Mourning Sickness

by apathys_whore

Summary

Late in the winter of 1978 a distraught Severus discovers he is pregnant.

Companion piece to Fragments of Devotion, but can be read on its own.

Notes

This was meant to be the second to last chapter of my larger work, Fragments of Devotion, but honestly it just got too long. I'm at 9,000 words already. I decided that was just too much for a single chapter as the style of Fragments is mostly individual vignettes in a nonlinear narrative, and this didn't really fit the theme.

If you want to get the back story of this while not dealing with the very heavy themes of Fragments (which is completely understandable), chapters 1, 9 and, 11 are safe (brief mentions of ceremonial blood used in a wedding scene in ch 11 but it's not violent). Chapter 5 is relevant, but there's a somewhat vague description of human dissection and some harm to animals. If that's a hard no for you I'd avoid it. If you have any questions, feel free to ask in the comments. And I would beseech you most lovingly to read the end notes. At the very least the first two paragraphs.
Chapter Notes

The following text is an excerpt from a work of fiction. The text is in English and contains characters from the Harry Potter universe. The text discusses themes of fate, destiny, and personal power, with particular emphasis on the perspectives of two characters, Tom and Severus. Tom believes in the power of fate and destiny, while Severus, a fractured shadow of himself, is described as having been refined into something great and terrible by his past experiences.

The excerpt includes a discussion of music and its role in Tom's life, as well as a reflection on the contrasting lives of Muggles and magical beings. The text also touches on the theme of indulgence, with Tom admitting to having found music in Muggles to be better than that of magical folks. The excerpt concludes with a reference to Justinian the First and Theodora, highlighting the idea of a great man seeking to bring glory back to Rome.

The narrative continues with Tom expressing his desire to have Severus close by, enjoying moments of intimacy and sharing a home outside London. Severus is described as having been refined into something great and terrible, and Tom is depicted as being willing to sacrifice for the things he desires. The text concludes with a reference to the potential dangers of some potions and a playful exchange between Tom and Severus.

Overall, the excerpt presents a complex exploration of themes such as fate, destiny, power, and personal transformation, set within the Harry Potter universe.
“Perhaps I simply trust your competence,” he grins as he buries his nose into the nape of his neck, inhaling the sharp scent of dried cherry leaves and juniper. He trails his hand down Severus’ side, hiking up his robe in order to worm his fingers beneath the waistband of his trousers, caressing the delicate flesh beneath. “I was hoping my wife wouldn’t be too opposed to a distraction?”

Severus himself finds it odd that he likes it when Tom calls him his wife. He’s not a woman (never has been, never will be) but when Tom started calling him his wife, the word held such softness, such reverence, and was so laden with the affection Severus had never before received. It’s begun to mean something beyond gender to him. He’s Tom’s one and only beloved, his one and only wife. Severus hums low in his throat and grinds back against him teasingly. “You wanted Hutchins dead by Wednesday, didn’t you? If I am distracted, who knows how long it will take me to make his poison.”

Tom’s right hand finds the buttons of Severus’ trousers and works them through the fabric, his left hand clutching his hip to further pull him back against his hard cock. “I suppose I’ll have to grant him a stay of execution then. I fear something of utmost importance has come up.”

Tom likes fucking him here, bent over his work table, trousers down around his thighs. His erection slips in easily, past the thick black curls and permanently soft cock and into his slick folds. Their lovemaking is much more practiced now; a far cry from the tense and painful first time. Tom wonders absently if he should have kept the sheets, stained red from the blood of his future wife’s defloration.

Severus keens, high and needy as Tom grips his hips and settles into a steady rhythm, burying himself to the hilt then only pulling out a scant few inches before plunging back in. He knows this is how Severus likes it, knows the head of his cock stimulates that patch of nerves inside him that brings the most pleasure.

Severus’ hand uncurls and grasps the edge of the table for stability and shoves his hips back against him. “Yes,” he hisses out, muscles clenching down around Tom’s erection, “just like that.” And Tom is more than happy to comply. Watches, fascinated, as Severus turns his head to the side to glance over his shoulder, black spider eyes half lidded and mouth open, little puffs of air bursting past his lips.

Severus likes the heat inside him, how molten hot his cock feels as it stretches him open, so deliciously thick and heavy as it rubs that spot that makes his chest heave and his muscles tense, shoving him ever closer to the edge of ecstasy. Tom lays flat against him, chest to back, mouth seeking his own; their fingers lacing together at the edge of the table. Severus feels a questing tongue lick at his lips and eagerly he sucks it in.

Tom groans into his mouth and speeds up his thrusts, making the table rattle dangerously. Severus hums back in amusement, toes curling in his boots and muscles tensing, very near his orgasm. He can feel it just on the periphery, hot and electric, centered in that wonderful spot in his pussy that Tom’s cock keeps hitting. He pulls away from their kiss, gasping for air. “Fuck,” he bites out, desperately shoving himself back against his lover. “Harder!” He’s so close, wants it so bad. And Tom, dear Tom, obliges, wraps an arm around his waist to keep him in place as he fucks him gloriously hard. Severus’ orgasm overtakes him, his whole body tensing as he’s pounded into; paralyzed by that glorious, horrible plateau of pleasure, so wonderful it almost hurts.

Tom can always tell when Severus cums. His whole body locks up and his already wonderfully tight cunt clenches down around him in spasms that he swears are trying to milk him dry. He lets it, releasing inside of him with a deep, satisfied hum; reveling in the raw, nerve flaying pleasure.

They stay together like that for a moment, Tom careful not to rest too much of his weight on
Severus as they catch their breath. Finally, Severus croons softly beneath him, signaling his wish to separate. He pulls his softening cock out, enjoys seeing Severus’ pussy, fresh fucked and red, clench back up; its inclination always to keep his seed inside. They’ve tried other things, of course. Cumming down his throat is nice, as is seeing Severus’ face flecked with it; beads of the stuff dripping over his lips, weighing down his long lashes, speckling his cheeks. But Tom has found his preference of location to be vaginal.

“Tom, do you have a handkerchief on you or something? You’ve left me a mess,” Severus said, trying to keep his robes hiked up so they don’t brush against the semen slowly oozing out of him.

“I’d prefer you left it as is, my dear. That way, when I leave, I’ll still be inside of you,” he replies, tugging Severus’ trousers back up as he kisses at his neck. Tom marks his followers, marks the remains of his enemies; it only makes sense he enjoys marking his wife as well.

Severus sighs and adjusts his pants and underwear before letting his robes fall back into place, shifting slightly at the uncomfortable feel of his husband’s fresh release trickling out of him.

Tom’s hand lands gently on his shoulder, urging Severus to turn and face him. “Give us a kiss before I leave to speak with Lucius, love,” he says as he leans in close. Their lips meet, his tongue doing a quick swipe over Severus’ teeth and soft palate before pulling back.

“What are you seeing Lucius about?”

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“Just work, my dear. I’ll be back soon.”

Weeks later, it starts with a strange cramping in his abdomen, below his stomach but in front of his intestines. He doesn’t worry about it, writes it off like he does all of his aches and pains. A talent honed by a life of abuse. Either it will get better or it will get bad enough to need treatment. Until then, he has other things to worry about. What really irritates him is how tired he is all of the time, made doubly so because he’s been sleeping better than he ever has before. It’s when his chest starts to get sore and he mysteriously starts wanting cheese despite having never liked it that he begins to put it together.

His menstrual cycle was never regular, probably because he wasn’t really a woman, but when he does the math it’s been fifty days since his last one. He’d never gone that long between them.

It’s then that something cold and terrible blooms in him (besides what else might be “blooming”), and he begins to tremble. It can’t be. It’s not possible. Not without something very strong to facilitate it, and the only thing he’s been making are poisons. Though the symptoms fit perfectly and he can't think of any other afflictions that would cause this. But he's not a healer. Surely there are a plethora of strange and magical diseases that may have oddly similar symptoms. Just a quick check. A simple test will disprove his fears and then he can figure out what’s really wrong with him. He flees to his laboratory, and with trembling hands, sets to work brewing the potion that will confirm or deny his suspicions.

Pennywort, minced fine. Raskovnik leaves, whole. Alkonost eggshell, powdered. Rabbit’s blood, fresh. Bring to the boil and stir over low heat for five minutes. The resulting potion should be clear and odorless. Mix with a urine sample. If it turns blue, you’re pregnant. He tips a vial of his own urine into mixture and watches, horrified, as it blooms a rich, royal blue.

Severus never thought it was possible, had never wanted this, and doesn’t know what to do. There’s something in him that he didn’t put there, didn’t ask for, something that both is and isn’t him. He feels invaded, he feels violated.
He could quickly and easily take care of it, of course. He has all the right ingredients to make an abortifacient already. That would be the easiest thing to do, and probably the smartest. They could just go on as they already were, and Severus would start on contraceptives.

But as much as he may want that path, there’s something keeping him from taking it. This thing inside of him, this thing he did not ask for, is Tom’s too. And Tom has only ever been kind to him, has only ever treated him to soft touches and sweet words. Isn’t anything like his father had been. Tom should know, will know what to do. But he’s off again somewhere, seeing someone about “an interesting rat problem. Nothing you have to worry about, my dear.” He assumes that means Tom and the others are going to have some fun at someone else’s expense, not that he particularly cared one way or the other. But of all the terrible times for him to be gone.

Severus retreats to their bedroom and curls up in the wingback chair that sits next to the fireplace facing the bed, trying desperately to think of anything other than the thing inside him.

He waits for what seems like hours, smoking cigarette after cigarette, little parasite be damned. He’s too nauseous to eat anything, though he can’t say if it’s just nerves or something related to his condition. He needs something, anything to distract him.

Tom’s taste in furniture may tip to the ostentatious sometimes, but they keep their bedroom sparse; neither having much interest in stuffing such an intimate space to the brim with objet d’art. There is a jewelry box full of finery Tom had pilfered from their more destructive raids. Severus has little to no interest in it, but certain moods will sometimes take hold of his husband and he’ll be of a mind to cover Severus in gleaming gems after he’d fucked him full of cum and redressed him in nice clothes. Comb his mussed hair into place with the sterling silver hairbrush rescued from the rubble of a wealthy home. Mist him in the rich perfumes stolen from the same places to cover the smell of sex. Severus indulges him. It’s nice to be treated like a fine treasure for once instead of the lowliest rot anyone had ever had the displeasure of seeing.

“You were raised like a feral thing, my dear,” Tom would say as he clasped an emerald necklace around his throat. “And while I love your wildness, there are times when you must act domesticated.” He’d escort him then, seed still dripping from his insides, to “strategy meetings”. Which was mostly code for drinking Lucius’ good wine and playing cat and mouse with whatever unfortunate soul was being held in the dungeons. Usually aurors. Sometimes people who opposed them. If those happened to be in short supply, which they occasionally were, Tom was known to settle for anyone they could catch off the street.

Generally ambivalent to the torture show, Severus had mostly entertained himself by wrapping around his husband whenever Bellatrix’s cruel eye would land on them. He’d aim at her a smile full of malice as Tom would absentmindedly stroke his arm, his hip, his hair, laughing all the while as his curses ripped their captive to shreds. Tom would pay covetous, beautiful, well bred Bellatrix no mind, causing Severus to squirm in pleasure as hatred and jealousy twisted her pretty face. He hoped she could tell they’d just had sex before they came. That it was her beloved lord’s semen currently drying in him. Her lord, his Tom; the only one allowed to say that name.

Severus had never had something someone else had wanted before, and he found it quite a fine feeling indeed. And now here he is, alone in their room with a thing he doesn’t want taking root inside him. No, the jewelry box will hold no solace for Severus as his current condition is closely linked to the debauchery it represents.

There is another thing Tom keeps in here. A gramophone, settled on the antique sideboard they’ve placed on the western side of the room, just beneath the heavily curtained windows. A guilty pleasure, as he calls it.
Severus pulls a record from the cupboard and removes it from its blank jacket. Tom has them charmed to play different songs by different artists and only he would know which is which. But Severus doesn’t care right now. He just needs something, anything to focus on until Tom comes home. He sets the record on the turntable and cranks the handle before carefully setting the needle on it. A dreamy sort of melody starts, and a woman husks out:

“If he swing by the string
He will hear the bell ring
And then there's an end to poor Tommy
He must hang by the noose
For no hand will cut loose
The rope from the neck of poor Tommy.”

Of course it would start with that one, with his terrible luck. Now is not the time to be that morbid; he doubts his nerves can take it as rattled as they are. He moves the needle further on the record, the voice mystic and lovely ringing out “if he swing” three times more before the next song begins.

It’s something with a swaying beat, the fluttering wail of the horns adding an almost lascivious element, accompanied by a woman’s throaty voice, dulcet and cigarette deep, crooning self assured and beautiful but almost harshly, smoke rich words becoming impossible to understand, indecipherable notes mouthed meaningless around him. But it’s still beautiful, still comforting. The chorus comes, and he knows this part. “Why don’t you do right? Like some other men do.”

They’d swayed together to this one, when Tom was feeling more affectionate than usual, his nose buried in Severus’ hair and his arms around his waist, And for the first time in his whole life, he’d felt safe and cherished. Tom was powerful, feared and beloved, and Severus trusted his judgment. He would know what to do, if only he would come home already. What the hell could he possibly be doing that was taking this long? They’d better have burned the whole ministry to the ground. With the amount of time it was taking him, he could have conquered an entire fucking continent.

The current song ends with a cacophony of horns, and the next one begins. Soft piano and then a man’s voice:

“There was a boy
A very strange enchanted boy
They say he wandered very far
Very far over land and sea
A little shy and sad of eye
But very wise, was he,”

Severus goes back to his chair and curls up with his legs underneath him and lights another cigarette, inhaling the acrid smoke in a futile attempt to calm himself. Just as he was considering sending a house elf to track his husband down, the door creaked open and in strode his Tom.

Equal parts relief and fear flood his veins. Tom would know what to do. But what if he reacted
badly? What if he was angry? What if he thought Severus did this on purpose? What if, horror of horrors, he didn’t think it was his? Every negative possibility stretched out before him, a yawning chasm of doubt threatening to swallow him alive, and for a moment he felt himself falling.

Their eyes meet, and Tom smiles. “What are you doing, hiding away from me in here?” He strolls in, casual as can be. As if he hasn’t spent hours doing who knows what with Merlin knows who, leaving him alone to fester with this burden. Tom takes the needle off the record and turns to look at him again. “You seem troubled, love.”

