My Dark Protector

by DebsTheSlytherinSnapeFan

Summary

A Dark Protector rescues Harry from the abyss, he had been missing for years, but when they get Harry he isn't exactly what they envisioned. Life hasn't been kind to Harry, will he take to the magical world or will he always fear everything around him?
“Have you thought about reconvening the Order and searching for Harry, Albus?” asked Arthur Weasley, staring across at the elder wizard who was worn down over the years by worry and fear. Arthur still wasn’t used to seeing him like this; it was rather disconcerting, if he was honest. The old wizard had been searching for Harry alone for a year and a half before Arthur had found out and offered himself up for the search. Harry Potter hadn’t turned up at Hogwarts, and Albus hadn’t been able to find his family, but it wasn’t the family he was looking for — it was Harry himself.

“The Order was created to bring Voldemort down, Arthur, I’m not sure anyone would be impressed if they were called in for something like this,” said Albus, smiling sadly, passing over a cup of coffee. It was six am; they had been searching all night, without luck, but that was nothing new to Albus. Regretfully, nowhere he searched brought up any good leads. The Muggles were odd and rude creatures; he’d called in at several places to enquire about the Dursleys, but the doors had just been slammed in his face.

“With others helping the search, we might find him — we might have better luck,” suggested Arthur. The Order might not be big in numbers, but they weren’t small either. He could think of a few other people who might be willing to help, that weren’t Order members. He had been in it during the last war, along with Molly’s brothers who, Merlin rest their souls, had died.

“That’s true,” admitted Albus. He’d never considered using them, but Arthur made it sound like a good thing. It wasn’t as if they would be forced to help search, they had a choice of whether or not to help him. After all the years of failure, he quite frankly would do anything.

“Worth a shot,” said Arthur, nodding.

“It’s Harry’s fifteenth birthday today,” said Albus, thinking, ‘July 31st, as the seventh month dies,’ Life hadn’t been easy for the child since he was born. Where was he? Why couldn’t they find him or any record of him? Even the Aurors had stopped looking three months into the search; speculation was that Harry was studying abroad. He knew that couldn’t be the case, he had warned Petunia about the importance of Harry staying in Privet Drive.

“Have you asked Severus to look?” asked Arthur, drinking the coffee with relish. He was cold and tried, so the coffee was the perfect thing for him right now. He knew how old Harry was; he was same age as his youngest son, Ron, and they would have been taking classes together at Hogwarts — and should have been.

“Severus? I’m not sure I could tolerate his ‘I told you so’ attitude,” sighed Albus. Severus had warned him against putting Harry with Petunia. As had Minerva, come to that, but he had felt the blood wards were far too important to listen to them. Something he had regretted two months into searching for Harry, between Wizengamot meetings and of course running Hogwarts.

“He might have more success than Charity,” Arthur told him — for a Muggle Studies teacher, she wasn’t very successful. She knew next to nothing about the Muggle world, just like him. Yet she
was constantly saying Wizards and Muggles should embrace each other? While he agreed, it shouldn’t be coming from a witch who had no idea about the Muggle world beyond the books she’d read.

“Perhaps,” murmured Albus, tiredly rubbing his temples. He just wished deeply and profoundly that Harry would be found, that he was alive, well, and happy. Yet he couldn’t shake off the horrible feeling that had been constantly with him since Harry was eleven. No letter had addressed itself to him, which had never happened before in all his years as first a teacher, and then Headmaster at Hogwarts. Things had changed a lot; when had Arthur Weasley become a close confidant? Usually it was Minerva, but he honestly didn’t want it thrown in his face that this was his fault, he was feeling guilty enough as it was.

“I should get home,” said Arthur, looking at the time; he would be able to get two hours sleep before he had to go to work.

“Say hello to Molly for me,” said Albus. Regretfully, sleep was something of the past for him, he spent more hours napping in this chair than he managed to get in his bed. The guilt was quite frankly eating him up inside. His tired blue eyes watched as Arthur disappeared in the Floo Network.

“Where are you, Harry?” wondered Albus quietly, leaning back against his chair, “Where can you be?”

His mind couldn’t help but drift to the drama that had unfolded over the years, beginning with the whole Philosopher stone debacle. Voldemort had been living on the back of his newly hired Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. Quirninus Quirrell had regrettfully died down in the bowls of Hogwarts, when in his fury Voldemort had left the wizard; the shock of the separation had killed him. The face of the evil wizard had been imprinted on the back of Quirninus' head, giving away exactly what happened without needing the autopsy to figure it out. The stone had been returned to its owner, safe and unharmed; Nicolas was extremely happy about that. But that should have been during Harry's first year at Hogwarts.

The following year wasn't any better. Fortunately, Ginny Weasley had come to her senses about a very dangerous book in her first year and given it to her parents, begging them not to let ‘them’ take her away to Azkaban. Silly girl had been corresponding with Voldemort for months; the diary had been quickly destroyed before anything could happen. Knowing Voldemort as he did, he knew it would have only been a matter of time before the Dark Lord had perpetrated some atrocity or other. He was curious how she had come by it; there were only a few options and all of them made him grit his teeth in fury. How dare the Death Eaters plant such an item on an eleven-year-old girl?

Just prior to what would have been Harry's third year, Sirius Black had broken out of Azkaban, initiating a massive manhunt for him. Then he was seen at Hogwarts, which of course Albus understood now. Black had seen Peter Pettigrew on the front page of the newspapers, with the Weasleys. In the end, during a Quidditch match, Sirius Black had transformed from a dog back to his human form in front of all their eyes with a rat in his hand, looking crazy. Before anyone could stun the fugitive wizard, and apprehend him, he had stolen a wand and used it to revert Peter Pettigrew to human form. It had been too public for the ministry to try and deny it; a few weeks later he was officially a free man and exonerated of his crimes. Albus had watched the wizard break down when he was informed that Harry was missing.

Harry would have enjoyed the last school year, which should have been his fourth. The different students, the tournament; it had been exactly what the students needed. Alastor had been kind enough to come out of retirement and teach the students Defence for a year. He’d also wanted his
friend around for extra security, since Severus’ mark had gotten a little darker. Viktor Krum had won for Durmstrang, in what had been a very close competition throughout all the tasks. He didn’t know what he was going to do for a Defence teacher this year; thankfully he now had the entire summer to worry about that.

Staring at his desk, taking a deep breath, now and again he was struck with the idea that Harry had passed on to the next great adventure. He hated thinking it, but as a smart man, he knew it was a possibility. While it was possible to stay off the radar, someone as powerful as Harry... he should have been found by this time. The posters were everywhere, Muggle-borns, half-bloods, and purebloods all knew about him; surely someone has seen him by now? It was time to ask Severus. The truth be told, he had a feeling Severus was waiting on him asking; he always had a certain look in his eye.

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Later That Evening…

“Ah, Severus, come in,” said Albus, before Severus could even knock at the door. He had a small secret smile on his face; he knew it irritated Severus when he did that. He wasn’t sure why, since Severus knew how he did it; he probably had since the first time it occurred. Snape was resourceful when it came to finding information.

“What can I do for you, Albus?” asked Severus, sitting down and ignoring the lemon drop the Headmaster was offering him with a curl of his lip. He hated those infernal things and Albus damn well knew that.

“I need your help to find Harry,” admitted Albus. He was the most powerful wizard alive, and he needed help to find one underage wizard; yes, life had a way of making sure he didn’t get above himself.

Severus smirked in amusement. “I wondered if you would ever ask. Did you think I would be so lax in my vow to keep Harry safe? I have been looking for him. I’ve found out where the Dursleys are, and I’m going to visit them to see if they have any idea where he is. It is extremely doubtful that they will know, but it’s a lead I want to follow. Every angle should be thoroughly investigated.”

“Where are they?” cried Albus in surprise. How was it that Severus was getting further than him?

“Prison,” stated Severus sharply.

Albus’ heart sank deeply into his chest, “Do you know why?” he croaked.

“I will be finding out tomorrow during the visiting hours I’ve scheduled,” replied Severus. The Muggles thought he was ‘Detective Smith’ and that he was questioning the Dursleys on another case they were implicated in. The database was filled with Smiths, so he knew there would be less chance of him being denied access. There was also the problem that Petunia knew his last name, so he didn’t want to use it. He wanted her to be completely unaware when he visited; caught off guard they were more likely to say things they didn’t intend to. Not that it mattered; if it came to it he would use Veritaserum to ensure their cooperation.

“Which one are you visiting?” asked Albus, aware that it was unlikely that husband and wife would be in the same prison.

“Petunia,” revealed Severus, grimacing in distaste. He hadn’t seen her in years, and it turned his
stomach having to see the sour-faced bitch that was somehow related to Lily. Merlin only knows how, the two girls were so different that it was astonishing to see, quite frankly.

“Severus, why didn’t you inform me of this?” asked Albus quietly. He didn’t know if he was hurt that Severus had kept him out of the loop or relieved that after so long, a solid lead had finally appeared.

“Albus, I did not want to raise your hopes. I’ve kept quiet a few times now where the leads didn’t pan out, and quite frankly it’s a good thing I did. I know how desperate you are to bring him here; I will only ever tell you if I find him,” said Severus sternly.

“Very well,” conceded Albus. He thought he’d come close once, but it had turned into a big bust, so perhaps Severus was right.

“Get some sleep, Albus, you need it,” Severus demanded, the old man looked ready to drop down any second. The bags under his eyes were extremely prominent; the weight he’d lost over the years was alarming, and that was even with the potions he’d been sneaking him in his drink every morning. “I’ll let you know how it goes. Do not tell Black or Lupin, I really cannot deal with the pair of them.”

“When can you ever?” Albus told him, his lips twitching a little. Just knowing Severus was helping had eased the weight that he carried around with him a great deal. He should have asked him sooner, but then he’d already been searching, hadn’t he?

“You know me well,” said Severus sardonically, he couldn’t stand Black or Lupin full stop; some things just couldn’t be fixed no matter how old you got. Severus stood up, shaking his head tiredly; normally he would leave for a few hours after curfew and search, but he decided against it tonight. He had a lead, and he would concentrate on that. He was just reaching out for the door when Albus spoke again.

“Thank you, Severus, I appreciate this,” confessed Dumbledore, sounding bitter, relieved, tired, and exasperated all in one go.

Severus didn’t reply, he merely opened the door and moved down the stairs. For once he didn’t roll his eyes at Albus’ dramatics. He had been searching for nearly four years as well; there was nothing dramatic about this situation, and it was wearing down everyone.
Visiting The Dursleys And A Grim Discovery

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

My Dark Protector

Chapter 2

Visiting The Dursleys

Severus wanted to curse. He was waiting in a queue to get into the main part of the prison to see Petunia Dursley, and he’d been waiting for what seemed like hours. The guards were taking their bloody sweet time as they checked everyone in, then patted them down to ensure they were bringing nothing into the prison. He was contemplating Obliviating everyone after taking the security cameras out, but no, that would come back to bite him in the arse, he was sure. Not only would the Ministry end up notified, they would dig into why he was there. He couldn’t let that happen, so everything had to be done by the book. Cornelius Fudge was desperate to get his hands on Harry, to boost his career and standing in the magical world. The search for Harry wasn’t as intense as it had been, but he still had people following leads. Fortunately, the Aurors were useless in the Muggle world; they couldn’t blend in to save themselves.

He could pass there, though, which was why he was standing here in a very uncomfortable black suit, white shirt, and green tie. It was the only Muggle attire he had, so it had been his only option. He had gotten the suit over ten years ago, probably longer, but it still fitted him. That wasn’t a surprise; he hadn’t gained any weight since he'd been a teenager. He'd grown in height, yes, but never put more than a few pounds on, and that had been all lean muscle. The only other things he had with him were a fake Muggle card with his so-called ‘police credentials’ that he had transfigured, his wand, and of course the bottle of Veritaserum, which he had ensured wouldn’t alert security. Due to the notice-me-not charms he had placed upon them, the Muggles wouldn’t pay them any heed.

“Name?” barked the guard when he finally reached the head of the queue. He didn't even grace Severus with a glance as he stared at his clipboard, looking for all the world bored and half asleep.

“Detective Smith,” sneered Severus, his voice cold and harsh, demanding the Muggle's attention. “I’m here to see Petunia Dursley.”

“Yes, sir,” said the guard, changing his tune immediately. “Go on through.”

“Thank you,” muttered Severus sardonically, making it extremely clear that it was anything but sincere. Moving past the guard, he endured being looked over, biting his tongue the entire time to stop the curses from leaving his mouth. Well, more than that, because if he hadn’t been clenching his hands into fists, he would have grabbed his wand and helped the stupid Muggle feel violated too.

“Clear to go through,” shouted the guard, presumably speaking to another black guard, who stepped forward.

“Detective Smith?” questioned a fourth guard, moving towards him, his blue eyes filled with enquiry.

“Indeed,” replied Severus, confirming what the man, Max according to his nametag, already knew.
“Follow me, sir; the prisoner is already in the requested private room,” said Max, moving them down the corridor, unlocking and locking gates as he went.

“I never got around to reading what she was in prison for…” said Severus, staring straight ahead, using Wandless magic to give Max the compulsion to reply to his comment.

“Embezzlement and accessory to embezzlement. Child abuse, child endangerment,” stated Max. He remembered reading about it in the newspaper, plus when it came to being in prison, word got around. The woman the detective was here to see, had been kept in solitary more than most, for her own safety, as she had been targeted by many of the other women. There was an unspoken code in prison: children were off-limits for most people; only the really sick ones harmed a defenceless child.

Severus blinked. “I see,” replied Severus; perhaps he should have checked the Muggle newspapers— that would have proved useful if nothing else. “Was the child Harry Potter?” his stomach clenched uncomfortably, he knew the answer to that question without needing to be told. Petunia had always had a very ugly streak of jealousy for anything that was Lily's...

“Yes, I think so... yes, I remember now,” said Max, nodding his head vigorously.

“Do you know what became of him?” asked Severus, trying to remain calm; the charges said child endangerment and abuse, not murder or manslaughter. That was, after all, exactly what the charges would be if the Dursleys had done the worst thing possible, and it would be all Dumbledore’s fault. Both he and Minerva had harassed the old fool for years, telling him that they weren’t the right people to raise a Magical child.

“No,” Max said honestly, shaking his head solemnly. He hoped though, that the boy was having a good life, away from the people who had hurt him. It just went to show that the justice system got it right, most of the time.

“I see,” said Severus despondently. At least now he knew the child was alive and probably in the system; he just had to find out where.

Max opened the door and let Severus into the interview room; true to his word, Petunia was already sitting there with her head down, not even looking up as he entered. Severus paid no mind to the door's closing as he observed the sour woman. He felt no pity for her as she sat there, rail thin, bruised, and evidently beaten down by the other inmates, who were stronger than she. She deserved everything she got. He wanted to curse her himself— how could she harm a defenceless child? Her sister’s son! Oh, he already knew why: she was a bitter, jealous bitch, who was angry at the world because she hadn’t been able to go to Hogwarts.

“You,” she croaked when she finally looked up, her brown eyes wide with astonishment and fear.

She had a right to fear him, because he truly wanted to cause her immense pain that she would never forget.

“Why?” growled Severus, glaring at her furiously.

“I told Dumbledore I didn’t want the brat,” snapped Petunia, some of her old vitriol returning.

“If the situation had been reversed, do you seriously think Lily would have dared lay a hand on your son? Other than a loving one?” demanded Severus, staring at her in disgust and not bothering to hide it the slightest.

“Yes, because Lily was the golden child that could do no wrong,” spat Petunia, in her jealousy
spurning all caution completely.

“I hope there is a hell when we leave this world, because there will be a special place reserved for the likes of you,” hissed Severus, black eyes glinting coldly.

Petunia blanched but refused to back down, despite the fact she had a split lip and a black eye.

Severus removed his wand, and finally saw raw fear emanating from the despicable woman in front of him.

“You wouldn’t!” gasped Petunia, terrified, moving back from him, shaking to her very core.

“Somnia!” spat Severus, and the curse hit Petunia with precision. “Sleep well,” he sneered, eyes twinkling viciously.

“Take it off!” she squeaked, not sure what it was; she didn’t understand Latin.

“I will if you can answer one question,” said Severus, but he already knew it would be a waste of time; how the hell could she know, she’d been locked up in here. Which meant he didn’t have to worry about Petunia answering, and he wouldn’t have to remove the spell.

“What?” whined Petunia desperately, rubbing at herself as if she could remove the spell by doing so.

“What is Harry?” demanded Severus, glaring at her.

“I don’t know,” confessed Petunia, paling further as Severus turned to leave. “Take it off!” she called, pleadingly.

“You should have known better than to mess with Harry, Petunia,” said Severus, opening the door and leaving the woman to her fate. Let her squirm for years wondering what he’d done. Although if she was smart, she would realize within weeks what that spell had been. He had cursed her to have bad dreams, nightmares, of what she had done throughout her life, and it would be a great many. She was such a vindictive woman, he was surprised anyone had wanted to marry her.

“Finished already?” asked Max. Usually when suspects were questioned, it could run on for hours.

“Yes,” said Severus, curtly; he needed to dig further into this. The next step would be to look at the newspapers and find out which hospital Harry had been taken to, and go from there. He was finally getting somewhere... He absently remembered the spell he’d put on the Muggle and removed it with a silent ‘Finite Incantatem’ and the guard was back to normal— presumably; he had no way of knowing for sure. That was the problem with doing silent, Wandless magic. He knew in his bones that this was going to pay off; he would find Harry after all these years.

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Hogwarts - Great Hall

“You did what?” hissed Severus, staring at Dumbledore in irritation.

“I asked the Order to meet here. We need help, Severus; the sooner we find Harry, the better.” said Albus, not the slightest bit apologetic. Up until now he’d assumed it was only Remus, Sirius, and Arthur Weasley and himself searching high and low for Harry; he could add Severus to the tally of searchers now, and hopefully the Order.
“Why now?” demanded Severus, narrowing his eyes; that old man had better not bring up the fact his Dark Mark was darkening, or he would explode. He carefully put his fork and knife down on his empty plate. He’d needed that, he realized: something filling to eat. He hadn’t taken Muggle money with him earlier, but it might be a good idea to do so this time—no telling how long he would be gone.

“It was Arthur’s idea, but I happen to agree. I would never have thought about restarting the Order to look for Harry, but it does sound like a very appealing idea,” said Albus grudgingly after swallowing his piece of steak. He knew why Severus was getting worked up, and he felt slightly hurt. How could Severus think he was only getting more desperate to find Harry just because Voldemort might come back? That wasn’t the case at all; he just wanted Harry safe and learning magic where he should be.

“Very well,” said Severus, giving his own agreement without outright saying it.

Albus hid a smile behind his hand; Severus would never change, and in this ever-changing world... it was nice to see solid familiarity. Severus would never let him think of Harry as a soldier, a leader, or a boy who would defeat Voldemort. No, he would always be made aware that Severus was watching, ensuring that he saw the boy as Lily’s son, which was needed—especially if the war did start back up.

“When?” enquired Severus, blatantly ignoring the smile, although he did roll his eyes at the old man.

“Half an hour,” revealed Albus.

Severus grimaced in distaste. “I do hope you don’t expect me to be there.”

“You have a lead?” asked Albus, true concern and hope in his voice.

“Yes,” revealed Severus, giving him a pointed look; he would not discuss it.

“Would you like company?” enquired Albus, knowing he wouldn’t get anything from the wizard in front of him.

“I’ll be fine.” Severus told him firmly. Albus, despite his love of Muggle things, didn’t know how to blend in, and when he was in the Muggle world on occasion he asked the most absurd questions, the sort that would see people being locked up and checked over for psych problems.

“Very well,” Albus said with a sigh, placing his goblet back onto the table. He supposed that he might go to his office and begin getting ready for the Order meeting. Arthur had said something about bringing in a few people who hadn’t been members the last time; if Fawkes got good vibes from them, then he had absolutely no problem with that suggestion. The more the merrier in his opinion, although…not Severus, he wasn’t a people’s person.

“I have to go; I only came to grab some lunch,” said Severus, looking at the time. The staff at the hospital would be back to work by now...

“I’ll see you later, Severus, and if you are back in time...come join us,” said Albus. Say what you liked, Severus was a very thorough wizard when it came to searching. He should have asked Severus’ help from the beginning; well, no point in dwelling on it, what’s done is done. He just couldn’t help but grimly wonder if they would ever successfully find Harry, or if they were doomed to search forever.

“Not likely,” muttered Severus under his breath, as he stood up and left the Head table without
another word. With a bit of luck, it would be a waste of time getting the Order involved. He was closer than he had ever been, which meant he might have finally found the child he’d been searching so rigorously for.

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Great Ormond Street Hospital

“Hello, how may I help you?” asked the nurse behind the nurse’s station; her ID tag revealed her name to be Jane.

“I’m looking for information on Harry Potter. He was brought here on the August the tenth, 1984; I cannot find any record of him after that time,” stated Severus, showing her his detective badge, knowing he wouldn’t have any trouble getting information with it.

“Hold on a second,” she said, clicking away at the computer in front of her. Finally she looked up again. “Do you know his date of birth?”

“July thirty-first, 1980,” replied Severus, waiting impatiently as she checked her computer once more.

“Yes, I have him here; he was transferred to The Priory hospital in North London,” said Jane, looking up from the computer to stare at him expectantly.

“Thank you,” said Severus, nodding curtly before he turned and left the children’s hospital. His heart was thumping wildly; had he finally found Harry— or was this going to be one long run-around with no results? The automatic doors opened, blasting air at him as he exited the front of the hospital. Inhaling sharply, he forced himself to relax, quickly moving out of the way of a wheelchair-bound patient who looked determined to knock everyone down that got in her way.

Walking away from the hospital, he looked for a secluded area where nobody would see him, which he soon found. Only when he was positive he was alone, did Severus Apparate to the next hospital. Three people gasped in surprise when he appeared right in front of them in the car park. “Obliviate!” said Severus quickly, cursing under his breath at being caught by someone. Their eyes glazed over, and Severus swiftly moved away, knowing they would be fine. Although they would forget the last few minutes, it was for the best, really.

He stopped moving abruptly, causing his left foot to skid a bit, as he stared at the sign by the entrance, not able to comprehend it. Mental health care? All this time? Unlikely, he thought to himself. “Point me, Harry Potter,” muttered Severus, using his wand as a point indicator. He was surprised when his wand automatically swung towards the large property. Swallowing thickly, he stared at the building unseeingly. What had the Dursleys done that Harry hadn’t been able to leave this place for ten years? He didn’t understand, but he wouldn’t get his answers standing here. He doubted they would talk to him right now… wait, he was a police officer; he wouldn’t need to wait.

Perhaps he should have had Albus come with him, he thought grimly as he walked up the path. The place was absolutely huge, and not at all hospital-like. In fact, it reminded him of Prince Manor; he’d visited the place only once, when he’d been ‘demanded’ by his grandfather, on his death bed. Apparently he’d felt extremely apologetic about how things had gone down, and wished he could go back and change them. Death always had a way of making people regret a ton of things, and Severus hoped when his time was finally up he wasn’t filled with regret. That regret had got him a fancy manor and a vault, both of which he didn’t need, but he wasn’t one to cut his nose off to spite his face… at least not in this regard. He wasn’t about to let the Ministry or the
Goblins get their hands on his family estate, even if he hadn’t been able to stand a single member of his own family.

“Sir, can I help you?” asked a woman, moving to stand in front of him, “Are you here to make a consultation?”

“No, I’m here to enquire about Harry Potter; I need to speak to him,” said Severus, showing his badge.

“Harry Potter?” she said blankly, moving towards her seat again, clicking the keyboard as she looked for the person he wanted.

“Yes, birth date, July thirty-first; he was moved here from Great Ormond Street Hospital in November ‘84,” stated Severus.

“I’m sorry, there is no one here by that name,” she admitted when absolutely no results came up for Harry Potter.

“Try Dursley,” barked Severus, impatiently.

“Nothing, Sir,” she said, cringing slightly.

Gritting his teeth, he forced himself not to yell as he ordered, “Then try Evans.” He knew Harry was there, and the fact they couldn’t find his name was very suspicious.

“Nothing at all,” the woman admitted.

Severus stared at the wall wondering what to do. He knew Harry was there, there was no way they could have mixed up his name, and surely Harry would have corrected them? “Thank you for your time, and help,” he added before turning and making a show of leaving. As soon as her attention was drawn away, he slid out the room, cast an invisibility and silencing spell on himself, then made his way back inside, being extremely careful.

Severus slid through another door, following where the wand was telling him to go, so he could find Harry Potter. As he continued on, he began to get a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. Harry wasn’t in the main part of the hospital; nobody would bring a patient down here, would they? The boy was alive, obviously, since the pull wouldn’t exist if he wasn’t.

Severus grimaced as water dripped down onto his clothes. Wiping at the wetness harshly, he looked around, and squinted to see anything. It was pitch black down here. “Lumos!” he called, and light exploded from the tip of his wand and expanded everywhere, lighting the entire area up as he explored further, following his wand's guidance. Did this place even exist on the floor plans? He somehow doubted it; it was wet, cold, and dreary, but all things considered, it could have been worse...

It was worse, Severus thought: Harry Potter was somewhere down here.

Then the wand jerked to the left, bringing him to an abrupt halt. No, not somewhere; here, behind that door. Severus’ heart hammered in his chest; he was truly terrified of what he was about to find. Was Harry suffering from a mental illness that couldn’t be cured? Could Poppy help him? What if nobody could? “Alohomora!” murmured Severus quietly, and the door unlocked and opened.

Severus nudged the door with his foot, opening it, leaving his wand hand free while he looked around. He tightened the grip on his wand, as if he expected something to fly at him. The room was ominously quiet; sliding further in, he saw feet under a blanket in a bed, and then before he
knew it he was standing at the bottom of the bed looking down.

At an unconscious Harry Potter.

Bound to the bed.

Pulling the covers back, Severus pressed his fingers into the boy's neck, making sure his pulse was steady. Gagging in disgust at the filth he found as his gaze roved over the body before him, he stepped away, horrified to the core. No wizard deserved this... no, no human deserved this, it was undignified and revolting. He didn’t even want to speculate how long Harry had been left in his own excrement and pee. Flicking his wand he removed both, as well as freshening the air.

“FAWKES!” demanded Severus; he needed Albus Dumbledore, and he needed him now. He wasn’t leaving until he had killed whoever was doing this to Harry, but he also knew Harry needed help.

“—wrong with you, Fawkes?” said Dumbledore, sounding surprised.

“I called him,” said Severus, watching as Dumbledore lit up every corner of the room with one flick of his pinkie finger. Then the old wizard paled when he saw the near-skeleton on the bed; he knew there was only one reason Severus could have brought him here.

He had found Harry Potter at long last.

And despite all Albus' praying that Harry would be well, healthy, happy, and powerful... it didn’t look like his prayers had been answered.

Chapter End Notes

This is edited by Jake and Jordre Thank You!
“Severus, what is going on? Why is he down here? Is this how Muggles treat their own?” asked Albus, staring around in horror. The bed was clearly a hospital bed, there was no denying that, and the cupboards surrounding the room also gave away that this was some sort of Muggle hospital facility. It reminded him of the Muggle section of St. Mungo’s, which was used primarily for the Muggles who were accidentally cursed with magic, or the Squibs. Even the Muggle part of St. Mungo's was cleaner, warmer and just...better than this. The room stank of foul things he didn’t even want to think of identifying; where was he?

“He isn’t their own,” said Severus, gritting his teeth, Harry was one of them—he was magical. The boy felt absolutely frozen to his touch; hastily unclipping his cloak, Severus cast a warming charm on it and laid it over the unconscious teen. He didn't look fifteen years old; dear Merlin, what had they done to him?

“Where are we?” asked Albus, moving towards a door at the far side of the room, and opening it to see what was beyond it. It was another room, this one containing a chair, bed, and cages that were empty. His stomach churned uncomfortably when he saw them; his blue eyes, missing their twinkle, hardened with the rage that was slowly simmering under the surface of his gentle face. He turned to stare at Severus, watching him closely.

“We are under Priory Hospital; its speciality is helping with mental health care. Harry was transferred here, but someone must have made sure any record of that disappeared. If I hadn’t cast a point-me spell, I would have been at another dead end,” replied Severus, his tone slightly distracted as he moved around with practiced ease. An IV drip was ensuring Harry at least had fluids in his system. There were a lot of needle marks in his arms; why would they need to do that, when there was already a place for whatever was going into him to be put in? He didn't even want to think about that, as he continued to search the area immediately around Harry’s bed. He quickly found what the Muggle or Muggles were putting into the boy; reading the labels, he started growling under his breath. Sliding them into his pocket, Severus vowed to analyse them later and let Poppy know what Harry'd been given.

“Someone didn’t want Harry found,” stated Albus sharply, understanding what Severus was saying without further explanation being necessary.

“They’ve gone to a lot of trouble; the question is...why?” said Severus darkly. He knew whatever reason they had for this...wouldn’t be good enough. He would kill them for this; it would be a mercy killing. How many others had they done this to? Oh, he would ensure they knew they’d done the wrong thing for daring to harm a wizard.

“Good question,” murmured Albus, alarmed. “Can we get him to Poppy?”

“I don’t even think it’s a good idea to move him,” admitted Severus cautiously. “He has to be moved, but it’s risky either way.” He paused to think the situation over a moment before deciding,
“Portkey and Apparation will definitely be too strenuous on his system.” Severus, let his eyes move towards the bottom of the bed, where Fawkes was watching everything intently. As if he understood the unasked question, Fawkes trilled a soothing melody that made them relax a little. The dark wizard didn’t even dare cast an ‘Enervate’ at Harry; his heart might not be able to take the strain. He was so thin and drugged up, the obvious neglect and mistreatment had to have affected his heart and other internal organs.

“I’ll take him to the infirmary and explain everything to Poppy,” said Albus, staring at the fifteen-year-old awkwardly. Harry looked as though he would break apart if he lifted him.

“Not the infirmary; that would guarantee the news of his being found would be around Hogwarts within five minutes. Twenty minutes more for it to reach the parents, and another half an hour at the most before it reached the Ministry,” Severus argued. If Fudge got his hands on Harry…there would be no hope of recovery. They had to keep this as quiet as possible, not only until they figured out what was wrong with the boy, but how to treat it and guide Harry until he came off age.

“All right, I’ll take him to my office; at least nobody will get to him there,” said Albus, but he knew that they would need to figure out something more permanent. “I’ll be back as soon as I’ve told Poppy.”

“Why?” enquired Severus as he eased the needle from Harry’s arm, wincing in disgust at the methods used by the bloody Muggles; he thanked Merlin that potions were less...invasive. Wedging his hand around the back of the boy's neck, he lifted Harry into a sitting position, arching an eyebrow at the length of his hair. It didn’t look like anyone had ever cut it, at least not for a very long time. He shook off that thought. He at least didn’t have to worry about Harry being too heavy; he weighed next to nothing, he thought as he lifted the boy off the bed completely.

Albus had moved around his side of the bed to take the teen; now he accepted the precious cargo, his guilt eating him alive. He felt sick to his stomach, and he wasn’t sure how he successfully managed to keep it in. He turned to stare at Severus, before he replied in a voice he barely recognized as his own. “I know what you are going to do, Severus, and I’m not about to get in your way. You have my word.”

Severus stared at Albus in surprise; this was a wizard who probably hadn’t ever broken the law, and always liked to take the peaceful way out. Yet he was basically giving him his permission to do what he wanted to those who had hurt Harry? Albus surely knew what he was about to do? Like unleash his Death Eater side against the unsuspecting Muggle; finally all the spells he’d learned would be put to good use. “Fawkes, go.” Trilling again, Fawkes spread his wings and landed on Albus, then flames consumed them all and they were gone.

Severus moved around the room, inspecting the place more thoroughly. Opening a cabinet, the blast of coldness told him it was a fridge; a rack of tubes within caught his eye. Severus leant in and took them out; ten full tubes of blood... Harry’s blood. What on earth? He couldn’t understand any of this; why was the boy down here to begin with? Shaking off his thoughts, he continued his search. He found additional racks of Harry’s blood, as well as more vials of the medicine he’d found beside the bed. He sincerely hoped they wouldn’t have used those, since medicine shouldn’t be just left lying around like that.

The other cabinets just contained bed sheets, hospital gowns, needles, IV bags, and things that seemed solely for one occupant — Harry. Slowly but surely he made his way into the next room, the one he’d seen Albus go into for a few seconds. Stepping in, he looked around, his black eyes burning holes in everything as if he could miraculously understand how anyone could treat another human like this. Even the Dark Lord hadn’t done shit like this. Yes, he killed, but it was a quick painless death... after a few Cruciatius Curses if he was in a foul mood, and worse if you were
found out as a traitor to the cause.

Had he done the wrong thing in going back to the light side? If this was an example of Muggles... he really wanted to kill them all and save wizards the grief. He would have liked to go into Harry’s mind and see what had gone on, unfortunately he couldn’t. Harry had been through too much already, and he doubted his bloody body would have been able to withstand such an invasive spell being used on him.

Stepping forward, he looked in the empty cages as if they contained clues, but there was nothing to show what could have at one point been in there. He shook his head in irritation; had this been for another patient? Or just something that had been here since before Harry was brought down here? Everything looked degraded enough for that to have been the case. Inhaling sharply, he moved out of the room and closed the door. Casting an illusion charm to make it look as though Harry was in the room, Severus doused the light Dumbledore had cast and sat down on the chair. With a flick of his wand he made himself invisible and settled down to wait. They would have to come down sooner or later, and then he would learn everything.

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Albus stumbled slightly before righting himself. He wasn’t in his office; Fawkes had brought him to his quarters. Smart thinking; at least this way he wouldn’t need to move up the stairs with such a precious cargo in his arms. Walking towards the spare room, for the first time he felt grateful for it, despite the fact it had never once been used. He used Wandless magic to open the door to get Harry safely in without pottering around trying to get the door open. Placing Harry on the bed, the old wizard muttered a spell to keep him from falling off, then he hastily made his way out and to the fireplace in the sitting area of his office.

“Madam Pomfrey’s office! Hogwarts!” Albus said hastily, throwing the powder into the flames and turning them green. Sliding onto his knees, he stuck his face into the fireplace and found himself looking around Poppy’s office. He wanted to shout and yell for her, but he refrained. He knew that Harry needed some serious attention right now, and he was terrified that they’d found him too late. Severus’ actions had gotten him extremely paranoid; he had the urge to check Harry for a pulse and it was getting stronger by the second. “POPPY!” he called louder, unable to conceal the urgency in his tone.

“Albus? Is everything all right?” asked Poppy, entering her office to stare at him in confusion. This was new; Albus rarely Floo-called her, and he would come into the hospital wing on any occasion that there was a student hurt. He had sounded extremely worried, which made her anxious; Albus wasn’t one for sounding concerned.

“I need you in my quarters immediately; bring everything you might need,” said Albus, trying to moderate his tone. “Quickly!” he added before he disappeared.

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Poppy stood staring at the empty fireplace for a few seconds before his words penetrated her worried mind. “Accio emergency bag!” she shouted as she quickly put her hair in a hastily made bun. Something was wrong, evidently, and it must be bad for Albus not to bring whoever it was down to her where all her supplies were.

“Albus Dumbledore’s office!” called Poppy, disappearing from her office, the bag clutched at her side to keep it safe from the bumpy ride through the network.

“Where?” asked Poppy as she stepped out of the fireplace; despite not having her uniform on, she
was all business.

“Through here,” said Albus, already up from the floor and showing her through to the spare room.

“Dear Merlin!” cried Poppy, retching at the state of the teenager. Making her way to his side, she began running a diagnostic charm. “Do you know what medication he’s had? Anything about his history?” When she removed the cloak she had to turn away, horrified to her core; who had done this?

“It’s Harry Potter, Poppy, and there is no known history since he was one year old. At the very least he’s had his jabs,” said Albus gravely. “I have no idea what he’s been given; Severus has the bottles.”

“I need to know, but not right away,” said Poppy; as always, Severus thought ahead. “Where is he?” she asked as she realized he wasn’t there.

“He stayed behind,” said Albus, turning the heating up, keeping Harry as warm as possible.

“Good,” said Poppy vindictively. She knew Severus well, and when it came to child abuse…he lost his head. Having been abused himself — though never to this extent — he just got so angry. For once she hoped Severus gave them hell, and made them regret ever harming a child. “You should get back and stop him from going too far.”

“I’m afraid I would rather join in than stop him, Poppy,” admitted Albus, his blue eyes filled with fire. "And I truly doubt that I could stop him in any case."

Poppy was rather startled by that, but she didn’t hesitate any longer. Straightening up, she put her bag on the bottom of the bed and quickly began to rake through it. She honestly didn’t know where to start, but getting a bit of the nutrition that he’d been missing into him was a good start. He would be requiring a lot of it before he would be considered healthy. She could see every single one of his bones; it was truly horrible, and she’d seen a lot as a healer. She was confident she could help him; all it would require was a strict diet and plenty of rest. She was getting ahead of herself, she knew, and this wasn’t going to be an easy fix. Who knew how long Harry had been this way, and how he’d managed to get this way? Finally she looked at the results of the diagnostics and hissed under her breath.

Hastily grabbing two blood replenishers, she spelled them into his system, praying that they would work quickly. How he was still alive she didn’t know; it was baffling. The damage done to his internal organs with the lack of blood was, quite frankly, bloody astonishingly horrific.

Albus watched her go to work, spelling various potions into him. His feelings of guilt were rising to epic proportions; why hadn’t he listened to Minerva and Severus? Regrettfully, there hadn’t been anything else he could have done; if the boy had stayed in the magical world, anyone could have adopted him, including some less-than-savoury characters. His godfather and magical guardian had been arrested; his parents were gone — the Dursleys had been the only family he had left. Until Harry was eleven, there had been nothing he could do; his hands had been tied. Once students agreed to come to Hogwarts, they were automatically added as a ‘magical ward’ to their Head of House.

He had to get out of here; he couldn’t keep looking at Harry or he would explode.

“I’ll be back as soon as possible, Poppy; I trust that you will remain here with him?” asked Albus. He didn’t want Harry by himself; he’d been alone too much in his life. Shuddering anew, Dumbledore thought of the disgusting pit they’d found him in — and that he was returning to.
“Of course!” she exclaimed loudly in shock—as if she was going to leave the teenager alone in unfamiliar settings.

“Thank you, Poppy,” said Albus, not looking in their direction. Would this guilt ever go away? Unfortunately guilt was a familiar thing with him; he’d been burdened with it his entire life. He didn’t think he would ever get away from this guilt, though; he prayed Harry could forgive him for trying to give him a normal life... a safe life, away from the magical world and the Death Eaters.

“Fawkes?” commanded Albus, and without needing to say anything the Phoenix transported him back to the dank room.

“Severus?” called Albus, lightening the room in confusion. “What are you doing?” Why was there a glamour of Harry in the bed? Hadn’t he been tortured enough by seeing the real thing?

“Waiting,” said Severus’ disembodied voice coldly.

“In the dark?” ‘And cold’ thought Albus, staring in the general area he could sense Severus and of course where his voice had sounded from.

“Best way to surprise them; I can’t have them running, now can I?” replied Severus harshly, twirling his wand around.

“Indeed,” murmured Albus, “What makes you think they’ll even come here today?”

“Considering he was drugged, they must come every nine to twelve hours. It depends how strong it is,” answered Severus. “I am not familiar enough with these Muggle drugs to know for certain. They will be here.” And then the fun will well and truly begin, he added to himself. After he got all the information he needed from them, of course.

Flicking his wand out, the old headmaster created a chair before sitting by Severus; the lights disappeared abruptly.

“I should have listened to you, Severus. What have I done?” murmured Albus, guilt and shame coating his voice.

“As omnipotent as you like to think yourself—as the wizarding world likes to think—you are but one man; you couldn’t predict the outcome,” scoffed Severus. “It’s hardly your fault the Dursleys were caught embezzling, although from what I could get from the nurse's mind, Harry wasn’t in good shape when the police came knocking. He would have died in their care; I don’t know which I prefer at the moment…only time will tell.”

“Thanks for the pep talk,” murmured Albus, reminding himself not to come to Severus if he wanted to feel better... but then again, he already knew that.

“I don’t do pep talks,” sniped Severus; nonetheless, his lips twitched in amusement.

“Clearly,” said Albus, wryly.

The time seemed to go by so slowly; nothing but the dripping of water could be heard.

“Severus, perhaps we should just put an alert on the room, then return when it goes off?” suggested Albus. He wanted to get back to Hogwarts, and he needed to know that Harry was fine. Anything could have happened in the time they’d been gone; he felt as though he’d been there for days, although the grumbling in his belly declared it was probably just after lunch or nearly dinner.
“I am not leaving,” said Severus. He had a lot of pent-up frustration to let off, and he wasn’t doing it at Hogwarts. Not that he could, since there was nobody there; no unruly students to remove points from, and the teachers honestly didn’t deserve his ire, which was getting worse with each passing minute.

“Very well,” conceded Albus, he wasn’t about to leave Severus alone. “Perhaps we should get a House-Elf to br—”

“Quiet,” commanded Severus, placing his hand on Dumbledore’s shoulder as he listened; he could have sworn he had heard footsteps.

Albus stood up abruptly. He could hear them as well, and he nodded despite the fact Severus couldn’t see him... nor could he see Severus, come to that. Sensing the building anger in his Potions Master, he wondered briefly if he wanted to be here. Knowing Severus had been a Death Eater was one thing...but to see it first-hand? He’d seen enough during the war to last him a lifetime.

When the door opened, Albus couldn’t help but be surprised; it was a small, dainty woman. He didn’t know why, but he’d been expecting an evil-looking monster. Who could blame him? Wizards that ended up evil did have a tendency to look deformed...or snakelike. Voldemort was a prime example. Coming out of his thoughts, he saw her moving towards the bed with a syringe but before she could take a step further he heard Severus mutter so softly that he had a difficult time for a second understanding what he’d done. Considering she wasn’t screaming, it didn’t take a genius to figure out he’d cast ‘Legilimens’ at her.

“Albus,” choked Severus, “Make sure you get all of Harry’s blood.”

“Severus?” asked Albus alarmed; he couldn’t quite decide if Severus was choked up in fury or raw fear.

“She’s been trying to understand his magic, injecting his blood into animals and people,” said Severus, heaving dangerously. Well, he now knew what magical blood did if transfused into a Muggle. Their bodies couldn’t handle it, and they literally ended up exploding. Considering he’d seen a lot, that was the most gruesome thing he’d ever experienced. To make matters worse, a child —Harry— had seen it happening; was there even a slight possibility of him being sane after this?

“But Muggles cannot...” Albus didn’t even get to finish the thought, or want to finish it. “Crucio!” snarled Severus, watching her agony with vindictive pleasure.

“Silencio!” chanted Albus, moving swiftly around the room. Finding the first cabinet full, he removed his cloak and transfigured it expertly into a bag. He flung everything into it, and looked in every drawer, cabinet, and filing drawer, taking everything, not risking anything being left behind. Once that side had been done, he moved around to the other side of the room, avoiding the writhing Muggle, who obviously knew about magic. She couldn’t leave the room alive to share this knowledge. With the look Severus was exhibiting (he was visible now, Albus absently noticed) he didn’t think that was going to be a problem.

Remembering the second room, Dumbledore made his way through to it, looking for other exits or cabinets. They couldn’t afford to leave anything regarding magic down here, it was too risky. This had happened because Harry was magical? Because she’d seen him doing accidental magic? Why hadn’t the Accidental Magic Squad investigated?

Severus stalked towards the woman, who was still twitching despite the fact the curse had been
lifted; he knelt down towards her and yanked her head around to face him by the hair. “You want magic? Here is some magic,” spat Severus, cursing her again, watching as little dots began to appear all over her, from head to foot, as if hundreds upon hundreds of little needles were piecing her. He let her go as she screamed again, throwing off the strands of hair that had gotten trapped in his fingers as she writhed in agony.

“Stop it, stop it, stop it, stop it!” she shrieked, feeling as though she was being eaten alive.

“Did you stop when a defenceless boy begged you to?” snarled Severus, “A boy I swore to protect? You won’t get your hands on another child ever again!” He couldn’t risk her getting her hands on a Muggle-born child, she’d already harmed someone. Merlin, he half wanted to personally hand her to Voldemort and let him kill her. It would have worked — if the Dark Lord had been alive.

“Sectumsempra!” The unholy shriek that penetrated his ears didn’t even cause him to twitch. He watched the light slowly fade from her eyes as she gasped for breath, the blood saturating her clothes and spreading out over the floor as she bled out. Eventually she went as pale as the sheets, and her erratically thumping heart ceased completely. It had been too good a death for her, but he couldn’t stay here and torture her forever…could he? No, he was getting hungry.

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“We need to leave,” said Albus, returning to the first room once quiet had fallen at last. He hadn't been able to watch... but he didn't to try to stop Severus either, knowing that she had to be silenced. He refused to look at the dead woman on the floor; he didn’t want to bring himself to feel pity for her. “I assume she didn’t have any…accomplices?”

“No,” stated Severus calmly, cleaning up the blood with a flick of his wand. “Everyone else who had been involved is dead…due to her.” He had saved many people who would have quite literally exploded, in the very room Albus had just stood in moments ago. After each death, the disgusting woman had just cleaned the place up and not given them any sort of burial. In fact, that gave Severus a good idea. “Wingardium Leviosa!” chanted Severus, moving the body towards the next room. “I need you to levitate something,” he muttered as he passed the older man.

Albus followed him cautiously, but one look at the floor made him realize what was needed. “Wingardium Leviosa!” Albus pointed at the cover to the drainage tunnel. He turned his nose away at the smell wafting up from it. He caught a tinge of red out of the corner of his eye; was that blood? Copious amounts were spread around it, as if it had been used as a dumping ground. The splash of water alerted him to the fact that Severus had just dropped her in, letting the tendrils of his magic fall away from her. Closing his eyes, Albus couldn’t believe what he’d been reduced to. For years he had told everyone that Muggles weren’t to be feared. He was being forced in the most despicable manner to re-evaluate his life’s work.

“Have you collected everything?” asked Severus, as if he hadn’t just committed murder.

“Yes,” replied Albus, staring at the door. He half wanted to Obliviate what had happened from his mind. “Did she leave information anywhere else? Her office? Her house?”

“No, nothing,” stated Severus, “Let’s go.” With that said, he Apparated from this grim dark underground make-do hospital room to the gates of Hogwarts. He wasn’t completely cleared of his anger, but the majority had been bled out thanks to the Cruciatus Curse. He hadn’t used it in years... nearly fifteen years, to be exact. That woman had brought out the nastiness in him, but it wasn’t as if he could hand her in to the Ministry and tell them she’d been torturing a wizarding child. They would want to know why, and who; nobody could know Harry was back until he was seventeen. If they had any hopes of healing him, it had to be done by them, not the Ministry... who would leave him as he was, and use him to elevate their own sense of self-importance.
A pop had him turning around to see that Albus had appeared behind him.

“What are you going to tell the others?” enquired Severus turning back around.

“Only what they need to know,” replied Albus.

“Good,” said Severus, glad they were in agreement. “Where is he?” He wanted to speak to Poppy, especially about the medication they’d found.

“My quarters, just temporarily of course,” murmured Albus. “He’s in my guest bedroom; Poppy is with him.”

Severus nodded curtly, and followed his Headmaster into the school once more.
“What is wrong with his skin?” asked Albus, horrified when he saw the state of his back when it came into his view. He had been watching Severus and Poppy work together, carefully easing the teenager into a different position as if they were afraid to break him. Which he completely understood; Harry looked as if a single wrong move would shatter him completely. His back was black, blistered; skin was peeling off. It looked very irritated and inflamed, and he had a hole in his back. The area was covered in different colours, all various stages of red where the blackness wasn’t. There was an odd yellow colour in the middle of the sore. He regretted looking immediately, as he realized it wasn’t an infection… it was the boy’s bones.

“He’s suffering from decubitus ulcers, more commonly referred to as bed sores,” answered Poppy. The worst one was on his back; he also had one on the base of his spine that extended into his buttocks, as well as some on the backs of his heels. She’d never seen any this bad in her entire career; not even those in the long-term ward at St. Mungo’s had them like this. When those patients began showing signs, they were treated immediately, not left like this. This was utterly horrific; when she’d seen them she’d wanted to hit something or someone. It explained the smell, which was quite bad. Bedsores could be fatal; it was only Harry’s innate magic that was keeping him alive, keeping him fighting the infection. The bedsores could have begun to show ten months into Harry’s captivity; she had no idea how long he’d been neglected in such a fashion, but judging by the state of them… it was a very long time — years, even.

Severus placed the sterilised gloves on, and scooped up a lot of the salve in the jar at the side of the bed. Only then did he begin rubbing it in, having to stop himself quite frankly being sick. He had seen a lot as a Death Eater, but this was a whole other ballgame. Breathing deeply, he continued rubbing it in, even into the crater in Harry’s back. It would help prevent any infection while it healed. Scooping up more, he quickly rubbed the rest of the salve into the wound, but gently, so as not to hurt Harry further.

“Here,” said Poppy, handing over the wad of cotton-wool, cut to the size of the wound. Severus took it as Poppy kept Harry in a position that made it easier for him to do this. They had to keep everything extremely clean; the slightest infection could be fatal, since his immune system was basically nonexistent. That done, he wrapped gauze around it, keeping the area sterile and clean, and of course to prevent the wool from falling out of the wound. It had to heal from the inside out, it was vital for that to happen first. and this was just the first of them, too; he had three other ones to tend to.

“That’s the first one done,” said Severus to Poppy, who eased him further onto his side, and pushed the covers down more, displaying the other one at the base of his coccyx. Poppy placed the gauze and cotton wool at the bottom of the bed, in easy reach for Severus. He repeated his actions, spreading the salve on thickly, before the cotton wool was settled in place, and the gauze applied.

Albus turned away, unable to watch; this was the most horrific thing he had ever seen. Why had she done it? Severus hadn’t spoken of what he had seen in her mind yet; part of him didn’t want to
know because he knew whatever it was, it was never going to be a good enough reason to have neglected a child. Standing up he moved out of his spare room, and rang the bell on his fireplace.

“What can Izzy get Headmaster Dumbledore?” asked the House-Elf answering the call.

“Three meals please, and some….soup, and maybe milk,” said Albus, he wasn’t sure if Harry could even have any of that. Thankfully, between Severus and Poppy they were well and truly covered on anything Harry could possibly need. Poppy was the best in her field; it was why he’d been so eager to have her at Hogwarts. Severus was extremely knowledgeable in both Muggle and Magical medicines and potions, although he hadn’t seemed to know what the Muggle drugs were that the woman was giving Harry.

He had asked Fawkes to go to Minerva, who had contacts in the Muggle world, and hopefully find a book that would tell them everything they wanted to know. He had yet to return, but it had only been approximately half an hour since Fawkes had disappeared. The popping of the House-Elf’s departure brought him out of his thoughts.

“Why are you hiding out here?” demanded Severus, as he exited the bedroom, gazing at Dumbledore pensively. He could see the sickening guilt surrounding the old wizard. He hadn’t seen such guilt in the old man since Lily and James Potter had died; he’d felt as though he’d failed them. The truth was, they had picked the wrong wizard to trust with their lives, and they had paid for it, the end. Severus knew that it wasn’t really as simple as he liked to try to make out; Lily had been the only person in the world he’d cared about, even after she’d turned her back on their friendship.

“I was just getting us something to eat…is there anything Harry can have?” asked Albus.

“Porridge; add honey and oil, perhaps a few small pieces of fruit. I doubt he will be able to eat them, but there is goodness even in the juices,” said Severus immediately. “A spoonful of sugar, but not much; he needs extremely bland food, as he needs to build up his tolerance to food once more.”

“Tolerance?” echoed Albus.

“There is a chance he will vomit his food back up; he is suffering from severe, chronic malnutrition, as evidenced by the dark patches on his skin, his bloated stomach, and of course the swelling of his eyes and ankles,” explained Severus. That wasn’t the only potential problem —there was a good chance he would have diarrhoea—, but he didn’t want to discuss that. They would deal with it when it happened. Poppy had already placed a plastic sheet on the bottom half of the bed, so they wouldn’t have to change the sheets.

“What else does he need?” asked Albus, wanting to know everything he could to help.

“For his malnutrition? Food, drink; he needs to be kept warm at all times, and of course the nutrition potions we’ve already started him on,” replied Severus, his tone grim.

“Why did she do it, Severus?” asked Dumbledore plaintively.

“You already know why, Albus,” Severus told him tersely. He didn’t even want to think about what he’d seen in that woman’s head, never mind talk about it.

“Severus…Harry seems to have some swelling in his throat; I cannot find a cause for it,” said Poppy, coming out of the room and staring between them cautiously.

“Feeding tube,” Severus bit out, “When she could be bothered.” They could be left in, but she’d
removed it every time... to feel more in control; to make Harry see she was in control.

“But they can be kept in… did you remove it?” asked Poppy confused.

“No, she removed it, she liked the power she gained when she hid Harry down there, the power of knowing she could just leave him there to die,” grimaced Severus, scowling at the thought. “She also didn’t like cleaning up after him…so she gave him the barest minimum.”

Poppy clasped her hand over her mouth— and this was a healer? Or as the Muggles called their healers — a Doctor? She desperately wanted to shout and rage. She couldn’t though; Harry needed her more than she needed to let off some steam…well, it was technically true, but she felt the need to scream at the injustice Harry had been forced to suffer through.

“When did she start sedating him?” asked Albus, sitting down, gesturing for the others to do the same thing.

Izzy returned with their food, and bless her, thought Albus there was a platter with coffee, milk and all the other essentials. He was hungry, but he didn’t think his stomach could keep food down; it was still churning thanks to the images forever planted in his mind. To make matters worse, he felt extremely odd having Severus and Poppy in his quarters. None of his teachers had ever been up here; it was his private place. A chilled pitcher of milk was also present; Severus hadn’t said anything about it so he hoped it was all right.

“Bring up a pitcher of water and a spoon, as well as a jar of salt and sugar,” said Severus curtly, speaking to the house-elf. “As well as freshly made porridge, drizzled with honey, oil, sugar, and a few small pieces of strawberry; allow the juices to mix in.”

“Yes, sir,” said Izzy, bowing low before immediately disappearing.

“Salt?” asked Albus.

“It hydrates; a small amount of salty water, as well as sugary water, is needed when the dehydration is caused by diarrhoea. The sugary water is required to give patients energy.” It was Poppy who informed Albus this time.

“I see,” replied Albus, nodding his understanding. “Severus, when did she start sedating him?” he repeated his earlier question before they were interrupted.

“A few weeks into taking him down there, I think. It’s hard to decipher the days, but he kept using his magic on her; eventually she realized it didn’t act up when he was unconscious,” stated Severus sharply. He did not want to talk about it. “I will place the memories in a pensieve, you can view them then.”

Albus looked distressed at the very idea of having to view the memories, but perhaps he deserved it to remind him of his failures.

Poppy grabbed a plate and ate a little bit of her meal, noticing Severus doing the same; she wouldn’t be getting any sleep tonight, so she would need what energy she could get from eating. She had so many questions whirling around her head, such as why Harry had been taken to a hospital for mental illnesses— was there something wrong with him? Would he even be sane when he woke up? Or would they have to confine him to the bed for his own good? She prayed that wasn’t the case; after how he’d been treated these past years, it was definitely NOT something he deserved. Here he would get everything he needed, at least she hoped so; if not, St. Mungo’s would definitely help him. That would be a last resort though, which she prayed to Merlin wouldn’t come
“Do you think I could get his medical file? I would like to know why they were transferring him to... Priory, was it?” wondered Poppy, after swallowing the food hastily, when Severus nodded. “Yes, Priory.”

“You would need to show your medical credentials, but yes, I don’t see why you couldn’t get them,” said Severus; he hadn’t even thought of that.

Fawkes flashed into the room, trilling softly as he dropped a package on his owner before swooping over to his perch and beginning to greedily drink the water that was in the bowl for him. He trilled some more, a soothing melody that relaxed the occupants of the room a little.

“Finally,” murmured Albus, opening the package to find the huge Muggle book within and a long letter from Minerva. He didn’t even need to read it; no doubt she was extremely curious and wanted to know what was going on and WHY they needed it. Her Animagus form had been truly fitting; thankfully her curiosity didn’t kill the cat. He passed the book to Severus, who began to flip through it, his food already forgotten.

“Haloperidol, or Haldol, is an antipsychotic medication used in the treatment of schizophrenia, acute psychosis, mania, delirium, tics in Tourette syndrome, choreas, nausea and vomiting in palliative care, intractable hiccups, agitation and severe anxiety,” Severus said as he read it.

“Antipsychotic? That doesn’t sound good.” said Albus, his blue eyes shadowed with embittered pain.

“Quetiapine is also an antipsychotic,” revealed Severus, his tone grim.

“Is there a chance that she was just giving it to him because it was there?” asked Albus desperately.

“We won’t know until he wakes,” said Poppy, “It will be something we must determine on our own.”

“The side effects of the long-term exposure to those drugs are...alarming to say the least,” said Severus. If they weren’t magical, she would have ruined Harry’s life.

“How so?” Poppy asked alarmed.

“The cerebral cortex is often irreparably damaged because of it, at least to the Muggles who don’t have our abilities,” said Severus grimly. “Considering he’s been there since he was four years old...it’s been eleven years nearly.”

Albus gulped, he knew what the cerebral cortex was responsible for: memory, attention, situational awareness, thought, language, and consciousness. “How can we fix it?” he croaked. Izzy placed the required items on the table before disappearing again, sensing the grimness of the conversation around her.

“A daily potion regimen. It can be added to the others; it won't interfere,” said Severus, “But I will have to check to be certain. It’s definitely not a potion we have lying around. He will not be getting the inferior potions from St. Mungo’s; I will brew it myself.” He didn’t care that it took over seven hours to brew.

“It needs to be made fresh anyway,” Poppy pointed out. She knew that it degraded quickly, only lasting a fortnight at the most, if she remembered correctly. “Excuse me,” she said, standing up, taking with her the pitcher of water, the salt and sugar, as well as the spoon.
“I will be through momentarily,” said Severus, still reading the book. He would have to thank Minerva for her quickness. It had only been an hour at the most; considering she lived in Hogsmeade, she must have been very quick and efficient. There was little doubt she was making her way back to Hogwarts; she was too curious for her own good. It wasn’t every day a colleague asked you for a Muggle book dealing with Muggle drugs.

“Will I just send the soup back?” Dumbledore asked, realizing it probably wouldn’t get eaten now that something more…filling had been ordered. Soup would just not do, when it came to malnutrition at least. Porridge with oil, honey, and sugar didn’t sound at all appealing, but it must be good for Harry if Poppy and Severus had suggested it.

“Yes, while soup may be a good idea, especially Vegetable, since he will require a lot of vegetables in the coming months, it’ll be too rich for his system right now. It would just be guaranteed to show a reappearance,” stated Severus. Standing up, he took the porridge through to the bedroom. Things were looking a little bit better, even if appearances were deceptive. “I would suggest the sugar first; he was on saline solution IV drip when we found him.” Saline solution was salty water, the same that was found in the body and it was usually for patients that couldn’t take anything orally… but magical people didn’t have that problem.

“I see,” said Poppy, conjuring another glass and pouring some water in with a small amount of sugar. It was room-temperature water, to keep Harry’s system from reacting to the shock of cold water. “He should be wakening soon, that’s if he can; I think the drugs will almost be out of his system.”

“Yes, he will,” replied Severus almost hollowly. He dreaded it with every fibre of his being; he didn’t want to see this, he’d rather crawl inside Harry’s bedsores. Well, he might be overstating things, but regardless he was terrified that what Harry had seen as a child had broken him, splintered him into a thousand pieces so that not even a great wizard and witch like himself and Poppy could put him back together again. It had sickened him to the core, seeing what she’d done to Muggles trying to give them magic, and that was only a cursory glance. Harry had been living the nightmare. It was difficult for him to admit, but with Poppy there was no need for pretence. She knew him; she knew how much this was bothering him without hearing his voice or the strain in it.

“We have to be positive, Severus, we must,” said Poppy, grasping his elbow in moral support.

“I know we must, but it isn’t easy. I’m a cauldron-half-empty wizard, as you well know,” said Severus, his tone slightly off. He thought the worst of every situation; it prevented him from being surprised or disappointed, whichever the case might be.

“Should we give him this magically?” asked Poppy, referring, of course, to the porridge Severus still had clutched in his hand.

“Only a spoonful at a time, I’d suggest, perhaps one every twenty minutes, to allow his body to get used to the sustenance,” replied Severus, thoughtfully.

“So long between them?” stated Poppy. She didn’t like that, but she deferred to Severus’ expertise; she’d never dealt with a patient so bad before.

“If we give him too much, his body will reject it, as you know,” said Severus.

“All right,” agreed Poppy, spelling a small amount into his stomach. At least he wasn’t having potions on a completely empty stomach now... which wasn’t very nice. “How about an anti-nausea potion? Could we mix one into the porridge?” she then asked, realizing it could only help.
“Actually, that’s a very good idea.” said Severus giving his nod of approval.
Chapter 5

My Dark Protector

Chapter 5

Albus Dumbledore landed with a thump, his ribs jarring painfully against the side of his desk as he emerged from the Pensieve. His face ashen, his eyes were filled with horror the likes of which shouldn’t be possible in a man who had seen two wars. Yet it couldn’t be denied, since it was so evidently there. Albus blindly sought for his seat; once he found it he sat down, wordlessly opening and closing his mouth, unable to formulate a single response.

“Do you need a calming draught?” asked Severus, his eyes meeting the Headmaster’s, filled with understanding and pain. He knew what the Headmaster had seen because he had put those memories into the pensieve. He had to live with it every minute of the day, quite literally; since he had raided that disgusting woman’s mind, he had yet to sleep for more than a few seconds at a time when he accidentally nodded off.

“I’ll be fine,” rasped Albus, grasping a hold of the jug and glass as he poured himself some water. He gulped it down as quickly as possible as he regained his bearings, trying to make sense of the despicable woman’s actions.

“Are you sure?” Severus then inquired; the Headmaster did look as though he was about to be spectacularly sick.

Albus nodded grimly; he was grateful he had taken a stomach-soothing potion and a calming draught before going in to view the memory. Of course, it had been Severus’ suggestion, and as usual he did know best. Sighing softly, the old wizard closed his eyes, massaging his temples; nothing but the soft whirling of the instruments on the desk could be heard. Even the portraits were silent as death, perhaps sensing the grimness of the day…or perhaps they didn’t want to miss anything the Headmaster had to say. “In my youth…I had this grand vision, you know…” Albus started, but he paused, not really sure if he wanted to reveal that — nobody else knew.

“Yes?” Severus said, curious now. Albus rarely shared stories of his personal life. He was a bit like him in that regard…and youth? Well that was completely new.

“I had a young sister, Ariana; she was attacked by three young boys when they saw her using accidental magic. The attack left her broken…she refused to use magic again, and her magic used to flux dangerously, until she couldn’t contain it any longer and it exploded from her,” said Albus, watching Severus’ eyes go large at his announcement. “I grew resentful and hateful towards Muggles, but it did not last, of course. I then spent over one hundred years defending them…What have I done? Was I wrong, Severus? What if incidents like this…this atrocity continue to happen? What if it had gotten out? The very foundation of our world would have been endangered beyond comprehension.” He could have helped along the way... by saying that Muggles weren't a danger.

“What happened to Ariana?” asked Severus, his tone oddly respectful. He couldn’t believe what he’d been told; how could the Headmaster even think of defending those that had attacked his family? He’d never had a brother or sister; the closest he’d had to one was Lily. If she’d been attacked he would have wreaked havoc on the Muggles.

“She died, not long after my mother, who died due to Ariana’s erratic outbursts.” The guilt he felt was still evident in his voice after all these years. Albus found it extremely odd to hear her name
from someone; Aberforth threw it in his face whenever they had a moment together.

“And the boys?” demanded Severus, his tone immeasurably hostile.

Albus stared at him, conflicted, before he eventually told him. “My father killed them; he was well known as a Muggle-hater. When I first came to Hogwarts, everyone assumed I would be just like him. I spent my life trying to prove I wasn’t, despite the fact I was glad he had done what he had. But just because I was glad those boys had got what they deserved, it didn’t mean I wished it on all Muggles. Dear Merlin, I haven’t told this to anyone,” he admitted in surprise. This situation was bringing up a lot of bad memories. He usually had more decorum than this, and the need to keep that incident secret had been drummed so thoroughly into him that he was surprised he’d been able to say anything. Yet at the same time, it had been very liberating to actually get the words out.

“I have always thought you a mystery, Albus,” confessed Severus. “With the exception of your achievements, nothing much is known about you, for a man living his life in the limelight. If this was supposed to help me understand you, then you have failed; you’re an even bigger mystery than I thought.”

“Have I been wrong, Severus?” whispered Albus, the memories of the Pensieve flashing before his eyes, making him feel sick. “Will Muggles be the end of us all?”

“Who knows?” Severus stated, hearing the unasked question: Was the Dark Lord right? “Nobody can truly tell us what the future holds, at least not without riddles.” Here he was thinking of Prophecies, and of those that had predicted the Dark Lord's downfall.

“True,” agreed Dumbledore. Suddenly, loud knocking at the door brought them out of their conversation. “Come in!” he called without hesitation.

“You wanted to see us, Albus?” said Remus, his kind voice filled with fatigue as he entered the Headmaster’s office, his permanent shadow Sirius Black following along behind him.

“Yes, yes I did,” said Albus, “Please take a seat.”

“What is he doing here?” whispered Sirius petulantly, glaring at Severus as if he was something nasty and foul. He didn’t trust Snape as far as he could throw him. Once a Death Eater, always a Death Eater.

“I will ask you to keep your opinions of Severus to yourself,” snapped Albus as he glared at Sirius, getting tired of his petty squabbling. "Or you can leave and never return."

Sirius and Remus stared at him in shock as they sat; never before had the Headmaster snapped at them or glared so fiercely. Remus’ amber eyes looked him over in silent concern, as Sirius stared at him in confused bafflement, half-waiting for an answer to why the Headmaster was being so ... off with them. Or rather, it was Sirius who was thinking that; Remus just slouched in his seat like an errant school boy, trying not to get any attention brought his way.

Severus pursed his lips, biting down viciously on his tongue to stop himself from releasing his pent-up frustration on Black or Lupin. Normally he would have no problem doing that, but considering what they were about to learn...he couldn’t help but feel particularly sorry for them. Any other time he would have sneered back at them, but he’d never expected Albus to say anything — he never usually did. He ignored their ‘petty squabbling’, as he liked to call it. Albus had always ignored it, from the time they’d been eleven until this very day. What had changed? Seeing Harry? Well, possibly; it had even stopped his natural inclinations towards Black and Lupin.
“I apologise, Albus,” said Remus quietly. “Was there something you needed? It's just we could be out there looking for…”

“We are wasting time here,” Sirius butted in irately, angry at the Headmaster for his threats. How dare he? This was a school! Not private property; he could come and go as he pleased. Remus just glanced apologetically at the old man, his amber eyes veering to Severus, to find him staring straight ahead with no emotion showing on his face. Usually it was filled with disgust, a sneer even, or a snarl for the two of them. Something was going on, Remus realized with a sinking feeling in his stomach.

“No, you aren't wasting any time; this is why I called you here,” said Albus, his tone curt.

“What do you mean?” asked Sirius, frowning darkly, not seeing the look of dread cross Remus’ face.

Remus felt despair building up inside him; for someone who used to be an Auror, Black was such an idiot sometimes. Albus had found Harry, obviously, and by the looks of it... it wasn’t good news. It certainly explained Albus’ anger; he didn’t know what he was going to do. How would Sirius react? No, he thought viciously, he wasn’t going to assume the worst, but he couldn’t think of any other explanation as to why they were here and not in the hospital wing where Harry presumably would have been if he had been alive.

“I mean that Harry is…” Albus trailed off, he honestly didn’t know what on earth to say — he couldn’t give them false hope.

“He isn’t dead!” shouted Sirius, standing up, blue eyes blazing; he absolutely refused to believe that, as denial hit him full force. Harry wasn’t dead. Remus stared blindly between Albus and Sirius, hoping this was some sort of mistake, that there was nothing wrong with Harry.

“No, no he’s not,” stated Albus.

“Where is he?” asked Sirius, “Where’s my godson?”

“He’s safe,” Severus told him harshly. “Now shut the hell up before you disturb him.” He hadn’t woken up yet, and quite frankly, he didn’t want the first time he did to be to the sound of yelling and shouting — it wouldn’t be good for his system.

“He’s here?” asked Remus in concern. “Why?” It made no logical sense, so he added, “Is he hurt?”

“That’s putting it mildly,” Severus stated mildly.

“TAKE ME TO MY GODSON!” demanded Sirius loudly.

“Shut up,” hissed Severus, his black eyes flashing furiously. The sound of a door opening up the spiralling staircase had both Severus and Albus looking up in alarm; they were expecting Poppy to tell them that the shouting had woken Harry up.

“It's fine, Severus, I have cast a silencing spell in the room; I’ll be going back up now,” Poppy told them, glaring at Remus and Sirius for disturbing her patient... well, nearly. Sirius moved to follow her up the stairs, determined to get to his godson and see him for himself. He was prevented by a wand under his chin, digging into his throat harshly. His eyes bore holes into Snape; his lips pulled back to reveal his teeth in a feral snarl, reminding them all of his Animagus form, which he did resemble sometimes — especially when he got angry enough to look rabid. Which Severus would say was all the time.
“Make another move and you’ll leave this office in pieces,” said Severus, his voice deceptively soft.

“That’s enough!” snapped Albus, “Harry is in no condition to deal with your antics, Sirius Black.”

“He’s my godson. I have legal custody of him, and if you try to stop me, I’ll make this official,” Sirius told Albus, staring at him, despite the fact it was Severus who had his wand wedged up his neck.

“All that will accomplish is getting him locked up in St. Mungo’s, or Harry becoming a ward of the Minister; your claim on Harry is weak at best. You’re a mess; you couldn’t look after a dog, never mind a human being. Everyone knows that; the Minister will have him before nightfall, and it’s the same end result: you not getting to see your godson,” hissed Severus, his magic fluctuating wildly.

Sirius froze; you couldn’t even tell if he was still breathing.

“St. Mungo’s? What exactly is wrong with him?” asked Remus, a tremble in his voice.

“Sit down. I mean it, Sirius, sit down. Neither I, Severus, nor Poppy has had any more than two hours’ sleep in two days. We are highly strung from exhaustion, and easily provoked,” said Albus. “Now, Remus, as for your question…” the Headmaster paused, wishing he could take another Pepper-Up Potion. Regretfully, though, he couldn’t take any more; the only option open to him was sleep. Even when he lay down to try and get some rest, his mind was plagued with Harry and finding him. Ten minutes into dozing off he woke up terrified out of his wits that Harry was dead. It was completely irrational, yet even as even as old as he was, he wasn’t immune to the worry.

“Where did you find him?” asked Remus, grabbing hold of Sirius’ shoulders and shoving him into the seat before reclaiming his own.

“I did not find him; Severus did,” admitted Albus, gazing at Remus shrewdly. “He was squirreled away under Priory Hospital.”

“A Muggle hospital?” grimaced Sirius.

“Squirreled?” echoed Remus, glancing at Albus; there had been a definite hard note in his voice.

“He was rescued from the Dursleys’, severely beaten and ill. The list is quite frankly endless; I won’t bore you with it,” stated Severus; that wasn’t the worst of it anyway. “He was sent to a children’s hospital in London; they healed all his physical wounds, but his mental scarring was… extreme. He wouldn’t talk, had night terrors, and refused to eat; he wouldn’t stop trying to clean the hospital.”

Remus gaped, his jaw unhinged as he stared at Severus... but he wasn’t seeing him.

“They weren’t equipped to deal with his problems, so they transferred him somewhere he could get the care he obviously needed,” Severus continued, his tone bland as if he didn’t care, but that was so far from the truth it was laughable. He’d paced like a caged tiger, furious for hours after reading the information the hospital had provided. “This is where things get…sketchy. When he was transferred there, a woman by the name of Louisa White saw him use accidental magic. He was transferred at night, they were short-staffed, and she saw an opportunity and took it.”

“Wait…what kind of opportunity?” asked Remus, swallowing thickly and glancing at Sirius worriedly. The animagus was too quiet…was he even processing this?

“What do you think? She saw him using magic,” Severus snapped angrily. “She took him under the
hospital and kept him there; he’s essentially spent the past eleven years as a prisoner, sedated, and when he wasn’t unconscious from the drugs she gave him, he was forced to watch unspeakable things happening, unable to prevent them.”

“Unspeakable?” whispered Remus, tears trailing freely down his face.

“Believe me, you don’t want to know,” Albus told them, his tone revealing more than anything else could.

“So…so…mentally? How…” stuttered Remus, not even making an attempt to wipe away the tears.

“The drugs she was giving him caused damage to the cerebral cortex; I have him on a potion regimen to help. We won’t know until he wakes up just how bad the damage is,” Severus told him grimly. “Either way, if he can be healed mentally…it’s going to be a very long road to recovery, if that’s even possible.”

“Cerebral cortex?” muttered Sirius, wide-eyed, finally speaking.

“The brain, a part of the brain,” said Severus, rolling his eyes at the bloody idiot. “It’s responsible for memory, attention, situational awareness, thoughts, language, and consciousness.”

“So he might not be able to speak? Think? Remember things?” whispered Sirius, shuddering in horror.

“As I said, we won’t know until he wakes up,” said Severus.

“Can I at least see him? Please?” begged Sirius.

Severus and Albus exchanged looks; Black was taking this too well, and he was obviously in some sort of denial.

“You do understand you must keep this quiet? If word got out…Fudge would take Harry away and maybe even lock him up. You understand this, don’t you?” warned Albus, cautiously.

“I know, I know,” croaked Sirius, “Please let me see him.”

“Follow us,” said Albus standing up. Severus went first, already halfway up the stairs by the time Albus, Sirius, and Remus followed, in that order. Not one word was spoken, and no sound was made other than the thumping of feet on the metal staircase. There was a tangible feeling of desperation in the air, and silent prayers for something going right for once. Severus opened the door to the room, giving Poppy a silent look; she then tried to get the covers over Harry so the two wizards didn’t see the worst of the damage. Unfortunately she wasn’t quite quick enough, having been in the process of moving him onto his stomach, to prevent more bedsores—Harry already had enough of them to last a life time. The padding had been removed from the bedsores, allowing air at them for half an hour.

“MERLIN’S BALLS!” croaked Sirius, turning around hastily, before he was spectacularly sick all over the place.

“Get him out!” cried Poppy, shoving both Sirius and Remus out of the room, hastily casting spells
as she went, sterilizing and sanitising the room and air.

“What’s wrong with her,” asked Remus, wincing as pain shot up his ribs, from where she’d shoved him quite hard.

“Harry’s immune system is non-existent; if he gets the slightest illness, it could prove fatal. Poppy is, as usual, being over-diligent in her care for her patient, and I can only commend her on a job well done,” stated Albus, using a spell of his own to get rid of the smell now lingering in his sitting room.

Eventually his eyes caught sight of Sirius crouched on the floor rocking back and forth, his hair bunched up through his fists. Violent sobs were breaking through, making him sound like a broken man, desolate. Remus was leaning against the doorframe, his entire body shaking as tears flooded down his face. At last he lurched for Sirius, ineffectually trying to comfort him when he himself was feeling torn asunder.
Finally Getting Some Rest

Severus couldn’t stand around and watch it anymore; he slid into the room and closed the door quickly behind him. He may hate their guts but he couldn’t just watch them at their most vulnerable, he knew no matter what happened in future he wouldn’t be able to get that image out of his mind. He would leave Albus to deal with it, he was much better at that sort of thing anyway; he sure as hell had no idea what to say. Nothing that came out of his mouth would be a comfort to them, and he wasn’t about to lie and lead them to believe Harry would be fine. Since there was no way they would find out for a long while. Magic was good at many things, but it couldn’t list the problems you have mentally, only physical wounds.

“Do you think they need a calming draught?” asked Poppy, looking guilty; she wished she’d been quicker, covered Harry faster so they hadn’t seen how bad he was. Or treated them so harshly, but she couldn’t risk Harry getting any virus or infection. They would understand now themselves, having seen how bad he was.

Severus paused at the side of Harry’s bed, facing Poppy blankly for a few seconds as if the words hadn’t registered. “No, they need this, they need to grieve, if they don’t get passed this stage, it will make matters worse in the long run. The last thing Black and Lupin really need is a false sense of calm.”

“Yes, yes I suppose you are right,” Poppy said, conceding the point. Taking a seat at the side of Harry’s bed, placing her wand on the stand next to her. Sighing softly, grateful at least that it was the summer. She couldn’t imagine having to split herself between here and the Hospital wing. Mostly here since Harry was the one who would need her the most, cuts and bruises were absolutely nothing on this damage.

“Get some rest, Poppy, we cannot continue on as we are, we must come to some sort of arrangement.” said Severus pensively, watching the Healer, who was utterly exhausted, as evidence by the fact she was almost fast asleep in the chair already.

“What kind of arrangement? I think it’s best we decide one before we do anything else.” said Poppy, shaking herself awake, sitting up straighter, blinking her eyes and stretching out her neck arms.

“Obviously one of us will do the day shift and another the night shift,” said Severus, “At least until he’s completely out of the danger point.”

“Well considering you are used to long nights brewing, perhaps I should take the day shift and you the night?” suggested Poppy, well aware that Severus was a night owl.

“Alright,” said Severus, agreeing with it, at least this way they both actually got some sleep. Right now they were running purely on caffeine, Pepper-Up Potion had been used and stretched out to the maximum. They couldn’t have anymore for at least twelve hours, twenty four to be on the safe side. The body wasn’t suppose to do this long without sleep, and considering everything they’d learned they needed the sleep to deal with it.
“So why don’t you get some sleep,” said Poppy, “Maybe something to eat too, I’ve noticed you aren’t eating well Severus, don’t think I didn’t.”

“I’ve not had much of an appetite to be honest.” replied Severus, “But you are correct, I think it’s best if we both eat.”

“Roz,” called Poppy.

“What can I be doing for Healer Poppy?” asked Roz, the uniform gave way the fact that she was not a Hogwarts House-Elf. She was Poppy’s personal House-Elf, and Severus was grateful that the thing wasn’t bowing and scraping.

“Bring two full dinners, some tea I think and…what should I get for Harry?” asked Poppy, before speaking to Severus.

“Stew, it must be completely blended no lumps,” he stated tiredly. It would give him a wide variety of the foods he needed, meat, carbohydrates and such.

“Roz will do as Sir wishes,” said Roz, giving a small bow she left the room with an inaudible pop.

“He’s getting better at keeping it down.” she said quietly, the sugary and salty water was helping to stop the diarrhoea completely. No regurgitation yet, which she was thankful for, probably due to the anti-nausea potions they were placing in the small quantities of food he was eating. Not a lot of potion, just lightly drizzled into it.

