The Most Powerful Magic

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/245793.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Explicit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>M/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship:</td>
<td>Harry Potter/Severus Snape, past Harry Potter/Ginny Weasley - Relationship, Draco Malfoy/Ginny Weasley, Scorpius Malfoy/Albus Severus Potter, Hermione Granger/Ron Weasley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character:</td>
<td>Harry Potter, Severus Snape, Albus Severus Potter, Scorpius Malfoy, Ginny Weasley, James Sirius Potter, Lily Luna Potter, Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger, Neville Longbottom, Draco Malfoy, Rita Skeeter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Most Powerful Magic

by cjr2

Summary

Severus Snape wakes up after the war to find that over twenty years have passed and Nagini's venom has wreaked havoc on his body. While he searches for a way to heal the damage, Severus has to find a way to come to terms with the new world into which he's awoken as well as the ancient magic that helped to bring him back. (Snarry is the primary pairing)

Notes

I'm a sucker for Snarry that includes Harry's canon children, so I decided to take a stab at writing one myself, and it has turned into a much longer endeavor than I initially planned. I apologize for any clichés, typos, or other general failures. I've taken selectively from the epilogue and Pottermore, but it's not completely canon-compliant (obviously, since Snape is alive).
Chapter 1

The first thing he became aware of was an odd, cottony feeling in his head. It wasn’t pain exactly; it was more like a strange inability of his mind to turn, an inability to process what was going on around him. This was compounded by the corresponding weakness in his body; everything felt heavy, from his arms to his eyelids, which had to explain his apparent inability to even open his eyes. He couldn’t help a groan from escaping his lips, but it came out a gravelly almost inhuman sound that he could barely recognize as coming from his own throat.

“Scorpius! Scorpius, he’s waking up!” he dimly heard, but the words didn’t seem to make sense to him. “Get a Healer!”

There was rustling in the room followed by hurried footsteps as Severus tried to process what was going on. Healer. That was a familiar word. He felt like he should know it, should understand the connotations. It took a few long moments muddling through his cottony brain before he seemed to grasp onto something. Healer…he was in the hospital, somewhere. St. Mungo’s? The Hogwarts Infirmary? Memories filtered in slowly as his mind supplied the words, and finally, finally he was able to pry his eyes open.

All at once, his eyes were assaulted by a bright light, and he snapped them shut immediately, feeling as though the brightness was burning his eyes. “Oh Merlin, I’m an idiot,” a voice murmured, seemingly not to him. Which was good, Severus thought, because for the life of him, he couldn’t identify the voice. There were more footsteps then the sound of something, metal sliding along metal. Footsteps again.

“Sorry, sir, you can try opening your eyes again,” the voice offered, deferential and a little uncertain. Severus was almost tempted to refuse just on principle; he still had no idea where he was or who was speaking to him. But there would be no way to remedy that save to open his eyes as directed, so after a long moment, he did.

The room was dimmer, the curtains closed and only one small light on, giving off a soft orangey glow. And Severus found himself looking into a pair of frighteningly familiar green eyes. But the thin, almost effeminate face was all wrong, nothing like either face in which he’d seen those eyes before. But still it was unmistakable; he was looking into the face of a Potter.

Severus closed his eyes and groaned again. He must be in Hell. There was no other explanation.

“Sir?” the voice asked again, soft and uncertain. Severus had no time to respond before there was a bustling sound at the door and another voice—also unfamiliar but definitely female this time.

“Mr. Malfoy, if you are playing a prank, then I swear your father will hear about it,” the voice chastised, and Severus felt his eyes snap open before he even considered what he was doing. He found himself staring at an unfamiliar brown-haired Healer in a familiar lime green robe and a small, pointy-faced youth with blond hair and grey eyes. Severus felt for a moment as though he had been transported back in time and was looking into the face of young Draco Malfoy.

What he was able to gather was that he was in a hospital—St. Mungo’s?—with a young Potter and young Malfoy. This clearly wasn’t Hell; this was somewhere infinitely more perplexing.

The Healer, still entirely unrecognizable to him, surveyed him was a distinct look of surprise. “Well isn’t this a surprise!” she said, striding across the room to stand beside Severus’ bed, on the opposite side from the young Potter. “It’s nice to see you awake, Mr. Snape.”
The words sounded strange to Severus, and it took him a long moment to realize why. He’d been called many things over the years—Professor, he remembered distinctly, and Headmaster, he remembered with a pit of guilt in his chest—but it had been many, many years since anyone had referred to him as Mr. Snape.

Severus stared at her warily as she took out her wand, but she simply cast a diagnostic spell that Severus recognized easily. “Remarkable,” she murmured to herself as she studied the results. “Simply remarkable.”

Severus opened his mouth to ask her what, precisely, was remarkable, but he couldn’t find his voice. What came out instead was another gravelly croaking noise, and the young Potter began flapping about agitatedly. “Water!” he exclaimed breathlessly. “He needs water.”

The Healer looked at the young Potter indulgently and waved her wand, and a pitcher of ice water and an empty glass floated rather merrily in the room, settling on the table next to him. She waved her wand and murmured another incantation and the bed shifted so Severus was in a partially sitting position.

Severus watched the young Potter—definitely a Potter, there was no doubt about that. He, unmistakably, had Lily’s eyes and James’ jet black hair. Unlike James and Harry, though, he kept his hair long, just past shoulder-length, tied back at the base of his neck. The young man carefully poured a glass of water—of course, he would be legally unable to use magic outside of Hogwarts—and settled on the edge of the bed, offering the glass to Severus.

That was when Severus discovered the next rather alarming fact. The fact that, no matter how much he tried to tell his arms to move, he couldn’t get a response out of them. He tried to move anything—his arms, his legs, even his fingers—and his body refused to respond in the slightest. He tried to fight a moment of panic, but the Potter boy—apparently more perceptive than either clueless James or Harry had been—seemed to notice his distress immediately.

“You’re having trouble moving—that’s okay,” he said, and Severus resented the way he spoke as if trying to soothe a frightened animal. He was not an animal, and he wasn’t frightened. Much.

“You’ve been immobile for a long time, and muscle-strengthening potions can only do so much. Here, drink.”

He held the glass to Severus’ lips, tilting it softly—and as much as his pride objected to it, Severus had no choice but to drink the water in slow sips, the Potter boy not allowing him much more than that as he tilted the glass slowly. It seemed to take an interminably long time, but Severus slowly managed to down the water, the cool liquid soothing to his aching throat.

When he’d finally finished, the boy took the glass away and placed it back on the bedside table, regarding him eagerly. Severus cleared his throat while three expectant faces looked on. “What—?” he croaked out, the voice coming from his throat sounding nothing like him. He cleared his throat once more and tried again. “What happened?”

The young Potter and Malfoy exchanged a meaningful glance before the young Potter spoke. “What’s the last thing you remember?” he asked carefully, with a sense of regard well beyond his years. The boy couldn’t have been more than twelve, thirteen at most.

Severus searched his memories, trying to make sense of everything. There was Hogwarts, his year as Headmaster, the Carrows, and—

It all came back to him then, the attack, his desperate attempts to find Harry Potter and impart Dumbledore’s final message about the Horcrux inside Harry—then Nagini, the pain and the blood…
“Potter—!” he forced out, the word sounding thick in his throat—and the two boys exchanged another glance, the Healer seeming to take a back seat while they spoke with him. The dark-haired boy bit his lip thoughtfully.

“You must be talking about my father, Harry?” he ventured slowly—and that at least answered one question about who this Potter boy was. But if enough time had passed for Harry Potter to have a teenage, or nearly teenage, son…he refused to think of the consequences of that, not yet. “He’s alive, he’s fine. You gave him your memories during the Battle of Hogwarts…do you remember that?”

Severus did, during the desperate moments as he lay dying. He remembered using his last reserves of magic to force his body to expel the memories, a last-ditch effort to get Potter to see what needed to be done. He took a deep breath.

“The…Dark L—” he forced out.

“Is dead,” the Malfoy boy said definitively. “As are most of the Death Eaters, if they’re not in Azkaban.”

Severus regarded the Malfoy boy for a moment. If the dark-haired boy was Harry Potter’s son, then logic told him that this tiny carbon-copy of Draco must be Draco’s son. But Draco had the Mark. Draco was a Death Eater.

“Dra…co?” he managed softly, and the pointy face took on a pinched look before he seemed to understand.

“Oh! My father, Draco, he’s alive. He’s not in Azkaban. Al’s father got him pardoned,” he said softly, quirking his head in the direction of the Potter boy. It took Severus precious long seconds to decode that. Harry Potter had gotten Draco Malfoy pardoned for any crimes he had committed during the war. He looked at the Malfoy boy imploringly, and the Malfoy boy looked startled, glancing helplessly at the Potter boy—Al.

“Scorpius, he probably wants to know about your grandparents too,” Al intoned with a roll of his eyes. The Malfoy boy—Scorpius, really, Draco?—looked a little sheepish.

“Oh! Grandfather, he…went to Azkaban,” he breathed with a flush coloring his delicate, pale skin. “Then he…died, a few years ago. Grandmother is fine. She lives in France with her new husband.”

Severus closed his eyes slowly. Lucius was dead. He didn’t know how he felt about that—whether he was saddened or relieved was something his brain wasn’t quite ready to ponder. But Narcissa and Draco were both alive and seemingly well, and Severus had no problem deciding he was relieved about that.

The seemingly definitive death of the Dark Lord was also a source of relief, but not something he’d feel at ease about until he spoke to Potter—Harry Potter—himself. He wasn’t sure who else knew about the Horcruxes, and unless he knew for sure they’d all been destroyed, he knew the Dark Lord could still come back. Slowly he forced his eyes open again.

“How long?” he managed, his voice still raspy but gaining strength as he used it. He’d gotten the impression that it had been a long time since he’d last spoke. Years, certainly. Long enough for both of his former students to have Hogwarts-aged children. That was unsettling.

The two boys—Al and Scorpius, his mind supplied—exchanged another look, seeming to communicate silently before Al turned to him with an apprehensive look. “It’s 2019,” he remarked slowly, and Severus closed his eyes again, trying to take that in. Twenty-one years since he’d last
opened his eyes. He’d expected death, been prepared for it, but he’d hoped that he’d be able to help
take the Dark Lord down with him. What he hadn’t been prepared for was to lose another two
decades of his life to the Dark Lord, to this war. To his youthful indiscretions.

Dimly, he heard Al’s voice again, but it didn’t seem to be speaking to him. “Can you call our
fathers?” he intoned softly. “There are some questions only they’ll be able to answer, and they’ll
want to know that he’s awake.”

There was some more murmuring and the sound of footsteps exiting the room. When Severus next
opened his eyes, he was staring again into the green eyes of the young Potter boy, but he was
otherwise alone in the room. Al looked as uncomfortable as Severus felt.

“How do you want some more water?” Al finally asked in a shaky tone, and Severus managed a nod. He
watched, feeling somewhat detached from the whole situation, as Al poured another glass of water
and hesitantly held it to his lips, helping him drink it. He finished about half before Al seemed to
sense that he was finished and set the cool water aside.

“I know this is a huge shock,” Al said slowly, gnawing his lower lip nervously. “I…I can tell you
what happened to you, if you think you’re ready to know?”

Severus sighed softly and nodded; what else did he have to do, after all? His limbs remained
stubbornly unresponsive and he could barely get a few words out of his unused throat. The throat
that hadn’t spoken a single word in over twenty years.

“Well…most of this happened before I was born, but I’ve heard the stories,” Al began softly. “You
remember the snake?”

Severus closed his eyes softly as the memory assaulted him. Nagini lunging, the pain in his throat as
blood began seeping out. He had been taking anti-venin for months, had blood replenishers and more
anti-venin in his robes, had been prepared for this kind of attack from the Dark Lord. But when the
time had come, imparting a message to Potter had been more vital than trying to save his own life.
After all, if Potter failed, then Severus’ life was forfeit, anyway. Then there was only blackness.

Slowly, Severus managed to nod.

“Well my father and Aunt Hermione found potions in your robes—anti-venin and blood replenishing
potions—and they managed to give them to you. They did what they could for your wound, but they
couldn’t close it.” Al recited the words as if they’d been told to him frequently—and maybe they
had. Severus had no idea what children of the next generation were told about the war—especially
not what Harry Potter’s son had been told.

“After my father killed Vo—” Severus flinched, and Al stopped immediately. “You-Know-Who,”
he amended after a moment, and yes, this new generation Potter was certainly more perceptive than
the last two had been. “After he killed You-Know-Who, they went back for you. Draco and Uncle
Neville went and harvested venom from Nagini to make a more powerful anti-venin for you, but
you’d lost so much blood that the Healers weren’t able to do much. Even though the Healers here
had figured out how to combat the snake’s venom when he’d attacked Granpa—Arthur Weasley, I
mean—it didn’t seem to work on you because your body was so weak.

“Your blood wasn’t clotting and all they could do for years was give you more and more Blood-
Replenishing Potion. The Healers thought they should just let you go, but my dad refused to let it
happen. Threatened to arrest any Healer who even thought about stopping your treatment. After
about seven years, you finally started getting better. They’re not sure why—the Healers tried dozens
of experimental treatments on you, so it could have been the result of any of them, or maybe all of
them…or that’s what they say anyway.

“They managed to clear all the venom from your system and get your blood to clot, and your wound finally healed, but you never woke up. They were afraid that all the blood loss might have damaged your brain, and that you’d never wake up. They tried lots of treatments, but nothing worked.”

Severus sat silently, considering the story. It tumbled around in his brain as he tried to make sense of the details. Harry Potter threatening people for him. Draco and Longbottom working together to try to save him. A lot of things didn’t add up, but then Severus was missing over twenty years worth of events. Events that led to him waking up to two young—and seemingly friendly—sons of boys who had hated each other when he’d last been awake and aware.

It seemed he had a lot to catch up on.

“You are quite…” Severus coughed slightly at the effort of speaking. “Knowledgeable…on the subject.” Severus eyed the boy carefully. He was small, like Potter—Harry—had been when he was that age. Severus would guess twelve, but perhaps he was older than that. His father had still looked twelve when he was in fourth year.

Al looked sheepish, examining his hands that were twined in his lap as he sat in a chair beside Severus’ bed. “I suppose, yeah,” he admitted softly. “I’ve spent a lot of time here. Dad still swears my first words were, ‘St. Mungo’s.’”

Anything further that he said was cut off by young Scorpius walking back into the room. He hesitated at the door, as if unsure of his welcome.

“They fire-called both of our fathers,” he said slowly, shuffling uncertainly in the doorway. “Yours will be here in a few minutes. Mine’s stuck at work for awhile longer. Your mother is coming to pick us up and bring us home—to the Manor.”

At the words, Severus got his first glimpse of Al’s resemblance to his father in his irrational temper.

“They’re making us leave?” he demanded angrily, and Scorpius’ eyes widened, taking a seemingly unconscious step away from the other boy. “Just because we’re kids doesn’t mean—”

“Al!” Scorpius implored.

“—we need to be protected from everything. And we were the ones who were here every day—every day—”

“Al!” Scorpius yelled again, and Severus’ eyes trailed back and forth between the two boys, wondering again if maybe he wasn’t in Hell. Losing twenty years of his life and then waking to a room of petulant teenagers might be Hell after all.

“What?” he hissed angrily. Scorpius recoiled almost imperceptibly.

“Our parents said we can come back tomorrow,” he intoned softly, and Al deflated perceptibly. “You might have read every book ever written about the war—and about Professor Snape—but our parents were there. It’s different.”

Al sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose, closing his familiar green eyes with a sigh. Severus watched the exchange in silence, wondering at this new world he’d woken into. Twenty-one years and a new Potter and Malfoy on his hands.

He was saved from having to reply by a sweep of Auror robes into the room, and Severus Snape
found himself looking into the eyes of Harry Potter for the first time in over twenty years.

Time had changed him, but some things had stayed the same—he had a few threads of grey in his hair, a rather visible scar over his right cheekbone. He still wore the same round glasses and his black hair still stuck out at odd angles, much unlike the way his son’s long hair was carefully tied back. He wasn’t as skinny as he’d been as a boy, and he’d clearly grown a few inches, though he still wasn’t tall by any means. He still managed to tower over Scorpius Malfoy, who remained uncertainly in the doorway.

Potter—Harry, Severus settled on saying in his mind, because there was more than one Potter in the room—stared at Severus blankly, as if he couldn’t quite believe what he was seeing. He wondered what Harry was thinking, because for once, nothing of his emotions showed in his eyes. Maybe he’d learned a thing or two about schooling his expression in the intervening years. Severus did the math; Harry must be thirty-eight or thirty-nine—had he had his birthday yet?—around the same age Severus himself had been the last time he was conscious.

Severus closed his eyes at that thought, surprised by the unexpected pain that hit him. That meant he, himself, must be nearing sixty. He’d been unconscious through all of his forties and most of his fifties.

“Hi Mr. Potter,” Scorpius said softly as Harry came to settle beside him. Severus opened his eyes; Harry looked frazzled and disheveled, as if he’d rushed straight from the Auror office when he’d heard the news. Maybe he had. Harry settled a hand on Scorpius’ shoulder—familiar, as if it was something he’d done often—but still didn’t say anything, just continuing to stare at Severus until Severus felt uncomfortable.

“Twenty-one years and you…still haven’t learned any manners, Potter?” Severus managed, proud at how even his voice sounded, if still gravelly.

And then Potter did the last thing Severus would have expected. He laughed. And it wasn’t just any laugh; it was a full-bodied, all-consuming laugh that seemed to go on forever, until Harry was holding onto the doorframe to keep himself from falling over, tears of mirth gathering in the corners of his eyes. Scorpius and Al exchanged yet another look.

“I think he’s finally cracked,” Scorpius said with widened eyes, taking a few steps away from Harry. That just made the man laugh harder.

After an indeterminate amount of time, Harry seemed to gain control of himself.

“I could kiss you right now,” he said breathily, and Severus’ eyes must have widened at the proclamation, because Harry laughed again. “Oh no! I won’t; I promise. I’m just…I’m glad to see you’re awake. And that you’re still…you. I never thought I’d be so happy to hear you insult me.”

Severus thought he managed to raise an eyebrow, although with the lack of control he seemed to have over his muscles at the moment, he wasn’t sure. “I could do it again…if it…means so much to you,” Severus breathed out, and that just set off a new round of giggles. Al looked over at Severus, seeming positively mortified.

“I’m sorry,” he said immediately. “My dad actually hasn’t gone crazy. At least…I don’t think so.”

Harry was finally getting himself under control again when someone else appeared at the doorway, someone red-haired and heavily pregnant. Severus’ brain took a moment to identify this adult version of her. The youngest Weasley. Ginevra. She took one look at Harry and rolled her eyes before her gaze traveled over and met Severus’. Severus wasn’t sure what he expected to see in them, but it
certainly wasn’t the caring light in them, accompanied by a soft smile.

“It’s good to see you awake, sir,” she said softly, and Severus was surprised at the words. He remembered the last time he had seen her—at Hogwarts, when he’d been making his best attempt to appear to be terrorizing the children while at the same time trying to protect them from the more sadistic Carrows. He wasn’t sure if he would be happy to see himself, if he were in her position.

“Ms. Weasley,” he managed softly. “Or…is it Potter, now?”

Severus didn’t quite understand her sadistic smirk until she spoke a few seconds later.

“It’s Malfoy, actually,” she said with a grin, seeming to delight in his doubtlessly shocked expression as she waved her hands at the two boys in the room. “Come on boys, let’s let these two speak in private.”

“Mom,” Al whined at the same time that Scorpius said, “Ginny.”

Ginevra shook her finger at them in a maternal gesture Severus had seen Molly use on the twins when the Order had been meeting at Grimmauld Place. Severus frowned, feeling more confused than ever about what was going on.

“No arguments. You can come back tomorrow. Now come along,” she said, and the two boys made their way to the door, grumbling under their breaths. Harry placed a gentle peck on Ginny’s cheek.

“Thanks, Gin,” he murmured, and Ginny just smiled before waddling out of the room with the two boys in tow, one hand on her heavily distended stomach. Harry seemed to have calmed in the amount of time it took to get the boys out of the room; he was no longer fighting laughter as he came and sat beside the bed, his expression serious.

“I’m sure you have questions…or…are you too tired? We can do this another time,” Harry offered after a moment, suddenly uncertain. Severus just frowned.

“I think I’ve slept enough,” he grumbled, unsurprised at how disgruntled he sounded, even to himself. At least he finally seemed to have gotten control over his voice, though it still hadn’t lost the rough quality it had.

Harry ran a hand through his disheveled hair, messing it up even further. “Yeah…yeah, you’re probably right,” he conceded. “You can ask me anything you want—I’ll answer as best as I can. Draco can probably fill in any of the gaps that I can’t.”

Yes, Severus had questions, so many of them that he wasn’t even sure where to start. He decided to start with the most pertinent concerns.

“Horcruxes?” he murmured.

The younger man’s nervousness seemed to recede a little at the businesslike tone.

“All destroyed,” he said seriously. “Including the one in me. It’s a long story, but I don’t think you need to be bored with all the details just yet. He’s dead, and all the Horcruxes were destroyed. In no small part thanks to you.”

Severus coughed spasmodically a few times as he tried to speak again. Harry watched him uncertainly, as if poised to take action, but when he recovered a few moments later, Harry just waved his wand, lifting the glass of water that his son had discarded and holding it to Severus’ lips. Severus found himself glad of the use of magic; it made the gesture feel much less like charity, somehow, to
not see the other man’s hand holding the cup. After he’d managed to drink the rest of the liquid, the cup levitated itself back to the table.

“Are you here to whisk me off to Azkaban, then?” he intoned, voice raspy. Harry seemed startled by the suggestion.

“What?” he demanded. “No! Why would you even—?” Harry stopped himself after a moment and stood up, shaking his head to himself. “Of course, they’d fill you in about the fact that you’ve been in a coma for twenty years but not give you any useful information.”

Still shaking his head, Harry crossed the room and picked up a box, carrying it over to Severus. He opened it carefully, almost with reverence, and held it up so Severus could read it.

*Order of Merlin, First Class,* read the medal inside. Beneath that was inscribed, *Severus Tobias Snape.*

Severus stared at the medal, blinked, and then blinked again, as if he expected the thing to disappear right before his eyes. He looked up at Harry questioningly, unable to form any words.

“You were exonerated of all charges, Snape,” he said seriously. “You’re a hero. There’s a statue of you in the Ministry atrium. You are in no danger of going to Azkaban. Trust me.”

There was a sudden thick feeling in his chest; Severus wasn’t sure what to do with it. He almost wondered for a second if he might cry, or perhaps keel over from shock. He hadn’t expected to survive the war, and if he had, he’d expected to be punished for his crimes. He didn’t expect the wizarding world to be able to accept the complexities of his double-agent role, expected to have to disappear or be taken straight to Azkaban. He didn’t expect an Order of Merlin—First Class, no less. And he certainly hadn’t expected a statue.

He almost wanted to tell Potter—Harry—to leave him in peace, but he’d missed twenty-one years of the wizarding world. He was hungry for any knowledge he could get, even if it was from Harry Potter. But he turned the conversation to a more neutral topic; he wasn’t sure if he could take any more revelations like that without an embarrassing emotional display, and in front of Potter, that would be even more horrible.

“Al,” he said after a moment, latching onto the first thing he could think of. Potter’s son seemed like a safe enough topic. “He’s an…interesting boy.”

Harry flushed, leaving the Order of Merlin sitting in Severus’ lap as he sat back in the chair, as if leaving it for the other man to look at.

“He didn’t bother you, did he?” he inquired sheepishly. “He kind of…idolizes you. My fault, I’m afraid.”


“It’s a strange new world you’ve woken up to, Snape,” he supplied helplessly. “You have a lot to catch up on.”

He did indeed, he realized as he looked up into the older face of Harry Potter. Into a world where he didn’t immediately feel the need to sling an insult at the boy—no, a man now, his mind supplied. But Potter was clearly making his best attempt not to antagonize him, and Severus found himself lacking the energy to be angry or insulted. Not when he was so busy being confused.
They fell silent for a long few minutes, but where Harry would have tried to fill the silence with inane chatter when he’d been in school—and Severus remembered his inability to be still, be quiet, to focus from their Occlumency lessons—Harry didn’t speak, didn’t even fidget. Clearly time had changed the man. Severus released a sigh.

“Al…short for Albus, I presume?” he ventured after a moment, surprised to find himself genuinely curious. Harry had the grace to look sheepish.

“Guess I’m pretty predictable, huh?”

Severus let out a soft sound, almost a snort. “Perhaps not. I would have thought you’d name your son James. Or perhaps Sirius.”

Harry laughed again at that, and Severus was afraid he’d be subjected to another unending bout of giggles. This one, however, ended after a few brief seconds. “My first son is James Sirius,” he admitted, although he looked more amused than embarrassed this time. “And before you ask, yes I have a daughter, and yes she’s named precisely what you’d think.”

That raised a strange emotion in Severus’ chest—the thought that there was another Lily Potter out there, granddaughter of his closest childhood friend. He wondered idly if she looked like Lily, if she had Lily’s eyes. And if her mother was Ginevra Weasley—or was Ginevra Scorpius’ mother?—did young Lily Potter have red hair like her grandmother, too?

Harry seemed startled after a moment, as if realizing what he’d just said. “Oh, I probably shouldn’t have said that,” he murmured suddenly. “You probably don’t want to talk…about her. I…”

“It’s fine, Potter,” Severus said, cutting off the younger man’s self-deprecating awkwardness. “Your mother has been dead for nearly forty years.”

Harry bit his lip awkwardly, and Severus managed to note that it was the same way young Albus Potter had done, a mannerism Albus had clearly picked up from his father.

“It wouldn’t feel like forty years for you, when you’ve missed the last twenty,” Harry murmured, and Severus closed his eyes against those words, against the welling of feelings that flowed up into his chest. The realization of all the years that he’d missed, the memory of Lily and his responsibility for her death. He wasn’t sure if Harry understood the significance of his children’s names to Severus—James, Albus, and Lily. Three people for whose deaths Severus had been directly responsible.

“I’m fairly tired, Potter. Perhaps you could come back later,” Severus managed with his eyes still closed.

“Oh,” Harry breathed, and Severus felt him taking the box carrying the Order of Merlin off of his lap, heard him set it down somewhere. Footsteps moved across the room, but then they paused. Severus found himself holding his breath, waiting to see what would happen.

“For what it’s worth,” Harry began after a moment, “I’m glad you’re finally awake. I know your life has been…not great up until now, and I know that you’ve done things that you aren’t proud of. But you are a hero, Snape, whether you believe it or not. We’d probably all be dead or being terrorized by Voldemort if it hadn’t been for you. You’ve more than redeemed yourself. I’d like to think that my mum would be proud if she could see you today.”

With that, the sound of footsteps resumed and Harry was gone, leaving Severus alone in his room.
Chapter 2

The next time he woke was to Healers administering muscle-strengthening potions, accompanied by a meal he had to have hand-fed to him, as he still couldn’t manage to lift his arms. He suffered that indignity in silence, mostly because he knew he had no choice if he ever wanted to get out of bed again. That was followed up by a rather uncomfortable massaging of topical potions into his atrophied muscles, which he also submitted to in frustrated silence.

Draco showed up curiously just after that; it was either fortuitous timing or Draco knew that he wouldn’t want to be seen in that undignified position by anyone who didn’t have the necessity to be there. Draco’s presence, at least, was familiar; the man didn’t react with hysteric like Potter, thank goodness, because Severus wasn’t sure he could take that from his former student. Draco did smile upon seeing him sitting up in bed, though, crossed the room and laid his hand on Severus’ arm.

“Severus,” he breathed softly, the ghost of a smile remaining on his features. It was the type of smile Severus hadn’t seen on Draco’s face much as a boy. It wasn’t vindictive or taunting; he simply seemed happy, and it transformed his entire face. Draco looked much the same as he had; taller, certainly, but where Harry’s hair had already been greying, Draco had the same flawless skin and the pale blond hair he’d had as a teenager, which made him appear perhaps ten years younger than his true age.

“I almost didn’t believe it when Scorpius fire-called me,” he breathed softly, as if afraid to speak any louder, afraid it would break the moment. “But you’re really awake.”

Severus cleared his throat. “It would appear so,” he finally said, and Draco’s smile grew—perhaps for the same reason that had thrown Harry into a bout of hysteric. Young Albus Potter had said they’d been afraid of brain damage; he supposed Draco had reason to be pleased to find his personality intact, such as it was.

They descended into a silence after that, although Draco’s hand remained on his shoulder, as if afraid to break contact. After a long moment, Severus spoke.

“Your son told me about Lucius’ passing,” he managed after a moment. “I’m sorry for your loss.”

Draco scoffed and rolled his eyes, and in that moment Severus saw the remnants of the obnoxious teenager he’d been. “He’s a complete dullard, but Mother seems content with him,” he intoned. “I’m just glad that she’s out of England and hopefully out of harm’s way.”
Severus raised an eyebrow; he was certain he managed it this time, because he could feel his facial muscles contracting appropriately. “Harm’s way?” he echoed, and Draco shuffled uncertainly, clearly losing his composure.

“You’ve just woken up, Severus; you don’t need to trouble yourself with—”

“Sit down, Draco, and tell me what happened,” Severus commanded, in his best professor voice. He was glad to see that it still worked, twenty year coma or not, when Draco sat, almost unconsciously. He took a deep breath.

“I suppose I should start at the beginning,” he said, and it was with effort that Severus managed not to roll his eyes, that time.

“That seems like a reasonable place to begin, yes.”

Absurdly, Draco smiled at the words, although his smile faltered almost immediately.

“My father…he defected from the Dark Lord during the Battle of Hogwarts—that’s what they call it now, the day that Harry defeated the Dark Lord,” Draco prefaced. “He decided that protecting me and my mother was more important than keeping himself safe.

“Harry…he admired that, I guess, or he understood it at least. He argued for leniency at my father’s trial, and they granted it. They weren’t willing to offer him a full pardon—he did commit his fair share of crimes, after all—but he got away with fifteen years in Azkaban when most of the Death Eaters were getting life sentences.”

Severus frowned, stopping him. “Not the Dementor’s Kiss?” he queried. Draco shook his head.

“Kingsley Shacklebolt became Minister and with his help, Harry and Hermione spearheaded a movement to get the Dementors removed from Azkaban. The Dementor’s Kiss has been banned entirely. Hermione says it’s inhumane.”

Severus took a moment to consider that. “Do you disagree with Ms. Granger?” he pressed after a moment, surprised to hear Draco referring not only to Harry but also to Hermione Granger by her first name. Draco gave him a pinched smile.

“It’s Mrs. Granger-Weasley now,” he corrected, and this time Severus did roll his eyes.

“Of course it is,” he breathed, deciding that the rest of Draco’s story was more important than his position on the Dementor’s Kiss. “So your father was sentenced to fifteen years. Then what happened?”

Draco lowered his eyes, looking uncertain. “He served his fifteen years and came home,” he intoned in a detached voice, as if he was talking about someone he barely knew, not his own father. “But there were—are—still some people who believe our family got off too easy. A group of disgruntled witches and wizards attacked my father, my wife, and my son outside Hogsmeade one day. My father and my wife were both killed.”

Severus mulled over what Draco had told him. He was, for once, totally at a loss for what to say. He eyed Draco carefully. “Your wife?” he ventured.

Draco jumped a little, as if startled out of his reverie. “Oh. Of course you wouldn’t know,” he said softly. “I don’t know if you remember her. She was two years behind me at Hogwarts. Astoria Greengrass?”
Severus searched his mind, vaguely remembered a pretty young pureblood in Slytherin. Just the type of girl Lucius and Narcissa would have wanted their son to marry.

“What happened to the attackers?” he ventured after a moment.

“Most of them are in Azkaban for life,” he said slowly. “Harry and Ron tracked them down personally. One was killed in the confrontation. By Harry himself, no less.”

Severus leaned his head back into his pillow, closing his eyes. It was strange to realize how much he’d missed, how many years had passed. That Lucius had been tried, convicted, served fifteen years, and been released all while Severus had been unconscious. Like during his conversation with Harry, Severus was on the verge of believing his brain might have reached information overload. He decided to change the subject.

“You seem to have gotten quite close to the Potters. And the Weasleys,” he said pointedly, opening his eyes and giving Draco a look. Draco blushed, quite noticeable on his pale complexion.

“Of course you know about that already,” he murmured under his breath. “Who told you?”

“Miss Ginevra herself,” he said, finding himself wickedly amused at Draco’s discomfort. It seemed the sadistic side of him hadn’t disappeared with his twenty-year coma, he noticed. “Care to explain?”

Draco’s face remained a pretty share of pink. “Do you really want to hear about my love life?” he asked incredulously. Severus just shrugged, or tried to; he was pleased to find his shoulders moved almost imperceptibly.

“I’m interested to hear how a former Death Eater ends up married to a blood-traitor.”

Draco gave him a sharp, pensive look. “I know you don’t think like that anymore,” Draco said, although his tone was slightly uncertain. “Even though you were good at pretending, for the Dark Lord. You can’t, not working with the Order and Dumbledore—”

Severus still managed to silence him with a look. “No, I don’t—and you’re right, I haven’t held those beliefs for a very long time,” Severus assented. “But I was under the impression that you did.”

Draco shrugged. “I was a product of how I was raised,” he admitted. “Harry—and the Weasleys, too—they defended me when they didn’t have to. I’ve learned to think differently; a lot of people had to, after the war. Don’t get me wrong, though; I’d never have married Ginny if she weren’t a pureblood. She knows that; they all do.”

Severus nodded slowly, taking that in. He knew twenty years had passed, but it was still difficult to believe that Draco had abandoned everything that had been ingrained in him as a child. The remnants of his feelings on blood purity somehow made the whole situation easier to accept.

“But she’s the mother of Potter’s children,” he ventured after a moment. Draco nodded.

“They divorced,” he said sharply.

“Before or after you slept with her?” Severus prodded. Draco didn’t answer, but his petulant look was response enough. “So I suppose congratulations are in order then. Is it a boy or a girl?”

Draco frowned. “A boy,” he said slowly, his tone still wary, as if afraid Severus was going to accuse him of something else. “Due in September.”

Well that brought Severus right back to something he had been wondering. He eyed Draco carefully.
“No one’s told me the exact date,” he admitted, slowly. Draco rolled his eyes.

“Of course not. Potters are all useless,” he breathed, conveniently forgetting that his son had been present as well. That made Severus feel a little less off balance, the obvious sign of discord between Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy. It was possibly the most familiar thing he’d encountered so far.

“It’s July 3, 2019,” Draco informed him finally, and Severus sighed again, closing his eyes and resting back against the pillow. Twenty-one years, two months, and one day since he’d last opened his eyes. He wasn’t sure if knowing the specifics made it better or worse.

For all that he’d apparently been unconscious for over twenty years, Severus found that he slept an awful lot. By evening, he was able to move his fingers and toes, although the rest of his muscles were stubbornly resistant to any of his attempts. He sat through another humiliating meal and another rub-down with topical potions and slept through the night.

He woke late in the morning; he could tell by the light coming in through the curtains, which were now partially open again, although the lights were still low. His eyes were slowly adjusting to the light, but he still winced as he looked around the room. He was both surprised and not to find a black and a blond head sitting at a table across the room, textbooks strewn between them.

He observed the two boys for a moment; they were murmuring quietly between themselves, almost conspiratorially, and they hadn’t noticed he had awakened. Severus found he didn’t mind; they were both less obtrusive than the previous generation of Potter and Malfoy, their voices too low for him to make out what they were discussing.

Severus took a moment to test out his body; he found his hands responding better than they had the day before, and he was even able to get some movement out of his arms and shoulders. He shifted slightly, wondering when he’d be able to get out of bed; he’d spent too much of his life trapped without freedom, and although this time was infinitely more literal than in the past, it wasn’t a feeling he reveled in.

His movements clearly attracted the attention of the two boys, because they both turned their heads toward him simultaneously. Scorpius looked almost embarrassed to be under Severus’ scrutiny; Albus, on the other hand, smiled shyly.

“Good morning, sir,” Albus greeted tentatively, standing up out of his chair and making his way toward Severus’ bed. Severus eyed the young Potter boy with a slight sense of wariness. “How are you feeling?”

Severus turned the question over in his head, wondering if he even wanted to offer a response. But Albus’ politeness was at such odds with the lack of respect he’d always received from his father that Severus found it difficult to be combative with him, despite his frustration at being cooped up in this bed. And at having lost over two decades of his life.

“Better than yesterday,” he affirmed neutrally, refusing to offer any more. Albus seemed to take that at face value.

“I hope you don’t mind us being here,” he remarked slowly. “It’s a quiet place to work on our
summer assignments. We won’t get in your way, we promise. But if you want us to leave, you can just ask.”

Albus’ words seemed to be specifically tailored to earn the opposite response, as if he knew precisely what objections Severus would have. And perhaps he did; Severus had no way of knowing what kind of stories they’d heard about him from their parents. His distinct distaste for obnoxious children probably ranked among the things they’d heard, though.

Severus just pursed his lips thoughtfully, but he didn’t ask the two boys to leave. His desire for information about the years he’d missed was stronger than his desire to be left alone. Albus nodded, as if reading his mind.

“We thought you might want something to occupy your time,” he remarked after a moment. “And you probably want to get caught up on everything that you’ve missed without having to rely on all of us to tell you. So we brought you some things.”

Severus raised an eyebrow, and Scorpius finally seemed to gather the confidence to speak, stepping out from behind his friend. “We brought some potions journals,” he said after a moment. “That might feel…well, too much like work when you’ve just woken up, but I’m afraid we don’t know what else you might be interested in. And…we also brought back issues of the Daily Prophet. We have all of 1998, and we can bring more, if you want to read through them.”

Severus blinked, surprised at the foresight the two had shown. He wasn’t sure if it was because he’d just woken up from a prolonged coma or if it was the unexpected consideration from the sons of two boys who had been anything but considerate at their age, but he felt completely off-balance. More so than he could remember feeling since he was a teenager himself.

Maybe it was that he wasn’t used to people going out of their way to be considerate toward him; he couldn’t remember the last time anyone had.

“That’s quite thoughtful of you,” he remarked after a moment, and he was surprised by the way the two boys beamed under the praise. But Potter—Harry Potter—had said young Albus Potter idolized him, though Severus couldn’t fathom why. He wondered what everyone had been told, what whitewashed version of his history Harry had given to make anyone think he was an object of idolization. And there was only one way to begin to find out.

“I’d like the Prophets, if you please.”

The two boys scrambled and ended up pulling out a box from under the table, Albus carrying a rather sizeable stack of newspapers and placing them on Severus’ lap. “This is just May,” he remarked sheepishly. “Dad shrunk them all and brought them in with us this morning, then returned them to normal size before he left for work.”

Severus regarded the stack carefully. “Thank you,” he said delicately, feeling strange as he reached for the first one. His arms protested slightly at the movement, shaky and unsteady—he wondered how long he could keep up flipping through pages—but he managed to unfold the paper.

May 2, 1998, read the top corner with a large, bold headline of YOU-KNOW-WHO DEFEATED! accompanied by a picture of Hogwarts, obviously damaged with wisps of smoke still dancing out of some of the rubble.

Severus read the article carefully, although a lot of it was still conjecture so soon after the battle itself. The article was mostly big facts, the majority of which he already knew. He read through the sparse details about what had happened after he had seen Harry in the Shrieking Shack. The Dark Lord’s
Severus took a deep breath, feeling a chill come over him. The events had happened over twenty years ago, but to him, they felt as though they had happened yesterday. In fact, for him, they virtually *had* happened yesterday. He remembered the duel with Minerva and the other Heads of House, remembered the hatred and anger he’d seen in Minerva’s eyes all year when she’d looked at him. Remembered Nagini lunging at him, remembered the pain and then the familiar green eyes looking into his.

He shuddered, turning the page to find a list of those confirmed dead. The dead had been separated into two lists; some approximation of ‘Death Eaters’ and ‘Other.’ Severus let his eyes roam down the list of Death Eaters and sympathizers first; he recognized the majority of the names, but he had to admit that he felt an especial sense of satisfaction to see Bellatrix Lestrange listed. Her whiny, co-dependent relationship with the Dark Lord had been almost painful to watch.

He knew far less people on the list of those who had lost their lives fighting against the Death Eaters. He recognized some names of former students, but few of them stuck out. And then there were the names that did resonate with him. Remus Lupin. Nymphadora Tonks. Fred Weasley. He supposed it was inevitable that one of the Weasleys would lose his or her life in the battle; pure statistics said that with so many Weasleys fighting, their chances of losing one were highly elevated.

The following days worth of papers featured more news about the aftermath of the battle, including several highly speculative and clearly exaggerated pieces about Harry by Rita Skeeter. There was also much speculation about the whereabouts of any Death Eaters who hadn’t been captured—Severus noticed that his own name was mentioned in that list—as well as several opinion pieces about the most worthy fate for the Death Eaters who had been captured.

Severus skipped over several human-interest stories profiling some of the deceased—every war had its casualties, and the transparent attempts to create sympathy and rile up anger against the Death Eaters was, in his opinion, completely pathetic.

May 8 brought the first article following the battle that captured Severus’ interest. *Boy Who Lived Protects Malfoys!* it read, depicting Harry standing at a podium, obviously giving a press conference. Severus skimmed the article and barely managed to avoid rolling his eyes. It was typical Rita Skeeter sensationalized pseudo-news, with Skeeter waxing poetic about how Harry’s sense of honor was leading him down a dangerous path protecting war criminals. And it was accompanied by ample speculation that he’d been magically coerced to do so. That was intermingled with Harry’s characteristic sense of blatant honesty and Gryffindor morals as he commented on the Malfoys’ desire to protect their family over all else. Only an orphan, Severus thought, could be so swayed by devotion to family.

The next article of interest came on May 10. *Albus Dumbledore’s Killer Lives!* read the headline—really, did everything need an exclamation point?—accompanied by a characteristically scowling picture of Severus himself. The article stated ‘trusted sources’ that declared Severus Snape alive but in critical condition in an undisclosed location. More speculation followed about the source of his injuries and what would happen to him when he recovered, followed by a long list of his misdeeds. Albus’ murder was front and center followed by a slew of quotes from students, mostly about his behavior during his year as Headmaster.

Severus closed his eyes for a moment, taking it in—letting the guilt wash over him anew. Because sensationalized prose and ignorance about his motives aside, everything the article had accused him of was true. He had been a Death Eater. He had killed Albus Dumbledore, his closest friend and
mentor. And he had terrorized the children at Hogwarts.

Severus finally took a deep breath and managed to open his eyes again, finding the next day’s paper—which brought immediate recourse. The front-page headline on this one read Severus Snape: Hero or Traitor? and featured what appeared to be a full-length interview with Harry Potter himself.

Severus read through the interview with a kind of detached interest, barely cognizant of the fact that he was reading about himself. Harry was surprisingly composed and fair, not rising to Skeeter’s bait when she asked him obviously leading questions, mentioning Albus’ murder at least once every three questions. Harry defended him with a fervor that, now, he didn’t find surprising. Not after waking up to find Potter’s son by his bedside, not after Harry himself had rushed to his bedside the moment he’d heard the news of Severus’ return to consciousness. But if he’d been reading this in 1998, he would have been shocked.

Still was a little bit, if he were honest with himself.

Severus finished the interview, setting the paper aside and closing his eyes once more, mulling over what he’d read. It was an interesting and unprecedented situation he found himself in. He felt as though the battle had just happened, was still reeling from all the discoveries, but everyone else had had twenty years to cope with what had happened. He had discovered just yesterday that his true motives had been revealed to the world; the world had had two decades to come to terms with the facts that had come to light.

And Harry Potter, the son of his school rival—the son he’d hated on sight, seeing Lily’s beautiful eyes in James’ hated face—had been his staunchest defender, right from the beginning.

What he was to do with all these new revelations, he wasn’t sure.
Chapter 3

At some point, there was lunch, Severus having slept through breakfast, and Albus and Scorpius went out to scavenge for lunch on their own, as if knowing that Severus didn’t want them around for the indignity of being spoon-fed. If he didn’t know better, he might have suspected the boys of Legilimency, but no matter how long he’d been unconscious, he knew he’d never fail to notice someone penetrating into his mind.

Afternoon passed into evening, and the boys came back then disappeared again some time while Severus was dozing, his body still stubbornly unwilling to remain conscious for any significant stretch of time. He managed to make it most of the way through the Daily Prophet issues from May, but he eventually got frustrated reading the coverage about him, part slander, part truth, and part Gryffindor optimism. He was surprised to find Longbottom—Longbottom of all people!—coming in to defend him, but the coverage on a whole just made him want to claw his own eyes out rather than continue reading.

Frustrated, he pushed the papers off the bed with as much strength as he could muster—which wasn’t much but was certainly enough to send several of them sailing to the floor, landing all over like some sort of absurd tiling. And, of course, Harry Potter took that moment to walk into the room, raising an eyebrow at the mess.

“That was pretty much my reaction at the time as well,” he remarked dryly, leaning over to pick up the strewn-about papers with the ease of someone who had spent years picking up the messes of small children. Severus waved his arms in frustration—or tried to, but what he managed to accomplish was more of an undignified flop of his forearms, one of which was still colored by the scar left by the Dark Mark.

“Pure drivel, all of it,” Severus bit out, glaring at the papers as though they had offended him. Harry just shrugged, dropping the papers he’d picked up on top of the boys’ textbooks in the corner.

“Pretty much everything ever written by Rita Skeeter is,” he agreed lightly. He strode over to Severus’ bedside, picking up the remaining Daily Prophets from his lap. He read the headline on the topmost issue with a frown—Public Outcry Over Proposed Pardon of Severus Snape—and set those aside too. “It got better, slowly. People started to believe.”

“How slowly?” Severus found himself asking, morbidly curious. Harry shrugged.

“I got you officially pardoned about a year after the Battle of Hogwarts. Bureaucracy, you know,” he explained. “The Order of Merlin didn’t come through until 2001, after Hermione headed a pretty relentless public relations campaign on your behalf. The last of the hangers-on seem to have come around when Al was born. There are still some fringe characters who believe it’s all a conspiracy of some sort, but…”

Severus mulled over Harry’s words, finding himself stuck on one thing. “What does your son have to do with anything?”

Harry looked startled by the question. “You mean Al hasn’t said anything to you?” he asked incredulously. “I would have thought it would have been nearly the first thing he told you. His pride and joy, really.”

Severus frowned, not liking how little he was comprehending the other man’s words. “Your son hasn’t said much at all,” he deadpanned after a moment, noncommittal. Harry just chuckled.
“That’s Al,” he agreed with a smile. “You’re lucky you haven’t met James or Lily. It’s difficult to get either of them to shut up, to be entirely honest.”

While Harry spoke, he stood up and crossed the room, sliding the copies of the Daily Prophet off the boys’ schoolbooks. He picked one up—*Standard Book of Spells, Grade 3 (Revised Edition)*—and flipped open the front cover, setting it down in Severus’ lap. Severus frowned, wondering what could possibly be of note in a third year’s spell book—and then he saw it, inscribed in swooping calligraphy inside the front cover.

*Property of Albus Severus Potter,* it read.

Severus blinked then blinked again, as if he thought somehow that would clear the image and make it into something more understandable. Harry’s words fumbled around in his mind as he saw something he never thought he’d see—his mentor’s name, his name, and his childhood nemesis’ name all lined up to christen one human being. He frowned.

“You named your son after me,” he deadpanned—and his voice had started to return to something like normal, less raspy and more melodic the way it has once been, but at that moment it sounded completely alien to his ears. Harry shifted uncomfortably as Severus eyed him with a positively inscrutable look.

“Well…yeah,” he admitted slowly, seeming somewhat sheepish.

“Why in Merlin’s name would you do an imbecilic thing like that?” Severus bit out, the words finding their way to his mouth before he even registered that he was speaking them. Harry seemed even more flustered at the biting words.

“Well…” he started slowly, shuffling his feet. “We decided on Albus pretty early. We toyed with a few other names…well, Remus mostly, but that’s already Teddy’s—Remus’ son’s—middle name. I…thought you deserved something, you and Dumbledore both, for all the sacrifices you made. Something of you that would live on.”

“That is perhaps the most idiotic reasoning I’ve ever heard,” Severus said flatly, although the flutter of something in his chest was something he had a difficult time defining. Was he…touched by the gesture, he wondered internally? Flattered? “Did you even stop to think of my opinion on your choice of names, were I to awaken?”

Harry bit his lip and lowered himself into the chair by Severus’ bedside once more. He took a deep breath. “I did,” he said, tone half defiant, half defeated. “I’d hoped you’d be…flattered, I guess, that I grew to hold you in such high regard, after our previous animosity. That you’d know that I believed the ends justified the means, and that ultimately your sacrifices for the greater good absolved you of your misdeeds. And I wanted the world to know that I believed that too, that I deemed both you and Dumbledore equally deserving of respect.

“But honestly, when Al was born, we didn’t think you’d live much longer,” Harry continued in a rush, before Severus could get a word in. “Your condition had been steadily declining for years, and nothing the Healers had tried was working. We thought you had weeks left, maybe months by a generous estimate.”