Severus feels a familiar viciousness rise in him, something he’d never felt directed at Tom before. “Do you want to know what troubles me?”

“If I did not care to know, I would not have asked,” he said, gliding to stand before him. And it registers then, how much bigger Tom is than him, how much more powerful he is. He has seen his husband break enough people down in the Malfoy dungeons to know what he is capable of, and for the first time in a long time, Severus is afraid of him. He could easily make Severus disappear, and no one would question him. Could poison him with one of his own brews, subtle and silent. Give him to Bellatrix to do with as she pleased, horrid, jealous hag that she is. But he has lived with fear all of his life, and he lets his anger seep in to cover it in enough righteous fury that he pushes on regardless. It’s the same instinct that pitted him against Potter’s gang throughout school, the same thing that drew his father’s ire over and over again.

Still though, he does not meet his eyes as he says, blunt and venomous, “I’m pregnant.” He stabs his cigarette out on the arm of the chair, not caring about the smoldering hole it leaves in the sumptuous green fabric.

Suddenly, Tom’s hand is gripping his wrist, iron firm, and Severus drops his cigarette to the floor. Tom had only ever touched him like a fragile thing; soft as a moth’s wing in the moonlight. Slowly, he lifts his gaze to meet Tom’s, acutely aware of the warm, smooth hand clamped around him like a vice.

Tom’s expression is serious, but aside from that unreadable. “Truly?” he says softly, almost wistfully as his thumb begins to caress the fragile joints in Severus’ wrist.

“Yes. I took the test; made it myself. It turned blue immediately.”

Tom nods sagely and hums in the back of his throat. Then, with movements smooth and measured, he kneels before Severus, who is still curled protectively into himself on the chair.

“I had entertained the idea that our union was predestined; that you were made for only me.” Tom’s hands, sure and strong, cup his face gently. “Now I know that this is indeed the case.”

“You want it then?” he whispers out, both flattered and terrified.

“Of course. This is fate.” One of his hands slides down to his belly, feather light, the way one touches a wounded animal not long for this world. And Severus’ breath stutters on the inhale.

He had not expected this, by any means. He had thought, deep down, that Tom would be surprised though ultimately uninterested in the concept. But apparently he’s beside himself with joy about it. And it’s suddenly, painfully real. He has what could become a child inside of him. Something that Tom wants to become a child inside of him.

It’s the ninth of December, 1978 and, in exactly one month, he’ll turn 19. Will still be 19 when it’s born. Surely that’s too young. Severus knows nothing about pregnancy or babies, and suspects that
Tom doesn’t know anything either. Severus certainly doesn’t know anything about raising a child. Until recently he’d only known about pain and isolation; the sharpened short end of the stick.

But beyond that, much deeper in his heart, he knows he doesn't want to give up his freedom. He won't be able to eat what he liked, go where he liked, or do what he liked anymore, eternally beholden to the whims of a child. There are expectations of mothers, that they relinquish all aspects of the self and become nurturing machines, all previous traits erased and replaced with “mother”. Severus doesn’t think he has that in him. He isn't patient or particularly kind, and isn't even sure how one would go about fostering such things. He doesn’t wish to lose himself to an identity he did not choose.

But he doesn't say that. What he does say is, “I’ll have to stop brewing.” He's been impulsive before and had paid for it dearly. This time he knows he can't lose someone over this; can't lose the only good thing that has ever happened to him because he wanted to be selfish. He isn't sure where he would go or what he would do without Tom. He'd be blacklisted by both sides, and that was if he was lucky. Without his husband he would be a penniless, jobless, former Death Eater, reviled by all. Tom could ruin him as easily as he had raised him on high.

“We’ll get by. You have a much more important job now.” Tom worms his arms underneath Severus’ knees and around the back of his shoulders, bundles him up in his arms and lifts him like he isn’t a gawky, squirming thing. Like he means the most in the world to him. Tom gently deposits him on the bed just a few steps away, as if he’s too sacred and fragile for his feet to touch the floor, and Severus cannot help but smile. Tom is kind (to him anyway, and that’s all that matters), and powerful, and has every wealthy pureblood of any importance firmly by the throat.

“You should eat and then rest. You’re carrying the next heir of Slytherin, after all,” he says as he glides from the room. Yes, Tom himself has very good blood. The best, in fact. Even his muggle father had been something of a nobleman.

Heir of Slytherin. It’s definitely a line that should continue, and he should be honored if it’s through him, right? Greasy, ugly, halfblood nobody, carrying a founder’s legacy. Perhaps a baby isn’t such a bad idea. Certainly, they can’t fuck it up any worse than their own parents had. And Tom wants it, seems to think it's some sort of sign or omen. He won’t be alone in this (won’t fall into the same trap his mother had). He’ll have Tom, of course, and house elves, and his husband’s silver tongue could probably convince a supporter’s wife to watch it on occasion.

Severus lays back and rests his hands on his abdomen, right beneath his navel. He’s going to have a baby.

He’ll warm up to the idea quickly, he is sure.

Chapter End Notes

I wanted to show a relationship that, on the surface, seemed healthy. But if you look closer at it, you see it's dangerous. Severus is a person who’s had the shit kicked out of him his entire life, and doesn't know what a healthy relationship is. He thinks that, because Tom doesn't beat him or degrade him, this is a good relationship.

I was very careful with the language in this as well. When Tom refers to and addresses Severus, he uses almost exclusively possessive language (my wife, my dear, a thing made just for me). He starts calling him his wife without asking, disregarding any
gender issues Severus would have with the term. When they have sex, he doesn't ask about boundaries or where he's allowed to cum, and he doesn't consider Severus' point of view on the pregnancy. He's a narcissist who considers Severus an object, even if it's an object that he loves. Severus also mentions that he feels selfish for not wanting to have a child. No one is selfish for not wanting a child. It's your body and your life. If you feel you cannot meet the obligations of parenthood, then you are making the right choice to either never have family or terminate a pregnancy. The world treats people who become mothers horrifyingly, and it shouldn't be that way. I stand by what I said above.

Nothing in this will get violent, so you don't have to worry about that, but the underlying tone of this is admittedly dark despite there being sweet scenes ahead.

Tom talks about the myth of Pygmalion, which is about a man who declares he is not interested in women after seeing a group of sex workers, but then falls in love with a statue of a woman he carved. To me, this just shows that throughout time, men are not interested in women as human beings, but in creating an empty vessel with no thoughts or feeling of their own who are at their every beck and call. Which is exactly what Tom is trying to do to Severus.

He also mentions Justinian the first and Theodora who are very much real, and the information I provided is accurate if severely condensed.

The songs referenced are Swing by the String by Marlene Dietrich, and fits into the overarching narrative of Fragments as well. For the full goth experience, I recommend the cover by the band Pig. There are multiple versions so if you would do me the honor of listening this is the one I'd like you to hear.

Then there is Why don't you do right by Julie London which is, to Tom and Severus (and me), is about shitty dads even though it's more in reference to a lover. The the final one is Nature Boy as performed by Nat King Coal. That one should be fairly obvious, but I purposely wrote it so Tom stopped it before it got to the final part, "The greatest thing you'll ever learn, Is just to love, And be loved In return," because they're not learning that.

Finally, songs not mentioned in this but very much required listening are Jennifer's Body by Hole, which came out on the album Live Through This in 1994. I know there is a beloved movie named after that song which I swear I'm gonna watch some day. The other song is Ava Adore by Smashing Pumpkins. The funniest thing about this is the lead singers of both bands have dated, so there's a slight chance the songs might hold some reference to each other.

Finally, the day I started writing this I got the news that my sister, who is one year older than me, is pregnant. And I violently relived every childhood trauma I have ever had in ten seconds. We are not on good terms and never will be and I doubt she'll be a good parent.

Anyway, I am terrified of pregnancy for the exact same reasons I have written about here. So the fair question is, why would I choose to write about it? As terrified by the idea of it as I am, I'm equally fascinated with the horror aspect. Which is why I like mpreg. I enjoy the body horror. Men have been inflicting pregnancy on women since sexism was invented. I like turning that around on them. The horror of being forced to carry a child you don't want or have the means to care for is strangely cathartic to me,
but only in the case of fictional men.
If one were to ask Severus to describe pregnancy, he would say it was drudgery. The first trimester he was tired all the time, with a shorter temperament than usual, and constantly sore in odd places. His nausea wasn’t too bad thankfully, but the smell of frying eggs or meat normally set it off, meaning he was on a porridge based diet some days.

It was cute though, how Tom hovered over him. “Are you sleeping enough? Eating enough? Are you taking your nutrition potions? Are you hurting anywhere? Do you need anything?” Severus had never been doted on in his life so while it was bewildering at times, it was also flattering. He allowed himself to bask in the attention, soaking up concern and care like a wilted flower taking in fresh rain.

During the second trimester, Severus began to feel more like himself. Less tired, less sore, and thankfully he no longer suffered from nausea. But he was quickly starting to show, much to Tom’s delight. Currently, it was just a slight bowing out of his middle. But Tom, intimately familiar with his body, spotted it easily. It didn’t bother Severus much, but it strained his back a bit, and necessitated altering his clothes to fit his changing form. “My dear, you know we could buy you new ones,” Tom had chided. But a life of poverty had made him thrifty, and it was easier to charm his clothes to fit. Besides, he didn’t relish going out somewhere very public in his current state, as most people had known him as a man. Not that he wasn’t one anymore, mind, he just happened to have...extra parts. Extra parts that were currently being occupied by extra humans. And that meant people would want to ask question, would want to touch him on the belly and give him terrible advice and unwanted opinions. Simply unacceptable. On the few occasions he did go out in public, he wore loose clothes with a notice me not charm around him middle, and that seemed to do the trick. Thankfully, he hadn’t run into anyone who might want to talk, not that he could think of anyone that would. All of his contacts knew better.

As the pregnancy progressed, there were a few oddities he experienced. His expanding chest, for one. But he probably should have expected that. He hadn’t exactly been flat as a board before, but it had been close enough in appearance to untrained muscle that it wasn’t really suspicious. Now he’s got a neat little handful swelling beneath his robes, upturned nipples becoming much more prominent. Tom thinks it’s cute, but Severus doesn’t care for it. He hopes they go back down at some point after the baby is born.

Troublingly his gums would spontaneously start to bleed, as well as his nose. He would be minding how own business, curled up and reading, when blood would start dripping on the pages of his book, frightening him terribly until he realized what it was. Once, during breakfast in the kitchen, he had been quietly lamenting the blood tinged flavor of his toast (on account of his
irritated gums), when he felt a warm trickle from his nose. Before he could even move to try and wipe it away, Tom gasped. "Oh, Severus, are you alright?" But without waiting for his answer Tom was on his feet, coming at him with a handkerchief. Severus tried to draw himself back from the insistent hand pressing the clean cloth to his face. "Do hold still, darling," Tom tutted as he tried to dab away the blood.

"I can wipe my face by myself, Tom. You're being ridiculous!" he said, trying to wave him off.

"Oh hush! Let me take care of you, my dear."

Severus, now frustrated, snatched the handkerchief away and dodged out of his seat. "I've had a bloody nose before. Just let me deal with it!" he snapped, trudging to the sink to wash the sticky blood from his face, having been smeared around by an overenthusiastic Tom.

"It worries me when you spontaneously bleed, you know."

"Then you shouldn't have gotten me pregnant," he said, pinching his nose shut and leaning his head back.

Tom came up behind him, wrapping his arms around his middle to stroke it gently. "Spiteful little spider, are we?" he cooed, planting a kiss to the top of his head. "We'll ask the doctor about it; see if she can shed some light on your mysteries, my love."

Severus sighed and slumped back into Tom's arms, suddenly feeling tired again. "I'm going back to bed," he muttered.

"Get as much rest as you want, my dear. That's very important," he murmured into his hair. They had an appointment with their doctor in two days; if he was truly determined, perhaps he could sleep until then.

Unfortunately his hibernation plan hadn't panned out, and he'd spent the time between feeling oddly bored and restless. It was actually a relief when Hemwick arrived to examine him. “Bleeding gums and noses are normal. It's your hormones sending the extra blood all over the place. Just make sure to brush and floss daily. There's not much to be done beyond that,” she said. Doctor Hemwick was kind in that noncommittal sort of way, and for the most part he doesn't mind her. She comes every month to check him over, first in the parlor and then, if more privacy was required, in his bed. He still remembers the cruel, sharp scrape of her metal speculum prying him open and her fingers, cold and slick, prodding at his insides. But she’s a trusted, discreet woman employed exclusively by the upper echelons of pureblood society. She doesn’t ask who Tom is, doesn’t ask what they do for a living or how they, with no recognizable name, have found themselves in her care. If Severus’ sleeve had ever slipped down enough to reveal the dark mark emblazoned on his flesh she never reacted to it. She only does her job.

He and Tom are side by side on the settee in the receiving parlor, located off of the main entrance on the left side of their home. Tom favors it for its emerald green silk wallpaper and raised panel wainscoting, as well as the carolean ceiling with its intricate scrolling plaster and ornate crown molding, complete with Acanthus leaf corbels. He had been mystified when Tom had brought him here for the first time and said it was to be their home, then taught him all the words to describe it. The settee is pastel green to offset the darker wallpaper, upholstered in velvet with damask print, curling woodwork at the top and bottom, and curved wooden feet. For some reason, it comes with two chairs built into it at either end, angling off and away from the main portion. Tom had called it a canapé à confidante (“canapay ah konfee-dant, my dear. It’s French” to which Severus had rolled his eyes). As far as he’s concerned, it’s a settee. His husband’s taste in furniture can be a bit gaudy but it was worlds better than the horrid, broken down stuff they’d grown up with. Severus is
thankful for the lovely home he’s been provided (five bedrooms, various parlors, an office, four full baths, a small library, and a section of the basement converted into a potions laboratory) already filled with fine art and furniture, the well made clothes, and plentiful food. Every need is met and then some. All things he may have never had without Tom. So if Tom wants to add a child to his collection, it’s the least he can do, he tells himself.

“You’re gaining weight as you should, your blood pressure is in the proper range, and all scans show a healthy baby. Do you have any questions for me?” Hemwick asked.

