It Had To Be You

by originella

Summary

Just before sixth-year begins, Harry is assaulted by Horace Slughorn. Once this happens, the most unlikely person saves him - Severus Snape. In the wake of this, not all is as it seems, and Harry must work hard to figure out why it is always him, and that desire, no matter how unorthodox, is the key to finding love.
Dreams I’ve Always Had

Harry had begun counting the days that he was due to return to Hogwarts from the summer after his very first year, just weeks before his twelfth birthday. Now, he was past his sixteenth birthday, and there were only a few weeks left until he would be permitted to go to the Burrow, which he’d done two summers before, and attended the Quidditch World Cup with the Weasley family. He would have liked to go to Grimmauld but, even though he’d legally inherited the house, he was not considered a good candidate to live on his own, now that the Death Eaters had broken out of Azkaban, murdered Sirius, and the Ministry of Magic was finally on board with the knowledge that Voldemort was back, although Fudge had been sacked shortly after the school year had ended.

Harry still had dreams, but unlike ones he’d had in the past. Thankfully, he was no longer embodying Nagini, the dreadful familiar of the madman who had marked him for death as a fifteen-month-old. He still saw things from Voldemort’s point of view, however, and, after a particularly awful nightmare, where he had witnessed him giving the Dark Mark to none other than Draco Malfoy, it was truly a harrowing experience. When his alarm blared promptly at six a.m., Harry shoveled himself out of bed, gathering up a tattered, oversized outfit he’d inherited from Dudley, and quickly put it on, all the while hearing Uncle Vernon tramp down the hallway outside his bedroom, unlocking his door, and barking at him to get a move on with cooking his breakfast before he left for work.

Summers weren’t so bad, now that he had stuff to look forward to from September until June, and didn’t attend the Muggle school down the road. Letting himself out of his bedroom, Harry took the opportunity to use the bathroom, before he traipsed downstairs and moved into the kitchen, listening to his uncle prattle on about wanting eggs, bacon, toast, and coffee for his morning meal. Harry got to work straight away, managing to multi-task when Aunt Petunia arrived soon thereafter, Dudley just behind, while his aunt demanded an English muffin and some eggs, while Dudley wanted a traditional fry-up.

Harry had always detested the wallpaper throughout the house, but none so more than the kitchen wallpaper. It was stained from cooking oil and age, and the lemons surrounded by flowers looked as if they’d been swathed in almost two decades’ worth of grease. Shaking his head, he hastily plated up the three breakfasts, and poured Uncle Vernon’s coffee, Aunt Petunia’s tea, and Dudley’s orange juice. He remained silent and tight-lipped throughout the ordeal, and his aunt gave him a nod, letting him know that he would be permitted to select a piece of fruit. Opting for an apple, Harry walked outside into the backyard, knowing that he wouldn’t be permitted to eat in front of his relatives, and began to take inventory of what needed work.

Uncle Vernon announced his departure shortly thereafter, and Dudley followed suit, going to meet Piers and his other friends to potentially terrorize some ten-year-olds. Harry was called back into the kitchen by his aunt, disposing of his apple core in the yard waste bin, and told to do the dishes that couldn’t go into the dishwasher. She then announced that she would be going to the shops, informing him that Vernon had requested beef wellington that evening, and Harry’s stomach lurched automatically at the thought of such a heavy meal at this time of year.

He vaguely continued to listen to her as he scrubbed the dirty dishes, assuring her with a simple nod of his head that he understood what his chores that day were—weeding, mowing the lawn, vacuuming, and dusting—and that they would have to be done by five, in preparation for his uncle’s return at six, and then be on hand to wash the dishes; his aunt had apparently decided to make lunch and dinner that day. Harry gave a final nod as his aunt left, her pocketbook clutched in her hand, and made her way into town to the shops.
Harry finished the task handed to him, attempting to ignore the heat that seemed to plague Little Whinging at this time of year, and was relieved when the dishes were clean. He then set to work on the yard, not wanting to leave it until the afternoon, when the sun would be high in the sky and the task more difficult. He was finished with the yard in two hours, by which time Aunt Petunia had returned from the shops, and, reluctantly, gave her nod for Harry to return inside to complete his inside chores. Vacuuming was next, as his aunt had gone to a friends’ house for tea, and wouldn’t disturb her watching her soaps. Once that task was done, Harry returned the cleaning instrument into its proper place—the cupboard under the stairs—and set to work on the dusting, which he completed in under an hour.

His aunt returned, just as he was finishing up, and gave her stamp of approval, and rewarded him with a second piece of fruit for his efforts; this time, Harry selected an orange, which he took upstairs with him, knowing that he could offer some of it to Hedwig, although he was quite positive that his familiar wouldn’t be best pleased. His aunt told him that he could let her out, provided that he didn’t call attention to it, and Harry thanked her minutely before he returned to his bedroom, waiting to be summoned to wash the evening dishes.

Dudley returned home at the appointed hour for dinner, about twenty minutes after Vernon had, and Harry could smell dinner cooking from downstairs. Once it was finished and his relatives had completed eating, he was called downstairs by Vernon’s bark and ordered to wash the dinner dishes that his aunt had used. Trudging downstairs and not giving his uncle any reason to smack him about, he walked promptly into the kitchen, ignoring the sound of an uneducated-sounding soap on the telly, and approached the sink. Harry remained silent throughout the work, his mind going a mile a minute; it was mid-August now, and the days seemed to go by quickly enough as the summer went on. As he continued washing the dishes, barely registering that the water was burning his hands, he heard the unmistakable crack of Apparition, and immediately looked up from the kitchen window, seeing Dumbledore standing there.

“He gave the man a pained expression and his headmaster, seeming to figure it out, waved his wand, charming the dishes to wash themselves. He then walked towards the gate of the back garden, and Harry moved outside to meet him, and sighed in relief at the Cleaning and Cooling Charm the man put upon his hands.

“Sir?” Harry asked, confused as to his arrival.

The man smiled. “We’ve a mission, I’m afraid.”

Harry regarded the man then, taking in the long beard and silver robes he knew so well, although he found himself deeply concerned at the look of one of his hands, which appeared to be quite withered. “Sir...”

“Quite a dramatic tale, if I do say so myself, with the meaning behind it most intriguing. But, I must confess that this is not the time,” the headmaster informed him, and lightly lifted the appendage ever so slightly. “Take my arm.”

Harry worried his lower lip, and turned and looked over his shoulder, where he could clearly see his uncle heaving himself to his feet, likely in search of some after-dinner pudding.

“Do as I say,” the man next to him said firmly, and Harry’s eyes jerked back to his, and instantly grabbed ahold of the arm, and the pair vanished with a sudden crack.

Harry felt disoriented and quite sick when they landed somewhere, in what appeared to be a village, and looked around, taking in the architecture, which seemed to be older than that of Little Whinging. “I... I just Apparated, didn’t I?” he asked.
“Yes, and you did quite well, my boy,” the man told him, his eyes twinkling. “Most people vomit the first time.”

*Not that far off,* Harry thought to himself as they neared a house in the center of the block, and was nonplussed to find its gate open.

“Wands out, Harry,” Dumbledore said without preamble, and Harry rushed to obey as they walked through the gate. The headmaster spelled the door open, which gave automatically, and they crossed the threshold and into darkness. *Revelio,* he said, and a rather plump man, who was adorned in pale purple silk pajamas, was revealed almost immediately.

“Merlin’s beard!” he shouted, and Harry was relieved he had not moved from the headmaster’s side as the stranger greeted them. “Albus, give a man some warning next time!”

Dumbledore chuckled lightly, and quickly spelled the room back together, which the man before them appeared to have disheveled in some way, making it not too far off than his initial appearance, to Harry, at least. “Harry, allow me to introduce an old friend and colleague of mine, Horace Slughorn,” he said. “Horace... Well, you know who this is.”

Slughorn regarded Harry for a moment, and smiled. “Harry Potter,” he said knowingly, his tone friendly as nodded in recognition. “I suppose you’ve come here to offer me that blasted position again, Albus, but I’ve told you, the answer is unequivocally no.”

Albus shrugged. “No matter,” he said. “I’m off to use the loo, then. I’ll return in a moment, Harry,” the headmaster said, and slipped from the room.

“You’re very like your father,” Slughorn said. “Except for the eyes, of course. You have...”

“My mother’s eyes,” Harry said, feeling slightly uncomfortable. “Yeah.”

“Lily. Lovely Lily,” Slughorn went on. “One of the most gifted students Hogwarts had ever seen, even though she was Muggleborn.”

“One of my best friends is Muggleborn,” Harry said quickly, cutting across him. “She’s the best in our year.”

“Oh, please don’t think I’m prejudiced,” Slughorn said, stepping towards Harry, appearing altogether benevolent. “Your mother was one of my absolute favorites. Look,” he said, and gestured towards a buffet-like table, “there she is now.”

Harry turned towards where Slughorn had indicated, seeing nearly two dozen magical photos of various former Hogwarts students. He easily picked out his mother among them, as well as Lucius Malfoy, due to his similarities towards Draco, and even caught a glimpse of Gwenog Jones as well. Automatically, however, he found himself drawn to one which appeared to be in the Quidditch stands at Hogwarts, due to the wind blowing in the background. A younger Slughorn stood prominently at the front, and a black-haired young man beside him, who seemed to be smirking rather proudly into the wizarding camera.

“Regulus Black,” Slughorn said fondly. “You will, of course, know that his older brother, Sirius, died a few weeks ago. Never took him on as a student, Sirius, but Regulus was always a favorite of mine. But, I would’ve liked the set...”

Harry stiffened automatically then, at the sensation of Slughorn’s breath on his neck, and turned around halfway, peering up at the man. “Sir?” he asked, his tone riddled with confusion at the predicament he’d found himself in. “Sir, what are you...?”
Slughorn grabbed ahold of Harry’s wrists, subduing him easily with the element of surprise, and his wand clattered to the floor. Harry was then slammed up against the wall, and he felt his joints seize up in pain. He was used to manhandling, for sure, due to his relatives using it as a game for the many years that he’d been forced to live beneath their roof. Heart pounding in his throat, he felt a wave of nausea as Slughorn nipped along his jaw, periodically pressing his lips against his skin, and Harry shut his eyes, tears flowing down his cheeks at the treatment.

*Merlin, help me*, he thought to himself. *Do not let this happen...*

It was then that the front door seemed to slam open, and quick footsteps moved to join both Harry and Slughorn in the living room, causing the former Hogwarts professor to dart away, but his actions were a second too late. Harry looked up, anticipating Dumbledore, but his jaw dropped when he saw that his savior came in the form of Snape. The man nodded towards Harry’s wand, and Harry then noticed that his potions professor was pointing his own wand directly at Slughorn’s face.

“Severus, that you?” Slughorn asked, and Harry found himself drawn to the man, and crossed the room to stand by his side, seeking comfort from the billowing black robes.

“Indeed,” Snape drawled, his tone filled with hatred. “I want to impress upon you the foolishness of your actions, Horace,” he sneered. “Now, before anything else untoward happens, I will be taking my leave now, with Potter.” He placed a hand on Harry’s shoulder, promptly steering him out of the house, and the pair vanished with a crack.

Harry doubled over as soon as they landed, on the grounds of the Burrow, and vomited. He initially expected his most-loathed teacher to berate his actions. What he did not expect was a compassionate hand upon his shoulder, or the feeling of a Cleaning Charm, both in and around his mouth, when he was finally finished. “Thank you, sir,” he whispered.

“Water?”

“Please,” Harry replied automatically.

Snape gave a nod, before conjuring a glass from a blade of grass. “*Aguamenti,*” he intoned, and the glass promptly filled with water. “Drink,” he said, handing it over.

Harry took the glass quickly, taking slow sips so as not to potentially sick up on himself. Once he had finished, Snape returned the glass to its grass form, and Harry was amazed that the stock grew in its former place once again. Looking up, Snape inclined his head, and the pair of wizards walked towards the dilapidated house, and Snape paused close by the threshold.

“This is where I leave you,” he intoned, looking Harry over, before he took the glass of water back and vanished it. “Will you be all right?”

Harry sighed, hunching his shoulders slightly. “Sir...”

“Yes?”

“There is the matter of my trunk, and Hedwig,” he said quietly.

“I summoned them, and they should be awaiting you inside,” Snape told him. “Now, do you have everything you need?”

Harry nodded, eagerly wanting to be beside people who cared about him again, but couldn’t shake the feeling that Snape was possibly not in the opposite category anymore. “Yes, sir. Thank you,
sir,” he said.

Snape tipped his head. “Very well, Potter. I will see you on the first of September,” he said, and moved away from the door. “Try not to get into any more trouble, all right?”

Harry waited for Snape to disappear with a crack, before he tried the front door of the Burrow, and mercifully found it unlocked. Stepping inside, he heard Hedwig hooting softly from the living room, and saw her inside her cage, just atop his trunk. He moved forward, unlatching the thing, and she promptly moved out onto his hand, and he stroked the side of her head, the owl shutting her bright yellow eyes at the comfort.

“Harry!” cried the familiar voice of the Weasley matriarch, and Molly Weasley herself bustled out of the kitchen, banishing a dish towel from whence she came, and threw her arms around him in an automatic gesture, while Hedwig flew off towards the kitchen, likely in search of some owl treats of some kind.

“Mrs. Weasley,” he greeted, accepting the embrace.

“Ron, Hermione, and Ginny are all here waiting for you in Ron’s bedroom,” she said, patting his cheeks as she let him go. “Don’t worry about your trunk, dear. I’ll send it along after you before bed.”

Harry nodded. “Thank you.”

“I’m making a roast this evening,” she called up the stairs. “Should be ready in about twenty minutes or so. I’ll call you all down then.”

Harry smiled his thanks, not knowing if he would even be hungry when the time came, and went up the stairs, feeling that his wand had regulated itself to the pocket of his jeans as he climbed the rest of the staircase towards Ron’s bedroom. He opened the door, and Ron, Hermione, and Ginny all immediately got to their feet, and, in that same order, crossed the room to hug him. He was then pulled by Hermione into the bedroom, where he took a seat on Ron’s bed beside Ron, while Hermione and Ginny perched upon the camp bed. Harry acknowledged the three pairs of eyes on him—two brown and one blue—and lifted up his own green eyes to figure out who would be questioning him first.

“Harry,” Hermione said tentatively, “are you all right?”

Harry sighed, picking at a hole in his jeans. “It’s a long story.”

“You can tell us, Harry,” Ginny said; the only girl in the Weasley family had settled down considerably over the years. In the wake of getting over her childhood crush on Harry, she had a special place in Harry’s heart as a sister, right beside Hermione, which really was a better relationship for the two of them, at the end of things.

“Ginny’s right, mate,” Ron said, clapping Harry on the shoulder. “We weren’t expecting you for another couple weeks, anyway. Not that Mum’ll mind,” he said with a grin. “You know how she always wants to fatten you up.”

Harry swallowed. “Dumbledore came to take me away from the Dursleys tonight,” he said quietly, and brought up his knees towards his chest.

“But that’s good, isn’t it?” Hermione asked. “You’re always talking about how terrible it is there, and having your summertime stay cut short with them should be a good thing...”
“One would think so, ‘Mione, but tonight... Tonight it was different,” Harry told her, forcing the words to pass through his lips.

Ginny leaned forward then, and waited for Harry to make eye contact with her. “Harry, did something happen tonight?” she whispered.

Harry swallowed. “Yeah,” he told her. “Dumbledore took me to meet an old professor; I don’t know what he taught...”

“What was his name?” Hermione asked.


“He was potions master before Snape,” Hermione put in, “as well as the former Head of Slytherin House. Would’ve been when Snape was in school...”

“Good to know,” Harry muttered sarcastically, hunching his shoulders.

“Harry, mate, what’s happened?” Ron asked quietly.

“I...” The words lodged himself into Harry’s throat, and he felt hot tears threatening to escape his eyes, which he quickly moved to scrub away. “Dumbledore left us alone, and while Slughorn was telling me about some former students of his...”

“It’s all right, Harry,” Ginny said gently, and moved to sit on his other side, and Harry put his head on her shoulder, allowing her to gently move her fingers through his hair. “Take your time, Harry. There’s no rush.”

Harry felt his resolve slipping, and he knew that if he had to tell the story at all, he would have to get it over with completely, before he broke entirely. “Slughorn... He made advances, physical and sexual ones,” he said softly.

“Blimey,” Ron said softly.

“Harry what did he do?!?” Hermione demanded, her dark eyes flashing with anger, her face quickly reddening soon thereafter.

“Please... Please don’t be mad at me,” Harry blubbered. “It’s not my fault that I’m...”

“We all know you’re gay, mate,” Ron said, and Harry quickly looked over at Hermione and Ginny next, who both nodded. “We don’t care about that. What that Slughorn git did was bang out of order.”

Harry sighed, shutting his eyes. “But... You’re not mad at me?”

“Oh, Harry,” Ginny said, wrapping her arms around him, and he snuggled closer to her. “We could never be mad at you. Both matters aren’t your fault at all.”

“Now, tell us what that poison master did,” Hermione said, her voice close to a hiss, and Ron coughed, trying not to laugh at Hermione’s attempt at dark humor.

“Breathed on my neck... It felt...wrong, disgusting,” Harry said, feeling the tremor of a shudder ripping through him. “Then he backed me up against a wall, and he started licking and kissing my neck and jaw... All I could think was...”

“Dear Merlin, I want to sick up on him?” Ron asked.
Harry laughed bitterly, gently pulling himself upright again, but retained a hold on Ginny’s hand to guide him through the conversation. “No,” Harry told him. “I... I called for help, in my mind, and that’s when...”

“Did Dumbledore come back, Harry?” Hermione asked him.

Harry shook his head. “No. Dumbledore just disappeared...”

“Like he wanted it to happen?!” Ginny demanded.

Harry went pale. “Merlin, I hope not...”

“Who came to save you, mate?” Ron wanted to know.

“It was Snape,” Harry said, and Ron, Hermione, and Ginny all stared at him, in varying stages of disbelief at his words. “I know, it sounds barking, but he came in like there was nothing in the world that could stop him. He belittled Slughorn, and then just marched me out of there, and took me here. He gave me a glass of water, and then he walked me to the door. He made sure that I was all right, and told me that my stuff was here, and then he just...left.”

“Are you sure it was Snape, Harry?” Hermione asked. “I mean, maybe someone Polyjuiced themselves to look like Snape to give off the illusion of authority...”

“Couldn’t have been,” Harry told her. “Snape had his wand, plus his voice was spot-on. There’s no way it could’ve been someone else.”

“You know that he just did it to save you for You-Know-Who?” Ron asked.

Harry swallowed. “I don’t know,” he admitted, shaking his head. “I don’t know much of anything anymore...”

When no further questions were forthcoming, however, Harry decided to move the conversation along to a different subject.

“How’re things with Dean, Ginny?” he asked.

Ginny blushed, quickly grinning at her romance with the Gryffindor in Ron, Harry, and Hermione’s year at school, and Hermione took her hand and pulled her back to the camp bed across the room in a sisterly gesture. Since Ginny’s relationship with Michael Corner had broken up last term, and Ron had gotten used to the idea of her dating a close friend of his, Ginny and Dean seemed to be flourishing. “Very well,” she said, lowering her eyes, but Harry was quick to note that her smile faltered slightly. “It’s just...”

“What?” he asked.

Hermione accepted Ginny clutching at her hand, and she turned to look over at Harry. “Ginny is concerned about Dean’s delay in getting back to her owls,” she explained. “Dean takes such a long time to write her back, and there’s only a smattering of sentences...”

“Give the bloke a break, ‘Mione,” Ron cut in. “He’s got all of those younger siblings to take care of, remember. He can’t do everything.”

Hermione fixed Ron with a glare. “You know as well as I do that his parents can handle them, Ronald, and that Dean has been in Ireland with Seamus this summer.”
Ron looked uncomfortable, his face turning red, and Hermione immediately noticed it, along with Harry and Ginny.

"Ron, if you know something..."

Ron threw up his hands. "Nothing for sure!"

"Ron!" Harry yelled out, crossing his arms. "That’s your sister!"

"I know who it is, Harry," Ron said, rolling his eyes. "Fred and George have told me for years that they think Dean and Seamus are...too close..."

Ginny trembled then, and Hermione immediately put an arm around her shoulders. "What are you saying right now, Ron?" she whimpered.

"It’s not like I’ve directly seen anything," Ron told her gently. "But I’d do anything for you, Gin, to make sure you were happy. If I ever did see anything, I’d break the foul little git’s nose and tell you to send him packing."

Hermione sighed. "You had better not be lying, Ronald."

"I’m not, ‘Mione," Ron told her. "I wouldn’t lie. Not about this, anyway..."

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The rest of the summer passed quickly, with the final days in August spent in rooms at The Leaky Cauldron, where Harry, Ron, and Hermione stayed to have ample time to do some shopping for the upcoming school year. Molly and Arthur instructed Fred and George to keep a close eye on the three sixteen-year-olds, and Fred and George put them to work for a few days in the Wheezes, which gave them some pocket money to spend in Hogsmeade, when the trips became available to them, once the year began.

"Too bad that all the shops are closing," Hermione said softly. "It’s a miracle that Fred and George are able to stay open..."

The trio met Ginny on Platform 9¾ on the first of September, and she opted to sit with them. It was plain to see her unhappiness from a mile away, and her face was as white as milk. As they left the station, Harry, Ron, and Hermione opened up their compartment for Neville and Luna as well, and waited for Ginny to speak. It was Luna, however, her hand wrapped around Neville’s, who told them what was going on.

"Ginny spotted Seamus and Dean together,” she said, and gently wound her fingers kindly into Ginny’s hair.

"Together?" Harry asked.

"Together how?” Hermione wanted to know.

"Snogging,” Neville put in, clearing his throat.

"What?!” Ron demanded launching to his feet.

"Ron,” Hermione hissed.

"I’ll knock that tosser’s head off!” he yelled. “No one disrespects my sister like that, or anyone else I love or care about! If someone so much as did something like that to you, Hermione, like telling
you that S.P.E.W. wasn’t worth a damn thing, or was a massive waste of time, I would curse them into the end of next week! I’d—"

“Ron...” Hermione whispered, getting to her feet as well, and launching herself into his arms, snogging Ron for all he was worth.

Almost immediately, after he had gotten over the shock, Ron’s arms wound around her, and he enthusiastically kissed her back.

“Bloody hell,” she whispered, grinning at him.

“I love you, Hermione,” Ron declared.

Hermione flushed becomingly. “I love you, too, Ron,” she told him. “Now, let’s go give that tosser the worst Bat-Bogey Hex he’s ever seen!” she said triumphantly, and grabbed onto a grinning Ron’s arm, and yanked him out of their compartment.

Harry was vaguely aware of Luna and Neville gently speaking to Ginny throughout the rest of the train ride. He wasn’t surprised when Ron and Hermione came back just before they arrived at Hogsmeade Station, to change into their robes. They all waved to Hagrid as they got onto the platform, and made their way directly up to the school. Once they stepped into the Great Hall, Harry noticed a familiar man at the table, noting that Dumbledore had seemed not to bring Slughorn into the school, and that, instead, had hired on a not-so-new Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. Grinning, he waved to Remus, who bowed his head to Harry, beaming, as Harry moved to sit with Ron, Hermione, and Ginny at the Gryffindor table.

“Maybe the curse’ll lift this year,” Ron said from across the table.

“Maybe you’ll actually stick to a good study schedule this year,” Hermione put in, and gently squeezed at Ron’s leg, which caused him to grin at her.

Ginny crossed her arms. “Maybe I’ll actually find someone who isn’t bloody immature, and who is bloody faithful, this year.”

Maybe I’ll figure out why Snape supposedly hates me this year, Harry thought to himself. But, aloud, he said, “Maybe snake-face will get with the program this year,” he joked, and he got the three of them to laugh. Slowly, when they were all preoccupied with their meals, however, he turned and looked at the head table, and could not mistake the hidden feeling behind the onyx eyes of his potions professor.
Harry managed to disentangle himself from his friends once they arrived in the Gryffindor common room, with Ron taking the opportunity to snog an equally enthusiastic Hermione, and Ginny deciding to catch up on some reading for charms. Harry noted that, while Dean seemed pleased that his relationship with Seamus was out in the open, he had not wished to hurt Ginny, but Harry had whispered to him on their way back to the common room that he should leave off for a while before attempting to apologize again.

Making his way upstairs, Harry summoned his cloak, before making his way back downstairs. It was a surprise to nearly trip over Lavender Brown and Cormac McLaggen as they came through the portrait hole together, talking Quidditch and the like, and the upcoming tryouts. While he had been staying at the Burrow, Professor McGonagall had sent Harry an owl, informing him that he had been made Quidditch captain. However, his quick reply had urged her to give the role to Ron, for it truly seemed to mean more to him than it ever would to Harry, as Harry had decided to stop playing the game altogether.

Harry made his way down the stairs, once he had exited the portrait hole, and took the most direct route to the dungeons. When the temperature around him dropped, he made his way in the direction he hoped were Snape’s rooms. However, as he neared the Slytherin common room, he heard the sound of sniffling, and saw Draco Malfoy in a corner of the hallway. Sighing, and hating that his desire to play the hero won out, Harry took off and shrunk his cloak, and made his way towards the sad Malfoy.

“Malfoy,” he said, and the sixth-year Slytherin immediately went to his feet.

“Potter,” he tried to spit, but he just didn’t seem to have it in him anymore.

Harry sighed, but, nevertheless, stepped closer. “Look, Malfoy, I know we’ve never been friends, but can’t we just agree to disagree on the Dark and the Light?”

Draco sighed, his shoulders slumping. “It’s not like that.”

Harry blinked. “What?”

Draco turned around then and exposed his back, and Harry immediately gasped at the whip marks that had been lashed into his skin. “That’s what.”

“Bloody hell, Draco!” Harry said, and the Slytherin immediately looked over his shoulder at Harry in shock at the use of his first name. “What...?”

Draco drew his wand and waved it. “Quietus,” he said, and there seemed to be a bubble of silence appearing around them, before it disappeared. “He gave it to me,” Draco told him as he pocketed his wand, and Harry swallowed, not needing an explanation as to who ‘he’ was. “I... I was ordered to take the mark, and to kill the headmaster, just a few weeks ago, but I wouldn’t submit to it. Severus, he’s my godfather, you know, he taught me how to shield my mind from certain spells last year, so the Imperius Curse wouldn’t work on me. When all else failed, they tried to...” He gestured to his back.

“They tried to beat you into submission?” Harry asked, unable to hide the disgust from his voice at his predicament.

Draco nodded, his movements stiff. “Exactly. I held out for as long as I could, and then I collapsed.
in a faint of some sort... I’m sorry for belittling you third-year for fainting,” he said softly, and Harry raised his eyebrows. “I’m sorry for everything, really. I know that nothing I could ever so could make up for all I’ve done, but...”

“It’s fine, Draco,” Harry told him. “Just tell me the rest.”

Draco nodded. “All right... Well, I woke up in St. Mungo’s, and all the mediwitch’s and wizards would tell me about how I got there was that a house-elf had brought me. I think it was my mother instructed ours to do so,” he explained. “After that, I got a short note from my father, telling me that I had shamed the family, and now I am disinherited.”

Harry looked around then, and sighed. “Not to bad-mouth anyone, Draco, but other Death Eaters kids are sorted into Slytherin.”

Draco nodded. “Yes.”

“You’re not safe,” Harry told him, and put a hand on his shoulder. “Come on.” He took Draco by the arm then, and cancelled the Silencing Charm, and pulled him down the hall. “You said that Snape was your godfather...”

“Yes?” Draco asked.

“Where are his rooms?”

Although he trembled at the mere suggestion of it, Draco knew what had to be done. “Around the corner, to the left, and then we make a right. We come to a dead end, and the door at the end of the corridor is his.”

Harry nodded, following the instructions to the letter as they moved down the corridor. Finally, at the final corner to be turned, he saw the door, and he knocked quickly. “Sir,” he said, ignoring how much his heartbeat spiked at seeing him again.

“Draco, what is the meaning of this?” Snape asked. “Why do you have Potter here with you, of all places?”

“Please, I need him here,” Draco begged, and something passed between them, so Snape moved out of the way and permitted them both inside.

“What is going on?” Snape asked, regarding both boys severely.

Harry nodded at Draco. “It’s all right. Tell him.”

Draco swallowed. “Harry found me,” he admitted, and Snape’s gaze swept over Harry for a moment before he turned back to look at Draco. “I... There was a Death Eater meeting last month, and you weren’t there.”

“I had some brewing to do, and my presence was not required,” Snape explained.

The Slytherin nodded. “Yes, well. He attempted to brand me with the Dark Mark, but I refused to take it...”

“Merlin,” Snape whispered. “How did you manage to...?”

“From the blocks you put into my mind,” Draco replied. “I was able to successfully block the Imperius Curse from working on me. They couldn’t get me to accept the mark, or to accept the
mission he gave me.”


“To kill the headmaster,” Draco said, his voice trembling.

Snape went pale. “I see.”

“When all else failed, they... They beat me,” Draco said, and turned around, presenting his back to Snape, who looked visibly disturbed at the markings.

“I am so sorry, Draco,” Snape said softly.

“I’ve been disinherited,” Draco said, lowering his shirt and turning around slowly. “I woke up in St. Mungo’s. I think Mother had me sent there with our house-elf. Father says that I’m never to go to the manor again, unless I agree to... Well, to comply, which I won’t.”

“You have successfully defected, then?” Snape asked.

“Not without a price, to be sure,” Draco replied, hunching his shoulders.

Snape swallowed. “Well, Wizarding Law states that guardianship passes automatically to godparents once a child is disinherited,” he said quietly. “While I am not nearly as financially stable as your parents are, I am by no means a pauper. If you would be willing to adjust to a different way of living, then perhaps...”

“Yes,” Draco said, nodding. “Please.”

Snape nodded. “Very well. I will ask the castle to provide an additional bedroom down here, as it wouldn’t be wise for you to remain in Slytherin.”

Draco nodded back. “Yes. Harry said the same thing.”

“Did he?” Snape asked, and turned towards Harry. “Well, then. Twenty points to Gryffindor, Potter, for your heroics. They were appropriate this time.”

Harry smirked at him, pleased that there was no bite behind his words. “Thank you, sir.”

“Draco, I would suggest that Madam Pomfrey looks over those wounds again, and that you remain in the hospital wing overnight, to give me ample opportunity to get your rooms in order for you. Of course, another teacher will have to mark your work. I will ask Professor Flitwick to do so from now on.”

Draco nodded. “Thank you, Severus.”

“I’ll escort you to the hospital wing now, then,” Snape said, and gestured towards the floo. He watched as Draco took the powder, called for the hospital wing, and disappeared in the almighty green flames. “Potter, if you wish to stay for a few moments...”

“Yes,” Harry said immediately.

If Snape was surprised by Harry’s declaration, he didn’t outwardly show it. “Very well. I shall return shortly, then.” He turned towards the floo himself, called for the hospital wing, and, too was gone in a sea of green.

Harry looked around the room, thinking it best not to touch anything without permission, but also
thought it would be wise to have a look around. He crossed over towards one of the many bookshelves built into the wall, and smiled at the rich color of the ebony wood. All the books were divided up first by subject, and then the surname of their authors. The potions section was the most impressive, with the books going from *A Collection of Above Three Hundred Receipts in Cookery, Physick, and Surgery* to *The Encyclopedia of Bat Eyes*. Smirking at what that book would entail, Harry made a mental note to ask Hermione what it was.

The floo flared again shortly thereafter, and Harry turned around, just to see Snape dusting off his robes as he regarded Harry. “You may sit,” Snape said, and Harry walked over to a black sofa, and sat, with Snape taking up the opposite end.

“How is Draco?” Harry asked.

Snape sighed. “He will be all right, given time. Madam Pomfrey has given him some Dreamless Sleep, and I hope he will sleep without nightmares. Nightmares seem to haunt each and every one of us these days...”

Harry swallowed, nodding. “They certainly do.”

Snape allowed for a moment of silence to pass between them for a moment, before he finally gave himself permission to speak to Harry again. “I’m sure you’re wondering why I was there that night, and, subsequently, why I brought you to the Burrow without further explanation to that fact.”

Harry nodded tentatively. “In all honesty, after all these years, I usually sort of go with it, sir, when it comes to Dumbledore especially,” he said quietly, hunching his shoulders.

“Yes,” Snape said with a nod, although his tone seemed to be hiding something that Harry couldn’t quite put his finger on. “However, that night, Dumbledore wanted something precious from Slughorn—a memory—and, in doing so, offered you up as bait. I... I couldn’t permit that to happen, especially since you called for help...”

“You... You heard me?” Harry whispered in disbelief.

Snape nodded. “Yes. That is why I was able to show up so quickly.”

Harry swallowed. “Another Occlumency trick?” he asked.

Snape leaned forward, steepling his fingers together, obviously wishing to convey something important, so Harry went silent. “No, Harry,” he replied, and Harry found he couldn’t quite put his finger on why it sent a thrill through him to have the potions master address him by his first name. “It’s... It’s much more complicated than that.”

Harry worried his lower lip. “Dumbledore kept me in the dark all last year,” he said softly. “I... I know we haven’t always seen eye-to-eye, sir, but I know that you have never lied to me. Perhaps you could inform me what is so complicated.”

“I am getting to that, Harry. It is a delicate situation,” he said quietly, “one that will ultimately affect both of our lives.”

“Tell me,” Harry said softly.

“I suppose you have heard the rumors about me,” Snape said. “My habits of sleeping in coffins, my Animagus form being a bat, and the like...”

Harry nodded. “Of course. Fred and George made it a point to tell me and Ron from the start of
first-year, although Percy tried talking them out of it.”

“Well, the rumors have some merit,” Snape told him. “I am... Well, I am not human. In fact, I became a vampire shortly after my graduation.”

Harry felt a lump lodging in his throat. “So, it’s all true?”

Snape smirked. “I am not an Animagus, nor do I sleep in a coffin, Harry, but the rumors about me being undead are complete fact.”

“But what does this have to do with you hearing me?” Harry asked. “I mean, are the legends about vampires true? About them having extraordinary gifts?”

“Other than immortality, I’m quite normal, other than the whole wizard thing,” Snape told him in a patient manner.

“But that still doesn’t answer my question...”

Snape nodded. “I know, Harry. I am getting to that.” He took a breath. “You see, all vampires have a mate, and with having a mate, comes certain privileges. We can hear them, but they can only hear our thoughts when the bonding is complete, unless they, too are vampires. We also have impressive tracking skills, and can remotely find our mates, wherever they are, plus any blood relatives that also have vampirism in their veins.”

“So, either I’m a blood relative of yours with vampirism, or I’m...”

Snape sighed. “I am afraid it is not the former.” He swallowed. “I apologize if this situation is a disappointment to you, Harry, but I’m afraid that, short of death, there is nothing that can be done to change this.”

“But, how can I be your mate?” Harry asked him. “You... You hate me, and...”

“I do not hate you, Harry,” Snape told him softly. “I am a spy for the Order, for the Light, and I stopped believing in the Dark Lord’s cause back in 1981, just after your mother...” He swallowed, and rolled his shoulders.

“You knew my mother?” Harry whispered, awed.

Snape nodded. “I did, yes. Your mother was my dearest friend growing up, and although we had our differences, I think we could have made up, ultimately, in the years that followed, had it not been for that Halloween night... You are so like her.”

Harry swallowed, his blush deepening at the compliment. “So, you’re a spy for the Light, for the Order... For Dumbledore, really...”

Snape nodded. “Yes.”

“And you don’t hate me.”

Snape shook his head at him, knowing that he had a lot of explaining to do for his treatment of Harry over the years. “No. I could not, ever since last year, due to our close proximity, I... I found myself feeling things that I never imagined myself capable of feeling. And then, that night, when I saw through your mind that animal Slughorn trying to play his hand for you, and your cries for help, I could resist no longer, for that night is when I knew for sure that you are mine, just as much as I am yours.”
Harry nodded. “All right.”

Snape blinked. “All right?”

“All right. I’m your mate.” He dragged a hand through his hair. “Madder stuff has happened to me, hasn’t it?”

“You would accept the bond, Harry?” Snape asked him, confused at how easy this conversation had been going. “This acceptance is lifelong…”

Harry sighed. “As long as we ultimately defeat him, then…” He broke off.

“We will, Harry, we will,” Snape assured him, amazed at the maturity Harry was exhibiting in the wake of this revelation. “But I sense something greater on your mind.”

Harry wanted to disappear through the floor, but forced himself to speak. “Yes. Children. I… I’ve always wanted a family of my own, and now, I…”

Snape reached out then, and slowly took ahold of Harry’s hand, and was pleased when Harry clasped it back. “Of course we may have children, Harry. I may be the greasy git of the dungeons of Hogwarts, but I’ve always wanted a family of my own.”

“Is wizarding adoption popular?”

Snape laughed. “Yes, although we could have our own children.”

Harry blinked. “Our own children? Like surrogacy?”

“Not necessarily,” Snape said with another chuckle, finding Harry’s naïvety endearing. “One of us would bear the children…”

“Me,” Harry said quickly, and Snape blinked. “I…” He hunched his shoulders and lowered his voice as his face flushed completely. “…I think I’m…”

“You believe yourself to be a bottom, Harry?” Snape asked.

Harry nodded. “Yes… Severus.”

Severus’s heart thundered at the notion that his mate had used his first name, and gently tugged on his arms, feeling relieved when Harry perched into his lap, placing his head down upon his shoulder. “That is all right, Harry, for I’ve always been a top.”

“There… Have been…?”

“I am not a young man, Harry, but now that I’ve found you, there will be no others, of that I can promise you.”

Harry sighed, pulling himself closer. “I… I’ve never…”

Severus pulled Harry back and away from him then, looking him over. “Harry, do you mean to tell me that you’re still a virgin?”

Harry colored again and lowered his eyes, nodding. “Yeah. I… I kissed Cho Chang last year, and we tried going out, but things… I couldn’t…”

“You were not attracted to her?”
“I... I believe it was her hair and eyes,” he whispered, slowly looking up at Severus.

Severus felt himself flush then. “Do you mean to tell me that you harbored an attraction towards me as well?”

Harry nodded. “Yes,” he whispered.

Severus smiled. “Well, I am sure that you understand that I don’t wish to rush into anything. I wish to court you, and see where things go, with the hope of marrying you.”

Harry flushed, lowering his eyes.

“If that is something you might want, of course...”

“There... There is the matter of my death, Severus,” Harry said quietly. “I mean, I’ll die one day, and I don’t want to...”

“There is the option for me to turn you,” Severus informed him. “Either before or after we have our children. It won’t affect them, but if I do turn you before you become pregnant, then they will be immortal as well.”

“They’ll be babies forever?” Harry asked.

Severus smirked. “No, Harry. They will physically mature, and will likely look like older teenagers for the rest of their lives.”

Harry nodded. “That’s a relief, then.”

“Is something else on your mind?” Severus asked. “Anything you would like to ask or tell me, before you’re late for curfew?”

Harry swallowed. “One thing...”

“Yes?” Severus asked.