“He is,” agreed Severus, it was one less thing to worry about. He wished he could say it narrowed the list down, but he couldn’t. Harry was going to need a lot of attention and healing, it would take him years to recover if there was any hope of it. The last thing Harry needed was locked up at St. Mungo’s, while it was a good place, they would look after him, and give him the care he needed, after everything Harry had been through - it wasn’t right or fair. Unfortunately he was well aware that life wasn’t fair on the best of people. Perhaps for the first time in his life, he was glad Lily was gone, so she didn’t have to see what had become of her son. Albeit if she had been alive none of this would have happened.

When Severus finally broke out of his thoughts, he found Poppy sleeping uneasily on the chair she was in. Shaking his head, why hadn’t she listened to him and had a lie down? Removing his wand from its holster, he flicked his wand and turned the chair into a comfortable recliner. Moving over to her, he placed a pillow under her head and grabbed the as of yet unused cover and placed it over the sleeping healer.

“Shh!” he said quickly when he heard the subtle pop, indicating that Roz the House-Elf had appeared in the room. Stopping her from opening her mouth and wakening the exhausted Witch up, “Wingardium Leviosa!” murmured Severus, levitating her to the other side of the room and conjuring up a table and three chairs for whenever they were needed. He wasn’t going back out there until he was sure they were gone, so he would eat his meal in here. Roz placed the platter, which by the way was bigger than her, on the table and disappeared again having done her duty.

Breathing evenly, Severus pulled a few tissues out of the box and wiped up the drool gathering at the side of Harry’s face. They’d cleaned him up as best as they could, but the child needed a bath. He had no idea how he would accomplish that, there was one thing they both agreed to was to keep magic to the barest minimum. They had no idea how Harry would react to it, after everything he’d witnessed he might see it as the cause of his imprisonment, which it was, and refuse his gifts. That had caused Albus to pale drastically, he had looked ready to topple, Severus understood that now, it was like a blast from the past. It was exactly the same fate that had met Ariana, but he wouldn’t
let it happen to Harry, even if he had to scour the Darkest of Arts for a potion to suppress his magic, or invent one if it comes it. He would not let Harry suffer, never again, he had sworn to protect him and he would do it - even if it was from himself.

Sitting down Severus reluctantly began eating, his appetite had yet to return, and with the way things were looking he doubted it would return any time soon. The covers on the food would keep Poppy’s food warm until she woke up, they had a warming charm imbued on them keeping them fresh for hours after being cooked. He did remove the lid from Harry’s food, leaving it to cool down, as he dug into his own. When he was half way through, he lifted a spoonful out and used his wand to make the stew disappear (and appear in Harry’s stomach) not that they would see it. It was much better than the crude Muggle method of getting food into someone.

Not being able to hear what was going on out there was making him antsy, and he had no idea why. Perhaps because he was also aware of his surroundings, his Muffliato spell worked different from ‘Silencio’ you could still hear out, only those under the ‘bubble’ couldn’t be heard, to the outside world it sounded like buzzing of bees or some other insect.

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Albus felt faint watching the two men grieve on the floor of his home, and it was his home, he’d been Headmaster for a very long time. For the millionth time in the past few days, he wondered if this crippling guilt would ever go away. By trying to give Harry a normal life, he hadn’t just hurt one person, but a plethora of them. Severus was hurt, but thankfully he wasn’t blaming him for it, but would those two be able to let it into their hearts to forgive him for doing what he thought was best. Even being raised by the Minister of Magic would have been better than the fate that had befallen Harry. He wanted to join them, grieve for their loss, Harry’s loss, his loss. Yet he couldn’t, he didn’t deserve to grieve, and if they chose to get angry at him he wouldn’t stop them. Couldn’t stop them, not any more than he could stop his own brother hating and blaming him for something that had happened over one hundred years ago.

Aberforth had expected too much of him, he had been a teenager; he had let his emotions guide him and only learned to follow his heart too late. Nothing he had done had helped ease the loathing his brother felt for him, and he had given up trying, thinking Abe needed it, only to realize he’d let it fester too long and nothing would change his feelings.

Sirius and Remus were only thirty-five-years old, one was a werewolf and one had been in Azkaban for years this could very well break them. Albus had always been good at comforting people, but right now there was nothing he could do, say or offer that would make one bloody bit of a difference. Dropping into a seat, closing his eyes wishing to press his hands to his ears to cut out the noise of their wails of agony. He envied that Severus had been able to leave, since he would have greatly liked to go with him. No this was his penance, he deserved to hear it all, maybe then he would think twice about making decisions that could have potentially damning affects.

Time seemed to stand still, he felt like it was, glancing at the clock, ten minutes….a whole ten minutes, and it should have more than just ten minutes that had passed. What could he do to help? Calming draught? No if Severus hadn’t tried to force one down their throat they were obviously better off without it. This wasn’t something small, this was something big and they needed to let it out. He would need to keep an eye on them; shock was a serious condition if left untreated.

“Who did this to him?” asked Remus, looking up at Dumbledore, his amber eyes reflecting madness and the desire to kill - he recognized the signs all too well, having seen them in one Tom Riddle, himself at one point and Gellert too.

“Someone who won’t get a chance to harm another soul,” said Albus, realizing he would need to
tell the truth otherwise they would likely try and hunt them down - maybe even harm someone innocent in the crossfire. His eyes were without their twinkle, a cold hardness in them that had been present for two days when he wasn’t displaying his guilt of course.

“Severus?” whispered Remus, his gaze filled with shrewdness despite the tear tracks trailing down his face. He was still crouched down, hugging Sirius close, he looked as if he was unconscious, but he wasn’t, sobs were still bursting forth. He knew Albus Dumbledore well enough to know that he’d never take another persons life. He hadn’t even been able to kill Grindelwald and look at all he had done an evil wizard who had killed countless of people. Severus on the other hand - he had no trouble envisioning that confrontation. He knew how much Lily had meant to Severus, and if anyone had touched her son…touched Harry…well he wasn’t even going to pretend to feel sorry for them.

Albus didn’t reply, he had told Severus that it would remain between them. He would allow Remus and Sirius some margin of vindictiveness that the one who harmed Harry was no longer breathing in this world. Let them draw their own conclusions, conclusions couldn’t hurt anyone if for whatever reason they might say something.

“Right,” said Remus, nodding his head resignedly. Need to know basis apparently, looked as though Albus was trying to protect Severus. Not that he needed to protect him from them, Remus wanted to thank him for taking out the trash, saving him the trouble. Swallowing thickly, as his mind conjured up the image of Harry once again and more specifically the state of his back…his skinniness, he was like a skeleton and his hair! It was extremely long. “What did they do to him?” croaked Remus, his emotions crumbling down upon him once more.

Albus looked over to where they were, crumbled in a heap outside Harry’s temporary bedroom. “Believe me, you don’t want to know, if you trust nothing else…trust that. You do not want to see what Harry went through.” Albus said, trying to soothe them, he would be taking dreamless sleeping potions for months to get over what he saw, if he ever could. No, neither men deserved the memories sitting in his pensive, nobody other than him did.

“It might help us understand,” whispered Remus, his face pained.

“No, Remus, trust me, you can never understand, she was a depraved soul preying on an innocent child for something he had that she didn’t.” said Albus, more firmly. He wasn’t going to let them see that, no the only memories they would have of Harry is he ones they’d create here and now, as Harry gets better. He might never be able to take care of himself, but he would spent the rest of his days happy, loved, cared for and Merlin be damned if anyone tried to mess with Harry - he would bring hell itself down upon them to save him. He didn’t fully understand it himself, and he had seen the memories.

It looked as though she wanted magic for herself and all the Muggles, to sell it off like a miracle drug and become renowned. In the beginning she had fed Harry every day and seen to his needs, but as the time passed she grew more negligent - perhaps due to her experiments failing. She’d never treated Harry as a human though, no he’d been an experiment to her, and she’d been envious of his abilities. It became glaringly obvious every time Harry successfully fought her off using his magic. It had tried to protect him, but at such a young age with such a small magical core - it hadn’t been able to do much.

Remus mutely nodded his head, staring down at Sirius who had finally gone quiet; his shirt was completely saturated in tears. He didn’t know what the hell to do, how could he offer any comfort to Sirius? This…this was horrific; there was truly no other way to describe this situation. He hadn’t fully recovered from the fact he’d gone from Azkaban, then he’d found out his godson was
missing, he’d spent every second he had looking for him. Which was every minute that he wasn’t asleep, which was rare itself, since he had bad nightmares of his time in prison.

“I think it’s best if I get Sirius back home,” said Remus, he felt exhausted as if he had run five marathons in a single day.

“I’m not leaving Harry,” protested Sirius immediately, his loud voice grating on Albus’ sleep deprive mind. “He needs me.”

“It is Poppy’s estimation that Harry won’t wake for at least another few days, a week at the latest, his body is going through a lot right now.” said Albus, getting used to potions, food, the right amount of blood in his system, his organs beginning to work properly, his mind repairing the damage done to the cerebral cortex, Severus had brewed it fresh and added a few ingredients to enhance it. That potion would be given to him for an entire week, morning afternoon and night. Then of course its fighting off the infections he had with the antibiotics they were giving him.

“He needs to know I’m here for him,” said Sirius breathing raggedly. “That I care about him.”

“Then you need to have Poppy give you a check-up, Harry’s immune system is…vulnerable, any sickness could kill him…you understand that? The slightest cold could spell the end of him.” said Albus, cruel to be kind, he wasn’t having Harry die on him now that he’d just been saved. “That will have to wait; we all need rest before we can begin to think straight.”

“Anything, anything for him.” said Sirius almost viciously.

Albus shouldn’t have been surprised, but he was. Poppy had been trying to give Sirius a check-up for years, and he’d persistently dodged her attempts ‘I’m fine woman, leave me alone’ were his words. Perhaps now would be a good time to get Sirius to sign up to see a mind healer, or Poppy at the very least since she was certified in that area as well. This was going to be a long ride for them all, difficult too, but only one of them was an emotional and mental wreck who’s been in Azkaban. If Sirius wanted to see or be near Harry - he would need to learn to remain calm, be consistent. Which was just two of the many things Harry needed, and will continue to need in future. Sirius was none of those things right now, he was loud mouthed, cruel, disgusting hygiene and he didn’t half a sympathetic bone in his body. He had no regret for anything he had done in his life, and continued to justify them.

“Good.” said Albus, saying no more about it - whether he went through with it was anyone’s guess. “Now please excuse me, I think a nap is in order, I’m not getting any younger.” asking them without saying anything to leave.

“Of course,” murmured Remus, letting go off Sirius so he could stand up, wiping away at the mostly dried tears, feeling shaky still. He turned to stare at the closed door, burned into his retina was a picture of Harry, his back looked as though he’d been put through a curse that was slowly killing him. His skin was gone, he had a hole in his back, and how the hell could it have happened by a Muggle of all things? Shuddering in horror, he looked down at Sirius before grasping him under the arm and pulling him up. “May I use your Floo?”

“Be my guest,” said Albus, grateful that they were leaving; he didn’t have it in him to talk for much longer. He was beyond exhausted, and he couldn’t even go straight to bed either. He barely listened to them go, as he walked towards the guest room, determined to tell Severus to sleep, so they could all get their much needed rest.

“How is he?” asked Albus, opening the door, his voice quietening upon seeing Poppy asleep in the corner. He could see Severus sitting at a table with the remains of food spitting around him. A half
full bowl of what was probably Harry’s meal was lying there too. He was getting more food already that was good. Yesterday he had only gotten a quarter of the bowl if he was lucky.

“Same as usual,” replied Severus, unsuccessfully trying to muffle a yawn. Reminding himself to call Roz back after Poppy had eaten of course; he couldn’t have her taking it all way. Harry’s food was definitely cold now, but he couldn’t get anymore, not without causing him to be sick and that was the last thing he needed a sick unconscious boy on his hands.

“Severus, put a spell on Harry so you know when he wakes up and get some sleep, we all need it.” demanded Albus. “The spell will wake you up before he is fully conscious if he even wakes tonight.”

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose, it was doable, he wasn’t going to remain conscious for much longer at this rate anyway. Shoving the empty plate from him, he nodded his agreement to the plan. Standing up he grabbed the seat he’d been using and moved himself to the other side of the room, the direction Harry was sleeping in at the moment (on his side). Turning the chair into a recliner seat, just like he had done for Poppy not even an hour ago. He took a cover from the bottom of the bed, and then turned to face Harry and cast the spell to let him know when he woke up.

“Where is Black and Lupin?” enquired Severus, removing his cloak as he sat down, his body sank into the comfortable recliner and almost purred in relief.

“They have gone back home,” Albus told him, “They will no doubt be back again tomorrow, but they’ll need a check-up with Poppy before I let them near Harry.” he didn’t care that Sirius Black was his ‘legal’ guardian.

“Good,” said Severus satisfied; he remained sitting there, watching Albus expectantly, and waiting for him to leave.

“Sleep well,” said Albus, realizing Severus wasn’t about to settle until he left. He certainly wasn’t surprised by the fact the doors were spelled as soon as the door clicked closed. Severus was far too suspicious for his own good, but it had saved his life numerous times, so he couldn’t say anything about it. Ten steps later, Albus was sliding into his own room, spelling it secure before he practically fell on the bed wincing as his beard was tugged on but nonetheless closed his eyes and sleep carried him off almost instantly.
Chapter 7

My Dark Protector

Chapter 7

Severus swatted at the irritating beeping in his ear, as if trying to dislodge the sound completely, still sleeping. Consciousness slowly began to heighten his awareness, until he realized the beeping was important by why he still couldn’t figure out. He abruptly sat up, his legs staying in the same position as he did so. His head went to the side so fast it clicked, his muscles spasmed in protest causing pain to flare through him. He absently rubbed at it as he stood up, the room was as always, lit up so they could keep an eye on Harry. That and to let Harry know he was in a safe environment, after spending those years in a damp underground facility. They had all been so tired they’d had no trouble falling asleep despite the brightness in the room. When you were that tired out, you could sleep anywhere - even standing up.

Standing up he moved over to Harry, absently rubbing the sleep from his eyes as he did so. Sitting down on the chair, moving it so he could see Harry properly and so the teenager would be able to see him. He knew he made an intimidating figure, hence his reason to sit down so Harry didn’t immediately become terrified and intimidated. Although he knew it was inevitable, he had to do everything he could to help him. Which included not using magic, as difficult as that would be, he would prevail.

He hadn’t expected this tonight; he had assumed Harry would remain unconscious for a few more days. Of course Harry Potter was one for defying others expectations. He had survived the attack on his family, survived a killing curse, and had it rebound on the Dark Lord and de-bodied him. He had survived the Dursley’s and he had survived all the evils the woman had heaped upon him, he was a survivor. If by some miracle Harry was fit, healthy and sane there was little doubt he would be placed in Slytherin for sure pure unadulterated drive to live, to survive.

Black eyes watched the small twitchy movements, he had no fear that Harry would be able to get out of the bed. Not only was there a spell that prevented it on the bed, but there was no way he would have the strength to move his head never mind his body. He would need to undergo physical therapy, something he was familiar with, Poppy as well.

He braced himself, making sure that he had no emotion on his face, anger or otherwise. Harry needs calmness in his life, especially after having so many negative emotions thrown his way. At four years of age the brain was fully developed, there was a chance Harry actually remembered his time with the Dursley’s, that is if the potions were repairing all damage done to him due to the drugs.

Then those startling green eyes opened, he’d known Harry had green eyes, Albus had told him. They were exactly the same shape and colour as his mothers, but that was where the sameness ended. Lily had been joyful, jubilant and boisterous, much like Albus her eyes had always held a twinkle to them except the night she died. Harry’s however were full, panicked and full of fear. It made his heart hurt as if someone was shoving a knife into him.

“You are safe, Harry, remain calm.” said Severus, his voice smooth, calming in its affect, catching Harry’s attention. “She cannot hurt you anymore, I made sure of that.” it was extremely difficult not to let his anger show, but thankfully, due to his spying days he was able to retain his calm façade. He continued to watch him, wanting to see if he understood, but his face didn’t change from its terror. Harry was watching him as if he was an extremely dangerous snake ready to strike.
Quite an apt description if Harry was anyone else, he would learn that he had nothing to fear from him.

Severus moved from his seat, slowly, aware that those eyes continued to move with him. He poured water from the jug into a plastic cup, the water was cold this time hopefully Harry would appreciate that. He kept his movements slow, letting Harry see where he was at all times. He was propped up with the pillows, which were half way down his back, keeping the weight off the bedsores. Although it was next to impossible with the one at the tail of his spine, but they’d done their best.

“Drink,” said Severus, placing the cup at his mouth, but he refused to open his mouth. Breathing evenly, he brought the cup to his own lips and drank some of the water. Letting Harry see it wasn’t drugged, and that it wasn’t about to hurt him. Once a few seconds had passed, he moved the cup back to Harry’s mouth, his lips twitched in pride as Harry took a small sip, once he realized what it was - or perhaps how thirsty he was he began to gobble it down as fast as possible. Severus didn’t let Harry drink it too quickly, so made sure that he couldn’t get too much at once. Before long the entire contents had been drunk, he then placed it back on the nightstand. He urge to wake up Poppy was strong, but he didn’t want to panic Harry. Food would also establish trust between them; he couldn’t summon a House-Elf in here. He didn’t want to leave him either, so he was in quite a dilemma.

His dilemma was solved when Poppy began to stir as if she was aware that her patient was awake.

“Poppy, move slowly.” said Severus barely moving his mouth as he spoke to her, facing away from Harry. Poppy heard Severus’ words, and she leapt to the only possible conclusion - Harry was at last awake. Slowly sitting up, she gazed at the child, barely refraining from gasping, his eyes…they looked older than Albus’ and more terrified than she’d ever seen anyone -ever. Severus had advised her not to wear her uniform when tending to Harry, as she was the same size and age of the woman who had hurt him. She had taken his advice to heart, and she was glad she had…she wouldn’t have been able to handle more terror in Harry’s eyes.

“Shall I get him something?” asked Poppy, the urge to feed him up was as always -very strong.

“Chicken soup,” suggested Severus, he doubted Harry would drink tomato soup if he gave him any. It would be too much a vivid reminder of the horrors he’d seen and the blood that had been spilled. No, they would need to stay away from things like that for the foreseeable future.

“I’ll go get it,” said Poppy still keeping her voice low and movements silent and slow. She could feel eyes boring into her, but whether it was Severus or not, she didn’t know. He was awake, she could scarcely believe it, and they would begin their true diagnosis soon. Had he spoken? Was he even capable of it? He obviously hadn’t retreated into his own mind; otherwise he wouldn’t have woken up. There was hope, a small one, but it was there and right now that’s all that mattered.

“How can I help Healer Poppy?” asked Roz, her sleep tired eyes gazing at Mistress. She adored Poppy, perhaps for the simple reason she treated her as though she existed. Poppy had even taught her spells basic ones to stop bleeding and such, just in case anything big happened and she needed help.
“Can you warm up some chicken soup, please?” asked Poppy, “Bring it through here, don’t appear in the bedroom, even if we call for you in there. We have a patient that isn’t familiar with magic, we want him to get better first before he learns of our world.” she continued to explain.

“I will do that,” said Roz before she popped away.

Poppy sighed softly, sitting down; she still wasn’t used to being in the Headmaster’s living quarters. It was different from his office, a lot different in fact. There were no knickknacks on every available surface, only a small selection of books, but he could have more elsewhere she supposed. It wasn’t red and gold, that was probably the biggest surprise, but considering she’d heard he’d set fire to his dormitory curtains as a teenager she shouldn’t be. No instead it was sedate colours, white, creams, caramel coloured leather couches with a matching rug across the fireplace.

“Here is the chicken soup, all warmed up,” she said appearing again. “I brought some fresh water and milk is that okay?”

“Yes, thank you, Roz, you may go now.” said Poppy standing up and taking the large tray, which was lightweight, otherwise Roz would have crippled under the real weight of it. Milk was something Harry definitely needed; his entire body was so short due to muscle atrophy, thankfully with potions they could build it back to what it was meant to be. It would take a long time, and he would need to wait until he was off two specific potions otherwise the interaction in the ingredients would cause worse damage. Plus his PT would also help with this particular problem too. She doubted Harry would ever be as tall as he could have been; the damage was too severe for that - even with potions helping.

Taking a deep breath she moved back into the room, placing the tray on the table she was sure hadn’t been there before she went to sleep. No, she knew it hadn’t been Severus must have conjured it for some reason. Well all the better, since she had nowhere else to put this due to the water jug and potions already being on the nightstand.

“Do you want it in a cup?” suggested Poppy softly.

“Actually, yes, it will make things less messy,” said Severus, taking the cup he’d just used and flipping it a few times to get the remains of the water out. Poppy had picked up the bowl, accepting the cup from Severus; she poured it into the cup, making a big mess. Considering Harry wouldn’t drink it all - it wasn’t going to be any less wasted. His stomach was probably still really small, Harry would get full quickly.

“Has he said anything?” whispered Poppy, gazing at Harry quickly in concern. The pain relief they’d given him had surely worn off by now? To see him so quiet was quite frankly unnerving, it was probably best to put the potions magically into him tonight, since he was no doubt still weary of them and their intentions. A small part of her wondered if using magic wouldn’t have the opposite affect of what Harry feared. What if by using magic they were making Harry see he wasn’t bad or wrong or a freak or whatever he could think himself. He could trust them quicker… but the damage they could end up doing was too big to ignore.

“No, give it a few days, he needs to learn to trust us, and this is the way to go about it.” said Severus so quietly he was positive Harry wouldn’t be able to hear them. Severus took the cup from Poppy, and stood once again, trying to make himself seem smaller…but it was an impossible task he was a tall man. All he was doing was hurting himself by crouching, but it was a cross to bear if it helped Harry. He once again took a drink to reassure Harry that there was nothing wrong with it, although it was a bit hot, hopefully it wouldn’t be too hot for Harry.

Harry wasn’t as calm as before, he kept shooting his eyes towards Poppy, as if he expected her to
come and take the food away, or land a blow or something. She seemed to realize this, so she sat down, still within seeing distance though.

“You need to eat, Harry, it will help you get better.” said Severus soothingly.

Poppy looked over unable to help herself, she’d always known Severus had a very calm voice when he wanted to use it. The thing was she’d never heard him sound so soothing before, not even when he had injured or the rare abused students in the hospital wing. Go figure it would take Lily’s son to bring out the best she knew was in Severus, out in the stern Potions Master/Professor/Head of House.

“Well done,” said Severus, calmly, but he could see half way through he was becoming uncomfortable. He assumed it could be due to the fact he was uncomfortably full. He continued eating regardless, and Severus knew if he pulled back distrust would breed, yet at the same time if he continued to eat he could end up sick. Unless of course the House-Elf had placed a spoonful of Anti-Nausea potion into the soup.

Just like that Harry’s eyes began to close, most unwillingly if the frustrated annoyance in Harry’s eyes was anything to go on. It was the same look that Draco used to get when he was tired and wanted to eat when he was a baby. He didn’t know whether to take comfort from that or not. Harry would be like a baby for a while; he would need help for absolutely everything for a long time depending on how he was mentally. He could have regressed to the age of a baby actually, it just depended on whether he remembered how to speak or whether he actually knew any words.

“What do you think?” she asked the silent room, as she watched Severus put the mostly empty cup back on the table before standing up and stretching in relief.

“Truthfully? It’s too early to say, but given that he didn’t even make a sound it isn’t good.” Severus admitted, “We will get there though, I’m not going to give up on him I swore to protect him and until now I’ve failed - never again.” his voice turned cold instantly, conveying the depth of his feelings on the matter.

Poppy nodded her understanding, glancing at Harry again, looking pensive.

“Go home, get some sleep,” said Severus, “I have no doubt Black and Lupin will be in to see you very early.”

“Do you think they realize they won’t be getting to spend a lot of time with him?” asked Poppy, doubt coating her voice.

“No,” Severus replied immediately. “In fact we can count on Black complaining lengthily about it. He will think that Harry will be fine with a few potions and magically get better. I don’t think he truly understands the affect the Muggle drugs had on him or the affect of what has happened to him. We might need to come up with some magical alternatives to make him realize the extent of Harry’s illness.”

“Black isn’t mentally equipped to deal with this, he is barely hanging on to his sanity from his stay in Azkaban, and I wouldn’t be surprised that he doesn’t understand the gravity of what happened to Harry. I’ve been trying to get him to realize this for years, but he kept pushing me off, insisting that he was fine.” stated Poppy, shaking her head in irritation.

“If anything or anyone can get him to see you, even I have to admit its Harry.” said Severus, it was odd saying the teenagers name. Not just because he had often referred to him mentally as Potter, but because he called all his students (children eleven-years-old to seventeen-years-old) by their
last name. Poppy, Filius, Pomona, Minerva and Albus were the only ones he called by their first names as well, the rest of the teachers were also called by their last name.

“Obviously since he’s agreed to come and see me,” agreed Poppy, “He might not like the results of my diagnosis, have you seen him recently? He isn’t taking care of himself, he’s…well…unkempt and smelly.”

“After so long in Azkaban, he won’t think himself as such…but obviously Lupin hasn’t had the backbone to tell him.” said Severus wryly, and for a werewolf the smell must be bloody awful.

“He hasn’t been taking care of himself, so the chances of him having something wrong- is quite frankly big.” Poppy told him.

Severus nodded his agreement. “Go get some rest, I shall remain here tonight, in fact with that handy spell I think I’ll try and sleep some more. Although I don’t think I will, I’m far too awake for that.”

“Will I give him his potions?” asked Poppy, glancing at the time. “He is due two right now anyway.” one for his mind and the other was his antibiotic.

“Go ahead,” replied Severus, “Excuse me.” he added making his way through to the bathroom, to relieve himself and the pressure in his bladder. Then scrubbed his hands and arms, making sure they were thoroughly clean before wiping down with a towel that had just not long been placed there. They couldn’t allow any bacteria near Harry, which was why they had antibacterial soap in the bathroom. Placing the towel in the hamper for the House-Elves to clean he exited the bathroom, seeing Poppy spell the last potion into Harry’s stomach. The empty vials were then placed in a small bin with the others, they would be cleaned out then reused - it was much too expensive to put them in the bin after using them only once. Especially considering all the potions they had to create, it definitely would be too costly.

“That’s the potions done for tonight, he will only need them again in the morning around ten o’clock.” Poppy said not even having to turn around - knowing she was speaking to Severus. By then it would be her on duty, moving towards the end of the bed and lifting the clipboard (having put it there out of sheer habit) and scribbling the necessary information down using an ink pen, a Muggle item Severus had introduced her to and she loved them. Especially for writing in charts, it looked much neater and took less time - especially when she was in a hurry or had more than one patient.

“Good,” murmured Severus, yawning behind his hand, surprised that he was yawning, he had slept more tonight than he had in what was now three days. It was August the fourth already, since it was past midnight, hard to believe, but that didn’t make it any less true.

“If we are to be his primary carer’s do you think we should set him a room somewhere else?” wondered Poppy, still standing.

“Well Albus did say this room was only temporarily, but I have no idea what he has planned. Harry is far too ill to have his own room, so that is out of the question.” replied Severus, truth be told he would prefer his own rooms. It was extremely odd to be in Albus’ quarters, and sleeping there especially. He would have been surprised he’d been able to sleep if not for the fact he’d been ready to collapse where he stood. His wards around his quarters were actually stronger than Albus’ which was surprising. Then again Albus actually controlled the wards in all of Hogwarts, he would know if someone was approaching his office never mind if they knew the password to get in. He had limited control of the dungeons, in Slytherin territory, so he knew where his Snakes were at all times. Even Minerva’s control of Hogwarts as Deputy Headmistress was limited, a ghostly version
“You have a spare room, it’s large, airy, and has a very tranquil feel to it.” Poppy pointed out. You could see under the lake, one of the charms on it and you could hear the waves and general water sounds. It was one of the reasons Severus hadn’t used that room, he honestly hadn’t wanted to silence the damn wall every time the charm wore off.

“While it would be ideal, I do not want Black or Lupin in my living quarters.” said Severus, he drew the line at that.

“If they get to see him now, they will only be allowed in the room for a few hours, less for the moment, he’s very ill - visiting hours will be implemented.” said Poppy, she wasn’t going to go about getting Harry better with Sirius and Remus sitting there watching her every minute of the day. She drew the line at that, plus she needed Severus’ help, desperately, and if Remus and Sirius went too far, she knew he would withdraw not just his help but completely. She couldn’t do everything herself, and Severus wouldn’t be doing it out of spite, he just couldn’t deal with Sirius or Remus - some wounds just went too deep. None deeper than the fact they’d almost killed him or worse left him with a cursed life - as a werewolf. Many didn’t survive a werewolf attack, and considering he’d just turned…if Sirius hadn’t revealed what he did, Severus would have been out there all night, there truly wouldn’t have been a chance for him to survive. She would need to keep an eye on them, at all times. More work for himself, it was the last thing she needed but it was better than the alternative.

“That is a very good idea,” said Severus, “Although Black will probably fight you on it every chance he gets.”

“Of that, I have no doubt.” murmured Poppy, her lips twitching in amusement.

“Go, sleep.” said Severus, sitting down on his bed, he really should have a shower he desperately needed one. In fact he would actually prefer a bath, he would need to get up half an hour early - hopefully it would mean he could bathe in peace.

“Alright, I’ll see you tomorrow, if you need me before then you know where I am.” said Poppy, grabbing her bag, all the necessary potions had been removed from it. She pondered bringing more up as she wandered out the room and using Albus’ fire to Floo back to her rooms. She didn’t do much thinking after that, as she slid into her warm comfortable bed and fell asleep almost immediately.

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“Bitsy!” called Albus, sitting down on the chair, having just spelled the fire to blaze in his sitting room warming it up. In a castle it could get very draughty and very quickly. So mornings were always cold, and usually the House-Elves had it done before he woke. Unfortunately he couldn’t sleep anymore, he was just much too anxious.

“Breakfast for Headmaster Dumbledore and Professor Snape.” said Bitsy appearing in the room, placing the large platter on the table.

“Thank you,” said Albus told her gratefully. Already pouring himself a strong black coffee, and added two spoonfuls of sugar, which he liked since it gave him energy he sometimes just didn’t have.

He wasn’t surprised when Severus walked out the door, not only was he an early riser but he loved coffee in the morning. In fact the students would be in danger if Severus was forced to teach
without it. Considering how he was during classes you’d think he couldn’t get worse with them but the truth was he could. He wasn’t a bad teacher per se, he was just...ill tempered, and having students making silly mistakes that could cause devastating explosions didn’t help. Even teaching Transfiguration had been a tricky class, with backfiring spells - he was just glad it wasn’t Potions he’d had to teach. When Horace had taught in the beginning there was a student in the hospital wing during each class, it had been endless. Perhaps because he was too soft on them, and he didn’t pay attention as he ought to have.

“Good morning,” Albus said, watching Severus closely as he poured himself a drink and sat down. He looked a bit uncomfortable, but he always did when he wasn’t in his own territory.

“Harry woke up,” revealed Severus, deliberately when Albus was drinking his coffee causing him to startle and splutter.

“And?” asked Albus, holding his breath, too eager for an answer to give Severus a pointed look for making him splutter of all things.

“And nothing,” replied Severus, “He will begin to heal, learn to trust us and then we will find out the extent of the damage. Considering he didn’t make a sound…it’s going to be an excruciating long road to getting him better.”

Albus swallowed thickly, “Not even a single sound?”

“No, nothing, when he began to tire a frustrated look appeared on his face, but he still remained silent.” said Severus honestly.

Albus pursed his lips, a frown appearing on his face as he thought on the new information. What did it mean? Would Harry not even be able to talk? Or was he just too traumatised that he didn’t want to? Or so used to not having someone listen to him that he feels it’s useless to waste his energy talking? Had he forgotten how to speak? Could he even remember how to hold a conversation? At the age of four children new the basics did Harry? Or were they going to have to teach him everything from the beginning? He didn’t mind per se, he just wanted Harry to get better. He was under no illusion that Harry would be fine in time for Hogwarts starting and didn’t even contemplate the thought. No, it would take years for Harry to recover.

“Do not worry overly much, there is nothing wrong with his vocal cords, and he was quite talkative when he was a child.” stated Severus.

Albus’ lips twitched, “That he was,” he admitted, as a child he had been adorable. “Dear Merlin, I hope that we do not linger after death Severus...for if Lily saw this done to her child...” his face spasmed in agony. James had loved Harry too, but Lily, she had been so proud of her son. James had been busy working a lot of the time, so Lily had been able to bond with her child in a way that James hadn’t. It’s perhaps why the bond between mother and son had been so strong that she was quite literally able to save him from the jaws of death.

“I know.” said Severus, grimacing bitterly.

Suddenly the Floo activated and spat out a new arrival.

“Am I interrupting something?” asked Poppy, sensing the grimness in the room.

“Of course not,” said Albus, “Have you had breakfast?”

“Yes, I’ve been up since six,” admitted Poppy, sitting down, reaching for the coffee pot. “I wouldn’t mind a drink though.”
“I assume Black and Lupin has been?” said Severus shrewdly, she looked frazzled. Not that people who didn’t know her, or very well would be able to tell. She never truly showed her emotions to the extreme, unless she was under immense strain. It was just the tense muscles on her face, pursed lips, tightened eyes and her jawbone kept clenching every few seconds.

“Yes,” admitted Poppy, rubbing at her forehead clearly agitated.

“How did it go?” asked Albus, he knew Severus was desperate to ask but would never enquire about Sirius or Remus’ welfare.

“Not good,” said Poppy, “Black pitched a fit, not that I could have expected otherwise.”

Severus arched an eyebrow, she was calling him Black? Well that was a surprise it must be a first she must be really furious at him. She hadn’t called him Black since he had graduated Hogwarts. She had her ‘favourites’ but nobody really knew who they were unless they got special treatment. Which was them getting away with things that normal students didn’t. There had been one night where she had used his first name, the night he’d almost been attacked by a werewolf. The shock of it had almost caused his body to shut down, but with care Poppy had helped him and brought him out of it. As a child he had been furious that Dumbledore had swept it under the rug. Although as an adult he reluctantly understood. He had been defending a somewhat innocent student and his own ass. He had been the one to let a werewolf in a school full of students, not only would Albus have been forced to retire or fired, Black would have been expelled and Remus sentenced to death or Azkaban.

“How long before they can visit?” questioned Albus.

“A week to three months, he has bronchial infection, probably been there since he was in Azkaban or after he got out.” replied Poppy, “He’s on antibiotics that’s if he takes them.”

“What of Remus?” wondered Albus.

“He has a small cold that with a few potions will be cleared up in a few days.” answered Poppy.
Chapter 8

My Dark Protector

Chapter 8

Remus Apparated into his and Sirius’ flat, ever since Sirius had gotten out of Azkaban they had moved into the flat that Sirius’ uncle had paid for. Not that it mattered now, since Sirius was the heir to the entire Black fortune. For some reason Sirius’ parents hadn’t struck him officially from the Black estate at Gringotts. Just the family tree in their home, and cutting him from getting more money but since they died he was the only one left able to take over. Perhaps they had unconsciously realized Sirius had the best chance of survival, Regulus had joined Voldemort after all. He had brought his stuff here, not that it had been much, but it was all in the basement now. Sirius had hired someone to redo the entire house; you could tell it had the stamp of a pureblood now instead of a bachelor pad it had been before. If only Sirius would look after himself the way the house had been done…but no, it wasn’t to be.

“I have the potions,” said Remus, putting the bag on the table, before ripping into it and silently handing over the antibiotics. He had heard everything Poppy had said, he knew Sirius was utterly mortified, perhaps he should have said something. Surely it would have been better coming from him than someone like Poppy?

Sirius grumbled under his breath, before he reluctantly grabbed the potion, uncorked it and downed it in one go. He hated potions, why did he have to bloody take the damn things? Oh yes, he knew why, because Poppy was threatening never to let him see his godson if he didn’t take them. She had no right telling him how to live his life. Which is exactly what he told Remus, feeling as though everyone was ganging up on him.

“You heard what she said, if Harry ends up with your infection it could kill him…you don’t want that do you?” declared Remus softly.

“No,” muttered Sirius, shaking his head in irritation.

“Then complete the course, you’ll be fine before you know it, then you can see Harry.” said Remus, he wasn’t under any illusions that Poppy would suddenly change her mind. No, Harry needed to be kept healthy, for all their sakes. If he died…Remus knew Sirius would kill himself out of despair. He wouldn’t be able to live without Sirius; he’d already lost three members of his pack, two to death and a third to the dark side.

“But it might be three months,” whinged Sirius.

“It might,” agreed Remus, “But it might not, you could be better in a week after the antibiotics.” he had four potions to take each day, one hour before eating anything. He was honestly surprised that an infection was all he had. With the way Sirius had been avoiding her, he had assumed that Sirius had been feeling something much worse in ways of his health.

“I hope so, I want to be there when Harry wakes up.” said Sirius determinedly.

Remus closed his eyes in despair, it seemed as though Sirius was in some sort of denial. Sitting down he exhaled sharply, he was at a loss of what to do. “Harry isn’t going to wake up and throw himself into your arms, remembering who you are as if the past fourteen years haven’t happened.” he pointed out as softly as possible. He doubted very much Harry would trust anyone any time soon
after what he’d been through. Oh, he knew it must be bad, for a wizard such as Severus to lose control and kill her? After everything he’d seen as a Death Eater…yes, bad somehow just didn’t cut it.

“No but he will know I’m there, that I’ll always be there for him.” said Sirius adamantly.

Remus said nothing in reply, what could he say that he hadn’t already?

“You’ll get to see him before me,” Sirius added sullenly.

“If you want, I’ll wait until you are better, we can see him together.” said Remus, pinching at his leg, stopping himself from saying what he really thought. That Sirius was a bloody damn child in a man’s body. What else could he think? You got to first it’s not fair, as if he wanted to see Harry in such a state. Having to wait was probably a good thing; he hadn’t been eating properly since seeing Harry. He was like a twelve year old, thin, gaunt, and the bedsores…were horrendous, and yes he knew what they were thanks to Poppy. He didn’t have a background in nursing or healing, so he hadn’t been aware of what they were.

“You would do that?” asked Sirius surprised.

“Of course I would,” replied Remus, rolling his eyes. “Hopefully by the time we visit Harry will look a lot better.”

“He will, at least the wounds will be gone, and he’ll be healthier,” said Sirius nodding sagely.

“If we wait three months then yes, the wounds will be much better but far from gone.” said Remus, didn’t Sirius see how deep they were? If they weren’t gone already then the healing process was going to be a long one. Not everything could be automatically be healed by magic or potions instantly.

“Don’t be silly, they’re probably already gone,” said Sirius, shaking his head in amusement at Remus’ silliness.

“Sirius, those sores need to be healed one layer at a time, his bones were showing through. It’s going to take a long time for those to disappear fully.” Remus once again pointed out to the deluded Animagus. It wasn’t just skin that needed to grow back…or be grown back.

Sirius didn’t reply, he merely stood up and threw the vial in the bin, having taken his potion.

Remus watched him leaving, feeling drained already and it was still morning. The worst wasn’t over he realized, when Sirius saw him again the denial would leave and anger would show itself. If he got angry in front of Harry…Poppy would never let them visit again. He would have to make sure that Sirius had a calming draught in his system - even they would only do so much. It wasn’t just Poppy they had to worry about either, he belated realized but Severus and Albus. Albus had been very angry with them for Sirius’ childish antics, and he knew it wasn’t because of tiredness. They’d seen Albus even more exhausted during the war - and he hadn’t spoken to them like that then. No what he had seen had obviously changed him; in a way what little he had seen had changed him too.

“Will we have some breakfast now?” shouted Sirius.

“Yes,” replied Remus, standing up, Sirius couldn’t cook anything; he even burnt toast when he tried to make it. It happened when you had a House-Elf to take care of your every need during childhood and teenage years. Sirius when he finally moved into the flat had lived off take out food, from either the Leaky Cauldron or brought stuff home from the Ministry cafeteria. There was of
course the times Lily brought food over for him, mostly leftovers from whatever meals Lily and James had.

“Want any help?” enquired Sirius, sitting down on the kitchen table.

“I’ll be fine,” stated Remus, knowing it was just asking for trouble if Sirius got near any kitchen implement. He didn’t have the patience to deal with any screw ups today; he was feeling very on edge. Plus he felt too hot and shivery at the same time - his cold no doubt. He should take his pepper-up but he would wait until he’d made breakfast then perhaps have a nap. His sleep had been very turbulent last night. He had woken up at least ten times that he remembered, so needless to say it had been very sleepless and daunting.

“How did you sleep last night?” asked Sirius. Without Remus he always had vicious nightmares, of his time in Azkaban. Thankfully after the first week, Remus seemed to realize his presence helped and they had begun sharing a bed.

“Not very well,” admitted Remus, inwardly wondering if Sirius could read his mind - it was spooky. Sirius had been fine, in fact he hadn’t moved all night, then again he had exhausted himself out crying both in the Headmaster’s quarters and when they got back.

“Did you buy some Dreamless Sleeping draughts while you were out?” Sirius then asked.

“No, do you want some?” wondered Remus, pattering around the kitchen as he cooked breakfast. The smell was already wafting in the air, and it smelt good despite the fact neither of them had much of an appetite, or rather…he didn’t, Sirius seemed to be just fine. Then again he was in denial; he really thought Harry would be fine after a few days.

“I think you should have one at least, to help tonight,” said Sirius absently.

“I’ll get to sleep no problem,” revealed Remus, when you were sick you always got to sleep easily, it was as if your body knew sleep was the best thing for it - as it fought off whatever virus or infection it had.

“Fine,” replied Sirius, not up for arguing with Remus right now.

“You should go have a bath and get some rest after breakfast, it’s the quickest way to get better.” commented Remus. “That way you can see Harry sooner.” using him made Remus feel awful, Harry was going through enough. Yet he knew this would be the only way to get through to Sirius - he was just too stubborn.

Sirius flushed darkly, remembering what Poppy had said he’d never felt more humiliated before in his life the way she spoke to him.

----------0 Flash Back 0-------

“Sirius it’s too early for this!” hissed Remus, as he trailed behind Sirius, having been dragged out his bed at the crack of dawn to get dressed, make breakfast and come to Hogwarts. Sirius had packed a dozen things into a chest to give to Harry - under the impression that he would get to see him and he would be awake, “They’ve been awake for days helping him, they’re exhausted let them sleep.” he added still hissing. He didn’t know why, Hogwarts was empty, then again there was the teachers, he didn’t know who knew about Harry yet and didn’t want to take the chance of someone hearing. The warning Dumbledore had spouted had shaken him - mostly because he knew it was true. Sirius wasn’t fit to take care of Harry at all.

“I want to see my go…him,” said Sirius, looking around uneasily, which relived Remus greatly, it
seemed as though he that at least had gotten through to him.

“‘Yes but isn’t it better to come at a more reasonable hour?’ asked Remus, they’d been exhausted it
wasn’t fair to wake them up after all they’d been taking care of Harry.

“We are here now,” said Sirius, not changing his mind even if he did feel a smidgen of guilt - it
was immediately forgotten in his selfish desire to see his godson.

“Fine,” murmured Remus, shaking his head in tediously. Honestly, Sirius was just bull-headedly
stubborn, and had a one track mind that rarely thought about anyone else. Sirius would need to
change and fast if he wanted anything to do with Harry.

Sirius eagerly opened the doors to the hospital wing sliding in, not surprised to see it deserted since
Hogwarts wasn’t in session. Walking up the centre, past the neatly made beds, that were for the
moment not being used. Knocking loudly on Madam Pomfrey’s door, waiting impatiently for an
answer.

“She’s not here,” said Remus, stating the obvious.

“She’ll know we are here, remember? She has wards on the hospital that let her know if anyone
comes in.” said Sirius smugly, he should know since he had got caught many times trying to visit
Remus before classes after the full moon. He used to drive her crazy trying to keep him out of her
infirmary, especially during flu season. The last thing she’d wanted was him sick in her Hospital
wing - he used to cause havoc when he was bored - still did.

Remus bit his tongue, before sitting on one of the chairs near the door, thoroughly tired. He could
only imagine what Albus, Severus and Poppy were feeling. He would need to apologise to her, for
Sirius, again. He was beginning to lose count how many times he’d apologies for Sirius’ antics
these days. He had a feeling Sirius wasn’t going to like the results of the scan, he hadn’t been
looking after himself and there was only so much he could do to help him.

Sirius knocked again persistently, becoming annoyed that she wasn’t answering him.

“Give it a break,” snapped Remus, “Give her a chance to come.”

“Someone got up on the wrong side of the bed,” muttered Sirius, rolling his eyes before plonking
himself down beside Remus.

“You,” said Poppy, not impressed, glaring at them, “What are you doing here?” she asked, already
knowing the answer. Severus had been right after all, not that she was surprised.

“The check-up,” said Sirius as if he hadn’t woken the healer up.

“And you didn’t think to come at a more reasonable hour?” asked Poppy, her face blank as she
regarded them.

“I want to see my godson,” replied Sirius in way of explanation.

Poppy closed her eyes and prayed for patience, “Then lets get this over with.” she said, ushering
him to the closest bed, and drawing the curtains around them both to give some semblance of
privacy. She was so exhausted that she completely forgot to cast her usual silencing spells.

The spell to give a person a check-up was strictly non-evasive. However, it did its job well, and
thoroughly too. The person on the receiving end of the spell however felt tiny prickling everywhere
it checked. The diagnostic spell didn’t cause that affect, but that’s maybe because when someone
(mostly healers) usually cast it the patient was unconscious.

“Is Harry always going to be at the Headmasters office? I mean can’t he come to my flat? There’s plenty of space for him.” said Sirius, eagerly.

Poppy just stared at him stunned, she couldn’t have formulated a reply if she’d tried.

A few seconds later the scroll with the results of Sirius’ check-up unfurled from her wand, snapping her out of it. She automatically grabbed it out of practised ease. Flicking her wand back into her holster on her arm, she unrolled it and began reading the results. He was malnourished, unsurprisingly so, since Azkaban wasn’t known for its nutritious foods. He definitely couldn’t get anywhere near Harry, she realized, he had a bronchial infection. He would need antibiotics for it, it could clear up from anything to a week to three months.

“You should have come to see me sooner, you need antibiotics,” stated Poppy sharply. “You can’t see Harry until that’s cleared up.”

“How long?” demanded Sirius, “I want to see him.”

“A week to three months, it depends…considering how long you’ve had it - it might take a while.” said Poppy.

“I’m not waiting that long to see my godson!” whinged Sirius.

“I’m sorry but Harry cannot be near someone with your kind of infection - it could kill him.” she explained.

Sirius scoffed, if it hadn’t killed him it wouldn’t kill Harry - as usual they were overreacting and keeping him away from his godson. “He’ll be fine; it’s not done anything to me now has it?”

“Other than the fact you’re malnourished, I bet you feel weak all the time, cough incessantly and feel pains in your chest? Yes? That’s because of the infection. Now I’ll prescribe you antibiotics, but you’ll need to go to St. Mungo’s for them, Severus hadn’t brewed the potions for the Hospital yet.” said Poppy, removing a small square piece of parchment and tapping it with her wand. Flame writing began to spread across it, along with her signature, signifying that it was the real deal.

“You can’t stop me seeing Harry.” said Sirius deceptively calm.

“You will find I can and I will, Harry is in no shape to recover if another illness hits him, he’s already vulnerable to everything as it is.” said Poppy, they regularly checked him for everything especially pneumonia, which is something most people caught when their immune system was recovering from some other illness especially the flu. Placing Sirius’ results on the cabinet, having everything she needed from it.

“I’m his magical guardian, you can’t stop me.” stated Sirius sharply.

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“I’m his magical guardian, you can’t stop me.” stated Sirius sharply.

“How is he?” Remus asked pensively.
“You saw how he was,” said Poppy curtly, she was just in no mood to play nice. They’d gotten her up at six am, she wouldn’t get back to sleep now, and despite the fact it was the longest she’d slept - she was still tired.

Remus said nothing in return, merely watched as Poppy grabbed the parchment from her wand. Once again sliding her wand in its holster she looked over the results. He was healthy, a little bit underweight for a man of his age and size, and a small cold other than that he was fine. “You have a cold, a few days rest and some Pepper-Up potion and you’ll be fine.”

“Thank you,” said Remus quietly. “What caused those…injuries?” he hadn’t thought Muggles capable of such things.

“They are bedsores, it’s caused by pressure, for instance sitting or lying in the same position for an extended period of time. They develop quickly but can be extremely difficult to heal.” said Poppy. “Remember, Pepper-Up Potion.”

“Alright, thank you.” said Remus, standing back up.

“Excuse me,” she said, swiftly leaving the main ward and going into her office, the Floo activated a few seconds later.

“Did you hear what she said?” gaped Sirius, shaking his head as rage began to suffuse him.

“Let’s go home, I’ll need to pick up your prescription,” said Remus, moving Sirius out of the hospital wing. It was always better to let Sirius let off his anger then become apologetic than argue with him. Arguing just guaranteed two or three days worth of petulance - not something he wanted especially now of all times.

-------0 End Flash Back 0---------

“Good idea,” muttered Sirius, a shower it was, he couldn’t believe Poppy had said that to him. Unfortunately in Azkaban hygiene went first - even before sanity.

Remus sighed in gratitude when Sirius left the kitchen to shower, maybe just maybe they’d get through this. As soon as Sirius was asleep, he intended on going back to Hogwarts. A long conversation with Severus Snape was on the cards, and he just hoped the wizard would speak to him. He needed proper answers, Sirius might be willing enough to live in denial, but he wanted answers. He needed to know what Harry had been through to make sure he knew what he was doing. He did not want his cub being terrified of him, so he had to know the do’s and don’ts.
Chapter 9

My Dark Protector

Chapter 9

A Permanent Room For Harry

Breakfast was eaten in silence as all of them reflected on everything that had happened in the past few days. Poppy was also wondering what would happen after the summer holidays, and how on earth they were going to be able to look after Harry when school began full time again. They did need to start thinking long term, to pull Harry away from everything that’s familiar to him after two months would do immeasurable amounts of damage. He would be like a child, wishing for familiarity and a sense of belonging if things went their way…if it didn’t well she couldn’t even begin to imagine what Harry would be like. She didn’t like to think it but Harry could end up worse then Voldemort if he put his mind to it. He could hate all magical people because of what had been done to him, and loathe all Muggles for that they DID to him. She wouldn’t want to blame him either such confliction was infuriating her. He needed someone to give him a good sense of right and wrong, help him overcome what happened. If such a thing is even possible. How could one overcome the horrors that they’d seen? With Severus’ help though, and hers, she was confident they could help Harry at the best of their ability.

“As I suggested to Severus, we really should give Harry a permanent room, to move him after a while could have a detrimental affect to his healing.” said Poppy. “He needs comfort, consistency, a place where he knows is his own, and Severus said this was just a temporarily set up? I suggested Severus’ rooms, they will be very soothing for that they DID to him. She wouldn’t want to blame him either such confliction was infuriating her. He needed someone to give him a good sense of right and wrong, help him overcome what happened. If such a thing is even possible. How could one overcome the horrors that they’d seen? With Severus’ help though, and hers, she was confident they could help Harry at the best of their ability.

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“Or it might have the opposite affect,” Severus pointed out sardonically. “All you could hear underground was the constant dripping of water, although I honestly can’t remember hearing it in the room…did you, Albus?” he may have just been distracted.

“You are right, I can’t recall hearing it in the room,” said Albus, thoughtfully trying to remember everything. Against his wishes, since he didn’t want to relive what he had seen. He could never ask for Harry’s forgiveness, not even if the child was willing - what had been done was cruel and horrific he’d never forgive himself never mind asking someone for forgiveness.

“Then we must tread carefully,” sighed Poppy, she didn’t know everything and if there had been dripping then water would be the last thing Harry needed to be near constantly.

“Then we must tread carefully,” sighed Poppy, she didn’t know everything and if there had been dripping then water would be the last thing Harry needed to be near constantly.

“Is such a thing truly that important?” asked Albus, staring between them. Why would a room have such a significant impact on Harry?

“In a way it would be like uprooting a child, and Harry will be unsettled by it, although how unsettled is anyone’s guess…we don’t know how volatile he could be if panicked. He was terrified by us, the constant moving around would derail his…well, any improvement he may make.” said Poppy, not sure how to phrase what Harry was going through.

“Then perhaps we should get a permanent location today,” said Albus, paling at the thought, neither Poppy nor Severus would have brought it up if it wasn’t important. He didn’t want anything that would derail Harry’s recovery, so a permanent room would be set up immediately.

“The question is where? Do you want him in your quarters, Severus?” aware that he cherished his privacy.
“I really don’t see any alternative, do you?” said Severus, showing his unhappiness that he was having to do this, but by doing it he was giving his consent and showing he was willing to do whatever it took to help Harry. Poppy’s living quarters only had one bedroom; it was behind her office and the Hospital wing. There was just no way to realistically let him live there.

“Prince Manor,” suggested Poppy, “Privacy, the acres upon acres of land, he wouldn’t be spotted and quite frankly we wouldn’t have to worry about him starting the students. The news would be around Hogwarts quicker than lightening.”

“Actually it’s best if the students do know of someone being in Hogwarts that isn’t a student. If they find out themselves they will be ten times more curious. If they already know they won’t be the slightest bit interested.” Severus said, grunting slightly as he moved his leg had gone dead on him.

“Won’t they try and see him themselves? And what of the Ministry?” asked Poppy shocked by what Severus was proposing it was very risky.

“Do you think they really write home with everything Albus says?” stated Severus sardonically. “It is risky but everything has the potential to be.”

“I’d suggest keeping it quiet, at least until we see how Harry fairs,” said Albus, speaking up. “He may not even be active until after the holidays or even the new school year, you did say that PT takes a long time…how long?”

“It depends, on many variables, whether the potions work fully, how Harry does at PT itself, everyone is different they set their own paces - some need a hard hand others encouragement.” replied Severus, “It’s extremely difficult work, especially until the body gets used to it. It is not like when we bend his knees and arms to keep them mobile.” he pointed out knowing that was what Albus was thinking about.

“It’s not just PT, Harry may need months before he even gets off the bed.” added Poppy. They couldn’t predict anything; it was just impossible right now until they figured out more about Harry.

“Perhaps I should pay Petunia a visit, find out what Harry’s life was like before she got her hands on him.” wondered Albus. Her name was taboo, they wouldn’t use it, she was always referred to HER, she wasn’t worthy of a name the depreciable woman that she was.

“You want to know how badly he was abused there. The fact a injured four-year-old was cleaning his hospital room in the dead of the night - being found by the nurses each time tells a tale on its own without the fact he wouldn’t eat because he ‘hadn’t earned it’.” Severus stated sharply, giving Albus a pointed look. He looked utterly miserable without knowing what the Dursley’s had done. It would have been utterly disgusting seeing the emotional display if one, Albus didn’t normally show his emotions, two he wasn’t feeling the exact same thing.

“Perhaps it wasn’t one of my best suggestions,” conceded Albus, he just wanted to know everything so he could be prepared for all facets of Harry’s character.

“It most certainly isn’t.” Severus told him grimly.

“Your rooms then, Severus,” said Albus, changing the subject. “Should we do it now? While he’s asleep or what?” he then enquired further.

“I’ll need to spell him to stay asleep, we cannot have him wakening up during the Floo travel.” stated Severus, “I’ll need to go down and prepare the room, it hasn’t been used in years, I don’t know whether the House-Elves clean it.”
“It’s the summer; they clean everything, since they do not have anything more interesting to do.” Albus told them, sounding amused. They were quite frankly intolerable trying to see constantly if you needed anything - stave off the boredom for while longer. They had no sheets to change, no pans to put in the bed to warm it, no washing to do, no cleaning after students, and especially no huge amount of food to cook for the students. They were looking after a measly few staff members that remained at Hogwarts for the summer. Which was usually just him and Trelawney and of course Filch, but both of them preferred to eat in their office.

“I should get to it,” said Severus standing.

“Not again,” sighed Poppy in exasperation, also standing.

“What?” queried Severus, arching an eyebrow at her.

“Remus Lupin is at the hospital wing,” sighed Poppy, waving him away, “Go on, I’ll join you as soon as possible.”

“Do you require my help?” asked Albus, actually finding himself wanting to help.

“No, stay here.” said Severus, “He cannot be left alone.”

Albus gulped, “I don’t know what to do.” he admitted, his eyes slightly wide. Just being in that room overwhelmed him with guilt, how could he even begin to interact with Harry?

“I’ll know the second he begins to wake up, and I’ll return,” stated Severus, rolling his eyes before he abruptly vanished through the Floo as graceful as ever.

“Excuse me,” murmured Poppy, following Severus’ lead and she was gone just as quickly as him albeit not as gracefully.

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Hospital Wing - Hogwarts

“What can I do for you, Remus?” enquired Poppy, dusting herself off absently as she came out of her office, not needing to see the werewolf to know it was him. She controlled the wards at the hospital wing since they were connected to her office and living quarters. Her face a professional mask, nothing gave away that she had been complaining earlier about him or Sirius Black.

“I just came to…talk, you know, about Harry,” said Remus, his tone unsure and worried. He wanted to know what had happened at the same time he dreaded it. The wolf inside him had been howling in fury at the damage done to his cub, and had practically purred when it heard that she was gone.

“Come through to my office….on second thought, follow me,” said Poppy, moving out of the hospital wing altogether. She didn’t know as much as Albus or Severus, so she was best going to the source of the information. Although she wasn’t sure how Severus would react to the fact Remus Lupin was there - he would need to get used to it eventually since Harry was going to be in the Dungeons full time.

“Where are we going?” Remus blurted confused, as they moved towards the entrance hall and down the steps. A turn took them towards the dungeons and Remus suddenly didn’t need her reply to know.

“Severus knows more about it than I do, he was the one who found him,” said Poppy grimly. “I
know the basics and enough to stop myself making any wrong turns when it comes to Harry. I do not know everything, and quite frankly I do not want to know. I’m still trying to come to terms with the fact a doctor, a healer, who swore to help and save people would harm someone.” not only could Remus sense the disgusting but he could feel it pouring off of Poppy in waves as her anger mounted against someone of her profession.

“There’s good and bad people from all walks of life, Poppy, in all ways of life, it is inconceivable the better off they are, but it’s nonetheless true,” said Remus offering some insight. “There was a Muggle serial killer in the Muggle world who was thought to be a surgeon or someone with medical knowledge since he cut his victims throat and removed their organs. It happened a long time ago in the eighteen eighty eight. Not helping I know, it’s just…well you never really know someone do you?”

“Evidently not,” said Poppy her stomach churning at the thought. She constantly forgot that Remus’ mother was a Muggle, and no doubt he had learned a lot of information from the Muggle world from her. She wished she could believe that Muggles were all horrible, but considering the lives lost due to Grindelwald and Voldemort over the years, she couldn’t. How the wizarding world continued to thrive she didn’t know it was madness.

“I don’t think he’s going to be happy,” said Remus, cautiously, he really didn’t want to fight or argue, he just wanted someone to sit down and explain what Harry had been through. So he could calm down and figure out how best to approach him when he was better, and to help his damn wolf who was still pacing on the edge of his mind just waiting for its chance to pounce. “Not that he’s ever happy.”

“Enough,” snapped Poppy, abruptly turning to face him. “He has a right to be unhappy with everything that’s happened to him Remus Lupin. How dare you judge him? He has been through more than you will ever understand.” she spat furiously. She knew what he’d been through, she had been the one to heal him every year, then to heal him every time he returned from Death Eater meetings bruised and bloody. She had been the closest thing to a mother Severus ever had, and he had admitted that himself albeit when he was sick. She was so tired of the constant putdowns, when Severus always went the extra mile when someone was hurt.

Remus’ eyes widened at the unexpected attack, “I just meant that he was never happy to see me.”

Poppy coughed a little, turning around she began walking again, and Remus saw her cheeks were a pale red as she moved hastily. He said nothing as he continued walking, knowing partly he deserved it after everything he and his friends had put Severus though in school. In many ways he had been worse, he had known it was wrong and just stood back and let it happen. James and Sirius’ friendship had meant too much, still did in many ways. They were the only friends he’d ever had, since he could remember. As a child before Hogwarts he hadn’t became friends with anyone. Not only because of the constant moving, he’d been terrified someone would find out what he was and he would be put down like a dog. His father had always ranted about werewolves, he could remember, his dad didn’t know - hadn’t known before his death either that he’d overheard it all. How they should all be put down and how they were soulless creatures. After the attack on him his dad hadn’t said another word, other than expressing his fears to his mother that they would find out. They, he assumed now was the Ministry, not everyone he came into close contact with.

Even with his parents gone, he still avoided large crowds, the only exception being the Order - who already knew what he was. It was perhaps why he’d attached himself to Sirius; truth was he needed Sirius as much as the Animagus needed him in turn. He was terrified of being alone, and that was one thing his wolf and he had in common, wolves were pack animals as were werewolves.
obviously.

Once they got to Severus’ classroom, Poppy opened it and entered without pause, then of course his office door. She was perhaps the only one who wasn’t afraid to enter the dungeon dwelling Severus Snape’s office. He blinked his amber eyes until Poppy wandered over to a hidden door and knocked loudly so she would be heard.

The door swung open, “Why didn’t you Floo?” asked Severus, evidently confused.

“I brought a…guest with me,” said Poppy, gesturing towards Remus. It was her way of saying she wasn’t sure of the reception she would receive with him and giving him the opportunity to say no.

Severus curled his lip showing his disgust but he nonetheless held the door open silently telling them to get inside.

“Thank you,” said Remus quietly, as the door thumped closed behind him.

Severus grunted in reply before he disappeared through a door to the right once more.

Poppy followed him, removing her wand as she began casting spells helping Severus clean the room and sanitise it. The entire room had to be sterilized, which wouldn’t take long since there was absolutely nothing in the room. It was as bare as the day it was made. Unless of course you count the oil lamps, burning brightly. “Do you think we should have a hospital wing bed in here or a four poster?” asked Poppy, as of right now it was just a normal bed Harry was in like the beds in the hospital wing.

“If you want to make it ten times more difficult to help him, then yes,” replied Severus wryly, no they needed to keep Harry in a bed that made it easy to help him for the moment.

“Good point,” mused Poppy, “Actually, do you think Roz would be able to magically bring the bed down here with Harry on it?”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” said Severus, surprised. It would certainly make things easier, but did they want to risk it with Harry? “If we can be sure it will work, I don’t see why not.”

“Test it, I’ll do it.” said Remus quickly, wishing to do something to help, and if this was all he could do then so be it.

Severus nodded to Poppy giving her the go ahead to test the theory, if it helped them avoid a Floo trip with an unconscious fifteen-year-old he was all for it.

“Roz?” called Poppy, using her personal House-Elf.

“Yes Healer Poppy?” answered Roz her big eyes staring up at her Mistress expectantly.

“Have you ever transported someone on an item such as bed from one area of the castle to another?” asked Poppy seriously.

“A stretcher, healer Poppy,” said Roz bowing lowly.

“Perfect,” said Severus, glad that the suggestion had been brought up.

“I want you to go to the room our guest is currently using and begin bringing everything down here. Use as much as the same layout as possible.” said Severus, firmly. The walls that had been dank and grey looking began to colour, cream paint filling every nook and cranney. He wasn’t
leaving the bricks black and horrible like that, it would remind Harry too vividly of his captivity.

“Yes, Potions Master Sir!” said Roz eagerly, practically bouncing with excitement.

“Go now, and if I call you, come immediately, try and not be seen he doesn’t know of the magical world.” added Severus before the House-Elf could disappear.

“Roz is understanding this, Sir,” she said, already aware since her Mistress Poppy had informed her of this over a day ago.

“He doesn’t know about magic?” asked Remus pensively.

“In a basic sense yes, he used it to defend himself, but his core was young, unused to performing strong magic and thus he wasn’t able to do much in way of damage. We have no idea how he will react to other magic users.” said Severus strongly.

“But you saved him; surely he will be glad for it?” Remus said not understanding.

“He could consider magic evil, the cause of his problems, which ironically enough was the cause of everything he’s been through. The Dursley’s abused him out of fear of his magic, and then a woman kept him hidden and imprisoned to try and understand and harness his magic. He’s seen people quite literally exploding to death after his blood was injected into them.” Severus told him impassively, watching Remus go pale and ready to be sick if the expression on his face was anything to go by. “The chance of him being violent towards magic users is very high, we need to get him to trust us before we even begin to mention magic, and even then it will have to be small things that couldn’t hurt anything.”

“Explode?” croaked Remus, horrified.

“Indeed, they agreed to an experiment without realizing what they were getting into. She got people off the streets, homeless people offering them a lot of money, so much that they couldn’t pass it up. Went about it very professionally as well, and then brought them down to room next to where Harry was being held. Nine times out of ten she brought him in to witness what was happening, as if it was Harry’s doing not magic reacting to the Muggle blood.” stated Severus.

“Where’s your bathroom?” whispered Remus his mouth clasp over his mouth as soon as he finished speaking.

“Straight ahead,” answered Severus, pointing towards it impassively.

Remus ran so quickly, you could have seen the trail if they had been interested in looking.

“Severus,” sighed Poppy, shaking her head, looking sick herself, despite the fact she’d already known about it…more or less.

“Why did you bring him down?” asked Severus, curiously.

“He wanted to know what happened,” said Poppy, looking sheepish, she’d just given Severus a small ‘reprimand’ if it could be called as such for being the way he had with Remus when it fact it was him who’d wanted to know. “Still, I would have preferred if he was told a little more gently.”

Remus who had superior hearing was able to hear everything they were discussing. People tended to forget that particular attribute - preferring only to think Werewolves as heinous monsters who enjoyed biting and turning other people.
He has to understand everything…the full extent if he is allowed anywhere near Harry. Black as well, but if I am the one to tell him, he will go out of his way to make sure he breaks every single rule just because he can.” said Severus, and he knew he was right, evidently so did Poppy since she nodded her head.

“This has been one of my worries as well, that he just won’t understand how fragile Harry is right now,” said Poppy, watching as her House-Elf popped in with the dining table Severus had conjured and placing it exactly it would have been in the upstairs room. “That’s perfect Roz, thank you.”

“The only way to get Sirius to truly understand is to show him, he has to see for himself what Harry’s been through. Telling him means nothing; he will just deny that it was as bad as you claim. Not out of maliciousness, but because he loves Harry so much that he doesn’t want to believe it.” Remus said coming back into the room.

“He loved the child he was,” corrected Severus, “Right now he just holds an idealised version of him, which he best un-idealise right away if he has any hopes of seeing Harry.”

Nobody paid attention to Roz as she continued to pop in with items from the room Dumbledore had originally given Harry.

“Isn’t that a bit harsh?” asked Remus, he didn’t understand why they were so adamant about keeping Sirius away from Harry. Okay, he had a good idea, but he just didn’t think it would turn out as bad as they were suggesting.

“Envision this, Black starts sobbing his bloody heart out, feeling guilty. Harry has a panic attack, Black tries to help, and in touching Harry only causes him to become even more hysterical. He uses magic due to his high stress, rendering him catatonic and setting any progress we may have made getting him to trust us and back to square one. This is only one of the many various ways it could go, Black needs to man up and stop being an emotional five year old.” snapped Severus.

“He’s been in Azkaban, he just needs time.” said Remus defending Sirius.

“IT WAS THREE YEARS AGO!” snarled Severus irritated.

“He was in prison for twelve years nearly,” said Remus quietly, “Nobody is usually sane after that amount of time.”

“Yes, but he was never affected by them when he was a mutt.” replied Severus. “If he had gotten the help he was offered, he would be fine by this.”

Remus’ shoulders hunched, “I know, I kept asking him to but he insisted he was fine.” the tired werewolf finally admitted.

“Roz will be bringing guest down now,” said the House-Elf, staring at them warily. She didn’t want to get in their way if they were about to begin duelling.

“Go to the living room,” stated Severus, staring at Lupin sternly.

Remus nodded his accent silently before he slid from the room, he didn’t close the door, able to see inside. Wanting to see Harry, even from afar. A few seconds later, the bed with the bundle inside appeared in the room. He looked so peaceful, you wouldn’t think he was so injured under the covers or so scarred.

“It’s just about time for his potions,” murmured Poppy, wishing to brush her hand through his hair but never daring to invade his personal space or wake him up. Sleep was the best thing for him
while he recovered, it would heal his mind and also allow the potions to work. Instead she moved out of the room, leaving Harry to his rest. They needed to finish their conversation with Remus at any rate.
“I was thinking about going to the Muggle world and getting a few things for Harry to use as he gets better.” said Poppy, as Severus rejoined both of them after giving Harry his potions. “Like colouring in books, he cannot get wizarding ones for obvious reasons.” they moved once it had been coloured in, or marginally so. That and the fact they were pictures of things you just didn’t see in the Muggle world often. Potions, cauldrons, flying on a broomstick, giants, trolls, dragons, phoenixes the whole shebang.

“You are getting a bit ahead of yourself aren’t you?” murmured Severus wryly, as he sat down.

“I won’t have the time once Hogwarts starts up Severus, I don’t know what we are going to do - we cannot split ourselves in two without a time turner.” argued Poppy; it was something that was constantly on her mind day and night.

“You don’t have to do it alone, I can help.” said Remus, exasperated. Why were they so determined to exclude everyone? If they could just let him and Sirius help they would be able to do all they needed to without the strife and worry.

“Do you have any medical knowledge?” Severus asked him impassively. Giving Poppy a look that said he was getting extremely annoyed with the werewolf. He wasn’t listening, what the hell was the point in talking if he was just going to ignore all advice.

“No…but…” started Remus feeling very angry that they weren’t even going to give him a chance.

“Then you are incapable of taking care of a child who is not only physically but mentally… challenged.” said Severus, not sure how else he could put it. Harry might never be able to look after himself, for all they knew he might always need a magical guardian. He might always have the outlook of a child; they just didn’t know the damage that was done. His magic could have shielded him from the worst of it, which was the Muggle equivalent of PTSD. In denial that it happened, refusing to speak about it, and having horrific nightmares of what happened. Regardless of his magic helping him, if it had even been able to do so, he was still treated horrifically for the majority of his life. All they could do was help him recover as much as he could.

“It seems to me that you don’t want anyone to help,” said Remus, speaking honestly.

Severus abruptly stood up his face furious, before he was making his way through to his bedroom, and out of sight.

“I did not bring you down here to disparage Severus’ word.” Poppy told Remus, rubbing at her forehead. She honestly didn’t know what to do anymore, they were making life so uncomfortable and she knew of no other possible way to have them understand. Even Remus, as smart as he was, didn’t understand how fragile he was. She knew he was trying, Merlin help them, he was trying but the depth of Harry’s captivity just couldn’t be recognized or understood especially by those who had known him as a baby. Severus was right; they did have an idealised vision one that despite all attempts couldn’t be scrapped. They didn’t want it to be, only truly seeing Harry would break through to them.

Severus returned with a file clutched in his hands, he removed the pictures and flung them at
Remus scattering them all over the werewolf. “Look at them! Look at him! Do you even know the first thing about healing? They aren’t instantly going to get better, it’s going to take months to get them healed, and by months I mean the better part of year.” hissed Severus. “Just as long to get some weight on him, do you seriously think you can face that without sobbing your pathetic little heart out? Touching, no even…walking near him terrifies him does that sink in to your brain?”

Remus gathered the pictures and turned them over, as his stomach rebelled dangerously again. He couldn’t believe how low Snape was going, showing him pictures like that - it was horrific. There was nothing more for him to sick up, he hadn’t eaten much this morning. This meeting hadn’t gone how he hoped, and he wasn’t sure what else he could say to help matters. He didn’t want to make them worse that’s for damn certain.

“This aside, surely you can understand our desire to see Harry at the very least?” questioned Remus, looking mostly at Poppy.

“Yes, we understand that, but it isn’t easy, we aren’t doing this for amusement, we are doing it for Harry’s sake.” replied Poppy, her tone grim.

“To give him the best chance he has at recovering,” added Severus sharply.

“We do love him,” Remus told them desperately. “Why else would we try so hard to look for him?”

Severus snorted at that announcement, causing Remus to glance at him slightly confused. “What?” he then said demanding an explanation for the snort of derision at the statement.

“Tell me if you love Harry so much…why is there always something more important to you?” sneered Severus.

Poppy closed her eyes, she could see how this conversation was going to play out and she honestly didn’t want to be stuck in the middle. She was grateful she had thought to put a silencing spell around the living room, the last thing Harry needed to wake up to is yelling. Nothing was going to bring these men together, not even how ill Harry was. There was too much bad blood between them. She couldn’t have this bitterness around Harry.

“There is nothing more important!” Remus said vehemently. “To neither me nor Sirius!”

“Really? So he didn’t allow Harry to go with Hagrid instead of taking care of him and going after Pettigrew? Getting himself arrested and imprisoned?” sneered Severus, “And you, you just hid with your tail between your legs, deciding never to visit the child?”

“Like you did!” spat Remus.

“He didn’t know me,” growled Severus, the seer nerve comparing him to his godfather or a man he’d called uncle? If he had been that close to Harry he would have visited him, he took his duty very seriously. “Even if I had been friends with Lily still, Potter wouldn’t have let me within ten feet of his son.” he’d only ever seen Harry in passing, he had been about a year old, when Lily had brought him to an Order meeting. The boy had babbled away, happy as can be, enjoying the attention and being cooed over.

“Lily wouldn’t have let that stop her, she had such a fiery temper on her,” Poppy said, in bittersweet amusement.

Remus grimaced in pain as it jabbed at his heart, if she had seen her son this way…Merlin she would have raged against everyone and everything. Could he have avoided all this if he had visited
Harry? Was he really at fault for what had happened? He couldn’t take this, Remus blindly stood up, and stumbled from Severus Snape’s rooms, though his office and out of classroom.

He stumbled blindly out of Hogwarts, down the path and Apparated back to his and Sirius’ flat, his spirit utterly crushed as guilt and grief consumed him whole. Tears poured freely down the werewolves face, as he sobbed into the couch, trying to keep quiet and not wake Sirius up. He didn’t want to see him never mind talk to him when he was in this kind of state.

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“I see he’s all settled in?” said Albus stepping into the bedroom, staring wide eyed, it was a far cry from the unused room it had been a few hours prior. The walls were painted a lovely shade of cream; the floor had rugs on pretty much every available surface of it. They were all green and silver, probably from the Slytherin store cupboards, where everything the dorms needed, that or the room of lost things where the House-Elves occasionally get items from. He had decided to take time off from the mountain of paperwork to see how they were getting on with the move.

“Yes,” replied Severus, and he hadn’t woken up again, which was quite worrying if he was honest with himself. Putting the Potions book he was reading down, while he spoke to the Headmaster - he wasn’t an ignorant person. Although many people would claim he was, there was a difference between ignorant and being blunt.

“Is there anything else he needs?” enquired Albus, wishing to help in any way he could. The guilt would never leave, that much was obvious but he wished to ease it somewhat - hopefully somewhere down the road it would be better.

“Nothing right now,” said Severus.

“Severus are you sure you can do this?” asked Albus, gazing at Harry sadly.

“Do you not trust me with Potters son?” sneered Severus.

“Severus,” said Albus curtly, shaking his head in disappointment.

“I’m sorry, Albus, Lupin was here earlier and he got to me,” admitted Severus, closing the book with a snap.

“How’s that?” enquired Albus surprised, it took a lot to get to his stoic Potions Master. Entering the room more fully, he sat down in one of the available seats. His piercing gaze never wavered from Severus, as he urged him to answer.

“The basics are that Lupin and Black only ever had Harry’s best interests at heart, that they wanted him to get better. I got angry and told them the truth. If Harry had been so important to them, then Black should never have handed Harry over and took care of him - himself. That Lupin wouldn’t have crawled away and hid for the past however many years. The only comeback he had was to blame me as well.” stated Severus, his hands tightening into fists as he thought about it again.

“You were not Harry’s godfather, or named in their will,” said Albus staring blankly. No, the only people that had been were Sirius, and of course Frank and Alice who by the time the will had been read couldn’t take care of themselves never mind a toddler. “As far as I am aware you didn’t have any contact with Harry…so why would he say a thing like that?” Severus had been a childhood friend of Lily’s; they had stopped being friends in their teenage years. Fifteen if he remembered correctly, six years before she died.

“Guilt, anger…” suggested Severus sardonically. “There’s a lot of it going around, and none of it
will do Harry the slightest bit of good.” nor would pity. He would need to learn to keep himself
calm, around the idiots especially in this room. Unfortunately when Black or Lupin were around;
albeit mostly Black he just lost it. They knew how to get under his skin, just like he knew them
well enough to do the same back.

“Very true, Severus, I hope the same will be applied to you?” said Albus, but he knew well enough
that Severus was very good at holding his temper. It was something he was legendary for having,
one wrong snap and that would be it. However, he needed to trust both Poppy and Severus to
oversee Harry getting better. He couldn’t allow the Ministry to get their hands on him, and if he
came forward with a request to be Harry’s magical guardian it would surround him in Ministry
officials, sneaking about trying to see if he had Harry so it was out of the question.

“Of course,” said Severus indignantly. He hadn’t agreed to this on a whim, he would do his best by
Harry, heal him, just as he had vowed to do so. He would not fail Harry again, he absolutely
refused.

“I’m pleased to hear that, Severus, and you have my permission to evict Remus or Sirius from
Hogwarts if it gets too much.” promised Albus. “Harry does come first I agr…”

“Quiet.” said Severus hushing him, his face becoming a calm mask, any anxiety or anger just bled
away. Albus was awed just watching it, it was little wonder he had survived as a spy he inwardly
thought. “Go through to the living room and get some broth for him, Roz knows what he’s allowed
so use her. Slow movements, and for Merlin’s sake Albus, don’t smile or beam at him as though
you’re happy to see him - he only knew pain when that happened.”

Albus blinked at the command, he wasn’t used to being told what to do - least of all by his
employees, but he knew there was a reason for it. So he stood up slowly, and began to leave the
room, before Harry even opened his eyes. Who had he said? Roz or had it been Rose? What was it?
“Roz?” called Albus quietly, hoping it was the right one. He couldn’t recall any House-Elves at
Hogwarts with the name so he was hopeful.

“How can Roz be helping Headmaster?” asked Roz, evidently knowing who he was.

“Can you bring something to eat for Harry, please?” Albus asked of her.

“Roz will get food for your guest,” said Roz, bowing low before she was gone.

Albus moved silently towards the door, peering in watching Severus interact with Harry. Hearing
the way he was speaking caused him to relax completely and trust that this was indeed the right
decision. Severus was the perfect person to help Harry; his voice was very soothing when he
wasn’t barking at people. He turned his attention away from the room when he heard a quiet pop
indicating that ‘Roz’ was back with the food.

“Here is the food, Headmaster,” said the House-Elf, handing over the tray before disappearing
before Albus could get in a word edgewise, he just gripped tighter to the tray surprised by the
abruptness of it. Breathing evenly he took another deep breath before relaxing himself completely.
He was terrified by what awaited him in there; could he stand and see the look in Harry’s eyes? He
was used to students glaring at him, suspiciously, in anger, in awe, in reverence…could he take
whatever Harry doled out?

Exhaling sharply, knowing he had no choice, he entered the bedroom, swallowing thickly as those
green eyes immediately latched into him terror and another identifiable emotion in them. He could
hear everything apparently if he’d heard him from outside the room. He moved towards Severus
and placed the tray of food on the table before sitting down. He must be a secret masochist thought
Albus wondering why he was even thinking of staying.

