Finding Potter

by etherian

Summary

This story was inspired by a passage from the Deathly Hallows right before Snape dies. What if it was all different? What if Harry was rescued at 4.5 years. What if Harry was unable to fulfill the Prophecy? AU
Prologue

The Future?

… his eyes were fixed upon the coiling snake in its enchanted cage. "No, my Lord, but I beg you will let me return. Let me find Potter."

"You sound like Lucius. Neither of you understands Potter as I do. He does not need finding.

"Potter will come to me. I know his weakness you see, his one great flaw. He will hate watching the others struck down around him, knowing that it is for him that it happens. He will want to stop it at any cost. He will come."

-from, Harry Potter & The Deathly Hallows

Severus Snape woke in a cold sweat as tendrils of his nightmare clung to him like an unwanted paramour. He rubbed the cobwebs from his eyes, his neck and then he leapt from his bed and swiped at his bare arms, chest and legs to completely rid himself of the images from his nightmare.

His hand gripped gingerly around his throat. It ached. As if that bloody serpent had actually hit him!

Blood. His blood. There had been so much… so… damned… AUGH!

With that cry Severus sprinted into his bathroom, turned the faucet of the shower to cold, and then he painfully immersed himself in the icy drops that quickly numbed his skin. A few minutes later the images were still strong, heavy, and much too real for him. He pushed out of the shower and returned to his room.

Severus cursed (in several languages) as he glared at his bed and its rumpled black, satin sheets. As he closed his eyes and Nagini struck him again, he opened them. There was no help for it. He dressed, and then left his quarters.

"Severus! I found him! Headmaster! Minerva!"

The voice, somehow familiar, edged like an unwilling knife through his consciousness. A moment later a cool, dry hand brushed over his cheek and then his forehead.

"Severus, my boy?" A gentler, older voice. A voice that he hated for its incessant kindness, and a voice that condemned at the same time it cared.

"Albus?"

"Can you stand, my boy?" asked the Headmaster softly.

His joints ached from the cold in the dungeon but his energy was returning with a vengeance. As the Headmaster helped him to his feet he pushed away. Blinking, he then realised that two other Gryffindors were staring at him with evident concern: Minerva McGonagall and… (gods teeth!) Remus Lupin.

"What are you three doing in my bedroom?" he grumbled. He tried to straighten his robes and glowered at the wrinkles that held on stubbornly.
"You're in the depths of the dungeons, my boy," Albus corrected gently. Severus' stiffened in sudden anxiety.

"You've been absent, Severus," Minerva replied with a soothing touch to his forearm.

"Absent." Severus resisted rolling his eyes in apparent dismay.

"You have been missing, my boy," the Headmaster said as he touched the younger man's shoulder and eased him into a walk. "For three days."

"And, you, Lupin. What are you doing here?" demanded the Potions Master as he glanced to the wizard on his right.

Minerva was walking slowly beside Remus and repressed a smirk as he stepped just a tiny bit closer. "I am here to help look for you, Severus. What have you been doing down in this part of the dungeon?"

Severus glowered. He was not entirely sure why he was so far into the dungeons that he had vanished for three days. The last he recalled was walking into his sitting room in order to try and shake his nightmare from his memories. He had tried to Occlude it but that had strangely failed him.

The Potions Master slowed his walk as he poked figuratively into the remnants of his nightmare towards a mental hive of angry bees. The memory of the nightmare was fading, and it was no longer helpful to him to draw the nightmare forward.

The young wizard's knees buckled as the memory of that dark Halloween nearly five years ago rose up into the forefront of his mind like a vengeful wave overwhelming all his senses. Albus could not keep Severus from collapsing so he offered what support he could by sliding down to the floor with him.

Caught by the woven tendrils of his mind Severus witnessed what he had never seen but knew of; the deaths of the Potters. He heard Lily plead for the life of her child, he saw the light - not the green of Avada Kedavra but a light that graduated through colour as a sunset would. If possible, he fell within his mind as the magical sunset cascaded over him.

"Love… protection… Lily gave her son the last of all that… she was…" Severus muttered as old grief swelled within his heart and throat.

"Severus!" Albus stroked the sallow cheek, the smooth, dark hair. His voice crooned in order to bring the man back from the past. "Come forward, my son. It's fine. I am here with you. Come back, Severus."

The Potions Master rapidly lifted his head as he blurted, "He's dying! Albus, Harry is dying!"
A Visit With the Dursleys

Albus had nearly run from the dungeons leaving Minerva and Remus to look after the Potions Master. Severus could not walk, and appeared to have fainted after making his pronouncement about Harry Potter. Remus conjured a stretcher, and with the lanky, tall wizard upon it, Remus and Minerva took Severus to the Infirmary.

Upon arrival the Healer, Poppy, examined Severus. She pronounced him well but he was exhausted, and was suffering from a few vitamin deficiencies. Poppy administered a Nutrition potion by spelling it directly into the insensate wizard's stomach. Remus leaned over and brushed the man's forehead with his fingers.

"He's hot, Poppy," observed Remus.

"It's simply a temperature increase to balance the stress of his body, Remus." Poppy conjured a cool cloth and she folded it. She then gave it to Remus. "Put that on his forehead. I'd like to ask the Headmaster to come down. I'm assuming Minerva left to go to his office?"

Remus nodded as he sat down in a chair beside the Potions Master. He dabbed gently at the man's fevered brow. "Severus made a claim that the Potter child was dying. Since Albus has several instruments to monitor him he no doubt went to check. Minerva probably followed up."

Just as they were speaking the Headmaster hurried into the Infirmary. He looked askance at the Potions Master. "Wake him, Poppy," he ordered.

"Albus," the Healer protested, "Severus needs his sleep."

"Then, Remus, you can go and find..." began Albus.

"I can't, Albus. Don't forget why I am here," Remus tactfully reminded the older man that although he had been recruited to help find Severus, he had come on the night of...

"It is the full moon tonight, Albus," said Severus quietly as he opened his eyes and blinked wearily. He then turned a sharp look upon Remus. "Close your mouth, you imbecile. I can never forget the meaning of a full moon for you." He then focused his gaze upon the Headmaster. "What do you need, Albus?"

The old wizard nodded, and smiled in relief. "Harry Potter is no longer with his family. Minerva has gone to lock the Dursleys into their house and she will be finding out for us where the child is. Would you please follow, and bring Harry to us, Severus? I fear for him."

Severus rose to a sitting position where he planted his feet onto the floor by his bed. "I recall only faint tendrils of my nightmare, Albus." He frowned and pinched the bridge of his nose. "A reality not this one? I..." he gazed deeply into the watery blue eyes of the Headmaster. "Yes, although I am no Sybill Trelawney, I know that Mr. Potter is near death's door." Albus blanched and his cheeks went as white as his beard. Severus flexed his shoulders, straightened his spine, and suppressed the desire for fatigue to attack his body with sleep. "Poppy, I need a Strengthening Potion and a Wit Sharpening Potion."

Poppy managed a small huff in objection but she retrieved the potions Severus ordered and gave them to him.
The Strengthening Potion surged through his veins waking his body for the next few hours. The Wit Sharpening Potion caused his brain to buzz with liveliness and focus. He stood.

"You don't have time to go to your apartment so that you may dress in fresh clothing, Severus," said Poppy. The Healer held out a tiny, black bundle, and enlarged it. "Engorgio." She gave the younger man a smug smile as she handed him clean clothing. "Minerva knew you would need these, Severus."

"My thanks, Poppy," he replied taking the clothing from her. Severus then vanished into the bathroom. A few minutes later he emerged now fully dressed. "I shall leave immediately," Severus informed all present. He then strode out of the Infirmary.

Minerva McGonagall had quickly travelled to the Muggle world and was now inside the quaint house of #4 Privet Drive. Sitting on a common sofa upholstered in a printed pattern of exploding flowers before her under a Paralytic Charm were Petunia and Vernon Dursley. The large, piggish six year old Dudley she had sent up to his room where he fell into a magically induced sleep.

For the last hour the Deputy Headmistress had been interrogating the Dursleys about where the four year old child, Harry Potter was. It rather surprised her how stubborn they were. She was just about to cast a complicated spell that would loosen their tongues when Severus Snape appeared at her side. The Dursleys fought against their magical restraints. Both tried to shout but a Silencing Charm prevented that.

"Severus! I am so glad to see you," Minerva smiled.

Severus nodded and let the full darkness of his gaze penetrate the Dursleys. Petunia, who had known Snape when he was a boy, shivered at the threat implicit in that gaze. Vernon blustered. He had no idea of the danger that stood blackly before him. A wave of his hand stripped the Silence away as if a bandage had been ripped from sensitive skin. Petunia screeched at the pain.

"We haven't got what you want, so go away, you Freaks, and let us be!" demanded Vernon with a growl.

Severus nor Minerva replied. The Potions Master painfully grabbed the male Muggle's chin, and peered into his beady eyes. He smiled thinly. That thin smile broadened into dreadful wickedness as Vernon's body responded where his mind wouldn't. Neither witch nor wizard paid any attention to the growing wet stain on the front of Vernon's trousers.

"Legilimens," Severus intoned silkily.

Vernon screamed like a wounded girl as the wizard's mind tore into his. Severus' mental thrusts were painful and unforgiving as he rooted through the Muggle's pitiful secrets. Secrets he was keeping from his 'dainty' wife. Secrets of a terrible appetite that Severus promised himself he would soon forget. For now… he wanted to know where Harry Potter was.
a/n: Yes, I know that healthcare is free in England BUT Harry does not and Petunia and Vernon have constantly harped on about how costly it is for them to have Harry in their house. They hope their conversation, staged for Harry, will be overheard.

I'm A Freak

A Few Days Earlier

Harry Potter was outside the picture perfect house on Privet Drive #4. He preferred being outside and of all the chores his Aunt Petunia demanded of him he truly enjoyed gardening. It was hard and thirsty work. He often could quench his thirst by drinking from the hose. Aunt Petunia never fed him enough so lots of water shut those hunger pangs up.

The garden was a silent source of pride for Harry. It warmed him that every flower that bloomed, every fern that swept peacefully in the wind, even the trees that bore fruit he could steal for himself had been planted by him. He could see the glow of its light and beauty. Aunt Petunia claimed the garden was all hers but her nephew knew better.

The tilling of the soil was not something Dudley was allowed to disturb with pummelings and pranks so it was the quiet that Harry craved. A moment in the day when he was the only human in existence.

This afternoon, though, an annoying tickle had begun in his throat, and his chest. Whenever he rose to his feet he felt as if someone had hit him in his lungs. As the day wore on that feeling deepened to one where he felt as if an elephant were sitting on his chest. He did not complain to his relatives, though, for they never listened to him.

At night, as he slept in a fevered state, the coughing began. It was quickly joined by Harry's raspy breaths as his lungs were desperate for unobstructed air.

Uncle Vernon woke to the noisy breathing and the coughing. He had ordered the boy to quiet down, and though Harry groggily woke for a moment, there was nothing he could do to stop what his body was demanding.

Each hour ticked by. Uncle Vernon grew increasingly angry because he could not sleep. Aunt Petunia shrieked at the Freak because Uncle Vernon would not let her sleep, and Dudley woke crying because he wanted to sleep.

That night no one slept and it was all that fault of the Freak.

Early the next morning with his temper at an end, Uncle Vernon lumbered down the stairs to wake his vile nephew but discovered after several minutes he could not. Catching his wife by her elbow they staged an argument in case the Freak could hear them. For several minutes, in obvious hearing of the Freak in the Cupboard, Aunt Petunia argued with Uncle Vernon about what to do with the obviously sick boy. Health care was certainly free but Harry did not know that. His aunt and
uncle's argument upheld what they had been telling Harry since he was left on the doorstep of #4 Privet Drive.

"There isn't anything to be done, Vernon, I have to take him to hospital."

"No. No, Pet," Vernon replied stiffly. "I am not going to waste money on that freeloader, waste of flesh. He's done nothing but take food away from our boy and he's a burden on us. Besides, when he injured himself with the axe last year the doctors couldn't heal the freak. His… magic…” he spat, and grimaced. "No, Petunia. I've had it. We're not dealing with him anymore. If his people want him then they'd best come for him. We're done."

Aunt Petunia should have protested more about getting rid of the boy but the truth was she had little love for her sister, and she had none for Harry. Retreating to the kitchen she paid no attention as Uncle Vernon removed the freak from his cupboard and stuffed him into the car. When Uncle Vernon returned home two hours later, just in time for a hearty breakfast, no one, not even Dudley (spooning heavily maple syrup and sugar Cremog crepes into his mouth) did not care where the Freak had gone to.

Harry had briefly awakened to the sensation of cold which soon warmed to an unbearable temperature. He slipped back into a weird daze of sleep and dreams and vague images of a huge snake striking relentlessly at helpless shadows. A voice encompassed by the night wove around his senses. It pleaded, "I beg you...let me find Potter."

"Yes," he rasped. "Find me…” he was not aware that he had spoken those ravaged words aloud but it was enough to reveal that still Harry Potter lived.

The night and the stars were parted by a fluttering, blustery ink that wrapped him in comfort drawn together herbs and spices. Harry smiled as the ink swallowed him and took him away through a tunnel that turned him inside out.
"... pneumonia and the malnutrition both contributed to an extreme weakness of Mr. Potter's young body, Albus. Worse, that has led to what we've now discovered," related a woman's voice through the haziness of Harry's awareness,

"Are you certain of this, Poppy?" a tired voice asked that question.

Harry could feel the disappointment and fear dripping from each word. He wanted to shiver.

There was quiet as Harry felt the air ripple with frustration. A different voice spoke. This one thrummed deeply. Instinctively Harry knew it was The Shadow of Ink that could swallow 'little boy-eating trolls'.

"Poppy has done every spell possible, Albus, and I cannot Legilimens someone unconscious. Also, if you have not realised, he is quite young."

"Don't patronise me, Severus. Of course I know that Harry is young. It distresses me that he is nearly like a squib." The older voice huffed in thinly disguised anger.

Once more the woman spoke, "I never said that he is a Squib, Albus. Mr. Potter's magic has exhausted itself with near continuous healing of his body almost since birth. This time, though, the pneumonia exacerbated by the malnutrition have served to exhaust his magic to the point that it is nearly at zero capacity. Argus has more magic than the child at this point."

Hopefulness filled the air like a perfume. The old voice asked, "Then, his magic will recover, Poppy?"

Harry wanted to weep as he felt that beautiful hope (of not being magic, ever) being crushed like a just bloomed rose.

The woman, Poppy, spoke quietly, "This is not normal magical exhaustion as if Mr. Potter cast a spell he never did before. Sleep will help but I am unable to say with any certainty that his magic will return to a healthy level."

A clinical, antiseptic film washed the air as The Shadow asked a question. "Poppy, what magic do you anticipate Mr. Potter of being capable of?"

"Potions, mostly. From beginner up to Healing. The Dark Potions will be, regardless of the law, too much. Transfiguration... hm... doubtful. Most of the hearth charms and those used while children are growing ought to come fairly easily. Arithmancy is out as that requires the use of the entire magical core on a steady basis. Runes, and Rune Magic would be very good. Divination..." she chuckled. "Well, I doubt Mr. Potter will ever rise to the occasion but that is not entirely a loss."

There was a pause and then Harry felt fingers trail across his forehead. "Mr. Potter could be a fine Potions Master or a Healer someday."

"A child of prophecy," sighed the elder voice.

The woman left the two men and Harry realised that now would come the secrets.

"The Prophecy is moot, Albus." Harry felt the tickle of cool fingers to his forehead.
“So I can see, Severus, but Harry will still be in danger.” Harry felt dry, gentle fingers caressing his cheek. Fingers then brushed over his forehead in the wake of the cool ones. “The scar is gone.”

“Poppy explained earlier, when I noted its disappearance, that the scar, being a curse scar, held a reserve of magic that Mr. Potter’s own magic siphoned until it was gone. We may… be thankful… that his own magic removed the curse the Dark Lord bestowed upon him.”

Harry, without fully awakening, fell back into his strange dreams where he encountered ghosts, pranksters, young witches and wizards all learning magic, a castle, and over them all… The Shadow watched. A sentinel of the night who had taken him away from the Dursleys.

Within his mind, Harry smiled at the silly dreams.
Am I Magic?

"Mr. Potter, as comforting as your sleep is, it is time for you to wake and partake in solid food," cajoled the Shadow in a voice that purred with amusement.

Harry blinked blearily and was thankful when deft fingers placed his glasses upon his face. He smiled shyly at the man seated by his bed. The man was stern looking with sharp angles to his face, and a prominent nose bent as though it might have been broken once or twice. Black hair fell to his shoulders and appeared greasy.

"How are you feeling, Mr. Potter?" asked Severus Snape.

Harry nodded as he swallowed experimentally. "I can breathe, Sir."

"Always a bonus, Mr. Potter." The Shadow smiled thinly and then sent a bowl of soup across the room to hover right in front of the boy.

Harry's bright green eyes were wide with wonder. "Are you a Magican, Mr. Shadow?"

"Shadow? the Potions Master wondered silently. "I am not a MAGICIAN, Mr. Potter. I am a wizard. Eat your soup."

Harry wriggled and shuffled until The Shadow rose from his chair, put his hands under Harry's arms and lifted him to a sitting position. "Thank you, Sir." He leaned forward and sniffed the steaming bowl of soup. "Mmmm, chicken!" Harry briefly glanced at the spoon floating by the bowl before he bravely grabbed it and began to eat. Severus watched him. After several minutes Harry stopped spooning the soup into his mouth. "Mr. Shadow, could I have some water, please?"

Severus conjured a glass which he filled with milk from the tip of his wand. He then floated the glass over to Harry. "Milk would be a bit more nutritious, Mr. Potter." Mr. Shadow? Again, why does he refer to me with that moniker? Severus found it curious that the child, so obviously abused by his relatives, appeared rather open. He expected that perception might change.

Harry beamed as he took the glass, and then indulged in several gulps. He wiped the milk-stache from his lips with his pyjama sleeve. "That's great! Aunt Petunia only lets me have milk when it starts to go sour." Harry quickly finished his soup and beamed again as the wizard made everything vanish. "You're very good, Mr. Shadow." complimented Harry.

"Shadow. Why do you call me Shadow, Mr. Potter?" asked Severus.

"Well, I don't know who you are," he replied quite logically. "... and in my dream you were a shadow that rescued me." Shyly Harry smoothed the edge of his blankets. "You were this great, big shadow, like spilled ink, that blocked out all the stars in the sky." He smirked. "You smelled of fresh earth, herbs and spices." Harry stopped babbling as he recalled how his Aunt Petunia tended to smack him in the head because he talked too much. Lastly, he whispered, "You probably scared the trolls."

I? Scared trolls? I am rather certain that there were no trolls in a Muggle area. Leaving that curiosity for later, he introduced, "Ah. My name is Severus Snape. I teach Potions here. You are in Hogwarts, a school for children that are magical," he replied. "So you recall when I found you?"
Harry nodded. "I was hot, and not feeling good but I know it was worse after Uncle Vernon threw me away under the bridge."

"Your uncle confessed such to me which is how I found you under that bridge," Severus confirmed.

"Sir?"

"Yes, Mr. Potter?"

"Now that I'm well am I going back to my relatives?" he asked softly.

"Do you wish to return?" Severus asked judiciously.

Harry sharply shook his head. "They don't like me. My Aunt says I eat all of Dudley's food and Uncle Vernon says I'm a burden. I cost too much. Can I stay here?"

Severus smirked and tapped one slim index finger to his chin. "I do not know, Mr. Potter. That is rather a complex matter…"

Harry threw off his blankets and scrambled in his bare feet to the Potions Master. His knobby knees smacked the kneecaps of the older man as he caught one large, potion stained hand in both of his.

"Please? I'll work really hard! I can cook, and garden, and I… I'll even clean toilets 'cuz I bet they're not as gross as Dudley's. Please, Mr. Snape, let me stay."

Severus did not answer right away. He Summoned a robe and slippers that he bade with a nod for the boy to put on. Harry then sat down dejectedly upon his bed. He wanted to let his head droop but he made himself look to The Shadow for an answer to his plea. His uncle had thrown him away, literally. Uncle Vernon had told him that he hoped the trolls would enjoy crunching his bones before leaving. He clasped his hands together.

"You may stay, Mr. Potter," Severus intoned coolly but without his usual rancor. Harry sucked in a hopeful breath. Already the small boy was causing the Potions Master to feel a protective streak that was beyond the purview of keeping the students of Hogwarts safe. The wizard held out his hand to the child who curled his small fingers into the much larger hand. Severus walked out of the Infirmary with Harry.

"Where are we going, Mr. Snape?" asked Harry as they stepped over the threshold of the Infirmary into the wide corridor. Seeing the tall, open arches in front of him, Harry released himself and trotted over to the wall that was above his head. He pushed up on tiptoes, and squealed as he was picked up under the arms, and held securely against The Shadow's chest. He could now peer with curiosity down at the Entrance Hall.

"You have slept the better part of two days, Mr. Potter. I thought you might enjoy a little perambulation around the castle," he replied.

"What's a… per…am…boo…layshun?" asked Harry as his eyes darted about taking in their surroundings. He marveled at the staircases that were moving on their own. Far, far, far (really only three floors) below them a stooped man watched by a scruffy cat was mopping the well-polished stone floor.

"PERAMBULATION," Severus pronounced. "It means, to walk about."

"Oh! Well, that's good," Harry agreed with a smile. To Severus' smug amusement Harry wriggled from the Shadow's arms and then caught the man's large hand in his small one. "So you don't get lost from me, okay, Shadow?"
Severus repressed the glower that hopeful tone in the child's voice caused him. He gently squeezed the small fingers. "It is quite a large castle but I believe neither of us will get lost." He was rewarded by a bare sigh and a beaming smile. Harry began to swing their linked hands the way happy children the world over did so as they walked down the corridor.

"This is the Entrance Hall and over there are the Grand Stairs of Rowena Ravenclaw," indicated Severus with a sweep of his hand.

For a moment Harry watched in amazement as stairs that rose to the Heavens moved slowly above him as if the were dancing. He was impressed. "That's neat she's got her own stairs," said Harry just as the sun began to sparkle through dozens of coloured diamonds in the tall windows in the Entrance Hall. A rainbow of sunbeams spilled onto the Travertine floor caught the eye of the delighted boy. "Oooo! Look, Shadow! Isn't that the most beautiful thing you've ever seen?"

Severus let go of the child as he tugged trying to get away. He crossed his arms over his chest and watched as the small four year old stepped into the prismatic light and spun slowly so he could watch the many colours dancing over him. They had walked from the Infirmary and down one of the slowly canted walkways that drifted down the outside wall of the castle. A warding spell kept the elements outside and the temperature cool but not cold. The corridors within revealed no end living portraits and landscapes, talking armor, and ghosts. The Potions Master wondered if he might be able to suppress the child's magpie-like predilection for looking at everything.

Harry had stopped at nearly every window on the walkway to view the Quidditch Pitch, the stone circle that marked the entrance to the Black Lake, the Forbidden Forest, and Hagrid's Hut and pumpkin garden.

Harry had gotten leery upon seeing Hagrid's large boarhound, Fang, and in so doing he related information about 'Uncle Vernon's sister Marge and her dog Ripper'. Ripper had chased Harry on several occasions and one time the vicious dog had caught him and ripped a fair-sized chunk from his leg. Severus did not show anything more than mild interest as the boy revealed the unsightly healed wound on the back of Harry's skinny leg.

The Potions Master had learned how Harry was taught to cook; he was hit with a frying pan if he failed. As for gardening, Aunt Petunia had stabbed him 'once or twice' with her garden trowel if something died prematurely. Only once had he prompted a story from the bright boy; about his cousin. Severus was curious to know if his cousin Dudley Dursley had ever laid a finger on Harry. As Harry tried to see past the stone circle to the Black Lake he told Severus about the game he played with his cousin and his friends that they called 'Harry Hunting'. The object was to chase Harry down, catch him, and beat him up. Harry proudly related at the end of his story that he was 'a very fast runner' and that he 'knew all the good hiding spots'.

The Potions Master felt his blood pressure rise as Harry so easily related the story about Harry Hunting. Severus Snape wanted to kill the Dursleys but he would not do so, thus sending himself uselessly to Azkaban for murder. He had already set into motion a way to catch Vernon Dursley legally via the man's unseemly peccadilloes. The man's mind was like water spilling forth its secrets. Even now a solicitor from Muggle London sought Vernon Dursley's unfortunate victims that had survived. Two girls, 8 and 12, had not. The pig of a human had buried them at his workplace. This was all information the solicitor had... or really needed.

As for Petunia, Severus had her on indifferent neglect, endangerment of a minor, and accessory to murder - of her nephew. The wizard had been rather pleased to learn that the woman's over-indulgence of her own son came under the law as gross neglect.
Vernon would go away for molestation, and murder. Petunia would be incarcerated for the complicit murder of Harry Potter, her nephew. The Potions Master had transfigured a mouse skeleton into a duplicate of Harry's skeleton that would or had already been 'found' with the bodies of the two females. Dudley Dursley would thus be taken from his 'loving parents' and given to another family who would truly love him and treat him well. This last, Severus would make certain of. As much as he currently disliked the cousin, the child was only six and was being raised in a household where bullying was encouraged.

"Harry," he had begun using the child's first name as they walked the outer walkway. Severus held out his hand. "I shall bring you back to the sunshine but I have something even more magnificent to show you."

Harry smiled at the dapplings of light, waved in farewell at them, then ran over to The Shadow. "What are we going to see now, Sir?"

"The Great Hall where all of the students eat their meals and come to meet when the Headmaster needs to speak to them," replied Severus cagily.

Severus led the wide-eyed boy across the Entrance Hall, past Rowena Ravenclaw's Staircase and through the large, arched entrance to the Great Hall.

The Great Hall truly fit its name as it was filled with long tables and benches for students and hovering over the ends of each table were the banners for the four Houses of Hogwarts. The walls on either side held the portraits of past, notable instructors and students that had secured a bit of fame. Already Harry had seen several of these magical portraits and he was delighted when a few of the inhabitants waved a greeting to him.

At the 'front' of the Great Hall was a long table draped in a snow white cloth decorated with silver emblems of various magical crafts for each teacher to show where they sat. Behind this table were the hourglasses that represented each of the four Houses. The hourglasses were now empty but once term began gems of emerald, ruby, citrine, and sapphire would drop within an hourglass according to House points; given or taken over term.

What riveted Harry after he had taken a few steps into the Great Hall was the Enchanted Ceiling of Hogwarts. It revealed the glorious sky above with fluffy clouds scudding gently past overhead. Large birds (or so Harry thought at first) flew through the clouds and sky above the castle. Literally, his jaw dropped open. He was not aware of Professor Snape until the wizard tapped his index finger on the boy's chin.

As if holding onto a life raft Harry gripped the Potions Master's hand in his. "This is magic!"

"That it is, Harry," agreed Severus calmly.

"Am I magic? A wizard?" Harry asked warily. He had been certain while he was in the infirmary that he didn't want anything to do with magic. However, after everything he had seen maybe being magic wouldn't be that bad at all.

Severus directed the child towards one of the student benches at the Slytherin table and they sat. Harry shifted closer beside The Shadow. "You *are* a wizard, Harry…"

The boy frowned as he heard the hesitation in the man's voice. "But, I'm not," it was a statement and Severus wondered if he knew already.

"Not quite," Severus said with apology in his voice. "Your magic has been working, daily, to keep
Harry nodded in understanding. "Last year Aunt Petunia couldn't stand my hair and she gave me a terrible haircut with this razor that took all my hair off. The next morning when I woke up all my hair came back." Harry plucked at a silk-covered, black button on the cuff of Severus' right arm. After a moment Harry confessed quietly, "Aunt Petunia never hit me with her fists before." His Aunt Petunia always used a pan or whatever might be at hand to hit him. This time she had gone crazy. "She was hitting me, and screaming, and she called my mum an 'evil freak' an' told me I shoulda been killed, too 'cuz I was evil."

Harry sniffled, and scooted slightly away from The Shadow. He figured the man was so quiet that Harry had probably said too much. He always spoke to the nice people, but they always looked at him with that pity in their eyes that also looked like hate. Harry was sure it was hate for him. He was afraid to lift his eyes to look at The Shadow. If he had that look of hate/pity in his eyes Harry decided he'd just die.

Instead, the Potions Master's inky, shadowy, wonderful cloak draped over him, and the older man pulled the boy into his side. Harry still did not lift his head (just in case) but he felt a piece of his heart break and the tears he'd held inside himself for so long poured out of him. He pressed his face into the wizard's side while the man's large hand thumped gently, if somewhat awkwardly, on his back.

After leaving the Great Hall Severus showed the child a few nearby classrooms and then took him down to the dungeons. They stopped in front of a large portrait framed in a forest green stained, wooden frame that had been heavily carved with small snakes and ivy. The portrait was of a dashing looking man wearing deep green robes trimmed with silver embroidery of arcane Runes and Alchemical symbols. The man had long, dark hair that spilled over a pair of broad shoulders. He wore a short, pointed beard and mustache that gave him a sort of mysterious air.

"One of our four illustrious Founders, Harry. Meet Salazar Slytherin," introduced the Potions Master with a half-bow towards the painted wizard.

"Hi," whispered Harry as he pressed his back against the Shadow's long legs.

"Welcome, young Master," Salazar returned the Potions Master's respectful bow and then smiled gently down at the small boy. "Are you a student?"

"This is Harry Potter, Salazar," Severus explained. "Until further arrangements can be made I shall be taking care of him. I would like you to allow him entrance to the Slytherin common room should he ever need to be there."

"Of course, Severus. Master Potter is most welcome." The portrait suddenly swung inward and Harry leaned forward for a peek.

"Come along, Harry," encouraged Severus. "This is the common room of Slytherin House."

Harry was mesmerised. He tried not to let his jaw drop open but he couldn't help himself. It was all so magnificent!

The Slytherin common room was shadowed in low lighting from five tall windows of clear, green, blue, and silver diamond pane glass that overlooked a sparkling castle and its city. The Mer city that the Shadow had earlier told the boy of that was at the bottom of the Black Lake.

Settling himself onto his chest, legs out behind him, and chin on his hands, Harry was too caught in
the sparkling spell of the Mer city to take in the comfortable, large common room. Supported by four
tall green marble columns the common room was furnished with many sofas, chairs, and loungers all
of white pine upholstered in velvet of green and silver. The walls were panelled with a wainscoting
of carved white pine that had been gilded in silver, and above it cream and silver wallpaper. Set
along the walls were tall bookcases that carried an enviable library of knowledge. Severus would
later reveal to Harry that much of the library in the common room were books collected by Salazar
Slytherin. Ornate iron wall sconces held flame that never flickered, came on or shut off with the
wave of a hand, and brought the dim light up to an acceptable level for reading, studying, and doing
homework. The last type of furniture to be seen were round tables with chairs that served as study
areas for study groups. Various niches within the walls provided more privacy for individual study.

A large fireplace was flanked by two stylised cobras that dominated the common room. Stairs on
either side of the great fireplace led to the boys dorms and the girls dorms.

Throw rugs of patterned green and cream were scattered all over the room. Any space free on the
walls was taken by tall portraits and one landscape in which a silent breeze ruffled the long grass.

Severus eased himself to a perch upon one of the upholstered arms of one of the deeply comfortable
sofas to watch as Harry enjoyed the view beneath the Black Lake. The five windows, the Mer city
and all below the Black lake, were all a part of the world's unknown and largest fish tank. The Giant
Squid sailed around one of the tall turrets of the Mer city like a huge, graceful creature flying through
water. Schools of fish, silver, blue, iridescent rainbows, all darted past the windows, each school
weaving and diving in its own dance.

Several diabolical looking creatures swam up to the window, eyed Harry, then the Potions Master,
and then they darted away. Harry turned to look over his shoulder only as flexible children that age
could. "Shadow! They were lookin' at me! What are they?"

"Grindylow," informed Severus. "They are a sentient, underwater species that the Mer people use as
the guardians of their city.

Harry mouthed the word 'grindylow' and then turned back to watch more. "Are they mean?"

"Not necessarily, Harry. The Grindylow are extremely territorial and in protecting what they believe
to be theirs they can appear… overly aggressive." The wizard smirked to himself. Once or twice
students had whispered of their Head of House that 'Professor Snape was Grindylow-ish guardian.'
As the wizard watched the small child enthralled by the view he recognised the fierce protectiveness
within himself for the child that was growing by the second. It was not as terrifying as he would have
expected himself to feel.

After several moments of peace had passed Harry pulled his gaze away and sat up in a Lotus
position. "I really like this room, Shadow. It's magical."

Three times now he had tried to correct the child away from calling him 'Shadow' but he now
realised that the child used the nickname as a term of affection.

Severus was preparing to help the child to his feet when a silvery, somewhat transparent figure
drifted down through the ceiling. Harry let out a scream of terror at sight of the ghost, scrambled to
his feet, and nearly knocked the older man from his precarious perch as the boy threw himself at him.

"My apologies, Severus," whispered the ghost. "I was not aware that a young one was with you."

"Harry, it is all right," soothed Severus. "This the Bloody Baron, the Slytherin Ghost. He cannot
harm you."
Harry had burrowed himself in the Potions Master's robes and abdomen. He shifted slightly and peered through a draping of the billowing robes to peer at the ghost. Severus had a protective arm over the small body.

"Come along, child," said Severus with his voice lowered. "You trust me, do you not?"

"Ye-es," Harry rasped.

"Then show yourself a gentlemen and properly greet the Baron," instructed Severus.

"He's a ghost," Harry wanted to do what the wizard asked of him but really… everyone knew ghosts were terrible spirits that hurt the living. *Dudley's ghost shows said so.*

"A very good observation, Mr. Potter. Hogwarts has about a dozen ghosts and a poltergeist. I dare say that the Bloody Baron is no doubt rather frightening but his stern mien masks a gentle soul."

If ghosts could blush the Bloody Baron would. Instead he fully bowed to Severus; the tight curls of his long wig brushing his ankle. The ghost then knelt to one knee lowering his height to Harry's own size. "Master Potter?"

Harry drew in a deep breath and then stepped out from beneath The Shadow's robes. He started to extend his hand but he snatched it back. Quickly he re-arranged his arms so one rested at his back and the other at his abdomen. Jerkily he bowed but a bit too low. Severus caught him before he tumbled forward and through the ghost.

"Sorry, Sir," gulped Harry with a tremulous smile. "It's nice meeting you."

"It is so very good to meet a friend of Severus', Master Potter." The ghost winked at the wizard who barely restrained from rolling his eyes.

"You can call me Harry, if you want, Mr. Baron, Sir," offered Harry.

"I am honoured," he gave the boy a nod. "As I have offered my name to Severus I shall do the same for you. Please call me Rhodri, Harry."

Harry smiled. "I like your name, Rhodri. Thanks for offering it to me."

"Rhodri," interrupted Severus. "Do you have a reason for your visit?"

The Bloody Baron stood. "Indeed, I do. The Headmaster has asked that you feed Master Harry and put him to bed in your quarters. You will find that Hogwarts has added a room. You are then to meet with the Headmaster in his tower." The ghost clicked his heels together, nodded, and vanished as if a breeze had blown him away.

"Where are we going to eat, Shadow?" asked Harry as he automatically slipped his hand into that of the Potions Master.

"My home here at Hogwarts." They left Slytherin House behind them and walked a measure (42 steps - Harry counted) until they came to a… wall. Severus glanced in bemusement at the child as he stared in puzzlement at the stone wall. "How good is your memory, Harry."

Harry's face brightened. "Very good, Shadow! What do you want me to r'member?"

"Watch carefully…" Severus touched his index finger to a stone, moved his hand, touched another stone, and did the same move adding three more stones. To Harry's awe those stones sank into the
wall until the wall itself split open downwards to reveal a simple door of old, rail-split oak and iron bars that held the rails together. Severus tapped the wall of stone on the right, and it closed so tightly that when the depressed stones returned there was no sign that a door was behind the wall.

"Do I get to do that, Shadow? Please?" Harry was very nearly bouncing in place. His large green eyes sparkled with hope.

"Only if you remember the sequence of stones I touched," the Potions Master replied.

"I remember, Shadow. I can do this." For a moment Harry studied the wall, frowned as he recalled what he had watched, and then he carefully touched the stones.

Severus watched intently. What he had not mentioned was that this bit of warding to hide the door to his quarters would only react properly if the stones were touched by just a tiny bit of Harry's magic. Thus the ward in the stone would either work if Harry recalled the correct sequence, or it would not. Severus hoped that the tiny bit of Harry's nearly completely exhausted magic might be enough to stir the ward.

One by one Harry carefully pressed his hand (the stone was large enough to permit the surface of the child's palm) to each of the correct stones. He held his breath in anticipation of the stones coming to life and sinking into the wall. He did not know that The Shadow held his breath also.

After what seemed an eternity (but was only a breath of seconds) the five stones, in the crude shape of a star, sank into the stone wall. The wall split in half to reveal the simple door.

Excited beyond belief Harry jumped up and down and let out a whoop of sound that echoed in the corridor. Normally Severus would immediately calm the boy down but within himself he was quite pleased that the ward had accepted Harry's magic and opened.
What To Do With a Little Boy

What to do With a 4-Year Old

Dinner was to be enjoyed in the sitting room of Severus' quarters. Harry was tempted to eat in front of the long window that looked out upon the Mer city under the Black Lake. "Magpie, I will place a chair near the window for you but for now I want you to sit at the table with me to eat dinner."

Harry walked over to stand by his chair, but he did not immediately sit. "Magpie?" asked Harry.

"As a child all sights intrigue you but I have noted you are particularly enamoured of "the shiny" such as a magpie is. Therefore, as I am Shadow to you, to me you are Magpie."

"Magpie. Yep. I love all things shiny. Where should I sit, Shadow?" asked Harry. Since the floor by the window was discouraged maybe he was supposed to sit someplace else. That's what his Aunt Petunia would tell him.

"Here, Mr. Potter, at the table." Severus noted Harry's worried frown at the chair he slid his hand off of; as if he were not permitted. "Have you never sat at a table for meals?"

Harry shook his head. "Freaks don't get to eat with normal people." He had known only recently that his name was Harry Potter. His family had always called him 'freak'.

Once more the wizard's lips thinned in distaste. "You... are not a freak. You are Harry Potter, my little Magpie." Harry's green gaze suddenly brightened. "I very much want you to sit at the table with me."

Harry pulled out the chair, settled into it, and then smiled at the dark-haired man. "I'm really your Magpie, Shadow?"

"I have so decided that you are, Mr. Potter." He gave the child a nod. "I shall order for us. The house elves have been given a Nutrition Potion that I would like you to take with each of your meals."

Severus tapped the table and Harry gasped as silver covered dishes appeared in the center. There were so many good smells. He sat on his hands so he wouldn't be tempted to grab at anything. He had learned from the Dursleys to never grab at things but he still had the temptation within him. He watched, his mouth watering, as The Shadow uncovered each of the dishes and then began piling roast beef, potatoes, vegetables, all onto plates. He then poured Harry a tall, cold glass of milk while he poured a medium sized glass of juice for himself.

"Shadow? What kind of juice are you having?" asked Harry as Severus floated a plate of food in front of him.

"Pomegranate," replied Severus. "Would you care for a sip?" Harry nodded and was a little surprised when the wizard handed him his glass of juice. Harry took a very, tiny sip. "A bit more, Magpie. You need a generous sample to taste."

Harry, now encouraged, took a bolder taste of the juice. He squinted. Severus actually laughed (more of a short bark) and Summoned his glass of juice back.

"I think your juice bit me, Shadow," Harry chuckled. Picking up his knife and fork he awkwardly attacked his meat.
"Pomegranate juice is very tart which is why I like it." He took a large measure of his juice, and then watched as Harry did a poor job of cutting his roast beef. The boy was, to put it mildly, making a mess.

Without making a comment Severus rose from his place, went behind the small boy, and carefully rearranged the four year old fingers and hands on his utensils. Then, still holding Harry's hands in his, he showed him how to cut the meat into bite-sized pieces.

"Thank you, Professor Snape!" Harry smiled and speared a bite of beef with his fork and popped it into his mouth.

Severus returned to his seat and began to eat. "It will take a bit of practice but you will soon have the knife, fork, and spoon all mastered." For awhile they ate quietly. Severus then asked the child, "You called me 'professor', Mr. Potter. Why, after all this time?"

"Easy, Shadow. You were being a teacher so since I wanted to be a good student I called you by your teacher name. And you just called me Mr. Potter like I was a student." Harry took a big drink of his milk. Just as he was about to wipe the milk-stache on his sleeve Severus floated a napkin towards the boy. Harry giggled as the napkin wiped his mouth.

"You are a gentleman, Mr. Potter. Use your napkin," instructed Severus.

Harry stuffed the napkin on his lap and continued to eat. After several minutes the Potions Master had the sense that something was not right with the boy. His head was drooped down over his plate and he was being terribly silent.

"Magpie, is something the matter?" asked Severus softly.

Harry did not reply immediately. Instead he folded his napkin and unfolded it. Finally, he drew in a careful breath. "I think I'm confused, Shadow."

"Over what?"

"Sometimes I think you're mad because your voice is hard on my Potter name. Other times…” he shrugged as he struggled with what he needed to say. "Well, other times it sounds like you think I ought to be a grown up. Which that isn't bad but... I don't know." He put down his napkin and sent the wizard a mournful look. "Are you mad at me?"

"No, I am not mad at you, Harry," sighed Severus. "If I am mad at you it is something that will be clear. And, I shall likely address you as 'Mr. Potter'. However…” he paused a moment and finished his pomegranate juice. "You and I are still getting to know each other and, at times, it has been habit that has caused me to address you in the same manner I address my students."

"But… but you have been mad, Shadow," Harry insisted.

"Not at you. A few times you have mentioned behaviour of your relatives and knowing how they treated you that does make me angry," the Potions Master confessed.

Harry slipped from his chair to stand beside the adult. He patted the man's hand. "They don't matter anymore 'cuz you said I wouldn't have to go back. Right?"

"You will never go back to those people, little Magpie. I will make certain of it," assured Severus.

Harry beamed as he whispered, "Thank you, Shadow."
Bedtime...

Harry Potter's bedroom in the home of the Head of Slytherin was a blank slate. Harry's disappointment in the starkness of the room was evident but he said nothing. He had no idea that the bedroom needed his imagination so it could become his. There were bedclothes to buy, drapes were needed for the Enchanted Window, a carpet or rugs for the floor, a desk, a wardrobe, and bookcases and shelves for a little boy to save those interesting things he would find over the years.

As much a temptation it was to tell the small boy that there was more to what he could see now Severus kept quiet. It would be a pleasant surprise for the boy that Severus discovered he was looking forward to. The Potions Master tucked Harry into bed after Transfiguring a few house elf tea towels into pyjamas for the sleepy boy. Harry snuggled into the bed. Even though the bed was plain it was 100,000 times better than the thin pad in his Cupboard Under the Stairs at #4 Privet Drive.

Much Later in the Evening - Headmaster's Tower

Albus handed a crystal snifter of brandy to his Potions Master and then took his own chair before the fire. He was drinking hot chocolate so he breathed lightly across the top of it to cool it.

Severus related his afternoon with Harry Potter. He also told the Headmaster that the child was terrified of being returned to his relatives despite several reassurances.

"You comforted the boy, Severus?" asked Albus with a twinkle in his blue eyes.

"Do not be insufferable, Albus," he sneered. "I have had to bestow comfort upon many of my Slytherins suffering everything from homesickness to a broken heart. I am not immune to a cry for human touch." Harry craved touch but had so far only permitted Severus to touch him. In fact, it now struck him, that the boy actively made an effort to seek him out for the simple comforts a child desired.

"No, no you are not, my boy. You simply tend to… reserve your affections for those who have earned it. It appears that Harry has earned yours." The Headmaster smiled. Severus simply huffed in annoyance.

There was comfortable silence between the two wizards as one sipped at his hot chocolate, and the other savoured his brandy. Then, Severus asked, "What is to be done with Mr. Potter, Albus?"

"You're concerned also that I will send him back to his relatives?"

"Not at all, Albus. As you know, they are being... legally... dealt with." For a moment Severus lazily swished the whiskey in his tumbler. "I am told that Harry's cousin has been removed from the custody of his parents, and that Petunia and Vernon now await trial. There is no one... no home... for him to go back to," he muttered under his breath. Then he lifted his head to glare forbiddingly at his Headmaster. "Why did you give him to Petunia, Albus? Did you have any idea how little she thought of her own sister, Lily?"

"My excuses are feeble, he confessed. Albus shook his head. "I never had a true picture of Petunia Dursley, Severus. As a child she had written to me begging to come to Hogwarts with Lily but I wrote her back and explained why that was not possible. She never wrote back. And," the older man sighed. "Lily spoke very little, if anything at all, about her Muggle family. When Minerva and I left the infant Harry with his aunt and uncle Minerva did express a slight distaste for the Dursleys..."

"And you dismissed that," sneered the Potions Master.
"Minerva could have said more, my boy. The members of the Order of the Phoenix that I sent to watch over Harry three times a month could have said more if they had seen anything unusual. Even Mrs. Figg could have reported injuries or bruises. She babysat Harry, and never saw anything out of the ordinary!" he suddenly blurted. "No one really said anything to me because they had faith that I knew what I was doing."

"What of that bloody Prophecy?" asked Severus as he finished his brandy in one punishing swallow.

"I knew that Tom would take the Prophecy to heart," sighed Albus. "To my regret, he did."

"My regret as well, Old Man. I often wonder why you gave me a home at Hogwarts, students to teach, a place in the Order…" slowly and deliberately he placed his tumbler down on his side table. "And, then you returned me to the Dark Lord as your spy."

"I gave you a choice!" Albus declared.

"Azkaban or your spy, Albus! That was the choice you gave me. I spent two weeks within those stone walls of torture while Mad-Eye Moody broke nearly every bone in my hands… I was in Hell, Albus! What do you think I would have chosen?" Angered to the point that he felt that his head would explode, Severus slammed his back against the pine wood, softly upholstered chair, and heard the wood creak in protest. He Summoned the carafe of brandy, poured some into his glass, and swallowed it all down.

There was a tense quiet between the two men that Albus slowly broke as he spoke, "I did what I had to do to preserve the Prophecy."

Severus narrowed his gaze at the old wizard, "Well, your Prophecy has been shattered, Albus. Harry does not have the Mark of the Dark Lord on his forehead and he is very nearly a Squib." He ground his teeth together as he drawled his question, "What will you do now?"

"We will… adapt… survive…" Albus said feebly.

"And, Harry? Surely you do not think this castle is safe enough for him, Albus. The moment he steps beyond the wards his life is in danger from those who still believe the child will vanquish evil," stated Severus dramatically.

"You will guard Harry, Severus," Albus decided firmly. He knew he had been wrong. There had been many such arguments in this office between himself and Severus. Both men had been wrong but that, the Prophecy, needed to be pushed aside. Harry was what mattered, and Albus was certain of his Potions Master.

"What?!" Severus' startlement was acted as he kept his own feelings to himself. The child had quickly wormed his way into the stony man's heart and the consummate Slytherin could see many ways that protecting the boy would be an advantage. When the child so guilelessly took his hand in his none of that flimsy thoughts mattered.

"Hear me out, my boy. Of myself and Tom Riddle you are the most powerful of our kind. You can keep Harry safe. You also had a connection with the boy's mother…"

"Lily chose James Potter, Headmaster. She and I never spoke again after our sixth year," the Potions Master relayed darkly.

The elder wizard's features darkened, "A history you may relay to Harry when he is older, Severus. For now it has no bearing on the four year old boy that is in need of a proper home. I have noted already that Harry seeks you out as his safe haven."

"Do not try to pretend
to me that when he looks to you for safety you can easily refuse him."

"I can protect him, Albus, but I am at a loss as to how you want me to do that. He needs a home. Parents. Siblings, perhaps. He needs someone that understands where he has been and that he is not a Squib. He needs…"

"You," finished the Headmaster triumphantly. Severus' gaze widened in disbelief. "Adapt and survive, my boy. The Prophecy means nothing without our Saviour. As you said, it is shattered. We have now, a vulnerable, little boy. Harry is in need of you, Severus. You understand the homelife that he came from more than anyone."

"You want me to be his father?" Severus asked. He felt frozen by the incredulity of what his superior was telling him. However, was that not just what he wanted? Just as quickly old memories of his own childhood threatened his confidence. He shook his head. "No. I cannot be what he needs, Albus. My own childhood…"

"...was a poor one made worse by an old wizard who played favourites here at Hogwarts. Haven't you told me often enough that I have to stop holding the Gryffindors above the other Houses? Have you not spent literally years showing me that Slytherin is not the 'House of evil'?"

"In no way does any of that qualify me to be a father, Albus," Severus stated stubbornly. He was also terrified. What if he could not offer Harry what he needed? What if he were just like his father had been to him? "And, my exhortations about your blatant favouritism have fallen on deaf ears." Severus knew he was hanging on to the threads of their old argument in order to avoid what was important.

Albus ignored the younger man's last statement before both of them fell into a vicious whirlpool of the past and their mistakes. He replied firmly to the first statement. "Are any of us ever qualified for parenthood, my boy? I have seen a caring man watch over his Slytherins. A man who imparts wisdom as easily as he does hot chocolate. I have seen you comfort the students without breaking your reputation as a 'scary bat'," the old man smirked at his small witicism, "and I have seen you break apart fights with the finesse of Socrates. You can be a father to Harry."

Severus was all prepared, so he thought, with another argument of further doubt but Albus sharply concluded, "None of that matters, though, as Harry has so obviously has chosen you, Severus."

The Potions Master had to conclude that the old man was not wrong. Harry - his little Magpie - had chosen him. He sighed to show he had given in.

"If I agree to this I cannot spy for you any longer, Albus. It is a risk I cannot expect Harry to agree to. He either has me as his family or as a…" he paused as he ironically drawled, "vague… Shadow."

"No, you cannot," Albus shook his head in agreement. "Your spying days are over, Severus." The younger man nearly gaped in astonishment. "Your spying days are over, Severus." The younger man nearly gaped in astonishment. He had expected a protest, at the very least. Albus smiled knowingly, "Harry not only needs you, my boy, but you need him. I have absolute trust in your protection of him, and I hope that this arrangement brings you both a lifetime of pleasant memories."

"An adoption…" subtly the younger wizard added, "...a Blood-Adoption… blood of my blood."

Albus' bushy white eyebrows rose in astonishment, but then there was pride in the twinkle of his eyes. "Such an adoption could not be contested even by the Ministry. Very wise, Severus. How quickly can the potion be ready, and administered?"
"I can brew the *Familia Adopto* this evening. How quickly can you assemble the necessary paperwork?"

"I will have it by breakfast tomorrow."

Severus nodded, finished his brandy and rose to his feet. He bowed sharply. "Then I shall begin. Goodnight, Albus."

"Goodnight, Severus."

---

**Just Before Dawn - 3rd July 1985**

Severus Snape stumbled wearily into his bedroom in his dungeon apartments. He slipped off his brewing robes, and then fell upon his bed. Within minutes he was asleep.

*Once more the nightmare of the future took over the Potions Master's dream. He was walking down the root laden tunnel beneath the Whomping Willow with Lucius at his side. They were headed for the Shrieking Shack.*

"I do not wish to be here, Severus," said Lucius wearily. His appearance was still that of a man worn down by his mistakes. "*The Dark Lord...*"

"I know, Lucius," Severus said tautly. He knew he walked to his death, and Lucius had been set up as his betrayer. He could tell that of all the guilt that had been piled upon the man's shoulders of late this would break him completely. It had already bent the older wizard that his mistake with the losing of the Prophecy had nearly lost him his son. "Just deliver me, and then go find Draco."

Lucius nodded. He pushed the old wooden door into the Shrieking Shack open. For a moment both men froze. Not at the sight of their Dark Lord but at the sight of his horrid familiar, Nagini the serpent, hovering at his shoulder in a silver cage of magic. Both wizards knew how dangerous she was.

"Ah, Severus, my Potions Master," smiled the Dark Lord. His smile never held any warmth in it. Voldemort grasped his shoulder to draw him closer, and in that moment the scene shifted. Lucius was gone. The Dark Lord was about to set Nagini upon the Potions Master, and Severus heard the dreadful pleading in his voice to find Potter was about to spill from his mouth and presage his death. With every ounce of his present self asleep, Severus blurted, "You will not have Harry Potter!" Voldemort glared in incensed astonishment at his Potions Master who never spoke back to him. "I will find you. I will kill you. And you will never return again!" His present self over-rode the nightmare and screamed in defiance of the evil that had ensnared him and an innocent little boy.

A clamminess sluiced over the Potions Master as if he were breaking a fever. He knew, despite his protestation, death was imminent... NO! It is not! he argued with himself. He fought against drowning in the future that wanted to be. He would not allow it. He began to choke...

"Master Potions Master, Sir! You wakes!"

Severus woke in such a panicked flurry that had he been under his duvet and sheets he would have been tangled up in them and crashed to the floor. Instead he had risen to a crouch, wand pointed at the elf, near death in his gaze. He glared in anger at the small, brown-eyed house elf with the Gryffindor logo on its tea towel.

"What the devil are you doing here?!" he demanded as he forced the tension in his body to leave.
"Master Headmaster is summoning Master Potions Master, Sir. He is waiting with Master Potter and breakfast." The house elf smiled timidly, and then had the audacity to vanish before the wizard could hex it.

Severus grumbled, and then glared inwardly at his nightmare. It was a future that no longer would exist and, as he vowed in the nightmare, he would do everything possible to keep Harry safe.

All the wizarding world that believed Harry Potter had vanquished the Dark Lord when he was barely a year old and knew in their hearts that he would continue to save them. Only he, Albus, Minerva, and Poppy knew that the Boy-Who-Lived was just a step above a Squib as to where his magic was. He could not... would not... battle a full-grown, powerful dark wizard.

The wizard relaxed from the defensive position he had taken upon waking to the house elf’s prodding. Leaving robe and slippers behind he left his bed to go to his bathroom. Severus Vanished his clothing to the laundry and then used Cleaning and Freshening charms on his body, a Shaving charm on his face, and lastly splashed cold water upon his face. He could have used a Drying charm to wick away the water from his cheeks and forehead but he did enjoy the small pleasure of the clean, soft hand towel to dry his face.

Just as he looked in the mirror a breeze ruffled the shower curtain, and the ends of the Potions Master’s hair. Severus felt a frisson of curiosity spiral down his spine, and slowly he unbent his back to stand up straight. His eyes darted here and there as if in the hope he might see something. There was nothing, and then...

He felt… or heard… Lily’s voice whisper, "Harry’s destiny is changed, Severus. He’s a little boy, now. And that is greater than a Prophecy. Thank you, my friend."

"I will give Harry all that you would have had you and… James… lived," Severus murmured.

The wizard strode into his bedroom, opened his wardrobe and donned clean clothing. Severus pulled down the cuffs of his linen shirt and lastly threw clean robes over his shoulders. He was now ready to head to the Headmaster’s Tower.
Paintings That Talk

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Paintings That Talk

The Headmaster's Tower

Harry was delighted when the funny-looking creature came for him in dungeon. They were called house elves and Harry had met the Slytherin house elf, Fry, last night before dinner. Fry woke him in the early morning and as soon as he was dressed they 'popped' to the Headmaster's tower. Harry giggled as he felt his insides tickling him when he arrived in the Headmaster's office.

The old man with the long beard was absent but all the portraits were there, and they waved, or even said hello to Harry.

"Come closer, young Master Potter," said a pretty portrait of a witch with raven-black hair that fell in gentle waves to her elbows.

Harry had not had a portrait address him before so he hesitated before stepping forward. "Hi, Ma'am." He spoke softly. He then recalled how The Shadow had bowed to the Headmaster so he made a little bow to the woman in the portrait.

She clapped, as several other ex-Headmistresses did, and Harry beamed. "What a polite little wizard!" The woman rose and graciously curtsied. "I am Dame Phyllida Spore, and you must be the Harry Potter we've been hearing about."

"I'm the only Harry Potter I know," stated Harry. He received a few chuckles so he smiled shyly.

"How do you like our castle, Master Potter?" asked the portrait of a tall man with red hair and an equally red, pointy beard that curled stylishly at its point.

"It's great. Did you know there are ghosts here? A real spooky one came to the Slytherin common room last night and he was all silver with silver blood on his chest," informed Harry.

"The Bloody Baron," intoned a third portrait. The Headmaster in that one wore a green robe, had black hair, and a mustache and small, pointed beard that made him look like a devil. "You don't sound like you were properly frightened, boy."

"Well, I was, when I first met him but then Sha… I mean Professor Snape introduced us and he was actually kind of nice. The ghost has an odd accent but I understood him."

The red haired Headmaster spoke haughtily, "A fib! The Bloody Baron has never spoken."

Harry scowled. He did not notice the devilish looking Headmaster smirking knowledgeably. "He did too! When he came back after Professor Snape left the ghost spoke to me and we talked about all sorts of things like sword fights and damsels that needed rescuing. He was a knight, you know."

The sinister Headmaster in robes as black as The Shadows spoke softly to Harry, "The Baron chooses only Slytherins to speak to, young wizard. Therefore, you are a Slytherin."

Harry was about to reply but a beautiful melody filled the air and wrapped itself around him like
warmth. Harry smiled serenely. He turned towards the sound and was greeted by a bird almost as tall as himself with feathers of red/orange fire, and gold. Harry felt a yearning within to touch the bird and even though it had a beak that could take his hand off he stretched his hand out and the bird remarkably bowed its head and allowed the small boy to stroke its crest. Harry felt a shiver of giggly delight that he was permitted to touch the beautiful bird.

"Fawkes likes you, my child," spoke the Headmaster.

Harry, caught completely off guard dove under the nearest piece of furniture which was a desk near the bird. He had curled up and covered his head. Moments later a hand was gently stroking his back.

"Shh, Harry. It is all right. It is just me, Albus. I am sorry for frightening you." The boy slowly unfolded himself. "There you are." The Headmaster smiled and extended his hand towards Harry.

"M'sorry, Sir," Harry mumbled as he pushed himself out of his hideaway. He had not taken the hand of assistance the Headmaster had offered.

"There is no need to be sorry at all, Harry. Come, I ordered up a nice breakfast for us. Professor Snape will be joining us shortly," said Albus. His voice was constant, a soothing tone that served to put Harry at ease. He directed the boy over to a round table where there were several dishes covered by silver domes. Harry's eyes lit up as the Headmaster revealed bacon, sausage, pancakes, butter, syrup, cubed fruit, and carafe of various juices and one pot of coffee.

"Sit down, child, and help yourself."

"Are you sure, Sir?" asked Harry with hesitation.

"Very. This is all for you."

"Thank you, Sir!" Harry lifted a pair of tongs and grabbed several pancakes, then lots of butter, and syrup. In moments he had a plate a diabetic would lose consciousness over.

Albus chuckled as he poured the boy a glass of pomegranate juice. Harry shook his head. "That's really tart, Sir. Shad… um… Professor Snape likes it."

"Ah," nodded the old man in understanding. "What sort of juice would you prefer?"

Harry studied each of the carafe's of juice and then pointed at one that looked like watery, milky light-brown mud with an edge of pale-red to it. "What's that one, Sir?"

"Apple juice*. Fresh pressed this morning by the house elves." Albus poured some into a new glass for Harry, handed it to him, and he took an experimental swallow. He grinned. Albus returned the smile. "You approve, Harry?"

"I like it!" Harry swallowed down more of the juice.

Albus floated over a bowl of cubed fruit as he poured more apple juice into Harry's glass. As he put the refreshed glass in front of the boy a brown clay bottle of his potion arrived and settled beside the juice.

"A little fruit and don't forget your Nutrition Potion, Harry. Severus would be displeased if I forgot," chided Albus.

For several minutes they both enjoyed their breakfast. Halfway through the Headmaster spoke up. "I must confess something to you, Harry." Harry had taken a large bite of his pancakes so he could
only look at the elder wizard while he chewed his food. "I truly thought your relatives would do their best by you. I have found as I have grown older that I am oblivious to the darker side of human nature."

Harry swallowed his food. "Aunt Petunia hated my mum. She said she was born an 'evil freak'."

Albus was shocked. "Harry, I am so sorry I left you there… had I…"

"S'okay," said Harry so nonchalantly Albus could detect that it was not all right. Thinking of his relatives had soured Harry's appetite. He stabbed at his pancakes but did not push the plate away. "Why didn't you ever come and visit, Sir?" he accused sharply. "I didn't even know about you… this world."

"I have no excuse for you, Harry. I should have visited, or had someone else check on you. I truly did think…"

"Well, you were wrong." Harry pushed away from the table and went over to the bird, Fawkes. He wondered what the magnificent bird was but that thought was fleeting as his memory showed him all the times he made wonderful breakfasts for the Dursleys and he had been left with barely a few scraps.

Albus sighed heavily. Lily Evans had easily stolen his heart the first time he saw her in the Great Hall as a child. He had seen a spark in her that he had not seen in any other child before. Lily was intelligent, but she had the capacity for a large heart. Albus knew he often saw her as an unblemished child, just as he had done so with James Potter, and his friends. A favouritism that Severus never tired of scolding the older man about. Albus knew he had seen much of his life through rose-coloured glasses, and he had made very many prejudicial judgements. Those judgements had hurt Severus who had forgiven him, but not without a price. After all, Severus was a Slytherin and nothing was ever 'up front' with them.

Severus had also made bad decisions but in the end he had turned to the only man that could help him. Albus, at one time, had not looked favourably upon the skinny, sullen boy, but as each had grown older and learned more about each other, and their respective flaws, they had grown close.

Albus had been correcting many mistakes of the past but he was still a foolish, old man and his mistake had injured another small boy who might not be as forgiving as Severus Snape. And that was not saying very much in regards to the younger man's forgiving nature; he rarely did forgive. Anyone.

"Harry… please?" The child took a deep breath before turning just enough to reveal the glimmer of tears in his eyes. Albus was an old man, and it was no longer an easy thing for him to kneel down upon one knee, but he left his chair, and forced himself to bring himself level to Harry. "I was wrong, child. I relied upon memories of the past and never thought to discover if those memories were right or wrong. You suffered for my neglect and I am so very sorry." Harry's gaze was still hard, pained, and Albus' knees were screaming arthritically to him. "I do not ask your forgiveness, Harry, but would you allow me to do right by you now?"

The breath Harry drew into his body caused him to shudder, and that was all he would reveal of his hurt and anger. "You'll let me stay here?"

Albus stretched out his hand to brush the small boy's cheek. Harry flinched but did not step backwards. The Headmaster smiled. "Of course you will stay."

At that moment Severus, as neat as a pin and as formal as the teacher he was, stepped through green
flames and into the Headmaster's Tower. Once more Harry was startled but instead of hiding under the furniture he had latched onto the older man; a sign of beginning trust.

"Albus! Whatever are you doing on your knees?" Severus chided but strode over to help the old man to stand. "Lean on Harry. Harry, take the Headmaster over to the breakfast table. I need to Summon a potion for Albus."

"Okay, Professor Snape." Harry agreed quickly and helped the older wizard back to the breakfast table. Even though Albus tried not to lean heavily upon the boy Harry thought the adult felt like a dried twig.

Moments later Severus had a pinkish potion in a glass bottle that ended in a bulb that he handed to Albus. "All of it, Albus. This will ease the pain and return a bit of your mobility."

Harry was hovering over the older man, and he laid his hands on Albus' forearm. "I'm sorry for being annoying and hurting you, Sir."

Albus cupped the boy's cheek. "No, no, no, dear. You have nothing to apologise for. Let's both start anew and put the past where it belongs." He glanced up at the Potions Master. "Severus, let's all have breakfast first and then we shall discuss with Harry his future."

Severus sat down and while Harry was scooping some scrambled eggs onto his plate, the wizard greeted him, "Good morning, little Magpie. Did you sleep well last night?"

A sigh of pleasure at hearing his nickname of affection eased the child. He smiled, and replied, "G'morning, Shadow. I slept real good last night…"

"Very well…" corrected Severus.

"I slept very well," Harry smiled. He then addressed Albus. "Professor Snape gave me some… No Dreaming Sleep potion last night…"

"Dreamless Sleep Potion," Severus smoothly corrected. "I have been experimenting with toddler-sized dosages of adult potions. "Harry kindly agreed to be a test subject." He nodded to the boy. "No dreams, then, Harry?"

Harry shook his head as he ate a piece of bacon. "I did sleep kind of long, though. Aunt Petunia tells me to get up at six to start my chores. The house elf that woke me told me it was 8am."

"What chores do you do?" asked Severus as he poured himself a cup of the steaming hot coffee.

"Well I always have to clean the house, and make the beds but I only have to clean Dudley's bathroom every other day. Breakfast is first, though. I make breakfast because I'm a good cook." Harry took a breath, swallowed a gulp of apple juice, and poked at his fruit with his fork. "The vacuuming is the last thing I do and then I go work outside. Once a week is lawn mowing day, once a week I water the trees, and the garden always needs something… pulling weeds, removing dead buds from the plants, aerating the soil, planting. I'm a busy boy. Do you want me to clean your room, Professor Snape?" Harry politely waited for a sincere answer.

Severus and Albus were both stunned at the large amount of daily chores Harry had blithely related to the two men. He spoke as though his "slavery" for the Dursleys was normal. Severus sipped at his coffee and dearly wished to pour a dram of whiskey into it. Albus had simply stopped eating.

"You do this daily, child?" asked Albus softly.
Harry hesitated. He was just now picking up the vibe of the two adults having been disturbed by what he'd said about his chores. "Aunt Petunia says that "idle hands are the devil's playthings". She can't have me "wasting space" and not contributing to her family."

"Your family," Albus whispered, and knowing at once he should not have said a thing.

Harry glowered for just a moment, then spoke, "My Aunt and Uncle both have told me that my family is dead. I'm an orphan."

Severus tossed his napkin to the table. "I have lost my appetite, Albus. Let us speak to Harry of the future."

"Quite so, my boy." He Summoned a rolled up scroll from his desk. He then had the dishes for himself and Severus but Harry was still eating. "Harry, there is no need for you to end your breakfast but if you don't mind Severus and I shall tell you what we have decided."

"I don't get to stay here?" Harry asked both men worriedly.

"You do stay," replied Severus. "However, I was hoping you might agree to stay with me."

Harry eyed the Potions Master who now sat nervously, ram-rod straight. He smiled shyly, his own nervousness peeking out. "With you, Shadow? Did you want me to cook and clean for you?"

"Oh… well, you would have chores but tailored more to what a four… hm nearly five year old boy ought to do. Such as keep his room clean, set the table for meals, keep his things in his room…" began Severus. Harry was not understanding and frowned in puzzlement with each thing Severus listed. "Harry, would you like to be my son?"

Harry was terribly, awfully quiet. He was almost afraid to reply on the off-chance he had not heard what The Shadow asked of him. Pushing his plate of breakfast away he purposefully sat upon his hands because they were sweating all of a sudden.

"Son? Shad… erm, Professor…? You want to be my f-father?" Harry asked so softly.

"If you wish, Harry," smiled Severus with just a small quirk up at the corner of his mouth.

Harry's green eyes sparkled. "We'd be a… a… family! You'd have someone and I'd have someone. YES! Oh yes, please, Shadow! I want to be your son!" Not able to sit still another second Harry jumped up from his chair and threw himself at the Potions Master so hard he nearly knocked him backwards. He whispered in the man's ear. "I'd be your Magpie forever and always?"

"And, I would be your Shadow." Without thinking of what he was doing, he kissed the small boy's smooth forehead. Harry threw his arms around The Shadow's neck and kissed his cheek.

"My Shadow," he sighed.

"My little Magpie," smirked Severus as he felt the joy of knowing Harry wanted to be his warmth flowed along his cold blood.

Albus clapped his hands as Severus caught the boy, and held onto him tightly. "That is settled then! Harry? Severus? Let's make this formal now." He unrolled the paperwork from the Ministry of Magic.

Chapter End Notes
*Raw Apple Juice that has been freshly pressed tends to look a bit cloudy and muddy but it is ever so delicious!
Most four and a half year old boys would pay little attention to the paperwork the Ministry had sent Albus Dumbledore for the adoption. However, Harry had listened and understood (to the best of a four year old’s mind) nearly every word. Severus Snape would adopt him and he would grow up in Hogwarts castle. The adoption would NEVER be revoked - something that Harry was very concerned about - and he would be the son of the Potions Master who taught Potions at Hogwarts.

Harry was riveted when Severus explained the potion he would drink. "It is called the Familia Adopto Potion. It is a delicate brew that will last only two more hours before we must add our blood and drink it."

"Are we both going to drink it?" asked Harry. Severus shook his head. "Oh. Just me… so… but, why the blood? Am I going to be a vampire?"

"Not by a long shot, Harry," smirked Severus. "This will provide a DNA Mask so that by all methods for proving paternity will show, unequivocally, that you are not just my son through adoption but biologically as well."

"My dad will still be my biological dad?" Severus nodded. "Uhm… will his DNA be revealed magically?"

"Not by magical means, Harry. However, Muggle means can see beyond the mask. Fortunately for us the Ministry does not employ Muggle means. But, Harry…" Severus knelt down to bring himself eye level to the child. "I vow to you that no matter what, you will be mine. I will allow no one to take you from me."

"No one," Harry echoed softly.

Severus gripped the boy’s small hands. "No one, Harry. This I do Vow."

Harry watched in astonishment as a ribbon of pure white magic drifted down towards their clasped hands and wrapped around them. It pulsed once and then was absorbed by their hands.

"Wicked! What happened?"

Albus replied, "It is an Unbreakable Vow, my boy. On pain of death Severus will never let you go."

Harry smiled as he understood the gravity of the situation. "I want to drink the Familia Adopto Potion now, please?"

Harry had slept in a bare room in the dungeons. He had hoped it might be his but he did not ask for fear of being disappointed. Now, Harry stood in his room - HIS ROOM - in the quarters of the Potions Master. A double-size bed was near the wardrobe that was currently empty. The sheets and blanket on the bed were white but Severus promised that Harry could decorate his room however he want.

A large, Enchanted Window dominated the room. It was blank but it could show Harry any view he wanted from all over the world. A large chair was puffy and just the perfect chair to curl up in and read a book, draw, or colour. It was white, as blank a canvas as the bedroom.
Suddenly, Harry beamed. Would The Shadow - *HIS FATHER* - let him have paper, and pencils, and crayons?! Or a kitten? He was old enough to take care of a pet. He was sure of it. Practically spinning out of his room he ran down the short hall into the main room where Severus was making adjustments to the… their… living space.

"Could I have some crayons? And a pencil? Maybe a kitten? I'd take care of her! And she could sleep with me… !"

"Harry! Sit down and take a breath before you pass out," ordered Severus.

"Sorry. Yes, Sir." Harry climbed up on the sofa and forced himself to relax as he breathed in and out.

Severus seated himself in a worn, leather chair that had seen nearly a decade with the Potions Master. It was the first purchase he had made with galleons earned as a teacher, and it was his favourite place to end the day.

"Better?" Severus asked.

"Yeah," Harry nodded. "This is all so much, Shadow. Just when I think I'm dreaming I pinch myself to wake up and then I realise it's not a dream. I get to stay here. With you. And, it's forever!"

"Indeed it is," smirked Severus. "So, what were you babbling about when you ran in here, my twittering Magpie?"

"Can I have an entire box of crayons for all my own, Sir?" asked Harry.

"You may have your own crayons, drawing quills, and paper. Anything you would need to create art… it will be yours. Harry, you never are going to get hand-me-down clothing, toys, and you will be fed three times a day. I will take care of you. In fact, the first order of business will be a shopping trip tomorrow to outfit you and then your room. So, think about the clothing you want to wear, and how you would like your bedroom to appear." Harry was practically glowing with his thoughts on what he would get tomorrow. He had to sit on his hands he was getting so excited. Severus chuckled softly, and then slyly asked, "Did you mention something about a kitten?"

Harry nodded, shrugged, then nodded again. "I don't like dogs, Shadow. Or, maybe I do but I just didn't like Aunt Marge's dog Ripper. I might figure that out later. But, do you think… is it possible… could I maybe have a kitten?" His voice hurried. "Not right away because I'm going to have lots to do already but someday? Or, actually… do you like kittens? Pets?" He slumped. "I shouldn't have asked. You don't like pets at all."

"I would prefer that you not make such assumptions about me, Harry," chided Severus. "We have a lifetime to learn about each other. So let us begin with 'pets'. In the wizarding world we seldom have pets. Instead, we have familiars."

"How are familiars different from pets?" asked Harry.

"A familiar bonds with its witch or wizard. Once bonded the familiar develops its own magical powers to safeguard its witch or wizard. With some familiars it is possible to talk to them along the bond," Severus explained. "I have no objection to you having a familiar but instead of a Muggle kitten you might consider a kneazle kit."

"Is that like a kitten?" asked Harry.

"Nearly so. They tend to be a bit larger once full grown and they can come with fur tinted… well, like a crayon box." Severus chuckled as the child's eyes widened. Harry was most definitely a
"Do you have a familiar, Shadow?"

Severus hesitated. He never had owned one since he thought the animal would be in danger from his abusive father, or bullies at Hogwarts. Recently, though, Hagrid, the Groundskeeper of Hogwarts, had trouble with a Thestral foal; it would not drink milk from its mother. Severus had found in his book, *Potions Husbandry*, a potion to stimulate the small animal's appetite. The Thestral began to thrive and ever since then it always sought out Severus to greet and nuzzle him.

"I do…" began Severus. "But he is a Thestral and they are not seen by all." He would not mention that only those who saw death could see a Thestral.

"An invisible familiar… neat! Can I see… uhm… meet him?" Harry pulled his hands out from under his legs and clapped once. He did love animals. He just hated Aunt Marge's dog Ripper who would chase him, and once that evil dog had bit him in the leg.

"Hagrid, our groundskeeper keeps Agamemnon for me. He's still nursing from his mother. We can go visit him now, and perhaps we shall go into Hogsmeade for a few things."

"Yea!" Harry was thrilled.
Beasts That Can Eat Me!

Beasts That Can Eat Me

3rd July 1985 - Early Afternoon

Fang saw his favourite wizard, Flowers, walking towards Hagrid's hut with a small boy holding his hand. Fang was delighted! A new friend! Fang began to bounce and bark and dance with joy. A new friend who would play catch with him, feed him wonderful snacks and maybe even go on a walk with him. Fang galumphed towards Flowers, but at Hagrid's shrill whistle he stopped and planted his haunches in the grass.

Something was wrong. The little boy was climbing Flowers. The boy was afraid of Fang! Oh! How awful! Fang never meant to scare anyone! Flopping down onto his stomach he put his front paws over his head and began to howl mournfully into the earth.

"'Ere now, Fang! None o' that caterwaulin' ye big baby!"

Harry had been happy to walk beside his new father. He even got to hold The Shadow's hand. It was beautiful outside and there was so much to see. Severus had pointed out Hagrid's hut as they were coming to it. A tendril of white smoke spiralled up from the chimney.

Then Harry had seen the dog. He was huge! At least as tall as The Shadow and he had floppy ears, a jowly mouth, and he was… bouncing towards them. Harry reacted the only way he knew how and that was to get off the ground, and climb. Severus quickly found himself with an armful of scared, gangly, little four year old.

"It's gonna eat me! Shadow! Help!" cried Harry as he tried to get up on his father's shoulders.

A shrill whistle pierced the air and the dog stopped. In a moment it had dropped down onto its haunches and then dropped to its belly and began a muffled howling after covering its broad head with its paws.

Seconds later a very tall man, taller even than The Shadow, came from behind the hut. He had a very bushy beard that could not be distinguished from his equally bushy brown hair.

Severus caught Harry tightly, held onto him, and shifted him to his right hip after casting a silent and wandless Feather Light Charm. "Ease yourself, Harry. The big man is Hagrid, and the big dog is Fang."

"F-f-fang?" asked Harry with chattering teeth.

"His name is the only thing about him to be frightened of, Harry. Fang adores all the students… the children of Hogwarts. I'm sure he would love you as well," soothed Severus.

"He won't eat me, Shadow?" the child asked timidly.

"Fang tends to slobber, not eat, Harry," chuckled Severus. "He really is a good dog."

"'allo Perfessor!" greeted Hagrid. "I hear ye got yerself a son. Congratulations!"

Severus frowned. "Does everyone know, Hagrid?"
Hagrid smiled… possibly. One could not always tell with his hair and beard. "By dinner time I 'spect ever'one will know, Perfessor. I only heard because I was getting a nosh in the kitchen. The house elves don' pay me no mind but they was gossipin' 'bout the new, little 'Snape boy'." As Harry slid from his father's arms the half-giant lowered himself to his knees so he was not as tall or as intimidating to the little boy. "So ye be the new sprout, eh? I be Hagrid." He held out his hand, and then stuck forth his index finger which Harry, at a gentle nudge from his father, grasped with his hand.

"I'm Harry. The Shadow's my father now. Can we see his invisible Thestral?" Harry smiled. Even though the really tall man's hair was unbelievably bushy he could see the genuine, caring smile of the large man.

"Course ye can, 'Arry. If ye don't mind, though, I'd like to interduce ye to Fang firs,. Trust me, 'e won't hurt ye. Fang's a big baby."

Harry almost shook his head but then he felt his father's hand on his shoulder. "Okay."

"C'mere, Fang. This is 'Arry."

Fang moved gently, and then as he neared the small human he lowered himself to his belly so the boy stood taller than him.

"Hold your hand forth and let Fang smell you, Harry," Severus instructed softly.

Fang, getting some fear smell from the boy, was able to smell the real boy underneath. The boy had the wonderful spicy smell of the fresh loam before a storm. Dirt. His new friend. Gently Fang nudged the boy in the chest with his nose. There was a brighter bravery in the boy's many aromas but this one told Fang he could complete his greeting. He licked the boy from sternum to face.

Harry was not scared of Fang any longer, and knew the hound had accepted him. That great lick, and was it ever slobbery, caused Harry to shriek and giggle.

"What kind of dog is he, Hagrid? Why's he so big?" Harry asked as he kept petting Fang's broad head.

"Fang's an English Boarhound. 'Ave ye ever 'eard of 'tha runt of tha litter', 'Arry?" asked Hagrid.

Harry nodded. "Well, Fang, 'ere, had to go an' be the opp-sit. Fang was larger'n all his littermates so I knew 'e was mine." Hagrid smiled and stood. "Let's go'n see Agamemnon."

"How is Agamemnon doing, Hagrid?" asked Severus.

"Right good, Perfessor. 'E's weaned off 'im mum yesterday. I give 'im the same mash I gives all tha foals an' 'e's likin' it right nice."

They walked into the Forbidden Forest to the paddock for the Thestrals that Hagrid had built when he was still a student. After the tragic death of a student, and when it had been proven he was innocent of the crime, he was one of the few able to see the Thestrals.

Harry had never seen an invisible anything before and so he was slightly, but only by a little bit, disappointed when they got to the paddock and were met by a large, horse-like animal with membranous wings. Its eyes were a glowing silver and it was often thought of as being skeletal with its body definition being delicate and slim.
At that moment, a small Thestral foal, broke away from its mother and trotted over towards them. Its silvery gaze was solely for The Shadow.

"They're horses with wings, Shadow" Harry said simply. "Beautiful horses… like… carved midnight."

How the little four-year old boy described the Thestrals was poetic but Hagrid was astonished and Severus frowned with concern even as he withdrew (not a sugar cube) but a bouillon cube from his pocket for Agamemnon.

Before Hagrid could speak, and say something injurious to Harry, Severus explained, "You can see the Thestral, Harry. Not many can which is why I told you they would be invisible."

"Invisible flying horses would have been neat to… not see…" Harry chuckled, "But these are neat. Can I pet one?"

"Of course," agreed Severus. "Meet Agamemnon." He handed Harry a bouillon cube. "Keep your palm flat and present the treat."

Harry did as instructed. He giggled as the foal licked the savoury cube away with his black tongue. Severus scratched the small Thestral's ear and Harry did the same with the other. Agamemnon was in heaven. Severus gave Harry another cube. He examined it.

"I used bouillon cubes to make soup base for the Dursleys. How come Agamemnon gets these cubes instead of sugar cubes, Shadow?" Harry gave the foal the cube and Agamemnon slurped it up with his black tongue.

Severus bit his tongue. Mention of those Dursleys would annoy him terribly for some time. He answered Harry's question, "They prefer the savoury taste as opposed to the sweet of sugar."

"Really? Why?" asked Harry taking a last cube from his father.

"Thestrals are predators, Harry. They hunt and eat meat. They may resemble Muggle horses but they are not horses." Harry was nodding but it did not deter his fascination with the delicate creature.

"Does Agamemnon hunt, yet?" asked Harry as he rubbed a knuckle up and down the bony, yet velvet covered ridge of the Thestral foal's nose.

"Agamemnon was just weaned from his mother's milk. His father, Apollo," Severus nodded to the large Thestral that had been studiously watching the entire time. "will teach Agamemnon how to hunt."

Harry gaped as he looked, up, up, and up to the silver eyes of Apollo. The Thestral's head was half the size that Harry was tall. The boy instinctively back-pedaled as Apollo suddenly lowered his proud head to get a good look at the small wizard.

"He isn't going to eat me, is he, Shadow?" Harry had begun to tremble.

Severus drew his robes protectively around his son, and drew him tight against the front of himself. Harry was effectively peeking out at the huge Thestral who had not removed its gaze from him.

"'Ere now, Apollo!" chided Hagrid who had been feeding the mares on the other side of the paddock. "Ye be nice, now. 'Arry is Perfessor Snape's foal just like Agamemmon is yers."

Apollo shook his head, and huffed as if he understood the groundskeeper. The Thestral then
whinnied at Agamemnon who answered with his own whinny. Both Thestrals moved away from the fence. The visit was ended.

"Will ye join me fer tea?" Hagrid asked his visitors. "I got some fresh rock cakes cooling."

"Thank you, but no, Hagrid. While we still have some sunshine I would like to take Harry into Hogsmeade to get him some new clothing," declined Severus.

Harry stepped out from the cover of his father's robes and looked up at him. "But, I'm wearing clothes!"

"So you are, Harry. However, when those are dirty, what will you wear?" asked Severus with a slight amused smirk.

Harry looked down at his clothing. It wasn't the overly large hand-me-downs that he would get from his cousin Dudley. He wore a simple pair of corduroy trousers, a white shirt, and a pair of trainers. His outfit, his father had earlier explained, had been Transfigured from bed sheets. Transfigured, Harry had then learned, meant that one object was magically changed into another.

Smirking up at his father, Harry cheekily replied, "Like my pyjamas... a tea towel?"

Severus took the young boy by the shoulders and turned him towards the castle. "You are not a house elf, Mr. Snape. I expect you to dress like a little boy."

Harry trudged exaggeratedly up the hill to the path that forked from the castle or to Hogsmeade. Severus strode up behind his son, picked him up, and reached the path quicker than Harry would have.

Harry's finger traced the dark green embroidered emblem of a snake and a cauldron on the collar of his father's robe. "Shadow, couldn't we save money if you transfigured clothes for me instead of buying them?"

"No, we could not, Harry. The majority of Transfiguration is temporary unless you know either a Binding Charm or Rune Magic to hold the permanence of a transfigured object," explained Severus.

Harry sighed and then pushed some of his father's hair back behind his ear. He was rather astonished to find that the hair wasn't greasy but silky, almost like water. A moment later he whispered, "Buying clothes is 'spensive, Shadow, and I don't have any money."

Severus put Harry onto his feet and took the child's hand in his. Instead of Apparating to Hogsmeade they would walk the path as it was still a nice day.

"Clothing is expensive, Magpie, but it is not an expense you need be concerned with. As your father it is my responsibility to feed you, clothe you, shelter you, and to keep you safe," replied Severus.

"What's my res-pons-i-bility?" he pronounced the word slowly.

"Your responsibility is to keep your room clean, set the table for meals, do the tasks I assign you, play like little boys do, mind me, and to give me a hug and a kiss at least once a day." He winked down at his son. "Does that sound acceptable?"

"Can I hug and kiss you more than once a day?"

"Certainly, little Magpie. On that there is no limit."
Since the tall wizard had a longer pace than Harry did the boy began to skip. Severus glanced down at the happy child that held onto his hand and wondered at the strangeness of being a father. It was something he had thought of, briefly, as a child but he had squashed the thought under a dozen Occlumency shields. The first time his father lifted a hand to him and his mother made no move to help him, he decided at that young age he did not ever want children.

The Potions Master had mused that he might have wanted a family with Lily but in truth he had never seen her beyond their friendship. It was why, even to this day, it still hurt that their friendship had ended so abruptly.

Harry was his redemption, the balm that soothed his soul of the pains and mistakes of his past. Seeing this little boy skipping and smiling along the side of the dreaded 'bat of the dungeon' lightened his heart in a way sunshine could not.

"Shadow?" Harry had tugged Severus forward to happily stomp in a small puddle of water. It thrilled him when the muddy water splashed everywhere.

