The Secret Guardian Angel
by nerd-girl [archived by ISF_Archivist]

Summary

Harry is poisoned during the summer to make him 10 years younger but something goes wrong and he becomes 10 years older. Severus Snape finds him and helps him.

Notes

This story was originally archived at Ink Stained Fingers, which was created in 2002 as a home for Harry Potter slash fiction. To preserve the archive, we began manually importing its works to the AO3 as an Open Doors-approved project in January 2015. We e-mailed all authors about the move and posted announcements, but may not have reached everyone. If you are (or know) this author or artist, please contact me using the e-mail address at the Ink Stained Fingers collection profile.

Author's notes: Beta read by the lovely JediCandy.
Chapter One - Happy 17th Birthday.

"I am so God damned BORED!" muttered Harry to himself while sitting at his desk in Dudley's second bedroom. He had even finished all his homework this summer and had rechecked it at least five times. To his credit, he had even finished Snape's potions homework. "Well, at least Hermione will be proud of me," he thought laughingly to himself.

It had been nearly two months since Harry had returned to Privet Drive and his routine had a steady pattern to it. Get up after a restless night, stare out the window for a few hours, get breakfast for the Dursley's, stare out the window some more, get lunch for the Dursley's. Stare out the window some more, get the evening meal for the Dursley's and then, if he was really lucky, he would get to stare out the window some more! Attempts to get some sleep usually resulted in waking up in a sweat from Voldemort-induced nightmares and then yes, you've guessed it! Stare out the window some more! Harry was not even allowed out of the house to go down to the park to break up the monotony of staring out the window due to Order rules. "Harry my dear boy, it's safer for you to stay inside the house this summer. Lord Voldemort will not be able to reach you if you are inside, the safety of the wards that have been placed upon your family's home it is your best protection," Dumbledore had told him at the end of last year.

"What about death by boredom, Hedwig?" Harry asked, looking at his familiar. Hedwig's big, golden eyes looked sympathetically at him as she hooted softly. "Bet they didn't think of that did they?" Hedwig ruffled her snowy feathers, flicked her wings to quietly flit over to his desk. Harry reached out to pet the feathers on her chest as she nipped his fingers affectionately.

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"Oi' freak you're wanted down in the kitchen to cook our dinner!" yelled Dudley as he banged on the door. All his bravery faded as soon as Harry opened the door, which caused Harry to smirk in a very Snape-like manner. Harry was in no way as big as Dudley, although Dudley's continuing diet and exercise had paid off. He was now Smeltings' boxing champion and he was still very large. It was pure size that made him good at boxing in school. He would never be fit enough to go professional, he still carried around an awful lot of fat. However, since sixth year Harry had filled out nicely. He had eventually 'grown-up', as he liked to call it. He now stood at a more respectable height of five feet nine inches tall. His face had thinned down, making his cheekbones more prominent; his body had also filled out to a pleasing form, his years of playing on the Quidditch pitch and of running away from Dudley and his gang had left him with a nicely defined, trim and slim body. He had the physique of an athlete.
After cooking dinner, cleaning up and being utterly ignored by his family as was their new
tactic for dealing with their wayward nephew. He returned to his bedroom to continue his new
hobby of staring out the window.

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Ten minutes before midnight, Hedwig softly flew over to Harry, who was dozing on his bed.
She gently nipped him on the ear knowing he would want to be woken up for the arrival of the
owls he would soon receive for his birthday. "What's up girl?" Harry inquired sleepily to his
owl, who hooted softly and moved over to his small digital alarm clock that was displaying the
time of 11:57pm. "Wow, girl! Nearly another year survived. Hopefully it will be the last one
here." Hedwig hooted gently at him and Harry simply responded with a winning smile that
would rival Gilderoy Lockhart's any day.

As the clock ticked closer to midnight, Harry said quietly to himself "Happy Seventeenth
Birthday, Harry." A few minutes' later six owls could be seen heading towards number 4 Privet
Drive. After Harry let them into his room, he quieted them down with owl treats and with drinks
of water. He recognised the first owl as a Hogwarts owl.

Dear Harry

Happy 17th Birthday! Quite the young man now, aren't you? How's it been going with those
stupid muggle relatives of yours? Been treating you alright I hope. If not, inform the Order and
we'll send someone over again just to remind them not to get too mean with you. Hope you like
you like your present; see you in September for school.

Love, Hagrid.

Wrapped in brown paper were a tin of treacle fudge (home-made) and a selection of
photographs taken of him, Ron, Hermione and Hagrid from the last few years. They were all
waving up at him from the pictures. Harry smiled to himself as he grabbed some parchment and
his quill.

Dear Hagrid,

Thank you so much for the fudge and the photos. I love them so much! I miss you and I can't
wait until September to see you again. Everything here is alright and my family are treating me
fine.

All my love, Harry

Harry attached the parchment to the owl that delivered Hagrid's letter and present and sent it on
its way. He grabbed the next owl.

Dear Harry,

Happy Birthday. How are you? I'm fine. I finished all my homework during the first week so
that I had most of the holidays to myself. I hope you have finished all yours. I know for a fact
that Ron has not, but I am going to stay at the Weasleys soon so I can tell him off to his face and
make him finish it! I have so much to tell you, but I guess it will have to wait until we get back
to school, as you are not allowed to leave your family's home. I hope you are keeping your
word, Harry, and not leaving your house because Voldemort could capture you if you did. Anyway, Harry, have a fine day.

Lots of love, Hermione.

Harry smiled at the letter, it was so Hermione. Even before he opened her present he knew what it was. He rolled his eyes in good humour and opened it to find out what kind of book she had bought him this year "Discover the Animal Within - A Guide to Animagi" by P. Hansworth. Harry raised an eyebrow, good choice, he thought to himself as he grabbed some more parchment.

Dear Hermione,

Thanks so much for the book. It looks very interesting! I can't wait to read it! Yes, I have finished all my homework and rechecked it about five times; there is not a lot else to do being stuck indoors all the time. Not that I complaining, I guess it's better then being Voldemort's new plaything. I also can't wait to see you when school starts. I miss you all so much! Also, be kind to Ron. He does try, you know.

All my love, Harry.

While tying the note to the owls' leg, Harry smiled to himself. He really did miss Hermione very much. Over the last year they had become closer to each other, spending lots of time in the library studying together. After Sirius' death, Harry had thrown himself into his studies, which pleased Hermione immensely. Not just that, she had helped him come to terms with a lot of things in his life such as his role in the war and the feelings of betrayal that he felt towards Dumbledore at the end of his fifth year. She also made him see the truth behind his feelings of anger, hate, distrust and blame that he directed towards his Potions Master, Professor Snape for Sirius' death. She truly was a friend and he loved her like the sister he never had. The next letter made him giggle to himself.

Happy Birthday Harry,

How's it going in the muggle world? I'm in Iceland with my Dad trying to find proof of the Ice Snakes existence. For some reason, people don't believe they exist - nutter's the lot of them! Anyway I have to go. Have a good day, Harry.

Love, Luna.

From her he received a very nice charm necklace. Not too feminine, he thought. It was an assortment of glass beads strung together; it was meant to be able to keep you safe from harm and keep away bad spirits. Might make Peeves stay away, Harry thought. He put the necklace on and admired it. It fit snugly around his neck, he liked it and was glad to see he was right it didn't look to effeminate. With his new hair, which was slightly longer and hung almost down to his jaw, his feathered bangs (fringe) and new necklace, he thought he looked like he belonged in one of those British rock bands that he had seen in one of Dudley's magazines. He again grabbed some parchment to send his thanks to Luna.

Hey Luna,

Thank you for my necklace. I love it and I'm wearing it now. Even if I do say so myself, I think it looks kind of cool. I hope you have some luck finding the elusive Ice Snake. If you do bring
one back, I will have a chat with it and find out its real name for you.

Keep the faith, Harry.

He sent her letter back with her owl. He liked Luna, she was fun and sweet and very intelligent, she was not in Ravenclaw for nothing! He didn't care what the rest of the school thought of her, even though he did agree a little with them. Yes, Luna was a little crazy but crazy in a good and nice way.

The next owl was Errol. He grinned to himself. He loved the Weasleys very much. They were his surrogate family - Mister and Mrs. Weasley and all of their children.

Harry, dear,

We have wrapped up some sweets and pies for you and have placed a preservation charm on them so they will keep for the duration of the summer holidays. Headmaster Dumbledore has told us you can not visit us this summer, I guess he knows what's best. Anyway, dear, take care.

Love Molly and Arthur Weasley.

Next he grabbed Pig and detached him from his parcel and read the letter first.

Happy Birthday Harry,

Mate, mum told me you can't come and visit this summer, rotten luck, that. I was looking forward to some real Quidditch practice. Ginny's pretty good and all, but you're way better. By the way, Ginny says hello. Hermione is coming to stay next week. I can't wait to see her again, all though I know she is going to whine at me to finish my homework. Maybe she'll let me copy hers? Nah, doubt that - ha. Anyway, mate, hope things are going well and I'll see you at school soon.

Love, Ron.

Harry grinned, he loved Ron like a brother. He was so much fun! Hermione was his sensible friend and Ron was his fun mate. When he opened Ron's present he found lots of England Quidditch team paraphernalia and a practice snitch. He got some more parchment.

Thanks Ron,

I love my gifts, the snitch should help me keep myself amused. Sorry I can't come to the Burrow this summer. I'm so jealous of you and Hermione hanging out and having fun without me, but I want you to promise me something, put the time you two will be spending together ALONE and put it to good use, AND TELL HER HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT HER! It's been six years already, mate, time to get moving or else someone else will come along and snatch her away from you. Enjoy the rest of the summer, mate.

Love, Harry.

He smiled and sent his reply along with Pig. He then looked at the last owl in his room and laughed as quietly as he could, it was Joker, the twins' owl.

How's it going our most dear and cherished silent partner?
This summer has been great for our shop and our mail order side to the business has taken off. Included in this box is some of our newer inventions as well as some of our classic ones to help make your summer a little more fun. So, anyway, mate, happy 17th birthday. Welcome to the world of adults.

Your forever-grateful partners, Fred and George.

Harry rummaged through the box feeling apprehensive, he knew there could be a world of trouble in the box.

Dear Fred and George,

Thank you for all of the stuff! I think I will keep most of it until I get back to Hogwarts so that if things go wrong, at least Pomfrey will be there to fix it for me. Also, the first years are always more fun to trick then testing them on yourself. Take care guys.

Love, Harry.

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With his last letter sent, Harry carefully packed everything into his trunk and tidied up. No need to provoke Aunt Petunia, he thought, not while they are at least feeding me and not locking me in. Though he was feeling a little peckish, after all, salad is fine but not when you have it every day, thanks to Dudley's health regime. He opened his package from Mister & Mrs. Weasley and grabbed one of the pies. He noticed a flask in the box. It was labelled fruit punch. Perfect, thought Harry, he was feeling a little thirsty after writing all his letters and eating the pie. So he opened it and proceeded to drink it all down. "Didn't realise I was so thirsty, I just couldn't stop drinking it," he muttered to himself, while getting back into bed.

Next Chapter: Harry wakes up to a big shock. He runs away in panic to Diagon Alley and bumps into an old friend.
"Boy, get down here now and make our breakfast, or else you will not eat for the day!" Aunt Petunia yelled up the stairs, breaking into Harry's sleep fogged mind.

"Coming, Aunt Petunia." replied Harry as he stretched. 'Strange,' he mused, 'haven't slept that well in what feels like years!' Putting all thoughts aside, Harry sat up in his bed to hear a panicked squawk from Hedwig and he turned around quickly.

"What is it Hedwig?" Harry asked, slightly alarmed. When Harry stood up he immediately realised what had panicked his Owl. His pajamas were tight on his frame, which was unusual, considering that most of his clothes were too big for him as they were Dudley's hand-me-downs. He was feeling strange, also. Rushing over to the small mirror that was attached to his wardrobe door, Harry froze in absolute shock at what he saw.

His reflection was of him, but of an older him. If not, then he had had one hell of a growth spurt during the night. He was trying to think calmly and logically, which is very hard to do when you know you are only 17 and yet your reflection is definitely that of a man 10 years older. He knew it could not be his future self for he had no memories of the next, or was it past, 10 years. Could it be a trick played on him from Fred and George? No, he had not touched anything from their gift last night. He was not that foolish, no matter what anybody told him. The only thing he could think of was the gift from Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, now if the twins lived at home that would explain it, but they lived in a flat above their shop.

"I said get down here boy, NOW!" yelled Aunt Petunia.

Harry's brain went into panic mode, he could not allow his family to see him in this state they would freak out and call the police. Then there would way too much to explain, such as what did this strange man do with a 17-year-old minor. Granted that in the wizarding world, 17 might make you an adult, but in the muggle world it was definitely 18. 'Shit!' thought Harry, there was no other way. He would have to make a run for it and try to make it to Hogwarts, or at least get to the Burrow. Choice was made - make a run for it and count on his family not caring enough about him to call the police. He would just leave them a note.

Aunt Petunia,

Something urgent came up for me to do from the Wizarding world. I'll be back as soon as I can to collect my things.

Harry.
With his note written, he grabbed his duffel bag and threw in some bare essentials:

Invisibility cloak, Two pairs of jeans, Three T-shirts, One plain black cloak, Five pairs of underwear, Five pairs of socks, The few Galleons, Sickles and Knuts he had left from last year, His Gringotts' key

Harry dressed quickly, thankful for the first time for Dudley's slightly larger clothes. He had not grown much, just enough to make his normal fitting clothes too tight. He slipped on his trainers, grabbed his bag, and wrote one last note before he made a run for it.

Professor Dumbledore,

Something really bad has happened, I have had to run for it I couldn't stay here. I am trying to make my way to Hogwarts I'll explain when I get there.

Harry Potter.

Harry called for Hedwig and he tied the parchment to her leg.

"Hedwig, give this letter to Albus Dumbledore. He is probably at Hogwarts. If he is not, then try Professor McGonagall. If that fails give, it to one of the trusted professors from the Order. Once you deliver it, stay at Hogwarts. I'll be there as soon as I can. Now go!" Harry opened the window and pushed Hedwig out it. She hooted and looked back at him worriedly for a moment, then flew off.

Harry grabbed his things, slipped his wand up his left sleeve, placed the note to his Aunt on his pillow, and placed everything else in his trunk. Once done, he locked it with the padlock Fred and George had given him last year to keep his family out of his trunk and he slipped the key into one of the side pockets of his bag. All set, Harry raced out of his bedroom, down the stairs, and out the front door yelling some nonsense about being back as soon as possible. He left behind a very confused and cross family.

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Harry kept running, however after about half an hour, he realised he was royally screwed. He had no muggle money, so he could not take a train to London. Sitting down to collect his thoughts, he ran through a mental checklist.

1: He needed to get to London and to get into Diagon Alley so he could try and find a way to Hogwarts. Maybe he could floo to the Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade and walk up to the castle.

A damn good idea, he thought.

2: He would need more money in case this could not be reversed. The upside to this, he thought, was that at least Malfoy and his goons, Crabbe and Goyle could no longer pick on him. He was now technically older then they were. However, he did not like the idea of being the oldest Seventh Year.

3: Would he be able to go unrecognised? Well, yes, he thought, no one had seen his hair lately and it did cover his scar rather well, a definite incentive to grow it, in his opinion. He no longer
wore his glasses; he had corrected his vision on the train home at the beginning of summer. Although for some strange reason he still kept them, but now they only had plain glass in them. He guessed he kept them so that when he wanted to go unnoticed, he could take them off. Strange now that his odd paranoia would serve him well.

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Now, all he had to do was get to London. Of course, the Knight Bus! How stupid of him! Realising he was far enough away from Privet drive not to rouse suspicion; he got out his wand and stuck out his wand arm.

BANG!

The big purple triple-decker bus, which seemed to have appeared out of thin air, came to a stop in front of him. The doors flew open and out stepped Stan Shunpike. "Welcome to the Knight Bus, where is it you want to go Mister...?"

Harry had to hide his smile, he had meet Stan a few times and he did not recognise him. It was bit of a moral boost that Harry was of in need right now. Realising Stan had asked him his name he racked his brain for the most muggle sounding name, he could think of. "Ford, Harrison Ford," Harry said hoping they were not Star Wars fans in the wizard world.

"Mister Ford, welcome. Where are you wanting to go to today, then?" Stan smiled at him.

Obviously they weren't Star Wars fans, "London, Diagon Alley to be specific."

"No problem, Mr. Ford, that is our third stop, it won't take long. Come in, come in can't stand around all day." He waved Harry in. Harry spotted an empty armchair two rows back and sat down before the bus could take off again knowing full well he would be thrown the length of the bus if he were still standing. Stan followed him to his seat, "so Mister Ford, that will be seven Sickles. For an extra two you can have a hot chocolate?"

"No thank you." Harry handed over the money. As Stan did not recognise him, he left him alone and went back to the front of the bus to chat to Ernie the driver.

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The journey was as uneventful as it can be on the bus; it only took 40 minutes to reach the Leaky Cauldron. Harry thanked Ernie and Stan, stepped off the bus, and entered the pub. He slipped on his plain, black cloak not wanting to step into the heart of wizard London in full muggle clothing. At least his cloak would make him look a little more like one of the locals.

Once through the pub and into Diagon Alley itself, Harry started to relax a little. No one would try anything in broad daylight in a street teeming with witches and wizards. He really needed to go to the bank, the Knight Bus had taken up most of his money. He would need a bit more to see him through. He fished out his vault key and headed for Gringotts.

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Once inside the bank, Harry saw a free goblin and approached him with caution, aware that there were customers either side of him. The goblin looked up at Harry, "can I help you?"
"Yes, I would like to go to vault 983 please." Harry said with as much quiet confidence as possible.

"Really?" the goblin replied

"Yes."

"And do you have the key to Mister Potter's safe, sir?"

Shit and double shit, thought Harry, why did everyone have to know him? He needed to act cool like he belonged there. "Yes, I do. Mister Potter asked me to come here and collect some money for him to buy his school things, as it's not safe for him with Vo... You know who on the loose again." Harry whispered quietly to the goblin hoping he would fall for it and think that he was part of some really big, secret operation to keep the boy who lived safe.

Although Harry did admit to himself that he nearly blew it when he almost said old Voldie's name out loud. The goblin seemed to have fallen for it, especially when the key was handed over to him. He nodded and told him to follow him. At this point Harry was feeling a little too confident and failed to take notice of his surroundings. If he had, he would have noticed the customer next to him had finished his business at the next counter and was watching him walk towards the vaults.

Harry grabbed handfuls of the coins and placed them into his money pouch and subsequently placed it in his duffel bag. He was Feeling pleased with himself and his acting skills. Once he was back in the main foyer of the bank, he left through the big double doors and was back into the sunshine. Deciding he was hungry, as he has skipped breakfast in a panic, he headed back to the Leaky Cauldron to get some food and a cup of tea. Again, if Harry had not been so self-involved, he would have noticed the same man that was watching him from inside the bank was now following him from the bank and up the street.

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Feeling as if things were going to be all right, Harry was starting to feel a little less worried. Dumbledore would know what to do, he always did. He would make him 17 years old again. So after he had eaten, he would pay Tom at the pub to use his floo network and floo over to Hogsmeade...

The next moment happened so fast, Harry did not even have time to finish his thought about flooing over to Hogsmeade. As he walked past an alleyway entrance that was draped in shadow, and was having said thoughts of Hogsmeade, a strong arm in black had whipped around his waist, trapping his arms by his sides. Another strong arm wrapped around his shoulders with the strong hand attached to it covering his mouth and he was pulled into the shadowed alleyway. Then the right arm that was covering his mouth moved as fast as a viper striking and pulled out a wand from his left sleeve and pointed the end of it directly into Harry's neck. He felt hot breath next to his right ear just above where the wand was lodged into his throat.

"If you as much as make a single sound you will be dead before you can finish it. Do you understand?"

Next Chapter: The owner of the voice is revealed. Harry get's some help.
The Secret Guardian Angel - Chapter 03

The Secret Guardian Angel - Chapter 03

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Beta read by the lovely JediCandy.

Chapter three - Convincing Severus Snape.

Harry did not for a second doubt that voice was telling the truth for he knew that voice. He himself had feared that voice for most of his school years, there was no need to turn around and look as his attacker for he knew it was Professor Snape. Knowing that his teacher was a logical man, he decided to take the meaning of the words very much at face value and he nodded very slowly without making a sound.

"Good, you are a quick learner." Snape hissed very quietly, directly into his ear.

Harry's eyes went wide until they were almost like house elves, if the situation had not been so serious he would had laughed. Professor Snape had just handed him a backhanded compliment to him, Harry Potter. Well, there was a first time for every thing, he guessed, even if the situation was a little odd.

"I was next to you in the bank; you failed to notice me though, too busy fooling a dumb goblin into believing you are one of Mister Potter's friends."

Harry could not but help sigh silently, damn the man was good, no wonder he was the Order's top spy, he hadn't even been aware he was being watched and now Snape was once again looking out for him. God, this situation was becoming complicated. How was he going to convince Snape that he had done no harm and meant no harm to Harry Potter because, well, he was Harry Potter! This was starting to give him a really bad headache.

"But believe me when I tell you that I know for a fact that you are not one of Mister Potter's friends. So who the hell are you? And keep it quite or I will kill you!"

If possible Snape's tone gotten more menacing, causing Harry to shiver involuntary. He didn't know what it was about this man that made him feel so strange, he always bought out extreme emotions in him - usually malice, hate, and grudging respect. Not everyone could face down Voldemort on a regular basis and lie to him like Snape did. He put the shiver down to the tone of voice Snape was currently using, it was low and gravely and instantly installed fear into you. He had even seen Snape reduce a Seventh year to tears once without even raising his voice. Yes, Snape was the Master of Intimidation 101. So Harry had to be careful with his answers, after all, Snape could get him back to school and help turn him seventeen again. He thought it was about time he trusted the man, after all he had promised Hermione he would try his best considering they were both on the same side in the war.
So, in a voice just above a whisper, Harry replied, "Sir, I know this is hard to believe, but I am Harry Potter. Sir, I don't know what happened, I just woke up this way."

"Really? And you expect me to believe this why?"

"Because it's the truth, S... sir," Harry almost called Snape by his name but he knew this would be a mistake. Snape would not be happy at being named and would no doubt just kill him on the spot for fear of his cover being blown.

"Truth can be a deceptive thing, what makes you think Mister Potter would ever tell me the truth?"

Harry snorted, he couldn't help it Snape had him there. "Point taken, sir. I could tell you something only Harry Potter would know?"

"And what makes you think I would know anything that personal about Mister Potter? And how would that prove you did not kidnap him and torture information out of him, mmm?"

Again, Snape had him on that one. He thought about telling him he had his invisibility cloak with him, but the same argument could be used against him as to how he acquired it, he could have tortured Harry Potter to get it. Damn the man for being so untrusting! But, again, Harry doubted he would have lived so long if he were not extremely paranoid.

Harry started to babble, "My best friends are Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, my Father..."

"All public knowledge, I grow tired of your stories. Tell me what you have done to Potter?" Snape interrupted.

Harry was starting to panic, how did you convince the inconvincible. "Sir, please, I know you are trying to look out for me, Harry Potter, but I am Harry bloody Potter! I just..." then it hit him how he would be able to prove who he was to Snape. Snape did not believe in much but he did believe in his own work as a Potions Master. "Sir, I know for a fact you have been dying to do this to me for years, you carry around with you a small vial of Veritaserum. Give me some and you'll see I'm telling you the truth."

"Tempting, if you are Potter; and if you are not, I guess I will find out how you know that I carry such an item around. Fine, you will hand me your wand slowly, and you will let me lead you to the Leaky Cauldron, where I will ask the innkeeper for a room. You will not make a fuss. We will go to the room and we will let the interrogation begin. Sound fair to you?"

Though Harry was fully aware this was not a question but an order, he felt compelled to give the man an answer. After all, he was doing what he was doing in order to look out for and protect him. "Yes, sir, I won't cause any trouble."

Snape snorted, "If you really are Harry Potter, then I guess there is a first time for every thing!" Harry also snorted at this, Snape was right.

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Harry slowly handed Snape his wand but did not turn around, that was not part of the deal. He
did not want Snape's anger right now. He wanted the man's help. Truth be told, he was still terrified of what had happened to him. Snape gave him a gentle push back into the main street and followed closely behind. He knew Snape's wand was pointed at his back, but did the damn man have to walk so close behind? It was unnerving. They arrived at the Leaky Cauldron. The bar was quite busy; then again Harry guessed it was almost lunchtime. He was starving. Harry was pushed towards the bar.

"Severus, what can I get for you?" Tom asked.

"Nothing to drink at the moment, thanks. Tom, I need a room immediately."

"A room, Severus, at this time of day?" Tom replied with humour in his voice, shifting his gaze to Harry. It dawned on Harry what Tom was getting at, and he blushed like a kid and cast his eyes down to the floor. Severus just rolled his eyes.

"Very funny, Tom. Just give me a room, I only need a few hours." Severus deadpanned back.

"A few hours, my, what stamina you must have Professor!" Tom joked. If possible, Harry went even redder. He was mortified. Tom thought Snape was taking him up to the room for sex! Harry just knew Snape would never allow him to live this one down.

"The room Tom, how much?" Severus continued acting as if he was oblivious to Tom insinuations.

"For you old friend, 5 sickles for two hours, room 5. Have fun!" Tom continued to grin like the cat that got the cream.

Snape chucked the money on the counter and pushed Harry in the direction of the stairs. Having stayed here before, Harry knew the way.

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Once they reached room 5 they entered. Snape closed the door and muttered several spells, some Harry recognised as locking and silencing spells. He guessed the others also fell under the same category, but just a little more extreme and complex and spy proof. As the spells were finished, Harry could feel the strong magic settle in the room and again he could not stop the involuntary shiver that passed over his body. God, this man was magically very strong. Harry always knew Snape was a strong wizard, he just didn't realise how strong and powerful until that moment. He always thought a lot of Snape's power came from his very strong physical presence. Harry was the first to admit that when the man walked, no stalked, into the room, you instantly shut up and paid attention. Now he was beginning to think that it actually had more to do with the power and aura this man gave off that made you shut up and pay attention.

Lost in his own internal debate, he missed Snape's order to sit. But the not so gentle push on the back bought him back to earth. This time he sat down on the chair next to the fireplace and turned to look up at Snape for the first time since their bizarre meeting took place.

Harry had to work very hard not to let his draw drop. WOW! Harry's mind was screaming. He looked so different out of his teaching robes! Snape was dressed in a cream silk, high-necked shirt with the top three buttons undone. It was currently un-tucked from his black leather trousers that were rather tight and were slung low around his hips. He was wearing black dragon skin boots, which shimmered with a green iridescence in the light. Over the top was an open,
long black cloak and, most surprisingly, his hair was tied back at the nape of his neck with a black velvet tie. Yummy! His mind screamed, after he has taken in the whole picture.

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Severus stalked towards the younger man that sat in the chair by the fireplace. He leaned down over him and captured his chin in his right hand. He studied the younger man's face, and then looked into his eyes. Severus had to admit to himself that the man did have an uncanny look of Potter about him up close. The face did have a James Potter quality to it, mainly the nose and the shape of it, even if it was thinner then James'. He had noticed the Potter boy had started to thin out in the face a little towards the end of the last school year. His eyes were the shape and colour of Lily Evans', no, Potter he mentally corrected himself. So if this was Potter, then what in nine hells had happened to him?

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Harry was feeling a little odd at the strangely intimate position Snape had put them in. At first, he thought Tom had gotten it right and that Snape was going to swoop down and kiss him silly, or was that wishful thinking? His body was screaming out to him. Harry mentally chastised himself when he noticed Snape was studying him, not swooping down on him to kiss him. He had a thought, something that might make Snape believe who he was, he reached down into his jeans pocket only to have his hand intercepted by Snape's left hand, his right one never leaving his chin.

"Careful, no sudden movements. We wouldn't want any unfortunate misunderstandings now, would we?" Snape said very quietly and very threateningly while raising his right eyebrow.

Harry just nodded slowly, his fear showed in his eyes. Damn, the man was scary when he wanted to be, he thought. Snape released his hand and Harry continued to his jeans pocket. Slowly he pulled out his glasses and even slower he put them on. He then lifted his fringe to show off his scar, which was a gift from Voldemort.

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Severus now looked at the young man who was wearing Potter's famous round glasses and showing off his famous scar, which was previously hidden underneath his hair. There really was no denying that this young man looked even more like Potter now, but he had to be sure. If the scar were real, then it was connected to Voldemort. If he touched it he should feel a tingle in his mark on his inner left forearm. He carefully lifted his left hand, extended his fingers, and traced the shape of the scar. His mark seemed to grow a little warmer, not the reaction he expected but none the less it was a reaction. Shit, he thought, this is Harry bloody Potter!

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Harry watched as Snape extended his finger to touch his scar, lots of people wanted to touch the famous scar. Normally he refused them or pulled back in revulsion, but something about Snape wanting to touch his scar fascinated him. Snape had done nothing but bitch about 'Famous Harry Potter' and his scar from day one, so why would he want to touch it? As he made contact with it, it eventually dawned on Harry why he would want to touch it. They were both linked to the big bad Dark Lord, there would be a reaction of some sorts and there was. He felt warmth spread through his scar; it was almost a soothing warmth. Not the reaction he would have thought, he imagined there would be shooting or stabbing pains for both of them, but no, not for
him. For Snape he did not know the man was such a fantastic actor he doubted he would ever know.

Next Chapter: Dumbledore is made aware of the situation and Snape is asked to help find the cure.
Severus sat down in the chair opposite the young man and leaned his chin on his left hand, still leaving his wand arm free in case he tried anything foolish. If this was Harry Potter, the chances of him doing something foolish were highly probable. He was nearly convinced that this was indeed the Potter boy. He had that same stupid look on his face when he was being torn down a strip in potions class, like that of a house elf caught badmouthing its master. Severus had to admit for the first time in years that he was at a loss for words. What did one do in a situation like this? How was the world going to react when they found out their boy saviour was, well, no longer a boy?

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It had been nearly 15 minutes since Snape had sat down opposite him and just stared at him. Harry was trying everything in his power not to squirm and fidget. But, damn, it was hard not too when you had the full Snape stare directed at you for this long. Most students and quite a few adults could only stand the 'Snape stare' for short periods of time. And here he was, having the full force of it directed solely onto him with no distractions like Neville too blow something up at an opportune time, to take the stare away from him. Damn, he thought again. It was then that his subconscious decided that it was bored and it wanted to have some fun. It reminded Harry of his earlier thought. 'You thought Snape looked yummy!' Harry visibly gulped and had the good grace to blush ever so slightly.

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Severus noticed the slight blush that graced the boy's, no man's, no boy's but technically not quite... oh, damn it! The brat's cheeks! He couldn't help but smirk. It was a wonder to him how Potter kept surviving the Dark Lord's yearly attempts on him. If he couldn't handle the pressure of being stared at for a few minutes. He also had not missed the fact that the boy was trying and failing miserably at trying not to squirm. But he had to admit, it was a fetching look for the brat. As much fun as it would be to make Potter squirm all day, he had to get moving and inform Dumbledore of the new 'Potter problem'. Was it just him or did the boy seem to create a new 'Potter problem' every year?

"So, just how did this happen?" he asked pointing towards Harry.

"I don't know. I went to bed last night fine and woke up like this."
"You don't just wake up like this, something must have happened to you," he snapped.

"Honestly, Professor Snape, I just woke up like this!" Harry stressed, hoping that Snape believed him. Otherwise, it would be a very long day of repeating the same answer to the same question.

"Wizards don't just wake up one day, what, 10 years older? Something had to have happened to make you change!" Severus was starting to get annoyed at the brat. Surely simple logic told the boy that something must have happened to him because he was not in a normal situation. By the look on Potters face, obviously he did not. Severus sighed, "Tell me everything you did yesterday, everything that happened to you no matter how insignificant you might think it is."

Harry paled visibly at this; he didn't want anybody to really know how miserable things were at home for him. He didn't even tell Dumbledore just how bad things were for him. He liked to keep it quiet; he didn't want to be known as a whiner. He knew plenty of others had it worse then him, but still to tell Snape of all people was not on the top of his 'to do list'.

Severus had noticed the boy pale slightly and had to wonder why? He put it aside to think about later, he had to find some answers for the problem at hand. "Well? I can assure you, Potter, nothing much shocks me if that is what you are worried about." Severus said with a slight teasing tone in his voice. "Now tell me everything!"

Harry knew there was no getting out of it, and why did Snape have to say it like that! God! What did Snape think he got up too? Did the think he paraded a bevy of beauties into his room to entertain him in the summer months? Now that thought brought another slight blush to his already slightly tinged cheeks. He took a deep breath, looked resolutely at the floor, and went on with his story. "Well, I woke up and cooked breakfast for Aunt Petunia, Uncle Vernon, and Dudley. When I was done I did the washing up. I had to vacuum the house..."

"Vacuum? Explain!"

"Ummm it's an electrical muggle device to pick up dust and dirt from the floor."

"Oh! How quaint!" Severus replied, wondering how muggles ever survived the Stone Age.

"Continue."

"Well, I then cooked lunch for Aunt Petunia and Dudley and his two friends. I then returned to my room and I did nothing until I was called by Dudley to cook the dinner for my family. After I did the washing up I returned to my room and did nothing until I went to bed."

"That was all? You did nothing else. I thought yesterday was your birthday, Potter. What, no party?" Severus said, half joking half serious. He would have thought that for the 'boy who lived' there would be a big party. Especially since he had effectively come of age since yesterday and that was a big deal in the wizarding world.

Harry looked a little sheepish "Well, no, Professor, my birthday is today. Ummm anyway, my family don't ummm like to celebrate birthdays." You never know, he might buy it, thought Harry.

"Really. So nothing else happened. No strangers were in your house. You didn't eat anything
unusual. You cooked and prepared everything you consumed yesterday?" Severus asked, not really buying into the whole 'my family doesn't celebrate birthdays' crap. But for now there were more important things to consider.

"Oh!"

"There's an 'Oh?' Replied Severus sarcastically.

"Well, yes," Harry said with a shy smile crossing his lips. "I received owls from my friends after midnight. But I knew who they were from."

"That makes no difference, was anything edible or wearable?" Severus interest was peaked; maybe this is where he would find his answers.

"Ummm Luna sent me this necklace." Harry's hand reached up to his necklace. "It's meant to be charmed to keep bad spirits away. But I feel no strong magical residue from it."

"Give it to me." Severus commanded holding out his hand. Harry did as he was told, though he knew Luna would do nothing to harm him intentionally. Severus took the necklace and had to admit Potter was right, there was no strong magic in it. But he had to be sure that no hidden charms had been placed on it. He took his wand and waved it over the necklace muttering the spell that revealed what charms were in place. "Aperio." There was a small crackle and a shifting of light around the chain of glass beads. "You're right, Potter, nothing more then a low level banishing charm." He handed the necklace back to the young man with a sigh "Did any of your friends send you anything to eat or drink?"

"Hagrid sent me some fudge, but I didn't eat any of it, its not very good for the teeth."

"That I can understand, having had first hand experience with Hagrid's homemade treats." Severus replied sarcastically. Harry just smiled at him, finding it a little hard to imagine his Potions Master sitting down to tea with Hagrid and eating his treacle fudge.

"Then there was Mr. and Mrs. Weasleys' box. I ate one pie from it. Oh, and I had the flask of fruit punch. But that was all."

"Weasleys. He said in a tone as if that explained it all. "Did those pesky twins have anything to do with the package?"

"No, I don't think so. They don't live at home any more and I got their gift separately from their parents." Harry replied with a tone that was none to pleased with his Professor. He did not like the way he said the name 'Weasleys'.

"Watch your tone with me, Potter!" He replied narrowing his eyes ever so slightly

"Sorry, Sir," he thought he heard Snape mumble something about him being an impertinent brat under his breath. It took all his self-control not to roll his eyes.

Sighing, "Was there anything unusual about the food?"

"No."

"Don't answer so quickly and dismiss it out of hand just to spare someone's feelings!"
"Fine! The pie tasted fine! It was strawberry and chocolate, the pastry was sweet. The juice was very fruity and very Moorish." He desperately wanted to finish that sentence by sticking out his tongue. But his pride absolutely refused to let Snape see him acting like a petulant brat.

"Moorish, how?"

"What?"

"Were you born stupid or was it something that you learnt along the way?" Severus snapped at the boy. Then in a slightly softer tone, "Why was the drink so moorish? Did you drink all of it? What exactly did it taste of?"

Taking a deep breath and closing his eyes to think back to the drink, Harry replied, "Actually it was a little bitter, had a strange undercurrent of aniseed to it, the main flavour was lemon and orange. But once I started to drink it I just couldn't stop!" Silence one again fell between the two. "Strange," Harry said under his breath.

"What's strange, Mister Potter?"

"Sorry. Oh it's just that last night after I finished the drink I had one of the best night's sleep I've had in years, no Voldemort nightmares or anything." He saw Snape flinch slightly at the use of Voldemort's name.

"You often have nightmares?" Severus asked before he could sensor his own thoughts. To cover his own tracks and not to sound like he cared he finished by saying, "And it's the Dark Lord, Potter. Don't say his name again in my presence."

"Sorry and yes, every night," Harry mumbled, looking a little embarrassed.

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Severus brain started to kick in with this new information. Usually if sleep is bad, then a sleeping drought is the answer. This can only be ingested in liquid form, so that ruled out the pie. But it can be mixed with other potions to have other effects than just sleeping. Also, if there was to be a transformation, then putting the person into a deep sleep was often a good option. The person was not so uncomfortable and if you wanted to be underhanded then there was the added bonus of the person not noticing the changes until it was too late. Also, the aniseed flavouring was ringing alarm bells in his head, he just couldn't think why at the moment. He knew it would come to him sooner or later. Hopefully for the Potter brat sooner would be better.

"It's time for us to leave, gather your thing. Now." Harry jumped up, knowing that tone of voice. It was the 'do what I say now or you will be cleaning cauldrons for a month without magic' voice.

"Where are we going, sir?"

Severus just looked at the boy and raised an eyebrow, "Where do you think you, idiot?"

"Hogwarts?"

Severus rolled his eyes "No, I thought I would take you on a muggle round-the-world romantic
cruise for two. Yes, of course Hogwarts, Dumbledore needs to be made aware of your situation."

"No need to be so sarcastic about it, I was only asking."

"And there is no need to be such a dunderhead about it. And watch that tone of yours, Potter. We might not be in school yet, but we will be soon," he let the threat hang. He was happy to see the brat pale and look a little frightened. He couldn't help but smile cruelly at that sight.

Harry couldn't help but groan inwardly. Why him, why did he always get into these stupid situations? Why wasn't Ron having at least some of these problems? Share the burden a little, spread the trouble a bit. Snape handed him back his wand and he replaced it back up his sleeve. He was shoved out the door and back down the stairs and out into the bar.

"Finished early, Severus? You know you still have nearly 30 minutes left." Tom called over the bar to Severus.

"What can I say, Tom? The youth of today have no stamina!" He shot back in a tone full of sarcasm.

"You're not finally admitting that youth and beauty are not all they're cracked up to be, are you?"

"Maybe I am, but it sure helps though. Wouldn't you agree old friend?"

"Hey! Less of the old, I'm only a few years older then you, Severus."

Severus just smirked at his 'old' friend and simply replied, "Until next time, Tom. Good day."

He noticed that the Potter brat was blushing again and couldn't help but laugh inwardly. Thinking that yes it was definitely a good look on him. He would have to try and make him blush again when he was back to being his own age. Obviously for scientific reasons, he told himself; he needed to know if it was a good a look on his younger self as it was on his older version.

He led Potter back into the alleyway that he had first confronted the boy in. He stood behind him and wrapped his right arm around Potter's shoulders. He immediately felt the boy tense up in his arms. God, what did the boy think he was going to do to him? Now that sprung up images in his mind that he definitely did not want to think about. Especially when he had the boy in his arms in such a provocative position.

"Relax, it will make this easier." Severus muttered in Potters ear.

"Make what easier, Sir?"

Severus rolled his eyes "Apparation."

Harry started to panic, "But, sir, I can't apparate yet."

"Do you think I'm holding you in this position for fun, Potter? Well, I am not. I'm going to apparate us both back to the apparation zone just outside the Hogwarts wards. It's the quickest and safest way to get there."
"But I didn't think that you could apparate two people like this?"

"It is possible, it is just a little bit illegal."

"But if it's illegal..."

"Who are you going to tell, Potter, mmm? I don't think it will be high on the list of my crimes, do you?"

Harry tried to think of happy thoughts, which was a little hard to do when Snape had mentioned his list of crimes. He had seen his professor in a few of his visions and dreams and he didn't like what he saw. He just had to keep reminding himself that it was all part of Snape's cover and he had to do these things, otherwise old Volde would get very suspicious very quickly. However, his treacherous body welcomed the close contact and happily leaned back into the embrace.

"Better," he heard whispered in his ear. Great now that sent a shiver down his spine. What was his body doing to him, trying to kill him with embarrassment? That was his last thought as he felt a wave of nothingness come over him. The next thing he knew he was falling further back into Snape's arms in the forbidden forest.

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"Sorry," he mumbled quickly while trying to secure his balance.

"It takes a while to get used to, but I'm sure you will." With that Snape straightened up and stalked off towards the castle. Harry ran to catch up with him. The walk up to the castle was a quiet one. Not wanting to annoy Snape further he decided to keep his mouth shut. As they passed through the front doors, a panic stricken McGonagall ran up to them.

"Severus, where have you been? We have been trying to get hold of you for the last 4 hours! There's been an emergency concerning Harry Potter," she shrieked. Harry had seen her angry before but never in such a panic.

"Really, Minerva! You should try a calming potion. It does wonders for stress."

"Severus, how could you be so calm at such a dreadful time! Poor Harry could be lost and alone anywhere, the mind boggles!"

"Minerva, the way you talk you would think Potter was a helpless whelp and not nearly a fully-grown wizard." Harry's mind jumped at that, did Snape again just pay him a compliment? This was definitely turning into one of the weirdest days of his life.

"Severus Snape! I can't believe even you would be that cruel! You-Know-Who might get a hold of poor Harry and do God knows what!"

Harry saw Snape roll his eyes at that statement, "You panic too much, and here I was thinking you were the one with all the faith in that brat." But before she could answer he started to walk away towards the stairs in the direction of the headmaster's office.

Then he barked out over his shoulder, "Come Potter, I don't have all day!" Harry at once began to follow him. He had never seen McGonagall gape at a loss for words before it was kind of
amusing.

"Batty old cat!" he heard Snape mumble under his breath. Harry had to smile. He and Ron thought that on occasion, too.

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They reached the stone gargoyle guarding the headmaster's office and Snape muttered the password 'candy hearts' and entered the stairway. He knocked on the impressive oak door when he reached the top.

"Come in, Severus," Severus couldn't help but shake his head. Just how did the headmaster do that? He entered the office leaving the door open for Potter to follow him.

"Afternoon, Albus, I thought I better bring in this stray that I found wondering the streets of Diagon Alley," Severus motioned to the young man behind him.

The headmaster approached Harry slowly, looking him over closely "Harry?"

Harry smiled his Gilderoy Lockhart award-winning smile; he couldn't help it. From the moment he got up this morning he thought nothing would go right. Until now. " Good afternoon, Professor Dumbledore."

Latain Translations:

Aperio - Reveal

Next chapter: A chat to Albus, Severus gets an idea about the potion Harry was poisoned with. And a trip to Snape Manor.
"Oh dear, you better come in and have a seat," Dumbledore motioned to the two armchairs in front of the desk. As he returned to his usual seat behind the desk, Severus sat in his usual black leather armchair leaving Harry the soft purple one with yellow suns on it. "Tea?"

Both nodded and a flowery tea set floated in from the room behind, already filled with steaming tea. Albus poured one cup and handed it to Severus, "It's with milk and sugar, Harry, isn't it?"

"Please, Headmaster." Harry saw Snape looking slightly repulsed by that, trust him to take his tea black with no sugar. Yuck, how bitter! Like man like tea! Harry laughed to himself. Unfortunately for him, both Snape and Dumbledore caught the slight smile on his lips.

"Ah, something amusing Harry? I think I could do with a good giggle after the shock I have just received." Dumbledore smiled at Harry, his eyes full of mirth. Harry decided he was going to have to find that legendary Gryffindor courage one day and ask Dumbledore if he really could read minds.

"No, sir. It's just one of those 'if you don't laugh you're going to cry' situations." Well, Harry thought, it was a kind of a half-truth. He did feel like that.

"Of course, Harry" Dumbledore looked over his half moon glasses, eyes still twinkling.

"Now, Harry, let me first wish you a Happy Birthday." Harry smiled at him "Secondly what happened to you? I got your note and it set the staff in the castle in a bit of a panic! We had no idea what had happened. Your note gave no details."

Harry winced, "Sorry, sir. I didn't mean to worry you, I was panicking and well, to be truthful, I was scared half to death." Then Harry proceeded to tell his story of what he had done since yesterday, up until he reached Dumbledore's office.

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Severus started to tune out Potter's voice, he had already scared the full details out of the boy and he sure as hell didn't want to hear them again. He sipped his tea, no wonder people always
left this office feeling better than they did when they came in, the tea they were drinking was laced with a calming potion. He mentally rolled his eyes. Crafty old coot! He nearly snorted out loud at that though. It would not do to laugh out loud when the brat was droning on about being scared out his wits by the new 'Potter problem'. Severus couldn't help but wonder how the boy could be so scared of what had happened to him, the boy had faced and won against The Dark Lord no less than six times, if you counted the time he survived as a baby. This new situation no doubt had a solution; he just needed to find it. There was something he was missing, if only he could find it. He had a gut feeling it was the fruit punch that Potter had drunk. That bit about it being slightly bitter with an under taste of aniseed kept playing on his mind. As did the fact the drink was Moorish. Severus was quite content in his own mind thinking things through when he felt two sets of eyes upon him and a deep silence in the room. Even Fawkes was as still as a statue. He just looked at the headmaster and raised an eyebrow, as if to ask, "what?"

"Were you some place nice, Severus?" He saw the brat try to contain a smile at Albus' words.

"Yes, not here!" he snapped back, feeling much better for acting more like himself. That took the smile of Potter's lips, he thought. Though Albus just smiled congenially at him, like he always did. Damned old coot!

"Do you have any ideas as to what may be wrong with Mister Potter? You have spent more time mulling over the problem than I have, Severus?"

Unfortunately, he thought, but decided to go with his other answer, which was, no doubt, the one that Albus was after. "Yes I have two possible theories as to how; but I am still drawing a blank as to what exactly it was. Potter received a drink in one of his birthday presents. A fruit punch with whatever was in it was ingested when he drank it. It was either made by one of the Weasley children as a joke," He raised his hand to silence Potter's predictable defence of the Weasley brats and continued on, "or the parcel was intercepted by someone and the drink added to the package, knowing that Potter would think it was safe, believing it came from a friend."

"Yes. Either is a possibility, Severus. They both have merit. If it was a potion, as you suspect, do you think you can brew an antidote?"

"Given time, I'm sure I can come up with something, but it will take time without the original potion to analyze. I guess a few samples of Potter's blood would be helpful in trying to determine what was used. It's the aniseed under flavour that's bothering me the most, it seems, and for it to be mixed with a sleeping potion..." leaving the sentence unfinished, Severus got up quickly and left the office in his typical dramatic fashion - long strides with robes billowing out behind him. The door shut with a decisive bang.

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"Must ask him how he does that one day," Harry said quietly under his breath.

"Yes, it is one thing Severus knows how to do quite well. He arrives and leaves in such a fantastic fashion."

Harry turned around back to the Headmaster and smiled sheepishly, "Sorry, Professor. I forgot you were here for a moment." Dumbledore just smiled his all-knowing smile at Harry.

At that moment, McGonagall stormed into the office looking absolutely livid. "Albus, one day I swear that I will hex some manners into that young man! He just cut me dead in the hallway,
totally ignored me. And the way he treated me in the entrance hallway was well!"

"Calm down, Minerva. Tea?"

"Yes, Albus, but you must speak to Severus again about his manners." She sat down in the seat that was recently vacated by the Potions Master. Dumbledore handed her a cup of tea. After a moment of silence she seemed to visibly relax.

"Minerva, you know how Severus gets when he is struck by an idea. He has to run off immediately and go research it."

"Is that what just happened, sir?" asked Harry. He had been wondering what had made Snape make such a quick exit.

At the sound of Harry's voice McGonagall turned sharply to look at him. "And you, young man, what in Merlin's name happened to you?"

Harry sighed internally. How many times was he going to have to tell this story?

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Severus was almost at the portrait that covered the entrance to his private chambers; he was muttering rude things under his breath about interfering and time wasting old cats. As he reached the portrait he said his password "Penetalis Venustas," and took down his magical wards. After he entered, he headed straight for the bookshelves, of which there were many. He pulled down three tomes that he knew would be useful. After all he had read most of these books several times. The thing that slightly worried him was that two of the books were more from his dark arts potions volumes. This does not bode well, he thought. He sat down in his private office, pulled out some parchment, grabbed a quill, and started to take notes.

***

Several hours later, Harry sat down in the teachers' lounge, enjoying his first good meal all summer. As he looked around the room he couldn't help but think that this was what he called a comfortable room. The armchairs all looked comfy; there were books and magazines everywhere and quite a few potted plants. There were many paintings and tapestries hung on the walls. All of their subject matters were of the four founders of Hogwarts. There were the four house banners hanging by the fireplace. The remaining staff had set up a small dining area in the teachers' lounge for the summer, as not that many staff remained during the holidays. It transpired that only Dumbledore, McGonagall, Trelawney, Filch and Hagrid stayed. He admitted to being a little shocked that Snape actually had a home to return to during the summer. He thought Snape haunted the dungeons of Hogwarts all year round, obviously he thought wrong, another thing to add to the ever-growing list that was the mystery of Snape.

As the meal was finishing, Harry noticed Snape had not joined them and now it looked like he wasn't going to. Harry was a little disappointed by this. He didn't want to think too much about why he was a little disappointed because it was freaking him out slightly that he had felt disappointed in the first place. He admitted to himself that he was tired and he let his attention wander from the teachers and he zone out a little.

{"He works too hard, always reading and taking notes is that young serpent."}
And he never takes proper breaks to feed himself.

Harry was startled by the odd conversation his ears were hearing, he did not recognise the voices at all. He looked around and saw a picture of a proud looking man with long flowing hair and beard with two snakes. One was resting around his neck and the other was just re-entering the picture. Harry rose from his seat and slowly walked over to the picture.

"Excuse me, but are you talking about Professor Snape?"

"Master, he speaks our language! How can this be?"

"Young one, who are you?" the proud man asked.

"Sorry, I'm Harry Potter and you're Salazar Slytherin, aren't you, sir?"

"Yes, you are correct. It has been a long time since one of our kind has walked the halls of this school. It is a pleasure to make you acquaintance, young Mister Potter. I have heard a lot about you."

"Thank you, sir, but were you talking about Professor Snape just now?"

"Yes, the young man never takes a rest when he gets into one of his moods."

"Moods?"

"Yes, all he does is read and do his research. He will make himself ill if he does not take better care of himself. Who then will take care of the house of serpents? There is none better qualified then him. It's all work and no play for him."

"Maybe this young serpent can take him some food and water, to make sure he does not fall ill again."

"Good idea Satin," Slytherin patted the snake around his neck, "and you Silk, go tell the other portrait to allow this young serpent in. Will you do it, Mister Potter?"

"I don't know if Professor Snape would like me to disturb him," but the look on Slytherins' face was one not to be argued with. "Umm, sure, why not?" Harry turned around to a deathly silent room, looks of shock and a little horror on all their faces except Dumbledore's. "Sorry, it just kind of comes out."

"It's okay, 'Arry. It jus' a little creepy to 'ear, all tha' hissin' goin' on" Hagrid said, looking a little pale.

"It's quite all right, Harry, don't worry about it. Salazar must like you; he does not talk to many people. I think in all my time here you are only the fourth person he has deemed worthy to talk to," Dumbledore said gently with a twinkle in his eye.

"Really! Who were the others? If you don't mind me asking?"

"Not at all, Harry, you will only find the answers to questions if those questions are asked." Harry just smiled at him, what could you really say to that? Then Dumbledore answered in a calm tone, which at first unnerved him. By the time Dumbledore had finished he knew why he
felt unnerved.

"Let me see, first there's me, but only in the Headmaster's office never in the staff room and Severus, he seems to have a real soft spot for him, and then there was Tom."

"Do you mean Vol...?" Seeing the shivers in the room, Harry stopped and rephrased what he was about to say, "Do you mean Riddle, sir?"

"Yes, Harry, now onto more important things. Did Salazar pass on some words of wisdom to you? Very intuitive chap he is." Dumbledore smiled brightly at Harry, relieving the building worry that he had begun to feel at another comparison to Voldemort.

"Umm, he asked me to take some food down to Professor Snape. He said he was worried about him."

"An excellent idea, Harry. I'll call some house elves to ready a tray for you."

***

So that was how Harry found himself with a hot tray of food and a bottle of red wine in the dungeons following a small snake called Silk as it travelled from portrait to portrait. He knew the way to Snape's office but had no idea where the man's private quarters were. Silk apparently knew the way quite well.

He found himself outside a huge portrait of three snakes swimming in a pool of water by a beautiful waterfall. Harry was sure if he stood and stared long enough that the spray from the waterfall would get him wet. He had never seen such a realistic portrait before. Silk hissed at the guardian snakes to allow Harry access because Salazar had said it was alright. At first the guardian snakes were sceptical until Harry said he was only here to bring his Professor some much needed food. It seemed, just like Silk, Satin, and Salazar that they also worried about Snape. Harry couldn't understand how such a cold man could invoke such devotion in others. Putting that thought away until another time when he could have a proper conversation with the snakes, he entered Snape's lair.

Whatever he had been expecting, and if he was honest with himself, it was not what he could see so far. He had expected cold slimy walls with stone benches and a few torture devices thrown in for good measure. Oh, and maybe a coffin to sleep in. However what was before him was completely the opposite of that. The left wall was fully lined with beautiful mahogany bookshelves. Hermione would be impressed, he thought there were literally hundreds of books. Over to the right side of the room was a sofa and two matching wing-backed armchairs that just screamed comfort! In front of them was a beautiful, ornate coffee table in the same beautiful mahogany as the bookshelves, behind that was a breathtaking fireplace and mantel, again in mahogany. On the mantel were lots of magical paraphernalia and a lovely crystal vase. Harry idlely wondered what flowers Snape liked. The whole room was decorated out in cream with dashes of antique gold.

Harry quietly called out, "Professor, are you here?"

When he got no reply he walked a little further in, seeing a lovely dining room table with six chairs Harry wandered over to it to set the tray down. He heard a quiet cough and looked up. Instantly his jaw dropped. Standing in the doorway, leaning casually against the frame, was Snape. Harry's breath caught in his throat. Snape simply looked gorgeous! Candlelight flickered
across his features making him look softer, gone were the frowns and lines. And his face looked relaxed as did his body. His skin almost looked translucent in the light, Harry thought it looked beautiful and had to resist every impulse in his being not to go over and touch him. His clothes and hair were rumpled. If Harry had not known better, he would have sworn the man had just gotten out of bed. Snape looked dishevelled and Harry thought that was a very good look for the man. I wonder if he looks that good after sex, Harry thought and immediately blushed, especially as all the blood in his body seemed to be rushing south. Thank God the table was high enough to cover any immediate embarrassment.

***

Severus heard someone come in and guessed it must be Albus considering he knew the password. As he started to leave his office the last thing he had expected to hear was the soft baritone of Potter calling out to him. Immediately annoyed that that brat was in his private rooms, he headed for the door. He leaned against the doorframe and waited for him to place the tray he was carrying down, after all he didn't want to clean a mess up. He coughed softly wanting to scare the brat half to death. Well, he thought, it might be fun if nothing else. He was about to go into full irate mode when something stopped him in his tracks. Potter was gapping at him with undeniable, lust! His first thought was, ha, wait until the world finds out their boy wonder is gay! He was admittedly a little cruel but he was not evil, so he was not going to bring this up with the boy. Unfortunately, he knew first hand what it was like to be outed before you were ready, and he didn't have half the world's press on his back. But that did not mean he couldn't have a little fun, after all Potter was seventeen and would be on to his next crush in fifteen minutes time.

He elegantly pushed himself off the doorframe and glided over to Potter in a few graceful steps, he reached out his right hand and lightly touched the boy's chin, his skin was red hot from where he was blushing so much, and leaned in closely. In a very quiet voice he whispered into Potter's ear, "You should be careful, you might get stuck like that." He pulled back and smirked at him, pushed his jaw shut and stepped away. In a more business like tone he continued, "how did you get in here? Did Professor Dumbledore give you the password?" Potter just stared at him; he rolled his eyes in a show of impatience.

"No, I did not, Severus." Dumbledore answered.

Immediately Severus started to panic, though no one could have guessed from his impassive expression, that Albus might have witnessed his little scene with Potter; but he couldn't have, considering he only just heard the door open and he wasn't hexed into oblivion. So he guessed he was safe. "Then how did you get in here? Well, speak up, boy! We don't all understand gibberish!"

"Umm, it was Silk."

"Who or what is Silk, and how did they come to know my password?"

"I'm guessing Silk is one of the snakes from Salazar's portrait from up in the staff room," Dumbledore interjected.

"Umm. Yes. She told the guardian snakes to open up for me. I don't know your password, sir. Honest"

Severus narrowed his eyes at the boy, of course he forgot that Potter was a parsleymouth and
could talk to snakes, be it real ones or portrait ones. He would have to have a word to Salazar about this, as if the boy didn't get away with enough already without having Slytherin giving him access to areas he did not belong. "Fine," he eyed the tray Potter had bought in, he realised he had forgotten to eat again.

"Salazar and his snakes were worried about you when you did not show up for dinner, he asked me to bring you some food." Severus wondered briefly if anybody would believe him if he told them that the portrait of the great Salazar Slytherin acted like a mother hen towards him. He doubted it. He relented and sat at the table, motioning to the others to sit down. He flicked his wand and three wine goblets floated to the table and the wine began to pour itself into the glasses. Then the full glasses slowly drifted towards each person.

"Any luck, Severus?" Dumbledore asked looking towards Harry with a twinkle in his eye as Severus started to eat.

Severus did not miss that look the old coot had given Potter, he narrowed his eyes; what was the insane wizard up to now? He wondered. "Yes and no. Would you like the good news or the bad first? You choose, Potter, considering this is because of you." he looked at the boy he slightly blushed again. Yes, Severus thought, definitely going to have to make him do that when he is back to normal to see if it does look as good.

"Whatever."

"Very well," he said dryly "There is no potion that makes you 10 years older and stay that way, until now, that is. There is, however, a potion to make you physically and mentally 10 years younger for a short period of time, it's a little in the dark arts but none the less I think this is the one your unknown attacker meant for you. It has plenty of raw aniseed in it and it can be mixed with a sleeping draft and still be effective. Your attacker made a mistake in the brewing possess and the result is as you are now, Potter. The bad news is that I don't know what mistake they made and it might take me a while to figure it out."

"Oh."

"I should take some samples of your blood, before I leave and I will work on the antidote from them."

"Leave, Severus?"

"Yes, Albus, leave to go back home. I do not wish to spend my holidays here. I spend all school year here as it is."

"Before you leave Severus, I'd like to see you in my office. At your earliest convenience, of course."

"I was planning on returning tonight."

"No problem, you know where my office is. Come along, Harry. Let's leave Professor Snape to his meal."

***

Severus had a funny feeling he should do a runner right about now. But his damn honour got in
the way, which was why he was now knocking on the door of the Headmaster's office. "Come in, Severus."

Severus entered the office with a raised eyebrow. "Albus, you wanted to see me before I left?"

"Please, come in and sit down, tea?"

"No thank you, Albus. It's getting late and I'd like to get home. So what is it you want?"

"It's about Harry, Severus."

"Really."

"Yes. I would like him to go back to Snape Manor with you for the remainder of the summer."

"Very funny, Albus, almost had me there. Great joke! I'll see you soon. Goodbye." Severus got out of his chair and headed towards the door.

"Severus, please, this is no joke. Harry cannot stay here during the summer. No student can, the board would not allow it. Also, it's not safe. The wards are yet to be reset for the next year."

"No! Albus, you can not ask this of me, it's too much!"

"Severus, please! He has nowhere else to go. He can't go home and he can't stay here."

"But Albus, Potter and I will kill each other. He does not even like me, we can not spend the rest of the summer together." He knew he was not going to get out of this, but he sure as hell was not going to make it easy for the old git! "You ask too much of me, Albus!"

"I know, Severus. Sometimes it seems I ask you for much more then I do others, and again here I am asking you for another favour. But there are very few others I can trust with such an important job."

Great, he thought, a double guilt trip. Now he knew he was trapped. He had succeeded in making Albus feel as guilty as much as Albus was making him feel guilty. "Fine, but I am reaching my limit, Albus. Soon there will be nothing else left to give." With that he stormed out of the office to fetch the Potter brat from the staff room.

He heard Albus say from his office, "I know, Severus. I know."

***

He reached the staff room and saw Potter jump at his entrance. He grabbed the brat's hand. "Hold on tight!" With that he activated the portkey. There was a pulling at their navels and with a pop they were gone from the staff room.

***

Harry stumbled to the ground in front of an imposing building, he was pale and shaking and still holding hands with Snape. He was scared and furious. "You should have warned me!" Harry yelled at Snape. He pulled his hand from Snape's grasp.
"Oh, I'm so sorry, boy wonder. Did my plans not fit in with yours?" Snape yelled in his face, anger very much in evidence. "Just shut up with all your whining and follow me!" Snape barked at him.

Harry was seething but he knew he would not win against Snape, either physically or verbally. He was pissed off because he felt as though he had been making some small progress with Snape. Now, because he was forced into looking after him for the rest of the summer, he felt as though all progress had been lost.

Next Chapter: Severus and Harry learn to live together and a Weasley interrogation by Severus.

Latin Translations:

Penetralis Venustas - Inner beauty.
Written in the house of man, the magic was such that even the air seemed to breathe. Harry, driven by a heavy heart, followed Snape's instructions and entered the house, which he found to be a mansion. The gate was barely held open as he scurried through it, and despite the long gravel pathway leading to the house, Harry scoffed at the word "house." His perspective changed when he entered the massive double doors and saw the beauty that screamed of money and luxury in every corner. Oddly, the first real thought to enter his mind was to wonder if Snape got lonely here. A house elf appeared, and after a brief conversation, they led Harry to his room.

As the lights came up, his breath was taken away. What he saw was simply beautiful. It screamed of money and luxury in every corner. Oddly, the first real thought to enter his mind was to wonder if Snape got lonely here. A house elf popped into existence almost immediately, "Sir is back with a guest! Would sir like us to get you a guest room ready?"

"Yes, the further away from mine the better," with that Snape stalked away.

The elf spoke again; Harry guessed this to be the head elf. "Would sir like to follow me to his room?"

"Umm sure, lead the way." Harry offered a weak smile. It was the best he could do, he was tired and upset.

Harry was led through a grand entrance done in cream marble with gold flecks in it. Just like his quarters, he mused, he must like the colour scheme. They went up one of the widest staircases he had ever climbed. He was led along to a third floor corridor decorated in soft blues with lovely landscape portraits hanging on the walls and small tables with crystal vases on them containing orchids of all colours. At least now Harry had the answer to his question about Snape's favourite flowers, he had never guessed Snape to be such a romantic, and he thought he would have preferred Venus fly traps. After being led through more corridors, they stopped outside a big double door, which the elf opened and stepped inside. Harry followed.

He guessed this was to be his bedroom; it was big enough to be a whole apartment. Even all of Dudley's crap could fit in here and still leave space for an elephant or two if you so desired. "Will sir be requiring anything?"
Harry looked down at the elf and noticed for the first time that it was dressed in a very nice toga-like outfit that was very clean. He guessed Snape was not mean to his elves. Another thing to add to his ever-growing list of the mysteries of Snape. "A glass of water would be nice if it's not to much trouble."

The elf smiled brightly at him, "Sir, there is water by your bed and tea and cake is on your table," the elf pointed to the table by the fireplace.

"Thank you. By the way, I'm sorry for not asking before but, what is your name?"

If possible, the elf smiled even more, "My name sir is Lula, sir."

"Hello, Lula. I'm Harry. You can call me Harry if you want. I prefer it to sir to be truthful."

"I is happy to call you Harry."

"Thank you." With a big smile and a small bow, Lula disappeared with a pop. Harry wandered over to the fireplace, poured himself a cup of tea, and sat in one of the armchairs, and surveyed his new 'room.'

***

It was simply lovely. It was decorated in soft lilacs and cream. It had a massive four-poster bed with drapes all decked out in coordinated colours. There was a massive wardrobe and armoire, a desk and chair, and bookshelves with volumes already on them but with space to add more. The wood of the furniture was in a lovely pale pine that seemed to fit with the room perfectly. Even the artwork and tapestries in the room all fitted in with the room's mood. Luckily, all the artwork was of landscapes and sceneries with no people in them. He did not feel like talking to anyone, really. Except to Snape to try and clear the air a little and apologise for the inconvenience he was causing.

He knew when Dumbledore had told him his plan that it was a bad idea and he had tried to get him to change his mind and send him to the Burrow. But he claimed it was not safe for him there and that Snape Manor was the best place for him, for it had hundreds of years of magical wards on it that not even Voldemort or himself could break through. That part Harry knew was true, as they had crossed the barrier tonight he felt the heavy pressure of ancient magic flow through him and it made him tingle and become a little light-headed. Harry frowned. There was nothing he could do now about Snape. He would have to play nice tomorrow and if that didn't work, well it was a big enough house to avoid someone for a few weeks. With that thought he stripped off his clothes and climbed into his massive bed and was asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow.

***

After Severus had left the boy, he had stormed off to his favourite room in his home - the library, where he knew he could gather his thoughts and calm himself down. As he entered, the lights burst into flame and the fire roared to life. He poured himself a brandy and went to sit in is favourite armchair by the fire. He knew he was wrong for snapping at Potter like he had, it was Albus he was angry at for backing him into a corner, and like any animal when trapped he struck out at the closest thing and unfortunately that was Potter. And he had forced the poor kid into using a portkey without warning. He knew damn well they freaked out the kid ever since the Dark Lord's rebirth party a few years ago. He could have hexed himself for that stupid
mistake. After they had arrived and Potter had yelled at him he saw the raw fear in his eyes. He guessed he had ruined any trust the brat might have had in him. He rolled his eyes in self-disgust. What did he care if Potter trusted him or not? Sighing, he got up, finished his drink, and headed for bed. He would try and be decent in the morning. He didn't think he could do nice, especially not in the morning. There were no such things as miracles!

***

Harry woke up from his lovely dream to someone calling his name. He turned over and came face to face with Lula. "Is Harry hungry? Breakfast is served, if you are."

"Sure, thanks. Umm, is there a shower near by?"

"Yes, Harry. The bathroom is through that door," she pointed to a door he had not noticed the night before.

"Thanks. I'll come down after a shower."

"Alright, Harry, the breakfast room is on the ground floor. Would you like me to stay to show you after your shower?"

"No, that's fine. I'm sure I can find it."

"If you is sure?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Very well, but if you get lost, Harry, click your fingers twice and someone will come and help you."

"Thank you, Lula."

With that Harry headed to the bathroom with his clothes bunched up in his arms. Due to his hasty exit from Hogwarts last night, he had left his bag behind. He would ask Dumbledore to send it on to him as soon as possible along with Hedwig. He entered the bathroom and again had to gasp. It was pure luxury. A big sunken bath that could fit five people in it and a massive shower that could accommodate at least three people was there. He jumped in the shower and let the hot water run all over him and wash away his worries. When he exited the shower ten minutes later he noticed something was amiss. Something was wrong, all his instincts told him something was not right. Then it hit him. His clothes were gone! "Shit! Oh shit! Shit what am I going to do?" he said aloud.

"It's a good look on you, I think."

Harry spun around at the sound of an unfamiliar voice, "What!"

"I said it's a good look on you, dear," Harry released the breath he was holding. It was the mirror. He never thought he would get used to all wizardly things no matter how long he was exposed to them. Harry grabbed one of the large fluffy white towels, rubbed it through his hair to take off the excess water, and wrapped it around his waist.

***
This was going to be his third attempt at finding the breakfast room. He knew he was in the right area, he could smell the coffee and tea and lots of different foods. He opened the door and saw Snape turn to look at him. He noticed Snape open his eyes a little wider and stared at him intensely. Which was a bad thing, considering his current state of undress, and that intense stare bought his lovely dream crashing back to him full force.

***

They were back in Snape's private quarters in Hogwarts and Snape was leaning elegantly against the doorframe to his office casually. He was wearing his low-slung hipster leather trousers again with his cream silk shirt, the top three buttons were still undone as they were earlier. He had confidently walked over to Snape and ran his hands up Snape's hard, defined chest and popped a few more of the buttons open and his breath had hitched. He pulled the shirt apart to reveal his chest, the skin was pale but with the soft light of the candles it seemed to glow. He could no longer resist the temptation and used his tongue to trace the shape of muscle up the older man's chest. His skin tasted salty but he liked it. He gently traced over Snape's right nipple and he heard the older man softly moan and felt a hand intertwine in his hair. This encouraged him more. He continued his path upwards and reached the long neck he had been thinking about nibbling on all day. He nipped and sucked his way up until he reached the earlobe, which he took it between his teeth and was treated to a low growl from Snape, the noises the man was making was just driving him wild with desire. "Harry," Snape breathed in his ear and the sound of that rich velvety voice saying his name sent shivers all down his spine. Snape then proceeded to take control as he gently pushed him back against the dining room table. He was leaning down towards him. He gently entangled his fingers in the man's long hair to pull him closer. Snape's breath ghosted his lips, a look of total desire in his eyes. Their lips were about to touch when a God damned house elf woke him up!

Shaking himself back to the present, "Sir, Professor Snape?"

***

Severus was enjoying a cup of tea. He had just brought the cup up to his lips when he heard the door open. He turned his head slightly to see if it was Potter or if one of the elves needed something. If he had not been trained to hide his reactions as much as possible in all situations he probably would have chocked on his tea and dropped his cup at the sight before him, as it was he felt his eyes widen in slight surprise at the image in front of him. Standing before him was a very grown up and virtually naked Harry Potter. It was a very pleasing image, he wanted too commit it to memory for what purposes he was not willing to admit to yet. His legs were long and very well toned and tanned, there was no tan line that he could see. Now that bought about another interesting image of Potter sunbathing naked. Yes, his legs looked strong and powerful. He guessed Quidditch did have a use after all; maybe he should pay more attention to the sport. His hips were narrow but not overly so; his chest was also very pleasing to the eye, again tanned and strong. With a little work he would have a definite washboard stomach. There was a small smattering of hair between his pecks and a soft trail of hairs that trailed all the way down his abdomen and disappeared under the towel. His arms were also tanned and strong looking, if he had to put a word to Potters figure he would call it sinuous or lithe.

Very pleasing indeed, he had a few scars scattered about which he thought rather added to the whole effect. He guessed battling the odd Basilisk and Dark Lord would give you a few scars. Potter's face had also changed for the better in his opinion; he was not the spitting image of the previous Potter in his life. As he thought yesterday, he definitely looked more like his mother.
now, with his thinned down face and more prominent cheekbones. And his face was simply
breath taking without those God damn awful glasses on that he used to wear. Now one of his
best facial features, his eyes, were allowed to shine through without the glasses getting in the
way.

His hair was longer now, almost down to his jaw and he had feathered bangs and a longer fringe
framing his face nicely though it was still an unruly mess even wet. Around his neck he was
wearing the necklace he had shown him yesterday, he hadn't liked it then but now with it sitting
snugly on Potter's neck he changed his mind, he did rather like it, a lot. He wondered if he could
push Potter onto the table and have him for breakfast instead of toast. Toast seemed such a
boring option right now with Potter to ravish.

***

Severus was bought back to earth when he heard Potter speak, he sighed internally, why did the
boy have to speak and ruin that lovely picture? He tried to pull himself together but could think
of nothing to say so he went back to tried and tested means. "Potter." he growled out.

"Professor, I'm really sorry for, umm, coming down here in, well, just a towel, but my clothes
disappeared and I don't have any others with me."

"House elves."

"Sorry, sir."

He sighed, "House elves, Potter, they would have taken your clothes to clean. Have you no
others?"

"No, we left Hogwarts in such a hurry I left by bag behind, and the rest of my stuff is at the
Dursley's, my muggle home."

Now Severus felt a little responsible. Because of their quick exit out of Hogwarts, the boy had
no clothes. He sighed and got out of his chair. "Follow me," he said.

In the main entrance he spun on his heals to face Potter and looked him up and down in an
obvious sign of checking him out. "Shame, really. I like you in that outfit but I must ask you,
where do you keep your wand?" The boy blushed furiously. Snape spun back on his heals and
continued walking with a big smirk on his face. It was just too damn easy, he mused to himself.

***

After Severus had given the boy some clothes, he returned to the library. He had a couple of fire
calls to make. The first one was going to be fun. It always was enjoyable winding up the
resident Hogwarts' cat, and he sure as hell did not mean Mrs. Norris. Throwing in a handful of
floo powder he called out "Minerva McGonagall, Hogwarts." A few seconds later she appeared
in the fire.

"Severus, to what do I owe this great honour? What have you done to Mister Potter, Severus?"

"Really, Minerva, is it such a shock to you? Could I not just be calling to say hello?"

"Try your dubious charms on another. Young man, I have known you since you were eleven,
you do not make social calls."

"Ah! I see I have slipped into that dreadful pattern of predictability! I guess I will have to partake in something shocking to shake things up again."

"How about giving points to Gryffindor, Severus? That will shock everyone so much they will believe you have gone stark raving mad."

"Now, now, Minerva play nice and I'm sure Father Christmas will bring you gifts of catnip wrapped in soft cuddly mice," he deadpanned. He could see Minerva trying not to laugh.

"What is it you want Severus? I do have better things to do with my time then be teased and insulted by you."

"Admit it, it's never as good as when I do it?"

"I'll give you that, Mister Snape, very few are capable of such malice with words. But knowing you, you will take that as a compliment."

He smirked at his colleague "But of course, my dear. I have a favour or two to ask. Don't worry; it's for your Gryffindor golden boy. He left a bag behind in the staff room and the rest of his stuff is with those nitwit muggle relatives of his. I was wondering if you would have the time to collect it and bring it here for the boy. Of course, I'm sure you can find the time considering it is for boy wonder."

"Purely because it will annoy you, I will do it, Severus."

"Don't feel pressured into it, Minerva. Potter after all does look quite fetching in nothing but the small towel he has been forced to wear. Oh, look! Times up! I better go, until next time, Minerva."

With that he closed the connection, enjoying the look of shock on her face. He quietly laughed to himself. If only he could find Albus' weakness, then he would be able to annoy the whole of the Hogwarts' staff. Oh well, he would keep trying. He set up his next call, "Molly Weasley, the Burrow"

"Severus?"

"Hello, Molly. Are you alone?"

"Why yes, dear. What can I do for you? We don't hear from you often now that Bill lives away from home."

"Something has happened to Mister Potter. Don't panic, Albus has him some place safe. But I need to ask you, when you sent Potter his birthday gift did you include a flask of fruit punch?"

"No, dear. Why ever do you ask?"

"Not over a floo connection Molly. It's not safe. See Albus if you want more details. What time is Arthur home?"

"Around six."
"I will come by at seven and take most of your brood into custody for questioning, make sure the twins are there. It's concerning a possible prank pulled on Potter that has gone very wrong. Keep it quiet from them. If they are responsible, I don't want to give them time to work a story out," he said this in a quiet and serious tone so that Molly would understand that his orders were to be followed and that this was no joke.

"Of course, Severus. I'll see you at seven."

With that he closed the connection and went to find Potter. He found him in the kitchen talking to the house elves. Well, at least now he was wearing something decent, if not as much fun. "Potter, I see the clothes fit fine."

"Yes, sir. Thank you again."

"Very well. Minerva will be arriving later with all your things from Hogwarts and your muggle relatives. She has access to the house, the wards will recognise her. I am going out and will not be returning until some time later. You are not to leave the house under any circumstances. Do not wander into the grounds and get lost. It will be a pain to have to explain to Albus and Minerva, do you understand Potter? Good, stay out of trouble." With that he left.

***

That evening, most of the Weasley family were sitting around the dinning room table enjoying a well-cooked meal.

"It was good of you to invite us around," Fred said, tucking into his second helping of mashed potato.

"Yeh, mum. I'm glad you did. We haven't eaten this well since we last came around a few weeks back." George finished his twin's statement. Ron and Ginny were enjoying seeing their brothers again, since they had moved into their flat above their shop they did not see them so much and when they came around it usually entailed fun and lots of it.

The clock in the dinning room quietly chimed seven o'clock. Molly and Arthur looked at each other, and there was a pop in the room right at the end of the table where Molly was sitting. The Weasley children turned to look at the source of the noise from behind their mother and all froze in place, behind her stood the tall and imposing Potions Master wrapped in robes and a cloak as black as the darkest night. His arms were crossed and a scowl firmly in place.

***

Severus had decided that to deal with the younger members of the Weasley brood he was to get back into 'costume' he would wear his teaching robes. They were stuffy but they served their purpose, they were imposing. He was waiting until the clock stuck seven exactly to make his entrance. When he apparated into the dinning room behind Molly Weasley with full sneer on his face he saw all the brats pale by several shades. Now this was fun! He gracefully took his right hand out of his robes making sure he had a firm grip on his wand and pointed once at each of the red-headed, pale looking brats.

"Each of you get up, now!" He said in his most deadly, quiet voice, the one that the entire student body knew as the 'you've pushed Snape too far' voice. They complied, still gaping in
fear. The youngest male Weasley brat, Potter's friend, was actually shaking. He couldn't help but wonder what was going through their small minds. He guessed they thought this was a Death Eater raid. Dumb kids!

"What's goin' on?" Fred was brave enough to ask, albeit very quietly.

"Silence," Severus hissed at them. He pulled out a silver serpent and floated it to the centre of the table, "Each of you hold on tight to it, NOW!" Each of the kids tentatively held out a hand and grabbed the silver serpent. Severus muttered "Portus" and the kids disappeared.

"Molly, Arthur, I apologise for the dramatics."

"Quite all right, Severus, dear. Guilty of this or not, that lot could do with a little discipline in the area of prank pulling." Molly said kindly.

"Albus told us what's going on with Harry, must be quite frightening for the poor lad," Arthur interjected casually.

"Quite," was Severus dry reply "Please pass on my best wishes to Bill and Charlie when you next see them, sorry to interrupt your evening." Severus finished with a small bow showing his respect for the heads of the household.

"Nonsense, Severus! It's been far too long since we've seen you outside of Order meetings or business. You will stay for a spot of tea and cake, and I will hear no argument, young man! Sit, it will do the kids good to wait and sweat for a little!" Molly ordered with a glint in her eyes. Severus knew better then to argue with the matriarch of the Weasley family so he sat, but he did resent that comment, 'young man.' They were not much older then he was. Probably about the same age gap as he and Potter had, he mused.

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Severus entered the lower level room of his home, and found the four Weasley children huddled together in a corner looking scared for their lives. He stalked up to the wooden bench table in the centre of the room and placed a single small clear glass bottle full of clear liquid in the middle of it. "Tell me," he said so quietly it was virtually no more then a whisper but all the kids heard every word, they were use to this threatening tone from class. "Do any of you dunderheads know what this is?"

"Veritaserum, sir?"

"Very good, Miss Weasley. What can you tell me about it?"

"Well, sir, it makes you tell the truth, sir."

"You can't do this, we are no longer your students!" George bravely said indicating himself and his twin.

"Oh, and who is going to stop me? You four? I think not. You are unarmed, are you going to try and attack me physically?" Severus made a snorting kind of sound that clearly said 'I don't think so.' "I was torturing and killing people for fun long before any of you were born, breaking you four will not even cause me to break into a sweat." He finished in what he knew was his coldest, nastiest voice with a very cruel smile. By the time he finished, these four would not just
worry about losing a few house points, they would be deadly afraid to be in the same vicinity as him.

"Miss Weasley, you were almost correct. It does not just make you tell the truth, it forces every dirty little secret out of you, it's like a compulsion. You cannot fight it, cannot resist it. That is the merciful way to do it, of course," he finished offhandedly.

"Mer... merciful?" Ron mumbled in complete horror.

"Yes, Mister Weasley, merciful. There is the more old fashioned way of starvation and deprivation."

"Starvation, deprivation... you're insane, you are!" George yelled. Perfect, Severus thought. It had barely taken 20 minutes and they were ready to breakdown and tell him everything and anything he wanted. There was just one more nail to hammer into the coffin.

"Yes, starvation and deprivation. After the first twenty-four hours, your mind starts to become slow; after forty-eight hours you start to lose coordination and your mind starts to shut down. Then it's the next landmark, seventy-two hours with no sleep and your speech will start to slur, your brain will be on virtual shutdown and your body will be too weak to stand for too long, your stomach acid will churn and start to eat away at its own lining," he smiled cruelly. Excellent! The brats were shaking and nearly in tears. Breaking young Gryffindors was always good entertainment. It was also a slight relief that they were so easy to break because the bottle held nothing but water in it. It was a huge no-no to give students Veritaserum. Even if that dumb bitch, Umbridge had tried to use it on Potter back in his fifth year. She never stood a chance of getting anything out of the brat. The Veritaserum he gave her was as good as the stuff that was currently sitting in the bottle in front of him. Now it was time to get down to business and question the brats.

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A few hours later after getting all the information possible out of the Weasleys, he lead them to the kitchen where he had previously arranged for the elves to have food and drink for the brats to perk them back up. He left them to it, after warning them to stay put and touch nothing. He even gave the elves permission to use magic against them if they stepped out of line. But he knew they would not, they were way too scared. He headed towards Potter's room after he had fire called Albus with his findings. He knocked on the door and awaited admittance.

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"Come in." Harry called softly from the chair by the fireplace. He was sitting in. He wondered who it could be.

Snape entered his room, "I see Minerva delivered all your belongings to you?"

"Yes, Professor." Harry was a little surprised by his Professor's demeanour, it was tired and almost defeated looking.

"Was everything alright? Your relatives had not touched anything that did not belong to them?"

To Harry his tone seemed almost concerned.

"No, everything was untouched. They would have been too scared to touch anything. My main
worry about my stuff at my relatives was my homework and school books." He did not fancy doing it all again.

"I'm sorry, but did I just hear Harry Potter say he was worried about his homework?" Snape said with what looked like a small genuine smile tugging at his lips. Wow, Harry liked that real smile. He decided there and then he was going to do everything in his power to make Snape smile real smiles as often as possible. Because of that small real smile Harry could not keep one off his own lips, even if it was a little shy. "Mister Potter, I have..." Snape had started in a soft but serious tone and Harry stopped him immediately. If they were going to have a heavy and serious talk he wanted Snape to call him Harry he was fed up with all this stiff formality.

"Sir, it's Harry," Snape looked him straight in the eye, their gaze locked. "Please, sir. Just Harry." He saw Snape narrow his eyes fractionally. Harry guessed he was making calculations of some kind, working something out maybe.

"Alright, Harry, but if I am to use your given name then you should use mine, it seems only fair." Harry just smiled and nodded it had sent a small thrill through him to hear Snape, no, Severus say his name for real. It was better then his dream.

"Can I do something for you, Severus? Or is this just a social call? Not that I mind," Harry asked quietly.

Severus gave him a small smile but to Harry it seemed a little sad. "I wish, Harry, but I am afraid this is not a social call. I have already spoken to Albus he does not wish for me to reveal all that I have pieced together. He feels you should be free to enjoy your final year at school with no worries, so to speak. But I feel you should be fully aware of what you may have to face. However, I will leave the choice up to you. I believe you are grown up enough and have seen and done enough to be able to handle most things thrown at you." With that Severus gave him another small sad smile, and he started to get up and leave. Harry reached out and grabbed the man's forearm.

"Tell me please, Severus."

"If you are sure, Harry."

"Yes."

Severus sat back down in the chair, took a deep breath and begun his analysis of the situation. "I have questioned the Weasley children extensively." Harry raised his eyebrow at this, Severus just smirked at him. "They are fine, if you wish, you can see them soon but first let me finish." Harry nodded for Severus to continue. "They did not have anything to do with the fruit punch concoction. After speaking to Molly and Arthur as well, everything else in the package was put there by them so I have concluded that it was the punch that was used to poison you. Someone intercepted your package, it is only a guess but I would say a pretty educated one when I say I believe it to have been done by someone working for the Dark Lord. The reason I think this, is because the potion was meant to turn you 10 years younger physically as well as mentally. I believe the Dark Lord was going to attack you when you were in this state, for you would have been no more the a child with no knowledge of magic, you would have been defenceless against him."

"My family," Harry interrupted panicked, he didn't like the Dursleys but he did not want them dead.
"They are being moved to a safe location as we speak, they will be fine. But getting back to you, I do not know why the Dark Lord did not call me to make the potion, which means I do not know what went wrong with it and I do not know if I will ever be able to brew an antidote, but do not give up complete faith in me. I will work on one with all my spare time, that I promise, Harry."

To say the least Harry was a little shocked. He could be stuck like this forever just because old Voldie could not kill him as he was. And to top it off, he had some shoddy potion brewer brew such an important potion. Oh, he was definitely going to kick some snake ass at the next opportunity!

"Harry your friends are in the kitchen. Go see them but tell them they must keep it secret. No talking via the floo network and no mentioning this in notes sent with owls, they could be intercepted. At present, as far as I know, the Dark Lord is not aware of his failed attempt. Goodnight, Harry."

"Severus?"

"Yes, Harry?" Harry noticed Severus looked tired

"If anyone can find a cure, it will be you are you. Are you not the best Potions Master in the world?" Harry gave a small smile then continued, "I have faith in you, Severus."

His breath caught as Severus' right hand gently reached out and caressed his left cheek, his thumb tracing the line of Harry's cheekbone. Harry looked up into Severus eyes and he had to use all his self-control not to lean too much into the soft and gentle touch. He unconsciously chewed on his bottom lip. Severus just smiled that enigmatic smile again and left the room. "Merlin help me!" Harry whispered to the now empty room, he didn't know if it was for what Voldemort had done to him or what Severus' presence and close proximity was currently doing to him.

Next chapter: Harry and Severus get to know each other a little better. Voldemort summons Severus.
Harry stirred out of his stupor and headed down to the kitchen to rescue and explain all to the Weasleys. As he quietly entered the kitchen, he wondered what Severus had done to them. They were so quiet and the food was left untouched, which was strange considering Ron was in the room and he was always hungry no matter the time of day. "Not hungry?"

"H-Harry?" Ron cautiously asked.

"Hi, Ron."

"What did that slimy git do to you?" Ron demanded hotly.

Harry rolled his eyes and smiled. "Professor Snape did nothing to me."

"But, but you're all grown up!"

"Listen Ron, guys, if I tell you everything, you've got to promise me you will talk to no one about this, not even via owl or floo." Harry received a chorus of 'yes's, and started his tale from the beginning. He guessed he would have to go through this again with Hermione. Hopefully, that would be the last time. He wasn't sure about Luna; she would no doubt think it was all due to the mystical cosmic beast or some such crap.

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Severus was, if he was honest with himself, hiding in his rooms from Potter. Oh yes, he thought dryly, in a moment of weakness he had promised to use the brat's first name and had even given said brat permission to use his given name. He was aware he should not have done so. It would cause confusion in their relationship. He gave a snort of laughter at that: relationship indeed! And what in nine hells had he been thinking in touching the brat's cheek so affectionately. He had to remind himself that it was only a shell of a man in his late twenties, no matter how attractive that shell was, because inside of it was Potter - 17 year old Potter - his student, Potter.

He knew why he had done it. It again was a moment of weakness: he felt sorry for the boy. It seemed so unfair to have the undivided hatred of such an evil shadow of a man, if he could be
called a man anymore. He wanted to comfort Potter, show him he was not alone in this. But
stupidly, for a brief moment, he forgot Potter was only 17 and showed him the care he might
show a partner. He just hoped Potter would not think on it too much. He didn't want to ruin the
shaky ground their truce was on by scaring the brat off, if he thought his greasy git of a Potions
Master was coming on to him. Severus shook his head, and realised he was probably over-
analysing the situation again. He decided to call it a night. He would be getting up early
tomorrow to work on the antidote for Potter.

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"God, Harry! You-Know-Who really has it in for you, doesn't he?"

"Have you only just worked that out, George?" Harry replied sarcastically.

"Sorry, Harry. Just thinking out loud."

"No, it's me. I'm the one who should be sorry. I'm so tired of it all! Every year he tries to kill
me. Almost on schedule, the end of school year comes along and Voldemort tries to take my
life!" He noticed the flinches and intakes of breaths. "Sorry, the Dark Lord."


Harry held in the growl he felt in his throat, "I totally refuse to say You-Know-Who or He-Who-
Must-Not-Be-Named! He has single-handily ruined my life, and I will not give him the
satisfaction of thinking he can control my life by my refusing to say his name. I'll refer to him as
the Dark Lord out of respect for Severus as it is his home, but I will not be afraid to say his
name."

"Severus, Harry! Awfully familiar, isn't it?" Fred said to him in a teasing tone.

Harry blushed a little. Fred just raised an eyebrow at him. "He said I could call him by his given
name in his home."

It was Ginny's turn to pipe up. "Harry, are you alright here? Is he, you know treating you
okay?"

"Yes, Ginny, it's way better than the Dursleys. He doesn't starve me, or ignore me - well not
much, and I can pretty much do what I want."

"I don't know, mate. I'd feel better if you weren't here. After what we've just been through with
that greasy git, I don't trust him not to hurt you!" Ron was quite upset by the time he had
finished.

"Ron! Honestly, I'm fine. It's safer for me here then anywhere else. The Dark Lord will not
think to look for me here. Why would he when he believes Severus to be his loyal servant? And
the wards here are really powerful and he is also the best Potions Master around. If anyone can
find me a cure, it will be him. That I believe without a doubt!" Harry finished with conviction.
As he was a little peckish, he decided to end his defence of Severus by eating food that was
provided by him in front of his friends. It didn't take long before they joined him.

Harry showed them the fireplace that had been set to take them home. He bid them good night.
On his way to bed, he hoped not to be plagued by wet dreams of Severus again, it would be so
embarrassing to have to face him again in the morning. At least he had clothes this time, he mused.

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Severus had been in his lab since the crack of dawn; he decided the best place to start was to brew the intended potion, 'Aevum Redeo' and try to work out what could have gone wrong from there. It was not easy because, although it was a difficult and time consuming potion to make, Severus could not see how you could mess it up, if the instructions were followed properly as they should have been.

"Maybe I should get some students to make it. They'd make a mess of it," he said aloud to no one, as he was alone. He continued to go over every detail with a fine-tooth comb and brewed three slight variations of the potion for testing. Next he would need some of Potter's blood to start the real testing and some of his own for comparison. Severus clicked his fingers twice and with a crack one of the house elves popped into existence.