“There’s- sometimes I...have some fluid...leaking from…” Severus muttered, gesturing between his legs. It feels wrong to have to explain what was happening. Growing up as he had (feral as his husband likes to say), he never saw anything close to a doctor until his time at Hogwarts and then it was mostly on account of the Marauder’s cruelty. Madam Pomfrey’s quick counter curses and sub-par antidotes hadn’t even come close to the level of invasive scrutiny he was being subjected to now. And it feels strange and wrong to have ask her questions about vaginal leakage. He had only recently come to terms with having these parts, only for the game to change again, leaving him back to feeling uncertain and uncomfortable in his skin. At least before he’d had some idea about what was happening to him, but here he was decidedly in uncharted waters. Everything was new and horrifying. Could it be a symptom of a miscarriage? A sign that Severus himself was ill? If he was would it deform their child? He knew nothing and had no one but Hemwick that could tell him.

“Oh you poor dear. I see you’re still not being taught anything at that school,” her tone is suddenly sharp as she packed her black leather bag. “It’s called leukorrhea and it’s perfectly normal too. As long as it’s not yellow or green or particularly foul smelling. Just wear liners to catch it, but nothing insertive.” Wonderful. Liners and menstrual pads aren’t the most comfortable things to begin with, but with a penis in the way it’s even worse. He’s had better luck with clean, absorbent cloth tuck right at the opening with a sticking charm.

When he had started puberty, he hadn’t known what to expect of his body. He’d never developed facial hair, which was fine, but his voice had gotten much deeper, and he’d grown tall but not shapely. Because of that, he hadn’t expected to ever have a menstrual cycle. But lo and behold, at 15 he’d gone to the toilet and discovered blood in his underwear. Merlin, the horror and shame he had felt.

He’d found an empty place to curl up like a dying thing to hate himself and his body and his life in peace. Everything about it had felt sick and wrong and unfair. Did this mean he had to be a woman? He didn’t feel like a woman. He didn’t want to be a woman. He didn’t even look or sound like a woman. He was only even tangentially aware of what a “period” was. Maybe this was something else. Maybe if he just hated it enough it would go away and not come back.

It had, unfortunately, not been a working strategy. His miserable first blood was only compounded by the mudblood incident with Lily three days later. He had been so panicked and frightened about his horrible, shameful body being exposed that he had said the worst thing he could think of to his first and only friend. And she, in her rage, had never let him explain, shoving him that much further into despair. But ultimately, perhaps, into meeting Tom.

His Tom who asks casually, “should we stop having sex?” warm hand perched lightly on Severus’ knee.

Severus flushed bright red and wished he could melt into the horrid canape sofa. Until the last two years he had decidedly buried any sexual urges he may have had, too disgusted by his anatomy and overall appearance to even think of ever being touched between his legs. And then he’d joined
Tom, and look where that had gotten him.

“Don’t be embarrassed now! You’re lucky you’ve such a fine husband, so concerned about your health and involved with every step.” She laughed and flashes a smile of perfect white teeth. “Most men you have to drag kicking and screaming into the room. Don’t worry, sex is perfectly fine. Your baby is completely enclosed in the uterus. Though you may have some blood spotting after. Just try to avoid doing it face down as that could put too much pressure on your middle,” she said, packing her things away to leave. Severus had half a mind to refuse sex just to spite Tom but, well, he’s been unspeakably horny himself lately. Not that his husband minded.

“Anything you need, love,” he’d said, grin lascivious. But he treated him like glass, entering him carefully and subjecting him to slow, easy thrusts, just barely scratching the terrible itch inside him. In his frustration Severus knocked him on his back and rode him roughly, his arms firmly planted on Tom’s chest for leverage, angrily chasing his release with a single minded drive. Tom had laughed and run his hands up and down his sides, cupping his new breasts and tweaking at his sensitive nipples. “You’re glorious like this, darling. Simply glorious.” Severus’ eyes snapped shut and he bit his lip as his orgasm hit him, an almost animal groan bubbling up from the back of his throat as he came harder than he ever had before, whole body trembling in the aftershock. Tom, as always, came inside him.

Eighteen weeks rolled around, and Severus feels a fluttering. The thing inside him is now large enough that he can feel it move. He knows he should be overjoyed, but he finds it unsettling; an alien creature inside him, transparent almost body rubbing up against his insides. Tom is disappointed he can’t feel any movement from the outside yet, but he’s still constantly caressing his middle, like he's afraid if he removes his hand for even a moment he may miss the first stirrings of life. It's unsettling, really. It makes him feel like nothing but a vessel, an unimportant husk compared to the not yet a human forming in him. It doesn't have any thoughts, doesn't have any feelings. Doesn't care if it's alive or dead. Unlike Severus, who feels used by its existence. But he carries on. He tells himself it's just hormones. An adjustment period. Tom would never knowingly hurt him, after all.

One night in bed, Severus gained the courage to ask, “what gender you are hoping for?” He knew his own father had wanted a son, if any child was to be had, and was sorely disappointed when the one he’d gotten wasn’t male enough for him. Would Tom be disappointed at a daughter? Or a baby that was like Severus and a bit of both?

Tom, who had taken to sleeping wrapped around him like a snake, hand always resting on Severus’ abdomen, hums softly into his cobweb hair. “I haven’t any preference. As long as they’re healthy.”

“I’d have thought you’d want a son.”

Tom chuckles, and Severus can feel the low rumble against his back. “A daughter would be just as welcome. She’d be a willowy thing, I suspect, with a severe mouth and high, pink cheeks. What would you prefer, my dear?”

“One or the other. But not both, like me,” he whispered into the darkness.

His husband lets loose a tired sigh as he curls himself tighter around Severus, chin resting on the top of his head. “Oh, my Severus, there is nothing wrong with you, and I won't let you imply that there is. There will be nothing wrong with our child either, be they one or both or neither.” At his husband’s assuring words Severus, much to his own surprise, begins to cry. “Oh, my darling, sshhh. It’s alright. No need for tears,” Tom soothes, stroking his back and planting a kiss behind his ear.
“It’s just these bloody hormones,” he snuffles, dragging his sleeve across his eyes to dry them. “So you’d best get used to this.” He’s lying, and he thinks Tom knows he’s lying. He had been frightened that Tom would hate his baby if it didn’t come out exactly as he’d wanted it. And who was he doing this for, if not Tom? But to know it didn’t matter, that it would be loved no matter what, that he didn’t have to be afraid, had broken a damn in him, and now he couldn’t stop it. And, somewhere deep and buried, there’s an odd part of him that stings, knowing that there are fathers out there who would accept their children no matter what. It comes as a bitter relief that’s far too late for him.

Tom unwinds himself from Severus to reach the bedside table, grabbing a handkerchief to hand him. Severus blows his nose and deposits the soiled fabric onto his own nightstand.

“Whatever you need, love,” Tom said, wrapping himself back around Severus.

Finally, at 22 weeks, Tom gets his wish to feel the baby. It’s more than just a flutter this time, much closer to a proper kick. Severus had been on his way back from the bathroom (because he was always needing to use it these days) to the parlor when it happened, and rested his hand against his middle, expression perplexed. “Is everything alright, my love?” Tom asked, concerned. The sensation comes again, and he can even feel it against his palm.

“Come here. Quickly.” And Tom rushes to his side. Severus takes his hand and moves it to the correct spot, just to the left of his navel. When the baby kicks again, he watches as Tom’s eyes widen in surprise, and then a smile bleeds across his face.

“That’s miraculous,” he breathes, hand rubbing slow circles against his belly. “That’s my baby.”

“It certainly is,” he whispers back.

Severus is surprised when Tom kneels before him, lips so close to his middle he’s almost kissing it, and says, “Hello in there, you dear little thing. I’m your father.” The baby kicks again, right beneath its father’s palm, and Tom laughs rich and deep. “Be careful with your mother. He’s very dear as well.”

By the time 30 weeks comes, it’s almost impossible to believe he has another 10 to go. His ribs ached from having a baby crammed beneath them, his ankles are swollen, his legs are cramping for some reason, and the novelty of the kicking has worn off no matter how excited it still makes Tom. Let him get his organs beaten for months on end and see how excited he is about it after.

He’s also become a bit of a klutz; Severus finds himself dropping, spilling, and knocking into things constantly. Apparently this is also “healthy and normal” and if he hears Hemwick say that one more time he’s going to hex her.

“Your hips are wider too,” Tom had said offhandedly one evening while reading through the Prophet.

“And how on earth would you know?” he’d snapped back.

“I should think I remember what my wife’s rear looks like by now,” he said, turning the page.

Severus believes that it showed a lot of restraint on his part that it’s only the paper he’s reading that catches fire, and not Tom himself. Unfortunately, he accidentally hip checks one of the velvet armchairs on his way out, causing him to yelp and stumble.

“It’s a lovely view, my dear,” Tom teasingly called out after Severus as he slammed the French doors behind him, glass rattling angrily in the panels.
Later, when he’s in his nest of pillows in bed, Tom rubbing bruise cream on the tender flesh, he says, “I don’t want to have tits and I don’t want to have wide hips. I’m not a woman, Tom. If you wanted someone with those things, you shouldn’t have married me.”

“Severus,” and he has the audacity to say it like he’s weary, like after all Severus has been through to please him there could possibly be something he had done wrong, “you already know I don’t care what you look like. I thought you were fascinating before; lithe and fine boned.”

“Hooked nose, crooked teeth...” he finishes for him, feeling irritated and vindictive.

Tom swats his bare thigh, making the new layers of fat beneath his skin wiggle. “Sharp tongued, quick witted, venomous little spider,” he said, laying down and wrapping his arms around Severus. “You’ve rounded out, and it’s very likely your hips will stay wide, and you’ll probably retain some breast tissue as well, but that’s irrelevant to your gender. If you say you’re a man, you’re a man. And I’ll drop anyone that says otherwise.” His hand skates up and down Severus’ laden belly, rubbing his thumb over the angry red stretch marks. “Miraculously, you’ve conceived my child, and I find myself endlessly fascinated by what your body is doing because of that. These things,” he said, hand roving over the ridge of his hip, freshly padded with a new roll of fat, then up to cup his breast, “are permanent changes left to show how divine you are, how special you are, for having my baby.” Severus finds himself crying again because Tom’s words are sweet and perfect as always. He’d been foolish to be bothered by the changes happening to his body. How silly of him, to feel anything other than blessed. How kind and patient and eternally merciful his Tom is with him, and only ever with him. Severus is just tired, worn to the bone from everything that is happening. It all seems so much always all of the time.

Tom coos to him softly, my darling, my dear, my Severus, until he settles and falls asleep.

Severus is 38 weeks, and he thinks it’s close enough that the damn thing inside of him should come out already. His body is already practicing, having small contractions that cause him to hiss and rest his arm across his abdomen, already strained muscles rippling beneath his skin. The baby has lessened its movements and sits lower in his hips, relieving pressure from his ribs but causing his pelvis to ache instead.

It's all in preparation for the birth. It's a relief to know it will be over soon, but it’s also terrifying. Severus is more than aware of the myriad of things that could go wrong. And Tom, for all of his previous enthusiasm and excitement, seems a bit sullen as the final week approaches. Severus understands; Tom had lost his own mother to childbirth, and part of him fears he may lose Severus as well. It makes him happy in a wan, aching sort of way to know Tom would be so lost without him.

In the meantime, he’s taken to making the house elves scrub every inch of their home and organize it to his liking.

“Is there even a carpet fiber left that you haven’t ordered terrorized, my dear?” Tom asks as Severus storms into his office. It’s all leather furniture and dark wood wainscoting (“it’s mahogany my dear; oak is cheap”), bronze lamps, and various relics. He’d once asked him about the rat king he kept framed and hung on the wall. “Oh, just a craft project from when I was a boy. There were many rats in the orphanage, after all.” Severus much prefers the large, taxidermy Cephalonian snake, two headed and bright blue, eternally wound in a glass case. He certainly has a better relationship with it than he does Nagini, who is coiled around the petrified ash tree branch that stands behind the desk.

“I’m trying to get this place in order before I have your baby! And I can’t do that if you keep taking all of the books from the library and leaving them in here.”
“It’s called a study, darling. Where else would you have me do research?”

“I swear,” Severus yells, slamming both palms flat on the desk his husband is seated at, “if I find one more missing book, I’m going to come in here and rip said book to shreds with my bare hands while you watch.”

“I think you ought to lie down,” he responds seriously as he steeple his fingers beneath his chin.

When the large picture window behind Tom starts to splinter, thick cracks zigzagging their way through the glass, Tom smiles. “Truly a feral thing you are, my dear Severus.” He hisses something to his snake, and she slithers leisurely out of the room. “I think I may have something that will calm you.” And his grin is hungry.

They fuck on the desk, Severus sitting on the surface, hair spotted legs spread wide for his husband to slot between them. And if feels good, it always does now; hot and wet and dripping on the solid wood beneath him. It may be the last time they have sex for quite awhile, so Severus decides to make it count. His nails, grown long and sturdy from his idleness and extra nutrition these many months, dig into Tom’s back and shoulders hard enough to draw blood and his angry mouth bites a collar of bruises around his throat.

Tom yelps and roughly tugs one of his now extremely sensitive nipples in retaliation. “Vicious, vindictive, feral little spider bride!” When Severus cum, it’s with his teeth buried in his husband’s adam’s apple and his legs locked tight around his hips.

Tom only pulls out after his own orgasm, his face red and hair unsticking from its normally slicked back style, tiny claw marks trickling blood and a dusky sunset of bruises setting around his throat. “Are you feeling any better?”

Severus lays back on the desk, chest heaving and nethers oozing various fluids onto Tom’s papers, blood drying beneath his nails, and his legs hang limply over the edge. “No. Put things back when you’re through with them.”

It’s 3AM on the fourth of September when a particularly long contraction wakes him, his muscles bearing down involuntarily. Severus lies back and simply breathes. Yesterday a large, gelatinous hunk of mucous had worked its way out of him, pinkish and flecked with blood. He had been cautioned that something like that might happen. It’s the plug that had been keeping his cervix closed, meaning his body is nearly ready to give birth. He waits in the dark, listening to Tom’s deep breathing as he rests peacefully beside him. He’s almost lulled back to sleep when, seventeen minutes later, he feels another contraction. He huffs and rises from his bed.

"Alright love?" Tom’s sleep rough voice asks.

"Bathroom."

"Hhmmm," he replies, rolling over.