“Are you hungry, Harry?” asked Severus soothingly, gauging his response to his words, wondering if he understood. Watching in triumph as those green eyes automatically locked with the food before settling back on him. Oh he understood what he was saying alright, this was good, it was exhilarating and hopefully not a coincidence. He was still saying nothing through, but he would get there, Harry would learn to trust him. Of that he would hedge his bet at one hundred percent.

“Would you like something to eat?” once again gauging him, but Harry wouldn’t give. He continued to stare at him with fear and torment. Severus noticed however that it wasn’t as bad as it had been just yesterday, as always giving food was a way to earn trust but keeping it would be the difficult part. He would figure out how advanced Harry was sooner or later, but if he had to bet he would put him mentally at the ages between one and five.

“I need to put some pillows at your back,” Severus said soothingly, Harry was lying flat on his back, which wasn’t ideal for someone trying to eat - unless you wanted to choke them. Which he most certainly didn’t, reaching slowly he lifted Harry using the pillow instead of touching him, but despite that he could feel the shaking, the flinching so he moved a little more swiftly until Harry was leaning up. The repugnant smell of ammonia hit his nose, he wasn’t surprised by the smell, since Harry was dehydrated, and ammonia was a common smell in people haven’t had enough to drink. The pee was orange; he could see that from the covers. Shit, this was the last thing he needed right now, Harry couldn’t tolerate anyone being hear him. He wasn’t going to leave him in his own urine, he couldn’t risk it getting into his wounds and infecting him. It would be difficult to help him especially if he feared touch so badly.

“Run a bath, please, Albus,” said Severus not wishing to leave Harry alone. He knew it would only take a few seconds - that was the beauty of magic. How the hell was he going to do this without Harry freaking out? It was times like this where he wished he was able to freely use magic. Unfortunately if Harry didn’t tell them when he needed, there was just absolutely nothing they could do to prevent this.

Severus drew the covers back, doing his best to ignore Harry’s terror, which was evident in every shake of his rail thin frame. Merlin he would have preferred shouting, screaming anything to this silent horror going through Harry. He knew nothing he said would make this any easier. So without further hesitation, he lifted Harry off the bed, keeping his touch as light as possible but making sure he wouldn’t fall. Not that his weight was a problem, he’d held a five year old who weighted more than Harry did right now.

“It’s alright, everything will be okay, I promise,” murmured Severus, and it was a promise he vowed to keep. He moved out of the bedroom and into the steaming bathroom, Albus wasn’t there he had kept himself away good. The water wasn’t too high, but still pouring into the tub, with difficult he removed Harry’s pyjama bottoms and placed him on the toilet, keeping a hold of him as he removed his top. He didn’t need to let go of Harry to turn the taps off and test the water, since the toilet was within reaching distance of the bath. Perhaps it would be best to empty his bowels when he was asleep, or as it got half way down his intestine. It would save Harry some embarrassment, although he didn’t think Harry was embarrassed with now…just scared.

Easing Harry off the toilet, he placed the teenager into the bath, and then to his profound sadness and happiness a startled sound escaped from Harry’s mouth. The smell of tea-tree oil filled the room, with the pain reliever potions, thankfully the wounds which were uncovered for the moment, wouldn’t be causing him pain. Grabbing a sponge, he began to delicately wash the teenager who seemed to have stilled completely. As though he was so surprised by the warmth, or perhaps he was shutting down in an attempt to protect himself. He ran the water above the wounds, letting them be cleansed but not quite touching them. Did he dare wash Harry’s hair? The
length of it was ridiculous and it would need cut sooner or later, but until they knew how he was mentally it was perhaps best to leave it.

Awkwardly holding into Harry’s neck, he tipped his head a little and began to pour the water onto his hair, avoiding his face not wanting to startle him badly. He did it twice before washing his hair, with a combination of shampoo and conditioner, letting it sink in as he wiped at his face, looking into those green eyes he wanted so badly to reassure him he would be alright from now on. “Safe,” murmured Severus soothingly, before he finished what he started and cleaned Harry’s hair of the shampoo. He would untangle it and run a brush through it later tonight; too much touching would just make everything ten times worse.

Grabbing a towel, he awkwardly got Harry out of the bath, and wrapped in it as much as possible. Harry’s head flopped onto his shoulder, he was either exhausted and asleep, or catatonic and he hoped this hadn’t put him back to square one in gaining Harry’s trust but unfortunately it couldn’t be avoided.

Getting him back through to the bedroom was easy, and with the fires lit in his quarters it was warm enough. Nonetheless, with Harry unconscious he spelled him dry, before getting a new set of pyjamas on him, which had been placed on the warm freshly made bed. The covers were turned down making it easy for him to put Harry on his side, he kept the pillows in their propped up position. Putting the covers back over him, sighing softly as he slumped down on his chair exhausted.

“Nothing quite prepared me for this…Merlin only knows what Sirius and Remus will be like.” said Albus sounding hoarse as if he was trying to stop himself from becoming too emotional. Seeing him so broken was different from being told that, and he felt a swell of protectiveness thum through him. If anyone wanted to try and get to Harry they would need to go through him. He would do what he had to - to protect Harry, and that extended to making whoever it was disappear for good. This entire experience had changed who he was, what he believed in and what he wanted for the wizarding world. He’d always believed the best in everyone, despite sometimes the appearance of the contrary, this time…this time it had gone too far and there was no going back. The darkness had finally touched him after all these years, the prophecy couldn’t be fulfilled, there was no way that child on the bed could do it. Not even in five years time, they couldn’t ask him to hurt anyone…which left it up to him. Perhaps Harry’s part had already been played, so it was up to him now, he prayed he was alive when Tom Riddle came back so he could destroy him and ensure Harry’s future happiness. He wouldn’t be touched by anymore evil, of that Albus Dumbledore swore with his magic and life. Magic flared inside him, binding him to his word, and he would do everything in his considerable power to see it through.

Severus looked up from where he was sitting and nodded grimly in agreement.
Regular Routine

Two weeks had passed already since Harry had first been found, it was now half way through August, and time was going so quickly despite the oddness of the summer. There was no way they could deny how odd it was, they spent the majority of their time in Severus’ living quarters. Although Severus had made it clear to Poppy that he would prefer her to sleep in her own quarters during the night. That there was just no point to both of them remaining there, when Poppy was watching over Harry, Severus was brewing the potions for the Hospital wing in batches of three instead of two as per usual. With every third day he brewed every potion Harry would need over the coming days. Poppy had offered to help but Severus had almost bitten her head off for touching his potions equipment.

Nobody at Hogwarts had noticed anything out of the ordinary, but there wasn’t anyone there other than the usual inhabitants during the summer holidays. Trelawney never ventured from the tower, Filch was seen wandering around, Severus presumed he was looking for his blasted cat, and the ghosts didn’t enter the teachers private quarters - thankfully otherwise they would have known quicker than you could say keep it quiet.

Albus continued on with his routine, going to the Ministry when it was required, which was much more regularly than people believed. Most of the laws and such were changed, altered or discarded during that time, as well as other changes, such as changes to Hogwarts or the outings they did, and the budgets. The Order had been informed that their services were no longer required, and it was disbanded as quickly as it had been reformed. Make of it what they will, but most of them were probably smart enough to realize why it had happened. He would of course spend time with Severus in his quarters, just wishing to be there for them while they were under this immense strain. At night when he should be sleeping, he was busy with Hogwarts paperwork, and his personal correspondence.

“What are we going to do Fawkes?” murmured Albus, absently as he scratched under his phoenix’s chin, Minerva would be returning to Hogwarts today if she was on schedule to begin to the letters for the new year and plan visits to the Muggle-born students and speak to the parents. Remus was a little more understanding, if not very solemn after the words Severus had with him over a week ago. Sirius however, was becoming an increasingly annoying presence at Hogwarts. He truly feared that the wizard would do something incredibly stupid and tell someone about Harry’s presence at Hogwarts.

The phoenix trilled softly, a soothing melody that would normally make Albus relax a little, but unfortunately his worries were much too…worrisome for his beloved familiar to soothe. Looking out, at the deserted grounds for once not wishing for Hogwarts to start again. No he wanted the summer to last forever, or two years until Harry was seventeen and legally off-age.

Albus was so distracted that he didn’t even sense the Floo Network in his office activate, or feel the wards alerting him to the fact someone had stepped into his office.

“No, Albus is everything alright?” asked Minerva, after alarmingly watching him stare off into the distance for a few minutes. Did it have anything to do with the book she’d been asked to get? She

Chapter 11

My Dark Protector

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had assumed it was for research, not someone needing it. Who? was her next though, who was it? She prayed to Merlin that it wasn't one of her Gryffindors.

“Minerva, right on time,” said Albus, trying to smile at her, but it came out more of a grimace. It was going to be a difficult few days, seeing her was bringing back the memories of her insisting that the Dursley’s were the wrong sort to raise Harry. Even knowing there had been nothing he could do - or still do come to that, didn’t make it any easier a cross to bear.

“What is going on?” asked Minerva, sensing something big was happening; perhaps she should have come back with Fawkes with the book. She didn't waver her view from Albus’ as she charmed her luggage back to its proper size, and banished it to her quarters, she would set it up later - right now she was more interested in what was going on with Albus.

“Why don’t you have a seat?” suggested Albus, wondering if perhaps he should let her see Harry. Although she would need to be checked over by Poppy before that happened. Both Severus and the Healer were adamant about being checked over before being allowed near Harry - to prevent the teenager getting sick.

“Now you have me worried,” murmured Minerva reluctantly sitting down, as she stared apprehensively at the Headmaster. “Does it have anything to do with the book you asked for?” well according to Albus it had been for Severus actually, but something had evidently happened.

“Partly,” admitted Albus, he didn’t want to show her the memories. No, that was being saved for Sirius Black the next time he came. Not only the memories Severus had gathered from the woman but Harry’s reaction to them all since coming here. Perhaps then he would realize it’s best to back off right now, and when Harry was a little less terrified of them it would be better for him. At least he wouldn’t have to go to sleep with the image of a terrified teenager on his hands. He had seen a lot but this was quite frankly on the top ten list of the things that ate him up inside and gave him nightmares.

“Would you care to elaborate? Especially before my heart drops further down my stomach?” suggested Minerva, her clipped tone sounding even more Scottish as though she had been spending a lot of time here.

“As you wish,” replied Albus, “As you know we’ve been looking for Harry, I just found out this summer that Severus has as well.”

“Of course he has,” said Minerva rolling her eyes, it wasn’t news to her. She wasn’t stupid, she knew Severus, and he wouldn’t have rested until he found Harry. For the simple reason being that it would have been what Lily would have wanted.

“You knew?” Albus asked surprised.

“Of course, this is Lily’s son we are talking about, Severus would have moved heaven and hell to protect her and incidentally her son.” answered Minerva, just like she would move heaven and hell to protect Severus, Albus and Pomona and Filius as well as those she cared deeply about. “Have you finally got a lead on him?” the poor boy had disappeared of the earth, presumably living on the streets or taken in by a family they just didn’t know. He may have even been taken in by a magical family, but it was unlikely due to the scar it would be obvious who he was.

“I had no idea he was,” said Albus drolly, although when Minerva put it like that he should have guessed. He had assumed the hatred between James Potter and the Potions Master had just been too great for Severus to see past the hatred and see Harry for himself. A wrong assumption, just like a great many he had made over the years, that was life such as it was.
“So?” asked Minerva, giving him a gesture to hurry along. Would Harry end up in her house? It depended on his life, he may very well end up in the other houses, and she couldn’t deny she’d be disappointed if he wasn’t in Gryffindor. She had been looking forward to teaching him for years and having him in her house.

“It is not good, Minerva, he was abused by the Dursley’s and found by the Muggle police and send to a hospital to recover. He was in the children’s hospital for a month before being transferred to another which was more equipped to dealing with Harry’s needs.” replied Albus, tiredly, as he took his own seat leaving Fawkes to preen himself.

“Harry’s needs?” echoed Minerva, becoming alarmed once again. Had they taken him to St. Mungo’s? No, Albus would have only taken him there as a last resort…which surely couldn’t be the case…could it?

“Unfortunately the hospital didn’t get the chance to help him, a doctor observed Harry using accidental magic when he transferred there. She essentially kidnapped him, and held him prisoner underneath the hospital for years. Severus only found him due to using the find-me spell within the required distance of where he was. He is not in good shape at all, both physically and mentally.” added Albus, regret and a profound sadness waving off him in droves.

Minerva’s jaw was practically unhinged, as she stared uncomprehendingly at Albus as if she was waiting for him to state it was a joke. Unfortunately she knew Albus well enough to know he would never joke about such a thing. Shaking her head, trying to comprehend what she’d just been told. What did it mean for Harry? Would he be able to recover? “H…how long?” she whispered, devastated.

“Eleven years,” croaked Albus, the number seemed to get to him every time.

“Where is he?” she asked, her voice hoarse.

“In Severus’ quarters, Poppy and Severus say that he needs to have a room that he can remain in, a sense of familiarity.” Albus told her.

“May I see him?” asked Minerva, her heart thumping wildly.

“Are you sure you want to?” asked Albus, his tone very serious.

Minerva paused at the warning in his tone, but eventually she spoke “Yes.” she had see him for herself, she just had to.

“Very well, follow me down to Severus’ quarters, Poppy should still be there,” said Albus, making his way to the fireplace and quickly going through the Floo Network.

Minerva followed as well, wondering why Poppy would have to be there, there had to be a reason from the way Albus had phrased the sentence. Nonetheless, she quickly shouted in Severus’ quarters into the network and tucked her hands in; the trip was short since it was an internal Floo. She was promptly spat out in Severus’ quarters, not a place she usually ventured, they spoke through the Floo but it was rare for her to be down here. If they got together it would be at the Leaky Cauldron for a drink or Hogshead. As she stepped in she heard the ending of Albus’ conversation to Poppy.

“…If you would, thank you, Poppy.” finished Albus.

“I’m going to run a check-up on you, Minerva, hold still,” stated Poppy, wand already out and the spell was being chanted softly.
“We need to check that you are not coming down with any illnesses,” Severus told Minerva, upon seeing the confused look on her face. “Harry’s immune system is very unstable right now, and until he gets better we cannot let anyone near him that even has a cold.” although with it being summer there was less chance of someone being sick, but right now it was better to be safe than sorry.

“I see,” answered Minerva grimly. Nerves were finally getting the better of her, she honestly didn’t know what to expect when she finally got to see him and it was more worrisome than knowing what he’d been through.

“Clean bill of health,” said Poppy, reading the results satisfied.

“I should hope so,” said Minerva, she took great care in looking after herself, ever since she’d had dragon pox as a teenager. It was an illness that killed even the strongest of wizards. The most notable one was Abraxas Malfoy, he had been one strong powerful wizard, with the best care money could buy and he’d succumbed to the disease. Thankfully there was a vaccine for the vicious wizard killer, so it did not claim as many wizards as it had back in the day when she was a child.

Poppy just smiled half-heartedly, used to the witch’s way by now.

“Come,” said Severus abruptly, inwardly irritated at how his living quarters were so crowded these days. He couldn’t help it, he was an antisocial man, and nothing would change that. It didn’t mean he didn’t care about Albus, Minerva or Poppy, he just preferred his own place empty. Somewhere he could be and just reflect on everything, he hadn’t always been this way, but when one became a Death Eater and a spy, it was better being alone. It also helped that he wouldn’t be hurt by anyone else turning their backs on him like Lily did for a word he hadn’t meant. He didn’t truly blame her, she had seen the path he was going down before he had, and Lily had been too good for that. She’d tried futilely to get him to see what was happening, and how wrong it was but she had only been a child herself, how could she have tried to stop him? Part of him wished she had been successful; life could have been so different. If wishes were horses then beggars would ride, he thought to himself disdainfully, nothing could change what happened.

Minerva swallowed thickly, watching everyone becoming blank before her eyes, as if they didn’t dare show any sort of emotions in that room. Breathing deeply, she exhaled before forcing her numb legs to move the short distance to the room. Once she was there, she held onto the doorjamb, and found herself looking in. She didn’t see anything popping out at her immediately, just a child in a bed with extremely long hair. Of course it belatedly dawned on her that this was supposed to be a fifteen year old boy, the height even resisted by the bed, his feet should have been down a lot further than it was.

“Where are Remus and Sirius?” asked Minerva whispering the words as she sat down on one of the available seats. Staring at the child on the bed, in sleep his face was twisted slightly as if he was in pain. Knowing Poppy and Severus, she knew that Harry wasn’t in any sort of pain…at least physically - it had to be emotional, she could only imagine the nightmares he had about being kidnapped and locked up. Her hand hovered over Harry’s as if she was going to touch him.

“Don’t do that.” warned Severus, easing slightly when she withdrew her hand.

“Remus and Sirius have been…escalating this situation more than you could possibly imagine.” Albus said, answering Minerva’s question.

“Escalating? How?” she asked baffled.

Severus snorted in derisively, as if it was quite obvious how they were doing it.
“Sirius wishes to be there for Harry, which is quite understandable, I do not blame him for that. Unfortunately he is asking every day, despite what we tell him - he is insistent.” replied Albus.

“Why don’t you let him see Harry then?” asked Minerva as if it would sort everything out.

“He has a chest infection, which he is recovering from, if Harry catches that, he would have pneumonia by the end of the week and his weakened system wouldn’t stand a chance - it would kill him, Minerva.” explained Poppy, since Severus didn’t seem in the mood to explain anything. Given he looked as though he hadn’t slept well in the past few weeks - she would bet that was the reason he was grumpier than usual. If she thought she could, she would put dreamless sleeping potion into his food or drink to make him sleep. Unfortunately he was a Potions Master; he would know the second it was placed in front of him.

“I see, and he’s still trying to see him?” Minerva wasn’t sure how to feel, astonished, shocked, disgusted and a little mystified.

“Yes, he’s just desperate to help, but he fails to understand the gravity of the situation. I fear he may go too far and everyone will find out - you know what would happen as well as I do.” said Albus. The Minister had tried to gain guardianship of Harry, when that failed due to the blood wards and the fact Harry had living family, he’d just bid his time. He had tried and failed when Harry was eleven, solely due to the fact they had no idea where Harry was. He understood Sirius’ desire, he really did, but it didn’t make a bit of difference - he couldn’t be near Harry at the moment.

“And Remus?” enquired Minerva, shaking her head.

“He’s doing his best to stop Sirius from doing anything silly. The conversation Severus and Remus had ensured that he understood, but from the looks of it - he just cannot get through to Sirius. I think there’s only one thing that will, the next time he comes, he will look through the memories Severus extracted from the woman doctor.” said Albus quietly.

“I hope that you dealt with her appropriately,” said Minerva, her tone filled with fire and viciousness.

Severus grinned ferally at the Transfiguration teacher, nobody said anything but Minerva didn’t need to be told - she knew.

“Good,” replied Minerva, to the unanswered answer she’d received.

Minerva looked over at Harry once more, her face spasming with pain; she didn’t even want to know exactly what he’d been through. Faced with this, she suddenly didn’t care which house he got into, or who he took after more…she just wanted him to get better. The nagging doubt plagued her - could he get better after eleven years of captivity? She couldn’t see it, but what did she know? The human spirit was a hard thing to truly break; she prayed to Merlin that he was whole and able to get better.

“How is he…mentally?” she asked with a tremble in her voice.

“He hasn’t said anything, or made any sort of sound except for one occasion,” Severus told her, not going into details about it. It had been a soft exclamation of surprise, nothing more even deeply asleep and in the throes of a nightmare he was silent. It was wrong on so many levels that it was physically painful to see. “It’s difficult to discern but our best guess is that he is mentally around the age of four to six years old.”
“And he will be able to get better? I mean he will be able to retain the mindset of a teenager or an adult somewhere down the line?” Minerva prayed that the answer was yes.

“That isn’t known, he may never be mentally capable of looking after himself, the mind is a unique thing, and no magic can penetrate it and tell us our answers.” said Poppy.

Minerva’s heart sank, that wasn’t the answer she had been hoping for - but she couldn’t say she was terribly surprised. “If he doesn’t…what happens long term?”

“It depends on how severe it is, with House-Elves he may be perfectly capable of leading a normal life, but if its worse he may always need adult supervision.” it was Severus who answered her this time.

“But who is capable of that? It wouldn’t be fair for him to get used to this then end up in St. Mungo’s it would be worse than what that awful woman did!” spat Minerva, if she’d been in her Animagus form her claws would have been fully extended and hair raised threateningly.

“Calm down, Minerva,” soothed Albus, “It may not come to that; we will just have to face it when it does. He will never end up in St. Mungo’s as long as I have breath in my body.” his tone might be quiet but there was no denying the determination in his words. He would never allow Harry to end up in there. Perhaps it was a residual fear that had remained from his childhood, but he would never commit a child to a hospital. The hospital wasn’t bad or wrong in any way, the patients were looked after but in his opinion it was no life.

“I hope you are right.” said Minerva. She despaired at the thought of it happening; she could only imagine the look on Harry’s face if they did. Maybe they were right, she was thinking of the future too much right now. Especially when they should be concentrating on Harry as he was now…not a few years down the line.

"Don't we all?" murmured Severus, he would look after Harry until the day he died if it was required of him. If it weren't for the fact he had a mark on his arm that declared him a Death Eater...and the fact the Dark Lord would be back some day...well his future wasn't exactly guaranteed now was it? He was however, the youngest of the lot of them in the room (minus Harry obviously) and he would live a lot longer. He owed it to Lily, to Harry and for his own peace of mind to try, to survive and live regardless of what care Harry my or may not need in future.

“He’s extremely pale, have you thought about getting a wheelchair and letting him sit out in the sun for a few hours?” suggested Minerva, it was probably something else Harry wasn’t used to. She knew a few of the healers in St. Mungo’s they wouldn't think twice about giving her one if she requested it, they were in fact old students.

“Oh, yes, I’m sure he’d love to see the ghosts wandering around the school,” murmured Severus dryly.

“Nice to see this hasn’t changed your nuanced wit,” replied Minerva smartly.

“Of course not,” replied Severus sardonically.

“It is a good idea though, Severus, we shouldn’t dismiss it, we could use the House-Elves to pop him to the gardens for a little sun and when its time to return a simple slumbering spell will go a long way.” suggested Poppy, thoughtfully.

“I never implied it wasn’t a good idea, just that it would be difficult.” Severus reminded her sharply.
“Anything worth doing is never easy,” said Albus, “I’m sure between us all we can come up with something, even if I have to make it abundantly clear to the ghosts they aren’t to stray down in a certain area between certain times of the day.” he would do whatever it took to make life easier for Harry. If there was anyone in this world who deserved a piece of happiness and contentment it was Harry wasn’t it?

“Then once he spends more than a few minutes conscious then we will see about it,” said Severus, “There is one thing, however, Poppy when you go and get his colouring books, buy children’s story books, I wouldn’t know where to start, even as a child growing up in the Muggle world I read magical tales.”

“I had planned on it,” said Poppy, nodding in agreement.

“If you would, I can accompany you, Poppy, I know the shops and areas well, I know where you can get things for Harry at very good prices.” suggested Minerva.

“Price is of no concern,” replied both Albus and Severus in unison.

“Very well,” said Minerva, knowing both men were obviously putting money to it, perhaps she should as well. Nobody would be able to touch the Potter fortune other than Harry and of course Sirius Black since he was his magical guardian - for whatever that was worth the young man couldn’t take care of himself never mind his godson. “I am free this afternoon if you wish to go then, Poppy.”

“That’s fine,” Poppy told her, nodding her agreement. It would be nice to get Harry real pyjamas and not transfigured items or hospital wing ones. They would need to be baggy, so they could easily remove them from the teen but considering how emaciated Harry was - they would be anyway. No doubt Severus and Albus only had Galleons so she would need to make a trip to Gringotts for Muggle notes before stepping out of the Leaky Cauldron and finding the necessary shops.
Chapter 12

"There's so much here," admired Poppy, looking around bemused, the shop they were currently in was what she would calculate the entire length and breadth of Hogsmeade village. Perhaps a small exaggeration, but nonetheless true, it was a very big shop, with what seemed like dozens of shops in all directions. She doubted they would need to go anywhere else, they would find everything Harry needed here in this place.

"You don't venture into the Muggle world very often do you?" said Minerva staring around, but without the slight awe that Poppy was displaying.

"Not at all," admitted Poppy, she was a magical healer, she had no reason to visit the Muggle world often. She was also a pureblood Witch, and had no ties here either - unlike Minerva of course. In her youth Minerva hadn't wanted to end up like her mother, a witch unable to use her magic because of the laws when she fell in love and married a Muggle. So she said no to a man asking to marry her and concentrated on the Magical world. Each summer though, she would travel back, as if to remind herself where her family was originally from who knew, she'd never asked and Minerva hadn't said.

It was the reason Severus had asked Minerva to retrieve the Muggle Medical text that they had needed desperately. Although Severus could have gone, she would have been able to look after Harry herself, but Severus wasn't one for ducking on his duty - In other words he didn't want to leave him alone. He might not show it but Severus felt guilty about what happened to Harry. Especially since he considered it his duty to watch over him, to protect him. If anyone even the Minister tried to hurt Harry, well she would pity the fools; Severus was quite a vicious man when he wanted to be. They all had it in them, it just took the right situation to bring it out (if such a thing could be called 'right' at the end of the day) and Severus' had been unleashed a lot younger than most peoples.

"Perhaps clothes and nightwear is the best place to begin," said Minerva, the two women nodded in silent agreement as the both swiftly made their way through the crowd innocuously. Both had on dress trousers and a t-shirt, although Minerva had a jacket on. It was the most 'Muggle' looking clothes they had that wouldn't cause them to stand out. Or rather in Poppy's case since Minerva was very aware of what the current looks were for the Muggles. "I didn't even think to ask what size," she mused as she looked around the teenage section of the store they'd just entered.

"Twelve years old and up, I doubt he will ever be tall as he should have been," Poppy said automatically, they would be too big for him and maybe even too long height wise for a while. Thankfully with magic that wouldn't be a problem, sighing softly she looked around wondering what on earth to get Harry. She didn't know him; hell the child didn't know himself either. Perhaps a good variety would be best; somewhere down the line hopefully they would know what he liked and could get him the preferred garments.

"So four seasons, summer, winter, autumn and spring," mused Minerva. "Winter clothes won't be available in many stores but hopefully we can find enough things here."
"He won't be able to wear things like shorts and t-shirts for a while, he must be kept warm, and so trousers and jumpers are a must." Poppy told her, shaking her head. Thankfully they had those items in abundance, although the summer garments did outshine them.

"You start, I'll go and retrieve a trolley," said Minerva, knowing they would need one. It wasn't as though she could cast a lightweight charm on them. She felt better doing this, stronger, but every so often she would get a flash of what Harry looked like in her minds eye. She thought keeping busy would have prevented this, but she should have known better - when something this gruesome happened it scarred you for life - she would never forget what she'd seen even years down the line. Memories like that didn't fade; they stay imprinted in your mind for all time.

Poppy quickly began to pluck items from their racks, ensuring they were comfortable, durable and most important thick so body heat wouldn't escape easily. T-shirts, long sleeves shirts, jumpers and four woolly cardigans she took an immediate liking too. She would get Minerva to transfigure some buttons and the House-Elves to sew some buttons on since it seemed as though they were missing or perhaps it was just the fashion. Why someone would want a cardigan without buttons she didn't know, she felt as though it simply defeated the purpose of it. She deposited the lot into the trolley Minerva wheeled towards her.

"We should hurry," said Poppy, rubbing her eyes, "I need to let Severus sleep; he's stubbornly trying to do it all alone. When I tell him to get some rest, he just comes up with one thing or another he needs to do."

"Yes, that's Severus through and through." Minerva stated, it was sometimes amusing but Severus was burning the wick at both ends - he wasn't doing himself any favours. It seemed as if she and Poppy were going to have to press him into getting some well deserved rest. "Don't worry when we get back we will make it clear to the silly boy."

Poppy pursed her lips definitely feeling amused; only Minerva would call Severus Snape a boy and silly. They'd both known him since he was eleven year old, and they knew more about him than anyone else did. Although it wasn't solely his choice, as Severus would say they constantly forced their attentions on him.

"Slippers, shoes, underwear, we will need to go to Diagon Alley for a hat, scarf and glove set… they don't sell them at this time of year in any store." said Minerva.

"Why?" asked Poppy, it made no logical sense.

"Look around, too many of one product and they don't sell winter clothes in many shops, you'd have to go to a specific one if there are any," explained Minerva.

"Hmm," was the only noncommittal sound Poppy made as they quickly but efficiently chose things for Harry. They didn't have to worry about not having enough Muggle money to pay for everything. Between the three of them they'd put what Galleons they'd had on their person together without withdrawing anything from their vaults. It had turned out to be quite a large quantity; Minerva had taken it to Gringotts to have it changed since she was the only one who usually did such a thing. They might be going over board to make things seem normal, but it was best for all concerned that it remained that way. Between Fudge, Black and the prospect of Harry ending up a commodity at St. Mungo's well they were all walking on egg shells to make sure things remained as they were.

The trolley as half full by the time they'd packed everything they could possibly need. With the only exception of a jacket, but until Harry learned of the magical world a cloak could be transfigured into one with a warming charm. Minerva would be the perfect one to do that as well,
she thought as they went to the checkouts and were dealt with immediately since there were no other people waiting.

"Is there anything other than essentials we can get him?" asked Minerva, handing over the notes, "Give it to charity." she added to shop assistant, without pausing merely giving Poppy half the bags and keeping equal amount for herself. Turning they both left the shop, but stayed within the shopping centre and made their way from shop to shop, until their bags were fit to bursting.

"Good afternoon, Severus," said Albus, walking into the Potions Master's lab, unsurprised to see him there. He was constantly in the lab or the bedroom. He never came out; in fact he would be surprised if anyone realized he was in Hogwarts other than the small group who knew the truth.

"Albus," greeted Severus, not pausing in his actions for even the slightest of hesitations.

"Are Poppy and Minerva still running their little errand?" asked Albus, it had been hours and he was quite frankly surprised.

"One thing you'll learn about all women - whether they are teenagers or adults shopping turns into a whole day event." replied Severus, his lips twitching in amusement. "I wont be surprised if the bring in more than Harry could possibly use." perhaps it would have been something Albus knew if his sister had grown up as she should have. Or wasn't continuously baffled by their ways, which he was evidently since he was surprised they were still away shopping. Any other day he would have snorted in amusement, but he was too tired even for that. He knew because he had been best friends with one for years, Lily had been his entire world now he was Harry's and he would make damn sure he was safe from harm.

"May I help?" enquired Albus, most people tended to forget he was one of the best at alchemy, albeit it was true he hadn't participated hands on in that particular branch of magic in a long time - you didn't forget.

"I've got it." stated Severus; he didn't like people touching his equipment. Probably because he paid for the best, that and not having anything as a child probably had a great deal to do with it. Everything in his private lab he'd splurged out for out of his own pocket. Even his potions stock was all his, the school paid for the potions cupboard only.

"Alright," conceded Albus, knowing better than to offer again. He stood against the doorjamb watching him work, suddenly struck by a fact he hadn't thought before. Severus was a tall intimidating man, even when he wasn't scowling, like right now, how was it that Harry could trust him? Would it be women he feared above all else? It would perhaps remain a mystery, but whatever helped Harry he would abide by or help in any way he could. He had already sworn as such, he just wished it was that easy to help the boy recover.

"Are you going to stand there all afternoon? If you must remain at least sit down." stated Severus, feeling distracted by Albus' quiet presence at his back. He didn't like people being out of his line of sight, he could sense the questions that were overwhelming the Headmaster. It wasn't like him to keep quiet either, definitely a new territory for the old wizard.

"What's on your mind?" asked Severus, exasperated by the silence. He would have taken Albus talking in riddles than this disconcerting quietness.

"You don't need to know the ramblings of an old fool, Severus," answered Albus, his voice sounded tired.
"Blaming yourself is not going to make this situation any better," snapped Severus, "Just concentrate on what you can do here and now, you did what you knew was best."

"Was it? At least with Cornelius Fudge he would have been alive, whole," said Albus, feeling the irony in Severus' statement since each one of them all felt some measure of guilt. Poppy perhaps had the least to deal with, which made her job of healing Harry a little easier.

"No, he would have been paraded around to the masses, spoiled rotten and shallow." argued Severus, adding the ingredient he had just ground to the potion, stirring careful before then speaking again. "Despite the fact Fudge was an Auror when all this went down he had a lot of political clout, especially when Crouch Senior lost favour, and he had money to ensure it." he no longer had that fortune, he'd had to share with a brother, who had a son, he had graduated from Hogwarts last year, and trying to climb the social ladder, well with that territory came bribing. Something Fudge wouldn't have had to do if he'd gotten his hands on Harry. It didn't mean he wished what had happened upon him, but really what the bloody hell was the point to wondering what could have happened? The past was the past; there was absolutely nothing they could do. He conveyed these sentiments to Albus, exactly the way he had thought them.

"I realise that, it's not easy to let go of guilt," confessed Albus, he still carried a lot around with him from his teenager years, even putting Gellert away. Blaming himself, thinking if he had only just seen what he was doing sooner perhaps he could have stopped Gellert, instead both of them had been encouraged by their own superiority.

"No it's not," said Severus, in agreement he had his own share of guilt. His troubled memories flashing past his mind eye, most of the memories had Lily in them. He was so deep in thought that he didn't realize the wards had shifted on his quarters, alerting him to the fact someone had entered.

What did cause both men to jump (and for Severus to incidentally abandon his potion and ruin it) was a scream of pure unadulterated terror coming from the bedroom…Harry's bedroom. For an old man Albus Dumbledore didn't half move fast, as if someone had lit his backside on fire.

Then their hearts sank when they heard Sirius Black's voice pleadingly telling Harry to calm down.
Sirius rummaged through the potions cabinet with determination, trying to keep quiet as possible, until he found that purple potion he needed. Grasping it in his hand, he slid out of the bathroom after closing the cabinet door. Padding through to the kitchen, he opened the cupboard and took out two glasses, and poured three drops of the sleeping draught into the glass on his right. Looking around with apparent concern, he breathed out then plucked the whisky from the rack and poured two generous measures into the glasses. He was going to see Harry, and he didn't want Remus stopping him or telling Dumbledore. He was so tired of being told he couldn't see Harry; well, no more. Screw everyone; this was his godson. If anyone had the right to see Harry it was him, not Snape or Dumbledore or even Poppy. The excuses were ridiculous, like he was going to make Harry sick! He was fine; they were just using that as an excuse to make him keep quiet.

The sound of the water running through the pipes told him Remus had probably left the bathroom. Putting the whiskey bottle back, he lifted both glasses and wandered towards the living room. "Drink?" he asked, offering Remus the glass in his right hand — it was the hand he always gave things with. His face didn't change to show his elation when Remus took it. The reason he'd used alcohol was because anything weaker and the potion would have been detected by his werewolf partner.

"What's wrong?" Remus asked, giving Sirius a speculative look; this was the longest he had refrained from whining in…well, since they'd been in the Headmaster's office and had been told Harry was safe. The only time he was quiet was when he was sleeping, and it finally gave his head a chance to stop pounding. He was at his wit's end trying to see all sides of this bloody triangle surrounding Harry and his recovery. He understood Sirius, he understood what happened to Harry, and he understood why they couldn't see him to a certain extent.

"I'm tired of fighting," Sirius admitted, and losing, he thought, but he wouldn't be losing for much longer. He would get in to see Harry, consequences be damned. Harry had to know he was there for him. He'd already failed by not being there since he got rescued. How he hated Snape, Sirius thought, gritting his teeth.

"Then don't; just be glad that Harry is alive; it's more than we've had in the past few years…isn't it?" Remus said, watching Sirius gulp down his drink and grimace.

"At first, yes," Sirius replied, actually telling the truth; when he first heard, he'd just felt relieved that Harry was in fact alive and relatively unharmed. It hadn't lasted long; the urge to see the boy had overwhelmed him, and now at long last he was finally going to see him. That was, if Remus ever drank the bloody whisky; speaking of a drink…he wanted another one. Standing up, holding onto the glass, he went back through to the kitchen and refilled the glass. He was feeling guilty about what he was planning, but the thought of his godson wiped all feelings of guilt away. He shouldn't drink; he needed a clear head for what he was doing, he belatedly realized; with that thought, he pushed the glass of whiskey away. A quiet curse followed by the smashing of a glass in the other room let Sirius realize his trick had been effectively put into action.

Rushing through the doorway from the kitchen, Sirius sighed in relief; Remus was fine, and he hadn't got hurt by falling off the couch. Remus' bones were brittle around this time of the month,
easy to damage or break. Grunting in strain, he managed to get Remus arranged comfortably on the couch. Removing his wand, he repaired the glass and set it on the table. "Sorry, Remy, but I'm not letting you stop me this time," he murmured quietly.

Breathing deeply, he climbed into the fireplace, activated the Floo Network, and shouted, "Hogshead pub, Hogsmeade!" Before he knew it, he was shooting through the system and being spat out at his destination. The place was packed with hags, witches, wizards, and all sorts of creatures enjoying their first drink during the day: alcoholics. He ignored their curious looks as he headed out. He wasn't often seen by the magical community; he had spent every second until now searching for his godson to bring him back to his true world.

He made his way towards Hogwarts, passing the shops, the people, without paying much attention. He honestly didn't care enough to even look at them. Anticipation was thrumming through him; once he was close enough to the gates, he called a carriage and waited impatiently for the Thestral-drawn carriage to appear. Breathing evenly, he hopped on and took the five-minute ride towards Hogwarts castle.

Hopping down at the front steps, Sirius wandered into the entrance hall, looking around and finding it empty. Grinning in triumph, he flicked his wand into his palm and cast the Accio charm. "Accio Marauders Map!" It would be coming from Filch's office, so it shouldn't take too long, he thought to himself as he kept looking around. He didn't want to be discovered; hopefully Dumbledore was still out of Hogwarts; he'd said something about being busy and going to the Ministry.

He was beginning to lose hope that the map was even still here, when he saw it flying towards him, coming from the stairs. Sirius quickly snatched it out of the air, and began opening it. "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good," he murmured, touching the parchment and watching the ink spread out, feeling like a teenager again. It was a very liberating experience; he swore he could feel James' spirit beside him laughing.

He looked in the area firstly around the Headmaster's office, a frown appearing on his face as he found no indication of anyone there at all. Dumbledore had implied Harry was up there…if he wasn't, where was he? Panicking now, he began to spread the map out and started looking all over, barely seeing anything in his haste. What if they had removed Harry from Hogwarts? He wouldn't be able to see him or find him. Nothing, he couldn't find anything; he was almost crying in horror. No, they couldn't do this to him. They had insisted he had to stay here, that Harry couldn't come with him. He didn't care what Dumbledore said, if his godson wasn't in Hogwarts, he was going to the Ministry.

Slumping onto the cold hard marble, staring at the map, he was just about to give in and storm Dumbledore's office and demand an answer when he saw the name of the very person he was looking for at the edge of the map.

Harry Potter.

A gush of relief left Sirius' lips; he was still here, thank Merlin for that. His jaw clenched tightly when he realized where he was exactly. Snape's rooms! He couldn't believe Dumbledore had let Harry go to that…that…snake. He'd probably hand him over to Voldemort and let him finish the job; Snivellus was a Death Eater and just as evil as the rest of them. Stupid old fool! What was Dumbledore thinking? He might even be hurting Harry to get back at James for everything they'd done. He had to get to him; the sense of urgency had tripled in a second.

Scrambling to his feet, he bolted for the dungeons, his run slowing somewhat when he noticed Dumbledore in there as well. He would need to sneak in and get evidence or something, anything,
to prove to Dumbledore that Snape was no good for Harry. He could take care of his own godson, and he would prove to everyone that he could.

Chewing on his lip, he realized he wouldn't be able to get in without a password; all places that were 'restricted', if you could call it that, were guarded by passwords. The teachers' quarters, house common rooms, and the Headmaster's office were all protected that way to stop students in general, or just those from different houses, from being able to get in. Hopefully it wouldn't be too hard to figure this password out — all Slytherins were the same, he thought to himself as he finally reached the front of Snape's quarters.

"Pureblood?" Sirius guessed, "Um… Forgiveness? Lily? Harry? Dittany? Unicorn blood? Phoenix tears? Aconite? Bezoar?" Sirius continued to whisper the names of Potion ingredients, praying that somehow he would get it right. The longer he stayed here, the more chance he had of being discovered. "Dragon blood… Asphodel?" and the door swung open, much to his delight, since he hadn't been able to remember any other potion ingredients.

Sirius crept in, hearing their conversation. "You don't need to know the ramblings of an old fool, Severus," he heard Albus say, sounding extremely tired.

"Blaming yourself won't make this situation any better. Just concentrate on what you can do here and now; you did what you thought was best," Sirius heard Snape reply as he got by without them noticing; they were too distracted, which was probably the only thing actually working in his favour.

Smirking in satisfaction, he opened a door, only to find out it was a bathroom. Closing it silently, he checked the other doors; he found Harry in the third room he checked. Smiling softly, he crept into the room. Harry looked so peaceful, and he looked a lot like his father. Of course Sirius was only seeing what he wanted to, since Harry more closely resembled a twelve-year-old skeleton — not his mother, not his father, and certainly not the fifteen-year-old he was.

He grimaced at the long hair; only Snape would keep it that way; he really should have his hair cut. Sirius sat down as he caressed Harry's hair; he stared at the sleeping face. The boy looked serene, untroubled; he just knew that Harry would be fine. They were obviously over-reacting, he told himself for the millionth time that night. Taking a shaky breath, he removed the covers… to find bandages still on the wounds. Shouldn't they have healed by this time? And what the hell was that? Did they have an adult-sized nappy on his godson? What the bloody hell?

Just then Harry stirred. Sirius scraped his chair forward, holding his hand eagerly. Oh, he couldn't wait to talk to Harry about things… his dad, Quidditch, Hogwarts — everything about the magical world. The boy would love it, and he would be at the helm teaching him all he needed to know. He had half a second to realize that Harry's eyes… were different from the last time he saw them — he was terrified, he realized, his heart pounding in his chest. Then he jumped from his chair as if he had just been electrocuted when Harry screamed as if he was peeling his skin off with a blunt spoon.

"Harry, calm down, it's me, it's Padfoot," Sirius reassured, panicking and trying to get Harry to keep quiet when he heard running. "Please, calm down, it's fine — you're okay…you're going to be okay!"
Chapter 14

My Dark Protector
Chapter 14

Sirius panicked, staring between Harry and the door where the thumping of footsteps could be heard. This wasn't the way it was supposed to go. No, this couldn't be happening — they weren't supposed to find Harry panicking like this. They were supposed to be talking — about everything: his parents, Quidditch, and what he wanted to do, so they couldn't keep him away from Harry anymore. Harry should recognize him; he'd been in his life for over a year! He was his godfather; Harry should have known who he was. This wasn't fair, he thought savagely, he hadn't even done anything, either; all he'd wanted to do was be there for him, and it was like he was spitting in his face.

Severus burst into the bedroom, placing himself between Black and Harry and facing the wizard with a look of pure, unadulterated hatred and fury on his face. He couldn't believe Black had actually come into his quarters! The sheer unmitigated gall of the man; he was trembling from head to toe, fighting against the urge to strike out at Black. Unfortunately, he was failing spectacularly; the only reason he was stopping himself was because Harry had seen enough violence in his life. If Harry saw him punching Black, that would be it; there would be no way on this earth he would trust him. He felt Albus' magic, and turned around to find that Harry was now deeply asleep; he need hesitate no further. His fist smacked against Sirius' face; that single blow, holding all Severus' anger, had Sirius on the floor before he understood what on earth was going on.

"Severus," Albus cautioned, but he did not step forward or intervene. If he was honest with himself, he wanted to curse the wizard for being so damn stupid. Severus' quarters were the most protected ones in the whole castle; he was honestly astonished Black had gotten in — he must have figured out the password. That was the only way he could have circumvented the wards protecting Severus' living quarters.

"Enough is enough," Severus hissed, sounding deranged as he hoisted the wizard to his feet with strength that shouldn't have been possible in such a thin man. It could have something to do with the fact that Black himself was malnourished due to his time in Azkaban, and his inability to take care of himself after his release. He prayed that Black hadn't done the unthinkable and set Harry back. He'd worked so hard to gain the boy's trust, to let Harry know he could rely on him, and because of Black it was all in jeopardy.

"Ouch! GET OFF ME, SNIVELLUS!" Sirius snarled, yelling in agony as his arm was forced further behind his back. His left arm began to punch out, trying to get the Potions master to let him go. All that accomplished was causing Snape to grab a hold of his other arm, and forcing him forward and out of his quarters. He braced himself for being thrown out, but Snape didn't do that; instead they continued walking out the dungeons. "Let me go! I swear I'll kill you!" Sirius raged indignantly.

"You? Attack anyone? Without at least two others at your side? Please, don't make me laugh," Severus spat, watching with unconcern as Sirius struggled further. He didn't even feel a sliver of amusement when Sirius almost face-planted on the stairs as he struggled at the wrong time. As much as he would have liked to let him fall, Severus didn't; he just kept a tight grip on him and forced him up the steps, not listening to the constant whining the mutt was doing. He had learned long ago to shut out Black's irritating voice. He didn't think he could open his mouth without
spitting in rage, so he allowed himself time to calm down properly. Black, Potter, Lupin, and Pettigrew had always been his Achilles heel; most times just seeing them caused red to cloud his mind completely.

"It looks as though we will have a guest when we get to my office," Albus said absently as he felt the wards shift, alerting him to the fact that someone was in his office. He didn't need to be a genius to figure out what had happened: Remus had figured out Sirius was absent and had come straight here to Hogwarts. He couldn't blame Remus for not being able to control Sirius, since by rights it wasn't even his problem. Sirius was a grown man; he should know better than to pull stunts like this. "Shouldn't we get someone to stay with Harry?"

"Roz?" Severus called as they walked around the corner to the next set of steps that would take them to the headmaster's office.

"How can Roz help Master Snape?" the house elf asked.

"LET ME GO!" Sirius hissed, struggling more strenuously.

"Take us up to my office," Albus demanded, getting extremely angry at Black. The portraits were getting curious, and there were still a few teachers in the premises. And most concerning of all were the ghosts. They might not leave Hogwarts, but he wasn't stupid enough to think they didn't talk to the students. All it would take was Harry's name being mentioned once before all hell broke loose amongst the students. He grasped a hold of Severus and Black, squeezing Black's shoulder in warning; if he didn't stop acting the fool, he would bind his former student. Roz grasped a hold of Albus' colourful robes, and with a pop the three figures were transported to the Headmaster's office. She stepped back, eyeing the intruder Severus had a hold of cautiously; she didn't want to end up caught in the fray if he started struggling again.

"Oh, no; what happened?" Remus asked fearfully. He'd been surprised to see the Headmaster's office empty, but had quickly begun to realize Sirius had done something really stupid. In near-panic he'd started down to the dungeons to look for Black. "What's he done?" the werewolf asked, although the look on Snape's face spoke volumes.

"Go and keep an eye on my guest; you know what to do. He shouldn't wake," Severus said sternly. He waited until she had popped out before he viciously shoved Black away from him, causing him to slam into the desk painfully.

Remus swallowed thickly; Snape had never been one for physical violence. Casting spells, yes; cutting you down with words, again, yes. But actually getting physical? He must be extremely furious, more so than he'd ever gotten with them at Hogwarts. Having grown up in the Muggle world, both he and Snape still had their natural instincts to strike out with their hands and feet, unlike the purebloods, whose instincts were to raise their wands.

"Easy!" Remus cried defensively, standing between them and groaning softly. He still felt tired. Due to his fast metabolism rate, the small amount of sleeping draught he'd inadvertently taken had only had him knocked out for ten minutes or so. It was still making its way through his system, though, making him feel groggy.

"No, Remus. That is what we've been doing, but no more," Albus said icily. "If he's set Harry back, then I will do everything in my power to see that he never gets near him again." They had been treating Black with kid gloves, feeling pity due to his circumstances: being locked up in Azkaban and finding his godson was so badly damaged. He was furious with the younger wizard, more furious than he'd ever been in his life, and that was saying a lot, since he'd lived for over fifteen decades.
“What were you thinking?” Remus hissed. He didn't want to hear the usual excuse of “it was his godson;” Sirius had already used that excuse to capacity. If he heard it one more time, he wouldn't be responsible for his own actions. He'd already been at the end of his tether with Black's antics, and this… this was the final straw, drugging him and going against Poppy's wishes.

"He's my godson, I have a right to see him!” Sirius explained, rubbing at his ribs and stomach where they'd been jarred into the desk by Snape's push. "It wasn't supposed to go down like that."

Remus looked up at the office ceiling, closing his eyes and stepping away, slumping down on one of the seats with a tired sigh. He was through; he couldn't keep doing this. He was so tired, not just due to the potion now, but emotionally. He just couldn't keep up with Sirius.

"How did you expect it to go, you stupid mutt?!” Severus snarled, his hands clenched tightly into fists. His eyes suddenly narrowed on Black, then shifted to the Pensieve. This had to be done; they had tried to avoid it, due to Black's mental instability, but it couldn't be avoided anymore. Black had to see the raw, unvarnished truth of what Harry had been through. It could shatter him, not that Severus cared about Black's mentality, but rather about what he could say about Harry now that he was found. He turned to face Albus, silently enquiring whether it was empty; a curt nod was his answer.

Severus grabbed a hold of him, and forced the wizard's head into the Pensieve, going with him... knowing better than to think he would be able to exit the Pensieve with what he was going to witness. Black would end up lost in an endless loop of Harry's memories. Nobody deserved that, not even Black, if he was fully honest with himself.

"Don't!” Albus snapped, preventing Remus from interfering; by then both men had disappeared into the small basin.

"I should be with him," Remus quietly said.

Albus looked at Remus and saw the look in his eyes, and he honestly couldn't blame Remus for feeling that way. "He just needs time and a lot of help," he told the werewolf, feeling pity for him. Lupin was caught in the middle, although his insistence was just as bad as Sirius' sometimes. There was no denying that he was the more mature of the two, but Remus hadn't been the one in Azkaban.

"What on earth is going on?” Poppy demanded as she stepped into the room, surprise flitting across her face. Something was up; Albus looked ready to blow a fuse, but this was mixed in with a large dose of worry. The fact that Remus was in the room, and the pensieve was glowing slightly gave the indication that there was someone in it.

"What happened?” Minerva asked, placing the bags she carried on the Headmaster's table, gazing at Albus in silent enquiry.

Albus just shook his head tiredly; he hadn't been sleeping as he should, and dealing with Black had tired him out further. "He broke into Severus' rooms and frightened Harry," the elder wizard confessed.

"Excuse me?!” Poppy shrieked, dumping her bags on the floor as she stared at Albus dumbly. Inwardly she fumed, swearing that if Black had done even an ounce of damage to Harry's fragile state, she would kill him. Closing her eyes, she struggled to contain her ire, but she wasn't as practiced as Severus, or Albus, come to that, at hiding her feelings. She was a professional, though, so she succeeded in regaining her composure. "How is he?” she demanded.
"Asleep for the moment, magically induced," Albus confessed, before he added, "He screamed."

"He what?" Minerva asked; "Is that a good thing or a bad thing?" She wasn't sure whether to feel relieved or horrified: Harry had used his voice.

Poppy replied, lips pursed and retribution promised in her eyes, "It's hard to say at this point. It might show Harry that Severus is willing to protect him, and help him in the long run. Or it could do the opposite, sending Harry into a catatonic state."

"That's bad," Minerva muttered; her voice was low, but they all heard her in the silent room.

"Potentially," Albus conceded, but he prayed that it was Poppy's first suggestion that had the greatest likelihood of happening.

"Gone for a few hours, and this happens!" Minerva cursed angrily.

"A few hours?" Albus echoed, "You've been gone nearly an entire day!" he said, his lips twitching as he remembered Severus' words.

"Yes, a few hours," Minerva said, giving him a strange look.

Albus just stared, lost for words.

"How long will they be in there?" Remus enquired from where he sat. His gaze was on the Pensieve, a pained look on his face. He could only imagine what kind of horrors were in there. Why hadn't he spoken to Sirius more? Made it clearer what Harry was going through? It would have probably meant more if it hadn't been coming from Severus. Unfortunately, Sirius was just completely irrational and angry when it came to anything Severus said. Not even Poppy could get thought to him, though, so that was saying something.

"Half an hour," Albus said grimly, with a definitive tone in his voice that spoke volumes. He should know; he'd timed exactly how long he'd been immersed in the memories Severus had given him. He doubted he would ever lose the feelings he'd experienced when viewing them; he knew they would be with him until he died. He would never be able to forget what he saw, and the memories would never fade.

"They? Severus isn't with Harry?" Poppy asked in surprise, deciding to head down to the dungeons and sit with him. She wouldn't attempt to wake him up; Severus seemed to have more luck with Harry than she did. It made sense that he would trust men better than women, considering it had been women who hurt him. With Vernon Dursley working, it was Petunia who was Harry's main caretaker and provider; she had hurt him the most, she would bet. From what little Severus had said about Petunia over the past couple of days, she had been a right bitter girl. Then there was that despicable woman, who was an insult to her gender and the human race.

"No, he's guiding Sirius in the Pensieve," Albus solemnly explained.

"Very well; let him know I'll be in his quarters," Poppy said, grabbing all the bags of things she'd just bought that afternoon.

"Would you like me to come with you?" Minerva asked, and then something dawned on her. "How on earth did Black get into Severus' quarters?"

"That's something I'm sure Severus intends to find out; it will be a blow to his ego that he's more predictable than he likes to think," Albus told them wryly.
Minerva's lips twitched just a little, knowing all too well that this was extremely true.

"Let's go; I don't want to be here when he gets out," Poppy admitted, her tone clipped and curt. She meant everything she said. She couldn't maim him…but there were other ways she could make his life a misery for as long as he breathed on this earth.

"To be frank — neither do I," Minerva replied, taking the bags from the Headmaster's desk and quickly joining Poppy in leaving the Headmaster's office. "We'll talk to you later, Albus," she added before she closed the door without waiting for his reply.

"Unbelievable," Poppy muttered, placing all the food on the tray. The bags had already been placed in Harry's room; she would have everything put away in their appropriate places, so as not to startle Harry or have him getting anxious at all the new items.

"Yes, I heard it the first twenty-seven times," Minerva replied, making her way ahead of Poppy to open the door to Harry's room, remembering that she'd closed it — out of habit. Poppy immediately made her way thorough, depositing the tray of food on the table. Albus' spell had worked; Harry was sleeping peacefully—although for how long, she didn't know. Merlin, if Black had screwed everything up, she was going to be so mad. Merlin, how she wished she could offer Harry some comfort, let him know she wasn't like that disgusting woman who had hurt him so much. What kind of doctor hurt his patients in such a despicable manner? The vow, "First, do no harm," was a witches' or wizards' oath, one they swore on their magic and took most seriously. It was one of the reasons you had to be sure about what you wanted to do in life. You couldn't go from being a healer to, say, an Auror; it just wasn't done. The vow healers gave made it physically impossible to harm anyone. If they had to engage in a duel, they could only defend themselves with non-lethal spells.

"What are you doing? He's not awake," Minerva asked, sitting up straighter when she noticed Poppy lifting the bowl of food. She assumed it was for Harry, since they rarely ate soup.

"He doesn't need to be; this is how we've been feeding him. His stomach is so small he can only consume small quantities, and since he isn't awake enough, we do it this way. In fact, he's only been awake three times for food so far," Poppy explained as she spelled the cooled food into his stomach.
Albus and Remus sat down and had a coffee while they waited, the offer of a lemon drop was as always accepted by Remus but he hadn't eaten it yet. Perhaps if they'd gone for Earl Grey Tea he might have, since it was always drank with lemon. With coffee? It would have tasted awful, and Remus couldn't help but wonder how he could suck on a lemon drop and drink his brew.

"What else can I do for him?" asked Remus imploringly, he had tried everything and he was frankly at his wits end. He had his own problems to deal with every month, and he honestly couldn't take much more of Sirius heaping all his problems upon his already burdened shoulders. He longed for the days long past when they'd been together, both of them working him in the Muggle world and Sirius at his job...yes it had been during dark times, but at least they'd had a normal relationship. He was beginning to forget all the good times they'd had in the flat, instead it was being filled with arguments, pleading and shouting (on Sirius' part) when he tried to get him to go get help.

"There is a time when you have to let him fend for himself, Remus." Albus eventually said, "Growing up he was pampered with House-Elves then he had the Potter's to look after him. As soon as he left you immediately started looking after him am I correct?"

Remus nodded looking down at the floor a frown twisting across his face, not sure what to make of Albus' words.

"He doesn't know the first thing about being grown up, it doesn't help that he was stinted during his stay in Azkaban. Unfortunately we cannot keep using that as an excuse - he was twenty-one years old when he was imprisoned, and that should have been an age where he able to look after himself." stated Albus, drinking his coffee, not showing his worry for Harry. He honestly dreaded the thought of Severus telling him that Sirius Black had set him back. It was going to take a long time for Harry to recover without instances like this.

"I don't have anywhere else I can go to give us some distance," admitted Remus, although he still had money left over from when he taught at Hogwarts for a year. He could get his own flat again, perhaps he shouldn't have been so quick as to move out when Sirius invited him to stay at his... well they'd always thought of it as 'theirs' but it was Sirius' it had been bought with the money his uncle Alphard had given him. It's why he'd had to move out when Sirius had been imprisoned and the property/assets frozen.

"Perhaps I could persuade you to return and teach Defence again?" enquired Albus, finding out his partner was innocent had been a knock to Remus so he had quit to take care of him and give him the 'attention' he needed. At the time he'd sounded as if he was talking about a dog but Albus had refrained from saying any of his thoughts. So he'd been forced to look for a new teacher, with Severus' Dark Mark getting stronger he'd realized he couldn't put his students at risk with a mediocre teacher and had asked Alastor one of his trusted friends to help out. As a fellow Order member he had confided in his fears and knowledge that he might be back soon and Alastor had agreed to help. It would be one less thing to worry about during the summer.
"That…actually…might not be a bad idea," said Remus thoughtfully, it would give them both the space they needed. It would also help him save up even more money as well. What fortune his father had was long gone, spent on him, and trying to cure his lycanthrope to no success. He had even sold the house, and began renting places going from one place to another to avoid anyone becoming suspicious.

"The students would love to have you back," replied Albus, "There is a shortage of candidates for the teaching position this year." he added looking at the lone application on his desk. A file clerk from the Ministry of magic who only got an Acceptable grade in Defence against the Dark Arts wished to teach his students how to defend themselves. He knew he'd taken on a few…less than reputable characters but did everyone really think he would allow just anyone into his school and teach? Perhaps he'd brought it upon himself by hiring the likes of Gilderoy Lockhart. Unfortunately he hadn't trusted himself or his own judgement since he had given the defence position to Quirrell and he had been in the league with Voldemort. At least he knew he could trust Remus with the student's wellbeing and his ability to teach them.

"I'll take it," said Remus immediately, making his decision.

"Good!" said Albus beaming at him, for what felt like the first time since he'd seen Harry. "Very good!" he added one thing he could strike of his list of things to do.

Remus just smiled a little almost brittle-like, feeling shattered not just physically but emotionally. If it was possible these few years had been worse than finding out Sirius had supposedly betrayed Lily and James. He hadn't thought such a thing was possible, but it was.

Albus glanced at the time again, and turned to face the blue glowing pensive, knowing that any second now they would return. He wasn't looking forward to seeing Sirius Black an emotional wreck yet again. It had been difficult the first time, but he wasn't sure he would feel that way this time. Sirius had gone too far and could have potentially taken it too far and scared Harry into a comatose state in which they might take weeks or months getting Harry out of - if that was even possible he didn't know much about the medical side of things.

A few seconds later Severus and Sirius did re-emerge from the pensive, Sirius was on the floor and before they knew it he was spectacularly sick all over the place. The smell of sick was enough to make their own stomachs heave but the repugnant odour of alcohol made it even more disgusting.

"I would have suggested a trip to Poppy, but I don't think that's the best idea right now." said Albus, flicking his wand and cleaning up the smell and sick.

"They returned?" stated Severus, already knowing the answer to the question.

"They have, they're currently in your quarters, Severus." commented Albus.

"Come on, Sirius," said Remus moving towards the pair of them, intending on helping the shaken wizard to his feet. It looked as though Harry might not be the only one to be comatose. He glanced at the top of the pensive briefly, as if somehow expecting to see the memories himself. "Get up." he added firmly.

"Remus she hurt him so much," whispered Sirius to the silent room, "So much." he said again whining as he keened back and forth. The memories still circling his mind despite the fact they were no longer in the pensive. Retching in disgust as he saw the Muggle exploding after a few seconds after magical blood being injected into his veins. He'd always thought himself superior to Muggles, but never had he wished them dead or being harmed…to know one Muggle had killed so many other Muggles just…blew his mind she was worse than the Death Eaters in a way. He
wished he could say that was the worst of it but it wasn't.

Remus closed his eyes, before reaching down and actually bodily hoisting Sirius to his feet. He would stick to Albus' advice; leave Sirius to do things on his own instead of doing it for him. If it helped get him back to his Sirius quicker then he was all for that - he just prayed it didn't go wrong. "I'll see you all later," he murmured quietly, guiding both of them towards the Floo network.

Seconds later they were gone.

"Are you alright, Severus?" asked Albus subdued, it was the second time Severus had basically been forced to watch those horrific memories. He also had to live with them too, since there wasn't really a way to forget, unless he Obliviated himself and that wasn't useful at all - as harsh as it was Severus knew everything so also realized the best way to approach the terrified teen.

"I will be," Severus said quietly, as always he found a way to soldier on.

"Perhaps we went about it wrong, I think I should have taken your advice and let him see the memories a long time ago," admitted Albus, although Severus had been slightly wary of it as well due to his fragile mental state. Of course he'd felt the need to add 'not that I care about his mental state' at the end.

"Nothing can be done now," grunted Severus his earlier irritation coming back. "It cannot be undone, just fixed."

"Right you are," agreed Albus, hoping it was as easy as that when all was said and done.

"I'm going to go down I wish to be there for when he awakes," said Severus, starting to stand up.

"What will you do?" asked Albus, preventing Severus from leaving just yet.

"Explain as best as I can, whether he understands or not is another thing altogether." Severus told him bluntly.

Albus nodded thoughtfully before saying; "I'll be down as soon as I've gotten through some paperwork." at least with a defence teacher it was less to do. He just had to get the paperwork signed for the students who were relying on the Hogwarts fund to purchase their Hogwarts items. Not everyone could afford to send their children, or better yet had parents to help them pay for the items so it was their duty to ensure they came with everything they needed to complete their magical education. There was only so many they could give out each year, starting with those who worked the hardest.

"Of course," said Severus straightening his spine as he stood up, he needed to let off some more steam so elected to walk back to his quarters instead of taking the quick way through the Floo Network.

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Severus' Quarters

"I think that's Severus returning," said Poppy as she moved out of the bedroom into the sitting area. She was feeling the wards changing slightly as if to admit someone entrance. She wanted to know exactly what had happened and he knew Severus would give her all the details without embellishing anything. She wasn't a nosy person, far from it, but when it came to a patient she would go to the ends of the earth to protect him or her, make sure they were sound emotionally and
physically. Protecting them came in many forms, not just healing them as many would assume.

"Would you like something to drink, Severus?" enquired Minerva, observing the haggard wizard with sympathy. She was standing in his kitchen with a bottle of wine in her hand, pouring it into a wine glass - that he knew wasn't from his quarters since he didn't drink wine. He gave it to Poppy in a goblet if she visited and stayed for one on the odd occasion.

"Offering me a drink in my own quarters?" asked Severus dryly, his lips twitching bemused.

"Something strong," corrected Minerva, she wasn't afraid to make herself comfortable wherever she was. Well that wasn't true, if she hadn't known Severus for years she wouldn't be saying that. Everyone who thought they knew her always said she was stern and professional and very protective of her Gryffindors - but that was only one facet of her character.

"Out of the question," argued Severus, "I cannot drink." at least not while he had Harry to look after.

"Severus, one will not kill you or harm Harry. Sit down and have a drink." said Poppy, sitting down herself, as Minerva poured three drinks, two whiskey's and a wine, Poppy did not like to drink anything other than white or occasionally red wine. Holding the drinks she moved to the pair and passed them their allotted drinks.

"Albus wasn't specific with what happened…" started Poppy, sipping her wine as she stared at him.

"When is Albus ever specific?" Severus said snorting a little unable to help himself. Almost immediately he felt a smidgen of guilt stabbing at him. After all Albus had told him a bit about his childhood, which was still quite shocking to think about even now. He wasn't a man that shocked easy, or so he assumed until a month ago when all this began. He'd like to think now it would be impossible to shock him - but he didn't want to test the waters so quickly.

"How did he even get in?" Minerva asked still shocked that Black of all people had managed to get around Severus' wards.

"He guessed the password," grumbled Severus, grimacing in extreme distaste.

"Pure luck on his part then," mused Poppy, no doubt Severus would triple the wards on his quarters after they went away.

"Desperate men are the most dangerous," conceded Severus, relishing the burn that went down his throat as he drank. "Not to mention cunning when they need to be." it turned his stomach to admit this but it was nonetheless true.

"They are," acknowledged Poppy, agreeing with him. "Would you like to see what we've bought for Harry?" changing the subject. Mentioning or bringing up Sirius Black or James Potter always caused Severus to brood for weeks; it was a testament to how much they'd affected his teenage years.

"Is there enough time in the world to see it all?" asked Severus smirking at the pair of them. A whole day, he could only imagine just how much they had actually ended up spending. More than he and Albus had put towards it he was sure. Merlin only knows when Harry would actually be using any of it.

"Funny," added Minerva her Scottish accent more pronounced than usual. Her mind was only half on the conversation around her the rest was fretting about Harry.
"But true?" guessed Severus.

"Perhaps," admitted Poppy, they had walked out each shop with a trolley filled with items. Something that didn't happen too often if the sales clerks wide eyed look was anything to go by. "There was a lot to choose from, certainly different from the shops here, and you could buy the clothes and take them with you - they didn't need tailored to fit."

"Indeed," replied Severus.

"How is Harry going to be?" wondered Minerva, unable to keep silent - she truly feared the worst. The conversation turned grim quickly, as the amusement they'd felt for a brief moment dulling completely.

Severus pursed his lips, "I'll soon find out, the spell should begin to wear off in the next twenty minutes."

"What was he thinking?" grouched Poppy, very angry at Black's actions. If only she had been there…she might have been able to stop it! There was really no point to wishing and 'iffing' since it changed absolutely nothing. The wizard would be hearing from her, she was half tempted to go and send a loud and extremely long Howler to the idiotic man.

"You'd have to ask him that," sneered Severus, his eye twitching slightly, the walk down to the dungeons hadn't cooled off his temper as much as he would have liked. His face went blank quicker than lighting as he stood up abruptly; placing his glass on the table he cast a refreshing charm so the smell of alcohol was away from the air his clothes and incidentally his mouth. Not that there would have been much of a smell, he hadn't even drank the small contents in the glass.

"Stay here," said Poppy, stopping Minerva from standing up as well. "He's terrified of us as it is on a good day…this isn't a good day. Here take this with you, he might like having something to touch." handing over the stuffed teddy bear. Yes it was a childish thing that young children had, but in Harry's mind that's what he was. It comforted children so hopefully it would have the same affect on Harry. They could only try and get him to trust them at the end of the day.

"Oh, alright." agreed Minerva, but very reluctantly, sitting back down watching Severus as he disappeared into the bedroom. In any other circumstances she would have found him walking towards a room with a teddy in his hand utterly hilarious. Unfortunately there was nothing hilarious about this situation. She strained to listen to anything coming out of the room, but so far not a sound had been made.

Severus sat down on the chair quickly but quietly, he preferred Harry being able to be as eye level as possible. There was nothing more intimidating than a man standing over you, especially one you didn't know. Harry didn't immediately open his eyes, not that he expected to him too. No doubt he was trying to access his surrounds, to make sure he was safe. He could only imagine what he was thinking, but with the warmth, clean and drip free room would reassure him that he was NOT back in that awful room. As the seconds ticked by, there was absolutely no indication that Harry was going to let on to the fact he was awake.

Moving his seat forward, he watched Harry tense giving away the fact he was truly awake - if he hadn't already known that little titbit of information. "Hello, Harry, I'm sorry you had to see that this afternoon I want to let you know it wont happen again." said Severus, wondering what else to say…especially when he had no idea if he understood. He saw Harry relaxing when he heard his voice; instead of triumph shooting through him he realized it might just be his voice causing Harry to relax not his words.
"The man that came to see you...he is your godfather," said Severus pausing, comparing both of them was not a fair comparison even if Black had spent time in Azkaban. He had been an adult Harry had been a child, so no, he couldn't say they'd both been treated horrendously in the same fashion. "He wouldn't hurt you; I wouldn't let him even if he did."

He paused when those green eyes opened; staring at him, the blankness in them was driving him mental. He didn't know if Harry had somehow perfected not feeling anything or at the very least showing it or if the blankness was just a canvas waiting for him and the others to help Harry, create a wizard in the making make his life good from here on in. They could Obliviate all the horrible memories and give him a de-aging potion and let him start all over again. De-aging potions didn't take fourteen years off someone, only a year at the most. Just like aging potions only aged you a year or so - and it was temporarily.

"I have something I want to give you," said Severus, shifting awkwardly, honestly he wished Poppy had given it to him. Unfortunately he doubted he would accept it from her, she probably reminded him too much of that wretched woman who had kept him locked up for years. There may come a time when he learned to trust her but now was not that time.

Without further ado, he slowly extended the stuffed toy placing it right next to his hand. Watching his reactions keenly, despite the fact he felt odd giving someone a gift - a teddy of all things - it's certainly never been something he envisioned himself doing. Any embarrassment left him when Harry grasped a hold of it; his index finger absently stroked it. He had a look of awe on his face as if he had never felt anything so soft in his life and Severus felt his heart hurt once more. Was that guilt? He thought to himself, he hoped it wasn't but wouldn't have been overly surprised.

Coming out of his thoughts, he relaxed back into his seat, his fingers laced together. He was dying to ask Harry if he understood him, even just a little bit. He cautioned himself though, knowing that trust would have to be built up first and foremost. Talking and finding out more could come afterwards, would come afterwards he doubted Harry would speak even if he could right now. He hoped that Poppy had changed him before he woke, considering there wasn't a smell of pee in the air he was hopeful he had. He didn't like putting a nappy on Harry but until he could walk or even talk to tell them he needed - it would be necessary. They couldn't keep giving him a bath every time he did the toilet on the bed. Although he reckoned Harry would actually rather enjoy the warmth of the water. Any source of warmth would be a blessing to Harry after living in the cold for so long.

He watched Harry snuggle into the teddy with a pang in his heart, he should be enjoying being a wizard - stressing over tests not stuck in a bed after suffering for years. He could see how tightly held it, perhaps he suspected that he would take it from him? Given time he knew that Harry would learn to trust him, for now he just had to contend himself with the fact that Harry was not affected by what happened earlier - and that he would use his voice if he felt even the slightest bit threatened.

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How far along should the time skip be do you guys reckon? two weeks? a month? all suggestions are welcome - especially with those who have experience in these situations. I would like a very real element of realism to my story so feel free to review or even PM if you would prefer!
Severus sat in Harry's bedroom, a pile of paperwork in front of him as he wrote his syllabus for the Hogwarts year, which wasn't as easy as one would think since he had to work around not only his schedule but everyone else's to make sure they didn't double up on classes accidentally. Although with magic, it was shifted around until it was perfect and with minimal fuss. Not just with his first year classes but also all the way through to seventh year. Admittedly it was easier from fifth through seventh year since not everyone took potions. Or rather he did not allow just anyone into his classes, he was a wizard that demanded perfection, and he did not want anyone in his class that couldn't perform to the standard he expected. Many of the teachers didn't like what he demanded such perfection, since their students couldn't 'study' what they wanted because of it. Severus didn't give in to their demands, he just told them that he had warned the students repeatedly, and it wasn't his problem if they were not willing to do the work. That he couldn't afford to waste time on students who couldn't keep up with the workload. Now that was something they couldn't argue with, since they knew a lot of students couldn't handle the workload.

Filling out the last square, watching it glow briefly as it was approved he nodded in silent satisfaction. He absently added the date, 19th August and it was done. Finally! He thought in relief as he shovelled the parchment together - no longer having a need for it. Placing it on the table he'd had put in Harry's bedroom just a few days ago so he could do his work and still be there for him. His quiet presence seemed to soothe something in Harry, there was always that look of dread when he moved - not always to leave the room but it was there. That to Severus was the biggest accomplishment so far, while others might not agree - well nobody else's opinion truly mattered to Severus. Although that wasn't strictly true, except for some days when he was in a foul mood.

They still hadn't told Harry about magic, and had no plans to do so until they knew how he was mentally. He still hadn't spoken, and apart from the occasional look in his eyes they were perfectly blank all the time. He was beginning to suspect that Harry was just very good at Occlumency and burying his own emotions and not to forget memories - in a bid to protect himself. Hopefully over time he would begin to trust them enough to speak and actually keep his barriers down and allow himself to feel. In fact he had something planned today that would help in that regard. The idyllic scenery of Hogwarts should help put Harry at ease shouldn't it? There was something tranquil about the location that soothed his own soul; hopefully it would be the same for Harry.

It wasn't all bad, the bedsores were nearly gone, just a smattering of redness where they had previously been. They no longer required tending to daily to keep them clean and free of germs. Harry was also beginning to put on weight, which wasn't surprising since he'd gone from eating practically nothing to three or four meals a day - even if they were smaller than a normal person's. To make things better Harry was actually awake and able to eat his food, they no longer had to use magic to achieve it.

Severus didn't so much as blink as a tray appeared on the table, he had spent a few days perfecting the spell to get the food to appear as long as Harry was unconscious without having the House-Elf waiting at the door until someone -usually him- came to get it - and if he was awake it wouldn't appear. He was rather hopeful it wouldn't need to remain there for too long. He so badly wanted to be able to perform magic around Harry; it would make things infinitely easier. He hadn't realized
until he could no longer use spells so freely that he was taking magic for granted.

It seemed as if it was lunch time already, and a quick glance at the time confirmed that it was past twelve o'clock. It was a beautiful day; the sun was out perhaps this was the perfect time to let Harry see outside this room. Standing up he moved out of the bedroom and called for the House-Elf they had been using since Harry had come. "Roz?" he called quietly, he didn't want to wake Harry. As he got stronger his naps grew shorter, they would need to begin a daily exercise regimen soon, and that would be without a doubt the most challenging thing yet. How did you help someone get better when they didn't like being touched overly much?

"Yes, Sir?" answered Roz, gazing at Severus, who she had gotten extremely used to and attached to in the time since Harry Potter her 'guest' as she usually referred to him as, had appeared.

"I am taking Harry to the lake, I wish to do so while he is asleep," stated Severus, it would mean less trouble, not only getting him down the steps without levitating the damn wheelchair and causing Harry to have a heart attack. Slight exaggeration on his part but unfortunately his reaction might not be far off that remark. They truly had no idea how Harry would react to magic or the mere mention of it. There was so many different ways they'd envisioned it going. Harry hating it and wishing never to use it (Albus' worst fear) due to the fact it had 'abandoned him' when he needed it most. Second terror and sheer panic attacks believing they would hurt him because of it again and that many other people would die due to his blood. Or accepting it as something he could grasp onto that could protect him from ever being vulnerable again. This was what everyone hoped, but they knew deep down it couldn't possibly be that easy.

"Roz will help," she said eagerly, clicking her fingers and a basket appeared beside her, another click had covers handy. Severus nodded in approval, as hot as it may be he definitely needed to keep warm. She gazed at him expectantly afterwards; she was ready to take them.

Severus stepped towards the bed, knowing Harry was deeply asleep due to the spell he had on him, he wouldn't be removing it any time soon. Lifting him up, taking his time so not to jolt Harry too much and wake him up. Once he had a firm grip of him he nodded curtly, it was all he needed to do before the Dungeon's disappeared and the lake replaced the scenery.

Roz lay down the blanket, and placed the basket at the side of it, another snap of her fingers had the wheelchair nearby just in case it was needed. Watching the wizard place Harry on the blanket she couldn't help but wonder if she was privy to a side to this man that anyone rarely saw. The other House-Elves at Hogwarts were…not scared but more wary of him and didn't like going near him if it could be avoided. It was as if they knew instinctively (as all House-Elves were good at) that he wouldn't hurt them purposefully but in a mood he had the potential to. Although not physically more…mentally with his scathing words. Now to see him like this, she wondered if perhaps he had been hurt in the past to make him this way. She had been hurt in the past before coming to Hogwarts and found a great Mistress who took care of her and allowed her to do things she'd never dreamed off. Hogwarts was more than just a school…more than just a home to the humans but to the very creatures she protects within her boundaries. House-Elves, Centaurs, Merfolk and so many others that she was sure that nobody realized was there. With the possibly exception of the Headmaster, who was so kind to let them live in peace away from the evilness of the world.

"You may go, thank you Roz." stated Severus, sitting down himself feeling extremely awkward but a lot of things had felt that way to him in the past three weeks. He wasn't one for lounging around in the sun; his skin was proof of that. He preferred the dungeons, the darkness…his potions to the outside world. Call him a hermit if you will, it's what he preferred at the end of the day. Flicking his wand he cast a barrier around himself and Harry, making them invisible to anyone that could
come into Hogwarts uninvited. Such as the Minister for magic or an idiotic wizard who thought Albus Dumbledore would give them a job when they knew next to nothing about Defence against the Dark Arts. Also keep Harry from seeing anything he shouldn't - like the centaurs or anything that might approach the lake. Even the Thestrals were let out around this time, Hagrid getting them ready to start taking the students back in September.

Thinking about that of course, reminded him of the impending return of the students. September would soon be upon them, and he honestly did not know how they were going to cope. Harry hated being on his own, you could tell by staring into his eyes when he was desperate enough to convey any emotion. It was hardly a surprise, he had been alone so long, that any company even if it scared him was welcomed. Harry wasn't scared of him per se, more cautious, perhaps curious. He had built the foundation of trust between them, now all that was required was for it to be cemented. By continuing on as he was, getting Harry better, it would be no easy feat but perhaps in the long run it would help ease the guilt eating him inside.

Spelling Harry so that the harmful rays of the sun couldn't damage his pale skin, at the same time he added a cooling charm to his cloak already feeling suffocated in his clothes. Then he slid his wand out of view, and up his sleeve and into its holster. He wondered absently if he should have brought the damnable teddy - yes it still made his mouth curl thinking about it - with him, Harry was inordinately attached to the thing. He should be enjoying his summer, worrying about girls and looming exams not bloody cuddling into a teddy, he thought gritting his teeth savagely. How he wished he could magically make Harry better, but he could not, all he could do was try and undo the damage the damn Muggle had done. He had gone too easy on her; he should have showed her what he was capable of, when all he'd done was scratch the surface. He would always regret her death had been so quick.