"Manni, where is Mister Potter?"

"Sir, he is in the kitchens with us elves. Would sir like Manni to get Master Harry?"

"Please, tell him I need his assistance with the antidote." With that the elf popped out of the lab.

***

Harry was sitting in the kitchen enjoying lunch and the company of the house elves. After Severus failed to show for breakfast, he felt stupid sitting in the large breakfast and dining rooms by himself, so he asked the elves if he could lunch with them in the kitchen. They were happy to oblige. He saw Manni disappear and come back a minute later looking a little worried. The elf approached Harry slowly. "Master Harry, Master Severus is asking that you join him in his lab for assistance with the antidote."

"Oh, all right, but I don't know where his lab is."

"I is showing you where it is, Harry," Lula said, turning to him. "Manni, you is telling Master Severus we is on our way."

"Yes Lula," and again Manni disappeared.

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Harry was following Lula into a part of the house he had not been in before. He guessed the reason for that was that if Severus' private lab was in this wing, then he would most definitely not be welcome. Let's face it, Harry thought, I'm no Potions Master. He was as shocked as Severus had been when he got a good enough grade in his O.W.L.s to be admitted to the N.E.W.T.s class, although he was enjoying the higher level potions class a little more due to the fact they made much more interesting concoctions than they had in the lower years. While he would never be top of the class he was pulling in decent enough grades to be allowed to stay. It also helped having Hermione as both lab and study partner. She helped explain all the stuff he was struggling with in a language he could understand God bless her, He thought. Ron surprisingly, also stayed on to do his N.E.W.T in potions since he needed it to become an Auror.
They arrived at a door, and Lula told him to knock and await admittance, so that is what he did. "Come," he heard Severus answer from behind the door.

Harry entered with some trepidation; this was like entering the monster's lair. It was surprisingly light and airy. He had expected something along the lines of the Hogwarts dungeons, dark and dank. The room was massive, almost twice the size of the potions classroom at school, and everything looked to be of better quality and were definitely cleaner. Even the jars full of floating, scary stuff that lined the back wall were not as gruesome as at school.

Severus was not here at the moment, but Harry saw three doors in the room that could lead to anywhere. He guessed Severus had disappeared behind one of them. He was just going to have to wait for him to come back. He took this time looking around. He guessed this was not private, as there were no obvious signs of papers and journals, not that he would look at any of them if there were.

"Look at you two, all you ever do is sleep! It's no wonder that I have not gone mad being stuck with you two for a lifetime!"

"Hay, I'm working over here."

"Working? Is that what you call it? It looks like sleeping to me."

"Hey, who died and made you the critic?"

"Uh, well, excuse me! But hey, left head here, that's my nature."

Harry was in tears from laughing.

"Why don't you just shut up, lefty. You're attracting an audience."

"Oh, yeah! Real worried woo, look at the big bad human."

"Why don't you just shut up so we can all get back to what we were doing? Like planning our escape."

"And just what is so amusing, Mister Potter?" Harry jumped at the surprise of finding Severus standing right behind him. He was so lost in the conversation of the snake; he forgot that he had been asked here for a reason. When he turned, he saw Severus smirking at him.

Trying to get himself back under control, he wiped the tears away, "Sorry, but your snake is really funny."

"Ah, I'll have to take your word for that."

"It's a Runespoor snake, isn't it?" Harry asked.

"Yes. Have you not studied them in Defence Against the Dark Art's?"

"No, have you forgotten that most of our teachers have been total nutters?"

He saw Severus rise an and eyebrow "You don't say!" Harry just gave him a look, which plainly said, 'as if you didn't know.' "I'm surprised Lupin did not bring one in; he was into dark
creatures. But then again, I guess a three-headed snake would scare most children, considering they are thought to belong only to dark wizards." Harry thought he saw a flicker of amusement in Severus eyes when he had said 'dark wizards' as if challenging him to say that he was a dark wizard.

"I guess you're right, but no, I have only seen a drawing of one. This is the first time I have actually seen one."

"This one is female, you can tell because it is brown. The male is green. It is said that the right head is the planner, the middle head is the dreamer, and the left head is the critic. It is also common for the right and middle heads to gang up on the left head and attack it. I have one partially because the eggs are a very useful ingredient in some potions, namely ones that enhance mental abilities."

"That certainly makes the conversation they were having make a little sense, I guess," He couldn't keep the smile off his lips, "The left head was complaining that all the other two do is sleep, and the right head was claiming it was planning their grand escape."

"Ungrateful beast. It is fed, watered and kept in an impressive tank and still it complains! I should have skinned it when it was forced on me," Severus said in an amused yet sarcastic tone.

"Forced on you?"

"Yes, an idiotic cousin of mine, a few years ago, was captured for murder and sentenced to life in Azkaban. I had to be present when the Aurors were going through his property looking for dark magic artefacts. They found the snake and were going to exterminate it. I took pity on the beast and told them to give it to me. They refused, saying it was a dark wizard's pet but Albus, who was with me, told them it's eggs were useful in potions and that it should be handed over to me. They were not brave enough to argue with the great Albus Dumbledore!"

"I bet they weren't," Harry answered in an equally amused tone, picturing quaking Aurors.

"The beast annoys the hell out of me, hissing and spitting all day. It's enough to drive a saint mad. I tell you what, you like it so much, you can have it."

Harry was stunned. Was Severus offering to give him a gift? Okay, who was this man and what had he done to the real Severus Snape? Harry wondered. It was tempting. He liked the snake and thought it funny, but then his conscience kicked in. "I couldn't, it's too much. I don't know much about them, but I know they are valuable. But thank you, anyway." Harry finished with a smile at Severus.

"Nonsense. Like I said, it drives me mad," and with a flick of his wand, the tank and snake were gone. "It's now been relocated to your room." Then with a smirk he said, "In a few days you won't be so grateful. It never shuts up."

Harry just gave Severus his biggest winning smile. "Okay, thank you. Really that's very cool. But I will only take it if you accept the eggs as I guess they will be more useful to you." Harry hoped he would say yes; he hated taking stuff without being able to give something back.

"Very well. You have yourself a deal."

"So, did you need me for anything important?"
"Yes, I need some blood."

"Wow! I guess I owe Ron five galleons."

"Whatever for?"

"He always said you were a vampire." Harry could not contain the smile that was forcing its way onto his face. He just hoped Severus would see it as the joke it was intended to be.

"I didn't realise that particular rumour was still doing the rounds." There was a definite smirk and a hint of amusement in his eyes.

"Mainly, just for first years. Oh, and Ron. It's the dark dungeons that do it."

"I like the dungeons because the students don't. Although I will admit, I do miss the light a little. Hence the reason I don't spend my summers there. Now sit. I need some samples from you." Harry guessed the time for idle chat was over. He did not want to push it too far with the older man, so he did as he was instructed and sat on the stool that had been pointed at. "This won't hurt, but it could make you a little light-headed" Harry was handed three vials. He must have looked as blank as his mind was at that moment. Severus just rolled his eyes at him. "Take one and place it in the centre of your hand, then place your index finger over the top."

As Harry did this, he saw Severus nod at him, indicating that he was holding it correctly. Severus took out his wand and waved it over his hand saying the incantation "Minuo." This was repeated two more times. He was right, Harry did feel a little light-headed after giving the three samples of blood. He was handed a glass of liquid. "Drink." Harry saw Severus going over to a machine and placing one of the samples of his blood in it, and saw him cast a spell over it. "Expiscor Toxicum," he heard, but did not recognise the spell. He saw the machine was softly glowing blue.

He did as he was told, gagging on the flavour of the potion. He recognised the taste as a blood-replenishing potion. He'd had this one a few times before. It's taste never did improve with repeated use. "That one almost makes me appreciate the flavour of Skele-Gro." He could not hold back a full body shudder.

"If you did not spend so much time in the hospital wing, Harry, you would not be privy to so many wonderful medications," he was told with a slightly clipped tone.

"Sure, blame me," he grumbled. It wasn't always his fault, rogue bludgers, giant basilisks, rebirths of evil wizards, all contributed towards his repeated visits to the hospital wing. He was waiting for a scathing remark to come back when he felt a twinge in his scar. He looked up to see Severus looking very pale as he clutched his left forearm. He knew Severus was being summoned.

"Touch nothing. Duty calls," and with that Severus was gone. Harry had never been so worried and scared in his life.

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Severus had been expecting a call for sometime. Especially as it seemed that the Dark Lord's new plan to get Potter had obviously gone wrong. After all, Potter was in hiding in his house.
After he had grabbed his Death Eaters robes and reached the apparation point outside of his home's wards, he apparated to a place just outside of Riddle Manor in Little Hangleton. He walked through the graveyard and up to the manor itself. God, he hated this place; it made his very flesh crawl. However, he needed to clear his mind before he faced the Dark Lord tonight, it would not do for him to find out Potter was in Snape Manor, not that he would be able to get in but Severus didn't fancy dying tonight. He still had to find that cure for the brat. He didn't want to let Albus down.

He approached the front door, he got himself back into the got character of the unfeeling, hate-filled, greasy git of a Potions Master. He nodded at the two sentries posted at the door and entered the manor. He greeted to a few of the lower level Death Eaters who he knew were favoured by the Dark Lord on his way to the main meeting room of the inner circle. He approached the double doors of the one-time dining room. He couldn't help but appreciate the irony of having the inner circle meetings in this room out of all the rooms in the manor. This room was the room in which the Dark Lord had killed his Muggle family when he was still Tom Riddle, just after he had left school. Yes, the Dark Lord had a very sick sense of humour by holding his meeting in this room, the dining room of a magic hating muggle family.

Severus waved his hand at the doors and they opened to him, the wards having recognised him. He looked straight ahead and stopped in front of the throne-like chair, and gracefully dropped onto his left knee, placed his hands out flat on the ground before him and bowed his head. "My Lord," he said in a respectful tone, with a touch of awe added for effect. He reached out his right hand and grabbed the hem of the Dark Lord's robe and kissed it. To Severus, this was the worst part. He detested the kissing of this creature's robe; it was so humiliating, but, then again, he guessed that was the whole point.

"To your position Severus," at that, he got up and went to his position in the semi-circle, third from the left with Augustus Rookwood to his left and Lucius Malfoy to his right. It was still a mystery to him how Lucius had talked his way out of Azkaban again. Well, he reasoned with himself, it's not that big a mystery when you come from one of the richer and more powerful families in the Wizarding world. And he undoubtedly lined Fudge's pocket with enough gold to cause the incompetent minister clear him without a trial.

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Everybody had arrived for the inner circle that was available; in other words, those that were not in Azkaban. It never stayed like that for long, and, with the Dementors now on the Dark Lord's side; the ministry could not afford to keep its best Aurors in Azkaban guarding the prisoners. So when the Dark Lord raided the place, which he did every now and again, to free his followers and gain some new ones, he was rarely met with anything challenging. The Dark Lord rose from his throne and silence fell across the room as everybody stared at their feet.

"I am not happy tonight. Some of you are aware why I am not, while others may be wondering why. Why don't you tell them Lucius?" Severus could tell he was angry by the way he had spat Lucius' name out; and from the corner of his eye he could see Lucius fidget. He felt something akin to pity for his one-time friend.

"My Lord, we did not foresee this out come." Severus knew the man was worried, he could tell by the tone of his voice.

"No, you did not, DID YOU? I wanted that little brat at MY mercy! MY plans were perfect: turn the brat back in age to when he was unaware of magic and kill him with no effort! I could
have throttled the brat with my bare hands." Voldemort was beyond angry, Severus could tell. He rarely yelled and he could feel the waves of hatred and anger coming off him. It was quite over-powering. He was also pacing, which was never a good sign. "I blame you for this, Lucius. Do you know why?

"No, my Lord."

"No? Have you suddenly lost your mind or are you just conveniently forgetting it was you that persuaded me to change my plans?"

"I'm sorry, my Lord."

"Sorry? SORRY! DO YOU THINK THAT WILL GET THAT BRAT INTO MY CUSTODY?" Voldemort stopped right in front of Lucius. Severus was glad for the masks they had to wear, for it hid his slight wince. He knew what was coming and it wasn't pleasant. Even though he had a sting of worry in his gut about what it might have been that Lucius had persuaded the Dark Lord to change about his plan. He could not dwell on that now. It was difficult to do so with Lucius screaming on the floor in agony under the Cruciatus curse.

"Severus."

"Yes, my Lord?"

"Do you know why Lucius was punished this evening?"

"I have some idea, my Lord, but I am not privy to all the information."

"What information are you privy to, then?" Severus knew he was referring to Dumbledore and what he might have learnt from him. He was going to have to play this carefully, he needed information from The Dark Lord.

"Dumbledore contacted me two days ago and told me he has put that horrible child into hiding." He hoped the Dark Lord would buy it.

"Did he tell you if anything was wrong with the brat?"

"No, my Lord. Should there have been?" He hoped he was not pushing it too far, but if he could get information on the potion it would speed up the process of finding an antidote.

"Yes, there should have been. He should have been about seven years old and have no clue about magic as he was not exposed to it until he was eleven. Obviously, something must have gone wrong if he knew to run to that Muggle-loving fool."

Severus had to chance it. He knew if the Dark Lord saw it as impertinence, he would be punished but he hoped it would be nothing too harsh. "How?"

Voldemort seemed to size up the question and surprisingly answered, causing Severus to let out a silent breath he had been holding. "Aevum Redeo potion, but something went wrong, very wrong." With that he looked at Lucius again. Severus stayed silent. What was worrying him was why he had not been asked to prepare the potion, and what did Lucius have to do with it as Lucius was no potions brewer. "I know what you are thinking, Severus." Severus sure as hell hoped not, otherwise he would be tortured and, if he was lucky, executed before the night was
"You are wondering why I did not ask you to brew the potion, are you not?"

"I'm sure you had your reasons, my Lord."

"Ah, Severus, ever the diplomat! I know you too well, do I not? Do not worry. I will not hold your curiosity against you tonight."

Severus bowed his head in a show of submission "You are most generous, my Lord"

"I was going to have you to make the potion, for I knew that from you it would be flawless. But Lucius warned me to be wary of you. He introduced me to a young potion brewer from Italy, who assured me he could brew the potion, said it was easy to brew. Is it easy to brew, Severus?"

Severus felt ice flow through his veins. Did Lucius suspect him? Did the Dark Lord believe him or was it just one of Lucius' little power games? "My Lord, I would not call the Aevum Redeo potion easy to brew, but if one had a talent in the area of potions then there should be no reason for mistakes to be made. I would not have made a mistake. I have brewed it before at my Masters decree." He hoped that was good enough.

"No, you would not have made a mistake, would you? Lucius has always been jealous of your skills in potions. You have never failed me before with your skills. Lucius has wronged you, Severus; he has tried to blacken your name. You may punish him." As he finished his speech, Severus saw him pull a vial out of his robes. His mind raced. If that was the potion that had affected Potter he could easily make an antidote, but what was he going to do? March up to the Dark Lord and ask for it? As if that would work. Snatch it and hope to run away? He knew he wouldn't even make it through the door. Then something happened that pushed his self-control to the absolute limit The Dark Lord threw the vial on the floor and it smashed. He wanted to scream out NO and make a running grab for it. He knew that would give away not just him but also that the potion had had some effect on Potter, if not the right effect.

Then an idea struck. He had to punish Lucius and make a show of it. That he could do. So, he grabbed the man next to him, threw him to the floor, and proceeded to kick him in the gut until he rolled near to the spill. Then he knelt down and placed his left hand around Lucius' throat and squeezed lightly. He had no desire to really hurt the man, but he knew he had to leave some marks and spill some blood. If it were the other way around, Lucius would not hold back.

He started to yell to distract the watching crowd from the fact his right sleeve was soaking up some of the potion. "You fucking imbecilic shit-for-brains! If I had made the potion, our Lord would have had that brat and I would not be forced to look at him any more while I teach! Now because of you, I still have to look at the fucking brat, day in and day out!" With that, finished he lifted his hand from around his neck and landed a left hook on to Lucius' jaw, and he heard a nasty crack. He stood and pulled his wand out, "Crucio!" After what he hoped would be considered long enough in the Dark Lord's eyes, he stopped the curse and bent down to Lucius once again. He grabbed his chin as he dragged his fingertips through the remaining potion on the floor and said in his coldest and nastiest voice, "Don't ever blacken my name again or next time I won't be so gentle!"

He stood and bowed to the Dark Lord. "Thank you, my Lord, for this chance at retribution"

"It was the least I could do, Severus. I must admit that I always enjoy your style of punishment.
It's so different from the others. They all bore me. All they do is use magic and some other, shall we say, more intrusive forms of torture. You always seem to favour the more physical violence. It makes for a refreshing change." Severus merely nodded and swallowed the bile that crept up his throat at the sick and twisted smile that graced the Dark Lord's serpentine mouth.

"Dismissed. Get out of my sight. And Goyle, take Malfoy with you."

Severus rushed from the room, still not feeling all that well because of what had happened at the end of the meeting. When he reached the graveyard, he keep on walking down the hill, hoping no one would question him as to why he was not apparating straight home. When he knew he was not being followed, he pulled an empty vial from his robes and scraped the few precious drops of potion that were on his fingertips into it. He hoped it was enough to be at least a pointer in the correct direction. Then he apparated to the Forbidden Forest; he had to see Albus.

Next chapter: A meeting with Dumbledore. Plans to conceal Harry's condition from Voldemort and a little fluff in the garden with Harry and Severus.

Latin Translations:

Minuo - To draw blood.

Expiscor Toxicum - Discover Poison.

Aevum Redeo - Age to be reduced.
Chapter Eight - Plan of Action.

As Severus arrived at the main entrance Albus was walking down the stairs to meet him. "Severus, thank Merlin! You look unharmed," obvious relief was evident in the Headmaster's voice.

"Indeed, I am unharmed, thanks to an old friend, Albus."

"Whatever do you mean, Severus?"

"Oh, I have quite a tale to tell you!"

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They walked to Albus' office in silence. Severus was glad for this, it gave him a chance to put his thoughts in order. After they entered the office, Albus set about making their tea while he sat down in his favoured black leather armchair. He refused to sit in the other one, to him it was a colourful monstrosity.

"Now, Severus, tell me. What did Voldemort want with you tonight?"

"Potter." He said simply and tiredly, "he wanted to know where he was. I gave him the story to which we had agreed to."

"Did he believe it?"

"I believe so. He thinks the potion was a virtual failure, Lucius had persuaded him to use a young brewer from Italy. He warned the Dark Lord to be wary of me."

"He does not suspect you does he? If he does, you will not return." Severus rarely saw Albus lay down the law as such although, when he chose to do so, it was an intimidating sight.

"Albus! Calm down, they do not suspect me of anything. It was one of Lucius' little power games. He hates the fact that the Dark Lord relies on me for something so specialised. Anyone can be taught to cast a curse, but not everybody can brew a complicated potion. It was Lucius' hope that by introducing a new potions expert, it would lessen my importance. I know the man too well. Because of my expertise I have been able to abstain from certain activities since the
Dark Lord's return that many a Death Eater enjoys. Albus, it's bad enough that I am forced on occasion to witness such activities, but I cannot take part, not again. I would kill myself first! Very unpleasant images were playing in his mind of the occasional rape he had been forced to take part in during the Dark Lord's first reign of power. It was something he could never find pleasure in.

"So that is the only reason why you did not make the potion, Severus." Albus said with relief evident on his face and in his voice.

"Yes, Albus. The Dark Lord believes Potter is unchanged and that you put him into hiding for his safety from a possible attack."

Severus then went into the full details of the evening meeting, including the details of the smashed potion and how he had managed to gather a few drops although they were undoubtedly contaminated because he had scraped them off the floor. As the debriefing was drawing to a close, Severus spoke of the nagging concern that had been playing on his mind for the last twenty-four hours. "Albus, we will need to come up with some form of a plan on how to get Potter back into school and looking normal if I have not found the antidote by September first. The Dark Lord has other spies in this school. He also he must never find out what that potion can do; otherwise he will start taking children, forcing the potion down their throats, and branding them early. He could build a whole army of nothing more then children trapped in grown up bodies, the ultimate disposable solider!" Both he and Albus shivered at that thought.

"You are right, Severus. I will start to look into 'Glamourie Charms' and such tomorrow. Fillius might be able to help us in that area. Severus, you look tired. Go home and rest, tomorrow is another day." Severus agreed it had been a long day, and after biding Albus goodnight, he headed out to the apparation zone.

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As soon as Severus arrived home, Lula pounced on him, "I is so happy you is home, Master Severus, because Harry would not leave."

"I'm sorry, Lula?"

"Harry is on the stairs, he forbid us to move him saying he is waiting for you to come home," Lula pointed to the bundle on the stairs. Severus rolled his eyes, walked over to Harry and sat down on the stairs next to him. He couldn't help but give a small smile. It had been too long since he had had someone to come home to, someone waiting up for him to make sure he was alright when he returned. He knew it was only going to be short term but it was a nice feeling anyway. He was surprised anyone could curl up so small and sleep. It was like he was almost in a catlike position. His own lion curled up on the stairs for him. He snorted at that, when the hell had he become so sentimental? He guessed he must be more tired then he realised. He leaned over the boy and spoke quietly into his ear, "Harry, it is time to wake up."

All he got for his efforts was a contented sigh from Potter, so he tried again, "Harry, wake up, you can't spend the night here. You'll be in pain in the morning."

"Mmm, Sev?"

Severus raised an eyebrow. Sev? Since when was he Sev? Trust Potter to find a short cut in his name. When he glanced down again his eyes met with sleepy green ones; he also noted the brat
was chewing on his lower lip. It was quite an enduring image. It wasn't until Potter smiled shyly at him that Severus realised he was still only about six inches away from his face. He snapped out of his stupor and pulled back. He muttered, "Sorry," quietly under his breath, "I didn't wish to startle you."

"No need to apologise, Severus, I was the one asleep on your stairs." Harry said to him. He noticed the boy had actually sat up and stretched in one fluid movement.

"Have you been following your father's dubious example, Harry?"

"Sorry, I don't understand." He could tell Harry was a little confused and a little hurt at what he had said. He supposed it could have been taken as an insult or a jibe, but he truly never meant for it to be taken like that. Why did Potter have to be so sensitive, though he guessed it was kind of sweet. God, did he just think that Potter was sweet? Damn! Must be very tired.

"All I meant was, have you followed in his steps in becoming an Animagus? You have a very feline quality about you," he replied keeping his voice as manner a fact as he could. He didn't want the boy to think he had been paying close attention to him.

He was greeted by a small, genuine smile, "Oh, no, but I was thinking about studying to become one. Hermione gave me a book about it for my birthday."

"Which one?"

"A Guide to Animagi,' by P. Hansworth."

"Not a bad choice, but I would expect nothing less by Miss Granger."

"Have you read the book?"

"Yes."

"Are you...?"

"No."

"Oh, but if you read the book...?"

Severus smirked at the boy. "Intellectual curiosity. I never seemed to have the time to take it beyond that."

"Maybe, you know, we could study together. That would be cool."

"I didn't have the time then and I sure as hell don't have the time now."

"Why read the book if you knew you didn't have the time to study?"

"Like I said, pure intellectual curiosity."

"Wow! You should have been in Ravenclaw, if you like reading for reading's sake!"

"I nearly was, but the sorting hat decided Slytherin was the better option. Ravenclaw would not
have been such a bad choice. My mother was in that house." He wasn't sure why he was divulging so much information on himself, but it just felt right. Comfortable even.

"Who would have thought we would have had something like that in common?"

Severus frowned at the boy, "Please! Do not take this the wrong way, but I would have not thought you Ravenclaw material. You are not stupid by any means but you lack a certain drive, shall we say, when it comes to your studies. Granted your grades last year was a marked improvement on the previous years," was Severus' dry reply.

"No, not Ravenclaw; maybe Hermione but not me, no. The hat wanted to put me in Slytherin." Severus could not help it; he whipped his head around, stared at Harry, and laughed.

Harry was shocked. Yes he decided, shocked, very shocked. Sitting next to him on a staircase no less, was a laughing Severus Snape. It was a deep, rich sound and very pleasant to hear. He hadn't thought the man was capable of making such a sound, especially after a meeting with Voldemort.

"Thank you, Harry. I don't think I have had such a good laugh in ages!"

Harry was a little taken aback. He had never told anyone this secret except Dumbledore. He hadn't expected to be laughed at. "Hey, I could have been a good Slytherin! There is no need to laugh!" Harry could see Severus pulling himself together. He was awaiting an explanation and he wanted it to be a good one.

"I'm sorry, Harry. I didn't mean to upset you but it is a funny thought. You are the most Gryffindor of all the Gryffindors I have ever met. Sometimes you even rival Albus!"

Harry could see the funny side. He was always rushing in where even fools feared to tread, running to defend and save people at every opportunity. "I guess you're right. Even Hermione claims I have a "saving people" complex. Like father, like son, I guess."

"No Harry, you are nothing like your father. You are much more Gryffindor then even him and his friends, maybe with a small touch of Hufflepuff in there also."

"Hufflepuff?"

"Yes. You are kind and loyal to your friends and you always try to do what is best for everybody else and not what is necessarily best for you. I know for a fact that several times you have taken the fall for your friends and served detention with me, no less, when it clearly was not your fault."

"I guess." Wow, he was a little surprised that Severus seemed to know him so well, when he barley seemed to know this man at all.

"Out of pure curiosity, what was the hat's deciding factor in putting you in Gryffindor?"

"Draco."

"And what did young Mister Malfoy have to do with it?"

"I had meet him a couple of times, once in Diagon Alley and again on the Hogwarts Express. I
thought he was a total prat and didn't want to be stuck with him. I don't think he liked me, either, because I refused his offer of friendship after he was mean to Ron. I don't think it's nice to be cruel to anybody, especially if they can't afford nice things like Malfoy." He left out the part about him being told all wizards in Slytherin were thought to be evil. He knew that not to be true, but back then he was young and impressionable. Also, the irony of the answer he had given was not lost on him. After all, it would be a cold day in hell when he forgot the images he saw of his father and his friends teasing Severus in his Pensieve.

"Indeed." It also seemed it was not lost Severus.

"Anyway, Harry, you should be getting to bed. It's late."

"I guess you're right." As he was getting up it dawned on him why he had waited up or, well, attempted to wait up. "Are you alright? Was vol... the Dark Lord rough on you tonight?"

"No, Harry, I am fine. The Dark Lord was, should I say, calm with me tonight. Now go to bed."

Harry had an overwhelming need to touch the man, to embrace him and take away the dirt and filth that Voldemort had placed on him. However, he was unsure of how he would respond to an affectionate gesture. He couldn't resist the need for physical contact, so he reached out with his left hand and rested it on Severus' shoulder. He felt the man tense a little under his touch and turn to look at him. He just gave Severus a small smile, "Goodnight, Severus."

"Goodnight, Harry."

***

Harry got up quickly and went to his room. He was quite simply freaking out. There was no other way to put it; his hand was still tingling from the contact. What was it with this man? Why did he always bring out such odd feelings and reactions in him? He fully admitted to himself that he had a little bit of a crush on his professor and that had only come about when he saw Severus in leather trousers the other day. He looked good in leather he reasoned to himself. Harry realised this was getting him nowhere, thoughts like this always led him into dangerous territories that should not be visited.

***

Harry spent the next few days pretty much alone. He had bumped into Severus a few times and all he had said to him was that he was working on the antidote and was very busy. Harry was glad for the space; he wanted time away from Severus to let his hormones settle back down again. The older man's presence was doing strange things to him. What he wanted was a good cup of tea and a good long chat with Hermione. He missed his long chats with her and her sense of perspective; she always helped him put his mind in order. Maybe he could ask Severus if she could visit. The worst that could happen was that he could say no. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, he told himself.

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He guessed he might be in his lab but did not want to interrupt him for fear of being yelled at for disturbing him. So he decided to do something terribly un-Gryffindor and ask a house elf to do his dirty work, which is why he found himself in the kitchen where the elves tended to be. "Can we get something for you, Harry?" Lula asked.
"I was wondering if you could give a message to Severus for me? I don't want to disturb his work."

"Of course, Harry, but Severus is not in his lab. He is in the garden. But I is able to tell him your message if you want."

"Garden, you say? No, it's okay. I can tell him myself. I have been looking for an excuse to get out there for a while." Harry smiled at Lula and headed through the passageway to the garden. After the first day when Severus had warned him not to go in the garden, he had resisted temptation. What he had seen through the windows looked amazing.

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The day was nice and sunny, with a cool breeze blowing in from the south. The garden looked massive, he was currently standing on a huge patio about the size of the whole ground floor of his Aunt and Uncle's home. It had lovely white painted wrought iron garden furniture on it that looked like it belonged to one of those beautiful Parisian caf's and trees that stood about three feet tall in clay pots along the edges. It had stone steps leading down to a manicured lawn then a pathway led through a row of very tall bushes. Beyond them he could see lots of tall trees. To his left there seemed to be three massive greenhouses that even rivaled the ones at Hogwarts. He wondered what kinds of things Severus kept in there. His breath was taken away, and the thing that all made it seem so magical to him was that it seemed to be teeming with life. There was a surprisingly high number of kneazles around, not doing much then sunbathing. There were lots of fairies were in the small trees and dancing around in the flowerbeds. He also saw many huge bumblebee type creatures buzzing around the flowers; he knew they weren't bumblebees because they were too big.

He decided to take the path along the lawn first before he checked out the greenhouses. He knew from school that they contained many dangers in them. As he reached the end of the path he had to gasp again. It was like something out of a fairy tale. There was a massive pond half covered in flowers with weeping willows shading the other half. Again, everything seemed to be teeming with life: kneazles, fairies, bowtruckles and so many other creatures that he had never seen before.

"Are you going to stand there all day looking lost or are you going to join me?"

Harry spun around at the familiar voice. Severus was sitting on a beautifully carved wooden bench by the pond near one of the weeping willows. He was wearing tan suede trousers and his trademark silk shirt; again his hair was tied back with a ribbon. Harry groaned to himself. With the couple of days apart he had put his silly crush down to a passing moment of insanity, but here he was again drooling over the man. Why did he have to look so damn edible out of his teaching robes? It was unfair, Harry surmised. It was a cruel joke the world was playing on him.

"Sure, thanks," with that Harry went over to join Severus on the bench. "Taking a time out?"

"You have an unusual way of putting things, but, yes, I am, as you say, taking a time out."

Harry did not miss the sarcastic sneer in Severus' voice, though he was starting to recognise when the man was teasing. Luckily, this was one of those times. He noticed a book in his hands, "Anything good?"

"Yes it's a muggle novel." The book was handed to him. He looked at the cover and read on the
back that was a crime thriller.

Harry handed it back. "Never saw you as the type to read muggle novels before, but I guess I have gotten a lot of things wrong about you, haven't I?"

"Most people do."

"So, are you telling me you are all nice and fluffy under that harsh exterior?" He couldn't keep the laughter out of his voice.

Severus just frowned at him, but he did look like he was trying not to smile also "Most definitely not!"

"You know this place is gorgeous. I never thought I would live to see anywhere so breath taking!"

"Thank you."

"You should get married, have some kids and fill this place up a bit. It's too big for just one man and his three house elves."

He heard Severus snort at his last comment. "I am most definitely not the marrying kind. And I spend enough time in a year with children to squash all and any paternal urgings I may have had!"

"That's a shame. I think you would make a great husband and dad." Harry meant it too, and thought it was a real shame that Severus felt the way he did.

"Thank you. That is very kind of you to say, but I am sure you did not come and find me to pay me undue compliments. Is there something I can help you with?"

Gee, and to think that Harry thought he had trouble accepting compliments; but he was right, he had found him for a reason. "I was wondering if I could send Hermione an owl and invite her over for a little while, you know for afternoon tea or something. We wouldn't get in your way and we would be real quiet. Oh, and we would cause no trouble, I promise!" He was grinning by the time he had finished his plea. It was hard not to when Severus was smirking at him.

"I don't think that would be a problem..." before he could finish his sentence, Harry had virtually pinned the man to the bench in a bear hug.

"Thank you so much, you are the best!" Harry could smell a faint scent of cinnamon. He opened his eyes and suddenly became very aware of what he was doing and where he was. In his happiness he had literally flung his arms around Severus and had his face buried in the man's neck. He could feel that Severus was a little tense in his strong grip. He pulled back immediately. He couldn't help the colour now staining his cheeks. "I'm so sorry, Severus, I don't know what came over me."

He could see the other man smirking at him; he let go of the breath he had been holding. "It is quite alright, Harry. Don't worry, I'm sure I will survive. But as I was saying before you interrupted me, if you give me your letter I will send it from Hogwarts. Your owl is too distinctive. There would be many questions asked if it was seen either leaving or coming here. I will include with your letter a portkey that will bring Miss Granger to within walking distance
of the wards around the house. When she arrives, I will go and meet her. We cannot risk you been seen here. Is that agreeable with you?"

Harry wanted to hug the man again but thought better of it. So instead he gave him his best winning smile. "When are you going to Hogwarts?"

"In about an hour. Is that enough time to write your letter?"

"Definitely," Harry virtually ran all the way back to his room, he grabbed some parchment and a quill and sat at the desk.

Dear Hermione,

Sorry I can't say much, but included with this letter is a portkey to take you someplace wonderful and magical. Touch it at three pm and trust me. Miss you loads.

Love, Harry.

Harry meet Severus in the main entrance, handed him the note for Hermione, and told him about the time for the portkey. He also told him he had not magically sealed the letter, so if the time was not convenient he could change it to a more suitable time.

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Severus apparated to Hogwarts. He wished to speak with Albus. He was getting worried about the lack of progress with the antidote and wanted to know if anything was going to happen with Albus’ glamourie idea. As he reached the stone gargoyle, he muttered the password and climbed the stairs. He knocked on the door. "Come in, Severus."

Severus entered the office to see he already had company. Minerva and Filius were sitting in armchairs opposite the Headmaster. "I'm sorry, Albus, I can return at a later date if it would be more convenient."

"Nonsense, my boy, this is about Harry anyway. It will save me the job of having to repeat all of this to you later. So please, come sit down. Tea?"

"Please. Earl Gray, if you have any." Severus knew he would have to order it from the kitchen, but he did not wish to be doped up on calming potion at the moment. Albus, for his part, just smiled one of his all-knowing smiles at him and asked a house elf to bring a pot up.

"So, Severus, any luck with the antidote?"

"Not really, Albus. Even with the sample I managed to get, it does not make any sense. The correct potion is a fusion of forgetfulness potion and a de-aging potion. That is what the Aevum Redeo potion basically is. But this is something else, altogether. The only thing it has in common with what it is supposed to be is the Ashwinder eggs, the Jobberknoll feather, and the raw aniseed. Other then that, it is a mystery. The sample was contaminated, as I feared. The boy's blood did bring out a few other things but nothing I would not have expected to find. I just need time. That is one of the reasons I am here, I cannot guarantee that I will have it done in time. You must come up with a way to hide what happened to Potter."

"Severus, I have complete faith in you. I know, no matter how long it takes, that you will find
the answers you seek. But to ease the pressure a little, Filius has an excellent suggestion."

"Thank you, Albus. There is a little known disguising charm that was outlawed several hundred years ago because it was considered too good and aurors could not break through it. Criminals trying to disguise themselves favoured it. Luckily I am one of the few in this world that knows how to do it."

"And tell me, Filius. How do you know of such a charm if it is illegal? I thought I was the only teacher who dabbled in illegal activities!" Severus couldn't help but tease the short man. He deeply respected him, he was a master in his field and a mean dueler, and not many knew that fact. When Severus needed to let off some steam, he usually went to Filius and they had some of the best sparing matches he had ever taken part in. Apparently in his school days he was the dueling champion. Severus knew it to be true; their duels were always a close match.

"Severus, you flatter me," he was chuckling. "But if you must know, I did my master thesis on it. The counter charm for it is very complicated and one no student should be aware of. The only downside to it is it can be a little draining, but Mister Potter is young and healthy and should be able to handle it."

"How so?" Severus was a little worried. If it was too tiring and he was to fall into the Dark Lord's hands he may be too exhausted to defend himself. They would be royally screwed in that case.

"It's nothing to worry about, Severus. It just has a small drain on one's magical power. I would suggest that he merely takes one pepper-up potion a day to counteract its effects."

It was Minerva's turn to enter into the conversation, "I have also looked into the charm and I think it is our best option, no one will think to look for it. Harry is in fine shape; he can handle it. And if anyone is in a position to see how fit and healthy Mister Potter is, it's you, Severus."

He did not miss the teasing tone in Minerva's voice; she had to be referring to the towel incident. Well, if she wanted him to blush about seeing Potter virtually naked she was going to have to work a lot harder then that. He simply did not blush. He just raised an eyebrow at her and answered in a similar tone, "Yes, Mister Potter does have a good physique, which would suggest he is healthy. Most pleasing to the eye, especially when he has just gotten out of the shower. You should try catching that show sometime." She blushed just a little, Severus could not help but smirk.

"Severus, you are wicked man, most assuredly devilish. He is only a student, I hope you remember that," she gasped at him in mock horror.

"I have never heard anyone describe me so perfectly. Of course I remember the brat is a student... but technically he is 27 years old," he finished with a wicked leer on his lips.

"Severus, you will be the end of me, you know that don't you?" She said with an evil grin of her own. "Catch the show, indeed. Well I never!"

"I think that is enough teasing for now. We have other business to be getting on with." Severus couldn't miss the twinkle in the old man's eyes or the fact that Filius was almost falling off his chair trying to suppress his giggles. He and Minerva couldn't help it. Whenever they were in a room together, they just teased one another. He saw it as sport, a bit of fun and he knew she did too.
"Sorry, Albus."

"Yes sorry Albus. When should I bring Potter back for the charm to be placed?"

"There is no need to bring him back early, just bring him with you when you return. So that is the plan of action then. You said there was a couple of things I could do for you?"

"Yes, Albus. I need for you to arrange a portkey for me."

"Why ask me, Severus? Not that I mind, but I know you to be perfectly capable of creating one yourself."

"I do not know the return address. It's for Miss Granger to visit Potter tomorrow at three pm. I need for it to return her some time in the evening, say nine pm. I do not think my home could stand two Gryffindors for much longer."

"That will be no problem at all, Severus. I knew that given the proper circumstances, you two would get on very well. You are both very similar you know."

"Don't push it, Albus. Just because I am allowing him a friend to visit does not mean Potter and I have, or will ever, become thick as thieves." Albus just grinned at him, his eyes twinkling away. Annoying old coot was all Severus could think.

Next Chapter: Hermione visits, and an accident causes Harry to spill some inner thoughts and secrets to Severus and things get a little sentimental.
At 2.55pm Severus found himself standing outside the safety of his home's wards awaiting Miss Hermione Granger's arrival. The only pleasure he could take out of this was the fact she would be immensely shocked to see him standing there when she would, no doubt, be expecting Potter. Oh, of course there would be the look of shock when she actually saw Potter, which would bring him a moment's pleasure.

Now he was annoyed again. Why did he have to put that brat back into his mind again? Seeing him everyday was starting to become slightly uncomfortable. He hadn't missed the little looks the boy had been giving him, or the fact that Potter would just stare at him when he thought he was unaware. He had hoped Potter would have gotten over his little crush by now; it wasn't that he didn't find Potter attractive; he did especially in his 'new' body. Nevertheless, he was a student and that was that. He was even prepared to go as far as to say he liked the boy. He was quite pleasant once you got to know him. He was not the egotistical attention seeker as he had thought. He found the boy to be quite the opposite, in fact it made him almost endearing. A popping noise could be heard to his left and he turned to meet Hermione Granger.

"Pro... Professor Snape?"

"Very observant, Miss Granger." He replied in a tone that was as dry as the Sahara desert.

"Sorry. It was..., I was expecting someone else." Clever girl, she was smart enough not to mention names. He could tell she was nervous though.

"Follow me." Once they were past the wards, Severus turned to the girl, "I'm sure he will fill you in on all the details, but you should be prepared for a slight shock." Not giving her time to respond, he continued up the path and into the house.

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Harry was excited! He couldn't wait to see Hermione. It had been a little over two months since he had last seen her, and, boy, hadn't he changed! The door opened and he saw her follow Severus inside. She was wearing the same expression he guessed he had been wearing when he first stepped into Snape Manor: total awe!

"Mione," he saw her snap her head around to look at him and he saw her eyes widen in disbelief.
"Ha-Harry?"

"Surprise!" He grinned at her. Immediately he saw her stiffen slightly. Oh, dear, he thought, here it comes.

"Harry James Potter! WHAT have you been getting yourself into?! I can't leave you for five MINUTES without you getting yourself into some kind of trouble. AND you had to drag poor Professor Snape into what ever MESS you're in!" He could tell she was on a roll now; she had started to point her finger. He couldn't help rolling his eyes. "Don't you DARE roll your eyes at ME! You had better NOT be causing Professor Snape any trouble while you are here, because if you are YOU WILL HAVE TO ANSWER TO ME!!"

He could see Severus trying not to laugh at him from behind Hermione, although he pulled himself together quickly and addressed Hermione "I couldn't have put it better myself, Miss Granger. 10 points to Gryffindor! Now, if you will excuse me, good afternoon, Miss Granger."

"That is not fair! We are not even in school!" Harry complained, even as he smiled, it was such a Severus-like comment.

Severus walked up to him, "Whoever told you life is fair, Mister Potter?" Severus smirked at him and walked off in the direction of his lab.

Hermione was looking expectantly at him. "I can explain, and it's a good excuse too! Totally not my fault, I promise. Shall we go for some tea?"

She gave him a piercing look and walked up to him, "Regardless, Harry, it's good to see you again," and she gave him a big hug that he was all too happy to return.

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He led her out to the garden patio. As they sat down at the table and chairs there, Lula popped into existence, "Is Harry wanting me to get him and his guest something?"

"Yes, please. Lula, can we have afternoon tea?"

"Yes, Harry, I will not be taking long."

"Thank you," with that Lula was gone.

"Wow, Harry. Is this Professor Snape's home?"

"Yeh. Amazing, isn't it? Just wait until I give you the tour. It's such a beautiful place. Oh, and you'll just go mad when you see the library. It has thousands of books in it and loads of which I've never seen before on every possible subject!"

"You're very lucky to be staying here. I don't imagine Professor Snape likes his privacy being taken away, though."

Lula came back loaded down with trays full of sandwiches, pumpkin pastries, cauldron cakes, a mountain of different biscuits, tea and pumpkin juice. "Thank you, Lula."
"You is welcome, Harry," and she was gone again.

Harry could see Hermione frown at the presence of the house elf. "Mione, promise me you won't try and free them while you're here!"

"I promise I won't try anything. I realise it's a lost cause, but that still doesn't mean I have to agree with the concept of house elves."

"They are very well looked after here. Severus treats them with respect and dignity." He could see a slight look of shock and confusion on her face. He totally got the wrong idea, "Oh, I know it's hard to think that he might treat house elves well considering he's a git in class, but he does."

"It's not that, Harry. I have always believed Professor Snape to be an honourable man. It's the fact you called him by his given name that startled me. Did he give you permission, Harry?"

"Yes, he did. Why?" Harry couldn't see what the big deal was.

"Don't you ever read anything I give you?"

"Sometimes. Why?"

"If you had read the book I gave you on wizarding traditions..."

"I did!" Harry interjected.

"If you had read it properly, then you would know that in the wizarding world it is quite a honour to be given permission to call someone by their given name, especially in the older more traditional families."

"I didn't realise, but I didn't ask to. He offered." Harry was a little taken aback by that. He hadn't realised what a gift Severus had given him. He thought it was just a common courtesy like it was in the muggle world.

"Didn't it even occur to you that the Professors all call us Mister and Miss when in muggle schools, teachers call us by our first names?"

"No, not once. But now that you mention it..." He trailed off realising that Hermione was right, again.

"Enough about that, Harry. Now tell me what happened to you this time?"

It was time for Harry to tell his story again except this time he added the edited highlight of his stay at Snape manor and the Weasley interrogation. While he told his story, they ate a good portion of the food Lula had bought out for them.

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"I'm sorry, Harry, for blaming you."

"It's okay Mione. You had plenty of reason to believe I was at fault, it is usually something stupid that I have done."
"Still, Harry, I shouldn't have gone off like that."

"Yeh, but it gave Severus a good laugh and you were probably the first Gryffindor ever to ever get points from him! So, no harm was done." They both giggled at that. They continued chatting for a couple of hours in the afternoon sun about frivolous topics that teenagers would discuss: homework, family and friends. Hermione was impressed that Harry had completed all his homework so early in the summer. She was going to so tell Ron off for not having done his.

"Speaking of Ron, when are you going to the Burrow?" Harry asked, feeling as if he was missing out on the last opportunity to act as a kid one more time.

"In three days time, I am looking forward to it."

"Are you going to tell Ron how you feel about him?"

"Harry!" She squealed at him.

"Well, it's about time! And I told him the same thing!"

"No, you didn't! Harry! I can't believe you said anything!"

"Well, I was getting tired of watching you two dance around the issue. It's been like this since our fourth year. You guys belong together; you're crazy about each other. So, if I have to interfere a little to set things in motion, then I will. It's my duty as you're both my best friends. So there!" He just grinned at her. She was very sweet when she blushed like that, but he could see the spark in her eyes that showed she was not angry.

"That's fine, Harry, but if you are going to interfere in my love life then I am going to interfere in yours. I'm sure I can find a nice witch for you!" Harry started to feel a little awkward. He didn't like the way this conversation was going. He needed to think quickly, say something that would steer her in a new direction. Moreover, he definitely did not like the way she was looking at him. It was nearly calculating. "Or maybe a nice wizard would be a better option, hmmm, Harry?"

Harry froze and paled.

"It's alright, Harry. It's not a problem."

"How?" He still could not look her in the eye.

"Harry, look at me." He lifted his head and looked at her. He was afraid he would see hatred and revulsion in her face but all he saw was a kind smile. "Harry, it doesn't take a genius to work it out, just a good friend who has spent a lot of time with you. There has been no one since Cho and I know you have had quite a few offers. When you told me there was very little chemistry between you and her I just guessed. You have grown up to be a good-looking guy, Harry. You should have had a ton of girlfriends by now. Your personal preferences are just that Harry. Personal."

"You don't hate me and think I'm a freak?"

"Harry! I could never hate you! You are my best friend; being gay does not make you a freak, Harry. It just means you have different tastes."
Harry smiled at her. He felt so relieved that she had taken it so well. He really didn't want to lose her on top of everything else that was currently happening in his life. "Do you think Ron will be ok with it?"

"Of course, Harry. He is also your best friend. He might freak a little, but that's just Ron for you. He will be fine, I promise."

"Thanks, Mione."

"So now I have the task of finding you a nice young man." She was wearing a slightly evil grin, "did I ever show you a picture of my cousin, Simon? He is 21, in management, and simply gorgeous. Tall, dark and very handsome!"

"Mione, calm down! I don't think I'm quite ready for that, and isn't he a muggle?"

"Yes, but he knows about me. We are very close. He is currently single and he's a real good catch. Just think about it, Harry."

"Okay. I'll think about it but I don't think now is a good time. Just look at me!"

"Oh, all right, Harry! But as soon as you're back to normal, I'm not going to let up until you are actively dating!"

"Fine, Mione. How about I give you the grand tour? As I said, you're going to flip when you see the library. Oh, and my room is so beautiful!"

"Sure, that sounds lovely, but just one thing. Harry, why does Professor Snape have so many kneazles around the garden? He never struck me as the cat type." Harry wondered when she would ask, being such a fan of the breed.

"They're not his, really. They're strays. I guess the elves feed them and look after them. Severus said he's grown quite used to having them around the estate, so he let's them stay." He had found out that information one evening while chatting with the man while in the library.

"Really? I never saw Professor Snape as such a sweet kind person before. Maybe I should change my opinion of him."

"Just promise me one thing, never say that to his face. I don't think he would like to be called sweet." Harry couldn't help but laugh at the image that bought to his mind. No, he could not imagine Severus would like being called sweet.

So off they went exploring. Harry took Hermione down to the pond and back into the house. They explored all of the wings, leaving Severus' private areas alone. Hermione loved his bedroom and was totally in awe of the ballroom. It was pure decadence, lavishly done out in golds and purples with a stage area set up for a live band. Many instruments were present: a grand piano, a harp and a full wind and string section. There were marble statues all around the room and a beautiful wooden dance floor, which they took a spin on.

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When dinnertime came around they headed to the dinning room. Harry was a little surprised to
find Severus sitting down going over some papers, "Severus."

"Mister Potter, Miss Granger, I trust you have managed to stay out of trouble and managed not to break anything."

"No, Professor. I have managed to keep Harry in check."

"Good!"

"Hey! I am in the room, you know," he grumbled as he took his seat.

"Yes, we are aware. You are a little hard to miss, Harry."

"You know when we get back to school you will miss me. Who are you going to tease all the time?"

"Why you, Harry. I will just put you in detention. I have never needed much of an excuse before."

"That's abuse of power!" He couldn't help the smile tugging at his lips and he didn't miss Severus' smirk, either.

"Ah, but I better make good use of it now as I only have you in my clutches for one more year, Mister Potter. Then you are free of me forever." Harry suddenly felt a little sad at hearing that. One of the few constants in his life was going to be taken away from him. It was in that moment that Harry realised he didn't want to let this man leave his life. He always thought he would be there forever. Severus didn't see the flash of sadness cross Harry's face, but Hermione had been watching the whole exchange.

He quickly composed himself, "But if this whole thing with the Dark Lord drags on, you won't be free of me quite so quickly."

Severus rolled his eyes, "God forbid me some peace from you," but he did have a small smile on his lips that assured Harry he was only joking. This made him feel a little better. Hermione was in a little shock from seeing her dower Professor smile albeit it a small smile.

***

Dinner passed without any problems, the three of them talked politely. Soon it was time for Hermione to go home. Harry gave her a big hug and told her he loved her and that he would see her in September. Severus would be escorting her to the point outside of the wards that the portkey would activate from.

"Thank you for allowing me to come and visit Harry, Professor."

"You are welcome, Miss Granger."

"You have a beautiful home and it was an honour to be able to see it."

"Thank you. I believe that the portkey will activate shortly. Goodnight, Miss Granger."

"Goodnight, Professor" and then she was gone.
Severus was tired. It had been a long and fruitless day in his lab. He had not gotten any further with the antidote and he was starting to have real doubts as to whether he ever would. As he re-entered his home, he saw the boy waiting for him. This he did not need right now. What he wanted was a stiff drink and a good book to wind down with.

"I just wanted to thank you again, Severus, for allowing Hermione to come and visit."

"It is the least I could do. I guess it could get a little tedious around here, it is not a house designed to keep teenagers entertained. I am afraid you will have to keep yourself entertained for the next few weeks until we return to Hogwarts, though."

"That won't be a problem, Severus. Believe it or not, this has been the best summer I have ever had!" He smiled at him. Severus was a little surprised to hear that. He thought the boy would have been going out of his mind with boredom. He was starting to feel a little uncomfortable under that intense stare and he made his excuses and retreated to the library.

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It was about an hour later that Severus heard quiet crying coming from the next room. He put down his book and drink and went to investigate. He guessed it must be Potter for it was the wrong tone to be a house elf and, as far as he knew, his elves had no reason to cry. But then again, neither did Potter, as far as he knew. He entered the room silently and walked over to the big old leather sofa that faced the fireplace, which had a fire roaring in it. He looked down on it and, sure enough, there was Potter curled up in an impossibly small position crying his heart out. Severus sighed internally, he hated doing the whole comforting thing. He occasionally had to do it with the odd first year that got very homesick but in general the Slytherins never publicly acknowledged such emotions, which he was thankful for. But he could do it if he had to, and it looked like now he was going to have to. He walked around to the front of the sofa and gently sat down next to the boy, placing a hand on his lower back. "Harry, what's wrong?"

"Sorry, Sev...Severus. I'll just leave. I didn't mean to interrupt you, it's not like I haven't done so enough already," and he doubled up in heart wrenching sobs.

Severus was concerned about what could have happened in the last hour to make the boy so upset. Even his heart was melting at seeing Potter so distressed and he gingerly wrapped his arms around the boy, one around his waist and the other around his shoulders, and he pulled him into an embrace. Potter grabbed onto the lapels of his shirt for dear life and cried his heart out. An undetermined amount of time later, Severus decided to chance it again and try to find out what had set the boy off. "Harry, whatever is the matter?"

"Maybe you should ask what's right. It's a shorter list," came the sad reply.

"Harry, surely nothing can be that bad. Your current situation, while it may be stumping me a little now, will not elude me forever. I will find the cure."

"See! Again I'm causing trouble! I didn't mean to, I promise. Especially not for you, trouble just follows me around!"

Severus laughed a little at that. He didn't reckon that Potter had ever said a truer thing. Trouble did follow the boy around. "Harry, you are causing me no trouble. It's been a unexpected
pleasure having you here."

"Honestly?"

"Have you ever known me to lie?"

"You're a spy, it's what you do."

He rolled his eyes, "To you, Harry, to you! I may fail to mention certain things but I have never lied to you."

"No, I guess not."

"Are you ready to tell me what has got you so upset?"

"Everything. Life, the Dark Lord, school, Ron and Hermione oh, and life!"

"That's quite a list, but what have your friends done to upset you?"

"They haven't done anything, it's me. They are really in love with each other, they just won't admit it to each other. It makes me sad that they are wasting time. With the darkness that is rising they might lose even more time. They could lose their chance if they are not careful." Severus thought that was a little melodramatic to get this upset. Surely there had to be more, considering the tears had not dried up yet and he was still clinging onto him for dear life.

"And old Voldie is just a constant headache. You know the prophecy, right? Well it's my job to kill the bastard. That's it! Just kill him in cold blood. I know he deserves it, I know he's evil and it would free so many people, most of all you. However, I don't know how to do it. He survived the killing curse before. What's to say he won't do it again? Then we would all just lay low until he gets another body and comes back!" He could tell the laugh the boy was forcing out was hollow and empty. It made him shiver a little. He didn't think he was capable of such emptiness. He was also touched that the boy wanted to free him from the Dark Lord's servitude, but he would not allow himself to be added to the boy's list of duties.

"Harry, do not worry about me. I can take care of myself; you have enough to deal with without trying to free me from something that is entirely my fault. I will not add to your burdens." The boy looked up to him but still did not move himself from the embrace.

"You don't add to my problems, Severus. I want to do it for you, to thank you for everything."

Severus sat transfixed and trapped in his gaze, unable to move. He saw Harry slowly raise one of his hands to his face. The hand cupped, then stroked his cheek. It was such a gentle touch from such a soft hand. It had been such a long time since Severus had felt a touch of this kind. He wanted desperately to lean into it and capture the lips that were barely six inches from his own, to partake and to share in a physical touch that he had almost forgotten because it had been too long. It would be so easy to give into his body's demands, to feel truly alive again, even if it was only for one night. If the young man on his lap was really twenty-seven years old, he would have been sorely tempted. His mind had to remind his body that this was not a young man of twenty-seven years who could handle such a thing, but a boy of seventeen who would want emotional attachments that Severus could not offer him, not ever. Also, this boy was a student, his student, placed in his care and protection and it would be unfair and wrong to take advantage when he was so obviously upset.
"Harry, I wish I knew how to make you feel better about yourself, but this is not the way. Trust me when I tell you that." He watched as Harry pulled away from him, and go to leave when he noticed a small scratch on the back of his neck. He reached out to stop the boy from leaving.

"You don't have to try and make me feel better, Severus. I got the message loud and clear. You think I'm abnormal and strange and a freak like the rest of them does. Everybody expects me to save them. Well, I will. I'll fulfill my destiny and I'll no doubt die when I do it..."

Severus rolled his eyes, "put a sock in it, Mister Potter. Tell me, have you been in the garden this evening?"

"Yes. Why?"

"You have been stung by a Glumbumble. That is what is causing this sudden onslaught of melancholy, but it is easily fixed. Follow me." Severus got up, grabbed the boy by his wrist and dragged him to his lab.

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Harry doubted he had been stung by anything, especially by anything with such a dumb name. Glumbumble! He tutted at that, his world was crashing down around him in waves of sadness and Severus was dragging him to his lab. He had wanted to stay in Severus' embrace, it had been so warm and comfortable there and the man's scent of cinnamon and vanilla was intoxicating. He had felt the man's magic and power tingling against his skin. He had wanted to kiss him, he was so close to doing it but then Severus had put a stop to it before anything could happen. That bought about a new wave of tears, he couldn't stop them. The sadness was all consuming, he was wallowing in it, drowning even, but he didn't care, not any more. What was there left to care about any more anyway?

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They entered the lab and Severus pushed Potter into one of the seats and he set about making the cure for him. It was not a difficult potion to brew, it would only take about thirty minutes to make. Until it was made, he would just have to leave the boy to cry. He felt a little mean doing so, but what other choice did he have?

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Harry sat down where he was told and pretty much surrendered to his depression. Some time later, Severus was stood in front of him holding out a glass to him. "Drink, it will make you feel better," his voice was low and gentle. Harry thought he could drown in that voice, it was so rich and sensual sounding, even when it was throwing insults at him. He was wearing the brown suede trousers, again, that made him look so sexy. Harry truly thought Severus was beautiful at that moment. All he could think was what would such a beautiful man want with a scrawny git like him. That bought on another wave of tears. He probably thinks I'm nothing but a cry-baby sitting here crying my eyes out over nothing. Shit, he didn't even know if Severus was gay. He saw Severus get down on one knee next to the chair and push the glass into his hand.

"Harry, trust me. Drink it, it will make you feel better." How could Harry refuse this man anything when he was trying his hardest to be very gentle with him even though it was not in his nature to be gentle? He just nodded and drank the liquid down in one gulp.
After a minute of feeling a bit woozy, his first thought was it tasted bad, his second one was 'oh, shit!' and he blushed deeply. He could see Severus smirking at him. "I see you have your equilibrium back Mister Potter."

"Oh God! I am so embarrassed right now. Is there a spell to make the floor open up and swallow you? Because if there is, can you do it for me?" Harry put his face in his hands and bent over double and mumbled, "Severus, I'm so sorry! Can you ever forgive me?"

"Consider it forgiven, Harry. You were not in your right mind, shall we say?"

Harry looked up at the older man, some of the red receding from his cheeks. He could see Severus was in a good mood and was not angry with him, if anything he looked amused. "Thank you, Severus. Again"

"I must admit, having you around is definitely making my summer more interesting and definitely more entertaining!" Harry laughed at that, it was only a week ago that Severus had not even wanted him in his house; now things seemed to be going relatively well. He was glad, even if it was at his expense a bit. "Now if you don't mind, Harry. I'm off to bed. It has been a long and, quite frankly, an odd day."

"Good idea! Thank you and goodnight, Severus."

"You welcome. Goodnight, Harry." Harry smiled at him and left the lab feeling a bit stupid. He also agreed that it had been a long and odd day and he definitely needed a good long sleep.

Next Chapter: The Glamourie is cast, school starts up again, and Harry admits all to Ron.
Disclaimer: Never was mine / Never will be mine I am making no money from this story. Everything belongs to JK Rowling and Warner Bros.

Beta read by the fabulous JediCandy.

Chapter Ten - Stressful September.

Harry was both dreading and looking forward to getting back to Hogwarts. He was looking forward to seeing his friends again and even getting back to class, but he was sad to be leaving Snape Manor. The manor had been more of a home to him then the house at Privet Drive had ever been. He was going to miss Lula, Manni and Zelk even though Zelk had never said more then two words to him he was still going to miss him. He would also miss the kneazles. He had grown quite fond of some of them. So here he was, sitting in his room for the last time. He was going to miss this room. His trunk was all packed and his runespoor's tank was on top of it. He had sent Hedwig on without him and even her empty cage was ready to go.

But most of all, he was going to miss his informal relationship with Severus. Since the embarrassing Glumbumble incident they had got on very well. Severus had been true to his word and had never bought up the fact that Harry had pretty much thrown himself at him. In one-way Harry was glad that he didn't have to live with the ritual humiliation of having to face the man if things between them had been awkward, but in another way he was kind of sad. Severus had given him absolutely no indication that he had any feeling other then friendship towards him, while Harry had to cope with ever growing feelings towards Severus. If it was just a physical thing he could deal with it, but the man intrigued him on almost every level. He was so intelligent on so many different topics. He was funny even though, sometimes, it was hard to spot the joke; but once you got used to his humour, he was funny. There was real kindness there, too, if you cared to look for it. Again, it was a little difficult to see at first glance but it was there. Magically the man just blew Harry's mind, he was strong and powerful Harry never wished to be on the end of one of his hexes; he imagined it would blow you into next week. It was so strong that Harry could literally feel it like it was a tangible thing, and it reacted with him in a way he did not really understand.

Harry knew that once the students had arrived back, things would have to return to normal between them. They would once again have to take the roles of arch nemesis, though Severus had told him that, on occasion, Harry could visit for tea and a chat if he ever needed someone to talk to, as long as he was discrete. Time was ticking on and soon it was time to go. He left his room for the last time and headed towards the main entrance.

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"Why so glum looking, Harry? Surely you are looking forward to seeing your friends again soon."
"Yeah. I'm just going to miss this place."

"I'm sure that once this war is over I can go as far as to extend an invitation to you to visit, if you would like?"

Harry beamed his winning smile at Severus, "I would love that very much. Thank you."

"Is everything packed and ready for the elves to transport?"

"Yep, everything is ready."

"Good then. Let's go." As Severus was heading for the front door, Harry had one more quick look around, imprinting everything to memory, and followed him out. They arrived at the portkey site.

"Are you ready, Harry?"

Harry was anything but ready; this form of travel always made him queasy. However, he was aware that it was a stupid fear and one he needed to deal with. So he put on a brave smile, nodded and took a hold of the silver chain. Within a minute, he felt the familiar tug in his navel followed by the feeling of free falling. Once they had landed he wobbled a little, but Severus held him steady. They then entered the Hogwarts gates.

***

They sat in the Headmasters office awaiting Professor Flitwick's arrival to cast the concealing charm that Harry would use until an antidote could be found. He was a little nervous; from what he had been told he would have to rely on pepper-up potions to keep his strength up for the whole day. To him it was another pressure he was putting on Severus - having to make extra pepper-up all the time for him. Maybe he could offer to help, ask Severus to put him in detention now and again and he could serve them by making the potion. He smiled to himself. When did he ever need to give the man help for putting him in detention? No doubt he would be in detention with him by the end of the first week.

Professor Flitwick entered the office and smiled at each of them. "Now, Harry, this shouldn't hurt but it will tingle and your skin will have a slightly stretching sensation in it for a few moments after the spell has been cast. Are you ready?"

"Yes, Professor."

"Good. Now, stand up. That's a good lad." Harry did as he was told and waited for the little man to cast his charm. "Dissimulo Aevum Ab Decem." Harry felt tingles all over as a bright orange light encased him. His skin did indeed feel a little like it was being stretched, but it was not an uncomfortable pain. He had suffered worse before. After a minute it was all finished. He looked around to see a grinning Flitwick and Dumbledore. There was a look on Severus face that he could not read, was that a little sadness? Surely Harry had misread that, hadn't he?

"Excellent, Harry. You look as you should. How do you feel?" Dumbledore asked him.

"Fine, a little disorientated."
"That will pass in a few moments, your mind is being asked to accept, essentially, a new body," Flitwick had chirped in.

"Sure. I guess I felt a little like this when I first changed. You know, older," Harry was back in his chair drinking his tea contemplating Severus' odd look when the man occupying his mind spoke up.

"If you will excuse me, Albus, Filius and Harry. I have a batch of pepper-up I need to be getting on with."

"May I help, Severus? I know you have more important things to be doing then making me pepper-up potion."

"You are offering to spend time in a potions lab? Has hell frozen over while I was not paying attention?" was the dry reply Harry received. He just rolled his eyes at the man and smiled.

"I was just trying to be helpful and, no, as far as I know hell has not frozen over."

Severus smirked at him, "Fine, Harry, your help would be appreciated. Shall we?" He pointed at the door. They both got up and left.

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"Albus. Did I just see Mister Potter and Severus having a civil conversation?"

"I believe you did, Filius"

"Are you sure hell has not frozen over?"

Albus laughed at that, his eyes full of sparkles, "Maybe it has, old friend. Maybe it has!"

***

Harry was content while making the pepper-up. He was watching Severus out of the corner of his eye. Harry marveled at how elegantly he moved. He wondered if he would ever have grace like that. He did in the air but not on the ground. His movements on the ground were not fluid like Severus but clumsy and awkward. Life wasn't fair, he decided.

***

Severus had finished packing away all of his stuff and he had even finished setting everything up for the antidote he was working on for Harry. He could feel Harry watching him and it was a little disconcerting. He had felt himself warm to Harry over the last few weeks quite a lot. He had enjoyed the company immensely, Harry was quite intelligent when he put his mind to work and he had quite a wicked sense on humour and quite a sharp tongue if he wanted to. But seeing the boy under the glamourie had bought it all crashing back to him. He was a student and, therefore, off limits no matter how much he enjoyed his company. It was just that he forgotten that fact a little over the last few weeks. "I spoke to Albus a few days ago about your snake. He said you could keep it in your dorm as long as your dorm mates have no objections. If they do, I can always keep it in my lab and you can visit on occasion."

"Oh, thank you! I forgot to ask about it. I'm sure they will be fine about it but if not, thanks
again. All I ever seem to do is thank you, Severus. Have you noticed that?"

Severus couldn't help but give a small smile at that. Yes, he had noticed. Nobody had ever
really thanked him for much, except maybe the staff. People tended not to bother to thank him;
he guessed it was because most people still saw him as a Death Eater once evil, always evil.
"Yes, I had noticed and you also have a tendency to over apologize," he wanted to test his
theory out now. He guessed it was the best time considering they were alone and the students
had not arrived back yet, which would force them to slip back into old habits.

"Your right. Sorry, I don't mean to..." he could see the boy mentally berate himself for falling
for something so obviously set up. He could not hide the smirk from his face. But his test had
worked perfectly, it had caused Harry to blush. Yes, he did have to admit to himself, it still
looked good on him even though he was younger looking. Yes, quite fetching indeed.

"I can't believe I fell for that! I am so gullible, I'm surprised I have managed to stay alive as long
as I have!" The boy said in a tone that was disbelieving.

"Yes, long live Potter-luck, mmm?" Severus replied in a dry tone. Harry just rolled his eyes at
him, and smiled and shook his head.

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It was now only a few minutes until the students arrived back to Hogwarts. Harry was looking
forward to seeing his friends again but was definitely not looking forward to being rude to
Severus. He didn't think he could do it anymore, not when he wanted to just kiss the man silly.
He hadn't seen much of Severus over the last few days, he had been holed up in his lab brewing
potions for the hospital wing and working on Harry's antidote. He had missed him, and he knew
the feeling would only get worse, especially when it came to potions class. It would be hard to
be in the same room with the man and not being able to share the joke if he found something
funny or ask him if he fancied a game of chess. Not that Harry ever won, but it was time well
spent as far as he was concerned. He could hear the distant rumbling of the coaches bringing
the students up to the school Harry took a deep breath and waited for his friends to come in.

"Harry!" He could hear Hermione before he could see her. The next thing he knew, his arms
were full of seventeen-year old girl. "Harry, it's wonderful to see you!" She then whispered in
his ear, "Thanks for whatever it was that you said to Ron!" As she pulled away, he could see a
gleam in her eyes that told him all he needed to know. Ron had finally asked her out. Harry
beamed his best grin, he was truly happy for her.

"Mate, you look better then last time I saw you," Ron clapped him on the back and gave him a
grin.

Harry looked around to see if anyone was paying attention. When he was satisfied, he turned to
his friends and whispered, "I'm under a glamourie. I'll fill you in later." They both looked a little
surprised but otherwise were pleased to see their friend seemed well.

They took their seats and Harry had to fend off questions from his dorm mates about why he
was not on the train. They accepted his excuse that Dumbledore thought it was safer for him to
arrive a day earlier. Harry also had a quick chat and a hug with Luna, apparently she and her dad
had failed to actually catch any ice snakes but they were not giving up hope just yet. They had
heard rumours of a secret breeding programme initiated by the Ministry of Magic. Harry had
wished her luck in her search. Hermione tutted and Ron laughed, but Harry refused to make fun
of her. He liked her and he felt she liked him for who he was and not the-boy-who-lived.

***

The rest of the welcoming feast went well. All his dorm mates said they had no problem with the snake as long as he didn't talk to it too often in their presence because they found parsel tongue freaky. As the feast was winding down Harry started to feel the drain on his magic from the glamourie. He felt so drained and he had already had a pepper-up potion in the afternoon. He didn't want to rely on them too much. "Guys, I'm heading up to the dorm. I'm really tired, I'll fill you guys in on everything tomorrow," Harry whispered to his friends

"Okay, Harry. Are you all right? You look a little pale?" Worry was evident in Hermione's voice.

"Yeh. Honestly, guys, I'm fine, just tired. I'll see you all tomorrow," with that Harry got up as discreetly as possible and crept out the hall.

He would have been successful in his endeavour if he hadn't heard a certain blond yell across the hall, "What's the matter, Potter? Are we not good enough to sit with any more? Does the great Harry Potter wish to be alone, or is it that now your friends are together your no longer welcome? You should have seen them on the train, all over each other. Totally disgusting! I still haven't got my appetite back!" Half of the Slytherin table were giggling at Draco's snide comment.

Harry just rolled his eyes. Ever since last year when he had taken to ignoring Draco and his taunts, the boy had almost seemed personally offended by it. Oh, well, he guessed he should say something just to shut the prat up! "How long did it take you to come up with that one, Draco? Surely you haven't had time to write to your father yet to ask him what to do. That is now that you are able to write to your father since his paid release from Azkaban." He could hear half of the hall sniggering; the ice blonde had gone bright red, Harry just smirked at him.

"At least I have parents, Potter!"

Harry just shook his head in mock sorrow at the boy, "Draco, Draco, Draco. Isn't it time you came up with a new one? It's been nearly seven years; maybe you should look to your Head of House if you need some tips on excellent put-downs. He is the master, after all, and you are merely an amateur." Harry spun on his heels and exited the hall before anything stupid like wands were drawn and the teachers needed to get involved. He was also a little worried that he might have pushed it by bringing Severus into it.

If he had stayed in the hall, he would have seen that most of the hall was laughing at the Slytherin Head Boy and that Draco looked mortified at being called an amateur in anything as well as being embarrassed at being outsmarted by Harry. Severus trying very hard to hide the small smile that was gracing his lips.

The following days went off without a hitch except that Harry was getting a little bogged down by fatigue at inappropriate moments, like during double transfiguration when McGonagall asked him to demonstrate turning a wooden stall into a bed and test it out. He fell asleep on it while testing it. He had lost five points for Gryffindor. Instead of just zoning out in History of Magic, he fell asleep. Luckily, Hermione was sympathetic and let him copy her notes later that
evening. He did this while filling his friends in on the glamourie that he was under and that it was the reason for his fatigue.

***

One night after dinner, Harry, Ron and Hermione were sitting in their favourite chairs by the fire in Gryffindor tower doing their transfiguration homework. Harry could not concentrate, his mind was wandering to a certain tall, dark and handsome potions master. He was embarrassed to admit to himself that he was pining for the man. He missed their evening chats, the bouncing back and forth of snarky comments said in jest. He knew he was turning into a tragic case of a pathetic puppy pining because he had added the scent of cinnamon and vanilla to his school scarf. When he missed Severus too much, he could smell his scarf and imagine the man was sitting next to him or, better yet, wrapped in his arms. He was equally looking forward to and dreading the next day. It was double potions day.

***

"Harry, pay attention!"

"Mmmm?"

"Harry, if Professor Snape catches you like this, half asleep, he will kill you!"

"Mmmm" Harry couldn't concentrate. It was Thursday afternoon and it was double potions. He was too lost in his fantasy world to care about what he should be boiling in his cauldron. Severus' voice was gliding over him like melted chocolate on his naked skin. After he had finished his lecture at the start of the lesson, Severus had sat down at his desk to grade papers. Harry was watching him lightly nibble on a nail on his left hand. Harry was transfixed on that left hand, the fingers were long and slender. Harry wanted to go up to him, take that hand and run his tongue along it, tasting each of the slender fingers, tonguing each one separately, paying each one special attention and then slowly make his way back down to his palm, nipping at the skin, tasting it, savouring the flavour. Harry wanted to know what it would feel like to have such graceful hands trace the lines of his body, to stoke his naked and exposed flesh. To have those sinful lips press down on his own and to mark him as his. He wanted that and much more, he wanted Severus to ease the constant ache in his groin and to soothe the pain in his heart.

"Harry!"

"What, Mione?"

"Your cauldron has over heated, your potion is ruined. You only took your pepper-up an hour ago, it shouldn't have worn off yet." She was right. What was meant to be his paternity potion was nothing more then solidified gunk stuck to the bottom of his cauldron. He was screwed and, not literally, but Severus was going to kill him. On the up side, he thought, if he gets put in detention at least he gets to spend time with Severus alone.

"You should have all finished your potions by now, pack up and I will come by and mark your pathetic attempts." He saw Severus get up and start at the front of the class. He was a little worried because he really should have been able to make this potion; and the annoying thing was he had worked really hard on the prep work. He wanted to impress the man with his intelligence, show him he was not stupid.
"Fat chance, now," Harry mumbled to himself. He had been stupid, allowing his mind to wander so far away from his work. Severus was coming closer, he knew they would have to have a 'mock' fight but he felt he deserved it. He had screwed up his work, he felt like a jerk.

He heard a sigh come from the shadow looming over him; it took all his courage to look up. "Pray do tell, Mister Potter, how in Merlin's name did you make this?" The sarcasm was harsh; he heard the Slytherins snicker.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said quietly.

"Sorry, Potter? Eeally! You will stay after class to arrange a detention and you will remake this potion then. I will not have you destroy my perfect record of people passing their N.E.W.T's with your ineptitude. Do I make myself clear, Potter?"

"Yes, sir," as Severus walked away from him he looked down, but he couldn't keep the very small smile from his lips.

***

He might have thought nobody had seen him, however, his lab partner was very observant, she had not missed his dreamy looks at their professor all lesson or that small smile. Surely nobody was ever that happy to be put in detention, especially with Professor Snape. Hermione decided she would have this out with her friend she had some questions she needed answered.

***

The last student had left the classroom and Harry approached Severus' desk. He was suddenly unsure what to call the man, yes they were alone but they were at school. He would have to play this one by ear, wait and see what Severus called him. If it was Potter then it was back to Sir and Professor Snape. He desperately hoped that would not be the case. "Sit." Okay, so that plan had failed, he hadn't used any name at all. "What happened today? I know you are capable of making that potion."

"Professor... Severus I'm really sorry."

Severus just sighed at him and run his hands through his hair. "Harry, quit apologising and tell me what went wrong today?"

Harry did a quick scan through all the excuses he had either used or had heard of. He couldn't tell Severus the truth; he would die on the spot, but he really didn't want to lie either. So he stretched the truth a bit, "I'm just a little tired, this glamourie is a little more draining then I thought it would be."

"Have you been taking the pepper-up in the afternoon?"

"Yes, after lunch every day."

Severus was running a finger across his bottom lip, deep in thought. Harry, who would have done anything to be that bottom lip right at that moment, fought back out of his daydream. "Maybe I could make a stronger one that would help you stay more alert for your lessons. Don't think I didn't hear of the now infamous 'Potter bed' incident in your transfiguration lesson," Severus was smirking at him, he just groaned in embarrassment.
"Don't... I'll be fine. I just need time to adjust. I absolutely refuse to take up anymore of you're private time."

That brought about a snort of laughter. "Private time, Harry? What makes you think I have any? With Pomfrey demanding potions every five minutes for dim witted students who have the indecency to injure themselves?"

"I guess I'm not helping much, either, with the whole antidote thing?"

"I do seem to have reached a bit of an impasse with that, but, like I said before, do not give up on me yet. I will find the solution."

"And like I said, I have faith in you."

"Right. I guess you should return here at seven for detention. You need to make that potion to pass this class. And you will pass this class!"

"Yes, sir. I'll see you at seven on the dot."

"Don't be late!"

"I won't, I promise."

***

Harry arrived in the great hall and took his usual seat next to Ron and opposite Hermione. "What happened with Snape, Harry? We thought he had eaten you or something when you didn't turn up in the common room."

Now that bought about some interesting images for Harry, but he didn't think now was the time to tell Ron about them. "I went to the library."

"Library? Harry, you're turning into Hermione!"

"Harry is taking his studies seriously, Ron. Maybe you should do so, also."

***

Severus was in his lab working again on the antidote; something was just not adding up, he was missing something important. He had a feeling that, once he worked it out, it would all fall into place. He had retrieved books from the restricted section of the library, which dealt in the darkest potions ever made. He was attempting to compile enough evidence and research combined to bastardize several potions and put them together to come up with the cure. He sure as hell was having no luck with modern texts. That is why he was trying his luck in ancient texts. At five to seven, he heard a knock at his door.

"Come," he called out and in walked Harry. "You know what to do, get to it!"

"Yes, sir."

He briefly watched Harry briefly set up his workstation. He was looking tired and a little
washed out; he wanted to find the cure so it would be one less thing for the boy to worry about. He was sure he was closer to his breaking point then he let on to anybody. He had tried for so long to help keep the boy alive and safe and now he felt he was failing him. It was so frustrating not being able to just brew up or spell cast the problem away. He was doing all he possibly could for Harry at the moment; he just hoped it was enough.

***

Some time later, Severus was deep in an ancient tome about appearance altering potions when he felt a hand rest on his arm. He looked up into the greenest eyes he had ever come across. He gulped, the boy was so beautiful and seemed so fragile, but he knew that to be a lie. The boy was powerful; he could feel it, almost taste it. There was still something fragile about him; maybe it was his innocence or what he had left of it. Severus didn't know.

"I didn't mean to startle you, but I have finished my work."

"I see. Bottle, label and leave it on my desk." He wanted to ask him to stay for a drink, a nightcap, anything to keep him there. He liked having him around, his presence was calming and peaceful. However, there were to many risks involved if certain students were to see them socialising and he did not wish to become more attached to Harry then he already was. It was a little unnerving. He watched Harry go about his business. When he finished, he turned to him and gave him a smile that made his heart melt a little more.

"Will there be anything else?"

"No. Go to bed and rest. You look like you need it."

"Thank you. Goodnight Severus."

"Goodnight, Harry," and he sighed as he watched the boy leave.

***

Harry headed back to his common room feeling relatively content. He hadn't actually talked to Severus that much tonight, but it was nice to be in his presence for a while. He had never felt so at ease in silence with anyone else before. It was nice, sometimes, to just be quiet and work. When he reached the fat lady's portrait, he gave the password and entered the common room. It was very quiet, he didn't care he was off to bed.

"I don't think so, Harry. My room, now!"

"Hermione! I was just going to bed. Can't this wait?"

"I don't think so, so move it," He could tell she was in no mood to be argued with and he was too tired to even try, so he went to her new room.

***

"Maybe I should have worked harder to become a prefect and go for Head Boy so I, too, could have my own room. It's nice, Mione," Harry sat down on the edge of her bed.

"If you hadn't broken so many school rules over the years you would have made prefect."
could tell she wasn't mad with him because she was smiling, which just made this more confusing.

"Hey Ron broke just as many as I did and he was made prefect!"

"I'm not here to talk about that, so spill."

"Spill what?"

"You know perfectly well what I'm talking about!"

"Trust me, Hermione. I have absolutely no idea what you are talking about."

"Professor Snape?" Harry paled, oh God, what did she know and how did she know it? Being the most important question. "You like him, don't you?"

He sighed. He was well and truly busted and he did want to talk about it, he needed to. "I'm not that obvious, am I?"

"A little, Harry. Not many people stare starry-eyed at him during class, you know." She was smiling at him. He just groaned out loud and lay back on the bed.

There was a knock at the door. Hermione answered it, "Ron, come in."

"I wondered where you two had gone. What's up, Harry?"

"Nothings up with me, Ron." He mumbled from under the pillow that was currently covering his face.

"Mate, is everything alright, apart from the obvious? Because you seem to have been a little off this last week."

Harry guessed it was now or never. He needed to tell Ron he was gay; he was his best friend and he didn't want to keep secrets from him. He knew Ron would start to get suspicious if he kept whispering with Hermione in corners. "Ron, sit down. I need to tell you something." Ron sat in the chair at the desk. "You have to promise me you will not go mad and also you have to promise me you won't tell anyone."

"Okay, mate."

"I mean it, Ron. Swear on it. You can't tell anyone, no matter how much you may not like it!"

"All right, I swear! What is it? You're making me nervous, Harry."

"Ronimgay." A moment of silence passed.

"I'm sorry, Harry, I didn't catch that."

"I said, Ron I'm gay." Another moment of silence fell upon the room. Harry was holding his breath.

"That's it! Merlin, Harry! I thought there was something really wrong the way you were going
on. I thought you were dieing or something." Ron rolled his eyes.

"You don't mind?"

"Not really, doesn't bother me none. It's not like it affects me. It doesn't, does it? You're not going to confess your love for me or anything like that are you, because you know I'm flattered, really I am but, well, sorry, but one hundred percent heterosexual, mate." He could tell Ron was a little flustered he couldn't help it, he laughed.

"No, Ron. You have nothing to worry about."

"Why? What's wrong with me? I'm not too bad, you know!"

Now Harry was in hysterics and so was Hermione, "first, you panic because you think I'm in love with you, and then you're offended because I'm not. And I thought I was the strange one!" All three of them were laughing now "Ron, it just that you're not my type."

"Oh, yeah? And just who is your type?" Ron had a glint in his eye; Harry could see another fix up job coming on, just like Hermione with her cousin. "Because you know Bill swings your way," and there it was, he laughed.

"Bill? But I thought he liked girls?" Hermione was curious.

"He swings both ways. Apparently there was some guy he was in school with that he really liked, older kid or something. Claimed he was the love of his life, but their relationship was doomed or some such crap. Never asked too much about it really. So who is your type? It's Dean, isn't it? No? Terry Boot from Ravenclaw?"

"Not really."

"Well?"

"Are you going to tell him Harry or should I?" Hermione said.

"Oh, so this is why you two sneaked off then? So come on, Harry, we're your best mates. If you can't tell us, who can you tell?"

"You promise not to go mad?"

"Not this again! Yes, I swear, promise and everything else."

"Severus." There was that pregnant pause again. Harry was becoming used to hearing it after one of his revelations.

"SNAPE! Oh Merlin, Harry! SNAPE?"

"Yes."

"Why? He's such a greasy git, mate?"

"No, he's not, not once you get to know him. He is lovely," Harry got that dreamy look over his face again. Ron stared at him as if he had grown an extra head.
"Mate, I never thought I would live to hear that: Snape and lovely in the same sentence. You're bonkers!"

"You don't hate me?"

"No. I think you're insane."

"Ron! That's not nice! Harry likes him a lot."

"Yeah, but Snape? Harry, as guys go you're not bad looking, you could do a lot better for yourself. Hermione surely you understand what I'm trying to say here?"

"I do, but I can also understand Harry," both the lads looked around at Hermione, Ron with a look of revulsion and Harry with a look of shock. "Well, he does have that whole tall, dark and mysterious thing going on, and he is a very powerful wizard. It's not for me, but I can understand the attraction."

Ron looked unconvinced, "Sure, whatever. Harry, if it's Snape you like, well, good luck. You're going to need it!"

"Thanks, Ron, for being, well, cool about everything."

"What are friends for?" That night Harry slept well. He was relieved that Ron and Hermione understood, even if they were a little confused at his tastes.

Next Chapter: Dumbledore and Harry chat about Severus’ birthday among other things. Harry has a nightmare and Severus makes a confession to Harry.

Latin Translations:

Dissimulo Aevum Ab Decem - Conceal age by ten.
September had generally been a pretty shitty month for Harry and he was glad it was coming to an end. The fatigue was getting better, he was feeling more in balance with himself and it had shown in his school marks. All of his Professors had remarked that he had gotten a lot better after a shaky start to the year. He was even looking forward to his final in-depth project for Defence against the Dark Arts. They had to choose a subject, research it and do some kind of demonstration with it; you were even allowed to work in pairs or groups if you wanted to. All he had to do was choose his subject matter; he was playing with a few ideas in his head. His only real remaining problem was Severus. Harry had gone and done the stupidest thing ever, he had gone and fallen in love with the man!

Ron teased him mercilessly but it was done in good humour. Hermione thought it was terribly romantic, she liked to call it a tragic love story. Harry just called it typical of his life, no matter what he wanted it was always just beyond his reach; however he was determined to find out if, maybe, Severus had feelings of more then friendship for him. He was going to use what the sorting hat had claimed it had seen, his Slytherin cunning, and try to find out, first of all, if Severus was even gay. When he told his friends of his plans, Ron predictably laughed and Hermione ran to the library. He wondered briefly if there was a sexual orientation list in which all the witches and wizards were recorded. Then he realised that was preposterous. He would just ask her when she came back; it was the easiest way.

***

Harry and Ron were finishing up some homework when Hermione came up to them with a grin. It was rather Slytherin-esque. "My room. Now!" They did as she ordered; that is how they found themselves spread across her bed while she was going through the big, dusty, old book she had returned with from the library as she sat at her desk. "Harry, I did a little research for you."

"On what, Mione?"

"You and Snape."

"How?"

"This book, Harry, is the list of all the school rules. It says that if a student is of age, he or she
can have a relationship with a member of staff as long as both parties are willing participants and are discrete."

"The most shocking thing, I think, is that you haven’t read that book for fun before and that you needed to get it out of the library!” Ron said, in a matter of fact tone. Harry couldn't help but snigger.

"For your information, Ronald Weasley, I have read it before back in our first year. I thought it was beneficial to become aware of all the school rules. I was just checking back on my facts so I could give Harry the correct information!” Hermione had managed to say all of that in the haughtiest of voices Harry had ever heard.

"Well, that told me, mate."

"Yeah, I suppose. And you're in trouble because she called you Ronald!"

"I guess I'll have to use the famous Weasley charm to get out of this one." He wiggled his eyebrows up and down causing Harry to laugh.

"If you two are quite finished," she was rolling her eyes, "Harry, don't you see there is nothing stopping you going after Snape except, well, Snape himself?"

"Yeah, but how do I show him I'm interested? I don't think it would work if I just walked up to him and said 'hi, Severus. I think I'm in love with you. Fancy a snog?' I don't think that would go down well, do you?"

"Love, mate? I thought you just fancied him." Harry blushed at what Ron had said; he had forgotten to censor his words.

"Harry, I didn't realise your feelings for Professor Snape were quite that deep. Are you sure?" Trust Hermione to ask questions and check that all the facts were in place before she actually commented on something.

"Yes, I'm sure. But how do I get him to notice?"

"Simple, mate. Buy him a gift or something. It's a Hogsmeade weekend in a couple of days so either buy him something for helping you or buy him something for his birthday." Ron said.

"Ron, you're a genius! That's a bloody brilliant idea! Oh, but I don't know when his birthday is," "Have you only just realised that I'm a genius?" He actually sounded affronted.

"Harry, why don't you ask Professor Dumbledore? I'm sure he won't mind telling you and if it isn't his birthday soon, do what Ron suggested and give him a gift to say thank you for the summer and all the help he has been giving you."

Harry grinned. That was exactly what he was going to do; first thing in the morning he would try to get an appointment with Dumbledore for later that day. After all, Professor Dumbledore had always said his door was open to him for a chat and a cup of tea. He thought it was time he took his Headmaster up on the invitation; after all it had been nearly seven years.

***
Harry was in a large, dark, circular room. The only light was from the fireplace and two lit torches on either side of the big double doors. He sensed that he was not alone. He turned around to find himself faced with three young men kneeling before him. He recognised one to be Marcus Flint. The other two he knew, he had seen them around school a year or two ago. One was a Ravenclaw, if he remembered correctly. They seemed to be fearful of him. He wondered why until he spoke words that he had no control over.

"You have made your families proud tonight, passing your initiations and proving yourself worthy to be in my service." Harry's voice was raspy and harsh. With dread filling his mind, he realised where he was. "Tonight, you will receive my mark. It will stay with you forever, serving you as a reminder as to whom you belong. You will be rewarded with riches and power, if you serve me well. But know that you will be punished if you disappoint me for I do not accept failure." Harry started to pace up and down in front of the three young men. "You are the first of my new generation of Death Eaters. Others will follow in your footsteps as my power grows. When our numbers are sufficient, we will strike and take the Wizarding world back from the mudbloods and half-breeds that that old fool Dumbledore had put in charge. You will help me rid the world of that nuisance brat, Harry bloody Potter. You will be my first line of defence and attack. Step forward and embrace your destiny!"

The three boys stood and took the few remaining steps to bring them closer to their new master. Even if they were having second thoughts it was now too late, their fate had been sealed. They each bared their left forearms to him. Harry wanted to scream at them, tell them that they were ruining their lives and that they were stupid and that they should run and hide. But he had no control over what he was doing. He lifted his wand and started to say an incantation he had never heard before. He then he raised his left hand and lightning seemed to erupt from his fingertips as more words were chanted. This time he recognised the language as parseltongue. His wand touched Flint's forearm even as he wrapped his lightning covered hand around it, chanting continuously. Harry could hear screams of pain from Flint and he felt a connection being made from the dark mark that now graced Flint's forearm, to his master. The pain was unbearable; his head felt as though it was going to explode and the burning on his arm was quite beyond belief.

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His screaming had woken his dorm mates. Ron immediately sprang into action, calling to Dean to go get McGonagall. He rushed to his friend's bedside and tried to pin him down so he would not do any damage to himself. Ron had not been woken like this in some time; not since Harry had gotten a better grip on Occlumency last year. It still happened every now and again, though. Harry's screams had died down to whimpers interspersed with the occasional sob. He smoothed his friend's hair and whispered comforting words to him. He heard McGonagall enter and gasp.

"Mister Weasley! How long has Potter screaming?"

"A few minutes Ma'am. I can't get him to wake up. I think he is still in some pain, though."

"Merlin help the poor boy! I will take him to the hospital wing to be checked over, I want the rest of you to return to bed."

"But..."

"No 'but's' Mister Weasley. You can see Potter in the morning. Now goodnight, gentlemen."
Minerva levitated Harry out of his dorm and to the hospital wing. She left him in the very capable hands of Poppy and went to see Albus.

***

Harry awoke in an unfamiliar bed hearing voices talking quietly behind the curtain. 'Oh great' he thought, the hospital wing. Why? Then it all came back to him; the placing of the dark mark on Marcus Flint's arm. His Voldemort visions were quite rare these days. He only suffered them now and again but when he did, boy did he feel it! His head was throbbing with a dull ache and his left arm was so tender he winced when he moved it. He must have made a noise because the talking stopped and the curtain was pulled back to reveal Madame Pomfrey, Headmaster Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall. They looked at him expectantly and Harry knew it was time to give his report, so he did. What surprised him the most was the relief he felt when Severus had come in half way through his telling of Voldemort's latest exploits. His heart had skipped a beat when he saw the man. He also felt a little safer having him in the room.