Harry looked up at him then, heart hammering in his throat. “Um, could you kiss me?” he whispered, trembling in the man’s arms.

Severus grinned at him. “You’re sure?”

Harry nodded. “Yes.”

Severus nodded. “Very well, then.” Gently, he tipped his index finger beneath Harry’s chin and tilted it upwards, and put his lips upon Harry’s.

Harry felt a jolt from somewhere inside him, and found himself throwing his arms around Severus’s neck, never wanting to let him go. It was a feverish sensation which passed through him as Severus’s tongue gently licked Harry’s lips, requesting permission for entrance, which Harry gave readily, pressing closer to the man, and savoring the taste of his mate. He thought of them, married, both no longer human, with beautiful, black-haired children running about, and found the thought made him deliriously happy.

After saying goodnight to Severus, after a lengthy twenty-minute snogging session—one minute for each point he had earned for Gryffindor for helping Draco that night—Harry fished his cloak out from his pocket and slipped out of Severus’s private rooms. Slipping down the corridor back the way he had come, Harry was quick to return to Gryffindor Tower, and slipped off the cloak
again, before darting inside, the fat lady giving him a knowing smile as she opened up for him to enter. He saw Hermione’s nose in a book on the couch before the fireplace, Ron lying across her lap reading a Quidditch mag, and Ginny sitting on one of the chairs beside the couch, taking notes on the charms text she had been reading earlier.

“Harry?” Hermione asked, looking up as he stepped inside, taking note of his flushed face, and raised her eyebrows. “Where have you been? I thought you were in bed...”

Harry shook his head. “Went for a walk,” he replied, shrugging as he dropped into the chair just opposite Ginny.

Ginny set aside her notes and looked him over. “Your clothes are rumpled, and your lips are bruised, Harry,” she remarked knowingly, and smiled at him. “Tell us. Who is he?”

“You’ve met someone, mate?” Ron asked, tossing his magazine towards his feet at one end of the couch and regarding Harry. “Looks like he treated you well tonight.”

Harry was about to open his mouth to speak when a wisp of air came into the common room, and presented itself at Harry’s feet.

Harry, thank you for bringing in Draco this evening, came the voice of Madam Pomfrey. It will do him a world of good to be cared for.

“Wait,” Ron said, pushing himself upwards and looking Harry over as the wisp disappeared. “I didn’t even know that Malfoy was your type!”

“He’s not,” Harry said softly, knowing that he had to bring this up delicately. “Hermione,” he said, and Hermione nodded.

Hermione casted a Silencing Charm then, in case other students came downstairs. “All right, Harry, we’ll listen. But this had better be good.”

Harry nodded. “It is,” he told them. “Malfoy... Draco has defected this past summer,” he told them all quietly.


“Hush,” Ginny scolded, before turning back to Harry.

“They tried to give him the mark, but Sev... Snape put up mind blocks on his behalf, so he was unable to submit to the Imperius Curse, which was used as a penultimate resort when all else failed,” Harry explained. “Then, when that failed, the Death Eaters attempted to beat Draco into all-out submission.”


“They... You-Know-Who also gave Draco a mission, one that he refused to take. The beatings were so bad that Draco woke up in St. Mungo’s, with a note from his father, letting him know that he had been disinherited and banned from the manor or contacting them ever again, unless he agreed to take the mark and accept the mission.”

“What was the mission?” Ginny asked.

“To kill Dumbledore,” Harry told her.
Ron crossed his arms. “You’re sure it’s not a trick?”

“Ron!” Hermione cried out.

Harry shook his head at him. “No, Ron, it’s not a trick. I saw the lashings myself. There’s no way that those are fake.”

Ron sighed. “Well, Merlin. I s’pose we really misjudged the bloke, now didn’t we?”

Harry shrugged. “We’ve been wrong before...”

“Is that all that’s on your mind, Harry?” Hermione wanted to know. “Not that that’s not a lot to handle for one evening, but...”

“I did have one question...”

Hermione leaned forward. “Yes?”

“What’s The Encyclopedia of Bat Eyes?”

~*~

Harry woke up before breakfast that morning to head down to the hospital wing, to escort Draco to the meal, with the question of whether or not he wanted to sit with the four of them at the Gryffindor table. Just as he was about to leave, Ginny showed up just behind him, and moved to follow him out.

“Gin?” he asked.

Ginny smiled at him. “Draco’s going to need all the friends he can get.”

Harry smiled. “The more the merrier,” he told her.

The pair ventured down to the hospital wing together, and, once they stepped over the threshold of the place, saw Draco just straightening out his robes. “Potter, did you have to bring your girlfriend with you?” he asked.

Ginny laughed aloud at that. “Harry and I grew up together, Draco,” she said, and Draco pinked at how familiar she made herself to him. “If anything, Harry is my brother.”

Draco flushed deeply at that. “My apologies, Ginevra.”

“Ginny, please,” Ginny told him, and she stepped forward, and Harry noticed that Draco was watching her walk, and seemed to be as amazed as Ron had when the Beauxbatons girls had arrived two years ago. “Harry and I have just come to ask that you join us, plus Ron and Hermione, for some breakfast. I think that Madam Pomfrey would want you to be having scheduled meals, Draco.”

“Thank you, but I’m not—”

“Miss Weasley is correct, Mr. Malfoy,” Madam Pomfrey said, bustling into the hospital wing as she proceeded to put Cleaning Charms and the like onto Draco’s former bed. “Even if it is just a light meal to start off with, you do need to be eating.”

Draco grumbled under his breath, but the sounds were cut off as Ginny took him gently by the arm and pulled him towards the door. “Ginny?” he asked.
"We’ll have to get there soon if you’re going to eat," she explained. "You haven’t seen first-hand what Ron is capable of doing at the table, even early in the morning."

"Perhaps Miss Weasley is just the ticket to keep Mr. Malfoy on his toes," Madam Pomfrey remarked with a smile, before her eyes drifted over to Harry. "You’d better be along, too, Mr. Potter," she told him. "Even if Mr. Malfoy hasn’t seen what Mr. Weasley can do, I certainly have, and you need to be eating as well."

"Yes, Madam Pomfrey," Harry said, and quickly moved to exit the hospital wing. As he did, he bumped unceremoniously into a sea of black, and looked up, his face flushing automatically at the sight of his potions professor before him. "Excuse me, sir," he said.

Severus looked around and, seeing no one, whispered, "In here," and promptly spelled the door of an empty classroom open, before he pulled Harry inside, and warded the door behind them. It was hardly a moment later that Severus caught Harry in his arms as the young Gryffindor threw himself into them, and Severus nearly chuckled as their lips met, and as they tasted each other for the first time that morning.

"I missed you," Harry said softly, when they had stopped snogging, in favor of Severus just holding him for a moment.

"I missed you as well, Harry," Severus told him.

"It was torture going to bed without you." Harry admitted, his voice slightly muffled from Severus’s typical black robes. "I wish..."

Severus pulled back then, regarding Harry for a moment. "What do you wish, Harry?" he asked him gently.

Harry swallowed. "I wish that we could be together, in public..."

Severus nodded. "I understand. I do as well. But I am permitted to court you, Harry, and I intend on presenting you with a ring in due time. Once we are engaged, we are sanctioned to go public with our relationship, and then we may begin plans for our wedding and moving in together and the like."

"We could have the wedding in June," Harry said quietly, gently tracing his fingertips around the many buttons that Severus’s robes had. "I mean, that way we could spend the rest of the month, plus July and August, on a honeymoon..." He broke off then, as green eyes met black in a moment of fear. "Once we’re married, nobody can take us away from the other, can they?" he asked, his heart suddenly beating in fright.

Severus shook his head. "Of course not, Harry. The only way separation would be possible is if it was coercion was discovered in some way, either through blackmail or through spells. They would likely check for this before the ceremony, due to the age difference."

Harry nodded, relieved. "That is good to know." He hesitated for a second time. "Does this mean that, once we’re married, I don’t have to go back to Little Whinging?"

Severus’s arms tightened around Harry’s arms then, delighting at the strength from his muscles, due to years of Quidditch. "Harry, did something happen?"

Harry swallowed. "Maybe..." He sighed, raising his eyes towards Severus’s again. "Yes. Yes, something did happen there..."
“What Slughorn did...” Severus gritted his teeth, not wanting Harry to think for a moment that he was angry with him. “What happened that night with Slughorn... That was not the first time that something of that nature happened to you, was it?”

Harry lowered his eyes, and, finally, shook his head. “No, it wasn’t.”

Severus gently pulled Harry into his arms, listening to their hearts beating as one. It was a common misconception that vampires didn’t have hearts, or a heartbeat, to speak of, but it was merely part of the legend itself. In reality, their blood—or, rather, their venom—pumped twice as fast through their veins, which gave them longevity and immortality. It was a well-kept secret among the covens throughout the world, as they didn’t suddenly want to have people lining up, desperate to be transformed, instead of remaining human, or an attempt to escape Merlin-given circumstances, which is what they were born into, and should, therefore, be worked out on their own, and in their own time.

“I do not like to think of people hurting you, Harry.”

Harry sighed, overwhelmed with affection for this man that, just over a year ago, he would have sworn on the bible—or whatever the wizarding equivalent was—that he hated. It was a terribly overpowering sensation—this desire, this lust—for the well-known greasy git of the dungeons of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Even though he had never dreamed of finding such happiness in such a sort time, or so young, if at all, he found that, even though less than twenty-four hours had passed, he didn’t want to give him up.

“Thank you, Severus,” Harry whispered to him at last.

Severus chastised himself for the thousandth time, hating that he had not opened himself up to the belief far sooner that Harry was not James Potter. Harry, although he may look like his father, had the heart, soul, and spirit of his mother, and, therefore, was a better man than James Potter could ever hope to be. It was tragic, he realized, that Harry didn’t get the opportunity to know either of his parents properly. However, perhaps they would have been banned from even attempting a relationship, due to James’ hatred of him.

“Will you tell me what happened to you, Harry?”

Harry swallowed once again at the predicament he’d successfully managed to find himself in. It was not a pretty story, or a happy story, nor one that he wished to relive anytime soon. The images of Harry Hunting passed through his minds eye, and he hoped beyond hope that Severus would not attempt to invade his privacy with Legilimency. However, since that he reached this latest understanding, and had seemingly found one another, Harry didn’t believe that Severus would invade his mind like that.

“Severus...” He whispered.

It wasn’t just Harry Hunting, of course, that managed to get Dudley Dursley’s rocks off. No, it had been far worse as they years went on, where Dudley would deliberately torment Harry about his inability to legally use magic in order to defend himself. It had begin with pushes and shoves to the ground, varying in hardness, and then Dudley’s gang would haul him across town to the abandoned warehouses, next to the play park that Harry would sometimes frequent on the rare occasions when permitted out of the house, to check and see how far they could drop him. Of course, Healing Magic only did so much, and then there was the matter of getting on his knees to service one of them—frequently Piers—while the rest of the boys beat him with sticks or hit him with rocks.

“Harry?”
Harry cleared his throat then, and slowly lifted his head upwards to Severus, feeling the sensation of comfort leaking through to him, and knew then that his chosen bond mate would never do anything to hurt him, as long as it was in his power to do so. “Yes?” he whispered, and hated that his voice trembled ever so slightly.

“Can you tell me?” Severus asked.

Harry sighed, lowering his eyes, before he finally managed to control the muscles needed to shake his head. “I’m sorry, Severus, I... I can’t. Not yet.”

Severus nodded, gathering up Harry into his arms, his heart hurting at the notion that Harry’s memories were still too painful to speak of. “I understand,” Severus assured him, and gently stroked his mate’s back. “Just know that I’m here, all right?”

“I know you’re here,” Harry whispered back. After a final kiss, Harry slipped from the classroom, unseen, to join his friends for breakfast, while Severus was left to think, and decided that the best course of action would be to speak to Remus.
Severus spent his double potions mid-morning period with the fifth-year Gryffindor and Slytherin class not even attempting to look at their Draught of Peace. He noticed that Ginevra Weasley had a happily flushed look about her face, and thought it had something to do with her sitting with Draco that morning at breakfast. Ever since the youngest Weasley child had gotten over her childish obsession with Harry, she had proved to be a bright young woman, with a kind disposition, and a very talented witch indeed. Severus firmly believed that Ginevra would be good for Draco, if their relationship ever became a romantic one, as he thought she could bring comfort to him.

Once the fifth-years had decanterized their efforts—with Miss Weasley receiving an ‘Outstanding’ for her work—he sent them all on their way. Resolving to speak to Remus before lunch, as he was finished until then, and knew that the wolf would be as well, he made his way from the dungeons and to the Serpentine Corridor on the third-floor, where he saw Remus dismissing the sixth-year Gryffindor and Slytherin class. He nodded at Draco, and allowed his eyes to do the speaking with Harry, letting him know that he would see him later as all the students meandered towards their next class, charms.

Remus looked up at Severus, and smiled warmly at his former adversary; in the wake of Riddle’s return after the Triwizard Tournament, Albus had confided in a select few members of the Order of the Phoenix—among them Remus, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Minerva, Filius, Pomona, and Tonks, a young Auror that had captured Remus’s attention—that Severus was a spy for the Light and could, therefore be trusted. “Severus, I didn’t expect to see you until lunch,” Remus said, offering his hand to Severus to shake, which Severus took. “I take it, however, that this is hardly a social call.”

Severus shook his head. “I’m afraid not.”

Remus nodded. “I see.” Quickly, he spelled the door shut behind him and warded the classroom before spreading his hands. “Very well, then. What can I do for you, Severus?”

“You know of my condition as I know of yours.”

Remus nodded a second time; he did know. After Remus had accidentally almost murdered Severus in their final year of school, Severus had come to him in the wake of his own transformation, and Remus felt a little relieved to know someone who wasn’t human as well. “I do know of it, Severus. Please, go on.”

Severus sighed. “I have found my mate.”

Remus smiled at him. “Oh, Severus, that’s wonderful,” the werewolf replied, his tone mellow as it usually proved to be. “Who is he?”

“Well...”

Remus looked Severus over then, smelling the shame and regret, and a third scent, one that was
unmistakably Harry. “It... It is Harry, then?”

Severus nodded. “It is. But I want you to know that I’ve only known a few weeks for sure that that was what this was, and that we haven’t…”

“I understand, Severus, completely. I appreciate you not forcing him into anything. He had been through a lot for one so young.”

“I would never, Remus, I swear it. I merely informed him of the dynamics of it, so to speak, and I fully intend on courting him with the intention of marriage. I will likely not be completely intimate with him until said marriage, however, unless Harry wishes it and, if the occasion arises, I will instruct him to think it over, and that we will talk about it.”

Remus nodded. “That sounds very agreeable.”

“I come to seek your permission to court him, Remus, with the view of proposing to him by the Christmas holidays,” Severus said quietly. “I know it is not far away, but Harry has already made himself open to it.”

Remus mulled over the proposition for a moment. “And do you intend to turn him into a vampire, once you are married?”

“Harry has expressed an interest, yes,” Severus told him quietly. “I intend to have Miss Granger know about it soon, so as she can recommend some reading on the subject for Harry. For the moment, she and Mr. Weasley seem to know him the best, alongside Miss Weasley, when it comes to his friends around his own age.”

“Well, you obviously care for Harry very much,” Remus said softly. “I fear it would bring more harm than good to not allow this. I assume there’s a wedding date in mind?”

“Harry has asked for it to be in June, so that the two of us can have a honeymoon over the summer months,” Severus explained carefully.

“Sounds quite reasonable, to be sure,” Remus put in.

Severus sighed. “I also came here to ask if Harry has mentioned to you the extent of what has happened to him during his time at the Dursleys.”

Remus swallowed. “Yes, he has mentioned it to me. As far as I’m aware, only I, Sirius, Ron, Hermione, Ginny, and Albus know the full extent of what has happened, with Molly and Arthur knowing a great deal of the tale. Harry even mentioned it in passing to Tonks last summer when we were at Grimmauld…”

Severus felt something akin to rage awake inside him. “Remus, do you mean to tell me that Albus knows what has befallen Harry?”

Remus blinked. “Of course he does. Sirius tried to take custody of Harry as soon as he made Harry’s acquaintance back in third-year, but Albus blocked it. Then, after Sirius died, I stepped up and attempted to get it, but Albus blocked it again…”

Severus swallowed bitter bile that had enclosed around his throat. “You mean to tell me that Albus was aware of the abuse that Harry was suffering from, and that he refused to remove him from the toxicity of the environment?”

Remus sighed. “Yes. He said something about blood wards, and attempted to convince me that the
abuse was just a misunderstanding, with Harry rebelling against their rules. But once I saw the marks on him, I knew it couldn’t be...”

“Excuse me, Remus,” Severus said, and turned on his heel, leaving the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom, his appetite for lunch lost; he was suddenly hungry for confrontation.

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Harry left his charms class with Ron and Hermione, and hesitated for a moment before going down to the Great Hall for lunch. Ginny, who had astronomy, joined them soon thereafter, and Draco immediately finished a conversation with Professor Flitwick and moved to join them when he saw her, making Ginny blush.

“Come on, Harry,” Hermione said.

Harry sighed. “Can we go to the Room of Requirement instead?” he asked. “It’ll give us lunch if we really want it, but I need to tell you all something.”

“Sure, mate,” Ron replied, putting an arm around Hermione’s shoulders.

Ginny offered her hand to Draco, who took it with surprise, and they showed the Slytherin the way to the room.

When they got there, Harry was relieved to see Neville and Luna there as well. “How did you know?” Harry asked.

“The Wrackspurts told me,” Luna said with a smile.

“Bloody hell, here we go,” Ron muttered, but was silenced immediately by Hermione and Ginny elbowing him in the ribs.

“Come on, then,” Harry said, pressing his hand to the stone wall, and a door immediately appeared, and he slipped inside, Ron, Hermione, Ginny, Draco, Neville, and Luna following in his wake. As they crossed the threshold and the door closed behind them, Harry noticed that there was a Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin flag in the room, plus a round table set for seven, each plate boasting their favorite dish.

“Holy hell,” Draco whispered.

Harry walked over to the table, his friends behind them, and sat down before the plate of roast chicken and potatoes, knowing it was for him. As everyone sat around him, Harry made no move to eat, wanting to get his conversation out in the open before he did no. “Listen, I needed to talk to all of you urgently. Can we wait on lunch for a moment?”

“Of course, Harry,” Hermione said gently, from where she sat between Ron and Ginny before a delicious-looking chicken Caesar salad sandwich, and instantly gave Ron a glare when he looked longingly at his turkey leg. “We’re listening.”

“Tell us whatever you want, Harry,” Luna said softly, ignoring her vegetable lasagna in favor of gently patting Neville’s arm, who sat, poised, before a heaping and steaming bowl of beef bourguignon. “We can wait.”

Ginny inclined her head, leaning ever so slightly over her chicken tikka masala, but was careful not to get her red mane coated in the sauce. “We’d never judge you,” she assured him.
Draco nodded over his shepherd’s pie and smiled tentatively over at him. “I know we only called a truce last night, Harry, but I already count you among one of my closest friends, if that makes any sense to you.”

“It does, thank you,” Harry assured him. “Listen, I’m involved in a courtship, but it’s no ordinary courtship, because we’re not just going to date for a while. Us getting married, me and this bloke, is a forgone conclusion, because he’s not human, and I’m his mate.”

“Oh, Harry, that’s wonderful!” Hermione squealed.

“No wonder you’ve looked so happy lately,” Ginny said with a smile.

“Just make sure he treats you right, mate,” Ron said, his attention halfway taken up by his turkey leg, which he still hadn’t moved to eat.

“Courtships were traditionally a Pureblood practice, and my gran has some literature on it, if you want me to write her for it,” Neville put in.

Luna, as usual, had a dreamy expression on her face. “I can tell that the two of you will be very happy, Harry, and once the blessing is given, you two will be happier than ever.”

“Is it Severus?” Draco asked.

“Really, Draco,” Ron said, rolling his eyes. “I can see that you’re drooling over my sister, and that Ginny’s into it, and I think it’s a beautiful thing, but there’s no way in Merlin that Harry would ever consent to——”

“I have, Ron. And it is, Draco,” Harry replied levelly, and Ron looked shocked. “Don’t take this the wrong way or anything, and he’s got a lot to make up for, apology-wise, but he’s amazing when we’re alone. He was able to hear my thoughts when Slughorn attacked me, and the only reason why that was is because I’m his mate. He cares about me, and has since last year, and I care about him. I want this with him, and I hope you all can be happy for me.”

Ron dragged a hand through his crop of red hair. “Well, mate, you know I want you to be happy regardless,” he said, still staring longingly at his turkey leg, before he forced himself to look up and look at Harry. “I wouldn’t be your best friend, though, if I told you that the git better not hurt you, or I’ll hex him.”

“Thanks, Ron,” Harry replied, and turned to Draco. “And you? Are you going to threaten to hex me if I hurt Severus?”

“I know you won’t,” Draco told him with a smile. “I just want Severus to be happy. He’s been alone a long time, but if you’re what makes him happy, I support you.”

“We both do,” Ginny said, gently taking ahold of Draco’s hand.

“Gin’s right, Harry,” Hermione told him, and grinned at him. “All any of us have ever wanted is to see our friends happy. If Severus is it for you, then you’ve got my support.”

“Maybe he could stop with the yelling during potions,” Neville put in.

“He only yells because he’s unhappy, dearest,” Luna replied, kissing him on the cheek. “He doesn’t feel any ill-will towards you. Now that he has Harry, the unhappiness should diminish to the point where Professor Snape acts relatively normally in the classroom.”
Harry sighed, relieved that all of his friends had pledged their support. “I guess that’s it, then,” he said at last.

“Not so fast, Harry,” Hermione said quickly.

“What is it, ‘Mione?”

“You mentioned that Severus isn’t human…”

“I don’t think I should be the one to tell you what he is, ‘Mione,” Harry told her gently. “I think it should come from him.”

Hermione nodded. “Of course. Let me know if you need help doing any research on courting rituals, and then I’ll help you further, once I know what Snape is.”

Harry smiled at her. “Thanks, ‘Mione.”

“You’re my brother,” Hermione told him. “All I want is for you to be happy... And I think Ron is this close to eating the flowers in the bud vase, so we should probably eat.”

“You’re right,” Harry said with a chuckle.

“Thank Merlin!” Ron cried, immediately lifting up his turkey leg and biting into it.

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Severus swept up the stairs from the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom, and immediately proceeded onwards towards the headmaster’s office. He would explain to Remus later why he left in such a hurry—a rather rude thing to do, he realized—but this conversation that he sought to have with Albus just couldn’t wait. There was literally a life on the line, and if Severus’s intuition was right, Harry could be killed by those relatives of his.

Severus approached the gargoyle then, who regarded him impassively, as he awaited for Severus to speak the password. “Lemon drop,” he growled, and the being promptly jumped out of the way, lest he be trampled upon by the potion master’s feet. Severus hurried up the revolving staircase and let himself into the office without knocking, glaring automatically at the headmaster, who had pushed some paperwork aside to tinker with some Muggle contraption or other that had struck his fancy that week.

“Ah, Severus, my boy,” Albus said with a smile. “Do sit down. Can I pour you a cup of tea, or offer you a lemon drop?”

“Neither,” Severus replied, his tone clipped, as he continued glaring at him.

“Has another student destroyed your classroom again, Severus?”

Severus shook his head. “No. This is about Harry.”

“I’ve never heard you speak about him by his first name, Severus,” Albus replied, and looked up at him in slight surprise. “Has something happened?”

“Much has indeed happened, Albus,” Severus growled. “First of all, Harry is my mate, and I fully intend to court him, become engaged to him by the Christmas holidays, and marry him by the time term ends in June.”

Albus raised an eyebrow. “And how does Harry feel about this?”
“Harry is all for it,” Severus replied, hating the notion that Albus would automatically assume that he had coerced Harry in some way. “We’ve discussed it at length, and he understands the matter completely. In point of fact, it was he who suggested we have our bonding ceremony in June, so as we could spend the summer holidays on a honeymoon.”

Albus inclined his head. “This wouldn’t be some clever ruse to get him out of speaking the summer holidays with the Dursleys, now would it?”

Severus clenched his teeth. “Lying about finding one’s mate to an authoritative figure is considered treason in the vampire world, Albus, with punishments ranging from several hundred lashes, to exile, to execution. I would never lie about such a thing.”

“I don’t suppose you’ve defiled the boy, then.”

“Absolutely not!” Severus raged, his face flaming with anger. “Harry and I have merely engaged in a series of kisses and discussions of the future. Nothing more, and nothing less. I let him lead with the former, Albus. He even asked if we could kiss the first time.”

“But you do want him?”

Severus narrowed his eyes; of course he bloody well wanted Harry, due to his vampire instincts wanting to claim him, but he would show restraint, as he didn’t want to potentially frighten Harry to the point where he was unwilling to ever be seen with him again. “I will not discuss my baser instincts with you, Albus.”

Albus’s eyes twinkled. “So, that is a ‘yes’, then?”

Severus was damn near closer to baring his fangs to the headmaster, but somehow, he called the vampire within him back, merely facing the man head-on. “I want to know if the rumors are true, about the Dursleys and Harry.”

“What rumors, Severus?”

“About their less-than-savory methods of punishment,” he growled. “It’s plain to see that Harry has been abused in some way. When he spoke to me, the night that leech Slughorn attempted to assault him, through his mind, he seemed somehow resigned to it, almost as if he was anticipating not being saved…”

“The Aurors were able to look into Horace’s mind as a part of the interrogation,” Albus told Severus carefully. “I got my memory, and now he’s locked away in Azkaban for life after what happened between him and Harry. Nothing is wrong.”

“Nothing?!” Severus demanded. “Everything is wrong! You forced a boy to continually enter a home where he was not loved or wanted, and instead belittled for his being a wizard! I’ve heard him talk enough with Weasley and Granger to know that much. It’s clear that he was beaten, and I hope to Merlin it wasn’t worse, old man. I would hate to think about what would happen to you, if you sanctioned the abuse of not only a minor, but a vampire’s established mate, for over a decade and a half, likely to serve your purpose to create a little weapon to defeat Voldemort all for the sake of the Light.”

Albus remained impassive at Severus’s words; once he had finished, he again moved to speak. “I suppose you want my blessing for the courtship and upcoming nuptials?”

Severus gave a stiff nod. “Yes.”
“Very well.” Albus waved his hand, summoning a sheet of paper, and dozens of paragraphs appeared upon it, so it appeared official. He signed his name with a flourish before handing it over to Severus. “You and Harry will have to sign it as well, plus Remus, and any other witnesses at the bonding ceremony in June.”

Severus swallowed, shrinking the document and pocketing it. “I also request that Harry stay at the Burrow over the Christmas holidays, and that, once we are formally bonded, he never return to Little Whinging.”

Albus gave a stiff nod. “We permit Harry not to return home for the Christmas holidays already, so I assumed he would be going to the Burrow. As for the time after your wedding, Wizarding Law states that no bonded couples, especially those with non-human attributes, are never separated unwillingly. You of course will make a home with Harry after your bonding.”

Severus gritted his teeth, hating that it sounded like the headmaster’s idea, but also knew that he had to take what he could get. “Good,” he said, before turning around and sweeping out of there, before the old man could call him back.

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The first week of school seemed to go by far more quickly than it ever had before, and Harry had arranged to have tea with Remus in his inner rooms that Saturday. Ron and Hermione had arranged a study date, with further plans to discuss their first Hogsmeade weekend, with Harry telling him that he could use his name to get them a table at Madam Puddifoot’s, which Ron was convinced would impress Hermione. Neville and Luna had arranged to help out Professor Sprout and Hagrid that day respectively, with Neville repotting Mandrakes, and Luna making sure that the new hippogriff children fell in line accordingly for the third-year Care of Magical Creature lessons. As for Ginny and Draco, the latter had asked her to walk down to the lake with him for a picnic, and Harry and Ron had it on good authority that Draco intended to ask if Ginny would mind it being a date.

Harry arrived in Remus’s rooms promptly at noon, and there was a light lunch, plus a tea service, waiting for him. Harry was perplexed that there were four places at the small table set, as he thought that it would just be the two of them. He was not upset, but he did hope that Remus gave him an explanation for the party of four. As he removed his outer robes and laid them out on the back of Remus’s couch, Remus entered the sitting room cum dining room from his bedroom and smiled warmly at Harry, and hugged him.

“I thought it was going to be just us today?” Harry asked as Remus broke the hug, his green eyes filled with curiosity.

Remus nodded. “Yes, well, I figured that it would be an opportune time to bring things out into the open.”

“Sorry?” Harry queried.

The floo flared then, and Tonks stumbled out from there, dressed in a white top, tight-fitting trousers, knee-length brown leather boots, and a dark purple trench coat, before she casted a quick Cleaning Charm on herself, and beamed at them both. “Wotcher, Harry!” Tonks said, before her eyes lovingly slid to Remus, and the wolf smiled warmly at her.

Harry blinked. “What...?”

Remus crossed the room and kissed Tonks lightly, before taking her hand. “I thought that you and
Tonks should get to know each other a bit better,” Remus explained. “We are becoming serious, and I want the both of you in my life.”

“Right, yeah,” Harry replied, and grinned at Tonks. He didn’t like many people immediately; other than Hagrid, Ron, Mrs. Weasley, Remus, and Tonks, he always took a fair amount of time to warm to people, although Fred and George didn’t take much time either. “Well, now that Tonks is here, who is the fourth, then?”

The door of the main room opened just a moment later and, turning, Harry felt himself flushing automatically as Severus crossed the threshold and stepped inside. “Remus?” Severus asked, his gaze lingering upon Harry for a moment before he looked up to see Remus, still standing before the fireplace, an arm casually wound around Tonks’ waist.

“I thought that this would be a nice idea,” Remus told him gently. “You and Harry need to be spending more time together anyhow.”

Severus swallowed. “And do you know about this, Tonks?” he asked.

Tonks smiled and nodded. “Just what you’ve told Remus,” she replied, and immediately shook her head at Severus’s daunted expression. “Just about the courting itself. I think it’s wonderful that the two of you have reached an understanding.”

Severus swallowed. “And the age difference?”

Tonks laughed. “Remus and I have twelve years between us, and while it is not as much as you and Harry, we still wouldn’t be proper judges.”

Harry turned back and looked at Remus for a moment. “Severus told you that we would be involved in a courtship?”

Remus nodded and smiled at Harry. “He did, yes, and I think it was remarkably sensible of him to do so.”

“And you don’t mind?” Harry pressed.

Remus shook his head. “I can sense that he cares for you, Harry, and considering he went through the proper channels, I see no reason why a courtship isn’t appropriate.”

“I spoke to Filius earlier today,” Severus said quietly, and Harry turned back around to regard him for a moment. “He’s absolutely delighted about our courtship, and doesn’t mind at all that I’ve asked him to mark your assignments. In fact, when I asked him, he toppled off the top of those books he’s always standing on. Squeaked, too.”

Harry tried not to laugh, but distinctly heard Remus clearing his throat, and Tonks suppressing one, just barely. “Yes, he did that on my first day of charms, back in first-year. He came to my name upon the roll sheet, and the exact thing that you just described happened.”

Severus found himself compelled to step closer, and did so, at last, and found that he was delighted that Harry’s heartbeat significantly picked up the pace when he was standing, just opposite him. Looking past him for a moment, he saw that Remus had drawn Tonks closer to him, and the pair of them were whispering to one another, quite distracted. He turned his gaze back down to Harry, before he bent slightly, and brushed his lips with his.

Harry didn’t want that, not at all; the last week had been hell, with Severus attempting to convince all the Death Eater children in Slytherin House during potions that he and Harry were still mortal
enemies. Before Severus could get away, Harry wrapped his arms around him and arched up against him, opening his mouth beneath his, savoring the sensation of Severus acting surprised before the potions master met him halfway. It made Harry feel full, in a way that he had never imagined he would be, and the thought of conquering Voldemort, with Severus by his side, didn’t seem nearly as formidable a task as it once had been.

They chatted long into the afternoon, with Remus and Tonks curled in an armchair, and Harry and Severus cuddling upon the couch. Tonks got an emergency ministry assignment via Mad-Eye Moody’s Patronus almost three hours into their time together, so she hastily kissed Remus goodbye, and told Harry and Severus that she would see them soon, before she went into the floo and was gone. Harry, meanwhile, had placed his head upon Severus’s shoulder, and Severus was gently running his fingers through his hair.

“One of the most important things within any relationship is honesty,” Remus observed quietly after Tonks had taken her leave.

“That is true,” Severus replied.

Harry stiffened, having the distinct impression that the words were directed at him, and slowly eased himself out of Severus’s arms. “What’s going on?” he asked.

Remus sighed. “Severus expressed a concern for your home life with the Dursleys when he came to inform me about your courtship,” he told Harry patiently.

Harry felt his shoulders hunching automatically. “Yes, I see.”

“When?” Harry asked him, his neck snapping to look over at Severus. “We’ve been together for what? Five minutes? And now suddenly you want to know my entire life story?”

Severus’s onyx eyes looked shocked. “Well, considering that we’re going to be married next summer, I thought that I should know a little something about it, yes.”

“How can I just willingly tell you anything, after you nearly bit my head off when I wanted to know something about you?!” Harry demanded of him, his voice shaking as he launched to his feet, green eyes blazing.

“Harry, things are different now...”

“Different? Hardly,” Harry said, turning away from Severus and crossing his arms, actively ignoring Remus, who remained sitting, albeit uncomfortably, on his chair. “You can’t go public about our relationship because of your precious Dark Lord, not to mention those heathens in Slytherin House, minus Draco...”

“Harry, you know very well that we have to keep our courtship, as well as the information that we are bonded mates, a secret,” Severus told him gently. “And you know as well as I do that he is not my Dark Lord. I haven’t served him willingly for nearly fifteen years, and I would never do so again. You mean too much to me for that.”

“What do you want from me, Severus?" Harry whispered.

“I want you to tell me what has gotten you so worked up,” Severus said, shooting a glance at Remus who, taking the hint, slipped into his bedroom, putting up Silencing Charms so that he
wouldn’t have to hear them. “Tell me what happened to you in Little Whinging. Harry,” he went on, and gently placed a hand upon his shoulder, “what did those people do to you?”

Harry ripped his arm away from Severus, trying and failing to blink away the tears which had ensconced themselves in his eyes. “Wouldn’t you like to know,” he responded bitterly.

“I believe I just said that, yes.”

Harry shook his head at him, hating that his voice cracked ever so slightly when he spoke. “I can’t, Severus,” he said, his voice broken as he wrapped his arms around himself, the stuff of nightmares imprinting themselves into his mind, and he shut his eyes, but that did no good to the matter at hand either. “I can’t talk about it...”

“Harry, did someone forbid you to talk about it?”

“No,” Harry replied through gritted teeth.

“Well, then, why can’t you...?”

“I can’t because it’s too goddamn painful!” Harry shouted, turning around to stare at Severus, his eyes filled with tears, which streamed down his face. “It hurts too much that people knew about it and just stood by and did nothing, like they wanted me to be a precious little weapon for the Greater Good! I’m just sick and tired of everyone I love getting taken away from me, Severus, and it’ll happen to you, too...”

Severus shook his head and stepped closer, trying to wrap his arms around Harry. “Harry, no, I’m not going anywhere...”

“That’s what they all say,” Harry said, looking up at Severus. “We shouldn’t even be entertaining the idea of a happy life together.”

Severus felt as if a rogue Bludger had encased itself somewhere in his heart, by repeatedly slamming into him. “Harry, what are you saying?” he asked.

“I’m saying that I have to kill him,” Harry whispered, tears suspended on his lashes. “I’ve got to kill him before we can even think about getting married.”

“Harry, we can do both...”

“No!” Harry shouted. “I can’t lose you, too! Not you, Severus! If he gets wind that I care for someone else, not to mention the fact that you’re a spy, you’ll be number one on his hit list. I’ve lost so much, and I can’t lose you...not you...”

“Harry...”

“No! I renounce this courtship,” he said, his voice trying to remain strong, as he ran out of Remus’s inner rooms, slamming the door behind him, all without looking back.
Harry remained catatonic in the wake of his argument and subsequent rejection of Severus’s courtship, and all throughout the rest of the weekend. He had escaped to the Room of Requirement on more than one occasion, with Dobby bringing him meals from the Hogwarts kitchen, and flitted in and out of a fitful sleep. Ron and Hermione tried to get him out of there, with help from Ginny and Draco, and Neville and Luna, but nothing they did or said would open the doors to the Room of Hidden Things.

Come Monday, Harry remained in his catatonic state, but he still mustered up the energy to ask the room to provide him with a shower, robes to wear, and breakfast. Dobby had come in on Saturday afternoon to bring him his school bag, and when Harry was not attempting to sleep, he had been getting ahead on various assignments. Once Harry came out of the room, he headed directly to his first class of the day, charms, and hoped that Professor Flitwick wouldn’t mind him arriving early.

And so the state remained, and even when the first month of school had ended, Harry had barely said two sentences to his circle of friends. The purple bruises beneath his eyes steadily grew darker, and the only times he did speak was when Hermione reminded him to study, Ron and Ginny requested that he eat, Luna queried about his well-being, Draco told him to suck it up (which got him an elbow in the ribs and an earful from Ginny), and Neville made sure that various other students kept a wide berth between themselves and Harry. Altogether, Harry was miserable, the only things managing to stay constant were his friends, mealtimes, and the study schedule that Hermione constantly pushed underneath his nose.

Severus wasn’t having an easy go of it either. In the weeks since Harry had broken off their courtship, he had taken as many points as possible, and not just from Gryffindor. He would yell at Seamus for making his cauldron explode; he would scold Draco for not paying attention; he would chastise Anthony Goldstein of Ravenclaw for consistently attempting to explain the topic ‘better’ to his fellow cohorts; and he even reprimanded Susan Bones of Hufflepuff for visibly grieving the death of her aunt, Amelia, which had happened the term before. And every night, he would stomp back to his inner rooms, secretly pleased that Draco spent his time until curfew in Gryffindor Tower with his new paramour, Ginny Weasley, and drown his sorrows in various bottles of Firewhiskey.

Finally, in the middle of October, Hermione had decided that enough was enough, and she dragged Harry to the Room of Requirement, and Harry was only slightly taken aback to see that Ron, Ginny, Draco, Neville, and Luna had all gathered there. Once they had all sat down, Dobby popped in, and quickly climbed up into Harry’s lap. Harry found that, combined from the lack of sleep and utter happiness he’d experienced upon his initial arrival at Hogwarts at the age of eleven, he couldn’t stop laughing at the situation which had been handed to him.

“Harry,” Hermione said, speaking tentatively once his laughter had subsided. “Harry, what happened between you and Professor Snape?”

Harry scoffed. “What do you care?”

“We may not understand the dynamics of it, mate, but we do want to see you happy,” Ron said, giving Harry a hard look.
Harry school his head. “Doesn’t matter.”

“Your brain’s gone quite fuzzy, Harry,” Luna observed quietly, from where she was draped across Neville’s own lap. “We’re all legitimately worried about you.”