Severus is incredibly grateful their bedroom has an attached bathroom as he drops his underwear and sits on the toilet. There isn’t any blood yet, not even a drop. He’s most likely in labor, but hours and hours away from needing his midwife. The best he can do is make himself comfortable and wait until the contractions are much closer together. He relieves himself, washes his hands, and returns to bed to drift to sleep.

It’s 10 in the morning when he wakes again with a terrible back ache and another contraction, though he’s surprised he managed to sleep as long as he had. He’ll probably need it, after all. He
returns to the bathroom, not surprised to find that he’d started to bleed a bit during the night. He sticks a clean cloth between his legs but doesn’t bother to dress further before he goes to find Tom.

He’s in the kitchen, still sipping his morning tea when Severus enters. “There you are, my dear. Did you sleep well?”

“Not particularly,” he sighs as he eases himself into a chair across from him.

“Baby keeping you up?”

Severus scowls into another contraction, this one coming faster than he’d expected. “Labor pains. I’m fairly certain I’m giving birth today,” he drawls, almost laughing when his husband chokes on his tea.

Tom coughs and clears his throat, reaching for a cloth napkin to dab away the mess. “And this was the earliest point you thought to tell me?”

He just shakes his head and sighs. “There isn’t much either of us, especially you, can do. We just have to wait. My contractions are still ten minutes apart, so it’s not like I’ve got to start pushing anytime soon.”

“I’d still like to have the midwife check you over,” Tom said, face drawn and serious.

“She’ll say the same thing.”

“Please,” he replies, reaching across the table to take Severus’ hand in his, “for my sake.”

He knows he’s right, and even if he wasn’t he never could deny him anyway. “Alright.”

The midwife comes, as airy and irritatingly unruffled as ever. “Get in bed, dear, and I’ll have a look at you.” He nods and winces at another contraction, still ten minutes apart.

“Can you walk, my dear?” Tom asks, concern heavy in his voice. Severus waves him off. His back and hips ache, but he’s not yet paralyzed by birthing pains. He heads up the stairs with Tom trailing behind, arms half out to catch him if he falls, as if he’d let himself suffer such an indignity.

He makes it to his bed without incident, and strips himself of his underthings.

He hates this part. The midwife’s hands are dry and warm, but her fingers are slicked in cold lubricant and horribly unfamiliar as she gently as possible inserts her cruel speculum, ratcheting him open like a clam shell to peer inside. He scowls in discomfort as her fingers press against his cervix and she hums.

“What?” Tom asks anxiously from his position of sitting cross legged on the bed, Severus’ head cradled in his lap.

She laughs at him, and if she were anyone else she would probably be dead where she stood. “Everything is fine,” she says, and Severus feels her fingers ease out of him before the speculum is disengaged, leaving him smeared in lubricant and with an uncomfortably stretched sensation between his legs. “You’re dilated three centimeters, so you’ve some time to go yet, but not too terribly much, I’d suspect. Your first labor,” she says, as if Severus has any intention of having a second one at some point, “generally lasts 12 to 24 hours. When do you think you started?”

“Around 3 this morning.”
“About 8 hours then. I don’t think you’ll go the full 24, probably closer to 12.”

“Is that good?” Tom asks.

“It depends on the person, really. But the further out from 24 hours you go, the higher chance you have of running into problems. You and the baby get fatigued, and that’s when things can get sticky.”

“But you don’t think he’ll have that problem?”

“Not that problem, no.”

“But you are concerned about something?” Tom asked, frustration seeping into his voice.

She smiles, but it’s wan and tired. “He’s young. There is a, ah, misconception that younger is better for mothers, but that’s not true. At this age, your main concern is toxemia, which you haven’t had but may still develop after giving birth, but I doubt you will. Your measurements indicate your baby is a healthy size, so we don’t have to worry about them having too low a weight—”

“So what is it then?” Tom snaps at her.

“Blood loss, tearing, ligament damage to his hips.” Her focus shift to Severus himself then, face soft and just a tiny bit sad. “You’re nineteen, and probably not quite done growing. You’re mostly out of the woods, so I don’t think those things will happen, but it pays to be aware. Young mothers do tend to have terrible melancholy though, and that can lead to severe problems in caring for themselves and a baby.

“Do you have a mother yourself? Perhaps some sisters or aunts who can help? If so we should send for them now so they can be here for you.”

And for a moment all he can see is his mother, dead in her bed by his own hand, and for the first time he fears he may have been too hasty. Would Eileen have liked to be here, holding his hand and soothing him as he labored? Would she have liked a grandchild at all?

“He has me. And I will make absolutely sure he is cared for properly. You can count on that.”

Tom sounds vicious, his temper strained by the implication he alone may not be enough, the side of him that’s a tyrant leaking through.

“It’s just us,” Severus tells her softly. “We have house elves, and Tom has...friends that will be obliged. I’ll be fine.”

No, Eileen would have been no help, already too beaten down and curled in on herself. By the time she died she mostly sat in bed and stared into nothing. She’d stopped caring when Tobias beat him a long time ago, so she probably wouldn’t care for him now. But Tom cares for him, deeply and painfully. Hemwick had said it herself before, that he has a fine husband. He won’t be negligent of any of his duties.

“All right, if you are sure. Expect to see some blood, more than you may think but it’s not more than you can afford to lose, trust me. Here, I have something for you.” She spells her fingers clean and reaches into the black leather bag she carries, fishing around for a few moments before she removes a silver chain from which a simple silver circle hung, almost like an unstamped coin.

“This will tell me when I’m needed or if an emergency happens and we need to get you into hospital. It has worked without fail for years, so you needn’t worry. We have magic on our side, love. You’ll do fine. Stay hydrated, but eating probably isn’t the best idea, as contractions on a full
stomach tend to cause vomiting. I’ll be back soon.” As she leaves, Severus remembers her soft sad face and thinks her very wise.

“The nerve of that woman.” Tom snipes after she is gone.

“She’s just doing her job.” Severus replies with a secret little smile.

He spends the next four hours reading in bed or pacing before the fireplace to try and relieve some of his stress and ease his aching back, as well as sipping water and weak tea. As the hours tick by, his contractions come faster and last longer. Tom hovers constantly, concerned, and it’s beginning to irritate him.

He excuses himself to the bathroom to try and clean up a bit, but mostly because he needs a moment to himself. He’d just finished cleaning the little smears of blood from his groin and thighs when his water finally breaks, streaming down his leg and pooling on the tile floor. He feels an increase of pressure, and a hard and painful contraction rips through him, almost bringing him to his knees with a shout as he clutches the sink to hold himself upright.

Tom bursts in and eases him back into standing, and for once his hands seem flighty. “Are you alright?”

He nods and takes a moment to catch his breath. “My water just broke. It surprised me is all.” He sees Tom’s eyes flick down to the clear puddle on the floor and he nods.

“Let’s get you back to bed.”

Just as he gets settled Severus has another contraction, and this time he curls into himself and groans, feeling the need to bear down and push. After what seems like an eternity the feeling tapers off and he’s left sweating and panting and thoroughly shaken.

Suddenly there’s a swift knock on the door and the midwife, bless her serene smile, sticks her head in. “Alright dear, now the real work begins.” She strides in confidently, bustling to the other side of the room and sets her bag on the sideboard, unclasping it with sure hands. She pulls a rubber sheet out and with a flick of her wand, it’s spread out on the floor before the bed. She dives back in and Severus watches, mystified, as she heaves an entire chair free and sets it on the sheet.

It’s an old thing, dark wood worn smooth with a broad back upholstered in deep brown leather. The arms are well crafted if plain with leather pads near where one’s wrists would rest, and peculiarly the they have carved wooden dowels sticking up from the ends like handles. The thing that makes it more unusual, however, is the seat itself: cushioned leather as well, but with a semicircle cut out, giving it the unfortunate likeness of a toilet seat.

Severus scowls. “What on earth is that?” But before she can answer him another contraction hits and he’s left to moan and writhe through it, Tom watching bewildered as Severus clutches his hand uselessly.

“It’s a birthing chair, silly thing.” she chides, going back to fishing through her bag. She pulls a metal basin from its depths to set beneath the open seat. “Don’t get up quite yet. I still have to check if you’re dilated enough to start pushing but that’s really just a formality. I’m sure you’re more than ready.” She nudges his legs apart again and somehow she’s already holding the speculum.

“Must you?” Severus says tiredly, eyeing the sinister glint of metal with disgust.

“Oh you poor thing. I know, it’s all terribly invasive, but I have to make sure you’re truly ready. I
don’t want you exhausting yourself and your baby by trying to squeeze it through a hole that’s not nearly wide enough.”

“Isn’t there a spell that checks?” he pleads.

“There is, but it’s not as accurate. The measurements are too important to be even slightly off and I refuse to be anything less than 100% sure. There’s a reason I’m the best dear, now let me have a look.” Tom pets his arm soothingly as cold metal is forced inside of him, hopefully for the final time. “You’re ten centimeters! All clear to push!” she declares, removing her speculum. Severus shivers and takes a deep breath, just in time for another contraction. “It’s alright. Go ahead and push,” she says, stroking his knee. “Just think, you’ll get to meet your baby very soon.” And it’s not exactly a comfort as he feels a small gush of blood ooze out of him.

“Is that too much?” Tom’s concerned voice rings out.

“No no, if it were the amulet would buzz. There’s always blood with babies, among other things. You let me worry about that and help him to the chair.”

Severus swats at Tom’s arms, panting. “I can manage the ten foot trek to the damn thing. The baby isn’t going to fall out the second I stand,” he snaps, wishing it actually would.

Tom looks to the midwife as if asking permission and she nods. “You have a strong spirit dear; that’s why I’m not worried about you. I have a feeling you could fight through anything.” He gives his own tired smile in return and heaves himself from the bed, the sheets now spotted with blood and other fluids. It explains the rubber tarp and bucket at any rate.

He delicately settles himself into her confounded chair and feels terribly awkward, sitting in nothing but his dressing gown on what is, to him at least, an overgrown toilet. He gets a moment to breathe, Tom’s hands tucking his sweat damp hair behind his ears and the contact is appreciated. Hopefully this will be over soon.

When another contraction hits, he sees the sense of the chair as his hands clutch the dowels and the upright position makes him able to bare down and push more effectively. “You’re supposed to let gravity assist you with the pushing, you see. If it helps, you can tuck your legs under you and squat as well. Whatever you feel is best.” Severus grits his teeth and feels his face contort into a horrible expression as something moves down inside him. “It won’t be long now. An hour or more. All right, deep breaths, nice and steady.”

It’s two hours. Two more tortuous hours of pushing and screaming and bleeding when finally, Doctor Hemwick spots the head. “They’re crowning dear, that means you just have to pass the shoulders and the rest will slide right out. The hardest part is the last but then it’ll all be over.” She strokes his straining flank with her warm hands and he hates it as much as he appreciates it.

Tom is standing behind the chair, bent over so his chin touches the top of Severus’ head, his hands kneading his shoulders gently as he hums softly to him. Severus doesn’t particularly like the contact, as he feels raw and over sensitized, but mostly he’s just too tired to complain about it. He’s stretched out and stuffed full in a way he doesn’t care for, but between contractions it isn’t so much actively painful as it is uncomfortable. Another wave hits him, and he rears back bowstring taut as he feels an unbearable, agonizing pressure and it seems like every muscle in his body is working to expel the baby. He clutches the handles of the chair and howls from the back of his throat, guttural and inhuman as he pushes with everything he has left. Finally something gives way inside of him and he feels his baby slide free, releasing the pressure and stopping the worst of the cramping.

He slumps down, exhausted beyond measure. His ears are ringing but he thinks he hears someone
distantly say “Severus” and “boy”. Tom comes into view, smile wider than he’s ever seen it as he carefully slips Severus’ right arm out of his sleeve to expose his chest.

Hemwick lays a slimy, sticky, bloody, shrieking thing against his newly bared skin and Severus gets a second wind as he realizes it’s his baby. He straightens out from his slump and wraps his arms around it, looking down in bewilderment and wonder as it flails and writhes.

“Did you hear, my love? A boy. Just a boy, as you wanted.” A boy. A son for his Tom. His tiny features are still obscured by muck but he runs his thumb across his forehead and around the shell of his ear. His baby. His son. He watches, dazed, as his midwife snips the long white cord that has connected them these many months.

“You’ve done so well, Severus. But I’m afraid you must hand him to me for a moment. I’ll clean him up and make sure he’s as healthy as he looks, dear,” Hemwick says, saccharine voice cutting through his haze, and he feels a strange fierceness inside himself. He doesn’t want to hand her his baby. She wasn’t the one that spent nine months carrying him around and suffering the indignities and invasions it entailed, or the one that spent hours upon hours bleeding and screaming and pushing, not the one ripping herself in two to bring him into this world.

“Severus, darling, we have to make sure he’s healthy,” Tom’s voice appeals to him. “Why don’t you let her hold him for a moment while I clean the blood off of you? That can’t be comfortable.” He’s right once again, and with great reluctance he lets her whisk away his baby. He feels some minor cramping in his abdomen and his muscles spasm, giving him the urge to bear down, but nothing nearly as close to before. He relents and gives a half attempt at pushing, and to his surprise something more slips out from him. With a wet splat it lands in the basin beneath.

“That’s just the placenta,” Hemwick calls over her shoulder, examining his baby on the sideboard in the afternoon sun. “No gouts of blood?”

“No,” Tom calls back, and with a flick of his noble hand, all the blood and mucus and amniotic fluid disappear from Severus' person. “Can I move him to the bed?”

“That’s fine.” And this time Severus doesn’t protest as he’s manhandled back into bed and propped up on pillows. It’s five o’clock in the afternoon on the fourth of September, 1979, and Severus has given Tom Riddle a son. His first and only.

“Aren’t you a lucky thing. No tearing at all. I would have expected some, given how narrow you are,” Hemwick says after a final examination with her fingers, He hardly feels it, too numbed from the whole ordeal. Mostly he’s just glad to have his baby back in his arms. He was a squashed and red thing with a crown of downy black hair. He’d been scoured and swaddled, wrapped tightly in an emerald green blanket with silver trim (courtesy of the family Malfoy) and given a clean bill of health. His tiny nose drips and there’s crust in the corners of his baby blue eyes. Severus has been assured that this is normal. He’s too exhausted to do anything other than believe it. He runs a spidery finger over his infant’s ballooning cheeks. The new skin there is oddly smooth with an almost vinyl like texture. So much for newborn softness.