Erecting his barriers, forcing himself not to dwell on it, once his emotions and memories had calmed he removed a book from his cloak and opened it to the page he had last used, a Slytherin bookmark holding its place. It was old, faded and peeled, from his school days, they were freely available in the library but he did not get another preferring to use the one he had. He lost himself in the new book he'd bought - specifically tailored to helping children who were mentally stunted. He'd had it delivered from America; they were much more advanced than the UK. The British magical world was behind due to fewer wizards, and of course lack of funding to do such a large project. Shifting slightly, sensing that Harry was coming around, before going back to his book, one eye watching Harry keenly, wondering at his reaction to being outside. It had been over a month since they'd rescued him and with the potions he was getting his immune system should be built up enough to tolerate the outside world - he hoped.

Then those green eyes opened only to instantly close, wincing in discomfort a whine so quiet that he wasn't sure how he'd heard it, leaving Harry's lips. It took him a few seconds to try again, but the eyes closed but only for a short time before he was blinking rapidly getting used to the sunlight he hadn't seen for so many years. The innocent awe in his eyes made Severus clench his teeth against the indignant bubble of fury swelling up in his breastbone.

"Did you enjoy your rest?" enquired Severus, his voice as always soothing when Harry as nearby. He spoke to him even though he never received answers, but he hoped one day that he would reply.

Harry turned to the voice, to see his dark protector who was always nearby. Keeping him safe from harm, even from that person who had surprised him that day who had said his name was 'Padfoot' who kept telling him he was okay very loudly, he wasn't used to raised voices and he didn't like them. His dark protector was always taking to him; giving him food and water…warmth did he dare answer? What if this all ended if he did? He didn't want to be hurt anymore; he didn't want to see people hurt either. His heart pounded tightly in his chest, but Harry slowly nodded his head,
that yes he'd had a good rest.

Severus' lips twitched as elation coursed through him, this was the second time he'd received a non-verbal answer in the month since Harry came here. The first time he had begun to think of as a fluke, but surely this one couldn't be? Deciding to test the waters, he asked another question. "Are you hungry?" pride swelling within him, Harry trusted him, and dear Merlin what a feeling that was to be the first person that Harry truly trusted. It may seem like nothing to others, but Severus wasn't used to being trusted so thoroughly with the obvious exception with Poppy, Albus and Minerva perhaps even Filius and Pomona.

Now that was a word Harry understood, hunger, with the likes that most people would never feel. He'd eaten plastic (from the saline drip) just to try and quench the agony in his quivering stomach...just to survive. He hadn't cared for the salty taste that had run through it, but to whet his parched throat ...well that had been very welcomed. There were only a few words he truly knew the meaning off, but as he was taken care of by his dark protector he began to understand more words as they were repeated to him often enough. Rest, sleep, food, hungry, drink, were the most prominent ones. There were other words that he knew…freak…unnatural abomination, which had been uttered so often and in such a harsh tone that he knew they were bad words.

Another nod had him placing his Slytherin bookmarker in its slot and moving the book aside. Was Harry strong enough to sit on his own? He wondered briefly, well, there was no time like the present to try, he doubted it very much but Harry had to learn eventually. Plus he wanted him to see the true magnificent splendour that Hogwarts had to offer. Then again even an ordinary house would look special to Harry after being in a damp dark underground for the majority of his life. Slowly moving so that Harry was aware of him, he latched onto his hands helped him into a sitting position; unfortunately he just flopped to the side, or would have if not for his firm grip on his hands.

After a few moments of indecision, mostly reluctance on his part - due to the fact he didn't like people being in such close proximity to his person, he shifted his legs parallel to Harry's and leaned the boy against his chest. Even if he was tense, Harry didn't seem to be the least bit perturbed; he seemed too fascinated by his surroundings to care for the moment.

"This is Hogwarts, a castle and a school, we teach children here," said Severus, wondering what Harry's expression was at the moment. "From the ages of eleven to seventeen. You would have attended here if I had been able to find you." now Harry did stiffen at that word as if he had understood.

"Yes, we were looking for you, and have been for a long time, I hope part of you understands that." added Severus, his arm reached out for the basket, keeping Harry steady and opened it up to find out what was inside. Sandwiches, sausage rolls, fruit nutritious foods that Harry would be able to eat. With one hand he grabbed a paper plate and put food on it and placed it in front of Harry - who could now muster up the energy to eat on his own.

It had been a messy beginning, as Harry had tried to eat it as quickly as possible, choking himself in the process. He still ate quickly, but not to the extent of hurting himself now. Severus had made it abundantly clear in a way that even Harry had understood that his food would not be taken away and making himself sick was not tolerable. Which had not been easy to do, at all.

"Good afternoon," said Albus, standing a few feet from them, he had a small smile playing on his old face as he observed them. Some good had come out of this, both boys he cared for so much were not at each others throats as he had feared they would be. An old fear to be sure, since he had it such a long time ago. Just when Harry was due to attend Hogwarts, Severus had been adamant
about keeping his distance, doing what he must to keep his 'duties' intact and that didn't include being 'nice' to the Boy-Who-Lived. Despite the fact he did care for him, since he had repeatedly warned him against leaving him with Petunia Dursley. He had feared that she would still be bitter about magic, and he had stupidly tried to placate him with empty words at how family had their differences but always came through. It was something he had believed, after all he and his brother did it often enough - mostly when it came to Order business but alone was another ballgame.

He had assumed he knew best and it had caused so much damage.

"May I join you?" he asked them not moving from his spot.

Severus arched an eyebrow, wondering at Albus' oddness, he usually would have just asked then sat down. Then again he had an odd look in his eyes that indicated that Albus wasn't fully here but lost in his own thoughts. "Feel free," he said smirking in amusement, wondering what Albus would do…actually sit down on the grass?

Albus moved forward with permission, pausing briefly, realizing he couldn't just conjure a seat. A slightly disgruntled look passed across his face before it was gone and he sat down on the glass his flamboyant robes making him look even more ridiculous.

Severus couldn't help but snort at the sight Albus made, he didn't think he'd ever seen the Headmaster look so…human, or dare he saw vulnerable looking before. Albus gave him a pointed look as if he suspected what he was thinking.

"Doing some light reading?" enquired Albus, he himself had been reading all the books he could to aid Harry in his recovery without accidentally destroying the trust Poppy and Severus were building in the teenager.

"Indeed," replied Severus, simply.

"That reminds me, I have something for you, Harry!" said Albus, digging into his pockets and pulling out a sweet. He handed it to the child slowly after unwrapping it, knowing that it would be fine for him. "It's merely a soft butter mint treat, not too sugary since I know you said that he might not be able to ever tolerate sugary sweets." he added lowly only for Severus' ears. His eyes twinkled brightly at the delight crossing Harry's face. He had gone to get his usual Lemon Drops from the shop and decided to look for ones that Harry might be able to cope with. Giving him one every time he saw him, knowing that it helped establish some sort of trust - part of him didn't feel worthy of it but he wasn't one to give up.

They sat in a comfortable silence for over an hour, the length of time it took for Harry to eat everything on his plate - no matter how difficult it was Harry always finished his food, if he was full he would keep it there until he could put more into his stomach without actually being sick. That and the fact he was constantly gazing around, the lake seemed to get more of his attention than anything else surrounding him surprisingly.

"He looks like he enjoyed himself," murmured Albus, amazed. How could just having him outside in the sun letting him eat cause him so much enjoyment? The students could certainly learn from Harry. Every little thing they took for granted Harry saw as an immeasurable pleasure. He certainly felt like he was learning a lot when it came to Harry.

"September is approaching fast," Severus, his tone light despite the fact his eyes were piercing Dumbledore - as if expecting him to have an answer to their solutions.

"Do you think perhaps he could deal with having people his own age around?" asked Albus,
"There is nobody that could understand this," stated Severus, his tone sharper than intended, he gazed down at Harry or tried to but the child didn't even so much as twitch. "Is he asleep?"

"He seems to be," replied Albus, he looked very at peace.

"Remove the plate," said Severus, beginning to ease Harry from his upright position as soon as Albus moved it, easing him onto the blanket moving his legs and finally able to stretch and move without being hindered. He hadn't fallen asleep so quickly lately, perhaps it was the heat? Or excitement getting the better of him.

"There are a few students who could," suggested Albus.

"It's too soon," Severus told him sharply. "Far too soon, trust me Albus; I am not doing this for my own amusement."

"Alright," said Albus, conceding the point. "Alright, Severus, what do you suggest?"

"I am hoping between the four of us that Harry won't be left alone," said Severus, a frown marring his features.

"Perhaps," mused Albus, "I shall compare your schedules and see if it's doable."

"It must," said Severus, "He cannot be alone, Albus, it will destroy whatever trust we've built."

"Then it shall," said Albus immediately, even if it meant he had to watch over him more than most, Harry came first so his duties would be placed aside when he could do them. He would not allow how far they had come with Harry to be done in a futile exercise. He had seen Severus doing work while watching over Harry - he too could do the same. It was just a shame they couldn't rely on Sirius and Remus to do their part, since they were still too emotional to deal with it. Perhaps one day in future they could help, but until they got themselves under control they would have to do it themselves.

Severus sighed in relief, glad that Albus wasn't going to push for teenagers to look after Harry. There would be a day where he would like that, and Severus was certain of that now. "I think he does understand me, to a certain extent." said Severus, pride gleaming in his eyes.

"How so?" asked Albus curiously, what had happened he wondered?

"I think its certain words that he understands, basic words which means there is hope that he may retain new words he begins to learn." replied Severus feeling a little smug. "He nodded twice this afternoon, answering two questions I asked him."

"So mentally he might just be behind others? Do you think the potion has helped with that?" asked Albus, his eyes twinkling brightly, this was the best news he'd heard in over a month. Well other than the news that they'd found Harry - his condition aside.

"It's a big possibility, do not get your hopes up quite yet, but I think we might get our answers soon enough." Severus told him.

"Will he ever talk?" wondered Albus.

"He certainly has the ability to use his voice when he wants to," Severus said dryly, yes, it had been when he was scared, but he'd used it which means he would be able to talk, or rather had the
capacity to talk - it just depended on whether Harry remembered how to do so. He may think that there was no point due to the fact nobody had wanted to hear him in the past. With a little luck he talking to Harry would open him to the idea sooner or later.

"I am relieved no damage was done," admitted Albus, gazing at the fifteen year old. The difference in him was truly astounding, he no longer looked like a skeleton, and the clothes he had on make him almost look as if he was just a regular teenager relaxing after his exams.

"I know," replied Severus, Albus had told him over a dozen times.

"It looks like Remus has finally decided to join us, if you will excuse me, Severus I shall go see to him." said Albus, standing up gratefully he was an old man - he didn't have it in him to sit on the floor, his bones were a bit too old for it.

Severus nodded curtly, gazing at Harry thoughtfully wondering if he should get him back inside now before he woke again. Yet he couldn't bring himself to do so quite yet, the sun would do him good give him the nutrients he'd been missing out on for so long. It might also help him if he didn't look like a vampire, Harry was paler than him and that was saying a lot.

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I am unsure about Harry's thoughts at all, not that I showed many of them just a few simple ones what did you guys think? too soon? any and all help in making this story as realistic as possible is welcomed - you know me :) I prefer a element of realism in my stories these days :) will we do another time skip to Hogwarts starting back up? or shall we have a few more at this time before Hogwarts begins again? R&R please!
"Good morning, Harry!" Poppy said softly as she entered Harry's bedroom, quickly removing a smudge of ash she had somehow missed upon exiting the Floo Network. Knowing she couldn't use magic near Harry, not until he was told about it. Which might be a long while yet, since Harry was still recovering, and it could take a further year for him to be well, at least physically, mentally however was much more difficult to predict. Even the best in the field would only be able to give a calculated guess due to experience.

Poppy gave Harry a small smile as she rounded the bed, and as she always did removed the empty plates, Harry had eaten his breakfast - all of it, no surprise there really. However, she was very glad to hear it, he needed to eat. She was ecstatic with the weight he was putting on but overall he still had a long way to go. The fireplace was already lit, keeping the room warm as she removed his covers; Harry no longer reacted to it well aware of their routine now. In the morning after breakfast, usually between thirty minutes or an hour afterwards she would begin his physical therapy.

"Are you feeling hungry?" Poppy asked she had heard from Severus that he had given her a non-verbal indication - a nod - that he was indeed hungry a few days ago. It had prompted her to begin asking her own questions, and not just talk to him about various things as she normally would do. She was unsurprised that she didn't even receive a single indication that Harry had heard her.

Patience, that's all it would take, she knew that, she was adamant that he would get there sooner or later - failure was never an option to her as a witch or healer. Holding onto his leg, she began to work it, bending his knee until it was firmly bent before levelling it back out, and for the next ten minutes she continued her administrations to the one leg.

"I have a book I think you will like with me, it will help you understand objects around you," Poppy continued to talk as she moved to the other side, having realized during her second PT that Harry seemed to take comfort in soothing tones no matter whether he trusted them or not. Perhaps it was how Harry gauged whether he would be hurt or not? "After this I'll sit with you and show you it, okay?" taking his other leg she began to repeat the process glancing at her watch so she knew she was doing it for ten minutes.

Poppy didn't bother trying to get Harry to press down with his feet; he either didn't have the strength or didn't understand what they wanted. Even with Severus speaking as plainly as possible, Harry hadn't even tried, so the only alternative to try and get him fit was to stand him up, without walking of course it was a bit too early for that still. She couldn't do it on her own without magic, so Severus had to be there for it.

"I'm going to do your arms now," Poppy said, watching with pride as Harry offered up said arm, he was getting there, beginning to understand and process more words. If that was true, then there was all the hope in the world that Harry would be able to age mentally. For however long he was capable, he might not be able to, passed a young teenage mentality, and always need help.
Honestly, late at night with nobody around she couldn't help but weep in despair, it was a horrible nightmare seeing this happen to someone...especially when that someone was who she helped bring into the world. She's saw him as an innocent little baby and then a toddler to this horror show. She couldn't help but wonder in despair if Voldemort was right, if Muggles didn't deserve the ending of a flash of green light coming there way before they harmed another soul. Oh don't get her wrong, she would never join, but if Tom Riddle had been hurt even a little bit with the likes Harry had - it could explain the way he had become. Surely someone didn't just hate Muggles on principle especially if they lived in the Muggle world for seventeen years. No something had happened, and she didn't even want to imagine what.

"How are you doing?" Severus asked, entering the bedroom, noticing that Poppy looked a million miles away.

"We are doing good today, aren't we Harry?" Poppy said, coming back to the now looking at her watch and realizing she'd been lost in thought longer than she anticipated. That had to stop; she couldn't allow that to continue, not when she was trying to help somebody.

"I have an idea on how to help Harry," Severus whispered to Poppy, he wasn't sure how the idea would pan out but it might make it easier for everyone concerned. Poppy stepped away from Harry and continued her conversation with Severus.

"Which is?" Poppy enquired, she knew that Severus' ideas were always rather good.

"There is something called Hydrotherapy in the Muggle world," Severus explained, "It isn't always used for this particular problem but it might enable Harry to actually begin walking without too much pressure." from what the books said, it was helped to read those with burn related illnesses, arthritis and such conditions.

"It's actually possible, but so soon?" Poppy mused quietly, staring at nothing as her thoughts took over - mulling on it. It would be less stress on his body to begin with, Harry liked being in the water from what Severus had said. So perhaps he would take an active interest in it. He would find it easier to move as well, she warmed to the idea very quickly.

"I didn't think right now, I merely offered a solution and asked for your opinion," Severus insisted.

"And I was doing the same," Poppy replied, her eyes boring into Severus' he seemed very defensive today - on edge. It didn't take her long to realize why, the looming day that was September was looming upon them. "Is it too soon?" both of them were well knowledgably in healing, Poppy had done PT before but it was only a few days not the long term PT Harry needed, they'd read as many book as possible and both spoken to experts from America through the Floo system. They did not want to risk getting in touch with the healers at St. Mungo's nobody could know about Harry so they were taking no chances. Or rather Severus wasn't taking any chances, he seemed to think the entire world would be out to get their hands on him, and regretfully Poppy couldn't actually say with any degree of certainty that this wasn't the case. It wasn't really Harry either; all they wanted was the Boy-Who-Lived.

"We would need to speak to Albus first, ensure that nothing comes out way," Severus pointed out, Peeves or the rest of the ghosts and most important the portraits if Harry saw them he dreaded to think what his reaction would be. Who would have thought it would be so damn hard to keep magic secret? Well it would be difficult, especially here, since it was a magical school.

"Isn't it getting tiresome?" Poppy asked wearily.

"Very," Severus answered immediately. "Unfortunately we cannot risk Harry's mind snapping - we
must introduce him to it very slowly you know what he's been through." he finished grimly. Seeing people quite literally explode in front of his eyes…there was no way he would be happy at the sight of magic being performed. They had to get him sound of mind first, if such a thing was even possible. Then slowly introduce him to the concept of magic, although how they were going to do that was still a mystery to him.

Hell it disgusted him to the very core and they weren't even his memories, although they were constantly in his mind now. Nothing short of Obliviating himself would get rid of them, and unfortunately he couldn't do that. He would never tamper with his mind or memories, truthfully there were others he would prefer to forget, but no. Dear Merlin, why did life have to be so stressful? He knew it would only get more stressful in a few weeks, when Hogwarts started back up. Thankfully the potions were done, it was one less thing on his plate, but that held absolutely no comfort to him.

"Have you considered becoming a part-time teacher, Severus?" asked Poppy, as she moved around and began the last of Harry's exercise; this conversation she didn't feel would compromise the 'secret'.

"And bring someone else in on this?" Severus snorted in bitter amusement. "The idea would have merit if it was anyone else…"

"Yes, doesn't it always seem to be the case?" Poppy mused wryly.

"Indeed," Severus replied his lips twitching displaying his amusement for Poppy to see.

"A Vow would work wonders, that way they wouldn't be able to reveal what they knew." Poppy added, but she knew Severus would go for it. He was very territorial; he wouldn't want anyone else in his potions classroom.

"Perhaps," Severus stated, giving yet another one worded reply - indicating his interest in the subject was below zero.

"There we go, Harry, nearly all done for today!" exclaimed Poppy, giving the teenager a smile taking no offence when those green eyes just stared at her was if he couldn't understand her or perhaps it was her cheerfulness. They sat Harry up, trying to get him to remain balanced for himself which worked for a few minutes before he began to presumably ache with too much stimulation. Only then did they stand him up on his own two feet. Severus made sure to keep a good grip of his underarms, so if it got too much - and it always did - he wouldn't fall. He didn't take any of Harry's weight, not that it was much, but Harry did grasp onto his robes as if he was terrified of being let go. The fact he was able to grasp on meant that he was coming along. After a few minutes they sat him back down and Severus began to rub at his feet, "You are doing really well, Harry, I'm proud of you." Severus said, regardless of whether Harry even understood it or not.

"Two more times today and I think that will be enough," Severus said, once again getting Harry to his feet, his lips quipping at the irritated look on Harry's face, PT was hard for the toughest person, it was a long gruelling process and Harry didn't have an outlet, couldn't or wouldn't scream or complain about it. Normally he loathed the thought of back chatter and complaining but he very badly wanted to hear anything come out of Harry's mouth even if it was to complain.

"I think it will," Poppy said nodding her head, he was beginning to tire. If only Harry would press down on his feet there would be no need to stand him up it was the only way they could strengthen his muscles the way they needed to be strengthened.

They repeated the process once more before getting Harry back onto the bed, one other thing then
Harry would rest for a few hours before lunch. Poppy sat down as she removed the book she'd brought for Harry and opened it at the first page. It was a very simple book, one a five year old would be able to understand and tell you about. It was simply parts of the human body, objects you see outside and inside your home. Harry already had quite a few of them lining a shelf in his room, but most of the things he had were puzzles, jigsaws, things that helped with hand and eye coordination.

At the same time Severus sat Harry up, bunching the pillows at his back so he could rest unaided without them holding him in position - they certainly didn't want him to hurt himself. Not that he could, magic would prevent it should they be too slow in their attempts to help him if he did fall. Once he was sure Harry would be fine, he opened the bedside drawer - which was filled to the brim with different potions Harry had to take at different times. So far since they'd found him only one potion had been stopped, the one to heal his mind from the damage the Muggle drugs had done - if it had done any damage but he would bet his vaults that there had been. He took out the ointment they used on Harry after each session, not only did it ease the strain but there were ingredients in it that would build up and strengthen his muscles.

Sitting down he began massage it into Harry's muscles; it was something he had to do since Harry began to tense and get anxious when anyone else did. Since they were trying to prevent a magical outburst - especially knowing what he did about Ariana. She had accidentally killed her own mother; he had never known accidental magic was so dangerous so they really had to keep him calm. So Poppy was out of the question, and Albus definitely couldn't do it, nor did he want to actually, he felt it was extremely improper as he was a Headmaster of a school - Albus did have a point. He didn't mind doing it though, which surprised him since he couldn't tolerate people touching him or touching others. The only touch he'd received during his childhood had mostly been harsh ones, as a teenager he'd only ever loved one person and that had been unrequited, he'd spent his adulthood being tortured by Voldemort and secluded at Hogwarts. He wasn't used to giving comfort, or receiving it, this was all new to him. Just as new as it was to Harry.

"House," Poppy said, showing him the picture of a normal two story house with a chimney. She kept the page in his view for a few seconds letting it sink in, before turning the page. "Castle," not as majestic as Hogwarts of course, but it was still a representation of a castle, Edinburgh castle if she was correct. "Cottage," and she continued on showing him various things couch, chair, table, bed, fork, knife, spoon, plate, different foods chips, burger, a selection of vegetables before going onto other things. A pond, fish, sea, ship, boat, paddle, creek, swimming pool. Hopefully some of it would sink in and he would know the different things that surrounded him.

"You can stop now, Poppy," Severus told her sounding deeply amused, putting away the half empty tub, grabbing the wipes and began to wipe his hands down now that he was finished. Getting the sticky oily residue from his fingers, until they were clean.

"Hmm?" Poppy murmured gazing at Severus, her mind still half on the book.

"He's asleep," Severus drawled sarcastically, but without any bite whatsoever.

"I see," Poppy quickly looked at Harry to make sure before she closed the book and placed it on the bed beside him. "Do you think it's sinking in?" if Harry wanted to look at it without anyone there to see him then that was just fine. No doubt he was constantly bored stuck in bed; she knew all her patience would have been. Then again they hadn't spent their entire lives practically strapped to a bed. This thought did sober her up particularly quick.

"Yes," Severus replied firmly and confidently. It wasn't simply refusing to see what was in front of him, or believe that Harry would always be this way - he knew Harry was going to be alright, that
he was learning, even if there hadn't been many indications of that. "Hopefully soon he'll trust you enough to join you." someone with mental problems would be trying to parrot her; the silence spoke volumes in his experience. Well at least he hoped it did.

"Swimming, what gave you that idea?" Poppy enquired, "I assume you're thinking of the prefect's bathroom?"

"Of course," Severus answered anything else would be too cold for Harry at the moment. "As I said I was reading the books on PT and it made a mention of Hydrotherapy and I researched that, quite informative, I do believe it will help with Harry's mobility."

"No doubt," Poppy replied nodding firmly, she knew it would. "Have you seen Remus?"

"No, and I have no desire to," Severus stated sharply staring balefully. He wasn't impressed with her bringing him up; he just wanted to forget the bloody arse was here.

"Minerva will be down shortly, she's finally finished her own work and getting the letters out," Poppy added absently, trying to make up for mentioning Remus - she really should know better. There would be some things that couldn't be changed, and the mutual hatred between Remus, Sirius and Severus seemed destined to last. It seemed as though not even Harry being caught in the middle will help - although only time would tell.

"Really?" Severus said arching an eyebrow, allowing the change of subject; Minerva hadn't been down in a few days she really must be caught up in work. He knew the feeling through; he certainly wouldn't like to have to deal with all the correspondence that came through Hogwarts and dealing with the Muggle-born's. "How many has she visited?" Minerva didn't quite like that part of her job description even after all these years.

"Five as far as I am aware," Poppy stated, they were good friends but she didn't know every detail of Minerva's life.

"I think I'll go and brew a potion, are you staying?" Severus asked, making no attempt to stand just yet.

"I think I will, I have nothing more to do before the students come, other than give the hospital wing a once over," Poppy told him, he didn't get much chance to brew - and she knew how much he liked brewing but didn't want to leave Harry alone so yes, she would stay if only to make sure Severus got some time to himself.

"Good," Severus said, "You know where everything is." he added before standing and exiting Harry's bedroom.

Poppy just smiled and shook her head before removing another book from her bag - this one was a medical text with no pictures but just as riveting if not more so than the book she'd given Harry.
Yawning tiredly, Severus bottled up the remaining potions that were heading to the hospital wing tonight. He finally had them all done; he had been staying up later than normal just to get the potions brewed. It was the only time he could, when Harry was asleep, since he needed around-the-clock care. Corking the last one, he sighed in relief; he could sleep a little easier knowing that his duty was done, at least for the rest of the summer. It was like looking after a small child. When this had all started, he had sworn he would do whatever needed to be done — even if it meant caring for Harry for the rest of his life. For the first time he was actually considering the possibility that he might be. Perhaps it was the lack of sleep making him think like that—or the truth of the matter slapping him in the face.

Putting the last potion into the last crate, he levitated all five of them. Poppy had been at St. Mungo's today, and she either would have just returned, or was on her way. It was late; in fact, it was just past midnight, so Poppy should literally have just returned, since this was the normal time for her to return to Hogwarts. Walking out of his lab, he made his way through the living room and out of his private quarters, the crates bobbing along at behind him. They didn't make a single sound... thankfully, since loud noises would wake Harry up. Even if the boy didn't make a sound when woken abruptly, Severus could tell that the sudden sounds distressed him.

Overall, he could tell that it was true. He had been spending more and more time with Harry and less and less time with his own affairs. This was the first time he realized that, and he was surprised. For the first time, he was actually considering the possibility that he might be. Perhaps it was the lack of sleep making him think like that—or the truth of the matter slapping him in the face.

Closing the doors behind himself, he could feel them ward securely; he would know the second someone tried to get into his quarters, if the person so much as touched his door. Nobody other than Albus, Poppy, and Minerva could come through his Floo network, and they didn't come through unannounced; he was always aware of when they were scheduled to come. He ignored the chattering of the portraits as he came up from the dungeon and passed along the corridor. The lights had been lowered due to the fact that the castle would be completely in darkness in less than an hour. The obvious exceptions were one or two lights in the main areas, such as the entrance hall, and along the staircases.

Due to his long strides, it didn't take Severus long to get to his destination; unsurprisingly, the hospital wing was empty. If Poppy was here, he knew she would be through before he knew it. Stalking towards her potion cupboard, he placed the crates carefully beside it where he usually put them. He didn't help her put the vials away; he knew that she had a specific way she liked placing them, as he himself did with his own cupboard, so he understood.

"Who's there?" Poppy demanded loudly; as she muttered under her breath, the lights flared brightly, causing the entire hospital wing to be illuminated. "Severus, you startled me; I didn't think you'd be bringing the potions so late."

"My apologies, Poppy; I assumed you would be at St. Mungo's this evening," Severus said apologetically, assuming that he had been wrong.

"Oh, I was; I came home earlier. The class was cancelled; not only was the healer sick, so were a dozen of the students," Poppy explained.

"Another case of wizards' flu? You would think that as potential healers they would keep themselves safe from germs." Severus grimaced; he didn't like the sound of the soon-to-be healers...
at all. Poppy always sanitized her hospital wing twice a day, and that was without anyone there; she did it a little more often when there were students in here. Her quarters were very neat and tidy as well, free of dust, and probably of germs as well; she was very conscientious about having everything clean.

"I know; it's extremely exasperating, Severus!" Poppy complained as she opened the top crate and began removing the vials. "Unfortunately, they think they're above illnesses, and don't listen to our recommendations! Being with sick people is guaranteed to cause you to be sick if you aren't careful enough." Poppy continued to complain quietly as she put the vials in the cupboard that had been scrubbed and sanitised just yesterday. The old vials, mostly with just dregs of potions in them, had been removed and given to the House-elves to clean and return to Severus so he had more vials to use. "They learn sooner or later, though; a few of my classmates were absent quite a bit of the time while I was going through training, and were close to being told not to come back."

"People think it's easy being a healer," Severus confirmed, probably due to the fact that they were thinking that there were scans that could find out what was wrong with a person, and then another spell to solve the problem, so all was well. It wasn't as easy at that; there were new ailments every day that scans couldn't pick up.

"Like you wouldn't believe!" Poppy emphasised by nodding vigorously. "There are always at least a few students dropping out after the first month of intense classes." Poppy took the potions that Severus handed over gratefully, "How is Harry?"

"The same," Severus told her, but she wasn't surprised; they both knew how long this road was going to be.

"Has Albus been able to get the ghosts to stay in secluded areas tomorrow morning?" Poppy enquired.

"As far as I am aware," Severus stated, picking up more vials and handing them over, despite the fact that he was exhausted.

"He should be talking by now, Severus," Poppy said quietly, concerned. "He should trust us,

"Poppy… this isn't just A worst-case scenario, it is THE worst case," Severus informed Poppy grimly, "From the moment we got him, we knew we would have our work cut out for us. All we can do is hope that his magic has protected him from the worst of it… in the Muggle world, for children who have been through what Harry has… there would be no hope. Yes, they would be marginally better with help, but they would always retain a juvenile mindset."

"For now; Muggle innovation has come a long way; one day they will be able to do what our potions can. Probably not as quickly, but do it nonetheless," Poppy said thoughtfully. "We cannot say that Harry will recover; that's unknown right now. That's why I wish he would speak." A little irritation was seeping into her voice.

"True," Severus agreed. They were set on killing each other quickly, in his opinion, but he said nothing. "When was the last time you slept?"

Poppy laughed softly, "The same could be asked of you, Severus," she pointed out; both of them were exhausted. "I didn't get much sleep last night; I have no idea what’s wrong."

"You should take some of your own advice, Severus," Poppy commented as the last of the first crate was finally emptied. "Leave the others; I'll do them tomorrow," she added, seeing that he was about to open another crate. She was exhausted, and her back and feet ached; she just wanted to get some sleep.

"I've never been good at that," Severus retorted dryly. "Goodnight, Poppy," he added; once she had given her reply, a quiet "night," he wandered out of the hospital wing, sighing softly. He didn't have to look where he was going; he had been basically living in this castle since he'd been eleven years old. The only exceptions were his time off during the summers, and when he left to gain his Mastery in Potions. He could get around the castle blindfolded; he knew where every tripping stair was.

Unfortunately, his walk towards the dungeons wasn't quite as… normal as usual. In fact he found something… or rather someone, in his classroom.

"Black?" Severus narrowed his eyes, as he spotted the wizard sitting on the floor next to his desk. "What are you doing here?" he demanded, surprised to see the wizard there. He noticed the half-empty bottle of fire whiskey beside him. Great; he could feel a shouting match coming on. Black was utterly inebriated; there would be no stopping him.

"You know… he always loved seeing me," Sirius said, his voice slightly slurred, but there was no denying what he was saying. "Used to get so excited, laugh himself silly… until he would end up with the hiccups." His face was filled with pain as he thought about it. "All that time in Azkaban, he was the one thing keeping me going. I couldn't let Lily and James down, couldn't let Harry down, he was my godson after all…but I did, didn't I?" He should have captured Pettigrew instead of yelling at him like an idiot. Unfortunately the things Peter had been saying had raised his hackles. He had lost any control he'd had, and that had been it; when he'd finally calmed down, he was in Azkaban, without a trial.

Severus gazed at the wizard impassively. He was pathetic, broken, and for some reason it didn't inspire any smugness as it would have years prior. Severus sighed in exasperation. "Look, Black, Harry doesn't need someone crying and whining about the past; there's not a damn thing we can do about it. You can just keep losing yourself in the past, but it will do you no good. Right now he needs you to be strong, not a pathetic mess."

"Like you'll let me see him," Sirius muttered bitterly, clutching the whiskey bottle close.

"Have you seen the state of yourself?" Severus barked angrily, "Look at yourself in the mirror, and you'll see why the hell I didn't want you around a terrified boy! He can barely look at anyone, cannot tolerate anyone touching him, and is terrified of the slightest loud noise! In one fell swoop you could have destroyed any and all process we'd made in getting Harry to trust us. This isn't about you, Black; as hard as it might be to accept, I don't think up ways to make your life hell. I am not a teenager anymore. Neither are you, and it's time you grew the bloody hell up!"

"Tell me what to do. I'll do whatever it takes, anything; I just want to be part of his life…" Sirius choked out desperately.

"Clean yourself up," Severus said, his lip curling in disgust. "Get off the drink, act your age, and then you'll get to see him."

"You know…I envy you," Sirius admitted, although there was little doubt if he hadn't been completely drunk he would never have said such a thing.

Severus' eyebrows rose up into his hairline in shock, "You?" Severus snorted, he wasn't aware
Black could envy anyone.

"Everything comes easy to you," Sirius insisted. "Spells, potions, healing; you can do whatever needs to be done. You can help Harry." Even at the age of eleven Snape had been better than he; Snape had known more spells than most of the seventh-years. How he’d hated the fact that everything had been so easy… effortless. It had just heightened his hatred; of course it was easy to blame everyone else for his lack of efforts. His head felt so heavy, he just wanted to lie down and stop the room from spinning quite so much.

"That’s because I worked my fingers to the bone," Severus hissed. "Unlike you, I didn’t have a House-elf to do everything for me, and a vault full of money to spend every year." In fact he’d been barely able to get his school supplies, money had been so tight. How dare he? Black had no right to think he’d had it easy. "You would rather goof off and play pranks and run amok than open a damn book."

"Oh, please! That was so my parents didn’t have to put up with me. They wanted heirs, but didn’t want to raise them." Sirius’ face screwed up as if he was ready to puke. "Being at Hogwarts was the first chance I had to get away from my parents. Every other day, growing up, they forced us to read books and go to lessons, trying to turn us into perfect, respectable Black heirs." Especially when it had become apparent that they were going to be the ONLY male heirs. He had grasped onto that freedom and refused to let go, drunk on it. So excuse him for not wanting to read books.

Severus wanted to groan, the last thing he wanted to do tonight was listen to Black’s pity-me syndrome. "Do you think you are the only one who found a home within Hogwarts’ walls, Black? Let me clue you in: you’re wrong; unfortunately, I went from one bully to two, although here I could at least fight back." Why was he even talking? The idiot probably wouldn’t even remember this conversation come morning. He would have included Pettigrew and Lupin, but they had taken a backseat to the other two, so to speak. Pettigrew had always been terrified of his own shadow and had never had the guts to stand up to anyone, not even with Black and Potter backing him up.

Sirius stared at Snape, as if he was surprised by the words that had come out of his mouth. Groaning weakly, Sirius just sat there feeling sick to his stomach. Maybe he shouldn’t have drunk so much... or at all.

Severus grabbed his shrunk pouch and unrolled it, hoping that there was a potion in the bag; he didn’t think he had a sobering potion in there, though. He wasn’t a big drinker; sure, he liked having a nightcap when things were tough, but since Harry had been brought here, he hadn’t had a single drink. Surprisingly, though, he did find one; plucking it from its place, he put it under his chin as he rolled his potions bag back up and placed it in his pocket again.

"Here, take this. Sober up; go to Poppy tomorrow morning, before eight o’clock. She will bring you; screw this up, Black, and I promise you — you will not get another chance. If you think for a second I am lying, then you are deluding yourself," Severus vowed vehemently. "ROZ!"

"What can Roz do to help Master Severus?" the House-elf asked, gazing at Severus, seeing as he was the one who had called her.

"Take him to Lupin’s private quarters above the Defence classroom; make sure he takes this potion," Severus ordered, passing over the vial of sobering potion. It also had a drop of muscle relaxant in it, which would ensure the wizard would drop right to sleep. Nobody else would have to listen to his inane rambling; he certainly didn’t want to any longer than necessary.

"Did you mean it? Can I see my godson?" Sirius whispered, his blue eyes filled with so much hope and desperation.
"I do not say things I don't mean," Severus stated simply, nodding to Roz to take him, which she did. Only then did Severus relax for the first time since he’d noticed the wizard's presence in his domain. He grimaced at the bottle, which had fallen over and spilled whiskey everywhere once Black and the House-elf had disappeared. Flicking his wand, he banished it, uncaring about the cost of the bottle, and also refreshed the air to get rid of the repugnant odour.

Letting out a gust of breath, he left his classroom and hastily made his way back to his quarters, not wanting to be stopped again. Inwardly he berated himself; why the hell had he agreed to let Black near Harry? Black wasn't ready; he was a bloody mess, and he couldn't control himself at all. Azkaban had obviously done untold damage to the wizard, but he would keep his promise: if Black did anything, then that was it — he would make sure he never saw Harry again. Not until Harry was one hundred percent better — if it happened — and consented to seeing his godfather. Although if Black screwed up now, he doubted Harry would want to see him. He had no plans to allow Harry to see Black or even be aware that he was there. He just wanted to show Black how long and tiring the process would be in healing Harry and getting him better. What better way than to see that Harry couldn't even walk on his own? That he never talked? That he was constantly worried or overwhelmed by everything he did or experienced.

Severus checked in on Harry out of habit, despite the fact that the spell told him that Harry was asleep — peacefully so. As always, he was struck by how... innocent he looked; one honestly wouldn't think he'd been through anything, never mind all that he actually had been. Shaking his head, he mused that it was times like these when he wished he could get a single glimpse into the future. Just to see what would happen, not with the Dark Lord, but with Harry. He wanted to know, to see, if Harry would recover; Merlin, what must Lily think? If there was an afterlife, she was surely watching her son; hopefully she could take solace in the fact that he was somewhere safe now.

"I'll do everything I can, I promise, Lily," Severus whispered with reverence. She had been the only light thing in his life, the only one who had cared about him, fought for him... saved him, even if she didn't know it herself. The only one who knew was Dumbledore; perhaps maybe Poppy and Minerva did, too.

Backing out of the bedroom, not closing the door, and moving to his own, he flopped down on his bed, closed his eyes, and almost immediately — still fully dressed — fell asleep. Troubled though he was, he was still asleep, his body greatly in need of rest.
Chapter 19

My Dark Protector

Chapter 19

Sirius groaned as consciousness came to him, batting the irritating alarm blaring in his ear to no success. Opening his eyes, grumbling nastily under his breath, looking for his wand whining when he couldn’t immediately see it. Grunting as he forced himself to sit up feet dangling out of the bed, he could feel something under his foot and he brightened up - he knew it was a wand, and his at that after all nobody would leave their wand in his room. Leaning down slamming his eyes closed and stopping as the world span around him. How much had he drunk last night? This was the worst he’d ever felt.

Grasping his fingers around his wand, before slowly sitting back up wincing at the pain in his back, crap, how the hell had he been sleeping to cause this pain? Flicking his wand he deactivated the alarm, sighing softly, silence at last. That is until what he did last night actually came to him. Horrified he put his hands over his eyes, wishing that he had imagined it, he couldn’t believe it, and damn the bloody drink to hell. He couldn’t believe he had told Snape he was jealous and envious of him! Fucking hell, he was an idiot. Why had he gone and drank so much?

The Alarm! Harry! He couldn’t let him down, he knew Snape would keep his word - he always did and it was annoying as hell but…damn it - he had every right to react the way he had. Grimacing in distaste, he hated rational thought; they made him feel even more of a fool. It’s why he liked to drink, to stop the blame and heartache. He had nobody to blame but himself, and he hated that, he wasn’t one for admitting when he was wrong.

Standing up he moved towards the door, before he paused as his own stink clung to the air. He stank like something enormously rotten, he’d be right at home in Grimmauld Place with the foul stench that was his mother and the million magical pests that made its home there. He had to clean himself up, huh, maybe Snape was right, he had to be strong, and Harry needed him. He made a beeline for the bathroom, stripped off his clothes and jumped under the temporary cold spray which warmed up quickly.

“Sirius? Is that you?” Remus shouted through the door, his tone on the verge of suspicion.

“Yes!” Sirius called back. “I’ll be done in a few minutes,” Remus knew it was him he could smell him; he was just being sarcastic and annoying. He didn’t want any of Remus’ comments this morning, especially not about him being at Hogwarts when he ‘supposedly wasn’t supposed to be’.

“Are you alright?” Remus continued, staring at the door in contemplation. It was early, really early and Sirius didn’t normally get up for hours yet - and especially considering how late he’d come in. Drunk out of his mind, it was becoming a real problem and he had no idea how to fix it.

“I’m fine,” Sirius said loudly, rolling his eyes he acts out of character once and Remus thinks he’s insane, fantastic. Stepping out hurriedly shutting the shower off, he wrapped a towel around his waist, before opening the door the steam billowed out. “Here,” moving around Remus and going back to his bedroom.

Unaware that Remus was gazing at him perplexed and admittedly a little shocked even when the door to his room closed he stood frozen. What the hell was going on? Had he entered an alternative universe? Was it secretly night time and Sirius had screwed with the time? No, even he wasn’t
capable of that one no matter how good he was at pranking people.

Kicking himself into gear, he moved towards the door and opened it, “What’s going on?” he asked.

“What do you mean?” Sirius enquired, deliberately being obtuse.

“Sirius,” Remus growled in warning.

“I’m fine, Remus, I don’t need you to baby me,” Sirius turned around to face him, his face sincere.

“I don’t think that’s true,” Remus admitted, struck by the look on his face, what had happened to change him so drastically? Just yesterday he had been a blubbering mess, using the Floo Network to come over and sit mourning over everything and how bad his life was. “What happened when you went out last night?”

“Snape, that’s what happened, bloody Snape!” Sirius muttered but there was no hint of bitterness in his voice.


“What always happens,” Sirius admitted, closing the wardrobe door.

“He told you how it was,” Remus said, his amber eyes lightening up. “If I knew Snape would get through to you I would have brought him here to lay into you.”

“Funny,” Sirius muttered drolly, giving him a pointed look. “I have to go.”

“Where?” Remus enquired, praying that he wasn’t going out for more alcohol.

“I’m going to see Poppy,” Sirius replied honestly. “I’ll be back in a few hours,”

“I’ll be in the classroom, I have a few last minute things I want to do before the school starts up again,” Remus, he was excited to be teaching again, it was the one thing in his life that allowed him to put himself first and help others.

“Alright, I’ll see you later,” Sirius said as he rushed down the stairs, out of Remus’ quarters, not even glancing at the classroom as he left. He was elated, terrified, anxious and concerned all in one go, making him feel as if he would be sick. It was better than the guilt and churning self destructive thoughts. He could do this, he had to, Harry came first, he continued that mantra all the way to the hospital wing each step he took becoming more assertive and confident. He had the strength to do this and prove everyone wrong. He would show them all he could step up.

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Hospital wing

Sirius skidded to a halt inside the room, out of breath, but considering he hadn’t been keeping himself in shape it was no surprise. Stepping inside, peering around looking for Poppy but there was no sign of her at all, what if she was already gone wherever it was she was supposed to go? He wasn’t late, he thought to himself, already beginning to panic. “Poppy?” called Sirius, “Poppy!” he added more urgently.

Sirius almost toppled over in relief when he heard the distinctive noise of someone’s feet thumping on the floor getting closer and louder to him.

“What the devil is wrong, Mr. Black?” Poppy demanded as she made her entrance, her eyes
narrowed in annoyance.

“Thank Merlin, you’re still here!” Sirius let out a relieved breath.

“Where else would I be?” Poppy gazed at the wizard speculatively, had he been drinking?

“Snape said I could see Harry today,” Sirius replied, his tone hopeful that she wouldn’t fight it.

“He said that?” Poppy asked doubtfully, her face openly displaying her doubt.

“I promise to behave, I won’t get in your way,” Sirius muttered defensively, he didn’t lie, well that wasn’t true, but he didn’t lie about important matters. Just to get himself out of trouble, most of the times he thought without speaking, but that wasn’t necessarily lying now was it?

“I hope for your sake that you can keep your word, if Severus has allowed it, he won’t allow it to continue if you do wrong.” Poppy warned her, her eyes softening, she knew he just wanted to see his godson, but it wasn’t as simple as allowing it, there was strict rules that had to be adhered to until he was well enough to understand everything.

“I know,” Sirius admitted sighing softly, resigned to the constant pressure and watching the both of them would do. “Has there been any change?” he asked quietly.

“I am needed elsewhere, talk while we walk,” Poppy said before disappearing into her office and reappearing with a bag.

Sirius just wordlessly nodded as they both left the hospital wing, taking the stairs instead of using the Floo Network - why he didn’t know he’d already travelled down and it had exhausted him beyond all measures. He refused to be left behind, and he honestly wanted to know how Harry was doing. He hadn’t learnt anything new since Harry was first through here and he had screwed up very badly. Which everyone around him had made very apparent - by telling him how exactly he had screwed up and the damage he could have done.

“What do you want to know?” Poppy asked as they swiftly made their way up the steps, she gazed at him before turning back straight ahead not wishing to trip up.

“Anything, everything,” Sirius echoed, his heart sinking, Harry didn’t know anything - it was like he was an empty shell waiting for information that made his heart hurt so badly.

“Well he’s getting stronger, he’s going through Physical Therapy, I’m also teaching him words,” Poppy explained.

“Words?” Sirius echoed, his heart sinking, Harry didn’t know anything - it was like he was an empty shell waiting for information that made his heart hurt so bad.

“Yes, I read to him out of a picture book, you must understand he doesn’t know anything, what he learned as a child will have been forgotten by this point.” Poppy told him as they rounded the seventh floor corridor - where they needed to be.

“Does he understand what you say to him?” Sirius enquired, sadness setting into him.

“Some things, just the basics he’s managed to pick up,” Poppy revealed, “He will get better.” she added firmly, she wasn’t going to consider the alternative.

“Do you really believe that?” Sirius asked.
“Yes, the progress he’s made so far is a good indicator that he can retain and learn new information, it’s just the matter of finding out just how much information he can retain or whether he will always keep the mindset of a child.” Poppy informed him. “The hardest part is over; the physical damage has been repaired, next comes the longest part, waiting to see what his mind is like.”

“How big is the percentage that he will be normal?” Sirius queried.

“I cannot say, there is no way to magically find out either,” Poppy replied knowing what he would ask, “Hence why I said this was the longest part.

“I see,” Sirius stated.

“He will never be normal by any means,” Poppy added as she motioned for Sirius to stand still as she stepped back and forth, causing Sirius to think she’d taken leave of her senses only to be amazed as a door literally appeared out of nowhere. A secret room! Awesome they’d never found it while at school - and they had found many secret tunnels and entrances.

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Harry abruptly woke, blinking in surprise to feel and see himself moving, but it no longer alarmed or worried him. He was used to going to different places and wakening up in another location. Although this was the first time he’d actually been moving, normally he just woke up and he was there. Like when he’d gone outside, the journey hadn’t woken him the slightest. He blinked again, they were moving through a corridor, it was dimly lit, not enough to see properly, but he could tell there were large portraits on the wall, or at least that’s what Poppy said when she described Hogwarts to him during physical therapy. To him it was just a picture on a wall, as they continued moving he swung his head to the left surprised, he could have sworn that the picture moved, but it couldn’t have right?

“Easy,” Severus said quietly, inwardly very impressed, his mobility was coming along quite well. It was little wonder, just a while ago he couldn’t even hold his own head up. Now if only Harry would start communicating with them. Maybe he was asking all the wrong questions, what if he had to ask simpler ones to gain Harry’s trust further before he could begin communicating with them freely? Perhaps talking to him just wasn’t enough at the end of the day. It was certainly worth a try, it was all they could do. They had frozen all the portraits, but it didn’t stop others from coming into the frames. They couldn’t do anything but leave the portrait though, since everything was literally frozen, they couldn’t speak or communicate in that certain frame.

They were nearing their destination; thankfully Harry had slept through him levitating the wheelchair up the stairs (all seven sets). Poppy should have been here but she was either running late or meeting him in Room of Requirements. He didn’t do well when schedules were interrupted so he continued on. Poppy knew where he was, they’d spent the entire summer basically joint at the hip, along with Minerva and Albus - although they couldn’t spend as much time with Harry due to their duties - important ones that needed done before the return of the students.

A door opened further down the hall, opening the Room of Requirements, Poppy’s head peeked out, “Severus!” she said, “I’m so sorry I was just coming to get you, it took much longer to set up than I thought it would. We have everything we will need for this session.”

“Good,” Severus replied, brushing off her concern, it was fine.

“Hello, Harry, how are you feeling today?” Poppy said, giving him her undivided attention. “Are you sore?”
“No,” Harry said quietly, his voice slightly hoarse and weak due to the lack of use over the years.

“Good, I think you’ll like today’s therapy,” Poppy promised, knowing how much Harry liked water. Probably due to the fact it made him feel clean and warm. She had assumed he wouldn’t like the sound, after hearing it constantly dripping over the years but she’d been wrong.

“Where is he?” Severus whispered lowly, so that Harry couldn’t hear.

“Inside, hidden, don’t worry,” Poppy replied, moving out of the way of the wheelchair so it could be pushed through. She however kept her hand firmly on the door, so that Severus could get him in unobstructed. There were the obvious dangers when using this room but she had specifically asked it NOT to conjure anything anyone thought about after the room was created for them. She only hoped that the room understood her request and didn’t do it. She had spoken to Minerva about it and they read the book from the library on such rooms - with a little luck it was enough.

“Swimming pool,” Harry said in awe, his voice same as before, hoarse and weak but blessedly there and speaking without prompting.

“It is,” Severus replied, glancing briefly to the side where what appeared to be some sort of antechamber the room had created, hearing a gasp, honestly Black didn’t have a subtle bone in his body - how he’d successfully became an Auror he didn’t know. It was his first time hearing Harry’s voice since he was a baby, so he decided to cut him some slack, at least he was obviously sober - there was no way Poppy would have brought him here otherwise. Harry seemed oblivious; if he had heard it he certainly gave no indication of having done so. “Alright, let’s get this started.” he added, putting the brakes on to prevent it accidentally going further and into the pool. He removed his cloak, shoes and socks as well as trousers, keeping his t-shirt and shorts on. He found it entirely distasteful, but if it helped Harry then he couldn’t care less.

“Hands,” Severus said, holding them out, slowly but surely, Harry’s hands found his, tightening against his hold, his legs extremely wobbly as he used what strength he had to stand up. As soon as he was standing his entire body trembled with the strain of using every muscle he had. Poppy quickly helped discard Harry of most of his clothes, he was tiring very quickly not having anyone taking even the slightest weight. Once she was done she nodded and Severus scooped the teen into his arms, and slowly descended into the water, he didn’t fail to notice Harry’s small grin. He was very easily pleased it seemed, admittedly it wouldn’t last for long as he got more used to it in every day life.

“One day I’ll even teach you to swim,” Severus promised. Easing up once they were in the water, taking his hands and allowing Harry’s feet to touch the floor of the pool.

“Harry would you like some lunch here today?” Poppy asked, sitting down near the pool but away from any splashing that might occur.

“Yes,” Harry said softly.

“Yes, Please.” Severus corrected, the quicker he started the better it would be for all concerned. Seeing the confused look on his face, he elaborated. “It’s polite to say please when someone asks you if you’d like something.” he didn’t know whether he understood or not, but he was getting there.

“Yes, Please?” Harry echoed, more in a bid to please his dark protector who had rescued him and kept him warm and let him spend time in a swimming pool of all things. He loved the feel of the water; he could spend all day in it. Looking down he flexed his toes it wasn’t as difficult to stay standing up in here. A very foreign feeling of happiness consumed him and confused him too. He didn’t understand it any more than a child could.

“Good.” Severus nodded, “Lets try walking, you can do it, one foot in front of the other,” stepping further away, but his hands kept a steady grip on his hands. “It will be easier here, than doing it at home.”

“Home?” Harry said quietly, was it his home? Did that mean his dark protector considered him
family? It was family that lived in a home after all.

“Yes, our home,” Severus, feeling a large lump coming to his throat at the look on Harry’s face, he hated these feelings, and wished he could stop them - it would certainly help him do what he had to without emotion clouding his judgement. “Step towards me.”

Poppy stood from her seat and moved towards the antechamber, towards Sirius.

“He’s speaking,” Sirius breathed in awe.

“He is,” Poppy said with a smile. “He’s coming along; just a few days ago it was only Severus who could get him to talk at all.”

“He doesn’t speak to you?” Sirius enquired slightly surprised, Poppy had that trusting look about her - she cared deeply about all her patients.

“Who do I look like?” Poppy said without pause.

“You look nothing like that disgusting woman!” Sirius whispered heatedly, understand what she meant.

“But I do, a little, Harry may never fully trust women, he might cling more tightly to men,” Poppy said thoughtfully, “We certainly cannot blame him for that.

“But weren’t you the first person Harry saw awake?” Sirius asked confused.

“No, when Harry first came around it was Severus, he was immediately wary of everyone of course, even more with me in the room.” Poppy confessed sadly. “He’s coming around; trust doesn’t come easily for someone who’s gone through so much. The school year is going to be very difficult.”

“I’ll help, I want to, just teach me how to do it,” Sirius vowed.

“You cannot teach anyone how to look after someone; it’s either there or not. You mustn’t let your emotions control you; you have to think before you talk. You cannot even allow the anger or frustration you feel to bleed through on your body, since Harry can read body language like its nobodies business. He’s had to; it’s a trait those abused pick up in order to survive.” Poppy revealed, watching the session keenly, despite the fact she was conversing with Sirius Black.

Sirius watched it, feeling tears building up, his hand went out and up against the wall which had been charmed to let him see through it as though it was invisible and his eyes closed. Letting out a trembling breath, he stopped himself from giving in to his wretched emotions.

“Were you taught mediation as a child?” Poppy asked, observing him, already knowing the answer.

“Of course,” Sirius replied, grimacing as he remembered his father trying to tutor him.

“Use it, and use it well, you might find it helps you with all you’ve endured along the way settling your emotions.” Poppy said, watching Harry take steady steps, he was at the other end of the pool now, and this probably had been the best idea yet. It was just too bad they couldn’t continue it would help Harry immensely.

“Huh,” he muttered, he hadn’t seen it ever coming in handy after learning it, guess he owed his father an apology - it looked as if he might need it after all. More than he could have ever thought possible.

“Amazing,” Poppy said, still watching them.

“What is?” Sirius wiped around to see what she was talking about.

“We stop when he gets exhausted, this is the first time he’s actually did walking, so far we’ve been building up his muscle, he’s gone much further than I thought he would.” Poppy revealed.

“What if it’s too much?” Sirius blurted out in concern.

“We know what we are doing, and to be quite honest Harry lets us know when he’s had enough,” Poppy chuckled quietly.
Remus sighed softly as he finished up all the work he would need to do for the oncoming school year, he had even set aside the schedules and pop quizzes for those that would take his classes the day after the full moon to give him just a little time to recover. Although thankfully, three of those days afterwards were the weekend, so the first term would be easy to say the least. It was so quiet, and really even after nine days it was disconcerting. Sirius had finally confessed where he was going a week after he started disappearing all the time for nearly the entire day. He hadn’t been drinking, loud; boisterous instead he sat quietly in front of the fireplace and just looked for all the world lost in thought. The fourth day he had actually taken a book out on how to deal with abused children, something he had gotten from Poppy Pomfrey if the writing scribbled at the bottom were any indication, it was obviously a book she had received during her apprenticeship if she had felt the need to pen her name on the bottom cover of the book. He had evaded all questions until Remus had snapped on the ninth day and demanded an explanation. Quite frankly ignoring the fact he felt like a spoilt child who was being ignored.

------0 Flash Back 0------

“I’m visiting Harry,” Sirius revealed, his grey eyes, that sometimes looked blue in certain light, watched Remus lose his anger and sit back down staring owlishly at him out of all the things he’d expected - that wasn’t it.

“So you aren’t seeing anyone?” Remus whispered closing his eyes and mouth as relief coursed through him. It wasn’t as if they were dating right now, it was more like he was just looking at Sirius so he didn’t do anything stupid. That wasn’t a relationship, so why wouldn’t he think Sirius wanted to look elsewhere for a relationship when he was probably treating him like a father or something?

“No, Remus, I’m not,” Sirius replied evenly, “I know I was a bit of a playboy when I was younger, but I can’t believe you’d think that of me these days.” he was gaunt still even after all this time, his boyish looks were gone, and he had never truly recovered from Azkaban. Not that it was why he wasn’t a ‘playboy’ he had stopped when he got into a real relationship with Remus, he never wanted to hurt him, he had promised not to and it was a promise he had kept. The others he had been with had all known what they were getting into, well except Mary…she had high hopes for more, becoming Mrs. Sirius Black, but he hadn’t had any intentions of settling down whatsoever. Poor girl had died during the war, without a family of her own; he had grieved for her despite how their so called relationship had ended.

“Well…I….though….I’m sorry,” Remus admitted, rubbing at his face tiredly, he wasn’t even going to try and defend his own ludicrous thoughts. “Why didn’t you want to tell me?” he then asked hurt coating his voice.

“Why do you think? You love Harry as much as I do, and the fact I’m getting to see him and you aren’t…it’s bound to be painful so I kept it from you…I probably shouldn’t have, I realize that now, but I really was only protecting you, you know.” Sirius said quietly, the popping of the log in
the fireplace was all that was heard for a few long moments as they sat in further silence.

“How is he?” Remus asked, his amber eyes glowing, he wanted to know so badly, he hid the hurt that Sirius had kept this from him deep within. He didn’t want Sirius not telling him things, he wondered if he would ever get to see him, the only image he had of Harry was him as a baby and then when he was rescued, it was enough to give him nightmares and it did very often in fact.

“Oh, Remus, you should see him.” Sirius practically glowed as he said that, “He’s so much better than the last time we saw him together, he’s healed, he’s walking now and talking, it’s very soft and you can barely hear it but its there. I’ve not had a chance to interact with him though, I remain hidden but its better than nothing.” he had stopped grumbling to himself after the third day, just relishing in the fact that he was in his own way getting to see his godson. “He’s learning everything a toddler does though.” his eyes darkened here. “He knows what most things are now, Snape shows and tells him what everything is.”

A sad grimace appeared on Remus’ face, it was horrifying to him that Harry was so behind on everything - it was a damn shame. “Do they know if he will…recover yet?”

“Well physically he will, they just don’t know how he will be mentally, but Poppy and Snape are optimistic,” Sirius nodded his head, “Even if he doesn’t, it won’t make me love him any less. I hope he will be fine though, and be a normal teenager and adult when he grows more. I think they’re just more concerned about how he will take to magic and if it will set him back.”

“Wait…what? What the hell does that mean? He doesn’t know about magic? How can that be?” Remus blurted out in surprise. “He hasn’t done magic yet?”

“Well when Snape sense Harry get worked up about anything he gives him potions to calm him down so he doesn’t actually do any magic - not that I think you can do accidental magic in Hogwarts…but we all have our wands to direct our magic so that might be why…I don’t know, either way he doesn’t know.” Sirius sighed, “I mean he…he’s bound to know on an unconscious level that he is special, after everything that’s happened to him and what that woman did.” the way he spat woman out would have made even the Death Eaters flinch away. “Snape thinks maybe Harry’s mind has made him forget in a bid to protect itself, but the mind doesn’t forget forever, and he might begin to remember now that he’s safe. In fact he thinks its already happening, he’s having bad nightmares but he won’t say anything to him about it.” in fact Snape looked exhausted, every day he saw it the anger and disgust he had towards Snape began to fade. He saw a side to him that he hadn’t ever saw before, and slowly but surely the prejudice was leaving him and with it guilt was settling in and he did not like that.

Remus nodded unsurprised by that information, Merlin he needed a drink.

“When he was small we thought he was going to look like James with Lily’s eyes, remember?” Sirius grinned in bittersweet remembrance. If only he had just taken Harry and ran, it would have been better than the bloody alternative. He couldn’t even rage at Dumbledore for putting him there since Dumbledore was…fuck he was broken; the guilt was weighing heavily on the old man. It wasn’t just that either, his whole outlook had been smashed into smithereens. He had always wanted to have a good relationship with Muggles, but now…now Sirius was sure that he wanted to take all the wizards and witches from the Muggle world and seclude them completely. The word he was receiving from those within the Wizengamot certainly attested to his thoughts.

“Yes,” Remus smiled himself, unaware of Sirius’ thoughts. The last time he had seen Harry he looked more like a skeleton than anything else.

“Well he does have Lily’s eyes but he has long hair, not the cursed birds nest that James and...
Charles had, Merlin, Dorea used to have a good laugh about that.” Sirius grimaced in pain. “Can you imagine what Dorea would have done if she was still alive?”

Remus shuddered visibly, “Merlin, I don’t even want to think about it,” he confessed, if everyone thought Lily had been protective of her son...Dorea had been even worse. Probably due to the fact that Charles and her had difficult having a child, in fact they had just about resigned themselves to the Potter name ending when she had blessedly found out she was pregnant. Like all Black’s they loved their children to the point of madness and would have stormed hell itself to protect their kids. Although the middle generation hadn’t understood that, more Black’s were disinherited than any other generation of Black’s before them. Between his mother and grandmother Harry would have had the most protective family alive, if of course...they had been alive themselves. If there were an afterlife the both of them were probably raising hell at what happened to him.

“It’s not fair, Remus,” Sirius spat bitterly, why did it have to happen to his godson?! Not that he would wish this up on anyone not even Voldemort himself.

“You don’t need to tell me that, Sirius, but fair has nothing to do with it.” Remus stated grimly, he knew that himself he had been bitten by a bloody werewolf when he was just a young child; of course he wasn’t under the impression life was fair. Although he was less bitter about life these days, having three good friends who hadn’t cared the slightest about his affliction and actually helped him by becoming Animagus’.

“You know, Harry isn’t going to be light don’t you?” Sirius said watching Remus closely.

Remus scoffed, “Do you think I’m under any illusions about that? Harry’s going to loath the very ground Muggles walk on, his ideals are going to match Voldemort’s, I am hoping the fact that we found him will stop Harry joining him...for I honestly don’t know what I would do if he does decide to side with him.”

“No, he won’t join him, although I’m bloody tempted to myself,” Sirius snarled harshly, in fact there was one he would love to curse to hell and back - but she was already dead. Snape had beaten him to it, hopefully he would get the memory of it, the fact that Snape had implied that Dumbledore had been there was astonishing. “Hopefully Snape will help keep the majority of the darkness in Harry at bay.” they didn’t even kid themselves that Harry would remain innocent - when he begin to realize that his life had been one fucked up complication after another, the bitterness would set in.

“Well if anyone can, Severus will,” Remus mused thoughtfully, since there was no doubt Severus continued struggle himself to this very day. Although they didn’t know why, they could certainly imagine why he would want all Muggles dead after living with them for the first seventeen years of his life. “We are getting ahead of ourselves though, it might not happen, we can’t just try and decide what Harry will think…” he trailed off.

“I suppose you have a point,” Sirius sighed, sitting back, “Although I’ve heard rumours about some of the legislations Dumbledore’s trying to pass in Wizengamot meetings, they’re all feeling as if they’re walking on a thin ice, I mean Dumbledore has always championed Muggles and Muggle-Born’s. To see him changing so abruptly without any reason, it’s bound to be confusing the hell out of them. I’m thinking about taking my seats and helping him,”

“You hate politics!” Remus blurted out wide eyed staring agog at Sirius as if seeing him for the first time in his life.

“Yes, because my parents made me read about it, I mean come on I was eight I didn’t want to read about bloody politics.” Sirius argued, shrugging his shoulders. “Of course, I’m not really that into
them myself even now, but if I had accepted my Lordship I wouldn’t have ended up in Azkaban without a trial…”

“You wouldn’t have had the Lordship,” Remus pointed out, Orion had still been alive back then.

“Well Heir-ship then,” Sirius amended with a sighed, despite the fact he had been stricken off the family tree, probably just his mother taking out her anger on something of his - he had never been disinherited officially. With so many of the Black’s dying off, and the new generation not having any males other than himself and Regulus they couldn’t afford to risk disinheriting him completely. Two Black heirs for the entire Black estate, which had always remained divided, suddenly joined together it made him extremely wealthy but he hadn’t cared for it - it also gave him many seats within the Wizengamot. “Legally as the last heir to the Black estate they would have had to give me a trial no matter what piece of legislation that was put down in front of that woman to get me put in Azkaban without trial.” yes another woman he hated, Millicent Bagnold she admittedly wasn’t alone…no, Bartemius Crouch Senior had a large part to play as well.

“I…wish I had spoken up, even given the magical world some doubts they might have given you a trial,” Remus confessed, he opened his mouth prepared to continue when he stopped short seeing the look on Sirius’ face. He did not want to talk about it anymore, so he closed his mouth with a snap and nodded his silent understanding.

“As Harry’s godfather I could use his seats as well,” Sirius continued his earlier musing as if they hadn’t been taking about the hardest time in his life - being sentenced to Azkaban was indeed the harshest time, seeing his best friends bodies lying in Godric’s Hollow dead over and over again - deal with the fact one of his best friends had betrayed them all so badly, and killed thirteen Muggles in the process.

“Doing that will reveal Harry’s presence, something I’m sure none of the others want.” Remus pointed out.

“Not really, they’re sort of legally mine, whether I have Harry or not, I am his magical guardian, I can just swing it in a way that makes it look like I’m just more determined to find him using the political system.” Sirius mused, “I’ll speak to the others, they’ll be able to see it from a different angle than me.” he determined resolutely.

Remus said nothing to that, “I suppose I can give you permission to use mine,” it shouldn’t surprise anyone, his mother might have been a Muggle (not that he was ashamed of that) but his father was from a pureblood line and they did have a seat within the Wizengamot, it had remained unused for three generations, four if he included himself, his great-great-great grandfather had been steeped in politics, his great grandfather, grandfather and father had all worked within the Ministry to some capacity but not on the Wizengamot.

“We need to talk though, I mean all of us before Hogwarts starts back up,” Sirius decided resolutely, and since Hogwarts was starting up very soon they had to do it quickly.

“Then do it,” Remus declared seeing that Sirius wasn’t going to give in on that front. “Just try and get some sleep, you’ve been going to bed really late and getting up too early.” six o’clock in the morning on the dot he was up and away.

“You know what? You’re right,” Sirius said, rubbing at the back of his neck, he was finding it difficult to remain awake, but it might have had something to do with the soothing warmth of the fire, and the safety of Hogwarts wrapping around him.

“Go,” Remus said quietly, “I’ll be joining you soon.” he was quite frankly weighed down with
everything they had just discussed.

Sirius patted Remus shoulder, giving it a brief squeeze before he slipped away with a quiet “Goodnight, Moony,”

Remus’ lips twitched, he hadn’t been called that in a long time, and usually it was ‘Remus’ or ‘Remy’

-----O End Flashback 0-----

Remus shook his head as he once again began putting the paperwork away, he was getting lost in thought more and more often, especially regarding some aspect of that conversation. It made him wonder if they were even ‘light wizards’ anymore, the order had always stood for equality, fighting for equality. Muggles didn’t deserve to die, Muggle-Born’s deserve to live in the magical world etc…yet they weren’t sure what their beliefs on Muggles were anymore. They new instinctively that not all Muggles were the same, but it was hard to differentiate when one of your own was hurt so enormously by one. His mother had loved magic; in fact she had been rather quirky about it. She had used a Boggart shaped wedding topper instead of the traditional man and wife. She had been very proud of him when he showed accidental magic, why couldn’t all Muggles be the same? Heck with all that was happening with Dumbledore and the Wizengamot…what the heck was the Order thinking? Were they even an Order anymore?

Things were changing too quickly, but Remus had always been good at going with the flow of things - even if he knew they weren’t right, especially thinking when Sirius and James had mocked Severus constantly at school. Grunting in frustration, cursing his wandering mind, he looked out the window and decided a bit of fresh air would do him good. He obviously needed to let off some steam, even if it was just by walking around the grounds.

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“Crucio!” the wicked fast aim of the Dark Lord had his terrified servant writhing and screaming in pain as he scratched at himself as if he could somehow physically stop the pain or stop the curse. After a few seconds the spell was removed, and they remained where they were huddled up in pain as they slowly regained themselves. The others didn’t even glance at the idiot who had point blank looked at the Dark Lord when he had demanded that Smith do something as if he was an idiot for suggesting something he felt was so insipid and for new recruits to do.

Nobody, not even the inner circle questioned the Dark Lord’s decision unless they asked permission then they did so respectfully aware of his wrath. Although less of the inner circle did so these days, as their fathers had done before them.

“No question me,” the deceptive dulcet tones of the Dark Lord sounded the cavernous room.

“Yes, My Lord,” Smith said soundly terrified, standing back on weak legs he sat back down without meeting anyone’s gaze.

A pop indicated someone had just Apparated into the Dark Lord’s manor; a few gusts of inhaling sharply in shock, wondering which idiot would dare to arrive so late to a meeting. They all stared unobtrusively at the door, wondering who it was and how quickly they would be cursed; Smith was looking forward for someone else to be on the receiving end of his Lord’s own displeasure.

“Forgive my tardiness my Lord,” Lucius Malfoy stated as he stalked into the room, his face impassive but Voldemort observed the slightly wide eyed shock in them. Arching an eyebrow curious, wondering what had happened to make the usually composed wizard to look so glaringly
shocked - at least to him, Lucius was very much like his father in that regard, both having their subtle tells. He bowed in respect to his lord before he took a seat to Voldemort’s left.

Voldemort waved it away, sensing there would be a good reason for it. Not wishing to look too eager, his red eyes snapped over to Avery who sat next to Smith. He was very pleased to have more of his people within the Ministry; it would make things much easier. “Avery,” Voldemort uttered smoothly, causing the wizard to swallow slightly before he began speaking, paling when he saw Nagini making her way towards his Master but after a very brief pause continued to give his report on the department he worked with.

“Keep it up,” Voldemort spoke, nodding briefly, “Lucius,” he added to his second-in-command. It was very deserved, Lucius had used the diary he had entrusted to him, while it was true it had ended up in the hands of Dumbledore and the Ministry, Lucius had swapped it out and used it, (thankfully before it was destroyed) bringing him back, or rather the portion of his soul, but the young Dark Lord had sought out the main piece of his soul, and joined them together, and he had the best of both worlds, absorbing his soul had given him his original magic he hadn’t realized he had sacrificed by creating Horcruxes and of course a young body free of the taint that followed creating the Horcruxes themselves. Of course, he used to have another second-in-command, Severus Snape, but he didn’t know if he could trust him, hence his decision to exclude him from the knowledge of his return. Until he knew for certain, he would remain in the dark, nobody knew he was back other than his most trusted, and that’s the way it would stay. When he called the others he forced the mark to purposely leave Severus from the calling. He did not believe Severus would ever trust him again, he had promised his Second-in-command to spare Lily Potter, and he had tried, but defeating Harry Potter had been too important, and so he killed her knowing he wouldn’t get near the boy until he did. Upon his return he had been informed that Harry Potter hadn’t attended Hogwarts, that he was missing, and been so for the past five years. The Aurors had given up really; there was just no sighting of him whatsoever, perhaps why Smith had taken it up on himself to join his side, thinking the light side was doomed.

“I have just come from a Wizengamot meeting…” Lucius said his tone filled with perplexity. “I… quite frankly, My Lord, it was disturbing to say the least. Dumbledore is acting more insane than normal…” he honestly didn’t know how to explain it to his Lord.

“Explain,” Voldemort stated sharply, sitting up straighter his eyes becoming more intense with just the mere mention of Dumbledore.

“He’s putting thought new legislations…that will change how things are run in the magical world,” Lucius swallowed thickly, still reeling by the words he’d read on the parchment.

“And?” Voldemort made it clear he was losing patience extremely fast with his second-in-command and his title wouldn’t even protect him from his anger if he didn’t hurry the hell up.

Lucius cleared his throat, “He wants to…restrict the access Muggles have to our world, and find a way to prevent anyone speaking about it or harming a wizard.” he revealed, his body stiff and just waiting on the anger he could feel brewing in the Dark Lord to direct itself towards him.

“He what?“ Voldemort gaped for a second, but it was enough, the others had seen it but would never dare to mention it. The champion of Muggles and Mudblood’s suddenly wanted to stop Muggles instead of helping them? What the hell was going on? Why would he suddenly want that? His eyes narrowed in contemplation, but he just couldn’t figure out the old fool’s agenda. He had been fighting for that himself, for years, and now Dumbledore comes along and wants it? “How were the reactions?” getting control of himself, vowing to get the memory from Lucius he wanted to see this for himself.
“I... My Lord they were stunned, after he put the legislation down they didn’t know what the hell
to say, Doge the insipid fool actually outright demanded an answer from Dumbledore, wanting to
know why clearly suspicious or thinking the old fool was suffering from some form of insanity.
Quite frankly everyone was thinking the same thing, but it was definitely Dumbledore, we were
there for over an hour, and that demented twinkle cropped up occasionally, but he had a steel look
in his eyes that I’ve never seen before. He truly means this, and he is not going to stop until he gets
what he wants.” Lucius explained he didn’t know what to think.

“Leave. Lucius stay behind.” Voldemort demanded, everyone immediately moved despite the fact
they didn’t want to, they wanted to hear everything. Pops immediately filled the air as everyone
began to Apparate from the grand hall - where they had been directed to with the mark - and before
long the hall was completely empty bar two lone figures.

Lucius already knew what was happening, he wanted the memory, and he wanted to see it for
himself.

“Follow me,” Voldemort commanded, standing up leading the blonde to his office where his
pensive waited their arrival. It did not matter that it was late at night; he would get to the bottom of
this however long it took.

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Severus jerked awake by the now familiar scream resonating from Harry’s bedroom, despite the
fact he was half asleep, he grabbed his wand and swiftly made his way out of his bedroom, and
into Harry’s room. By the time he reached the room his wand was up his sleeve, preventing the
teenager - if he could be called as such - from seeing it. He stepped back shocked at the feeling of
the full force of Harry’s magic, swirling around the room nearly bringing Severus to his knees that
certainly woke him up completely. Only two other hand magic that strong, one openly displayed
the other kept it carefully hidden. Swallowing thickly, he backed out ‘Accio Calming Draught!’ he
thought to himself, non-verbally summoning it.

Grasping a hold of it as it barrelled into his palm, he uncorked it and walked back into the room,
despite the physical difficulty he was having. The magic was pushing him away, but it was only
the aid of his own magic that was preventing him from being pushed back and probably propelled
into the wall with great force.

“Harry, you are safe,” Severus said soothingly, trying to get through to the teen as he was once
again nearly brought to his knees, his magic was drenching the room completely, it was heavy and
admittedly awesome in its magnificence. He quickly as an afterthought cast a shielding charm
around him; it would take the worst of it if Harry’s magic did explode. It wouldn’t surprise him if
it did; it had been contained too long. His magic might be ‘fifteen years old’ but for all intents and
purposes it was in its adolescence like Harry, at least when it came to reacting to extreme feelings.
Accidental magic wasn’t possible within Hogwarts walls, yet here it was being performed, by one
powerful little boy. “You are safe, little one, come on, take a deep breath for me.” he continued
speaking nonsensically knowing Harry reacted to his voice, would react to any soft voice speaking
to him with such concern.

He finally reached the bed in time to see Harry’s green eyes open wide in terrified horror, his entire
body began to shake.

“It’s fine, little one, just calm down, you can do it.” Severus said, but he feared that Harry was too
far gone - too terrified at his magic being ‘exposed’ and that he would be hurt again. “It’s okay,
you’ll be fine, I just need you to drink this, Harry it will help you feel better.” he was used to
potions by this, he never questioned why they worked so quickly. This wasn’t a shocking thing
since he’d spent his entire childhood without medicine and unconscious because of that filthy Muggle.

He couldn’t control it, now his dark protector knew how freakish he was - would he hurt him too? Panicked beyond belief, he didn’t want to be hurt again, he didn’t want to be alone, he couldn’t do it again, with that his magic exploded from him, and every projectile in its path were smashed to smithereens, including the wardrobe containing his clothes, but oddly enough the clothes weren’t affected just lay amongst the rubble off wood. The bedside table, the bed, his drawers, and of course more importantly Severus he was flung heavily against the wall.

Harry stared in horror as his dark protector flung against the wall, “NO!” he yelled, he didn’t want him to explode like the others. And just like that his magic retracted, settling within Harry, finally content that it had been used, given an outlet for all the new and warring emotions within Harry making him feel more balanced.

Chapter End Notes

Did you ever see that coming? LOL!
Chapter 21

The Dark Lord Voldemort sat in his lavish office, which was filled with all manner of books; ranging from beginners of the Dark Arts to his Parselmagic books that nobody other than he could read. The fire crackled merrily in the grate and on his desk sat a pensive, a few books scattered to the side and of course parchment he planned to use to gather more forces. He was feeling utterly perplexed, he had sent Lucius away after he had put the required memory in the pensive and then spent the last hour and half observing the scene. It was a good thing he was alone, for he hadn't been able to contain his reactions as much as he should. Much like Lucius he was shocked by the old fool's actions, he was tempted to believe he was losing it but he knew that wasn't the case at all. No, those eyes were just as sane as ever, just with hardness he wasn't used to anyone other than himself seeing when it came to the old fool.

Something had happened, that much had to be true, but what could have happened that would make Dumbledore turn his back on all things Muggle? His eyes narrowed in contemplation. The old fool had no family; the only thing he genuinely had to care about was the students under his care, mostly just the Gryffindors so what had happened? It was times like this he wished he still had his spy; he would greatly like to know just what the hell was going on with the old fool. Had someone he cared about been murdered by his Muggle family? There had been no indication of such a thing in the papers, and he read them thoroughly, always looking for pieces of information - even small subtle ones that idiots tended to miss that were far more important and far reaching sometimes than anyone could guess.

He would have to use the students within the halls of Hogwarts to get his answers then, perhaps Lucius' son along with the others can investigate. He couldn't rely on them, unfortunately, since he knew they wouldn't be able to figure it out unless Dumbledore took it upon himself to tell them, but they would know if a student hadn't returned. It wasn't any of the Slytherins and was tempted to believe it was a Gryffindor.

Sitting back, his finger tips meeting and under his chin as he thought more about the odd scene in the pensive. Perhaps he should create an identity for himself, and use the political route for his end goals. There was no doubt he and Dumbledore would be at odds for the things he had planned, and perhaps it wasn't worth it. He couldn't stand the old fool, but he was trying to pass one of the most important things he felt should have happened fifth years ago - the total separation of the Muggle and Magical world. Once that was done, and the public settled, he could advance his cause further in the meeting rooms with the Wizengamot, he had always been very good at getting people to see things his way. Or he could work behind the scenes using Lucius; it definitely bore thinking about thoroughly before coming to a decision.

He couldn't reveal who he really was, too many people were aware of that name, and that he was Slytherins heir. They didn't know the lengths he had gone to achieve immortality, he doubted even Dumbledore himself did, but if he ever saw the form he had now, he would figure it out - of that there was no doubt whatsoever. It would be easy to create another name, he mused to himself, and
there were plenty of magical rituals that would see to that without a problem. He looked exactly like he did at the age of eighteen when he left Hogwarts after all. Glamours were much too risky, all it took was one wrong move and you would be completely exposed and he did not take risks well - not unless he was sure it would work out. The last time he had taken a risk that he thought would work out well for him, he had been wrong, turned into a parasite, forced to live in snakes to survive, roaming around just waiting for his followers - who he had been so sure would look for him, find him and return him back to his former glory. It had not happened for many years, he had lost himself, to the insanity of being alone, lost in the silence, without a body unable to do anything - utterly helpless. He could feel even now how it had felt, but it was only due to his seventeen year old Horcrux self that he was able to overcome it and think rationally as well as having more than one silver of his soul within a body. At least that was his theory, and most of his were always correct.