“I may not know too much about love—anymore!” Draco said quickly when Ginny fixed him with a warning look. “But I do know my godfather. I know when he’s upset about something, and it is plain to see why that is. Neither of you are functioning like normal, and we’re all here to get to the bottom of it.”

“Courtships are sacred, Harry,” Neville put in. “They stemmed from arranged marriages back when the whole Pureblood thing was more universal.”

“Are you and Luna arranged?” Ginny asked.

Luna smiled becomingly. “Oh, yes. We’ve been arranged in a match since I was five and Neville was six,” she explained patiently. “Of course, we didn’t start our relationship until after the whole debacle at the Department of Mysteries.”

“Really made me realize how short life is,” Neville put in, taking Luna’s hand and dragging the pad of his thumb over her knuckles.

“But what does that have to do with Harry and Severus?” Draco asked.

“Everything,” Neville went on. “Harry mentioned that Snape could hear his thoughts, in the wake of what happened between him and Slughorn,” he explained. “That only happens with non-human people, and only if they’re blood related, or mates. Harry and Snape aren’t blood related, so it can only mean that they’re soulmates.”

“But if they’re soulmates, then why have they been so barmy lately?” Ron wanted to know, as he looked from Harry, to Neville, and back again.

“Well, the bond hasn’t been completed yet,” Draco told them. “For it to be complete, Harry and Severus would have to exchange vows and consummate the union. In most courtships, no matter what the time period, the latter is always done after the vows, or the marriage, which is traditional, even in Muggle society.” He looked at Hermione for this.

Hermione nodded. “Yes, that’s true. There didn’t want to be any discrepancy as to who the father of the future heir was.”

“If the bond hasn’t been complete, then...”

“Then they’ll suffer from not engaging in what is considered to be appropriate physical contact beforehand,” Luna said, replying to Draco as she shook her head sadly.

“Appropriate physical contact?” Ron asked, turning red to his ears.

“Honestly, Ronald,” Hermione whispered.

“Snogging, holding hands, cuddling,” Draco said, rolling his eyes, but nevertheless smiled when Ginny gently pressed herself into his side. “There’s only so much one can do before the vows of bonding are said,” he continued, slipping an arm around her, and Ron glared at him, which left Hermione to squeeze his leg to distract him.

“It’s still a very traditional practice, not bedding your intended before the bonding of the respective
“souls happens,” Neville continued. “As such, the deliberate separation between Snape and Harry will only do more harm than good.”

Harry’s green eyes flashed to Neville. “What... What does that mean?” he whispered.

“Soon, the fact that you’re residing underneath one roof, merely exchanging glances with one another, and being in close proximity during potions, won’t be enough,” Luna informed him, her blue eyes riddled with sadness.


“Keep up, Potter,” Draco said, but there was no malcontent in his tone. “It means that, until or unless this is resolved...”

“Don’t say it,” Hermione begged.

“It’s unavoidable, ‘Mione,” Ron whispered, finally having caught on.

“It means that you’ll suffer utterly,” Luna put in.

“When haven’t I done?” Harry muttered.

“What does it mean for Harry, though?” Ginny pressed.

“It means that both he and Snape could die if this isn’t resolved in the near future,” Neville said simply, and Hermione, Dobby, and Ginny all let out wailing shrieks, before throwing themselves simultaneously at Harry, as if their warm embraces could prevent such a thing.

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Harry knew that Madam Pomfrey had administered Severus’s own personal recipe of an advanced form of the Dreamless Sleep. It had some components of the Draught of Living Death, meaning that one would fall into a deep, dreamless sleep. Harry, however, while not dreaming, certainly had a lot on his mind, especially given what had happened during the past week.

In the wake of his conversation with Ron, Hermione, Ginny, Draco, Luna, and Neville in the Room of Requirement, something had gotten Harry out of his funk...slightly. He would ultimately go to the hospital wing, and request some Dreamless Sleep from Madam Pomfrey, who cleared it with the headmaster. Now that he was actually sleeping at night, and eating and working during the daylight hours, things had seemed just a bit brighter.

After potions class on the twenty-fifth of October, however, things had changed. He casually mentioned to Draco—as they had paired up in class, due to Hermione helping Ron with their Veritaserum—the vision he had had of him the summer before. The blond’s eyes had widened at the notion that Harry had a vision of him taking the mark, and Draco even bared his own arm to Harry, letting him know that he didn’t have one. When Harry reached out and touched it, however, Draco let out a pained hiss, and Harry, without questioning it, immediately grabbed Hermione and the three had gone to the hospital wing. Once Hermione had been briefed on the situation, she had promptly run to Remus with the short version, and then went to the library to seek out Madam Pince, armed with a pass to the Restricted Section.

Madam Pomfrey was quick and efficient, promptly putting Draco into a hospital bed, and ran a customary Diagnostic Spell on him. Coming up with nothing, she ran a more advanced one, and the dark magic immediately caused his arm to glow red, the problem area identified. The mediwitch looked concerned at the location, especially because there was nothing visible to the
naked eye on the Malfoy heir’s arm. Madam Pomfrey was quick to run more tests, which soon brought the arrival of Ginny, who threw her arms around Draco, while the mediwitch had gone into her stockroom to get a Pepper-Up Potion, knowing that such invasive spells could potentially exhaust the Slytherin sixth-year.

“I just finished History of Magic when I saw Hermione!” Ginny had burst out, pulling back to look Draco over. “She said that you were here... What’s happening?”

“Gin, I don’t want to worry you...”

“Worry me?!?” she demanded, her brown eyes flashing with emotion. “Of course I’m bloody well going to be worried! The man that I love is in the hospital wing!”

Draco blinked, and Harry considerately stepped towards the opposite side of the room, but he could still hear their conversation. “You love me?” Draco whispered.


Draco promptly grabbed the fifth-year Gryffindor and yanked her lengthwise against him, kissing her with as much passion as he could. Finally, when the pair came up for air, he rested his forehead against hers. “I love you, too,” he replied.

“Ah, Miss Weasley,” said Madam Pomfrey as she bustled back into the hospital wing. “Mr. Malfoy seems to have some of his color back. As long as you don’t interfere, both you and Mr. Potter may remain.”

“Thank you, Madam Pomfrey,” Ginny said, and perched in the chair beside the bed.

“Have you figured it out yet?” Harry asked, moving across the room and sitting beside Ginny, and looked up at the mediwitch.

“The results will be forthcoming, Mr. Potter,” the mediwitch replied, and handed over the Pepper-Up Potion to Draco.

Draco visibly grimaced, but nevertheless popped open the vial and drank the orange liquid all in one swallow, and steam came out of his ears instantly. “And now?” he asked.

Madam Pomfrey clicked her tongue, and casted a more thorough Diagnostic Spell, and, this time, a piece of detailed parchment came out of the tip of her wand. Her face grew white then at what she read, and that did nothing to put Harry, Ginny, or Draco at ease. Even her lips went white as she looked up, and she finally sighed, knowing that she would have to come clean about the diagnosis.

“It appears as if some residual dark magic found its way into your arm.”

“What?!” Draco demanded as Ginny cried out. “What? That’s impossible! I wasn’t marked. I think your spell must be wrong—!”

“Mr. Malfoy, do control yourself,” the mediwitch said gently. She turned the parchment so that the two Gryffindors and one Slytherin could see it, and it revealed the source of the problem firsthand. “It appears as if You-Know-Who has somehow put a dark form of Appare Vestigium into your very skin.”

Harry swallowed, barely registering when Ginny let out a cry of anguish and threw herself into
Draco’s arms. “Then... Then what can we do?” he whispered.

“I am afraid I don’t have an answer for that one, Mr. Potter,” she replied.

“’Mione will find out, Draco,” Ginny sobbed as she held on tightly to her boyfriend. “She’s just got to find out how...”

“Mr. Potter, I’m afraid that I must check you over as well,” Madam Pomfrey said in the moment of silence that followed, and pointed her wand at Harry, running the same advanced form of Diagnostic Spell that she had done on Draco. “Well, it seems as if there’s some clarification here,” she said.

“What?” Harry demanded. “What is it?”

“Your scar, Harry,” Madam Pomfrey said, looking up at him with tears in her eyes. “Your scar is a form of Appare Vestigium as well.”

Harry’s knees buckled then, and he heard the distinct sound of his head cracking on the bed frame before he hit the floor.

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Severus gave the password to the gargoyle and took the steps two at a time, until he arrived at the headmaster’s office. Stepping inside, he automatically refused the query about tea, a biscuit, or the customary lemon drop, and took a seat without being asked. He folded his hands atop his knees, knowing full well that it would take simply forever for Albus to reach the point, and so, instead, he inclined his head, intent upon hurrying him along. “What is it you want of me this time, Albus?” he asked.

Albus sighed; he looked as tired as Severus felt, but he wasn’t about to demand to know if the man was taking the wellness potion that Poppy had prescribed to him last term. “It is not a little thing, Severus.”

Severus swallowed. “It never is,” he replied bitterly.

“Riddle is plotting something,” he said.

Severus automatically stiffened at the mention of their mortal enemy. “Is he? Has Potter come to you with new information?”

Albus shook his head. “No, it was Draco, and Harry. Harry mentioned that he had seen a vision of Draco being marked, but, as you and I both know, Draco was never marked.”

Severus nodded stiffly. “Yes, I’m aware.”

“Well, it seems that, even though the mark itself did not take effect, there was so residual dark magic imbedded into Draco’s arm,” Albus said. “Unfortunately, the bit that was able to ingrain itself into Draco works as a form of Appare Vestigium.”

Severus’s heart thundered. “What?”

Albus nodded. “Yes. As such, I immediately had Poppy run tests on both boys, and the results, while expected, are not good.”

“Albus, what are you...?”
“Harry’s scar is also a form of Appare Vestigium,” Albus told him carefully. “This means that no matter wherever he is, wherever he may go...”

“That Riddle will constantly be one step behind him,” Severus replied, suddenly growing sick to his stomach. “What do we have to do?”

“Miss Granger is already seeking avenues of how to remove it, and, suffice it to say, there are very few options,” Albus said gravely.

“What are the options, Albus? Anything. Anything...”

Severus visibly stiffened beneath the gaze of the headmaster. “He’s my soulmate, Albus. One must care when that is the case.”

Albus tugged at his beard. “Yes, I suppose that’s true. I can only hope that a reasonable solution presents itself. Perhaps it will make Harry truly understand that I am not the enemy here, and that all I wanted was for him to be safe.”

“It is about his life!” Severus suddenly screamed, and slammed the palm of his hand onto the blasted old man’s desk, as he glared at him. “Harry is more than just a weapon for the Greater Good, Albus. He’s... Harry is everything...”

Albus’s eyes twinkled then from over his half-moon spectacles. “Why, Severus Snape, I never thought I would see the day...”

Severus continued to glare at him. “What?” he asked through gritted teeth.

“You’ve fallen in love with the boy,” the headmaster declared.

“I will not listen to such trivial nonsense!” Severus yelled, and bolted to his feet. “Let me know when there is an update on Harry.”

“Oh, Severus,” Albus called over his shoulder, and Severus turned around to glare at him one final time. “Once again, I must ask too much of you.”

“What is it this time?” Severus sneered.

“Have Molly and Arthur come to the castle, Tonks as well,” he told him quietly. “I should think that, what with Harry in a coma, he would want all the people he loves around him.”

“Circe save us all,” he growled, and stomped out of the headmaster’s office. He made his way down to the dungeons, relieved that Draco had made himself scarce—probably in the hospital wing with Harry. He knelt in front of the floo, and tossed in some powder, before he leaned forward shouted, “The Burrow!” into the flames.

“Severus?” Molly asked, clearing her throat and rubbing the sleep out of her eyes, as soon as the connection had established itself. “It is the middle of the night...”

“Yes, and I apologize for that, Molly,” Severus said softly. “Albus has requested that you and Arthur come to the castle. It’s Harry.”

“Oh, dear,” Molly whispered. “What’s happened?”

“He is in the hospital wing, so I suggest that you use Poppy’s floo,” Severus told her. “He is in a
coma, but I’ll leave Poppy to explain.”

Molly nodded. “Thank you, Severus. I’ll wake Arthur now,” she said, and closed the connection behind her.

Severus sat back on his haunches for a moment, before he tossed some more powder into the dying embers, calling out the coordinates of the Tonks address. Tonks responded to the call immediately, likely buried in paperwork. Severus told her to go to Remus’s rooms, likely thinking that the wolf would want the company, as he briefed the young Auror on the situation which had befallen them all. Severus nodded in welcome to Tonks’ thanks before the connection was once again closed, and he slowly got to his feet.

Looking around, Severus crossed immediately over to his private lab; he had been brewing when the phoenix Patronus belonging to the headmaster had interrupted him. He shut the door of his lab behind him, regarding the cauldron of Wolfsbane that he had been brewing for Lupin, and muttered a curse under his breath. In his effort to get to Albus so quickly, his Stasis Charm had been rendered ineffective. Thankfully, he had plenty of the potion on reserve, but it was a low blow for Severus, mucking up a potion he knew so well.

He banished the silver potion without a second thought; it hadn’t even given off the blue hue of smoke that it was supposed to, and the smell had been off. Before he could stop himself, he shoved the cauldron to the ground, where it landed with a clatter, but the permanent Shield Charm he had upon it prevented it and the floor from cracking under pressure. Severus let out a scream then, thinking that Voldemort was completely inescapable, and covered his face with his hands, as the rage continued bubbling through him.

In no less than a second, the jars of potion ingredients—varying from being worth several dozen Galleons to a handful of Knut’s—suddenly exploded all around him. A good portion of them stuck to the opposite wall, due to them being immersed in something to keep them fresh, or simply landed in various spots, due to the trajectory of the potion master’s accidental magic. It was only a moment later that he lifted his hands, and saw first-hand all the destruction around him, that he shook his head. He shouldn’t be permitting himself to get so upset over a boy—young man—who had previously been the bane of his wretched existence.

But that was not so, not anymore.

Somewhere along the way, although he couldn’t pinpoint exactly when, Severus Snape had fallen in love with Harry Potter. He loved Harry Potter. The thought came crashing though him suddenly, and it was as if he was waking up from a long sleep, due to the realization. He knew that, once it had been made clear that Harry had indeed been his soulmate, that love would soon follow, but the fact that it had come at the worst possible time...

Shaking his head, Severus knew that he would need help in clearing up the mess in his private lab, and he would have to do it soon. “Winky,” he said, and the elf popped into view, her lovely dark brown eyes staring up at him.

“Master Severus has made a mess?” she asked.

Severus nodded. “Yes, I am afraid so, Winky.”

“Winky will fix it, Master Severus,” the little elf informed him, and proceeded to push the man out of his own lab. “Master Severus needs his rest now, now that Harry Potter is in the hospital wing. Master Severus will want to be there when Harry Potter awakens.”
Severus sighed, but gave in to the elf’s protests—she could be as infernal as the headmaster sometimes. He walked out of his private lab and down the little hallway, towards the bathroom, where he intended upon taking a shower before bed. Crossing into the room and shutting the door behind him, he moved to turn on the taps to a temperature he liked, and waited for them to warm up sufficiently.

As he mulled over both Albus’s revelation and his own, about being in love with Harry, he found himself knowing that it was the truth. There was, however, one matter that he had to figure out first, and so, he drew his wand, shutting his eyes for a moment, and thought of the day that he and Harry had kissed for the first time. “Expecto Patronum,” he said, his eyes snapping open, and his jaw dropped at the sight before him.

What emerged from the tip of his wand was not the silver doe he had become accustomed to; no, it was a great lion, who tossed his mane proudly. When Severus just stared at it, awestruck, the lion let out an almighty roar, before it suddenly charged in the direction of the bathroom door, and made itself scarce. Severus nearly dropped his wand in all the shock, and sat upon the lip of the bathtub, attempting to get his bearings.

“I suppose I truly am in love with the Gryffindor brat,” he mused to himself.

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Hermione had scoured the entirety library for almost six days before she finally went to the Restricted Section as a last resort. Scanning through the various titles, she found plenty on dark magic, but none matching what Ron’s terrier Patronus had explained to her. Now, with both Harry and Draco in a magical coma, after their harried conversation with the headmaster earlier that afternoon, Hermione knew that time could potentially be running out. Despite the headmaster telling Madam Pince to allow Hermione all the time she needed, the sun had long ago disappeared over the horizon, and dark shadows were around the place she was currently standing, eyes blinking, and she finally took out her wand.

“Lumos Maxima,” she intoned, and saw that she had finally gotten to the section on Magical Creatures and Humanoid Beings. She remembered Draco saying something about Snape not being human, and recalled all the rumors that all the students—mainly perpetuated by Fred and George—had concocted over the years. Vaporous Vampires by Bathilda Bagshot quickly got her eye, due to her well-worn copy of Hogwarts: A History, and Hermione immediately plucked it from the shelf, actively ignoring Voyages with Vampires by Gilderoy Lockhart.

Thumbing open the ancient and heavy text, Hermione admired the gold-leaf pages, before she forced herself to focus. She scanned the appendix for something, anything, until she noticed that there was an entire section devoted to mates. Heart hammering in her chest, she hastily turned to the page itself, and propped herself up against the opposite shelf, settling down ever so slightly as she began to read, her wand gripped between her teeth.

“Vampires do not all necessarily have a mate, so when theirs is found, it is considered to be a cause for celebration,” Bagshot wrote. “While it is not a rare occurrence, the entirety of the state of affairs should be treated delicately, as not all vampires will strictly have a mate who is a vampire, or full-vampire. Because of this, over the centuries, many vampires would act impulsively, and, upon discovery of the notion that their mates were human, they would transform them immediately, without their mates’ personal consent. This could either lead to outright rejection, which could mean the death of both vampire and mate; a blind love where the person who has been transformed is so pleased to have found their soulmate that not much else matters to them; or a happy medium, where resentment is at the beginning, but love is forthcoming. With
other creatures, however—centaurs, mermaids, werewolves, goblins, etc.—the vampire can resort to a blind rage, wherein they inadvertently kill their mate, for vampires are frequently seen as vain creatures, where they believe that, if you are not human or vampire, you are therefore unworthy of standing by their side.”

“How barbaric,” Hermione tried to say aloud, but was stopped by her wand, which caused her voice to be slightly garbled. She scanned through the sections within the chapter about mates, and all situations were described with rather clear detail. Swallowing, she hoped beyond hope that something would present itself, until...

“In the event of deadly dark magic inhabiting the human mate of a vampire, there are one of three things which can be done. One, the vampire can—in the cases of the vampire being a witch or a wizard—Obliviate themselves from the knowledge that said person is their mate, thus leaving the person to die on their own, without the vampire having to die themselves. A second option is that the vampire, resigned to their fate, can elect to die by their mates’ side. The third and final option is that the dark magic can be removed. One of the most extreme cases is an Appare Vestigium, or a Tracking Spell, in which a dark witch or wizard implants some of their own essence into the person, therefore always knowing where they are, and, sometimes, what they’re doing, if they manage to cross over into their minds. The only known cure for the Appare Vestigium would typically be a counter-curse but, considering this a human life, the rules, therefore, are quite different. The only, only, known cure for this curse would therefore be a full soul-bond, for, if a person is granted such a thing, all residual dark magic will fade. A full soul-bond, plus consummation and, in extreme cases, a full transformation, must be done, and sanctioned by the proper authorities. By doing this, all parties should be as right as rain, and all should return to as it was before.”

Hermione let out a shriek then, her wand clattering to the stone floor, which alerted Madam Pince; after she managed to apologize to the librarian, Hermione immediately took the book out of the library and ran at top-speed towards the dungeons. She ignored the looks of disdain from the Slytherins and ran towards the private rooms of Professor Snape, having heard from Harry exactly where it was. She rapped on the door then, trembling from the information and the adrenaline pumping from her veins, which nearly skidded to a halt when the door opened, and the potions master stood there.

“Professor,” she said breathlessly.

“Miss Granger,” the man replied.

Hermione felt her cheeks flush with a sudden onset of nervousness, but she couldn’t give up, not yet. “I’ve found it, sir.”

The man sneered openly down at her. “What could you have possibly found, Miss Granger, that I would care about?”

“But, if you would please…”

But he cut across her. “Stop prattling on and get out of my sight, before I take house points from Gryffindor for you attempting, once again, to be an insufferable know-it-all.”

“I’ve found the cure for Harry!” she shouted, quickly losing her patience, and immediately saw the change in the man’s demeanor. She let out a slight yelp as she was dragged into his rooms, and promptly opened the book in her arms as he shut the door behind her. “Here,” she said to him, and handed it over, pointing to the page, “that section there.”
Severus Snape looked down at the book by Bathilda Bagshot; the title was familiar, to be sure, but he himself had never sought out literature on vampires, something he was kicking himself for in that very moment. “It... It is...”

“A soul-bond,” Hermione said gently.

Severus raised his eyes to hers then, and he could feel himself trembling. “But... But what if it is like she says in the first paragraph?” he whispered.

Hermione blinked. “Sir?”

“What if he grows to resent me,” Severus elaborated. “What if Harry sees me turning him without his knowledge or consent as a selfish act...”

“Harry, while he is impulsive, ultimately comes around to seeing the bigger picture,” Hermione informed him gently. “You’ve been at each other’s throats for years, and although I confess I couldn’t understand it at first, I know now that you’re good for each other. The days and weeks have been a torment for him, sir,” she said softly.

“For me, too,” Severus said softly.

Hermione nodded. “Which is why we must rectify the situation.”

Severus blinked. “‘We?’”

“Why, of course,” Hermione replied brightly. “All weddings need witnesses.”

“Bonding ceremony, Miss Granger,” Severus replied, although his tone was more patient with her than it had been in all the years he had known her.

“Very well, bonding ceremony, then,” she replied, and gave him a small smile. “I know that Harry wants to be with you, sir. He has merely lost so much, so many people, and he doesn’t wish you to be added to the list of casualties.”

“He’ll never lose me,” Severus told her.

Hermione reached out and squeezed his shoulder. “Then assure him of that, once he wakes up,” she advised him. “Tell him you’re strong enough; make him listen, if you have to.”

Severus sighed. “Well, then, I suppose all that remains is to tell the headmaster,” he said, and took out his wand. “*Expecto Patronum*,” he said, and the lion roared forth from his wand, and Hermione immediately drew back from it. “Tell the headmaster to meet us in the hospital wing immediately,” he told it, and the lion ran off with a roar.

“Sir... Sir, was...?”

“No,” Severus replied, shaking his head. “It was a silver doe.”

Hermione’s eyes immediately turned to his. “But... But that was Harry’s mother’s Patronus,” she told him softly.

Severus nodded. “I know. She was my dearest friend growing up. Mine took on her form due to my loyalty towards her.”

Hermione smiled slowly at the man, and tears slowly filled her brown eyes. “You really do love Harry, don’t you professor?”
“I do,” Severus replied, shrinking down the book and placing it into his pocket as they walked towards his floo. “Oh, and Miss Granger?” he asked as she stepped into the floo.

“Yes, professor?” she asked, turning around.

Severus smiled at her for the first time. “Fifty points to Gryffindor,” he replied, before the green flames swallowed her up, although he could still see the shocked expression on her face.

Chapter End Notes

The book that Hermione finds in the library by Gilderoy Lockhart and subsequently ignores is one of his real books. The book that she finds by Bathilda Bagshot, however, is not real, and merely one of my own invention. The text therein is also my own work, and I hope I did the Wizarding World justice on creating a book on my own.
Maybe You’ll Be Pleading In Vain

Severus arrived in Poppy’s office just behind Hermione, and unshrunk the book she had found as he stepped into the hospital wing. Hermione, meanwhile, had immediately darted over to the small crowd gathered around Harry’s bed, and threw herself into Ron’s arms. Severus took a much slower approach, and just reached the edge of the crowd itself—which contained Molly and Arthur, Remus and Tonks, Ron and Hermione, Ginny and Draco, and Fred and George—as Albus entered the hospital wing himself.

“Albus,” Severus said, stepping forward with the tome.

Albus looked at the thing, and his eyes widened. “Bathilda always was a knowledgeable one,” he said softly, gently pulling at his beard. “Well, it seems as though we must get to work, then, my boy,” he said.

Severus nodded, turning to look over his shoulder, where he could see Hermione explaining the situation to Molly, Arthur, Remus, Tonks, and the rest of them in hushed tones. “The sooner the better, I’d say,” the potions master replied.

Albus raised his hands and called for silence to the crowd gathered, plus Madam Pomfrey, who came over from cleaning one of the beds to listen. “Have you explained what must be done, then, Miss Granger?” he asked.

Hermione nodded. “Yes, sir. All explained.”

“Very good,” Albus replied. “First things first. Poppy, you must awaken Harry immediately so that he can speak for himself. Then, we will give Severus and Harry a few moments together so that Severus may explain the goings-on. And then, a ceremony. Are we all in agreement?” he asked them all.

“Sir,” Ginny said, stepping forward, “Harry would want Luna and Neville here as well,” she put in softly.

“A perfectly reasonable request, Miss Weasley,” Albus said, nodding. “Mr. Weasley, why don’t you, Miss Granger, your sister, and Mr. Malfoy all go to get them? Mr. Weasley and Miss Granger can fetch Mr. Longbottom, and Miss Weasley and Mr. Malfoy can go and get Miss Lovegood, if that is agreeable to you.”

“Yes, sir,” Draco answered. He still looked a trifle pale from the sudden revelations over the past week, but he was determined not to permit any of it to get to him. The sooner that Harry was woken up and agreed to marry Severus, plus the transformation, the sooner he could go out and kill Riddle, and save them all. “We’ll go at once,” he went on, taking Ginny by the hand, while Ron did the same to Hermione, and the four of them left the hospital wing together.

“Why don’t we all go down to the kitchens, then?” Albus asked the remaining adults, minus Severus, of course. “We can ask the house-elves to make us a little spread for the celebrations ahead, so as to make it all just a bit more festive. They’ve likely got most of their arms full with the Halloween Feast, but there’s no harm in asking for something on a smaller level for the night ahead, is there?” he asked, eyes twinkling, and waited for Molly, Arthur, Remus, Tonks, Fred, and George to follow him out of there, which they did, albeit reluctantly.

“I’ll be along in a moment, Albus,” Poppy said, and Albus nodded in understanding, as he ushered
the four adults out, sending his Patronus to Minerva along the way. Poppy summoned a vial from her personal stores, and handed it over to Severus. “This must be spelled directly into him, as you know, and will take...”

“No more than five minutes. Yes, I know, Poppy,” Severus told her, his tone gentle.

“Sure you know what you’re doing?” she asked, gripping repeatedly onto her apron, looking a trifle worried.

Severus sighed. “I know this will save him, Poppy. That is all I do know.”

She nodded. “Well, you’ll have eternity by Monday morning to make up for it,” she told him, as she squeezed his shoulder and moved to leave.

“Oh, and Poppy?” Severus called, turning around.

“Yes, Severus?” she asked.

“Please invite Dobby and Winky to the wedding,” he said. “They have always been close to Harry, and I’m sure he’d want them there.”

Poppy smiled. “Of course, Severus,” she replied, and left at last.

Severus slowly made his way to the bed that Harry occupied, placing Bathilda Bagshot’s book upon the small table beside it. He then uncorked the phial, and spelled its contents into Harry’s stomach, just as Poppy had ordered. It was the pucker in Harry’s brow which was the first indication that he was coming around, followed by his eyes squeezing shut further, and his hands gripping onto the hospital duvet.

“Harry?” Severus asked tentatively.

Harry murmured something in his half-asleep state, before his green eyes snapped open, and he stared at Severus. When he came to the direct conclusion that they were alone, he finally permitted himself to speak. “Severus?” he whispered.

“Oh, thank Merlin,” Severus whispered back. He sat down in the chair provided and was slightly taken aback when Harry took his hand, but nevertheless held it back. “Harry, Hermione has found something to help you.”

Harry chuckled. “Of course she has,” he said, and coughed a little, prompting Severus to conjure him a glass of water, just like that first night, causing Harry’s eyes to widen momentarily before he sipped it. “Thank you,” he said, once he had finished. “Now, about this thing that Hermione found...”

“Yes, of course,” Severus said, squeezing Harry’s hand before letting it go, and opening the book to the marked page. “As you can see, it clearly states here that, if one’s mate is affected by Appare Vestigium, then the only way to remove it is...”

“A soul-bond,” Harry whispered, reading the paragraph for himself. “But I still don’t understand how us getting married could...”

“I would transform you immediately following the ceremony,” Severus explained. “My venom would then burn off all traces of dark magic within you. You would then have the weekend to recover and, once your transformation is complete, you and I would then set about completing the bond and coming up with strategy to take down Riddle once and for all.”
“Com... Completing the bond?” Harry asked, clearing his throat.

“Yes,” Severus said gently. “You and I would have to become intimate with one another. I promise, Harry, I will make it good for you, and you would have nothing untoward to worry about when it came to that side of our relationship...”

Almost without thinking, Harry launched himself across the little space, Bathilda Bagshot’s book tumbling to the floor, and threw his arms around Severus, his lips meeting his. Their respective mouths opened almost automatically at the feeling of the others’, and Severus promptly held Harry against him. Once Harry came to his senses, he eased himself back from the man, and cupped his cheeks with his hands.

“I don’t have anything to worry about in that vein, Severus, I know that,” he said quietly, pressing his forehead against his. “And the reason why I know that is because I’m so in love with you that it hurts. I love you, and I know that things will be all right.”

Severus’s breathing intensified then as he dragged Harry back to his lips for a moment, before he, too pressed his forehead against the younger man’s. “I love you, too, Harry.”

Albus arrived shortly thereafter, with Molly, Arthur, Remus, Tonks, Fred, and George behind him, and Hermione, Ron, Ginny, Draco, Luna, and Neville all coming up behind. Dobby and Winky popped into the hospital wing shortly thereafter, each holding two platters. Dobby held one containing many finger sandwiches, while the other had cuts of meat and cheese. Winky held one with small cookies and cakes, while the other boasted crystal-cut glasses of pumpkin juice, Firewhiskey, and Gillywater.

Albus raised his hands then, and the curtains of the hospital wing transformed into an array of crimson and gold, plus green and silver, to mark the union of a Gryffindor to a Slytherin. Upon looking around, Harry noticed that everyone was wearing some form of dress robes, and he felt horribly out-of-place in his hospital wing pajamas. Hermione, quick to see his distress, pointed her wand at him, and transformed his own pajamas into his own bottle-green dress robes from the Yule Ball, complete with a Sizing Charm so that they actually fitted him.

Dobby and Winky transfigured a small bedside table into a long, ornate one, with a red and green tablecloth to place beneath the various platters. Ron pointed his wand at Dobby, giving him a top hat for the occasion, and spelled Winky’s uniform clean, knowing that she likely wouldn’t want any clothes, even for the night. Dobby squealed at the hat, told Ron that he was a good wizard, and asked if he could keep the hat, to which Ron told him that it was his, and Dobby promptly danced around the room with Winky, who giggled.

Arthur and Molly were now dressed in their best, along with Remus, Tonks, Fred, and George, the latter of whom looked mighty pleased with themselves. Molly was wiping her eyes, while Tonks was doing her best to comfort her, and Arthur had successfully managed to pull Remus aside, letting him know that all would be well. Fred and George walked up to Harry, handing over a wrapped gift as they did so, before they moved to where most of the guests had thought it appropriate to gather.

Severus made quick work of transforming his typical black robes into his black dress robes, and Harry’s eyes widened at the sight before him. Severus gently eased Harry out of the bed with Poppy’s permission, and Harry leaned on him for several moments until he could finally manage standing on his own, although he still kept ahold of Severus’s hand. He noticed Ron and Hermione standing together, both dressed exceptionally well, in traditional dress robes and a knee-length pink dress respectively. Just beside the pair of them was Draco and Ginny, who stood, hand-clasped, wearing a black and white suit and a lovely green dress. He was pleased to see that Luna and
Neville had come as well, and Luna, lovely in a periwinkle gown, had her head upon Neville’s shoulder, who, while dressed in a red and black suit, subsequently leaned down and pressed a kiss to it. Professor McGonagall arrived shortly thereafter, her lovely green dress robes billowing around her as she entered, and stood with Molly and Tonks.

“All right, then,” Albus said, calling for silence. “Would the intended couple please step forward?” he asked, and beamed as Severus and Harry did so. “Right, then. Face one another, please,” he went on, and Severus and Harry quickly obeyed. “Do you, Severus Tobias Snape, take Harry James Potter, to be your lawfully-bound magical partner? To join in mind, body, and soul, for as long as you both shall live?”

“I do,” Severus replied, running the pad of his thumb along Harry’s knuckles.

“And do you, Harry James Potter, take Severus Tobias Snape, to be your lawfully-bound magical partner? To join in mind, body, and soul, for as long as you both shall live?”

Harry smiled, attempting to blink the tears from his eyes. “I do,” he replied.

Albus removed his wand from his robes then, and tapped at their respective clasped hands, and a platinum band promptly put itself on each of their proper fingers. “Then, by the power vested in me, by the Wizengamot, I now pronounce you husband and husband, and lawfully bound-magical partners. You may now kiss,” he declared.

Harry didn’t have to wait long as Severus promptly drew him to him, and pressed a light kiss to his lips, although the man’s eyes promised more to come. Harry’s heart pounded in his chest at the look that the onyx eyes gave off, but was soon separated from Severus as everyone in the room moved to hug him, clap him on the back, or sob into his shoulder. Harry accepted the treatment for a few moments, before Severus, thankfully, rescued him, and the pair then toasted their union with glasses of Gillywater, not wanting to forget the evening ahead of them. Severus nodded at Harry to partake in as much food as he wanted, and he permitted himself a finger sandwich or two, plus a slice of cake, before he looked at Severus, letting him know that he was quite ready to be off.

“I’ve had Kreacher bring your belongings to Severus’s rooms, Harry,” Albus said as Severus and Harry finished up their goodbyes. “You need not worry about a thing. While you are expected for classes come Monday morning, I am quite positive that Severus is fully aware of what he is doing.”

Harry nodded. “Yes, sir.” He lifted his hand to the rest of his friends and family, before he was pulled into Madam Pomfrey’s office and floo’d directly into Severus’s private rooms. Harry then followed the man into the bedroom, and looked questioningly up at him. “There is the matter of diet, once this comes to pass...”

Severus smiled. “Of course. As we have a magical core, we must have food to sustain it. One goblet of blood with each meal, to start out with, will suffice. Although, you’ll be disappointed to know, that pumpkin juice tastes quite vile after the transformation.”

Harry laughed. “Pity.”

“Quite,” Severus replied. “You’ll soon only need one goblet of blood a day, but, depending upon how much magic you use, you may require more.”

“So, I can still eat roast chicken?” Harry wanted to know.

“Just raw,” Severus told him, and Harry looked horrified. “A joke, Harry,” he told him, and Harry
immediately breathed a sigh of relief. “All the foods you eat now you will likely be able to eat in future, although your tastes may change, yet it varies from transformation to transformation, you see.”

Harry swallowed. “And how long will the transformation take?” he asked.

“As you are a wizard, likely eighteen to twenty-four hours,” Severus explained. “When it is a Muggle transforming, however, the process takes two to three days, while a Squib would take twenty-four to thirty-six hours.”

“Will... Will it hurt?” Harry asked.

Severus sighed. “Yes, I am afraid so,” he replied. “The venom will attempt to burn at your vital organs before your magical core will propel it into its proper place.”

“And... Healing Spells and potions?” he queried.

Severus shook his head. “I am afraid my venom will merely burn them off, and they could potentially delay the process by a full day.”

Harry felt his brow pucker as he considered it for a few moments. “You will stay with me, won’t you?” he asked, his voice rising an octave.

Severus smiled at him and nodded, crossing the room to take Harry into his arms. “Yes, of course I will stay with you, Harry. Poppy has given me leave from brewing anything for the hospital wing this weekend, and Albus informed me that someone would be on hand to cover my classes if need be. Miss Granger has also been instructed to take notes for you, and to bring you your assignments in case it takes longer than expected.”

Harry laid his head on Severus’s chest. “Not like it’ll last forever, though, right?”

Severus chuckled, gently running his fingers through Harry’s hair. “I have yet to meet or hear about the person who had that experience.”

Harry bit at his lower lip then, slowly lifting his head and gazing up at Severus. “But you know as well as I do that I’ve always been the exception to every rule.”

Severus sighed. “Yes, perhaps so. But I will do everything in my power to ensure your comfort, Harry. We can put you to sleep for this...”

“No,” Harry said, shaking his head. “Please, don’t. I want to know you’re beside me. You... You can hold me, can’t you?”

Severus swallowed then, staring down at the beautiful man in his arms who was now his lawfully wedded husband for as long as they would both shall live. “Of course I can hold you, Harry. I will hold you for as long as you let me.”

“Thank you, Severus,” Harry whispered, burrowing closer into his arms.

Severus pressed a kiss to Harry’s head. “Always,” he replied.

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Severus painstakingly laid out Harry in the center of his four-poster bed—now belonging to both of them—which was done up with ebony wood, green velvet curtains, and a green velvet duvet with
matching sheets. He pressed a kiss to his forehead, and could feel Harry trembling ever so slightly at his touch. He decided that Harry must’ve been anxious—both nervous and excited—based upon his body language and the look within his eyes. He stroked the fringe of his hair back from his forehead, placing a kiss there, and staring down at him for several moments, as silence passed between the two of them.

“Are you ready?”

Harry nodded, his Adam’s apple bobbing briefly in his throat. “Yes,” he replied. “I’m ready, Severus, to complete the first part of my journey in my life with you.”

Severus leaned down and brushed his lips with Harry’s. “It will soon be over, love, and then we’ve got forever.”

Harry smiled. “And then we’ll defeat him, my love. Together.”


“I love you, too,” Harry told him.

Severus leaned down then and parted his lips, his breath hot upon Harry’s throat, as he slowly bared his fangs and sank them into the exposed flesh of Harry’s neck. He could feel Harry stiffening beneath him as the venom direct from Severus’s teeth made its way into his bloodstream, and his fingers gripped at the duvet beneath him, as a litany of discomfort escaped from his own lips. Pulling back, Severus gently took Harry’s right arm in his hand, and bit Harry upon his wrist there, before he did the same to his left wrist, and to the opposite side of Harry’s neck, once the second wrist was bitten.

“I love you,” Severus whispered, pressing kiss after kiss to Harry’s forehead, cheeks, and, finally, onto his lips. He enclosed Harry in his arms as the young man struggled against the transformation, crying out in pain every few moments. “I love you, my Harry, and I am so sorry that it had to be done this way.”

“Not...your...fault...Severus,” Harry managed to get out from between his clenched teeth. “I wanted...forever with...you. It had to be...this way...”

“Don’t speak, my love,” Severus whispered once more, and kissed his forehead again. “Save your strength for the transformation process. It has already begun.”

Harry nodded. “I love you,” he said softly.


Severus was relieved when Harry finally slipped into sleep, and the clock chimed midnight soon thereafter, therefore marking the sixteenth anniversary of Riddle’s attack on the Potter home in Godric’s Hollow. The very night in question filled Severus with a sickness that he knew would never truly go away. He had come to the conclusion long ago that he would never feel the same way about the night in question as Harry had. But he would strive to do Harry right as his husband, and made a promise to himself that he would tell Harry everything he ever wanted to know about Lily, and, now that they were married, he could keep him away from the very people meant to protect him, but had failed so miserably.