Certainly it’s a relief to not be pregnant anymore but his body will still be distended for some time. He’s been told he will drip blood as well as various other fluids and tissues for a few weeks. Hemwick had called it lochia. She’d also cautioned him to only use pads to catch it, as anything absorbent inserted inside him could cause a nasty infection.

The baby squirms a bit in his arms, making a throaty coo as it wiggled. Severus is fascinated by him. The terrifying entity that had used his body, dictated his moods and emotions, and morphed
him near unrecognizable, was this tiny, helpless little thing that fit snugly into the crook of his arm. So weak and new and fragile and so sweetly, utterly helpless as his little face wrinkles and he squalls.

It’s a harsh noise, and it will only grow louder as he ages. Severus isn’t looking forward to that, but there will be things that should help balance it out. Someday his son will laugh, and he is told it will be a transformative experience for him.

Truthfully though, he is unsure about how all of these things will make him feel. But the thought of feeling nothing about it gives him guilt, and he hopes that is a good sign. He would never admit it, but it is true that Severus had not wanted this baby. That he had been utterly terrified of the concept. But it seems different now as he holds him in his arms. He is still reluctant, of course (because until recently the things he’d loved have been taken from him or used beat him down) but there is a stirring in him he cannot ignore, gentle and rising like birdsong at a Spring dawn.

Severus has made a great many things in his life. Potions and mistakes and spells included. But in a way, none of it competes with this. An entire human being, a whole new soul he had created from next to nothing: just his husband’s seed and his very own blood. Blood that everyone had said was worthless and disgusting, but Tom, powerful and wise, had deemed strong and worthy.

So Severus thinks, very cautiously, that he may love this baby.

“You’re both the very picture of health, aren’t you?” Midwife Hemwick’s voice cuts through his fog and he jerks his head to stare at her. “Now we just need to see if he feeds well.” Oh. She means breast feeding, doesn’t she? Magic folk, Severus has learned, don’t really use things like baby formula. If you had trouble producing milk, a lactation potion was easy and cheap to make, and most apothecaries sold them premade as well. If a baby couldn’t tolerate milk, there was a potion for that too. But an infant without a mother was a mouth in want of food, and providing it could be a very lucrative business. One needn’t have been pregnant for a lactation potion to work, so it wasn’t unusual for witches in need of extra coin to bottle and sell their own milk. There was even a branch of the Ministry to ensure that it was safe and healthy. Despite it being an option, however, it was really only considered in an emergency. Apparently babies did best on their own parent’s milk, and a baby who wasn’t nursed directly from the breast supposedly didn’t fare as well.

If given the option, Severus may still have chosen to purchase rather than produce, but now the time had come and he was the only one with any milk to be had.

Hemwick unbuttons the top of his dressing gown and pushes the fabric aside as well as the alert charm he still wares. Gently she helped adjust the baby into the proper position in his arms. “Alright, support his head. There you are. Now, cup the end of your breast and pull your nipple out.” His nipples, small and dusky brown before, had enlarged greatly. They’re swollen and red, jutting angrily from his chest and ache terribly when touched. But he grimaces and follows her instructions, flinching at the contact. “Now, carefully, bring his mouth to you. Brush his lips gently with the nipple, and hopefully instinct should take over from there.” Severus can’t help but gasp as his baby’s mouth clamps down and he begins to suckle. There’s a tingling, like when you move a limb that’s fallen asleep, but it swiftly fades. Soon it just feels like a release of pressure. “Look at the both of you,” Hemwick said, her face uncomfortably close to his bare chest as she examines them, “got it right on the first try. He’s latched like he should be, and seems to be sucking well. Any pain?” He’s about to say no when something like a contraction happens and he scowls, his less encumbered arm going to his middle.

“Uterine cramps happen while feeding. It’s just the way of it. It’ll help clear out what’s left at least. Any breast related pain?”
Really, he wished she would stop saying breast as he still didn’t feel comfortable with thinking of himself as having them and honestly, they’re not *that* large. Hardly noticeable when he’s fully dressed. Though at the very least there isn’t any pain involved. He feels calm, exhausted, but strangely at peace. His son’s tiny hand rests on his chest near his sucking mouth, fingers flexing and unflexing, and his little eyes roll up to meet Severus’. “No pain,” and he says it more to himself than he does to his doctor.

“Wonderful. If you’re alright with it, I’ll pack up my things and be on my way. Keep the necklace on for now though, just in case. I’ll be back first thing in the morning to do another check. Oh!” she exclaims, stopping in her tracks, “It may be a bit of an odd question, but do you want to keep the placenta for any reason? Some people do, you see.” Severus is about to answer no, but Tom’s voice cuts him off.

“I have an idea for it, actually,” he said. He’d moved the wingback chair next to the bed, his expression steady and thoughtful as he watches Severus feed their son.

“Please tell me you’re not going to frame that in your study as well,” comes Severus’ deadpan voice.

Tom laughs, and for some reason he finds it gorgeous. “No, my love. I think Nagini would enjoy having it for her supper.”

Severus’ mouth curls downward in distaste. “As long as I don’t have to see it again I suppose.”

Hemwick hands Tom a large glass jar containing the afterbirth, its flesh a deep maroon with the white umbilical cord wrapped around it. “Thank you, Doctor Hemwick, for all that you’ve done.”

“The name Thomas is fine enough, if a bit plain. It’s my father that I hate.” Severus smiles knowingly, as he understands completely that you don’t stop hating someone just because they’re dead. The lingering ghosts of your pain still whisper into your ears in quiet moments; the phantom
hands of their hated, beaten into you over many years, will still try to drag you down.

“So what better way to spite him than continuing this ill gotten tradition? Besides, in such violent
times, it’s necessary to have a bit of anonymity, and Thomas is a rather innocuous name. When
these skirmishes are over, I shall name him something proper, as an emperor renames themselves
and their family after their conquests. But for now I think Thomas will suffice.”

Severus nods along. “Thomas is fine, but it will be odd to call the both of you Tom.”

“The diminutive then. I’ll be Tom, and he’ll be Tommy.”

“I think that’s suitable.” It gives Severus a warm feeling in his chest. His Tom loves their baby,
loves him enough to share his name. Not as an afterthought or out of hate, but out of pride. His
wise, handsome, all powerful Tom and their new little Tommy.

“Severus?”

“Do you want to hold him?”

“If you wouldn’t mind, my dear.” And it’s incredible to him, to see a parent love their child.
Severus feels broken and rebuilt as he carefully hands his son to his father. The tiny, miraculous
thing he had carefully grown for all those months is cradled like a treasure in Tom’s arms.

His baby, his Tommy, snuffles and begins to fuss, and Tom smiles as he rocks him gently. “Oh,
you precious thing. I know, the world is empty and harsh and cold, but I swear that I shall protect
you from it with everything I have.” His sure fingers caress Tommy’s chubby cheeks with the same
reverence he only used to touch Severus, and Severus feels beyond relieved. For once in his life,
everything has worked out in his favor.

He’s drifting off to sleep when Tom’s voice pulls him back. “Severus, I am sorry to keep you from
your well deserved rest, but I should like to take a picture of you and Tommy.”

Severus chuckles; his Tom, Dark Lord Voldemort and scourge of magical Britain, is secretly
sentimental. “Make it quick.”

Chapter End Notes

I continued the use of possessive speech, and until Tommy is born Severus refers to
him as an it out of resentment. Giving birth to a child does not mean you will
automatically love that child, so going through with a pregnancy you are unsure of is
never a good idea.

I wrote a lot of Severus’ dysphoria through the lens of my own dysphoria, but I did my
best to make it gender based and not weight based. A lot of pregnancy stuff you see
has that "oh I feel FAT and UGLY" complaint in it and we do not do this in my corner.
We can do better as a society.

All of the weird symptoms I included can happen during pregnancy. I wanted to keep
it sort of accurate. When Hemwick says toxemia and melancholy she means pre-
eclampsia and postpartum depression. Magic land doesn't really seem like it keeps up
with science, but Hemwick tries. Yes, I named her after Hemwick Charnel Lane from Bloodborne. It's a good name and you can't tell me what to do.

Now for jokes! Anybody see the video for Ava Adore? Billy Corgan be rocking that Voldemort look back in '98! Every scene I write of Tom is now just Ava Adore Billy Corgan with hair scribbled on. I call him Corgamort and I am in hell.

Other joke: the game boy advance Harry Potter game that that dedicated a weird amout of pixels to making Snape's ass detailed and dummy thicc made its way in here. It's my fic and I get to choose the jokes!

"My dear, you have become most dummy thicc and it pleases me greatly. Surely the clap of your ass cheeks is drowning out the terrible dysphoria I have inflicted upon you because of my possessiveness, narcissism, and lowkey male chauvinist attitude."

"My life is one long bad choice."
Chapter Summary

Added a little more to the previous chapter. Bonus breakfast scene. More introspection.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Severus thinks that they adjust to parenthood rather well, all things considered. Tom comes and goes as he must, but tries to limit his time away from home. “Everyone sends their well wishes and congratulations, of course. Narcissa says we’ve gone and given Lucius ideas about babies, though I believe it was said in jest rather than anger. She’s fond of you, I think,” his husband told him, pressing a kiss to his cheek after arriving home from his first outing since the birth of their son. Severus hums and readjusts the newborn he’s holding. Tommy is still mostly an uncoordinated bundle of uncontrolled limbs. It’s cute to see his eyes go wide every time he catches a glimpse of his own hand, unsure of what it is and how it relates to him. He sleeps mostly, waking in tears until he is nursed or changed. He fuses if he’s not being held, so they take turns handing him back and forth until evening when, thanks to elves and a breast pump, they’re able to sleep most of the night through.

Tom had been true to his word, and he and Tommy wanted for nothing. Tom was a doting father and spent as much time with his son as possible, gleeful at every blink and hiccup. Any free time he could find would be spent in the nursery which he had, thankfully, allowed Severus to decorate. He’d disliked the chauvinistic implications of that, but not as much as he would have disliked a lacy bassinet draped and canopy-ed in tulle and taffeta, most likely green and somehow covered in snakes. There were plenty of snakes in the house already, thank you, and as it was she had a terrible tendency of finding her way into the nursery.

Nagini was 500 pounds of highly venomous muscle that didn’t understand a word he said and ignored any shooing gestures he attempted to make, with Tom treating her either as another baby or a second wife; Severus wasn’t sure which. No matter how many times he was assured she understood that both he and Tommy were not prey, it still made him uncomfortable to walk into the nursery in the dead of night and trip over 30 odd feet of reptile curled up in front of the door. Worse still when he discovered her upper half actually coiled in the crib, the tip of her tail occasionally flexing in contentment on the floor as Tommy slept peacefully. She’d eyed him curiously, black tongue flicking out every few seconds as he hoisted Tommy out of his crib in a panic.

“Could you please tell me why there is a snake big enough to swallow a man and venomous enough to kill a hippogryph in our son’s crib while our son is also in it?” he’d snapped, bouncing a now awake and fussy baby in his arms.

“She’s protective, my dear. Let her brood,” was the response he received for any complaints.

Severus was fairly certain she only snuck in because the temperature was kept higher there than anywhere else in the house, as opposed to any defensive instinct Tom insisted she had. It truly was a warm room, both literally and metaphorically.
Facing southwest and at the upper left corner of their home, it was the last door on the left. Severus had chosen cream and butter yellow as the main colors, and stocked it with much simpler furniture. An ivory colored settee devoid of any carvings or filigree, a plush and fully upholstered rocking chair with intricately scrolled arms, and a nursing chair with a broad oval back, little fabric buttons denting the upholstery; it gently curved in and tapered towards the seat, and had no arms to speak of (“Spoonback, my dear. The buttons are called tufting”). The crib was Eastlake style, solid walnut with just a bit of curling decoration at the head.

Tom favored the settee placed beneath the window. He’d sit in the evening glow and read to Tommy or simply hold him close, broad hand stroking his tiny back as he hummed quietly. Sometimes he’d even fall asleep, baby cooing softly on his chest.

It was the most wonderful thing Severus had ever seen. Life was finally good and he felt safe and happy and loved; all strange and new emotions welling up syrup thick inside him.

Tom kept his promises, and there was nothing else in the world he could have wanted.

His only complaints were the snake and his husband’s odd choice of child literature.

“Old John Watkins be dragged to town
Wearing such a frightly frown
As people came from all around
To see him hang that day

Ladies donned their finest frocks
Gents and children they did flock
And through the misty morning walked
To see him hang that day.”

“Should you really be reading that to him?” Severus asked, concerned.

“Oh how you worry, my dear. It’s fine. He’s too young to understand any of it at this point, aren’t you?” he’d said, looking down fondly at the baby held in the crook of his arm. Tommy gurgled happily, soaking up the attention like hellebore bathed in January sun. “But I’m sure you’ll love it when you’re older too. Just like your father.”

Tom’s affection often had a subtle violence to it, he had noticed as of late. And while it didn’t personally bother Severus, he sometimes did worry if, when Tommy grew older, it would frighten him.

Terror had been Severus' constant and only companion growing up. It hung heavy in the halls of his childhood home, wrapping around and adhering to every aspect of his life like fine cerecloth until he learned to wear it like a second skin. Fear became a default state of mind and his jittery, flighty behavior had only drawn more anger. Soon he learned to fight instead of run, not that either
strategy had ever helped him.

But here should be safe. Here should be a good home to raise their son in, free of misery and pain. If only Tom didn’t seem to relish in it so. Things that hadn’t phased him before soon became worrying.

Two months after Tommy was born, Severus had been contentedly feeding him in the cold November light of the nursery window, almost in a doze himself, when Tom entered the room.

“My dear, when our son has finished, we are in need of your services.”

“No sex for another month,” he’d muttered sleepily.

“Of that I am painfully aware. What I mean is that we need veritaserum.”

Severus perked his head up then, intrigued. It had been a long time since he was able to make any true contribution to the cause, though he had been assured by all that providing strong heirs was more important than supplying potions. Still, he was glad to be needed in some capacity outside of the home. “Who do we suspect of lying?”

Tom smiled, sharp and cruel. “Just a prisoner. We think we’ve gotten all there is to be had out of him, but it pays to be sure.”

Severus nodded. “Tommy should be done feeding in a few minutes. After that I’ll bring some up from the lab.”

