the infusion of emotionally-responsive Nundu genes, whose notorious deadly breath was always powered by the emotion it faced.

Still, Narcissa figured, she hardly wanted Draco to piss off one of the beasts by accident and get a lesson in true pain— even if it was only from a mere "warning" swat, sting, or breath.

Oddly—
Sometimes she’d find Draco propped up against Roisinn as she lounged in the library, and there would be books open like she was reading them. When she picked them up and reshelved them, the cubling would give her such a look of annoyance that she wondered if the bond between her and Severus was a little too tight.

Stranger still, Draco always seemed to have his head cocked as if he were listening to her. More than he ever seemed to listen to anyone else in the house.

Even more unnerving was the clutter of spiders that would dutifully attend, weave booties, change nappies, and even sing him to sleep. They were seemingly Roisinn's personal arachnid honour guard, and they never went far from her, disappearing into her thick mane at a moment's notice.

Try as she might, Narcissa could never find them, even when she combed through the cubling's mane. It was if her mane was a portal to some other place, at least for the disturbingly cute and fluffy arachnids.

Once, she could have sworn she saw "Adorable" written neatly in a spider web over Draco's crib. Surely, she had imagined that.

Right?

Roisinn, however, seemed content to boggle Narcissa's mind. She was getting huge for a "cubling", even though she chased her arachnids around with the same gleeful abandon as one of Narcissa's runaway yarnballs. It was just so unnerving to see her carrying a tome between her jaws, cauldrons, Lucius' walking cane, and all manner of things. She'd even seen her sitting over a cauldron next to Severus seemingly making potions.


Severus had warned her that there was a good chance Hagrid's genetic tampering had included human blood from a magical family— at least, he’d said, he hoped it was just blood.

Hoped it was "just" blood?

What exactly did he mean by that? Surely he didn't think Hagrid had been crossbreeding with humans, right?

Impossible.

However— from what she remembered of Hagrid, he tended to get his everything from less-than-reputable sources. Who could say that he might not have gotten one of his breeders from someone who didn't care what the pedigree had been as long as they made a few galleons more on the sale.

Narcissa shuddered. It was a Merlin-blessed miracle, she realised, that Roisinn had imprinted on Severus (now that was an ironic thought) and so had become one well-adjusted furry lady.

Narcissa froze.

She'd once thought that her sister and Rodolphus were to have a child. It was expected of a pureblood witch marrying into a family such as the Lestrange family, to produce a magical male heir in short order. But just as Narcissa had begun to notice the telltale swelling of the abdomen on Bellatrix' unnaturally thin frame—
All signs of that pregnancy had abruptly disappeared.

Everyone had assumed Bellatrix had suffered a miscarriage, and that was considered enough of a shame that most pureblood families wouldn't question such a thing or bring it up, lest the stress prevent another attempt, but everyone knew that once Bellatrix had been sworn into the Dark Lord's service she only had eyes for him.

Which had come first?

Marriage or the Dark Lord?

Everyone knew that Bella had put no one before her Lord—

But had that been before or after her "miscarriage"?

Narcissa frowned.

Suddenly she paled. The Dark Lord cared nothing about love. That was well known. All he cared about was loyalty to himself and by proxy, his vision.

Bella had been nothing but happy about having a child until—

Until she went completely mental and loyal to the Dark Lord's vision.

Narcissa bolted into the library, startling Roisinn and her baby as they lounged near an open tome of _The Tales of Beedle the Bard_. She traced a magical symbol on the back of one shelf, and it slid to the side. She threw books on the floor as she looked for the one that had set her mind racing.

Book after book went flying onto the floor until she found the tattered, black grimoire she was looking for. She used her wand to cut her finger and traced a symbol on the cover, and the book opened.

Sweating profusely, she flipped page after page until she found—

The book dropped to the floor as Narcissa sank to her knees.

Scrawled in the quill-writing of an ancient Black ancestor was:

_**Vita Utrem**_

Bottle life.

A spell of supposed immortality— to transfer one's life essence into liquid form to be drunk by a younger, more suitable "host".

Narcissa slumped.

It was an old, ancient spell— created in a time when the loss of the knowledge of one's family magic was unforgivable, back when the lives of.magicals were nearly as short as Muggles.

In time, it fell out of favour because it required a Muggle host, and none of the later purebloods wanted to taint their own essence by admitting they needed a Muggle for anything.

As far as Narcissa knew, no one had ever used the spell to extract the life essence of an unborn child into an elixir.
Until now, a voice whispered in her head. Until now.

Gods only knew what it would have done to the mother.

To Bella.

And if that elixir had been added to some potion, the creator thinking it was merely the blood of a magical person—

Merlin—

It would put the soul, the potential, the magic—into a new host.

Narcissa looked at Roisinn and her son nestled between her front legs as he tugged and played with her mane.

Vita Utrem was never meant to be given to a magical or a beast.

If Hagrid had used a potion to give his beasts the ability to become more capable of higher thinking, he had actually imbued them with human potential, intelligence, and possibly human magic.

Narcissa stared at Roisinn.

The cubling could be her— niece.

Her father standing in the doorway of the library, the handsome, charismatic younger wizard beside him.

The predatory look the man gave her sister—

It hadn't been lust, Narcissa realised. No, the Dark Lord had no passions of the flesh, despite what Bellatrix' crazed mind thought. The wizard had wanted her as his— so crazed that she served only him, so misunderstood that one he saw her worth, for in her was the power of the line of Blacks and the money and influence that also brought to the table.

Her marriage would keep the connections he wanted, but a child—

A child would have been unwanted, unneeded.

A child would take too long to mold into a soldier of war, and he wanted his followers to devote on him, not some squalling baby.

Narcissa's blood was running cold. Now, she realised why Lucius had always acted so cold in public, often making it seem like he didn't care about her or her pregnancy in front of others. He had been protecting her and Draco from the Dark Lord's scrutiny. As long as he was the perfect agent, Voldemort was willing to let Narcissa have her baby.

Bellatrix had been excited about the baby— prepping, getting rooms ready, cribs, clothes. She and Rodolphus had been ecstatic about their child together. Then, it had all stopped.

How had she not seen it before?

Blindness, she thought. I was utterly unable to admit what I saw. If I admitted it, I would have shown such fear in front of him— fear that would have told the Dark Lord everything Lucius was trying desperately to conceal.
Roisinn was looking at the open grimoire on the floor, and for a moment, Narcissa saw the cubling’s eyes narrow. Her hand-paws stretched outward as her claws unsheathed in an eerie, almost-unnatural slowness. Her lips pulled back from her teeth—

She snatched Draco up by his nappy and carried him out of the library, a puff of dark purple magic trickling out of her mouth as her stinger dripped its venom.