Severus hurried his step to get to Harry. He urged the boy from the puddle, and quickly ran a cleaning charm over his trousers.

"That's cool!" marvelled Harry.

"You had a question, my little Magpie?" asked Severus as he steered the boy from the distracting puddle.

"Oh yes!" He slipped his hand into his father's hand. "Is my sneezle kitten waiting for me?"

"We shall not find the kneazle kitten in Hogsmeade, Harry. For the kitten we will travel to Diagon Alley," explained the Potions Master.

"Nee-zul," he repeated softly. "Kneazle. I don't want it to wait forever, Shadow. It might get sad, and not eat, and the other kittens will just let him get skinny 'cuz they don't care about him like I do."

"There is no need to worry, Harry. The owners of the Magical Menagerie are very conscious of all of their animals needs," assured Severus.

"If you're sure..." Harry spoke slowly. Severus could tell he was still worried for the kitten he had never met that was already his.

Stopping the boy, he knelt on one knee so he could look into his emerald gaze. Yes, Harry was very worried. "Do you trust me, Magpie?"

Harry nodded. He then sniffled and Severus saw that the brave child was trying not to cry. The wizard conjured a handkerchief and held it to the child's nose. "Blow your nose, little Magpie. I do not want you to get a cold."

Harry breathed in and took the handkerchief. He blew, not terribly hard, and remembered a time when both he and Dudley had been sick. Aunt Petunia was always wiping Dudley's nose, cuddling him, and giving him broth. Harry was locked into his cupboard for being 'grotesque'. He had no handkerchief for his nose. He smiled at The Shadow. Such a little thing like a handkerchief was a huge gift.

"There we go," Severus smiled, but ever so little. His smile beamed in his black gaze and it warmed Harry's heart. "Now, I do not want you to worry about your kitten. Graham Oswald is a fellow Slytherin and is very thoughtful towards all of the animals he takes care of. All of them are waiting
for their own witch or wizard so Master Oswald must keep all of them healthy and happy."

Harry's shoulders lifted as he breathed a sigh of relief. "That's good, Shadow. Just… um… let's not
leave her there for long, please?"

"Her?" Severus asked as he stood and they began to walk again. "Did I not hear you say him a few
minutes ago?"

"Well, I'm not sure if the kitten is a him or her. I think I'll find out when we go to Magical
Menagerie, don't you think?"

"I think that makes perfect sense," Severus agreed. He smiled a small expression of contentment as
his son skipped ahead on the path after a large Blue Velvet flutter-bye caught his eye. The magical
flutter-bye was invisible to Muggles and Squibs. Therefore, the Potions Master knew that Harry's
magic, though exhausted, was not completely gone.
The town of Hogsmeade was accessed by one main road that went through its market area where all the shops, vendors, and food establishments were. From this road sprouted smaller roads that led to several farms, and homes scattered throughout the woods that surrounded the town. At each of these main road entrances was a tall archway of river stone. Each entrance was a magical gateway and when Harry saw a horse and rider vanish under the arch as it left Hogsmeade, he was speechless.

"It's magic! Dad! Did you see that? The horse disappeared!" Harry enthused practically jumping from his skin.

Severus was pleased at Harry's excitement but he was more pleased at hearing his son refer to him as 'dad' for the first time.

"Shadow, how did they do that?" asked Harry as he turned to his father.

"As you observed, Magpie… magic." Falling more easily into the mien of a teacher he began to lecture, "Everything from the stone to its shape is a part of the magic that is contained within, Mr. Snape. The stone is feldspar riverstone that has had its edges smoothed off by the flow of the river. You will see this river at the other end of Hogsmeade. The stone not only absorbs the magic but projects it. It is the wards that direct the magic and the arch shapes the magic so that it weaves itself and constantly is moving. You might be able to feel the magic in the stone as a faint hum that tickles the timpanic membrane in your ear, or you will feel the magic as you step under the arch as either a breeze that buzzes like a bee."

Harry stepped towards the arch and held his hand out until he could touch the stone. He giggled as his ear vibrated with a tickling that caused him to shake his head. He glanced back once and when his father gave him a short nod he slowly walked under the arch along the wall. He grinned as a gentle breeze drifted around him and the sound of bees lazily drifting on the air surrounded him.

"What do normal people see, Shadow?" asked Harry excitedly. He had both palms pressed to the stone wall.

Severus moved to step beside his son. "We are normal people, Harry. We are called 'wizarding' people, magical people, or individually witches and wizards. Our world, separated from the non-magical world, is the Wizarding World. People without magic are called Muggles and they live in the Muggle World."

"Then Muggles see magic stuff differently?"

"They do," replied Severus just as he pulled Harry out of the way of an arriving carriage. "We are a minority, Harry, and so it is important that we hide ourselves and our world. Much of magic hides itself. Such as many of the magical animals and creatures. Their own magic keeps them hidden from the Muggle World. We have created many wards and spells to hide our structures, towns, villages. Even Hogwarts is hidden by a complicated ward that makes the castle appear as a ruin that Muggles are discouraged to explore."

"So what do Muggles see here?" asked Harry once more.
"A simple path. They do not see the gateways but the magic subtly causes a temporal shift that allows a Muggle to walk along the same path where a thriving community walks," replied Severus.

"Like Doctor Who!" Harry suddenly comprehended.

"Good gracious! Is that television show still being produced?" asked Severus in surprise.

That element from the Muggle world that was a joy to boy and man set them off upon a discussion of the British show Doctor Who. Harry loved it for being a clever and magical show. Severus had always enjoyed all the travelling to different places in a blue police box.

Of course, the subject faded as all of Hogsmeade came into view.

Harry could not keep his jaw from dropping. There was so much to see and magic was everywhere! Severus had captured Harry's hand when they walked down the main street because Harry's magpie-like tendencies had him darting off when his green eyes caught something interesting to look at.

Severus heard his son's tummy growl in warning so before they began their shopping they would need to get something to eat. A small restaurant that appeared in the market only during the months of Summer was just what they needed.

Called Félicité it was a curious set up of comfortable loungers in various stained pine upholstered in woollen tapestry of many colours. In front of each two-person lounger was a low table where food and drink would be settled. It was not an odd sight to see a patron or two taking a nap on their lounger.

Severus fully expected Harry to fall asleep after his well-rounded lunch. He did not expect himself to also snooze lightly once Harry's head had dropped sleepily to his thigh.

A half hour later father and son had awakened from their naps and began their shopping trip in earnest. Severus directed his son towards Gladrags Wizardwear. It was a good place to shop for a growing child and the wizard had rightly assumed that Harry at the age of four and a half had many years of growth ahead. That meant the new father would need to put aside a considerable portion of his teaching income towards Harry's clothing.

Gladrags was not a crowded place that day for which Severus was thankful. Not having the attention of a seamstress or tailor the two were left to their own devices as they perused the many racks stuffed with "gently" used and new clothing from underwear to robes.

Severus intended to purchase more of the "gently" used clothing later but Harry, in need of a full wardrobe, deserved the new clothing he had never owned. As they began with the underwear Severus discovered his son's modesty. He could not resist tweaking the boy who tried to hide his sight behind his hands.

"Do you prefer coloured underwear or perhaps you would like the underwear that has hippogriffs or dragons on it." Severus held up a pair of each he mentioned. The dragons were the straw that broke the camel's back.

"I'm four and a half, Dad, not two!" he pushed the dragon underwear from his father's hands not realising that he had just called his father "dad" for the second time.

Severus, though he expected the warmth that bloomed like a fever in his chest, was not uncomfortable with that degree of distraction. He stated softly, "You need to choose something, Harry."
"Black," Harry replied. "I only want underwear if it's black." He then glanced shyly up at his father. "I called you, Dad. Was that okay?" He had not been aware of his first slip. This time he was.

Severus smiled in contentment. "More than all right, my son. I rather like the sound." Harry beamed, gave his father a quick, one-armed hug, and then stepped towards a rack that was stuffed with shirts.

Later, socks were a problem.

"Socks need only be in black, brown, navy, or white, Harry. You do not need socks with stripes or dancing hippos!" Severus lifted a sock that had purple hippos in pink tutus dancing gracefully across the yellow background of the sock.

Harry grabbed the sock and smiled at the hippos. "But, the hippos are purple, Dad," said Harry cajolingly.

Severus crossed his arms over his chest and glared down at the small four-year old boy. "Black, brown, navy, or white."

"I want purple hippos, and stripes, and rainbows and leprechauns, and…" Harry stubbornly listed what he wanted.

"Black, brown…"

"Pleeeeeease?"

Severus sighed at the large, green eyes and the features full of limpid hope that he would acquiesce. The Potions Master's eyebrows beetled, adding a dark frown to his face. He grimaced. Harry's eyes only got larger. How can I fight such a sight, his mind questioned. "A compromise, then, Harry."

"What's that mean?" Harry asked with genuine interest.

"It means that I will allow for three sets of ridiculous socks if you select five pairs of socks in black," sighed Severus.

Harry beamed. "Okay!"

And, just like that Harry had five pairs of black socks for dress, and three pairs of socks that Severus knew a certain old wizard would approve of.

An hour later, and laden down with not yet shrunken packages, Harry had outfits for every day of the week which included everything from his preferred black underwear to a variety of socks, 2 pairs of trainers, and 1 pair of dress boots. Just out the door of Gladrags Severus shrank the boxes and bags until he was able to tuck them all away in an inner pocket of his long frock coat under his robes.

And, Harry yawned. The newly adopted boy had such a busy day that it was not odd to see him tired once more.

"Someone needs another nap," observed Severus.

"I already had one," Harry protested.

"Yes but you have had a very busy day so far…"

"Can't. Where next, Shadow?" This time the yawn that caught him nearly bent him double with its force. Harry breathed heavily after the yawn.
"Harry, have you ever taken a nap midday?" asked Severus with the certainty he already knew the answer.

Harry shook his head. "Aunt Petunia always said I was being lazy if I fell asleep in the middle of my chores." He sighed. "I can stay awake if you want to keep shopping, Dad."

Severus suppressed a faux yawn. "Actually, I would like a nap. We can then put your new clothes in the wardrobe?"

"Really? It feels like we've been shopping forever!" Again, he yawned.

"Which is why we both need a nap."

Harry practically sighed with relief. "I guess I'd like that, Dad." As he slipped his small hand into his father's hand, he glanced up at him sideways. "You're just pretending, aren't you? Cuz, you care and want the best for me."

"How disgraceful!" Severus mocked himself. "I make a poor Slytherin if I am that transparent." He squeezed his son's hand, winked, and they were gone from Hogsmeade.

The Snapes returned to the dungeon and promptly went to Harry's room to put away his new clothes. It was quickly apparent that the wardrobe, a small one Severus had taken from one of the Hogwarts attics, was insufficient to store everything.

Severus expanded a box into a much larger box. "We will be shopping for furniture tomorrow, I see."

"I never thought I'd need all this stuff, Dad. It's a lot, isn't it?" Harry's voice held a slight tremor of worry.

Joining his son in packing the clothes away in the now enlarged box, he agreed, "Rather surprising, isn't it, Harry? And, you are a growing boy so you will need more."

Harry dropped a set of socks in shock. "More? But, Dad, shouldn't all these clothes last for years and years? That's what Aunt Petunia always told me."

Severus lips thinned in restrained anger. "Harry, you will learn that everything your aunt and uncle told you was a lie. A growing boy requires new clothes at least once a year. It is not until you are in your latter teen years that you will attain your full height."

He caught Harry chewing his lips as the child frowned in consternation. Severus bent to pick up the fallen socks, and then knelt. "Harry, this is something you need not worry about. As I have said before it is my responsibility as your father to make certain that you are clothed, sheltered, fed, and always taken care of." He gently tugged the boy's lower lip from his teeth. "I knew precisely what I was taking on when I adopted you, Harry. It is my intention to take care of you, to provide for all your needs, and to be sure that you know I shall always do the best for you because... I care about you."

Harry stepped closer to his father so he could lean towards him but not lean on him. "Maybe... someday, maybe, you'll love me, Dad?"

Severus gathered Harry into his arms and the boy threw his thin arms around his neck as he tucked his head into his father's shoulder. "I believe... I already do... love you, Harry."
Harry smiled against his father's shoulder, and his muffled voice reached Severus' ear, "I think I love you, too, Dad."

That night, after a story about Mowgli the Jungle Boy, Harry slept blissfully until a strange dream wove its way into his consciousness.

… The Shadow's eyes were fixed upon the coiling snake in its enchanted cage. "No, my Lord, but I beg you will let me return. Let me find Potter."

An older boy with a redheaded boy and a bushy-haired girl all watched from the shadows as the scene played out.

"We have to help him," whispered the girl.

The older boy who looked familiar to the young dream Harry shushed his friends. "Look. That isn't our Snape. It's Shadow and he knows what he's doing, 'Mione. We helped the Magpie in his cupboard and now Nagini is going to help the Shadow."

The large snake burst from the confinement of her cage and instead of striking the younger Death Eater in the throat, it lunged for the wizard's forearm. The Death Eater cried out in pain as Voldemort let out a howl of anger.

Four year old Harry screamed for his father.

Severus was not sleeping well, either. He dreamt again of that horrid Nagini, the familiar of the Dark Lord. Voldemort wanted Harry Potter and Severus was doing his best to get the vile wizard to let him 'Find Potter' and then Voldemort struck. A shimmer of the dreamscape changed it and now Harry's Shadow stood in place of the young, terrified Death Eater. This was right. The Shadow knew what was coming and he was ready. The huge snake burst forth from her magical cage and lunged. The Shadow threw up his arm to protect his neck. Fangs sank into his arm. He cried out at the searing pain. It was a pain at the surface of his arm but there was a pain even deeper that pulled at his very essence. Shadow was certain he was dying.

With his vision blurring at the burning of his arm a pair of green eyes obscured by glasses rose up before him. "You're not finished, yet, Shadow. This ends tonight. Save him."

Emotions he had never known before boiled within The Shadow's blood. He knew they were not his emotions but even so he felt anger at the "stupid boy with eyes as green as his mother's but that looked like his bloody father".

Just as the young Dream Harry Potter was about to turn away The Shadow grabbed the young man's wrist with his good hand. "You're not mine..." the pain was almost blinding him that he had to fight against it. "Look... at... me..."

Dream Harry Potter somehow knew to take his glasses off before looking into the black eyes filled with pain.

The Shadow saw what he needed to in those green eyes. Not her... but his... his little Magpie.

"Daddy! Help! Daddy! Daddy!"

Severus leapt from his bed fully awake. He only wore his black, silk pyjama bottoms so his chest
was bare as his feet were. His wand in hand he sprinted out of his room, across the hall, and into his son's room. Harry's face was a picture of terror until his gaze locked onto his father. Before he knew it, Severus had caught his son just as he launched himself from his bed. Harry was wrapped around his father like a second skin as they both fell to the floor. Severus shifted but kept a tight hold of his son.

"My little Magpie! Shhhh! Daddy's here! Hush little one… I have you… it was a terrible nightmare but it is over now." Severus held his son tight as much to reassure himself that his own nightmare was also over. Unfortunately, he wanted to know why he was having such an awful dream.

Harry was petting his father's pale arm. "Dad? Your skull-snake scar is gone."

"No…" Severus looked down at his left forearm where Harry's small fingers traced over… nothing. The Dark Mark was gone. How? "Gone…" he whispered. "Harry, we need to see Albus." For a moment they disengaged while Severus gained his feet and Summoned their dressing gowns. He then picked up his son and they went to the Floo in the sitting room. "Grab a handful of that green powder and throw it into the flames, Harry."

His father brought him closer to the black box that held the Floo powder and Harry stuck his hand into the green sand that sparkled lazily. He threw the handful of powder into the flames and then quickly grabbed onto his father - and wondered where the collar of a shirt had come from.

Magic! Wasn't it wonderful? Harry never got tired of it.

Severus called into the green flames, "Headmaster Dumbledore's quarters." He then waited a moment.

"Severus?" came the Headmaster's voice through the flames. "Is everything all right?"

"I need to show you, Albus. I'm bringing Harry with me."

"Come through, then."

"Is that gonna burn?" asked Harry tensing in his father's arms.

"It is safe when the flames are green, Magpie. Now, hang on tightly and close your eyes. It can be disorienting at first." Once Harry had buried his face in his father's shoulder the Potions Master stepped through the green flames and then into the Headmaster's Tower.

4 July 1985

Hardly had the sun risen for a new morning when Albus Dumbledore was awakened from a sleep disturbed by a nightmare in which he was falling from the Astronomy Tower. But… there had been an end to the nightmare he could not recall. Just as he was attempting to recall that vague thread the small embers of his fire had whooshed into powerful, green flames.

Wakened by Severus Snape's call he was eager to leave the unsettling dream behind as he left his bed, and threw on a heavy, red velvet, dressing gown. Oddly, the matching, soft cap, skewed by his nightmare tumbling and wrestling, remained on his head.

Upon receiving his early morning guests Albus had ordered chamomile tea with a sweetener should Harry want it. He had also arranged two chairs near the fireplace when he had seen that Harry had no intention of leaving his father's embrace.
After all three of them related very realistic dreams that appeared to tell of a future that might not be, and the eradication of Severus' Dark Mark, it was hoped Albus might have a theory.

"What I find remarkable in each of these… dreams, my boys, is that within them is a figure known to us," said Albus slowly. He caught the dark-eyed gaze of his Potions Master. "You, my boy."

"He looked like you, Shadow, but he wasn't. Then, as if someone pushed the picture and jigged it you were there." Harry nodded firmly. "That was you."

Severus kissed his child's forehead, pulling him close for the comfort he needed that moment. "I would never lift my wand to you, Albus, as much as you have irritated me." He tried to smirk but was unable to do so. To think that he could kill the Headmaster even if the man pleaded for him to do so… no. He could not. Again he pulled his son so close Harry squeaked at being squeezed too hard. "My apologies, Magpie," he whispered into his child's ear." He looked up at the tired old man and realised that for the first time he looked more tired from age rather than from lack of sleep. "What are we to make of these dreams, Albus?"

Albus rose to his feet and moved over to a tall, mirrored, octagonal cabinet. "Before I speculate, Severus, I should like to see if I can catch the end of my dream."

The older wizard opened the tall, narrow doors of the cabinet to reveal a heavy looking, carved, stone bowl on a pedestal. Severus knew the Headmaster owned a pensieve but what shocked him were the number of phials that held the squirming, coruscating contents that were the milky-pearl substance of memories. If all of those memories belonged to Albus how did he retain his sanity?

Albus turned and smiled at the younger wizard, "I assure you, Severus, that these are not all my memories. Many are copies from my active days on the Wizengamot and then there are copies of every Order of the Phoenix meeting."

Harry watched in fascination as the Headmaster put the tip of his wand to his temple and pulled a wriggling strand of the dream from his mind. He dropped the memory of the dream into the clear pool in the basin.

"Severus? Would you give me your opinion?" asked Albus.

"Of course, Albus…" Severus began to try and put Harry from him as he rose from their chair.

Harry clutched on tighter. "Are you leaving me, Shadow?"

"I will be viewing Albus' nightmare beside him. I do not think you would care to join us," Severus explained gently.

Harry hesitated a moment. Seeing someone else's nightmare? And, didn't Professor Dumbledore say that The Shadow killed him? Harry shook his head and released his father. "Don't be afraid, Dad," he cautioned softly.

Severus smiled softly and ran the knuckles of his hand down his son's smooth cheek. "I promise not to be. Stay here. We shall return momentarily."

Harry then watched, with his anxiety rising, as both his father and the older wizard dipped their faces into the wide bowl, and were sucked in. Harry jumped to his feet but froze where he was.

"The bowl ate them!" he rasped in a harsh whisper.

Fawkes, not so far away, flew down to beside the boy and soothed him with song. Harry moved to
stand next to the large Phoenix that stood as tall as himself, and petted the bird's fiery crest.

Albus and Severus found themselves on the Astronomy Tower. On either side of the Dream Headmaster and the Dream Snape were a half-dozen Death Eaters. Beside Dream Snape was the grown Draco Malfoy pointing a trembling wand at the Dream Headmaster.

"Give me the Elder Wand," Dream Draco cried. "I don't want to kill you!"

"Do it, Draco! Make our Master proud!" screeched the Death Eater Bellatrix LeStrange.


Without hesitation, anger and pain evident in his voice, he held out his wand steadily, and cried out harshly, "Avada Kedavra!"

The real Severus stumbled in shock and was prevented from falling to his knees by the real Albus grabbing his elbow. "This is not important, Severus. Something happened after my death."

While the Dream Snape and the Dream Death Eaters followed him, the real Severus and real Albus went over to the railing where the body of the Dream Headmaster fell. In slow motion. His body had not struck the ground. Inexplicably they were joined by an anguished, nearly grown student with dark hair, glasses, and very green eyes.

"NO!"

"Magpie?" gasped Severus. Albus stared for a moment with his Potions Master.

"You were supposed to save him!" the young man, Dream Harry Potter screamed into the night before turning abruptly away and running after the Death Eaters.

"Here, Severus," whispered the Headmaster. His thin arm wrapped around the Potions Master's arm in order to wrest his attention from the Dream Harry Potter.

At the very bottom a figure of ink and shadow darted out of the tower. It caught the Dream Headmaster, whispered in his ear, and the older wizard, now alive, stood on his own and walked away with the figure in billowing black robes.

"That is me," the real Severus said rather unnecessarily.

"That is what I thought, my boy. You... ended my death."

In that declaration the memory of Albus' nightmare ended. Both wizards were spat from the pensieve and Albus, more used to the abrupt travel, caught Severus before he tumbled arse over tea-kettle.

"Dad!" Severus was knocked anyway to his arse as Harry threw himself at the taller man. "The bowl ate both of you and I was totally scared but Fawkes came and sang to me and I knew you were coming back and you did!" Harry took a breath, then lowered his voice as he asked, "Were you scared, Shadow?"

"Never," Severus denied strongly. "Did I not promise you that I would not get scared?"

Harry nodded, threw his arms around his father's neck, and kissed his cheek. "Why did we dream of you, Shadow?"
"That is a very good question, Magpie," agreed Severus. He stood, seated himself and Harry climbed up onto his lap. "Albus, have you a speculation as to what these dream mean? Why my… Mark is gone?"

"I needed to confirm that which was vague in my dream, Severus. As I suspected, you are not the only common thread in our dreams," began Albus as he settled himself into his plush velvet chair.

"The young man with the glasses," Severus quickly interrupted. Albus nodded in understanding. The younger wizard did not want his son to know his grown self had appeared in their dreams. A different Harry Potter who had lived a much different life than the one Harry Snape would live.

"It is interesting that the young man has managed to save each of us… and have you be near to catch myself, Severus," mused Albus softly. He smiled at the bundle in the younger wizard's arms. The Potions Master glanced down at his son who had fallen asleep. No doubt the grown-up talk had simply been too boring for a four year old.

"Will the nightmares plague us anymore, Albus?" asked the younger wizard.

Albus shook his head. "I do not believe so, my boy."

"Then I should like to ask a favour of you, Albus?" Severus asked carefully and with gravity.

Albus leaned forward attentively in his chair. "Anything, Severus, I owe you so much that there is nothing I can deny you. What is it you ask of me?"

"You only added to the hell that my years as a student was and you did make me feel as though, of all in the world, I had failed you when I asked you for help…” Severus paused. These were old arguments they had both nearly come to hexing each other on, but they were also being resolved. Even now.

Severus kissed his son's messy black hair, drew breath in and out and began anew and without accusation. "You have changed, Albus. Sometimes slower than I wish, but you are doing what another man could not. Whether I have always welcomed it or not you have become more a father to me than my own father was.

"Last year at the beginning of term you finally came to the Slytherin common room to meet my Snakes…"

"I have neglected the Slytherins for too long, Severus. It had to stop before my shunning of the Slytherins became irrevocable," sighed Albus.

"Indeed," the Head of Slytherin agreed in voice that rumbled pleasantly against his son's ear. "My son will be raised within the walls of Hogwarts where he will have witches, wizards, and even ghosts to watch over him. He needs another family member, though. I ask that you consider being grandfather to my son."

Albus was stunned at the younger man's request. It was true that he often attempted to treat Severus as a son but rarely were his actions taken at face value. He admitted to some jealousy that Harry had so easily trusted the Potions Master but he knew he was far too old to raise a four year old boy. Yet, he wanted to be… something of import… to the child. "Grandfather," whispered Albus. Severus nodded as he suppressed the smirk that threatened. "Yes. I would be so honoured, Severus."

"I should also add, I would like you to be his grandfather in more than just name, Albus. I would like… for you… to formally adopt me," Severus almost blurted the last of that sentence. It was something he had thought of before but had never made mention of because there was a deep, down,
lost part of himself that was afraid the old man would refuse him. It was a rejection he had long expected would finish him.
A New Day For Harry

4 July 1985 - Early Afternoon

The third of July had been a terribly busy day for Harry and although he looked forward to decorating his bedroom he chose to stay home instead. His morning had been an easy one for after breakfast his father had set him the task of making his bed and cleaning his room. Of course, Harry, as directed by his Aunt Petunia, had gone overboard in his cleaning. When his son had not appeared in the sitting room after a half hour he went to look in upon him and found Harry with a bottle of wood polish and he was hard at work polishing the wooden canopy bed poles, the desk, and the wardrobe that Severus planned to replace.

"Stop this, Harry," ordered Severus tautly. He was frowning and Harry, who actually had been smiling, lost his smile in the face of his father's evident displeasure.

"I was just cleaning my room, Sha… um, Sir," he said as a glimmer of worry, perhaps even fear drifted across his features.

"I did not tell you to go so far as to polish the furniture, Magpie," he softened his voice. He did not want to project the anger he felt at Petunia onto his son. Moving into the bedroom he then noted a mop sitting in a bucket. His lips parted in near shock. "Did you mop the floor?"

Harry nodded. "The elf wasn't going to let me but I told him that it was my responsibility to keep my room clean because you told me so." He dropped the polishing rag onto the floor and began to scoot uneasily towards his desk as if it might protect him. "It is my responsibility… right?"

Severus moved to sit upon the bed, and then patted the area beside him. Harry moved quickly enough towards him but the Potions Master felt his heart break just a little as the child made a conscious effort to put space between them.

"You are right that it is your responsibility to clean your bedroom but cleaning it does not mean mopping the floor, polishing the furniture or…" he frowned and ran his finger across the surface of the narrow bedside table. Clean. "Or dusting."

"But that's cleaning!" Harry blurted in frustration. His fists curled up into the duvet as his anger sought to internalise itself.

Severus removed his son's hands from the duvet and held them in his. "That is how Petunia taught you to clean a room, Harry. That is not something a four year old should be expected to do."

Harry's lower lip trembled and he sniffed back angry tears. "But, I don't know the right way, Shadow. I want to clean my bedroom the right way so you know I'm a good boy and so you won't throw me under a bridge with the trolls for their dinner."

"What the…" Severus bit back his shock. He shifted and tugged his son against his side until the boy snaked his arms around his waist. "Little Magpie, forget a moment about the cleaning. What did your aunt and uncle tell you about the trolls under the bridge?"

Harry sat up straighter, and sniffled again. "Can I have a hanka'chief?" Severus produced a handkerchief and handed it to Harry who wiped his eyes and blew his nose. He then crumpled the used linen into his closed fist and stared down at his toes.
For a moment the child was silent and the Potions Master just waited until Harry was ready to speak. Finally, the distraught child drew in a steady breath and spoke, "Aunt Petunia told me a story when I was three years old about the hungry trolls that lived under the bridge. I just thought it was a fairy story like the ones she'd tell Dudley but then she told me I was to start earning my keep around the house. If I was bad, refused to do my chores, or even talked back then Uncle Vernon would give me to the trolls so they could eat me for dinner."

He brought his hands together, wove his fingers tightly, and wrung his hands. "Over… and over… and every time I did something wrong, or cried… I had nightmares about those trolls until that one morning when everything was swimmy, my tummy hurt, and I couldn't move. Uncle Vernon called me useless and told me that this time he was done with me. He was giving me to the trolls."

Harry looked up into the dark gaze of his father. His emerald eyes were filled with all the love and trust he had for The Shadow. "You came for me before the trolls could eat me, Dad." He then glanced quickly at the polishing rag on the floor. "Will you show me how to clean my room the right way?"

"Yes, please, Shadow," agreed Harry.

"Then let us take a walk and get some fresh air," suggested Severus.

Fresh air consisted of visiting Hagrid and Fang and helping to feed the Thestrals. Harry had to be prevented from jumping with joy when Agamemnon, who only had eyes for Severus, had first greeted the Potions Master and then greeted Harry.

"Agamemnon likes me, Shadow," grinned Harry as the foal nipped a chicken bouillon cube from the palm of his hand.

"So he does, Magpie. Now, are you certain you want to feed the mares after Hagrid explained what they ate?" asked Severus cautiously.

"I broiled steak for Uncle Vernon every Friday bee-cause," he emphasised the whole word since he was in the habit of dropping the 'be' and his father had caught him on a few times already. "Aunt Petunia hated handling raw meat," said Harry. "Dudley told me that girls don't like gross stuff and get all squidgy about it."

Severus stiffened. Everyday he learned of something those vile Dursley's had said or done to his son. He could not deal with the anger and so he chose to focus on something else. "Squidgy. I do not believe that is a real word, Magpie." He led his son over to the opposite of the paddock where the mare Thestrals congregated.

"'Course it is, Shadow," Harry insisted. "I heard lots of kids besides Dudley say 'squidgy' and it was Maisie Deets who told me what the word meant. She was kinda nice. I wish she'd never moved away. Maisie punched Dudley once," Harry smiled proudly.

Severus' heart felt as though it has shrivelled in his chest. Maisie Deets was the first victim to fall to Vernon Dursleys fatal brand of cruelty. She had only been four years old. Not a man with a weak constitution Severus felt his knees threatening to buckle as the memory he'd found in that beast's mind skated harshly across his mind; Maisie's screams being overshadowed by Vernon's laughter. And, he had been shouting at her, 'That'll teach you to hurt my boy, bitch!'"
"Dad?" Harry left the paddock to stand by his father as he seemed to wilt until he was seated upon a crudely carved bench from a long dead fallen tree trunk. The child laid his hand on his father's forearm. "Shadow, you're white. What's wrong?"

Severus shook the debilitating fugue away and thrust those memories into the deepest recess of his mind with his Occlumency. He straightened and drew his son into an embrace that assured the boy and fortified him.

Harry stroked his father's defined, sharp cheek as the blood drifted back into its natural place. "Are you okay, Shadow?"

Severus could not speak to the boy. He rose and settled his son onto his feet. "I am fine, Magpie. Let us feed the mares before they begin to wonder where their dinner is."

Harry knew his father was not 'fine' but he had his fair share of knee-shattering times when he couldn't speak to anyone. Of course, no one had ever been there for him. Thus, Harry slipped his hand into his father's and squeezed his slim fingers. He would be there for his father. Always.

"So how do we feed big Thestrals, Shadow?" asked Harry as if the last few minutes had not happened.

Severus opened a wooden container that contained strips of chicken that Hagrid had prepared beforehand for the Thestrals and placed under a Preservation Charm. The Potions Master picked up a slice of chicken.

"The mares are not as aggressive as the stallions so they can be fed the way I showed you to offer Agamemnon the bouillon cubes." The Potions Master laid the strip of chicken on his palm and offered it to the nearest mare. The female Thestral nipped the delectable chicken delicately from his hand. "Your turn, Magpie."

Harry picked a strip of raw chicken from the container, laid it upon his palm, and then offered it to a mare that was slightly smaller than the others. She nipped the food from his hand, gulped it down, and whinnied in gratitude. Harry giggled.

Father and son fed the mares in that manner for the next fifteen minutes until the chicken was all gone.

"My hands are yucky," Harry observed as he held out his chicken slimed, Thestral spit covered palms.

Severus had just cleaned the same mess from his own hands. "Hold your hands out towards me," he instructed as he held his wand tip above them. He cast a cleaning charm that did not quite sound like the same one he had recently used on his son's clothing. "This charm disinfects in addition to gently cleaning skin. It is much nicer than the Scourgify Charm," Severus anticipated his son's question.

"Tea!" bellowed the half-giant from across the Thestral paddock.

Fang bounded over to 'Dirt' and 'Flowers' and gave Harry a sternum to chin drooly kiss and then licked the taller man's hand.

"Hi, Fang. Let's get some tea!" replied Harry as he patted the dog's head. Severus silently and wandlessly cleaned the drool from the front of his son, and then from his own hand.

They soon joined Hagrid on his front porch and the half-giant ushered them inside where he had tea laid out in old, handmade clay mugs, and a selection of biscuits that he thought Harry might like as
opposed to the usual rock cakes.

Harry regaled the two adults with tale of feeding the mares, and he tried to sneak an extra biscuit. His father was too well-trained after almost five years of students to not catch a four and a half year old boy trying to stuff a biscuit into his pocket. Using silent and wandless magic, the lone biscuit was easily removed from Harry's pocket. Of course, the little boy glowered at his father. Severus only quirked a smug eyebrow at him, and Hagrid chuckled loud enough to fill the walls of the hut.

"It has been quite nice, Hagrid, but I do need to get back to my lab," said Severus. "I have an important potion to brew this afternoon."

"Could I stay and play with Fang, Dad?" Harry blurted.

Severus smiled softly. This was the first time his son voluntarily parted from him at his own request. He nodded. "Hagrid, Harry will need a nap in about a half hour. Will you take care of that?"

"O' course, Perfessor," agreed the half-giant. "Donna ye think abou' it. The little tyke can sleep on my bed while I take to work in me garden."

"I could help with that, Hagrid!" piped up Harry.

"Nah, ye go on and play with Fang. Tire out the big, ol' baby," said Hagrid gently.

Harry jumped up from his chair as his father rose to his feet. "Do you have to go, Shadow?" he asked quietly as he hugged the taller man tightly.

Severus knelt on one knee and held out a small bracelet of leather with a small silver amulet on it. "I made this for you this morning, little Magpie." He put the bracelet on his son's wrist.

"What's it for?" asked Harry as he lifted his arm to look at the curious silver amulet that sparkled in the thin shafts of sunlight that came through the window of Hagrid's hut.

"This is an amulet. Hold the small coin between thumb and forefinger and say 'home' and it will bring you right to our sitting room." His voice become firmly serious. "This is not for a lark, Harry. Emergencies only. Understand?"

Harry nodded gravely. "Yes, Dad." Once more he hugged his father by putting his arms around his neck and kissing his cheek. "Fang and I have to go play now since we both need a nap. C'mon, Fang!"

Dog and boy ran outside. Fang almost bowled over the Potions Master but Hagrid caught the wizard. "Sorry, Dad!" Harry called over his shoulder as he took to the long grass with laughing with the large boarhound gallumping after him and barking out his own joy.

"Kids," chuckled Hagrid as he beamed in the direction of the boy and his dog.

Severus did not smile but, amazingly, his dark gaze sparkled as he agreed with the Hogwarts groundskeeper. "Indeed."

---

**The Order of the Phoenix**

"Do I have to be here, Dad?" asked Harry as his hand tightly gripped his father's hand in trepidation.

Harry and Severus stood across the street from a usual and non-descript row of attached, two-storied
houses. Severus removed a torn piece of parchment that Albus had written an address upon. The address would reveal the new quarters of The Order of the Phoenix meeting place.

"We both must be here, Harry. We need to prove to our most staunch allies that our circumstances have changed." Again, the Potions Master looked down at the address, then spoke it aloud. "#12 Grimmauld Place."

Harry's eyes grew big as the row of houses pulled apart to reveal a dreary looking house of dark red brick. That held stacked upon it two more floors than the houses around it.

"No dawdling, Harry," said Severus as he mounted the steps.

"Dad! Did you see that? The houses pulled apart…!"

"I did see that. Magical, was it not?" smirked Severus.

"Yeahhh!"

The Snapes stepped into #12 Grimmauld Place where they were met by a tall, sandy-haired wizard in robes that had seen better days and scars upon his face. Severus stepped away from the man but managed a pointed sneer.

"Lupin," he grumbled.

Remus Lupin ignored the sour Potions Master. "You are looking much improved, Severus." The Potions Master managed a quick nod of acknowledgement. Remus Lupin knelt and smiled at the small boy who had drawn a portion of his father's robe over himself. "You must be Harry." Harry just nodded and pressed tighter against his father.

"My son, Lupin," Severus said smugly with his lips thinned. "Harry James Potter-Snape. Harry, this is Remus Lupin. He knew your parents." Severus nudged his son to greet the wizard.

"You did?" Harry took a step from his father but he did not relinquish his cover from Severus' robe.

"I went to school with James and Lily. As did… Severus," confirmed Remus.

Harry nodded sagely. "Dad told me he hated school." He glanced back at his father. "Can I talk to Mr. Lupin about my parents?"

Severus found himself caught by the 'emerald gaze of pleading'. He knew he was lost. "You may speak to Lupin until Albus arrives. Do not leave the living room." He lifted his gaze to Remus. "I shall make certain that the Blacks did not leave any… surprises."

Remus was enchanted by the son of Lily and James Potter. What startled him was the tentative fear his heightened senses could smell on the boy. It was as though he were preparing to run at the least perceived threat. He led the boy into the drab living room. "Have a seat, Harry." Remus indicated the simple, brown couch that had once been luxurious velvet. Remus seated himself in a chair of questionable looking oak and green velvet.

"I never knew my mom and dad," said Harry as he shifted away from a broken spring hitting his bottom.

"What has… Severus… told you about Lily and James?" asked Remus.

"Well, Dad told me that he and my mom were friends when they were little kids but then there was
something terrible that ruined their friendship before he left Hogwarts," Harry shrugged. "I don't know what that was 'cuz thinking of it made Dad mad and he went to brew some potions for awhile."

"And your father, James?" urged Remus.

Harry shook his head. "Dad's never said anything bad about him but I can tell he didn't like him. He did tell me that I should love my dad because he loved me." Harry sighed. "I don't know if I loved my first dad. I can't even 'member him. What was he like, Mr. Lupin?"

Remus smiled at the memory of the boy who had been his best friend. "James was a popular, handsome boy in school. He had girlfriends in Gryffindor from his first day. None of them mattered when he saw your mother, Lily."

"Was my mom friends right away with my dad?" asked Harry as he thought that he liked Mr. Lupin.

Remus chuckled, "Not right away, no. James was a clown and Lily didn't think he was serious."

Harry frowned slightly. "Sooo my dad played a lots of jokes on people?"

Remus nearly spoke blithely but then he stilled his tongue. James and Sirius had played many pranks on other students but they had targeted one student… ruthlessly. What could he reply that would not condemn James or Severus in the child's eyes?

Harry answered himself before the adult could reply, "My cousin Dudley is always playing jokes on people because he's mean. My aunt and uncle think he's just being silly but Dudley hates me. He tried to drown me in the toilet once."

Remus was appalled. Stunned to be more precise. He had no idea that Harry had been so bullied and by his own cousin. He thought of the boys that James Potter and Severus Snape had been, and he felt his gorge sour his stomach.

"Don't think kids should play jokes on other kids just to be mean," Harry muttered darkly.

"Did your aunt and uncle punish your cousin, Harry?" Remus asked with a half-hearted hope that he would not hear what the child soon told him.

Harry shook his head. "My aunt and uncle didn't like me. Aunt Petunia told me once that I shoulda been killed in the car accident with my parents." He then shrugged. "Grandpa Albus and Dad told me that my parents were really heroes that fought a bad wizard who killed them. They weren't in no car." He sniffled angrily. "I don't wanna talk anymore about them. Where's my Dad?"

Remus stood. He felt ill. He had no idea what to say to Harry now and so he decided that he ought to leave. "Stay here, Harry. I'll look for Sev… for your father..." with that he nearly ran from the dim living room.

Harry slumped into the sofa and stared at the flames in the large fireplace. His adopted father had told him a lot about his mother but very little about his father. He had insisted, several times, that James Potter had a great deal of love for him. That was the most Harry could wheedle from his father. If he asked questions about what his father had been like as a boy his Dad would barely say anything. This Remus Lupin had told him a bit more about James but nothing that made him seem like he'd ever been a real person. Just that he was handsome, liked lots of girls, and was a clown.

Tired of adults, Harry crossed his arms over his chest in a fair imitation of the man who was now his father. He decided right then he didn't care about anything about his parents. They were heroes. Big
deal. They got themselves killed and left Harry all alone with the Dursleys who hated him. All that mattered was his Dad of now and Grandpa Albus. They loved Harry and he knew they meant it.

At that moment the orange flames whooshed to green and Albus Dumbledore stepped through. Albus was brushing the soot from his blue robes with the twinkling stars when a small boy nearly knocked them both back into the dangerous orange flames. Albus, not as old as one might think, kept his feet while holding onto the distraught bundle of child.

While Harry still held onto his middle, the child's face pressed into his abdomen, Albus walked over to the sofa, seated himself, and pulled the boy onto his lap. Harry had not been so demonstrative of his affection for the older man. It heartened him that the child sought him for safety but at the same time it hurt him that Harry needed him in such a way.

"Harry, my child, what has you so upset?" Using a handkerchief he dabbed at the tears on the child's cheeks, and then had him blow his nose. Harry obediently did so, and then Albus Vanished the soiled cloth. "Come along now. I am here, my dear."

"Was my Dad James a mean man to my Dad Severus?" asked Harry who ended his question with a sorrowful hiccup.

Albus drew Harry into himself, "Oh, Harry. I never wanted to answer this question but you have a right to know."

Albus felt that traitorous part of himself that wanted to raise James Potter to sainthood in his son's eyes but the truth he had to admit to himself was that James Potter had not been a thoroughly kind student. Sadly, James and his friends upheld prejudices against Slytherin House that Albus had encouraged. It was Albus who had long rent the fabric between Gryffindor and Slytherin. As the Potions Master had suggested, Harry deserved truth because he was very good at detecting a lie.

"Severus and James absolutely hated each other as students. Your Father James upheld unreasoning prejudices against Slytherin that I, unfortunately, did little to refute," the older man confessed.

Harry was stricken with a new batch of tears that he gave no voice to even though they slid over his cheeks. "Dad was a mean man?" He lifted his viridian gaze accusingly. "You let James be mean?"

Albus' lips thinned. He had not had to acknowledge those days of Severus versus the Marauders - James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, and Peter Pettigrew - for a very long time. He had hoped to never visit those memories again but here was Harry, seeking the past, and Albus had to recognise his own poor self in those years. He had not been the man he should have been.

"I was a prejudiced man, Harry. I made some very bad decisions that hurt many people. Your father, my son, has worked hard to effect change in me." He floated a handkerchief to his grandson. "I want you to know, my dear, that children are not perfect," sighed the Headmaster. "James Potter had his faults, as too did Severus, but they each had a chance to grow up. To change. I recall that James was very proud of you and often spoke of the sterling future you would have because he intended to bring you up better than he was himself was. I saw in him a maturity that I never thought to see. Your father James loved you as much as any father loves his own, Harry. Had he lived, I am certain he would be someone you have pride in. Severus, I am certain, still has pain from that time but he has you and you are healing him so very much."

"Cuz I love him?" asked Harry with a tremulous smile.

"And, he loves you, Harry." He kissed the child's messy, black hair. "I can tell you that your mother was terribly proud of you, too, and she loved you dearly. Your father thought you absolutely perfect
and I believe he was becoming a better man because he was your father. James often told anyone who would listen, including his little son, that he loved you very much."

With the perspicacity of a child not veiled by the past or adulthood, Harry asked, "Do you think my Dad James would like my Dad Severus?"

Albus sighed and rocked the little boy on his bony knees. "Death has a way of erasing old hatreds, jealousies, and pains, my dear. James would be happy knowing that you have found happiness with Severus. So, too, would Lily." He smiled. "In fact, I do wonder if both James and Lily had something to do with removing Severus' Dark Mark. They might have even brought your father to you under that bridge."

"I am certain of it, Albus," said Severus as he strode into the living room and lifted his son from the lap of the Headmaster. "I did not see either in my dreams but I have the strong sense that both were in all of our dreams."

Albus nodded sagely. "The young man with the glasses. Yes."

"Can we go home now, Dad?" Harry whispered to his father.

"I am afraid we cannot, yet, Harry. However, I will stay with you from now on," Severus assured.

"Good!" sighed Harry. Pulling back in silent measure to be let go, he slid down his father's chest, then his hip, and leg until his feet were on the floor. For further good measure he slipped one hand in his father's and then the other hand in Albus'. Severus squeezed his son's hand in reassurance while Albus smiled.

---

**A Change is Coming**

The Order of the Phoenix consisted of Albus Dumbledore as its head, Minerva McGonagall as Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts and Deputy of The Order. The others in the house had once been members but had become close friends of Albus and Minerva. They were Kingsley Shackelbolt, a very tall, even taller than Harry’s Dad, dark-skinned man who was the head of The Aurory. Severus quietly explained to his son that The Aurory was like the Muggle Police.

Next was a man no taller than Harry who taught Charms at Hogwarts. He was Filius Flitwick. Harry had not, yet, met him at Hogwarts since Professor Flitwick had been on vacation.

Harry was further introduced to a witch and warlock that he liked immediately, Molly and Arthur Weasley. The only thing he did not like was when Molly tried to hug him. Harry ducked under his father's robe and peeked out from under the material after that. He didn't want anyone else hugging him!

What remained of The Order was rounded out with Remus Lupin whom Harry had met. The small boy was still deciding whether he liked the man or not. Part of that was due to him knowing that his father clearly did not like the wizard. He wanted to be loyal to his father.

And, if he admitted it, Remus Lupin made him feel like he was hiding a monster; not like his aunt, uncle, and cousin did. No, Harry was sure the wizard was hiding a magical monster.

Kingsley Shackelbolt cleared his throat, "Before we begin, Headmaster. I am curious... how do we come to be in the home of an Azkaban prisoner?"

Albus' lips thinned, then he spoke, "The arrest and incarceration of Sirius Black set into motion
living-will instructions that had been drawn up to turn the house into a safe house for the Order. I had
the house removed to a non-descript Muggle neighbourhood and hid it behind several concealing
wards including a Fidelius. This would prevent Sirius or any of the other Death Eaters from finding
our quarters. Remus has been the caretaker of the home since then."

Arthur Weasley observed, "We are hardly an Order any longer, Albus. You broke up the Order with
He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named's death."

"So it would appear, Arthur. However, the demise of Voldemort was never confirmed." There were
puzzled and worried glances from around the table. Albus continued, "Myself, Minerva, Severus,
Remus, and a few whom only I knew from the first inception of the Order of the Phoenix, did not
believe Voldemort's death to be final. There were clues, small ones to be sure, that led us to believe
otherwise."

Minerva added, "The strongest clue was that He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named had marked the son of
the Potters with a scar that revealing magic had shown to be a curse scar."

Severus lightly smoothed Harry's bangs off of his forehead to show that it was free of such an ugly
blemish.

Filius stated, "That child's forehead is as smooth as the day he was born, Albus. I am confused."

"Severus?" Albus asked silently and the younger man nodded. "I placed Harry Potter into what I had
hoped was a household of Lily's sister's family. The child's relatives. To put it mildly, the situation
for Harry was not a good one."

Severus interjected, "Harry was abused." He hugged his child seated on his lap since he could feel
small tremors of nerves radiating off of his son. "His magical core should have exhausted itself into
non-existence as it tried to keep Harry safe, and healed on a daily basis. At some point, his magical
core began to use the Dark Magic within the Curse Scar until that, too, was so thoroughly spent that
the Curse Scar, and the Dark Magic it harboured, was removed."

"He doesn't have magic? Oh dear!" gasped Molly. She faced the little boy. "You poor little thing!"

Severus was irritated by the commiseration with Mrs. Weasley that he saw upon the faces of the
others present. "Mrs. Weasley," chided Severus, "Harry's magic is greatly exhausted. It is not
completely gone."

Filius Flitwick seemed to find the lack of magic to be a positive. "It is not a terrible thing to be
without magic at Harry's age. For one, perhaps we shall all..." he meant those of the wizarding
world, "...stop relying upon a child to be our hero."

"Dad? Was I going to be a hero if I still had that scar on my forehead?" asked Harry as he peeked
out from under his father's robe.

"A sacrificial hero," Severus spat before he could stop himself.

Harry's jaw dropped. "I know what a sackerfice is! I don't want to die, Dad!" He clambered higher
up onto his father's lap and threw his arms around the Potions Master's neck. "Don't let'em sackerfice
me, Dad!"

Severus patted his son's back in comfort. "That will not happen, little Magpie," he whispered just
loud enough for his son to hear him. "The Prophecy is moot." He then announced to those present,
"We shall no longer be on the Defensive. It is time that we go on the Offensive. We must find the
remains of Voldemort and make certain he will not be coming back."
For a long moment there was stunned silence; mostly due to the fact that their most silent member had spoken so forcefully. Albus shifted, and then spoke, "Severus is right. The Path of the Prophecy is not one we can base our strategy on anymore. There is change for us which is one reason I have brought you, my friends, to our first Order of the Phoenix meeting since we disbanded."

There was more talk with Albus revealing all the plans he had in process to find Voldemort. Usually the elder wizard kept his plans close to his chest but he and Severus had spoken, several times, upon the folly of not being completely informative to their allies.

When the meeting appeared to wind down Molly was about to rise to serve dinner when Albus stopped her. "Before we begin our meal, Molly, I have something I wish to share with all of you… but most especially, Harry."

Harry, who had been nodding on and off on his father's lap perked up. It was then that Severus handed him a crystal phial with a blue-tinted potion within. "Do you recognise it, Harry?" he asked.

"That's the potion I drank so you could adopt me." He frowned. "Didn't it work and I have to drink it again?"

Albus took that as his cue to float a piece of parchment to Harry. Severus caught the unrolled parchment and showed it to his son. He pointed to the large, scroll-work, calligraphed heading. "Do you recall what this says?"

"Adoption certificate?" he asked, greatly puzzled.

"It is the Certificate of Adoption of one Severus Snape by Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore," replied the Potions Master carefully. He looked only at his son and none of the other gawkers at the kitchen table.

"Professor Dumbledore is adopting you?" he glanced over his shoulder at the older wizard. Albus' watery blue eyes were twinkling… beautifully. "Is he going to be your dad?"

"I have chosen him as my father, and he has chosen me as his son…" Severus quickly glanced up at Albus before returning his attention to his son. "That means that Albus will now be your… grand… father."

Harry had felt his blood flow increasing as understanding as his father spoke came in leaps and bounds. By the time The Shadow said the words he was hoping to hear he was actually feeling a little lightheaded. He clutched the lapels of his father's formal robes to keep himself upright.

"Professor Dumbledore is going to be my grandfather?" Harry whispered. He was almost afraid to say it aloud for fear he might jinx everything.

Severus took the Familia Adopto potion from his son's hand before it slipped. "I asked for the Blood Adoption just as you and I did. Shall I drink the potion?"

"YES!" Harry breathed out the word and his smile was like the sun.

Severus chuckled softly, uncorked the phial, and downed the potion. Warmth suffused him as a sense of belonging wrapped around him.

Harry slid off his father's lap, for a moment away from his protective sphere, and scooted behind Molly, Arthur, and Remus Lupin to reach the Headmaster. Albus had already spread open his arms and so Harry clambered up onto the older wizard's lap.
"Hello, Grandfather!"

"Hello, Grandson!" replied Albus. He hugged the child to him and kissed his cheek. Albus then turned Harry around and gestured to the Potions Master who went to stand beside him. "My friends, I am very proud to introduce to you, my blessed family, my son Severus and my grandson, Harry."

Harry had given in to his body's exhaustion and he had fallen asleep on the short journey home. Severus laid his son into his plain bed, covered him, and then grimaced at the bare room.

Tomorrow they would have to go out and find furniture but until then Severus could practise the few decorating charms he had found in the Hogwarts library. Taking out his wand he began with the largest part of the room: the bare walls.

Holding his wand in his hand he studied the walls, looked down at his son, and then began to work.

Severus could have used the charms that just splashed paint on the walls but he had, when he was younger, been a bit of an artist. Allowing his imagination to become part of the magic he covered the walls in something Harry might enjoy: the freedom and comforting closeness of The Forbidden Forest.

The walls were the roots and trunks of great tall trees with bark that glimmered rich blue, velvet black, deep brown all with highlights of silver or accents of small blue, red, yellow flowers and lush green ivy that twined around the roots, trunks and even into the leaves. The ceiling was the canopy of the trees parted in places just enough to show a sky rich with the sparkling diamonds of stars and the soothing glow of a crescent moon. The Potions Master had cleverly added into the shadows the gentle, small form of Agamemnon the Thesstral with his mother Demeter beside him. Apollo, his father, was also there near the large fireplace where flames of orange, red, and yellow kept the bedroom warm.

Quite content with the forest and guardians he had created, Severus stretched out beside his sleeping boy to enjoy his work. He missed such creativity. With a yawn… he, too, soon slept.
Harry was bouncing. He loved the decor' his father had done while he was asleep. It was not the fluffy pink with clouds that was his cousin Dudley's room. It was a beautiful forest at night with all the rich, dark, soothing colours of the night. Harry loved the night. It was wonderfully dark and full of secrets. And, the stars were always twinkling at him.

Uncle Vernon had locked Harry out of the house at Privet Drive at night a few times during Summer, and he had not minded. He was able to stretch out on the back lawn by the shed, and though his tummy growled in hunger, he was beneath the lights of the sky.

This - his bedroom - was a hundred, hundred thousand million times better. First, it was his. Second, his bed was perfect. Third, Harry now had stars, a crescent moon. And fourth, he would never have a grumbly tummy to sleep on in his own bedroom!

Severus was bathing in the joyous warmth radiating from his son. For a brief moment last night he wondered if he had… possibly… gone overboard in his artwork. The truth was, though, this was a bedroom painted as he had wished his own might have been when he was little. All he'd had growing up were bare walls that were cracked and not one painting. Severus had given his son… a forest.

"Magpie, come here," Severus said to the little boy that kept wandering around and looking at what his father had done. He skipped over to his father who draped an arm over the child's head and pulled him close. "You may have to squint your eyes to see them but I have painted three guardians for you in the forest."

"Where, Dad?" Harry whispered as he squinted his emerald eyes.

"There, by your bed is Agamemnon," pointed Severus. Harry peered. "Can you see him?"

It took a moment but Harry could see the small, delicate frame of the Thestral foal peeking from behind a tree near the upper corner of his bed. His wings were stretched out to catch the moon's rays. Right behind Agamemnon, at a bit of a distance, was another Thestral.

"I see Agamemnon, and farther away behind him is another Thestral," Harry gasped. "Is that his mum?"

"Yes. Demetre." Severus smiled and then turned Harry towards the fireplace where lush ivy with blue flowers spilled lazily across the mantle. "To the right of the fireplace. Who do you see?"

"Apollo!" Harry nearly did not see the large Thestral whose black chest, sturdy forelegs, neatly folded wings, and regal head could have been a dark tree in the shadows if one quickly looked at that side of the fireplace. "He's huge, Dad!" Harry turned to face his father. "You really did all of this?" Severus nodded. "For me?"

"Only you could have inspired me so, Harry." Severus dropped to one knee to accept the enthusiastic hug from his son.

"Breakfast with your grandfather Albus and then we shall shop for linens, curtains and furniture for your bedroom," Severus announced.
Breakfast was set up in the Snapes sitting room in front of the large window that looked out over the Mer City under the Black Lake. Harry was in his father's chair by the fireplace eagerly awaiting the arrival of Albus.

The small boy could not believe how his life had changed so quickly. The Shadow had rescued him from the trolls under the bridge after his uncle threw him away when he got sick. The Shadow then adopted him and they became their own little family. Then, just hardly a day later, the Headmaster had adopted The Shadow.

It had been done all so quickly that sometimes he felt butterflies tickling his tummy and he just wanted to laugh.

Of course, when he became too quiet, and started thinking too much he started to worry about silly things; was it all a dream? Had the trolls eaten him and he was dead and in Heaven? What if all of it was nothing more than a story like the Jungle Book?

"Where's my grandfather?" Harry whispered worriedly to those wisps of doubt that kept trying to plague him. They were worse that the Dursleys sometimes!

The sitting room was filled with the sound of the whooshing of green flames and the scent of evergreen and sage drifted into the Snapes quarters. Harry jumped to his feet as the wisps of doubts scattered. He smiled and eagerly waited for the first sight of his grandfather.

Albus stepped through the green flames and gracefully stepped from the Floo into the sitting room. The bearded wizard was dressed in gold velvet robes embroidered with white dragons that cavorted along the hem.

"Hello, Harry," greeted Albus.

"Hi, Grandfather!" He started to run but suddenly found his feet stuck to the floor. "Ulp!"

"Harry," said his father from the short hallway that led to their bedrooms, the private lab, and the bathroom. "Enthusiasm is fine but you really must stop surprising people by throwing yourself at them. You might cause that person to fall."

"Sorry, Dad." He tried again to move his feet. "My feet are stuck!" he complained.

A wave of his wand and his son was free. "Sticking Charm, my little Magpie," he smirked.

"You just wait until I get enough magic, Shadow," warned Harry, his green eyes sparkling with mirth. "I'll stick you to a wall."

"Will you?" Severus voice dropped into a rumbling basso profundo and he raised his arms as he lunged for the child. Harry let out a laughing screech and ducked for safety behind his grandfather.

Albus chuckled at the hijinx he was witness to. "You are too terribly frightening, Severus. Come along now, I have quite the appetite."

He smiled down at Harry who had grasped his hand in his and entreated, "Come see what Dad did in my room, Grandpa!"

"Good morning, Severus," Albus managed as Harry tugged him past his father and down the short
hallway to his room.

Severus moved to the round table that was hidden when they were not having meals. He tapped the surface and three silver dome-covered plates arrived along with carafes of milk, pomegranate juice, and Albus' indulgence of lemonade. Summoning a small potion he tipped its contents into the lemonade. It was a potion that would cut the effects of sugar in half but the drink would still taste sweet. For a thin, old man Albus imbibed in too much sugar.

The Potions Master then mixed Harry's nutrition potion into his milk. At his request the house elves had cut his fruit into the shapes of animals. His three Cremog stuffed with blueberry compote had been shaped to form a smiling face. The face had whole blueberries for eyes. Whipped cream set the whole ridiculous plate off as it had been shaped into curly, messy hair for the smiling Cremog. Severus shook his head and re-covered the plate.

Minutes later Albus returned, alone, from viewing the child's bedroom. Harry had vanished into the bathroom to wash his hands at the Headmaster's request.

"My son, I am impressed by Harry's room." He seated himself and accepted the hazelnut coffee Severus had made for him. "I recall you carried a sketchbook as a student but I haven't seen it since you finished school. Are you taking up the brush now?"

"Since I can no longer spy for you…"

Albus waved his hand. "That matters not, Severus. You are raising Harry and that is infinitely more important." He poured a measure of syrup onto his Cremog that had been stuffed with clotted cream.

"Why are your arteries not pure stone, Albus?" asked Severus as he grimaced at the older man's breakfast.

The Headmaster chuckled, "I suppose I must be thankful for a son that is a Potions Master and keeps me functioning."

"Functioning is not sufficient," sighed Severus as he sipped his pomegranate juice. "As your son I expect you to be around for quite awhile… at least until you have one great-grandchild. Therefore, you will go with Poppy to St. Mungo's next week for a complete physical."

Albus jaw dropped. "Severus! Did you…" The younger man smirked and nodded. The Headmaster stabbed at his Cremog and defiantly stabbed a bite into his mouth. The sweet soothed away the anger and after a few more bites, and several sips of lemonade, he asked, "So, are you going to continue your artwork, Severus?"

Severus nodded and sipped his bitter Jamaican coffee. "I believe so, Albus. It felt good to paint Harry's room last night. While we are out shopping to finish off his room I think I might pick up a sketchbook and drawing quills."

Harry popped into the room, slid into his seat, and lifted the silver dome from his plate. He froze in wonder. That broke as soon as he went to grab the golden syrup. Severus intervened. "The blueberry compote in the Cremog are sweet enough without adding syrup, Harry. Try them."

"Yes, Dad…" Harry took a bite of his blueberry Cremog and sighed happily. Wonderful!

"What did you think of our meeting last night, Harry?" asked Albus.

"I hated it," he said casually.
Albus dropped his fork to his plate in shock and it clattered.

"Harry!" chided Severus in astonishment for his son's bluntness.

"Well, I liked the adopting part but," Harry put down his fork and picked up a piece of bacon. "I'm sorry. There was just too many people there and that one woman Mrs. Weasley was nice but she kept trying to hug me. I didn't like that." He looked up at his father giving him a quiet but firm look. He then mumbled, "I don't like people I don't know touching me." He then stared down at his animal fruit and speared what looked like a walrus. "And, Mr. Lupin is hiding a monster so he gives me collywobbles."

Severus had not, yet, seen the depths of darkness his son had buried deep inside himself. In fact, he generally overlooked what he did see as Harry usually appeared to be a happy child. Harry was still stabbing his poor fruit animals as he frowned down at his food. Severus put his hand over his son's to quell his boiling anger.

"My apologies, Harry," began Severus. Harry froze and looked up at his father in perplexity. "I was not careful enough last night. You were introduced to so many new faces. It must have been more overwhelming than what I perceived."

Harry did not move his hand but he dropped his chin into the palm of his other hand and just nodded without looking at his breakfast companions.

"I promise you, Magpie, I shall be more diligent," responded Severus. "However, I would like a promise from you."

Harry turned his head to offer a quizzical expression. "What promise?"

"Tell me when any situation is too much for you. I wish to keep you safe and to make you feel protected but you sometimes strike me as an older boy... able to handle everything. Not every social situation will be easy for you. Will you tell me?" asked Severus.

Harry nodded. "I think I've had enough breakfast, Dad," he stated quietly.

"All right. Finish your milk," he sighed in resignation. "Then go get yourself ready. We have a busy day ahead of us."

Harry drank his milk quickly, glanced at his mostly un-eaten breakfast, and felt a sourness in his tummy. He slid from his seat and quickly spoke to Albus. "Thanks for coming to breakfast. Bye!" he ran out of the sitting room before either wizard could stop him. But then he skidded to a stop and turned back. He knew he was being unaccountably rude and his father was not speaking up against it. "Dad? Grandpa? I'm sorry. I did like Professor McGonagall and Professor Flitwick. Mr. Shackelbolt was scary until he smiled at me. Bye, again." He turned and vanished.

Severus sighed and leaned back in his chair. "I really do forget, Albus. These few days Harry has been a generally happy child, but his speech and some of his mannerisms are those of an older boy. An older child hardened by abuse..." His lips thinned. "I can only imagine what he would have been like had he stayed with the Dursleys any longer than he did."

"We might have been dealing with a boy corrupted by his relatives, and the scar that Voldemort gave him," said Albus darkly. He shook his head, then smiled at Severus. "Has Harry shown any interest in magic?"

"It fascinates him but, as of yet, he has made no mention of wanting to perform any of his own magic," replied the Potions Master.
"He is aware he has magic?"

"What Harry is aware of is that his magical core exhausted itself in an effort to heal his own body from his relatives neglect and abuse…"

Harry arrived silently and interrupted, "Aunt Petunia always wanted to beat my magic outta me. Guess she did."

"Ah, Harry," gasped the Headmaster. "You are as silent as a kitten." He smiled benignly.

Severus scowled. "Eavesdropping is not a habit you need practise any longer, Harry." His son frowned in puzzlement. His father clarified, "No doubt listening in upon your relatives made life just a bit easier as it sometimes allowed you to know what might be soon perpetrated against yourself."

Harry nodded in understanding. "So I don't need to eavesdrop on you and grandfather because neither of you want to hurt me. I'm sorry. I won't do it again."

"Your father and I were speaking of your magic… that you do have," began Albus. "Has Madame Pomfrey explained?"

"I don't think so," Harry replied slowly thinking about the too many things the Healer had told him. He shook his head. The Healer had likely told him something but he recalled feeling 'floaty' a lot in the Infirmary. He couldn't recall all she said to him.

"Allow me, then," said Albus. "Madame Pomfrey has told your father and I that you will regain a modicum of your magic as you grow older."

"I can create a potion to completely suppress your …" offered Severus but Harry was shaking his head. "Explain, Harry."

"Maybe I might want my magic. Kind of doubt it, though. Aunt Petunia constantly told me it was evil, and that made me an 'evil Freak'. I'm kinda glad my magic is too tired to do anything now. Dad, I love watching you do magic but I don't want to do any." Harry shrugged. "I'd rather read, or colour, or help you cook." He tipped his head sideways as he looked at his father. "Can I help with your potions?"

Severus smiled. He had never thought to have a son or daughter to whom he could pass on his secrets in brewing potions to. It warmed him that he would be able to do so with Harry. He rose from his chair and moved over to his son where he crouched down in front of him. Severus ignored the annoying cracking in his knee bones.

"Potions is a wonderful discipline, my little Magpie. You only need a touch of magic," he touched his son's breastbone with a slim index finger, "but a great deal more of devotion. Do you have that?"

Harry caught his father's finger, and beamed. "Yes, Dad. I do. Really I do."

"Then it is as it should be. Shall we go and finish your decorations for your room, now?" asked Severus.

"I'm ready!" He had dressed in all new clothing, blue shorts, a white sleeve cotton shirt, the new trainers, a light jumper, and upon his ankles were a pair of coloured socks that were bright enough to blind a healthy man.

Albus loved them! He chuckled, and his eyes twinkled at Severus who was trying not to look at the vile socks. Harry glanced down at the yellow and green striped socks that appeared to have come
from Dr. Seuss's imagination.

"I needed to wear some happy socks. Are these okay, Shadow?"

"I did purchase them to be worn," sniffed Severus as though offended. He gave the socks a second glance. Then again, maybe he was. A quick wave of his hand sent a Glamour to settle over the socks; Harry saw them as they naturally were whereas everyone would see perfectly adequate white, athletic socks with new trainers.

Harry smiled knowingly. He felt the little bit of 'hidden' magic his father had done on his socks. He just could not see how they had changed and since he could see yellow and green stripes, he was happy.
Hogsmeade - Another Trip

Hogsmeade

5 July 1985 - Late Morning

Harry held onto his father with his face burrowed against Severus' abdomen. Instead of walking this time they had Apparated from the gates of Hogwarts to Hogsmeade.

"Am I all here, Shadow?" Harry asked miserably.

Severus patted his son's back as Harry slowly raised his gaze skyward. "You are fine, Magpie."

"Appertating pulls me all apart." Harry lifted his head, took in a few deep breaths, then lifted the hem of his shirt to make sure he still had his belly button.

Severus touched his son's chin, lifted his head, and examined his colouring. "You do appear a bit green." He then withdrew a potion in a small, single dose phial. "Anti-Nausea Potion, Magpie. This should ease your stomach."

Harry took the phial and for a moment he studied the pink contents. He removed the small cork, and quickly drank all of the potion. He then smacked his lips as he tasted the remains. "It tastes like bubblegum!"

Severus took the phial and put a finger to his lips. "Shhh, my twittering Magpie. That is a secret. I added the flavour just for you. Everyone else gets something that tastes like powdered chalk." He winked. Harry chuckled. The small boy then slipped his hand into his father's.

"That's cuz I'm special, right?"

"Of course you are, Magpie. I must warn you that we will have one more APPARATING trip this afternoon to Diagon Alley. After that we will eat at the Leaky Cauldron and Floo directly home." He then nudged his child to look down the main street of Hogsmeade. Harry's jaw dropped with proper awe.

Of course he had been there before but his father, in a hurry, had walked them quickly right to the front of Gladrags for his clothing. He didn't have a chance to linger and savour anything! This time Severus was not in a hurry as they had been when clothes shopping so he and Harry walked leisurely down the sidewalk. Harry peered into windows, and was smiling, and at times giggling with his pleasure of the sights and sounds of Hogsmeade.

Severus, always all in black and with the stern, "ugly" face that had troubled many witches and wizards all his life, sent covert looks his way and towards the small child that either walked beside him, or held on to his hand without fear. For those few whose gaze he caught Severus managed a sneer to send the lookie-loo continuing on without a backwards glance.

"Shadow, I don't see any furn-ture shops," observed Harry as they walked past the Owl Post Office.
"FURNITURE. Just around the corner, impatient Magpie," replied Severus.

As they turned they ran into a slim, well-dressed man with long, pale blond hair. The wizard glanced down at Harry with silvery-grey eyes and Harry, sensing possible trouble, slammed back into his father's legs. The aristocratic man raised his eyes, looked at Severus, and smiled.

"Severus, so this is your son that I have heard of," stated the man.

"How did you hear of the adoption when The Daily Prophet knows nothing of it, Lucius?" Severus accused.

Lucius raised his cane. "I have connections everywhere, Severus," he smirked. "I do not need to rely upon a gossipy newspaper, or flakey government officials." Lucius chuckled softly, then revealed. "A little elf tattled. Now, be a gentleman, and introduce me to your son."

Severus' lips thinned and for a moment he grit his teeth. He had learned, from the one year of school they had shared that Lucius Malfoy was a poseur. A rich wizard who appeared vacuous and vain (although, there was a question regarding that!) to cause others to discount him as "unimportant". In that way he wed the young witch he had dared to fall in love with, and became a "gentle threat" to the unsuspecting.

The Potions Master also learned, during the most difficult year of his life (when he became a Death Eater) that Lucius Malfoy truly loved his family over anything including his own, overbearing father, Abraxxas. After the elder Malfoy 'presented' Severus (a sacrificial offer) to Voldemort it was Lucius who bore the grieving and injured man (through initiation) to a secret hiding place and tended to him. In the throes of nerves still throbbing from cruelly placed Cruciatus curses by Bellatrix Lestrange for her Dark Lord's entertainment Lucius tended the younger man. It was then that Lucius chose Severus as his frère d'âme - Brother of the Soul.

Severus had not immediately understood that declaration and thought it was nothing more than guilt the young aristocrat carried from his father betraying his Slytherin friend. When the Potions Master was named, and accepted the role as godfather to Lucius and Narcissa's newborn son it was Narcissa who explained the Pureblood tradition in which naming a wizard that was not 'blood' as frère d'âme; it established a magical bond 'stronger than blood'. It was when he first held his godson, Draco, that the import of Lucius declaration hit him.

From that point Lucius and Severus worked together to keep safe the 'Children of the Unwanted' - those whose parents, siblings or other relatives had succumbed to the deadly charm of the Dark Lord.

As close as this brought the two men they still projected their masks in public; Severus as hateful and dangerous, and Lucius as the wealthy wizard who cared for nothing but power and the shine of gold. Of course, Lucius tended to just generally irritate Severus - most of the time, so his part was not that difficult to effect.

Severus, forcing his body to relax, rested his hands upon his son's shoulders. "Harry, I would like you to meet Lucius Malfoy. Lucius, my son… Harry." He deliberately left out Harry's true last name.

Lucius did not need to hear the little boy's last name; he knew Harry was the son of Lily and James Potter. Again, an elf had told him all he needed to know. With a graceful flourish of his robes the aristocrat knelt upon one knee so his silvery gaze met the emerald eyes. "Harry, I am honoured to meet you. Did your father tell you that you had an uncle, an aunt, and a cousin in the wizarding world?"

Harry had been relaxing since the tall wizard's body language had lost its aura of threat. The mention
of relatives made him instantly think of the Dursleys. Harry stiffened and pressed his back against his father's legs in a silent plea to 'protect me'. Severus squeezed his son's shoulder.

"Trust me, Harry. The Malfoys are not the Dursleys." Harry twisted his head to look up and over his shoulder in puzzlement at his father. Severus quickly explained, "Lucius is my frère d'âme," he translated when his son wrinkled his brow in confusion. "My brother. His son, Draco, my godson, is your cousin."

Harry nodded, took a deep breath, and then slowly stuck his hand out towards the man who was still smiling, encouragingly, at him. "H-hello, Mr. Malfoy."

Lucius took the boy's small hand into his gloved one. "A Muggle handshake. Quaint. Shall I guess that you recently lived in the Muggle world, Harry?"

Harry nodded and managed a half bow before gulping nervously. "With the Dursleys. You're my… uncle?"

"That I am," Lucius said rising to his full stature. "Your father had not meant for us to meet in the street since he had arranged a day for you to meet myself and my family," Lucius glanced up at Severus to see the man's brief scowl. Lucius smirked, he had presumed the visit but he knew it would occur. "However, we cannot dismiss the whims of Fate." Lucius chuckled. "So, young Harry, what brings you and Severus to Hogsmeade?"

"We're going to get stuff to finish decorating my bedroom," Harry said as the last of his trepidation left his body.

"Ah! There are those who will tell you that I have a terrible penchant for fashion…” he rose to his feet, spun slowly with his arms artfully spreading his robes to reveal his light gray suit beneath. Harry giggled. "...and decor, Harry. Might I join you?"

"Dad?" Harry quickly faced his father to silently ask for permission.

Severus nodded his head curtly, once. "If you wish it, Harry. Lucius, we are going to Boromir's Interiors for curtains, bedclothes, and area carpets."

"Then let us go, gentlemen!" declared Lucius as he nudged Harry to walk between them. "Now, tell me, Harry. What is your favourite colour?"

"Black," Harry replied swiftly. Severus smirked at the sudden look of dismay upon Lucius' face.

"Clearly the boy is your son, Severus," Lucius huffed softly. "Harry," he said taking charge of the young man's hand. "I can tell you are in need of someone with a taste for colour."

"But my socks are green and yellow," protested Harry.

Lucius looked down where the socks ought to be, and detected a Glamour. He produced his wand, tapped each sock, ignored Severus' huff of indignation, and admired the loud socks. "Those are worthy of a Headmaster I know. Do they make you happy, young Harry?" The child glanced down at his socks, smiled and nodded. "Very good! You do have a touch of the fashion in you." Stretching out his hand, Harry latched onto the tall aristocrat. "Come along."

For a moment Severus stood as he watched his son and Lucius Malfoy turn off of main street to go to their destination of Boromir's Interiors. The annoying man... that popinjay... has taken my son! The nerve!
Rolling his eyes skyward Severus followed his son and Lucius and found them in the colourful shop being entertained by a young, bearded redhead (with streaks of white artfully at his temples) and a book of… swatches.

5 July 1985 - Early Evening

Their purchases, even shrunk, put bumps all over Severus' pockets. As he emptied his pockets and enlarged each bag, box or piece of furniture, he grumbled, "I shall never be caught shopping with that diva ever again!"

"Why not, Shadow?" asked Harry as he dropped onto his bed. "Uncle Lucius has loads of advice and knows lots of things. I didn't know you could put drapes and curtains together."

"You only needed one or the other, Magpie, not both," growled the Potions Master. He had tried to convince his son why both were not needed, and Harry appeared to agree but after they left the shop Severus noted an extra package amongst all the others. Lucius had slipped in the curtains to go with the blue velvet drapes his son had chosen.

Harry caught three packages that were floating towards him. He caught the floating packages of sheets, pillowcases and duvet. He quickly unwrapped them, slipped off the bed, and began to make it.

Shaking the new sheets out he babbled, "Uncle Lucius told me my colour was blue because it complemented my green eyes…"

"COMPLEMENTED," Severus corrected.

Harry halted his prattle to slowly repeat the word and consign it to memory. He then continued, "Uncle Lucius says green's not so good 'cause… bee-cause... my skin is freckled and pale and green washes out skin like mine. So, I got blue even though I thought purple looked sorta… I mean sort of... neat. And, then, Uncle Lucius asked me what my bedroom looked like and he thought it was funny but 'just like Severus' to make me a forest." Harry glanced up from the difficult pillow he was stuffing into a pillowcase. "I love my forest, though."

"Obviously you told Lucius your feelings," said Severus as he swished his wand and the recalcitrant pillow slipped into its case. He then floated the next case over to his son and Harry snatched it from the air.

"Of course I did, Dad. That's how come I got these blue sheets that 'bring in the sky'," he said quoting Lucius, again.

Mentally Severus batted the rising jealousy unconscious. It was good that Harry enjoyed his time with Lucius.

"Adding twinkling stars to the blue duvet was too much, though," Severus insisted. "I still wonder if I did not go overboard in painting the forest," he paused as he looked around at the packages, ribbon, tissue paper, all settled within a forest where Agamemnon and his parents watched from the trees.

"No you didn't, Shadow," assured Harry. "My forest is perfect and the twinkling stars on the bed thing cover were fun but even I knew they were too much and I'm the Magpie!"

"That you are!" agreed the Potions Master. He unfurled the blue duvet and flung it over the bed, thus perfectly covering his son's head.
Harry giggled, scrambled to uncover himself, grinned and smoothed out the duvet. "We did a great job, Shadow. How are you gonna put the rug in that Uncle Lucius helped me choose?"

"Over to me, Harry, and you shall see," smirked Severus. Harry obediently trotted over to stand beside his father.

Severus lifted his wand and pointed it at the rolled up area rug. Like a conductor of a symphony orchestra the roll lifted upward as a musician might ready his instrument then unrolled itself and in a flourish of twinkling silver magic. The unrolled rug then vanished only to reappear under the bed where it stretched out across the floor far enough so Harry's bare feet would not touch the wooden floor of stained oak Severus had already put down with magic. The rectangular rug was a deep pile smokey blue, wispy white, with touches of green, brown, and deep red. It did a very good job of enhancing the walls of trees.

Harry jumped, clapped his hands, and giggled. "Wicked!"

Severus smiled, well almost smiled, smugly. "Now to put up the drapes."

Once more the wizard conducted but instead of a rug it was a "puddle" of luscious, deep blue velvet. Harry watched in awe as the pair of drapes spun about the room and wove each other together and then apart. A moment later the drapes were joined by a gold curtain rod with scrollwork finials at either end. The curtain rod positioned itself, and then magic adhered the holding brackets to the wall. The rod then settled upon the brackets. With a silver shake of magic the drapes vanished until they reappeared upon the curtain rod over the enchanted window. They spilled to stillness.

The drapes were then followed by lacey curtains of stars that settled over the drapes.

"Woooowww!" breathed Harry. "Uncle Lucius picked the best colours, Shadow."

"So it would appear, Harry." Severus then Summoned several shrunken boxes. "It is time for the last of the furniture." He examined each of the boxes. "Where would you like your new desk?"

"Near the window. It'll be nice to look out the window if I'm drawing or reading," explained Harry. Severus nodded, removed a shrunken desk from its box, walked it over to a place by the window, and then Enlarged it. He made a few adjustments which he verified as acceptable to his son, and then he was finished. Harry went over to his desk and touched it lovingly.

The desk was a natural stained oak (honey-cherry coloured) with a rolltop lid. Under the lid were small drawers that could hold everything from pebbles to shells to quills to parchment, and more. There was even a secret hidden drawer for Harry's eventual treasures. More drawers made the support of the massive "legs" of the desk. Harry loved his desk already and couldn't wait to fill it.

A matching chair with a cushy leather seat and arms slid itself into position under the desk.

Two chairs of natural stained oak to match the desk were unpacked next. They were upholstered with a sturdy, stain-resistant fabric in cream to offset the blues and greens and darkness of the trees on the wall. The chairs settled by the fireplace but Harry moved each one just a little so that they were canted side-by-side and facing each other and the fireplace. The chairs were joined by a table with a round surface. Harry arranged this as well to create a perfect triangle.

At seeing this needed perfection of arrangement Severus felt one of those annoying irritations at Petunia Dursley once more. He stepped over and pulled the table out of alignment. Harry glared at him.
"Far be it from me to dismiss perfection in anything, little Magpie, but in the arrangement of furniture in a room it is the imperfection that creates an atmosphere of warmth," expounded Severus.

"Oh," said Harry in understanding as he viewed the tables and chairs. He then looked at his desk where he had closed everything neatly including the rolltop lid. He moved to open the lid, paused, and glanced over his shoulder at his father. Severus nodded so Harry pushed up the lid. He smiled. "Warmth, Shadow." Severus bowed his head once in agreement.

The last piece of furniture was a new wardrobe to replace the one Severus had been using temporarily for his son's clothing. This was a tall piece of cabinetry of raw cedar that was large enough for Harry's new wardrobe... and then some. It was also taller than the boy himself and so Severus had purchased a small stepladder of matching wood that would allow his small son to reach the upper shelves when the wardrobe doors were open. The stepladder had a Steadying Charm to keep Harry on the stepladder so he would not accidentally fall.

The wardrobe was placed on the left side of the door to Harry's bedroom. This way the large piece of furniture would not overwhelm the bedroom.

Extra luxurious (since Lucius insisted upon paying for half of the carved piece of furniture) were the flowers, ferns and ivy bas-relief carvings that decorated the doors and decorative top and bottom. Within the wardrobe were two hanging racks, upper and lower, a full 6-drawer cabinet for all the clothing that did not hang, and a large drawer at the bottom of the wardrobe for a Winter duvet and more sheets and pillowcases and two extra pillows. Lastly, and this was the extravagance Severus had rolled his eyes at, were shoe cubbies for six pairs of shoes: trainers, dress shoes, and boots.

"This is the bestest room ever," Harry exclaimed softly as he and his father surveyed their work.

"And, I expect you to keep it that way, young man," instructed Severus

"Of course I will, Dad!" Harry threw his arms around his father's waist and nestled his head against the man's hip. "Thank you, Dad, for everything."

Severus heard a happy sniffle. Patting his son's back he then nudged him towards the bed. "We have had a very busy day, Harry. I think you should take a nap... test out your bed... and I will brew a few potions for Madame Pomfrey. I shall wake you for dinner when I am finished."

"Don't you need a nap?" asked Harry as he kicked off his shoes. Severus charmed a new set of sky blue pyjamas of flannel onto his child who then carefully crawled under the covers so he would not wrinkle them.

"Brewing my potions... relaxes me. I shall be fine, Harry," Severus leaned over, kissed his child's forehead, and then left the bedroom.

A Half-Hour Later

Severus was in his private lab working on several potions to stock Madame Pomfrey's store. One cauldron held a sickly glowing blue potion that bubbled slowly by itself. This was a potion Severus had been working upon since his Dark Mark had vanished. It was a caustic brew that would dissolve a wizard's Soul in the same manner that the Dementors "ate Souls".

He lifted his head as his hearing picked up the faint sound of some tiny animal that had intruded into his lab. He was about to investigate but a stronger noise of a chime alarm sounded through the potions lab. It alerted him to the eventual arrival of his son. He frowned. He had not shown Harry his
private lab, yet he had changed the locking ward to admit his son only if he was within. Therefore, his son was seeking him out. And, sighed Severus as he put the active potions for Madame Pomfrey under a Stasis Spell, the sound of bare feet to stone steps gave evidence to the fact the child had forgotten his slippers.

The heavy ironwood door silently opened at Harry's slight touch. The boy peeked in, glanced dubiously at the cauldron of blue potion to his right and wiped the sleep from his eyes with his fist.

"Harry. What is the matter?" Harry saw his father, smiled trepidatiously, and trotted over to him. Severus leaned over, picked up Harry, and settled him into his lap. While he waited for the boy to speak he Transfigured two wooden stirring rods into slippers and put them on Harry's cold feet. "You were sleeping, were you not?"

Harry did not want to mention the nightmare he had of strange, tall ghosts in long grey shrouds and a giant of a snake that cowered like a thief in a corner that had wakened him. "Can I help you brew, Dad? I need to relax."

"Of course you may," said Severus as he settled Harry onto a tall stool beside him, and cast a Warming Charm over the boy. "Would it disturb you to pluck the legs off of red-legged grasshoppers?"

Harry examined the tall jar his father held in two hands. He squinted. "Are they alive?" he asked warily.

"Quite dead. They have been dried so that I can pulverise the legs into a powder easily." His left eyebrow rose appraisingly. "It requires a delicate touch…"

Harry smiled. "I can do that, Shadow." Severus placed the jar in front of his son, then Summoned a medium size brass bowl for the grasshopper legs. Then he took the ornate lid off of the jar and poured out a good portion into the bowl. Severus lastly Summoned a second bowl of brass, smaller than the first. "So, what are we making?"

"Chamomile Lozenges for Sore Throats," informed Severus.

Harry's head shot up as he was about to pluck a leg off a dried grasshopper. "But you're putting bugs in it!"

"Many potions that are ingested have… bugs… in them," Severus chuckled softly. "This particular grasshopper is used to bind the powdered chamomile flower with the Licorice Root and it boosts the soothing properties of both ingredients."

"Wicked!" Harry approved.

Severus smiled, but the bigger smile was within. Never could he have imagined where events would have taken him. His dreams had shown him a terrible alternative, and it seemed that Harry had also had such dreams. Fate re-rolled the dice and now Severus was a father, a teacher, and it appeared he and his son were no longer destined to die.
A Visit to Hagrid

27 July 1985

The days and weeks passed easily for Harry and Severus. With a little backup from the Headmaster the acquisition of Harry's familiar was specifically put off until Harry had fully settled into his new circumstances.

In the meantime the Potions Master had gone over his lesson plans for the new term and he had researched a Primary School for Muggle children in Manchester, England. His research included a Primary School on the wizarding side of Manchester that would work as well. Severus was still debating internally as to where he would send his son.