He’d handed him off to Tom soon after, who tutted sweetly back at every coo and yip he made. Severus headed towards the cellar, descending the narrow servants stairs right next to the nursery, and down the long L shaped corridor that lead to the massive entrance hall, from which the rest of the house branched out. In the upper right corner, tucked surreptitiously next the grand stairs, was the door to the kitchen, where the basement entrance was. Down in his lab, mostly dormant these many months, he eyed his wide array of ornate bottles twinkling faintly in the dim light. He ran his finger over the handwritten labels and felt a flush of pride. He’d worked hard to perfect his craft, to be recognized as a master. This was what he had chosen to do all on his own as opposed to something his body had accidentally done for him.

He loved his son, certainly, but he’d felt subjected to pregnancy.

His fingers brushed over the correct bottle, the champagne colored liquid inside waiting patiently. He pocketed it and dashed up the stairs.

Back in the nursery, Tom had settled Tommy into his crib, on his back at the center of his mattress. His tiny mouth making little sucking motions as his arms wiggled. Tom looked up and smiled. “Are you ready?”

“I have the veritaserum. Should I wear my mask and robe?”

He made a dismissive gesture with his hand. “He’s not leaving alive. And you’re certainly not a secret to anyone else there, my dear. Come, before our starving wolves grow too impatient and devour him,” Tom said, lips still turned upwards as he wrapped his arm around Severus’ waist. He led him out of their son’s room, down the hall and to the right, into the large upstairs landing at the center of the house, with the inbuilt benches framing the massive stained glass window, filtering colored light onto the rich wood. Arm in arm they descended the grand Queen Anne style staircase, Tom’s proud hand running down the solid mahogany banister, humming softly all the while. They apperated from the foyer after leaving care instructions to the elves.
The stygian depths of Malfoy manor were just as dank and foul as he remembered. Cold but humid, dark and cramped, smelling of mildew and stale sweat. The inner circle had gathered by a cell door were chattering quietly to each other.

"I trust he's still in one piece," Tom called out jovially.

"Of course, my lord. We would not disobey your command," Lucius’ voice rang out, calm and cultured.

"Good. You know how I hate to be disappointed." The sea of Death Eaters parted for them as they approached, clearing the way to the cell where their current toy was being kept.

What was left of their prisoner was crumpled in a corner. His clothes were soaked through with blood and sweat, his short blond hair ripped out in chunks. His left cheek was terribly swollen, a massive bruise already blooming a terrible dusky violet, the bone beneath probably cracked. Severus had experience with that. A zygomatic fracture. He remembered when he’d heard his own cheek crack; it sounds different when you’re hearing it from the inside, when it’s your own skull popping and snapping out of place, than when you hear someone else’s snap.

He remembered being curled into himself on the floor of his childhood home, his hands covering his head defensively after his father hit him with his full strength; hard enough to fracture bone.

He didn’t even remember what he’d done to make him so angry, if it had been anything at all. Perhaps he'd just been a convenient target, something weak and living that couldn't yet fight back. Severus just remembered looking up at him from the floor as he walked away and wondering when it would happen again, feeling numb in every way possible.

Was this the first time the man before him had been beaten this badly? Did he feel numb? Was he expecting death? Or did he think someone would swoop in at the last moment and save him? A fool's thought, certainly.

Severus scoffed, his long hand darting out to grab the prisoner’s jaw. Life isn't a fairy tale, there's no heroic rescue waiting in the wings for just the right moment. Nobody saves you. Nobody even cares. Nobody had ever cared about him, so why should anybody care about this man?

What they never tell you is that you’re terribly replaceable. One slip up and they’ll find another warm body to take your place. They’ll find more people willing to throw themselves at Death Eaters, more stupid wand fodder looking to be heroes, more wayward youths looking for a cause to give them meaning. The supply seems endless these days.

Severus' hand squeezed at his mouth, spider leg fingers pressing roughly at the hinge of his jaw as the prisoner struggled weakly against him, a wet wheeze trickling past his newly opened lips. “Please,” he rasped out, “no more. I told them everything I know. I promise.” He coughed, a wet rattle emanating from deep in his lungs, his ribs most likely cracked. He’d taken apart enough of their victims postmortem to know the types of injuries they liked to inflict. Broken ribs. Crushed fingers. Gouged eyes. Shattered knees. Missing teeth and tongues. He’d even watched it happen before, uncaring and apathetic. This man was no different, he assured himself.

He poured a measure of veritaserum past his lips. As he sputtered, Severus forced his jaw closed then used one long white hand to cover his mouth, the other pinching his nose shut. He struggled weakly beneath his steady hold, the seconds ticking by painfully slow as he waited for him to give in and swallow. He didn’t relish being this up close and personal with the process like the others did, didn't find pleasure immeasurable in the suffering of others. Finally the man relented, choking down the potion.
Severus removed his hands, flicking them sharply to clear away any fluids that may have beaded on their surface. He exited the cell, stride steady and expression neutral. “He’s ready for questioning,” he said, wiping his hands on his hips.

“Thank you, my dear,” Tom said, wrapping his arm around his waist before pressing a quick kiss to his cheek. “Now, to whom shall I grant the honor of his questioning?” A hush went over the small crowd, and the black robed figures seemed lean forward like hungry dogs straining at their leashes, all slavering for the piece of meat dangled before them. Starving wolves indeed.

Tom’s thumb rubbed small circles on his hip as he pretended to contemplate, basking in the anticipation of his audience. “Rabastan,” he called out, clear and calm. Severus heard Bellatrix whine from the back of her throat, high and needy and so terribly disappointed as her brother in law shoved his way to the front of the crowd. Tom laughed his beautiful laugh, deep and measured, chuffing out in short bursts from his throat. “Just the questions, Rabastan. We shall wait and see what happens after that.” Rabastan disappeared inside the cell, followed by a weak moan of protest.

“Please, my lord! Am I not your most loyal? Your most eager devote? Do I not sing your praises daily to all that will listen?” Bellatrix wailed. Severus sneered. To be raised so comfortably that all you need to do is speak your wants to receive them; to be pampered to the point that being denied something is a betrayal. Spoiled rotten pureblood trash, the lot of them, so jaded that they can only feel when someone else is suffering. Horrible children who have never had to face consequences, who were praised and loved to the point of ruination. Never having to pick themselves up from the ground soaked in mud and blood, never beaten down to barest pulp only to rise again and force themselves to carry on to the next day, as empty and hopeless as it may seem. They never had to try twice as hard to be half as good. And god how he hates them for it.

But now here he stood before them, wrapped in their master’s arms like a holy relic and raised above them on a gilded pedestal. And from this vantage point Severus could see them for the scum they truly were. He didn’t need to be here. He didn’t need to watch the highest echelons of society debase themselves for scraps of the affection he was already glutted on. Thoroughly disgusted, Severus was more than ready to take his leave.

He turned to look at Tom, opening his spider eyes wide and round to appeal to him. “It really is getting late. I need to return home to Tommy,” he pleaded sweetly.

Tom’s expression changed, hard eyes going soft and sharp smile turning sweet. “Of course, my dear,” he cooed, so horribly saccharine it made Severs’ stomach turn. “Our son must always come first.” He kissed him again, a swift brush of lips against his own. “You’re a good mother, my Severus.”

Severus gives a smile that he doesn’t quite feel as a scream echoes out from the cell. “I love you,” he said. And it’s true. Painfully, terribly, dammingly true. Tom’s growing smile is the last thing he sees before he pops out of space, appearing back in the foyer of their grand home.

He waves the elves away, chattering status reports on Tommy and dinner and laundry and mail. He doesn’t care what they eat. He doesn’t care how they fold their clothes. Any mail can be dealt with tomorrow. Tommy is being tended to properly.

Severus felt he’d earned a respite. There’s a sitting room at the back of their home directly beneath the nursery that he favored. It was private, quiet, and two doors away from the library.

The walls of his parlor were painted royal blue, offsetting the brooding nature of the dark wood trim and surround mantel fireplace, as well as the built in shelves that flanked it; their inset frames
rounded at the top, their insides domed and ridged like a clamshell.

Sad really, that he hadn’t found much to display, as he detested the uselessness of figurines and empty bottles, as well as enameled plates never meant to be eaten off of, and despised crystal vases too fragile and expensive to fill with flowers.

He only kept two things there: the first being his cigarette case, sterling silver with delicate filigree curling at the corners, and a large black onyx and white shell cameo of a snake in the center. It sat empty now for many months. But Tom had given it to him the previous year and it was the first gift he’d ever received, thus it held a special place in his heart. The second item was a wedding present from Narcissa. A large, egg shaped chunk of amber polished down smooth and gleaming, an immense spider trapped within. Along with it she’d left a note that read, “he always calls you spider. It’s cute, in a strange way, but don’t tell him I said that! Remember, we wives have to stick together.” An odd gift, with an even odder note, but much appreciated nonetheless.

Mood buoyed by nostalgia, Severs curled up on the sofa. A much less gaudy piece compared to what Tom preferred, with a higher back and arms, the seat much more plush. Supposedly it was made in the American empire style, as if that meant much to him. But it was comfortable, and he felt strangely drained after his excursion. Best to put it out of his mind for now.

A wave of his hand lit the fireplace, and he reached for the academic journal on spell crafting he’d left on the coffee table. He perused it quietly for almost an hour, long fingers turning the flimsy pages, before the sharp sound of a baby’s cry echoed down from above. He sighed, marking his place before setting the publication aside. His chest, prompted by the sound of his son crying, began to leak milk into his shirt. “Damn it,” he muttered, pulling a handkerchief from his pocket to try and dab away the fluid. He supposed that meant it was time to feed Tommy again. Luckily the back stairs were the next door over.

He slipped into the nursery to find an elf just finishing up a diaper change. When he was clean, he was handed over to Severus, who settled in the rocking chair. “Hello, you little trouble maker. Are you hungry again already?” he asked, nimble fingers unbuttoning his shirt. When presented with the nipple, Tommy latched on and began sucking voraciously. “You’re a greedy thing, aren’t you? But that’s probably for the best,” he said tiredly.

He sighed as his head fell back to rest against the chair, eyes slipping shut as Tommy nursed. Much to his relief, he loved his son. It was probably made much easier by the fact he didn’t have to change his soiled nappies or wake up at all hours of the night to soothe and feed him (thank the gods for elves and breast pumps). He really only had to play with him and chat with him, or at him rather, and he was surprised by how enjoyable he found it. Also, secretly, he thought it helped quite a bit that he was a very cute baby.

His new skin had gone from pink to milk pale, and thankfully lacked Severus’ sickly undertone. His tiny nose was a miniature replica of Tom’s, much to Severus’ eternal relief. His little cheeks were wonderfully round and chubby, with just the smallest rosy hint at the center. It was too soon to really tell, but he believed he would take after Tom almost entirely.

The only thing he seemed to have inherited from his mother so far was his blue black hair, though it was too new and sparse to tell if it would be straight and limp like Severus’ or slightly thicker and wavy like Tom’s. Straight would be easier to care for, but wavy would look nicer as he aged. Tommy’s wide eyes were still pale blue and wouldn’t darken for a few months yet. “I do hope, my dear, that he has your lovely spider eyes,” was Tom’s opinion on the matter. He personally didn’t really care what color they ended up. Neither of them knew much about their extended families, so while it was unlikely, it also wasn’t impossible that he may end up with a different color entirely.
Tommy finished his dinner and unlatched from the nipple, his head turning away as he fussed and wriggled. “Are you tired finallly? Would you like to sleep?” The only response he got was a throary “guh” and some arm flailing. Severus laughed quietly. “I’ll take that as a ayes. Mostly because I am tired and would like to sleep.” As he was settling him in his crib for the evening, Severus heard the distant tap of footsteps coming down the hall as well as soft, melodic humming. “I believe your father is home, Tommy. I think he’s coming to say goodnight to you. Are you ready to say goodnight?” he said sweetly as he leaned over the sides of the crib.

The soft footsteps and gentle humming stopped before the door, and Severus watched as the brass knob turned and it creaked open. It was Tom, of course. Dark hair slicked back as perfectly as ever, strong, angular cheeks sloping into his square jaw. But on his handsome face, a bright streak of dried blood stood loudly in contrast to his pale skin, offset terribly by his grinning lips. And for a moment Severus was terrified. He wanted to take his baby and run, hide him away from the smiling, blood stained monster who had invaded their pristine home. “I thought I’d find you here,” said the monster fondly. And the fear vanished, excised by straight white teeth and a sweet, soft voice. He is very lucky, Severus reminds himself, to have Tom. Tom, who has given him the world and then some. Tom, who saw a filthy, ugly, angry halfblood and refined him into a genteel scholar and loving partner.

Besides, he had known all along what type of man his Tom was; he’d seen it firsthand on numerous occasions, and had been part and parcel to the violence himself. Perhaps Severus had simply been away too long; lost his nerve in all the softness Tom had wrapped him in during his pregnancy. It must be his new motherhood giving him such a delicate constitution. “Tom, you’ve got blood on your face,” he sniffed with cool distaste.

Tom cocked his head, perplexed. “Have I?” he asked, hand rising to rub at his cheek. “How odd. Normally you can feel it drying.” And Severus knows; of course he does. He’d spent his whole life feeling his blood dry dull, rusty brown on his own skin, itchy and tight; his dirty nails scratching away the dusty flakes it left behind.

He sighed before approaching his husband, long white hand reaching out to banish the filth from Tom’s cheek, magic tingling beneath his fingertips as he brushed his skin. And then it’s gone, erased, never again to cast a pall over their happy home.

Before his arm could fall back to his side, Tom’s hand snaked out to snatch his wrist back. “Thank you, my dear, for always taking such good care of me,” he cooed, bringing the tips of Severus’ fingers to his lips, placing a kiss to each one.

Severus smiled, wan and thin. "I suppose someone has to; it might as well be me," he teased. "Cheeky little spider," Tom said, pressing a final kiss to the center of his palm. "You know, we received some very useful information from that man thanks to you. They're trying to build a secret opposition apparently. Something about a phoenix, I believe."

"Oh?" he asked, pulling his hand away.

Tom strode past him to the crib, reaching out to pick up a wiggling Tommy. "Apparently it's a who's who of holier than thou trash, headed by queen bee Albus himself. All of your schoolyard nemeses have joined up as well," he continued as he gently bounced their son. "And who was that mudblood sow you used to run with? Billy? Well she's a member, and apparently she's a Potter now."