"Just what are you up to, Dumbledore," Voldemort muttered quietly, he would call Lucius in the next few days, but before Hogwarts started up, and would ensure he knew to instruct his son. Perhaps Nott and Avery would be best to called as well so their sons could be informed. They might hear something that young Malfoy didn't after all.

Voldemort firmly moving everything he had learned and placing it behind his unbeatable occlumency shields. He had spent too long dwelling on something he just wouldn't get answered any time soon and quite frankly he had too much to do without thinking on something that wouldn't be solved. Turning in his chair, his pose elegant as he moved the parchment into position and began to write - he wanted all the dark creatures to align with him, it was their duty to do so really, without him they wouldn't get their rights and entitlements back. They would just be considered less than second class citizens, the least they could do as he fought for them was to fight for him in the mean time.

He had the patience to wait; he had been back for years had he not? Slowly rebuilding everything that had been lost fourteen years ago due to his insanity and rash actions. He wasn't sure whether it was the fact the boy was missing presumed dead (at least by the Ministry) or whether he had just decided to deal with Potter whenever it next came up. He certainly wasn't going to send his Death Eaters out looking for him; they had much more important tasks to do for him. Plus sending them out to look for Potter would have caused fights and arguments as they would want to prove their worth by bringing the boy to him - it would have gotten messy fast. And that was in no way helpful to him in keeping his return extremely low-key. He was prepared for the day they learned he had returned, but he hoped not to have to put it in place for a long time yet.

"Misty!" Voldemort called after ten minutes of writing his missive.

"What can Misty do for Master?" Misty said, popping before him bowing low showing him the appropriate deference for her position. She had worked for the Malfoy's before being released into the Dark Lord's service, and nobody would believe her if she said she actually preferred being here than with her old Masters.

"Have this delivered to the Owlery, use the Hawk." Voldemort stated before dismissively waving the House-elf away. He did not give the animals he had acquired names, he had learned long ago not to form emotional attachments to things like that. The only exception was his snakes, one he had brought back from Albania, Nagini, she had lasted the longest with him possessing her, and he had left before she died, he had actually liked her. Protective and possessive little thing especially for a snake, and her humour was rather amusing.

The House-elf left without a single word, knowing she was being dismissed.
Glancing at the time, he sighed, well he wasn't going to get anything else done this evening, it was
time to rest before Nagini came looking for him. His lips twitched just ever so slightly, she was the
only one that could annoy him and get away with it. Certainly the most unique of snakes, although
she was magical so that might explain it. Of course the only reason she got away with it was
because nobody else could understand her.

All else would wait until tomorrow, and with that the Dark Lord retired to bed, safe in his manor
which held more wards than anywhere other than possibly Hogwarts. Although his abode was most
certainly more secure since he had Dark wards up. That would trap anyone unwelcome so he could
deal with them. Nobody was idiotic enough to try, not with the amount of wards in place; he was
still waiting for such an occurrence to happen.

Poppy paused briefly in her task, the buzzing in her mind surprising her, what on earth? Frowning
softly, placing the potion vials on the shelf within the cupboard. She had removed all charms on
Harry that would alert her when he woke up for whatever reason; Severus himself had them on him
still since he was the one watching him at night these days. Had they simply forgotten one? It
certainly wasn't like her, and she would have noticed before this surely? She thought as she
grabbed a few more thinking intently.

That was until she remembered they had come up with a new spell, it was one that alerted her to
Harry if he was distressed and Severus was unavailable. Which shouldn't be possible, it was night,
even she should be getting some sleep, but with how hectic everything had been all things that
could be pushed aside had been until there was no option other than to getting them done before
the return of the students. Most of the potions had already been put in place, with only a few crates
left to go. She wasn't as busy as the teachers these days now with the impending return of all
students.

The buzzing didn't cease and a gripping foreboding began to lash through her, making her shiver
slightly. Shoving the potions aside, she summoned her emergency medical bag, and began to leave
the hospital wing with haste; she didn't dare use the Floo network - not without knowing whether
Harry was in the main room or his bedroom. Severus had found Harry slept easier on the couch -
even if only for a few hours before he was put to bed.

As she ran into the dungeons the warning buzz never ceased or slowed in its urgency. Thank
Merlin she had Severus' password and the freedom to come and go as she pleased - as one of
Harry's main caretakers. Severus didn't just open his rooms to anyone after all; he was a very
private person. As she skidded to a halt outside Severus' classroom, she took big gulps of air, trying
to calm her racing heart and her exertion having run the entire way.

If she was wrong then that was fine, but from the buzzing she realized it just couldn't be a false
alarm. Severus' inventions were exceptional, and he would have stopped the warning buzz if he
was able to surely? Making her way with much more composure until she passed his classroom,
office and to the door to his quarters. Muttering the password under her breath she opened the door
and found it quiet. Perhaps it was just a glitch in the spell after all? Just as she had started to relax
she felt enormous amounts of power coming from Harry's bedroom. She had never felt raw power
like that before, and it set on edge, every single hair began to prickle in awareness of it.

She opened Severus' bedroom door - normally she would never do such a thing, but he wasn't there,
so she closed it behind her. Where was he? Why wasn't he here? It was very unlike him to leave
Hogwarts for any reason, the feeling of magic as she approached the door was very oppressive. As
she looked in she gasped in shock, Severus was lying in a crumpled heap on the floor, with Harry
sobbing over him - had he moved on his own? She didn't even bother to think of the immaterial things that were broken as well.

"Harry?" Poppy said softly, approaching him only to be stalled by his magic as he stared at her his entire face tense and wild. "Harry I need to see Severus, I need to help him." she added softly, trying to approach him but Harry acted like a skittish animal.

"NO! GET AWAY!" he hissed, his green eyes glowing with power and fear. "LEAVE ME ALONE!" his magic lashing out further in his fear causing Poppy to be propelled away from them both and out into the sitting room - she remained firmly on her feet.

"Alright, Harry," Poppy said softly, going down on her knees, her hands up to show she wasn't about to hurt him. "It's fine, I'll stay right here." he was obviously not in his right mind. The fear, she hadn't seen such fear since the first week they had rescued him. He was obviously remembering what that awful woman had done to him, and he wasn't going to let her anywhere near him.

Harry grasped a hold of his Dark Protector, tears rolling down his face; he didn't want to be hurt again. He liked it here, he loved his dark protector, he was his family - he had said so. He didn't want to be a freak, he didn't want to hurt people, or make them explode like they had. He wouldn't want him anymore, the last time he'd been hurt so bad, another sob tore out of his throat, as he keened softly rocking back and forth as his magic continued to whirl out of control.

"Harry, look at me, Harry?" Poppy said quietly, not wishing to startle him but he didn't seem to hear her over the force of his own cries which were hurting her more than even seeing how bad he had when she had been called to Dumbledore's office. "We need to help Severus, yes? I'll stay right here, I promise, but I need you to give him this for me, okay?" Poppy added, showing him one of the potions from her back and sliding it across the floor directly at Harry's leg, having no fear that it would be smashed; Severus put unbreakable spells on all vials to ensure they didn't accidentally get broken. Well it was a boarding school and accidents did happen, he was used to potions and didn't see anything odd about them. After this though…she knew they couldn't put it off any longer they had to tell him, he was utterly hysterical. She didn't know if he would be able to think about anything she said, never mind performing it.

"Harry? Do you want to help him?" Poppy urged him soothingly, speaking louder but hopefully not too loud, he was just too far gone and it was breaking her heart. She'd never seem him so broken before, would he even recover from this? No, she refused to think like that. "You can make him better, you had help him." she had a feeling only Severus could hope to calm him down enough to get his magic to stop reacting so harshly. After what the woman had done to him, he wasn't surprised after displaying magic that he would physically stop her advancing.

"...Help…protector?" Harry rasped out, his eyes still glowing but with robustness this time.

Poppy had to suppress her smile at Harry's words for Severus, they were teaching him as much as they could, it shouldn't surprise her that he would term Severus' role as a protector because to Harry it was obviously that's what he was to the teen. She was getting through to him, this was good. "Yes, help your protector." she said softly her eyes glimmering with unshed tears.

"Help…my…protector," he said possessively, gripping close, but would he want to be his dark protector anymore? Would they send him back to her after seeing how freakish he was just like his aunt and uncle had said he was? He didn't want to go back to her, to the pain, to the hurt, to the hunger; to being weak and unable to move…to sleep all the time unless she was making him hurt those people.
To Poppy's pride he picked up the potion, even if his grip was shaky, he held it firmly and bit out
the cork, before shuffling along and pouring it down his throat.

"Now, Harry, you need to rub his throat, right here, like this," Poppy said, showing him using her
own throat as an example, her heart still pounding erratically, if he didn't she would need to use the
spell - and if she did before Severus woke up she didn't want to even imagine his reaction to her
abilities.

No, Severus was the one he trusted the most, she was tolerated compared to him, and if anyone had
to tell Harry it was definitely him. They wanted to calm him down not frighten him further, and it
was obvious Harry's magic acted out when he was scared - it tried to defend him considering what
that vile woman had done she wasn't surprised his magic acted so 'defensively' instead of
offensively. She had her fingers twitching near her wand just in case, she couldn't let Severus
choke and she knew she couldn't approach him. She let out a sigh of pure relief when Harry did it,
she could see Severus swallowing the concoction, he would return to the world of consciousness
soon. She just had to keep Harry calm in the mean time. His magic was scorching in its intensity,
even now. He hadn't calmed down the slightest but he was thinking, that helped, she thought
almost beginning to panic herself but she knew better than to let herself get worked up. She was a
healer, she had to keep calm in all situations and it helped her immensely here.

"Well done, Harry," she said soothingly, smiling a little, nodding. Praying that he wouldn't get
himself further worked up, she dreaded to think what he was capable off, just look at the room - but
she wasn't aware of his state before coming it may have been worse.

As soon as Harry began to notice his dark protector stirring, he began to edge away, fear and terror
clear as day shining through his face. Scrambling over the wood, uncaring of the splinters, just
needing to back away. He didn't want to go away, he liked it here, stupid freak that he was he had
ruined it. He ruined everything, stupid, stupid freak he thought angrily to himself, as despair settled
in. Harry didn't stop until he reached the wall, and remain cowering utterly petrified.

Poppy was helpless to help him, still confined to the other side of the wards - she didn't dare test
them. Just remained sitting there on her knees as not to scare Harry further. She just looked
between Severus and Harry, hoping that the elder wizard would wake soon, to help Harry before he
completely lost it and had a total meltdown. She could have cried out in relief when Severus
groaned, oh thank Merlin.

Severus blinked open his eyes, wondering why he was sleeping on the floor, that was until the pain
made itself known causing him to grunt in agony. Closing his watery eyes, trying to think what had
happened, when the events quickly caught up to him, he forced himself into sitting position,
feeling extremely foolish. He had known Harry's magic was getting out of control, he should have
spelled it into his stomach, but that would have been revealing magic before he felt Harry was
ready. Ready or not, they would have to tell him, but only after he was calm. He could feel Harry's
magic running along his entire body filing up the room in all its hot un-comfortableness. His eyes
widened when he saw the state of the room, bloody hell, it was destroyed, and he realized he really
should have told him sooner.

"Severus," Poppy said quietly, from where she sat, able to see him clearly.

"Poppy…why?..." the 'are you sitting there' was certainly understood whether he voiced it or not.

Poppy just gestured towards Harry her face ashen and filled with worry, "I can't get through, he's
beyond thinking rationally especially with me. He's scared." she whispered quietly, but she was
sure Harry had probably heard her. Although he was muttering to himself, but she was too far away
to hear what he was saying.
Severus looked over before inwardly cursing, keeping his body relaxed so Harry didn't think he was in trouble. Breathing evenly, grateful for the pain reliever so he could actually move without pain. His head occasionally throbbed dully, but he could handle that without a care - at least until he had Harry settled. He began to approach the boy, slowly as not to startle him and it took all his considerable skill to not get angry with the words he could hear the child muttering under his breath when he got close enough. Harry was NOT a freak; oh he didn't need to guess where he had heard that word. Which made him wonder about Petunia, had she died yet? The magic he had spat at her would give her terrifying nightmares, mostly about everything she had done to Harry, stopping her from sleeping. Even with any muggle medication she would still see them and it would interrupt her sleep to the point her body would break down. She would slowly die a horrible painful death, and he was glad he had cast it. She deserved no less, Harry was obviously beginning to remember more…or perhaps he always had?

"Harry?" Severus said soothingly, as he knelt down beside the boy, before sitting on his backside, removing the wood from the immediate area with his hands. "Harry? You are not a freak, believe me, whoever told you that was wrong." attentively letting his arm reach out, he stroked Harry's head in a way that Harry liked. He finally stopped muttering under his breath, stiffening at the feel of being touched kindly even after what he did. "You aren't a freak little one, never think that." and to his pride the magic began to dissipate, slowly yes, but it was happening and he was very proud of his control. "You are a good boy, I am proud of you." he told him despite the fact he wasn't sure Harry would even understand what pride meant.

Sliding further over until Harry's head was resting comfortably on his leg; he continued to pet him as the shaking slowly began to stop. The fear in his eyes almost made his solid control break violently. He wanted to curse something, someone.

"Don't want to go back," Harry slurred out, utterly exhausted from that not so little magical display. "I'll be good. Wont be freaky anymore."

"Do you want to know a secret little one?" Severus decided.

Harry didn't reply, he just gazed warily at his dark protector he just knew he would be sent back, but he had to try and make his family see he didn't want to. He liked his home, he liked his food, even liked the little sweets that Albus gave him.

"She can't hurt you anymore," Severus stated his voice very strong and sharp, nothing like he'd ever used with Harry before. "She's dead, she can't hurt you or anyone else ever again." he told him with vehemence.

Harry blinked at him, hope rising like an unstoppable inferno deep within his chest. Was there a chance his dark protector would keep him despite what he did? Why would he? The only other people he knew had hated his freakishness, yet he couldn't stop the feelings rising in him no matter what. He trusted and loved his protector, not that he understood the feelings of course, he just knew he was safe….protected perhaps even cherished?

"Come," Severus said his tone quiet once more, "Drink up," pressing the vial of calming draught to his lips, nodding firmly, and just like that Harry opened his mouth and let the liquid drop into his mouth and swallowing despite the nasty taste. He felt himself calming completely, the horrid pressure (his magic) he didn't understand faded away completely. Leaving him feeling extremely lethargic he didn't so much as flinch when he was picked up and led away from the destroyed bedroom.

Severus placed Harry on the couch, already moving the things he'd had set out from earlier and placed them on the couch keeping Harry warm. Except his feet, he noticed they had many splinters
in them. Just seeing them made him wince but with a few potions he would have them out in no time at all. Poppy he noticed was keeping her distance; he wasn't sure if it was for her protection or if she thought Harry would still get hysterical at the sight of her.

He quickly retrieved the potions he'd need from his lab before returning. Poppy had sat herself down on one of the chairs. Severus knelt down and spread the numbing cream across the entire affected area, giving it a few moments to sink in, how he had managed to get so many in such a small ankle he had no idea. It wasn't just one either it was both of them, sighing softly; shaking his head, well tonight hadn't gone as planned.

"When did you get here?" Severus enquired, before whispering the words to remove the splinters as they came out one by one to drop at his feet. The salve did its job very well, Harry didn't even twitch, and that was good. Although the area now looked as if Harry had come into contact with poison ivy that is to say red, irritated and slightly puffy.

"I can honestly say I don't know it feels like such a long time ago, I was just planning on putting the rest of the potions into the cupboard before the ward you placed on him went off. I thought it was an accident for sure until it continued. I decided to come regardless of whether it was a mistake; I just had to know he was alright. I quickly realized it wasn't, I would say it's been roughly twenty minutes, it took me a long time to get through his panic." Poppy explained softly, glancing at Harry with worry and fondness.

"I see," Severus said quietly as he spread the salve on the other foot. Checking him to see if there were splinters anywhere else on his leg - he found none. "Well at least the spell works," he conceded, but he'd never had any doubt about it. If there were two things he was honestly good at, it was spell crafting and potions.

"Yes, that is one good thing that's came out of tonight, although I am surprised you told him," Poppy said, Harry was deeply asleep, his face once again peaceful in his rest. That was until the nightmares came once again, the poor boy.

"He had to know," Severus said grimly, "Did you hear him? He was bloody terrified of being sent back just because he used magic." Severus spat furiously. "He was calling himself a freak! A stupid freak for Merlin's sake," he forced himself to calm down before he woke Harry, but the potion should keep him under for a good six hours in a relaxed calm sleep after that episode. "No, I had to say something, perhaps now some of his nightmares will lessen, and I have no doubt a great many are featured with her in them prominently."

"Yes, I do suppose you are right," Poppy said a faraway look on her face, she felt so bad for Harry and all he had been through. "He called you his dark protector; he wouldn't let me near you or him."

Severus lips twitched as he removed the splinters from his other leg before cleaning and wrapping both his feet in his fluffy slipper socks with frozen snitches that didn't move - when he found out about magic he would remove the charm on them. It was colder in the dungeons than anywhere else, so Poppy and Minerva had gone overboard with the slippers, slipper socks, and warm fluffy socks. With really warm pyjamas and the like. They didn't buy him much magical clothing but the ones they did, they charmed not to move until he learned of magic.

Truthfully neither had expected that day to come until Harry was fully recovered. Now they were going to have no choice, not if they wanted Harry to continue getting better. He needed to begin learning magic so he could learn to control it.

Slipping his feet inside the cocoon, he pressed the duvet down so he knew his feet would be warm
within it.

"Roz?" Severus called, as he absently moved hair from Harry's face.

"Yes Sir?" Roz whispered from behind the couch.

"Harry's bedroom has been destroyed in a fit of wild magic, his cupboard, his drawers and clothes are all strewn inside. I need you to get a few House-elves to help you clean the room itself. They don't have to know who exactly is in there, and quite frankly I don't want them to. Can you ensure that the room is sorted and new furniture brought down? A new bed will also be needed." Severus said firmly. If it had just been one break everything could have been prepared even if it had been smashed though muggle means, but with such magical ferocity, nothing would repair the mess in there. He didn't even need to try a repairing spell to know that piece of information.

"Roz will get to work immediately." Roz said clicking her fingers causing the room door to snick closed, so the other House-elves couldn't see outside the room. Nodding firmly, she wouldn't let her mistress' friend down, with that she popped away to find a few others to help her set the room right.

"Go get some sleep, Poppy," Severus insisted.

"Not so quick young man," Poppy said sternly, "Let me see," she knew he was injured.

"I'll be fine!" Severus insisted flipantly.

"And if you are not? You have a child in your care now, Severus; you need to make sure you are in full health." Poppy scolded him knowing using Harry would get to him quickest.

"Very well," Severus conceded gritting his teeth.

Chapter End Notes

What did you think? will we see Tom Riddle and Albus Dumbledore working together towards a common goal after setting some ground rules? no spilling magical blood or whatnot - Tom isn't stupid enough to say a Vow and Dumbledore will know that so wont demand one...hmm or will he remain oblivious as Tom works in the background to ensure both their top proprieties are met? will Severus be called eventually? due to Toms impatience and desire to know what was going on? Would he even return? is Severus loyal to the dark and wavering due to everything Harry's been through? will there even be dark or light by the time they're finished securing their world? ive never seen this done before so I wanted to do it - I just hope you find it at least a little realistic and perhaps even refreshing! I don't know what you'll think of it though I mean it is different from all I've ever done! R&R please
Severus sat staring unblinkingly into the fireplace, Poppy had been gone for hours, although truthfully Severus had no idea of the time, he was just too preoccupied. The knowledge that he was going to have to inform Harry about magic was extremely daunting and frankly a little terrifying. They had no idea how he would react, and he was scared of causing detrimental affects to Harry's fragile state of mind. He couldn't sleep, trying to think of ways to soften the blow, Merlin he could reject his magic and he knew that wouldn't end well. He knew what had happened to Ariana through Dumbledore and just how bad it had been, and how much guilt Albus still felt over it even now, added to the pressure of Harry's it was little wonder he wasn't his normal buoyant self.

Harry was much more powerful than Ariana Dumbledore; the consequences could be direr. He didn't care that the threat would probably be to his own life due to the fact he was and would remain Harry's primary guardian. He had no intention of leaving him, even when it got bad. If it cost him his life so be it, he had sworn to protect him and would do so until his dying breath. He just prayed to Merlin that Harry could accept his magic even just a little bit. Hopefully that would be enough to prevent any catastrophic displays of magical outpouring.

"Does Master wish the fire to be lit again?" enquired a House-elf that popped quietly into existence making herself visible, staring at the human cautiously. They normally did their work without being observed, and it wasn't often you found the teachers or anyone really up at this time of night. The dying embers tried valiantly to remain burning, but there was naught but ash left, and soon the embers would die off.

"Yes, please," Severus whispered tiredly, barely giving the House-elf a look before he was staring pensively at thin air. Pinching the bridge of his nose, he sighed softly, he couldn't sleep, he was just wound too tightly, and he didn't want to take Dreamless Sleeping draught, it would leave him vulnerable, that and he wouldn't rouse when Harry did even with an alerting spell on him.

The House-elf efficiently put three new logs into the fireplace; a click of her fingers had a small spit of fire spreading across the logs, slowly but surely consuming them in merry flames. Once she was done, she popped away, she didn't want to disrupt her Master's peace and she could come back another time to clean. Although they were never allowed in these rooms during the day, and had to remain invisible if they did until they knew it was clear. They were forbidden from entering the guest bedroom as well.

He had put Harry back into the repaired bedroom hours ago, so he could sit out here for a while. The room had been put back to normal, all debris swept up, a new bed and furniture set up and his clothes cleaned and replaced as well as his toys. Toys that a five year old would play with, although that thought had stopped bothering him so much, that wasn't to say it was fine to see just less daunting.

"Tempus!" Severus chanted quietly, waving his hand in a show of Wandless magic. The time
appeared above him glowing in red numbers, five o'clock in the morning, standing up he flicked his wand out and cast an 'Aguamenti' at the flames drowsing them with a hiss, ensuring that the fire was actually put out before he walked to his room, he had to try to get some sleep, even if he suspected it would be a futile exercise - some was better than none.

Opening the door he wandered in and slid straight into his bed, a sigh of relief leaving his mouth, closing his eyes he began his meditation technique and that was the last thing he remembered until he was woken by the spell alerting him to Harry's conscious state.

Opening his eyes very reluctantly, feeling as though they were going to pop out of his head any second. His entire body protested at his movements. He didn't want to move let alone get up, he felt as though he had just literally closed his eyes, but he knew that wasn't possible. Stretching out trying to wake up he walked to his ensuite bathroom and did his morning ablutions before dressing feeling a little more normal but just to ensure he managed to get through this day he grabbed a Pepper-up potion from the cabinet and drank it.

Today wasn't one either of them were going to forget he'd bet.

He just had to figure out a good way and a good time to tell him.

Opening the door to Harry's room, he noticed that he must have rolled onto his side at some point during the night, his mobility was definitely improvising. A few weeks ago that certainly wouldn't have happened, he gave a small smirk just thinking about the leaps and bounds Harry had overcome. Perhaps this was just going to be another bump along the way to achieving Harry's full potential whatever it might be.

"Good morning, little one," Severus said quietly, as he entered, ignoring the blatant fear written across Harry's face. He obviously remembered yesterday and was evidently terrified. "Are you ready to get up?" as usual of late, waiting on Harry making the first move his hand outstretched.

Harry didn't know what to think, a large part of him suspected it was a trick, he was used to those, both from his uncle and doctor. A small part that hadn't been squashed by the world and evil around him, wanted it to be real so much so that it encompassed him completely. He placed his hand in his dark protectors trustingly, and moved his legs out of the bed, until he was up on his feet. Shaky at first, but quickly became accustomed to holding his own weight. It was much easier in the swimming pool; he almost wished he was there instead of this. It exhausted him so much, but he wanted to be able to walk properly, to move, to touch things he'd seen around here that piqued his curiosity. Especially the small thing that had spun around a few times on the bookshelf. More importantly he wanted to see that pride and be told he was good, he'd never had that before and it felt amazing.

"Take your time," Severus said keeping his grip steady as Harry's own hands shook. It was becoming less and less violent, more of a slow shake between the potions and Harry's hard work he was getting there. He no longer followed Harry into the bathroom, there were wall grips for him to hold onto, both along the toilet and shower. Severus had to help Harry become as independent as possible, but there were still some things he had to do for him but with time he would be able to do it himself.

Pressing Harry's hands onto the rail, making sure he was secure before he sat down on the chair outside the room which he had placed there himself just in case anything happened. It had happened the first few tries, but not anymore he was stronger now. Although when the school started things were going to be strained, Harry's routine was going to be disrupted. He would just have to make sure to lessen it as best he could.
If only he wasn't teaching, he thought to himself in irritation, he hated teaching students, always had done. Yet he did it for Albus since he had been asked, plus it kept him safe, as safe as he could be at any rate. Still he had so many ambitions that he wanted to fulfil and he couldn't do them stuck teaching students all year.

He of all people unfortunately knew what one wanted in life wasn't exactly what they got in life.

Standing up he got Harry's clothes for the day out of his wardrobe and new drawers making sure himself that no splinters remained behind. He was satisfied there were none, and put them on the bed, he was feeling more pigeonholed than ever, he continued to feel an increasing desire to get out of Hogwarts, out of Great Britain and just abandon all his duties and take Harry with him just for a short period of time - any amount of time. He was tired, very tired and nothing was changing and he wasn't one for change either, so he was very confused, irritated and annoyed really and when it came to him - those emotions weren't exactly good to have one at a time never mind altogether. It was probably the stress of knowing Hogwarts was about to begin again and things were about to get more complicated.

It took forty-five minutes for Harry to emerge, he liked the water for some reason, would spend hours if he got the chance just relaxing around in it. He was just lucky Harry chose to come out at all, the first time he'd actually had to go in for him out of concern.

"Stay," Harry said quietly, his hand out shakily to demonstrate his words like he was used to seeing his Dark Protector do.

Severus paused in mid step, giving Harry a pensive look before he gave a single nod. "It's stay there, please." he informed him, giving him a small reassuring smile that let Harry know that he wasn't angry with him. Harry barely spoke more than a few words each time, but he wasn't about to let him continue that way. It was best to start immediately than wait until he'd picked up bad habits. And in what looked to be Harry's first little bout of rebellion (by not correcting his statement as he usually would) he began to walk on his own, without aid for the first time in what was probably fourteen years.

"Well done," Severus said proudly, he wasn't even deterred by the fact that Harry had all but fallen onto the bed in extreme fatigue. He was walking on his own, Harry was feeling determined, that would go a long way in getting him better fully.

Moving over he got Harry dressed for the day, it looked as if the hydrotherapy was helping more than even he anticipated. Well, it looked as though things were about to either get interesting or very bad. "Come, let's go through to the living room and get breakfast and your medicine. No, Harry, let me help, you cannot over exert yourself or you will end up exhausted and back to square one and too sore to get out of bed." he furthered his explanation so Harry would understand what he was talking about. Plus the quicker he got Harry breakfast and had his potions the quicker he could tell him everything the anxiety and waiting was delaying the inevitable and if he continued delaying it he knew sooner or later he would start making excuses as to why wait before saying anything.

"Okay," Harry said in agreement, as always trusting Severus completely.

Together both of them moved out of his bedroom, without much difficulty due to the fact they were used to the routine. Getting him comfortable on the couch, he could smell the breakfast Roz had no doubt brought for them. She was the only House-elf who served him during the day, and helped with Harry. She was the only one that knew, she was bound to Poppy not Hogwarts and it was probably the safest they could make it so nobody found out about Harry being there.
He found it in the kitchen; he must have already been helping Harry through to the living room when she appeared with it then. Grabbing the tray he moved back beside Harry finding him looking at the instruments on his bookcase in fascination. Severus put both bowls down on the chair next to him, before sitting with his own. Harry had pancakes and waffles in one bowl and scrambled egg and sausage in another.

"Albus what is going on? What are you doing?" Doge begged his old friend, sitting in his office early in the morning. He was so confused, everything Albus had preached…surely his friend had to be possessed? Yet nobody in the Auror department would take him seriously, they all knew Albus was a fierce Legilimens and Occlumens. He didn't much believe it himself either if he was honest, he just knew something had changed and it had changed drastically in his old friend.

"What do you mean?" Albus enquired being deliberately evasive.

"Albus! Please," Doge begged pitifully. Staring at his blue twinkle-less eyes in desperation.

"Elphias, I am fine," Albus said soothingly. Feeling sympathy for his friend, but not enough to tell him what was going on. He couldn't trust anyone when it came to Harry; he just couldn't, just like he had told nobody about Ariana. He pressed his hands together on top of his desk, wishing that Elphias hadn't come, but he had been expecting it for a while now due to the changes he wished to make within the magical world through his role as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot.

"How can you say that?!" Doge cried out, exasperated before stuttering. "You…you…you…Wizengamot what you're doing goes against EVERYTHING you've ever believed!"

"That's right; it is against everything I did believe, but not anymore." Albus replied, "Things have changed, Elphias, and they've changed a lot."

Doge slumped against his chair, "Why?" he whispered bewildered. "Please…Albus just explain why," shaking his head, his white hair in disarray he hadn't done anything except put clothes on and make his way here to get answers unable to stand it anymore.

"Let's just say that I've learned my lesson," Albus told him, a sad look on his aged withered face. "I don't expect you to understand, Elphias and I cannot tell you everything, just know I'm doing what I think is best for us." and their survival, it burned him that Tom had been right all along, but his methods had most definitely been wrong. That cannot be denied, but that was neither here nor there since he had been defeated by Harry fourteen years ago nearly.

"You can trust me, Albus, you know you can, I…I've been your best friend since we were at Hogwarts…what can be so bad that you can't tell me? Does it have anything to do with stopping the search for Harry Potter and disbanding the Order again?" Doge enquired.

"No, the search for Harry is ongoing, just a select few looking for him, we do not hold out much hope that he will be found." Albus replied in his usual soothing tones, no pause or hint of guilt.

"I see," Doge said, digesting that new piece of information. He knew that Albus wouldn't say what was wrong until he was ready. He couldn't be guilt tripped or manipulated into sharing his thoughts, he'd always been that way, and he just wished that Albus would confide in him. Perhaps he should speak to St. Mungo's, see if they could help him.

"I am not going senile, Elphias," Albus said a little twinkle coming to his eyes as he caught his friends plans. "I've just been enlightened."
"I just don't understand," Doge said again, sighing morosely.

"I know," Albus replied sadly. "Everything will be fine, I promise. You'll see."

"Will you ever tell me?" Doge enquired further.

"In time," Albus answered, "Everything will make sense."

"I see," Doge replied, "Very well, I can see I won't get an answer today, I shall take my leave."

"Have faith old friend," Albus told him standing up out of courtesy, a tense smile on his face.

"I always have faith in you Albus; always will, no matter where it leads." Doge informed him before heading straight to the Floo and left without another word.

"I'm sorry my old friend," Albus whispered to the now empty room as he reclaimed his seat, he knew everyone was reeling with his change of heart. Nobody understood he didn't know if he would ever tell anyone, but if Harry didn't age mentally the way they prayed…then they would find out sooner or later.

Albus shot up in shock when he felt magic coursing through the school, magic he hadn't felt before and with only the teachers he knew it could only be one person.

Harry.

Albus paled drastically, swallowing the lump in his throat, staring at the fireplace not quite able to bring himself to move. What if history was repeating itself? Could he never do anything right? Why did he always regret too late? Act too late? Severus couldn't die, he was like a son to him, and he would do whatever it took to ensure both boys he had failed survived this if it was at all possible.

Lurching into action, he swept into the network and Floo'ed himself to Severus' quarters.

Chapter End Notes

Would you like to see the conversation between Harry and Severus regarding magic or just hear about it from Severus telling Albus? MERRY CHRISTMAS GUYS! I'm sorry I've not been writing much but the family is here for Christmas and I've not had much of an opportunity to write a lot but i'll get back into a routine soon enough :) until then thanks for bearing with me! I wont say happy new year since i'll probably write a chapter before then :) take care guys R&R
Chapter 23

My Dark Protector

Chapter 23

Back To Severus & Harry

Severus didn't think he'd ever been so worried in his life, and that was saying something since he had kissed the hem of the Dark Lord's robes more often than he could remember. His stomach was in one hell of a twisted knot, and he felt sick with nerves. His mind continued to dwell on all the things that could go wrong, Albus' sister had accidentally killed her own mother for Merlin's sake so he had a big reason to be nervous right now considering everything he was about to reveal to a powerful boy that was mentally...a young child in many ways. A scarred child with a lot of issues.

He swallowed back the lump in his throat as those big green inquisitive eyes stared trustingly at him. He forced himself to relax, which by the way is more difficult than anyone could possibly imagine - especially at this point of time for him. He'd been going over and over it in his mind now the moment had come he found his mouth dry, his heartbeat shooting through the roof and opening his mouth and nothing coming out as he just wordlessly moved his lips unable to squeeze the words out.

Seeing worry and fear beginning to play across Harry's face prompted him to begin. There was no need to make things worse than they already were. "I knew your mum from an early age, younger than you are now," Severus explained, before putting a few pictures in Harry's lap, they didn't move - and it was no spell preventing it, they had been taken with a Muggle camera, Mrs. Evans had received a brand new one from her husband and she'd barely put it down for half the year. She had given him quite a few of the photos, which he had always kept stashed away in his books - away from his father - they hadn't seen the light of day for years, but this was the perfect time to show them to Harry. "This is your mum," he pointed out. He didn't have any pictures of James Potter to give to Harry. The pictures of his father he would need to get from Black or Lupin.

It was a picture of himself and Lily at the park, they hadn't even been aware of her presence. It was a year before they attended Hogwarts, it was cold still, he remembered that day - it was firmly imprinted in his memory - as all memories of Lily were. "I met her when I was eight years old, I knew right away she was special, just like I was - just like your dad as well." Severus told Harry his voice as always when dealing with him, soothing and quiet.

"This castle teacher's special people," Severus informed him, not able to gauge Harry's reaction, he was staring at the picture not meeting his gaze, and hopefully he was listening though. "They make sure they can handle anything, teach them how to use their gifts properly." He knew he was just dragging this out, but he honestly couldn't help himself.

Special? He wasn't special he was a freak, he hurt people, hurt Severus and he still kept him despite it. Why had his Dark Protector kept him when he knew? Why wasn't he sending him away or hurting him? He didn't understand himself; it had happened twice in the past, he remembered it all, he never got a reprieve from the memories that tormented him all night - every night. Of
course, Harry failed to realise 'special' meant magical powers, since Harry didn't see his magic as something good, he saw it as bad, terrifying and it caused unimaginable pain. Whether he could be taught otherwise or if he would refuse to use it despite it all…remained to be seen.

Severus grabbed a pillow from the couch, removing his wand for the first time in Harry's presence while he was conscious. Murmuring Latin under his breath, his wand pointed at the pillow a spark of blue shot out of his wand and into it, and just as quickly as the pillow had been still it was animated, transfigured into a kitten. It was the first time he had ever used that particular spell, he didn't really care for Transfiguration, or animals much, and the ones he dealt with tested his potions, or were already dead.

"We have magic, it is our gift, who and what we are, nothing can change that," Severus informed him, placing the kitten in Harry's lap, it meowed at the exact moment Harry once again lost control of his magic, causing it to blast out of him and surround the room in its intensity. Severus remained firmly planted beside him, mesmerised, he wasn't hurt, he wasn't sure why, but he suspected that Harry was beginning to gain control of his magic, at least in the respect that he didn't want to hurt him despite the fact he was talking about something that obviously scared the crap out of him. He did wonder how much had sunk in though.

"Easy, Harry, calm down," Severus told him soothingly, no hint of worry showing in his voice, the last time he'd been thrown across the room, and Harry's bedroom had been destroyed, he didn't relish having to replace everything in his living room, which included rare books, perhaps he should pack them away until Harry learned control. "You can do it, I know you can," he added, grasping Harry's hands in his.

"No!" Harry protested trying to yank his hand back, terror written on every frame of his body. He didn't want to hurt him, he couldn't…it would destroy him utterly if he did, he knew that. He loved Severus, not that he understood the emotion much less what love meant.

"Harry, look at me," Severus spoke firmly, only when those green eyes met his, having understood did he continue, "Do not be afraid of your magic, what happened to you was wrong, horrible, but it had nothing to do with you or your magic but what she was doing. Our blood is different to normal peoples, normal people aren't equipped to handle it." an image of the exploding homeless man flashed across his eyes, he had little doubt it was much worse for Harry who was probably remembering a lot more than just one. "Nothing absolutely NOTHING that you saw was your fault, believe me, those people who were hurt were hurt by her."

Severus sensed the Floo network flaring, warning him of someone approaching his quarters. Thankfully Harry's gaze hadn't once left his face, so he was oblivious to the flaring fire a few seconds later, Albus' face when he stepped out had him genuinely taken aback, he looked down right terrified.

When he saw both of them as soon as he entered Severus' quarters, the ash automatically disappearing with a little Wandless magic, relief flowed through him. It had definitely been Harry's magic, he could sense it, even now his grip on his own magic was weak but there, more control than Ariana ever had, this was good, very good news. It meant there was hope at long last that Harry wouldn't be like her, that he wouldn't see the horrifying fits as his magic tore into him just as it had his sister.

"There we go, I told you that you could do it," Severus said proudly, relaxing slightly, Harry's face lit up with a sweet unsure smile, as if he knew he'd done something good…but unable to conceive what that 'good' was. Yet so thirsty for approval that he would take it whatever form it appeared in.

"Hello, Albus how are you this morning?" Severus enquired, bringing him to Harry's attention now
that he wasn't near the fire. That and speaking to him so Harry could learn how to talk to people one day hopefully he would be having lengthily conversations with others.

"Good morning, Severus, I am well, is everything alright?" he asked cautiously, he wasn't sure what had happened. He could see a kitten on Harry's lap and a picture clutched in his hand, it was a Muggle picture he observed and judging by the red hair he knew it to be Lily, he should have thought of it sooner - he definitely would be putting it on the agenda.

"I am trying to show Harry that magic isn't bad," Severus informed him, causing Harry to gasp in shock, his eyes going extremely large. Severus gazed at those wide green eyes wondering what was wrong; he was easily able to read his surface thoughts. Worry and fear, not wanting the same thing that Harry went through to happen to him, and it was good, it meant Harry trusted him.

"No, magic isn't bad, Harry, its what people choose to do with it," Albus informed the teenager, taking a seat and deciding to stay for the conversation. If he could help one child accept magic, after all they'd been through, then good. His mother, brother and himself had failed with Ariana he refused to allow it to occur a second time. "Not all people are good just like not all people are bad. Severus isn't bad is he?"

Harry immediately and vehemently shook his head, no, his Dark Protector wasn't bad. Unbeknown to everyone that view no matter what was said would never change. For Severus had helped Harry when nobody else ever had, and that bond was eternal.

Severus on the other hand threw Albus a droll look that statement should be up for debate. He wasn't exactly a good person, it didn't matter what Harry thought, most people would agree he was 'evil' since the sheep couldn't think for themselves and believed anyone who wasn't nice was evil. Truthfully he had been on the opposite end of good for a while before he came to Albus when Lily's life had been threatened. If it had been anyone else other than her, he knew deep down he would have remained on the dark side, it was horrible and awful to acknowledge but he'd been so drawn in that he wasn't able to see the destruction he wrought on the world. While it definitely was his belief that the magical world was shunning too much magic, dark magic, and they shouldn't be it was no excuse for the Dark Lord to have killed so many to prove the point. All they were doing was destroying the magic, what good was knowledge dark (to many peoples beliefs not his) or otherwise when everyone was gone? Then it felt as if the world had been destroyed when Lily died, his entire world.

There was also the biggest factor; he didn't think Muggles should be aware of the magical world - full stop. His own father was a prime example of that. While most didn't deserve to die, a lot of them did, and in as much pain as humanly possible. He thought viciously as a picture of that despicable woman writhing on the floor in front of him flashed by his eyes. He wished he had made her suffer more; especially know that he actually cared very deeply for Harry and not just for Lily.

"How would you like to get a wand and learn to do magic?" Severus, promptly ending the whole good and bad spiel that was going around. He didn't want to think on it let alone discuss it at all.

Harry once again shook his head vehemently, he might on some level believe his Dark protector but he didn't want magic himself. If he hadn't had magic, he would have been welcomed by his aunt and uncle, they had hated him for his magic, just as the woman had taken him for it. To him even now magic had been the cause of all his problems, but in time he might understand it was what had saved him too. Everything was black and white to Harry, but he still had a lot of growing to do. Both physically and mentally.

"Alright," Severus said quietly, obviously it was much too soon for that, Merlin this had gone
much better than he had hoped. They still had a lot to overcome, but he was determined in time that Harry would accept his magic, and when Severus decided to do something he went the extra mile to ensure its success. "Everyone here has magic, we are all the same, and nothing will ever harm you."

Harry had nothing to say on that front, merely continued to pet at the kitten in his lap. He didn't want to listen to anymore, or talk about it - if it could be considered talking.

Severus sensing this decided to change the subject before it came to much and Harry did more accidental magic. "Harry walked on his own earlier, didn't you Harry?" and what better way to do that than give him the praise he sorely needed and desired?

Harry peered up, nodding his head a small smile twitching at his lips, the previous conversation forgotten as elation and happiness tore through him. Severus was proud he could hear it, and it was the best feeling in the world. Better than when he got to eat pudding like a mini strawberry tart once a week. His Dark Protector said he couldn't have too much sugar or he'd get sick. He didn't want to get sick, didn't want his belly to grumble and be empty like before all the time, so he would do what he was told.

"Well I think that deserves a treat, don't you?" Albus said, his eyes beginning to twinkle, things were definitely looking up. He was walking on his own, albeit for a short while, he knew about magic and didn't seem to mind (which was astonishing really) he was gaining wait, small amounts mind, he was understanding what was going on. It was more than he had hoped for the first few days they spoke about Harry and how he might recover. Severus rolled his eyes as he produced a few more of the buttermilk candies that he kept handy to give Harry. Giving them over, he stood up and moved over to the kitchen, without a word conveying he wished to speak to Severus.

"I see how it ended, but how did it begin?" Albus enquired quietly, as Severus stepped beside him.

"How do you think? As soon as I mentioned magic his went out of control, but as you can see and feel he has a tremulous infinitesimal control over it. In time it might strengthen or worse...break altogether. Which is why we should probably make sure he doesn't accidentally see something damaging where magic casting is concerned. We ourselves should keep magic to a minimum as well, but slowly get him used to being around it." Severus said, sighing softly as he pinched the bridge of his nose anxiously.

"This is good news, Severus," Albus told him seriously. "That control is there, which means there's more hope than I had ever considered."

Severus gazed at the Headmaster; it was easy to forget that Albus had experience on this sort of thing. "I hope you are correct, Albus." Severus conceded. Glancing at Harry to see him eating the sweets Albus gave him, cooing over the kitten, perhaps he shouldn't have transfigured the damn thing, sooner or later it was going to be a pillow again and Harry might be attached to it.

"Yes, me too," Albus admitted, as of late he felt as though every decision he made throughout his life was wrong. "Do you wish to get some sleep? I am free until this afternoon then I will be attending another Wizengamot meeting."

"Another one? Albus, what are you up to?" Severus enquired suspiciously.

"Correcting all the wrongs I've done to our society," Albus revealed honestly.

"Which means?" Severus asked with deceptive mildness.
"That I was wrong, despite the means Tom went to he was wrong as well, but he may have had a point," Albus sighed sadly. His twinkle leaving, it hurt to admit all this, he was becoming maudlin in his old age. Perhaps revealing his biggest secret to Severus had somehow broken down the remaining barriers and made things different between them. Perhaps Albus had a confidant at long last.

Severus chuckled in sardonic amusement, "If he had been alive to hear you say that, Albus - it would have tipped him over the edge and caused him to have a stroke or heart attack."

Albus couldn't help but give Severus a half amused smile and his twinkle came back just a little.

Meanwhile the wards on Tom Riddle's hideout went off, indicating that he had visitors, and for once he wasn't annoyed by that particular fact - he wanted information and he hoped Lucius was bringing it otherwise he wouldn't be impressed. He had given his loyal follower long enough to acquire the information.

Chapter End Notes

I know the chapter probably sucks its just really weird writing right now...especially Severus' character its why I updated Lord Of Time instead of this when I was going to...I hope it stops being so odd since there are so many stories with him as the main focus character...well anyway what did you think? next chapter we will pan back to Voldemort I think will he find out about Harry and actually interact with him without the others even knowing? will he in essence nullify the prophecy by refusing to touch Harry? or will he try and finish the prophecy off and cause Severus to go all protective? R&R
Chapter 24

My Dark Protector

Chapter 24

Dark Lord's Manor

The Dark Lord left his office and made his way to the normal meeting hall, it was much more intimidating than his office, colder too and there was nothing he liked more than actually intimidating everyone around him even when he'd been eleven years old. Of course, he wasn't as intimidating as he used to be so he liked all the help he could get. He often contemplated on making himself look more like he had in the past, but he couldn't help but admit he had grown fond of this look - nobody would ever find that particular bit of information out. The doors opened with a simple wave of his magic, and he stalked in, walking with purpose towards his throne, he took a seat and an impassive look overcame his features as he waited. He could sense four people crossing the threshold of his manor, two bore his Mark and two did not. He was assuming Lucius had brought his son for this meeting like he'd demanded.

He was of course proven correct when Lucius Malfoy and Theodore Nott Senior came in followed closely by their sons, Theodore Nott and Draco Malfoy. He had to stop himself laughing at the look on their faces, even if it was just cackling manically, he wanted their attention not them peeing their pants - which had happened before much to his utter disgust. The younger generation didn't have the tough stuff that made good heirs like his generation had. Some were just as powerful, smart, but that was a very small collection, it was disheartening to say the least. It was why he was releasing his followers from Azkaban, most of them were smart and powerful, a few were insane and he intended on dealing with it, if nothing could be done medically so to speak. They'd sworn their loyalty to him after all, and the least he could do was grant them their freedom, restricted to base as it may be, it was better than the alternative.

"Lucius, Nott," Tom stated, his eyes gazing at them penetratingly, he could not read his followers minds, but their sons? He could hear their terrified thoughts without even needing to meet their eyes. Not that they made any attempts to do so, they currently had their heads bowed staring intently at the floor.

"My Lord," Lucius said swiftly bowing to him, bringing his son into a bow with him, before standing back up, his grip on his sons shoulder was tight.

Nott and his son did exactly the same thing, before standing waiting for their Lord to speak. The difference in both men who had son the same ages was astonishing, Nott was an old friend, had been with him since the beginning and age was beginning to take its toll. He had been the last of his followers to have an heir, and while all the other followers his age had grandchildren he only had his son.

"Speak," Tom demanded, his gaze never leaving Lucius' face making it clear whom he wanted to hear from.
"I have been in touch with all my contacts, none of them know why this change has come about, I even got in touch with Marcus who is close with Doge, playing on his worry for his friend, but nothing came of it. Whatever this is, he's paying it very close to his chest." Lucius admitted his eyes gleaming darkly, he hated failing at anything, especially orders from his Lord.

"I suspected as much," Tom replied his tone dark and filled with disappointment. Dumbledore had always played it close to the vest, trusting only a few close to him and even then they got enough to sate their curiosity or if the information was pertinent to them. Not much was known about Dumbledore at all, even he had tried to dig up anything he could, but other than addresses and such not much could be found. Nothing worth mentioning at the very least and he'd gone back all the way to the years after Dumbledore just graduated.

"I was in touch with Mundungus Fletcher, I got him a few drinks and he did confess to being a member of Dumbledore's Order when I asked about Dumbledore though he clammed up, even after another round," Nott admitted, "He implied the Order had been put back together again and they'd been sent on a mission for a while before they were ordered to stop."

Tom sat up straighter, his eyes narrowing in contemplation, now why the hell would Dumbledore restart the Order of the phoenix? "Any mention of us? Anything at all?" he demanded.

"Nothing, I tried to get what their orders were but I had no luck," Nott sighed, with him being older, people tended to underestimate him.

"Keep on him until you gain his trust," Tom stated sharply, "But be very careful, I do not want it known that I am back." why would Dumbledore start the Order of the phoenix back up? It made absolutely no sense.

"I will, My Lord," Nott murmured quietly.

"Did he give dates to when these orders came through?" Tom enquired curtly, deep in thought, his fingers drumming on his throne in impatience. The urge to use Legilimens and find out all details for himself was strong, but he refrained, he had a feeling it would be a long and tedious conversation with little to show for it.

"From what I could make of his slurred speech, the orders were very recent and stopped just as abruptly," Nott replied steadily, despite how terrified he could feel that his son was. He'd gotten lucky, he knew that much, who would have guessed Mundungus Fletcher would be introduced into the Order? Considering how much a drunk he was, he'd been tempted to believe he was lying, but not many people knew about Dumbledore's precious little Order.

Dumbledore had obviously been looking for something, or someone, and he must have found it and disbanded the Order just as quickly. If their orders had already been stopped, then the likelihood of Dumbledore knowing he was back was slim to nothing. No, something had happened during that time to change who Dumbledore was on a whole. He desperately wanted to know what had happened. It must have been something important for him to use the Order, a niggling thought that it was Potter crossed his mind but he dismissed it, if it had been the Prophet would be all over him - word would have surely gotten out. Something like Potters reintroduction to the magical world will be a grand affair if he was ever found.

"As for both of you," Tom said zoning in on the children, his lip curling just slightly; he couldn't believe he was going to have to rely on them to get what he needed. Both of them froze eyes extremely large as they stared at him for the first time. "I want you both to keep an eye on Dumbledore, what he does, where he goes and with whom." he removed his wand and relaxed against his throne, doing nothing with it, feeling amused by how they reacted.
"Yes, Sir," Draco managed to get out, squeaking only a little, remembering to bow like his father had spent the past hour teaching him. He'd thought he'd been prepared, from the way he was spoken off he had expected something different. The man in front of him, even he couldn't really think of him as a man, he looked only a few years older than him. He was absolutely stunning, gorgeous even; he was drawn to him like a moth to the flame. He understood now how his grandfather and father had given their all to serve him, for Draco wanted to do it too and he wasn't follower material, he was used to doing the leading at least at Hogwarts.

"Yes, Sir," Theodore added after a few seconds hesitation, he didn't know what the hell to think. He couldn't believe the boy sitting on that throne was the same age as his elderly father. He had so many questions to ask his dad, but he would wait until they were safely away from here. Turning around curiously when he heard a slight knock only to freeze in shock, a large snake was making its way over, squeaking slightly when its powerful body thudded against his foot.

"Come," Tom hissed, enjoying the terror on the boys faces, the snakes powerful body began to wrap itself around his throne until its head nestled in his shoulder, hissing contently as he scratched her. Nagini was one of the two Horcruxes he had left, the rest had been reabsorbed, he didn't want to make himself vulnerable after all, but insanity was definitely not something on the agenda.

"I want regular updates until I state otherwise, now go. Lucius stay behind." Tom commanded, not taking no for an answer.

Lucius looked to Theodore Senior who just nodded without a single word needing to be said. He knew what the wizard was asking, of course, Draco wasn't old enough to Apparate himself yet, so he was asking Theodore to take him home to Narcissa. Lucius gave a thankful nod, not even giving his son a glance as the three left. "My Lord?" he questioned respectfully.

"You will accompany me to the meeting with the Dementor Lord," Tom stated, giving the wizard an answer to his question for once.

"Yes, My Lord," Lucius answered, still holding himself stiff and at attention. The Dementor Lord, which meant he would once again get the allegiance of the Dementors and would break the rest of his followers from Azkaban. He knew it would be simple and easy, since all the negotiations had happened the last time around. It would be a simple matter of just smoothing them out, he hated Dementors though, and the thought of being near them for any length of time filled him with dread. As always though, he would follow his orders, as he had sworn to do the day he'd willingly taken the mark. Through good and bad times, near the end had been intolerable, especially considering he had a son the same age as a child the Dark Lord had marked for death. Now though, now they were back to their original goals and he couldn't be more ecstatic. Well expect going to a meeting where Dementors would be attending. He just hoped he wasn't going to be the meal the Dark Lord wished to use as negotiations.

"Nagini, I have a job for you," Tom hissed, eyes gleaming, it was risky, but hopefully with a few protection spells she would be fine for this task he had in mind for her.

Hogwarts

"Where's cat?" Harry asked looking around, looking slightly lost.

Harry had spent the entire afternoon yesterday playing with the damn cat despite Severus' attempts at diverting Harry's attention. He had been worried something like this would happen, unfortunately the transfigured cat didn't stay transfigured, and it was harder to maintain an
animated animal than say something like a pin cushion. Afterwards they'd gone to his hydrotherapy treatment, after that he'd been asleep half an hour after eating dinner. They were pushing him to see how far he would go, and Severus was extremely happy with the progress. He would soon be able to walk unaided all the time, he was getting there.

"Where is the cat," Severus automatically corrected him, "The cat was transfigured, it wasn't a real animal, just animated for you," he told him soothingly, "Did you like it?" Poppy had mentioned an animal would help him, some sort of pet that was useful as a therapy. Familiars were useful he had to admit, it might go along way in helping Harry recover completely and also accept his magic. There were more upsides than downsides at any rate, but he didn't want an animal in his quarters, least of all a cat.

"Yes," Harry nodded eagerly, he had liked it, and it was so soft, cuddly and warm.

"Would you like to have a real one?" Severus asked, staring intently at him, it would also help Harry become independent as well, if he had something else to take care of.

"Really?" Harry's green eyes lit up like he'd just received the best news he could possibly ever hear in his life. "A real cat? Just for me?"

"You would be responsible for it, that means feeding it, watering it and making sure to clean up after it," Severus informed him, "It isn't easy, I'll help to begin with, but once you're capable of doing it on your own you will be. All wizards and witches have familiars, they usually have them at the age of eleven, its only fair that you get yours too." hopefully Harry understood it all and the large responsibility he was taking on, he seemed to understand everything they said these days, but whether he was sometimes guessing…well that was anyone's guess.

"I'll do it, I promise," Harry swore his eyes so wide and hopeful, so excited but remembering to speak how Severus liked him to.

Severus cursed inwardly; he would never be able to say no to Harry with those eyes. There was a magical shopping district in Ireland, a simple Floo call away, and they could go and look at animals, but the question was - was Harry ready for that? They couldn't just bring one back if Harry wanted a familiar, he would need the right one, and he would feel a pull to a certain cat the one that was meant for him if one was.

The door opening brought Severus out of his thoughts, "Good morning," Poppy said as she closed the door behind her, smiling at the both of them.

"Good morning!" Harry said cheerfully, "I'm getting a cat," he declared, "All mine!"

Poppy's eyes filled with astonishment, glancing at Severus in mild disbelief, he had been so adamantly against having any sort of creature in his quarters when she'd brought up therapy animals to him. What had made him change his mind? Then again, despite his protests or anything of the sort Severus was the one who wanted Harry to heal the most, he had become so attached it was wonderful to see. He had been alone so long, keeping everyone at arms length, go figure it would take Lily's son to bring him out of his self imposed isolation. "Is that so?" she finally asked.

"Yes!" Harry was positively beaming, a wide grin splitting his face in two, which thankfully didn't look so gaunt anymore. He was still much too thin for a growing boy his age, but the weight would need to be put on gradually. The worse thing about it was that neither Poppy nor Severus thought Harry would grow passed his current height, his growth had been permanently stunted, but they were giving him potions nonetheless in hopes of it helping. It certainly couldn't hurt him at any rate.
"Well that's lovely," Poppy said sitting down next to him, and beginning her usual diagnosis spell, which she could finally do while he was awake now. She'd done it last night and thankfully other than the weariness Harry hadn't reacted negatively.

"I was thinking of taking Harry to Abartagh Alley, it should be a safe place to take him, nobody will be visiting there with the students boarding on the train right now to come to Hogwarts." Severus admitted, "What do you think?"

"That's actually a good idea," Poppy nodded, "I will come with you if you wish," that way they could both keep an eye on him and make sure he was alright with being surrounded by so much magic.

"I think that's a good idea," Severus stated, the more people that were around the safer he would be, and if anything happened he wouldn't be accused of bloody kidnapping or abuse with a healer around.

"Everything is already set up in the Hospital wing I have nothing further to do, so whenever you want to go, we can." Poppy declared she'd made sure everything was sorted despite the interruptions this summer had provided. "Perhaps Minerva could accompany us as well?" obviously they couldn't risk taking such a well known figure like Albus, not without eyebrows being raised.

"If she has the time," Severus replied, he didn't mind either way, they were only going there for a familiar for Harry then straight back here, he wasn't playing around, plus Harry didn't have the energy to actually walk around Abartagh Alley, it was bigger than Diagon Alley admittedly not by much but still.

"Perhaps transfiguring a walker for Harry so he can walk by himself?" Poppy suggested. It would take some of the weight from him and allow him to walk. If it got too much all they had to do was transfigure it into a wheelchair for the rest of the time. It just meant he wouldn't be doing hydrotherapy tonight, which he wouldn't anyway, since the students would be there. Harry couldn't be seen, not yet anyway, not until he was one hundred percent better.

"Would you like that Harry?" Severus asked, giving him a chance to give his own opinion.

Harry stared slightly worried, unsure of what to say.

"If it gets too much we will make it back into a wheelchair, don't worry," Poppy tried to guess what was bothering him.

"It's very early still, there won't be many people there," Severus informed him, knowing what was bothering him unlike Poppy. Harry had never been around a lot of people, three maximum nearly all his life, so this trip would overwhelm him there was no doubt about it. With half a calming draught hopefully the trip would be panic free and easy for all of them. "You don't have to go right now if you don't want to, we can wait." it was just a matter of Harry deciding whether he wanted the cat enough yet or not. He couldn't believe he'd even raised the question with Harry, he couldn't be bothered with animals, then again he couldn't be bothered with most people but Harry was alright, perhaps it wouldn't be too bad.

"Kay," Harry murmured before quickly correcting himself, "I mean okay,"

"Very well, why don't you get Minerva so we can head off? He can learn his words and numbers afterwards," Severus stated, making the decision to go now, and Poppy obviously understood why now. That was going very slowly, Harry was learning words he should have at the age of five,
small ones like at, too, was, is, it, but the good news was that he was retaining the information. All they could do was wait to see how much he absorbed and whether he would be an adult or always stuck in an adolescent stage unable to look after himself.

"Of course, how do you suggest we leave?" Poppy asked either mode was going to leave Harry extremely frazzled; they weren't exactly pleasant first time.

"Honestly? Floo would be easiest as well as quickest;" Severus mused thoughtfully, "Apparation would be easier, only in the aspect of it being quick and instantaneous, whereas Floo can be quit jarring."

"As long as one of us goes with Harry he should be fine," Poppy replied, standing up, she moved over to the Floo and made a quick call to Minerva to see whether she would like to accompany them - to see Harry and how he did with his first magical shopping trip. Who knows…Harry might surprise them and the trip might be smooth and easy, in fact he might enjoy seeing all the sights just as long as they don't stay too long. Perhaps it was even time to take off all the spells they had keeping all magical items immobile. He knew about magic, and seeing his clothes move might actually help him accept it quicker. There was one thing she knew they weren't going for - his wand. Severus was determined to wait until Harry accepted and wanted it, he felt it was the only way to go forward, and perhaps he was right? He was Harry's guardian now, so it was his choice, she couldn't fault him for it either.

"Minerva, are you busy?" Poppy questioned seeing the witch at her desk.

"Just finishing something up, is everything alright?" Minerva asked, as always worried.

"Severus and I are taking Harry to Abartagh magical district would you care to join us?" Poppy proceeded to explain why she was calling, so Minerva didn't worry so much.

"I thought he wasn't going to get a wand yet? Has he changed his mind?" Minerva enquired, her blue eyes alight with surprise, and Severus rarely changed his mind when it was made up.

"Actually Severus decided to get Harry a cat," Poppy told Minerva wryly, and Minerva could see the grin even through the fire.

"Excuse me?" Minerva replied mouth open in disbelief.

"You heard me right. We wish to get there and back before the area gets busy, we don't know how Harry will take being surrounded by so many people," Poppy pointed out, trying to stop herself chortling in amusement.

"Of course, I'll be down momentarily," Minerva replied immediately, capping her inkwell, and placing the quill on the little holder and standing up. By the time she turned around again, Poppy was gone from the flames allowing Minerva to Floo to Severus' quarters.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not sure about making Harry a Horcrux, but I don't think I want to but I still want him to have the ability to talk to snakes...will they find that information out next chapter or will it not happen for a while? will Harry converse with Voldemort's snake? will that be how Tom finds out or will we keep him in the dark for a while longer? :D
just to frustrate him! will tom also go the political route? back Dumbledore with all the spells he would need to completely cut themselves off from the magical world and prevent any Muggle from even speaking about magic? tighten the regulations that make sure the obliviators go and investigate even one instance of magic in front of muggles? i’m going to have fun making up a whole knew magical alley :D hehe R&R
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

My Dark Protector

Chapter 25

Abartagh Alley

The small group of protectors had inevitably decided that using a Portkey would be the easiest
means of travel for Harry, using the Floo or Apparating could be quite jarring and suffocating, it
wasn't something they wanted for Harry's first experience travelling, it might panic him and they
didn't want an episode in the middle of what could potentially be a crowded alley. Albus was
disappointed that he couldn't go, unfortunately he was too well known, and if talk got around, well
they feared that the chatter could reach the Ministry of magic. Something nobody wanted, at all.

There was just too many ways that it could blow up in their faces if Cornelius Fudge, Minister for
Magic, found out about Harry. While his power wasn't absolute it was enough to make Harry's life
hell if he should wish. By hell they mean locking him up in St. Mungo's and never letting him out.
Or getting Harry made ward of the Ministry and taking him in to bolster his own image, and
neglecting Harry - not giving him the care he so badly needed. Or more terrifying being bribed into
having one of the dark families adopting him, such as the Malfoy family who would make Harry
pay for the 'death of their Lord' in all likelihood.

Abartagh Alley, or as it was better known by the Irish Abartagh magical shopping district, although
nine times of out ten the word 'shopping' was cut from the sentence. The Portkey had deposited
them near the large fountain with seven people situated all around in a circle, the Ballycastle Bats
Quidditch players, they were the most famous of Irish players, having won twenty-seven times in
the Quidditch league cup, there was only one other that did better, Montrose Magpies, Scottish
Quidditch players that had won thirty-two times. They each had their Quidditch gear on with the
mascot clearly displayed, holding onto a cup shaped fountain of water that was spouting down over
them. There were many Knuts lying in the pool of water.

Harry couldn't help but stretch out his hand and let the water run freely through his fingers, it was
cool, pure and wonderful, he loved water, it was very soothing and showed everything, it was the
opposite of being in the dark dank underground unable to see anything laying in his own filth. He
hated the feeling of being dirty, it made his skin crawl.

Abartagh Alley was completely opposite from Diagon Alley, here you could actually walk
comfortably in a group and passers by could still walk comfortably, while in Diagon Alley you
were hard pressed to have three people walking side by side and being squashed. The smell of
freshly baked bread, goods and coffee were the most prominent smell lingering in the air from the
café to their left.

"Are you okay, Harry?" Poppy asked placing a comforting hand on his shoulder, letting him know
he wasn't alone and that everything was going to be alright. To her immense surprise and delight,
Harry didn't even flinch, the slightest, was he too enchanted by the water or was he finally
beginning to trust her as much as Severus? Or rather as much as Harry would ever trust anyone
other than Severus. Since Severus would probably always come first to Harry, the trust they had
was an unbreakable bond that would never be severed.
Harry turned to face her, nodding without saying anything, feeling a little overwhelmed, his gaze quickly searched for Severus who was behind him as always and only then did he truly relax. There was so many people here, more than he was used to, and it felt like they were all staring at him, but when he looked they weren't at all.

"Hold on to the handles," Poppy said, placing the wheeled walker, which had a chair on it for when Harry felt too exhausted to continue, in front of him. This way he could move independently without having to rely on them, which according to Severus he didn't want. He was going through phrase of wanting to do everything himself, whether it exhausted him or not. Thankfully he hadn't quite gotten to the extent where he was being rebellious though, which probably would be the most difficult time for both Harry and Severus. He had come along in leaps and bounds since he was found, they were all astonished really, talking, walking, they were so hopeful that it would continue, that he would one day be able grow into the adult he could be. "Now let's go see those cats," she informed him, watching those green eyes sparkle in delight.

Minerva watched Harry's interactions with Poppy, and more importantly observing Harry constantly looking behind him every few steps to make sure that Severus was still there. "He has come along way hasn't he?" Minerva said in awe, she hadn't been able to spend as much time with Harry as Severus or Poppy having to visit the homes of Muggle-Born students as well as go through all the replies and even take them to Diagon Alley if they required it.

"He has," Severus replied his face impassive but his voice was laced with pride. He was proud of Harry there was no doubt about it, he had such determination and spirit to overcome what life had thrown at him. He wasn't bitter, at least not yet, and yes he sometimes got scared but he looked to all the new and wonderful things he was seeing and lit up. Severus honestly didn't think he would be the way Harry was if it had happened to him, in many ways though Harry was still a child, still had a lot of growing up to do. He doubted Harry would ever be outgoing but he had sworn to make sure that he lived life to the fullest, even if it meant Severus himself had to spend the rest of his life taking care of Harry if he couldn't look after himself.

"Do you think his progress will continue?" Minerva asked, continuing her conversation with Severus while watching Harry. He was beginning to strain a little, she was unsure of how much longer he'd be able to continue walking.

"We have no idea," Severus replied honestly, giving Harry a nod and small smile of pride when he turned to look at him again. Harry thrived on his approval, it made him try harder, Severus could see that, and it was a terrifying thought to have someone so utterly dependant on him even now, at the same time he felt a sense of accomplishment and pride at what he had helped to do. "Matters of the mind are extremely delicate, but the progress he's made this far? It means there's a chance, and it's greater than we thought when we first found him."

"True," Minerva nodded conceding the point, they had feared Harry wouldn't recover, she couldn't have imagined that they were the same boy, he had been so skeletal, but he was up, walking and talking, it was miracle to her.

"Do you need to sit down, Harry?" Severus asked his voice soothing.

Harry once again shook his head, before tilting it, just staring in the window with a look of wide eyed wonder.

Severus glanced to see what had caught Harry's attention, it was the aquarium shop, which obviously dealt primarily in fish, there was a large tank in the window with dozens upon dozens of colourful fish swimming around they had just been fed he could see the remnants of their food still floating about. Of course something like this would gain Harry's attention; anything water related
seemed to enchant him. He gazed himself wondering what Harry found so fascinating, but he came up empty.

"It's getting a little busier now, Severus," Minerva said with caution, wondering to herself when she had gotten so damn paranoid. It must be Severus' influence she had never been overly paranoid before in her life.

"It is that, and he doesn't seem to mind," Severus replied wryly, it seemed their worry about Harry being surrounded by too many people would be hard for him was for nothing.

"Perhaps not for now, he's easily distracted but I believe such a time will come," Poppy informed them quietly, glancing pointedly at them.

"Cats?" Harry turned to Poppy, wanting to leave now, as peaceful and beautiful as they were he wanted to see the cats now.

"Of course, this way," Poppy said, moving again, but keeping close enough to catch him if he got too exhausted and didn't stop. Not that she'd be needed, Severus was behind Harry for that exact purpose, and despite his shaking legs was continuing to walk slowly but surely towards the pet shop. Which was just one more shop down, she realized as they passed the owl store.

Harry felt excitement thrum through him when they got to the store, large pens were all around the shop with kittens inside them, and others had cats. There were so many of them that he didn't know where to look first, he was that excited he was completely ignoring the signs his own body was trying to tell him, that he was exhausting himself, pushing himself too far.

"It's time you too a rest, Harry, you need to sit down," Severus informed him, his tone serious, he tended to use that tone when he didn't want Harry fighting with him and Harry seemed to understand when he meant business.

"Can I help ya?" a very Irish sounding accent asked them, making an appearance in front of them.

"We are interested in buying a cat as a familiar," Minerva replied in her usual curt manner when she was dealing with something. "But thank you regardless." a familiar wasn't something even a shopkeeper could help them with; it was solely between Harry, his magic and the animal of his choosing.

"Alright, how are we best going about this?" Minerva asked, looking around pensively. "Will his magic be up for seeking out a familiar?"

"Of course it will," Severus couldn't contain his snort at that question, Harry's magic was strong, stronger than Harry was able to deal with emotionally, which made it an admittedly very unstable combination that they were going to have to keep an eye on very carefully. As already proven, Harry's magic was quite violent in its backlash.

"This will definitely take a lot of time," Poppy did admit, there were more cats than she'd ever seen in her life in this shop, and that is if bonded to Harry as his familiar.

"Harry?" Severus called, kneeling down so he was eye to eye with him, or was when Harry's inquisitive green eyes landed on him. With calm contentment in his eyes, Severus knew he was doing the right thing, and prayed that Harry didn't have to return to Hogwarts without a cat, no doubt he would feel disappointed and perhaps frustrated, and Harry of course wouldn't know how to handle those emotions. "Minerva, would you do me a favour?" he asked, an idea coming to mind.
"Name it," Minerva said, she would do anything for Severus as long as it was within her capabilities he knew that.

"Look for a jewellery store, a focus stone is something I think would be beneficial for Harry," Severus replied, "The strongest one you can get, perhaps amethyst would be the best gem?"

"That's an excellent idea, I'll go now I'm sure there's a store around here," Minerva nodded vigorously as she spoke.

"Thank you," Severus replied he knew Harry would need to return to Hogwarts soon.

"Focus stone?" Harry repeated, blinking in confusion.

"I'll tell you more about it later," Severus informed him honesty, "Right now I need you to be very brave and do something for me, something that might seem scary to you, but if you would like a cat you need to do it, okay?" Severus remained frank and honest, he wasn't one for lying and he didn't want to lie to Harry.

Harry remained confused, his brow furrowing but he answered the question, "Yes?" with a question.

"You need to feel your magic, it will help you pick out a familiar that's just for you," Severus explained, hesitating only slightly, with good reason after what happened the last time he brought up magic. "You'll be able to feel it, it's like a pinching," not truly able to articulate it, but doing the best he could.

"You'll want to go to a certain cat, it will guide you," Poppy added to be helpful. "Like it's calling to you."

"Yes, hopefully it will be a sphynx cat," Severus said wryly, it didn't have much hair.

"It has," Harry murmured quietly, flinching as he admitted this.

"You already feel the pull?" Severus required confirmation.

"Yes," Harry replied, green eyes wide and apprehensive, he had just assumed it was the feeling of wanting to see them all but until his dark protector, who he was becoming to know better as Severus these days, said he could.

"Good," Severus said nodding encouragingly; it was obvious to him that Harry still feared admitting anything when it was regarding magic. "That's very good." he added laying it on, he had to get it through to Harry that magic wasn't something to be scared off, but baby steps.

"It's nothing to be scared off," Poppy added, giving him a smile. "Do you want to stay in the chair and let us push you to the cat you can feel?" it was obvious to them both that Harry was beyond exhausted but he wasn't going to give in until he had his cat, he was one determined boy.

Harry wanted desperately to believe that, but he didn't, he just couldn't all his experience had taught him that magic was very, very bad and should be hidden, if he didn't use it his aunt and uncle wouldn't have hated him, and that woman wouldn't have hurt him or other people if he hadn't had magic as well. He would have preferred if he didn't have it at all, yet these people could do magic too and they weren't scared and they wanted him to use it. Needless to say he was very conflicted and confused, but those feelings were becoming increasingly familiar to Harry nowadays.

"Harry?" Severus queried, worried about how quiet he was being.
"I'll walk." Harry finally said, "Is that okay?" he added, biting his bottom lip, feeling vulnerable with magic actually being brought into a conversation.

"Of course it is," Severus stated firmly, staring pensively at Harry for a few seconds before he stood up, he would ask him later if he was aright, right now wasn't the place for such a conversation. Gripping Harry's hands in his own, he helped the teen out of the seat and Poppy turned the four wheeled walker so Harry could grip it tightly. His gait was uncomfortable, weak and shaky at best, but he moved.

Severus remained right behind him, his hands outstretched just a bit almost touching Harry's back. Watching each time he passed a pen of cats, Siamese cats, Ragdoll cats, Abyssinian cats, Burmese cats and then he stopped, peering into the pen that had Bengal cats, of course, thought Severus sardonically, of all things it had to be a Bengal cat. He shouldn't complain really, at least they'd found one in a relative short amount of time.

"Point to which one it is," Severus encouraged him, he was rather pleased with how well this trip had went. Perhaps during the Christmas holidays they could come back here and properly look around, by then Harry might not even need the walker, especially if his physical therapy continued to go well.

Harry pointed, to the one that wasn't playing with what Severus assumed was its siblings seen they were all the same size roughly at least. The one he picked was definitely the runt of the litter, and it wasn't lost on Severus that he would want that one. The cat looked like a miniature leopard.

"I'll go and get everything it will need," Severus said, "Sit down, Harry, this might take a while, Poppy would you get the cat for him?" it would keep him occupied while he got the rest of the things a cat would need to be contented with life at Hogwarts.

"Of course, go ahead," Poppy said, gesturing for him to do what he needed to.

Severus nodded and stalked off to the shelved area of the shop, taking a basket he began to load everything he'd need into it. Bowls, cat food, some packed mice and other treats it would like to eat. A dozen toys, and scratching posts, a litter tray, pine cat litter, a scooper, a collar with an ID tag, nail clippers, he did not want his home destroyed or to be scratched by a blasted cat, a brush and comb, sponges and scrubbers, non-toxic cleaner, a bed, a throw, and last but no means least, a cat travel carry case, it would mean the cat could easily be travelled through the Floo, Apparation or even flying without being jolted around even if the person was being jolted around.

He looked around thoughtfully, trying to discern whether or not he was forgetting something. Not that it would be too much trouble, he could just owl order it if he did. He'd rather not have to pay for an owl to deliver something he'd forgotten though truth be told. His eyes caught the vials, cat flea and tick treatment, he wouldn't be using substandard potions, he would create his own, which would require a potions book specifically aimed at potions for animals, cats specifically obviously. That would be easily purchased at the bookstore.

He found Poppy at the check out counter, with the cat already; he swiftly made his way over, placing the basket and cat travel case on the counter. "This should cover the cost, I'm going to go to the bookstore and get a book on potions for the cat."

"Wouldn't Hagrid have something like that already?" Poppy asked curiously.

"No, I brew all his required potions, but I've never been asked to brew anything for a domestic animal, such as a cat or dog surprisingly." Severus replied wryly, especially considering he did in fact have a dog, Fang, but he didn't think the dog had ever been sick, Hagrid loved those animals
and if he thought he was sick then Hagrid would have come straight to him. Dropping his money pouch into her hands before he left the store as quickly as he could.

Once it was all rung up, did the teller speak, "One hundred and sixty five galleons, fifteen Sickles and twenty Knuts please," which Poppy worked out to be five hundred pounds in total, but that wasn't a problem, she handed over her Gringotts card, not touching Severus' money, the money spent today was a pittance compared to what she had in her vaults. Harry deserved to be spoiled, and she didn't mind spoiling him one bit.

"Where's Severus?" Minerva enquired as she returned, with a small brown wrapped box in her hands.

"He's just popped over to the bookstore," Poppy explained, accepting her card back giving him a smile of thanks before the two witches grabbed the packages and got Harry as well as the cat outside the shop to wait for Severus to return. "It's alright, he'll be right back." Poppy assured Harry, seeing him looking around worriedly, the cat couldn't even keep his attention it seemed.

"He's right over there," Minerva said spotting him a few tense moments later, both of them sighed in gratefulness, they weren't sure how long Harry would have remained quiet and calm without Severus' presence. The pure and unadulterated relief on Harry's face was obvious for all to see, even Severus whose face creased in concern for a moment before smoothing back out again.

"Thank you, Poppy," Severus said, taking the travel case, and taking the cat delicately from Harry and placing it inside so it was safe while they Portkey'd back. Which was what he explained to Harry, telling him he could let him out again just as soon as they got back, and yes the cat was a he.

Severus handed Harry the case, which he clutched tightly, nodding in approval he removed the Portkey, waiting until everything was shrunk down and they all quickly gathered around, holding onto each other, the walker, the cat and Harry. He put the Portkey out, and once he was sure they were secure, he said the phrase and the Portkey activated. One moment they were at Abartagh Alley the next moment they were at Severus' quarters in Hogwarts.

None of them were overly surprised when Harry fell asleep curled up within moments of getting on the couch; he had pushed himself quite far this morning. Severus opened the cat travel case and his lips twitched as he watched the Bengal cat curl up next to him.

Minerva couldn't help but summon her camera, this was definitely a picturesque moment, Harry would love it she was sure, and all she had to do was develop the picture herself and transfigure a picture frame. "He did very well today," "That he did," Severus agreed.

"Here you go Severus," Poppy said handing over the pouch which Severus accepted and tossed onto the bookcase without a second thought not realizing that Poppy had paid for the cat at the moment.

"I got a variety of focus stones, some mixed, as well as a booklet that explains their properties, there were so many of them that Harry could use so I thought you might like to choose which ones appropriate for him." Minerva answered, handing over the box.

"How much?" Severus asked, flicking his wand out to summon the pouch.

"Nothing, it's fine," Minerva said her tone going stern knowing Severus would try and pay her back if she didn't.
Severus sighed in exasperation, "Very well," he admitted defeat, before conjuring an additional seat since Harry had taken the sofa to himself, and he had only two other chairs so Minerva would require one to sit on for however long he remained. He knew she got extremely busy around this time when it came to the students returning. "Coffee?" he asked them both as he ripped open the brown paper to get into the box.

"I wouldn't mind, I've been gasping for one since we passed that café," Minerva admitted.

"Me too," Poppy chuckled quietly, consciously lowering her voice so she didn't end up wakening Harry.

They were doing everything they could to ensure Harry had a normal life, as normal as they could, and they prayed it was enough.

Chapter End Notes

There we go! what do you think? Hogwarts will be starting back up soon and you'll probably see some time skips again so who will be together for Harry's first Christmas (well that he can remember anyway!) still can't decide what to do with Voldemort, whether to have the light side continuously in the dark so to speak about Voldemort's return for longer...because lets face it there won't be much fighting :) would you like to see them all brand together to safeguard their world and make it better for them all? perhaps Voldemort will still get to rule his people and feel as though his goals are being accomplished without all the bloodshed :D if and when they find out will Dumbledore and Voldemort meet to put down ground rules on what what like no killing children or innocent people in exchange for the Ministry to stay in the dark about who he is? how about Tom becoming Minister of Magic or something? hmm so many possibilities here and its so different I love that about this story...and look where i took it before in the other version? I must admit i do love this one more :D anyway R&R please!
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

Chapter 26

Severus had asked Poppy if Roz could be used to keep an eye on Harry while he taught classes, since the child couldn't be left on his own. She had been in agreement with the idea, Roz had experience in healing, just small things, but it would be enough should Harry panic she would know what to do. It helped that Roz was Poppy's House-Elf, she didn't belong to the school, and her loyalty was to Poppy and Poppy alone. Not that it was the school they would have to worry about, since the school was loyal to Albus, and obviously Albus was doing everything he could to keep the information contained. Nothing stayed secret forever, but he was hoping that by the time it was out, Harry was at least moderately informed and could look after himself, and that he was of age.