Severus himself soon slipped into a fitful sleep, although at every movement or sound emitting from Harry, he was suddenly jarred awake. Harry had broken out into a cold sweat, which was entirely normal for the transformation process. Severus quickly summoned a damp flannel from
the attached bathroom of the master bedroom, and placed it upon Harry’s head, which soon seemed
to calm him down. Severus brought him deeper into his embrace, quite content to hold on tightly to
his mate as his body temperature dropped, knowing that such a thing would be a common
occurrence once it had done, for the vampire’s body ran about five degrees cooler than that of a
human.

“Merlin,” Severus muttered under his breath, soon after dawn broke, as there was a knock upon his
bedroom door. Pressing a brief kiss onto Harry’s forehead, he gently eased him back onto the bed
and fluffed the bolster before tucking him in. Muttering to himself, he left the bedroom and made
his way to the door, opening it, and glaring at Albus, who stood there. “What is it now, old man?”
he demanded of him.

“And good morning to you as well, Severus,” Albus replied brightly, almost as if Severus had been
just as cheery, and invited himself into Severus’s rooms without being asked. “I’ve come to inquire
about Harry.”

“Harry is quite all right,” Severus said, crossing his arms.

“Is he now?” Albus asked conversationally.

“The transformation process has been going on for about seven and a half hours now,” Severus
told him, his tone clipped.

“How marvelous,” Albus replied, clasping his hands. “And what stage is he at now?”

“He has completed the cold sweats and has moved onto freezing temperatures overall,” the potions
master informed the headmaster. “I tucked him into bed, ensured his was comfortable, and put
Warming Charms upon my bedroom.”

“Excellent,” Albus said, nodding in approval. “Well, I assume that the visions will begin in due
course, which I am sure you remember very well.”

“Indeed,” Severus replied, desperately wanting the conversation to be over. He absolutely hated
leaving Harry to fend for himself, for the young man was indeed the exception to every rule. He
was already at least halfway, if not more, through the transformation process, and he didn’t want
not to be there, in case he missed anything.

“Well, I shall permit you to carry on, then,” Albus said, moving to take his leave. “Bill Weasley
will be taking over your classes today, Severus.”

Severus nodded; Bill Weasley was certainly one of the more capable potioners out of the seven
Weasley children, although young Miss Weasley was certainly more than competent, despite her
young age. “Gringotts will not miss him for the day?”

Albus shook his head. “I should think not, although Miss Delacour may believe otherwise. He’s
already considering marriage to her, you know.”

Severus arched an eyebrow. “No, I’d not heard. She is a most brilliant witch, and I assume she will
make him a most happy man.”

“We can all hope, Severus,” Albus replied, giving him a smile. “Feel free to order whatever you
like from the kitchens. I assume you will be feeling hungry eventually.”

Severus was relieved once the headmaster had left, breathing a sigh of relief as he moved back into
the master bedroom. He saw that Harry was still then, having gone to the in-between period of
altogether shivering and the visions—that of calmness. Knowing it would not last long, he made his way into the bathroom, and took a quick shower, his mind entirely on Harry, knowing that he had to get back to his side at once. Once the absolutions were complete, he placed a quick Drying Charm upon himself and returned to the master bedroom, and climbed into bed beside Harry, holding him tightly in his arms.

“Sev’rus,” Harry whispered, his voice barely audible. “Sev’rus, we’ve...got to go.”

“Harry?” Severus asked, lifting his head and staring down at the boy. “What are you talking about? Where would we go?”

“Somewhere safe,” he managed to get out. “We’ve got to get out of here.”

“Why do we have to get out of here, Harry?”

“They’re coming!” Harry suddenly shouted, seemingly fully prepared to launch himself from the bed, and attempted to tear himself out of Severus’s arms. “Death Eaters... They’re marching upon the castle, Severus! All by his orders! They’re—!”

Severus promptly moved to shush and calm Harry, and pressed a kiss to his lips. “You’ve nothing to worry about, my love,” Severus told him gently. “This is a mere vision, brought on by the venom mixing with your blood. It clouds your senses for a brief period, making you believe falsehoods about the world. I assure you, my love, we’re plenty safe here.”

But Harry still struggled within his arms, refusing to believe any of it. “But they’re coming, Severus! We’ve got to evacuate the castle! We’ve got—!”

“Harry, my love, please hear me,” Severus told him, his tone patient. “I, too, had unsavory visions during my own transformation process. I assure you that there is nothing to worry about, nothing at all. Nobody is marching upon the castle, and so there is no need for evacuation. Last I heard, Riddle is hiding somewhere in the North Countries, somewhere in Yorkshire, a good seven or so hours away from us. His forces, while some have managed to breakout of Azkaban, are slowly being hunted down and thwarted, or captured altogether. You need not worry about a thing, my love,” Severus assured him, and moved back his fringe, from where it was sticking to his forehead. “Another few hours of this, and the transformation will be complete.”

Harry wanted to believe Severus; he wanted to believe him so badly. He had managed to convince himself via Severus’s words, and the last of the rational within him, that the visions weren’t real, and, finally, they passed altogether. The next phase, according to Hermione, was that of the burning, wherein Severus’s venom would burn away the paths of his blood, thus replacing them entirely. This process could take anywhere from three to six hours, and Harry, although used to it now, was not looking forward to the pain.

The burning began about an hour after the visions had ended, and Harry’s head was only taken up with the knowledge of pain, the feeling of pain, and the aftermath of pain. He gritted his teeth and struggled to get comfortable in Severus’s bed—his bed, too, he reminded himself—and tried to think of good things. Severus rescuing him from Slughorn’s clutches was one; another was all his good times at the Burrow; and yet another was the first time he and Severus had kissed. He thought about more with the man, on the physical side of things, and envisioned how truly wonderful it would all be. He imagined what life would be like, once Riddle was finally defeated once and for all, and how he and Severus could find someplace to call their own, where they could have a family, and just live in peace.

Harry’s eyes snapped open then as the burning sensation suddenly roared to an inferno, and a small
scream escaped his lips before he could call it back. “Make it stop,” he begged, his voice shaking as he trembled in Severus’s arms. “I want it to stop…”

“I know, my love, I know,” Severus assured him, holding him close and pressing kiss after kiss to his forehead, cheeks, and jawline, which served as a worthy distraction. “It won’t be long now, as it has been over two hours…”

Two hours? Harry thought to himself. Well, Luna had certainly been correct when she had informed him that you truly did lose all sense of time... “What... What happens after the burning is over with, Severus?”

“Sleep,” Severus told him.

Harry gave him a strange look. “But... You said you wouldn’t...”

“No, Harry, and I will not, per your request,” Severus assured him. “You fall into a deep sleep, which will last anywhere from three to seven hours. When you awaken, that is when the transformation will be complete.”

Harry swallowed. “It will?”

Severus smiled. “Yes, my love, it will. You’ve come through this entire thing beautifully, and I am so proud of you.”

Harry trembled slightly in Severus’s arms. “But... But what if you don’t...?”

“What, Harry?”

“What if you don’t like me, once I’m a vampire?” he asked, his voice shaking, almost as if that, in that moment, was his greatest fear, which, he supposed, it was.

“I could never not like you, Harry. I love you,” Severus told him. “Once you are transformed, and you are truly well enough, I will show you just how much.”

Harry felt his cheeks flush then, and it wasn’t just the pain from the burning, which still ebbed and flowed from within him. “I look forward to it,” he told him.

“Cheeky brat,” Severus said, his tone indulgent as he pressed another kiss onto Harry’s forehead, and held him closer than he’d ever done before.

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Once Harry had slipped into sleep about an hour and a half after the burning had subsided, Severus eased himself out of Harry’s arms and moved to the front room of his chambers. It was close to five in the afternoon, and he was amazed at how quickly Harry had come through the transformation. If all went according to plan, it would all be complete between eight that night and one that morning. Severus made his way towards the kitchen in his rooms, and made himself a sandwich—pastrami on marble rye, with a generous helping of mustard—which he ate quickly, not wanting Harry to be left alone for too long. After washing his hands and spelling his plate and knife to wash itself, he went over to the small table where his post was, and looked through the letters left there.

Many were from Hogwarts staff—Filius, Pomona, Hagrid, Sybill, and Aurora, most notably—who congratulated him on his marriage to Harry. Hagrid had sent over a package with his rock cakes, although Severus didn’t think that he or Harry would be eating them, but he did make a mental
note to send a ‘thank you’ note to each of them. Thankfully, the latest *Daily Profit* or *The Quibbler* hadn’t reported on the nuptials, which means that both Severus and Harry had more time to consider what they would do, once it became public knowledge. Riddle would likely see right through his spy game, so the sooner Harry’s own *Appare Vestigium* was defeated by Severus’s venom, the better.

Once he had sifted through the entirety of his mail, he noticed that Hermione had sent along a copy of her notes to Harry, plus all the assignments he’d missed that day. Severus would ask that Harry be given an extension, for even he didn’t know how long his mate’s recovery period would ultimately turn out to be. *Being Harry*, he reasoned as he set the final piece of homework aside and made his way back to the master bedroom, it could be a long or a short one.

Severus shut the door of the master bedroom behind him and moved to slip into bed beside Harry once again, folding his mate into his arms and pressing a kiss to his forehead. Once the warmth and the scent which was unmistakably Harry surrounded him, Severus felt the sensation of his eyes growing heavy, and he himself succumbed to sleep as well. It was only when he felt as if night had fallen once again, and the Hogwarts clock chimed midnight that his eyes came open automatically, and he lit the candle beside his bed. Turning around then, his jaw dropped at the sight which greeted him.

“Severus,” Harry said, and smiled up at him. Harry’s skin was completely unblemished, and it was a beautiful pale color, close to Severus’s own. His eyes were much more intense, and were shining as they never had before. If one looked closely, one could see a red tinge just around the edges, and when he smiled, his fangs shone brightly from betwixt those beautiful cherry-colored lips of his.

“Harry...” His mind snapping back to reality, Severus bolted upright in the bed, and called for Dobby immediately, who arrived, carrying a red goblet, studded with rubies. “Thank you,” he said to him.

Dobby nodded, wiggling his ears. “Dobby is happy to serve Master Severus and great Master Harry Potter!” he squeaked, before he vanished with a sudden crack.

Severus turned back to Harry and handed over the goblet. “Drink,” he said.

Harry inhaled the goblet then and shuddered with delight, the red around his eyes coming out to play, as he tipped the goblet to his lips and drank deeply. The color slowly returned to his cheeks and he suddenly appeared more lively, as he finished the goblet and handed it back over to Severus, before he pounced on his husband.

“Yes?” Severus asked, raising an eyebrow at him.

“I... I want to...”

Severus grinned. “It would be my pleasure,” he replied, before grabbing ahold of Harry’s wrists and promptly pinning him to the mattress, feeling complete at the sensation of his mate in his arms. Just as he bent to kiss Harry’s lips, a sudden knock on his outer chamber door startled him from his prey, and he dipped his head. “Dammit,” he muttered.

“Come on,” Harry said, moving to get out of bed, and pulled on a pair of sleep pants, plus a lose-fitting Chudley Cannons T-shirt. “Perks of being married to the Boy Who Lived means that your social calendar and circle of friends has increased two-fold.”

“Mr. Potter,” Severus said, rolling his eyes as he moved towards the door.
Harry dashed forward then and caught Severus around the middle, somehow managing to turn him around, and grinned impishly up at him. “That’s Mr. Potter-Snape, if you must use formalities, Severus,” he grinned.

Severus’s eyes widened. “You... You would...”

“Happily,” Harry declared, standing on his toes and kissing him. “Now, come on,” he said, opening the chamber door and yanking Severus after him. “We’ve got forever, now, don’t we? I should think one little interruption won’t hurt anything.”

“Not yet,” Severus muttered, but moved after his mate to answer the door.
Severus couldn’t help but smile as Harry squeezed his hand one last time before he rushed ahead of him, practically bouncing in his excitement to answer the door. Upon opening it, he drew back at the unexpected sight of Remus, Tonks, Albus, Minerva, Molly, Arthur, Ron, and Hermione standing there. Severus put a hand upon Harry’s shoulder, and gently drew him back to his side; the protection in vampires ran deep, and Severus was no exception to that rule.

“To what do we owe the pleasure?” Severus asked, and Ron immediately looked away from him, while Hermione blushed, both sixth-years easily figuring out his less-than-calm demeanor. “It is rather early for socializing...”

“Severus, this conversation would be better-suited inside,” Albus said pragmatically, and Severus rolled his eyes, but nevertheless ushered in the uninvited guests with a nod, and moved with Harry to an armchair beside the fire, and gently pulled Harry into his lap, which the young man didn’t seem to mind; in fact, he snuggled closer to his husband.

“This will not be a delicate conversation,” Minerva said gravely, and nodded to Ron, who drew something out of his pocket, which Hermione un-shrunk immediately. “Please give the paper to Severus, Mr. Weasley.”

Ron nodded, squeezing Hermione’s hand for a moment before he crossed the room, blushing red to his ears at the sight of his best friend in their potion professor’s arms, and handed over the paper to the two of them. “Sorry, mate,” he said to Harry, before he re-joined Hermione on the couch, where Albus and Minerva sat on her other side.

“What’s this about?” Harry asked as Severus unfolded the morning’s edition of *The Daily Profit*, which had likely only just hit the stands before breakfast.

In bold script upon the first page, were the words, *Death Eater Marries Boy-Who-Lived in Secret Ceremony*, and Harry felt a chill up his spine. He turned and looked at Severus, who remained impassive for the moment, although he suddenly shook with anger. Before Harry could read the article—which was published by none other than Rita Skeeter—Severus had thrown the rag into the fireplace beside them. Harry immediately ran his fingers through Severus’s hair in an attempt to calm him, unsure of what else to do.

“We’ve already given Veritaserum to everyone who was present at the ceremony,” Tonks told Harry softly, from where she was perched upon the arm of the chair opposite, holding tightly to Remus’s hand. “None of the parties sold you out, Harry, you can be assured of that.”

“None of this makes any sense,” Molly said, shaking her head as she began pacing back and forth through the small living room. “I don’t understand who would do such a thing. Naturally, we thought it was Draco, but...”

“But due to his love for Ginny,” Arthur said, cutting across his wife from where he stood beside the fireplace, his hand resting upon the mantlepiece, “we knew it couldn’t have been him and, even when questioned, he did not waver in his story.”

“It’s perfectly reasonable to assume how it was done,” Hermione said, her tone biting, as Ron
placed an arm around her shoulders.

“Miss Granger?” Albus asked.

Hermione sighed. “Perhaps you should learn to ask questions a bit better, sir,” she said carefully, and rolled her shoulders. “Rita Skeeter is an unregistered Animagus.”

Minerva paled at that. “Well, that certainly would explain things.”

“What form does she take, Miss Granger?” Albus asked.

“A beetle,” Hermione replied, her nose wrinkling in disgust. “I found out after the tournament at the end of fourth-year. “Kept her in a jar, too. However, when I did finally let her out, I made her promise not to write false stories about Harry anymore.”

“Apparently, the promise had an expiration date,” Harry muttered disdainfully.

Albus sighed. “Well, there’s not much else to be done. Severus, your spying days for the Light are over.”

Severus straightened in the chair he shared with Harry. “But, Albus...”

“Now, now, Severus, Riddle won’t take too kindly to this news, and if something befalls you, Harry could be in grave danger,” Albus said, cutting across him. “Now, the plan of action will be for the two of you to go into hiding as soon as possible.”

“Hiding?” Harry demanded. “But Hogwarts is the safest place...”

“Honestly, mate,” Ron said, interrupting Harry. “Where’s the first place You-Know-Who will go looking for either of you?”

“Ron’s right, Harry,” Hermione said gently. “It would be best if the two of you fled, once loose ends are tied up.”

“Loose ends?” Severus queried.

“Miss Granger has agreed to tutor Harry in his NEWT’s, which Harry will then sit for this Friday evening,” Albus explained. “We’ve no idea how long you and Severus must remain in hiding, Harry, and the sooner your magical education is complete, the better.”

“Bill has arranged for time off from Gringotts,” Arthur went on, “until a more suitable replacement for your classes can be found, Severus. If you would give him your instructor’s notes between now and Friday, that would be wonderful.”

“And Lupin Lodge has been made available to you,” Remus said, speaking for the first time; he looked exhausted, and Harry was worried about him.

“Lupin Lodge?” Harry asked.

“My family home, located on the cliffs of Cornwall,” Remus explained. “It’s under the Fidelus, and the only other people who knew about its particular location were my parents, your parents, and Sirius.”

“Not Peter?” Harry wanted to know, knowing full well that the rat could easily leak out the locations’ information to Riddle.
“No,” Remus replied. “Only five living people at a time could be keyed into the wards. Albus is now keyed in, plus myself and Tonks, which just leaves the two of you to be keyed in. I’ll provide you with a Portkey to leave on Friday around nine o’clock, four hours after Harry is due to finish his NEWTs.”

“And nobody will find us?” Harry pressed.

Remus smiled. “Muggles frequently go around there, due to it appearing as the ruins of Tintagel Castle,” he explained. “However, they will find themselves growing bored of the fortification within ten or fifteen minutes, and they always leave well enough alone, never bypassing the wards in any way.”

Severus sighed, and Harry moved to rest his head upon his shoulder. “And what about the potions that Poppy will inevitably need for the infirmary?”

“Bill has been brewing them,” Molly said with a pleased smile.

Severus swallowed then, considering what it would be like to have Harry to himself. “And what about Riddle?” he asked. “Now that he knows about my status as a spy, there’s no telling what he could do...”

“We think that he wants me, Severus,” Albus said gravely. “He won’t stop until he gets to me, for he initially believes that I block the way to his recruitment or execution of Harry.”

“No,” Severus said quickly, tightening his arms around Harry without hesitation. “I won’t permit that to happen, Albus. I won’t.”

Albus nodded. “I know you will not, my boy. However, we cannot take any chances. Miss Granger,” he went on, turning to Hermione. “Your tutoring sessions with Harry will commence forthwith. From now until Friday, you are excused from your classes, and someone will be on hand to take notes and collect your assignments for you. Mr. Weasley, if anyone asks, you are to say that Hermione has come down with a mild case of Dragon Pox, but is highly contagious and in the hospital wing.”

“Sir, what if they ask about Harry?” Ron wanted to know.

“Ah, yes, and they will likely account for Severus’s absence as well,” Albus said, stroking his beard thoughtfully. “No matter. You will say that Severus and Harry are taking a honeymoon, which was approved by me, and that you know nothing else.”

Minerva pursed her lips. “But, Albus, with Draco now living in Severus’s rooms, he’s bound to see the comings and goings of both Severus and Harry...”

“No,” Severus said quickly, tightening his arms around Harry without hesitation. “I won’t permit that to happen, Albus. I won’t.”

Albus nodded. “I know you will not, my boy. However, we cannot take any chances. Miss Granger,” he went on, turning to Hermione. “Your tutoring sessions with Harry will commence forthwith. From now until Friday, you are excused from your classes, and someone will be on hand to take notes and collect your assignments for you. Mr. Weasley, if anyone asks, you are to say that Hermione has come down with a mild case of Dragon Pox, but is highly contagious and in the hospital wing.”

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Minerva pursed her lips. “But, Albus, with Draco now living in Severus’s rooms, he’s bound to see the comings and goings of both Severus and Harry...”

“Severus will remain in either his private lab or his bedroom during the hours when Draco is going to be coming and going,” Albus replied pragmatically. “And as for Harry and Miss Granger, they may use the Room of Requirement for their studies. The only professors who will know that Harry has remained in school will be Hagrid, Professor Flitwick, Remus, Professor Sprout, Severus, and Minerva. Of course, Bill will be the one giving you your potion’s NEWT, Harry, for as Severus is your husband, his marking yours would be inappropriate.”

“Better keep Hagrid away from the Firewhiskey, then,” Ron muttered, and Hermione elbowed him in the ribs, to which he squawked, “Oi!”

“Ronald Bilius Weasley!” Molly said, her voice sounding identical to that of the Howler she had sent him in second-year.
“What?” Ron cried out, rubbing his side, which had proved to be smarting. “Hagrid’ll blab to the first person at The Leaky that Harry took his NEWTs early...”

“A very smart presumption, Mr. Weasley,” Albus said, and Harry had to hide his smile as Severus rolled his eyes. “I suppose we shall have to Obliviate Hagrid as soon as Harry has taken his exam. I hate to do it to him, but we must ensure your safety, my boy.”

Harry sighed. “All right, then,” he said, turning to look at Hermione. “I suppose it’s time to hit the books, then?”


~*~

Draco paced around the edges of the lake, which had frost around its outer edges; it was early November now, and the coldness of Scotland was threatening to seep into his bones. He pulled his fur-lined winter cloak around his shoulders, which Hermione had put Sizing Charms on, for he could hardly go back to the manor, or write to his mother, requesting a new one. Ron had, surprisingly, shown Draco what he did for workout routines, and while they were decidedly a bit Muggle, Draco had flourished for the past few weeks, which had driven the whole thing about having the Dark Lord’s essence inside of him. His shoulders had filled out quite nicely, and he had even grown a good two or three inches since term had begun.

“Draco?” Ginny called out from behind him, and Draco turned around at the sound of her voice, watching as she made her way down the footpath. Her hair was covered by earmuffs, and she was wearing a thick green jumper and matching mittens, likely made by her mother. Her brown boots caused the frostbitten ground to crack slightly as she approached, and Draco thought about how beautiful she looked, with her face flushed like that.

“Gin,” Draco said, automatically drawing her closer, and pulled her up against him, and pressed his lips hungrily to hers, which caused Ginny to mewl ever so slightly into his mouth, and push her body up against his.

“Draco,” Ginny whispered, her tone filled with hunger as his lips descended to her neck, and nibbled ever so slightly upon her jawline. “Sorry I’m late...”

“Forget it,” Draco replied, nuzzling her neck.

Ginny giggled. “What’s gotten into you today?” she asked, although she made no moves to complain about his treatment.

“Ginny, I need you to promise me something,” he whispered, and pulled back, looking into those beautiful brown eyes of hers.

“Anything,” she whispered, understanding the seriousness of his voice.

Giving a cursory glance to the terrain around them, Draco put up a strong Silencing Charm, before he turned back to look at her. “Harry and Severus are going to be leaving the castle by Friday night,” Draco whispered to her.

“Leaving?” she whispered. “Because of what Skeeter wrote?”

“That’s part of it,” Draco whispered, his arms wrapped tightly around Ginny’s waist. “Riddle is going to be after the two of them inevitably, and Hogwarts isn’t seen as safe, for it’s seen as an obvious hiding place.”
Ginny nodded, looking concerned for the two of them. “Naturally, it’s where You-Know-Who would look first, if someone affiliated with the school displeased him,” she said, and immediately held tightly onto Draco. “But what does that mean for you? Is he going to be coming after you as well?”

“No,” Draco replied, shaking his head. “I... I made a deal with him.”

“A deal?!?” Ginny demanded, looking fearful. “What did you...?!”

“I signed over my inheritance to him,” Draco said simply. “It was an easy price, money for freedom. I hope to Merlin that he keeps it.”

Ginny shook her head then, throwing her arms around Draco and kissing him for all he was worth, trembling in his arms. “I won’t let you go,” she whispered. “I can’t, Draco. I won’t. I love you so much...”

“I promise, Gin, I won’t go anywhere unwillingly...”

Ginny swallowed, slowly letting herself down from Draco’s arms, and looking up at him with tear-filled eyes. “Please don’t hate me...”

Draco blinked, staring down at her and shaking his head. “I don’t understand. I would never hate you, Ginevra Weasley. I love you.”

Ginny gripped her lower lip in between her teeth, and found that she couldn’t stop the tears which flowed out of her eyes. “There’s a reason that I was late...”

“Gin?” Draco asked, lifting a hand and gently wiping away her tears. “Whatever it is, we’ll figure it out together...”

“I went to see Madam Pomfrey,” Ginny said quickly, her voice shaking, just as her body was, from the sheer nerves of what she had to say to Draco. “I’ve been feeling ill lately, and I’ve hardly been able to keep anything down...”

“Is it Wizard’s Flu?” Draco asked, smiling down at her, and pushing himself closer. “I don’t mind you infecting me, Gin. Doesn’t bother me...”

“I’m pregnant,” Ginny said, continuing to tremble in Draco’s arms, unknowingly how her boyfriend would react to such a revelation.

Draco felt his eyes widening then. “And...it’s...?”

“You don’t even need to ask, Draco—of course it’s yours,” she said, slightly annoyed that he would even ask such a question. “Dean and I only snogged—I never found that I was ready to jump into bed with him. But with you... I can’t explain it. I needed you...”


“Five or six weeks,” Ginny replied, hunching her shoulders. “It was right after I visited you in the hospital wing, and we just sort of...”

“Lost control, I remember,” Draco said. “Before that, I hadn’t...”

“Neither had I,” Ginny told him, feeling slightly relieved that she hadn’t been the only virgin between the two of them. “So... What do we do now?” she asked.
“Do you want the baby?” he asked.

Ginny nodded. “I do, but not if you...”

“Of course I want the baby, Ginny,” Draco assured her and, as he had been taught to do from childhood if he ever found himself in this situation, he took ahold of her hand and got down on bended knee. “Ginevra Molly Weasley, will you marry me?”

Ginny’s mouth fell open. “Draco, I don’t want you to propose to me just because we’re going to have a...”

Draco promptly reached into his pocket and drew out a box, which he promptly opened, revealing a platinum band with a striking circular emerald, which boasted small circular diamonds on each side. “I was actually going to propose at Christmas, and I know it’s soon, but there’s going to be a war on anytime now,” he said, flushing to the roots of his hair. “I got this in Hogsmeade over the weekend...”

“Yes!” Ginny shouted then, and threw herself at Draco, sending the pair of them to the ground and kissing his face over and over again. “Of course I’ll marry you, Draco Malfoy!”

Draco grinned up at her, slipping the ring onto her correct finger, before he took her face into his hands. “I love you,” he whispered.

Ginny smiled down at him, and Draco thought that she looked breathtaking in that moment. “I love you, too,” she replied, and leaned down to kiss him repeatedly. “I suppose now all that has to happen is to plan for this baby, and for my brothers to potentially hunt you down to destroy you about deflowering and impregnating their only sister...”

Draco pulled back from Ginny, looking fearful. “They won’t actually do that, would they?” he demanded of her.

Ginny grinned. “Oh, I’m sure a fair few will. But they’ll be on the receiving end of the Bat-Bogey Hex if they so much attempt to come near the father of my child...”

Draco reached up then, cupping the back of Ginny’s neck and pulling her down towards his lips again, hardly bothered by the cold ground beneath him.

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Harry took his invisibility cloak out of his bag after the lunch-hour on Friday; he had spent over three hours that morning working on his NEWT studying with Hermione, and his mind was about to burst. Thankfully, his examinations were that afternoon, which he was both looking forward to and dreading all at once. He requested that the room grant him safe passage to Professor Flitwick’s classroom for his charms NEWT, and knew that, in a matter of hours, he would, technically, be free to be with his husband.

It was a daunting experience, having a husband, for the bond itself had not technically been completed. What with the rigorous study schedule provided by Hermione, and the hours he spent with her in the Room of Requirement, they’d hardly had a moment alone together. Severus had been busy instructing Bill on the direction he wished the varying years of potions classes to go, and had been brewing around-the-clock for Poppy in the hospital wing. As such, they only had a few moments together in the morning or at night, but Severus promised that, upon the arrival at Lupin Lodge, they would be completing the bond through consummation.

Harry attempted to remember everything that Hermione had gone over with him for the next few
hours of the afternoon and, as the Hogwarts clock chimed five, Harry filled in the final answer on his Transfiguration NEWT. Minerva praised him for finishing his examinations on such short notice, although something in her own green eyes filled Harry with trepidation. As she summoned his exam into the pile to be marked, Harry wrapped his Gryffindor scarf around his neck and slowly stepped forward.

“Is everything all right, professor?” he asked.

The woman sighed, warmth radiating on her face despite said trepidation. “I know that both you and Severus are fully capable of protecting one another, Harry. However, I cannot help but worry about the eventual outcome.”

“As you said, professor, we’ll be protecting one another,” Harry told her gently. “I know that this is a frightening and uncertain time, but I know that we’re doing the right thing.”

Minerva nodded, reaching out and squeezing Harry’s shoulder. “I sense that all will be well, once the two of you get to where you need to go.”

Harry smiled at her. “Thank you, professor,” he said, lifting a hand to her, before he summoned his cloak out of his pocket and draped it over himself. Leaving the Transfiguration classroom as quickly as he dared, Harry promptly made his way down to the dungeons, where he and Severus would spend the next several hours packing, and having a light supper before the headmaster brought them their Portkey. The password let Harry into Severus’s rooms, and he immediately took off the cloak upon entering.

“Harry,” Severus said, and let out an indulgent chuckle as his mate rushed forward, and threw himself into his arms. “Well, I take it by that entrance that you missed me.”

“Terribly,” Harry replied, nuzzling into Severus’s neck. “I did my best on my NEWTs, Severus, but I make no guarantees.”

Severus pressed a kiss to Harry’s forehead. “I am sure you made out excellently, my love. Now, come. We’ve got to get some supper into us before we commence with the packing.”

Harry walked over to the small table beside the kitchenette, which had been made ready for the two of them that evening. Harry inhaled at the sight of steaks, jacket potatoes, roasted vegetables on their respective plates, with goblets of wine beside them. Taking off his bag and tossing it onto the couch, Harry went over to his customary chair, and proceeded to place his napkin into his lap, and lifted up his knife and fork.

“Albus should be along no later than forty-five minutes past eight o’clock to deliver us the Portkey to take us to Cornwall, along with others to give us a proper send-off,” Severus said with a quick smile at his mate. “Now, tell me, if you like, how your exams went.”

Harry, who had already taken a bite of his meal, slowly placed his knife and fork down. “I guess you could say I impressed Remus in Defense Against the Dark Arts.”

Severus arched an eyebrow. “Oh, yes? How?”

“He brought out a Dementor via a Boggart, and I had to perform my Patronus Charm on it for my practical examination,” Harry replied.

Severus, who had been methodically chewing a carrot, forced himself to swallow the vegetation and too lowered his utensils. “Am I to assume that your Patronus has changed?”
Harry nodded. “Yes. Prongs is no more.”

“I didn’t want to alarm you, but mine has changed as well,” Severus told him, and Harry looked up at him. “Would you like to see it?”

Harry nodded. “Yes,” he whispered.

Severus smiled at his mate before he drew his wand without hesitation. “*Expecto Patronum,*” he said, waving his wand in the proper motion, and the great lion came triumphantly out of its tip, gazing at Harry and Severus for a moment, before it turned tail and darted through the door. “I call him Alexander,” Severus explained, smiling.

Harry, not wanting to be left out of all the fun, drew his own wand. “*Expecto Patronum,*” he said quickly, and his wand glowed a brilliant silver light before the creature took shape. Instead of the stag, which he had had since third-year, a brilliant and lithe beast came forth, taking the form of a black panther.

Severus drew back at the sight of it. “Sweet Circe,” he whispered, watching intently as the big cat regarded the pair of them for a moment, before it too slipped out the door.

“I call her Valentina,” Harry told him.

Although he desperately wanted to knock their supper to the ground and ravage Harry atop the small table, Severus knew full well that his mate deserved better than that for their first time. He merely stroked the younger man’s hand while they ate, before they indulged in some chocolate gateau and treacle tart for their pudding, and then made their way towards the master bedroom. It did not take long to organize their respective belongings, and Shrinking Spells were used more than once to accommodate everything, but, quite soon, the packing was done, and Severus had even shrunk down the bed, for he’d bought it himself, and couldn’t bear to leave the thing behind for another professor to use.

Albus arrived at promptly eight-forty-five, along with Remus, Tonks, Molly, Arthur, Ron, Hermione, Ginny, Draco, Neville, Luna, Dobby, and Winky to say goodbye. Harry was hugged from all sides, and laughingly promised to figure out how to stay in touch. Gazing at the cage which held Hedwig, Harry remembered Sirius informing him how recognizable she was, so he thought that owl post was decidedly out.

It came as a surprise for Harry to see Hermione, Luna, Tonks, and Winky gathered around a blushing Ginny, who boasted a beautiful emerald ring on her finger. Ron, meanwhile, was staring daggers at Draco, who looked equally nervous as he spoke to Molly and Arthur, the former of whom was crying, while the latter clasped Draco in a good-natured manner upon the shoulder. Neville had gone to stand beside Ron, who kept muttering and looking towards Draco, calling him “a slick git”, while Dobby held tightly to Ron’s legs, and Harry couldn’t even begin to fathom what had gone on.

“Ginny has announced her pregnancy,” Remus told Harry softly as Severus and Albus discussed the Portkey that he and Harry would have to take that evening. “Draco subsequently proposed to her in the aftermath.”

“He didn’t just because she’s expecting, did he?” Harry demanded.

Remus smiled at Harry. “No, he didn’t. According to Hermione, he had the ring in his possession already, but he was intending to wait until Christmas.”
“She’s fifteen, he’s sixteen,” Harry said, looking back and forth between them.

“You married at sixteen, Harry,” Remus reminded him.

Harry sighed, dragging a hand through his hair. “Yes, I suppose I did, didn’t I?”

After a final round of hugs and further promises to stay in touch, Albus escorted Harry and Severus outside the castle gates and the wards, just up the hill from Hogsmeade. Just as they passed through them, Albus handed over a weather-beaten spoon as their Portkey, and smiled at the two of them.

“Ready, my boys?” he asked.

Severus put an arm around Harry’s shoulders. “Yes.”

Harry nodded, leaning into Severus. “Ready.”

“Very well, my boys,” the headmaster said, pointing his wand at the spoon. “Portus,” he said quietly, and a bright blue light came forth from the tip of his wand, causing the spoon to take on the same hue.

Harry gripped tightly onto Severus then, as they mutually felt the yanking behind their navels, and spun around, disappearing from Hogwarts. Harry, who had been holding Severus around the middle, somehow managed not to fall upon their arrival, and his nose was assaulted with the scent of the sea, and his ears with the crashing of waves upon rocks. Opening his eyes, he grinned upwards at Severus, who smiled back, before taking him by the hand and leading him towards Lupin Lodge.

Harry could see the ruins that Remus had indicated as Tintagel Castle but, once they passed through the wards, a beautiful patch of land awaited them. An impressive stone wall was built around the entirety of the property, while lush grass was just inside the black iron gate. A stone path led from the gate itself to the front door of the place, made out of gray-stone, which looked like a cottage straight out of a fairy tale.

Severus and Harry immediately pressed their hands into the door, and the wards seemed to accept them almost immediately. Once inside, the beautiful entryway seemed altogether welcoming, and Severus and Harry immediately hung up their cloaks upon the pegs provided to the two of them. Severus shut the door behind him, and Harry looked to the left of the entryway, which boasted an informal living room, while the right had a formal dining room. Down the hallway proved to be the library, formal parlor, and back entrance, leading directly to the twelve acres of gardens that Severus had expressed an interest in.

Peering over his shoulder at Severus, Harry grinned at him before he charged for the massive staircase just opposite them. Severus felt something akin to lust and desire flowing through him at the picture that Harry painted, arse perfect as he went up the stairs as quickly as he dared. It didn’t take long for Severus to move to follow him, and found him in the master bedroom, which seemed perfect, were it not missing a bed. Without missing a beat, Severus summoned the bed he had brought from his own master bedroom, and reverted it to its original size.

Harry then stripped of all his clothes, and Severus felt his cock jumping and literally rising for the occasion at the display. He slowly began to strip as well, and advanced upon the bed, climbing atop his mate. Nobody was there to touch him but Severus and, after weeks and weeks of waiting for this moment, it was finally upon them. Severus could finally, once and for all, claim his young vampire mate, and he was slightly pleased at the notion that no one could knock on their door—within reason—and demand their presence in some way, shape or form.
“Are you all right?” Severus whispered to Harry.

Harry nodded, arching slightly so as their skin touched. “More than,” came the reply.

“What do you want?” Severus asked quietly.

Harry bit down hard on his lower lip, his face flushing. “It’s silly…”

Severus reached down then, gently easing Harry’s chin up, so as the younger man would have to look at him. “Tell me, my love.”

Harry swallowed. “I was jealous, when I heard about Ginny’s pregnancy tonight,” he whispered, feeling altogether ashamed of himself.

Severus nodded. “Do you wish for me to make you pregnant, Harry?”

Harry sighed, before he wound his arms around Severus’s neck. “Yes,” he confessed, before he buried his face into Severus’s shoulder.

Severus gently eased his mate backwards, and pressed his lips to his. “Nothing would make me happier than to grant your wish, Harry James Potter,” he told him.

Harry grinned cheekily up at his husband, all nervousness forgotten. “That’s Harry James Potter-Snape to you, Severus,” he replied, and smacked Severus’s arse.

Severus’s eyes darkened at the movement and pleasure which his mate had elicited from him, and subsequently pinned Harry firmly down onto the mattress, and felt the spark of delight form within him when his mate’s heartbeat fluttered beneath him. “Touché,” he replied, and leaned down to kiss him.

Chapter End Notes

*Tintagel Castle is indeed a fortification/ruined castle-like area located in Cornwall
*I based Lupin Lodge on Butterfield House, located in Watergate Bay, Cornwall
Harry arched automatically upwards into the kiss Severus bestowed upon him, firmly believing that he had never been happier in his life than he did in that moment. Although their main goal, in however long a time the pair of them would have to remain in hiding, was to fully complete the bond between them, Harry knew that they could easily have some fun as well. And as Severus deepened the kiss, tasting him, Harry felt his erection forming between them almost automatically, and a small moan escaped from his lips before he could call it back.

Severus pulled back from Harry then and stared down at him, and Harry felt his face flushing automatically at the intensity of his mate’s stare. “Don’t hide from me, Harry.”


“Don’t feel the need to deliberately silence yourself,” Severus said patiently, gently running a hand up and down Harry’s naked side. “I want to hear you.”

“You... You want to hear me?” Harry whispered, his brows coming together at that. “Why would you want to...?”

“Because it lets me know what you like. We may have forever, but I always like being right the first time,” Severus told him gently, leaning down and gently sucking on his neck, and Harry practically purred at the sensations which flowed through him at the sensation of Severus’s lips on a particularly sensitive part of him. “See? Now I know that you like that.”

Harry bit down hard on his bottom lip, immediately inquisitive as to what his husband liked. He pushed himself upwards then, and Severus moved back so as he was on his haunches, his onyx eyes watching Harry. Harry bent his head then and stuck out his tongue, gently teasing his nipple, which immediately seemed to become erect in his mouth. Greatly daring, especially after Severus let out a satisfied groan, Harry gently dragged his teeth along the surface of the erogenous zone, and Severus promptly dug his fingers into Harry’s hair.