Severus found himself both frustrated and annoyed by the younger man, a feeling he was most accustomed to. He longed to pinch the bridge of his nose, a longtime habit when he was trying to contain his frustration; the fact that he couldn’t lift his arms enough to do so only made him more frustrated.
“So you used your son as a pawn to serve your political agenda,” he said after a moment, sternly. Harry looked suitably shocked.

“What?” he demanded with a squeak. “No! I mean… I’m happy that it helped turn some people’s opinions in your favor, but I never would have given either name to my son if I hadn’t believed strongly in each of your merits myself. I wanted all of my children to have names they could be proud of.”

“So you named your son after a murdering Death Eater.”

Frustrated, Harry slammed his fist against the arm of his chair. “Would you stop that?” he hissed.

“Dumbledore did things that were just as bad as anything you did. He played us all like pawns in his giant game of chess. My father and Sirius weren’t exactly angels either, but they were still good people, and I’m still proud to have a son named James Sirius. Just like I’m proud to have a son named Albus Severus.”

Severus swallowed thickly, trying to fight back any emotions Potter’s impassioned speech may have roused in him. “Ah, the victim and his murderer, all in one name,” he spit out self-deprecatingly. “How… morbidly ironic.”

Harry stood suddenly in a swish of his Auror robes. He turned his back to Severus for a few seconds, taking a few deep breaths as he clearly tried to contain his rising temper. Severus felt an absurd sense of triumph that he could still manage to rile the boy—no, man. After a few long seconds, he turned back to Severus.

“Look,” he said seriously, his tone soft, one Severus had the distinct belief he’d honed by using it on his children. “I know that for you, it feels like the war just happened. What Dumbledore did—what he made you do—is still fresh in your mind. But I know—as does most of the wizarding world—that Dumbledore’s death was little more than assisted suicide, a calculated ploy to put you in position to help our side. He would have died either way, and you doubtlessly prolonged his life with your skill at healing magic. You were more his friend than any of us; you could do for him what none of us would have been able to.

“Dumbledore’s death was a tragedy; it really was. Your wand—your spell—might have been the one that did the deed, but we both know who was really responsible for Dumbledore’s death. It was Voldemort, no one else. So mourn him now that you can, now that you don’t have to worry that your grief will give you away or make you weak enough that someone can take advantage of you and take you out of the game before you’ve done your part. But don’t blame yourself; you did what had to be done; nothing less. But I’m proud to have a son named Albus Severus, and he’s proud to have that name as well.”

Harry Potter had clearly learned something about dramatic exits, because with one last pregnant look at Severus, he turned and left the room in a flourish of robes, leaving Severus alone to ponder the younger man’s words. And finally Severus closed his eyes and felt, in a detached sort of way, the tears that fell down his cheeks. The war really was over…and he really did have to deal with the fallout.
He dozed awhile after his tears finally stopped only to be woken up and fed dinner; he found that his limbs were making precious little progress after the initial improvement, and he still had to be fed by someone else. One of the Healers informed him of the possibility of nerve damage from prolonged exposure to Nagini’s venom, but Severus didn’t need to be told. He was already beginning to feel his body’s limitations quite acutely, already wondering if he’d even gain back enough mobility to do the most basic tasks.

Refusing to give himself into melancholy—not yet, not when he hadn’t even been awake for a full two days—he had one of the staff bring him a few Potions journals from 1998 that the boys had left and busied himself reading the articles until he dozed off.

It was morning when he next woke, earlier than he’d woken the previous morning, he wagered. This time, he was greeted by sight of Al—Albus Severus, his mind supplied helpfully, and he wasn’t sure what he felt about that upon renewed inspection. Disgusted, maybe. Perhaps proud.

Al was sitting in the chair by Severus’ bed, his feet pulled up to rest on the edge of the chair, a large tome resting on his raised thighs. Severus could just see the beginnings of the title over the tops of his knees—Modern Healing Potions and, it read before the title was obscured by Albus’ knees.

Severus frowned slightly, pondering that. Remembering the way Harry had said his second son idolized Severus—‘my fault, I’m afraid,’ he’d said, and the words suddenly made more sense with context. Severus pieced together the name, the long black hair so similar to his own, save that Albus tied it back at the base of his neck. An interest in Potions.

Looking at young Albus Potter, Severus felt a roil of emotions going through him—saw all the potential that had once been in him, before he’d been sorted into Slytherin, before his life had taken an unexpected and horrible turn. But no, he corrected himself quickly; Albus Severus might have pale skin, long dark hair, and an apparent interest in potions, but he had all the advantages Severus had not. A father who loved him. A soft, pretty face, almost too pretty for a boy. Wealth. Family, friends.

He sighed softly, feeling the familiar weight of regret—and Albus looked up from the book, smiling shyly when he saw that Severus was awake.

“Good morning, sir,” he said, polite as ever as he closed the book and lowered his legs, setting the tome on his lap. “Do you need anything? Water, or…?”

Fighting back the instinctive disinclination to appear weak in front of anyone, Severus had to admit that he was thirsty. “Water would be appreciated,” he finally admitted, stiffly, and Albus nodded and stood, setting the book aside as he poured a glass of water, helping Severus drink it with little fanfare. Eventually he set the empty glass back next to the pitcher.

“No more improvement?” Albus ventured carefully after a moment, jerking his head in the direction of Severus’ stubbornly unresponsive limbs. Severus wiggled his fingers and moved his arms around experimentally to demonstrate for the boy. From Albus’ frown, he wasn’t pleased either.

“I’m concerned about the efficacy of the potions I’m being given,” Severus admitted after a moment. Albus rolled his eyes.

“With good reason, too,” he said sourly. “The UK has a distinct shortage in talented people in all the worthwhile trades, after the war. Except for Aurors—everyone wanted to be an Auror after the war. But between the people who fled and never returned and the people who were killed…let’s just say that there aren’t many competent brewers left.”
Severus released an annoyed sound, but secretly, part of him was pleased that someone else shared his disdain for the incompetent. That this boy was the offspring of Harry Potter was almost unbelievable.

“Who teaches Potions at Hogwarts these days?” Severus found himself asking, vaguely curious. Albus lit up at that.

“Professor Zabini. Blaise Zabini,” he added after a moment, looking perplexed for a moment, as if unsure about whether there might be any other Zabinis to confuse Severus. “He’s brilliant.”

Severus hummed noncommittally, but he didn’t really have an opinion on the matter. Zabini had always been a talented brewer, and while he’d spouted a lot of pureblood propaganda, Severus was fairly certain he hadn’t gone so far as to ally himself with the Dark Lord during the war. He’d mostly wanted to stay out of it, and he’d been just radical enough in his beliefs that he’d been left alone, since he was still a student. Provided that Zabini had gotten decent training following his time at Hogwarts, Severus supposed he had no objections.

“Is that why you’re reading a book on healing potions?” Severus prodded after a moment. Albus gave him a look that was deliberately obtuse.

“Because of Professor Zabini? Or because there isn’t a decent brewer left on the British Isles?”

Despite himself, Severus snorted a quiet laugh. Albus’ dry sense of humor was well matched with his own, surprisingly. “Either,” he provided after a moment, but Albus just shrugged.

“It’s something to do,” he remarked noncommittally. Severus eyed him for a moment, wondering if he wanted to pry into the thought processes of a teenage boy. He fell immediately on the side of ‘not,’ so he changed the subject. His mind lingered on Albus Severus—something about the whole situation didn’t sit right with him.

“There must be a record somewhere of my course of treatment,” he remarked after a long bout of silence, so long that Albus had been eyeing his book once again, seemingly wondering if the conversation was over. Albus nodded, indicating a magical board hanging at the foot of his bed.

“It’s spelled closed, for privacy of course,” he remarked dryly. “I know the spell to unlock it by heart, but I’ll just get in trouble if I do it, since I’m not of age. If there’s something you want to know, though, I pretty much know its contents back to front.”

Severus sat silently for a moment, mulling over this. It was probably better, anyway, to have this conversation with Albus than his father. Albus was calm and reasonable enough that he and Severus didn’t seem to fly off the handle at each other at any given opportunity. Severus changed tacks.

“How old are you, Albus?” he asked after a moment, for some reason feeling uncomfortable at the idea using the boy’s nickname and deciding to forego it entirely. Albus frowned at the apparent change of subject.

“Thirteen,” he answered slowly, his brow furrowed. “Nearly fourteen.”

Severus mentally did the arithmetic. “Which means you were born in…2005?” he ventured after a moment. Albus nodded slowly, and Severus felt a shred of confirmation at that. “And tell me, when did my condition begin to improve?”

Albus smiled softly, as though he finally caught on to what Severus was implying. “2005,” he said shortly.
“Before or after your birth?”

Albus smiled. “After,” he remarked softly, and Severus nodded slowly, taking that in. “That’s some obscure magical lore you’re suggesting, Professor.”

Severus raised an eyebrow, surprised the young boy had clearly picked up on his insinuation. “There are documented cases, however,” he contested. “I’m surprised you know of them.”

Albus smiled. “I found the timing curious as well, but Mum and Dad thought I was crazy,” he said slowly. “The only person I could get to believe me was Scorpius, and we scoured half the Black library—in secret, of course—before we found the myths. ‘A child, named after a living person, can bring good luck to that person in the case that the naming is imbued with deep emotion by the parent for the child’s namesake.’ *The Magical Power of Language*, 1894.”

Severus mulled that over in his mind. He wanted to dismiss it, too, the way that Harry and Ginevra apparently had, but it seemed too fortuitous to be a coincidence, especially considering how close Harry said he’d been to death. It seemed to confirm the older Potter’s assertion that the name had been granted with positive intent. Deep emotion? Well Severus wasn’t sure he was ready to contemplate that too deeply.

Severus looked up, regarding Al seriously. Al held his gaze this time, seeming more confident than he had been when Severus had first woken up. He considered the boy slowly—too cunning by half for a boy not yet fourteen. He pursed his lips suspiciously.

“Out of curiosity, Albus—what House are you in?” he ventured after a moment. Albus grinned widely, and Severus felt like he already knew the answer.

“Why Slytherin, of course,” Albus said proudly. “Is there any other?”

Afternoon saw a visit from Draco on his lunch break before Draco sent Albus back home to his mother by Floo. The visit was surprisingly pleasant, and it came with a perfumed letter from Narcissa—which Severus had set aside to read later—as well as tales from a surprisingly chipper Draco about everyone’s current careers, whereabouts, and families.

By unspoken consent, Severus let Draco and Albus lead the conversation, steering clear of anyone who had died or been sent to Azkaban. Severus still found himself flabbergasted by how familiarly Draco spoke of the Weasleys, how comfortable he seemed with Potter’s son. But, of course, with Draco’s marriage to Ginevra Weasley, the Weasleys were now his in-laws; Potter’s children were his stepchildren. That might take the most getting used to, out of everything Severus had heard.

In any event, Severus was in a much better mood by the time Harry came around later that evening, flipping through a Potions journal. He had already gotten into 1999, finding himself, for the time being, fascinated and not frustrated by all the breakthroughs in Potions that he’d missed over twenty-one years.

Which was why Harry came in to find Severus reading with a slight smile on his face. Severus looked up and found Harry raising his eyebrow; he wasn’t surprised, he supposed, because seeing even the ghost of a smile on Severus’ face likely wasn’t something to which Harry was accustomed.
Severus greeted him with an identical raised eyebrow.

“Am I to expect a visit from you every evening, then?” Severus questioned, although his tone was without malice. Mostly. Harry just shrugged, a gesture Severus had seen echoed by his son many times over the course of the afternoon.

“The kids spend the week with Draco and Ginny at the Manor, and every other weekend with me,” he remarked offhandedly. “So yeah, my evenings are pretty free. Unless you’d like me to stop coming?” Harry ventured after a moment.

“Not courting the soon-to-be new Mrs. Potter?” he asked dryly, avoiding the question. For better or for worse, Harry Potter was now one of Severus’ few windows to the outside world, now that he was stuck in this bed. One of the few sources of information about all the years Severus had missed. Harry made a face not unlike someone biting into a lemon.

“Ugh,” he said simply.

“I see your eloquence remains unimproved with age,” Severus remarked, but rather than get offended, Harry just laughed.

“No more Mrs. Potters,” he said honestly. “The one was enough. And you see how that turned out.” Severus made a noncommittal noise at that. “Indeed,” he pronounced after a moment before pondering the words he wanted to speak, wondering whether to let them loose. After a moment, he decided to. “Your middle son is quite charming, at least.”

Harry laughed again, slipping into the chair beside Severus’ bed with surprising grace. “I always told him you two would get along, if you ever woke up,” he said finally. “He’s been like that ever since he was little.”


Harry smiled. “All of the above,” he agreed good-humoredly. “Al always knew who he was, even though James always gave him a hard time about it. From the time he was six years old, he knew what he wanted to do—become a great brewer just like you and find a way to cure you. He was sure a potion would be the key. The only time he had a moment of uncertainty was just before he went off to Hogwarts. James teased him mercilessly, telling him he’d be sorted into Slytherin, where all the Dark Wizards went.

“Of course, all it took was one reminder that you’d been a Slytherin, and he went straight into Slytherin as expected without complaint. Sorting Hat only took twenty seconds to place him, apparently. I think James was just sore because he was nearly a Hatstall. Seems he had to argue with the Hat to put him in Gryffindor.”

Severus was surprised to find himself chuckling at the apparent triumph of his namesake over James Potter’s. “Their grandfather must be turning in his grave. A Potter in Slytherin, honestly.”

For a moment Severus froze, wondering if Harry was going to take the comment the wrong way, wondering if it would ruin the unexpected good humor of the conversation. Harry’s expression did turn a little grim, although he didn’t rebuke Severus for the words.

“Soon to be two Potters, I think,” he finally admitted. “I can’t imagine Lily will end up anywhere but Slytherin. Although…I suspect that’ll be for different reasons than Al did.”
Harry didn’t elaborate, and Severus didn’t push. He mulled over that revelation, the possibility of two out of three Potters sorted into Slytherin, the third having to argue with the Hat to be put into Gryffindor. The world truly had gone mad.

They fell silent for a few moments, Harry continuing to look grim for a long minute before he finally seemed to shake it off. “I wonder if Al’s plans are going to change,” he remarked slowly, “now that you’re awake and he no longer has to cure you.”

Severus pursed his lips thoughtfully, but he couldn’t even manage to lie to himself and say that he hadn’t warmed to the second Potter child. It almost made him wonder what it would have been like to have a child of his own. *Almost.*

“Well I may still be in this bed with nerve damage by the time he reaches a point when he could, so he may have a purpose yet,” Severus remarked grimly, feeling his good mood evaporate. Harry looked startled—a not uncommon expression for him.

“That’s not…you don’t really think that’s a possibility, do you?” he asked, clearly concerned. Severus for a moment fought the urge to mock the boy—all Gryffindor optimism and not an ounce of sense, as always.

“I’m not responding to their potions as they’d hoped, the Healers inform me,” Severus said dryly. “I have nerve damage from the venom and, of course, muscle atrophy from the long period of disuse. As it is, I have limited movement of my arms and the rather unsatisfying ability to wiggle my toes.”

Harry looked unconvinced. “You’ve been awake for all of three days, Snape,” he said seriously, optimism still in place. “You’ve already gotten loads better since you woke up. Don’t you think it’s a little early to be making dire prognoses?”

“And, of course, your vast knowledge of Potions and medicine makes you completely qualified to make that judgment,” Severus remarked, voice dripping with sarcasm. Harry looked wounded at that but didn’t contest the assertion, apparently recognizing it as truth. After a long moment, Severus sighed.

“What happened to my things, Potter?” he asked slowly. Harry blinked at the abrupt change of subject, looking at him dumbly.

“Things?” he echoed finally. Severus rolled his eyes.


The specifics seemed to finally bring sense back to him. “Oh,” Harry breathed after a moment. “I have your wand; I can bring it to you, if you think you’re up to doing magic—or if you just want it anyway. Spinner’s End and everything inside of it is under a Stasis Charm. Nothing has been removed.”

Severus waited pointedly for the other news, the obvious news, but Harry wasn’t forthcoming. Severus gave a very put-upon sigh. “And my quarters at Hogwarts?” he prodded.

Harry looked down, regarding his hands for a moment before he met Severus’ eyes again. “Curious thing, that,” Harry remarked finally, making a face. “The castle sealed them off.”

It was Severus’ turn to be startled. “What?” he demanded after a moment. “What the devil do you mean?”

Harry gave another shrug.
“Just what I said,” he put in after a moment. “The castle sealed them off. As in the previous location to your office and your quarters is now an empty wall. As in no amount of magic by any of the Hogwarts professors or anyone else could get them to reappear. I’m sorry.”

Severus lowered his head and let out a dejected breath; well if his good mood hadn’t already been shattered by the reminder of the lack of marked improvement in his condition, this news certainly did it. And, as usual, Harry Potter didn’t know when to leave well enough alone.

“Is there…something in there you need from there?” he prodded gently. And Severus couldn’t help it; he went off.

“Something I need? Something I need?” he parroted angrily. “What about hundreds of Galleons worth of rare and sometimes irreplaceable books? What about nearly all of my personal possessions? What about any scrap of my life that’s left after I’ve spent twenty years in this bed?”

He was breathing hard by the time he finished forcing out the words, further frustrated that a mere rant could do him in so completely. He closed his eyes, trying to will his breathing back to normal.

Harry watched this silently, so silently that Severus was almost convinced that the man was no longer there. But no; when he opened his eyes, Harry Potter was sitting there in the chair right where he’d been when Severus had closed them. Severus took another deep, calming breath, forcing composure.

“All my research journals are in there,” he finally admitted, trying to school his expression to one of bland acceptance. “I was working on numerous potions—one that doubtlessly would have helped me in my previous state of unconsciousness, for instance. And something of a counter for nerve damage caused by prolonged bouts of the Cruciatus Curse. Modified, it could perhaps do me some good, in my current state.”

Harry looked pained at that. “You don’t remember the recipe?” he asked helplessly after a moment. Severus sighed; he didn’t know whether to be cheered that Harry Potter had finally realized the extent of his intellect or frustrated by Harry’s lack of knowledge of experimentation.

“It was an experimental potion,” he remarked after a moment. “I could perhaps recreate one of the more successful variations—” He stopped, looking down at his rather useless arms. There was no way he could precisely prepare ingredients or stir a cauldron for long enough to create any potion of merit. Possibly ever again. He cleared his throat painfully.

“But this—is not nerve damage from Cruciatus. It would doubtlessly require an entirely different preparation, and without my notes on the precise reactions of each and every variation, I’d be months behind where I could be. Years, possibly, given my current limitations.”

Harry’s pained expression didn’t abate in the slightest. “We’ll give your rooms another try then,” he said helplessly, but even he didn’t sound hopeful. And, Severus mused, if a Gryffindor thought something was hopeless, there was a good chance it truly was.
As Harry had informed him that he had his children for the weekend, Severus was anticipating a possibly restful and Potter-free weekend. A visit from Draco was in the cards, perhaps, but he had on the horizon two whole days during which his world did not revolve around any green-eyed individuals named Potter. He had time to relax.

Which is why he was equal parts annoyed and perplexed to wake up Saturday morning to find every available surface in his hospital room covered in the most revolting arrangements of flowers imaginable; the room smelled like a florist shop with the added twist that some of the plants were magical, including a large yellow flower that spoke in dreadful rhymes and a sickly purple looking plant that emitted an aroma somewhat akin to blueberry jam.

Severus crinkled his nose as he looked around, but there was nothing he could do about the monstrosities that flooded the room; he couldn’t get out of bed and he didn’t even have his wand to damage or destroy the damn things. Which meant that he was in a particularly bad humor when Harry Potter unexpectedly strode into his hospital room later that morning with none other than Ronald and Hermione Granger-Weasley in tow.

“Circe’s tit!” Ron exclaimed as he looked around the room. “It’s a madhouse in here!”

Severus rolled his eyes, but he had to admit that the Weasley boy had pretty much hit the nail on the head.

“You never were a poet, Mr. Weasley, but I must admit you’re correct in this case,” Severus acknowledged darkly, taking in Harry’s two childhood friends. They’d both grown into rather dignified-looking adults, Ron towering over both his friends and resembling, Severus thought, a thinner-faced version of his father. Hermione Granger, on the other hand, was still petite and pretty-faced, but she’d tamed her once-wild hair into a poofy bun at the base of her neck.

Ron stared at him for a long second after he’d spoken, as if he couldn’t quite believe his eyes. After a long moment, his expression darkened a little, but he still dipped his head in some sort of grudging gesture of respect. “Snape,” he acknowledged gruffly.

His wife, on the other hand, greeted Severus with a soft smile. “Good morning, sir,” she greeted softly, as though they were old friends who had just seen each other a few days prior. That was a little disconcerting, which is why Severus found himself looking to the more familiar option—right at Harry Potter.

“What, may I ask, is the meaning of the sudden encroachment of flora into my personal space?” he demanded darkly. Harry was still in his Auror robes despite the weekend, but this time Severus noticed a few extra badges tacked on. Harry sighed.

“I’m sorry,” he said immediately. “The press seems to have gotten tipped off that you’re awake. These are from all your well-wishers.”

Severus blinked and looked around the room again, feeling a bit annoyed and a bit ill. Anyone who knew anything about him would know that flowers were the last things he’d want. Not unless they would make a valuable potion ingredient, of course. He frowned.

“Blimey. This is worse than I thought,” Ron breathed under his breath, going over the poke the yellow flower, which proceeded to launch itself into a rather sexualized poem about the act of being
poked. Ron’s face wrinkled in disgust. “Eugh.”

Severus gave a very put-upon sigh. “Once again, Mr. Weasley, you echo my sentiments perfectly,” he remarked, but part of Severus was a little awed. He knew that Harry had told him that most of the wizarding world considered him a hero, but to see it echoed even in such a grossly sentimental gesture that disgusted him came as rather a shock. The reality suddenly began to sink in.

“I’m sorry,” Harry breathed again, looking flustered. “We’ll get them all out of here, I swear.”

“You have a big stack of letters too,” Weasley remarked after a moment, still considering the poetic yellow flower with a disgusted look. “Probably more marriage proposals and offers of sexual favors from desperate witches. Yuck.”

Severus wasn’t sure if it was the desperation of said witches or the idea that they were, ostensibly, offering sexual favors to him that had the Weasley boy so disgusted. Probably the latter, he wagered.

“Oh, do I get a lot of those?” Severus asked, deadpan. Ron just made another disgusted face; Harry shrugged.

“A fair amount of them, to be truthful,” he admitted after a moment. “The Auror office has been screening all the mail addressed to you, in case anyone made threats on your life.”

Severus took a few seconds to ponder that; that witches had actually been so drawn in by whatever gallant and romantic tales Harry Potter had spun that they had stooped to offer themselves to a misanthropic, ugly man. And a comatose one at that. He snorted to himself. At least the prospect of death threats was more familiar.

“I don’t suppose you have any of those from wizards?” he asked blandly after a moment, enjoying the way it made Ron Weasley appear even more ruffled. “I’m not exactly inclined toward witches.”

“Eugh,” Weasley intoned again, having moved to observe the blueberry jam scented plant—although whether the sound of disgust was directed toward Severus’ inclinations or the sickly smell of the small shrub, he wasn’t sure. Likely the former.

Harry seemed even more flustered by his proclamation. “…what?” he intoned after a moment, keeping none of the shock from his voice. “What about my mother?”

Severus gave Harry a dark look, resenting him bringing it up—and in front of his two friends, no less. But then again, Severus assumed he’d probably told them every single thing he’d seen in Severus’ memories as soon as the smoke had cleared from the final battle. He gave Harry a nasty look.

“Your mother was a dear friend to me, and I loved her, certainly,” he finally said, darkly. “I never had romantic feelings for her. Which is not to say that I was happy to see her marry James Potter, mind you. Trust you to misinterpret everything, as usual. It’s a miracle that you were able to glean anything useful from the memories I gave you.”

“Hey!” Weasley protested immediately, but Harry put a calming hand on his arm. Weasley gave his friend a disgruntled look but he halted his protest. His wife eyed them both warningly.

“As usual, you are both completely off-topic,” she scolded, frowning at both of them. Both men looked reasonably chastised. “Harry, you need to hold a press conference before this gets any more out of control.”

“Eugh,” Harry complained immediately, and Severus was beginning to believe that Harry Potter and
Ronald Weasley’s friendship was based largely off of communication through caveman-like grunts. “I hate giving press conferences.”

Hermione placed her hands on her hips and rolled her eyes at him. “And Professor Snape hates cheerful flower arrangements, so I suppose we’re all having a bad day,” she said sharply, and it was in that moment that Severus decided that he could most certainly tolerate Hermione Granger-Weasley. “Honestly, Harry, between the end of the war and…how many years have you been Head Auror?”

“Twelve,” Harry murmured after a moment, sheepishly.

“—twelve years as Head Auror,” she continued as if she had never been interrupted, “you must have given hundreds of press conferences. It needs to be done. Severus Snape is a public figure, a war hero, and there needs to be a public statement on this before any well-wishers try visiting him in person.”

Severus listened to the exchange, shivering at the thought of random witches and wizards barging into his dubious solitude. Various Potters, Malfoys, and Weasleys were more than company enough.

“I know, ‘Mione. But you know I hate these things,” Potter complained again. Hermione was not swayed.

“Then quit your job and move to a remote desert island,” she said humorlessly. “Until then, buck up. And get someone to clear away these flowers.”

“I’ll call Neville,” Weasley volunteered after a moment, still eyeing the rhyming flower suspiciously. “He’ll know how to dispose of some of these magical ones.”

Severus groaned, closing his eyes. And he thought his day couldn’t get any worse.

True to the not-quite warning from Weasley, Longbottom appeared in Severus’ hospital room about an hour later. Severus wasn’t quite sure what he was expecting—wasn’t sure he was really expecting the young man at all. However, the sight that greeted him took the Neville Longbottom from his recent memory—from the boy’s seventh year—and amplified it to the nth degree.

The boy was well and truly a man now, more distinctly than he could say for still small and thin Harry Potter. He was tall, probably at least as tall as Ron Weasley had been when he’d appeared an hour prior in Severus’ sickroom, but where Weasley was still quite gangly, Longbottom was broad and solid. He had been quite the unattractive boy, Severus remembered, but he seemed to have grown into his looks the way that everyone had always assured young Severus that he would grow into his own rather prominent nose. He never had, however, and seeing this rather distinguished version of the child he’d always found so stupid and troublesome irked Severus in some way he didn’t want to analyze.

What irked him even more, however, was the way that Longbottom seemed to not be intimidated by him at all any longer. Not that he was a particularly intimidating sight in his hospital bed, he wagered, although he hadn’t yet caught a glimpse of himself in a mirror. He wasn’t sure he wanted to.
Longbottom met his eyes almost defiantly. “Sir,” he said curtly, his tone wavering halfway between annoyance and grudging respect. There was that, at least, Severus supposed; since he had awoken, everyone had been respectful to him, even those who had blatantly disrespected him in the past.

“Mr. Longbottom,” Severus greeted just as curtly, and Longbottom eyed him for a long moment, as if trying to decide what to make of him. He frowned.

“It’s Professor Longbottom now,” he countered defiantly, and Severus raised an eyebrow at him. Severus caught a glimpse of the old Longbottom in the way he swallowed nervously at the look. “Sir,” Longbottom tacked on after a moment, hastily, and Severus had to bite back a smile.

“Herbology, I presume,” he drawled after a moment, and Longbottom nodded sharply before moving over to examine the blueberry-scented plant. He let out an annoyed noise as he surveyed it.

“Not again,” he groaned under his breath, whispering something to himself as he turned to observe the plant from another angle, as if he expected it to show him something different. The rhyming yellow flower began to speak suddenly; it had seemingly exhausted itself about half an hour before, perhaps running out of material.

“Tension so thick, it’s thicker than thieves
Envy greener than my green leaves
Undercurrent of hatred in this sterile room
With two men who narrowly escaped their doom.”

“Oh, do shut up,” Longbottom said at the flower, and remarkably it did. Severus blinked. He wasn’t sure why he hadn’t thought to tell the blasted thing to shut up himself; it could have saved him an hour of rhyming couplets.

“Quite the nuisance,” Severus remarked after a moment as Longbottom glared at the flower. Longbottom pursed his lips.

“You don’t know the half of it,” he remarked darkly. “A shop has popped up in Hogsmeade recently that magically synthesizes plants with…other objects to produce bizarre characteristics. There are great things that could be done with a discovery like this, but what do they do? Make plants that smell like pudding. Make them rhyme. Bet the rhyming one was synthesized with a poetry book. By a terrible poet, from the sound of it.”

“Dreadful,” Severus remarked dryly. Longbottom made a low sound of agreement before something seemed to strike him; he turned toward Severus and opened his mouth as if about to say something before he stopped himself, turning back toward the rhyming plant, which promptly began rhyming once more.

“Words so dreadful, stuck in his throat
That he wished for courage to have spoke
As a boy, he was such a coward
Now grown and being told off by a flower.”

Neville fumed at the thing, pulled his wand out of his sleeve and lifted it toward the plant—before he turned back toward Severus with a look of determination and strode to the side of his bed, glaring. Severus raised an eyebrow, perplexed by the younger man’s odd behavior.

“You know what—I’m just going to say it,” Longbottom bit out after a moment, still holding his wand in his hand. “Harry told me not to provoke you, but I’m not going to stand here and act like everything is perfectly okay when it’s not. I need to give you a piece of my mind.”
Severus snorted. “Sure you have any to spare?” he couldn’t help but quip.

That seemed to incense Longbottom even further; his face turned an ugly shade of reddish pink and his hand gripped his wand even more tightly.

“That’s exactly what I mean!” Longbottom hissed, fuming. “I understand that you had a part to play—after You-Know-Who came back, you had to convince everyone you were on his side. I get that. But you were horrible to all the Gryffindors—and to me and Harry especially—since the moment we got to Hogwarts. That had nothing to do with playing a role and everything to do with you being an utter bastard, Snape. You were unfair and childish and petty and nothing like an adult and an educator should be. Harry acts like all is forgiven because you got attacked by You-Know-Who’s snake trying to win us the war, but do you know what? It’s not. And I’m not going to act as though it is.”

By the time Longbottom finished speaking, he was breathing hard from the strain of his anger. Severus, for his part, found himself impressed. Until his seventh year, Neville Longbottom never would have dreamed of standing up to him like that. And even then, it had been a close thing, had been a role he was forced into by Harry’s absence from the school.

Begrudgingly, though, Severus had to say that he respected the younger man. Longbottom had been a clumsy boy and a terrible student in most subjects and most especially Potions, but against all Severus’ expectations, he had made something of himself. And he’d grown a backbone.

“Are you quite finished?” Severus asked after a moment, his tone colder than even he had expected. Longbottom looked startled by the unflappable tone; his face colored, but this time it seemed to be from embarrassment rather than anger. He, in fact, looked quite sheepish.

“I…yeah, I guess I am,” he mumbled after a moment, moving to turn away. Severus’ voice, however, stopped him.

“For my part,” Severus began softly, and Longbottom turned back, seeming surprised to hear Severus responding, “I must say that you are correct in your assessment. My treatment of you was cruel and uncalled for. I could make excuses…”

Severus trailed off slowly, all of them running through his head. About how he hated children, never would have taken a post teaching them if not forced to by the Dark Lord, wanting him to spy on Dumbledore. And then forced to stay because of lack of other options and the feeling of indebtedness to Albus for taking him in and helping him when he’d had nowhere to turn. He thought about his own childhood, about all that he’d suffered at the hands of Gryffindors when he’d been at school…but no, none of these were things he wanted to reveal to Longbottom. He hoped, at least, that Harry had had enough sense to keep some of his private things private.

Severus cleared his throat as he realized Longbottom was looking at him oddly, as if he’d been silent for too long. He steeled himself and continued.

“I could make excuses for my actions, but I suspect you don’t want to hear them,” he finally said. “What it comes down to is that I am not a kind man, and I was terribly unsuited to my position.” 
Teaching students, he added mentally. Spying, it had turned out, was something to which he had been perfectly suited, so much so that he had sometimes almost fooled himself. After a long moment, he continued in a measured tone.

“With that said, I apologize for my actions at the time. For whatever my apology is worth to you.”

Longbottom spent a few seconds staring at Severus as if he had grown a second head. Severus, in
turn, was equally surprised by the sincerity he heard in his own words. Apologizing to Neville Longbottom—and meaning it as well—wasn’t something he’d set out to do that day. Wasn’t something he even knew he’d had in him. After a long silence during which Longbottom regarded him carefully, he surprised Severus by breaking into a tentative smile.

“No, you’re not a kind man,” he agreed after a moment, although his soft smile belied the severity of his words. “But you are a good man. That counts for more, I think.”

Severus blinked at the younger man a few times before rolling his eyes.

“Bloody Gryffindors,” he murmured under his breath. “Always wanting to believe the best of people.”

Longbottom laughed suddenly; it was a pleasant sound, one Severus wasn’t sure he’d ever had occasion to hear before. Probably not; Neville Longbottom had never had cause to laugh in his classroom, certainly.

“Oh, believe me, sir—the last thing I want to believe is the best in you,” Neville said, still laughing. “But somehow, part of me does anyway.”

With that, Longbottom turned back to the couplet-spouting flower, now humming under his breath as he cast a couple of spells Severus didn’t recognize, making the flower freeze and stop speaking finally. Severus watched him, silently, suddenly feeling very worn-out. A simple apology, and all was forgiven? Was that how it worked in the world of Gryffindors? But Albus had certainly never forgiven that easily, and he’d been a Gryffindor. But perhaps all Severus had given to help win the war had evened the scales; Gryffindors did have an absurdly noble sense of justice.

Severus frowned and closed his eyes, dozing off as he listened to Longbottom’s inane humming. And when he woke later, all the offensive flowers—magical and otherwise—were gone from the room.

Severus didn’t get another visitor until the following evening, when Harry Potter walked in with a tired expression and a letter in his hand. For the first time since Severus had woken, Harry wasn’t in his Auror robes; instead, he had a pair of emerald robes that made his eyes appear even greener than usual.

Harry slumped into the chair beside Severus’ bed with all the grace of his own twelve year-old self—which was to say none—and handed the letter to Severus without a word. Severus took the envelope in hand, seeing his name on the front, written on thick, cream-colored parchment. He sucked in a sharp breath as he recognized the handwriting. Harry seemed to take that as an indication to speak.

“I assume your letter will be much more positive than mine was,” Harry grumbled, crossing his arms petulantly. “Minerva nearly tore me a new arsehole for not informing her sooner that you were awake. Very disgruntled that she had to find out from the Prophet. I’m surprised she didn’t send a Howler.”

Severus eyed the letter warily, not sure whether or not he even wanted to open it. His year as Headmaster of Hogwarts was still fresh in his mind; he knew that Minerva had had years to get used
to the idea that everything he’d done had been under Albus’ directive, but he didn’t know how she might have taken the news, knew that she still might feel betrayed. Knew it was hard to separate his actions from his intentions. He sucked in a shaky breath.

“How is Minerva?” he asked carefully, trying to cover his nervous reaction from Harry. Harry shrugged.

“She’s abroad somewhere, traveling,” he intoned slowly. “She seems to be doing well. That’s not really what you’re asking, though, is it?”

Severus pursed his lips. Actually, that had been exactly what he’d been asking, but only to cover up what he really wanted to know. And for once in his life, Potter had been perceptive enough to pick up on the undertone of his words. Severus didn’t answer, but his lack of verbal response seemed to bolster Harry anyway.

“Everything that happened—she took it hard,” Harry admitted after a moment. “She’d trusted you implicitly on Dumbledore’s word, then had to adjust to the fact that Dumbledore had been wrong all along. Then had to adjust to the fact that she’d been so quick to believe the worst of you and that she’d been wrong. I’d never seen her so…emotional as she was when we brought you back alive. She was instrumental in lobbying for your Order of Merlin.”

Severus closed his eyes against the words. Out of everyone, he was most ashamed of how his actions might have impacted Minerva. She’d been kind to him and treated him as a friend even when some others had continued to view him with suspicion or been unable to look past his harsh exterior. But Minerva had been a friend to him inasmuch as anyone had, and he’d put her through hell.

“I couldn’t tell her the truth,” Severus breathed after a moment, his eyes still closed. “Occlumency…she didn’t have the mind for it, much like you didn’t. If she’d known my true allegiances and the Dark Lord had ever gotten near enough to use Legilimency on her…that would have been the end of everything. Albus would have died in vain.”

Severus was surprised to feel, suddenly, Harry’s hand on his arm. He started, his eyes shooting open to be confronted by the younger man’s familiar green gaze. Harry gave him a reassuring smile.

“She knows that,” he said seriously, squeezing Severus’ arm gently before he pulled away. He stood up in a sudden twirl of robes. “I’ll leave you to read that in peace. Except—oh, I almost forgot!”

Severus watched in mild interest as Harry rustled through the pockets of his robes; after a moment, he pulled a familiar wand out of the folds. Severus felt his breath catch as Harry turned it in his hand, offering the handle to Severus.

“I meant to bring this to you earlier, but with the madness of the press conference, it slipped my mind,” Harry admitted sheepishly. Severus was barely listening; he stared at the wand for a long moment before closing his fingers around it, almost frightened whether it would even respond to his damaged body. He hadn’t dared to even think of attempting any wandless spells to see if his magic was undamaged; he knew he didn’t have the strength.

But the fear seemed unwarranted; he felt a familiar prickle as he took his wand in his hand, felt the connection in a rush through his body, like coming home. He could feel its power running through him, almost needy—as though the wand had missed him. He barely suppressed a shiver at the intensity of the sensation.

“Lumos,” Severus whispered softly after a moment, the first spell that came to mind, despite the fact that the room was already well lit. The tip of his wand lit without preamble and Severus sighed in
relief, lying back against the pillows and letting his eyes fall closed as he released the tension he hadn’t even known he was holding in him.

“Nox,” he said, equally quietly, without opening his eyes—and he didn’t need to, could feel the magic thrum through him, prickling through his own body. He didn’t need any visual input to know that the spell had worked.

Severus took a few steadying breaths, unwilling to admit—even to himself—how much trepidation he’d been feeling at the fear that his magic might have betrayed him completely, or that he simply wouldn’t have the strength to use it. After a long moment, he felt centered enough to deal with Harry Potter once more—and he opened his eyes, only to see that Harry had left silently while his eyes had been closed, granting him his privacy.
The next few days brought marked improvement for Severus; it was as though the ability to use magic had jumpstarted his recovery in some way, which wasn’t actually unheard of in cases of long-term injury. Severus wasn’t sure why he hadn’t thought of it himself, but he thought it prudent to blame the fact that he’d had too much new information to process to be able to truly contemplate his condition.

As it was, by Wednesday evening he seemed to have regained complete, albeit shaky, use of his upper body, though he still tired quickly, which the Healers were attributing to his atrophied muscles. Even that was beginning to improve with twice daily Muscle-Strengthening Potions, so while his legs still remained stubbornly unresponsive, Severus was beginning to see hope on the horizon that he might at least be able to brew simple potions. Which was a better outcome than he’d been beginning to fear.

Albus, for his part, was ecstatic—and his corresponding excitement belied his earlier maturity and reminded Severus that he was, indeed, a thirteen-year-old boy and that all thirteen-year-old boys could be excitable and obnoxious. Scorpius, for his part, seemed to notice Severus’ agitation and managed to reign the boy in whenever he started to get too overwhelming, which was a small consolation.

Harry Potter managed to keep himself from telling Severus ‘I told you so’ in response to Severus’ previous fatalism about his condition, but Severus could tell that he managed only just.

Wednesday brought another bizarre revelation via another of Albus’ more spirited theories about the prospects for Severus’ later life. When Albus suggested that Severus would soon be able to climb mountains to procure rare potions ingredients, Severus decided that things had gotten out of hand and held up a hand to stop him.

“Albus,” he said seriously, his tone grave. “You do realize that I’m nearly sixty years old.”

That seemed to stop Albus in his tracks; he went oddly silent in just a moment, exchanging a rather strange look with Scorpius before turning back to Severus with a bizarre expression still on his face.

“I forget you technically are,” Albus breathed after a moment, looking momentarily flummoxed. “Because, I mean…you don’t look any different now than in old pictures. My dad has more grey hair than you do.”

Severus promptly snatched up his wand and transfigured a mirror in the air—and he saw that Albus was entirely correct. He was a bit paler than he’d ever been—which Severus wouldn’t have previously considered possible, but he’d never before spent over two decades indoors without even brief interludes outside. He looked tired, perhaps, his hair was a bit longer than he’d used to keep it—and, of course, he had a rather unsightly scar on his neck.

Other than that, though, he appeared unchanged; his hair was still jet black, every strand of it that he could see, and he ran his hands through it several times, searching for hidden white hairs. He’d been surprised that his entire head hadn’t gone white from the stress of that final year he’d spent at Hogwarts, but he was even more surprised that twenty-one additional years of life hadn’t given him any, nor any additional wrinkles on his face for that matter.
Severus found himself observing his face in the mirror for longer than he’d ever done, possibly in his entire life. He hadn’t given much thought to his appearance since he’d woken up, but naturally he’d assumed that his body had been ravaged by injury and time, that he’d be uglier than he’d ever been. To find his face entirely unchanged was…unsettling to say the least.

Harry Potter, predictably, came with a completely theoretical and entirely unsatisfying answer later that evening.

“Well,” Harry explained when Severus had posed the question to him, wrapped again in his familiar Auror garb and sitting in the chair beside Severus’ bed, “there haven’t been many cases of witches and wizards in a prolonged coma like you were. Usually the magical life force tends to tap out and they die, or they wake up after a few years. What I can tell you is only conjecture.”

Severus rolled his eyes and waved his hand impatiently, indicating that Harry should continue. Harry, thankfully, was learning to read the signs Severus gave off, which was making their interactions marginally easier.

“Are you familiar with the theories about wizard life span?” Harry intoned after a moment, looking thoughtful. “About why wizards can live so much longer than Muggles?”

Severus pursed his lips thoughtfully. “I’ve heard many theories,” he said sourly after a long moment, and he had. Most of them agreed that something about the magic running through the body affected human biology. It explained why Squibs tended to have life spans more comparable to Muggles but even Muggle-born witches and wizards could live well into their hundreds. Unfortunately, no single theory had become the accepted explanation because it was so difficult to test such theories. It was, he understood, a topic of research of the Unspeakables—at least by rumor.

Harry, strangely, smiled at his tone.

“Well congratulations, Snape, because you’ve done your part in adding credence to what is now the leading explanation,” Harry explained. “The prevailing theory these days is that once a witch or wizard has reached magical maturity, they begin to go into a kind of stasis during sleep or unconsciousness. Which is to say that every hour a witch or wizard sleeps extends their waking life span. It’s why wizarding children seem to age at a comparable rate to Muggle children but wizarding adults don’t.”

Severus stared at him for a long moment. “So you’re saying that in the last twenty years, I’ve failed to age at all because I’ve been unconscious,” he deadpanned, unable to quite believe his words himself. Harry just shrugged.

“Depends on who you ask,” he said softly. “I mean, you’ve technically been alive all these years, so unconscious or not, you’re still technically fifty-nine. Does having or not having grey hair or wrinkles make you less of fifty-nine? I’m not sure. If you want a better answer, you’re better off contemplating the idea yourself. Or consulting with someone smarter than me. Philosophical questions were never really my strong suit—and please feel free to make a crack about my intelligence. I pretty much walked right into it.”

But Severus didn’t; he was too busy mulling over the words in his head and wondering what they meant for him. He’d never been a vain man—it was a losing proposition, considering how he looked, and it was why he hadn’t even thought to consult a mirror during the entire week since he’d woken. Did his appearance matter in the grander scheme of things? Did the possibility of extra years of life make up for the twenty-one he’d lost? He wasn’t sure, and Harry was correct that he’d need extra time to contemplate the issue. So instead, he turned his attention back to the other things on his mind.
“Have you had any luck getting into my rooms?” he asked after a second—and Harry seemed taken aback by his sudden change of subject, giving him a flabbergasted expression quite similar to the one his son had worn earlier in the afternoon. Harry, to his credit, recovered quickly.

“All the current Hogwarts professors who are available this summer took a crack at it,” he said after a moment, not answering the question. “Also Bill Weasley, who you very well know is a Curse-Breaker, both Arthur and Molly, Hermione, Ron, and a handful of other Aurors and staff at the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Your rooms won’t appear, Snape. They still seem to be there, but the castle isn’t letting anyone through.”

Severus opened his mouth to say something acerbic, but Harry stopped him.

“And before you say anything, it’s not your wards,” he said sharply. “Every person who has examined it—from Curse-Breakers to Charms experts to Dark Arts experts—they all say that the magic that’s sealed off your rooms comes from Hogwarts itself.”

Severus fought the urge to cross his arms across his chest petulantly, but that had been what he was about to suggest. He frowned instead.

“Perhaps the castle will let me inside them,” he suggested after a moment, feeling slightly warmed by that possibility, the possibility that Hogwarts Castle itself was protecting his privacy until his return. At least he hoped that was what was happening. “I want you to take me there.”

Severus made sure to phrase that as a statement, not a request. Harry still looked troubled.

“I’m not sure you’d be up to the journey,” Harry said fretfully, nibbling on his lower lip in a way that Severus found equal parts obnoxious and almost…endearing. Severus gave him a sharp look.

“My magic is entirely intact,” he argued snappishly. “My inability to use my legs is an obstacle but not an immovable barrier to my ability to visit the castle. Even Muggles who can’t walk have managed to find a way to move around successfully. Are we wizards or not?”

Harry frowned, but Severus knew that he was accepting that Severus had a point. Harry sighed, running a hand through his already-disheveled hair.

“All right—I’ll send an owl to Headmistress Sprout and ask her if we can’t visit,” he said after a moment, resignedly. “I’ll try to clear some time in my schedule to take you.”

“I don’t need a babysitter, Potter,” Severus hissed without even realizing it. Harry rolled his eyes and stood up in a wave of fury, resting his hands on his hips.

“Yes, you really do,” he argued with a stern expression, as though talking to one of his children. “You’ve been unconscious for all these years, so we have no idea what kind of threat against your life might crop up now that you’re awake again. Despite, and sometimes because of, your true allegiances coming to light, there are people on both sides who blame you for the deaths of their loved ones, and there’s no guarantee that one of them won’t be angered by your second chance at life when their loved ones are dead. You must have heard what happened to Lucius. And they went after Astoria and Scorpius too, despite both of them being innocent of any wrongdoing. The majority of the wizarding world considers you a hero, Snape, but not everyone does. So no, you’re not going anywhere without a trained Auror at your side, at least until you’re stronger. So I’m going with you or you’re not going at all.”

Harry stood there looking down at Severus with a serious gaze, as though expecting the other man to argue further. But whether it had been intentional or not, the mention of Lucius had stopped Severus’
resentment in its tracks. He reached up and pinched the bridge of his nose in exasperation, somehow annoyed and simultaneously glad that his recent progress gave him enough mobility to do so.

“All right, Potter,” he conceded after a long moment. “We go together.”

For all of Harry’s apparent reluctance about letting Severus go to Hogwarts, he was remarkably efficient about setting it up. The next day found Harry in his hospital room at nine in the morning, and while at first Severus wasn’t sure of the necessity for the early arrival, the reasoning soon became apparent as they began their preparations to leave.

It started with getting Severus into more suitable attire, as anyone with eyes could recognize that his hospital garments were not fit for public consumption. Harry came with a pair of simple black robes along with black trousers and a black shirt to go beneath them. All, Severus noted, were his own, which Severus supposed meant Harry must have gone to Spinner’s End to fetch them. The idea of Harry in his childhood home—in the neighborhood in which both Severus and Lily had grown up—brought a distinct sense of discomfort to Severus’ chest. Not nearly as much discomfort, of course, as Harry having brought him his pants, because then that brought up the prospect that Harry Potter had been rooting through Severus’ underthings.

Even with the help of magic, getting himself dressed was a tremendous hassle, considering that his legs were nothing but dead weight and his hands still shook too much to successfully manage buttons. Harry, astutely, left Severus to the task by himself, which took Severus the better part of an hour and but left him, at least, with his dignity.

The next two hours were spent trying to settle Severus in what he could only think of as a magical wheelchair.

Having been raised in a Muggle neighborhood, Severus was more than familiar with traditional wheelchairs. He even knew, in a distant sort of way, that there must be some witches and wizards with irreversible spell damage that necessitated they have an alternate way of achieving everyday mobility. One would have thought that being in acquaintance with Alastor Moody and his missing leg would have caused Severus to consider the subject a little more deeply.

The magical wheelchair was—well, it was more of a chair, really, in that it didn’t have any wheels. It seemed to hover over the ground, although like a traditional wheelchair, it did have a place to rest his feet. Severus would have been more than glad to accept a normal, Muggle wheelchair for all the hassle that it took to settle him into this device, known as a Basic Regulator of Otherly Mobility (BROOM).

Severus wasn’t sure what annoyed him more, the obnoxious acronym or the fact that it had to be magically adjusted to his height (the adjustments for which took half an hour) or that he had to have it keyed into his magical signature so that he could control it with his thoughts alone (which took more than an hour). An uncommonly difficult case, the BROOM technician had insisted, because Severus’ magic was exceptionally powerful and thus difficult to harness. It sounded, Severus reflected, like flattery meant to divert his annoyance.