"Roz?" Severus called, waiting for the House-elf to show up. He was sitting drinking a glass of wine in front of the fireplace. The students would be here soon, and he really shouldn't be drinking but it was a single glass of wine, it wouldn't hurt anyone. He was dressed in his teaching robes; they were stiff, uncomfortable and made him look even more intimidating, he honestly didn't want Harry to see him dressed in those, at least for as long as he could help it.

"How can Roz help Master Severus?" Roz questioned him, her eyes wide as she gazed at the stern man, who she knew was more than he looked after everything that had happened during the summer holidays.

"I will be leaving for the Great Hall soon, Harry has already gone to bed, all I need you to do is keep an eye on him, do you know what to do if anything happens?" he questioned the House-elf, despite the fact he and Poppy had already gone over every detail they believed to be important.

"I should come to get you, but be discreet, I know Master Severus, I will be careful," Roz explained promptly, her speech perfect, it was one of the first things her Mistress Poppy had required of her. So if she had to go anywhere in case of an emergency she would be able to speak clearly so people would understand her, such as the other Medi-witches or healers at St. Mungo's or the teachers here at Hogwarts. It was a mouthful getting around all the medical terms, but she did it effortlessly now, and with ease, it helped that everyone now understood what she meant when she spoke. She knew better than to ever repeat Harry's name in public, but she was also not to make anyone curious.

"Good, he shouldn't wake," Severus informed her standing up, banishing his empty wine glass to the kitchen. No his nightmares seemed to get too much for him in the early hours of the morning, if it weren't for the spell he wouldn't have known, Harry never screamed during the throes of a nightmare, he rarely used his voice at all. He just trembled and curled himself up into a ball as much as possible. To his astonishment though, the presence of Harry's little familiar seemed to help Harry a great deal but it was much too soon to draw any conclusions obviously. He flushed just remembering the conversation about the cat… in question.

-0 Flashback 0-
"Now you have to remove the dome, pick the scooper up and add it to the litter box." Severus explained unlatching it so the dome lay to the one side, a single spell quickly sterilised the litter box just to be on the safe side. Severus did it one to show him, probably quite needlessly, before handing it over praying that it wouldn't go all over the place. Severus absently opened the sand further to decrease the likelihood of spillages.

Harry accepted the light blue scooper his dark protector gave him, and slowly began to fill the tray with sand, his curiosity evident in every move he made. He glanced up after every scoop, waiting to see when he should stop, but it was well on to the seventh one and yes he counted and yes he could count much to his delight, but nothing bet the pride his dark protector conveyed to him. It made him feel special, wanted something he had gone without his entire life.

"And that's enough," Severus replied giving him a nod of approval, watching him light up like a Christmas tree. He had probably praised Harry more than he had ever praised any student during the entire duration of his career. Though there was no denying that Harry definitely deserved it more than those spoiled brats he taught each day. "Clip the dome back up," the kitten would be able to do the toilet in privacy, added benefit that he didn't need to watch a kitten defecate and the smell would be contained.

"Now food and water," Severus stated, standing up, he held his hands out to Harry to help him up, taking great care. The walk yesterday had taken more out of him than anyone had anticipated. He had remained asleep for hours afterwards, he hadn't moved much after his rest either, a muscle relaxant helped ease the aches and pains of so much movement. His agility was getting better, but he still had a long way to go. He had gotten pouches so it was easier to feed he kitten, he demonstrated how to open it, and let Harry pour it into the metal bowl. Instead of using tap water he decided to show Harry some more magic, mostly to gauge his reaction and let him see that it wasn't a bad thing. Of course, it could blow up in his face; it was time to see which it would be. "Aguamenti," Severus cast, making his wand movements slow but confident, stilling it as water rushed through his wand, filling the bowl with water, before flicking his wand to cancel the spell. "Using this water will be better for your kitten, it's purer than water from the tap, it remains colder for longer too, and it's important that all animals have the ability to get to a fresh clean supply of water, it's why you'll change it a few times a day." Severus observed Harry; he looked struck between petrified and curiously wanting to investigate the water presumably to see if there was truly any difference.

"Magic is safe, Harry," Severus said quietly but firmly, "It tried to keep you safe too, but it can only do so much." turning Harry around to face him, he crouched down towards the growth stunted child, "If you and I didn't have magic, we would have died when we were young, we wouldn't be here now. I wouldn't be able to help you. I realize blaming magic could be considered the easiest way to blame for what happened to you. It's not, I hope one day you will come to see that, the choices people made sometimes can't be understood, but nevertheless they are to blame not the thing that makes you so special." he hadn't meant to reveal a little about himself, but he doubted Harry understood the meaning behind it quite yet.

Severus gave Harry's shoulders a gentle squeeze and let him think on what he said. He put both bowls down for the cat, before guiding the silent boy back to the couch and sat him down letting him get comfortable. "Have you decided on a name?" he questioned, staring at the teenager who looked paler than normal, he truly didn't like the sight of magic, but Severus was determined to get that out of his system.

"Name?" Harry whispered, his green eyes going wide, evidently he hadn't thought of it.

"Of course, we can't keep referring to the kitten as cat or kitten, you need to name him," Severus
pointed out, he was undeniably curious as to what the kitten would end up named. Perhaps he should have left it a while, there was no doubt it would be named something childish and silly… Harry still had a lot of growing up to do…

"Severus," Harry decided.

Severus flushed red that was definitely not an answer he was expecting. "Ah, perhaps something else?" he stated, he wasn't sure whether he felt abashed or embarrassed, perhaps a bit of both? Harry wanted to name his cat after him, a cat of all things. Could he have actually misheard? Perhaps it was Harry wanting his attention not his decision on the name?

Harry stared at Severus trying to understand what was going on, "Don't you want me to name him Severus?" Harry asked his face crumbling as sadness began to take hold of him against his wishes. He just felt so sad by what he'd just heard without really knowing why.

Severus groaned as quietly as possible, damn him, now he just felt incredibly guilty. "I would be honoured if you did," Severus then said, his voice slightly slower than normal as if he was saying it reluctantly. Then Harry was beaming at him as if he'd just granted him a big honour he just shivered a little imagining everyone's reactions to finding out. Poppy and Minerva were going to tease him mercilessly, and who knows how Black and Lupin would react, not that Lupin had been around much, just Black a couple times. What did he have to be embarrassed about? Harry cared about him, cared enough to name the first thing he ever got after him.

"Honoured?" Harry said quietly, he'd heard it a few times but had no clue to what it meant.

"Very happy," Severus explained it would do for now, when his English came along he would find a more appropriate and closer definition than that. He wasn't about to lower his vocabulary for anyone, not completely, in time Harry would learn more that way.

Harry just nodded, he'd already suspected that, and of course he had, he'd beamed at him. Harry gasped, watching his kitten sniff at the food and begin to eat it. Turning back to Severus, he said "Thank you," and he was thankful, he wanted to scoop Sevvy into his arms and cuddle him close, but he didn't, he knew what it was like to be hungry so he reluctantly let Sevvy eat, he could play with him after. There was nobody he'd rather his kitten named after than his dark protector.

-0 End Flashback 0-

Severus couldn't help himself, he checked on Harry before he left, his lips twitched, Harry lay curled up, his kitten resting against his neck, cuddling into him. It furthered the bond they had between each other, allowing magic to do its intended thing and make them Master and familiar. Convincing himself that Harry would be fine, he closed the door until it was only open a little, Harry didn't like being closed in a single room, that and he also didn't like the dark. Hence his decision to make a night light, which shone through the space in the door.

He stood at his quarters door, closing his face off, which he found increasingly difficult to do, he hadn't done it all summer. While it was true he hadn't been able to show any negative emotions however small, he hadn't truly put his masks fully up. Harry wouldn't have even began to trust him if he had been that way. Straightening his spine he existed his quarters, closing the door feeling the wards come down securing the area.

He relished in the quietness as he made his way out of the dungeons and up to the Great Hall, knowing that in less than twenty minutes he would be enduring what felt like eternal loudness from over a hundred Hogwarts students as they all embraced their friends and loudly told everyone what they had done that summer while shrieking and fawning over each other as if they hadn't seen each
other in years.

Flicking his wand out, he opened the Great Hall doors, which were closed for some reason, was he the first one down? Now that would be a first, he loathed these things and only came just before the students arrived. Even the teachers weren't immune from gossiping or telling tales of what they'd done. The only one he remotely interesting was Filius who travelled with the duelling tournaments, keeping his status as a champion was exhausting. He soon found that he wasn't the first one to come down; he would bet they used the side entrance instead of the Great Hall doors.

"Good evening, Severus," Albus said giving Severus a wide smile, pleased to see him, not at all perturbed by the fact he chose to roll his eyes at him, it wasn't the first time and certainly wouldn't be the last.

"Albus," Severus replied giving him a nod as he made his way up to the Head table, having to sit next to Severus due to the fact Sirius Black was at the table despite the fact he was not a teacher.

"Everything going well?" Albus asked, trying to encourage Severus to have at least one conversation as he always did.

"Indeed," Severus replied, giving another nod, knowing what Albus was truly asking beneath the surface, he was asking if Harry was alright without drawing attention. Albus and Minerva had been busy getting last minute things ready to really be able to stop in and visit Harry, who thankfully didn't seem hurt by it.

"I heard you recently got a familiar?" Albus questioned, eyes twinkling brightly.

Severus pursed his lips, glaring at Albus in annoyance, why had he come down at all? To think he could be safely ensconced in his quarters, he'd even put up with the damn kitten climbing all over him than deal with this. To make matters worse he knew the others were all listening intently as soon as Dumbledore asked that damnable question. "It is not my familiar, but yes, it's living with me, and more questions and I'll use it for potion ingredients," he snapped irately. He and everyone knew even as he said it that he would never harm another living being, perhaps the only exception being rats that were frequently used to test potions.

Albus leaned over, "Has it been given a name?" there was genuine curiosity in his blue eyes.

Yes, he definitely wished to be in his quarters, "He decided in all his wisdom to name the kitten after me," Severus replied, his mouth barely moving as he replied, well whispered really. He was not going to get into the nickname he had given the damn thing, and he dreaded the day anyone heard it. Severus noticed that Sirius Black was straining to hear their conversation, and got vindictive satisfaction out of the fact he knew the wizard wouldn't be able to hear him.

"That is hardly surprising," Albus said solemnly, his joyful nature gone as the conversation became serious, at least to him. "You saved him, Severus, gave him his life back and are the only one he's been able to rely on."

"I know," Severus sighed sombrelly.

"Have you made a decision on what to do while you teach classes?" Albus continued their conversation in a hushed manner.

"Roz will be taking care of him," Severus informed Albus.

"I see," Albus nodded thoughtfully, perhaps he could visit him occasionally, he needed human contact, and he said nothing to Severus knowing he was doing his best by the child. He had no
doubt Severus would be checking in on him as well.

"She already knows what to do if something happens," Severus informed him, Harry would be fine. Or so he continued to convince himself.

The Dark Lord's manor

Tom glared at the disgusting thing that had been Portkey'd to his manor, per his request. Theodore senior hadn't been able to pry any information out of the disgusting excuse for a wizard and so he had demanded it. He wanted the information and he knew just how to get it. He smelt absolutely foul, and he dressed even more so, once again he wondered at Dumbledore's sanity at having such a weak thing in his precious order. Of course, the same could be said for Pettigrew, which made him grimace in distaste.

"My Lord?" Theodore questioned, wondering if he had done something wrong, "Do you wish for me to clean him up?"

"No," Tom replied waving his hand and easily cleaning the cretin up himself, only then could he feel as though he could breathe freely without contaminating himself.

A small almost indecipherable groan alerted both men to the fact the wizard was slowly coming around. Theodore stepped back, removing his wand as he stood there and waited. He would do nothing unless he had no choice or was asked to, as always. Ever since the Dark Lord's return, he had worried they'd go back to how things were, but it became glaringly obvious it wasn't, and for that he was thankful. It was more like the times where they were the knights of the Walpurgis, this eased him somewhat, he didn't fear for the life of his son as he had done in the past despite his young age obviously.

"Whaaa...." Mundungus' eyes widened as he goggling sat up, "Where am I?" he murmured, his eyes narrowing as if it would help him look around.

"Crucio!" Tom flicked his wand watching in morbid fascination as the wizard writhed on the floor, screaming at the top of his lungs. His fascination didn't last long, Tom flicked his wand ending the curse, the wizard had peed himself, on his floor, and he would die for that. Not that he planned on letting the wizard leave, he couldn't, not without risking his return being exposed, to Dumbledore of all people, who had become increasingly unpredictable as of late and Tom still didn't know what to make of it.

Mundungus continued to snivel on the floor, curled up in a pathetic attempt to protect himself, "I'll make you more money, and just give me more time." he pleaded. Assuming it was one of the many wizards he owed money to.

Tom nodded to Theodore, who quickly "Incarcerous!" once the wizard was bound, he cleaned up the mess not wishing to touch the wizard without doing so, the smell was just rank. Grasping his hair, he forced Mundungus to look up, straight at the eyes of Lord Voldemort, Mundungus gasped in horror, but before he could do a single thing Tom struck out.

"Legilimens!" and he were in, flipping through his memories like soft butter, not truly caring whether he was hurting the cretin or not. It didn't take him too long to get to the memory he desired, he slowly watched the memory, pouring more magic into the spell, then he searched for the next memory. Once he'd seen what he wished to see, he yanked himself out so he could think without enduring the pathetic memories from the waste of space that dared to call himself a wizard.
"Wait…please, I'll join you, I can…spy, I'm good at getting information," Mundungus blubbered, his chest rising and falling fast as he breathed harshly, terrified out of his wits.

"I already have what I want," Tom said coolly, staring in disgust as the wizard before him, his eyes flashing.

"I can get more," Mundungus wheezed, Merlin he didn't want to die, why had he joined the Order? Oh, yes, he owed Dumbledore for getting him out of a spot of trouble. Look where that had landed him! The last thing he really remembered was drinking at the tavern at Knockturn Alley.

"Hardly," Tom replied, his eyes going to Theodore, telling him with his eyes to move, he did not want to be in the way of the killing curse. The last thing he wanted to do was kill his old friend, and Theodore was an old friend, he had been with him since the beginning and completely loyal. "Avada Kedavra!" with speed that you would only find in the fastest of things, the spell sat out of Tom's wand and hit the wizard who was dead before he could truly touch the floor.

"Did he have the information you sought, My Lord?" Theodore questioned, hoping that he had. Giving a glance at the dead body, he assumed that it was more than likely 'yes' that would be the reply.

"Indeed," Tom said distractedly. "It seems as though Albus Dumbledore had the Order restarted to search for Harry Potter and stopped just as abruptly." which meant the boy had been found. Dumbledore wouldn't trust anywhere other than Hogwarts with the boy. It didn't matter if Dumbledore thought he was dead or not. Dumbledore had looked old when he asked the Order for help, but when he told them to stop; he looked as though he'd aged fifty years in the space of a meeting. Something had happened, something big, now that he knew what to do, it was definitely time to send Nagini in. He had contemplated it a few times in the past, but hadn't done so.

"You think he found the boy?" Theodore asked, praying that his Lord wasn't about to begin his desire to kill a teenager, a boy the same age as his son yet again.

"I know he did," Tom replied.

"What do you wish to do now?" Theodore queried.

"Gather as much information as I can about him, things aren't what they seem Theodore, ask yourself why they are keeping him a secret. They do not know I am back…so why else would Dumbledore go to such great lengths to keep him hidden?" Tom pointed out.

"There's something wrong with him? Perhaps he was injured?" Theodore said thoughtfully.

"I'll soon find out," Tom stated confidently, not only was Nagini his familiar, which nobody knew about yet, but she was his Horcrux and he had an ability to control her, to see through her eyes. He would get his answers soon. "I require you to take Nagini and drop her off at the gates of Hogwarts." he added, shrinking his familiar down to an extremely small unnoticeable size. Causing her to hiss out, well not to him but to Theodore he imagined it was. She wasn't happy the slightest but she would do it, for him. He handed the creature to his weary follower who didn't protest and handled Nagini with the utmost care causing him to not in approval. "Now go,"

"What about…him, my Lord?" Theodore questioned.

"I've got him, now go!" Tom said losing his patience.

Theodore realizing this, bowed before swiftly stepping over the dead wizard and making his way out of his Lord's manor to the Apparation point, making his way directly to Hogwarts.
Chapter End Notes

There we go! Hogwarts is starting back up! So will the Ministry find out and Dumbledore and Tom join forces to save Harry? Realising the Ministry is just too corrupt? Or will it take a while before Tom and Dumbledore come to any sort of agreement? When will Tom reveal himself? I hope you'll continue to enjoy the story even though it's not going to be action packed in regards to fighting etc... but more of manipulating in the background sort of game in this i think! R&R please!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

My Dark Protector

Chapter 27

Even with Nagini's sense of smell and freedom to look around it took her two days find Harry in the labyrinth that was Hogwarts. Not that Nagini was in complete control during those days, since Voldemort would possess her to check out what he thought were the most obvious places Harry would be sometimes. Such as the old guest quarters Hogwarts occasionally used, Gryffindor common room and even Dumbledore's office and quarters, it was sheer luck that they had even found him if they were honest, Voldemort had been in control of her when he observed his spy up extremely early in the morning, around five am with a young boy, young being a relative term since Harry was supposed to be fifteen but his height made him seem ridiculously small and well he looked like a third year student. He had glimpsed the scar through the wet hair, Nagini kept her distance watching them from afar and even at that his suspicions had been confirmed. Harry was using a walker to move, it couldn't be a simple case of broken legs since they had a potion for that.

Something serious had happened, and he couldn't figure out what. It was that evening that Nagini managed to subtly sneak into Severus' quarters keeping to the shadows so she wasn't detected. It was pure luck that the defensive hissing of the kitten wasn't heard as Severus had just literally closed the door once making his way down to dinner. Nagini eyed the snake but before the drive to hunt, track and kill her prey could overtake her, her Master once again took control, completely ignoring the kitten Nagini began to inspect his old spy's quarters.

It shouldn't have surprised Voldemort that the boy would be with Severus but it did. His spy had come to him and begged him to spare Lily Potter, which in his defence he had tried to do. He couldn't see how Severus would have thought it would go any other way. What woman would stand aside and let their child be killed? He had known as he approached the house that he would be breaking his promise, regretfully he had not cared then; he had been insane, power hungry, surviving on a small shard of his own soul. Now thriving on more than half his soul (the half that had been in the diary and the half he had absorbed from his disembodied soul piece in Albania he did have a small amount of regret. He held most of the regret he had for the fact he had been disembodied and his cause lost to madness.

Voldemort slid into one room but found it empty, and considering all the potion books he would say his room belonged to Severus. Sliding back out he checked the other rooms finding the library and bathroom before thinking to check the room next to Severus'. That room wasn't empty; there was a young boy that could only be Harry sitting up in bed reading, his eyes already drooping as if he was tired. The book was for children, for children who were just learning to read. That book was for a five year old, in his shock as he observed Harry he forgot to make sure he was in a nice dark unseen spot.

"A snake," Harry said, blinking in astonishment, it was a snake, he had learned all about animals. "There's no mice here." assuming just because the book said they like to eat mice and rats that was all they did eat. Unaware of the potential danger he or his kitten was in.

"You SPEAK!" Voldemort/Nagini hissed out in complete and total shock.
"I didn't know snakes could speak," Harry said his green eyes wide in astonishment, the innocence in those eyes as the stared at the snake spoke volumes and Voldemort was just utterly stunned by this turn of events. Had the boy been Obliviated? Had he forgotten everything in his life? That didn't explain how he couldn't even walk! He's expected answers when he finally found the boy and observed them not more questions.

"We aren't speaking in English," Voldemort hissed out, managing to sound exasperated and annoyed even talking through a snake. "We are conversing in Parseltongue," not to mention the fact he was still numb by the fact the boy was clearly able to speak and understand the snake language, it was hereditary, not something someone can just pick up.

Harry just blinked as he struggled to understand the big words that were being used. Both of them were unfamiliar to him, and not to forget extremely odd. He didn't even twitch when the miniaturised snake swept forward, coiling itself up towards his bed before sliding along his eyes on Harry the entire time. Ninety percent of the population were terrified of snakes, probably more, even those who vaunted the fact they were Slytherin's were terrified of them. His own followers were terrified of Nagini, despite the fact as of yet, she had never given them cause to be.

"The term for talking to snakes is being a Parselmouth, the language is Parseltongue," Voldemort explained clearly seeing that he didn't understand. "It's a very rare magical gift." he certainly did NOT miss the flinch Harry gave of with his words. People flinched at his name because he instilled fear in it, now why would Harry Potter fear the word magic? A sinking feeling drove into his gut, now he should be feeling a sense of satisfaction or something, anything that wasn't a bad feeling. If Harry didn't like the word magic then he would never be able to defeat him. Yet the thought of anyone being scared of their own magic made him furious. Magic was a gift, sure he wanted or had wanted to kill the boy but…this wasn't right.

He wished for nothing more than to be able to read the boys mind, get definitive answers but unfortunately possessive his snake as he was - he could not. "Magic isn't bad," he told the teenager to see his reaction, perhaps he had it wrong and he wasn't scared of magic maybe he already knew that he, Lord Voldemort, was a Parseltongue and did not want anything in common with his parents killer.

"I know, its what my dark protector says," Harry whispered as if he was afraid of being overheard.

"Dark Protector?" Voldemort hissed out, already realizing the answer to that, he must mean Severus. Protector meant that Severus had saved Harry from something, protected him from someone he was perhaps scared of, helped him perhaps?

"He saved me," Harry whispered once more, green eyes misting as he remembered life before wakening up to his Dark Protectors face and soft voice telling him everything was going to be alright, the fear he'd always felt how cold, how tired and seeing people being hurt and not able to do anything. People still scared him, humans scared him, and with the obvious exception of the people his Dark Protector introduced him to, mostly just a fear of what they were capable of.

"Who did he save you from?" Voldemort asked, feeling extremely angry but thankfully that couldn't be showed through Nagini, instead his magic flared in warning inside his own manor.

"A bad person," Harry said flinching just thinking about her, he didn't know her name, but he could remember everything she'd done, and how could he forget when he saw her in his nightmares most nights? Sometimes his Dark Protector came into the dreams and made her go away, protecting him making him feel no longer alone and forgotten. The dream quite obviously symbolising the rescue, or perhaps it was the fact she was dead and couldn't hurt him or anyone else again.
"Your family?" Voldemort hissed out, if that was the case he'd need to hunt them down and get the information, depending on what he got he had every intention of killing them. Nobody, especially not a bloody Muggle hurt someone magical (a magical child) and lived to tell the tale, he would not allow it. He'd never wanted to allow it. Keeping a close eye on Harry and his reactions, he saw yet another flinch and realized he had his answers.

"They hurt me too," Harry said with sad green eyes, he didn't understand why he was always hurt, always called a freak and an abomination. Severus didn't though, his Dark protector said he was good, that what they did was wrong, and he tried to believe him but the fear that his Dark protector would see him as one constantly reared its ugly head.

"Stupid filthy Muggles! They'll pay for what they did!" Voldemort spat out vehemently, hurting a magical child, until the prophecy he'd never killed a child, and he only killed those who openly defied him, stood against him or betrayed his cause.

"My Dark Protector said she cant hurt anyone again," Harry explained with childish exuberance, his dire mood disappearing in the blink of an eye. Shifting his covers and leaning over so he was face to face with the dangerous serpent.

If snakes could raise an eyebrow (if they had one at any rate) then it surely would have, Voldemort wasn't surprised to hear this. Severus was a dark wizard, and he loathed child abuse of any kind, especially considering all he had been through at the hand of his Muggle father. This just went to prove that Dumbledore hadn't been able to completely turn him to the light side if such a thing had happened. The unknown had forced his hand in keeping Severus in the dark about his return. She specifically he mentioned…family? Or someone else he'd ended up in the care of? He intended to find out. It had to be a Muggle surely…it was the only thing that made Dumbledore's actions make sense.

His attention was diverted when a House-elf walked in, the sight of the House-elf wasn't strange, but the fact it had walked in was extremely odd - you only usually saw them pop anywhere. Was Harry's fear so paramount that no magic could be done near him?

"Does Master Harry want anything to drink or eat before bed?" the House-elf squeaked out, not yet noticing the snake.

"Cheesy toast?" Harry asked perking up; he liked the way Roz made cheesy toast.

"Roz will be right back with your cheesy toast and milk, Master Harry," Roz said beaming proudly once again exiting the room without using magic.

Nagini/Voldemort watched Harry sit up slowly, as if each movement was uncomfortable or difficult. He had a pair of pyjamas on with one large snitch that continued to zoom around his top and his bottoms had beater sticks hitting the Bludger over and over again. He couldn't be in pain, Severus would never allow it, and he just didn't seem to have the coordination for it. He would have suspected Harry to be blind if not for the fact he could clearly see Nagini. His instincts shouted that there was a lot more to this than met the eye, more than just a fear of magic, he would have to call Severus, he wouldn't have any other way to get the information and he was not going to wait any further. He'd been more than patient enough for two days, the wait was over.

What happened next made it seem all that more urgent.

"Master Harry move away!" the House-elf said dropping the plate onto the floor, its hand moving out, ready to defend Harry as she had been told to, with a snap of her fingers a bolt of magic shot from Roz's finger straight at the snake.
"NO!" Harry shouted in horror, not wanting anything to happen to his new friend, his magic reacted to his intent, bursting forth, the magic bounced off his shield from where it protected Nagini and returned to its sender, causing Roz to go flying with an alarmed cry out into the living room and slam against the wall, falling in a heap unconscious.

Harry began to shake in horror as he stared at the bleeding House-elf, horror at what he'd done. He repeated 'no' over and over again as he fell from the bed and scrambled into a corner, quicker than Nagini/Voldemort had seen yet. Rocking back and forth, his magic lashing out uncomfortably, none of the furniture was affected, cluing Voldemort in on the fact this was obviously not the first time such an incident had occurred. He would burn his core out if he continued like that.

"Calm down, don't let your magic control you little one," the nickname most unwillingly left his mouth, without his permission, in his bid to try and calm Harry down. It didn't work he just continued his mantra of 'no' over and over again completely shut down, he definitely wouldn't listen to anyone now. He'd never seen anything like it, he would have continued study him, instead he slid back down the bed, intending on getting to one of the portraits that spoke Parseltongue, which thankfully were quite a few and he knew where every single one of them were. He had memorised every nook and cranny of the school, and found more rooms than anyone before him - including the legendary chamber of secrets.

"OPEN!" Voldemort hissed, commanding Hogwarts to do as such since he was the heir of Salazar Slytherin and this was his domain. He didn't know if it would work since his physical body was back in his base, safe from anyone sneaking up on him. The quiet click indicated Hogwarts had opened the door for him. Quickly squeezing through the opening, he slid down the hall at a fast pace until he came upon the portrait. The portrait of Herpo the foul.

"FIND A GHOST AND TELL THEM TO TELL SEVERUS SNAPE THAT HE IS REQUIRED IN HIS QUARTERS POST HASTE!" Voldemort hissed out, his demanding presence couldn't be covered, it was more than obvious to Herpo the foul that this was no ordinary snake, after all snakes did not talk quiet like that.

The snake like famous wizard, stared down at the snake for a few moments before he was gone, exiting his portrait and quickly going around the castle to find a ghost - which wasn't easy to do - especially not at dinner time since most of the ghosts usually went into the Great Hall during dinner. He couldn't use Peeves for obvious reasons, he literally couldn't enter the Great Hall due to the whole dung bombs fiasco a long time ago. Dumbledore had found a way to ban him completely, and so it was peace reigned in the Great Hall during meal times.

Eventually Herpo had to move into a portrait as close as he could get to the Great Hall and wait. Muttering how he, one of the most famous wizards, chocolate frog card wielder and inventor was playing the part of a messenger. "BARON!" Herpo called out in relief, a ghost he could stand and tolerate, good.

Baron floated in mid air, glancing at the portrait curiously, Herpo rarely left the dungeons, what would happen to drive him up here? "What is it?" he growled out, with his usual surly attitude.

"Tell Severus that he's required in his quarters immediately," Herpo explained hastily.

"Why?" the Bloody Baron asked.

"I don't know do I? Just do it!" Herpo grumbled back, he'd done his part now it was up to Baron from here on out.

The bloody Baron turned back into the Great Hall bobbling along to the head table, until he was in
Severus was one of the few people he could tolerate, probably because he never asked any stupid inane questions. "You're requested at your quarters immediately,"

"Excuse me?" Severus said sharply, eyes narrowing in caution, why would the bloody Baron say such a thing? His first thought was Harry, but he had a House-elf looking after him, she would have came immediately to him and taken him to Harry.

"It seems urgent," Baron stated before turning and bobbing away, leaving the Great Hall again this time he did not return.

Severus hastily stood up, his dessert forgotten as he made his way around the teachers table, stalking along the length of the hall. It was much quicker getting to his quarters this way than using the teachers entrance and he had absolutely no time to waste. If he found it was some sort of joke the perpetrator would not live to see the next day. His heart was pounding like a never ending drumbeat, as worry crawled over him, all manner of thoughts crossing his mind. Why did the walk to his quarters have to feel even longer than normal despite the fact he was nearly all out running to it now he was out of the damn Great Hall? Severus' thoughts raged at him as if it was somehow his fault.

He could feel it even as he approached the hallway to his quarters, the pure unfretted magic bursting from Harry. He would never forget, he had been a victim of it, and quite frankly after hearing about Ariana he was terrified that this would be Harry's life. Locked up to prevent him being sent to St. Mungo's until an accident and his magic killed him as well as whoever was in the vicinity. It was tingling all over him; he froze in shock, for all of a few seconds, when he noticed that his quarter's doors were open when he knew he had not done so.

Wand out, realizing he would need to do whatever it took to keep Harry safe no matter the cost to himself. Closing the door, re-establishing his wards, keeping the area secure. Flicking his wand he did the spell that would let him know how many people were in his quarters, it came back to a grand total of two, whoever it was, was already gone. He would have to see if he could get any understanding from Harry when he calmed down.

Summoning a calming draught, he approached his bedroom, noticing Roz; the House-elf was unconscious crumpled in the corner. Something had happened to make Harry go like this, had Roz somehow surprised him or had someone else done that and while Roz defended him she ended up being hurt? By an assailant or Harry? He stepped over the broken plate, and now useless food. The intense feel of Harry's magic was overwhelming, it was very difficult to take each and every step he did take, and he had to be within certain vicinity to spell the calming draught into him. He dreaded the day the potion would stop working, truly dreaded it.

Murmuring quietly, using non-verbal magic to spell the contents of the vial into Harry's stomach, deciding against using any magic - he didn't want to risk winding Harry up in the state he was already in. "Easy, Harry, I'm here, I'm here." he said softly, continuing determinedly over to the near catatonic youth. "I'm here, it's alright, easy." his fingers brushed over Harry's face, in sure even soft strokes, his face set in a soothing mask of calmness, so that Harry knew he wasn't in trouble.

"Hey, calm down now little one," Severus soothed him, when those green eyes latched onto his. A soft sob broke out from Harry's mouth as the teenager flung himself at Severus, burrowing into him as if he was attempting to make the world just disappear. Sitting himself down, Severus just stroked Harry's head as his magic stopped lashing around the room and the crying stopped.
Will Severus know through the mark that Nagini belongs to the Dark Lord? Will he go to him? resume his spying? Or will Voldemort release him from his duties or will Voldemort actually be able to help Harry? with the dark arts that Dumbledore was so vehemently against before all this? Will it make him realize he could have helped his sister? making him feel worse? will Dumbledore's legislations go through or will it require both the wiles of Voldemort and Dumbledore for them to succeed in their new venture? Will the public find out and back Dumbledore completely when it comes to realizing what Muggles are like? Will Skeeters be the one to reveal all? will she be signing her death warrant or will Harry remain in the shadows having a life outside the constant scrutiny? R&R please
Chapter 28

Severus wasn't sure how long he remained sitting there with the dead weight of Harry's body draped over him, despite his slumber Harry's arms were tightly wound around his back, making it next to impossible for him to move without wakening Harry up. He had hoped that the outburst the other time would be the last. This was confirming that Harry may just end up like Ariana Dumbledore, with constant outbursts of magic that prevented him from having a normal life. He loathed the thought of Harry having to remain hidden from the world, unable to truly live his life. He'd been through so much already, locked away and abused then locked away again and experimented on. To think they'd only feared that Harry might not be all there due to all he'd suffered.

Harry had come a long way since he'd been found both mentally and physically, it seemed the only problem was magically. The thought of creating a potion to block Harry's magic, stop him from ever being able to use it was quite frankly disgusting, horrific…evil. Such a potion should never be created and he hated the thoughts he had on the subject. Harry wouldn't recover unless his magic stopped hurting people, he could see Harry felt so bad about what occurred. It might be what was stopping Harry from accepting magic and having them going on a relentless circle from which there was no escape. He wasn't sure Harry could accept magic fully; maybe he would be doing the best thing for Harry if he did make the potion.

Glancing down at the boy, his green eyes were hidden from view, tear tracks were visible but had dried quickly once he'd fallen unconscious. Merlin help him, he was at a loss of what to do, sitting in the same position was beginning to cause aches to appear, he had to move, he had to find out what had happened to cause this. Which meant healing Roz and speaking to her, shifting Harry slightly so he could grasp his legs and back once he had a hold of him, he cursed when he realized he couldn't use the wall with Harry's arms still around him. Pursing his lips, he moved to he was on his knees, then slowly put his right foot on the ground, using his arm to put weight on it before after a few seconds, hoisted himself to his feet. He wobbled for a few seconds before regaining his bearings, sliding Harry onto the bed, reluctantly forcing Harry's hands out of their grip and from around him. Getting him comfortable, he soothed him for a few seconds, hoping he would sleep, he quickly settled then Severus put the duvet over his cold form.

Breathing out a sigh of relief, he exited Harry's bedroom and made his way over to the still knocked out house-elf. She had been blasted so strongly that there was blood splattered on the wall where she'd landed. Wincing at the thought of how painful it must have been, he wouldn't be surprised if the House-elf didn't want to look after Harry again when all was said and done. Turning the elf around, he unsheathed his wand and cast the basic first aid healing spells required to deal with the small cut, also reducing the swelling in the lump that was already showing through.

Summoning a pillow from the couch, he turned Roz back around, letting her head rest on something comfortable. Rolling his eyes all the while, he wasn't used to caring for anything let alone a House-elf. Yet he knew Poppy would kill him if he let anything happen to Roz so he did what he had to.
What the hell happened? He thought completely perplexed, the door had been open, someone had been in the room yet he had not been alerted to that fact which worried him the most. He doubted Black had done it again; he was taking a telling and allowing him to set the rules for when he got to see Harry. Admittedly short periods of time, just so Harry could get used to him, and Black had accepted that he knew best when it came to Harry's mental state. Who had seen him? Should he get Harry through the Floo and to his home? What if it had been someone within the Ministry? This was his greatest fear, and before he could panic too greatly, Roz began to come around; Severus prayed that she remembered what happened despite the knock to the head.

"Sir!" Roz squeaked, standing up looking ashamed of herself. "I'm so sorry, Sir, I failed,"

"Stop!" Severus said curtly, knowing it was the only way to get through to her at the moment. "Now calm down and tell me what happened, who got into the room?" it had been Harry's magic that knocked her out, he could feel it all over her, and so it wasn't the mysterious assailant who did. Although Harry's magic may well have scared them off.

"Nobody Sir," Roz promised speaking quickly, "I scared Harry, I used magic when I wasn't supposed to." staring at the floor.

"You popped in beside him?" Severus questioned perplexed, none of this explained the open door.

"No Sir, there was a snake in Master Harry's room, right next to him, I was using magic to pop it to the Forbidden Forest, but Harry panicked and a shield went up against him and the snake before mixing with Master Harry's magic and bouncing back at me." Roz explained half way through her explanation, Severus bolted through to Harry's bedroom, his eyes narrowed as he looked around cautiously, his wand out. It must have been an Animagus; it would explain how the door got opened.

Then suddenly he saw the snake, his fingers tightened on his wand, only to freeze in shock, as he felt a familiar tingling on his left arm. It couldn't be, the Dark Lord was not an Animagus, and if he had been he would have transformed immediately.

"Don't hurt my snake please!" Harry said surprising Severus who turned to face the boy but kept the snake within his sight at all times.

"Harry…this snake is dangerous," Severus stated, he didn't have the courage to actually kill the damn thing, especially not if he was right and it belonged to the Dark Lord. If he did such a thing and the Dark Lord found out, he would never be able to return to his position…and his death would be sought out with a vengeance. Yet the thought of the Dark Lord knowing about Harry terrified him more, he felt very conflicted.

Hearing hissing caused his spine to stiffen, it took every ounce of his power not to show how much Harry having that particular power confused him, terrified him, even if part of him was awed it did not drown out the negative feelings he had over hearing Parseltongue. He did not want Harry to think badly of anything magical. He forced himself to relax, but that all went to hell when Harry's innocent yet confused voice washed over him.

"The snake says you're to go to him when he calls, that you've not to tell Dumbledore or he will be most d-dis- displeased." Harry said, "You're to take Naginie with you." he pouted at that, he didn't want his friend to leave.

If snakes could roll their eyes, Voldemort would have ensured he had, at the butchering of his familiars name.
It wasn't even a few moments later that the mark flared to life, the Dark Lord was back, how long had he been resurrected? Closing his eyes in dread, what on earth was he going to do? Did he go and try and explain himself? Begin spying again? Ignore the summons and risk his and Harry's life? The thought of Harry being hurt had him scooping up Nagini and moving out of Harry's room to retrieve a sleeping draught.

Returning to the room he sat down on Harry's bed and coaxed him into drinking the potion, stroking the hair from his face while he waited on it working. He prayed he survived this, for he wasn't sure what would become of Harry if he thought he abandoned him. He never wanted Harry to think that, but he was out of choices. Closing his eyes once more, he bent down and kissed Harry on the forehead, with a resigned sigh, he stood up and exited the bedroom. He found that Roz was still there.

"Harry will remain asleep for the rest of the night, go to Poppy to make sure you are properly healed and get some rest," Severus told her, withholding the urge to inform her to tell Dumbledore that the Dark Lord was back. The snake would inform the Dark Lord if he did so, he couldn't risk it, if he returned then he would inform Dumbledore it was all he could do seen as he was being watched.

"Yes Sir," Roz said, with that she was gone.

Anxiety thrumming through him, Severus left his quarters, ensuring that his quarters were indeed locked down, not that he trusted them anymore, he would need to ensure more wards were put up or Harry was moved elsewhere, he was not going to let anything happen to him. He almost wished that Albus would appear so he could lower his shields and inform him that way, but nary a soul went by, which was unusual itself, usually he passed a ghost or two. So it was with a heavy heart he stepped out of Hogwarts, summoning a carriage, not wishing to waste too much time lest the Dark Lord be in a curse happy mood. He'd already dawdled as it was, by the time he was down the steps the carriage was waiting, stepping in, the Thestrals began to move him towards the gates passed them to their usual post at the train station.

Stepping out knowing the carriage would return to its normal place without needing to be informed, he removed his clothes and pressed down on the mark and he was transported to the Dark Lord's current place or residence. Looking around, it wasn't familiar to him, it looked new, stepping forward, and he felt the mark tingle before it granted him entrance. It looked very well kept, and he couldn't help but wonder if perhaps the Dark Lord had a new follower to which this estate belonged.

Blank faced, Severus moved without hesitation but his heart was beating like a never ending drumbeat. He could feel the mark pulling him to the Dark Lord. Guiding him where to go, sooner than he wished he found himself outside a door, just as he was about to raise his hand to knock a young voice called for him to "Enter!" young it may be, but it was hardened much like the Dark Lord was.

When Severus opened the door he couldn't help but blink in sheer shock, as if he hadn't gone through enough this evening as it was. The Dark Lord was young, extremely so, he looked as though he'd barely left Hogwarts. He looked like the epitome of a pureblood, classically handsome, with the confidence to go with it. What ritual had he done to acquire his old looks? For Severus knew without a doubt that this was what the Dark Lord had looked like in his teens. He had heard those who had once upon a time been in the Dark Lord's inner-circle speaking about it in hushed revered tones.

"My Lord," Severus murmured, bowing low showing the proper amount of deference. The snake
slid from his body, rejoining her Master, and to Severus' surprise, the snake was much larger than he anticipated as the Dark Lord returned her to her normal form. They hissed for a few tense moments before the snake began to leave the room.

"Am I your lord, Severus?" Voldemort's red eyes flashed in anger as he stared down at his Potions Master, letting Nagini go hunt after her exhausting journey. Considering all he had learned that evening he had been correct in leaving Severus out when he had called his followers, forbidding them from contacting him for anything, let alone informing him that he had returned until he was aware of his true loyalties.

"I made an oath, my Lord, and I stick to it," Severus stated his voice solemn.

"To me or the old fool?" Voldemort sneered derisively, he wasn't easily manipulated, and he sensed Severus telling the truth in his own way, what and whose oath remained to be seen.

"You, My Lord," Severus said truthfully, he had made an oath to both of them, so it was strictly speaking the truth.

"Somehow I doubt that," Voldemort stated shrewdly, staring down at the wizard who had yet to stand again. "Stand up," he added, snapping a little.

Severus stood back up with a relieved sigh, he was exhausted.

"And if I asked you to bring me Harry Potter…would you do it?" Voldemort asked, his red eyes gleaming knowing he already had Severus stumped, he knew the wizard would not bring him the boy; he had seen the way Severus had looked at him. Seen how protective he was of the boy, and seen how much the boy trusted Severus as well.

"I…my lord…Harry is no threat to you, he never will be," Severus told him his entire posture tense. "You broke your promise to spare Lily, I ask of you now to spare her son," he tensed further waiting on the Crucius curse to come his way, expecting it, but nothing happened.

"I did not break my promise fully, Severus, I did try to spare her," Voldemort eventually said cutting the tense silence. "Three times I told her to stand aside, but she refused to do so. You and I both knew she would not let her son be killed…and if you expected her to stand aside then perhaps you did not know her as well as you think you did." he pointed out, his tone blank.

Severus' face spasmed as if he was in severe pain, nobody had known what had happened that night, to hear that the Dark Lord had tried to spare Lily all along was unexpected to say the least. "No, no I don't suppose she would have," it wasn't the kind of person Lily was, she loved ferociously, defended everyone, but her son…her son she would have done anything for…including giving up her life for him to live. He felt as though he was in the twilight world, he was standing having what could pass as an friendly conversation with the Dark Lord, he had not yet hissed at him, cursed him or threatened him, at least not really.

"What is wrong with the boy?" Voldemort questioned, gesturing for Severus to take a seat, his red eyes gazing at Severus' black ones intently. "What did you save him from?"

Severus couldn't help but arch an eyebrow as surprise momentarily filtered through his mask.

"I did speak to him, it doesn't take a genius to figure out who 'His Dark Protector' was," Voldemort muttered dryly, crossing his right leg over his left, poised elegantly.

Severus cursed inwardly when he felt his cheeks heat up, remembering what he had been through made him tense in anger. "Yes, I found him, and I suppose to him I have protected him." and would
continue to do so, despite the fact he didn't say it; his face said it all for him.

"Tell me everything," Voldemort demanded impatiently. "I know it has something to do with Muggles, something that has shaken the old fool's faith in them."

"That is has," Severus answered honestly. "After you attacked the Potters, Albus sent Harry to live with the only family he had left; making it an easier decision was the blood wards that would protect Harry from you."

Voldemort's eyes narrowed but he said nothing, he wanted answers and cursing Severus would make him wait even longer.

"They abused him, severely, the police came to arrest the Dursley's and found Harry in the cupboard under the stairs, and it was his bedroom." Severus scowled darkly, "He was sent to the hospital to recover, but it became obvious they weren't equipped to handle the mental difficulties, the hospital staff had to keep hunting for him because he refused to stay in bed. They kept finding him cleaning the hospital, no matter how many times they tried to make it clear he didn't have to. They transferred him to another hospital, one that could help him, the night it happened they were short staffed…he did accidental magic in front of her," he snarled ferociously at the mere mention of her.

Voldemort made a mental note, remembering the name, intending on finding them and making them pay.

"She wiped any and all mention of him off the computers and shredded the paperwork, according to the hospital he was never a patient. If I had left…Harry would still be there. Fortunately I am cautious enough and used the locating spell, I found that he was in the hospital, the spell led me underground, and she had kept him bound to a bed for years, trying to harness his magic for her own selfish greed. In the process she put magical blood into Muggles with devastating affects, he saw her doing it and it has shaken his faith in magic, the people she tried to experiment on exploded as if someone had cast an internal blasting curse on them." Severus stated grimly, "He's terrified of his magic, no matter how much I try and help him see that it's something good, that it's a person's choice that makes them good or bad. It's the second time such an instance has occurred, when he gets very emotional his magic destroys the room he's in, he needs to use magic but will not do it, and I am terrified one day that his magic will kill him,"

"And what exactly did you do to her?" Voldemort asked, vindictively.

Surprise once again filtered through Severus' usually stoic mask. "I gave her a taste of her own medicine, I just wish I had made it last a little longer," he told the Dark Lord truthfully.

"And the Dursley's?" Voldemort queried, wondering if they too had suffered similar fates.

Severus smirked darkly, "I visited Petunia in prison, if she is not yet dead she soon will be, I cast the Somnia curse on her," it would stop her from sleeping, she'd just get weaker and weaker, plagued with nightmares when she did sleep, she'd stop eating, slowly deteriorate, hallucinate until eventually her body would shut down.

"Interesting choice, Severus," Voldemort said gleefully, Severus was always quite vindictive with his spell casting; even his fellow comrades didn't dare get on his bad side.

"As I told her she should have known better than to mess with Harry," mess with Wizards really.

"And the husband?" Voldemort demanded.
"Both were in prison, I am unsure of whether he is still inside or when he will be released."
Severus stated getting Harry better was more important than left over revenge.

"Leave it to me," Voldemort stated sharply, to his surprise Severus nodded, his black eyes gleaming, he knew the tortures that awaited Vernon Dursley and he couldn't even muster up a smidgen of pity for the disgusting Muggle.

"Very well, My Lord," Severus said nodding in deference to the order.

"I want to see everything that happened to the boy," Voldemort demanded, he needed proof that this wasn't all some game to make him lower his guard when it came to Harry Potter.

Severus tensed surprised by the order, he wasn't about to let the Dark Lord poke around his mind, so there was only one way that the Dark Lord was going to get anywhere near the memories. "Do you have a pensive, My Lord?"

"Yes," Voldemort stated sharply, memories in a pensive were easier to view, easier to tell if they were tampered with, and Severus was bound to know this. He opened the drawer and removed the pensive and placed it delicately on his table, which was clean, orderly and tidy.

Severus nodded grimly, and began to remove each of the memories he felt the Dark Lord would be satisfied with. Trying to keep the ones with Albus to a minimum, or rather a single one, the day he'd found Harry. One by one, his wand directed the memories to the pensive until there was nothing more he thought important. If he wanted to leave here alive he would need to do what he could.

"Before you leave, you must swear an oath not to reveal my return to anyone unless they already know." Voldemort stated, "I'm sure I don't need to tell you what will happen if you refuse."

Severus swallowed thickly, well there went that plan to inform Dumbledore after he got back, and perhaps he should have given some sort of clue to Roz before he left.

"I'm sure it will be a comfort to you that I have no intentions of going back to the way I was, magical blood will not be spilled needlessly, it will be done through the proper channels, and with Dumbledore unknowingly helping my cause along, I have a feeling pretty soon things will be going my way. What happened to Harry Potter should never have happened in the first place, yes I am guilty of killing the boy's parents, I'll admit to that, but I would never have put him in the custody of Muggles!" he spat the word out as if it was the filthiest thing he'd ever heard. "I will make sure what happened to the boy never happens again!"

"Politics?" Severus murmured in surprise, he had heard the Dark Lord had gone down that route once, when he first started out but was blocked on all sides by Dumbledore. He wouldn't meet the same restrictions this time, perhaps he wouldn't be forced to pick sides, for he knew he would join the Dark Lord if he had to, he'd seen what Muggles had done, and what they'd done to Harry...he couldn't deny where he belonged. If the Dark Lord had no intentions of harming Harry, and swore to that effect then he would bring the boy with him if it came to it.

Things were all topsy-turvy right now, with both Albus and the Dark Lord on the same page with different methods...or perhaps the same methods now...he would need to wait and see but he knew the Dark Lord wasn't going on killing sprees, how long he'd been back well...that was a mystery in itself - one he probably wouldn't solve unless he spoke to the others - Lucius would know.

"Your oath?" Voldemort demanded, his wand rose at the ready, he didn't want to kill Severus, it would be difficult to find another decent Potions Master, and he had been his second-in-command
for a brief time, and an amusing one at that. His spell work was mesmerising to watch and to snuff that talent out would be difficult. He hoped it wouldn't be necessary.

"I would like to speak to Lucius on the matter," Severus questioned, his tone cautious.

"Very well," Voldemort said lazily, already knowing what questions the Potions Master would have on the subject, the most obvious one being how long he'd been back.

Severus nodded his thanks flicking out his wand, he swore and oath to the Dark Lord not to reveal that he had returned by any means at all. The oath was ironclad, but since it was the Dark Lord he was dealing with, it didn't surprise him that he would think of all and every means necessary.

"Shall I send Harry a snake in place of Nagini?" the Dark Lord asked amused. Wondering what Harry would make of the snake in its real size.

"No," Severus replied at once, "At least not yet, in a few months his kitten will be matured and independent, and won't be required to stay in my quarters every day, having something to talk to might help him as well."

"Very well," Voldemort stated, gesturing for him to leave, he wanted to view the memories and he wasn't going to do that with anyone in his manor.

Severus stood on shaky legs, scarcely able to believe that he had lived to leave, bowing once more before righting himself. Turning he began to leave the room, half expecting to be cursed…it had all gone too well, and things didn't go well in his experience. Yet nothing happened, he was able to leave the wards and return to Hogwarts. It mattered little whether he wanted Albus to know now since he literally couldn't his hands were tied. He was not going to lose his magic, he couldn't, and Harry needed him. In time Albus would become aware and then he would be free of the restrictions he'd just been placed under.

With a little luck maybe, Harry would mention Nagini to Albus, or the conversation he'd actually HAD with Nagini.

He snorted derisively at his own thoughts like that would ever happen.

Chapter End Notes

You all seem to like the idea of Voldemort and Dumbledore working together for a common goal, will Dumbledore make restrictions so that the Dark Lord isn't allowed to just willy-nilly hunt down Muggles? Will Dumbledore make it so that 'Tom' would become the Minister to help their goals along? Or will Voldemort do it himself under a different name with a few glamour to change his eyes and subtly change his appearance slightly and have Dumbledore guess somewhere along the line? It will not only protect Harry but it would help them secure the magical world? This story was originally at Severus/Harry story (not that it was posted here on A03) it seems to be going in a guardian way in this one...will they be bonded in a bid to help Harry and their feelings grow over the years as Harry actually matures? or would you prefer it to remain guardian Severus? If so which pairing would you like? bear in mind that it might not happen until the end of the story! R&R please
Chapter 29

My Dark Protector

Chapter 29

Severus had gone straight to bed (albeit after setting his alarm) as soon as he returned from the Dark Lord's hideout...although in all honestly it couldn't be described as a hideout. Hideouts by definition were secret, small usually, somewhere nobody would think to look. Nobody would be looking for the Dark Lord in such a place. With the possible exception of thinking whoever owned it was either terribly paranoid or dark, which in the magical world these days was enough to be considered evil. Not just by children either, but grown adults, shunning magic just because of where it came from it was idiotic at best and had led him to joining the Dark Lord as well as his hatred for Muggles.

Despite his late night and early start, not to forgot his shock last night, Severus felt very refreshed but that may have something to do with the purpose. A purpose, he flicked the alarm off immediately upon wakening up, stretching out he slid out of bed, his room and quarters already being warmed up by his House-elf, although it was slightly more chilly than usual due to the fact he had gotten up earlier he wrapped his green robe around him as he exited his room.

His mission was simple, rearranging the wards on his quarters, Harry wouldn't wake up for a few more hours yet giving him ample time to do what he needed to without having to worry about him seeing it. After last night he was going to have to do something he just didn't know what...perhaps the Dark Lord would have an idea.

Severus paused, his arm outstretched to his library door handle, completely stunned by his own thoughts. How could he even think of letting the Dark Lord come up with an idea on how to help Harry? He always trusted his gut; it's what had turned him to Dumbledore despite his obvious revulsion for all the wizard had represented at the time. His gut had been right, in a manner of speaking, he'd known deep down that Lily would die, but he hadn't realized the Dark Lord had tried to spare her. Given his reactions to what Harry had gone through, he thought perhaps that Harry would be safe. He was in no danger to anyone, and he honestly didn't think that would change. He prayed it would, Harry deserved to have a life.

There were many children outside the magical world with mental difficulties, cared after by their parents, there were a few in the magical world hidden away also and raised in secret from time to time. The rest were admittedly in St. Mungo's, the families making the difficult decision for both their's and their child's sake especially with magic getting out of hand. It would be the best thing for Harry if he took him away from Britain showed him the world, but if magic was exposed...Harry would be exposed. It all came back around to binding Harry's magic, but he had absolutely no idea if he could create a potion to do such a thing, and it wasn't his abilities called into question it was his heart, he had no idea if he could give it to him. The thought alone left him cold, disgusted and there wasn't much that could do that to him.

Shaking off his thoughts, he would think on them later, right now he had something more important to do. Opening the door he swiftly made his way over to where he knew he kept his books on warding. Each book was placed into a section, and then by title the biggest section of course comes as no surprise - Potions then by a few books Defence. His darker books (illegal by
the Ministry's standards - which would see you in Azkaban or severely fined with the books removed) were kept in his vault at Gringotts in a trunk for safe keeping.

Severus began to remove them from the shelf, one at a time and placing them on the desk nearest to him, not stopping until he had practically every single book on warding he had - with the obvious exception on the books that explained warding but without the spells themselves - which was useless to him he knew the book from back to front and also knew the best way to ward properties. Flicking his wand he levitated the books and swiftly exited the library - the books bobbling up and down along side him until he once again flicked his wand and set them on the table.

Severus wasted no time in sitting down, reading through the index pages, opening them at the chapters he desired until each book had been opened. Nodding firmly, those were exactly what he wanted, it was annoying that he would need to add the others to the wards yet again, but he'd persevere. He wasn't sure how exactly the Dark Lord had succeeded in getting his familiar into his rooms and back out, but if he could do it then others just might. Animagus wards as well as wards to prevent animals unless otherwise approved by him.

Stretching out once he had the plan set and an order for the wards to go up in, breathing out almost in a huff before layer by layer, Severus removed the added wards he'd placed in his home. Truly it was the only home he'd ever had, Spinners End wasn't a home, it was a rundown house he'd inherited from his mother and father, he'd never bothered to sell it, despite his distaste for the memories it evoked it was a place to stay, he spent two months nearly three out of an entire year there that is if he did return there after the school was let out.

"Roz?" Severus called out as he fell back onto the couch with a grunt, he'd just tore down a decades worth of spells in less than ten minutes, he'd need to eat a quick breakfast before beginning to add the new ones.

"What can Roz do for Master Severus?" the House-elf asked sounding chipper and cheerful as ever.

"I see you've made a full recovery?" Severus questioned looking her over, it appeared as though she just might have, his words weren't a statement they were in fact a question. Looks could be deceptive especially a head injury.

"I'm just fine, Master Severus, Mistress Poppy made sure," Roz said, awed inwardly that he cared to make sure she was fine, there weren't many wizards or witches that cared one iota for her kind, she had been lucky enough to get one that did care. Most House-elves made their way to Hogwarts when they were freed in hopes of a home and sanctuary; she had as well and had been picked as Mistress Poppy's personal House-elf because she needed the extra help.

"Good, I'm glad to hear that," Severus said, and he surprisingly was, he knew Harry would be as well. "I'm sure Harry will be relieved you made a full recovery too."

"Is Master Harry going to be okay?" Roz asked, staring at the floor, eyes filled with worry, she had no idea what exactly was wrong with him, but she'd been there from the beginning and knew it was bad. He wasn't like normal teenager wizards, he'd been hurt badly and she hoped she hadn't put him back.

"He will recover with time," Severus explained, saying nothing more on the subject due to the fact he honestly didn't know how Harry would be upon wakening up.

"What can Roz do for Master Severus?" Roz then asked seeing that she'd been called for a reason, they always were but it was nice to have someone concerned about her.
"Could you bring me up some breakfast from the kitchen?" Severus enquired, wiping his sweaty brow hastily, only for further sweat to bead upon it. They should have started at least to cook breakfast, since they were making it for over a two hundred students, it was always looked and spelled under a heating charm then sent up in time for the students to eat.

"Roz will do that right away," the House-elf promised, before leaving the room with a pop seeing as Harry wasn't there.

Severus relaxed when he was on his own again, he was anxious about how Harry would deal with being on his own with just the House-elf, perhaps allowing Black to have longer contact with Harry might be needed. Black had been respectful of the limits, doing what was required and Harry had calmed somewhat with him. Although he had been there supervising the hour Black was in the room with him. Five hours between breakfast and lunch was a long time to leave Black with anything…let alone Harry.

He wasn't wasting any magic given what he was about to do, so he stood up and made his way over to the Floo, threw some powder in calling out the Defence quarters, watching it flare green, waiting on someone answering, more than likely it would be Lupin.

He was presently surprised to be proven wrong.

"What's it?" Sirius muttered blearily, having stuck his head in the Floo.

"Would you spend the morning with him?" Severus asked, gritting his teeth loathing asking Black for anything, but Harry came first. He idly also wondered why Sirius Black was awake so early, but considering the years in Azkaban the nightmares must be horrific.

"What happened?" Sirius' tone sharpened as he deduced something had occurred lately, concern mingled with determination. Of course he would help, this was his godson. He had also heard Severus gritting his teeth, and understood why. Merlin, he was so glad Severus had laid into him; it had made him see sense, see reason.

"I'm not explaining where we can be overheard, just get down here if you want to see him," Severus retorted sharply, no doubt there wasn't any silencing charms in the area so if someone was listening…well he wasn't going to chance it. It was why he hadn't said Harry's name.

"Alright," Sirius said in agreement, "I'll Floo down." knowing it was bad if Severus didn't even want to discuss it.

Pinching the bridge of his nose, he turned around, the smell of breakfast wafting through the air, Roz must have returned while he conversed with Black, the food was there but the House-elf was gone. The enticing aroma of black coffee had him straight over and pouring himself a cup.

Not even a few moments later the Floo flared and Black stepped out, a puzzled look on his face.

"There's something different about this place," Sirius admitted the puzzled frown still on his face, as he tried to figure it out. Looking around the rooms but everything was as it should be. Then he realized what it was, "Magic…the wards…what happened? Did Harry accidentally remove them?" he gaped at the thought.

Severus didn't snort; it was a big possibility that Harry just might do something like that one of these days. "No, I removed them."

"I don't get it, what happened? Why would you remove them?" Sirius blurted as he sat down hesitantly, he was never sure what would set Severus off any given day he was a grouchy bugger.
Severus narrowed his eyes shrewdly, observing Black, wondering if he could take the news without making him furious and forbidding Black from ever contacting Harry again. "Harry has a power...one that surprised me greatly," Severus admitted, "A power you will automatically 'claim' as dark just because of one person who had that power did not use it for good."

Sirius refrained from scoffing, as if he'd ever judge his godson. His mind mulling over all potential gifts that wizarding world was known for. It obviously wasn't a Metamorphamagus; the only person he knew with the gift was his cousin, Nymphadora Tonks. A seer was also out of the question, although it did fit one of the categories, he loathed Trelawney, but it wasn't dark per se. An Animagus was also ruled out since he knew more than one...and he himself was as well. He couldn't see it being an Occlumens or Legilimens. He gave up, he just couldn't think of anything he despised, in ways of gifts wizards were known for.

It was at the height of irony that it was the only gift left out.

"He's a Parselmouth, he has the ability to speak to reptiles, and it's what caused the incident last night. Roz used magic to return the snake to the forbidden forest; Harry's magic reacted and blasted the House-elf off its feet." Severus explained what he could; he had no desire to lose his magic. "His outbursts are getting stronger, Black, more powerful."

Sirius felt dread consume him, regardless of what he'd just learned seconds prior, it prevented him from doing something stupid at any rate. The thought of losing his godson before even knowing him properly hurt so severely that his heart twisted in agony. "What do we do?" Sirius whispered, wide eyed, "What do we do?" he added seeing the look on Severus' face, he knew even Snape didn't have an idea.

Severus just stared grimly - he had absolutely no idea and it showed.

"No, no, we can't let anything happen to him, Snape, please, there must be something we can do," Sirius begged.

"I have an idea...but it's not a good one, even I do not want to contemplate it." Severus admitted tiredly, he didn't want this resting solely on his shoulders.

"Why?" Sirius questioned blankly.

"A potion, to bind his magic," Severus revealed, the twisted look on Black's face said it all. "Exactly, the thought isn't a nice one but if he continues on this downward spiral he's going to die." as well as anyone in his vicinity.

Grimacing in pain at the thought of his godson having his magic bound, realising that Snape must be out of options to even think about it let alone tell him. How the hell could they think about it? It was wrong on so many levels to bind someone's magic...but what if it could save his godson's life? What if it truly was the only way to save him and give him a normal unencumbered life? Magic hadn't been all that kind to him, if it came to it he'd gladly leave the magical world behind and take Harry with him.

"Do you think it will come to that?" Sirius whispered hoarsely.

"I hope not," Severus admitted grimly.

"Yeah, me too," Sirius agreed. "Could St. Mungo's have something that could help?" upon seeing the look on his face he hasted to explain himself. "I'm not going to do anything stupid by asking or anything like that! I swear I'm just trying to think of something...someway to help him."
"It better remain that way, and no I've looked down that road, I've not come up with anything other than the fact the Healers and Medi-witches keep them sedated, or filled with calming draughts, it's all they can do," Severus relaxed then explained further, glad that he wasn't going to have to watch Black's every step. "Such a potion doesn't exist and nobody wants it to."

Sirius nodded grimly in understanding and agreement, his brow furrowed as he stared at the floor thinking.

Severus was grateful that he was, for at that moment his mark flared up, and Severus was only just able to keep his face mask and obscured any sign of pain that the flare caused, thankfully though once it had gotten his attention it cooled immediately. "Harry is going to be scared, you call Roz and get him to see that he hasn't hurt anyone, there's a collection of new books in his room that he will enjoy, read to him. He hasn't had breakfast yet, so make sure he has something, and whatever you do, don't talk about or use magic."

"I know, I'm not stupid," Sirius replied, "I know the rules by now." it annoyed him that Snape thought he'd be lax when it came to his godson. He was doing his best to keep himself in Harry's life without screwing up and he was succeeding damn it.

"It wouldn't be the first time you've ignored them," Severus stated sharply, a vision of Lupin's wolf form flashing before his eyes.

Sirius swallowed thickly, giving a small nod to concede that Snape was right, but it didn't mean he should be that way forever.

"I will be back in time for Lunch, just don't mess up, and if things go south call the House-elf do not attempt to deal with it yourself." Severus cautioned him.

"Alright," Sirius agreed, barely stopping his jaw from dropping, he was actually going to be unsupervised? For what six hours? Alone with Harry? Snape obviously trusted him to a certain extent.

Severus stood up, gulping down the now cooled coffee; he needed something in his stomach. He did nab a few pieces of toast before leaving. He was risking it as it was; he'd called over five minutes ago. Yet he honestly couldn't bring himself to care, the Dark Lord knew he had someone to take care off, and disappearing all the time was going to raise questions he couldn't answer! Literally!

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"Enter!" the Dark Lord called out to Severus, knowing it was him; he had been the one he called after all.

"My Lord," Severus murmured quietly bowing low.

"Sit down, we have much to discuss you and I," the Dark Lord stated sharply, not in the mood to see Severus bowing before him when he wasn't one hundred percent loyal to their cause anymore.

Severus took a seat almost dumbly, discuss…what could they have to discuss? "My Lord?" he questioned, confused and concerned.

"Has Harry Potter ever changed?" the Dark Lord commanded.

"Changed?" Severus echoed, "In what way?"
"Physically," the Dark Lord replied. "Such as an ash-coloured, tendril-equipped cloud,"

"Definitely not," Severus stated, wondering what the Dark Lord was thinking.

"Yet his magic explodes from him?" the Dark Lord stated calmly, shrewdly.

"Yes," Severus answered feeling cautious.

"It's possible that he's an Obscurial*," the Dark Lord informed him, twitching his hand in the direction of his desk, and a book began to float over to Severus to let him read up on it, it wasn't exactly the most known piece of information in the world, more known in America than it is in Britain. However, they used to be well known due to the fact there were more of them, not so much anymore.

Severus read the first page, gulping upon reading it, this was bad...this was very, very bad.

Chapter End Notes

*An Obscurial is a magical person who doesn't perform magic. It makes a person strange and dangerous at uncontrollable times, with magic exploding out of you. And it's definitely a threat to the International Statute of Secrecy and they kill them without a seconds thought! (THOSE WHO HAVE WATCHED FANTASTIC BEASTS WILL ALREADY KNOW THIS) So will Harry be an Obscurial? or will he be able to start using his magic and prove them all wrong? If it's required who would you like to see Harry bonded to? Tom or Severus? R&R please!
Chapter 30

Severus sat across from Albus as he read a book, the book the Dark Lord had given him, not the same book, this one was from his own collection one that had been read only once. Despite that though the book had been well kept, much like the rest of his books he treasured knowledge and books were what eighty-five percent of knowledge came from. He hadn't spoken a word much to Albus' confusion; instead he had spread the book open at the appropriate page and sat down. He watched as Albus paled, not liking the thought anymore than he did.

"It can't be," Albus murmured quietly, his blue eyes wide with shock. "Most die before their tenth birthday…only one is known to have reached adulthood due to their immense powers."

"You knew one?" Severus rasped, why had he never said anything?

"Knew? Not so much, but I do know that Grindelwald was involved with Credence Barebone and he caused the young man immense pain, so much so that his obscures manifested and they were forced to kill him and thus the parasite." Dumbledore admitted his face ashen, "Newt Salamander tried to help him but he was far too gone."

"So he could be one?" Severus had hoped that Albus would assuage his fears not cause them to rise to greater heights.

"Harry has suffered severe trauma both by his Muggle relatives and that woman, he is suppressing his magic…it could come to that," Albus admitted, rubbing his eyes tiredly. "Not all children who suppress their magic become one, Ariana did not, and she was powerful just like me and Aberforth so power doesn't always mean becoming an obscures."

"I pray that is the case," Severus sighed; feeling just was tired as Albus all of a sudden.

"It may be the fact that Harry wasn't conscious for much of the time that has saved him from such a fate so young, or he isn't suppressing his magic as much and as far as we believe." Albus admitted, his shrewd nature beginning to take hold. "Part of him may actually be accepting of his magic, it's hard to tell, but what we do know is that he isn't showing any of the signs other than suppressing his magic which we can only consider a good thing."

Severus felt himself un-tensing a little, yes, it was a good thing, he had been thinking it but only with someone else's opinion did it truly hold weight. How did he get Harry to accept magic fully? If he did then there was no way for the parasite (if it existed in Harry) to thrive and it would die off surely? Nothing much was written in the book, nothing good about them at any rate. Was he doing Harry more damage by not trying more? Perhaps taking him out to see more magical areas might help him. Not Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade, but the lesser visited areas, by Merlin he felt so torn. He honestly didn't know what to do and it wasn't like him. He always made a decision and stayed the course, to feel torn was ridiculous, and he didn't like it.

"How do we do it? How do we get him to accept magic?" Severus enquired, hiding his desperation barely; he suspected Albus would see right through his mask at least today.
"I do not spend as much time with Harry as you do, regrettfully, so I am not really in any position to help you with that, Severus, but I will do all I can to help you." Albus promised, "You do not seem yourself, is everything aright?" the headmaster then asked Severus, staring at him in that maddening way.

Severus straightened up, his mask falling fully into place; he might not be able to actually say anything but hopefully the Headmaster would put the pieces together. One day he would find out, and honestly? Considering the Dark Lord looked younger and saner than he remembered him, he was in for quite a shock and he hoped he was there to see it. Albus didn't exactly surprise easily, not something he should look forward to but he was a man who found amusement in the oddest of things. "I'm fine," he answered.

He would be when he found out how best to deal with introducing magic to a traumatised teenager who was mentally still a child in many ways. Sighing resignedly, he pinched the bridge of his nose; his lips were pursed as he tried to think of something. Harry truly had enjoyed himself out on the outing to Ireland. Perhaps showing more good experiences in the magical world would help? "I best get back to Harry, who knows what Black is doing," he rolled his eyes in exasperation.

"My door is always open, Severus," Albus said watching Severus stand up ready to depart.

Severus nodded grimly and then left without a word.

Albus stared at the closed door, praying with all his might to any deity that would listen for that not to be Harry's fate, for if anything happened…it wouldn't just be Harry and Severus or himself for that matter but the entirety of Hogwarts would be consumed by the uncontrollable power. So consumed in his worry for Harry he completely disregarded Severus' worries as the same thing.

Perhaps it was a good thing all things considered, since there were many things in motion that might not have otherwise happened.

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Severus had to mask his worries as he approached the door to his quarters, as in completely shut them down, Harry could read body language and the smallest sign of him being upset would cause Harry to be either scared or worried himself and Severus didn't want that. Which was another reason why he didn't like Black spending too much time with Harry, with him wearing all his emotions on his sleeve.

Opening the door he was surprised to see that Black had actually gotten Harry dressed and out into the living room, he was reading to him in a horrific tone of voice but Harry he observed, seemed to like it. Neither man missed the pure unadulterated relief pouring from Harry when he noticed Severus. Surprisingly Black didn't react very much on that front, was he getting used to the fact he wouldn't be number one in Harry's life?

"Good morning, Harry," Severus said, giving him a small smile, completely ignoring Black for the moment.

"Good morning, Sev'rus," Harry said, smiling widely at his dark protector with childish innocence. Normally such a look on a teenager would be extremely daunting to say the least, fortunately or perhaps unfortunately Harry was nowhere near the right weight or height for his age.

"Have you eaten breakfast, yet?" Severus asked, ignoring the fact his name had been mangled yet again, he would get there.
"We saved some for you," Harry said proudly, and Roz had commended him on his forethought, which meant it was nice of him to think of his Dark Protector according to Sirius, which Harry thought a funny name.

"Thank you," Severus replied, "Did you feed the kitten?" he refused to use the name when anyone was near, judging by the small grin on Sirius' face he'd obviously been let in on the kittens name.

"Yes," Harry answered, knowing better than to reply with an 'uh-huh' it was hard sometimes to remember but without other people ever saying it, it became easier to imitate everyone around him.

Since it was always adults, it was never a problem.

"How would you like to visit Abartagh Alley with me today?" Severus asked, sitting down to his meal, as always eating with manners that his pureblood mother had instilled in him since infancy, despite having a drunk father she had imparted him with the most important information he needed to survive.

"Can I see the snakes?" Harry asked wide eyed and hopeful, he'd seen a lot of animals, but had fixated on the beautiful fish and the water that time, he could recall vaguely seeing snakes before they went to the shop that sold the cats.

Sirius swallowed back the automatic words that had been on the tip of his tongue. The urge to show his distaste was strong; he couldn't do that, not to Harry. He would never get to see him again if that happened. Seeing the look on Harry's face eased something inside him and made it a little better. Harry looked so happy at Snape's confirmation that they could see the snakes that he could never, ever bring himself to say anything wrong or bad about them. He was so innocent, it hurt, and it hurt so badly that he had to suppress tears.

"Go and get your coat, Harry," Severus told him, standing up himself and placing the half eaten plate on the kitchen counter before returning. By then Harry had got up and was slowly making his way to his bedroom, his lips twitched seeing it, he'd come a long way. Unfortunately he couldn't go a long journey without the walker, so he would be using it when they were out. Harry got irritated at having to use it, wanting so badly to be independent at least walking wise. Harry still had a long way to go before they would know whether he would be able to live independently or if he would be dependant on others for the rest of his life. If he lived that long, he thought a shudder making its way up his spine thinking of what he'd read.

"What's wrong?" Severus enquired of Black, a frown making its way onto his face; did Black know something he didn't? He looked choked up, how far had he fallen that he was enquiring after Black's health? He couldn't let Harry see it anyway, so he brushed it off as concern for Harry not Black.

"He's just so...innocent," he choked out, how the hell could he survive this world when he saw how bad it could be? Would he even want to? Would he retreat further into himself?

Severus' lip curled distastefully, "Get yourself together, all things considered it's a good thing, he can start over see the world as he should have...get a second chance of a normal life for as long as we are able but hear this Black, he will never forget what happened to him. He is not as innocent as you think." he wasn't under the illusion they could wrap Harry in cotton wool and keep him oblivious to everything. One day he would find out how nasty the magical world could really be, but Severus would do his best to ensure that Harry could understand and process it before that happened.

Sirius nodded slowly, breathing out deeply gathering his wits around him. "May I accompany both
of you?" he asked, this was the most time he'd spent with his godson and he didn't want it to end. He was pushing his luck he knew, but he had to try.

"You cannot go looking like that," Severus stated he couldn't risk anyone putting the pieces together.

"Glamours or Poly juice potion?" Sirius asked, too excited to care if he had to chug down the disgusting potion. He also didn't pretend that Snape had at least five vials stashed somewhere with random hairs from Muggles in a box beside them. He'd had them during the last war anyway and he'd bet five galleons he still had a similar stash. Ever the spy he had everything he'd need for a quick getaway.

"Glamours can weaken," Severus stated, "The only problem is Harry understanding," glamours or the potion it was still magic, and how the hell could they make him understand? Especially without freaking out? It was regretful really but he couldn't be seen with Sirius bloody Black, especially not with Harry in tow.

"Maybe I should go another time," Sirius said, inwardly dismayed, but Harry's health came first.

"No," Severus said with a speculative look on his face, "I think it's time to show him little bits of more magic."

"Then if we are...I'm better off just going in my Animagus form?" Sirius trailed off hopefully.

Severus glanced thoughtfully at Black before nodding, the Dark Lord and his forces knew about Black's Animagus form, but other than that, the general public didn't. It would be perfectly safe for him to go as a dog, it wasn't unusual to see.

"What if freaks out?" Sirius asked worriedly, his eyes shadowed, he had never seen any of the episodes that he'd been told about and quite honestly he didn't want to witness one.

"Then the trip will have to wait for another day," Severus answered, glancing when he heard Harry coming back out of the room, he already had his cloak on that explained what had taken so long.

"We aren't going?" Harry questioned having heard the tail end of their conversation, disappointment showing clear as day on his face. While he didn't like seeing so many people, he did want to see the snakes and other animals like the ones in his books they looked and sounded so fascinating.

"We are, but first...Sirius has something he wishes to show you, isn't that right?" Severus said glancing at Black for confirmation.

Harry's delight came back; he didn't care what they had to show him they were still going.

"Sirius has a very special ability that he can do with magic," Severus explained quietly ignoring the flinch that accompanied the word that Harry so desperately hated, or perhaps it was a combination of hatred and fear who really knew? "There is an ability called Animagi, people who can accomplish it turn into an Animagus, an animal."

"I can turn into a dog," Sirius explained in a way that Harry would understand right now. "Would you like to see?" the hurt was returning, to see Harry so afraid of the word magic hurt, it should be such a wondrous thing, but he was acting as though it was physically painful to hear the word. He waited patiently for Harry to decide, it had to be up to him, he couldn't force showing magic to Harry. The books he'd read made it clear it had to be done at Harry's pace, everything must be done to his pace if they had any hopes of wanting him to get better.
"A dog?" Harry repeated haltingly and hesitantly.

"That's right," Sirius said kneeling down, "A black one, about this height," he said gesturing with his hand to the size that 'Padfoot' roughly stood. "I like to call him Padfoot."

Harry just stared blankly; he didn't understand how magic could make you turn into a dog. Green eyes turned beseechingly into the dark eyes of his protector, he didn't understand, he didn't like this. He just wanted to go outside and see the odd named alley again.

"He would like to come with us…but as a dog," Severus explained, not giving him the real truth since he probably wouldn't be able to digest that anymore than he could understand how magic could turn you into a dog. Just like a child wouldn't understand especially disillusioned to magic as Harry was.

Harry nodded just once, showing he understood, then watched wide eyed as Sirius transformed into a dog before his very eyes. A scraggy black dog that was on its belly whining, its tail wagging watching him closely, its tongue out. Harry stepped back stumbling slightly, not sure what to make of it. His breathing ragged as he tried to keep a hold of himself.

"Easy, Harry, deep breaths and think of a happy place," Severus said soothingly, his tone hiding his worry. "Think of swimming, the water," knowing that Harry loved being in the water above all else. If anything could calm him down and prevent another outburst of magic it was that. Standing there watching him something stuck Severus, almost completely blindsiding him. Harry was essentially a child with no control over his magic; he just needed to learn how to control it. When he learnt to control it and no longer had outbursts then he wouldn't be afraid of it. Merlin help him, he had never felt this way before, and he loathed the constant changing of his thoughts. Enough was enough, he would do his best by Harry and that was it. "You can do it." to his immense pride he managed to keep himself focused. "Well done."

Harry wasn't listening though, he was desperately thinking of the water, the gentle waves and the warmth that radiated from the room which helped stop the feeling like he would explode. He didn't like being dirty and absolutely loved baths of any kind; he remembered the first one he'd had in a long time despite how sore he was he'd enjoyed it so much. He never wanted to lose that, but it seemed to him that they wanted him to like magic when every instinct was screaming at him not to. His life was so different now, all his life he'd seen magic as something horrible, disgusting, freakish, now it seemed they thought it was normal. He came back to himself with the feeling of a hat being placed over his head, and a scarf around his neck, his Dark Protector, he wanted so badly to make him proud.

"Ready?" Severus questioned softly, tugging his cloak further around him so he would be warm enough.

Harry nodded, not even bothered by the dog/man anymore.

"Good, then let's go, the students will all be in their classes at the moment," Severus stated but without his sharp tongue. The ones that didn't have classes would either be in their common rooms or the library studying…or the lazy ones doing absolutely nothing.

He could scarcely believe he was actually bringing Black along…he must have inhaled too many potion fumes lately it was the only reason he would be contemplating this.

Together the three of them left Severus' quarters after Harry was situated with his walker, with a pout on his face - he didn't like using it - even with it they took over three times the normal length they usually took to get to the edge of the wards, which was thirty minutes, even factoring in using
the coaches. It surprised neither of them that Harry could see the Thestrals (he had seen people blow up with negative affects to being injected with magical blood after all), and since they were in his animal books he didn't seem daunted by their appearance.

Luckily enough nobody other than the Bloody Baron saw them, and he had just floated on past disinterested but did give a nod of respect to Severus.