“Harry,” Severus moaned, as Harry continued teasing one nipple orally, and snuck a hand across his chest to do the same to the other, only with his fingers instead. “Merlin, Harry...”

“See?” Harry asked triumphantly, pulling himself backwards and away from Severus, and looking triumphantly up at him. “Now I know you like that.”

Severus’s eyes darkened then, before he made a grab for Harry’s hips and flipped him over without ceremony. “Cheeky imp,” he muttered, although his tone was fond as he ran his hand from the base of his neck, in between his shoulder blades, and came to rest at the cleft of his delectable arse. Severus took ahold of those hips again and pointed them upwards, while Harry looked over his shoulder in confusion at his movements. Severus inched closer to his prize, murmuring soft words in Latin that Harry didn’t recognize, but he felt cool air flit from within him then, opening him up slightly, and he swallowed at what the spell meant.

Severus chuckled, running the palms of each hand up and down Harry’s arse as if to calm him, and leaned forward, closer still, and gently eased the younger man’s arse apart. Harry let out a squeak of surprise as the cool air of the room hit him in a most sensitive place, but the squeak soon turned into a surprised groan as Severus tasted him there. He made a series of most undignified sounds as Severus lapped him in his arsehole, wholly unknowing that this was actually a thing that couples did.
“Severus, what are you...? Mmm,” he murmured, grabbing ahold of one of the bolsters in front of him, and leaning down upon it. He bit into it then, groan after groan passing through his lips as Severus dragged his tongue over the tight ring of muscles presented to him.

“How do you like it?” Severus breathed, taking a moment to calm himself.

“Yes,” Harry moaned, shoving his arse backwards so as to capture that elicit tongue again. “I don’t want you to stop. Please... Please, don’t stop, Severus.”

“Well, since you asked so nicely,” Severus said with a chuckle, before he bent his head to taste Harry once again, this time adding a finger to the mix.

“Oh... Oh, Merlin,” Harry moaned, gripping more tightly to the bolster than ever before as Severus found the tight bundle of nerves within him. “I really like that...”

Severus made a sound of acknowledgement, and continued rimming Harry, adding two other fingers as he went, until the younger man threatened to come undone, which he couldn’t allow—not yet. Gently, he took ahold of those incredible hips again and turned Harry over, the green-eyed vixen staring up at him, pupils dilated, face flushed, and lips bright red from biting them in order to keep himself in line. He looks good enough to eat, Severus mused to himself as he bent down to kiss him again.

“How are you,” Harry whispered between kisses, “going to fuck me now?”

Severus nipped at his lips then before pulling back, Harry letting out a mewl of protest. “I will never fuck you, Harry. I will only make love to you.”

Harry’s flush deepened then. “I think I would like that,” he whispered.

“I guarantee you will,” Severus assured him, before holding out his hand, and a small tub of his personally made lubricant flew into it; from the moment he had known that Harry was his mate, Severus had brewed batch after batch of the stuff. Pressing a kiss to his inner thigh, he smirked as Harry’s legs fell open, literally offering himself up to Severus. Dipping his fingers into the stuff, he teased Harry’s opening again, and slowly began to stretch him. The rimming had already done some of the job for him, so by the time he’d gotten a third finger back into his mate, young Harry was quivering with need.

“Please,” Harry whispered.

“Hmmm,” Severus said, arching an eyebrow. “Please what, Harry?”

“Please make love to me,” Harry whispered, a picture of need.

Severus nodded, gently easing his fingers out of Harry’s opening, and slicked himself up as quickly as he dared. He banished the tub of lubricant over to one of the bedside tables, and gently dragged Harry’s hips closer. “Bolster,” he ordered, and Harry handed over the one he hadn’t been using. Tucking it beneath Harry’s arse, Severus moved to position himself at Harry’s entrance, holding his cock tightly and gently pressing it to Harry’s opening. “I’ll go slow,” he assured his young mate, and smiled at him. “Are you ready?”

“Yes, just please, do it,” Harry begged, nipping hard on his bottom lip.

“As you wish,” Severus replied, dragging Harry’s hips closer still, and entering him slowly. He could feel Harry tensing around him at the sudden intrusion, and Severus gently ran his hands along his hips, before they caressed at his flanks. “Nothing to worry about, my love. Push against
me. That’s it, that’s right,” he said as Harry obeyed him, and, a moment later, he was fully sheathed inside him.

“Just... Can I have a moment, please?”

“It’s ‘may I’,” Severus corrected, grinning down at Harry, who glared at him.

“No grammar lessons when your cock is in my arse, thank you,” he muttered.

Severus contemplated that for a moment. “To be clear, it is a verb lesson, Mr. Potter,” he said steadily, and slowly moved outwards, as if to remove himself entirely from the equation.

“No!” Harry screamed, and moaned at the sense of loss within him as Severus successfully managed to pull himself out. “I didn’t mean... Severus, please...”

Severus smirked then, and nodded to himself. “Well, such things can certainly be discussed later,” he mused, before slamming himself back into Harry.

“Thank Merlin... Finally,” Harry said, his voice pure exultation as he made a grab for Severus’s hips, wrapping his legs around the man and urging him as close as possible.

Severus was amazed at how responsive his mate was proving to be, but it was not something he would ever tell Harry not to be. In fact, he loved it. He successfully managed to pound Harry into the mattress, and was elated when Harry met him thrust for thrust. He found himself growing close, especially when Harry’s inner walls successfully managed to tighten around him. He clenched his teeth at the sensation, and reached in between them to make a grab for Harry’s erection, bright red with desperation.

“Close,” Harry murmured, pushing himself more deeply into Severus’s hand, which, by contract, embedded Severus all the way into his arse.

“Harry... Gods, Harry,” Severus moaned, going faster than he ever had before with any lover, and suddenly felt Harry’s pre come leaking far more quickly. “Harry!” he yelled, as he suddenly burst inside him.

“Severus!” Harry screamed, half a moment later, and burst in Severus’s hands.

Severus collapsed on top of him, muttering a Cleaning Charm before he found Harry’s lips and smashed them to his. He smirked around the kiss as Harry moaned, languidly stretched his tongue to meet his, and wrapped his arms around him. Pulling back and gently placing his forehead against his, Severus stared down at his mate. “Are you all right?”

Harry nodded. “Never better,” he replied.

Severus smiled, rolling off him and wrapping up Harry in his arms, before he pressed a kiss to his forehead. “I love you,” he said softly.

“I know,” Harry replied.

Severus swatted his arse. “Brat,” he muttered.

Harry laughed and pulled himself closer, placing a gentle kiss onto Severus’s chest. “I love you, too,” he replied, before the both of them slipped into sleep.

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Ginny had been amazed at the consideration of the headmaster for, now that she and Draco were engaged, they were permitted to share his rooms in Professor Snape’s former quarters. She loved waking up each morning to Draco wrapped around her willowy frame, and knew that she could finally grow used to it. For there was the ring on her finger and the child in her belly to think about, and she couldn’t be happier for both cases.

It was a Saturday in late-November when she awoke, the silvery light of dawn creeping into their shared room, and turned over when she felt a slight blockage. Gently easing herself from Draco’s arms and pushing herself upwards, and let out a small noise of surprise at what she saw. She was getting closer and closer to two and a half months, and she had the barest hint of a bump, just between her hips.

“Gin?” Draco asked, suddenly roused from sleep as he pushed himself upwards as well, and turned her face to face his. “What’s the matter?”

“Nothing is the matter,” Ginny assured him, gently taking him by the hand and placing it upon her stomach. “Merely that our child is growing.”

Draco let out a noise of delight and bent his head, lifting up the tank top that Ginny had been sleeping in and pressed a kiss to her stomach. “Picture it, my love,” he whispered, running his fingertips along her stomach as he lifted his face to look at hers, “a beautiful baby with your beautiful eyes and my striking good looks?”

Ginny shook her head and gently swiped him on the arm. “More like a beautiful baby with my hair and your eyes,” she said with a giggle.

Draco let out a growl then, pinning Ginny to the mattress and kissing her, and chuckled when she let out a slight giggle, which was caught in her throat. “I love you,” he whispered.

Ginny grinned, wrapping her arms around his neck. “I love you, too,” she said, trailing her fingers down his naked chest. She let out a noise of exasperation when the wards chimed in their outer rooms.

“Let’s just be quiet,” Draco suggested, pulling her more deeply into his arms. “Then, whoever it is might get the hint and go away...”

“Ginny?” called Hermione from the outer rooms.

“I’ll get them,” came Ron’s voice.

“Ron!” Hermione cried.

The door to their bedroom came open then, and Ginny fixed her brother with a glare, while Draco’s cheeks flamed at what Ron saw. “Oh, bloody hell,” Ron muttered, as Hermione pushed him out of the way.

“Oh, honestly, Ronald,” Hermione said, gently helping Ginny out of bed and throwing a robe on to cover her up. “Morning, Draco,” she called over her shoulder as Ron hauled him out of the bedroom, and Hermione helped Ginny select what to wear. “Cold today,” she said conversationally, amid Ron telling Draco that he’d better not get Ginny pregnant a second time while they were at school together.

“He does realize that that is damn near impossible, right?”

Hermione rolled her eyes at Ron’s words. “Charlie has told us more than once that superfetation is
more possible in dragons than humans, either magic or not,” she said gently, allowing Ginny to lean on her arm after the latter had selected a pair of jeans. “However, if Charlie wasn’t talking about how some dragon or other can breathe fire up to fifty feet…”

“Horntail,” Ginny said softly, and Hermione raised her eyes to hers. “It was Harry’s dragon during the tournament,” she explained.

“Ah, right,” Hermione said, shaking her head as she grabbed a T-shirt and jumper for Ginny, which the latter put on quickly. “Does Draco know what’s happening today?”

“Just that we’re going to Hogsmeade,” Ginny replied. “I told him I wanted to get some early Christmas shopping done, and that it was your idea…”

“Which it was, the Christmas shopping bit, anyway,” Hermione told her with a grin as she grabbed Ginny’s snow boots and hat. “Blizzard last night,” she explained, and Ginny nodded at her. “Cleared up now, of course, but we’ll have to take a carriage down to the village. It’s too dangerous to walk it.”

Ginny nodded, stepping into her snow boots and gripping onto her hat. “Oh,” she said, and lifted her shirts slightly, and showed Hermione her stomach. “I started showing.”

“What?!” Hermione cried out with excitement, immediately moving to touch Ginny’s belly with a grin on her face.

“It’s all right,” Ginny whispered to her belly. “That’s Aunt Hermione.”

Hermione looked up, shocked. “Aunt Hermione?”

“Well, of course,” Ginny told her with a grin. “You’re practically my sister anyway. Have been since my third or fourth-year.”

Hermione grinned and embraced Ginny, before summoning Ginny’s winter coat and putting it firmly around her. “Wouldn’t want either of you to catch cold.” Hermione put an arm around Ginny’s shoulders and guided her out of the bedroom, while Ginny put a Cleaning Charm on her teeth. “Now, Ronald, can you promise not to hex Draco while we’re gone?”

Ron grumbled under his breath.

“I’ll hex you as well,” Ginny warned him, and Draco grinned.


“What does he want this time?” Draco asked, rolling his eyes, but stopped immediately when Ginny cuddled close to him.

Ron stuck his tongue out at the display of affection, but was singing a different tune when Hermione pressed a kiss to his cheek. “Hagrid found a mother Kneazle abandoned in the forest ready to give birth on Halloween,” he explained, putting an arm around Hermione’s waist. “The kittens are about four weeks old now, but he needs some help taking care of them, and finding a home or two for the little things.”

“Oh,” Ginny said, her tone longing.

Draco sighed indulgently. “Of course we can get one, dearest,” he replied. “Think of it as one of your Christmas presents.”
Ginny let out a squeal and threw herself into Draco’s arms, and Ron let out an “Oi!” before Hermione silenced him with a kiss. “Thank you, thank you, thank you!” Ginny cried out then, peppering Draco’s face with kisses.

“I’ll ask Hagrid if we can visit them together tomorrow,” Draco told her.

Ginny grinned at Draco before she leaned closer to whisper in his ear, “You won’t believe the thank you you’ll be getting tonight,” she whispered, gently nipping at his earlobe before she pulled away from him.

“Um... I think a brisk walk down to Hagrid’s is a capital idea,” Draco said, kissing Ginny chastely on the forehead before he broke away from her. “Just give me a few moments to dress myself, Ron.”

Hermione grinned at Ginny before she kissed Ron one last time. “Have fun at Hagrid’s,” she told him, before putting an arm around Ginny’s shoulders again and left.

They quickly left the dungeons and headed directly upstairs, past the Great Hall, and towards the entrance to the courtyard, where the carriages were kept. If there had been a blizzard that night, then the Hogwarts wards had definitely blocked some of it, although there was a healthy amount of snow upon the ground around them. A particularly enthusiastic Thestral made itself available to them, and both witches climbed inside and made their way down the hill towards the wizarding village.

“What did you say to Draco?” Hermione asked.

“Merely that he would be getting a better kind of thank you this evening,” she replied vaguely, but shared a smile with Hermione at that.

“He’s excited, isn’t he?” she wanted to know. “About the baby.”

“He certainly seems to be,” Ginny told her, gently running her hands over her stomach. “I think he wants it to be a boy, though.”

Hermione laughed. “And your parents?”

“Mum cried,” Ginny said, shaking her head. “Dad kept a level head about the whole thing. Draco even Fire-Called them to ask permission to propose. When it came out that I was pregnant, they naturally believed that Draco had proposed because of that. They were shocked that he’d actually done it because he loves me.”

“Any fool could see that,” Hermione assured her.

“Even Ron?” Ginny queried as the carriage came to a stop upon the village square.

Hermione rolled her eyes as they got out of the carriage, and it was sent on its way back to Hogwarts, and would return via Patronus when they were ready to go back to the school. “I certainly hope so... Now, where did you want to go first?”

“Ramona’s Regalia Reserve,” Ginny replied, naming the high-end jewelry store in the village, just next door to Madam Puddifoot’s.

Hermione arched an eyebrow. “For what purpose?”

“I’m going to buy Draco a ring,” she replied, and flushed slightly at that, but Hermione merely took
her and hand guided her straight over.

~*~

December had arrived, and Harry had been overjoyed when Severus had transfigured a Sessile Oak into an elegant Scots Pine to serve as their Christmas tree. Harry was equally shocked to find boxes of old decorations in the attic, and Severus casted _Tergeo_, making them all look like new again. It had been quite humorous for Harry to head into Diagon Alley under the influence Severus’s new and improved Polyjuice Potion—to last three times as long as a typical batch—to do some Christmas shopping. Severus had gone that day as well, but they’d agreed not to run into each other until an appointed hour so as to keep their gifts a surprise. A Hogwarts owl came now and again to share news or drop off little packages here and there, and Harry used this to send gifts to his friends.

Harry had spent the weeks before Christmas organizing his gifts for Severus, so pleased to be with his husband and mate for the holiday season. It would be too dangerous to travel to the Burrow for the holidays, but Harry knew that Molly would find a way to wish him well during the holiday season. Once the organization of Severus’s gifts was complete, Harry set to work with wrapping them, and did his best to keep his mind from wandering to them more than once over the course of the next few weeks. The last thing he wanted was for Severus to catch wind of what it was he got him.

Christmas Eve arrived, and Harry put a Celestina Warbeck song into the record player, and moved around the expansive kitchen, getting dinner ready. That evening, he was making a traditional roast, mashed potatoes, roasted vegetables, Yorkshire pudding, and a chocolate gateau for dessert, as the latter was Severus’s favorite. Severus was quite busy in his lab brewing all through the afternoon and early evening, but Harry called to him, letting him know that dinner would be ready soon, and that he should come up and change.

The roast had begun to set after it had baked, and the cake had been transferred onto a cooling rack. The potatoes were all mashed and prepared delightfully, and the vegetables were under a Warming Charm in their pan. Harry was just putting together the gravy and popping the Yorkshire puddings out of the oven when he banished the tablecloth, napkins, silverware, goblets, and candlesticks to the table when Severus walked in. Harry swallowed, his Adam’s apple bobbing in his throat as he took in his husband, before he turned back to the gravy to ensure that no lumps formed.

“Why don’t you sit down?” he asked, hating the squeak in his voice, and cleared his throat. “I’ll bring out everything shortly.”

“Very well,” Severus replied, kissing the back of his head before exiting the kitchen.

Harry banished everything that he was finished preparing into china serving dishes, before he sent them onwards to the table in the dining room. Harry then charmed the gateau to frost itself with the dark chocolate frosting he had made, before he picked up the serving dish that held the roast and brought it into the dining room, the pot of gravy floating by his head. He felt his cheeks warm as he saw Severus looking at him, before the man got to his feet and took the dish, and moved to carve the roast expertly.

Harry grinned and moved to his seat at the foot of the table, settling in comfortably as the dishes filled themselves, save for the roast and the gravy. Severus put a generous piece onto both of their plates, and the gravy was charmed to pour itself. Harry waited for Severus to sit before they both began to eat, and basked in pride at the noises that Severus made as he took a bite of everything before him.
“It’s all right?” Harry asked tentatively.

“All right?!” Severus sputtered. “All right is lukewarm water and stale bread when you’re starving, my love. This is fantastic.”

Harry beamed at his mate’s words, tears filling his eyes. “Thank you,” he whispered. “I am so pleased you like it.”

“You did not take any wine,” Severus observed. “It’s that red elf wine I thought you enjoyed quite well, Harry.”

Harry smiled and shook his head. “Wanted a clear head for the night.”

Severus grinned slowly at the remark and nodded. “As you wish.”

Harry and Severus continued making small talk throughout the rest of the meal, and, once it was finished, Severus said he would like to wait a bit for the cake. Understanding completely, Harry was quick to banish the dishes into the kitchen to clean themselves, and also moved the table adornments to the washing station or back into the cupboards or shelves. Taking his husband by the hand, Harry took Severus into the more intimate parlor, and turned off Celestina Warbeck, before he cuddled into his side on the couch.

“Enjoying ourselves, are we?” Severus asked, pressing a kiss to his forehead.

“Immensely,” Harry told him. Flicking his wand, an already-opened letter flew towards him, and he handed it to Severus. “Professor McGonagall sent these over today,” he explained as Severus looked it over. “They’re my NEWTs scores.”

Severus smiled at Harry before he removed the piece of parchment from the envelope, and looked at the scores his husband had achieved.

Charms            E
Transfiguration   E
Care of Magical Creatures      O
Defense Against the Dark Arts           O
Herbology       E
Potions            O

Severus promptly banished the piece of paper onto the mantle in the parlor, before he made a grab for his husband and pulled him lengthwise against him. “You did splendidly, my love,” he declared, kissing him over and over again.

Harry laughed. “She also sent me a letter, informing me that, since I completed my NEWTs, I no longer have the ministry trace on me, so I’m free to perform magic now.”

“So, that’s why you were showing off before, during, and after our meal,” Severus said, smirking lovingly down at him.
Harry grinned. “Perhaps that was my intention, yes,” he replied.

Severus, without prompting, slid his fingers beneath the Weasley jumper from last year that Harry was wearing. “Perhaps a celebration is in order,” he said softly, and proceeded to tease at Harry’s nipples in the way he so enjoyed.

“Can... Can we hold that thought for a moment?” Harry asked, trying hard to focus on what else he wanted to tell his husband that night, although it soon proved difficult, what with Severus proceeding to suckle at his neck. “Severus, please, I need to tell you something...”

Severus sighed, but nevertheless released his husband’s neck. “Very well. What is it you want to tell me, Harry?”

Harry grinned, summoning a box wrapped in green paper, and adorned with a silver ribbon. “Go ahead,” he said, pushing it into Severus’s arms.

Severus rolled his eyes playfully and pulled at the ribbon, and carefully tore the paper off from the box he held. Then, he lifted the lid, and raised his eyebrows at the red and green booties that lay within a bed of crêpe paper, and gently lifted one up. “What...?”

“Molly made them for us, and I hid them in a hidden compartment of my bag,” Harry told him with a quick smile.

Severus turned and gazed at his husband. “Does this mean what I think it does?” he asked, and he hated to admit that his voice was shaking.

“Yes, Severus,” Harry replied, his eyes awash with tears of joy. “I’m pregnant, about a month or so along now, I think. The baby should be here in late-summer... Severus!” he cried out then as his husband promptly lifted him upwards, and spun them both around the room.

When he finally stopped to gasp for breath, he gazed deeply into his eyes. “I love you, Harry James Potter-Snape,” he declared.

Harry’s heart thundered in his chest at Severus finally using his full name. “I love you, too, Severus Tobias Snape,” he replied, and bent his head to accept his husband’s kiss.
I've put Ron's relationship with Lavender as happening in fifth-year, not sixth.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The rest of the Christmas holidays saw the double wedding of Ginny and Draco, plus Neville and Luna, knowing that it was entirely possible that they would all ultimately have to go into hiding once the war broke out in earnest. Despite the fact that they were all Purebloods, they were all decidedly on the side of the light, something that Riddle despised above all things. Albus presided over the ceremonies, with Arthur Weasley giving away Ginny, Bill Weasley standing in as Head of Slytherin and giving away Draco, Augusta Longbottom giving away Neville, and Xenophilius Lovegood giving away Luna.

Hermione, who served as dual Maid of Honor for Ginny and Luna, cried during the ceremony as she held tightly to the three bouquets. Ron, as Best Man for Draco and Neville, remained tight-lipped throughout the ceremony. He was happy for Neville and Luna, to be sure, but he still slightly resented Draco for getting Ginny pregnant. Still, Hermione had reminded him more than once that Ginny was truly happy with the arrangement, and he resolved to be happy on her behalf eventually. It all helped when Albus announced dancing, with him pairing up with Minerva, Bill and Fleur, Molly and Arthur, Ron and Hermione, Xenophilius with Madam Pomfrey, Filius and Pomona, and the brides and grooms.

“It was a lovely ceremony,” Hermione said softly, resting her head upon Ron’s shoulder as he held her about her waist. “Didn’t you think so, Ron?”

“I suppose it was,” Ron allowed, turning his head to look at Draco and Ginny, the former of whom was gently caressing his sister’s belly as they danced close together.

“Leave them alone,” Hermione admonished him gently, “at least they’re happy, and dancing somewhat traditionally...”

“What do you made of Luna and Neville’s...erm...dance?” Ron asked, turning his head to look at the second pair who had been married that day.

“Keeps the Wrackspurts away, according to Luna,” Hermione said, watching wide-eyed as Luna and Neville danced in a circle, swatting their hands back and forth, up in the air. “I’m glad they found someone to make each other happy...”

“Well,” Ron said, pulling Hermione closer against him, which caused Hermione to raise her eyes to his, “when we’re married, it’ll be a lavish affair, and we won’t share the day with anyone.”

“Married? Ron!” Hermione hissed, shaking her head at him. “It’s bad luck to propose to your intended at somebody else’s wedding.”

Ron smiled down at her. “Regardless, I’m still going to marry you, Hermione Jean Granger, no matter what you say.”
Hermione flushed becomingly. “Is that so?”

“Of course I’m going to marry you,” Ron declared. “I knew I was going to marry you the minute you walked into the Yule Ball with Krum.”

Hermione sighed and rolled her eyes. “You really did spoil everything that evening with your jealousy, Ronald...”

“I know,” he said, gently tilting her chin up as they danced, “and I’m sorry. Merlin, am I sorry. I suppose I needed a right kick to the arse, because I wasn’t prepared to address my feelings. I’ll never forgive myself for it, ‘Mione. I won’t.”

Hermione stepped forward then and rested her head on Ron’s shoulder. “All I know is, when you were parading around with Lavender Brown last year, when she thought you were pants because of Dumbledore’s Army, I wanted...”

“Yes?”

“I wanted to hex her breasts off,” she whispered.

Ron chuckled. “Well, now I know how much I mean to you...”

“I’m serious, Ronald,” Hermione replied, righting herself then and staring into his eyes, unblinking, although she resented the fact that her lower lip trembled. “I’ve been in love with you for years, but didn’t fully realize it until then. And now that I’ve got you, well, I’m afraid that someone else will come along, someone prettier...”

“Hermione,” Ron said, his voice firm as he cut across her, “you’re the most beautiful woman that I’ve ever seen. And when I make you Mrs. Weasley, it’ll be the happiest day of both our lives, because you’ll be mine, and I’ll be yours, forever.”

Hermione laughed then and shook her head at him. “Make it Granger-Weasley, and you’ve got a deal,” she told him.

Ron promptly dragged her towards him and kissed her passionately. “Whatever you want,” he assured her, and Hermione tucked herself into his embrace again.

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Harry woke up during the first weekend in January, feeling the self-satisfied smirk encroaching on his lips at the notion that his husband’s naked form was wrapped equally around his. He carefully turned and pressed a kiss to his forehead, before summoning his robe and slipping out of bed and heading downstairs. Since he had become pregnant, he was hungry at all hours during the day and night, but was relieved that no odd cravings had made themselves known.

Going down the staircase, Harry made his way down the hallway between the stairs and the living room, and entered in the back way of the kitchen. Opening the fridge, Harry took out eggs and sausages, and even snagged a few potatoes from the counter. He set up three different frying pans upon the eight-burner stove, and was content with the sounds of eggs, sausage, and potatoes sizzling in their respective pans. He sliced four slices of sourdough wandlessly and banished them into the toaster, summoning butter and a wide array of jams onto the table.

As Harry flipped their hot breakfast upon the stove, he felt the hands of his husband snaking around his waist and pressing a kiss to his neck. “Good morning,” Harry said, leaning back into the embrace the man provided. “I didn’t wake you, did I?”
“Merely your cooking, my love,” Severus replied, gently easing the spatula from Harry’s hand and shoving him towards the table. “You sit down. I should be doing this anyway.”

Harry placed his hands upon his hips. “I won’t be made a housewife, Severus.”

“You’re hardly a housewife,” Severus replied, yanking Harry back to his side and kissing him fervently. “But you’re also pregnant with our child and I don’t want you tiring yourself out for anything, love.”

Harry scoffed. “Fine,” he said, throwing up his hands. He took the toast from the toaster and put it on a platter, before placing it on the table. “I need some air. Will you be all right for a few moments?” he asked.

Severus smiled indulgently at him. “Of course, love. If you’re not back by the time it’s all ready to be eaten, I’ll let you know.”

Harry grinned at his husband, pressing a kiss to his cheek before he wandered towards the kitchen door, and summoned his outdoor slippers, which zoomed immediately onto his feet. He was satisfied with the display, and gave a cheeky grin to Severus, who rolled his eyes, as he stepped outside. Snow was still on the land surrounding Lupin Lodge, but his slippers had a Warming Charm on them as well as Weather Charms, thus evading any untoward slipping. As Harry made his way towards the edge of the wards, where a forest surrounded the back of the house, he breathed in the smell of the salt air.

The waves crashed upon the rocks, which were several yards down from the base of the land, and Harry truly felt as if he and Severus were on the edge of the world. There was a great oak tree, separated a bit from the forest, which had a porch swing suspended within its branches, and Harry had often looked over at it, picturing sitting upon it with Severus, and now their baby, once it was born. As he peered over the edge of the rock wall and continued listening to the waves crash against it, he was suddenly startled by some whimpering from below and, lowering his eyes, saw that a tiny Crup appeared to be stuck in a crevasse of rocks.

“Oh, Merlin!” Harry cried out, drawing his wand from his robe sleeve as the poor thing continued to cry out. “Wingardium Leviosa!” he said, pointing his wand directly at the small creature, which brought it out of the crevasse. “Accio!” he cried out then, and the little thing came flying into his arms, literally. The poor thing was frightened, but Harry quickly shushed it and cradled it close against him, pressing a kiss to its soft head as he turned around and brought it back towards the entrance of the house. “Severus!” he called, bursting in, just as the man had finished plating up their breakfast.

Severus promptly banished the pans into the sink to wash themselves and rushed over, regarding the little canine beast in his husband’s arms. “And where did you find this?” he asked, although his tone was kind, as he reached out a hand, which the Crup promptly sniffed.

“It was lodged in the rocks,” Harry told him, immediately moving into the parlor and turning on the fire, while Severus put a Stasis Charm upon their breakfast. “I managed to get the poor thing out, but I didn’t see or hear any others...”

“Must’ve wandered off and got lost, poor mite,” Severus replied, moving to sit beside his husband, and Harry was shocked to see a bottle of milk in his hand. “It looks to be a fairly young creature, so milk is the best option for now.”

Harry blinked. “How did you even...?”
“Merely by transfiguring a glass into a bottle, a cap into a rubber nipple, and using a Warming Charm so as it appears more appetizing,” Severus told him patiently. “Here. Hold the little thing like a proper baby. That’s it,” he went on, his tone encouraging as Harry took the bottle from him, and offered it to the little Crup, who promptly got the hang of suckling from it.

“Well, seeing as we’re feeding it, we’d better find out if it’s a boy or a girl,” Harry said with a light laugh, and Severus rolled his eyes.

“I assume you will want to keep it,” Severus replied, lifting the tail. “Girl,” he said promptly, and released it.

“Yes, I want to keep her,” Harry said firmly, looking up at Severus innocently. “She’s hardly old enough to be on her own, and this will be good practice.”

“Practice?”

“Muggles often have dogs before they have babies,” Harry said offhandedly.

“We are hardly Muggles,” Severus replied tempestuously, but found that he couldn’t stop simpering at the little Crup in Harry’s arms. “Very well. We may keep her.”

Harry flashed his husband a smile then, watching for several moments until the Crup had finished her bottle, before he transfigured a throw pillow into a proper dogs’ bed, and shrunk the couch’s afghan into one of a suitable size for her. Tucking in the little thing, he pressed another kiss to her forehead. “Sleep well, Matilda,” he said softly.

“Matilda?” Severus asked.

Harry looked over his shoulder at him and smiled, before leading Severus back into the kitchen, where he charmed the bottle to wash itself. “Matilda should’ve been the first Queen of England in her own right, upon the death of her father, Henry, and brother, William, but her wicked uncle, Stephen, ended up stealing the throne right out from under her,” Harry told his husband. “After a war, they negotiated, and it was decided that Matilda’s son, Henry, would be made Stephen’s heir, as Matilda was intelligent enough to know that she wouldn’t win. It means ‘mighty in battle’,” he explained patiently.

Severus smiled. “I think it’s a beautiful name, Harry,” he told him.

Harry grinned radiantly up at his husband. “I am glad you think so. Now, may we please eat our breakfast now? Our child doesn’t like to be kept waiting,” he joked, running a hand along his stomach, which caused Severus to chuckle, but nevertheless pull out a chair for him.

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Ginny Malfoy gently ran her hands up and down her swollen belly, her pet Kneazle, Adelpha, nuzzling herself more deeply into her side. Ginny remembered the beautiful Sunday afternoon when she had walked down to Hagrid’s with Draco, and picked Adelpha out of all of her brothers and sisters in the litter that the half-giant was minding. Hagrid was only too happy to give her over to the couple, but made her promise to ask Harry to come down for a visit as soon as possible.

“I hated lying to him, Delly, you do know that,” Ginny said as the cat-like creature looked rather inquisitively up at her. “But Dumbledore was right about putting the Memory Charm on him, and at Ron’s suggestion. Poor man can’t keep his mouth shut...”

The door to their chambers came open then, and as Draco crossed the threshold and shut it behind
him, Ginny smiled up at him. “And how are my wife, my Kneazle, and my son doing?” he asked in an indulgent manner, promptly kissing her.

“We’re all quite well, darling,” Ginny replied, watching as Draco dropped his bag, and moved to sit beside her. “Madam Pomfrey isn’t working you too hard, is she?”

Draco promptly shook his head. “Of course not,” he told her, wrapping an arm around her shoulders and lightly chuckling as Adelpha nestled herself between them. “It’s a great honor for any Hogwarts staff member to take a student on as an apprentice, let alone a sixth year.”

Ginny peered up at Draco. “I never envisioned you as a healer...”

Draco smiled at her. “Neither did I, to be honest with you. But it’s good work, and I could train to work beside Madam Pomfrey, or she could send me a reference letter to St. Mungo’s. Merlin knows that when all of this is over, we’ll need healers.”

“Well, I’m sure your superior knowledge of potions is certainly beneficial within the walls of the infirmary,” she told him, snuggling in closer to her husband.

Draco grinned. “It is. I got twenty house points today for healing Ron’s head wound that he got in the Gryffindor versus Ravenclaw Quidditch match earlier today.”

“My wonderful husband,” Ginny told him indulgently, pressing a kiss to his cheek. “He’s still a bit torn up that I can’t play anymore, now that he’s captain as well as keeper. He wanted me to play seeker once Harry had to run, but...” She shrugged her shoulders.

Draco squeezed her shoulder gently. “Love, you can always play again once the child is born,” he told her gently.

Ginny’s red brows went together then. “You wouldn’t mind, having me play Quidditch, and you being a healer?”

Draco shook his head. “Of course I wouldn’t, darling. All I want is for you to be happy. I’ve found my happiness, both personally and professionally. Who is to say that you cannot go out and find yours?”

Ginny nibbled her lower lip. “I don’t know. I suppose it would be so simple for you to resent me for this. In the wake of the wedding...”

“Gin, don’t dwell on it,” Draco said firmly. “We won’t pay any mind to the letters from Lucius or Narcissa. The very idea that you trapped me is absolutely ludicrous, and it hurts me just as much as it does you, I’m sure of it.”

“It was all so spontaneous,” Ginny whispered.

“I know,” Draco told her, “for I was there, and no passive participant. We are both equally responsible for the conception of the child, but I cannot thank Merlin enough for permitting such a wondrous thing from happening.”

Ginny smiled up at him. “I was thinking of names today...”

“Were you?” Draco asked. “Tell me.”

“I was thinking Arthur Draco,” she said softly. “For the two best men in my entire life. I would want to name him Draco, naturally, but...”
“We don’t want any juniors,” Draco said with a smirk. “I quite understand, love. And I think that Arthur Draco is a beautiful name.”

Ginny leaned down her head upon Draco’s shoulder. “I just wish...”

“Yes, my love?”

“I just wish that things could stay as they are, in this moment, forever,” she said quietly. “But the both of us know that they can only last so long.”

“Quite right,” Draco said, pulling his wife closer against him. “It always seems as if, the moment things are going well, all hell decides to break loose.”

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Hermione walked through the snowdrifts towards Hogsmeade from the castle, knowing full well why Ron had suggested The Three Broomsticks instead of Madam Puddifoot’s. Since it was the day of the valentine, tables had to be booked weeks in advance, and it wasn’t as if she and Ron hadn’t been on a date there already. Wrapping her scarf more tightly around her neck, she jammed her gloved hands into her jean pockets as she trudged along.

She had received a letter from Harry the week before, and was quite pleased for the update on his pregnancy. It appeared as if Harry and Severus would be having a baby girl the following summer, and both fathers-to-be couldn’t be happier. He had also mentioned that Matilda, their newly adopted Crup, was doing exceptionally well, and that Matilda should meet Crookshanks and Adelpha, as soon as it was safe to do so again.

It had come as a surprise to her to get a note from one of the Hogwarts owls that morning that Ginny was dealing with some morning sickness and wouldn’t be able to meet for breakfast. As it was Draco’s day off from apprenticing with Madam Pomfrey in the hospital wing, Draco would be staying behind as well to take care of her. Luna and Neville were using the Room of Requirement during the weekends to salvage an attempt at a honeymoon, for Hogwarts had yet to give the happy couple chambers of their own, and Hermione wondered when a pregnancy announcement would be forthcoming from the new branch of the Longbottom family.

Ron had been equally evasive, only staying long enough in the Great Hall for Hermione to have a cup of tea, while he all but shoveled his breakfast down his throat. While up until a year ago this would have been a normal occurrence, Hermione had gotten Ron to eat somewhat more delicately over the past several months. However, this had seemed to go all out the window, and he left the hall at the run, barely managing to give Hermione a kiss on the cheek. A quick-worded note had come later, written in Ron’s slant-like handwriting, informing her to meet him at The Three Broomsticks just after lunch.

As Hermione finally cleared the stone bridge, she entered the village properly, but the frequent crowds were strangely absent. She sighed, shaking her head, knowing that the Wizarding World was a plenty unusual place, so perhaps it wouldn’t be such a bad day after all. Shrugging off the trepidation that decidedly flowed through her, Hermione made her way towards The Three Broomsticks, remembering being shut out of there during third-year, when she and Ron had attempted to follow an invisibility-cloak-clad Harry, seeking information as to why there was a connection between him and Sirius Black. Hermione couldn’t sense anything as she pushed the door open and removed her hat and gloves, but boy, was she in for a shock.

There was a spark of something then and Hermione was immediately on her guard, but her jaw dropped open when it was merely a banner suspended from the ceiling. Upon looking up, she saw
Fred and George pulling a lever, bringing it down, permitting her to read the words which had been painted upon it. It declared, *I love you, Hermione Granger!* all done up in large, red letters and outlined with gold.

Hermione’s eyes were drawn to the center of the room then, where she spotted Molly and Arthur with her own parents, and Ginny and Draco standing just beside them. A little off to the side were Luna and Neville, smiling at her encouragingly, and Fred and George came down the stairs quickly, Bill and Fleur just behind them. Hermione shook her head, unsure of all that was happening, as Ron came out from behind the staircase, Madam Rosmerta smiling indulgently at him, and Hermione took in Ron’s new dress robes.

“What...?” She whispered, but found that she could only mouth the word. Looking around, she also spotted Professors McGonagall and Sprout standing at the bar, with Professor Flitwick standing upon a stool, and Dumbledore waving his wand just beside Madam Rosmerta, which directly caused fairy lights, in red and gold, to appear and light up the place, which caused Draco to playfully roll his eyes, while Seamus and Dean, standing just beside him, gently nudged him in the ribs on either side.

Ron had, by this time, made it about a foot away from Hermione, and she was fully prepared to throw herself into his arms and tell him that this was a wonderful gift for Valentine’s Day, but her eyes filled with tears when she saw that he was going down on one knee, and reached up to take her hand in his. “Hermione Jean Granger,” he said, and Hermione felt her heart thundering in her breast at his use of her full name, but even more so when he used his other hand to reach into his pocket, bringing out a black velvet box, “you’ve told me that I have the emotional range of a teaspoon, and I will never thank you enough for that. It would mean the world to me if you would remind me of that every single day, for the rest of my life,” he said, and Hermione choked back a sob as he slowly opened the box. “Would you make me that happiest wizard in the land and consent to being my wife?” he asked, and Hermione briefly glanced at the gold-banded ring, which featured an oval ruby in its center, and was surrounded by diamonds, which spilled around the entirety of the band itself.

“Yes,” Hermione breathed, suddenly aware that she would have to give an answer. “Yes, Ron, I’ll be your wife,” she said, and watched with glee as Ron slipped the ring onto her finger, before she grabbed ahold of his collar and yanked him upwards, catching his face in her hands and kissing him breathless.

Ron promptly grabbed ahold of Hermione by the waist mid-kiss and spun her around, while the whole of The Three Broomsticks broke out in applause. Peering around her fiancé’s shoulder, Hermione could plainly see both Molly Weasley and her own mother crying, and they were likely doing so just as much as she was. She gripped tightly onto Ron, kissing him again as he gently lowered her back onto the ground.