Severus felt his heart turn to ice in his chest. Lily. Oh Lily. How he'd loved her. Longed for her. Been destroyed by her. But never able to hate her. He doesn't allow himself to think of her, as
somehow, the pain is still so raw. He had hoped that loving Tom, being loved by Tom, would heal that wound over, let it scab and fall away at last. And it had, somewhat, but there's still a deep scar there, pale and pitted and ugly. How could she so easily throw him away? Had he meant nothing to her the entire time? It had been one mistake in an otherwise pristine friendship, and she hadn't even let him explain.

It must have been because of Potter. She'd fallen in love with him somehow and knew it was a one or the other situation. And nobody ever chose Severus. Why would they? Poor, ugly, ill tempered, no named halfblood.

But then, wonder of wonder, Tom Riddle picked him. The strongest wizard of their time had chosen him above everyone else and had declared him worthy of love. And his word was law. "Oh, your poor mother, forced to play with the pigs, only to have his tender heart broken," Tom cooed to Tommy who babbled back, ah-ing and gurgling softly in response to his father's sweet tone. "And what do we do with pigs, my darling, precious boy? We slaughter them, don't we? We slit their throats and hang them upside down to drain away their dirty, worthless blood."

The coldness from Severus’ heart settled in his stomach. She didn't deserve to die like a pig along with her shit stain husband. Not his warm, mesmerizing Lily. He could keep her, probably. Tom kept Nagini, and all she did was slither around and make a nuisance of herself. Lily would be more useful. A good nanny, certainly. Without a doubt she would be a perfect assistant. There was more than enough room in this mostly empty mansion. It would be nice to have her here, to have someone to talk to other than Tom. He loved him, doubtlessly, but he could be a bit rigid.

Yes, he would very much like to keep Lily. Tuck her safely in their happy home where she couldn't run away or cause trouble. She would be sorry for her betrayal, and so so thankful to have been spared by Severus' magnanimous hand.

It may take some convincing, perhaps some bargaining, as well as Slytherin manipulation. Something to necessitate her. Perhaps that fabled, willowy daughter Tom had mentioned all those months ago in the quiet comfort of their marriage bed. A fair trade, in his opinion. It would be a last resort, certainly, but a very convincing one. Tom apparently had a soft spot for pregnancy and babies. And, much to his own chagrin, Severus seemed to be very good at making them. If there was another on the way, they would need someone to help with Tommy. A human touch. Not a wretched elf, so easily panicked and trampled. It would be a perfect ace in the hole. And wasn’t it time Severus had his wants tended to? Couldn’t it finally be his turn to be spoiled rotten?

Severus snuck up behind Tom and placed his chin on his sturdy shoulder, peeking down at the baby lovingly cradled in his arms. "Don't rile him up before bed. He needs his sleep."

Tom turned his head to kiss Severus' temple. "Wise as always, my dear." Yes, it was finally Severus’ turn to possess without consequence, he thought, the echo of excitement thrumming through his veins.

November would give way to December, and thus the new year. The months flew by as their son grew, and March rolled around at last, bringing with it fresh grass and delicate new buds, as well as longer days. The sun’s hue turned from cold and white to pale gold and finally, there was warmth held in its light.

And for the first time in many months, Severus is alone in their house. “I believe it is time our boy begins to learn the family business, my dear,” Tom said as he bundled up their son. Tommy squirmed in his arms, alertly looking all around as he loudly mouthed nonsense to his parents. His eyes had finally changed, slowly deepening to black, much to Tom’s eternal pleasure.
“Nothing raucous or violent, please. Just talking. And have him home before his bed time. He’ll want to nurse before he sleeps or he’ll raise hell the next day. I’m serious! You’re not the one who gets chewed up when he’s fussy!” Severus snapped as he chased after his husband, shuddering at the idea of their now teething son biting into him.

“Severus, I know his schedule. I’ve been raising him too, as I’m sure you recall.” But there is no malice to his words, only fondness. “Please don’t panic, my dear. It’s only for a few hours, and you’re the one who declined to come in the first place.” It’s true. He had been more than ready to have some time alone, but for some reason the idea of Tom and their son off somewhere without him now gives him pause. “It’s alright, my Severus, for you to be a bit nervous. It’s only natural; probably healthy even. But our darling boy has to venture out from your web sometime, you know. And this is a good place to start.” And Severus knows this. He does.

But the war outside is steadily growing more violent, their opposition becoming desperate for anything to halt Tom’s ever expanding influence. And a beloved son, their first and only born, would be a most alluring target.

It would break them, without a doubt, to lose their baby. Tom, bloodthirsty and draconian at his best, would become a rabid, unhinged beast if the worst should happen. He knew it in his heart of hearts. And Severus would help him, would be just as vicious, if anything should happen to Tommy.

But if there is a place as safe as their home, it’s probably Malfoy manor, Tom’s current destination. It’s only for a few hours. “Be safe,” Severus tells him. Tom draws him in for a kiss, mindful not to squash Tommy, still held safely in the crook of his arm.

“We will be, my love. You can trust me.” And he wants to. He used to trust Tom so easily but now...now there is so much more at stake. But you needn’t trust someone, to love them. And any mistakes Tom made would be not be intentional. He watched, cold and unmoving, his insides a writhing knot of anxiety, as the two most important things in his life disappeared before his eyes.

Five o’clock turns into six, then seven. Night now solidly upon him, Severus grows restless. Tom isn’t due home until eight, but by 7:55 he’s grown too unsettled to sit idly by. He refused to just nervously chew his nails and tap his feet as he waited for his husband to notice the time. Ire stirring within him, Severus prepares to fetch them himself.

Life here has been good to him thus far. Having hardly been raised like a human, he was never really taught proper hygiene. His body’s natural tendency to produce excess oil had only added to Severus’ problems, as did his own inclination to hang his head over roiling, fuming cauldrons. Never having anyone to care about him, or having anyone to care about in turn, he’d neglected himself, unable to find a reason to bother to keep clean. It hadn’t helped, of course, that he hated his own body, and having to see it naked was a reminder of how disgusting and unlovable he was. Compounded by the vulnerability of nudity and the burning fear someone may see him and discover his secrets, washing used to be a torture to him.

But Tom understood that, and had taken the time to assure him that he wasn’t a nightmarish freakshow, and that he was in a safe environment and needn’t fear prying eyes or violence. Tom prefers him to appear well kept when he’s out of the house, and Severus wants to please him. He combs his clean hair into place, and dons his nicer coat (and isn't that something, living in a world where you can have more than one coat). It’s solid black, close fitting and down to his shins, the bulk of it is made from polished cotton and the capelet, black brocade, is decorated with a fringe of crow’s feathers, resting just below his chest. The coat is kept closed by a long row of tiny jet buttons, but the capelet is fastened shut with a silver brooch of two snakes intertwined. Tom’s
family symbol, and now his as well, bestowed as a promise of love and loyalty, and all the responsibility that entailed.

When Severus feels he looks sufficient for someone of his station, new as it may be, he apparates to Malfoy manor.

He’s guided by wide eyed and jittery elves to the most formal dining room, temper rising with every step as he hears their laughter echoing through the halls. The double doors swing open to admit him, and what he sees is a terrible tableau. In the center of the room there is a long, rectangular table, capable of seating twenty two people, and stretched out to the left of it on the floor, is a dead man he doesn’t recognize, face up and jaw hanging open, cooling as its joints go stiff. He sees red for a moment, remembering his explicit instructions not to exposing Tommy to anything loud or violent, and a dead man lying forgotten on the ground is proof that he had been ignored.

Furious, his gaze turns to take in the rest of the room. There, at the head of the table, sits his Tom. One leg crossed over the other, a glass of port in his right hand and his smiling face propped on his left; a merry king holding court. Resting peacefully in front of him is Nagini and, swaddled in her great coils, is his baby. How he managed to smuggle such a massive animal out of the house without him knowing is irritating, but not surprising. Unfortunately he has grown used her apparent affinity for Tommy and it doesn’t bother him too terribly much these days. What he considered to be the biggest threat to his son, however, is Bellatrix, seated to Tom’s left. Her sharp eyes never wavering from Tommy, her expression almost hungry.

Anger and panic tug Severus from both sides, but it would not do to make a scene. He strides forward, head held high and expression neutral, booted feet stepping gracefully over the dead man with ease.

He stops at the head of the table where Tom sits and reaches, most carefully, into the thick coils of Nagini to untangle Tommy from her grasp. She lifts her head to watch him, seeing who would be so bold as to take her master’s son from her protection. She seems to recognize Severus’ face though, and she curls back up, placid.

“A word please, if you would.” Severus said to his husband as he draws Tommy close. Their eyes meet, and he can feel Tom’s mind trying, however gently, to pry into his own. A nasty habit he’d developed over the last few months. “It’s just that you hold your tongue too well sometimes, my dear. How am I to make you happy if I don’t know what you want?” And it was a nice sentiment, but Severus values his privacy too much to allow it. Ever adaptable, he’d learned to block him out when necessary.

He shields his mind from the delicate prodding, and he knows it will draw a proverbial line in the sand. Either rip my mind to shreds, or speak with me in private. Tom merely smiles, teeth like will o’ the wisp in the gloaming of the room. He sets his glass on the table, and stands to rise.

“Of course, my dear,” he says, voice soft and measured. He loops an arm around Severus’ back, gently guiding him towards the exit.

They’re halfway to the door when Bellatrix’s voice rises, horrible and shrill as ever, “Sour Severus won’t let Daddy have any fun, will he?”

Casual as can be, Tom turns around, wand already outstretched in his hand. “Crucio.” And Bellatrix goes limp in her chair and slumps to the floor, shrieking like a banshee the entire time. He holds her under for ten seconds before he relents, tucking his wand back in his sleeve. “We’ve talked about this, Bellatrix. To disrespect Severus is to disrespect me. And if you’re as loyal as you
claim, you would never do that, now would you?” It’s satisfying, as always, to see someone punished for slighting him. Tom’s the only one who ever really did anything of any true consequence on his behalf, and it’s not that he isn’t grateful, as his heart flutters with vengeful satisfaction at her pain, it’s just that he would prefer it done away from Tommy. Though, thankfully, his son doesn’t seem bothered by it; his wide, curious eyes fixed on her slumped form.

She coughs, a deep rattling from the back of her throat before her voice, now tiny and strained rasps out, “no, my lord. I would never.”

“And yet you have. Consider this a warning, as I am not without mercy. But **do not** let it happen again.” Tom wraps his arm back around Severus’ waist to usher him out, not bothering to acknowledge her further.

They know the manor well, have walked the long halls together more than once. They’d met here for the first time, after all. Severus, disillusioned and disenfranchised, sick of being beaten down and so, so full of starving vengeful rage, had pledged his life to the first person to promise him power, not knowing it would lead to so much more. It was here, in fact, that Tom made love to him for the first time, the both of them still smelling of smoke from the hospital their merry band had burned to the ground just a few hours before.

And now he is here again, cradling the fruits of his devotion against his chest as his heart bloats heavy with unease. Tom, arm still looped firmly around his waist, leads him to a sitting room out of earshot, but his graceful hand casts a silencing spell nonetheless.

“A snake is not a proper babysitter,” Severus bites out as he takes a step back from his husband.

“Nagini was just holding him, my dear. She likes him,” Tom said, attempting to plaicait him.

“She likes him because he’s warm and small,” he said, tone flat but angry.

Tom laughs, but for once it does nothing to soothe him. “She likes him because he’s my son, and he likes her as well. He’s a parselmouth too, aren’t you, you darling little thing?” he said, plucking Tommy from his clutching arms to hold him high in the air. Tommy squeals with joy and reaches down for his father, and Tom pulls him close against his chest, grinning as tiny fingers explore his face.

“We don’t know that for sure.” Severus is infinitely glad that Tom is so pleased with their son, but on the other side of that he fears he will be disappointed if Tommy doesn’t meet his every expectation with flying colors. They’ve just been lucky so far.

“I’ve heard him trying, and so has Nagini. Here, watch,” and he hisses something, the strange, inhuman sound sending a shudder down Severus’ spine. As if prompted, Tommy turned around and points to his mother with a questioning expression, causing Tom to cheer. “That’s my boy,” he preens, proud as can be. “I asked him where Mummy was, and he understood perfectly, didn’t you?” Tommy ahs and chatters nonsense before reaching out to Severus again, and Severus obliges, more than happy to wrap him in his arms.

“It’s not just that, Tom,” he sighs, “I don’t think you should be doing anything particularly dark around him. He’s just too young. There was a **dead body** on the floor, if you recall, leading me to believe something both loud and violent took place in front of Tommy. After I specifically requested that not happen.”

“I am sorry, darling.” Tom said, having the tact to at least sound somewhat apologetic. “Lucius dragged him up from the dungeon. In my defense, his death was swift and quiet; not a drop of
blood spilled, I assure you.”

The Avada then. Quick and painless, leaving no time for any screaming or writhing that would frighten a baby. Not ideal, in any sense, but much better than the alternatives. Speaking of, “you crucio-ed Bellatrix, and Merlin knows how loud she always is,” he sneered.

“Oh, Tommy wasn’t bothered by it,” Tom said, waving his protests away. “I must teach my boy proper values, my dear. If someone steps out of line, you punish them. And you know how people are; always testing their boundaries. It’s how society degenerated in the first place.”

“I just don’t want him to be frightened.” He knows what a childhood of fear feels like, and he would die before allowing such a life for Tommy.

“He isn’t frightened. Our boy has a strong constitution and a good temperament. He’s unflappable, this one,” Tom said, reaching out to caress his son’s cheek.

“I don’t like that you were drinking around him,” Severus murmured, somewhat embarrassed. There is an instinct inside him that always flinches at the sight and smell of alcohol; memories he’d tried to bury rearing up to haunt him, lurking in the back of his mind and waiting to attack at the slightest provocation. Of course such a fear would spill over when his son is involved, so unprotected and near to the substance that had made Severus’ life hell for so many years.

“Severus,” Tom crooned sadly and softly, expression drawn somber as he reaches out him to brush a lock of hair behind his ear, “I’m not your father. Half a glass of wine isn’t going to turn me into a monster, I assure you. You have my oath as a wizard.”