Harry stood by while Severus was poked and prodded and levitated in and out of the chair, while his
feet were inadvertently slammed into the ground when the height sensors failed, and while Severus peppered both the BROOM technician and the accompanying Healer with a barrage of rather creative vitriol.

Finally, two hours later, Severus was settled in the damn thing and everything seemed to be working properly. If Severus hadn’t been so annoyed—and his legs hadn’t been thumping with throbbing pains from being smacked unceremoniously into the floor—he probably would have been fascinated by the kind of charm work that was obviously needed to make the device function, responding to his mental directions immediately.

As it was, he was just annoyed, and Harry seemed to sense that as he Apparated them both outside the gates of Hogwarts, walking silently beside his magically thumping chair as they made the long trek to the castle.

The castle was, predictably, quite deserted for the second week of July; they’d met Hagrid on the grounds, forcing Severus to rather politely ignore the big, blubbering sobs of relief the half-giant had given at seeing him awake. Harry had managed to extricate them with a sense of delicate tact Severus hadn’t known his former student possessed, both placating Hagrid and begging off due to urgent business up at the castle.

Hogwarts itself was quite as Severus remembered; it was obvious in some places where the stone was newer or had been repaired after the Battle of Hogwarts, but in most places, it seemed unchanged. It was like stepping twenty years into the past—only that past felt uncomfortably recent to Severus. He surveyed the surroundings with a strange sense of discomfort, remembering all the terrible things that had happened there. All the terrible things that he’d done.

He swallowed thickly as his floating chair followed Harry down the familiar path to the dungeons; there he felt almost a sense of relief, because the dungeons had been so much safer in that final year. Slytherins had rarely been the target of the Carrows’ rage; Severus had had to do so much less fast-talking to try to let students escape from the Cruciatus Curse.

It wasn’t long before they stopped in the corridor that led to Severus former office and his private rooms. It took but a second to see that Harry had been truthful—not that Severus had suspected him of lying—and see that the previous door had now become a blank wall.

Harry turned to him with a raised eyebrow as if to say, “Well?” Severus didn’t rise to the bait; instead, he mentally instructed his chair—he refused to refer to it as a BROOM, even mentally—closer to the blank patch of wall, laying his hand against the cool stone.

He could feel it, then, thumping through the stone, could feel his own magical signature in the wards behind the wall, which were in serious disrepair, as would be expected without regular maintenance. And then—and Severus was sure he wasn’t imagining it—he felt, physically, the castle responding to him, felt the stone beneath his hand begin to grow warm. Suddenly, the wall rippled and a door appeared.

They were both silent for a long moment.

“You’re kidding,” Harry breathed in frustration. “All this time, and we could have just wheeled you in here on a stretcher, stuck your hand on the wall, and it would have opened.”

Severus stared at the door for a long moment, thinking. “I don’t think so,” he murmured finally, distracted and thoughtful. “The castle…it seemed to recognize my magic but also my intent. I don’t think it would have opened to my touch if I were unconscious.”
He reached out and opened the door with Harry muttering behind him all the while about stupid temperamental castles and bloody wastes of time.

Severus propelled himself into his office and stopped immediately, so suddenly that Harry almost ran into him from behind. Harry jerked to a stop as well, just barely managing to avoid hitting Severus.

“What?” Harry asked when Severus was silent for a long moment, surveying the room. Severus pursed his lips.

“Something is wrong,” he said seriously, looking around carefully. He couldn't quite pinpoint what it was; things seemed to be mostly in order, but he felt as though…somehow something was wrong. It was as though things had been moved, subtly; all his specimens on the walls were still in place, everything on his desk as well… but still, Severus couldn’t shake the feeling.

Harry took the words seriously, which probably said something about how concerned he was about a possible threat to Severus’ life; he suddenly seemed completely on alert, his wand out as he surveyed the room with an Auror’s eye. Severus heard Harry muttering various spells to detect dark curses, and several objects around the room lit up. Letting out an exasperated sigh, he turned to Severus, but Severus had no compunctions about what Harry was seeing.

“Those are all my curses,” he admitted easily, not even having the grace to be ashamed about the barely-legal magic he’d performed in the past. “But…someone’s been in here.”

“That’s impossible,” Harry breathed as he scanned the room, but all the same, he cast a quiet *Homenum Revelio*, which predictably revealed no human presences in the room. Whoever had been in the room was long gone. “How could a wizard get in these rooms without your help?”

Severus pondered the question for a moment before something struck him. “Maybe it wasn’t a wizard,” Severus said slowly. “House-elves can Apparate within Hogwarts. And you’ll notice that this room is entirely devoid of dust.”

Severus watched as Harry looked around the room, seeming to notice this for the first time. He pursed his lips thoughtfully. “Winky!” he called after a moment, and a small, female house-elf suddenly appeared in front of him.

“Winky, have the Hogwarts house-elves been coming in and out of these rooms?” Harry asked after a moment, and Winky nodded vigorously, her large head nearly overbalancing her.

“Yes, Harry Potter, sir, Winky is here, sir!” she intoned in a squeaky voice. Severus just managed to not wince at the sound.

“Winky, have the Hogwarts house-elves been coming in and out of these rooms?” Harry asked after a moment, and Winky nodded vigorously, her large head nearly overbalancing her.

“Winky and the other house-elves is keeping the rooms clean for when Headmaster Snape is waking up, sir,” she declared proudly, and she looked over and spotted Severus in his chair then, promptly falling over for real this time with a loud squeak of surprise. “Winky is happy to be seeing Headmaster Snape is awake!” she called from her position on the floor. Severus blinked repeatedly at the small creature, not sure how to respond.

“That’s great, Winky; I’m sure he’s very grateful to you for keeping his rooms clean,” Harry said after a moment with a sideways glance at his silent companion, as if daring Severus to contradict his statement. “But can you tell me—have you seen anyone in these rooms except for the other house-elves?”

Winky stood up awkwardly, shaking her head with equal vehemence, her ears flapping back and forth around her. “Winky is not seeing anyone, sir. Wizards is trying to getting in, but wizards
Severus narrowed his eyes as he regarded the small creature. Something was still wrong; he could feel it.

“Winky, have any house-elves taken anything from these rooms?” he intoned after a moment, wondering if that accounted for his feelings of discomfort. Winky’s vigorous head shake almost toppled her over again.

“No house-elves is taking things from Headmaster Snape, sir,” Winky squeaked shrilly. “Headmaster Snape is a very respected and beloved Headmaster. No house-elves is touching his things except for cleaning, sir.”

Severus looked around thoughtfully, taking in his surroundings again. “Thank you, Winky; that’s all for now,” Harry said softly after a moment, and the house-elf squeaked and disappeared with a crack. After a beat, Harry came up next to Severus.

“What is it now?” he asked, and although his tone was level, it belied his outward patience. Severus thought about telling him that something still felt amiss but dismissed the urge; he didn’t think Harry was liable to believe him.

“Nothing,” Severus said in a surly tone. “I want to get my Potions notes and maybe a few books. They’ll be in my private rooms.”

Harry nodded silently, following Severus as he made his way through another door and into his private rooms. Severus felt the other man hovering by the door, perhaps surveying the rooms; he didn’t want to know what Harry Potter thought of his rather Spartan setup, didn’t pay him any mind as he slid two books off a shelf carefully, settling them in his lap.

Finally, he moved across the room and lifted a portrait from the wall, ignoring Harry’s eyes on him as he did so. Behind the portrait was a broken section of wall, sealed off and warded and containing all of notes on his most secret Potions experiments, hidden from the view of anyone who might have wanted to steal his research or who might have brought his loyalties into question if they’d seen the kind of potions he was working on. Inside would be the potions notes that would hopefully help him develop a potion that would bring back his mobility; inside was all the knowledge he’d need to get started, at least.

Severus blinked as he realized that the wards and spells he’d put on the false portion of the wall had been dismantled; he could feel it, the lack of buzz of magic from the wall. Already having an idea what he would find, Severus opened the section with his hand, holding his breath—and, as part of him had feared, it was completely empty.

Chapter End Notes

Please see the lovely piece of fan art for this chapter by TrekkieGrrrl [here](https://example.com).
Severus wasn’t sure if he was enraged or just dejected when Harry finally managed to get him settled back in his hospital bed, which had been a huge pain for both of them—literally so for Severus. He didn’t want to acknowledge that Harry had been correct and it was too soon for him to be moving around so much, but between all the excitement of the day, the mishaps in setting up his BROOM and having to be moved between that and his bed, his whole body—and his useless legs especially—were thrumming with needle-pricks of pain, the muscles still unresponsive yet plagued with protesting spasms.

Harry had assured him that he would get the Auror corps to question the house-elves at the school to ensure that none of them were responsible for the theft, but the even more disturbing possibility was that somehow Death Eaters had gotten to the research before the rooms had sealed themselves off. It was a possibility, albeit not a likely one—and though there had been nothing in those notes that could be dangerous in the hands of any Death Eaters who had managed to evade capture all these years, it also significantly decreased his chances of getting his notes back.

Which meant that Severus was right back where he started, with the prospect of having to re-start trials on his Cruciatus nerve-damage potion nearly from scratch and have to figure out from there how to possibly modify it to help his current, non-Cruciatus induced damage. It meant that all the other potions and potion improvements that he’d been researching were lost except for what remained in his memory—which, while sharp, wasn’t perfect.

And on top of all that, he was exhausted and his whole body was aching. It was not shaping up to be a good day at all.

Once Severus was settled, Harry stood by his bed uncertainly for a long second, and though Severus’ eyes were closed, he could feel the other man’s eyes on him. He sighed harshly.

“I don’t appreciate being stared at like some sort of zoo exhibit, Mr. Potter,” Severus hissed after a moment, and Harry seemed to jump at those words.

“Sorry,” he said immediately, abashedly. “Just…are you okay?”

Severus was actually almost too exhausted to be acerbic. Almost.

“I’ve lost twenty years of my life, my research has disappeared, and my legs are still perfectly useless except—for of course—for being excruciatingly painful. I’m bloody wonderful, Potter. Thank you for asking.”

Though he didn’t open his eyes, Severus could almost hear Harry biting his lip.

“Do you want me to get a Healer to bring you a Pain-Relieving Potion?” Harry asked after a second.

“Theyir potions are perfectly useless, Potter,” Severus grumbled—although that wasn’t precisely true. They weren’t as effective as the ones Severus made, but then Severus hadn’t shared his improved recipe. He’d developed it after the Dark Lord’s return (and had received much personal relief from it), but he had felt as though sharing information about pain relief with the magical community as a whole put a bit of a damper on his position as the Dark Lord’s Most Trusted Servant. Pain relief wasn’t exactly the purview of Death Eaters—causing pain was.

Still, Severus had nothing to gain by telling Harry not to get a Healer—an imperfect potion was still better than no potion at all. That all said, he was in too much pain to really consider the distinction.
Severus heard Harry collapse into the chair by his bed. “I know,” he said softly. “The ones at Hogwarts were always more potent, but I’m sure that’s because you made them.”

Severus opened his eyes blearily; under other circumstances, he was sure that the offhand compliment from Harry Potter of all people would make him feel a little smug. He was actually too exhausted to feel smug, but after a moment, Harry met his eyes with a hopeful little look.

“Look…I really shouldn’t say this—I’m sure your Healers would have my balls if they knew—but Albus makes a great Pain-Relieving Potion,” Harry murmured after a moment. “Whenever I’ve been injured, I pretty much try to get myself discharged as quickly as possible and go home to take Albus’ potions. I’m not really supposed to give you anything not sanctioned by the hospital, but if you want, I can run home and get one for you. It might help.”

Severus closed his eyes, finding himself a bit dismayed at the idea that a thirteen-year-old Hogwarts student brewed better potions than whoever was currently supplying St. Mungo’s. Then again, bureaucracy had always bred mediocrity.

“Fine,” he breathed softly, and Harry made a little noise of assent, leaving the room without pause. Severus half-dozed as he was gone, torn between feeling too exhausted to stay awake and being in too much pain to actually fall asleep. It seemed almost like an eternity and simultaneously like mere seconds before Harry returned.

Harry laid a soft hand on his arm, as if reluctant to wake him. Severus opened his eyes slowly to meet Harry’s, which were looking down at him in concern. “Here,” Harry said softly, unstopping a small bottle and handing it to Severus. It must have said something for the instinctive trust he held for Harry Potter that he downed the potion without hesitation.

A familiar taste washed over his tongue; he’d had many an occasion to require pain relief over the years, from less sinister things like student potions accidents and more sinister ones like battle wounds and torture by the Dark Lord, and this taste brought back all those memories—

But wait. Severus stopped himself blearily, realizing that there was something wrong with that thought. He searched his mind for what, fighting his exhaustion as he tried to pinpoint exactly what it was that was wrong. He’d been taking Pain-Relieving Potions several times a day for the past week, and it had never triggered all those memories for him.

And then it struck him. It hadn’t triggered those memories because the formula hadn’t been the same, the taste subtly different.

Suddenly, Severus was very awake.

With much effort, he pushed himself up so he was sitting up properly instead of the half-reclining he’d been doing on his bed of pillows. Harry, who had obviously been expecting him to go to sleep, looked down at him with surprise and concern.

“What?” he asked immediately. “Are you still in pain?”

Severus wasn’t, and therein lay the problem.

“Where’s Albus?” he asked seriously. “I need you to bring him here immediately.”

Severus had hoped that his tone was stern enough that Harry would obey without question—but he should have remembered that this was Harry Potter, who never obeyed anything without question.

“What? Why do you need Al?”
Severus threw his hands up in exasperation. “Can you just once in your life do as I ask without questioning my motives?” he demanded acerbically. That seemed to do the trick, although it obviously annoyed Harry at the same time because he rolled his eyes.

“Fine. He’s at the Manor; I’ll go get him.”

Severus couldn’t sit still as he waited for Harry to come back with Albus; he went over and over it in his head, trying to figure out how any of this made any sense. Severus wasn’t usually one to fidget, but he found himself picking absentmindedly at a loose thread in his hospital blankets, impatient for their arrival.

It couldn’t have been more than fifteen minutes later that Harry came in with a rather apprehensive-looking Albus. That, Severus could understand; Albus had a tendency to show up in his hospital room with Scorpius for at least a few hours every day, but this was the first and only time Severus had summoned him there.

“Good afternoon, Professor,” Albus breathed after a moment, still unfailingly polite. Severus, on the other hand, didn’t feel himself bound by the same social conventions.

“Where did you get the recipe for your Pain-Relieving Potion?” he asked sharply, and Albus stilled visibly, suddenly clinging to his father’s robes. It was only at that moment that Severus remembered how young Albus really was.

Harry made a face, clearly offended by the tone Severus had taken with his son.

“What are you implying, Snape?”

Severus ignored Harry entirely and continued to gaze right at Albus. “You know what I’m implying, Albus Severus,” he said slowly, deliberately using the boy’s full name. Albus paled visibly.

“Please don’t be angry with me,” he said softly, seeming to cower behind his father. “I wasn’t trying to invade your privacy, I was just…” Albus trailed off, as if unsure of what to say. Harry’s expression changed at that; he seemed to realize once more that Severus wasn’t the enemy.

“Al, what are you talking about?” Harry asked in the careful tone parents used when they suspected their child had done wrong. Albus just shifted uncomfortably, so Severus picked up with his suspicions.

“Albus is the one who has been in my rooms at Hogwarts,” he said with total certainty in his voice. Albus just swallowed thickly, but Harry’s brow furrowed.

“How did a thirteen year old, unqualified wizard get into your rooms when dozens of fully qualified wizards tried and failed?” he asked skeptically, but Severus didn’t answer, just gave Albus a penetrating look. For once, Albus looked very intimidated.

“You never believed me about that name business, no matter how many times I tried to tell you!” Albus shouted suddenly, breaking away from his father and giving him an indignant look. “I tried to tell you that it was too much of a coincidence that he started getting better right after I was born, and I told you what Scorpius and I found in those old books, and you all thought it was wishful thinking because I idolized him!”

Albus was breathing hard following his rant; Harry looked surprised, as if Albus had suddenly grown an extra appendage. He clearly wasn’t used to his calm and collected son yelling at him like that.
“What does that have to do with anything?” Harry asked slowly. Albus threw his hands up in frustration, pacing the length of the hospital room. Severus watched his progress with careful interest, Albus’ words confirming what he’d already suspected.

“Everything!” Albus yelled in exasperation. “Because Professor Snape’s rooms opened for me without me even trying, but no matter what we did, they wouldn’t open when Scorpius was with me. They wouldn’t let him in. You had him in mind when you named me and so you made this…weird magical connection between us!”

Harry blinked a few times at his son’s exasperated outburst. “I went into his rooms,” he said softly, although it was more of a non sequitur than a negation of his son’s words. Severus cleared his throat, speaking for the first time since the beginning of Albus’ confession.

“If I may,” he cut in authoritatively. “There could be several reasons for that. It could be because his power isn’t fully formed that he couldn’t get the rooms to accept another, even in his presence. Or it could be because he was simply a proxy for Severus Snape, not the real thing.” Severus suspected the latter, or perhaps some combination of the two, since the wall had obviously re-sealed behind Albus, but the door had remained in place even after Harry and Severus had left that afternoon.

“This is crazy,” Harry intoned after a moment, but Severus just shrugged. After all, he and Albus had discussed this idea already; he didn’t have as far to stretch to believe in the connection between them. In the fact that, apparently, the magical world had somehow accepted Albus Severus Potter as something like his son, his heir—and wasn’t that disquieting thought? Severus ignored Harry for the moment, focusing once more on Albus.

“I’m not angry with you, Albus,” he assured the boy softly. “Though I do wish you’d have told me you had accessed my rooms sooner. Before I’d gone in and found things missing.”

Albus colored visibly. “I didn’t know you were trying to get in,” he said abashedly. “And I didn’t know what you’d think of me taking your notes. I just…I was curious, so I looked around, and your rooms gave me full access to everything, even the warded things. And I thought maybe I’d find something that would help to cure you.”

The words sent a bit of a chill down Severus’ spine.

“And you did, didn’t you?” he asked knowingly. Albus paled again, and Harry, once more, seemed confused.

“What is he talking about?”

Severus gave him a piercing look. “You didn’t find it curious that I woke up not long after the start of the summer holidays?” he asked seriously. Harry turned a dark expression on his son, and Albus seemed to visibly cower under the look.

“Al, what did you do?”

Albus looked visibly frightened when he answered. “At the beginning of the summer holidays, I gave him a potion I brewed,” Albus admitted in a shaky voice. “From his own notes. He was developing it.”

Harry met Severus’ gaze as if to confirm that, and Severus gave a short nod before turning his gaze back to Harry’s son. “That was an experimental potion, Albus,” he said seriously. “Untested. And waking a person from a coma wasn’t its original intent.” Although Severus could see the leap the boy had made; he’d had a similar thought after he’d woken, about the possible efficacy such a potion
might have had on his comatose state.

Harry regarded his son as if he were just seeing him for the first time. “You’re kidding me,” he said under his breath, his tone disbelieving. “You gave Snape an experimental potion without having any idea what it might do?”

“I knew exactly what it might do!” Albus countered darkly. “I didn’t just give it to him untested! Scorpius and I spent all year modifying it and testing it! And it was Professor Snape’s own potion! And he woke up!”

Harry pursed his lips in an expression that Severus had only previously seen on the faces of women like Molly Weasley and Minerva McGonagall—more often than not, in both cases, in response to the Weasley twins.

“That’s not the point!” Harry countered angrily. “What if it hadn’t worked? What if you’d killed him instead?”

Albus looked distinctly troubled by that possibility, but he didn’t let it show in his words. “He’d been in a coma for more than twenty years,” Albus countered morosely. “He nearly was dead.”

Severus stared at the boy for a long moment; he saw the Slytherin in him then, distinct and shining. The Slytherin who didn’t like to take risks unless they were calculated risks, risks in which the possible rewards were great enough to ignore the possible consequences. Especially if the consequences would be suffered by someone else.

Severus’ voice broke the long silence.

“How did you test it?”

Albus’ gaze turned to Severus, as if trying to figure out if Severus was also angry with him. Severus, for his part, wasn’t sure; the boy had clearly taken a risk to try to save him, and if he’d been incorrect, the consequences could have been dire. On the other hand, he was a Slytherin and the results spoke for themselves.

“We gave the Draught of the Living Death to mice,” he admitted after a moment, dimly. “Then tried reviving them with different variations of the potion you were developing. Not a single one of them died, and when we got a successful variation that woke them up every time, we… experimented on Kreacher.”

Harry gave his son a dark look at that, and Severus wasn’t surprised that he had. Severus was surprised that the old house-elf was even still alive.

“He gave his permission!” Albus countered before his father could scold him. “He wanted to help Professor Snape!”

Severus, despite himself, couldn’t help but be impressed. A second year Hogwarts student successfully brewing the Draught of the Living Death, not to mention successfully adapting and perfecting an experimental potion, was a fairly impressive achievement. He wasn’t sure he could have done it in his second year, although he wasn’t about to tell Albus that.

“Please, please tell me you didn’t experiment on any people.”

Albus looked affronted by that. “Of course not!” he insisted, but Harry crossed his arms angrily.

“So Professor Snape was your only human ‘test subject,’ then,” he breathed out harshly. Severus just
managed to hold back a laugh; so he deserved a title from Harry Potter, albeit a lapsed one, only when he wanted to give his son the impression that killing Severus would be wrong.

“It wasn’t dangerous!” Albus insisted vehemently. “There’s no way it could have harmed him. It would either work or it would have no effect. We made sure of that.”

Severus, for his part, was inclined to agree with Albus, especially since he was the one to have developed the original potion. But he’d spent enough years as a teacher to know better than to get between an angry parent and their child.

“What you don’t know about danger could fill a book, Albus Severus!” Harry intoned, and really, Severus reflected as he watched, it was like watching Molly Weasley yell at her children. It was more than obvious from where Harry had acquired his parenting skills. “You are grounded.”

“What?” Albus demanded in a tone only affronted teenagers could manage. “For how long?”

“Until I decide I’m done being angry at you for your total recklessness and disregard for the safety of others!”

Severus covered up his amused snort with a fake cough; he wondered if Harry Potter had ever heard that saying about the pot and the kettle.

“But I cured him!” Albus argued.

“The fact that you think that’s all that matters shows that you have a lot to learn,” Harry told him seriously. “We’re going straight back to the Manor and we’re going to tell your mother what you’ve done. And you’re going to bring me Professor Snape’s potions notes so I can return them to him.”

Severus sighed as he leaned back against the pillows, blissfully pain-free for the first time in a week. He’d been wrong. It had shaped up to be a good day.
Chapter 7

It took more than an hour before Harry returned to Severus’ hospital room, during which Severus dozed with a ghost of a smile on his face. There was something about the whole situation that made him inexplicably happy, although whether it was that Harry Potter’s second son cared so much about his wellbeing that he’d managed to cure him or whether it was watching Harry Potter become flustered at his son’s rule breaking, Severus wasn’t sure. Either way, Severus’ pain was finally manageable and on top of that, he was finally seeing a way out of the whole miserable mess.

When Harry did finally return, he appeared visibly wrecked, his hair more disheveled than ever and his expression drawn and tired. For a brief moment, Severus found himself wondering what the discussion with Ginevra Weasley—no, Malfoy—had entailed. Not enough, of course, to ask after details. The Potter-Weasley-Malfoy family drama wasn’t something in which Severus had any interest involving himself.

Wordlessly, Harry pulled something from his pocket and took out his wand to un-shrink it—and Severus couldn’t deny the deep-seated feeling of relief he felt at seeing his carefully bound booklets of experimental notes. Harry handed them to the other man, Severus lowering them to his lap slowly. Severus counted them methodically—half a dozen, some thicker than others, sorted by potion type. They were all there, and they were in immaculate condition; the boy had clearly taken good care of them, for which Severus could only be grateful. He had, from a thirteen-year-old boy, expected the worst.

“I don’t know what to say,” Harry murmured after a moment, sounding almost ashamed—ashamed for his son’s actions, perhaps, ashamed that he hadn’t raised Albus better. Severus had to hold back a sarcastic response, taking a deep breath.

“I think you’re being too hard on the boy,” Severus said finally, and the room suddenly fell deadly silent, Harry’s mouth opening and closing repeatedly, like a fish on land. After a moment, he spluttered.

“Now I know something must have gone wrong with Al’s potion. Who are you, and what have you done with Severus Snape?”

Severus just rolled his eyes.

“Is the melodrama really necessary, Potter?” Severus droned. “Or are you so assured of your infallibility now that you think you know better than I do about how I should feel about a supposed crime perpetrated against myself?”

Harry blinked, as if unsure of how to react to the other man’s bored tone. It took him a few seconds to regain his equilibrium.

“You do realize how ironic it is, you telling me I’m being too hard on someone?” he finally supplied. Severus snorted.

“Perhaps about as ironic as you trying to tell your son off for sneaking about, breaking into people’s rooms and stealing things,” Severus offered with a raised eyebrow. At Severus’ words, Harry visibly deflated, slumping into the chair beside Severus’ bed and burying his face in his hands.

“He should have come to me,” Harry said disconsolately into his hands, his words seemingly directed toward his own lap. “He needs to understand that there are consequences for taking matters
into his own hands like that.”

Severus mulled over that for a moment, along with what he’d been pondering while the two Potters had been gone. He frowned thoughtfully.

“If I might offer a solution?” Severus ventured after a moment, surprised by how tentative his voice sounded. It wasn’t that he was expecting Harry to say no; if anything, Harry Potter had proven thus far that guilt and a sense of duty were enough to compel him to do anything for Severus, and Severus wasn’t above exploiting that. Especially if it kept him from having to seek help elsewhere; regardless of what Harry said about his hero status, Severus remained skeptical about his position with the rest of the wizarding world.

Harry’s head shot up, eyes boring into Severus’s almost pleadingly, as if begging him to have a real solution. Severus pursed his lips, mindful that Harry’s approval might hinge upon the way he phrased the request. After a long pause, he spoke.

“I suspect that the Healers here have done all they can for me,” Severus remarked after a moment, carefully—and it was clear from Harry’s expression that he agreed with Severus’ assessment. “I can brew more powerful potions myself, and I believe that modifying the potion about which I previously spoke may be my best chance to regain something approaching regular use of my limbs.”

Severus paused thoughtfully, but Harry didn’t interrupt.

“As you are…no doubt aware,” Severus began reluctantly, “I am in no shape to brew complicated potions. My fine motor skills are too damaged for precision dicing and cutting, and I…lack confidence in my ability to retain a uniform and lengthy stirring motion. I would benefit very much from an assistant to aid me with such procedures.”

A light seemed to go on behind Harry’s eyes as he realized what Severus was implying.

“You want Al to help you brew potions,” he said slowly, as if testing out the words on his tongue.

“Yes,” Severus said, almost defiantly. Because as loathe as he was to spend more time in Harry Potter’s company, it seemed to Severus that this was his quickest route to regaining his health—and with it his independence. Harry shook his head exasperatedly.

“Next to Scorpius Malfoy, potions and you are his two favorite things in the whole world. How in the world would this be a punishment? Getting to brew potions with you is like his every dream come true!”

Severus smirked. “That’s true, I suppose,” he intoned carefully. “Although it might behoove you to remember that it’s summer, and that Hogwarts students technically aren’t supposed to perform magic outside of school—I assume that rule remains in effect?” Harry nodded. “Well, I’m sure young Albus would be less than pleased to find that he is required to clean all the cauldrons by hand, then. In the interests of obeying the law, of course.”

A slight smile began to blossom on Harry’s face—and for the first time, Severus felt a twinge of something at the realization that Harry Potter was sitting there right in front of him not only recognizing his slightly sadistic side but being pleased by it. Not just accepting Severus for his role as a war hero, but accepting Severus for the rather flawed man that he was.

“You are a very wicked man,” Harry said slowly, although he said it with a smile on his face.
Getting released from St. Mungo’s was more of a hassle than Severus expected—not just because they were reluctant to release him, but also because it then opened up the question of where he would stay and where he would have a place to work. Draco had been the first to offer, of course; the Manor was certainly large enough, and there was ample space adequate for brewing.

Of course, all it took was one reminder that during the week (and on alternate weekends), the Manor was filled with three Potter children, one Malfoy child, and one very pregnant Ginevra Malfoy for Severus to have the sense to decline Draco’s offer.

Severus’ own first thought had been to return to his home at Spinner’s End—which Harry had previously had informed him was under a Stasis Charm and should thus be easily readied for habitation. Harry had been the one to burst that bubble, to remind Severus that it would be nearly impossible to maneuver his BROOM—the blasted chair that allowed him what little mobility he had—in the cramped quarters of his childhood home.

So somehow, that had brought him to what he had initially considered a rather distasteful option—Harry Potter’s home. Harry made a good case for it; it was spacious enough, Harry assured him, that Severus should have no problems getting around, and it was segregated from all the children except on alternate weekends (during which time Draco assured him he would be welcome at the Manor, if he pleased).

Severus’ first objection was that he would need a Potions lab, but Harry even had an answer for that; he’d built a Potions lab for Albus’ use years before, just as he’d (apparently) cleared a large plot of land behind the house for James and Lily to practice Quidditch. Harry Potter was, without a doubt, rather a pushover of a father. Rather the polar opposite of Severus’ own father.

Severus tried to find a way out of it, tried to think of a reason why it was a terrible idea for him to stay in Harry Potter’s house. But it had everything he needed and Harry himself would be gone the majority of the time anyway, doing whatever it was Head Aurors did.

And that was how, on Sunday afternoon, Severus found himself (temporarily) moving in to Harry Potter’s home.

Severus didn’t know what he’d expected of Harry Potter’s home—perhaps that he’d live in Grimmauld Place, once the war had ended, or perhaps that, with his wealth and prestige, he’d acquire some other giant manor like the Malfoy Manor. What Severus found, instead, was a place in Godric’s Hollow that he’d call, for a lack of a better word, homey.

It was large, sure—it would have to be, Severus reckoned, considering that Harry had three children to house at regular intervals. High-ceiled with large windows, light wood floors and pale walls, it was bright and open and the perfect antithesis of Severus’ home at Spinner’s End. Severus was willing to bet that it had more bedrooms than even Potter, with three children, needed, but nothing about it was extravagant or pompous like the Malfoy Manor or Grimmauld Place or any of the other homes Severus had seen of old Pureblood families who came from money. It was absurdly welcoming and disgustingly…comfortable.

Severus hated it on sight.

It was nothing like the clutter, the ordered disorder of Hogwarts castle, nothing like the dark and enclosed dungeons or book-lined walls of Spinner’s End. It felt like a place for light and goodness
and happiness—very much not a place for Severus Snape.

Still, he had to remind himself, it was temporary; Harry had offered his hospitality and his son’s aid, and as soon as Severus was well enough that he could perhaps walk (or at least hobble) again, that he could brew by himself, he could be back to his comfortable darkness. The fact that he didn’t object, Severus assured himself, had nothing to do with the fact that he was afraid of facing the rest of the wizarding world, afraid of opening himself up to their prying eyes, as would be inevitable if he had to venture out to purchase his own ingredients (Harry had offered to do so), hire a real assistant, or find more suitable lodgings.

Because Severus Snape was not afraid of something like the prying eyes and overbearing opinions of the wizarding public. He had stared into the eyes of one of the strongest and evilest wizards in a generation and lied to his face, hundreds and hundreds of times. Severus Snape was not afraid of facing common, average wizards, and he wasn’t hiding from the realities of finding everything changed by the twenty years that had passed him by while he’d been comatose. He wasn’t.

He was just staying with Harry Potter, a boy he’d detested since Harry had been in utero, and enlisting potions help from Harry Potter’s son—a perfectly reasonable course of action. There was certainly nothing strange about it at all.
Chapter 8

Perhaps it should have surprised Severus, but it only took a few days for them to fall into some sort of a routine. Ginevra would send Albus over by Floo in the morning before Harry went to work. More often than not, Albus had already eaten breakfast, and Harry usually only had a slice of toast or a piece of fruit for breakfast. Severus, for his part, had found that his body was still adjusting to consciousness; he’d never had much of an appetite, but now he nearly had to force himself to eat, if only to give his body the fuel to heal itself.

After Harry left for work, Severus and Albus went downstairs to the Potions lab. Harry had already taken Severus’ list and stocked all the ingredients he’d requested, so it was simply a matter of deciding a course of action and beginning to brew.

Albus was more subdued than he’d been in their previous interactions; perhaps he’d taken his father’s displeasure to heart, or perhaps he still felt guilty for invading Severus’ privacy. In any case, he was the absolute opposite of Harry Potter in the Potions classroom; he understood the properties of almost any ingredient Severus brought up, followed directions clearly and without argument and had a remarkable memory for Potion recipes.

Severus spent the majority of the first day getting Albus to brew a stock of medicinal potions—Pain-Relieving Potion and standard Muscle-Strengthening Potion were their first order of business, since Severus would need them and he wanted to be assured of Albus’ skills as a brewer before he tried to modify his potion to combat Cruciatus-induced nerve damage. At Albus’ prodding, they also began to prepare a topical salve that Albus had found in a book; it was intended for older wizards who were experiencing joint and nerve pain, but at that point, Severus was willing to try anything.

Albus had more than met his expectations; in fact, Severus found himself feeling bizarrely comfortable in the boy’s company, more so than he ever had been around any children, even when he’d been a child himself. Severus didn’t question it, didn’t want to; all he wanted was to hopefully heal his body enough that he could function on his own. Then, perhaps, he could leave England and start over rather than try to pick up where he’d left off in this almost-familiar world in which he no longer really fit.

They started with trials on the nerve potion the second day; the beginning stages of the potion were complicated, but it was followed by a long period in which the potion had nothing to do but to simmer, during which time Severus set Albus to work brewing common medicinal potions he thought might be useful for a thirty-something man with three children—all manner of healing pastes and potions as well as (for when they inevitably drove him to drink) hangover remedies. Albus prepared them all without complaint, was unfailingly polite, and cleaned all the used cauldrons by hand.

It was almost by accident that Severus began preparing their dinners. On that first day, when the first batch of potion was completed, Albus had insisted they go upstairs for lunch—which Albus had prepared for them, quickly, in the form of simple sandwiches.

“We’re all miserable cooks,” Albus explained sheepishly as he’d set Severus’ sandwich in front of him. “Even Mum.”

Determined not to be subjected to that every day, Severus had wordlessly shuffled through the kitchen cabinets while Albus was cleaning cauldrons and found enough ingredients to whip together a simple pasta dish before Harry returned home that evening. From Harry’s reaction, one would have thought that Severus had prepared a four-course meal.
“This is bloody brilliant, Snape!” Harry had exclaimed after taking his first bite. “I never knew you could cook!”

The look Severus gave him, Severus was sure, was more grimace than smirk. “There are a great number of things you don’t know about me, Mr. Potter,” he’d said, and Harry had managed to appear abashed and almost eager, all in one expression.

The potion trials, on the other hand, weren’t going nearly as well. The brewing process was complicated, enough so that even Albus was finding it tricky. Severus knew that he could have done a better job himself—or would have been able to, anyway, prior to his injury and coma. But chopping vegetables with his shaky hands in the kitchen had proven to him well enough that preparation of delicate ingredients wasn’t anywhere in his near future. If it was in his future at all, that was.

On top of that, the potion required nearly eighteen full hours to brew, which meant that the only option available to them, Severus was grudgingly able to accept, was to start the potion one day, put it under a Stasis Charm overnight, and continue it the next. When he’d developed the potion, he’d prepared it in bulk over holidays or weekends, not stopping to eat or sleep, but even Severus Snape knew that that was beyond the capabilities of a thirteen-year-old boy. And even if Albus had been willing, Harry would doubtlessly have seen it as a breach of his offer of hospitality if Severus subjected his son to inhumane labor.

What it added up to was that Severus was only two attempts in by the end of the week, and despite his protestations of wanting to get out of the hospital, he was far from healed. Being up all day supervising Albus’ brewing was more draining than he expected, such that even when he tested out the variations they’d created, Severus couldn’t tell if they had a positive effect. He felt like death either way, and since he was unable to determine any immediate effects or differences between the two, he had to shelve both of the attempts to try the next week, one at a time, if he had any hope of retaining any manner of scientific accuracy.

Harry, as Severus had expected, was a total pushover of a father and let up on Albus’ punishment by the weekend, which the kids were slated to spend at Harry’s. Severus took the excuse and accepted Draco’s offer to spend the weekend at the Manor, although he could do little more than get out of bed to make it to and from the toilet.

The whole matter was both a horrible embarrassment and a terrible setback of his plans to heal soon and get out, and Severus knew that he had to accept that his recovery might take far, far longer than he’d expected.

Naturally, he refused to do so.

Scorpius Malfoy brought him his meals on a tray without him asking; it didn’t make Severus feel good at all to realize that he apparently looked so bad that it was obvious he didn’t have the energy to get out of bed and down to the dining room. He took the meals with as much grace as he could manage, which was to say very little, but although Scorpius remained timid, he didn’t seem put off by Severus’ dismissive manner.

When Scorpius came to clear away his dinner and bring him his potions, and Severus couldn’t help but sigh, rubbing the bridge of his nose in exasperation.

“You know, Scorpius, you don’t have to do this for my every meal,” Severus said with as much patience as he could muster. “The Malfoys do still have house-elves, correct?”

Scorpius looked sheepish and embarrassed, but after a long moment, he seemed to bolster his
courage and pulled up a chair from the corner of the room, setting it beside Severus’ bed. He sat down slowly, tentatively, as if he expected Severus to ask him to leave. Severus didn’t; he waited patiently for Scorpius to take a deep breath and speak.

“My father told you what happened, didn’t he?” Scorpius breathed after a moment, looking down at his lap as he wrung his hands there. “To me? And my mother and grandfather?”

Severus pursed his lips thoughtfully, wondering where Scorpius was going with this conversation.

“Yes,” he finally said after a moment, curious about why Scorpius was bringing this up. It was obvious that the topic made him uncomfortable, but for some reason, he’d raised the topic anyway.

Scorpius nodded slowly, seemingly trying to steel himself to continue.

“After…I was in St. Mungo’s for awhile,” Scorpius intoned softly, his voice barely above a whisper. “The people who attacked us…they were angry about grandfather being a Death Eater, but even so, they used dark curses on us. The one that hit me…it was horrible. Even after I came home, I could barely move for months. But Dad and Harry and Ginny and Al…they took care of me. Every day, they came and they sat with me and read me books and brought me my food. They didn’t leave anything to the house-elves. It…made me feel better, and I suppose…I suppose I thought it might make you feel better too.”

Severus was silent for a long moment, mulling over Scorpius’ words. He couldn’t quite wrap his mind around his feelings on the matter; Lucius had been cruel to him many times over the years, but he’d still considered the man a friend. His death…it mattered to Severus somehow, not in the way that Lily’s or Albus’ death had, but still, he couldn’t shake the fact that he cared. And the fact that witches and wizards, supposedly on the side of Light, would use dark magic and nearly murder a child, no matter the reason…it disgusted him, low in the pit of his stomach, to think that he’d sacrificed so much and even with the death of the Dark Lord, that sickness still remained.

Scorpius, for his part, seemed to take Severus’ silence the wrong way. He stood up sheepishly, pale skin turning noticeably pink as he shuffled nervously.

“I’m sorry, I don’t want to bother you. I just…I’ll send a house-elf next time,” Scorpius breathed, turning to leave the room.

“Scorpius, wait,” Severus said softly, surprising even himself as he heard the words leaving his lips. The Severus Snape of past might have let this boy, even this Slytherin boy, leave thinking he’d caused a disturbance. He likely would have let him depart believing that because Severus detested children and encouraging them to think they were a nuisance to him meant they were more liable to leave him alone.

But something had changed. Severus, despite all the odds, found that he cared about the Malfoy family, cared about this boy he’d only recently met, more than even he’d realized.

Startled, Scorpius turned, an almost hopeful expression in his eyes—and Severus found that he didn’t want to crush the boy’s hopes, wanted to prove to him, and to everyone, that he was as good a man as Harry Potter had clearly led the world to believe.

“It helps,” Severus finally admitted slowly. Scorpius nodded, giving him an uncomfortable half-smile before darting out of the room.
Severus knew immediately when the three Potter children returned to the Manor on Sunday evening. They seemed to bring a whole contingent of just noise with them, and it was at about that point that Severus decided he had to muster his strength to get out of bed and back to Harry’s quieter house. Sighing to himself, Severus picked up his wand and cast a Feather-light Charm on himself, owing to his still rather lacking arm strength. It was only then that he could lift himself into his chair, which hovered, ghost-like, by the side of his bed.

Canceling the Feather-light Charm, he guided his chair out of the room and down the stairs—there, at least, he saw a distinct advantage of the magical device over a traditional Muggle wheelchair—and set off to find Draco. Courtesy wasn’t exactly one of Severus’ strong points, but he figured that he should go and talk to Draco before leaving, even though he’d scarcely seen his former student over the course of the weekend.

He eventually found Draco outside the front of the Manor, standing with his hands in his pockets as he watched the children in the fading daylight. All four of them were out on the lawn outside the Manor on broomsticks; they appeared to be practicing Quidditch with Albus acting as Keeper and trying to prevent James and Lily from scoring a goal through a set of hoops someone (likely Draco) had charmed to float in the air. Scorpius seemed to be playing Beater, trying to block James and Lily from scoring goals by lobbing Bludgers in their direction.

Severus guided his chair up beside Draco, who remained silent for a moment, not acknowledging his presence with words. Severus took a moment to observe the scene himself, seeing the remaining two Potter children for the first time. They were far away and in motion, but even so, it was clear that James Potter took after his namesake. Obviously a year or two older than Albus, he had the same shaggy black hair that Harry and his father had had. He seemed taller, lankier than either his father or his grandfather had been at that age, however. He flew well, and the Chaser position seemed to suit him.

Lily, on the other hand, obviously took after her mother. She had red hair like her namesake, but it was a lighter, coppery red that obviously came from the Weasley line. In fact, if pressed, Severus would describe her hair as more of a strawberry blonde. She was small—not at Hogwarts yet, Harry had said, so she was eleven at the oldest.

Severus was too far away to see if she’d inherited Harry’s eyes, her grandmother’s eyes, but it was clear enough, when she turned toward them to throw the Quaffle to her brother, that she didn’t take after Lily Evans much at all. Her face was thinner, her nose pointier—Severus frowned as he squinted his eyes to get a better look at young Lily Potter’s face.

And then, in an instant, it struck him. There wasn’t an ounce of Potter in her appearance, but her face wasn’t all Weasley, either. Her coloring was lighter, her features sharper…

Severus Snape was, unmistakably, looking into the face of a Malfoy.

He turned his eyes to Draco, frowning, and finally, Draco looked down to meet his gaze. He seemed to sense nothing as he met Severus’ eyes, but there was a slight smile turning up the corners of his mouth. Draco…he loved these children, there was no mistake about that.

“Ready to go back to Harry’s, then?” Draco intoned finally, and Severus nodded, still mulling over what he’d deduced. He’d already assumed—and even accused Draco—of sleeping with Ginny Weasley when she’d still been Harry’s wife, but he hadn’t gone so far as to imagine that Lily Potter
was, in reality, Draco’s daughter.

He wasn’t sure why he cared either way.

“I’ll walk you to the gate,” Draco said graciously, since the wards around the Manor prevented Apparition in or out. “Unless you’d rather travel by Floo?”

Severus made a disgusted face. “And try to maneuver this contraption through the Floo system?” he queried, gesturing to his chair. “I’d rather not.”

Severus knew why Draco had asked; considering the obvious weakness of his body, Draco wasn’t sure he had the strength to Apparate back. The strange thing about his condition, though, was that although he was physically weak, his magic seemed entirely unaffected. And he was grateful to Draco for not actually bringing it up; he didn’t want to discuss his weakened state any more than he had to.

“I figured as much,” Draco murmured, gesturing for Severus to proceed ahead of him down the path toward the front gate. Severus did, mentally guiding his chair in that direction, Draco falling into step with him after a few seconds. They proceeded silently for a few moments, but eventually, Severus found that he lacked the desire to be silent about what he’d just observed.

“Malfoy genes are exceptionally strong,” Severus remarked casually as they made their way toward the edge of the grounds. “Both your children look remarkably like you.”

Draco, at least, had the grace to look abashed. His alabaster skin flushed dark red with embarrassment, but he didn’t acknowledge the words, as if by ignoring them, he could make the whole conversation go away. Severus wasn’t willing to let that happen.

“Does Potter know?” he asked after a moment. Severus wasn’t sure why he even cared, but for some reason, the idea that Draco would hide something of that magnitude from Harry troubled Severus. Perhaps because Harry had named the girl after his mother, although she apparently wasn’t Harry’s child to begin with.

Draco, for his part, looked flabbergasted. “What? Of course he knows,” Draco said defensively. “He’s known since before she was born. It was his idea to keep it a secret.”

That was interesting; there was no doubt about it. Harry had known that the girl wasn’t his, but he’d deliberately decided to cover it up, to keep his wife’s philandering from coming to light. Had named the child Lily even though he’d known from the start that she wasn’t his blood. Harry Potter, it turned out, was full of surprises.

“Why hide it? Why not expose the two of you for your infidelity?” Severus couldn’t help but ask. Draco’s expression turned pinched, and he looked out over the grounds, at the approaching front gate.

“He knew that our reputations couldn’t take that kind of hit, at that point—betraying the Boy Who Lived like that would be tantamount to social suicide,” Draco admitted softly. “It was ten years after the war, but Father was still in Azkaban, and the Malfoy name…well, there were still people who were willing to kill over it, even years later.”

Severus rolled his eyes. “So your plan was what? Wait a few years for them to get divorced and marry her yourself as though the affair had never occurred?”

Draco’s expression looked pained. “There wasn’t a plan,” he said sharply. “We were going to keep it a secret. I was still married, and Mother and Father didn’t approve of divorce. None of us…planned
for what happened to Astoria. And my father.”

Severus took a moment to consider that. Somehow, he’d forgotten the presence of Draco’s wife completely… but, of course, her death would have changed things. Had paved the way for Draco’s marriage to Harry’s ex-wife, if he were to think of it in the most callous way possible.

They were almost at the front gate. Severus, for his part, was content to let the conversation dwindle away—the whole business was distasteful and ultimately none of his concern. Draco, however, still seemed to have something to say.

“She didn’t… look so much like me, when she was younger,” he remarked with a listless sigh. “Her hair was so dark when she was born, I almost didn’t believe she wasn’t Harry’s. She used to have such a round face, but the older she gets… we’ve tried to keep her from the public eye, but she’s going to Hogwarts in the fall. It’s only a matter of time before people look at her and start to realize. Just like you did.”

They reached the front gate and Draco turned to face Severus, his expression still pained. Severus just shook his head; he didn’t know why he was getting involved in the first place. This was precisely the sort of drama he’d always tried to avoid involving himself in.

“You’ve made quite a mess for yourself, Draco,” Severus remarked dryly. And then he Disapparated.
Severus woke the next morning to the sound of shouting. He woke disoriented; for a moment, he wasn’t sure where he was or what had woken him. His paranoia from wartime remained, though; he assessed the situation in seconds before placing himself at his bedroom in Harry Potter’s home. The voices, he realized, were drifting through the window, which he’d left open overnight owing to the nice weather.

The first voice Severus heard was clearly female. It was a voice he recognized but couldn’t immediately place, and it was obviously raised in anger.

“You can’t hide him from me forever!” yelled the agitated voice; it floated up as if from a distance, and Severus frowned, sitting up in bed. He grabbed a dressing gown he’d hung on the edge of the headboard and pulled it on, casting the familiar Feather-light Charm on his body and levering himself into his chair with his arms.

“I can hide him from you for as long as I like.”

The second voice was unmistakably Harry’s, and although he wasn’t yelling, his voice projected with a sense of command and authority that Severus was surprised to hear from him. For the first time, Severus could imagine Harry as Head Auror.

“The public has a right to know—” began the female voice before it choked off suddenly, as if Harry had cast a wordless Silencing Charm on her. Severus guided his chair to the window, looking out—and in the distance, at the edge of the property, Severus saw Harry standing opposite Rita Skeeter, who obviously could not get past the wards around the house.

“You listen to me,” Harry said, his voice going a little softer, so that Severus had to strain to hear him. “The public has no rights as they pertain to Severus Snape. The only one with any rights in this situation is Snape himself—the right to privacy and the right not to be harassed. If and when he is ready to make an announcement or a public appearance, we will contact someone at the Prophet. Someone who is not you, Ms. Skeeter. So kindly leave us alone before I arrest you for harassment.”

He stepped back then, turning away from her and waving dismissively, seemingly removing the Silencing Charm, wandlessly and wordlessly.

“You wouldn’t dare!” she called after him defiantly, despite his obvious dismissal.

“Don’t tempt me, Ms. Skeeter!” Harry called over his shoulder, not even bothering to look back at her.

Severus pursed his lips thoughtfully as he watched Harry walk back toward the house, Rita Skeeter continuing to stand at the boundary of the property for a few moments before she seemed to get frustrated and Apparated away. Severus stared at the spot where she’d disappeared for a few seconds, wondering how many similar requests Harry had gotten. Wondering how much of the outside world’s response to his return to consciousness Harry had shielded him from.