***

Harry finished his report, aware that everything he had told them had not been of any tactical importance, and was waiting for them all to leave because of this. He was a little thrilled when Severus had stayed behind, after the others had left.

"Severus, did you bring the salve I ask for?" Pomfrey asked him.

"Yes, but why did you need a burn salve?" Harry saw him glance over to him with a perplexed expression on his face.

"If you will excuse me, Severus, I need to see to Mister Potter." the tone was obviously one of dismissal.

"If you don't mind, Poppy, I would like to see Mister Potter after you are done with him." Harry's heart was close to bursting at hearing Severus say those words. He was hurting and in pain and he wanted to be comforted by him.

"Severus, really! I think it can wait until morning. The boy is hurt and..."

"Madame Pomfrey, I'm okay, really. I would like to speak to Professor Snape," Harry interrupted her before she became too much like a mother hen.

"Fine, but Severus, you need to wait outside until I am done and then you can stay for only a short time, Mister Potter needs his rest." Severus left the area and Poppy went about applying the burn salve to his left arm. Once applied, she covered the area with bandages, "Don't let Professor Snape bully you, do you hear me?"

Harry smiled, "I won't."

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A few minutes after she had left, Harry saw Severus re-enter. He sat down in the chair next to his bed. Harry watched as Severus gave him the once over, his eyes stopping at his bandaged left forearm. His eyes widened and, if possible, he seemed to pale a few more shades. "It's not permanent," Harry ventured.
"Oh, Merlin! Please don't tell me that's..."

"No!" Harry interrupted quickly. He guessed what Severus had been thinking, "It's shaped a little like it, I guess, but it's just a burn. Madame Pomfrey reckons there should be no scarring, the burn salve should heal it all up."

"How?"

Harry told Severus everything that had happened in his dream, including all the pain and fear he had felt. He didn't know why he was giving Severus such a detailed account when he had only told the others the bare facts. He decided it was because Severus could sympathise with him and would understand the pain more than the others, considering both of them had been through it. When he finished talking, he was unable to hold back the tears he had been fighting since he had woken. He refused to break down into sobs but a few tears did leak down his cheeks. He immediately felt better when Severus reached out and brushed the tears away.

"I'm so sorry, Harry, that you ever had to experience something like that," he truly did sound sad and regretful.

"It's not your fault, Severus." He meant it, too. It wasn't his fault, but something was gnawing away at him and he needed to know so he decided to ask. If he wanted to try and pursue something more then friendship with this man, then there was something he needed to know. "Was it like that for you?"

He looked a little startled at the question, then he looked uncomfortable but he did answer, "Yes."

Harry sighed, "Why?"

"Why what?"

Harry knew that Severus had perfectly understood the question and was purposely avoiding it. Harry gave a heavy sigh, "Why did you join?"

He saw Severus get up to leave with a look of annoyance in his face, Harry reached out and grabbed his hand, "Please, Severus."

"It's not important and it none of your business. I do not need you judging me as well!" But he noticed Severus did not pull away from his hand.

"Severus, I won't judge you by it but I need to know."

"Why?"

"Because... because that's what friends do. They share things, they tell each other things no matter how tough it might be."

"Is that what we are, Harry, Friends?"

He was a little taken aback by that statement because, yes, that is exactly what Harry had thought, and he was hoping to, maybe, turn it into something more then friendship, if possible.
Harry answered honestly "Yes, I think so. I consider you to be one of my closest friends."

"And that is why I don't wish to tell you. I don't want to jeopardise our friendship."

He could tell Severus truly meant what he said. He really didn't want to risk their friendship but Harry knew there was not an awful lot he could say that would put it at risk. Shit, he had seen Severus at a couple of the dark revels, he knew the kind of crap he had to get involved in to keep his position as a spy from being discovered. "Please, I won't judge you by it; it was a long time ago."

"Exactly! That is why it should stay in the past. I am now paying highly for my mistakes. I do not wish to include our friendship to that very long list of regret and loss."

Harry wanted to hug him, but knew that doing so would no doubt send him running from the ward in full flight. Instead, he squeezed his hand in a reassuring gesture, "I promise you, you won't lose my friendship over anything short of me dropping dead tomorrow."

"You shouldn't say things like that."

"It was a joke, Severus."

"I am aware of that, but let's not prove the mad old cow in the North Tower to be correct at anything, all right?"

Harry smiled at him, "Okay, I promise."

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Severus sat back down again, very aware that he was still holding Harry's hand, but it was nice. He didn't want to let go and Harry seemed in no hurry to let go either. If he were going to have to speak of one of his most stupid mistakes, then it would be nice to have a little comfort while doing it, though he had no doubt that once Harry had heard the whole tale he would not feel so forgiving towards him. "Fine, but if I am to tell you I want no interruptions, or that will be the end of it. Understood?" He saw Harry nod at him and give him a warm smile. He studied that smile and committed it to memory, he wasn't sure he would ever see it again.

"There was a couple of deciding factors, as to why I decided to take Riddle's mark. I was mostly undecided as to whether it was the correct choice for me. My father wanted me to take it; he as good as beat the shit out of me when I dared to say I was unsure. He called me a coward for not following my family's destiny. He threatened to disown me. What I was unaware of at the time was that my Father had already sold me into the Dark Lord's service, for what I don't know. Probably for money or for more power, I never asked him.

"After my father had beaten me, I went to Dumbledore for advice. I asked him to possibly help me. He told me that if I chose a different path from that of the one for which I seemed distained for; he would give me sanctuary at Hogwarts but that the choice had to be mine. I had all but made up my mind not to take the mark, I knew I would lose all my friends for most of them had taken the mark or were getting ready to. It was my life I wanted to make my own money and gain my own power. Father had all but squandered the family fortune on drink and women, he had even resorted to selling the family treasures. I hated him and did not wish to be like him; I knew if I was marked, then I would start to become just like him, cold, evil and cruel."
Severus took a sip of water from the glass next to the bed, he offered some to Harry and he also took a sip. Severus was stalling. He knew he was, he didn't want to finish it, but he would. He had started his sordid tale of foolhardiness, so he would finish it and hope Harry would still be comfortable in his presence.

"I am sure your godfather and Lupin filled you in on the event that is now known as the Shrieking Shack Incident?" A small nod was given, "good, I can skip most of that. As you are aware, your father saved me. A lot of people believed I hated him for doing so, but that is not the case. I won't deny the fact that I am no fan of your father's, we absolutely did not get on, and we were never friends. But I was grateful that he pulled me out in time. I did not wish to die. It was what followed that pushed me to make my decision.

"Your father, Black, Pettigrew and I were in the headmaster's office no more then ten minutes after your father had rescued me. I was, for some reason, the one being reprimanded. I was as good as told that if I told anyone of Lupin's condition that any sanctuary I might have wanted would be taken away. I was effectively bullied into it. When I demanded Black and Pettigrew to be expelled, Dumbledore merely smiled at me and told me it was just a practical joke gone wrong and that boys would be boys and that they would be punished. They both lost 50 points each from Gryffindor and were given a week's detention, cleaning duties without magic. Potter was awarded 100 points for showing bravery in rescuing me. I was deducted 10 points for being outside the castle at night.

"I left the office in tears. I felt an injustice had been served. They had tried to kill me and I lost house points for it. When we were outside of the office, Black even laughed at me for crying. I was so angry, I felt let down by Dumbledore; it was as if he was willing to sacrifice me to the dark as long as his Gryffindor heroes were fine. Words from Lucius flooded my brain about how the Death Eaters would accept me and the Dark Lord would welcome me into his fold because I was intelligent and gifted in potions. I went straight to the owlry and owled my father to send for me that weekend so I could take the mark."

Severus finished his story and waited for Harry to yell at him for blaming his father and godfather for it all, but it did not come. He received a gentle squeeze of his hand; he looked up to see a little sadness in Harry eyes, "You don't hate me?"

"No, Severus. You were treated unfairly and I can't blame you for being hurt and angry. I would have been, too. Thank you for telling me."

All he saw was honesty in Harry eyes; he was relieved, he had not lost his friendship. It had started to mean a lot to him recently and he didn't think he could bear to lose it. "I should go, it's late and you need some rest. Goodnight, Harry."

"Goodnight, Severus." He was rewarded with a beautiful smile that made his heart melt even more; he left with a small smile on his own lips.

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Harry lay in the infirmary with silent tears running down his cheeks. He had never realised that his father and his friends had had such a horrific impact on Severus' life. He knew of the bullying but hadn't realised it had affected Severus so badly. No wonder the man had hated the name Potter and despised his godfather with a passion. He could not blame him. Harry decided that he would have to do something special for Severus so that he would no longer associate the name Potter with pain and the Headmaster was going to be the one to help him. Harry rather
thought the man owed it to Severus.

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The following morning, Harry awoke to find the Headmaster sitting next to his bed, smiling at him with his eyes set on full twinkle. Harry instantly felt some of the old aggression fire up in his system about how this kind, old man could be responsible for such betrayals as keeping life-and-death secrets from him and sacrificing Severus to the dark.

"Good morning, Harry."

"Morning, Headmaster."

"How are you feeling?"

"Fine. I was wondering if it was possible, to make an appointment to see you later today to discuss some stuff."

"Stuff, Harry?"

"Yes."

"I see. Well, why don't we talk now? As it is nearly 10.30am, you have missed the start of lessons this morning. We will not be disturbed."

"Umm okay. Now is good."

"Tea, Harry?"

"Please." With a flick of his wand, Dumbledore conjured a pot of tea and two cups. Harry was a little apprehensive; he was effectively going to be attempting to pry into a teacher's private life. He had tried this before with Dumbledore about Severus, and he was always told to mind his own business. He needed to keep his anger in check, it would not do to lose his temper in front of the Headmaster again. He doubted he would, considering the tea was laced with calming potion. Severus had tipped him off about that one.

Dumbledore poured them both tea, "Does this have anything to do with Professor Snape?" he asked.

"Why would you ask that?" Damn! Why did the man have to know everything?

"Just a guess, Harry. Madame Pomfrey told me he stayed with you for a while after we all left last night. It seems as if you two have settled your differences," his eyes were still in full twinkling mode.

Harry wanted to yell 'well, isn't that what you've always wanted?' He, instead, settled for "I want to do something for Severus. Sorry, for Professor Snape."

"It's perfectly fine, Harry. If Severus is happy for you to use his first name, then please do so."

"Okay. I want to do something for Severus, to thank him for all his help this summer and for still working on the antidote in his free time."
"I see. Yes, Severus has helped you a lot hasn't he, Harry? Considering for years he claimed not to like you."

I wonder why that is, he thought sarcastically "I know about his counter curse on my broom in my first year and that it saved my life."

"Amongst other things, yes."

"Other things?"

"Mmmm, yes"

"Such as?" Why did the man have to talk around corners and not give a straight answer? Harry was getting a little frustrated even as he grew more curious. What other things?

"He warned Professor Quirrel away from you, many times. And think back, Harry, to maybe your second year?"

"Second year?"

"Yes, and a certain professor."

Harry could only think of Lockheart, but what about the man? "I guess Severus did try to keep him away from me and exposed him to be a total fraud in the dueling club." That had been highly amusing to Harry and his friends.

"Not just that, but he went in front of the Board of School Governors to plead your innocence in the opening of the Chamber of Secrets after the dueling club incident. He stated that you could not be the heir of Slytherin because he knew who was. He risked a lot by revealing that fact because Lucius Malfoy was on the board at that time."

"Oh!" Okay, he was shocked. That was the first time he had heard that. All he knew was one minute he was facing possible suspension for all of the incidents and the next moment he was not.

"And have you really thought about your third year, Harry? Now that time has passed and the facts can be seen in clear unemotional terms?"

"Not really." Harry was starting to get a bit of a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach.

"Why do you think he went to the shack that night? Do you really believe it was to get you suspended for being off school grounds? Try and see it from his point of view."

So Harry did try. Yes, he remembered Severus bursting in and his total shock and fear at seeing Sirius who had just escaped Azkaban... Oh! Now he got it! "He thought that I, we, had been kidnapped by Sirius and Remus and he had no reason to believe or know that Sirius was innocent and meant us no harm. Also, he knew that Remus had not taken his wolfsbane potion that night."

"Indeed. So he risked his life to help you and your friends once again."
Now Harry felt not only anger but also guilt as well, not a good mixture to have first thing in the morning. "Anything else I should be aware of?"

"Do you want to try your fourth year, Harry?" His voice almost sounded amused. Harry guessed he was enjoying watching him squirm.

"Sure, why not?" Harry was resigned, now, to feeling like a total prat in his assumptions about Severus' previous behaviour.

"Can you imagine why he tried to get you disqualified from the TriWizard Tournament on no less then two occasions?"

"To protect me from getting hurt? Because I wasn't ready to participate in such an event?" Silence fell between them for a few moments. Harry was lost in thought when another scene flashed before him; when they were back in this very room after Voldemort's return. "Also, Severus risked his own personal reputation and safety when he bravely showed the returning dark mark on his arm to Fudge. God! He returned that night, didn't he? Just before the leaving feast. He disappeared for a time, that's when you asked him to return to his spying duties?" Now the anger was back. How could Dumbledore ask him to do it, to risk his life again? Surely the information he obtained was possible to get through other channels.

"Yes, it was a difficult decision to make but unfortunately in war, hard decisions must be made. The information Severus is able to obtain for us is invaluable."

"More so then his LIFE!?" Now Harry was seriously pissed off. How could Dumbledore be so dismissive?

"It was not an easy decision to make, Harry; to send Severus back to Voldemort like that. It was one of the hardest orders I have ever given. I love Severus like a son, I feel I have wronged him dearly over the years, and that I will not live to see things put right by him. I feel it has been left to long."

"Is that what you told yourself after he got the dark mark, that it was too late! You could do nothing for him?" The words were harsh and Harry did regret saying them the moment he had finished, the look on Dumbledore's face and in his eyes showed genuine sorrow and guilt.

"I can guess what you and Severus spoke about last night. For years I wondered what the deciding factor was for him to take the mark? I had my suspicions, a few educated guesses, but he would never tell me the reason why. I believe now I was correct in thinking it had something to do with me. I wish I could go back and change the past for him and make things better, but I cannot. All I can do is love him and give him my support and hope that it is enough."

Harry's anger was subsiding but it was still there. "Have you ever told him how you felt about things, about him?"

Dumbledore chuckled sadly, "Could you imagine Severus' reaction if I went up to him, threw my arms around him, and told him I loved him like a son and that I was sorry for everything I had done?"

Yes, Harry could imagine that and, yes Severus would be a little non-responsive but at least he would know. "You should try, you know."
"Maybe I will. Are you ready to rethink the actions of Severus in your fifth year?"

This was still a hard topic for Harry. "I guess he did try to help."

"Yes, Harry, he did. When Professor Umbridge gave you Veritaserum in your tea, Severus gave her nothing more powerful than water. He also understood your message regarding Sirius. He immediately contacted him to make sure he was safe and not captured by Voldemort. When he tried to find you in the forest to tell you it was nothing more then one of Voldemort's sick games, he found me and told me where you had likely gone. If it were not for Severus, you could have all died that day."

Harry now felt terrible, awash with guilt. Then he started thinking back to his battle with Voldemort last year when, mid duel, he had found himself portkeyed back to Hogwarts. "It was Severus who gave me the portkey some how, last year, wasn't it? How?"

"The Death Eaters were told to watch Voldemort duel with you. For safety, Severus carries around an emergency portkey that will bring him back to my office in case he is found out. He made it invisible and levitated it to your outstretched hand, whispered the activation word and you were gone. I believe Voldemort was not happy."

"I bet! But if he had been found out, Voldemort would have killed him. With no way to escape, he was trapped!" Horror hit Harry at the full implication of that act.

"Yes, he was willing to sacrifice his life for yours."

Harry's voice was full of shock and incredulity, "I never knew! Everything he's done. It's so much and all I have ever given him was a hard time. I just never knew..." If silence's could be deafening, this was one of them. Harry was at a loss for words.

"Was there anything else, Harry?"

"Yes. I wanted to know when Severus' birthday was and, if it was before Christmas, what should I get him? I want to get something special to say thanks."

The smile was back on Dumbledore's face and the twinkle in his eye "Severus' birthday is in the beginning of November, the 12th I believe. And what to get him? I don't know, Harry, he is very difficult to buy gifts for. My best advice is to give him something from the heart. That way, whatever you decide upon will be treasured because of the thought that had gone into it. Now it is almost lunchtime and you have afternoon lessons to be getting too; so, if that is all, I shall bid you farewell, 'till next time."

"Yes, thank you, Headmaster." Harry was a little distracted by thoughts of what to get Severus for his birthday. Dumbledore did not seem to mind as he got up and left Harry to his rumination.

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A few days later Harry was packing his things away at the end of his Defence Against the Dark Arts lesson when he was asked to stay behind by his Professor. As the classroom emptied, Harry approached his teachers' desk. "Is there a problem, sir?"

"Nothing to worry about, Mister Potter, but you haven't yet submitted a paper on what your end-of-year project will be. I need to know what you will be studying."
"Sorry, I have had my mind on other things."

"I understand you have been in hospital, Mister Potter, but you can't allow your school work to slip."

"Of course not, sir. I'm sorry. It won't happen again." Harry felt like sounding off about how would he like it if he had Voldemort swimming around in his head, but he managed to keep his temper in check.

"Do you at least have any ideas on a subject matter?"

Harry contemplated this for a moment and an evil smirk crossed his lips, he knew how to shut this prat up and get him to back off. "Yes. Morsmordre and the Dark Mark." It seemed to have worked, his Professor looked horrified. Harry just smirked at him and left the classroom. Might as well give the idiot a reason to be scared of me, Harry thought as he walked up the corridor to his next class.

**Next Chapter:** Harry plans, organises and gives Severus his birthday present. And, at long last, the first kiss!
Chapter Twelve - A Thoughtful Gift.

A gift and not just any gift, he needed the perfect gift - a gift that conveyed thanks, friendship and love. But Harry was lacking in inspiration. He had thought of everything: a watch with a nice inscription, but no, Severus already had a nice watch; furniture of some kind, but no, Severus already had all the furniture he needed; clothing was an option but it lacked the criteria Harry was looking for in his perfect gift. How did a scarf say 'I love you,' or a cloak say 'Hey, thanks for saving my life more times then I realised?' And was a shirt even capable of conveying the message of friendship? NO!

He was running out of time. On his first visit to Hogsmeade he had found nothing that had jumped out at him screaming 'Buy me I'm perfect for Severus!' Hermione had suggested books, but what book did you get the man whose personal library was every bit as large as the Hogwarts' one. He didn't even trust himself to choose an old and rare book because Severus seemed to have pots of money and would, no doubt, just buy one if he wanted to. Harry admitted to being a little curious about how Severus had gotten pots of money. He had said at one time that his Father had spent vast amounts of the family fortune and had even resorted to selling furniture and artworks to raise money; and yet Severus had only the finest of things, the best clothes, the best furniture, the best artworks, but how? Maybe Harry would one day have the guts to ask him.

That did not solve his problem of what to get! While Hermione's suggestion wasn't bad, it just wasn't right. Ron's was damn right ridiculous! Buying him some shampoo! Harry could have hexed him while he was rolling around the floor in tears from laughing too much.

"Harry?"

"Yes, Hermione?"

"Don't you think that you may be going a little over-board with this whole gift thing?"

"What makes you say that? I told you what Dumbledore told me, about how much he has helped and saved my life."

"Yes, I Know, Harry, but you could get hurt. We don't even know if Snape is gay. What happens if you make a pass at him and he's homophobic or something?"
Harry sighed, "You're right, I need to be careful; but even if he isn't gay, I still want to get him something special to say thank you."

"Mate, what about Dumbledore? Didn't he have any suggestions?"

"No help. He just told me to choose something from my heart."

"Did you ask him if, you know, if Snape was gay?"

"God, Ron! No! How embarrassing would that be?"

"Yeah, true. It would be funny though. There must be someone you can ask?"

"Yes, there should be, but who?"

"I could ask my brother, Bill. I think he went to school with him, a year or so below. He might remember if he ever saw him with a boyfriend or something."

"Ron, that's brilliant! Let's do it now, I only have a few weeks left until his birthday and the next Hogsmeade trip is in ten days." The three of them ran to the owlery at full speed to collect Hedwig and write their letter to Bill.

"What shall we write?" Ron asked, hovering over the parchment on the desk in the owlery.

"We can't just come out and ask, he might get suspicious and not tell us." Hermione was ever the practical girl while Harry and Ron were just going to put "Bill, do you know if Severus Snape is gay?" She saw the looks of confusion on their faces, sighed and took over the writing duties. After much squabbling they finally finished the letter.

Dear Bill,

We know this may be bit of a strange question to ask, but we have nowhere else to turn. We know that you were in school with Professor Severus Snape and it is about him that we are writing. One of our friends really likes him; the problem is that our friend is male, he is afraid to make a move or make a pass at Professor Snape in case he is not interested in men.

Do you know from your school days if he is indeed gay or not? We would love to put our friend's mind at rest before he makes a prat of himself.

Yours truly, Ron, Hermione and Harry.

They tied the letter to Hedwig's leg and sent her on her way. Harry had his fingers crossed for a speedy reply.

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They received their reply three day's later at breakfast; it was not what they had been hoping for.

Ron, Hermione and Harry,

First off, it is none of your business if Professor Snape had girlfriends or boyfriends at school. Secondly, if you are digging around for dirt on Professor Snape to try and play a cruel trick on
him after all he has done for you three; you WILL have ME to deal with!

Why must you kids be so cruel to him, he is just trying to do his job and walk the very thin line that his life is so dependent on? You know what I am talking about.

**LEAVE HIM ALONE OR I WILL HEX YOU ALL TO HELL, Bill.**

The three of them were speechless. This was totally not what they were expecting. They thought they would receive a simple yes or no. "Well, that was wired!"

"Yeah, Ron. I'm with you. I didn't realise your brother really even knew Severus."

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Hermione was quiet and thoughtful. It seemed a little strange to her that Bill would be so protective over a man he barely knew in school. They were a few years apart and in different houses, though they did work together for the Order. Maybe they had stuck up a friendship? But to her they were such radically different people. Bill had always been kind and sweet to her, where as Snape had been cold and sometimes a little cruel. She would have to dwell on it later when she didn't have classes to attend.

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Harry was getting desperate. Bill had been no help. His reaction had been weird to say the least, no one else was talking, and he still had no idea what to get the man. "Harry, I have been thinking about what Dumbledore said to you, about what gift to get Snape. I think, maybe, he meant you should make something, so it will be uniquely from you," Hermione was in a thoughtful mood again, Harry could tell by her facial expression.

"You could be right, Mione, but what could I make?"

"A potion of some kind?"

"Ron, are you stupid! How could I give Severus, a Potions Master, A potion! He would just say I had made it wrong!" Harry rolled his eyes at his friend.

"Well, how about jewelry. I know girl's love that stuff!"

"RON! Are you telling me you think that Severus Snape is a girl?" Ron actually seemed to pale at that.

"No. I didn't mean it like that! I meant that, you know, partners love that stuff!"

Hermione was giggling, "Ron, sometimes you fluster so easily, but you know, Harry, he does have a point. Jewelry is a nice gift to give; and if he, you know, isn't gay, then it can also be seen as a symbol of friendship."

"True, I like that idea. Wow! Ron! Recently, you have been full of good ideas! I guess for the gay thing, I'm just going to have to play it by ear and hope I don't misread any signals." Harry was frowning a little. He realised he was not good at reading signals; he almost always got them wrong.
They were rushing off down to Hogsmeade. It was a crisp, autumn morning and Harry could not wait to get to the Jewelers. He had decided that he would like a necklace or a bracelet in Severus' house colours, silver and green, which meant the metal was either to be silver, platinum or possibly titanium because it was strong and light. The gemstones would need to be jade or emeralds but if possible he wanted to get the Ruby-in-Zoisite because it was green with small flecks of red rubies in it. It would represent both of their houses.

"Harry, slow down, mate! We have all day!"

"I know, Ron, but what if I take all day to decide?"

"You better not, I have a few things I need to pick up," Ron whined.

"You don't have to come along, you know."

"What, and let you miss out on my genius? I'm on a roll at the moment!" Harry and Hermione rolled their eyes at their friend's statement.

After a short while, they arrived at the end of the main street to find two jewelers next door to each other.

"So, which one should we go in?" Ron asked.

"Both," Harry simply said and he entered the smaller of the two shops.

"Can I help you? Oh, you're Harry Potter!" Harry hid his grimace; he hated being recognised. Maybe he should not have worn his glasses today. But then again, he wasn't ready for the world to know he didn't need them any longer. It was better this way, when he left school he could blend into a crowd.

"No, it's okay. I'm just looking." Harry turned so he could start looking at all the shelves in detail; Ron was getting fidgety and now the sale girl kept staring at him. "No, I'm fine, thank you."

"Harry, over here!" Hermione called from across the shop. Harry went over to her.

"Did you find something?"

"Kind of, look at this." She pointed to a beautiful platinum chain. It had a look of a fine rope about it and, if you looked real close at it, you could see a delicate gold thread running through it. "Harry, I think this is definitely a man's chain, and if you wanted to you could hang a pendent
She was right, the chain was exquisite, he wanted some kind of pendant on it and it would hang from this chain beautifully. He still had to check out the other shop, but he didn't want to lose this chain. "Excuse me," he looked towards the sales witch.

"Yes, Mister Potter?"

"Would it be possible to put this chain to one side, while I visit some other shops?"

"Of course, Mister Potter, anything for you."

Harry just rolled his eyes. "Thank you."

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The three of them left the shop and entered the one next door. This jeweler was more orientated towards rings, which was something Harry was trying to avoid. "May I help you, sirs and madam?" The three of them turned to find themselves face to face with a stern looking older wizard.

"Yes, I'm looking for pendants or necklaces designed for men. Do you have anything like that?"

The stern looking wizard eyed them carefully, his gaze did linger a little longer on Harry as he recognised him, "Follow me," and so they did.

He showed them an array of necklaces, chains and pendants, but nothing grabbed Harry's attention. The sales wizard also seemed to pick up on this. "Sir we do offer another service which might suit your needs, but it is expensive."

This got Harry's attention, "What? Money's not a problem."

"We offer a service which allows you to design a gem of your choice into any shape you like, but I warn you, it is expensive."

Harry grinned; this is what he had been looking for, something special and something unique. "Any shape or design I want?"

"Yes, Sir. Do you have something in mind?"

Harry thought hard then grinned, "Yes, I want a Ruby-in-Zoisite shaped like a lightning bolt, the pendant is to be encased in platinum. I want it to match a particular chain."

The sales wizard looked a little perplexed at Harry request. "And do you have the chain with you?"

"Oh, I'll be back in five minutes." Harry ran from the shop at full pelt with Ron and Hermione hot on his heels.

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They caught up with him in the shop next door buying the chain they had found earlier. "It's a
beautiful chain, Mister Potter, whoever is going to receive this wonderful gift from you is very lucky." Harry knew she was fishing for details, he felt like telling her to piss off and try another fool, but held his tongue and smiled. "That Mister Potter will be eighty Galleons."

"I'd like to pay by bank draft, please."

"No problem." She handed Harry the form to fill out that would be sent to Gringotts. When they authorized it they would send his perchance to him via owl. He paid the extra one Galleon for fast delivery. But he needed the chain now, to create his pendent. So he was going to do something he promised he would never do, use his fame to get what he wanted. He did the whole thing, smiling seductively at her, paying her compliments and the 'you do know who I am routine' and the 'I promise that I won't run away and not pay, you can find me at Hogwarts if you want.' It seemed to work. She handed him the chain, and told him she would be in touch to send him his half of the bank draft.

"Harry, I can't believe you just did that! It was a gross misconduct of power. To use who you are, just to get something quicker!" Hermione was in a little bit of a huff with him.

"Yeah, but it worked, didn't it?" Ron was laughing; he thought the whole thing was hilarious. "If she was stupid enough to fall for it then it's her tough luck. I mean, 'Mione, Harry just spent eighty Galleons on a chain for a man! It doesn't take a genius to work it out. She just believed what she wanted to!" Harry was actually quite impressed with Ron's reasoning. Maybe he really was growing up at long last.

"Well, I guess you are right and it was funny that she fell for it." Hermione was trying to contain her smile.

"Just one thing mate, what's a Ruby-in-Zoiscite?" Ron asked.

"It's an emerald with ruby etchings in it. You'll see, it's quite beautiful." Harry replied.

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They returned to the shop next door to finish up the creating of the pendant. "This is the chain I want the platinum on the pendent to match." Harry handed the chain to the sales wizard.

"Nice, I can see Sir has good taste. Now back to the shape of the gem, you say you want it to look like a lightning bolt?"

"Yes," Harry held up his fringe to show what shape he wanted exactly. The sales wizards eyes widened slightly, first in surprise then in understanding.

"I see, sir. This friend of yours must mean a lot to you, to give something so personal."

"Yes, he is very special to me." The four of them got to work designing and picking out the correct jewel. Harry was really happy with the final outcome. They had managed to get the metal outlining the Ruby-in-Zoiscite to match the chain exactly with a few aging charms. It took them nearly two hours to make it perfect.

"Sir, all of that comes to one hundred and thirty seven Galleons and six Sickles and four knuts."

Ron paled at hearing the cost, Hermione whistled, Harry just grinned. He didn't care how much
it cost; it was perfect. "Is banker's draft alright?"

"Of course, sir." He handed Harry the forms to fill out.

***

A few days later the finished present arrived via owl. The three of them rushed upstairs to get a good look at it in private. "Harry, it's simply beautiful. I just know Professor Snape is going to love it. It's so romantic."

Harry and Ron just looked at each other; they knew Hermione had gone off on one of her 'nice, fluffy, perfect world' trances. "Harry, you realise how much pressure you have put me under for Christmas now, don't you?" Ron whispered to him. Harry giggled.

"Hermione, I was wondering if you knew anything about protection charms?"

"A little, why?"

"I was thinking of casting a few charms on it for protection, like the one Luna gave me but stronger."

"Oh! That is so sweet, Harry! I never realised how much of a romantic you were. Ron, maybe you should take some lessons from Harry. I'll have a look in the library for you during lunch."

***

Because of Hermione's research, Harry found himself knocking on Professor Dumbledore's office. She had discovered that if powerful enough wizards placed the correct charms on a jewel it could actually protect you from all harmful spells and hexes, just like the charm of love his mother had protected him with. He had already asked Hermione and Ron to place a protection spells on it. He choose Hermione because she was clever and powerful, and Ron because of his courage and friendship. He wanted to ask Dumbledore, also, because he knew he cared about Severus. He entered the office to find it empty, he had learnt not to touch things but he wanted to wait until he returned, so he sat in one of the chairs by his desk to keep his hands to himself.

"Something on your mind, Potter?"

Harry spun around at the voice he had heard. It belonged to the sorting hat. It had been a while since they had last spoke, almost a year. He liked the hat; sometimes it could come out with some real gems. "Hello, how's it going?"

"Well you know, Potter, same old thing. Trying to come up with a new song for next year. Passing on the odd bit of information to those that are wise enough to listen. You?"

"The usual, classes and quidditch."

"But I can tell there is something else."

"It's kind of personal."

"And who would I tell?" Harry reasoned that the hat had never betrayed his confidence before, so he took it from the shelf, sat down and plopped it on his head. "Ah, a matter of the heart," a
"Tell me about it. I don't even know if he, well, you know?"

"Yes, I can see. That is not what will cause you problems. I remember being put on his head when he was just eleven years old. So intelligent and powerful, full of potential, like you it was difficult to decide. But I can see that he has told you all about that."

"Do you mean that he is...?"

"Yes, he would have no problems with you being male," Harry could not keep the stupid grin off his face. "But don't celebrate yet, Potter. He is a complex individual, very private. He will be hard work to win over. He always was afraid to let people get to close, for fear of rejection, just like you. In fact, you have many similarities. You would be a good team if you were to get together."

"Thanks."

"Don't thank me yet, you have an uphill battle ahead of you. I believe our time is up, we have an audience."

Harry removed the hat to see Dumbledore watching him from behind his desk, smiling at him. "Sorry, sir."

"No need to apologise, Harry. You looked deep in conversation, so I did not wish to disturb you. How may I help you today, Harry?" Harry went on to explain about the gift he had gotten Severus and how he was hoping that he might place a protection charm on it, to make it more powerful.

"A splendid gift, Harry. I knew that if you put your mind to it you would come up with something special. I would be happy to place a protection charm on it!" He placed the necklace in front of him and raised his wand above it and chanted a string of words Harry had never heard before. Harry could feel the magic in the air. He knew Dumbledore was powerful and cared for Severus a lot, so his charm would have extra power in it. When he finished the emerald seemed to glow a little for a while, Harry could feel the power flowing through it. "Might I suggest a few others that might be able to help you?"

Harry hadn't really thought of asking anyone else, not knowing who Severus was friends with, but the more powerful the charm the better. "Of course, Professor."

"Why don't you pop along to see Professor McGonagall and Professor Flitwick, I believe they could help you also."

Harry never imagined them to be friends, but then again Severus was just one big mystery to him. "Thank you, sir."

***

Harry knocked on Professor McGonagall's office door. "Enter," Harry entered the office, and sat at one of the chairs she had pointed to. "What can I do for you tonight, Mister Potter?"

"A bit of a favour," he was a little worried of asking her to do this. What if she twigged to his
feelings? He would die of embarrassment.

"Go on, Mister Potter, I won't bite." Harry got out the necklace and explained what he wanted from her and that it was Dumbledore who had suggested that he come and see her. At first she looked a little startled about such a gesture, especially from him to Severus; but she placed the charm on the necklace, and again it was a powerful one. Harry could feel it. He never realised that McGonagall even liked Severus.

"I had heard that you and Severus were getting along better now, but I didn't realise it was this well?" She was pointing to the slightly glowing necklace.

"Professor Dumbledore made me see how much he has done for me over the years, what he has done this summer and he is still working on the antidote for me. For all of that, I think it is the least I could do to say thank you."

"I see. Well, it was about time that you two had buried the hatchet, and not in each other's heads, I might add."

Harry smiled, "Thank you, Professor. I didn't realise you were friends with Professor Snape, either."

"I have known Severus since he was eleven, he kind of grows on you." They both laughed at that. "Might I suggest you visit Professor Flitwick, he and Professor Snape are good friends."

Harry nodded and left her office and headed to the Ravenclaw wing of the castle, in search of Professor Flitwick.

***

Harry entered his office after being granted admittance. "Good evening, Professor. I was wondering if I could ask you a favour?"

"Of course, Mister Potter, take a seat and tell me what's on your mind." Harry once again went into his tale of the necklace, about the charm he wanted to place on it, and why he was doing this for Severus, for he knew the small wizard would wonder why. Professor Flitwick was happy to oblige and cast his own very powerful protection charm over it.

"Might I make one small suggestion?"

"Please do."

"This is a beautiful piece of jewelry, Mister Potter, and now it is very powerful. If certain people were to see it, they might wonder why Professor Snape is wearing a symbol of Harry Potter, when he is meant to be working for the bad guys to plan your downfall." Harry immediately realised what he was getting at, if Voldemort was to see it he would wonder why? Harry paled, why hadn't he thought about this? His internal berating was interrupted.

"Mister Potter, there is a way around this problem. It is called the Giver and Receiver Only Charm. It is designed to only allow the giver and receiver to see the gift. He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named will not be able to break this charm, as it is only breakable by the giver of the gift. I believe this will solve your little dilemma."

"Thank you, Professor, you're a life saver!" Harry smiled at him bid him good night and
returned to his dorm, to cast his own final protection charm on the jewel.

***

Hermione and Ron were waiting for him; they ran to Hermione's private room. "Spill, we want details now. What took you so long?" Hermione was pacing in front of her desk.

"I also went to see McGonagall and Flitwick, they cast really powerful charms over it. Here feel." Harry handed them the necklace. They were both in awe of the power radiating from it. "All I have to do now is cast my charm. Oh, and Flitwick gave me another charm to cast over it so nobody can see it, except Severus and me. You know, so Voldemort won't see it."

They both shivered at that name. "That's a good idea that Professor Flitwick gave you. We should have thought of that."

"Don't worry, 'Mione, it all worked out in the end!" Harry grinned at her. He set the necklace down in front of him on the desk and pulled out his wand and concentrated on all his feelings for Severus. "Amor ac Servo," with a flick of his wand over the jewel, his charm was cast. The emerald glowed brightly for a moment. He set about casting the second charm so only he and Severus would be able to see it. "Tantum Donatus Recipero Emin Aspicio Harry Potter Donatus Severus Snape Recipero." The charm was cast and the necklace disappeared from Hermione and Ron's vision, they both gasped.

"Harry, is it still there?"

"Yes, Hermione, I can see it perfectly well." He smiled. Yes, things were definitely going to work out.

***

It was around 10:30pm and it was November twelfth; Harry was under his invisibility cloak outside Severus' office door. The light was still on so Harry guessed he was still in there. The corridor was clear but he was so nervous that he was afraid to knock on the door. After nearly ten minutes of hanging around, Harry decided enough was enough and he gathered all his Gryffindor courage and knocked. The door opened, "I wondered how long it would be before you actually knocked," the tone was very dry. Harry was glad to be under his cloak because he was blushing, again.

Harry entered the office and walked over to the desk. He removed his cloak. "Sorry, I didn't want to disturb you." Harry saw nothing wrong in saying a little white lie to save him from further embarrassment.

"Indeed. And what, may I ask, is so important that you are out of bed? After curfew again, I might add." There was a definite smirk on his lips.

"Sorry, but it couldn't wait until tomorrow, otherwise it would be too late." Harry was wishing away the butterflies in his stomach, every time he looked at Severus he had this same reaction, especially since his talk with the sorting hat. Right now the light was low in the office, which Harry was grateful for, for it hid his slightly red stained cheeks a bit. Severus looked as gorgeous as ever to him, he really liked the dishevelled look on the man. It was a shame he only allowed a very select few see it. Harry was glad he was one of them. His hair was a mess; his jacket was unbuttoned as was the top of his un-tucked shirt. Harry thought the necklace would
look nice resting against the hollow of his neck.

"Are you actually going to tell me what was so vitally important that it would be to late to wait until tomorrow? Or are you just going to stand and stare at me all night?"

Harry rather liked the idea of just standing and watching him all night, but guessed he should choose the first option. "Ha ha, very funny, Severus. If I didn't know you better, I would say you almost cracked a joke."

"Then it's a good thing that you do, as no one would ever believe you."

Severus sat back down in his chair; Harry went around to his side of the desk and leaned back against it in front of Severus. "Chairs were designed for sitting on, Harry, not the edges of desks." Harry rolled his eyes and smiled at Severus.

"I have something for you." Harry pulled out the necklace's case from up his jumper and handed it to Severus. "This is to say a massive thank you for everything and, of course, Happy Birthday!" Harry grinned at the slightly shocked expression on Severus face.

***

Happy Birthday? How did he know? Albus! Interfering old coot, was all Severus could think. It didn't happen often, but right now he was shocked. Not many people acknowledged his birthday; just Albus, Minerva, Hagrid and Filius and now, it seemed, Harry. Outstretched in Harry's hand before him was a black velvet box tied up with a red and gold ribbon. He just raised an eyebrow at the choice of ribbon colour. He reached out and accepted the gift. "Thank you," was all he could say. Yes, shocked was the word all right!

"Your welcome, Severus," Harry was still grinning at him.

Severus could feel the power radiating from the box and he was a little apprehensive to open it. Curiosity was getting the better of him, what could Harry have gotten him? He untied the ribbons and lifted the lid of the case. Merlin! His mind screamed. Whatever he had been expecting it definitely was not this. It was beautiful. A platinum rope chain with a thread of gold running through it and a pendant of Ruby-in-Zoisite hanging from it that had been charmed. Green and silver mixed with a little red and gold. He noticed the shape of the jewel, and couldn't help but smirk. He held back the desire to say 'are you branding me, Mister Potter?'

He guessed the boy had spent a great deal of time and money on this item, the chain looked antique and he thought that one of his usual snarky comments would be inappropriate. He was stunned as to why Harry would go to such trouble for him. He knew the boy had, at one point, a bit of a crush on him. But then again, from the only other time he had been involved as such with a Gryffindor, apart from the friendships with his colleagues, he had found them to be terribly sentimental. "Thank you, Harry. It is beautiful, but it really is to much."

"No, it's not, not for everything you have done for me."

"Harry, I have done no more then was expected of me." Severus was a little uncomfortable at the direction the conversation was taking. He didn't really have much of a reason for looking out for Harry all these years, he just did. After the boy's first year to repay his debt to his father, it had just become like a bad habit to pull Harry out of dangerous situations.
"Here, let me." Severus watched as Harry lifted the necklace out of its case and lean towards him. He was incredibly conscious of how close Harry was to him at that moment. As he leaned in towards him and clasped the necklace around his neck it felt like the power from the charms was infusing with his body, for an instant he felt protected and loved. It was a most unusual feeling.

Harry continued talking to him, "Green is the colour that represents money, prosperity, employment, fertility, healing and growth. Also it is meant to be pacifying, refreshing and calming. It is suggested that wearing jewelry with green gemstones will cool, soothe, and calm you, both physically and mentally. Wearing green is said to be an aphrodisiac. The red in the stone is meant to enhance the wearer's energy, strength, and health. It also represents the wearers' sex, passion, courage and protection. Also they are both the two main colours from our houses."

Severus was at a loss for words. Then something dawned on him, "I can't wear it. What if the Dark Lord were to see it? It's a little obvious whom it's from." He couldn't keep the smirk from his lips.

"That's okay, Severus, it's charmed so only you and I can see it. The Dark Lord and the student's will be none the wiser of its existence." He felt Harry's fingers trace the chain around his neck, then trace up his neck to his jaw and stroke the side of his face.

Severus was holding his breath, he was almost afraid to move, to break the spell both of them were under at that moment. The next thing he was aware of was a soft pair of lips against his. Initially, shock ran through him. Harry Potter was kissing him, Severus Snape! This was not meant to be happening. Harry was the world's saviour and he was a man that moved in shadow, through the underworld of crime and evil. But he was only a man, only human, and it was hard to resist such sweetness when given to you so freely. The kiss was soft and gentle, and, Severus guessed, it was one of inexperience. As Harry started to pull back from him, Severus noticed a small shy smile grace those sweet lips and a slight blush grace his cheeks. It was as if he had no control over his actions, it was like being trapped in their own private world. He reached out his right hand and cupped Harry's warm cheek, and his thumb gently swept over his lips. Harry's longer hair was tickling his fingers, but he paid it no mind, their gaze was locked on one another. Severus started to rise from his chair, all the time not loosing physical contact with Harry's face. When he was fully standing, he leaned down to Harry to recapture his lips, in a real kiss.

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As soon as Harry had initiated the first kiss, he felt a jolt of electricity shoot right through his spine, his blood felt as if it were on fire. When he pulled back he was afraid Severus would hex him or at least yell at him to get out and leave him alone. He did not expect Severus to reach out and touch his face in such a gentle, caring manner. As Severus rose from his seat, Harry's breath hitched in his throat and he almost passed out from longing when Severus leaned down and captured his lips again in what Harry could only describe as a real kiss. As their lips met, he felt Severus' tongue skim along his lower lip, he couldn't hold back the quiet moan that escaped from his chest. He opened his mouth, allowing him entrance. Harry felt Severus' tongue slide along his and the sensation almost blew his mind. He had never been kissed like this before. As the kiss deepened, he felt Severus' fingers slide further around his head as his other arm snaked around his waist. He was glad for the desk he was leaning on; otherwise he would have hit the floor in a big puddle. As it was, he was hanging on to Severus' shirt for dear life.
He felt himself being gently pushed down onto the desk and he heard papers and inkpots hit the floor. He moaned as Severus broke the kiss from his lips and continued along his jaw and down his neck. His back arched, his body desperate for more contact. The hand that was around his waist was travelling up his torso. Harry was in heaven, lost in a world of new sensations. Then it all came to a stop.

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Severus suddenly came to his senses. It dawned on him what he was about to do and where he was, in his office no less. He should not have a student spread out before him on his desk. It was not proper behaviour for a Professor. He pulled away from Harry and helped him up; he was waiting for the fallout from his actions. Harry might have kissed him first, but he had taken it further. What the boy did shocked him for the second time that night. He placed a chaste kiss on his cheek and smiled that beautiful smile at him.

"Goodnight, Severus, and Happy Birthday."

"Goodnight, Harry."

Harry put his invisibility cloak back on and left the office. Severus sat back in his seat and let out a huge sigh. He stared at the door that Harry had just left through. He couldn't keep the smile from his lips. "Insufferable brat," he mumbled to himself and with a snort of laughter he left his office for the night.

**Next Chapter:** There's a breakthrough with the antidote; Voldemort gets a clue and calls a meeting. Severus and Harry have a discussion about Voldemort.

**Latin Translation:**

*Amor ac Servo - Love / affection and to watch over and protect.*

*Tantum Donatus Recipero Emin Aspicio - Only giver and receiver may see / gaze at.*
Harry ran back up to his dorm. He was on cloud nine; his first kiss with Severus was beyond perfect. It was everything he had dreamed it would be and more, to him it had been magical. Perfect. Shame Severus stopped it though, he thought to himself. As he entered the common room, he was not surprised to see Ron and Hermione waiting on the couch for him. Hermione grinned at him. "Details now!"

"We kissed, it was perfect!" He could see Ron trying his hardest not to look sick at the thought of kissing Snape. He just smiled; he was in too good a mood to let anything bother him.

"Oh, my God! Harry! That's huge! Was he a good kisser? Was he gentle? Did he like his gift?"

"Mione, calm down! Let the man answer!"

"Sorry, Ron. Harry, I'm just rally excited and happy for you."

"It's okay, I'm way too happy to let anything bother me right now," the huge grin on his face was testament to that. "Severus is a fantastic kisser! I kissed him first, but it was only a small kiss. Then he kissed me back and wow is all I can say. Yes, he was gentle and, yes, he liked his gift. He is wearing it right now."

Hermione let out what can only be described as an excited squeal. Ron just rolled his eyes. "Can we go to bed now, Mione? It's late and Harry has given you all the details."

"Oh, Ron, you're no fun."

"Sorry, but if you call wanting to know details about how Snape kisses fun, then you're stranger then he is." Ron pointed to Harry, it was said in jest because he was smiling at his best friend.

"Ron's right. It's late and I'm going to bed to have sweet dreams about Severus." Harry got up
and headed towards the stairs. He heard Hermione tell Ron that she thought Harry was really sweet. Harry rolled his eyes and went to bed.

***

In hindsight Harry knew something was going to go wrong, he was too happy. Even though Severus and he had not been alone since the kiss, he knew he was on the man's mind. He could feel Severus watching him in the dinning hall and he caught a glimpse of the necklace around his neck. That made Harry really happy, even double potions was not bad. Yes, Severus had been snarky and mean to all the Gryffindors, but it was all part of the act. He was starting to find his comments incredibly funny, especially the one where Ron had found the courage to backtalk Severus in class. The class had collectively held its breath awaiting the punishment Ron would receive. Severus had born down on him and, in a dangerous low voice that made Ron visibly gulp, he dealt out the punishment.

"Fifty points from Gryffindor for being an insolent little snot, Mister Weasley. Five nights entertainment for Filch, I'm sorry did I say entertainment for Filch? I meant detention WITH Filch for the next five nights and a three-foot parchment on why it is not a good idea to question ME about my marking technique. For your information, your girlfriend's potion is flawed, not perfect as you claim. The colour is wrong, as is the consistency. You should be more worried about your own grades and leave your girlfriend to worry about hers."

Ron had grumbled non-stop for an hour after class about how Harry needed to go to St. Mungos for mental health treatment for liking such an evil git. Harry though that it was rather funny but he had the brains not to tell Ron that that what he thought. Apart from that, things were going well. Harry was happy. As he realised before, he was too happy. One night he headed to the dungeons to ask Severus if he could make some more pepper-up potion for himself, as his stock pile was running low and he didn't want to go back to what it was like at the beginning of the school year. He knocked on Severus' office door.

"Enter."

Harry entered and closed the door behind him, this was the first time they had been alone since the kiss and he was a little nervous. "Professor Snape, I was wondering if I could make some more pepper-up potion? I'm running a little low."

Severus looked up from his desk and regarded him through his curtain of hair. "You know where everything is," he gestured to the classroom, "Try not to blow anything up, Mister Potter. Filch just had Mister Weasley do a wonderful cleaning job on the room." An evil, twisted sneer graced his lips. Harry sniggered; he had learnt years ago it was not a good thing to backtalk to Severus in class. The punishment was always harsh.

***

When Harry was putting the finishing touches to his potion, Severus entered the room in a flurry of robes. Harry was impressed, he really must ask him one day how he did that. He was casting a critical eye over Harry's cauldron. "Not bad."

"Was that a compliment?"

Severus raised an eyebrow at him, "Don't get used to it."
As if he ever would, he just rolled his eyes at Severus. "I see you are fully back."

"Back?"

"Yes, back to being snarky, evil potions master."

"Ah, he never went anywhere, he was always here. I am not a nice man, Harry. I have told you that before. I just like to relax at home, also not having to teach hundreds of dunderheads helps." Harry was laughing; it was true. But he didn't believe the part about not being a nice man. Harry thought he was perfectly nice, just a little difficult to take. Suddenly it felt as if a lead weight had dropped in his stomach and bile was climbing up his throat as an evil desire swelled in his gut. He must have paled; Severus was at his side helping him to sit down.

"Harry?"

"MOVE!" Harry yelled at him, while pushing him out the way. He ran to the sink and threw up. He could feel Severus' hands stroking comforting patterns on his back. He helped him back to his seat.

"Do you want something for the nausea?"

"No, I'm fine. I just need a minute." Harry was handed a glass of water, which he took gratefully.

"I should take you to the hospital wing."

"There is no need."

"Harry, it is not normal to vomit for no reason."

"There was a reason it was Volde... the Dark Lord."

"The Dark Lord?"

"Yes, I need to see Dumbledore now!" Severus helped him from the chair and to the Headmaster's office.

***

As Severus was helping Harry to Albus' office, his mind was racing a hundred miles an hour. What could have made Harry vomit so violently? He knew he felt pain through his scar, but had never heard of this reaction before. A few of the students wandering the corridors gave them funny looks as they passed, after all it was not everyday you saw the school's resident evil one helping the school's resident good one. But a few well-placed glares made sure none of them were stupid enough to approach and ask if they needed help. They reached the office, said the password and were granted admittance.

"Severus, Harry, whatever is wrong?"

"I don't know, Albus. Harry was in the potions classroom with me when he turned pale and vomited. He insisted on seeing you."
"Harry?" the Headmaster was obviously worried.

"Sorry, sir. I just need a moment."

"Of course. Tea?" Severus nodded, hell he could do with a calming potion just now and Harry was looking a little dazed. Severus didn't like that look on Harry. It was, quite frankly, a little eerie. He was about to place the teacup to his lips when Harry made a grab for it shouting some nonsense about it not being safe. Both he and Albus were a little shocked. "Harry, you know, I would never hurt Severus!" Albus seemed a little upset that Harry would think such a thing.

"I know, sir. It's not that. It's Voldemort."

"Harry, Voldemort had not gotten into my tea supply." Albus said calmly. Severus had to hold himself in check not to laugh at that. Yes, the Dark Lord was a sneaky bastard and poisoning was a very Slytherin technique, but to kill the great Albus Dumbledore that way would look bad for him. People would believe him a coward, not capable of taking him in a fight. No, if he was to kill Albus it had to be in a real fight, he had to try and prove he was the stronger wizard. Fat chance, Severus thought. Yes, he was very powerful, but Albus was more so. He had been playing with dark wizards before the Dark Lord was even born.

"I know, but Voldemort will probably summon Severus tonight. He needs all his wits about him and calming potion will not help."

Okay, that had Severus attention, "How do you know this?"

"What happened down in the classroom was that I was feeling what he was feeling. The reason I was sick was because it was like undiluted evil. He has discovered something. I don't know what, but it pleased him greatly. He will want to gloat, and who better to do it to then his inner circle."

That made sense, but what could he have discovered? A heavy uncomfortable silence filled the room while each of them contemplated what could have made the evil man so happy. Severus had work to be getting on with; he couldn't sit here all evening pondering whether he was going to be called tonight or not. "If you will excuse me, I believe I have reached an important point in my research regarding Harry's antidote." He got up and left.

***

Back in his private labs, Severus tried to put Harry's warning out of his mind. He didn't have the time to contemplate what if's. Not right now, he was close to something. He could feel it, all his instincts told him he was on the right track. He had books and parchment piled all over the place, and test tubes and cauldrons everywhere showing how much work he had put into this antidote. He sat staring at the original sample he had managed to get at one of the Dark Lord's meetings. It wasn't totally useless even though it had been contaminated with dirt from the floor he had scraped it from, but it hadn't really told him anything he hadn't been expecting. He heard a tapping at his door, he guessed it to be an owl and, after opening it, he discovered he was right. He untied the parchment.

Dear Severus,

Thank you for this month's wolfsbane Potion. The improvements you have made were astounding, I felt so much better in the morning, less aches and pains. Thank you again for all
your time and effort.

Remus Lupin.

He rewarded the owl and it flew out of his office, not without knocking over three containers. Blasted animal, Severus thought.

But like many great potion inventions, they were discovered by accident. When all things seem lost, sometimes a spill, or a miss-measurement can bring about desired results. This time, it was due to a clumsy owl. Severus jumped up to try to stop the vials from entering his experiments. He stopped two from mixing, but the third spilled right into his cauldron. Severus groaned, it wasn't a tragedy, he was going to experiment with the fluxweed next, but it was definitely an inconvenience to not be able to measure the correct amount and time things correctly. He stopped his internal cringe when the fluxweed started to have a severe reaction in the potion. It was bubbling madly. It was going to blow so he did what any self-respecting Slytherin in his situation would do... he ran!

The lab door slammed behind him as he heard the resulting explosion. He grinned wildly, it had been so obvious and he had been blind not to see it. Warding his door heavily so no student could get in, he, Severus Snape, ran for the second time that day, and running did not happen much in his life, all the way to the Headmaster's office.

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Severus barged in without knocking, "Albus I must speak with you immediately."

"Of course, my boy, is it private?"

"What?"

"He means do you want me to leave, Severus?"

"Minerva!"

"Well done, Severus! You are correct."

Severus threw his best scowl in her direction, "Shouldn't you be out chasing vermin or something?"

"I have no need to when all you have to do is glare at them, and they go scampering back to the Forbidden Forest."

"Children."

"Children!" Both Severus and Minerva chorused together.

"Well, if you insist on acting like them..."

"Albus, I am no child. I am old enough to be that boy's mother." She pointed indicating Severus.

Severus had a shocked look on his face, "Merlin, forbid!"
"That is enough. Now, Severus, whatever is the matter?" Albus enquired, knowing that if it were private he would indicate it to him to politely ask Minerva to leave.

"I have it, the antidote. But..." he added seeing the excited faces of his colleges, "I can not make and administer it now. I initially failed to take the date it was made into account. It was brewed on the Summer Solstice. As you are aware of, many things of a magical nature have altered results if done injudiciously on either solstice or on either equinox. If it had been made any other time, I could make the antidote immediately, but the batch Potter was poisoned with was affected by this factor and I cannot make it at this time."

"When do you believe you can make the antidote and when will it be safe for Harry to take it?" Albus asked.

"To counteract the effects of the Summer Solstice on the potion, I would have to brew the antidote on the astrologically opposite day, which would be the winter, or Yule, Solstice. As it is now late November, we only have a few weeks to wait. I would then have to put a preservation spell on it to keep its potency until the next Summer Solstice. At that time, Mister Potter can take the antidote. Unfortunately, the physical effects of the original potion will not wear off until his next birthday. After that, Mister Potter should be back to his normal, annoying Gryffindor age."

"But, Severus, that is next year!" Minerva exclaimed.

"And how long did it take you to work that one out?" If the tone had been any dryer she would have been in need of water. She just glared at him, like she did when he was in school.

Albus chose to ignore them both, "Well done, Severus! I knew you would do it. I'm sure Harry will be delighted to be his natural age again."

"Yes, I'm sure he..." Severus stopped speaking with a sharp intake of breath. The clutching of his left arm left no doubt as to what was happening in the other professors' minds. "I must go."

"Take care, my boy. And come home safely." Albus looked worried. Who wouldn't be after Harry's warning earlier in the day? Minerva just looked pale and worried. He had no time to think about it; he had to get a move on. The Dark Lord waits on no one.

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After bowing and scraping at the evil wizard's feet, Severus took his place. Harry was right; he did look immensely pleased about something. No doubt he would find out soon.

"I have some exciting news, a discovery that will quicken our war efforts; something that will speed up my eventual victory over the tainted and un-pure. Avery, fetch my surprise."

They were all waiting for the revelation of the 'surprise.' Severus had a feeling this was going to be bad on a catastrophic level. Anything that made the Dark Lord appear to be bouncing in excitement was never good, in any way! Avery led in a shackled youth of about nineteen or twenty into the room. Severus did not recognise him, which was a little unusual. He rarely forgot past students, especially ones that would have only graduated a year or two ago. He may have gone to one of the foreign schools. The young man was not just crying, he was bawling like a child and his mannerisms were a little odd. Severus had seen grown men cry in the Dark Lord's presence before, but this was over the top.
"Splendid! Is he not?" The Dark Lord asked. He was met with a puzzled silence. This just made him laugh. It was an evil sound, not pleasant at all. "I see I shall have to explain. This child was only ten years old when he came into my possession yesterday." Quite murmuring broke out throughout the dining room. Severus' heart beat loudly in his chest. **FUCK!** His mind was screaming. How had he found out, he had presumed the potion was all gone with the test tube he had witnessed being smashed. How wrong he was.

"Silence." All talking stopped, "This brat was given the wrong poison by one of my lower ranking Death Eaters and left to die. Imagine my shock when, this afternoon while taking a walk through my cellar, I find the brat not only not dead but ten years older as well! Imagine the possibilities, I could swell my ranks with children whom had been given this potion, after all, do not all children wish to grow up faster? Ha! I will take unwanted children from orphanages and children's homes and train them up to be loyal to me before they have had a chance to have their opinions formed and influenced by Dumbledore! They would be the perfect vanguard for my army. They will decimate the enemy. Any losses among them will be no great loss to ME for I can create however many I need whenever I need. When they have annihilated the enemy, I will take over the wizarding world with my loyal followers at my side!"

Cheering was quickly spreading through the room; Severus wanted to follow Harry's example and throw up. His worst nightmare was coming true, innocent children used as the ultimate disposable solider.

"However, there is one thing I am interested to know and, Severus, perhaps you could tell me the answer? After all are you not my spy in Hogwarts?"

Severus bowed his head. Shit, he knew what was coming and it was going to hurt. "My Lord?"

"If the potion had this effect on this brat, then why the hell does Potter look seventeen? It was the same potion, Severus."

"I don't know, my Lord, Dumbledore only tells me so much and Potter looks the same to me." He knew it was not a good enough answer.

"He must have changed. Otherwise, why would he run to that old fool in the summer? Yes, I believe Potter has changed and you should have been aware of it, Severus!" The anger was building.

Severus gritted his teeth as he mentally prepared for the punishment he knew was not far away. "I am most sorry, my Lord."

"Some mistakes can be rectified, Severus, and this is one of them. But you will have to be punished; I cannot show favouritism. Crucio." He was braced for the pain so when it came it was not too much of a shock to his system. He could also feel the necklace Harry had given him take the edge off it. But it still hurt like hell and caused his nose to bleed and his knee hurt from his crashing to the floor on it.

A minute later, "Get up Severus." He did as he was told, though he was a little shaky. "The reason I did not punish you as severely as I should have is that I had, unfortunately, killed that young potion brewer from Italy so he is unable to reproduce the potion for me. But with your skills, Severus, I know you CAN reproduce its effects for me."
"Of course, my Lord, it is an honour to serve."

"Excellent." He handed Severus a vial of the potion. "I expect it in a few weeks for our first raid on an orphanage." The glint in his eye was pure evil as was the smile on his twisted lips. "Oh and, Severus, this brat will need to be killed, he knows too much. You will have that honour, I know you don't have as much blood thirst as you used to, but it's always good to keep your hand in, don't you agree?"

"Yes, my Lord." Severus stepped towards the man-child and raised his wand, he would have given anything not to have to do this to yet another innocent child but he had no choice. Albus had to find out what the Dark Lord's plans were and, if he refused, he would be killed and another brewer found to make the potion and Albus would not find out until it was too late. Sacrifice the one to save the many, he chanted in his head. "Avada Kedavra." The man-child died. The Dark Lord looked pleased.

"Dismissed." Everyone left the hall in a hurry; most were excited about the possibilities of this new army that was planned. Severus wanted to get away fast; back to the Forbidden Forest to throw up everything he had eaten in the last twenty-four hours.

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After being thoroughly sick, Severus gathered his wits about him and headed back into the castle and up to the hospital wing. He still did not feel well and his nose would not stop bleeding. He needed Poppy to perform some of her special brand magic on him to get himself back in balance.

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"Severus, you look pale. What happened?"

They were in one of the private rooms in the back of the infirmary, and several silencing spells had been cast to ensure them privacy. "Nothing too bad, Cruciatus Curse once for about a minute and I vomited for about ten minutes outside in the forest."

"Why? Do you still feel nauseous?"

"I wish to only relive it once, will you do me a favour and call Albus down?"

"Of course. Lie down while I do so."

She left the room and Severus did as she asked. He didn't have the energy to fight her right now; his heart wasn't in it. He heard the soft patter of steps enter his room, the footsteps were all wrong to belong to either Poppy or to Albus. As quick as a blink of an eye, he had his wand out and pointed directly at the heart of a very startled looking Harry Potter. Severus groaned and lay back down. "Pot... Harry what are you doing here?"

"I was worried, I couldn't sleep. I saw you cross the fields from my dorm window and wanted to make sure you were alright."

"I'm fine. Go back to bed." He could not deal with this now; he did not need to look at Harry while he dealt with the figurative blood on his hands from the death of an innocent. He closed his eyes and hoped the boy would be gone when he opened them again. No such luck! Instead
the steps came closer and he felt soft fingers stroke his cheek. He sighed, what was he going to do? He should never have kissed the boy, but he basically lost control. And it was nice. He couldn't keep the small smile from his lips; it would only give the brat encouragement.

"Hello, Harry, Severus." Severus snapped his eyes open to meet the twinkling gaze of Albus Dumbledore. He would never live it down, being caught with a smile on his face, albeit a small smile, in the company of Harry "I'm a bloody Gryffindor and too cute for words" Potter.

"Albus."

"Headmaster." Harry looked as guilty as sin; Severus again wondered how in the hell did this boy get away with so much?

"Isn't it time you were in bed, Harry?" Thank Merlin; Albus was going to send him away.

"I want to stay."

"No. I will not allow it. Not this time."

"Calm down, Severus. You are not well." Poppy had already started thrusting cups of potion at him.

"Harry, why don't you wait outside? You may see Severus after we are finished." Harry looked a little unsure, but complied with Albus' order.

Once Harry had left, Severus turned to Albus. "He has discovered the use of the potion. It was accidentally tried on some child that was kidnapped last night. The idiot Death Eater thought it was poison. The Dark Lord discovered the child this afternoon, hence his extreme happiness. He has ordered me to make some more."

"More?"

"Yes. In about two weeks he is going to raid an orphanage and start building his disposable army."

"I guess you have no choice but to make the potion. There are not many wizard orphanages in this country. We will have to get order members to guard each one. At least now we know the antidote should something go wrong. What of the child Voldemort has in his custody?"

Severus paled again, if there had been anything left in his stomach it would have come up at that moment. Poppy noticed though, "Severus, I'm guessing this has something to do with your nausea?"

"You are correct, Poppy. The Dark Lord ordered that I kill him. I made sure it was quick and as painless as possible." His voice was no more then a harsh whisper, a weaker man would have cried.

Albus looked saddened. "I know you did, Severus. There was nothing you could have done." He patted him on the arm "I shall leave you to get some rest."

Poppy, ever the professional, barely stopped what she was doing when she had heard of the child's fate. "Severus, you will be fine. You may return to your rooms, but, if possible, please
eat something at breakfast. You need your strength."

"I will, Poppy, thank you." She left with Albus to apprise him of the physical injuries; Severus just hoped he could cope with the mental ones as well.

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He was just about to leave the room when Harry entered. Damn! He had forgotten about him. He just wanted to go to bed and try to forget tonight had ever happened. He was good at that. "Severus, how are you?"

"Tired." Before he could get another word out to send Harry away so he could get some peace, the boy had flung himself into his arms. He winced in pain. Harry pulled away immediately looking horrified.

"Merlin, Severus, I'm so sorry."

"Don't be, I'm fine. I just need some rest."

"What happened tonight?" Severus just growled at the boy, he was never going to get to bed. "Please."

"The Dark Lord has discovered your condition and plans to use it on other children to build an army. Happy now? May I leave?" Severus was aware his tone was sharp and that Harry did not deserve it. "Sorry," he mumbled after seeing how upset the boy was. Harry was visibly shaking.

"You were punished by him tonight, weren't you? Because you didn't tell him about me."

"Yes, it was not..."

"It's all my fault! Everyone I care for ends up getting hurt because of me." Anger and guilt was evident in the boy's tone, what he was angry about Severus wasn't sure.

Severus was not in the mood for this! "Quit the self pitying act! There is more at stake here than your pathetic self. The world does NOT revolve around you!"

"This is not self pity, it's a fact. Look at you, you're hurt because of me."

His response was a frustrated growl. "Harry..."

"Let's just go and get out of here. Leave."

"That's the best thing you have said all night. Goodnight." Severus got up to leave, but never made it past Harry.

"No. I mean leave here, just go. Leave Voldemort and everything else behind,"

The boy had clearly gone insane, he wondered if Albus was aware of this fact. "And go where exactly?"

"Anywhere, a tropical island." He actually sounded sincere.
"Harry, go to bed" Severus' temper was threatening to come out.

"No! Voldemort is never going to leave me alone! He will keep picking and picking until I am all alone!"

"Where is your famous Gryffindor courage? I know it's a shit hand you have been dealt, but DEAL with it. We all have to deal with shit we don't like but we do. Sure, run away and the devil take everyone left behind! You self-centred little shit! So the Golden Boy is a little tarnished about the edges. I would not have expected this cowardice from you, from Black, yes, but not from you." To hell with keeping his temper in check, the boy was pressing all his buttons right now. One thing he hated was a self-pitying whiner. And right now Harry was exactly that!

"Why are you getting angry at me? This is not my fault." Great, now the boy was being petulant.

"Keep up with your own complaints, boy. Just now you were complaining that it was all your fault. Make up your mind." Fuck temper, he actually wondered if anyone would notice if he killed Potter!

"I meant your anger, why are you angry at ME! I didn't ask for this, I don't want to be the fucking saviour!"

"Piss off and do your martyred messiah routine for someone who cares. Every sacrifice that has been made for you...your parents must be spinning in their graves right now! Or do their efforts mean nothing to you, you conceited little twit?" Teeth were bared and venom was dripping from his voice. Why wouldn't the boy just leave him alone?

"Why are you so pissed off at me? What have I done?" Tears started to fall down the boy's cheeks, he felt as though someone had forced all the air from his body at one time. First Sirius, now his parents...

"I'm pissed off at you, because you wouldn't let it go, when I clearly asked several times for you to let me be." Severus started to walk away.

"All I wanted to know was if you were okay? And you went off on me." Harry screamed after him.

Severus could feel the tension building in the infirmary. It was never a good idea to have two powerful wizards embroiled in an argument in an enclosed space. Shit usually smashed that way. He just wanted to get away; Harry's tears just reminded him of the man-child he had killed in cold blood.

"I was just worried, Severus, I care about you!" Harry had caught up with him. He spun on his heel.

"Well, you shouldn't, Potter. I have told you before and I will tell you again, I-am-not-a-nice-man! You should not care for me. I have done things that would make you sick, things that would make you flee in terror." His voice was low and dangerous.

"I don't care, Severus, what I care about is you. Why can't you see that?"
"You shouldn't." He tried to leave again, but Harry was not giving up so easily.

"Why shouldn't I? Why are you being like this? You didn't act like this when I last saw you after a meeting."

"Because LAST time I didn't have to KILL a petrified ten year old in cold BLOOD!" The one thing Severus didn't want Harry to know had just slipped out in anger. He dearly didn't want the boy to think him a monster. To late for that, the logical part of his brain said. Harry was pale and looked horrified. The silence between them was deafening. Severus turned to leave.

"Why?" it was a whisper.

Severus' anger had left him, now he felt defeated and oh so tired. "Because I was ordered to, because I sacrificed him to save many more, what does it matter? I did it. I murdered a child trapped in an adult body without a second thought. So that makes me a heartless bastard."

"That's not true, if you didn't care you wouldn't be so upset now. I guess you did what you had to do. No matter how hard it was. You are stronger then I."

He could tell the boy was telling truth, he could see it in his face. But he was not ready for forgiveness just yet. "I am sorry I lost my temper with you. It has been a hard night." He tentatively reached out and wiped a tear away from the boy's cheek with his thumb.

"I'm sorry also. I should have just let you leave when you asked." Harry stepped towards him and hugged him. He eagerly embraced the boy back, welcoming the comfort. "I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to hurt you. I never want to hurt you, I love you to much to want to hurt you."

Even though the boy was speaking into his chest, there was no mistaking what Harry had said to him. This just added a whole new set of complications in his life. Nice ones, hopefully. He tilted Harry's face up and gently pressed his lips to his in a soft and tender kiss.

**Next Chapter:** Harry continues his Dark Mark and Animagi studies; and the first orphanage raid takes place!
Disclaimer: Never was mine / Never will be mine I am making no money from this story. Everything belongs to JK Rowling and Warner Bros.

A/N: There seemed to be a little confusion concerning the antidote, so I shall try my best to explain it slightly simpler: It was made on the night of the Summer Solstice (June 22nd) the year that Harry was turning 17 and it was given to Harry to drink on his 17th Birthday nearly a month later. The dawning of the Solstice had a direct magical effect on the potion. Severus worked out the antidote just before the Winter Solstice, December 22nd and made it on that particular day to counter balance the summer effects. But Harry is unable to take it until the following Summer Solstice because it would have no effect. Once he has taken it, the changes will not happen until his 18th Birthday. Exactly one year later. I hope that makes things a little clearer and not just complicate them more...lol.

Beta Read by the fab JediCandy.

Chapter Fourteen - Evil 101: An Introduction.

Severus was putting the final touches to the potion the Dark Lord had ordered him to make. This time he was making it without the seasonal quirks Harry's batch had. That way, if any children were lost and they had to fight to get them back, the antidote could be given to them immediately. He felt a heavy lair of magic settle across the room. He looked up to see Albus putting his wand away. "Why do you use that thing? You are a master of wand-less magic."

"I find that it comforts people to see me use a wand. Many still believe wand-less magic to be the gift of sorcerers and are afraid of it."

Mad old fool! "Albus, there is only you and me in this room."

"Habit, my dear boy," there was a twinkle in his eye. "Sherbet lemon?" Severus response was a lifted eyebrow; he really was fond of the mad old man. "Maybe next time. How are things going?"

"The ageing potion is all but complete, it just needs to cool. The antidote will be ready in time. How are things at your end going?"

"I have placed five order members at each of the four orphanages across the country. I have set up a signal system so that when the one that Voldemort chooses is attacked the rest can apparate to it and help defend it. I just hope it is enough."

"I'm sure you are doing everything possible. Are you going?"

"Yes, but I will remain at the school until the location is known. If I am already at one of them
and it happens to be the one Voldemort chooses, he will sense that I am there and leave. Do you know if you will be taken on the raid?"

"Honestly, I don't know. He might, but one of his flaws is over confidence and there is a chance he won't take me along believing his numbers are strong enough. There is the possibility that he will leave me behind to administer the potion to the children when he arrives back."

"It would help us if you were not there. It is near impossible to tell the Death Eaters apart, and the Ministry will arrive at some point and I cannot risk you being caught up in the arrests or getting hurt."

"I can make a request to the Dark Lord, to stay behind and prepare the potion, but he will do what whatever he believes is best. If he wants me there, I will have no choice but to go."

"I know you will do your best, Severus. I believe it is time for me to leave as there is a young man on his way down here to see you," his eyes were twinkling full of mirth.

Severus just glared at the old man. "What is with that look?"

"Nothing, Severus, nothing at all. I'm just pleased that two of my favourite people are forming a friendship."

"That is all it is, old man, a friendship. Nothing more."

"Of course not, Severus. But you do know there is no rule against a relationship between a student and a teacher if the student is of age?"

"I am fully aware of all the school rules, Albus. But that still does not change the fact that there is nothing more than friendship between myself and Mister Potter."

"As you wish, Severus. Just be mindful that young Harry is rather fond of you. Now I must be on my way. Good day, Severus." If looks could kill, the one being directed at Albus' back would have put him six feet under.

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It had been nearly two weeks since Harry had had his argument in the hospital wing with Severus. Things between them were still a little tense, but definitely better. Maybe it was true, Harry thought, time does heal all wounds. Nah, that was crap. He realised he had pushed it too far that night and acted selfishly. He found it hard not to around Severus, he wanted to occupy all the man's time, be with him constantly. Hermione had called it sweet and Ron called it possessive. Harry had a horrible feeling that Ron was right and that he needed to calm down a bit considering that all that had happened between them were a few hugs and kisses. Then he had gone and admitted he loved him! He could have done a fine impression of Dobby when that had happened; he could have banged his head against the wall, repeatedly.

"A sickle for them."

Harry looked up, startled out of his train of thought, into the eyes of the headmaster. "Sorry, sir?"

"For your thoughts, Harry."
"Oh, they're not worth that much, sir. Maybe a knut or two."

Dumbledore laughed at him, "It's good to see you have not lost your sense of humour, Harry, in such dark times."

"I always try to look on the bright side of life, sir." Harry was grinning at the Headmaster. He liked the older wizard, he was barking mad and brilliant all at the same time.

"Run along now, Harry. Severus is expecting you. I told him you were on your way."
Dumbledore smiled at him and started to walk away back to the upper levels of the school. Harry walked towards Severus' office shaking his head. The Headmaster always baffled him; it was like the man was psychic.

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Harry knocked on Severus' door and entered. "Have you time to take a break with the schools most annoying and insufferable brat?" Harry was grinning ear to ear.

Severus rolled his eyes, "Who am I to turn down a tea date with the wizarding worlds most eligible bachelor?"

"I don't think you are such a bad catch yourself. You're tall, dark, handsome, very mysterious and incredibly rich!"

"So it's my money you're after?"

"Nah, have plenty of my own. In fact, people I have never meet before keep giving it to me. Only today I received an owl from Gringotts, it seems a Mrs. Baly has bequeathed her whole estate to me, she didn't even leave it to me by name just 'to the boy who lived'."

"It's because you are a symbol of hope to many people, especially to the older generations. Harry, it is nothing to be embarrassed about."

"Maybe. I don't really know what to do with the money; I don't think I should keep it, but I don't want it to go to waste. Mum and Dad left me with more then enough for myself. I don't know, I will have to think about it."

"I am sure that whatever you decide to do with it will be for the best. When you put your mind to it you can be a terribly thoughtful person, Harry."

"You can be so sweet, Severus."

"Are you flirting with me, Mister Potter?"

Harry blushed a little; he couldn't help it. "Me? No, never," but his grin gave him away.

"Maybe you should follow me, we can order tea, and you can promise me something."

"What's that?"

"You'll see." Severus led Harry through the door in his office to his private chambers.
Severus gestured for Harry to sit down; he ordered tea for the both of them from a house elf. "Harry, I need you to promise me something."

"Sure, what is it?"

"I need you to promise me that when the battle at the orphanage happens, you will not leave Hogwarts. You won't try and be the hero. I need to know that you are safe, I cannot afford to let my mind wander, worrying about you. I need you to promise me these things." Severus knew full well that he was using the boy's feeling against him, forcing him to promise something that no one else could. He was aware that, given half a chance, Harry would be out the door and in the thick of the fight if he thought he could save just one person. Severus was also aware that Albus could not extract such a promise from Harry, many times the old man had made Harry promise something and he turned around and did the exact opposite.

"Sure."

Severus was not convinced by that answer. He joined Harry on the sofa and took his face in his hands. "I mean it, Harry, I need you to promise me that you won't do anything stupid. Please, promise me." He leaned in and tenderly kissed Harry on the lips. Severus was aware he was using every dirty trick in the book, but if it got the desired results he was prepared to do it.

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Harry leaned in to the gentle kiss. Severus was evil to do this to him, forcing him into a promise this way. As Severus pulled back Harry smirked at him. "That was cruel. Evil, even."

"Did it work?" There was a twisted, evil curl on his lips with a hint of amusement.

"You know it did!" Harry faked being in a huff, but failed miserably because of the smile on his face.

"Good..."

"But," Harry interrupted; he wasn't letting Severus off that easily.

He saw Severus raise an eyebrow in question, "But what?"

"If you are going to force me into this, then I want a few things in return."

"Are we negotiating, Mister Potter?"

"Always."

"Let's hear your terms, then."

"First off, your name."

His eyes narrowed, "What is wrong with my name? I like it. I have been told it suits me."
"Oh, it does, very much so. It's a beautiful name, very regal. Rolls off the tongue, but it's a mouthful."

"A mouthful?"

"Yes."

"Ah, yes. I have been told, that once or twice, that it's a mouthful." Severus was playfully smirking at him. It took a moment for Harry to catch on to what exactly he was referring to. As soon as the sickle dropped Harry's eyes widened slightly and a small blush crept across his cheeks.

"Are you flirting with me, Professor Snape?"

"Me? No. Never."

"You are an evil, evil man, Severus Snape."

"Thank you. But what exactly do you wish to change my name to?"

"Mmmm, how about Sev? I know you said before you don't like pet names or anything, but, hey, at least I didn't ask for Sevvie!"

"If you had of done so, I would have had to kill you, very slowly. Sev? It's tolerable. Anything else?"

"Christmas."

"Christmas...Christmas. I believe I have heard of it. Nuisance holiday at the end of the year, in a few weeks I do believe."

Harry eyes rolled. "I know you said you don't like it but I do. So, Christmas evening you and I will have a private party."

"Define 'private party'."

"You are SO suspicious of everything. Don't worry; it won't be dreadful. Just a private moment of festive cheer."

"Define, 'private moment of festive cheer'."

Harry had to resist temptation to strangle the difficult man sitting next to him, but he couldn't hold in the laughter. "You, me, a glass of wine each with a toast to absent friends, that kind of thing, nothing untoward. Deal?"

"If you tell me why you wish to spend your evening with me; surely there are happier people to spend such a festive holiday with, such as Albus?"

"Well, you see, I need to give you your Christmas present, but if you like I could give it to you in the great hall at breakfast. I guess it would be fun to see everyone's reaction to me giving you a gift."
"Fine, you win. But! Only if you promise not to spend vast amounts of money on me, like you did for my birthday."

Harry weighed this up, it wasn't a bad deal, but he was a little worried as to what he could get Severus for Christmas that would come cheap. The man had expensive tastes. "Deal!" Harry would find something, he was sure. Well, pretty sure.

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A few days later at dinner, Harry felt a twinge in his scar. He looked over at Severus and saw the man ever so slightly nod in his direction, get up to say something to Dumbledore and leave the hall in a hurry. Dumbledore had a fierce look in his eyes that told Harry he was readying for battle.

"Hermione?"

"Yes, Harry?"

"I think it's going to happen tonight. May I stay in you room? That way if things get bad, I won't wake the rest of the dorm."

"Of course, Harry. We can always set up a few silencing charms if things get bad." She smiled at him reassuringly.

"You don't have to stay, Mione."

"I know, Harry, but I'm not leaving you."

"Thanks."

"I'm in too, mate. I'm not going to leave my best friend to You-Know-Who's mercy."

"Thanks, Ron. I didn't ask because I didn't want to put any demands on you."

"Think nothing of it, Harry. That is what friends are for."

After dinner, the three of them headed for Hermione's private head girl's room and cast several silencing and locking charms.

***

Severus was waiting for the Dark Lord's orders; he was hoping not to have to go on the raid. Kidnapping children was not high on his to do list. Unfortunately, he was not asked to stay behind. Only a few of the lower level Death Eaters had been asked to stay to ensure that the cells for the children were secure. He was going to have to risk the Dark Lord's ire and request to stay behind. He was going to have to be quick, for he was leaving the room, "My Lord!"

"Severus?"

"Might I seek your counsel for a moment?"

"Now is not a good time, Severus. This had better be good!"
He swallowed the bile that rose in the back of his throat, "The potion, my Lord, it needs some slight last minute preparation to be perfect. If I stay behind I can get it ready so that when you have captured the brats and they are brought here, I can immediately administer it to them." He mentally crossed his fingers.

The Dark Lord narrowed his red eyes at him, trying to gage his motivations. Severus stood up to the scrutiny; he was not a master of Occlumency for no reason. "You make a good point, Severus. It would be best to give the brats the potion immediately upon arrival. That way there is less chance of interference. You will stay and prepare your potion. The rest of you go, now let's stake claim to my new army."

The room was now empty and Severus prayed to Merlin that the Order would be success.

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Remus J Lupin, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Hestia Jones, Emmaline Vance and Bill Weasley were sitting in an invisible cart outside of 'Merlin's Home for Orphaned Children'. They were waiting for the appearance of Death Eaters or for a call to go to one of the other orphanages that were under watch. They silently prepared for battle.

"Remus?" The voice was a whisper, as was the reply.

"Yes, Bill?"

"Do we know if Severus will be in on the attack or not?"

Remus looked sympathetically over at his friend, "Sorry, Bill, no news. But Albus did say Severus would ask Voldemort to stay behind to prepare the potion. Hopefully he will not be here."

"Mmmm, I hope so." Bill said in a nearly silent whisper.

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Not quite half an hour later, loud cracks could be heard all around the orphanage as Death Eater apparated in.

"Showtime," Hestia commented.

"I'll inform Albus," Emmaline immediately said.

The other four burst forth from their hidden carriage and started firing hexes in all directions. Albus had forewarned all the orphanages there might be an attack by Voldemort, and they were to keep their charges inside and stay out of the way.

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Bill dogged a Stupefy Curse and fired a Trip Jinx back at his attacker. Once the attacker was on the floor, he set a Binding Spell on him. Snake-like ropes trussed him up tightly. One down and forty to go, Bill thought sarcastically. With barely a second to spare, another Death Eater engaged him in battle.
Remus was also keeping busy trying to prevent two Death Eater from entering the orphanage via a side window. During battle his wolf senses always gave him advantages: he could smell the magic coming from different directions and he moved quicker than the average man, making it easier to dodge spells. He evaded a Cruciatus Curse and sent back a Blasting Curse as a way of saying thank you; the Death Eater hit the wall behind him with a satisfying crunch. Remus winced slightly at the noise; he managed to cast a Stupefying Charm at the other one in defence but he missed. As another Death Eater joined his colleague, Remus threw up a shield in order to protect himself from the onslaught of the two wizards.

"Rictusempra!" A gravely voice called out from his left. The Death Eater fell to the ground with uncontrollable laughter. Before his comrade could cast the counter curse, Remus hit him with a Blasting Curse, knocking him out cold.

"Some of the old ones are still the best."

Remus let a feral grin spread across his features, "Yes, Moody, I must agree. About time the cavalry showed up!"

"Ha! You five were just the warm-up act, now they have to deal with all of us. Has Albus has been sent for? Has Voldemort dared to show his face yet?"

"Yes, Albus has been called. And no, Voldemort has not shown up yet, as far as I am aware of, but we have been told that he will."

"Of that I have no doubt!" Mad-Eye pointed his wand at the laughing Death Eater and cast a Binding Charm, gagging and tying up the wizard. "Snape here tonight?"

"We don't know, we will have to check on all the ones we apprehend and hope that no one gets wand happy."

"They have all been warned to use nothing deadly as we do not know Snape will be present or not. Albus would never forgive us if something happened to him, Merlin knows why!"

"Alastor! Severus is on our side now!"

"If you say so."

"I do. Watch out..." Mad-Eye ducked as Remus fired another hex off at an approaching Death Eater.

***

Kingsley Shacklebolt had teamed up with Hestia Jones; they were protecting the back door entrance to the orphanage from three Death Eaters. They weren't doing badly. They were using the low wall that was around the porch as protection from hexes. They had managed to take two enemies down, but the odds were starting to go against them. They heard several loud cracks indicating more people had just apparated in. They were both praying to Merlin that the new people were on their side!
After contacting Albus, Emmaline Vance had joined in the fight. She was a strong and powerful witch regardless of appearances. Many people had commented on her looking stately and regal, she just put it down to good breeding, though that was not a very politic thing to say these days, but she couldn't help who she was. She was a pure blood Slytherin and proud of it, but she was not prejudiced against those that were not. She did not believe in the stupid rantings of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and would never join him. She had managed to take down three Death Eaters single handily when she heard the crack of someone apparating in behind her. She turned; she raised her wand just in case whoever it may be was not friendly, and she came face to face with her worst nightmare. Red eyes madly glinting with anger and amusement were boring into hers. She fired off a Blasting Hex and she tried to run. Her hex was deflected as if it were nothing more than a bothersome fly. The last thing she heard as she fell to the ground was the evilest voice imaginable muttering the most unforgivable words of all, "Avada Kedavra."

Harry let out a piercing scream, he had felt Voldemort's curse stab through him. His head had, had a dull ache to it for about the last hour, but when Voldemort had cast an Unforgivable, the pain had become searing. As it started to fade back to the dull ache, he noticed his two best friends were next to him with their arms around him. He smiled sadly at them and explained that Voldemort had just entered the fight and that he had just killed someone.

"Tom!" Albus voice roared across the makeshift battlefield. He was angry at seeing his one-time student cast the Killing Curse without a second thought.

Bill turned his head when he had heard Albus' voice ring out across all the chaos. Standing not too far from him were Voldemort and his inner circle. He had never actually been this close to the evil wizard before and it was not an experience he was eager to repeat. He could feel the immense and corrupted power emanating from him. He didn't know how Severus handled being so close to him all the time; now that bought back his worry for the other man. He scanned the inner circle looking for him but could not tell if he was one of them or not as they were all in their dark robes and hideous facemasks. Bill was now frighteningly aware that the real battle was about to begin and that they were vastly out numbered. The people they were fighting before were inexperienced; the inner circle would not be so easy to take down. They were powerful wizards capable of casting the Unforgivables with ease and a great many of his family were here tonight.

"Go. Get the brats; I will deal with this foolish old man. You lot deal with his petty followers." The lower rank Death Eaters fell back towards the orphanage while the inner circle Death Eaters formed a parameter around the outside ready to take anyone down who interfered with their business. Voldemort stood proud, awaiting Dumbledore's next move.

"Tom, I cannot allow you to do this, they are innocent children."

"Then try and stop me, old fool!"
The battle for the orphanage escalated. If anyone had had the time to watch, they would have been surprised at the agility and grace these two were capable of, especially considering that one was around one hundred and fifty and the other around seventy.

Voldemort cast a Pain Curse and directed it at his rival; Albus erected a Shield Charm of brilliant white and reflected the curse back onto its caster. However, Voldemort was too quick and he disappeared with a spin of his cloak only to reappear a millisecond later when the curse had passed by.

"How's your boy saviour tonight, Albus? Is he feeling a little old for his tender age?"

"At least he is away from your evil clutches! I will see to it personally that it will stay that way."

Albus cast a powerful Fire Charm at Voldemort, engulfing him in flame. He heard Voldemort scream out in frustration.

It only managed to stall him for a few seconds and he hit back with an equally nasty charm "Diffindo," and a bright purple light raced towards Albus. He managed to dodge the blast easily but his cape was completely shredded. He spared a moment's thought for the cape, it had been a gift from Filius Flitwick and he had been rather fond of it, but, unfortunately, it was either sacrifice the cape or sacrifice a limb. He hoped Filius would understand.

"Getting slow, you doddering old man?"

"Not slow enough for you, it would seem, Tom."

"Don't call me that, you old fool, Crucio!"

Albus pulled Voldemort's disappearing trick on him but he did it with more style. When he reappeared, he was behind the evil wizard. "Evanesco."

Voldemort seemed to flicker a little, almost appearing as if he was vanishing. He managed, however, to throw the spell off. "Nice try, old man, but it will take more then a Vanishing Spell to rid the world of me."

"You never know until you try these things, Tom." Even though he was in the heat of battle, Albus Dumbledore still managed to come across as serene and calm. If you looked into his eyes, however, they told another story. They were hard and determined. If that vanishing spell had been cast on a normal wizard, he would have immediately disappeared.

***

The Death Eaters had broken into the orphanage but, due to anti-apparation wards placed on the building, they had to take the kids outside to apparate away. The inner circle were keeping Dumbledore and his crew busy out front, so they decided the best course of action was to exit via the back door. They had not managed to get all of the kids; there were nearly fifty of the brats and only thirty of them. They could only take one apiece; they hoped there would be others available to take the rest. One of them opened the back door believing he was home free, only to be faced with an irate looking Kingsley Shacklebolt, Hestia Jones and several of their friends.

The battle at the back of the building was conducted with fierce care, as neither side wanted the
children hurt. But, unfortunately, they were only able to rescue a few of them. Nearly twenty of them were spirited away by the Death Eaters.

Hestia rounded up the ten children they had managed to rescue and took them a safe distance away from the fight. Kingsley and the others entered the building, hoping to rescue the remaining children.

***

Both Albus and Voldemort witnessed many of the inner circle enter the orphanage. Voldemort grinned, this was his signal that the children had started to be apparated away. "Until next time, Albus. Oh, and do bring that brat Potter with you. He is so much fun to play with." He then apparated away along with many of his inner circle. The few remaining lower ranks disappeared with a crack, too.

Albus went over to Remus, who was exiting the orphanage, "How many did we lose?"

"About twenty-five to thirty. The rest are with Kingsley and Hestia. The matron is badly hurt but she will survive. Why isn't the Ministry here?"

"Fudge would not believe the intelligence I gave him, claiming that Severus was not to be trusted and that this was no doubt a trap."

Remus let out a feral growl, "That foolish man, we could have saved more tonight if we had had more support. We were just so out numbered. I guess there is no denying Voldemort's involvement now, not with the Dark Mark hanging above the building."

"I know, Remus, we did all we could. If I had not been tied up with Voldemort maybe I could have done more."

"Albus! That is foolish talk. No one else here could have stood up to Voldemort and lived to tell the tale."

"But I think that was his plan, and we fell for it."

"You had no choice. Unfortunately, tonight he was calling the shots."

"Right you are, dear boy, right you are." It was a sad tone that did not suit the usually jovial wizard.

***

"I think its over." Harry announced to his friends.

"The battle?" Ron asked, his nerves frayed.

"Yeah, I think so. I don't feel Voldemort casting anymore magic, well not powerful magic anyway. He is still happy, I can feel him celebrating."