Plop.

Tsssszzzzz.

Plop.

Tsssszzzzz.

The venom, like acid, burned through the hardwood floor as it dripped from the waving stinger.

With each step of her paws, she seemed to grow. Her bulk expanding so much that she barely fit through the library doorway. Her claws clicked across the marble floor outside the library. Her tail flicked, spasming, and a glob of venom landing in a line across the wooden tiles—

The Black family grimoire smoked and turned to goo, folding in on itself as the potent venom destroyed generations of family magic dating back to the Dark Ages.

Yet, Narcissa wasn't sure what horrified her more: that her family Grimoire of untold years was destroyed, that the venom was decidedly more acidic than anyone had ever seen it, that a beast had just removed her son from a possibly dangerous situation, or that the said beast was quite possible, more than likely, the soul and potential of her once-to-be niece.

"She's more than just a mere beast, Narcissa," Lucius said, sipping his tea.

"How do you know she isn't just a remarkably cunning animal, Lucius?" she replied.

Lucius' expression darkened. "We are all capable of being cunning animals, Narcissa," he said. "But when it comes right down to it, we are all— animals."

Memories of Severus surrounded in books for his studies and Roisinn being right there came back to her in a rush— how the cubling would, at least in her mind, imitate him so perfectly.

Could it be true that she wasn't imitating him at all? Was she in fact learning right alongside him?

The cubling was growing fast—

Her size alone had already surpassed that of her father, Gruffydd. She was still very curious, playful, and protective of "her people" even as they were even more protective of her. Her parents were already more relaxed about letting her decide her own adventures outside their line of sight, a sign that she was, at least to them, almost full grown.

How was that possible in just a few years?

Lucius said that Master Morgan thought she was right on track— but he, himself, was a dragon-bat— hardly a great example of normalcy in any case.

Master Morgan unnerved her greatly. His eyes seemed to bore into her soul.

Roisinn gifted the old dragon-bat with a lush mane to match his wife's, and the two were an
impressive and intimidating pair to be sure. Roisinn loved on him like no tomorrow, getting away with cuddles and other social defiance that his other apprentices would never have been able to (or wanted to).

Then again, she had a hard time coming to terms with the words snuggle and dragon-bat in the same sentence.

It wasn't that she didn't trust him to watch over Severus or teach him right. It wasn't that she thought he was a mass-murderer, either. It was just—

Narcissa sighed.

Even knowing her own upbringing was biased and probably not the best example of fairness, it was hard to dismiss a lifetime of thinking. It was the main reason the pureblood families flocked to Voldemort's banner. They were afraid of change, and they were even more afraid to admit that their blood had nothing to do with the power of their magic.

Hence, why the Vita Utrem elixir fell out of favour once the idea of the Sacred Twenty-Eight came into play.

Who wanted to admit they used a mere Muggle to host their magic and preserve their pureblood lines? It would mean that Muggles were completely compatible and as capable of housing magic as "the grand old pureblood family lines." If one thing Narcissa remembered, it was that the elixir was always to be used on Muggle stock— remnants of a time when Muggles were nothing more than tools to be used, or exploited, and thought to be nothing but "empty vessels" to be filled at a whim.

Narcissa flinched.

It sounded quite despicable now she really thought about it.

Her father would have had her believe that rubbish, though. Nothing and no one could compare to the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black.

As Narcissa exited the library, her attempts to fix the floor were utterly foiled by magic-eating venom seeping through the floor. She grimaced at the damage to the wood even as she thanked Merlin it had only been the floor and not herself or Draco.

The cubling had been very deliberate in protecting Draco from the aftermath of her venom-dripping tail.

Just how aware was she? Narcissa wondered a bit nervously.

As she walked into the sitting room, she stumbled into a bestial pile up. Draco was babbling happily as he played with a Quidditch mobile dangling from Gruffyd's tail, surrounded by Lucius, Severus, Kingsley and Zoë. Roisinn was curled protectively around Draco as the others curled protectively around her.

As Narcissa contemplated just how sentient the cubling was, Draco babbled gleefully from his cradle of blissfully warm, maned bodies.

She didn't really know the answer, but like most things in her life, it was a wee bit complicated.

Lily frowned as she went browsing through the wee witches and wizards store looking for items to fill up her nursery for her unborn baby. The shower the Potters had thrown her had been very well
attended, and she had gotten quite a bit to ensure her baby would not lack for clothing, crib items and mobiles, but she couldn't help but feel like her guests were subtly trying to insult her by repeatedly saying that she couldn't take care of the baby on her own.

One supposed old Potter family friend had attempted to gift her with a young female house elf—a daughter of one of their own family's elves—to help her out, but Lily absolutely refused to have it.

"It's slavery!" she had hissed at them in outrage, completely scandalised at the very idea.

Her parents, she knew, would be absolutely mortified at the thought that their daughter would need outside help to take care of one baby when they themselves had raised two daughters without as much as a babysitter.

"Do you think the food at Hogwarts just showed up by magic?" Marlene had hissed at her. "House elves are what cleaned our dorms, our clothes and prepared our food, and you never complained then!"

No! If, if that were true, surely she would have seen them. She would have known!

Lily browsed the aisles, happy to find some cute Muggle baby items that the Wizarding world just didn't seem to understand—like disposable nappies and baby bottles shaped like cartoon figures, dinosaur pyjamas with feet, even perfectly normal, everyday things like walkers, bouncers and breast pumps were practically unheard of!

Surely it wasn't so crazy to want to be able to feed your baby in public without having to expose a breast instead of hiding away somewhere?

She wanted to decorate the nursery in Winnie the Pooh and the Chronicles of Narnia that her parents used to read to her, not the adventures and life of Merlin or some plain, sterile room.

James had once said he wanted the nursery filled with Quidditch pitches and golden snitches, enchanted to move and entertain.

Well, a bloody lot of good he was rotting away in the bowels of the Goblin Nation.

Sure she got to visit him, but the goblins watched her like hawks. They searched her! The nerve!

"I think I'll go with this," a voice said from the counter as Narcissa Malfoy put a few bundles on the counter.

"Those are our best sleepsuits and rompers, ma'am," the lady at the register said. "You'll love them. And who is your little man?"

"This is Draco," Narcissa said.

"Well, hello, Draco," the woman said with a smile.

Draco sucked on his foot while he rocked in the bassinet, his grey eyes staring up at the other woman.

Lily froze. What was the Lady Malfoy doing at a Muggle establishment?

Narcissa paid for the items with a nod of thanks and accepted the plastic sack with a wry expression.

"Here are some coupons for your next visit," the saleswoman said with a friendly smile.
"Thank you," Narcissa said as she picked up Draco's travel bassinet and walked away from the counter.