Harry was looking forward to school since he had not been allowed to go to school when he was living with the Dursleys. He was soon to turn five, though, and it was time for him to learn how to write properly, and to better his reading. He also needed to get used to other children. Despite students coming to Hogwarts at the beginning of term there were no children Harry's age.

Since Severus had a whole host of ingredients to prepare for seven levels of classes it was the child's new grandfather who showed him around the castle. Hagrid and Fang continued to accept the child's help with the Thestrals, and after Severus had supervised a proper introduction, Harry could also help with the new arrival, Buckbeak the Hippogriff.

27 July 1985 - early afternoon

Harry James Potter-Snape was walking with his grandfather down to Hagrid's hut. The half-giant, coming from his pumpkin garden bellowed a friendly hail as he waved. Fang, asleep on the front porch perked up when he smelled the arrival of 'Lemon' and 'Dirt'. With a stretch that caused him to rise from the wooden slats of the porch Fang tumbled over to his little 'Dirt' and hairy-faced 'Lemon'.

"Hi, Fang! Hi, Hagrid!" waved Harry and was promptly knocked onto his back by the boarhound. He giggled now since he was no longer afraid of the 'big baby'. For a moment the groundskeeper and the Headmaster watched as boy and dog wrestled, then Fang jumped to his feet, and Harry was soon chasing the boarhound.

"Good afternoon, Hagrid," greeted Albus.

"'Eadmaster. What's got ye out o' yer office, Sir?" Hagrid ushered the older wizard to his front porch where they could keep an eye on Harry and Fang.

"It was getting stuffy with all that paperwork and when Severus had to work on his ingredients for his classes I had a lovely reprieve in my grandson." The old man smiled proudly. He was so very pleased with his little family.

"What a nice lil surprise that was, 'Eadmaster," chuckled Hagrid. "Professor Snape's always thought highly of ye."

Albus blushed and smiled in melancholy. "I have not always measured up, Hagrid, but I do hope that I am making amends where I can."

Harry breathlessly ran down the hill with Fang after him. He barrelled right into the groundskeeper. Before he could smack head or nose on that very tall man's knees, Hagrid caught him.
"Sorry. That hill just kept pushing me and I couldn't stop!" he laughed. "Hagrid are you feeding Buckbeak soon?"

Hagrid set Harry back on his feet and grinned. "Ah 'spec we can feed Bucky right now, 'Arry. Ah picked some fresh sweet melon squash. Nice treat fer 'im t'day." He stood and turned to Albus. "Ye 'aven't met our 'Ippogriff, 'Eadmaster. Care to come along?"

Albus stood from his chair. "I'd like that, Hagrid. Harry told me about his first meeting with Buckbeak and how Buckbeak 'affectionately' knocked him on his bum."

Hagrid whistled for Fang who was bouncing after something in the grass a few feet away. Lifting his broad head he looked towards his humans, left the large rat he had almost caught, and trundled along with them to the Hippogriff paddock. The rat squeaked and scampered through the grass towards the castle. Harry caught a glint of silver dashing away but as he was going to feed Buckbeak, the curious shine was quickly forgotten.

Feeding Buckbeak and the Thestrals ended all too soon for Harry. He was picked up at Hagrid's Hut by his father and he walked between the new father and son (his grandfather and father) to the castle. Albus departed at the Entrance Hall with a hug and a kiss from Harry and an… affectionate nod… from Severus.

Once down in their quarters in the dungeons Harry let free his first yawn. Severus ushered him off to 'the jungle room' and put his son to bed. Once he was sure that his child was asleep, Severus Summoned his new drawing tablet and art quill - a special quill that would automatically renew its ink reserves, and the platinum nib could be exchanged magically between six others.

The Potions Master seated himself by the softly glowing fireplace that gave off just enough heat to take the chill out of the air from the pervasive cold of the dungeons. Facing his sleeping son he flipped the drawing tablet to an empty page. For a moment he studied the innocence in his son's sleeping face. His face was one unmarred by the abuse of his relatives. Before Severus was simply a child, a normal boy. He began to draw his son.

28 July 1985 - A Dragon Boy

A visitor. A boy his age. Harry sat primly on the sofa in their sitting room. He wore a pair of trousers, a pale blue shirt with short sleeves, and over that a knitted brown jumper with hem and cuffs that were cream coloured. He had intended to wear his dress shoes but his father mentioned that he and the little boy visitor, his father's godson, were going to play in the Staff Courtyard. Therefore, he wore a pair of black socks (he had been talked out of the yellow socks decorated with mean looking blue fuzzies on it) and his new trainers.

Harry was both excited and nervous. He had tried making friends but they either moved away (Maisie) or were scared away by Dudley and his friends (skinny Jack Parker). This boy, this Draco Malfoy, would be his first friend that wouldn't move away or be scared by a bully. That is, if Draco and Harry even liked each other.

Severus, taking to his drawing tablet, appeared not to be nervous about this visit as he sketched a small portrait of his son waiting. The truth was, the Potions Master was worried. Harry had got along well with Lucius during their shopping trip but becoming friends with Draco was another matter altogether.

The young wizard frankly loved his godson. Draco was destined to become very like his father but
he was also blessed with a strong compassion that Severus suspected might send the boy into Hufflepuff when he became a student. Lucius had reacted badly, at first, to that supposition but then he had heard the wisdom of his brother's logical argument that 'no matter what House Draco might be Sorted into, the child was still the son of Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy'.

Lucius was teaching his son all that he needed to learn about being a son, then an heir, and lastly of being the son of a Death Eater. Draco knew his father had never wanted to be under the thumb of the Dark Lord, and he also knew that his grandfather Abraxxas had been the one to 'present and betray', his godfather, Severus Snape. Just as his own father must appear the 'foppish aristocrat and Death Eater to those in the Dark Lord's Circle, Draco knew, even at the age 4 that he had a role to play in public versus the one he lived in private.

It was this Draco Malfoy, of the private world of the Malfoys, that Severus hoped would befriend his son.

---

**Malfoy Manor - Draco Malfoy's Bedroom**

"Why did my godfather have to get a son, Father?" asked Draco with his head in his wardrobe.

Lucius was seated on an elegant Louis XIV chair upholstered in sea green silk. "Your godfather was not 'forced' in any manner, Dragon. Young Harry needed a family that would be able to protect him and without argument your godfather is one of our world's most powerful wizards."

"But Uncle Severus is mine," Draco pouted as he closed the door of his wardrobe. He was supposed to have picked out a shirt to wear but all he had done was turn his pale blond locks into a mess as the clothing that hung above him had served only to annoy him.

Lucius would usually send Draco back to complete his task but the child was genuinely upset. Waving his child over towards the bed, he pointed his wand at the wardrobe; the doors opened, a shirt flew out towards the elder Malfoy, and then, before Draco could sit upon the edge of the bed he drew his son closer and slipped the shirt onto him with a touch of magic.

Draco tried to suppress a sniffle and so he was happy when he father enfolded him into the comfort of his arms. There, in such safety, he was allowed to weep. After a few tears were let onto his father's chest Lucius drew his son away, wiped away his tears with a conjured handkerchief, and nudged him to raise his silvery-grey gaze of the small boy's up to his own.

"You do not wish to share your godfather?" Lucius asked softly. Draco only shook his head in mournful negativity. "Your godfather has a very large heart, Dragon. For me, for your mother, most certainly for you, and now he shares the love he holds for us… his family… with his own son."

"What if Harry doesn't like me?" Draco asked softly as the real worry asserted itself. "I don't know any other children, Father."

Lucius chuckled gently. "You do recall that your godfather is my brother, correct?" Draco nodded. "So, he is your uncle, as you so call him. Therefore, Severus' son would be…?"

Draco only paused a moment, "M-my cousin?" A spark of understanding lit his beautiful gaze and Lucius smiled as he then nodded. "Harry's my age, too. Do you think he'd like to chase peacocks with me or ride my Aethenor?" His voice perked up just a bit.

"Severus tells me that one of Harry's favourite activities is to run with the groundskeeper's dog, Fang. He also enjoys drawing, and Severus has made the attempt to play chess with him."
Draco’s nose wrinkled. His own father was trying to teach him the game but he still found it more
fun to create mayhem on the board with the animated chess pieces. Lucius outright laughed. "Yes,
Dragon. I understand that Harry is quite enamoured of making a mess of wizarding chess just as you
are!"

For a moment Draco smiled at his father. He was very much reassured that his fears were unfounded.
However, there was one more things he needed to know before they went to Hogwarts. He leaned
forward supporting himself by placing his hands on his father's knees as he leaned forward.

"Does Harry like good socks, Father?"

Lucius also leaned forward and tapped his son's pert, aristocratic nose. He whispered, "I happen to
know that he has a pair of green and yellow socks that your godfather detests."

Draco was suddenly overjoyed. He clapped his hands once and ran over to his wardrobe. "I'll meet
you and mother downstairs, Father! Thank you!"

The elder Malfoy, satisfied with his moment of parenting, rose from his chair and left his son's
bedroom. It was now time to find Narcissa who was also trepidatious about meeting her new
nephew.

Narcissa Malfoy was more beautiful as a woman who was a mother than she had been as a sixteen
year old ingenue. Lucius was breathless at the sight of his wife. The lovely woman appeared as
delicate as a lace and silk flower in her new tea dress. The bodice, of sea green spiderweb lace
spilled over cream silk until it ended in an Empire waist. The skirt then drifted down in the softest of
silk in green and cream stripes. Pale green slippers with a hint of a heel ended the 'stems' of shapely
legs in semi-transparent silk stockings that matched the green of the slippers.

"Ahh, Narcissa Black, be mine own… once again?" Lucius sighed.

Narcissa turned to find herself in her husband's arms. She kissed him and melted delightfully against
him. She then smiled wickedly up into those silver-grey eyes of his he had shared with his son.

"Ever and always, my love," Narcissa then delicately slipped from her husband's arms and twirled
slowly for him. "Acceptable?"

Slowly the wizard shook his head. He stepped into his wife's sphere once more and began to remove
the silver pins that held her curls up on her head. One by one tendrils fell to her back and shoulders.
Lucius then Summoned two combs of green enamel with a diamond peacock on one and a diamond
peahen on the other. He carefully placed one comb on each side of her temple artfully loose. He then
used his wand, and a Cosmetic Sticking Charm to hold the styling in place.

"That is acceptable, Cissy." He took his wife by the shoulders and turned her so she could view
herself in the full-length, oval mirror.

Narcissa wrapped a curl around her finger and managed a shy smile at her reflection. "Lucius, I'm a
grown woman not young woman vying for a suitor..."

"Shhh," he moved aside his wife's hair to nibble at that sensitive spot beneath her ear. When she
giggled he knew he had the right place. "You will ever be as young in my eyes as the day I beheld
you in your wedding gown. Spun sugar drifting over the blue ice of Winter."

Narcissa turned in her husband's arms and this time he kissed his wife with every particle of love,
passion, and adoration lodged for her within his heart. When he pulled away, Narcissa was
pleasantly light-headed, and her lips were rosy with arousal.

"Now, my beloved, Cissy, you are perfect," he pronounced. He offered her his elbow. "Shall we meet our patiently waiting son?"

Narcissa wrapped her hands around Lucius and stopped him. "Lucius…" she drew him closer and drew a hand down his chest until she held his opposite hand. "What we hoped…" she pressed the palm of his hand to her abdomen. "... was just this morning confirmed at one month."

Lucius expressed his delighted joy.

The old Muggle clock on the mantle, the only heirloom of the Snapes, chimed the noon hour and alerted Severus to the precise time of the Malfoys arrival by Floo. He stood just as the the orange flames whooshed into green. He motioned to his son and Harry scrambled to stand beside his father.

Severus could feel the nerves and excitement radiating off of his son like a palpable seen wave of magic. The elder Snape extended a hand to the younger Snape. Harry gripped his father's slim fingers in his small hand and sighed with some relief.

"Brother, might we come over?" came Lucius' voice through the Floo.

"You and your family are welcome, Brother," replied the Potions Master.

All three of the Malfoys gracefully stepped through… well, two of them were graceful. Draco emerged sneezing from the unfortunately ever present lingering dust of fireplace ash. Severus conjured a handkerchief for his godson while Lucius cast a simple Scourgify that vanished the ash. Once the sneezing fit was finished, introductions were made.

Harry was enchanted with his Aunt Cissy. She looked just like a fairy princess from the book Harry had rescued from his cousin. Then he met his new cousin - a near carbon-copy of his father.

"My son, Draco. Draco, your cousin, Harry," said Lucius with a slight nudge to Draco's back.

Harry bowed rather than offering his hand. "Welcome to our home, cousin," he recited just as his father taught him.

Draco bowed in return, but then straightened. "Your socks are black!"

Harry grabbed the knees of his trousers so he could view his socks better. "Yeah, Dad told me that your visit was formal so I had to wear black socks."

Draco lifted the hems of his trousers to show socks that were green with blue hippogriffs. Harry shot an 'see, I told you so?' at his father. "Those are neat, Draco!"

With that simple acceptance, Draco beamed. "What kind do you have?"

"Lotsa stripes and blue meanies," replied Harry. He turned to his father. "Can I show Draco my blue meanie socks?"

Severus sighed, and nodded. "Go put those atrocious socks on, and hurry. We are having lunch in the staff courtyard."

To Draco's surprise Harry caught his hand and dragged him into his room. At the doorway Draco was petrified as he looked at everything that made up a jungle in the evening. Harry moved to his wardrobe, sat on the step-stool, removed trainers and socks, and dove in for the blue meanie socks.
"I've never seen anything like this…" Draco finally managed to blurt. "Who did this?"

"Dad painted it for me," replied Harry as he tied the shoelaces of his trainers. "He told me he used to draw and paint when he was younger but he stopped when he had to grow up. So, one night while I was sleeping dad painted the walls."

Draco moved into the bedroom and climbed up onto the bed. "Do you think your dad would paint my room?"

Harry climbed up beside Draco. "I can't say for him but you sure could ask. Dad told me he's your godfather and he loves you just like he loves me." He shrugged. "That means he might paint your room. What's it like now?"

Draco wrinkled his nose. "Kind of girly. It's white and with some blue but it's just all…" he waved his hands. Harry nodded in understanding. "My old, fat cousin Dudley had a room that was all in pink with fluffy clouds on the ceiling."

"Ew!"

"Yeah," agreed Harry. "Dudley peed on the walls a lot 'cuz he hated it. His bedroom always smelled bad."

"Didn't his mother and father get mad at him for doing that?" asked Draco aghast at this strange Muggle cousin's behaviour.

Harry shook his head. "Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon never got mad at their 'Dudders'," he confessed sourly. "They just threw me in my cupboard when Dudley misbehaved."

"That's awful, Harry. I'd never be nasty like that to you. We're family." Draco smiled.

Harry grinned back. "Yeah we are."

Severus stuck his head into his son's room. His lips were thin. "Harry, are you trying on all of your socks? You are making our guests wait."

Harry and Draco slid off the bed. Harry grabbed his father's hand. Draco, feeling a tiny stab of jealousy caught his godfather's other hand in his. "Sorry, Dad. I was telling Draco about my room. He likes it."

Draco nodded. "It's wicked, Uncle Severus!"

"Thank you, Dragon," nodded Severus.

"Dad? Could you paint Draco's room? He said it's got blue in it but it's girly. He looked across his father's abdomen. "Would you want a jungle, Draco?"

Draco shook his head. "King Arthur and the Round Table. All the knights and stuff. That would be…"

"You found our wayward offspring, Severus," chuckled Lucius at the sight of the dour Potions Master with a cherub on each side of him.

Narcissa smiled, "I was afraid they had vanished."

Draco moved over to his mother and was about to tell her about Harry's room but Severus tossed the glittering green floo powder into the flames and called out, "Hogwarts Staff Courtyard!"
The Staff Courtyard was a lovely little hidden away garden that Severus and Lily Evans had found as first years at Hogwarts. Together, in the tradition of The Secret Garden, they cleaned up the forgotten garden. They set to rights statuary that had fallen, and repaired stone benches that had succumbed to lichen and erosion. They planted all manner of flowers, ferns, bushes, and Lily had planted a pepper tree with the knowledge that she likely would not see it come to fruition long after she left Hogwarts. As it was, she planted the tree, and never saw the garden after that first year. Lily’s attention had been captured by her schoolwork and friends. Severus spent an annoying amount of his free time avoiding, when he could, the four Marauders of Gryffindor - James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, and Peter Pettigrew. This garden became his refuge.

He had tried after their first year to lure Lily into coming back but it had been a one year project that she soon forgot. Severus had continued to maintain the garden. He planted an herb garden, roses that bloomed in the array of a rainbow, and he planted ingredients that he often used in his potions.

The young student built up the surrounding garden with wards and spells to further keep it hidden, and to do so should he ever pass on. The courtyard became his own little place to study, and to hide away from the Marauders. When he returned as teacher and spy he had shown the garden to Albus and suggested that it be kept just for the staff.

Over nearly five years each teacher had added to the garden flowers, ferns, ivy, bushes, or trees that reminded them of comforts from their childhood.

Albus, who adored roses, had placed a whitewashed gazebo at the center of the rose garden. With Pomona Sprout’s help he had coaxed a yellow flowering ivy to drape itself over the gazebo. Minerva, who rather enjoyed lavender and blue bells of Scotland had planted those in a corner of the garden where she added a stone grotto where she could sit and study, or sleep in her Animagus cat form amongst the aromas of her childhood.

Filius Flitwick, the dwarven teacher of Charms had gotten besotted one evening and had sprinkled all of the garden liberally with a profusion of clover. Sober, he had added moss, and then a quaint, small stream that ambled throughout the garden.

It was a hidden enchantment that Lucius, Narcissa, and the two boys had never seen.

"There are no birds here," remarked Lucius as Severus directed them to the gazebo on the north side of the garden.

"Very true, Lucius," agreed Severus. "The problem is in changing the wards to allow birds or insects to fly in and out." He mused thoughtfully as he took a seat under the shade of the gazebo. "House elves have to mimic what nature provides."

Lucius 'listened' to the magic of the wards. It was a particularly rare talent he had in which he was able to thread his way mentally through each layer of wards that had been settled over the garden since Severus had begun his initial work in his first year as a student. It was a formidable talent and it was a good thing that Lucius was not, and never had been, on the side of Voldemort. If so, Lucius could conceivably have been as powerful opponent as the Dark Lord.

So rare, in fact, was his magical talent that neither he nor Severus could ever find a description or name for it. It also had come to Lucius as easily as breathing did. Since the day he had discovered this skill (at 16) he had called it 'listening'. He did so now in order to find the one ward that would allow the natural inhabitants of nature into the garden. No doubt if there were no birds then there were no insects, spiders, etcetera. How their jobs were being mimicked by house elves Lucius could not comprehend. It would be so much easier to allow that bit of Nature to exist within the perfection
of the garden.

"Ah!" Lucius declared as he found the one ward he was looking for.

Draco was not interested in watching his father do something invisible that no one could see. Since lunch might be awhile he'd rather play. Interrupting, he asked, "Can me and Harry go play, Father?"

Only for a moment did irritation cross Lucius' face as he was distracted from the magic of the wards. Narcissa touched her husband's arm in placation and focussed her attention on her son. "Go and enjoy yourselves, Dragon. I or Severus will call when lunch is ready."

Without a by-your-leave Draco grabbed Harry's hand and they both rambled off the gazebo and out into the garden where they could play.

"...clover's just a weed!" scoffed Harry.

"Noooo!" cried Draco as he pulled his dark-haired cousin down beside him amongst a profusion of clover. "Watch." Draco picked fully formed, three-leafed clover.

"Four-leafed is supposed to be lucky," muttered Harry.

"Muggle myth. Of course, that does keep Muggles away from what they consider common clover… all those plants with 3 leaves."

With sudden interest Harry watched as a very faint green glow limned his tow-headed cousins fingers. Draco was weaving the fragile plants together as one might do so for a daisy chain. He then held it up to Harry. "Spit on it."

"You sure?" Harry pulled slightly away.

"Spit. On. It." Draco ordered thinly. Harry, still skeptical and sort of weirded out, leaned forward and spit. Draco gave the small, woven vine of clover a twist. "Alright. Wait." Draco scrambled to his feet and ran for the gazebo. Harry watched as the boy held the short vine out to his father. He asked him something, Uncle Lucius nodded and took out his wand, and touched the vine. There was a sparkle of magic, and then Draco ran back to Harry and seated himself. He presented the vine to Harry with a smile.

"Uhhh…" Harry took the vine of clover and was startled to find that it now felt like cool, metal links. "What is it?"

Draco was a little disappointed that Harry had no idea what he had just done for the boy. "It's a lucky friendship bracelet. My father did the solid magic because I can't do that, yet."

"Lucky friendship?" Harry studied the bracelet, saw the catch and hook, and asked Draco to help him put it on.

Draco looped the bracelet around his cousin's left wrist and hooked it closed. Harry admired the small bit of jewelry that glinted greenly in the sunshine.

"I want to make one for you, Draco," said Harry with a smile.

Within minutes Harry was picking clover plants with three leaves and long stems. Under Draco's quiet instruction he wove the plant material with such concentration that the tip of his tongue lay upon his lower lip. Finally, his creation was nearly finished. He then had Draco spit upon the small
"Alright," said Draco the teacher. Take one end in each hand. You're going to twist the vine once. The right hand will go towards you and the left towards me." Draco watched as Harry expertly twisted the small creation. "Perfect! Now, take it to your father or mine and ask him to 'make it into links'." Draco looked up. "We're too young for that sort of magic."

Harry hurried to his feet, ran to the gazebo, and then held the twisted plant matter out to his father. "Draco said that you're supposed to make it into links..." he held up his left wrist to show the bracelet the younger Malfoy had made. "See, Shadow? Like mine."

Severus' wand appeared in his hand. "Ligare O Fortunae."

In Harry's hand the vine shimmered and changed into emerald metal links imprinted with three leaves each and ending in a hook and clasp. Harry thanked him and ran off with his gift for his cousin.

"Lucky friendship bracelets," mused Lucius. "I had no idea Dragon knew of them."

"We have an extensive library, my dear," interjected Narcissa. "Perhaps he has begun to see its value."

Lucius sighed. Before the melancholy of knowing his child was growing he turned to their host. "Your owl-letter was suitably vague, Severus. What is that you wished to share with us?"

As if prepared, Severus removed an odd bottle from within a hidden pocket of his long coat. The bottle was shaped like an elongated tear with pointed, curled ends. The bottle was black but for the very center that coalesced like a milky memory from a pensieve. He held up the teardrop suspended between his thumb and forefinger as he showed the object.

"Fascinating," remarked Lucius.

"There is something... eerily wrong about whatever that is, Severus," Narcissa shuddered slightly and put her hand protectively over the secret she had shared hours earlier with her husband.

Severus, ever the observant wizard, caught Narcissa's protective gesture. Quickly he enclosed the tear in the palm of his hand. "Narcissa, I think you should go and watch over the boys. Now." He rose from his chair and took several steps away from the witch. Narcissa did not ask any questions as she abruptly rose from her chair and made her way to the boys who were now watching something in the small stream.

Severus returned to his chair. "Wretched Hades, Brother," gasped Lucius. "What is that thing you have?"

The Potions Master returned to his chair and revealed the black tear. "Pure Essence of Dementor."

Lucius cursed under his breath in French. He then looked over at his wife who had seated herself between the two four-year olds. "Will Cissy be all right?"

Severus nodded. "As will the child she carries, Brother."

"I do not know what to begin to ask, Severus... what, how, when?" stuttered the aristocrat.

"I have long wanted to understand the Dementors, Lucius. They are a magical creature that has been around longer than we have been in existence. We fool ourselves into believing that we can control them, and the truth is... we do not."
Lucius held up his hand. "Put that away, Severus. It makes me ill just seeing it." The Potions Master tucked the tear away in his hidden pocket. "How did you manage to even study a Dementor. You know what they do to our…" Lucius' right hand covered his left forearm where his Dark Mark had begun to noticeably burn.

"Because of the Dark Mark and its… reaction to a Dementor… it was not possible to do my research to the depth I wanted. However… circumstances changed." Severus unbuttoned his left cuff and rolled up the sleeves of coat and shirt, and showed Lucius his smooth inner forearm. Lucius' mouth very nearly dropped open. His silvery gaze widened in wonder. "Somehow, when I rescued Harry and adopted him as my son… events in Time changed. I am convinced that myself and Albus would have died and Voldemort would be returned. My son would have been caught in the miasmic threads of a Prophecy that compelled him to kill the Dark Lord." Severus shook his head slowly. "That has been changed and with that past crushed my Dark Mark was erased. Immediately I dove into my theoretical research and I was able to break down what a Dementor is and how it… takes the sustenance of a Soul…"

Narcissa knew that Severus as a Potions Master dealt with magical substances that were dangerous but what he'd had in his hand was much darker than dangerous. She could sense its existence and it felt like all the tears she had wept over the miscarriage she had a year before Draco. A tiny son who had not lived even long enough to take a breath when he was born. The terror she had felt for her unborn child had shaken her and when Severus ordered her to leave she happily did so.

Walking towards her son and her nephew they were both crouched on the edge of the small stream that tumbled through the garden. "Whatever has your interests?" asked Narcissa.

Harry flinched but not because he was afraid of his Aunt Cissy, it was simply that he had not heard her. He smiled to welcome her. Draco replied to his mother, "We're looking for tadpoles, Mother."

Narcissa sat between the two boys. "Have you seen any?"

"No," replied Harry. "But there's lots of shiny pebbles at the bottom. Do you think it would be all right if we took some?"

"Please, Mother?" pleaded Draco.

"Perhaps three or four each," she agreed.

Harry stretched out onto his belly so he would be closer to the water. Draco tried to stay in his crouch and almost fell into the stream. His mother had caught him. Upon seeing the his cousin was having luck in his prone position Draco shifted and he was soon on his belly.

Narcissa was pointing out interesting pebbles until Draco picked one out of the water that gleamed a bright yellow. "Gold!" shouted Draco.

"That's not gold!" asserted Harry.

"It is so!" Draco glared indignantly. "This is gold and now I'm rich and that means you're my slave and you have to do whatever I tell you to do!"

Something broke in Harry. It almost felt the way a breaking bone might snap but it was not that. It was indefinable. As that something broke a wave of heat, angry and in pain, washed so quickly over Harry he couldn't stop himself. He pushed and Draco flailed and fell into the stream. Draco did not sit down and cry. He shot back up of the water, and though he knew his mother was ordering him to stop, he still struck out by pulling his cousin down into the water with him. Like two dragons the
boys splashed, wrestled, and yelled all manner of insults at each other. Suddenly, a burst of Accidental Magic radiated from Harry. The magic knocked Draco back several feet along the stream.

The heat, the anger, the pain stopped. Cut off like the strings for a marionette. And, like that puppet, Harry became a thing boneless and he flopped into the water. As water filled his nose, his mouth, and his lungs… all went black as ink.
27 July 1985 - Slytherin Common Room

Draco sat on a sofa before his father. His mother had been left asleep in the Infirmary. Draco had been mad at Harry for his Accidental Magic doing what it did but then his cousin had fallen.

Maybe I killed Harry. Maybe that's why father has that stormy look that means I'm about to be spanked.

Well, his tumbling thoughts sighed, if you killed Harry a spanking is the least of your trouble.

"Please say something, Father?" Draco wrung his hands. "You can spank me but I'm sorry! I didn't make Harry fall and drown! He just…" his hands flew outward. "...and his magic is hard!"

"Dragon," began Lucius in a soft voice as he pushed down his anger. In truth he was not angry at his son. He had been terrified the moment that all of the air in the courtyard had exploded in a thunderclap that shook the trees and wilted many of the flowers nearby. First he had seen his son at the bend in the stream picking himself up and spluttering madly. Then he had seen Narcissa. His wife had fallen into a dead faint that, when he reached her, he could not waken her from.

Severus had practically leapt from the gazebo to the stream when he had heard the thunderclap. He found his son also fallen… nearly drowning since he fell face first. After Lucius had pulled his son from the stream and made certain that only his son's dignity was bruised, he picked up his wife and followed Severus through the hidden, courtyard Floo to the Infirmary.

Madame Pomfrey had examined Narcissa and found that wife and unborn child were unharmed by the magic that had been released. The Healer pulled Narcissa from her faint into natural sleep, and they had left her in the Infirmary.

"Dragon," Lucius began again. He then opened his arms. "Come to me, my son."

Draco slid off the sofa and approached his father with trepidation. Maybe father's just going to kill me, his brain gulped. When the boy was close enough Lucius leaned forward and plucked his son from the ground and settled him onto his lap. Lucius then hugged his child to him until Draco stroked his father's long, white-blond hair.

"Papa?" he whispered into his father's ear. "Are you all right?"

"Papa," Lucius smiled. "I've missed being called 'papa'. Did you know that your Grandfather Abraxas used to slap me each time I forgot to address him formally as 'father'?" Draco shook his head worriedly. "Although I have never slapped you as my own father did I have insisted that you address me so formally that it feels as though each time you call me 'father' we are torn apart."

"But I thought it made you happy, fa-fa-... uhm, Papa," Draco said in confusion.

Lucius shook his head. "It does not, little Dragon. When you call me your 'papa' I hear and feel in that name all the love you have for me." Lucius' kissed his son's forehead. "Don't change, please."

Draco drew in a small breath. He then smiled. "I'll always be your Dragon, Papa." He threw his arms
around his father's neck and hugged him tightly. Lucius did the same until Draco let out a squeak of protest. "Papa, is Harry alive?"

Lucius replied, "He is and he is fine, Dragon."

"What happened, then? Why did it sound like the sky was blowing up and Harry almost drowned? And, why did mummy faint? Is she going to be all right?"

"Oh! So many questions!" laughed Lucius.

"Don't laugh at me, Papa. My questions are legimint!"

"LEGITIMATE. And, I was not laughing at you, Dragon. Never." He tapped the tip of his son's nose. "Your cousin Harry had a burst of Accidental Magic triggered by… memories of the bad home life he had with his Muggle relatives."

"But, that was a lot of magic. It was loud, too." Draco shook his head. "I don't know anything about Accidental Magic but I know that wasn't normal."

"No it was not, Dragon. Your godfather told your mother and I that Harry had been… hurt… by his family when he lived in the Muggle world. I do not want you to speak to Harry about this because it is private."

Draco shook his head. "I won't. Did I do something to make Harry explode?"

"It is possible but I cannot say, Dragon. All of us will just be careful around Harry." Lucius smoothed his son's hair which was as pale as his own. "As to your mother she will be fine. She fainted because she is in a delicate condition." Draco frowned in puzzlement. Lucius smirked. "In about nine months, if all continues well, you will have a little brother or sister."

Draco was so pleased he slid off his father's lap and started to jump and dance around the common room. Lucius merely enjoyed the joy his child was exhibiting. After a minute or two Draco returned to his father's side and leaned against one thigh.

"Does Uncle Severus know?" Lucius nodded. "Oh. He always knows everything. Does Harry know?"

"He does not. Would you like to share the news with him?" asked Lucius.

"Yes! When? Can I tell anyone else?" Draco's cheeks had pinked in his excitement.

"Only Harry and wait until he is recovered from today. No one else is to know until your mother's last month of pregnancy," instructed Lucius.

"How many months?"

"Nine," replied Draco's father.

Draco sighed heavily. "That's sooooo long, Papa. It's like… forever!"

Suddenly Lucius drew his son into his lap and whispered in his ear, "Drippy." It was a signal that Lucius had drummed into his child that all was not well in their surroundings and Draco was to pretend that it was. Aloud, Lucius said, "Tell me how you discovered knowledge about Lucky Friendship bracelets, Dragon."

Draco prattled on and Lucius did listen but only enough to keep his son chattering. Only a few
minutes ago had he felt that he and Draco were being watched. Sending out his senses he tried to find their spy but it was difficult. Right when Draco yawned - he was not truly tired; he was acting - Lucius, looking not directly at the spy caught a glint of silver down by the floor. It vanished. With it, the sense of being spied upon ended. Lucius patted his son. "Drippy is gone."

Draco drew a shuddered breath. "You know, Papa, this room is sort of spooky. Can we visit mummy and Harry now, please?"

The Malfoy aristocrat rose from his chair and put his son on his feet. Whatever was spying on them was too small to be in human form. It was human, though. He suspected that it might have been an Animagus. He would need to discuss this with Severus. Hogwarts might not be as safe as the Potions Master thought.

---

**Hogwarts Infirmary**

Harry woke up on a soft bed with clean white sheets and a white blanket. His father was to his left side and looked upon him with worry. Severus stretched out his hand to cup his son's cheek.

"How are you feeling, my little Magpie?"

"Awful. I feel like a lorry hit me and smushed me all over the road. And, Uncle Vernon was driving." He winced instead of smiling. He literally ached every place possible. "What happened?"

"You and Draco were in a fight… possibly over a rock… and then you hit Draco with a burst of Accidental Magic," explained Severus.

Harry struggled to sit up (and failed) as he looked at his father in mortification. "Did I hurt Draco? Is he all right? We weren't fighting over a dumb rock… he hates me now, doesn't he, Shadow?" Tears began to drip down the small boy's cheeks. He would have swiped them away but it was clear his limbs weren't listening to him just now.

"Here now, Magpie. Stop that," Severus ordered gently. As carefully as possible he dabbed a handkerchief at the weeping. "Draco is not mad at you. Rightly so he was extremely upset but when he calmed down he was very concerned about you." Severus pulled a small, yellow pebble from his pocket. "He wanted you to have this."

Harry gingerly took the pebble. Since he ached so much lifting the pebble felt like lifting several of them. "It's not gold," he muttered.

"No it is not," agreed Severus. "That is pyrite. Fool's Gold." Severus moved to behind his son to carefully raise him to a more comfortable, sitting position. Even that gentle touch had Harry sucking in his breath with pain. After plumping pillows behind the child he returned to his chair. "Draco is not hurt, Harry. He was as watered down as a peahen but he recovered the moment he knew something was wrong."

"Something was, Shadow," Harry said quietly. "I felt something break inside of me and… and I was so angry… and then I… ugh… I exploded."

"Narcissa tells me that your Accidental Magic exploded when Draco teased you about being his slave…" Severus cautiously studied his son. Harry's features darkened and his fists clenched into the hospital blanket.

"I know Draco was makin’ a joke, Dad, but when he said I was gonna be his slave and he was going to make me do everything he told me to… I thought of all those times that I wanted to scream or hit
the Dursleys for making me their slave." Harry sniffled. "Why me, Dad? I was never mean. I didn't steal or beat up the neighbourhood kids and even after Dudley beat me up a few times I was nice to him. Why didn't they like me? What did I do that was so terrible?"

Severus floated a handkerchief to his son. He wanted to hold him and to squeeze him tightly in reassurance but he knew, with how sore the child's body was, that the last thing Harry wanted was touch.

"It was not you, Harry. It was never anything you did," he sighed. "The Dursleys were afraid of you and of what you might do to them. Not once did any of them look at you beyond what they feared."

"Idiots," he grumbled as he slipped under the protection of his blanket.

Severus pulled the covers down to reveal his son's face. "I quite agree, Harry. They were idiots. Luckily for you there is never anymore a time for you to worry about them. You are with me. We are family."

Harry smiled. That ached too but he didn't care.

"'H-harry?' the small voice belonged to Draco who was gripping his father's hand tightly.

"Draco!" Harry cried happily. "Are you okay?"

Lucius nudged his son towards Harry. "Be careful, Dragon," he cautioned softly. Draco nodded and then went to stand by Harry's bed.

"I'm real fine but you exploded," Draco said in awe. He threw his arms wide and almost hit Severus who caught the boy's arm and pulled him against his knees. "Father told me that was Accidental Magic. I haven't had mine, yet." Draco huffed. He was annoyed waiting for his magic to show up. "What was it like?"

"Exploding," Harry replied simply. "I felt like there was a fever in me and I couldn't catch it."

"I did," Draco smirked wryly. "You pushed me all the way to where the stream bent. That was wicked!"

Harry blushed. "I didn't mean to do that to you, Draco. Are you mad at me?"

"Noooooo… well, I was at first but then Papa explained to me what happened after you fell in the water. That was cool…"

"Draco!" chided Lucius from the chair he had taken on the other side of Harry's bed.

"Sorry, Harry." Quickly he leaned forward and whispered, "It was cool, though… ouch!" He turned to glare at his godfather.

Severus, who had smacked Draco's bum, appeared rather innocent of having spanked his godson. Draco glared. "Go and visit your mother, Dragon," ordered the Potions Master without malice. "Harry has a potion to take and will need to sleep."

"All right," pouted Draco. He turned to Harry. "Our visit ended… too soon," he smiled wryly. "But, next time you can come to the Manor so Uncle Severus can paint my bedroom."

Harry smiled thinly but only because he still… STILL… ached. "I can't wait, Draco. Bye." He lifted his head. "Thanks for visiting, Uncle Lucius. I'm sorry about the explosion."
Lucius smiled and bowed slightly. "Accidental Magic, my dear. Do not worry yourself overmuch. Sleep well." He then turned to Severus who stood. "Brother, it has been… interesting. We shall talk soon."

Severus nodded but it was not in farewell but in the understanding of Lucius' unspoken message. When Lucius and Draco had vanished to the private room that Lucius had demanded for his wife, Severus turned to his son, a potion in his hand.

"What is this about me painting Draco's bedroom, Magpie?" asked the Potions Master sardonically, one eyebrow raised to underline the question.

S.

Eyes watch, ears listen… too close to the floor.

It is... but is not.

The pot's cradle has broken.

L.

Severus committed the letter, carefully worded, to memory. He then threw it upon the flames.

There was a spy in Hogwarts. Small in size. An Animagus. Harry was not safe at Hogwarts.

Severus sipped at the brandy as he sat in the unlit sitting room. Green light came through the windows that overlooked the Mer city under the Black Lake, and from the embers of a dying fire.

The Potions Master would not have left his son's side but the quick Legilimens he had initiated into Lucius mind had only been of one word: urgent. That meant a message would be waiting for him in his quarters. As predicted, a letter had arrived by house elf rather than owl and Severus had quickly opened it.

The letter had been further 'hidden' as it had been written in a dead language that no one on Earth alive spoke any longer.

One month before term began. Harry would attend Primary away from Hogwarts. Away from his father. With the threat of a spy at Hogwarts watching and waiting for who-knew-what it would not be safe for Harry to be gone daily. Severus would worry every minute as to whether or not something might happen to his son.

There was no help for it. The spy must be found and dealt with.

Severus grimaced as he glared at the red embers in the fireplace. He had forgotten but now his memory was sharp. Lupin had found him all those weeks ago down in the depths of the dungeons few had explored or even knew of. How did he manage to do that? A spell? A ritual? An amulet?

Finishing his brandy and extinguishing the last of the fireplace's heat Severus left his quarters to return to his son. He would speak to Albus in the morning to get an answer to his questions.

28 July 1985 - The Fair

"Good morning, little Magpie." The smooth, caring voice slipped into the woven threads of sleep and put them aside. Harry yawned, stretched, and opened his eyes.
"Shadow! Good morning."

"Madame Pomfrey has ordered a high energy breakfast for you." Severus looked down upon the domed platter and lifted the silver lid to reveal his son's morning meal. "Waffles with real maple syrup, four slices of bacon, one slice of ham, two eggs scrambled, fruit compote with buttered toast, and a glass of milk."

Harry sat up and found he had an easier time of pushing himself to a sitting position. His father hovered the breakfast before him. "That's a lot of food, Shadow."

"You expended an inordinate amount of Accidental Magic yesterday," replied Severus. "That energy needs replacing." Harry took a bit of waffle and syrup. He smiled his pleasure at the rush of sugar to his system. "You eat, Magpie. I need to speak to Madame Pomfrey to see if I can take you home today."

Harry's mouth was too busy to answer so he just nodded. Severus took that as an affirmative and then went into Madame Pomfrey's office. The Healer was busy with paperwork that she put aside when she saw it was the Potions Master in her office.

"I came to see if I might take Harry home, Poppy," he said hopefully.

"You may, Severus," lifting her wand she pointed it at her door and it closed. "I want to speak to you about yesterday."

Severus sat down. "It did get rather hectic in here. We did not get to speak about Harry's Accidental Magic."

"That is what I wanted to speak to you about, Severus."

The Potions Master did not like the serious tone in Poppy's voice. His body stiffened as he sat ramrod straight; prepared for whatever the worst might be.

"I did a very thorough diagnostic scan on your son. The burst of magic that manifested itself was not upon the scale of a child expelling child-age-developed magic. Harry's burst of Accidental Magic was on the order of an adult projecting their distress... catastrophically... upon the object of their distress."

Understanding bloomed like molten silver down Severus' spine as he understood the import of what Poppy was saying. "Harry could have killed Draco."

Poppy's lips were thin as she amended, "Had Draco been physically attacking Harry, yes, he would have received severe injury... if he had survived. It is fortunate that Draco was only teasing and that Harry's thoughts were of his Muggle cousin, Dudley Dursley."

"Poppy, I am confused," Severus spoke carefully. "You said this was an adult expression of Accidental Magic. If Harry's magical core is as low as your tests showed where did he gather the energy for that burst of magic?"

Poppy sighed as if she did not want to say what she had learned out loud. "Harry's magical core is weak, Severus. His magic will always be weak. However, his magical core has learned to draw energy from the Elements in order to boost itself, temporarily, if Harry believes his... freedom... is threatened." Severus glared darkly as he glanced at his left forearm where the Dark Mark had so recently been. Poppy continued her explanation. "That thunderclap that you, Lucius, and Draco, described, and Narcissa told me of this morning, is where Harry's magical core pulled the energy it needed. Poppy stiffened. "Severus, that ability to take energy, I have seen that in your Dark Mark."
Severus breathed out, then nodded. "Harry's magical core adapted. Just in the same manner it removed the Dark Magic in his curse scar, and then removed the scar itself." He closed his eyes tightly at the migraine that threatened. "Poppy, I do not know what to do."

"A Binding," she said quickly. "There have been precedents when a child's magic has developed sooner, and quicker, than even wizarding parents can handle. A child's magic is bound until he or she is of age to properly control their magic."

"We would have to remove what magic he has," Severus agreed in resignation.

"Not remove, Severus," Poppy smiled. "A Binding suppresses the strength of the child's magic. Harry would still have a little magic, and until you can remove the Binding, there are some... fun... magical exercises via a line of toys that can be used to teach him to control his magic." She pushed over the parchment she had actually been working on when the Potions Master arrived.

"Crayons?" queried Severus.

Poppy chuckled. "Any drawing implement will do but Bardoff's Crayons are made with beeswax and are lighter than normal crayons. In fact, Bardoff's also makes pastels, chalk, charcoal, sketching quills and an entire array of paintbrushes. Harry would use his magic to control the drawing implement. It is likely he would get no more than scribbles but that is a triumph in itself."

Severus continued down the list. "Blocks? Poppy, you have to admit these sound much younger than toys Harry would consider at his age," smirked Severus.

"So it would seem but all of these toys are for ages 5 to 11, Severus. I rather like the blocks since they are a variety of shapes and colours. Using his magic Harry would keep the blocks floating as he built a patterned piece of artwork."

"Would he be able to go anywhere near a Potions lab?"

"Potions is a bit advanced, but Harry might like it, Severus. It would require exercising his focus. I suggest preparing or gathering ingredients." She shook her head. "I would not let him near a cauldron until his control is established."

"These all appear reasonable, Poppy," said Severus as he folded the parchment list. "I am not certain I could bind his magic, though." Severus stared at the folded list of instructions from Poppy.

"It is a dramatic step, Severus. The toys I mentioned, helping you with potions... all of those will allow Harry to focus and understand his magic. He will also be using what little magic he has and thus preventing such a future, wild display." Severus nodded and started to rise from his chair.

"Before I let you both go, Severus," Poppy's voice of concern halted him. "Your son's mental health. Harry has improved greatly since the adoption. However, simply taking him in, caring for him, and even giving the child your heart is not enough for him to heal." Her voice softened. "Harry was abused, my boy. He was never allowed a friend or a confidant his age. If Draco and Harry can truly bond then Harry needs to feel free to talk to Draco about anything." Poppy rose from her desk, and Severus followed. "Also, Harry mentioned that he was getting a kneazle?"

Severus nodded. "I have promised him one and he believes it is, now, waiting for him."

"A familiar would provide Harry with an extra layer of control once the two bond, Severus. Children often confide in their familiars rather than adults." She opened the door to her office. "Is there some reason you have been delaying this acquisition?"
Severus looked towards his son who smiled and waved at him. He nodded and sent a brief smile to Harry. "He is five at the end of this month. I had thought for his birthday…"

"That should be soon enough." She smiled at Harry and strode over. "Is your breakfast all finished, Mr. Snape?"

"Yeah! I didn't think I'd eat all of that food but once I got started I couldn't stop." Harry chuckled at himself. "It all tasted very good, Madame Pomfrey."

"Tut, Mr. Snape. I am a Healer not a house elf. You may thank them for your generous breakfast." She beamed as she ran one last Diagnostic Spell over her patient. "And, you are released. Have a lovely day. The pair of you."

Severus needed to speak in confidence to Albus and he decided that not only was Hogwarts vulnerable but all of the wizarding world was suspect. Thus, he chose to take Albus and Harry to a memory Lily's family had introduced to them before they were students. The Renaissance Faire held in Little Saltwhite; a community of 2000 people (as of 1975) was south of Spinner's End where Severus grew up.

Little Saltwhite had saved itself from the economic hardship Spinner's End, and several nearby communities fell under, by becoming one of those towns that used an obscure bit of history to lend it financial credence. It was claimed that King Henry VIII, in between his first and second wife, had stayed in Olin Manor with a contingent of knights who hunted with them. They had proceeded to hunt deer in Graham Olin's forest. And, a week later, the king left.

Of course there was no written record of this visit. Just word of mouth passed down from generation to generation. Whether or not it was accurate, this industrial part of England wanted a town that hearkened back to 'ye olden days'. Of course, it did help that there were several houses of stone and brick that had been built or existed at the time of King Henry VIII's hunting visit. The town itself resembled a town out of the pages of the 17th century, although it was much cleaner and prettier with the flora.

To add to their appeal, Little Saltwhite began their Renaissance Faire once historically incorporated. The faire was held for a week and ended with a (nearly) authentic joust. Young Severus had loved getting lost in a town that seemed to pull everyone that stepped through their gates back in time. He was certain Harry would enjoy himself.

That was an understatement.

Harry was a fly caught in a spiderweb. He had no words other than 'oohs', 'aahs' and other noises as various sights caught his eye. Knowing that he would be busy taking his son to see as much as they could he had bought a schedule printed on parchment paper.

Sitting on a weathered wooden bench father and son perused the schedule for today.

"Does anything stand out, Magpie?" asked Severus.

"Uhm… the petting zoo, the falconer, maybe the weapons… not sure… oohh what about axe throwing, Shadow? Can you throw an axe?" asked Harry very seriously.

"I believe that I am able," smirked Severus. "Against my better judgement why do we not go to the axe throwing first, then we'll have lunch at Pig Slop Pub." Harry giggled at the name. "Oh hush!" Severus put the map away, took his son's hand, and then they joined the crowd as the wizard followed the route to the axe throwing demonstration he had memorised.
Halfway there they were met by ladies in period dress smiling, giggling and doing their best to get Severus’ attention. He was having none of it but Harry was curious as to why all those girls were being silly. His question was answered as a brazen young woman showing a barmaid’s worth of cleavage approached.

"Are you a highwayman, good sir?" she curtsied.

Severus stopped. He was dressed, rather more in the book sort of description, as a highwayman. He wore a black coat with dull, gold buttons and braid that flared at his waist, a waistcoat that was deep blue brushed satin over a crisp white shirt, trousers that ended at the knee as they were tucked into a pair of black boots. Over all this he wore a long, and voluminous black cloak with a hem that brushed the ground. Lastly, a black cravat that did double duty as a mask, was around his throat.

"To admit such an occupation is folly, fair lady. Would not the king hear and stretch my neck on his gallows?" he replied as he fell into the game of the Renaissance Faire.

"Ohh ain't you the elegant rake!" exclaimed another young lady dressed somewhat like a woman who worked a farm.

The third young woman in the small, admiring and flirting crowd, was dressed much like the first, although whereas the first had her hair tucked in a bun, this one allowed her hair to fall where it pleased. She bit her lower lip. "Your eyes are gorgeous…” she purred.

Harry thought the attention his father was getting was funny, at first, but the women were like predators moving ever closer. Irrational images of the frightening ‘trolls under the bridge’ that his aunt and uncle had threatened him with flashed through his mind. He was not holding his father's hand so he gripped a handful of cloak.

"Dad… trolls…” he gasped.

Severus was on the immediate alert, and forgot the attention of the Renaissance women. "Harry…"

Severus was interrupted by the bold barmaid who saw Harry and crouched towards him. "Ohhh look! A cute little street urchin! Hello, sweetie."

Using his cloak as a shield, since he could not wield magic in the Muggle world, he flourished the cloak until it billowed and cut between his son and the women. Enveloped in the scents of earth, spices, and herbs, the aroma that calmed him, Harry breathed easier. Severus had crouched protectively over his son like the great shadowy inkspot Harry imagined him to be.

"They are gone, little Magpie. Are you all right?" he ran his slim fingers through his son's dark, messy hair.

"I'm okay," he spoke softly into his father's ear. "I just feel stupid. I know they were just a bunch of silly girls but I started to see those trolls…” Harry breathed slowly a few times and Severus unfolded himself so now the sun was able to shine upon his child.

Severus stroked Harry's cheek. "You are not a stupid child, Magpie. Your relatives hurt you and, for now, you cannot help it when some things unnerve you or frighten you."

"Yeahhh," he said not entirely assured. "Do you think they'll let us throw some axes, Shadow? I'd really like to throw some."

Severus rose and took Harry's hand in his. "The programme did say that throwing was to be demonstrated and that there would be audience participation. Let us go and find out."
The exhibition demonstration of axes was a booth by two tall, brothers - Rupert and Dan Grint, dressed for the fair, and talking about their axes they had made. The brothers were blacksmith crafters during the fair and in their regular lives. They showed a variety of axes and then took questions from their audience.

"Can I throw some axes, Sir?" Harry piped up.

One of the Grint brothers smiled down at Harry. "You sure can."

"Can my dad throw some, too?" asked Harry looking over his shoulder at his father.

"Roop, father and son!" yelled Dan to his brother as he ushered Severus and Harry into the booth. "Through there… yes… We have a target set up."

Dan brought over two axes, one that an adult could hold, the other was more Harry's size. As Dan prepped Harry to throw his axe the audience was ushered around the sides of the booth to the throwing area behind it. In that area was a target dummy of burlap stuffed with straw. Further beyond the target was a wall to catch axes that missed the dummy.

"What's your name?" Dan asked of Harry.

"Harry Snape," he replied.

"I'm Dan. Now, this is a one-handed axe. Which is your better hand?"

Harry looked at both hands, then shrugged. "I don't know."

"Hm. Well, almost everyone is stronger on their right side so hold the axe in your right hand." Dan helped position the child's hand. "Now turn slightly, and keep your knees unlocked." Dan then pulled an axe he had in his belt. "Harry, watch me, and do just what I do after I throw my axe." Dan eyed the target by squinting one eye and then as if he were casting a spell he threw the axe. Seconds later there was a satisfying 'thunk' as the axe embedded in the dummy.

"Wow!" marvelled Harry. "Is it my turn, Dan?"

"Yep. Are you ready?" Harry got into position. "Now, look at your target… then… throw!"

Harry's axe spun but then fell into the dirt in front of the dummy. There was some clapping, and expressions of encouragement for the little boy. Harry glowered at the fallen axe but he was taken away from his pout as Dan patted him on the back.

"That was a good throw, Harry. Do that again but with more strength behind it," instructed Dan as Alan brought the axe over to the boy.

Harry looked down at the axe and then at the dummy. "How'm I supposed be make my throw stronger, Dan?"

Dan crouched down with a hand on Harry's shoulder. He whispered just for him. "Think of something that makes you angry. Something you want to hit. Whatever the object of your anger is, that dummy will take it." Dan positioned Harry. "Now, breathe a bit… think of something that's just made you really angry… when you are ready…"

Harry glared at the dummy. He thought immediately of his cousin Dudley. He thought of all those times Dudley and his friends would chase him all over the neighbourhood until they caught him. He
thought about all the times Dudley had laughed and teased while he cried as blood dripped from his injured nose.

THWOK! Harry threw his axe and it landed right in the dummy's belly area. Dan chuckled, Alan clapped, and Harry smiled with dark satisfaction.

Severus had been watching his son carefully the whole time. It had not occurred to him that the simple act of throwing an axe might trigger a burst of Accidental Magic. Instead of interrupting and pulling Harry away, he stood by, and studied events as they proceeded. When Harry's first throw fell short of the target he was, as any parent might be, disappointed, but his son's throw had been well executed. There had just been no emotion behind it.

When Dan crouched down to whisper in his son's ear, Severus cast a silent and wandless Eavesdropping Charm. His heart-rate sped up as Dan suggested Harry plumb the depths of his hate as that, alone, could trigger his magic. Severus still did not intervene. Not when he saw the concentration on his son's face and saw the storm clouds of the past come over him. He was mildly caught off guard when the axe went sailing sharply from his son's hand and landed with a solid (and a bit sickening) thwok! right in the dummy's belly.

The smile, though. As adult and as dark as any smile he himself had ever possessed. Severus knew that it was good his son found a way to express the anger towards his relatives but it also saddened him. Those vile Dursleys had chipped away at a piece of Harry's innocence, and buried it away forever.

Harry's decidedly grim satisfaction ended as he, Magpie, realised he had thrown the axe and hit his target. He jumped, shouted, and then ran for his father.

"I did it! I did it! Shadow, did you see?" the excited child danced until Severus caught him and lifted him up.

"I did see, Magpie. Very good!"

"Your turn now," announced Harry.

Severus looked up to see the face of Rupert standing in front of him and holding a long-handled axe. "Sir? Will you try?"

"Hmmm," considered the Potions Master as he eyed his son who was practically humming with anticipation. "What say you, Harry?"

"Please?" Harry whispered as he willed himself to calm down.

Severus let his son down to his feet and took the axe. Although he was not on the mark (at least by 4 meters) the man threw the axe with such precise control from where he stood that it effectively decapitated the dummy. For a moment all was silent and then Harry let out a joyous yelp. The audience then fell into a thunderous applause as Rupert and Dan looked at each other, and then the Highwayman, with respect.

"Look what you did, Shadow! Wicked! You took the dummy's head!" Harry did his little dance again.

Severus put his hand to Harry's back. "Come along, my dervish Magpie. Your grandfather ought to be here by now."
"Grandfather? You didn't tell me he was coming… let's go!" Harry tugged on The Shadow's hand leaving him barely a moment to nod to the two men. Rupert and Dan nodded back.

Dan whispered to his brother, "Wasn't he about 7 meters from the target?"

Rupert shook his head in amazement. "He was right behind our booth, Dan. An extra 5 meters from the target. I wouldn't want to meet him on a dark night."

Chapter End Notes

I expected this chapter to go on much longer but in regards to the news of today (the sad passing of Alan Rickman) I decided to post this 'as is'. If you note any mistakes, feel free to let me know. I am just devastated beyond words. RIP Mr. Rickman. Thurs. 14 Jan 2016.

Little Saltwhite is purely from my imagination. Severus Snape's persona, The Highwayman by Alfred Noyes, is from the poem of the same name.
Severus and Harry picked up traditional meat pasties and more modern day milk for Harry, and a coffee for his father from a street vendor. Harry, needing the energy for a growing body, nearly inhaled his meat pasty. The lunch was quickly followed by the milk contained in a short carton. Severus relished his pasty but had thrown his coffee away as he declared it, "as tasteless as hippogriff leather."

"That was a big pasty, Shadow, but I'm still hungry," Harry mentioned.

He turned as his eye was caught by the sight of a colourful beggar wearing bells on the hem of his coat. The beggar bowed and doffed what appeared to be a floppy, dirty hat.

Once more Harry turned in their walk as they passed a booth where 'spinning buttons' were being demonstrated. It was a booth of period toys. Curious about finding something for Harry, Severus stopped, and directed Harry over to the booth. Severus studied the various toys while Harry watched a young woman demonstrating a large, round 'button' on a string. As she held the string stretched between her thumbs the round button spun causing an image painted on each side of the button to show.

"Can I try it, please?" Harry asked as he stood on tiptoe. Only his nose and eyes could be seen.

"Of course," smiled the young woman. She walked out of the booth and helped Harry with the Spinning Button she had been demonstrating.

Harry pulled the strings but the button did not immediately move. The woman encouraged him to keep pulling and then loosening his tug on the strings. Soon, the button was spinning madly and Harry could see the two images - a walrus and a bearded man - appear through the blur.

"Shadow! Look!" entreated Harry as he held up the toy. "It's magic. The man is becoming a walrus."

Fascinating, Magpie," he agreed as he looked down at the toy. It was rather magical for a Muggle toy. "Pick two that you like."

Harry turned to the young woman. "Do you have any buttons with cats?"

The young toy woman nodded. "I do. I have one with a pretty woman turning into a cat or a boy that turns into a kitten."

Harry studied both buttons critically. "I like that one," he pointed. Severus glanced quickly to the side and was amused that his son picked the one of the woman turning into a cat. He would have to ask Minerva to reveal her Animagus ability to his son.

"And your second button?" asked the toy seller.

"Uhmmm… a bat?" Harry asked.

Severus head turned so sharply he heard the bones crack. Harry could not have ever heard that vile
nickname. "A bat?"

Harry nodded. "Batman likes bats because they're really smart and clever."

Severus did not know who this 'Batman' was but guessed that might have been an influence from his Muggle life. "Why do you like bats?"

Harry grinned when the toy seller found a button with a bat on one side and a man who looked like a Muggle wizard on the other side. "Thank you, ma'am." Harry handed the buttons to his father. "I like bats because they have neat wings, they're fuzzy, and they squeak like they're happy all the time."

Severus paused in negotiating price for his items to look at his son. He smirked as his child had taught something to him. "I admit I have not ever seen bats in that light, Magpie."

"Yeah?"

Severus tapped his nose and drawled, "Yeahhh."

Severus paid for the buttons and added a black and green wooden top, a leather pouch bag with various shaped puzzle block pieces of wood and painted a variety of colours, and a second bag of something called 'Pick-up Sticks'. Simple, old-fashioned toys for Muggle children, the wizard was certain he could use the toys in magical games to help his son to control his magical growth.

As they wandered down the main area of the Faire Severus asked why Harry had chosen to dress in shabby clothing that did not quite fit. Harry replied, "I'm Oliver Twist, Shadow."

"A curious character to chose, Magpie," mused Severus. "Why the ubiquitous Oliver Twist?"

"Well, he's a lot like me," Harry explained. "He's an orphan who lived with bad people. They tried to sell him but he was sort of rescued by Fagin and the Artful Dodger. Of course, they aren't terribly great because they teach him to steal and Oliver is a bad thief."

"Try any thievery, Magpie?" smirked Severus.

"Wellllll…" shrugged, "a lot of times I had to, Shadow. Steal food, that is, because my Aunt and Uncle wouldn't give me anything to eat if they were punishing me. I learned how to pick the lock on my cupboard under the stairs so late at night while they were asleep I could eat leftovers that they threw out." He saw that his father was angry again but not at him. He continued to speak about Oliver Twist. "Anyway, I was a better thief than Oliver because he wound up picking the pocket of the man who was his real grandfather. His grandfather finds out who Oliver is and takes him to his wonderful life." Harry caught his father's hand and squeezed his fingers. "Just like you came for me and gave me a wonderful life, Shadow."

And, just like that Severus was able to push away the anger he felt for the Dursleys and to replace it with the love radiating from his son.

They resumed their return to the entrance of the Renaissance Faire to meet Albus but were caught off guard by a wizard in full regalia, pointed cap in blue with stars, a long robe that matched, and a living, snowy owl on his shoulder.

"Albus?" Severus nearly hissed. "You are in the…" he lowered his voice as he captured the older man's elbow. "...Muggle world. You shouldn't be…"

Albus slipped his hand onto the crook of Severus' elbow and interrupted, "I am Merlin, the court magician to King Arthur."
"Your owl is cool, Grandpa!" enthused Harry giving the owl a small wave. It chirped at him, and lifted a foot as if to return the wave.

"Her name is Hedwig," he said as he stroked the snowy breast. "She is an early birthday present to you from Hagrid, Harry."

Harry's eyes widened in surprise. "She's for me?" Albus smiled down at Harry and nodded. "I never got a birthday present before. Hedwig's beautiful, isn't she, Dad?"

"Indeed, Harry. Are you aware of how owls are utilised in our world?" asked Severus. Harry shook his head. "Owls are our distribution venue for communication by letter, packages, scrolls, nearly any matter that requires a speedy delivery."

"Most children do not get their own mail-owl until they go to school, Harry, so practise your letters..."

"I can write to Draco! And Uncle Lucius and Aunt Cissy!" interrupted Harry.

"However, you will be writing your first letter to Hagrid to thank him for Hedwig," instructed Severus. "And, you will ask him to teach you how to care for her."

Harry nodded but then frowned in worry. "What about my kneazle, Shadow?"

"Do not fret, Magpie. Your kneazle is patiently waiting for you," assured Severus.

"Oh good," Harry breathed in relief. "I'm saving my second pillow for her. Or him."

As they had walked along the main road through the town of Little Saltwhite they came to an open area where men were barbecuing a side of beef and a pig. Women were making corn on the cob, along with other vegetables, potatoes and watermelon. Fresh pies made Harry's mouth water. Although many were eating out around the barbeque there was a building of a traditional pub just behind that they went into. An older woman led them to a table where they seated themselves. Albus then ordered trenchers of bread piled with ham or beef, baked potatoes with butter and gravy, and corn. Severus refused the coffee (he would not risk it after the first one had tasted so bad) and had orange juice. Harry also had orange juice since he never got to have it at the Dursleys. So, Albus decided on the same.

As the three wizards ate their hearty lunches Harry regaled Albus with their activities so far. "I threw a real axe but my throw wasn't hard enough so when I threw again Dan told me to think of my cousin Dudley."

Severus cast a glance at the small boy. "How did he know about your cousin?"

"Well, he didn't but he said to imagine someone that made me mad and it was real easy to think of Dudley," explained Harry.

"How did it make you feel to throw an axe at your cousin?" asked Albus carefully.

"It made me mad thinking Dudley was the dummy but I wish I could have hit him instead. An axe is a terrible thing to hurt someone with." Harry glanced meaningfully at his father.

Albus gave a chiding look to the Potions Master. Severus shrugged. "What, Albus? Was I to pretend I did not know what to do with an axe?"

Harry clapped once, "Dad took off the dummy's head, Grandpa!"
Albus glowered at his son. Severus' eyebrow raised, and quite innocently he declared, "The axe slipped."

When lunch was finished and Severus had managed to Summon a coffee from Hogwarts he put Harry to sleep under a spell, earning him another glare from his father.

"I do not want him out of my sight, Albus, and this is safest," explained the Potions Master as he settled his small child on his lap.

"Then tell me what had you bring us all out of Hogwarts, my boy?"

"A coded missive from Lucius," he replied. "Last evening as he and Draco were in the Slytherin common room he sensed someone watching and listening to them." He explained, "Lucius is able to sense a wizard's presence. That talent has been as life saving to him as my Occlumency has been to me, Albus. However, the peculiar thing about this presence was that it existed close to the floor." Severus eyed the old man closely to see if he, yet, understood.

"An… Animagus?"

"Lucius seemed quite certain of it," Severus nodded. "I am inclined to agree since I have been hearing… a rodent scratching about in my private lab." The Potions Master sneered but vanished it as his son whimpered in his sleep; feeling his father's body tense.

"Don't you ward against rodents, Severus?"

"That is the crux, Albus," Severus spoke thinly. "My ward keeps rodents out. It does not keep out a wizard disguised as an animal."

"A spy within Hogwarts," Albus sighed wearily.

"Indeed. Albus, how were you able to find me a few weeks ago in the dungeons when I went missing?" asked Severus who had not questioned the Headmaster those weeks ago.

"I was wondering when your curiosity would wonder, Severus. It was Remus who found you," the Headmaster revealed. "After the death of the Potters James left a few items with me that he wanted given to his friends and to his son. One of those items was a remarkable map of Hogwarts and nearly every attic, dungeon, classroom, corridor, staircase… oh, really, my boy. So much."

"Where did James Potter ever find a magical map?" Severus wondered.

The Headmaster sipped the last of his orange juice. "Remus claimed that he, James, Sirius Black, and Peter Pettigrew all created the map."

"Remarkable," Severus sneered lightly. "I would not have thought they were able."

Albus found it hard to listen to his son denigrating the four students he had so shamelessly allowed to do as they pleased when they attended Hogwarts. He realised, though, that just as Harry needed to speak harshly against those that hurt him, so did Severus. At least, thought the old Headmaster, I recognise that my son was hurt by his bullies, and also by me.

The younger wizard had begun to recognise a dark glitter to his father's eyes that told him that Albus was seeing Severus' own time as a student as he should have as a Headmaster. Not as a fellow Gryffindor. "What have you been able to discover about the whereabouts of Voldemort?" asked Severus.
"My spy has not discovered the whereabouts of Voldemort but he has found his Necromancer." Severus' eyes widened in shock. "You are correct in your silence, my son. Necromancy has been illegal since the Third Convocation of Wizards in the 17th Century."

"I was not aware that Voldemort harboured such a wizard. He would have the power to prepare a body for the Dark Lord," said Severus under his breath.

Albus added sagely, "I believe the necromancer is the one who taught him how to create the Dark Mark, Severus. It is a curse that is connected to Voldemort so that he is able to siphon off the magic of his followers. I have a Curse Breaker who has confirmed that the Dark Marks of all the Azkaban prisoners are active in that… some-Thing… is eating their magic. Tell me, have you felt any different magically since the Dark Mark was removed?"

Severus glanced at his left forearm that was now cradling his son against his chest. "I have not given the Mark any thought, Albus, but now that I think of it my heart has felt light, my mind is clearer, and I had a breakthrough in a potion that was… to put it simply… thwarting me for a long while." He nodded firmly. "Yes, I do believe my magic has felt stronger… it has felt more like it belongs solely to me."

Albus smiled but it was a weary one as he shook his head. "Our Curse Breaker has not found a way to break the curse of the Dark Mark."

Severus was the one to smile now. "Perhaps it is not needed, Albus. If the Dark Mark is connected to whatever remains of Voldemort, then I have a way of dealing that Dark Wizard a final blow." Albus straightened with interest. The Potions Master revealed, "Essence of Dementor. Not an entirely accurate name but it does convey what I have managed. By breaking down the magical components of a Dementor I have created an elixir to destroy a soul in the same manner that a Dementor's Kiss does."

"Perfect! How will you administer the potion, Severus?"

"That is a slight problem at the moment," sighed the Potions Master. "I have an idea of how Essence of Dementor would be distributed but I need to make sure that the only permanent death would be that of Voldemort. What will you do with your Necromancer?"

"Kingsley will take custody of Quirrell and then turn him over to the UnSpeakables." Albus shook his head. "His is a magic that can only be dealt with by the UnSpeakables."

"Will he be allowed to live?" Severus glanced up with annoyance as a group of drunken revelers entered the pub. A pretty, dark-haired woman was doing her best to settle the men down.

"He might but if he does I doubt Quirrell shall be thank…"

An ear piercing scream from the black-haired young woman rent the air of the room as she was grabbed by her waist and pulled into the arms of a man who looked like the sweat stains on his clothing were real.

"Let go of my daughter!" ordered a short, bald-pated man in the simple dress of a pub owner of the olden days. The men just laughed louder, one rising to push over the pub owner who fell on his bottom.

The young woman bit out another scream as she was manhandled and passed to the next drunken, smelly, sweaty Renaissance Faire player.

The scream woke Harry who stirred blearily in his father's arms. "Albus, take Harry, please."
Severus handed over his son to the older man. Harry blinked; entirely uncertain as to what was going on.

Severus had risen from his chair, thrown on his very long cloak, and stomped over to the rowdy men. One man near Severus and unaware of the presence that loomed over them, was squeezing the pub owner's daughter's neck and trying to kiss her.

The wizard, who did not consider himself terribly tall, stood at six feet two inches but radiated the shadow of a giant. He grasped the young woman, put her behind him, and then he clouted the now indignant man upon his ear. Of course, it was not a soft smack so the man slid off his seat and to the floor. The pub owner rose to his feet and trotted over to his daughter.

"Ere now! Whut you gone do that fer?" yelled a man on the opposite side of the table.

"Yeah, Billy ain't hurt no one!" shouted a second man who was helping the aforementioned Billy to his feet.

"I was under the impression there was a blockage in his ear," replied Severus in a dangerous purr. "After all he did not heed the gentleman's request to leave his daughter alone." Severus stepped uncomfortably close to the occupants at the table. "I suggest you leave."

The man that had been hit, Billy, shoved himself in the tall man's face so they were eye to bleary eye. "Why don't ye leave yerself afore I break that ugly nose on yer face."

Like a whip-slash that no one could see Severus clouted the man's other ear, knocked a second man onto his arse, broke the nose of a third, and the last one he kicked in the kneecap. He returned to where he had been standing not even breathing hard.

"Get. Out." Two of the men grabbed their companion who had only one knee working and they stumbled out of the pub. Billy was rising from where he stumbled. He lifted a fist. Before he knew it The Shadow caught Billy by the fist, thrust his arm painfully behind his back, and walked him quickly to the door. An elderly patron, smiling, opened the door. Severus then threw Billy through the door. He then walked back over to his table and took his son from Albus' arms.

"Dad?" Harry asked worriedly.

Before Severus could reply he felt a timid tap on his upper arm. He only needed to turn slightly to see the pretty young woman, her dark curls falling down her back and adorned by a red rose. She smiled shyly up at him (she had to be just under 5 feet!).

"Sir, thank you for taking care of those men. No one's been able to do anything with them." She glanced over at her father who waved his hand encouragingly. "Uhm… my father would like to offer each of you something to drink. And… and I just took some fruit pastys out of the oven. May I tempt you?"

A thoroughly inappropriate thought flashed through his mind of the young woman in his arms, and he shoved it down into the depths of his Occlumency. "I am sorry but we…"

"Dad?" Harry whispered into his father's ear. "I'm thirsty. Could we stay a bit longer, please?"

Those mesmerising, emerald eyes! Merlin, there was no defense against them. Severus huffed, then nodded. "My son is thirsty. Do you have any apple juice, my Lady?"

She blushed so prettily that Severus wanted to see it again. Mentally he had to shake himself. This was not a time for flirtations.
"We have the best apple cider in Little Saltwhite!" she enthused. "Sit down, Sir. I'll bring each of you a tankard."

While she ran off to get the cider Severus sat back down with his son. He moved Harry back onto his own chair, and then gave him a calculating look.

"Yes, Shadow?" Harry asked innocently.

"I do not believe you are thirsty, Magpie. What mischief are you up to?" questioned Severus.

"Me? I'm only 4, Shadow. I don't know what mischief is."

Albus laughed outright, and Severus fumed until the pretty barmaid returned with a platter that held three tankards of apple cider. The apple was so pungent the aroma drifted over to them before she had the cider on the table.

"Thanks, Ma'am," spoke up Harry. "I'm Harry Snape, this is my grandpa Albus and my dad Severus. What's your name?"

Severus' lips thinned. Was his son actually flirting for him? And, Albus? Merlin, his eyes were twinkling like they were filled with stars.

"Elizabeth Foss." She curtseyed and offered Severus sight of her delightful neckline. "It's very nice meeting all of you." She then aimed a gaze of absolutely midnight eyes upon the Potions Master. Elizabeth smiled and Severus felt a tightness he did his best to will away. "You're a gentleman, Master Snape." With flame colouring her cheeks that drifted like a blossoming rose down her throat to her decolletage she turned and vanished into the crowd of patrons.

"She's nice, Shadow," smirked Harry.

"Drink your cider, Magpie," growled Severus.

With their business out of the way the three, grandfather, father, and son, were able to enjoy the rest of the Renaissance Fair. Their day ended with a 'Robin Hood' Exhibition.

Knight Archers, led by a peacock of a dark haired, dark bearded man - the Sheriff of Nottingham - took to a colourful field where large targets awaited a contest. The audience, in all manner of dress from peasant to king watched as the archers vied for the trophy; the hand of the Maid Marian.

Throughout the contest the Sheriff of Nottingham played up his cockiness to the crowd. With each arrow of his that declared a win, he shouted, "Cancel the kitchen scraps for lepers and orphans!" "No more merciful beheadings!" "And call off Christmas!"

At the taunt to call off Christmas a mysterious, old man with a large, floppy hat stepped up to try his hand in the contest. He shot one arrow at the target where the Sheriff's arrow was stuck right in the middle. The old man's arrow split the Sheriff's arrow right down the middle. As the crowd clapped the Sheriff howled and then there was a hush as the 'old man' threw off his disguise to reveal that he is Robin Hood. The crowd broke into a great cheer as the Merry Men appeared from under disguises in the audience.

The Sheriff snatched a sword from a knight, brandished it, and shouted, "Locksley. I'll cut your heart out with a spoon!"

Robin Hood laughed as his Merry Men began dagger fights with the knight archers. The Sheriff and
Robin Hood came together in a mighty sword fight that ended with Robin running the Sheriff through with his sword.

Triumphant horns ended all the fighting as the real king, King Richard entered splendidly on horseback with his knights following him. King Richard chased after the coward King John, ran him through with his sword, and then rescued Maid Marian. As he escorted her over to Robin the exhibition ended with their kiss and thunderous applause.

At the castle Severus, Harry and Albus shared dinner in the staffroom with Minerva McGonagall and a surprise guest, Remus Lupin.

During dinner Harry entertained everyone by revealing the day they had at the Renaissance Faire until he exhausted himself to where he fell asleep in his chair. Severus signalled an end to the day by bidding every goodnight and gathering his son.

When they got to the dungeons, Harry had not awakened. Not wishing to disturb his little one, and feeling rather tired himself, Severus took his son to his bedroom. He removed Harry's trainers and socks and then his own. Lastly he removed the Highwayman cloak. With a yawn, Severus crawled under the covers beside his son, who turned and curled into his father. They both slept until the morning.

29 July 1985 - Early Afternoon

Deer Drako,

Me dad and granpa all went to a fare yesterday in the Mugle world. It was lots of fun! Dad flirted with a bunch of girls and took off the head of a dummi with an axe.

Love,
Harry

Deer Ant Cissy,

I got an owl now so I get to write a lot. Dad says I gotta make my spelling better so he's letting my letters go without looking at them.

I love you,
Harry

Deer Uncle Looshus *crossed out* Lucius,

Dad had to tell me how to spell your name. I was sure I had it right. We ate lots of meat pasties at the fair yesterday. I got a new owl birthday present from Hagrid. Her name is Hedwig.

I love you,
Harry

Deer Shadoo,

Hi.

I love you 1000000000 times 50,
Severus had settled against the roots of a large oak that served to shade one of the hidden gardens at Hogwarts. The sun above was dappled by the leaves above the wizard. He had finished painting an hour ago and now he was reviewing the new textbooks he had finally ordered for his classes.

"Ahh, my boy! Here you are!" Albus, dressed rather sedately in robes of soft cornflower blue and edged with royal blue embroidery, conjured a cushiony wicker chair to sit upon. He was soon beside the Potions Master. "Where is our little boy?"

"I took Harry down to Hagrid's to play with Fang," replied the younger man. "He was getting a touch too rambunctious and needed to wear himself out."

"It is exhausting to have a child with us," sighed Albus. "Refreshing, though. Harry's bright-eyed exuberance and desire to learn…" he chuckled, "…everything possible…"

"Unlike many of our students who would rather sleep during class," sneered Severus but without malice. He closed the textbook in his lap, leaned back against the trunk of the mighty oak, and managed a hint of a smile. "I had thought of leaving Hogwarts as soon as I was certain my Dark Mark was gone." Albus raised his bushy eyebrows in concern. "Being a father I believe has provided me with a new outlook on all of my classes, Albus." He held up a second year textbook. "Rather than giving my Slytherins an advantage over other students who do not have to research mistakes in the current textbook, I am replacing the very outdated textbooks with new ones."

Albus took the textbook and at first he saw nothing remarkable about it until he read who the author was on the inside cover page, "Ahhhh, Severus Snape, Potions Master, Healer, & Apothecary." He lazily thumbed past a few pages. "Remarkable, my boy. When did you ever have time to do this?"

"I have been revising, then re-writing the old textbook since I was a student. In my first year as a teacher I began writing my own textbook," explained Severus. "Due to my… questionable status…" he glanced down at his left forearm, "I would not have been a credible source for the majority of parents. Therefore, I merely tuck my notes away."

"Many parents were doubtful of your loyalties," nodded Albus. He then closed the textbook and smiled. "I was not aware you were a Healer, though. When did you ever manage that discipline?"

"It was something I had settled on even in school, Albus, but circumstances changed… as they did for everyone…" Albus nodded sadly in agreement. The Potions Master continued, "I… discovered… a hidden member of the Order…"

"Hippocrates Smethwyck," Albus said in slow awe. "He mentored you, Severus, as a Healer?"

"Aye. And, he kept the secret. Until now." Severus allowed himself a small smile of satisfaction as he patted the textbook fondly.
"Will we now see a nicer, more approachable teacher, my boy?" teased Albus. He had silently Summoned full tea, and leaned forward to hand the younger man a cup of Orange Pekoe.

Severus’ smile vanished as a sneer dominated, and he growled, "Certainly not! I intend to remain a terror to my students. However, students from any House are welcome to ask questions and be assured that they will receive an answer not loaded with the loss of points."

"What a blessing that will be," teased Albus with a twinkling gaze. "Your change will give ease to our poor House Point Hourglasses, Severus."

The younger wizard snorted caustically. He returned to his perusal of the textbooks as he enjoyed his tea with Albus. The Headmaster was preparing his own work for the start of term, and the old wizard was reading a handful of reports from his other spies in regards to possible whereabouts of Voldemort. Remus, a spy, Severus had learned, had brought in Quirinus Quirell the famed ‘Vampire Hunter’ and secret Necromancer to the Dark Lord that morning. Severus had only arrived for that arrest to confront Quirrell.

Quirrell had sputtered and stuttered and appeared quite the incompetent until Severus rolled up his sleeve on his left forearm to reveal the bare flesh. Quirrell had screamed at such an impossibility claiming loudly, "the Dark Lord would never have let you go, Traitor!"

Nothing else could be taken from the wizard, and even though Severus had tried a Legilimens, Quirrell's mind was such a dark place that it gave him a headache… and terrified him. Albus Summoned the UnSpeakable he had spoken of Quirrell to, and the hooded, anonymous witch or wizard, had wordlessly taken custody.

By then, Quirrell was pleading for mercy but there were none to give it.

Severus would rather have spent the morning writing letters as Harry had.

After several minutes of comforting peace, Albus spoke up.

"You are aware that Harry's fifth birthday is coming very soon, Severus?"

"I am, Albus. This Wednesday will be the 31st of July," replied the Potions Master.

"Have you decided how you might celebrate?" asked Albus casually. He knew the younger wizard never celebrated his birthday and refused to join in the celebrations for any of his colleagues.

Severus looked up with a frown. "Celebrate? Albus, you know I do not celebrate birthdays."

"Not for yourself, my boy, but Harry will be five years of age. Little boys ought to have birthday parties," he cajoled.

"I did not," muttered Severus darkly.

"That child is grown and now a father, Severus," Albus chided strongly. "Will you raise Harry as your father raised you?"

Severus' frown was replaced by outraged shock. "I am not my father, Old Man," he growled.

"Good!" smiled Albus. "I am very glad to hear it. Now, what will we do for the boy's birthday?"

Severus slumped. He briefly recalled those few times he had been desperate for a birthday celebration of his own as he was growing up. It was something his father called 'costly' and 'foolish'.
"I..." he hesitated.

"May I make a few suggestions?" Severus nodded once. "Harry should have a cake. I'll get the house elves to make something special for him."

"Ice cream," prompted Severus. It was known that the Potions Master harboured a secret desire for ice cream. He was a frequent patron of Florean Fortescue's Ice cream Parlour in Diagon Alley.

"Ah, yes. Ice cream and cake. Very good, Severus. And, presents. I already have something for him. Do you?"

Severus froze. "Well, the kneazle... I never thought... I should..." He Vanished the books to his classroom and stood. "I need to get something for Harry."

"We can celebrate at Grimmauld Place and invite..."

"No," interrupted Severus. "Only you and I. The meeting was necessary but it was very hard on Harry to speak before everyone. He knows none of them meant him any harm but he is wary of crowds."

"Remus. He would dearly love to get to know the child," cajoled Albus.

"No," insisted the Potions Master who then held up a hand against any argument his father might bring up. "I know that Lupin was not the one to set me up, and that in fact he was at much at risk as I was if the Aurors had learned of his... truth. However, on his birthday my son should be comfortable with only those he knows. As there is already the bud of a friendship between himself and Draco, the Malfoys should all be invited."

"Seven. A propitious number, my boy," Albus replied sagely.

Severus rolled his eyes. "A propitious number would be the number that is the center of spiritual consciousness... nine. However, numerology, like divination, is not a true magical discipline."

"Neither of which you follow," sighed the Headmaster.

"And when you did... Father? What did Sybil's Prophecy ever bring but pain, misdirection, and secrets?" He stared broodingly past the large tree towards Hagrid's hut.

Albus rose to move and stand over the brooding man. "Severus? Please, look at me, my son." Instead Severus wrapped his arms around older wizard. He buried his face in the robes which were infused with the aroma of sage and lemon. Lemon being the scent Severus swore he despised but deep down it brought him comfort.

Albus carded his fingers soothingly through the long black hair so many descried as greasy yet was as smooth as silken water. "My dear child," he kissed the young man's cheek. "I have made terrible decisions, bad judgements... all of which you have paid for. Yet, you accepted my pledge to adopt you, and you have been my forger, my redemption." He lifted Severus' face between his hands to look at him. "You and Harry are my family. You and he will always and forever be first and foremost in my thoughts and actions. I love you both more than my own meagre life." With his thumbs he wiped at the tears that escaped the control of the Potions Master. He lowered his voice so he was speaking only for Severus. "This be my pledge, my dearest, every day of my life until I breathe my last."

Severus Snape was not a demonstrative man. He embraced his father, whispered into his ear, and ended the embrace. "Where shall Harry's party be held, Father?"
"The Staff Garden," suggested Albus. He smiled, and his eyes twinkled. "The elves can decorate it very nicely."

"That would be acceptable," instructed Severus. "I need to go, Albus. Watch over Harry for me?"

"Of course, my boy. Send your Patronus when you are ready to return," replied Albus. "I will also take care of inviting the Malfoys, shall I?"

Albus came upon Harry playing with a puppy on Hagrid's front porch. Fang, apparently recently worn out, was sleeping on the ground nearby. Hagrid was on his porch seated in a large rocking chair as he whittled at a new magical creature for a collection he had been adding to over the years. The half-giant stood when he saw the venerable old man in forest green robes trimmed with yellow feathers around the hem, sleeves, and collar.

"'Eadmaster!" Greeted Hargrid with a bushy grin. "Loverly day out. Ye come to join us?"

"I have at that." He tapped the occupied little boy on the top of his head. When Harry looked up he returned the child's big grin.

"Hello, Grandpa," greeted Harry. "Hagrid said Fang found this puppy so I've been helping take care of him."

The puppy gamboled over to the Headmaster who bent over and stroked the broad head. The puppy was black in colour but for golden brown on its feet, chest, tail, and its muzzle. For the most part the puppy looked like Fang but then it had rather Beagle-like, long, floppy ears. After greeting Albus the puppy trotted back to Harry, stepped on an ear, and rolled the rest of the way. Upon reaching the little boy, who was giggling, the puppy wagged its golden tail happily.

"He…?" Albus glanced at Hagrid who nodded in confirmation that the pup was, indeed, male. "He seems to like you very much, Harry."

"I like him, too. Me and Fang were playing with the puppy but Fang got tired. Me and the puppy aren't, though," he laughed as the puppy climbed onto his lap and then slobbered all over his face with wet doggy kisses.

Albus conjured a comfortable chair beside the half-giant. As he sat Harry had jumped to his feet and was running. The puppy was behind and nearly caught the boy when he inevitably stepped on an ear, and went rolling once more.

Albus smiled knowingly, "I am guessing the puppy is the reason for your outing this morning, Hagrid?"

"Needed me some Slug Repellent down on Knockturn Alley, Sir. Got it, but there was a darlin' little witch on Diagon Alley giving the pups away. Seems 'e's a cross 'tween a Muggle Beagle and a Boarhound," said Hagrid as he continued to carve. "'Could'n'a help meself. Ye think Perfessor Snape is gonna be okay if'n I give the pup to 'Arry?"