"Creepy." Ron shivered in revulsion.

"Harry, try and get some rest. You look really pale. I saw Professor Snape the other day and
asked him for some Dreamless Sleep potion for you, that way, after the battle, you would be able to sleep without nightmares."

"You went to see Severus? And he gave it to you with no argument?" Harry was a little shocked and touched at that.

"He made me make a deal with him before he would give it to me. It was kind of sweet, really."

"Sorry, did you say Snape was sweet?"

"Shut up, Ron."

"What was the deal?" Harry asked intrigued.

"That I would look after you during the battle at the orphanage and make sure you didn't leave Hogwarts, in case this was some kind of Voldemort double cross to get Dumbledore away from the school so he could snatch you." Harry felt the first smile cross his lips that night. He was so touched that Severus had been worried enough about him that he had roped Hermione in to look after him. Even the fact that he had promised Severus that he would not leave the grounds didn't bother him in the least. All he cared about was that Severus had been worried about him.

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The potion was prepared and Severus was nervously awaiting the Dark Lord's return. He hoped he would escape punishment if Albus and the order had been successful, which he hoped they had. He guessed he could put up with a little punishment if it meant the kids were safe. He heard the screams of terrified children first, and his heart sank. Some had been lost to the Dark Lord. Marched in front of him were about thirty children, most of which were crying, some were frozen with fear. The Dark Lord appeared a minute later.

"Stop your wailing! Tonight I have done you a great service. I have taken you in and given you a real home, where you will be trained and looked after. All I ask in return is your loyalty. Work hard at your studies and you will be rewarded. Now it is time for a bedtime drink, I believe. Severus!" Severus started to ladle the potion into the cups as the terrified kids came up to his workbench to take their bedtime drink. They were led out of the room once they had their libation and were taken to their new home. Once they had all gone the Dark Lord turned to them and ordered them back into position.

"Tonight was not a total failure, but was also not a total success. Dumbledore! Again! Why does that interfering old man always get in my way? But fear not, my faithful, we will just have to work with what we got, twenty-seven little brats, that, by this time tomorrow, will be twenty-seven big brats, ready for my guidance. This batch will be my test subjects, if all goes to plan we will take more and if Dumbledore thinks he can stop me, he has another thing coming. If I have to I will snatch the little bastards off the streets from their mothers arms! I will not have my vision stopped by those do-good sodden bastards. I will expect some of you to teach the brats, train them in what will be expected of them to make them useful to me." He seamed lost in his own thought, pacing back and forth. "That is all for now, go, get out of my sight. I will call those I expect to train the children soon."

Severus left the Manor and headed back to Hogwarts. He had a lot to tell Albus. He wasn't sure the reaction to the news that the Dark Lord had, in effect, set up a dark academy for his man-child soldiers would be. It wouldn't be good, Albus would be furious. The one thing he despised
above all others was the using of children in war as weapons.

Next Chapter: Severus brews the antidote. Harry concentrates on his Dark Mark studies. And a little fluff.
Chapter Fifteen - Dark Marks and Antidote.

It was almost Christmas and Harry was not having a good time. He recently had awoken from a vision involving Voldemort and his man-child army. He was pleased with them for learning the Unforgivables so quickly and, as a reward, had marked them early. Hence the reason he was now in the hospital wing with burn salve and bandages on his left forearm. And to top it all off, he had a meeting with his dumb Defence Against the Dark Arts Professor in a few hours. The man was so pathetic; he didn't teach them anything useful, he only went over stuff Harry had taught the DA's a few years ago. The single most amusing thing was he was afraid of Harry. No, afraid was not the word; petrified would be a better one to use. He believed Harry was the next Dark Lord in training. Harry hadn't helped the situation by declaring he was going to study Morsmordre and the Dark Mark for his final project. His reasoning had found new meaning of late and he hoped he could persuade the dim-witted professor to allow him to continue. He would see if he might succeed at their meeting later today.

***

Severus was not in the best of moods. That blithering idiot, Damien Larkswood, who had the audacity to call himself a professor, had called him to a meeting. All three senior members of the faculty had been called: Albus Dumbledore, Minerva McGonagall and himself. He could not imagine what could be so vitally important that it would require the attention of all three of them. Oh, it had better be good or blood would be spilt or, at the very least, teeth would be smashed. He was busy trying to organize and prepare everything for Harry's antidote. The window of opportunity to brew it was small enough without morons getting in the way, wasting his precious time.

He always wondered why Albus kept hiring such morons for one of the most important positions in the school. It was a mystery! One theory was that he was hoping Harry Potter would take the position once he had finished school. Severus was not completely convinced Harry would want such a position, even though they had never talked about his future like that. He just had a feeling that it would not be the top choice for Harry. Everyone believed he, Severus Snape, wanted the job! He shuddered at the thought; no, he most definitely did not want the job and he was perfectly happy where he was. The Defence Against the Dark Arts position required too much interaction with the students for his liking. All students loved the subject, mainly because they got to fire hexes at each other. On the odd occasion that he had taken that class in order to cover the absences of other professors, he had never truly enjoyed it. It was too noisy and he spent the whole time reining in his temper and the temptation to hex the
little brats to hell and beyond!

Severus didn't even know where the rumour that he wanted the job came from but did serve as a good cover to the students as to why he seemingly hated Albus. He gave out a snort of laughter; he had never really hated Albus. He had just lost faith for a while but, thankfully, that faith had been restored.

***

The top three ranking professors of Hogwarts were sitting in Damian Larkswood's office waiting for him to start this so called important meeting. "I'm glad you could all come today."

"Did we have a choice?" Severus spat.

"Severus! Now Damien, what is so important that you had need for all of us to all be here?" Albus asked, he knew this had better be good; otherwise Severus was going to kill himself a DADA professor and he didn't know if he would have the heart to stop him.

"It's Harry Potter!" Larkswood proclaimed. The three professors looked taken aback. Severus knew Harry did not think highly of his professor, but he hadn't realised that the feeling was mutual. Most, if not all, of the professors loved Harry and thought him to be a good student student. Even Severus didn't have as many complaints any more. The boy had grown up and had started to take his studies seriously.

"What of Harry, Damien?" Albus asked.

"I know you all think I am mad for believing anything bad of Mister Potter, but his recent area of studies is cause for concern. He is dabbling in the Dark Arts and I believe him to be on the verge of turning!"

"Well, I never! Albus, surely you are not going to stand for this nonsense? Harry Potter turning dark! I have never heard such rubbish in my life!" Minerva looked personally insulted; it was an insult to her house.

Severus tried to hold a tight rein over his amusement, however the look on Minerva's face of insulted shock proved to be his undoing. He found himself letting out a bark of laughter. The three other professors looked at him a little oddly, it was not everyday you saw Severus Snape laugh. "Sorry, Albus. I thought I just heard someone claim Potter had gone evil. Amusing joke, Larkswood, the funniest thing I have ever heard. It ranks right after the farce of finding out you were hired by Albus!"

"Severus," Albus warned him, but he could see the amusement in the old man's eyes.

"Sorry, Albus, but that is the most preposterous thing I have ever heard. The boy is not evil; believe me, I know evil. Hey! Larkswood, maybe sometime I could take you along to meet some old friends of mine for tea? Then, believe me, you would know evil. Potter evil? Please! He doesn't have an evil bone in his body."

"He can speak to snakes! And, he has a Runespoor. It is a well known fact that only Dark Wizards keep a Runespoor!" Larkswood spat back.

"As the kids like to say, whoop-dee-do!" Severus rolled his eyes, "That does not make you evil!
He is keeping the Runespoor for me because he can speak to it! It is invaluable for potions."

"He is studying the Dark Mark, it's only one more step before he starts to mark people!"
Larkswood said in his defense.

"Please! The more you speak, the more crap flows from your mouth."

"His final project is on the Dark Mark, Professor Snape. I'm telling you it is only a matter of time."

Minerva and Albus both looked a little shocked at hearing what Harry was studying and, truthfully, so was Severus, but he hid his surprise like a pro. He knew that if Harry had chosen that subject to tackle then he had good reason to do so and he was not about to go around marking people. He rose from his chair and leaned towards the idiot, resting his hands on the desk between them to get closer and replied, "regardless of what his choice subject of study is, Harry Potter is NOT evil, nor is he going evil. It would be a cold day in hell before that boy ever marks anyone in any way similar to Lord Voldemort!" His voice was low and dangerous as was his mood and temper. He rarely used the Dark Lord's chosen name, but he believed the situation called for it. Maximum impact was what he was after and maximum impact was what he got. Larkswood had gasped and paled at the sound of 'that' name and nearly fell off his chair.

"It's nice to know somebody trusts and believes in me. Thank you, Professor Snape."

Severus snapped his head around at the sound of the familiar voice, standing in the doorway was one angry looking Harry Potter. It crossed his mind briefly that Harry looked quite delectable when slightly pissed off.

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Once Harry arrived outside his professor's office door he had heard raised voices. He instantly recognised Severus' voice as it was so distinctive, and he was pretty sure he recognised Dumbledore's and McGonagall's, too. It sounded like Larkswood was back on his Harry-Potter-is-evil trip. Harry rolled his eyes, the man had believed him evil from day one; it was starting to get ridiculous. Then he had heard his end of year project being mentioned. Shit! He hadn't gotten around to telling anyone about that yet. He kept meaning to but other stuff kept distracting him. He opened the door quietly in order to enter and defend himself when Severus did the job for him, brilliantly so. Harry was touched. Even without an explanation, Severus had believed he would have a good reason to study the dark mark and not so he could turn evil. The sweetest part for him was when Severus had used Lord Voldemort's name, he knew the man hated saying it and generally would never do so. Harry wanted to run up, kiss him, and thank him for believing in him. Then his eyes caught Larkswood's and he found himself brimming full of anger and frustration. It would seem that now was as good a time as any to announce his arrival.

"It's nice to know somebody trusts and believes in me. Thank you, Professor Snape."

"Potter!" Larkswood looked petrified. Idiot! Harry thought. He entered the room and sat down in the empty seat next to the chair Severus had just sat back down in.

"I believe you wanted to see me, sir?" Harry offered.

"Yes, I did, Potter. One thing I will say for you is that you have good timing. I asked the senior
faculty members to be present when I confronted you about your end of year project.” He looked smug.

"Really?" Harry snapped and didn't think he had ever sounded more threatening in his lifetime, but this man was so annoying.

"Yes. And, strangely enough, when I bought it up, it was Professor Snape who jumped to your defence." Larkswood raised an eyebrow in triumph.

Severus let out a snort of laughter at that; Harry gave him a look that clearly stated - hands off, he is MINE! Severus immediately understood and he leaned back in his chair, waiting for Harry's reply. "Just what are you insinuating by that, Professor?"

"We all know of his reputation," Larkswood nodded in Severus direction.

Harry narrowed his eyes, "and what reputation is that? Be careful how you answer, professor."

"Why? Are you going to set your Master on me, Potter?"

"I have no need to set anyone on you!"

"Going to get me yourself? You and your dark follower?" Larkswood again indicated to a furious looking Severus.

"I have no need to set anyone on you because I have it on good authority that Headmaster Dumbledore looks upon Professor Snape as a son, and you are successfully digging your own grave." Harry gave him a smirk.

Larkswood suddenly paled remembering the other two professors in the room. While Minerva did not look happy, Albus looked positively savage. "Headmaster..."

"Silence! I will hear no more of this! Severus is a trusted member of my staff, which is more, then can be said of you right now. And Harry is no more a dark wizard than you or I, unless you wish to incriminate yourself or accuse me?"

"O-of course n-not, Headmaster. I'm sorry." If eating ones words were to become a sport, Larkswood would be champion. It took a lot to piss off Albus Dumbledore and it seemed as if Larkswood had succeeded spectacularly. "I just lost my temper, forgive me."

Albus did not respond, but turned to Harry instead. "Maybe you could clear this up for us, Harry?"

"Yes, Headmaster. After having the dream of Voldemort marking Marcus Flint, I started to do a little research on similar subject matters. I came across some really interesting theories on the subject; however no one believed it was possible to ever remove such a mark, especially one done by Voldemort. Apparently people had attempted to remove Voldemort's mark, but it wouldn't disappear. After my dream and study, I believe I know why no one has ever had any success. When marking someone, Voldemort uses a string of ancient charms in the middle of which he places some kind of charm in parseltounge. The reason removal has never worked is because no one can learn to speak parseltounge, you either can or you can't. With more time and study I believe I will be able to remove the dark mark from someone's arm. Last night I had another dream where Voldemort marked all the children from the orphanage." Harry
unconsciously touched his burnt left forearm. "If I can create and master the correct charms and incantations, when those kids are rescued and returned to their correct ages I could remove the mark from them. Thus freeing them of any prejudice they would face from having such a mark." Harry had put forward his case with passion and flair. Initially he had wanted to do it to offer Severus a way out of Voldemort's clutches, but with the kids now marked this just gave him added incentive.

Larkswood looked suspicious, Minerva looked unsettled at the subject matter, Severus looked stunned and Albus looked proud. "I see no reason to stop Harry in his studies. If he is able to do such a remarkable thing then we should encourage him. Those children face a hard and long road of rehabilitation when we get them away from Voldemort's clutches, and if Harry is able to release them of such a disfigurement then I can see no wrong in it, only good."

"Headmaster..."

"No, Damien. My word is final." There left no room for argument in his tone. The room fell silent.

"If I am not needed anymore, may I leave? I have work to be getting on with."

"Of course, Severus." Albus let him go, knowing this new information of Harry's had been a shock for him that he needed time to ponder and come to terms with it. He left the room in his usual dramatic fashion. "Now, if there is nothing more I believe this meeting is over. Good day to all." Albus got up and left, followed closely by Minerva.

Harry threw his nastiest smirk at Larkswood and followed his professors out.

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Severus returned to his private quarters, he needed a stiff drink. He didn't care that it was still before midday, brandy was about the only thing that would slow down his racing brain. After attempting to remove the mark himself many years ago and failing, he believed he would be forever marked with it. But, if what Harry proposed became possible, then maybe he could also have a future without prejudice. It was a frightening thought. He had had the mark for over twenty years, it was a part of him - a part he hated and wanted rid of. Then there was the fact that he was a spy to take into account, if he no longer had the mark, he would be unable to go to the Dark Lord. To him that was a plus point, but he couldn't let the Order down. Maybe after the war... that was a real possibility. He had to calm down, Harry had only said it was a possibility not a guarantee. A small smile graced his lips, it was more hope then he had had in the last twenty years. A soft knock on his door brought him back out of his musings, "Enter."

"Severus, are you okay?"

Severus smiled at Harry, "Yes, I am fine."

Harry sat down in the armchair opposite his, "I meant to tell you sooner, but with one thing after another, I forgot. Sorry."

"There is no need to apologise Harry."

"Thanks for sticking up for me against Larkswood." The name was spoken with distain.
"You are more than welcome. That blithering idiot deserved every word. I just wish Albus would allow me to hex him!"

Harry giggled at that, "and I would have liked to watch that."

Severus flashed one of his slightly evil smirks at Harry. "Yes, it would have been fun."

"You are not mad at me for studying such a thing?"

"I was a little surprised, but no, not mad. Your reasons are honourable."

"Thanks Sev!" Harry was grinning at him; Severus just rolled his eyes at him.

"Go, I have work to do." It was said in good humour.

"Sure, I'll see you soon. Bye, Sev." And Harry left his rooms smiling.

***

"Harry, are you sure you don't mind us going away for Christmas?" Ron was acting nervous.

"Ron, I don't mind. You go, have fun, and don't do anything I wouldn't do!" Harry was grinning ear to ear.

"Maybe I should wait, you know, until we have left school."

"Ron, it's not a full engagement, just a promise ring. You have nothing to worry about, Mione will love it."

"You think? Harry, I don't know, I don't want her to think I'm trying to tie her down."

"Ron."

"You know she wants to go to University or something; I would never try stopping her!"

"Ron, you should be telling her that when you give her the ring on Christmas day and not telling me!" He was laughing, he had never seen Ron so anxious before. "You had better go before the carriages leave without you and you can't get home. Hermione is waiting for you, see?"

Hermione was waving at them, "Come on, Ron! We're ready to leave. See you soon, Harry! We're going to miss you! Love you lots, Harry!"

"Go on, mate! Good luck and have fun." Harry and Ron hugged briefly. Ron left the castle, for Christmas, running across the snow-covered fields to the carriage in which Hermione was waiting for him. Harry smiled and waved at them from the castle's main doors as they left.

***

Harry spent the next few days catching up on his homework assignments and his Animagi studies, he had read the book that Hermione had given him at least five times. He had the basic principles down but he had reached an impasse; it was the part where, if he wanted to shorten the amount of time necessary to study for and to complete the transformation, he would have to
make and drink seven different potions. They were some right doozies, complicated, unusual and downright weird. His first thought had been to ask Severus for help, but he was too busy with brewing the antidote for him and Harry didn't want to impose on him any more that was needed. He could do it without the potions but it would add on about a year of study, and he was a self confessed instant gratificationist.

His other studies on the Dark Mark seemed to be going well. Dumbledore had signed a slip allowing him unrestricted access to the library's restricted section because Larkswood had refused. Imbecile! Harry thought with a grin. He had found some truly interesting stuff. He reckoned he had found the final part of the incantation, the part where you wrapped your hand around the recipient's forearm. What he was having trouble with was the middle part of the incantation, the parseltongue part. It was not a language that was written down anywhere. Hell, he didn't even know if you could write it down. He had never tried. He wanted to ask Salazar Slytherin's portrait if he could help, but he would need permission to enter the staff room. He would tackle either Sev or Dumbledore about that later.

There was only one other thing left for him to do before Christmas, and that was finish up Sev's present. It had been a challenge trying to come up with something that did not cost a lot of money. Harry was not ostentatious by any means, but Severus was a tricky customer to buy for because he had such refined tastes. To get around this problem, Harry decided to have fun with his gift to Severus. Hermione and Ron tried to warn him that Severus and fun did not mix, but he thought he had Sev's number. His choice of gifts, he believed, would appeal to the twisted side of Severus.

***

It was early on December 22, the first day of the Winter or Yule Solstice, and Severus was preparing all the ingredients needed for Harry's antidote. After the fluxweed incident, he had worked out where he was going wrong. He reasoned with himself it was an easy mistake to make, it had not at first been obvious. Not many potions were sensitive to the changes of the seasons; a few were time sensitive, like the wolfsbane, but even that was not season sensitive. It had been a challenge, and he enjoyed a good challenge. He just wished it were not at the expense of Harry; although; it was responsible for bringing them together, kind of!

That was a nice thought; he hadn't felt this way about another person for a very long time. One thing he really liked about Harry was that he was not needy and overly demanding. He understood they could not spend every single second of the day together, which suited Severus. It had been a while since he had taken a lover as such and he had very much gotten used to his independence, to doing things when and how he liked. But this was almost too much! He hardly got to spend any private time with Harry because of the situation they were in and because of this blasted war. He did have his private Christmas evening to look forward to with Harry, and with so few students staying he doubted they would be interrupted. He could only hope things would change a little when Harry graduated, if things between them worked out. He was still a little skeptical as to whether they would, but he had heard Harry tell him he loved him. They would still need to be careful, the Dark Lord would not be happy if he found out.

Severus gave a frustrated growl. Hopefully, they would get to spend more time together then five hurried minutes in a storeroom cupboard or ten snatched minutes in his office between lessons. He was starting to feel like a student again, embroiled in an illicit affair. He had tried that once, and it had ended in tears as many of those situations do. Severus was determined not to let it end that way for him and Harry. He was rather taken with the young man, more so then he was ready to admit to himself let alone to Harry or the world in general.
He wished he could tell Harry the words and show him the things that the younger man seemed so able to give so easily, but he was bought up in a refined household that spoke of no such nonsense. He was aware Harry was also bought up in similar circumstances, a house without love, well, a house with no love for him. But even with these similarities, Severus still could not find the courage to simply tell Harry he loved him. Loved him, he wondered? Did he love Harry?

Enough! He chastised himself, he was working on a volatile potion that was ninety percent guess work and did not really have the time to be daydreaming about Harry 'bloody' Potter. He didn't know what worried him more, the fact he was daydreaming which was something he had not done in years, or the subject matter of said daydreams. He had to remember Harry he was a student, his pupil, and quite clearly the bane of his existence. He was forever doomed to spend his life thinking about Potters! His fingers went up to his necklace and he fiddled with the green and red lightning bolt shaped pendant. Yes, forever doomed, he though with a crooked smile.

***

It had taken nearly seven hours, but sitting in front of Severus with a preservation charm on it was Harry's antidote. Of course he couldn't take it until June 22, the start of the summer solstice, and the effects would not be visible until his birthday; but at least it had been made. He had had real trouble in getting the correct amount of Ashwinder eggs into the potion. They traditionally are used for youth potions but due to the complete cock up with this potion, the amount was dramatically less then in what was meant to be the original potion. Also, the number of full rotational stirs for the jobberknoll feathers had all been done by instinct. He had stopped mixing them in when it had felt right to do so. The same went for the daisy roots and the Runespoor eggs.

He knew this was the correct mix though, because it felt right. Unfortunately, he would be unable to test it until Harry was able to take it. That was the real gamble. If by some chance something went wrong, it would be another year before they could try again. He picked up the jar of antidote and headed to Albus' office. It was the safest place in the castle to keep it, no students would be able to get their grubby mitts into it and ruin it. Yes, the Headmaster's office was the best place for it.

***

"Severus, come in." Albus called through the door after he had knocked.

"Albus, I was wondering if we could keep the antidote in your office for safe keeping until it is needed."

"Of course, Severus. Please come in. Tea? Sherbet lemon?"

"Please and no thank you." Tea was ordered as Severus sat in his favourite black leather armchair. Today, the multi-coloured one was covered in rainbow stripes. Nasty, Severus shuddered. He was handed his tea, black with no sugar.

"I have been thinking about Voldemort and his new army. I think our best chance to rescue them would be when he first uses them."

"I concur. But when that will be? I have no idea. As you know, he wants them to study and I
have a feeling I will be called in to help teach the little dears, as if I don't have enough trouble with the brats here!"

Albus laughed. "Indeed, Severus. I imagine you will be asked to teach them dark potions, poisons and the like?"

"More then likely, Albus. I don't think the Dark Lord plans on keeping them around long enough to worry about teaching them healing potions."

"Yes, we must work fast to try and get the children back to safety. But enough about that Severus, tell me about you and Harry?" The twinkle in his eyes was back.

"Tell you about what?"

"That was quite some gift he gave you."

Severus' hand automatically went up to his necklace. He raised an eyebrow, "Indeed, it was."

"Don't worry, Severus. I can't see it. Mister Potter is quite the powerful wizard. His concealing charm is most effective. I saw it before it was charmed."

"Of course you did. Harry told me that you; Minerva and Filius also cast charms on it. I don't believe I have thanked you yet. So thank you."

"Not a problem, my boy, not a problem. I was more than happy to help. I see that Harry has become quite fond of you and you of him." There was a definite smile on the old mans lips.

Severus frowned, was nothing ever kept a secret from this man?! "Harry and I have found, shall we say, some common ground."

"The common ground of being fond of each other?" Albus teased him.

In response, Severus gave a world-weary sigh. He was not deeming that statement with an answer. He was in his mid-thirties, for Merlin's sake! He refused to be teased by his former teacher. "If there is nothing else, Albus, I had best be off, I have work to do."

"Work? Severus, relax! It is almost Christmas."

"I must get these potions finished by Christmas, any later would simply not do. Good evening, Albus."

"Good evening, Severus." Albus sent after him with a knowing chuckle as he left the office. He loved the old man like a father, but damn! He could be infuriating when he wanted to be.

***

Severus was silently stalking back down the corridors when he came across one Harry Potter leaning against the wall outside of the staff room. Perfect! He needed a few things from Mister Potter and now would be the perfect time to acquire them. He could have a little fun with him, after all it was almost Christmas as Albus was so fond of telling him. He took a sharp right and entered a secret passageway. He came up against what looked like a solid brick wall, but he knew better. He put his hand through it and around Harry's mouth to keep him from screaming
and he pulled the young man through the wall. In a voice as sibilant as a knife slicing through satin, he whispered into the struggling Harry's ear. "You know this is the second time I have had you in this position!" He removed his hand once Harry had recognised it was him. "Mister Potter, why are you hanging around the staff room door?"

Harry managed to compose himself. "I was waiting for someone to let me in, so I could have a chat with our friend Salazar. Oh, and you are evil. What is with that wall? I was leaning against it for ten minutes without falling through it!"

"It only works from this side. It is solid from the other side. I would have thought you would have known that. You seem to have an uncanny knowledge of this castle." He replied, with a hint of playful suspicion in his voice.

"I have no idea what you are talking about, professor." He was trying to look anywhere but at him.

Severus did not miss the equally playful smile on Harry's lips. He took a step closer to Harry forcing him to back up against the wall until there was nowhere else to go. "Oh, my. Out of running space, Mister Potter?" He took another step closer until there was barely any space between them and he placed his hands on either side of Harry's head, effectively trapping the young man.

"What makes you think I want to run away from you, professor?" He stretched onto his toes and kissed Severus briefly on the lips.

"I'm sure there are rules against that kind of behaviour from students, Mister Potter." Each word was punctuated with a small kiss along his jaw and neckline.

"No, there isn't. I checked." Harry said with a happy sigh.

"Intolerable brat! If there is not, then there should be. I would call it the Harry Potter Rule." Severus finished his exploration of Harry's neck and had moved up to his lips. As he captured them in a kiss, he gently ran his fingers through Harry's hair, snagging a few out for his needs. The kiss deepened and he felt Harry press himself against his body. If he didn't get control soon he would end up taking Harry Potter, literally, up against the wall, right here, right now! The problem was that Harry was a fast learner and his kisses were no longer just sweet and innocent but full on passion. Severus traced his tongue across the roof of Harry's mouth and pulled back, smirking. Damn! Harry looked good debauched, leaning up against that wall with his hair disheveled, his lips swollen from deep kisses, and his clothes all rumpled. He silently prayed to Merlin to give him the strength to resist. "Straighten yourself out, and I will let you into the staff room to speak to Salazar." He finished his words with a simple and quick kiss on the lips.

Harry smiled back at him, "And whose fault is it I'm all crinkled up?"

"Yours and yours alone!" He placed another small kiss on Harry's lips. "Now, come."

"Trust me, I'm not far off."

Severus looked impressed at Harry, "Mister Potter, I never knew you had it in you to be so crude."

"That's me! I'm full of surprises."
"I bet." He raised an eyebrow at Harry, turned and walked through the wall into the staff room.

**Next Chapter:** Harry takes some younger students on the Fred and George Tour of Hogwarts, and it's Christmas Day and Harry gets his private party.
Harry was going through the papers he had gathered after his chat with Salazar. Apparently Salazar had been responsible for a book published in parseltongue that covered charms and spells. It was a type of magic that could not mastered by many because most wizards lacked the ability of parseltongue. From the sounds of it you did not need to be a particularly powerful wizard to master it, you just had to be capable of speaking the language. The problem was that the book was never published for the masses; it would never have sold. Copies of it were given to the old, established Slytherin families, as gifts, not long before he left Hogwarts for good.

Salazar's portrait had also agreed with Harry that the charm he was looking for was in this book. Harry had recited what he remembered from his dream and Salazar definitely recognised it as the branding charm. According to him it was designed to make personal property inaccessible to those to whom it did not belong. It appeared that, when combined with the other two other Latin charms, it could be used for branding and summoning people. The parseltongue reverse charm was also in the book, all he had to do was find a copy and that was easier said then done.

The following evening, everyone who would be staying at the castle for Christmas was in the Great Hall for supper. Harry reckoned this was the best time to bring up the subject of the parseltongue book and partly because it would annoy the hell out of Larkswood. Oh, alright! Mainly because it would annoy the hell out of Larkswood, Harry smirked to himself. "Professor Dumbledore, could you possibly help me track down a book that I need for my studies?"

"That depends on the book, Harry. We have no objections to ordering new books for the library if the students need them."

"You see, sir, that is the problem. It is not a new book; it is actually a very old and rare book. And it was never printed for the general public. It was printed for a select few families."

"I see and what is this book exactly?" Dumbledore asked him.

"Umm, it's closest translation, I think, would be 'Charmed Snake Magic' by Salazar Slytherin,' I believe."

"Oh, that is a tricky one." Dumbledore looked thoughtful.
"I was led to believe that all of Slytherin's writing had been lost." Harry turned to look at Severus. It was unusual for him to engage in conversation at the dinner table, especially with him.

"Apparently, Professor Snape, this book was in parseltongue and the only printed copies were given to traditional, pure blooded Slytherin families about a thousand years ago." Harry answered him, delighted that he was having a civil conversation with the man in public.

"I have heard of folklore, if you like, of such a book. But have never come across it. If it does still exists, no more then a few copies will be around." Severus told him.

"Harry, my family has been in Slytherin for as long as this school has been standing and we have quite a library at home. Though I truly don't think we have a copy, I can write to my Father to ask him to check." Arimus Jenkins offered.

Harry smiled at the small Slytherin first year. He was a really sweet kid, nice and kind. Apparently, even though his family was very old and dated back to the founder's time and was as pure of blood as you could find, they had stayed neutral during the last war and would remain so for this conflict, but it still did not make them any less powerful among the Slytherin families. That is why Arimus was never given a hard time at school for befriending kids from other houses, for talking to Harry Potter, or for simply not supporting Voldemort. "That would be very helpful of you, Arimus. Thank you."

"You're welcome, Harry. If we do have it, you are more then welcome to borrow it. Please don't get your hopes up too high, for I know those libraries quite well and I have never seen a book like it."

"That doesn't matter, your offer is still most generous and I thank you for trying."

***

Harry had just left the Great Hall after supper when his arm was grabbed and he was spun around. "You really should be more aware of your surroundings."

"I knew it was you."

"How?"

"Sev, you are the only man in history to make absolutely no noise when you walk. Even old Voldie makes a noise."

"I'm trying to work out if that was a compliment or not."

"It was a backwards one, very similar to the ones you like to give."

"Touch. About this book of yours, I do not have a copy of it back in Snape Manor but I might possibly have a copy in one of the other Snape properties. I remember my father speaking of such a book when I was a small child. He would never have sold it even though it is worth a fortune, purely because of who wrote it. Not that anyone understood it, but because the Dark Lord ordered all families that were loyal and who had copies to keep a hold of them in case he was to lose his copy and need a replacement. I never actually saw the book and didn't realise it
was in parseltongue until you mentioned it tonight. I will ask the house elves to look for the book when they do the tour of the properties to make sure everything is all right with them. It will be some time in the new year."

"I don't know what to be more shocked about, the fact you may have the book or the fact you have properties in the plural! Maybe I should change my mind and be interested in your money and not you!" Harry was only joking and he knew Sev knew this. "Just how many properties do you have?"

"Six. No, seven! I forgot the home in Hong Kong."

"H-Hong Kong! Wow," Harry pointed a finger towards Sev's chest. "I definitely love you for your money."

"Floozy!"

Harry giggled. There was absolutely no way he was after this man for his money. As a matter of fact, he couldn't care less about it. He loved him because he was just... him, and the fact that he looked gorgeous in the moonlight he was currently standing in. "You know I'm only kidding; but, for purely scientific research, just where else are these properties?"

He saw Sev roll his eyes at him and smile that sexy smile that only he got to see. "There is a county house in Scotland near Edinburgh, a beach house in the south of France just outside of Nice bordering Monaco, a flat in Paris which is my personal favourite, a villa in Northern Spain although I have never been there, a town house in London, and the house in Hong Kong. So which do you fancy visiting first?" The last part was finished in a low whisper directly into Harry's ear. He shivered; damn that voice did strange things to him!

"How about your personal favourite, Paris?"

"Sounds good, to me." Severus then winked at him, smirked at him and walked away.

Harry was left in the corridor gaping like a fish. Did Severus just wink at him? And why did he get the feeling it was just a small promise of things to come? Why was it when you didn't want something to happen it came around really fast, and when you wanted it to happen it took forever and a day to arrive?!

***

It was Christmas Eve and Harry was one of only eight students staying this year. Most families had wanted their children home for the holidays; they feared it might be their last chance for a relatively peaceful one with Voldemort back once again in the race to become the supreme leader of all things wizard.

The other seven kids were either first, second or third years. Harry had decided it was time to pass on the legacy of his forefathers, 'The Marauders,' as Fred and George had done for him. First, he had taken them on a tour of the local 'hotspots' around Hogwarts. He started with the dungeons; he showed them where to find the Slytherin dorms even though Arimus was a first-year Slytherin himself, he pointed out where Sev's office was situated, as no doubt at some point in their Hogwart's career they would serve detention there. Second it was on to the Hufflepuff dorms after which they headed further down the corridor to the kitchens, where he introduced them all to the house elves after showing them how to gain entrance. Third, they
travelled up a level to the staff room and then on to the place that all students wish to have a
rummage through but feared being caught too much - Filch's office!

He also took them to McGonagall's office and up to Moaning Myrtle's bathroom, explaining
that, if any rule braking was going to take place, this was a good place to do it as nobody ever
went in there. He also pointed out the entrance to the Chamber Of Secrets guessing it was safe
as none of them spoke parseltongue. He took them up a floor to Dumbledore's office. The kids
were deeply impressed Harry knew the password. Harry knocked on the door, "Enter," he heard
Dumbledore call. As they did the kids gasped, they had never had reason to visit the
Headmasters' office before.

"Headmaster, I was just taking the kids on the "Fred and George Weasley Tour of Hogwarts,"
and your office is one of the stops. I hope you are not too busy?"

"Not at all, Harry. Children, welcome. Sherbet Lemon?" Dumbledore was grinning like a mad
man. "Harry, it is kind of you to spend some time with the younger children."

"I don't mind, sir. It's kind of fun, reliving my glory days." The twinkle in Harry's eyes told the
whole story.

"Yes, some of your escapades have joined Hogwart's ledged. I hope you don't leave out the
Whomping Willow or statue of the humpbacked witch on the third floor," Dumbledore winked
at Harry. Harry had the grace to look a little shocked; did he ever get away with anything, he
wondered? The kids liked the Headmaster's office, especially Fawkes, none of them had seen a
real phoenix before.

They continued with the rest of the tour, visiting such attractions as where Hagrid had kept
Fluffy, the statue of Boris the Bewildered and the statue of Gregory the Smarmy, telling them
that behind it was a secret passageway to Hogsmeade. He took them to the east wing on the fifth
floor to show and explain about the Twin's magical swamp in his fifth year. He took them to the
prefects' bathroom where he also mentioned the password 'Pine Fresh' to them. They headed up
to Gryffindor Tower and along to the Room of Requirement, explaining how to use it. The tour
then wound its way over to Ravenclaw Tower and Flitwick's office. He introduced them to Sir
Cadogon and told them the story of when Sirius had attacked the Fat Lady and he was put in
charge of guarding the entrance to Gryffindor Tower.

By the evening when they went to the Great Hall for supper, Harry was convinced he had
passed the legacy on. He had even told the kids that if one of them wanted to take on the
Weasley twin's title of troublemakers, he would hand over the Marauders Map when he left the
school at the end of the year on condition they passed on the knowledge when they came to
leave. He wanted to keep the map as a memento, but he knew it belonged in the school.

***

Severus watched with a raised eyebrow as Harry led the remaining students into the Great Hall
for supper. It was not everyday you saw a Gryffindor lead in a mix of Hufflepuffs, RavenClaws
and, last but not least, a Slytherin student. They were all talking animatedly to the young
Gryffindor, asking him questions and giggling. Yes, something foul was afoot! But what?
Severus knew Harry would not lead anyone into danger, but lead into trouble, yes!

Also, Albus had that twinkle in his eye that suggested he knew what the kids had been up to
with Harry and that it indeed was mischief. The old man seemed to enjoy causing mischief and
breaking the rules. Severus surmised that when you reached his age and stature you could pretty much do what you liked; after all, who was going to stop him?

***

Christmas day was a very pleasant day for Harry. He got some wonderful gifts from his friends. Hermione had given him a collection a romantic classic works from muggle authors, among them were "Romeo and Juliet" by William Shakespeare, "Pride and Prejudice" by Jane Austin, "Memoirs of a Geisha" by Arthur Golden and "The Wedding" by Danielle Steel. Harry had raised an eyebrow at that one, he hadn't had the chance to read many muggle books but Aunt Petunia had read Danielle Steel novels and he was sure she would never had read anything that was considered a classic. Hermione was such a daft romantic, but he loved her and would never change her.

From Ron he had gotten his very own wizard's chess set, he needed some real practice if he ever wanted a chance at beating Ron. The man was a tactical genius. He also received the yearly Weasley jumper, this year it was green with a yellow capital H on it, from Mister and Mrs. Weasley along with lots of homemade sweets. He was also given a ton of new tricks and pranks from Fred and George's new store as well as a new photo album from Ginny. From Luna he had received a book on mystical beasts; it actually looked rather interesting.

He spent most of the afternoon hanging out with the younger kids, telling them more tales of his, Ron and Hermione's high jinxes at school. He also spoke to them of the tales that Sirius had told him about the Marauders and the things they used to get up to.

***

Harry was waiting nervously for the evening to arrive. He had not spent much time alone with Sev since they had returned to Hogwarts and he was hoping that tonight would go well. He had seen Severus briefly at breakfast and for a short time during lunch, at neither time did he look happy. Harry wondered why he hated Christmas so much while he simply loved it; well, at least since he had come to Hogwarts he had. He was just going to have to bring in some festive cheer to Sev's life this evening. He wouldn't ask tonight why he hated Christmas. He didn't want to spoil the mood as such, but one day he would ask.

***

It was Christmas evening and the meal had just finished in the Great Hall. Harry had made his excuses and left about ten minutes after Severus. He was going to make the man live up to his promise if it was the last thing he did. He briefly returned to Gryffindor Tower to collect Sev's presents. He was having second thoughts about what he was giving him for Christmas, what if Hermione and Ron had been right and fun was not the way to go? Would his gifts be appreciated? Harry took a deep calming breath, he was being stupid and he knew he was. Sev would like and appreciate his gifts because they had come from him. He knew Sev must like him; after all you didn't kiss someone if you didn't like him or her, did you? Harry certainly didn't. No, he was panicking for no reason, again! He reached the door to Severus' private chambers and knocked.

Severus answered the door. "Ah, so you do plan on making me keep that promise you made me make?" He could see the man smirking.

"Too true! You made a deal and, as we all know, a deal is a deal! I kept my part and now it is
your turn to keep yours." Harry replied triumphantly.

He watched as Sev narrowed his eyes at him playfully. "You had better come in then. We wouldn't want boy wonder to catch his death in a drafty corridor, would we?"

As Harry walked past him through the door, he poked his tongue out at Severus. "I guess it would be kind of embarrassing for the saviour to die from a cold, but it would be amusing to see old Voldie's reaction." He saw Severus roll his eyes in amusement. Harry went and sat down on the sofa, hoping Sev would join him and not sit on one of the chairs. The Gods must have been smiling on him because he did and was given a glass of red wine.

"Here, I believe this was also part of the deal. I guess if I must be festive then being drunk will certainly help!" There was a definite sarcastic undertone in his voice. It made Harry smile.

"This might help," Harry started to pass his gifts over to Severus, "But you have to promise me something."

"Promises to you usually end up bad for me."

Harry laughed out loud. "I promise this one won't."

"Famous last words." Severus grumbled.

"I promise."

"You should be a lawyer, your negation skills are getting quite good." Severus muttered back.

"Please, no way! Come on, promise me." He jabbed him in the arm to emphasize his point.

"Okay, but what exactly am I promising to this time?"

"To promise not to use these while I'm still in school."

Severus raised an eyebrow at that. "Why should I promise such a thing?" Was the suspicious reply.

"Because you won't get your presents otherwise, and I know the curiosity is now killing you."

After what seemed like forever, while he guessed Sev was weighing up the pros and cons of his deal, Severus agreed. Harry passed him his two gifts. He watched as those elegant hands untied the wrapping on the first gift, which was tied up like a Christmas cracker. Harry supposed he was more impatient the Severus, he couldn't wait for Sev to unwrap it and work it out. When he had finished unwrapping it he studied it, "It's a map of Hogwarts?"

"Kind of, let me explain," Harry was grinning. "We need to set it a password so only you can use it. It will show you where anybody in Hogwarts is at anytime. Let me show you. Harry Potter." He asked it, and sure enough it zoomed into a room and two dots could be seen, with names above them. Harry's dot was flashing green. He passed it back to Severus who had a look of recognition on his face.

"Why do I get the feeling I have come across something very similar, in your possession no less, before?" It seemed as if he had trouble keeping the amusement from his voice.
"Oh, I have no idea what you talking about Professor!" Harry tried his best innocent face, failing miserably.

"Third year? If I remember correctly."

"Maybe." Harry looked sheepishly, after all innocence had failed.

Severus sniggered at that. "Why make rule breaking even harder for you fellow students?"

"Hey, once I leave it every man for himself or herself!" Harry laughed back. "The same promise goes for the other gift also."

Severus nodded at him and set about opening the second gift. It was a book; he flipped it over to read the title 'A Guide of Potions To Use Against Friends and Enemies Alike Compiled by Harry Potter'. Severus smirked at him and raised an eyebrow in question.

"I did a whole load of research in the library, especially in the restricted section, and compiled all the fun potions I could find and put them all in one book for you along with situations. So when someone annoys you, flick through the book for a similar situation, and it will suggest which potion to use for a little fun payback."

Sev was actually smiling at him, "And you always claimed you are not a trouble maker. Here you are trying to get me to use underhanded tactics for payback. I love it, very Slytherin of you! Thank you, Harry."

"Glad you like them, and to think Ron and Hermione tried to persuade me fun was not the way to go with you."

"Believe me, it makes a refreshing change. Most people are to afraid to get me something like this." There was definitely a bit of an evil smirk on his face. Harry just grinned back like an idiot. He was so relived he had made the right choices. "I guess I should give you this?"

Severus handed him a silver box tied with a green and red ribbon. Harry briefly wondered if it was symbolic, then shrugged it off in order to open his gift.

As he opened the lid of the box, a huge grin graced his lips. Inside were seven little bottles, all labeled and filled with the potions he needed to finish his Animagi training. "These are what I think they are, right?"

Severus rolled his eyes at him, "I made an educated guess that you would not have the patience to go down the long route. I believe you will need these next." He indicated to the box.

"Wow! Its like you read my mind! How though? I thought you needed some of my hair for one of them. Anyway, this is so cool! Can I take then now?" Harry was virtually bouncing on the spot.

"Well, the wine will have no effect on them. Oh, and you are easy prey Potter I had no trouble collecting a few stray hairs from you. But,"

"But? Why is there always a but?"

"Because there is. The glamour you are under could affect them. It should be removed before
ingestion." Sev stated matter of fact tone.

"Can you remove it? The glamourie, I mean."

"I could, but I shouldn't. My charms are nowhere near as good as Professor Flitwick's. He should be the one to replace it and I don't think he will appreciate you turning up half inebriated on his doorstep asking for it to be done; plus anyone in the school could see you."

"No problem, I have my invisibility cloak, and no one is in Gryffindor Tower except me, so it's safe. Please!" Harry was begging now, he wanted to take the potions and move on to the last step of his training.

"Why do I have a bad feeling about this?" He was looking at Harry.

"Because you're one of life's natural pessimists?"

Sev snorted at that but did get up from the sofa and took out his wand. "Fine! Get up, but remember, I hold no responsibility if anything goes wrong." Harry laughed and got up. "You do realise the irony of this position?"

Harry looked blankly at Severus, irony? "No."

"A few years ago, if I had pointed a wand at you, you would have run a mile away, or tried to hex me."

"Ah, how times change. But don't ever think I still don't want to hex you on occasion." Harry shot back smirking.

Sev just gave him a classic smirk back. "Hold still. Emoveo Dissimulo Cassus Aevum."

Harry was once again encased in the orange light and he felt his skin stretch a little. He put the slight pain out of his mind in favour of thinking about his Animagi transformation. When the light faded Harry was once again twenty-seven years old. "How do I look?"

He could see Sev look slightly uncomfortable, but decided to ignore it. "Like a slightly older brat!"

"Excellent! Now which one should I take first?"

***

After nearly an hour Harry had taken his potions, they had tasted from foul to out right disgusting. They had worked, but he expected nothing less from a gifted Potion Master. The first one had made him tingle and had covered his hands in black fur. The second one had been some kind of DNA-accepting potion, to make sure his genes could handle the change. The third had made him sprout ears; Severus had had a good laugh at the image of him with pointy ears. The fourth one had allowed his brain and senses to accept the changes. The fifth had made him grow whiskers; the sixth had given him the changing back-and-forth ability. The seventh had transformed him completely. He looked in a mirror of Sev's and what had stared back at him was a little disorientating at first. When he had opened his mouth to say something a high pitch growl had come out. He must have looked startled even in his new form because Sev had laughed his head off. He looked back in the mirror and staring back at him was a green-eyed
black panther, with a little white patch above his right eye. He guessed his scar was his recognisable feature. He didn't mind, in fur it wasn't half as identifiable. After he had changed back he flung himself at Severus and gave the man a bear hug. He was so happy, especially with the fact he had cut about a year out of his study. He had heard his father and his friends had taken a few years to perfect their transformations, he reckoned they had done it the hard way without the potions. Harry was grateful he had a Potions Master on his side.

***

It was starting to get late, it was already after midnight and they were on their third bottle of wine. Harry liked Sev when he was a bit tipsy; he was so much more relaxed, informal and fun. As they both lounged on the sofa, Harry couldn't believe that he would have seen his tightly wound teacher slouching; it was a nice image. He had the whole disheveled thing going on for him again. His hair was a slight mess, his trousers were informal, and his white shirt untucked. Very pleasant, Harry mused. Before he knew it he had been staring for too long and was busted. "What are you looking at?" Severus asked him.

"You."

"Believe me, I am not that interesting. Go stare elsewhere."

Harry giggled; even tipsy this man could sound snarky. "But I like where I'm staring right now."

Sev turned to him and raised an eyebrow as though to question his sanity, "you are odd. No, make that VERY odd, Mister Potter."

Smiling, Harry reached out with his right hand and stroked Sev's cheek. "I can live with odd. I have been called worse, you know?"

"Really? Would you like me to hex all of them for you?"

"I believe that is the sweetest thing you have ever said to me."

Severus turned his face to kiss the palm of Harry hand. "I don't do sweet." He leaned in towards Harry and their lips met. He could feel Severus' tongue gliding along his lower lip, seeking entrance to his mouth. He gave it willingly. Harry could only describe the resulting kiss as toe curling; he never wanted it to end. But end it did, Sev pulled away from him as he seemed to get his bearings back, "Harry... I'm sorry. I just..." He got up from the sofa and stood by the fireplace. Harry was not going to let him get away this time. No way!

He got up and stepped over to the fireplace and took Sev's face in his hands. "There is no need to apologise. Trust me when I say that." He stood on tiptoe and kissed Sev right back. As the kiss deepened, Severus' hands started to tightly wrap around Harry's waist to pull him closer. When the kiss finished they stared into each other's eyes, waiting for the other to pull away, or say no. But neither of them said a word. Severus raised an eyebrow in question and Harry shyly smiled his answer back. Chastely placing a kiss on his lips, Severus raised his hand to stroke his cheek; he then took his hand and led him to the bedroom.

***

Harry was led into a large room with a beautifully carved ornate wardrobe, armoire, dressing table and huge king-size four-poster double bed. The sight of the bed made his heart flutter, he
had never had full sex before. He had never gone this far before with either a man or a woman. He had never gone beyond second base, as the muggle kids liked to say. He wanted to do this with Sev. He loved Sev and the idea of him being his first sent a thrill of excitement through him, it just felt totally right. If he had his way, Sev would be his first and only lover.

Severus recaptured his lips and the kiss instantly burned bright with untamed passion. He could feel Severus' hands running down his back and gripping his ass. Harry gasped into Sev's mouth; he was so filled with emotions and excitement he thought he might explode. He felt his shirt being un-tucked from his trousers. Eager to help, he started to undo the buttons on his shirt. Sev stopped his hands halfway down. He raised them to his lips and with gentle nips and licks he worshiped each of his fingers in turn. He never broke eye contact with Harry. Harry nearly fainted from desire due to that passionate gaze. After Sev had finished with his fingers he gave him a small smile and led him over to the bed.

Sev's hands stroked up his arms up to his shoulders and he was gently pressed down onto the decadent bed. Severus lay down beside him and started to kiss him slowly, trailing along his jaw, down his neck and onto his chest. The rest of his shirt was undone with a practised hand as Sev continued to devour Harry's chest. He could no longer control himself and keep quiet; moans were escaping his throat as Sev's talented hands stroked torso to hip while his mouth was feasting upon his nipples. "Oh, God!" Harry moaned quite loudly as his body went into sensory overload when Sev began to nibble on his earlobe. He heard Sev give a low, seductive chuckle.

"That's the first time I have been called a God!" The amusement was evident in his voice. Harry let out a sound that was a mixture of laughter and a groan. The man's voice was so intoxicating! "A nice boost to the ego, though." He was looking down at Harry with a sexy smile that Harry could not resist. He pulled the man down for another soul-searing kiss.

It was not long before he had been freed from his shirt and was happily wrapped tightly in Sev's arms. Harry had never believed sex could have such a slow, burning build up, he guessed that was the seventeen year old in him talking. But he was on cloud nine from having his upper body idolized by such a sexy man. However, it came to his mind that there was a slight imbalance in their positions as Severus still had his shirt on and that, in Harry's opinion, was quite unfair. He was an equal opportunist after all!

He gathered all the strength his liquefied brain could muster and he pushed Severus on to his back. The man didn't seem to mind, as he made no vocal complaints. Harry repaid the favour by starting on his neck, nipping, licking, sucking and kissing his way down, undoing the buttons of his shirt as he came across them. He figured he was doing something right from the pleasurable noises that Sev was making. He noticed a few scars gracing Severus' torso but didn't mind, they added to the whole package. The man's skin was pale but beautifully so, especially in the soft flickering candlelight. One thing Harry's lust-addled mind did pick up on was the physique this man was hiding under all his layers of clothing. He was well defined and hard; his upper body did not have an ounce of fat on it. It was wonderfully sculptured, strong and powerful looking. It was driving Harry wild with passion.

As Harry reached the waistband of Severus' trousers, he became a little worried that his inexperience would become overly apparent. He didn't want to ruin the moment by accidentally scraping his teeth across something he shouldn't. He had some idea of the mechanics of sex, like any healthy teenager he had fantasised away most of his nights. But he was happy to let the living, breathing fantasy in bed with him lead the way. He might be a stubborn Gryffindor but he was not stupid. So, with his tongue he licked his way right up the centre of Sev's chest and back to those luscious lips in one fluid movement. Sev seemed to get the idea and rolled them
back over so he was on top again. He felt expert hands unbuttoning his trousers, slowly pushing them down past his hips and thighs, closely followed by his underwear. He arched his back a little to help the process along. Sev made his way back down his chest, pushing the clothing down at the same time. Soon he was in Sev's arms, naked, panting, and trembling ever so slightly from lust and passion. As he reached down with trembling fingers to unbutton Severus' trousers he got trapped in his dusky gaze. His breath hitched, in his eyes he had believed Severus could get no more beautiful but what he saw now proved him wrong. Sev's eyes were aflame with passion and wanting, his lips were bruised and swollen from intense kissing. He had a little colour in his cheeks and his hair was a real mess, a little wild and untamed. Harry just stared, wanting to remember this image for all time.

***

Severus leaned down and whispered in Harry's ear, "Harry, I must ask if you are sure? We will soon be hitting the point of no return." He placed a gentle, almost loving kiss on his cheek.

"Trust me, I'm sure!" Harry groaned out, proving his words by finishing the unbuttoning of Sev's trousers.

"Please, Harry. Think about this. I will be as gentle as possible but it will hurt a little bit." He really didn't want to cause his young lover any pain, but he knew from experience it would hurt, even if it would be dulled by copious amounts of red wine!

"Sev, I know you would never intentionally hurt me. I want you! I want you to be my first, last and everything. I love you," was the husky reply. Severus was lost, how could he refuse such passionately spoken words? He wanted Harry in every way possible!

Harry had successfully removed his trousers and they were both lying naked, wrapped tightly in each other's arms. He lifted his right hand and quietly muttered "Accio lubricant," under his breath. It flew into his hand from across the room.

"Impertinent brat!" He replied. Harry just giggled. He was glad Harry was able to have a little fun in bed; it made things more interesting. He hated people who took sex too seriously. It was good to have a little fun and enjoy yourself.

He parted Harry's legs with his own and stroked his lover's inner thigh, in order to relax him a little. He put some lubricant on his fingers to lessen the pain for Harry and started to stretch and relax him so the first penetration would be less painful. After he had introduced the first finger, he waited for Harry to adjust to the new sensations bombarding him. He was whispering to him to distract from any discomfort. When Harry groaned in pleasure, he moved his finger in slow, rhythmic strokes. As Harry became more relaxed, he entered another finger and followed the same procedure as he waited for him to adjust. He skimmed across his prostate, knowing it would send waves of pleasure through his young lover and enjoying the sounds and reactions it had caused. When Harry had become sufficiently relaxed, he entered a third finger to help prepare him a little more before penetration. He heard a small, sharp intake of breath from Harry, "Shhh, Tu an adeo bellus meus dilectio." He had noticed that speaking in Latin had distracted Harry before and he tried it again. It seemed to work. He was glad Harry didn't speak Latin; he didn't want him to know he was being told sweet nothings. It would do nothing for his reputation!
"Better?"

"Mmmm, yes," came the breathless reply.

Severus carefully and gently removed his fingers. After he applied liberal amounts of lubricant to himself, he positioned himself between Harry's legs, pulling his knees up a bit. Harry must have picked up on his apprehension to enter him.

"I'll be Okay, Sev. Please! I...I want you."

Severus leaned down and kissed him hard to help distract him and he slowly entered, carefully breaching the tight ring of muscle until he was fully sheathed. Once he was fully inserted, he stilled all movement to check on his young love. He could see his eyes had started to water a little and he carefully wiped his thumbs across his eyelids to remove the tears. "Shhh, let it out, relax." He whispered, he was referring to the fact Harry was holding his breath.

When he did, he took a couple of deep calming breaths. "Oh, God!"

Severus pressed a soft kiss to Harry's mouth, "that's the second instance you have called me a deity this evening, isn't that blasphemy?" He said in an amused tone.

Harry looked up at him and let out a giggle, which seemed to relax him. "Only you could use big words at a time like this!"

"There is nothing quite like a mouthful to break the ice, mmmm?"

Harry nipped at his neck, "I quite agree!"

Severus was pleased Harry had gotten past his pain, he wanted to make this as pleasurable as possible for him. He traced his right hand down Harry's side and lightly gripped his thigh. He began to slowly trust in and out of him. He was using all the self-control that remained in him to keep up a slow and steady pace. He was so tight, it was pushing even his strong will to the limits! However, he could not rush things for he refused to cause any great discomfort for Harry.

As they both got lost in a world of hot, passionate kisses and scintillating sensation, Severus was able to increase their tempo and deepen his thrusts bringing screams of pleasure from Harry as he bought him closer and closer to completion. He could tell Harry was as ready as he was and he wanted to bring his young lover with him. He reached between them and took Harry in his hand and stroked him in time with his thrusts. "Cum with me, Harry." He whispered into his ear. It was not long before Harry was screaming out his name as he came in Severus' hand, Severus not far behind him whispering "Ego delectio tu," into Harry's ear.

**Next Chapter: **It's the morning after. School starts up again and Draco gets a little suspicious.

**Latin Translation:**

Emoveo Dissimulo Cassus Aevum - *Remove Disguise of Age.*

Tu an adeo bellus meus dilectio - *You are so beautiful my love.*
Ego delectio tu - *I love you.*
The light in the room had a grey tinge to it, not quite dark and not quite light. It was coming in through the small high windows in the bedroom. Harry turned over in bed and stretched out. Realising he was alone, he sat up on his elbows. Immediately he regretted it, his head was swimming and his guts were sloshing around. He lay back down slowly, hoping it would pass. He wondered where Sev had gotten to and knew the only way he would find out would be to leave the huge, soft warm bed and face his hangover. He got out of bed carefully, and slipped on his trousers and walked out of the room towards the living room. He entered to see Severus sitting at the table while nursing a cup of tea.

"Have a spare one for a hung-over reprobate?" Harry pointed to the teapot. Severus just grunted at him, waved his hand in the air and another teacup appeared and settled gently on the table. Harry went over to it, filled it up from the pot and sat opposite Severus. "Sev, are you okay?"

"Mmmm. Here, take this. It takes about an hour to work through your system." Harry was passed a small vial filled with pink liquid.

"What does it do?"

"It will get rid of your hangover."

"Oh, cool! I was worried I would have to go Pomfrey and make up some story about why I feel so rough."

Severus gave him a snort of laughter. "She would have guessed why then she would have reprimanded me for giving a student so much alcohol, even if you of age."

"You're probably right, she always knows. Oh man, I feel rough." Harry uncapped the vial and took it in one swig. He lifted an eyebrow towards Severus, "Tastes good!"

"Do you really believe that I would have my own personal potions taste vile?"

A wicked grin crossed Harry's face, "I can't believe you make the student's potions taste so bad. That's cruel!"
"It's an incentive to stay healthy and out of trouble, though it never had that effect on you!" An equally wicked grin was on Severus face.

"Hey! It's not nice to pick on a man with his first hangover. I'm suffering enough!" Harry gave out a soft laugh.

"Mmmm." Harry saw Severus rub a hand over his face while he had given his cryptic mmmm.

"What does 'mmmm,' stand for, Sev?" Harry asked, a little nervous of the answer.

"Nothing."

"Come on, Sev. Don't give me that crap! Someone else maybe, but not me."

"I believe... I am wrestling with my conscience right now."

"Why?"

"Harry, this looks bad." He had pointed to Harry then himself, "I am your teacher and I essentially got you drunk and seduced you."

Harry laughed, not too loudly as his head was still banging away, and he took Severus' hand in his. "Sev, you so did not take advantage of me. I wanted it, I wanted you."

"Will others see that if what happened gets out?"

"If I had my way, Sev, I would run up to the tallest tower and shout it from the top of my lungs. You know how I feel about you. I want to tell the world I have found the man I love and if people don't like it, they can sod off." Harry leaned over and stoked Severus' cheek. "I know we have to be careful, the Dark Lord must be kept unaware; but it doesn't change the way I feel about you." Harry leaned over again and tenderly kissed Severus.

***

Severus pulled back from the kiss before it could become too heated. He had to use all his self-control to do so. Harry was looking very tempting in only his trousers and messy hair, but it was a little odd to see Harry looking ten years older then he really was. Severus liked him looking this way but he knew it would not last; although he did admit to himself, Harry looked gorgeous whatever his age.

Boundaries needed to be set, especially if they were going to attempt anything remotely like a relationship. Severus was aware there was no rule against them being involved as Harry was of age. He still felt as though he had betrayed a trust that had been placed in him. What he needed to do was to get Harry to understand his point of view. He didn't think he could resist him if he continued to throw himself at him. "Harry, we can not do this again..."

"But..."

Severus lifted a hand to quiet him, "Harry, I am your teacher. The parents of children believe this to be a safe haven for their children. They do not expect the professors to start dating their children if one of them takes a fancy to them. I know there is no rule preventing it; we are both
of age so legally there is nothing stopping us. But, morally, I believe it to be wrong. If something is to develop between us, then we must wait until you finish school."

"Sev, do you regret what happened last night?"

"No. The only thing I have a slight problem with is that I was your first."

"Don't be, I'm not. I'm glad it was you. I can't imagine anything worse then being with another guy who had no idea what he was doing. We would have spent the whole night fumbling around. I didn't want my first time to be a meaningless moment in time that I would come to regret. I will try my best to control myself around you; I do understand what you are saying. It doesn't mean that I like it, though."

"Thank you for being so mature about it."

"Your welcome. Come graduation day though, your ass is mine!" There was an absolutely wicked smile on Harry's lips.

Severus flashed back one of his best smirks. "I now have more reason to want you to hurry up and graduate, Mister Potter."

"I'm counting down the days, but can I, you know, still come and hang out?"

"I don't see any reason why not." He leaned over and kissed Harry. "Now that my hangover has passed, I think I will jump in the shower. Please feel free to order breakfast. I will call Filius later on to recast your charm."

"Want some company?" Severus rolled his eyes at Harry. "I think I will pass on breakfast for the moment, my hangover has not gone yet."

"It will pass soon. Keep out of trouble." He left the room heading to the bathroom feeling better because Harry had understood his point of view and he seemed to except it.

***

On the night of the welcome back feast, Harry had the pleasure of congratulating Ron and Hermione on their promise ring announcement. Hermione was positively glowing with excitement when Harry had told her of his and Sev's night together. She wanted explicit details, while Ron blushed and mumbled something about needing to send an owl to Bill.

"Oh, Harry! I'm so happy for you. It's so romantic, having to contain your passion until you graduate."

"Mione, the way you tell it makes it sound like a muggle romance novel."

"But, Harry, it's better then that, it's real life."

"Since when did you become an impossible romantic? I have never seen this side to you before." Harry was laughing at the huge grin Hermione had spread across her face.

"I always have been. You have only noticed recently because you have acknowledged me being a girl, and not one of the lads."
"Maybe."

Ron walked back into the room and kissed Hermione on the cheek. "Enough about that, Harry, what did professor Snape get you for Christmas?" She asked.

"You'll never guess! He made me all seven potions for my Animagi training!"

Hermione gasped, "I can't believe it! They speed your training up by almost a year!"

"I know! How cool is that?"

"Harry, mate, I can't believe Snape made them for you. They are really tricky and time consuming, not to mention expensive to make." Ron looked shocked, but impressed. "Maybe I was wrong and Snape does have feelings after all."

"Ron, trust me. Sev has plenty of feelings, he just likes to keep them hidden."

"Ron's right, you know. Harry, those potions are really expensive to make. They have lots of rare ingredients in them. Oh! Harry, have you taken them yet?"

Harry's huge grin told them his answer. "Yes and I'm a panther."

"Wow, Harry that's so cool. Come on then, let's see you change." Ron egged him on.

"Okay, but I'm still a little slow, but I am practising everyday. According to the book, if I practise all the time it should only be a few months until I can change in the blink of an eye."

Harry got up from Hermione's bed, stood in the middle of the room and concentrated hard on his animal form. A few minutes later, standing on the rug was a black panther with the white smudge of fur above his right eye. "Harry, that is so amazing. You look amazing!"

"Yeh Mione's right, mate. Wow! I think I might have to borrow this book of yours. Cool!" Ron went over and scratched Harry behind his now feline ears.

***

A week later, Harry had the feeling he was being watched. He was in potions class so at first he put it down to Sev but it did not feel right. All of his intuition was telling him it was something else, something dangerous.

***

Draco liked to consider himself as being aware of his environment; he was very good at picking up on the small things most people missed. Years of training at his father's hands had taught him that. He had always kept a close eye on Potter; his father had requested it of him back in his first year. Over the holidays he had heard some interesting tidbits of information regarding Potter. He had heard his father and his friends talking about him being under some sort of gamourie. Draco had cast a Reveal Spell on his eyes before this class and looked several times at him but nothing changed, he still looked like Potter.

One thing he had noticed, though, were the little shy looks Potter had been throwing at his Head
of House, and the strangest thing was that Snape was not scowling back. He looked almost indifferent to Potter's shy smiles and small blushes. Interesting! Draco thought. Could Potter have a crush on Snape, of all the people? Oh, someone would hear about this, maybe that annoying writer Rita Skeeter. He smirked to himself when he imagined the headlines 'Boy Wonder in love with a male professor!' He would have to seek his fathers' counsel first, in case it interfered with anything that was planned for Potter.

He didn't want to cause Snape any problems; the man had way too much power over him, especially while he was in school. The house of Snape was a very old and powerful house. It still was even after it had lost some of its reputation following the last war with the Dark Lord. After this lesson he would write to his father and keep a closer eye on Potter, and maybe a little on Snape too.

***

Dear Father,

I have been keeping an eye on Potter, as always, and I have found out some rather amusing news. It seems as if Potter has a crush on our one and only Professor Snape.

I don't know if Professor Snape is aware of this or not, but he does seem a little indifferent towards Potter since the Christmas Holidays.

If you require anything of me, owl me and I will do my best for you.

Draco.

Draco tied the parchment to his family owl's leg and sent it on its way. "Crabbe, Goyle. Let's go, it's nearly time for supper and we can't have you two passing out from hunger now, can we?" Draco sneered at his two goon bodyguards. They did as they were told and followed him to the Great Hall. While eating supper, he noticed that Potter had looked up at Snape twenty-three times. Snape had only looked at Potter once and gave him the classic Snape sneer. Thank Merlin, Draco thought. At least some things seemed normal. Snape still seems to dislike Potter.

***

The next morning at breakfast, the Malfoy owl delivered its letter to an eagerly awaiting Draco. He opened it in a flourish, tapping his wand against the parchment and, after speaking the password, the words appeared across the formerly blank parchment.

Draco,

Very interesting, but do you have any proof? This could prove very useful to us. I want you to keep this under wraps for the moment, I know you would dearly love to go running to that annoying woman from the Daily Prophet to embarrass Potter but, as I have said, this information could prove useful to us at a later date.

I will trust you with some information, Draco, but you must not tell anyone of it. Back in school when Severus and I were still good friends, he told me that he was gay. I had no problem with it, as I still don't, but Severus and I are not as close as we once were and if what you say about Potter is true then things could get interesting.
That Potter brat is very much Severus' type: Young, powerful and mildly attractive. If Potter makes his intentions clear, I am not sure my old friend will be able to resist for long!

There are two ways this could play out for us, it could be used in some way to keep Severus under our control or it could prove very useful to our Lord.

So, my advice to you is to keep a close eye on things and keep me informed if anything happens.

Your Father

Draco respelled the parchment so it would be unreadable to anyone that was not a Malfoy. He had a lot of things to think about, and he had to keep a closer eye on Potter and Snape.

***

It had been too long since he and Severus had been alone, Harry was getting withdrawal symptoms. He hadn't hugged, kissed or even been in a room alone with Sev for over a week. He had no excuse to go down and see him, his supply of pepper up potion was fully stocked and he had no detention. So he sat curled up on his bed with his scarf wrapped around him acting, in his own words, pathetic. "I am so God damned PATHETIC!" Harry groaned out loud to no one, as he was alone in the dormitory.

{"Hey, you said it, skin bag."} 

{"Leave him alone, he is in love."} 

{"Shut up, you middle idiot. The human is pathetic."} 

{"You have no dreams, lefty. And you're mean."} 

{"Mean! I am not mean, just a little critical. Look at him, he said it himself, pathetic."} 

{"Will you two ever give it a rest, I'm planning the downfall of this stupid school right now and it's not helping hearing you two argue all the time."} 

{"I don't understand why you two are so desperate to get away from our master. I like him; at least he talks to us on occasion. Not like our last master."} 

Harry heard his runespoor arguing with itself about him and he had to smile, the snake was right, he was acting pathetic. {"So what do you suggest I do about it?"} he asked it. After all, he was fresh out of ideas.

{"Oh, so now you want our advice? It will cost you."} 

{"What will it cost me?"} Harry asked clearly amused by the whole situation. After all, how many people asked for relationship advice from a snake!

{"Three mice, you dumb human."} 

{"Deal, lefty."} Harry put the three mice in with the snake and flinched a bit as the three heads set about devouring their treat. {"So, what's your great advice, then?"}
"Don't ask me. I'm the left head, the critic, remember."

"Tell him you love him." Said the middle head. Strangely enough, the middle head managed to have a dreamy look on its face.

"Tried that, but it's not a good enough reason to go down and see him." Harry was starting to feel dejected.

"Must I do everything around here? Don't listen to the middle head it's the dreamer. If you want a plan then you come to me, the right head because, guess what! I'm the planner. From what you have said, you two have already been intimae, correct?" Harry nodded. "So what's the problem then? Put that cloak on that makes you invisible and just go and see him. No doubt he is missing you to. Or if you don't like that idea, change into that big cat that you can become and go visit him. Either way, stop moping and go see him so I can get back to my planning!"

Harry hadn't been told off like that in quite some time, and it was quite humbling when coming from a three-headed snake. But it had given Harry some ideas; the cloak probably would have been the best idea. It was a tried and tested means of getting around the school, especially when teamed with the marauder's map. The transforming into his Animagi form had added excitement to the plan. It was decided then, Animagi transformation it was. Harry crept out of Gryffindor Tower and into the closest bathroom to transform.

***

Severus was trying to finish up his marking but he wasn't having much luck, his mind kept wandering to two of his students, for different reasons. One was Harry Potter, a small smile crossed his lips, because as annoying as the brat was he was also the most interesting and not to mention charming young man he had met in years. Two was Draco Malfoy. He had noticed that the Lucius-in-training was watching Harry all the time. At first he thought the younger Malfoy may have a slight fancy for Harry and immediately wondered if anyone would notice if he killed Draco Malfoy. He knew many clean ways to do it that would leave no evidence, which bought an evil grin to his face. No, that was wrong, he knew Draco to be heterosexual. He had met most of the young ladies that he had dated, and Draco was not stupid enough to go and fall for Harry Potter. He let out a snort of laughter, unlike me, he thought.

Strange scratching noises at his door bought him out of his reflections. It wasn't loud but it was enough to get his attention, it sounded vaguely like an animal at his door. Maybe one of Hagrid's 'pets' had escaped again and was seeking sanctuary in the dark dungeons. It wouldn't be the first time that had happened. He opened the door cautiously with one hand on his wand, ready to stun whatever had come to say hello.

Out of the shadows came a green-eyed panther, it quietly crept into his room, twisting through his legs. He closed the door and turned to look down at his new guest. "This new trick of yours, Mister Potter, is not to be used for rule breaking." The panther walked up to him and rubbed itself against his leg. "Nor am I your personal scratching post." If it was possible for big cats to laugh, it seemed this one was doing so as its long tail curled around his calf and knee. He reluctantly reached down and scratched the cat behind the ears as it sat down next to him with its tail still wrapped around his leg. It licked his hand and disappeared into the bedroom.

Severus ordered some tea, secretly very pleased that Harry had come to visit him, after all it had been over a week since they had been alone. It was getting harder and harder to find excuses to be alone with the boy.
He poured two cups adding milk and sugar to Harry's while wincing, how could anyone drink their tea all sweet and sugary? Like tea, like young man, Severus mused. He turned around to ask if Harry wanted anything to eat and immediately found his arms full of one very ardent Harry Potter!

***

After Harry had changed back in the bathroom, he lost patience and ran into the living room and straight into Sev's arms. He wrapped his legs tightly around Sev's waist. He didn't seem to mind as he responded to the bruising kiss Harry had initiated. He could feel Sev's hands sliding around his waist to come to rest on his arse. He softly moaned into Sev's mouth, he had missed this man's touch so much. If possible he believed he was addicted to it. "Mmmm, I missed you so much." Harry said as he pulled away from the kiss.

"As pleasant as it is to see you, were you followed? Or did you notice anyone hanging around outside in the corridors?"

"No I wasn't, and no I didn't." Each word was punctuated by delicate kisses to Sev's jaw. "You're too paranoid."

"And you do not pay attention to your surroundings."

Harry slid out of Severus' hold, "what makes you say that?"

"Draco has been watching you a lot today, me also. I think he may suspect something. He is a very bright young man and suspicious." Harry could tell by his tone he was truly worried.

"Really? I hadn't noticed, he watches me all the time, I'm just kind of used to it."

"It is even more so than he usually does. Be careful of him, Harry, he can be a very dangerous young man."

Harry took Sev's hand and bought it up to his lips to place a soft kiss on his knuckles. "I will, I promise. Now, enough about that, why don't we go sit down on the sofa and you can tell me everything you have been up to since I last saw you." Harry smiled broadly at Sev and dragged him across to the sofa by the hand he had yet to let go of. Once they were sitting down, Harry snuggled into the side of Sev and was pleased when Severus placed his arm around his shoulders.

***

They lost track of time as they caught up on their news. Severus told Harry about his and Filius' recent mock duel, and how he had only just beat the diminutive wizard with a well-placed Levitation Spell coupled with an ancient Binding Hex. They also talked in depth about Harry's research into removing the Dark Mark and Severus gave Harry a few books to read that might prove helpful. The longer they chatted, the deeper they sank into the sofa, and all the time Sev was playing with the hair on the back of Harry's neck making him very drowsy.

***

When Harry opened his eyes, he was immediately met with a black wall. Disorientated, he panicked and instantly sat up only to feel an arm tighten around his waist and attempt to pull...
him back down onto the sofa. Everything fell into place. They had lain down on the sofa as they had chatted into the night and they must have fallen asleep. He willingly went back down and smiled. He would have to leave soon so as not to be missed, but he thought that he could get away with another five minutes. He could feel the steady breath on the back of his neck of the sleeping Severus and truly believed for the first time in his life he had found his rightful home. It felt so correct, so perfect.

"Its time you headed back to your dorm, otherwise Minerva will have my head." Severus words were heavily fogged with sleep.

"I know, just five more minutes."

He could feel Sev smile against his neck as he kissed it delicately. "Two, then you must go."

Harry turned around to face Severus and leaned in to kiss him, "deal."

***

Over the next week, Harry spent a lot of time on his Animagi studies. Since he had taken the potions his transformations were becoming more natural to him, but he still wasn't quick enough compared to what Sirius was, he was down right slow. He was going through all of the mental exercises in the book again to try and speed things up. Severus had also given him a couple of books that he thought might help.

Hermione had been kind enough to let him use her dorm room while she and Ron took moonlight walks by the lake to plan their future. He was really happy for them and he was so pleased for Ron that she had said yes to his promise ring. Apparently they had decided to become formally engaged when Hermione had finished with University and Ron had completed his Auror training. He had yet to apply to become an Auror, but he was unable to do so until Easter. Harry figured that he would be accepted because Dumbledore had agreed to write his reference letter that needed to be submitted with the application and his grades were good; even his potions grade was high enough to get him accepted.

It was starting to get late and Harry was starting to feel the exhaustion of his transformations setting in. He had it down to around seven seconds per change. He was getting there; he reckoned that with a few more weeks of intensive training he would have his transformations down to around three seconds.

**Next chapter:** Harry has second thoughts about taking the antidote; Harry and Draco have a little bust up. And a little fluff!
Chapter Eighteen - Fear Of Going Back.

Severus was in his office filling out an order form to restock his classroom store while his mind kept on wandering back to one Harry James Potter. The young man was more and more on his mind these days. He put it down to the fact that in around five months Harry will have graduated and in theory have left the school for good and he would have taken the antidote also. He didn't know where this would leave them, assuming there was a 'them.' His feelings for Harry were deepening; there was no question about that. He had told him he loved him during their night of passion back on Christmas night, albeit in Latin. But it still counted, right? Just because Harry did not speak fluent Latin was not his problem nor his fault. It was a coward's way out, he knew that, but at the moment he was not ready to rectify this slight discrepancy. Soon, yes definitely soon.

Severus had finished his form and frowned at himself. It had taken twice as long as it normally would have done due to his ruminations on Harry. He shook his head as he left his office and headed to the owlry. He seemed to be doing it more and more these days.

***

The subject of Severus thoughts was currently holed up in his dorm with a very frustrated Hermione and an angry Ron. "Harry, you have to take the antidote. I have never heard anything so... so stupid in my life!" Hermione was at a loss for words; at first she had thought that Harry was joking, although he was sticking to his argument. Stupid boy! Hermione thought.

"Yeah, Mione's right. Mate, you have to take it. I'm not one for sticking up for Snape but he has spent months trying to figure it out. You owe it to him and if you love him like you say you do then you will take it." Ron had lost his temper; Harry was acting stupid and selfish.

Harry had taken the words of his friends to heart, he really had. But he had thought this out too; he no longer wanted to take the antidote. Once the glamourie was off he was just another citizen, another face in the crowd and most importantly he was twenty-seven. Even though Sev didn't seem to have a problem with the age gap, he was worried that once he was seventeen again, Severus would tire of having a teenager around him all the time. To him Severus was the personification of elegance and sophistication and having a teenager as a lover or consort would soon lose its appeal. "I'm sorry guys, but I have made up my mind. I am not taking the antidote. Once school is out I will live as a fully-grown adult, I won't have to go back to the Dursleys or do anything I don't want to."
"Harry, I understand, I really do, but you must take the antidote." Hermione had started to pace to work through some of her agitation.

"No."

"Why? That is what I don't understand, mate. Please explain it to me in simple terms so I can try and understand where you are coming from." Ron pleaded.

"I have my reasons. Why can't you two just leave it alone? My mind is made up!" Harry huffed.

"Because we are your friends, Harry, we want what is best for you and taking the antidote is what is best for you." Hermione reasoned.

"Maybe a few months ago it was, but not now."

"What do you mean, Harry? Maybe a few months ago?" Hermione asked suspiciously.

"Nothing. Just leave it." Harry got up to try and leave but was stopped by Hermione as she managed to hit the nail on the head.

"It's because of Snape, isn't it, Harry?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, Mione?"

"I think you do."

"Does Snape have anything to do with this, Harry?" Ron asked worriedly.

"No! Severus does not even know of my decision yet. Mione, why can't you just accept my decision?"

"Because it's wrong, Harry, and you know it! But you're blinded by something." Hermione yelled at Harry.

"I love him. Hermione! How long do you think he will want to be around me if I go back to being seventeen?" Harry hollered back. He stormed out of the room searching for a quiet corner of the castle to hide out in until everyone had calmed down and his friends accepted his decision.

***

A few days later Severus was sorting out his store cupboard when a knock on his office door caused him stop and frown. He was not expecting anyone and Albus usually walked in after knocking and, strange as it may seem, he always knew when it was Harry, he could almost sense him in some way. It was like he could feel his magic in the air when he was close. This was not he; he could tell. Maybe it was one of his students from his house. They did occasionally come to see him. "Come." The person who entered was not anyone he might have expected; it was Hermione Granger. "Miss Granger?" He asked.

"Professor Snape. I was wondering if I could have a moment of your time?"
"Come in and sit." Severus pointed to a chair in front of his workbench. She did as she was told. He raised an eyebrow when she took out her wand, he had to use all his self control not to laugh at her, was she going to try and hex him? On second thoughts no; she was a stickler for the rules. She cast a simple silencing spell on the room. He raised another eyebrow at her.

"Sir, what I need to talk to you about is very private."

"How private?" He asked. He was actually rather intrigued, what would she want to talk to him about?

"About Harry." She whispered at him.

He nodded, took his own wand in hand and cast several more complex and powerful silencing charms over the room. After all, you never knew who was listening now that he needed to be extra careful with Draco on the prowl. "What about Mister Potter?"

"He is acting like an idiot that needs a good seeing to!" She was definitely in a bad mood with Harry, Severus could tell because she had acted the same way when she had visited Harry at his house during the summer.

"Why come to me? You are his best friend, surely if he is to listen to anybody then it is you."

"Not on this matter, he can be so stubborn. Professor, you are our best hope."

"To do what exactly, Miss Granger?"

"To talk Harry into taking the antidote."

Severus froze. What! Harry was thinking about NOT taking the antidote! Why? "Surely you are mistaken. Why would Harry not want to take the antidote?"

"I'm not really sure why. I think it may have something to do... with you." She had whispered the last few words.

"To do with me? Whatever makes you think I would not want him to take the antidote? I had been working on it for six months!" Severus felt defensive. Why would someone think that of all things? It was an absurd notion.

"Not to do with you, but because of you. I might be wrong and if I am I'm very sorry, Professor, for wasting your time. Harry will not listen to us on this one and we need you to talk to him about it. He will listen to you, he values your opinion highly."

"More so than that of his best friends?" Severus was truly curious about that. Surely the opinion of his friends was more important.

She looked as though she was weighing something in her head. "Harry is... well, he is... only because he is in the first wave of love... Professor."

"Oh." Well that had been intelligent, Severus, he berated himself. He knew Harry had talked to his friends about them. He just wasn't expecting first hand knowledge of it to come knocking on his office door. "I shall speak to Harry at the next opportunity. I will do everything in my power to change his mind and show him the error of his decision." An evil smirk graced his lips, after
all he was the master of intimidation and if that failed he could always emotionally blackmail
the boy. If that failed he could just pin him down and force it down his throat. It was for his
own good, after all.

"Thank you, sir, I better be on my way." She was getting up to leave.

"Thank you for this information, Miss Granger." He muttered a few spells that lifted the
magical lock from his door and the silencing charms from the room. She smiled briefly at him
before she left his office. He scowled, since when was he the kind of person that you smiled at?
POTTER! It was because of him that now some students believed him to be friendly enough to
smile at. He shook his head; he guessed it would only get worse. A small smile graced his lips;
he could live with it, he mused, as long as it did not become a worldwide thing. Then again,
dating The-Boy-Who-Lived was definitely going to ruin his reputation.

***

The following Thursday was double potions for seventh year Gryffindors and Slytherins. This
was when Severus decided he would have his little chat with Harry about his reluctance to take
the antidote that he had worked so hard on. He had pre-arranged with Miss Granger, of all
people, to get Harry into trouble so he would have to serve detention. Technically, so would
Miss Granger, but it had been decided she would just use the time for quiet study. He didn't
know how exactly she was going to do it, but when did he really need an excuse to put a student
in detention, especially a Gryffindor student? A smirk crossed his face.

He left his office thirty seconds before class was due to begin so he could catch any latecomers
to his lesson. He entered his classroom with his usual dramatic flair; he liked to see the brats
literally jump in their seats, and he started his lecture on what they would be studying today. It
was a continuation on the truth serum they had been studying, very few of them had even come
close to what it was meant to be like. He concluded that his job was safe for a few more years!

***

With only fifteen minutes left of his lesson, he noticed a small piece of parchment appear on his
desk.

Professor,

Your opportunity to put us in detention will arise soon.

Hermione Granger.

Flashy, Severus thought. Typical of the Gryffindor way, he mused to himself. That was when
he saw it. Miss Granger had passed Harry a note in class; everyone knew that to be a big
infraction in his classroom. Clever girl, he thought, not for the first time. "Miss Granger, Mister
Potter." He said in a low dangerous voice. "Is it so difficult for you to wait to pass your silly
little love letter to each other after my class?" He stalked up to them and snatched the folded
piece of parchment out of Harry's hand. He unfolded it and read it to himself. An evil smirk
crossed his lips, "Mister Potter, how sweet. Detention tonight with me at eight O'clock. Miss
Granger, I believe there is a prefects' meeting tonight which you have to attend?"

"Yes, sir."
"Very well. Detention with me tomorrow at eight O'clock." He stalked back to his desk. He noticed Harry looking a little confused at the punishment, good thing he hadn't read the note, Severus mused to himself, considering all it had on it was a list of ingredients for the potion they were working on. Miss Granger, on the other hand was acting out her part perfectly. She looked suitably annoyed; which he didn't mind, after all she was a Gryffindor.

***

The bell rang and the class filed out of the classroom. "Passing love notes, Granger, to Potter? I thought it was the Weasel you were supposed to be dating?" Draco called to them in the hallway.

"It was not a love note, Malfoy!" Hermione snapped back.

Harry grabbed her by the arm, "Don't, Hermione, he is not worth it."

"He just makes my blood boil at times."

"Hey, Weasel! Is your girlfriend leaving you for someone with money? Or is it just that the mudbloods are sticking together?" Draco called out viciously as Ron met Harry and Hermione in the hallway.

"Watch it, ferret boy!" Ron spat back, bright red in the face.

"Or what, Weasel? You'll set your mudblood friends on me? I think not. I...

Harry had lost his temper at this point. Draco's taunts about him he could handle, after all they were nothing new, especially since he had joined the wizarding world. But Ron and Hermione were not, and he would not stand by and watch his two best friends be attacked like this. He had taken the few strides across to Draco that had separated them and grabbed the little twerp by his collar and pushed him into the wall. He whispered furiously into his ear so no one else could hear. "Watch your step, Draco! You have no fucking idea what is going on in the real world. When it is time for you to leave the safety of Hogwarts, you are going to discover the world in which your father has protected you from is a big, bad place. And I am going to be a fully trained wizard with a licence, and if I choose to go after you and destroy you there will be no one to stop me! Who do you think they are going to believe, Draco? You or me? The-Boy-Who-Fucking-Lived or a wizard whose family is known to have connections to Voldemort?"

***

Severus was in his empty classroom enjoying the respite the end of classes for the day brought. Seventh year Slytherins and Gryffindors were always a hard bunch to teach, even though the class was significantly reduced due to the fact it was a N.E.W.T level class with no Longbottom. Thank Merlin for small mercies! Severus thought. He heard the scuffle in the corridor outside of his classroom. The voices were instantly recognisable, Granger, Weasley, Malfoy and Harry. When would they ever learn? He had noticed that last year, Harry and Draco had managed to stay out of each other's way for the most part, but for some reason it seemed as if all bets were off again this year.

Severus winced at hearing Draco say such racist comments. Draco was an intelligent and powerful young man, why he felt the need to be so nasty with his remarks when he really had no reason to, was beyond Severus. He heard gasps from Granger and Weasley, followed by
them calling to Harry to get off him and guessed it was time for him to intervene and stop this nonsense.

He stepped out of his classroom to a sight he never thought he would live to see. A Potter pinning a Malfoy up against the wall, whispering something which had turned said Malfoy ghostly white. Draco seemed to wince at something Harry had said to him; he had seen that reaction many times before. It usually happened when someone had mentioned the Dark Lord's fashioned name. If the Dark Lord had been bought into their argument, it was definitely time to put a stop to it. "Enough!" All the students present turned to look at him. Excellent! "Potter, ten points from Gryffindor for fighting in the corridor; Weasley, Granger ten points each from Gryffindor for not being able to restrain your friend."

"But, sir..."

"Quiet, Mister Weasley, unless you want to be responsible for further loss of points from your house. Now everyone back to their dorms. Mister Malfoy, my office now!" He noticed Draco give Harry a smug look, which riled Harry further.

"Remember what I said, Draco, five months!"

"Enough, Mister Potter! Do you want to increase your detention with me?"

"No, sir." Before Severus turned to leave, he saw Harry stick up five fingers and point to Draco.

***

Back in his office, he asked Draco to sit down opposite him at his desk. "Draco, tell me what that was all about?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Don't give me that nonsense! Now tell me what happened to get Potter so wound up?"

"Just the usual. It seems as if Potter has lost his sense of humour these days. But I'm not scared of him."

"You should be, Mister Malfoy."

"Why?" The tone was pure arrogance.

"Because he has the whole school in his back pocket. The Headmaster would have taken his side if things had gone further." Severus sighed. "Draco, you are so close to completing your education; do you really want to be expelled? Because that is what will happen if you cannot rein in your temper, I only have so much pull with the Headmaster. I have been overruled when it comes to Potter at every step. Also, if you were to be expelled it, would bring shame upon your family and upon Slytherin. Others wish to deal with Potter, and do you think they would be grateful for your interference?"

"No, sir." The tone was still too arrogant for Severus' liking; but, realistically, there was nothing he could do. A Malfoy will always do what a Malfoy wants to do!

"Go back to your dorm and stay out of Potter's way."
"Yes, sir."

Draco left his office and Severus knew there was a high chance that not a single word had sunk in. All he could do was hope Draco would find a big rock to hide under when the shit really hit the fan and stayed out of this war altogether. He was a good kid and Severus wanted to see a future for him, he just didn't know if he would get one if he listened to his father.

***

Harry was in a savage mood. Few people could put him in one but Draco Malfoy was high up on that list. Harry reckoned he was actually above Voldemort on the annoying scale, Voldemort scared and upset him but Malfoy pissed him off severely! There was only one thing to do in a situation like this and that was to eat everything in sight that was bad for you. That was why he was heading to the kitchens to see his old friend Dobby, he would skip supper and go straight to desert, lots of desert! He could hear Hermione and Ron following him; he didn't mind, they always put him in a better mood after a Malfoy confrontation.

"Harry!"

He stopped in his tracks and turned to the new voice, "Luna! Now's not a good time. I need cake and ice cream." He continued on to the kitchens, Luna was walking next to him.

"Ah, the Malfoy incident!"

"How do you know?"

"You should know by now that gossip spreads like wild fire in this place. After all, the walls do talk."

He let out a snort of laughter. "Tell me about it. It only happened about five minutes ago and I bet the whole school knows about it."

"At least two thirds." She gave him a big goofy grin. He just rolled his eyes. They reached the portrait of the bowl of fruit and Luna tickled the pear to gain them entrance. He heard Ron and Hermione catch up with them.

"Mate, when did you learn to walk like Snape?" Ron joked.

"When I get mad enough I just walk faster."

"Hello, Luna, are you joining us to watch Harry and Ron stuff their faces with unnatural amounts of ice cream?" Hermione asked the other girl. Though Hermione found it a little hard to take much of what the girl said seriously, she had learnt to tolerate her because Harry seemed so fond of her.

"Sure, it's been a while since I have binged on stuff that is bad for me. Dad doesn't approve." She replied with a dreamy expression on her face. Hermione just smiled at her.

They entered the kitchen, which was in full swing as it was nearing supper time and all of the elves were busy, but the moment Dobby spotted them he stopped what he was doing and launched himself at Harry's leg. "Harry Potter has come to see Dobby!" The elf wailed.
"Hello, Dobby. If it's not to much trouble, I was wondering if we could have something to eat in here tonight?"

"Of course, Harry Potter! You is all to follow me. There is a table set up at the back that you is able to use. So you won't be in the way of the other house elves." Dobby lead them to a table near the back of the kitchens near the fireplace. "What is Harry Potter and his friends liking tonight?"

"Ice cream." Harry stated.

"Cake." Ron followed up.

"Treacle tart." Luna said.

Dobby looked at Hermione. "Umm, I'll just have a chicken sandwich."

"Mione! The whole point of the Malfoy Munch Fest is to eat ice cream and cake and slag off ferret boy." Ron informed her.

"I know, but I skipped lunch today because I was in the library studying for the Defence against the Dark Arts project, so I need something a little more substantial. Then I promise I will join you in desert, honest."

"Fine, but I want to see you eat copious amounts of cake before we leave here tonight." Ron smiled at her. She smiled back. Dobby went about piling up the table with the requested foods and pumpkin juice. They all happily tucked in.

***

"So what did you say to Malfoy to make him go so pale? Well, paler than usual." Ron said around a mouthful of chocolate and ginger cake.

"I mentioned old Voldies' name and he acted like a frightened little girl." Harry replied, as he was finishing off his second bowl of strawberry ice cream. His mood had lightened considerably.

"I wonder how he will handle being in his master's presence, if he can't even bear to hear his name?" They all looked at Luna who was staring at the fireplace with a blank expression.

"Good point, Luna." Harry replied, after all, it WAS a good point.

"I wonder if Malfoy has been, you know, marked yet?" Hermione said.

"I don't think so, I don't feel the evil git's magic on him." Harry responded.