“So... Surprise,” he said.

Hermione gently smacked him in the arm. “This is what you were hiding from me?” she asked him, and shook her head. “I should’ve known...”

“You’re not really an insufferable know-it-all, ’Mione,” Ron said gently.

Hermione shook her head. “No, it’s not because of...” She sighed and reached into her pocket before she got down on one knee herself, and flipped open the box she held, thus revealing a beautiful, highly-polished gold ring. “I may have planned on doing the same, Ronald Bilius Weasley, but if you don’t want...”
“Bloody hell,” Ron whispered before he yanked up Hermione without ceremony, and peppered her face with kisses. “I bloody well will marry you, Hermione!” he said, and Hermione slipped the gold band onto his finger, before he hauled her up into his arms again, much to the joy of the crowd around them.

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Harry felt delightfully domestic as he was preparing dinner in the kitchen—roast chicken, potatoes, and roasted vegetables, his favorite this time around. Matilda was sleeping in her bed in the parlor, having been fed fifteen minutes ago, and Severus was downstairs in the brewing lab he had been permitted to set up by Remus. As Harry finished buttering and spicing the chicken, vegetables, and potatoes and put them into the oven, he found that he was slightly perturbed that Hedwig hadn’t returned from Hogwarts yet. As she was a magical owl, she was able to fly a bit faster than normal, and it would’ve normally only taken her five hours, as opposed to the more traditional nearly twelve.

Harry wandered throughout the house, painstakingly tidying the rooms in an effort to keep himself occupied from the sense of dread which quickly managed to overwhelm him. In the wake of Ron’s proposal to Hermione, a near fortnight had passed without a scrap of news. It was slowly but surely growing infuriating to have his husband merely state that his friends and the Hogwarts staff were likely busy, and couldn’t be bothered to keep them both updated as much as Harry would like. Harry shook off the comments, straightening out books in the living room that didn’t need to be straightened, craving a distraction, but finding none.

Severus had been very attentive of late as his belly grew; he was over three months into his pregnancy now, and his ankles were sufficiently swollen. Each evening, after brewing or reading and dinner had taken place, Severus and Harry would sit in the parlor, while Severus would rub Harry’s ankles. Walking wasn’t something Harry was prepared to give up, however, and although he didn’t overtly complain about the matter, he knew that the waddling stage of his pregnancy was likely due to begin quite soon.

It was the sudden crash in the parlor, followed by the bark from Matilda, which alerted Harry, and he quickly dashed across the house towards it. Severus, meanwhile, came charging up the basement stairs immediately, and when they ran into one another, they’d barely exchanged pleasantries before they gazed down at whatever it was that was invading their sanctuary. Harry felt his jaw drop automatically then, for he quickly figured out that it was a Patronus, in the form of a lynx, which he knew to belong to Kingsley Shacklebolt.

“The ministry has fallen,” came the man’s voice, and Harry’s sense of dread increased twofold as Severus enveloped him in his arms. “The Minister of Magic...is dead. Death Eaters have begun to overtake Hogsmeade, with the intention of breaking through the Hogwarts wards. Get out while you still can. They are coming...they are coming...”

Harry turned around then, his eyes blinking back tears as he threw himself into Severus’s arms and trembled within his embrace. “What are we going to do?” he sobbed.

“We’re going to move,” Severus replied, snapping his fingers, and a bag flew into his arms, which he put an Extension Charm on, and summoned everything of value into it. He cancelled the oven, cooking the dinner that Harry had so lovingly prepared, and banished the food, putting only non-perishables, fruits, and ready-to-eat vegetables into the bag. Their great bed came tumbling downstairs from the master bedroom, and was immediately shrunk, before summoned into the bag by Severus.

“And now?” Harry whispered, gently taking up Matilda into his arms.
“Now, to Grimmauld,” Severus replied, wrapping his arms around Harry, before they Apparated out of the living room of Lupin Lodge with a crack.

Chapter End Notes

If at all interested in seeing Hermione's engagement ring, please click here:
Ginny’s eyes snapped open at the first bang of impact, and pushed the covers off of her, leaving Adelpha and Draco in their bed. Opening the door, she moved at a run through the living room and made her way towards the main door. Pressing her ear against it, she opened it slowly, and saw many students running to and fro, and saw that Bill was shouting orders to Slytherin House as the panic arose. Heart pounding, Ginny stumbled out of the room and ran forward, eyes wide, and went as fast as possible towards her brother.

“Bill!” she yelled, darting closer, and saw that Fleur was standing beside him. “What’s going on in here? What—?!”

“No time, Ginny,” Bill said quickly. “Rosier, stay in line!” he yelled towards one of the students, before turning back to his sister. “Death Eaters have taken Hogsmeade, and they’re surrounding the castle.”

“Then, we fight,” Ginny said, her wand falling immediately down her arm from within its sleeve, and lifting her wand.

“No in your condition, you don’t,” Bill shot back. “Besides, you’re underage. Fleur, take Ginny to the safe house. I’ll join you there as soon as I can.”

Fleur immediately turned towards Bill, and threw her arms around him, kissing him. “I’ll watch your sister with my life, William, just as your brother once did for Gabrielle.”

Bill briefly pressed his forehead against Fleur’s, and held her against him. “Marry me,” he whispered, as a bang caused a wall to collapse itself just across the way.

Fleur pressed another kiss to Bill’s lips. “Of course, my love,” she replied. Squeezing his hand before she pulled away, she put an arm around Ginny’s shoulders.

“Wait!” Ginny yelled. “What about Ron and Hermione, and Neville and Luna?!”

“Neville and Luna left earlier for his grandmother’s. Luna’s father is joining them,” Bill said quickly, and drew his wand. “*Expecto Patronum!*” he shouted, and the great silver falcon flew out from the tip of his wand. “Ron, Hermione, use the Floo in the Gryffindor Common Room to get to the safe house immediately. That’s an order!” he bellowed, the falcon cried out before it quickly flew off in the proper direction.

Ginny gave a torn expression to her brother. “Be careful,” she said.

Bill nodded. “I will,” he replied.
Fleur then dragged Ginny back down the corridor, and the door to their chambers flew open, with Draco already dressed, and their belongings packed. He was holding Adelpha in his arms, which he promptly opened to let Ginny fly into, while Fleur took charge of the Kneazle. Ginny remained in his arms for several moments while Fleur crossed the room, and opened up the fireplace to the Floo Network, knowing that they would have to get out of Hogwarts as soon as possible, now that the wards were being torn apart.

“Ready?” Draco whispered.

Ginny quickly calmed herself down, wiping her eyes as she pulled Draco towards the fireplace and watched as Fleur tossed some powder into the grate. Her eyes widened as Fleur shouted out for Grimmauld Place, but nevertheless, stepped in once the flames had swallowed both her and Adelpha flawlessly. “Grimmauld Place!” Ginny cried out, and pulled Draco into her, the hearth expanding in size to accommodate them both, and they were engulfed in flames, just as their bedroom door was broken down, and Death Eaters watched as they were swallowed up to an unknown location.

“Were you followed?” Fleur asked, once they’d reached the living room of Number Twelve, and quickly dusted Ginny off.

“Some Death Eaters broke in as soon as we were swallowed up,” Draco said quickly, his voice fraught with nerves.

Fleur promptly drew her wand and held it aloft. “Colloportus Severus Snape’s chambers!” she yelled, and there was a locking sound from somewhere far off. “Come,” Fleur said, and led them directly into the kitchen, where, surrounding the table, were Molly and Arthur, Kingsley, Remus and Tonks, Ron and Hermione, and Harry and Severus.

“Ginny!” Hermione yelled, launching to her feet, and throwing herself into her future sister-in-law’s arms. “Oh, Merlin, are you all right?!"

“I think I am,” Ginny replied, holding Hermione back for a moment before breaking away from her, and accepting an embrace from her parents, Ron, Harry, and Tonks before Draco helped her into a seat, and sat down beside her.

“I am going to Fire Call my family, let them know what has happened,” Fleur said softly, and Ginny knew that she would likely mention the engagement to them, but not to the Weasley’s yet, as Molly was still slightly perturbed by her relationship with Bill.

“Yes, of course. Go ahead, dear,” Molly said, and Fleur smiled, hugging Harry and immediately congratulating him before she slipped from the kitchen.

Ginny turned back to the crowd gathered and sighed. “Baby’s been a bit active tonight...” Her voice was soft as she caressed her stomach, and Draco promptly moved closer and wrapped a rather protective arm around her shoulders.

“What is it we’re waiting for now, Mum?” Ron asked, swiveling his head to regard his mother, from where he sat, in between Harry and Hermione.

“Well, Kingsley would rightly know more about it than I would, dear,” Molly replied, as the Floo sounded again, and Fred and George came into the kitchen, and moved immediately towards their mother. “Boys,” she said, dragging them into her arms.

“Bill called Charlie away from Romania,” Fred told her.
“We wanted to fight, too,” George continued.

“But he told us to come here and stay with the family,” the twins concluded together.

“Well, now,” Kingsley said, getting to his feet once all pleasantries were out of the way, and everyone had moved to sit. “Albus informed me that, in this event, that he and Minerva would come as soon as possible.”

“They’re probably helping establish more wards on the school,” Hermione said quietly.

“Quite right, Miss Granger,” Kingsley replied. “As such, many people who are Muggleborn will be forced to go into hiding, which would typically include you, Miss Granger…”

“Typically?” Hermione asked, shaking her head. “I don’t understand, sir. Either you are a Muggleborn, or you’re not…”

“Yes, Miss Granger, but you are currently engaged to a Pureblood,” Kingsley explained in a patient manner to the seventeen-year-old witch as Fleur returned to the room, and all seemed slightly surprised at how quick the conversation with her family had been, before she slipped into a chair on Draco’s other side. “It is an old law within the Wizarding World that, once someone marries someone of differing Blood Status, the higher one will then be taken over by the second member of the wizard kind bonded in marriage. This did not change, however, the Blood Status of Mr. Potter-Snape, or the new Mrs. Malfoy, or the new Mrs. Longbottom, for Mr. Potter-Snape and Professor Snape are both Half-Bloods, while the new Mrs. Malfoy and the new Mrs. Longbottom were Purebloods, like their husbands.”

“So, let me get this straight,” Ron said, immediately straightening up, “when Hermione and I get married, that would make her…?”

“A Pureblood,” Kingsley said, nodding to himself. “Quite right, Mr. Weasley.”

“It originally started in France, a few hundred years before the revolution,” Fleur said softly, her accent thick, with a smile Hermione’s way. “We still follow the law over there. I would not be surprised if other wizarding families still followed it here.”

Ron turned and looked over at Hermione. “Well, I did propose…”

“As did I,” she reminded him.

“All ministry employees are permitted to marry couples,” Arthur said softly, mulling the rather sudden information over. “And, as you well know, Dumbledore is permitted as well, as is Remus, for they’re part of the Hogwarts staff…”

“Tonks!” Ron cried out unexpectedly then, and the young Auror turned to look at him. “I mean, you could marry us, couldn’t you?”

Tonks smiled. “I would be happy to, Ron.”

“Wait,” Hermione said, cutting across the exchange. “Tonks, I wanted you to be my bridesmaid, so we’ll have to find someone else.”

Tonks flushed becomingly. “I’d be honored to be your bridesmaid, Hermione.”

“And Fleur,” Hermione said quickly, turning to her, “you’re going to be my sister-in-law in a matter of days, so please, be my bridesmaid as well.”
“It would be a great honor, Hermione,” Fleur told her with a smile.

“And Ginny,” Hermione said, turning towards her, “could you be my Matron of Honor?”

“Naturally,” Ginny replied, clasping Hermione’s hand.

“Harry, you’ll be my Best Man, won’t you?” Ron asked.

Harry grinned, and looked at Severus, who smirked, before Harry turned back to Ron. “Of course I will, mate,” he assured him.

Ron sighed and turned to Draco, after noticing Ginny’s expression. “And, well, I suppose it wouldn’t be very brotherly if I didn’t include you... Would you be willing to be my other Best Man, Draco?” he asked.

Draco, to everyone’s surprise, smiled. “Yes, Weasel. I’d like that very much.”

“Fantastic, Ferret,” Ron replied.

“Watch it,” Ginny said, narrowing her eyes at her brother, and Fleur twittered at the exchange, which she found it be quite funny.

“Gred, Forge,” Ron said then, turning red to his ears at the notion that Fleur had found his words to be funny. “Be my groomsmen.”

“We’d love to,” the twins told him.

“When shall this event take place, then?” Molly asked.

“Next weekend,” Hermione told her brightly. “That’ll give me time to ask for an early wedding gift from Professor Snape.”

“Yes, Miss Granger?” Severus asked, arching an eyebrow at her.

“Please, call me Hermione, as we’ve been family for months now, truly,” she said, and Severus found that he was surprised at her demeanor.

“Well, then I suppose I could permit you to call me Severus,” he replied, and it had next to nothing to do with Harry’s hand gently squeezing his leg.

“Well, thank you, Severus... And, well... Could I potentially trouble you for a vial or two of Polyjuice Potion?” she asked, and he looked surprised. “I want to be able to go out into Muggle London to buy a wedding gown—”

“Muggle Paris,” Draco said, cutting across her. “It would be much safer there, and you’ll find something you’ll like much better. Trust me.”

Hermione nodded at him, before turning back to look at Severus. “Harry had mentioned that you had a new formula,” she said quietly.

“I’m quite sure he did,” Severus said softly, knowing that he would have to have a word or two with his husband later, and shot him a look, and smirked at the notion that Harry trembled deliciously in anticipation at the expression he was giving him. “I would only be too glad to assist you in your endeavor, Hermione,” he told her, turning back to face her, and Hermione beamed at him. “How many would you like?”
“Well, four for me,” she told him. “Ginny, Fleur, and Tonks will have to come as well to get a Matron of Honor and a bridesmaid dresses. I’ll also write to Luna, see if she’ll be my other bridesmaid and if she consents, I’ll take five.”

Severus nodded, before turning to Ron. “I assume you will be wanting new dress robes, Mr. Weasley, as well as some for your Best Men and groomsmen?”

“Yes, that would be best,” Ron said, nodding. “I’ll take five vials, please.”

“Four, mate,” Harry put in. “Severus bought me some dress robes over Christmas that’ll do very well for the wedding. Besides, it wouldn’t be wise for me to leave the safety of Grimmauld, given the circumstances...”

“What circumstances?” Ginny asked.

Harry slowly turned and looked at Kingsley, before nodding at the man to speak.

“Since Scrimgeour’s execution by the Death Eaters earlier this evening, a campaign against Harry and all that he stands for has been launched,” the senior Auror informed them. “As well as a dreadful Muggle Registration Commission—which is said to be rumored throughout the various departments of the ministry, with that toad Dolores Umbridge behind it—Harry has been proclaimed the Undesirable Number One.”

“Makes for a much better title than ‘Chosen One’, don’t you think?” Harry joked.

Severus narrowed his eyes at his mate and shook his head. “Harry, this is hardly a laughing or joking matter,” he reprimanded him.

Harry sighed, leaning back in his chair and repeatedly running the palms of his hands along his swollen belly; he wasn’t as big as Ginny was, and likely would never be able to catch up to her in the long run, but the pair of them did indeed have similar symptoms. “I suppose the pregnancy has the ability to affect my filter,” he said quietly.

“Are you feeling all right?” Severus asked, immediately concerned for his husband’s well-being, knowing full well that, given that Harry’s family was around, he would have to tread carefully, and appear to be quite doting, even though he was in their private lives.

“Tired,” Harry replied.

“Harry, dear, why don’t you go up and get some rest?” Molly asked softly. “You had that goblet of blood when you arrived, plus an entire platter of sandwiches. Why don’t you have an early night, my dear?”

Harry sighed, not wanting anything to be kept from him, but also knowing that Ron, Hermione, Ginny, Draco, Fleur, and the twins would likely keep him in the loop. “Yeah, all right,” he said, and got to his feet with Severus’s help, and hugged everyone in turn, before his husband guided him from the kitchen and up the creaky old staircase.

“Filth!” screeched Mrs. Black as they got to the landing and came into view. “Half-Blood filth in my house! I’ll—!”

“Oh, shut up you great big windbag!” Harry yelled and, for once, the portrait was stunned to complete silence. “In case you didn’t realize, it’s my house now, because you’re a bloody portrait of a dead woman! Dead people can’t own property, magic or not. Now, if you don’t keep your mouth shut about your betters—for everyone in this house is a great deal better than you—then I’ll
hex, burn, or liquify you off the wall! Do I make myself clear?!”

Mrs. Black considered a retort, before thinking better of it, and clamped her mouth shut.

“Good,” Harry said stoutly, and walked up the stairs, pulling his husband up behind him. They made their way to Sirius’s old bedroom, which Kreacher had kept clean—especially when he had heard that Harry was expecting—and Harry pushed open the door.

No sooner had the door closed behind him than Severus slammed him up against it, devouring his younger husband’s mouth. To his delight, Harry automatically wrapped his arms around his neck, allowing him to plunder within. “You have no idea what you do to me,” he whispered against his lips, and Harry grinned up at him. “Listening to you talk down to that harridan made me so bloody hard...”

Harry absorbed his husband’s words into his very pores, slowly dragging his teeth along his lower lip, as he practically felt his pupils dilating in desire, and slowly moved to stand on his toes, so as to reach his husband’s ear. “Then fuck me, Severus,” he whispered to him, and teasingly trailed his tongue along the lobe, before biting onto it. “Fuck me into the fucking mattress and calm me down, make me forget...”

“You... You said you were tired,” Severus said.

Harry smirked. “I’m never too tired to be with you,” he said simply.

Severus smiled openly down at the man he loved, before he gently took ahold of his waist and guided him across the room and towards the massive bed. He eased him down onto the mattress and slowly removed the dark green cardigan he wore, which covered that Chudley Cannons shirt he’d gotten from Ron a year ago Christmas, before he permitted his fingertips to graze slightly at the waistband of his jeans. The jeans his husband wore, ever since the pair of them had married, seemed to hug him in all the right places, which drove him mad...

“I do it on purpose, you know,” Harry said quietly, and Severus’s eyes snapped to his.

Severus blinked, attempting to cover his thoughts as his husband stared so openly up at him. “I don’t... What?” he asked.

“I deliberately wear tight jeans,” he explained, stretching out like a cat along the mattress and bolsters beneath the two of them. “I’m hoping it’ll drive you up the wall enough to fuck me on every foreseeable surface we can find.”

Severus leaned down then, gently grazing Harry’s neck with his teeth. “You’re purposely attempting to tempt me, are you not?” he asked.

“Merlin, yes,” Harry groaned, arching up automatically at the feeling of Severus’s mouth on the sensitive skin of his neck. “I don’t want you thinking I’m made of glass, just because I’m pregnant with our child,” he said, his tone husky. “I feel wonderful, but that feeling is only eclipsed when you’re inside me.”

Severus pulled back then to admire the beautiful man that was inexplicably his, and found that it would take a long time, perhaps forever, to fully come to terms with that fact. “And, would you like that to happen now?” he asked, his fingers flicking inside of his pants once again, and teasing the treasure trail beneath his boxers.

“Fuck, please,” Harry begged, arching just so Severus’s hands wrapped around his cock, and mewled beautifully at the sensation.
Severus found himself awed at the noises he could summon from Harry’s lips, and the blood seemed
to automatically pool in his groin immediately upon hearing them. It was a rather heady
phenomenon, having Harry, the Boy Who Lived, the Chosen One, his mate, at his fingertips
whenever they both could potentially want it. It would come out like a song, like a rare opera of the
highest-quality, or perhaps a symphony, with each litany a note, thus continuing the story, which
was composed entirely for him.

“Come here,” Severus said gently, and moved them so that Harry was straddling his hips, and
banished both of their clothing with a wave of his hand. The feeling of their cocks touching was
nearly undoing, but Severus had other plans for the night. He held out his hand, and his personally-
made lubricant flew into it, and he dipped his fingers into it, and gently eased one inside of his
husband.

“Oh... Oh, fuck,” Harry whispered, his eyes rolling back into his head, as he dragged his hands
through his hair, breeching himself on his husband’s finger further. “Don’t stop... Severus, please,
don’t ever stop...”

“Never,” Severus declared, stretching him to the point where a second finger could be added to the
mix, and he added it slowly. “Tell me what you want...”

“Merlin,” Harry said quietly, lowering his hands from his hair so as he could tease and twist at his

“You have me,” Severus assured him. “Always.”

Harry let out another keening sound then as Severus added a third finger, and found that he liked
the slight burn which came along with it. “Fuck, make me forget...”

“Always, my Harry,” Severus whispered, slowly removing his fingers, and gently easing Harry
over his erect member, before teasing the furl of his entrance with it.

“Let me forget that our world is burning, just for a little while,” Harry begged, biting down hard
upon his lower lip. “Let me forget that it’s up to me, that it’s always been up to me. Let me forget
that Dumbledore made me into his little weapon... Merlin!” he hissed as Severus’s cock breached
him for the first time that evening, and groaned at the feeling of it. “Make me remember how
much I’m loved, and that I’ve got family, and I have you...”

“You’ll always have me, Harry,” Severus told him, gently caressing his husband’s hips as he eased
them in a fluid up and down motion, which Harry seemed to like. “And once we defeat Riddle, will
we truly be free.”

“Free,” Harry groaned, as the head of Severus’s cock brushed that bundle of nerves inside him, and
he cried out as they met. “Oh, Merlin, free...”


“I want...”

“Yes?” Severus asked.

“I want us to have a house all our own,” he told him, swallowing slightly, wondering if he was
asking for too much. “I don’t want to live here, or at Spinner’s End, because based on what I saw
last year, it is hardly a place for...” He gently caressed his swollen belly.

“As soon as all of this is over, and it is safe, we will find a proper home to raise our family in, my
love,” Severus assured him.

“Somewhere with a palace of a basement potions lab for you, and a massive garden to grow all your ingredients in,” Harry told him.

Severus grinned, humming in agreement. “And many, many bedrooms.”

Harry stilled for a moment, staring down at his husband. “Severus?” he asked.

Severus kept smiling up at him. “I take it that you will want more children after our daughter is born,” he said softly.

Harry’s eyes filled with tears unexpectedly then. “You... You would like to have more children with me after she is born?” he whispered.

“Merlin, yes,” Severus replied, arching slightly so that the head of his cock gently caressed Harry’s prostate once again. “If you would want more, of course...”

“Fuck, Severus,” Harry whispered. “Of course, I would. I mean, what kind of parents would we be if we didn’t give Lily a sibling or two?”

Severus raised his eyebrows. “You would call her Lily?”

“Lily Eileen,” Harry replied, his voice trembling slightly. “To honor the women who, despite the fact that they could not be here, are half of the reasons why we are here in the first place. If you don’t like it, we can...”

Severus promptly wrapped his arms around Harry’s frame and dragged his husband against him, and kissed him feverishly. “I adore you,” he whispered. “Yes, we may name our daughter Lily Eileen Potter-Snape.”

“Thank Merlin,” Harry breathed, before he suddenly managed to propel them so that he was back lying on the mattress again. “Now, fuck me into the mattress, Severus,” he ordered, although his expression and tone of voice was cheeky.

“With pleasure,” Severus replied, gripping at Harry’s hands, never letting go as he effectively pinned his husband to the mattress. He pistoned his hips appropriately, repeatedly hitting at Harry’s prostate, which caused Harry to clench around him. “Merlin... Harry. Oh, fuck, Harry,” he breathed, the sensation of his husband encapsulating him almost too great.

“Yes, Severus, yes,” Harry breathed. “Come inside me, Severus. I’m close. I’m so close,” he moaned, arching into the movements.

Severus reached between them and took ahold of Harry’s cock, pumping it in time to his thrusts into his husband’s body. “Tell me when, my love.”

“Now... Now!” Harry suddenly screamed, bursting in between the two of them, long white ropes covering their bellies, and nearly came a second time when Severus let out a great groan and emptied himself inside him. “Oh, fuck...” He whispered.

Severus promptly casted a Cleaning Charm, before collapsing next to his husband, and smiled in relief when Harry curled himself around him, and placed his head onto his shoulder. “You are amazing,” he whispered.

“Promise me we’ll always do that, and it’ll always be that way...”
“If I have anything to say about it, it certainly will be,” Severus told him.

Harry dragged his fingers along his husband’s chest. “I love you.”

“I love you, too, my Harry,” Severus replied, pressing a kiss to his forehead. “Always.”

~*~

Everyone who hadn’t adjourned upstairs for the night remained in the kitchen waiting for the report on the Death Eaters’ attack on Hogwarts. Ginny and Draco had followed Harry and Severus to Regulus’s old bedroom about half an hour after the vampire couple had gone to bed, which left Molly to pace around before deciding to make tea and biscuits for everyone. Arthur and Kingsley talked about battle strategies with Remus, while Fleur, Tonks and Hermione discussed wedding plans, and Ron accepted a job offer from the twins to be a partner in the joke shop upon his graduation from Hogwarts.

The Floo flared just as Molly placed the tray of tea and biscuits onto the table, and immediately was on edge as Minerva stepped into the room, Filius and Pomona in her wake, with Bill bringing up the rear, and, finally, Moody coming in behind them. Ron and Hermione’s jaws fell open then as Kingsley rushed forward, wrapped up Moody in a tight embrace. They were shocked even further when Moody pulled back, and were worried that one Auror was going to hit the other, but they were in for the greatest shock of the night when Moody kissed Kingsley roughly on the mouth.

“Don’t worry about me, Kings,” Moody told him. “Another limb wouldn’t make a difference.”

“Don’t scare me like that, Mad-Eye!” Kingsley ordered, his voice firm as he leaned in to kiss Moody again. “I was worried sick!”

“We were all worried sick,” Tonks said, flashing a smile at her mentor.

“Yes, this is all very touching,” Moody said, rolling his fake and real eye, before he was ushered to the table by Kingsley to sit in between him and Remus.

“William,” Fleur said, and made her way to her fiancé’s side, and Molly was most put-out playing second fiddle to her.

“That’ll be enough,” she said, and promptly moved to put herself between them.

“No, Mum, that’s enough from you,” Bill said firmly, as Fleur scanned his face, taking in the series of scars that hadn’t been there before. “I’ve asked Fleur to marry me and she has accepted, so that makes her my family now, too.”

“She couldn’t possibly...” Molly said.

“What?” Fleur demanded then, narrowing her eyes at Molly. “Because of his scars? I happen to think that William is beautiful! I am not with your son because of his looks. I am with him for his kindness, compassion, consideration, bravery, and intelligence. Furthermore, I am also with him because I am in love with him.”

“I’m in love with Fleur, too,” Bill said resolutely to his mother. “Nothing you say or do will ever come between the two of us.”

Molly stammered for a moment before Arthur gathered her up and gently eased her back into the chair she had vacated.
Arthur then approached his son and put out his hand. “Congratulations,” he said, shaking the hand of his oldest son and kissing Fleur on the cheek.

“Touching indeed,” Moody growled. “But I think Minerva has something to say.”

“Yes, Minerva, of course,” Kingsley said, putting a hand on top of Moody’s, who appeared to be begrudging of the action, but nevertheless slipped his fingers into his. “Please. Tell us what happened at Hogwarts this evening.”

“A bloody battle is what happened,” Minerva said, her voice grave.

“Riddle and Albus engaged in an all-out war,” Filius squeaked.

“No telling who would win,” Pomona put in.

“But, in the end, there was only one winner,” Bill said quietly, and Fleur wrapped her arms around him immediately. “Albus is dead. He killed him.”

Molly’s head sprang up then, and there were tears in her eyes. “Merlin, no,” she whispered. “I... I want to know who else we...”

“Greyback,” Minerva said softly. “Your son fought against him valiantly, despite the scratches he received from him, before delivering the Killing Curse like a hero.”

“Was he in his wolf form?” Remus asked.

Bill shook his head. “No.”

“Thank Merlin for small miracles,” Remus said softly.

“Hagrid is helping gather up the dead, but he is all right,” Minerva continued, sliding her gaze onto Ron and Hermione. “I am sorry to report that we lost Seamus and Dean in the battle. But, I can say that they went together...”

“Oh, no!” Hermione said, immediately breaking into sobs and throwing herself into Ron’s arms, who automatically stroked her back.

“It’s how they would’ve wanted it, ‘Mione,” he whispered into her hair.


“Colin and Dennis Creevey,” Filius whispered. “Such bright, gifted boys...”

“Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle,” Minerva continued. “Although I’m not positive many people will mourn them, although they were children...”

“You’re neglecting to mention your battle against Bellatrix Lestrange,” Moody put in. “Which, of course, you won. The bitch is dead and gone, while I took out her husband and brother-in-law, and Dolohov.”

“I killed the Carrows,” Filius said, but there was no excitement in his tone.

“Yaxley and I engaged in battle which ended in death,” Pomona whispered, her face grave, seriously lacking the cheery smile she always seemed to wear.
“There’s something you’re neglecting to tell me,” Molly said in the moment of silence that followed, and her eyes slowly drifted to Bill, who looked uncomfortable. “Bill, Bill, what happened?” she whispered.

“Mum... Mum, I’m so sorry,” Bill said brokenly, tears entering his pale blue eyes as he struggled to put the words together.

“Bill,” Arthur said firmly, as Molly threw herself into his arms with a great wail. “Bill. Don’t drag this out. Just...”

The Floo flared in the living room then, and a battle-scarred Charlie struggled into the room, what appeared to be lashings on him, and he was sporting a broken leg. “Hey, Mum, Dad,” he said, his tone weary, which caused Molly and Arthur to let out shouts and launch themselves to their feet and grab ahold of their son.

“Don’t you scare me like that!” Molly yelled at him.

“Mum!” Bill cried out then, and Molly finally let Charlie go, catching the note of desperation in her oldest child’s voice. “It’s Percy.”

“Percy?” Arthur whispered.

“He was battling with me and Charlie,” Bill recounted, his voice shaking. He quit the ministry, and we were all so excited. Charlie got hexed, which caused the broken leg,” he went on, his voice continuing to tremble. “Percy engaged in battle in vain with Lucius Malfoy, but the senior Malfoy killed him before we could get in there to help him.”

“Where is that blaggard now?!?” Molly demanded, amid Hermione’s continued sobs, and Ron’s whispered words of comfort, although tears were coming down his face, and he looked across the table to see the twins holding each other.

“In hiding with Riddle,” Minerva said, trying to keep sadness from her voice and failing to do so entirely. “I am sorry to cut this short, but, as headmistress, I need to go and observe and be sure that things are being handled accordingly.”

“Of course, Minerva,” Arthur said, his face devoid of any emotion as he comforted his wife. “We shall see you soon.”

Minerva nodded, before ushering Filius and Pomona out with her. The Floo flared in the living room once more, before the three Hogwarts professors were subsequently swallowed up. And no sound could be heard further from Grimmauld Place that evening, save for the sobs of the people gathered in the kitchen, grieving for those lost.
Harry was perched on the staircase, coming down for a glass of water after the brief interlude with Severus, and heard the death toll from the battle. It sickened him, then, as everyone proceeded to wail in despair; not that they were sad about what had happened, but the fact remained that he himself was to blame for it all. How would they be able to look at him, now that all those people close to them were dead and gone?

Shaking his head, Harry made up his mind and made his way back upstairs, his thirst forgotten, and stepped back into Sirius’s old bedroom. He made sure that Severus was sound asleep, before he summoned his rucksack, and put an Extension Charm upon it, and gathered his clothes, before he promptly put on another outfit. He stole a few vials of Polyjuice Potion so as he could go places to buy food, and took his supply of Galleons with him. Then, knowing that this would be the icing on the cake to make people hate him, he removed his wedding ring and scrawled a quick note to his husband, which he left on the pillow.

Severus—

When you awake, I shall be long gone. I am leaving my wedding ring here so as you will have a way out, if need be.

I am going to him.

I can no longer stand by and permit those I love to die for me. Although I never asked for this, any of it, it is my burden to bear. These senseless slayings won’t end until one of us dies, and I know now what I have to do.

I know you will likely reprimand me for being reckless, but sometimes, a little reckless is the way to accomplish your destiny. You married a Gryffindor with a hero complex, my love; you knew that when it was a forgone conclusion that I was your mate. I can’t thank you enough for saving me from Slughorn that day, for the last several months have been the best of my life.

I love you, never doubt that. And, should I return, and you still want me, I would love nothing more than to spend forever with you.

Your Harry

Harry put his invisibility cloak over his shoulders and trekked down the stairs, before he opened the front door, the chill of the evening air cutting into him. He silently shut the door behind him and made his way down the cobblestone path towards the gate, knowing that he would need to slip into an alleyway or something to find a safe place to Apparate. Just as he put his hand upon the gate to leave the house, the front door opened from behind him, and, turning, he saw Ron and Hermione standing on the porch.

“Going somewhere?” Ron called.
Harry grimaced, pulling the cloak over his head so that it was exposed. “I’m sorry, about leaving like this, without saying goodbye,” he said thickly, noticing that Hermione’s eyes were red-rimmed from crying.

“You’d better be,” Hermione said, stepping forward and wrapping her sweater more closely around her.

“Mate, where do you think you’re going, anyhow?” Ron wanted to know, tramping after his fiancée and moving to stand opposite Harry.

“I’m going to find him,” Harry said easily. “I’m sorry. But nobody else is going to die. Not for me,” he stated firmly.

“How many times do I have to tell you?” Hermione hissed at him, crossing her arms. “You need us, Harry, and we’re in this together.”

“We’re not letting you leave without us, mate,” Ron told him.

Hermione showed Harry a beaded bag at her waist when Harry moved to protest, and gave him a small smile. “I’ve had the essentials packed ever since you and Severus had to run,” she said simply with a small smile. “As soon as I’d finished giving you your NEWTs tutoring, Dumbledore called me to his office and told me what would happen, and what the three of us would ultimately have to do.”

Harry blinked. “You’re in on it, too?”

Hermione smiled at him. “Of course we are,” she said, bringing out a well-worn looking map from within her bag. “I have here a map of potential Death Eater hideouts, Malfoy Manor among them, which will lead us to where he is.”

“Plus, we’ve got plenty of time for planning-out what we’re going to do,” Ron said quickly. “No more rushing in and letting all hell break loose.”

Harry sighed. “All right, then,” he said, and lifted the cloak to accommodate the three of them as they passed through the gates. He watched as Hermione slipped the map back into her bag, and peered at it as they walked down the Islington street. “What else do you have in that bag of yours, Hermione?” he asked.

She flashed him a smile. “Food, plenty of it, given how Ronald eats,” she said with a laugh. “I suppose I should also mention that I’ve got a tent, plus another map of safe areas, which I’ve memorized the Apparition coordinates to.”

“How can you perform magic?” Harry asked. “Will I have to side-along you? I mean, since I have my graduation certificate and everything...”

“Mate, what do you think me and ‘Mione were up to while you were in hiding with Severus at Lupin’s place in Cornwall?” Ron asked with a chuckle as Hermione pulled the two of them into an alleyway. “We took our NEWTs, too, so we’re all graduated.”

“Then why were you still at Hogwarts?” Harry asked.

“A formality,” Hermione replied with a shrug. “Dumbledore didn’t want many people to know that we’d graduated, and it was all for our own protection. Sure, some of the assignments became trivial after a while, but it beat letting people know that we’d finished our education.”
Harry sighed with relief, knowing that they would all be safer now that all of them could defend themselves against the remaining dark witches and wizards. “I suppose that the only things that can kill me at this point are a stake, a crucifix, and holy fire,” he muttered.

Hermione nodded at him. “Then we’re just going to have to make sure you don’t come into contact with any of them,” she said simply. “Oh, and as for proper nourishment for both you and your daughter, I took the liberty of getting some blood from Dumbledore.”

“Blood?” Harry whispered.

She nodded. “A three-month supply, just in case.”

Harry sighed with relief. “Thank Merlin.”

Hermione took hold of Harry and Ron’s arms then, and the three of them quickly vanished with a near-silent pop. When they landed, it was in a lovely bunch of trees in a forest that Harry had never seen before, and he watched as both Hermione and Ron took off the cloak, and he moved to do so as well. As Ron summoned the tent that Hermione had mentioned having in her bag, he watched as Hermione proceeded to put protective enchantments on the surrounding area.

“Where are we?” Harry asked in the minutes that followed, once the three of them were safe and warm inside the tent, surrounding the little stove within.

“The Forest of Dean,” Hermione said softly. “I used to come camping here with Mum and Dad when I was a little girl. Doubt they’d recognize it now...”

“Why wouldn’t they recognize it?” Harry wanted to know.

Ron sighed as Hermione lowered her eyes, and painstakingly wrapped a protective arm around her shoulder. “The reason why we were so late to Grimmauld earlier tonight wasn’t because we couldn’t get the Floo to work,” he said quietly.

Harry blinked. “Okay...?”

“We had to go to Hampshire, to my parents’ house,” Hermione said quietly, her fingers proceeding to knot themselves together.

“What were you doing there?” Harry queried. “Did you need something from there before you went into hiding?”

“More like hiding evidence,” Hermione replied, her shoulders hunching. “I... I Obliviated my mum and dad,” she said quietly. “They should be on a plane to Australia by now, and they should know nothing about being parents to a witch.”

“Hermione...”

“The Death Eaters want to get rid of Muggleborns, mate,” Ron told him, his voice firm. “They would come after ‘Mione to get to you, and to go after ‘Mione, her parents would be brought in and tortured or killed.”

“They’re all I’ve got,” Hermione said softly. “And now, even though I may never see the two of them again, I know that they’re safe.”

“Safe,” Harry whispered.
“Harry,” Hermione said, snapping him out of his reverie. “You’re not wearing your wedding ring,” she said slowly. “Did something happen?”

Harry bit at the inside of his cheek. “Something like that,” he replied, feeling the tears threatening to spill from his eyes.

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Draco watched as Ginny sat in the cushioned window seat of what had once been Regulus Black’s bedroom. The white lace curtains nearly matched that of her skin, which had gone pale and remained that way, in the wake of the news reaching them about Percy’s death at the hands of Draco’s own father. Ginny’s hands were wrapped protectively around her belly as she stared out into the darkness at the Islington street, silent tears slipping from her eyes and creating wet trails down her cheeks.

“Gin,” he whispered.

Ginny shook her head. “Don’t,” she replied.

Draco swallowed. “Gin, please,” he begged, and forced himself to step closer to her. “I don’t know what you want me to say or do here...”

Ginny’s eyes promptly flashed to his, and he could detect the rage just beneath the surface as they glimmered with unshed tears. “No, I wouldn’t expect that,” she said, her voice filled with venom as it shook. “Here I am, having a child, and married to the man whose own father killed my own brother.”

Draco felt himself stiffening. “You know perfectly well that I’ve had nothing to do with any member of my family in months,” he told her. “I got out of there as soon as it became unbearable to stay—”

“Exactly,” Ginny replied, cutting across him as she got to her feet. “You waited. Waited until it became unbearable, instead of leaving when it was safe to do so.”