Narcissa stopped in front of Lily. "Mrs Potter," Narcissa said, inclining her head slightly. She looked at Lily's heavily swollen belly appraisingly. "Due soon?"

Lily flushed. "The doctor says in late November or early December."

"Doctor?" Narcissa repeated, her blonde brows furrowing. "Have you not seen a magical healer this late in your pregnancy?"

"I've kept all my doctor appointments," Lily said proudly. "I'll be having a baby boy."

Narcissa frowned. "Please do not take this the wrong way, my dear, but this is the child of James Potter, yes?"

"Of course it is!" Lily said, utterly aghast at the implication.

Narcissa held up her hand. "Please, I mean no offence, truly. It is just that— babies from—" she carefully looked around. "Magical families tend to have special concerns and, erm, considerably earlier due dates than is typical for Muggles— rather, the magic gathers in the first month, often fooling the body into thinking it is pregnant later before— ah— the witch starts visibly showing."

"Look, there is absolutely nothing wrong with my pregnancy," Lily said, uneasily rubbing her swollen abdomen.

"Please, I'm not saying there is," Narcissa said gently. "I'm just saying that seeing a healer could help with—"

"There is nothing wrong with my Harry!" Lily hissed. Her hands clenched, and she crushed the package of pacifiers in her hand. Her magic crackled through her body, and made her long red hair writhe eerily. The shop window suddenly exploded, sending shards of glass flying in all directions, and the women shopping nearby screamed in terror as they hit the deck.

A policeman's whistle sounded off repeatedly down the street, getting closer and closer.

Lily groaned, clutching her belly, doubling over in sudden excruciating pain. She cried out as a powerful contraction took her off guard and the sensation of Harry's legs kicking her uterus with a series of powerful ninja kicks, and with it, the tree outside the shop cracked and fell over in pieces.

"It's the IRA!" someone screamed shrilly. "BOMBS! BOMBS!"

Lily tried to brace herself on a shelf as another contraction came. "Oh God. Oh God," she cried. "AHHHHH!"
A car burst into flames outside as people screamed and ran in a panic. Police were swarming about everywhere like a cloud of angry hornets.

Lily was on the ground, moaning in agony as search and rescue teams stormed in from seemingly everywhere, pulling terrified and injured people to safety from the rubble and the flames. Women were screaming all around the shop, terrified, even as a few yelled that "some woman was giving birth in aisle five."

A medical team ducted and ran in at same time, one of them asking if her back was injured while the other shined a torch into her eyes.

Lily moaned as she saw Narcissa and a few other women being herded out the broken shop window due to the door being covered in heaps of merchandise and shelving debris. Vaguely she remembered her mother-in-law telling her that she needed to see a proper healer too. She'd brushed it all off thinking that if a Muggle OBGYN was good enough for her mother, it was good enough for her as well.

The owls.

The parchments.

The flyers advertising magical motherhood classes at St Mungo's—

She'd dismissed it all as being ridiculous, backwards, pseudo-Edwardian, old-fashioned poppycock.

She'd read every book on pregnancy from the London public library and in the OBGYN's office, and her mum had told her everything else. She'd been very well-prepared, damnit!

Another strong contraction hit, and the light fixtures violently exploded above them. The paramedics threw themselves over her body to shelter her from the falling debris even as they tried to avoid being hit by it at the same time.

The falling light fixtures made Lily scream even louder in fear, and another agonising contraction came along with it.

A double decker bus crashed into a line of automobiles, blocking the already jammed road with even more chaos.

Oh god. Wh-what if… Death Eaters were to come wading in, having quickly recognised the signs of a magical pregnancy?

Lily shrieked even louder. This time the convulsions came with a gush of fluid that caused one of the medics to slip and fall, almost cracking his skull on the shelf as he went down.

Crack!

Crack-Crack!

CRACK!

CCCCCRACKKK!

ROAAAAARRRRRRR!

A honey-coloured chimaera Apparated in, towering over the broken shelves. A burst of magic blew
out from her mouth in a cloud of magical vapour, filling the room.

Time screeched to a grinding halt as people were suddenly paralysed, all completely immobile.

As the cloud dispersed, Lily saw a woman with a wild mane of Medusa-like curls standing tall in the middle of the rubble. Her hands traced a series of complex runes in the air—silent as a graveyard—as great wings folded around her slender body like a cape. She flung out shield after shield as a number of other spells pushed things out of the way.

Dark figures in black robes and white-robed figures with horrific masks showed up in the smoke and chaos, even as every Muggle was frozen in place.

Wands waved. Fires dampened. Cars righted themselves. Dents seemed to fix themselves, and even the tree put itself to rights again.

*Shing!*

*Shing-shing- SHING!*

Mass Obliviates struck in waves, one after another after another.

A fearsome black bipedal chimaera walked through the smoke, a great chimaera on one side of him as an even larger fey-dragon roared on his other side. A strawberry blonde bipedal chimaera and one with a scruffy-messy mane walked with them.

"Obliviators! Get this cock-bungled arse-end of a hag's fuckup erased off the face of Creation!" the dirty-blonde chimaera roared.

"Unspeakables, restore this area as of yesterday! Move it! Now!" the strawberry blonde chimaera yelled over the spray of a nearby fire hydrant.

The black chimaera seemed to melt into the figure of man in the blackest of black robes. He pulled a snarling golden lion-like mask off his face to expose the familiar pale countenance of Severus Snape.

His pupils were swallowing his irises in forbidding onyx, and his thin lips were flattened into a painfully familiar expression of utter disgust.

Lily started to hyperventilate even more than she already was.

The Muggles had been frozen in time, but she had not.

They were starting to move, albeit slower than slow.

"The time bubble is collapsing!" the strawberry-blonde chimaera yelled. "Move!"

Severus placed his hand on the curl-haired woman's shoulder, and then their eyes met. His expression turned to that of wonder, and the mysterious female's held a trust so deep it was tangible enough to be seen in an aura of colour.

"Five!"

They slammed their palms together.

"Four!"
Cords of magic bound between them.

"Three!"

They slammed their hands down on the floor.

"Two!"

A ring of magic formed under Lily and expanded outward.

"One!"

CRACK!

Every single one of them Disapparated at once as the time bubble burst and the Muggles began to move again, shuffling about the area with no idea why they were there while others didn't notice anything amiss.

"I'll get this one," one woman said, placing an adorable set of footed pink hedgehog pyjamas on the counter.

"Excellent choice," the cashier cooed as time marched on once more.

"We'd really like to speak to her, Master Morgan," Moody said.

"She's in a regenerative cycle with Severus," Manfred said. "Talking to either of them is impossible."

"A what?"