"This might feel a little jarring," Severus said honestly, they were Apparating today, it was a risk but it was one he was going to have to take. He was going to have to take more risks and open Harry up to magic fully. "I want you to close your eyes and hold your breath for as long as you can."

Harry's brow furrowed, "Okay," he replied, doing as his Dark Protector requested.

As soon as Harry did so, Severus came up behind him and wrapped his right arm behind him, grabbing Black a lot less delicately before Apparating - not risking waiting too long not breathing helped relieve a lot of the symptoms of Apparating so he wished to do it while Harry was holding his breath.

Severus aimed for a familiar place for Harry, the fountain that he'd found so enchanting the last time he'd visited. He was very pleased Harry didn't have a bad reaction to the magical means of transport. He held onto his walker tightly, wide eyed but relatively calm. The first place he was aiming for was the jewellers to get a fixed focus stone for Harry, one that responded and resonated with his magic that would be able to help him.

Padfoot watched the interaction between the two; he opened his mouth to tell Harry about the Quidditch players on the fountain only to realize he couldn't. All that would come out of his mouth was a bark, since Harry hadn't reacted really well to his Animagus for he decided against startling him. Quite frankly he was amazed that Snape would let him come, perhaps he had him all wrong. He'd assumed that he'd never see Harry, that Snape would take revenge for everything he'd done.

"Let's go, Harry," Severus said, getting the boy's attention, "We will visit a few shops before going to the magical Menagerie."

Severus as always went at Harry's pace not showing any sign of impatience with the stroll. His eyes automatically began to roam around the area, paranoid to the extreme especially now that he knew the Dark Lord was back. Speaking of which he'd meant to talk to Lucius and find out just how long he had been back. Something he had so far been unable to do as of yet. It wasn't easy when you were the sole caretaker of someone who was unable to do much for themselves.

"In here, Harry," Severus said five minutes later after walking by many shops to get to his desired destination. Dogs were allowed in the shops in the Magical world so Padfoot was able to come in with them. He was gratified to see that there wasn't a single person in the shop at the moment so he would be seen relatively quickly. Nobody was at the front of the shop, but no doubt they had been alerted to someone coming in.

"Can I help you, Sir?" the gentlemen asked, giving his new customer his undivided attention. Severus noticed that he did not have an Irish accent; if he was not mistaken there was a hint of an American accent there.

"I would like a focus stone for my ward," Severus explained, his voice smooth and confident. Minerva had bought one for Harry the first trip to the alley but it hadn't worked for him; it was just a piece of jewellery. They should have known to take Harry to the shop and get one that was uniquely his. No matter, what was done was done.
"Of course, why don't you come over here, the seating area might be more comfortable," the wizard said, giving Harry a once over. Focus stones were used by people of all ages so there was nothing the slightest bit strange about requesting one.

Severus nodded once and they made their way over, passing the glass encased shelves filled with all manner of jewellery, it was quite a large shop and had many items on display, most of it was expensive things, but there were things hanging up that had been cheaply made but nonetheless colourful. The found the seating area quite quickly and Harry was the only one who sat down, the wizard was currently opening the cases and bringing out two trays that held the focus stones in a wide array of different colours and sizes.

"How is my first customer today?" the wizard asked cheerfully, as he approached them, placing both trays on the counter nearby.

Harry's eyes flickered to Severus who gave him a reassuring look, before returning to the wizard and gave him a shy smile and said "Fine," before remembering his manners, "Thank you," he added even more shyly. He wasn't used to talking to many people or anyone really.

"Alright," the wizard said, the child was extremely shy, barely able to make eye contact, he briefly wondered what on earth he had been through before getting down to business. "Now all you need to do is touch each of those stones until one lights up, the one that lights up is right for you." he told the young boy, speaking slowly and clearly for him. With that he picked the tray back up and knelt down holding the tray of stones firmly in his hands, waiting on him getting to it. One glance at the dark clad wizard showed gratitude. Yes, this boy had definitely had a tough time of it at one point in his life.

Harry's eyes once again flickered to his Dark Protectors looking to him for the answers, once he got a nod of confirmation that he was safe and it was alright, his hand raised shakily and unsure at first, but upon touching the stones and nothing happening he was much less hesitant. That was until he touched the purple agate and gasped as it light up brightly.

"Very good," the wizard said, "Keep going," most wizards and witches had more than one compatibility when it came to focus stones.

It didn't surprise Severus that amethyst would be on his list; it was the strongest of all gems. Aragonite was a surprise, despite the fact it really shouldn't be. It was the one stone that was most in tune with Mother Nature, Gaia as she was often called and he seems endlessly fascinated with water, another element of earth. All in all Harry had four potentials by the time he was through, Tigers eye, Amethyst, Aragonite and Agate. The stones themselves were small, smaller than a Knut.

"He will have them all," Severus informed the wizard before he could think of asking Harry which one called to him more.

"Melded together or separate?" the wizard straightened up, probing questioningly.

"Which way would they be stronger?" Severus questioned curiously.

"Melded together, definitely," the wizard informed him, they were all similar to one another that they would work well together. "How would you like it done? Any particular shape?"

Severus' lips twitched, "A snake," he decided, "With black rope, it will ensure its safety much better than silver or gold." Harry's eyes widened at that, understanding what was going on...he was going to get something made in the shape of a snake.
"I can have it done within two days," the wizard told them, standing up taking the four stones and putting them into a pouch before carrying the rest back to their spot and placing them securely inside. "As for the snake…silver encasing?"

"Yes," Severus confirmed, "I would like to be able to imbue a calming spell into it,"

The wizard nodded, writing information down quickly before passing it to Severus to fill out. Letting him decide whether to come back for it or he could sent it via owl. He could also pay a deposit on it or pay in full. When the paperwork was returned he found that Severus Snape had paid in full and wanted it delivered to Hogwarts. There was a slip at the bottom made out so the money came out of his Gringotts account.

"It will be with you within two days," he promised, placing the paperwork and stones to the side, he would take them to the back and work on them when he had free time. Which he did not right now he realized, as the door opened, and another customer walked in.

"Good," Severus nodded firmly, "Thank you," with that he moved back over beside Harry, and he was sitting where he left him watching him intently - no doubt making sure he didn't just disappear.

"Ready to go to the magical Menagerie?" Severus asked making sure that Harry was well enough for it, magic always made him feel out of sorts. It was why he liked to cast a few pieces of magic here and there like the cats water in the safety of his quarters where Harry himself felt safest.

Evidently not willing to miss the opportunity, Harry nodded eagerly.

"Very well, perhaps you would like to pick out a sweet afterwards?" he suggested, nothing to big or sugary, at least not all at one time, Harry's body wouldn't be able to take it, having gone so long without.

The blinding smile on Harry's face was answer enough.

He sincerely hoped that he could keep that happiness on Harry's face for as long as humanly possible.

Chapter End Notes

There we go! To clear things up the bond will be a parental one the old story might have had Severus/Harry but this cannot be, it will have no pairing I'm afraid...the old version was nowhere near as realistic as this one, especially for all Harry went through! so whether it's Tom/Harry/Severus bond or Severus/Harry bond it won't be a marriage bond just one to help Harry harness his magic :) which way it goes I don't mind I'm making this up as I go it long ago diverted from its original storyline :) by that I mean before the end of the first chapter it was deviating LOL! anyway there you go I hope you still enjoy it and Harry is still realistic! Will we see more magical explosions before Harry needs help then begins to harness control over it? R&R please
Sirius accompanied Severus and Harry into every shop, their progress was slow, almost maddeningly for him who could go at a faster pace due to his four legged state at the moment. He never once complained though, he just trotted along beside them, he was so happy when Harry petted him even if it was only for a few seconds before he assumed Harry remembered that he was in disguise and not an actual dog. He wasn't sure if it was that or not, but he felt elated, in this form he was also able to hear the quiet murmured praise Severus was giving Harry every now and again.

"How about we get you that sweet now?" Severus enquired, having paid for his purchased items at the till, glancing at Harry, always making sure to ask him what he wanted and get his opinion.

Harry nodded a beam of delight spreading across his face; he didn't get many treats so he loved it when he did. His Dark Protector said it wasn't punishment or because he was bad, it was just that his tummy couldn't and wouldn't be able to handle sugar very well because of how unhealthy he had been due to not being fed properly for so long. It just made it extra special when he received them though. Especially the small pieces of chocolate cake or a miniature strawberry tart those were his favourites. He wrinkled his nose at the horrible smells, it reminded him of the Potions lab, but not quite so strong or repugnant.

Severus' lips twitched at the innocent delight on Harry's face, glancing briefly at Black, worried he'd start getting overwhelmed again. He couldn't make out anything on his canine face, but abruptly dismissed his thoughts, he wasn't going to be responsible for Black, if he screwed up then it was on him he'd been warned often enough. Glancing back at Harry, he took his shoulders and began to guide them out of the thankfully mostly empty apothecary. Those Harry's age could learn a thing or two about enjoying the moments in life they constantly took for granted.

As always he kept an eye on Harry as he walked, making sure he was alright and reacting well to things around him. The last thing he'd ever wish to do was overwhelm Harry, while sure he'd need to take Harry out of his comfort zone for him to grow, now wasn't that time, perhaps once he had accepted magic, grown to control it, then they could do things that might push him in the right direction. His black eyes sharpened when they noticed a bounce in Harry's step, something very easily missed, he followed Harry's line of sight to the ice cream shop. He debated with himself whether to ask Harry or see if the boy would ask himself. He inwardly snorted bitterly at the thought; he wasn't at the extent where he would ask for such a thing.

"Would you like some ice cream after?" Severus enquired, no doubt he could do with a rest as well, he had been fantastic so far, and he was out without his trolley for the first time. He'd been in a few shops; the walking he'd done was more than he usually would. He had a vial in his pocket just in case Harry needed it.

"Really?" Harry completely lit up, eagerly nodding his head.

"Yes," Severus replied, his tone as always calm and comforting when Harry was concerned. He felt
prideful and content that he was able to bring such light into Harry's life after all he'd been through. How he could trust again was beyond his understanding, he was glad for it, don't get him wrong, but he wasn't sure he would have had it in him to trust again. He was one of a kind; he deserved all the happiness that could be brought to him. Knowing that the Dark Lord didn't seem interested in harming Harry judging by his actions was a relief. Even though he couldn't warn Albus, from what he could deduce the wizard had been back quite a while, something he intended on finding out the full details from Lucius perhaps after lunch when they returned or dinner.

"Yes, please!" Harry said remembering his words, unsure of how to feel with all the excitement coursing through him, he left like jumping up and down and squealing, but he did neither of those things. Not sure of the reaction it would elicit from everyone around him, he wasn't used to these feelings, he hadn't truly felt them so much before.

"Sweets first," Severus informed him, guiding him towards the sweet shop.

"That dog cannot come in here!" called out a loud stern yelling voice that caused Harry to freeze and cringe as memories assaulted him.

Severus threw the woman a scathing look before his attention was on Harry. His thumb moved in a soothing circle at the back of his spine, pressing down so that he could focus on it, moving so he was standing in front of Harry, so he didn't see the despicable woman. "Harry, nobody will hurt you, I won't let them talk to me little one, come on, and you can do it, think of your safe place," he whispered determinedly into his ears.

They couldn't hurt him here, they couldn't hurt him here, Harry thought desperately as memories of Petunia and the doctor assaulted him. The voice…it was so similar to theirs it had caught him off guard. His Dark Protector touching him anchored him, stopping him from collapsing as the memories assaulted him. They couldn't get him, he was safe, his Dark Protector would keep him safe, safe place, safe place, water, the pool, and slowly but surely the memories began to quieten, leaving him feeling shaken but calm. "Out, I want to get out of here," Harry pleaded, he didn't want to see her…didn't want to be here anymore.

"Of course, just take a deep breath for me," Severus murmured quietly turning them around, ignoring Black's concerned glances as he did so. "In and out, there we go, easy does it." having been watching Harry while he spoke, and Severus was ninety percent sure that Harry had just occluded his mind, he had calmed down far too quickly for it to be anything else. His 'safe place' was water and it was probably what enabled him to erect rudimentary shields he was quite ecstatic, he was using magic! The fact he didn't notice made him want to kick himself, perhaps Albus was right, it made him feel all that more hopeful. "Still up for ice cream?" he suggested, trying to keep his mind off it completely.

Harry slowly nodded his consent to getting ice cream.

"Very well, come let's sit down," Severus said guiding him towards the seats, grateful that the ice cream shop wasn't far from the sweet shop. Sirius lay down next to the chair, his mind reeling over everything that happened. He wanted so desperately to return to human form, but he dared not. He and Severus didn't get on, and they were worried people would put two and two together and realize that it was Harry.

"Good afternoon, what can I get you both today?" asked a cheerful chirruping voice.

Seeing Harry relax at the sound of her grating voice (to him anyway) made him a little more accepting of her. "A cup of coffee for me, and a banana split…would you like a drink?" he asked Harry, his lips twitching into a look of pride when Harry nodded.
"Orange?" it came out a hesitant question rather than an answer.

"Orange it is, that is all for us, thank you." Severus finished.

"How about a bowl of water for the dog?" she suggested, giving Padfoot a fond look.

Sirius stared at Severus 'don't you dare' written all over his face.

"That would be welcoming." Severus nodded, amusement thrumming through him at the indignant look Black was able to pull off in his Animagus form.

"Be back in two ticks!" she declared before leaving them.

Sirius growled lowly at Severus as if he could sense just how much amusement he was getting at that moment.

Severus just smirked at the Animagus, "You're bound to be thirsty," was all he said.

Harry remained oblivious to the entire scene, just grateful to be sitting down, happily waiting for his ice cream.

True to the girl's word she was back, giving them their coffee and ice cream as well as the suggested bowl of water. Harry quickly began to devour the large banana split with glee, occasionally looking up at Severus to make sure his Dark Protector was still there - which of course he was slowly sipping his cup of coffee which was much too hot to drink quickly.

"Do you have anything needing your attention today?" Severus whispered to Sirius, aware that the canine had better hearing in that form and would hear everything he said.

Sirius cocked his head to the side, before shaking it just once; no he had nothing that required his attention. Was Severus going to let him spend more time with his godson? Was he finally being trusted? He hoped so, he really did, and spending time with his godson was a...one of the best things he could ever wish for. Sure it got overwhelming at times, but he held it in until he was alone not wishing to scare Harry - well that and knowing if he upset Harry then he wouldn't get to see him. It did wonders for his self-control, which had been tested many times since word had reached him that his godson had been found.

"I have somewhere I need to be this afternoon or tonight, preferably this afternoon; Harry will no doubt sleep after this trip for a few hours. If you have nothing on I would appreciate it if you could spend time with him." Severus informed him grudgingly. He didn't like leaving Harry for any reason, knowing that he felt safest with him, that leaving would make Harry feel insecure it was no surprise that he felt guilty for the time away. He also knew that this continued way was better, in the long run, Harry would learn he'd always come back, that him not being there didn't mean Harry was being abandoned.

Sirius' tongue peeked out, eyes sparkling energetically as he panted and nodded looking ready to begin chasing his tail. The only reason he refrained was because he didn't want to startle his godson.

Severus rolled his eyes at the display, although he had to admit Black was adhering to the rules he'd set down with maturity he hadn't thought him capable of. It made him realize that perhaps Black did have a brain in there somewhere and that his love for his godson was a pure unfretted form that enabled him to act his age for once rather than his shoe size. Turning back to Harry he had to refrain from grimacing, his face and clothes were covered in ice cream, Harry was just excited, he didn't normally get a lot of treats, that was all it was. He would make sure he was calm
the next time, especially if they were out in public, but thankfully most people seemed too busy to pay any attention to them whatsoever. If anything it was Sirius that got the most attention and it was mostly from children and teenagers.

"Enjoying that?" Severus asked, unable to fully curb his sarcasm.

Harry's brow furrowed as he cocked his head to the side, studying his Dark Protector as if he was something odd - which he was being right now. Not able to pick up what it was that was in his voice he just grinned happily and nodded that yes, he had enjoyed it very much. His stomach felt very, very full though and he felt a little sick, but he'd definitely not tell his Dark Protector that! He didn't want to miss out on any future treats he'd get after all.

"Good, it's time to head home now, we can Apparate from here," Severus explained as he unobtrusively cleaned Harry up using magic - and he thanked his lucky stars that Harry only blinked at him with a little weariness but didn't react any other way. Harry trusted him completely, even enough to let him use magic when if someone else did it there would have been panic attacks involved. He let his pride show through, knowing that Harry would need positive reinforcements to witnessing magic and not reacting. "Well done, Harry, I'm very proud of you," he verbalized his pride.

Harry swallowed bobbing his head up and down before burrowing himself in his Dark Protector, holding his breath remembering from the last time. Beaming in happiness as Severus praised him yet again. Then the uncomfortable sensation of being Apparated tore through them.

Harry knew without opening his eyes that they had returned to Hogwarts.

Sirius trotted along, his mind reeling over all he had seen and observed today, he'd seen it before, but it hadn't quite dawned on him just how good Snape was for Harry. He got him so calm so quickly, gave him choices, waited for him to decide, never once getting impatient and as much as it pained him to admit he didn't think he had that sort of patience. He loved his godson, enough to admit he wasn't what Harry needed, not full-time, and for the first time, he was truly beginning to see what the others had always known. The last dredges of hurt, anger, and annoyance faded away leaving him strangely lethargic a happy one.

Instead of being a disciplinarian (which Harry would eventually need) he got to be the fun loving uncle figure he determined as he bound up the steps with a happy yip, his tail wagging as he bound around unable to help himself. Hearing Harry giggling very quietly behind his hand was the best sound he'd ever heard. After that, he trotted to Snape's quarters with a smug strut.

True to Severus' belief, Harry barely sat on the couch curled up before he was out like a light.

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Malfoy Manor

Lucius looked up from his work, surprise flittering over his eyes upon seeing Severus step through the Floo. For a second he was worried that he had forgotten his son's birthday before relaxing, Severus only visited two times out of a year, to spend time with his godson. It was the wrong time of year and his son was at Hogwarts at the moment. Their relationship had not been the same since the Dark Lord had targeted Lily Potter, and none existent after the Dark Lord was defeated. "Severus, is Draco alright?" his concern evident. He loved his son so much, Draco and his wife, they meant the world to him.

"He's perfectly fine," Severus answered immediately, knowing if the roles were reversed he
wouldn't want to wait on news of Harry if he was concerned.

Lucius felt his jaw trembling as if he was barely keeping it from dropping. Severus was rarely forthcoming about anything, always had a sarcastic barb at the ready to grace him with. Not that he truly minded, since if Draco was hurt he definitely wouldn't be so sarcastic. "Then why have you graced me with your presence?" Lucius asked, face impassive.

Severus' brow barely refrained from sliding all the way up his head, if he didn't know any better he would have suggested hurt lurked behind those normally icicle eyes. He knew Lucius wasn't as cold, hard and unfeeling as the world truly believed. He had seen the look on his face when he presented his son to him after his birth, he had looked ten years younger but those looks were rare. There was a good side and a bad side to Lucius, but one thing Severus could respect was the fact he stood up for his belief's…well for the most part, he had claimed to be under the Imperius Curse after the Dark Lord's downfall after all. "How long has the Dark Lord been back?" he questioned.

Lucius didn't miss a beat, "I have no idea what you're talking about," he lied through his teeth.

Severus' lips twitched, "I must say that was perfect, I couldn't detect a hint of your lie, Lucius," he drawled, impressed despite himself.

Lucius sighed, rubbing his forehead, reaching down he pulled out a bottle of his favorite brandy, which had half its contents missing. The clinking of glass came next as Lucius set two down on the table, and poured more than a generous amount into each one. "What happened?" he eventually asked after a few moments of silence, swirling the alcohol around in the glass before taking a grateful sip.

Severus snorted, sitting himself down; even he was still having trouble with it all. "I'm unsure of a few points, but I can guess how it went down," Severus admitted in a ponderous tone. His fingers grasped the glass but he didn't drink from it, at least the temptation hadn't overwhelmed him yet. "Dumbledore's decision to have the Order look for a missing person probably drew a lot of attention, and the Dark Lord was, of course, alerted to the new development and his curiosity was roused," and when the Dark Lord got curious, there was no stopping him finding out everything.

Lucius' confusion smoothed out into a thoughtful one, "Missing? I've not heard anything…and if it was a student there is no way Dumbledore could sweep that under the rug surely?" if he had he was going to see to it that the old man paid no matter his change of heart.

"Not a student, no," Severus replied, rubbing his temple in agitation, he was grateful to have someone to talk to don't get him wrong but he detested explaining. He had come here looking for answers not to be the one giving them.

"Why is it being kept out of the mainstream media? Surely the Aurors would have had more luck than the idiotic order?" Lucius said lip curling they were useless. Although some of them were very smart, had gone down taking some of his own comrades down - the Prewitts, in particular, he would never admit that though. "You're being very secretive of who it is, Severus." he pointed out drinking yet again.

Severus copied him, "Harry Potter," he muttered under his breath.

Lucius coughed and spluttered a little, "Excuse me?" disbelief evident on every line of his face. He was the Dark Lord's second in command and he didn't know about this? He knew the boy had been missing, had been for years, so it hadn't dawned on him that it was the Boy-Who-Lived they were speaking about.
"You should have seen him, Lucius," Severus croaked, his emotions getting the better of him.

Lucius drew up in alarm, his eyes wide; he'd never seen Severus emotional, never. For the life of him he couldn't figure out what to say, or do, he suspected Severus just wanted to talk for once, to let it out. So he remained silent, giving him solid yet silent support.

"I'd been searching for him myself for years, a lot of dead-ends and disappointments, but I got there in the end. What I found…was way worse than my imagination could conceive all these years." Severus hunched over, not reacting to the Floo flaring, the twinge in his arm already letting him know who it was. He wasn't likely to forget, each day Harry recovered a little more his mind just went right back to the state he was in when he first found Harry.

"My Lord," Lucius stood abruptly, a look of worry on his face, thinking perhaps he shouldn't know about Harry Potter.

"I see Severus finally got around to talking to you," Voldemort stated, gesturing sharply for Lucius to sit down, he didn't want any fanfare right now.

"Not quite," Lucius replied, removing another glass and sliding it along to the other seat available, noticing Severus watching with a cautious startled look. Yes, things had changed, sure the Dark Lord wouldn't think twice of cursing insubordination but he also actually listened these days to ideas and suggestions even if he didn't follow through with them. He filled the glass before settling once again, a strong desire to know more filling him.

"You were quite right, you should have made her suffer further," Voldemort insisted, his red eyes flashing in anger just visualizing the damn disgusting Muggle. He was grateful nobody had seen his jaw drop when Dumbledore had allowed it, sure he hadn't stayed around but he'd all but allowed Severus his retribution on the woman.

Lucius hated being left out, but he wasn't about to say anything that could be construed as insolence in the presence of his Lord - he would rather go without ending up cursed, which he hadn't been since his return, but he'd rather be careful than sorry. Keeping quiet was the most difficult thing he'd ever done because he wanted to know everything! He was completely in the dark, something had happened, something severe enough to make Severus lose his cool and for his Lord to defend a boy he should rightfully hate as his defeater. If Lucius hadn't been so composed he would have jumped at the growl Severus let loose. "What exactly happened?" Lucius asked, finding it difficult to moderate his tone but succeeding.

With a resigned sigh, Severus began to tell the tale yet again, with a lot more information than he'd given the Dark Lord when he asked, but Voldemort had seen the memories so he actually knew more now than he was telling Lucius now. He told him about the visit to the prison to see Petunia, the curse he put on her, the things she'd said, the things they'd done to Harry, how he had ended up being transferred to a different hospital only to be kidnapped and treated despicably by the woman who had done the deed. His reaction and torture of the woman - the Dark Lord revealing that Dumbledore had been party to that - Lucius' reaction had been comical, to say the least. The very slow process of healing Harry, how he was mentally, physically and everything else in-between, including the whole snake debacle.

"Wait…Parseltongue?" Lucius gasped, "But how is…how is that possible? The Potters are descendants from Gryffindor for Merlin's sake!" the Potter's were the new names for Peverell, they were originally from Godric's Hollow, named after the founder himself, that cottage had been in the family since Ignotus Peverell married Ornelle Gryffindor both old in those days to settle down since they married in their late twenties.
"They are both," Voldemort pointed out grudgingly, both a Slytherin and Gryffindor. "I am a descendant from Cadmus Peverell, the second brother." he had done his research immediately upon realizing the boy could speak Parseltongue.

Lucius choked, it was bloody hilarious if Potter had known he would have had a fit, cousins, the last Potter heir was related to the most powerful wizard in the magical world. It was no wonder he had been destined for such a momentous task, they were the last of their lines, and if Harry Potter had been raised right…just how powerful could he have been? How powerful was he really? How much power did that abused body and mind hold? "If you were to estimate how…what age would you say he was mentally?" pouring more alcohol into their glasses, inclining his head when Severus put his hand over the glass indicating he didn't want more.

"It differs," Severus said thoughtfully, "Sometimes he can act like a two-year old, but other times...other times he can be solemn and mature perhaps seven or eight years old?" his interactions with children were limited so he truly was guessing, especially children under the age of eleven.

"He got right into Nagini's face," Voldemort said dryly, "He has no concept of danger," Severus pursed his lips, a frown etched across his face, he hadn't known that part, even children had instincts, was his perception so screwed that he saw humans as a danger and not animals? How did he keep him safe if he did things like getting into snakes personal space? He should just be grateful that there wasn't any fatally poisonous snakes in Britain. Although he supposed if left unattended their poisonous snake could kill...he was getting well off topic and worrying about something that would not come to pass. He had already fixed his wards so that nothing other than the cat could enter his quarters - even Animagus' were excluded, while in their Animagus form of course.

"Muggles," Lucius hissed through gritted teeth, how he loathed those disgusting creatures. Whether he liked the boy or not, nobody deserved to be tortured thusly, while he couldn't care less that she'd killed a few Muggles trying to imbue them with magic, it had obvious scarred Potter heavily, and he'd been a child so obviously, it would have had such a profound effect. If he had the ability he would just wipe every single one of those filthy things off the face of the planet, one by one. "Go figure it would take one of his precious Order members children being hurt to make him see the Muggle filth for what they are," he spat bitterly if he had only just seen what Muggles were like sooner they wouldn't be just beginning to get to the root of the problems now.

Severus wishes he could defend Dumbledore; tell them that there was a difference between being smacked around by your Muggle father and what Harry had gone through. The truth of the matter was abuse was abuse, but Dumbledore was from a time where a smack or two was permitted, in fact, it was expected to keep your kid in line...he'd ignored the deeper problems that came with it. Harry had truly opened his eyes to just how deprived Muggles could be, but wizards weren't all saints, but he had no doubt if either of these two sitting with him had kids (one already did) they would give their all to protect them. Every wizard and witch would children were revered, coveted, protected at all costs, it was rare to find child abuse in the magical world, but those growing up with Muggles...it happened all too frequently. With the laws changing they could take the children away, protect them, and give them all the care and attention they need. "I know he's trying to change the law, how is that going?" he hadn't asked, Dumbledore liked to be cryptic so he'd rather avoid asking.

"Those stringently light are confused about Dumbledore's change of heart, especially Doge; he's getting a lot of flack to find out what's going on." Lucius revealed, still reeling over everything he'd learned in a single afternoon. "Those neutral and dark are overjoyed that our main antagonist has had a change of heart, there are regretfully more light than there is neutral and dark, even with
Dumbledore demanding the changes, it won't be easy, but we do have a greater chance. It's too bad we cannot get the Black and Potter seats, now with those, we would win with admittedly not by a big margin but it would be enough to see the changes through."

"Black, as far as I know, is going to help," Severus pointed out, "As for Harry, how many seats are you talking?" he hadn't been aware that they had seats on the Wizengamot, but he didn't care for politics, and James Potter evidently didn't either he didn't take on the mantel as Lord Potter, he hadn't really had a chance to grow up, he'd died at the age of twenty-one for Merlin's sake.

"I know that he has nine votes per the Potter name, eleven for the Peverell name, six for the Gryffindor one...I do believe though that many families bequeathed their seats and monetary goods to Potter after...that Halloween night," Lucius revealed after a quick glance at his Lord who didn't seem perturbed by the fact he was bringing it up. "I couldn't say how many, but it's something I'm one hundred percent sure of despite the fact I have no way known of checking." Gringotts was very secure, no bribery would work. It was a decent amount, he had thirty votes, they'd been built up over the generations of Malfoy's who all sat on the council and Wizengamot, all with independent jobs to supplement their income to keep the Malfoy fortune going. Narcissa had inherited seven through her family, which was being used by him now, putting it from twenty-three to thirty. If they did have Black fighting in their corner with the rest of the Black votes...he felt excitement coursing through him... "Perhaps I should get Narcissa to contact Black," he mused out loud.

"Between Me, Black and Dumbledore we overtake the lights votes making it so that their voting is for naught," Voldemort said with a victorious smirk.

"There's a chance that Dumbledore might find out about you, My Lord," Lucius pointed out in real concern.

"I am different enough that I will not be recognized," Voldemort waved the concern away.

"Except your eyes, My Lord," Lucius murmured quietly, wincing slightly expecting a backlash for arguing with him.

"Muggle contacts would help with that," Severus said absently, "Lucius, would you mind asking your House-elf to bring up some coffee?" he refused to return to his quarters stinking of booze or worse yet actually drunk.

"Sure," Lucius replied, clicking his fingers and giving his House-elf instructions.

"Muggle contacts?" Voldemort asked dryly, unfortunately, his eyes were the one thing preventing his complete change into an unknown person. Charms and spells to change their appearance could be removed if anyone suspected all they'd need to do was do such a spell and he would be revealed. Nobody would suspect Muggle contacts...whatever they were.

"Yes, they come in a variety of different colors, blue, black, green even odd combinations including snake eyes if one wished. They are lenses that settle over your eye covering your original colour, they last for months at a time if you get the permanent kind although as permanent as they are they must be removed while you sleep, and can easily be removed and replaced when they are done." he wanted the law changed as soon as possible, he didn't want to risk anyone going through what Harry had.

Voldemort nodded thoughtfully, it sounded perfect actually, and with his new identity complete he would be able to sit in his seats once more. 

"Still take it Black, Severus?" Lucius questioned, handing him over a large mug of black coffee.
He looked longingly back at his alcohol before sighing resignedly and taking a cup of his own to fill. He had much to do today and couldn't really do that after the amount of drink he had consumed.

Severus nodded his thanks; enjoying having company for once almost forgetting that it was the Dark Lord he was sitting near.

Chapter End Notes

Finally managed to get past the little roadblock on this story yay! I hope you're still enjoying it :D even if it's completely different from the original! In fact, the original is kind of embarrassing compared to this one! :D so what will cause Severus to make a guardian magical bond with Harry? Will the Ministry find out and try to interfere? or Will Albus or Voldemort suggest it in a bid to help with Harry's accidental magic being too powerful for them to keep ignoring? Or will Severus ask Sirius' permission to do it himself just as an added measure to keep Harry truly safe? R&R please
"Black, what is wrong with you?" Severus snapped in utter exasperation, for two days the wizard had been acting oddly. Or should he say odder than normal? He was too quiet, and normally that would be a godsend to him since nearly every word out of Black's mouth made him either want to roll his eyes or sigh in exasperation. Normally Severus wouldn't notice, not until he began spending more time with the wizard due to their shared interest in Harry. Remus occasionally made an appearance, mostly just at night for an hour or so when he could, due to his workload, being the Defence teacher was hard work. Between grading homework, making his rounds, meetings, spending time with Sirius regaining their lost relationship he didn't have much time, added in the full moon he certainly had a full life to contend with.

Sirius jumped, looking almost bewilderedly at Severus before a perplexed frown appeared on his face. "I…er…well…I got a letter…a few days ago, I…just forget about it," he doubted Severus wanted to hear about his stupid troubles.

Severus frowned outwardly, but inwardly he remembered Lucius' words a few days ago about the potential for Narcissa to write to Black. To try and get them on his side, to find out what he planned to do with the Black seats or see if he would allow them to use them by proxy if he had no desire to use his political clout to aid their cause. "Are you being threatened?" Severus narrowed his eyes; he couldn't very well say he knew the Dark Lord had made it more than clear that Black couldn't know about any of it, not that Severus had protested, like at all.

"No, no, bloody hell, no," Sirius protested quietly. "Nothing like that!" Harry had just returned from PT, and as always it tired him out so much so that he fell asleep on the couch.

Now Severus rolled his eyes, why did Black have to make everything in his life a drama? "Then what is it? Talk to Lupin if you must, just stop being so…un-Black-like, it's disconcerting, to say the least." and wasn't that the truth.

"Narcissa wrote to me," Sirius blurted out, a pained grimace on his face, whether it was due to the fact he'd told Severus of that he was mentioning a family member not even Sirius truly knew the answer that one.

Severus' left eyebrow rose in surprise, he definitely hadn't expected it to be this easy or for him to say anything at all. He and Black hadn't gotten on at all for the majority of their lives. Black had done everything he possibly could to make his life a misery, and even when it was best for Harry, Black had made it his mission to seem as though Severus had done something seriously wrong instead of taking care of his godson in a way Harry needed caring for. Black wasn't equipped to deal with all that.

Sirius had, of course, come to that particular epiphany and accepted his place in Harry's life a few days ago now.
"And?" Severus prompted, wondering if he was pushing his luck.

"I…I haven't spoken to her since I was…what fifteen?" Sirius said, sighing softly, as he rubbed his face tiredly. "Hell, I haven't spoken to any of my cousins since I ran away and they haven't made any effort to contact me either."

Severus blinked, was that hurt shining through Black's eyes? That was unexpected. "You made the decision to cut yourself off from your family and as the Patriarch of the family, your father would have expected them to fall in line and cut you off as well. You know they had no choice if they were found to be doing something against Orion Black's wishes they would have been disowned. By the time the Lord of the Black estate died…you were in Azkaban…for the so-called murder of thirteen people and presumed betrayal of Lily and James…they wouldn't have wanted to contact you."

"Patriarch? You mean matriarch, right?" Sirius snorted bitterly, his father was definitely the better of his parents, but his father had been furious with his decision to abandon the family and all the values it held most dear. His father hadn't struck him off from being a Black altogether leaving him nameless, and that had ensured he could still become Lord Black…good thing too otherwise all that money would have been forever lost.

"We can't pick and choose our families, Black, and all of us have grievances we can discuss, the best you can do is get on with your life and let the past lie," Severus stated sharply, shifting himself just slightly, getting more comfortable in his chair, his gaze never wavering from Sirius who sat across from him on the couch, just inches from where Harry's sleeping face rested on a pillow.

Sirius chuffed bitterly, "And you've done that have you?" his tone sardonic.

Severus' black eyes flickered towards Harry, "I had to, life wasn't just about me anymore," he admitted, surprising himself by being truthful with someone who he would have always assumed would be his enemy to the bitter end. "He managed to instill a sense of…wonder in my life, I don't know how he can be so trusting…with anyone, but he is. That more than anything else made me realize I had to let it go or it would continue to drag me down." he was still very angry over many things, but the things he couldn't change…well, he made an effort not to think about it, and surprisingly Harry's presence helped with that. Helped him to see a future, one he with all his heart hoped that Harry would be there in, as an adult, a fully functioning adult. If not then he would be there for him to the day he died.

"Oh," Sirius murmured, glancing at Harry, he got the wonder, he really did, and Sirius had thought he'd never see his precious godson again. Then news reached him that he was alive…only to see his condition. Merlin help him, but it had broken something in him to see Harry so skeletal and hurt beyond measure. He'd assumed in the beginning that this was all Harry would ever be, only to see each day that he was getting better. Day by day he was awed at his progress.

"Does Narcissa say what she wants?" Severus asked, refusing to say any more on the subject of family or anything of the sort.

"To talk," Sirius said wryly, figuring that Snape didn't want to talk about his feelings anymore, not news; he didn't either especially not with him. Although surprisingly, everything he had said had made Sirius pause and think, perhaps it was time for him to let go of old hates too. Life was too short to spend it wasting those precious moments he could cultivate. "I don't get it, I've been out of Azkaban for a long time, why does she want to see me now?" the very same thoughts had been plaguing him for two days now. Wondering if it was a bloody trap, if so for what? It wasn't very Slytherin writing a letter to meet if they planned something.
"How about you meet up and find out instead of driving yourself insane?" Severus replied sarcastically. Gryffindors, honestly, they were supposed to be fearless, go where angels fear to tread but faced with an invite - probably to afternoon tea - from his own cousin he was acting like a terrified pup.

Sirius just scowled and looked away from Snape, when he put it that way it made sense, not that he had any intentions of telling Snape that.

Severus' lips twitched, eyes gleaming brightly as if he knew what Black was thinking.

"Harry will sleep for at least another hour and a half, now do me a favor and go," Severus retorted, he wanted to get a few potions done, Poppy was a little low on a few different kinds. She didn't trust Slughorn to brew them, which left it to him, he didn't mind though, he had plenty of time on his hands when Harry was asleep that allowed him to do what he needed.

Sirius nodded reluctantly, the 'go' was actually get out of here, Severus wanted him gone, not telling him to visit Narcissa. Although now that Severus had told him to get it over with…he was actually contemplating that. It was just going on eleven o'clock, perhaps he should write back to let her know he'd appear at Malfoy Manor at 1 pm.

Damn his curiosity otherwise, he wouldn't be doing this.

"I'll see you both later," Sirius murmured, slowly standing up so he didn't jolt the couch and wake Harry up, even though after PT he slept like a log - he didn't like the word dead even in jest associated with Harry at all - so slept like a log became his new mantra whenever he noticed Harry sleeping so soundly.

Severus sighed and inwardly grumbled, was it too much to ask for privacy in his own quarters anymore? Apparently, it was Black had begun spending way too much time down here. He could have told him never to darken his doorstep again, yet he did not.

He stood when the door clicked closed, making his way to his potions lab, using his time while brewing to wonder if the Malfoy's would have any luck with Black - he was too stubborn after all - if anyone could get through to Sirius it would be Narcissa, but if Lucius was there…he would bet old prejudices would rear its ugly head.

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Sirius quickly regained his bearings after Apparating to Malfoy Manor, just one look at it made his stomach swoop unpleasantly. What the fuck was he doing coming here? He must be off his rocker. He wasn't someone anyone would be glad to call a relative! He wasn't smart or sophisticated, he was a bloody idiot who forgot all pureblood necessities that had been indoctrinated into him as soon as he left home at sixteen gladly! Swallowing thickly, he couldn't do this. He'd been so stupid in his decision to even contemplate coming.

"You must be Mr. Black," a voice called out, strong and confident, just like the wizard to whom it belonged. His lips twitching just ever so slightly at the way 'Mr. Black' flailed around in fright. He didn't want the wizard leaving before they had a chance to discuss something so he'd been forced to act. "Your cousin speaks of you often," he added, it wasn't painful to keep it up, he'd, after all, had to speak to many people in order to manipulate them to give him what he wanted.

"She…does?" Sirius asked dubiously, and it showed both in his voice and on his face.

"Not that she'd admit it," the wizard chuckled, "It seems to be a reoccurring theme amongst this
"You're hardly old to be considered older generation," Sirius replied, calming down but still dubious but now about this wizard's age, he spoke like he was his father's age or something. If only he knew.

"Why thank you for the compliment," the wizard said tilting his head just so. "Shall we?" a grandiose hand gesture was thrown in. He had before now gathered every scrap of information about Sirius Black that he could. Most of it he knew he couldn't trust completely since it wasn't from people close to Black, such as Narcissa and Lucius. Pettigrew would have been someone he would have been able to use, regretfully he was in Azkaban now, and he had no intentions of letting him out, he had outlived his usefulness the moment his duty had become known - he couldn't spy if everyone knew now could he? Even as he spoke, he kept a keen eye on the wizard, watching his every reaction as he had done since he had Apparated here.

"Sirius, I was beginning to think you had changed your mind," Narcissa said calmly, watching the approaching wizards from the front doors, hands delicately interlocked together at the front. "I am glad you came, it's been too long." she found herself surprised by meaning it, until she saw him… she hadn't realized how much she'd missed her hyperactively stupid cousin, to think her son could have grown up thinking him an uncle…instead, well instead it was as though he had no family but Lucius and herself.

"C-cissa," Sirius whispered, a warble in his voice, incessantly clearing his throat to get rid of it, refusing to show any more weakness.

"Have you eaten?" Narcissa asked him, completely ignoring the other wizard for the moment.

Sirius shook his head, no, he hadn't, and he wasn't risking speaking again so soon until he knew he wasn't going to get overly emotional.

"Let us sit outside, on the veranda, winter will soon be upon us so we should cherish the good weather while it lasts," Narcissa suggested, not that they would be completely outside, it wasn't warm enough for that, but a nice breeze would do them wonders. Narcissa led both wizards through the manor, which was as always very well kept, not a speck of dust to be seen anywhere. Sirius looked everywhere, bypassing the still portraits, proudly displayed family heirlooms, through the sitting room, dining room and towards the veranda. A large pot of coffee - lemon, sugar, and milk as well - with three cups was already situated on the table along with an assortment of tea foods. Including finger sandwiches, egg salad tea sandwiches, cucumber tea sandwiches, smoked salmon finger sandwiches, roast beef finger sandwiches, ham finger sandwiches and chicken salad finger sandwiches the House-elves had gone all out. There were also basic buttermilk scones to savory cheddar mustard scones too sweet cinnamon scones which were his favorite, Narcissa had remembered, as well as Narcissa's favorite raspberry scones. Added with jams, Devonshire cream, clotted cream and lemon curd.

"Is your…husband going to be here?" Sirius at least made an attempt not to scorn Malfoy…much.

"Lucius is working at the moment," Narcissa said, a genuinely amused smile on her face, having predicted Sirius correctly - some things just didn't change - and Sirius was one of them. "It seems that some of Dumbledore's ideas have got Lucius quite excited."

"Excited?" Sirius asked dubiously. Not just because it was Malfoy, but because of politics! Who cared about politics! His eyes narrowed suspiciously, wondering if that was why he was here. But his cousin knew he loathed politics and wouldn't get involved, so surely she didn't think for a
second he'd be bought into all that crap.

"Mmm," Narcissa replied, taking a seat, "Please, take seat, make yourselves comfortable,"

Sirius glanced at the stranger once before taking his own seat, out of polite habit.

"Sirius, may I introduce you to Lord Aloysius Ambrose, Lord of the Ambrose estate, Aloysius this is my cousin, Lord Sirius Black, Lord of the Black estate," Narcissa introduced them, barely refraining from smiling at the chosen name, it wasn't very subtle if you asked her, but it's perhaps because she knew. Aloysius meant famous warrior and Ambrose meant immortal, he had chosen with care, of that Narcissa was certain.

"Ambrose? I'm not familiar with that name," Sirius admitted with a frown, as he automatically shook hands - unbeknown to him shaking hands with the Dark Lord the wizard who had killed his best friends - he knew all pureblood names, his parents had forced him to learn each and every name of importance so he didn't 'embarrass them' as it were. Taking a better look at him, cerulean blue eyes, long black hair tied back at the nape of his neck, extremely tall, confident and self-assured in his own power, and he was powerful even he could sense that.

"My father's family hailed from France," 'Aloysius' explained, "My mother returned to Britain before I was born, she died giving birth to me, I wasn't aware of my birthright for a long time." he knew it was better to mix in half-truths instead of outright lying.

Sirius winced, "I'm sorry," he said emphatically.

"It was a long time ago," Aloysius answered, nothing in his tone giving away his anger at having to even speak of 'parents' while having to think of his own who were sorely lacking and not something he'd ever be proud to claim as his own. An almost squib mother and a Muggle father, nobody in their right mind would lay claim to them with anything other than scorn and derision.

Narcissa cleared her throat, understanding it was dangerous territory they were straying into, "Sirius, how have you been? Have you been seeing a mind healer?" getting off to a start.

"Not you too," Sirius groaned, shaking his head, "No, I am not going to see one either, the last thing I want is to talk to a complete stranger about my life or memories."

Aloysius gave him a sympathetic but understanding look agreeing with him completely even if the sympathy was utterly feigned. He didn't do sympathy unless it was for show. He knew this was going to be an extremely long and tedious afternoon, but if they could get Black on side, they had every chance of winning, of gaining momentum and seeing those legislations passed into laws so to better protect the people of the magical world.

Narcissa pursed her lips, "How have you been?" she repeated, the urge to ask him how Harry was, was very strong, but she did not. Instead, she finished pouring three cups of tea for the three of them.

"I…I'm good, better than good really, I feel better than I have in years," Sirius replied, accepting the cup she passed him, absently going for the milk and pouring some in.

He was so intent on his task he missed the knowing look Narcissa and 'Aloysius' shared. They could guess what had made Black so nauseatingly 'better' as he said. He was exuding excitement and happiness; he certainly wasn't very good at hiding his emotions.

"Has Lucius heard the news?" Aloysius asked Narcissa, noticing he had Black's attention from the corner of his eyes.
"How do you mean?" Narcissa asked, nabbing three of the roast beef finger sandwiches and of course her favorite raspberry scones on another plate. Stirring her spoon around her tea in a bid to cool it down quicker and stir the contents in properly.

"There are rumors of yet another legislation being proposed by Chief Warlock Dumbledore," Aloysius explained before turning to Sirius, "Sorry for turning this into a political matter, but I do intend to get into politics."

"Another one? That's over fifteen in the past month, when is he getting the time to sleep along with his additional duties?" Narcissa shook her head bemused, "I don't think Lucius has heard, do you have a copy of the legislation?" sipping her tea with the grace all pureblood women tended to have. Of course, Lucius had heard, he was the one that had told the Dark Lord to begin with, but they had to get talking politics somehow.

"No, but I do know it's regarding a mandatory healer evaluation upon your acceptance into Hogwarts," Aloysius told her. "That includes a history check-up, back to childhood to ensure there is no abuse going on."

Sirius snorted bitterly, "Not all abuse is physical," swallowing thickly vividly reminded of Harry when he first saw him.

"Most instances its both," Aloysius replied somberly, "It's a very good idea, one that I wholeheartedly approve of, in fact, I may propose that such a thing be mandatory in all magical schools." it just irked him something rotten that it was Dumbledore doing it, he had tried to go down that path decades ago only to be judged by the old fool and his lackeys.

Sirius gazed at Aloysius, judging by his tone he had been abused as a child, it seemed to him that nothing was black and white anymore and he hated it. Merlin, he almost wanted to be back in his teenage body, with his stupid teenage beliefs things had been so simple back then. Hate everything Slytherin, be a good friend, a good boyfriend, now here he was reuniting with family, still comprehending everything his godson had been through and spending all his time with Slytherins.

Without realization throughout that afternoon, Sirius found himself drawn into heated debates regarding nearly every single piece of legislation that had been passed, tossed aside or being contemplated.

Chapter End Notes

It took me ages to come up with the Dark Lord's name :D I hope you find amusement in it that's for sure! Everything discussed will probably be summarised in the next chapter still debating on whether Sirius would let anyone vote by proxy for him...or whether he could be convinced to go himself and vote for things to be done the way he wants them...I'm just not sure whether his character would do it...and I honestly don't like making the characters too OOC you know? would what happened to Harry be enough to change Sirius for the better? Would it take Harry actually innocently enough saying something to kick a fire under his ass? R&R please
Chapter 33

My Dark Protector

Chapter 33

Severus hastily wiped down the counters in the potions lab, trying to clean up before Harry roused for breakfast this morning. He was remaining awake for longer periods of time. Severus didn’t believe it would be long before his afternoon naps were a thing of the past. His body was enduring more, strengthening, the muscle atrophy had caused a great deal of damage over the years. He thanked Merlin for the potions, he knew without them Harry would have declined and died before true help could have come to his aid. Magic was only able to do so much, it had barely been able to keep Harry alive as it was.

Huffing in annoyance, Severus cleared his mind, the farther Harry recovered, the more he dwelt on the past. Thinking more and more on what Harry had been like when he was first found. He hated it. Remembering what Harry had first been like. He just wanted to think on the future, Harry had come along so well, beaten all expectations both he and Poppy had for him.

They truly believed that Harry was going to completely recover, both mentally and physically.

As he exited the lab, he found Harry already standing in the living room, legs barely shaking anymore.

“Good morning, little one,” Severus’ voice was like a balm to Harry, soothed him like nothing else could. It spoke of safety, warmth, family, happiness, shelter, and refuge.

“Good morning, Severus,” Harry said, it had taken him a long time to say his Dark Protector’s name right. But he had done it and the pride on his face was enough praise for Harry without hearing the words. He slowly began to make his way into the kitchen, with difficulty, but also with great determination, he fed his cat. Staring at the water bowl, and instead of guiding the bowl to the sink. Harry took a deep breath, anxiety and fear building up inside of him, he used the same spell his Dark Protector did to fill it up with fresh clean water.

He stood frozen and still. Waiting.

What Harry was waiting for he did not know, anger? Admonishment? Fear? Being hurt? Taken away and prodded? Quite frankly he was expecting some sort of explosion, but that did not happen. Instead he felt arms wrap themselves around him, cupping the back of his head, and guiding him around.

Harry swallowed thickly, unable to meet his Dark Protectors eyes, somewhere inside of him he knew he was being illogical. That his Dark Protector had magic, that he had magic, and that he was free to use it here. Encouraged may have been a better word for it. Yet the all-consuming fear never left Harry, not even for a moment. It had taken all the courage he had to do this. He feared that the past would occur once again, that someone evil, horrid, and nasty would take him and hurt him and others.

“Well done, Harry,” Severus spoke gently, positively bursting with pride, but he knew making a big deal about it was the absolute worst thing he could do. So, he remained calm, but most assuredly made sure that Harry understood that he’d done good. That he was proud of him, he knew how well Harry responded to any positive emotion especially pride. “I’m so proud of you,
you’re so strong,” he added, Harry was still not meeting his eyes.

He was beginning to fear that perhaps Harry was not going to respond in any way, frozen from the moment he cast a simple water charm.

He exhaled sharply when Harry suddenly lurched around him, arms holding him tightly around his middle in quite a formidable grip. His body was trembling lightly, probably going through a lot of emotional upheaval at the moment. Everything he knew against everything he was re-learning. Severus was barely able to breathe through the coiled tightness that Harry had brought by holding him so strongly.

“You’re okay, you’re fine, everything is going to be just fine,” Severus spoke gently into Harry’s ear. He was so pleased that Harry felt safe enough here with him to use magic. It also showed that he had the ability to retain and memorise information. He had done that spell perfectly, and for the first time too, it was amazing. “You did so well, little one,” he couldn’t wait to teach Harry everything he could. It was a lot of ground to cover, to get his O.W.L.’s and N.E.W.T’s completed.

Harry shuddered in his Dark Protectors arms before slumping completely. Giving over his weight and worries to the wizard. He had made Severus happy and proud, he felt so exhilarated with himself at his accomplishment. He wasn’t quite ready to do more magic though. So, he hoped his Dark Protector would be happy with what was done. He loosened his hold but didn’t let go, just grasped a hold of the back of his cloak and held on. Touch starved as he was, he’d never back away from his touch. Not his Dark Protectors touch. He trusted him after all. Others though…he didn’t like others touching him.

“How about we have some breakfast and go somewhere different today?” Severus suggested, as he continued to rub Harry’s back. He was making no move to leave, or let Harry out of the safety of his arms. Harry felt safe here, and he’d be damned if he didn’t give Harry every bit of support he needed, whether it was emotional or physical. He hadn’t had a touch that was kind for years, so sue him for overcompensating. He didn’t give too fucks, Lily would have been the same and he was trying to use her as an example.

“Shops?” Harry questioned, looking up, green eyes peering at his Dark Protector curiously.

“I was thinking of somewhere else,” Severus said thoughtfully, Prince Manor in fact. He knew realistically he couldn’t keep Harry here forever, it wasn’t fair. Surrounded by people but unable to be seen, secluded until it was safe for him to roam around. He wanted to see what Harry thought of the place, he knew one part of the manor he would love. He’d never actually ventured in himself, just gave it a quick glance when he was roaming around curious. It was the labs that had been calling to him far greater than anywhere else. “Pancakes or waffles?”

Harry remained staring for a few moments, pondering on the question, as his stomach rumbled hungrily. “Waffles, please,” he declared after he made his decision.

“Alright, waffles it is, why don’t you sit down until they’re ready?” Severus suggested, still allowing Harry to remain comfortably ensconced in his arms.

Harry nodded before reluctantly letting go, shuffling out of his Dark Protectors arms before making his way to the couch. By the time, he got over there he sank down on the cushions with a relieved sigh. It hurt sometimes, to stay standing so long, today was one of those days. He didn’t mind though, he liked being able to move, to do anything really.

Roz appeared just as Harry sat down, already making everything they wanted when Severus informed her what they’d like today. Waffles – only for Harry mind – sausage, egg, bacon and
toast. Severus, however, made himself a cup of coffee. He had gotten up earlier to brew potions, Poppy preferred him creating them, so he always did what he could, when he could.

He poured some milk into a goblet for Harry, before making his way through.

“Drink up,” Severus said, handing over the goblet, milk was always going to be a vital part of Harry’s diet for years to come. The more he drank the better, as far as Severus was concerned.

Harry did drink it, loving the taste, “Thank you,” he said, with a white moustache, which was quickly wiped away by Harry’s tongue when he wiped his lips.

“You're welcome,” Severus replied, he was very pleased that Harry’s manners had remained, even when he became more independent and stubborn. He abhorred cheekiness, bad manners and bullying, and what he abhorred he could not stand. It took nothing to be polite and considerate, which he knew, most people wouldn’t know of him, due to his manners in class, which he taught children how to brew potions. He was quite proud to say that he had never had an accident in his classes. His students were too terrified to screw up to the extent that anything bad could happen. With Slughorn here, he feared that may change, but unfortunately, there was little he could do about that. He would not hand over Harry’s care to anyone else. Not to teach children who held no love for the arts of Potions making.

No, Slughorn could do what he liked. For the first time in his life, he had a true purpose. Not a feeble one that was a danger to his health. Spying on the Dark Lord, he must have been insane to even contemplate that. Something he was thinking more and more frequently, he suspected it had something to do with having a life now.

One that meant something, something tangible, that gave him a sense of purpose, happiness and contentment that had been so absent thus far.

Harry crooned softly at his cat, which was growing quickly, he couldn’t be considered a kitten anymore. Petting at him, he could do that now without getting stiff or accidentally pressing to hard and hurting him. He now knew to be very careful. Sevvy hadn’t moved when he got up this morning, which was strange, Sevvy was usually up before him not the other way around.

Sevvy made him feel nearly as protected as his Dark Protector did. It was like hugging his stuffed animals, feeling sleepy and knowing he was safe.

“Mine,” Harry argued with Sevvy over the fact the cat wanted to drink his milk. Which he wasn’t allowed to do, Severus said no, and so Harry listened. Sevvy got his own bowl of milk if he wanted it, he didn’t drink from his goblets he’d said and that was that.

“Put your cat down, breakfast is ready,” Severus informed him as he nursed his coffee, seeing Roz plating up their foods. Harry still had a smaller amount compared to Severus, and didn’t have a lot of syrup on his waffles. They kept his sugar intake to a minimal. Everything was still cut up for him to make it easier, but Severus reckoned that he’d be able to sit and eat at a table properly soon enough. He was just being soft at allowing Harry to continue eating on the couch. He knew Harry got sore and stiff still, so that was why.

Harry slowly lowered Sevvy to the floor, as the familiar sound of vials clinking together. Inwardly he groaned, he didn’t like the taste of the potions much. Yet he’d never complain, they made him feel better, stopped the pain, they were just so worth it.

“Drink this before you eat,” Severus handed over the open vial he always had around for Harry to take before each meal.
Harry didn’t hesitate to drink the vile concoction down, before handing the empty vial back. The aches and pains he’d accumulated since last night washing away as if they had never been there. Now, that there, is the reason he never would moan about it. Well, that and the fact he had stopped complaining a long time ago, it never did any good where he was concerned.

“Thank you, Roz,” Severus accepted the plates of food, his lips twitching as Roz refilled his coffee cup with a click of her fingers after giving over breakfast.

“Eat up, after this I’m going to take you to my home, Prince Manor,” Severus explained, putting the plate of cut up food into Harry’s lap, he quickly grabbed the fork eager to eat. His stomach was rumbling loudly, he was so hungry.

“Manor?” Harry echoed wide eyed, he knew what manor was, Manors were like castles, sometimes, the pictures were different. “Is it big?” he was curious now.

“It is,” Severus replied, as he ate his first meal of the day. “I do believe you’ll love it.” Especially the pool, it was underground, almost cave like, he’d once wanted to fill it up, turn it into a Potions Lab. Fortunately for him, he didn’t, there had been plenty of lab space that he just didn’t need more.

“Will there be any peoples there?” Harry asked, his green eyes sparkling.

Severus glanced at the boy, wondering at that look, did he want to interact with someone? Or was it merely interest in something new? Trusting him that he would be safe? He honestly wished sometimes that he could read Harry’s thoughts. It would make everything so much easier. Well he could if he wished, read Harry’s mind, but he quite frankly would never evade Harry’s privacy like that. It had been evaded as it could possibly get, without adding mind reading to the list. “Prince Manor is my home, not a school, when we go there, only you and I will be there. Except of course, some House-elves who take care of the property.” Severus informed him, still trying to gauge what it is that Harry was truly trying to ask. Quite concerned about Harry’s state of mind, that he quite frankly forgot about Harry’s grammar mistakes. Which he would always correct.

“So, I can look around?” Harry asked quietly, not quite meeting Severus’ eyes.

It was Severus’ turn to freeze on the spot, he could imagine Harry’s thought process if this was what he was thinking. He had noticed the fact he was only ever allowed out when there was nobody around. All manner of thoughts could be circling Harry, the probability of them all being negative was high indeed.

He was going to have to tell Harry why that was, at least an acceptable version. He wasn’t exactly known for his subtly, perhaps asking Minerva and Poppy would be his best bet. They were used to dealing with children. They could help him with how best to tell Harry a childish version of why and what.

He hadn’t wanted to. Not this soon.

Unfortunately, this was just the way it would need to be done. He refused to let Harry think awful thoughts. That he couldn’t be seen since he wasn’t normal. That his magic made him wrong, and he shouldn’t associate with normal people. Just imagining the thoughts made Severus almost shiver in revulsion if not for his long-held ability to keep most reactions to himself.

“You definitely can,” Severus finally managed to speak.

A childish smile spread across Harry’s face, happy at the prospect of such a simple promise.
“We can even investigate around the grounds, if you feel up to it?” Severus suggested, “We have all day so we can take our time. There will be no rush.” He vowed to himself to do right by Harry. Even if it meant moving him to Prince Manor to give him true normalcy, instead of being stuck in these damn quarters if that was what’s troubling him.

“Really? Without the walker?” Harry said determinedly, green eyes alight with delight.

“Without the walker,” Severus conceded, they had all day after all, what would it hurt to stop now and again. It was a beautiful day, with winter coming, why not let Harry enjoy a full day outside in the sun? He had been trapped in the darkness for far too long.

He wasn’t sure if it would be ideal to let Harry out in the winter, he could get very easily poorly, become sick. It would depend on how his immune system was, sooner or later though it would need built up.

"I am going to tell him about almost everything,” Severus informed Minerva and Poppy, while Harry was distracted by colouring in, he largely still went out the lines, but he was getting more careful. “I am just unsure of how to say it in a way that would be appropriate for him…somehow in a way that he might actually understand.”

“I see,” Minerva nodded thoughtfully, “Yes, it is concerning isn’t it? Daunting too I’d imagine.”

“I don’t think he should know,” Poppy’s voice was adamant, stern but very quiet as to not concern Harry or let him overhear them. “Not yet, he deserves this safety you’ve given him, Severus, to rip it away…it’s not only careless but it would hurt him and terrify him more than anything else we could do.”

“I would hate to see him retreat back into himself,” Minerva’s brows furrowed, realizing at once that Poppy was quite correct. “The thought of getting taken away…you’re quite correct, perhaps he isn’t ready for any of that. We always knew there was a risk at keeping him here at Hogwarts…” perhaps too much a risk.

Severus’ eyes shied away from theirs, feeling sorely lacking for his desire to tell Harry everything. He just didn’t want the boy to think he was a prisoner or a freak as he had been made believe his entire life. What would cause the most damage? Harry knowing? Or perhaps he should just take Harry away from Hogwarts. Bring him to Prince Manor and let him free to roam. Without a door locked, free to live his life, with a new imagination. Be a child that he’d never been allowed to be.

“Do not think so harshly of yourself, Severus,” Poppy stated sharply, understanding Severus’ reaction better than most. He hadn’t seen such a look on Severus’ face since he was a damn teenager and she did not like it one bit.

“I think he’s beginning to realize that he’s being kept down here away from people,” Severus said quietly, the urge to rasp his hair in fistfuls was strong. “I am worried what this might do to his state of mind…it is fragile as it is.”

“Ah,” Minerva exclaimed softly, understanding Severus’ decision now. “Perhaps have Sirius take Harry out to the Muggle world? Perhaps the days you work? You could also take him out yourself more often, he isn’t in the dire straits he was when he was found.”

“Or we could move him elsewhere, do what we wanted to do at the beginning. Take care of Harry, together, between the three of us, as well as Sirius and Roz, Harry won’t be alone. Somewhere near
a park? But not with too many people, who knows how the Muggles would react to Harry being there.” Poppy explained, unaware that there were children much like Harry – however temporarily Harry’s is – there and judged just as badly by many regretfully, but the Muggle adults wouldn’t blink over it.

Severus breathed out, glancing at Harry, feeling peace flow through him. He was happy colouring, a smile on his face, except when he was concentrating on which colour to choose. Things felt less stressful when he saw Harry this way, made it feel all worthwhile. “I think perhaps, Harry and I will see if we like Prince Manor enough to stay.”

“Both of you?” Minerva whispered, mixed feelings at the thought. She would miss Severus terribly, she had worked with him for many years. Yet, the thought of Severus doing more with his life than just teaching students he most definitely didn’t want to teach was good.

“It’s something I’d need to discuss with Albus,” Severus confirmed, he felt guilty about making Dumbledore’s workload even more immense. He was already ploughing through more wizengamot meetings than was sane. Then keeping everything to do with Hogwarts on and the up, admittedly with a lot of help from Minerva but that was her job. If he left, not only would they need to find a new Head of House for Slytherin…they would also need to find another person to take his classes. Although he assumed Dumbledore may just ask Slughorn to step up completely, at least until he found someone worthwhile.

“No, this is something YOU need to decide for YOU and HARRY,” Minerva retorted seriously. “Let me worry about Albus, but I do not believe he would talk you out of it. He wants Harry as safe as possible. Just like we do.”

Severus relaxed further at her proclamation, “Yes, you’re quite correct, Minerva,” this was about him and Harry, what was best for them both. Being here at Hogwarts, was maybe not that anymore. Harry had unique needs for someone his physical age, he needed to spread his wings a little, explore, he was always so happy and eager to see things. Books couldn’t do that justice.

“Of course, I am,” Minerva teased, “So both of you get going, have fun, it’s already nearing ten o’clock.” With how slow-moving Harry was, through no fault of his own, it would take them all day to see the manor and its surroundings. She had never been, but she had heard it described in social circles.

Severus breathed out, nodding in agreement, it was time.

Tonight, would be a deciding factor on whether they stayed here or moved to Prince Manor.

It was all down to Harry, whether he was ready to move, but Severus had an inkling that all would be well.

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There we go! That's the next chapter done next one will be Sev and Harry enjoying their day out at Prince Manor, I'm not sure how this story will be ended, the original - if I can still call it that due to the fact its so laughably different! - had a evil Voldemort so that's not going to happen! I suppose his seventeenth birthday would be the best place to end it, where he's considered an adult and not easily - or like at all - manoeuvred into the Ministry's care and safe. The main question would be whether Harry would be mentally equipped to deal with adult life, or whether he will retain the mind-set of a child and living in safety with his Dark Protector? Read and Review please
Chapter 34

My Dark Protector

Chapter 34

Harry and Severus used a Portkey to get to Prince Manor, he deliberately ensured it deposited them near the end of the wards. So the entire front of the manor and its surroundings were visible for them to see. Severus kept a tight grip of Harry – who had refused to bring his walker – until both were situated and the dizziness of the magical transportation dissipated. Severus watched Harry closely as he was turned around, he gasped at the sight in front of him.

“Pretty,” Harry admitted, green eyes alit with wonder, glancing up at his Dark Protector with adoration.

From where they stood, they could see the manor and the few outhouses that had been added overtime. Large hedges designed in squares with a water fountain inside them. Climbing vines were spread out over the building, beautifully maintained so they didn’t grow over the windows. The white windows were clean and spotless even from where they stood, the House-elves did their duty very seriously. Shrubs, flowers and plants adorned the front, with some trees off to the left. The front of the manor was very different from the back, which wasn’t quite so neat, spacious and tidy. The grass was cut giving it an appearance of a checker look.

“That it is,” Severus admitted, probably for the first time. He had denied himself this property and everything that came with it out of spite. He’d been in it all of a few times, he’d allowed himself a day of weakness imagining him moving in, all the changes he’d make – like turning the pool into a potions lab – but he’d forced those thoughts out of his mind. If his mother had somewhere to go… she would have left that son of a bitch. He wouldn’t have grown up with nothing but abuse or watching it go down. Tobias Snape was a disgusting piece of work, he hadn’t considered the man his father for a very long time. The only good thing in his life, and the fact he’d lived there was Lily. If given the choice, he wasn’t sure he’d give her up, even for a better life living with the Princes. Even if it meant going to Hogwarts with fitted clothes, and a decent upbringing where he was actively encouraged to pursue what he wished and not beaten down and called all manner of names due to his love for magic.

Those thoughts tore him apart sometimes, but truthfully, what good did it do thinking about it? The past was the past, nothing could change it, even if he could…it wouldn’t be his past he’d change… it would be Harry’s.
“Ready to go and have a look around?” Severus suggested, hoping that Harry would be fine. He would have brought the cat with them, but he had to make sure that Harry wished to remain here before he made any plans whatsoever. He was surprising himself by actually feeling alright if he did move here. It was quite odd, the feelings being responsible for someone elicited. It made you put aside your own feelings, perhaps even dampened them to an extent. He’d sworn never to return here, yet here he was, and he couldn’t bring himself to feel angry about it.

Harry nodded his head, looking around eagerly as he began walking. As always his gait was slow and steady, which was good for taking in the sights before him. Before long they were walking on gravel, Severus glanced down as Harry held onto his hand, obviously feeling a little wobbly on uneven ground without his walker. Which was a really good job they didn’t have it, otherwise it would have made this part a little difficult admittedly.

“Easy,” Severus cautioned as Harry tripped up a bit, not lifting his feet high enough to walk over the gravel. Grasping Harry’s elbow to give him better stability than just a hand being held. “Would you like to see around the back or the house first?” giving Harry a choice, he’d been doing that a lot more recently, it created independence according to the books he’d read. It might be meant for children but the reality is that Harry was basically a child relearning everything anyway. Severus waited patiently, standing still until Harry gave an answer.

“Back?” Harry sounded unsure about making his own decisions, but after he said it, he seemed to gain confidence when his Dark Protector merely nodded in agreement.

“Around the back it is,” Severus said firmly, guiding both of them off the gravel, and beaten path towards the side of the main building. The two buildings weren’t joined, but were close enough to one another that from a distance they looked attached to the other.

More climbing vines were attached to the side of the building to their left, as they walked passed them, Harry’s fingers trailed over them with childish fascination. Severus didn’t need to worry about them being poisonous like he would have to if Harry touched anything at Hogwarts. None of the House-elves were aware of his visit, or about Harry’s condition, he would need to inform them. No, he had to stop making a mental list, not until he knew if perhaps Harry would like to live here. It was odd, he was beginning to wish they could.

The trees were immediately in sight the second they stepped through the back. A variety of trees that all housed fruit hanging from their branches. Along the border of the property were cherry blossom trees the pink clouding anything beyond the perimeter. There wasn’t a single sign of anything falling off the trees, the House-elves had evidently been out here recently giving it a good clean.

“Pears!” Harry said, noticing the one closest to him, eyes gleaming as he approached the pear tree,
fingers gripping around one and yanking it with surprising strength. Sniffing at it curiously, glancing sideways at his Dark Protector, seeking permission.

Severus laughed, “Go ahead, it’s safe,” he reassured him, smothering more amusement at the wide eyed look of wonder he received from Harry just because he laughed. It may well be the first time he’d heard a genuine laugh, he didn’t know if anyone had laughed in Harry’s presence before. Perhaps not, given the fact his life hadn’t been a good one, and everyone was just trying to help him recover not make him laugh or worse laugh at him.

Pests weren’t able to get at any of the fruit and vegetable grown here, there was also slug repellent along the boarders of his home stopping slugs as well. Additional spells prevented smaller critters from getting to anything. Everything grown within the confines of Prince Manor was fresh, glossy and healthy without any waste whatsoever. So the fruit was very safe for Harry to eat, and honestly, he’d never deny Harry anything, especially fruit which was good for him.

“S’ nice,” Harry said, eagerly biting into the fruit again, it was juicy and it dribbled down his chin.

Severus bit his tongue, stopping himself from correcting Harry, just this once.

“It’s nice,” Harry automatically corrected himself as he continued to devour the pear.

Pride shot through Severus, by Merlin, he didn’t think he could be more proud if he tried.

Once the pear was naught but the core, Severus automatically flicked his wand, cleaning Harry up and banishing the remainder of the eaten fruit. He stalled a moment before forcing himself to relax, lest he give Harry the wrong impression. Eyes soft and open, watching each reaction Harry went through, a hand automatically grasped onto his clothes as he stared wide eyed and fearful.

“You have nothing to fear, little one,” Severus said soothingly, almost wanting to curse himself for his thoughtless actions. Yet they had a breakthrough just this morning, Harry had used magic on his own without prompting and it was definitely wasn’t accidental magic. He also hadn’t used a wand, he would need to get Harry a wand at one point, unless the focus stones were actually acting as a wand core of sorts enabling Harry to cast magic without any wand.

Cupping his hand around Harry’s neck, his thumb stroking up and down the nape, he wasn’t surprised when Harry seemed to slump into him. Securing his arms around him, he let Harry come to the conclusion that all was well on his own without too much prompting from him. The magic
wasn’t going to hurt him, using magic was nothing scary, there wasn’t anyone who was going to be furious or use him, not with him around. Harry knew the woman who hurt him was dead, that he’d made sure she wouldn’t hurt him again. That was as blatant as a confession to anyone…even Harry. He could be assuming too much, but no, Harry had definitely understood when he told him. He’d made sure of that fact if nothing else.

The thought of magic terrified Harry to the very core of his being, both seeing it and using it. He wasn’t sure what prompted his actions this morning, he’d just felt lazy, why traipse all the way to the tap to get water instead of just doing it right there? Then before he knew it, water had filled the bowl, he didn’t have the stick that his Dark Protector used though. The last time he’d used magic as accidental as it was due to his fear, he’d ended up in a world of hurt. He’d seen people hurt so much because of what she was doing to him. Harry blinked, his mind comprehending what he’d just thought mere seconds ago. Because of what she was doing to him, for the first time he realized he wasn’t to blame. The others had told him, but Harry hadn’t believed it. He hadn’t believed his Dark Protector. Shame warred with sheer happiness, he wasn’t to blame. He didn’t hurt anyone, it wasn’t his fault. Something stuck in his gut unloosened, making Harry feel freer than ever.

Suppressing his own emotions wasn’t quite so easy like it had been in the beginning, the overwhelming fear didn’t close him down as it had in the past. He was having to endure each messy feeling as he grew, both mentally and emotionally. He was still too terrified to act out too much, he didn’t want his Dark Protector to send him away.

“Better?” Severus questioned after a few moments of silence.

Harry nodded from where his head was burrowed in his Dark Protector’s chest, the anchoring feeling of his hand still on his neck gave him peace of mind.

“Ready to continue?” Severus then asked, he knew that the pool would enchant Harry completely. He loved water so much, he’d spend days in the water if he thought he could get away with it. He was half tempted to tease Harry that he was half-merman but that would have Harry asking questions he probably didn’t want the answer to.

“Yes, please!” Harry murmured, voice muffled from Severus’ clothes, as he reluctantly unwound himself from his Dark Protector. There was nowhere else he’d rather be, but he really, really did want to see the manor, he was so exited to investigate everything surrounding him.

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Ministry Of Magic
Albus Dumbledore felt a tingle of awareness running down his spine as the door to the meeting room was held opened. An unknown wizard stepped through, quite young, barely looking a day over twenty. There was something about him that bothered Albus. The way he walked, the confidence in which he carried himself, had he met this wizard before? It was tugging at his mind and he found that quite bothersome that he couldn’t remember.

“Cornelius, who is he?” Albus asked quietly, from where he sat next to Cornelius, who was choosing to sit in on the meetings as is his right. He was the Minister for magic, and he could do what he liked in any department. He even had a vote, he couldn’t stand the woman sitting opposite him though, Dolores Umbridge was a…challenging woman even he didn’t have the patience to deal with.

“Whom?” Cornelius turned from where he had been conversing with his undersecretary, glancing at the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot.

“The young gentlemen who just entered,” Albus gestured just so with his head to let Cornelius know where the wizard was to whom he was referring.

“Ah, that is Lord Aloysius Ambrose, he is new and wishes to take up his family seats within the wizengamot,” Cornelius explained, eyes brightening up, “Everything has been proven and he’s already been sworn in.”

“There is no Ambrose seat for claim,” Albus pointed out the obvious, while unobtrusively watching the wizard. He felt like he had seen this wizard somewhere before, it was beginning to rather annoy him.

“No, not on his father’s side, no matriarchal,” Cornelius informed him, “His mother moved to France I presume, married the father and returned here for an undetermined amount of time. He wasn’t forthcoming about his family, I think he suffered a great tragedy,” he added his tone tinged with sympathy. He would be kind until he could see what he could get out of any alliance with the wizard.

“Interesting, do you know who his mother is?” Albus asked, as yet more people entered the meeting room. Perhaps it’s the mother he knew this Ambrose from. He couldn’t remember any news of someone from Britain marrying into the Ambrose line. Perhaps the Delacour’s knew, he’d need to ask Fleur, she may be able to get some information for him.
“No, he had all the proof he needed, it was verified by the Goblins, but he wouldn’t speak of it, but he is the last of his matriarch line, thus it’s his for the taking,” Cornelius told him, turning away, fed up with the conversation already. He couldn’t give Albus what he didn’t know. He had a feeling he’d be asked the same question in a dozen different ways.

Albus was about to stand up, ready to call the meeting to order, there was one seat always empty, the Black one. So, it was to his everlasting shock when the door opened again, revealing Sirius Black, who walked with confidence, but deep in those grey eyes was annoyance. It was evident that Black truly didn’t want to be here, he wasn’t one for politics Albus knew this. Things were about to get interesting, he thought, giving the Black Lord a nod in silent greeting. What surprised him more was when Black nodded to Ambrose, how do they know each other?

Standing up, “I call this meeting of the wizengamot to order,” Albus stated, staring confidently around the room. “Are there any questions or concerns one wishes to bring up before we officially begin?”

Doge opened his mouth before closing it with a snap, this wasn’t the time or the place. Yet every time he tried to approach his best friend, to give him both council and an ear to listen to he was just given empty platitudes. What had happened to cause Albus to turn so swiftly and suddenly? If it weren’t for the fact he knew nobody could use the Imperius curse on his old friend he would believe he was under it. He knew everything there was to know about Albus, they shared everything, except this.

That was what Doge thought. It couldn’t have been further from the truth. There were things Albus would never entrust to a single soul. No matter how good and pure they were, he was much too cautious for that. In fact out of everyone, his spy actually knew the most, well, nearly everything actually. A wizard who you shouldn’t trust, trusting a spy was a duplicitous thing to do. Yet he did indeed trust Severus, far greater than anyone else.

Silence reigned for a minute, as Albus waited on anyone speaking up, but nobody did.

“Very well, I call your attention to the latest pieces of legislation,” Albus said, flicking his wand, and folders – three of them – flew from the desk at the back of the room and onto the circular bench which currently housed them all. Three folders set themselves down in front of each wizard. All fifty-two of them.

“What the fuck is this?” Sirius barked out in anger, seeing the first piece and not even attempting to read it all. Seething in anger, his grey eyes boring holes into Umbridge’s who just sat there smug as you please, unafraid of the wizard before her.
Ambrose cleared his throat, giving Sirius what could only be called an amused look before it was stuck behind a very professional façade. “It is to my understanding that the attacks on humans by werewolves had actually decreased over the years?”

“It is so,” Doge declared, and he’d know, he was all about statistics.

“Indeed, and it’s solely because they have found a way to gain control, with the Wolfbane potion,” Ambrose declared.

“Very much so,” Albus nodded firmly.

“Then why, may I ask does anyone propose to make it even more impossible for werewolves to acquire jobs in order to pay for the wolfsbane they so need?” Ambrose drawled out, looking bored and annoyed for a moment. “It’s almost as if you wish for the attacks to happen Madame Umbridge, our children are the future, to be so careless with the future makes one wonder what you are really attempting here.”

“There may be more attacks than anyone knows, statistics don’t show everything,” Umbridge declared, sweat beading at her forehead. She was used to people getting annoyed, or arguing with her, not outright basically saying she was endangering the magical population. If they believed that, she may never get her in again.

“Unlikely, if there were unknown werewolves out there, we would know,” Albus stated resolutely.

“Quite frankly, alienating the entire race is just asking for war, which would result in a great many wizards and witches being bitten,” Ambrose continued, trying his best to ensure she wasn’t going to be at further meetings, she was wasting his time, he didn’t want to see this sort of legislations talk about boring. “You really should frankly keep your personal prejudice to yourself Madame Umbridge, you are in a position of power which can cause complications. This is not being done for the greater good of the magical world, this is you using your limited power to abuse it.”

“Nonsense,” Umbridge said, managing to stop herself spluttering unattractively. “Werewolves are a danger to our way of life, we need a way to control them before they get out of hand.” Her tone haughty despite her growing frustration at the wizard. She’d need to find something on him and quickly, prevent this escalating further. She couldn’t back down now, or worse be shoved aside, she’d worked too hard to get to where she was.
“You are a danger to our way of life,” Ambrose retorted seriously, his tone grim, “I suggest we prevent any further pieces of useless legislation by blocking any and all attempts made by Madame Umbridge to waste our time, judging by everyone’s resignation, this is not the first piece of legislation she’s proposed over werewolves.” Acting as though he didn’t know, when in fact he did.

“Indeed,” Lucius drawled with boredom. He’d had to listen to her go on and on and on for years, it was the most intolerable part of being in the wizengamot. If he was going to see a chance of her getting banned so to speak, he’d do it in a heartbeat. “I second the vote.”

“All those in agreement, raise your hand,” Albus called out, watching in surprise as the majority of the people actually raised their hands, lighting their wand tips signifying an official answer. Forty-two out of the fifty-two all agreed to have Umbridge barred from anything wizengamot related, Cornelius wasn’t one of those who raised his hand. “At Forty-two, we are in agreement, any legislations and votes from Dolores Umbridge are now disqualified and she is therefore banned from participating.” Unfortunately, as the undersecretary she would still have the right to remain within the room. Not quite so easy to get rid of her.