"The boy has been speaking of a kneazle waiting for him," Albus said carefully.

"Aye," nodded the half-giant. "He were askin' me if the pup'd stay here to play with 'im. 'Arry stills speaks o' the kneazle. Ennyway, the pup's Muggle and 'as no magic fer bonding. Fang needs 'im a playmate an' I sure don't mind if'n 'Arry wants teh come down and play."

Albus chuckled, "Considering that Severus has been in more need of naps than Harry I am certain he
would welcome Harry as playmate to the pup."

"Where's my Dad?" Harry asked as he half waddled while carrying the pup beneath its forefront legs. Not showing any discomfort, the puppy was waggling its tail non-stop.

"Severus is running an errand for me, Harry. When he is finished he will send his Patronus and we shall meet your father in your apartment," replied Albus.

"Hmmm… okay…” Harry sat down in front of Albus' legs and leaned against them. Harry began to pet the puppy as it fell asleep in his lap. "Grandpa?"

"Yes, Child?" he leaned forward as Harry leaned his head against the older man's knee. He stroked the boy's hair.

"What's a Puh-tro-nuhs?" He sighed contentedly under the gentle touch of the old man.

"A Patronus is a bit of magic that a wizard with an unblemished Soul is able to produce. Your father is one of a handful of wizards who is able to produce a full, corporeal Patronus." Albus gently raked his fingernails through Harry's hair, soothingly. "One does not often get to see one, so I thought you might enjoy seeing Severus' Patronus."

"Oh good! I like Dad's magic," Harry sighed and with that he dropped into sleep.

Albus cast the Levitation Charm so that he could draw the child and his puppy into his lap. A Featherlight Charm on Harry allowed the Headmaster to cradle the child comfortably.

"Some tea would be nice, don't you think so, Hagrid?"

"Aye, 'Eadmaster." He put down his carving and vanished into his hut. Moments later he returned with a Hagrid size mug of tea, and a much smaller mug for Albus. "Exter sugar, 'Eadmaster."

"Thank you, Hagrid." Albus sipped his tea while the unoccupied hand kept the child close to his chest. "Tell me, what is it you are toiling with over there?"

Hagrid picked up the small (for his hands) carving of a dragon. "Showed 'Arry my collection of dragons. Little tyke was real 'appy o'er them. Figured I'd carve 'im one for his very own," replied Hagrid proudly. "Fer his birthday?"

"It would be perfect, Hagrid. Your carving is beautiful. Will you be painting it?"

"Oh, aye, Sir. 'Arry wants it teh be purple even tho there ain't no dragons that're purple." He smiled as he began carving again. "I bet its gonna be my best, yet."

Everything was stopped as the beautiful snowy white owl flew overhead in a wide circle before landing in front of the puppy and Harry. Harry was soon running to the porch holding aloft in one hand a handful of letter. "I got letters, Grandpa!" Harry dropped the letters in his grandfather's lap. "There's only three. Did you and Hagrid write back?"

Albus nodded. "I will write something this evening, Harry."

"Yeh write as well as I do, 'Arry," spoke Hagrid. "Ah can send you a letter this evenin'."

"Okay," agreed Harry. He opened his letters and tried his best to read them but he really did his best
Dear Harry,

You spelled my name wrong. It's D-R-A-C-O. The fair sounds great. Can I go next time?

Love Draco

Dear Harry,

Just keep practising and your spelling and writing will all improve.

Love,

Aunt Cissy

Dear Harry,

I am so very pleased to receive a letter from you. Hedwig is a very polite owl. Draco wants one of his own now so perhaps you will help me find one for his birthday.

Love,

Uncle Lucius

Harry was already planning his replies but he had an important question, "When's Draco's birthday?"

"Whatever is that mess, Snape?" demanded the Bloody Baron as he slipped into the Potions Master's office. The ghost was not allowed in Severus' apartment. "Entertainment for a little one?"

"My son," said Severus as he glanced down at all the packages of toys, socks, and such he had Enlarged. Scratching his head he glowered. "I may have gone overboard."

"I never had children of my own but I do recall that children adore their gifts," said the Bloody Baron as he floated around the gifts. "Snape, you do have quite a collection there. Why?"

"Harry never celebrated his birthday," sighed Severus as he cast a wandless, silent spell that quickly wrapped one toy in glittering silver paper. "I was content to forget his as I did my own but Albus reminded me that Harry is only four." He sighed as another gift wrapped itself this time in blue foil. "My father thought such celebrations were frivolous. The celebrations I had were used books from my mother wrapped in newspaper that she slipped to me at the end of the day." A rainbow of coloured, striped, dotted, and checked socks, along with one set that even had toes and each toe was a different colour leapt upward. The socks danced about and then were caught by bright gold wrapping paper.

"My eyes!" growled the Bloody Baron. "Do not tell me you picked out those atrocious socks!"

Severus glowered, "My son likes colourful socks. I choose to indulge." Another gift danced upward and was caught by red foil wrapping paper. "Have you not anything better to do than to watch me wrap gifts, Baron?"

The Bloody Baron smiled darkly. "Not at all, Snape. My schedule appears quite empty." He squinted at the next gift. "Now what might that be?"
Within a half hour Severus was finished with the wrapping of Harry's gifts, he shrank them, and took them into his apartment where he hid them in his dresser bureau. He then cast a Patronus expecting to see the silvery outline of the delicate doe he had been able to conjure since he was first taught. Instead… it was not at all what he expected. He gave the creature a smirk, a message, and then sent it on its way.

After letters it was naptime for Harry and the puppy. Harry and the pup's nap was only about twenty minutes. Upon waking Albus had ordered a small salad and a sandwich from the house elves since the stew that Hagrid was making looked dubious.

The little boy gobbled down his food and managed to sneak a few scraps to the puppy, and also to Fang. Finished before the adults had finished their lunches Harry excused himself and took the puppy outside. Fang followed in order to supervise. The large dog settled upon a hillock where he could survey Dirt (the scent he had for the boy) and Milky (the scent for the pup). He kept his front feet crossed, one over the other, and his head up as he watched the little Dirt and Milky.

Running, jumping, giggling. And, lots of slobbery kisses. Harry felt as though he had fallen into Heaven. There was no Aunt Petunia with endless chores and deprecating remarks that condemned her nephew and the parents he had never known. There was no Uncle Vernon who had a voice like thunder and who made the earth quake when he walked. Harry's mind muttered, No more scary looks from Uncle Vernon making me think he wanted to eat me! Finally, there was no more pushiness and bossiness from his fat cousin who never allowed Harry to speak to anyone for fear he might make a friend.

Suddenly in its jumping after Harry the puppy once more trod upon its ear and rolled. Harry instantly turned and tumbled right over the puppy. The fall was harmless but in picking himself up off the ground Harry's hand squashed one of the pup's paws and he squealed in pain. Harry, so startled at having hurt an innocent creature fell back and away from the pup and managed to bend his small finger backwards. His yelp joined the pup's and as soon as he saw his oddly bent finger he began to cry… silently.

Fang jumped up and lumbered down the hillock just as Hagrid and Albus left their lunch to tend to the cries from the pup that alerted them there was trouble. Hagrid took care of the pup who was now licking the big half-giant's face and Albus had knelt down upon the grass by Harry. He held the child to his chest and examined the strangely bent finger.

"I'm sorry, Grandfather! I messed everything all up!"

"Of course you didn't, Child." He kissed the boy's forehead and held the hand with the injured finger gently. "You just had an accident and little boys and girls have those all the time."

"But Aunt Petunia says I'm a clumsy oaf who ought to just fall into the tip and never come out 'cause I'm always hurting myself." He pressed his face to Albus' soft beard and mumbled into it, "I didn't mean to. I really didn't. I'm sorry!"

"Tut, tut, my brave boy," sighed Albus. "It appears you have broken your finger. Madame Pomfrey can fix this right away."

Harry looked at his finger, gave it a quick glare, and then looked up at the groundskeeper. "I'm sorry I hurt the puppy, Hagrid. You prob'ly don't want me helpin' anymore."

"Tush, 'Arry," chuffed Hagrid. "Look at 'im," he said holding the puppy easily cradled in one hand. "'E's feelin' all better now. An' you can always help me, 'Arry. Now, you go get yer finger fixed. It'll
be all right as summer rain."

Albus helped Harry to stand whilst he still held the injured hand. Saying farewell to Hagrid they then headed to the castle.

Poppy was soon engaged to heal Harry's finger but it turned out it was not entirely the quick process Albus expected. Poppy explained, "He's had numerous breaks and sprains in his finger, hands, and wrists, Albus. I could fix the digit magically but he could easily break it again. That we want to prevent. Now, hold perfectly still, Harry." Poppy instructed as she waved her wand around Harry's finger and he watched in awe as a cast of what looked to be plaster but was thinner formed over his wrist, his hand, and finally his small index finger. "There we are!"

Harry thumped the hard shell on his wrist and part of his forearm. "Is this plaster?"

Poppy replied, "It is simply linen strips hardened by magic. While this heals the Muggle way you'll be taking a daily Bone Strengthener." She clucked at herself as she wrote upon a hovering piece of parchment. "I should have caught this sooner but I simply was not thinking."

"What is it, Poppy?" asked Albus.

"Harry has not been properly fed and although his magic did what it could to heal broken bones it did not heal the bone itself. Consequently, Harry has a system-wide condition known as Osteoporosis."

"Ossiopromosis," Harry badly pronounced.

"Osteo-poro-sis," Poppy enunciated.

"Osteo-poro-sis. What is it?" asked Harry.

"Very good," smiled the Healer. "It is brittle bone disease caused by a deficiency in Vitamin D and Calcium. Since your father is already having you take a daily Nutrition Potion…"

Harry interrupted, "It tastes like dust." Really, it tasted like nothing when mixed with whatever drink he had with meals, but his father seemed to believe that no one else knew about flavourings for yucky potions.

"Hmm, indeed." Poppy rolled her eyes. "I will suggest a flavouring be added including the addition of Vitamin D and Calcium. You are four not eleven."

"Almost five," corrected Harry. He was suddenly mesmerised by the silvery-blue outline of a large rabbit making its appearance. The Patronus hopped through the window, across the Infirmary floor, and onto Harry's bed. The boy tentatively held out his hand to touch the rabbit. As his fingers lightly touched the rabbit he was filled with the warmth of love. "Isn't she pretty?"

Albus glanced up at Poppy. She nodded in understanding. She, Albus, and Minerva all knew the Potions Master was one of the few wizards to ever cast a full Patronus. Each of them had seen the delicate doe Severus used to have. It had changed. No doubt his love of the child was reflective of what Severus thought the boy's best qualities were.

The rabbit then wiggled and moved a little closer to Albus. It opened its mouth and Harry was startled to hear his father's voice emanate from the silvery rabbit. "Albus, I have returned from my business. Please bring my son to our quarters as soon as you are able."
"That's my father's voice!" Harry beamed.

Chapter End Notes

A nod to The Highwayman, Bess the Landlord's daughter, Oliver Twist, Merlin, and to the Sheriff of Nottingham as portrayed by beloved Alan Rickman.
27 July 1985

Albus delivered his grandson to his son's apartment, begged off dinner - he did have responsibilities that required his attention - and was startled when Harry threw his arms around his waist in a hug.

"I had fun, Grandfather. Thanks for being there. I love you!"

Albus, who had not heard those three words from Harry yet, smoothed a hand over the child's dark hair, and murmured, "I love you, too, Harry."

Severus and Harry watched as the Headmaster vanished in the green flames of the Floo. The little boy did not know how he had affected his grandfather, but Severus knew and bestowed a brief smile upon his son.

"Are you hungry for dinner, Magpie?" asked Severus.

"Starved! Can I…"

Severus interrupted, "May I…"

"May I have a chicken sandwich for dinner, Shadow?"

"Tomorrow you may," replied Severus. "I shall show you how to order what you would like from the kitchen. For tonight we will be having chicken pot pie."

"With lots of chicken?" Harry clambered up onto his dining chair. "And broccoli? And peas. I like peas. What about cel…"

Severus seated himself, tapped the table surface with his wand tip, and began serving the porcelain bowls that were adorned with chicken pot pies. "Why do you not just eat your pie and see for yourself what is in it, Magpie?" He smirked and then poured a glass of milk for Harry who stirred some of his Nutrition Potion into the drink.

The chicken pot pie settled Harry down and after his bath he climbed into his bed and was delighted when his father, book in hand, joined him.

"What story is that?" asked Harry as he snuggled up against the Potions Master.

"The Story of the Tree," replied Severus. "It is an old tale told to children who need to understand the value of memorisation."

"Do I have a problem with that, Shadow?"

Severus scooted down so that he could kiss his son's forehead. "Not that I have noticed, Magpie. Despite the object lesson in this tale I think you will like it. Ready?"

The Tale of the Name of the Tree

Severus' voice in a timbre that rumbled gently in his chest told the story of a wondrous tree bearing
all the fruits of the world. In a time of famine it was a blessing but for one problem; to make the tree drop its fruit one had to say its name. None of the animals knew the name but the Ibex suggested that they send one of them to the Chief Over the Mountain and ask him for the name.

The first animal sent was the swift cheetah who dashed over land, river, and rock until he ascended the great mountain to speak to the Chief Over the Mountain.

Severus' voice dropped thrillingly as he voiced the Chief Over the Mountain, "The name of the tree is… Uwangalemah!" Harry giggled and pressed his ear to his father's chest.

Armed with the name of the tree the cheetah ran as swift as the wind could carry him. When he came to the ivy it caught in his feet and tripped him. Over and over he rolled until he was back on his feet running once more. He arrived in the village, walked to the tree where the Ibex waited.

"What is the name of the tree?" asked the Ibex.

The cheetah drew in a breath and said, "Uwanalemah! Uwanalelemahna! Uwangelahleemangalee!"

No fruit fell from the tree.

One after the other animals were sent to the Chief Over the Mountain who told each one, "The name of that tree is… Uwangalenah!"

And, one after the other the animals returned but some were tripped by ivy, some slid on the rocks, some fell in the river and were dunked. Upon returning to the village, not one of them could correctly repeat the name of the tree. The animals were all very hungry now, and the fruit remained just out of reach. When it was certain all was lost, one voice piped up, "I shall go and bring back the name of the tree."

Laughter rang in the village. The tortoise had volunteered. How could he do what they could not? He was slow and stupid.

The tortoise declared solemnly, "I shall go and bring back the name of the tree."

And so he began his journey. He crossed the field, he crossed the river, until he reached the great mountain. Slowly, ponderously, the tortoise continued onward until he came to the Chief Over the Mountain.

"What is the name of the tree?" asked the tortoise.

"The name of that tree is… Uwangalenah!"

"Tell me again, please, what is the name of the tree?" the tortoise asked a second time.

The Chief Over the Mountain replied, "The name of that tree is… UWANGALEMAH!"

The tortoise asked one last time, "What is the name of the tree?"

This time when the Chief Over the Mountain spoke the air rumbled with thunder and lightning broke the sky. "THE NAME OF THAT TREE IS… U-WANGA-LEMAH!"

"Thank you," replied the tortoise who then turned and began his journey back to the tribe. Beneath his breath he repeated the name of the tree on every return step of his journey; "Uwangalemah."

When ivy on the trees tripped the tortoise, he said, "Uwangalemah."
When the rocks tumbled beneath his feet, the tortoise said, "Uwangalemah."

When the river threatened to drown him, the ponderous tortoise said, "Uwangalemah."

Finally, the tortoise returned to the tribe, stood under the tree, and spoke, "Uwangamanee! Uwanalele! Uwangu…"

All the animals sighed in sorrow. The tortoise had forgotten the name of the tree.

The tortoise took a deep breath and closed his eyes. When he was ready, and very sure of what he had to say, he spoke slowly and carefully, "U-wanga-lemah!"

The fruit immediately fell from the tree and the animals all cheered the brave and smart tortoise who saved them from the famine.

"Now, little Magpie," asked Severus in a purr, "do you remember the name of the tree?"

"Uwangalemah!" Harry cried out. He broke into giggles as his father began to tickle his ribs. "No more, Shadow! No more!"

Severus caught his child in a calming embrace, helped him to slip back under the covers, and kissed his forehead. Upon reaching the door of Harry's bedroom, he heard a faint voice whisper, "Uwangalemah."

---

31 July 1985 - Harry is Five

On Wednesday Harry woke early and watched as the sun rose over the roofs of Hogsmeade where his Enchanted Window had been tuned the night before. Birds were singing outside but Harry knew that the idle days of the Summer were soon to pass. That meant that students would be coming to Hogwarts to learn all sorts of things. He would be the grand age of 5 and he would get to go to primary school and learn how to read, write, and make sums. He hoped the children were nicer than Dudley had ever been to him since he had so much to learn.

Finally, he slid from his bed, ducked under it to grab his slippers, threw on his bathrobe and went to the end of the hallway where the bathroom was. He took care of necessary matters, brushed his teeth, and then began to fill the tub with water for a bath. His father had tried to get him to bathe at night but he was too sleepy for that. Baths and showers were for waking up. That's what he was accustomed to, and Severus did not see a need for breaking such a habit.

Once the tub was filled, with the appropriate blue suds (Severus had installed the faucet for coloured suds not long after the adoption… he certainly did not need them!) covering the top of the water, he removed his slippers, bathrobe, and pyjamas and climbed into the welcoming warmth of the water.

The bathtub was long and deep, and Harry would easily fall beneath the water if Severus had not added a few safety modification spells that would assure Harry remained above the water. So, Harry could not play 'Deep Sea Captain' any longer but he had recently discovered a new game where he would duck down in the suds until his head and shoulders were properly bubbly. He would then skulk over the sea as unsuspecting ships passed his hideous, monstrous form. Once a ship was in his path he would POUNCE! and sink them in a flurry of splashing water and 'deadly' blue or sometimes green bubbles.

It was this game of imagination that he played now. He would sink beneath the bubbles as he did his best imitation of a sea serpent - weaving back and forth menacingly. As soon as he spotted his prey Harry exploded upward from the water and suds with a terrifying roar. He then slapped his hands
and arms downward causing both bubbles and water to splash up… and out of the tub. Lost to the fantasy reeling through his mind, and the utter joy of being a sea monster, Harry never saw the bathroom door open.

"Harry! What are you…?" Severus was interrupted as his foot landed upon a dangerous puddle of water and dying blue suds that sent him up and off both feet. He could not cast a spell fast enough and he crashed, most indecorously, upon his tailbone.

"Are you all right, Dad?" Harry, very contrite, was up on his knees and peering over the edge of his bathtub at his father. Severus was wincing in pain but he managed a dark glower for his son. Harry sank down into the suds and water hoping he might disappear. He. Was. Dead.

Severus did not reply to his son. He rose, carefully, retrieved his slipper and put it back on, dried himself (but not the floor), and then dipped into the bathtub where he yanked out the boy. Harry made not a sound but he wriggled and thrashed like a fish out of water until his father plunked him down on the floor. With a wave of his hand Severus sent a towel hung up on the wall flying toward his son. Harry tried to duck but his father was now holding onto his waist and keeping him in place.

The towel attacked Harry starting with his wet, black hair. It rubbed, fluffed and Harry tried to grumble through the towel but nothing intelligible came through. The towel then swung itself into the air, seemingly dried itself, and then draped over Harry's body. His skin was rubbed dry until it was pink. Severus then pushed the towel into Harry's arms.

"Mop up this mess and then get yourself dressed, young man," ordered Severus.

"But I'm naked!" protested Harry. Severus nodded once and Harry looked down to see a curious bit of cloth wrapped around his hips and through his legs. He glared darkly at his father. "You put a nappy on me!"

"Loincloth," corrected Severus. "Mop up the bathroom and then you may dress in clothing." Severus then turned, and strode away but not before he told his son, "I expect you for breakfast in fifteen minutes."

Harry, mumbling dark words to himself, threw the towel in his arms onto the wet floor and began mopping as quickly as he could.

Most children do not worry about time, or have a concern for being at a place at a certain time. Severus, drinking his coffee and reading The Daily Prophet, had expected Harry to be late for breakfast and so he had put a serving of bacon, eggs, hash browns, a sectioned orange, and a glass of milk all under a charm that kept everything at its perfect temperature.

Fifteen minutes later, and not one second sooner, Harry arrived at the breakfast table. Severus frowned slightly but said nothing as his son climbed onto his chair and studied his breakfast.

"I have said this before, Harry, you do not need to wait for my permission to begin eating," encouraged Severus.

Harry picked up his fork, thus breaking the charm that preserved the temperatures of his food. "It's not that, Dad. I'm…" he drew in a heavy breath. "I'm sorry for making a mess. I won't do that again."

Severus lowered his newspaper. "If you were a student I believe I would have been much more angry. However, I can add a ward to keep water in the tub so that you are able to play. Would you like that?"
Harry nodded and smiled shyly. "So you're not going to hit me?"

Severus' jaw almost fell open in shock. "I would never hit you, little Magpie. Where…” his brows beetled together in comprehension. "Hmmm, yes. Your aunt and uncle punished you in such a crude manner."

Harry stabbed his eggs with his fork and muttered, "They just wanted any old excuse to hit me."

"You need never concern yourself with that again, Harry. I do not believe in corporal punishment," said Severus.

Harry frowned. "Corporal? Is that some sort of military punishment, Dad?"

Severus smirked. "No. It is spanking a child as a punishment." Harry gulped and one hand slipped from the table to protect his posterior. "There is standing in the corner, extra chores, and when you get a bit older I will likely have some detentions for you."

"But no spanking? Ever?" asked Harry worriedly.

"Not ever, Harry. I do not believe a child needs to be spanked in order to discipline him or her. A parent ought to be more… creative."

Harry frowned. "My relatives were plenty creative."

Severus' lips thinned. "They were not, Harry. The only thing they ever did was hurt you. That is far from being creative."

Harry sighed heavily as he tried to forget his erstwhile relatives. He ate his breakfast with a lack of enthusiasm that had arrived when the memories of the Dursleys had begun.

After several silent moments Severus drawled softly, "I cannot overlook the mess you made today, Harry." The boy lifted his head in question. "Since you will be occupied this afternoon I believe you may prepare the Waterwright Slugs that I'll need for today's Fluxus Soothe Potion, and then you can skin the eels and add them to an infusion of rosemary, lavender, and chamomile."

Harry grimaced. "Skinning eels? Is that what you make your students do in detention?"

Severus smirked and snapped his Daily Prophet. "Ohhh, my detentions tend to be more elaborate than skinning eels."

"Ee-laboar-et?" Harry tried to sound out the word in the hopes it might provide a clue to its meaning.

Severus Summoned a pocket dictionary he had recently purchased via Owl Mail for his son. "E-l-a-b-o-r-a-t-e."

Harry caught the dictionary as his father sent the flying book towards him. "But, I can't read, yet!"

"Just say the word aloud, Magpie," smirked Severus.

"Ee-lahb-bore-et," he said at the dictionary. The book flipped open and the pages turned until a voice emanated from the book, "e-lab-o-rate, involving many carefully arranged parts or details; detailed and complicated in design and planning."

"It talks!" Harry grinned. He then frowned a moment and then his face lit up with understanding. "So you're saying that skinning eels is easy? But, they're gross, Dad!"
"Indeed," Severus agreed with insouciance. He then looked over the edge of his Daily Prophet and caught Harry's indignant green gaze with his own stern black stare. "And, you spilled water all over the floor of our bathroom."

"I cleaned it up," he muttered as he crossed his arms tightly over his chest. Skinning eels is easy? Harry huffed. Even more under his breath he mumbled, "I'm four. I make messes."

Severus eyebrow rose sardonically. His hearing was delicately honed from having to listen in upon illicit conversations by Death Eaters, and then, teenagers. "You are five years old today. Time to grow up, Harry." He stood. He Vanished the newspaper to his chair in the sitting room and his cup of coffee, along with his son's dishes, to the sink. "Come along now. Let us get our work finished. We have a birthday to celebrate this afternoon."

Harry was just slipping off his chair to follow his father when he abruptly halted. "Celebrating? My birthday?"

Severus turned in the doorway. "I know of no other boy that is having his birthday today. Are you saying you do not want a celebration?"

"Me?" Harry smiled beyond hope. "I've never had a party, Dad! Are we having a party?" Harry moved to his father's side and slipped his small hand in his so they could walk together to the Potions Master's private lab.

Severus smirked as he released the wards to his private lab and showed his son through. "I do believe someone wants his party."

Skinning eels was gross but it was also sort of neat, Harry had decided. Before skinning an eel he had thought the task might be done the way he skinned the potatoes before boiling them and mashing them for the Dursleys dinner. That would have been gross factor 10,011!

The eels were Indian Eels harvested along the edge of the Indian Ocean. They measured in length from two centimeters to nearly 120 cm! That was taller than Harry by 10 centimeters!

In order to skin the eels Severus showed his son how to notch the skin at the end of the eel. Once notched in the shape of a cross the skin could be slid off in one piece. This, of course, was another test of Harry's magic. It would tell the Potions Master if Harry had enough of a spark to simply pull the skin off in one piece or if he would wind up needing to take the skin off in ribbons.

The first eel skinned (63cm) was a great accomplishment for the small boy who let out a yelp of pleasure. "It was hard, Shadow, but I did it!"

"It was a test of your magic, Magpie, that is why it was hard. Try another eel but this time imagine your hands sparkling with your magic to make the skinning go smoother and easier," Severus instructed.

Harry looked down at his hands and did his best to visualise sparkling stars of magic all over his hands. He smiled when he managed the visualisation. He then grabbed an eel, notched the tail, and very quickly peeled the long skin off.

"I did it! Shadow, can you use magic all the time when doing gross stuff in potions?" asked Harry as he stopped peeling eels and watched his father brew.

"Generally, no, Magpie. Magic can cause the efficacy of a potions end result to change, and usually not for the better," he explained. He then smirked as he saw Harry reaching for his pocket dictionary.
"E-f-f-i-c-a-c-y."

Harry flipped through the pages, mumbling, "E-f-f-i... ef-i-kuh-see." He watched in awe as the book flipped open and found the word Harry needed. The voice of the book said, "Efficacy - the capacity for producing a desired result or effect." He stuffed his dictionary in his back pocket. "Sooo, if you use magic it can mess up a potion, right?"

"Indeed," Severus agreed.

Harry glanced at his hands. "I was using magic, though, wasn't I?"

"You were using passive magic. That is the natural magic that is produced as you go about doing whatever you might do. It is similar to breathing." He watched his son as his brow furrowed in thought.

"Are you using... passive magic, Shadow?" he stared as his father stirred his potion and it went from clear to bubbly green.

"I am. The entire process of Potions, from the gathering of ingredients, to preparing them, and then brewing the potion all utilise passive magic." He tapped the cauldron with his wand. The cauldron rose and Harry watched as it floated to the end of the work bench, and then rested on the surface. "That was an example of active magic. Active magic can be used in certain tasks such as lighting a fire beneath the cauldron, or moving the cauldron, or putting the potion under stasis - pausing it."

Harry tugged at a forelock of his dark hair worriedly. Finally he asked, "Was it passive magic or active magic that came out of me when I knocked Draco backwards."

Severus sighed. "Accidental Magic is generally passive. It really is not setting out to do anything and the one manifesting the Accidental Magic has not put any intent behind it." Harry frowned so the Potions Master clarified, "The wizard or witch has not chosen any particular task for the magic that appears." Harry nodded in understanding. "The magic that you manifested the other day is not, technically speaking, true Accidental Magic. Your magical core is not strong enough. You do have magic but it needs to build itself up."

"Like I do with my body when I drink my Nutrition Potion," interjected Harry.

"Precisely, Magpie! 5 knuts to Harry Snape."

"Really, Shadow? Money?" asked Harry happily.

"For the time being. If you were my student I would give you points but since you are my son, knuts for spending as you wish," Severus decreed.

Harry was ecstatic in earning his own money but he still wanted to understand what his magic had done. He continued, "So was it Active Magic that knocked into Draco?"

Severus nodded. "To the extent that you wanted to knock down your cousin Dudley, that was Active Magic. However, that was not your magic."

"It wasn't? Was it yours?"

Severus put his second potion under Stasis so he could concentrate on his son. "You understand that your magical core, that spark that is your magic, became exhausted as it worked to keep you healed from major injury, and kept your body as healthy as possible. When your magical core ran out of its own magic it drew magic from a curse scar that had been on your forehead."
Harry touched his forehead where the scar had once been. "The lightning bolt. It just wasn't there one day. I was sort of glad because then I didn't feel like I was sick all the time." Harry's eyes widened. "That's when I got really, really sick. I couldn't move and then I could barely hear Uncle Vernon telling me that he was throwing me to the trolls."

"Yes, Harry. The magic in your scar was gone. However, after what happened in the Staff Garden we believe that your magical core reached out to the only energy it could to create magic. It took the air that was around us."

Harry sighed. "I don't understand all of it, Shadow, but I think I get the idea that my magic is tired, and it has to grow up. Kind of like I do." Harry slid off his stool and moved to lean against his father. Severus dropped a hand down over his shoulder to pull his son closer to him.

"You are still worried, little Magpie," Severus observed.

Harry sighed and then caught a button on his father's sleeve. He scraped a nail over the button and discovered it was cloth. He then twisted the button. "Is that magic going to come back, Shadow? I don't want to hurt you, or Draco, or anyone ever again." Suddenly he twisted the button too far and it came off in his hand. "Oh…!"

Severus took the button from his son's hand, brought it to his lips, whispered, and then they both watched as the button sailed through the air and re-attached itself to the cuff. Severus flicked the button and invited his child to do the same.

"Wooooah!"

"Harry," Severus deliberately used his son's name in order to get his full attention. Harry settled his gaze on his father's black eyes. The Potions Master tapped his nose, then chin. "Yes, I shall not lie, Harry. That magic will come back. However, there are exercises we can do together that will teach you control of your magic so that you are able to prevent such a burst."

"Dad? I know my magic's never going to be strong like yours… is it… will I ever be able to do Potions as good as you do?" Harry asked softly.

The worry of being inadequate was radiating off of the boy. Severus lifted Harry onto his lap, gave him a squeeze until he squeaked, and then he drew his knuckles gently down the boy's cheek. "Let me tell you something about Potions that very few people ever understand, my worrisome Magpie." Harry lifted his chin and caught his father's gaze and could see that a secret was tucked away in them. "Potions utilises magic in a way that has not been formally recognised or often used in centuries. Potions were once known as Elemental Magic. It required the use of all four Elements - Earth, Fire, Air, and Water then… as it does now."

"How, Shadow?" asked Harry with intense interest.

"Earth nurtures the plants that we grow, and feeds the animals who give of themselves to the Art of Potions. Fire is the catalyst of brewing a potion. Fire is that which draws the various components of a potion together. Air…" for emphasis he softly blew aside part of his son's dark fringe. "Air sustains the Potions Master or Mistress, the animals, the plants. It touches all aspects of the creation of Potions. Lastly there is water that, like air, exists within all organic matter - animals, plants, and even the witch or wizard."

Dawning blossomed in the five year old's eyes and his jaw dropped. "You're saying that everything is magic and Potions uses that magic to make… to make it… an art. Shadow, you're god!"
Severus chuckled. "Not even close, sweet Magpie. However, the Elemental Wizards were considered so powerful that it was feared they would become gods and rule the world. Hence, the Guild of Potioneers came into being. They removed all mention of the Elements in their magic, and Potions is now considered the most benign... and dull of all the disciplines of magic."

Harry whispered, "But, it's a secret that nothing was ever changed, right?"

Severus smiled softly and pressed his lips to his son's forehead. "It is a secret I give to you because you are my son. Do you wish to become a Potions Master, Magpie?" If Harry did become a Potions Master with the way that his magical core drew power from the elements he might become a true Elemental Potions Master. That would be... satisfying to teach such a wizard.

Harry had the voracious look of a hungry hatchling upon his face as he nodded. "Yes, Shadow. I want to be just like you." He then made a curious motion in which he drew one hand across his lips. "I won't tell a soul the secret... ever."

Severus wrapped his son warmly in his arms as the spell of a vow shimmered around himself and his son. They did not say the words of a Vow but the magic was still invoked. Severus, though, felt a shiver travel along his blood. He had spoken of a secret he had Vowed to his own mother, and then to the Potions Guild, since learning the truth himself. It was frightening to have been so bold in revealing himself to his son but his mother had revealed the truth of potions to him when he was six.

And, what warmed him down to his soul was in having a son he could pass on all his secrets to.

Chapter End Notes

The Tale of the Name of the Tree is a story that I heard Danny Kaye narrate when I was 9 years old. To this day I have never forgotten the name of the tree... Uwangalemah. I have written, poorly, what I do remember of the story. If you can find it the story, narrated by Danny Kaye it was part of six stories originally on record (vinyl). It was titled: Stories For Children narrated by Danny Kaye. His voice is lovely, but just imagine if Severus Snape were reading the story to you, and said Uwangalemah! Delicious!

The Truth of Potions is taken from various sources that I have put together over the years. Stories of Merlin (who was thought of as a potioneer), Druidic mythology, and various stories of wizards and dragons I have read of watched.
The Birthday Party

31 July 1985 - The Birthday Party

Harry was filled with the joy of one of his father's greatest secrets. And, he understood all that his father had told him. He was growing up!

Harry rummaged around in his wardrobe which was starting to show some disorganisation despite the shoe cubbys and dresser drawers to put everything. The little boy had the tendency that most boys had of throwing his dirty clothes, not on the floor of his room where The Shadow would see them, but the floor of the wardrobe. Therefore was the need to rummage for the only pair of trainers he had.

Finally he found the shoes! He sat on the floor pulled on his hippogriff socks, then the trainers. His next thing to seek was a clean shirt. That was easier since he was used to hanging those up. He picked out a green cotton shirt with short sleeves and then a pair of black shorts. Once dressed he ran out into the sitting room to try and patiently await his father.

The excited boy sat down on the floor in front of the window that looked out at the Mer city just as the Great Squid gracefully swam past the window.

"I'm getting a birthday today," he said in a hush to the passing Great Squid. "With cake. And presents. And Shadow said that Draco was coming and so was grandpa, and Uncle Lucius and Aunt Cissy." He clapped his hands together once, and then looked sadly down in front of himself. "I hope my kneazle isn't missing me too badly."

"Your kneazle is waiting, Shadow," replied Severus as he stepped into the sitting room. "Do you think we ought to bring your familiar to your party?"

Harry scrambled to his feet and trotted over to his father. "Yes! Oh good! I can't wait, Shadow. I know she's going to be such a good kneazle. He's going to like everything I do."

Severus smirked as they walked over to the Floo. "You still do not know whether your kneazle is female or male, do you, Magpie." Harry shook his head. The wizard grabbed a handful of Floo Powder and threw it into the orange flames. In an instant they whooshed into the safe flames of green.

"The Leaky Cauldron!" Severus called out. He then picked up Harry, nudged his face against his chest, and stepped into the flames. Within seconds they were in a dingy looking pub with a ceiling that rose up above the rooms that were to let around its sides on the second floor.

"My boys!" greeted Albus. He was splendid in robes of gold and canary yellow that had yellow canaries embroidered along the ends of the sleeves and hem. Snow white fur at the collar added volume to the old wizard's long, white beard. Harry hugged his grandfather who patted his back. "Happy Birthday, my dear Harry!"

Severus stood a bit away from the tableaux of grandfather and son. He managed a brief smile that lit his eyes as he witnessed the two. The Potions Master could not recall having seen the Headmaster - his father, he kept reminding himself - so happy in such a long time. Harry, still wary of adults in general, had taken rather well to the additions of his family. He loved his magical aunt and uncle, he liked Draco - Severus hesitated in admitting the two might love each other - but it seemed that the old Headmaster had become a favourite of the boy's affections.
"Dad!" cried Harry in excitement. "Grandpa's canaries move! Come see!"

Severus moved towards the two and took the draping sleeve that his son held up for him. He studied the animated embroidery. "Why, Merlin's toes! Is that not remarkable, Harry?" he drawled with an acerbic smirk. "Whatever could be causing such a miracle?"

Harry chortled, and replied, "Magic, Shadow! Magic is wonderful!"

Severus drew his son into his arms and was suddenly aware of patrons in the Leaky Cauldron watching them. He gave them a dark sneer that turned away their curiosity.

"Shall we leave, Father? Magpie? I do believe we have an appointment at the Magical Menagerie," Severus addressed only his son and father.

With nods all around they left the Leaky Cauldron.

Diagon Alley. What a wizarding wonder with its quaint shop fronts with signs that changed smoothly from applied charms. Vendors in the street hawked wares that ranged from flowers, to foodstuffs, to sweets, to toys and curiosities.

Harry looked all around the street, and began to wiggle in his father's arms. Severus let his son down but latched an invisible leash on him knowing that his Little Magpie was wont to wander.

"We've gone back in time," marvelled Harry as they passed quaint, old shops that sold robes, writing supplies, books, potions and so much more.

The sight that grabbed the wide-eyed child, and threw a frisson of terror down his spine, was the pinnacle ornamentation of Gringotts - the main branch of the wizarding world's commerce.

The small boy clutched the black robes of his father and the yellow-gold robes of his grandfather, and peeked through them, "Dad, it's a dragon!"

Severus dropped a hand to his son's shoulder and felt the slight tremble of Harry's body. Harry, of course, was curious but his innate caution won out as his eyes remained fixed upon the swaying, gold, monster of nightmares. He ducked when the dragon let out a terrible roar and spewed a lick of flame that crossed the roofs of many shops. None of the buildings suffered from charring, though.

After seeing the flames burst out overhead Harry ducked against his father, his face in the wizard's abdomen and his arms around Severus' slim waist. The Potions Master knelt as he nudged his son a bit away.

"Magpie, shhh, it is not real." The boy looked deeply into his eyes. "Trust me, the dragon is merely a sophisticated illusion to warn would-be-robbers that it is unwise to steal from goblins."

"It's not gonna cook me, Shadow?" Harry breathed in relief.

"Never," Severus assured. "And, it is 'going to' not 'gonna', Little Magpie. Shall we go find your kneazle?"

Harry beamed and nodded. "Yes. Please."

Severus rose to his feet and nudged his son with a hand to his back towards the pet store.

The Magical Menagerie was nothing like Harry expected a pet store to be. He thought there would be cages for dogs and cats and reptiles behind glass. There was not a cage or terrarium to be seen.
The animals were held in their sectors by specially shaped Cushioning Charms that built invisible enclosures. Reptiles, monkeys and colourful birds hung about on a nest of intertwined branches of trees that encircled the interior of Magical Menagerie and spread as a lush canopy above the shop floor.

It was also quite a busy place as children, most who would be first years at Hogwarts, were with their parents to find their familiars. Harry stood beside his father until Albus called him over to a small corral that held eight kneazle kittens.


Harry was entranced.

A kneazle nearly looks like a cat but its ears are a few centimeters longer and wider at the base, and the ears are usually tipped with a growth of fur that follows their main colouring. The tails are also a bit longer and end with a forked tip that has fur matching that on the ears. The full, adult weight of a normal kneazle is 1.5 stone (23 pounds). The kneazle is just a bit larger than the American Maine Coon Cat.

The kittens were all small and far too adorable for words. Harry had crouched down by the corral while Albus had conjured a chair for himself. Severus had skirted all the children, parents, and clerks of Magical Menagerie to stand beside his father so he could watch his son.

"All those colours," marvelled Harry. "They're like a crayon box of colours."

A clerk, a young woman with dark curls bent down beside Harry. "Is your familiar here?"

Harry glanced to his side. "My kneazle has been waiting for me forever. I'm just waiting for her or him to recognise me."

"I'm Kali. May I wait with you?" asked the young clerk.

"Sure. I'm Harry." That was enough attention for the pretty clerk. He pet each of the kits hoping that his kneazle would recognise him soon.

It wasn't long before one kneazle kit singled itself out. The kit had a bent ear that sent its tip of pale grey fur over one brilliant golden eye. Paws were a blending of gray into pale blue fur. The tail was all grey but for the fluffy tips of pale blue. The kneazle was mostly ghostly grey but for the lively brushing of blue blending into the grey along its spine. Lastly, it sported a pale blue nose. The kit was doing its best to climb out of the enclosure to get to Harry.

"That's my familiar!" the child beamed. He looked over his shoulder. "Shadow, come see! My kneazle is here."

Severus left his father's side and with one knee upon a silently and wandlessly cast Cushioning Charm he placed one arm across Harry's slim back and rested his hand upon the boy's shoulder.

"The kit does appear quite anxious to get to you, Magpie," commented Severus.

Harry chuckled. "She's anxious to come home. Can we take her now, Shadow?"

"Of course, Magpie. We would not want her to have to wait any longer," Severus nodded.

Kali picked the kneazle kit out of the enclosure and then quickly did a scan with her wand to determine the sex. "It is a female. How did you know that, Harry?" She handed him the kit and he pulled her close to his chest and rubbed his cheek against her head.
"Easy," he replied. "She told me." Harry held up his new familiar to his father. "Rub your cheek on her forehead so she'll know you, Shadow."

Severus took the small kneazle kit almost at arm's length, but, for his son (mind you) he brought the ball of fur close to his chest. She began to purr and rubbed her own forehead against his cheek. The Potions Wizard chuckled… and then bit back that unexpected expression of mirth. He handed the kit to his father. He sneered, "Let the kit know you, Albus."

Albus was not quite as abrupt and was delighted to introduce himself to the little ball of fur. The kit purred, and delved into the older man's soft, white beard. Harry giggled and Albus laughed. The kit only purred more in happiness.

"You two are an embarrassment," snapped Severus without true rancor. "Come along. We have ice cream to procure and then a party to attend."

Out on the sidewalk, and between his father and grandfather, Harry happily cuddled his new familiar.

"What name have you for her, Harry?" asked Albus.

"I don't have one grandfather. She'll tell me when we're bonded." He glanced up at his father. "Shadow, I can feel our magics weaving together. Mine's not strong but it's there."

"Very good, Harry," he replied.

Without thinking the Potions Master had dropped into that once old comfortable form of projecting a mien that was dark and unapproachable. The many children who would be new students were seeing him and it was habit to show that side of himself.

To be honest, that dour, dark teacher of Potions had been who he was since his first day as a student at Hogwarts. Becoming a father, then a son himself… that was changing him. For the better, he hoped. However, it was not soon enough.

Harry stopped walking as he stared at his father's back. The coldness was falling from his shoulders just as one would see frost falling from an opened freezer. Something Harry had seen a time or two. He saw his father's spine stiffen as a gaggle of little youngsters who would be attending Hogwarts dashed in front of him. To a little five year old boy it felt like his father was being swallowed up by some darkness of the past. A darkness that had once touched Harry.

He shivered as the fear overtook him. The kneazle kit in his arms hissed, and spat, and then drew closer to her boy.

"Shadow?" his voice was a whisper none could hear. He swallowed and made his voice bigger, "DAD?"

Severus halted. In a flash of a moment he realised his son was no longer beside him. Harry had called out to him in a tone of voice to bring him back from where he had gone in his mind. Suddenly missing the presence of his son, the Potions Master spun and knelt one knee down upon the sidewalk. Heedless of the many children and parents looking on in puzzlement, he spread his arms in supplication. Harry ran into his father's embrace, holding his kneazle kit with one arm. The other arm snaked around his father's neck.

"Shadow! Something big and scary and cold was taking you away from me! Don't leave me… please don't… I love you… I want to be with you always… Daddy…" His voice broke on a sob and so he simply held his child.
Insecurity. It was clear that Harry was afraid of losing his father. Losing him would mean losing everything he had gained so far. He still believed that Severus might be recalled to something more pressing, more important. His child was afraid.

In that moment Severus realised he could not be another person; that teacher that students dreaded, and still be a father to his son. Oh, he could still be that 'horrid git' to his students but he could not be afraid, himself, to show that he loved and cared for his son, in public.

"Magpie," he spoke softly for his son. "I… love… you. There is never going to be anything that changes that. I am a very possessive man, and you are… mine. That means I shall never… never, my insecure Magpie,... let you go. Do you understand?"

Harry nodded, then whispered into his father's ear. Severus rose to his feet. With an air of determination he completely surprised the Headmaster, his father, by embracing him tightly, kissing his cheek, and telling him, "Since Harry has never heard me say so, I love you, Father."

A thin clapping from an audience around them showed their approval, and their delight at catching such a domestic scene. For good measure, Severus glowered his darkest at everyone who had stayed to watch. Parents yanked their children away and a few youngsters screamed - for melodramatic effect.

Severus smirked, and looked down at his son. "I still have it."

Harry took his father's hand. He smirked, too. "Yeah, you sure do, Shadow!"

31 July 1985 - The Staff Garden

"Merlin's Bent Toes!" cursed Severus as he looked around at the Staff Garden.

"It's wonderful!" breathed Harry, his eyes sparkling.

Albus chuckled. "I take it you did not give the house elves any particular directions regarding birthday decor, my boy?"

"Modest decor, Father. That… is hardly… modest!"

The most prominent change was the gazebo; it was gone. In place of the gazebo was a Medieval Pavilion. The tent was circular, round and was green with a scalloped awning of blue. The dome was of a midnight blue and sparkled with stars of gold and silver. Ribbons also of gold, silver, blue and green spiralled down the tent sides between each scallop. Outside the tent was a buffet of little sandwiches of several varieties, house elf made fried potato chips and dip, and carafes of pumpkin juice, pomegranate juice, orange juice, and milk.

In the middle of the table was a large, rectangular sheet cake with five candles in the center of the cake. Written on the cake was: Happy Birthday, Magpie! The cake had been decorated with kneazle kits and krupp puppies that played on a green hill overlooking Hagrid's hut. Hogwarts was in the distance.

Matching the pavilion the birthday cake's main frosting was blue with green scalloped edging and the lettering was enhanced with silver and gold edible glitter.

To Harry's further surprise the Malfoys all appeared from the interior of the tent. Lucius' robes were a dove grey but for a large cabochon pin on his cravat that was an emerald. Narcissa wore a tea gown with an Empire waist that was cream and dove grey with ribbons of green. There was also a gentle bump of roundness of her belly to show her pregnancy. Draco, hair combed back but for a stubborn
lock that fell over his right eye, wore a white shirt, black shorts, his trainers, and a pair of splendid lemon yellow socks that were bright enough to blind.

Harry was so overcome by all the pomp and circumstance that he took a step backwards against his father's legs, hugged his kneazle to his chest and neck, and bowed his head into the little one's fur.

Instantly on the alert for a problem Severus fell gracefully to one knee and took his child into his arms. "Magpie? Is something the matter?"

Harry shook his head and lifted a face that smiled while tears glistened in his eyes. The Malfoys, also concerned, had drawn closer to father and son.

"I'm happy, Shadow," Harry spoke softly. "I've never seen anything so great, and beautiful, and wonderful before. Dudley never had a birthday that looked like this. This is really all for me?"

Severus cupped one of the boy's cheeks, and gave him a serene smile as he kissed his son's forehead. "This is all for you, little Magpie." He then smirked. "I have never celebrated a birthday so I might have let the house elves go a bit over the top with their decorating. You do not mind?"

"Honestly, Dad?" asked Harry, still smiling as he grabbed his father's hand. "Even if it was just you and me and Nellie it would have been perfect." He then laughed. "But all of this is wicked!"

Harry turned and trotted over to the Malfoys. He gave each of the adults a one-armed hug and a kiss, and then hugged Draco, too. He then held up his new familiar

"This is Nellie, my kneazle," he declared.

Severus, who had been just a bit puzzled as to who 'Nellie' might be heard the declaration, and nodded. "Her name is Nellie."

"Very charming," mused Albus. "I wonder, did she tell Harry her name?" Severus darted a glance at his father. He, too, wondered about that. Could Harry actually talk to his kneazle?

Harry and Draco played with Nellie for a bit on the grass in front of the tent before Severus asked them to come in. In the tent was a set of cushy chairs (they were wooden until Albus had transfigured them for comfort), and small, round tables at the side or in front of each chair.

With a swirl of Severus' wand ice cream (a special mix of chocolate chip, cookie dough, and toffee bar) from Fortescue's in Diagon Alley was served in blue dishes and silver spoons. Lucius used his wand to levitate the cake into the tent and with a wave of her wand Narcissa lit the five candles at the center.

Severus then stood behind his son, put both his hands on Harry's shoulder, and whispered in his ear, "Wishes in our world are magical, Magpie. Think carefully, make your wish, and then blow out the candles with one breath." He gently squeezed his son's shoulders. "Breathe… and…"

Harry stretched up his hands and put them over his father's. He then closed his eyes, silently made his wish, and then blew out all five candles with one breath. Severus smiled, kissed the crown of his son's head, and declared, "Now, shall our birthday boy bless us all with a piece of his cake?"

Lucius presented Harry with a delicate, curved knife with a blade that had been etched with Celtic scrollwork. "It is tradition for a young wizard to cut the first slice of his cake for his parents, Harry. In your case, slice a piece for your father and your grandfather."
Harry took the knife and after admiring the blade he cut the slices. Severus noted that the pieces were cut with precision that had been drummed into the child by an exacting Petunia Dursley. He guessed, and quite correctly, that Harry was the one to cut Dudley's birthday cake for his aunt, uncle, and cousin but never for himself.

Pushing aside all thoughts of the Dursleys, Severus accepted his slice of cake from his son. Albus did the same.

Once the cake cutting ceremony was complete everyone received generous slices of cake courtesy of the Headmaster's own Food Slicer Charm. It wasn't long before everyone was sated and Harry and Draco both eyed the table of gifts with boyish, hungry curiosity.

"Magpie? Would you like to open your gifts or perhaps you would prefer salivating over glittering wrap?" teased Severus.

"Open!" Harry declared quickly. He then lowered his voice, and amended, "Please?"

"Can Harry open my gift first?" Draco glanced hopefully to his parents, and then to his godfather. All three nodded so Draco jumped up from his chair, sprinted to the gift table and withdrew a rather awkward, plump gift wrapped in a bit too much green foil wrapping paper and five bows of silver and green. He handed the gift to Harry. "Happy birthday, Happy. I wrapped it all by myself!"

"Thank you, Draco!" With a smile Harry began to slowly and carefully open the gift in such a way that the paper would not rip.

Severus leaned forward to whisper in his son's ear, "You need not be careful, Magpie. We are just going to Vanish all the paper and ribbon."

Harry's face fell slightly. "All of it, Shadow? Can I keep the ribbons and bows? They're really shiny and pretty."

Severus chuckled softly, "Of course. The paper has to go, though. Feel free to rip through it."

Harry plucked off the five bows and put them aside. He then practically attacked the gift, decimating the green foil paper. He revealed an oval-shaped kneazle bed the Nellie would grow into. It was purple velvet with white fur trim.

"You were talking so much about your kneazle I thought a bed would be handy for her." Draco then turned the bed in his cousin's hands to reveal a small, leather plaque on one side. "See here, Harry. Uncle Severus just needs to tap that with his wand and say Nellie's name and it will write curvy script in her name in gold."

"This is neat!" gushed Harry. He felt little claws on his shin and looked down to see Nellie, his kneazle kit, asking for a lift. Severus picked up the kitten, removed her claws from his son's sock, and plunked her down on the 'royal kneazle bed'. "Thanks, Shadow. See? Nellie loves her bed!"

"Indeed," Severus agreed. He had Summoned a gift in blue with a pearlescent bow on it.

Harry saved the bow and tore into the paper to reveal a drawing tablet. "Ohhhh, wow! Thank you, Shadow!"

"I added a few extras, Magpie," said Severus. "Tap the left top corner with your index finger twice." Harry did so and was crowed when a drawing quill appeared. "The charcoal tip is self-replenishing. Just tap the nib three times when you need new charcoal. To put the quill back you just settle it at the top left corner of the drawing tablet."
"This is terrific!" marvelled Harry.

Severus chuckled as his child's mood became infectious. He could not understand why, at the moment, he hated birthdays so much. "One last trick..." taking the tablet he stroked his index finger down the right side and the tablet shrank to pocket size. Stroking his finger up the left side caused the tablet to expand to full size. He handed it back to his son.

Harry experimented with shrinking and enlarging the tablet until Lucius interrupted. "I do believe there are quite a bit more gifts to unwrap, Harry?"

"Oh! Gosh... there sure are! What's next?" asked Harry.

Lucius floated a large, rectangular gift wrapped in gradient greens with a yellow ribbon in front of the five year old boy. Harry removed the yellow ribbon and then took off the lid of the box. He fell back as a swarm of flying boys and girls in uniforms and on brooms came out of the box. They circled what was inside and Harry, joined by Draco, peered down into the box.

Draco explained, "That's a Quidditch pitch. I picked out the teams which are from Ireland and Bulgaria. Each of the players is modelled after the real player." He caught one. "Look. That looks just like Alfred Noyes of the Irish Banshees."

Harry peered at the little Quidditch player who was struggling to be let go. "He seems kind of angry, Draco."

Draco let the tiny player go and he flew into formation with his team. "He's captain of his team so he probably didn't want to be separated from them."

With Draco's help they both lifted out the beautifully constructed Quidditch pitch which instantly expanded to take over the table to the point it went past the edges of the table. With a quick swish of his wand Severus expanded the table to generously accommodate the pitch and leaving Harry room to open his other gifts.

Harry then made the room, including the magically animated players pause as he asked, "What's Quidditch?"

Draco easily rattled off an explanation that offered words such as 'snitch', 'bludger', 'quaffle', 'beater', 'chaser', and 'seeker' that made absolutely no sense to Harry.

Severus patted his son's back. "Quidditch is played between the Houses of Hogwarts so when the students play, you may watch, and you will learn all about the sport."

"It's a really important sport, Harry," explained Draco loftily. He handed his cousin a scroll of paperwork. "You can collect ALL the professional teams of the Quidditch League which Papa and I thought was something you should learn about." He then grinned. "Plus, we can play this until we get to fly on our brooms!"

"Fly?" queried Harry. Severus glared at his godson.

The Potions Master Summoned a long gift weirdly wrapped in a green paper that looked like snake-skin. In fact, it was nearly as long as a snake.

Draco started to jump up and down. "Oh! I know what...!" Lucius caught his bouncy son and cast a Silencing Charm over him before he gave away what the gift was.

There were no bows or ribbon to salvage so Harry tore into the snakeskin paper. The wrapping was
hiding a broom. Harry, who's only exposure to flying was his little players of Quidditch, did not truly understand the gift he held.

"A training broom," explained Severus. "When a boy's magic has manifested before or by the age of five he is eligible for his first broom. As you learn to balance and maneuver you will also learn to control your magic."

Harry's fingers trailed down the highly polished handle of the broom. His look was envious. "Shadow, do you think I have enough magic to fly?"

"I know that you do, Magpie," Severus assured his son.

Draco patted Harry's arm to get his attention (once his father lifted the Silencing Charm and let him go), "I can help you learn to fly, Harry."

"Do you already know how?" asked Harry.

Draco nodded. "I can't go any higher than three feet but I do pretty well." He smiled. "I've wanted to fly forever!"

"Has your magic shown, then, Draco?" He was sure someone couldn't do magic until their Accidental Magic showed up.

Draco looked to his godfather for permission to impart a secret. Severus nodded. "Madame Pomfrey knows a spell to check for magic. It's something all Healers can do but they're not s'posed to. Anyway, Madame Pomfrey looked for magic in me and she found it. So, Uncle Severus knows a way to make magic like breathing… he taught me and so I can fly!"

"Like breathing…" he frowned but there was a smile with Harry's frown as he recalled his father's secret about Passive and Active Magics. Harry looked up at his father and smiled. "You'll teach me to fly, Shadow."

Severus smiled slyly, "Like breathing, Magpie, I shall teach you so that you will believe you were flying from birth."

Lucius let out a bark of laughter as the two Slytherins exchanged a look of secrecy known only to those of that House of Hogwarts.

The birthday celebration continued with more presents than Harry thought he'd ever see in his life.

His grandfather presented him with a baker's dozen of socks that were in stripes, dots, argyle, and some that had individual toes. Of course, they were in every colour of the rainbow. Severus pretended, for his son's sake, that the socks were… remarkable. Harry never knew his father really wanted to Incendio the lot.

Narcissa Malfoy presented Harry with a set of formal robes and a suit woven from soft Dragon's Wool and Acromantula Silk. The suit was not black but an emerald green. The robes were black with silver embroidery on the collar and hem and it was lined with forest green satin. Harry wanted to wear his new robes and suit right then and there but Severus told him that there would be a special occasion in future during which he could wear them.

Draco's gift was a box for memories. The interior would grow in depth by 5 extra inches but the exterior would stay the same.

Harry studied the 'memory box' which measured 8x12x5 inches. The outside was a rich, dark
mahogany, lacquered to a high polish. Upon the lid were the words: Harry's Memories. The box had a lock and a key but the key would only work if Harry turned it. The key was on a grey, leather cord so he could wear it around his neck.

Severus had not gotten just the drawing tablet and broom for his son. As he suspected, he had gone overboard on the gifts, but with every smile from Harry he did not regret it. He had given Harry two extra pairs of trainers since he was already putting considerable mileage on the one pair he had. Their little magical trick was that if Harry tapped the top of both shoes with his index finger three times he could change the colour of the trainers.

Harry had to put on a pair of the new trainers immediately and spent time in between opening gifts changing the colour of the canvas of his trainers. Draco was jealous and managed to sidle up to his father to request his own pair of colour-changing trainers.

Lucius denied his son's request. He already had to get an owl for Draco's birthday.

Harry's father had also bought for him four new shirts to play in - green, blue, red, and yellow - and three pairs of black shorts. Severus justified the extra clothes as something a growing boy would need. Lastly he had gifted his son with a selection of interactive toys that appeared useful in teaching Harry to control his magic.

The birthday celebration continued until both little boys had dropped off to sleep. Draco fell asleep curled in his mother's lap, and Harry had curled up on his grandfather's lap. Nellie, the kneazle kit, slept on Severus lap where he (supposedly unknowingly) stroked her soft fur.

The adults made their farewells. Severus first put Nellie on the ground, divested his father of his grandson and lifted his child into his arms. Harry curled into him still fast asleep. Lucius removed his son from his wife's arms and smiled when Draco curled into his father.

Narcissa kissed her son's forehead and smiled up at her husband. "These last few days, Lucius, you have been a more pleasant spouse to me, and father to our son."

"No shade of Abraxxas?" he asked softly.

Narcissa shook her head. "I see only my Gentle Soul." Lucius leaned down slightly to accept the kiss to his cheek his wife bestowed. She then moved to Severus and he leaned down a little to accept a kiss to his cheek. "This has been a lovely day, Severus. It is so good to see how Draco and Harry have embraced each other." Very lightly she smoothed Harry's hair away from his sleeping face and she kissed the boy's warm cheek.

"I, too, am pleased, Narcissa," agreed Severus in a quiet voice. "I believe they shall be friends for life."

Severus had just placed Harry into his bed when he stirred, stretched, and smiled up at his father. "Hi, Shadow."

"Hello, Magpie," Severus glanced away as a small 'mew' at his foot caught his attention. Nellie was too small to jump up onto Harry's bed so she waited for assistance. The Potions Master picked her up, Summoned the new kneazle bed, and placed Nellie into it. "Was your birthday all that you thought it might be?"

"I never dreamed of anything like today, Shadow," Harry declared. He then grinned. "Can I go to school with Draco?"
"I believe he is being tutored at home, Magpie," Severus hedged.

Harry nodded. "I know. Draco told me that's what he was going to do but we want to learn together and make a whole bunch of new friends." Harry frowned. "Did you know him and me only have house elves to play with?"

Severus was struck momentarily speechless. He knew that Draco did not have any true friends. He had 'allies' but no one he could call a friend. He also had to admit that even though Harry had not played beyond where he was there were only house elves… and ghosts… in this castle.

"I shall speak to Draco's parents, Harry. If they agree, perhaps we may find a Primary school for both of you to attend," suggested Severus.

"Yay!" crowed Harry, startling Nellie from her sleep. "Oops. Shhh. Sorry, Dad."

"Time to sleep, Little Magpie," smirked Severus.

"You, too, Shadow," said Harry as he pulled his covers up to his nose.

"Most certainly," Severus agreed as he bent forward to his son's forehead. "Goodnight, Harry."

"G'night, Dad." He then turned his head slightly. "G'night, Nellie."
August was the month at Hogwarts when the staff returned from various vacations for the Summer and the castle hummed with the buzz of teachers preparing for class, house elves cleaning, the grumbling of Hogwarts caretaker Mr. Filch grumbling, and Hagrid tending to the grounds.

Harry discovered very quickly that both his father and grandfather were busy with their own work and the little boy would find himself alone but for Nellie, his kneazle.

The morning would be breakfast with his father but then Severus would assign a task for Harry, sometimes cleaning his room, but then there would be nothing but boredom.

That morning Severus should not have left a five year old boy to boredom but thoughts of the new term and his preparations had superseded common sense. He was only inviting trouble.

Harry had cleaned his bedroom, and when Nellie had fallen asleep under his bed after playing he had gone to his father's private lab in the hopes that there might be something for him to do. He'd even skin eels just to stave off the boredom!

The little boy pushed through the oak and iron barred door that appeared heavy but was not. He peered around it to hear his father cursing in a language he did not recognise. Deciding now was not the time to bother him Harry drew back behind the door, closed it, and climbed the stairs back to his and his father's apartment.

Harry sat down in his father's leather chair by the fireplace, and contemplated his feet. He was short.

*Well,* he thought to himself, *I am only five.*

For a moment boredom ended as a house elf appeared with lunch.

"Hi!" Harry welcomed the house elf. "Who are you?"

"I is Dipsy, Master Harry. I brings you lunch on schedule." The elf set out a sandwich, a glass of milk, and the child's Nutrition Potion.

"Will you eat with me, Dipsy? I'm bored," he sighed as he climbed up onto his chair at the table. "My dad was s'posed to be gone a 'moment'."

"Me is working in kitchen, Master Harry. Dipsy not allowed to eat with wizards." The house elf bobbed its head, and then vanished.

Harry sighed and took a bite of his sandwich. It tasted like sand. *Of course,* he thought quietly, *
I've never been around sand so I don't know what it really tastes like.*

He took another bite of his sandwich, and grimaced. "Sand would taste like this sandwich." Harry knew the sandwich really tasted just fine; better than fine, in fact. That was why he finished it so quickly. Dutifully he mixed some of his potion into his milk, drank it, and returned to his father's chair.

For awhile, at least, his head drooped and his eyes drifted close in sleep. He never heard his father stomp up the stairs from his private lab, rummage around in his desk, and he returned to his lab, all while muttering under his breath.
Severus sealed the crate that held all of the Hogwarts Infirmary potions for the beginning of the year. He Summoned a house elf to deliver the crate, and then he sat down at his desk to examine his checklist of preparations for the new term.

He had to inspect the dorms and common room of the Slytherin House once they were all cleaned. He had to do an inspection of his office, and classroom. There was also the visit to all the towers of Hogwarts to inspect their wards; wards of safety that would keep students from attempting hare-brained stunts (such as climbing up to the roof) or doing something as dreadful as leaping from the towers. These were wards that he, himself, had put into place in his first year on staff. Severus recalled, painfully, the many times he had climbed one of the towers thinking to do just that; jump.

He was tapping his quill, thinking of his students, when a frisson of dread slithered up his spine and lodged like a claw into his heart. HARRY!

Practically leaping from his desk he ran up the stairs to his apartment and hoped that he would find his son reading a picture book primer, or playing with Nellie. He was met with silence.

"Harry!" he yelled. There was no answer. "HARRY?!" The Potions Master strode to the fireplace, threw in the Floo powder, and shouted, "Headmaster's Tower... emergency!"

Severus was met by a concerned Headmaster who caught the younger wizard as he stepped through the green flames. "My boy, what's the matter?"

"Harry!" Severus blurted. "How could I... what an utter imbecile... I..."

"Severus! Tell me what is wrong?" the Headmaster demanded firmly.

The younger man glared at his father but in his eyes his anger was at himself. "Harry. My son. I left him… alone."

Albus let out a chiding sigh of relief. "I am sure that Harry will forgive…"

Severus shook his head and put a hand on the elder wizard's forearm. "You do not understand, Father. I left Harry alone and now… he is not there! He is gone!"

Albus' brow furrowed. "Gone? Severus, do you mean to tell me that he is, perhaps, hiding from you?"

"No, no, no…" Severus slumped into a guest chair. "Father, Harry is in trouble." Severus bent sharply as terror tore through his heart. Albus moved swiftly for an old man. One of Albus' thin hands rested on his son's back the other over the man's hand that covered his heart. Severus rasped, "This is what I felt when I was in my lab. It reminded me that I have a five year old dependent! Something is wrong. Wherever he is Harry needs my help but I do not know where to find him."
Albus squeezed his son's hand, and stroked the man's back briefly. He then straightened and moved
to his fireplace where he threw in a handful of Floo powder. "The same way Minerva, Remus, and I
found you in the dungeons, my boy." He turned just as the green flames whooshed into being.
"Remus, please come at once. And bring your map. Hurry."

"Lupin's here?" Severus asked a touch lamely. He knew Remus was coming back to Hogwarts but
not why.

"Remus brought Quirrell back from Transylvania," Albus said over his shoulder.

Severus frowned. Albus had told him that Quirrell, a Necromancer, who had taught Voldemort how
to create the Dark Mark, was being brought back to Britain. He did not recall if his father had told
him that it was Remus Lupin delivering the Necromancer. "Albus, did Quirrell tell you anything
about Voldemort? Where he might be?"

At that moment Remus stepped through into the Headmaster's tower from the Floo. He held a folded
parchment in his hands. Remus had heard Quirrell's name so he answered, "The UnSpeakables took
custody of Quirrell the moment I portkeyed to Britain from Transylvania, Severus."

Remus appeared his usual out-of-date self in a tweed suit and robes that had seen too many repairing
charms. Despite this, the suit and robes were clean, and the wizard's hair was still damp giving
evidence to a recent shower. Severus flicked his hand and silently, and without his wand, dried the
man's hair. Remus nodded his thanks.

Albus added, "It is unlikely we shall have a moment with the wizard since the UnSpeakables also
pronounced a sentence of death when they took custody."

Severus shook away the question that had popped into mind. His son needed him and he was lost.
"Lupin, I asked this before. How did you find me in the dungeons?"

Remus flourished his wand, "Di-Mensa," he cast and a table appeared. He enlarged the table and
lengthened the legs it so they could stand around it, and then he spread out the parchment. It was
entirely blank.

"Lupin…" warned Severus as he glowered down at the blank parchment.

"Patience, Severus," smirked the scruffy wizard. Severus only glared. A moment later his jaw was
ready to drop as the interior of Hogwarts spread across the parchment.

More than a simple blueprint of Hogwarts this magical map that showed rooms, dungeons, attics and
towers; there were also labels to every living human in the castle. In the Headmaster's tower there
were labels to show Severus, Remus, and the Headmaster. Scattered throughout the castle were
labels for each of the teachers, and Argus Filch.

"I… do not see… my son… on your map, Lupin," Severus said through gritted teeth.

Remus frowned. He then tapped his wand to the center of the map. "Show me Harry Potter."

Everyone held their breath until Severus grit out. "Harry. Snape." Remus glanced sideways at the
Potions Master. "That is his legal name, Lupin."

Remus' lips thinned, but then he tapped his wand to the map. "Show me Harry Snape."

Near the dungeons, to the southeast of the map, a black splotch bled outward as if someone had
spilled a bottle of ink. The splotch was not an even circle but began to resemble a slithering monster
that was mostly beneath Slytherin House. Just off-center of the blackness was a label that fluctuated in its appearance. Soon, it simply faded out.

"Harry!" blurted Severus. "What is that area?" he hit the map with his index finger. "How do we get there?"

Remus shook his head. "I… I've seen it before but whatever it is I don't know."

Albus was stroking his beard and frowning. He asked carefully, "Remus, is this the only black spot on your map or have their been others?"

Remus nodded, "I've seen this one, Albus, but James told me that he once saw one that obscured part of Hufflepuff. Sirius claimed that he saw a black spot near Ravenclaw and one that was under the Gryffindor tower."

Albus turned away and made his way over to the many shelves of books behind his desk. Both Remus and Severus were curious about the older man's actions but it was the Potions Master who spoke sharply, "What are you thinking of, Father?"

Albus did not reply right away as he continued to peruse his collection of tomes and scrolls and old journals. Finally he Summoned down a particularly ratty looking old portfolio that had several unattached pages sticking out between the covers of leather.

"What do you have there, Albus?" asked Remus.

Albus put the portfolio down on the surface of his desk. "A collection of original ideas and blueprints hand-drawn by the Founders before Hogwarts came into being." He sat at his chair as he carefully opened the portfolio and started to thumb through the pages. "I've been studying these in order to learn what I could about Hogwarts." He looked up and smiled. "There is so much to this castle we do not know about."

Severus was interested in the history lesson but not now. Impatiently he inquired, "Father, please, what does this have to do with my son?" He gasped and clutched at his heart.

"Severus?" worried Remus.

Albus pushed away from his desk and went to his son's side. He caught the younger wizard as the younger wizard dropped to his knees. Albus drew him closer. "My child… is it… Harry?"

"Magpie… Father, he's afraid of making a sound…" Severus straightened, took a deep breath and then declared softly, "He's terrified." He grasped Albus' forearm. "Tell me what it is you suspect."

"Come, Severus. Remus, you, too." The Headmaster returned to his desk and removed four blueprints from the portfolio that he laid out for the younger wizards to study. "Helga's Underground Garden… Rowena's Forbidden Library… Godric's Magnificent War Room… and Salazar's Chamber of Secrets."

"Those are mythical, Father!" Severus declared with frustration.

"I think not, my son," Albus replied gently. He moved to the table with the remarkable map. The black snake, for that is what it now looked like, was still there. There was also the faintly flickering of Harry's map-label. "This must be the Chamber of Secrets."

"That still does not get me to my son, Albus!" Severus slammed his fist upon the accursed map as a wave of his child's fear bit sharply at his heart.
Albus did not address his son's anger. He spoke soothingly but firmly. "Severus, dear boy, the portrait on the door to your quarters may be the key we need." The Headmaster summoned a house elf and asked the creature to bring the portrait to them. The elf nodded and vanished.

"Salazar Slytherin… how?" asked Severus hopefully.

"If the Chamber of Secrets truly exists, my boy," said Albus. "then he will know where it is and how to access it."

A Few Hours Earlier

Harry was not allowed to leave his and his father's apartment unless his father was with him. He really tried to obey that rule but the curiosity that he had kept suppressed for such a long time with the Dursleys had been set free when he learned of this magical world that he was now a part of. Then, there was this wonderful castle where he now lived. Harry knew there had to be so much more to it.

And so, with the thinking that he would return before his father even knew he left, Harry stepped out of the apartment and into the main dungeon corridor.

The corridor wasn't all that interesting but Harry knew it would lead to the Entrance Hall. From there he could go into the Great Hall and look at the beautiful ceiling.

The dungeons of Hogwarts, though, were not just one, main corridor. There were many and not all of them known to those that lived in the castle. The corridor Harry wandered was not well lit, either, he began to realise. Darkness lay between each torch and in that darkness there were shadows that tricked the eye. Some minutes later Harry wondered how long this corridor was. He never knew that he had taken a few turns that placed him into other corridors. The small boy was descending deeper into the dungeons rather than ascending to the Entrance Hall.

It was when Harry took another turn, and the torches on the wall no longer lit up at the presence of a living being, that he began to panic. The darkness and deceptive shadows drew in close, and he knew he was lost. Therefore he did the worst thing he could possibly do.

He ran.

Harry's eyes did adjust a little bit to the darkness but the shadows seemed to be doing their best to completely disorient him. Three times he ran into stone walls. He allowed his fingers to find new turns and he kept hoping that he would see torches, and maybe even the Entrance Hall.

After ten minutes of running, hitting walls, and falling several times he knew he was crying. Hogwarts had swallowed him and maybe it would never let him go. He wanted his daddy. He wanted his grandpa. He wanted to yell for them but he was afraid of doing so. Harry had begun, he swore, to hear a hissing and the rasp of something slithering beside him. It was a troll. He was sure of it.

He turned a corner once more and this time when he ran into something it wasn't a wall. It felt cool to his touch but it breathed. It was also as tall of he was.

And, then it surrounded him.

Harry screamed! The trolls were going to eat him! They had him!

Breath rasped across his face, and Harry trembled.
"P-p-please don't eat me!" he begged.

Again he screamed as something leathery caught him, wrapped him up, and pulled him against the troll. At that point Harry was far too frightened to understand or even guess what held him. He fainted.

The pain in his heart left him as suddenly as it arrived. Severus was now frightened; if he could not sense his son… was he dead?

The house elf brought the portrait of Salazar Slytherin at the moment the Potions Master collapsed into a nearby chair. Albus was pleased to see the painting but he was swamped by a miasma of fear that threatened to remove his feet from under him. His son was the one with fear at this moment. He moved to Severus, conjured a chair, and sat beside him as he took the younger man's hand in his own. Far away his mind wondered… what had the Fidelus Adopto opened between he and Severus, and between Severus and Harry?

"I cannot sense him, Father," whispered Severus, not wishing Remus to hear.

Remus, though, was endowed with the hearing of the wolf within; he heard. Wisely, though, he pretended he had not. Albus looked up. "Remus, bring the portrait here, would you?"

Remus, with the painting of the Founder Salazar Slytherin behind him, brought it over to the two wizards together; their hands tightly clasped. The emotion of fear and caring that arced between them Remus could not miss. For the tiniest second, a moment of thought, a quick flash of green envy filled his thoughts. In a breath, he had forced away the inappropriate feeling.

"My child," Albus squeezed his son's hand that he still held. "Salazar will only speak to you. Ask him about the Chamber."

Severus returned the gentle pressure on his hand from his father. Closing his eyes a moment he Occluded the desperation that sought his son, and faced the portrait.

"Salazar, does the Chamber of Secrets exist?" asked Severus tersely.

Salazar, dressed as he had been in life, the figure of a court wizard to a Muggle king, lifted his bearded head. "The Chamber of Secrets is real, Severus. Each of the Founders created a room to house their greatest secrets."

"Lupin! The map," ordered the Potions Master. Remus gathered the map and had folded it in such a way that the black snake could be seen in the parchment's reduced size. Severus pointed at the blank spot in the shape of a serpent. "Is that it?"

"Aye," nodded Salazar Slytherin.

"Then tell me where the entrance is so we may access it," ordered Severus as his heart soared with renewed hope.

"The entrance is beneath the sinks in the 2nd floor girls bathroom," revealed Salazar. "However, unless one of you three is a Parselmouth you will need to take me with you." Salazar turned his head to the Headmaster. "Professor Dumbledore, I suggest you carry the small, empty portrait. I shall meet you." With that, the Founder of Slytherin rose from his ornate throne, stepped to the edge of the frame of his portrait, and vanished.

"He has never done that before," mused Severus. He then looked questioningly at his father. "What
Albus smiled, rose from his chair, and cast a Summons. There was a rustling from somewhere in the
tower room, and then an indignant 'grump' from the Sorting Hat high on a shelf overlooking the
room. It had been rudely displaced as a frame with an empty canvas shot out from underneath it and
down into the Headmaster's hand. As Albus held the empty portrait, a hand height in length and just
as wide, for his son to inspect, Salazar Slytherin entered from the left of the frame.

"Let's go, Professor Dumbledore," called Salazar Slytherin.

Remus went to retrieve his map but froze for a moment when he saw a particular label near Harry's
that chilled him to the bone. Hurriedly he murmured to the map. It rapidly folded itself and Remus
tucked it into his trouser pocket. He then caught up to Albus and Severus who were already on their
way down the tower stairs.

Harry wakened shivering. Whether it was the chill where he was or fear he could not say. A roar and
a great, frustrated thumping woke him. He wished it had not. Being unconscious was so much easier.

And, the troll still had him. It had curled itself around him keeping him trapped.

Harry did find it odd that the troll did not smell bad. In fact, it had an aroma of apple blossoms!
"That's not right," Harry whispered to himself. He hoped the sound of his own voice would calm
him but he had squeaked.

Or, had he? No! Something else squeaked. Not too far away and it sounded mad. The squeaks
became rapid chittering and Harry gulped, trembled, as the troll slithered, and thumped the ground
again. Harry figured the thumping was the troll's club. They always had clubs to smash their dinner,
didn't they?

The squeaking faded and moments, seconds, or just a blink, and the troll was breathing softly into his
ear. The troll hissed.

"Don't eat me," Harry begged. "I'm skinny. Mostly bones. Not a whole lot of meat. I probably don't
taste too good, either."

In reply a forked tongue very gently licked his cheek and neck. Harry shuddered. The troll was
tasting him!

"Oh! I want to see," his thoughts cried. Another part of him yelled at those thoughts, _Shut up! I don't
want to see the troll!_

As if someone heard his arguing thoughts, light began to thread its way into the chamber. Harry
could barely make out where he was, or what had him but he could tell that it wasn't a troll. A head
with glittering crimson eyes was settled at his feet. The huge head was bigger than he was; at least
twice as large. As the light in the distance came closer Harry could finally tell that it looked like a
large, snakey dragon was coiled around him.

"Cover your eyes!" came a shout from ahead. "It's a basilisk!" Harry did not recognise the voice.

An older voice replied urgently, "NO! Her eyes are shadowed! She won't hurt you!"

"Harry!"

That voice the boy did recognise. He stiffened, afraid to say a word.
"Magpie! Tis Shadow!"

Harry was still afraid to answer.

"Albus, kill the basilisk!" demanded Severus. With the torch light he could just barely see the head of his son. A basilisk of such a huge size it dwarfed the Potions Master, the Headmaster, and Remus, did not deter Severus from wanting to reach his child.

"NO!" roared Salazar Slytherin from his portrait. "Put down your wand, Albus."

Albus spoke, "The legend says you left a monster to destroy all Muggle-born. It will kill Harry!"

"Bloody, damned legend is all wrong, Albus!" growled Salazar. "I left Blossom to PROTECT the Muggle-born not to destroy them. They were children without protection and they needed it since their families were left to Muggle witch hunters. Take me to her, please. I am the only one who can speak to her."

Severus snatched the portrait of Salazar Slytherin from his father and strode over to the head of the great beast. His son was behind the basilisk's head and even though the shadows made the torch light difficult he could see that Harry was trembling.

Salazar began to hiss at the beast and her head lifted as she turned one, crimson-faceted eye upon the small portrait. A moment later the basilisk appeared to hiss in reply. Severus discerned that they were speaking Parseltongue.

"Daddy?" Harry managed a small whisper.

"Shh, Magpie. I am here and you are fine. The basilisk is not trying to hurt you," assured Severus. "What are you two saying Salazar?" interrupted the Potions Master.

"Blossom has felt evil within the corridors of Hogwarts, Severus. She has been trying to track it but has been unable until now," replied the old Founder.

"Evil? Was it after my son?" asked Severus.

"Yes. The evil found your son in the depths of the dungeons and was following him. Your son was not aware that Blossom was in the depths as well, patrolling and seeking that evil. Blossom took your son to keep him safe, Severus."

"Will she allow me to take my son back?" Severus knew the basilisk would not harm him but it was far too large for him to take any chances.

For a few moments Salazar hissed in Parseltongue to Blossom. The great beast shifted, and Harry was free to run to his father. Severus knelt, caught his son, and held as tightly to him as the boy held onto him. Harry squeaked eventually. The Potions Master chuckled in relief and kissed his son's forehead.

The basilisk hissed at Salazar and then the portrait called up to the young wizard. "Severus, Blossom knows what shape the evil is but it is too small for her to catch."

"What is it?" asked Severus. "We will catch it."


Severus' lips thinned. "The rodent that has managed to get into my private lab." He turned to the
Founder. "Thank Blossom for us all and let her know that we shall catch the rat, Salazar."

For several, long moments portrait and beast spoke in the hissing language until the basilisk shifted and quickly, despite her size, slithered away into the shadows.

Severus rose to his feet, still holding his son. He had cast a Featherlight Charm to lessen Harry's weight. He returned to Albus and Remus. "A rat, Father. The Animagus that has gotten into my private lab. It was following Harry."

Remus finally spoke up, "I saw it, Severus, Albus. The rat is an Animagus." Only for a moment did he hesitate. "Peter Pettigrew."

Severus was angry. Quite possibly more angry than he'd been in a long time. Without looking at Remus he turned to his father, "I must take care of my son, Father." With no more explanation than that, Severus left the Chamber of Secrets.

At the long pipe that led from the second floor bathroom sinks to below the castle, Harry craned his neck upward. "There aren't any steps, Shadow. How are we going to get back up there?"

"Secrets, Magpie," whispered Severus with a conspiratorial tone. He tapped his son's nose and said, "Libero!" The Potions Master held tight to his son as they both began to rise off the floor and upwards through the pipe.

Harry let out a squeal and a laugh, "You're flying, Shadow! You're a superhero!"

Severus landed up on the second floor of the girl's abandoned bathroom where a ghost with glasses, and ponytails, watched them. With narrowed eyes he glare at the ghost and before she could zip away to one of her toilets, he waved his hand and cast, "Obliviate. You will never tell a soul what you witnessed Miss Myrtle." The ghost faded away.

"What'd you do, Shadow?" asked Harry in puzzlement.

"I removed her memory of what she saw, Magpie," Severus said simply.

"But… she's a ghost! Ummm… she doesn't even have a memory to change. Right?" Harry looked over his father's shoulder as they left the bathroom.

"Nearly correct, my curious Magpie. The memory of a ghost is not held in place with a brain as a living being has. This means that their memories, of which they do have, tend to be extremely randomised. The ghost, Moaning Myrtle, or as I choose to call her Miss Myrtle, would have retained what she saw. It is a secret she would have kept to herself until someone asked her the right question to trigger that particular memory. Therefore, I removed it."

The Potions Master did not mention to his son that touching a ghost's memories, as he had, was very dangerous. At the very least, what he could have done, was opened himself up for possession. It was to his advantage that as Hogwarts ghosts went, Moaning Myrtle was very young and she still retained a memory once influenced by the functioning of a living brain.

For the rest of the journey down to their quarters Harry wrapped his arms around his father's neck and nestled his head between the man's shoulder and cheek. When they finally stepped through into their apartment Harry drew in an audible sigh of relief.

Severus gently disentangled his son from around his throat and settled the child onto his feet. "Get in your pyjamas and get into bed. I shall be there shortly."
Harry caught the terse note in his father's voice. He touched the man's forearm. "Daddy? Are you mad at me?"

Severus turned and touched his child's head. "Not at you, Magpie. I am, though, angry at Mr. Lupin. I shall resolve that while you are taking your nap. Now, to your bedroom and into bed. I shall be there."

Harry nodded and then trotted towards his bedroom to get ready for bed. Severus turned to his small kitchenette that really only had space to heat water. He decided he would remedy that aspect later. For now, he heated water in a kettle, took a blue, ceramic mug from his cupboard, and put himself to work.

In his bedroom Harry found Nellie on his bed. She stretched as she woke, trotted over to him and meowed in greeting. He flopped onto his tummy to pet his kneazle.

"Hi, Nellie. I met a really giant snake. She's not a snake, though. I heard someone call her a 'basilisk'. I think. Her name's Blossom and she smells like apples." Harry pushed himself off his bed and he went to his wardrobe. He dug out his black pyjamas, threw them on the bed, and then he began divesting himself of his clothing. Naked as a jaybird he sprinted to his bed, slipped on his pyjamas, and wriggled into bed. Nellie jumped in little leaps up Harry's legs, to his belly, and to his chest. Once near his face she rubbed her cheek against his.

"Did you know Blossom was protecting me, Nellie? I thought she was a troll but that was because I couldn't see anything." He stared up at his ceiling of the night sky as Nellie settled in her kneazle bed. He then turned on his side to face his familiar. "Nellie? There was something else with me and Blossom. She was trying to catch it but she couldn't. It was really small. Maybe… well, you're still a kitten. You couldn't find a small thing and squash it." He stretched out a hand and stroked her grey-furred head and her blue limned ears.

"Do not encourage her, Little Magpie," cautioned Severus. He brought a mug that was steaming over to his son. He handed it to him. "Scoot over."

Harry did so and then looked in the mug. "Hot chocolate!" He inhaled the brew and smiled in pure bliss. "I never had hot chocolate before, Shadow. Does it always smell so good?"

Severus settled down beside his son. "I have always thought so. By the by, I have put a dose of Calming Potion in it to ease you into sleep. Hopefully you will not have any nightmares."

Harry blew across the surface of his hot drink, took a wary sip, then glanced at his father. "You think I might get nightmares tonight?"

"Tis possible, Magpie. I… felt your fear. I would be rather surprised if you did not have any troubling dreams," replied Severus.

"You got scared?" His father nodded. "I hope you don't have bad dreams."

Severus smiled and kissed his son's forehead. "It is possible that if we speak of our fears now we might not have nightmares, Magpie. Would you care to tell me anything about what happened."

Harry was hesitant but he did lean into his father's side. "Would you tell me first why you were scared, Shadow?"