He continued to consider this as he showered and dressed; it was a daily chore, trying to do both those things, but at least his chair had been equipped with an Impervious Charm so it didn’t get ruined in the water (although sitting still made washing his backside somewhat of an issue). Asking Harry for help in getting into his trousers would doubtlessly save him time, but he’d take the extra time, pain, and frustration over the indignity of requesting aid every time.
By the time he made it downstairs, Harry was already sitting at the kitchen table, dressed in his Auror robes with the Daily Prophet open in front of him, a half-eaten plate of toast sitting on the table in front of him. It struck Severus, then, how out of touch he’d been with everything; he’d read through dozens of back-issues of the Prophet, trying to catch himself up on the years that he’d missed, but he hadn’t read a single recent one since he’d woken. He didn’t even know who was Minister (was it still Shackelbolt, like Draco had mentioned?) or anything about current events.

“Morning Snape,” Harry murmured absently as Severus made his way into the kitchen; never one for pleasantries, Severus cut right to the thick of things.

“Rita Skeeter,” he said blandly, as though that was his usual morning rejoinder. Harry jerked a little at the unexpected response, the paper crinkling in his hands as he lowered it to meet Severus’ gaze.

“I suppose you heard that whole thing, then?” Harry inquired, sounding more tired than abashed. Severus gave him a penetrating look.

“Is there any reason you feel compelled to conceal these facts from me?” he asked with a raised eyebrow. This time, Harry did appear a little embarrassed.

“I presumed you wouldn’t be interested in speaking with her,” Harry replied, his tone surprisingly light and easy for all that his face was flushed. “And you have enough to deal with without having to deny all her obtrusive requests.”

Severus frowned.

“T’m not one of your children, Potter—I don’t appreciate you making decisions for me.”

Harry gave him a strange look.

“So you want to talk to her, then?” he asked skeptically.

“Absolutely not,” Severus scoffed, barely suppressing the urge to roll his eyes at the mere suggestion. “But I don’t appreciate being kept in the dark.”

Harry’s expression turned contemplative for a few seconds before he nodded. “Noted,” he said seriously. “In which case, you should know that there’s mad speculation about your condition and future plans. You’re more sought after than I am these days, Snape.”

As he spoke, Harry folded back the Prophet and handed it to Severus, and at the top of the page, Severus immediately spotted the article Harry was indicating and began reading.

War Hero Severus Snape Paralyzed?!

Inside sources have reported to the Prophet that former Hogwarts Headmaster, war hero, and Order of Merlin Recipient Severus Snape has been released from St. Mungo’s Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries. Although he is reported to be in fair condition, sources inside Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry report that former Headmaster Snape was using a Basic Regulator of Otherly Mobility (BROOM) for transportation and appeared to be unable to use his legs.

According to a statement from Harry Potter, Head Auror and close confidant of the
man in question, former Headmaster Snape regained consciousness after over twenty years in a coma on the morning of July 3, 2019. Auror Potter provided no explanations for the mysterious recovery, simply stating that former Headmaster Snape was mentally undamaged and physically recovering at St. Mungo’s.

Few details were ever released about the injuries that lead to former Headmaster Snape’s comatose state, and both Harry Potter and Severus Snape himself have refused comment on the injury or his miraculous recovery. No explanation has been provided for the injury to the former Headmaster’s legs. Could one of the most beloved surviving heroes of the Second Wizarding War be permanently paralyzed after spending over two decades in a coma? For more on this tragic story, see page 7.

Severus stared at the paper for another few seconds after he finished, almost unable to believe what he had just read. He’d never been worthy of news, at least not a full article. He knew he’d been mentioned in articles after the first war, when the Albus Dumbledore had vouched for his innocence, but this was simply too bizarre for him to wrap his head around.

Instead he turned his mind to other concerns. “‘Sources inside Hogwarts’?” he read back, tossing the paper on the table beside Harry’s half-finished plate of toast. “The only person who saw us was Hagrid.”

“And anything and everything living in the Forbidden Forest plus any Hogwarts staff who happened to be in the castle during summer and might have glanced out a window,” Harry pointed out fairly, mouth half full of toast. “Hagrid would never say anything to the Prophet.”

“How could you possibly—” Severus started to protest, but Harry held up a hand.

“Hagrid. Would Never. Say Anything. To the Prophet,” Harry said in a sharp, measured tone. When Severus gave him a warning look, Harry sighed and his tone softened. “Look, Snape, you’re just going to have to accept it—you’re a celebrity now. You have become everything you once despised about me.”

Severus snorted. “I haven’t become James Potter’s son while I’ve been comatose, have I?” he drawled.

Harry just rolled his eyes.

“Very funny, Snape,” he returned flatly, standing and pulling his wand out of his robes. He sent the plate he’d been using to the sink, where it proceeded to wash and dry itself before soaring back into the cupboard. He turned to Severus with his hands on his hips, clearly annoyed. Severus raised an eyebrow at him, unimpressed.

“Do you need Al today or should I tell Ginny he’s to stay at the Manor?” he inquired, tone all business. Severus frowned deeply.

“Given up on his punishment already? How very lenient of you.”

Harry remained unfazed.

“Snape, we both know that scrubbing cauldrons or not, that wasn’t punishment for Al,” Harry said slowly. “Brewing with you was his dream come true. And I’m sure he’ll want to come back when you need more help, but Al said—”
Harry stopped midsentence, seeming startled.

“Said what?” he demanded. Biting his lip nervously, Harry seemed to consider his words.

“He said that you can’t proceed until you’re able to get more data on the effects of both the original potion and the first variation you brewed,” Harry said softly, and it was clear to Severus that he’d softened his word choice. Severus frowned; he hadn’t said as much to Albus, but the boy was clearly sharp enough to read between the lines.

“Albus is correct,” Severus said sourly, turning his chair away as if to signal that the conversation was over. “He may remain at the Manor.”

Harry, as ever, failed to read the social cues—that, or he just blatantly chose to ignore them.

“So you’ll test the potion…on yourself?” he ventured tentatively after a moment. With a sigh, Severus turned his chair back to face Harry, giving him a steady look.

“Unless you have an array of test subjects who were subjected to the bite of a giant venomous snake, lost nearly all their blood volume, were comatose for twenty-one years and then revived by a potion whose recipe had only been seen by myself and two Hogwarts-aged boys—then yes, I will be testing the potions on myself.”

Harry looked startled. “Isn’t that dangerous?”

Severus raised any eyebrow but didn’t offer a response. Harry frowned, running a hand through his hair—and Severus watched him for a moment, mulling over that. Was that Harry Potter…concerned for him?

They remained in tense silence for a few long moments before Harry spoke.

“The potion that woke you up,” he prefaced slowly, thoughtfully. “You told Al that waking someone from a coma wasn’t its original intent.”

Though surprised by the change of subject, Severus forced himself not to let that show on his face.

“No,” he deadpanned.

“What was its original intention?”

Severus frowned, breaking Harry’s gaze as he wondered how much to tell the other man. Wondered at the merits of being truthful in this situation, wondering if Harry would even have the deductive skills to make something out of the truth, if he told him. In the end, he didn’t have the energy to try to think of a reasonable lie.

“A coma is a physical break from normal consciousness,” Severus murmured after a moment, flatly. “The potion was originally meant to help people who had had a mental break.”

Severus saw the moment Harry realized what he meant; his expression slackened and a light seemed to come into his eyes.

“Neville’s parents,” he said softly, his eyes suddenly looking a bit moist. He was staring in a way that made Severus feel distinctly uncomfortable, as if he was seeing Severus for the first time. After a long moment, Harry cleared his throat uncomfortably. “They…died a few years back.”

“I know,” Severus said dully. “I read it in a back issue of the Prophet.”
Harry shook his head disbelievingly. “Why? Why spend all that time developing a potion for the parents of a boy you so obviously despised?”

Severus averted his gaze. “It was a puzzle, Potter, nothing more,” he said, as evenly as he could manage.

Although he refused to meet Harry’s gaze, he could feel Harry’s eyes boring into him—could feel Harry studying him in a way that made him distinctly uncomfortable. After a long moment, Harry exhaled loudly.

“I don’t believe you,” he said defiantly, a sense of certainty in his voice. “I think you did it because you feel responsible. What I don’t understand is why.”

Severus sucked in a sharp breath through his teeth; he wasn’t sure how Harry could do that, how he could seem so completely oblivious most of the time but occasionally be unnervingly insightful. Severus knew how to be prepared for either—for the surprisingly omnipotent Albus Dumbledore or the shockingly thick Dark Lord—but Harry kept him off balance, somehow, never knowing which to expect.

“The Longbottoms were tortured because Bellatrix believed they knew the Dark Lord’s whereabouts after he disappeared,” Severus intoned softly, still not meeting Harry’s gaze. “A disappearance that I, indirectly, caused by telling him about the prophecy. One could argue that I’m responsible for everything that came after.”

Harry remained silent at those words, and after an awkward minute of silence, Severus finally raised his eyes and met Harry’s—and was surprised to find Harry smiling.

“How time I think you’re a heartless bastard, Snape—every single time you prove me wrong in the most fantastic of ways,” Harry said, and he was nearly beaming as he looked down at Severus. Severus shifted uncomfortably in his chair. “I don’t know how I ever missed it, really.”

“I am a heartless bastard,” Severus argued after a beat, halfheartedly. Harry just shook his head, still smiling, as if unable to stop once he’d begun.

“You may be a bastard, Snape—but the last thing you are is heartless,” Harry said lightly.

Severus took a deep breath, trying not to let the words affect him—but it was hard not to feel something, when for so many years, the most he’d received from everyone he’d known was contempt. Was he pathetically, Severus wondered, that a few kind words from Harry Potter of all people could warm him so much?

He tried, desperately, to regain his composure.

“First Longbottom calls me a good man, then you accuse me of having a heart; be careful, Mr. Potter, I might develop an ego,” Severus intoned dryly, pleased by how even—how unaffected—his voice sounded. Harry just chuckled.

“The size of your ego is the least of my worries,” he assured Severus with a smile. “Your guilty conscience could use a downgrade, though.”

Severus said nothing, but Harry seemed unfazed by his silence. “I have to go to work,” Harry said after a moment, shaking his head silently to himself. “I’ll tell Ginny to keep Al at the Manor today, but Snape—if you need help from him or from any of us, you only have to ask.”

Severus grunted noncommittally in response, waiting patiently as Harry shuffled around the kitchen
—and then, finally, he was gone through the Floo, leaving Severus alone with his rather jumbled thoughts.
Chapter 10

The next few days passed remarkably without incident. He and Harry did not bring up their conversation about the Longbottoms, there were no more visits from Rita Skeeter and Severus still mentioned nothing about what he had learned about Harry’s failed marriage and Lily’s parentage. Severus tested his original potion recipe on himself first—he suspected that the version he created to combat the quivering feeling in his muscles after the Dark Lord had performed the Cruciatus Curse on him wouldn’t be terribly effective for his current condition, but then he had no scientific data on which to base the supposition, so he tried it anyway.

He let it go for a week, and though the potion seemed to provide additional pain relief, it didn’t have a noticeable effect on allowing him to use his lower limbs, and the unsteadiness of his hands and arms didn’t improve. By the weekend, he was in better shape than he had been the previous weekend, but he attributed that to the increased rest he got due to not having to oversee Albus’ brewing every day. Instead, he spent the week consulting books—his own and some borrowed from the Malfoy, Black, and Hogwarts libraries, trying to figure out his next course of action if his second variation of the potion was as unsuccessful as the first. He slept more, not having to spend nine hours a day working on the potion.

He and Harry worked around each other well enough; they didn’t fight, but then they didn’t talk much either. Severus continued to prepare their meals, gave Harry a list of the ingredients he wanted as well as the books he wanted to consult, which Harry dutifully and without complaint retrieved from their respective libraries. Harry also passed Severus any seemingly important letters after the Auror department had screened them for curses and death threats. By possibly unspoken agreement, any of the marriage proposals and other frivolous letters that Ronald Weasley had mentioned were not delivered to Severus.

If only Harry had been this compliant when he’d been a student, Severus mused, things could have gone much more smoothly.

When Saturday came, Severus was frustrated by the lack of progress and decided to switch to the first variation of the potion that he and Albus had brewed the previous week. They’d increased the amount of wood betony and common skullcap when compared to the original recipe, which Severus had hoped would do more toward soothing a chronic condition.

By Wednesday, it was clear that things weren’t going as planned; he was starting to get a bit of movement in his legs, but the resulting muscle cramps were so severe that any attempt to actually move them was so excruciating that not even the topical salve Albus had prepared helped matters. The answer was clear to Severus almost immediately; his original recipe had included lobelia to soothe muscle cramps caused by the Cruciatus Curse, which he had removed from the modified recipe. And in focusing solely on the nerve damage, he’d failed to take into account the stress of healing would take on his muscles.

Wednesday, it so happened, was Harry’s birthday, and though Harry had done a rather admirable job trying to convince Severus to attend the evening dinner they were holding at the Manor, Severus had declined. He’d planned an excuse, but by the time the evening came, he was in such obvious pain that Harry just took one look at him in bed and said, “Is there anything I can do?” Severus simply shook his head, and Harry winced sympathetically and left him to suffer in peace.

On Thursday, Harry brought Albus back without even being asked, this time with Scorpius in tow. Since evidently Harry had decided to halt the pretense that this was a punishment, Severus stopped asking Albus to scrub cauldrons and instead allowed him to focus solely on brewing. Scorpius
unobtrusively read a book in the corner, trying his best to stay out of the way of the potions fumes as he remained in heavy robes despite the heat of the basement. Albus occasionally asked Scorpius to hand him ingredients but never, Severus noted, asked for the other boy’s help with preparation.

The modifications Severus made to the potion, thankfully, shortened the brewing time by nearly two hours, which meant that it was finished by Friday afternoon and Albus and Scorpius had a few free hours without the other two Potter children before they invaded Harry’s home for the weekend— which would also include, Severus was informed, a very involved birthday party for Harry during which Molly Weasley would cook up a storm and the entire extended family and many of Harry’s friends would attend. Assured that this would include no less than fifteen children, all of whom (excepting Teddy Lupin) had been born following the end of the war, Severus begged off to spend the day alone at the Manor, and neither Harry nor Draco fought him on it.

Severus began taking the new variation of the potion on Saturday; it was clear that he was on the right track, because while he continued to achieve minimal motion in his legs, it came with much fewer cramps and spasms in his muscles. What spasms of pain he did have were easily relieved with topical salves, and while he recognized that someone with more strength than he currently possessed in his fingers would aid in the application of the salve, the last thing he was going to do was request help.

While re-introducing the lobelia had clearly been a move in the right direction, though, Severus knew he could do better, could find a more concise combination of ingredients. It was the balance of vervain, St. John’s Wort, and ginger root that needed to be perfected, but every time he changed one ingredient, he also had to calculate the appropriate change in brewing time, number of stirs, directionality, and half a dozen other variables.

Which was to say that it could take him months to hit on the right combination, and his body was so damaged, he wasn’t even sure if he’d recognize it when he found it. That, and Albus was set to go back to school in less than a month, which didn’t leave Severus much more time to utilize his assistance.

So on Monday, he had Albus back pre-emptively preparing another variation (more ginger root, less valerian, three additional drops of salamander blood, one less lionfish spine, thirty minutes increased brewing time and two additional periods of clockwise stirring) while he continued to take the variation they’d previously made, enjoying the mild improvement it brought him.

It was on Tuesday that things all went to hell.

It began as an ordinary enough day; Albus came in the morning, without Scorpius (who had Arithmancy tutoring on Tuesdays in preparation for starting the subject in the fall), and they removed the Stasis Charm and worked on the potion as usual, engaging in occasional small talk about Potions, Hogwarts, and other relatively innocent topics.

It was about an hour after lunch when that changed; their brewing was interrupted by a whoosh of the Floo and then a crashing noise. Severus had his wand out in seconds—they weren’t expecting visitors—before he heard a familiar voice releasing a string of rather creative expletives.

Albus’ eyes widened. “Dad?” he called up the stairs, abandoning the potion (which was simmering, anyway) and dashing up the stairs, taking them two at a time. Severus cursed under his breath as he stared at the abandoned potion—could he complete the adequate stirring motion required in exactly four minutes and twenty seconds if Albus did not return by then?—before Albus’ voice traveled from upstairs.

“Professor!” he called loudly, and Severus might have ignored him but for the frantic note in his
voice. There was nothing for it—Severus cast a Stasis Charm on the potion, despite the fact that he knew this wasn’t a good time for it, that they might have to start over from scratch, and guided his chair toward the stairs to the ground floor.

“Professor!” Albus called again, sounding even more panicked than before. “Oh Merlin, Dad—”

Something about the panic in Albus’ voice got to Severus that time; he willed his chair to move faster, his mind running through a thousand horrible scenarios. Was Harry hurt? He was Head Auror, so surely his position was mostly administrative by that point. There was no way that he was still going out into the field, throwing himself into danger and nearly getting himself killed—

Except, Severus reminded himself, this was Harry Potter.

When Severus finally reached them, Harry was seated on a chair at the kitchen table, trying to wave Albus off as the boy blatantly ignored his attempts. “Al, I’m fine,” Harry protested loudly. “Bloody Kingsley, ordering me to go home…”

“You’re not fine!” Albus shouted, near hysterics. “Merlin, you’re covered in blood—”

And he was. The entire left side of Harry’s face was caked with dried blood, beginning to flake off. It was mashed through his hair, which also seemed to be littered with small fragments of what looked like glass. There was a considerably gaping gash in his Auror robes right at the shoulder that exposed a rather alarmingly large patch of pink, newly healed skin.

Severus surveyed the scene in seconds with a practiced eye, his heart racing—but it became clear within a few seconds that however much Harry might be exaggerating about being ‘fine,’ he wasn’t in mortal danger. He’d clearly already seen a Healer.

Severus willed himself to relax, not giving himself a chance to question the staccato beat of his heart at the realization that Harry had been injured.

He stopped his chair at Albus’ side, and almost without thinking, he reached up to place a comforting hand on Albus’ shoulder. “Albus, calm down,” he said softly, making sure own voice was even and calm as he continued to survey Harry for further injuries. Albus turned his gaze to Severus, familiar green eyes wide with panic.

“Do something!” he hissed, clearly on the verge of tears, and Severus looked back and forth between the two Potters for a moment before speaking to Harry.

“Potter, take off your robes and shirt and go lie down—no, on second thought, keep them on, and don’t move that shoulder,” Severus said with the best air of authority he could muster. He couldn’t spot any other injuries on Harry, although he couldn’t tell if there was anything under the mass of hair, blood, and glass that was the left side of Harry’s head.

“I’m fine!” Harry insisted again, and Severus gave Harry his best penetrating look.

“Potter, you’re frightening your son,” Severus bit out sharply, watching as Harry’s gaze flicked to Albus, as if noticing for the first time how upset the boy was. “Go get in bed and let me look you over.”

Looking abashed, Harry nodded wordlessly, standing and making his way toward what Severus knew was his bedroom, though he’d never been inside. Albus’ eyes tracked his father’s movements until he disappeared from sight, upon which time they turned back to Severus.

He looked helpless, Severus thought, suddenly much younger than thirteen, and Severus took a
moment to imagine what this must feel like, seeing one’s father so obviously injured. As Severus would have rejoiced to see his own father injured, it was difficult for him to empathize—but then he remembered when Albus’ namesake had returned to Hogwarts with a curse eating its way from his hand through his body…

Severus remembered the terror and pain he’d felt then, the frantic rush to stop the poison before it killed the Headmaster immediately. It was obvious enough to Severus that Harry wasn’t in mortal danger, but he was much more accustomed to seeing blood and carnage than young Albus Potter must be. No wonder the boy was terrified.

“Albus, bring me some Pain-Relieving Potion and meet me in your father’s room,” Severus said evenly, hoping that having something useful to do would settle Albus’ nerves. It seemed to do the trick; Albus nodded and dashed off to fetch the potion while Severus made his way to Harry’s room.

Harry, at least, had taken direction well; he was lying down on top of his bed sheets, robe still in place. He spoke as soon as he spotted Severus.

“I’m sorry,” Harry said in a rush. “I should have noticed that Al was—”

“Be quiet, Potter,” Severus said shortly, making quick work of vanishing the ruined garment, leaving Harry in only his trousers. Harry made an affronted noise, but Severus paid him no mind as he began examining the wound on Harry’s shoulder.

“Did you take a Pain-Relieving Potion yet?” he inquired as he took out his wand, casting a diagnostic spell on the pink and tender skin. It was clear what had happened, if not the cause; some kind of explosive curse had taken out a huge chunk of tendon and muscle Harry’s shoulder, right where it had met his neck. The Healers had obviously used Tendo-Gro, a variant of Skele-Gro for tendons and muscles, but Harry had obviously left before the process was finished, as the skin was still visibly mending before Severus’ eyes.

“Not yet. I was waiting until I got home,” Harry said slowly, and Severus nodded.

“I suspected as much,” he said seriously as Albus dashed back into the room, breathless, a vial of potion in his hand.

“I had to…measure out the dosage…” Albus said breathlessly as he came around the other side of his father’s bed, the uninjured side. He took in the mending skin and muscle of his father’s shoulder with a horrified expression. “Merlin, what—?”

Harry reached out his opposite hand to grasp his son’s, looking at the boy with a soft expression. “I’m fine, Al,” he informed his son in a soothing tone. “The Healers have already sorted me out. It’s just that the potion takes a few hours to work.”

Albus made a noise like an injured animal, looking to Severus for confirmation of his father’s words. He seemed relieved when Severus nodded briefly. “Is it okay to give him this?” he asked, his tone shaky.

“The Pain-Relieving Potion has no known adverse reactions with Tendo-Gro,” he assured the boy. “Give it to your father.”

Albus did, tentatively, and Harry took the potion in his good hand and downed it in one swallow, making a face at the taste. Albus nibbled his lip nervously as he looked between his father and Severus.

“Why is there still so much blood?” he whimpered. Severus, despite himself, found himself feeling
something he could only think of as *tenderness* toward the boy. He found himself wanting to comfort him, as much as it was contrary to Severus’ nature to *comfort* children.

“[The Healers wouldn’t have wanted to perform any unnecessary spells in the area in case they interfered with the healing tendons,]” Severus explained evenly. “Which means we’ll have to clean you off the Muggle way—no Potter, don’t get up. Albus, bring a bowl of water and a cloth, please. And some of the Scar-Reducing Salve we prepared a few weeks ago.”

Albus nodded, seeming eager for something to do as he dashed out of the room. Shaking his head to himself, Severus located a stray cufflink on the nightstand—probably a gift from Draco—and with a slight snicker, transfigured it into a pair of tweezers.

“I imagine you threw yourself right into the path of a dark curse in order to save baby kittens from danger,” Severus drawled sarcastically as he leaned in, using the tweezers to pick a piece of glass out of Harry’s blood-matted hair and carefully set it on the nightstand. Severus glared at him. “Is it actually *possible* for you to be any more of a bloody irresponsible imbecile?” he intoned as Albus came back, carrying a large bowl of water and setting it on the nightstand along with a cloth. Albus pulled the salve out of a pocket of his robes and set that down as well before hovering nervously behind Severus, watching what he was doing.

Harry took a deep breath. “Okay, I acted rash—I admit it,” he said seriously. “Kingsley ticked me off with some administrative bullshit and I cut out.”

“Harry Potter admits to acting without thinking—will wonders never cease?” Severus murmured to himself, carefully selecting another bit of broken glass with his tweezers and pulling it out of the matted hair. Harry watched him carefully, his expression curious.

“Your hands,” he said after a moment, softly. “They’re steadier than they were.”

Severus stopped mid-motion, staring at his hand—but Harry was right, he was able to pick the glass out of Harry’s hair without stabbing Harry with the tweezers, which was monumental progress over a few weeks before. Smiling softly to himself, he removed the final piece of glass and wordlessly took the cloth, wetting it and gently dabbing at the side of Harry’s head to try to remove some of the blood.

“Ouch—*fuck!*” Harry said again, and Severus made quick work of that area, removing as much blood as he could as quickly as possible to find that there was, indeed, a rather sizeable wound.
buried under Harry’s thick black hair, still seeping blood.

“Bloody incompetent Healers,” he cursed, going over his options. He didn’t want to use any spells this close to the still-mending shoulder, which left either topical potions or Muggle methods—which meant pressure, bandaging, and waiting for the bleeding to stop. He groaned. “Albus, do we have essence of dittany?”

Albus jumped in surprise at being addressed. “I…yeah, I think we still have some stored with the potions ingredients downstairs,” he said nervously. “I’ll bring it.”

Albus dashed out of the room quickly, and Harry watched his son with a pensive expression. “I forgot he was here today,” Harry said regretfully after a second as Severus carefully pulled Harry’s hair as much away from the wound as possible. “If I’d remembered, I wouldn’t have let him see me like this.”

Severus shook his head. “What’s done is done,” he said vaguely, surveying the wound. It was a head wound, so it was bleeding fairly copiously, but it actually didn’t look very severe.

Harry, it seemed, wasn’t finished talking.

“The last time I got seriously injured on the job, he was too young to really understand what was going on,” he said wistfully. “And I was already bandaged up, so he didn’t see any blood or anything. Plus, he thought trips to St. Mungo’s were like going on holiday to visit you.”

Severus rolled his eyes, but he couldn’t deny that some part of him was warmed by the mental image.

Once Albus returned with the dittany, it was quick work to apply it to the wound, which healed over quickly and allowed Severus to clean the remainder of the blood from Harry’s face and head—or at least as well as was possible without magic or a proper bath. He put some salve on the freshly healed skin of Harry’s shoulder, though the tendons were still mending beneath the surface.

When Severus finished, Harry moved to sit up, but Severus placed a hand on his good shoulder and forced him back to the bed.

“You are, under no circumstances, to get out of this bed for the rest of the day,” Severus said in his most authoritative voice, and Albus jumped up, seeming relieved.

“I’ll go make some tea!” he announced seriously and dashed away again, Severus shaking his head at the boy’s obvious tension. Harry gave Severus a petulant look.

“You aren’t honestly going to make me stay in bed all day,” he said disbelievingly, but Severus simply gave him a serious look, one that left no room for argument.

Harry released a petulant sigh but didn’t try to get up again until Albus brought them all tea; Severus and Albus helped him arrange the pillows so he could sit up a bit without aggravating his shoulder, and Harry accepted the tea with a relieved exhale.

They all drank their tea in silence for a few minutes before Harry’s eyelids began to droop. Harry looked at his son suspiciously.

“You drugged my tea!” he exclaimed, and Albus didn’t even have the grace to look abashed. Severus turned to look at the boy, shaking his head with a soft huff of laughter. Dreamless Sleep was colourless and odorless, and he knew for certain that they had a stock of it in the house, along with many of their other medicinal potions.
Severus couldn’t help it; he smirked.

“Well he *is* a Slytherin, Harry,” he remarked blandly, and Harry smiled suddenly, eyes drifting shut as he slumped back against his pillows.

“Y’called me…Harry,” he slurred, and a moment later he was out completely.

Predictably, the whole afternoon went pear-shaped after that. The potion, put into stasis at the wrong time, was entirely ruined, so Severus wasted no time banishing the thing with a frustrated sigh. Albus apologized at least half a dozen times, but Severus found that he couldn’t be angry with the boy for worrying about his father. If he was angry with anyone, it was Harry himself—for refusing proper medical care and storming off half-cocked with a still-bleeding head wound to boot.

With no choice but to leave re-starting the potion until the following morning, Severus spent the remainder of the afternoon consulting books, already planning his next move if the variation they were to begin brewing the following day were to be ineffective. He had half a mind to send Albus back to the Manor, since the boy was jittery and couldn’t concentrate on anything, but since it was clear that separating Albus from his father would only do more damage, he allowed Albus to stay. And although he couldn’t keep from snapping at the boy a fair amount of times, he did check on Harry at least once an hour, mostly to assuage Albus’ concerns.

Harry, for his part, was resting peacefully; Severus had summoned a blanket to place atop his body, since he had fallen asleep atop the duvet and Severus didn’t want to use magic to move him. He remained bare from the waist up, although the blanket covered him, and every time Severus pulled back the blanket to observe the mending skin, muscle, and tendons of his shoulder and neck, everything seemed to be healing without incident.

He sent Albus back to the Manor by Floo in the evening, but it was only after repeated assurances that he would continue to check on Harry that Albus would even agree to leave. And just when Severus thought he’d finally get a moment’s peace, Kingsley Shacklebolt’s head appeared in the fire.

To say that the conversation was awkward was an understatement; Kingsley seemed unsure of how to act around him, and he was equally unsure of how to act around the now-Minister. Though Severus knew that the facts were now in the open—that both of them knew that their previous antagonism had been based on a farce, that they’d been on the same side—it was clear that neither of them were sure of the etiquette of dealing with one’s previous mortal enemy.

Severus informed the Minister that Harry was asleep, and the Minister informed *him* that Harry was absolutely forbidden to come into work the next day, a message Severus promised to pass on to Harry as soon as he woke.

Then, exhausted from the unexpected excitement of the day, Severus went to check on Harry one more time. The man was still out like a light, didn’t even wake when Severus pulled back his blanket to spread more salve on his shoulder wound, which would hopefully keep it from scarring.

Severus stared down at Harry for a few long moments as Harry slept on peacefully, wondering at how lucky the other man was. There were dark curses, quite a number of them, that did damage that couldn’t be so easily countered—George Weasley and his missing ear could attest to that. If this had
been one of them, judging by the positioning and severity of the wound, Harry would be dead.

And wouldn’t that be ironic, Severus mused, if the Boy Who Lived, who defeated the Dark Lord twice and lived to tell about it, were to die as the result of the incompetence of an overconfident Junior Auror.

Severus fervently hoped said Auror had been fired. In fact, he hoped the man was dead.

The fervency of his anger surprised him, the anger on Harry’s behalf. He told himself it was just because of Harry’s recent kindness toward him—allowing Severus to stay in his home, to utilize his son’s aid with potions…but the kindness had started before that, hadn’t it? Started when Harry had prevented the Healers from giving up on him despite his declining state of health. Started when Harry had inadvertently saved his life by caring enough to name his son Albus Severus.

Dumbledore had always said that love was the most powerful magic of all, and it had ultimately been the Dark Lord’s refusal to understand this that had led to his downfall. Severus had studiously avoided thinking about it until then, but the implication was clear; the magic that had saved Severus was the same magic that had saved Harry on Halloween night in 1981. Lily Evans had sacrificed herself for her son, and that sacrifice, and the love upon which the sacrifice had been based, had protected baby Harry from the Dark Lord’s curse.

The same magic had obviously been at play when Harry had named his second son. Harry had used a lot of words to describe what had motivated him to christen the boy such: respect, high regard, pride. But was respect really enough for the ancient magic to recognize, to pull him back from the brink of death? Was high regard enough pull to equal the sacrifice motivated by Lily’s love for her child, the sacrifice that had saved Harry’s life?

Dumbledore had talked a lot about the ancient magic of love, but he’d never talked about respect, or high regard, or belief in someone’s inherent goodness.

So ultimately, what was it that Harry Potter had felt for him, that had motivated him to name his son Albus Severus? Was it love? Or was it just that Harry Potter’s magic was so strong that respect was enough?

And how had it come that Severus felt something as well? Something not based on duty or guilt, but instead simple caring, something that made his heart nearly stop when he’d heard Albus’ frantic calls, seen Harry covered in blood.

For Severus, sleep that night was a very long time in coming.
Chapter 11

When Severus awakened the next morning, it was still dark; the clock by his bed informed him that it was just after four in the morning. He resolved to go back to sleep, but then he heard shuffling noises downstairs. Sighing with resignation, he grabbed his dressing gown, cast a Feather-light Charm on himself and lifted his body into his chair before making his way downstairs.

He found Harry in the kitchen again, this time shuffling through cupboards. Harry appeared in good condition, didn’t seem to be in any obvious pain, though he had pulled a dressing gown on to cover his bare torso so Severus couldn’t be sure of the status of his injury. Severus pinched the bridge of his nose, shaking his head to himself.

“Sit down, Potter, and I’ll make breakfast,” Severus said patiently, and Harry jumped about a foot in the air in surprise. Severus rolled his eyes. “Well if that’s how perceptive you are, it’s a wonder you aren’t attacked and injured every day of the week.”

Harry shook his head, but miraculously he did sit.

“All these potions are making my head fuzzy,” he complained as he sank into one of the kitchen chairs. “I can’t believe Al drugged me.”

Severus snorted, moving beside Harry and pulling back the shoulder of his dressing gown without asking permission, looking over the wound. The skin was still pink and tender, but it appeared to be healing well. And, injured or not, Severus couldn’t help but notice that for a man of nearly forty, Harry Potter was remarkably in shape.

“You clearly needed the rest,” Severus chastised lightly as he prodded the wound gently with his wand. Harry hissed slightly but otherwise there was no reaction. “You slept for over twelve straight hours.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “You’re one to talk,” he groused. “Trying so hard to cure yourself that you’re going to kill yourself instead.”

Severus chuckled slightly despite himself.

“Touché, Mr. Potter;” he said slowly. It was obvious enough that his first week at Harry’s home had done him more harm than good, and he knew he would have looked like an idiot to deny it. “I’ll want to put more salve on that shoulder after you shower.”

Harry nodded brusquely, pulling his dressing gown back in place and tying it closed as Severus went through the kitchen, finding the makings for omelets.

“You called me Harry yesterday,” Harry ventured tentatively, and Severus paused for a moment before summoning a pan from the cupboard. It had been unconscious on Severus’ part; he’d been referring to Harry by his first name in his mind for quite some time, if only because there were too many Potters around for last names to be expedient. He’d hoped Harry would have forgotten his slip.

“Did I?” he asked flatly, feigning innocence. Harry huffed in frustration but didn’t bring it up further, so Severus began preparing their early breakfast without interruption. He was quiet for a few minutes, busy preparing ingredients, before he finally spoke again.

“The Minister fire-called last night to say that you are forbidden to come to work today under punishment of painful death.”
Harry sniffed in disbelief. “Kingsley didn’t say that.”

Severus shrugged. “I may have added the painful death bit, but the message is the same. You’re to stay home and rest.”

Harry sighed but he didn’t protest. “I don’t suppose I could convince you to do the same?” he ventured after a moment, and Severus tried to ignore the warm feeling he felt at Harry’s obvious concern for his welfare.

He shook his head, carefully transferring one omelet onto a plate as he set about making another.

“Unfortunately for me, Mr. Potter, your untimely arrival yesterday halted the brewing process at a crucial point,” Severus informed him, purposely laying on the blame as thick as possible. “The whole potion had to be scrapped and we need to start from scratch this morning.”

Harry cursed under his breath. “Merlin, Snape, I’m sorry,” he said, actually sounding contrite. “I should have thought.”

Severus shook his head to himself. “Famous last words,” he said under his breath as he added fillings to the second omelet. Harry remained silent, but Severus could almost feel his frown without even looking at the other man. Severus sighed but resigned himself to explaining.

“I’m running out of time, Potter,” he admitted quietly, not turning to face the other man. “Albus returns to Hogwarts in less than four weeks, and I’m not confident that I’ll be healed enough to brew something so complicated on my own by that point.”

It was silent for a beat before Harry spoke.

“I could help you brew, come September,” he commented idly, and Severus couldn’t contain his disbeliefing snort.

“If I wanted to be killed, Potter, I’d just ask you to cast a Killing Curse on me and cut out the lengthy potion preparation.”

Severus folded the second omelet and slid it carefully onto a second plate, bringing them both to the table at which Harry still sat. Harry regarded him with a solemn expression.

“I’m serious,” he told the other man earnestly. “Look, I may not understand complex potions theory and I may need more direction than Al does, but we both know that I can brew perfectly adequate potions when given detailed directions from you.”

There was a long moment of silence as Severus regarded Harry across the table; it was the first time they’d ever brought it up, the potions book from Harry’s sixth year. The first time, at least, since he’d revealed to Harry that he was the Half-Blood Prince as he fled the castle following…that night on the Astronomy Tower.

For a long minute, neither of them seemed sure what to say as Harry nervously poked at his omelet with his fork. In the end, Severus was the one to break the awkward silence.

“You have a job,” he reminded the other man. “You don’t have the time to aid me with something like this.”

Harry shrugged, taking a tentative bite of his omelet. “It would have to be on weekends, but provided that you don’t lengthen the brewing time longer than two days, it would be manageable,” Harry insisted. “You don’t have to drive yourself into the ground trying to find the answer in the next
four weeks.”

Severus pursed his lips thoughtfully as he began eating his own breakfast, wondering at that.

“No pressing social engagements, Mr. Potter?” he asked with a raised eyebrow. Harry flushed.

“The kids will all be at school, so my weekends are free,” he said evasively. “If anything else comes up…we can work around it.”

Severus gave Harry a searching look as he carefully chewed a piece of his omelet. “I’ll keep that in mind,” he said vaguely, still mulling over Harry’s offer.

Albus arrived, as usual, a few hours later, a little before the time Harry usually left for work. As Harry was banned from attending by Kingsley, Severus had managed to convince him to go back to bed with a copy of Seeker Weekly. Despite insisting he was fine, Harry seemed cheered at Albus’ relief to see him in bed, although that didn’t prevent him from giving his son a stern lecture about administering potions without the consent of the person involved. The lecture didn’t seem to trouble Albus at all, Severus mused, considering the way he’d smiled the whole way through it.

The brewing process was relatively painless, considering they were just redoing work they’d already done. Albus’ level of retention was nothing short of remarkable, and it seemed he’d already committed the modified recipe to his memory. As such, Severus didn’t have to dedicate as much focus to instructing the boy, which was good after he’d been woken at four in the morning. During the war, he’d grown accustomed to working on little or no sleep, but his body’s current limitations still hadn’t finished making themselves known.

At first, Severus thought that Albus had understood his fatigue; the boy had been quiet and reserved as soon as they’d gotten down to the basement to work on the potion. Albus didn’t tend to be talkative in general, but he did generally to pepper Severus with questions every so often. That morning, though, he was uncharacteristically quiet, and after about an hour, even Severus began to feel discomfited.

Severus mulled over it in his head; it clearly wasn’t worry over his father, because Albus had seen his father and seen perfectly well that Harry was fine. Severus knew that Albus felt badly about the failure of the potion the previous day, but he’d seemed to have calmed down about it by the time he’d gone back to the Manor the night before. In the end, Severus had only been able to land on one explanation: Scorpius.

Draco’s son had been tagging along most places with Albus since he’d first encountered the two, with the notable exception of the week that Harry had been keeping up the pretense that brewing these potions was a punishment for his middle son. The only other exception had been days when he’d had some sort of tutoring, such as the previous day with Arithmancy. Had Severus been more alert, he likely would have noticed Scorpius’ absence immediately—and something about Albus’ lack of explanation for the absence didn’t sit right with Severus.

So after the potion had turned pale blue and Albus had added a drop of salamander blood, stirring clockwise twenty-six times before letting it simmer, Severus took the opportunity to strike up a conversation.
“Where is Scorpius today, then?” he asked after a moment, his tone slightly bored with fatigue.
“Arithmancy again?”

Severus had expected the boy’s displeasure over Scorpius’ absence; what he didn’t expect was the way Albus’ face fell as he heard the question.

“Scorpius is ill,” he replied after a moment, shortly. Severus waited a long moment, thinking the boy would elaborate, but Albus fell mute after that, a pinched expression on his face. Severus, to his surprise, found himself both curious and slightly concerned.

“Oh?” he pressed after a moment, raising an eyebrow at Albus. Albus shook his head to himself and sighed.

“Scorpius is ill all the time,” Albus admitted after a moment, dejectedly. He picked awkwardly at the hem of his sleeve for a moment before he continued, quietly, “Ever since that curse hit him.”

It took a moment of thought before Severus fell on what that curse was—doubtlessly the curse that had landed him in bed for months. The curse he’d suffered in the encounter that had killed Lucius as well as Scorpius’ mother, Draco’s first wife. The side of Severus that had always been fascinated by the Dark Arts was piqued at the mention.

“The curse…continues to afflict him even now?”

Albus just shrugged. “Sort of,” he acknowledged after a moment. “It’s difficult to explain.”

It took some effort for Severus to keep himself from rolling his eyes.

“Try,” he said simply, and Albus sighed.

“The Healers say that the curse weakened his immune system. So whenever anyone around him is ill, it’s as if he automatically gets it. Even Muggle illnesses, the ones that we can usually cure with potions…it takes twice as long and twice as many potions for him to get better.”

Severus stared thoughtfully at the boy for a long moment, considering the words. He’d never heard of a curse that weakened the immune system in quite the way Albus had described. There were curses that would compromise a witch or wizard’s immune system, but usually the victims would be rendered entirely bedridden until they eventually died. But Severus had seen Scorpius fairly regularly for over a month, and it was clear that the boy functioned with some fair semblance of normalcy.

“What curse was he hit with?” Severus inquired after a moment, curious. Albus just shrugged, looking over at the potion to see that it had turned the precise shade of periwinkle that they wanted. Albus added a pinch of powdered ginger root and stirred the potion, slowly.

“No one is quite sure,” Albus said quietly after a moment. “The witch who they think cast the curse…she’s dead, and her wand was destroyed during the duel, so they can’t even cast Priori Incantatem. He’s been to dozens of Healers and no one has the foggiest clue what is wrong or how to fix him!”

Albus set aside the stirring rod with perhaps more force than was necessary, but Severus just observed him for a moment, pensive. As Albus continued to seethe silently, Severus finally spoke.

“I realize it must be frustrating to see someone who is very nearly your brother—”

Albus cut him off.
“Brother! Brother?” he demanded, throwing his hands up in frustration. “If you think I view Scorpius as a brother, you really are a shit spy, Snape!”

For a moment, Severus saw a young Harry in his son—in his sharp temper, in the brusque way Albus addressed him. He thought for a moment of chastising the boy, both for his language and for his blatant disrespect, but what he saw in Albus’ eyes made him freeze.

“In my defense,” Severus said after a beat, his tone slow and measured, “I am out of practice.”

Albus seemed to deflate at that, sinking down into a chair and twining his hands nervously in his lap. When he declined to say anything further, Severus took the chance to speak again.

“You do realize, Albus, that Scorpius is your step-brother,” he remarked carefully. Albus slammed his fist down on the table, annoyed.

“His dad marrying my mum has nothing to do with us,” he hissed angrily. “We’re not nearly as related as the majority of Pureblood couples, and you don’t see anyone grousing about that. It’s bloody irrelevant.”

Severus let the words linger between them for a few long moments, mulling over what the boy had said. At another of the many ways that young Albus resembled him, Severus mused, was an infatuation with a Malfoy boy. Severus remembered that feeling well, how taken he’d been by the charismatic older Malfoy boy when he’d first started school, the charm and good breeding Lucius had that Severus himself so sorely lacked. The infatuation that had carried on after he’d left Hogwarts and met Lucius again, once he’d become a Death Eater.

Of course, Lucius had never reciprocated, but Severus had always suspected that the older man had known of his youthful infatuation and had used it on many an occasion to manipulate Severus when Severus had still been young and impressionable enough to influence.

But Scorpius, as far as Severus could tell, was nothing like Lucius except in looks.

“Does Scorpius return your feelings?” Severus found himself asking after a moment, if only because ending the conversation there seemed somehow gauche. Albus made an exasperated noise.

“I don’t know,” Albus whined, his confusion clear in his voice. “He’s got these, curse scars all over his chest and arms and he’s so embarrassed about them that he won’t even think about letting anyone near him. Won’t even admit to fancying anyone. I’ve known him my whole life and I don’t even know if he fancies blokes or not!”

Severus watched Albus for a moment, taking in his words. In truth, Albus’ mention of Scorpius’ curse scars had piqued his attention far more than the boy’s adolescent romantic woes, but he also had enough of a sense of self-preservation to realize that the work on this potion was directly proportional to Albus’ willingness to help him. So Severus persevered.

“Do you plan to speak to him about your feelings?” he intoned after a long pause. Albus’ raised eyebrow wasn’t precisely the reaction he was expecting, however.

“I don’t know.” Albus whined, his confusion clear in his voice. “He’s got these,” Albus motioned vaguely in front of his chest, “curse scars all over his chest and arms and he’s so embarrassed about them that he won’t even think about letting anyone near him. Won’t even admit to fancying anyone. I’ve known him my whole life and I don’t even know if he fancies blokes or not!”

Severus watched Albus for a moment, taking in his words. In truth, Albus’ mention of Scorpius’ curse scars had piqued his attention far more than the boy’s adolescent romantic woes, but he also had enough of a sense of self-preservation to realize that the work on this potion was directly proportional to Albus’ willingness to help him. So Severus persevered.

“Do you plan to speak to him about your feelings?” he intoned after a long pause. Albus’ raised eyebrow wasn’t precisely the reaction he was expecting, however.

“Do you plan to speak to my dad about yours?” he countered after a moment, and Severus couldn’t help it; he made an undignified noise that, if pressed, he’d have to describe as a splutter.

“Speak to your father about what, precisely?” he queried after he’d regained his proverbial footing. Albus rolled his eyes in a way that only a thirteen-year-old boy could.

“Oh please,” he said exasperatedly, “it’s obvious that my dad fancies you, and I think you fancy him
too. You live with him, you eat all your meals together...you’re practically a couple already, except that you aren’t shagging. And I’m not sure why not.”

Severus wasn’t sure how to react to that; he couldn’t remember the last time he’d been thrown so off-balance, and considering that he’d just woken from a coma to find that he’d missed twenty-one years, that was saying quite a lot. He stared at Albus for a few long seconds, as if he was expecting a punch line, expecting the boy to admit that he’d been playing a prank. But Albus’ expression was deadly serious.

“What makes you think your father is even interested in men?” Severus managed to ask shakily after he’d gotten his bearings. His own preferences, after all, weren’t in dispute, although he had no idea how Albus had come to know of them. Albus gave him a long-suffering look.

“The fact that he told us that he fancied blokes, and that was why he and Mum divorced?” Albus said with a vague roll of his eyes.

Severus was stunned. He’d never given a single thought to Harry Potter’s sexuality, and he suddenly felt remarkably off-balance.

“What?”

Albus just shrugged.

“He sat us down and gave us all the ‘divorced parents’ lecture,” the dark-haired boy explained after a moment. “You know, blah blah ‘doesn’t mean we don’t love you all very much’ blah blah. It came with a fancy helping of, ‘married too young,’ blah blah, ‘love her like a sister,’ blah blah, ‘prefer a big, stiff prick.’ You know, the usual.”

Being that Severus’ mother had studiously avoided divorcing his father, despite the habitual beatings he gave her and despite the fact that she could have easily overpowered him with magic meant that Severus had very little knowledge of what comprised the ‘typical’ post-divorce lecture. But, he reflected, he doubted that a stiff prick usually entered into those sorts of conversations.

There was, of course, the very real possibility that Albus was seriously overdramatizing the conversation. All evidence pointed to Harry and Ginevra’s divorce being several years prior, which would have likely made Albus ten or younger and Lily even younger still. Severus highly doubted that a ‘stiff prick’ had entered into the conversation at all.

Desperately not wanting to think about it any further, Severus changed the subject.

“What is Scorpius ill with?” he inquired after a moment, hoping he looked less flustered than he felt. Because he’d suspected that Harry felt more than simple gratitude and a sense of indebtedness when it came to him, but he certainly hadn’t expected that. And he wasn’t sure whether to trust a teenager’s assessment of the situation in the first place.

Albus gave him a serious look, as if to warn him that the conversation was not over. Still, he allowed Severus to change the subject.

“Some Muggle disease...pneumonia,” Albus said after a second, with all the seriousness of a boy who had no idea what pneumonia was.

Severus sucked in an unconscious breath; it wasn’t rare for Pureblood wizarding children to have no idea about the severity of Muggle diseases, since the majority of them, even the common cold, could be cured by potions. The last thing Severus wanted to inform the boy was that pneumonia was, in rare cases, fatal—that pneumonia, in fact, had led to the bitter and anticlimactic end to Tobias
Snape’s miserable life, though the condition in Severus’ father’s case had likely been some combination of his chronic alcoholism and his refusal to visit a doctor until it was too late.

Scorpius, on the other hand, was young—although if Albus’ appraisal of the situation was correct, not particularly healthy. The likelihood he would die of his condition was, Severus knew, not particularly high. But logic be damned, Severus couldn't dismiss that niggle of fear that he felt, the fear that Draco was about to lose a child just as he was on the cusp of gaining another. And while Tobias’ death had been more than welcome, it was hard to deny, at that moment, that it had left an impact on Severus.

Severus took a deep breath and shuttered his expression; that, at least, was something of which he was still decidedly capable. He gave Albus a careful look, but Albus, though he was clearly worried about Scorpius, was undoubtedly more worried about his perpetual state of illness than about this particular illness.

“Why don’t we brew something for Scorpius?” Severus asked, keeping his tone as light as possible—which was a feat, of course, because ‘light’ wasn’t precisely one of Severus’ strong points. “I know of a salve that, when applied, will help to clear his lungs.”

Severus knew, of course, because he’d briefly considered the idea of reappearing into his father’s life to save him with magic. In the end he’d decided not to, decided that Tobias deserved whatever he got—and Severus had studiously avoided thinking about the stain that that had brought upon his soul. He hadn’t killed his father, of course, but he’d more than certainly allowed him to die, the same way he’d allowed countless others to die in the intervening years.