"A cocoon of magic while they restore their magical reserves used to sort that royal cock-up in London," a wizard with a thin, hooked nose and beady eyes grunted as he tapped a quill to a clipboard of parchments. "Surely you don't think *that* kind of powerful magic just happens without serious consequences?"

Alastor glowered darkly at the other wizard. "I won't be long," Alastor said, pushing by them to walk past the closed doors. He came to a halt by a large tank of sorts filled with a shimmering blue liquid.

Severus and the mysterious woman seemed to float within it as tendrils of magic wove in and out of them both. Both seemed to shimmer in and out of chimaeric features— manes, tails, wings, fur, scales, and even humanity. They were caught in each other's embrace even as magic seemed to embrace them both simultaneously.

"What—" Alastor whispered in awe.

Manfred wing-walked into the room, clearly unfazed.

"To prevent a disaster, Roisinn tapped into her human heritage and the magic of an ancient magical lineage. She couldn't maintain it forever, but she *did* force herself to hold it open so the entire squad could Disapparate to get there in time, thanks to the assistance of Severus, with whom she shares a unique bond deep enough for them to literally *share* magic."

Manfred yawned hugely, all fangs.

"They both collapsed the moment they arrived at Mungos, and our Unspeakables brought them back
home to recover. Master Egon set them into the leytanks, hoping they would be helpful, and it seems they are."

"But?" Alastor asked, sensing there was a bit more to it.

"Some other form of magic seems to be at work here as well," a thin, balding, beady-eyed wizard said as he shuffled in, pushing his glasses back up his nose. "Something incredibly old. Something unfathomable."

"Like?"

"Ancient magic," Egon said, rubbing his chin with his fingers. "The leys aren't just helping them recover. They are of the same primaeval magick. So, too, are you, at least in part. Not as much as those two."

Alastor frowned, rubbing the area beside his eye.

"You have a mane as well as the full transformation, as I recall," Master Egon clarified. "You are of her family, thus linked to her magic. What brought her to us is this very old magick, perhaps guided by a primordial power we have yet to name. Lady Malfoy said there was a very good chance she was meant to be born as her niece, but was prevented by family magic cast either by her sister, You-Know-Who, or her own father."

"I am familiar with the potion, but I was thinking that perhaps Hagrid had simply used blood from a magical person along the line."

"No, someone created the potion using what they thought was merely the blood of a magical, but it was in fact the distilled essence of a magical soul and potential. Had she been born, she would probably have gained past life skills and talents slowly and become quite talented in her own right—but she was put into play as a chimaera cubling instead."

"So, she's really a Black?"

"Technically."

"And you tested her?"

"Yes, but as to her previous knowledge, no one can really say."

Alastor scowled.

"What about her?" he asked, his hand-paw slamming on the glass of the tank, causing it to slosh.

The ley lines that were gentle woven around the pair jostled and moved, rising up in anger as energy crackled ominously.

"Mr Moody!" Egon barked sternly. "Unless you wish to become caught in-between multiple crossed streams of raw ley energy and end up instantly vapourised, I'd highly recommend you not taking your frustrations out on the tank or its occupants!"

"So all this transformative mumbo-jumbo was just some kind of ruddy trick?" Moody growled.

"Why no," Master Egon said, tilting his head and staring down the cranky Auror.

"From the official reports, you yourself said that it was possible that she was at the very least partially
human in nature. She was, and I say this with the utmost belief, fortunately able to recall a sense of identity in time to save Muggle London the trauma of believing the IRA was causing even more trouble as well as saving that Potter witch… uh, Lily I believe was the name. And her child, of course.”

Moody shifted uneasily, visibly uncomfortable.

"You trusted her before, and she trusted you," Egon admonished sternly. "Why fall to pieces just because she happens to be able to look human some of the time now?"

"She was innocent—"

"She still is," Egon insisted.

Moody stared at his hand-paws even as he stroked his mane in a self-soothing gesture. He sighed heavily.

"You're right."

The leylines seemed to whisper as they were joined by tendrils of ethereal vapour. There was a low chattering sound, like soft voices in a library only the language wasn't quite discernable. The two energies seemed to reach an agreement, and they began weaving together like Celtic knots.

"Fascinating," Master Egon muttered, rapidly quilling down more notes.

"What?" Alastor asked, wrinkles forming between his eyes.

Master Morgan gave a startled squeak as the leys and ether picked him up and examined him, gave him a massage, and then set him back down. They snubbed Master Egon, moving right past him, much to his disappointment.

"Well, those aren't ley energies at all," Egon said, scribbling some more as he waved his wand around to take measurements. "Those are ether-strands from the Veil—you usually only see them in graveyards and such where the the Veil tends to be thinner between the here and now and that which lies beyond the mortal plane."

"Stop scowling, Alastor," Master Morgan said. His expression was sour, but there was a "baby" leyline trying to nestle into his mane, making it somewhat hard to take his fierce expression seriously.

Healer Paddington glided in from the other side of the room, and the leys and tendrils swirled around her, lifting her up to the top of the tank.

"Eee! Why thank you, dears," she said, laughing as she perched on the side of the tank. She waved her wand around, humming and clicking in satisfaction. The rest of the baby strands came over to visit, burrowing into her mane and giving her a Medusa-like appearance.

"You'll be happy to know, my love, that your Apprentices are just fine. Looks like their energy level is stabilising well. Might be a few more days in the tank, but they should come out with no ill effects."

"Excellent," Manfred answered his mate.

There was a sudden flash of energy from the tank, and all the ethereal strands gathered around one trembling strand. It made a strange gurgling sound.
HURK!

Plunk, ting, ting, ting!

A gold ring with a strange black stone and a coat of arms etched upon its stone went zinging across the floor and bonked into Alastor's boot.

Hur-Hur-HURK!

Another one coughed up an ether-drooled locket.

Ah-KKKSSSSHHTTTKKKFTT!

One of the larger strands sneezed out what looked like a delicate jewelled crown. Ether dripped off one of the leys, and it seemed to give the ether-strand a disgruntled stare. The strand hung its "head" in shame.

Another strand sneezed pages onto the shamed one before coughing up a leather binding to go with it.

The other strands stared at the page-sneezing one with curious regards.

The sneezy strand seemed to merely shrug in reply.

Suddenly, the amulets around their necks flared to life with a brilliant, blinding green.

Alastor had Patroni zinging out in all directions, making it look like he was conjuring his own ethereal strands.

Manfred's muzzle curled back in a snarl as he sniffed at the scattered pages.

"You-Know-Who's last will and testament, I believe. How very courteous of him to ensure they were all delivered."

A virtual horde of Unspeakables Apparated in as a containment bubble slammed down upon the room.