Severus took a deep breath. He then spoke carefully, "At first I only felt your fear, Magpie. It was when I returned from the lab and found that you were missing that my fear was for you." He closed his eyes. "It hardly feels like it has been only a short time since the adoption but you have found your
way into… into my heart and soul. I cannot imagine my world without you, my dearest Magpie.”
Severus hugged the boy close and spoke quietly into his ear. "I was terrified of not being there when you needed me. I was horribly afraid I might lose you.

Harry slipped an arm over his father's waist and hugged him. Severus Vanished the mug of hot chocolate that was nearly empty. That allowed father and son to comfort each other better.

"I was scared of all the darkness, Shadow. It's not like the black that's a colour of robes. It's huge and it's full of terrible things that hide in the darker places of the dark." He shuddered, and held tighter to his father. "When Uncle Vernon threw me under the bridge I was already in the dark of my mind and that was weird but I knew it wasn't bad. I… woke from that 'cause I think I hit my head when I fell. I couldn't see and everything was that awful darkness. I knew the trolls were in it. They wanted to eat me."

The little boy shifted so he was supporting himself on one elbow and he could look into his father's eyes. "I know Uncle Vernon was making up a bad story to scare me, Shadow, but… I met Thestrals, and Unicorns, and Hagrid told me all about dragons." He shrugged. "I guess basilisks are real since Blossom is one. Dad? Are there really trolls in this world?"

"I will not tell you otherwise, Harry," sighed Severus. "There are trolls but they dwell in the mountains."

"Do they eat little boys?" he asked warily.

Severus replied, "I have never heard of trolls eating little boys, or full grown wizards. They tend to hunt deer and bear." He then leaned in, and whispered, "I will never allow a troll to eat my son." The Potions Master then tickled the little boy's ribs causing him to squirm and giggle.

Harry dove under his covers, then peeked out. "G'night, Dad."

Severus rose from Harry's bed, moved to the door and turned out the evening light. "Good night, Harry. I will wake you in a few hours for dinner."
I Always Wanted to Punch a Werewolf

Chapter Notes

*Ka (vital spark) - The Ka was the Egyptian concept of vital essence, that which distinguishes the difference between a living and a dead person, with death occurring when the ka left the body. The Egyptians believed that Khnum created the bodies of children on a potter's wheel and inserted them into their mothers' bodies. Depending on the region, Egyptians believed that Heket or Meskhenet was the creator of each person's Ka, breathing it into them at the instant of their birth as the part of their soul that made them be alive.

5 August 1985 - Early Evening, Headmaster's Tower

Severus strode into the Headmaster's office and looked around. "Lupin. Good. You are still here."

Remus rose warily from his chair. The menace radiating off the wizard that had just arrived boded ill. "Yes. We were talking about what to do about Peter…"

Severus lashed out with a quickness that Remus did not expect. He might have expected at least a hex but the man's fist to his cheekbone he did not. Remus fell backwards, tripped by the chair he had recently vacated.

"Severus!" Albus shouted rising to his feet.

Remus was not going to remain on the ground to be beaten any further. He jumped up and rammed the Potions Master in the abdomen, knocking him into a glass stand of curios. Albus shouted at Remus but he was ignored again as Severus jumped to his feet and tackled the werewolf. They both slammed to the floor and began to wrestle, throwing punches here and there.

All of a sudden both men were ripped one from the other and flung into chairs where they were stuck with a Sticking Charm. Both started to protest as they tried to break the charm holding them in place but there was no doddering, old Headmaster facing them. This was the wizard Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, and he was angry.

"Whatever is the matter with the two of you? Acting like little schoolboys dusting the pavement." He shook his head. "You both shame me."

"I was defending myself, Albus!" growled Remus.

"You are lucky I only hit you, Lupin," snarled Severus.

"STOP!" roared Albus.

Both wizards shrunk in their chairs as they felt magic that had terrified novices, eddy about them like the crashing waves of the sea. Severus noted the scent of the sea, the salty tang in the air, and he recalled that Albus once told him that he had long associated himself with water. The sea.

The wave faded and Albus, tired from his expedition of magic, fell wearily into his desk chair. He addressed his son, "Why the attack, Severus?"
"Peter Pettigrew," he almost mumbled. He shot Remus a dark glare. "You knew he was alive, and trying to kill my son!"

"I did not! I learned the truth as we were leaving the Headmaster's tower, you hot-headed, gormless, duffer!" retorted Remus.

"You knew he was an Animagus!" snarled Severus. "How long? Since we were students? Did he escape Black instead of getting killed by him? Answer me!"

"Stop asking your damn questions and I will!" Remus tugged against his magical bonds, then slumped.

"Remus," spoke the voice of calm, "tell us what you know."

"I was folding up the map to take with us, Albus," Remus sighed hotly. "I saw the name Peter Pettigrew in the Chamber of Secrets. We had to get to Harry so I doubted the last thing you, or Severus would want was to learn of my discovery. It could wait." He glared hard at the Potions Master. "Couldn't it, Severus?"

"Yes," Severus ground out reluctantly. He then accused, "But you knew he was an Animagus. How long?"

Remus hesitated as thoughts of his best friends pained him. He sighed, then replied, "James, Peter, and Sirius all became Animagi in our 5th year so that they could be with me when I… changed. The… werewolf… would not attack them as animals." He pinched the bridge of his nose. "It was James' idea."

Severus' eyes widened but it was Albus who asked in shock, "They let you out of the Shrieking Shack?"

"Sirius did, Albus. He was sure that the werewolf was more agitated by being locked up. If he… I… were allowed to run free…"

"They let you free?" asked Severus incredulously.

"Fools!" Albus exploded and his magic rose up darkly again. "If I could I'd send the lot of you to Azkaban!" He moved around his desk to look down upon the man struggling in his confines. "You said nothing to them? Certainly not to me. You knew as well as they did that by allowing you your freedom as the werewolf, they and you, were putting the entire school in danger." Albus began to pace. "If the Centaurs had caught you, Remus, they would have torn you apart! They are the only magical creatures capable of subduing a werewolf, and destroying it."

To Remus' shock the elder wizard whirled upon him and slapped him soundly. "I… risked… everything… to bring you to Hogwarts, Remus. I wanted to show our world that a werewolf could be educated. That he or she could control their magic, and then themselves." Albus turned to his son as he pulled at his beard. "I have said this before, Severus, but I say again… I am so very sorry for not having better protected you. My actions… sweet Merlin… my inaction allowed Sirius to get by with a slap on the wrist. Had I but known…"

"Stop it, Father," sighed Severus, partially embarrassed. "No one knew."

Albus moved closer to his son, and put his hand upon the younger's shoulder. Briefly he stroked the man's cheek with his dry knuckles, and released the Sticking Charm. He then faced Remus. "Peter Pettigrew was a rat Animagus, wasn't he?"
Remus nodded. "James was a stag, and Sirius was a dog. Specifically, a Grim."

Albus waved his hand to release the Sticking Charm from Remus and then he returned to his desk and seated himself. "Peter has to be caught. Blossom and Salazar both called him 'evil'. We need to know what happened the night he was supposed to have been killed, and then we need to know if he knows the whereabouts of Voldemort's Ka*. If he does then he must tell us."

Remus sat up. "Are you implying that Sirius might be innocent, Albus?"

Albus' lips thinned. "We have to catch Peter, first." He then looked to his son. "Severus, I would like your help in adding a ward to trap the Animagus in the castle. If he gets out…"

Severus nodded. "Remus, can you track the rat on your map?"

"I can," nodded the werewolf. He stood up and opened the map on the table he had conjured earlier. "Peter's on the fourth floor!"


As the two men, father and son left together, Remus looked up from his map and watched them. He touched his still red cheek where he had been slapped by Albus. He had long felt as though he had the fond favour of the Headmaster. Now, he felt as though he had been thrown out with the trash. And, it rankled that Albus had chosen Snape over him.

**Hogwarts Grounds - Dusk**

Severus sat upon the ground beside his father. Both wizards leaned on each other full of exhaustion from the new ward they had constructed around the castle.

"I am too old for this, my dear," Albus wheezed. "I just want to sleep." His head drooped and his eyes closed despite his fight to keep them open.

Although he had his own exhaustion to contend with he scrambled to his knees and caught Albus against his chest. Lightly he slapped the older man's cheeks. "Father, come along now. Stay awake. Father... please..." Severus choked back a sob that threatened to escape. "Father..."

Severus grimaced as he pulled the older man entirely onto his lap so that he could lift him in his arms. Once on his own feet, a Featherlight Charm aiding his carrying of Albus, he ran to the castle. It was not until he reached the door of the Infirmary that the Potions Master allowed himself to fall to his knees.

"POPPY!" Severus shouted with his last breath.

The Healer appeared at once and half-skidded on her knees to reach Severus and Albus. "What happened, Severus?"

"Magical Exhaustion," he breathed heavily. "Albus and I were erecting a new ward around Hogwarts. We had just finished and he passed out. Will he be all right?"

Poppy did one last Diagnostic Spell, nodded, and then directed. "He... and you, are going to need a good deal of sleep. Let's get him up to one of the beds." The Matron helped to lift Albus, get him into a bed, and covered him.

"I cannot spell him into pyjamas, Poppy," sighed Severus. He immediately yawned.
"I'll take care of that, Severus. You get yourself into bed and..."

"Poppy I cannot," Severus shook his head. "Harry needs to be wakened for dinner, and he has had a terrible afternoon, and..." Severus swayed and Poppy, always a quick thinking Healer, sent a bed near the Potions Master and he toppled onto it.

Poppy threw another spell at the young wizard as he snorted with a snore. Her spell deftly tucked him into the bed. She then went over and cast a Diagnostic Spell over him. Once she had the results, she patted the Potions Master's cheek. "Don't you worry, Severus, I'll see to Harry."

The Healer dealt with her patients and then she summoned a house elf. With big, brown eyes and a tea towel with the Infirmary crest on it, it bobbed its head. "Yes, Mistress Healer. What can Leelee do for you?"

"Have dinner sent up here for Harry Snape, and then I'd like you to bring him here so he knows his father and grandfather are all right," instructed Poppy.

"Leelee do, Mistress!" the house elf vanished.

Poppy returned to her patients where she waved her wand and put them each into comfortable pyjamas. She then dosed each of the sleeping wizards with a Magical Regeneration Potion and an Internal Equilibrium Potion to keep their bodies in chemical balance as they healed. By the time she was finished with those tasks the house elf returned with Harry.

Harry was in his pyjamas, a cotton plush robe of purple and slippers that matched. He was a bit bleary-eyed and bewildered. "Madame Pomfrey?" he asked softly.

"I brings dinner!" the house elf declared and popped out.

Poppy went to the small boy. "Harry. You're going to spend the night here with your father and grandfather." She stepped aside so he could see his family.

Harry ran to his father and wrapped his fingers in his limp hand. "Daddy? What happened? Are you okay?"

Poppy had conjured a chair for Harry between his father and grandfather. "Sit here, dear." Harry would not move. "I assure you that your father and grandfather are both all right. They're just sleeping."

"Why?" asked Harry.

"They were both doing work involving strong magic and it exhausted them," the Healer replied.

"Like my magic is exhausted?" he surmised.

"Not as much as yours is, dear, but it is similar," Poppy said.

"Dinner!" the house elf Leelee returned with a covered platter of food. Leaving the platter to hover she snapped her fingers and a small table appeared in front of Harry with silverware and a napkin. The elf sent the platter to the table. She smiled at the child. "Now, you eats it all and don't forget your potion, Master Snape."

"I will. Thank you," replied Harry. As soon as the house elf was gone Harry looked from his food to his father. He wanted permission to eat, or maybe not. He wasn't sure.
Poppy conjured a chair and sat beside Harry. "May I sit with you while you eat, Harry? I've had dinner but I don't want to sit alone in my office."

Harry smiled shyly. "Sure you can, Madame Pomfrey."

"Why don't you call me Poppy? At least until term starts," she suggested.

"Okay, Poppy," Harry smiled again and ate some vegetables. He then glanced at his father. "Dad's not going to be able to read to me tonight," he sighed sadly.

Poppy inquired, "Is that something you and your father do every night?"

Harry nodded, then drank some of his milk. "He's reading to me 20,000 thousand hundred leagues Under the Sea, Poppy. It's a really good story."

"Would you tell me about it?" she smiled.

"Well, it's sort of about Ned who's looking for adventure and gold but then he meets Captain Nemo. Nemo seems like he's nice but he really isn't. Dad and I are at the part right before a giant sea monster attacks." He looked again to his father. "How long does he have to sleep?"

"The expected time is 24 to 48 hours of sleep. Severus' body tends to heal quickly so he may not sleep the entire 48 hours," she replied. "Albus may sleep a bit longer since he is rather old."

"Just like the 2,000 year old man!" blurted Harry.

Poppy gave him a puzzled look. "Is there a man that old in the Muggle world, Harry?"

Harry shook his head. "I heard it one night on the television set when I was in my cupboard. It's a really funny play about a reporter interviewing a man who's lived 2,000 years. The old man is kinda weird and makes all sorts of funny observations about history." Harry finished his mashed potatoes. After some thought he asked, "Poppy? I know the Magic world doesn't have televisions. What sort of stuff do wizards have besides books?"

"Hmm, well, the theatre is very popular. Wizards communities do have local theatres and acting troupes but we can travel to the Muggle world to see their theatre," revealed the Healer. "We don't have concert venues but there are a number of musicians that work in the Muggle world and play their music there."

"I've never gone to a Muggle movie but Dudley told me all about Bambi." His lips thinned. "It was a sad movie and I think Dudley told me just to make me cry. Bambi is an orphan fawn 'cause his mum gets killed by hunters. I always wondered if Bambi grew up with a happy life."

"Well, Harry, I'm certain your father could help you to find out. Perhaps there is a book of Bambi's story," she patted his arm. "There is also a wonderful acting troupe in Hogsmeade that does Saturday Afternoon plays just for children. You might ask your father if he'd take you."

"Could you come, Poppy?" asked Harry hopefully.

Poppy suddenly blushed. She rather liked the Potions Master and next to Albus he was the only other one on staff who knew of her secret. She appeared 20 years older than Severus but that was helped by a Glamour she wore. She was really only seven years older than him.

"I don't know, Harry. If your father would ask me to go to the theatre with both of you," she said carefully, "I would love to."
Harry pushed his empty plate away as he ate the last bite of steak. He surveyed the Infirmary and then brought his gaze back to his sleeping family. "If my kneazle were here I could maybe play with her," suggested Harry.

"I'll ask Leelee to bring her," replied Poppy. "And, perhaps a book I could read to you?"

"Dumbo!" declared Harry. "Mr. Filch has a bunch of stuff he's... con-fee-skated... and there were some story books but this one has pictures. He gave them to me."

"What a very nice thing for him to do," smiled Poppy. "There's a bathroom over there," she pointed towards a simple looking door. "Go wash your hands and I'll talk to Leelee."

"Okay, Poppy!" Harry slid off his chair, ran to the bathroom, skidded to a stop, turned back and trotted back to his father and grandfather. He kissed each of them on their cheeks, and then he went back to the bathroom.

"Leelee!" called Poppy with a chuckle on her lips.

The house elf popped into view. "What can Leelee do for Mistress Healer?"

"Leelee, would you find Master Harry's cat and his book titled Dumbo. Also, if he has any colouring books and crayons you might bring those, too."

"I can do, Mistress!" Leelee popped away with a grin.

Harry stepped out of the bathroom, eyed his father and grandfather, and then looked for Madame Pomfrey.

"Harry, come with me," she said crooking her finger. "I want to show you something the students rarely get to see."

Harry's face lit up. "You got a secret?"

Poppy chuckled. "I do, Harry." Poppy went over to one of the long windows that were diamond-paned glass. Tapping the sill with her wand the sill dropped to the floor and the window lengthened. It was now no longer a simple window but it was now glassed doors that led out onto a mezzanine of beauty.

Built on one outer wall of the infirmary was a glass covered porch that held a profusion of hanging ferns and flowers, in pots were small trees that had been lush with fruit earlier in the season. Chairs of wicker with thick cushions were around round tables scattered the length of the mezzanine. Since it was now dark outside fairy lamps hovering amongst the greenery leant a soft glow of comfort to the entire place.

"You got your own jungle, Poppy!" enthused Harry. "I have a jungle, too, that dad painted for me in my room. I really like this."

"Wonderful, Harry," she was inordinately pleased that the little boy liked her garden. Hagrid had used his extra muscle in helping Poppy's design of the mezzanine come to life. Pomona Sprout had offered her knowledge of all the plant life and little secrets to assist in growing them. "Pick a place that you like and I'll make a little play area."

"Mistress Healer! Leelee is back!" On the house elf's shoulder was the little kneazle and in her hands was a book, and a box of crayons, and a colouring book.
"Nellie!" cried Harry. The kneazle jumped from the elf’s shoulder and trotted over to Harry. He stroked her head and scratched her ears.

The elf handed the remaining items to Poppy and then she vanished.

"Where should I make a play place, Harry?" asked the Healer.

Harry looked around, then pointed. "How about there? We can see the lights of Hogsmeade and the moon." He then watched the witch perform a few magic spells. One was a Cushioning Charm, then she conjured a thick blanket that threw itself out over the Cushioning Charmed spot. Finally, Poppy hovered the book, crayons, and pictures for colouring onto the play area. Harry clapped in approval. "Can I sit down, now?"

"Of course," nodded Poppy. Harry settled with his kneazle and Poppy sat down gracefully beside him. From her pocket she took out some small, shiny balls of crumpled, colourful foil. "I thought Nellie might like to play with these."

For several minutes both Poppy and Harry tossed about the shiny balls for Nellie to stalk and attack. They laughed or giggled when the kneazle rolled over as if the toy got the better of her, and cheered when she "caught and subdued" the toy. After a time Nellie grew tired and retired to a corner of the blanket that she scratched at until it was ‘perfect’ and so she curled up to sleep.

Harry was still wired so Poppy settled him with the crayons and a colouring books of tall, wizarding ships. Harry stretched out on his tummy with the box of crayons to his left and the book of heavy weight pages in front of him.

"Poppy? What's different about wizard ships than Muggle ships?" asked Harry.

"Muggles don't sail on tall ships anymore, Harry," she began. "Wizards still use them but our ships have sailed under the water since the 19th century."

Harry looked up, "Under the water?"

"Mmhmm," Poppy nodded as she grabbed a crayon to help Harry in colouring the ship he was working on. "A wizard ship's captain designed the ward that allows ships to sail beneath the ocean."

For a moment the little boy watched as the older witch carefully coloured a sail on the ship. "That's red," he commented. "Do wizard ships have red sails?"

"The sails tend to appear black under the water but that allows the crests, usually in yellow or white, to show up brilliantly. It is the crest that identifies the ship," revealed Poppy.

"Oh, that makes sense." Harry studied the crayons then selected a yellow one. He began to colour the crest. "What's this say, Poppy?" the child asked as he pointed with his crayon at a caption above the ship.

"That says..." Poppy read the words to herself and then aloud she read the words putting her finger under each word, "The... IMS Sharkweed." The Healer added, "IMS stands for International Magical Ship."

Harry finished the crest so he chose another crayon, a brown one, to colour the ship's hull. "I wonder if they ever got attacked by sea monsters," mused Harry.

"Oooh, they did, Harry," replied Poppy. "My Auntie Rose told me a story about her own father who was captain of a merchant wizarding ship in the late 1890s. His name was Oliver Coffin and his ship
was the Woden. He would ship bolts of luxurious fabrics of Acromantula Silk, Dragon's Down, Goblin Gossamer, Pulie's Crepe, Winter Wool, Hollander Linen, and Rootstock Cotton to all the major wizarding towns. One night, on a run from Greece to the hidden port in Cornwall his ship was attacked by a huge, many tentacled monster that rose up from the depths of the sea to wrap itself around the ship.

Harry had stopped colouring to listen to Poppy's story. The Healer continued, "The monster was so huge that when it breached the surface of the ocean it carried the ship with it... up, up, and up. Then... **crash!** The monster *threw* the ship onto the rocks of the nearby shore, splintering it into thousands of pieces."

"Did anyone survive?" whispered Harry in awe.

"The ship's cook, the cabin boy, and Captain Coffin's familiar, an African green parrot," Poppy replied sadly.

Harry scrambled to his knees, and threw his arms around the Healer. "Don't cry, Poppy! I didn't mean to make you cry."

Poppy hugged the little boy. "You're such a sweet child, Harry. It's a sad story but Auntie Rose's father is considered a hero because the one thing his parrot said when it returned to shore was, 'Cap'n killed the beastie! Cap'n killed the beastie!'"

Harry breathed a huge sigh of relief. "That's wicked!" He then yawned. "Oops!"

"Ah, it looks like someone is ready for bed. I had Leelee bring your Dumbo book, Harry. Should I read it to you?" asked Poppy as she stood and offered her hand to the boy.

"Oh yes! Please!" Harry jumped to his feet and took Poppy's hand. "Dad gave the pictures magic so they all move, did you know he could do that?"

"Really? What a talented gentleman your father is," smiled Poppy. "Go say good night to your father and grandfather, and then I'll tuck you in."

Harry ran over to the two beds where his family still lay sleeping. He kissed his grandfather's cheek, then his father. Before he trotted to his bed he leaned over and whispered into his father's ear, "Shadow, when you wake up could we go see a play and bring Poppy with us? She's been ever so nice and I like her." He kissed his father good night a second time then went over to the bed Poppy had prepared for him.

The little boy climbed into bed, then scooted over to give Poppy room to sit beside him and read. Poppy removed her shoes then settled herself beside Harry. She opened the book to show the first image which was of the little baby Dumbo. Dumbo's mother, Mrs. Jumbo held her little baby in her trunk to rock him to sleep as she sang. She didn't care that her beautiful baby had the largest ears anyone had ever seen.

Halfway through the story Harry nodded off. Poppy closed the book, put it on the bedside table, rose, and Summoned Nellie to sleep beside her boy. She then checked on her two patients, cast a Diagnostic Spell over each, then dimmed the light of the Infirmary. Poppy then vanished through her office door to retire to her own chamber for the night.

About a half-hour after the matron left, a harried, and put out Remus Lupin arrived in the Infirmary. He saw the two sleeping patients, and threw a glare at Severus.

"Someone could have told me what happened to the two of you," he huffed, and then fell, weary,
onto an empty bed where he fell asleep.
11 August 1985

Severus woke after a full 24 hours of sleep. He felt refreshed and hated to face the prep-work he needed to complete before the students arrived. Harry was excited to see his father up and about and he was doubly pleased that Severus allowed him to help with all of his preparation work.

It was great work when they inspected all of the Slytherin dorms. Severus told his son where each student would reside, a habit students fell into from their first year.

"In their first year I assign students to study groups that they remain in for their entire time as a student. Typically there are four students to a study group and the dorms match that," explained Severus.

"So four beds!" finished Harry.

Severus ruffled the boy's hair. "Very good."

"Rhodri, the Baron, told me that the other Houses don't like Slytherin, Shadow," commented Harry. "Why is that?"

"You will find that there is an unfortunate amount of prejudice towards Slytherin from the other Houses due to the fact that many of my students come from old, wizarding families, and some students have families that are associated with Dark influences." He glanced to his side to see that Harry was consulting his pocket dictionary.

"Spell prejudice, please?" asked Harry as he frowned at the pages of his dictionary.

"Prej-u-dice. P-R-E-J-U-D-I-C-E." He stopped and observed his son as he spoke the word carefully at his book.

The dictionary's pages flipped and then its voice read aloud, "Prej-uh-dis - unreasonable feelings, opinions, or attitudes, especially of a hostile nature, regarding an ethnic, racial, social, or religious group." Harry's face lit up with the acquisition of new knowledge but as he realised what the word meant his face clouded as he lifted his sparkling, emerald gaze. "That's not nice."

"It is not, Magpie," agreed Severus. "That is what my children face and it is my duty to teach them the best way to deal with the unfairness of prejudice."

Harry reached out to touch his father's arm. "Your children, Shadow? Does that make them my brothers and sisters?"

Severus cocked his head in thought, and then he nodded. "Yes, I suppose in a way they are. I shall make sure they know that." He smiled. "I am certain once they realise your belief they will all embrace you as their brother."

Harry spread his arms as wide as his smile. "I will have the most giant family in the world!"

Severus let out an unexpected bark of laughter, and urged his son out of Slytherin House.

14 August 1985
The final two weeks of work before the term began was always at its busiest for the Headmaster. He would be going over the list of new first years, checking their wands, and familiars, if they had one. The Headmaster also approved the food for the Welcoming Feast. That was only a few of the things he had left to do.

This year was slightly different as Remus Lupin was at Hogwarts after delivering the Necromancer Quirrell to the UnSpeakables. The full moon was just a few days away and Albus had forgotten to give his son enough time to brew the officially approved Wolfsbane Potion. Therefore, Albus would be taking Remus to the Shrieking Shack and locking him inside. Severus was already out at the shack checking that the wards were strong and that there was no way for the werewolf to get out.

Remus, in addition to being overcome by the lethargy and mood swings that were the beginning of his monthly change, had his nose bent over the fact that no one had told him what had happened to Albus and Severus several days ago and he'd been waiting for them in the Headmaster's office. Albus had apologised but Severus had not. He felt that there was no reason to apologise; of course, he refused to apologise to Remus for anything.

Harry had his own preparations, few though they were, in getting ready for Primary School. His father had decided that his son would attend a wizarding school and he had found one in the wizarding borough of Manchester. Severus had talked Lucius into having his son attend rather than home-schooling the boy as so many Purebloods tended to do. Draco was thrilled knowing he would be going to school with his cousin and therefore the two boys had written to each other several times a day.

Today Harry had changed his mind about what he was going to wear for his first day of school. He had chosen a sky blue shirt with long sleeves (which his father assured he could roll up the sleeves if he needed to) but as for the rest of it. He was having a difference of opinion with his father.

Severus was at his desk in their sitting room going over his roster of Slytherins. Every term brought a handful of his children that did not return to Hogwarts. The reasons were many, and not always justified. He was cogitating over who he would have to visit.

"How about this, Shadow?" he spread his arms akimbo.

Harry stood in the sitting room before the short hallway to their bedrooms. For the last half hour he had been changing clothing to find the right outfit for his first day of class. This was his third outfit which consisted of the sky blue, long sleeved shirt, a jumper vest of cream knit and with a dragon over the right breast, a pair of black shorts, red and white striped socks, and his pair of colour-changing trainers.

Severus looked up, perused his son, and frowned. "Trousers, not shorts. Black socks so you do not resemble a Christmas elf. Dress shoes."

Harry glowered. "That's not comfortable, Dad!"

"It will be your first day at school, Harry," Severus said firmly. "You have an impression to make and I expect it to be a good one. You may wear your ridiculous socks and trainers afterwards."

"I don't have to make a good 'pression, you do," he muttered and turned back to his bedroom.

Severus smirked and returned to the list of names. He paused on the name Tomas Dylan. Tomas would be a second year student; if his parents allowed him to return. The Dylans were a family from Ireland. Their money had come from grapes; grapes sold to the elusive High Elves of the Emerald Isle. Rafe Dylan, if the rumours were true, had more than just a business connection to the High
Elves. It was thought he was the son of a warrior High Elf, or possibly a bastard son of the king. Whatever lineage the father may have he had not approved of his son being Sorted into Slytherin.

Tomas Dylan was a good student that showed promise in all of his subjects. That was a rarity amongst wizards and witches whose talent was decided in their first year. Tomas Dylan had the chance to be whatever he wanted to be.

Severus wanted to keep the boy in his House for he was, even in his first year, an asset academically. However, if it would make the boy's life easier he would offer a re-Sorting. The father could not dispute that.

"This?" Harry's voice broke into his thoughts and he looked up.

Harry now wore the blue shirt he had settled on, a grey jumper, black trousers, and his dress shoes. "The socks?" Severus' right eyebrow rose in question as he pointed his quill. Harry lifted the hem of one trouser leg to show a solid, black sock.

Severus rose from his desk and knelt on one knee in front of his son. "Now that is the boy who will make a very good impression upon his teacher... for his father." Since Harry was not quite smiling, Severus tickled the child's ribs.

Harry giggled, then tried to frown. "Not fair, Shadow!"

"Indeed, Magpie," nodded Severus. "You will find that all in life is not fair..." he glowered but there was no admonition in his eyes, "...and that means...?"

Harry sighed, "No ridiculous socks."

"Correct!" Severus then grabbed his son and tickled him until he was giggling, and out of breath. He ended by standing the boy on his feet. "Go and get ready." Severus returned to his desk.

Harry started to head back to his bedroom but then stopped, "Ready? Are we going someplace?"

"We are going to meet Draco and Lucius in Diagon Alley to pick up your school supplies," said Severus seating himself at his desk.

Harry went back to his bedroom but almost immediately ran back. "I get school supplies?"

Severus pointed towards the bedroom and growled, "GO!"

Harry squeaked, giggled, and ran back to his bedroom. He did not emerge until he was dressed for the day out: shorts, 'ridiculous socks', trainers, and a white, short-sleeved shirt.

---

**Diagon Alley**

Once Severus and Harry met with Draco and Lucius it was decided that no important shopping could begin until they had lunch. Both boys wanted ice cream but both fathers insisted upon a sandwich and juice. A small scoop of ice cream could be eaten for dessert. As they were eating their sandwiches the two boys spoke.

"Have you ever gone to school, Harry?" asked Draco.

Harry shook his head. "Dudley went to a nursery school but he got kicked out for punching the other kids."
"Your Muggle cousin was mean," declared Draco.

"He was a jerk," Harry bit out and took a large bite of his sandwich in emphasis.

"Well, nobody's going to punch us," decided Draco. "Both our fathers are scary wizards."

Lucius smirked and glanced at Severus who was grimacing.

"That's good," said Harry. "I want to like school. Do you, Draco?"

"Papa told me that I was going to be tutored but your dad said we should go to school together. That will be fun!"

Harry grinned. "It'll be great!"

For some unknown reason (perhaps only known to little boys) Draco began to hop. Harry immediately joined him and they both gaily hopped down the street in front of their fathers.

Severus frowned, and quipped, "Are you certain you want another one of those puzzling creatures, Lucius?"

Lucius chuckled as he strolled easily down the walk. He was an elegant picture in a suit of dark grey, a crimson waistcoat, and robes of midnight. His dragon-headed cane led the way. "With Draco I have found that he gives me a sense of innocence with the wisdom I did not have when I was younger."

Severus eyebrow rose acerbically, "Obviously."

"As I know you do, Brother, I enjoy that feeling and look forward to experiencing it with a second child." He glanced sideways at his brother and smirked, "Perhaps Harry might like to be a big brother someday, Severus. Hm?"

Severus lips thinned. "Until I know that my son is safe..." He shook his head. "It is a future I will not contemplate, Lucius."

"Has that future any chance, Severus?"

"There is a rat that may give us the answers that we need," smirked the Potions Master.

"Indeed? Is this rat to meet its end with your frightening... Essence of Dementor?" asked Lucius.

"Perhaps. However, that rat, better known as the murdered Peter Pettigrew, has a few questions to answer," sighed Severus darkly.

Lucius' eyes widened, "Peter Pettigrew. Ahh, wasn't he one of those Gryffindors..."

Severus interrupted sharply, "The Marauders."

"That incompetent excuse for a wizard is an Animagus?" Lucius lowered his voice.

"Aye. Lupin revealed recently that his friends thought it *wise* to become Animagi in order to run in the Forbidden Forest with the... wolf," sneered Severus. He stopped when they reached a shop with a sign over the door, in peeling, gold, paint that read Ollivanders: Makers of Fine Wands since 382 B.C.

"Gentlemen!" alerted Lucius. "We have come to our first stop. Come along."
Harry and Draco ceased their rabbit hopping and joined their fathers to enter the wand shop.

Ollivander's was not a busy place. It was dry, the air replete with the dust of thousands of different woods scenting the air, and behind a long counter were seven, tall shelves that appeared to disappear into the depths of a beyond no one could see.

Draco was practically dancing with the magic that drifted around him. Harry had become instantly wary and stepped back against his father. He was curious but in case any trolls jumped out to eat him he wanted to be near The Shadow. Like Draco had quipped earlier, Harry's father was scary, and no troll would dare eat his son!

A spry, elderly man with a bald pate and a ring of white hair that went from ear to ear fell wispily to his shoulders. He had a long, thin nose, and gold-rimmed spectacles that perched upon them. His odd, gold eyes glittered with interest at his customers.

Ollivander bowed. "Welcome Mr. Malfoy, Professor Snape," he then looked down at the two boys. "They both appear to be the age of wizards in need of practise wands."

Severus nodded once. "That is what we are here for. Draco and Harry will be starting Primary in a few days and will need a practise wand for school."

The wandmaker eyed Lucius. "The Elm. Nearly 1,000 years old." His eyes glittered almost avariciously as Lucius held up his snake-headed walking cane.

Lucius withdraws the wand that is concealed there. "My son will be given the wand on the day he finishes at Hogwarts." He then put the wand away. "It is a testament to the age of the Malfoy line. A lineage he will... continue."

Draco piped up, his voice a respectful whisper, "But I get my own wand, right, Papa?"

Lucius stroked his son's cheek, and smiled. "A practise wand first, Dragon. On your eleventh year we shall come here for your own wand." The elder Malfoy eyed the older man. "Something suitable, Ollivander?"

"Extend your arm, young Malfoy," ordered Ollivander. He purposely did not indicate which arm knowing that the child would select the arm and hand that would naturally hold his wand."

Draco eyed both arms and then extended his right arm. He looked up at the wandmaker expectantly. Ollivander smiled knowingly. The old wizard held up his hand with the index finger up, and he winked before turning away. Draco had not moved his arm."

"Dragon, put down your arm," ordered Lucius patiently.

Draco did so but glanced at his father in confusion, "Papa? Why did he do that?"

It was Severus who replied, "What Ollivander does no one understands, Draco. We shall see when..."

A loud crash followed by cursing in another language reached them from the depths of the tall shelves. Harry pressed closer to his father who laid both hands upon his son's shoulders.

Another crash sounded but instead of cursing there came the tinkle of distressed chimes... breaking glass... and the sound of boiling water. All of a sudden, as if a dimensional portal had snapped shut, the noise ended and Ollivander emerged with six boxes. He lay the wand boxes upon his counter, opened them, and then waved Draco over. Unfortunately, Draco couldn't see a thing. He was five,
short, and the counter was tall.

Lucius saw the problem at once. He could have used magic but it was easier to catch Draco under the arms and lift him so he could see the six wands. Draco started to grab one but Ollivander slapped his hand. Draco glared.

"You must understand, young man, that these wands have only a unicorn hair core. This is so that they will help you to control your Accidental Magical outbursts." He drew his hand, palm down, over the wands. "The only thing that differentiates these wands are the wood and the carvings. Even at your young age these will mean something to you. Something you will learn at school."

Ollivander smiled. "Now, choose a wand, young man."

As Draco examined the wands Lucius cast a Featherlight Charm on his son and supported him on his hip.

Three of the wands had runes carved into them. One wand had ivy twined around it. A fourth wand only had what appeared to be small notches. The last one was bent as though a twig might be bent and with a yellow stone in a dark setting at its base. Draco picked up the sixth one, cried out in pain, and dropped the wand. The wand clattered to the counter, and rolled off onto the floor.

"Not that one, young man," tsked Ollivander. "Try again."

"Sometimes a wand dislikes the wizard, Dragon," Lucius whispered in his son's ear. "Pick another."

Draco nodded silently and studied the five wands once more. Draco's eye was drawn to the wands with runes because his father's specialty was runes. However, it was the pale, honey-coloured wand with the notches that drew him to it. He stuck out his hand warily, hovered, and then he picked it up. Instantly he smiled.

"It likes me, Papa!" Draco felt the warmth of acceptance from his hand travel through his entire body. "What are those funny sticks on it?"

"Cuneiform writing," answered Lucius.

Draco looked to Ollivander, and asked, "Can you tell me what it says?"

Ollivander's index shook as did his head. He smirked, "That is what you have school for, young man." The wandmaker then looked down at Harry. He frowned in puzzlement. "You are no longer who you were meant to be, young Snape. It shall be interesting to see what wand chooses you when you are eleven."

Severus felt his son only burrow harder against his legs as the old wandmaker continued to stare at him. The Potions Master glared at the wizard, "Find my son a practise wand, Ollivander.* or I shall curse you* went the unsaid part of The Shadow's order.

Ollivander swept the wands he had picked out for Draco off of his counter, and dashed back into the tall shelves. They heard more crashing, cursing, and then those odd chimes. When Ollivander returned he had four boxes that he placed upon the counter.

Severus lifted his son up onto the counter where Harry sat with his legs crossed in the lotus position. His father remained chest to his son's back with his arms around the little boy's waist.

"Which wand will choose you, young man?" asked Ollivander too politely.

Harry leaned forward to study the four wands. One was very rough as though it had been plucked
right off of the tree that gave of its wood. The second one was rather plain but for the red stone embedded into its base. Harry shuddered just looking at that one. A third one was entirely black with runes carved into its handle. The fourth was just as white as the other was black.

"This one," Harry said decisively as he picked up the wand that resembled a tree branch. "It's rough. Like me."

The wands were paid for and they began to leave but Ollivander stopped them. "Professor Snape." Severus turned to look at the wandmaker over his shoulder. The Potions Master scowled so darkly in warning at Ollivander that the old man felt his breath stop for a moment. He did not breathe again until the door shut with a chime behind them. Ollivander then shrugged, and disappeared beyond the shelves of his wands.

Lucius leaned towards Severus and spoke beneath his breath. "Breathe, Brother. Your Dark Magic is showing."

Severus took in a deep, steadying breath before snarling softly, "That barmy, old fraud. I have half a mind to take Harry to Argyle in Hogsmeade."

"Tut, tut, Severus. Only the best for your son, and as egregious as Ollivander can be he is our best wandmaker," chided Lucius.

"He had chosen a wand that was like mine and one like Albus' wand, Lucius," Severus spoke as though the choice of wands had been an insult.

"As he did for Dragon, Brother," soothed Lucius.

Harry skipped back to his father and held up his wand. "Shadow, Draco says that the wood a wand is made out of is just as symbolic as runes or Kew-nee-form are. Do you know what wood this is?"

"The word is Kew-nee-uh-form, Magpie. Let me see your wand," Severus took the wand and studied it. He tested its flexibility by bending it slightly. "Yew would be my guess."

"You?"

"Yew, y-e-w. From the yew tree," clarified Severus.

Harry took his father's hand and walked beside him. Draco had done the same and looked up at his father. "Papa, can you read to me and Harry from your book on wands?"

Lucius glanced down at his son, and replied, "It would give me the utmost pleasure to do so, Dragon, but Ollivander was correct in that one of your lessons when you go to school will be to learn about your wands." Draco pouted. It was an affectation he disliked to see in his child. "Draco, cease that pouting or we shall return home at once."

Draco's eyes flew open as his pout vanished. "I'm sorry, Papa! I'll be good. Please let's stay... please?"

Lucius nodded once. "Continue to behave and we shall. Now, run along to the shop with the moving quill and wait for Severus and I."

Draco grabbed his cousin's hand. "Okay, Papa. C'mon, Harry!"

"Severus, what will you do about the rat in Hogwarts walls?" asked Lucius.
"Albus and I erected a ward that keeps the rat within Hogwarts and traps him in his Animagus form. Lupin is setting traps for the beast today." Severus smirked at some secret joke.

Lucius smiled, "Do tell, Brother. What has you in a sudden mood of mirth besides our progeny?"

"Lupin was informed by the back of his Headmaster's hand that he is no longer 'the golden boy', Severus chuckled darkly, "Albus slapped him so hard it is no doubt the wolf's ears rang."

"That seems rather uncharacteristic of the old man," commented the aristocrat. "Whatever did Lupin do?"

"Albus had not known the Marauders were illegal Animagi. A fact that my father swore to me, and supported with Legilimens of his past memory, later as we were doing the wards."

"Bullies and lawbreakers," mused Lucius.

"And worse," scowled Severus briefly. "Black and his friends let the wolf out on the nights of the full moon in order to run with him in the Forbidden Forest!"

Lucius jaw dropped and he stopped walking. He hissed, "That bloody, cowardly lion, never said anything? To... anyone?" Severus shook his head slowly. "They put the students in danger for a lark in the forest? Severus, that is monstrously... criminal!"

"Aye, Brother," nodded Severus as he began to walk and to catch up with the boys. Lucius fell into step beside him.

Lucius lightly touched Severus' arm so their paced slowed just a little, "If I may, I should like to hear what that rat has to say once he is caught."

Severus nodded once. "I do believe my father would not mind if you were in attendance..."

"Shadow! Uncle Lucius! Come on!" called an impatient Harry. Beside him stood Draco with his hands fisted into his hips.

"Come," chuckled Lucius. "I see that our sons are patiently awaiting us."

"Hardly," scoffed Severus, but he smirked. He and Lucius increased their pace and soon they stood with their sons outside of Amanuensis Quills. Lucius pushed the door open and held it open. As each entered there was a tiny, melodic chime to announce them.

The owner of Amanuensis Quills was the reedy, thin witch Althea Blessed. Her brown hair was messily twisted into a lopsided bun supported by two quills stuck into it. She wore long, loose rather gauzy robes of aged crimson that gave her an ethereal air. She had very few customers so as soon as she was free she floated over to the Malfoys and Snapes.

"Good day, gentlemen," she curtseyed slightly. "What might I help you with today?"

Severus spoke up, "Both of our sons will be attending Primary in a few weeks. They are both in need of practise quills, stain-free black ink, vanishing lined copy books, and a scroll each of lined parchment."

Althea Blessed smiled. "We supply the three Primary wizarding schools so if you come over here," she ushered them over to a section of the store where there were quills, copy books, and scrolls of parchment. "Everything that your sons will need for their first year of school will be found here," she said plainly.
"We have both non-erasing copy books that refill with paper that we supply for a subscription or the slightly more expensive vanishing mistakes copy books. Both are lined so that letters will be aligned properly. We have dipping quills only as the never-ending ink quills tend to make a new scribe lazy. However, our quills all come in a slightly thicker quill stem, and are shorter than an adult one for little hands. A subscription will insure that the student is supplied with new quills monthly. The subscription is optional."

Lucius interrupted, "We shall sign each of the boys up for a monthly subscription of quills. Is that available for the parchment, Madame?"

"Yes, that is available. A scroll will supply a student for two months but the subscription is monthly. We suggest that students be encouraged to use the extra in writing letters." Althea looked down at Harry and Draco. "Do you two correspond with each other?"

Draco replied with a nod, and added, "We write letters to each other since Harry got Hedwig for his birthday. I want an owl, too."

"Very good! Correspondence is a wonderful way to exercise the hand with the quill and it I believe it is wonderful in teaching one to cultivate a sense for writing letters." Althea finished, "We offer a safety knife to sharpen the quills so I suggest that you get one of those, as well."

Althea Blessed then Summoned two colourful boxes made of stiffened cotton and embossed with the moving quill sign of Amanuensis Quills. "Kit boxes," she explained as she handed one to Draco and then to Harry. "They seal easily and with just a tap of the forefinger on the side you'll have a handle to carry your kit." She straightened and addressed Lucius and Severus. "The boxes are free. Choose what you'd like then come up to the counter and we shall settle the price."

There was quite a bit to choose from, at least as colour was a choice. Harry selected everything in blues whereas Draco went with purple. Both fathers thought they might choose the opposite, but they were wrong. It appeared the favourite colour was not written in stone.

Once all was chosen the items were paid for and subscriptions for the scrolled parchment and the quills was set up. Kits closed, sealed, and the handles produced the four wizards left and turned into their next stop, Madame Malkins Robes for All Occasions.

The Primary school that the young boys would be attending required robes for all their students in order to get them used to wearing robes as they would in Hogwarts and in their adult lives. The robes were simple; black light wool for warm months, and a second robe of heavy wool for colder months. The robe length fell to the knees and had a single hook and loop clasp that were decorated with simple, gold carvings of animals. Harry chose a kneazle and Draco chose a dragon.

The shopping for school was complete and the boys had earned a trip to Sugarplum's Sweets Shop. Harry was fascinated by the multi-coloured, hard candy, fluttering Snitches. Draco was salivating over Pogo's Chocolate Dipped Toffee Sticks. Lucius bought a small box of Bracken's Fizzing Spearminted Drops and a dozen Floss Ducklings for Narcissa. Severus grimaced over all the purchases but was finally tempted by Grayle's Perfect Coffee Nips in Bitter Jamaican Flavour.
Chapter Notes

*I know in the books Peter Pettigrew lost just a finger but for the purposes of my story it is his hand that was lost. Personally, a hand is easier to find then a finger.

Regarding Bambi being killed in a fire in my story. I never cared for the death of Bambi's mother being by hunters. That was too violent. A fire, even though terrible, is natural.

16 August 1985

Harry had been feeling an oddness within himself since waking in the morning. He did not feel terribly hungry but for his father he ate everything that was before him. He then made his bed and straightened his room then retired to the bathroom for his morning bath.

Severus had erected wards to keep splashed water in the tub for when Harry played 'Sea Monster' or 'Captain Nemo' who blew the ships out of the water rather than pouncing on them like the sea monster did. This morning, though, Harry sat listlessly in his tub of blue suds and finally left when the water became lukewarm.

Severus had some prep work for Harry to do in the lab but Harry was having trouble paying attention to what he was doing. The Potions Master took the safety knife from his son and Vanished the poor work on the Milkweed Leaf. Severus then had his son sit in the corner he had recently put together for homework. Harry took out a quill, sharpened the tip while Severus glanced over at him, and then began to practise his letters. He only had A, B, and C and soon he tired of the work.

"Bring your copy book over here, Harry," said Severus without looking up from the current potion he was brewing. Severus was doing what he did every year which was to test each of the potions for each of his classes. He was also perfecting the manuscripts for the new texts he had written that would replace all of his textbooks that, under his expertise, were both out-of-date, and full of errors.

Harry brought over his copy book and climbed the stool that sat next to his father. Severus quickly looked at his son's letters and had a few criticisms but one look at Harry's droopy shoulders and air of ennui and he knew something was not right.

"Magpie?" without thinking of what he was doing he placed the back of his hand to his son's forehead; something his own mother had done for him when he was ill. "Are you not feeling well?"

Harry only managed a shrug. "Perhaps an early nap might sort you out. Come along."

Putting his potion under a Stasis Spell the Potions Master caught his son under his arms and pulled him close to his chest. Harry wrapped his arms around his father's neck and lay his head down upon his shoulder.

Harry was soon tucked into bed where he fell to sleep almost immediately. Nellie had arrived at that moment, jumped up on her boy's bed, and nestled into her own bed.
Severus, worried for his son, went to the fireplace, threw in a handful of Floo powder, and called for Madame Pomfrey. As soon as she stepped through the green flames she asked what might be wrong with Harry.

"I am not certain, Poppy," he said as he escorted her into his son's bedroom. "Since this morning he's been a little listless but that appears to have escalated. He also felt a bit warm to me so I thought it best to call you."

Poppy gently touched each of Harry's cheeks and his forehead. "His cheeks are flushed and there is some warmth. I'll do a Diagnostic and see if anything comes up." The Diagnostic Spell was a quick one and the Healer soon had something to tell the worried father. "Just a slight rise in his temperature, Severus. I do not find a cause for it beyond being a simple cold. When he awakens it would be safe to give him a half-dose of Fever Reducer and juice, no milk. Also take his temperature. He's at 39.6 celsius."

"That is a bit high, Poppy," observed Severus.

"That could still go down, though, Severus. If his temperature goes above that then let me know." She patted his shoulder. "Until then, cold compresses.

"Thank you, Poppy," he sighed. Using his wand he incanted a charm that would alert him as soon as Harry either woke, or was in distress. Severus then escorted Poppy back to the Floo. Before he let her go, he spoke. "Poppy, I wanted to thank you for taking care of Harry while Albus and I recovered from our exhaustion. He's spoken several times since that day and of the fun he had."

Poppy smiled and he noted a slight blush that graced her cheeks. "I enjoyed myself, Severus. I enjoy the students during term but I never get to spend any quality time with them. It was fun to sit and play with Harry." She started to turn towards the Floo but hesitated. "Uhm... Severus, if you ever need someone to sit Harry I would very much like to do so. If that is all right with you?"

Severus allowed himself a small smile as he nodded, "Yes, Poppy. That would be most acceptable. Thank you."

Poppy's smile was softer before she turned back to the flames and threw in a handful of Floo powder from her uniform pocket. In a breath she had stepped into the green flames and was gone.

Severus had checked on his son at noon and found that the fever had gone. He was also still asleep. Nevertheless, the Potions Master woke his son and gave him his Nutrition Potion mixed into a glass of mango juice and the half-dose of Fever Reducer. Harry pet Nellie for a bit, kissed his father, and went right back to sleep.

Severus returned to his brewing and was not disturbed until an hour later when he heard a faint rustling noise. That was followed by an ominous click, and frantic squeaking. Severus smiled like a feral cat. An unwelcome rodent had finally been caught.

The trap, like several dozen all over Hogwarts, had been hidden. This one had been tucked into the shadows deep under the Potions Master's desk. With a Summoning charm he retrieved the rickety looking but magically re-enforced cage. Inside the cage was a large rodent with an obvious silver paw*. The rodent squeaked angrily at Severus and then the squeaking seemed to change to begging.

"Alive after all, Pettigrew," sneered Severus. "I cannot wait to hear your story."

Putting his potion under Stasis Severus ascended up the stairs with the cage. He took down the alarm ward, looked in on his son, and hissed a curse as the rat bit his finger through the cage. A small
Stinging Hex sent the rat squealing to a corner of the cage. With a snarl filled with imprecations the Potions Master swept into his sitting room, threw Floo powder into the flames, and stepped into the Headmaster's tower with his prize.

Harry stirred awake a short while after his father left their apartment. He was bleary-eyed, and confused. Stretching out a hand to pet Nellie settled him as he looked around his bedroom.

"Shadow?" he called softly.

Hearing no reply he rolled out of bed, put on his slippers, and purple night robe, and padded to the sitting room. His father was nowhere to be seen. Not thinking anymore than where his father might be the little boy checked his father's lab and then trudged back to the sitting room. He found Nellie playing with one of the crinkly, pretty foil balls that Poppy had given her so he joined in her play for a bit.

After fifteen minutes Nellie tired and so she climbed up onto Severus' favourite chair, nestled in the seat cushion and fell asleep. Harry pulled out his picture book of Dumbo and thumbed through that but he was growing bored and he really wondered where his father might be.

When the boredom got too great Harry went to the door of their apartment, pushed out into the corridor, and left.

"Father, I have him!" Severus declared as he stepped through the Floo flames into the Headmaster's tower.

"Wonderful, my boy!" Albus clapped his hands together and left his desk to view the rat in its cage. "A silver paw. Only Peter's hand was found where Sirius killed him."

"At least Black is not guilty of the murder of a friend of his," sneered Severus. "I wonder, though, if Pettigrew faked his death... could he have killed those twelve Muggles?"

"We shall discover the truth as soon as I return, Severus," said Albus as he walked towards the door of his office.

Severus looked up from the rat. "Where are you going?"

"The Whomping Willow, my boy. It is time to escort Remus to the Shrieking Shack," replied the Headmaster. "I shouldn't be gone long. Minerva brought some licorice snaps. Have some, if you wish." The older wizard left the office.

Severus put the cage down on his father's desk and then caught one of the licorice snaps that were bouncing up from the bowl. Before it could snap his fingers he squeezed the helpless candy in between his thumb and index fingers. It let out a dying snap, and Severus popped the sweet into his mouth. The first time Albus had offered the vicious licorice to him the sweet had pinched his fingers. Picking up another licorice snap, he squeezed and popped it into his mouth to follow the first. He then took a chair, seated himself, and scowled at the rat.

16 August 1985 - 7:15pm, Full Moon rises at 8:22pm

Albus met a bent and weary Remus Lupin in the Entrance Hall by the tall doors. He was leaning against one which showed how weak he was feeling. A touch and a slight push was all it took to open one of the doors. The older wizard scooped the man's elbow into his hands and then pulled the
younger man close. He then pushed open the door so they could both walk out into darkening dusk.

Remus glanced warily at the sky where he could see the beginning of the full moon.

"Lean upon me, my boy," encouraged Albus. "You seem to be pulling away."

"I don't want to be a burden, Headmaster," the blond-haired man breathed painfully. Already he could swear that his blood was boiling in his veins as his body prepared to change at the full moon.

Albus gently patted the man's arm and tugged him close until he had no choice but to lean his weight upon the older man. "You are not a burden, my dear."

"You hate me now that I've disappointed you," whined Remus.

"Yes, you did disappoint me, child, but I do not hate you. Do you not realise I could have assigned anyone to escort you to the Shrieking Shack but this is something I have always done," replied Albus soothingly.

"I don't know why," sighed Remus.

Albus stopped and took the younger man's chin in his hand and forced him to raise his gaze. "You made me very angry, my boy, but regardless I still see you as mine. Mine. Your parents, Merlin watch over their Souls, put your welfare into my hands. I took that duty not because I was Headmaster and felt obligated. I did so because I loved you. As I do now."

"But Severus is the one you chose, Headmaster," a tear dripped onto his chin as he spoke wearily.

"I formalised what I already felt for Severus. Am I only allowed to love one of you? Can't I love you both?" Albus drew the taller man into an embrace and kissed his cheek. "Now, enough of this feeling sorry for yourself, Remus. You made a stupid and terrible mistake as a child. I believe you are aware of this." Remus nodded firmly. Albus sighed, and smiled. "Good. Now, let's get you settled at the Shrieking Shack so we can put the night behind us."

"Thank you, Albus," sighed Remus as this time he allowed his weight to fall on the older man. "I love you, too."

16 August 1985 - 7:30pm

Harry first saw his grandfather in the Entrance Hall as he was emerging from the dungeons entrance. For some reason, instead of going to greet him, he waited in the shadows to see what his grandfather was up to.

Minutes later the man whom Harry knew as Remus Lupin, an old friend of his first father, was walking slowly down the stairs. Harry thought the man looked like he'd been fighting a fever for a few days. Remus looked like he had felt that morning. Shrinking back further into the shadows the little boy waited until the two wizards left the castle. Harry dashed after them.

As Harry followed his grandfather and Remus Lupin he kept to the shade by ducking behind little hills, or boulders that were along the way. The child thought it strange that there wasn't a path they followed but then he figured that perhaps it was a magic thing in which only they could see a path. As soon as Harry had such a thought he stopped and paused.

There was something! He smiled. It was faint. Like breath in a soft breeze but Harry could feel a slight difference to the air. If he moved to the left a few steps the feeling vanished. If he returned to
his spot that weirdness was back like a tingling nerve. Harry followed this invisible path now and he was able to keep better hidden from the two men.

Harry began to skip, duck, jump, hide... he was having fun. Not once did it occur to him that he should not be outside the castle, or that he should not be sneaking after his grandfather. He had forgotten about looking for his father. A euphoria was sneaking into his blood cells. He did not know, for he was too young to understand, but the magic that hid the path the Headmaster had taken over the years with Remus Lupin had found something familiar in Harry.

The path had been discovered by James Potter and he and Sirius had changed it slightly so they could use it to follow after their friend, Remus, to the Shrieking Shack. It was the signature of that mischievous magic that 'recognised' Harry Potter and it was luring the child along and imbuing him with the cavalier recklessness the Marauders had often been full of.

Harry did not even pause when he saw the dark, wavering tree ahead of him. He continued to follow, and giggle to himself. It was sheer luck that took him past the dangerous branches and to the trunk where minutes before Harry's grandfather and Remus Lupin had disappeared. Harry did not know where to go from there, and for a brief moment he was lost but James' magic had settled with his own and he soon watched as his hands both depressed a big knot in the trunk of the tree. The branches above quit waving, and a hole opened up beneath the child. With a cut-off scream Harry fell into darkness. His head struck a hard root, and he was unconscious.

16 August 1985 - 8:53pm

Nellie woke up from the warmth of a lovely dream of cream and salmon with her heart beating rapidly. For a kitten she was unused to such a sense of foreboding where her boy was concerned. And, she knew what she felt in her belly was worry for her Harry. Jumping up she found the little hole in The Shadow's magic around the apartment that would allow her out into the castle. With the uncanny ability of a kneazle she ran, and ran, and ran until she finally made it to the Headmaster's tower.

Severus had slipped into a light snooze in Albus' comfortable chair by the fireplace. With his head leaned back against the chair back and his fingers laced over his abdomen he slept until something bumped into his leg. Snapping awake, and aware that he might have defend himself, he glanced down and was promptly yowled at.

"Nellie? How ever did you get up here?" asked Severus. For an answer Nellie yowled again causing a prickle of danger rising upon the skin at the back of his neck. "Nellie, why are you not with Harry?" Again she yowled. Rather loudly and the Potions Master was astonished by the volume. "Nellie...!"

The kneazle sprinted for the door, looked back at Shadow, and yowled a fourth time. Severus did not hesitate as he rose to follow the kneazle. Soon he was running to keep up with kneazle as she dashed down the stairs, slid across the smooth stone floor of the Entrance Hall and practically climbed up the door that would not open for her.

The Potions Master caught up with the kit and opened the door allowing her out into the night. Quickly he cast a Tracking Spell on her so he would not lose her. There was a full moon but she was quick...

Oh, gods! Severus' heart sank to his feet. The full moon! Nellie was headed in the direction of the Whomping Willow!
"Magpie!" he shouted across the night as his trot became a sprint of terror. Another night in his past that was so much like this one flashed to the forefront of his mind.

He skidded to a halt as he felt his heart skip a beat. A few paces ahead of him was his father and in his arms was a little, purple bundle. The bundle wriggled and Albus let the child down to the ground.

"Shadow!" cried Harry as he ran the short distance to his father.

Severus, by then, had fallen to his knees. He caught his child and clasped him tightly to his chest. Harry let out a yelp as his father's hand connected once to his backside. Seconds later his father was holding him, and rocking him.

"Lumos," Albus cast over his son and grandson.

Severus pulled the boy in front of himself and examined him in Albus' wandlight. "What in the name of all the gods were you doing out here, Harry?" he demanded.

Harry's upper lip wobbled. "I was looking for you, Dad, but then I saw grandpa... and then there was magic from the path... I couldn't think of anything else because it was..." his voice faltered. "I don't know... Shadow, I felt like it was all fun. Like I was going to run in the forest with the animals... I don't know!" Harry burst into frightened tears as he threw his arms around his father and held him tightly.

"The Hidden Path to the Whomping Willow, Severus," Albus clarified softly.

Severus patted his child's back who was now hiccuping his distress, "Harry could see the path?"

Albus shrugged. "He must have. I found Harry in the tunnel just beneath the tree. He was unconscious..."

Severus pulled his son away just enough to once more check him for injury. Albus grasped his son's hand and put it gently against the back of Harry's head. Severus could feel the lump that was there. Harry let out a cry of protest as just his father's light touch hurt. Once more he enfolded his son close, cast a Featherlight Charm, and stood.

"How was Harry able to see the Path, Father?"

Albus replied, "I did a Diagnostic on him and found that there was a lingering ghost of James and Sirius' magical signatures." Severus frowned tautly. "I can only guess that James and Sirius' discovered the path and changed the magic so they could see it, too. Their magic... somehow latched onto Harry's."

"Father, what is happening with my son's magic? Siphoning of Elemental magic, actually listening to his familiar for answers to questions, and now this? I am..." Severus lips thinned in frustration. "It makes no sense to me."

"I can only guess, my boy, for I have never heard of such a thing," sighed Albus as he placed his hand against Severus' back. The Potions Master glanced at the Headmaster asking silently for his guess. "When the child's magic was struggling for help it drew upon the Dark magic that had been in the curse scar he had received from Voldemort. We know that in Tom Riddle's time as student and adult he delved into Dark and arcane magic that most in our world have put aside as 'newer' spells, charms, and rituals came to the fore, and most Dark Magics have been outlawed." A pointed glower from the Potions Master as they stepped into the castle hurried Albus to conclude his theory. "It is possible, my boy, that Harry's magic learned a few things from Voldemort's magic before it obliterated all the Dark magic from the curse scar."
"That is... quite the theory, Father," replied Severus absorbing all that the Headmaster told him. "I need to get some dinner into my son, and then put him to bed. Expect me within two hours to assist with interrogation of the rat." He started to head down to the dungeons but he paused before looking over his shoulder. "Father, please summon Lucius to join us. I would like for him to be there as well."

Albus nodded, and then turned to ascend to the Headmaster's tower.

16 August 1985 - 9:10pm

Severus sat beside his son on his bed after he'd had dinner. There was no story for the evening since he needed to address his son's habit of wandering and getting into trouble. Harry cuddled, attentively though, against his side.

"Magpie, you do understand that I am very glad to have you back in my arms, do you not?" asked Severus softly.

"Grandpa said I scared him. I scared you, too," Harry sighed regretfully.

"That you did. However, as much as I was, and am, pleased you suffered no more than a lump on the back of your head, you should not have left our apartment." He felt his son shake his head. "That is partly my fault for I have not warned you from doing so especially after your adventure in the Chamber of Secrets."

"I'm in trouble," concluded Harry softly. "Even after you swatted me, though?"

"For that I should be in trouble, Magpie," he sighed sadly. "I swore I would never punish you in such a manner... and then I did."

"It didn't really hurt, Shadow," Harry soothed his father who seemed very anxious over the swat.

"There is no excuse for it, Harry, and I will do my utmost to never let it happen again," vowed Severus.

"What's my punishment going to be, then?" asked Harry warily.

"I am going to have you clean some small cauldrons, stirrers, and pipettes in my lab," replied Severus. "And, no allowance for two weeks."

Harry pushed away so he could see his father's face, "But I don't get an allowance now." He frowned. "I don't think I know what one is."

"An allowance is a small reward, usually monetary, that a child earns for doing chores around the house. I am going to give you one starting now but you will not get it for two weeks." Severus tried not to smile. It sounded rather backwards to him as to what he was doing but he needed to punish Harry so he would not go wandering again. An allowance might be that extra incentive he needed. Unfortunately, he had to give it before taking it away, first.

"What's monetary?"

"Monetary is money such as galleons, sickles, or knuts. I am setting your allowance at five sickles. That is equal to about two pounds Muggle money," clarified Severus. "The exchange rate does vary between wizarding and Muggle money, though."
"That's okay, Shadow," smiled Harry. "Five sickles sounds like a lot to me. Do I get to spend it any way I want?"

Severus nodded. "It will be your money so what you do with it is up to you." He kissed his son's forehead. "Are you ready to sleep?"

"Yep. And, you're going to be with grandpa?"

"I am. And, no more wandering, Harry. Summon a house elf if you need me and cannot find me. Understood?" he asked firmly.

"Understood, Dad. No more wandering. I'm glad Nellie got you to find me. She's a great kneazle," Harry smiled, stroked Nellie who was already asleep in her bed, and then he snuggled up in his covers. "G'night, Shadow."

Severus rose from his son's bed, leaned over and kissed his warm cheek. "Good night, little Magpie."

---

16 August 1985 - 9:35pm

Instead of using the Floo to reach the Headmaster's tower he choose to walk the distance. He was very interested in interrogating the rat, Peter Pettigrew, since he believed it would provide a large piece of the puzzle in regards to how the Potters were betrayed. How had Voldemort known where they were? There were many who believed that Severus had such answers; after all, he was a Death Eater. What the general public did not understand was that the Death Eaters, an elite group of wizards, were divided into cells in which only those witches and wizards in those cells knew who was in them. No Death Eater knew all the Death Eaters; a fallacy enforced by Death Eaters on trial who were trying to keep away from the Dementor's Kiss or being pushed through the Veil.

The Death Eater trials had turned into a horrid witch hunt in which many disliked witches and wizards were accused by Death Eaters on trial for just being followers. Therefore, literally dozens of innocent men and women were thrown into Azkaban. These witches and wizards languished and died in Azkaban unless they had family or an advocate to effect a trial and get them released.

As much as Severus hated to acknowledge it, Sirius Black was one of those wizards convicted on the flimsiest of circumstantial evidence - the possible murder of twelve Muggles and his school friend. All that remained of that wizard was the hand of Peter Pettigrew. Black was then thrown into Azkaban without benefit of a formal trial. He had not even been searched for the Dark Mark!

Frankly, Severus could not recall if ever there had been a witness to the deaths of the Muggles, nor who had 'discovered' evidence of the death of Peter Pettigrew. The only evidence at that time that Severus recalled, as he himself was being handled by Aurors, was that he kept screaming, "The rat deserved to die!" over and over. It was a litany that Severus had to bear as he sat in his own cold cell in the wizarding prison awaiting his trial.

_Gods_, thought Severus as he ascended the steps to reach the floor of the Headmaster's tower. _What if Black were innocent and Pettigrew really had deserved death?!_ Aloud he asked,"But, for what? What did that rat do?"

Without having paid attention Severus pushed through his father's office door to find Lucius comfortably seated in a chair by the fire, and Albus standing by a disheveled creature who, even though he was human, resembled the rat he had recently been.

"Severus!" Peter Pettigrew's face broke into a slimy, unctuous smile as if the man in black were his
With uncanny speed Severus was in front of the smaller man with his wand poking dangerously just under Pettigrew's eye. "Say my name again and I will pluck out your eye..." he held up his other hand and curved it into a claw, "...with... my... fingers."

Pettigrew shuddered and let out a squeal as he tried to move away from the wizard that threatened him. Moving was impossible. Albus had frozen him in place and bound his Animagus power so he could not change.

There was light applause behind Severus and he whirled around angrily. Lucius was smiling, and said, "Ohh, good form, my Brother. I have missed this side of you. Will you hex the truth from him?"

"Hardly, Lucius," sneered Severus.

Albus spoke softly, "You brought the Veritaserum, Severus?"

Severus nodded and removed a small, green-black bottle from the hidden pocket of his robes. Grasping the cowering wizard's jaw painfully between his fingers he forced Pettigrew's mouth open. The rat tried to struggle but Albus added to his restraints and then the Animagus could not move at all. Severus administered three drops of the Truth Potion, waited less than a minute, and then checked both Pettigrew's eyes. He nodded to his father, and stepped back to stand beside Lucius.

Albus moved into Pettigrew's line of sight. There was no twinkle to his eyes. This was not the kindly, old Headmaster that stood before Peter Pettigrew but the wizard that had fought Grindlewald and was known as the most powerful wizard of the century.

"Who told Voldemort where to find Lily and James Potter?" Albus flatly demanded.

Pettigrew struggled, but blurted, "I did!"

"You were not the Secret-Keeper of the Potters whereabouts. How did you learn of it?" asked Albus.

"Sirius. It was Sirius' idea to be clever and to make me their Secret-Keeper." Pettigrew snickered. "We were best friends. He trusted me." His lip curled into a snarl and his teeth chittered together like the rat he was.

Severus interrupted, "Why did you betray the Potters? They were your friends."

A coarse laugh erupted from the bound wizard. Pettigrew's beady eyes hardened as he eyed the Potions Master. "Did you think you were the only one the Marauders ground under their contempt, Snivellus? What do you think they did when there was no one to bother, no one to play with?"

"You were a Marauder!" snapped Severus. "You were their friend."

"I was their bloody pet!" spat Pettigrew. "Thick, ugly, fat Peter," he mocked himself. "Wormy. They thought I didn't care because I had thick skin and was stupid. I just waited, Snivellus. I heard what you told Him, Traitor." He snickered. "Might as well have painted targets on all of the Potters, especially their brat.

"I know very well what I did, Rat," snarled Severus. "The moment I realised Lily was a target I went to my father and begged his forgiveness." Severus had no need to mention that forgiveness was not immediately given. In fact, his father, at that inauspicious time in his life, reflected the very disgust
the Potions Master held for himself.

"Obviously, he gave it," laughed Pettigrew. "Your... father. And, how nice that the Potter spawn is your son, now. Jamie must be rolling over in his grave."

Severus was about to verbally eviscerate Pettigrew but Albus held up his hand to stop his son. "What happened the night Sirius supposedly murdered you and twelve Muggles?"

Pettigrew cocked his head to look at the Headmaster. "Nobody liked me, Headmaster. No one would care that I was gone." He smirked showing a rat like fang over his lip. "I just grabbed a handful of Muggles, and killed them. When Sirius came for me it was easy to set him up as a murderer." He tried to shrug. "Siri's temper always worked against him. It did this time, too. I cut off my hand," he glanced at the silver appendage, "and a little Confundus and an explosion took care of the rest."

Pettigrew struggled and freed his head and neck from restraint so he could better see the Headmaster. "I thought it fascinating that you so easily believed Siri of my murder that you let the Aurors throw him into Azkaban without trial. Why did you do that, Headmaster?"

Albus spoke through gritted teeth as he gripped the Rat's collar, nearly choking him. "Because Sirius Black nearly killed my son, and I let him off with a detention and a few points lost. It was no leap of logic to believe that he could kill you and a dozen Muggles... and think it all a prank!"

The Headmaster seethed and Severus caught his father by the shoulders. "Forgive yourself, Father," he whispered in the old man's ear. "You have the evidence you need so now we can get Black out of Azkaban."

Albus nodded, and gripped his son's upper arms. "Get rid of him."

Lucius stood up and walked over to Pettigrew. "Before we do that, Headmaster, there is one more thing... Peter... needs to tell us." Before anyone could stop him the aristocrat had his wand out and had cast, "Crucio!"

Pettigrew screamed as his restrained body tried to writhe in the restraints as every nerve ending burst into flame.

"Lucius!" cried Albus but now Severus was holding tight to his father.

Lucius ended the curse and the Animagus drooped, panting as the residual pain began to fade. "You are not as stupid as you appear, are you, Peter?"

"I earned all O's in my NEWTs, Lucius. That wasn't due to me copying from Jamie or Siri. They copied MY work," laughed Pettigrew.

Lucius glanced to Albus who nodded in confirmation. He returned his attention to Pettigrew. "Then you are the one that took the..."

"Ka," supplied Albus.

"Yes. You took the Ka of our Dark Lord and hid him. Where did you hide him?" Before Pettigrew could try to deny him Lucius cast one more Cruciatus Curse that lasted only a blink. The Rat was now shivering with fear. "Tell me... where did you hide our Dark Lord, Peter? If you do not... I shall burn... every nerve... in your body." He then held his wand to the Rat's throat.
The Coward's Way

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

16 August 1985 - 10:15pm

*Lucius purred with dire intent restrained, "Tell me... where did you hide our Dark Lord, Peter? If you do not... I shall burn... every nerve... in your body." He then held his wand to the Rat's throat.*

Pettigrew struggled to keep his mouth closed so he would say nothing. Ohhh, he knew the truth but he refused to speak it even though the Veritaserum flowing through his veins compelled him. His muscles began to shudder with the desperation to go against the Veritaserum. Severus' lips thinned as Lucius smiled with near triumph. Albus' gaze was fraught with concern.

No longer able to fight, the rat let out a scream of anguish. He screeched, *"Elegi morte!"*

Albus lunged for Pettigrew, "NO!"

Severus caught his father so he would not be caught in the red death of suicide that grew from Pettigrew's chest to swallow him whole. Lucius stumbled backwards, and fell on his backside. "Bloody hell!" shouted the aristocrat.

Peter Pettigrew was truly dead, now, but the spell of Suicide, the angry red magic, was still spreading and Lucius was scrambling backwards like a tipped spider to escape it. Both Albus and Severus caught Lucius, one by his hair, the other his arm and pulled.

"Get up, Brother!" roared Severus. Letting go of his father he helped Lucius to his feet.

"Fawkes!" shouted Albus.

"Father! We have to get out of here!" cried Severus. "Lucius!"

Fawkes, responding to his master's summons flew over the head of Albus. The old man caught the tail feathers of his Phoenix. "Severus! Lucius! Hold onto me!" he ordered.

Both younger wizards threw their arms around Albus. In that moment Fawkes vanished with his passengers from the Headmaster's tower to the Hogwarts front lawn. Albus was able to alight on his feet but both Lucius and Severus suffered a bout of dizziness that knocked them both to the ground. All three looked up at the castle to see the yellow torchlight glowing from many of the windows. As for the Headmaster's tower it was yellowish-red and burst into a final flame of crimson that dissipated before their eyes.

"Peter chose death rather than reveal where he had hidden the *Ka* of Voldemort," Albus sighed.

Severus, already on his feet, helped Lucius to his. The aristocrat used a few judicious cleaning spells, and shrugged when the grass stains refused to leave the light wool. "Not only for himself, Albus. The bloody rat tried to take all three of us!" snapped Lucius. He tried again to get the grass stains out but they would not leave. "I need a drink," he grumbled.

"Come with me, Lucius," ordered Severus as he headed up the hill towards the castle. "I am in need of a nightcap."
17 August 1985 - 2am - Severus Snape's Bedroom

Lucius and Severus had their one drink, in silence, and then Lucius stepped into the Floo and back to his wife. Severus had then gone into his son's bedroom to check upon him and to make sure he was sleeping well. Nellie had opened her eyes, yawned at him, and curled back up to sleep. The Potions Master had listlessly dragged himself off to his bedroom.

Severus had showered under rather hot water with the hope that it might soothe his excess energy and allow him to sleep. That hope was shattered as he had spent nearly an hour staring at the dark green, watered silk canopy of his bed.

It bothered him, angered him really, that Pettigrew had chosen his own death. If he were honest with himself, Severus would liked to have tortured the wizard responsible for the death of his best friend, and the man she had loved. Frankly, he was jealous that Lucius had slipped two Cruciatius Curses into their interrogation. No doubt Albus had been up late giving a story to the Minister of Magic to justify the use of an Unforgivable on school grounds.

Severus turned on his side, closed his eyes, but opened them wide only a moment later.

"Where are you, Voldemort?" the weary Potions Master asked the darkness.

"I don't know where he is, Shadow, but I'm here." Harry padded into his father's room with Nellie following.

"You are supposed to be in bed, Harry," scolded Severus as the little boy climbed up onto his bed.

"You're supposed to be asleep, Dad," Harry countered. His father lifted the covers and the little boy slipped in curling himself up with his head against his father's chest. Harry reached up to pull the covers down so he could snuggle. "Sleep all you want, Shadow."

"But, I have so much to do..." began Severus. He felt his son shaking his head.

"'Member what you told me about Saturdays and Sundays? Unless you're teaching, and I'm going to school, and you have detentions, than those days are free. We can do whatever we want, and you're tired so let's sleep in and then we can have pancakes when we wake up."

Severus chuckled as he pulled his son closer, and settled his nose into the child's hair. Harry smelled like summer rain, the earth, and the sea air. "You are right, Magpie," he sighed. "There is nothing to do tomorrow and I would like pancakes."

"Lotsa syrup and butter?" asked Harry as he yawned.

"Certainly, Magpie. And... how about... the beach?" Harry lifted his head to look questioningly at his father. Nellie took that moment to climb up onto Severus' bed and settle herself in the dip between father and son. "When I was about your age, my mother took me to the beach."

"Did you build a sand castle?"

"I did," he said with a kiss to his son's forehead. "And then my mother told me all about the wonders of Hogwarts, Diagon Alley, and the Hogwarts Express."

Harry giggled, "I live in a castle!"

"As do I, little Magpie." He gave his son a small squeeze. "Go to sleep, my son. We shall dream of pancakes and ocean breezes." Severus dropped off to blessed sleep the moment Harry was sleeping.
Both dreamt of pancakes, with syrup and lots of butter, and castles of sand.

17 August 1985 - Almost Noon

Harry and Severus did sleep until nearly noon and woke to Nellie nuzzling both awake. They both dressed casually but at their breakfast, of pancakes (Harry had syrup and Severus indulged in blueberry and strawberry compote) Harry noted that he did not own a bathing suit.

"What am I going to do without a swimmin' suit, Shadow?" asked Harry as he stuffed a mouthful of pancakes delectably dripping with syrup into his mouth.

Severus tapped his chin, then indicated his son's napkin. Harry picked up the napkin and wiped away a drop of syrupy butter that had dripped onto his chin. "Magic will take care of swimsuits for us, Magpie."

"What kind of swim suits do wizards wear, Shadow?"

"They are called 'swim costumes' and they were all the rage amongst Muggles until... hmm... I believe the early 1900s," explained Severus. "It consists of a short sleeved swim shirt and shorts that fall to the knees."

"That's neat. Can my swim costume be any colour I want, Shadow?" asked Harry with a smirk of mischief on his face.

Severus scowled in warning, "Any colour you wish but nothing ridiculous, Magpie, or I shall put you in puce."

Harry frowned sharply. "Puce sounds gross!"

"Perhaps it is," purred Severus. "There is only one way to find out. Now, finish your milk. I want you to get all of that Nutrition Potion in you." Harry nodded and drank his milk while his father stood and Vanished their dishes. "Get dressed. I need to talk to your grandfather via the Floo."

"Okay, Shadow. Tell grandpa I love him!" Harry finished the last of his milk then scooted from the table to his bedroom.

While his son dressed for their afternoon at the beach Severus was in his sitting room kneeling at the Floo speaking to the Headmaster.

"Good afternoon, Father. Were you able to sleep at all?" asked Severus.

There was the muffled sound of a yawn. "I have not, Severus. I went immediately to the Wizangamot with the pensieve evidence of our interrogation of Peter Pettigrew. I don't want Sirius to spend any more time in Azkaban than he must. Perhaps you would retrieve him from Azkaban, my boy?"

"I am sorry, Albus. First of all, even though knowing that Black was not responsible for the deaths of his friends he did nearly kill me, and Lupin, for that matter. I am afraid that once we were a'sea in the boat I'd toss him overboard," grimaced the Potions Master. "Second of all I do not ever want to be anywhere near Azkaban, and certainly not in the vicinity of Dementors."

"True, too true. I am sorry, Severus, I was not thinking," again the older man yawned.
"Are you picking up Black at a certain time, Father?" he asked in concern.

"At eight in the evening. The Aurors wouldn't let him go until all the paperwork went through the proper channels," Albus sighed. He then forced a bit of cheer into his voice. "Have you and Harry plans for today, I hope?"

"As much as we need to find Voldemort, Harry and I have decided that today we just need to... go to the beach," Severus smirked.

"The beach! Well, I most heartily approve, my boy. Do enjoy yourselves immensely," the Headmaster had mustered a bit of genuine warmth.

"I firmly believe we shall, Father," he was about to close the Floo when the Headmaster stopped him.

"Severus, wait, please."

"Yes?" Severus had risen and he now knelt back down on the hearth.

Albus began carefully, "Are you aware that Sirius Black is Harry's godfather?"

Severus stiffened. "I was not... however, it does not surprise me. He and James Potter were... best friends." He drew in a deep breath. "What is it that concerns you, Father?"

"As Harry's legal father you have the right to change who his godfather..."

Severus interrupted, "I will honour the choice that Lily and James Potter designated, Albus. There will be rules, though, and the first one is for you."

"Me? I don't understand, my boy."

"You will explain to Black who I am to Harry and that he will not speak against me in front of the child," Severus explained. He continued, "Harry would only view such negative insults as an attack upon someone he loves and that would only end badly for Black, not myself or my son."

"I shall explain everything to him, my son. Sirius will understand or he will not be allowed near Harry."

Severus breathed a sigh of relief. "Thank you, Father."

"Think of me when you and Harry are building sand castles, Severus," said Albus and his son could hear a weary smile in his voice.

"Father, Harry asked me to give you his love," Severus replied. He added, almost quietly but loud enough for the old man to hear through the Floo, "and mine as well. Good day." He closed the Floo connection and relaxed to rest back so his bum rested upon the heel of his shod foot.

"Shadow!" Harry leaped upon his father from behind, wrapping his arms around the wizard's neck. Severus toppled over but quickly regained his equilibrium so he hovered over his son as he tickled his ribs. Harry squealed and begged his father to stop. The Potions Master picked up his son, hugged him, and then popped him onto his feet. He then stood.

"Shall we get our afternoon started, Magpie?"

"Yes!"
Brighton was the beach Severus' mother had taken him to when he was a child. It was a popular Muggle beach but the wizard wanted to go to a wizarding beach where magic would not be constricted. That beach was Blackpool Cove right beside Blackpool Sands in Devon. Blackpool Cove was protected from the windward side by white-faced cliffs that sloped down to a smooth, sandy beach that touched the turquoise sea. The beach was a gently curved area that was ten generous miles home to a beach resort - Bitty's End - on the sand's northeast side. Bitty's End offered rental cottages, a tea shoppe, three cafes and one restaurant, and a few residential homes for those that lived and worked there. Down at the water's very edge was a seasonal hut - Carlito's - that offered drinks to cool the palate.

Since Severus and Harry only planned a day on the beach they had found a nice spot nestled in a fold of the cliffs that offered a pleasant view of Bitty's End, and was a pleasant walk from Carlito's.

The first thing Severus did after they used a portkey to take them from the portkey station in Hogsmeade to Blackpool Cove, was to set up a circular, green striped tent for changing from their street clothing into swim costumes. Harry noted that there were similar tents along the beach.

"Come along, Magpie," Severus held the flap of the tent open and ushered his son within.

"Oooooh! Shadow! It's bigger on the inside than the outside! Like a TARDIS..." exclaimed Harry with big eyes at the replica of their sitting room in their apartment at Hogwarts.

"So it is!" agreed Severus as he removed his outer cloak and then his long coat.

"Dudley liked Doctor Who so I got to watch it, too, sometimes." He giggled. "The Doctor wears celery on his coat."

"I recall that you equated the location of Hogsmeade to a TARDIS," Severus mused with a smirk.

"You watched telebision as a kid, Shadow?" asked Harry as his father steered him over to the sofa where he stood the child in front of himself.

"I certainly did, Magpie. And, it is tele-vision." replied Severus. "Your mother and I used to watch Doctor Who."

"Tele-VISION," Harry repeated the word correctly. "You and my mum watched that show, Shadow?" He then watched as his father removed his jumper leaving him in shirt, shorts, socks, and trainers.

"Your mother was fascinated by Doctor Who so I watched the show with her," he said wistfully. "I did not think I would care for it at first. I grew to eagerly anticipate it, though."

"Shadow? Did you love my mummy?" Harry asked carefully.

Severus hesitated then replied slowly, "At one time I believed I did. It was not to be, though. I treasure the memories I have of us being best friends."

Harry climbed upon his father's lap, threw his arms around him and hugged him tightly. "I love you, Shadow! I'll tell you every day so you won't ever forget." Harry kissed his father's cheek.

Severus kissed his son's cheek and then put him back on his feet. "I am... blessed, my little Magpie." He lifted his wand and tapped his son's shirt changing it from sea green to a stretchy cotton with horizontal white and purple stripes. He then tapped the shorts changing the fabric to the same flexible cotton but in solid, purple coloured swim shorts that fell to his knees.
Harry looked down at his swimming costume. "It looks good but can I have yellow shorts?"

Severus' jaw dropped. "Yellow? And purple stripes? You are hanging around your grandfather too much."

"No I'm not," huffed Harry in annoyance.

Severus sighed the heaven-weary sigh of all parents as he changed the colour of his son's swim shorts from understated purple to bright, lemon yellow. "Yellow," stated Severus with a glower.

Harry pulled up the hems of his swim shorts to view the pretty yellow colour. He beamed. "I look snazzy!"

"Snazzy? Wherever did you hear that term, Magpie?"

Harry leaned with his bum against the edge of the sofa as his father stood to transfigure his clothing into his swimming costume. "When I lived with the Dursleys there was this next door neighbor, Mr. Cudahy, who was about as old as grandpa. He knew my aunt and uncle didn't like me to get nice words on anything so he'd wait until no one was around and tell me that my garden was 'snazzy looking'. When I asked him one time what that meant Mr. Cudahy told me that snazzy meant beautiful. So, I'm beautiful, right, Shadow?"

Severus glanced sideways at his son. "If I agree, I shall deny it should you ever tell anyone."

"Okay." Harry giggled. "Hurry up I wanna swim and you still got your clothes on."

Severus sneered sans-malice at his son. He then tapped his white shirt until it became a long, black swim shirt that fell to his mid-thigh. His trousers were then transfigured into a pair of black swim shorts that ended just below his knees. Lastly were his boots that he transfigured into sensible swim shoes. He then held out his arms akimbo in order for his son to assess his appearance.

Harry smiled, and purred (rather like his father did), "Snazzy!"

"Hah!" Severus stroked his son's cheek and then nudged him out of the tent.

"Shadow? Do you know how to swim?"

It turned out, of course, that Harry did not know how to swim so Severus held onto his son as he floated. They kept near the beach so the Potions Master did not go deeper than his hips. Still, they both were dunked by waves until both were soaked.

A half an hour later they both emerged, went into their tent where Severus dried them off with a charm, and then he rubbed a fresh layer of Sun Screening Potion onto both of them. With towels for them each, and Harry with a bucket and scoop, they settled just above the encroaching surf. Right away the little boy began to scoop up buckets of sand for a sand castle. He wound up with melting lumps, though, as he did not know how to get the right ratio of dry sand to wet sand, nor packing the sand.