And that was something that no amount of reasoning could make Severus come to terms with.

Severus’ words had the desired effect, however; Albus perked up immediately, both improving in humor and, thankfully, forgetting his earlier conversation about Severus and his father. Which was, Severus mused, most certainly for the best.

“Really?” Albus asked, the perfect picture of innocent gratitude and hopefulness. “Thank you.”

Severus nodded crisply. “Well then, tend to this potion and then we can get started on the salve for Scorpius,” he said evenly, jerking his head in the direction of the bubbling cauldron, which had now turned the precise frothy texture that they wanted and was ready for the next step.

Albus hurried back to the cauldron without preamble, his eager focus decidedly back on brewing.
Chapter 12

Rather than seem surprised or troubled by Severus’ desire to go to the Manor to check on Scorpius, Harry seemed decidedly pleased. Severus knew precisely why that was—it was the usual Gryffindor optimism, Harry’s desire to believe in his goodness as a man. Of course, if Harry Potter had known the way he’d allowed his father to die of this same disease when he could have saved the man, he likely would have changed his mind about Severus’ inherent virtue.

Upon mutual agreement, they decided that Severus would Apparate with Albus to the gates of the Manor, much to the excitement of young Albus, who very rarely got the chance to travel anywhere by Side-Along Apparition, what with the logistics of moving their large family back and forth. Severus was still loathe to try to maneuver his chair through the many grates of the Floo Network, but for all of Albus’ excitement, it seemed just as well.

Severus tried to play it off as he requested Albus grab a few more medicinal potions, just in case—most notably a few Fever-Reducing Potions, brewed using a slightly altered recipe Severus had developed some years before. It wasn’t that Severus didn’t believe that Draco would have access to the best Healers that money could buy—it was just that he had a startling lack of confidence in everyone else’s competence.

Albus, at least, didn’t seem to think much of it. He seemed appeased by Severus’ assertions that the other potions were ‘just a precaution,’ and he was, perhaps, unduly excited by the idea of Apparating with Severus.

The sun was just starting set when Severus and Albus appeared outside the gates to the Manor; they hadn’t called ahead to announce themselves, but the gates opened for Albus without problem as the two made their way up the long path toward the looming building. Unlike Severus’ previous visit, there were no children playing out on the lawn, and the grounds seemed eerily quiet as they made their way up the path.

Albus opened the front door for them, holding it open so Severus could guide his chair through the large double-doors of the entrance. Albus seemed antsy as soon as they got inside, barely willing to wait for Severus’ slower progress as he led the way toward Scorpius’ room.

The scene when they stepped inside was absolutely the opposite of encouraging; Scorpius lay in the middle of an irrationally large bed, small and pale and drenched in sweat, shivering noticeably. His lips had a decidedly blue tinge and his breathing was labored.

“Scorpius!” Albus exclaimed immediately, running to the side of the bed without preamble. Draco looked up from where he sat in the chair by his son’s bed, a look of relief flooding into his eyes as his gaze fell upon Severus. Severus wagered that he’d never seen Draco look worse, save perhaps the year he’d been tasked with killing the headmaster under the threat of the painful death of his family.

“Severus! Thank Merlin you’re here,” Draco said in a breathy exhale. Draco’s worry was more than palpable; he wasn’t usually prone to hyperbole. Severus pushed up his sleeves without pause and made his way to Draco’s side, all business within seconds. Severus banished any morbid curiosity about his own father’s last days; he had to, because it would be no help to him here.

“Tell me everything you’ve given him, and when,” Severus said brusquely, pulling out his wand and casting a simple diagnostic spell. Scorpius’ fever was far too high, Severus noticed with dismay, and he was having obvious trouble breathing. Severus listened as Draco listed off a litany of potions and
times, none of which, Severus noted, seemed to have been doing Scorpius much good.

Deeming it safe, Severus pulled a Fever-Reducing Potion out of the bag he’d brought.

“Scorpius,” he said seriously, and the boy’s dull grey eyes turned toward Severus blearily. “I need you to take this.”

With Draco and Albus’ help, Scorpius managed to sit up enough to down the potion. He groaned at the movement, kicking his blanket away even though he was still shivering. Scorpius was definitely lethargic, but the fact that he was alert enough to respond was more than certainly a good sign.

“We’re going to apply a salve to your chest,” he informed the boy after a moment. “It should help you breathe.”

Scorpius’ reaction to that was immediate; he brought his hands up to his chest, covering it protectively.

“N-no,” he protested weakly as he continued to shiver violently. For a long moment, Severus couldn’t even begin to comprehend the boy’s reaction—and then he remembered what Albus had told him, about the curse scars on Scorpius’ chest and arms. He noticed, too, that despite his fever, Scorpius’ nightshirt was long-sleeved and fastened all the way to the neck.

Whereas Severus had wanted to protect Albus not long before, he looked down at Scorpius and recognized the value of scaring the living daylights out of him.

“My father died of pneumonia,” Severus remarked coldly after a moment, and beside him Draco made a choked sound in the back of his throat as he heard the words. “Unless you’d like to end up with the same fate, you will allow us to apply the salve.”

Scorpius’ eyes widened almost comically; there was no way that he was anywhere close to death, but scaring the boy had made an obvious impact. Scorpius nodded numbly and lowered his hands without further protest.

Albus made quick work of unfastening the front of Scorpius’ nightshirt, reaching for Severus’ bag to get the salve that they’d prepared.

“Wait!” Severus said after a moment, and everyone in the room paused suddenly, as though being held at wandpoint. The air in the room was thick as Severus leaned forward to examine the boy’s torso.

His scars were horrific; there was no doubt about that. There was a large knot of gnarled, pinkish scar tissue somewhere close to his heart and ugly raised tendrils shot off from it, snaking along his torso and toward his arms and sides in dozen paths, a few of which tapered off somewhere atop his ribs. It looked something akin to cracked pavement after a severe earthquake.

The sight truly was horrific, but that wasn’t what had stopped Severus in his tracks; it was the feeling of dark magic radiating off of the ruined skin in waves, so thick and malignant that Severus was surprised that the others didn’t recoil from it. Severus had never seen a curse that could do this, had never known such obvious darkness to reside in any curse scar but Harry Potter’s, which had been housing a small piece of the Dark Lord’s soul.

But this wasn’t a Horcrux; of that Severus was certain. He’d been near enough of them, had spent enough time in close proximity to Harry before the Horcrux had been destroyed to know what that felt like. It was, perhaps, because of that that he was so attuned to the vibrations of it; he doubted that Draco or Albus could even feel it, even though Severus felt it strongly enough that he thought it
might bowl him over.

It was no surprise, then, that Scorpius was so prone to illness; with this kind of darkness pulsing from his skin, right over his heart and lungs and most of his vital organs, Severus was surprised the boy wasn’t dead.

Severus cast a few careful spells, but it was obvious enough that the magic was contained within the scars. Only once he was sure that it wouldn’t harm Albus did he hand the boy the jar of salve.

“Go ahead,” he instructed carefully. “Rub it into the skin of his chest, thoroughly.”

Albus, to his credit, didn’t recoil from the sight of the other boy’s scars; he was completely professional, if apprehensive, as he dipped his fingers into the jar of salve and began rubbing it carefully into the other boy’s skin. Severus watched him for a moment; after he was satisfied that Albus had things in hand, he turned to Draco, who was still looking at him in alarm. Severus grabbed Draco by the arm and rather awkwardly dragged him to the corner of the room.

“Your father—” Draco began nervously, but Severus just held up a hand to stop him.

“My father was a Muggle, a drunkard, and an incurable imbecile,” Severus said sharply, tone leaving no room for argument. “His death was a product of his own stupidity. Your son isn’t going to die. I was just trying to scare him.”

Draco released an audible sigh. “Bloody fucking hell,” he exhaled slowly, and it was clear enough that Scorpius wasn’t the only one Severus had scared, because Draco was rarely one to curse, especially in such profusion. It was abundantly clear how much Draco loved Scorpius—how much he loved all the children, even Harry’s. It wasn’t a side of Draco Severus had ever expected to see. If he were honest, part of him hadn’t even expected the Malfoys to survive the war.

“Indeed,” Severus agreed mildly.

“I didn’t know what to do,” Draco confessed after a moment, running a hand through his blond locks and leaving them distinctly more disheveled than they already had been. “I had three different Healers in here and nothing seemed to be making him better. Ginny’s beside herself, you know, that she can’t be in here, but we can’t risk it, not with the baby—”

“Draco,” Severus found himself saying before he even realized he’d spoken. “Take a deep breath. Calm down. I’ll stay here and monitor his condition.”

Severus made the promise without even thinking about it, with no regard to the fact that he’d been awake since four in the morning, been in his chair for over twelve hours straight and was sore and tired and had a potion to finish the next day. He wasn’t sure if it was his latent guilt over not saving his father or his long-standing sense of duty toward the Malfoy family, but he knew there was nowhere else he could be that night.

Draco surprised Severus by falling to his knees in front of Severus’ chair, taking Severus’ hand into his and lowering his head. For a frightening moment, Severus was afraid Draco would kiss the back of his hand, but instead Draco just rested his forehead against it, obviously exhausted as he released an almost-sob.

“Thank you, Severus. Thank you,” he whispered sincerely, and Severus couldn’t help but feel a sick sensation in his chest as he mused that his own father had been nothing like Draco; Tobias Snape wouldn’t have cared, even if his son had been dying.
It was half past three in the morning and four doses of Fever-Reducing Potion later that Scorpius’ fever finally broke. Albus had fallen asleep hours earlier on the far side of the overlarge bed and Severus had managed to convince Draco to catch a few hours of sleep as well by telling him that Draco would need to be awake and alert to watch over his son after Severus finally had to retire. Severus, alone, had stayed awake and nursed the boy the entire night, but finally Scorpius’ fever went down, his breathing evened out, and he slept peacefully.

Severus, however, couldn’t remember feeling worse since he had woken up from his coma; nearly twenty-four hours without sleep was clearly too much for his weakened body, and that many hours out of bed and in his chair brewing and playing nursemaid brought him to the point that the pain in his body was almost unbearable.

Draco managed to convince Severus to take a bed in one of the guest rooms of the Manor, reasoning that he was too tired to make his way to the edge of the grounds and Apparate back to Harry’s. Severus, at least, saw the truth in that and went to bed sometime around four, leaving Draco with instructions to wake him if his son’s condition worsened.

Severus was disoriented as he woke; he’d gotten used to waking in Harry’s home, and on top of that, there was an unusually bright light streaming through a gap in the curtains. It took a long moment for it to come back to him; he was at the Manor, Scorpius had been ill, and a glance at the old-fashioned clock on the mantle told him that it was nearly noon.

Severus groaned, throwing an arm over his eyes to try to block out the streak of mid-afternoon light that peeked its way through the small gap in the curtains. The ache in his body hadn’t gone away; if anything, it had gotten worse as he’d slept, felt like he’d run a marathon without stretching rather than just sat in a chair for a prolonged period of time.

He knew, however, that he couldn’t stay in bed; there were too many things demanding his attention, first and foremost being checking on Scorpius’ condition. Then, of course, there was the potion; he’d already left it in stasis for too long—which meant that the attempt needed to be scrapped for the second time and started anew, which was something, Severus knew, that would have to be put off until Monday. At the rate things were going, Severus felt that he would never walk again; on the other hand, given the chance to do it all again, he still would have come to the Manor to help Scorpius.

Perhaps, Severus mused, Harry and Longbottom were right. Perhaps he was a good man.

Or, Severus’ subconscious provided, perhaps he was a man plagued by the avoidable death of his abusive father and a sense of eagerness at seeing the effects of an unknown dark curse.

It was with a monumental amount of effort that he managed to get himself back into his chair; he was still exhausted, his fatigue seemingly undaunted by the hours of sleep he’d gotten, and his body ached in ways he’d forgotten it could. Still, he forced himself to sit up straight, to school his expression. Thankfully, at the very least, he’d brought some Pain-Relieving Potions in his bag, on the chance that Scorpius would need them. Severus took one then, but even his modified recipe didn’t provide as much relief as he’d have wished.

Severus found Draco sitting beside his son’s bed; Albus had vacated the premises, but Scorpius, in the least, seemed quite better than he had before Severus had gone to sleep. Some of the colour had
returned to Scorpius’ face, more resembled the usual paleness of his complexion than a sickly pallor. Scorpius seemed to be breathing more easily, and he was no longer shivering. He appeared to be sleeping peacefully.

Draco looked up as Severus entered; he smiled wanly, and although he was obviously pleased at the improvement he’d seen in Scorpius’ condition, he was clearly exhausted. Still, he attempted to be gracious.

“Severus! Did you sleep well?” Draco inquired cordially, but Severus wasn’t having it. Not only did he know he had nothing to gain by being truthful—he’d slept quite badly—but he had other things on his mind.

“How is Scorpius?” Severus inquired, completely ignoring Draco’s question. Draco pursed his lips, obviously miffed by the dismissal, but he replied anyway.

“He’s doing much better. He’s still running a low fever, but he seems to be improving.”

Severus nodded curtly, guiding his chair toward the opposite side of the bed and pulling back the covers wordlessly, moving to unbutton Scorpius’ nightshirt. Draco watched him mutely, though he seemed slightly perturbed as Severus deliberately undid each button.

It took a considerable amount of effort; Severus’ hands were still unsteady and lacked the dexterity needed for the process. He would have been better served to undo them with magic, but he was too stubborn to change his course, especially not with Draco looking on. After a painfully long few minutes, Severus finally had Scorpius’ shirt open, and he rested his hand gently above the knot of pinkish scar tissue on Scorpius’ upper chest.

Severus frowned at what he felt; it seemed as though the dark, malicious magic he’d sensed before had largely dissipated. He could still feel the echo of it, very faintly, but the scars didn’t radiate the same feeling as before. That, Severus reflected, brought up a whole new series of questions—did the dark magic in the curse scars help weaken Scorpius so that he was more susceptible to illness, or had the dark magic in the scars activated because he was ill and mostly died down now that he was getting better? Severus was equal parts fascinated and perplexed; he’d never seen curse damage behave in this way, and he’d seen a rather incredible amount of curse damage in his life.

Scorpius stirred lightly but didn’t wake as Severus examined him; after a long moment, Draco made a pained noise, almost a whimper.

“Are you finished?” he asked impatiently after a pause, his tone sad. “He hates people to see them, and if he wakes up and sees you scrutinizing them like that, he’ll be devastated.”

Severus frowned thoughtfully but he did pull back, this time closing the boy’s buttons with magic. The last thing he wanted to do was tell Draco how to parent, but he wasn’t sure that Draco encouraging his son to be embarrassed of his less than objectively beautiful parts was a good decision. Severus should know; he was made up almost entirely of objectively non-beautiful parts.

“Is it true that you don’t know the curse that caused those?” Severus asked after a beat. Draco looked troubled by the subject, averted his eyes but still responded shakily.

“It’s true. There were no witnesses other than members of the group that attacked them—plus my father and Astoria, neither of whom are…able to tell the tale,” Draco murmured, stumbling visibly over the mention of his late father and wife. Still, he recovered himself quickly. “The wand of the witch who cast the curse was destroyed, and none of the others perpetrators will give up the memories of the event. It’s illegal, of course, to harvest another person’s memories without their
consent. Damned Hermione passed an entire new statute reaffirming it, years ago. Why do you want to know?”

Severus mulled over his answer carefully; he wanted to be truthful with Draco, but he wasn’t sure Draco was really the person with whom to discuss this topic. Draco, despite his involvement with them, had never been much of an expert on the Dark Arts. If anything, Severus wanted to speak to Harry; barring Severus’ lack of knowledge from the intervening years, he wagered that he and Harry might be the two wizards in wizarding Britain who were most knowledgeable about unusual curse scars.

“Albus informed me that Scorpius is often ill,” Severus intoned carefully. “I had wondered if there was a way to counter the damage done.”

Draco sighed. “You’re cleverer by half than all the fools at St. Mungo’s, but I wouldn’t get my hopes up, Severus,” he said sadly. Severus made a face but didn’t address Draco’s skepticism.

“Speaking of Albus, where is he?”

Draco raised an eyebrow, smiling slightly. “He went back to Harry’s to finish your potion,” he said after a moment, beaming.

Severus couldn’t help but be alarmed at that; Albus was a competent brewer but wasn’t yet in his third year at Hogwarts. On the other hand, they’d completed most of this potion variation already once before, and Severus had left detailed notes. And untouched until then, it would have been ruined anyway, so he supposed the uncertain chance of Albus successfully completing the potion was better than the certain chance that it would have to be discarded.

Severus shook his head to himself; the Potters were most certainly going to be the death of him.
Figuring that little more damage could be done to his potion in another half hour, Severus accepted a
light lunch at the Manor before making his way back to Harry’s home. He should be famished, he
knew, having scarcely eaten since the previous afternoon, but instead Severus found that he had very
little appetite. He managed to finish perhaps half of his meal before excusing himself to leave;
Ginevra Malfoy, who had been playing the gracious (if very rotund) hostess gave him an almost
scolding look but had let it go without a word, though that was more than likely only due to her
gratitude toward him for helping her stepson.

It was past one in the afternoon when Severus found himself back at Harry’s home; he made his way
down into the basement only to be alarmed to find Harry helping his son brew. Albus was effusive
and grateful to Severus, and thankfully, Harry seemed not to have found some way to bollocks up
the potion entirely. It was the color and consistency that Severus would have expected at this stage,
which was rather a relief considering the impressive amount of damage Severus knew Harry was
capable of in the potions lab.

Against all odds, Albus and his father seemed to have everything in hand; it took very little extra
direction from Severus, which was good because Severus was still very much tired and in pain and
was having quite a difficult time focusing. As it was, they got the potion brewed and stoppered in a
collection of vials by half-six, and, exhausted and in pain, Severus declined dinner and excused
himself to go lie down.

The night promised to be even more long and uncomfortable when there was a knock on the
doorframe; exhausted, Severus hadn’t even managed to close the door to the guest bedroom he was
using. He looked up blearily to see Harry Potter standing in the doorway with a familiar-looking jar
in his hand and a slightly uncertain expression on his face.

“Al told me this would help,” Harry said softly, taking a tentative step into the room—and Severus
almost groaned as he saw what Harry held, the topical salve that he and Albus had prepared to rub
into Severus’ muscles to help relieve some of his pain. Severus had been applying it himself as
needed, but he knew his hands had lacked the strength to rub it in with quite enough pressure.

It was clear that Albus was meddling; their conversation the previous morning slammed back into
Severus’ consciousness with alarming force, but Severus was too much in pain and too drained to
even care that Albus had an ulterior motive to set Severus up with his father. Severus was also far too
knackered to care about Harry Potter touching him or seeing him in such an undignified state, he
realized.

With a low sigh, Severus waved a dismissive hand.

“Get it over with then,” he drawled, surprised at how pained his voice sounded. He thought he had
done an admirable job hiding his pain during the day, but at that point he was too far gone to care.

Harry, for his part, didn’t hesitate or drag it out; he came to the side of the bed and sat down, pushing
Severus’ robes up past his knees. Harry had no response to his lack of trousers beneath his robes—
perhaps it was because he’d seen the trousers discarded haphazardly beside the bed or perhaps it was
because he remembered the way the elder James Potter had once humiliated Severus at Hogwarts. Either way, there was something strangely intimate about the gesture, about Harry so deliberately revealing flesh that never saw the light of day.

Harry, at least, seemed unperturbed; there was some shuffling, and after a long moment, Harry’s hand came to rest on his shin.

The hand was cold with the salve; Severus couldn’t help but hiss in response, to which Harry said a breathy little, “Sorry.” Harry’s hands, when he began to rub the potion into the skin, were gentle but firm; Severus felt the tingle of magic beginning to soothe his aching muscles. The groan he released in response was unconscious; the firm pressure was both soothing and achingly painful as Harry massaged the salve into the skin of his lower leg, reaching behind to firmly press his fingers into Severus’ calves.

If Albus was correct and Harry Potter harbored any sort of amorous feelings for him, Severus mused, seeing him in just a robe and his pants with his spindly, knobby-kneed legs would more than likely be enough to quash that.

Harry didn’t say anything as he worked, which Severus appreciated; his touch was methodical as he massaged the salve into first one calf, then another, movements which brought equal parts pain and relief. It was all Severus could do to muffle his sounds of pain; he didn’t even have time to consider the implications of Albus’ deductions or his scheming.

Harry massaged the salve into Severus’ thighs with the same professional focus; Severus cringed and gritted his teeth as he tried to muffle his whimpers of pain. It was, in the least, less invasive than similar rubdowns Severus had gotten in the hospital; still, the obtrusive relief/pain seemed to go on for an eternity before Harry finally finished, pulling Severus’ robes down delicately to cover him once more.

His legs were still very sore, Severus reflected, but the painful massage seemed to have done its duty to get some of the tension out. That—and the tingling magic contained in the salve itself seemed to be doing its job, though not quickly enough or well enough for Severus’ liking. Harry gazed down at him with a worried expression, biting his lip with more tension than usual, which led Severus to the conclusion that he must have looked positively awful. Harry’s next words just confirmed that for him.

“How can there anything else I can do?” Harry asked sympathetically, but Severus just grunted noncommittally, throwing his arm over his eye to block out the light.

“Turn out the light and leave me alone,” Severus said honestly, taking measured breaths and hoping that the mixture of the salve and the Pain-Relieving Potion he’d taken earlier would kick in and let him sleep. And that he’d feel better in the morning.

Severus could almost feel Harry’s worry.

“How sure you don’t want any dinner, or…? I could bring something up here to you,” Harry offered hopefully after a moment, but Severus couldn’t even wrap his mind around the concept of food. Severus shook his head, face buried in the crook of his elbow.

“Just go, Potter,” Severus hissed in frustration, and finally Harry did, although not before summoning an extra blanket and settling it atop Severus’ body, since Severus hadn’t managed to make it beneath the sheets.
Severus woke the next morning with the distinct feeling that something was wrong. His eyes snapped open and he sat up in bed in a flash, reaching for his wand—only to find his legs dead weight, stubbornly unwilling to move. He hissed in pain as his hand flew down to his thigh, the muscle spasmingly painfully but not producing any conscious movement.

“Fuck,” he hissed under his breath, and a moment later, he found a vial of Pain-Relieving Potion thrust in front of his face. He grasped it between his fingers thankfully, downing it in a moment as he looked over at the person who had offered it to him. It said something about the amount of pain he was in that Severus drank the potion without even checking who had offered it.

Albus sat next to Severus’ bed with a cautious expression on his face as he took the empty vial back and set it aside on the bedside table. Severus frowned as he saw the boy; he hadn’t woken like this, with Albus beside his bed, since he’d been hospitalized. In fact, he usually woke long before Albus every arrived at Harry’s home, which meant that Severus must have slept in quite later than usual.

“What time is it?” Severus asked, surprised by how scratchy his voice sounded. Albus apparently noticed it too, because he handed Severus a glass of water that seemed to be sitting beside the bed.

“Half-ten,” he answered as Severus took a drink of the cool water. “Dad went to work. I brought up the new variation of the potion we finished yesterday. Do you want to try it?”

Severus frowned but held out his hand for it; Albus reached into his pocket and started to hand it over before he hesitated.

“You really should eat something with all these medications,” Albus remarked softly. “Mum sent something over with me in the morning; it’s warming in the kitchen.”

Severus pointedly ignored him, promptly plucking the vial out of the boy’s hand and downing it as well. Albus shook his head, “Or…not,” he amended after a moment, giving Severus a thoughtful look. Severus set aside the vial and leaned back against his pillows again, closing his eyes and pinching the bridge of his nose. He was in pain still, but things had undoubtedly improved since the previous night.

“How is Scorpius?” he asked dryly, no longer surprised to find himself concerned about the boy’s welfare. There was a scientific interest, certainly—and there were still things he wanted to discuss with Harry, who as Head Auror would doubtlessly be privy to all the available details about the attack—but there was also the simple concern for the boy himself. The Malfoy family had always been somewhat of a weak spot for Severus, he found himself realizing.

“He’s better,” Albus said warmly, and he had that glow in his tone that Severus was surprised he hadn’t noticed before. Albus’ feelings for his friend were glaringly obvious now that Severus knew what to look for. “He’s still fairly weak, but he’s able to get up and out of bed now, so thank you.”

Severus waved away Albus’ thanks with a dismissive hand. Albus stared at him for a long moment before smiling slowly.

“How did things go with my father last night?” he asked mischievously after a pause, and Severus couldn’t suppress a groan; he’d almost forgotten everything that had transpired, the way that Albus had clearly been scheming to get his father close to Severus. There had been, however, nothing sexual about the encounter; Severus had been in too much pain to even consider the implications of
another man’s hands on his thighs.

“You’d do well to give up on your scheming, Albus,” Severus sighed after a moment, exasperated. “I don’t know what ever gave you the impression that someone like your father would ever be interested in someone like me—”

“Someone like you? What the hell does that mean?” Albus broke in after a moment, frowning. “Someone…imperfect? Injured?”

Severus frowned at the words; his at the moment seriously disabled body was certainly part of it, as was his rather less than appealing appearance. There was also the remarkable amount of history between them, and although Harry seemed prepared to forgive him, to encourage the wizarding world to laud him as a hero even though he had been a Death Eater and gotten both Lily and James killed…

But then, Severus reflected, he still didn’t know what highly-edited version of events Harry had given to the press to solidify his status as a ‘hero,’ and the last thing he wanted to do was share any information with Albus the boy wasn’t privy to already. He reminded himself that it would be a good idea to read a book about the war, to find out what Harry’s ‘official’ version of events were, lest he contradict it.

Lest he convince his namesake that the last thing he should be was idolized—because as much as he hated to admit it to himself, Albus Potter’s opinion of him had come to matter to Severus.

Severus took a moment to try to gather his thoughts, trying to find an acceptable answer. But it seemed Albus hadn’t finished.

“So I guess I should just stop loving Scorpius, because he’s scarred and gets sick all the time?” Albus shot out angrily. “No one can ever love someone who’s ‘damaged’?”

Severus took a deep breath, trying to hide his exasperation toward the boy. Only when he was sure he wasn’t going to say something scathing back did he reply.

“That isn’t what I said, Albus, and I’d appreciate it if you didn’t put words in my mouth,” he finally said slowly, evenly. Albus snorted disbelievingly.

“So what’s wrong, then?” Albus demanded after a moment. “I mean…it still works, right?”

It took a moment for Severus to figure out what Albus was referring to—and another moment for him to suppress his instant desire to both laugh and roll his eyes. How simple, he thought, to be able to wind relationships down to whether or not one’s prick would still ‘work,’ Severus thought. How simple to be thirteen again.

Severus was, he realized, entirely unsure of whether ‘it’ still worked. He hadn’t gotten an erection, or even felt the stirrings of desire, since he’d woken from his prolonged coma. The thought hadn’t even crossed his mind; he’d been so focused on finding a way to cure himself that the prospect of the sexual efficacy of his genitals hadn’t even come into play.

In either case, it meant nothing; Severus’ body had been more than ravaged by his prolonged coma; there was the nerve-damage, of course, and the muscle atrophy. On top of that, there was the fact that he was at least one stone thinner than he’d ever been in his adult life, and all together it added up to the fact that he lacked both the physical energy and the emotional desire to be sexually active with anyone. Not that he’d ever been particularly sexually active in the first place.

There was no reason to be worried, then, that an attractive man had just had his hands all just inches
from Severus’ prick and he hadn’t experienced even the minutest stirrings of arousal. The whole ordeal had been more painful than pleasurable, anyway; it was nothing to be concerned over.

And either way, it wasn’t of any consequence. It wasn’t as though Severus wanted to pursue a relationship with Harry Potter. It wasn’t as though he was even interested in the idea.

…was he?
Chapter 14

Albus stayed for a while longer before he made his way back to the Manor; Severus took the opportunity to go back to sleep for a bit before he woke again and both his bladder and his stomach were demanding attention.

He managed to get up out of bed and into his chair, managed to make his way through his entire tedious bathing and dressing routine and managed to get downstairs and consume some of the food that Ginny Malfoy had sent over, obviously prepared by the Malfoy house-elves. Severus felt remarkably better, considering how poor he’d felt the previous night, but he remained fatigued enough that he then returned to bed with a book before dozing off again in the late afternoon.

Severus was startled awake by noises in the house, but it only took a moment for him to identify the familiar gait and movements as belonging to Harry. Severus relaxed for a second, taking a deep breath to calm himself before getting himself back into his chair and making his way downstairs. There was something he wanted to discuss with Harry, and now that he was lucid and pain-free enough to have a reasonable conversation, it seemed a good a time as any.

Severus found Harry downstairs in the kitchen; he’d fixed himself a plate from what his ex-wife had sent over, since Ginny had sent her son over with quite a lot and Severus had barely even made a dent in it. Harry looked up, mouth still full, as Severus glided into the room.

“Sev’rus,” Harry said through his mouthful, and Severus shook his head, unsure of what he should scold the man for first. He hadn’t ever given Harry leave to use his given name, but then he wasn’t sure it was worth his effort to continue to attempt to keep their relationship as it had been when they had been teacher and student all those years ago. After all, he was living in the other man’s house.

And after all, talking with one’s mouth full was a much more abhorrent habit.

“Were you raised by Muggles or wolves, Potter?” Severus breathed exasperatedly. “Swallow your food before you speak.”

Harry chewed for another few moments before swallowing his mouthful with a sheepish look.

“Sorry,” he said, although he didn’t appear particularly contrite. “I assumed you’d still be in bed. How are you feeling?”

Severus took stock of his body; he’d taken another Pain-Relieving Potion and another dose of the new nerve-damage potion before he’d dozed off, but overall, he felt vastly improved over his condition the previous night. He wasn’t sure yet if the new potion was having any effect or if it was just the increased rest that accounted for the change, but barring that, he was certainly feeling better.

“I was in bed until just now,” Severus assured him, and Harry’s worry appeared fairly assuaged by the words. “And I’m feeling much improved, thank you.”

Harry smiled brightly. “That’s good. I’m glad,” he said softly, but Severus shook his head to himself, changing the subject.

“I need you to tell me everything you know about what happened during the attack on the Malfoys,” Severus said brusquely, pulling his chair up so that he was sitting at the table, directly across from Harry.

Harry made a face.
“You could give someone whiplash with the abruptness of that segue,” Harry remarked dryly, taking another bite of his makeshift dinner. Severus could sense the attempt to stall for what it was; there was something about it Harry did not want him to know, and that much was certain. Severus hadn’t spent years as a spy to be unable to sense something as blatant as that.

“All the same, I need to know.”

Harry gave him a searching look, still chewing. This time, though, he at least waited until he’d swallowed before he responded.

“Why?” he asked simply, observing Severus as though the other man was some particularly interesting sort of scientific specimen.

“Have you ever seen Scorpius’ curse scars?” Severus intoned after a moment, and Harry shook his head.

“Not since just after he got them, when he was in hospital,” he confirmed after a moment. “Why?”

Severus frowned but decided that blunt and straightforward was the way to go. It usually was with Gryffindors.

“I observed them the other day when I went to the Manor, and there was something very curious about them,” he informed the other man bluntly. “They’re still imbued with a reasonably large amount of dark magic.”

Harry at least had the sense to look startled at that.

“What?” he inquired, putting down his fork and finally giving Severus his full attention. “Curse scars don’t act like that. They don’t…store dark magic.”

For all that Harry was a complete imbecile when it came to potions, he did seem to at least be well versed in the Dark Arts. The fact that he hadn’t noticed it, though, in the years since Scorpius had been attacked didn’t say much for his ability to sense dark magic.

“No, Mr. Potter, they don’t,” Severus agreed, going back to his familiar lecture tone out of habit. “I’ve only ever known of one that did.”

Severus flicked his eyes up to Harry’s scar, in case the other man was too thick to understand his inference. Harry, however, got it immediately.

“You don’t think…his scar is a Horcrux?” Harry breathed out slowly, his voice barely above a whisper, as if he were afraid to breathe the sentiment aloud. Severus pursed his lips.

“No,” Severus confirmed shortly—that whole business brought up memories he’d rather not recall. “I spent enough time around both you and Nagini to know what a Horcrux feels like. This wasn’t the same. However, the dark magic mostly dissipated when Scorpius’ condition began to improve. There is a rather troubling possibility that the residual dark magic in his scar is what is making him ill in the first place.”

Harry looked distinctly troubled by the whole business, and rightly so.

“So that’s why you want to know what happened that day. You want to know what curse he was hit with.”

Severus nodded.
“Draco and your son both informed me that the spell was unknown, owing to there being no living witnesses besides the other perpetrators and the caster’s wand being destroyed,” he told Harry evenly. “However, I did consider the possibility that there were facts you are aware of as Head Auror that you’ve perhaps held back from them.”

Harry shook his head pointedly.

“They know everything there is to know, and we don’t know the curse that hit Scorpius,” he affirmed seriously. “Don’t you think I tried to find out? But none of the living attackers are talking, and they refuse to surrender their memories of the event.”

Severus released a long sigh. “Which brings me right back to where this conversation started,” he said impatiently. “I need you to tell me everything you know about the attack. Really, it would save us so much time if you’d just listen to what I say the first time.”

Harry glared at Severus but didn’t argue.

“Lucius, Scorpius and Astoria were attacked on the outskirts of Hogsmeade on December 2, 2013,” Harry began flatly, clearly attempting to recite the facts as emotionlessly as he could manage. “Lucius had been out of Azkaban about six months. They were attacked by a group of five, three witches and two wizards, all of whom were members of a support group for those who had lost loved ones during the war. The leader of the group, a woman called Tisiphone Nettles, had a brother who was killed during a raid in which Lucius had participated.

“This group cornered the Malfoys while they were heading out of Hogsmeade after doing some Christmas shopping. Lucius and Astoria attempted to defend themselves and Scorpius, who was only eight at the time and didn’t yet have a wand. They were overpowered. Astoria was killed first, then we believe they attacked Scorpius and then killed Lucius before they scattered. They didn’t realize Scorpius was still alive when they left.”

Severus took the words in as Harry spoke, wishing it weren’t so easy to picture the scene. To imagine Scorpius smaller and younger than now, Lucius older than Severus had last seen him and the three of them bundled up in warm cloaks and scarves against the cold. Severus frowned to himself, trying to shake the mental image.

“What do you know about the curses that killed Lucius and Astoria?” Severus found himself asking after a moment, almost on autopilot. “Or any other information you may have gotten from the other attackers’ wands?”

Harry visibly hesitated. “Their wands revealed that they used a variety of offensive spells, including dark ones. Nothing that should have caused the kind of reaction you described,” he said after a moment, evenly. “Lucius…he was hit with the Killing Curse.”

Severus looked down at his lap for a moment, trying not to picture the moment Lucius fell to the flash of green light. He took a deep breath.

“What about Astoria?” he pressed finally.

Harry shook his head in exasperation. “Does it matter?” he seethed. “It doesn’t match the wounds on Scorpius, so it wasn’t the same as the curse that hit him. I can give you a list of the curses we got from the attackers’ wands, but since Ms. Nettles’ wand was destroyed, it will be an incomplete list at best. And a dozen Aurors have gone over it a number of times, trying to put together what happened. But it appears that she was the one that cast the curse that killed Lucius and the one that injured Scorpius as well. So without her wand or someone’s memories, we’re in the dark here, Snape.”
Severus gave Harry a long, searching look, trying to figure out what it was that Harry was holding back and why—because it was clear that he was holding something back. But for the life of him, Severus couldn’t figure out why Harry wouldn’t offer up all the facts if they could help his friend’s child. He released an aggravated breath.

“We just have to acquire a memory, then,” he said as though it was the most reasonable thing in the world. That only made Harry become more exasperated.

“Didn’t you hear me the first time?” Harry demanded, standing up out of his chair and beginning to pace the room, the same way his son did when he was frustrated. “All the co-conspirators refuse to give up their memories of the event. To take their memories against their will would be both difficult and illegal.”

Severus’ response was slow and even as he refused to be cowed by the other man’s obvious irritation.

“They aren’t the only living individuals who were present at the event in question.”

Severus saw the moment that Harry realized what he was suggesting. Harry stopped pacing immediately, turning on Severus with a dark look. It was strange, then, to have to look up at Harry Potter while the green eyed man stared him down. Quite the role reversal.

“No,” Harry said sharply, his tone leaving no room for argument. Severus argued anyway.

“You’re a fool. Why not?”

Harry threw up his hands in frustration. “Why not? Why not? Because you’d be asking Scorpius to relive the single most horrible day of his life in order to extract the memory of it. He’s thirteen, Snape.”

Severus was not intimidated by Harry’s obvious anger.

“By the time you were thirteen, you’d already faced the Dark Lord twice and survived. Not to mention a troll and a rather vicious basilisk,” Severus argued levelly. Harry gritted his teeth at that, obviously holding back anger.

“And do you know what else I faced when I was thirteen? Dementors,” Harry hissed furiously. “And do you know what I heard then, when the Dementors got close to me? I heard my mother screaming and pleading for our lives. So I know what it means to ask a thirteen-year-old boy to relive the death of his parent. I know, and I’m not doing that to him.”

Severus wasn’t sure if Harry’s words were calculated or if they’d just come out the way they had, but either way, the mention of Lily’s death effectively stopped Severus in his tracks. He took a couple of slow, deep breaths, trying to fight back the pain—and the responsibility—he still felt at the memory of her death. It wasn’t going to do him any good in this situation.

Harry seemed equally affected by his outburst; he dropped down into his chair after a moment, burying his face in his hands. Severus hesitated for a beat before guiding his chair closer to the other man, close enough to touch—though he didn’t. When Severus spoke again, his voice remained low and even.

“And if it wasn’t necessary, I wouldn’t ask it of him,” Severus insisted slowly, and although Harry didn’t react, Severus knew the other man was listening to him. “But we don’t know what the curse was or why it is reacting this way, and it’s already affecting Scorpius’ health. If we don’t know anything about it, we have no way of knowing if it will become worse over the years—if it might
perhaps even kill him. Scorpius may have still been a child when this happened to him, but he’s old
enough to make his own decision now. If we lay out the facts for him, he can decide whether or not
he wants to do this.”

When Harry finally looked up, his expression was nothing short of tortured.

“This isn’t fair,” he said slowly after a moment, tone too exhausted to be petulant.

“No, it isn’t,” Severus agreed sensibly. “But you know it needs to be done.”

Harry sighed, pulling off his glasses and rubbing his eyes tiredly. He finally put them back on before
regarding Severus with a serious expression.

“He was eight, Severus,” Harry intoned slowly, sounding defeated. “You must know how unreliable
the memories of children are. There’s a good chance he doesn’t even remember everything he saw.”

“We have to take that chance,” Severus said seriously. “You know that I’m correct about this.”

Harry sighed tiredly, shaking his head to himself. “You always are,” he admitted resignedly.
Despite Harry’s seeming acquiescence, he insisted that Severus let him re-interview the living perpetrators and take one more shot at getting them to turn over their memories in hopes of saving Scorpius the pain of having to relive the trauma of seeing his mother and grandfather killed right in front of him. All of that meant that Harry spent the better part of Saturday visiting Azkaban, leaving Severus to his own devices at home.

Severus spent the morning brewing a new batch of Pain-Relieving Potion, as his hands had finally stopped shaking enough that he thought there was a chance he could brew the relatively uncomplicated potion without bollocking it up entirely. It helped, too, that neither Albus nor Harry were around; Severus doubted he would have attempted it if there were any witnesses were he unable to brew something as simple as this.

To Severus’ immense relief, however, he was able to successfully brew the potion and prepare lunch for himself besides, all entirely without incident. His legs still didn’t seem to be improving much, but the ability to at least brew simple potions on his own did a great deal to lift his spirits.

When Harry still hadn’t returned from Azkaban by mid-afternoon, Severus decided to make an executive decision and Apparate to the Manor to speak with Draco directly.

There seemed to be some sort of impromptu gathering going on at the Manor; Severus found Draco, a very pregnant Ginevra Weasley (barely a month from her due date), and Hermione Granger-Weasley sitting in chairs under the shade of a tree on the front lawn watching the children. Scorpius and Albus were under another tree not far away playing Gobstones with a redhead girl around their own age that Severus didn’t recognize but was unquestionably a Weasley. Lily and James were in the air playing Quidditch once more, but this time they were joined by an entire additional gaggle of redheaded monstrosities.

Fighting the urge to roll his eyes at the obvious influx of yet more Weasley children, Severus cornered Draco and convinced him to go inside to talk as quickly as was feasibly possible after exchanging compulsory pleasantries with the two women, both of whom seemed unreasonably cheered by his presence.

Once they got inside, it took surprisingly little time to bring Draco around to Severus’ line of thinking. Like Harry, he was far from enthusiastic about exposing his son to the pain of remembering the incident, but the idea that Scorpius might be in more danger down the line if they didn’t figure out what curse had hit him had an obvious impact on Draco. Draco, after all, had always been somewhat of a pragmatist, a sharp contrast to Harry’s idealism. They agreed that they’d bring up the subject with Scorpius if and only if Harry came back empty-handed.

Which was exactly what happened later that evening when Harry returned home rumpled, exhausted, and dejected, reporting to Severus that (as Severus had already suspected) he had had no luck in convincing the remaining culprits to hand over their memories.

Scorpius, perhaps not surprisingly, was the easiest to convince. Over Harry and Draco’s tentative objections, he simply said, “Do you really think there’s a day of my life that I don’t think back on what happened?” which shut both Harry and his father down quite soundly.

Severus was the one to coach Scorpius through extracting the memory because it entailed the same kind of mind magic in which Severus had always excelled and both Harry and Draco miserably failed, both being far too hotheaded and not near analytical enough for the practice. Scorpius, on the
other hand, seemed to find it easy; he extracted the memory on the first try and Severus enclosed it in a vial for safekeeping until they could get it back to Harry’s Pensieve for viewing.

It was only when Severus and Harry returned to Harry’s home that things began to become strange.

It was clear from the moment that they arrived that something about the whole situation troubled Harry, but as astute as Severus was at judging people, even he wasn’t able to put his finger on it. That was until they reached the door to Harry’s study, the room in which he informed Severus he kept a Pensieve. Rather than let them inside, though, Harry turned and placed his back against the door, facing Severus with a rather apprehensive look on his face. He nibbled on his bottom lip nervously, and Severus didn’t manage to suppress an impatient sigh.

“What is it, Potter?” he demanded peevishly, and Harry frowned.

“Before we go in…there’s something I should tell you,” Harry prefaced after a moment, sounding more apprehensive by the second. Severus looked up at him patiently until, finally, Harry seemed to settle upon what he wanted to say.

“It’s just—” Harry cut himself off after a moment, as if rethinking his words. After a long pause, he continued tentatively. “I probably should have told you sooner, but I still have your memories. The ones you gave me when…you know. I should have brought it up weeks ago, offered to give them back. If you want them, that is?”

Severus frowned; that had not been what he had been expecting at all. He had given more than a passing thought to those memories, but he’d already figured that Harry still had them in his possession—or if not, that he’d been forced to surrender them in some kind of trial, in whatever proceedings had gotten Severus exonerated.

The question of whether he wanted them back—well that was a more difficult one. On the one hand, he felt a sense of possessiveness; they were his memories, and he was loath to entrust another person with something so personal. It wasn’t as though the memories were gone, precisely; he knew what he was missing, but they had a detached feeling, as though they had happened to someone else.

The pleasant memories, the ones of Lily before everything had gone terribly wrong—he had plenty more of those, enough that he didn’t feel the absence of the ones he’d given to Harry. The unpleasant memories, too—being tortured by James Potter and his gang—were numerous and varied. And as to all the turning points…he didn’t mind the emotional distance from them, though even that didn’t much lessen his guilt over everything that had happened.

“It doesn’t matter now, Potter,” Severus told him with a tired sigh. “My only current concern is viewing Scorpius’ memory.”

Severus thought that the words would placate Harry but still Harry hesitated, not moving from in front of the door. Severus sighed again, giving Harry another impatient look.

“What is it now?”

Harry hesitated again.

“If you’re going to view the memory, I’m going with you,” he said seriously after a moment, and Severus just rolled his eyes.

“I presumed you would be, being an Auror and the Savior of Everything and all that rot,” Severus said snarkily. “Now, will we be waiting here all day or may we go in?”
Harry seemed relieved by Severus’ easy acquiescence to his demand, but there was still something wary in his expression when he opened the door and held it open for long enough to allow Severus entry behind him.

Harry’s office was much like the rest of the house, bright and airy and sparsely furnished, although Severus did note that it contained rather more books than he would have expected from Harry Potter. Harry, perhaps thinking ahead, had already set the Pensieve in the middle of the desk for easy access.

Harry remained inexplicably jumpy as he poured the memory into the Pensieve, swirling it around with his wand. Before they moved to view the memory, Harry looked at Severus one more time over the top of the Pensieve.

“You’re sure about this?” he asked tentatively after a moment. Severus made a face.

“Yes, Potter,” he said impatiently. “Let’s just get on with it.”

Seeming to resign himself, Harry leaned in toward the swirling memory. Severus did the same, until both of their noses touched the surface of the memory and they were pulled inside.

It was a bizarre thing to fall into this particular memory, but for a long moment, Severus wasn’t sure why. That was until he looked down at Harry and realized…that he was looking down at Harry, who stood at least a head shorter than Severus still. The Pensieve, apparently, did not take into account Severus’ physical limitations, so he found himself standing in the snow, his feet not leaving a mark on the pristine surface, his chair forgotten back in the physical world.

Harry seemed equally startled to be looking up at Severus, who was suddenly standing as though it were no strange thing at all. It was an odd sensation, being inside a Pensieve memory, but Severus had never noticed before how much, how disconnected he felt from the manifestation of his physical body. He frowned.

“Well that’s…unexpected,” he murmured after a moment, and Harry nodded in silent agreement, although he didn’t comment further on the issue.

“Where are they?” Harry asked after a moment, but as soon as he’d spoken, they both noticed three figures making their way toward them, traipsing through a thick blanket of snow.

Lucius was in front, walking alongside a young, pretty witch in her early thirties, a witch who was undoubtedly Draco’s first wife. Astoria Malfoy had dark blonde hair, darker than her husband’s or her son’s by a few shades, and blue eyes. Wrapped up in scarlet winter robes, she wore white gloves with fur around the cuffs and a matching white scarf.

Lucius looked markedly different than the last time Severus had seen him. During those final months before the fall of the Dark Lord, Lucius had already aged considerably, probably due to the stress placed upon him by his rather tenuous position with the Dark Lord. The Lucius standing in front of him then, though, looked every bit of his nearly sixty years. His long hair, which had previously been a pale blond, had gone entirely white. The lines of his face were more noticeable than ever, and there was a certain weariness in his eyes that wasn’t entirely unexpected after a fifteen-year stint in Azkaban.

Still, Lucius carried himself with an undeniable sense of dignity in black winter robes and familiar-looking cane, although it appeared as though Lucius carried this one more out of necessity than fashion. He seemed to be having a particularly trying time navigating through the snow with it, one leather-gloved hand gripped particularly tightly around the handle, this one ornamented with a silver dragon’s head.
Scorpius, however, was skipping through the snow behind his mother with a grin, jumping carefully in her path, trying jump into the larger footprints she had left in the snow. He was smiling, more lighthearted than Severus had ever seen him, in plain black robes with a green scarf.

“Scorpius, mind your steps!” Astoria called over her shoulder toward her son. “You’ll slip and hurt yourself!”

Scorpius seemed nonplussed by the scolding. “I’m fine, Mum!” he called, taking another flying leap to match his mother’s longer stride. She shook her head, and she and Lucius exchanged a knowing look.

Severus turned to Harry, “Why are they heading out of Hogmeade?” he queried after a moment, watching as the family began to break away from the main road and the crowds, up a slope toward the very edges of the town. Harry gave him a long, curious look before shaking his head to himself.

“Of course you wouldn’t know—I don’t imagine you ever engaged in any serious holiday shopping,” Harry chuckled after a moment, though after a pause his expression turned grave, as though he just remembered what they were about to witness. “The Ministry sets aside specific Apparition points outside all of the wizarding villages around the holidays. There were too many incidents of people Apparating on top of each other because of the crowds. Even so, there are people who flout the law every year, and we always have to clean up the mess.”

Severus mulled over that thought as he and Harry began to move as one after the Malfoy family. It was curious, Severus thought, to be walking again, even if he wasn’t able to actually feel his limbs as usual. Even more curious was the way that their feet didn’t sink into the snow, the way they left no footprints.

As the Malfoys continued to walk, they left the crowd behind; there were still a few people milling about in the distance, but no one was in their immediate vicinity. Severus felt a sense of disquiet as the family began to leave the safety of the crowd, further compounded when he spotted the Shrieking Shack in the distance. It was difficult not to remember his unpleasant history with the place, which remained boarded up and abandoned much as it had always been.

Even though Severus was prepared for it, he very nearly jumped when he heard the first crack of Apparition. A woman appeared directly in the Malfoys’ path, followed by four identical cracks as two more witches and two wizards appeared. The woman in the lead—he knew from Harry that her name was Tisiphone Nettles—was a witch with mousy brown hair and brown eyes.

Both Lucius and Astoria reacted immediately to their appearance; they had their wands out in moments, a space of perhaps fifteen feet between them and their attackers. Scorpius, still behind his mother and grandfather, stopped, startled.