Master Egon pushed his glasses up his nose again, nonplussed. "Kindly don't touch anything on the shelves, if you please."

Gringott's Interdepartmental Memo:

Due to some body-chomping Christmas crabs having been mailed to Mr Potter from (presumably) Christmas Island, he will be unable to serve his normal duties this week until his skin heals and his bits grow back. None of us were there for the unboxing, but from the curse-breakers who were being housed in the same area, a Howler apparently arrived along with the package, which proceeded to read him the riot act about Potter and friends having shamefully used a young werewolf for their own ends and encouraging him to romp around the school grounds without a suitable chaperone.

The rest of the missive in question was apparently garbled by hysterical screaming before the Howler itself went up in flames.

It took a few minutes to get the locks off the door in order to rescue him.

Oddly enough, the crabs didn't bother anyone else.
We now have them inhabiting a large semi-aquatic terrarium in the bank lobby for our visitors to stare at.

Someone please send this Mr Lupin a large savings bond. I don't think Hobshank has laughed so hard in centuries. He might have even broken a rib or two.

Regards,

Snar'sec,

Gringott's Work-Level Living Quarters Security Department

Owl to Headmaster Dumbledore

Albus,

I had no idea just what kind of trouble a giant guinea pig could get into until an owl arrived with a box containing a number of self-replicating bright red and orange crabs, which then proceeded to attack, chasing a terrified Mr Black around the classroom.

There was no accompanying letter, Howler or otherwise, and the delivery owl left as soon as it dropped off the "parcel."

The crabs shaved (or rather plucked) the squealing guinea pig until it was completely hairless, and I've subsequently had to move him into a secure warded habitat within the Divination tower.

Afterwards, the crabs were adopted out to the children, which seem quite infatuated with their new young caregivers.

They seem perfectly loveable and remarkably docile— save for whenever they see the unfortunate Mr Black. The children have been warned to not take their crabs to Divination class any longer.

Sincerely,

Silvanus Kettleburn

PS: That obnoxious, nasally woman was fawning all over the front gate again. That horrid Trelawney witch.

She was screeching her lungs out about Grims and Doomsday before she literally sneezed off the front gate, only for the gate to promptly snap back into place and punt her out over the forest canopy.

You really need to do something about that witch before the gate ends up killing her by accident.

Most people would have sufficient brains to take an unequivocal "no" for an answer.

James,

I do realise the crabs may have been a bit overkill as an accompaniment to my message, now that I've had some time to think on it. But let me put this to you in a way that allows you to understand that I had something of a grand epiphany the other evening that made me realise that your "good will" to me almost resulted in me becoming a murder weapon. I could so easily have ended killing or infecting countless other people.
Sure, I may have been safe around you, but I'm betting that it was sheer dumb luck and the random enforcement of school rules that kept the other students from going out at night and stumbling upon me after you set me free to roam the grounds wholly unchecked on every full moon.

But, because I *know* you had a change of heart at least once that prevented Snape from being murdered by my wolf while my human mind was off on walkabout, I will at least give you something quite interesting to chew on as you serve out your time for having cast an Unforgivable curse at him.

Snape *personally* paid for my acceptance into the resident housing program over here, allowing me to continue my studies and conservation efforts even after I met the terms of my exile from Britain.

I truly wanted to stay, you see, but I was without a single knut to my name and possessed few connections outside the insular community of my fellow furry comrades in penance.

Want to catch the real snitch, mate?

He doesn't even *know* that I know.

In fact, his uniquely innovative potions are what allowed our conservation project to succeed well beyond our wildest dreams.

He asked for nothing in return.

Nothing at all, James.

Our remarkable success won us sufficient funding to build a small research and observation station and gave us enough to both live on and furnish some much-needed supplies without risking polluting the area. Now we can keep a watchful eye on Christmas Island well out of sight of the Muggles and without leaving any discernible evidence of our covert activities.

And before you try and claim he only did it to ensure that I would never return to Britain, I want you to know that I choose to stay here because, in this place, the wolf is not driven to bite and maim anyone. Wolves have never existed here, so the inner wolf remains dormant. I have no desire to return to the British isles only to once again succumb to the agonising transformations and the terrible, insatiable, bestial desires.

There are about twenty-some of us weres in residence, and, well... I've finally met someone. We plan to marry in this coming September. Her name is Geertje, and until I met her, I never thought I would ever find such a wonderfully loving witch who might actually wish to share a life with a stupid sod like me.

So, let my story help you to pull yourself out of the deep rut I am quite sure you are still wallowing in — in continuing to blame Severus Snape for the shameful downfall brought about by our own foolish choice to hate someone whose only crime was in daring to voice his wish to be a Slytherin and not a Gryffindor.

Rather ironic that he has repeatedly proven himself to be far more honourable than we from the oh-so-noble house of Gryffindor, don't you think?

So instead of pointing the fickle finger of judgment at another, why don't you think about ending the cycle of ever-escalating hatred and retribution that we started so many years ago when we were just a bunch of stupid young boys. Maybe back then we had nothing but our youth and innate prejudices to blame for foolishly idolising who we did, but we are all grown up now, James. The war is *over*.
It is past time that we let the old hatreds die, once and for all

Voldemort was recently unmasked as Tom Riddle Junior—a half-blood wizard who aspired to seize power over all of Britain through the sowing of blood prejudice and countless heinous acts of terror and brutality.

With so many determinedly hiding their heads in the sand and steadfastly ignoring the dangers ahead, he would have soon succeeded, too.

But, do you know who **really** brought about an end to the war?

*It definitely wasn't the so-called Order of the Phoenix or Albus Bloody Dumbledore.*

*It wasn't Team Gryffindor or Hogwarts either.*

It was a wide group of disparate individuals who chose to work together, united under a single purpose, and it didn't matter to any of them who would be the one to land the final blow.

And therein lies the heart of the lesson, my friend.

Do remember and think on all this as you heal, and maybe the next time I see you, we can both say we have finally grown up and become far better and far wiser people than we were.

Your friend,

Remus

——

Severus suddenly found himself in a strange, quiet, misty realm. There was a dark figure sitting on a stone wall that was riddled with a thick green moss.

The figure stood, looking ever so much like a vision of the grim reaper if ever he had seen one. Where the figure's head was supposed to be was the skull of some unknown great beast.

A young woman with a wreath of lush curls rushed up. "Master!"

"Ah!" the figure said, opening his arms, engulfing her in a sea of black. "Your mission is complete, my Lady of the Claw and Stinger. How very creative you have been in dispensing justice to the unwary guilty."

He pressed a fond kiss to her forehead, and the woman beamed brightly back at him.

"Ah, Severus, I see you've finally decided to join us—consciously, at least."