For the first time, he finds it frustrating that his husband has all the answers, that he is cool and concise about every worry and complaint. Like Severus is some nervous pet that just needs to be scratched the right way to stop his yapping. He feels ignored, discounted, and somehow humiliated. Tom, sensing his distress, reaches out to him. “Oh, my Severus. I am sorry to have disappointed you so, and I pledge to not make the same mistakes again. I must admit, all of these things are as new to me as they are to you, and there are bound to be a few missteps here and there,” he said, drawing him into his arms once again, their son enclosed between them.

He wants to argue, to snap back with pointed words and refuse his apology, but trapped here with them is Tommy, already exposed to too much this evening, and he doesn’t need to hear them fight as well. Severus himself was still unlearning his flinch at loud noises. A habit formed early in his childhood, the image of his enraged father screaming over his frail mother burned into his mind. Later at home then, they’ll have their fight, but for now he allows Tom to lead him out of the room. “Come, sit with us, my lovely spider bride. You hole yourself up in your webs too often these days. We are in no danger, least of all here. And I know you enjoy gloating over Bellatrix. Watching her sulk will lift your spirits, surely.”

They return to the dining room, and at the head of the table now sits two chairs. Someone had anticipated their staying, and he isn’t sure he’s comfortable with that. There is a meaning there that he can’t quite pin down; a nagging, unsettling alarm ringing in the back of his head as Tom settles him in. Perhaps it was that, to the other Death Eaters, Tom’s wants would always come first, the comfort and safety of Tommy (and Severus) being always be a distant second. That Tom would guide them back to the gathering at all, oblivious to his outrage, also gnaws at him.

Severus fears he feels a schism forming in his heart. He loves him, as much as he ever did, and probably more so after the birth of their son, but Tom is stubborn. And he is cruel. Not to him, never to him, and he is a better father than Severus thought anyone could be, but he is afraid that Tom’s hubris may lead to their downfall. The family of a would be conqueror is always executed,
and now Severus feels he has something worth living for beyond his husband; for the first time he has something to lose. And for Tom to either not realize that or not care is unacceptable.

And, floating gently above that leaden weight of that terror, is the fear that Tom’s bloodthirst will seep into their son, infect him like a virus. He does not want that for Tommy. He doesn’t want his son’s pleasure to be predicated on the pain of others, doesn’t want his son to become the type of person who hunts down vulnerable people just to enjoy their agony. Severus has watched people ruin themselves with that lifestyle. Severus himself had been the one to rise up and take his pound of flesh from those who tormented him.

It seems that the paths Tom has laid out for their son ends always ends with Tommy’s death. So Severus, still very much in love with his husband, will have to come up with his own plan to keep Tommy safe. After all, love is more about sacrifice than anything else.

Tommy, squirming on his lap, reaches his hands out for his father, flexing his little fingers and ahing cutely. Tom coos and plucks him from Severus’ lap, delighted to give him his every want. Severus misses the weight of him, warm and familiar and so wonderfully alive. He would have protested, would have snatched him back, but suddenly there is a new weight working its way across his legs. He gasps in surprise as Nagini wraps around him, cool and dry and smooth. He freezes, barely even breathing, as she loops her body around his multiple times, effectively tying him to the chair. She rests her head comfortably on his shoulder, venomous mouth terrifying close to his throat.

Tom’s reaches out then, the back of his hand gently stroking down the side of Severus’ face and, with the same motion, pets over Nagini’s head as well. “See, my dear? She’s absolutely harmless.”

Chapter End Notes

The difference between Tom and Severus, imo, is that Tom sees himself as the only person in the world whereas Severus doesn't see anyone, including himself, as a person. Abused child syndrome. If you wanna play a fun game you can go through this and try to figure out my tragic backstory.

Anyway, I love snakes. I have since I was seven and had a hyperfixation with them and irritated the hell out of my family with it. I figure Nagini is like, a fantasy mix of an anaconda (thicc) and reticulated python (long). Reticulated pythons are actually the longest snakes in the world. Anacondas are the heaviest. Regardless, the closest I've gotten to watching a Fantastic Beasts movie is the episode of My Brother My Brother and Me where they rip on one. Crimes of Grundlewad is a very good episode. But Tumblr has told me that the snake used be a lady? And I’m like nah bro. That snake is just a snake. This is my garbage dump and here the snake is just a snake. Also none of the movies had the right actors. None of them looked how they looked in my head. I’m sorry but Alan Rickman looks like my aunt Helen and Becky I DO NOT want to smash. Any of you see Mad Fantasy’s art? Nailed it.

What else? OH! This is a little embarrassing but I did make a playlist? Look, if TheCokeworthSnakes can make a playlist for their incredible fic A Prince By Early Frost, I (a humble trash lady) can make one too and not feel bad about it.
Epilogue: In Perpetuity

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It’s January, 1982, when Severus decides he can no longer live with only Tommy in their massive home. He had known, deep down, that Tom would fail, and had taken steps behind his back to ensure Tommy’s safety and his own. But that hadn’t stopped him from loving Tom, from trying to keep him alive as well, from sharing that damned prophesy with him. And now he has to wonder if that was what ultimately led to his death. But Severus had begged, hadn’t he, to spare Lily?

“Kill the child, as I know you must, and make Jame’s death as painful as possible. But please, please spare her. Wouldn’t a human nanny be best for our son? And if we had a human watching him, that would free up time for another child. Wouldn’t it be good for Tommy to have someone to play with?” Tom had seemed convinced, even enthusiastic, about the prospect. They had tried, certainly, for another. He’d gone off contraceptives, and they’d fucked each other raw and sore. He still had a fertility potion stashed in his nightstand. Thank the gods he hadn’t taken it. “I’ll try to bring your Ms. Mudblood back in one piece,” Tom had said, drowsy and sated after Severus had ridden him to their mutual completion, “but you must keep her quiet and out of the way, my dear. Servants are to be seen and not heard.”

But in the end, it had all been for naught, as so many of his efforts were. And now he’s alone with Tommy is a house that feels like a mausoleum. Around every corner he expects to see his husband. Thinks he hears him humming in the next room. Rolls over in the middle of the night to grasp at him, only to be met with empty space and terrible grief, bile bitter in the back of his throat.

Somehow, it is the absence of Tom that is haunting him. The stillness is suffocating and the silence leaves him on edge. Strangely Nagini is gone as well, her perch in the study as empty as Tom’s side of the bed.

Severus decides he would rather live in the shadow of his miserable childhood than in the broken promise of a loving future. Here is now a reminder of what he lost, of what would never come to be, and the wanting of it aches more terribly than any memory of his father’s abuse. He had, however fleetingly, tasted joy. Then, in the blink of an eye, it was ripped away. And living in the echo of it was unbearable.

He sends the elves to the Malfoys. Or gives them, rather. He gets to work packing some of the more serviceable furniture, covering Tom’s showpieces with white cloth. He takes as many books as he thinks he will fit into Spinner’s End but leaves the gramophone and jewelry in their bedroom.

It’s when he’s packing his clothes, careful to avoid Tom’s because he feels like if he touches them he may shatter into pieces, that he finds his robe and mask shoved into the back. And for the first time since he was a child he allows himself to cry.

He’s done terrible things. Unforgivable things. So delirious with love and approval, so intoxicated by power and privilege that he’d run rabid; just another one of Tom’s starving wolves far too eager for the kill, lashing out because it was the only thing he knew. He had felt so alone his whole life, so small and scared and broken, almost half a person, that he had stupidly, easily been lured in by soft touches and sweet words.

Severus bundles the rough fabric of his Death Eater robe into his shaking hands as he sobs. He’d been a witless child, beaten half to death and cobbled back together one too many times. Maybe
that’s what was wrong with his head. Maybe that was why he still loved Tom.

Charismatic, beautiful, powerful, poisonous Tom. Who, with his silver tongue and quick wit, had tricked almost every pureblood into worshiping him with promises of absolute power.

A ruling class. An aristocracy who thinks they are entitled to their position because of blood. Who think they know best because they have money. Who delude themselves into thinking that they are different from muggles, that they are somehow better. But They are human. Just as terrified and poised to kill as the outside world was.

But that world has changed. It changed a long time ago and it is changing still. It has, effectively, left them behind. Out there they fight back against bigotry en mass, organize against their oppressors to overthrow them, and demand equal rights. Sometimes their progress stutters to a halt, but eventually the groups below will rise up and over take, either by violence or the inevitable conqueror worm.

The magical world has grown paranoid in its complacency, has stagnated and become lazy while muggles make things with their science. More effective communication, streamlined distribution of information, mass transit. They’ve even left the planet, being so bold as to step foot on the moon. And what do wizards have? Fireplaces, a train, and a bus. They eat the same foods, wear the same clothes, and follow the same archaic laws. The world outside his bubble is changing, and that change will never cease. In a way he finds it beautiful.

At one time the wizarding world had seemed like a paradise. But now he knows that’s a lie. That this world is a trap.

For the second time in his life, he wished he hadn’t killed his mother. He wished he could ask her why she chose to leave in the first place, even if where she ended up had been a violent prison of its own. She could have used her magic to kill Tobias. And yet she never had, enduring every blow without a fight. Maybe she thought she deserved it somehow. Maybe she’d secretly hoped he’d beat the magic out of her, and a part of him almost understands why. At this point magic has only brought him pain. But now he’s trapped here. He’d struck a bargain in exchange for his and his son’s souls, thus he finds himself locked at its center. Because one day, years from now, Tom will rise again.

He doesn’t know how, but he doesn’t doubt that it will come to pass. It will be Severus’ place to lie to him then, to play a dutiful wife; to coddle and fuck whatever pieces of Tom rise from the grave in exchange for information. He will betray his husband. The only person who ever really loved him. But it will be worth it.

He understands now why Lily died for her son. Had stood before a mad man and told him to get fucked when he asked her to step aside. Severus had, in a way, done exactly the same thing. He protected a child from Tom Riddle, but had the audacity to survive. Though, if he was being honest, he wasn’t sure if that was better.

He slumps to the floor of his closet, feeling wrung out and hollow, sticky tears drying on his face. How long did he have until his husband clawed his way out of hell and dragged them down as well? How long until they finally drown in his madness? Hopefully long enough for Lily’s son to become capable of stopping him. Harry, he recalls. What a terrible name.

Oh Tom, his poor Tom, to be laid so low by a baby named Harry. And for some reason, that thought makes Severus laugh. At least they’d named their baby something better. Just Tommy. Tommy Riddle. Tommy Snape now. Bundled up with all of his fine things (but not his father’s expectations), moved from this fine house, to the ancestral Snape home. He’d have to give him the
tour. This is the corner where Grandpa Tobias beat Mummy. That's the corner where he beat your grandmother. Here's the kitchen where Mummy had enough and stabbed him to death with a big knife. And that's why your father and I fell in love.

What a terrible, horrible fairy tale his life had become.

Severus scrubs at his eyes before he stands, trying to clear away the filmy residue. With a sigh he takes his mask and robe from the closet. He'll need them. In some distant part of the future, he'll be obligated to wear these horrible reminders and stand before his husband. Only then they'll be on opposite sides of the war. But for now, he'll need to conceal them, along with any evidence linking Tommy to his father. The photo album, thankfully sparse, is really the only thing Severus can think of. He'll have to find a very good place, he muses sadly, to hide these fragments of devotion.

Chapter End Notes

Three guesses about how I feel about the magical world. I'm a bitch that loves the internet and and eating all kinds of different foods. And leggings. And SSRIs and therapy. Max me out on that sertraline! Teach me how to cope with my trauma! Catch me in the international market in Pusheen leggings and a Junji Ito jacket stocking up on Maesri curry paste and bopping to KMFDM and Pig on my fucking smart phone. But don't talk to me because I don't know you and I have severe social anxiety. After I'm gonna hit up the shawarma place next door then I'm gonna go home and play video games! Have you played video games? Holy fuck they're amazing! Oh man real tea? Real loose leaf oolong? Cheese is gross and expensive! I can buy a massive bottle of oyster sauce for $3 and it lasts me all year! Sorry I'm just really hungry. Mexican crema is valid though. I'll eat young cheeses too come to think of it.

Okay real talk! I have given the relationship between Lily and Sev a lot of thought. My initial take was that calling her a mudblood is not a big deal. The reason why I thought that, is because to me, that's like a white person getting pissed off that they were called a cracker. She went full Bo Bice at a Popeye's.

Lily is smart, white, conventionally attractive, beloved by her peers, has a stable and loving home life, and (I assume) is better off economically than Severus. She has almost every social advantage over Severus, who is, as she would know, also a mudblood. And here's a hot take people are not ready for. If you're raised in an abusive house, you don't really learn right from wrong or how to regulate your emotions. You have to figure that out later and it's hard. I too was raised like a feral bob cat and let me tell you, you don't learn how to be a human until you hit 20, and even then it's a fucking struggle. I'm one of the lucky ones who managed it but only because I had a decent mom (good woman, bad situation. It's a whole thing).

If he had called Lily a whore (in this house we respect sex workers anyway and we don't use it as an insult) or a slut or even a dumb bitch I would be like eehh you played yourself, Sev. But he called her a made up insult from a culture that she really isn't a part of, and really isn't effected by.

But, if you take that out of the equation and view it as a slur more on the level with like, actual irl racial slurs and saying it has the same social weight, I would get why she would be like OH HELL NO. Let's say that this is indeed the case. Then she had
every right to ghost him. I don't care if it was said in a heated moment.

However, the question of the hour is does Lily face real oppression because of her blood status? I absolutely cannot say for sure. There are still some hold outs, but they're dying off. And she has pretty much every other advantage. Does that excuse Sev? Not really. I stand by her choice to ghost him.

She's not his mother. She doesn't owe him anything if their relationship becomes toxic, which is most likely was. The only thing that bothers me about Lily is she married James. Not just because he was an asshole to Severus, but because he was exactly as wrong as Sev was. Just because you don't say the slur doesn't mean you're not a racist. You can still be a bigot even if you use the politically correct language.

James comes at it less about blood status and more about class. Which, as we are seeing play out in the real world, can be almost as damaging. James is the guy who thinks Joe Biden is progressive. He thinks homeless people are just people who are bad with money and deserve to be homeless. He's too privileged and insular to actually understand the problems people face and he never once examined his power over others.

As shitty as J.K. kind of turned out to be, I do give her credit for trying to show that the people who we are told to idolize are often just as shitty as the people who we are told to hate, and that you can't really lump people simply into good or bad. This is very true.

Anyway, to lighten to mood, here's a cute Mbmbam animatic about wizard swears.

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