“Mum? Granddad?” he asked nervously.

“Stay back, Scorpius!” Astoria called, shifting closer to Lucius in an attempt to shield her son from the attackers’ line of sight. Something sparkled in the air around them—and Severus recognized them as anti-Apparition wards that the attackers had laid down to keep the Malfoys from escaping.

After that, things suddenly became strange. The air seemed to shift, and everything became blurry. Ms. Nettles’ mouth moved but nothing but indistinct sounds came out. It took a moment for Severus to understand; Scorpius, at only eight, had only a hazy memory of this part of the events, something Harry had already cautioned about. It wasn’t entirely unexpected for a child going through something so traumatic. For a moment, Severus feared that all would be for naught, that Scorpius wouldn’t be able to remember anything important. He and Harry exchanged an apprehensive look.
But then Astoria’s voice echoed through the air, loud and clear. “Don’t you dare hurt my son!” she called loudly—and while Astoria had a pretty, pale face and delicate features, at that moment her voice was the perfect antithesis of that.

Severus looked around and saw, to his dismay, that a group of three witches were standing at the edge of the town, watching the exchange and whispering to each other. They must have noticed the odds—five armed adults against two, both of whom were attempting to shield a small child. And Severus saw the precise moment when the three shook their heads and ducked back into town, ignoring the exchange entirely.

Severus felt a rush of rage at that—those three witches, had they come to help, might have evened the odds, might have saved Lucius and Astoria’s lives. But instead, they’d looked upon the scene and decided to do nothing—and Severus thought there was a good chance that that was because of who was at the end of those five wands, the fact that they were Malfoys, even if one of them was a mere child.

Severus committed those faces to memory; if Harry didn’t already know the identity of the witnesses, Severus vowed that he would hunt them down and they would one day get what was coming to them. Forcing his rage away for the moment, he turned back to the scene before him.

“Please.”

That was Lucius’ voice; Severus would recognize it anywhere. He saw his old friend looking legitimately frightened as he pleaded with their attackers.

“Please, let them go. They have nothing to do with this.”

Severus’ heart ached at the words, and finally the woman, Tisiphone, spoke.

“It’s because of you my brother is dead!” she accused with a hiss. “It’s only fair that I take from you what you’ve taken from me! Your family.”

“No!” Astoria whimpered, but it was in vain; a moment later, a male voice came through the air and Severus looked at the man—a dark-haired wizard with a goatee—as he shouted a spell.

“Sectumsempra!”

Severus’ blood felt as though it had frozen in his veins as he heard the man cast the spell—his own spell—as he saw blood sprout up across Astoria’s stomach and chest. It only took a second before she collapsed into the snow, blood saturating her scarlet robes in blossoms of dark colour.

“Mum!” Scorpius yelled, running to his mother’s side—and Lucius glanced over out of the corner of his eye, clearly torn between wanting to help Astoria and wanting to continue to protect his grandson. In the end, he stayed stalwartly where he was, his wand pointed at the attackers while he leaned heavily on his cane with his other hand.

Severus spared a glance at Harry to see the other man eyeing him nervously out of the corner of his eye. It was then that Severus realized—that Harry had known what spell had killed Scorpius’ mother, that he’d been nervous about how Severus would feel seeing it unfold before him.

Frowning, Severus turned back to the scene before him. It had gotten hazy again—young Scorpius clung to his mother and Lucius and the others faded a little, though Severus could still see the blood soaking through Astoria’s robes in vivid detail as Scorpius sobbed over his dying mother. The snow around her began to turn pink as Lucius continued to exchange frantic words with their attackers, but the words were too muffled for Severus to make them out. A few spells were exchanged, but neither
could Severus make out what the spells were. It was clear that Lucius was able to block the first several, but Severus knew that couldn’t last, not when it was five against one. Still, for the time being, Lucius seemed to be holding his own.

That was until the woman in the lead of the group, Tisiphone Nettles, raised her wand high in the air, pointing it directly at Scorpius. Severus held his breath; if Scorpius didn’t remember this part, then this entire exercise would be entirely pointless.

And then, as if the air unfroze, her clear voice rang through the air.

“Avada Kedavra!”

Her loud voice seemed to startle Scorpius; he straightened just in time for a bolt of green light to hit him directly in the chest, right near his heart. The next part happened so fast that Severus was almost unable to grasp it; the spell ricocheted off of him, but because of the angle from which Scorpius had been struck, instead of hitting the caster, the bolt of green light struck Lucius in the back.

Harry and Severus were thrown back into reality suddenly, before Lucius’ body even hit the floor—it was clear that that was when Scorpius had lost consciousness.

Severus sat up in his chair, breathing hard. His hand flew up to his chest almost out of reflex, as if trying to slow his rapidly beating heart. Harry looked at him over the Pensieve, his gaze frantic, as if unsure of what he had just seen, seemingly searching Severus’ face for answers.

Severus, however, knew exactly what he’d seen. He’d seen Scorpius struck by the Killing Curse, had seen it rebound without killing him, right after his mother had sacrificed her life to protect him. He’d seen a bastardization of Harry’s own story. He’d seen Scorpius Malfoy saved from the Killing Curse by the same old magic that had saved Harry Potter’s life over three decades prior.

What he’d seen was Scorpius Malfoy saved…by love.
Chapter 16

Rarely, if ever, had Severus seen Harry Potter look as startled as he did when they came out of the Pensieve. His eyes were wild with surprise, almost panic, as he stared at Severus desperately.

“What…what did I just see?” Harry asked quickly, sounding almost breathless, as though he had been running for his life. Severus frowned, settling back into his chair; it was strange to be confined to it again after he’d been able to stand, even walk, in the Pensieve, although the detached, otherworldly feeling of that had made it obvious that that wasn’t reality. Even so, the transition was bizarrely uncomfortable.

“You know what you saw, Potter,” Severus said flatly, his tone low and even. But even though Severus was sure of what he’d witnessed, it still left him with too many questions that needed answering.

“No, I don’t!” Harry insisted, throwing his hands up in the air in frustration as he began to pace, a familiar nervous habit of his. “If I did, I wouldn’t be asking you, would I?”

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose and took a deep breath to try to keep himself from snapping at the other man.

“Scorpius’ mother died trying to protect her son from danger. The Killing Curse was cast upon him, but it rebounded without killing him,” Severus deadpanned impatiently. “Even you are not so thick, Mr. Potter, that you cannot reason out the implications of that.”

Harry seemed to become even more frazzled at that. “But it doesn’t make any sense!” he insisted determinedly. “Why did it leave such a huge, horrible scar and do lasting damage to Scorpius when it just left a tiny mark on me? And I became famous for being the only wizard ever to survive the Killing Curse, and yet it happens again just three decades later? What are the odds of that? It’s completely illogical.”

Severus snorted. “It’s nice to see that you’ve finally decided to embrace logic,” he said, his voice dripping with sarcasm. Harry turned on him with a fiery expression.

“You know what, Snape, I really don’t need your sarcasm right now,” Harry snapped. “There has to be some other explanation—”

“Potter,” Severus hissed darkly. “Shut up and give me a moment to think.”

Harry glared at Severus but surprisingly enough, he did shut up, although he didn’t stop pacing the length of the room. Severus mulled over the situation for a second; for all of Harry’s totally irrational reaction, he did bring up several fairly important points. After a few long minutes of tense silence, Severus finally spoke up.

“You’re right, Potter,” he acknowledged after a second, and Harry finally stopped in his pacing, surprised by the admission.

“So you don’t think that Scorpius survived the Killing Curse because his mother sacrificed her life for him?”

Severus shook his head. “No, I think that’s precisely what happened,” Severus countered after a moment, voice still entirely even.
But—” Harry began to protest, but Severus held up a hand to silence him.

“Potter, just shut your mouth and listen,” Severus said seriously—and Harry did, his gaze fixed on Severus. Severus took a deep breath and spoke. “It is illogical to think that this has occurred only twice in recorded history, and both times took place in the last half-century.”

Harry seemed vindicated at those words. “See? I said—”

“It logically follows that this has, quite obviously, occurred more than twice in recorded history,” Severus interrupted, his tone severe. Harry looked startled by the proclamation.

“But—” Harry began to protest once more, but once more Severus cut him off.

“Listen, Potter,” he repeated impatiently. “Certain spells and curses fall in and out of favor over time. The Killing Curse, after it was banned in 1717, fell out of favor for several centuries until the Dark Lord brought it back into the public consciousness. However, this kind of sacrificial protection would still be in effect against other, less immediately fatal, spells. It’s possible that historically, witches and wizards did not make the connection between this protection and the decreased efficacy of certain curses cast upon people who were given this protection.”

Severus was slightly worried that he was going to lose Harry partway through his explanation, but surprisingly Harry seemed to follow his logic.

“That’s no more than speculation,” Harry countered after a moment. “And it does nothing to explain why the Killing Curse only left a tiny scar on me but caused such extensive damage to Scorpius.”

Severus, too, had considered those concerns.

“You’re correct, Potter—it’s only speculation. Only extensive research into the topic would be able to prove or disprove this theory,” Severus acknowledged. “As to the effect on Scorpius, I could provide you with theories, but they would only be speculation as well. It could have something to do with the raw power of the person giving the sacrifice. It could be related to the raw power of the person on the receiving end of the protection. Or it could be affected by anything from the phase of the moon to the season of the year to the proximity to certain intersecting ley lines. There really is no way to know for certain without further research.”

Harry suddenly seemed resigned in the face of Severus’ certainty.

“If that’s true,” he said tiredly, “and that’s a big if—why has no one put this together sooner? You say that people may not have noticed curses not working as strongly as they should, but surely someone would have put it together by now.”

Severus shook his head seriously.

“Your perception is skewed because of how much you spoke with Albus—Albus Dumbledore,” Severus added belatedly, realizing Harry might miss his point. “Most witches and wizards do not believe in the power of love and sentiment nearly as strongly as Albus did. Witches and wizards are in general are loath to believe in magic that happens without their conscious control. Magic that even Muggles could potentially access. The thought alone intimidates enough people that the theory has never been widely accepted.”

Harry appeared startled at that.

“Am I not proof enough?” he intoned dully. “I survived an unsurvivable curse. How much more proof do people need?”
“Much more than that, surely,” Severus said haughtily. “I may have missed over twenty years, but even if you’ve told everyone your mother’s sacrifice is the reason you survived the Killing Curse, I suspect most people still believe that you have some trick or some special power that was truly responsible for your survival.”

Harry took a long, deep breath, as if trying to steady himself.

“Okay,” he said finally after a second. “How do we figure out if this is true, and what it means for Scorpius?”

Severus gave Harry a meaningful smirk.

“I told you, Potter,” he said silkily. “Research.”

Severus’ brain was roiling with the possibilities as soon as it became clear to him what the correct course of action would be. His first intention had been to send out for copies of several different magical journals in order to ascertain whether or not anyone had done research on the topic in the two decades he’d been comatose, since Severus knew there had been no previous research on the topic. Harry, however, informed Severus that Mrs. Granger-Weasley subscribed to them all (not that he should be surprised) and a quick fire-call with her confirmed that, in fact, his suspicions were correct and no one had ever published research about the strong magical effects of sentiment.

Which meant that Severus spent the better part of Monday planning his strategy. The whole subject fascinated him, both for being an entirely uncharted branch of magical research and for the fact that he suspected that the magic that had saved his own life—the magic brought about by Albus Potter’s birth—was directly related to what he intended to research.

Severus wanted answers—not only for Scorpius Malfoy but also for himself—and the opportunity to research a completely unexplored topic would doubtlessly prove to be fascinating. Considering its implications for his own life, however, was still not something for which Severus was fully prepared.

Severus had his fair share of books about Potion and the Dark Arts, which were scattered between his rooms at Hogwarts and his home in Cokeworth, but he wasn’t sure he was in possession of any volumes that would give him any useful information on the subject at hand. What he did have, however, was access to three large collections of magical tomes—the Hogwarts library and the collections of the Black and Malfoy families both.

It made the most sense to rifle through the Hogwarts library first; as it was still summer, Severus could do so without encountering any students. That also meant, however, that he would have to owl the current Headmistress, Pomona Sprout, to ask for permission to access the grounds and the school’s rather impressive selection of books. Severus had never been particularly close with Pomona, but they’d never been at odds, either—save for that final year, when he himself had been Headmaster. He hoped that that meant that she wouldn’t have a problem granting his request, providing of course that he phrased it in the correct manner.

Harry seemed perplexed by Severus’ single-minded focus on the subject—but Harry Potter, of course, had never been particularly intellectual or driven by any kind of thirst for knowledge. For better or for worse, Harry had always been a man of action and intuition, and his friend Hermione
Granger had been the only one in their group who had truly been motivated by the persual of knowledge for knowledge’s sake.

Albus and Scorpius, however, had been immediately interested when they’d heard the avenue he was pursuing and offered their help, much to their fathers’ chagrin. Both Draco and Harry spent a good deal of time over the following two days trying to convince the boys that they should enjoy the remainder of their summer instead of being cooped up in the library of school, where they would return in less than a month. Ultimately, Harry and Draco lost the battle and Severus was somehow convinced to bring the boys along with him.

A reply came from Pomona that Wednesday, and as Severus hoped, she was more than willing to let him travel to Hogwarts to make use of their library. It was then that the logistical things needed to be worked through, but they eventually agreed that Severus would Side-Along with one of the boys to the Hogwarts gates in the morning, and either Harry or Draco would take the other, then arrive at an appointed time in the evening to bring one of them back home.

They went to Hogwarts for the first time on Thursday; the grounds were eerily quiet, the same way they had been when Severus had come to access his own rooms. As far as Severus knew, none of the human professors were in attendance as of yet. Even Hagrid was away, Harry informed him, traveling with Olympe Maxime, with whom he carried on some sort of casual relationship, the nature of which Severus purposely avoided contemplating. Most of the professors, Severus knew from his time teaching, would be arriving the week before term began to set up their classrooms and take care of any last-minute preparations that were needed.

Harry had come with Severus to drop the boys off before he’d gone to work that morning, which somehow left Severus with sole charge of the two teenage boys. They, thankfully, remained well behaved, although Severus could sense how excited they were to have the opportunity to wander through Hogwarts when none of the other children or staff were present.

“Since we’re at Hogwarts, does this mean we can do magic?” Albus had asked excitedly as they made their way through the front doors.

“No.”

The answer came easily to Severus, even though he was almost certain that legally, there was no prohibition if the children were on the Hogwarts grounds. Still, the last thing he wanted to do was deal with having to reverse any of their wayward spells. It was clear that his answer left the two boys dejected, though neither argued with him over it.

The Hogwarts library was much as Severus remembered; stacks and stacks of books plus the roped-off Restricted Section. Severus thought that they were most likely to find valuable information in old diaries or other historical texts; it was unlikely that any text on Charms or the Dark Arts would give them anything of note, since Severus’ entire supposition rested on the assumption that things such as Harry and Scorpius’ remarkable escape from the Killing Curse had happened before but been unrecognized for what they were.

As such, they started to slowly make their way through the books in the stacks about history; Albus and Scorpius immediately passed him any books in languages they didn’t understand and allowed Severus to cast a translation spell on them, although those could be notoriously unreliable depending on the source text. Scorpius, surprisingly, kept several volumes with source text in French, a language that Narcissa had apparently encouraged him to study following her nuptials to a French wizard.

It was very slow going, although to their credit, the boys didn’t complain about the tediousness of the
work or the distinct lack of immediate progress. Perhaps it was because they truly did enjoy research, or perhaps it was simply the implications of said research on Scorpius’ life and future that kept them motivated.

The house-elves, who remained in the castle during the summer to keep the place clean and tidy (although, Harry informed him, they were allowed to take two week vacations in shifts if they preferred, a part of house-elf liberation legislation that Mrs. Granger-Weasley had gotten passed nearly a decade before) brought them lunch, which they ate on a table separate from the books at Severus’ insistence. (Severus was unsure if Irma Pince was still the librarian at Hogwarts, but regardless of who now held the post, he was certain they would not appreciate drops of condiments on the books.)

Friday afternoon saw their first small breakthrough in a French diary Scorpius had been pouring over for most of the day. Severus himself had been reading through an account regarding the establishment of the first European wizarding communities in the Americas when Scorpius suddenly spoke up.

“I think I found something!” Scorpius declared suddenly, and Albus slid over next to the other boy in seconds, trying to read over his shoulder, despite the fact that Albus obviously did not understand a word of French. Severus guided his chair over, too, regarding Scorpius as he ran his finger carefully below a line of French text. When it was clear Scorpius had both of their attention, he finally elaborated.

“There’s an entry in the diary of this French Healer from 1162—it’s written in Old French, so I’m not certain I’m even reading it correctly, but it says that there was a case in which…gross…a dark wizard cast a spell on a woman that would close all her orifices. Is there really a spell for that?” Scorpius’ face, as he asked, was filled with disgust.

“I wouldn’t doubt it. Witches and wizards during the Middle Ages could be particularly vicious,” Severus acknowledged slowly. If possible, Scorpius’ face contorted even further at the confirmation.

“That’s appalling,” he said seriously before continuing. “At any rate, before she was cursed, her husband jumped in front of another curse bound for her, which killed him. After the curse was cast on her, her skin began to grow over everything—her nostrils, her mouth—and apparently witches and wizards usually only survived for a few minutes before the skin grew over completely and suffocated them. But when the Healer reached her nearly half an hour after it happened, he reported that the growth of new skin was slow enough that he still had time to reverse the curse and save her life.”

Albus seemed most excited by the small breakthrough as Severus did a spell to copy the text from the book onto a piece of parchment for his later study. They needed to find more cases before they could achieve any real certainty about Severus’ theory, but the new piece of information was compelling to say the least. It seemed to add credence to Severus’ idea—that these kinds of cases had happened before, but wizards of the past had lacked the necessary information to recognize them for what they were and had blamed them on other factors, like a miscast spell or the power of the caster.

It was just the beginning, but it provided hope that Severus was, at least, on the correct path.
Chapter 17

Severus settled into bed later that evening after he took his final dose of the new potion for the day. As much as his mind had been overtaken by the new mystery in front of it, the new topic of interest didn’t do anything to assuage his lingering problem—that of his legs and whether or not he’d perfected the potion to the point that it was actually doing him the most good that it could.

Sitting on his bed, Severus massaged the sore muscles of his thigh gently as he considered the last week. He’d been in a very poor state before Harry had applied the salve at the end of the previous week and he’d started taking the new potion, but Severus noticed that over the subsequent days, his legs had been improving, if only slightly. He was beginning to gain more voluntary control over his muscles, but in practical terms it hadn’t amounted to much yet.

He could make his thighs and calves flex at will, instead of the angry spasm of the muscles he had been getting since he’d woken. But it was difficult to tell whether the improvement was truly due to the potion or simply due to the fact that he was getting slightly more rest than he had been when he had been up brewing and taking care of Scorpius for longer than his body had been ready to handle.

The whole situation left Severus at a bit of a loss; he wasn’t certain whether he should devise a new formula or keep on with the one he was already using. He wasn’t certain of anything anymore, and the fact that he was his only test subject didn’t give him anywhere near enough data to make adequate judgments on the proper course of action.

Severus sighed in frustration; whatever the cause, he did have to judge how much he was improving, and the only way to do that would be to push his body to do things of which it had been incapable when he’d woken.

Sitting back against the pillows, Severus experimentally wiggled his toes. Whereas that simple act had been a huge struggle in the beginning and he’d only gotten minimal movement of the appendages, they now moved easily, as though nothing was impeding the action at all. Slowly, he flexed his feet, finding them bending as he’d hoped. He wasn’t quite able to point his toes, but his calves did at least flex appropriately as he tried, which was something.

After a long pause, Severus took a deep breath and leaned forward, gritting his teeth as he tried to lift his knee, bending his leg. His body started to respond slowly; his thigh muscles clenched as they tried to obey the command of his mind and his knee lifted off the bed slightly. Gritting his teeth, he pushed himself harder, but he still lacked the muscle strength to get his leg moving any further.

Finally, annoyed, he tucked his hand beneath his thigh, supporting it lightly as he tried to lift his leg a little further; his muscle spasmed angrily but he kept going, trying to will his body to at least do this one thing for him.

“Severus—”

Severus jerked in surprise at the sound of his name, drawing his hands back and dropping his leg, where it flopped uselessly against the bed. Severus groaned in frustration, sitting back against his pillows as he looked over at a startled-looking Harry Potter standing in his doorway.

“Sorry,” Harry said with an abashed expression as Severus glared at him through a curtain of hair. “I didn’t mean to bother you, but…are your legs improving, then?”

Severus sighed again, resigning himself to a conversation with Harry.
“Not terribly much,” he admitted, rubbing his sore thigh again as he responded. “I remain unsure of whether or not the current potion is having a noticeable effect or whether I’m simply improving with time.”

Harry eyed him uncertainly from the doorway. “Well…if you’re improving, that’s good either way, isn’t it?” he inquired after a moment, and Severus lacked the energy to argue with the younger man for his overly simplistic appraisal of the situation. For him, personally, any improvement was good, but in the spirit of experimentation and potion making, the inability to pinpoint a direct effect of the potion was positively disastrous.

Still, he said nothing of that to Harry—it wasn’t worth his time or effort to try to get the boy to understand the complexity of potions, or indeed science in general.

After a long moment, Harry took a tentative step toward Severus’ side, coming to rest beside his bed. Harry bit his lip in that way that Severus almost had to describe as endearing as he tentatively looked down at Severus’ still-frustratingly handicapped legs.

“Have you tried to stand?”

Harry asked the question with all the comprehension of a person who had never been anything but able-bodied. Which wasn’t entirely unexpected, Severus supposed, but he doubted that he could properly communicate to Harry how decidedly not simple that process would doubtlessly prove to be. Severus huffed out an annoyed breath.

“You’re vastly overestimating my capabilities, Potter,” he replied sourly, but Harry remained undeterred.

“I don’t think I am,” Harry said after a moment, carefully. “I think you’re frightened that you won’t be able to do it.”

Severus scoffed at that.

“Any person with a functioning brain would be frightened of falling on their face, Potter. Which excludes you, of course.”

Harry, surprisingly, didn’t rise to the obvious bait. Instead, he reached out both of his hands toward Severus, standing beside his former professor’s bed.

“Come on,” he said with a smile. “I’ll make perfectly certain that you don’t fall on your face.”

Severus was surprised by Harry’s determination in the matter, and for a moment he had to confront his own fears about doing this. What if he tried to stand and simply couldn’t? In fact, what if he could never stand again, even with support? The time he and Harry spent in the Pensieve came rushing back to Severus, the memory of towering over his small-statured former student the way he always had in the past, before he was confined to his damned chair.

The whole situation brought up another serious consideration for Severus—and Albus’ words, too, came rushing back to him, his accusations that Harry had feelings for Severus. Severus still had a difficult time grasping the idea that something like that could even be true. The supposed marriage proposals he’d received via the post (because he still hadn’t looked at a single one of them, and didn’t have any interest in doing so) aside, Severus was almost entirely certain that no one had ever fancied him in his life. He had, as far as he himself could see, almost no redeeming qualities—his looks were abhorrent, and his personality certainly didn’t make up for any lack in that department.

But, if he suspended his sense of disbelief for a moment and imagined that Potter did, in fact, have
feelings for him, he couldn’t help but think that his sudden disability had changed matters for the other man. That Harry couldn’t help but want to fix yet another thing that made Severus fundamentally undesirable.

Yet as it was, absolutely none of that seemed plausible in the first place.

“İ’m quite a bit larger than you are, Potter,” Severus said by way of argument. Harry rolled his eyes. “In height, maybe, but I wouldn’t be surprised if I outweigh you by a stone. I’m stronger than I look. Come on.”

Severus pursed his lips thoughtfully, wondering if he could get Harry to budge on this particular course of action, but Harry seemed disinclined to do so. Severus weighed his options for a moment—he could continue to argue with Harry, an argument that the other man would likely press on with ad infinitum, or he could just give in immediately and show the idiot that his body was still too damaged for what Harry was suggesting.

Deciding the latter was, overall, the less bothersome course of action, Severus carefully shifted himself, using mostly his arms, so that his legs hung off the side of the bed, facing Harry. With a very put-upon sigh, he took Harry’s hands and let the other man help lever him to a standing position.

And braced himself for the inevitable fall.

Severus was surprised, for a long few moments, that he didn’t fall. He was leaning heavily on Harry, but still his legs seemed more prepared to carry his weight than he’d speculated. He relished in the sudden feeling of elation that came from it; leaning as much as he was on Harry, he didn’t tower over the other man quite like he had in the Pensieve, but he was still standing and looking down at Harry Potter, who he’d been seeing from nothing but a sitting or reclining position for weeks.

And then, as soon as the elation came, it fell as Severus’ fragile legs apparently decided that they no longer had the strength to hold him, buckling under his weight. Severus felt it as if in slow motion as his legs gave out beneath him—but it seemed that Harry was not lying about being stronger than he looked, because Harry was able to catch him in an instant, wrapping both arms around Severus’ waist.

“Woah—easy there,” Harry said amiably before helping ease Severus back on the bed. After he was certain that Severus was settled, he took a step back and surveyed Severus where he sat on the edge of the mattress, his legs hanging over its side.

“See, that was good,” Harry beamed. “You’re capable of more than you think, Severus.”

Severus shook his head grumpily, rubbing his upper thigh, which had begun to ache from just the few seconds he’d spent on his feet.

“As usual, you simply want to rush forward without thinking,” Severus groused as he massaged his muscle rather ineffectually. Harry’s eyes followed the movement of Severus’ hand before he flushed in embarrassment.

“Sorry, I should have—I’ll get your salve,” Harry said abruptly, dashing from the room before Severus could even think of mounting an objection. Severus spent a few long moments wondering whether it would be worth the effort to try to argue the other man out of it when Harry returned with the salve, but the truth was that his legs really were starting to throb.

Resignedly, Severus removed his trousers and slowly began to haul his half-useless legs onto the bed. He had at least not removed his robes yet, so he was afforded some measure of modesty when
Harry returned to the room a couple of minutes later as he was still using his arms to pull his left leg up onto the bed. Harry rushed to Severus’ side immediately.

“Let me help,” Harry said feebly as he reached the side of the bed, and Severus huffed and removed his own hands, rolling his eyes as Harry lifted his trembling leg onto the bed. Annoyed, Severus flopped back down onto his pillows and resigned himself to Harry’s ministrations.

To his credit, Harry did it with absolutely no fanfare. He pushed up the bottom of Severus’ robes and poured out the salve, beginning in the same way as before, lifting Severus’ leg and gently massaging the paste into his calves. Severus groaned in half-pain, half-pleasure, throwing an arm over his eyes as if to remove himself entirely from the indignity. After busying himself with the task for a few moments, Harry spoke again.

“I was reading—” Harry began tentatively, and Severus snorted. “Shut it, Snape—I can read—and apparently Muggles do something called physical therapy for people trying to get over long-term injuries. Exercises and stretches and they practice walking by holding onto two bars.”

Severus rolled his eyes behind the crook of his elbow.

“I’m familiar with the practice,” Severus drawled in a bored tone. It was true that most wizards didn’t put much stock in something like physical therapy—they tended to think that magic alone could cure any ill—but Severus had spent enough time in the Muggle world to know better than to completely discount Muggle methods of healing.

“You’re going to suggest that I turn to Muggle methods,” Severus remarked as Harry moved his attentions to Severus’ opposite leg. Really, Harry was woefully transparent.

“Well…”

Harry said the word so tentatively that Severus could almost picture him biting his lip. Slowly, Severus removed his arm from over his eyes, and sure enough, Harry was indeed worrying his lower lip with his teeth, just as Severus had expected. Severus sighed impatiently.

“Out with it, Potter,” Severus said impatiently, wincing as Harry found a particularly tender spot on his calf. Harry looked apprehensive for a second before he finally seemed to find his resolve to speak.

“I’ve been looking into it,” Harry ventured finally, “And they make magical leg braces that can help support you. Pair that with some crutches and maybe…”

Severus snorted, amused.

“So that was a test, then,” he surmised after a moment. Harry lowered his eyes guiltily.

“Well I guess you could think of it like that.”

Harry sounded glum, almost petulant as he said that, as if he was upset about being caught at the game he was playing. If anything at all could be said about Harry Potter, it was that he would make a terrible spy. He had absolutely no instinct for subterfuge.

Harry was quick to qualify his actions, however.

“I just…I know how hard you’ve been trying to heal yourself and…I just want what you want, Severus,” Harry said softly, and Severus wasn’t sure if the use of his first name was deliberate or simply a slip of the tongue. Harry had been having more and more of those lately. He sighed, unable
to hold a grudge against the man for wanting to help him.

“Perhaps I have been a little…myopic in my attempts to cure my condition,” Severus acknowledged after a moment, slowly. Harry beamed at that, as though he’d gotten a correct answer on an oral test.

“Turn over,” Harry said slowly, and it took Severus a long moment to react, his mind going to any number of not strictly appropriate places before he realized that Harry was simply trying to get access to the back of his thighs in order to rub in the salve. Slowly, painfully slowly, he managed to turn himself over, although this time Harry saved him the indignity of offering to help.

Harry didn’t speak again until he’d pulled up the back of Severus’ robes, beginning to massage the salve into the back of Severus’ thighs.

“So I’ll look into the leg braces then?” Harry asked hopefully, fingers working slowly and methodically over Severus’ skin.

But Severus, for his part, was finding it difficult to focus on the question. Suddenly, the precariousness of their positions struck him—Harry behind him on the bed, him lying facedown with his robes hitched up lewdly as Harry’s hands grazed over his skin…it brought all manner of thoughts to Severus’ head, and none of them were particularly family friendly.

His prick, however, had suddenly become very interested in the proceedings, pressing insistently into the mattress with an urgency he hadn’t remembered feeling in years.

It turned out that his prick did, indeed, still ‘work’—and it responded rather enthusiastically to the suggestion of being pressed facedown into the mattress for Harry Potter of all people.

Severus was more than certainly going to hell.

“Fine,” he forced out after a moment, surprising even himself at how unsteady his voice sounded.
Chapter 18

The next week brought marked improvement for Severus. He wasn’t certain if it was his potion, the salve or his decision to rest at the Manor for the weekend while the kids were at Harry’s, but Severus was getting more and more movement out of his legs as the days wore on and it was starting to look as though the magical leg braces Harry had been looking into might actually be a real possibility for him.

Pre-empting Albus’ return to Hogwarts, Severus took a break from searching through old journals and spent Monday and Tuesday of the week having Albus brew another batch of Severus’ potion. On Wednesday, they were back at Hogwarts researching once more; several of the professors had returned to the castle that week, which meant that Severus had to deal with the sticky business of greeting and making small talk with Hagrid, Pomona Sprout, and Aurora Sinistra. Neville Longbottom even came into the library to greet him cordially. He brought along his wife Hannah, a former Hufflepuff student who Severus found out had replaced Poppy in the Hospital Wing when Poppy had retired a year prior.

That week, unfortunately, brought them very little progress; they came across two different cases of witches and wizards being less affected by curses than was typical, but they hadn’t been able to tie any of them to a related sacrifice of a loved one. Severus had noted them down anyway; it was possible that they were relevant to his search and the accounts simply failed to report the sacrifice because they didn’t understand that there was a connection between the two events.

Besides those two cases, though, they found nothing for the remainder of the week, and it was obvious that Scorpius and Albus were beginning to become disheartened by the obvious lack of progress. Still, they insisted they would be returning the following week and made promises to Severus that they would continue to check the Hogwarts library during their free time once term began.

Severus’ found his weekend surprisingly occupied; Harry had, as previously discussed, made an appointment at St. Mungo’s to have Severus fitted for magical leg braces, and Harry accompanied him on the trip on Saturday afternoon.

The process, Severus found, was simpler for him but more difficult overall than setting up the BROOM had been. First, Severus was told, they simply had to take measurements of his legs in order to set the size specifications before they were sent off. The actual braces, it turned out, would be made of goblin-forged metal, a pronouncement that rather surprised Severus, considering all the bad blood between wizards and goblins. Relations, it turned out, had improved in the intervening years, with Hermione Granger-Weasley pushing through several pieces of legislation protecting the rights of non-humans in the magical world and making serious reforms to, Severus was told as measurements were taken, the Goblin Liaison Office in the Ministry.

The process was, unlike setting up the BROOM, entirely painless for Severus, in excepting the fact they did have to move his legs around a bit in order to get accurate measurements. But also unlike setting up the BROOM, Severus was not able to walk away, as it were, with a finished product directly after the preliminary preparations were finished.

Much to Harry’s obvious pleasure, Severus also suggested they stop by a Muggle bookstore in order to pick up some sort of volume about physical therapy. That trip took a certain amount of preparation, as being spotted in a floating chair by Muggles was, quite obviously, not something that could be particularly condoned by the Minstry in respect to the Statute of Secrecy. In the end, they left Severus’ BROOM at Harry’s home and Severus was able to transfigure a kitchen chair into a
passable wheelchair.

It was a novel experience to go out into the Muggle world in a traditional wheelchair—first and foremost being that Severus had gotten used to easily controlling his movements and the gentle glide of his chair through the air. Harry pushing the chair meant that it somehow managed to go over every bump in the road, and that unpleasantness was nothing over the gentle looks of pity he got from everyone who opened doors for them. In the wizarding world, Severus could at least use magic in order to accomplish many of the things he couldn’t without his legs.

Eventually, they did find some decent books and Severus retired to bed to read them, still unreasonably exhausted by the two outings. Harry went off to the Manor to spend time with his children, leaving Severus alone to doze and browse the volumes in peace.

The next week was a repeat of the previous, with Severus and the boys visiting the Hogwarts library every day to do research, although the visits from other returning staff members became more frequent as more of them returned to the school. Most of the other professors were new and largely unknown to Severus, although most were former students he had been able to place after a reminder of their year and their House. As such, most stopped in out of some mixture of courtesy and curiosity, both thinking it rude not to come and greet the former headmaster and wanting to see that he was, really and truly, alive and mentally undamaged.

Only Blaise Zabini stayed longer, and a good portion of Monday afternoon was spent conversing with Severus’ former student. It turned out that, along with being the Potions professor, Zabini had also become Head of Slytherin as the only Slytherin teacher currently on staff; he spent nearly an hour picking Severus’ brain about how to best fulfill his duties to Slytherin, which Severus surprised himself by not particularly minding.

Neville Longbottom and his wife also surprised Severus by stopping in nearly every day; Hannah, fresh out of her training as a Healer, frequently asked after Severus’ condition. Neville, in contrast to their meeting at the hospital, was downright cheerful to the point that it was infuriating; he grinned in response to even Severus’ most sarcastic of comments, and at the end of their first encounter of the week, Severus was entirely convinced that Harry had shared with his friend Severus’ intention to develop a potion to cure Neville’s parents.

In the end, what the numerous visits meant was that they were able to do much less research than the time they spent in the Hogwarts library would have indicated, and at the end of the week, they were no further than they’d been after that first breakthrough, but Severus did at least feel much more informed on the state of current wizarding affairs after multiple conversations with both the Longbottoms and Blaise Zabini. He also took some time in the evenings to attempt several of the leg exercises he’d seen in the book he’d purchased the previous weekend, with varying degrees of success.

Saturday was the final day of August, and it proved to be total chaos; an entire contingent of Weasleys, Potters, and Malfoys gathered at the Malfoy Manor (the largest venue they had on hand) to get together before all the children went off to school the following day. Severus wasn’t sure how, but he’d somehow been coerced into attending, and the picnic-style gathering they held on the front lawn was nothing short of total insanity.

Being forced to socialize with all the Weasleys was surprisingly more pleasant than Severus would have expected; he’d always gotten along with Molly and Arthur, who had been the members of the Order who had been most willing to trust Albus’ word and thus the least suspicious of Severus’ motives. It was, as they asked after the state of Severus’ health, decidedly awkward, but the remainder of their conversations were, in contrast, generally pleasant.
The children mostly gave him a wide berth, more concerned with playing games and pranks on each other than speaking with a man who had been unconscious since before all of them (excepting Teddy Lupin) had even been born. Severus did have a decidedly awkward conversation with George Weasley (who seemed unsure of how to both simultaneously thank Severus for trying to save his life and condemn him for irreparably damaging him) and an incredibly odd conversation with Luna Scamander née Lovegood that left him absolutely unsure of what had just been discussed (if anything at all).

It was only as the sun was beginning to set that Albus finally came over to Severus where he had parked himself under a tree and away from all the commotion as various parties began saying their goodbyes to get home and sleep before the upcoming exodus to King’s Cross. Albus, in just a jumper and jeans, flung himself back onto the grass beside Severus’ chair.

“James is an ass,” he said without preamble, staring up at the orange-tinted sky. Severus snorted.

“His namesake was the same way at that age,” he informed the boy with a sardonic grin. “Perhaps he’ll grow out of it.”

Albus shook his head disbelievingly, his long dark hair, hanging loose that day, tangling in the blades of grass beneath his head.

“Lily thinks she’ll be put in Slytherin, and he’s giving her grief about it, the same way he did to me,” Albus complained. “Gryffindors. I swear, if his head gets any bigger, he’ll overbalance and fall over.”

Severus chuckled.

“Would your sister like to be in Slytherin?” Severus asked carefully.

“Well, she—” Albus began before cutting himself off suddenly, sitting up and wrapping his arms around his jean-clad legs as he turned to look at Severus. “Wait—do you know?”

Severus was careful to school his expression; he wasn't sure that he and Albus were thinking the same thing, and he had no intention of spilling any secrets that evening. Severus had, above all things, always been able to keep a secret.

“That depends,” Severus said seriously, “on what you think I know.”

Albus rolled his eyes. “Very diplomatic answer,” he said with a sardonic smile. “Lily…she wants to honor her father. But she also doesn’t want to let Dad down.”

Severus didn’t let his surprise show on his face; he couldn’t help but wonder how the children had found out that Draco was Lily’s father, whether the adults had told them directly or whether they had managed to reason it out themselves. Children, Severus knew, could be surprisingly perceptive at times, and Albus was rather brighter than most. Severus pursed his lips thoughtfully as he considered how to answer.

“I don’t believe your father would consider it any kind of betrayal were she not in his House,” Severus assured the boy after a moment. “If he’s made anything clear to me, it’s that he loves all of you regardless of such trivialities.”

Even the triviality of shared DNA, it turned out.

Albus smiled wanly at that.
“We all know that. But it’s…complicated,” Albus explained after a long moment. “Dad…he’s more forgiving of the situation than Draco is. I don’t know how Dad would feel, but I think it would please Draco if Lily were in Slytherin. Like it would be proof that she’s his, even if he can’t announce it to the world. Or like…vindication, somehow.”

Severus shook his head with a soft laugh. Albus, it turned out, had a good insight for people, because that analysis sounded perfectly like Draco. He’d matured, certainly, but there had always been a side of Draco that had been petty and possessive and resentful when he didn’t get his way. Being forced to pretend his own daughter wasn’t his was likely torture for the man.

“For all Draco’s faults, I do truly believe that he’ll love her either way as well,” Severus assured the boy softly—because from all that Severus had seen since he’d woken, Draco’s love for these children was something of which he was entirely certain.

Albus nodded slowly, although whether he was agreeing with Severus or merely taking in what the man had to say, Severus wasn’t certain. After a long moment, though, Albus looked up at Severus, his expression concerned.

“Are you going to be all right once we go back to school?”

Severus stared at the boy for a moment, almost unable to believe that he’d actually posed such an absurd question. Severus snorted.

“I’m sure that somehow I’ll manage,” he said sarcastically, but Albus wasn’t having it.

“I’m entirely serious,” Albus said gravely. “I have this recurring nightmare that as soon as I’m back at school and not making this potion with you anymore, you’re going to decide you no longer need to be at Dad’s house and run off to your little home in Cokeworth, BROOM be damned, and knock an entire shelf of books over onto yourself and die.”

Severus snorted again.

“That’s a frighteningly specific nightmare,” he told the other boy with a raised eyebrow. “What do you know of my home?”

Albus rolled his eyes. “Everything there is to know, for a person who has never been there,” he said in a no-nonsense tone. “Because my father and Scorpius’ grandmother have both been there. Well, I suppose she’s my grandmother now, too…step-grandmother.”

Severus gave the boy a serious look.

“I can’t remain in your father’s guest room forever, Albus. You must know that.”

Albus looked petulant. “You could make your way to his bedroom instead, of course,” he argued with entirely too serious an expression.

Severus had to fight not to bury his face in his hands in frustration, although whether at himself or at Albus, he wasn’t sure. He wasn’t entirely certain Albus’ fixation with setting Severus up with his father wasn’t simply a desire to keep Severus close—after all, it was more than obvious that Albus had, and did, idolize him in some way. But it was also impossible to ignore the way Severus’ body had recently reacted to Harry’s hands on him, the way he was increasingly beginning to tolerate—and even enjoy—Harry’s company. He wasn’t sure what Albus believed Harry felt wasn’t simply wishful thinking, but what Severus was sure of was that he felt something that was difficult to grapple with.
Which was, he supposed, all the more reason he could get himself walking so he didn’t, as Albus feared, kill himself with a wayward bookshelf trying to maneuver his chair through his cramped childhood home. Because a part of him wanted to stay right where he was, right where he’d somehow gotten comfortable—but another part of him didn’t even want to think about what that desire really meant.

Severus took a deep breath before he looked back down at Albus, who was frowning.

“Albus…” Severus began softly, but Albus held up a hand, shaking his head.

“Look…I want you to stay, but you should do whatever you want or need to do—for you,” the boy said after a moment, suddenly uncomfortably serious. “But just…if you go somewhere, even if you leave the UK…don’t abandon us entirely, okay? Visit, or at least write.”

Severus felt an uncomfortable knot in his chest at Albus’ words; it was true that he’d considered the merits of leaving Britain entirely, of going somewhere where his face and deeds weren’t both famous and, in some cases, infamous. Once, he could have left without looking back, without missing what he’d left behind. But looking down into the familiar set of green eyes he’d seen through three generations…Severus found that he felt a pang at the thought of leaving the boy behind. This boy, who’d effectively saved Severus’ life twice before Severus had even known his name.

For the first time since Albus’ namesake’s death, Severus found himself feeling connected to other living human beings in more than a casual way. When he considered picking up and leaving as soon as he was walking again—if that ever even happened—Severus felt a strange pain in his chest at the thought of leaving behind Albus and Scorpius, Draco…and Harry.

For the first time since his mentor’s death, Severus felt he had…family, this time without all the subterfuge, without the manipulation, without all the conditions. But it contradicted everything Severus had ever known of family, and the whole situation left him feeling uncomfortably adrift.

And Severus found, suddenly, that he didn’t think Albus was off base in asking whether Severus would be okay once he’d gone back to school—because Severus wasn’t entirely certain he was ready for the upcoming shift in the status quo and all that might entail.
Chapter 19

There was a flurry of activity the next morning as everyone prepared to go off to King’s Cross; even Severus, at Harry’s home, noticed it as Harry and all three Potter children jumped in and out of the Floo all morning, searching for some knickknack or other they’d left at Harry’s home over some weekend. Severus, despite Albus’ protestations, had begged out of the duty of seeing the children off to the train station; Severus had no desire to confront such a large segment of the British wizarding population while still in his chair, had no desire to become a spectacle to be gawped at by schoolchildren.

The school year beginning anew meant that Severus, if he wanted to avoid the particular discomfort of dealing with hundreds of children again, would have to abandon the Hogwarts library for the time being and move on to another collection in order to continue his research. He had both the Malfoy and Black libraries at his disposal—and eventually he decided that the proper course of action was to check Grimmauld Place first.

In the beginning, Severus had been surprised to find out that Harry had kept the Black family’s ancestral home despite the fact that he clearly did not live in it, but it was hearing the peculiar history of the place that made Severus decide to head there before trying the Malfoy Manor’s collection.

Grimmauld Place, Severus had been told, had dealt with a revolving door of different residents over the course of the years since the war. Harry and Ron had resided there while going through their Auror training and waiting for both their future wives to finish Hogwarts; all four of them had then lived there together for some time before they had wed and Harry and Ginny had moved into the house in which Harry now lived.

The story of what had happened to the place in the intervening years became increasingly more bizarre. Apparently for several years, Luna Lovegood had resided on the premises prior to her marriage, Neville Longbottom had lived there for several months after getting into a drunken argument with his wife, and Harry had moved back in for a couple of years following his divorce from Ginny Weasley, until she’d moved into the Manor and Harry had moved back into their former home. Gabrielle Delacour had lived there for a stint while studying abroad in England. Teddy Lupin had also dwelled at Grimmauld Place for some time while waiting for Victoire Weasley, who he subsequently married, to finish school at Hogwarts.

All in all, the entire story made Severus distinctly fearful that someone new would move in momentarily, and in the interest of the fact that he didn’t know whether or not he’d want to interact with this hypothetical future resident, he decided to make his way through the Black collection post-haste.

Severus made his way to Grimmauld Place on Monday; he found Kreacher, surprisingly, still well and keeping up the old mansion, which was in much better shape than it had been the last time Severus had visited. The Black library was, unfortunately, not nearly as organized as the Hogwarts library had been, as no one had bothered sorting or rearranging the books for decades. As such, Severus spent the majority of Monday simply attempting to locate volumes he thought might be useful, not even searching through any content.

Without the boys or the various Hogwarts professors to remind him of the time, Severus was surprised to discover, when he looked at a clock after some hours, that it had already become late evening and the dinner Kreacher had brought him hours before had remained untouched.

He returned to Harry’s home that night to find Harry already in bed, and after that, it simply made
sense for Severus to sleep at Number Twelve Grimmauld Place instead of Apparating back and forth each day. So on Tuesday, Severus brought enough of his various potions to last him through the week and attacked the Black family library with renewed fervor.

It wasn’t the first time Severus had been through the books in the Black family collection, but it was the first time he’d been through them in such detail. It was difficult not to get sidetracked from his research by all the rare volumes on the Dark Arts, and occasionally Severus found himself perusing passages that had absolutely no relevance to the topic at hand.

It wasn’t until Wednesday that Severus found another mention of a case he thought could be relevant to his search; an old woman whose son had sacrificed his life for her had found herself, curiously, unaffected by any harmful curses for the remainder of her life (which, Severus read, had only lasted another seven years). According to the tome, Dark Arts specialists and Healers had found themselves entirely perplexed by the situation but had never made the connection to the source of the protection.

Severus spent the majority of the evening searching for more accounts about the particular woman and the circumstances of her son’s death, as well as the last few years of her life. He continued staring through text after text until his eyes began to blur and he was forced to concede to sleep for a few hours.

Severus woke up Thursday mentally refreshed but physically exhausted; his legs were throbbing more than usual and he was forced to take twice his usual dose of Pain-Relieving Potion (his own fault, he knew). In the end, he resolved to ask Harry if he could check Ministry records to see if they had any information about the woman or her son. As Harry would be at work, Severus contracted Kreacher (who was not in a particularly helpful mood, considering that Severus had ignored or forgotten about nearly half the meals the elf had brought) to deliver a letter to Harry with the request.

Kreacher came back an hour later with a dossier about both the woman and her son and a message from Harry that Severus was to meet him on Saturday for a final diagnostic session regarding his leg braces.

Severus surprised himself by having forgotten about the braces entirely; he’d been so wrapped up in the research that he’d also forgotten about the physical therapy exercises he’d begun only the previous week. Rubbing his aching thigh, Severus sent a disgruntled Kreacher back to Harry with confirmation that he’d be there before returning in earnest to his search.

The woman in question, called Ceinwen Blishwick, was a relative of the Blacks (by marriage) and her son was Maximous Blishwick. According to the records Severus had received from Harry, Ceinwen had received a cursed box from an unknown sender. Seeing her about to open it without checking the object for dark curses, her son Maximous had jumped forward and tried to take it from her hand, getting killed as a result.

In the intervening years leading up to her death, there had been many more reports to the Auror’s office about attempts on Ceinwen’s life, although it was unproven who was responsible. Several more attempts had been made via cursed objects, none of which had had any effect on her. Two different poisoning attempts had been reported, both of which had killed other guests dining with Ceinwen but had had no visible effect on her.

The whole business was more than curious, and Severus had a suspicion that gossip about her seemingly inborn ability to repeatedly escape death had been part of the reason for the Black family to marry into the Blishwick family a generation later. But the information from Harry, while answering many questions, still left many more. There had to be a reason the protection had lasted for so long for Ceinwen while it had provided for only a single encounter for others.
Could it be, Severus wondered, that she was still residing in her ancestral home and had thus been protected in the same way Harry had been protected by living with his mother’s sister? But Dumbledore had theorized, and correctly so, that the protection provided by living with Petunia Dursley would only provide for Harry until he came of age, and Ceinwen Blishwick (who had died at age 136) was clearly already far past magical maturity.

There were too many variables in every story and too little of the information that Severus needed to put together all the pieces. It only made him redouble his efforts, carefully marking down the similarities and differences between each case. He prudently included Harry’s own narrow escapes of the Dark Lord, Scorpius’ escape from his attack…and, reluctantly, Severus included his own narrow escape from death that had come alongside Albus Potter’s birth. Because as much as he wanted to, Severus could not shake the suspicion that somehow, all of it was tied together by sentiment. He couldn’t bring himself to say ‘love,’ even inside his own mind, because that had too many dangerous implications for his own life.