The figure pulled his skull-mask off, exposing a gaunt, feral-looking face that didn't truly make him any easier to take in.

"Do you remember our covenant?"

*Severus tilted his head in thought, his dark brows knitting together.*

"You and she shall be as one throughout the ages, bound together in My service until it is time to come Home. But, as a gift for your willing covenant into my Get, I will allow you set right what was never intended to be corrupted and bring the one who defies the cycle with no conscience to my most eagerly dispensed justice."
Death smiled, an eerie and almost unnatural thing to see upon a face so utterly intimidating.

Severus felt a wave of distortion as he remembered "Granger" and her steadfast loyalty to the end, their bodies pressed back to back as they drew on Ancient Magick to bring the Dark Lord's minions low just enough to give Harry Potter the chance to take out the man who would have destroyed the world to remake it in his own image.

He remembered "Ballsbridge" the chimaera of Hagrid's making as it had impaled both him and her together— them too weak from their ordeal to take out the beast and survive.

The feel of her hand in his.

The feel of her magic entwined in his.

The rightness of it.

The love in her last squeeze of her fingers in his as they bled out together— just like it was with Roisinn— the very same— the startling pure loyalty.

Their blood and magic combined with that of Hagrid's unintentional murder weapon as death approached ever closer.

"I love you," she whispered, her eyes closing as her head sagged against his, their bodies mutually impaled.

Severus Snape's eyes closed, a wince of agony on his face not for the pain of his wounds but for the future he would never see with the one witch who never gave up on him. "Hermione—"

Their bodies went still together.

"I do remember, Master," Severus whispered.

Death nodded with a smile. "My Stone, Cloak, and Wand finally returned to me in the future past. The rise that was never meant to be foiled. The man who would defy Death and by proxy, Life has been transformed into something of beauty that both pleases me and horrifies the tattered remains of his soul— a soul so shattered and broken that it can never be made whole enough to pass on into the afterlife or ever be reincarnated again— save as a most peaceful habitat. What I asked of you has been done well, and for that great service, I will now give you a choice: leave the world you have improved to its own evolution and return Home with me or live in it, serving me in life amongst the living until I do call you Home."

Death leveled his eyes to Severus. "Would you be willing to share your life with the man you would have become, with she who was once his, but is also now your own?"

Severus frowned slightly, having never had to make such a decision before— having never had such a cryptically phrased question posed to him. Could he the one who had been saved from a tortured half-life serving two masters by Roisinn willingly merge with the man who had loved Hermione first?

They were both the same— she and he— bound souls from a different time.

They were both Severus.

Both— Roisinn. Hermione.
Her love had not changed, whether it be cubling or witch—devotion and protection, loyalty to the one she both lived and died with to the very end.

They had been teacher and student, master and apprentice, then—having never had the opportunity to grow beyond the boundaries of their formality. Had they survived, perhaps it would have been even more beautiful in its rareness.

"Severus," she said, her voice so very warm and familiar, like an embrace of both arms and the brush of fur and scales.

He knew what his answer would be.

He looked at Death, setting his shoulders. "I would live in Your service, my Lord," he said.

"And you, my cherished agent of mischief and justice?" Death asked, his fingers brushing the hair from her face.

"I would go with him, wherever he might go, if—" She looked at Severus with a sadness that was inexplicable. "If he would want me."

How could I not?! Severus' heart screamed at him.

He realised that there was no other he could wish for in his life, ever since the moment she had first walked into his lap and stole his fish.

He opened his arms to her even as he opened himself up to the man he could have been. As he pulled her into his arms, they became but a tangle of arms as his face pressed into her mane of curls. A shudder went through him as ethereal vapours danced around and dove through them both.

Whatever came, they would face it together.

All of him and the all of her—

The human and the beast.

"I accept," he whispered as the rush of ethereal tendrils slammed into them both and sang.

Death's bony hand closed upon their joined left hands, leaving upon their ring finger a shining ethereal white bone ring.

"Congratulations on your handfasting," he said warmly as the world faded away into mist. "And welcome to my Get."

Albus walked into the court of the Wizengamot and struggled to keep an impassive face as two great chimaeric beasts lounged, stretching lazily beside the acting Chief Warlock.

No…

There were actually four of them.

Each of the beasts yawned, all fangs and bright orange tongues as their stinger tails swished back and forth.

As the doors closed behind him, he saw there was more than that.
Hagrid's original beasts rested on custom designed perch-shelves seemingly carved out of the very bedrock—the manticore-nundu and the fey-dragon whose body seemed to shift in and out of sight so easily that it was hard to tell precisely what might have gone into her making.

All around him, the Wizengamot was heavily peppered in—manes.

Standing in a wrought iron enchanted "cage" was Rubeus Hagrid. The half-giant cast a fearful look at him even as he grew more hopeful. Somehow the half-giant had been cured of his transformation, but judging by the tremor in the man's body, it was most likely temporary.

Before him, a Pensieve was projecting memories in a three dimensional playback above the pool itself.

"Albus Dumbledore," the Chief Warlock began sternly. "You have been brought before us today to answer to the charges of conspiracy to commit vigilantism, providing support and aid with regard to the illegal breeding of magical creatures by Rubeus Hagrid, tampering with and artefacts and portkey specifically designed to avoid detection by magical authorities, purposely introducing a woman infected with a dangerous strain of dragon pox to the very core of the Ministry while allowing her to run rampant in a wide array of public places, conspiracy to provoke the former Dark Lord Voldemort by attacking an apprentice of one of the Masters of the DoM in order to "retrieve" a pregnant Muggleborn witch who was deliberately kept ignorant of the true nature and severity of her affliction, passing along a custom-made artefact to Lord Lucius Malfoy after entrapping him via a Wizarding Oath with orders to turn it over to the Dark Lord, also known as Tom Marvolo Riddle, knowing that if the Dark Lord tampered with it, it would inflict a powerful paranoia and recklessness hex upon him without consulting or seeking permission from any agency of the Ministry, whether in secret or otherwise, encouraging minor students to wage a bullying crusade against another student en masse without retribution, purposely allowing a werewolf to school at Hogwarts in secret yet providing shoddy warding and defences that a group of children could so easily thwart it,—"

"Pardon me, Chief Warlock and Ladies and Gentlewizards of the Wizengamot, but after such a tediously long list of serious accusations against me, can you provide any significant proof whatsoever that such activities even took place?"