The Potions Master rose from his towel and knelt in the sand opposite his son. He could have used magic to create a sand castle but it was more rewarding to build one from scratch. As they began to build solid towers and a wall around the towers, Harry began questioning his father.
"You didn't answer me earlier, Shadow. Do you know how to swim?"

"I do," replied Severus as he shored up one wall with a slope of wet sand at the base.

"Do you go to the beach to swim?"

"This is the first time I have been to the beach since I was a child, Magpie. I swim at Hogwarts." He clarified. "In the Black Lake."

Harry's eyes widened. "Where the Mer people live?" Severus nodded. "But those mean grindy-slow are there and you told me they bite!"

"Grindy-lows," the wizard corrected. "You are right, Magpie. They do bite and try to drown you if they catch you."

"Do you use magic to make them go away?" asked Harry with curiosity.

"The Giant Squid keeps them away," Severus replied. "He can be a bit frightening if one does not know him but the Giant Squid is a gentle creature and he rather likes us wizards and witches. When I swim in the Black Lake he keeps the grindylows away."

Harry patted the sides of one tower, examined it, and then began to shape the conical roof. "Do you think the Giant Squid would like me?"

"You are rather likable, Magpie," smirked Severus as he carved windows out of a tower. He had conjured the tool and his son had not noticed it, yet.

"Yeah, I am, aren't I, Shadow," Harry smirked back. He then eyed the small tool his father was using. "Hey! Where'd you get that?"

"My back pocket," Severus replied instantly.

"You did not! You don't have no pockets..." he got up and walked over to his father and tried to look for pockets but Severus dodged to the left. Harry tried again but his father dodged to the right. Harry pursed his lips, feinted to the left, and then tackled his father to the sand.

Severus did not let a small fall into the sand deter him. He caught his son and began to tickle his ribs. Harry shrieked, wriggled, and slithered from his father's hands. He then ran towards the surf and padded rapidly across the seafoam. Severus was in pursuit and after only a moment he caught his son from behind, raised him high overhead, and propped him on his shoulders. The wizard cast a silent and wandless feather light charm and then a charm to support his son on his shoulders.

Harry was extremely delighted by seeing the world at this new height. "I feel like I can touch the sky, Shadow!" crowed Harry as he stretched his arms over his head.

Severus carried his son and then walked down to the ocean where he stepped in until his knees were under the water. Harry let out a screech as his father tossed him from his shoulders. Severus did not leave his son to sink or swim. He dove in after his little Magpie, caught him, and drew him up to the surface where he spluttered, and shook his head.

"You threw me in the water, Shadow!" chastised Harry with a pout.

"Did you hate it?" Severus asked half-seriously.

"Oh nooooo! Do it again, please!" Severus picked up Harry and threw him into the ocean... again.
The little boy let out a giggling squeal that was quickly swallowed by the water. The Potions Master dove after his son even though he had secured an invisible leash to Harry so he would not lose him to a tricky current. Over and over again until both were worn out.

They dragged themselves out of the water, rested a bit on their towels, and then Harry continued to work on the sand castle. Severus folded up his long legs and wrapped his arms around his knees and settled in to watch his son.

Intent upon his work Harry built walls, towers, and interconnecting rooms. One large, rectangular room dominated all the buildings. As Harry gouged long windows into the walls Severus recognised the Great Hall of Hogwarts. He became curious when Harry settled his backside upon his heels and was counting under his breath.

"One, two, three, four... fiiiiive... siiiiix... seven." He smiled at his finished work. "What do you think, Shadow?"

"You have created a remarkable likeness of Hogwarts, Magpie," approved Severus. "Are you certain there are seven windows to a side?"

"Yes, because I counted them," Harry replied. "Behind the teachers there's the hourglasses for the Houses. You can't see them from the outside, though. I also counted the windows in the Entrance Hall and there's four big ones with diamonds in the windows that are each different colours. The windows have animals at the top, too." The little boy began to work on a small hut at the base of the castle. He continued telling his father about the Entrance Hall stained glass windows. "One is mostly red, and fire, and golds, and yellows. At its pointy top is a lion that looks like its going to attack something. Next to that is the blue one with diamonds that are all kinds of blue. It's got a big bird that's going to fly down and get a rabbit for dinner. The third one looks like a happy bumblebee with lots of yellows. It should have a giant bee on it but there's a weird animal on it that looks sort of like a skinny teddy skunky bear."

Severus chuckled softly, "Tis a badger, Magpie."

"A badger?"

"An animal that digs into the ground for its simple fare. They are known for their tenacity in seeking out that which is lost. Terribly fierce fighters. And, loyal." Severus sighed heavily. "To have a badger as a friend..." The wizard unfolded himself and moved closer to his son's castle. "You said there were four windows in the Entrance Hall, Magpie. What is that one like?"

Harry looked up and grinned, "The last one is really pretty with lots of greens and it looks like a pirate's treasure. There's a snake at the top of the window with silver eyes." Harry smirked. "A snazzy snake."

"Hmm, so might I assume you like snakes, Magpie?" asked Severus as he pointed his wand at Hagrid's sand hut and created little sand pumpkins in the sandy garden.

"Yep," replied Harry. "I know that Britain has three kinds of snakes: the grass snake, the smooth snake, and the..." he paused and then spoke the next word slowly, "the... esk-you-lap-ee-n snake*. And, then, Britain only has one snake that's poison. The adder."

"How do you know all of this, Magpie?"

"Well, my cousin Dudley got these kid encyclopedias as a gift for his third birthday that Aunt Petunia read to him. To make him smart, you know? I don't think that worked, though, 'cause
Dudley is dumb and mean. But, I listened from my cupboard when Aunt Petunia read from the encyclopedia so I'm the one that got smart." He smiled smugly. "I learned about snakes, and lions, and Africa, and Australia..." he shrugged and patted the roof of Hagrid's sand hut into shape. "I think I sorta know lots of things." Harry glanced shyly up at his father. "Is that okay, that I know some stuff?"

Severus reached over and stroked his fingers down his son's cheek. "More thank all right, Magpie. I look forward to expanding your knowledge."

"Really? Can I have some encyclopedias? Wait, does the wizarding world have them?" He rose to his feet and clambered onto his father's lap.

"En-cyclo-pedia," pronounced Severus. "We do not have an encyclopedia but there is something equally educational and interesting that I could buy for you. It is called the Grand Compendium of the History & Legends of Witches and Wizards. So far there are 17 volumes."

"Wow! That's a lot of..." Harry yawned so wide his jaw cracked. He chuckled. "I think I'm tired, Shadow."

"What about a little nap before we take in dinner at a restaurant in Bitty's End?" suggested Severus.

"That sounds good," Harry yawned again.

Severus Summoned their towels and transfigured them into an air mattress. He rose, then knelt down on the air mattress and curled up with his son. His last bit of magic was to conjure an interesting bit of cloud that blocked the sun enough that they were shaded but not freezing. The sun block the Potions Master formulated and brewed for he and his son would be sure to deflect the burning rays.

Harry fell asleep first but Severus was soon behind.

Chapter End Notes

*The Aesculapian Snake was accidentally introduced to the British Isles about 30-40 years ago from zoo escapees.
17 August 1985 - Azkaban

It had taken an accusation from... no one knew who, and the supposition of two Aurors that found the hand of Peter Pettigrew and the unconscious body of Sirius Black to send the man to Azkaban without a trial one day after the deaths of James and Lily Potter. However, three years and nine months later, with his innocence proved via Veritaserum deposition through the pensieved memory of the Headmaster of Hogwarts... it would take a near mountain of paperwork to release the wizard from the dreaded prison.

Sirius had been neatly shoved from his wretched bed before dawn on the 17th of August, 1985. Of course he had no idea what date it was. He did know who he was because his ability to transform into the form of a great, shaggy, black dog when his human guards were not watching had preserved his mind. That did not mean that he was wholly healthy.

The wizard had had his powers bound when he was incarcerated. They did not bind his Animagus talent because they did not know of it and had not woven it into the Binding spell. From that day forward he had endured a filthy looking gruel composed of the barest nutrition and the worst of taste. Consequently he was shockingly underweight. He survived regular beatings and sadistic rape from three of his human guards. As horrid as all of that was it was his time beneath the aura of the Dementors, his skeletal guards that fed on any bit of well-being and hope he had, that had been the worst.

A hosing of cold water from the wands of four guards wet him down while he shivered in the humiliating nude with a bare sliver of soap to wash himself. He had then been dried by a viciously heated drying spell that felt like it was burning his skin off. After suffering his bath a guardian in mustard coloured robes with a bald head, and an eerie smile, that the exonerated prisoner had never seen before handed him a folded stack of clothing. Sirius was finally allowed a moment of privacy in which to dress in out-dated clothing that hung upon his emaciated frame.

Sirius lost his composure when he came to the socks and shoes, and wept. Simple, functional, and the shoes did not quite fit but it was a taste of civilisation he had not known in a long time. Socks and shoes were not something a prisoner was allowed. When he emerged from the solitary room into an actual, if sparse, yard he almost wanted to break down into tears once more.

"Ahhh, Mr. Black," greeted the strange, monkish looking guardian. "Nearly presentable." He held up his wand. "We shall adjust your clothing, if we may?" Sirius managed a confused nod. The wand was waved and Sirius felt his clothing hugging him into a trimmer fit. Even his shoes were adjusted to fit his feet.

"Wh-wh-what is going on?" Sirius finally managed to ask raspily.

The odd wizard took Sirius a bit too intimately by the arm to escort him to their destination. "Come with us to the reception room and while you have lunch we shall explain everything. Come, come, now."

Sirius was led across the sparse yard and into a room lit by the warmth of the sun through a large window. The view was of the black waves of the ocean surrounding Azkaban. Sirius closed his eyes
to bathe in the warmth. He had not seen any sun or moon the entire time he had spent in Azkaban.

Behind him the guardian set a table for one and produced a sumptuous lunch of salad, with tomatoes, olives, fresh croutons of an herbed bread, a tall sandwich of turkey and ham, a bowl of fruit that held cubes of fresh fruit. Also included was a carafe of orange juice.

"Lunch, Mr. Black," called the guardian. "Do come."

Sirius did not think he wanted to face any food but there had been a tone in the pleasant, dulcet voice of the guardian that was not giving him a choice. Suppressing a sudden shiver as to the mystery of his changed circumstances, he moved to the table. He looked down at the food waiting for him and his mouth salivated with unexpected hunger. He sat down and began with the orange juice.

One swallow of the fresh juice was nirvana. As the natural vitamins burst healthily in his entrails he sighed, smiled, and finished the orange juice. His appetite strengthened and even though the guardian watched every move Sirius made, he ignored the mustard-man, and ate. It seemed only seconds passed and he was finishing the sandwich and all but ravenously devouring the fruit. He sat back in his chair and patted his thin stomach. He could not recall ever having a meal that had given him such satisfaction.

The table was cleared, and was vanished. "Please take a seat, Mr. Black," the guardian's voice asked/ordered. Sirius moved to the indicated chair and gingerly seated himself in its extravagant comfort.

"Is this a new form of torture?" asked Sirius. He was feeling a bit more like his old self and questions rose in his mind as to what was going on.

The guardian laughed, and seated himself across from Sirius. "Goodness, no, Mr. Black. You are beyond the grasp of torture. You are a free man."

Sirius' spine stiffened and he sat up straight. "Free? How... what... I don't understand."

"Peter Pettigrew, Mr. Black. He survived the deception of his own death. He admitted to setting you up, and serving the Potters to Voldemort." The guardian watched as a thundercloud of emotions swept across the young man's face. "We can see the confusion upon your face, Mr. Black. We do believe that a badly set memory spell is the cause of much of your confusion." Again he held up his wand. "If we may?"

Sirius eyed the wand guardedly before nodding. The guardian rose from his chair, circled Sirius as he waved his wand, and mumbled in a language he could not recognise. "Aha! There it is! A memory block. We can remove that, if you wish, Mr. Black?"

"Yes," growled Sirius.

A flick of the wrist and then the guardian re-seated himself. Again he watched as the younger wizard's face replayed the events of 31 October 1981. The moment in which Peter Pettigrew's final betrayal was of Sirius Black.

"I'll kill that rat," Sirius growled as his hands tightly gripped the arms of his chair.

The guardian chuckled, "As satisfying as that might be, Mr. Black. We must regretfully inform you that Peter Pettigrew used a Suicide Spell to immolate himself to ashes as he was being interrogated."

"So I am free." Sirius stated a bit dumbly. He started to rise from his chair.
"You are free," said the guardian who had risen from his own seat and began pushing Sirius back into his chair, "but not free to go. There is the matter of a bit of paperwork that Albus Dumbledore is dealing with."

"Paperwork?" asked Sirius blankly.

"Government runs on the back of parchment, Mr. Black," smiled the guardian in amusement." He then began a recitation of all of the forms the Headmaster was dealing with at the Ministry.

Sirius was not listening to the boring diatribe. His thoughts had tumbled over the murder of his friends, Lily and James, and settled upon their son. His godson. James had formally made him his son's godparent at Harry's birth. "What happened to Harry?" Sirius asked abruptly. His voice interrupted the guardian.

"Harry?" the guardian asked showing a bit of true uncertainty.

Sirius eyed the strange wizard sharply. "Harry Potter. My godson. What's happened to him? Did he survive that night? Where is he? Does Albus have him?"

The guardian held up a hand of blunt fingers with sharpened nails that gave him the appearance of claws. Sirius dismissed the fanciful illusion and concentrated upon his godson.

"Harry Potter did survive and the most we are allowed to reveal to you is that he is well, Mr. Black. However, we must clarify that you are no longer the child's godfather."

Anger boiled up inside of Sirius but he held it down in his gut. Even so, he still bit out, "What do you mean I am no longer his godfather. James formally named me himself!"

"Ah, well, as you were recently a prisoner of our humble prison the law removed that right of your civilian life. An adoption also supersedes the wishes of the child's former parents. If Harry's new father wishes to name you as godfather he may do so..."

"I am Harry's godfather," Sirius insisted stubbornly.

"No. You are not." Although the guardian had not changed from his genial mien, the tenor of his voice was exquisitely firm. So much so that Sirius felt his inner flame of anger die as the prisoner he was rose obediently to the surface. The recently incarcerated prisoner deflated and his shoulders drooped.

The guardian rose to his feet, encouraged Sirius to stand, and once more he slipped his arm through that of Sirius'. He tugged the man close revealing that he was shorter by at least a foot. Even so, Sirius was the one who felt small, and obedient to the man that held him.

"So much has changed, Mr. Black. We wish we could reveal it all but we were given strict instruction not to do so," the guardian led Sirius back into the small courtyard where the grass grew sickly. The guardian patted his reluctant companion's forearm with his other hand. "There are no clouds so far, Mr. Black. We suggest you wait as patiently as possible until you are able to leave this miserable place." The guardian glanced up as Sirius stopped and raised his face to the small bit of sunshine that penetrated down to the rude courtyard. His eyes were closed, his face relaxed. "Freedom, Mr. Black, is a little touch of the sun."

For the rest of his day of freedom in Azkaban the strange guardian, who frankly gave Sirius the collywobbles, left him alone to wander between the room Sirius was calling the 'guardian's office' and the 'small yard'. He paced, slept on the grass, slept in the chair, and paced again. The guardian
Uppermost on Sirius' mind was the son of James Potter, Harry. What had happened to the boy? Who adopted him? How long had he been adopted? It did not matter, truly, that the adoption had removed him as Harry's godfather. An adoption did not remove the fierce protection he felt for the child.

When the night removed the last of the rays of the sun from the small yard Sirius wandered into the guardian's office where he found dinner had been laid out for him. As he seated himself in front of the absolutely delectable steak he wondered what time it was.

"It is 7:42 in the evening, Mr. Black," the guardian replied to the unspoken thought.

Sirius dropped his knife and it clattered to the plate as he spun around in his chair to look at the odd wizard. "You read my mind!" he accused.

The guardian bowed obsequiously. "We do humbly apologise, Mr. Black. It is rather a habit and we do forget that we do not have to monitor everyone that comes in our purview."

Slowly Sirius returned to the steak. He ate cautiously as he glanced once or twice over his shoulder. After three bites of his steak, he placed his cutlery upon his plate and turned to face the guardian who was shelving what appeared to be books.

"What are you?" Sirius demanded.

"Ahhh," the guardian turned and smiled at Sirius. "We had thought you might leave Azkaban without ever asking but your curiosity has peaked, hasn't it?" Sirius only glared. "My species is not a large one, Mr. Black, and unless your education touched upon the arcane and esoteric, you would never have heard of us. The UnSpeakables call my people Janus. We are the only one who works at Azkaban; employed by the UnSpeakables."

"Janus," Sirius eyed the wizard with suspicion. "I know that Janus was a two-headed god in the Greek pantheon. What has he to do with your people? Is that why you keep referring to yourself as 'we'?"

The guardian moved so that Sirius could turn back to his dinner. "That is... hm... difficult to explain but we shall try. Mr. Black, looking at me we appear as one being, don't we?"

Sirius nodded slowly and sipped at the wine that had been provided with his steak. He nodded. "One person, yes."

"Ah, person we are not. Creature is more apt. And, we are not one creature, but two." He smiled at the confusion that settled upon Sirius' features. "A further clarification, then, Mr. Black. Humans are divided into male and female, correct?" Sirius only nodded slowly. "Well, the Janus are both. We," he bowed low. "are male and female. Together as one."

"You're a hermaphrodite!" guessed Sirius.

The guardian laughed and shook his head. "It is a bit more complicated than mere genitalia, Mr. Black. We are two distinct bodies, male and female, that appear as one." The guardian bowed as if in apology.

"And, you read minds," sneered Sirius. He did not like the idea that this thing, this Janus, had been in his mind for nearly four years.

"We monitor the thoughts of all our prisoners. The Dementors enervate our prisoners so they are
unable to run but it is still possible to escape, if they so wish. Those are the thoughts we remain aware of." The guardian sidled up to Sirius and spoke as if they were conspirators. "How clever you were in taking an Animagus form, Mr. Black, to escape the depression of the Dementors." He patted Sirius' forearm and the wizard jerked back sharply at the touch. "Had you ever thought as a dog to escape you would not have gotten far, Mr. Black." He turned back to shelving books, his back turned to Sirius. "But freedom beckons and escape is no longer in question for you, Mr. Black. Aren't you the fortunate one?"

17 August 1985 - Evening - Hogwarts

Albus Dumbledore arrived in the Janus Guardian's office precisely at eight in the evening. Not in the mood for pleasantries the Headmaster handed the guardian the paperwork from the Ministry releasing Sirius Black. He indulged the young wizard in a hug that was all too brief for Sirius but he allowed himself to depart the guardian's office, leave the walls of Azkaban behind, and headed down to the pier where a boat that appeared un-sea-worthy waited.

Magic made it possible for the boat to sail black, choppy waves. A potion that Albus gave Sirius eased the discomfort in his stomach from a rich lunch and dinner. It was after they docked that a Thestral drawn carriage waited for them.

"I can see the Thestral," Sirius remarked softly. Albus did not acknowledge the observation.

As much as Sirius wanted to say, hoped to say, to the old wizard he had revered since childhood he said nothing. In hugging the Headmaster he had sensed obvious weariness but underneath that was a chill that the young wizard would never have equated to the elder.

The silent ride ended at the great, oak doors that were the entrance to the castle. Both men disembarked, one leading, the other following as his thoughts and emotions whirled with helpless abandon inside of him.

On the flagstone floor of the Entrance Hall Sirius finally spoke up, "Albus, speak to me. Please..."

"My office, Sirius. I am very tired but I find that there are things I must say to you before I sleep," sighed Albus tightly.

The elder man spoke not another word and did not look behind him to see whether or not Sirius was following him. A part of him almost seemed not to care but he knew he was not the hard Slytherin his son was. He was a Gryffindor, old in years, but in the years since the Potters deaths the past of those children, the Marauders versus Severus Snape, had played over and over in his mind. His own role in influencing their lives was now a stark, and bleeding wound, that had festered. He would speak to Sirius as he had not done so when the man was a child. The wound threatened to engulf the old man and a silly, perhaps worrisome part of himself, thought he just might die.

Up in his office, Albus poured a glass of elven wine to fortify himself. He deliberately did not offer any to Sirius but indicated that the younger man should sit as he drank the fermented grapes that often reminded him of smoky Autumn, the dying of a season bringing the chill clarity of Winter.

"Albus," Sirius began. "You're scaring me. This is not as I had ever hoped our reunion would be. Has something happened to Harry? Is it possible for me to see him? I was told that he had been adopted." The young, ex-prisoner smiled warily, and chuckled worriedly. "I sort of hoped you adopted him, or perhaps Moony was finally able to get past Ministry restrictions, and..."

Albus bluntly interrupted, "Harry was adopted by Severus Snape."
Sirius went from nervous wariness to instant anger. His entire stance as he rose to his feet became a flame of righteous indignation and he shouted, "Snivellus! You gave Jamie's son to that filthy, Slytherin, Death Eater? Are you mad?!"

"Sit. Down." Albus words were taut with emotion he could not readily identify as it was laced with his own guilt of the past. Sirius slammed back into the chair and glared darkly at the older wizard. "You will speak of my son with the respect that is his due. Severus is Harry's father and they have bonded in a way I'll not allow you to sunder."

"Madness!" snarled Sirius. "That scum has bamboozled you, Albus. You know how he was when we were students. He was a slippery, angry, snivelling wizard of Darkness that crawled in the dirt with others of his sliminess. What has that waste of flesh done to you, Albus?"

"Severus has removed a sight prejudiced by red and gold, and four Marauders until I saw and acknowledged the truth, Sirius. It is unwise to speak against... my son... to me," Albus reiterated with renewed strength.

"Son? I don't... Albus. I feel like Alice falling in that hole after the white rabbit. What are you saying to me? Is that Death Eater like a son to you?" Sirius' face pleaded for understanding even as hatred stretching all the way back to his youth burned in his eyes. 

"Not like a son, Sirius. Severus is my son. I adopted him not long after he adopted Harry. Of course, that makes Harry my grandson. I shall not go into that, now. We need to speak of what you expect and you need to understand that those expectations must change."

Sirius, still taut with confusion and anger, sat in the chair as his nerves thrummed with hatred he could not direct at anyone other than the older wizard before him.

"Severus has been a son to me almost since the night he came to me with that hideous Dark Mark on his arm. I had nothing but disappointment and contempt for him. I have now acknowledged, to my son, that I was wrong to judge him for what he'd had no control over. I, as much as his parents, the Marauders, you, and his contemporaries, pushed him until the only acceptance he could find was at the feet of Voldemort."

Albus sipped his wine for a moment, and then said, "Do you want to know something, Sirius? I realised that at the worst possible moment of his life Severus did not turn hate upon our world and murder us all in our sleep. Severus came to me. He came to me and his heart reached out for forgiveness." Albus' hand ghosted over his eyes and drifted down to his beard. "I would not forgive, though." Albus sighed towards the past. His own actions were hard to face each time he did so, but he reminded himself that Severus suffered more. "Despite my open disgust with him and the Mark upon his arm, still he thought of his best friend."

Sirius barked a laugh that was bit off prematurely as the Headmaster glared at him. "Albus, everyone knows that Sniv... er, Snape, had the hots for Lily. She told him to bugger off after what he called her and she never spoke to him again. He just wanted Voldemort to save Lily for him. Snape didn't care one whit for Harry or Jamie!"

"Severus had me hide the Potters, Sirius. He also advised me to make you their Secret Keeper since he believed you would do your best to keep your dearest friend and his family safe. Sadly, at my behest, he remained with the Death Eaters. He endured their ridicule, their abuses, and he brought to me knowledge we would not have had if he had not felt a loyalty towards the humanity that existed within himself."

A shudder drifted over the older man's body as an old grief sank its claws into him momentarily. "I
was beyond angry at you for your stupidity in making Peter your Secret Keeper. The Ministry wanted to sentence you to the Dementors Kiss and I was very willing to let them do it." He settled his light blue gaze upon the thin, younger man before him, and pierced him with his eyes. "Severus saved you, Sirius. He was going to Azkaban just for being a Death Eater but it was he stayed my hand when I so easily wanted to condemn you in my grief. He told me then, and now I know the truth of it, that 'we do not know what was done, Albus. We must know before such punishment as the Dementors Kiss is given'."

For a long moment Albus only looked at Sirius. Sirius felt the heaviness of that gaze, the accusation, the hurt, even. Even so he could not stop him from biting out, "You believe Snivellus saved me?"

Power of an ancient Merlin rose in the old wizard as he forced himself to his feet. He strode over to Sirius, towering over the boy who wilted before him. "His name is Severus Snape. My son. Use that vile nickname in my presence once more and you will regret it, Black." Just as quickly the Headmaster was returned and he shuffled to his chair where he sipped down the last of his wine. "You owe your life, even your freedom to a man you would easily have killed as a student."

Sirius snorted, unwisely, "That was a simple prank, Albus! You took points and gave me detention. Are you seriously under the belief that I meant to kill Snape? Has he twisted your mind so thoroughly that you think him innocent and I the one wrong?"

"To my everlasting chagrin you were wrong, Sirius! You endangered Severus' life and you were more than willing to sacrifice your own best friend's life to do so!" Sirius frowned in puzzlement. "Remus! Have you never thought once about what might have happened to him had Severus been bitten or killed? Never mind that Remus has not hurt or killed anyone while a wolf but you would have handed Severus to him on a silver platter."

Sirius snorted, "Moony wouldn't have killed Snape!"

Albus was about to add to his rant but he paused as he studied the man before him. "Is that what you truly believe?"

"You don't know the control Moony had over the wolf, Albus!" Sirius retorted. "He would never have hurt anyone!"

"Sirius... Remus is a werewolf. He has no control over the bloodthirsty beast within. Whether it had been James, you, Peter, or Severus the wolf would have killed all of you." He then pierced Sirius with the dagger of his disappointment. "And Remus would have been legally destroyed by the Ministry if he did not kill himself, first!"

Albus drew his fingers soothingly through his beard while Sirius tried to think of the past, what he had done, and see it for the truth of his actions. Instead, the hardheaded stubbornness that marked a Black was all too prominent on the man's face.

Albus shifted in his chair and leaned forward. "Think upon this, Sirius. Harry, living here in the castle followed myself and Remus on the night of a full moon to the Whomping Willow. He lost all self of caution as his magic was caught by magic you and James had set down upon a hidden path when you were students." He was pleased to see that Sirius was listening intently. Albus continued. "My grandson followed us all the way to the Whomping Willow, through its dangerous limbs, and to its trunk. He then fell into the tunnel beneath the tree. Had Harry not hit the back of his head and knocked himself out it is very possible that he could have been a victim of the werewolf. And, there would have been nothing I could do since werewolves tend to be impervious to most wizarding magic. Remus would then be destroyed by the Ministry and Harry Snape would have buried with his parents."
The moment Albus had called James Potter's son Harry Snape a deep, unreasonable hatred filled his heart. "Harry Potter! He is James' son you bloody, wanker! Prongs would come through the Veil to kill Snivellus if that were..."

"EXPPELLIARMUS!" thundered the wizard who had ended the reign of Gellert Grindlewald. Sirius was slammed backwards so hard that he was ripped from his chair and thrown into a glass cabinet of curios and preserved, old scrolls. The glass fell about the ex-prisoner and it was a good thing Albus had long ago prevented broken glass from doing harm. The shards fell like chiming diamonds all about Sirius who had been knocked out cold.

Power such as many wizards had not ever seen or known flowed as a burst of adrenaline in the old wizard's. Unfortunately, lack of sleep in more than 24 hours, and the anger behind the Expelliarmus had simply been too much for Albus. Taking in one, long breath, he crumpled like decaying parchment to the floor in a blessed swoon.

Poppy was cataloguing all of her Infirmary supplies when she was interrupted by an insistent ring through the air. It was a monitoring charm she had put on the Headmaster after he had exhausted his magic in adding a ward to Hogwarts to keep an Animagus trapped. Dropping everything she ran to her office, threw Floo powder on the flames, and was soon in the Headmaster's tower. Just as she arrived Albus was slowly sitting up.

"Albus! What happened?" The Healer knelt down and cast a simple Diagnostic Charm.

"Sirius..." she followed his glance to the fallen man. "Poppy, please see if he is all right. I was..." he shook his head. "He angered me."

"You need to sleep, Albus," she patted his arm and then rose to move over to Sirius. She ran her Diagnostic Charm and clucked her tongue. "You gave him a bump on the head, Albus, and he shall recover from that. However, he is severely malnourished and his bones are showing early signs of osteoporosis." She shook her head. "Numerous cuts and bruises and..." she gasped and closed her eyes.

"I guessed as much, Poppy," he echoed her shock with his weariness. "Azkaban monitors the prisoners but not the guards who are supposed to take care of the prisoners. Please, send him to St. Mungo's Poppy. They need to do a complete evaluation before I can remove the Binding Spell over his magic."

Poppy had conjured a stretcher that she was levitating Sirius onto. He groaned but did not wake. "I will take care of him, Albus. You must get to bed, and now. You are physically exhausted and that has put a considerable dent in your magic." She helped the older wizard to his feet. "Go on, Albus."

Albus trudged up the stairs to his room. He heard the whoosh of the Floo and knew that Poppy and Sirius were gone.

Once in his bed the Headmaster found sleep difficult despite the fact that he truly was tired. He had hoped for an accord between Severus and Sirius so that his son could honour James' desire to have Sirius as godfather to Harry. The man that he had encountered was eerily like the teenage boy who often created additional trouble all on his own, thus straining the patience of his Head of House, Minerva McGonagall. The hate within Sirius for Severus was, to be honest, a bit frightening. He could not expect Severus to deal with it, and Albus himself was loathe to expose his young grandson to it.

Less than four years in Azkaban and Sirius had become unhinged. His time as a prisoner had only...
made worse the flaws he'd had as a child.

Albus shuffled in his bedding and pulled his duvet over his head. Something he had not done since... since the death of Ariana, his little sister.

Thinking of Harry and Severus at the beach he smiled wistfully into the dark. He would like to visit the beach someday. His last time spent in such idyll had been when he, Ariana, and Aberforth had all been children.

The Dumbledore children had lived a stone's throw from a wizarding beach in Godric's Hollow and the three siblings often retreated to the beach to escape a father who was not an ideal sort. Their father was not one to hit them, or hex them if they disobeyed. He yelled, though. He was angry quite a bit. Even now, thinking of his father, Albus shivered in the warmth of his bed. His father had frightened him, Ariana, and Aberforth.

Severus was certainly not afraid of Albus; at least not these days. Harry had accepted Albus with literal open arms. He hoped to never see his grandson in fear of him.

Thinking of his joyous grandson and how the child had lifted Severus from the darkness of his own world finally was enough to allow him to sleep.

---

18 August 1985 - Morning

Severus had wanted to indulge in laziness and sleep but his inner timepiece had awakened him that day just as the sun was rising. The Potions Master had slipped from his bed, taken care of his ablutions for the morning, tightened the belt on his long, green velvet night robe, made his coffee, and then settled for a bit in the sitting room.

A letter had been waiting for him that had been sent by Floo; it was from Poppy Pomfrey in the Infirmary. As had been lately, thinking of the woman had brought a warmth to his belly that was like the affection he held for his son, but was not. There was an 'otherness' that he could not readily identify. He felt drawn to this witch that had befriended him since childhood and had remained his friend even when he had been a foolish, young man, and tried to turn away a friendship he had not felt worthy of.

The subject of Poppy's letter was not a pleasant one but it was something he needed to know; his father remained asleep after having to deal with Sirius Black yesterday. He is an old man and that is a factor but his magic was expended under the casting of a spell fueled by frustration and anger at Sirius. Sirius suffered a bump on the head, and unconsciousness. I sent him to St. Mungo's for that and ordered an evaluation done. His years in Azkaban were, I can only say this much, unkind to him.

Before your father retired to his bed last night he sent an order to me in regards to Sirius Black, and I pass this onto you: Sirius Black is to have no interaction with Harry until both Albus and St. Mungo's are in agreement that he is able to behave in a civil manner.
I would like to end this on a more pleasant note by saying that I am grateful for all the medicinal potions you have brewed for me for the start of term. They are all catalogued, shelved, and await the students.

**Poppy**

_P.S._ You mentioned in passing, literally, the other day about Harry wishing me to attend the theatre with you both. I would be delighted to join you. The Hogsmeade Regional Wizards Theatre has a Saturday Matinee in which they are presenting the telling of Robin Hood for their final show of the season on the 24th. Are you interested?

Severus Summoned parchment and a Never-Ink Quill to reply to Poppy's postscript. He had never gone to a live theatre show but he had promised such to Harry. It would be very agreeable to have Poppy join them. He sent his reply through the Floo and then wrote another letter, of a business inquiry, to St. Mungo's chief Healer Ascel Witt.

**To: Healer Witt**

**Chief Healer at St. Mungo's**

**Healer Witt,**

_I would like permission to visit Sirius Black while he is in hospital._

**Severus Snape**

**Master of Potions, Hogwarts Instructor**

His last, short missive he also sent through the Floo. A reply sailed through the green flames about ten minutes later. The Potions Master caught the parchment and read the note. He had his first appointment at one in the afternoon. If Albus were awake he could watch Harry for him.

---

**18 August 1985**

Albus woke just before noon and he was more than pleased to watch over his grandson when Severus called him. The headmaster intended to take Harry to visit Hagrid and to feed the Thestrals. Before he took on that pleasant duty he travelled to the Whomping Willow to look in upon Remus Lupin. There was one more night of the full moon but Albus intended to make sure that Remus had weathered the change from the last two nights with fairly little injury to himself.

Remus Lupin, slept lightly in the admittedly rickety looking bed on the first floor of the Shrieking Shack. His clothing had suffered the usual change from man to wolf and lay in large shreds upon the floor. Remus, wrapped only in a sheet, had curled up in a foetal position to sleep.

Albus tucked the man better under the covers, set repair spells upon the worried clothing, and tended to bruised ribs, lacerations upon face and arms, and lastly spelled a strong Nutrition Potion into the sleeping wizard. Remus only moaned in his sleep once, and Albus soothed the younger man by crooning a soft lullaby to him.

Once assured that Remus slept comfortably, the Headmaster went to pick up his grandson.

"Grandpa!" Five year old Harry ran across the sitting room to throw his arms around his grandfather's waist as the old man emerged from the Floo.
"Harry! Dear child. Are you ready to spend the afternoon with myself and Hagrid?" asked Albus.

Severus rose from his chair and Summoned a cat carrier that he handed to Albus. "According to Harry Nellie wishes to meet Fang and Droopy."

"Droopy? The puppy? Didn't he have another name, Severus?" asked Albus with a small chuckle.

"I believe that Harry has changed its name a few times. I told him to settle on one, and no, he is not allowed to name the puppy 'dingie'**." Albus laughed as his son frowned.

"Oh dear, Severus. That would be a most unfortunate name," commented Albus.

Harry piped up, "I still like it but dad said its in'propriate because it is... der-oga-tory. That means its a mean name."

"I believe it is. Droopy is much more suitable," agreed Albus. The Headmaster then looked to his son whose face was now shadowed. "Must you go this afternoon, my dear?"

Severus nodded. "I would like to get this confrontation out of the way and determine for myself the extent of Black's mental health."

"Understood," nodded Albus. He then touched his son's cheek affectionately in the same manner Severus did to his own child. "Come along, Harry. We have a full afternoon!"

Harry quickly hugged his father. Sensing that the older man was uneasy about something he whispered, "I love you, Shadow. I'll have lots of hugs and kisses for you later."

Severus ran a hand through his son's hair. "Be good, Magpie." He then watched as his father and son stepped into the green flames and vanished. He knew then would appear almost instantly upon Hagrid's hearth. The Potions Master himself was going to read before he left for his appointment but then he changed his mind. Leaving his apartment, he headed to the Infirmary.

Poppy was going over the medical charts for all of the current students who would be returning at term. She was looking at the updates on their charts over the Summer. Beside her she was compiling a list of students she would need to schedule for an exam, and those that would need Nutrition Potions formulated for them.

"Poppy."

The Healer raised her gaze from her work to look upon the Potions Master who had arrived in her office. Since she had no plans to leave her office that day Poppy had given herself a rare reprieve from the Glamour that Severus had helped her to construct her second year at Hogwarts. Her hair, a natural ash-blonde that was usually sprinkled generously with white, glowed with the health of her true age. The wrinkles she wore were gone leaving a face with soft features free from blemish.

Poppy was in possession of the coveted 'English Cream' skin. Her hair, generally in a tight bun and mostly hidden by her Healer's cap fell in gentle waves over her shoulders and nearly down to her waist.

Severus, who was experiencing an awful case of instant dry mouth, had not seen Poppy without her Glamour in almost three years. The effect was, to him, stunning. He could not speak and slammed his mouth shut before he resembled a fish out of water.

"Hello, Severus," Poppy greeted him easily and smiled. She tended to get nervous about someone catching her without her Glamour but not one who knew about it and why she used one.
"Such radiance..." breathed Severus. To his mortification he realised in that second he had spoken his mind aloud. Poppy, of course, blushed so demurely that the wizard felt as though he were falling off a precipice. He forced a cough into his throat until he could speak properly. "Poppy, I..."

"What may I do for you, Severus?" she asked. The wizard realised that the graininess of the Healer's voice was gone and in its place was the natural sound she had been born with. Severus had never known that Poppy's voice was so charming to listen to... he... he swallowed and pushed away those tumultuous thoughts crowding his mind.

"Poppy, I... am going to St. Mungo's... to see Sirius Black. I find that... I do not wish to do so... without medical supervision." Severus clasped his hands tightly across his back. He wilted inside as her smile only seemed to broaden and invited him to come closer.

"I'd be happy to go with you, Severus." She Summoned her medical bag and then a moment later she replaced the Glamour.

Aged by ten years there was now a dull, dryness to her skin, wrinkles around mouth and eyes, and the white was heavy in hair of blonde ash that had recently shimmered in sunlight. For the first time it felt as though he was truly looking at the Healer as he had never done so before. Severus found that, even with the Glamour, Poppy was still a very beautiful woman. The meeting to come with Sirius Black was all of a sudden not so oppressive.

18 August 1985 - Afternoon - St. Mungo's

Healer Ascel Witt had been the Chief Healer at St. Mungo's for almost four decades. Despite the administration duties he faced on a daily basis he still found time for patients he chose. One of them was ex-prisoner Sirius Black.

The Healer, considered an elderly man due to an age of 90 Summers, had brown hair barely streaked with grey, sharp, clear, blue eyes, thin features and a tall frame that was as thin. Ascel Witt was a wizard who had kept to a strict health regimen that included a morning run. His wife Carise, also a Healer, was 23 years younger and could easily attest to the fitness of her husband.

It was Carise Witt, a petite woman at just four feet in height, with red dusted by white hair and eyes of green, who met Severus and Poppy. She greeted them both with a big smile. "My husband, Ascel, is finishing up a psychological evaluation of Mr. Black. Follow me and we'll join him."

As they walked Poppy asked, "Do you know how Mr. Black has been since I sent him here last night?"

Carise Witt sighed heavily. "Irrational, to say the least. When he arrived he became so agitated in his sleep that he came out of the sleep potion you had given him at Hogwarts. He began to yell, to threaten to kill Mr. Snape, here, and to take his godson 'away from all these freaks that would use his godson to their own bitter ends'."

Severus lips thinned in response whereas Poppy patted his arm soothingly. "Has Mr. Black slept at all since then, Healer Witt?"

Carise shook her head sadly as they stopped outside of a pastel coloured door of pink. "Mr. Snape, why don't you wait here just a moment. I'd like to make sure that Mr. Black does not behave foolishly the moment he sees you."

"Muzzle the mutt," glowered Severus under his breath. He had learned that Black was a dog.
animagus and he thought it rather apropos for the wizard.

Poppy smiled at him, and caught her hand in his. She squeezed his fingers, let go, and followed the Healer into Sirius' room. She closed the door behind herself.

Severus waited a few minutes before staring at the soft, obnoxious, pink door. He hated pink. Deceptively cheerful. He recalled a witch on the Wizengamot who had wanted him to be kissed by a dementor at his trial. She had a disturbing habit of smiling... at everything. And, everything she wore including her robes were pink.

Poppy opened the door, breaking his thoughts of the past. "Come in, Severus. Healer Ascel Witt has given Mr. Black a mild sedative. He is still awake but he will remain in bed."

Poppy's good words were for naught. Sirius saw his childhood nemesis, and with the rush of adrenaline to his system the mild sedative potion was wiped out. Breaking free of Healer Witt and his blankets with near inhuman strength Sirius leapt from the bed, cursing, as he dove for Severus.

Severus had fully expected Sirius to attack and his wand had been at the ready. While Sirius was basically still in the air Severus pointed his wand and cast the Stunning Spell. "Stupefy!"

Sirius fell to his hospital bed and would have slipped off of it had he not been caught by a rather disapproving Healer Ascel Witt.

"Was that necessary?" demanded Ascel. His wife was settling the unconscious wizard back in his bed.

Severus momentarily cocked his head, then said, "Yes. You saw that he was about to attack me. Obviously a sedative is not enough. I suggest you restrain him as I do wish to speak to him."

Poppy frowned angrily as she regarded the Chief Healer, "I told you last night that he ought to be restrained!"

Ascel glared down at the Hogwarts Healer. "Mr. Black was fighting against his restraints so I made the decision to remove them. Other than his anger manifesting verbally I did not anticipate a problem with him."

Poppy was about to verbally eviscerate the tall man before her but Severus' calm, yet firm, voice stopped her when he commented, "Problem anticipated, Healer Witt. Would you please restrain the man, and then wake him?"

The Healer did not reply to the Potions Master, but glanced quickly at Poppy. "Madame?"

Poppy stood straight already but she stiffened her spine more as she nodded sharply. "Please do as Professor Snape asked, Healer Witt."

The Healer nodded but he was clearly displeased by the Potions Master's presence. To underline that sentiment, he addressed Poppy, "Madame, you will remain in this room with Mr. Black as Mr. Snape interrogates him, otherwise I shall not leave."

Severus wanted to retort, and maybe hex the Healer for the insult implied, but Poppy stopped him with a firm touch to his forearm. She nodded, "I shall remain, Healer Witt."

Once Sirius was restrained and then wakened, Ascel addressed his patient as he touched the man's shoulder. "The restraints are temporary, Mr. Black. I shall remove them once Mr. Snape has said his peace. Please, try to remain calm."
Sirius gave Severus a look of glittering daggers that could kill but he turned his gaze away, and
nodded in compliance to the Healer. Ascel and Carise left without another word. As soon as the door
to his room closed, Poppy erected a Silencing Charm as Sirius burst angrily, "You took Jamie's son,
you snivelling bastard!"

Severus threw the same Silencing Charm across Sirius' mouth, and then spoke to him calmly. "What
you do not know, Black, is that Harry was placed with his Muggle relatives. The Dursleys. Do you
recall them?" Sirius, who was resigned to his enforced silence, nodded sharply. "Despicable people.
They disliked Harry. In fact, several months ago his uncle threw the child away when he was so very
sick they were unable to wake him. Had I not gone to see to the child, he would have died."

Sirius' face went suddenly chalky-white. He struggled, and yelled at Severus. Poppy spoke softly,
"Severus, please remove the Silence. I believe he has something to say."

Severus removed the Silencing Charm and Sirius yelled, "...mean he was sick? Explain, Snape!"

Severus did not but deferred to the Healer in their midst. Poppy spoke, "Harry was suffering from an
extreme bout of childhood pneumonia. His magic was unable to fight the illness because it had
exhausted itself after facing a daily basis of healing the child. When Severus brought Harry to
Hogwarts I was able to cure the pneumonia."

"There's more," Sirius said with concern. "Tell me, Poppy."

"The list is horrifying, Sirius," sighed Poppy. "Harry not only faced daily verbal abuse but he was
beaten."

"Not daily, but still too often," added Severus quietly.

Poppy nodded, "I had to re-break bones that had healed improperly, and Severus formulated a
Nutrition Potion to heal his malnutrition."

"I met Petunia once," sneered Sirius tiredly. "She was a harpy." He glanced up at Severus. "What
aren't you saying about Petunia's husband, Snape? I gather he beat Harry but what else was there?"

"We discovered the bodies of two little girls that had been sexually abused, and then killed," Severus
replied flatly. "They were both under the ages of six years. A boy was also... hurt... but he lived only
because his parents moved away. The boy was four."

"Harry?" Sirius trembled with fear and anger.

Poppy replied and touched Sirius' restrained hand. "He was not touched in that manner, Sirius. We
got to him in time."

"You still took Harry, though, Snape," Sirius accused but with caution this time.

Severus shook his head. "I did not have any intention of doing so but Harry was responding
positively to me. He looked to me as his saviour..." Sirius snorted rudely and the Potions Master's
lips thinned and his gaze narrowed. "Harry needed to feel safe around an adult, Black. I am the one
that rescued him from under a bridge where he lay dying. He felt than as he does now, safe."

"So you're his big knight in black bat's clothing, Snape?" Sirius scoffed.

"Yes, Sirius, he is," Poppy declared firmly. "Harry also happens to love Severus as does he love
Harry."
"That's impossible!" barked Sirius in denial. "Snape's a damn Slytherin and a Death..." Sirius froze as Severus showed both his forearms; smooth and free of any blemish.

Severus spoke coldly, "Not long after I adopted Harry the Dark Mark was removed. Voldemort has no hold over me."

Sirius struggled to sit up but his magical restraints kept him from doing so. "Poppy, take these off. I promise, I won't attack Snape."

Poppy glanced up at Severus, and when he nodded, she removed the restraints. Neither Poppy nor Sirius knew or could see that the Potions Master had his wand ready for a surprise attack from the man in the hospital bed. With a huff of relief Sirius moved to sit up. Once sitting he took a long look at the man he sincerely hated.

"I want to see Harry," demanded Sirius. "I want to know that he's fine."

Severus shook his head in the negative. "No. I am not allowing you near... my son."

"I am his godfather, Snape," growled Sirius.

Severus drew in a deep breath. "In the eyes of wizarding law, as both a prisoner and an ex-prisoner, you are no longer the godfather of one Harry Potter, my son, Harry Snape."

"I was innocent!" roared Sirius. "That's not fair! I never should have gone to Azkaban!"

"Not for the crime of killing Peter Pettigrew and in turn the Potters, Black," said Severus tautly. "However, if life were fair, your... friend... Remus Lupin would have been destroyed by the Ministry for the mauling of one Severus Snape." His voice hardened to the point that Sirius winced. "IF life were fair, you would be in Azkaban for four years if I had been mauled by a werewolf, or... for your entire life had I been killed." Severus made a bare movement and Sirius was caught by the restraints imprisoning him prone against the bed. The vengeful wizard leaned over Sirius. "Life. Is not. Fair."

Severus spun on the toe of his right foot and left the hospital room. He glided and did not even slam the door when he left. Poppy returned her attention to Sirius when he jerked loudly against his restraints. He looked up at the Hogwarts Healer mournfully.

"Poppy, you knew Jamie and Lily. They wouldn't want this. I'm Harry's godfather," Sirius pleaded.

"Sirius, James and Lily would want their son to be safe and happy. He is," she insisted calmly.

"With Snape?"

"With Severus," she nodded. "Listen to me, Sirius." Poppy spoke slowly. "Harry. Loves. Severus. If you speak against Severus, hurt Severus, or try to separate them, the only one you will irrevocably hurt is Harry. Be James and Lily's best friend. Think... clearly... of what their son is feeling and what he wants. Support him and you will gain the love of a beautiful, little boy."

Slowly Sirius nodded. What Poppy was saying to him made sense. He wanted Harry to not only like him but to love him. "But, Poppy, it's Snape. We... we hate each other."

"Yes. You both do. However, neither of you are children. Are you?" Sirius shook his head. "You have to accept that everything that Severus has done has been for the health, welfare, and happiness of Harry." Her voice held quiet strength as she finished her speech. "Harry is all that matters, Sirius. Whatever you and Severus harbour for each other no longer matters. Grow up."
The Hogwarts Healer began to turn away but Sirius stopped her by countering, "Tell Snape to grow up!"

Poppy, a hand on the doorknob, looked over her shoulder, and smiled. "Severus has grown up, Sirius." With a nod, she left.

Chapter End Notes

*Ascel is pronounced As-KEL.

**Dingi is a derogatory term usually used by children to describe that particular part of the male anatomy.
Meeting Poppy for the First Time

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

18 August 1985 - Late Afternoon - Hogwarts

With her arm through Severus' the two adults ambled down the worn dirt pathway to Hagrid's hut. From their vantage they could see Harry energetically playing with Fang and the floppy-eared puppy, Droopy. Severus expected to see his father sitting in a rocking chair on the porch but he did not immediately see him.

"There, Severus," Poppy was pointing towards Hagrid's garden.

They both stopped walking as Severus' jaw nearly dropped in surprise. Albus, wearing grey robes, was kneeling in the garden. His beard had been braided and tossed over one shoulder to stay out of the way. Hagrid was not far tending to his large pumpkins.

"That cannot be," Severus breathed in astonishment. "Is that Albus actually gardening?"

Poppy chuckled, "I do believe it is, Severus."

To Severus' further disbelief Poppy had gathered up her skirts and was now running down the hill the rest of the way to join Harry. He watched as she caught Harry into her arms and he let out a giggling shriek. Moments later he was back on the ground and running towards his father. Severus automatically knelt upon one knee to better catch his son.

"SHADOW!" Harry kissed his father several times. "Did you see Madame Pomfrey catch me? She surprised me."

"I did see that," replied Severus. "I do believe she surprised me as well. What is your grandfather doing in the garden, Magpie?"

"Hagrid put something called Thestral lin-mint on grandpa's knees, Shadow. I don't think it's a potion of yours," whispered Harry.

Severus frowned. "No, that is not. It is meant for Thestrals, not grandfathers." He rose and let Harry slip to the ground. He noticed his father waving to him from the garden.

Poppy, carrying the puppy in her arms, was following Harry. Severus was momentarily blinded by the smile on the woman's face, and her beautifully flushed cheeks. It recalled him to the first time he gave her more than a cursory glance.

1971 November - Hogwarts

Severus Snape, even at the tender age of eleven, was a tall, gangly Slytherin who had a poor tendency to hunch his shoulders as if he were hiding. He was, more than likely, hiding. Severus was always anticipating attack from one or all four of the Marauders, those four Gryffindors that had taken an instant dislike to him. Three months had passed and still there was no let up in their hexes, jinxes, and the pranks they pulled.

This time James Potter had caused his cauldron to blow up in his face after he had thrown a simple
bit of dust into his potion. A piece of the cauldron had hit Severus squarely in the face, breaking his
nose, and giving him not one, but two black eyes. He had not wanted to visit the Infirmary but
Professor Slughorn had insisted. What galled Severus was that it was Potter who had escorted him
to the Infirmary. Luckily, Potter had not spoken at all to him.

Madame Enid Wells was nowhere to be seen and Severus guessed the old witch was asleep in her
office. Eight times now Severus had been sent to the Infirmary and had not once been treated by the
old matron. Her apprentice, Poppy, had dealt with him.

The young apprentice generally irritated Severus. Mostly because she was so young! Eighteen years.
Who knew anything about healing at that age. She had left Hogwarts barely a year ago, and had
done her required two years towards her Healership at St. Mungo's beginning in her 6th year at
Hogwarts. Poppy was now apprenticed to Madame Wells, the Healer for Hogwarts. Well qualified
she was, but she still only looked like she ought to be a student ...she was pretty, though...

Like other students who had been treated by the young apprentice Poppy was not taken seriously as
a Medi-Witch. Severus disliked the crude jokes that cast aspersions upon the young witch's
character. Of course, Sirius Black had begun those awful words.

"Oh, Severus!" said Poppy with concern the moment she saw him. "Come. Sit down over here," she
indicated a clean, empty bed.

James Potter had left his charge the second they both saw the Infirmary doors. Severus had been
holding a dingy cloth to his nose and it was nearly soaked with his blood. Poppy carefully removed
the cloth. "The bleeding has nearly stopped but..." she cast a minor Diagnostic Charm. "Your nose
is broken. I ought to be able to fix it..."

Severus pulled away. "You can't," he snapped with the obvious change in tone from his damaged
nasal cavity. "Doo mady dimes brokeden."

Poppy cast a more in-depth Diagnostic Spell to give her a history of injury to the young boy's nose.
As runes wrote themselves into the air above Severus her lips thinned. "Broken three times. You're
right, Severus. I can't magically heal your nose. I can set it and you'll just have to bear the time it
will take to heal."

Severus shrugged. The last time a Healer had used magic on his broken nose had only resulted in
further injury that he'd just decided not to mention.

"Do you have trouble breathing at night, Severus?" the Medi-Witch asked.

Severus glared in astonishment. "I thleep thitting ub." He frowned. "I thound lige a boob."

Poppy smiled and chuckled as she lifted Severus head by his chin. "I can fix that, Severus. Let's get
you cleaned up, heal those black eyes, and then set your nose."

"Kay," he sighed. "Thankth."

Poppy was quick and thorough with her healing spells. The setting of Severus' nose was a bit longer
to do since she had to manually set his nose and that was painful. His eyes glimmered with tears but
none fell. She then bandaged his nose in a splint that would keep it protected.

Severus looked down at the white splint cross-eyed. "This is horrible, Poppy!"

"Oh hush, Severus. Don't be so vain. I have a little cosmetic Glamour that will hide it perfectly." She
touched the tip of his splint with her wand and the plaster was soon invisible. The young boy actually
managed a smile as she held up a mirror to him to show that his face was healed.

"You can fix my breathing at night, Poppy?" asked Severus.

"I can. There is scarring of the nasal cavity due to your previous breaks. I am guessing that for those you went to a Muggle Healer?" asked Poppy.

Severus nodded. "The last time my nose was broken I went to St. Mungo's with my mother. The Healer warned me that it might not work..." he shrugged.

Poppy clucked her tongue, and shook her head. She replied sharply, "If the Healer had any doubt he or she ought not to have tried. All the Healer did was make things worse. Lift your chin," the Medi-Witch instructed as she held her wand over his nose. "This will feel a bit itchy and you might want to sneeze but try not to. All right?"

"I'm ready," he said lifting his chin. Poppy chanted the spell and waved her wand to scribe a set of runes in the air. Severus felt a warmth in his nose, then a dryness that brought that itchy feeling. He really wanted to sneeze but did not want to mess up the Medi-witch's healing. He grabbed her hand in his and she squeezed his fingers as she finished the spell.

Finally, the itchiness was gone and the need to sneeze had vanished. "Lie down and let's check your breathing, Severus." Gingerly Severus lay back upon the bed and rested his head on the pillow. "Breathe, dear," she said softly.

Severus had not realised he had been holding his breath. He let it out, then back in. As his nerves settled he breathed normally. Then he marvelled at the change. "I can breathe!" For a brief moment he flashed her a worried look. "Will I still snore?" The Medi-witch shook her head. "Poppy, you did it. Thank you!" In that moment, as she smiled at him, he decided he would find a way for everyone else to take her seriously. Poppy Pomfrey, was, in his eyes, a Healer of Miracles.

— Severus Snape's Second Year (1972) at Hogwarts

Poppy Pomfrey was the new Healer at Hogwarts. She should have spent one more year in apprenticeship but Healer Enid Wells had passed on in her sleep at her desk. It was the Headmaster who had found the older witch. He had then requested Poppy to be his new Healer from St. Mungo's on the condition that she would finish her apprenticeship at St. Mungo's when term was finished.

Poppy was very pleased at her new position but it did bother her that she was still perceived, by the students, as too young. She recently ran into problems with a few of the staff simply ignoring her because of her youth. Charged with the health and welfare of all, students and staff, that resided in Hogwarts, this attitude made her job difficult. It sometimes distressed her to the point of tears.

The young Healer had retreated to her office after a blistering reprimand from the regal Bathsheba Babbling the teacher of Ancient Runes. Poppy had scheduled all of the staff for routine exams at the beginning of term but Professor Babbling had been ignoring her appointments. In an attempt to re-schedule the witch's exam once again, she was flatly told to 'bugger off' and to leave her alone. The professor then proceeded to insult Poppy's age and lack of experience.

The brief meeting had worn Poppy out, and since the Infirmary was empty and she could briefly set aside her paperwork she had closed herself in her office.

Severus Snape, second year student, had arrived in the Infirmary in an unusual state of health. No skinned knees, bruises, or ribs broken from the attacks he was beginning to expect upon a daily basis. All Summer he had been working on a project that he'd had to mostly do at night, or in the
park away from his parents home. He had finally succeeded and could not wait to show the Healer what he had done. As he ambled into the Healer's office he did not expect to see Poppy with her head upon her arms.

"Poppy?"

Her head jerked up and she gave the student a watery smile. "Severus… I-I-I didn't know anyone had come in." She tried to pat the bun of her hair into place but it only drooped to the side.

Severus took one of the visitor chairs in the Healer's office and seated himself. "What happened?" he asked gently.

Poppy shook her head. "I can't speak of it, Severus," she sighed.

"Ah," he nodded. "Then one of the teacher's upset you."

Poppy's eyes narrowed. "I always seem to forget that it's useless to hide anything from a Slytherin." She smiled to show she was only joking.

"It is," he smirked. "I have something for you, Poppy."

"You do?" Poppy then tried to suppress her excitement. She reminded herself that she was a Healer at Hogwarts and Severus was a student. "I… uhm… I can't accept…"

Severus would not allow her to finish as he said, "I created an aging Glamour for you that will age with you and it will also be undetected by nearly all Revealing Spells."

"You created a charm for me?" Poppy gasped.

"Not a simple cosmetic Glamour charm, Poppy. This is a spell that's a bit more complicated. It will age you by 15 years until you reach the age of 33. It will then age you only by five years. When you reach the age of 38 it will no longer age you." He smiled shyly. "Of course, you don't have to use it but I figured that if you appear older maybe the students will take you more seriously as a Healer."

"Severus! Of course I'll use it! That's just what I need. Please teach it to me, would you?" Poppy brightened in anticipation. Severus just nodded, and they began.

The spell was an easy one to do. The complication came in the wand movement which would describe a series of Binding Runes that contained the aging magic and the ability for no one to detect the Glamour easily. Since Healers routinely used runes and Binding Runes in their work it was not difficult for Poppy to master the spell. Finally, after a half an hour of instruction the Healer applied the Glamour.

"How do I look, Severus?"

Poppy was aged by fifteen years yet she was not terribly changed. There was a maturity in her features she did not usually project. Her eyes were not quite as bright but Severus thought they were still striking. Her gaze demanded attention. The faintest of wrinkles appeared at the outer corners of her eyes and a shadow of wrinkling on the forehead. Her hair, a usually soft, ash-blondé, had darkened to a deeper, somewhat smokey blonde.

"Beautiful," he replied before thinking. Poppy blushed. Severus blushed as he realised what he'd just spoken aloud. To stop either of them from saying or doing anything they might regret he conjured a hand mirror and handed it to her. "Everyone will take you seriously now, Poppy… uhm, Madame Pomfrey."
The hug that the Healer gave Severus remained a pleasant memory that he eventually tucked away in his 'Memory Palace' when he began to learn Occlumency.

18 August 1985 - Late Afternoon - Hogwarts

Harry watched with rapt interest as his father bowed partially and extended a hand to Madame Pomfrey who was coming up the small hill with Droopy in her arms. He was smiling, knowingly, a bit too long and was caught by his father.

"And, what has you so amused, Mr. Snape?" his eyebrow rose as he smirked.

"Have you and Madame Pomfrey come to play, Shadow?" asked Harry. Severus was taken aback by the absolute innocence upon his son's face down to blinking his large, green eyes in a disarming manner.

"Are you not the little Slytherin, Magpie?" he mused.

"Me?" asked Harry in genuine puzzlement.

"Yes, you, my son," he smirked as he chose not to explain his words. "Madame Pomfrey and I have had a difficult day so far and we shall spend the rest of it with you," he said instead. They had reached Hagrid's garden. "Father, I do not believe I have ever seen you gardening."

Albus grinned as he rose nearly effortlessly to his feet. "It's remarkable, my boy! Hagrid's Thestral lineament has made my knees and ankles nicely warm and flexible."

"So I see. I was not aware it could be used on wizards and witches," Severus mused as he glanced at Hagrid. The lumbering groundskeeper shrugged and welcomed the timely arrival of Fang against his legs.

Hagrid did not hesitate in striding over to address the Potions Master. "Me da' used to use Muggle 'orse lineament on 'is joints where 'e were older, Perfessor. I jes' used the Thestral lineament on me knees one night. Felt miles better. Figured the 'eadmaster might benefit."

Poppy put down the puppy who gamboled over to Harry. She moved to the Headmaster, her wand out. "Albus, may I see your knees?" she asked. He nodded so she waved her wand over the area of his knees. Small runes soon appeared above the area Poppy had done her Diagnostic Charm. She then straightened. "No irritation to the skin and the knees are warmed. I can approve the Thestral Lineament… this time only, Albus. I would suggest that you use a localised Warming Charm instead. Thestrals and… Hagrids…" she smiled at the half-giant, "have stronger skin than you do. Lineament could burn your skin with repeated use. Also," and she spoke sternly "you must keep using the Arthritis Potion Severus makes for you. It doesn't just reduce the inflammation but helps to do some repair to damaged joints."

Albus nodded and smiled. "I shall certainly do so, Poppy. And, no more gardening today. I am in need of a bit of rest."

The four adults seated themselves on Hagrid's porch. The groundskeeper whittled, Albus, true to his word, fell asleep in the rocking chair he had conjured earlier in the day. Severus and Poppy were settled in matching rocking chairs that the Healer had conjured. Severus was going to change his rocking chair into something more befitting a Potions Master but Poppy had insisted.

Hagrid's whittling soon vanished as he took a bit from his pipe and Fang settled at his feet to sleep. Harry had climbed onto his father's lap and curled up until he was comfortable and napping. A
rumbling snore revealed that Hagrid had nodded off after Fang had fallen asleep at his feet.

Dusk began to paint itself across the sky in deep purple, royal blue, and a melting sun on the horizon. Poppy sighed happily.

"The early afternoon was nothing to speak of but this afternoon has been wonderful, Severus. I cannot recall a lovelier day." Poppy smiled and leaned back in her chair with her eyes closed.

With the woman's eyes closed Severus allowed himself to give her a soft smile. He then caught the hand nearest him into his own, and lightly squeezed her fingers. "Thank you for coming with me to St. Mungo's, Poppy. You made a difficult visit so much better."

Chapter End Notes

Horse Lineament is 'a thang' that nearly any horse lover knows about. It CAN be used on older human with arthritis or rheumatoid arthritis. However, it cannot be used all the time because it can burn sensitive, human skin. Heat does help but it should always be used with a pain reliever.
Manchester Primary For Little Wizards & Witches was a literal little, red school house in the midst of a wonderful grassy courtyard and playground. The town of Manchester in London was a Muggle town but hidden within it through the complex wonder of magic was the borough of Manchester that was home to a small community that thrived on farming. Manchester Borough had the best produce market that would run daily until the first snow. Snowy weather would then bring a host of Winter fruits and vegetables that Muggles either had never seen, or had not seen in decades.

Manchester Borough was also home to a thriving community of weavers of Acromantula Silk. Their cloth was highly prized in the wizarding world.

Manchester Borough was not only the community where the Malfoys lived but it was a community that Lucius could proudly claim as the wizarding town he - alone - had built. Something his father Abraxas would never have approved of or wanted. When Severus suggested that their sons attend this primary school Lucius had not hesitated. Narcissa had wavered since she wanted to teach her son at home. She had relented when she had received a letter from Harry pleading that 'let Draco go to school because if he didn't he'd be very lonely all day.'

Severus had the morning free from classes at Hogwarts. He would meet his students on Thursday. Until then Harry would have The Shadow nearby… just in case. Lucius would stay with Severus only because he might want company.

Maura Bilcross ran the Manchester Borough Primary School. Maura was in her 40s, young for a teacher. She had a slim frame, blue eyes that needed help from her silver-framed glasses, and dark brown hair that hung in a neat braid down her back. She had an apprentice that was a recent student at Hogwarts, a Hufflepuff by the name of Alison Carrew. Alison was 22 and had already been apprenticed one year to Maura. At the end of her apprenticeship she wanted to continue her career in child education.

Both women welcomed their students as they arrived by portkey. Once enrollment for his son had been confirmed Lucius had the small portkey station built and permanent portkeys sent to each student's family. Maura did not embarrass Lucius by thanking him for the station and the portkeys that day since she had already done so by owl-letter. She greeted him and Draco as she greeted Severus and Harry; with a smile and a curtsy.

It was during the greeting that a small, round boy fell out of the portkey station and right into Severus. The child scrambled backwards only to propel himself into Lucius Malfoy's long legs. Lucius caught the boy and set him to rights on his feet.

"I'm really sorry!" he blurted. "I've never portkeyed before and gran said it wasn't anything to be scared of…" he glanced down at his rounded belly in his set of black robes and patted his stomach. "I hope my stomach caught up with me."

Harry, noting the young boy's all over distress, stepped forward. "I've portkeyed with my dad a couple of times. I still think my belly button's going to wind up on my back."

Draco nodded knowingly. "That isn't ever going to happen though. My father says portkey travel is one of the wizarding world's most reliable forms of travel." Draco looked up at his father. "Right?"
Lucius smiled. "Quite correct, Draco." The aristocrat then looked down at the small boy whose hair was brown and rather shaped like someone had put a bowl on his head and cut around it. "Who might you be, young man?"

"Neville. Uhm… Neville Longbottom, Sir."

"Ah. The grandson of Augusta Longbottom. I am most pleased to meet you, Mr. Longbottom," Lucius held out his hand. For a moment Neville looked at the gloved hand, and then he put his own tentatively into it. "I am Lucius Malfoy and this is my son, Draco."

"Hi, Neville," smiled Draco.

"I am Severus Snape," Severus bowed and did not offer his hand. The little boy bowed back awkwardly. "This is my son, Harry."

"Hi," Harry said with sudden shyness.

Neville looked up at the two wizards with wide eyes. He was suddenly afraid. His Uncle Algernon always spoke caustically about You-Know-Who and his followers. The two wizards that stood imposingly in front of him were probably the most infamous and scariest, by his uncle's stories.

Sensing the boy's fear, Harry stepped in front of his father, and smiled. "Draco and I are friends but we're cousins, too. Would you be our friend, Neville?"

Neville tore his gaze away from the adult wizards to look at the two boys his size that would be students with him. Harry smiled, and though Draco had a bit of a smirk on his face there was nothing closed or sneaky about him. Neville breathed a sigh of relief and smiled back. "I'd like that, Harry."

"Great!" declared Draco now that all was said and done. "Let's go play!"

"Mr. Malfoy!" tch'd Madame Bilcross.

"That is you, Dragon," Lucius said softly as he caught his son by the collar of his robes.

"Yes, Ma'am?" Draco had stopped and he now looked up at his new teacher.

"Madame Bilcross, Mr. Malfoy. You and your friends may go and play before school starts after you have put your lunch and robes up in the cloak room. Understood?" she said archly but with a softness that would soon endear her to all three boys.

"Yes, Ma'am, yes'm, of course, Madame," all three boys acknowledged.

Madame Bilcross directed the boys into the little red schoolhouse. "Turn to your right after you go through the doors, gentlemen." She smiled and then looked up at Severus and Lucius. "Will you both be with us today?"

Severus nodded. "We shall stay out of the way over…"

Madame Bilcross shook her head slowly and smiled. Her apprentice smirked knowingly. "Oh no, Mr. Snape. If you are staying then I expect you to help with all of the students."

"No, no, no, Madame," interjected Lucius. "We are just here as moral support for our sons. We would be terrible help…"

Madame Bilcross smiled again. "Mr. Malfoy, I hate to put this so bluntly but your son… and your son, Mr. Snape, do not need you. They will make friends. Learn. And, have fun. Draco and Harry
can do that without their fathers hovering protectively over them."

Severus' lips thinned. "We shall just sit with the other parents, Madame."

"There are no parents remaining, Mr. Snape," said Alison Carrew soothingly. "Madame and I promise. Your sons will be fine and they will both be overjoyed to see each of you when you come at the end of the day for them."

---

Lucius and Severus were outside of the little red schoolhouse in front of the portkey station. They were glancing at each other, and then the schoolhouse. It was Lucius who spoke first. He sniffed, "I do believe we were just thrown out, Brother."

"Not quite, Brother. We were encouraged to leave in the face of our children not needing us," corrected Severus.

Lucius frowned as he sent a glare at the portkey station which resembled a slightly larger Muggle telephone box. "Now what? Cissy is at the spa in Paris, and I have my day cleared."

Severus smirked at the older man. "You have nothing to do, Old Man?"

Lucius sent a look of annoyance at his companion. "Don't be a smart aleck, youngster. No doubt you do not have anything to do either."

Severus slowly shook his head. "I always have potions to brew, Lucius."

Lucius made a face of distaste. Then, he smiled as he pulled Severus into the portkey station where they soon vanished. They arrived at the arched, stone gates to Hogsmeade. "We shall have an espresso and you shall tell me about your day at the play. With our dear Madame Pomfrey." He chuckled as Severus blushed markedly.

**Flashback - 24 August 1985 - Hogsmeade**

The Hogsmeade Theatre Players had a theatre house within Hogsmeade but their Saturday matinees (free for all children under 12) were held on Schubert Field on the south side of Hogsmeade. To reach the field took a walk from The Hogs Head Inn. Those that dallied at the Hogs Head before reaching Schubert Field could get an ale for half the price.

Schubert Field had been set up with graduated theatre seating that rose up in a crescent from the front of the stage. The trees and shrubs natural to the field had been incorporated into the scenery of the play. There was a mock-up of Sherwood Forest, Nottingham Castle, and several set transitions.

Poppy had since removed her Glamour, permanently, and her hair had been left to hang to her waist in tempting ashy waves of burnished gold that Severus was tempted to touch. A ribbon of black velvet edged with red embroidery tied her hair back softly away from her face. The rest of her outfit was a travelling suit with a dark grey, woollen skirt, a black velvet jacket decorated with red embroidery piping, and no hat. As the suit kept her warm enough she did not have an outdoor cloak or robes.

Harry was dressed in black trousers, though he had really wanted his shorts. It was getting cooler and Severus had insisted that it was time for the trousers to make an appearance. He had conceded on a pair of yellow socks with flying hippogriffs and the colour changing trainers (currently blue). He wore a white, long-sleeved shirt and a blue jumper that had a smiling, yellow hippogriff on the back. Severus hated the socks, the trainers, and the jumper but his son was so ecstatically pleased when he wore his outlandish clothing that Severus had to give in. Harry had worn a black cloak for
warmth.

Albus, their fourth guest, had chosen to wear dark red robes trimmed with white embroidery of dancing fauns at the hem of robe and sleeves. He wore a matching, conical hat to keep his head warm. His cloak was of deep gold velvet that only appeared to brush the earth. It never touched it. He held his grandson's hand in his own as Severus had offered his elbow to Madame Pomfrey.

It went without saying that Severus was dressed severely all in black but for his white cambric shirt in which only the cuffs and collar peeked out of the long jacket. His cloak, if possible, was such a darkened black that it was almost disorienting, for Harry, to look upon since it felt as though he were falling into a great Black Hole.

"Shadow, can we sit anywhere we want?" asked Harry.

"We are free to sit wherever we may, Magpie, as long as there are seats to accommodate our party," replied Severus. He was looking at the seats high from the front of the stage at the rear of the forested theatre.

"There!" Harry pointed at two seats in the front row.

"I know that you are able to count, Harry," dead-panned Severus.

"We shall sit down in front, Severus," smiled Albus at Severus. He had that ubiquitous twinkle in his eye.

Poppy giggled knowingly. "I see two seats up there, Severus. Why don't we take those?" With such a beguiling smile for him, the Potions Master could only nod in agreement.

Severus and Poppy ascended to the top level of the seating. At that point Severus took the witch by the elbow and guided her in front of him. Poppy was seated and then he sat beside her. Severus began to squint as he peered down at the front.

"Where are Harry and my father?" he asked in frustration.

"Here, Severus. Try these." Poppy held up a pair of spectacles that looked like something from Captain Nemo's ship the Nautilus.

The wizard backed away slightly as he gave the spectacles a wary look. "What are those?"

"Omnocular spectacles," replied Poppy. "I find them more useful in this form than as a pair of binoculars with omniocular properties."

Severus gingerly took the spectacles from the witch and then placed them upon his face. There was a soft whirring sound as the dark lenses focussed themselves. The Potions Master thought of his son and with the small bit of prescient magic within the lenses he was quickly able to pick out his son from the spectators on the front row.

Harry, beside his grandfather, had climbed up to his knees so that his head was just a bit higher than himself. This allowed him to eagerly take in the sight of all that was around him. He grinned but he leaned back with his seat on the arm of his theatre chair. He felt his grandfather's arm wrap protectively about his waist and he calmed himself. The crowd of spectators to the outdoor theatre had made him nervous despite the Calming Potion his father had given him a dose of earlier.

"Isn't all of this wonderful, Grandpa?" asked Harry.
"Truly magnificent, Harry," commented Albus. "Come, sit down. The play will start soon and you
don't want to block anyone from seeing it, do you."

With a light thump Harry slid properly back down onto his chair. He would have kicked the heels of
his seat against something but there was only air beneath his chair. He was excited. "Grandpa, have
you ever been to a play?"

Albus looked thoughtful for a moment before answering, "I'm afraid I never seemed to find the time
to see one, Harry."

Harry grinned, "But you have time for me now, right?"

Albus draped his arm across his grandson's shoulders and pulled him close so he could kiss the
crown of his head, "I shall never not have time for you, child."

The lights above the audience dimmed as veils of dark cloth floated over everyone. A single light
described a circle on the rough grass, and with the pop of Apparation a tall wizard in green
leggings, a leather tunic, a cap with a feather in it, and a bow and arrow appeared. As the audience
broke into applause the wizard, Robin Hood, grinned.

The play was begun.

—Far up in the shadows of the bleachers a Potions Master was jolted from all thought of the play as
a tentative hand rested on his forearm. After a moment he placed his own, larger hand, upon the
more delicate one. Severus smiled.

"How bold of our dear Healer!" smirked Lucius.

Severus glowered at the aristocrat, finished his espresso and his tale of the play with, "The play was
quite good. Harry and Albus both seemed to enjoy themselves." The younger wizard sighed. "Harry
would like a band of Merry Men in the woods on the wall of his bedroom."

"Very good but tell me more about Poppy. You are on a first name basis by now, I do hope. If not,"
scoffed Lucius as he sipped his espresso. "I fear you will never marry, Brother, at the pace you are
going."

"Poppy and I have been on a first name basis since we first met. I only call her madame in public,"
Severus retorted. "Besides, there will be no thought of a relationship until we find the Ka of
Voldemort."

Lucius sobered at the thought of Voldemort. "Has there been any progress?"

Severus shook his head. "Our only lead, Pettigrew, killed himself rather than tell us where the Ka of
Voldemort was hidden."

"Yes, as you recall, Brother, I was nearly singed." Lucius sipped at his espresso; it had cooled.
"What of the Death Eaters in Azkaban?" Then Lucius grimaced. "Perhaps my dear sister-in-law
might know something."

"Doubtful," muttered Severus. "If you recall Bellatrix was leading the group that tortured the
Longbottoms. She would not have been caught otherwise."

"True. Besides, I think none of that group in Azkaban would be of any use," Lucius shook his head.
"I understand that Jontu Loki their experts in curses has been on loan from Gringott's in order to
break the curse of the Dark Mark." Lucius looked expectantly at the younger wizard.
"No news," replied Severus. "At least, none that I have heard." Taking out his wand, Severus cast
the current time in the air. "An hour and a half has passed?" he declared in annoyance. "Perhaps you
will allow me to go and brew something now, Lucius?"

Lucius smirked, put down the cool remains of his espresso and stood. "Not at all. I fancy a few hours
at the spa where my wife is."

"Then you do not need me for that frivolous activity," muttered Severus as he also stood.

"On the contrary, Brother. I rather think you need a day at the spa." Tapping a silver ring on his
finger and muttering a password, he grabbed the younger wizard by the arm, and they were gone.
In Manchester, inside the little red schoolhouse, Miss Alison slowly circled around a group of children who were attempting to gain control of a crayon that was lazily scribbling on a piece of paper at the center of the table. Draco was glaring at the crayon. Neville looked entirely worried stiff. And, Harry had given up. He had tried the exercise when it first began but he felt nothing where Draco had reported feeling a heat in his belly, and Neville had claimed that what he felt made him nauseous. Miss Alison crouched down beside Harry being careful not to touch the sensitive child. She, like her mentor, had received notes that Harry did not like to be touched.

"Even though you might not feel the magic stir within you, Harry, practice the motion. See in your mind's eye your hand…” encouraged the apprentice. Harry nodded, stared hard at the crayon and stuck his tongue in concentration out of the side of his mouth. He pictured everything he saw in front of him, then his hand stretching out to grasp the crayon.

Neville's eyes widened. The crayon had stopped scribbling. "Is that you, Harry?"

Harry was not feeling his own magic stir but he was feeling something "spill into him" as if he were a bucket in a well. As that bucket filled he did feel more certain that he held the crayon. That was all; just holding it. He wanted to scribble with the crayon but he could not. As the bucket overflowed with whatever magic was being drawn to him he began to feel full. Then bloated. And, finally sick to his stomach.

"Stop it, Harry!" Draco looked at his cousin in alarm. "You're green!" Harry's face was a pale tinge of green.

"I feel awful…” Harry muttered and let his head drop onto his forearms on the table. The crayon fell to the paper.

Draco scrambled to his feet and went to his cousin. He touched the boy's shoulder. "Harry?"

"Draco? Can I have some... water?" asked Harry. His skin was now pale. A marked improvement from the green.

Miss Alison handed Harry a glass of water. The water she had poured from the end of her wand. She was concerned as she studied Harry. No child she had ever taken through the "crayon" exercise had responded as Harry Snape had. "Harry," she asked tentatively. "What did your magic feel like?"

Harry slowly shook his head. "It wasn't mine, Miss Alison. It felt like a little bit of water was coming into me but then it became a lot of water and it filled me up like a bucket but didn't stop." He looked pleadingly at the young witch. "I don't want to do this anymore, Miss Alison."

Miss Alison stood. "Draco. Neville. I want the two of you to start again." With a twirl of her wand the crayon on the table leaped up and was soon scribbling again. "Harry, come over here. Why don't you draw or colour while I speak to Madame Bilcross?"

Harry left the table where his new friend and his cousin were trying, once again, to gain control of the crayon. He moved to a small table where Miss Alison Summoned parchment paper, crayons, and charcoal for drawing. He smiled. This was a lot better than what he'd been doing. He sat down, picked up a piece of charcoal, and began to draw with easy concentration.
Miss Alison caught the attention of her mentor and drew Madame Bilcross to a corner of the room where children, ten in total, all sat at round tables trying to gain control of a scribbling crayon. She had just finished describing to her mentor what had happened to Harry.

"I've never seen or heard of anything like that, Madame," said Miss Alison.

Madame Bilcross nodded knowledgeably. "It's known as The Stealing of the Elements. A rare condition that shows up in children who either have a low magic rating or their magical core has been exhausted due to… outside influences." She glanced over at Harry. "What you describe makes it clear to me that Harry drew upon our nearby creek's energy to support his own."

"So, Harry does have magic?" Miss Alison asked in confusion.

Madame Bilcross nodded, "Oh, he does, Alison. However, his magic needs to emerge slowly. It is… cheating… you might say by drawing upon the Elements rather than making his own magic work."

"Are we to prevent that from happening?" Miss Alison frowned as she turned her attention to Harry.

"No, Alison," smiled the teacher. "It is something that he will grow out of as he matures. What we must do is watch for times such as what you saw in which he tires out from drawing upon the Elements. It is not tiring to his magic but physically it will tire him out. From now on, be sure that Harry knows what is happening and that it is natural. We don't want him to feel left out of activities if he must rest or take a break. In fact…" Madame Bilcross stepped into the middle of the classroom. "Attention, Children!" She waited a moment until all the students were looking up at their teacher. "You've all done so very well. It's time to take a break so I want everyone to get some parchment, charcoal or crayons, and to draw. We'll do that for an hour and then we shall go outside and practise our wand movements." She clapped her hands once and there was a rustling as the students rose from their tables, gathered drawing supplies, and returned to the tables to begin drawing.

Harry was pleased to be joined at his lonely table by Draco and Neville. For a few minutes all three boys drew or coloured quietly until Draco stopped to review what his friends were doing.

"You're drawing Uncle Severus, Harry," Draco said with admiration. He'd seen some of his cousin's other drawings and he really was good.

Neville peered over at Harry's drawing. "He looks kind of scary."

Harry giggled. "Dad looks that way but he's really nice. He rescued me from my bad relatives and adopted me."

"Really?" asked Neville with a smile. "I wish someone had adopted me."

Draco nodded. "Your grandmother scares my papa. He told me she has a vulture on her head."

Neville grimaced. "It's a hat. Grandmother likes it but it always looks at me like I'm its next meal."

"Is the vulture alive?" asked Harry with sudden, worried interest.

Neville frowned, considering. "I don't think so but it does move. Once, when my grandmother hadn't put the hat away she left it on the dining table. I got curious and tried to touch the vulture and it bit me."

Draco was appalled. Harry shook his head. "That's awful! I live in Hogwarts castle and I found out the armor is almost like alive," he added in commiseration.
"Armor?" gasped Neville. "It moves?"

Harry nodded. Draco replied, "I saw it when Harry showed me. There's some parts of the castle that Uncle Severus says we can't go unless an armored guardian goes with us."

"Wow. My Uncle Algy says there's all kinds of things that are scary at Hogwarts." The boy leaned forward and whispered. "He told me that a troll lives in the dungeon and eats bad students."

Harry frowned sharply, "There's no troll! I live in the dungeon with my dad. It can get kinda scary but I never met no troll. How come your uncle told you that, Neville? My uncle used to tell me that a troll would eat me."

Neville shrugged and picked out a crayon for his drawing. "Uncle Algy is mean. He's always calling me a 'useless Squib'. But, I got magic because my grandmother took me to St. Mungo's and they scanned my magical core."

"What's a Squib?" asked Harry.

Neville blushed and did not answer. Draco piped up, "A Squib is a magical person who can't do magic, Harry. You know Filch at Hogwarts? He's a Squib."

"I think I remember someone calling me a Squib right after my dad rescued me but Madame Pomfrey said I wasn't," said Harry gently. He empathised with Neville. He figured that being called a Squib in the magical world was just as bad as being called a Freak in the Muggle world. "I like Mr. Filch. He's scowly but he's not bad."

"Have you had any Accidental Magic, Nev?" asked Draco.

Neville shook his head. "That's why my uncle says I'm a Squib. He doesn't believe me when I tell him I can feel my magic but it's sleeping."

Draco nodded. "Mine feels like that, too. My father says that's because my magic is waking up. Your uncle should believe you, Nev."

"What's your magic feel like, Harry?" asked Neville.

Harry thought a moment. "Tired, I guess. Madame Pomfrey said my magic was working everyday to keep me safe but now that it doesn't have to… well, yeah. Tired." He sat up straight. "But I don't need a bunch of naps or anything silly like that."

"I thought Uncle Severus made you take naps, Harry," commented Draco.

"Well, yeah, but not because of my magic. Dad just said my body has a lot of growing to do so it needs lots of sleep." He scowled at his cousin. "I saw your dad make you take a nap once, Draco."

Draco scowled then shrugged. "Yeah? Well, so does my mother. Adults only make us take naps because they're the ones that get tired, not us."

Neville nodded. "My uncle gets tired a lot because he drinks lots of fire whiskey at night."

"I've woken up twice from naps and found my dad asleep in his chair in the sitting room," Harry added his observation. "I bet he's really going to get lots tired since school started."

"What's your dad do, Harry?" asked Neville.

"He teaches Potions at Hogwarts," Harry replied proudly. "He's taught me some… a little. I get to
help with preparing ingredients. Even the gross ones." Harry peered at Neville's nearly finished
drawing. "That's a neat plant, Nev."

"That's a Caratacus Cactus. They make great guardians for your bedroom," Neville enlightened his
friends. "If you give them enough space to move they'll 'walk' all over that space."

"A cactus that guards your room?" asked Harry in puzzlement.

Neville finished colouring then put down his crayon. "If you give the Caratacus a path of dirt they
can move along it. My Caratacus Cactus is planted in a long planter that I put at the door of my
bedroom. That way Uncle Algy won't mistake my bedroom for his when he's drunk."

Draco chuckled. "So he gets stuck with a bunch of needles!"

Neville smiled shyly. "Yeah. He does."

A clap broke their discussion and they all looked towards Madame Bilcross in the center of the
classroom. "Children, gather your robes and make sure you have your practise wands. We are going
outside."