Friday brought no new discoveries, and by the time he finally decided to retire from his search on Friday evening, Severus was thoroughly exhausted and in pain. He Apparated back to Harry’s home, took a Pain-Relieving Potion and a vial of Dreamless Sleep, and retired to bed.

Severus woke Saturday morning feeling worse than he had in recent memory; it was with a certain degree of effort that he was able to get himself showered and dressed in time to meet Harry, who watched him with a very strange expression as before they made their way to St. Mungo’s for another set of diagnostics.

The Healer taking measurements that morning was a plump, older witch called Sirona Hyslop; Severus had met her when he’d gotten his first set of measurements taken for the leg braces. The first set of measurements, Severus had been led to understand, were simply to ascertain the proportions of his body. There had been some diagnostic spells performed regarding the functionality of his legs, but the second set of measurements was meant to more closely ascertain the kind of spellwork needed for his specific degree of injury.

It was clear within minutes from the expression on the Healer’s face that something was terribly wrong; she frowned deeply at each diagnostic spell she cast. Her displeasure was so obvious that even Harry had caught on to it; he kept looking back and forth between her and Severus with a nervous expression until Healer Hyslop finally spoke.

“Mr. Snape,” she said carefully, her tone practically dripping with displeasure. “I’m aware that the Healers here at St. Mungo’s agreed to discharge you into your own care, considering your Potions expertise. But I must say that I’ve never seen this degree of regression in any person’s condition in a span of only two weeks.”

Severus found that he wasn’t sure what to think of the assessment. Harry, however, looked distinctly startled.

“How could that happen?” he asked the Healer, desperately glancing between her face and Severus’ legs as though hoping one or the other would give him an answer. Severus simply frowned, massaging his sore thigh with a thoughtful expression. Rather than answer Harry’s question, however, the severe witch looked right past him at Severus, her expression stern.

“What have you been neglecting to take your potions? Not getting enough food or rest?”

Severus pursed his lips thoughtfully. It was true that he’d skipped his fair share of meals in the past week, but he was uncertain that it was worse than it had ever been since he’d woken up. He didn’t think that he’d skipped his potions at all during the week, but as he cast his memory over his actions
for the specified period, he found that he couldn't remember for certain.

Before Severus had a chance to formulate an answer, Harry had responded for him.

“Kreacher—my house-elf—said he’d been missing meals this week,” Harry told the Healer with a concerned expression. “Could that really have this much of an effect on his condition?”

“Wizards tend to underestimate the importance of proper nutrition and rest on their physical condition. Tend to think that everything can be solved with a potion,” she said harshly, giving Severus a sideways look. “Whatever the reason, if he continues on this trajectory, I find it very doubtful that his leg muscles will be able to support him, braces or no braces.”

When they arrived home nearly half an hour later, Harry was livid. He did, at least, wait until they were properly ensconced inside the front room before he whirled on Severus with a furious expression.

“This has to stop,” Harry hissed angrily, staring down at Severus with his hands on his hips. “You spending nights at Grimmauld Place, skipping meals, barely sleeping—”

Severus, despite the fact that he was inclined to agree with Harry’s assessment of things, found himself annoyed by the words on principle.

“I’m not one of your children, Potter—I’d appreciate not being treated like one.”

Harry just rolled his eyes.

“Well then maybe you need to stop acting like one of them!” he yelled, throwing his hands up in the air in frustration. “Have you no instinct whatsoever for self-preservation?”

Severus opened his mouth to argue before realizing how ridiculous it would be for him to do so; the majority of his life had been spent in pure self-preservation, whether from his atrocious home life as a child to avoiding James Potter and his friends as a teenager to playing the dangerous game of double agent as an adult. But taking care of his basic needs had never been so difficult or so vital; a missed meal or night of sleep had never been so totally incapacitating for him, and he’d missed many of both over the years.

After a long pause, Severus resigned himself to the situation.

“You’re right, Potter,” he said after a moment, reluctantly. Harry stared at Severus disbelievingly, blinking a few times as though trying to figure out whether or not he was hallucinating.

“I’m…what?” Harry spluttered disbelievingly. Severus sighed, massaging the bridge of his nose to fight back his oncoming headache.

“Don’t make me say it again, Potter,” Severus said tiredly. “I have an obsessive personality and am…unused to having these sorts physical limitations. I’ve clearly made a miscalculation.”

Harry exhaled slowly, seemingly releasing all of the tension he’d built up preparing for a fight that hadn’t come. He slid down and planted himself on the edge of a table sitting against the wall near the front door. After seemingly regaining his composure, Harry spoke again.

“Okay…okay,” he said quietly, seemingly speaking more to himself than to Severus. “So why don’t you get in bed—I’ll order takeaway, and after we eat I’ll apply some of your salve and you can rest for awhile. Then we can make plans for what we’ll do from now on—and Snape, let me warn you, if I need to come drag you away from your research, I will. I don’t care how angry you’ll be with me;
I’ll do it every day if it means you’ll stay healthy.”

Severus stared up at Harry for a long moment, feeling like he was taking in the man for the first time. This Harry that he was looking at in the present—this Harry had retained all the stubborn rashness of his childhood self along with all his determination to do good. But he’d mixed that childish optimism with a sense of strength and power that Severus found made him easier to stomach. Reminded him of Lily, who had for years had the strength to remain his friend when everyone else had shied away from him.

Part of Severus wanted to fight back against what Harry said—just because he could, because the last thing he needed was another wizard dictating his actions the way the Dark Lord and Albus Dumbledore had done for so many years. And yet as kind and caring as Albus Dumbledore had sometimes been, he’d never made his decisions for the sake of Severus’ wellbeing. He’d made difficult decisions because he had to, and all his orders to Severus had been for the greater good, not for Severus’ own good.

In fact, Severus wasn’t certain anyone had ever make decisions purely for his wellbeing.

Sighing, Severus decided to give in and made his way up to his bedroom.
Chapter 20

An owl came from Albus the next morning while Severus remained in bed under Harry’s watchful eye. Severus, frankly, was surprised that it had taken the boy so long to send him a letter; he had it on good authority that Albus had already written to both of his parents since the start of term.

Carefully, Severus extricated the letter from the owl’s leg before it flew downstairs to the kitchen, likely in hopes that Harry had treats. Sighing, Severus sat up and unfolded the letter.

*Dear Severus,*

*I’m not certain if you’ve heard yet, but Lily was Sorted into Slytherin. I hear a certain someone is practically beside himself with glee at the news.*

*Dad told me about what happened with the Healer. You scoffed when I asked you if you’d be okay once we went off to school, but this is precisely what I was talking about. This is you metaphorically knocking a shelf of books on yourself, just like my nightmare.*

*Scorpius and I found something we think might be relevant in the Hogwarts library earlier this week, but I won’t be sending it to you unless my father assures me you’re taking better care of yourself. Yes, Severus, this is blackmail. We are all Slytherins, after all.*

*You’d better be alive and in one piece when I arrive home for the Christmas hols.*

*Yours,*

*Albus Severus Potter*

Severus couldn’t help but snort as he read the letter, a strange mixture of childish manipulation and genuine sentiment. Albus carefully signing the letter with his full name was a touch that didn’t go unnoticed by Severus, either.

For all that Albus was petulant about the situation, it certainly drove the point home for Severus in a way that Albus probably hadn’t expected. Severus had been so caught up with his research that he’d nearly forgotten where the research had started. He’d forgotten that the starting point had been Scorpius and the attempt on the boy’s life. He’d forgotten about Lily Potter and the dramatic family dynamic of her upcoming Sorting. And worst of all, he’d forgotten to ask after Albus and how his third year was progressing, which even to someone as misanthropic as Severus Snape seemed a poor way to repay all Albus had done for him, just as much as Albus’ his namesake had done in what seemed like another life.

Severus summoned a quill and a piece of parchment and set about writing a carefully worded response to Albus. The last thing he wanted to admit was that the boy’s worst fears about him were true, but it would be impossible for him not to admit that he felt almost absurdly better after spending the previous afternoon in bed, dozing for several hours following Harry’s careful application of salve to his legs.
Severus spent the majority of Sunday in bed as well, although Harry didn’t protest Severus’ decision to get out of bed to prepare their evening meal (Severus was certain that Harry was getting tired of takeaway). They ate in companionable silence, although after they finished eating, Harry gave Severus a stern lecture about how he was to eat all his meals and be back home before supper each evening and was to go to sleep at a reasonable hour. Severus surprised both of them by duly agreeing to Harry's terms, slightly surprised by the warmth he felt in his chest at the prospect of someone actually caring what happened to him.

Severus was struggling into his trousers on Monday morning when Harry suddenly ran into his room unannounced and exclaimed, “Ginny’s gone into labour!”

The rest of Monday was, unsurprisingly, chaos. Ginevra Malfoy had, like many Pureblood witches, decided on a home birth, which was attended by what seemed to be the entire contingent of the Weasley and Malfoy families. Even Narcissa managed to travel over from France (without her husband, who she mentioned was a high-ranking official in the French Ministry). She was effusive in her greeting of Severus before going to join several of the other women in the birthing room.

Severus had never been present at a birth, wizarding or otherwise, but he knew that many births in Pureblood families remained strictly traditional—that meant that only women were allowed in the birthing room and Draco, pale and nervous, was forced to wait outside with the rest of them.

“My thirteenth grandchild,” Arthur Weasley informed them all proudly to a pronounced eyeroll from all his sons who were present.

After the first hour, things became profoundly boring, although Draco became more and more high strung with each minute that passed. Hermione, Fleur, or George’s wife Angelina would come down periodically with updates, although the majority of the updates consisted of, “No change yet.”

The Malfoy house-elves served them lunch around noon, although Draco pushed his food around more than he actually ate it. Despite everything, Severus was surprised to see Harry go over to comfort Draco.

“Gin and the baby’ll be fine,” Harry assured his former classmate with a gentle hand on his shoulder. “This is Gin’s fourth time through it—she knows her way around this one.”

It was around five in the evening when Angelina came down with a grin. “Won’t be long now,” she informed them before going back up to Ginny. By the time it hit half-five Draco was pacing the room frantically, and none of them had the heart to chastise him for it.

Finally, just after six, Hermione rushed into the room, bushy hair flying behind her. “It’s a boy!” she announced, grinning as she stopped in front of Draco. “He’s perfect.”

The pronouncement led to a frenzy of hugging that Severus deliberately backed away from. Arthur hugged Draco. Draco hugged Harry. Hermione hugged Ron. George hugged Ron and Draco at the same time.

Only after the hugging abated was Draco allowed to go see his wife and newborn son; the women all came downstairs a few minutes later.

“We wanted to give them some privacy,” Molly Weasley informed the room, positively glowing as she dropped a kiss on her husband’s cheek. “They still won’t say a word about what they intend to name him.”

It was another twenty minutes before Draco returned downstairs to call them all up. Severus
reluctantly followed, his chair gliding beside Narcissa as she continued to fill Severus in on the recent happenings in her life. Severus felt strangely out of place—although a glance at Luna Scamander made him realize that not only was there another non-family member present, he was more than certainly not the strangest one about.

The bedroom in which Ginevra Malfoy had given birth was obscenely large—but it would have to be, Severus reflected, considering the sheer amount of people trying to occupy it at that moment. Even with all the children gone off to school, all the various Weasleys and their spouses made a good case for trying to occupy the entire large space.

Ginny was lying in the middle of a large bed, looking exhausted but happy with a small bundle slumbering in her arms. Severus, from his seated position, had to crane his neck to see inside the bundle of blankets, although all he could make out was pale skin and a tuft of red-blond hair.

Draco moved to Ginny’s side, sitting on the edge of the bed next to her with a grin the likes of which Severus had never seen on his face. He and Ginny exchanged a look, one that was absolutely filled with such soppy sentiment that Severus had to fight the urge to look away. After a long moment, Draco returned his attention to the assembled crowd.

“Everyone, I’d like to introduce you to our son—Lucius Arthur Malfoy,” Draco said, his tone proud and clear.

For a long moment, the air in the room was thick and still; Severus felt a stutter of his heart in his chest as he heard the name. Narcissa gasped, hand flying to cover her mouth, eyes glittering with tears. Molly Weasley surprised Severus by turning to Narcissa and pulling the slim woman into her arms. Arthur Weasley strode across the room and embraced Draco once again.

Severus was surprised when he felt a hand squeeze his shoulder; he looked up to see Harry looking down at him with a knowing expression. Severus sucked in a breath as he remembered standing in the Pensieve with Harry and watching the bolt of green light ricochet toward the elder Lucius Malfoy. And staring at the tiny bundle in Ginny’s arms, it struck Severus again how much of the world he’d missed.

---

Considering what poor shape Severus had been in by the end of the previous week, it was almost comical how good he was feeling when the next Friday rolled around. He acquiesced to Harry’s demands that he come home every evening, and Harry continued to regularly insist on applying the salve to Severus’ sore muscles. Combined with the increased rest and regular eating schedule, Severus was finding a rather surprising improvement to his condition, if not to the progress of his research.

The entire Weasley-Potter-Malfoy clan was granted a special pass from the Headmistress to visit the new baby that weekend, and Severus somehow found himself coerced into going to the Manor as well. Albus was willing to hand over the discovery he and Scorpius had made in the Hogwarts library the previous week, though only after giving Severus a very involved and obviously rehearsed lecture about “putting his health before his bloody research” which even Severus found slightly charming in its subdued brazenness.
Scorpius consented, after some prodding, to allow Severus to examine his scars again; it was slightly troubling to find that the dark magic in the scars was building once more, although it was nowhere near as strong as it had been when Scorpius had been struck down by pneumonia. The whole business was perplexing to say the least; the knowledge that Scorpius had been saved by his mother’s sacrifice did nothing to explain why he had been left with such a gruesome scar nor why the scar had been storing dark magic or how to stop it from doing so.

In a show of good faith to both Albus and Harry, Severus left the research Albus had brought until Monday. He spent most of the weekend resting, although he was (against his will) handed a tiny snuffling baby Lucius, who (to his abject horror) stopped crying immediately when put in his arms.

“We’ll have to get you to babysit, Severus,” Ginny said with a grin as she observed the interaction, and she wasn’t in the least dissuaded when Severus shot her a positively murderous look.

On Monday morning, Severus finally began searching through the materials Albus and Scorpius had left him; they centered upon a Japanese wizard called Koki Fukue. The source was incredibly vague, as was generally the case with English-language volumes about Asia. The man in question survived ten years following being struck by a curse that should have killed him near instantaneously. Unfortunately, the text they’d provided had little in the way of details about how he had survived or what kind of curse he’d been hit with, although it did mention that he’d been left with a rather horrific scar and been ill a good portion of the remainder of his life.

Searching through the Black library, unsurprisingly, brought him absolutely no information about the case. It was after two days of fruitless searching through even any blithe mentions of Japan before Severus remembered a Japanese wizard he’d met several years prior at a Potions convention. He had no idea what the man was doing now or even if he was still alive, but Severus took a chance and attempted to send him a letter anyway.

Several days passed before he received a response from the man; surprisingly, he was intrigued by the direction of Severus’ research (of which Severus had provided a very vague overview) and had asked his son, who worked at the Japanese Ministry, to look up the case records.

Japanese Ministry records showed a death of Fukue’s older brother several years before he’d been attacked, although there was no information about whether or not the eldest son had sacrificed his life for his brother’s. The materials Severus had been provided did detail, however, how he had a twin sister called Nozomi who had lived with him their whole lives. Neither had been married; the letter detailed how the two had slept on futons side by side their entire lives.

The case turned bizarre from that point forth; Koki Fukue had been attacked by a curse Severus had never heard of but was described as having an effect that mimicked the Japanese history of ritual suicide by disembowelment. Fukue had not been left disemboweled; instead, he’d suffered only a large, grotesque scar across his lower abdomen.

Several medicinal treatments were attempted on the scar but none could heal it, and Fukue was described as having been sickly for the remainder of his life. Still, the information further elaborated, Nozomi Fukue continued to attempt to treat the wound with various topical salves and liniments to no discernable effect.

The account of the man’s death was even more bizarre; his sister, it said, had died suddenly in an accident. The man became somewhat of a hermit and was found dead in his home barely a year later with no discernable cause.

Severus pondered over the case for several hours. It was, without a doubt, the most similar case to Scorpius’, but the lack of details made it difficult to draw parallels. Was it perhaps, Severus
wondered, dark magic in Koki Fukue’s scar that had killed him in his sister’s absence? And what was the reason he’d died scarcely a year after her death? Was it, in fact, her disappearance from his presence that caused his death?

If so, what was it about his sister’s presence that had kept him alive all those years? Had it been because of the blood connection between her and their brother who had provided the sacrifice (if, indeed, he had provided a sacrifice)? Had it been her constant tending to his scars over the years?

And that thought brought another frightening one—that the dark magic from Scorpius’ scars had dissipated almost completely after Albus had rubbed an unrelated salve on his chest, a salve that had been intended to clear his lungs. Much the way, Severus realized, he himself felt markedly better—almost unreasonably better—after Harry had rubbed a salve into his legs. A salve that, if Severus were honest with himself, he hadn’t even been entirely certain would be effective on him.

Severus frowned at the thought that was going through his mind. But if he was going to accept that sentiment—that love—could protect people and save lives, was it truly that much of a leap to believe that touch, in and of itself, could be healing? But that was unbelievable in the same thought—because as Harry had said previously, surely someone would have made the connection sooner. Holistic healers, Severus knew, had believed in the concept for centuries, perhaps even millennia—but could it be possible that true witches and wizards had ignored what was directly in front of them for thousands of years simply because it wasn’t obviously magic?

Severus frowned down at the letter he’d received, as if hoping his scowl would force it to reveal the answers to his questions.
Severus chose not to breach the topic with Harry when he returned home that evening. There were still too many questions swirling in his mind for him to want to expose the theory to the light of day—and when Severus woke the next morning, Harry was already gone from the house. It wasn’t a usual occurrence for Harry to leave before Severus even came downstairs, but Severus shrugged it off with a frown, moving to make himself breakfast before the *Daily Prophet* sitting on the table caught his attention.

It wasn’t the headline that captured Severus’ focus, not at first; it was a photograph of several familiar figures walking through the streets of Diagon Alley. The photograph, clearly several years old, depicted Draco and Ginny walking side by side with the three Potter children and Scorpius. A much younger Lily Potter clung to Draco’s hand as he led them through crowds.

The accompanying headline read, in almost unreasonably large font, “*LILY POTTER REALLY A MALFOY?!*”

With bated breath, Severus picked up the newspaper and began to read the accompanying article.

*On the undoubtedly joyous occasion of the birth of the first child of Draco and Ginevra Malfoy (formerly Ginevra Potter), questions have been raised by anonymous sources about the truth of the parentage of one Lily Luna Potter, Mrs. Malfoy’s third child with her former husband and Head Auror Harry Potter.*

*Rumors surrounding the rather quick nuptials between Ginevra Weasley and Draco Malfoy following the tragic murder of Malfoy’s late wife, Astoria Malfoy, speculated at the time that the relationship between the two may have begun while both Draco Malfoy and Ginevra Weasley were married to their previous spouses. Following Lily Potter’s recent entrance into Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, many have noticed a striking similarity between Draco Malfoy and Harry Potter’s youngest and only daughter.*

“She doesn’t look anything like Harry Potter!” claimed one fellow Hogwarts student who wishes to be kept anonymous.

*Indeed, there has been speculation that the Potters and Malfoys have attempted to keep Lily Potter out of the spotlight not to give her a normal childhood, as they claim, but to keep the public from noticing the uncanny resemblance between her and her stepfather. Could one of Harry Potter’s closest friends have been committing infidelity with his wife for years directly under his nose? For more about the tragic dissolution of the marriage between Harry Potter and his Hogwarts sweetheart Ginevra Weasley, see page 6.*

Severus frowned as he put down the paper. He’d expected that people would eventually notice the resemblance between Draco and his daughter, but he almost wanted to praise the Hogwarts pupils for how quickly they had accomplished it. That was, of course, if the whole business wasn’t exploiting an eleven-year-old girl who didn’t need her life or her parentage dragged through the mud.

Severus went to Grimmauld Place to continue his research, but he found that he couldn’t concentrate on it; he ended up returning to Harry’s home around lunchtime to see if the man had returned. He hadn’t, but there was a second *Prophet*, still rolled up, sitting on the kitchen table. Curious, Severus
moved over and unrolled it—and found it adorned with large print that the top that proudly declared, “SPECIAL EDITION.”

Under that, in still quite obscenely large letters, it read, “HARRY HOMOSEXUAL?”

Severus groaned audibly to himself. It spoke a great deal to the level of journalism at the Daily Prophet that the best they could come up with was “Harry Homosexual.” Still, Severus let his eyes scan down the page as he read.

In an emergency press conference held earlier today, Head Auror Harry Potter revealed that he is, in fact, a homosexual. According to Auror Potter’s statements, his marriage to former wife Ginevra Weasley (now Malfoy) began to disintegrate when he realized he had an attraction to men.

“I am to blame for what happened to my relationship with my wife—not Ginny and not Draco,” Auror Potter asserted to a crowd of assorted journalists. “But regardless of what happened, my daughter is still a child and doesn’t deserve to become part of a media circus. What happens or has happened in our family is no one’s business but our own.”

Some are acknowledging Auror Potter’s comments as tacit confirmation that the affair between his former wife and Draco Malfoy did indeed occur.

“It is irrelevant to me whether or not Lily shares my DNA,” Potter commented seriously. “And it shouldn’t matter to anyone else either. She is my daughter and I love her. That is all that matters.”

For the full text of Auror Potter’s press conference, see page 2.

Severus stared at the article for another few seconds after he’d finished reading the front page before, out of morbid curiosity, he turned to the inner portion of the small, four-page special edition of the Daily Prophet. The third page contained more speculation and a very detailed description and timeline of events, which Severus found himself oddly curious to read. He’d spent days looking through back issues of the Prophet while in hospital, but hadn’t made it more than a few years in, so he was woefully in the dark about the whole situation.

The article began with Harry’s rather spirited defense of the Malfoy family, telling the way he’d argued for Draco’s pardon for all crimes he’d committed because he was a minor and his part in making sure that Lucius got sentenced to only fifteen years (and was even, the article noted, able to ensure that those fifteen years included time served while awaiting trial). It then detailed the sudden and unbreakable closeness of the Potter, Weasley, and Malfoy families with several pictures of Draco and Harry together—almost clumsily staged. Severus wasn’t sure how anyone could possibly miss Harry’s rather blunt attempts to make sure he was seen in public with the Malfoy family.

Ginny and Harry, it said, married in 2002, a little over a year before their eldest son was born. Draco had married fellow Slytherin Astoria Greengrass in 2003, a mere month before the birth of James Potter. It was clear that these articles had been in the works for some time, because the Prophet had somehow managed to get their hands on a photograph of Harry, Ginny, and Draco on Draco’s wedding day, and Draco’s arm was very noticeably curled around a very pregnant Ginny Potter.

Severus rolled his eyes as he noticed the photo. They weren’t possibly going to suggest that James Potter wasn’t Harry’s son either, were they? Because James Potter was the spitting image of both his father and his grandfather, except that he’d inherited his mother’s brown eyes.
Albus and Scorpius, it turned out, were born barely a month apart in 2005—and there was another photo, obviously taken surreptitiously, of Ginny and Astoria pushing side-by-side baby carriages. The article made several rather rude assertions that Ginny continued her friendship with Astoria in order to throw the woman off about her affair with Astoria’s husband.

Astoria, it then noted, had a failed pregnancy in 2007 that required several days’ stay at St. Mungo’s. The article then went on to raise questions about whether Astoria’s inability to bear any more children may have been Draco’s motivation for setting his sights on the only daughter of the famously fertile Weasley clan.

Just reading the article was making Severus feel a bit ill. He wasn’t certain of the circumstances of Draco and Ginny’s affair, but he knew Draco well enough to know that Draco would never be motivated by the desire to produce more children—at least not out of wedlock. He was too well bred to be in favor of that.

Harry and Ginny’s divorce came in 2012, though the article stated that Harry made a point of telling the press that he and the entire Weasley family—including his ex-wife—intended to remain close friends. Severus knew what was coming then, the brutal murder of Astoria and Lucius Malfoy in December of 2013.

Ginny and Draco got married in a small ceremony in 2015—Severus snorted to himself as he read that, not surprised at the gossip that had sprung up after Draco had gotten remarried less than two years after the untimely death of his wife. The article ended with yet another mention of the birth of baby Lucius, who they asserted—correctly—was Draco and Ginny’s second child.

Severus sighed, shaking his head as he scanned over the next page, which included a graphical timeline of events as well as more photographs, including many stolen shots of young Lily through the years. Severus frowned at the paper—it was a sad thing that he’d been comatose for more than two decades and not only did the *Daily Prophet* still employ Rita Skeeter, they hadn’t made any attempt to become more reputable.

Severus busied himself for the remainder of the day on several small projects; he knew he wasn’t going to be able to focus on his research with all that was going through his mind at the moment. He managed to (fairly successfully) do several stretches and leg exercises from the book he’d purchased about physical therapy; whether his success was because of the increased rest and food or Harry’s rather persistent desire to administer salve every few days, Severus wasn’t certain.

He also brewed a batch of Calming Draught, mostly to have something fairly mindless to occupy his time (and partially because he figured there was a chance Harry might require one when he finally did return home). He also responded to several pieces of actually relevant correspondence and finally set about preparing dinner in the evening, although he was uncertain if Harry would return as per his usual schedule.

Harry finally did return through the Floo as Severus had left a stew simmering on the stove; with a loud groan, Harry lowered himself into one of the kitchen chairs and buried his face in his arms, barely sparing a glance at Severus. Severus pursed his lips thoughtfully.

“Would you prefer a Calming Draught or a Firewhiskey? I have it on good authority that both are available,” Severus said dryly when Harry made no sign of intending to move or speak. Harry groaned again but he did lift his head a fraction.

“Would ‘both’ be an acceptable answer?” he asked helplessly, and Severus simply shrugged, summoning a vial of the Calming Draught he’d prepared as well as two glasses and a bottle of Firewhiskey. He poured a generous amount into each glass and set Harry’s glass to persistently
nudge him on the arm until Harry looked up and took it.

Harry finally looked up—and he looked well and truly exhausted, his hair messier than usual, if that was even possible. He grabbed the glass and downed it in one long swallow before picking up the vial of Calming Draught, uncorking it, and downing that as well. After a second, he made a face.

“Should have done that in the opposite order, really,” he remarked to no one in particular, but Severus just poured him more Firewhiskey and slid the glass back over to him. Harry took it gratefully, although he didn’t move to drink it immediately. Instead, he spotted the two Prophets still sitting on the kitchen table and scoffed.

“Absolute trash,” he remarked bitterly before taking another, more careful, sip of his Firewhiskey. After a moment, he looked over at Severus with a sigh. “Well, go on then. I’m sure you have something to say after reading all of that.”

Severus raised an eyebrow at the other man. “Only that you’re truly an idiot if you didn’t expect this,” Severus commented seriously after a moment. “She looks just like Draco save her hair color. I spotted it after ten seconds from fifty yards away.”

Harry stared at Severus for a long moment, frowning slowly.

“You knew,” he stated after a long second, his voice low and even. Severus snorted.

“Of course I knew. My legs may no longer work properly, but there’s nothing wrong with my eyes or my mind.”

Harry frowned even more deeply, taking another drink of his Firewhiskey.

“Molly and Arthur didn’t know,” Harry put in after a moment, sighing. “Neither did most of the Weasleys, save Ron and Hermione. Needless to say, they aren’t too pleased by the deception.”

Severus chuckled. “And I’m sure you fell on your sword as usual and told them that it was all your idea to keep it a secret,” he commented idly.

“It was all my idea,” Harry protested after a moment before noticing Severus’ expression. “But…you already knew that.”

Severus nodded in confirmation.

“Draco said that you’d known Lily wasn’t yours since before she was even born.”

Harry nodded slowly.

“Ginny and I hadn’t been…intimate during the time when Lily was conceived,” Harry finally admitted after another dose of liquid courage. “It didn’t take much work to figure out what had happened. I suggested we keep it a secret because of the damage it would do to both their reputations. They agreed.”

Severus watched the other man for a long moment. “But you told the children. Or did they put things together themselves?”

Harry looked at Severus for a long moment, as if trying to puzzle him out.

“We told them, when we thought Lily was old enough to handle it,” he admitted finally. “So I take it you and Al have discussed this?”
Severus frowned. “Albus and I have discussed a great many things,” he conceded after a moment.
Including, Severus thought, Albus’ stubborn belief that Harry had feelings for Severus. Harry frowned at that comment but thankfully he didn’t press for details—because Severus wasn’t exactly keen to give them. Instead he sat back and sipped his Firewhiskey with a bitter expression.

“It’s amazing that with all the things I can do, I still can’t manage to get Rita Skeeter fired,” he commented idly after a moment, running his finger along the rim of his glass. “She’s a bloody menace, that’s what she is.”

“You’ll find no argument from me,” Severus said with a snort, turning to retrieve their dinner from the stovetop.

The next day brought a trip back to St. Mungo’s—Severus’ braces, they were informed, were finished and ready to be put to the test. Severus almost wanted to be nervous after the stern scolding he’d received on his previous visit, but he knew that he was doing better than he had been then. He was starting to suspect more and more strongly that his improvement was more to Harry's influence than it was the actual effect of his potion, but he wasn't ready to commit himself to that conclusion without further evidence. That simply wasn't in his nature.

But regardless of the reason, Severus knew that his legs were in better shape than they'd been since he’d woken; he could move them on command finally, and stretching, flexing, and bending them were ventures that were successful basically the majority of the time. He hadn't made the attempt to stand again—the last thing he wanted was to attempt it on his own and collapse again, perhaps having to call for Harry's aid—but they did hold his weight in the interim between his bed and his chair, as long as he used at least one of his hands to brace himself at all times. It eliminated the need for the Feather-light Charm—and although that would make the process infinitely easier, Severus took a certain amount of pride in the ability to do the simple physical task.

His hands, too, had improved; they only shook now when he spent too many consecutive hours lifting heavy books. His precision slicing seemed to have improved as well, although he'd tested it only on food, not yet on any kind of volatile or complex potion.

As such, Severus wasn't particularly nervous about his appointment to finally get his leg braces. If he were honest with himself, though, he was a bit nervous about whether or not he would actually be able to walk with them.

Healer Hyslop seemed to be in a much better mood than she had been the last time Severus had seen her; her diagnostic spells were met with much fewer frowns and dissatisfied glares than the last time. She reported with a half smile that Severus' condition had improved dramatically, but then Severus already knew that. She seemed confident that the braces would work for Severus.

The process of actually getting the braces on was a bit of a curious one; the magic used to create them was especially involved, and in some ways, completely fascinating. The braces were made to fit themselves magically around his legs; the first set of measurements they'd taken had mostly been to determine the length of his legs, since it was difficult to get the devices to conform in that direction, but Severus was led to understand that as long as they were within certain parameters, they would conform to the girth of his calves and thighs.
Healer Hyslop showed them how to put them on and the spell required to get them to conform themselves to his body shape, but overall the process was incredibly straightforward. The braces could even be worn over his trousers, in which case the metal would conform itself to their color (black, always black) in order to make them less conspicuous. The level of thought and care that had been put into their creation was astounding.

The crutches, on the other hand, were much less ingenious. They were simple forearm crutches, the same as Severus had seen used by disabled Muggles. Healer Hyslop had informed Severus that there were certain extra cushioning charms that had been applied to the crutches to make them easier and more comfortable to use, but other than that, there wasn't much of anything distinctly magical about them.

It was only with his leg braces on over his trousers, crutches leaning against the bed next to him that Severus got nervous, because when he tried to stand with them, there were two things that could happen; they could work well enough to allow him to support himself, or they could not. The latter was obviously a negative outcome; it meant all the work and time he'd put into trying to heal his injuries had been for naught. On the other hand, the former had its own complications; he'd seen vast improvement with just his various potion trials, but the quickest and most drastic improvement had come after Harry had insisted on applying the salve to his legs at regular intervals. If he'd truly improved enough to begin walking in such a short time, that brought credence to his tentative theory that touch from a loved one had healing powers in and of itself.

Brought credence to Albus' theory that Harry had feelings for Severus.

Severus forced himself to push that thought out of his mind for the time being and focus on the issue at hand. The issue of whether or not he'd be able to walk in the first place.

At the Healer's insistence, Severus first tried to stand with Harry's help, as Harry could react and catch him if he was too unsteady while his crutches, on the other hand, could not. Harry held onto nearly Severus' entire forearm as he slowly eased his legs to the floor, Harry helping to give him the leverage to stand.

For a few long seconds, Severus was sure that his legs were going to crumple beneath him—but at the same time, he could feel the magic imbued in the leg braces subtly supporting him. He felt slightly unsteady, but with Harry's hands on his arms, holding him up, he was almost surprised to find his legs supporting him. Harry grinned widely.

“I almost forgot how tall you are,” he remarked in a conspiratorial whisper, looking up at Severus with a smile. Severus, despite himself, found his lips twitching into something resembling a smile as well.

“How do you feel, Mr. Snape?” the Healer asked after a moment, and Severus looked over at her abruptly. He'd almost forgotten that she was even in the room.

“Dreadfully unsteady,” Severus answered truthfully. “But with the crutches, I believe perhaps I’ll manage.”

“Are you ready to test them out?”

Severus mulled over that for a moment; as Healer Hyslop had pointed out when they’d prepared to get Severus to stand, crutches couldn’t catch him if he were to fall. On the other hand, he was a wizard who was fairly competent in both wandless and wordless magic, the former of which would be helpful with both of his hands occupied. He gave the other two a very put-upon sigh.
“I suppose it can’t be put off forever,” he remarked dryly, partially to cover up his nervousness about the act. Still, he let Harry help him to sit back on the edge of the physician’s bed before the Healer handed him his crutches.

Getting up on his own was a bit of an ordeal; Severus could tell that Harry was itching to help him, but the younger man seemed to have found at least enough sense to know when to hold back. In the end, Severus found that the best way to accomplish the task was to brace his hand on the handle of one crutch while using the table to pull himself up with his other arm. After he seemed to be up, Harry handed him the second crutch and Severus found that with the various bits of spellwork that had been applied to them, standing was even a bit easier than it had been when Harry had been holding onto him.

Walking proved to be very tricky business; the Healer demonstrated how to use the crutches with a spare set, and although Severus got the gist of the process, he found that he was only able to take half a dozen steps or so before he tired. By the time he sat down again, his leg muscles were trembling in protest of the atypical level of activity. But it was progress, and Severus knew that Harry would insist on applying more salve to Severus’ muscles as soon as they returned home in order to ease the ache.

Severus wasn’t sure what was more frightening about that prospect—the fact that he was certain Harry would offer or the fact that a very significant part of him was looking forward to accepting.
Come Monday, Severus had an entirely new track to his research; he completely abandoned the idea of sacrificial protection for the time being and instead searched through various medical texts for any mentions of touch itself being healing. He hit a virtual goldmine of information as soon as he changed tactics, but what was most surprising about it was how often it had been attributed to other varying factors.

A witch with severe spell damage being released to her family’s care when the Healers determined they could do nothing more, only to have her improve dramatically as soon as she was home. The text cited the Healer’s belief that being surrounded by the familiar magics of her home had led to her improvement, but Severus suspected it was more than that.

A young wizard who had been struck with a mood-altering spell leading him to have violent outbursts that were only calmed when his sister held his hand; this had been attributed to the psychologically calming effect of the familiar presence, but the text also stated that simply being in the same room as his sister hadn’t been enough.

There were dozens of such stories if one only knew what to look for, and by mid-morning, Severus was more than convinced that his theory had a certain amount of merit. That Scorpius’ unwillingness to let his loved ones close—physically close—since his attack might have been precisely what led to the slow decline of his condition, the build up of dark magic in the curse scar. That it was a very real possibility that Scorpius allowing Albus to apply salve to his chest that day might have saved his life.

That Severus’ own isolation from Harry, and from the boys following their return to Hogwarts, had been the cause of the sudden decline in his own condition. That allowing Harry to apply salve to his injured legs might have been the biggest catalyst toward his returned ability to walk—however shakily that was.

Monday was also, consequently, Albus’ birthday; Severus hadn’t been told in time to get the boy a gift (not that he’d have known what to buy a newly-fourteen year old boy anyway), but he did send off a compilation of his various notes around midday. He knew that Albus would be quick enough to pick up on the implication—and although Severus was far from a romantic, he did wonder if an honest conversation between the two boys might mean that Albus would have a very happy birthday indeed.

To Scorpius, Severus sent a more detailed letter outlining his suspicions—telling the boy in no uncertain terms that allowing his loved ones to touch him, even just in casual hugs and touches, might make the difference between his prolonged health and seemingly never-ending bouts of illness. He did impress upon Scorpius that the theory was still in its infancy, although with each passing hour, Severus became more and more convinced of its validity.

No matter how absurd—how stupidly optimistic and romantic—it seemed that there was a good chance that simply experiencing physical touch from a loved one could have some sort of healing property. But no, it wasn’t all romance; beloved family members and friends seemed equally capable of providing this kind of benefit.

It still left the idea of Scorpius and his curse scar entirely up in the air, but in that sense, Harry had more than certainly been right about one thing—he and Scorpius Malfoy were the only two wizards ever known to have escaped the Killing Curse specifically, so there simply wasn’t a large enough data set to determine which reaction was typical. It was possible that Scorpius’ injuries were the standard response to such an event and that Harry had simply been lucky; reversely, it was possible
that Harry escaping with nothing more than a small scar (and, in an unrelated turn of events, a piece of the Dark Lord’s soul) was typical and Scorpius was simply incredibly unlucky.

Severus had a feeling that he might never find a satisfactory answer to that question—but he thought he might have found a satisfactory answer for how to keep Scorpius alive and healthy, which is what he had set out to do in the first place. He may have also found a way to keep himself alive and healthy—the problem was that it went against everything he’d ever thought or believed, his every survival instinct. To believe that someone honestly had feelings for him—not just a desire for a quick shag or a convenient arrangement but honest and real affection for him. And to let somebody get close to him.

Logically, Severus knew that he could shy away from both; he could continue in his current arrangement with Harry, receiving regular muscle rubs and refusing to acknowledge the reason behind his improvement until he improved enough that he no longer deemed such help necessary. Then he could get up and go wherever he wanted, could truly leave England even. Could find a new life free of all the terrible memories and the larger-than-life reputation he’d gotten as a war hero.

The problem was, Severus realized, that he no longer wanted to do any of that. He could foresee staying in Harry’s home indefinitely; the two of them had developed a comfortable routine that was mutually beneficial for both of them. Harry no longer irked Severus, at least not more than anyone did. The littlest things didn’t propel them into argument the way they had when Harry had been Severus’ student; they worked around each other in a complementary and comfortable way.

There was merit to something Albus had said to him weeks ago—that in some ways, Severus and Harry already were a couple save the fact that they weren’t shagging.

And suddenly, like Albus had said before, Severus wasn’t certain why not.

The wizarding public, it seemed, had a similar opinion. Severus found this out the next morning when he came down to the kitchen. He used his chair to make it down the stairs—they were still too difficult a proposition for him to consider, even with the crutches and the leg braces—but he managed to make it all the way into the kitchen on his crutches.

He mulled over the prospect of whether or not he’d be able to stand through the process of making breakfast when he caught Harry’s mortified and apologetic expression as Severus hobbled into the room.

“I am so sorry,” Harry said immediately, and Severus wasn’t sure what the other man was apologizing for until he caught sight of the copy of the Daily Prophet sitting on the kitchen table—along with the larger-than-ever headline:

“HARRY POTTER’S NEW FLAME,” the headline read in large (and ever-present bold) letters. Frowning, Severus lowered himself into the kitchen chair and began reading.

According to a confidential source, former Hogwarts Headmaster and Order of Merlin, First Class recipient Severus Snape has found very interesting lodgings since getting himself released from St. Mungo’s Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries. The
Daily Prophet can exclusively report that since his release from St. Mungo’s over two months ago, Severus Snape has been residing in Harry Potter’s home.

Famously a bachelor after divorcing his wife of ten years, Ginevra Malfoy (née Potter née Weasley) in 2012, Head Auror Potter has been living alone for the past seven years. Though sought after by many witches in the subsequent years, Head Auror Potter never again married, and he may have revealed the reason why not four days ago when he confessed that the reason for the dissolution of his marriage was his homosexuality.

Head Auror Potter spent many years following the Second Wizarding War advocating for the innocence and heroism of former Headmaster Snape. He also, famously, visited the comatose man in the hospital for years and christened his middle son Albus Severus. Could Head Auror Potter have been holding a torch for his former professor all these years while he was comatose? With former Headmaster Snape’s miraculous recovery, has Harry Potter been granted a second chance at love?

For more on this romantic tale, see page 5.

Severus stared down at the paper for a few long seconds, trying to reason out what he made of it. Harry was watching him silently but with a panicked expression, as if he expected Severus to blame him immediately.

Severus took in the other man's nervousness as Harry watched for his reaction to the article. After a long moment, he took pity on Harry and decided to put the other man out of his misery.

“It’s not your fault, Potter,” he said softly, giving the man what he hoped approximated for a kind look. He was, after all, incredibly out of practice when it came to kindness, whether in looks or otherwise. “You just announced your sexuality to the world at large. It’s wholly unsurprising that disreputable reporters at the Prophet would print such speculative drivel after that.”

Harry looked relieved at being absolved for responsibility for the story. Still, though, he nibbled his lower lip uncertainly for a moment before speaking.

“I just don't want you to think...” Harry trailed off after a moment, as if he wasn't sure precisely what he wanted to say. Severus frowned.

“That it’s true?” he prodded after a moment, raising an eyebrow at the other man. “Don't worry, Potter; I have no illusions about my value as a potential romantic partner.”

Harry looked even more startled at that.

“No, that's not what—”

He stopped himself after a moment, seemingly trying to collect his words into a more coherent form. That was another change about Harry since he'd become an adult; when he'd still been a teenager, he doubtlessly would have rushed forward with what he was saying without so much as a second thought, even if it would end in a giant mess. After taking a deep breath, he seemed to have decided on how to continue.

“I didn't want you to think that I've shared the fact that you're staying here with anyone outside my group of friends and family. And I didn't want you to think that I'd implied anything about our relationship that isn't true.”

Severus snorted. “Do you believe that I operate under the delusion that the Prophet needs actual facts or information in order to print a story, Potter?” he asked with a slight quirk of his lips to let the other
man know that he was making a joke. “Please, do give me more credit than *that.*”

Harry, on the whole, seemed relieved by Severus’ nonchalant reaction to the article; Severus himself was a bit surprised by how unfazed he was by it. But then, after there had already been articles about him, after seeing the rather abominable way they’d addressed rumors about young Lily Potter’s parentage, Severus wasn’t certain he could take anything written in the paper seriously. And he was fairly certain no one else was either.

But more than that, Severus had had time to consider the implications of him staying in Harry Potter’s home; he’d had time to consider the implications of a relationship between the two of them, what with all of Albus’ determination that it should happen. In fact, as much as he had been trying to avoid thinking about it, he’d done little besides consider the implications of a relationship between himself and Harry Potter, which in itself was a concept he would have considered entirely foreign before his unfortunate encounter with the Dark Lord’s snake.

This would, Severus reflected, be a quite opportune time to ask Harry if Albus’ suspicions, if the speculations of the article were true. It was, in Severus’ estimation, the only thing that made sense, that tied together Albus’ birth with Severus’ escape from the brink of death, Harry’s touch with Severus’ rather significant progress toward healing.

But Severus was far from a romantic; he had little faith that a conversation between himself and Harry would lead to the two of them throwing themselves into each other’s arms and living happily ever after. For one, Severus was entirely unaccustomed to relationships; the last time he’d been in anything resembling a relationship, it had been with Regulus Black, who had (regrettably) been dead for forty years. He’d also had a brief fling with Evan Rosier during their school days, but in the ensuing years, Severus’ love life had been nearly nonexistent—with the exception of some very infrequent one-nighters and some incidents among the Death Eaters that he’d rather not remember.

So Severus kept his mouth shut about the actual contents of the article, and it seemed that Harry was content to do so as well. They continued with their established routine, although Severus was continuing his research at that point more for the sake of figuring out if there was enough evidence to support any of his theories to be worth submitting to a magical journal.

Severus spent Saturday morning brewing more Pain-Relieving Potions; though his ability to walk and use his legs had improved by leaps and bounds, the actual act of doing so seemed to increase the pain in his muscles tenfold. He’d gone from barely using his legs at all to trying to walk increasingly long distances, albeit aided by various medical apparatuses, and there was no question that his body was feeling the strain.

Harry had brought him a sandwich around midday but had otherwise left him alone to brew. In fact, when Severus finally came up from the basement around two, he thought for a moment that Harry had gone out—that was until he heard a few familiar voices trailing in from outside. At first, Severus didn’t intend to eavesdrop—that was until he heard his name.

“Severus apparently wrote Scorpius and told him that his research is suggesting that the touch of a loved one has healing properties in and of itself,” Severus heard Harry remarking, and he pulled back the curtain and glanced outside, seeing Harry sitting at an outdoor table that had clearly been conjured for the occasion. Ron, Hermione and Ginny had all joined him, along with Draco, who was cradling a sleeping baby Lucius in his arms.

“Scorpius *did* improve rather dramatically after Severus scared him into letting Albus apply that salve,” Draco pointed out, lightly rocking back and forth as he held his slumbering son. “When he’d been seen by various other Healers, and nothing they had done was helping him.”
“It’s just…such an un-Snape-ish thing to believe,” Harry floundered after a pause, and Draco rolled his eyes.

“It’s a very ‘Snape-ish’ thing to believe if that’s what the evidence supports,” he remarked after a moment, his tone haughty and almost annoyed. “He’s a man of science, Harry—he believes what the evidence tells him, regardless of whether or not it upsets his delicate romantic, or in this case un-romantic, sensibilities.”

“It’s not a terribly far-fetched thought, in any case,” Hermione added helpfully after a moment. “After all, what is magic based on if not intention? When you introduce wandless and wordless magic, it’s nothing but intention and power. Isn’t that what it means to be a witch or wizard? To want something badly enough to make it happen? We’ve all seen and experienced bouts of spontaneous magic—Merlin, do you remember when Rosie changed her carrot cake to chocolate when she was six years old?”

Ron snickered loudly. “That’s my girl,” he said with a proud grin. Hermione gave her husband a look out of the corner of her eye but did not address the comment.

Harry glanced back and forth between Draco and Hermione before pursing his lips thoughtfully.

“I know you’re both right, but…it just doesn’t seem real. It seems like a fairy story,” he finally said.

This time, Hermione rolled her eyes.

“Like The Deathly Hallows were a fairy story? Or the Chamber of Secrets?”

Harry gave his friend a look. “Okay, I see your point,” he said. “But the implications to that are—”

“That you loved Severus right back to good health with your healing touch?” Ginny suggested with a mischievous look, waggling her eyebrows suggestively. Severus felt a lump in his throat at that—that neither had Harry’s group of friends missed the obvious conclusion to his findings. Which was precisely why he hadn’t mentioned it directly to Harry, although either Albus or Scorpius had eliminated the efficacy of that decision when they’d simply told Harry anyway.

“You see, and that is why I have a difficult time believing this,” Harry commented with a half-glare. “It simply sounds like a joke.”

“And just because it sounds like a joke, why should that mean it’s not true?” Hermione said logically. “Sometimes life simply is ridiculous, Harry.”

Harry released a self-deprecating chuckle. “Well that much I know,” he admitted finally. “I’m sharing a house with a man I’ve fancied for over two decades and I even have a legitimate medical reason to put my hands all over him on a very regular basis and…nothing.”

Severus’ heart stuttered in his chest for a moment at Harry’s pronouncement. It seemed that Albus’ theory about his father’s feelings for Severus had been totally on point—and on top of that, it was an open secret between Harry and his friends.

“Maybe you’re not his type?” Draco suggested with a smirk. “I always got the feeling that he fancied my Dad for awhile. And no one can compete with a Malfoy—you must know that by now.”

Ginny smacked her husband rather hard on the back of the head, though she was careful not to jostle her sleeping son. Draco glared at her, but she ignored him completely as she turned back to Harry.

“I know this is going to be a completely preposterous sounding idea, Harry, but have you ever considered simply telling Snape how you feel?” she suggested with a raised eyebrow. Harry glared
at her as well.

“He’s not a stupid man, Gin,” Harry said seriously. “If he’s figured that Scorpius’ improvement is because of the touch of someone who loves him, Severus has certainly figured out the source of his own improvement. If he hasn’t said anything, he’s either not ready or not interested. I’m not going to say something that may potentially drive him away while he’s still recovering—not if I might be integral to his recovery.”

“So noble, as always, Potter,” Draco remarked, his tone reminiscent of their schoolboy days. Lucius snuffled and shifted in his arms but didn’t wake. Ron gave his friend a serious look.

“I know you’re always trying to look out for others, but you do have to think about yourself sometimes, mate,” he said seriously. “We just don’t want you to forget that.”