Out of the shadows, Molly Weasley strode in carrying a cage with two nearly-grown kittens with startlingly bright ginger and white fur, Lily Evans stepped out cradling a newborn baby in her arms, James Potter standing silently beside his wife with an unusually grim look on his face, Peter Pettigrew shambled in quietly (having grown back his arms only for them to look disturbingly rat-like), Lucius Malfoy glided in with a bucket-shaped "boulder" with something strange suspended inside it, and Remus Lupin (sporting a strange, glowing metal collar around his neck with petroglyphs etched into it) walked in wearing a tight-lipped, unforgiving expression. Healer Pearl Paddington stepped up with Madam Pomfrey, an impressive armload of scrolls shared between them. Master Manfred Morgan wing-walked out into the light, a distinct snarl plastered on his already alarming visage that spoke of things discovered that were most definitely not liked or appreciated. Minerva McGonagall walked in in her blatantly Scottish tartan regalia, her stiff, angular stance looking far more feline than witchly in character. Others he could not make out the face of filed in behind them.

Dumbledore stiffened at the sight, a soft yet fervent profanity escaping his lips.

Only he was standing on the projection tiles for speakers to the Wizengamot, and his muttered "Oh shite" roared throughout the chambers just as forcefully as if he'd used Sonorous.

He stood up a little straighter as the vivid flames engulfed him, and the shrill cry of a phoenix screamed as the two fireballs collided and rose up together—
The stunned phoenix and wizard slid down what had appeared to be the exit as the huge bulk of Zoë moved in close, her fey dragon camouflage having appeared like both the exit and multiple rows of seated Wizengamot wizards and witches.

Snap!

Zoë's mouth clamped around them both—

"Lady Zoë!" Kingsley Shacklebolt ran up, waving his arms. "My lady, please— spit them out, please!"

The dragon and the chimaera simply stared at each other for a long, drawn-out moment, before…

Pataooooie!

Zoë abruptly spat out her drool-soaked victims.

"LONG LIVE THE DARK LORD VOLDEMOR—!" came a cry from amidst the Wizengamot as a wizard stood, summoning the Dark Mark in the middle of the chambers.

ROAR snap THUMP!

Gruffydd pounced, mauled, stung, breathed on, and devoured fully half of the Death Eater sympathizer before another spell could be launched or anyone around him could get over the shock enough to react.

The Chief Warlock straightened his robes and glared out fiercely across the courtroom.

"Would anyone else like to interrupt me today?"

The chimaeras at his side purred in a low, vibrating rumble as the Wizengamot then went back into session without any other word being said out of order.

Former Headmaster Albus Dumbledore Found Guilty of a Shocking Array of Charges

Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore was found guilty of so many charges that it took the court scribe well over an hour to get through the entire list, most of which were sealed away from the public and are not repeatable in this publication.

As for the ones that could be made public, Mr Dumbledore was found guilty of manipulating the climate of Hogwarts to suit his own personal agenda in an elaborate conspiracy to bring down the Dark Lord Voldemort, also known as Tom Marvolo Riddle.

The same wizard that Dumbledore himself brought over from a Muggle orphanage back in 1938.

Tom Riddle, the self-named Dark Lord Voldemort, succeeded in rising to power and prominence after courting the wealthiest British pureblood families by hitting them where they were most insecure, promising them a return to the Old Ways and to further augment and strengthen the wealth and power they had possessed for untold centuries by ending the alleged "threat" posed by those borne of Muggle heritage. As they eventually discovered, Riddle's solution to said threat amounted to systematic genocide
Unfortunately for those who had been caught up in Riddle's insidious web, by the time they suspected there may have been a darker side to Riddle's stated aims, their own sins had thoroughly obscured the path to redemption, and there was no way out—even for those who really did want out.

While many would rather have died than admit a Muggleborn wizard or witch was in any way comparable to a pureblood magical, that very prejudice is what fueled the rise of the Wizarding War.

Dumbledore stated in his own defence that everything he did was for the "Greater Good", or to stop the rise of Tom Riddle in his quest for ultimate power, but his supposed Greater Good has been peppered liberally with shady activities since the first uprising and defeat of Gellert Grindelwald.

The Wizengamot was apparently split between the previous good Mr. Dumbledore had brought about by stopping Grindelwald and the sheer gravity of the charges against him, but after numerous witnesses came forward from family after family, many believed Mr. Dumbledore had gone much too far without bothering to consult any official law enforcement or any specialised task force from the DoM.

While Dumbledore claims doing so would have quickly alerted the Dark Lord's many supporters amongst all levels of the Ministry, the testimonies given had the Wizengamot completely deadlocked for well over a month before any decision could finally be made with regard to Mr. Dumbledore's many and varied criminal activities.

The final nail in the Wizengamot's case against him, however, was Dumbledore's attempt to escape the grounds which was foiled by one of the DoM's specialised guardian beasts that have been steadily weaving their way into the hearts of many Ministry workers since their initial introduction shortly before the end of the war.

Dumbledore has been sentenced to a specialised cell in Nurmengard, ironically the very prison that holds Gellert Grindelwald.

Rumours have it that certain other countries may be attempting to take on responsibility for Mr. Dumbledore in attempt to spare him from "unlawful acts carried out during a time of war."

It is unknown at the time of this publication if these rumours have any truth to them or not.

Advertisement in the Ministry of Magic

Now Open!

The Hallows Apothecary

Serving your Custom Potions, Rare Ingredients, and Spider Silk Needs!

Nestled next door from the Office of Magical Law Enforcement, the Hallows Apothecary is open and serving the discerning witch and wizard for their custom potion needs. Also, we offer rare ingredients not found in typical apothecaries, including the strongest spider silk in magical Britain.

All items are harvested humanely and sustainably. No animals, beasts, or arachnids are harmed to bring you these excellent high quality ingredients for your most valuable potions where quality matters!

Need a Nundu whisker for that Coordination Elixir?
"Need a Fey Dragon scale to etch out a sacred space?"

"We have you covered!"

"Need a natural solution to rid yourself of a gnome infestation that doesn't come back and bite you later?"

"We have that too!"

"Stop by and talk to one of our highly skilled staff at The Hallows Apothecary."

"You'll be glad you did!"

(Emblem of the Hallows on a mortar and pestle)

Baby Harry scrunched up his face and threw his rattle at Draco causing the other infant to scrunch up his face and kick his plush dragon away to bonk baby Harry square in the head.

Harry promptly began to bawl loudly, completely upset at anything, everything and everyone he could think of in that moment.

**THUMP!**

Two massive paws slammed down near Harry and Draco. Black paws landed next to Draco and golden ones thumped down next to Harry.

Both babies ceased their tantrums at once and proceeded to stick their feet in their mouths and gum their own toes to death.

Minerva eyed the two bassinets with a shake of her head. "Thank you so much for coming Narcissa, Lucius, Lily, and James," she said. "Severus and Roisinn, I know you've been quite busy of late, so I'm very glad you could make it as well."

The two chimaeras yawned, tongues lolling.