"Nah, ferret boy's all talk, if you ask me. He wouldn't be stupid enough to get it done while in school. Dumbledore would know for sure." Ron said with conviction.

"Yeah, maybe."

"What makes you say that Harry?"
"Well, Mione, Severus got his done while he was still in school and Dumbledore never pulled him up on it." Harry told them.

"Severus?" Luna asked him.

"Oh, Professor Snape."

"Yes I know his first name, but why do you use it?"

"Umm we have kind of become friends." Harry shifted a little in his seat.

"Friends, with a teacher?"

"Yeah, he helped me over the summer with a few problems."

Luna was looking at Harry as though she was weighing him up. A smile broke across her face, "I see."

Harry just gave her a small smile back. Merlin, he hoped she didn't see. Not that he didn't trust her he did; he just wasn't too sure how Sev would take it with her knowing also. He hadn't even told him how much, exactly, he had told Ron and Hermione.

"Harry, what did the hand gesture you gave Malfoy at the end mean?" Hermione was observant, Harry mused.

"Five months."

"Why five months?"

"Well, Mione, I told him that in five months I would be a fully trained and licensed wizard and that if he annoyed me I could legally take him out! Who would they believe, him or me?"

"Ha! Nice one, mate. I bet he crapped in his pants!" Ron burst into fits of giggles along with Luna.

"Harry, you didn't?"

"Yes I did, Hermione. He deserved it. If he thinks he can bully people just because of who he is, he has another thing coming. Especially in my presence."

"Harry, that's a terrible thing to say, even if it is to Malfoy."

"No, it's not! It's bloody brilliant!" Ron was now in tears from laughing too much. "I want front row seats if it ever happens."

All three of them started to laugh; even Hermione could see the funny side of it though she did not agree in principle to it. The bitching about Malfoy and in general putting the world's wrongs to right continued for another hour.

"I better go, detention. Oh, by the way Mione. What was in that note you passed me?"
She thought frantically, "I was just asking if you were okay, you looked a little pale. That was all."

"No I was fine. Strange, it seems a little harsh even by Severus' standards. Oh well, maybe he just wanted me all to himself!" A grin was on Harry's face.

"All to himself, you say?"

Oops. Harry had momentarily forgotten that Luna was in the room with them. "You never heard me say that. Okay?"

"Never heard a word." Luna winked at him and he blushed a little. He left for the dungeons and his detention.

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It was a minute past eight and Severus was a little annoyed at Harry's tardiness. To him there was no excuse for it, plain and simple. If you are required to be somewhere at a certain time then you should be there. At three minutes past eight came a knock on his door. "Enter." Harry walked in with a sheepish expression and something on his face, was that ice cream? "Sit." He watched as Harry settled himself in to his normal classroom seat and cast a locking charm on his door and silencing spells over the room. He walked up to Harry, pulled a seat up and sat down opposite to boy. The workbench was between them as he leaned over to languidly lick the ice cream off of his cheek. He then licked his lips, "I always preferred caramel myself." Harry sat with a stunned look in his eyes.

"The funny thing is, I don't remember strawberry ice cream being served at supper tonight. It tends not to be offered when it is raining outside and the temperature is not far above zero. Also, maybe you could help me with the fact that I don't remember seeing you or you little band of friends at supper this evening?"

"Well umm... maybe you just missed us, or didn't see us."

Severus raised an eyebrow at Harry with a look of disbelief on his face. "One can never miss your entrance at supper because half the hall stops to look at you. Maybe if I had checked the kitchens I would have had more luck."

"Then you would have had to put me in detention for the next week, and just what would you do with me for a whole week, Professor? Harry leaned over the desk and placed a small kiss on the tip of his nose.

Severus smirked at him, "I would have told you that I don't care for strawberry ice cream and I would have palmed you off to Filch."

He saw Harry narrow his eyes at him playfully. "You would have done that, too, wouldn't you?"

"To true. Now if you had had chosen caramel ice cream, that would have been another story altogether!"

"I'll keep that in mind for the next time."

"There will only be a next time if you answer my next set of questions truthfully. Do not think
you can lie to me because I have permission to give you a nice healthy dose of Veritaserum if you don't tell me the truth."

He could see a little bit of worry flicker through Harry's eyes. "Okay, what is it you want to know?"

"It has come to my attention that you no longer wish to take the antidote. Why?"

He saw Harry slouch on his chair. He answered in a defeated tone, "Who was it? Ron or Hermione? No, wait. It wouldn't have been Ron; he still is too scared of you from the second year. Hermione?"

"It matters not if it was Mister Weasley, Miss Granger or Merlin himself. Why would you refuse?"

"Because... because I will just be another face in the crowd, another normal person. People don't recognise me so much when I look ten years older. I could have a normal life once I leave school and do away with the Dark Lord."

Severus could understand this, but it was not nearly a good enough reason, not for him. "And?"

"And what?"

"And what else? Surely that cannot be the only reason. It is a big world out there, there are many places you could go to once the war is over where you will not be recognised."

He could see Harry looking anywhere but at him, he looked uncomfortable. Severus almost felt sorry for him, almost. "But you will be here," was the mumbled reply that he received.

"Harry..."

"Sev, please! I know what you are going to say. I don't care. I know how I feel about you and that will not change no matter what you say."

"What I was actually going to say before you interrupted me was, once the war is over and if I survive..."

"Don't say that."

"If I survive, my life will be my own again for the first time in over twenty years. What makes you think I so desperately want to stay here and continue on with teaching dunderheads like you?"

That seemed to bring a small smile to Harry's lips. "I just assumed you would."

"You of all people should know better then to assume anything about me."

"True."

"So will you stop this nonsense and take the antidote?"

"I don't know."
"What don't you know?"

"What if you get bored with having a teenager as a partner?"

"That is a poor argument. You won't be a teenager forever, thank Merlin."

"You know what I mean. If I don't take the antidote I will be older and people will just leave us alone."

"Harry, why do you think that I would tire of having a younger lover? If anything, it makes me look good! Also when people find out, which they always do, we are still going to get strange looks." Severus couldn't hide the amusement in his voice.

"It doesn't bother you that I'm younger then you? That sometimes I run of to the kitchens and eat disgusting amounts of strawberry ice cream and cake for dinner? That sometimes I act like a big kid and have snowball fights with my friends? That Ron and I do nothing but kid around and play Quidditch with most of our spare time? None of that makes you think I'm childish?"

He could not contain himself any longer, he had to laugh and he did. "Harry, the potion you took does not affect your mental age, only the one that would make you younger does. That one would have wiped the last ten years of your memory out. You are mentally the correct age now. Harry, school is meant to be a time to act childishly in your spare time. You have had a very limited childhood, I don't know everything that happened to you while you lived with your muggle relatives for the first eleven years of your life but I know you were never given the childhood you deserved. So what if you are making up for a little lost time now? I know men five times your age that talk of nothing but Quidditch all day with their friends. Harry, you have to take the antidote, we don't know the full extent of what your staying like you are now would do to you. I would rather have a hundred years with a younger, slightly annoying at times, brat than a few years with a slightly older looking man."

"You mean it?"

Severus looked Harry straight in the eye. "Yes."

"Okay, I'll take the antidote."

"Good. Other wise, you know I would have forced you to take it anyway. Even if I had to sit on you and ram it down your throat!" Severus all but growled.

"Now that sound more like the Severus Snape I know and love."

Severus rolled his eyes at Harry. "One more thing, what in Merlin's name did you say to Draco today to shake him up so badly?"

Harry laughed out loud. "I told him that in five months time when we have all graduated, if he wasn't careful I would come after him."

"Ah, now that makes sense. I couldn't understand why he had been so worried."

"He shouldn't be, I would never hurt him... badly. I just said it to freak him out a little."
"It worked. You must remember that to Draco you are the boy that has defeated and defied his father's powerful master on many occasions. Most sane wizards would be a little wary of you."

"Are you?"

"No. I know all your weaknesses and I am far from sane."

Harry giggled at him, "I don't believe for one second that you are not sane and what makes you think you know ALL of my weaknesses?"

"Pull you wand out at me."

"What?"

"Stand up and pull your wand out at me."

"Okay."

The both stood up in one of the aisles between the desks and faced each other, with wands drawn. Severus looked at Harry critically, "Something's wrong." He walked up to Harry and bought their lips together in a heated kiss. He felt Harry lean into him and it felt good. But when the need for air became too much he stepped back from Harry, "I think I could get used to strawberry ice cream." He walked back to his position and raised his wand. He saw Harry gather his wits about him and go for his wand.

"H-Hey, my wand, it's..."

"Looking for something, Mister Potter." He couldn't help the smirk on his face. Harry looked at him with a shocked expression on his face as he twiddled with Harry's wand in his fingers.

"How?"

"Simple. I distracted you with a weakness of yours and took it while your mind was else where."

"Evil, evil man."

"Quite." Severus passed Harry's wand back to him and gave him another small kiss. "Detention is over. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, you evil man." Harry laughed at him. Severus lifted the spells from the classroom and watched as Harry left. Yes, he could get used to strawberry ice cream if he had too, but that wouldn't stop him from showing Harry the delights of caramel ice cream. Once he had graduated, of course.

**Next Chapter:** A trip to Hogsmeade goes terribly wrong.
It had seemed as if spring had started to break through to the Scottish Highlands. With the dawn of March, the snow had all but melted and flowers had started to bud in the flowerbeds. All this had helped to put Harry in a good mood. His Animagi training was all but complete; he was now down to an average of two to three seconds per change. He had lent Ron the book he had started with and was now reading the more advanced ones Severus had lent him. Not that he really needed them anymore but it was good to keep them handy as an incentive to keep practicing.

His and Sev's relationship was also going well. It was official, he was in the full throws of love. He wanted to scream and shout it from the highest tower at Hogwarts, but knew that wasn't practical, so he didn't. That didn't stop him wanting to, though. They managed to spend at least an evening a week together. It wasn't much, but he understood it would have to do for now. After all, a little was better than nothing.

Their evenings spent together was when they got to know each other on a deeper more personal level. Harry was learning all about Severus' family history, his childhood, and his relationship with his mother and father. Harry had finally plucked up the courage to ask how come he was so wealthy when his father had spent much of the fortune. It transpired Severus had been responsible for the invention of many of the world's groundbreaking and popular potions. The list was impressive. Veritaserum was one, which the ministry used in all their courtrooms and had to pay him handsomely for the right to do so as he had taken out a protection on it. From what Harry understood it was like a muggle patent. He also created a very popular fertility potion; which according to him was the top selling brand in the entire wizard world. If you wanted to get pregnant, drink this first and hey presto! There were many others that Harry had never heard of before.

Harry had also told Severus a lot about his childhood and how he had spent a lot of time in primary school running and hiding away from Dudley and his gang and that was why he had no muggle friends. Severus told him that he should revisit his old school and former classmates when he graduated Hogwarts just to say hello. When Harry had informed him that his family had told everyone that during term time he attended St. Brutus' School for the Incurably Criminal Boys, that reduced the older man to tears of laughter. Generally things between them were good and he was happy.

The only thing to spoil his good mood was that some time next month he had to go and see
McGonagall for another careers talk. After promising her to work hard on his studies to become an Auror he was feeling guilty. He no longer wished to follow that path, not that it didn't attract him, he just didn't want to spend the rest of his life chasing evil wizards when he had spent the most part of his life fighting the evilest of wizards. He wanted to do something more fulfilling, he just hadn't decided yet. He still had a little more time to decide before his meeting with McGonagall.

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Severus was making his way up to the second floor to see his colleague and friend, Minerva McGonagall. He had heard rumours that something might happen in Hogsmeade today. He had already passed his fears onto the Headmaster, but he believed it best to keep the children living a normal as possible life. He could see the old man's point, but it still didn't alleviate the knot in his gut. He was probably worrying for no reason, but his mind would rest better if he knew that Minerva was more on guard. He reached her office, knocked, and awaited admittance.

"Enter."

Severus went in and sat down in the seat she had gestured to. "Minerva, a moment if you would."

"Of course, Severus. What is on your mind?"

"I believe you are to be the chaperone for the Hogsmeade trip today?"

"Yes, Severus, is there a problem?"

"Nothing solid, just a few rumours really and a bad feeling."

"Such as?"

"I just have a funny feeling the Dark Lord has a little surprise planned. I could be wrong, but do me a favour and keep a close eye on Potter and his friends."

"Have you spoken to Albus of this?"

"Yes, but he believes we can not run our lives by rumour and fear. He does have a point, it doesn't make me feel any better though."

"I see. I will keep an eye on Potter and his friends, make sure they stay on the main street and do not wander off."

"Thank you, Minerva. I feel better knowing you will be more alert."

"Of course, Severus. We wouldn't want something to happen to Mister Potter now would we? Especially you!"

Severus raised an eyebrow in question. "What exactly are you implying, Minerva?"

"Nothing, Severus, nothing at all."

"Indeed. Good day, Minerva."
"Have a good day, Severus."

He left her office, he knew what she was inferring but he refused to rise to her bait. He would not pass comment on anything going on between him and Harry. He believed it was nobody else's business and they should keep their noses to themselves.

***

Harry was waiting with Hermione and Ron to be signed out by Filch so they could leave the castle for the day. They had agreed to meet up with Luna, Ginny and a few others after lunch for a few butterbeers and Harry was looking forward to getting together with a few of the DA's.

"So, where are we off to first?" Ron asked as they were walking across the school grounds towards the main gates.

"I need to go to Gladrags and pick up some new trousers, shirts and some other bits and pieces. That's all I really need to do." Harry told them.

"I need to also visit Gladrags and I also need to pop into the Post Office to send some parcels back to Mum and Dad. How about Madame Puddifoots for lunch as its virtually next door to Gladrags?" Hermione asked the lads.

"Sound good to me, Mione. Harry, you okay with that?"

"Sure, Ron. Sounds like a good plan to me." The three of them headed off in the direction of Gladrags discreetly followed by Minerva McGonagall.

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After a successful visit to the Post Office and Gladrags the three had gone to Madame Puddifoots' for an enjoyable lunch. The three of them had commented how much like old times the day had been so far, with just the three of them hanging out. They also made a pact that once they had left school and got their apparition licenses, they would meet up once a week without fail to catch up on things and to generally enjoy each other's company.

After lunch, they made a slow journey back down the main street towards The Three Broomsticks. They stopped off in Zonkos so they could check up on the competition for Fred and George and at Honeydukes to stock up on supplies should an impromptu Malfoy bitching session take place and they were unable to get to the kitchens. Harry had spotted some chocolate caramel snitches and could not resist buying some, knowing Sev would love them.

They made their way into The Three Broomsticks, where they spotted their friends immediately and joined them in the corner they had commandeered. They spent the next few hours catching up on everyone's gossip and sinking a few butterbeers. It was a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the bar and everyone was enjoying himself or herself. Even Malfoy and his gang did not cause any trouble, although Ron had mentioned how he had looked too smug when he had left an hour ago. Harry told him to ignore him, as he was nothing more than a spoilt brat that had not been invited to the party.

It must have been around five in the afternoon when everyone heard McGonagall call out that it was time to return to Hogwarts as supper was to be served in an hour and they wouldn't want to
miss it. With a little bit of grumbling, they all complied and rose from their comfy chairs to leave the pub.

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Because of the general noise happening outside of the pub, everyone missed the first pot shot taken at them until one of the students screamed as their friend hit the ground. Momentary silence broke out in the street. Minerva ran to the fallen student and noticed the figures advancing on the group of milling students.

Harry instantly felt the dark magic of Voldemort in the approaching figures. "RUN!"
Everybody stared at him like he was an idiot. "NOW, IT'S VOLDEMORT'S ARMY!" That bought about a mass of screaming, but it also brought with it the desired result as the students started to run. "EVERYONE BACK TO HOGWARTS! DA'S LISTEN! COLIN, SUSAN, LAVENDER, PAVARTI, RON, HERMIONE, LUNA, GINNY AND NEVILLE WITH ME, THE REST OF YOU MAKE SURE THE STUDENTS GET BACK TO THE WARDS OF HOGWARTS! NOW GO!" The students obeyed him. The rest of the DA's ran with the students and the remaining members readied for battle.

"Mister Potter, what in Merlin's name are you doing?" McGonagall yelled at him.

"I'm giving the majority of the students a chance to get out of here alive. If I am right, those people are Voldemort's Forced Army!"

"You should run now!"

"NO! If we all run more will get picked off, if we stand with a line of defense, the rest will get away. Then we can make a run for it." The first few hexes had already been cast and it was soon starting to escalate into a full battle. Luckily for the DA's, most of this army had not been fully trained and were only capable of casting a few of the nastier curses. "BREAK UP INTO THREES AND WATCH EACH OTHER'S BACKS! RON, HERMIONE AND NEVILLE WITH ME. NOW GO!"

"Harry, we're here." Ron told him.

"Ron, to my left; Mione, to my right; Neville, watch my back."

"Mate, one group has gone to the left, the other group has gone to the right. That leaves us with the middle."

"Typical!"

"Mister Potter! I must insist we leave now!"

"Professor, with all due respect, either stay and fight or get the hell out of my way!" Ron looked impressed that Harry had had the guts to speak to a teacher in such a manner. Hermione looked mortified, and glanced an apologetic look in her teacher's direction, Neville just smiled at her.

***

Colin, Ginny and Luna had taken the left side of the street and were currently using the corner
of The Three Broomsticks as cover. Ginny had mentioned to the other two how cowardly the
town folk were by running inside, locking their doors, and turning out their lights. They had
provided covering fire for Susan, Lavender and Pavarti to get to the other side of the street. As
they engaged in battle, all three had noticed that there was something strange about these Death
Eaters. It was almost as if they were awkward with their movements. That still didn't stop them
from having to dodge some seriously bad hexes.

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Luna was under heavy fire from two Death Eaters and the other two could not help her out as
they were busy. She was racking her brains for an idea when her eyes fell on the hanging sign
of the pub and inspiration stuck. She whispered a Severing Charm at the sign and it started to
fall, a quick Wingardium Leviosa and the sign was floating in the air. She directed the heavy
wood sign to hit one of her two attackers in the head, as it did the other one turned around and
got a face full of pub sign and they both fell to the ground. Colin turned around and gave her
thumbs up.

***

Susan, Lavender and Pavarti were on the other side of the street and had made their way to the
corner of the small street that led to the Shrieking Shack. The three girls immediately had to
defend themselves as four Death Eaters made their way into the fight via the little side street
they were blocking.

"Why did they use portkeys to get here?" Susan asked the two other girls. She was left flank in
their formation, it had been what Harry had told them to be the most effective.

"Don't know! I thought Death Eater apparated into places?" A voice from the right answered, it
was Pavarti.

"Who cares?" Lavender bitched from her centre position.

"Just saying, that's all." Grumbled Susan, who had only joined the group to impress Neville.

One of them was coming directly at Lavender; she raised her wand and said the first thing that
came into her head, "Stupefy." He flew back a little way and hit the ground, but was still
moving. "Stop moving you idiot, umm, Petrificus Totalus." The body of the Death Eater went
rigid and froze. She smiled to herself.

***

Minerva was in a pickle about what to do. The majority of the students had returned to
Hogwarts, hopefully to raise the alarm, she could really do with Albus, Filius and Severus here.
Though she doubted Severus would be able to come because it could blow his cover. What a
shame, though, she had seen what happened to someone on the business end of one of his hexes.
It wasn't a pretty sight.

She was crouching next to the body of Peter Jones, who had been the unfortunate boy to get hit
first. He needed medical attention and fast. Children of his age could not handle the after effects
of the Crucius Curse very well. Then she had the added problem of the three groups of
students who had disobeyed her and followed Potter into battle. She didn't know what annoyed
her more, the fact that Potter had lead them into battle or the fact that the rest of the town had
left them to it. For Merlin's sake, these were children and the fully trained witches and wizards had fled like untutored squibs.

She was in a quandary, she had sent up the sparks to give Albus an early warning that something had gone wrong after Potter had told her off. Told HER off! That boy was definitely spending too much time with Severus and if they got out of this unscathed, house points would be taken!

She watched as the group, which looked to be lead by Miss Ginny Weasley, seemed to be doing all right for themselves. They had managed to knock out three of the advancing party, two of them by an ingenious move by Miss Lovegood. The little party on the other side of the street also seemed to be handling themselves adequately; they had knocked out one and were currently keeping the other three busy. Potter's group looked to be in the most trouble; they were being advanced on by about ten of the Death Eaters. Should she stay with the sick student or help out Potter?

***

Harry and his group were getting it from all sides; collectively so far they had knocked out three of the advancing army. "H-Harry, two coming from the r-rear."

"Keep them busy, Neville."

"O-Okay, Harry." Neville was nervous but proud. He was determined not to let Harry down.

He had chosen him to join his group because he believed in him. He was a lot more confident after the battle at the Department Of Mysteries, and it helped having his first real wand and not his fathers'. This one worked with him a lot better. He realised the time for thinking was over when two Death Eaters had drawn their wands and pointed them right at him. He heard one of them mutter a curse and shot it at him. "Protego." Neville erected a shield, it was possibly not the greatest shield known to wizard-kind, but it did the job and deflected the hex sufficiently. "Petrificus Totalus." One of his attackers went ridged and hit the ground with a resounding thud. "Stupefy." He attempted to hit the other one but he had dodged it quite well. "Bugger." He mumbled to himself.

Harry, Ron and Hermione were facing the onslaught from the front. They were out numbered and they knew it. "Harry, order everyone to fall back."

"Ron?"

"We are out numbered, so our next move needs to be tactical. Get Ginny's and Lavender's groups to fall back behind us and head towards the school. They should get inside the wards if they move quickly. If we start to move back slowly so they don't notice, we will also have them nearer to the school wards and Dumbledore, our strongest piece!"

"Right. Neville, did you hear that?"

"Yes. Stupefy. Sorry!"

"Go tell Lavender's group then come back, Hermione will cover you. Ron, you tell Ginny's lot and I will cover you. Tell them to also take Peter with them."
"Got it." Ron ran over to his sister to tell her of their new plan.

"Right, Harry." Neville went off to inform the other group, narrowly avoiding a hex that was fired at him.

"Relashio." Neville's attacker became engulfed in hot fiery sparks and he screamed and ran away. "Didn't you know children should not play with fire."

"Thank you, professor." Hermione briefly turned to thank her. She was having a little trouble keeping all aimed hexed off Neville.

"You're welcome, Miss Granger."

***

Minerva had joined Harry's little group. She couldn't leave them to fend for themselves as they were taking the main brunt of the battle. She noticed Ron Weasley come back to the group, shortly followed by Neville Longbottom. She saw the two smaller groups head off back towards the school and take Peter with them; only a few of the Death Eaters followed them. Normally she would think this strange behaviour in a battle, but reckoned the real prize for them stood in front of her in the form of Harry Potter.

Apart from her usual wishes to keep her students safe, she asked Merlin for extra help with this situation. She had made a promise to Severus that she would look after Harry Potter for him. She wasn't blind; she could tell something was going on between them. Exactly what it was and how deep it went, she wasn't sure. She hadn't seen Severus happy like he was now for a long time and, if she had anything to do with it, she would help him stay that way. Harry also had seemed to be a lot happier this school year, and if it meant that she had to turn a blind eye to him sneaking out his dorm once a week to spend some time in the dungeon with Severus then she was not going to stop it. In her opinion, both boys could do with a little happiness and comfort in their lives. "What's our plan, then?" She guessed she might as well ask since it seemed that she had no authority over them for the moment.

"We're to pull back slowly and trick them into going near school and the wards."

"Thank you, Mister Weasley." It wasn't a bad plan; she guessed it would have to do, as at this precise moment there was little else to do. If they were to turn their backs on the Death Eaters they would no doubt be out of the battle in a matter of seconds.

***

Harry's blood was pumping through his veins at an alarming rate. His adrenalin was so high right now that he would need a calming potion just to stop the shaking it was causing. His anger was rising dangerously at the moment, not at the brainwashed army trying to kidnap him but at Voldemort for doing this. He felt every curse he was firing at these kids strike to his very core, they were only on average nine and ten years old. It was sick, sick to watch such young children cast the Cruciatus Curse. It was morally wrong. He dodged another Binding Hex and cast back a Confundus Charm and he saw the recipient wonder off in the opposite direction. A loud crack no further then ten feet in front of him brought an eerie feeling to his gut. As he looked up, his head exploded in pain and he fell to his knees, biting his tongue as he refused to scream out aloud.
"Nice to see you again, Potter!" Voldemort pointed his wand at Harry. "Emoveo Dissimulo Cassus Aevum."

Harry was once again encased in the orange glow from the spell and his skin had the stretching sensation also. Once the spell had finished its work, a twenty-seven year old Harry Potter knelt on the ground. A few gasps from his friends bought him back to himself.

"H-Harry, please tell me that's not You-Know-Who?" Ron said in a slightly high-pitched voice.

"Merlin!" McGonagall whispered behind him, she also heard Neville squeak next to her.

"Vo-Voldemort!" Hermione said in dismay and fear. The part of Harry's brain that was quite happily taking a holiday somewhere in the Bahamas right now and ignoring this whole episode realised this was the first time his friends had actually seen Voldemort in the flesh!

"Run." Harry told them.

"No! We want to help." Trust Neville to find his courage once again at the most inopportune moment, Harry mused.

"V-V-Voldemort!" And Hermione to freak out, typical! Could anything else go wrong?

"Granger? Yes, I have heard of you. How dare a filthy little Mudblood speak MY NAME!" Voldemort yelled at her. "Crucio."

Hermione let out a blood-curdling scream and fell to the ground. Harry immediately jumped up, "NO!" and he ran at the evil wizard. Ron ran to Hermione and jumped in front of the curse being sent at her. He screamed for a second until Harry had ran into the side of Voldemort forcing him to break the spell.

"RUN. NOW!"

"Potter, we can't leave you." McGonagall yelled at him.

"TRUST ME, GO!"

And they did. If it weren't such a frightening moment it would have been funny. Ron was dragging Hermione, Neville was dragging Ron and McGonagall was dragging all three of them. Ron was fighting back, "No, I won't leave Harry behind. HARRY!"

"RON, GO. I CAN GET AWAY, GO."

"Not this time, Potter, there is no escape for you. No Dumbledore to protect you and no mudblood mother to die for you."

"I don't think so, Riddle." Harry had to keep him talking, which was not easy when his head was threatening to explode. He needed to buy time for his friends to get away.

"How dare you call me that you filthy half-breed."

"Takes one to know one, Tom Marvolo Riddle. How is dear old dad?" It seemed to be working,
although it may not have been a wise plan to piss off an already angry evil wizard.

"Dead, as you will soon be."

"Yes, the killing curse worked wonders the last time you tried it on me, didn't it? Or maybe we could go for the whole Priori Incantatem thing again. Didn't do so well that time either, did you?"

"I will crush you. No one speaks to ME that way. Crucio."

Harry ran. He had to hope he had given enough time to his friends. He could not fight Voldemort and hope to win, not when he was this angry. He ran as fast as he could to the closet building, which was The Tree Broomsticks and hid behind the wall. He heard Voldemort give orders to his army. From the sounds of it all but five or six were to portkey back to the manor, the remaining five or six were to join him in hunting Harry down. Harry had to concentrate and clear his mind, otherwise his plan would fail and he would be dead. He could feel his new shape take form at the edges of his mind and the desire to stand on all fours become very strong. When he opened his eyes, he was seeing at the height of a big cat. He had never traveled such distances in his new form before and hoped he would be able to cope.

It was show time. It was time to make a run for it. To keep Voldemort unaware of his new ability, he had to get back to the school though the cover of the Forbidden Forest. He broke cover and started to head for the edges of the forest. He could hear Voldemort shout to his followers that he must have made a run for the forest. Shit! Why did the evil wizard have to be an evil genius as well? Harry kept running, his new form had given him the ability to run faster then in human form but it was hard to concentrate on his direction while his head still felt such searing pain. Fear kept him going.

"Find the brat! He can not have gone far." The voice was getting further into the distance, but not far enough away for his liking.

"POTTER, I WILL KILL YOU!"

Hopefully not today, Harry thought. He was aware he was making a lot of noise in the under bush and leaving a good trail to follow behind him but he was not prepared to wait it out in the forest. To many things would happily kill him if he stayed put. With his new sensitive hearing he could hear a couple of the Death Eaters not far off from him to his left. He had to hope their young mentality would cause them to be scared. After all he was nearly ten years older, biologically speaking, then they were and the forest still scared the hell out of him.

He could see the school; he was getting closer to it. His heart was racing madly and he was tired, but his adrenaline and fear were keeping him going. So close! He could almost taste it, almost feel it. He could hear Voldemort screaming out in frustration somewhere in the distance behind him. Almost there, almost there, became his mantra as his tired legs protested against more running. He felt a pushing against his fur as he broke through the school wards but he couldn't stop running. He needed to be somewhere he felt safe.

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Harry burst through the double doors still in his cat form and ran for all he was worth, he heard a few gasps and shrieks from his fellow students as they dove out of his way. He was even sure he heard Dumbledore mutter something about stray cats. The pads on his feet were burning from his non-stop running, but he didn't care. All he cared about was reaching his destination. He ran down the stone steps at full pelt and more students were either screaming or shrieking in
his wake. He still didn't care as he continued his mantra, almost there, almost there!

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Severus was at his desk marking some papers. He was currently watching over a few of the students that took potions seriously and wished to attend extra curricula classes. He didn't mind teaching this class too much. It was a small class of nine students that wished to learn the true art that was potion making. It was also only once a month so it didn't take up too much of his free time. He heard screaming and a general commotion going on a little further up the corridor from his classroom. He got up from his desk to go and investigate; the Slytherins generally didn't make that much noise, fearing his wrath. As he approached his classroom door the screaming seemed to get closer, it made him a little nervous and he reached for his wand.

He opened the door only to have a black streak of fur run past him at full speed. This streak then attempted to stop near his desk. It wasn't making to good a job of it either; its paws and claws were skidding all over the stone floor. It actually looked quite comical, but he would not allow himself to laugh in front of students. He was also concerned as to what could have frightened Harry so badly that he ran to him in this form. Then the big cat bolted under his desk and hid there.

His mind was working feverishly, he needed to come up with something that would make it believable that having a big black panther run into his classroom and hide under his desk was something of a common occurrence and nothing to worry about. "Ah, Professor Snape. I see you have the wild cat trapped in your classroom." He turned to see Albus standing in his doorway, with a serious expression on his face but a twinkle in his eye.

"So it would seem, Headmaster."

"Children, I think it best if you leave Professor Snape and I to take care of our little problem. Please leave the classroom quietly as not to antagonise it further." The kids quietly rose from their seats and left the room as quickly as they could while making minimum noise. When the room was empty, Albus locked the door and cast several silencing charms.

Severus went over to his desk to check on Harry. He crouched down so he could see him better, the sight that greeted him was one that caused his worry to spike. Harry was still in his cat form curled up in an impossibly tight ball in the corner of the already small space shaking very noticeably. Piercing green eyes looked up at him, Severus reached out a hand to encourage him to come out, but all Harry did was inch a little closer and rub against his hand. In normal circumstances it would be quite a sweet gesture, but this was anything but normal.

Severus stood up as Albus crossed the room and tapped lightly on the desktop. "Harry, you can come out now." Silence was his answer.

"Albus, care to fill me in on what is going on?" The tone was a little harsh, Severus knew this but he didn't care. He wanted answers.

"Harry, please come on out. You are safe now." The Headmaster pressed on.

"No," came the reply from the now human Harry.

"Albus." Severus ground out between clenched teeth.
"You were right, Severus."

"I usually am, but pray tell about what this time?"

"Voldemort attacked us in Hogsmeade." Said the muffled voice from under the desk.

Severus was shocked into silence, and that didn't happen all that often. "If you knew, why did you let us go?" Harry asked still from his hiding place.

"Harry, it was only a rumour. We can not dictate our lives by the possible movements of Voldemort." Albus told Harry.

"We could have died!"

"But you didn't. Your quick actions bought everybody back alive, only a few have cuts and scratches and Madame Pomfrey can fix those. Please come out, Harry, we need to talk about this."

"NO. Not today. I can't. Tomorrow."

"Alright, Harry."

"How are Ron and Hermione? Oh, and how is Peter?"

"They will be fine, you can go see them if you like?"

"I will, tomorrow."

"Okay, Harry, I will leave you now with Severus. Come see me if you need to talk to me."

"I will, Headmaster."

Severus watched as Albus conjured up a large animal cage covered by a blanket and leave the room. He heard him tell the students outside that they had captured the animal and would release it back into the forest. He crouched down by his desk again. "Are you going to come out yet or do I have to get a mouse for you to chase to get you out?"

He saw Harry smile a little at him, "No. I'll come out." Severus held out his hand to Harry and he took it. He crawled out from under the table and straight into Severus arms, where he held Harry in a tight embrace for a long time.

Next Chapter: It's the next day and Harry steps up his training to kill Voldemort. Draco again gets in Harry's way.

Latin Translation:

Emoveo Dissimulo Cassus Aevum - Remove Disguise of Age.
Harry's first thought, as awareness started to creep into his brain, was 'where the hell am I?' as he was not in his own bed. He cracked open an eye to 'case' his surroundings. It was too dark so that ruled out Gryffindor Tower because the morning sun always broke through the curtains up there. He felt an arm snake around his waist and pull him further back into the centre of the bed. A voice husky from sleep spoke quietly into the back of his neck. The breath from the words tickled the sensitive skin there and caused his skin to break out in goosebumps. "Worked out where you are yet?"

Harry and broke into a relaxed smile as he snuggled in closer, "Just a momentary panic attack. How did you know?"

"You went ridged for a second. I guessed you had awoken and were wondering where you where." The voice was still husky from sleep making Harry think it all the more sexy, which was not good for his slightly embarrassing case of 'Morning Glory.'

"Surely it's happened to you before?"

"Mmmm."

You couldn't get more noncommittal than that, Harry thought. But then again, he really didn't want to talk about Sev's previous partners while he was in bed with the man. He didn't think his control over his stupid jealousy would be good enough. "So what time is it?"

"Early."

"Not much of a morning person are you?"

"Mmmm."

Harry let out a small giggle. He also hated mornings, especially when it was cold outside the bed like it was now. "I'll take that as a no, shall I?"

"Mmmm. Why are you so chipper in the mornings?"

Because I have a hard on as hard as the ice burg that sunk the Titanic! Harry didn't say that,
though, for many reasons. One, he was too embarrassed to admit it; and two, he wasn't sure Sev would understand the comparison as it was a very muggle reference. "It's nice to wake up with someone next to you, that's all." He reckoned that was a much more 'Harry Potter' thing to say. The response did make him smile though.

"Sentimental twaddle. People will think you have gone soft."

"Fat chance." He mumbled back.

"Pardon?"

"I didn't say anything."

"You lie badly, even with your back to me." He could feel Sev's smile against the back of his neck.

"Okay, it was irrelevant."

"I'm stunned. Big words so early in the morning, Potter! Maybe I should wake up next to you more often if it is the only time of the day you use words with more than two syllables."

"Maybe we should, as it seems the morning is the only time you have a sense of humour."

"Touch. So are you going to tell me what has a fat chance?"

Harry blushed a little. "You heard me? Why doesn't that surprise me?"

"Did you really think I wouldn't?"

"I was hoping, but it just slipped out."

"Indeed. So?"

"I'm not telling, now go away and leave me alone."

He felt Sev place a soft kiss on the back of his neck and the arms around his waist and shoulders tighten. "Do you really want me to leave?" The tone was teasing.

No! Yes! No! Maybe! Harry screamed in his mind. Damn! No, he most definitely did not want him to go. What he wanted him to do was pin him down and bang out his brains, don't think that is going was happen, though. "No, its quite pleasant the way it is, thank you very much."

"So you're not uncomfortable in anyway? This is comfortable for you?"

Could he hear a teasing tone in Severus' voice? "No, I'm good."

"No aches, pains or stiffness anywhere? You know it can take a while to get used to sleeping next to someone."

Oh, now that had got Harry's attention. He couldn't help but smirk a little. Sev had obviously worked out Harry's little problem and was teasing him, again. Oh, the payback was going to be a bitch! For starters he elbowed Severus in the gut. "Git!" He could hear Sev laughing behind
him. "It's too early to have the piss taken out of me."

"Also it would be a little hard in your condition!" Again he was laughing at him.

"You're a cruel and evil man, Severus Snape. It's not funny, it's embarrassing."

"Really. I find it quite flattering, knowing I can get such a rise out of you, especially first thing in the morning. How do you usually get around this problem?"

"None of your business!" He could hear Severus sniggering behind him and sighed. "I refuse to knock one out while you are here. Okay?"

"Shame, I believe that would be one hell of a sight to wake up to."

Harry blushed, he was glad he had his back to Sev. Sometimes some of the things Sev said made him feel like an inexperienced kid. The idea of wanking in front of another, while all well and good in fantasyland, was just too embarrassing to contemplate doing in real life. Unfortunately, such thoughts were just making him harder. "Well, it's not going to happen."

"Why?"

"Just because."

"Pity. It really would have fulfilled one of my fantasies, you touching yourself while you think of me, all the time knowing I am watching you."

Harry suppressed the moan trying to escape his chest and it wasn't helped by Sev's hand traveling up under his t-shirt. The fingertips lightly traced across his nipples bringing back the goosebumps to his skin. Sev was placing little kisses on the back of his neck. "This isn't fair. Why are you doing this to me when I can't have you?" But he got no reply. He felt Sev's hand travel back down his chest and lightly grab his own hand. At first Harry wondered what he was up to, but that became glaringly obvious when they traveled to his hip to carefully push down the waist of his boxer shorts. Sev was keeping Harry's hand under his at all times, minimising the contact. Harry gasped as his hand was gently curled around the base of his own penis, all the time Sev was keeping his hand over Harry's, guiding it and setting the pace. He could feel Sev nibbling on his ear lobe as their hands were moving in unison, in a rhythm that was painfully slow. Harry wanted to scream and beg to be fucked senseless but all his words stuck in his throat as he felt the pad to Sev's thumb skim across the top of his already leaking cock. "Oh God! Please!"

"Again with the blasphemy, Harry, and please what?" The voice was so low and husky Harry reckoned he could cum by just listening to that voice.

"Please, I want you! Sev... ahhh!"

"I know, Harry. Soon. I promise."

Harry was starting to see dancing colours in front of his eyes as he was getting closer to completion. He could feel Sev forcing his hand to pick up the pace, his already laboured breathing was becoming more ragged the closer he got. He felt Sev take his hand away, leaving Harry to finish himself off. Need took over embarrassment then, all at once, everything seemed to go black and he let out a half-scream half-sob of relief as he came all over his hand and
stomach. Harry took a couple of deep breaths to try and steady his rapidly beating heart back to a normal pace. He felt Sev remove his arm from under his shoulder and use it to lean over Harry, then he raised Harry's hand from under the covers by his wrist and did quite possibly the most erotic thing Harry had yet to witness, Sev licked his fingers clean.

When he had finished, he smirked at Harry and told him he needed to go for a shower to get ready for the day as no doubt the Headmaster would wish to see them this morning. Harry stared at the bathroom door for a while with a slightly goofy look on his face for some time before he found the strength to actually get out of bed.

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After Severus had finished in the shower and had gotten dressed, he entered his main room to find a still dishevelled Harry sitting at his dinning room table sipping tea. He raised an eyebrow in question. "Dobby. Don't worry he is the soul of discretion, I asked him to get me some clean clothes and he bought down some breakfast for us."

"Ah, yes. The old Malfoy elf you freed some years back. Lucius was very annoyed at you."

"I bet but he deserved it. I know he is a friend of yours but he is still a bit of a git."

"I concur." A bit of a git, was putting it mildly, Severus thought but he left it at that. He went over to Harry and captured his lips in a kiss.

"Mmmm, minty." Harry was smiling at him again. He liked that smile, he reckoned he could sit all day and watch that smile but that was a highly impractical pastime. "Mind if I jump in your shower? I don't want to go and see the Headmaster all sweaty."

"You know where it is." Actually he quite liked Harry all sweaty, but he could see his point. It would not be good for Albus to see him in that state and give the old coot anymore ideas.

As Harry left the room Severus sat down and helped himself to a cup of tea and picked up the newspaper. He didn't even look at it; he couldn't concentrate. Even though Harry had filled him in on what had happened in Hogsmeade yesterday, he still had a funny feeling about the whole thing. Why hadn't the Dark Lord just killed Harry when he had the chance? That didn't mean that he wasn't grateful that he hadn't killed him. Merlin, he wasn't too sure just how deep his feeling went for Harry, but he knew he would be devastated if anything were to happen to him. But what was to be gained by exposing his altered age? It wasn't as if there were enough people around to actually be shocked by it. Everybody present except Longbottom, who would do as he was told and shut up and never speak of it again, knew about Harry's condition. Severus put it aside and decided to call Filius down to ask him to recast Harry's charm. He went over to his fireplace, threw in a handful of floo powder and called out Filius' name.

"Severus, I was expecting a call from you this morning. How is Harry?"

"He is fine Filius. Are you able to come down and recast the charm on Harry so he will be able to leave my quarters?"

"Is there really much of a point to that, Severus?"

"Excuse me?" Severus was not sure if he had heard the man correctly.
"Oh, I guess you have not read this morning's Prophet?"

"No. Why?"

"Umm. Well, Severus, why don't you read the paper and I will contact Albus and we will get back to you."

"Excuse me?"

"See you soon, Severus." The diminutive wizard popped out of the floo connection. That was rather odd, Severus mused as he returned to his table and grabbed the newspaper. He let out a groan as he saw the headline.

THE BOY-WHO-LIVES DOES NOT ESCAPE YOU-KNOW-WHO'S ATTACK THIS TIME!

Below it was a picture of Harry holding his head looking as if he is kneeling at the feet of the Dark Lord. That was not the worst thing about the picture though, because one look at it clearly showed how much Harry hated him by the look of pure loathing on his face. It was the fact that Harry was twenty-seven in the picture. Severus quickly scanned the article.

"It has been discovered that even The-Boy-Who-Lived is not impervious to You-Know-Who's attacks. It is believed that he is responsible for this amazing change in Harry Potter. This astonishing photo was sent into our offices late last night only a few hours after the attack on Hogsmeade..."

It all fell into place for Severus, the Dark Lord had no intention of killing Harry yesterday; he merely wanted to shake the belief that many people still have that Harry was untouchable by the Dark Lord. It would cause the Ministry and Albus some real embarrassment. The article continued much in the same vein...

"It is believed that You-Know-Who was responsible for the changes in Harry Potter. We are currently speaking to medical experts in the field of aging to determine what the long time effects could be for the young hero. To find out what the healers reports say, buy the evening prophet tonight..."

The rest of the article was as nonsensical as that, pointless gobbledygook that basically told you nothing new. He heard Harry re-enter, he looked up and saw for the first time a Harry Potter with tame hair. He had to smile a little at that. "What are you smiling at?"

"Your hair. I have never seen it so under control before."

Harry gave him a shy smile. "It wont last, it never does once it dries. What's a guy to do?"

Severus handed Harry the newspaper as he sat back down opposite him. "You should be made aware of the day's headlines."

"Why? What have I supposedly done now?"

"I don't want to ruin the surprise for you." He said dryly. He watched as Harry's expression got darker the further down the article he read.
"Are there side effects, Severus?" He was asked; he could tell Harry was a little frightened.

"I don't know. As far as the taking of the potions goes I cannot see any side effects. For being trapped in a body ten years older than your own, I do not know."

"Oh. Do you think there might be any?"

"Harry..."

"Please Sev, give me your best educated guess. You are the smartest guy I know, if anyone can make a good guess it would be you."

"My best guess would have it as highly unlikely that there will be any physical side effects. If you were younger than maybe you would suffer some mental ones, but you are old enough to cope. I have seen you cope with much worse."

"Thanks."

"You are welcome."

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A knock at the door brought Harry out of his musings. He looked at Sev with a slight panic in his eyes; technically he was not supposed to be there. "Don't panic, it is, undoubtedly, just Albus and Filius."

"Oh, okay." Harry braced himself for this meeting. After reading the newspaper he guessed they would all want to see him and make a plan of action. What he wasn't expecting were as many people to enter as did. First to enter was Dumbledore, followed by McGonagall, Hermione, Ron and Flitwick. Harry grinned at his friends and rushed over to them and hugged them both fiercely. "Ron! Mione! You're both okay. I'm so sorry I didn't visit you in the hospital."

"Harry, it's okay. Professor Dumbledore told us where you were." Hermione informed him.

"Harry, we were so worried about you. Don't ever expect us to leave you like that again." Ron told him.

"Sorry, guys, but I needed to be sure you were both out of harm's way. I knew he would follow me and I knew I could escape if I was by myself."

"Why don't we all sit down and order some tea." Dumbledore pointed to the table and everyone in the room started to make their way over. Harry noticed the slight look of unease upon Sev's face at having his rooms invaded by far too many Gryffindors.

"Harry," Ron whispered in his ear. "Is this Snape's place?"

"Yes."

"Wow. I'm no history buff but some of this stuff is really rare and valuable."

Harry glanced around the room that he had become quite used to and guessed Ron was right.
After all, Sev did have expensive tastes. "I guess you're right." He whispered back.

Everybody was sat around the table. Harry was the last to join them, reclaiming back his seat. Dumbledore ordered more tea and had the breakfast things cleared away. "Now that everybody has some tea, let's get down to business. Harry, it is now your choice as to whether you would like the glamourie put back in place. While it is no longer necessary as the story is out, it will remain your choice."

Harry thought about this. He was already someone to be stared at as it was and he did not want to give people any more reason to do so. He would also feel odd sitting in class looking twenty-seven when the rest of the class looked seventeen. "I'll go back under it, if that's okay. I don't want to be stared at any more than I already am."

"Of course. It will be recast after our little meeting. The next thing on the agenda is how did this photograph get out?"

"I believe I have an idea as to how."

"Go ahead, Severus."

"I believe the Dark Lord got one of his lackeys to take it and he sent it himself to the paper."

"Why would he do that, Sev... Professor?" Harry corrected himself and hoped that Sev would not hold it against him.

"It's blaringly obvious, Potter." Harry smirked at Severus for that one. Fine, they were now even for the name-calling; he listened as the man continued. "The Dark Lord has successfully shaken the faith a lot of people have in you to be their saviour. They have always believed you to be untouchable and now there is photographic proof of you down on your knees, looking like you are begging for mercy after he had changed you with a spell. Little does anybody know that a moron from Italy caused your changes. That is why the paper has doctors and the like looking into the effects of an aging spell."

"If you are correct, Severus, which I have no doubt that you are, Voldemort has manipulated everyone into believing what he wants. Which forces us to either admit defeat to the press and tell the truth or lie and deny damming evidence."

Harry was angry also, it seemed as if Voldemort was having everything go his way of late. It was starting to get on his nerves. "Fuck him!" Harry heard gasps go around the table at his explicit language. He looked up and all but one person was looking at him in shock. Sev was just smirking at him, looking as though he was trying everything in his power not to bust out laughing.

"Harry... You should watch your language!" Hermione told him off.

"Sorry." Harry mumbled and caught they eye of Sev again and had to bite the inside of his cheek not to laugh. It looked as though Severus was having similar problems.

"Maybe, Harry, you could explain your outburst for us." Dumbledore was looking at him with an amused look on his face.
"Sure, sorry again, sir. It's just why bother, people are going to believe what ever they are going to believe. I say we say nothing to the papers, let them write their silly reports and waste money paying healers to hypothesise what's wrong with me. We should be concentrating on more important things like trying to stop Voldemort from taking over the world and not piss-arsing around with the press."

"Here, here. I agree with Harry."

"Thanks, Ron." Harry smiled at his friend.

"Though crudely put, I agree with Mister Potter. The press will continue to write what ever they want, regardless of what you say to them, Albus. Let them stew." McGonagall put her two sickles in to the debate.

"It's agreed then to let the press be and pass no comment?" Everyone agreed with Dumbledore on this point. Harry was glad, he hated dealing with the press. "The other thing I wanted to mention while everyone was here was the need for some extra training. From what Hermione told me of yesterday it seems as if Voldemort is fully aware of who you two are." Harry noticed he was looking in the direction of Ron and Hermione. "So it would be prudent if I were to include the both of you in the advanced training I had planned for Harry. I know both of you have plans for after Hogwarts, but I am sure you can still make a class or two in the evenings." Harry knew that tone and look, it was the you-have-no-choice-but-to-obey one. The thing that really had Harry reeling was the talk of extra training, it was the first he had ever heard of it and by the look on the other professor's faces it was the first time for them to. "I wasn't going to mention this until after you had all graduated and had gotten your licenses, but I believe it would be judicious to start this now. I want to set up, with all of your permission of course, a set of advanced classes and a mentor type situation."

Harry noticed a few mumbles break out across the table; he also noticed that Hermione looked excited at the prospect of learning even more, bringing a small smile to his lips.

"Calm down everyone, let me explain myself. Unfortunate as it is, these three here are primary targets for Voldemort and his followers and they will all need a few more tricks up their sleeves if they are to defend themselves. I believe that with extensive training in advanced Charms, Transfiguration, Defence Against The Dark Arts, Potions and Physical hand-to-hand combat they will stand a better chance at surviving. I would also like to set each one of you," he looked directly at Harry, Ron, and Hermione as he said that and continued. "A mentor to go to, when you have questions about your studies or you need some extra practice. I have thought long and hard about this, Severus, Minerva and Filius, you are three of my most trusted friends and professors and I would like to ask you to take on these roles as mentors, but please do not feel as though you have been backed into a corner. You are free to say no if you wish to."

After some thought, all three professors agreed to Dumbledore's request. "Excellent. Minerva, of course you will teach them advanced Transfiguration and I would like to place Miss Granger in your care. Filius, it will be advanced Charms and some dueling techniques if at all possible for you. And I would like to place Mister Weasley in your care. Severus, it will be advanced Potions and hand-to-hand combat for you and you will have the pleasure of having Mister Potter in your company. I will be teaching you all advanced Defence Against The Dark Arts, though Severus would have been my first choice for that class but I believe I have imposed enough on your time, Severus?"

"Yes. I have no desire to teach that lesson, at all. Ever!"
"I know how you feel about it, Severus. That is why I will be dusting down my old teaching robe for the job. It's been a few years but I am sure it will all come flooding back to me. So is everyone happy with those arrangements?" Everyone gave their confirmation and fell into a relaxed chatter.

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Severus had been expecting something like this for some time, at least he hadn't gone and gotten stuck full time with Weasley or Granger. That would have been a disaster waiting to happen having to teach Mister Temper and little Miss Know-It-All. Unfortunate, Ron Weasley was nothing like his eldest brother, or Charlie even. No, he took after those troublesome twins. He also knew how the old man's mind worked, with his new little plan he and Harry had a perfect excuse to spend extra time together. Meddling old fool! Severus grumbled to himself. His inner musings were distracted by a quiet tapping noise at his door. He went over and opened it and one of his estate owls flew in and landed on the back of his sofa. It was carrying a small brown package, he went over to it to relieve it of it burden and found some owl treats to give it. Once he took the package it flew over to the owl perch in the room and rested up. Severus was thankful Harry's owl, Hedwig, was not on it today as she had seemed to have taken a liking to his quarters and spent a great deal of time hanging around and preening on that perch. He was grateful because he did not wish to insult his own owl by making it think it had been replaced.

He joined the group back at the table just as Harry was having the Charm recast over him and opened his package. It was a small book titled in a language he did not understand, but underneath the unusual language written in small silver letters were the words, 'Charmed Snake Magic by Salazar Slytherin'. He quickly read the accompanying letter and passed the book over to Harry. "It seems as if the Potter luck has struck again! The house elves found it in the Spanish villa a few days ago when they were checking up on the property."

"Wow! Sev... I mean Profess... Oh sod it! Severus, this is amazing! I can't believe you had a copy of it. According to Salazar the reversal charm is in this book somewhere. Thank you so much. I must write a thank you note to Lula, Manni and Zelk for their help. Wow, I'm speechless! Thank you."

He couldn't help the smirk he gave Harry during his attempt to stay formal in front of the others. "You're welcome, Harry."

Severus was glad that the others took this as a natural conclusion to the meeting and said their goodbyes. Harry had stayed a few minutes longer and had given him a quick kiss before he had left also. Severus had a lot to think about; for starters he had to plan out some advanced classes.

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A few days later Harry had to report to Severus for his first 'tutorial'. He didn't know what to expect, Ron and Hermione were also having their meetings tonight. He entered Sev's office after knocking and being granted admittance. He was told to follow Sev into a chamber he had not been to before. Harry did as he was told and followed, but he found it hard to concentrate on where they were going because his eyes were to busy checking Severus out. He was wearing casual black cotton trousers with a red stripe down the side of each leg and a nice form fitting white t-shirt with long sleeves. Harry had a nice view from behind and because he was not concentrating on where he was or what he was doing he walked smack bang into the back of Sev when he had come to a stop in front of a small door. "Sorry." He heard Sev tut at his
inattentiveness as he opened the door.

Once inside, Harry found himself in what was best described as a work out room. It had some kind of mats on the floor and swords hanging from the walls. "This is where we will work on your hand-to-hand combat skills." He was only half listening, he was too distracted by watching Sev tying back his hair and exposing his pale neck. "Potter! Are you even listening to me?" He saw Sev smirking at him, even though his tone was a little harsh Harry could tell he was not in any real trouble.

"Sorry, Sev. Sure I was listening; hand-to-hand combat, in this room. Right?" He watched as Sev rolled his eyes at Harry in mock disgust. Harry couldn't resist and quickly walked up to Sev and gave him a little kiss. "I promise to pay attention from now on."

"Good. Remember, I have the Headmasters permission to beat the shit out of you all in the name of the light." He had an evil grin on his face.

"Now, now, professor, play nice."

"I never play nice, Harry, you should know that by now. Right now sit and listen." Harry sat down on the floor, crossed his legs and got comfortable as Sev went into lecture mode. "I will be teaching you the basics of swordsmanship and a muggle fighting style called martial arts. There are many martial art weapons, with the most popular being the broadsword also called saber. The staff, spear and sectioned whip are also good ones to learn to use. I will be teaching you how to use the Butterfly swords, Tai Chi sword and the standard broad sword. We will be starting with the Rapier, a double edged blade with a sharp point. It is lighter than the broadsword and a Saber, Scimitar class which is a slashing weapon. So if you are ever stranded and you have lost your wand you will not be totally defenseless. Any questions?"

"When will we be learning the whole potions thing?"

Severus came and sat down next to Harry. "Do you really think I would put myself through the hell of teaching you three, who I am hasten to add are not my three best students, advanced potions on three separate occasions?"

"No, I guess not."

"You guessed correctly. I will hold a class when all three of you are present so I can get it over and done with in one go. I am not a masochist and will not go through that torture three times a week. Right, now get up and show me what you got."

"Pardon?"

"Stand up and come at me and show me what you've got."

"Oh, okay." Harry stood up not really sure what was expected of him. There was no way in hell he could beat Sev in a fist fight, he had seen the man naked and knew all about the muscles he was hiding under his teaching robes. But, hey, if Sev wanted him to throw himself at him, he was all for that. Harry stepped up to the man and in a blink of an eye he was pinned under Severus on the floor. "Hey, that was so unfair, I was not ready."

"Do you think the bad guys will wait until you are ready, Harry? First we will work on a little hand-to-hand, then we will move on to the swords," was whispered into his ear.
"No." Great, Harry thought, now I'm fighting with a hard on from the close contact.

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Things continued in the same vein for the best part of an hour. Harry was getting a little better; once he was shown how to maintain his balance correctly he remained on his feet a hell of a lot more. After the work out he was starting to get tired, he was hot and sweaty and ready for his bed. It slightly irked him that Sev looked as fresh as a daisy. "How do you do that?"

"What?"

"Look all fresh."

"Practice. If you work hard then your fitness level will rise. Now let's call it a night. It's getting late."

Harry poked his tongue out as Sev as he walked past him, and was subsequently thrown on the floor for his troubles. "That's one hell of a move, Sev."

"It is only one of many."

"Maybe you would like to show me the rest, Professor Snape?" Harry craned his neck up until their lips meet in a fiery kiss. Harry rolled Sev on to his back and climbed on top of him and continued the fiery kiss. Harry started to grab at the tight white t-shirt Sev was wearing and started to kiss his exposed neck. "So when do we learn these other positions?" Each word was punctuated by a kiss to Severus neck.

"Patience, Potter." Harry felt Sev entwine his fingers in his hair. "This is meant to be physical education, not sexual education."

Harry smirked as he pushed Sev's top up his chest and kissed and licked the abdomen of his teacher. "I don't hear you complaining, sir." Harry continued his exploration, nipping and licking an exposed nipple. He heard Sev give a small moan from his ministrations and it made his penis stand immediately to attention. He felt Sev's fingers tighten in his hair.

"Harry, you know we can't."

"I know." Harry knew Severus had explicitly stated they would not have sex again until he had graduated from school, and Harry had no plans to let it go that far, not that he didn't want it to, because, let's face it, he was a seventeen-year-old boy and even a slight breeze blowing in the right direction gave him a hard on. But he had promised himself that he would give Sev a little payback for the other morning. After all Sev had said to him about no sex the night before and then in the morning to do that to him, Harry felt it was a little unfair. Not that he was complaining, it was one hell of an orgasm. Harry continued his journey south on Sev's chest; he reached the man's waistband and took a deep breath. He had never done this before but he knew the mechanics of it and guessed the rest would be instinct.

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Severus felt Harry unbuttoning his trousers, sliding them down his hips enough to release his aching erection. His fingers instinctively held a little tighter on to Harry's hair, he heard his
younger lover moan as he did this. He blinked away the fuzziness threatening to overtake his vision and looked down in time to see Harry lick his way along the length of his engorged shaft, taking the head into his mouth. Severus let his head fall back as a moan escaped through his clenched teeth. Shit! He thought, I'm going to hell for this; I'm corrupting the-boy-who-lived. He held back the small laugh that threatened to escape, or was it Harry that was corrupting him? Never in a million years did he ever believe he would be lying on the floor of an old disused classroom receiving a pretty good blowjob from a student. He could feel Harry taking more of him into his mouth, the wet heat of Harry's mouth was too much and he let out another strangled moan. Yes, definitely going to hell, the only rational part of his brain mused.

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Harry could feel Sev's fingers that were tangled in his hair start to stroke the back of his neck, it was all adding to the new sensations he was feeling. He was unable to take all of Severus into his mouth but compensated for that by using one of his hands on the base of his cock. He had placed his other hand on Sev's hip to minimise the chance of him jerking up and causing him to gag, he reckoned with practice he would overcome this problem. And he would be quite happy to put that practice in. As he continued to suck harder and use his tongue to add to the pleasure for Sev, he could feel himself getting harder and it wasn't helped by the noises he could hear coming from his lover, each noise went straight to his cock.

He felt Sev tighten the grips on his shoulder and in his hair and let out a cry of pleasure as he came in Harry's mouth. Harry did his best to swallow it all, but felt some of it trickle down his chin. When he felt Sev start to soften in his mouth and hand he pulled back to bring himself up level with Sev. What he was not expecting was to be thrown on to his back, have his chin licked clean and his mouth pulled into a toe-curling, knee-buckling kiss. He groaned out loud as his mouth was plundered by Sev's tongue.

He felt his jeans being pulled open brutally and his cock being taken in hand roughly. Harry cried out in pleasure as Sev skilfully started to entice him to completion. It didn't take long before Harry was using language that turned the air blue and he screamed out as he came in Sev's hand. "Merlin!" Harry whispered as his senses returned to him.

"Indeed." He could see Sev smirking at him as he whispered a cleaning spell to tidy them both up.

***

After Harry had straightened himself up, he gave Sev a good night kiss and he was on his way back to Gryffindor tower when he noticed two large shadows step out in front of him. He stopped instinctively going for his wand,

"I wouldn't bother if I was you, Potter." The dulcet tones of Malfoy came from behind him. He guessed it must be Crabbe and Goyle in front of him.

"Piss off, Draco, leave me alone."

He could feel Draco come up behind him, "Why, Potter, are you feeling a little tired after visiting with Snape?"

Harry panicked but his face showed nothing. Did Draco know something about him and Sev? "Like I said before, Draco, piss off."
"Now, now, Potter don't think I haven't noticed how you look at Snape. I never would have guessed him to be your type. Or are you into the domineering type. Someone who can put you in your place maybe?"

Harry was quickly losing his temper but knew his best chance to get out unscathed was attempt to play it cool. "Listen, Malfoy, just leave me alone." He felt more than saw Crabbe and Goyle move closer to him.

"I don't think so, Potter. I told you I would get you back for the other week. Nobody treats a Malfoy that way! Crabbe, Goyle." Harry braced himself as he felt both of the goons starting to punch him. They had only landed a few punches each before Draco had called them off him. It wasn't too bad; Harry had had much worse at the hand of Dudley and his gang. "I won't finish you off, Potter, because others would not be pleased, especially Snape."

Harry knew exactly what he was getting at, as far as he was concerned Severus was a loyal Death Eater. One thing Harry did have on his side, though, was the fact that Draco was just guessing that there was actually something going on between Severus and himself. He was going to have to do something he dearly didn't want to do, he was going to have to deny the relationship between them and the feelings he held for the man. In a quiet dangerous voice Harry replied, "I wouldn't allow that filthy Death Eater to touch me." Harry stood up and faced Draco, who had started to not look so sure about himself. "You have no fucking idea what is going on, Draco, you are out of your depth, so step away before you drown."

"Fuck you, Potter, it's you that has no idea of what's going on. I can't wait to see the look on your face when the balance of power changes."

"Shame you won't get to see it then."

"That confident your side will win are you?"

"No. It is just a fact that if Voldemort is to win this war then I will be dead, hence the reason you will not see the look on my face." Draco actually looked a little shocked at Harry's statement. He saw Draco raise his wand at Harry, but he was too slow and Harry had Draco pinned to the floor sitting astride him with his own wand jabbed into the fair-haired boy's neck. "Back off, you idiots, or your little leader will get it."

"You haven't the guts, Potter."

"How much are you willing to bet, Draco? Your life?" He saw Draco pale.

"Back off, you idiots. Potter's gone mad. You won't get away with this Potter! Wait till my father finds out about this!"

"Now I'm real scared. Yes, your father, the man I got kicked off the school board, the man I got thrown into Azkaban. I'm quaking in my boots."

"Watch it, Potter!"

"Shut up, Draco! I have had to listen to you, now it is time for you to hear a few hard truths." Harry saw a drop of his own blood fall from his lip onto Draco's cheek, and he saw the boy flinch from it. "You still seem to think this is some kind of game don't you? GROW UP!"
Harry moved within an inch of Draco's face. "This is not a game, this is real life and death shit that is happening. People are dying out there and when we leave this school you will have to choose what side you want to die for. I don't care what side you choose because I'm still coming for you! Then it will be your Lord and Master after that because he is a sick fuck that deserves to be taken down and put back in his place in hell! Do you even know what his latest plans are? Has Daddy even informed you what is happening out there? Well, has he?" He saw Draco shake his head in a negative. "He is taking children as young as seven and eight and poisoning them to make them older and marking them and sending them out to kill people and kidnap other innocent children. How long do you think it will be until he forces you to take the mark? Then force you to kidnap children or even force you to marry just to breed him further soldiers for his army? Grow up, Draco! I am fed up with you annoying me all the time. Do you understand? Well?" Draco nodded his head in affirmation. "Good. One other thing, Snape is mine! Touch him or go running to your father with any dense stories and I will finish you. As I will with you, I will deal with Snape after school is finished. I guess I owe him a few, just like you." Harry got up and left the three silent boys in the hallway and headed to his dormitory.

**Next Chapter:** The trio have to plan out their futures. Harry finishes up his Dark Mark studies and more advanced training.
The Secret Guardian Angel - Chapter 21

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Beta read by the irreplaceable JediCandy.

Chapter Twenty One - Future Plans.

It was almost Easter and Voldemort had finished his full return to power; he had never conducted much of his business away from his manor except for that one time in Harry's fifth year when they had met in the lobby of the Ministry and he had dueled with Albus Dumbledore. He even had even had the audacity to raid a second orphanage. The Order had been more successful this time in preventing the loss of too many children because of the help they had received from the Aurors. Voldemort's forces still managed to escape with eleven newly conscripted children. There was also an alarming rate of children being snatched in the streets away from their parents. The Minister had tried to calm things down but the people were not listening. It had almost gotten to the point where children under the age of eleven were rarely seen. If they were not old enough to go to Hogwarts, then they stayed indoors in relative safety. Quite possibly the most disturbing piece of news came to them via Severus Snape, the man-child army of Voldemort's were now being taught full time by none other than Lucius Malfoy! He had been put in charge of the newly established Dark Academy. The Order was worried that the constant exposure of corruption and violence from the fair-haired man would damage the children further. Lucius Malfoy was truly a sick and twisted individual. The Order was loosing ground to Voldemort. The evil wizards new plan of action to swell his forces seemed to be unstoppable. Everything seemed to be going his way. Yes, Voldemort had returned in a blaze of glory!

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Harry and Ron were waiting outside McGonagall's office for their career talks. Hermione was in there at the moment; typically her meeting had run over no doubt from all the questions she was asking. Harry had agreed to let Ron go in next because his was cut and dry; he wanted to be an Auror and that was that, whereas Harry had an idea of where he would like to go with his life but had no real idea how to go about doing such a thing. Hopefully McGonagall would not be too disappointed with his decision not to become an Auror. He looked up as he heard the office door open and watched as Hermione bounced out the office. "Which one of you two gentlemen is next?"

"That would be me."

"This way, Mister Weasley." Ron got up and smiled at his friends before he disappeared behind the office door.
"Mione, how did it go?" He asked the visibly happy girl.

"Oh Harry, it was brilliant. I'll tell you what, when you are all finished why don't we meet by the lake and we can tell each other everything?"

"Sounds good. If you want I'll tell Ron when he comes out."

"That would be wonderful. I best head off and get one of my textbooks for some revision. I'll see you by the lake." Harry watched as she walked away. Obviously the news had been good, not that he was expecting anything less. Her grades were brilliant and any University would be lucky to have such a clever witch join them. He just hoped things went as well for Ron. Then again, the Auror division was hardly going to turn down an application that was backed by Dumbledore himself; not that Ron needed it, he was strong and courageous and would be an asset to any team. A little while later Ron stepped out of the office with a mixture of dread and excitement on his face, Harry wasn't even sure that such a thing was even possible until now.

"Mione's by the lake. Is everything okay?"

"Brilliant, mate, I'll fill you in later." Harry smiled and nodded.

"Mister Potter, your turn I believe."

"Coming, Professor." Harry walked into her office and sat down in the chair that was indicated to him.

"Now, Mister Potter, I am sure you know why you are here. We at Hogwarts attempt to set you on your chosen path with as little trouble as possible. Now let me see." He watched as she picked up his school file and thumbed through it. He blushed ever so lightly when he noticed how thick his file was compared to the others on her desk. No doubt it was from all the trouble he had been in over the years. "As I recall you wished to follow the same path as Mister Weasley and become an Auror. Your grades have certainly improved greatly over the last couple of years, even in potions. I'm sure the Headmaster would be more than willing to write your letter of recommendation also. I shall give you the forms, they need to be completed within the next few weeks and sent..."

"Professor?" Harry interrupted hoping he wouldn't annoy her by this too much.

"Yes, Mister Potter?"

"I um...I have..." Harry was mumbling.

"Speak up, Mister Potter."

"Sorry. It's just that I think I have, no, I know I have changed my mind about becoming an Auror." He finished a little more decisively.

"I see."

"Sorry."

"Why ever are you sorry, Mister Potter?"
"I didn't want to disappoint you."

"Disappoint me? Whatever makes you think that?"

"Because you stuck up for me against Umbridge about becoming an Auror."

"I see, but may I ask why you no longer wish to pursue that path?"

"I do still want to, well kind of. You see, ever since I have come to the wizarding world I have, in effect, been doing the job. I have been fighting the darkest of all dark wizards and I'm tired of it, and I still have more fighting to do. If this war continues on the way it has, I just feel there is another way I could be of some use. And let's face it, I am not going to be able to just go out there and do anything normal with Voldemort on my tail."

He saw his professor glance at him with sadness in her eyes and a little bit of pity. That irked him a little, he did not want pity. He had gone through his self-pitying stage back in his fifth and sixth years and was now over it. He reckoned this was one of the reasons he liked Severus so much, he never felt pity for him, sympathy, yes, but not pity.

"Potter... Harry, I know this has been difficult for you but you must not allow You-Know-Who to rule your life. Yes, you may have to put your application off for a year or so but you should still go for what your heart tells you to."

He smiled a little at her. "I am, Professor. I know in my heart I would not be happy doing that job, not in the long run. I want to do something more positive with my life, help people if possible."

"You sound as if you have thought about this a lot."

"I have, Professor."

"Do you have any ideas as to what you would like to do?"

"I have a few. I want to work with children, mainly the ones that will be forgotten by this war. You see, I have a lot of people leaving me money in their wills and for some reason some other people give me donations. Sometimes they are quite vast amounts and I feel uncomfortable using that money so I want to put it to some good use. That is what I have come up with, so far."

"Well, there are a few options open to you. You could train to become a Medi-Wizard and work with children that way, but they won't necessarily be orphans or homeless children, and the training is many years of hard work. You could work in one of the few halfway homes for runaway youngsters. There are not many in the wizarding world, only one or two I believe. Or you could work in an orphanage, again there are not many of those around or you could even set one up yourself. How does that sound?"

"Good. Would the N.E.W.T's I have chosen to study work in those areas?"

"Well you won't have much use for your Defence Against The Dark Arts N.E.W.T but your Transfiguration one will always come in handy. Luckily you stuck with potions because that will come in very handy, especially if you have to look after sick children. I would suggest that once you graduate you look into doing a course in basic medicine, just enough so you know how to look after cuts and the odd broken bone. Maybe a small business course would be good
to help you deal with the extra finances you have. Perhaps even a small course in counseling could be of some use." She handed him some leaflets, all with titles like 'Childcare: A Career' or 'Medi-Wizardry.' "These should be of some help to you, Mister Potter."

"Thank you, Professor. I'll read them and get back to you."

"Don't dally too long, Mister Potter, as we will need to start making preparations if you wish to take some of those extra courses."

"I won't Professor," with that, Harry smiled at his teacher and left her office heading towards the lake where he knew his friends would be waiting.

***

Harry rushed over to the lake to where his friends were talking excitedly. "Hey guys, so what's the news?"

"Harry, I have been accepted by all three magical Universities in the world. I don't even have to wait until I have received my grades from my N.E.W.T.'s."

"That's my girl!"

"Oh, Ron!" Harry did not miss the small blush that crept across her cheeks.

"So where have you decided to go?"

"I have decided to go to the magical branch of Cambridge University. Paris was tempting, so was Bulgaria University but they are quite far away from where Ron will be training. Also, Cambridge allows me to study history of politics, which is something I am very interested in."

"Hey, Ron. Just think, one day Mione could be your boss when she becomes the Minister Of Magic." Harry couldn't help but laugh at that thought.

"You two! I have no desire to become the next Minister Of Magic. I see myself in more as an equal rights campaigner. See if maybe I could get SPEW off the ground again." Ron and Harry looked at each other and burst out laughing. Hermione just grumbled something under her breath about stupid boys.

"What about you, Ron, what had your knickers in a twist?"

"Mate, it's the application form. It's a killer! It's about thirty pages long. McGonagall said she would help me with it, she reasons I should get in with Dumbledore doing my reference and all. What about you, still want to be an Auror?" Ron asked Harry.

"Nah, not for me. Kind of fed up with dark wizards and all that comes with it. I'm thinking about working with kids. You know, like me. The ones that don't have a home, the ones nobody wants. I have a feeling there could be a bunch of Death Eater's kids at a loss for a home after this war. I'm hoping to help them in some way."

"That sounds very worthwhile, Harry."

"Thanks, Mione." The three friends fell into a relaxed conversation about their possible futures,
all the time unaware of a pair of grey eyes watching then from a distance.

***

Draco was not really sure why he was watching the golden trio. He hated them with a passion; they got everything he would never be able to have, such as automatic respect and adulation. The world was at their feet. Though he did have to admit to himself that the mudblood Granger would no doubt go far with her intelligence, being friends with Potter only helped her a little. Where as in his opinion the weasel would never have gotten far in life if he were not Potter's friend. No one would have paid attention to him; after all he was just another poor kid from that overly large family of mudblood lovers. He would have had to live with his lot in life - a low level ministry job like his father, but because he was associated with Potter he was to get an easy ride into becoming an Auror.

Draco was only a little jealous of him, he had wanted to be an Auror when he was younger, but he didn't think he could live with being so law abiding all the time, not with who his father supported -- the Dark Lord. He was another thing Draco was not all that interested in. He did not believe it fitting for him, a Malfoy, to grovel at anyone's feet, let alone a half-breed like him. The man was clearly insane. Far too obsessed with Potter's demise for him. Yes, he would like to see that superior smug look wiped off Potter's face but did he really want Potter dead? He enjoyed teasing and taunting him and, if at all possible, publicly humiliating him. Getting one-up on him was always fun. But Potter dead was another thing altogether.

Draco knew without a doubt that he was better then Potter because his blood was pure. He was a true wizard, but Potter had managed to get himself out of some tight situations with the Dark Lord before, therefore he should not be under-estimated. Also if rumour was to be believed, Potter was the one to rid the world of the Dark Lord. Not a bad state to be facing, Draco mused to himself. He had no desire to be anyone's servant. He would be the master of his own servants not the other way around. He was, even if he would only admit it to himself, a little shaken by what Potter had told him a few weeks ago about the Dark Lord's doings with orphans. He did not want to force his heir into slavery for that half human half serpent mudblood freak. He needed to make some plans, have a backdoor, so to say. So that depending on what way the war went he would be safe from either side.

***

Harry, Ron and Hermione were silent during supper this evening because their minds were elsewhere. After the meal they would be reporting for their first Advanced Charms and Duelling lesson with Flitwick. All three of them were apprehensive because professor Flitwick was going to be teaching them things that could one day save their lives. Harry had to wonder what kinds of things they would learn, though he was not bad at the subject he had to wonder what it could offer in the way of extra defence or survival tactics. He could not see how a Cheering Charm could be used to defeat an enemy unless half way through a battle Voldemort decided he was too sad to continue and would not unless Harry helped cheer him up. Well, better then giving him a hug, Harry thought, though his death would no doubt cheer up the evil old snake in a way nothing else could.

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When they had all finished their supper they headed up to the Charms classroom. They knocked and waited for admission. Once they had received that they entered the room. "There is no need to look so worried children, come on in." Flitwick encouraged them. As Harry entered he
noticed all the tables and chairs had been stacked up at the sides of the room, and down the centre was a duelling stage very similar to the one they had used in their second year with Lockhart. He sat down in the remaining chair in front of his professor's desk and waited to hear what they would learn.

"You all know why you are here, to learn the finer points of Charms and dueling and how, when they are combined, they can be quite deadly. After much though and debate about how and what to teach you, I have decided to only skim over the proper aspects and rules of duelling because the people you will be fighting will not stick to the rules. But you need to be aware of the rules so that you know how to break them. Any questions?"

Ron was the first to speak up; Harry reckoned it was because he and Flitwick were now spending more time together in this new mentor programme Dumbledore had set up that he was the most comfortable with him. "What do you mean, sir, about not sticking to the rules?"

"He means, Mister Weasley, that he will teach you to fight dirty, just as the enemy will." Harry's head snapped around to the dark corner that that voice had come from and grinned. Severus stepped out of the shadows and merely smirked at him and his friends.

"Ah! Severus, forgive me, I forgot you were here, you are much too quiet."

"Nothing to forgive, Filius." Severus nodded to him.

"As Professor Snape has just told you, you will basically be taught a lot of the tricks that are not condoned by the official board of dueling but could be useful in saving your lives one day. The reason I asked Professor Snape here tonight was because he is one of the best duelers I have ever had the pleasure to practice with and he has graciously agreed to help me with a few demonstrations. Anything else?" The three of them remained silent. Harry had heard many stories from Severus of how these two got into epic duels for fun and believed that by the end of the night he would have a whole new collection of bruises.

"Excellent, Severus, shall we?" Severus nodded his agreement at his colleague and they walked towards the dueling stage.

"You three don't think you are going to sit there all night do you?" Severus asked Harry, Ron and Hermione in a typically sarcastic tone. They immediately jumped to their feet and rushed over to the stage.

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"I have decided that for the moment we will not learn any new Charms but instead get comfortable at the idea of facing multiple enemies at the same time and work out the best way to get away from them. So who would like to volunteer to have a go first?" Flitwick asked them, Harry noticed Ron and Hermione shrink back just a little leaving him up front yet again.

He rolled his eyes. "I will, sir."

"Wonderful, Mister Potter, come on up."

"Please just call me Harry." He asked professor Flitwick as he climbed up onto the stage.

"As you wish, Harry. Now, Severus, if you wouldn't mind taking your position." Harry watched
closely as Severus took off his cloak and stepped up to the stage in his full dueling robes. Harry couldn't help but raise an eyebrow in appreciation; they looked good on him, very sleek. Severus stood at the opposite end of the stage and smirked at Harry when he noticed his expression. Flitwick ushered Harry into position at the opposite end of the stage and then went and joined Severus at the other end and stood just in front of him.

"Umm, excuse me, Professors," Harry said with a little apprehension in his voice. "I don't have to duel the both of you at once do I?"

"Don't worry Harry, we will be using very low level Charms and hexes for demonstration purposes."

"Okay." Harry said without much conviction.

"Right! Okay now, you are faced with two enemies as Harry is now, what do you suggest is the best course of action?" Flitwick asked them.

"Run away." Harry mumbled in all seriousness, he was ignored as Hermione came up with a better option.

"You could always try and take down the one in front and attempt then to escape."

"How about running away?" Harry asked again to himself as no one was seemingly listening to him.

"Not a bad idea, Miss Granger, but..."

"Nah, I would... sorry, sir, I didn't mean to interrupt." Ron seemed to remember his manners.

"It's alright, Ron, please go on."

"I would attempt to take Sna... Professor Snape down first because he is the bigger threat, no offence, Professor."

"None taken, Ron, but why do you see Professor Snape as the bigger threat?"

"Because if I could only get one spell out, I would have a better chance at charging and taking you down physically then I would Professor Snape."

"Very good, Ron, excellent. Just how would you take Professor Snape down though without him just erecting a shield or I for that matter?"

"I see nobody is listening to my idea of just running away!" Harry whispered to himself. "That's because they are not facing these two!"

"Did you have something to say, Mister Potter?" Severus said in a smooth silky tone.

Harry looked at him and narrowed his eyes at the smirk Severus had. "No, not me, Professor Snape."

"No idea?" They all shook their heads. "Allow us to demonstrate." Flitwick went and joined Harry at his end and stood in front of him. "Ron almost had it right, in battle you have to make
quick assessments and Professor Snape was the bigger threat, literally!" The small wizard laughed to himself. "For if it became necessary Ron could have taken me down physically. Now the move we are about to show you is not quite in the official dueling rules and is considered sneaky and under-handed but when you are faced with two enemies it is a good little trick to know. Are you ready, Severus?"

"I am."

"Good. As you can see Professor Snape is now taking on the role of the attacked and he will take down Harry, in one move why don't you come up and take my place, Ron. Ready when you are." Ron reluctantly took Flitwick's place on the stage.

Harry knew the minute Severus had sprung into action he was doomed, he was totally looking in the wrong direction and even at the wrong thing. It had been an impressive move. Harry reminded himself never to face Severus in a duel because he would never have thought of that.

Initially it had seemed as if Severus was retrieving something from his pocket, which he had. He threw the shiny object into the air at a forty-five degree angle to Harry's left hand side. This had been the first thing Harry and Ron had done wrong, they had tracked the shiny object through the air. Harry wanted to find out what its threat level was, by the time he had realised it was only a coin Severus had transfigured it into a reflective surface. Harry turned to face Severus and heard him call out a hex but the aim seemed way off to his left. Then it dawned on Harry just what was going to happen, the hex bounced on the reflective surface at a perfect angel and hit Harry in the back, he went flying forward causing Ron to stumble a few steps. He managed to look up in time to see Severus spin, draw a sword from under his jacket and point it directly at Ron's throat.

"Wonderfully done, Severus. Now it was two against one but he managed to take you down. How and why?"

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The rest of the time was spent in discussion about how both Ron and Harry had both been distracted by a simple trick with a coin and if it had been the battlefield they both would have been killed. They discussed other possible ways of making such a move work for them. They all got to practice trying to make the same move Severus had made, with varying degrees of success. They were informed that Professor McGonagall would help them with any trouble they had with the Transfiguring of the coin or rock or whatever else came to hand. Much to Harry and Ron's annoyance they were given a little light reading as Hermione would call it for homework. They had to read all 3041 pages of the official rules of dueling. They were told it was not mandatory but it would be most helpful to learn. Harry knew Hermione would make them read it in the few hours a day they had put aside for sleep in-between studying for their N.E.W.T.'s and eating. At least there was no deadline for this, so the pressure was off.

The three of them walked back to Gryffindor Tower in a relatively good mood. The lesson had been fun, informative, and, best of all for Harry, he had gotten to spend a few extra hours with Severus. It didn't matter that others were in the room; it was just nice to be able to sit and be civil with the man in company instead of having to act as though they hated each other.

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Harry was on his way up to the Headmaster's office after receiving a note asking for his
attendance at his earliest convenience. Harry decided that the news about his new career choice had reached the Headmaster's ears and that he would, no doubt, think of it as a waste of talent. But he had made his choice and he was determined to stick by it. He knocked on the door and awaited admittance. "Enter." He heard through the door. When Harry had entered he was smiled at and waved to one of the chairs in front of the huge desk. "Tea, Harry?"

"Thank you, sir." A cup was placed in front of him.

"How about a sherbet lemon?"

"No thank you, sir."

"Okay, Harry. Down to business. We are not far away from the summer holidays and arrangements and plans need to be made. As you know, we moved your family to a safe location for a while, last summer, until the wards on your family home could be strengthened, which they now have been. I have spoken to your family, not so long ago, about you returning this summer."

"What! Sir, please isn't there somewhere else I could stay?"

"Harry, please. It is the safest place for you. The blood you share with your aunt and the added wards will keep you safe."

"Please, sir, isn't there any other options?"

"Your family has agreed to allow you to go back until your eighteenth birthday. They have told me under no circumstances are you welcome to stay after you turn eighteen. I am sorry for you, Harry."

"Don't be. I'm not." Harry was feeling everything from anger to misery. He was angry at having to return to his family but he was also sad that the last link to his mother no longer wanted anything to do with him. He truly felt alone. "What's going to happen to me after I turn eighteen?"

"I have arranged for the wards to be reset on Hogwarts a little earlier this year. Once you reach your birthday someone will come and collect you from your family and you will remain in the school until it is safe for you to get your own place."

"Can I stay at Severus' again?" He asked hoping for once he would get his own way.

"I am afraid not, Harry. Severus will be returning to the school in late August for the start of the new school year. We cannot risk you being found out staying there. It was fine last year because it was only for a few weeks. It would have to be for longer this time, and we cannot risk someone finding out. You will have to stay at the school where Voldemort and his kind cannot enter."

"Can I at least visit Severus?" Harry saw the Headmaster try to cover a small smile. Though the twinkles in his eyes never stopped.

"I'm sure something can be arranged. I am very happy that my two favourite boys are getting along so well." Harry could feel a little heat radiating from his face. He knew Dumbledore was aware that he and Sev had become close friends but he wasn't to sure if Dumbledore was fully
informed on exactly how close they had become.

"Thank you, sir."

"Now if there is nothing else, Harry, you may be on your way."

"Okay, sir. Thank you." Harry got up and left the office. He was at a bit of a loss of what to do. It was another hour before supper and he was up-to-date on his homework. A small smile crept across his face; a few days have passed since he had seen Sev and he was desperately in need of a good kiss.

***

Draco stayed in the shadows as he watched Potter walk deeper into the dungeons. He watched as his fellow student knocked softly on his Head of Houses' office door and enter without even being given permission. Everyone knew that was a big no-no to enter Snape's office without permission. The young blond guessed this to be his proof that something indeed was going on between Potter and Snape. He knew Potter had had some kind of extra lessons, remedial potions if he remembered correctly, in the fifth year but nothing in the sixth year. As far as he knew Snape was only giving one extra class this year and that was for the exceptional potions students. He knew this because he went to a few of them, when he had the time and that was why he knew for a fact Potter was not included in this class. Potter was a better student then he used to be but Potter was never going to be an excellent potions student, only adequate.

So what was the deal then? He knew Snape to be a Death Eater, but he wasn't entirely sure where the older man's loyalties lay. He was supposed to be the Dark Lord's spy on Dumbledore, but he had been at Hogwarts for a long time. Maybe in those years his loyalties had swayed to the crazy old man, Draco mused. He wondered briefly if this was a plot of the Dark Lord's to get to Potter. Have Snape seduce him and gain his favour then hand him over, like a lamb to the slaughter. Draco dismissed that out of hand, loathed as he was to admit it there was very little that went on in this school that the crazy old muggle lover didn't know about. He would not allow the seduction of his golden boy if it were to put him in danger. So did that mean Snape was loyal to Dumbledore? The seduce him and turn him to the dark side was not what was going on, his father had been surprised to learn of Potter's crush. He would have found out if it were a plot of the Dark Lord's.

So, was this the real thing? It was not against school rules for them to be involved. Potter was of age and Snape was not dramatically older then him, not by wizard standards. Had their constant animosity over the years developed into something more, maybe even love? A wicked smirk graced his pale features; this could be very useful to him. Especially if he could use it as his backdoor escape route if the war went the way of the light. Yes, things were definitely going to get interesting.

***

After Harry had entered Severus' office he walked over to the man who was at his desk working. "What are you working on?"

"Nothing that would interest you. I am sure your undersized brain could not handle it."

Harry sat down in the chair opposite the potion master and smirked. "You know I could surprise you."
"Indeed?"

"Yes, try me."

"Yes, you are very trying aren't you?" Came the sarcastic reply.

"Ha ha, very funny, Severus. Chances are, though, if it is a potions thing then I probably won't get it. I thought maybe I could tempt you into taking a brake, because if I know you, and believe me when I tell you I have your number, I doubt you have taken much of a break all day."

He saw Sev glance up through the curtain his hair provided and raise an eyebrow at him. "Think you know me that well?"

"I think I am getting there. I bet you haven't taken a break though."

"Just because I have a strong work ethic does not mean you fully understand and know me, Mister Potter. There are still many things to learn."

"I bet." A cheeky smirk graced Harry's lips. "But I wouldn't mind putting in the time to learn them though."

"Potter, you have a one track mind."

"Of course I do. I am a seventeen, you know. What else is there to think about?"

"Your studies?"

"Please! You expect me to be able to concentrate on school work when you are walking around no more then five minutes away from me?"

"Yes. It's called self-control, Potter. Heard of it before?" Sev's tone was dry and he was smirking at him.

Harry narrowed his eyes playfully. "Yes I have, thank you very much, Mister Snape. But you see the problem is that there is this professor that I have the hots for and he is driving me nuts. I can hardly concentrate when we are in the same building let alone in the same room."

"Then I suggest you keep your distance from Professor Binns if he has this effect on you." The smirk was now very obvious.

Harry looked mortified. "Oh, no! My big secret is out now, sir, whatever am I going to do? I know! If you kiss me silly I might get over my infatuation. Will you help me, sir?"

Severus gave him a wicked smile. "I think I can do something to help you, Potter."

"Really?" Harry jumped up from his chair and moved to the other side of the desk and promptly sat on his professors' lap.

"A little old to be sitting on laps aren't we, Potter?"
"I don't think so." Harry rearranged himself so he was astride Severus' lap and was facing him, he couldn't keep the smile from his face. "I think operation 'kiss Harry Potter stupid until he is over his infatuation with Binns' should commence."

"Good thing the man is already dead, otherwise I would have to kill him. I don't like competition."

"Ahhh, you can be so sweet at times." His answer was a stern look of disapproval. Harry leaned in and placed a chaste kiss on the lips he had been dreaming of. He pulled back and whispered confidentially. "Don't worry, I won't tell anyone."

"That is because nobody would believe you."

"True as that may be, but at least I know the truth." He smiled again and lent in to continue kissing the man that plagued his dreams.

***

Once Severus had kissed him silly, as Harry liked to call it, and the young man on his lap was making noises of satisfaction, he decided it was a good time to approach the subject of the summer holidays. He was aware Albus had no doubt spoken to Harry on the subject already, but he wanted Harry to understand he had tried to get permission for Harry to spend the summer with him in his home. "Harry, has the Headmaster spoken to you about your living arrangements for the summer?"

"Please, don't remind me."

"I'll take that as a yes, shall I?"

"Mmmm."

"I want you to know that I tried to persuade the old man into letting you stay at my home again. He was having none of it; he believed you would be safer here. He is no doubt correct."

"Really? That's good to know, sucks big time though."

Severus let out a snort of laughter. "You have such an unusual way with words. We will see each other if you wish. Albus has assured me I can come by as often as I like."

"Of course I wish it. I know you don't like to spend your summers here but it would be really nice to see you."

"As it would to see you."

"I wish Dumbledore..."

"Professor Dumbledore, Harry." Severus interrupted Harry.

"Sorry, Professor Dumbledore would let me stay with you. I don't want to be anywhere else."

"Silly sentimental Gryffindor. It's time for you to head for supper."
"I don't want to go. Its nice here."

"Be that as it may, you will be missed if you do not make an appearance for your public." He enjoyed teasing Harry because he always fell for it. Harry gave him a playful smack in the arm for his teasing. He did get up and give him a quick kiss before heading out of his office.

Severus stood and straightened himself out, it would do no good to go to the Great Hall looking disheveled people would think that he had been up to something.

***

When he had finished his supper, Harry excused himself from the dinner table and from his friends. He had some work to do, work that he felt could not wait. It was his Dark Mark studies.

He knew the first part of the reversal incantation and the last part he was starting to understand, both were in Latin. The middle part was the tricky part as it was in parseltongue. The book Sev had given him was proving useful if difficult to translate. He had found the charm that Voldemort used and he was sure he had found the reversal of that charm, but because it was not designed to be used on humans he wasn't sure if the reversal charm would work.

While thumbing through the book he found two spells that were designed to be used on humans. One was a concealing charm and the other was a disguise spell. It was only a theory but he reckoned if he could somehow combine the human element of one of those spells to the removal charm then he might just be able to remove the Dark Mark.

**Next Chapter:** Harry gets to put his theories to the test.

A massive thank you to everyone that has reviewed my story. Thanks also to those that have read and enjoyed it.
Tidus looked at his reflection and knew it to be wrong. He looked around twenty years old but he knew himself to be only ten, nearly eleven he mentally corrected himself. He was to go to Hogwarts in the fall; he remembered this because he was so excited that he had packed his trunk early. Too early, claimed the matron of his children's home. His memories were vivid in this but hazy in other areas. His new Master had seen to that. He had claimed that he would give them the home that he and the other kids had always wanted. At first he was excited, a new home and a father to care for them. But after the first night he had awoken looking like this. His new Master had seemed pleased, he wanted to please his new Master and said nothing about the oddness of it all.