Severus dropped the curtain quickly, backing his chair away from the window, as if that would allow him to forget what he’d heard.
The overheard conversation gave Severus a lot to think about. The idea of Harry having feelings for him, of course, had been on his mind ever since Albus had brought it up quite some time before, but Severus had never been able to believe that the suggestion was anything more than wishful thinking on Albus’ part. Albus had grown up idolizing Severus as his partial namesake, and Severus had figured that Albus considered a potential relationship between Severus and his father as a way to keep Severus close.

And although there was a good chance all that was true, it seemed that Albus hadn’t been off base in reading his father’s feelings, as farfetched as that idea seemed. That Harry Potter, of all people, had somehow developed some sort of infatuation with him, Severus Snape, was nearly unbelievable in itself, although Severus could almost make himself believe that the idealistic Potter boy could build him up into something he wasn’t while he was still unconscious and unable to contradict the boy’s silly flights of fancy. But the added fact that Harry hadn’t been put off once Severus had woken, once he remembered how unpleasant his former professor’s personality was, made the situation even more unfathomable.

But then again, if someone had told Severus before his unfortunate encounter with Nagini that he would be considering a relationship with James Potter’s son, he’d have believed them to be mad. And yet there he was, twenty-one lost years later, wondering how he had engendered the particular fortune of having a young, successful, and famous man fancy him—and at the same time, how he’d found himself unfortunate enough to be interested in a man who could frequently be the most stubborn, reckless and infuriating person he’d ever met.

And Harry was still reckless and stubborn; there was no doubt about that. On the other hand, Severus didn’t find Harry as infuriating as he once had. They still had differences of opinion, certainly—sometimes more extreme than others. Sometimes Harry was irrational and emotional as he had ever been, but no longer did he discount Severus’ differing opinion simply because it was Severus’.

In short, they complimented each other well; Severus was (sometimes) able to keep Harry from acting in a rash and irrational manner and Harry was (sometimes) able to remind Severus of the feelings of others and remind him that his physical wellbeing was important when Severus had spent so many years discounting it entirely. When he’d been playing the part of being in the Dark Lord’s service during the war, all that had mattered was that he was well enough and alert enough not to make a mistake, not to get himself discovered or killed. Harry and Albus and even Draco had reminded him that there was more to life than that, more than guilt and vengeance and bitterness.

Severus has known a life like that once—maybe. Then again, perhaps not. Even his years of friendship with Lily had been tainted by his home life, the darker bits of his school experience. So perhaps this was a first for him, and that was why he was having such a difficult time wrapping his mind around it.

So in the end, Severus decided to preserve the status quo, and true to what Harry had told his assembled friends, Harry did nothing to disrupt that. Harry spent weekdays (and the occasional weekend, as circumstances required) going to work, and Severus spent the days going back and forth between Grimmauld Place and the Malfoy Manor, looking up references and preparing an article to submit to the British Journal of Magical Medical Research. He had enough evidence to comfortably support the conclusion that the touch of a loved one had healing properties, possibly enhanced when other spellwork or potions were involved—even without including anything about his own case, or
Scorpius’. Severus had made the decision to sit on his findings about the sacrifice of loved ones producing protective magic; the topic was too complex, and Severus had the feeling that if he ever did want to publish an article about it, that article would be months, or perhaps even years, in the making.

In the meantime, Severus’ condition continued to improve, and Severus had the sneaking suspicion that Harry’s muscle rubs had more to do with his recovery than any of Severus’ own Potions expertise did. What it meant, though, was that Severus was well enough, his hands steady enough, to brew even his complex Nerve-Damage Potion on his own, although Harry vetoed Severus’ idea of brewing it through the night without sleep, and Severus surprised himself by accepting that.

Severus’ legs began to improve as well, although more slowly; part practice and part Muscle-Strengthening Potions, Severus was making it longer and longer distances on his crutches, having to rely on them less and less as time went on. He had bi-weekly checkups at St. Mungo’s, and after the second one Harry stopped accompanying him, apparently trusting Severus to be truthful with him about his condition. And Severus was.

They passed most of October in companionable coordination; Severus cooked dinner, Harry applied Severus’ salve, and once a week or so they had dinner with Ginny and Draco at the Manor. Baby Lucius truly had taken to Severus’, and Ginny took great delight in handing him over frequently, always ignoring Severus’ protests. Harry even managed to convince Severus to allow Ron and Hermione over for dinner, and to sit through it; Severus surprised himself by having a rather involved discussion about his research with Hermione while Harry and Ron hotly debated Quidditch statistics.

No mention was made of Severus returning to his home on Spinner’s End; in fact, no mention was made of Spinner’s End at all, but Severus had managed to cajole Albus into sending over several of his books from his rooms at Hogwarts, to which Albus still seemed to have unfettered access. As more and more of Severus’ things began to accumulate at Harry’s, it began to feel more and more as though he was actually living there instead simply staying.

As was in his nature, Severus resolutely refused to think about it.

Scorpius’ birthday came and went at the end of October (he was, of course, a Scorpio—Severus hesitated to think what atrocious name Draco may have given his son had he been born under another astrological sign) with no sign of any kind of returning illness. The boys were a bit cagey in their letters to Severus, but Scorpius did admit to Severus that he was being mindful of Severus’ findings and was trying to be less guarded around Albus and his group of close friends. At the very least, there were no more bouts of pneumonia, Dragon Pox (which Scorpius had reportedly contracted twice), Spattergroit (which he’d contracted at age ten), or even the common cold.

Draco seemed pleased and openly credited Severus for the change, although they didn’t discuss the reasoning behind it, likely at Harry’s request. Still, it would be difficult for them to avoid the topic once Severus’ research was published—and he was sure that it would be accepted, what with how painstakingly he’d supported and annotated his findings.

Severus decided he’d cross that bridge when he came to it, which of course meant that he simply took longer getting to the metaphorical bridge. He took frequent breaks in his research (because Harry insisted, Severus told himself) and dedicated a rather significant amount of time to practicing walking longer and longer distances. Even with all his procrastination, though, Severus reached a point at which he could put it off no longer and he sent off the article three days before Halloween for a hopeful December publication.

This left Severus with little to do, so he took advantage of the increased agility of his hands to pick up on some of his experimental Potions work, right where he had left off over twenty years prior.
There were many decisions to make about an entire slew of potions; his improvement to the Pain-Relieving Potion he could patent and publish without a second thought, as it had been perfectly ready more than two decades prior, and it was only his precarious position as a spy that had kept him from doing so. The results of the Nerve-Damage Potion were simply too tied up with Harry’s helpful intervention, which meant that the only way he could think about taking the potion further was to find a way to conduct further tests with it.

The most questionable was the potion that had woken him from a coma; any further steps on that potion would require credit paid to Albus and possibly even Scorpius, and Severus wasn’t certain Harry would want to lay that level of acclaim on his fourteen year old son, certainly not after the notoriety he’d suffered his entire life. On the other hand, keeping the findings to himself seemed cruel, if there was anyone who could be helped by them.

He decided to sit on that one, to discuss it with Albus and Harry both when the children returned for Christmas. He shelved the Nerve-Damage Potion for the time being while he dreamed up a proper scientific method to test it, and he wrote up and applied for a patent for his improved Pain-Relieving Potion before devoting himself to several other projects.

The patent came through surprisingly quickly; in his previous experience, a lot of bureaucracy and red tape was required, but apparently his newfound hero status was good for something. He had the patent by the end of November as well as a glowing (and only slightly exaggerated) review of his rather remarkable Potions talents in the *Prophet*. Severus didn’t even protest the celebratory dinner held in his honor at the Manor, attended by a surprisingly large contingent of the Weasley family plus Luna Scamander and her husband, who always managed to make an evening extra interesting.

Severus brought his chair to the gathering—he tended to avoid using his crutches in public, what with the undignified picture he gave while attempting to walk with them—but Molly Weasley commented, and rightly so, on how much the dexterity of his hands had improved.

“It’s quite remarkable,” she commented as Severus deftly cut through his steak, and Ron rounded that out with a comment of, “Especially considering you were as good as dead six months ago,” which earned him a smack from both his mother and his wife. Severus, on the other hand, was rather growing to appreciate Ron Weasley’s forthrightness.

All in all, contentment and good fortune were not things to which Severus had been accustomed in his life, but he found himself slowly getting used to them. Things took a turn for the even more bizarre when, at his checkup on the last day of November, Healer Hyslop suggested that he test out the idea of using only one crutch.

“You’re able to put more weight on your legs when you walk these days,” she observed as she watched him make a lap around the room. “Your left leg is in a little worse shape, it appears, so I’d recommend trying to use just your right crutch for short distances and see how it works out for you. If you get to a point where you feel comfortable, it’s possible we may be able to switch you to a cane full time.”

Severus was startled by her observation; he’d noticed himself relying less and less on the crutches, but at the same time, the idea of having nothing more than one long stick in his hand to keep him from falling seemed a rather extreme transition.

“You don’t believe it’s a little soon?”

The Healer simply shrugged.

“At this point, it’s only too soon if you think it’s too soon,” she explained to him after a moment. “I
see you twice a month, so you’re more aware of your body’s limitations than I am. Seeing you walk
now, it seems to be a feasible idea to me, but you would know better than I would.”

The Healer’s words kept Severus thinking as he returned home that afternoon. He wasn’t certain
precisely why, but he decided not to share the news with Harry or anyone else. Perhaps saying it out
loud would make the whole thing uncomfortably real—and incredibly more mortifying were he to
fail.

But come December, Severus began practicing in earnest with one crutch and he found, surprisingly,
that it wasn’t as frightening or as difficult as he imagined it might be. At first he kept his other crutch
in hand, just in case he were to fall, but after a few days, he abandoned even that, and the Healer’s
encouraging words about his ability to switch to a cane seemed somehow more feasible.

The British Journal of Magical Medical Research was published in mid-December with, as
expected, Severus’ article included. The ensuing days brought Severus a whole slew of meaningful
correspondence, of other scientific minds wanting to probe further into the implications of his
findings. Harry congratulated him on the publication but they still didn’t speak of its significance to
their own lives allowing them to continue to live on comfortable avoidance.

The children came home for the Christmas holidays only a few days later; Severus managed to cajole
Scorpius into letting Severus examine his scar, and Severus was pleased to find only trace amounts
of dark magic lingering around it. It would plague Severus for a long time, he knew, were he to
continue to be unable to find the exact cause behind Scorpius’ condition; finding its remedy, at least,
was a balm to ease that unpleasantness. Both boys remained coy about their relationship, but a single
smirk from Albus told Severus more than he needed to know.

Christmas Eve dawned cloudy and grey; Harry was up and out of the house early to meet at the
Manor, the typical gathering place being as it was the best locale to comfortably house the gigantic
Weasley-Potter-Malfoy clan. Harry stopped in on Severus in the morning, informing Severus he’d be
leaving.

“Feel free to drop by at whatever time you’d like,” he said with a grin as he popped his head down
into the basement where Severus was brewing. “But no later than mid-afternoon, or you’ll miss all
the food!”

Severus, as his interest in food was much less pronounced than Harry’s, waved a hand dismissively,
but Harry seemed to accept that as acquiescence. Little did Harry know that Albus had already
cajoled Severus into attending the gathering, although he hadn’t actually had to put forth much effort
to convince Severus.

And Albus’ cajoling aside, Severus had a plan in motion regarding the celebration.

As of yet, only Harry and his Healer had seen Severus walk with his crutches. It had been a
laborious and incredibly undignified process at first, Severus having to rely heavily on the supports to
keep himself upright. It was not a side of himself he wanted to show off; it was much easier—and
less mortifying overall—to glide gracefully in his chair.

But not a soul besides his Healer had seen him walk with his cane, which he’d rather optimistically
acquired a week and a half prior. It was unadorned and, of course, black—with what Healer Hyslop
referred to as a “derby handle,” whatever in Merlin’s name that actually was. It was also equipped
with the same sort of spells his crutches had been—to aid slightly in balance and cushion his
movements so he was much less likely to fall when confronted with an uneven surface.

Severus had practiced with it daily since he’d acquired it, even transfiguring the wall into a full-
length mirror to make sure he didn’t look too terribly ridiculous using it. In the end, Severus concluded that he didn’t present too embarrassing a picture walking with a cane; he didn’t cut the imposing figure that Lucius once had, but then Lucius had, in those years, carried his cane as an aristocratic accessory rather than out of necessity.

Something about the sentimentality of revealing his ability to walk with the cane at the holiday struck Severus as appropriate for the season. Severus didn’t understand the attitude himself, but he knew, for whatever reason, that the group cared about him. And he knew, with a kind of detached certainty, that it would please them to see him on his feet.

And so, confident that he could use his cane without making an utter fool of himself, Severus resolved to bring it instead of his chair to the Manor, although he made no mention of it in advance. Instead he waited until Harry left, wrapped up his potion, and made his way to shower.

The ability to stand had, in the preceding weeks, made everything much easier; he still had difficulty standing for long periods and sat for a good portion of his shower, but being able to stand with a grip on the bar he had transfigured from a misshapen hairpin (Lily’s, Harry informed him) and affixed to the wall made washing his thighs and backside a less monumental task.

Severus put slightly more care into his appearance than he might have were it an average day; he tied his hair back (which he rarely bothered with except on sporadic occasions when he was brewing something particularly volatile) and found a pair of dress robes Harry had obviously brought from Spinner’s End but that Severus had had no occasion to wear since he’d woken. They were rather plain (as was Severus’ preference, even when it came to dress robes), although they were a very dark green instead of his habitual black. Dumbledore had bought them for Severus one Christmas many years prior in an attempt to get him to vary his wardrobe choices, although he’d clearly known Severus well enough to know that a green that was fairly indistinguishable from black (except in certain lighting) was as far as Severus was willing to go. (This had been following several prior attempts the other man had made to buy Severus more…eccentric dress robes, none of which Severus had ever deigned to wear).

Sensible (black) shoes and leg braces later, Severus was ready to head to the Manor.

Standing in front of the fireplace and preparing to go through the Floo, however, Severus found himself feeling uncharacteristically nervous. He was banking on the group’s sentimentality—even Draco, many years and three children later, had given way to it—but Severus wasn’t certain he was prepared for oversentimentality.

Then again, he also wasn’t prepared for the (admittedly slim) possibility that they simply wouldn’t be moved at all. Not after all his hard work. And not after he had, somehow, come to care about the assembled group, even perhaps Ron Weasley. Not that he’d ever admit to that fact aloud.

Taking a deep breath, Severus finally steeled himself, grabbed a handful of Floo powder, and tossed it into the flames.

“Malfoy Manor,” he said clearly, and stepped into the Floo for the first time in quite a long time.

It was disconcerting to land at the other end. He made a kind of undignified stumble—and looked around quickly, happy to note that there was no one in the immediate vicinity to see his misstep. Severus had gotten so used to coming up from the front gate of the Manor that he’d forgotten what it was like to go through the Floo—that the only connected Floo in the Manor was one in a rather formal receiving room that was never inhabited by anyone, and apparently that fact hadn’t changed in over two decades.
Getting his bearings, Severus made his way toward the door—he could hear conversing voices echoing through the large halls, so he followed the sound slowly, carefully. The noises seemed to be centered around the large sitting room Draco preferred, so Severus made his way in that direction—until, in the foyer, he almost quite literally ran into a young Lily Potter, who was sprinting across the room. The moment she saw him, she stopped comically, almost as if someone had cast a Shield Charm in her path.

She looked him up and down with wide eyes and then, without a single word to Severus, yelled, “DAD!” at the top of her lungs.

Draco appeared at the top of the stairs holding his infant son at the same moment that Harry poked his head out of the sitting room.

“What?” they asked in unison, and Severus chuckled despite himself. There was a long, silent moment when both men regarded him—and Harry’s face broke into a huge smile.

After a moment, Ron Weasley’s head appeared behind Harry’s.

“Merlin’s beard!” he exclaimed after a beat. “Snape can walk!”

Things turned a little chaotic after that; everyone flooded into the foyer with varied gasps of surprise and congratulations. Albus hugged him—and surprisingly, so did Draco, after handing baby Lucius off to Scorpius to hold. All the while, Harry hung back and watched with a soft smile, as if understanding how little Severus actually wanted to be fussed over.

After everyone had gotten their questions out of the way and finally begun to drift toward the dining room to the promise of food, Severus finally met Harry’s eyes again. There was a warmth in them and something of a promise—a promise that told Severus that he wouldn’t be able to hold to his silence about his findings and his recovery much longer, would have to address the elephant in the room about Harry’s feelings—and about his own.

And for the first time, Severus felt that perhaps he was ready to do so.
It was after eleven by the time all the kids got settled into bed and most of the others had gone back to their respective homes to convince their own children to do the same. Ron and Hermione bade them their goodbyes, Hermione holding the hand of her sleepy daughter (Rose, Ravenclaw, Al and Scorpius’ year) while Ron carried their already sleeping son (Hugo, Gryffindor, Lily’s year) rather elegantly considering that at eleven, he was already as tall as Albus (who, like his father before him, was rather short-statured for his age).

With the kids up in their rooms, that left Harry, Severus, Draco, and Ginny in the sitting room where they’d all retired after dinner. A fire crackled in the grate and Ginny held her infant son, who had woken hungry and in need of a change sometime earlier. Draco had pulled out a rather nice (or more specifically, expensive) bottle of brandy, and he, Severus, and Harry were all nursing a glass (Ginny, still nursing Lucius, had given her husband a dirty look and gotten one of the house elves to bring her some pumpkin juice).

Lucius finally fell back asleep in Ginny’s arms a little before midnight and she got up to bring the boy back to bed. But before she left the room, she stopped by the door, turning around and smiling tiredly at the three of them.

“You two should stay the night,” she said with a kind look at Harry. “The kids will want you here in the morning Harry, for presents.”

Harry looked startled by his former wife’s proclamation, but after a second he nodded. He exchanged a look with Severus, and when Severus just shrugged, Harry smiled back at Ginny.

“Okay. Thanks, Gin,” he said, returning her smile. She gave him a sharp nod before turning her eyes toward Draco.

“Don’t stay up too long,” she said, giving her husband a meaningful look before turning around and disappearing out the door with their son in her arms. Without preamble, Draco downed the rest of his glass of brandy in a rather undignified manner and excused himself to follow her.

“Feel free to use any of the rooms you’d like!” Draco called over his shoulder on the way out. “I believe you both know your way around!”

Harry watched him go and made a face, taking a short sip of his own drink.

“Why do I get the feeling that there’s going to be another little Malfoy child within the next year?” he said with a frown before making a rather disgusted looking face and downing the rest of his glass as well. Severus watched him stand up a moment later, stretching to expel the stiffness in his body after the extended period of sitting. He turned to Severus slowly.

“I think I’ll turn in, too,” he informed Severus after a moment with a soft quirk of his lips. “In a bedroom far away from theirs, to be safe.”

Severus looked up at the other man and felt a moment of hesitation; he felt as though this was the time to say something, if there ever was one. He was back to walking again, albeit not unaided; the tangible proof of Harry’s feelings for him was right there in his nearly-healed body if not also in the conversation he’d overheard between Harry and the others.

Severus felt as though he’d come to a turning point, but the problem was that he wasn’t sure quite how to take the leap, to take the next step. Wasn’t even sure he’d be able to. Harry didn’t go yet,
sometimes, giving Severus time to contemplate as he continued to look down at Severus with a soft expression.

“I’m glad to see you walking again,” he said gently after a long pause, addressing the topic for the first time that day. He’d let some of the others fuss over Severus, but Harry himself had remained in the background, and the subject had quickly been forgotten as everyone had gotten caught up in the meal and the holiday festivities. Severus acknowledged his words with a short nod.

“I’m glad to see myself walking again as well,” Severus agreed with a carefully raised eyebrow. Harry chuckled softly.

“Well then… good night, Severus,” Harry said finally, turning to leave the room—and at that moment, it struck Severus again that he couldn’t simply let the night end with so much still left unsaid. The air was thick and seemed almost to tingle with anticipation; Severus knew that if he said nothing, Harry would allow them to continue as they had been, allow Severus to avoid whatever it was between them. He knew it was up to him to address the issue lest Harry leave it unspoken forever.

Although Severus imagined that Albus, at least, wouldn’t let things stand as they were, not for much longer.

“Harry, wait,” Severus found himself saying after a moment—and Harry stopped, startled, and turned around to look at Severus with a curious expression, much in the way one might look at a rare magical creature one had never seen before.

Severus had surprised even himself when he’d spoken; he’d only half-intended to actually call Harry back, and once he had, he found he was at a loss for words.

He’d evidently remained silent too long, Severus realized as Harry eyed him with a questioning expression. Severus steeled himself and finally spoke.

“We should talk,” he forced out finally, and Harry raised an eyebrow at him.

“Words I never thought you’d say to me,” he said with a soft smile, but all the same he returned to the sofa, sitting beside Severus once more. He looked at Severus expectantly, and Severus supposed he shouldn’t be surprised by that; after all, he was the one who suggested they talk, but still Severus remained totally unsure what to say. Harry didn’t seem to mind; he waited patiently for Severus to decide on his words.

Finally, Severus decided to take a page out of the Gryffindor playbook—decided that simply jumping right in was the correct option. He took a deep breath and spoke.

“I know that the reason I’ve improved so much, the reason I’m even alive right now, is because of you. I simply can’t understand why.”

Harry gave him a strange look, half sad and half sympathetic.

“You understand why, Severus,” Harry told him seriously. “You wrote a rather lengthy article all about it.”

Severus shook his head, pursing his lips thoughtfully. His words weren’t coming out quite as eloquently as he might have hoped.

“I understand… that you have feelings for me,” Severus acknowledged after a moment, and to his credit, Harry didn’t appear surprised to hear Severus come to that conclusion. “But I can’t understand
why you would.”

At that, Harry’s expression suddenly turned sad.

“Do you truly think so little of yourself?” he asked quietly, seeming totally unabashed at confronting the truth about his feelings. Severus gave him a meaningful look.

“You once thought the same,” Severus reminded him pointedly, and Harry just shrugged.

“I saw what you showed me,” Harry acknowledged after a moment, softly. “I saw an angry, bitter man who hated my father and me by extension. I didn’t see the brilliant, compassionate, brave, and utterly determined man beneath all that bitterness. And by the time I did, you were half a step from death’s door.”

Severus lowered his gaze with a soft frown. “You exaggerate my merits, Potter, and diminish my faults,” he said seriously, looking up to meet Harry once more. “Regardless of what else I am, I am still an angry, bitter man. And I still hate your father.”

Harry chuckled softly at that.

“Noted,” he said with a lopsided grin. “But I don’t think you are. You’re sarcastic, stubborn, quick tempered—but you aren’t bitter or angry, at least not any longer. You let a Weasley hand over a tiny screaming redheaded infant, and you don’t even complain. You hold him and comfort him until he stops crying. You take care of Scorpius, mentor Al…no bitter and angry man could do all that. I’m fairly certain of that, Severus.”

Severus shook his head in disbelief.

“You’re simply mad, Potter,” he proclaimed after a moment. “Have you looked at me?”

Harry’s grin widened at that.

“I’ve done nothing but look at you, Severus, for over twenty years,” he affirmed slowly. “I’ve seen you at your very worst—when you were so close to death that you nearly looked like a corpse already…up and walking and alive is a vast improvement, I must say.”

Severus couldn't help but roll his eyes.

“There will be no more improvement than this, I’m afraid,” Severus mentioned, gesturing at his face absently. Harry snorted.

“Are you trying to proposition me or dissuade me, Severus?” he asked with a laugh. Severus frowned at the reaction.

“I’m not entirely sure myself, to be honest.”

That just made Harry laugh even harder, running his hand through his already-mussed hair. He took a moment to calm himself, and when he finally did, he gave Severus a meaningful look.

“In ten seconds, I’m going to kiss you,” Harry said as he held Severus’ gaze, suddenly deadly serious. “I’m giving you adequate warning in case I’m reading this all wrong and you’d like to put a stop to this before it begins.”

Severus felt his breath catch in his throat at the words, something he wasn’t certain he’d felt since he’d been a Hogwarts student. His heart jolted in his chest—and the last thing he wanted was to tell
Harry not to follow through with his promise. Even if he wasn’t certain what Harry saw in him, even if he couldn’t even fathom why Harry would want him...he didn’t want to tell Harry to stop.

So he didn’t.

Harry leaned in finally and cupped the edge of Severus’ jaw for a moment, looking into his eyes as he presumably gave Severus the chance to change his mind. Staring into those familiar green eyes, Severus found himself struck by how similar this moment was to those last moments in the Shrieking Shack, before he’d passed out, not to open his eyes again for more than twenty years.

But that thought, and all others, fled from his head the moment that Harry leaned in and kissed him.

Harry’s lips were surprisingly soft, and the kiss was gentle but firm. Severus hesitated for a moment, unable to even recall the last time he’d kissed someone, but Harry clearly knew what he was doing, taking charge of the kiss easily. Severus let him, let Harry dip his head back a little as his hand slid from Severus’ cheek to cradle the back of his neck instead. Harry’s tongue slipped out tentatively, as if testing the boundaries—and seemingly encouraged by Severus’ acquiescence, Harry straddled Severus’ lap a moment later, kissing him even more thoroughly.

The kiss was different than Severus might have expected; he’d expected Harry to be tame, perhaps even gentle, but after the tentative first moments, Harry’s kiss was tantalizingly aggressive. He took Severus’ lower lip between his teeth and tugged slightly, sucking on the trapped mound of flesh. Severus couldn’t help but moan softly at that, finally reaching his hand up and gripping Harry’s arm tightly. After a long moment, Harry pulled back, breathless, resting his forehead against Severus’ for a moment.

“I’m not...hurting you, am I?” Harry inquired after a moment, concerned. Severus was, for a moment, perplexed; while the kiss and the introduction of teeth had been rather forceful, it was nowhere near the point of causing pain—and Severus knew pain, having taken a handful of rather sadistic lovers in the past.

But Harry leaned backward after a moment, eyes flicking down at Severus’ lap—and Severus saw, then, how careful Harry was being to keep his weight off of Severus, to try to keep from unintentionally injuring him. Severus shook his head slowly.

“You’re not hurting me,” Severus affirmed slowly, still barely able to believe what was transpiring. He’d had weeks, months even, to prepare himself for this possibility, but still it seemed too farfetched to be truth. Harry sucked in a long breath.

“Merlin, I want...,” he trailed off helplessly, as if unsure of what to say. Severus arched an eyebrow at him.

“Want what, Harry?” he challenged, his voice low with arousal. Severus was surprised by how aroused he already was, from nothing more than a mere kiss.

Harry groaned and closed his eyes, taking another deep breath. When he opened them, his emerald green irises had been almost overtaken by his blown out pupils.

“Everything,” Harry said greedily after a moment, still half breathless. “I don’t even know where to start. And I don’t know what I can do without hurting you.”

Severus ran his fingers absently along Harry’s arm, still feeling strange about the fact that suddenly he could.

“Everything hurts me, Harry. But I’ve had two glasses of liquor and a dose of Pain-Relieving Potion,
“so you may as well cease worrying about it,” Severus surprised himself by saying a moment later. Harry just winced at that.

“Well then I want to know what will hurt you the least,” Harry amended after a moment, and Severus frowned.

“A bed may be a step in the right direction.”

A moment later, Severus found himself atop a bed in one of the Manor’s many bedrooms, Harry having Apparated them both without preamble. The bedroom was spacious, with deep burgundy sheets and more pillows than was strictly appropriate. The grate in the fireplace was stocked with wood but unlit; Harry waved his hand absently in that direction and a flame roared to life before leaning in to kiss Severus once more.

Severus had seen the casual way Harry was able to use wandless, wordless magic before—had seen it with Rita Skeeter, the way he’d cast a wordless Silencio over his shoulder as he was walking away, barely paying her any mind whatsoever. It struck him that if the Dark Lord had been confronted with this Harry Potter—the Harry Potter who had finally discovered how to channel all the raw power he’d been born with—he might have been frightened for more reasons than just the prophecy.

Harry kissed Severus thoroughly for another few minutes before he began fumbling with the buttons at Severus’ neck. After a long, frustrated moment, he pulled back.

“Bloody—Severus, if you are having second thoughts, now would be the time to voice them,” Harry said carefully, looking down at the other man with a meaningful expression. But considering their positions, Severus was fairly certain Harry could feel his persistent erection the same way he could feel Harry’s.

“I believe we’re past that point, don’t you?” Severus posited after a moment. After all, he had been the one to suggest they move to the bedroom.

“Okay,” Harry said breathily, and seconds later, Severus felt his leg braces release as Harry presumably used the incantation to disengage them.

And then Severus found himself wholly, completely nude.

He blinked, looking down at his own body and then up at Harry’s face one more.

“I hope you know to where you banished those,” he remarked idly after a moment, too surprised to be embarrassed by suddenly being so exposed. Harry looked sheepish.

“Just to the next room,” he assured Severus quietly, although he looked a little troubled. “Or perhaps to another dimension. In wanting you naked, I may have gotten a little overzealous.”


“So do I,” Harry said with a grin before lowering his head, kissing his way down Severus’ neck. Severus almost expected a long seduction from Harry, but it was clear that the man was impatient; it didn’t take him long to reach his intended target.

“Jesus,” Harry breathed when his face was level with Severus’ prick. Settled back on his knees between Severus’ spread legs, Harry appeared positively hungry as he gazed down at it, and something about the distinctly Muggle curse was somehow endearing. Harry reached down, experimentally stroking Severus’ length for a second, and Severus groaned, instinctively arching into
the touch.

And a second later, Harry leaned down and swallowed Severus whole—no shame, no hesitation.

Severus couldn’t help but groan at the unexpected sensation; like with most things, it seemed that Harry dived in head first, so to speak, and that wasn’t something Severus was particularly prepared for. He’d never had lovers in the past that he’d particularly describe as *generous*, although if the moans Harry released around his prick were any indication, the act wasn’t entirely for Severus’ benefit.

Severus refused to let his eyes slip closed, no matter how delightful the sensations became; he wanted to see every moment, watch the mussed head of dark hair descend into his lap. It was deliciously dirty and simply added to the intensity of the sensation, seeing Harry’s swollen pink lips wrapped around his cock.

After a long minute luxuriating in the sensations, Severus wrapped his fingers in Harry’s unruly locks; he gave them a tug, insistent but not violent, and Harry lifted his head, releasing Severus’ prick with an obscene *pop*. His lips were swollen and pink, his hair even more mussed than ever, and what made the whole situation even more bizarre was that he was still *fully clothed*.

Severus took advantage of that fact, grasping at the front of Harry’s garish jumper (his previous year’s gift from Molly Weasley) and pulling Harry up, capturing his mouth once more. Severus kissed Harry for another few long moments, taking control this time, purposely grinding himself against the man above him.

“You’re wearing entirely too much clothing, Mr. Potter,” Severus said as he pulled away, and Harry groaned deeply, seemingly affected by Severus’ use of his last name at that moment. Severus didn’t know what might be going through the other man’s head—imagining Severus taking advantage during detention, perhaps?—but he didn’t have the time to contemplate the matter any further, because mere moments later Harry was also suddenly, inextricably nude.

The casual display of power again struck Severus; Severus himself was competent at both wandless and wordless spells, but Harry made them seem as nothing more than an afterthought. It struck Severus once more how much he had missed over the years he’d been unconscious, how much Harry had matured into a competent adult.

A competent adult, it turned out, with a rather impressive prick.

Severus wrapped his fingers around it slowly, giving it a long stroke—and Harry surprised him by actually *whimpering*, burying his face helplessly against the crook of Severus’ shoulder. Severus found himself pleased by the other man’s responsiveness; it was so incongruous with the competent Head Auror, and the contrast was striking.

Severus continued to stroke the other man for a long few moments—but Harry did decide to make himself useful, kissing and licking along the side of Severus’ neck. It was a peculiar feeling, Harry’s tongue running along unmarred skin and scar tissue both, and the way he didn’t ignore it, didn’t avoid it, sent a shiver down Severus’ spine.

“How should we do this?” Harry asked breathily against his ear after a few minutes of this, Severus still stroking his cock with languid, unhurried strokes. It took a long moment for the meaning of the inquiry to strike Severus—and when it did, he was struck by how mundane the question was.

After a long moment, he pushed Harry away slowly—and Harry moved back onto his haunches, frowning, until Severus turned over purposefully onto his stomach. Harry sucked in a long breath.
“Are you sure, Severus?” he inquired uncertainly. Severus cursed under his breath.

“Oh honestly—”

But Harry stopped Severus’ tirade before it could truly get going.

“I just mean…I thought you would want to be in charge,” Harry clarified after a moment, running a gentle hand down the long expanse of Severus’ back. It amazed Severus that Harry could even still want him in such a moment, feeling Harry’s fingers tracing over his pale skin, his rather prominent ribs.

“If you truly believe that being on top means being ‘in charge,’ Mr. Potter, then you have a lot to learn about intercourse.”

Harry groaned, then cursed several times under his breath—and yes, Severus was certain that referring to Harry by his old Hogwarts-era moniker for the boy was a deliciously good decision. Not in charge, indeed.

Harry Accio’d one of the rather obscene amount of pillows from the head of the large bed—so large that even at six-plus feet in height, Severus could stretch out fully without coming near them. Understanding Harry’s intention, Severus lifted his hips, allowing Harry to slide the cushion beneath them.

The old-fashioned clock on the mantle chimed suddenly, making Harry jump; it was midnight. After a second, he laughed nervously, and then a pair of suddenly lubricated fingers brushed against Severus’ entrance.

Wandless, wordless lubrication spells—well, that was certainly something Severus had never had cause to require, or contemplate.

Severus tried to force himself to relax, but his instinctual inclination to tense up was too difficult to resist. His thigh cramped for a second in protest, quivering angrily; Harry’s other hand pressed against it, massaging the protesting muscle gently.

Severus’ body didn’t relax into it as he expected; he had likely experienced every type of lovemaking that could be had between two men, but he couldn’t easily remember the last time he had had intercourse, let alone been penetrated. Add to that twenty-one years of unconsciousness, and his body was far from accustomed to the intrusion.

After a long moment, Harry pulled back, though one of his hands remained resting on the back of Severus’ thigh.

“You’re too tense for this,” Harry murmured against the skin of his lower back, massaging his thigh soothingly. It was, Severus reflected, an odd parody of the care Harry had been applying for the preceding months—and it was perhaps that established ease that finally allowed Severus to settle in stages. Harry seemed to notice the subtle change, because he focused his attentions then on the practiced motions of massaging Severus’ thighs.

Severus took a deep breath, luxuriating in the familiar feeling. It was different without the tingling effect of the salve Harry routinely applied, but the familiarity of the sensation was soothing, almost absurdly so. After a long few minutes, Severus found himself drifting, almost forgetting what was meant to transpire—and then, suddenly, a slick finger entered him with no apparent resistance.

It brought Severus’ attention back to his almost-forgotten arousal; his prick, which had softened slightly, twitched in response as he arched back into the sensation.
“So…fucking…sexy,” Harry murmured in a strangely gravelly voice, and Severus didn’t bother to contradict him on that. After all, how could Severus fault Harry for having such deplorable taste as to find him attractive? There was no way to correct that kind of bad taste.

Severus had never been one to talk during sex, at least not in this particular position—so he let his actions speak for him, shifting gently against the movements of Harry’s hand. He didn’t tense when Harry pulled back to add a second finger, although a certain part of his anatomy suddenly began to become much less relaxed.

Harry was careful with his preparation, although thankfully he didn’t ask again if Severus was okay, apparently trusting the other man to tell him the truth if he was in pain. A long few minutes later, Harry slowly removed his fingers and a much larger, blunt pressure appeared against Severus’ entrance.

Harry paused there for a few moments, likely to give Severus the time to object—but Severus didn’t, and finally, Harry’s length slipped slowly inside him.

Severus buried his face in his arm for a moment, trying to muffle the unconscious noise that he made when the other man breached him. Harry paused for a long moment before beginning to move in short, slow thrusts, waiting for Severus’ body to open completely to him. Finally, he was seated fully inside Severus, buried to the hilt—and it was then that he began to move in earnest with long, purposeful strokes.

The sensation of being so utterly filled was a long forgotten one for Severus; there was a burn of discomfort but also a tantalizing wave of pleasure each time Harry thrust into him. Severus felt Harry’s fingers at the base of his neck where he, with surprising gentleness, removed the elastic Severus had used to tie back his hair in a rare attempt to appear vaguely presentable. One hand rested lightly on Severus’ hip as the other carded through his now-loose hair, and Severus almost purred at the sensation, the discomfort of his injured legs almost forgotten.

When Harry’s thrusts began to become less coordinated, more ragged, he gripped Severus’ hip a little tighter, moving Severus up off of the cushion beneath him just enough to grasp a suddenly slick hand around Severus’ cock, stroking it in time with his movements. Severus sighed, arching into the movement, feeling his pleasure building slowly toward its apex.

It was clear in his jerky, uncoordinated movements that Harry was trying to hold himself back for Severus’ benefit; after a long moment, Harry suddenly stilled inside him, though he continued to jerk Severus’ prick with sure movements. He leaned forward, pressing himself against Severus’ sweat-slicked back before kissing lightly along his scarred shoulder and neck.

What he was trying to do was obvious, so Severus tried to let go and just focus on the sensation of Harry’s slick hand along his prick, let himself luxuriate into the sensation. Harry’s breathing was ragged in his ear, obviously engaging in a fight with himself not to thrust into Severus’ willing body.

After a long minute, Severus felt himself getting close; he rolled his hips back into Harry’s, and Harry, seeming to get the message, released a relieved-sounding laugh before beginning to thrust once more, still stroking Severus with purposeful movements of his hand.

Severus felt himself going over the edge first; he shuddered and jerked against Harry’s hand, breathing harshly into the crook of his own arm. Harry followed him over the edge with an almost relieved whimper; burying his face against of Severus’ shoulder once more as he rode out his climax.

Harry lay there for a long moment, trying to catch his breath, before his ever-present concern for Severus seemed to kick in; he pulled out slowly and fell onto his back next to the other man, taking
his weight off of Severus’ body. Severus did the same, gingerly; he felt a tingle as Harry spelt both them and the bedding clean.

The two of them lay there side by side for a few long seconds, trying to catch their breaths; both of their bodies were slick with sweat, Harry’s more so than Severus’. After a long pause, Harry swiped his sweat-slicked fringe off of his forehead, glancing at Severus out of the corner of his eyes with an appraising expression.

“Did I hurt you? Do you need your salve?” Harry asked quietly, carefully, as he searched Severus’ face for signs of discomfort. And Severus did hurt rather more than was average, but he was fairly certain that the discomfort would abate with a few hours’ rest in a comfortable bed. He frowned at the other man.

“Harry, you are permitted to occasionally stop being my caretaker and start being my—”

Severus stopped suddenly, unsure of what he wanted to say. Harry grinned widely at the other man’s obvious discomfort.

“Your what?” he prodded after a moment with a huge, self-satisfied smirk.

“My…lover,” Severus provided finally—and if that were possible, Harry’s grin widened even further. He leaned down and settled himself against Severus’ shoulder, tracing his finger gently against the other man’s chest. Severus had never been one to snuggle, but he found that Harry’s smaller frame fit against his in a way that was unobtrusive enough not to bother him.

“I can do that,” Harry murmured against Severus’ skin, still smiling.
Severus woke rather abruptly the next morning to the sound of a heavy door opening and a familiar voice.

“Dad!” the voice yelled loudly, and Severus opened his eyes immediately, searching the room with deliberate focus, his wartime paranoia still not yet forgotten. His eyes immediately fell on Albus in the doorway, who had stopped there with a half-shocked, half-pleased smile on his face. Harry woke more slowly next to Severus; he groaned and rolled over, the two of them having gravitated apart during the night as they slept. After a long moment, Albus’ expression turned into a wide grin, the same one his father had sported the previous night.

“Never mind!” he called, turning on heel and striding out of the room. “Take your time!” he called over his shoulder before slamming the door closed behind him.

Harry groaned again and finally opened his eyes, blinking owlishly at Severus. It seemed to take a moment for Harry to figure out where he was; when he finally did, he groaned and buried his face in one of the bed’s innumerable pillows.

“Did I dream it, or did we have sex? And then my son wandered in and saw us in bed together?” Severus snorted.

“Your son has been conspiring to get us together—likely since before I was even conscious,” he murmured, stretching his limbs experimentally. He didn’t feel nearly as sore as he would have expected following their nighttime activities—not, indeed, any sorer than he was on any other morning.

Harry murmured something against his pillow that sounded suspiciously like, “Bloody sneaky Slytherins.” After a long moment, he turned onto his side and looked at Severus experimentally. He blinked again, as if trying to focus, before Severus rolled his eyes and reached over to retrieve Harry’s glasses from the nightstand. Harry took them with a grateful smile.

“How do you feel?” he asked carefully after a moment, obviously having become aware of the fact that Severus was sensitive to questions of his health. Severus sighed, resigning himself to the interrogation.

“Surprisingly well,” he finally admitted, and Harry grinned wolfishly at that.

“Well if touch itself can be healing, maybe, erm…exchanging fluids is a step better,” he provided jokingly. He clearly expected Severus to be amused by the words, but Severus simply raised an eyebrow at Harry.

“In some cases, that idea might have merit,” he said seriously. “Not in this case, however.”

Harry looked startled by the proclamation.

“…what?” he asked disbelievingly. Severus frowned at the other man.

“Sex magic, Potter. Surely you’ve heard of it.”
Harry’s eyes widened almost comically. “No,” he insisted, looking almost scandalized that such a thing could exist. It was all Severus could do to keep from rolling his eyes.

“Only you could manage to exist in the wizarding world for nearly three decades without hearing of sex magic,” he drawled after a pause. Harry, to his credit, looked sheepish.

“I guess I’m a prude,” he murmured, flushing slightly. Severus shook his head at the other man, but when Harry leaned in to kiss him a moment later, Severus allowed it, allowed Harry to swing his leg over his body and straddle Severus’ hips as he devoured his mouth thoroughly. The kiss lacked the urgency of the previous night; it was slow but still not gentle, Harry pleasantly aggressive as he took his time plundering Severus’ mouth.

Harry rocked his hips into Severus’, their pricks sliding against each other with delicious friction. Harry wrapped his hands around both their erections, barely able to get his small hands fully around their combined girth. Harry groaned into Severus’ mouth as he thrust into his own hand, his prick sliding against Severus’.

After a long moment, he pulled back to catch his breath.

“Well, Al did say to take our time, so no one will be expecting us downstairs for awhile,” Harry said with a conspiratorial grin, and Severus shrugged, cupping the back of Harry’s head and pulling him back down to continue the kiss.

An orgasm for each of them, a shared shower, and some uncomfortable searching for necessary items later—Severus’ cane had been left in the sitting room and they had to Apparate down to get it—Harry and Severus were downstairs, not having missed the Christmas festivities. Ginny had, apparently, insisted on waiting for Harry and Severus before the kids could begin opening presents, and Severus might have felt guilty about that were it not for the fact that she then handed him a rather dazed-looking nearly four-month old.

Baby Lucius was left in a small baby chair as they all ate breakfast, the kids obviously brimming with excitement about opening their presents. Draco and Harry exchanged a sinister expression and took their sweet time finishing their meals despite the kids giving them hopeful—and impatient—looks for the entire duration.

It was nearly an hour after Harry and Severus had come down that they all retired to the room with the large, elaborately decorated tree and began opening presents. Baby Lucius was left in a small bassinet Draco levitated into the corner, sleeping soundly as the older kids exclaimed excitedly about all their gifts.

Severus was surprised to find a handful of presents for him; Narcissa sent him a rather obscure volume on Potions for which he’d spent years searching, the Granger-Weasleys had given him two rather large vials of rare dragon’s blood (acquired from Charlie Weasley no doubt), and even Neville Longbottom and his wife had sent a rather large collection of medicinal herbs. Severus had sent a gift to Narcissa, but he felt guilty for a moment that he hadn’t thought to arrange gifts for several of the others who had sent him one. Harry, seeming to sense his thoughts, came over and sat on the arm of Severus’ plush love seat.
“I put both our names on a good portion of the presents I sent out; don't worry,” he said conspiratorially into Severus’ ear, and Severus shook his head but found himself grinning darkly at the idea of what kind of presents Harry might have thought to send—and what it would be like were his name to also be associated with said gifts, which were undoubtedly terribly sentimental and not the sort of things that would typically be associated with Severus in any way.

The highlight of the day for all the children seemed to be the new brooms they’d gotten from Ginny and Draco, Ginny seeming to have enough connections left in the Quidditch world that she’d managed to get her hands on some of the newer models before their official release. Even Al and Scorpius, neither of whom where particular Quidditch fans, seemed eager to try out their brooms, so after all the presents were opened, everyone moved outside.

The kids began what seemed like a rousing game of everyone against James; Draco charmed some hoops to hang in the air once again and Scorpius and Albus repeatedly hit Bludgers in toward the eldest Potter while Lily manned the goals. Severus smirked as he watched them; if there had been more games of “everyone against James” with James’ grandfather, Severus might have had, overall, a better school experience.

Severus was surprised when, after the children were engrossed in their game, Draco came over to him with a long, thin box in hand. With Ginny watching the baby and Harry in the air refereeing the children’s game, Severus had been sitting alone in a chair in the shade; without asking for permission, Draco conjured a chair beside Severus’ and handed Severus the box.

“I wanted to wait to give you this,” Draco said seriously after a moment as Severus took the box in his hands with an inquisitive look. “I wasn’t sure how you would feel about it, but…I thought you should have it.”

Severus gave Draco a probing look, but nothing in Draco’s expression gave away what he was thinking. With a frown, Severus turned to look at the box in his hand; it was long and slender, though not wrapped in gaudy paper as all the other gifts had been. There was a green ribbon carefully tied around its middle with a large bow on top but no other adornment.

Wordlessly, Severus removed the bow, then the ribbon; setting the long package on the arms of his chair, he carefully removed the top of the box.

Inside the box sat a long, black cane with a silver dragon handle adorning the top. It took Severus barely more than a moment to recognize it as the one he’d seen Lucius sporting in the Pensieve—the one that Lucius had been using when he’d been killed.

Up close, Severus got the same impression he’d gotten when he’d seen it in the Pensieve; unlike the cane Lucius had used previously, this one was more function than fashion. It was sturdy, and although still decorative, one touch to the sculpted dragon handle told Severus that magic had been applied to it to make it more comfortable to hold. The ridges of the dragon’s face didn’t press into his hand at all in the way he expected they would—the handle felt just as smooth as the handle of his own cane.

He picked it up out of the box slowly, feeling its weight in his hand before looking over at Draco questioningly. Draco looked uncharacteristically nervous.

“I thought…he would want you to have it. After all you’ve done for him, for our family…you deserve it.”

Severus felt a rush of something come over him at that; he never was sure how to feel about Lucius, about their long friendship. In some ways, it had been genuine, and it was true that he had attempted
to keep the entire Malfoy family out of danger when they had fallen out of the Dark Lord's favor. But in some ways, the majority of his interactions with Lucius had been based on farce; certainly everything after Lily's death had been subterfuge and self-preservation, but even then he’d felt some genuine camaraderie for the other man. Watching him die in that Pensieve, certainly, had left Severus feeling more than unsettled, and this expression of *sentiment* from one of the generally starkly unsentimental Malfoy clan...it struck a chord inside him, and he found that although he felt conflicted about the gesture, he was genuinely glad for it.

Perhaps, Severus reflected, he was becoming *accustomed* to sentiment.

And that was what it was, he realized, what made everything in his life since he'd woken up so different than the lifetime that had come before it. He’d felt compassion, caring, and even love before, but never had he felt it—nor experienced it—from so many people at one time. And if anyone would have told him that this would be his life—surrounded by children he wasn't forced to teach, receiving Christmas gifts from Weasleys and *Longbottoms* of all people—he would have asked them if they'd had *Confundus* cast upon them. But somehow, it *had* become his life.

Holding the late Lucius Malfoy’s cane in his hand, Severus looked around him, taking everything in as he felt a sudden moment of clarity. Draco sitting next to him under a tree at the Malfoy Manor with a nervous expression, Ginny Weasley holding Lucius' redhead namesake, rocking him slowly to sleep, three Potter children and one Malfoy child (or two and two, depending on how one chose to look at it) up in the sky flying...and Harry, wind running through his wild hair as he made his best (and rather futile) attempt to keep the other children from injuring his eldest son with a Bludger.

Severus may not have any idea whether he would walk unaided again; he may never find the answers to Scorpius' dilemma. What he *did* know was that he had something he'd never truly felt he’d had before. Not just Harry and the curious relationship they'd developed—but a *family*. People who celebrated his triumphs, felt pain at his setbacks and ultimately wanted the best for him.

Severus took a deep breath and turned back to Draco.

“Thank you, Draco,” he said seriously, and Draco looked relieved at the words, relieved that his gesture had not been taken in the wrong way. Severus looked up once more to see Harry—and, as if sensing him, Harry stopped and hovered in midair on his broom. Harry caught Severus' eyes and he smiled, his entire face lighting up as he did.

And, unable to help himself, Severus found himself smiling back.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you everyone who has joined me on this journey that was my first ever Snarry fanfiction. It was buckets of fun to write, and everyone's comments, kudos, and general encouragement meant the world to me. Also, for any of you who have decided you enjoy my writing, I currently have another multi-part Snarry in the works, and with any hope, I can get the first chapter posted sometime in the coming weeks.

Thanks everyone for all your support! It's been a blast!
Works inspired by this one

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!