Draco narrowed his eyes. “I don’t know what you want from me,” he said succinctly. “I’ve been a loving and devoted husband to you, Ginny, and was a loving and devoted friend, boyfriend, and fiancé as well. I told you everything about my past, and you accepted me. You praised me for making it out before I was marked, and welcomed me with open arms. I fell in love with you, Ginevra Molly Weasley, and I will not apologize for that. However, if you wish for me to apologize on behalf of my father, I will do so as many times as it takes for you to love me again as you once did.”

“You...” Ginny shook her head at him. “You think that, despite what that blaggard did, that I would fall out of love with you?”

Draco sighed. “Ginny, nobody showed me love the way you have,” he replied. “Lucius saw me as a means to an end—an heir to continue the Pureblood Malfoy line—while Narcissa was coldly loving at best. You were the great, fiery phoenix that I didn’t realize I needed in my life. I didn’t believe that love, or anything resembling it, could ever be so passionate, nor did I imagine that it would make me feel again. You and our son are everything to me,” Draco declared, closing the distance between them and pulling Ginny by the waist towards him. “I will never stop thanking Merlin for sending you to me, or whatever it was to make you fall in love with me, but I’ll never think I’m good enough for you. You’re so pure of heart, while I’m forever tainted by the blood of evil which runs through my veins, no matter if I’ve turned my back on it or not.”
“No,” Ginny said immediately, stepping closer still and taking Draco’s face into her hands. “You are not evil, Draco Malfoy. Do you hear me? You’re not evil.” She swallowed then, feeling the tears intensifying. “When I saw you in the hospital wing with Harry on the first day of term, do you know what I thought?”

“Merlin, it’s so wonderful to see my mortal enemy so broken?”

“No,” Ginny repeated, shaking her head. “I thought about how brave you were, to turn your back on all that you’d ever known. It takes so much courage to do that, and I couldn’t believe, at first, that you had done what you did. But then, I could believe it,” she whispered. “There was that fire in your eyes, and your constant unwillingness to give up what you believed was right all those years I knew you. I was so pleased to bring you over to our side that I...”

“That you?”

“I fell in love with you immediately,” she whispered. “Sure, I was still smarting from my failed relationship with Dean, but then I realized that I’d never really loved Dean. I was upset, to be sure, about how it ended, but I was upset at the feeling of being lied to, above all things. But from the moment you and I realized that there was something greater between us, you haven’t spoken of any falsehoods to me. I don’t believe you ever would,” she told him. “And do you know why I know that?”

“Why?” Draco asked.

“You wouldn’t do that because you love me; I know you love me,” she said softly. “I see the way you look at me, when you think I’m not looking back. You look as if you’d go through fire for me, or do anything to ensure my safety...”

“I would,” Draco said steadfastly. “I can’t even begin to apologize for all I’ve done in the past towards you, your family, Hermione, the list goes on. But I hope that, one day, you can look past all that, and perhaps, forgive me...”

“I forgave you long ago, my love,” Ginny said. “I saw past that from the moment you defected and I saw you for who you really are. You’re the only one I’ll ever want, and all I ever wanted in the man that I would one day settle down and have children with. Granted, the latter could have come at a better time, but I won’t apologize for our son’s existence. I won’t.”

“And I wouldn’t want you to,” Draco told her, his fingers sweeping along her swollen belly. “I love you, and our son, and although I don’t know what the future will bring, or where we’ll ultimately settle down, I know that I’ll never be without you, because the two of you are my entire world.”

“You’re all I want, the two of you,” Ginny informed him, standing on her toes and wrapping her arms up and around his neck. “We’ll have a life—you, me, Adelpha, and Baby Arthur. I know that there could potentially be some complexities, financially, but I married you after your disinherittance, and I fell for you after it as well. It was never about the money, Draco. It was entirely about who you were, are, and continue to be—the man that I love.”

Draco automatically tilted his head downwards and kissed his wife. “I love you, Ginevra Molly Malfoy,” he whispered.

Ginny felt her entire body erupt in a shiver to her toes at his use of her full name. “And I love you, too, Draco Lucius Malfoy,” she whispered, kissing him back.
Severus awoke the following morning, and immediately reached out blindly in an attempt to feel Harry next to him. However, what greeted him was cold sheets, and he immediately thought that Harry had gone downstairs for an early breakfast. When he opened his eyes and looked, he saw the note that Harry had placed upon his pillow the night before, and Severus automatically felt his heart hammering in his chest at that fact. Instantly, he reached out and unfolded the note, and barely could make heads or tails of the words.

Severus—

When you awake, I shall be long gone. I am leaving my wedding ring here so as you will have a way out, if need be.

I am going to him.

I can no longer stand by and permit those I love to die for me. Although I never asked for this, any of it, it is my burden to bear. These senseless slayings won’t end until one of us dies, and I know now what I have to do.

I know you will likely reprimand me for being reckless, but sometimes, a little reckless is the way to accomplish your destiny. You married a Gryffindor with a hero complex, my love; you knew that when it was a forgone conclusion that I was your mate. I can’t thank you enough for saving me from Slughorn that day, for the last several months have been the best of my life.

I love you, never doubt that. And, should I return, and you still want me, I would love nothing more than to spend forever with you.

Your Harry

Severus slammed the note down, blinking the tears out of his eyes as he turned to the sound of a small whine, and saw that Matilda had jumped from her chair beside the bed and hopped up onto the bed and put herself into Severus’s lap. Severus’s first inclination was to shove the Crup to the ground in a fit of anger; however, upon looking into those beautiful brown eyes of hers, he couldn’t bring himself to be so cruel. Instead, he gathered her into his arms, and wept.

Finally, when Severus couldn’t stand it any longer, he casted a Cleaning Charm upon himself and summoned an appropriate outfit to change into. Once he had changed, he gathered Matilda into his arms and fetched the note, sweeping downstairs in those billowing black robes of his, his face pale and drawn. Upon stepping into the kitchen, he saw that Arthur, Remus and Tonks, and Moody and Kingsley had already gathered around the table, while Molly was bustling about, making a breakfast of eggs, bacon, sausage, potatoes, and sourdough and wheat toast. Without provocation or preamble, Severus promptly slammed down the note that Harry had left for him, and Remus immediately snatched it up.

“Merlin’s teeth,” he growled, and Tonks placed a hand upon his shoulder in comfort, as Moody swiped the note away from the wolf.
“Dear Merlin,” Moody said in that classic drawl of his, as Molly charmed the pans to cook the breakfast themselves, and peered at the note over Moody’s shoulder.

“Oh, Merlin,” she whispered, and charged out of the kitchen. “Harry!” she shouted immediately, as if she fully expected to find him hiding out somewhere else in the house. “Ron! Hermione! Fred! George! Ginny! Draco!” she carried on yelling.

There were a series of doors opening and closing—although Severus only heard two. Then there came several sets of feet upon the stairs as Molly returned to the kitchen, and Severus felt his mouth go dry when he saw that the twins, Draco, and Ginny were the only ones that readily emerged from their bedrooms; Severus assumed that the rumor that Fleur would be taking Bill to France for his own protection were true, and that Charlie had gone back to Romania was yet another truth for the morning. The twins hung back slightly then, looking a bit guilty, while Draco had his arms wrapped protectively around Ginny’s frame, the latter of whom held that ginger cat of Hermione’s, Crookshanks, while Draco had their familiar, Adelpha, wrapped around his shoulders.

“If you’re aware of Harry’s whereabouts,” Arthur said, getting to his feet as his words echoed Severus’s thoughts, “speak now.”

“Nothing,” Draco replied, shaking his head as the Kneazle on his shoulder batted slightly at his cheek in play.

“I wasn’t told anything,” Ginny reported as she stroked the half-Kneazle in her arms. “Hermione just asked me to watch Crookshanks last night. I suspected she wanted some alone time with Ron, so I didn’t ask why,” she said, wrinkling her nose.

“Ron came to us last night,” Fred said softly.

“It was after Harry, Severus, Ginny, and Draco had all gone up to bed,” George went on, his eyes wide with slight fear.

“He said that Hermione was in their room getting things ready, but we didn’t press for more information than that,” Fred continued.

“Ron asked us about Notice-Me-Not Charms, and other things like that,” George said softly, the guilt practically radiating off him.

“We considered teaching him the spells, but just ended up writing them down for him to give to Hermione,” came Fred’s response.

“Easier that way,” George put in.

“Ron left as soon as we’d given him the spells, but he hugged us, telling us not to tell anyone that they were leaving until morning,” Fred whispered.

“To give them a head start, I guess,” George finished.

“And you have no idea where any of them are?” Severus asked, trying his best to keep his temper, for the twins were only responsible for a fraction of the blame.

“No,” Fred said softly. “Just that they intended to follow Harry.”

“That’s all we know,” George said quickly.

Quietly, Severus handed over Matilda to Tonks, who took the Crup without hesitation, as Severus
stomped out of the kitchen. He went back upstairs to Sirius’s bedroom, and slammed the door behind him, the frame causing the entire wall around it to rattle. It seemed as if Harry’s note had been mocking him, playing on his weaknesses, and the words drove him mad.

He had wanted forever with Harry, but perhaps that had been too much to ask for and, at the first opportunity, his young husband had run away from him, taking their child as well. He shut his eyes, dragging his hands down his face, hating it when the hot tears made themselves known. He felt his fangs come out without ceremony, and he let out a hiss, before he launched himself towards the large window in the bedroom, and smashed through it, running through the back garden of Grimmauld Place, and into the forest beyond.

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Harry stared up at the sky of the Forest of Dean as he sat outside the tent; Ron and Hermione had put up some Silencing Charms after Harry had volunteered to give them some alone time together, as he had needed some air anyhow. Swallowing, Harry drank in the cool forest air, and wrapped his arms around himself. The Wizarding Wireless had called for snow in their area, and Lee Jordan hadn’t reported that Harry, Ron, or Hermione were missing, so Harry assumed that, despite the aching knowledge within him that Severus and company knew that they’d gone, they’d decided to keep the information to themselves.

The weather forecast had called for snow, and Harry wasn’t a hundred percent sure that he actually wanted such a thing to happen. He remembered his first Christmas at Hogwarts, when things seemed to spectacularly uncomplicated, and although Riddle was gunning for a return by using Professor Quirrell’s body, he had yet to return fully, and Harry was unaware of the destiny that was to be foisted upon him. It was before he had fallen for Severus, and all he had to worry about was passing his classes, and counting down the days until he would be forced back into the clutches of the relatives who saw him as a burden more than anything else.

He missed his husband above all things, and the constant reminder that he was carrying their daughter did nothing to alleviate the massive feeling of guilt that he was carrying on his shoulders and in his heart. He knew that leaving would hurt Severus, and while that had never been his intention, only he knew what had to be done with Riddle, and he wouldn’t just sit by and wait for other people to make the world a better place. Riddle had taken away enough people in the Wizarding and Muggle World alike, and the killings had to stop, even if Harry had to commit murder to make that happen. Placing a hand upon his stomach, he felt hot tears escaping his eyes before he could call them back.

“Lily,” he whispered, knowing that his daughter would be the only one to hear him, “I promise that I’ll do everything in my power to ensure a new tomorrow for you.” He smiled then as his daughter seemed to flip around inside him in response, and leaned back against the tree he had been sitting in front of.

Harry remembered Severus rescuing him from the nefarious intentions of Horace Slughorn, and the knowledge that he felt something more for the man hitting him. The sensation of Severus holding him back, thus putting a block between him and the man that Dumbledore needed information from, was daunting, at first. The fact that the man seemed to want to protect him, after everything that they had gone through, especially after the Pensieve incident, had literally turned Harry’s world upside down and sideways. There didn’t seem to be any hidden agenda as they Apparated to the Burrow that evening, and the fact that he hadn’t made fun of him for being sick afterwards was a life-changing experience.

“Water?”
“Please,” Harry replied automatically.

Snape gave a nod, before conjuring a glass from a blade of grass. “Aguamenti,” he intoned, and the glass promptly filled with water. “Drink,” he said, handing it over.

Harry took the glass quickly, taking slow sips so as not to potentially sick up on himself. Once he had finished, Snape returned the glass to its grass form, and Harry was amazed that the stock grew in its former place once again. Looking up, Snape inclined his head, and the pair of wizards walked towards the dilapidated house, and Snape paused close by the threshold.

“This is where is leave you,” he intoned, looking Harry over, before he took the glass of water back and vanished it. “Will you be all right?”

Harry sighed, hunching his shoulders slightly. “Sir...”

“Yes?”

“There is the matter of my trunk, and Hedwig,” he said quietly.

“I summoned them, and they should be awaiting you inside,” Snape told him. “Now, do you have everything you need?”

Harry nodded, eagerly wanting to be beside people who cared about him again, but couldn’t shake the feeling that Snape was possibly not in the opposite category anymore. “Yes, sir. Thank you, sir,” he said.

Snape tipped his head. “Very well, Potter. I will see you on the first of September,” he said, and moved away from the door. “Try not to get into any more trouble, all right?”

Trouble; Severus certainly knew him well enough that trouble seemed to follow and consequently find Harry at every turn. The notion that he had such a burden to bear from the time he was fifteen-months-old was old news to him now, but Severus had seemed to take the information in stride, especially given the knowledge that they were mates. It had been a truly wonderful experience to be loved romantically, without the object of his affections completely blinded by his fame and fortune.

Harry shut his eyes then, the tears flowing down his cheeks a constant now, as he imagined Severus’s lips on his, pushing him down into the mattress, making him feel as if he was the only other person in the word. How tender and compassionate he was, how loving, how he was everything to Harry, and how Harry had felt as if Severus had felt the same. Snapping his eyes open, he knew that he had potentially lost his husband and the love of his life forever, and yet he knew, deep down, he couldn’t let that happen.

“I’ll come back,” he whispered into the silence of the forest. “I don’t expect you to wait for me or anything, but I’ll come back. I’ll come back because you’re the only one there is for me, and the only one I’ll ever love. I love you, Severus Tobias Snape,” he said quietly to no one. “I love you, even though I’m reckless and thoughtless and have a hero complex, I love you. Please don’t forget about me,” he begged, swallowing as he shut his eyes once more, knowing that it could potentially be a lost cause.
Harry opened his eyes and stared out at the forest around him; he had fallen asleep against that tree of his for the sixth time that week, and he knew that he had to stop avoiding Ron and Hermione and cut to the chase. They had been in hiding for nearly a week, and they still hadn’t had the courage to look at the map of potential Death Eater hideouts. Harry got to his feet and went into the tent, summoning Hermione’s bag over and taking a vial of blood from it, downing it quickly to curb his appetite until breakfast.

“What?” Hermione asked, coming out of the area that she used as a makeshift bedroom, which she shared with Ron. She wrapped her latest Weasley sweater around her and rubbed her eyes, before pulling up her hair into a messy bun. “Tea?” she asked, knowing when she had to be the one to completely break the silence.

“Yeah, thanks,” Harry replied, clearing his throat and moving to the picnic table they’d set up in the upper portion of the tent, along with the cot bed he was supposed to be using to sleep in, which he always somehow managed to stumble into during the wee hours of the morning. He, too rubbed his eyes as he sat down, swallowing and minutely thanking Hermione as she set a steaming mug in front of him.

“Feeling any better?” she asked, looking him over. “Hungry?”

He sighed; he wasn’t feeling hungry, but he had to eat, for Lily’s sake, if nothing else. Of course, he would need some strength to face Riddle at some point, so he nodded his head. “Yeah. Some eggs if you’ve got them.”

“You need more protein and carbs than that, Harry,” Hermione reprimanded him gently, before going over to the bag across the room and summoning things without a word. After some quick Warming Charms, she brought enough to feed a small army to the table, and Ron stumbled out of bed and came to join them. “Eggs, rashers, tomatoes, and toast,” she said, plating them up and scattering them about the table.

“Thanks, ‘Mione,” Harry said.

Ron pulled Hermione down so that she was perched on his lap, and kissed her cheek. “Yeah, thanks, love,” he said, stabbing at his eggs.

Harry forced himself to eat his tomatoes by forming a sandwich with everything else on his plate; he never liked them on their own. Chewing slowly, he hung his head back, and finished more quickly than Ron did, but shook his head when Hermione asked him if he wanted seconds, and casted a Cleaning Charm on his hands. He summoned the bag again, and called out for the map, surveying the locations it sported.

“Malfoy Manor is too obvious,” Ron said quietly, shaking his head.

Hermione nodded at her fiancé. “What about Lestrange Hacienda?” she asked.

“With Bellatrix, Rodolphus, and Rabastan dead, it’s a possibility,” Ron muttered, picking up another rasher and chewing on it.
“It’s got to be Riddle House,” Harry whispered, and Ron and Hermione turned to look at him. “I mean, I saw him resting there with Wormtail before the tournament, in those dreams I had. He was recovering, of course, but he thought that inheriting the manor was his due, despite his father being what he called a filthy Muggle—no offense, ‘Mione,” he said quickly.

Hermione shook her head. “None taken,” she assured him.

“Didn’t he kill his father there when he was still at Hogwarts?” Ron asked.

Harry nodded. “Yeah, likely seen as revenge for abandoning his mother while she was pregnant with him,” he responded, hunching his shoulders. “I say we go there today. We get in somehow, and you and Hermione have to distract everyone enough so that I can get to wherever he’s being kept hidden for his own safety. Then, I’ll...you know, do it.”

“Do you think that’s a good idea, Harry?” Hermione whispered. “We could run into real trouble if we just show up...”

“Fred and George gave you the information on Notice-Me-Not Charms, ‘Mione,” Harry replied in a patient manner. “I also have to use a Concealment Charm,” he whispered, running a hand along his belly. “Merlin forbid Riddle catches wind of my pregnancy...”

Ron sighed, swallowing slightly at the image of Riddle destroying both Harry and his child all in one go, and it didn’t sit well with him. “Well, the sooner we go there and kill him, the sooner we can end this,” the redhead said softly.

Hermione sighed as well, her shoulders slacking ever so slightly at the notion of what the three of them were about to do. “All right, then,” she said, knowing full well when she was overruled and outnumbered. “Let’s get to Little Hangleton, then, and finish this, once and for all.”

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“If anyone get can him to see reason, it’s you.” Ginny was staring at her husband, who refused to make eye contact with her, and so she reached out and took him by the hand. “Love, you know that that’s true.”

Draco sighed, looking up at her; the sleepless nights for the past seven days had taken a toll on her sixteen-year-old husband, who had been distraught upon the knowledge that Severus had given in to his baser vampire instincts and fled the safety of Grimmauld. It had taken nearly five days, but he had been returned to that place, with Remus, Moody, Kingsley, and Arthur all hauling him in after searching for nearly all that time, and promptly brought him upstairs to Sirius’s old bedroom. Draco leaned against the wall of the library, where he and Ginny were currently standing, just down the corridor from the bedroom itself.

“I know that,” Draco said, speaking at last, and noticed his wife’s body language immediately relaxing in relief. He sighed, mulling it over in his mind. “Very well, I’ll speak to him. Why don’t you ask Neville, Luna, Mr. Lovegood, and Mrs. Longbottom to come?” he asked. “I’m sure Harry would want them here, what with the reports of the Death Eaters looking left and right, and the wards here are far superior...”

Ginny launched herself towards him and threw her arms around Draco, kissing him feverishly before pulling herself back down. “All right, love, I will,” she told him.

There was a tap upon the library door, and Tonks stuck her head in; ever since Harry, Ron, and Hermione had left, her hair had gone into a mousy brown. “Severus has woken up,” she reported in
Draco sighed. “All right. I’ll speak to him,” he replied, pressing a kiss to Ginny’s cheek before he left the library, just enough to hear Ginny cross the room and toss in some Floo Powder into the fireplace and call out for the Longbottom residence. Draco smiled at Tonks as he walked down the darkened corridor, and slowly opened the door, seeing his godfather sitting, rigid, in the window seat of the bedroom, Matilda in his lap. “Severus?” he asked softly.

Severus turned and regarded his godson, while Matilda gave a happy little yelp and jumped down from his lap, running around Draco’s legs and eagerly waiting to be petted. “Even my damn familiar wants to leave me,” he muttered.

Draco swallowed, gathering the Crup in his arms and crossing the room, and took the seat close by the bed, settling Matilda easily and regarding his godfather. “You make it seem as if Harry left you willingly.”

Severus shrugged. “Well, it’s perfectly obvious that he did, Draco.”

Draco narrowed his eyes. “I don’t believe that,” he replied, proceeding to gently scratch Matilda behind the ears. “I was preconditioned to believe so many lies about the Wizarding World by Lucius, including that Harry was an enemy. However, in the wake of my refusal to take the mark, and Harry going out on a limb for me—as well as offering me his friendship and loyalty, for no reason other than out of the kindness of his heart—I knew that I had been lied to from the time I could fully attempt to understand politics.”

Severus shook his head. “Friendships and marriage are hardly the same.”

“And I am not saying they are,” Draco said quickly. “I am merely saying that Harry is a kindhearted young man, and, for reasons I’ll never begin to understand, fell in love with you, despite your former animosity towards one another.”

Severus sneered. “What do you know, Draco?”

“I know about humankind,” he said simply. “However, I also know that Harry would never leave you completely willingly. He fell in love with you, married you, became pregnant with your child, and was dead-set on forever with you.”

“Then why would he leave me?!” Severus growled, causing Matilda to cry out, and Draco soothed the creature immediately.

“Perhaps because he wanted a safe enough world to raise your daughter in,” replied Draco in a simple tone of voice. “Can’t you see that?”

“I see that he has left me,” Severus replied bitterly.

“He didn’t do it for selfish reasons,” Draco said firmly. “If he was selfish, and not the Harry we knew, he would have willingly stayed in hiding with you forever. I think you know that, but you fell in love with Harry for his selflessness. You knew full well what his destiny was, as I did; I mean, Lucius wouldn’t shut up about the prophecy in the Department of Mysteries, especially when he escaped from Azkaban and attempted to force me into taking the mark. The Harry we knew wouldn’t sit by and permit more bloodshed, Severus; he would have fought, with every fiber of his being, to ensure that there was a Wizarding World at the end of the day, one where he could have forever with you and your daughter.”

Severus swallowed, gritting his teeth against the wave of emotions that flowed through him at the
proclamation of his godson. “I just don’t want anything to happen to him,” he whispered then, his tone broken.

Draco nodded. “I know you don’t,” he assured him. “But, Harry knows what he has to do. He couldn’t think of himself in this moment, Severus; he had to think about the entirety of the Wizarding World.”

Severus dragged a hand down his face, shaking his head. “But at what cost, Draco?” he whispered, his voice shaking. “I don’t want to trade his life for Riddle’s.”

Draco shook his head. “Even I cannot say for absolute certainty what the eventual outcome between Harry and Riddle will be, Severus,” he said calmly. “All I know is, Harry needs to face him down, the sooner the better.”

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Luna and Neville stepped through the Floo, Xenophilius Lovegood and Augusta Longbottom just behind them. Ginny greeted them all in kind, Mr. Lovegood and Mrs. Longbottom heading downstairs to speak to the Order, and summoned Kreacher, who provided a tea service for the three of them in the library. Ginny sat back immediately upon the chaise longue, and stroked her belly absentmindedly, looking at how wonderful Luna and Neville looked together as a married couple, and hoped that Draco would return soon to engage in conversation with them. She knew how important it was to ensure Severus’s well-being, but Ginny loved her time with her husband all the same.

“It’s just a few weeks yet,” Luna said softly, as Neville urged her into a chair by the fire, and perched upon the arm of it, “but Neville and I will be having a child by September.”

Ginny grinned at her closest friend, next to Hermione. “That’s wonderful news, Luna,” she said warmly to her. “How did your father take it?”

“He’s overjoyed,” Luna said; she was beaming, and Neville kissed her forehead.

“And your gran, Neville?” Ginny queried.

“Gran is Gran,” Neville replied with a slight shrug. “Said that it was too soon to even be thinking of having a child, but...” He shrugged.

“You know how to defend yourselves, and I’m positive your reflexes will increase twofold once the child is born,” Ginny told them gently.

“And you?” Luna asked. “How is your son?”

“He is lively,” Ginny replied, rolling her eyes, remembering the consistency of the nights she was literally kicked out of sleep due to her unborn son’s antics. “I’m convinced we’ve another star Quidditch player for the brood, and Draco couldn’t be happier.”

“Try chamomile,” Neville told Ginny with a smile. “It aids sleep and encourages calmness, thus permitting you to get a decent nights’ sleep,” he explained, knowing exactly what his friend needed in her pregnancy.

“I’m surprised it’s only you here,” Luna said, not unkindly. “We usually meet as a group. Is Harry all right? Is it the baby?”

Ginny sighed and shook her head. “No. Harry, Ron, and Hermione actually left a week ago,” she
said softly.

“To face down You-Know-Who?” Neville guessed.

Ginny nodded. “Yes. Severus is devastated, and Draco’s gone in to calm him. He... Severus kind of lost it on the morning after Harry’s departure,” she informed them gently.

“Lost it?” Luna questioned. “How?”

“He turned to his baser vampire instincts,” she said softly. “Nearly wrecked Sirius’s old bedroom in doing so, and smashed through the window.”

“The window?” Neville asked, shuddering.

“The same,” Ginny told them. “He went off into the forest, and we all believed it was in an attempt to follow them, but his tracking was blocked somehow. Anyway, Dad, Remus, Moody, and Kingsley put steps in place to follow them, and they were successful, bringing him back in the wee hours of the morning.”

“Merlin,” Luna breathed. “Is he all right?”

“He was shaken up, according to Tonks,” Ginny continued.

“Naturally,” Neville said with a nod.

“Draco’s in there now with him,” Ginny went on. “I just hope that he can get Severus to open up and calm himself a bit. Naturally, it’ll be difficult, what with him worrying about Harry day and night, and Harry’s pregnancy,” she whispered, shaking her head. “All I know is, Severus won’t take this lightly, and Harry will have a lot to answer to upon his return.”

“Plenty,” said a voice from behind them, just after the door to the library opened, and Draco strode across the threshold. He clapped Neville on the shoulder, and was rewarded with the same in return, and leaned down to kiss Luna on the cheek. “How was your journey?” he asked the pair of them, as he moved to sit beside Ginny on the chaise, winding his hand around hers and pressing a kiss to her temple. “Was it all right?”

“Oh, very,” Luna said in that lyrical tone of hers, as Adelpha and Crookshanks made their presence known, and hopped up onto her lap. Luna laughed indulgently and proceeded to stroke their fur.

“Gran was a bit irritated with it,” Neville said, shrugging his shoulder as Crookshanks decided he wanted to be in his lap, and stroked the ginger cat. “She said the entire thing seemed a bit dodgy, but nevertheless said that superior wards couldn’t be ignored.”

“Harry would want you here,” Ginny assured the two of them. “He wants everyone close to him to be here now.”

“How have you been doing?” Luna asked, raising her silvery eyes to Ginny. “You wrote that Percy was killed at Hogwarts by Malfoy Sr.”

Ginny nodded, leaning into Draco as he wrapped an arm around her shoulders. “Yes. It was a bitter pill to swallow, especially given the information from Bill and Charlie that he had quit the ministry just before that, and was going to be coming home to us.” She shrugged. “I suppose that, in the end, he was on the correct side.”

“How are Bill and Charlie?” Neville asked.
“Bill went to France with Fleur to spend some time with her family,” Draco put in. “They got engaged during the battle, and wanted to tell her family in person about the engagement. He also said that he would be getting her a ring while they were over there.”

“Charlie went back to the dragon preserve the next morning,” Ginny said softly. “I suppose, after helping all of us, he needed to go home, and we respect him for it.”

“How did your mum take the engagement?” Luna wanted to know. “From the last you told me, she wasn’t too keen on their relationship...”

“Mum tried to put a barrier in between the two of them, before she knew about it,” Ginny said as she snuggled in closer to Draco. “Once she found out, however, she was a bit livid, to say the least. She even tried to make Fleur out to be a shallow person...”

“Didn’t you think that that was the case as well?” Neville wanted to know.

Ginny shook her head. “No. When I saw how much her sister meant to her during the second task, my opinion of her changed. It takes a lot to love another person, even I know that, and the love one shows for their siblings is such a powerful force. The fact that she wept, and was so worried of her, shifted my opinion of her greatly. We’ve gotten along quite well ever since, and she’s even asked me to be a bridesmaid at the wedding.”

“Greyback got to Bill during the battle,” Draco explained. “Slashed him across the face, but he was in his human form during, so no transformation will ever happen and, according to Remus, he will only have attributes of a werewolf.”

The blonde witch cocked her head to one side. “So, your mum believed that Fleur wouldn’t love Bill anymore, all because of a few scars?” came Luna’s perplexed question.

“Apparently so,” Ginny told her. “Appearances shouldn’t really matter, in the end. While I love my mum, she spoiled me for years, and I was so surprised that she even let me marry Draco in the first place.”

“I thought they had consented because of the pregnancy,” Draco admitted, tracing patterns on Ginny’s arm with his fingertips.

“They hadn’t?” Neville asked.

“No,” Draco said, shaking his head. “They could see that I had changed, and had gone over into the side of the Light. Harry helped convince them. And then there was the matter of me being madly in love with their only daughter to take into consideration...”

“And me being madly in love with you,” Ginny put in.

Draco smiled down at her. “Yes. Of course, I’m positive that they would have made us wait, were it not for the pregnancy. However, they took our feelings into account, and permitted the marriage to take place, as you well know. Then there was the matter of the war being just around the corner, and they wanted to see the both of us happy, for it isn’t known just how long we’re going to have such happiness.”

“Infinitely, if Harry has anything to say about it,” Luna said with a smile.

“Definitely,” Ginny replied.

Luna lowered her eyes then, taking in how Adelpha and Crookshanks seemed to be reacting to one
another, and smiled. “Well, the two of you have more in common with many people residing in
this dusty old house, don’t you?”

Ginny blinked, lowering her eyes to the feline creatures. “What?” she asked, confused as to what
Luna could mean.

“It’s quite a simple matter, really,” Luna replied, raising her eyes to Ginny, her smile staying
constant. “Adelpha is pregnant with Crookshanks’ children,” she said, and Ginny clapped a hand to
her mouth, wondering what Hermione would have to say about that.

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Harry, Ron, and Hermione gathered up the tent and all of their belongings, spelling them into
Hermione’s beaded bag. Then, behind the Protective Enchantments, the trio joined hands beneath
Harry’s invisibility cloak and popped out of the Forest of Dean. They almost instantaneously
cracked onto the grounds of Riddle House, and spotted many Death Eaters guarding the various
entry points of the old property.

Hermione and Ron casted Notice-Me-Not Charms upon themselves, before they slipped out from
beneath the cloak and stepped forward. With scattered cries of, “Incarcerous!” and “Confringo!”
and “Flipendo!”, both of them managed to subdue the Death Eaters. Harry, who had whispered a
quick combination of “Repello Inimicum”, “Protego Maxima”, and “Fianto Duri”, as well as a
spell of his own invention, “Integumentum”, so as to conceal his pregnancy, before he stormed
towards the main entrance of the house, and whispered, “Alohomora” and was immediately
granted access. Stepping inside, hearing the shouts of Ron and Hermione battling the Death Eaters,
Harry stormed in, slightly taken aback at the notion that he didn’t encounter any further guards as
he made his way upstairs.

“Homenum Revelio,” he whispered, and the swooping sensation enveloped him as something
called him further and further up the stairs. As he neared a beautifully-carved and ornate door, he
moved to place his hand on it, and it opened immediately at his touch. As he stepped into the
room, he noticed Riddle and Wormtail whispering to one another, the latter appearing in his typical
simpering manner, while Lucius Malfoy stood more reserved to the right.

“Ah, who do we have here?” came Riddle’s voice, and Harry promptly threw off the cloak, and
glared at the creature who had made his life a living hell from the moment he had murdered his
parents and subsequently marked him as his equal at fifteen-months-old. “Ah, I see it is Harry
Potter, the Boy Who Lived. Has he come to die?” he whispered.

“Not today, Tom,” Harry stated.

Riddle’s red eyes immediately flashed at the name, and Wormtail, who immediately stepped forward to do his master’s bidding, looked as if he would do anything for the man. However, his feet subsequently shuffled over the other as he hurried closer and closer to Harry, almost as if some unforeseen and hidden barrier was holding him back from completing the task. When he finally reached Harry, after a fair bit of struggling, he took out his wand from within his robes and raised it but, the moment he attempted to use a spell, his silver hand immediately reached up and bound itself around his neck, choking the life out of him, and
causing him to fall dead at Harry’s feet.

Harry looked up at Riddle and smiled. “One down,” he said with a shrug. “Is that your best shot,
Tom? What else do you have up your sleeve?”
“Lucius,” Riddle promptly hissed, narrowing his red eyes further. “Get the boy!”

Lucius, although the man looked exhausted and resentful, stepped forward. He had no wand, Harry noticed then, and so Harry promptly raised his and narrowed his eyes at him. The older man, for once, looked taken aback at being literally faced down by a sixteen-year-old boy but, with no other means of defending himself, could do nothing.

“Everte Statum!” Harry shouted without hesitation, remembering how Draco himself had used the spell upon him in second-year, during the first meeting of the Dueling Club. Harry watched as Lucius Malfoy literally flew through the air, and collapsed against a far wall, hitting his head badly, and subsequently going unconscious. “That’s for Percy,” he growled, before turning to gaze at Riddle. “Looks like you’re out of ammo, Tom,” he said, and smirked at the Dark Wizard, who rewarded him with a heated glare. “Now what?”

“Avada—!” He started, bringing out his wand and launching to his feet.

“Expecto Patronum!” Harry shouted, numerous images of his times with Severus filling his mind in the milliseconds that followed. Severus rescuing him from Slughorn; Severus providing him with water at the Burrow and not making fun of him when he sicked up; the first kiss the pair had shared together; their wedding; their first time together; when Harry had revealed to Severus that he was pregnant; when they had found and subsequently decided to keep Matilda; and their wonderful night together at Grimmauld Place.

Harry watched at Riddle’s eyes widened as the creature burst forth in a multitude of silver light, and let out a scream as he noticed that it was not the stag. No, the black panther charged forward with a mighty yowl, taking down the Dark Wizard easily, slashing at the air with its great claws as it toppled before him. The light absorbed the green of the Killing Curse, thus permitting it to rebound, and go directly into the body of Tom Riddle. The panther backed off as soon as its job was done, before turning around and gently butting Harry’s hand with its head.

“Thank you, Valentina,” Harry whispered.

Valentina bowed to him, before she waited for his next command.

“Please deliver a message to Madam Pomfrey,” he said softly. “Tell her that Lucius Malfoy is broken and bleeding in Riddle House, and needs medical care immediately. Then, just rest,” he told her.

Valentina bowed a second time, before she charged out the window, and beyond.

Harry gave a cursory glance at the trio of bodies around them and, once he was satisfied that they were all down for the count, he made his way out of the room. He went down the staircase and towards the main door of the house, opening it, and saw Ron and Hermione standing there, just waiting for him. Harry flashed them a smile and charged forward, throwing himself into their arms without letting go.

“It’s done, it’s over,” he wept into their arms.

“Over, mate?” Ron asked.

“He’s dead—dead,” he managed to get out, his voice shaking as he let himself down. “Wormtail was up there, and his own hand strangled himself,” he said as they walked towards the edge of the property.

“Was anyone else up there?” Hermione asked.
“Malfoy,” Harry told them, summoning a vial of blood from her beaded bag, and drank it down, all in one go. “I knocked him unconscious, and sent my Patronus to Madam Pomfrey to see to him, because, no matter how evil he is, he should answer for his crimes.”

“You’re better than me, mate,” Ron said softly.

“Now what?” Hermione queried as Harry vanished the vial.

Harry smiled. “Now? Now, I go back to my husband, and the two of you get on a plane to Australia to find ‘Mione’s parents.”

Ron nodded. “That’s right! We’ve got to go and get them ‘Mione! They have to be witnesses when we get married! We’ve got to go—!”

Hermione suddenly threw herself into Ron’s arms, kissing him. “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me, thank Harry,” Ron said with a smile.

Hermione turned to Harry, pulling him into her arms. “Thank you for making the Wizarding World safe again, Harry James Potter.”

“Potter-Snape,” he reminded her with a cheeky grin. “Now, I’ve got to get back to my husband, and you two have to get Mr. and Mrs. Granger.”

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Severus had felt a stinging sensation in his arm, and, upon yanking his sleeve up, he saw that the Dark Mark was coiling around itself. A hiss emitted from it then, before it proceeded to vanish, his arm returning to pale and bare once more. He looked up then and out the window, feeling tears pricking at his eyes. “You’ve done it, then,” he whispered, gently stroking Matilda, who was fast asleep in his lap.

There was a bang from somewhere down the corridor then, and then a pair of feet rushing down the hallway. The door to the bedroom was thrown open, and Harry himself stood there, his green eyes blazing. “It’s done,” he declared, and Matilda jumped off his lap and proceeded to run gleeful circles around Harry’s ankles.

Severus got to his feet then, slamming the door shut behind his husband wandlessly, and stalking towards him. Without hesitation, he yanked Harry into his arms and kissed him fiercely, needing to have the taste of him in his mouth. “Do you have any idea how worried I was?” he growled between kisses.

Harry immediately latched onto him, his body language confirming that he never wanted to let his husband go. “I have an idea,” he whispered, arching into Severus’s ministrations. “And I don’t expect to be automatically let off the hook...”

Severus yanked himself backwards then, and shook his head at his husband’s words. “I’m not into punishments, Harry,” he said softly. “If you’re looking for that kind of relationship, then I am not the man for you.”

Harry sighed, relaxation settling over his body. “Good,” he replied. “I don’t particularly fancy being beaten up black and blue.”

“Nor do I wish to make you so,” Severus replied, wrapping his arms around his husband’s waist and cupping his arse. “You’ve had enough turmoil in your life, my love.”
Harry nodded his head. “You’ve no idea,” he said, leaning his forehead down onto his husband’s chest and nuzzling closer. “Now that Riddle is dead and gone, I want... I want...”

“What do you want, Harry? Name it. Anything that I am in my power to give, I will give it to you, no questions asked.”

Harry smiled, looking up at Severus. “I’ve signed the house over to Draco and Ginny, to keep it in the family,” he explained. “I was at Gringotts just now, getting the paperwork in order. Did you know that they also have a realtor on staff?”

Severus raised his eyebrows. “No. I was not aware of such a thing.”

“I bought us a house,” Harry declared, wrapping his arms around Severus’s neck. “A house to raise Lily, where Matilda can run free, where you can brew to your hearts’ content, and where we can be happy, now that we’re free.”

Severus felt the tears pricking at the backs of his eyes at the notion that, not only was he indeed free, but he was with the man he loved, his mate, and he was real. “And where is this property, then, my love?”

“Dorset,” Harry told him brightly with a grin. “I’ve already sent Kreacher to Diagon Alley to procure all the necessary potions to set up your brewing lab, which will be the entire basement of the house, all for you, my love. Furniture came with the house as well, and Gringotts has already sent for a top Curse-Breaker to do the wards on our behalf. Now that it’s over and done with, my love, all I want is you, Lily, and Matilda by my side, day and night, for the rest of my life, if that is amenable to you,” he said softly.