The two babies stared, wide-eyed into the bright orange mouths. Harry sucked on his foot, and Draco stuck the dragon-shaped teething ring into his mouth and chewed on it.

"I've been asking for the opinions of a number of families on what they would like to see changed here at Hogwarts in regards to child safety and stamping out bullying. At a magical school, the dangers are great enough without having the children attacking each other, and I believe it is past time for us to crack down on such things before we get another situation such as we had while Albus was Headmaster." Minerva poured the tea as she spoke. She poured the tea into large bowls next to the chimaera pair, amused as the babies stared at the bright orange tongues flicking in and out to lap up the tea, seemingly unconcerned about the temperature of the liquid.

"Well, as the voice of experience in this case," James said uncomfortably. "I don't want Harry to grow up thinking he can get away with the stuff I did as a kid. I don't even want him to think he wants to do the stuff I did— well, maybe except Quidditch. He's going to be a star Seeker, mark my words."

Lily glowered at James. "Quidditch is hardly safe."

"It's **Quidditch**! I don't see you complaining about that Muggle "ragbee" stuff you like."
"That's rugby, you berk!"

"Whatever. They deliberately try to slam into each other. At least in Quidditch we're trying to avoid collisions, yeah?"

Lily rolled her eyes and huffed, her nostrils flaring a little, but she said nothing.

James fanned his hands in appeasement, quickly shutting up.

Lucius and Narcissa exchanged amused looks while Severus and Roisinn groomed each other assiduously, utterly unimpressed by their antics.

Narcissa said, "I would like to see less importance placed on the Houses and instead on cooperation. Hogwarts was always known for it, yet in practice it was so rarely done outside the house you were sorted into."

"I would also like to see Sorting happen perhaps in the second year," Lucius said slowly, "perhaps even later. If you have ever raised Crups or Kneazles, you know that the pup or kit is hardly a testament to its adult qualities, so why Sort when a child is so young? At least allow them a year to sort out themselves and show their true natures before throwing them into a house. Perhaps, as my lady wife so said, this will assist in team work. If they were already working together before the Sorting, they will be more likely to do so after, regardless of House."

James looked instinctively appalled at the suggestion, but Lily was already nodding fervently. "I agree."

James looked at the black chimaera and swallowed hard, squaring his shoulders. "I— I know it's the right thing to do."

Lucius and Narcissa stared at Lily and James for a beat and then seemed to take it in. They nodded in once acknowledgment.

"Well," Minerva said, "you'll be happy to know that a few changes, such as Sorting in the second or third year, has already been pre-approved by the Board of Governors as so many parents have suggested similar. We are also working on a no-tolerance for bullying at the school as well, but we are still ironing out the rules on what we consider to be bullying as there is that nebulous, fine line between simple childhood teasing and true acts of bullying."

Minerva's meeting continued on well into the afternoon with her writing down suggestions as the parent couples made their opinions known. Lily, at one point, could take the stress no longer and blurted, "How am I going to teach when I'm pregnant again!" causing all eyes to focus on her with no small amount of curious staring.

Minerva, assured the stressed out young witch, convinced Lily that it was, indeed, possible to teach and be pregnant at the same time. Poppy had delivered quite a few babies in her time, and the house-elves were always nigh on ecstatic about them.

It wasn't until James and Lily flooed home that Lucius cracked his neck and seemed to relax a bit. "I believe congratulations are in order, Severus," he said, nibbling on a biscuit and somehow making it look like a fashion show.

Severus and Roisinn stood up as their forms became bipedal and then shifted from beast to human, causing Draco to clap his little hands and babble happily as he tried to get them to do it again.

"As to what, Lucius?" Severus asked, visibly amused.
"I hear you are having a cubling of your very own," Lucius said, amused as Hermione flushed slightly. "Narcissa, too, is expecting again. A girl this time. She couldn't wait to find out and practically had the poor healer at wandpoint to do the scan."

"Lucius!" Narcissa protested.

Lucius gave her a sly smile, clearly quite proud despite it all.

"How very wonderful for you," Minerva said with a grin. "You know, Hermione, there is a Transfiguration position open now that I have to assume the duties of Headmistress."

Hermione's eyes grew wide, and she pressed into Severus' robes in a silent need for reassurance.

"You would make a fine teacher," Severus said with a gentle brush of his fingers on her cheek. "Unlike myself. I loathe children unless they are our own or easily returnable like Draco."

Lucius sputtered as Narcissa laughed out loud. Hermione flushed a little more.

"We can take care of the shoppe with Severus," Lucius said with a grin. "We can even keep him in line for you."

Severus snorted, crossing his arms across his chest as he looked down his hooked nose at Lucius with a dour expression.

"You can even floo in for the mornings and out in the evenings. Unlike Mr and Mrs Potter, the two of you are not under any special restrictions for work and reporting in locations every day," Minerva said. "Though, I will say, after Albus' trial, James has been— quite a changed man. Motherhood has seemed to ground Lily a bit more as well— enough that I know she'd do well as a teacher if she truly puts her mind to it."

"We do have our other job, Minerva," Severus said meaningfully, wrapping his arm around Hermione to reassure her that he supported her choice above all things, even in the face of Minerva's shameless bribery.

"Well the offer is out there, my dear," Minerva said bracingly. "I've seen you in action, so I know you'd do well at it. Perhaps when Amelia finally tires of you—"

Lucius snorted. "Amelia would give birth to a litter of Crups before she'd ever tire of her favourite chimaeras," he said, smirking. "The have the children on their best behaviour just by being there."

"If only—" Minerva said wistfully.

"Thank you for having us, Minerva," Lucius said. "We must tend to the store. Manfred is manning it at the moment, and I'm quite sure he'll blow it up in spite if we don't bring him dinner."

Hermione giggled, looking up at Severus with true fondness.

Severus took her hand, a small smile playing on his lips.

"Hermione—" Minerva said. "I'm… curious."

Hermione turned back to look at the Headmistress with curiosity of her own.

"Whoever taught you your Transfiguration lessons?"

The couple stepped into the floo, and Severus threw down the powder as he said "Department of
Mysteries, Ministry."

Hermione smiled as the flames took them away. "You did."

And then they were gone.

Minerva made a tiny noise that sounded almost identical to a young Scottish wildcat's meow.

Master Cthulhu: Eht Dne.

Spiders: *cheers with front legs up*

A/N: Phew! 12 hour shifts suck the life out of me! It's either work or sleep unless I get a couple days off to simulate a weekend (which is rarely ON a weekend, mind you!) Thank you all for your patience and understanding. Nothing is abandoned, I just need more time in my day that I'm not allowed to work or be pulled into something else! XD

Thank you all for your kind reviews. I may not reply to everything, but I read them all and appreciate every single one!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!