Miss Alison gently ushered the students towards the cloak room. She paused a moment to study the
work of her three artist's. Harry had drawn a rather good likeness of his father asleep in a chair before
a fire using charcoal to shade and shape. Neville had drawn a colourful likeness of a cactus. Draco's
drawing was an abstract of shapes of patterns whose outlines he had darkened as well as he could.
They were not finished but the drawings all deserved to be shared with the rest of the class. Miss
Alison proceeded to hang each picture on a corkboard wall that had been decorated at its edges with
a border of live-looking ivy and pink flowers.

---

**Paris - Madame de la Corte's Day Spa**

The sun seemed brighter in Paris than it was in England but there was a breeze that was enough to
chill. The spa, Madame de la Corte's Day Spa, was located in the wizarding town of *Petit Paris*
nested within the borders of Muggle Paris.

*Petit Paris* was not plagued with automobile traffic such as could be seen in the unfortunately
polluted Paris but it did have a busy traffic of horses, carriages, and buggies that traversed the streets.
Walking traffic was also healthy with many witches and wizards congregated upon *Avenida
Principale* (the main avenue) in the merchant district.

The spa itself, like many other shops, sat between two other buildings. The spa stood out with its
front of round river stone and windows trimmed in blue that were decorated with window boxes of
flowers that bloomed even in the chill air. It had an aura of serenity to it, and Severus was certain he
sensed a Serenity Charm — usually used to get colicky babies to sleep — surrounding the building.

The two wizards walked into an interior that resembled the Roman baths at their height of supposed
luxury. Attendants of both sexes were outfitted in nearly transparent, lightweight linen togas of white
edged in blue to denote that they worked there. Both wizards were met by a young man with curly
hair and looking, to Severus at least, scandalous in his toga which left certain areas too viewable.
Severus chose to look at the young attendant's eyes… and he kept his gaze there.

"Welcome to Madame de la Corte's Day Spa, gentlemen. I'm Jordy. How will we be relaxing you
today?"

"Lucius Malfoy and my dear brother Severus Snape," said the older wizard silkily. "Severus has
never been to a spa so treat him with care, Jordy."

Jordy beamed at Severus. Severus glowered. Jordy nearly swallowed his smile. He turned his attention to Lucius. "We treat everyone with the utmost care, Mr. Malfoy."

It was at this moment Severus was reconsidering the possibility of helping out at Harry's primary school. Lucius smirked, but chuckled within as he glimpsed how uncomfortable his brother was. "Jordy, we shall both begin with the Egyptian Sea Salt Mud bath followed by a massage, and then a manicure and pedicure." Jordy nodded. "And, would you let my wife, Narcissa Malfoy know that we are here?"

"Of course," Jordy acknowledged. "Christi and Meilis will escort you both to the dressing room and then the ladies will take you to the Mud Room." He turned and waved two young witches over.

Severus nearly died inside as the one called Meilis slipped her arm through his. If anything, her toga seemed to be more transparent than Jordy's and seeing the young woman's... well... that which ought to be covered. The last thing the Potions Master wanted to do was to undress! He tried to politely dislodge the young witch from his person but he was stopped by Lucius' hand on his shoulder.

The aristocrat whispered, "Brother, you are entirely too uptight. Do loosen up and enjoy this experience," encouraged Lucius.

Severus lips thinned in a glare that could kill before he snapped away. Meilis smiled softly, caught him by his forearm, and drew him towards the back of the spa to the men's dressing rooms. "Any empty room with an open door may be used, Mr. Snape. There is a rack and hangers for your clothing. Just don the white robe that you'll find within."

Severus was not about to take another step but Lucius was suddenly beside him and directing him to a dressing room. With a determined air he stomped into the dressing room and slammed the door shut.

Ten minutes later the Potions Master emerged from the dressing room. He was clothed in his black robes, long coat, and trousers. Ignoring the eyes of a few attendants he strode to the front desk and whirled upon Jordy whose smile faltered in the face of the intimidating wizard who had stared down Death Eaters and stood before a Dark Lord without flinching.

"Sir? Mr. Snape is something the matter?" asked Jordy gingerly.

"Give a message to Lucius Malfoy for me. Tell him that I am returning to Manchester Borough where my time will be better spent." He gave the attendant a brisk nod, and left in a billow of black robes only ever seen by the students and staff of Hogwarts.

---

Back in Manchester Borough, England

Severus arrived at the portkey station from Petit Paris nearly in an instant. He knew it was beyond the height of rudeness to have left the spa as he had but once he saw the robe he was to wear at the spa; a thing of fabric that left little to the imagination, he wanted nothing to do with it. No, he was not a prude, but he had no desire to see Lucius in such a robe, and undoubtedly Narcissa had one as well. Friends, they were. Even family to him. Yet, he had no desire to see that much of the Malfoy family!

"Oh! Mr. Snape! How delightful to see you," exclaimed Madame Bilcross as she rounded the back of the schoolhouse.
"How did you know so quickly that I was here, Madame?" asked Severus with a slight frown.

The woman tapped a brooch upon the lace collar of her dress, and smiled. "The portkey station has an alert spell that sends a small chime when there is an arrival. Have you returned to help us?"

He nodded once. "If I may. It appears I am without any activity for the day and I am in need of occupying myself."

"Come to the playground, then," said Madame Bilcross as she walked with him from the front of the schoolhouse to the playground behind it. "Your son will be pleased to see you."

"I would hope so, Madame. I am sincere in my offer to assist. I am a teacher and so I do believe it would not be difficult for me. What are the children doing outside?" he asked as they crossed a ward that kept the playground area seasonally warm.

"They are practising holding their wands, or removing them from arm sleeves, as they traverse an obstacle course," the teacher replied. "The one that reaches the boulder first wins a chit for ice cream at Fortescue's in Diagon Alley."

As they entered the playground Severus saw that an obstacle course that included monkey bars, slides, swings, and a sandbox had been laid out. The obstacles also included a series of free-standing doors and a pathway that appeared to be smooth, raised rocks with flat surfaces. At the end of the course was a very large boulder with a flat surface; the goal.

The students, all in their robes, were laughing and giggling as they traversed the obstacles and practised the simple motion of removing their wands from 'wand bands' on their forearms. Wands were dropped, children fell or got turned around, but all of them were enjoying themselves. Severus felt his own, restrained smile, appear at the happiness of the children. And then he saw a little boy slip and fall on the pathway of rocks. The child started to cry.

"Are those rocks real?" asked Severus, appalled.

"The rocks are real but the edges are softened with a Cushioning Charm. A child might get a bruise but there will be no broken bones." Madame Bilcross looked for her apprentice and spied Miss Alison working with another child that had gotten tangled up in the folds of her robes sleeves. "Mr. Snape, please go see to that young boy, would you?"

With an acknowledging nod Severus strode over to the small boy who was now sniffling and joined by two other young boys that were crouching down by their friend.

"Are you okay, Nev?" asked Harry with concern.

Neville's voice was hitching so he only nodded. "We shouldn't have run so fast," said Draco softly.

"Harry? Draco?" Severus paused as he recognised his son and godson.

"Dad! "Uncle Severus!" The Potions Master was quickly assaulted by two, joyous five year old boys.

"It is very good to see you both but shall we see to your friend?" Severus gently nudged each child from him. He knelt upon one knee by the third boy who looked up at him in fear.

"I'm s-s-s-sorry, Sir! I shouldn't have fallen!" Neville stuttered.

"We were really running fast, Dad," enlightened Harry as he crouched back down. "Neville was
doing okay but then these rocks made him fall. Did we break him?"

Severus stifled the bit of laughter that threatened as his son mentioned ‘breaking Neville’. "I do not believe so, Harry. Neville, are you hurt anywhere?"

Neville nodded sadly as he looked down at his right knee. He had torn a hold in his trousers and even though the rocks were softened by a Cushioning Charm the child's skin was still slightly abraded. "Am I broken?"

"Just a little scrape, Neville." With a wave of his wand Neville's knee was healed and the fabric of his trousers re-knit itself back together. Severus stood and then drew the little boy up by his armpits. "Better?"

Neville tested his knee. "Yes." He smiled carefully. "Thank you, Sir." His smile faded as he continued to look up at the tall wizard. "My Uncle Algy said you're a Death Eater. How come you're so nice."

*He is just a child,* Severus reminded himself. He began to unbutton his sleeves and then roll them up. "Your Uncle Algy is mistaken, Neville. I am no longer a Death Eater." He bent slightly to show his forearms. "As you can see… no Dark Mark."

Neville peered at the smooth forearms. He then gingerly raised a hand and touched the left inner forearm. Harry moved closer to Neville. He whispered in his friend's ear, "'Member what I said? He just looks scary, at first, Nev. My dad won't hurt you. Ever."

"Never," agreed Severus as he returned his sleeves to their place. "Now. Do you three not have an obstacle course to finish?"

Harry grinned. "Yeah! Let's go!"

With just a small smile from Neville all three boys continued their run.

Neither Harry, Draco nor Neville were the first to finish the course but once the day was finished (and Severus had helped in distributing blankets for nap-time after lunch) Severus took his three charges to Florean Fortescue's for ice cream. Neville's grandmother had not shown to pick up her grandson so Severus had sent an owl so, hopefully, the woman would not worry about Neville.

Of course, the day's excitement was not to end with ice cream at Fortescue's. Severus, as teacher of Potions and the Head of Slytherin House, was required to put in an appearance at dinner since he had missed breakfast and lunch.

And, Harry would get to accompany his father!
According to the Harry Potter Wikia Bill Weasley was a fourth year student in 1985. Charlie was a second year student.

Dinner in the Great Hall

Chapter Notes

2 September 1985 - Evening - Dinner in the Great Hall

Harry watched with interest as his father tapped his black dress shoes with his wand causing the laces to lace themselves. Severus then adjusted his son's robes, that were a match to his, and nodded.

"Quite acceptable, my splendid Magpie," smiled Severus. "Are you nervous at all?"

Harry nodded. "A little, Shadow. There's gonna be lots of students there. Will they all like me?"

Severus paused a moment. He wanted to tell his child that unequivocally he would be accepted by all the students but it was not the truth. The Potions Master valued the truth and he would be honest with his son. "No. Not all of the students will like you, Harry. Some will dislike you because of who your parents were, and some will dislike you because of who I am."

Harry's shoulders drooped as his nerves became taut. "That's not fair…" he breathed uneasily.

"It is not fair at all, Harry. Children often reflect the prejudices they are taught at home. I do believe that once given the chance many will accept you." He stroked his son's cheek. "My Magpie is a very loving boy."

Harry smiled and slipped his hand into his father's hand. "Okay. I'm ready, Shadow."

The Great Hall

Severus had always arrived for meals in the Great Hall from its main entrance rather than the staff entrance hidden by a long tapestry. It allowed him a moment to peruse his Slytherins and it also showed that there was nothing about himself to be ashamed of. This time, though, he arrived in the Great Hall with his son at his side. His most implacable expression was upon his face but in his heart he was… indecently… proud of the son that walked, in robes that matched his, at his side.

Harry was excited but also a touch afraid. All of the students eyes were on him. He saw hostility in the gazes of some students. Shock… awe… puzzlement. He breathed an internal sigh of relief as nearly one table of students, all wearing ties with green and silver stripes, actually smiled at him. Then, they clapped.

"Dad, are they clapping at me?" Harry whispered nervously.

Severus stopped, purposefully, at the middle of the Slytherin table and moved his son in front of him. "Harry, these are my Slytherins. They have not met you but I told them last night during our House meeting about you. I do believe…" and he paused as he dropped his dark gaze upon each of his students, "that they are… all… looking… forward… to meeting you."
Rather to his surprise all of the Slytherin students left their table until all of them were surrounding their Head of House and his son. Not oppressively, though.

"Good evening, Professor Snape. I've been elected to speak for all of the Slytherins." The boy was tall, nearly as tall as his Head of House, with a dashing spray of straw/straight blond hair. He smiled down at Harry after his Head gave him a slight nod. "Hello, Harry. I'm Prefect Jonnal Deeves, a seventh year. Everyone in Slytherin would like to welcome you and to tell you that we're pleased to have you as our Head's son."

"Hi," Harry could just manage. He did smile, though, and his gaze embraced the kind smiles that met his.

Another student, a dark-skinned girl with black curls that fell to her shoulders, and bright blue eyes, stepped forward. "I'm the girls prefect, Adele Smollins, Harry. I have a list here for your father…" she gave the rolled up scroll to Severus who took it, "of students that have all volunteered to be with you around Hogwarts or in the Slytherin common room." She then moved her gaze to Severus. "Professor Snape, included with that list are the signatures of all the students in Slytherin who have pledged to keep Harry safe and happy when you aren't available."

"My gratitude to each and every one of you," Severus nodded graciously. "Please, return to your meal. I am certain my son is rather famished after his first day of school." He patted his son's shoulder and Harry looked back at his father.

"I hope it's good, Dad!"

There were small chuckles and giggles from the Slytherins as they moved back to their table. Severus and Harry moved up to staff table where Severus sat one chair away from the Headmaster. The chair between them was for Harry.

"Grandpa!" Harry hugged the older man as he turned to make himself available.

Albus kissed Harry's temple and then directed him to sit. "How was your first day at school, my dear?"

"We learned lots of stuff like controlling crayons, and drawing, and then we started practising our letters. I know A-B-C-D-E and F. Then me and Draco made a friend. His name is Neville and he's really nice. Kinda shy but with me and Draco as his friends he won't be forever." Harry chuckled and stared at his empty place setting. "How do we get dinner, Shadow?"

Severus leaned over slightly, "Ask your grandfather or myself to call your meal to you, Magpie." He then tapped the empty spot with his wand. A plate with a slice of roast beef, mashed potatoes with butter and gravy, and early Winter beans appeared. It was quickly followed by a cold, glass of milk, and a small bowl of sliced melon.

"Where's my Nutrition Potion?" asked Harry. He picked up a piece of melon and popped it into his mouth.

Severus replied, "Madame Pomfrey has decided you no longer need one, my strong son."

"Wicked!" he dug into his dinner and was soon lost as the adults conversed around him. Finally, he finished everything on his plate and was brought back to reality as his grandfather touched his arm. "It was good, Grandpa."

"That's good to hear, Harry. Would you like some pudding? I believe it is treacle tart this evening," said Albus.
Harry glanced at his father for permission. Severus nodded his head once. With a smile Harry nodded, "I've never had treacle tart. It sounds neat. I'll try it."

Harry soon had his pudding and was quickly transported to Heaven. It wasn't until his last bite that he became aware of some disturbance in the Great Hall. The little boy peered out at all of the students and saw that the trouble came from the table that had a red and gold banner floating above it.

"Dad?" asked Harry worriedly.

Before Severus could reply a brown-haired boy yanked something from the hands of a young, red-headed boy. Tempers burst, and a fist fight broke out across the table. Albus rose smoothly from his seat at the center of the staff table, touched his wand to his throat, and then his voice boomed across the Great Hall. Harry jumped off his seat and climbed into his father's lap where he curled up with his face against the man's chest.

"William Weasley, come up here!" Albus ordered the fourth year student. He then sat down and lightly stroked his grandson's back while the young Gryffindor walked up to the staff table.

"Headmaster," William Weasley nodded, and then ran his hand through his messy hair.

"What was the reason for that unseemly fight, Mr. Weasley?" demanded Albus.

"Uhm… my little brother, Charlie, he made something for Professor Snape's son." Charlie was a second year Gryffindor. "Charlie was going to bring it up but some of our mates…" he scowled, "thought that was a dumb idea and wouldn't let him go. Milly pinched Charlie's arm, that distracted him and Dorrin took it. Charlie's got him a temper, Headmaster. And… well, after one punch was threwed everyone started fighting. Sorry, Headmaster." William dropped his head.

Albus grimaced. "Whatever the reason for the fight, Mr. Weasley it was an inappropriate display of temper. Fifty points from Gryffindor. A very poor start to the term." With a nod he dismissed the boy.

Severus spoke up, "Mr. Weasley. Send your brother up here with whatever he made."

"Of course, Professor!" William smiled and then turned to yell at his brother. "CHARLIE!"

"Mr. Weasley!" snapped Severus. "I did not tell you to shout in order for all to hear."

"Uhm… yeah. Sorry, Professor." This time when he turned he was met by his younger brother holding something in his hands. William pushed his brother towards the staff table. "Professor Snape wants to see what you made. Go on!"

Charlie Weasley was a bit shorter, more freckled than his brother, but he shared the same messy, red hair that William had. With Gryffindor confidence he finished his walk up to the staff table and stood on the other side where Severus sat with his son curled in his lap.

"I made something for your son, Professor Snape," said Charlie a bit rapidly.

"What is it?" asked Severus.

Charlie held up a somewhat diamond shaped construct with one part elongated. Six pieces of thin wood held a piece of light yellow cloth stretched over the pieces of wood. A knotted ribbon in purple was on the corner longer part. A picture had been painted on the yellow fabric. "It's a kite. I painted the dragon, too. It's an Antipodean Opaleye since they have a lot of colour and a beard of feathers.
and great big wings." The kite was good sized but no taller than Harry himself was.

"A kite," Severus drawled. He then patted his son's back. "Harry, please turn around and see what Mr. Weasley... Charlie Weasley... made for you."

Harry first peeked up from his father's chest, and then turned to face the freckle faced boy with the colourful kite. "You made it for me?" he asked softly.

Charlie nodded. "Our mum used kites to help us control our magic after it manifested. I thought you might like one, too. Bill and I will show you how to fly it... uhm... if you want, that is."

"Dad?" asked Harry so softly that only his father heard him.

"On the weekends before the weather turns, Mr. Weasley," replied Severus. He held out his hand for the kite. "What do you think, Harry?"

"It's a really nice kite." He smiled at the Gryffindor boy. "Thank you, Charlie."


Albus ordered gently, "Return to your table, Mr. Weasley."

Without another word, but the smile remaining on his face, Charlie trotted back to the Gryffindor table.

"On that note, Father, I believe Harry and I are finished. We have a meeting of my House to attend," said Severus standing. He let Harry slide down to the floor and then handed him the kite to carry. "Good evening. Come along, Magpie."

"Goodnight, my boys," nodded Albus.

"G'nite, Grandpa." Harry took his father's hand and walked beside him down the aisle of the Great Hall.

---

2 September 1985 - Slytherin Common Room

The 'meeting' with his Snakes was not one scheduled so it was a surprise to all the Slytherins in the common room when their Head of House arrived... with his son.

"Good eve, everyone," greeted Severus as he made his way to one of the green velvet covered sofas. It was occupied but the two students sitting upon it rose up and found other seats. "Harry is being allowed to stay up for a half-hour so he can visit with everyone. If anyone needs any help with homework I am available."

Prefect Jonnal Deeves, a seventh year student, left his study group and walked over to Harry. "Hi, Harry. Thanks for coming to visit us. Would you like to sit with my study group?"

"Are you by the big windows? I want to watch the fish," said Harry.

"That would be fun, Harry. C'mon, let's go and sit down in front of the windows." Jonnal escorted Harry over to the five, tall windows that looked out over the Mer City, and sat down right on the floor. Harry joined him.

Jonnal waved an invitation over to any students that wanted to join them. Severus had been watching but a first year girl had gotten his attention as she asked him a question about her Charms homework.
"How was your first day at school, Harry?" asked Jonnal.

"It was good. We tried to control a scribbling crayon but I got sick so I got to draw instead. Then we got to run a really fun obstacle course in our robes and with our wands." He giggled. "There was lots of falling. 'Cept, it wasn't funny when Neville fell."

"Who's Neville?" asked a blonde haired 5th year girl who had just sat down beside Jonnal. She looked rather a lot like Jonnal.

"He's my new friend," Harry replied. "Neville Longbottom. His granny is raising him but his uncle is sorta mean when he drinks."

"My mum gets mean when she drinks her elf wine," interjected a black-haired boy that sat down by Harry. "She doesn't hit us or anything but just yells a lot. Can we all be your friends, Harry?"

"Sure," Harry grinned. "I don't think there's a number of how many friends you can have. What's your name?"

"Neil Bobanek. I'm in my 6th year here at Hogwarts."

"I'm Ellemere but you can call me Elle, Harry. Jonnal's my big brother," she glanced admiringly up at Jonnal who grinned and ruffled her blonde hair.

"Are you going to cheer on Slytherin, Harry?" asked Neil.

"For what?"

Nearly everyone chorused in reply, "QUIDDITCH!"

Adele Smolls laughed and joined the growing group. "Neil's our Seeker, Harry."

"He became Seeker after Tomas Kiel and his family left for Australia," explained Jonnal. "Neil has some big shoes to fill."

"So you're going to be new?" Harry asked of Neil.

"This year, yeah," replied Neil. "I've been practising, though, and I think I'm pretty good."

Another boy, with dark, olive skin and black, curly hair laughed and clapped Neil on the back. "He's being modest, Harry. Neil's great. We should have no trouble winning the House Cup this year."

The Visit in the Slytherin Common Room Ends

Severus helped a few more first years with homework. All the while he kept an eye on his son. Harry had nearly all of the House sitting around him in front of the large windows that looked into the depths of the Black Lake. When he caught Harry yawning he ended the visit, picked up his son, and told his Snakes that they ought to go to bed as well.

Once within the comforting walls of their apartment Severus sent Harry to brush his teeth and to get into his pyjamas. After several minutes all remained quiet in the apartment so the Potions Master went to investigate. He found his son asleep in the center of his bed, curled up with Nellie his kneazle not quite asleep herself. The kneazle kit had her golden eyes upon the little boy.

Without disturbing his son, the duvet he slept on vanished and a second later reappeared floating over the boy until it slowly drifted down to cover him.
Severus kissed his son, and Nellie, secure in knowing that all was well, closed her eyes.
A Sleepover

*a/n: For those that have asked-the dates are to show the passing of time. I cannot show what happens every single day. I am also following the real-life calendar for 1985. Google it and you will see that Sunday is the 1st of Sept. and Monday is the 2nd. Therefore, the school day begins on the 2nd.*

September 1985 Ends

By the end of September Harry had learned all 26 of his letters. He had begun to read a primer - a simple educational book - that was about children doing chores at home. Severus kept reading to Harry and they practiced at night so that Harry would excel in his reading. For writing, he wrote simple letters to Lucius and Narcissa, Draco, and Neville Longbottom.

This last weekend in September was going to be a special one because Harry had talked his father into letting him have a 'sleepover'. He had explained, without mentioning his cousin Dudley, that sleepovers were held on weekends for kids to be together with their friends, play games, eat ice cream, and tell each other scary stories before sleeping. He did not mention that his friend Neville was not doing well at school because he was losing sleep. Severus was loathe to be 'burdened' with two other young children to care for, especially during term, but those blasted green emeralds that were his son's eyes had pleaded silently for the sleepover. After several days where he told Harry he was considering the idea, he acquiesced.

Dear Draco,

*I am having a sleepover. Dads not happy but he's happy for me. You get to come. It's Saturday and starts at 12.*

Harry

Dear Cissy and Uncal Lucius,

*I am writing this all by myself and Dad did not check anything because he said I need lots of practice writing my letters and words.*

*I am glad you told Dad that Draco could come for the sleepover. It will be lots of fun. We are going to have great food and stay up for ever!*

Love Harry

Dear Neville,

*My Dad asked your grandma if you could come sleepover this Saturday. She said yes. So you come on 12 and we will play with Fang and Droopy and eat really good food and tell stories all night. You got to come. Okay?*

Harry

For good measure, and because he wanted to make sure his father knew how happy he was to have
his sleepover, Harry wrote to his father.

Dear Shadow,

Thank you so much for the sleepover. It is going to be great and lots of fun and you are going to have fun to.

Magpie - thanks for telling me how to spell our speshul names.

Severus' letter from his son went into a box he had begun to keep of things he never wanted to lose. He had the Adoption Certificate and a phial of the Familia Adopto Potion for when Harry became his son, and then he had added the Adoption Certificate and phial of the Familia Adopto Potion when Albus became his father.

The last Saturday in September Draco and Neville arrived at the Snapes escorted by Lucius at noon. The two fathers then took the three boys to Hagrid's for lunch, to help feed the Thestrals and Buckbeak, and then to play with Fang and Droopy the puppy. Nellie eschewed her boy and his friends for the quieter Severus who had lunch in his quarters with Lucius.

Severus ate an obligatory salad but then indulged in bitter coffee laced with whiskey that Minerva had given him last Christmas. Lucius had taken a half of a sandwich before delving into a smokey glass of Ogden's Finest Devil's Portion. Once the smoke dissipated the aristocrat was left with a glass of nearly black amber whiskey.

"So, Augusta Longbottom chose to leave her grandson with you rather than with me," stated Severus. "Even after our Floo conversation." He rubbed his knees. The conversation had been a long one and his Cushioning Spell had ended before their talk did.

Lucius nodded and said ironically, "You might think the woman has something against those of us who are 'suspected' Death Eaters..." Severus bobbed his head slightly in agreement. "However, the old woman is a Pureblood elitist."

"Even after what happened to her son and daughter-in-law she still holds to that prejudice?" asked Severus.

"Not every Pureblood is a Death Eater and not every Death Eater is evil. Distinctions many are unable to make," replied Lucius coolly. "Augusta Longbottom still espouses the same rhetoric against the Muggle-born that Voldemort did even though her children fought for their right to be a part of our world. That old, stodgy witch still dislikes you simply because you are a half-blood, Severus."

"So, she condones allowing her grandson to sully himself with my son?" sneered Severus.

Lucius chuckled drily as he sipped at his whiskey and said, "Ohhhh, Mrs. Longbottom was quite vocal about how her grandson is taking pity on the poor orphan, just as my son is." Severus had stiffened with outrage but Lucius continued. "Do you recall that annoying little deprecatting myth that came about a few decades ago about orphans? That they are as feeble in mind as Squibs are in magic?"

"Yes. That one I do recall," Severus muttered darkly. "The Ministry has done nothing to address that slur, yet, and adoptions from the orphanage continue to dwindle. I learned that my adoption of Harry and Albus' adoption of me are the first in twenty years!"
"Disgraceful, Brother." Lucius then smiled as an idea brightened his features. "Cissy has been looking for a suitable project during her pregnancy. Perhaps this issue with the orphanage could use the Malfoy touch?"

"To have someone in society focus their attention upon the less fortunate children would stir the hearts of others." Severus grinned darkly. "How might I be of service, Brother."

"Perhaps you might speak to your father, the good Headmaster, Severus? I am certain that if his son were involved in the plight of wizarding orphans he would surely wish to lend a hand."

"Indeed," nodded Severus. Not to mention that his own son would find it imminently agreeable to see his father involved in such a worthy project. After several minutes of comfortable silence Severus commented, "Harry has been bringing home some disturbing stories about Neville's uncle Algernon. Has Draco said anything?"

Lucius nodded forbiddingly, "He has told his mother that Algernon drinks, rather heavily, and then shouts at everything with a suspicious shadow. Recently, he has taken to hexing the dangerous looking plants in the house. I understand that a beloved Caractacus Cactus succumbed to one of Algernon's hexes."

"A beloved cactus?" frowned Severus.

Lucius smiled easily. "It appears that our little Neville is quite the talented herbalogist. He correctly identified every plant in my Apparition Reception Parlour." He chuckled. "The child went on to tell me that, 'the elves are over-watering my Violet Hill Tradescantia Zebrina'."

"Hm, yes. It has gotten rather a yellowish cast to its leaves," mused Severus.

"You have no idea what plant that is, Severus!" declared Lucius tautly, but with a grin.

"It should be a lush house plant with light green leaves defined with black edges, and a dark green stripe down the center of the leaf. You have it trailing its length to the floor whilst artfully framing the arched doorway," the Potions Master glowered but there was a slight up-lifting of his mouth that took the sting away. "Really, Brother, you know I could teach Herbology as well as I do Potions. As a Potions Master I must have more than just a passing interest in the flora of our Earth."

Lucius gave his friend a mock look of disgust. "Is there nothing you do not do to perfection, Severus?"

"Transfiguration," Severus replied an instant later.

"Yes, I do recall you lost quite a lot of points in Transfiguration, and continued to do so after I finished my seventh year. Still, even that is an accomplishment… of sorts." Lucius laughed roundly as Severus' lips thinned and his gaze narrowed.

Harry, Draco, and Neville had finished a generous lunch of beef stew with vegetables, a sectioned mandarin for each, and milk (even though Harry had requested juice). They were now playing with Fang and the puppy Droopy while Hagrid threw gnomes from his garden.

"What's Hagrid doing?" asked Draco as he caught sight of the groundskeeper throwing something that squealed.

Harry, who had just caught an exuberant puppy, looked up and Droopy took the chance to lick his face. He giggled. "Don't know."
"He's de-gnoming his garden," Neville informed the boys.

"Garden gnomes are just decoration," said Harry. "There were three in my Muggle garden."

"Muggles don't have problems with magical gnomes, Harry," said Neville gently. He was still smarting from a tirade his uncle had shouted at the top of his lungs the other night against Muggles. He rubbed his sore ear.

"Do Muggle gnomes look like magical gnomes?" asked Draco with curiosity.

Harry shrugged. "I've never seen a magical gnome. Let's go help Hagrid!" He jumped up, followed quickly by his friends, as he trotted over to where Hagrid was working. "Hey, Hagrid! Can I see a gnome? I've only seen Muggle gnomes."

"Sure, 'Arry. Gots about ten left yeh can all help me with." he then crouched and pointed at a pair of beady, red eyes next to a large pumpkin. "Can yeh all see 'is eyes?"

"I think he's hissing," observed Draco as he crouched.

"They do that," nodded Neville. He stepped behind the half-giant. He was not fond of gnomes. "They bite, too."

"Do they?" asked Harry in awe.

"Will they kill us, Hagrid?" asked Draco a bit luridly.

"Not that I've ever 'eard tell, Draco. Gnomes is just vicious blighters," he grabbed the gnome he had pointed at. The gnome was barely a foot tall, it had strange, green hair on its head and lining its limbs. It was also nude. It gnashed a terrible set of teeth at Hagrid, and hissed. "Once yeh grab yer gnome yeh need to hold 'im by the 'air on 'is 'ead. Yeh then spin…" Hagrid stood, spun the gnome above his head, and slung it far over his garden wall. It let out a squeal as it flew.

"I want to throw one," grinned Draco.

Harry shook his head. They did look vicious but he did not want to throw one. Yet. He and Neville watched while Hagrid looked for a gnome and then helped Draco to catch it and then throw it. Draco spun himself around and right into Hagrid's shins. He smacked his nose, but he was laughing.

"I threw the gnome!" Draco crowed to his friends.

"Yeh done real good, Draco. So, Neville? 'Arry?" asked Hagrid.

Harry shook his head. Neville took a deep breath then spoke up, "I'd like to try, Hagrid."

"Ah'right, Neville. Come over 'ere," Hagrid motioned to a spot beside him. He crouched down by the round child. "Now, keep yer eyes sharp. Look into them shadows. Ye'll see their beady eyes shinin' first."

"There's a gnome!" he whispered with excitement. "If I catch him he might bite me, Hagrid."

"Don'neh yeh worry 'bout that, Neville. Yer gonna grab 'im by the 'air so aim jus' above 'is eyes, an' grab 'im!" instructed Hagrid.

Neville took a few deep breaths, eyed the red-eyed gnome that hissed at him… and dove head first for the creature. Hagrid did not expect the boy to tackle the gnome, but considering Neville's round frame - he was built like a Bludger Batter in Quidditch - he tackled his gnome. The creature
squeaked, squirmed, and even gnashed its teeth but it was squashed to the ground.

"Great tackle, Neville," shouted Hagrid. He picked up boy and gnome, grabbed the gnome by its skinny body, put Neville back on the ground, and aimed the gnome at Neville by its green-haired head. "Yeh can throw him, now."

With a lot more confidence then he had a few seconds ago, Neville grabbed the green hair, and with a very sharp swing, tossed the gnome right over the garden wall. His task completed with flying colours he grinned. Draco thumped him on the back and Harry jumped up, did a little dance, and cheered.

Harry quickly sobered, and then leaned against Hagrid's knee. "Hagrid, when we throw the gnomes like that does it kill them?"

Hagrid very gently patted Harry's back. "Nahhh, gnomes are forever creatures, 'Arry. They gets dizzy and don't know the way back to my garden for least-wise a week."

"They're immortal?" asked Draco with sudden awe.

"Not so much, Draco. Jackie Thorn the 'Erbologist what discovered gnomes three cent'ries ago figured out there was just so many but in eatin' magical plants they makes more of 'emselves," explained Hagrid. "That's why we de-gnome our gardens."

"I want to try, Hagrid," Harry finally decided.

Hagrid took Harry through spotting a gnome, and then catching it. Harry's aim was a bit off and snatched his arm away right before the little garden beast bit him. Hagrid caught it as it ran towards Harry, and then held the gnome out to the little boy the same way he had done for Neville. Harry caught the gnome by the hair, spun it above his head, and then threw it with all his might.

Hagrid clapped and Draco and Neville cheered.

Lucius had left Severus after their visit. He had planned an evening at a cafe in Paris for his gravid wife. Severus was glad to see the older man go; he was too insufferably smug at the impending arrival of his second child.

Upon arrival at Hagrid's hut he was met by the groundskeeper. The half-giant raised his hand in greeting.

"Did they behave, Hagrid?" asked Severus.

"Aye, Perfessor. Those are good tykes. Afore you go and wake'em from their nap, can I have a bit o' yer time to mention something?" Hagrid indicated that they ought to sit in the chairs he had on his porch.

"Is something the matter, Hagrid?" frowned Severus as he sat gingerly upon the edge of the chair.

"I jes' noticed today that 'Arry seems a bit off… in 'ow 'e grabs at gnomes, plays wi' Droopy, an' such," commented Hagrid. "Like 'e don't see quite right. Yeh ever notice such a thing, Perfesser?"

Severus paused in thought. He had noticed lately that as he and his son were reading at night Harry tended to squint at the words, or bring the book closer to his nose. The other night his son had been bent over his letters he was writing like an old scribe. Thinking of that he recalled other times when Harry moved to pick something up, such as a spoon, fork or knife, he generally had to try twice
before connecting with the implement.

"You think Harry might have a vision problem, Hagrid?" mused Severus. "I do recall that James Potter had a significant problem with his vision."

Hagrid nodded. "Yep. I foun' the young first year Potter by the lake oncet. Cryin'. His spect'acles were broken an' 'e didn't know 'ow to fix'em. T'werent a bother to me. Jes' took 'im up to Madame Pomfrey an' 'e was good as new."

"Could Potter see anything without his glasses?" wondered Severus.

Hagrid shook his bushy head. "Blind as an auld bat, 'e was."

"I shall make sure that Harry's eyes get looked at," sighed Severus. "I suppose I was hoping he would take after Lily in that respect."

"'Arry does 'ave Lily's purty eyes, Perfessor. 'Ave ye noticed 'is 'air be changin' since the 'doption?"

Severus' eyes widened. "I had not but, yes, you are right, Hagrid. Harry's hair is sitting neater when we comb it." He smirked slightly. "A Blood Adoption does not always impart... characteristics to the child from the parent. I was hoping that Harry might inherit my height."

"Yeh were a short sprout fer the longest time, Perfessor," mused Hagrid as his eyes wrinkled from a teasing smile.

Severus nodded. "Late bloomer. My growth spurt at the end of my sixth year was most welcome."

"Shadow!" Harry, yawning, had wakened from his nap to the sound of his father's voice. Like a little spider he clambered up onto his father's lap and kissed his cheek. "Did you and Uncle Lucius have fun while we were away?"

"Best fun ever, Magpie," smirked Severus as he nudged the end of his nose against Harry's own nose. "Did you have a productive time?"

Draco and Neville emerged. Draco was fisting sleep from his eyes and leaned languidly against his godfather's leg. He smiled when he felt Severus' fingers card through his sleep mussed hair.

Harry replied quickly, "We fed the Thestrals and Buckbeak..."

Draco interrupted, "Buckbeak didn't like me right away, Uncle Severus. I just thought I could pet him as soon as we saw him but you can't do that with a hippogriff. You gotta introduce yourself first."

"INTRO-DUCE," Severus corrected. "Did you introduce yourself, Dragon?"

Draco nodded. "Buckbeak likes me now."

"After that," continued Harry, "we played with Fang and Droopy and then Hagrid taught us all about garden gnomes. Did you know they aren't at all like the statues Aunt Petunia put in my garden, Shadow?"

"Are they now, Magpie. What are they like?" asked Severus. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Neville standing awkwardly by himself. He patted his thigh in front of his godson and Neville smiled as he moved closer.

"Garden gnomes are naked, Shadow!" giggled Harry. "They gots... I mean have... green hair that's
also on their arms and legs."

"They got big teeth, Professor Snape," said Neville. Shyly he held up his left arm. "I got bit but Hagrid had some sticky stuff to put on the bite so it didn't hurt anymore."

Severus glanced down at the tiny bite mark on the inside of the child's left arm. "We shall visit Madame Pomfrey to get that healed, Neville."

"Neville was really brave, Shadow," said Harry with obvious pride in his voice. "He didn't cry when he got bitten."

Draco grinned, "And, you should have seen how far he threw that stupid gnome, Uncle Severus. It's never going to come back!" He laughed. Turning slightly he smiled admiringly at his friend. "That was really wicked, Nev."

Severus set Harry on his feet and he rose. "Come along, gentlemen. We have a visit to Madame Pomfrey to take care of and then we shall begin the remainder of this afternoon's activities."

"Race!" cried Harry as he broke into a run. Draco and Neville were right behind him. Severus shook his head. Their energy promised the Potions Master a long night!

Madame Pomfrey smiled very quickly at Severus but then schooled her features into the solemnity the students were familiar with.

"What have you brought me, Severus?" asked the Healer.

"Neville was bitten by a garden gnome, Poppy," replied Severus. "Although Hagrid put on one of his homemade pastes, it ought to be examined."

Neville held up his left arm. "I didn't cry," he boasted softly.

"Splendid, Neville," said Poppy. She then frowned at the paste that gave off a faint pearly sheen in the light. "What did Hagrid put on this bite?"

Neville shrugged since he did not recall. Draco peered over his friend's shoulder. "Unicorn spit."

Poppy choked back the laughter that threatened. "Severus, can you tell what it is?"

The Potions Master took the little boy's arm and scrutinised the paste and the bite. The bite, he noted, was nearly smooth, and pale pink with healthy flesh regenerating. He knew of only one substance that could work so quickly. "It is unicorn blood, Poppy." He drew his thumb gently across the paste. "Thickened with gelatin, I would surmise."

"What's gelatin, Dad?" asked Harry as Poppy cleansed away the paste and cleaned the nearly healed wound.

"Gelatin is a by-product of Thestral, Aethenor, or even Dragon skin, marrow, and bone all boiled down, Harry." He smirked as all three boys grimaced in concert.

"That is really yucky, Shadow," Harry wrinkled his nose.

"Gelatin is an extremely useful product, Magpie. It is used in many healing potions, and…" Severus paused dramatically until all three boys were paying attention and then he finished, "It is used in quite a few foods… including many of your favourite puddings."
Both Severus and Poppy chuckled as the Infirmary echoed with groans of 'ewws', gagging, and protestations.

"Good as new, Neville!" announced Poppy.

Neville examined the inside of his arm and saw only smooth skin. "Neat! Thanks, Madame Pomfrey!"

"All right, gentlemen. We are now going to the Staff Garden for our appointment," Severus gathered the boys towards the door of the Infirmary and ushered them out into the corridor. He paused, then strode back into the Infirmary. "Poppy, would you join us for dinner?"

The Healer smiled so brightly Severus could swear that the sun had found its way into the Infirmary. He was inordinately pleased with himself for just asking. "I would love to join you, Severus. What time?"

"We will be dining at 7:30, Poppy, in my quarters. The Floo will admit you."

Bill (called William by all of his teachers) and his younger brother Charlie were not popular students in Gryffindor. Their popularity had plummeted a few weeks ago when the Weasley brothers had presented the young son of their Potions teacher a kite. A fight had broken out in the Great Hall between the Weasleys and several of their fellows. The Headmaster had stopped the fight, taken points, and Bill and Charlie still wound up giving their kite to the small boy. Popular they weren’t but the joy on Harry's face at being gifted the kite still warmed their hearts.

Even better, the two Weasley boys had been invited to the mysterious Staff Garden that students only heard rumours about yet had never seen. The invitation from the Potions Master was short, as expected, and gave them a password that would allow them into the garden from the Gryffindor common room Floo at "precisely one quarter of the hour to two, post meridian." Charlie was going to keep the note as a souvenir of having been written to by the Potions Master but the note inconveniently vanished as soon as they used the Floo.

Even though the season of warm weather was nearing its end the garden had been cloaked in a ward that kept the temperature that was perfect for the myriad of flora. Bill and Charlie wandered about in awe as they took in the various areas of the garden. There was an old stone grotto in the corner of a 'field' of heather and bluebells. A gazebo at the center of a profusion of roses arranged in a kind of rainbow took center stage.

Another area of the garden was bright with flowers that thrived in arid soil; much as one would see in Australia's plains. Cacti thrived in another area, and Bill made a note of staying away from that area that could be bad for playing near.

A creek burbled coolly amongst all the various areas of the garden and little waterfalls were formed by strategically placed rocks in the stream.

The Staff Garden was nothing like either boy had ever imagined. It was a paradise unexpected at the castle that was their school.

At 2 of the clock Severus and his son, Draco and Neville arrived through a Floo that vanished along with its green flames.

"Professor Snape!" called Bill. "This garden is terrific!"

"Thank you, William," nodded the Potions Master. "You both already know my son. I should like
you to meet his cousin, my godson Draco Malfoy and their friend Neville Longbottom. Gentlemen, these two students are William and Charles Weasley."

"You kids can call me Bill and my brother is Charlie," said Bill. "If that's all right, Professor Snape?"

Severus nodded once to the fourth year student. "Harry, Draco, and Neville may address you as you wish. I shall keep to a form of formality that reminds us both you two are students."

Charlie frowned but then smiled as his brother elbowed his side. "Sure, Professor."

"What are we doing here, Dad?" asked Harry with a breathlessness that revealed how long he had kept his excitement at bay.

Severus took out a small, diamond shaped construct with a purple tail. He enlarged it and Harry clapped as he recognised his kite. He handed the kite to Bill. "William, you are in charge. I will be in the gazebo, reading." He then looked sternly down and his son and his friends. "I expect each of you to behave to listen well to William's instructions. Understood?"

"Yes, Dad. Of course, Uncle Severus. Yes, Sir." Each boy nodded, as well.

Severus then left the boys to their kite flying as he retired to the gazebo where he tried to read but his attention kept being diverted as his son met success with the kite and he flew it… with his own magic.
Go Fly A Kite

28 September 1985 - Go Fly A Kite

Harry was flying his kite with just his thoughts! And, he could feel deep down inside himself that it was his magic flying the kite and not some magic he picked up from the air or whatever. Stolen magic was dangerous, Harry had decided after nearly 'blowing up his cousin'. Harry broke into his little dance of triumph as he clapped his hands.

"Don't lose your concentration, Harry!" yelled Bill.

"He's already lost it, Bill," stated Charlie. "The kite's falling."

Harry caught his falling kite out of the air and jump-hopped over to his friends. "I did it! Did you see, Draco? That was all my own magic, Nev." He giggled and danced around as he handed off the kite to Neville.

Neville stared at the kite he held almost with fear. "I can't do it," Neville rasped as he pushed the kite at Draco.

"Course you can, Nev," Draco pushed the kite back. "Harry and I did it so… well, you at least should try."

"B-but Draco, my magic…" stuttered the round boy.

"It's just asleep, Nev," Draco said soothingly. "This will wake it up gradually. Like the crayon exercise we do at school." He smiled. "You made the crayon wiggle lots of times."


"Hey!" Draco lightly punched Neville's shoulder and grinned. "I haven't made the crayon scribble. I just knocked it off the table. Just try."

Neville huffed knowing he'd lost this argument. Shrugging his shoulders and drawing in a breath he called out, "Let me try, Bill, please!"

Bill, who had been talking to his brother, turned and smiled. "Great, Nev." He jogged over and held up the kite. "Just imagine the kite flying up and over us."

Neville frowned and glared tightly at the kite. Charlie trotted over to the round boy. He fell to one knee. "Relax, Nev. You're not forcing anything. Just imagine the kite lifting from Bill's hands and then floating over our heads."

Everyone, including Severus still pretending to read in the gazebo, watched Neville or the kite with baited breath. After several minuted the tail of the kite began to slowly swish back and forth as if in a breeze. Charlie stroked Neville's back and grinned.

"That's it, Nev. You've got it. Lift the kite. It's just paper and wood so it's light." The kite shuddered in Bill's hands. He was just waiting to let it go. "Breathe, little brother, breathe," Charlie crooned softly.

After a seemingly decade of minutes the kite lifted up from Bill's hands. With a wobble it flew for just a moment and then it plummeted to the ground. Neville huffed and glared at the fallen kite. For a
breath of a second he was unaware that everyone, including the Potions Master, were applauding.

Harry ran over and broke into his triumphant dance. "You did it, Nev!"

"You got magic, Nev!" Draco hugged the smaller, round boy who stared in disbelief as he finally realised that he had flown the kite.

"Very good, Neville," came the deep, smooth voice of Harry's father.

Neville raised his head to look up at the very tall, dark wizard… and smiled beatifically. "Thank you, Mr. Snape."

"Everyone, come along to the gazebo," Severus gathered all the children. "I have broken my rules regarding dinner and have ordered hot fruit tarts for everyone from the Hogwarts kitchen."

The three youngest boys ran to the gazebo but Bill and Charlie walked; each with a bounce in their step.

"Mr. and Mr. Weasley," Severus said only for their hearing. "Ten points each. You both did acceptably well today."

"Me and Charlie had a lot of fun, Professor Snape. I hope we can do this again," Bill said sincerely.

Severus nodded once. "I do believe my son would like that, Mr. Weasley. Go, eat your tarts. I shall take the kite."

Bill handed over the kite and then he and Charlie broke into a sprint for the gazebo. Sweets were always great before dinner!

28 September 1985 - Early Evening

Poppy, clad only in a light yellow, semi-transparent slip, that fell to her ankles held up a dress to her chest and scowled at her reflection in the oval-full-length mirror. She threw that dress to the floor and Summoned another. Again, she held that to her chest. Once more she scowled. The Healer then decided that for a moment the dresses were a lost cause and she needed to brush her hair again.

The witch seated herself at a vanity that allowed her to view her reflection without her Glamour. Severus had encouraged her to remove it and there had been a difference. The white (given to her by genetics in which both parents had snow white hair in their 30s) was more a highlighting silver in sunlight. Quite pretty, she thought. She was pleased to see that the liver spots had vanished from her arms and legs after removing the Glamour. Those she had never liked.

Seeing herself, her face mostly, without the Glamour still made her a touch nervous. At the age of 32 (seven years older than the Potions Master) she was a very lovely looking woman. Of course, she tended to think she was 'handsome'. The one time she heard Severus call her beautiful was with the Glamour on and she had felt both complimented and depressed. Poppy wanted to be beautiful in his eyes as herself.

Poppy drew the boar bristle brush through her hair that fell in soft waves to her waist. As she brushed she contemplated more than a friendship with the Potions Master.

In 1977, Severus' seventh year as a student everything took a downward turn. Their friendship anchored by weekly tea, ended. Severus did his school work and kept to himself. For Poppy, she missed her friend but she respected the choices he had made. In the meantime she was offered a
membership in the small group of wizarding rebels led by Albus Dumbledore; the Order of the Phoenix. It was an offer she turned down as she felt it would compromise her vows as a Healer, vows she had renewed with the end of her apprenticeship when her mentor died. Poppy offered her services as a confidential Healer to all the members of the Order and in turn she had taken a Vow of Silence that did not allow her to speak of the Order, its leader, any of its members, or their families.

Poppy stopped brushing her hair and stared into her own eyes in the mirror. Her memories were still lost to the past. Those turbulent years when she could not help thinking about her Slytherin friend and how he fared as the days of 1977 passed.

When term ended in 1978 Poppy had hoped for a fare-thee-well from Severus but she had not seen him. Albus mentioned that Severus had left when his last class ended. He had not stayed for the Farewell feast.

A tenseness fluttered uneasily through the air as the weeks passed into August of 1978.

The Healer did not attend Order meetings but she treated James Potter, Sirius Black, and Peter Pettigrew often enough and all three were heavy with derisive rumours about that 'Snivelly boy', that 'greasy, useless, Death Eater', and worst epithet of all, 'that murdering wizard with his potions'. Although Poppy never said a word, either to the Marauders or about their insults, it hurt her to hear such scathing criticism of her friend.

A break in the unease came with the birth of Harry Potter on 31 July 1980; an event celebrated by the Order of the Phoenix. This occasion Poppy attended at Order headquarters since she had delivered the baby. With his arrival Lily and James became devoted parents. Poppy noted that James finally sloughed off the insults towards Severus Snape. His friends followed. Harry became a regular attendee at Order meetings since Lily always brought him. This Poppy knew of since Albus always told her about the baby he had grown to love.

The worst night came with the deaths of the Potters and the strange disappearance of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named on 31 October 1981. Hallowe'en. A night in the wizarding world that was a celebration of magic. In mere seconds, it seemed, it had become a night of terror. Lily and James were murdered and that alone was shocking news. However, it was often forgotten in days that followed that Frank and Alice Longbottom had been attacked and left for dead. Both Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade had been overrun by Death Eaters who took delight in causing terror and destruction.

The battles were small and had Poppy not been diverted to Order of the Phoenix headquarters she would have been summoned to St. Mungo's. In those hours Poppy learned that the Order of the Phoenix was not a simple group of a Headmaster and some students. The entire Auror corp of the Ministry was part of the Order and there were countless witches and wizards fighting for the side of Light. The only patient she was concerned with, though, was the terribly distraught, tortured, Potions Master.

That night, only hours after the news of the deaths of the Potters, Severus had been brought to Poppy by Albus who clearly thought the worst might happen; the young man would die. Severus was curled up in a foetal position that she thought was due to his grief at the loss of Lily but he had been tortured, nearly to death, by dozens of Crucius Curses. He could not unbend his body. She treated the Potions Master with a potion he had created sometime after becoming a Death Eater.

Poppy continued to treat witches and wizards but her mind, if she were honest with herself, was always on Severus. A massive dose of the Potions Master's own Crucius Relief Potion ended his severe cramps just hours into the 3rd day of November and allowed his body to relax.
Hours later Poppy allowed herself to collapse onto a bed near the only patient that mattered to her. Severus Snape had not slept for one moment since coming in and when he saw the Healer flop onto the nearby bed he spoke to her in a whisper afraid to be heard.

"My best friend was murdered," he shifted onto his side.

Poppy nodded. "I'm sorry, Severus."

"Lily spoke to me once… after her son was born," Severus lowered his gaze. "I made a Vow to protect her son but I could not find it in myself to ask for our friendship to be renewed. I was cold. I turned her away." He gulped in the dimness of the Great Hall which had been turned into an infirmary. "My last words to her were an order…" he suppressed a sob, and continued, "...'never speak to me again, Lily,' and she never did."

"Severus, no matter what Lily had been your first friend. You are allowed to grieve for her," said Poppy.

Severus shook his head. "I already have," he said in shame. And, then he began to silently weep with uncontrolled grief.

Poppy could not explain it but she rose from her prone position, pulled down the wizard's blanket, climbed in beside Severus, and pulled him into her arms. Severus' arms snaked around the Healer after a moment, and then his weeping became silent sobs that nearly tore him… and Poppy… apart. Despite that, she held tightly to the very young Potions Master until he fell asleep.

Neither ever spoke of that oddly intimate night again. Poppy sometimes wondered if Severus had, perhaps, forgotten. And, if he had? She would not blame him. There was so much that many wanted to forget of that time.

The witch finished brushing her hair. She grasped two hanks of hair on either side of her head, drew them so that they draped softly, and then she tied them into a love-knot that she decorated with a blood-red rose. She then smiled at herself. Poppy knew which dress to wear for dinner with the Snapes.

Harry was overjoyed when his father invited the Weasley brothers to join them for dinner in their apartment. Severus uncovered the hidden Floo in the Staff Garden with Revelio and they Floo'd directly to the dungeon apartment. The Potions Master sent everyone to the bathroom to wash their hands. Bill volunteered to use the Cleaning Spell to clean himself, Charlie, Draco, Neville and Harry.

Severus decided on what to eat for dinner so he Summoned a kitchen elf and ordered dishes for seven people. He then enlarged the round table that he and Harry usually ate at, and was pleased to hear the Floo activate. He turned in time to welcome Poppy.

And, he was immediately tongue-tied.

Poppy had dressed in a simple gown in a pale, silvery-blue velvet with an Empire waist. A blood-red ribbon that matched the rose adorning the love-knot in her hair encircled the Empire waist. She was also not wearing her Glamour. Severus thought she was beautiful with the Glamour, but as herself the witch was stunning.

"Wow, Madame Pomfrey!" gushed Harry as he traipsed into the sitting room.

"You look really different, Madame Pomfrey," agreed Bill. Charlie nodded. His nod was followed by nods from Draco and Neville.
Severus then bowed partially as his voice returned. "Poppy, welcome, to our home."

The witch curtseyed halfway, and blushed as she straightened. She could see in his dark gaze the appreciation the wizard had for her appearance. "Thank you, Severus." She then turned to the boys. "And, thank you, gentlemen, for the compliments."

A tiny chime signalled the arrival of their dinner. Seven plates with seven silver domes sat upon the round table. Severus ushered the boys over to the table, and then held out a chair for Poppy. As she moved to sit and adjust herself in her chair strands from the ends of her hair swept over the older wizard's hand. He shivered.

"I ordered Canard à l'Orange with sparkling cranberry juice for the boys and an elven merlot for we adults. Gentlemen, you will also find servings of cubed fruit and sauteed asparagus." Charlie started to grimace at his asparagus until he caught a familiar glare on the Potions Master's face that he'd seen in class. "I expect every bite to be eaten."

Severus poured a glass of wine for Poppy then seated himself. He glanced over at his son, sitting next to him, to see that Harry was studying the slices of roasted meat under an orange sauce. Figuring that his son, or any of the boys might find the body of the roasted duck disturbing he had that left behind in the kitchen. Even so, Harry was frowning at his food.

"Problem, Magpie?" asked Severus softly.

"Is this chicken, Shadow?" Harry whispered.

"Duck," replied the wizard. Harry lifted his chin and cast a stricken gaze at his father. "Try it, Harry."

Harry nodded hesitantly and then cut a small slice off of one of the slices on his plate. He put it into his mouth, chewed, and blinked. "It's good, Dad."

Draco, a mouthful of the roast being chewed, mumbled, "Modder says dug is more sophithicate…!"

"Draco!" snapped Severus. The small blond boy froze in mid-chew. "Never speak with your mouth full. Chew first, then you may speak." With a glower he nodded to his godson to chew his bite of food. "Very good. What were you saying?"

"My mother says that duck is more sophisticated than chicken so we have it once a month," Draco smiled warily under his godfather's stern look. "I like duck!"

"Mum always cooks chicken," said Bill. "This tastes great, Professor." Charlie, his mouth stuffed, just nodded. He liked the duck, too.

Poppy giggled. "I like duck as well, Severus. I think you ordered the perfect meal."

And, the wizard was 'chuffed' at that!

Dinner was finished with a cherries jubilee for dessert and then goodbyes were made for the Gryffindor guests. Bill and Charlie were hugged by all three of the five year old boys before Severus sent them to Gryffindor tower. Harry, Draco, and Neville then retired to Harry's room where Severus had earlier made a few temporary changes.

Harry's bed was gone. In its place was a large tent with camp cots and sleeping bags within. Outside of the tent the floor was covered by lush grass and a safe campfire that the boys could toast
marshmallows over. Overhead the ceiling was now animated with sparkling stars and deep purple
and blue clouds the scudded slowly across the face of the moon. As a final touch to the outdoor
experience Harry's talented wizard father added the sound of crickets singing around all the sounds
of an invisible creek that burbled happily.

Poppy, who had only heard rumours about Harry's marvelous jungle bedroom had to see it for
herself. Severus, defying the nerves he truly felt, leaned against the door frame as the Healer looked
at the wonderful bedroom.

"You painted this, Severus?" asked Poppy with wide-eyed incredulity.

Severus nodded but Harry was the one to reply with exuberance, "Dad painted all of this while I was
asleep, Madame Pomfrey. He draws, too, just like I do. I want to become as good as he is someday."

"Thank you, Harry," smiled his father. "That would please me. So, Poppy. Is it to your liking?"

"To my liking? Oh, Severus! I wish I'd had such a bedroom when I was a little girl," she gushed.

"I want the knights of the Round Table and King Arthur," said Draco. "Uncle Severus has promised
he'd paint my room for me at Christmas."

"I do not recall such a promise, Dragon," purred Severus without malice.

"Harry said you did, Uncle Severus," maintained Draco. Harry nodded in the affirmative beside his
cousin.

Severus' thinned his lips at his son but Harry saw the smile in his father's eyes. He shrugged, and
giggled softly.

Poppy looked down at Neville who was being too quiet. "What would you like for your bedroom,
Neville?"

The little boy hunched his shoulders, then mumbled, "My gran wouldn't want my room painted. She
had a professional decorator do all the rooms in the manse."

Severus moved into his son's bedroom and knelt beside Neville. "Let us pretend that your
grandmother would let you decorate your bedroom any way you wish, Neville. What do you dream
of?"

Neville smiled timidly and looked around himself. Everyone was awaiting his answer. Taking a deep
breath he replied, "My gran has this big book of gardens that belonged to my father. In it is this grand
photograph of a really beautiful garden that has a frog pond with lilies, a Japanese bridge, and
flowers and trees and all sorts of big and wonderful plants. My gran told me that the garden had been
created by an artist that she was sure must have been a wizard because no Muggle could ever have
done what he'd done." His last sentence had almost been rushed so Neville took in a big breath.

"Claude Monet," said Poppy. "His gardens in Giverney, France. My mother took us there once. It
was beyond words."

Neville nodded enthusiastically. "I want to visit it someday." He then looked to Severus. "That's
what I dream of, Mr. Snape." He sighed sadly. "It's too bad that my gran would never let you paint it
for me, though."

Poppy leaned down and kissed Neville's forehead. "That is why we dream, Neville."
"Gentlemen," said Severus rising. "You have an hour to toast the marshmallows and then to bed. Understood?" All three boys nodded. "Very good. Poppy and I shall be in the sitting room if you need us for anything."
28 September 1985 - After Dinner

Poppy seated herself on the sofa and watched, slightly bemused as Severus, just barely, waffled between sitting on his old, leather chair, or beside Poppy on the sofa. She patted the area of the sofa beside her to encourage the decision. He sat where invited, if somewhat stiffly.

"Fatherhood agrees with you, Severus," she observed.

Severus nodded stiffly and settled his gaze, for the moment, on the flames in the fireplace. "Being a father has taught me that there are fundamental differences between five-year olds and eleven year olds."

"And, from students," Poppy added smoothly. "Harry is your son, Severus, and as much as you care for your Slytherins, he is not a student."

"My Slytherins respect me," he nodded. Then, as an if in after-thought he smirked, "None of my Slytherins have ever kissed me ‘just because’."

Poppy chuckled, "I dare say if that were ever to happen, Severus, I'd be treating an eleven year old for heart failure!" She carefully put her hand upon the wizard's upper thigh. "Thank you so much for inviting me, Severus. This has been such a delight for me tonight."

Carefully his own hand, so much larger than the witch's, covered hers until his fingers curled around her hand and Severus was holding Poppy's hand. "I could have allowed this sleepover to get the better of me, Poppy, but I have quite enjoyed myself. The time was only enhanced by your presence." He lifted the hand he held and very gently pressed his lips to the palm of her hand.

Poppy felt a warm, pleasant flush down to her toes at the touch of the Potions Master's warm, soft lips against her flesh. To her surprise, and evident delight, he kissed her hand but more firmly. "Ohhhh… Severus!"

Severus spoke mournfully. "My son… Voldemort… this term of classes and students… there is so much in question, Poppy. I have not the right to ask anything of you."

The witch moved closer until her thigh touched his, "I do understand, Severus. Harry must come first. The question of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named must be dealt with as well." She leaned closer to where his lips brushed her fingertips. "As for teaching, I believe that would not deter a wily Slytherin. I should like to think… that at sometime when there is a place for some lady you think well of… you might consider me more than just your friend, Severus."

"I think more than just well of you, my Lady Poppy," purred Severus as he lifted his lips to her mouth and barely brushed his mouth to her soft and plush lips. "I cannot deny that already I consider you more than just a friend."

Slipping a hand at the nape of her neck he drew the witch's head close and captured her lips in a kiss that she felt from her head down to her toes. He was about to deepen the kiss when a throat being cleared came from the mantle over the fireplace. Severus pulled swiftly away and looked to the mantle where a small portrait of Salazar Slytherin sat.

"My apologies for disturbing you, Severus," said the Slytherin Founder.
"What is it, Salazar?" asked Severus as he caught one of Poppy's hands in his. He felt bereft for having been so interrupted and he did not want her to feel so abandoned as well.

"Blossom, my basilisk. She has news to impart to you and Albus at once."

Severus rose, but bent to Poppy's lips and quickly kissed her. "I apologise for leaving so suddenly but this is something I must deal with at once, my dear. Would you consent to stay…"

Poppy interrupted the Potions Master. "Go, Severus. I'll watch over the boys. Be careful, though."

Severus smiled, and then nodded. "I always endeavour to do so, my Lady. Good night." Grasping the small portrait and then his teaching cloak, he left the apartment.

Minutes later Neville emerged with a smudge of marshmallow on the side of his mouth. He looked around for Mr. Snape but only saw the Healer. "Madame Pomfrey?"

"Neville. Oh! You had a bit of a run-in with a marshmallow. Come here." Neville trotted over to the pretty Healer and held still while she whisked away the sticky residue of melted sweet with a wave of her wand. "Perfect. Now, what is it you needed?"

"My gran wanted me to Floo her before nine o'clock. Harry said it's almost nine. Could you help me Floo her, please?" he asked politely.

"Of course." Poppy rose, grabbed a handful of Floo powder and with her other hand she waved Neville over to her. They both knelt, on a Cushioning Charm, before the flames. The witch then threw in the powder. "Augusta Longbottom!"

Instead of a pleasant goodnight to his grandmother they both heard an argument from the Longbottom Manse. There was a shout from a woman, a man shouting about 'bloody Death Eaters'. They then could hear a scuffle and muffled shouting from both the man and woman. The woman then screamed. Neville, afraid of what he was hearing, leaned closer to Madame Pomfrey. Both were startled backwards violently as the green flames burst from an explosion of magic on the other end. Then, there was only silence.

"Gran?" Neville said softly as he scrambled up from where he fell.

Madame Pomfrey caught the boy before he went closer to the flames that now glowed an eerie blue. "No, Neville. Go back to Draco and Harry. I'm going to send an auror to your home to find out what happened." Neville was frozen with fear over what he had heard and the explosion. He could not move from Poppy's grasp. "Neville? Please, go to your friends."

Neville nodded but still he stared at the blue flames that were beginning to fade to orange. "But… my gran…"

Madame Pomfrey used the voice students in her Infirmary were familiar with. She ordered, "Go to Harry and Draco now, Mr. Longbottom." Without hesitation Neville ran back into Harry's room.

Madame Pomfrey raised herself to her feet and then grabbed another handful of Floo Powder. "Aurory, Ministry. It's urgent!" She called into the orange flames that had obediently turned green.

A voice came through, "Auror Melville Dickens here, ma'am. Who am I speaking to and what can I do for you?"

"I am Healer Poppy Pomfrey from Hogwarts. I am helping to supervise a sleepover between three five-year old children. One of the children, Neville Longbottom, was calling his grandmother,
Augusta Longbottom. We heard an argument and then there was an explosion of magic through the Floo that threw myself and Neville backwards. Could you send someone to the Longbottom Manse to make certain that all is well?"

"Just a moment, Madame Pomfrey…" said Auror Dickens. She heard some shuffling, soft murmuring, and then the Auror spoke to her again. "Madame, the Floo network has received a report that all the Floos at Longbottom Manse have been disabled. We'll send someone right away. Are you taking care of Neville Longbottom now?"

"I am," she replied. "Report to me at Hogwarts, Severus Snape's quarters."

"May I ask where Mr. Snape is?" the Auror inquired with the curiosity of his office.

"He was momentarily called away," replied Poppy tersely.

"Ah. I'll be in touch, Madame Pomfrey. Goodbye."

The green flames faded away but Poppy stared into the fireplace anyway. She was worried about what could have happened and what would be done about Neville.

After several minutes she sighed and rose, "At least he has tonight."

---

A Meeting With Blossom

Severus had collected his father and together, with the help of Fawkes, they travelled down to the Chamber of Secrets. They moved through the maze of tunnels, with the small portrait of Salazar Slytherin speaking Parseltongue to every ward that blocked their path. Finally, after a half hour, they were in the large chamber presided over by tall snake sculptures holding torches and the face of Slytherin at the end. Blossom, the huge basilisk with eyes shaded against harming anyone who looked into their crystalline beauty, waited. She was quiescent with her head resting in the thin layer of flood water flowing across the floor.

"Blossom," greeted Albus. "We have brought Salazar to you."

The portrait began to speak in the hissing tongue of a Parselmouth. Blossom soon replied in the same language. Albus and Severus waited patiently until there was a silence.

"What did Blossom bring us down here for, Salazar?" asked Albus.

"Blossom tells me that she has been following the 'scent of evil' down here. It moves slowly and it shows signs of decrepit illness," replied the portrait.

Severus leaned his tall frame towards his father, "Could Blossom be talking of Voldemort's ka, Father?"

"I believe so, my son. How… audacious… that it chose to hide where we least expected," Albus shook his head, and stroked his beard. "Salazar, is Blossom able to capture the evil?"

The portrait shook his head. "No, Albus. Blossom told me that it was too small. However, with the arrival of the students it is growing stronger."

Severus' lips thinned. "It's drawing on the students' magic, Headmaster."

Albus nodded. "Just as Harry's magic drew the magic from his curse scar."
"What are we to do, Headmaster?" asked Severus as he dropped into the role of teacher. He needed his employer, not his father.

Albus scowled. "I… we need to protect the students, Severus. If that Ka is draining their magic Poppy will get inundated with magical exhaustion illnesses."

"If not worse," muttered Severus. "A ward, perhaps? Reversed in such a way that it protects the students… cutting off the Ka."

"Yes, yes. I cannot do it this time, though," sighed the older wizard. "Poppy threatened me with lacing my sherbet lemons with Calming Potion if I work the wards again."

"Lupin. He knows of the Ka and he is strong enough," suggested Severus. "Where is he?"

"He's been following leads for me but now that we know where Voldemort is I shall call him back. Get a lot of rest, my son." Albus gripped his son's forearm.

"I shall, Father." Severus then looked around the huge chamber. The basilisk was nowhere to be seen. "Blossom is gone."

Albus looked around. "Salazar?"

The portrait chuckled, "Blossom is large but she moves like a whisper. She departed while you and Severus were discussing what to do. Blossom will keep an eye on the evil."

Albus nodded. "Very good, then. I have an owl to write and send."

"And, I have a sleepover to return to."

The Headmaster called for his familiar Fawkes and they left the Chamber of Secrets in a blink.

---

Returning to his apartment Severus hoped that Harry and his friends were asleep and that Poppy was, perhaps, reading in the sitting room. He smiled to himself as he opened his door. It would be pleasant to be greeted…

"Severus! They took him!" Poppy was visibly upset as were the two children at her hips.

"Dad! Neville's scared!" cried Harry as he threw his arms around his father.

"He didn't do anything wrong, Uncle Severus!" Draco also was crying. "We gotta save him!"

"Quiet!" thundered Severus. There was instant silence in his sitting room. "Harry, Draco, go and sit down. Poppy, explain, please."

Poppy related the events of the Floo call and her subsequent call to the Aurors. "I expected to hear from Auror Dickens but instead two Aurors showed up with a Wizarding Childrens' Services agent and without explaining anything to us they just took Neville." She breathed heavily and worriedly. "Severus, Neville really was frightened and they were doing nothing to ease him. Please, can you find out what happened?"

Severus nodded and drew the witch over to the sofa. "I shall make a few Floo calls, Poppy. Would you put the boys to bed. You have my permission to induce sleep."

Poppy nodded. She turned to the two boys. "Harry, Draco, come along…"
Harry, like a slithering snake, slipped past Poppy and clung to his father as soon as he reached him. "Do I have to go to bed? Please, Dad..." Harry begged.

"Magpie, I need you to go to bed. I am going to find out what happened to Neville, where he is, and if we can do anything. I shall not be able to do that if I am worrying about you," Severus explained gently.

Harry sniffled, and nodded. "I know. Okay. Save Neville, Shadow." He raised his arms and with his hands beckoned his father to lean down. Severus, familiar with the motion, leaned down and kissed Harry's cheek. Draco suddenly slipped away from Poppy and to his godfather. He made the same motion his cousin had and Severus leaned over and kissed the boy's forehead.

"Go with, Poppy, now," he nodded.
It is a sad truth that the Wizarding Childrens Services is a power unto itself. Neville was lost to the clutches of the system and a very powerful wizard that was the head of the Wizengamot was unable to make them let go.

However, a determined, and angry, Headmaster was not to be easily dismissed. After Severus could not find out what happened to Neville Longbottom or his family he had called in his father for assistance. Albus had begun in his genial mien in making his inquiries but he was soon relegated to a frustrated wizard who wanted to blast several in the Ministry to smithereens. He did not find Neville but he did finally find out what happened at the Longbottom Manse on Saturday evening two days ago.

Albus had summoned Severus to his office for lunch so they could speak. Severus had not slept as he had promised his father and he looked the worse for wear. Unfortunately, his students had all paid the price in lost House points and detentions. Not even his own House was spared. Albus did not know whether to laugh or to cry at the Points Report he was reading as his son arrived and settled down with a cup of coffee.

"Severus, 20 points from Marlene Hughes of Ravenclaw for 'unbound hair in Potions'? 25 points from William Weasley of Gryffindor for 'threatening looks at a Slytherin' and then 17 points from Scott Turrow of Slytherin for 'sneering disapprovingly at his teacher when he was reprimanded for tripping William Weasley'? And this one… 30 points from Nymphadora Tonks of Hufflepuff for 'excessive clumsiness and a particularly annoying shade of hair colour'?" Albus sighed, put down the report and moved to the table where he placed a sandwich on a plate and took it to the Potions Master.

"Excessive, Headmaster?" snarled Severus as he snatched the sandwich from his father.

"Beyond excessive, Severus," chided Severus. "Most of those are ridiculous. I will honour the points taken from Gryffindor and Slytherin and I will reduce the points from Ravenclaw as Miss Hughes is not a repeat offender. However, I have said this before and will do so again, Miss Tonks is not to be punished for her inveterate clumsiness and Metamorphmagi changes."

Severus waved dismissively at his father as he bit sourly into the ham sandwich. He swallowed but that one bite was all he could manage. "My son hates me," he glowered.

"Why is that, my boy?" asked Albus as he seated himself with a sandwich on a plate in his hand.

"Harry is distraught over Neville and he simply does not understand that government for wizards moves as slowly as it does for Muggles," he sighed. "He begged not to go to school and I very nearly let him stay home but then Draco Floo called in tears himself. Lucius was making him go to school and he wanted Harry to be there for him."

"Why would he hate you for that, Severus?" frowned Albus.

"Harry has decided that I do not care for Neville and will not find him." Severus finished his coffee and Summoned the pot so he could pour some more.

"It is only temporary, my son. As to Neville, I have some news," broached Albus. "I had to invoke
my power as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot to get the Aurory to open an ongoing classified investigation but I now have the events of Saturday. Augusta had come home after a dinner with friends. She was wearing that Merlin-be-damned vulture hat of hers when her brother, Algernon, drinking since the afternoon, mistook either the hat or her as an attacking Death Eater. He began to cast spells that Augusta was successfully blocking until the Floo call from Neville distracted her. Augusta let down her guard and Algernon killed her with the Killing Curse."

Severus was so shocked he nearly dropped his coffee mug. "Augusta is dead?!" Albus nodded. "What happened to Algernon?"

"Dead," sighed Albus sadly. "When the Aurors arrived at Longbottom Manse he was in high dudgeon and began firing spells at them. The Aurors had subdued him with a Stupefy Spell but he fell onto a broken vase and a shard of the ceramic fatally wounded him when it cut his throat. Algernon bled out before the Aurors could stop what was happening."

"This is horrid, Father. What of Neville? Any news?" asked Severus in agitated concern.

"The only news I have is that Neville is in the custody of the WCS and they have not provided any…"

"Albus? Is Severus there?" Narcissa Malfoy's voice interrupted from the Floo. Severus rose swiftly and nearly fell onto his knees to answer her.

"I am here, Narcissa," replied Severus. "Is something wrong with the baby?"

"Oh! Oh no. We're fine. Lucius and I found Neville!"

Albus dropped beside his son just as Severus cast the Cushioning Charm to save the old man's knees. "Where is the child, Mrs. Malfoy?"

"The orphanage," Narcissa replied. "Lucius brought me to the orphanage for a tour and as we were walking through the facilities we came across Neville."

"How is he, Narcissa?" asked Severus.

"He's in a bad way, Severus. Lucius is with him while I Floo'd you. The child is terrified beyond speaking and he just stares out the window. Please come, would you?"

"I shall cancel your afternoon classes, my boy," Albus said softly to his son.

"I will Apparate to the orphanage as quickly as I can, Narcissa. Meet me at the front, would you?" Severus nodded his thanks to his father.

"I shall meet you, Severus." The green flames whooshed back into orange as the connection was broken.

Severus rose to his feet and then helped his father up. Albus spoke, "Bring Neville home to us, my dear."

"I will do everything I possibly can, Father. Would you make sure that Harry is picked up from school if I am not back by 3 of the clock?"

Albus escorted his son to the door of his office, his hand to his back. "Do not worry about Harry. I'll take care of him. Get our little Neville."
The wizarding orphanage was tucked between two dark buildings down in the worst part of Diagon Alley known as Knockturn Alley. The orphans building appeared thin but was larger on the inside. That did not mean it was better.

The wizarding world had forgotten their orphans and the building practically stank with neglect. Severus hoped that Lucius and Narcissa would invest in the place, and make the lives of these children better.

Narcissa, cloaked in black wool to keep the curious, and dangerous witches and wizards of Knockturn from spotting her, waited for Severus. As soon as she saw him she ushered him into the orphanage and to the reception desk. The desk was not manned.

"I am glad you came so quickly, Severus," said Narcissa as she briefly hugged him. "This place is terrible. I made my decision to take over this orphanage the moment we stepped in here."

"Is there no one here to escort us anywhere, Narcissa?" asked Severus as he grimaced at the dingy, old walls where much of the plaster had fallen from rot and revealed the brick beneath.

"There are two matrons, Madame Burke and Madame Hare." Narcissa shook her head as she took Severus by the hand and led him down a narrow hall. "Two of the most frightening witches I have ever seen, Severus. They make me believe that the Muggle perception of witches stemmed from those two."

Severus sniffed as a particular odor of stale, unwashed bodies wafted past him. "Where are those matrons?"

"Madame Burke was showing us the facility but vanished when we recognised Neville." They turned a corner into a large, open room with long windows that had bars on them. "He's in here."

A group of children, ranging in age from two to at least twelve occupied the room. Each child, whether boy or girl, wore a shift that dropped to the ankles and a smock over the shift. Both garments were stained by years of dirt and sweat. The children themselves appeared dirty with smudges of dirt on faces or arms. All of them had dirty, straggly hair. The neglect shown was not simply due to lack of finances, it was criminal. It made Severus ill to think that children had been forgotten here, dumped by the WCS, and left to grow up in these dismal walls. It was no wonder there were so many unscrupulous witches and wizards roaming Knockturn Alley.

"Brother!" Lucius was seated by a window in a corner where a little boy, dark of hair and cherub-cheeked sat forlornly staring out the window. At Lucius' call Severus strode over.

"Neville?" asked Severus as he knelt down on one knee. The child did not move or even acknowledge him. "Lucius, has he spoken at all since you found him?"

Lucius shook his head. "Not one word. He has not even looked at me."

Severus' lips thinned and he stood. He then reached over and picked Neville up. At the touch Neville cried out and began to struggle. "Neville! Stop! It is I, Mr. Snape, Harry's father. You are all right. Calm down, child. Calm yourself." Neville let out a huge sob and then curled up tightly. He was shaking. Severus sat down and carefully coaxed the boy into unfolding himself. "Neville, I am here and so are Lucius and Narcissa. You are safe. No one will hurt you. Come now, child. Look at me."

Neville hiccuped once and then began to softly cry as he trembled in his friend's father's arms. Severus could do nothing more but pat the child's back soothingly. "He cannot stay here, Lucius," growled the Potions Master softly. "This filthy place will destroy him as quick as any of Bellatrix's
A gravelly voice broke in with an order, "Put that boy down, wizard." A tall witch of muscle and twisted features had her wand pointed directly at Severus.

Lucius started to wield his wand when it flew from his hand and zipped behind him. Turning, the other matron, bent and with an apparent hump on one shoulder and teeth obviously missing from her mouth had her wand aimed at Lucius. She snickered darkly as she held up his wand.

"I said," bit out the tall witch, "put the boy down or I will blast your face off."

Severus rose and deftly handed Neville over to Narcissa. He held his hands to either side of himself to show his wand remained sheathed. "As you can see, I am unarmed." He did not take his eyes off the tall witch but he was aware of the one behind him.

"What could you want with Neville?" demanded Narcissa.

"That one we're getting paid a pretty galleon for so we don't wanna lose him," chuckled the second witch.

"Let us take him and I will pay whatever the WCS is paying you," chimed in Lucius.

The first matron slowly shook her head. "Take what Mr. Malfoy has offered or you will get nothing," Severus suggested tautly.

"You got no wand showing, wizard," laughed the first matron. "Don't threaten us. I have no problem giving that boy a few stripes down his back for your insolence."

Severus saw the move he had been anticipating; the first matron changed the aim of her wand from the Potions Master to Neville's back. Simply by opening both his hands the first matron fell as the bones of both legs were crushed. He then spun before anyone could see him and sent a blast of power that knocked the second witch off her feet. In the same movement he sent Lucius' wand back to him. Lucius caught his wand and aimed it with determined threat at the second matron. Severus now had his wand on the first matron.

"We will be taking Neville with us," said Severus drily. "My father, the Headmaster of Hogwarts and Chief Sorcerer of the Wizengamot will notify WCS in the change of the young boy's circumstances." Severus took Neville from Narcissa and strode out of the common room watched by the wide eyes of the remaining children.

Lucius caught his wife by her waist, his wand still aimed at both witches as they followed Severus. "And, consider the two of you without employment. These children will be moved to another facility with people that will take care of them properly."

"The children are our future," Narcissa said softly as she touched her baby bump. She would make certain that the wizarding world would never again forget the orphans.

---

30 September 1985 - Near 3pm, Hogwarts

Severus had returned to Hogwarts with Neville and explained the situation to his father. As Albus drew the traumatised child from his son's arms and cradled him with a soft crooning, the Potions Master explained, "Lucius and Narcissa are securing the new orphanage and will move all the children with expediency. Galleons do have their uses."
"Especially Malfoy galleons," Albus concurred as he carefully seated himself and his small parcel. Neville liked the softness of the old man's beard and had nestled himself until he fell into a healing sleep. "He is sleeping, Severus."

"That is good, Father. He shook in my arms the entire trip back to Hogwarts." Severus sighed heavily and shook his head in disgust. "When possible I should like to Legilimens him in order to discover what exactly was done to him in the two days he was gone."

Albus nodded. "And we shall have Poppy examine him and, if Lucius agrees, perhaps she might recommend a Healer for the orphans. I hate to even consider what they might have been subjected to." He kissed the crown of Neville's head and sighed. "I had a message from Salazar while you were gone, Severus."

"Blossom?" the younger wizard asked of the basilisk in Salazar's Chamber of Secrets.

"Yes. Blossom has cornered the Ka which has been…" Albus paused as the little boy curled against his chest shifted slightly. When Neville stilled, the Headmaster continued, "… dragging itself around the maze of chambers. She cannot hold Voldemort's Ka for long so we need to get a ward in place that will cut Voldemort off from our students."

"I have not…!"

"Hem! Hem! I must speak with you, Albus Dumbledore!" a female voice demanded imperiously from the Floo breaking into their conversation.

Albus glanced over at the green flames of the Floo. "Who is calling, please?" Albus' voice did not show any distress.

The voice replied with her importance, "Dolores Umbridge, head of Wizarding Childrens' Services. We have an incident and I have been informed that your Potions Master, a suspected Death Eater and his cohorts, the Malfoys, have kidnapped a child under our protection."

Albus quickly rose at the same time Severus did to take Neville from his father's arms. "The hidden room," whispered Albus. "Hurry, my boy."

Severus, who had been secreted in Albus hidden room many times before, knew it as a large broom closet with a cot. The Potions Master tapped upon the wall between two bookcases. A door popped open just enough for the younger wizard to slip through.

The Head of WCS spoke again, "I would like to come through and talk to you in person so that we may resolve this issue, Headmaster."

"Come through, Madame Umbridge," beckoned Albus.

A witch who thought herself a goddess, but in reality she looked like a pink-garbed toad, stepped through the green flames. "Headmaster…"

Albus smoothly interrupted as he indicated two chairs for them to sit in, "Madame Umbridge, before we go further I must insist that Severus Snape is no longer a Death Eater. I have vouched for this before the Wizengamot after I adopted the young man."

"Hem, hem, yes, Headmaster," she smiled. "Your pensieve testimony was accepted at the time but this latest incident has put his status into doubt."

"Does it now? And what proof would you accept now?" asked Albus as he Summoned tea.
"Physical proof of no Dark Mark, and the safe return of Neville Longbottom," Dolores simpered sweetly.

"What proof have you that Neville was kidnapped, Madame Umbridge?"

"Severus Snape was in the company of Lucius Malfoy. Another Death Eater," she declared with surety.

"Ah. Was anyone harmed at the orphanage?" Dolores Umbridge coughed uneasily. "The children were incinerated?" She shook her head. "The matrons were murdered?" Again the witch shook her head. Albus leaned forward, "What diabolical thing happened, Madame?"

"The matrons have both tendered their resignations and Gringotts has purchased the building," Dolores explained swiftly. "I sent agents to discover the whereabouts of the orphans and learned that they were taken by Lucius Malfoy and his wife, Narcissa. Severus Snape took Neville Longbottom but it seems my arrival preceded them." Her lips thinned in annoyance.

"Isn't it possible, Madame Umbridge, that the Aurors are not here because a crime has not been committed?" suggested Albus. "Allow me to Floo call Lucius to find out what is going on."

Albus moved over to his fireplace, threw in the glittering black-green Floo powder and called Malfoy Manor for Lucius.

"Good afternoon, Albus. What might I do for you?" came the aristocrat's voice through the green flames.

"I have a Madame Umbridge from WCS with me and I do believe you might be able to clear a discrepancy up for us. Prepare yourself, and then come through, if you would?"

"Give me five minutes and I shall be there shortly, Albus." The flames faded to orange.

"Headmaster! Really, I cannot accept the word of a Death Eater…!" protested the pink witch.

"Tut, tut, Madame. Please wait until Mr. Malfoy joins us," Albus held up his hand and smiled. Moments later the flames whooshed into green and Lucius stepped through. Upon his arrival he helped Albus to his feet, and to a chair.

"Madame Umbridge," Lucius bowed. "Lucius Malfoy at your service." He then glanced at Albus deliberately not accepting a greeting from the toadish woman. "Albus, what is going on?"

"Before we go further, Madame Umbridge needs proof that you are not a Death Eater. Are you willing to show us that you do not have the Dark Mark?" asked the Headmaster.

Lucius' lips thinned in annoyance but he unbuttoned the cuffs of both sleeves and pushed them up to reveal…

Dolores peered at Lucius' inner arms. "Impossible!" she cried. "There is no Dark Mark! How did you remove it?" Accusation heavy in her voice.

"There was nothing to remove. I was never proven a Death Eater, Madame Umbridge," replied Lucius with dignity as he fixed his sleeves back into place. "If you recall my trial before the Wizengamot I was only a 'suspected Death Eater'. I was exonerated of all treacherous activities before I was called to prove I did not have the Dark Mark. As you saw with your own eyes, my skin is free of all Dark blemish."
As though foiled, the witch paced a moment, her lips thinned tightly over her teeth. She stopped abruptly. "Hem, hem, Mr. Malfoy. I accept your physical proof of your innocence so I would like an explanation as to what happened at the orphanage. Said building is empty and now belongs to Gringotts." Dolores seated herself, and smiled. "Where are the matrons Burke and Hare and their charges, the orphans? What has Severus Snape done with Neville Longbottom?"