Severus leaned down and kissed Harry lightly on the lips, although it didn’t take long for the kiss to turn passionate. “Always,” Severus whispered against his husband’s mouth, before wrapping his arms around his husband, mesmerized at the wandless magic as Harry packed up their room around them.

Harry pulled back from him then, catching up Matilda in his arms and grinning up at his husband, before he took his hand, adjusting his rucksack on his shoulder. Then, they cracked away from Sirius Black’s bedroom at Grimmauld Place, before landing in a beautifully-decorated parlor, complete with books lining the walls within their shelves, two couches, a plus armchair, Persian rug upon the highly-polished wood floor, a fireplace, and a landscape painting positioned above it. Harry watched as Severus drank in his surroundings with trepidation, shock, and finally, awe, while Matilda jumped from his arms, and wandered outside to explore the expansive grounds.

“Welcome home, Severus Snape,” Harry whispered.

Severus reached out again, dragging Harry so that he was lengthwise against him, and pressed his lips to his once more. “Welcome home, Harry Potter-Snape,” he replied and, reaching into his pocket, returned Harry’s ring onto his finger, where it belonged.

Chapter End Notes

*Integumentum directly translates to “The Shroud” in Latin

*If at all interested in seeing the inspiration for Harry and Severus’s new home in
Dorset, kindly follow the link: https://www.rightmove.co.uk/property-for-sale/property-82555499.html
Harry opened his eyes as the winter sun gleamed in through the window of the master bedroom of the new Potter-Snape residence in Dorset, gleamed and snuggled in closer to his husband’s mutually naked body. Their reunion had lasted for hours, with Severus pinning him to the mattress, multiple walls, and, finally, even the bedroom floor, to the point where Harry felt as if his arse would give out. He could barely feel it that morning as he felt his husband’s arms wrapping around him, and smiled automatically at the contact.

“Fuck,” Harry whispered automatically as Severus reached in between his legs to stroke his already-erect member. He arched up against him, finding that there was no greater sensation than that of Severus’s cock teasing at his hole. “Severus...” He whispered.

Severus’s breath was hot at Harry’s ear as his tongue gently teased its shell, before he took his free hand and gently guided his member into Harry, who was still plenty stretched from the evening before. He savored the sounds he evoked from Harry’s lips, and shuddered at the first one—a delightful shiver and subsequent gasp of pleasure. He gently nibbled at the sensitive skin of Harry’s neck, pulling his husband closer as he continued to pound into him, while all the while stroking Harry’s own member.

“Severus,” Harry moaned, his eyes shutting automatically at the sensations that tore through him at his husband’s touch. “Severus... Oh, Merlin... Fuck me,” he whispered.

“I am, my Harry, I am,” Severus assured him, pulling Harry closer still, so as the head of his cock pushed just so into his prostate.

“Fuck!” Harry screamed, followed by a series of delectable moans, before he trembled. “I can’t stop it!” he whispered, gritting his teeth. “Need to... Need to come,” he said, shuddering and spasming in his husband’s arms.


Harry let out the single most beautiful noise that Severus had ever heard as his orgasm tore through him, and spilled all over his husband’s hands. He shivered with the aftershocks as Severus’s own release coated his insides, and he methodically waved his hand to complete a Cleaning Charm over the two of them. Sighing with satisfaction, Harry turned himself over and let out a pleased sound as Severus wrapped his arms around him.

“Good morning,” Severus said softly.

“Hell of a good morning,” Harry whispered back. “I could get used to waking up like that every single day.”

Severus sighed, pressing his forehead against Harry’s. “And you will.”

Harry blinked, pulling himself back and staring at Severus. “What?”

“I sent Minerva and owl in between our exploits last evening,” he said gently, running his fingers up and down Harry’s back. “I won’t be returning to Hogwarts to teach.”
Harry blinked. “You won’t?”

“No,” Severus said, shaking his head. “Bill Weasley has left Gringotts permanently and will be assuming my position as potions master, as well as Head of Slytherin House.”

Harry smirked. “The Weasleys will have a field day,” he predicted.

Severus chuckled. “Cuthbert has decided to finally retire as well, and Fleur will be taking over the position of History of Magic professor,” he continued. “I assume that now that the class will have a reputation for being more...lively.”

Harry laughed aloud at that and nodded. “Well, while I won’t be upset to have you not utilizing the Floo Network on a daily basis to return to Scotland, I know you like to keep busy. What will you do now that you’ve given up Hogwarts?”

“Research,” Severus replied, and Harry raised his eyebrows. “If you would allow me, I can grow and cultivate new species of plants utilized for potions in our own garden. I can use the basement lab for my personal experiments, enabling me to work from home.”

Harry smiled. “The garden is quite a big place...”

“Yes,” Severus replied.

“I would like a portion of it to use for flowers, and perhaps an area where the children can play and for family picnics and such,” he said softly.

Severus smiled down at his husband. “Of course, my love, anything,” he replied. “I know you have something else on your mind as well...”

“I would like to offer the house and garden to Ron and Hermione for the wedding,” he said softly to his husband. “I think it would really be wonderful to have such a gathering here, as we want to prove to everyone that you really are on the side of the Light. I wouldn’t want anyone getting the wrong idea, or attempt to take you away from me, now that we’re together...”

Severus leaned down and pressed his lips to his husband’s. “Nobody will be taking me away from you, Harry. It is not like I’m the one who killed Albus.”

Harry nodded, sighing with relief. “No, you’re not.” He sighed, about to say something further, when a familiar tap-tap was heard upon one of the master bedroom windows and, turning, he spotted Hedwig just perched on the windowsill. Smiling to himself, he summoned his robe and drew himself out of his husband’s arms and opened the window, Hedwig screeching good-naturedly as she flew in, and immediately set about to greeting Severus, who chuckled affably at the owl’s antics. “I suppose I’m not here then,” Harry said with mock-bitterness as he summoned a treat for Hedwig.

Hedwig, upon smelling the treat, gently pecked Severus goodbye before swooping over and landing flawlessly upon Harry’s shoulder. She took the treat from his outstretched hands before she extended her claw as an afterthought. Then, nipping at his ear, Hedwig flew back outside, likely wanting to check out the owlery that had come with the property, and already housed Severus’s owl, a Greater Sooty called Artemis.

“Minerva,” Harry stated as he broke open the wax seal, and Severus sat up in bed automatically at the proclamation. “Ah. I see,” Harry said as he read over the parchment.

“What is it?” Severus asked.
Harry swallowed. “She’s asked that I take on the position of Defense Against the Dark Arts as well as Head of Gryffindor House.”

“Ah,” Severus said, nodding. “Very few would be a better choice, love. Well, what are you going to answer her?”

Harry smiled and folded up the letter. “That is a simple answer. No.”

Severus blinked. “No? You would so willingly give up such a divine opportunity practically handed to you?” he asked, shaking his head. “Why?”

“Because I’ve had enough of people attempting to make plans for me,” he said simply, setting the letter aside and spelling the window closed. He crossed back over to the bed and climbed into it, chucking his robe as he did so. “I know that Minerva means well, my love, and I’ll readily admit that the position is a good one. However, all I want, in this moment, is to be here, with you, and to raise our family. I’m only sixteen, after all, and I’ve plenty of time to decide what I want to do with my life. However, I’ve only just defeated Riddle, my love, and I want to rest. It’s not like we’ll be starving for money, anyhow—the Potter and Black fortunes will do more than enough for us financially, and we already own the house outright.”

Severus automatically wrapped his arms around his husband from where he sat against the bed frame and bolsters, permitting Harry to lie back against his bare chest. “And you truly imagine that you will be happy, my love? In this house, with me, Matilda, Lily, and any other children we decide to bring into the mix?”

Harry sighed and nodded. “All I’ve ever wanted was a family, Severus.”

“The Weasleys have been your family, my love...”

“Yes, yes, I know,” Harry said gently. “But I wanted something that was truly, truly mine. You, Matilda, Lily... You are my true family. And while I’ll always love Molly and Arthur for their selflessness in taking me in, feeding me, clothing me, loving me, and giving me birthday and Christmas gifts, it is not the same as being in love, nor having familiars, or having children of one’s own.”

Severus pressed a kiss to Harry’s temple, taking great delight as his husband leaned further back against him, and wrapped his arms around him. “So, you’ve no idea what to do as a career? I thought that you and Ron were dead-set on joining the Auror Academy...”

“Perhaps I was, once,” Harry admitted, tilting his head back so as he could see his husband’s face, and smiled up at him, never feeling more pleased than he was in this moment. “But I’ve dreamed a new dream now.”

“Oh?” Severus asked.

“You,” Harry told him, smiling up at him, and gently tilting his face so that his husband was looking back at him. “You are my new dream, Severus.”

Severus smiled then before he dipped his face downwards and silenced all further thoughts from his husband with a passionate kiss.

~*~

Ron and Hermione finally returned from Australia by the end of the week, with Mr. and Mrs. Granger re-establishing their lucrative dental practice in Hampshire. Ron had immediately asked
Mr. Granger for Hermione’s hand in marriage, and the man, despite being there for the engagement months before, was pleased to have his future son-in-law ask a second time. When his best friends came to the Potter-Snape household just two days after they’d gotten back to England, Hermione was delighted with it and immediately requested a tour, and Severus was pleased to give her an extensive one of the plans for the garden.

“He’s much calmer now, now that the war’s over, mate,” Ron put in, taking the offered cup of tea that Harry offered him, once Severus had gone downstairs to the lab to do some brewing for the rest of the afternoon.

“He seems much happier as well,” Hermione put in, smiling indulgently as Ron wrapped an arm around her shoulders. “Not spying for the Order seems to have worked wonders. He looks a good decade younger.”

“He is happier,” Harry informed them, gently running his fingers over his swollen belly in a moment of happiness. “Now that he’s decided to devote his life to potions research and cultivation of plants for his experiments, he seems much happier on the whole.”

“Now that he doesn’t have any more kids to terrorize— Oi!” Ron squawked as Hermione jabbed him in the ribs.

“Honestly, Ronald, that’s your brother-in-law you’re talking about,” she said, shaking her head at him with a scathing look.

“I didn’t mean anything by it, Harry,” Ron said quickly.

Harry grinned at the display and shook his head at him. “No worries, Ron. Severus readily admits that teaching was hardly an appropriate position for him. Now that Lily is on the way and we’re safe, however, he’s resolved to turn over a new leaf when it comes to the treatment of children around us.”

Ron rubbed his side, which was still smarting ever so slightly. “Well, still. Better you than me, mate—I love ‘Mione too much,” he told him.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Well, as my mind attempts to divest itself of that charming image,” she said, her voice dripping with sarcasm, “I assume there was a purpose to our visit, Harry. I mean, I’m pleased to see the house and Severus’s garden, don’t get me wrong, but I sense that there’s something underlying here...”

“There is,” Harry responded with a nod. “Have you and Ron given any thought to where you might hold the wedding?”

Ron sighed. “Well, we were going to use the Burrow, but Bill and Fleur booked it for the first of August, and Mum likes to limit it to one wedding or significant event per year, no matter whose wedding it is,” he replied. “And there’s no way I’m waiting longer than necessary to make Hermione my wife.”

“That’s awfully sweet of you, Ron,” Hermione said, their earlier spat forgotten.

“Does your family attend church, Hermione?”

Hermione sighed. “Not so much. On Christmas and Easter, if Mum and Dad can get around to it, now and again, but they never forced me to go, of course.”

Harry nodded. “Well, Severus and I have talked it over, and we’d love it if you and Ron would be
willing to have your wedding here,” he said with a smile, and his two best friends looked shocked at the declaration. “It could be in June, and we could hold it in the garden, which would be beautiful at that time of year. I’ve already contacted Neville, who’s going to help us with the planting and such, and I think it would be a lovely place to hold a wedding—”

Hermione darted out of her place upon one of the living room couches, putting her teacup onto the coffee table between them, and launched herself at Harry, throwing her arms around him and kissing him on both cheeks. “Oh, Harry, you’re wonderful!” she cried out. “It’s more than we’d ever hoped for!”

“You really don’t have to do this, mate,” Ron said, although he was beaming.

“I want to do this,” Harry assured him, gently easing Hermione back and Hermione, taking the hint, returned to the couch beside Ron. “Severus and I don’t want to renew our vows so quickly, although one day we may have a proper wedding. But you two have been with me since we fought that bloody troll in first-year, and the two of you deserve a wonderful wedding. And besides, Mum Weasley and Mrs. Granger would likely have a field day if you didn’t take some time to plan out the perfect ceremony.”

Ron sighed, wrapping his hand around Hermione’s. “You’ve always been my best mate and my brother, Harry, and although I’ve proved several times over that I’m hardly worthy of that title, I can’t believe that you took me back each time."

“Let’s not bring up the confusion regarding the tournament again,” Harry said with a smile and a lighthearted chuckle. “No fourteen-year-old is going to appear rational on every given day. And while I’m glad you know now that I didn’t put my name in the Goblet of Fire, I in turn can fully forgive you for your behavior.”

“Thanks, mate,” Ron replied.

“Boys,” Hermione muttered to herself.

“Now all that remains is a day for the two of you to select for the ceremony, finalizing the wardrobe, and making sure that the wedding party is a-go. Plus, I’m sure that Kreacher, Mum Weasley, Dobby, and Winky can cook up a delicious spread,” Harry put in.

“Dobby and Winky?” Ron questioned.

Harry smiled. “It’s quite a large house, this one,” he told his friends, “and Kreacher’s getting on in years. He typically keeps to himself, but Dobby and Winky offered their services to us; I suppose the castle affords too many memories. So, the two of them should be finishing up their duties there for good, and they’ll be coming to work with us on a paid basis at the end of the following week.”

Hermione sighed. “Well, I suppose if they’ve entered your service willingly, plus what I can assume will be a generous allowance tacked onto it, then there’s no room for issue.”

“Well,” Ron said, hoping not to be forced into another lecture about S.P.E.W., “I suppose we should let Mum know what’s happening, then.” He hesitated for a moment, before he turned back to look at Harry. “I know we discussed it at Grimmauld a few weeks back, mate, but I feel I should ask you again..”

“Yeah, Ron?”

“Will you be my Best Man, Harry?”
Harry grinned at the question. “Who else would you ask?”

“Well, I’m sure Fred and George would be willing to—”

“Rictusempra!” Harry called out then, his wand’s tip illuminating silver then as it caught Ron unawares, causing him to erupt in a fit of giggles as he was tickled.

“Harry! Harry!” he cried out.


“Finite Incantatem,” Harry said with a second wave of his wand, a red bolt of light streaming forth and connecting with Ron, who stopped his fit of giggles. “Sure, Ron,” he said, pocketing his wand as if nothing had happened. “I’ll be your Best Man.”

~*~

The fifth of June dawned pleasantly warm in Dorset on the day that Ron and Hermione were due to become man and wife. Ginny stood with Hermione in one of the guest suites, assisting her with her beautiful wedding dress, which she had bought in Paris, and smiled at her soon-to-be sister-in-law. As Maid of Honor, Ginny had remained by Hermione’s side for the entirety of the morning and early afternoon, making sure that nothing ill happened to her.

“How are you feeling?” Ginny whispered. “Okay?”

Hermione sighed, putting her hands on her hips and gazing at herself in the floor-length mirror and shook her head. “Just wish this nausea would die down,” she whispered.

Ginny smiled knowingly and wrapped her arms around Hermione’s waist, pressing a kiss onto her cheek as their eyes met in the mirror. “Ron is going to be thrilled,” she assured her. “I know it may seem like bad timing, what with Ron working with the twins in Diagon, but he’s set to take over their new location in Hogsmeade.”

“But I’ve got Unspeakable training starting in September,” she said softly. “How will I ever manage to do so properly...?”

“You have so many people around you, love,” Ginny assured her, squeezing her about the middle for a moment before finally letting go. “Mum has grandchildren coming out the ears, ever since Fleur revealed her pregnancy after her and Bill got back from France to start work at Hogwarts last term.”

“You don’t think she’ll be upset...?”

“Why would she be?” Ginny asked. “She’ll be as thrilled as Ron.”

Hermione sighed, running a hand along her belly, which wasn’t even swollen yet. “I don’t know, Ginny. I suppose...”

“Are you worried about what your mum and dad will think?”

Hermione shrugged. “I’m seventeen and getting married,” she whispered. “I suppose a surprise pregnancy wouldn’t be too untoward at this point...”

Ginny reached out and took Hermione’s hand. “Well, what with Luna’s announcement that she and Neville are expecting twins last spring, this can’t be all bad, ‘Mione. Besides, there will be so
many more babies for the Wizarding World. It’s a wonder that Kingsley hasn’t put out a re-
population bulletin…”

“Probably because he’s pregnant himself with Moody’s child,” Hermione said, this time a laughter 
emitting from betwixt her lips. “Who knew they’d been married for over a decade? I just feel bad 
that it took them so long to conceive…”

“Probably waiting until it was safe,” Ginny replied. “Too bad we’re the hope for the next 
generation of magic folk.”

“Why?” Hermione asked, arching an eyebrow.

Ginny giggled. “Well, clearly we can’t keep our hands off one another,” she replied with a small 
shrug of her shoulders. “Harry’s pregnant, Fleur’s pregnant, Tonks is pregnant, Luna’s pregnant, 
you’re pregnant, I’m pregnant... I suppose the list goes on, if one wants to be that black and white 
about it.”

“I know Harry was saddened about the quickness of Remus’s and Tonks’s wedding,” Hermione 
put in quietly.

“Hey, even I didn’t know about it, and we were all in hiding together,” Ginny said. “I suppose a lot 
can happen in a week, if you properly put your mind to it.”

“Have you told Harry about giving over Grimmauld to Neville and Luna?” Hermione wanted to 
know, her eyes meeting Ginny’s in the mirror again.

Ginny reached out to adjust Hermione’s long train again. “Not yet. It didn’t seem like the proper 
thing to do over owl post.”

“How’s Draco been, now that Lucius is in Azkaban for life, and Narcissa has fled to the continent, 
perhaps permanently?”

“As well as one can be, I suppose,” Ginny replied, slowly righting herself and placing a protective 
hand upon her belly. “The plans to knock down and rebuild Malfoy Manor are going entirely to 
plan, and Neville and Luna have agreed that we can remain at Grimmauld until the renovations are 
complete.”

“What’s the timeframe on that, then?”

“It should be all finished, wards and all, by Christmas,” Ginny told her. “Like Hogwarts for Dobby 
and Winky, the manor simply held too many memories for Draco. He believed that the place 
needed more than a fresh coat of paint or different rugs and furniture. The new plans for the place 
don’t include dungeons, which is a massive improvement, if you ask me.”

Hermione nodded. “Perhaps it will set an example for Pureblood ancestral homes throughout the 
Wizarding World,” she said softly.

“Well, there’s a long way to go yet,” Ginny said with a smile. “I suppose all of our dreams have 
changed completely, as we never thought we’d truly end up here.”

Hermione grinned at Ginny. “Draco doesn’t mind that you didn’t take the contract with the 
Holyhead Harpies?”

Ginny shook her head. “No. I think he’s pleased, now that Madam Pomfrey is retiring, that we’ll 
both be at Hogwarts throughout the year.”
“How does it feel, being the youngest professor on staff, and youngest Head of House in Hogwarts history?” Hermione wanted to know.

Ginny laughed. “Well, after Harry refused the position, Minerva immediately thought of me, why I still don’t know. I may be talented, even I know that, but having the savior of the Wizarding World could easily boost moral and admittance to the school. I still don’t understand how I could be second to Harry on the list...”

“How is Professor Flitwick?”

Ginny grinned. “He’s really come into his own as Deputy Headmaster. Personally, I think he’s looking forward to the Sorting Ceremony, because he’ll get a stool to stand on, and be eye-level to the Sorting Hat the entire time.”

There was a tap at the door then, and Harry stuck his head in. “Hey,” he said.

“How are things?”

“We’re almost ready,” Harry told her. “Your dad’s already on his way up to fetch you. Which means,” he said, letting Hermione go and offering Ginny his arm, “it’s time for the Best Man to escort the Maid of Honor.”

“We’re going to be great,” Harry assured her.

“Precisely,” Draco confirmed, kissing his wife on the cheek.

“It appears as if the time has come, then,” Hermione said nervously.

“You’re going to be great,” Harry assured her.

“You look beautiful, Hermione,” he called over his shoulder as Ginny pulled both men out.

Ginny, Harry, and Draco made their way down the staircase and towards the living room, which had its French doors open to the beautiful garden. It smelled of roses, tulips, and irises, and many other flowers that Ginny didn’t care to readily name. As she walked, escorted by Harry and Draco, down the aisle, everyone around them oohed and aahed at their appearance, but as she nodded at Severus, in the place of honor as officiant, she knew that everything had worked out the way it was
meant to. She made her way to stand in front of Luna, letting go of Harry and Draco, who moved to the other side, and summoned her bouquet of pink roses into her hands, while the bridesmaids held their white ones.

The music started up then, and Ron suddenly appeared from a side door of the house, shaking hands with all of his groomsmen, Harry, Draco, and finally Severus, and the pair were positively beaming at one another. Turning, the French doors, which had shut upon Ginny, Draco, and Harry’s entrance into the garden, suddenly opened again, and Hermione stepped through, looking breathtaking in her long gown beside Mr. Granger, her red rose bouquet offsetting her gown perfectly. Hermione only had eyes for Ron as she stepped forward, and Ron’s jaw nearly dropped at the sight of his bride-to-be. He shook Mr. Granger’s hand when they’d finally approached, and took Hermione by the hand, placing a gentle kiss on her cheek as they both turned to face Severus.

“We are gathered here today at Potter Park to celebrate the union of Ronald Bilius Weasley and Hermione Jean Granger,” Severus began, his tone reverent. “To be brave is to love someone unconditionally, without expecting anything in return. Ronald,” he said, turning at last to the groom, “do you take Hermione to be your lawfully wedded wife? To have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, for as long as you both shall live?”

“I do,” Ron replied, obviously attempting to keep it together.

“And do you, Hermione,” Severus continued, turning to the bride, “take Ronald to be your lawfully wedded husband? To have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, for as long as you both shall live?” he asked.

“I do,” Hermione responded, her voice choking slightly, her brown eyes filled with tears as she struggled not to come completely undone.

“Then by the powers vested in me, in accordance with the Laws of Wizarding World, I now pronounce you husband and wife,” Severus declared. “You may kiss the bride.”

Ron promptly turned away from Severus and grabbed Hermione about the waist, pulling her to him and kissing her for all to see, and the entire wedding party, plus the guests, let out almighty whoops, hollers, and applause at the spectacle. They almost didn’t see that the shouts of excitement turned into ones of shock, and then pain, as Ginny nearly seemed to double over. It was Draco who noticed that his wife was in distress, and he immediately rushed forward, and took her by the hand, supporting her waist with the other.

“Madam Pomfrey!” he called out then, and the mediwitch immediately bustled forward from within the crowd.

“Oh, my,” the mediwitch said, and nodded. “Well, nothing to worry about, Draco. Your wife is merely in labor.”

“Labor?!” Ginny demanded. “I’m not due for three weeks! He’s not ready!”

“I assure you it is quite all right, my dear,” Madam Pomfrey assured Ginny, and motioned for Draco to lift Ginny up. “I suppose we had better head to the hospital wing—”

“Absolutely not,” Severus said quickly, cutting across her. “Poppy, we would be honored if Ginny gave birth here. I’ve got plenty of pain potions, and Harry and I have the room to accommodate her.”
“Very well, then,” the mediwitch replied, motioning for Draco to follow her, Molly at their heels, as they all hurried inside the manor.

Hermione turned to look at Ron, who was slightly white in the face at what had just transpired moments after their wedding. “Would this be a good time to tell everyone that I’m expecting, too?” she asked, her voice uneasy, but Ron immediately turned to her, enveloping his wife in a passionate embrace and kissing her again.

Chapter End Notes

(1) What Severus says about love during the wedding vows is actually a quote said by Madonna in an interview with Oprah. I personally love Madonna, and thought that this was a beautiful thing for Severus to say here.

(2) All that’s left is the epilogue, which is coming soon! Stay tuned!
EIGHTEEN YEARS LATER

Harry strode through Diagon Alley, Severus at his side, while their brood did a combination of running about, and being far more reserved about the stores around them. They were due to meet Ron and Hermione, plus Draco, Ginny, Neville, and Luna at The Three Broomsticks for lunch, but Harry and Severus had plenty of shopping to do beforehand. So much had seemed to change within the wizarding shopping center, as well as within the hearts and souls of the people around them, but Harry and Severus had never fallen out of love with one another.

Lily Eileen Potter-Snape, their firstborn, was due to begin her seventh-year at Hogwarts in just a few short weeks; she turned and regarded her fathers for a moment, her brilliant green eyes offsetting her raven mane perfectly, and she adjusted her robes accordingly. Minerva had already written that Lily had been made Head Girl for the following term, and Lily was very proud of herself; academically, she was quite intelligent, and she had been Captain of the Gryffindor Quidditch Team from her fifth-year. She had aspirations of joining the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, and had been under tutelage from Moody from the time she was fourteen, already having mastered the ability to become an Animagus, and ultimately taking the form of a black wolf, which was a shock, due to her apparent blood lust, but Lily was the most in-control of all their children.

Their second child, Maximilian Francis Potter-Snape, who was a charming gentleman with brown hair and blue eyes, was about to begin his sixth-year at Hogwarts, and had been sorted into Ravenclaw, and was every-inch the rule abider. He was a great favorite of his Head of House, Professor Flitwick, and had been successfully making up charms and spells since he was about six. Max, as he much preferred to be called, had eyes for pretty Gryffindor Rose Granger-Weasley, only daughter of Ron and Hermione, and had already impressed her with his superior knowledge of spells and the like, with the pair commencing a relationship in the middle of his fifth and her fourth-year. Max’s Patronus was that of a red fox, matching that of Rosie’s, and the pair of them seemed to be headed for the wedding aisle upon their graduation from Hogwarts, although they both wanted to be established within the Ministry of Magic beforehand.

Their next child, a second daughter that Harry and Severus had named Guinevere Hermione Potter-Snape, was every inch the Slytherin at fifteen-years-old. Living up to her father’s reputation, she had subsequently taken every title that Bill Weasley put forth within his potions classes at Hogwarts, and would share her father’s basement lab at Potter Park. Her auburn hair and striking green eyes reminded Harry and Severus so much of her grandmother, Lily, but her stubborn streak matched Harry completely. Gwyn’s sharp tongue and temperament was all Severus’s, however, and when it came to potions debates, the whole of the rest of the family cleared the room, for there would be two black panthers prowling about and someone could get hurt if they weren’t careful.

Their final two children were a pair of mischievous twins that could easily give Fred and George Weasley a run for their money. Conroy Sebastian and Toireasa Marcellina were about to begin their fourth-year at Hogwarts, andFilch had hated every moment that the Slytherin and Gryffindor had terrorized him and Mrs. Norris with their various pranks. Conroy also had striking auburn hair, but his eyes matched that of his brother, Max, while Toireasa had brown eyes and brown hair. Despite their pranks, their marks were good, and although they were kind and popular with the student body Lily, as a former prefect for Gryffindor House, hated to act the disciplinarian around
them, especially around Desmond Rosier, a Slytherin who had successfully caught her eye, and who had been named Head Boy for the next term.

“Think she can manage to keep them in line?” Severus asked his husband as they left Madam Malkin’s and made their way down the cobblestone street.

Harry smirked to himself at the question, already having an idea of where his husband’s thoughts were going. “Perfectly,” Harry told him. “Why do you ask?”

Severus waited until the children had gone into Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes, before he made a grab for his husband and pulled him around a dark corner. After a quick survey of the scene to be sure that they were alone, he cast a quick Notice-Me-Not Charm upon them, and slammed his husband against the brick of the side of the building. “They won’t miss us for a few moments,” he assured him, pressing his lips to Harry’s neck and sucking hard.

Harry shuddered at the feelings his husband could still evoke through him, and proceeded to wrap his legs around Severus’s torso. “We won’t have long,” Harry groaned into his ear, managing to free their cocks, and cast a silent Lubrication Spell to ensure that he was ready for his husband. “George and Angelina may have Fred II and Roxanne to worry about, and Fred and Gabrielle might be watching Percy II and Bridgette, but they still have eyes in the backs of their heads...”

Severus smirked against his husband’s neck as Harry fumbled with their erect members, and managed to push Severus inside of him, causing the older man to groan in Harry’s ear. “Perhaps Ron will be able to watch them...” He whispered.

“Doubt it, especially if Hermione has anything to say about it,” he grunted, angling himself so that the head of Severus’s cock stroked his prostate just so. “Now that she’s in training to take over for Kingsley by next month...”

“And about time to,” Severus said, cutting across his husband. “That poor man’s been worked to the bone. Someone has to spend some time with all those children they’ve got...”

“Moody and Kings only have four, Severus,” Harry replied patiently. “Seraphina, Emeric, Griffin, and Louisa have proven themselves competent in their respective fields regardless of lack of time with Moody and Kings... And, as for Hermione, you know full well she’s pawned off the kids onto Ron at every turn. Ron can negotiate his own hours, but everyone knows that a Minister of Magic never sleeps.”

“Fudge slept,” Severus growled into Harry’s ear.

Harry smirked against Severus’s jaw, and proceeded to pepper it was kisses. “Of course he slept, love. And why do you think he was sacked?” he queried.

“Point,” Severus allowed, pressing his palms against the wall of the building, and proceeding to pound into his husband. “How long do you think it’ll take for Minerva to step down?”

“Didn’t you hear?” Harry asked. “Filius sent out an owl this morning during breakfast. He’s taking over this term as headmaster.”

“And who will assume his post as Deputy Head?” Severus managed to question, which was becoming difficult, as Harry was periodically squeezing his inner walls around him. “Bill, Ginny, or Neville?” he wanted to know.

“Bill, as he is the senior member of the staff, despite the fact that Neville and Ginny didn’t take too
long to join after he did,” Harry replied. “I think it has to do with his age more than anything else, to be honest with you.”

“Oh?” Harry huffed. “And why... Is that?” he managed to get out, grunting as Severus pressed himself in deeper still as he fucked him.

“Gryffindors are too reckless, whereas Hufflepuffs far too sensitive,” Severus said, narrowing his eyes at Harry as he clamped down along his sensitive cock.

“I’ll have you know that you married a reckless Gryffindor, my love,” Harry told him, smirking up at his husband at the death glare he received. “And as for Hufflepuffs, Newt Scamander happens to be a former member of that very house. Were it not for him, we wouldn’t have the innovative developments in the magical creature world.”

“Fantastic beasts indeed,” Severus replied with a roll of his eyes. “Far too much information if you ask me. Why couldn’t they have just left things as they are?”

“Because there was more of the story to be told, my love, no matter in what order it was presented to the people who clearly wanted to hear it, regardless of the opinions of others,” he said simply to his husband. Harry planted his palms down hard upon Severus’s shoulders, thus gaining some form of leverage, permitting him to work with him in order to achieve their goal of mutual orgasm.

“Although, one can admit that, perhaps, the reckless streak has rubbed off on you somewhat, love...”

Severus scoffed. “Rubbish.”

“Hardly,” Harry replied, grinning cheekily up at him. “You’re literally fucking your husband in between two businesses in Diagon Alley.”

“I put up a Notice-Me-Not—”

“Despite the strength and prowess behind your spell work, my love,” Harry said patiently, “you wouldn’t have consented to public sex at the beginning of our marriage.”

“At the beginning of our marriage, you were pregnant, and a madman was after the both of us,” Severus said quickly. “We hardly had any time.”

“We have time now,” Harry told him gently. “Forever, if you want it.”

Severus yanked Harry closer then with a sudden possessive growl, wrapping his hand around his husband’s stiff cock, which directly caused Harry to keen and explode between them, prompting Severus to finish off inside him, whereupon he pressed his lips to his, their mutual moans drowned out in each other’s respective mouths. “Of course I want it,” he whispered to Harry, continuing to kiss him, never wanting to let him go.

Harry sighed with contentment, gently easing himself down from his husband’s embrace and casted a quick Cleaning Charm, whereupon they put themselves back together and walked out from the alley. Taking off the Notice-Me-Not Charm, Harry and Severus stepped into the Weasley’s shop, and, amid the customers flurrying around them, noticed Ron, Fred, George, Angelina, and Gabrielle looking on as Lily and Desmond snogged in a corner, Max and Rosie held hands reading in a corner, Hugo and Gwyn making tentative eyes at one another, Fred II, Percy II, and Conroy dashed about testing new products, while Toireasa, Roxanne, and Bridgette attempted to establish
rules for the products themselves.

It had been a slight shock for the Weasley and Delacour family, when Gabrielle came to England the summer after she had turned seventeen to assist Bill and Fleur with their children, when she had run into Fred rather unexpectedly, as Bill and Fleur had inadvertently scheduled the both of them to watch the children. However, it didn’t take too long for the attraction to set in, and the Weasley boy was overcome with emotion at how much Gabrielle had grown, and it didn’t hurt that she was a Veela, and even more beautiful than Fleur, according to Fred. Despite the age difference and their knowledge that it could cause controversy on both ends, Fred and Gabrielle hadn’t cared, and were married three months after their reunion, just after Gabrielle’s eighteenth birthday, and Gabrielle had found that she had truly come into her own by working in the joke shop, tending to their lovely little cottage in Hogsmeade just down the lane from Hogwarts, and raising their two children, with the help and support of the Weasley family, was all she had ever truly wanted in life, after many years of being overshadowed by her older sister’s beauty and magical abilities.

“We miss anything?” Harry asked casually as they stepped inside, and stood where the adults were congregated.

Ron flashed Harry a knowing look before he turned back to oversee their various children. “Not much. Just our kids being kids.”

“Naturally,” Severus replied, giving a wary look towards Lily, who looked about ready to do just about anything with Desmond.

“Love, don’t,” Harry said, gently nudging Severus and giving him a look. “You know as well as I do that I was sixteen when I found out we were mates.”

Severus rolled his eyes. “Nevertheless, Lily is...”

“Seventeen,” Harry replied, cutting across his husband gently and patting his hand. “And you know full well that she’s been head over wand about Desmond for years. Desmond seems to be an all right fellow, despite the fact that his grandparents were locked away in Azkaban for Death Eater activity.”

“Felix Rosier always had a good head on his shoulders,” Severus put in.

Harry smiled. “There you are. Desmond must’ve learned from his father, then.”

The front door to the shop opened, and Ginny and Draco stepped inside, their seventeen-year-old son Artie flitting in just ahead of them, his shock of red hair and engaging silver eyes not lost on Toireasa, who had been drawn to the fellow Gryffindor since they were children, and although Severus was a bit wary of the age difference, Harry needed only remind him of their own, and the subject and trepidation connected to it were promptly dropped. Severus and Harry watched as Artie and Toireasa immediately walked towards one another and began a whispered conversation between themselves, as Ginny and Draco’s only daughter, thirteen-year-old Slytherin Vera Molly, clung to her mother’s hand, her blonde hair long about her shoulders and her brown eyes engaging as they swiftly darted about the store, never one to wander too far, although she did openly stare at Conroy, and he her. Draco himself held onto their youngest child and his own miniature, six-year-old Thaddeus Aaron, who merely rested his blond head upon his father’s shoulder, his silver eyes calm, every inch the Hufflepuff, despite five more years before his beginning at Hogwarts, much to Ginny’s amusement, and Draco’s slight horror.

Ginny whispered to Vera that perhaps she might wish to speak to Conroy and, after a fair bit of reluctance, the girl stepped away from her mother and went to join them. Satisfied, Ginny climbed
the stairs and accepted the embrace of her siblings and in-laws, in which she firmly counted Harry and Severus. “So, how are the children?” she asked.

“The same, as you can see,” Harry replied.

The back door to the store opened shortly thereafter, and Hermione stepped in, immediately gravitating towards Ron, as Luna and Neville came up behind them. Luna and Neville also had twins, a boy and a girl, whom they had named Ginevra Pandora and Loreto Alexander, and the pair promptly moved to join the fray below. Luna and Neville spoke to Ginny and Draco about the upcoming changes to Hogwarts in the next term, and about how Bill and Fleur couldn’t possibly leave the school for the moment, due to the added responsibility of Bill’s promotion to Deputy Headmaster. However, they did care to mention Bill and Fleur’s daughter, Victoire, and her established romance with Teddy Lupin, son of Remus and Tonks, as well as the health of Dominique and Louis, Fleur and Bill’s other two children.

As the conversations picked up around them again, Harry saw that his husband had wandered across the room to stare out of a massive bay window, and walked over to lean in closer to Severus, inhaling his traditional scent of sandalwood and lavender, and smiled automatically when his husband’s arms seemed to come around him like a moth to a flame. He looked up at him and turned his cheek into his robes.

“I really should learn to use a different ink,” he muttered, looking down at his fingertips, “for I find that scrubbing beneath my fingernails on a daily basis is growing quite tiresome.”

Severus chuckled. “As one of the foremost writers of our time, my love, I cannot help but find myself in awe of you,” he replied.

Harry rolled his eyes. “You’re quite a popular writer yourself, love.”

“Yes, but with your in-depth research on vampires, as well as your re-vamped version of Hogwarts: A History to make it more palatable towards younger generations...” He sighed. “I’m afraid I cannot apologize enough for believing you to be lazy and arrogant.”

“We were both wrong, love.”

Severus pressed a kiss to his husband’s temple. “Both, love?”

“Extremely,” Harry said softly to him. “We both misjudged the other’s character so harshly that it took quite a while for us to get to know the real person, hidden due to circumstances placed upon us by the war and the pawns we’d been made out to be.”

Severus sighed. “Pawns, eh?”

“Of course,” Harry replied, caressing his husband’s hand “Your circumstances being the way they were because of spying, and mine due to the walls I’d built up around myself.”

“Those were for your own protection, on both accounts.”

Harry sighed, staring out into the street of Diagon Alley below. “Yes, and I am aware of that, now,” he told him quietly. “I suppose I just wish that nothing had been hidden from me at all. I know that, up until a certain point, I was not deemed mature enough to know and handle such things, but still, a significant part of me is aware that I could have benefited considerably from some of the information.”

Severus gave a nod. “Yes, I suppose you could have, love. However, the past is finished, as are the
Harry sighed, lifting his arms to wrap around his husband’s, which had gone over and around his frame, and knew then that he was truly fulfilled. “I’ve got all I could ever possibly want,” he whispered. “I’m fulfilled in my professional life, as well as in my personal one. I wanted to fall in love, to have children...”

“Even though I took away your human life?”

“What was the point of it all, anyway?” Harry asked with a chuckle. “I live and breathe for you, and for our children, Severus. I couldn’t have survived, in the end, without you. And with the transformation, we’re assured of my survival, tantamount to yours, being forever. I said as much then, as I do now at least several times in any given day,” he went on, turning to look up at his husband, “I love you, Severus Tobias Snape.”

“I love you, too, Harry James Potter-Snape,” came the reply from the potions master, as he bent down and brushed his mate’s lips with his, “always.”

THE END

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