The problem was that he was a curious child and he always had been. Matron had told him on several occasions that his insatiable appetite for knowledge would get him in trouble one day, and, boy, hadn't it! He had questioned one of his Master's orders one day claiming he did not understand the logic in it. Why would anyone want to kill Harry Potter? He was a hero to the wizarding world. He had been placed under the Cruciatus Curse for his impertinent behaviour, and he didn't even know what "impertinent" meant! He guessed it to be something bad because of the punishment with an Unforgivable. From that day on he had started to realise some things; he realised his Master was none other then He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and his faith in Harry Potter was shaken.

There was another name he heard bounded about quite a lot, 'Albus Bloody Dumbledore'. He had always thought 'bloody' was a swear word and not a middle name, how wrong had he been? Though the name Dumbledore was really ringing bells in his head. He just needed to remember from where. It had been a few days later that it had come to him in bed. Dumbledore was the Headmaster of the school he had dreamed of attending and was the sworn enemy of You-Know-Who, his new Master.

The memory of writing a letter to Dumbledore when he was seven had come flooding back to him. He had asked the Headmaster to allow him to come to Hogwarts early. Suddenly he remembered he had actually got a reply even though matron had told him he was wasting his time saving up his pocket money to send such a busy man a letter, for he would get no reply. But, a reply had come, delivered by the legendary phoenix, Fawkes. It hadn't just been a letter either it had been a package. It had contained a book on useful things to know and study for young witches and wizards and a bag of sweets he had called sherbet lemons. They had been really nice, the letter had told him they were muggle sweets and therefore not available in the
wizard world, the letter had also told him he could not yet attend the school as he was too young and that he should enjoy his time and play lots of silly games and eat lots of food that was bad for him until his time came for him to buckle down and study. Tidus remembered telling matron he couldn't wait to go to Hogwarts and have more of these wonderful muggle sweets called sherbet lemons. The letter had been his prize possession, he had treasured it, only allowing the other kids to view it and not touch it, for they might damage it.

That had all seemed like a lifetime ago, a time where he was free to dream about going to school, to study and eat sherbet lemons until his tongue hurt from too much sherbet. Now he was a suspicious and angry young man, because whenever he had stood up for his one time hero, Harry Potter, he was punished and taunted by his master. Where is your saviour now? Potter cannot save you only I can! Potter hates you; he will kill you when he catches you! After hearing this so much and the follow up with the Cruciatus Curse Tidus was starting to believe it. Harry Potter could not and would not save him. If he wanted to get away and find help his best bet was going to he his other boyhood hero Albus Bloody Dumbledore.

***

It was time again for another private potions lesson. They weren't as bad as the regular lessons, it seemed as if Severus was a better teacher when he only had to teach a smaller class. Still snarky as hell but definitely a little more patient, but that didn't mean Harry, Ron and Hermione dared to be even a minute late. That was why they were sitting in the potions classroom with nearly ten minutes to spare.

"Do you reckon we'll actually be making anything tonight?" Ron asked.

"Well, we haven't really covered all the theory yet, but you never know." Hermione smiled at him.

"We are going to be having a go at the Freezing Draft tonight." Harry told them.

"How do you know?" Ron asked him. Harry just gave him a look that clearly said 'how do you think?' "Oh yeah, sorry mate." Ron mumbled back.

Ron did have a point, Harry mused. So far they had only gone over what kind of potions they should carry and why. Not that it wasn't interesting but Harry was much more of a hands on kind of guy, theory was Hermione's domain. Severus had informed them that they would be learning several stunning potions including the Freezing Draft they would be going over this week. Veritaserum, proper de-aging drafts to help the children and many poisons. How to make them and recognise them in case your food or drink is sabotaged. Harry was not looking forward to that particular lesson because he knew the only way to really know whether you had been poisoned or not was to actually ingest the poison and learn its effects first hand. He knew Severus would have every antidote on hand but he was not looking forward to a night of puking. Another class that had Harry slightly worried was the truth serum classes. They were going to learn how to make it and how to try and survive an interrogation under it without spilling all your secrets. According to Severus you could get away with telling half-truths while under Veritaserum as long as you had been trained to do it. Harry did not want to learn that lesson in any way, be it in this classroom or in real life.

***

Things started off quite well, Severus had given them the ingredients and instructions on how to
do it. He sat opposite them at the workbench at which they were working, casting a critical eye over them while they worked and occasionally making critical barbs at them, "Mister Potter, be careful just how much dragons blood you put in that, you don't want to kill your enemy just freeze him." "Chopped daisy roots Mister Weasley, not mashed!" They were only half as bad as they would have been if the class had been full of students.

Harry was carefully adding the powdered spine of lionfish and watched with a smile as his potion slowly turned from dusky pink to a bright ice blue. So far so good, he mused. Next was the essence of belladonna and then finally the lovage needed to be added. Then his potion would be complete and correct. He hoped so; he wanted to show Sev that he could pay attention when he had to and make a correct potion. He added the final ingredient and the colour remained stable, he let out a breath he had been holding and stirred it anti-clockwise the required amount of times, then laid his spoon on the table next to his cauldron and extinguished the flame under it and waited for it to cool. Hermione had already finished and Ron followed a second or two after Harry. They all waited with bated breath for the final verdict.

"Miss Granger." Harry snuck a peak over at her cauldron and noticed her mix to be just a little brighter then his. He watched as Severus gave hers a stir. "Consistency is almost perfect just a little thick, it was taken off the heat a little early but other than that well done. Mister Weasley." Harry saw Ron visibly gulp, Ron's was a few shades darker then both his and Hermione's. "The colour is a little off, why do you think that is?" The tone was not that bad, but still a little sharp.

"I don't know sir." Ron mumbled back.

"The daisy roots were not cut as finely as they should have been. That is why the colour is off, it should still work but it will not last as long or be as effective."

Harry watched as Severus leaned over his cauldron and gave it a stir. "Mister Potter."

"Dragon's blood, too much or too little?" Harry blabbed out.

Much to Sev's amusement by the looks of things, he was smirking right at him. "Indeed, too much causing the colour to be off, other than that not bad." Harry grinned sheeplishly, he was warned during class to watch how much to put in. "Now start again and get it right." All three of them scrambled to get everything cleared up so they could all start again.

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It was starting to get late, the three of them had all redone their potion and this time it looked as if they had all taken on board the criticism and done it correctly. All three cauldrons shimmered with the same colour liquid inside of them. Severus had cast another critical eye over them and congratulated them on eventually getting it right. Harry watched as he retrieved three mice in small cages and placed one in front of each of them.

"Sir, what are we going to do with the mice?" Hermione asked.

"Miss Granger, we are going to test your potions."

"But that's cruel, sir!" Hermione squeaked.

Harry watched as Severus rolled his eyes and shook his head in slight annoyance. "How do you expect to test your potions? On each other? You silly girl."
"Oh, but..."

"No buts, Miss Granger. The mice will live if your potions are correct, they will unfreeze in an hour. Now, normally you would use a bottle full of this potion and throw it as your assailants feet, the potion and the fumes it will release will be enough to freeze a man of average size for one hour. If they are smaller, it will last longer. If they are larger, they will remain frozen for a shorter period of time." All three of them closely looked at the bottle, it wasn't very big but all three could tell it was made of very fine glass, easy to smash. "You will only need a quarter of what this bottle can hold to freeze your subjects here. So go ahead and try it."

All three of them filled there bottles up just a little and stood back to throw it in the direction of their mouse. Severus had told them that because of the mouse's size they only had to aim at the outside of the cage and not directly at the mouse. Ron was the first to throw his, the bottle smashed easily and the liquid and fumes covered the mouse, and it froze instantly. Ron grinned; Severus gave him a nod of approval. Harry was next to have a go, he took a deep breath and threw his bottle; he got the same results as Ron. Hermione seemed to hesitate a little; Severus was about to say something to her when Ron held up his hand to silence him. Harry blinked and looked over at Severus to see if he was pissed off at Ron's action. He smiled when he saw Severus merely smirking back at him. Harry guessed he was amused at Ron's unconscious action of telling him to be quiet.

"Mione, the mouse will be alright, Professor Snape said in a hour it will unfreeze." Ron gently told her.

"I know Ron, but it feels wrong to hurt an innocent creature." She whispered back to him.

"Mione, look at it this way. Many breakthroughs with science have been made for the good of wizard kind and muggle kind this way, at the expense of other, smaller creatures. At least this time nothing is going to be hurt permanently, even those stupid Death Eaters who get a face full of this stuff wont even be seriously hurt."

Hermione gave Ron a small smile. "I know I'm being stupid."

"No you're not, you just don't like causing pain to others. That does not make you stupid; it just means you care. That is why I love you so much, Miss Hermione Granger."

Hermione blushed a little and smiled back at Ron. "Thanks, Ron." She took a step back and threw her potion and it worked as well as the other's had.

Severus gave a small cough to bring the attention back to him. "Well done, bottle up the remaining potion then when you have cleared up you are dismissed."

Once they had cleaned everything up, Harry told his friends to go on without him and that he would catch them up in a little bit. Now that Harry was alone with Severus he threw his arms around his neck and placed a chaste kiss on his lips. "Thank you."

"For what, Mister Potter?" Severus asked him.

"You know what for. For not telling Hermione off when she didn't want to throw the potion and not telling Ron off for raising his hand to silence you."
"Mister Weasley was the best person to talk her into what was necessary; as for his little hand gesture, I don't think even he was aware he had done it."

"I know, but it was still generous of you not to snap at them." Harry placed another small kiss on his lips.

"I am not here to teach you how to kill, I do not wish to train a bunch of mindless killers. Unfortunately it may become necessary, as this is war. But, the longer someone can hold onto his or her innocence the better. It is a hard thing to live with, knowing you have taken another life." Harry had a nasty suspicion Severus was talking from experience and did not want to push it, because he did not want to know. Putting those thoughts aside for later dissection he stood on tiptoes and brought their lips together in another kiss.

***

Harry was just leaving Professor Flitwick's office after confirming his suspicions of combining the two spells to be able to remove the Dark Mark. He knew he was on the right path, and Flitwick had helped him fine-tune his theories. Now he just needed a test subject. Severus was of course his first choice; it was why he had started this line of study, to free the man from his enslavement to that evil sick bastard. He had a funny feeling Severus would say no. That would not stop him from offering it to him all the same. He wanted to give him the choice, a choice that he would be in control of. He knew Severus had felt that many times during his life that the choices to do something had always been taken away from him. Harry now wanted to give him back control of his life.

He was heading down to the dungeons to see Sev and have a chat to him about everything. He was keeping an eye out for anyone watching him to closely, especially Draco. The extra training all the teachers had been giving him was helping him to be more aware of his surroundings. Severus was passing along a lot of his tried and tested spying methods. The shocking thing was that he was even passing along his knowledge to Ron and Hermione during their extra lessons with him. He had managed to hold his tongue when tutoring them. Hermione had taken it all in her stride, as was her way. Even the physical ed. lessons that she had taken part in with Severus. According to her they were just building up her stamina and self-defence techniques. She was not physically strong enough to be able to wield a weapon like him and Ron were. She claimed she was enjoying it, where as Ron was grumbling about the whole thing all the time. He had told Harry that he enjoyed the extra lessons even though they were hard work but he definitely was not to keen on the extra private lessons with Snape. Ron had admitted that Snape had held his tongue in the most part, but he couldn't handle the sniping, Harry and Hermione had a long time ago learned to just ignore them or answer back but Ron just got angry with him. Both of them were trying their hardest to help Ron through it.

Apart from that, most of the lessons were going well, even the extra potions lesson they had to sit through once a week. Ron was even interested because they experimented with potions mainly used by Aurors. They made lots of stuff that stunned, froze and blew up your enemy. All very cool stuff Harry thought. He had reached Severus' office door and checked no one was around and lightly knocked. He heard Severus call for him to enter.

"Mister Potter, to what do I owe this pleasure?" Severus had asked him without looking up from his work. How does he do that? Harry wondered.

"I was wondering if I could have a moment of your time, Professor, to discuss one of the projects I am currently working on." He watched as Severus pointed at one of the chairs in front
of his desk. He went over and sat in it waiting for Severus to finish whatever he was working on.

***

Severus just needed to finish up some calculations he was working on before he could give Harry his full attention. He briefly wondered what help he could be to any of his school projects, after all he was not Harry's Head of House. Thank Merlin! That brought up to many ethical quandaries to think about. After he had finished his work he looked up at Harry and raised an eyebrow in question. He watched as Harry brought a finger to his lips to signal that this was to be a private discussion. Severus cast the needed spells to give them their privacy. "Now what is so desperately secret that I needed to cast such spells?"

"I have come to offer you something."

"Go on."

He noticed Harry grow serious. "I want to give you the choice of whether or not to keep your Dark Mark."

"Excuse me?"

"I believe I have completed my studies. Sev, if you want I can try and remove it for you. Give you back your freedom to choose." He watched as Harry's expression grew even more serious.

"You...you." Great Severus, he mentally bashed himself. He needed to get his thoughts in order. He took a deep breath and started again. "You believe you can remove it?"

"I have no proof, but it feels right. I have had Professors' Flitwick and Dumbledore go over it with me. They both seem to think it will work, as do I. I know this is a big decision to make, that is why I wont push you for an answer."

"Thank you. I will seriously consider your proposition...Harry."

He watched as Harry gave him a small smile. "I'll do it for you whenever you want. If you're not ready now and want to wait for even fifty years, I'll still be around to do it then."

"Thank you." Severus tried his best at imitating Harry's small smile, but he had a feeling it had come out as more of a grimace.

"Okay, Severus. I'll leave you to your work. As I know you are desperate to get back to it." In other words that was Harry-speak for 'I'll leave you alone now so you can think over the possibly life altering option I have just given you in private.' He realised he was truly blessed to have such an intuitive young man in his life. He was brought out of his internal monologue when he felt Harry place a soft kiss on his cheek.

"Haven't you some work to be getting on with?"

"Yes Severus. See, I'm going now; see, I am all but gone." Severus rolled his eyes at Harry as he left the office. He didn't even know where to begin in thinking this through. He decided to go and see Albus and have a chat with him.
Tidus was one of five boys, no, correction - young men sent out to look for new children to 'join' their army. This was Tidus' third recruitment day out; it didn't seem to get any easier with practice. He had been hoping to go out on this trip because he wanted to put into practice a little plan he had been working on. He wanted out, he no longer wished to follow his Master into battle. The only man he wanted to follow was the Headmaster of Hogwarts. If he were unable to school there, then he would help protect it from You-Know-Who. His evil Master may have destroyed his dreams, but he would not allow the dreams of hundreds of other children to be ruined.

He had to wait until the other four boys were too distracted to notice what he was up to. He did not know where Hogwarts was. He knew it was Scotland and close to Hogsmeade, but the exact geography eluded him. They were in a small village in the South East of England. It was a mixed village of muggles and magical people. The magical part of society had successfully integrated themselves into this village without raising suspicion. Of course his Master knew exactly which families to go after. It was a pretty place, Tidus mused to himself. A place where nice families grew up and played together in nice white cottages with wild flowers growing all over the garden. The kind of place he would never know.

His plan was simple; hopefully not so simple that everyone would work it out to quickly. Once the raids had finished, there were only three houses to raid, they were to portkey with the new children out of there and back to their Master. He would not really hold on, so once they had popped away he would look like he had been left behind. He would ditch his Death Eater robes, re-enter one of the magical home and floo over to Hogsmeade. He had only ever flooed once before, to the medi-wizards clinic because he had a bad case of the sniffles, and Matron had held his hand the whole time. It wasn't the world's greatest plan but it was all he had.

He was the last one into the first house, two of the other boys had bound up the three other occupants in the room, and another one had grabbed their child, a nine-year-old girl, by the arm and was dragging her out of the house. Tidus noticed a huge fireplace in the dinning room and knew he would be back. He just needed something to persuade them to allow him to use it. "Give her to me. You go get the other's." He shouted. Strangely they did as he asked and they passed him the screaming and kicking little girl. As they all rushed out, Tidus whispered in her ear. "Listen, if you behave I will give you back to your mummy in a minute, understand?" She nodded at him, snuffling away to herself.

The raids were over and his fellow Death Eaters were hanging on to the portkey. "Come on." One of them yelled at him. He walked up to them and placed his hand beneath theirs, only pretending to hang onto the old sock. "Got it." He told them, and one of them spoke the activation word and they were gone. Tidus' mind went into full overdrive; it was possible he would only have a minute or two until someone was sent after him. He ran back into the first house that the little girl who was hanging onto him for dear life lived in. "I'm here to make a deal with you. If I let you go and give you back your daughter, you'll let me use your floo connection. Deal?" He watched as the three tied up adults all nodded. He pulled out the wand he was given and cast the spell to free them. "I need to get to Hogwarts, but I don't know the best connection to use."

"T-The Three Broomstick will take you to the centre of the village. It a few miles from there, head towards the lake and you will see it."

"Thank you." Tidus started to rip off his robes. "I suggest you burn these, so no one will know I
was here."

"Thank you."

"No, thank you, ma'am, hopefully I will be safe soon." Tidus stepped into the fireplace, and grabbed a handful of the powder that was being held out for him and he called out his destination.

***

Severus was comfortably seated in his favourite armchair opposite his favourite insane old man. "Albus, for the first time I do not know what to do."

"Yes, interesting, isn't it, when we are given choices to things we so often believe cannot ever happen. What Harry has offered you is truly an amazing gift. The gift of freedom."

"Is it really? Voldemort will hunt me down for leaving his service; no one dares to leave him. It is a lifetime contract when you sign on with him. I will be trapped in this school until he is defeated."

"Be that as it may, Severus, you have served your penance as you so like to call it. I know I would feel happier knowing you are safe and away from Voldemort's clutches. The information we would lose would be hard to replace, I will not lie to you. But, I would rather lose that then lose you. Severus, I don't tell you this enough, but you are like a son to me. I feel I have wronged you so much in your life, turned a blind eye to certain things when you were a student here, which I shouldn't have. So maybe it is time for you to relax a little and enjoy what life has now given you, especially in the form of a certain young and handsome student." His eyes were twinkling with an insane amount of pleasure.

Severus knew on one level Albus was right, he had paid his dues as such. Yes he had done terrible things but he had also done many things to save many lives. Also if life for once wanted to be kind enough to throw something as precious as Harry at him, then who was he to turn it down. Harry wanted to give him this enormous gift, who was he to refuse it? His thoughts were interrupted by the school alarms going off. Both he and Albus jumped to their feet and speed down the secret passageway that would lead them to the main entrance.

The school knew what to do in these situations, the teachers had been trained and they had then reinforced it into the student's heads, especially since in these times of unrest. The Heads of House would guide all their students in to do a head count, then effectively lock them in and stand guard with there deputies. Minerva McGonagall and Madam Hooch stood ready at the top of the stairs just outside of the Gryffindor common room. Filius Flitwick and Professor Vector stood awaiting further instruction in the West Tower just outside the Ravenclaw common room. Pomona Sprout and Damien Larkswood were standing out in the hallway by the Hufflepuff common rooms. Irma Pince and Poppy Pomfrey were waiting outside the infirmary, in anticipation of the possible injured that might come their way and Professor Sinistra was awaiting Severus Snape's arrival at the school's entrance to the dungeons. The other professors were awaiting the Headmasters arrival in the main entrance.

Severus followed the Headmaster out of the secret passageway, he knew his job was to head straight for the dungeons to check on his students, but he knew Professor Sinistra to be perfectly capable of doing a head count and locking them all in. He was loathed to leave Albus to face this threat alone. All the best professors were protecting the dormitories, typical of Albus to
think of the children first.

"Severus, go check on your Slytherins, I will be fine. Voldemort is not here. I do not sense his presence here, this is something else."

"If you are sure, Albus."

"Yes I am, child. I cannot and will not risk your exposure if this is a Death Eater attack."

"As you wish, Albus," with that Severus quickly walked down the hallway to check up on Professor Sinistra.

"Professor Snape, all students have been accounted for and are safely locked up in the common room."

"Thank you, Professor Sinistra. Sorry for my late arrival but I was caught up with the Headmaster."

"Of course, Professor."

***

Albus gave Severus a few minutes to arrive at his destination before he called to Fawkes to go and check everyone was in position. His familiar came back to him a moment later with a squawk of affirmation. Albus nodded at the staff gathered in the hallway and at his bird, which settled on his shoulder. He left the building to go and welcome his visitor.

***

Tidus had managed to push his way though the wards of the school, it had been physically very taxing to do so. Then all hell had broken loose, alarm bells had started to go off in every direction, the children that had been outside had fled back inside and the stone gargoyles had come to life and were pacing the school's parameters. Tidus was of two minds as to whether to proceed or not, then he saw a lone figure walking towards him with serenity that was not befitting of the situation. As the figure came closer Tidus realised he had reached his goal, he had found Dumbledore. He broke into a run and ran straight to the man and into his arms and broke down in sobs that raked his whole body.

***

To say Albus was a little shocked was an understatement, but to anyone viewing this bizarre scene he looked outwardly calm and in control of everything. He held this young man as he cried his heart out. "There, there. Why don't you tell me what this is all about?" His voice was soft and gentle.

"P-Professor D-D-Dumbledore h-help me p-please." The young man fell to his knees it was heartbreaking to watch. Fawkes flew down to him and watched him carefully. "Wow, F-Fakes! Bet y-you don't r-remember m-me." Fawkes cocked his head to the side and sang a soothing song. It seemed to calm the young man down.

"Well it seems, young man, that you have Fawkes' seal of approval, who am I to argue with a phoenix." Albus helped the young man to his feet. "Fawkes, inform the senior staff the panic is
over but they are to keep the students in the common rooms and then come to my office." The big red and gold bird chirped and disappeared in a fireball.

"Wow."

"Indeed young man. Now what am I to call you?"

"Tidus, sir."

"Tidus you say? I had sent a letter off a young man named Tidus once."

"You remembered, sir! That was me."

"My, how you have grown." Albus realised who and what this young man was, he was one of Voldemort's new army. He knew he would have to be careful it could be a trap of some kind, but he had a feeling it was not. Long ago he had learnt to trust his instincts. He led Tidus back to the school and up to his office.

***

The senior members of staff were all waiting for Albus to arrive back from whatever had set off the school alarm. Severus had managed to get his favourite chair and that was all that mattered to him, because no doubt it had been a false alarm as there was a lack of fighting going on. He was not prepared for the sight that greeted him when Albus had entered his office. He walked in with a young man who appeared to have only just recovered from an extreme bout of crying. Albus had conjured up another chair for the lad to sit on.

"Everyone this is Tidus. Tidus, these are Professor's Snape, McGonagall, Flitwick and Sprout. They are the Heads of House in this school and my most trusted members of staff, that is why I have asked them to be here." Albus was telling the boy.

The boy was looking around and stopped at Severus, his eyes widened in fear and he immediately jumped up and cowered at his feet. "Y-You. Oh, Merlin, don't tell him, I beg of you. Please don't kill me. Please tell our Master that I am foolish and scared."

Severus fiddled with his collar nervously. "Who exactly is your Master, boy?" Severus asked him.

The boy looked up at him, obviously scared out of his wits. "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named sir. Please don't kill me. I don't want to die."

Severus looked blankly at the boy, the sickle dropped. He was one of the man-child army. "Don't lie to me boy. Who do you serve?"

"I-I..."

"Tell me the truth or I will give you a healthy dose of truth serum and force you to tell me."

"I serve our Master. But in my heart I serve Albus Bloody Dumbledore." The kid was brave; no doubt he had received his potion from Severus himself but what was with the 'bloody'? Being brave was one thing, being disrespectful was another. It had seemed as if the Albus was allowing him a free reign with the Death Eater, after all who was better to talk to one then
another one?

"What gives you the right to speak of such a great man like that?" Severus asked in threatening tones.

"I do not understand, sir."

"Albus 'bloody' Dumbledore? Even I do not speak such names in front of him." The other professors gave a little chuckle.

"That is what our Master calls him. I believed it to be his name. Am I wrong?"

"Yes. You will address him as Professor Dumbledore, Headmaster or sir. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, sir. Sir?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to take me back to our Master now?" Fear was evident in his voice and face.

"Not if I believe what you are about to tell us."

They sat in silence as Tidus went through his tale of how he realised that he was being asked to do was wrong. He also told them of when he had started to remember his letter to the Headmaster and then how things started to fall into place. He also gave them some information on Voldemort's dark academy and what Lucius was up to. He kept looking in Severus' direction and both the Headmaster and Severus had to explain to him he was safe there and that Severus was of no threat to him and that Severus served Albus Dumbledore and no one else. They were safe telling him this much, because if it was a trap and he was loyal to the Dark Lord, Severus would be able to get out of this by telling the Dark Lord that he could not slip and show his true colours in front of the old man. Severus was inclined to believe this young man; after all, not everyone could eat that many sherbet lemons in the name of deception and duty.

The whole story took a few good hours to go through with questions being asked and facts confirmed. Tidus again looked at Severus. "Are you going to send me back?"

"No."

"Thank you, sir."

"Tidus," Albus interrupted. "Professor Snape is a Potions Master and if what you are telling us is the truth, then you will have no objections to taking the antidote that he has made."

"Antidote?"

"Yes. I can make you your natural age, again Mister...?"

"Just Tidus. You can make me ten again?"

"I believe so."
"That means I can go to school!" Severus had to hand it to the young man, it seemed as if his biggest regret was that he might not be able to attend to his studies. That will change, Severus mused. Once they start school they almost always lose interest.

"Yes, Tidus, it does. Also, there is someone else I would like to introduce to you tomorrow that might be able to help you further."

"How, Professor Dumbledore?"

"He is a bright young man who may be able to remove that Dark Mark of yours." The boy broke out in a wide grin for Albus. Severus was hopeful that Harry could pull this off; he would hate to see Tidus scarred for life. "Severus, if you wouldn't mind popping along and getting the antidote, I will set up a room just off from my office that Tidus can spend the night in until we have sorted something more permanent out. How does that sound?"

"That sounds fine, sir." Tidus said.

Severus nodded to Albus and left his office to go to his own and collect the antidote.

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Once Severus had collected it, he returned and administered it. The boy almost immediately fell asleep and was levitated out of the office and into a room with a bed. Poppy was called to check him out. She said he was fine if a little under fed. She promised to pop in on him once an hour just to check up on him. Severus went to bed that night with a lot on his mind. Tomorrow he would find out if Harry was truly able to remove the Dark Mark.

***

The next day Harry was walking to the Headmasters office after being briefed by McGonagall on what had happened the previous day. This was it; it was show time. He had asked if Flitwick could be present to help him if needs be with the charms. He had accepted immediately. He wondered if Sev would be there or not, not only because he wanted to see the man but also he wanted to show him that he had worked hard on this for him. He stepped up to the gargoyle said the password and climbed on the stairs. After he had knocked and entered the office, everything had seemed to slow down. He had a sense of danger come over him and he drew his wand. He turned to find a wand getting ready to be pointed in his direction by a stranger. He felt Voldemort's magic on him by instinct alone he yelled out a disarming spell. "Expelliarmus." The stranger went flying.

"Well, Mister Potter, full marks for speed. I never thought I would live to see the day that you had actually learnt something." Severus was smirking at him, Harry realised something else was up.

"Harry, stop!" The Headmaster told him.

"What is going on here?" Harry asked, confusion evident on his face.

"I'll kill you, Potter!"

"Voldemort can't do it so what makes you think you can?" He saw the strange child pale in front of him at the name of his Master.
"You can't say his name!"

"I Can and I just did. VOLDEMORT!" Harry snapped back.

"Gentlemen, please. Harry, Tidus sit down please."

They both did as Dumbledore had asked. If the mad child next to him were not trying to kill him, Harry would have laughed out loud. It was funny having a small kid glaring daggers at him. "Headmaster, why can I feel Voldemort's magic on this child?"

"This, Harry, is Tidus. He was one of the children taken at the first orphanage raid. Yesterday afternoon Severus gave him the reversal potion and he woke up this morning back to his natural age. You can feel Voldemort's magic because Tidus is marked."

Harry paled while he listened to the Headmaster tell the tale of Tidus. He felt a little bad at some of the things he had said and done to this kid since they had met, but his actions had been on instinct not by plan. "I'm guessing you would like me to try and remove the mark?"

"Yes, Harry, I would. It is something young Tidus does not need to spend his life with. Also, if you don't mind, I would like to ask Professor Larkswood to be present."

"Why!" Harry, Severus, Flitwick and McGonagall all spoke at the same time.

"Because, Harry, he is going to need to mark you on you final project."

"Oh." Was all Harry could bring himself to say, he heard Sev give into a snort of laughter. Dumbledore sent Fawkes off with a message for Larkswood to come to the Headmasters office as soon as possible.

"I don't want him near me." Tidus pointed in Harry's direction. It was Severus' turn to join the conversation. "Why ever not?"

"Because he is evil!"

"Mister Tidus, it is the Dark Lord who is evil, not Mister Potter."

"But the Master said he was evil."

"Simple brainwashing. You need to relearn some of the basics before you can return to polite society."

"Will you teach me, Professor Snape?"

It seemed as if everyone in the room was trying not to laugh, the idea of Severus teaching anyone about being polite was just unimaginable. It looked as if the idea did not settle well on him either. "Madame Pomfrey will do a better job than I. You will learn with her. Now let Potter get to work at removing that mark from your arm." The tone seemed a little harsh to Harry, but it seemed to work as the kid nodded to Severus.

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When Larkswood arrived Harry gave him an evil smirk and Larkswood had just looked down his nose at him. That had no effect on Harry, because Severus had done a lot better at that look for the last seven years.

"You wanted to see me, Headmaster?"

"Yes, Damien. Harry is going to attempt to remove the Dark Mark and I thought it best that you be here to mark him on it, because lets face it the next time he has a chance to do this school may be over."

Larkswood looked directly at Severus and Severus had just glared at him and pointed to the young boy sat on a chair near Harry. "Oh."

"Indeed."

"Severus." Dumbledore warned him.

"Damien, this is Tidus, he is one of the victims of Voldemort's new army."

"Oh dear, that is terrible. I guess Potter is going to put his theory to the test then."

"Yes, if you would care to take a seat. Harry?"

"Okay, I'm good." Harry approached the child who was still nervous of him and rolled up the boys left sleeve and looked at the Dark Mark. He lifted his wand and started to say the first part of the incantation that was in Latin. He then raised his left hand and lightning seemed to erupt from his fingertips as he started the second part in parseltongue, this was the part he was most worried about, it was two different spells combined to make one. He brought his wand to Tidus' forearm then he wrapped his lightning covered hand on top of it, chanting continuously in parseltongue. Tidus screamed out in pain from the spell. Harry started to lift his hand slowly away and it looked as though the Dark Mark was literally coming out through his skin, it was time for the third part of the spell and Harry spoke again in Latin. Harry held on tight to the ball of Dark Magic and thrust it away from him. One of the smaller windows in the office shattered as the magic hit it.

***

The moment Harry was done and Madame Pomfrey had cleared him, Severus had escorted Harry back down to the dungeons to look after him. Harry was a little pale and unstable on his feet, but Severus knew enough secret passageways through the castle that he was able to carry him without ever crossing another student's path. Once they were safely inside his quarters, he had placed Harry on the sofa, bundled him under several blankets and had force-fed him chocolate.

"Are you feeling better?"

"Yes, I was just a little shocked at how much magic was contained in that one mark."

"The good news is the boy is now free of the mark, you did a good thing back there. Also Albus has insisted to Larkswood that you pass the practical part of your Defence Against the Dark Art's N.E.W.T with top marks. So congratulations are in order I believe."
Severus watched as Harry gave him one of his lopsided grins. "Thanks."

"As for your offer regarding me, I am afraid I must decline at this juncture. There is still work for me to do, until the information I have access to can be obtained some other way I still must go to the Dark Lord." He could see Harry about to protest, but interrupted him. "I have thought about this in great detail, Harry. When the war is over, or if he discovers that I am a spy I will be seeking your services, but not until then."

"I understand. I didn't think you would let me do it anyway. Although I would like you to know one thing, I did it for you. I want to free you, give you back your choices. And when you choose to have it removed I will be more then happy to oblige."

"Thank you, Harry," Severus received another lazy grin. "You should get some rest you can barely keep your eyes open." He heard Harry mumble something that sounded like he agreed as he snuggled down into the sofa and fell asleep. Severus got up and tucked the blankets around Harry and placed a small kiss on his forehead.

**Next Chapter:** Harry receives a surprise from Severus and promises are made.
Chapter Twenty Three - Deals, Buildings, Promises and Shocks.

Draco,

*It has been many weeks since your last letter updating me on our friends, Potter and Snape. Why is that?*

*I am not happy with you at the moment. The war is at a crucial point and any information we have that can keep me one step ahead of everybody else is of the utmost importance. If I were to have something like this on Snape, the Dark Lord would be most pleased with me, especially if I were to bring it to light at the right moment. If executed correctly, I would forever be in the Dark Lord's good graces.*

*I want to hear of anything that you witness or hear about immediately!*

*Your Father*

This had been the third time Draco had read the letter from his father. It still came across the same way, I, me, I want, I am, Draco was starting to think maybe his father did not have his best interests at heart. What could he do about it? He sure as hell was NOT going to be joining Dumbledore's band of merry men. For starters he did not believe in many of the things that stupid old man believed in. Equality! Never, he was a pure blooded wizard, a house elf never was and never would be his equal. Neither would any of those mudbloods and half-breeds be his equal. He was better then them, it was a simple as that. But he was not a Slytherin for nothing, if needs be he could deceive and manipulate with the best of them to get what he wanted and if he did find out something was happening between Potter and Snape he would use it to his own advantage, maybe use it as a barging chip with the Dark Lord to assure he would not be marked. Surely Snape and Potter would be worth that much?

***

Harry had come to a few decisions during the last few weeks. If Dumbledore was going to keep him captive in this castle until he saw fit to allow Harry to go free, then a few provisos would need to be made for him. If he was to be the one to take down Voldemort and save everybody else the trouble of doing it, then he wanted some things in return. Harry reckoned it was high time he had a few paybacks for keeping Voldemort at bay for a few extra years then he had planned. If it wasn't for him, old Voldie would have been back when Harry was still a first year.
It was time to strike a deal with the big man himself. Harry squared his shoulders, took a deep
breath, and spoke the password to the Headmaster's office. After knocking and being given
permission to enter he gathered all his courage and walked in.

"Headmaster, a word please."

"Of course, Harry. Tea?"

"No, thank you," now was not the time to be drinking calming potion, he mentally thanked
Severus for tipping him off on that one.

"So what is it I can do for you today, Harry?"

Why did he always have to sound so calm? "Sir, I need to talk to you about some arrangements
for when I return to Hogwarts. There are certain things that I require. Sir." Harry felt silly
standing their demanding things from possibly the most powerful wizard alive.

"And what things are those, Harry?" Was that a twinkle of amusement in his eyes? No, Harry
could not allow himself to be distracted.

"Certain provisions I need. I guess I am to have quarters of some kind?"

"Yes, I was going to arrange for something near Gryffindor, as some of your friends are the year
below you. Is that acceptable, Harry?"

"Umm, yes. I also want a floo connection set up."

"To where exactly?" Harry raised a questioning eyebrow at the Headmaster. "To Severus'
quarters by any chance?"

"Yes, and to wherever Ron and Hermione are living. Also there are some courses I would like to
take. If I am going to be spending all my time here, then I need something to do."

"I quite agree, anything in mind?" There was that twinkle again, Harry noticed.

"Yes. I have decided once I have all the qualifications and experience necessary I would like to
work with children, like me, the ones with no homes and no family. Maybe one day, if this war
ever ends, I could build and set up my own orphanage or halfway house. As such, I will need to
take courses in business, basic medicine and childcare. Nothing is definite but these are the
areas that interest me."

"I'm sure all that can be sorted out for you, Harry. Was there anything else?"

"No. No, that was all. Good day, sir."

"Good day, Harry." Harry left the office in a daze, feeling as though Dumbledore had expected
all of that.

***

Severus was walking along one of the quiet hallways on his way to the Headmaster's office; to
hand in his paperwork for the term and the exams he would be giving the N.E.W.T.'s students
when he spotted a rather bewildered looking Harry leaning against the wall. "A sickle for them?"

"Oh, hi, professor. I have just spoken to Dumbledore and I had a feeling he knew everything before I had even asked for it. How does he do that?"

Severus couldn't help but smirk, he to had had that feeling many times. "You will get used to it, with time."

"I hope so." Harry looked up to him with a wry smile on his face.

Severus couldn't resist, and carefully reached out a hand to lightly stroke Harry's cheek. "I should be going I have to see the mad old fool myself. Hopefully I shall see you later?"

"You can count on that." Severus nodded to Harry, and went on his way to the Headmaster's office.

***

Draco grinned to himself, as he put the camera away in his robes. What he had just witnessed would make an interesting photograph. Snape and Potter, the touch had been subtle, barely even noticeable but nonetheless an intimate touch that would only be shared by lovers. Draco remained stock still as Potter sighed to himself and watched with a goofy look on his face the corridor down which Snape had just walked. He watched as Potter stroked his own cheek and smiled to himself before he too walked off, in the opposite direction from Snape.

Draco remained in his hidden spot for a few more minutes before going back out into the corridor. He went straight to one of the spare rooms that had been setup as a darkroom for students. No doubt he would have to scare that Gryffindor idiot, Creevey, away, but he could not risk anyone see what he was doing. As Creevey being one of Potter's fans, he would no doubt go running to him if he saw Draco with a photograph of him. No, this needed to be developed in private.

***

It was the second time that day that Harry had to go to Dumbledore's office, except this time he was accompanied by Ron and Hermione. They were attending another private Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson. So far the lessons had been relatively easy for them because most of the things they had covered they had already mastered, like the Patronus Charm. Dumbledore was also an easy-going teacher, he did not allow them to mess about but he had patience and understanding, never getting angry with them if they did something wrong.

Harry didn't mind these lessons, everything they were taught became useful in the Charms / Duelling classes they were having. The same could be said for Potions and Transfiguration, all the classed meshed together nicely, each one supporting the other. It was good to learn these other things, Hermione enjoyed the intellectual challenge and Ron liked it because it was giving him a step up in his Auror training. Harry paid special attention on the off chance it might save his life one day. They knocked on the door and entered when told to do so. As usual, Dumbledore led them into a side room off his office, which had very little in it apart from a couple of desks a blackboard and a tea set.

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"I have thought long and hard about what we are going to be studying tonight. I do not like the idea of doing this but I think perhaps it is a necessity. Voldemort is a dangerous enemy and will use any trick he can to get what he wants and these are a few of his favourites. The Unforgivables." Dumbledore finished his little speech with a very serious expression on his face. Harry, Ron and Hermione had all taken sharp intakes of breath.

"Sir?"

"Yes, Hermione?"

"You don't want us to cast them, do you?" Hermione looked horrified at the thought.

"Heavens no, child! I just think it is time for you three to learn about them and the damage they can do. I will only teach you the theory behind them, so if you are ever face with a hopeless situation it will be something that you may fall back upon."

"But you can go to Azkaban for using them." Ron said in horror.

Harry, who had managed to keep a relatively straight head though all of this, answered the question for Dumbledore, "Ron, do you really think that if you were in a life or death situation with a Death Eater or Voldemort that they would really throw you in jail for using an Unforgivable?"

"I guess not, still don't like it though." Ron mumbled back.

"Good, because you are not meant to like it. They are evil curses to use. They can mark your soul in a way that is terrifying and irreversible. They seem like an easy way to gain power but it is not. The only thing it will do is destroy your humanity."

"Like Voldemort." Harry said in a sad tone.

"Exactly, Harry, just like Voldemort. Once he was a bright young man who could have done anything with his life but he choose a dark path that led him to become what he is today. A mere shadow of a man full of hate and rage, who only wants to control everything or destroy that which he cannot control."

"Then why do you want us to be exposed to such magic if it is hard to control, Professor?" Hermione was as logical as ever.

"Because if Voldemort cannot destroy you, he will try to recruit you." Both Hermione and Ron looked petrified at such a thought.

"Sir, I am muggle born."

"Maybe so, but you are powerful and smart and a friend of Harry's."

"Nothing he could say would make me join him!" Ron spat out in disgust.

"No offence, Ron, but smarter people than you have fallen for his charms." Harry told him.

"Like who?" Ron said in a tone that was full of disbelief.
"Severus."

"Yeah, but..." Harry raised an eyebrow at Ron, "That was..." The look he received from Harry told him clearly he would not win this argument. "Alright, power corrupts but you know, Snape turned out alright, I guess."

"Professor Snape, Ron."

Ron blushed, "Sorry, sir."

"Now, the one he likes to use the most to assert his authority is the Cruciatius Curse. It is a nasty curse that causes the most unimaginable pain ever. It stimulates every nerve ending in your body to be receptive to pain, the natural reaction is to tense every muscle in your body to try and fight it off. Though very hard to do, the best thing is to try and relax and let the pain wash over you. If you tense up too much, it can cause muscle spasms strong enough to snap your bones. Another point to take note of is that you cannot cast it if you truly do not wish harm your opponent." The lecture went on to explain what was best to do if you were ever exposed to the curse. Harry unfortunately had first hand experience at what it felt like and knew no matter what he would never be able to relax and let the pain wash over him. He made a mental note to ask Severus how he managed to deal with it, that thought made him a little angry. Voldemort had no right to curse his man!

***

After the Cruciatius Curse they moved onto the deadliest of all the curses, Avada Kedavra. This part of the lesson did not last very long because there was nothing you could do against it. Harry was the only known survivor and no one still really knew how he had survived. Dumbledore had said it was his mother's sacrifice that had saved him and it was probably true, but there was still always that slight doubt as to whether that was the only factor. Curses aimed at him did have a funny habit of going wrong for the caster. No doubt more of that 'sheer dumb luck!' his professors were always going on about.

"Sir?"

"Yes, Harry?"

"Are you going to teach me how to cast the killing curse?"

"What makes you ask that, Harry?"

"How else am I expected to finish off Voldemort?"

"Ahhh, yes I see. Maybe in time, but I will not teach it to you while you are still a student at this school."

"If he keeps to his usual pattern, then he will try again at the end of the year."

"You do have a point, Harry, but I do not feel comfortable teaching you this, you have so little innocence left."

Harry refrained from rolling his eyes at the Headmaster, he had had a little experience with the
curse but not enough. "Is there another way?" He asked feeling a little exasperated.

"I do not know, Harry, it is not even known if the killing curse will work on him. I promise to give it some serious thought and I will get back to you."

"Thank you, sir."

***

Next they moved onto the Imperius Curse, which was another one Harry had far too much experience with for his liking. The theory was gone over as it had been with the previous two, but Harry had a sneaking suspicion that this one was going to be put to the test.

"You have all been placed under it before by the fake professor Moody so you all know what to expect. You all had various degrees of success in throwing it off, I believe?"

They all nodded. "Are you going to be casting it on us so we can practice again?" Hermione asked Dumbledore.

"Not this week, first I will need permission from your parents or guardians to do such a thing; and, secondly, I think all of you should practice some mind defense techniques first so you will all have a better chance of succeeding. Especially you, Ron and Hermione, because you are the best targets to use to get close to Harry, that and the fact that Voldemort already knows that Harry has had some success in throwing off the curse. Considering the fact that you can now shield your mind using Occlumency, I would hope you would have even greater success than in the past, Harry." A pointed look was given to Harry from Dumbledore. "What I will give you are some papers on basic mind defense techniques that should help you, but I am sure a visit or two to the library would not go amiss. There are many books in there dedicated to the defense of the mind."

***

Once they had finished the discussion on mind defenses, Harry used this opportunity to ask after Tidus. "Sir, what happened to Tidus? I thought he would be staying with Madam Pomfrey."

"For his own protection, Harry, he has been placed somewhere safe and is being re-educated back into polite society. He will return here on September first to begin his academic education."

"Why didn't he just stay at Hogwarts?" Harry asked.

"Because the school is not an ideal place for a child during the summer. He is somewhere, where he can be watched and protected from Voldemort."

"Okay, sir." Harry gave the headmaster a small smile as they were excused for the evening and told to go and have fun; it was a typical Dumbledore-ish thing to say. How could they have fun with their minds buzzing full of horrible things like the Unforgivables?

"I don't like all this talk of deadly curses, it gives me a headache." Ron grumbled on the way back to the dormitory.
"Unfortunately, Ron, in the face of war, it is good to learn these things. I just hope we never have to put them into practice."

"Mione's right, Ron, it is best that we learn these things. At least now we know what is the best way to counter the after effects of the Crucioitus Curse and it will be good if you guys can throw off the Imperious Curse. At least you don't have to learn the killing curse."

"Harry, Professor Dumbledore did say you might not have to learn it." Hermione smiled a little at him.

"And how else am I meant to get rid of Voldemort? Ask him politely to sod off?"

"He's got a point, Mione, how else can you get rid of You-Know-Who?"

"I know, Ron. Sorry, Harry." She sighed dejectedly.

"No need to apologise, Mione. Unfortunately, it is just another fact of life I have to face." They walked the rest of the way to the common room in silence, each deep in thought.

***

Safely hidden under his invisibility cloak and with map in hand, Harry made his way down to Severus' quarters later that night. He had stuck to their agreement of not visiting Sev's quarters more then once a week, so not to arouse suspicion too much. Harry had a nagging feeling that McGonagall had worked it out, but he said nothing to Sev. They didn't keep it as the same day each time, they chose random days mixed it about a bit so it seemed as if they did not have a pattern. Harry gently tapped on the frame of the guardian painting and it opened. He went in and shut the painting and took off his cloak. "I never thought I would make it down tonight, the common room was full of students already starting to panic about their O.W.L.'s and N.E.W.T.'s."

"Are you not worried?"

"No, Hermione already has our study schedules all worked out, so there is no need for us to panic. I just do what Mione says. It makes for a quiet life." He grinned at Severus as he walked over to him and engaged him in a tender slow kiss. "Mmmm, I have missed you."

"It will only be this bad for a few more months." Severus told him.

Harry leaned into the hand stroking the side of his face. "Maybe, but it is still going to be tough even once school is out."

"Unfortunately, you are correct. Until this war is over we can never truly be open."

"Life sucks."

"You truly have a unique way with words, Potter."

"Thanks."

"That was not a compliment."
"I know, but I am going to take it as one anyway."

"You are a strange one."

"Thank you." Harry gave Sev another one of his big grins, walked over to the sofa, and made himself comfortable. Harry noticed Sev go to one of his other rooms and heard him looking around for something. He watched him as he re-entered with a bundle of papers and a stack of photographs. "What's up?"

"This is something for you."

"Me?"

"Yes, when I was visiting with Albus this afternoon, he mentioned some of your little chat with him. I have no objections by the way to a floo connection." Harry was relieved to see a genuine smile on Sev's lips. "He mentioned that you would be taking some new courses and the reason you would be taking them."

"You don't think it's a silly thing to do?"

"Not at all. It is a noble way to spend your life, helping others."

"Glad you think so."

"My opinion does not matter, Harry."

"Yes it does, it's important to me. I want to make you proud of me."

"I am proud of you. You have been through so much more than any other and you are still standing. I wonder what I have done to deserve this, to deserve you." Harry blushed a little. "This is why I wanted to give you this, to help you on your way."

Harry was handed the bundle of papers and stack of photographs. First he looked at the photographs, they were of an old, slightly run down manor house that, by the looks of it, was set on quite a few acres of land. It needed a good lick of paint and a clean up but otherwise it looked okay. Harry frowned at the pictures and moved on to the papers. As he started to go through each sheet of parchment, realisation started to dawn on Harry. These were the land and ownership papers of a house. Was it the house in the photos? "I don't understand?"

"The house in the photographs is one of the Snape properties. The country house in Scotland near Edinburgh, and the paperwork is all the land registry deeds, ownership papers and the property deeds. They have, for the interim, been signed over to Albus so as not to arouse suspicion. But when the time comes they will be signed over to you. The house and its lands will become yours to help you on your way to setting up your halfway house or children's home."

"Sev, I... it's, wow! It is too much, I don't think I can accept it." Harry stumbled over his words. Right now he was in shock, nobody had ever given him such a huge gift before.

"Harry, do not worry about it. It has been many, many years since anyone has lived in it. The house elves do what they can but the house is still in need of a lot of work."
"Yeah, but... wow."

He heard Severus laugh at him. "Harry, this house will mean a lot of hard work for you."

"Sev, it's still too much."

"Trust me, it isn't. Just think of it as me paying a little back to the world."

"I don't understand."

"Harry, you are too young to remember but, after the last war, it was the children of Death Eaters, children who were the product of forced couplings, and many a child that came from a Slytherin family that found themselves homeless. Nobody wanted to take them in; most people claimed that because they were the children of evildoers they were themselves thought to be evil. In reality they were nothing more then innocent children. It is a fear of mine, and a few others, that this will happen again. I know I would rest better knowing that there was somewhere they could go, someplace where they would not be judged because of a certain house their parents were sorted into. Do you understand?"

Harry had never realised that, though it did make perfect sense. Of the few kids he knew were in children's homes, they did almost all come from Slytherin. He had just never put two and two together before. It was a sad truth, Harry realised. "Yes, I understand, Sev. However, this is still too much, you must let me pay for it or something?"

"I have enough money, I have no need for any more. It is a gift so stop being so honourable and Gryffindor about it and just accept it."

Harry could tell Severus was now teasing him; he smiled at the older man next to him. "So when can we go and see it?"

"I am sure something can be arranged for the summer. It will be up to Albus, of course."

"I can't wait that long!" Harry whined.

"You have no patience."

"Of course I don't. As you are so fond of reminding me, I am an impatient Gryffindor brat."

"I usually am correct, you know."

Harry rolled his eyes and decided they had talked enough and it was time to get down to some serious expressing of gratitude. He carefully put the stack of papers and photographs on the coffee table and leaned closely into Severus' neck. He began to place a trail of kisses from the base up to his ear. "I'll just have to find another way to thank you then." Harry whispered into his ear as he climbed onto Sev's lap.

"This I will accept." Severus smirked at Harry. Harry smirked back at him and brought their lips together in a bruising kiss. Harry then slowly licked along Sev's lower lip seeking entrance. They explored each other's mouths, their tongues idly stroking the each other's. Soon the need for contact became too much for Harry, it had been so many months since he had had the pleasure of an intimate touch from Sev. Yes they had kissed, but there had been nothing overly sexual since their encounter during the first physical education lesson. Feeling as if he was on
autopilot, Harry's hands went to the buttons on Sev's jacket, it was not long before it was fully undone and Harry started working on the white shirt underneath it.

Harry left Sev's lips and started to kiss his way down his neck and down to the chest he was exposing with his hands. He could feel Sev's breathing getting a little faster and a hand stroking his hair. Harry bit and then licked the exposed nipple, finally making his way back up to push the shirt off Sev's shoulders and recapture his lips.

The kiss this time was more needy and desperate. It was not long before Harry found himself being gently pushed back down into the sofa, he quickly found himself bereft of his top as Severus pulled it up over his head. Harry's hands traveled down Sev's sides to waistband of his trousers. He wanted to take them off, he knew he had made promises but he wanted this. He wanted Sev. He wanted to feel everything that this man and only this man could give him.

***

Severus' barriers were breaking down; he was finding it increasingly difficult to resist giving in to anything Harry wanted. He knew he had gone too far when he had removed Harry's top but he as finding hard to stop. He didn't like to admit it out aloud, but he wanted Harry as much as it seemed the young man wanted him. The kisses between them had become heated and the need for removing unwanted clothes desperate.

Severus had kissed his way down Harry's chest and was soon confronted by Harry's waistband. He reached up to start unzipping the trousers, when a loud bang made him stop and look up. Fawkes was sitting and the back of the sofa looking at him. Severus narrowed his eyes at the bird in annoyance because the bird looked a little too amused for his liking. "What?" he growled. Fawkes squawked at him and dropped a parchment on the naked chest of Harry who was still on his back looking more than a little frustrated. Severus sat up and attempted to pull himself together and read the parchment.

Severus,

I am truly sorry to interrupt your evening with Harry, but something regarding the Order has arisen. Therefore I have called an emergency meeting tonight.

Please come to my office within the next 30 minutes.

Albus.

Severus grumbled many different swear words under his breath and told Fawkes he would be there and the bird squawked again and disappeared with another fiery bang.

"I'm guessing this 'date' is over?" He heard Harry grumble to himself as he gathered his clothes to redress. Severus joined him in tidying himself up.

As Harry made ready to leave, Severus knew he was as disappointed as was he. He reached out and grabbed Harry by his arm. "Harry, please do not leave like this. I am sorry we were interrupted."

"I know. I am not upset with you, I am just pissed off with the whole war. Just ignore me, Sev, I'm just grumbling." Severus saw Harry smile as he stepped closer to him and wrapped his arms around his neck in a tight embrace.
"I understand, Harry, believe me I do. These interruptions will not last forever."

"Yeah, it just gives me more reason to want to end that git's life."

"You will have your peaceful life one day, Harry, I promise."

"The only promise I want from you is that you will be there when it comes."

"I can not make that promise, Harry, I am in a very dangerous position, and you know that." He cupped Harry's chin to make him look up. "I am sorry."

"Then just promise me that if we both survive, then you will give me a chance and enjoy some of the peace with me."

Severus smiled a real smile, "That I can promise." He leaned down and lovingly kissed Harry.

***

Draco was finishing up the final step of developing his 'special' photograph. It had taken a little longer then he had anticipated, he was not used to doing things for himself. At home he would order an elf to do it, but he could not risk sending this particular film home to be developed. No, he had to do this himself; he could not chance his father finding it until he had decided what exactly to do with it.

The photograph was finished and Draco cast a drying charm on the picture. He looked at it and found he could not take his eyes off the two moving figures. They seemed so comfortable with each other, just how long had something been going on between these two? Draco wondered. He had believed it had been around the Christmas holidays that something had started between them. But the way the two photographic versions of them were so relaxed with each other contradicted that theory. He had no idea at all but it looked to be well over six months, maybe even a year.

Fortunately the photographic versions of Potter and Snape were not to overly familiar with each other, that image made Draco scowl. He did NOT want to think of either of them in any kind of sexual situation. That was just sick! He was not against same sex relationships, one of his good acquaintances and an Aunt of his preferred the same sex to the opposite, it was just the thought of Snape and Potter. If he was to go gay all of a sudden, neither of them would be on his 'to do' list. No, if he had to pick another male he would at least go for a handsome one, like Belise Zabini. Then again maybe not, he just knew it was not for him.

Draco watched the familiar touches go on between Potter and Snape for nearly thirty minutes. This photograph had just added to his confusion. He had to admit that they seemed very fond of each other, the image of Potter had not even taken his eyes off the photographic Snape once, and Snape had only a few times taken his eyes off Potter to check the corridor before he stroked Potter's cheek again or even smiled a little at Potter. When that had first happened Draco nearly fell over, he had known Snape most of his life and had never seen him smile at anybody, smirk yes but never smile. The final straw for him had been when Potter had obviously had enough of just the small touches and had stood on tiptoe to place a small kiss on Snape's lips. Draco felt physically sick, and knew he did not really want to watch them anymore. He headed back to his dormitory to stash the photo safely in his trunk. He had many spells placed on it so nobody could open it, but he was also going to place a few disguising charms on the picture for extra
safety. Then again, no one in Slytherin were stupid enough to try and breach anything belonging to a Malfoy.

***

Severus was briskly walking towards the Headmaster's office when a hand came out and lightly touched his upper arm. He spun around, his hand going towards his wand and stopped dead, his fingers never quite making it all the way to his wand. He felt his heart racing in a fashion that was driven by a combination of fear and shock. He briefly thanked Merlin for being able to control his outward expression with ease.

"Hello, Severus. Long time, no see."

"Yes, I suppose you are correct. It has been a while."

"Nearly three years since we have really had a good chat."

"That long?"

"Yes, I was beginning to think you were avoiding me. Whenever I attended Order meetings you were never there."

"Coincidence I assure you."

"Good, I was starting to worry if I had done something wrong."

"I can promise you, that you have not."

"I'm glad. Maybe you and I could get together after this meeting for a drink and catch up a little?"

"Bill, I don't..." Severus started but was interrupted by Bill.

"I will not take no for an answer, Severus. Come on, just one drink."

"Hogsmeade is not really my thing."

"We do not need to go to Hogsmeade. I will be staying in the castle for a few days so we could go to my quarters but I warn you, they are near the Gryffindor dormitories; or we could go down to your rooms. Whatever you prefer."

Severus was feeling strangely backed into a corner. He had not prepared himself for this confrontation, especially tonight. He had just left Harry after making deep committing promises and was not ready for his past to rear its head. He knew he was going to have to tell Harry eventually that he had had a relationship with a Weasley, but was afraid of how Harry would take it. As such, he had always managed to talk himself out of it and put it off for another time. It looked as though his cowardice had caught him out. "My quarters would be better. I do not wish to be seen hanging around Gryffindor Tower."

Bill smiled at him, "After the meeting?"

"Sure."
"It's a date then." Bill replied still smiling at him.

Severus frowned at him; he was not comfortable with the word date at all! "The meeting, shall we?"

"Lead the way, Severus, I don't know the new password."

"Of course." Severus walked off towards the Headmaster's office again, this time with Bill in tow.

***

Severus found it hard to concentrate on the meeting, his mind kept flipping between the past and present, Bill and Harry. He snaked a sideways glance at Bill, the man had not really changed much since his school days, and he had filled out in all the right places. He was a pleasant man to look at; his features were soft and welcoming. Severus had been caught looking at him as Bill turned and smiled back at him. Severus barely nodded to acknowledge him and went back to paying attention to Albus.

***

"I got a letter off Bill today, he is coming to Hogwarts tonight and he will be staying for a while. Not to sure why he's staying but it will be good to see him again." Ron informed his friend and girlfriend.

"That's where Severus is tonight, at an Order meeting." Harry told Ron.

"Bill is coming here?"

"Yeah, Mione, why? Is there a problem?" Ron asked her.

"No. It will be wonderful to see him again." Hermione put on her best-excited smile, Ron seemed to accept it but she noticed Harry give her a strange look. It was only speculation on her part, but she rather thought that something had gone on between Snape and Bill. She had no real proof for her theories, just a few rumours and some educated guesses. It had all started when Ron had mentioned that Bill had been involved with an older kid, who he claimed was the love of his life, then there was his rather abrupt reply to their letter. He had come across as being extremely protective towards Snape. Then over the Christmas holidays Bill had extensively questioned them about school and the professors. At first she had just believed he was taking an interest but it always lead back to Snape somehow, no matter how subtle it was.

Hermione did not really know Professor Snape as Harry did. But from what she knew and from what Harry had said and the way she had witnessed them interact together, she really did believe that Snape did care for Harry. But if he felt the same way as Bill felt for him, then things could get complicated. This is what she was worried about; she knew Harry was sensitive about him being younger then Snape. Luckily Snape had managed to talk Harry into taking the antidote. How Harry had never really said. She didn't know if Harry could handle a blow like Snape leaving him for a partner from his past. All she could do was stick close to Harry and help pick up the pieces if everything went wrong for him.

Next Chapter: Severus and Bill share a drink and Voldemort orders Severus to help in the
Dark Academy.
The Order meeting was drawing to an end. Severus did not believe, in his opinion, that it had been an emergency, definitely not an emergency worthy of interrupting Harry and him. Even though he had made Harry promise to no sex until graduation, it did not mean he was not happy to help relieve some of the tension his young lover was feeling since he had effectively put a sex ban on a seventeen year-old. It had been necessary but not very kind. Severus remembered back to when he was seventeen; he was always in need of relief.

Thinking back to when he was seventeen brought reality crashing back to him; his partner when he was seventeen was sitting on the other side of the room from him, expecting some kind of 'date' to happen after this meeting was finished. His feelings for Bill had always been complicated, set in the backdrop of a complicated time. After he had ended things with Bill they had always managed to stay on friendly terms. Bill had understood eventually that it could not be, between them. They exchanged Christmas cards and the occasional letter, and if you didn't count the few 'incidents' between them over the years, they had managed to create for themselves a working relationship. Well it worked for Severus.

Severus couldn't help but compare the situation he was in now with Harry to the one he was in with Bill nearly twenty years previous. Both of them were idealists, terrible romantics and worst of all bloody Gryffindors. Severus let out a snort of laughter at that. What was it about Gryffindors and him, why did he attract them? He only realised that he had laughed out loud when his train of thought was interrupted.

"Something you wish to add Severus?"

Severus' head snapped up. "Sorry, Albus. No I have nothing to add."

"Very well." Severus narrowed his eyes at Albus and his damn twinkling eyes. "If there is nothing else to add then I call this meeting to an end."

Severus got up immediately hoping for a quick escape; he even made it as far as the bottom of the stairs before he heard his name called out to him. "Severus, slow down. If I didn't know you any better I would think you were trying to ditch me?" Bill smiled at him.

"Of course not, I just don't wish to be involved in small talk with the others. I don't do small talk."
"No you never did, did you?"

"No. Shall we?"

"Where you lead I shall follow." Bill said to him.

"Indeed." Severus pushed back down his nervousness, and led Bill back down to his quarters.

***

After Severus and Bill were back in his quarters he invited Bill to sit down and make himself comfortable. "Would you like a drink?"

"Sure."

"What would you like?" Severus was feeling awkward, like a teenager on a first date.

"Whatever you are having will be fine."

Severus made for the red wine but stopped. It was the drink he and Harry enjoyed together and it felt wrong somehow to be drinking it now. Severus pinched the bridge of his nose and let out a sigh.

"Something wrong, Severus?"

"No, Bill, I am fine, just a little tired." Severus picked up a bottle of rum, he was in need of something a little stronger then normal and poured out two healthy measurements into the glasses. He walked back towards the sofa and handed Bill a glass, he was going to join him but decided against it and instead headed for one of the armchairs. "Tell me, how are you enjoying being based back in England? It must be quite different to Egypt."

"It's not as much fun as Egypt but it has its perks."

"Perks?"

"Yes, like my family. It is good to see them on a more regular basis." Severus merely raised an eyebrow at that statement.

"I guess you have had a few bad experiences with the younger Weasleys. Just be grateful you didn't have to teach Charlie and me, we would have given you a real headache. My younger siblings have never had the style for prank pulling Charlie and I had."

Severus laughed. "True, though I will never admit it ever again even under Veritaserum but the evil twins did pull a few classics over the years. Especially against that bitch Umbridge."

Bill laughed out loud. Severus believed it was a pleasant laugh. "I promise never to tell them because they would become unbearable to live with if they thought they had received a compliment from you."

They fell into a relaxed conversation. Catching up on what they had been up to over the last few years. Severus mainly just listened to Bill's tales of Egypt and the tombs he had broken into, it
all sounded very exciting and Severus kept their glasses full. He needed the alcohol to get through this.

"You are being very quiet, Severus, is everything okay?" Concern was evident in his voice.

"I am fine, as I have told you just a little tired but that is no reason to worry. It is Saturday tomorrow so I will not have to teach any brats. Small blessing, I know, but it is all I have at the moment." He replied sarcastically. He sure as hell was not going to admit to what was really frustrating him at the moment. He needed Harry for that!

***

Severus became acutely aware that they had exhausted every topic and drunk to much rum when Bill approached the subject that always arose between them when Bill had drunk too much. Them! Severus had been dreading this and again pinched the bridge of his nose in frustration.

"I have only ever had one regret in my life, you."

"Bill, please." Severus sighed out.

"I know, I know. You were a Slytherin and I was a Gryffindor, etcetera, etcetera."

"Bill," Severus ground out between his teeth, he took a deep calming breath. "It was vastly more complicated then that, and you know it."

"So you said."

"I was not lying to you. I never did and I never have. I was marked, Bill, I served the Dark Lord."

"No. I will never believe that, it was never in your heart, you were loyal through fear."

"Be that as it may I still served him as one of his for a time. I followed his orders without question. I was his servant and you always knew that. It was hardly a secret where most of Slytherins' loyalties lay back then."

"You were different."

"No, Bill, I wasn't. I took that mark after Potter and his friends humiliated me again. I knelt before him willingly and accepted his mark so I would have the power to finally shut Potter and Black up. Fat lot of good it ever did as they still continued to make my life hell."

"Severus, please, I know you."

"I have told you this before, Bill, but you always fail to really hear it. You are a good man a kind man, and that is why you always fail to see what the truth really was."

"Do not tell me how I felt about you."

"I was wrong, I should never have accepted your advances, but I was selfish and I basked in the attention."
Wrong? What we had was never wrong."

Severus softened his voice, "I did not mean to insult you in anyway. My feelings for you ran very deep; you were the first person to show me a level of tenderness I had not experienced before. You kept trying to tell me I was more then the mark on my arm and eventually I listened to you. If it were not for you I would either be in Azkaban or dead. I owe so much, my life in fact. It is a debt I will never be able to repay."

"I do not want repayment, Severus."

"Then what is it you want from me?"

"You."

Severus snapped his head up. "Excuse me?"

"I still care, a lot. I think I still love you."

"Bill..."

"Severus, you were, are, the love of my life."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"Severus I am not. The two years we were together..."

"Bill, please."

"I know my timing is terrible."

You have no idea Severus thought to himself. "Bill, you must stop this." He got up to try and clear his head and leant against the dinning room table.

"Severus, we were good together. We could be good again."

"Bill, what we had fundamentally changed my life in so many ways. I guess you were my, first love." Severus whispered the last few words.

Bill got up and took the few steps towards him; Bill reached up his hand and cupped Severus cheek. "I would like to be your last love also." Bill said quietly.

Severus reached up and took Bill's hand in his, "Bill, as tempting as that offer is. Truly it is, you are a wonderful, handsome, charming and a kind man, but..."

"Why is there always a but?"

"Because in this instance there is. I still care for you deeply and I hate to say this, to you, of all people, especially as you have just laid your heart open to me, but." Severus took a deep breath and looked Bill directly in the eyes. "My heart belongs to another."

"Another?"
"Yes. I am truly sorry."

"Who?"

"That is not important right now."

"To me it is." Bill's voice rose in anger.

"Why?"

"See who my competition is."

"Bill, it does not matter..." Before Severus could finish the sentence he found his lips caught in an explosive kiss. Bill's lips felt as good as they always had, sweet and soft. Bill brought his body up close to his; he found his arms going around Bill's waist. Bill's tall strong frame felt so good against his, he could feel the buttons of his jacket being undone. He heard Bill moan as there tongues dueled for supremacy over the kiss. He knew Bill's intentions; he could feel Bill's arousal against his hipbone. Severus could feel his bodies defenses betray him, after the way things had been left earlier, when Harry and him...HARRY! With what strength he had left he pushed Bill away. "No."

"Severus, I know you want me, I can feel it." Bill's hand stroked Severus' own arousal. "I know you too well."

"Obviously you don't know me as well as you believe. When I say no I mean it. My heart belongs to another." He growled out in frustration, Severus could see Bill was upset. "I am sorry, truly I am, but this can not be. Please leave, Bill."

"Have I ruined things between us?"

"No, I will always consider you one of my dearest friends, Bill. I just hope that you can forgive me for being a little harsh with you this evening, I did not mean to be."

"You have nothing to apologise for. It was I who pushed to far. I will gratefully accept you as a friend. You know though that if things don't work out between you and this new mystery man of yours you should drop me an owl."

Severus gave Bill a small smile. "Thank you. Good night, Bill."

"Good night, Severus." With that Bill left Severus' quarters. Severus took a deep breath to steady himself, picked up his drink and went back to his chair to drink himself into oblivion.

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It was the early hours of the morning and Severus had finished off the bottle of rum and had moved on to the brandy. His mind would not stop, he felt guilty about the kiss and wanted to tell Harry, but how in nine hells did you put something like that? 'Sorry but last night I kissed the older brother of your best friend, oh and by the way we were lovers for two years. As this was before you were born, there is no need to worry. Sorry I didn't mention it before, never mind, hey!'
The thing was he didn't want to cause Bill any undue embarrassment. He truly did owe him his life. When Bill had first approached him he was a young fifth year and Severus was a seventh year. At first he had just accepted the unexpected attention but as the weeks went by he found himself more and more attracted to the young handsome red head. Also it had the added excitement of being forbidden, he was a marked Slytherin and this boy was an innocent Gryffindor, idealistic in his views. The more time they spent together the more he fell for the boy. Their relationship did not turn sexual until Severus had graduated and Bill was a sixth year. Even back then he was not into sleeping with minors; he made Bill wait until he was sixteen. They meet up at Hogsmeade weekends, holidays and the odd weekend Bill could persuade his parents to sign him out for the weekend. They were both young and sex played a big part in their relationship. It was hot and passionate, quite memorable, Severus mused, they had learnt a lot with each other. It was down to Bill that he had switched sides; he had helped Severus to see there was another option, another way to go about things. It had gotten so bad serving the Dark Lord that often Severus wanted to take his own life to end all the suffering and misery he was causing. He was very much in love with Bill by then and wanted to protect Bill as much as possible but things were getting dangerous. Lucius was suspicious about where he was spending a lot of his weekends and holidays. He could hardly admit to spending time at the Burrow!

He went to Dumbledore for his help; he had to protect Bill. Albus could only offer him redemption in the form of becoming a spy for his little group, the Order of the Phoenix. Severus had accepted he could no longer face the death he was causing because of the Dark Lord. He hated that evil wizard with a passion, a passion that would have consumed and destroyed him if it had not been for Bill and Albus. They both played a part in helping him to focus his anger and hatred into serving the light.

The problem was that once he was a spy, the stakes had been raised. He could no longer risk Bill so he had ended it. It was for the best, he had made Bill see that, though now it seemed he had not been clear enough if Bill's actions were anything to go by, it also wasn't helped by the few physical slip up's that had happened over the years between them. The guilt he was feeling was also partly because of Harry. Wasn't he now doing the same thing to him? Risking Harry's very life for his own needs.

***

For Harry and his friends the whole of Saturday morning was spent revising for their N.E.W.T.'s. It was tedious and boring but they would never hear the end of it from Hermione if they did not study. Ron and Harry had learnt their lesson from the fifth year and their O.W.L.'s, that it was just easier to listen to and follow her revision timetable. They had taken an early breakfast to fit in their required four hours so they could meet Bill for a picnic lunch by the lake at one.

"Mione, can't we leave now." Ron whined.

"No Ron, we must not slack off early."

"Come on, Mione, it is 12.45pm so it's almost time." Harry had also had enough and wanted to break early.

"Yeah, and it will take us nearly ten minutes to get down to the lake."

"Oh alright, but just this once. No more early breaks, promise?"
"We promise." Both Harry and Ron said together.

Harry was looking forward to seeing Bill. From what Ron had said about the Christmas holidays, Bill did not hold any grudges about the letter they had written to him at the beginning of the year. Harry liked Bill; he was a relaxed easy-going guy and a pleasure to be around. They all packed the books they had been using away and headed out of Gryffindor Tower.

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The three of them headed across the grass towards the lake where they saw Bill relaxing on a blanket with a big picnic basket placed next to him. Ron picked up his pace and embraced his brother in a bear hug. Ron was almost as tall as Bill now, Harry noticed. Bill also hugged Hermione; Harry kept back a little, as he did not want to intrude on this family moment.

"Don't think you can escape a Weasley family moment, Harry, because you are family and don't you forget it." Harry gave Bill his award-winning grin as he was hugged by him.

"Thank you, Bill."

"Come sit down and tell me all your news, the house elves have prepared a wonderful lunch for us." The four of them tucked into the lunch that was in the hamper.

***

Severus was drinking his ninth cup of tea today. He was feeling in a word, rough! He had taken the hangover potion he had created twice, but it wasn't having much effect because the amount of alcohol he had consumed had been too great for the potion to counter. He was severely dehydrated, hence all the tea he was drinking, but that wasn't helping too much either. He had barely had an hour of sleep and he was having trouble concentrating on anything. He had decided to spend the day in his quarters and just go to bed as soon as the sun had set. He could not deal with screaming students today.

His plans went to shit when a shooting pain shot though his left forearm. The Dark Lord was calling him. "Fuck!" Severus groaned to himself. He got his act together and downed three pepper-up potions. This was not a healthy thing to do but it would keep him going for the next few hours. He could not afford to fuck up right now. He gathered his 'uniform' and placed it in a bag. He put a fire call through to Albus' office.

"Severus, how can I help you?" Albus sounded far too cheerful for his liking.

"I have been summoned. I must leave Hogwarts, I don't know how long I will be."

"Very well, Severus, don't forget to take the emergency portkey."

"I won't. Good-day Albus."

"Take care, my boy." Severus ended the connection, placed the emergency portkey around his wrist and left his rooms.

***

Lunch had been a fun and relaxing affair for everyone. It had been a much-needed break for the
Hermione was starting to feel a little worried because Bill had started hinting at more personal subject matters and it wasn't helped when they had all spotted professor Snape walking at full speed across the school grounds. They had all stopped talking to watch him, except her. First she looked at Harry and saw the familiar flicker of fear and worry cross his face. He had had a small twitch in his scar not long ago; he had no doubt thought he had got away with no one noticing but Hermione had seen his reaction, it was a familiar action she had seen him do a thousand times. Then she looked at Bill, he was not aware of why Professor Snape was leaving Hogwarts. His expression had been one of lust and desire. Oh my God! She had been right; Professor Snape was the lover Bill had mentioned in the past. She was sure Harry was not aware of this little fact, but what was she to do? Was it her place to tell Harry something of Snape's past? Or should she leave it to Snape to tell Harry when he was ready? Hermione did not know what to do; she would have to think on this some more. Whatever her decision would be, it would be made in Harry's best interest.

***

After lunch the trio headed back off to the castle and towards their Transfiguration classroom. At first they were a bit miffed that they did not even get the weekends off from the extra lessons, but they had realised there was no other choice because there was simply not enough days in the week, not when Quidditch practice, Prefect and Head Girl meetings and studying for exams also needed to be taken into account. That was why it had been agreed that Transfiguration would be on Saturday afternoons. This time had also been convenient for Professor McGonagall.

She had already offered to help them become animagi if they wanted to and had been a little shocked to find out that Harry had already mastered this particular skill. It had taken her a little while to calm down and not go straight to the Ministry to register him, it was good timing on Dumbledore's part to suddenly pop in for a visit at that moment. He explained to her that as soon as the war was over Harry would register. He had given Harry a particularly pointed look when he had said that, it had no room for argument.

Ron at first had been very excited at this prospect he had read one of Harry's books about it, but after some serious thought he had decided not to go for it at the moment. He felt with all the extra classes and his studying for his exams things might get on top of him. Also come September he was to begin a three year training programme to become an Auror, he had seen everything he was going to be studying and it was a tough curriculum. Hermione on the other hand had decided it was something she could get her teeth into and had already taken all the reading material McGonagall had given her. She believed she could fit it in with her University studies. Ron and Harry did not doubt her; she really would have fit in well with Ravenclaw.

***

They entered the classroom and took their usual seats and waited for their Professor to start. "Good-afternoon. As you have now mastered the turning a coin into a reflective surface I have been thinking of other things that could be useful to know in a dueling situation. What I have come up with is a collection of spells that I want you to only use in the most desperate of times, these are not spells to be used for fun and to tell you the truth I am not happy at teaching children these spells. But desperate times call for desperate measures." She stood up and placed a rock, a stick and a tin on a desk near the trio. "Now, gather around, hurry up we don't have all
Harry, Ron and Hermione gathered around the desk and waited to see what their professor planned to do with each of the items. She gave a little cough to clear her throat and pointed her wand at the small stick and gave an anti clockwise movement with her wand and clearly said, "Augmentum ad longitudo." The stick grew into a solid wood baton. "The reason I have shown you this particular spell is because sometimes stealth is needed and magic can not be cast in a particular place, or if you do not wish to be spotted or followed, transfigure a few sticks lying about and you can head off safe in the knowledge that you have a few weapons with you. The next one is a combination spell it contains a mixture of a Charm and Transfiguration." She pointed her wand at the rock and with a complicated movement of her wand clearly said, "Forma ab a cuspis ac seco ac ictus." The rock changed into a pointed dagger shape lifted of the table and flew towards the blackboard and impaled itself in its centre.

All three of them looked impressed. McGonagall continued, "If you have no desire to use some of the more deadly curses this one can be a handy one to know to stop your assailant from chasing you. The final one I would like to show you is one that you are to only use under the most extreme of circumstances and I know Professor Snape is going to be doing some further work with you on this particular weapon in your physical ed. classes. So listen closely and pay attention." A pointed glare was directed at Ron and Harry. "Forma similes a surculus arma." The tin can transformed itself into a silver antique pistol. "This pistol comes fully loaded with two bullets, if you would like to learn more about this type of weapon then as I have said Professor Snape is your man. Now each of you go and collect one of each item from my desk and practice."

Hermione had no trouble with any of the spells but it was expected that she would not, considering Transfiguration was one of her best subjects and she was hoping to study it a bit more in depth at University. Everything from her wooden baton to her pistol was perfect. She was a little apprehensive at the idea of using any from of handgun, but she knew she would rather use one of them than the killing curse any day.

Ron was not quite having as much luck as his girlfriend. His wooden baton was good and strong but his Transfigured rock didn't really look right. The tips were rounded, counting out any impaling he was hoping to do with them. And he had a feeling his pistol was not going to be much of a threat to anyone unless he was going to hit someone over the head with it. He saw McGonagall raise an eyebrow at his work and cross the room towards his desk. Ron was kind of grateful, he was past the stage of getting embarrassed at not getting something first time. He had to get used to it otherwise Hermione and he would not have lasted five minutes.

Harry watched as McGonagall went over to where Ron was working. He to knew his professor would soon visit him. He had transfigured his stick into a baton and when he had picked it up it had crumbled in his hands, he saw Ron out of the corner of his eye stifle a giggle. Harry couldn't blame him and laughed along with him, it was a pathetic attempt. He had much better luck with the projectile rocks, and had successfully impaled the blackboard twice. Also from the looks of things his pistol was okay. He had been intrigued when McGonagall had said something about Severus being able to teach them more about handguns and pistols. It was strange when he
learnt something new about his partner from someone else, but then again he guessed that was the problem with being involved with such an intently private man. Thoughts of Severus started to bring back the uncomfortable feeling of worry in his gut. He hated it when Severus was called away to that sick bastard Voldemort! Harry realised he had zoned out when he felt a soft hand come to rest on his forearm. He turned his head and looked right at McGonagall.

"Mister Potter, are you alright?" She asked him quietly.

"Sorry, Professor, I was thinking about Sever... Professor Snape. Voldemort summoned him a while ago." Harry softly replied.

"It is a worrying time, Harry. Why don't you give this one more try then we can call it a day." She smiled kindly at him and he returned her smile, grateful that soon he could go and wait for Severus to return.

***

Severus was waiting in position in the semi-circle for the Dark Lord to speak. He was so not in the mood for this. He rarely was, but this was terrible. His head was banging and he felt sick. He had made a mental note to himself to never drink again, at least never to excess again. He was too old for this, being hung-over was for teenagers and bright healthy young people, not bitter confused Potion Masters. He was praying to any deity that might exist for this to all end quickly and peacefully so he could return back to Hogwarts and crawl into bed.

The moment the Dark Lord spoke he knew there was very little chance of that ever happening. "Severus."

"My Lord?" His vision was beginning to sway; this was not good! He mused.

"One of my new Army escaped the other day. Do you know anything about that?"

"No my Lord. There was an incident at Hogwarts that may have been connected."

"An incident?"

"Yes my Lord. The alarms went off, I was not told why."

"I wonder if my little solider made it to Hogwarts?"

"I can make some discreet inquires if it pleases my Lord."

"Yes do that, Severus, I want to know if Dumbledore has him and what he plans to do with him. Not that I need him, he is replaceable but it would settle my curiosity."

"I will see to it immediately."

"Indeed, but first you have another job to do for me."

"Anything to help my Lord." Severus bowed his head and immediately regretted it; it made the whole room spin.

"I want you to put your years of teaching into some real practice. I want you to put my army
through their paces and teach them combat potions."

Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! Severus mentally chanted. "Of course my Lord."

"As it is the weekend, Dumbledore will not miss you so you may start now."

Severus continued his mantra. Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! "As you wish my Lord."

"Follow Lucius, he will take you to the brats." Severus nodded again at the Dark Lord and followed Lucius out of the room and down a staircase into what was once the vast wine cellar.

"Who would have thought it, Severus? You and I working together on something like this. Quite exciting, is it not?" Lucius asked him in a tone that was far too smug for his liking.

"Quite." Severus replied, he tried his best to keep the disdain out of his voice but did not fully succeed.

"My, Severus, by your tone one would think you had something better to do with your time then serving our Lord."

"I would never dream of it being any other way."

"Really? So there is no pretty young thing to keep you company at the moment? Oh, beg my pardon I meant to say handsome young thing."

Severus felt like slapping him silly and boasting to the fact that he actually had two handsome young men vying for his attention, but he would never indulge in something so vulgar and it would also put Harry in even more danger and risk Bill also. "You have an over active imagination Lucius. You always did."

"We shall see, Severus."

"Indeed." Sod the-slapping-him-silly, the way Severus was feeling he wanted to make a grab for the dagger in his right boot and slash this idiot's throat! 

"Now Severus, let me introduce you."

Severus had to stand through a twenty-minute lecture that Lucius gave the young men. Severus almost nodded off a few times, it was such a dull speech. The power had obviously gone to his head, he sounded like a dictator rallying the troops. It took all of Severus control not to roll his eyes. When Lucius had finished and handed over to him, he did as he always did with first years, he scared the shit out of them so they would give him no hassle, he also told them that if the noise level rose one iota above silent he would kill who ever was responsible. If they had a question they were to raise their hands and wait to be spoken to before even so much as opening their mouths. Hangovers, Malfoys and frightened kids did NOT mix!

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The first few hours of the lesson had been all right. He had lectured them on basic safety and basic potions, nothing too dangerous but he knew eventually he would have to teach them the darker side of potions. He just didn't want to do it today. He really didn't want to do it any day but he didn't have much choice in the matter unfortunately. He was hoping he would be able to
escape this lecture when Lucius had insisted he show, then allow them to make, a mild explosive potion because it was good to throw in the enemies face in a battle situation. Severus shivered internally at the thought of what Lucius was teaching them when he was not around. He would not be able to get out of it, if he tried then Lucius would go running to the Dark Lord telling him Severus would not cooperate and he would be punished. Although his hangover was getting no worse he did not want to go through a dose of torture.

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He made the potion with ease, it only took around fifteen minutes to make and bottle. That was the beauty of this potion, it was deadly, violent and quick to make. He flicked his wand and muttered an old teaching spell Albus had taught him and the instructions appeared on the board. His students' set about their task.

Things at first seemed to be going relatively well, they were quick learners. Then again if he had Lucius and the Dark Lord breathing down his neck he reasoned he could learn just about anything. He strolled among the tables making the odd correction here or there when he heard an 'oop's' come from behind him. He turned to see one of the student's cauldrons bubbling over with green goo. Why did he have to have a Longbottom in every class he was forced to teach? It was going to blow; he knew that by just looking at it. He ordered for everyone to get away from it. They ran in every direction, he turned to leave himself when he noticed the idiot that was responsible for this mess still standing there. He rushed over to grab him and pull him out of harms way when it became too late. He threw himself over the man-child to protect him and took the brunt of the explosion to the side of his head. His last conscious thought as darkness over came him was that he wished he had had the chance to come clean with Harry about Bill.

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After the explosion ended, Lucius went over to check on Severus and winced at what he saw, Severus was a mess. He was bleeding badly and in dire need of medical attention. He ordered the brats to clean up and he levitated Severus out and back up to the main part of the building. Lucius went in to see the Dark Lord and explain what had happened. The Dark Lord ordered him to return Severus to Hogwarts immediately. Lucius did as he was told, even though he was annoyed with it. He couldn't understand why Severus seemed to get such preferential treatment from the Dark Lord.

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Voldemort watched as Lucius walked away with Severus floating behind him. Voldemort knew that Lucius would see this as more special treatment for Severus. In reality there was no special treatment as such, it was hard to find someone with Severus' skills in potions and he held the complete trust of that fool Dumbledore. He was in effect irreplaceable, not that he would ever tell Severus that, but that was what Lucius had trouble understanding. He would just have to remind Lucius who was in charge when he returned and who made the decisions around here. He hoped Severus would survive this ordeal he really didn't have the time to recruit another spy and a good potions brewer.

***

Lucius apparated to the outside of Hogwarts, he could no longer enter the wards because of his active Dark Mark. Because that old fool Dumbledore trusted Severus he had keyed the wards to allow him entrance, Lucius could enter, but it would be hard work and it would set all the
alarms off, he really did not fancy all that hassle. So he got his wand out and sent up some emergency sparks and apparated back to Riddle Manor, to give a more detailed report of what happened today to the Dark Lord.

**Next Chapter:** Severus is in Hospital and Bill visits him. A big shock is in store for Harry.

**Latin Translation:**

Augmentum ad longitudo - *Grow to length.*

Forma ab a cuspis ac seco ac ictus - *Shape to a point and fly and stab.*

Forma similes a surculus arma - *Shape like a shooting weapon (Gun/Pistol.)*
Albus was sitting in his office enjoying a cup of tea with Bill when Fawkes screeched and flew to the window. His familiar was hopping up and down in agitation, when Albus went over to investigate he immediately saw the red sparks floating over the main gate. Albus did not know why they were there, but red sparks were used in the wizarding world as a sign of an emergency. He opened the window and allowed Fawkes to fly out to investigate. He placed a fire call to Poppy to expect an emergency in the hospital ward, he also sent Bill to help Poppy set up. He had a bad feeling he knew who this was about.

Severus was with Voldemort and this would not be the first time he had arrived back this way. Although it was an unusual occurrence because Voldemort needed his spy in Hogwarts and having such things occur during the school year could get the children suspicious Albus just wanted him here for safety and because he cared. He loved the stubborn boy like a son. Many a time he had found himself smiling like a mad man after Severus had stormed into his office, rant and raved about how all the children should be expelled so he can have a quiet life and then storm out. Albus would always just sit there and allow Severus to vent his frustration and smile to himself when he had left.

As he rushed from his office and along the corridors to get outside the castle, Albus' thoughts bounced around from one thing to another. He would need to inform Professor Sinistra that she would need to take over the duties of running Slytherin until Severus was better. He would have to inform Harry, which was not a job he was looking forward to. He knew that Harry's feelings for Severus ran very deep, and if only Severus would admit it his feelings run equally as deep for the younger man. He knew the arrival of Bill could cause a few complications, but he hoped they might be able to get past them.

As he neared the main gates he could see a black form moving his heart was saddened and overjoyed all at once. His boy was alive but injured. He raced over to Severus as he saw him trying to get to his feet. "Easy now, my boy."

"Albus?" Severus was obviously confused and hurt. "Ahhh." He moaned out in pain.

"Careful, let me get you a stretcher."
"No. I am alright."

"Nonsense, Severus."

"No."

Albus knew this was a losing battle; Severus had a stubborn streak as long as the river Nile. He no doubt did not want any of the students to see him being carried in on a stretcher. Albus acquiesced, this time. He would allow Severus his pride in walking in, but he would not allow Severus to not accept his help in getting there. "Only if you let me help you walk."

"Fine." Albus smiled as he took most of the weight of the younger man as they walked back to the castle and up to the hospital ward.

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They took a little longer then Albus would have liked to reach the hospital ward but it would be worth it if it would keep Severus passive. "Poppy?"

"Over here, Albus... Merlin! Severus."

"Not quite Poppy." Severus ground out in an attempt to be sarcastic.

"Albus, get him onto the bed, come on." Albus helped settle Severus in and left Poppy to her work, he wanted to stay but knew he would be in the way. He dragged Bill out with him.

"Do you think he will be alright?"

"Bill, Severus is as tough as they come. I am sure he will pull through. Why don't you take a seat while I go and inform a few people."

"Sure."

Albus watched as Bill settled into a seat, he knew Bill still had feelings for Severus, what he wasn't sure of was Severus' feelings for Bill. He went to Poppy's office and placed a fire call to Professor Sinistra's office to ask her to look after Slytherin until Severus was well enough to resume his duties. He then placed a fire call through to Minerva's office. This was the one he was not looking forward to, partly because Harry would need to be told and partly because no matter how much bickering Minerva and Severus did, they were extremely fond of each other.

"Albus, to what do I owe this pleasure?" He saw Minerva answer from her desk.

"I bring bad tidings with me I am afraid, my dear."

"Albus, whatever is the matter?"

"It regards Severus."

"What has happened?"

"I am not sure, but he has returned from Voldemort badly injured. He is conscious but he is not well."
"Merlin help him. Albus what can I do?"

"I need you to tell Harry."

"Harry! He will not take it well, Albus." Minerva said worriedly.

"I know Minerva, but he must be told, I do not want him to hear it through the school grapevine. Try and keep him away from the hospital wing for a while. It will be busy up here and people will wonder why Harry Potter is visiting Severus."

"I understand, Albus, I will speak to him and inform him of the situation. Tell Severus my prayers are with him."

"I will Minerva. Good day."

He ended the call and went back out into the main part of the hospital to wait for Poppy to give them Severus' diagnosis. He joined Bill on the chairs.

***

Minerva hated this part of the job, passing on bad news to students. She knew it was a responsibility of all the Heads of House but she would never get used to it. She entered Gryffindor common room and spotted Harry, Ron and Hermione seated upon the comfy chairs by the fireplaces all with their noses in books. "Mister Potter, I need to see you in my office immediately."

"Is something wrong?"

"I will tell you in my office, Mister Potter, come along." She watched as Harry rose with a shrug of his shoulders to his friends and exited the common room.

***

Harry walked along to McGonagall's office in silence. Since the war had started again he had heard stories of how Heads of House would come and collect you to give you bad news in private. He wondered what he was going to be told; though he was not close to the Dursleys he wished them no ill. He was at a loss; he guessed it might not be bad news, maybe she wanted to talk to him about his summer arrangements.

He was ushered into her office and told to sit and given a cup of tea, he was really starting to worry now. "Is something wrong, Professor?"

"Mister Potter, Harry, there a has been an accident of some sorts which has hospitalized Severus."

Harry's eyes widened in panic and fear. "I have to go!" Harry got up to leave.

"Harry, please sit back down. I am afraid you cannot go to the hospital wing now. The Headmaster believes that it would be too dangerous to have you there, do you understand?"

"Yes, but it doesn't mean I have to like it." Harry snapped out, he took a deep breath. "I'm sorry.
I didn't mean to snap at you."

"Do not worry, I understand. You are worried and upset, Harry, as am I."

"What happened?" Harry whispered.

"I am not sure, Severus returned from a meeting with You-Know-Who and needed to go to the hospital. Apparently he was conscious and talking but in a bad way."

Harry's head snapped up at hearing that name. "Voldemort!" He spat out between clenched teeth. He saw McGonagall flinch a little.

"Mister Potter, I want your word that you will not do something stupid." Her tone was stern.