Umbridge’s face went through all kinds of all colours as she watched the wand tips light up. First pale, then red, then puce quite honestly it wasn’t a surprise when she stood and shrieked at the top of her lungs that werewolves were going to be the death of them all. That they would all see, that she was right and when they found out they’d be apologising to her on bended knees.

Sirius bared his teeth ferally at the raging woman who was just a step away from having steam bellowing out of her ears in rage. She stomped off, her body jiggling as she left, the door was slammed closed behind her in her fury. Sirius glanced at Ambrose nodding his thanks, unaware of just who he was thanking. If he had any indication, he would have been just as red in the face as Umbridge was just moments ago. The file with the legislation disappeared with a puff of smoke, as they all settled once again as if they hadn’t just watched a grown woman throw a temper outburst worthy of a two-year-old.

“Let’s get back down to business,” Albus said after a few moments of silence, letting the Wizengamot members to calm themselves down. Some were disgusted, others deeply amused while others looked blatantly relieved that her presence was gone. “The second piece of legislation calls for…social workers,” Albus stared at the paperwork in surprise, “For a department to be created within the Ministry solely for the care and benefit of our underage witches and witches,”

Most wizards here wouldn’t even understand the concept of a social worker, or wouldn’t if it wasn’t plainly written down by Ambrose to help them understand. Albus thought as he read the entirety of the folder. The way he wrote it made it clear that he had spent some time in the Muggle world, perhaps Cornelius’ words earlier rung true, perhaps he had suffered some sort of tragedy in his childhood. Given how comfortable he was in a magical setting, it mustn’t have been until he
was of age. Before all this with Harry, he would have assumed that it wasn’t all bad, but now… now he understood just how horrific Muggle’s could be in a way that hadn’t penetrated his mind as a young boy after what they did to Ariana. Not that Albus actually knew what they did, his father had never revealed it. Albus never wanted to know either, he just wished he had his sister with him, to apologise, to let her grow up, have a normal unencumbered life.

This, all this he was doing, it wasn’t just for Harry but for Ariana too, in her memory.

“I will take the reins on this shall I?” Ambrose suggested, seeing as Dumbledore wasn’t going to speak. He was quite fascinated and so desperately wanted to know what was going on in the old fools mind. “Having our children in the Muggle world is risking exposure, with the advancements taking place in the Muggle world, we could be talking world wide exposure within minutes with their electronic gadgets. We must protect our society, and cannot, I repeat, cannot blame the children for outbursts of accidental magic, all children go through it. It’s a celebration when most children here do so, but in the Muggle world…it sows fear and discord. We need our of social services here in the wizarding world, to take children out of social services in the Muggle world and bring them home. It isn’t just Muggle-borns who are left there but some Pure-blood’s as well who have no immediate family and there is no check to see if he or she has potential family out there.”

- Under no circumstances will a child be sent back to the Muggle world
- Each child will undergo blood heritage testing in order to see the closets living relative.
- Each child will be given a chance to be blood adopted.
- If a relative cannot be found, they will remain in the custody of Social Services until such time a family can be found.

It was obviously just a first rough draught Albus realized, reading through the stipulations called forth. He could think of dozens of more that could do well with being placed forth. He found himself quite happy to deal with this piece of legislation, perhaps he could get everything done quicker if more than one person is helping grease the wheels so to speak.

“We need this,” Black stated firmly, his grey eyes solemn. “We always say the children come first…well now it the chance to prove it. I mean what if you died Madam Bones…what would come of your niece…Susan who is still a minor by magical law?” her godparents were dead as well, since the Bones family had chosen family members to be godparents to the little girl.

“Your own godson wouldn’t have disappeared either, would he?” Carrow stated, his eyes holding no emotion whatsoever.
Nearly everyone gasped in shock at Carrow’s callous words, his own children were suspected Death Eaters. They hadn’t been arrested, but it didn’t pass anyone’s notice that they rarely made an appearance in public after You-Know-Who’s downfall.

Albus stiffened, ready to stop Sirius from making a mistake that would see him barred as well as Umbridge.

Sirius inhaled sharply, “No, no he wouldn’t have,” he revealed, grey eyes filled with pain and resignation, “But if I ever find him…I want him to know I did everything I could.” He promised ardently, quite easily making it seem as though he truly hadn’t seen his godson since that faithful night. Albus wouldn’t have thought he had it in him. “This…this is all for him.” he had no other reason for this…even if it bored him to death. Or rather he thought it would, he’d been having fun with the whole thing with Umbridge.

Ambrose made a mental note to visit Carrow manor after this, with Black firmly on his side…he had greater chance of succeeding on all legislations, he had the most votes to his seat. A few half-truths revealed and he had Sirius Black exactly where he wanted him. If he’d been anyone else he would have felt guilty, but his goals came first. Even at that, he wasn’t a wizard for feeling guilty, it was a useless emotion. Although the closest he’d ever came…was in actual fact regarding Harry Potter oddly enough.

He couldn’t wait to meet the boy.

And he would one day, of that he was silently determined. Severus would know better than to deny him, if he knew what was good for him. Yet there was no denying just how protective Severus was of the child.

“Let’s vote to see whether this legislation will be pushed forth?” Albus called, and by pushed forth, everyone would take it home, make amends to it, until they could all come to a single agreement on how the legislation should look. How it should be, only then would it be approved or discarded. If it was approved, the construction would begin immediately, a new department would be opened up, which increased new jobs for the magical world, which was also a very good thing.

He made a mental note to ensue that a oath to do no harm, never to ignore a child’s suffering or accept bribery. He would refuse to pass it otherwise, he would not let anything interfere with the running of such a vital department. It would be one of the first things he was going to write on the legislation.

Un an unprecedented turn of events, each wand lit up, agreeing with the legislation to be put forth.
Fifty-one lights, Albus could scarcely believe it. Things never usually went that smoothly, it could only be because Ambrose had called into question the secrecy of their world. The protection of the children, if they didn’t agree…then it would not look good at all. He was impressed despite himself. It wasn’t often – or at all – that someone new came on the scene and had a legislation put forth, and definitely not with everyone in agreement.

The folders were placed aside, and the last one, his one, was turned to next, Albus waited impatiently for them to read through the paperwork. Which seemed to take forever, with him being the only one who wasn’t immersed in the reading. This wouldn’t be as easy as the previous one, he had a fight on his hands. He honestly wouldn’t be surprised if it was turned down, but he was determined to see it through. Even if he had to keep changing the legislation slightly until he got what he wanted.

Ambrose read through the legislation piece, not surprised by it’s contents, he had known it was coming. Well, known it entailed, but not every detail. He knew most wizards would have a problem with it, and he quietly mulled over how best to get them to agree. He wasn’t above playing dirty if he had to in order to get what he wanted. He wasn’t Dumbledore, who would try the gentle sympathetic approach. He knew no other way, it was just who the old fool was.

Sitting back, a thoughtful look on his face as he awaited everyone reading through the three pages. Unsurprisingly it was very long, very to the point and with every stipulation possible attached. He hadn’t bothered doing such a thing, knowing that it might not pass. That was the way he was used to, his legislations being tossed aside. He savagely wondered if Dumbledore would have done it again if his birth name was on it.

“Who would be privy to such a scan?” Bones surprisingly was the one to ask.

“It doesn’t matter who! It’s unethical to ask for such a procedure done!” protested one such member of the wizengamot.

“I agree, it’s offensive!” it implicated they abused their child, their heir, and it wasn’t something done often.

Albus ignored the naysayers, “The only one who will see the results of the scans are Madam Pomfrey, who might I add is sworn in as a Medi-witch to prevent any such concern. She does not gossip about the safety and wellbeing of her patients.” He patiently chided them.

Ambrose rolled his eyes, yes, Dumbledore hadn’t changed, that was not the way to go about it. “I do hope you’re not quickly forgetting the deaths of Miss. Fenwick and Mr. Fenwick,” he said
coolly, “They were I believe regularly abused from the age of four, Mr. Fenwick died as a result of severe abuse and starvation, in Hogwarts walls two days after the school started back up. It was only when they went to arrest the father that they found out about the squib twin, who did not survive the help St. Mungo’s tried to provide the child. This went down seventy years ago, and is surely remembered by many in this room.”

Albus paled just thinking about it, those children had been Benjy’s cousins, he had been very good friends with Benjy Fenwick. Who had regretfully not survived the first war with Voldemort, in fact they hadn’t found all of the poor wizard, he’d been buried with only an arm and a few fingers. He’d had classes with Bill Fenwick, the boy who had died in Gryffindor Common room in fact. Doge had been the one to find him, he could still hear the echo of his horrified screams when he found the their dead classmate and fellow Gryffindor. He hadn’t thought much about them if he was honest, he’d had his own worries, his mother, sister and his father who had been in Azkaban at that point.

Many others grimaced as well, being so callously reminded of such a disgusting wizard that was William Fenwick who abused his two children. He had died in Azkaban and nobody had mourned the bastard. He was an exception to the rules, everyone denied knowing him after the news got out.

“That is only an example of well-known case,” Ambrose pointed out, enjoying the discomfort he was causing, but mindful not to show it. “I am sure I could find other cases just as severe if I did some digging,”

Sirius swallowed thickly, he’d hated his parents, sure, but he couldn’t say he’d been abused, perhaps verbally when he didn’t do what they wanted. The thought of anyone hurting their child enough to kill them so horrified them. He knew Ambrose was one of those abuse statistics, Harry was too…perhaps it was too frequent to allow anyone their privacy.

“If this had been in place,” Ambrose tapped the folder, “It would help prevent more abuse heaped upon children, it won’t give them back their childhood, but it would secure their future. If you’ve got nothing to hide in regard to how your children or grandchildren are treated…then what exactly do you have to lose?” he challenged them.

Sirius watched the room and its occupants, still reeling over what he heard, but admiration was beginning to creep up in him for Ambrose. He had them all eating out of his hand, and the best part was they’d been very reluctant and furious at the thought of the children being given intense scans upon their persons the day after they entered Hogwarts walls.

“Will this be each year or only once? What if the abuse begins after their first year?” Sirius questioned, “Or if they’re sent to live with different relatives?”
“Something you should add as a stipulation for the legislation being moved forward, if it gets the agreement of the wizengamot today,” Bones as always, was curt but fair in telling Sirius what to do.

It appeared as though Dumbledore had forgot to consider something while writing it, quite honestly he could smack his own forehead in exasperation for such an obvious mistake.

“Let’s vote!” Albus called, holding his breath, it could go either way, and Albus truly wanted this to go in his favour. Heart pounding he watched as one by one hands began to raise, others frowning in quiet contemplation. Albus’ own wand was raised, until a decision had been reached. Thirty people out of the fifty-one still in the room, they had won, only just.

Ambrose was furious with the dark fraction, they were primarily abstaining from voting. He wasn’t going to be impressed if he had to reveal his new identity to them.

They were passed the first hurdle, it wasn’t complete yet, minds could be changed right up until the very moment they officially stamped their approval on the entire document giving it the wizengamot seal of approval. Agreeing to push it through and making it legal were two different processes.

Just knowing they were going to consider it was a load off, it gave him hope that he would be finally listened to.

He could see Doge wasn’t happy, he had a feeling he’d be having the wizard in his office pretty soon.

He only wished he could tell him, but he couldn’t the more people who come aware the greater chance of being found out.

Harry was too important to him to consider taking any chances.

Albus inwardly apologised to his old friend.
Severus had let Harry lead the way for the past two hours, which was spent truly investigating the grounds and insides of Prince Manor. Harry had eaten more in two hours than he usually did in a day. All of it fruit, so Severus didn’t mind quite naturally, the more vitamins he got the better. He did keep an eye on his legs to ensure they weren’t shaking with the strain, off keeping him up for so long. Also ensured he remained nearby, Harry was touching everything he could see, being gentle of course, not wishing to break anything.

The only places not investigated yet were the pool and the potions lab, which Harry was not going to get into either. Not for a while at least, not until Severus had taught him to respect potions, the consequences and inherit dangers of brewing and the ingredients. He’d teach him as if he were a child – which he essentially was – first getting him used to handling ingredients, how to cut, and such.

Merlin, he was actually looking forward to teaching Harry about potions. It was his passion, but he didn’t normally like teaching, as all the students and teachers at Hogwarts could attest. Yet teaching someone one on one, it would be much easier and less stressful.

“Come, Harry, I have something I want to show you,” Severus said, seeing the first sign of tiredness coming from him. It seemed as if it might be catching up on him after all. He’d done much greater than Severus could have hoped for, he was so proud of him.

“A surprise?” Harry asked inquisitively as a two-year-old, his legs twitching a little as he grew sore and tired.

Severus’ lips twitched, “Certainly something you’ll enjoy,” he didn’t really consider it a surprise, and no other boy would ever consider it one either. Removing a vial from his cloak pocket, and handed it to Harry without a word, giving a nod of encouragement for him to take it, as he uncorked it for him.

Harry gratefully guzzled the potion down, green eyes brightening considerably after the pain reliever began to work almost right away. The aftertaste was rather yucky but he didn’t mind, medicine had never been ‘wasted’ on him at the Dursley’s and no help given at the hospital, so getting it here was…more than Harry could have ever dreamed.

“Ready to go?” Severus questioned, today was for Harry, he wanted him to enjoy this trip where he
didn’t need to feel hidden away. He felt an unsurmountable weight of guilt that Harry felt that way, even if it was meant to be for his own good. Harry already had enough to endure without thinking he was being hidden away from other people. Part of him just wanted to de-age him, let him go out make friends, and be an actual child for a while. It wasn’t as if Harry could approach a child as he was, the Muggles would probably grab their children and run or judge to hell and back. Everyone in the magical world knew who Harry was, so the prospect of getting him a friend – even one at the age of eleven or so – wasn’t truly possible. The only other alternative was to weed out potential friends for Harry in Hogwarts and pick ones who would be more than likely to be what Harry needed to grow into who he was meant to be.

The pool was at the very foundations of the manor, very out of place, he wasn’t sure what his ancestors were thinking to be frank. It was beautiful in its own way, very out of the manors character, but if Harry liked it then honestly, it could remain there for all he cared. Opening the door, he used his wand to light up the darkened hallway, nothing terrified Harry more than dark enclosed spaces. He would always remain claustrophobic. If Harry wished to remain here, then he’d need to get dozens of oil lamps installed so that if and when he came down here, the light would lead the way and prevent any panic attacked or fear.

Guiding Harry down, keeping a tight grip on his elbow, so that he could easily get down the stairs, the banister helping him along the way.

Once they were at the door, the sound of the water being heard through it, Harry immediately perked up to Severus’ everlasting amusement. Swinging the door open, Harry gasped in delight, “Pool!” twitching as if he just wanted to jump up and down and expend some of his energy.

It encompassed Harry’s entire attention.

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I wanted to insert pictures of the pool and manor into the story but I can't figure out how to do it so oh well! another decent length chapter! YAY! I guess getting up a few hours earlier (6 o'clock) helps me get a chapter out without too much trouble. Although I'm not sure if I can do that every day but we'll see how it goes :D I think this will be how the chapters will go from now on, a bit political a bit Harry perhaps even 'Voldemort' not playing Ambrose but I am having fun with that! I hope you're all still enjoying it this chapter came surprisingly easy compared to previous chapters so there's hope for it yet :) Read and Review please!
Chapter 35

I've created a Facebook group for my stories if you're interested - annoyingly links don't work here SO look for it under the group called 'DebsTheSlytherinSnapeFanStories' if you still can't find it/get it give me a message and I'll send you the link through that way.

Chapter 35

Hours had passed since Harry had found the pool, and he’d yet to show any signs of wishing to get out and dry. Severus felt no desire to force Harry out of somewhere he obviously felt safe and happy. There was no doubt that Harry loved being in any body of water, whether it was the pool he had created in the Room of Requirements or this pool in the foundations of his ancestral home. Harry wouldn’t have argued if Severus had said it was time to leave, he never did, and normally they didn’t spend too long in the ROR, just out of sheer worry of them being seen and found out. Damn the Ministry to hell, if it weren’t for them and the fear of the unknown (not knowing what they would do should they get their hands on Harry) this wouldn’t be necessary. They wouldn’t have to hide him away just in case he ended up some sort of damn spectre in St. Mungo’s gawked at and reviled because he wasn’t what they wanted or imagined.

He’d never really contemplated leaving Hogwarts, despite his distaste for teaching, it had been his home for a long time. He had grown complacent with his life, such as it was. He wasn’t living for himself, by himself anymore and that changed everything. Seeing Harry here…how he’d been, it was a stark contrast to how he usually was when they were getting him through the halls of Hogwarts (with haste). Merlin help him, Harry looked as though he had a weight off him. He was so relaxed and curious and his eyes were sparkling in a way he hadn’t seen yet. Was it because it was somewhere new? Getting to investigate something that wasn’t just their rooms at Hogwarts? Was this just because of the newness? Would this happiness fade in time just like…nothing, Harry had never expressed an overly curious mind over their rooms. Just the shopping districts, his cat – Sevvy – and the pool.

Did he need a clean break from living at Hogwarts? Was it a constant reminder of what had happened to him? Not that he could ever forget, but surely Hogwarts would be a good thing for him? It was where he had been saved, where he had found salvation and hope and safety. It had been that for him since he was eleven years old, except for the few years after he’d graduated. Yet he thought with consternation, he was actually willing to leave. It wasn’t solely for Harry either, and he wasn’t going to lie about that. It would definitely be a weight off him not having to teach students while constantly worrying about Harry.

Severus stiffened, alarmed when he felt the wards give, he hadn’t even been aware he was connected to them already. It was very disconcerting not to know he was part of this place without any forewarning. Yet here he was, able to sense the wards giving way, granting someone entrance. Then again, he had no idea what kind of wards was on this place, it hadn’t been used for decades, maybe longer, surely the wards would be stronger though? After all the war had been going during his grandparents lives. Then again they were old pureblood’s and probably agreed with Voldemort’s ways, they’d certainly disowned their daughter for marrying his father, a Muggle.

Why they had given everything to him he had no idea. Perhaps old age and regret maybe even the prospect of the Ministry getting it.

This wasn’t his biggest concern. Someone was approaching the Prince Manor. Correction, already
in the manor he realized.

He couldn’t very well leave Harry on his own, but he didn’t want whoever it was to find him. He forced himself to relax, whoever it was had access, perhaps it was someone who came by to check on the property. He could be the grounds keeper or someone from the Prince estate. He’d see them off and demand a House-elf to show him the warding hub, which he would then place every warding spell he knew and used on his own rooms at Hogwarts and then some as a precautionary measure. He would never let himself feel vulnerable, and he did right now, especially with Harry here. It wasn’t a feeling he was used to, but he’d kill anyone who attempted to reveal Harry’s presence, he didn’t care if Dumbledore didn’t approve.

He would do anything to keep Harry safe. Absolutely anything.

Just then his Dark Mark began to tingle and he froze in absolute horror that was merging with terror very rapidly.

It couldn’t be.

The Dark Lord was not in his manor.

He wished he could make himself believe that, but he wasn’t one for immersing himself in denial.

How on earth had the Dark Lord found him here? Only Albus, Minerva and Poppy even knew he was here. They would never have revealed it to anyone, they knew just how precarious Harry’s situation was. They wouldn’t tell anyone let alone the Dark Lord, so just how had the wizard found him and so soon into leaving Hogwarts? Had he been followed? Was he being watched? His skin prickled at the prospect that he’d missed being watched. No, it wasn’t possible, surely, he would have noticed. He had survived the war due to his damn good instincts, and his ability to keep his emotions in check.

Glancing at Harry, his heart pounding away dangerously fast, quite honestly if he was prone to panic attacks, he would be having one right this second. Harry was immersed in swimming all around the pool, after having floated around staring at the ceiling for around twenty minutes. The prickling on his arm began to worsen as the Dark Lord got closer causing him to glance at the door half expecting the Dark Lord to be standing there.

He was heading straight for him. With precision. How?

Turning back to Harry, could the Dark Lord have managed to put a tracer on Harry? No, he had been a snake, or rather saw through his snake. Surely, he hadn’t been capable of magic. He’d sworn to protect Harry, yet he was failing at every turn, from the snake to the Dark Lord’s actual presence here in a place he had decided would be safe for him. He cursed the fact he hadn’t turned on the Floo Network, there was one just a few feet from him.

Truthfully, if the Dark Lord wished to kill them or speak to him…he would find a way to do so, even from within the safety of Hogwarts. Although he’d probably use someone else to send his message. Whether that person arrived alive…well, that would depend on a lot of things, most just how pissed off the Dark Lord was by his attempts of getting himself and Harry out of here. He didn’t seem completely insane though, vividly reminded of the hope he’d felt when he got over the shock.

The time for action was unfortunately over, as the Dark Lord – who did not look like himself at all from before or after his resurrection – stepped into the room. His eyes taking everything in, dwelling far too long – in Severus’ opinion – on Harry before they latched onto his. His face blank
but his eyes were as always very intense.

Severus clenched his hidden hand into a fist, his face smooth and impassive, giving nothing away, “How did you find me?” breathing out in relief when his voice managed to remain somewhat polite, he wasn’t about to antagonise the Dark Lord. Harry had been through enough trauma without seeing him being cursed within an inch of his life, now that would definitely put him off magic for all eternity. Perhaps even render Harry completely catatonic, he glanced at him with a frown before a quick look at Voldemort made him ponder leaving the room. Just in case the Dark Lord was trigger happy right now.

Annoyance flickered over those changed eyes, he wasn’t used to being spoken to in that manner. Yet he could clearly see that Severus was completely thrown by his appearance here at Prince Manor. So, perhaps a little leeway was in order, Severus was in uber protective mode at the moment. Understanding dawned, of course, Severus was no doubt worried that he’d be cursed in front of the boy. The boy who was so utterly terrified of magic, that it was nearly incompressible to him.

“You forget I can always find those who belong to me,” Voldemort in his Ambrose visage stated firmly yet with softness.

A softness that almost had Severus cringing visibly. That softness usually led to terrible, terrible consequences, yet his gaze was on Harry, it was almost as if he didn’t want to raise his voice and scare him. Was that possible? Could the Dark Lord actually have a soft spot for Harry? Out of guilt? Did he feel responsible or at least partially responsible for what had happened to him?

Belong to him? Closing his eyes, swallowing thickly, of course, the Dark Mark, he’d had no idea it was a damn tracker as well. It explained why nobody ever left the Dark Lord’s services without suffering then death. Why he’d never searched for any of his ‘servants’ when they went ‘missing’ since he no doubt knew they were dead. He had examined it extensively, and never found anything remotely tracking his location within it. Then again, out of all people who could successfully do something like that would be the Dark Lord. “The Mark,” he muttered almost under his breath.

“Indeed,” Voldemort replied, throwing Severus’ own favourite word back at him his tone desert dry. “You didn’t think I’d be stupid enough to let everyone run amok?”

“Yet you did,” Severus retorted sarcastically, before he paled spectacularly when he realized what he’d said and whom he’d said it to. Savagely biting his tongue, he silently cursed his loose lips. It had to be the looks and the lack of powerful aura that surrounded the Dark Lord at the moment. He’d never been so idiotic as to talk back to the Dark Lord let alone so disrespectfully. This was not how he survived the war thank you very much.

Voldemort flared his magic dramatically, glaring at Severus with deadly intent in his eye, “You should be thankful that I will ignore that comment and the way you’ve spoken to your chosen Lord.” He stated, before diminishing his powers, sensing that Harry was watching him from the corner of his eye. His green eyes were alight with inquisitiveness as he watched both of them. He seemed and looked much better than the time he’d seen through Nagini. Making it clear to Severus that just because he was changing how he operated it didn’t mean that he would allow disrespect.

“Thank you, My Lord,” Severus murmured, suddenly looking exhausted, more so than Voldemort had ever seen him. He had seen Severus remain awake for days at a time brewing difficult potions for him so this…this truly was the most fatigued he’d ever observed him. Arching an eyebrow curiously, was it truly that tiresome to look after one boy and brew potions part time? Yes, he knew everything about his potions master, he had dossiers on all his followers – everything that had happened to them over the past decade – so that he knew everything he’d missed as a spectre.
Voldemort refrained from rolling his eyes, other people’s emotions didn’t bother him or move him. He only used emotion when it suited him, specifically to manipulate in order to get what he wanted. What he did instead was move over to the little niche beside the pool that was filled with bottles of alcohol, he poured both himself and Severus a drink as he stood and observed his surroundings. He had to admit this place was…actually very serene, perhaps it was the sound of the water and the quietness or the feel of the room. “How is he?” it was clear Severus needed someone to talk to, and he…didn’t know why he was asking, it was baffling, yet here he was asking someone else about their feelings. It made him feel sick, perhaps he was better off completely insane.

The swipe that thought almost immediately after, he hadn’t almost taken over the magical world…he’d almost destroyed it and rendered magic completely gone from the world. In the process more people had suffered when he had originally set out to prevent the suffering of magical children.

Severus shook his head a bit, dazed and surprised, surely he hadn’t heard right? “Physically his recovery is going as expected,” Severus automatically began speaking, not as a protector but as one delivering a report, almost mechanically. “Mentally, he is learning…but not in the way a teenager should, I would put him at nine years of age.”

“And will he continue to advance?” Voldemort asked, he knew next to nothing about mental impairments, he’d read a few books but it didn’t make him an expert, he doubted Severus was too. Yet he expected that Severus knew more than him, after all he’d known about Harry’s predicament for a lot longer and had more free time than he himself did.

Severus claimed a seat, his brow furrowed, clearly worried, “We don’t know,” he revealed, “We won’t know for years to come if he will ever be the adult he should have been. If he will ever be able to live on his own without some sort of supervision.”

“How sure are you that the mental impairment wasn’t there to begin with?” Voldemort asked pensively, surely someone couldn’t survive the killing curse without some sort of ailment presenting itself. It wasn’t just any old spell, it was the killing curse, it was supposed to kill the intended recipient, there had been no exceptions until this boy had survived the un-survivable. Not that he was wishing that it was his fault, he could sense how powerful the boy had the capacity to be, to be responsible for the decline of what could have been an amazing mind and a powerful wizard wasn’t exactly what he aspired. It had been something he had been thinking of in the times he allowed himself to dwell on the past.

“Other than the cut to the forehead, Harry wasn’t damaged by the spell at all.” Severus stated firmly, “I’ve seen his records, he was tested in every way after that night by Poppy declared both mentally and physically fine.” Except for the fact that Dumbledore refused to let Poppy heal the cut on Harry’s forehead. She’d been quite furious about that and had actually written down how unhappy she was with him. Minerva had expressed similar concerns, it wasn’t like Harry wouldn’t be recognized without the scar though, regretfully he did look a bit too much like his parents to avoid being a ‘Potter’ as it were.

Which would have made his life infinitely more easier.

“I have a feeling that is not what’s on your mind, Severus,” Voldemort stated abruptly, disliking the feeling of immense relief flowing through him at Severus’ words. Knowing that he wasn’t ultimately responsible for Harry’s current condition. No, it was Muggles who once again harmed one of their own. Why the guilty feeling? He could kill without blinking an eye or feeling even a single smidge of guilt yet when it came to this boy…he was feeling things he didn’t normally
“What is it you wish of me, My Lord?” Severus asked, inclining his head in respect, not fully bowing, he would not do that with Harry in the room. “Do you still require me to spy?” it was not something he wished to do, he didn’t want to be caught between two powerful wizards who both thought they were doing the right thing. While that wasn’t accurate where the Dark Lord was concerned…at least not in the past. Now though…perhaps he was going to do the right thing. Only time would tell whether his Lord’s sanity was long lasting. Dumbledore had made just as many mistakes as the Dark Lord really, mistakes that had affected generations of children but he too was trying to correct his mistakes. The thought of being caught in the middle of it all made him want to just take Harry and run, leave everything behind.

“Would you deny my request?” Voldemort asked, eyes flashing red through the glamour his tone held bite.

“If you don’t kill me for it then yes,” Severus replied seriously, glancing briefly at Harry who was watching both of them, not at all interested in anything else now. Could he hear what they were saying? No, probably not, they weren’t speaking quite loud enough even if the room was cavernous.

Voldemort despite himself was rather impressed with Severus’ straightforwardness, it was an odd change from the usual characters he had to deal with. The endless kissing ass, what they thought was subtle manipulation or outright begging for what they wanted. He would have wondered where the bravery was coming from if he didn’t already know Severus was capable of it. After all, he had bravely asked him to spare Lily Potter, someone he saw as an enemy. To ask for something that could have surely ended in his death was extremely brave. He was far from a Gryffindor though, and he was grateful that Dumbledore hadn’t turned him into one.

“You wish to bring the boy here,” Voldemort deduced, it wasn’t a difficult leap after all.

“He’s happier…” Severus said breathing out shakily, surprised that he hadn’t been cursed yet. He knew he was pushing his luck, but he was just so damn tired of being told what to do. He wanted as much freedom as he could gain, and not spying would help that a great deal. He already felt absolutely wretched that he couldn’t reveal the Dark Lord was back to give Albus some warning if he went back to his old ways. “He’s begun to realize that he’s being hidden away at Hogwarts… and without revealing everything he won’t understand.” And it was something he so desperately wanted to avoid. He wanted to keep Harry as innocent as possible for as long as possible. He’d been through enough shit to last a lifetime, why the hell would he want to heap more upon him? He knew realistically he should tell Harry…just in case it blew back in his face, and there was a chance it would. That was how life worked, but if he could keep Harry with that carefree look on his face he’d seen while he plucked fruit from the tree earlier…then he’d do his damn hardest to see it through. Screw what everyone else thought, Harry was in his care, and in his care he would remain.

Black and Lupin weren’t suitable caretakers, and it might not be official, but Harry listened to him, learned from him.

“You are still my Potions Master,” Voldemort warned possessively, as he had always been with what he considered his. Giving him what he wanted, he didn’t really need a spy anyway, Dumbledore was not going to be a thorn in his side this time around. If anything, what happened to Harry had made Dumbledore realize the error of his ways. They’d work together for the betterment of the magical world, without Dumbledore ever realizing who he was. Which reminded him, he had to speak to all his followers, he was extremely displeased with their actions within the
Wizengamot. “You will do and brew anything I ask when I ask.” He was going easy on the Potions Master, the wizard would know this, and perhaps he’d get him back for his slights this day but today was not that day.

“Yes, My Lord,” Severus replied, almost dizzy with relief, although he believed the Dark Lord would get him back at some point. He would make sure that it wasn’t in front of Harry…albeit if he didn’t go too far. Voldemort’s temper was explosive, he rarely thought before reacting. He knew Voldemort wasn’t the same wizard he had been, the insanity had left him but he kept waiting for the other shoe to drop. He suspected it would take a long time for him to truly believe he’d changed. It just felt all too convenient really, that he ‘changed’ after being defeated. Perhaps the fact he’d almost died had caused this…speculating was just messing with his head, which was already messed up as it was with everything that had happened lately.

“Good, I have a list with me,” Voldemort stated, handing the slip of paper over. He could brew them himself, of course, he was the best in his year, and that hadn’t changed until Severus had completed his OWLS and NEWTS.

Resignedly, Severus accepted the piece of paper and gave it a short glance before sliding it into his pocket with a firm nod.

“Hello little one,”

Severus jerked his head up, heart pounding when he noticed that Voldemort had moved from his position – next to him – and had made his way over to Harry. He hadn’t even sensed the Dark Lord moving, dear Merlin, he attributed it towards the fact that he had his magic tightly contained so it wasn’t so easily felt. He really should take a moment to admire that, not many had the willpower to deliberately contain their power.

“The snake!” Harry hissed out in excitement, “Was it you?” eager to know more, swimming towards the figure kneeling beside the pool. The way he called him ‘little one’ gave that away.

Severus froze on the spot, he had no idea what Harry or worse the Dark Lord was saying. He did not like it in the least.

“She is my familiar,” upon seeing the confused look on the boys face, he refrained from gritting his teeth and added, “My pet,” which truly was an insult really, Nagini was extremely smart, very intelligent for a snake. She would have thrown a hissy fit worthy of the name if she had been here to hear him say something so insipid. She was the one thing in his life that he really cared about, the one he’d let away with murder, the only one he’d let speak to him in any way she wanted.

“Like Sevvy! My Kitten!” Harry proclaimed proudly, in only the way a child could be with their pets.

Voldemort pursed his lips in amusement, the urge to laugh astonishing him.

Harry’s next words surprised him however.

“My Dark Protector is afraid of you, isn’t he?” and his Dark Protector wasn’t afraid of anything.

Surprise filtered over his ‘Ambrose’ visage, giving Harry a shrewd look, “Very astute, there’s more to you than meets the eye, isn’t there, little one?”

“I believe…Severus, that Harry is going to surprise us all,” Voldemort stated as he stood back up facing Severus, children were perceptive yes, but not to the extent that they would reveal it so boldly to the one they’d seen scaring their guardian. Then again, he hadn’t much dealt with
children, not since he himself had been one. He knew he hadn’t been the most normal child out there – and he didn’t mean in terms of magical powers – he meant in general, he had been smarter than any child his age.

Severus glanced between them, perplexed and a little wary of Voldemort’s pleased expression.

“Meaning?” Severus asked cautiously, wondering if he even wanted to know.

“I mean that he’s more observant and perceptive than any child his age should be,” Voldemort informed him, by age he meant the speculated mental age and Severus would realize this. With that Voldemort began to leave the room, glancing back just the once, “Goodbye, Little one, we will meet again,” he promised, or threatened judging how one person saw the statement.

Harry merely waved, almost as if he didn’t have any self-preservation whatsoever.

It made Severus more determined to protect him while he could.

He narrowed in on Harry absently rubbing at his head, perhaps he’d been in the water too long?

“Are you ready to get out and put some clothes on again?” Severus questioned, relaxing fully when the wards alerted him to the fact Voldemort was off his premises. With Harry mostly just floating around it didn’t cause too much strain on his muscles and let him relax a little. It was good for him, which was why he let Harry indulge.

Or so he told himself.

Relentlessly.

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Would you like to see this from Harry’s POV? And I know I don’t do it a lot I really should but Harry’s POV doesn’t have a tendency to last very long in this story…This has long ago surpassed its original plot so I’m having a little trouble keeping up with it and continuing it really. That and it’s plot is vastly different as well, so you’ll need to bear with me while I try to get some semblance of a story out of it…who would have thought writing something so different like Dumbledore and Voldemort working together (sort of) towards a common goal would be difficult to write? Surely it should be fun to write and easy…but noooo it doesn’t even give me that :D Read & Review Please!
“You wish to leave Hogwarts permanently?” Albus stared at Severus completely stunned, oh, he’d known it was coming really, he had. He was just burying his head in the sand in hopes that he was wrong and that he wasn’t about to lose Severus as both Head of Slytherin and his Potions Master. That and with everything going on, it was easier to put such idle thoughts aside as he worked hard within the Ministry and dealt with students at Hogwarts.

“I do,” Severus confirmed, giving a grim nod, not at all concerned for Harry’s safety, he was currently with Minerva and Poppy. With their upcoming move – whether Dumbledore approved or not – he wouldn’t see them quite so often so they had jumped at the chance. “I am hoping you will allow it, Albus, so that I can take Harry home, if not I will most reluctantly spend the rest of the year here, before leaving.” He had absolutely no intentions of signing another contract to stay on as a teacher at Hogwarts.

Swallowing thickly, shoulders hunching, “I see,” if he didn’t accept it he would lose more than just his Potions Master and friend, even if he would remain in Hogwarts until the end of the school term. Severus could hold a grudge like the best of them. “Are you sure this is what you want?” knowing without a doubt that Severus had indeed thought it through, he always did weigh the pros and cons before deciding something.

“Don’t look at me like that, Albus, it won’t change my mind,” Severus muttered exasperated, honestly, he looked as thought someone had just kicked his phoenix after it just had a burning day. “At least you aren’t going to have to find a new Potions Master in the middle of a school year, Slughorn will be more than capable of taking over fully, and I wouldn’t be surprised if he should actually design to stay after the year is up.” The old wizard was in his element, he was happier than he had been at the beginning of the year that’s for certain.

Albus cocked his head to the side for a moment, silent conceding Severus’ point, “You will bring Harry to visit won’t you?” he added, he felt a lot of guilt and fondness for Harry. He was the reason for his state…he had placed Harry with the Dursley’s and it would be his single most biggest regret to the day he died. Considering the rest of his…past, it spoke volumes that Harry was his biggest shame when it came to his own actions.

“Of course, definitely during the summer holidays,” Severus agreed, Harry liked a few people in the castle, Poppy and Minerva specifically and Albus too. It might be because he was bribed with sweets, well, sugar free sweets his body could handle of course.

“When do you wish to leave?” Albus asked, sort of resigned to it all. He would never risk his relationship with Severus and Harry by trying to keep them at Hogwarts. Try to keep Severus there until the end of the year in hopes of trying to change his mind. Which would be impossible, Severus wasn’t one for changing his mind easily if at all. He was bull-headed stubborn.

“As soon as possible, you should have seen him yesterday, Albus, you’d understand if you saw for yourself.” Severus explained, giving a grim smile. He had sworn an oath to watch over Harry in Lily’s name. He had failed so spectacularly in the past, he wasn’t about to let anything come in the way of Harry’s recovery. Harry was…like a son to him now, he would sacrifice his own life to see him live. He would sacrifice his own happiness if it came to that, but living in Prince manor was
not a sacrifice. He’d never been a good teacher, never wished to be one, and this was…two birds one stone, he’d get to leave, get to brew, to experiment and make Harry happy too.

“Are you sure this is what you want, Severus?” Albus asked after a few moments of contemplative silence.

“Yes,” Severus replied immediately, there was no doubt in his voice, he was determined.

“Very well, I thank you, Severus Snape, for your hard work and dedication as a tenure teacher here at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, but your services are no longer required.” And with that both glowed briefly, and Severus Snape was no longer a professor of Hogwarts. “You will receive full pension and your pay until the end of the year, part-time as your severance package.” Giving him money, despite the fact he didn’t think Severus needed it, still, he had worked hard for over a decade, he deserved it.

“Thank you,” Severus said, his shoulders relaxing marginally, feeling much more freer than he had in a long time. Which was odd, considering he’d always thought of Hogwarts as a safe heaven, a sanctuary, his home. Yet he felt nothing but relief and marginal excitement at the unknown, his future…their futures. During that time, he would do his best to stay out of this war, or any manipulation going on between the Dark Lord and Dumbledore…hopefully though, it wouldn’t be too difficult considering they now wanted the same thing.

“No, Severus, thank you,” Albus said his tone soft and fond, before he pondered, “What do you intend to do regarding Sirius and Remus?” Severus still didn’t like either wizard, and probably never would. He had not stopped either from visiting since the initial ban due to their ill health, which would have severely affected Harry’s non-existent immune system.

“I am not going to stop them from visiting,” Severus said dryly, as much as he’d like to keep Black and Lupin from his life, he knew he wouldn’t be hurting them so much as Harry. Who was he kidding? Harry liked them well enough, but he doubted he’d be unduly upset over their disappearance, it would definitely hurt Lupin and Black more. He was a vindictive bastard, yes, but not a complete unfeeling bastard. Plus, he knew Black and Lupin would go to dangerous lengths if he went back on his word. If they went to the Ministry…Harry could very well end up in St. Mungo’s for the rest of his life, and while Black and Lupin wouldn’t want that…they wouldn’t think the Ministry would do it. They were light wizards, they didn’t see the Ministry for what it was, never could. Especially with Cornelius Fudge as Minister for Magic, any threat to his power – and make no mistake Harry was regardless of his state of mind – would be dealt with swiftly.

Albus let out a breath of relief, “I am glad for that, Severus…Sirius…isn’t…one for thinking things through, the consequences could have been disastrous should he feel…slighted.” He’d always been that way unfortunately, he was just very childish when insulted.

“You think I’m unaware of that?” Severus retorted darkly, he was more aware of Black’s twisted mind greater than any other, he had been a victim of it repeatedly without mercy or aid.

Albus just gave him an apologetic look, not apologising, he had already done it, to do so again would just irritate the hell out of Severus. “I am proud of you, Severus, you did not let the past dictate your life,” he was very proud of Severus for that. It couldn’t be easy allowing Sirius or Remus anywhere near him, yet he did so every week because it would not only benefit them by keeping Remus and Sirius happy but it would allow Harry to be happy too.

He could only hope that Sirius didn’t do anything spectacularly stupid to Harry should any situation arise. Well, other than the one time he’d scared Harry stiff the first time. Merlin, scaring him out of his sleep when he was unused to people…what on earth had he been thinking? That’s
the problem with the wizard, he just didn’t think which made him dangerous to Harry’s wellbeing.

Severus arched a brow, every day his past dictated his life, he’d never be free of his reputation as a Death Eater. Even though it wasn’t ‘common knowledge’ it was known around certain circles. The Dark side didn’t trust him due to his spying duties, and the light side didn’t trust that he was truly a spy for the light. It was a vicious endless circle, but he wasn’t alone anymore, he had someone to look after that didn’t need his dark depressing thoughts. Someone who didn’t care about his past and looked at him as though he was Merlin reincarnated. It made him feel…liberated.

Albus just stared right back, believing his words, uncaring that Severus couldn’t see it himself. In time he would, Harry was…quite frankly the best thing that could have happened to Severus. In the long run, he prayed for a full recovery, but should the worst be realised and become a reality…Albus knew, knew that Severus would be there for Harry until his dying breath and make sure he had someone to love him after he was gone. He didn’t need to worry about Harry’s future at all.

“I should go, I have packing to do,” Severus insisted, standing up feeling extremely awkward at the moment. He wasn’t used to being praised or told anyone was proud of him. Try as he may to brush off any compliments he couldn’t help but bask in them, usually in the privacy of his own quarters admittedly.

“Would you like some help?” Albus asked, “I would like to see Harry before you depart,” he added knowing this would be the only way Severus would accept any help from anyone.

“Try not to give him too much in the way of treats,” Severus told him wryly, in his own way teasing the Headmaster for his penchant for bribery.

“Perhaps a few pieces of fudge?” Albus offered.

Severus’ lips twitched at how hopeful Albus looked, he didn’t want to go down there without something due to the fact Harry was used to getting something nice from the elder wizard. It’s what had drawn Harry into liking him, plus Severus believed it was due to guilt too. He probably thought one day, that fragile relationship would combust and Harry wouldn’t want anything to do with him. The reality though, was that Severus didn’t think Harry blamed anyone, not even the Dursley’s. He was scared of them yes, terrified beyond recognition but no blame. Harry probably didn’t even understand the concept yet. “Very well,” he sighed, as if it was a long suffering problem he was allowing.

Albus beamed as if he had been given one of life’s greatest gifts. “Then let us depart,” he could deal with his friend later, and convince him to take over Potions full time, and if Severus was correct he might just have one for the coming few years. Who knows, by then he might actually step down and allow Minerva to take over once and for all and it would be up to her to find a brilliant Potions Master.

Although they’d never find another Severus, he was truly irreplaceable when it came to Potion Masters. He was the youngest Potions Master in the world after all.

“Forgive an old man, Severus, but I’d rather use the Floo, would that be acceptable?” Albus asked, he didn’t see Harry every day, so he was unsure of his progress when it came to magic and what kinds of magic he would accept without panicking.

“We will go to my private potions lab,” Severus declared, even on a good day he wasn’t sure what could pull Harry back into his nightmare of a headspace where that horrific woman used him for his magic. Oh, he was much more comfortable around magic than he used to be, even used it some days, only to fill up Sevvy’s water dish but it was still a work in progress.
Albus agreed, and both wizards left the Headmaster’s office.

Severus found Harry, Poppy and Minerva on the sofa, Minerva was reading from one thousand magical herbs and fungi book. The book as the name suggested was filled with every magical herb and fungi in the magical world. With names in English and Latin as well as clear comprehensive pictures. They had clearly been at it for a while since they were all the way up to ‘G’ since they were looking at Gillyweed.

“Gillyweed is a magical plant that, when eaten, allows a human to breathe underwater. It is said to resemble a bundle of slimy, grey-green rat tails. When eaten, it gives the consumer gills, allowing them to breathe underwater, and webbing between the fingers and toes, allowing them to swim underwater with ease. Gillyweed is native to the Mediterranean Sea.” Minerva’s voice echoed around the room.

Poppy smothered an amused laugh by the look of revulsion on Harry’s face at the sight of ‘Gillyweed’ which as stated resembles a rats tail. Evidently Harry understood what ‘when eaten’ meant, he was coming along nicely, able to retain information and understand it especially when it came to grammar. Perhaps his mental age could be kicked up to ten, but she’d need to observe more before declaring that.

“Good afternoon, would you all like stay for lunch?” Severus asked, hating to interrupt when Harry was learning.

“Can you?” Harry asked, looking at them with a puppy dog look, which somehow worked despite his age, especially with those soulful green eyes. “Please?”

“Of course,” Poppy was the first to break, as she continued to go through Harry’s workbook, correcting his work or ticking those that which were right. It was basic words, spelling, math and such, his writing was sloppy and childish, but readable, given time he’d be taught properly. Learning his ABC’s and 1,2,3’s was much more important than calligraphy. Between them all they were getting Harry through the difficulties of learning, or rather re-learning something he probably had already known before his hellish life. The most important of all things was that he was retaining information, it boded well for his future.

“Sev!” Harry said clearly perking up further – which was clearly possible with Harry when it came to his Dark Protector – very happy to see him. Nobody missed the stark relief hidden in those green depths either. It happened every time Severus was out of his sight, but they’d be happy to note it wasn’t the same desperate desperation as it would have been a few weeks ago. He was beginning to trust that Severus would always return to him. “You’re back!”

Progress. A work in progress.

“I did say I would be, didn’t I?” Severus said calmly and simply, but before long Harry was eying Albus with wide eyes, knowing without a doubt a sweet was coming his way.

Poppy, Severus, Minerva and Albus couldn’t help but chuckle at the look and the excitement that came across Harry’s face at the sight of the small see-through bag of fudge. Just four small pieces, which by the way had been made with less sugar than normal teeth rotting fudge. Albus passed it over without another thought, as always, pleased with Harry’s happiness.

“Harry?” Severus said, sitting himself down as Poppy and Minerva stood, they knew what Severus was going to discuss. Severus had spoken to them earlier before going to see the Headmaster.
Harry half way through chewing his first piece of fudge, paused and automatically sought out Severus’ gaze. Swallowing down the piece of fudge with a moue of disappointment. “Yes?” preening at the pride on Severus’ face, he loved nothing more than making his Dark Protector proud of him and yes, he understood that expression now, it was a good thing. He was good. A good boy.

“Did you like being at Prince Manor yesterday?” Severus asked, ignoring the conversation Albus was having with Poppy, regarding Harry’s progress.

Harry nodded his head eagerly, looking like a bobblehead. “Can we go again?” he asked eagerly, he so wanted to see the pool again, it had been so much fun.

“We can,” Severus agreed, “But how would you like to live there?”

Harry’s brow furrowed as uncertainty crossed his features.

“You will still see Poppy, Minerva and Albus, but instead of living here you can live in Prince Manor, and you will be living with me and still have a room of your own.” Severus calmly explained, telling Harry how it would be so that the uncertainty would wash out of his features. He was just beginning to like making choices and decisions, and Severus didn’t want to overwhelm him and make him reluctant to do so again.

“I can use the pool every day?” Harry asked, a wistful hopeful note to his voice. It was calm and peaceful in the water, and didn’t hurt his body so much when he moved around. He was always tired when he came out and had a nap, but still not the same way as walking had on him.

“You may.” Severus agreed, and it was probably going to be a reality, Harry loved the water, quite frankly if he didn’t already know he was fully human he’d think he was some sort of merman with his penchant and love for the water.

“And go outside?” Harry whispered, he’d enjoyed being outside too until it hurt too much, picking the fruit and eating it had been awesome. He didn’t get to go outside here often, and he had noticed there was never anyone around. His Dark Protector was always worried too, he just didn’t understand why.

Poppy, Minerva and Albus went quiet at the words, eyes dimming, sadness enveloping them. They knew right there and then that Severus was doing the right thing. Harry was beginning to notice and question a great deal of things. It didn’t sit well with them.

“Any time you like,” Severus declared, but he’d be warding the area so that Harry couldn’t go too far. There were acers and acers of land, he wasn’t risking Harry hurting himself or getting lost. He’d take them down when Harry was fully recovered and more familiar with the land.

“Okay!” Harry chirped happily enough, feeling very excited about it now. The pool all for him when he wanted and to go outside? It was a dream come true, so excitement and happiness bubbled within him.

“Why don’t I help you pack up everything you’d like to take with you?” Minerva suggested, none of her inner heartbreak showing. Although, Harry’s situation had come close to breaking her iron-clad composure more than once, in fact it had, when she first saw him. He looked nothing like that thin skeletal boy they’d brought back, although he could certainly use more meat on his bones.

Harry looked at Severus, not even needing to ask a question for Severus to understand what he wanted to ask.
“Yes, we can leave tonight if you like, your room is already made up for you,” Severus explained, House-elves made things much easier for him when it came to getting everything done. He could if he wished, used House-elves to brew potions actually, since they were magical, but nobody except him ever got to brew the potions.

Harry scrambled to get up – still very slow but it was scrambling for him – shuffling towards his bedroom. Minerva stayed beside him the entire time. “What about Sevvy? We can’t leave without her,”

“You won’t,” Minerva explained, smiling, he absolutely adored that cat, “She will settle with you at Prince Manor,” although she’d obviously have much more places to explore and probably spend longer times away from Harry and explore and be a cat. She hoped Harry was prepared for that, they were always so close that she hoped it wouldn’t feel like abandonment. She suspected Severus would keep him busy enough that he wouldn’t notice.

“Promise?” Harry said, sounding impossibly young, young and vulnerable. It made her wish she had known, known and tortured that despicable woman before Severus disposed of her. She wanted to gut the woman like a pig, and she wasn’t normally a violent woman.

“Definitely,” Minerva declared, as if Severus would leave the cat behind, Harry adored the little – not so little anymore – thing. “Okay, let’s start packing.”

Harry immediately went to his bed and scooped up his soft toys, clutching them tightly as if fearing they would be left behind. Minerva opened the wardrobe door and realized that a great deal of the clothes still had their tags on them, and most definitely wouldn’t fit Harry anymore.

“How about Ginevra Weasley? Some are quite suitable for a girl,” Minerva suggested, as she looked over the articles of clothing’s. “I know of a few families that could use the more male suited attires.” They would definitely be grateful for the clothes, it would allow them more leeway to buy other essentials. They wouldn’t accept much in the way of charity, but the clothes would just end up thrown away and they wouldn’t be able to accept that either and inevitably give in.

“Then take them,” Severus answered, as he set the books tidily into the trunk, amused by the mess Harry was already making of the other side, as he put everything he loved in first, regardless of whether it was a priority – and it definitely wasn’t – or not. “I’m sure they will be relieved to have them.” and he knew that to be true, he had spent his entire childhood with second hand clothes, as his parents had been unable to afford anything better. Mostly due to his fathers alcohol intake, he didn’t like thinking of that time in his life.

“Thank you, Severus, they certainly will,” Already circling through what to give who, as she lay out three piles on the bed, and put what she was sure would fit Harry into his trunk. It was a shame none of it would fit Ronald Weasley, he was much too tall and broad for any of this to fit, but Ginevra would be able to wear them. Luna was another candidate as well as Sam Warren, his family were currently struggling as much as the Weasley’s. They were trying to save up for Sam’s
Hogwarts tuition which wasn’t easy, so these clothes would be a welcoming relief.

“NO!” Harry protested, grabbing his quidditch pyjamas, “Mine!” backing away from Minerva as if he was afraid of her first time in a long time. He did have his head tilted with defiance and determination. “No touch!”

“That’s fine, Harry, you can keep them, in fact, Severus can make them fit again, can’t you?” Minerva was quick to reassure Harry, knowing it would probably be the only thing Harry would trust – Severus’ word – right now.

“Harry, what have I said about that tone of voice?” Severus warned him firmly, not indulging him like Minerva was at the moment. “There is a way to make your desires known without being petulant. Now apologise to Minerva for your behaviour.” He refused to pander to Harry, not in this way, he wasn’t going to have Harry turning into a younger version of his godson, who was barely coming out of the mindset of a spoiled brat these days but sometimes he still slipped up and stated ‘wait until my father hears about this’ in that infuriatingly haughty tone.

“They’re mine!” Harry said, his tone a cross between desperate and whiny, he didn’t want to give up his quidditch pyjamas.

“Yes, they are,” Severus agreed, “But it’s the manner in which you spoke and acted that I have a problem with.” He told the boy, “You may keep them but I want to hear what you should have done instead.” He added, and it certainly wasn’t an afterthought.

Minerva kept out of it, knowing better than to exasperate the situation. Severus was…in essence Harry’s father figure, not by blood but because he was raising Harry. At the end of the day, it was Severus’ decision on how Harry was raised and perhaps it was a good thing. The rest of them would want to coddle him, and perhaps in the long run it wasn’t what Harry needed. She felt awful when Harry looked ready to cry though.

“What should you have said?” Severus urged Harry, giving him an encouraging nod, to show that he wasn’t angry with him just disappointed.

“That I’d like to keep them,” Harry whispered, feeling awful, swallowing the lump in his throat. The anger disappearing leaving him feeling sad.

“Exactly,” Severus replied, “Now why don’t you put them in your trunk and apologise to Minerva for your attitude?”

“A lot of big words there, Severus,” Minerva muttered almost under her breath.

“He’s aware of their meaning,” Severus confirmed, “He’s smart,” it caused Harry to perk up hearing that, a beaming smile was directed his way, and with that, the sadness and anger was a thing of the past. His emotions were all over the place, one minute he was happy the next confused by how he was feeling, having been supressed it was hardly any wonder really, Severus wondered if it was some sort of puberty hit that was going through Harry’s body? If he’d been normal he’d have already gone through it…but Harry’s situation was so far from normal there was no held to be had, everything they went through was unique to the situation and they were having to take it step by step.

“M’sorry,” Harry said, now he was sounding sheepish.

“It’s perfectly alright, I forgive you,” Minerva replied, giving him a small smile, that was only for Harry. “Go on, let’s get packing again.”
And he did, the incident already forgotten as Harry eagerly helped, even while aching.

“You definitely are the best thing that could have happened to Harry,” Minerva declared as they moved out of the bedroom and begun packing the living room of Severus’ quarters, which was mostly books.

Severus’ cheeks tinged red, but he shook his head, “You’d be the same way if you were responsible for him,” and sometimes it felt overwhelming and he often wondered if he was doing the right thing late at night.

“Perhaps,” Minerva conceded, she may be a little more stern if she was fully responsible for him, but she wasn’t one hundred percent sure of that herself. “But regardless, you’re doing a wonderful job, Severus, he’s going to turn out wonderful you’re a good father.”

Severus waved off the compliment, even as it warmed him. It was good to hear that he was doing a good job, when he sometimes doubted himself.

“Or rather Dark protector,” Minerva teased, yes, Harry still called him that from time to time.

Severus laughed, genuinely amused, shaking his head, out of all the things he’d been called, dark protector was definitely unique. “James Potter is probably turning in his grave.” He said wryly.

“No,” Minerva stated firmly and immediately, “No, Severus, he would be thanking you on bended knee, without reservation and thanking you. James loved his son so much, he would have thanked You-Know-Who on bended knee if it saved his sons life. Lily would just be proud of you, she knew you were capable of this,”

“Perhaps,” Severus murmured, already knowing she was speaking the truth.

Between the four of them, they had the entire living quarters completely bare within the hour.

“Excuse me,” Severus said, Harry had been rather quiet, so he wished to check on him.

As soon as he stepped into the room, the concern gave way to fondness.Harry had fallen asleep on his bed, with his favourite stuffed animal and his snitch pyjamas that he hadn’t let go off. Unwittingly a smile crossed his usually dour features, as he stepped up, he flung a throw over Harry’s body to keep him warm. Letting him sleep for a while, they didn’t need to leave right away. He had done very well with his room, there wasn’t much left to do. Absently brushing Harry’s growing hair out of his face, it was soft, nothing like the straw like dowdy strands he’d had when he first came here. Emotional upheavals tended to tire him out more than physical exercise. His body was going through a lot, Severus never forgot that, but he hoped that he was doing the right thing.

It's how you should be with children, so why doesn’t the same apply here?

“Is he…” Minerva paused, yes, Severus was exactly like a father. “Should I take the clothes?”

“Yes,” Severus confirmed, “I’m sure he has all he wanted, and if I’m wrong I’m sure given time he will ask for it.” Harry knew he could ask for anything he wanted. He’d give him it too, he was going soft in old age.

“Would you like help in here?” Minerva asked as she bundled up the clothes, she’d get a House-elf to take them to her Quarters where she could package them up and take them to the families.

“No, there’s not much else left to do,” Severus shook his head, only under the bed and his actual
bedding are is all that’s required to be put away. His clothes, toys, teddies and everything else had already been placed in his trunk.

“You’re nervous,” Minerva realized, as she leaned against Harry’s bedroom door, watching Severus closely. Of course, he was going to be, Severus had pretty much spent his entire teenage-hood and adulthood in the safety of Hogwarts. This was probably as exciting as it was nerve wracking.

“Only a little,” Severus replied, he had never enjoyed teaching, he would never be apprehensive of the fact he was giving up his career. It was the safety and comfort and normalcy that Hogwarts provided that he’d probably miss for a while as he realized he didn’t need to live his life according to schedule. This was all he’d known except being a spy. He’d never thought he’d see the day where he actually went to Prince Manor with the intent of making it his home, let alone with a boy in tow, Lily’s son of all people.

“Change is inevitable, it’s a part of life,” Minerva commented, “And you’re too stubborn to let it bother you.”

“Very true,” Albus agreed joining the conversation, his blue eyes softening as they set upon Harry, curled up as he was, he looked a lot younger than his actual age. Not that he actually looked his age either, he looked three or four years younger than his actual age Albus reckoned. “I, for one, am going to miss both of you being here.” And it would take months he reckoned for him to calm down and stop worrying twenty-four seven that they were alright.

“Do you intend to place the Manor under the Fidelius?” Poppy asked from the living room, “Refreshments have been brought.”

Severus, Albus and Minerva made their way through, Minerva requested a House-elf to take the clothes away before she joined them in having a cuppa.

“No, but I will be securing the manor with a lot more wards than one probably sees,” Severus admitted wryly, much like he did with his own quarters.

“That will take months if not years, Severus, the manor is huge,” Albus pointed out, “Would you like help?” knowing he would decline but offering nonetheless.

“No,” Severus replied, ignoring the knowing look on Albus’ face, “It might take time but I will get it done.”

“Plus, you have Wizengamot meetings nearly every day,” Minerva informed him, well aware of his schedule due to the fact she was having to adjust hers to accommodate his leaving Hogwarts at all hours. Thankfully, Albus seemed to have made it so that it was mostly in the evenings. Which was understandable, since a few of wizengamot members actually had second jobs.

“Yes, that is unfortunate,” Albus conceded, it would make helping Severus quite difficult if he had agreed. “There are a lot of laws being changed as of late…and I do not want to miss anything.” Normally he didn’t mind, but to make change one had to sacrifice something…which just happened to be his time. That and even if they are passed…it would take years if not decades for it to be running smoothly.

“Do you think they will even leave a mark? We aren’t known for gracefully accepting change,” Poppy said, sipping her coffee, “Especially the Ministry,” which was true enough. Not even when Albus Dumbledore was attempting to make those changes. Admittedly, she didn’t know the ins and outs just what little titbits Dumbledore had dropped now and again talking to Minerva after
long arduous meetings.

“It’s going well in our favour, quite a few bills are in the process of looking ready to be passed but we won’t know until the actual voting.” Albus conceded, but it did look like it was going in his favour, especially with Ambrose backing him up. He’d looked him up, and he didn’t have much in the way of history here in Britain, indicating he’d spent the majority of his life abroad. It explained why he hadn’t heard of the wizard, which usually left him leery, but given the rumours he’d heard and the fact he was very fair in the courtroom warmed Albus to him.

“Our?” Poppy questioned.

“Yes, there’s a young wizard who has taken his place within the Wizengamot, through his mother’s line I believe a Mister Ambrose. He’s quite…intelligent and eager to see the laws passed, given his past, if the rumours are to be believed it’s not surprising.” He shouldn’t be telling them that, but he knew he could trust their discretion.

He completely failed to see the way Severus stiffened and gave off non-verbal warning signs.

“How many children have been failed?” Poppy sighed, the conversation turning darker.

“Too many,” Albus croaked, and he was to blame, he’d forever have it on his conscience, he had failed too many people. He was working hard to right his wrongs, Harry, Severus…Tom, the list was probably longer than he wanted to admit.

Harry was by far his wake up call and his greatest regret.

Thankfully he had a wizard who would go to the ends of the earth to protect him. Kill for him, as he had already done.

My Dark Protector as Harry referred to him as. Very apt description.

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Very tempted to end it here but it's not a real ending so I'm going to refrain from doing so :) it's just as I said before I'm finding it difficult to continue...and quite honestly going over wizengamot meetings isn't something I want to do...especially considering I'm going to be doing a lot of that with The Contract story...and maybe a bit with Embracing His True Self...and probably a few others The Leader too! I will keep this as a primary Harry being cared for story, just them, I think with Dumbledore and the law changing as a backstory. Will Harry recover fully and become a full functioning adult OR will we see it ending with Severus caring for a Harry who sometimes needs help but mostly lives a unencumbered life with a job of his own but still need in some care and supervision? THIS needs decided before I go any further I think...he did in the old story but that was awful really and unrealistic so yeah what do you think? Full recovery or partial recovery? R&R please
Chapter 37

My Dark Protector

Chapter 37

One month later

It had been exactly one month to the day since Harry had moved from Hogwarts to Prince Manor. During that month he had flourished farther than should be possible. Poppy, a frequent visitor, continued to quietly deduce just what age Harry was mentally. They had put it now between eleven or twelve, he was retaining information, remembering things, but nowhere near adult level, and Poppy thought that Harry would begin to stall and remain a teenager mentally, but while he’s still getting the potion there was hope. Harry had come along farther than Poppy could have foreseen when they first saw the boy.

Today, Poppy was there, but only as a chaperone, to allow Black and Lupin to see Harry and Severus was free to brew his potions. It was actually the first time they’d seen Harry since the move, Black had been too busy pouting over the change, and Lupin went were Black did. So, the idiot had been sulking over not being notified or given a say in Harry’s living situation. Severus had not bothered with Black, leaving him to it, it was only himself he was hurting in the long run. He’d worried about Harry for a moment or two, but Harry hadn’t once asked about them or where they were.

“Good morning, Poppy,” Remus said, as he emerged through the Floo network with Sirius. Glancing around the magnificent splendour that was Prince Manor. It was…beautiful, spacious and clean, a lot of marble though, what if Harry got hurt?

“Good morning, how are you gentlemen?” Poppy asked them with a thin smile, not at all showing her displeasure. They knew very well Harry needed consistency in his life, and they’d just blown out of it like he didn’t matter. Severus had told her not to bother wasting her breath, and Poppy feared he was quite correct on that front. They just wouldn’t listen, Sirius just did what he wanted. Luckily Harry had one consistent figure in his life that he adored and anyone else was just a…welcoming but temporarily figure really.

“We’re good, how’s Harry?” Remus asked, speaking for both of them.

“He’s currently eating breakfast, would you like to join him?” Poppy asked, before biting her tongue in order to prevent herself from saying things that Sirius Black would definitely not want to hear. The last thing she wanted was for Sirius to leave when Harry knew he was coming, just in case he got hurt by it.

“We could eat,” Remus said, nodding his head, “How’s Harry settled in?”

Sirius scowled, glaring around the manor as if everything was personally offending him. Snape had always been piss poor, to see that his estate was much grander than his own was definitely an offence to him. Not that the Black estate would have been available to him if his brother or any other Black male had survived. It made him leery about telling the Ministry anything. There was a bloody chance that Harry might get to stay here, what did he have? The Black name yes, but properties that weren’t suitable for anyone let alone a kid like Harry with mental problems. They had money, yes, but nothing compared to the Prince Estate or you know, the Prince properties.
“Oh, he loves it here,” Poppy said beaming with pride, “He’s come on leaps and bounds, it was as if he had reservations at Hogwarts but has lost them here.”

“What do you mean reservations?” Remus asked, confounded by her words, not really understanding why coming here would change that. Following Poppy as she lead them presumably towards the dining area, it was early and neither himself or Sirius had eaten much, just a slice of toast.

“Harry was beginning to realize he was being kept from the general public, secluded to a few rooms and ushered to and fro. Here he has free reign, he can go wherever he likes, with either Severus or a House-elf with him to ensure he doesn’t get hurt or lost.” Poppy explains, something they’d already know if they hadn’t been avoiding Severus like the plague.

Remus seemed horrified by the statement, he knew personally how that felt, “I see,” was all he could reply. He’d been hidden away too, it’s perhaps why he was still so ashamed of his being a werewolf. if his own parents hadn’t accepted him…how could he expect anyone else to accept who he was? Never mind the fact he had found out later in life why he had been bitten…well, that had made him wish to curl up and die, truly.

To think James Potter’s son felt the same…it made him want to weep.

“Should he be walking around? This place is huge, I thought he couldn’t walk for long?” Sirius asked, quite rudely but also without much concern for Harry, he was just being his usual thoughtless self. Sirius ignored Remus’ glare that bored into his face, rolling his eyes as he looked away with irritation.

“That’s what Severus and the House-elves are for, Sirius, to ensure Harry doesn’t go too far, but as I said, he’s come on leaps and bounds, he’s able to go far longer while walking, especially with his walking aid.” They’d put a few spells on it so that Harry could actually walk over gravel with it, or even take a step up steps – there were a few around the manor – and it had been checked and proven worthy.

“Oh? How well?” Remus asked genuinely curious, turning a corner when Poppy did, sighing in vexation at Sirius’ silent petulance.

“He can take strolls around the manor grounds, grab a bite to eat and come back in without needing to be reminded to take it easy.” Poppy explained like a proud mama. Not everyone who had been through what Harry had would want to get up let alone explore. The fear and depression over what happened to them would cause them to curl up in bed with no desire to emerge from their cocoon of safety. Harry wasn’t letting what had happened to him dictate his future. To this day though, they had no idea how much of it Harry remembered, how much of it he was awake and aware for, and quite frankly she didn’t want to know the nitty gritty of what Harry had endured. That was for his physiatrist when and if he got one. He probably should, but not quite yet. Having a mind healer here while he was physically getting well would probably do more harm than good.

“A bite to eat?” Remus queried, the smell of food wafting in the air, they were close.

“Oh, yes, he loves going to get fresh fruit from the trees, he has a fondness for pears,” Poppy said, smiling in amusement. Despite the fact Severus made sure there were more pears than anything in the fruit bowl for him he always meandered out to get one from the tree.

“He doesn’t wash them first?” Sirius asked, concern bleeding into his voice.

“Everything is safe to eat,” Poppy explained, at least he was showing concern now. “Severus has
ensured that.” so had the House-elves who were gleeful over having someone to look after and care
for. Although, Severus had imposed boundaries, they weren’t allowed in the bedrooms, or the labs,
those were for Severus and Harry to keep clean.

“Where is Snape?” Sirius asked, bitterness edging into his voice.

“He’s brewing Harry’s potions for the next fortnight,” Poppy explained, “He doesn’t allow for
inferior potions to brewed for Harry as you well know.” which was true enough, most potions
bought were watered down to an extent, not as strong as they could be, thus Severus always made
Harry’s potions himself.

“Can’t beat Severus’ potions,” Remus agreed, as they entered the dinning room, Harry was sitting
eating breakfast happily enough, legs swinging back and forth as he ate.

“Hi!” Harry said, happily enough to see them, but never with exuberance, no ‘it’s been so long
since I saw you’ kind of way, but more of ‘just dropping in’ kind of happy surprised. He didn’t stop
eating, and come over and hug them, or anything like that.

“Hello, Harry,” Remus said with a pleasant smile.

“Remus and Sirius are joining us for breakfast,” Poppy explained, as she claimed her seat, where
her half eaten breakfast resided. Gratefully picking up her coffee, and drinking it while it was still
hot.

“Okay,” Harry said, he may as well have shrugged his shoulders dismissively, while he was at it as
he went back to eating. Nothing got in the way of Harry and his food, except his Dark Protector, if
he wanted him, Harry would always respond regardless of what he was doing.

“What would you like to do today?” Poppy asked.

Harry perked up, biting into his food, swallowing before answering, “No work?” his tone hopeful.

Poppy laughed a little, “No work today,” she promised, she was there to teach him normally, but
today Severus had asked her to be with Harry so he could get some potions done and deal with
Black and Lupin. Usually part time, Monday through Friday barring if something happened at
Hogwarts that prevented her being there. Such as any sudden patients that require her attention. She
was first and foremost a healer at Hogwarts after all. Severus understood that, so contingencies
were put in place, mostly him teaching Harry when she could not. She very rarely visited during
the weekend, that was normally Minerva and Albus’ time when they visited.

“Pool?” Harry said immediately, eager and happy.

Poppy was not surprised. “Very well,” amusement bleeding into her voice, Harry would spend
twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week in that pool if given the opportunity.

“There’s a pool here?” Sirius asked, in genuine surprise, Snape had had a pool built for Harry? It
was an uncomfortable realization and he hated Snape, he didn’t want to like him, not even a little
bit, not even at all.

“Oh yes, you’ll see for yourself,” Poppy said grinning, “That’s if you would like to accompany
us?”

Both Remus and Sirius nodded, both had their mouths full, they were here to see Harry after all.

“How are you feeling, Harry?” Remus asked, he always asked when he saw the young boy.
Harry smiled sweetly at him, “I’m well, thank you for asking,” he said politely, beaming at the fact he remembered to say it right. He knew if Severus had been here, his Dark Protector would have been proud of him. It wavered a little when Sirius scowled, but he was used to Sirius being a little off all the time.

Sirius hated how prime and proper Harry was all the time, turning into a right pureblood kid. James would be rolling in his grave, James wasn’t one to stand on ceremony and he was sure he wouldn’t have raised Harry to be either. Lily on the other hand…probably would have raised Harry to be polite and respectful but Sirius didn’t dwell on what Lily would have done. He’d had his childhood stolen from him, he should be allowed to be a kid now.

“Did your kitten make the move too?” Remus asked, aware of how much Harry adored the little thing, well, not quite so little anymore.

“He’s outside,” Harry said, with a wistful look on his face, his Sevvy didn’t need him as much anymore. He could always feel him though, and he was close. He always came in at night and they curled up near the fire together. He still fed and watered him though! His Dark Protector told him Sevvy might spend more time away from home as he got older. Harry didn’t consider locking his Sevvy up for even a second, he knew if it felt to have his freedom ripped from you. Well, not really, he’d always been locked up in some capacity, but not anymore. He wasn’t exactly a kitten anymore, he was a cat. “He doesn’t like water much,” he never joined him near the pool.

“Some cats don’t, no,” Remus said patiently, gripping Sirius’ leg tightly in reprimand, he would have them out of here so quickly Sirius’ head would spin if he didn’t stop his attitude. Harry didn’t deserve to be on the receiving end of Sirius’ petulance.

Sirius winced at the pain, as he drank his coffee, but silently acknowledged the reprimand for what it was. Breathing deeply, trying to stop the anger and distrust, which came so very easily, even after he was out of Azkaban.

“I’m finished, may I go now?” Harry asked, eager as always to get changed and into the pool.

Poppy glanced at his plate, and true enough, it was scraped clean. “Go ahead, no running in the pool room,” she warned him, and had been told to warn him by Severus. Apparently, Harry on the second day, almost toppled in by accident. As far as she was aware, he’d already spelled the area so that to get in you actually have to use the steps, otherwise magic would gently propel you back to the edge. Severus and Poppy were also aware that accidental magic might circumvent that, so he’d prefer Harry told to remain calm and aware.

Especially as he gained independence and didn’t need watching over twenty-four hours a day.

“Are you coming?” Harry asked the two, positively bursting with excitement.

Poppy just watched on amused, Harry had been there for a month, and he’d been in the pool every day since their arrival. Some lengths of time longer than others, but apparently Severus didn’t have the heart to say no to him. He was grateful that it was swimming he seemed to like, not something such as Quidditch or general flying, although he hadn’t had the opportunity to do or see either one yet. Not until he had healed as much as he’d be able. Harry would never fully recover from the horror he’d lived through, both physically and mentally. Of that, Poppy was regretfully sure of.

“I’d love to,” Remus said, standing immediately, extremely pleased to see Harry in such good fatal. He had never seen him look so excited before. Not even gleefully discussing the boring details of ‘Sevvy’s’ life that Harry found so utterly fascinating.
“Sure,” Sirius said, almost as eager too, so very glad to ‘have fun’ with Harry and just forget Snape for a while or the fact that Harry was living here with Snape and he wasn’t having any say in his own godson’s life.

With that, instead of Poppy leading them anywhere, Harry was, and quite quickly too, even if it was a more awkward shuffle than actual long strides. The fact of the matter was, he was walking without the aid of his trolley, which he rarely used indoors, unless he was sore then he definitely used it.

“Holy crap!” Sirius muttered, staring around, “It’s more like a cave than a pool room,”

“Wow, just wow,” Remus said, almost gazing around in wonder.

Harry didn’t wait around to see their reactions, he just popped into the changing area and plucked his trunks from the table, which housed three fluffy towels, ready for him when he came out. It took a while, Harry moved slowly in order to change himself, even while sitting down, but it didn’t feel long to him, since he felt nothing but excitement and pure unadulterated happiness.

Harry waited almost impatiently for Poppy to cast the spell, before he was off, making his way to the steps, and into the pool without fear or question. His green eyes gleaming happily, he loved it, there was absolutely no contesting that.

They didn’t need to wonder which spell for long, since Harry didn’t turn up for air, just easily swimming at the bottom of the pool.

“I…he’s really happy here isn’t he?” Remus said, awed by the way Harry was acting today.

“Oh yes, very much so,” Poppy said, as she slid into a deck chair. “You should join him or sit down, he will be here until lunch.”

“You’re not kidding are you?” Remus asked, blinking at Poppy in astonishment.

“No,” Poppy said, smiling wryly. “Even Severus has trouble coaxing him out, he can do whatever he wants in here, and doesn’t hurt him as it would while walking properly. The weightlessness helps, he just enjoys it very much.”

“I’ll join him!” Sirius said, eagerly stripping off and joining Harry in the warm water.

Remus sighed, “How is Albus doing? I’ve been noticing that he’s…particularly run down lately?” as always worried about their leader. When he asked, Albus just brushed it off, insisted he was fine, and he was genuinely worried that he was ill.

“Consuming too much Pepper-up potion will do that,” Poppy said, shaking her head, Dumbledore had been working extremely hard the past few months, refusing to slow down and take care of himself. Fortunately, Dumbledore knew best his limitations, he never went too far, so all she could do was remind him to rest when he was looking a little too haggard. With Hogwarts to oversee and the wizengamot legislation that was passing at an alarming rate, or being introduced it was…immense to say the least. So, yes, he was busy with his work.

“Yeah,” Remus murmured, even if it was something worse, Poppy wouldn’t be able to tell him anything. Patient confidentiality and all that. Although, she didn’t sound at all worried, more exasperated than anything else.

Sirius enjoyed the freedom of just being, watching his godson with bright eyed anticipation. Everything he did awed Sirius, he’d overcome so much, why did he like Snape so much? Why
“Couldn’t he be attached to him and have that desire to live with him instead?”

“Are you happy?” Sirius asked quietly, when Harry stood in the pool, face coming out of the water fully, bubblehead charm still in place.

Harry blinked at Sirius, almost as though he didn’t understand the question, “Yes!” he exclaimed, there was no denying that he definitely was happy and understood the question.

“Are you happy here?” Sirius then asked, much to Harry’s bafflement.

“Yeah,” Harry said, brow furrowed, not really understanding why Sirius was asking him these things. “Yes,” he added absently, remembering his manners.

“You don’t miss Hogwarts?” Sirius questioned.

Harry shook his head, why would he miss Hogwarts? He could go wherever he liked here, and wasn’t confined to just Severus’ quarters. Here he could go to the pool whenever he liked, and roam around without having to wait until a certain time or the dead of the night. He knew it meant something…he just didn’t know what. It didn’t matter though, because he was here now, and could swim and play and eat and do whatever he liked.

“Did you miss me?” Sirius then queried, his heart pounding loudly in its ribcage.

Harry nodded, just once, he had missed him, but not in the way he would miss Sevvy if he wasn’t around, or his Dark Protector. Not enough to ask why he wasn’t there, sometimes Sirius was fun, other times he was a bit too weird for Harry, he wasn’t predictable not like his Dark Protector, Poppy or even Albus or Minerva. He was often moody, then the next time he saw him talkative and happy, it made Harry’s head spin if he was honest.

“Would you like to live with me?” Sirius then asked, too low for Poppy or Remus to hear.

Harry immediately and vehemently shook his head, shaken to the core by the simple question. He swam and walked at the same time to get to the steps, making his way out the water, which was always lukewarm for him. Making a beeline for Poppy.

“Does he not want me anymore?” Harry asked, green eyes wide and pleading.

“What?” Poppy said, taken aback, “What on earth…why do you ask that?” keeping her gazed fixed upon the panicked one of Harry’s. remaining calm and steady, becoming panicked would do nothing to reassure Harry. Plus, she had a funny feeling she knew where this was all coming from.

“H—he wants me to live with him…” Harry said still panicked. He needed to see Severus, he needed to apologise for whatever he’d done, he didn’t want to leave with Sirius, he wanted his Dark Protector. Was that really why he wasn’t here today?

“Sirius!” Remus’ voice was curt and displeased, “You just had to ruin it didn’t you?”

“I only asked a few questions,” Sirius said, chin jutted out in defiance, as he too made his way out of the pool. Unlike Harry, he didn’t remain sopping wet, a few spells later, he was dry and his clothes were back on and situated perfectly. “A simple question, I don’t know why he reacted like that.”

“Harry look at me,” Poppy said, her tone stern, learning from Severus what tone was best for whichever situation they found themselves in.
Harry who was staring at the door, as if he just wanted to leave, hunt Severus down and make sure he was staying right were he was turned at that tone. He wasn’t used to Poppy adopting that tone, but even in his panicked state he responded to it.

“Severus isn’t asking you to leave, this IS your home, and will remain your home,” Poppy stated waspishly, furious at Sirius for spoiling things, but that was the problem. The idiot didn’t think before he opened his goddamned mouth and spoiled everything. “Do not listen to everything Sirius says, he just worded it badly, that is all, okay?”

“Where is he?” Harry said, still leery of trusting her, “Where’s my daddy…”

The ensuing silence…you would have heard a pin drop.

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I love this story but I don't know if there's much more than can be added to it! I hope you can all understand this story might only have two or three chapters left to it, two long epilogues or something of the future to show Harry's life perhaps a decade apart...or a few decades apart? One showing Harry's life in a decades time and maybe what his life is like without his Dark Protector? Or would that be a bit too on the sad side? Other than Albus, Severus, Minerva, Poppy and Sirius and Remus who can you see as part of Harry's life? I truly cannot think of anything to add and it's getting so very repetitive that I fear it will be just one of those stories people just dismiss and its not what I want to see happen for such a unique story, or it was when I begun it LOL! R&R Please!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!