"You have my word, I am just angry at him! He always tries to take everything away from me that I love." Harry huffed as he slouched back in his chair folding his arms.

He saw McGonagall raise an eyebrow at his bold statement and he blushed a little at admitting he loved Severus out aloud to another that was not Ron or Hermione. "I am sure Poppy is doing everything possible and that he will be fine. You may see him later when the Headmaster says it is alright to do so."

"Okay, I am just so worried about him. I don't know what I would do if something happened to him. Listen to me, I sound like a love sick puppy." Harry rolled his eyes in mock disgust.

Harry stayed in her office for the next hour they swapped stories about Severus. Mainly Harry just listened to Professor McGonagall tell him about Severus at school and what an intense young man he was. He hadn't changed that much, Harry thought he was still intense about almost everything.

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Albus rose from his chair when Poppy rejoined them from the cubical she was treating Severus. "What's the diagnosis?" Albus asked her.

"He will live, no need to worry. From what he was able to tell me, he was teaching the aged children battle potions and one of them, and I quote 'caused a Longbottom'. The cauldron exploded and to save the child he pushed him out of the way and took the full force of the explosion himself. He does not remember how he got back to Hogwarts. His injuries are mostly superficial; he has minor burns to the side of his face, which will be gone by the morning. The knock to the side of his head caused me the most trouble he had a small fracture which a little skele-grow will fix while he sleeps. He lost a little blood that I have given him a potion for and strangely he seemed a little sleep deprived but again I have given him a potion to rectify that problem. He should sleep now through the night with very little interruption."

"An excellent job as always, Poppy."

"Thank you, Albus, very kind of you to say."

"If it was not for you this school would have fallen apart years ago."

Poppy laughed at him. "Be gone with you, Albus, and stop cluttering up my hospital wing." She
playfully shooed him away.

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The sun was starting to set and Harry was watching its descent from the small window in his dormitory. He remembered spending his very first night at Hogwarts on this very windowsill; he tended to return to this sill when things were on his mind, then it was the wonderment of it all, now it was the worry he was feeling for Severus. He wanted to desperately run to the hospital wing and go see him, even if all he could do was sit there and be there for him when he woke up, he just felt so useless at the moment. Harry wiped angrily at his face as a tears leaked from his eyes. He was startled when he felt a soft hand rest on his shoulder.

"Harry."

"Hey, Hermione, how's it going?"

"Harry, you have been really quiet since you came back from Professor McGonagall's office. I know you are worried about Professor Snape, but he is in good hands." Hermione perched on the edge of the windowsill and gave Harry a sad smile.

"I know, it's just unfair that I am not allowed to go and see him."

"Well, you could go see him."

"How? McGonagall and Dumbledore have told me to stay away."

"I never said this to you, but why don't you use your father's invisibility cloak?"

"Mione, you are a genius!" He got up to go and collect it.

"Harry, now is not a good time to go, why not wait until after supper when the hallways are a little quieter."

"You know, Mione, if you had used your brains for prank pulling and rule braking you would have been unstoppable."

"Thank you, I think." She lent over and kissed Harry on the cheek and gave him a cheeky wink and left him to his thoughts.

{"He'll start to think he's something special if people keep treating him that way."}

{"Watch it, Lefty!"} Harry told the snarky left head of his Runespoor.

{"OOOO, I'm really scared now."} It replied.

{"Why are you always so mean to me, Lefty?"} Harry asked him.

{"Take no offence kid, I'm just playing with you. You are such an easy target, you are far to emotionally open, not like our last master."}

{"I guess, I can't help it."}
"Listen because I will only say this once. You are a nice kid; you care about others, you worry about the safety of others. You always put others before you and you allow me to pick on you, then you feed me. You know what that all means?"

"No."

"It means you are too nice but you know what?"

"What?"

"I like you, you have got real heart. Now if you ever repeat any of that especially when those two are awake," she nodded in the direction of the sleeping middle and right heads. "I will deny it and call you a liar because lets face it, you wont let me go hungry."

Harry lightly laughed. "I guess you are right. I wont let you starve and I promise never to tell anyone that you were nice for a few minuets. Nobody would believe me anyway."

"That's the attitude kid. Now go eat and then go see that man of yours and leave me in peace and quiet to get some sleep."

"Thanks, Lefty."

"Don't mention it. Ever!"

Harry smiled at the left head and got down from the windowsill, grabbed his invisibility cloak and stuffed it up his jumper and headed to the Great Hall for supper.

***

Harry had dragged out his supper for nearly over an hour, he wanted to be one of the last to leave the hall so there would be less chance of bumping into another person. Generally once the students had finished supper they returned to their common rooms and stayed there, especially when the time was ticking down towards exam time. He left the hall and slipped in behind one of the suits of armor and put on his invisibility cloak around himself. Undetected he walked towards the hospital wing.

Even though he was practised at this, he mentally slapped himself for forgetting his map but it was early enough that anybody around did not attempt to be quiet so he knew when almost any one was coming towards him. He reached the hospital wing successfully and gently pushed the door open just enough so he could slip through. He could see a low light on behind a curtain and as it was the only bed occupied he guessed it was where Severus was. As he crept closer he realised someone else was there, again he mentally slapped himself for forgetting the map, because if he had it he would know who was there. Harry was extra careful in taking the final steps towards the curtain, he was glad to see there was quite a big gap in them that he could slip through undetected.

He had to keep himself in check not to gasp out loud when he saw Bill Weasley sitting down next to Severus' bed on a chair holding Severus' hand. His Severus' hand! Harry became frozen on the spot; he knew he should leave because this was obviously a private moment but he found himself unable to move, it felt as though he had become rooted to the spot.

"...So worried, you have no idea what I thought when I heard it was you that was injured. I
though I had lost you again, Severus, I couldn't handle it if I had. I love you, Severus, so much. I always have, you were my first true love. I know you doubted me when I told you the other night but I was telling you the truth. I know you still have feelings for me, I could tell when we kissed..."

Harry felt as though he had been hit in the stomach and that he had lost the ability to breath properly. Other night? When we kissed? What the hell! How could Bill sit there and talk of things like love when Harry didn't even know that there had even been 'love' between them! Harry didn't know if he felt angry, jealous, sad or even dismayed, he wanted to reveal himself and ask what the hell was going on between these two and exactly how bloody long it had been going on. From what Bill was saying it had been quite some time. He watched as Bill brought Severus' hand up to his lips and place a small kiss on the knuckles, then with his other hand stroke the side of Severus' face in a practised move. Harry's heart shattered into a thousand pieces as he watched Severus ever so slightly lean into that touch.

"There is no need to worry, Severus, I will look after you from now on. I won't let anyone else hurt you, ever."

Harry felt as though he was losing control of his emotions, he heard a small noise come from the bedside table and looked over. He noticed a small hairline crack down the side of the water jug. Harry knew it was time to leave before he did something stupid and lost total control of his magic and temper. He saw Bill look over at the table and search for the source of noise; it was time for him to leave. He didn't know how much longer he could remain quiet, especially with the tears that were now running down his cheeks. He turned and fled, he tried to make no noise but he didn't care, he just needed to get away. He ran all the way back to Gryffindor Tower and up to his bed. He spelled the curtains closed and placed a silencing charm up around him and cried out loud to himself.

***

Severus awoke the next morning feeling a lot better, still a little stiff but well rested. He glanced to the side of his bed and noticed Bill asleep in the chair. He frowned a little at seeing him sitting there; he was uncomfortable with him being there because he thought he had made his feelings clear the other night, obviously not. Then again he did agree to allow their friendship to continue, Severus did not believe Bill would be so prepared to continue on a friendship once he found out about Harry. Harry was considered an honorary member of the Weasley family; he wasn't sure how Bill would feel about him 'dating' his adopted younger brother. Severus sat up and his movement woke Bill.

"Good Morning, Severus." Bill said with a stretch and a yawn.

"Bill. You should not have stayed here all night."

"I wanted to, to make sure you were okay."

"It was very kind of you, but unnecessary."

Bill just smiled at him, "I'll go get Poppy for you."

Severus watched as Bill left his cubical, he had a bad feeling he was going to have to explain things all over to him, Severus was not looking forward to that, again! He turned to pour himself a glass of water when his hand stopped short of the jug. He noticed a small crack down the side
of the jug, on closer inspection he saw a single droplet of water had managed to leak through. For some reason he felt drawn to it and ran a single finger down the hairline crack. He had the oddest sensation run through him, somehow it felt familiar but yet he couldn't place it.

"Severus, are you alright?"

"Yes, Poppy. Poppy, was anybody else in here last night?"

"Albus popped in once last night but nobody else was here, why?"

"No reason, just wondering."

Poppy lent in closely to him and whispered, "Mister Potter was told to stay away for security reasons but I have it on good authority that he desperately wanted to visit." She winked at him. Severus just nodded at her in thanks.

***

Severus was released from the hospital wing after he had showered and eaten enough food to feed five people. The first thing he wanted to do was find Harry, he didn't know why he all of a sudden felt so in need of the younger man's company but he really wanted to see him. The problem was that he could not exactly march into Gryffindor Tower and ask him to go for a coffee, though the looks on everyone's faces would be worth the trouble he would get in. Harry was not due to come down and visit him for another few days' for their weekly rendezvous. He would just have to bide his time and wait for an opportunity to present itself.

***

It was late that evening and Severus was starting to worry, he had not seen Harry at lunch or supper. He had been hoping to catch him as he left the Great Hall. He could not chance it tomorrow morning because too many students would be around as they all had lessons tomorrow and he did not have potions with the seventh year Gryffindors until Thursday. The solution to his problem came in the form of Harry's owl, Hedwig, who came to visit him that evening. She flew straight to the perch and started to preen herself. Severus often wondered why she visited him in the dungeons so much, not that he minded, it just perplexed him a little. He asked her if she would mind taking a letter to Harry she hooted softly and Severus took that as an affirmative.

***

Harry had not left his bed since he had returned to it the previous night in tears, he had heard Ron and Hermione come in and discuss whether they should wake him or not. He silently thanked Ron for persuading Hermione to leave him be and not to bother him until Monday morning. He had not really stopped crying since then, he felt miserable. He heard Hedwig hooting from outside of his curtains, he opened them just enough to let her through. She was carrying a scroll he took it from her. He immediately recognised the spidery scrawl.

H.

I was wondering if it would be possible for us to meet up soon.

S.
He couldn't face him right now; he didn't want to be told it was all over between them. He knew it was but did not want to hear it, he didn't think he could handle it right now. He grabbed a scrap of parchment and a quill and scribbled a reply and sent it back with Hedwig.

***

Severus was eagerly waiting a reply to his note and was thankful when Hedwig returned so quickly. He barely gave a moment's thought to the fact that she flew away straight after delivering the note. He opened it.

S.

I can't bear to actually hear you say the words, but don't worry I know what you are going to say. Don't worry, I won't cause a scene; I will stay out of your way.

H.

Severus reread it three times, after the third time it still made no sense to him. What was Harry convinced he was going to say to him? All he wanted to do was see him; he still felt a little shaken from the accident and thought Harry would understand him and his worries about the Dark Lord. Somehow Harry had gotten the wrong idea, he just didn't know how or what he had gotten the wrong idea about. He would just have to try and catch him in one of the corridors tomorrow.

***

During breakfast the next morning Severus was unable to catch Harry's eye. Only once had the young man looked up at the table and it was not at him. He tried again unsuccessfully through lunch, but again Harry did not once look up at the table. Something was seriously wrong with him, he looked a little pale and was not eating very much, his friends also looked a little worried. He decided that if he couldn't get Harry alone for a few minutes then he would approach Miss Granger. He had done a favour for her after all; okay, it was for his and Harry's own good that he take the antidote, but she did ask him for his help and if he had to he would ask her for hers. She was not like Weasley who would go blabbing to everyone that 'Snape' had asked him a favour. Yes, that is what he would do if he had no success with finding Harry by the end of the school day.

He never had to ask Miss Granger for her help because his opportunity to corner Harry came not long after the last lesson for the day. He spotted Harry walking down the Transfiguration corridor looking miserable and in a world of his own. He stormed up behind him and grabbed him by the upper arm and dragged him into one of the empty classrooms. "Tell me what the hell is going on!" He said in an annoyed tone. He as not prepared to admit to being a little worried out loud.

"Nothing, Professor." The tone was very dismissive, that irked Severus even more. Severus cast several silencing and locking charms on the room. "That's not necessary, I'm going now."

Severus took a deep breath, "Harry, what the hell has happened here?"

"You know damned well what has happened. I know what you were going to say and I told you I don't want to hear it. But don't worry, I accept it." Harry was pointing a finger at him in rage.
There was a tingle in the air that was somewhat familiar.

"How do you know what I was going to say? I had no idea what I was going to say. I know you don't like me spying but I have to do it and yes, occasionally I get hurt, but really it is not that often."

"What! You weren't even going to mention it? I had you down as many things, Professor Snape, but a coward was not one of them!"

Oh that got Severus' hackles up and he saw red. He may not have been from the House of the Brave, but he considered what he did by going to the Dark Lord whenever he called and look him in the eye and lie to him to be pretty damn brave! "I have no idea what the fuck you are going on about, Potter." He saw Harry flinch at the use of his surname and he stepped right up to him until their faces were mere inches apart. "I assure you I do not have the faintest idea what the hell you are going on about. Your under used brain must be working overtime and you have started to imagine things. One other thing, Potter," Severus spat at Harry. "I might not be a heroic Gryffindor like you but some of the things I have had to do in the name of the light would make most of those brave little Gryffindors flee in terror." He turned to leave, his temper was starting to run too high and he did not want to say something he would regret.

"Severus, were you ever going to tell me?" He heard Harry choke back tears. He stopped in his tracks, Severus was at a loss, he didn't even know what they were arguing about.

"Tell you what?"

"That you are in a fucking relationship with Bill Weasley!" Harry shouted at his back.

Severus spun back around with a look of shock on his face. "Where in Merlin's name did you get that idea?" The latter part of his sentence trailed off as he placed the slight disturbance in the air. It was coming from Harry; it was like a tangible strain of his magic, a frighteningly dark strain, it was like all his negative emotions all rolled into one. Thank Merlin he wasn't attempting to become the next Dark Lord, Severus mused, because if he let all that darkness and negative energy rule him he would be unstoppable. He had felt it before but where? The hospital! The water jug that had a crack in it, that was where he had felt this power signature before, but what the hell happened in the hospital? He was asleep the whole time. "I have no relationship with Bill except friendship."

"You're lying."

"No I am not. I should have told you we were involved when we were students but that was before you were even born."

"I heard him in the hospital wing, I know what is going on." Harry shouted back at him.

"Well then, why don't you let me in on it because I was asleep and have no idea what was said." He replied sarcastically.

He watched as Harry angrily wiped away the escaped tears. Part of Severus wanted to go over and comfort him but the other part was still dangerously angry. "Bill kept going on about how much he loved you, and how much he knew you still cared. He could tell because of the kiss you shared with him and now that he was back in the country you two could be together again. He kept touching you in a very intimate and gentle way. Stroking your face and kissing your
"I had been given a dreamless sleep potion. Voldemort could have come in and stroked my face and I would have been none the wiser." He was so angry with Harry right now that he had even used the Dark Lord's chosen name. "And for your information, Bill kissed me and I told him thanks but no thanks. The only thing he could feel from that kiss was the frustration of the interruption you and I had experienced earlier that evening. All I could think about was you. Thank you very much for trusting me and waiting to hear my side before making any snap judgments."

"What do you expect?"

"I expect you to trust me! I held back thinking you were too young for an adult relationship but you kept trying to prove me wrong and eventually you won me over. Now I can see that I was foolish in thinking you were grown up enough to handle such a thing."

"You should have told me."

"I have not seen you since Bill arrived at Hogwarts. When exactly should I have told you? Well? Maybe I could have asked the Dark Lord if I could borrow one of his fireplaces to place a call to you to tell you about a previous partner who tried, unsuccessfully I might add, to come on to me. What the hell do you expect from me?" Severus shouted right in Harry's face.

"Severus..." He never allowed Harry to finish that sentence, he had heard enough for one day. He grabbed him by the shoulders and threw him up against the door and pressed his own body up tight against Harry's. He could feel a jolt shoot right down his spine, it was almost always present when he was this close to Harry and their emotions were highly strung, it was like their magic sizzled against each other's when it was brought to close to the surface.

He saw a momentary flash of uncertainty in Harry's eyes but chose to ignore it. He placed his right hand on Harry's face and brought their mouths together in a searing kiss. He nipped quite hard at Harry's bottom lip and he heard the boy whimper as his mouth opened. Severus took full advantage of it and thrust his tongue into Harry's open mouth. The kiss was hard and full of raw sexual energy. Severus' hands traveled down to Harry's trousers and he ripped them open and released Harry's mouth only to mutter a quick spell to remove them completely before recapturing Harry's mouth in another hard kiss.

Severus unbuttoned his own trousers, releasing his own pent up frustration, and picked Harry up pushing his back further against the door, he felt Harry tighten his legs around his waist that was all the consent he needed but he could feel that Harry wanted this as much as he did. He released Harry's mouth again only to be met with moans of protest from Harry. He once more muttered another spell that lubricated and prepared Harry, it took all the romance out of sex but it was a handy spell to know. He heard Harry gasp as the spell took effect and Severus gave him a wicked grin.

He grabbed on tightly to Harry's shoulder as he thrust into the tight consuming heat in one swift movement. Harry cried out in pleasure, thankfully, and not pain. Yes, it was definitely a handy spell to know. Each thrust became harder and faster and Harry started to scream out, Severus started to lose what little self control he had to begin with, the months of sexual frustration had built up to exploding point between them. Harry gave out one final scream as he came over the both of them and Severus was not far behind him.
Breathing heavily he rested his forehead on the cool door in front of him, he could feel Harry lean his head on his. He spoke quietly, not having the energy to scream and shout anymore. "I did not mean to be so rough, I am sorry."

"No need to apologise, Sev, trust me, wow!"

Severus let out a snort of laughter. Still speaking quietly and facing the door Severus continued. "That night I told Bill that there could be nothing between him and I because my heart belonged to another. That other, is you. I love you Harry."

**Next Chapter:** The trio's futures are decided and Draco makes a decision.
Hermione was in complete shock; she was sitting opposite Harry with her hands over her mouth desperately trying not to squeal like an over excited five year old. "How romantic, Harry! I can't believe Snape told you he loved you, and in such a way. Ahhh! I'm so happy for you. You are happy, Harry, aren't you?"

"Merlin, yes. You have no idea!"

"Did you say it back?"

"No, I was in complete shock, I just held him tighter but I have told him before back around Christmas, I think."

"I knew you both wouldn't be able to last until graduation. An explosion of passion, it's like the best Jackie Collins' novel." Harry didn't know how he felt being compared to a Jackie Collins novel, not that he had a problem with the books but he felt they were a little girly.

"What are you two up to?" Ron asked from across the room. They were all currently in Hermione's headgirls room studying.

"Professor Snape told Harry that he loved him."

"Ughh!" Ron looked horrified at that thought. "Rather you then me, mate."

"Ron!" Hermione snapped at him. Harry just laughed. "You have not got a romantic bone in your body."

"Listen, Harry, I'm sorry. If you're happy then I'm happy, I just don't understand what you see in him, is all."

"That's alright, Ron, I don't know what Hermione sees in you." Harry face creased up laughing at the look of mock outrage on Ron's face.

"Guess I deserved that one. Anyway I think I'm gorgeous, Hermione told me she thinks so. Lets face it, mate, she is never wrong." Harry was now in tears from laughing too much. "Really I am happy for you, sounds as if you are having better luck than Bill." That got Harry's attention.
"It seems as though this bloke he still really likes has got another boyfriend or something. I tend to not really pay attention." Ron went back to reading his book.

Harry felt a momentary pang of guilt when he heard about Bill, then he remembered how he had tried to kiss his man! The anger was back, then the happiness was back when he remembered that Sev had told him he loved him and only him. Now he wanted to dance around the room like an idiot celebrating.

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It was halfway through another dueling lesson and again Harry found himself the victim of Severus' superior dueling skills. Harry didn't know if he should be angry at his friends for giving him up as the sacrificial lamb to the slaughter or at Severus for embarrassing him in such a way. Even though they had been attending these classes for a while now, Harry was always surprised at the dirty underhanded tricks Severus and Flitwick had up their sleeves. Harry had always known Severus could be tricky and underhanded but he had never expected it of little, kind, sweet Professor Filius Flitwick.

"As you can see this particular trick of Professor Snape's is an extremely effective way of ending a battle." Flitwick spoke happily from the centre of the raised dueling platform. At that moment, Harry's anger and bloodlust had shifted again to Flitwick, how dare he sound so nonplussed when Harry was the victim, yet again!

"Potter...Harry," it looked as though Severus was trying to keep from laughing and this just made Harry glare at him; oh, he was so going to pay for this! "My cloak?" Severus picked up his cloak from the side of the platform and in a few graceful strides was stood directly in front of Harry with an amused smirk in place. Even though Harry was extremely annoyed at Severus for this he couldn't help the small shiver that spread over him at being naked this close to Severus. Severus draped the cloak over his shoulders and fastened the clasp so it closed, covering him up. Quietly in his ear he heard Severus purr, "I think this is a most fitting look for you." Then he walked away, not that it mattered, everyone in the secure room knew of their relationship; even if they hadn't told Flitwick directly, Harry was sure he knew.

Professor Flitwick continued on. "Stripping your opponent naked during a battle may not be deadly but it is effective at stopping them dead, as was so well demonstrated by Harry here. While your foe is getting over their shock, you could cast another spell to tie them up. Any questions?"

"But be warned, only cast this type of spell against someone you feel you have the upper hand against. It would not be wise to cast such a spell against someone who is defeating you. The reason is that you should not waste the time and opportunity of casting a lower level spell if the situation is not right or if you have no intention of arresting your attacker for later questioning." Severus pointed out to the three students.

"So you're saying it would be a waste of time casting such a spell against a higher level Death Eater but not against one of the captured children?"

"Exactly, Miss Granger. A higher-level Death Eater would no doubt just apparate away or raise a shield strong enough to deflect such a curse."

"But it is handy to know next time Malfoy pisses us off!" Ron joked.
"I did not just hear you say that, Mister Weasley." Severus told him with a smirk.

"Sorry, sir, of course not, sir."

Harry was happy to see his friends trying very hard to get along with Severus and Severus with them, he would have to reward both parties in very different ways, he thought with a grin. "Can we get around to conjuring up some clothes for me. I don't want to walk through the hall naked, only in Sever...Sna... Oh bugger it!" Harry huffed.

Severus again was looking like he was trying very hard not to laugh out aloud; he clicked his fingers and called for Dobby. "Dobby, could you go and collect Mister Potter some new clothes."

"Yes, sir, anything for Harry Potter, sir." The elf beamed and vanished with a small pop.

"We should have asked him to get Colin's camera so we could recreate that scene and get a photo of Harry's face." Ron broke out in laughter, everyone else tried their hardest to stifle his or her laughter because Harry did not look very amused.

"Very funny, Ron." Harry stropped.

"Mate, you're expression was priceless!" He doubled over in laughter.

Harry gave a very Slytherin smile, which no one but Severus saw, and he raised his wand to Ron and bellowed, "Conseco Induviae." Everyone went silent as Ron's clothes disintegrated into shreds and he let out a very girly scream and blushed furiously.

"I see when you blush, Ron, that it goes all the way down." Harry said in his best sarcastic tone. Ron just seemed to blush harder.

"Very impressive, Mister Potter, if we were allowed to give points for these little classes I think I would have to break a life time promise and award Gryffindor points for your quick study."

"Why thank you, Professor Snape." Harry replied with a smirk. Dobby popped back into the room and handed Harry his new clothes. "Dobby, I think you had better get Ron some new clothes also."

"Yes, Harry Potter, sir." Again Dobby was gone from the room with a small pop.

Harry pulled up his new trousers under Severus' cloak and buttoned them up; removing the cloak and handing it back to finish dressing himself. Harry noticed that Severus did not offer Ron his cloak; instead Ron had to make do with Hermione's. Harry wanted to make some quip about him wearing girls clothes but thought better of it when he realised that he and his friends had wasted enough time joking around. The dueling lessons so far had been invaluable to them; it had been where they had been able to put into practice all the things they had learned from the other classes. Harry was looking forward to learning how to incorporate guns into dueling, because he liked the idea of shooting all the Death Eaters in the leg, instantly incapacitating them but not killing them and, according to Severus, shields did not and could not deflect bullets. But Severus had refused to teach them how to use guns until after they were all over eighteen. Harry could see his point but that had not stopped him from pouting. Dobby came back and gave a very red Ron a new set of clothes which he immediately dressed in.
"Now that we are all dressed again and I want it to remain that way. I have set up three mannequins for you all to practice the curse on, but Harry, as you have already demonstrated your capability with it you don't need to practice if you don't want to." Hermione and Ron went over to the mannequins and practiced. Hermione got it on the second try and Ron on his third.

Harry chose to sit it out believing he had it down, Harry decided to take the weight off his feet and sat down next to Severus on the side of the stage. "You know I would have been within my right to have aimed that curse at you."

Severus turned and gave him an evil grin, "Yes, but I know how to defend against it."

"Evil git! You could have warned me."

"And ruin all my fun?"

"Evil sod!"

"Haven't I already warned you that I am not a nice man? Yet, you keep coming back for more. You are very strange, Mister Potter."

"It's the whole taming the wild beast thing, it's a real turn on, believe me." Harry winked at him.

Severus shook his head in amusement. "I would say you were far more wild than I am!"

"Ah, in some ways yes, but you have this whole dark and mysterious thing happening for you and you come across as very unattainable. All those things attribute to your appeal."

"The youth of today," Severus snorted. "I don't understand you lot!"

"Severus, by wizard standards, aren't you still considered a youth?" Harry grinned at him.

"Only by those foolish enough to have a death wish, oh and Albus. So yes, those with a death wish and the barmy!"

"I pity the fools, you are quite intimidating when you want to be."

"Good, it's a practiced art."

"I get worried facing you in these classes, I really do pity anyone who faces you on the battlefield."

Severus seemed to frown a little, and then he turned to him. "Harry, you should not worry. You are a powerful wizard with an abundance of natural talent, except when it comes to potions! Though as much as it pains me to say it, you have improved vastly in the subject. People are more afraid of facing you on the battlefield than they are of facing me. The only reason I am able to out manoeuvre you at the moment is because I have a few more years of knowledge under my hat, but soon that will change."

"Maybe, but you are by far quicker at thinking of things than I am. I would still be fearful of meeting you in full battle mode, you and old Voldie. He still scares the shit out of me, pisses me
off no end but still scares me shitless."

"Only a foolish man with a death wish would not be afraid of facing the Dark Lord, he is a master of dueling."

"Nah, I got past my death wish stage back when I was nearly sixteen. No, I have to stay alive and survive this whole war just so I can go on annoying the hell out of you for the next hundred years or so."

Severus laughed a little at that. "Promises, promises."

"Oh, you can count on that one, Sev." Harry whispered to him just as the other three occupants in the room walked over to them.

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"Professor Snape and I have decided that once the summer holidays have started and Harry returns to Hogwarts, we are going to be starting some free form dueling. Basically that means you will pair up and we shall see who will be victorious and we will test what you have learned. Now I think that is all for tonight as it is starting to get late and we all have classes tomorrow."

Harry gathered his things and knew instinctively he would no doubt get paired with Severus because Ron and Hermione, Ron especially, would be too worried at the idea of pointing a wand at him. Harry felt Severus looking at him and turned and smiled a little at him and winked at him, Severus returned his smile with a real smile of his own. This made Harry feel even more happy with his relationship with Severus, yes, he was looking forward to annoying him with his Gryffindor ways for the next hundred years or more.

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The N.E.W.T.s were fast approaching, they spent most of their lessons revising and going over old material and their spare time with their noses in books. It was hard and tiring, it was getting to the point where words were starting to dance in front of their eyes. Hermione had sent back her acceptance form for Cambridge University after Ron had been accepted into this years Auror training programme. He would get the summer off, then come September he would need to report to the Ministry for duty. Hermione was to start in October; they were going to rent a flat near the University so Ron would feel he was getting away from work. They had promised Harry they were going to get a small two bedroom flat so that he would always have a room and a place to call home. Harry had nearly cried when he had been told that.

This left Harry with some decisions to be made. He had the big house Severus had given him; according to the paperwork it had eight rooms that could be used as bedrooms. He knew he wanted to work with kids like him, homeless and without a family. But he would need some help that was the reason he was walking down to the kitchen; he had an old friend to visit.

"Harry Potter has come to see Dobby!" The elf had thrown himself at Harry's leg as he had entered the kitchen.

"Hello Dobby, I was wondering if I could have a word?"

"Anything for Harry Potter."
"Let's sit down." Harry led Dobby to the small table situated in the back of the kitchen and sat down. "Dobby you can sit down, you know." He though the elf was going to cry again, but it seemed as though Dobby managed to keep control. "Dobby,"

"Yes Harry Pot..."

"Just Harry, Dobby." Harry smiled at the silly grin the elf wore. "I was wondering if we could do a little business?"

"Business, Harry?"

"As you know I will be finishing school soon."

"I know, Harry. It is a sad day for all." The elf pined.

"I won't be gone for long before I have to come back for a while, but that is not what I want to talk about. What I'm about to tell you needs to be kept secret."

"It will never pass my lips. Dobby is always honoured to keeps Harry Potter's secrets for him, his secrets are not bad like my last master's... that was a terrible thing to say." Harry had to stop him before he started to hurt himself. "Dobby, you are free now and the Malfoy's are evil."

"Still, it was a terrible thing to say."

"I order you not to hurt yourself, Dobby."

"Thank you, sir. You is great, Harry, sir."

"Okay, Dobby, we are getting a little off track here. You see the thing is, I am going to open a children's home of sort and I am going to need some help."

"Harry Potter wants Dobby's help?"

"If you want to leave Hogwarts. I would pay you and give you time off, let you take holidays but I can't do it by myself, I need help."

"I is honoured that you want Dobby to work for you but..." Dobby looked a little worried.

"But what?"

"I is worried to leave Winky, because nobody else would look after her."

"She can also join us if she wants to."

"You are great and good, Harry Potter. Thank you."

"Then all we need to do is negotiate your wages and time off."

"Now I is getting one Sunday a month off and one Galleon a week."
"You can have three Galleons a week and every Sunday off. How does that sound? Oh, and the same for Winky."

"You have yourself a deal, Harry Potter. I is so happy! When do we start?"

"Not yet, Dobby, I don't know when. It will be a lot of hard work, the house needs tidying up and redecorating and I can't move in and do anything until Voldemort is dead."

"Harry will beat You-Know-Who because Harry is great and good, he is evil." Harry wished it were that easy.

He was pleased with the deal he had made with Dobby; it would keep Hermione happy because it had been Dobby's choice to go work for him and he would be paid and get time off. And it would help him with the workload a bit. Not that he was entirely sure what the workload would involve in running an orphanage and halfway house. He guessed he would learn that in the courses he would be taking after the summer.

***

Harry was frantic; he was sitting down to take his first N.E.W.T, Transfiguration theory.

"There will be no talking during the exam, roll up your scrolls when you have finished. Keep your eyes to yourself. I will dismiss you when time is up. Begin." Came the loud voice of the examiner over the great hall, where everyone was sat in silence, waiting to start his or her exam.

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They filed out of the hall when they were told they could leave.

"So, mate, how do you think you did?" Ron asked him.

"Okay, I think. I was able to answer all the questions, though I wouldn't say I got them all right, mind you."

"Okay, I think. I was able to answer all the questions, though I wouldn't say I got them all right, mind you."

"Same here, I think I did okay. No need to ask her, I bet she did the extra credit questions." They both chortled.

"You would both be right, I did. If you had studied as much as I did, you also would have answered them."

"We did almost, but we needed breaks to eat." Ron answered in jest. Harry just rolled his eyes and walked quickly back to the dorm to collect his notes for the Transfiguration practical they had to do this afternoon.

Harry found the practical a little easier then the theory test, mainly because he didn't need to know the science behind the transformation, just the incantation and the will for it to change. He had to demonstrate how to turn a wooden stool into a bed again. Harry just smiled, remembering how he had fell asleep on the bed last time he had tried this spell. After he had done that he had to do the live animal test and change a kitten into an item of clothing, the more complicated the item the more points you were awarded. Harry went for a relatively safe bet and chose an item from the middle. He successfully turned the kitten into a cardigan. He smiled to himself when he knew Hermione would go for the toughest and choose the double-breasted
suit jacket. He was right when the three of them had met up, Ron, like him, had gone for the safer middle option, the cardigan; and Hermione had gone for the jacket.

***

The next day was the Potions exams. The practical was in the morning. They had to make Veritaserum. The trio smirked to each other because they had had it drilled into their heads by Severus in the extra lessons on how to make this properly. The examiner had even given a little speech about how he did not expect anyone to make it properly because it was such a difficult potion to make. They had been given the base of the potion already made for them, that was the easy part and they had to add the rest of the ingredients to finish it off. They were told they would be marked on their skill and awarded points on how close they would come to the final product.

As the three left the classroom they were giggling because all three of them were convinced that they had made it correctly and decided they really should thank Severus somehow. Harry suggested that they get him a bunch of rare orchids because he was a fan of the flower; Hermione agreed having seen his house and garden. Ron grumbled about giving Snape flowers but agreed nonetheless.

All three had wished the theory was as much fun as the practical, it was a doozey. Harry made a note to tell Sev that he was evil for setting such a difficult exam. All three of them agreed, they were happy to see the Polyjuice potion on the theory exam but the rest was hard. Even Hermione admitted it was tough but believed she had done well. Harry and Ron decided to reserve judgment on it until the results came out.

***

The next two days were taken up with Herbology and Care Of Magical Creatures. All three of them reckoned they had done well in both of those exams. Friday was the Defense Against The Dark Arts exam. Harry reckoned he aced the theory and the practical; he had to do simple things like throw off the Imperius Curse and cast another Patronus Charm. He believed with the top marks Dumbledore had insisted he get for his course work he would receive another outstanding.

***

They had the weekend; off thank Merlin, everybody agreed. Hermione decided she needed more study time, Ron settled down to a mini tournament of chess amongst the Gryffindors and Harry slipped out to visit Severus.

"I can't believe you set such a difficult exam."

"You and your friends should pass the practical with ease, if you do not I will kill the three of you."

"You would, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, for we have studied that potion a lot."

"The theory, Severus what were you thinking?"
He saw Severus smirk at him. "I would have thought that you three in particular would have enjoyed going over the Polyjuice potion again."

"I have no idea what you are getting at."

"Of course," was the sarcastic reply.

Harry narrowed his eyes at Severus playfully; he was convinced that Severus knew about their adventures with that potion in the second year, but was not stupid enough to bring it up.
"Maybe, but the rest was tough. I have said it before and I will say it again, you are an evil man."

"Why thank you, I do try my best. So how are the others going?"

"Good, I think. Transfiguration I did well in, Defense Against The Dark Arts was a breeze and it was fun to watch Larkswood squirm. Herbology, Care of Magical Creatures were both good. I think I should do all right. Not as well as Hermione, but I think there will be very few people who will do as well as her."

"Indeed."

Harry took another sip from his just recently refilled glass of red wine. "Are you trying to get me drunk, Professor? Because if you are, I don't mind." Harry gave him a cheeky grin.

"Imp! Why ever would I want to do that?"

"So you can have your wicked way with me."

"Do I need to get you drunk to do that?" Harry smiled at the raised eyebrow Severus gave him.

"No, I guess not. Does that make me, what was it you called me before?"

"A floozy."

"Yes, does that make me a floozy?"

"Completely."

"I promise to only be a floozy with you." He was slightly startled at Severus bursting out in laughter, it was only the second or third time he had heard it. "What?"

"Do you even know what a floozy is, Mister Potter?"

"Kind of."

"For one who has done and seen so much, you have lived an incredibly sheltered life, Harry."

"You shouldn't take the piss out of the inflicted, it's not nice."

"Actually, I find it endearing and very attractive."

Harry smiled as Sev leaned in to kiss him. Harry sighed in satisfaction as he pulled Severus
down on top of him. "You know I have never been called endearing before."

"Really?" Harry could feel Sev kiss down the side of his neck.

"Mmmm, I was called shit-head a few times by my family."

Severus stopped kissing his neck and pulled up next to him and leaned on one of his elbows. "Don't worry about them, what goes around always comes around." There was a positively evil grin on his face.

Harry narrowed his eyes in suspicion. "What have you got planned?"

"Nothing."

"Yeah right! I know you, Severus Snape."

"Trust me."

"Said the spider to the fly."

"Nice analogy."

"Well?"

"Do you really believe Albus would allow me to go around and 'play' with some useless muggles for fun, Harry?"

"No, I guess not, but you are not head of Slytherin for nothing."

He was given another wicked grin. "No, I guess not."

"Just promise me one thing, just wait until I am out of there."

"I have no reason to promise you anything because I have no plans of doing anything evil to your family, no matter how much I might want to." Harry's lips were once again recaptured in another kiss. Somewhere in the back of his mind he couldn't help but think Severus had out manoeuvred him somehow.

***

Thoughts of his family facing down one Severus Snape in full pissed off mode slipped from his mind the following week as Harry had to sit his final N.E.W.T.'s. He had nothing Monday but that just gave him an extra day to study up on Charms. He really wanted to do well in Charms because it was his mother's best subject and he had very little to associate with her, that was why he wanted to do well. He aced the practical but was a little unsure about the theory paper. His fears were a little alleviated when he discussed it with Hermione afterwards, he seemed to have answered most of the questions the same as she had, so that was a relief.

As the week finished and all exams came to an end Harry thought he had done rather well, he was not expecting outstanding for everything by any means but he had hoped he would see a few exceeds expectations. The only one he really wanted and thought he had achieved an outstanding in was Defense Against The Dark Arts, purely because he wanted to wind up
Larkswood about how dangerous he really was now that he had top marks in the subject.

McGonagall had also helped him with the paperwork needed to apply and sit for an Apparation licence test. He guessed it would be one of the few ways he could keep in touch with his friends once they had all gone. She had also confirmed the courses he would be starting after the summer. They still unfortunately left him with lots of spare time but she promised to help him find something to fill his time with other then annoying Severus. Harry rather liked the idea of annoying Severus all day but thought that might be pushing his luck.

***

Draco was sat in his dorm room holding the picture of Snape and Potter. He had thought long and hard about what to do. He knew time was running out for him, in a few weeks time he would be expected to return home and receive the Dark Mark. He believed his plan was foolproof; he had though it out and planned it down to the very words he would say. He had his backdoor escape route should he need one so to him it did not matter which side won, he would be safe.

He left his dorm room and gave his two goon shadows the slip and headed up to the second floor of the castle from the dungeons. He managed to avoid most people on his way up; a few people nodded their acknowledgement of him but most people stayed put of his way because the upper parts of the castle belonged to the other houses especially this part of the castle; it belonged to his natural enemies, the Gryffindorks!

He came to a stop outside the door of his destination and knocked and awaited permission to enter. "Come in." He entered the office he had not been in before and sat in the chair that he was offered. He hid the smirk he felt coming on because the look on the Professor's face, no doubt from the shock of seeing him. "How may I be of service to you, Mister Malfoy?"

"I need your help, Professor McGonagall."

"What could I possibly help you with?"

"I need your help with keeping me alive." Draco loved to be dramatic; it always made things seem so important.

"Excuse me, Mister Malfoy? That is not a very funny joke," was her curt reply.

"I am not joking, Professor, I have come to you seeking sanctuary at Hogwarts."

"Why come to me? You have your own Head of House and you know where the Headmasters office is," was her suspicious reply. Draco did not blame her, after all what she had said was right.

"Simple, I trust you. Your interests may lie with Gryffindor but I do not believe you would turn your back on any student in need."

"I most certainly wouldn't, Mister Malfoy."

"Then that is why I am here."

"But..."
"I do not trust Snape. Sorry, Professor Snape." He didn't want to get on her bad side to early on in their deal.

"Professor Snape is a trusted member of this staff."

He had expected this, but he truly did not know where Snape's loyalties lay. "You may trust him, Professor, but I do not. He is a long time friend of my father's, I know what he gets up to and I am afraid to think of what Professor Snape may also get up to." There, he had not said anything incriminating against Snape so if he was on the side of the so called light Draco would not get into any trouble and if he was on the Dark Lord's side again he would get in no trouble. He had not told anyone any details.

"I see. What about the Headmaster?"

This was going to be the tricky part; he knew McGonagall and Dumbledore were close. "I do not hold with everything he believes in. I truly do not know if he would help me because I wish to stay neutral. Where as you, I believe, would not stand in my way to remain passive during this war."

***

Minerva was wary of the young man sitting opposite her; she would dearly love to believe him to be telling the truth but knew this one to be one deceptive young man. "What would you like me to exactly do for you, Mister Malfoy?"

"I wish to be kept safe from the Death Eaters, the Dark Lord and my mother and father."

"You do know that I will have to discuss this with the Headmaster. I cannot give you sanctuary without his permission. If you are telling me the truth, which I dearly hope that you are, I will do everything in my power to help you." Minerva knew she had to take a small leap of faith, she knew the youngest Malfoy would have his own reasons for wanting to do this but if she could help keep one child safe during this war then she would do it.

"I understand that, Professor McGonagall. Just one thing, if I may?"

"Go on."

"This must be kept secret, especially while school is still going on, I would not be safe otherwise from a lot of the other students."

"Alright you have my word on it, but I will have to speak to the Headmaster, you understand."

"Fine, but only him no other, especially Professor Snape."

"Mister Malfoy..."

"Those are my terms, please!"

"Fine. Wait here and do not touch anything because I will know if you have. I will be back shortly." She left her office, locking it on the way out and headed straight to Albus' office. She had not had to deal with such a problem before and would need his help. A Malfoy coming to
her for help, she wasn't sure she could take such a shock at her age. Then again it did make sense, because Severus had played his part so well Malfoy didn't know for sure whom he was loyal to. She would have to congratulate Severus next time she saw him on being so brilliant at casting the illusion of aloofness, not that the man wasn't when he wanted to be.

***

Draco knew the next part would be the tricky one. It was one thing to play on the heartstrings of McGonagall but it was another thing to convince the Headmaster. He knew the old man was as tricky as any Slytherin known to man. On a good day he could no doubt outwit Salazar Slytherin himself.

***

Minerva entered Albus' office and took the tea offered to her. "Albus, you will never believe who I have sitting down in my office right now?"

"Go on, I could use a surprise, Minerva."

"Draco Malfoy." She smiled to herself as she watched Albus' face turn into an expression of surprise. "He has requested my protection and sanctuary."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know, Albus, what should I do?"

"It is your decision, Minerva, it is your protection he is seeking."

"If I agree, can he stay at Hogwarts?"

"He should be safe within the wards. They will not be at their strongest but truthfully I can not see Voldemort going to the trouble of attacking the school just for young Mister Malfoy and Harry will not be back until they have been reset and Voldemort will not enter then."

"He has asked me to tell no one else of his request apart from you. He does not trust Severus."

"Then there is hope that he is telling the truth, I dearly hope he is. The decision will lay with you, Minerva."

Minerva sat silently for a while thinking things over. It was her reputation she was risking, she did not offer her protection lightly. There was only one way that she would feel safe doing so. She asked Albus if she could place a fire call.

"Minerva, an unexpected pleasure."

"Charmed as always, Severus. I need to ask you a favour."

"Go on."

"I need a dose of Veritaserum and also the antidote."

"An unusual request, especially from you. I will bring it through once I have collected it."
"Thank you, Severus." His head popped out of the fireplace and she ended the call.

"A drastic measure, Minerva."

"I know, Albus, but I need to be sure. If I allow him to stay and he causes us trouble I could not live with myself." They both turned as Severus came through the fireplace, Minerva marveled at how he managed to floo with such grace.

"Here are the potions you requested. Do you know how to administer them?"

"Three drops to the tongue; wait a few moments and don't ask any leading questions. The same for the antidote, three drops."

"Correct, if there are any problems, call me."

"Thank you, Severus, I must be going." Minerva left the office leaving behind a curious Severus, but she had given her word she would not tell him about Draco, though she knew Draco had nothing to worry about from Severus.

***

Draco watched as McGonagall came back into the office alone, he was surprised, he was expecting her to be accompanied by Dumbledore. He watched as she sat down and pulled out two bottles and place them in front of her. He knew what those bottles held, he didn't have too much to worry about, there was no reason for his back door escape plan to ever come out and he knew where his loyalties lay, he had already told her that without Veritaserum.

***

"I am sorry for having to do this, Mister Malfoy, but I need to be sure. This is my reputation on the line."

"No problem, Professor."

Minerva only wanted to ask a few questions, nothing too private; she did not want to know whom the boy was involved with. She walked over tipped his head back and administered the serum. After a few moments she noticed his pupils dilate and all expression leave his face. "What is your name?"

"Draco Malfoy." His voice was monotonous.

"How old are you?"

"Seventeen."

"Why did you come to see me today, Mister Malfoy?" She was keeping her tone soft and inviting.

"For sanctuary and your protection."

"What do you need sanctuary and protection from?"
"My parents and the Dark Lord."

"Why do you need protection from your parents?"

"My father and mother wish for me to take the Dark Lord's mark."

"And the Dark Lord?"

"If I do not take his mark I will be branded a traitor and killed."

"And you do not wish to take the mark?"

"No."

"If you are allowed to stay at Hogwarts, do you plan to cause any trouble?"

"No."

"Are you planning on hurting or betraying Harry Potter to the Dark Lord or your father?"

"No."

"How do you feel about Harry Potter?"

"I hate him."

Minerva was a little shocked by the bluntness of his answer, she needed to know if he was planning on hurting Harry for his own purposes. "Do you wish him dead?"

"No."

"Where do your loyalties lie?"

"To myself."

"You do not support the Dark Lord?"

"No I do not."

"And you do not support Albus Dumbledore?"

"No." That worried her a little bit.

"Who do you hope will win the war?"

"I would prefer the side of the light to win."

***

Draco could feel his senses coming back to him as the antidote took effect. He breathed a sigh of relief as the interrogation came to an end. Luckily she had not asked him if he had a backup
plan should things go wrong. Draco reckoned he had this in the bag.

"Well, Mister Malfoy, as you want this to be kept quiet the best thing for you to do is keep this under your hat and report to me before everyone else is ready to leave the castle with all your things and I will assign you new quarters near my office when the time comes. A word of warning, Mister Malfoy, Mister Potter will also be staying at the castle from August on. I expect you to stay out of his way and do not antagonise him in any way. I can protect you only so much. Do I make myself clear?"

Draco instantly felt his blood boil at hearing Potter would also be here also and no doubt kissing up to Snape and everybody else. He had no choice though, these were her terms and he did not have many other options open to him. "Of course, Professor McGonagall."

"That will be all, Mister Malfoy."

Draco nodded at McGonagall and left her office. Once outside the door and half way down the corridor he allowed his customary smirk to return, he had gotten his way he would not be handed to the Dark Lord once school had finished.

**Next Chapter:** The seventh years' party and it's antidote time!

**Latin Translations:**

Conseco Induviae - *Strip / Shred Clothing.*
The Secret Guardian Angel - Chapter 27

Disclaimer: Never was mine / Never will be mine I am making no money from this story. Everything belongs to JK Rowling and Warner Bros.

Beta read by the charming JediCandy.

Chapter Twenty Seven - Graduation and Antidotes.

The exams were over and it was everyones last weekend at Hogwarts and all of the seventh years were in reflective moods. You could see most of them running around the corridors, collecting addresses from their friends and making promises to keep in touch with everyone. The one good thing that everyone was looking forward to was the 'big' night out; all students in the seventh year were allowed to go to it. Dumbledore had made an announcement last night at dinner that they all had been given permission to go to The Three Broomsticks for a big blow out before real life took over. Arrangements had been made for them to floo directly to the pub and floo back when they had finished for the night. Dumbledore had even set up a few extra wards on the pub to keep the bad elements out. Harry thought it was hilarious was that Severus was to be one of the chaperones for the night, along with Hagrid and Professor Sprout. He could not imagine Severus being comfortable in a pub and could not wait to see that image.

The one thing that was causing Harry a little bit of worry was that on Monday he was to take the antidote to reverse his age back to normal. It would be just over a month before it would take effect, on his birthday to be exact. He still had the same apprehensions as before but he knew Severus was going to force it down his throat if he did not take it willingly. So it was just easier to take it. Harry knew it was for the best anyway, that didn't mean he had to like it though! Harry managed to place it on the backburner, so to say, because he had his last night out for a while to get ready for. He was glad there would be no formal because he hated dancing with a passion. He knew some of the girls were going all out and getting dressed up but Harry could not really see the point, he had no one to impress because he already had his man in the bag. That brought a smile to his face; Severus, in less than a week, would no longer be his teacher!

Harry was quite impressed with himself, they had managed, for the most part, to keep their hands off of each other, there had only been one or two, well maybe three, instances where they had given into temptation. Harry thought that it was rather good going, considering he was seventeen years old and virtually every waking moment was consumed with thinking about sex. Especially when you had a sexy boyfriend who was only ever no more then a ten-minuet walk away.

"Harry, what are you thinking about?" Hermione asked him, bringing him out of his daydream.

"Nothing, Mione."

"Come on Harry, you have had a silly grin on your face for the last half an hour."
"Severus."

"Ahhh, well that makes sense." There was a wicked glint in her eye. "You must be excited about having something more with him soon?"

"Very much so." He gave her his award-winning smile.

"So what are you going to wear tonight?"

"Don't know, whatever first comes to hand."

"Harry!"

"What, Mione?"

"Don't you want to look good for your man?"

"What's the point, I already have my man and he likes me just the way I am. Also we are hardly going on a date tonight, he is acting as chaperone."

"That may be, but you should still make an effort to look good. Also, it would be just a little taste of what he will have from next week."

Harry rolled his eyes at her, "Mione, I don't own anything that wonderful, you know me and cloths have never had much in common."

"Nonsense, Harry, you are a wonderful looking young man, you just need to learn how to bring out your best features."

"Why do I have a feeling that we are going to start playing dress up Barbie and I am going to be Barbie?"

"Who's Barbie?" Ron chipped in.

"It's a girls muggle doll."

"Oh, why are you going to be playing the part of a muggle girls doll, mate?"

"I'm not, Ron. It's a figure of speech."

"Oh." Ron went back to his magazine on the Chuddley Cannons, completely confused about the conversation going on between his friends. Then again he often got lost with them when they talked 'muggle' to each other.

"Harry, follow me." Hermione marched off in the direction of his dorm.

"Why do I have a bad feeling about this?"

"Because Mione is about to play dress up with you. Good luck mate!"

"Thanks, Ron." Harry mumbled and went up the stairs to join his other friend.
Harry was watching out of the corner of his eye with fascination as Hermione went through all his clothes, casting various spells on them to either to change their size or colour. One minute his shirt was green, then the next it was blue and then back to green. "Harry, put this shirt on." Rather then argue he did as he was told. "Harry, you have absolutely no clue, come here." He was a little confused, he had put the shirt on as she had instructed. She quickly made some changes, first she undid the collar button and the next two down, he felt a little exposed. "Stop fidgeting." Then she unbuttoned his cuffs and untucked the shirt from his jeans.

"Mione, I just tucked that in." Harry protested.

"Stop fussing, it looked stupid." She stepped back and looked at him. "Much better, but the colour is still wrong. Take these off, its not like you need them."

"But..."

"If anyone asks, say it is a temporary spell."

"Alright." Harry reluctantly took off his glasses. He felt exposed without them, different.

Hermione pointed her wand at Harry and his shirt turned white. "No, something's still wrong." She pointed her wand again and the shirt turned black. "Much better. It accentuates your figure."

"You're lucky I trust you so much."

"Why is that, Harry?" She asked puzzled.

"Because you have just pointed your wand at me twice."

"Oh! Sorry, Harry, I didn't think."

"It's okay, Mione, I was only joking."

Harry received a playful slap on the arm for his teasing, Harry just laughed. "Harry, you're terrible, I will fix you some trousers next."

"What's wrong with my trousers?"

"They don't fit properly." She went about casting spells on a pair of plain black trousers. "Here they should be more tailored now, put them on."

"But you're in the room."

"Harry, sorry to say this, love, but you are not my type. Also, you are gay! So strip."

"Yes, Miss!" Harry changed from his jeans into the trousers Hermione passed him. They felt pretty good, a nice fit. "These are good, Mione."

"Thank you, Harry. Over the Christmas holidays, Mrs. Weasley taught me all the household
spells. Why, I have no idea. If Ron wants his trousers fixed, he can do them himself. Same goes for his dirty dishes." They both laughed at that. Seeing Harry trying to tuck his shirt in Hermione scolded him. "Tuck that shirt in and the next time I point a wand at you it will hurt!"

"Sorry, Mione, just habit. Feels strange with it untucked, but I'll get used to it."

"Harry, you definitely look better but something is still off. Wait here."

Harry waited. While Hermione was gone, he looked at himself in the mirror; even he had to admit to himself she had done a good job. He looked a little less awkward and the black trousers and shirt made him look a little taller and without his glasses he even looked a little older. As he was checking on his Runespoor, Hermione came bursting back in with Ginny.

"Harry, stand straight. Right. Ginny, what's missing?"

"A belt."

"You're right, something with a nice buckle but not too fancy."

"Wait here, let me go get something and transfigure it." Ginny went rushing out of the room. Harry just looked perplexed.

"Harry, sit. Where is your comb?"

"Bedside table."

Hermione collected it and stood behind the chair in which Harry was seated and started combing his hair. "I never noticed it was this long before, it suits you, especially the fringe."

"You mean I have done something right?"

"Shut up, Harry." Hermione finished combing through his hair and ruffled it up a little.

"Mione, why did you comb it just to mess it up?"

"It's called the just-got-out-of-bed-look, very fashionable in the muggle world."

"Really." His tone was just a little too sarcastic. He had definitely been spending too much time with Sev.

"Stop complaining, Harry. Trust me, Professor Snape will not be able to keep his hands off you."

"I should be so lucky."

"You never know, Harry." Ginny came bursting back in the room and handed Hermione a belt, she told Harry to put it on. "Oh, Ginny! It looks good." It was not an overly fancy belt but it looked good, it was plain black leather with a plain solid silver buckle shaped plainly. "So what do you think, Ginny?"

"If I hadn't met him before, I would be at his feet." She giggled.
"I agree, but just one more thing." Hermione went up and undid a couple of the buttons at the bottom of the shirt.

"Why did you do that?"

"Doesn't hurt to show a certain someone just a little, you know." Hermione winked at him and Ginny just smiled. Harry wondered just how much Ginny knew?

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Severus could think of 101 better ways to spend an evening than chaperoning a bunch of kids who were, on doubt, going to get inebriated out of their minds. He was the advance party, as such, and was waiting in the pub for the brats to arrive in their droves. The most annoying aspect for him was that he would be in the same room as Harry and unable to go over and have a chat with him or even buy him a drink. No, he would be stuck in the company of Hagrid and Pomona all night; not that he disliked either of them, he was quite fond of the half giant in his own way and Pomona was a good colleague. He just did not wish to spend his Saturday evening with all the seventh year students.

He sat quietly in the corner, wishing time would speed up and tonight would finish, no such luck though. The first of the students started to come through the floo connection to find tables or go off to the bar. The pub was nearly full when he heard a few snorts of laughter and even a few gasps. He reckoned Harry had just arrived because his entrances from a floo connection were always comical, as much as he loved that boy he had to admit that, out of the air, he had very little grace.

Severus glanced up and almost had to do a double take. Harry looked in a word, gorgeous. He seemed taller them before; maybe it was all the black he was wearing. He had on a nicely fitting black shirt that defined his muscles perfectly. His long black trousers sitting snugly on his hips, a simple silver belt buckle drew his eyes there, the trousers made his legs look longer. The amount of buttons undone on his shirt showed just enough flesh to make him enticing, three at the top and two at the bottom, Severus noted. His cuffs were also undone, giving him a smart but casual look. Severus raked his eyes over Harry's body and up to his face, damn he looked so much better with his glasses off. Without them you could see his eyes properly and they just seemed to sparkle with energy and power. Severus also liked the way Harry's hair was, a little bit longer than in the past but still a little messy. The longer hairstyle really looked better a little mussed up than his former shorter style had. It also framed his thinned down face perfectly, accentuating his cheekbones. He could tell Harry was nervous at all the attention he was getting because of the way he was standing. Both of his hands were in his trouser pockets and his tongue was darting out to wet his lips, a habit he had when he was nervous.

Severus had to suppress the moan that was threatening to come out because the only thing on his mind now was marching up to Harry to tell all of the silly little girls they didn't stand a chance because Harry needed a real man to tame him and not some silly witch that wanted the glory of marrying the-boy-who-lived. Then he would kiss Harry within an inch of his life and drag him somewhere private and have his wicked way with him. Sod going all the way back to Hogwarts, there was a small Bed & Breakfast across the road. Severus believed he could wait just about that long. Then Harry had looked over at him and when their eye met, Severus could see the lust and desire in Harry's eyes and he was sure his eyes were just as telling. He curtly nodded to Harry and got the same action back at him. Merlin! Tonight was going to be a long night!
Harry had been aware of Severus checking him out from the moment he had arrived in the pub. He could almost feel the other man's stare bearing down on him, it was all he could do not to run over to him and just kiss him and tell him he loved him and wanted him and, sod this stupid party, ask him to take him somewhere private. He knew of a small Bed & Breakfast across the road. No, he needed to stop having these thoughts; otherwise it would just make the night seem longer. He had resisted as long as he could and when he did look back at Sev he was instantly turned on by the lust in his lover's eyes for him. Damn, he wanted that man and, damn, Hermione was good. He decided that as soon as school was out and he was able, he would drag her clothes shopping so he could buy himself a whole new wardrobe, if one outfit could get this reaction imagine what a whole wardrobe full would get!

Harry leaned in to whisper to Hermione, "Thanks, love, I owe you big time. You should have seen the way he just looked at me."

"I told you it would work, you should never doubt me."

"I never will, ever again. You and me have a shopping date sometime in the near future."


"Red wine, French, Sancerre if possible."

"Fancy tastes, Harry, I wonder where they have come from?" Harry just rolled his eyes at her.

***

A few hours later and quite a few glasses of red wine, later Harry had relaxed and was having a good time. He was glad he had been allowed to go, he knew a big part of why Sev was chaperone was that Dumbledore knew that he would do anything to keep Harry safe, but he also knew Sev would want to be there to keep an eye on him. It really was very sweet, Harry thought. He was sitting on a table with his dorm mates and Hermione was on Ron's lap. Harry envied them a little for the openness they were allowed in their relationship, but he did not allow it to get him down. He was brought back to the conversation when he heard Sev's name being mentioned. He looked up and was silently pleased to see both Ron and Hermione were a little annoyed at the 'Snape bashing'.

"I think you are all horrible about Professor Snape. We were very lucky to have such a brilliant and talented Potions Master teach us potions." Hermione immediately jumped to his defense.

"You're just saying that because you are a teacher's pet."

"Oi, watch it, Dean. That's my girl you're speaking to." Ron raised his hand to silence the friendly rebuttal, "And who, I must hasten to add, broke more school rules in her first year then you did in all seven. She most definitely is not a teacher's pet, just smart is all." Everyone at the table made cooing noises and Ron predictably blushed just a little. Everyone laughed.

"Well, if she likes him so much, maybe she should offer to buy him a drink and go over and have a chat with him." Seamus laughed.

"Nah, I've got a better one, Harry, mate, I dare you to go over and join Snape for a drink." Ron
leaned back behind Hermione where his face was concealed by her back and winked at Harry.

"Harry, he will kill you! Brilliant dare, Ron." Seamus chipped in.

"Harry, I don't know about this. Snape is evil." Neville squeaked.

Harry raised an eyebrow at his friend's sneaky behaviour, he was impressed! "I was never one to run away from a dare! I accept your dare, but will you accept one back, Ron?"

"Bring it on, mate!" Ron smiled back at him.

"You two will get in trouble right up until the day we leave." Hermione chastised them, but Harry could tell by the glint in her eye that she thought Ron's idea was brilliant and that she was just playing her part.

Harry got up from the table and was told by his friends that he would be sadly missed once Snape had killed him. Harry bought two glasses of red wine and approached the far booth at which Severus sat. His breath hitched as he stood by the table awaiting permission to sit, this man always took his breath away. Sev was seated sideways on the bench, with his back against the wall and his leg up on the seat. It looked as if all his concentration was directed at the book he was reading, but Harry knew him better than that.

"Are you going to sit down before you fall down, Mister Potter?"

Harry gave a lazy grin as he sat opposite Severus in the booth. All of the students had kept away from this area, even the Slytherin's, but a few of them had now stopped talking and were looking in their direction. Harry was glad the students had stayed away; it gave them a little privacy now. "I bought you a drink, sir."

Severus looked up from his book and smirked at Harry. "Such generosity, Mister Potter."

Harry slightly raised his glass, "To the past, sir."

It would seem to the rest of the pub that Severus was giving Harry nothing but a blank stare, but Harry had long ago learnt how to speak 'Sev'. It was a tricky language at first, but Harry had paid attention and was almost fluent. "To the future, may it be more pleasant between us."

Severus brought his glass together with Harry's, there was a quiet chime when the glasses made contact.

"I'll definitely drink to that." Harry took a small sip from his glass. "I think I'm tipsy, a few more of these and I'll be drunk."

He saw that sexy smirk cross Severus' face, "Indeed. Tell me, not that I am complaining, but how come you are here?"

"Ah, a dare from Ron."

"Impressive, I didn't think Weasley had it in him to be so sneaky."

"He can surprise the best of us on his day. You should never under estimate him."

"I must admit to being impressed with his defeat of Minerva's chess set back in your first year."

"Was that a compliment, Sev?" Harry leaned in over the table and spoke quietly.

"Yes, but he will never believe you so what is the point in telling him?"

"He has a little more respect for you then you are aware of, more then even he is aware of."

"By the way, thank you for the flowers, they were quite beautiful."

"Hey, no problem. It was the least we could do after what you had taught us about Veritaserum, and it coming up on the potions final."

"Pure luck, I assure you."

"Regardless, you helped us a lot. So, thank you. Glad you liked them though, we were assured they were a rare breed of orchid and quite revered."

"Yes, they are, they must have been hard to come by?"

"It was worth it."

"I must admit, I never though Mister Weasley would send me flowers!"

Harry grinned, "Ron does what he's told, bless him."

"I must compliment you on your outfit tonight, very fetching."

Harry gave him another lazy grin and leaned back across the table again. "Why thank you! I was hoping it would drive you wild enough to drag me from this place and have your wicked way with me."

Severus shifted position and also leaned across the table bringing their faces mere inches apart. "Believe me, Mister Potter, it almost was enough." His voice was low and sultry and was going straight to Harry's groin.

"Only almost?" He whispered back.

Severus brought one of his hands up and put one of his fingers almost together with his thumb; there was barely a hairs width of space between them. "This close."

Harry gulped, but kept staring straight into Sev's eyes. "You know I am so tempted to just kiss you right now." To an outsider it just looked like two old enemies having a staring contest, especially with their long hair covering their eyes from anyone else.

"And I am very tempted to do many wicked things to you and your luscious body right now. If this bar were empty and it was just you and I, I would have you screaming in pleasure in under a minute," came the quiet reply.

"Right now you wouldn't need a whole minute all you would have to do is keep talking and I would be very messy, literally." A smirk was his reply. Harry needed to break the sexual tension building up between them before others guessed what was going on. So he leaned back, picked up his glass and began to sip his wine. Severus did the same but with a wicked smirk on his
face. Harry watched him over the rim of his glass, lust evident in his eyes.

***

After Harry had returned to the table where his friends were, they had all been amazed to see that he had not been hexed within an inch of his life from Snape. They all joked that they knew Harry was brave but they did not realise that he was suicidal.

It was getting close to the time to leave, Hagrid had joined almost all of the tables at one point and was now almost as drunk as most of the students. Professor Sprout was definitely tipsy but it seemed as if Professor Snape was stone cold sober. He had only had one alcoholic drink, the glass that Harry had bought him. Even Hermione had let her hair down and was drunk, not as drunk as Harry and Ron but then again someone was needed to help floo them back to the castle. Last orders were called at the bar and it was Harry's round. While waiting at the bar he felt a small breeze pass him, when he looked around he saw the back of Sev heading towards the bathroom, he checked his pocket which was feeling heavier and felt three new items in there. He carefully pulled them out half way and saw that Sev had slipped in three vials of hangover potion into his pocket. Harry again thought Sev was very sweet, especially because he had included Ron and Hermione. Harry knew Sev was attempting to build bridges with them for Harry's sake.

Harry ordered and paid for the drinks and was having trouble carrying them back to the table, when he felt a cool familiar hand rest on his shoulder. "Would you care for a hand, Mister Potter?"

"That would be appreciated, sir." Harry shyly smiled back at Sev. Severus just rolled his eyes back at him. He helped him carry the drinks back to a slightly stunned table, after all it was not everyday you got Snape to help you. After he left,

Dean whispered to him, "Harry, what did you say to Snape to make him so nice?"

Being drunk, Harry had to watch what he was saying, he wanted to blurt out that it helped when you gave your professor a blowjob but settled on, "It must be my charming wit!" The others looked sideways at him but accepted his word on it.

***

Everyone finished up their drinks and stood by the floo connections to return to the castle. Harry knew he was too drunk to care about much now and he just wanted to curl up on the floor and go to sleep where he was. He, Ron and Hermione were one of the last groups to leave. It was just the Gryffindor seventh year dorms and a few Hufflepuff's left to go through when Harry found his world tipping a little then a strong hand placed on his back to up-right him again. Harry slowly turned around and stumbled right into Sev's chest. Merlin, he was drunk and horny and after inhaling the intoxicating sent of cinnamon and vanilla from the object of his desires his libido went crazy. He looked up and grinned at Sev. "Oops," was all he could manage to say. A few of the other students giggled. Harry just wanted to ravish Severus but somewhere in the back of his mind a small voice was yelling at him that now was really not the time. "Sorry."

"No damage was done, but we have yet to see you master the floo connection, and in this state could be quiet amusing."

"You would think that, Professor Snape." Harry slurped ever so slightly while pointing a finger
right into Sev's hard chest. "But I know that you will miss me when I am no longer your student."

Severus raised an amused eyebrow at Harry and smirked at him. "I honestly can say that I will not miss you as my student, Mister Potter,"

"You will, you know why I know this."

"Please do enlighten me." Severus sounded like he was trying not to laugh.

"Because I will miss you not being my professor, Professor, in some sick way." Even Harry looked confused at what he was actually saying.

"I'm touched, Mister Potter, I never knew you liked potions so much. To think I was wrong for the last seven years," came the dry reply.

"Ahhh, you know I love you, really." Harry grinned then burst into fits of laughter.

***

"I believe it is your turn to go through the connection, Mister Potter." Severus gently pushed him towards the fireplace. Harry gripped onto his arm and pulled him with him. "Hagrid, Professor Sprout, it looks as though I am to accompany Mister Potter through the connection, will you be all right with the few remaining students?"

"Don' you worry 'bout the last few 'ere, P'fessor Snape. You make sure 'arry gets back okay. I think he as 'ad to much too drink." Hagrid told him.

Luckily the connections were big enough to allow two people to travel at the same time. Severus pulled Harry into the fireplace and placed one arm around Harry's waist and with the other he grabbed a handful of floo powder. Before he could even get a word out he felt Harry turn around in his grip and wrap his arms around his waist and place a small kiss on his cheek. Severus blinked in slight surprise and smirked at the look of shock on the faces of the remaining students. He noticed Harry's two friends Mister Weasley and Miss Granger desperately trying not to laugh out loud. Severus had to admit Harry's condition was hilarious, oh, he was going to have fun making Harry squirm later over this. He called out "Hogwarts Great Hall" and they disappeared from the fireplace only to arrive back at Hogwarts a minute later. Severus reckoned that was Harry's best ever landing from a floo connection, mainly because he was half unconscious and Severus was supporting him..

"Ah, Severus. I see you have accompanied Harry back."

"Indeed, Headmaster. Mister Potter was barely able to stand, let alone floo,"

"Hello, Headmaster, I love you too, you know," slurred a giggly Harry from Severus' arms.

"Why thank you, Harry. I am very fond of you too, you know." Albus told him as the last few students came through and left the hall. Ron and Hermione were the last two through, it seemed as if Ron was in just a bad a state as Harry and Hermione was only a little better.

"But not like I love him, sir." Harry prodded Severus' chest again.
"I should hope not, Harry." Albus grinned at him.

Ron and Hermione came over towards Harry. "I love them too you know, they are my bestest buddies and my family." Harry announced to the four adults present.

"Sir, would you like me to help Harry back to his dorm?" Asked Hermione as best she could.

"I would be most grateful for that Miss Granger." Severus unwrapped Harry from around him and passed him to her.

"I didn't mean to leave you two out. I love you also, Hagrid and Professor Sprout, you are very sweet, you helped save Mione back in our second year, I love you too." Harry grinned at them.

"Thank you 'arry, I love you too. Now off ta bed with ya." Hagrid replied. Professor Sprout blushed and thanked him also.

As the three students left the hall, Severus gently grabbed Hermione's arm and quietly said, "If you check Harry's left pocket, there is something for you three that will make tomorrow more bearable. Goodnight, Miss Granger." She looked a little confused at him but nodded and wished him goodnight.

***

Hermione had managed to get the two boys to their dorm and lying down on their beds, she was in no fit state to be attempting to undress them as she was also tipsy. Then she remembered something Professor Snape had said and checked Harry's left pocket. In it she found three vials of hangover potion. She smiled to herself, yes, it did seem as though Professor Snape truly did care for Harry. She left one for each of the boys with a scribbled note telling them to drink it the moment they woke up and headed to her own room.

***

Harry went down to the common room after finding and taking the hangover potion and showering. The common room was full of very hung-over seventh years.

"How come you three all look okay?" Ginny asked them from the sofa.

"We were given a graduation gift of sorts. A little hangover potion to make the morning after a little easier for us." Hermione told Ginny.

"Who?"

"Sorry, Ginny, that's a secret." Hermione told her.

"Its not fair."

"We'll tell you soon, Gin, okay?" Harry told her.

"Okay, but I'll hold you to it." Ginny smiled at Harry and went to join her boyfriend who was suffering.

"Hey Harry! How are you feeling today?" Dean called from across the room.
"Good actually, better than you from the looks of things."

"Maybe, but at least while I was drunk I didn't tell Snape I loved him and kissed him as well!"

Harry's eyes widened like house elves. "I didn't. Oh Merlin! He is going to kill me." Harry said in shock. The rest of the room fell into fits of laughter.

Ron leaned over to him, "I don't think he was too mad, not many people were around. He looked sort of amused, for Snape anyway."

Hermione also nodded towards him, "He didn't sound pissed off at all last night, I think Ron is right he was amused by it all."

"I hope so," Harry replied. He truly hoped things were okay, he was due up in the Headmaster's office first thing tomorrow morning with Sev to take the antidote.

***

The next morning seemed to arrive really quickly and Harry found himself sitting in front of the Headmaster awaiting Severus' arrival to administer the potion. Harry had not taken a cup of tea, as he was worried that the calming potion it was laced with would cause the antidote to have some weird side effects. The door opened and Severus walked in, Harry almost jumped out of his skin from fright.

"If you will excuse me, gentlemen, I will go and collect the antidote." Dumbledore said just before leaving the room and going through a door in the office.

"Sev, oh God, Sev! About Saturday night..."

"Harry, you have no cause for concern. You were drunk, your friends saw it as nothing more than that."

"You're not angry at me?"

"No, highly amused by you, yes, but not angry."

"Thank God, I was so worried." Severus smiled at Harry, and this relieved him greatly; he couldn't help it, he stepped forward and embraced Severus.

They both turned at the sound of a small cough. Harry blushed, "Sorry, sir."

"No need to apologise, shall we?" Dumbledore passed Severus a container that Severus waved a hand over while muttering a few words in Latin and he turned towards Harry.

"You will need to drink this down in one go, it has the same ingredient in it as the first one you took so it will be very moorish, so it shouldn't cause a problem. If you wish, you can mix it with some juice if you want but no more then a twenty-five percent mix. Any questions?"

"The last one made me sleep, you said it was so I would not be aware of the pain."

"There is nothing to worry about here. You will take the potion now, I removed the sleeping
properties from it and as you know, it will take until your birthday for it to work. The day before your birthday, some very strong painkilling potions will arrive at your home, take them exactly five minutes before midnight, then once an hour every hour for the following five hours. Understand?"

"Yes, one at five to midnight then every hour on the hour, got it. Okay, I'm ready. Just one thing though."

"Yes?"

"What happens if I fall asleep?"

"You won't, the painkillers will have a mild pepper-up in them to help keep you awake. The next day as you are aware of, someone will come to collect you and bring you back to the castle where you can sleep the day away. Anything else?"

"No, I'm as ready as I'll ever be. I'll take it without the juice, the less liquid the better." Harry accepted the cup of antidote and knocked it back in one gulp. Sev was right, it was moorish. It didn't taste too bad; it mainly tasted of aniseed. He handed back the now empty cup to Severus and gave him a nervous smile. "Thank you for all you're help Severus."

"My pleasure, now we wait and see."

**Next Chapter:** It's Harry's last night in Hogwarts and he's ready to collect on a promise and Bill works everything out.
The Secret Guardian Angel - Chapter 28

Harry was feeling a little sad, it was his last full day in Hogwarts; even though he was coming back in a month's time, it would not be the same. His friends would be long gone and Severus would not be back in the castle full time until September. He had a horrible feeling he was going to be lonely. He would miss his friends and Sev terribly. The upside was that his courses would start soon, so that would help keep him busy. Dumbledore had told him he was allowed to go flying as much as he liked. He had never been able to fly for fun during the summer before. He was also a little nervous because he planned on going to see Severus tonight, after all he was no longer his teacher, they could do what ever the hell they pleased. He had to trap Hermione first to help him get dressed for tonight, he wanted her to spin her magic on him tonight so Sev would look at him like he did last weekend.

He knew she would, she was a big softy for romance. He was really going to miss her and Ron. Boy, would he miss Ron, his first real friend his own age that Dudley could not bully away. He knew they would always stay in touch, especially now Ron and Hermione were going to get a flat with two bedrooms so he would always have a place to escape to. They had told him that Dumbledore had offered to help place some wards on their flat, as had some of the other professors, according to Dumbledore. Harry had a sneaky suspicion Severus was one of the professors because he would know Harry would visit them. Severus' over protectiveness made Harry smile, he had never had someone care for him so deeply before. It was nice to know someone was watching out for him and had his best interests at heart. As much as he loved Dumbledore, he knew that on occasion the old man had pushed him into situations to test him.

***

Severus was packing up most of his personal belongings for the summer. His house elves would be arriving this afternoon to collect it and take it back to the manor. He was leaving behind more then he usually would because he planned on dropping in to see Harry throughout the summer. He had considered staying at the school for the summer but had a few things he needed to complete at home, like the new potions he needed to finish and register. He also needed to see to the paperwork of the Snape estate and visit a few of the properties abroad. He would love to take Harry with him, especially to the properties abroad; he knew Harry had never been anywhere and would enjoy the experience. First, he had to persuade Albus to let him take Harry to the house he had given him in Scotland. Albus was not playing ball.

While going through his stuff he came across something that he though would be perfect for
Harry's birthday. He was going to wait until after his birthday to give it to him, but he didn't want Harry to think he had forgotten his birthday so he had decided to give it to him early. He would give it to him tomorrow before he got on the train.

Severus wondered if Harry would visit him tonight or not. He wanted his young lover to spend his last night at Hogwarts with him but he knew realistically that Harry would very possibly be spending it with his friends, after all it was his last night with them also. Severus was trying his hardest not to be selfish with Harry's time, he was young and still wanted to go out and have fun. And why not, Severus mused, it wasn't like he had had the world's best childhood full of parties and friends like he had once believed. So much had changed over the seven years he had known Harry. If back in Harry's first year someone had told him he would end up dating Harry in seven years he would have hexed them into hell after he had laughed his ass off. Nothing about that awkward child had turned his head. He could in all honesty say it was not until they had spent that month together last summer that he had had any feelings except annoyance towards Harry Potter. He had given up hating him some time in his sixth year but he sure as hell was not fond of him in any way!

No, it had definitely changed during last summer, he was able to witness by a strange quirk of fate what an attractive man Harry would grow up to be. By being attracted to his older look it allowed him to look a little deeper and discover an intelligent, funny, intoxicating and a surprisingly insecure young man. It had taken a while to get used to seeing Harry looking seventeen, at first it had made him uncomfortable because every time something sexual happened between them Harry had been looking ten years older then all of a sudden he was seventeen again and it brought it crashing back to him that he had just had fooled around with a student of his. There had been one or two times that something of a sexual nature had happened between them when Harry had looked seventeen, so he had to admit he was getting more used to it now. Severus let out a snort of laughter, more used to it now! Who was he kidding? He had gone and done something he promised would not happen again, he had gone and fallen in love. So it no longer mattered that Harry looked seventeen because he was blinded by love, and he thought Harry was just simply perfect the way he was.

***

Harry had managed to get Hermione to help him out and dress him up again. She had been happy to oblige. She changed one of his plain white school shirts into a deep red and taken off the pockets from the breast and managed to tailor it to fit his shape better. She also changed one of the pairs of trousers he had picked up at Gladrags a few months back from black to a dark charcoal grey. Harry had asked why not keep them black and she had told him to shut up and mumbled something about softening the lines. He just smiled at her. She had also spelled his summer cloak from black to charcoal grey and tied his hair back with a green tie, claiming it was symbolic. He just smiled at her. He had mentioned to her that he wanted to pass a note on secretly to Severus at supper to tell Severus to expect him later that night. Hermione had taught him a really good spell to pass notes along so nobody would notice. He had asked her why she had not taught this to them years ago. She told him she was not prepared to help him break the rules for no good reason.

***

Severus was sitting at the head table waiting for supper to be served when he heard a few hushed whispers across the room and he looked up. Harry was walking in looking absolutely fabulous, tall, dark and powerful. He had his hair tied back, which exposed his neck perfectly for feasting on, and the same buttons were undone as the weekend before, three at the top and
two at the bottom. The dark red of his shirt contrasted perfectly with the golden sun kissed glow of his skin and the almost black trousers looked good. They were the same colour as his cloak that was doing a fine impersonation of Severus' by billowing out behind him. Very edible, mused Severus. He couldn't keep his eyes off him, he wanted to go over and ravish Harry on the Gryffindor table he was about to sit down at. Sex on the Gryffindor table, interesting thought!

It was sometime during supper that a note appeared next to Severus' fork. He briefly thought it was from Hermione Granger as the last time he had received a note this way it had been from her. He immediately realised it was not from her when he saw the scrawled SS on the front of it; it was Harry's writing. He opened the note carefully so no one else could see it.

S.

Don't think I have forgotten that promise you made me. You are officially no longer my teacher. After "lights out" at 10pm you may expect me at 10:01pm.

Yours always,

H.

Severus smirked to himself and a few minutes later looked up and caught Harry's eye and gave him a barley noticeable nod. It seemed as if Harry had got the message because he gave him his lazy smile back.

***

It was still a few minutes to ten and Harry was in the corridor not far from Sev's quarters under his cloak with his map in his hand. This would be the last time he would use it, after the summer he would pass it on. He had even placed a few spells on it so it could not leave the castle anymore, so no one could do a runner with it. If you tried to leave with it, it would just materialise back in the school into Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. He chose that location because only a rule breaker would ever go in there. His watch ticked onto 10.01pm and he softly knocked on the door. It opened instantly. Harry went in and threw off his cloak and then threw himself at Severus. He wrapped his arms around the older man's waist and just held him. He felt Sev's arms encircle his shoulders and pull him in tighter. "Merlin, I missed you, Sev."

"It has only been about a week since we were last alone."

"I know, but it doesn't stop me missing you, though. I know also that you think I am a sentimental Gryffindor so stop laughing." Harry turned his head slightly and started to kiss Sev's neck. He felt a hand rub up his neck and come to rest in his hair.

"Nice hair tie."

"You like the colour?" He mumbled into Severus' neck.

"Mmmm. Can I get you a drink or anything?"

"No." Harry pulled him over to the sofa and pushed him down on it and pulled his knees apart and sat down between them. Severus raised an eyebrow in question at him. "I told you, you would be mine the moment you were no longer my teacher." Harry said while running his hands up Sev's hard thighs.
"So what is it exactly you plan to do with me, Mister Potter?"

"Everything." He grinned back.

"That would mean you would be up all night and then some."

"I don't know when I will see you next."

"It will not be that long, I promise you."

"I know but it will be at least a month because that is how long I will be stuck at the Dursleys. A month is a long time there because I will have nothing to do except daydream about you."

Harry finished the last few words in a whisper as he had lent forward to bring their lips together. He started the kiss off slowly, and lovingly he ran his tongue softly over Severus's lips seeking entrance, which he was granted. Harry took the time to explore his lover's mouth; this was no hurried kiss between lessons or in a dark corridor, now it felt as though they had all the time in the world. Harry's tongue slid together with Severus's in and out of their mouths, taking turns to explore the other's mouth. Harry ran his hands up the length of Severus's thighs and came to rest of his hips. Harry pulled his mouth from Severus's and started his way down the other man's neck. His hands slowly making their way up his chest unbuttoning his shirt along the way exposing his lovers chest.

Harry nipped and licked his way down the exposed chest, paying special attention to the hardened nipples. The noises of pleasure coming from Severus were going straight to Harry's groin. Harry licked Severus' lower abdomen, nipping his bellybutton while bringing his hands to Severus's trousers. Harry looked up at Severus and they locked eyes, he could see lust shining brightly in his lover's eyes, Harry slowly unbuttoned Severus's trousers never breaking eye contact. Harry gave Severus his lazy grin and pulled his trousers off his hips exposing Severus' arousal. Harry took it in hand and ran his tongue the length of the shaft and laved his tongue around the head, Harry heard Severus take a sharp intake of breath and Harry smiled as best he could with a mouthful. He took as much as he could manage in his mouth, more then last time he mused. He felt Severus place a hand in his hair and gently pull the tie out of his hair and then tangle his fingers within the locks. Harry placed a hand on the base of his cock and squeezed lightly, getting another moan from his lover.

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Severus could feel himself getting closer to completion and tried to pull Harry off him so not to make him gag but his younger lover was having none of it. He felt Harry suck harder and moan in enjoyment, it was too much for Severus watching Harry giving him head and he exploded into his willing lover's mouth. Severus thought he would pass out from pleasure as Harry drank every drop he gave down. When Harry had finished he kissed his way back up his chest and nibbled along his jaw line up to his ear. Severus moaned out in pleasure as Harry took his earlobe gently between his teeth.

"I want you so much, Sev." Harry whispered directly into his ear. "You have no idea how much."

"I think I can guess."

"I want to make you feel the way you make me feel. I want to drive you wild with desire I want..."
you to lose yourself to me."

Harry's whispered words were doing wonders for his libido. He would never have imagined such a passionate handsome young man to want him so much. It had been a while since he had allowed a partner to take him but he didn't think he could deny Harry anything he wanted. He trusted Harry implicitly. "Maybe we should move this to the bedroom." Severus said before recapturing Harry's mouth in another heart stopping kiss. Harry helped him up and they retired to the bedroom.

***

Harry dropped his cloak to the floor and walked over to Sev, who was waiting for him on the bed. He was nervous but he wanted this, he wanted this man. He bent down and kissed Sev lovingly as he climbed on top of him, sliding off Sev's shirt in the process. They spent some time just exploring each other's bodies; Sev freed Harry from his shirt, trousers and underwear. Along the way Harry repaid the favour. When both were naked, Harry could feel that Sev was fully aroused again; he whispered the spell to bring the lubricant to him.

Harry did his best to steel his nerves and suddenly wished he had gone for a more aggressive mood and knew that handy little spell Severus had used on him a while ago, at least that way he would not need to prepare Sev. Putting such thoughts aside, Harry decided the best policy was to just go for it, he reckoned Sev would be the first to tell him if he was doing something wrong or doing something to hurt him. Harry carefully unscrewed the lid of the lubricant and dipped his fingers in.

"There is no reason to look so petrified, Harry, I do not bite unless you want me to?" There was a suggestive look on his face. Harry let out a nervous laugh.

"Sorry, Sev, just a little nervous."

"Don't be, relax." Harry's mouth was caught in another kiss distracting his mind from all previous thoughts.

Harry slowly let his hand wander down to Sev's entrance and he tenderly inserted a well-lubricated finger. Harry felt more than heard Sev moan in pleasure. So far so good, Harry mused, and he chanced a second finger. Again he as met with a pleasurable noise from his partner. Harry was starting to find his confidence and realised that, even though he was largely inexperienced, there was not much too go wrong as long as he didn't rush things. With three fingers fully inserted, Harry felt for the spot that he knew drove him wild and found it, Sev bucked underneath his ministrations and pulled Harry into a fierce kiss, biting his lower lip and then sucking on it to take away the pain.

Removing his fingers, Harry positioned himself between Sev's legs and placed his already painfully hard cock at Sev's entrance and pushed a just a little, entering him. Harry took a deep breath to steady his racing heart; the sensations now hitting him were unlike anything he had felt before. Harry forced himself to carefully push until he was fully inserted, breathing heavily, he bowed his head until it was resting on Sev's chest.

"Just relax, Harry." Sev said quietly to Harry, he could feel Sev gently rubbing his hands up and down his back. After a few moments, Harry had gathered his wits and slowly started to move. It was a feeling like none other that Harry had ever experienced; everything from the tightness, to the heat, was overwhelming. Harry found his rhythm and moved with care and Sev moved with
him. Harry found he had to keep part of his mind focused so as not too finish to early and leave his partner unsatisfied. As their pace increased, Harry felt as if he were in heaven, he could easily understand how people became addicted to sex.

He placed a hand on the side of Sev's face and brought their mouths together in a passionate kiss. Harry forcefully pushed his tongue into Sev's mouth and kissed him for all he was worth, nipping on his lower lip when he had finished exploring his mouth, continuing to nip and lick his way down the long pale exposed neck. He knew Severus was enjoying his ministrations from the sounds of pleasure he was letting out. Harry knew he was close and he wanted to bring his lover with him, he raised himself up on his left arm to create space between their abdomens and he reached down to take Sev's hard, leaking penis in hand. Harry could tell Sev was as close as he was to completion and, as roughly as this man had once treated him during a 'private' lesson, started to move his hand up and down the long length. Harry bent down and strongly licked across the inviting parted lips just below him, he smirked as Sev nipped at his tongue. Harry tightened his hand around Severus' cock a little more and took his partner over the edge. Harry thrust hard into Severus a few more times before he gave out a cry of pleasure and collapsed on Severus' chest, breathing heavily. Harry was vaguely aware of hearing Sev mutter a cleaning spell as he pulled out and collapsed down next to his lover.

A short while later as Harry was regaining his senses, he wondered when Severus had slipped an arm around his shoulders and pulled him in close to his chest, he could feel fingers lethargically stroking in his hair. "Did I fall asleep?" Harry mumbled into Sev's chest.

"Just for a short while." It was said very softly and was followed by a gentle kiss to the top of his head.

"Didn't mean to be so rude." Harry said with a yawn.

"No need to apologise, Harry."

Harry reached an arm across Sev's chest and snuggled in tighter. "Sorry, by the way."

"For what?" Came the puzzled reply.

"For being a little aggressive, kind of just lost it."

Severus gave him an amused snort of laughter. "Trust me, Harry, that was not rough."

"You mean I didn't..."

"No, not at all."

"Good, I am glad."

"But, who would have thought that The-Boy-Who-Lived liked to play rough in bed." Severus said to him, trying his best to hold back laughter. Harry just jabbed him in the ribs as a reply and snuggled in tighter before he let sleep claim him.

***

Severus woke up and looked at the time, they had only been asleep for just over an hour, when he glanced at Harry he knew what had woken him up. Harry had moved himself into what
Severus could only think looked to be an uncomfortable position. But Harry was dead to the world, fast asleep. He was face down in the mattresses with one arm hanging off the bed and the other twisted up behind him lying across Severus' chest. Severus was uncomfortable for him, he slide out from under the arm and softly leaned across Harry to wake him. He didn't want to but as it was at them moment Harry could not spend the whole night. He caressed Harry's shoulder and gently shook it; he got no response except an annoyed huff. Severus placed a kiss on Harry's shoulder and wickedly grinned to himself, there was more then one way to wake a sleeping Gryffindor!

He softly traced his fingertips down Harry's side, noticing how the flesh twitched under his touch and came to rest on his hip. He carefully lowered himself down next to Harry and started to first caress his hip, then going slightly lower to his ass, gently stoking over it. Then down to his inner thigh as his legs were already slightly parted. He felt Harry stir a little in his sleep, he gave another wicked grin. He planted a soft kiss on the back of Harry's neck while still stoking his inner thigh.

"Mmmm, Sev," he heard Harry mumble in his sleep.

Severus continued on up a little higher, running his thumb over Harry's entrance. He felt him buck a little under his touch; he leaned close to his ear and whispered. "Harry, it's time to wake up." He got a slightly more coherent mumble this time as Harry was starting to wake up. He moved his hand back down to Harry's scrotum and placed feather light touches on it. This made Harry stir, he looked sleepily over his shoulder, reached behind him, and grabbed Severus' head and pulled him down into a fierce kiss. Not quite the reaction Severus had been looking for but quite pleasant all the same. As the kiss deepened even more Harry had moved around slightly onto his side. Severus let his fingertips trace random patterns on his now exposed chest. He could feel Harry's skin tense a little to the feather light touches it was receiving. He allowed his hand to travel the length of flesh exposed to him and lightly touched Harry's now hard cock.

"This was meant to be a wake up call, nothing else."

"Stop and I'll hex you into next week!" Severus raised an amused eyebrow at Harry. "I mean it, Sev! I need you in me now!"

"Now there is an offer one can hardly refuse." He mumbled in between the small bites he was making along Harry's shoulder blade. Harry gave him needy noises with each small nip he made along his back. Severus definitely could not help the smirk crossing his lips at Harry's demands. Once he had found his confidence, Harry was quite the demanding partner in bed, but yet also submissive when he needed to be. Harry was most certainly fun in bed. Severus forwent the use of lubrication and whispered his handy little spell directly into Harry's ear so he knew what was about to happen. The gasp he received from his lover was more then enough to tell him Harry knew what was happening.

He was not going to allow the use of the spell to forgo his fun at winding Harry up so tightly that he would explode. He pushed Harry's hips down back into the mattresses a little, giving him a better angle and swiftly inserted two fingers. The good thing about his little spell was it not only lubricated, it also prepared your partner. Harry pushed back on them, all the while making more needy noises that went straight to his groin. He pushed his fingers fully in and reached for Harry's prostate knowing it would make him scream, and it did. Harry jerked up and let out a cry of pleasure. Thank Merlin he had placed silencing charms, Severus laughed to himself.
Severus leant down over Harry, "Is that good, Harry?" He whispered right into his ear, then taking the lobe in between his teeth biting lightly.

"Yes...I want you so much right now, please."

"Mmmm, please what?"

"Don't make me wait any longer. I want to feel you in me, I want you to fuck me senseless." Harry managed to breathe out.

Severus removed his fingers and pushed Harry fully down onto his front and parted his legs and licked in one smooth movement up from the base of Harry's spine to the nape of his neck. "Your wish is my command." He said in a low sultry voice right before he entered Harry in one swift deep thrust. Harry cried out in pleasure and bucked up under him. Severus placed a hand on Harry's hip to keep him from moving. Severus at first kept his thrusts slow and steady, yet deep and hard.

"Sev, please! Just let go." Harry pleaded with him. He was a little reluctant because Harry was still largely inexperienced and he did not wish to hurt him. But he found it harder to keep control with Harry muttering obscenities underneath him. "Harder, Sev, fuck me harder."

"No."

"Please, I want you so much."

"Your. Too. Tight. I. Would. Hurt. You." Each word had been said in-between thrusts and was growled out in lust.

Eventually he gave in halfway and lost slight control, but not fully. He continued to drive hard and deeply into Harry while somehow managing to keep the pace steady. He could feel Harry was close as he felt Harry tighten even more around his impaling penis. Harry started to scream out as cum shot out all over the bed and Severus knew he was not far behind. He thrust deeply a few more times until he too followed Harry over the edge. He collapsed down next to Harry and, breathing deeply, he muttered the cleaning spell to get rid of all unwanted fluids from themselves and the sheets.

"So where can I get you permanently installed as my wake up alarm?"

Severus let out a snort of laughter. "Shut up, Potter, and do something useful with that filthy mouth of yours." He pulled Harry close to him and devoured him in a loving, slow burning, and passionate kiss.

***

As consciousness came back to Harry, he glanced at his watch and realised it was time to be going. It was nearly 5am, and soon the people in his dorm would be waking up, so he would need to return so as not to raise suspicion. He glanced over to Sev who was still sleeping peacefully next to him. He gave a small smile at the sight, at the beginning of their relationship Severus would never have slept comfortably with him in the bed, he had been too used to his independence and the intrusion of another would have kept Sev awake. Harry softly reached out a hand and brushed the hair out of Sev's eyes, he smiled when Sev quietly stirred but did not wake. Harry carefully got out of bed and dressed, as quietly as he could, once dressed he crept
over to the bed, and sat on the edge and softly brought his lips down to kiss Sev's slightly parted ones. It was only a few seconds before Harry felt Severus respond. "Mmmm, I need to be going, not that I want to, you understand."

"I must have been more tired then I realised, that or I am getting old."

"Sev, you are not old, you just don't sleep enough."

"Maybe you are right, roll on the summer."

"I am going to miss you, you know."

"I know, and I you. I promise you it will not be for long, the moment you are free from those muggles I will see you." Harry leaned into the hand Severus was using to stroke his cheek.

"I better go, everyone will be waking soon and I don't want to start a panic by not being in bed."

"I will see you soon, Harry."

"You better, you git." Harry laughed.

"Remove yourself from my quarters, brat," came the amused reply.

Harry leaned in once more for a final kiss, savouring everything from the taste and feel, imprinting everything to memory. He pulled back and stared once more into Sev's eyes before he left. He knew that if he had hung around much longer, he would have done something stupid like start crying and that was the last thing he wanted to do. He was a strong, independent young man, not a dripping tap! That and Sev would never have allowed him to live it down!

***

Draco had shrunk all his belongings and placed them all in his pocket. He had followed all of the students up the main entrance and had managed to get lost in the crowd as he slipped away from the rest of the Slytherins and headed to McGonagall's office. There was no going back now, he had made his decision and was going to stick to it. The train would have left the station before anyone would be aware of his absence. He knocked on the door and entered when he heard his now former professor give him permission to go in.

"Mister Malfoy, I see you decided to come."

"Yes, Professor, I was telling you the truth when I told you I did not wish to be marked."

"Mister Malfoy, may I call you Draco?"

Draco believed he owed her that courtesy, after all she was the one doing him the favour. "Please do."

"Draco, you may call me Minerva. I feel I should warn you of something before it is too late for you to make it to the train. As you know Mister Potter will be returning to the castle at some point during the summer and no doubt also be staying in the vicinity of Gryffindor Tower. Although exact location is unknown at this point I am sure it will be close. Will this present a problem for you?"
He thought Potter would have been whisked away to somewhere secret. Then again, it was no doubt another hair brain scheme of that fool Headmaster to keep Potter available to the public as such. "No."

"Think seriously about it, Draco, because if you can not get along with him the Headmaster will overrule me and I will have to place you somewhere where there may not be a lot of people."

Again Potter was getting preferential treatment, bastard! Draco thought, but he played the nice student that he knew would guarantee him a place at Hogwarts. "I will try my best to stay out of his way."

"Thank you, Draco. I think it is best that you stay here while the students leave the castle. If you still do not wish Professor Snape to know of this, then you will have to spend the day here until he leaves the castle this evening."

"No, I do not wish him to know. I will stay here until he leaves."

"You do realise he will have to find out at some point."

"I know, but just not right now, please."

"As you wish, Draco. I will be back as soon as I can." With that she left Draco alone in her office. Draco smiled, everything was falling into place for him, all he had to do was wait for Snape to leave this evening and he would be home free.

***

All the students were milling around the platform at Hogsmeade station, saying their last goodbyes and promising to keep in touch or yelling at one another that they would see them again next term. Though Harry knew he would be back at the school in a month's time, it still felt like an end of an era. This would be the last time he would be on this platform as a student, the last time he would be boarding this train as a student. His studies were finished and so was the most amazing seven years of his life. Yes, he had had some tough times at school but he had truly never felt alive until that day Hagrid had come to deliver his letter at that hut his family had taken him to, to hide. He had found a family, friends and love during his seven years at Hogwarts.

"Mister Potter, stop holding up the rest of the students and get on the train." He heard Sev say from behind him, he spun around to see Sev smirking at him.

"Sorry sir, I was unaware I was holding anyone up."

Harry held his breath as Sev leaned in close to him, he wondered briefly if Sev was going to kiss him. "Five points from Gryffindor for your cheek, Mister Potter," was whispered into his ear.

Harry pulled back slightly with a smug expression on his face. "You can't do that sir, I am no longer your student. And if I am not mistaken Gryffindor already won the House and Quidditch cup this year, so your deduction will count for nothing, sir."

"I can and I have, I'll remember it for next year. What will Gryffindor do without their hero to
"Win both cups for them next year?"

"Think Slytherin are contenders again now that I have left?"

"We shall see." There was definitely a playful smirk on his face.

Harry gave Severus his award-winning smile and placed his hand out to him. "It has been interesting, challenging, an honour, at times entertaining and most certainly life changing, Professor Snape."

Severus looked as though he was attempting to hide a real smile and took Harry's hand in his and reciprocated the handshake. "The pleasure was all mine, Mister Potter. Until we meet again."

"Until next time." Harry gave him another smile; aware a few students were looking at them sideways and boarded the train. He found Ginny, Dean, Ron and Hermione waiting for him in a carriage. Harry took the available seat by the window and looked out onto the platform and made eye contact with the one thing he was really going to miss from the school, Severus. Harry gave him a sad smile as the train started to pull away and if he had blinked he would have missed the wink Severus had gave him. That turned Harry's sad smile into a brighter happier one.

***

They were about halfway through their journey when Bill and Remus joined them in their compartment. "Hi guys, we thought we would pop in and make sure none of you were up to any trouble." Bill said jokingly from the seat he was taking next to Harry.

"I resent that Bill, we are all adults you know." Ron retorted back.

"He is only teasing you, Ron." Remus laughed as he sat opposite Bill. "Harry, are you okay? You look a little off."

Harry smiled at Remus; he was the closest thing to real family that he had in the wizarding world. "Yeah, I'm good, just a little sad to be leaving that's all." Harry said with a small nod.

"It wont be long until you are back, Harry."

"I know, Remus, but it won't be the same."

The lady who sold sweets and snacks knocked on their carriage door. "Anything for anyone in here?"

"Yes, please. I better stock up for the next month at the Dursleys." Harry said to his friends. He placed his order and after paying he returned to his seat and grabbed his knapsack to stash his bounty so Dudley wouldn't find it. That was when he noticed a rolled parchment that was not there when he had packed his bag. He carefully pulled it out and looked at it suspiciously.

"What's that mate?" Ron asked him.

"I'm not sure, I didn't pack it in there."
"Harry, you should check it for charms and traps." Hermione interjected quickly before Harry could open it. Everyone in the carriage looked worriedly at the parchment. Harry carefully removed his wand from his sleeve and cast several revealing charms over it and came up with nothing.

"Here let me." Remus said holding out his hand. Harry passed him the parchment. Remus cast several of the lesser known revealing spells on it and he also came up with nothing and passed it back to Harry. "I could find nothing wrong with it, I think it is safe. Maybe it is a letter from a secret admirer." Remus teased him and Harry grinned back as it clicked whom this was from.

"Thanks, Remus." Harry took the parchment back wondering how Severus had gotten it into his bag without him noticing. He leaned back in his chair and opened it.

_H._

*Did you seriously think I would allow you the last word until we next see each other?*

_In case I did not get the chance to do this before your birthday I wanted to wish you a happy one and give you this gift. It belonged to my grandfather and means a lot to me, almost as much as you mean to me. I may have a lot of possessions of monetary value but they do not hold any meaning to me, they are merely objects to fill large empty houses passed down from generation to generation in my family._

_This object of my grandfather's was one of the few things I was able to save from my father when he sold many of our family's possessions, mainly due to the fact it had no real monetary value only sentimental value to me. I know what you are thinking, how could you accept something of such value to me? Well that is simple; it's because it is one of the few ways that I know how to show you how I truly feel about you. You have enriched, enlightened and gave my life meaning again. You have given me something that I never thought would be possible again. Love._

_You are special in so many ways that the others do not see. They may weigh you down with labels that they believe make you special, The-Boy-Who-Lived or 'The Saviour Of The Wizarding World' but to me you are special because with me, you are just Harry. I see things they'll never see or do not choose to see, a bright, funny, beautiful, intelligent young man._

_Everyday I cannot believe that you allow me another day to be in your life and for everyday you allow it to continue I will endeavour to be worthy of you._

*I can only hope that my quill was more successful at saying what my lips never seem able to._

_S._

Harry fought back the tears that were threatening to spill down his face. He had never been given a letter so beautifully written before and he had always thought he never would. He could see his friends looking at him a little worried but he paid then no attention, as he reached into his bag and found a small green velvet bag. He carefully pulled it open and emptied its contents onto the palm of his hand. It was a thin pewter chain with a Celtic design cross on it. It was not fancy, or worth a fortune, but Harry loved it.

***
Hermione hoped that Harry was all right; he seemed a little upset at what he had read in the letter. She prayed it was not bad news, but guessed it wasn't when he pulled out something from his bag and empty it onto his palm and a huge smile broke out across his face. She was momentarily relieved when she saw that smile but that changed when she saw the look of confusion then shock and hurt on Bill's face. She guessed that whatever Harry had in his palm was something personal from Professor Snape and Bill had just worked it all out. She hoped for Harry's sake that Bill did not cause a scene, she cared for Bill but she loved Harry and would not see him upset by anyone. Harry had confided in her about what they liked to call 'Bill-gate' so she knew Professor Snape had chosen Harry, but she didn't want her friend to feel insecure again by something Bill might say. She was grateful when she saw Bill get up and say something to Remus about how they should go and check up on the rest of the train and leave the compartment.

***

Harry slipped the chain over his head wearing a silly grin. "I guess that is from you know who, then?" Ron said to him.

"Yeah, an early birthday present."

"What!" Dean said in an astonished tone. "You mean V-V-Vo, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named sent you a birthday present?"

"No, you daft idiot. I think Harry has a secret admirer." Ginny said grinning.

"What do you know?" Ron asked her suspiciously.

"I don't know who, but I am not stupid, thank you very much." Ginny said.

"It's alright, Ron. I'm sorry I haven't told you, Gin, I will soon, I promise. I just I can't right now. I hope you understand." Harry pleaded to her.

"It's okay, Harry, I know you will tell me when the time is right." She winked at him Harry blushed just a little.

"Thanks Gin."

"It must have been one hell of a letter, Harry." Hermione teased him. Harry just grinned at her and passed her the letter.

"Are you sure?" He nodded at her, as she read the letter her smile became wider and wider. By the time she had finished she was almost in tears. "Oh Harry, that was, wow!"

"I know." He grinned at her. "Sorry Ron would you...?" He went to pass the letter to his other best friend.

"Nah mate, it's okay, I'll no doubt hear about it from now until next year." He laughed pointing to Hermione. Harry was his best mate and he loved him like a brother but he sure as hell did not need to read love letters sent between him and Snape. Truth be told, he still found it a little hard to understand Harry's fascination with the man. Since Harry had been together with Snape he had noticed Snape trying to be a little bit more patient with him and Mione, so he guessed it could only be a good thing. He knew Snape was a powerful wizard and would help protect
Harry at all costs but old habits and prejudices were hard to ignore. Ron knew it would just take a little more time but he would get there, that he was sure of.

***

It was late afternoon and it had been hours since the students had left. The castle was empty and quiet, that was until his office door banged open with a ferocity usually only caused by Severus himself. In an instant he had his wand out and pointed at his intruder and half a curse already out his lips when he stopped dead.

"Harry fucking Potter!" The words were spat at him. Severus took a deep breath and replaced his wand back in its holster up his left sleeve.

"Bill."

"He is a fucking child, Severus, one of your students, the saviour of our world, how could you?" Each word was said full of venom.

"He is so much more then that, Bill, you of all people should know that. He has been a part of your family for the best part of seven years."

"He is almost half your age."

"So what!" Severus snapped back. "That is nothing to a wizard, merely a few years difference."

"How about the fact that he is your student." Bill yelled back.

"Was, Bill. He was my student, not any more."

"You are being pedantic, Severus."

"So fucking what if he was! We did nothing against the rules."

"It's wrong, Severus, and you know it. Sleeping with a student is just wrong."

"We kept ourselves in check and controlled our actions." Severus did not think this was a good time to mention the three slip-ups he and Harry had engaged in.

"Is it because he is the saviour, Severus? Was the boy-who-lived just too much of a temptation for you? All that power!" Bill yelled at him.

"You have no idea of what you are talking about." Severus said in a dangerously low voice. "Harry deserves to be more the just your bloody saviour." Severus had spat out the last word.

"He doesn't need the likes of you messing with his head." Bill replied a little shaken at Severus' tone.

"The likes of me? What he does and doesn't need is none of your concern."

"I didn't mean it like that, Severus, and you know it. I just meant a powerful wizard who should be his teacher and not his lover. He has too much on his plate to worry about you and a silly little relationship that will no doubt end when you grow tired of him."
"You know nothing of what Harry and I share and the only reason he has too much on his plate is because the likes of you and Dumbledore put too much on it. He is young and wants to have something normal in his life to cling to instead of all that pressure to fulfill some idiotic prophecy and hero worship."

"And you think what you have with him is normal? You think you are the right person to help anchor him to reality?" Bill said in disbelief, laughing to himself without humour.

"Normal! Is there such a thing as normal? I am there for him when he needs someone to just be there for him and not to keep pushing him into things he has no wish to be involved in. I am there for him when he gets scared or when he feels lonely or when he just wants to be held. I understand what he goes through when the Dark Lord affects his physical as well as his mental well-being. I help calm him because I understand what he is saying or what he is feeling when he has nightmares about the Dark Lord. We understand each other in a way others do not. So yes, I believe that makes me damn well qualified to help anchor Harry to reality."

"Why didn't you tell me who it was?" Bill said in a resigned tone.

"Would it have made any difference?"

"Yes, so I could have talked some sense into you."

"It was none of your business and I did not wish to hurt you in any way. The less people that know the safer we will be."

"Are you in love with him?"

"That also is none of your business."

"Severus, I saw what you gave him for his birthday. For the whole of your school career you never once took that chain off. I know how much it meant to you and how it was one of the few things you had of your grandfather's. You would not give it away lightly."

"Would it help you deal with this better is I spouted platitudes of love for Harry?"

"It might help!"

"Why?"

"Because even though you mean a lot to me, and you know you do, Harry is like family to me, I have to look him in the face over the dinner table while he lies to protect his and yours little relationship. I need to know for his sake if this is as real to you as I think it is for him. You didn't see how happy he was on the train when he realised the letter was from you, how close to tears he was when he opened your gift to him."

"Though it really is none of your business, I understand you are looking out for Harry. You have nothing to worry about from me, I mean him no harm, I am most fond of the young man."

"I don't get you, Severus, then again I don't think I ever did. You can't even say if you love him or not! Is that because you know that morally it was wrong to bring him into a relationship he is clearly not ready for? He is too young to handle anything serious, Severus, and one of you is
going to end up hurt and I care too much about the both of you to see that happen. You should end it now!"

"No." Severus growled out between clenched teeth.

"You should do the right thing and set him free. He is young and will get over it in no time."

"Then you truly do not know Harry at all. He is far more grown up then half of the wizards I know that are three times his age. He has seen and done more them most of them combined, you see, what you don't understand Bill, is life is not like this little fucking fairytale you live in. Both Harry and I are damaged goods; we both have a darkness that lives within us that no one else can understand. We both have power to do great things be they good or bad and we have been fortunate to find each other because we balance out each others darkness out. When Harry begins to feel himself slip he looks to ME to help bring him back and I look to him to help me. What I give him no one else can and the same can be said in return. Do you think it really wise for me to break his heart just to appease you? I have no such wish to do that, not because he could turn dark with all the hurt and anger it would cause him or that he could slip into a deep depression while trapped alone in his relative's home but because I care for him in a way you obviously do not understand. I would not wish to hurt him for any reason. Maybe I do have difficulty in expressing my feelings but Harry knows me well enough to know how I feel for him."

"I am glad to hear it, my boy." Both wizards turned to see the Headmaster stood in the doorway. "I could hear this commotion from up the corridor."

"Albus, please do not tell me you approve of this." Bill said pointing to Severus.

"I most certainly do. I will admit I was a little surprised at first, but I could not be happier for them. With Severus at his side Harry has settled down into a happy well-adjusted young man. For Severus to do what you suggest for no real reason would break Harry in a way that I do not believe would be fixable. Everybody knows that there are risks involved when you give your heart to another but I believe that both of them are mature enough to deal with such an occurrence should it happen naturally and not interfered with by a third party. I will hear no more of this and I expect you not to interfere with either of them in this matter, Bill." Albus gave Bill a stern look.

"Fine, but that does not mean I have to approve." With that Bill stormed out of the room leaving the other two in silence.

A few moments later Severus spoke up. "Thank you, Albus, for believing in me."

"I always have, my boy. I know how you feel for Harry and I know you would never intentionally hurt him in anyway."

"Still, thank you. I guess I should get used to that reaction as I think it will be typical of the ones we shall receive if people find out."

"You should have more faith in people, Severus, not all are so bad."

"If you say so, Albus." Severus smiled a genuine smile at his employer, mentor and friend.

Next Chapter: Harry's month at the Dursleys and his 18th birthday. Severus has a little surprise
in store for him!
It was a hot and muggy night in July and the last thing Severus wanted to be doing was attend another Death Eater meeting where his Dark Lord did nothing more then complain about Harry Potter. The last three meetings had been a complete waste of time and he felt a bit of a fool returning to Albus with nothing more to report then Riddle's nonsensical rantings about Harry. The evil wizard was very close to going completely insane, Severus believed. The idea that he was only a step away from total insanity was not a comforting thought.

Severus walked down the hallway into what was once the dining room and knelt before his 'Master,' once given permission he turned and went to his position in the semicircle. He noticed a few gaps and knew instantly that at present one of the missing was dead and the other three were in Azkaban. That would soon change, it had been a while since the Dark Lord had raided the prison and was due another recruiting from within its walls. He just hoped that he would not be asked to go along, though he had only spent a few weeks in that place a long time ago he had no desire to ever repeat the experience. Ever! Severus watched dispassionately from behind his mask as the last few people to arrive took their places in the semicircle.

"I have come to a decision, my faithful. I have decided for the moment to forgo going after that little Potter brat. At the moment he is far to well protected by Albus bloody Dumbledore! Instead I have a new target, the Ministry."

There were a few murmurs around the room. While Severus was relieved and pleased that Harry was not going to be the sole focus of the Dark Lord's ire, he was worried because this meant that the evil bastard was now ready to launch a full-scale war.

"I hear a few of you have something to say about my decision." The tone left it clear he was not asking a question. "So far all we have been doing is playing around making small strategic hits against insignificant targets. I have grown bored with this. It is time to show the wizarding world that we mean business. This time my vision, my new world order will come to fruition."

Severus gulped as quietly as humanly possible, the Dark Lord meant business because he only paced when he felt he was having a flash of inspiration. Severus frowned behind his mask, slightly worried because he could not remember when he had started to read the Dark Lord's actions so well.
"We will not rush this, I will not be forced to show my full hand too fast. We will take our time starting first with the lower Ministry workers. If they can not be swayed into joining us and have no value then we will simply just kill them, but, if they have some value then we can place them under the Imperious Curse and make them do my bidding. Yes, this will work; we will worm our way in slowly like a cancer they won't even realise that we are in control before it is too late. Then we will strike! And take control, then all shall bow at my feet." He had a sickening grin on his hideous face. "Tell me... Lucius. What do you think of my plan?"

Severus saw Lucius puff his chest out at being asked his opinion, as if it would make any difference. "My Lord, your brilliance is as outstanding as is your power. It is a sure way to bring the world to its knees." Severus rolled his eyes behind his mask; Lucius was such a teacher's pet!

"Yes, you would say that wouldn't you, Lucius?" Severus smirked as he saw Lucius deflate. "Tell me your thoughts, Severus, you have a level of intelligence that even I can respect."

If Severus had been in any other company he would have snorted at such a comment, especially as he was sure he could detect an undercurrent of sarcasm in the Dark Lord's tone. Then an idea struck, but he knew he shouldn't say it; it was almost a cruel and most definitely evil thing to say. But, on the other hand he had had to sacrifice the few before to save the many and he knew that getting rid of that idiot could only benefit the wizarding world in the long run. "I believe, my Lord, that your plan has merit." Severus hoped that he would pick up on the unfinished sentence and without fail he did.

"But?" The Dark Lord gave him a steely look.

"But, if it were up to me I would go a slightly different route."

"Explain."

"After having taken down a few of the more worthless and lower level workers I would bypass the others and go straight for the top."

"Fudge! Tell me, Severus, though I do plan on removing that idiot from power permanently, tell me what is to be gained from taking care of him earlier then I had planned?" The tone suggested that Severus' answer had better be good or he would be punished for wasting time and contradicting his Lord.

"Fudge is a muggle loving incompetent fool who deserves everything he gets. Though for some reason that I am unable to fathom, the people to have faith in him. Take him out and the rest of the government will fall, the people will fall into a mass hysteria and everything will be in shambles. That is when you, my Lord, will be able to step in and claim what is rightfully yours." The Dark Lord actually seemed to be considering his point of view. Severus knew it was morally wrong to as good as place a death warrant on Fudge's head but he couldn't stand the idiot and was finding it hard to actually feel any guilt. It would be best if he was taken out of the picture and a better leader put in his place for he knew that Albus would never allow everything to fall into shambles if Fudge were to die, the wiley old coot no doubt had three successors lined up just in case something did happen to the esteemed Minister of Magic.

"You make some good points, Severus, I shall think about them. Now everyone leave, I have had enough of your idiotic company for one night. All be warned that I will wish to implement
my plans soon so everyone should start to get into shape for I will not accept any failures with
this. Failure will result in my displeasure with you." The last part of the speech was delivered in
icy tones that left nothing to the imagination. Severus realised he was one of the few left and
turned to leave when a cold hand grabbed onto the top of his arm. He had to use every trick in
the book not to flinch at the touch he was currently receiving from the Dark Lord. "Not you
Severus, I would like a word in private."

Severus bowed his head in submission. "Of course, my Lord." Severus hid his panic well and
only felt slightly relieved when he saw Lucius look at him with pure loathing and jealously in
his eyes.

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The room was now empty except for Severus and the Dark Lord. The Dark Lord motioned for
Severus to sit in a chair he had just conjured next to his. He did as he was told, truly perplexed
at what was going to happen. This kind of thing did not happen often, not very many had been
asked to stay behind for private chats. Severus could recall Lucius having been asked a few
times but not often and he never said a word of what had happened. Then suddenly fear struck
his heart, what if what the Dark Lord was after was a little more personal? Apart from the fact
he would retch at the thought of that freak touching him, the idea of being unfaithful to Harry,
even for the side of the light, was unthinkable. No, there were many things he would do in the
name of the light but this was not one of them, he gently touched his bracelet that Albus had
given him that was an emergency portkey back to Hogwarts.

"Remove you mask, Severus, let us talk as pure blood gentlemen should." Severus carefully
removed his mask and placed it in one of his pockets. "Better. Now I think a drink is in order,
now let me see if I can remember your favourite. Yes, red wine if I remember, French I believe.
Am I correct?"

As if Severus would contradict him. "Yes, my Lord, you memory is as good as ever."

With the flick of his wand a dusty bottle of wine and two glasses floated into the room and
settled on the small table between them. "Open it, Severus, and pour."

Severus did as he was told; once the glasses were filled he quickly glanced over to the Dark
Lord and saw he was in deep thought about something. He wanted to cast a small purifying
charm on the wine to make sure it was not drugged but couldn't risk a shift of magic in the
room; the Dark Lord would feel it. He slowly slipped a hand into his robes and carefully
uncorked a bottle of potion he knew would have the same results as the charm would. He
dipped his fingers in it and re-corked it. Then dipping his fingers in the wine, making it look as
though he had miscalculated and fumbled with the glass out of nerves.

"There is no need to be so nervous, Severus." It was all right for him to think that, Severus
mused; he was not currently living in fear that he was about to be pounced on by his living
nightmare. "Taste your wine, do you like it?"

After making sure what potion was on his fingers was all washed away in the wine he took a
sip. "Very nice, my Lord, a Merlot if I am not mistaken."

"I will have to take your word for it, Severus, though I do enjoy the odd glass I am no expert. I
am sure Dumbledore has no doubt filled you in on the kind of childhood I had. Not one filled
with refinement like yours where I could grow accustomed to things like fine wines."
"Indeed." Severus could not think of anything else to say, he was still worried as to what exactly the he wanted with him. The Dark Lord turned to him with a smirk that made his flesh crawl and instinctively his fingers found his bracelet again, activation word on his lips.

"Do not worry so much, Severus. Though I am fully aware of your personal persuasion you are not my type, nor the right sex." Severus tried not to let the relief he felt show too much. "I did not ask you to stay so I could have my wicked way with you, I asked you to say because I have a job for you. You are smart, Severus, your intelligence is rivaled by few as are your potion skills and you are also in possession of something a lot of wizards lack, logic. And logic is what I will need at my right hand for my war efforts to go smoothly."

Severus could not believe what he was hearing. "My position at Hogwarts, my Lord?"

"You will not get out of that that easily, Severus. No, you will remain there and keep an eye on Dumbledore and Potter, because no doubt that little brat will return there before the summer is out, also it will be to difficult to place another within the school. That old fool is getting far to cautious. No, he trusts you so you will remain there. Also I want to know the true story behind the Malfoy heir's deflection."

Severus' head shot up at hearing that. "Draco?"

"Yes, it seems as though he has decided to remain at Hogwarts. Pity really, he would have made a fine addition to my Death Eaters. Lucius claims that his heir is merely placing himself in a position as a spy on Dumbledore and Potter, but I do not trust him. My true spy at Hogwarts will remain you and only you. Everything the Malfoy heir tells us shall be taken with a grain of salt. But I do not want him to know that we may be on to him, watch him and see what he is up too, and report back to me."

"Yes, my Lord."

"Severus, your ideas tonight were good ones, you have proven yourself to me once again. I need a man that I can trust and rely on at my side and I have chosen that man to be you, Severus. When this is all over and I am in charge of everything you will be rewarded with your rightful place at my side."

"Thank you, my Lord, though the honour is all mine."

"I do not wish to keep you any longer then is necessary, I know that during the summer you like to retreat to your ancestral home and create new and wonderful potions. I only ask that you visit Hogwarts at least once a week to keep up to date with things and watch the young Malfoy for me."

"As you wish, my Lord."

"Leave, return to your home, Severus. I will call you when I am in need of you again."

Severus got up and bowed and left the room at once. Briskly walking out of the manor and beyond its wards. He apparated back to Hogwarts's main gates and started his walk up to the Headmaster's office. He was truly bewildered at what had just taken place and the information he had learned. For starters, Draco was in the castle, under whose protection he did not know. There was also the fact that he was telling his father he was spying, what was Draco up to? He
was not sure what to do with this little bit of information; maybe he would discuss it with Harry when he saw him. Harry had an odd way of looking at things but Severus did admit that he did have a good point a lot of the time. Then there was the almost laughable fact that the Dark Lord had in effect promoted him to his right hand man. Though the level of information he could gather for Albus would be invaluable, he just had to hope that his Slytherin side would not rear its ugly head and demand all the things he had wanted as a youth: power and fame, two very evil seductresses. He would have to speak to Albus about him maybe being able to see Harry sooner because he knew the young man would help him control that side of him, that and once he was back with Harry no other temptation would be able to take him away from his young love.

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The boredom was killing him; it was worse then anything Voldemort could do to him. Maybe this was his new plan to kill him by making him live with his relatives forever and a day. He could see the headlines now 'Would be Hero, Harry Potter, Dies a Slow, Boring Death.' He could imagine the paperboys and girls yelling that out aloud and down Diagon Alley the day after his death. Harry laughed to himself at his own stupid whiney attitude, it always happened when he spent too much time at Privet Drive. It was the same every summer, except this time it truly was his last summer here. He wondered if he would ever come back, if he would ever have cause to see his only living relatives again. Not that they wanted to see him again, but it was kind of sad. They were his blood, no matter how much they made it boil.

Maybe in time he would try and see them again, he doubted that but Harry refused to say never again. The thing that was making this summer worse then any other was that he didn't even have his homework to do to stave of the boredom and he kept thinking about all the fun his friends were having with their last days of freedom. Freedom, ha! That was a luxury not afforded to Harry, even when he got away from here and back to Hogwarts he wasn't free. He couldn't go to Hogsmeade when the mood suited him, he couldn't even go for a wander outside of the castle. No, he had no freedom. That just made him want to do something about Voldemort more then ever.

He had had a funny feeling that Voldemort had called a meeting the other night, and that made him think about Severus. Which was something he was trying desperately not to do, he didn't want to dwell on something he couldn't change for the whole month. He hadn't done bad, three and a half weeks had passed and he only had a four more days to go before someone was due to pick him up and he had only sunk a bit low twice. Once a few days after he had arrived back and he realised his family would never change and once after what he was sure was Voldemort calling a meeting.

Harry cocked his head to the side when he heard a scuffling noise outside of his door. Harry tiptoed over to the door and snapped it open. Dudley gave a startled squeak. "Dudley, what are you doing listening through my door?"

"My door, remember this is my second bedroom and if I want to listen at it I will." Came the petulant reply.

Harry eyeballed Dudley; he had again lost a few pounds since the last time Harry had seen him. He was still a fat pig though, always would be. "Fine, do whatever you want because you're going to anyway." Harry walked back to the windowsill and continued his favourite pastime from last summer, staring out the window.
Dudley seemed to take a tentative step into the room. "What's up with that hissing I have heard from here at night?"

"What? Oh, I was talking to my snake."

"You have a snake! I don't believe you."

"It's over there, underneath the green cloth." Harry watched as Dudley slowly walked over to the big cage currently covered by a green cloth. Dudley carefully lifted up one corner and peeked inside.

{"Help us we are being invaded!"} Harry instantly recognised the voice of the left head. Strangely it reminded him of Severus, snarky as hell but the heart was in the right place.

{"Righty, what are we going to do?"} Harry was sure that was the middle head.

"That snake is a freak, Potter, it's got three heads." Dudley looked shocked.

{"Hey fatso, who the hell are you calling a freak."} That was definitely Lefty again, Harry had to bite his tongue not to laugh. {"You over weight pork rind!"

"It's supposed to have three heads, Dudley, it's a Runespoor."

"I have never heard of one of those."

"That's because it's from my world."

"So it is a freak snake then, just like you."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Yes, Dudley, just like me."

"So you really are going then in four days?"

"Yes."

"Never coming back?"

"Not if I'm not wanted."

"Oh." Was all Dudley said and he walked out the room closing the door behind him. That was the most any of his family had spoken to him all holiday.

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Two days and counting, Harry had pretty much packed all his stuff away, it hadn't taken long it was almost pitiful really. Everything he had accumulated in his eighteen years on the planet fitted into his trunk and knapsack. He was taking part in his renewed favourite pastime when he heard his uncle bellow at him from downstairs. "Boy, get down here now." Harry did as he was told, it made for an easier life and went downstairs and waited in the living room doorway waiting to be spoken to.

"I know it is only a few days before we are rid of you for good but you will still obey me while
you are in my house, do you understand?"

"Yes, Uncle Vernon." Harry dutifully replied, holding all his natural reactions in so as not to roll his eyes.

"Good. Just you remember that. Now I have an important family announcement to make." Harry wondered if he should leave as he was not really considered a member of the family by Vernon, but he stayed where he was, not wanting to cause a scene.

"You know that I have been looking for a new business investor to bring Grunnings right into the twenty-first century, I think I may have found my man. He will be coming for dinner tomorrow and I want everyone to be on their best behaviour. This man is worth millions! And what will you be doing?" He looked directly at Harry.

Harry had a strange sense of déjà vu. "Staying in my room and keeping quiet."

"And I am warning you, if you get up to any funny business like you did last time you were here when we had guests I will throttle you. Do I make myself clear?"

"Crystal, Uncle Vernon." Harry looked him directly in the eye; he hated being treated like a child.

"Good, now go back to your room and stay there until who ever it is coming to collect you on Thursday morning arrives." Harry turned and left heading up to his room. He had a sudden flash back of Uncle Vernon complaining about not being able to finish off his Japanese Golfer joke because of the banging coming from his room. Harry smiled and pitied the poor fool who was coming for supper, because he doubted Vernon had any new jokes.

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It was Wednesday afternoon and he could hear Aunt Petunia rushing around downstairs cleaning the already obsessively clean house. Harry tried to pay her no mind, tomorrow he would be back home in Hogwarts where he belonged and hopefully it would not be to long until Sev came to visit him. He smiled thinking of his tall, dark and handsome partner. All right, so Sev was not classically handsome, Harry could admit that but he made Harry feel weak in the knees. Harry giggled out loud at that analogy, Merlin, now he sounded like some silly woman, all wind swept and weak in the knees for her man. He had definitely read to many of those romance books Hermione kept giving him. Harry's fingers fiddled with the chain hanging around his neck, it was a silly habit he had picked up since the day he had put it on. Dudley had taken the piss out of him claiming he wore more jewelry then a girl. Harry didn't think he did, he only wore two pieces, one was the row of beads Luna had given him and the other was the longer pewter chain and Celtic cross Sev had given him. He didn't think he looked like a girl, considering most of his tops covered the cross up. Dudley was not the only one who thought he looked weak now he had the Internet that was how he spent most of his day, surfing and buying junk and clothes online. The whole internet revolution had seemed to pass Harry by, he had read a few of Dudley's old magazines and he thought he had the idea down, he wasn't half bad at computers when he was in Primary School, but on the whole the internet boom had passed him by. Wizards didn't have much use for the Internet; they just apparated to where they needed to go to or they owled the person if they needed to speak to them.

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Harry was lying on his bed with his window open waiting, or more hoping, something would arrive for him. Sev had told him the pain killing potions would arrive in time for him to take, it was nearing six o'clock, he was due to take his first one in about six hours. He heard Uncle Vernon's car pull up outside, the doors opening and shutting and Vernon doing his usual 'welcome to my lovely home speech' to his dinner guest. Poor fool, Vernon was only after his money and would attempt to bleed him dry this evening. Harry quickly got up and exited his room and speed across the hallway to use the bathroom before he was forced into total lockdown. While in the bathroom, Harry could hear the typical family welcome, this is my ever so wonderful son and my lovely wife, please do come in and have a drink. Harry mimicked to himself in the bathroom, though he was slightly caught out when he heard Vernon give his guest directions to the bathroom. Harry began to slightly panic, he couldn't pee any faster and he knew Vernon's guest would wonder why the hell they had a teenage boy upstairs and not sitting down with the rest of the perfect family. Harry finished peeing and pulled the flush and quickly washed his hands and left without drying. His luck was not to hold out as he ran smack bang into Vernon's guest in the small hallway.

"I'm so sorry, sir, I'll just get out of your way." Harry quickly mumbled looking at the floor and started to retreat to his room only to be grabbed by the collar of his t-shirt and pulled backwards, then pushed up against the wall.

"Do I not even get a kiss?"

Harry snapped his head up and for the first time looked at Vernon's guest. "Sev!" Harry whispered, and broke out in his award-winning smile. "What are you doing here?"

Severus leaned in to keep his voice low, "We could not risk sending these by owl, in case they were tampered with." Harry was handed ten small vials of pain killing potion. "There should be enough there but if not, I can always go back to my home and get some more."

"Does Dumbledore know you are here?"

"Yes, you dunderhead." Sev rolled his eyes at Harry. "The wards had to be adjusted to allow me entrance so I would not set any alarms off. Now I had better be returning downstairs before those stupid muggles come up to look for me, don't forget five to midnight then on the hour every hour." Harry shivered as Sev traced a finger along the outline of the chain as he smirked and leaned in to steal a quick kiss before turning to leave.

"Wait, will I be able to see you before you leave?" Harry grabbed onto his arm. Severus just gave him a wicked grin and left. Harry returned to his room feeling his adrenaline pumping through him, that had been a bit of a shock seeing Sev like that. "Shit." He mumbled, he had forgotten to thank him for the necklace, but Harry didn't worry too much, he licked his bottom lip and smirked to himself. Severus was a sneaky bastard and he hadn't said no to them seeing each other again before he left.

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It had barely been an hour and he already had a headache. These muggles just kept droning on about themselves and how wonderful their family was Severus was thanking Merlin for the single malt scotch. What he really wanted to was go upstairs and finish that kiss he had started with Harry, that was a much more interesting way to spend ones evening. It occurred to him that even though Harry had spent most of his life with these dunderheads he was not stark raving
mad, Severus had barely spent an hour in their company and felt the insanity setting in. The fat child, Dudley, kept staring at him and offering to refill his glass every five seconds -- most annoying. He realised his father, Vernon, had put him up to it. It was the oldest trick in the book; get your target drunk so they will agree to almost anything. It would take a hell of a lot more then a few scotches to get Severus to agree to anything this muggle put forward. Then there was the horse-like woman with a long neck, Petunia. She kept smiling at him and batting her eyelashes at him. He felt like snapping at her 'Not a chance in hell, woman,' but refrained from saying anything, it was better off that way. The horsewoman bustled off in the direction of the kitchen and asked her 'Diddikums' to help her. Severus had to bite the inside of his cheek to keep from laughing out loud.

"So, Severus," Vernon smiled at him, Severus controlled his reaction to flinch at this idiot using his given name. He did not remember giving this oaf permission to use it but then again muggles never did have the same standards of manners as magical folk. "Now that the women and children are out of the way, we should get down to some business." Severus just gave him a raised eyebrow; he would love to have seen Minerva's reaction to such a sexist comment. She would have hexed him into next week, which made him smirk. "I see that you agree, Severus."

"Indeed."

"Severus, that is an unusual name, where did it come from?"

"It is an old family name, it derives from old Latin."

"Fascinating, an old family name you say?"

Severus knew exactly what he was implying; old family equals old money. "Yes, I believe the first Severus in my family was around a thousand years ago." If he had been talking to a wizard he might also have informed then that it was a name given by one of the founders, Salazar Slytherin when he had been godfather to one of his ancestors. But he didn't think that would go down well, especially with what Harry had told him of his family's opinion of magic.

"So you are looking to invest in a serious business, I understand?" Vernon's sickly sweet smile made Severus want to retch.

"Yes. After my accounts were done my accountant advised me of a small fortune sitting there doing nothing. I have already invested in enough property and fancied something a little different."

"Property, you say. Yes I have always fancied doing that, buying a little winter home somewhere either in Spain or America. The winters in Britain are getting worse, greenhouse effect apparently."

"Indeed." Was all Severus could think to say. Greenhouse effect? Did the muggles want to live in greenhouses in the winter?

"Severus, tell me where have you chosen to invest in property?"

"France, Spain, Far East and the British Isles of course."

"Of course, as much as we Brit's complain about 'Ol Blighty we would never leave it all together."
"It is home."

"Dinner is served." The Petunia woman called from behind him in a counterfeit upper class accent. Severus followed her into the small dining room off the kitchen and sat in the chair she indicated. The food didn't smell too bad, nowhere near as good as Hogwarts though.

As the meal progressed it seemed as though they were desperate to strike up conversation again, Severus internally groaned and wished midnight would just hurry up and arrive so he could leave this manicured hellhole. "So tell me, Severus, is there a Mrs. Snape?" Petunia asked him, he wanted to choke on his pasta for how ludicrous that idea was.

"No."

"No one special in your life?" Vernon smirked at him acting as though they were friends.

"As a matter of fact there is."

"Really, how come she is not here with you tonight? She would have been more then welcome." Petunia said.

Doubt that! Severus wanted to snap but decided now was not the time to get angry, well at least not visibly so. "She was unable to attend as she is visiting with family at the moment." He hoped Harry could not hear him referring to him as a her!

"Known her long?"

"Yes, Vernon, almost seven years now."

"Seven years, and no marriage?"

"We have only been together for about eight months of that time, we are still getting to know one another on a more personal level." The rest of the dinner conversation was just as dull to Severus. He made the fatal mistake of starting to clock watch so time seemed to move slower than normal.

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Harry was sitting up in his room nervously biting his thumbnail. He was happy to see Sev any way he could, but this was a little close to home, he knew Sev was a fabulous spy and could fit into almost any situation, but Harry was not so convinced he could fit into a muggle situation so well. His uncle was mean and devious but then again on the other hand Severus was the head of Slytherin for a reason. He to was sly, cunning and just as devious as anyone else. Unfortunately that did not mean he could handle muggles in the right way. Though Harry had never broached the subject with Severus, Harry kind of presumed he was a bit of an elitist, a milder version of say Malfoy. After all Slytherins were known for their dislike of anyone that was not pure blood and Severus was a Slytherin. On the other hand Sev was not your typical Slytherin, he was brave and courageous and on top of all that he was with Harry.

Harry was very aware that he was not pure blood; he was what was referred to as half-blood. It didn't matter that both his parents were both magical because his mother was muggle born. It was another thing he had in common with Voldemort, one parent muggle, the other magical.
Severus had never brought this up as a problem with Harry, but it was something Harry had worried about. Would Severus be able to commit himself long term to Harry? Or would the old Slytherin pure blood expectations weigh down on him forcing him to leave to find a wife and sire an heir? Harry knew Severus was gay but that did not mean he would not leave him to do his Slytherin duties because, believe it or not, Severus was an honourable man. Sometimes Harry got a little frustrated at Sev's honour because the man lived by it like it was an unbreakable code, an old muggle saying came to mind when Harry thought of Severus this way, 'live by the sword, die by the sword.' Severus sometimes could see things very black and white, though Harry knew he would never admit it, he was far too stubborn.

These were the kind of things Harry dwelled on when left to his own inner voice to long. He rolled his eyes at his own insecurities; he was acting daft. The most embarrassing thing about the way he acted sometimes was that it was Ron who had pulled him up on it, claiming he was getting very possessive and a tad obsessive about Severus, or Snape as Ron preferred to call him. He couldn't help himself though, he felt as though he was falling further and further into a place that only he and Severus existed and he didn't want to be anywhere else, he was happy to drown in that place. Merlin! He was becoming obsessive; Harry shook his head to get rid of these thoughts. He heard someone coming up the stairs and held his breath hoping it was Severus. There was a light knock on his door and it opened and Severus slipped in. It was the first time Harry had actually looked at Sev tonight. Harry had to hope he was not drooling, standing before him was Severus wearing muggle black suite trousers and jacket and a red shirt. The first few buttons of the shirt were undone accentuating his long neck that was on show as his hair was neatly tied back at the nape of his neck. Harry didn't care what Ron thought, this man was his and he sure as hell was not going to let him get away from him. He lightly jumped off his bed and straight into Sev's arms and pressed their lips together. The kiss quickly became heated and hands starting to roam over their bodies. Harry could taste the whisky on Severus' breath. Severus was the first to pull away.

"Harry, I just came up here remind you that in a little over half an hour you need to take the first potion."

"How's it going down there?"

"In a word dull! How have you managed not to go insane spending the best part of eighteen years with these people?"

"We rarely spoke."

"After just one evening with these people I am starting to believe that may have been a blessing."

"Has my uncle not twiggled yet?"

"No, I am a far better actor then you give me credit for. Also, Albus and I arranged for a fake muggle check book to be created. So all your uncle cares about is the check sitting in his back pocket for 25 000 with the belief there is more to come."

"I can't wait to see his face when it won't cash."

Severus smirked at him in an evil way. "I best be going or else they might grow suspicious." A quick kiss was placed on his forehead then he was alone again. Harry returned to his bed to clock watch.
Severus was glad it was only a minute to go until five to midnight when Harry would be taking the first pain potion because he was bored out of his skull and he wanted to leave! He had never had to play nice for such a long time before in his life. Oh, he would get Albus for this. This was an evil, a new kind of torture that if the Dark Lord found out about would have the wizarding world at his feet in only minutes. That image brought a smirk to his face, the Dark Lord using Harry's muggle relatives for world domination!

"Is everything alright, Severus?" Vernon asked him, bringing Severus out of his reverie.

Severus checked his pocket watch, which he had noticed the Dursleys eyeing with approval, after all it was gold with studded emeralds, and saw that it was now a minute after Harry had taken his potion. "It is now." Severus snapped and stood up and exited the room leaving the Dursleys gob smacked as to what was going on. Severus stood at the bottom of the stairs and yelled up them. "Potter, get down here now!" He heard quiet bangs come from what could laughingly be called Harry's room.

He was joined in the hallway by the idiotic muggles. "Wh-what is going on here?" Vernon asked him.

"Nothing that concerns you." Severus snapped back he looked up when he felt Harry was half way down the stairs. "You have five minutes to get your things together and get back down here." It looked as though Harry did not need telling twice.

"Just who are you?" Vernon asked in suspicious tones. "And how do you know Potter?"

"That, Mister Dursley, is none of your concern."

"You have come into my home, eaten the food my wife has prepared, drank my scotch and all along you knew that useless good for nothing little twerp?"

"Watch your tongue, Dursley, before you end up 'holding' it!" Severus said in a deathly quiet tone. It seemed to work because it shut the idiots up for the time being. "Potter!" He yelled up the stairs again.

Harry appeared on the stairs dragging his trunk, owl cage and snake tank. "Release Hedwig, put the snake around your neck and shrink everything else." Harry nodded at him and released his owl and quietly hissed something at the Runespoor and it twisted itself around his neck.

"What about the shrinking?" Harry asked him quietly.

"Are you not a wizard? Do you not have a wand?" Those words had caused his hosts for the night to gasp and take a few steps away from him.

"Yes but I'm not allowed to do magic..."

"Were you born a dunderhead or is it something you have practiced? You are of age, you could have used magic at any time."

"Oh."
"Oh, indeed." Severus rolled his eyes at Harry when he saw the slight blush creep across his face, then he gave him a smirk telling him everything was okay and he was not angry at him. He watched as Harry shrunk the two cages and trunk.

"You're one of them!" Severus snapped his head around to look at the other youth in the hallway. The word pathetic sprung to mind.

"If you don't want me to cause you any trouble then you will not attempt to cause me any. Do I make myself clear?" He used his teaching tone with them and it had the desired result. They nodded dumbly at him.

"Now what?" Harry whispered.

"Now we wait until the portkey is activated and it will take us back to Hogwarts. That should give us enough time for you to show me just how much you have missed me." Severus hated displays of public affection, finding them tacky and unnecessary, but he was going to allow his young lover the satisfaction of truly shocking his family before his departure if he wished to. By the very Slytherin smirk on that face, he guessed Harry was going to take him up on that offer.

"Oh, I think you know how much I missed you, Severus."

"Prove it."

He watched as Harry pocketed his belongings and run down the remaining few stairs and straight into his more than willing arms. Severus felt Harry's lips meet his as he tightened his grip on Harry's waist. He slid his tongue along Harry's lower lip seeking entrance, Merlin, he had missed kissing this brat! As the kiss deepened and a small moan escaped from Harry and Severus backed them up a few steps and pulled away from Harry's lips, giving him an amused, evil smirk. With enough force, but not enough to hurt, Severus pushed Harry back up against the hallway wall by the front door and dove back in to devour that willing mouth. In the background he could hear disgusted noises coming from the fat one about Harry's age and Vernon spitting in either rage or disgust. Severus really didn't care, he could handle anything they threw at him with one hand tied behind his back and probably blindfolded as well. He pulled back from Harry and gave a small genuine smile at the pout Harry was now giving him for the loss of contact. "Stop pouting, it is not becoming." He stoked Harry's cheek, and said in a low voice full of need and desire, "Say your good byes, we only have a few minutes until we must go." Harry gave him a small nod.

Harry turned a little to address his family. "Vernon, thanks I guess."

"I don't want your thanks you... you." He never finished that sentence because of the glare Severus gave him.

"Aunt Petunia, bye." She didn't answer she looked to horrified to actually speak.

"Dudley, take care. I hope the world will not be too cruel to you if you ever decide to leave home."

"You kissed him." Harry rolled his eyes at his cousin.

"No shit, Sherlock!"
"But he's old." It was said in shock more than anything else.

"He is not old. What will a few years difference mean when we are old and grey?" Severus tucked that piece of information away to be analysed at a later date. "Also he is rather good at it actually, I would suggest you give it a go, but I am a highly jealous young man and would be liable to kill you."

"Oh." Now he looked scared, that gave Harry some real satisfaction.

"You don't seem to disgusted though, just shocked?"

"Potter, I went to private school."

Harry's eyes widened with realisation. "Are you...?"

There was a loud bang and everyone looked at the passed out form of Petunia Dursley.

"No!" Was the emphatic answer, "but I know boys that are or at least gave it a try." Harry merely nodded at this information.

Severus had had enough of this conversation though it was amusing to see that retched woman pass out at the thought of her son being gay, but it was time to go. "Harry, we must leave. It is time to go." He pulled out an empty tin of sherbet lemons that was their portkey and gently brought it into Harry's view. He did not want a repeat performance of what happened last time they had portkeyed together, it was almost a year ago that that had happened, Severus mused.

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Harry gave one last look to his family, it was not full of hate or bitterness as he would have expected but one of pity and sorrow. He may not like them but they were his only real family and he doubted whether they would ever want to see him again. Just before the pull from behind his navel he saw his Aunt Petunia wake up, he gave a sad smile and held on tighter to Sev as the popped out of existence from his family's home.

After what felt like only a few moments later they were standing in the hospital ward in Hogwarts. "What are we doing here?" Harry groaned; he hated this place.

"Your vitals need to be monitored, I will stay if you wish me to."

"You better or I'll hex you if you try to leave." Severus smirked at him and led him to one of the beds in the infirmary and Madame Pomfrey bustled out to see to him. The first thing to happen was Severus removed the charm; Harry caught a look of something in his eye. Madame Pomfrey preformed her tests and told him she would be back in an hour. Harry waited till she was gone before he asked Severus about that look in his eye. "You prefered it when I look a little older, didn't you?"

"Not prefer, just find it a little more comfortable."

"I don't understand."

"Harry, when you and I started all this you looked as you do now, making me forget you were a
student. Then when our relationship became more physical, again you looked older and it kept seeming to happen that way, allowing me to put my guilt of sleeping with a student aside and that was wrong of me to forget."

"It was not against the rules, Severus."

"I know, but I should not have allowed it to go as far as I did." Harry's face fell and Severus reached out to stroke his cheek. "Do not look so sad, I do not regret what happened, ever. But I should have been stronger and resisted you until you had graduated."

Relief was very much evident upon Harry's face. "Guess I didn't help by constantly throwing myself at you, did I?"

"You are hard to resist, Mister Potter."

"And stubborn. I refuse to let go of something I want. Sorry about that."

"There is no need to apologise, Harry. As I have said, I have no regrets." He leaned in and gently captured Harry's lips.

"Besides, at least I know I can look forward to what you will look like in ten years."

"So you plan on sticking around then?" Harry asked him, trying his hardest to feign indifference.

He shivered a little as Sev once again leaned in to kiss him softly on the cheek and whispered in his ear, "As long as you'll have me."

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As Harry had to stay awake through the night to continue taking his potions, he and Severus passed the time playing chess, which Harry lost every game, and catching up on what they had been up to for the last month. Harry also remembered to thank Severus for the necklace and the letter he had received from him on the train back to his relatives. That letter was now among one of Harry's most treasured possessions. Harry felt occasional pains shoot through his system as the change was taking place but it was nothing compared to the pain he had felt from falling off his broom during Quidditch, though Harry couldn't help but milk the situation a little just so Sev would continue to hold him for a little longer when one of the pains arrived. He had a feeling Severus knew this but didn't mind. At five o'clock Harry took his last pain potion as the final parts of his transformation back to his natural age occurred. By five thirty he looked eighteen again without the help of any charms. Harry snuggled up to the side of Severus on the bed they were on and fell into a deep sleep.

**Next Chapter:** Harry is in for a shock and the war for the orphans begins. (Last Chapter.)
The Secret Guardian Angel - Chapter 30

Harry was woken up by a gentle squeeze to his shoulder, he murmured something and snuggled in tighter to the warm body next to him. He was not ready to be awake up yet considering he had only gotten to sleep at five thirty this morning.

"Harry, its time to wake up." Harry heard Severus' voice speak through his sleepy haze.

"Soon, not yet. Too tired." He managed to say back and allowed sleep to take him once again.

"If you don't get up on your own, I will force you awake and it will certainly not be pleasant."

Harry stirred again, sat up and threw a glare at Severus. "What is so important that you felt you needed to wake me?"

"That glare would work better if your hair was not sticking up everywhere and your clothes were not so wrinkled." Harry poked his tongue out and made a disgruntled face, which Severus just smirked at. "Albus and Minerva have requested our presence in an hour and you need to eat something."

"Are you eating?"

"A little, but you need to eat to regain your strength. The potions may have subdued most of the pain but your system still needs to recover from the shock. Therefore you must eat." Harry mumbled his agreement and headed off to the bathroom.

***
After much grumbling and a quick breakfast, Harry and Severus were making their way to the Headmaster's office. Harry could tell that he was not in the best of moods, he was tired and grumpy as hell. He couldn't understand why this couldn't wait until tomorrow when he was fully recovered. He knew the war was important but it wasn't going anywhere, it would still be going on tomorrow. "Sev, this is stupid! Why can't this wait until tomorrow?"

"I have my suspicions but nothing concrete."

"Suspictions?"

"Yes, but that is all they are. It would be best if the Headmaster was to explain it all to you."

Harry gave him a sideways glance but left it at that as they arrived at the stone gargoyle. Severus muttered the password and it jumped aside revealing the stairway. They both moved up the stairs and Severus knocked and entered the room. Harry did not miss the subconscious stiffening of Severus' back; Harry could not see the reason why because Severus blocked his view. Though Harry fully understood why Severus had had that reaction the moment Severus had stood aside allowing him entrance. Harry saw red, simple as that, and he let the anger control his actions. He rushed forward into the office and somehow magically threw the chairs that were in his way aside with a flick of his hand and threw a perfectly placed right hook directly onto Draco's nose. It sent Draco flying backwards onto his ass on the floor. He was looking up to Harry with a look of shock and a little fear. Harry saw him go for his wand. "I don't think so, Malfoy." Harry spat at him and again waved his left hand and Draco's wand went flying from his grasp to the other side of the room, Harry threw himself down on the other boy and began to throttle him. "I warned you, Malfoy, what would happen to you if you crossed my path again after school!"

***

From the moment Harry had charged into the room and went for Draco, Severus had been in a mild form of shock. First had been the unconscious wandless magic preformed by Harry, twice and then the actual attack had been physical and not magical. It seemed as though Harry really had been paying attention in his physical ed. classes. It also it spoke volumes about his upbringing; it was a muggle's form of attack. Severus spared a glance at Draco and winced when he saw the bloodied nose of his former student. He too had broken his nose and knew even with magic the healing was painful. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Minerva and Albus getting into action to put a stop to the fight, especially now as Harry had drawn his wand and held it to Draco's throat. It was the first time in his life that he actually had a moment of pity for the Dark Lord because he was going to lose, there was no way in hell he would be able to beat Harry. That thought brought a wicked grin to his face.

He heard Minerva gasp at his grin. Yes, he guessed it did look bad watching two former students fighting and grinning at them. She wouldn't know that he was actually thinking of the Dark Lord's defeat. He rolled his eyes when Albus joined her in looking at him strangely; he guessed it was time to put a stop to this. "POTTER!"

Both of his former students froze. "No, I warned him to stay out of my way."

"Be that as it may, Potter, you can not simply kill him because you do not like him."

"I don't plan on killing him, maybe just... impair his ability to walk again or make it impossible for him to reproduce. Put an end to the Malfoy line once and for all!"
"Potter," Severus growled. "Have you learned nothing about the wizarding world in the last seven years?"

"What?"

"Mister Malfoy is here under someone's protection, if you harm him you will have to answer to his protector. If that harm is fatal, his protector has the right to challenge you to a duel to the death."

Harry narrowed his eyes at Severus. "Is it you? Are you protecting this little bastard?" Severus sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose he could feel a headache coming on, he was tired and in no mood for this. He pointed towards Minerva and looked pointedly at Harry.

"Professor McGonagall!"

"Yes Mister Potter, now kindly remove yourself from my charge before I am forced to remove you." Minerva told him.

Severus could see Harry looked a little unsure, Severus knew Harry wanted to throttle Draco, but did not want to have to face Minerva. He knew Harry deeply respected her. Again he took matters into his own hands, "Potter, put down Malfoy this instant!" Harry did as he was told, but he shot a look at Severus that told him in no uncertain terms he would be explaining that remark in great detail at some point.

"Malfoy, you are lower than a snake's belly. If I had a dog with a face like yours, I'd shave his ass and make him walk backwards!" Harry snarled.

"Ahem, Potter. I meant for you to let go of Malfoy, not insult him."

"Oh, sorry, Professor." Harry gave a look of mock innocence.

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"Fine, but I want him out of here. I will not stay to discuss anything in this room while he is here."

It was Albus' turn to join in on the chat. "He will not be staying, Harry. I asked him to be here so we could inform you that he would be staying in the castle as Mister Malfoy has asked for sanctuary. We thought it best to inform you of this in person before you found out from someone else, or by running into him near Gryffindor Tower as his quarters are next to yours."

"What! You have got to be kidding me! Seven years I have had to put up with that little shit lording it over me and bullying me; and now you want me to be a good little Gryffindor and be his neighbour?" Harry shouted while pointing at Malfoy.

"Harry!" Minerva gasped.

"Minerva, why don't you take young Draco to the infirmary. Now, Harry, you could be a good influence on him."

"First you want me to save the world and now Malfoy! No, I won't do it, I want nothing to do
Harry watched as Malfoy was led out of the room with McGonagall, his attention was brought back to the Headmaster purely because of his commanding tone. "Then Harry you will just have to stay out of Mister Malfoy's way and I ask you not to attack him again. He is under the protection of one of the professors of this school."

"Why don't you tell him to stay out of my way?" Harry knew he was being disrespectful by raising his voice in an angry tone.

"I have told him the same as I am telling you, but you must learn to live together."

"Live together! You have got to be kidding me!"

"No, Harry, I am not." The twinkle was gone and the tone was deadly serious.

"Fine! But please do not expect me to befriend that git."

"Harry, he is looking for protection from Voldemort and his family. Is it not our place to help him?"

"Tell me one thing, why was he worth saving and giving sanctuary to and yet Severus was not?" Harry was losing control of his anger. "It might be your job to save him but it is not mine. Don't you think I have enough on my plate with having to save the world?" Harry turned and walked out of the office and slammed the door on his way out.

***

Severus stood dumb struck for a moment unable to move or speak. He knew Harry had a temper on him but he had never seen it in full force before. Yes he had been on the receiving end of a few nasty glares through Harry's school years and he had even seen Harry give a bit of lip to the Dark Lord last year when he had been captured. But, he had never seen him go off on one in front of the Headmaster; sure, he had heard off and seen the devastation of the Headmaster's office after Black had died, he had put that down to Harry wallowing in grief. One thing that he was having a little trouble getting to grips was, was that it seemed Harry was angry for him. He had never had someone defend him so passionately before, it was a curious feeling. He turned to Albus to see the old man stroking his beard deep in thought; Severus hated to interrupt but he really did want to try and track Harry down. "Albus."

"Mmmm, sorry Severus, was there something you wanted to say?"

Severus could not keep the slightly confused look from his face. The old man was really was starting to act as barmy as he liked people to believe he was. "Yes, Albus, Harry." He pointed towards the door that the young man had stormed through.

"Yes, Harry. No need to worry, Severus, he will calm down. He is just a little hot headed like his mother. He will come to his senses soon and calm down. He really does seem to care very deeply about you, Severus. You are a very lucky young man to have someone so devoted to you."

"Yes, Albus." Severus just wanted to get out of the office and go find Harry, he didn't know what the Headmaster was going on about and he hated being trapped in a room and without
really knowing what was going on. "I'll go find Harry and inform him of what we were going to
tell him before things got out of hand."

"Yes, you do that, Severus. It will be best coming from you. Just make sure it is somewhere
secure where you are sure you are alone."

"Of course, Albus. Good-day." Severus left the office and pulled out the map Harry had made
for him and whispered the activation word and smiled a little when he saw Harry had returned
to his quarters. He vaguely remembered never having told Harry the password. It must be those
damn guardian snakes protecting his door that had let him in. Somehow Harry had managed to
charm them with the help of Salazar Slytherin and his two pet snakes, not that he really minded,
his would have gladly given Harry the password if he had asked.

***

Harry was pacing in front of the fireplace, he was furious with McGonagall and especially with
Dumbledore. How dare that mad old fool give Draco Malfoy sanctuary when he had refused it
to Severus all those years ago! If you asked him, he thought Severus was much more
worthwhile saving than some stupid snotty selfish spoilt brat! He knew after his temper had
abated he would do as the Headmaster had asked, he would be civil to Malfoy but he would not
ever be friends with him! He had hurt his friends far to many times over the years and he sure as
hell would never trust him.

He looked up as he heard the door open and looked as apologetic as he possibly could as he
watched Severus enter. "Sev, I am so sorry."

Severus gave him an amused look. "It is not I to whom you should be apologising to."

Harry rolled his eyes. "I know but I think I will just let them stew for a while. But I do owe you
an apology also for acting like such a prick. I just saw Malfoy and lost it."

"I can understand that."

"Was that all Dumbledore wanted, to inform me of Malfoy?"

"No, but I can fill you in on the rest. Why don't you take a seat and I'll order some tea for us."

***

Severus had been hoping to have Albus tell Harry most of what was going on, he didn't fancy
having Harry blow up again. That was why he poured a little calming potion into Harry's cup,
he did not agree with doing this as it was a trick favoured by Albus, but he could see its merits
right now. He handed Harry his cup and waited while he drank down most of it, then waited a
few minutes more for the potion to take effect.

"Are you just going to look at me, not that I mind by the way, or are you going to tell me what
was meant to be said this morning?" Harry asked him.

"I need you to promise me you will not get mad and jump to conclusions until you have heard
the whole story."

"Okay, this sounds serious."
"It is."

"Very well. I promise."

"Good. Now, last week the Dark Lord had a meeting to tell us of his new plans, you will be pleased to hear they do not concern you."

"Ecstatic." Came the sarcastic reply.

"Yes, but do not allow that little piece of information make you drop your guard."

"Nah, I won't."

"Good, because I learnt many other interesting facts during this little meeting."

"Like?"

"Let me start at the beginning, the Dark Lord has decided that his next bid for power lies in attacking the workers at the Ministry. He wants to either kill them and possibly replace them with his own spies." He saw Harry look at him in fear.

"Don't worry, I was able somehow to persuade him to take a slightly different path."

"Different path?"

"The details are unimportant."

"No, Severus, they are not."

"This time they are."

"Why won't you tell me?"

"Because I do not want you to think any less of me, you know what I do and some of the decisions I must make."

"I know and I promise I will not think any less of you."

Severus weighed it up in his head, he did not wish to keep secrets but then again he did not want his whole life laid bare for all to view. He decided on a slightly sweeter version of the truth. "Under pressure I worked out that there was a way that I might be able to save more lives at the cost of only one or two. As I have said, I somehow managed to persuade him that going after unknown office workers was a waste of time and that he should go after Fudge instead." There, that was a slightly better way of putting it then just openly admitting that he thought Fudge deserved to die for being a total incompetent moron.

"Fudge! You told him to go after Fudge?"

"Yes, he is well protected and stands a chance of surviving an attack, where as what chance does, say, Miss Joanne Lingley, a former student of mine that I know is an office junior in the Ministry, have against the Dark Lord if he decides to kill her, or worse place her under the
Imperious Curse if he deems her to be useful to keep alive?"

"I guess you have a point."

"I do, while his mind is on Fudge the others are safe. Fudge will be warned and anyway, because we are now at war, his personal guard has increased."

"I feel that I should disapprove of what you did," Harry said with a troubled look, "and yet I cannot help but feel some satisfaction with the idea of Fudge having to come face to face with Voldemort. Does that make me a bad person?"

"No, Harry. It makes you a human one." Sev replied softly.

Harry sighed, "I do understand, I just don't know if I could make and then act on such decisions."

"You know that you can, you did in the Hogsmeade attack."

"Yeah, but nobody was dying."

"But they could have been."

"I guess. So what else happened?"

"This is where it gets interesting. After the meeting was finished I was asked to remain behind." Harry's eyes widened.

"Oh, I got the full treatment, wine and even a seat."

"Merlin! What did he want? He didn't try anything did he?" Harry finished a little angrily.

"No, he did not, thank all the Gods! Although that is what I first thought. I don't believe I have ever been so worried in my life."

"I bet!"

"Now what we discussed, you must never mention again, only Albus myself and you shall know." He saw Harry look at him with a raised eyebrow. "But, I will tell you everything, the reasons will become apparent. That was where I learnt that Draco was residing in the castle; the Dark Lord was not at all pleased. It seems as though Draco had informed Lucius he had remained behind to spy on us all, especially you. The Dark Lord does not trust Draco, neither do I. I am unsure where his true loyalties lie. I do not want you to be around him alone and you need to watch what you say around him, he is not to be trusted."

"I won't, you have nothing to worry about there. I can't stand him, git!"

"The other thing is, for some reason, I seem to be in the Dark Lord's favour at the moment and he wants me to be his right hand man. The information I can gather from this position will be invaluable."

"But dangerous."
"Yes, very dangerous. I will still have the same safety fall backs I have always had, the portkey from Albus and his support should I be arrested."

"Its not just that though, is it?" Harry said to him in a very serious tone.

"Mmmm." Was all Severus could manage.

"It must be very tempting, all that power."

"It sometimes unnerves me how well you know me."

"Don't forget, the hat wanted to place me in Slytherin for a reason. Were you tempted?"

"It was only tempting for a split second, then I thought about you and it no longer seemed desirable."

"And you always try to tell me you are not sweet." Harry gave him one of his lazy grins.

"If the offer had been made twenty years ago, then life now for me would be very different. I no doubt would be in Azkaban rotting away with very little of my mind remaining."

"Thank Merlin it is now and not then." Harry took a deep breath. "Does this mean you will have to spend more time with him?"

"I do not know, but I have told Albus if it becomes too much than I shall walk away and take you up on your offer. I can not go back to doing everything I did when I was faithful."

"Well, that is certainly good to hear. You know that when things start to pile up a little bit too much, I am here for you."

"I know, Harry, and I shall attempt not to bottle everything up and keep it from you."

"Scary isn't it?"

"What?"

"The way it all seems so real now. Now that I have left school, the way Voldemort is making real plans that do not even include killing me first off. It just seems more real somehow."

Severus wrapped an arm around Harry's shoulders and pulled him in tight for a hug. "I know, unfortunately it will get worse before it gets better, but it will."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

***

Draco was sitting in the infirmary waiting for his nose to finish healing itself. He was fuming at Potter, how dare he hit him, a Malfoy! If it didn't suit his own purposes he would hand the little shit over to the Dark Lord himself, but no, unfortunately, if he wanted the Dark Lord dead then he would have to tolerate Potter until he had fulfilled his destiny. Then if Potter survived, it was
all bets off. But, of course, there was the flip side of things to plan for; unlikely as it might seem, Potter might lose. Draco did not want to fall into the Dark Lord's grasp without a good chance of surviving. That was why he had told his father he was remaining behind to spy on everyone here. Sure, he knew that meant he would have to pass some information over to his father about what was going on in the castle, but he was never exposed to anything important because for some reason Dumbledore did not fully trust him.

That didn't really bother him very much, he didn't want to be trusted he just wanted to stay alive. His father had assured him that although he was initially a little annoyed, the Dark Lord had seen merit in keeping him in the castle as an extra spy. Did this mean the Dark Lord did not trust Snape anymore? His father had mentioned that during a meeting last week Snape had been asked to remain behind with the Dark Lord but nobody knew what it was about. According to his father, people were only asked to remain behind if it was for one of two things, extra punishment or for an extra mission. His father believed that it was for extra punishment because he had been setting the seeds of discontent about Snape for a while now. Draco wasn't too sure but was prepared to defer to his fathers better knowledge on such a subject, that and because Snape had had a slight worried look on his face for the past week.

Draco knew that as soon as he was allowed to return to his rooms, he would have to write another letter to his father because it was time for his weekly update, which he had to do if he wanted to remain relatively safe from both sides. Draco sighed to himself; playing both sides off each other was becoming tedious and confusing.

***

Albus was sitting in his office going over some order reports when he realised he was about to be rudely disturbed by Damien Larkswood. He had been expecting this confrontation since the summer holidays had begun but that didn't mean he was looking forward to it, he hated having to interview possible new members of staff, especially for that position. Maybe the rumours were true, maybe the position was cursed!

His office door burst open and on cue Damien started screaming like a trapped banshee. "Albus! Tell me it is not true!"

"I can't do that, Damien, until you tell me what you don't want to believe." As if Albus didn't already know.

"That...that Potter brat is staying on at the castle!"

"Yes, Damien, it is true."

"Why? I have told you before and I will tell you again that boy is evil!"

"Damien, he is not evil, he is pivotal in this war and his safety cannot be guaranteed. Harry Potter will remain at Hogwarts until I feel it is safe for him to be else where."

"Then you leave me no choice, Albus, I resign my position."

"As you wish, Damien, but please think carefully about it. Nowhere is safer then Hogwarts during this dangerous time." As much as Damien annoyed Albus he did not wish to see his former pupil dead because of some misguided prejudice, Damien was not evil, just stupid. That and he wasn't a bad teacher.
"I am sorry, Albus, but I must leave. I cannot sit back and watch the fate of wizarding Briton fall into the hands of a child I do not trust."

"Very well, Damien, where will you go? Somewhere safe I hope."

"I will be leaving Briton for the New World, my brother is living over there now."

"Yes, Simon. How is he?"

"He is doing well, he has asked me to join him."

"Very well, Damien, I wish you all the luck in the world."

"Good bye, Albus," with that Damien Larkswood left his office. He released another hefty sigh, who in Merlin's name was he going to get to fill that position? He briefly thought about trying to persuade Severus to take the position, but no, that would never work. Severus, though he had a deep interest in the subject would never teach it. Too much interaction with the students, he claimed. Albus had to smile at that; it was a very Severus thing to say. Also, with his new position with Voldemort he would have very little time to create a new curriculum and teach a subject he had never taught before. No, it was best for him to remain where he could do the job blindfolded and only half a mind on it.

It also seemed as if Harry had very little interest in becoming a teacher, which Albus had hoped he would and be able to fill that position once and for all. Strangely though, Severus' influence on the boy had made him even more determined not to have anything to do with the Dark Arts or the defense of them. He had to admit, if only to himself, that he had not seen that coming. But what to do about his now vacant teaching position? Maybe he would ask Severus if he knew of anyone, after all he did have some very interesting friends. Yes, that is what he would do, he would ask Severus. He called Fawkes to him and penned a note to his favourite Potions Master,

**Severus,**

*S*orry to interrupt your day but I was wondering if it would be all right if Minerva and I pop down to your rooms for a small meeting?

*I have no objection to Harry remaining for the meeting. Please send your reply back with Fawkes,*

**Albus.**

Albus gave Fawkes the letter and sent him on his way, he fire called Minerva and asked her to come along to his office, as she stepped through the fireplace Fawkes returned with a small fiery bang. He took the note and thanked his familiar. The response was typically Severus.

**Albus,**

**Yes.**

**SS.**

"Albus, whatever is the matter?"
"Nothing to worry about, Minerva, I need you at this small meeting because it is school 
business and I need my deputy Headmistress' input. Shall we?" Albus pointed to the fireplace 
and she nodded in return.

***

As Albus stepped through the fireplace he could not help but give a small smile at the domestic 
scene. Severus was sat at one end of the sofa reading some report and making occasional notes 
in its margins and Harry was sprawled along the sofa with his feet in Severus' lap reading a 
book, both looking very content. Severus started to rise, but Albus stopped him. "Do not get up 
on our account, this should not take long. I do not wish to take up much of your time."

"Very well, Minerva, Albus, won't you both take a seat. Can I get you something?"

"Don't worry yourself my boy, allow me." He waved his wand and a full tea set arrived. "Can I 
get anyone something to eat?"

"No thank you, Albus." Severus said.

"Not for me, Albus, lunch has not long finished."

"Cake, chocolate would be good, sir." Harry said to him. Albus was relieved to hear that Harry's 
tone was not as harsh as it could have been considering their discussion this morning. It looked 
as though Minerva was yet to forgive him. He waved his wand and a three-tiered chocolate cake 
appeared and settled gently down on the table next to the tea. "Thank you, sir."

"No problem, Harry."

"By the way, Professors, I am sorry for my behaviour this morning, though I have no excuse for 
it. I was very tired only having a few hours sleep the night before because of the need to take 
the pain potions."

"Don't worry, Harry, all is forgotten." Albus reassured him. "And Harry, call me Albus, I am no 
longer your teacher."

"Mister Potter, Harry, I know it was a shock but just promise me you will try and get on with 
Mister Malfoy. Failing that, please don't kill him, I do not fancy finding myself in a duel with 
you, especially now that Severus and Filius are teaching you." Minerva finished with a smile.

"Thank you, Professor, and I will."

"Minerva, Harry. Albus is right, we are no longer your teachers."

Albus smiled at the grin Harry gave them, he knew it would take Harry a while to get used to 
using their first names. He remembered he had to actually threaten to hex Severus if he 
continued to call him sir before he called him Albus. Albus cut Harry and himself a generous 
slice of chocolate cake and settled back in the armchair Severus always used to sit in until Harry 
had arrived on the scene.

"Not to long ago I was visited by Damien Larkswood and he handed in his resignation." Albus 
held up his hand to the questions he knew were coming, "Yes, Minerva, I know that it is eleven
teachers for eleven years and Harry, no it was not your fault. Severus, I know you do not wish to teach that class. There does that answer all of your questions?” He was rewarded by three stunned nods. “Good, now as to the reason I called this little meeting. If I cannot find a replacement for that position I will be forced to accept someone from the Ministry again and after the fiasco of two years ago I guess we all know that is not an option. What I need is help in finding a replacement, that is why I have come to my two most trusted members of staff. Have either of you any suggestions?”

“Well, I guess we could always ask one of the older Weasley boys if they would be interested.” Minerva said to him. Albus could see the panic wash across Severus' face. No, Bill would not be a good choice, not with the way they had left things between them. "It's a thought, Minerva, but I feel that the position requires a more experienced hand at teaching."

"Then why ever did you employ Lockhart, Albus?"

"Now, Minerva, it is not nice to make fun of the sick." Minerva gave him a stern look. "What about you, Severus, any thoughts?"

"Albus, most of the people I know are not desirable people and would most certainly not good teachers."

"True, but I want you both to think about it, before I am forced to place an advert in the paper."

"Well..."

"Yes, Severus?"

"There is someone I know, a former professor from the Sorbonne in Paris. I have known him since I was a child; he was our neighbour in Paris. Though Defense Against the Dark Arts was not his subject, he is well versed in it."

"Really, Severus, and just what was his subject?" Minerva asked.

"History."

"Sounds like a possibility, and his loyalties?" Albus was intrigued; Severus had never mentioned a French professor friend to him before.

"Not to the Dark Lord, actually he has very little interest in any politics that are not over a century past."

"And you have faith in his abilities in the Defense of the Dark Arts?"

"Complete."

"Is he currently looking for work?"

"I believe so, I have not spoken to him in a few weeks and then he was complaining of being at a bit of a loose end and threatening to come spend the summer with me."

"Why would a professor who has worked at the Sorbonne in Paris have trouble finding work?" Minerva asked Severus in a suspicious tone. Actually Albus had to give her credit, he was so
excited at the possibility of finding a professor who was not connected to the Ministry he forgot to ask this question.

"It has been a while since he last taught."

"When did he last teach?" Albus asked him intrigued.

"1883."

"I'm sorry, I thought you just said 1883, surely you meant 1983?"

"No, Albus, I did not."

"But that would make him over 100 years old."

"Indeed, he is over 100 years old, far older. Couldn't tell by looking at him mind you, he looks great for his age."

"Umm, Severus, who or should I ask what exactly is your friend?" Albus asked, already having guessed the answer but wanted confirmation.

"A Vampire."

***

Harry choked on his second slice of chocolate cake, Malfoy always put him in a bad mood that could only be mollified by sugar. He felt a little sad that Ron and Hermione were not here to share it with him. Then he had heard Severus talking about a friend of his a paid a little more attention, because Severus had not really mentioned any friends to him before, at least not in this detail. Then he had heard the word 'Vampire', Severus knew a Vampire? Harry didn't know whether to be shocked or to roll his eyes because he should have known Severus would be friends with a dark creature of the night. "You know a Vampire?" The moment the words left his mouth he knew it was a stupid thing to say, because he had already been told that yes he did indeed know a Vampire. "Sorry, stupid question." He mumbled at the look Severus had given him.

"Albus, you can't seriously be considering this, can you?" McGonagall shrieked.

"Well, Minerva, it is a possibility."

"You would choose a Vampire over one of the Weasley lads?"

"I will need both Bill and Charlie where they are for the war and I will need a teacher here who I can rely on to teach the children what they need to know. That way, if this war drags on they will not fall prey to some evil Death Eater or Voldemort himself. Severus, how shall I contact your friend?"

"By owl would be best, but I make no promises. He is by profession a History professor."

"I would just like the chance to meet this friend of yours and ask him to come visit Hogwarts and have a chat."
"Fine, but if he accepts the wards will need to be modified to let him in."

"That will not be a problem, I modified them for you, I can modify them for a friend of yours. I will need to know his name though if I am to write to him."

"Nikolai Miasnikov."

"Sounds Russian."

"That is where he was born."

"Excellent. I will send him an owl and we shall wait and see. Come along, Minerva, I think we have taken up enough of Severus' and Harry's time."

Harry watched as his former Headmaster and Head of House left via the floo connection. He turned to Severus. "How come you can surprise me almost everyday?"

Severus smirked at him, "It's a gift, Harry."

"Git."

"Inferable brat."

Harry smiled at him and went back to his book, hoping that Severus' mysterious friend at least paid a visit to the castle, so he could try and discover more about his mysterious partner.

***

Voldemort had made his first Ministerial attack, two office juniors had been found dead in the house they shared just outside Diagon Alley. Severus had also brought news that three junior Ministers had been placed under the Imperius Curse and were now acting out under Voldemort's orders. They had so far not been asked to do anything too heinous, so it had been decided by the Order to leave them as they were and wait to see what Voldemort planned to do with them. It had not been a unanimous vote to leave them alone, a few wanted to go and rescue them, mainly the Gryffindors in the group. But they had been persuaded that it was actually safer for them where they were. As long as Voldemort believed them on his side, he would refrain from killing them, at least not until they had out lived their usefulness, and Severus was making sure to keep them useful so Voldemort would not have a reason to kill them.

There had been a plan put in place for them so that when Voldemort decided to get rid of them they could be whisked away to safety. While they had been unconscious, Severus had placed a small word-activation portkey underneath the skin on the right wrist of each person. He could whisper the activation word and all three would disappear to the infirmary at Hogwarts. It was a tricky procedure that Harry had come up with after reading a sci-fi book that Hermione had sent him to help keep him occupied. The thing that had scared Harry the most was the high number of children still missing and still going missing on a daily basis. Severus had only been able to account for 75% of them within Voldemort's home. It was believed the others were being kept at Malfoy Manor. That thought alone had left Harry cold and full of fear for the children.

Another thing that Harry had been told about was that Bella Lestrage had been given the 'honour' of bringing Harry to Voldemort. It looked as though Voldemort had taken Severus' suggestion of attacking the Ministry and moving Harry's death to after that had been completed
seriously, because that was what he was doing. Harry didn't mind though, because he still felt as if he owed the 'lovely' Bella a severe hexing for what she had done to his Godfather, Sirius. Oh yes, he was looking forward to that showdown. Even though Severus had told him to be careful because Bella was a powerful dark witch who had gone completely insane and now had absolutely no morals or sense of right and wrong left, Harry didn't care, he just wanted revenge.

Severus was now meeting with Voldemort a lot more regularly because of his new position, usually once but occasionally twice a week. Before, he was only called to Voldemort's side when a potion was required or Voldemort wanted a full audience to rant and rave at. The strain of a double life was starting to show a little bit, but he always looked much healthier and happier after he had spent the night with Harry. Which is where he went directly to, after he had debriefed Albus about Voldemort's latest plans.

The mysterious Nikolai Miasnikov had accepted Albus Dumbledore's offer of a meeting and was due to arrive mid August. The Headmaster had even re-keyed the schools wards in anticipation of his arrival. With all the extra time on his hands, Harry had taken the opportunity to do some extra reading on Vampires and their customs, he was excited to meet one of Severus’ friends from outside of Hogwarts, even if he was a little afraid. Severus had told him not to read any silly muggle novels about Vampires because they were all wrong but Harry could not put down the books Hermione had sent him, especially the ones written by Anne Rice.

Harry had managed to stay out of Draco's way for most of the time, they saw each other in the Great Hall for meals and they had occasionally seen each other in the corridors, each meeting had them both nodding curtly at each other and moving on their way. Neither wanting to speak with the other. Minerva McGonagall had worried about what Draco was going to do once school had restarted and had persuaded the Headmaster in allowing him to become her teacher's aid. He had grumbled at first because Harry had not been told to do anything but when Minerva had threatened to turn him out on his lazy aristocratic ass, he had relented and accepted her offer. She had also explained to him that Harry was not being asked to do the same because he had decided to further his education and had a war to win. Draco Malfoy was now Transfiguration Professor's aide, much to his dislike. He hated being called an aide to anything, and the position was nothing more then filing paperwork and ordering tea.

Harry was continuing with some of his private lessons, mainly Defense Against the Dark Arts, Transfiguration (minus aid from Draco), Potions and Physical Ed. It had been arranged for once a week to have Ron and Hermione to come and visit Harry under the pretence of just hanging out, while in actual fact they were holed up in a classroom with different professors learning advanced spell casting. They were vastly improving and amongst themselves believed that soon they would be ready to face down Voldemort and his followers.

***

Harry was in his rooms reading a book on advanced Defense Against the Dark Arts when he heard a curt knock at his door, not expecting anyone he cautiously opened the door with his wand in his hand. "Professor, I did not know you were back in the castle."

"Mister Potter, though it is none of your business, I had to see the Headmaster about next years intake and he asked me to come along and give you this." Harry looked down at the book being offered to him.

"Won't you come in, Professor?"
"I see you are learning the basics of hospitality, Potter." There was a definite smirk on his lips.

"Why, Professor Snape, that almost sounded like a compliment."

"Never."

Harry stepped aside trying to keep a straight face. "Please, Professor, let me get you a cup of tea."

"Oh, very well."

Harry ushered him in and shut his door. "Was the meeting with the Headmaster enjoyable?"

"Considering I only spent the grand total of about sixty seconds with him, it was most enjoyable."

"Sixty seconds, but I thought you said you had a meeting with him about next year's intake?"

"I lied, I flooed into his office bid him good-day and came and saw you."

Harry couldn't keep the grin off his face. "Ahhh, that is so sweet."

"As I keep telling you, Potter, I don't do sweet."

"I think you do, you just don't want to ruin your reputation. What are you going to do when this war is over and we no longer have to go around in secret? Your reputation will be ruined the moment they know you are with The-Boy-Who-Lived."

"Simply resolved, I will just tell the world that you are a masochist and enjoy being dominated. Or I will tell them that you placed me under the Imperious Curse and had your wicked way with me."

"Oi! You would and all wouldn't you?"

"Definitely."

"But wouldn't it make you look weak if I was able to place you under the Imperious?"

"Maybe, but by then the whole world will know you as the Man-Who-Defeated-You-Know-Who and they will believe you to be the most powerful wizard around so they will not question me. If I use the other excuse they will just think you are kinky." Harry had a look of mock horror on his face, which soon changed to a more suspicious calculating look. "You are a sneaky bastard, and you lie far to well. You would never do such a thing. I know you to well. So what will you do when this, we, become public?"

"I'll do what I usually do when the press and public look down upon me. I'll hold my head high, scowl at them and tell them all to go screw themselves!"

"Now that is the Severus Snape I know and love. I'm glad it doesn't worry you to much."

"Why would it? I will be the envy of over half the wizarding world with the equivalent of a trophy husband on my arm. It is the dream of every pure blood wizard, you will look fabulous
on my arm at dinner parties." That sentence was finished with a wicked smile on his face.

Harry couldn't help but laugh; although Severus was only teasing him there was a strange truth in his words. With him off doing his charity work with children and Severus doing whatever he wanted to do, that is how a lot of the world would see them, especially the pure bloods. Harry laughed even harder at that thought. "Hermione would be horrified at that thought."

"Yet you seem to find it amusing."

"It is, but hey, who am I to complain if I am to become a kept man." Harry again doubled into fits of giggles. "I will just have to make sure you are around next time to save my ass when I get into trouble so I can fulfill my destiny to become your trophy husband."

Severus also laughed at that. "Yes, it does seem as though I have made a second career out of saving your ass, as you so eloquently put it."

"Bet you're glad now that you saved me all those times."

"I must admit it does seem to have worked out for the best in the long run. Let's face it, it is such a great ass!"

"Are you flirting with me, Professor Snape?"

"Why bother when I already have you."

"A little sure of yourself, aren't you?"

"Abso-fucking-lutely, Mister Potter." The tone was low and seductive and made Harry shiver, he couldn't find it in himself to pull away as Severus leaned over him, forcing him to lie down onto his back on the sofa. Severus was leaning over him, his lips a mere inch away from Harry's. "Care to contradict me, Mister Potter?"

Harry could feel the wisps of Severus breath across his own lips and tried to lean up and kiss the teasing lips, but Severus was too fast and pulled away at the last moment, smirking down at Harry and he raised an eyebrow in question to him. Harry smirked back at him as he replied. "No, I do not wish to contradict you, not when you are absolutely correct, Professor Snape." Severus grinned at him and leaned back down allowing their lips to meet. The kiss was slow and unhurried, as they explored each other's mouths. It wasn't long before the kiss turned heated and clothes were shed, leaving them both naked on the sofa.

They both lavished kisses over the other's body with utmost reverence; they were unhurried and enjoyed the time they had been afforded for the moment before the war took over their lives. Harry felt himself floating on a cloud of bliss as Severus lovingly prepared him for penetration. Severus was taking his time driving Harry wild with desire; he wanted Severus to enter him but knew there was no hurrying the other man. He wanted to take his time because soon when school started again time would become more precious.

Harry could feel Severus move position into between his knees and couldn't hold back a groan as he waited for Severus to take him. He felt Severus slowly enter him inch by inch, there was the familiar initial burn followed by the wave of pleasure that washed through him. Severus rested his forehead against Harry's and looked into his eyes, Harry's breath hitched at the love and devotion he saw in Severus' face. He twitched a little as Severus ran a hand gently down his
side and came to rest on his hip. Harry gave a small shy smile and looked back directly in to Severus' eyes. "Sev, I love you." Harry whispered.

Severus gave him one of his rare true smiles, "I know," was whispered back.

"I know you know, Han Solo." Harry giggled back.

Severus frowned at him. "Han Solo?"

"It's a muggle thing, I'll take you one day to go see it."

"I await it with bated breath." The tone was unusually soft and lacked all the usual sarcasm.

"I'll hold you to your word, you know."

"I would expect nothing less."

Harry was kept from replying by a toe-curling kiss as Severus started to slowly thrust in and out of him. Harry continued to ride wave after wave of pleasure that was slowly building up. Each time Severus brought him to the peak of pleasure he would carefully bring him back down again just to start all over again. Harry was whimpering loudly by the time Severus took him over the edge with an orgasm that made him black out. He came too a few minutes later, clean and sprawled over Severus' chest, covered with a green and silver throw. "Where did this come from?" He inquired, tugging on the throw slightly.

"I transfigured one of your cushions."

"Nice colour scheme." Harry said as a joke.

"Thought you would appreciate it. I can change it back to its original form later."

"No, I like it, keep it as it is."

"Sentimental Gryffindor." Harry did not need to see Severus roll his eyes to know he had done it. He let out a small laugh. "Though I wouldn't change it or you for the world."

"I love you, too." Harry smiled against the chest he was using for a pillow.

Harry felt a small kiss being placed on the top of his head. "And I love you, Harry." It was said quietly but Harry still heard it and again smiled. "It will soon be supper time, should you not go down to the great hall?"

"Nah, not tonight. Tonight I want to stay here with only you and forget about everything that is going on outside this room. Forget that some nutter wants to kill me, forget that there are people dying out there and most of all forget that there is a war going on out there that both of us are so involved in that we might lose."

"That I believe I can do, your wish is my command."

"Like a fairy godmother."

"Fairy godmother? Not too sure I like the sound of that," came the sleepy, sarcastic reply.
"Okay bad choice of words, how about guardian angel?"

"Moderately better."

"Okay how about..."

"How about you shut up and give me a kiss?"

"That I can do." Harry leaned up and gave his amused lover a kiss.

~FIN~

A/N2: A massive thank you to everyone that has reviewed this story, every single one of you has kept me motivated. Once again thanks a lot and I hope to see you all over at the sequel.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!