"The orphans are in the Malfy Charities Wizarding Orphanage of Manchester Borough. I just completed an endowment to the Ministry so that I am now CEO of the orphanage. WCS will have no connection to it," he smiled thinly. "My wife is currently hiring a competent staff to take care of the children while all of them are being examined by Madame Pomfrey. The Aurors have already taken in Matrons Burke and Hare for an unprovoked attack upon myself, my wife, Neville Longbottom and Severus Snape. They will also be answering to charges of sexual abuse against the children, arranging illegal liaisons between wizards and witches of under-age children for 'nefarious purposes', the suspected murders of 11 orphans and disappearances of 19 orphans all over 32 years since the matrons have been employed, and finally… severe nutritional neglect." He sneered at the woman. "I have also just issued a warrant for complicit negligence to WCS who should have been monitoring the deplorable situation. WCS never bothered… in those 32 years… to check on those children, and for the gross stupidity of being the Ministry department that hired those two criminal witches in the first place!"

Lucius leaned forward with both hands on his serpent headed cane. It was a deceptively relaxed position that anyone who knew Lucius Malfoy, would instantly be wary of the man seated before them. Dolores Umbridge was too busy swallowing her outrage to be cognizant of the threat to her person.

Lucius continued, over the witch's indignant splutter, "As to Severus Snape and Neville Longbottom I let the man take the boy with him. Neville suffered a severe trauma at the double loss of his only family, and the trauma was further exacerbated by the Aurors who picked him up on Saturday, and the matrons of that filthy place that was called an orphanage. Neville, had also chosen Severus for comfort and I saw no reason to part them."

Dolores Umbridge pushed herself up from her chair so sharply she almost pitched herself forward to the floor. She caught herself, though. "Then there is no reason for me to waste my time here. Albus, if there are any consequences I will see that you pay for them." She tried to Apparate in a dramatic huff of annoyance but could not. Only the Headmaster and Hogwarts elves could leave in such a manner. She fumbled her way to the Floo powder, threw it into the flames, and nearly singed herself by going into the flames before they had become safe green.

Once the witch was gone both Lucius and Albus chuckled. The Headmaster smiled fondly at Lucius, "I see that the Muggle cosmetic worked to cover up the Dark Mark flawlessly."

Lucius lifted his left forearm. "A temporary measure, I hope. Thank you for the warning, Albus. I could not have 'prepared' otherwise."

Severus emerged from the hidden room. Neville stood beside him holding securely to the drape of his robes. "Very good the both of you," nodded the Potions Master. "Let us hope that is the last we see of that particular witch."

Albus leaned forward in his chair and smiled at the noticeably timid boy. "Neville, how are you feeling?"

In reply Neville turned his face into the tall man's cloak in an effort to hide. Severus calmed the boy by placing his hand to the child's back. "Neville is not very talkative, at the moment, but I believe a bath and seeing his friends will cheer him immensely." The Potions Master nodded at Lucius.
"Brother, I shall pick up Draco so the three may play before dinner. Shall I return him after we have supped?"

Lucius nodded. "That would be fine. I think Narcissa is due a home-cooked meal by yours truly and a quiet night in. Today has been rather difficult for her." He then rose and caught the flash of little boy as Neville wrapped his arms around the man's legs causing him to teeter a moment.

"Thank you," Neville whispered very softly.

Lucius touched the child's head. "You are welcome, Neville. Take care of Draco for me this eve, will you?"

The boy nodded, gave Lucius a shy smile, and then returned quickly to Severus' side.

Harry and Draco sat outside under the protective ward that kept the temperature a mild Spring while beyond it snow fell in a soft flutter. Both were waiting for their parents to pick them up from school.

"I was really hoping Neville would be in school today, Harry," sighed Draco.

"Me too. It was terrible when those big men in red and gold took him away on Saturday." Harry plucked at a blade of grass idly.

"He was crying for his mum," commented Draco; not judging.

"I've cried for my mum a lot and she's dead," admitted Harry.

"You got your dad now so no one would take you away from him." Draco grinned slyly. "Uncle Severus would scare their pants off!"

Both boys chuckled at the image that conjured up. "So would Uncle Lucius," observed Harry.

"What would your mum do?"

"Mother is really wicked with Transfigurmacation stuff. I bet she could turn someone into a frog," Draco said proudly.

"I'd like a mum like that," Harry said wistfully.

"How about Madame Pomfrey? She's pretty and smart and she heals everyone at Hogwarts," said Draco.

"I like Madame Pomfrey," nodded Harry. "Did you know the Infirmary's got a jungle made of glass and you can watch all the lights of Hogsmeade from it."

"Can I see it?"

"Maybe. I think Madame Pomfrey would let you see it. We could colour wizarding ships." Harry poked his finger into the cool earth and was startled when he dug out a wiggling earthworm.

"Put him back, Harry. He's probably got like hundreds of hundred-thousand kids an' if you leave him out he could get dried up and die." Draco began to dig a small hole for the worm. "Put him here."

Harry dropped the small worm into the hole and Draco carefully filled it back in. "Neville told me that we get great flowers and trees because worms make the dirt perfect so we gotta keep them safe."

"We didn't keep Neville safe," Harry observed bitterly.
"Yeah? Well, we're little. We couldn't do anything. Those AURA guys were big, mean, and had magic so we weren't s'posed to keep him safe. Your dad was, and my parents were," scoffed Draco rather accurately. "I hope Neville's all right."

"Me, too, Draco," sighed Harry.

"Perhaps you gentlemen would like to ask Neville himself how he is doing?" intervened Severus' voice. He had heard much of what the boys were talking about.

Both Harry and Draco lifted their heads and both broke out into similar grins as they saw their friend.

"Neville!" Harry cried as he jumped up to hug the slightly smaller boy.

Draco clambered to his feet and took both Harry and Neville into his arms and squeezed until all three had fallen to the ground. "I'm so glad you're okay, Nev! Are you going to stay forever now?"

For a moment Neville revelled in rolling around wrestling with his friends. He then sat up and looked at Severus. "How long do I get to stay, Mr. Snape?"

"That is a question I will only answer after we have had our dinner. For now, it is back to Hogwarts and you three may create mayhem in the Staff Garden for a few hours." Severus smiled briefly as he was met by three cheers. He then corralled the boys so they could portkey back to Hogwarts.
Neville's Loss is an Unexpected Gain

4 October 1985 - Friday Evening

Harry and Neville played a game in which as they moved along the path they built a complicated mousetrap. The object was to catch mice at the end since the mice skittered around the board taking the pieces from the mousetrap. Madame Pomfrey sat in the sitting room in Severus' chair reading but keeping an ear out for trouble from the two boys. Severus was dealing with a detention that began when all classes were finished. He would meet the boys and Poppy after for dinner.

Neville's status was as stable as Severus could legally get it. He had provisional custody of Neville established the day he removed the child from the despicable orphanage. The child's parents were still alive but they had never been deemed *Non Compos Mentis* - which was a declaration that neither Frank nor Alice Longbottom were mentally able to parent their child. On the night that Harry's parents were killed Frank and Alice Longbottom were being tortured by Bellatrix LeStrange with the Cruciatius Curse. They had been cursed into a fugue where they were no longer part of their Present minds.

Now permanent residents of the Janus Thickey Ward of St. Mungo's Frank and Alice were undergoing analysis to legally determine that they were both *Non Compos Mentis*.

Almost at once Severus had worked the previous few days with his father in arranging a place for Neville to live. Now, at the end of the day, he would reveal to Neville what had been done.

The door to the apartment opened and Harry ran to give his father a hug. "Shadow!"

Severus smiled at the exuberance. "Hello, Magpie," Severus bent, and even though he was tired from the day of dealing with students, he lifted his son into his arms to accept a kiss to his cheek.

As Harry kissed his father Severus saw Poppy smiling at him in greeting. The only thing that marred this little image of domesticity was the little round boy all the way across the sitting room. Neville, sitting far too patiently, was exuding an aura of being the outsider in the room.

The Potions Master lowered Harry to the floor upon his feet. "Neville? Do you not have a greeting for me?" As Severus opened his arms, Neville let out a held breath, jumped up and ran to the tall wizard he had begun to think of as The Shadow. Severus bent down to one knee to accept a tentative hug from the child.

"Hello, Mr. Snape," Neville said softly. He blushed with sudden pleasure when Severus kissed his Cherubic cheek.

"Thank you, Neville." He glanced across the room to see that two game mice were busy dismantling the mouse-trap. "I think you ought to return to your game before the mice win."

"Oh no!" cried Harry. Grasping Neville's hand they both hurried back to their board game.

Poppy had risen from the chair and she seemed to float across the floor to Severus. She touched his hand, and kissed his cheek, far too briefly, he thought. "How was the detention, Severus?"

"Calamitous," he sighed. "I had given Nymphadora Tonks the simple task of cleaning cauldrons. She decided to show me a Charm she had learned from a book in the library. Instead of pouring sudsy water into the sink her spell went awry when she made too wide a sweep with her wand. I had
to stick her in my office, take away her wand, and assign lines while the house elves cleaned the mess of water all over my classroom floor."

Poppy laughed softly as Severus rolled his eyes. "You poor, suffering man." She patted his arm. "It is my turn now since Filius set a detention in the Infirmary for Anthony Poros of Slytherin and Timothy Galworth of Gryffindor."

"Allow me to guess; fighting?" drawled Severus.

Poppy nodded. "After four years of impromptu wrestling matches in Charms or Herbology I am beginning to think there is something more to these fights." She smirked. Severus raised an eyebrow with a silent, ironic guess. "I might just give them a dancing lesson after they clean a few bedpans." Poppy burst out laughing. Severus smiled to the point the corners of his eyes wrinkled tellingly.

"Dancing might just lessen the black eyes and bruised cheekbones those two always create. I approve, Madame Pomfrey." He escorted the Healer to the Floo where he tossed in the Floo Powder. "Thank you for taking care of the boys, Poppy."

"My pleasure, Severus. Goodnight." She glanced over her shoulder. "Goodnight Harry and Neville."

"G'night! Goodnight, Madame Pomfrey!" they each waved and then turned their attention back to their game.

Once the witch had left Severus divested himself of his teaching robes, and sat down in his chair. The warmth that greeted him from the warmed leather was a subtle pleasure.

"Neville, would you come here a moment?" asked Severus. The boy looked wary and he sighed inwardly in frustration. The boy obviously wanted to be near him but still he was afraid of the Potions Master.

"Wh-what is it, Sir?" asked Neville as he approached The Shadow. He did like that name Harry had given his father. While they waited for sleep to come in Harry's bedroom one night Harry had told the story of his rescue by 'The Shadow'.

Severus caught Neville under his arms and lifted the boy onto his lap. Harry, who had yet to show a jealous bone in his body, leaned against the arm of his father's chair.

"Neville, your parents were being examined and evaluated today," began Severus as he observed the child.

"You told me Monday that it was going to be decided if my parents were No Campus Mintys and couldn't be my parents," Neville sighed sadly.

"It is NON COMPOS MENTIS. Latin for Not of Right Mind." Clarified Severus. Neville nodded as if he understood but then he shook his head.

"It's a magical disease, right, Dad?" asked Harry.

Severus stroked his son's cheek. "Not quite, Magpie. Non compos mentis describes a mental malady in which the personality is divorced from the mind; not of right mind because the mind is wrong. Voldemort's Death Eaters use a terrible curse that causes such great pain that the mind is... broken... so broken that the personality is separated from it."

"My gran always said my parents were insane," Neville shivered. He had always imagined that insanity meant his parents had become monsters. "Uncle Algy said they didn't have any brains and
I'd never see them because they didn't know me.

"Well, your mother and father are not without brains, nor are they insane, Neville," Severus corrected tautly. "Your parents minds have been broken by a magical curse. They have personalities but those are rarely seen as the personality does not often connect with the mind."

"So… they're… uhm… non compy mental?" asked Neville as he tried hard to make sense of what The Shadow was telling him.

"Non Compos Mentis," Severus repeated slowly. "Today's examination and evaluation only confirmed what was already known: your parents are no longer right of mind and thus they cannot… legally… parent you."

Neville's breathing became shallow and he started to cry. "Dad?" asked Harry in worry for his friend.

"Neville, look at me. Deep breaths, little one. In…" he breathed in and urged the boy to mimic him. "Out… In… Out…"

"Like me, Nev," Harry breathed slowly in and out a few times. He smiled when Neville was finally breathing slowly and deeply.

"If my parents… can't parent me, Mr. Sn-sn-snape," Neville drew in a long breath then blurted, "I don't want to go back to the orphanage! Are the big men gonna take me back?"

The boy was too distraught at the moment for him to finish what he was going to tell him. He pulled Neville against his chest and patted his back. "Harry, go to the Floo, ask for the kitchen. Order three hot chocolates, would you, please?"

Harry straightened, "Got it, Dad!" he loved being of help.

The hot chocolate soon arrived seconds after Harry ordered it. Severus put down his bundle of Neville and ushered the boys to the table where they all sat. Both Neville and Harry were cooling off their hot chocolate by blowing across the surface.

"Gran never let me have hot chocolate," sighed Neville as he breathed in the aroma. "She said I was overweight. Uncle Algy called me a fat toad."

Severus' lips thinned in distaste. Algernon and Augusta Longbottom were becoming as foul to him as Vernon and Petunia Dursley had been. Their treatment of Neville, coming in little snippets such as this, were not painting a pretty picture of the child's life in five short years.

Once the hot chocolate was finished and the boys were obviously relaxed, Neville asked the question Severus had been waiting for. "What's going to happen to me, Mr. Snape?"

"As you are the heir to Longbottom estate and your parents are alive, you would usually go to your godparents…" said Severus.

Neville shook his head. "I don't have godparents," he said hopelessly.

"Only due to the fact that your parents had never chosen anyone, Neville. However, you have a very good friend in Albus Dumbledore, my father, who is able to accomplish many things." Severus smiled as he lay an official looking parchment on the table.

Neville studied the parchment but he had only learned his name, so far. "My name is on there. What
"It is the document that names your godfather as... Severus Snape," Neville's eyes widened and Severus smirked. "I will be your legal guardian until your majority."

Harry beamed as a big smile slowly graced Neville's face. "You're like Draco! That means you get to stay with me and dad!" Harry clapped once, jumped up from the table and hugged Neville tightly. The slightly smaller boy hugged him just as strongly.

"Thank you, Sir!" gushed Neville. "What do I call you, now?"

"Well," considered Severus, "Draco calls me Uncle Severus. I see no reason why you could not address me the same."

Harry shook his head strongly. "No. You rescued Nev like you did me, Shadow." He waved his hands and weaved dramatically about as he explained, "You were this great, shadow-y figure that swooped in and took Neville from those evil witches at the terrible orphanage."

Neville nodded in agreement. "Just like you saved Harry from the trolls."

"Trolls, Magpie?" Harry shrugged sheepishly, and smiled. "Hmf. I thought we established that there were no trolls under that bridge."

"You didn't see any, Shadow, but there could have been. And, you told me that there are trolls in our world. So..."

The Potions Master nodded, "And, so. Hm." Severus smiled gently at his new godson, "I have not a problem if you wish to follow Harry and call me 'Shadow', Neville. I am quite... endeared... to that moniker."

"Do I get an... endearing... nickname, too, Shadow?" asked Neville guilelessly.

Severus barked out a single laugh and put out his arms towards HIS boys. They both ran to him and hugged him tight about the waist.

---

The Question of the Evil

5 October 1985 - Saturday Morning - Headmaster's Tower

"How does it feel being a father the second time round, Severus?" asked Albus with a smirking smile as he sipped his morning tea.

"Despite the error of your semantics, Father, it is not difficult in being a father to Neville. If anything, his behaviour is a bit more subdued than my own son's is," replied Severus. "He wants a nickname, though." He frowned at his coffee. "Harry has told me that he thinks Neville will not believe I have true affection for him unless and until I think of a nickname."

Albus chuckled, "Something will come to mind, my boy. However, I know that your affection for Neville does not hinge upon a nickname." The Potions Master only nodded.

It had come as a surprise to him as to the depth of the affection he had for Neville.

He had not found it difficult to bestow kindness on Harry for he was so open to whomever he chose as safe. Severus, as his rescuer, had immediately fallen into that category of 'Safe Adults'. Adults for
whom he could show trust, and in turn affection.

The love and affection he had for Draco had come before he was born. Lucius had established early that he would choose his Brother as godfather to his child. Both Lucius and Narcissa trusted Draco to Severus because they were without doubt that Severus cared for and loved him as much as they did.

Neville had come into Harry's life as his *first friend*, an honour the child was likely unaware of. Severus had not expected to have any feeling for Neville beyond the care and protection he would offer to any child entrusted to him. However, Neville's quiet mien, his obvious shyness and trepidation that was so like Harry's own, had slipped beyond what Severus expected. A protectiveness had risen within the Potions Master.

The night he had heard of Neville's frightened abduction by the ham-fisted Aurors that sense had morphed into the sudden feeling that a child belonging to him had been taken from his home. Two days later, at the orphanage, he had been angry at seeing Neville there. The boy appeared so small, so lost and alone in the world. Severus had no expectations for he thought that Neville would remain closed to all around him. It would have been a logical expectation. In spite of everything he had been through, though, the arrival of The Shadow had unfrozen the boy until he had clung to him in silence; asking in that behaviour to be protected, cared for... wanted.

*And, Severus realised even before he had left the orphanage, he wanted Neville.*

The almost five days in which Severus took care of his son and Neville he had learned that Neville was a very polite boy, versed in all of the accepted behaviours of a Pureblood child. In many things he deferred to the "man of the house" in others he took his cues from Harry.

Severus also learned that Neville had never cleaned anything in his life since house elves did everything for him. Harry recruited Neville to help clean his bedroom, and all three *men* would clean the sitting room and tiny kitchen.

*Ahhh, that kitchen,* the Potions Master reminded himself, *it really needs to be expanded.*

Severus had not introduced the child to his lab and potions. He was interested in knowing how Neville would react. Harry enjoyed potions and rather reveled in dealing with the more *icky* ingredients. He suspected Neville might be more sensitive in regards to those ingredients that gave their lives to potions. Some witches and wizards chose magical disciplines that did not deal with that side of potions. With the child's talent in growing things he might not have to deal with potions. Severus intended to do whatever Neville needed, or wanted.

"Severus, we need to take care of the ward to protect the students from Voldemort's Ka," said Albus. "Hogwarts herself has made it possible for me to monitor the effects the drain is having on the students. Voldemort is growing in strength."

The younger wizard nodded, his lips thinned. "I have had a moment to do some research. Lucius aided me, as well. We found an obscure ward but as it is Blood Magic it is illegal. If we could do it, it would create a barrier between the students and the Ka and, this additional benefit would be ideal, it would trap the Ka."

"Whose blood is required, Severus?" inquired Albus with interest.

"Everyone within the castle, Father, but a drop only," Severus delivered tautly. "Poppy suggested that she would be able to take a drop of blood by telling everyone it was needed for their medical profiles. This would include staff, as well."
Albus nodded. "That would work well. Will you and I be able to cast the ward?"

Severus shook his head. "We will need four to invoke the Elements. I shall invoke Water. Lucius will invoke Earth, you will invoke Air. I do not know who could invoke Fire."

"Remus," Albus immediately supplied. "Fire is an Element of severe change. It would suit Remus."

"Is he not busy with Black at St. Mungo’s?" asked Severus with a grimace.

Albus nodded. "He spends a great deal of time there but the protection of the children will be of importance to him. Remus will have time to devote to this. Do you have any recovery time for us?"

"Poppy suspects that we will all require at least 24 hours of sleep to rest our magic." He then lowered his gaze to capture Albus' gaze, "You, however, will need 48 hours of sleep. I have also begun to prepare a Strengthening Potion for you that will also aid your joints as you sleep. That way, when you wake, you will not feel the usual stiffness."

Albus gave his son a smile that showed, within it, the love he felt for the young man. It warmed his heart when he heard how his child thought of his comfort. "I suspect you have Poppy gathering the blood drops already, my son?" Severus nodded, and smirked smugly. "As I thought. Find out, then, when we can do the ward. I received a report just this morning that two students have complained of heavy tiredness."

"Yes. Poppy told me. The longer we delay the more students will show up that complain of exhaustion or wind up sick," agreed the Potions Master. "I will confer with Poppy and then I will set up a time for the casting of the ward." He rose from his chair, but paused. "Albus, would you mind the extra duty of watching Neville while I arrange this? Poppy is with them at the moment."

"I would be delighted, Severus!" Albus clapped his hands together and rose. "Bring the boys here. I shall dress and then we shall walk down to Hagrid's."

"A half hour, then, Father?" asked Severus.

"I'll be ready." Albus nearly skipped up his circular staircase that took him to the second floor of the tower, and to his bedroom. He rather enjoyed being a grandfather and suspected that such joy would only double with the addition of Neville.

Albus, his joy and pride reflected in his yellow, gold trimmed Winter robes, and very white, clean beard and hair, walked down the hill to Hagrid's hut with Neville holding his left hand, and Harry holding his right. Both boys were dressed in Winter cloaks, scarves, hats and mittens. It was snowing, but lightly. Even so, Albus had cautioned the two youngsters against skipping down the hill. He did not want either to take a tumble.

Neville was pleased in knowing that he would now have a place to stay, he had a godfather, and he would grow up with Harry, and his other best friend, Draco, a Floo away. What had given him the smile he had not lost was that his godfather had given him a nifty amulet bracelet that would return him to his bedroom in Hogwarts if he ever felt in danger.

"There's Hagrid!" grinned Harry as he saw the groundskeeper half giant on the porch of his hut. "Hi, Hagrid!" Harry waved, then broke from his grandfather, ran in a near tumble the rest of the way down the hill, and threw himself into Hagrid's big embrace.

"Good afternoon, Hagrid," smiled Albus.
"Eadmaster! 'Oo yeh got with yeh?" Hagrid asked as he crouched down to minimise himself.

Harry giggled. "Hagrid! That's Neville! You met him already."

Hagrid nodded. "Course I did, 'Arry but word roun' th' castle is Neville's somethin' new to yeh, right?" Harry nodded.

"This is Neville Longbottom, now Harry's cousin and Severus' godson," Albus re-introduced the small boy.

Hagrid held up his huge hand to be shaken but Neville's wide eyes made him hesitate. The half-giant, soul of gentility, proffered his index finger. Neville smiled, took the large man's index finger into his hand and lightly shook it. "Hello, Hagrid. Don't you remember me?"

Hagrid chuckled, "Aye, that I do, Neville. Jus' wanted teh 'ear yeh really were the perfessor's godson."

Neville smiled shyly. "I am."

Hagrid chuckled again. He rose up on his feet and Neville watched as though the man was growing right before his eyes. "So, we're gonna feed the Thestrals first..."

Neville shook his head. "Harry can feed him but Buckbeak scares me." Once more he strongly shook his head. "I don't want to go near him."

"Remember what I said about Buckbeak, Nev?" asked Harry.

"Don't startle him and show respect," nodded Neville. "I didn't mean to upset him last time, Harry. I just think he's not going to like me at all now."

Albus pulled the child closer. "Neville, I do know that it was terrifying when you got snapped at by Buckbeak but that does not mean you cannot repair things. Allow Hagrid to properly introduce you so that you may apologise for startling him last time. You are a brave boy so I know you can do this."

"Remember how brave you were when we were hunting gnomes, Nev," encouraged Harry. "You can do this."

Neville hesitated but then followed the small group as the entered the edge of the Forbidden Forest to get to Buckbeak's paddock. He had really liked the strange creature that was a mixture of bird and horse. Buckbeak had feathers and horse hair, and was really pretty. He had felt brave that day when he ran up to the creature to pet him but then Buckbeak had snapped at him catching him sharply on his arm. After that Neville had no interest in the silly creature at all! He was also pretty sure that Buckbeak would rather eat him than be nice to him.

"C'mon, Neville," Harry urged his cousin to hurry. Neville picked up his pace until he was standing next to the Headmaster. "We just got you too excited before and Buckbeak doesn't like that. Remember, he didn't like Draco, at first, either."

"C'mere, Neville," Hagrid urged by dropping to one knee and waving the boy over. Neville eyed Buckbeak warily and noted that the creature was closely watching him. Once he reached the groundskeeper, Hagrid pulled the small boy close to him. He spoke softly into his ear. "Buckbeak, 'ees really a nice fellow, Neville. All 'ippogriffs is skittish, though. Yeh made a little mistake before but what's one little mistake, eh? I make lots of 'em meself and Bucky, there, 'ee bit me twice as a little babe afore 'ee accepted me. And," smiled Hagrid, "I'm 'is mum!"
"He bit you, Hagrid?" asked Neville softly, his eyes wide and round.

"Aye. Got me big finger, an' then me ankle," confirmed Hagrid. "Yeh ready?"

Neville drew in a deep breath. He was going to do this because he wasn't going to be left out. Harry liked Buckbeak and so did Draco. He decided he was going to be quiet like he always was around his gran and Uncle Algy. "I'm ready, Hagrid."

"Buckbeak, I want yeh teh meet, Neville. Now, yeh be nice to 'im. 'Ee's a good boy," said Hagrid. The creature let out a screech. Neville's eyes widened. "Now, don'na yeh be feared, Neville. 'Ee 'members yeh, that's all. Jus' bow to ol' Buckbeak, say 'Ello, an' if'n he wants yeh teh pet 'im 'ee'll lower 'is 'ead."

Neville glanced over at Harry who smiled at him. Taking in a breath of courage he removed his mittens and stuffed them into a pocket of his cloak. He studied Buckbeak, nodded, then he took one step forward, and bowed. When he rose he spoke, "H-hi, B-buckbeak. I'm Neville. I'm sorry for startling you last time. Can I pet you?" He bowed somewhat awkwardly.

This time Buckbeak did not screech but the creature bowed by lowering his forefeet. When he rose, he lowered his head to the child. Tentatively Neville put forth his hand and carefully pet the animal's feathery crest.

"He's soft, Hagrid!" Neville breathed out in astonishment.

"Too right 'e is," Hagrid smiled proudly. "You an' 'Arry want teh feed, Bucky?"


"It's fun?" Neville asked with the same hope.

"Yeah," whispered Harry.

"Come over 'ere, boys," said Hagrid as he moved to a low, wooden bin. The boys went to where the groundskeeper indicated.

Neville watched with a touch of unease as Hagrid lifted a dead, plucked chicken from the bin. "Those are dead."

"Buckbeak's a meat-eater, Neville. You all right wi' that?" Hagrid asked gently.

"Can I just watch?" he asked. "I don't want to touch dead chickens."

Hagrid lightly patted Neville's head. "Shore, Neville. Why don'na you an' the 'Eadmaster cheer on 'Arry? 'Arry, you come 'ere an' stand in front of me." Harry moved to stand in front of the groundskeeper. Hagrid handed the little five year old the chicken carcass he was holding. "Yeh ready?"

"Ready, Hagrid!"

"Tell Bucky yer gonna feed 'im an' then give that chicken yer mightiest throw."

"Get ready, Bucky. I'm going to feed you," Harry told the hippogriff. Buckbeak's beady eyes concentrated on the food the boy held. Harry lifted the chicken above his head, and threw it with all his might. It was not a great throw but it was one Buckbeak could work with. The hippogriff smartly dove before the carcass hit the ground and he gobbled it up.
After Harry threw two more dead chickens Neville stepped in. "I want to try, Hagrid."

Albus patted the small boy's back. Harry left his place in front of Hagrid so Neville could take his spot.

"'Old the carcass by its legs, there, Neville," instructed Hagrid gently.

"It's creepy, Hagrid," grimaced Neville as he grasped the legs of the carcass gingerly.

"Animals is like us 'Uman's, Neville. They got teh eat. Some of 'em eat veggies an' some eat meat. Buckbeak is what yeh call a carnivore an' 'ee eats meat," lectured Hagrid, almost as if he were a teacher.

Neville paused, interested despite the carcass he was holding. "What do hippogriffis do to eat in the wild?"

"They 'unt's is what they do. They use them wings of theirs and they got great eyesight so's they can see what's really small on th' ground," Hagrid smiled as he recalled a few times when he had seen hippogriffs hunt.

"Why doesn't Buckbeak hunt for his food?" asked Neville as he took a surreptitious look at the chicken carcass he held.

"Buckbeak's never been 'untin'. Yeh see, Neville, I got Buckbeak when 'e were just an egg. Lil' baby 'atched an' then he latched right on'na my big finger." Hagrid chortled. "Right strong 'ee was! But, 'Ee's a tame one is old Bucky so fer th' pets he gives us we feed 'im." Hagrid crouched down to Neville's height. "'Ee give yeh a pet, right?" Neville nodded. "Now yeh gotta feed 'im, right?"

Neville nodded and took a stronger grip of the chicken legs. "B-bucky? You let me pet you so now I'm going to feed you. Okay?"

As if the hippogriff understood the child, Buckbeak nodded to Neville. Neville swung the carcass high and then with every muscle in his body he threw it. His throw was so vigorous that he would have toppled forward if Hagrid did not catch him. Buckbeak dove for the tossed carcass and gobbled it down.

Hagrid lightly patted Neville's back and then motioned, him, Harry, and Albus a few feet away from Buckbeak. As a rule, hippogriffs did not care for sudden, loud noises, or unexpected movements. Hagrid had learned that Harry loved to cheer and to dance when he faced Buckbeak and the Thestrals. Neville had conquered a mountain in his fear of the hippogriff so he moved the boys to an area where it was safe to express their exuberance, and Neville his triumph.

"Now, Hagrid?" asked Harry.

"Now, 'Arry," chuckled Hagrid.

Harry broke into his now familiar Happy Dance. He grabbed Neville by the hands and both boys were now dancing. Albus laughed and clapped his hands. Hagrid's eyes wrinkled in pleasure. He wanted everyone to appreciate the world's animals as he did. It cheered him knowing that Buckbeak had made a new friend in Neville Longbottom.

"You both did very well, Harry and Neville," commented Albus. "Shall we…"

"Father…" called a familiar voice behind them.
"Shadow!" shouted Harry and he ran for his father.

Severus picked up his son and for the first time he noted a healthy pinkness to his cheeks. He kissed a cheek. "You are chilled, Magpie. Hagrid, how about some hot chocolate? Father, you look a bit pink in the cheeks, too."

"'Allo, Perfessor," smiled Hagrid. "'Ot choc'late sounds a right good idea an' my fire makes my hut nice'n cosy. Come 'long, ever'one."

Hagrid ushered them from Buckbeak's paddock on the edge of the Forbidden Forest, across the dusting of snow on the grass, and to Hagrid's hut. Before going in Severus brushed snow off of Harry and Neville's cloaks, and then nudged them inside.
5 October 1985 - Malfoy Manor

Lucius, one knee on the hearth of his study Floo, was speaking into the green flames. Narcissa's gentle voice was speaking, "...you really need not come, Lucius. I have..."

The aristocrat firmly interrupted, "I have all the confidence in the world in your abilities, dear Cissy, but until your staff is hired, I intend to be with you. I have a few more forms to deal with, and then I need to compose a missive to the Wizengamot. I should be with you in about two hours."

"All right, Lucius. We shall be waiting," agreed Narcissa. The flames then faded back to their normal orange and red.

A manor house elf, wearing a pale blue tea towel with the Malfoy crest on the shoulder, popped into the study. "Master Lucius, Sir. Dobby comes to tell you that Master Potions Master Snape is arrived to speak to you. I brings?"

Lucius settled back into his high-backed, leather office chair. "Do bring him, Dobby. I have a moment."

The house elf vanished, and before Lucius could complete his breath Dobby had returned with Severus Snape beside him. The house elf vanished in a blink, leaving the younger wizard behind.

"Severus! I have some good news for you," smiled Lucius. "Do sit."

Severus did so, and eyed his brother with interest. "Something to do with the orphanage?"

"Better, Severus," grinned Lucius smugly as he pushed a parchment toward the Potions Master. "The witches, Burke and Hare, folded and turned on the one that set them to their despicable business with the children."

Severus picked up the official parchment. It was an arrest warrant. "Dolores Umbridge? The Head of WCS was directing those two? Renting the children to deviants?"

"And, in some cases, selling children to their abusers," Lucius nearly spat. "In the last forty-eight hours the WCS has crumbled with the corruption that Umbridge brought within it. Her record has been spotless in all cases outside of the orphanage but it was there that her rot settled." Severus grimaced and handed the arrest warrant to his brother.

"I have a feeling that you've only told me the surface of what was found, Lucius," Severus said tautly.
"Nine children were sold between 1967 and 1982 to their abusers. We would never have known the exact number but it seems that Dolores Umbridge was a bit too meticulous in her records keeping. A hidden filing cabinet was found that detailed each of the sales. Two children did not survive to adulthood - one a suicide, one killed by his abuser. A third child ran away at her majority. She has not been found. I suspect she might have retreated to the Muggle world so I have two of my Muggle agents looking for her now."

"Let us hope she found peace in the Muggle world," sighed Severus. "What of the other six children?"

"Unknown, at the moment, but the Aurors have found the abusers. It appears only one family was not an abuser but bought the child illegally to raise in a normal and loving household. Details will come out in a few days," replied Lucius. "The remaining, known abusers of those nine children will have their memories scanned, and then they will go on trial. A formality, though," Lucius said flatly but with a touch of relish. "The Wizengamot is very hard on sexual abuse of a child and I do not doubt that every one of those witches and wizards will get the 'Dementor's Kiss'."

"What of those that… rented… that were clients? What did Umbridge have planned for Neville?" asked Severus as the bile raced up his throat.

"Umbridge also kept a list of clients that… frequented… the orphanage. They are being rounded up for interrogation as we speak. As to our little Neville…" Lucius bowed his head. "I can only thank the gods that Cissy and I went to visit the orphanage when we did, Brother. Neville would have been auctioned off the next day. The gold mentioned… astronomical! It is no wonder the witches picked a fight to keep Neville."

Severus shook his head and tamped down the anger that had risen within him. A part of him wanted to leave the manor, find Umbridge, and tear her to a dozen pieces! "Tell me of your orphanage, Lucius."

Lucius smiled easily. "I found a fine building that was an old hotel in Manchester Borough. It is across from the primary school so the children can all attended there. I spoke to Madame Bilcross of the primary school and she would be more than pleased to hire another teacher in order to welcome more students."

"How many orphans were there?" asked Severus.

"Only eleven - between the ages of seven to thirteen. I expected more, and there were, at one time, but it seems that Matron Hare had her own deviations to satiate." Lucius lowered his voice. "Cannibalism."

Severus' hand slammed down upon the surface of Lucius' desk. "May Hades burn her to a crisp! Deviltry, Lucius. How many children succumbed to such a terrible fate?"

"Three toddlers all under the age of two, my Brother. The skeletons were found in the kitchen," Lucius shook his head. "I shudder to think…"

Severus held up his hand. "Please, Brother. No more… no more. I have enough nightmares as it is I do not need to add to them. Just tell me, will the children you have recover?"

Lucius smiled gently. "They will. Poppy has examined all of them, and although they were all abused, she assured myself and Cissy that the children would recover. With Poppy's aid we have hired a Healer with a specialty in troubled children. A pioneer in his field regarding abuse trauma suffered by wizarding children, and he is head of the Childrens Ward at St. Mungo's." Tea appeared
on his desk and he handed a cup to Severus.

"I am curious, Brother, will your orphanage have any involvement with WCS or the Ministry?" asked Severus.

Lucius shook his head. "No, it will not. It is now wholly a Malfoy charity in which I am CEO. I have the money and those children will be properly provided for from now until their majority or adoption; whichever comes first. I am establishing a board that will oversee adoptions and there will be an intensive screening of prospective parents. Nothing such as WCS, Umbridge, or Burke and Hare perpetrated will be allowed."

"That is going to be quite a task for you, Lucius," observed Severus. "Moreso, I believe, than your other interests."

Lucius nodded. "I do intend to be more... diligent... shall we say as my orphanage concerns living witches and wizards." Lucius did not need to detail that his other interests were so widespread that a few of them dipped into the Muggle world, and some were just this side of questionably legal. The majority concerned shipping of imports and exports across the wizarding world. "How is our little Neville doing?"

"Neville wishes to have a nickname as Harry does," smirked Severus. "According to Harry, Neville does not believe he will be truly loved by me until he has such a moniker."

Lucius chuckled. "Such endearments are important to children. Draco knows that I am especially favoured towards him when I call him 'Dragon'." He shifted slightly forward. "You have had a few days to observe the child. What strikes you most about, Neville? What makes your heart warm?"

Severus nodded and the corners of his eyes wrinkled as he thought of the other night when Harry and Neville sat in front of the Enchanted Window in Harry's room to watch the snow fall. Harry had draped his blanket over his shoulders, and had Nellie, his kneazle kit in his lap but Neville had burrowed under a cover so deeply that only his nose and eyes showed. It was not the first time he had noticed this behaviour but it was the first time Severus had realised that Neville was not attempting to hide. The child burrowed simply for comfort. That small peccadillo of the little boy's had caused that curious warmth in the Potions Master's breast he felt every time his son hugged him... kissed him... greeted him with a smile.

"Neville burrows. He loves the Headmaster's beard because it is so soft and he can burrow into it," Severus sighed at the pleasant memories of last evening. "After he and Harry fell asleep watching the snowfall Neville had pulled all the covers around and over himself. The only part of him I could see were his closed eyes, his round cheeks, and his button nose. I knew he would be well."

Lucius nodded and took a deep draught of his tea. "I do believe in that behaviour is the child's nickname, Severus." He put down his empty cup, and his features sobered. "Now, shall we speak of why you have come, Brother?"

"The Headmaster has decided that we will go with the ward you found to protect the students and staff from the Ka of Voldemort," stated Severus. "Poppy is collecting the blood we need and as soon as I return to Hogwarts I shall help." Severus emptied his cup of tea. It was orange pekoe which was a touch too sweet for him but it was a favourite of his brother's. "I need to know when you are available to help us cast the ward."

"I have completed what I needed to do for the orphanage," replied Lucius. "The Wizengamot is reviewing the actions of WCS for the duration of Umbridge's tenure as the head."
"No doubt they are looking at a complete change to WCS," muttered Severus.

"And, more stringent involvement by the Wizengamot," agreed Lucius. He shuffled some paperwork, tapped his desk with his wand, checked his calender, and then said, "I am available at your convenience, Severus. You need only summon me."

---

**Hot Chocolate With Hagrid**

Hagrid's hut looked small, for a half-giant that is, on the outside but it was larger on the inside. A magical benefit adapted from the wizarding tents that could put an entire house into an object the size and width of a large umbrella.

The interior was cozy but not at all cluttered. It was round when seen from a distance but the structure was hexagonal. Inside it was a large, eight-sided room. Dominating the one room was the large fireplace with its cooking cauldron which always held a good portion of the stew Hagrid was rather known for. Anything else that he needed cooked or heated up the castle kitchen elves would provide him with.

The next large feature was the old, round table that sat offside to the fireplace and partly stuck out towards the center of the room. Three large, handmade chairs sat around the table. Hagrid had taken one, the boys had taken a second and were being tucked onto it by Severus who had draped a quilt over both boys for them to burrow under. Each held a large mug of hot chocolate. Albus had taken a third chair and modified it with cushions and transfigured the size to better fit him. He had also conjured an ottoman for his feet, and was holding a large mug of the hot chocolate.

Severus conjured a functional ladderback chair for himself, and he also held a mug, though smaller, of the hot chocolate. "I hear you faced your fear of Buckbeak," mused the Potions Master. He noted that Neville had curled up into the large quilt to the point only his eyes and nose, and steam from his drink could be seen. Harry had pulled his part of the quilt over his shoulders leaving his head free.

The bulk of the quilt that was Neville nodded. "I did, Shadow, and now Buckbeak likes me. He even let me throw him a dead chicken. Did you know he never hunted 'cause Hagrid raised him from an egg?"

"Truly? That is remarkable, little Mouse," commented Severus with a small smile.

"Mouse?" Neville perked up, and a bit more of his face was revealed.

Severus lowered his head, then looked up. "You have a habit of burrowing for comfort as a mouse does." Before Neville could protest, Severus raised his hand. "The mouse is not a simple rodent. The mouse is observant, extremely clever, determined... as you most certainly are. They are also regarded as the guardians of the Earth which means they are Earth Elementals. You, my little Mouse, are unquestionably extraordinary with plants. Therefore, I should like to call you Mouse."

Neville blushed with pleasure and sank into his blanket a bit more. He just always loved plants because they made sense to him. And, they gave the earth a sublime beauty that even at the tender age of five he could see. The gardens at Longbottom Manse maintained by a the house elves had always been a favourite place of Neville's when he needed respite from his gran's overbearing presence, and his uncle's drunken yelling.

As for the bit about burrowing? Well, Neville could not recall ever not having burrowed into his covers. When he did so he felt safe, invisible, and he could watch, listen, and no one would be the wiser.
He quite liked being called a mouse after he gave it some thought. Mouse. It fit him. It made him smile. "Shadow?" Neville asked softly.

"Yes, Neville?" concern and possible distress over having chosen the wrong nickname for the child hit his belly like lead.

"Could I hug you?"

Severus managed a slightly larger smile than usual as the fullness of his relief and pleasure touched his dark gaze in a glimmer. "Whenever you wish, child."

Like a snake uncoiling from its skin Neville spun out of the quilt, handed his cup of hot chocolate to Harry, slipped off the giant-size chair. Instead of throwing himself at his godfather with the exuberance of his cousin Harry, Neville waited for Severus' arms to part in invitation. When they did, he climbed onto the older man's lap and threw his arms around his neck. Severus drew the child tightly into his embrace.

Neville whispered into his guardian's ear, "I love my nickname, Shadow."

Harry was now at his father's knees holding up his arms in supplication, and grinning. "Me, Shadow!"

Hagrid chuckled as Severus leaned enough forward to awkwardly grab his son around the chest. A silently cast Levitation Charm floated Harry better into his father's arms. In the same blink the Potions Master cast a Feather Light Charm on his boys. He drew them close, purposely squeezing them close until Neville let out a squeak and Harry chirped.

Severus' heart swelled to three times its size in his chest that day. He thanked all the gods for his son and new godson. He was so very blessed.

"I promise you two little Idiots, this will not hurt," Severus assured his son and Neville in preparation for taking a drop of blood from each. He had already taken blood from Hagrid and Albus who snoozed away softly.

"I'm going to spring a leak," said Harry stubbornly. "I got a hole once in the garden hose and the water went everywhere. Aunt Petunia was real mad."

"Harry," began Severus tautly, "you will not spring a leak. You are far from being a garden hose."

Harry glowered, then he blurted, "Do Nev first, Dad."

"Why do I have to go first?" demanded Neville. "You're Shadow's Magpie. You go first!"

"Your Shadow's Mouse and everyone knows that mouses go first!" Harry maintained hotly.

"They do not! Mouses observe and are careful. That's why you're going first, Harry," concluded Neville.

Severus rolled his eyes as he had had enough. He waved his wand and without breaking the skin of either boy he had the drops of blood he needed from each. "Finished. Come along, you two, it is time for naps."

The two 'idiots' glanced at their fingertips in confusion for each had felt a tiny itching that had come and gone as quickly as it was noticed. Harry shrugged, then Neville did. Both boys sighed but slid
off their chair and went to Severus' side. Severus gently shook Albus' shoulder. The older man had finished his hot chocolate long ago and had settled in for a nap. "Come, Father."

Albus quickly and smoothly woke. "So soon?" he asked sadly.

"I have a potion to brew," explained Severus, "and you have to speak to the students at dinner about what we did this afternoon."

"Quite so I do, my dear." He held out his hand and Severus helped to lever his father from the chair. Severus then tucked his father's hand into his elbow. "Hagrid, thank you for having us today. It was delightful."

Hagrid grinned as he stood. "No' a problem, 'Eadmaster. Any ol' time yeh all are welcome."

"Don't forget to feed the Thestrals, Hagrid, since we didn't do that," reminded Harry.

"Yeh need no' worry, 'Arry," nodded Hagrid.

Neville and Harry waved and Hagrid waved back. He then whistled for Fang and the puppy Droopy, and headed into the Forbidden Forest.

*a/n: Thank you to everyone for some of the most wonderful and thought-provoking nicknames. It was quite fun choosing between them all.*
Casting the Blood Ward

The Week of 6-11 October 1985

It was a week before the Blood Ward could be cast. Five students were in the Infirmary with varying degrees of exhaustion.

Blossom, the basilisk in the Chamber of Secrets, had reported that the Ka of Voldemort had slipped her grasp. She could still sense it within the Chamber but it had absorbed enough magic from students and staff that it was moving around. Blossom warned that the Ka, the Evil of Disease - she called it, was seeking a weak vessel in which to reside.

"The Evil of Disease will want the Snape Egg for it is the weakest in magic," hissed the giant basilisk. The portrait of Salazar Slytherin had interpreted the dire warning.

Severus Snape was certainly ill at ease that unconscionably long week as he worried for his son. Harry was showing signs of fatigue by sleeping deeper at night, and longer when he took his afternoon nap. Poppy had done a scan of Harry's magical core to find that it was so inactive that it was if it had gone to sleep. Neville had practically stopped talking and Severus knew that his godson was being affected as well.

While waiting for his potion for the Blood Ward to cure Severus waffled between taking his son, godson, and himself away from Hogwarts to remaining steadfast where he was. Harry, though, was blissfully unaware of the turmoil his father was going through. He knew his father was concerned with something but he had come to find that such a state during class term appeared to be usual for his father.

Harry and Neville went to school, played when they weren't tired, and both looked forward to the coming of Hallowe'en.

11 October 1985 - Friday at Primary

"It was called Samhain," said Draco as he, Harry and Neville were swinging on the small playground area where the swing set was. It was still odd to see snow beyond the temperature ward that kept their primary school and surrounding grounds within the Spring season.

"How come its called Hallowe'en now?" asked Harry. As he swung he stretched his feet towards the sandy ground. He was short and could not reach.

"The increase of the Muggle-born and half-born witches and wizards," replied Draco. "My father says we're changing too many of our holidays to make them comfortable."

"But you told me you don't do costumes and go trick-or-treating," maintained Harry. Draco shook his head. "Well, what did you do?"

"Still do, Harry," piped up Neville. "It's a really magical time when the space between the Living and Dead is thin. This is why the ghosts celebrate."

"They do?" asked Harry with interest.
"The ghosts are able to speak to their friends who aren't ghosts," Draco then grinned as he skidded his feet in the sand as he swung slowly. "Did you know sometimes the living can talk to the dead?"

"Nev! You could talk to your grandmother!" said Harry with excitement.

Neville shook his head. "Maybe later but not this year." After Neville stopping his swinging he turned to his cousin Harry and told him, "You could talk to your parents!"

Harry stared down at his feet. He was a bit interested but he was also worried; what if his father objected? "Maybe," he hedged. "Is that all you do for... uhm... Samhain?"

Draco shook his head. "You can eat whatever you want and dinner is a celebration that is all of your favourite foods." He then grinned. "You get to eat all kinds of sweets and puddings, too, Harry!"

Neville shook his head. "We didn't. Gran always said I was too fat 'cause I ate too much already."

"No you don't, Nev," insisted Harry. "Dad's always telling you not to pick at your food."

Neville glowered, "I'm just not used to eating so much, Harry!"

"Your grandmother didn't feed you enough, Nev," observed Draco.

"Yes she did!" blurted Neville. "Gran just didn't think people should eat so much 'cause they didn't need it!"

"My aunt and uncle told me I was eating everything and starving my fat cousin Dudley so sometimes I didn't get to eat all day," Harry said sharply. He then caught Neville's gaze with his green eyes. "You eat like there's not enough food, Nev, and you gotta stop that. We live with Shadow in Hogwarts and there's lots of food."

"Then why am I fat?" Neville asked as he pouted.

"Madame Pomfrey already told you why," said Harry gently. "She said you got jeans that're telling your body to make you the way you are right now. You'll grow out of it."

Neville shrugged and left his swing to go walk by himself. Draco glared at Harry. "Now Nev's all upset, Harry."

"That's not my fault, Draco. We were talking about Hallowe'en... and... well, it just all went weird," sighed Harry as he watched Neville walk away.

Draco slipped from his swing. "C'mon, Harry. Let's go get Nev or Madame Bilcross won't give us a star for today."

Harry and Draco caught up with Neville and they were soon walking together, arms over each other's shoulders as playtime ended and school began for the afternoon.

——

12 October 1985 - The Day of the Blood Ward

On the 12th day of October Severus had Poppy and Narcissa take Harry, Draco, and Neville to the Winter Faire in Hogsmeade. Poppy picked up Harry and Neville in the morning and met Narcissa in Hogsmeade. They would not return until evening's light began to fade.

Albus, as Headmaster, had instructed the students to remain within the castle. He had not intended to say any more than just for the students to stay indoors but Severus had explained that if his father
was not more straightforward with the students, the curious would wander, and perhaps, interrupt them. That would not hurt the curious but it would destroy the potion, and ruin the ward they would be casting. Therefore, Albus had added an explanation to elucidate that he, one of their teachers, and two other wizards, would be casting a ward. It was important that none of them interrupt the process.

Severus would have liked a bit more said but he and Albus agreed to disagree. Thus, Severus met with his Snakes and explained the situation more in-depth. He then had his Slytherins go amongst the other students before they were confined to their common rooms, and to apprise them of the situation fully.

As usual, the needed information was disseminated, the students were ordered to their common rooms at 10 in the morning, and the Headmaster with his Potions Master, Lucius Malfoy, and Remus Lupin, all left the castle. The complicated casting of the protective ward was ready to be cast.

The four wizards assembled on the small hill above Hagrid's hut. The circle of seven standing stones was not simple decoration for the students to rest against while they did their studies. The seven stones had been placed by the Founders for the express purpose of erecting all of the wards that kept Hogwarts safe and invisible to the Muggle world. It would be used to create the Blood Ward.

Severus' potion consisted of the blood collected from every living being in Hogwarts which included students, staff, and familiars; which were magical. The blood was combined with herbs that all reflected protection: anise, bay, calamus, clover, elder, frankincense, mistletoe, myrrh. The potion also was bolstered by crushed measures of serpentine, jade, onyx, and amethyst to bind everything together. The final phase of the potion brewing was the three days needed to cure it. In this time the liquid compressed down to a rather sludgy, black, unappetising potion.

At least no one had to drink it!

The Potions Master placed the Blood Potion upon the altar stone at the center of the stone circle and then took his place at the north end of the compass. He nodded to Lucius to take the reins of the ritual at that point.

"Albus, as the southern compass point you are air. You will open the ritual," instructed Lucius. "I shall awaken the Earth. Lupin, you will create the fire. Severus, you will invoke the water. Begin."

The Headmaster lifted his wand, arm and other arm skyward as he chanted, "Air! I beseech thee to come down and bestow the power of your Element into this potion!"

Air began to swirl around the Headmaster causing his hair and beard to whirl about. As if catching the wind on his wand tip, he spun his wand, then dropped it sharply to aim at the cauldron of potion. The sludgy, black potion roiled slowly and lightened from black to nearly flawless white. Holding his position he began to chant in words as old as time.

Lucius knelt down on one knee, touched the earth with the tip of his wand, and said, "Earth! I beseech thee to rise up and to bestow the power of your Element into this potion!"

Again, as if caught by his wand, a thin, whirling rope of earth rose up from the ground. Lucius stood, lifted the small tornado, and directed it to the potion. The sludgy, black potion roiled slowly and lightened from black to nearly flawless white. Holding his position he began to chant in words as old as time.

Remus then created fire by casting a small incendio - flames danced in front of him. "Fire! I beseech thee to encompass the cauldron in order to bring the power of your Element to this potion!" Pointing his wand, the flames seemed to dance about the tip of Remus' wand as he directed the flames to the
cauldron. The flames spun around in a frenzy around the cauldron until it became red with heat. The flames then leapt into the rapidly boiling potion causing it to turn into a cinnamon red heat that threatened to boil right out of the cauldron. He began the chant and added his voice to Lucius' and Albus' voices.

Lastly, Severus conjured water to rise from the Black Lake until it undulated in an impatient, standing wave in front of him. "Water! I beseech thee to seal this potion with the power of your Element." With his wand he threw the water at the cauldron and potion where it flowed over the flame and joined the other three Elements in the potion. His chanting voice joined the other three.

The cauldron cooled to its original colour and the potion itself began to cool, as well. It turned from the colours of flame to that of pale blue ice until it cracked; a frozen substance that shattered where it was carried high above them. As each wizard lifted their gazes the sparkling ice wavered into threads that wove themselves over all of Hogwarts.

Although it seemed the ritual to cast the Blood Ward was only minutes each invocation of an Element took an hour. The chanting did not stop as the ward wove itself into the fabric of all of the other wards.

Albus was the first to fall to his knees as his body became exhausted. He did not stop chanting, though. Lucius fell a half hour later not stopping his chanting for a moment. Severus dropped to his knees and although his voice did not sound as strong, he, too, continued to chant. Minutes later Remus was the last to fall to his knees. By then the ward had almost buried itself within the earth.

The moment the ward vanished from sight Albus' voice was the first to go silent. He had drifted into sleep still chanting until his sleep became so deep his voice became quiet. Remus, last to fall was the second overcome by sleep. Lucius and Severus dropped into the arms of Morpheus almost simultaneously.

When the air was silent and still Hagrid emerged from his hut where he had patiently been waiting as earlier instructed. Using his wand hidden inside a folded pink umbrella he conjured stretchers, loaded the four wizards onto them, and headed up to the Infirmary where he put each man to bed. A contingent of Hogwarts elves had been enlisted by Poppy to watch over the wizards until she returned.

The Winter Faire

The Winter Faire at Hogsmeade was to celebrate the first snowfall of the season. Daryl Lane, a side street to the main avenue of Hogsmeade, allowed the snowfall. Spells, enacted long before when the lane and other avenues of Hogsmeade were laid down, kept the sidewalks free of snow and ice. The spells had been extended to encompass the lane itself where all of the booths and rides of the fair were held. The booths were neatly lined up, back to back on the lane, struck comfortably side-by-side.

Harry, Draco and Neville were dazzled by the sights, sounds, and wondrous smells all around them. There were silly trinkets to fine jewels, a variety of sweets, toys, face-painting for children, or adults that were children at heart, savoury meats encased in fluffy dough, and so much more to be seen.

The rides were located at the far end of Daryl Lane. There was a ferris wheel, a carousel with beautifully hand-carved Aethenor, Hippogriffs, Unicorns, Dragons, and Thestrals. Near that was a magical merry-go-round that consisted of balloons over baskets to hold passengers as they circled round and gently lifted on the air upwards then downwards. The final ride was a spiral slide wrapped around a very tall tower. The thrill was in the slide itself (which slowed the rider at strategic marks)
but the slide was cloaked in a very sophisticated invisibility spell. Riders appeared to be gliding down through the air with no support whatsoever.

As Poppy held the hands of Neville and Harry, Narcissa, just under four months pregnant, held her son’s hand. The boys all wanted to go right to the rides but the witches insisted that the booths were to be visited first.

A quarter of the way in their walk (which was hardly leisurely for either Narcissa or Poppy given their youthful companions) Harry, Neville and Draco were caught by the sparkle of curious instruments and Rube Goldberg like constructions. The instruments glittered or shimmered as they moved. Some chimed, some played music. One even had tiny ballet dancers that danced to the Nutcracker Suite. They dragged Poppy until she gave in and let them join the group of children that were fascinated by the objects. Draco, as tempted as he was to pull on his mother's arm, had earlier been cautioned to treat his mother gently. Therefore, it took him a few moments to join his friends.

"What are all of these?" Harry asked, his nose to the topmost part of the counter.

He was answered by the wizened looking wizard with curly, grey hair, no beard on his bare but wrinkled chin, and a pair of spectacles that were round with frames of tortoise shell over brown eyes. "M'Guffins, young man."

"What are M'Guffins?" asked Neville as his eyes watched a silver ball traverse a small course made of blue and gold wire that twisted in upon itself as it flowed up, down, and into a final spiral that dropped the silver ball into a small, never growing pond of silver that produced a new silver ball from a spout at the bottom of the pool. As the new ball was dropped onto the track, it began once more to follow the course of its brother.

"Do they do anything useful?" asked Draco.

"M'Guffins are perfectly useless but ultimately artistic creations to bewitch the eye," expounded the grey-haired M'Guffin artist with a twinkle to his eye. "Some of the M'Guffins are created from metals that are precious and glitter with jewels of diamond, ruby, emerald." He then smiled at Poppy who looked a bit ill at the imagined cost of these useless pieces of art. Narcissa did not even blink at what the beautiful constructions might cost. "I do have some creations that are sturdier and more affordable for the child in all of us."

"And what would be the price range for such a M'Guffin, Sir?" inquired Poppy.

"15 galleons, Madame," replied the artist. Surreptitiously he pointed to a group of three M'Guffins behind him. "My more expensive and involved M'Guffins begin at 300 galleons."

Two gazes, one of emerald sparkling at twilight and one of fawn-soft brown, gave the Healer a silent, pleading look. Poppy frowned and crossed her arms. "Gentlemen, we've just begun. What if there is something more interesting for your allowance?"

Harry's eyes widened, "Allowance! I forgot about my allowance, Madame Pomfrey. Does Nev have an allowance?"

Poppy smirked softly. "As a matter of fact, Harry, Neville does have an allowance. His godfather extended him an extension on his considering he has not been earning it as long as you have earned yours."

Neville blinked. "I have an allowance?" he glanced at his cousin and whispered, "What's an allowance, Harry?"
"It's money that you earn weekly for doing your chores, helping with dishes, being good, doing your homework. It's like a job," said Harry.

"Neat," nodded Neville.

Draco scowled. "Mother, how come I don't have an allowance?"

Narcissa combed her fingers through her son's hair. "Your father and I have given you almost everything you ever wanted, Dragon."

Draco pursed his lips as he saw the Healer give Neville and Harry small, leather pouches with galleons inside. "But, shouldn't I get paid for doing my homework... and, uhm, doing chores and stuff?" Draco was not terribly sure what 'chores' were.

"My dear, but for your homework, you do not have chores," said Narcissa with a smile. "The house elves do all of those."

"Put your money pouches in your pockets," instructed Poppy to Harry and Neville. "Try not to be frivolous. You might want something more than..." Poppy glanced sideways at the M'Guffins, "...some useless but pretty art."

The grey-haired artist's lips thinned as he saw a potential sale fly away. Poppy caught the sour look, smiled graciously, and gently eased the boys back onto the pavement.

Draco leaned towards his friends, "What are chores, Harry?"

"Stuff I do around the apartment," Harry replied easily.

"What stuff?" Draco demanded for clarification.

Neville answered, "Well, we gotta keep our room clean, make our beds, and when Uncle Severus makes dinner we do the dishes."

Harry smiled. "It's a lot easier with the both of us. I wash and Nev dries."

"What else do you do?" Draco continued to gather the information he needed.

Harry's forehead wrinkled in thought. "Sometimes we help dad to clean the sitting room but that's just really quick. After the one time I polished my desk he's never made me do it. He has the house elves do that."

Neville nodded. "We don't do laundry, either, but Harry and I do have to put dirty clothes in the hamper in the bathroom."

"And you get allowance for doing all that?" asked Draco. His friends replied by each nodding.

"And, you get to spend your allowance on anything you want? Even sweets?"

"Yep," said Harry. "Dad says chores and earning an allowance gives you 'character'."

Again Draco scowled in puzzlement. "What's character?"

Neville replied, "It means you grow up with good habits that will make you a good man when you're older."

Draco's brow beetled in worry. "I don't have chores or allowance. I'm not gonna have any character."
Neville leaned towards his friend, "You should ask your mum, Draco. Tell her you want to do some stuff so you can make good character."

"Maybe just your bedroom," suggested Harry. He had seen Draco throw everything on the floor like his clothes and toys.

Draco nodded. "Okay." He turned away from his friends and trotted back to his mother who was walking leisurely with Poppy. "Mother? Harry and Neville have chores and I want some so I grow up with good character. Do you think I could clean up my bedroom and make my bed for an allowance?"

Narcissa considered her son's request. It was not an unreasonable one. She and Lucius had both grown up privileged with everything done for them by house elves. Not really a bad thing but Narcissa and her husband were both learning later in life the sense of accomplishment one received when a task was done with their own hands. Lucius was and would always be a scholar who spent hours in his library but after he had been goaded by his brother into creating something with his own hands, he had changed. In their parlor was a plain wooden box with hinges not attached perfectly. However, it had been made by Lucius without magic, without elves, and a great deal of inventive curses and the loss of a few flowering plants.

Lucius had been pleasantly stunned by the sense that had blossomed over him when he had finished his box. Severus had even complimented the crude construct and had not spoken sarcastically of the genuine effort it had taken to create the thing. Narcissa had, at first, thought the little box was quaint, if a bit silly. The pride upon her husband's face had swept that vacuous thinking away. After taking a second look at the box, and then at Lucius' hands rife with splinters, bruises, and cuts, her compliment had been sincere.

Ever since then, as he had taken to his love of runes and fisticuffs, Lucius had delved into carpentry work. He had built a number of chairs, cabinets, and tables which he sold and then funnelled the profit into the various Malfoy charities. His project now was a cradle he was building for his new son or daughter.

Narcissa smiled down at her son as she felt pride in him. She could not see a reason to deny him something that would 'build character'. "Dragon, I think that you keeping your room clean… and perhaps helping your father in his woodshop, would be a good thing." She turned to the witch beside her. "Poppy, how much were Harry and Neville given today for their spending?"

"Fifteen galleons each," replied Poppy.

Narcissa opened her reticule. Using a silk handkerchief she transfigured it into a leather pouch and then counted 15 gold galleons into it. She handed over the precious bundle. "Keep it in you pocket, Dragon."

Draco was beaming happily as he accepted the pouch of money. Quickly, yet carefully, he hugged his mother and then he sprinted back to his friends. "I have an allowance!"

This time as the boys perused the booths that they passed each boy considered the galleons in their pockets and how they were going to spend the coins. Poppy spent her money on a few roots that would become various flowers for her indoor garden. Narcissa discovered lush Winter Berries that she bought, explaining as she did so, that she had been meaning to try a Winter Berry Pie recipe given to her by Molly Weasley.

"Oh look! Madame Pomfrey it's floaty feathers!" Harry called as he nearly jumped up and down in excitement.
Poppy left the Gem Flowers she was drooling over and moved to the booth dyed, colourful feathers intertwined with beads and puffy balls (also multi-coloured) that floated back and forth, up and down. "They're pretty, Harry."

"I think Nellie would have fun with something like that," commented Harry as his gaze tried to watch different floating feathers. "She's been going after Dad's teaching robes and he's been complaining that he keeps having to fix the hem." He glanced up and shrugged sheepishly. "Nellie likes how they billow."

"It sounds like she's getting out into the castle," mused Poppy.

"Yeah. Dad says she can't stay in the apartment all day. Nellie'd get bored." Harry tried to catch a floating feather but he wasn't tall enough. "Ma'am?" Harry caught the attention of the artist that created the feather toys.

"Did you want one, young man?" asked the pretty, raven-haired witch.

"Yes, please. I like the one that's got purple and green feathers with all the clear beads and yellow puffy things," described Harry. "What do you call these, Ma'am?"

"Feather Float Toy for Kneazles and Kits," replied the artist as she caught the toy Harry wanted. Before she put it into a small, silver bag she demonstrated how it would be used. "Hold the feather at the height you want it to float and dip," she held the feather over the narrow counter. "Then, you flick it with your fingertip to activate the spell. Like so!" The artist flicked the feather and like the others in the booth it began to lazily float, fly, and dip.

"That's perfect!" declared Harry.

Harry purchased the Feather Float Toy for Nellie and once his package was shrunk and in his cloak pocket he looked around for something else interesting. Madame Pomfrey, he noted, was looking rather wistfully at a glittering selection of rings. Harry slipped up beside the Healer.

"What do you like, Madame Pomfrey?" asked Harry softly.

"They're all lovely," she murmured with a sigh. "But, I do love the cluster of opals being guarded by the snake." She pointed at the ring that had caught her eye.

"It's pretty," nodded Harry. "You like snakes?"

Poppy chuckled softly. "I do, Harry. Few witches do but I've loved snakes since I was a little girl."

"Have you met Blossom?" asked Harry.

"No. Is she living in Hagrid's menagerie?" inquired Poppy.

"Oh no," Harry shook his head. "Blossom is living in the Chamber of Secrets. She's a basilisk and what I read that's a kind of snake."

Poppy was astounded. "A basilisk? And, you lived?"

Harry nodded. "I got lost down in the dungeons when dad first rescued me and one day I just went stupidly wandering. Blossom found me and protected me from the Evil that was down there."


"Salazar said she can't hurt us because he did some magic on her eyes so she won't kill us by
accident," revealed Harry. "Of course, Blossom is really, really big, and she could probably squash you flat. If she were mean. But, she's not." Harry looked at the pretty snake ring. "You oughta meet Blossom if you like snakes, Madame Pomfrey."

"I would dearly love to, Harry," Poppy said sincerely. She then looked away from the rings and discovered she was missing something. "Where did Neville go to?"

Harry pointed to a booth they had passed a few minutes ago. "They got plants."

There was not much of a crowd at the booth where Neville was. Just himself and another wizard who had glanced over the plants and turned away. Neville was talking to the owner of the booth, interest shining in his eyes.

Poppy placed a hand to Harry's back and nudged him. "Let's go see what has Neville so interested."

Harry skipped and half-trotted over to Neville. "Hey, Nev! What did you find?"

"Winter Cacti," grinned Neville as he glanced over his shoulder. "I thought all cacti just grew in the desert but these like the snow and cold weather."

Harry put his nose up to the booth to look at the cacti that were on display. "These only grow in Winter?" asked Harry as he lifted a hand toward the spines of one cactus that was as tall as his palm.

Neville caught Harry's hand. "Careful, Harry. That's a Snatch'Em Cactus. They're like the Venus Flytrap. Their spines really hurt."

"Are you getting one, Nev?" asked Harry somewhat luridly.

Neville shook his head. "I like that one," Neville pointed to a snowy white cactus with tiny forked spines. It looked like a pincushion gone insane. "It sings."

Harry's eyes widened. "It does? Does it sing now?"

"The Singing Cactus." The wizard that grew these magical cacti lifted the cactus the two little boys were discussing and he held it down between them. "Shhh. Listen."

Like a whisper in a breeze a faint warbling song that resembled the chiming of bells could be heard. The herbalogist lifted the cactus back into place.

"How do I take care of it, Sir?" asked Neville with respect.

"Each cacti comes in a special soil that magically mimics Winter soil. That then goes into a small terrarium that is spelled to bathe the cactus in an atmosphere it grows within," instructed the herbalogist. "I sell the cactus with a bag of specialised dirt under a Stasis Charm, a terrarium, and a pamphlet that illustrates care and signs to be aware of that presage problems. Will you take one, young man?" asked the wizard and then quoting a price that would take almost all of Neville's allowance.

Neville hesitated, then glanced at Harry. He whispered, "Do you think Shadow would mind?"

Harry shook his head. "I don't think he'd mind at all, Nev. He might even help you with it." He nudged Neville. "Go on, Nev, buy it."

The small boy took a deep breath, then smiled and nodded.

Draco, his allowance burning a hole in his pocket, had become an instant shrewd buyer. He was
dazzled by all the things his friends and he were looking over and he sincerely wanted to buy something. However when it came time for lunch Draco had decided not to buy anything; he wanted to save his allowance.

12 October 1985 - The Day of the Blood Ward

Chamber of Secrets

The Ka of Voldemort was partial spirit partial dessicated creature no larger than an unformed, human, foetus. It was more sensed than seen but there was enough substance that for the few minutes of an hour that it was almost solid it could move around the depths of the Chamber of Secrets.

Tom Riddle had always seen the Chamber of Secrets as a right belonging to him; a gift presented to him by Founder Salazar Slytherin. The fact that he was a Parselmouth and was able to gain entrance, then to speak to the basilisk only confirmed this belief for the growing Dark Wizard.

When his destruction planned for the Potter family had backfired so catastrophically that his body was destroyed and the Ka ripped away that Ka had fled at once to the Chamber of Secrets. There, before the giant face of Salazar Slytherin, he had languished as nothing more than vague substance that was the totality of his Dark soul. During the term when the students and staff of Hogwarts flourished above the Ka's silent darkness, his magic crippled to near death, awakened. As he had long ago been taught by the Necromancer Quirinus Quirrell the Ka of Voldemort would steal the magic of the young. The Ka also took magic from those still connected to him by their Dark Marks.

Each day the Ka felt stronger, more substantial. It could not voice words but could speak through touch of the flood water that ran throughout the Chamber of Secrets. Through the water he could speak to the basilisk. What the Ka was not able to discern was that it no longer had the influence over the basilisk as he once had as student Tom Riddle. Blossom, a clever creature, allowed the Ka to trust in her. She bided her time, kept touch with the water that linked her to her former master, and spoke to Salazar and the others when it was needed.

One day Blossom felt the water ripple with the eerie triumph of the Ka. It had found a weak wizard in which to inhabit. It's vile joy overflowed as it realised the one it found was the son of Lily Evans-Potter; Harry Potter. Blossom had spoken then to Salazar and the others to warn them that the Snape Egg was in danger.

This day the 12th of October after the ritual had been completed the Ka of Voldemort was cut from its sustenance. Violently. As if the strings of a puppet had been cut it could no longer move. It began to curl in upon itself quickly becoming as insubstantial as it had been upon its arrival.

Hogsmeade

Lunch was greeted with enthusiasm by all and then sadness afterwards; Narcissa and Draco were going home. Draco wanted to stay with his friends but Narcissa insisted, and with melodramatic farewells, the Malfoys Apparated home.

Harry and Neville continued to view each of the booths and salivated over the delicious goods the vendors had to sell.

"I want to get something for dad," Harry mused when they stopped in front of a booth that had several potions bubbling merrily in their cauldrons.
The potioneer (not a Master) stood in front of a shelf of all of his potions. Poppy scowled as her eyes read some of the labels.

"Not here, Harry," Poppy leaned down and whispered softly in his ear. She nudged Harry away from the booth as she caught Neville’s hand.

After they had put a little distance between themselves and the potioneer, Harry asked, "Why couldn't I buy anything there, Madame Pomfrey?"

"That wizard is a charlatan," she replied. Harry frowned at the unknown word. "A fraud," Poppy clarified. "He's selling coloured sugar water with the claim that it heals aches, scrapes, and headaches."

"Uncle Severus wouldn't have liked him," smiled Neville.

Poppy giggled lightly. "Oh no, Severus would have taken the man to task so strongly that he would have no choice but to pack up and leave."

Harry was frowning as they took a rest upon an iron bench. Harry had climbed up it but Neville was trying to pull himself up onto the bench with his hands behind him. Poppy grasped him under his arms and pulled the boy onto the bench where he sat back until his legs were dangling from his knees over the edge.

"Madame Pomfrey?"

"Yes, Harry?"

"What would dad like as a present? I don't think I want to get any potion ingredients," explained Harry.

Poppy thought a moment, then smiled as an idea struck her. "Your father has been drawing quite a bit lately," she mused. "I noticed he had his drawing tablet at the staff table at dinner a few nights back."

Harry nodded, "I saw the drawing he did of all the kids eating dinner."

"Your dad's good at drawing," agreed Neville. "You are too, Harry."

Harry shrugged modestly. "I draw some stuff that's okay."

"What if all of us bought your father something together, Harry," suggested Poppy. "What do you think of coloured ink for his drawings?"

Harry blinked in agreement. "Could we get dad a quill with all kinds of colours of ink?"

"Let's see what we can find, Harry. We went past an ink-makers' booth. He might have something." Poppy helped the two boys off of the iron bench and they then went to find the ink-maker.

It took them about twenty minutes since they passed the booth they wanted by mistake. Doubling back on their path they were at the booth and were led into the small space so they could peruse all of the inks.

"You make lots of inks," commented Neville to the ink-maker.

"I like to keep busy, young man," smiled the ink-maker.
"What is the base of your inks, Sir?" asked Poppy.

"Lampblack or Floo-smut the ash from those, atramentum from octopi, squid ink, dragon blood which makes the richest, smoothest red, and then I have a powdered calligraphy ink made of several herbs and dragon bone," said the ink-maker. "Ambergris is in the perfumed inks," he grinned. "The ladies like to write with those. What are you looking for?"

Harry piped up, "My dad draws a lot but he only has black ink with a never-ink pen. We're looking for a bunch of colours and a pen."

"My Lampblack or Floo-smut inks are the best for drawing," replied the ink-maker. "I do carry a small selection of pens. It only takes a simple spell to connect it to the ink colours."

"Madame Pomfrey," said Harry. "Me and Neville will pick some colours and you pick a pen for dad, okay?"

"I would be pleased to do so, Harry," nodded Poppy. "I suggest no more than six or seven colours. Too many would be too many to choose from."

Harry nodded in agreement and he and Neville began to study the inks that the ink-maker had shown them to choose from.

"Blueberry Sky or Midnight Cobalt?" asked Neville.

"The second one," replied Harry. "Oh! Pomegranate Crimson! Yes!"

After a good half an hour of looking at colours of ink and pens Poppy had picked a silver and green blown glass drawing pen with a silver nib, and Harry and Neville had picked out Midnight Cobalt, Pomegranate Red, Saffron Gold, Slytherin Green (both boys chose this colour the second they saw it), Royal Violet, and Sunset Orange inks.

"This is a lot," Harry whispered worriedly as he looked at all the bottles of ink and the beautiful glass pen.

Poppy touched his shoulder. "You and Neville will contribute three galleons each and I will make up the difference," she assured Harry.

Harry and Neville quickly removed the required galleons and dropped them into the hand of the ink-maker. The rest he took from Poppy. He then performed a spell to attach each of the inks to the pen and then showed each of them how the ink was changed. Latin names for each of the colours and a tap on the end of the pen with the fingertip was all that was needed. The ink-maker packaged everything up into a wooden, black lacquered box that Poppy shrunk and put into her reticule.

Dinner was calling as the two boys rumbling tummies testified. Dinner at the faire was not very nutritionally sound, unfortunately. Therefore Poppy being the Healer she was, did her best to find food that wasn't "too awful". Nearly everything was fried or sweet. She did find a vendor selling slices of orange. The closest to decent vegetables were cheese and bacon broccoli; which tasted undeniably good (Poppy had some). Protein came as teriyaki chicken nuggets. The chicken was floating in a bowl of the sauce. Milk was not found, and juice unadulterated by some extravagant ingredient, was nigh on impossible.

Dinner was soon concluded but instead of settling the boys, as Poppy had hoped, they were becoming cranky. After checking the time with a wave of her wand, it was just after five of the evening so she Apparated Harry and Neville back to Hogwarts.
Albus slept until the morning of the 14th; recovering from the Blood Ward that he, Severus, Remus and Lucius erected to protect everyone that lived within Hogwarts. Severus slept only until the next day, the 13th. He was met by his son and godson Neville who both hugged him while he was still in his infirmary bed. Lucius was still asleep and had been moved to Malfoy Manor when Poppy, Harry and Neville had returned from the faire.

Remus Lupin still slept and it was likely he would continue to sleep through the full moon of October. Poppy had administered a dose of Wolfsbane upon her return from the faire and she continued to dose him until he could be moved on the 13th, with the Potions Master's help, to the Shrieking Shack.

"I do not like this place, Severus," Poppy clucked her tongue as she tucked the sleeping Remus into the rickety looking canopy bed. "I never have."

"We cannot take the risk of bringing Lupin into the comfort of Hogwarts," replied Severus. "It would put everyone within the castle in danger."

"I am aware of that, Severus," Poppy replied a bit too sharply. "I have been performing this duty longer than I have wished. I just do not like Remus waking to these cobwebs, the dust... the ruin of the shack. It cannot be good for his sense of self."

Severus did not reply. His mouth tightened before he turned away. "Come, Poppy. We do not want to be here when the full moon arrives."

On Monday, before classes began, Severus dropped his son and Neville at their primary school and then he met Poppy in the Infirmary where a wakened Headmaster was eating chicken noodle soup.

"Father," nodded Severus. "You are looking much improved. How do you feel?"

"Rather well rested, my dear boy," Albus nodded at a chair upholstered in the comfortable cushions the Headmaster preferred. Severus took the chair. "I understand that Lucius still sleeps." Severus nodded. "Poppy will visit and look him over. We cannot have our expectant father missing the arrival of his second child."

"I hardly think Lucius is likely to miss that event, Father," lightly scoffed Severus. "I believe Narcissa has about five months to go."

"How fare my two grandsons?" smiled Albus. He was enjoying his growing family.

"Harry and Neville were a bit resistant to going to school this morning," sighed Severus. "Harry has been very attentive towards me since I woke. Neville is, of course, following the lead of my son."

"Bring them to my office when you pick the boys up from school, Severus. I should like to see them," asked Albus.

"We shall use the Floo rather than portkey and come straight to your office, Father," Severus stood. "I must get ready for class so I shall see you later. Good day, Father."

---

**Chamber of Secrets**

Blossom, lightly asleep in the depths of the Chamber of Secrets, the room that had once served as Salazar Slytherin’s lab, woke to the distress of the Ka. The Ka was in pain. It could not scream aloud.
Due to these vibrations Blossom was able to discern just where the Ka was.

The basilisk thumped her great tail against the stone of the floor three times. This caused a vibration in the heart of Hogwarts that alerted a chime on Albus' desk to ring.

At the sound of the alert Albus', drafting one of the many letters he wrote during term, lifted his head. Instantly knowing the dull chime was from Blossom, he Summoned a house elf.

The elf, big blue eyes goggling, smiled at Albus. "What can Doogie be doing for Master Headmaster, Sir?"

"Let Professor Snape know that Blossom is calling. We might need his 'special' potion," ordered Albus.

The elf nodded, vanished, and a few minutes later Severus arrived with his Essence of Dementor in hand. "Blossom, Father?"

Albus nodded and held out his hand. "Blossom has alerted us. We need to get down to the Chamber of Secrets at once, my boy. I have Salazar with me."

Severus took hold of his father's hand while Albus caught hold of his phoenix Fawkes' tailfeathers. "We are ready, Fawkes. To Blossom, please."

Blossom was pleased to see Salazar with the other two wizards. The two wizards bowed to the great basilisk in greeting and then Salazar began to speak to his old familiar. Albus and Severus patiently listened to the exchange of Parseltongue until both became silent a few minutes later.

"Albus, Blossom tells me that the Evil has taken refuge beneath my head in the Grand Hall," Salazar Slytherin spoke quickly.

"The Grand Hall," wondered Severus. "I would have expected Voldemort would have hidden better."

Salazar added, "Blossom tells me that the Evil was seeking refuge when it collapsed. It has not moved."

"Then we must deal with it," began Albus.

"Headmaster," interrupted the portrait. "Blossom warns that what remains is poison. Be careful."

"We shall…"

"No, Father," Severus ordered firmly. "You will stay here with Blossom. I will do this. I have stood before the Dark Lord many times..." within his mind he finished, 'and in his eyes I saw death.' The Potions Master held up the curious little vial of black that glowed in the center with a white light. He then curled his fingers around the Essence of Dementor and spun out of the lab and followed the corridor to the Grand Hall.

Perpetual torches burned from the crowns of ceiling height serpents that rose up from the floor. Water from two narrow rivers to either side of a mosaic tile path overflowed giving the mosaic path a rippling surface.

Right away Severus was able to see something that resembled an insubstantial lump that had been
burned and scraped raw. Slowly he approached as if wary of a snake striking him and he not seeing it. The lump barely moved but for its form shuddering with possible cold.

With a wave of his hand Severus cleared the water so that there was an area around the Ka and himself that was dry. He then knelt upon one knee.

"My lord," he spoke smoothly but with that unemotional tone he always adopted when speaking to Death Eaters or Voldemort.

"Sssssssnape…!" whispered a voice from within the Ka.

With that voice came a mixture of emotions but foremost was, not unexpectedly, unreasonable anger; anger at being betrayed.

"Yes, my lord, it is I… your most deceptive servant, Severus Snape," he purred and allowed the hatred he had long harbored for his old master to fill his voice.

The Ka squirmed in a renewal of anger, hatred, and betrayal. Severus could sense that it wanted to strike out at him with bloody vengeance. And then he felt something otherworldly, like a tentacle, stretching forth for him. The wizard did not flinch.

"You are not my master anymore," he smiled but it was the smile of a very dangerous, ruthless man. "I am no longer marked by you." Severus then held up the teardrop shaped crystal that held the most diabolical potion he had ever created. The Ka shivered, and though it still radiated anger and hate there was now fear. "It is fortunate that you need not imbibe this, my lord…" The Ka tried to move away but it was far too weak. "…for you have no mouth and cannot… scream*.

Severus held his potion, his Essence of Dementor over the center of the near amorphous Ka. When he let go it floated as the wizard held it in place with his magic. The Potions Master then rose to his feet and backed away until he was beyond the dry circle he had created. He brought both his hands together and then with the force of a concentration of magic Severus thrust his hands apart. The phial shattered pouring its viscous black contents over the Ka.

Its shivering became a writhing of terror, and Severus, who had been the last the Dark Lord had ever legilimensed could hear the Ka… the soul of Voldemort corrupted by his own darkness and evil… scream.

As the Ka shriveled and faded ultimately to nothing, Severus allowed himself the last, cruel smile of satisfaction he would ever indulge in.

Chapter End Notes

* quote from a short story by Harlan Ellison. The story is For I Have No Mouth and Cannot Scream. It is a very good story and it makes me think of Severus having been trapped by two masters and never being able to speak as he wished.

Well. Now that the slimy business is dealt with...
A Cure Proposed

15 October 1985 - Hogwarts, Early Morning - A Cure Proposed

Since ending the existence of Voldemort the day before Severus had not slept; he was afraid that old nightmares he had imprisoned with his Occlumency shields had been awakened. He had tried to read, played chess against himself, and even had lemon tea with his father until the old man had begun to yawn. He had then spent a fruitless hour watching as the last of the full moon waned in the star-sprinkled sky. Then, with students and teachers snugly asleep in their beds he trudged out to the Whomping Willow, stopped its flailing branches, and descended into the tunnel beneath its great roots. He emerged within the Shrieking Shack.

Remus, due to the Wolfsbane, appeared exhausted after his first night's ordeal beneath the full moon. The transition from man to wolf was not easy but the Wolfsbane greatly reduced the horrible animal drive that often caused Remus to cause harm to himself. He would change, and soon after, as a full wolf, drift into sleep on the floor. Two more nights were ahead of him but Severus needed to speak to the wizard.

"Severus?" inquired Remus as he leaned back against the foot of the bed. He remained seated on the floor.

The Potions Master crouched down in front of the bewildered wizard. "I created the worst potion of my life," he began conversationally. "It destroyed Voldemort's soul as surely as a Dementor would with its kiss."

"He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is dead? Completely?" asked Remus in puzzlement.

"His name was Voldemort," Severus corrected with frustration. "You need not fear his name any longer. Now, pay... attention."

"Yes. Of course, Severus. You were saying?"

"If I am able to create a potion that will destroy a magical soul... Remus... then I can create a cure for Lycanthropy," Severus declared drily.

Remus smiled wryly and slowly shook his head as he scoffed, "No, Severus. A cure is impossible!"

Severus' gaze narrowed sharply, "I did not just 'put a stopper in death', Lupin, I created... death."

He rose to his full height and then put out his hand towards Remus. Remus stared at the proffered hand before accepting it. Severus' grip was firm and certain as he helped Remus to his feet. "You will be my guinea pig, Lupin." Remus frowned as he was unfamiliar with such an animal. "My test subject. My most willing... volun... teer."

"It is impossible, Severus," Remus shook his head as he sat down on the edge of the bed. "The closest anyone has come to a cure is Wolfsbane."

"And, therein I believe lies the problem. Tell me. I need to know precisely the differences in your transition when you are not under Wolfsbane and when you are," said Severus rather imperiously, and then he began to pace.

Remus studied the wizard before him. The Potions Master appeared wired and alert but there was weariness just beneath that facade. "Severus, when did you last sleep?" The man in question whirled angrily upon Remus; the werewolf did not flinch. "Don't take offense, Severus. I can see the
weariness upon your face. You haven't slept since He-Who—I mean, Voldemort, was vanquished."

Severus grasped the edges of his open cloak and drew it against himself as he crossed his arms over his chest in belligerence. "Not interested in contributing to a cure, Lupin? I will find another…"

Remus interrupted by holding up his hand. "I concede, Severus. I will disclose all the information you need, I will take your potions and tinctures, but first you must sleep."

Yes, Severus admitted to himself, I am tired down to my bones. However, my past... dances grotesquely at the edges of my consciousness. Nightmares awaited him should he fall into sleep. He dropped down to a sitting position beside Remus and lowered his head into his hands. Remus noted that the Potions Master would never show him such vulnerability.

"Severus," Remus spoke softly, "I cannot begin to think why you are not sleeping and I do not profess any such cure. A suggestion is all I have."

"And what is that, Lupin?"

Remus could hear the tired sneer in the man's voice even though he could not see his face. "Your son. I have observed you and he a time or two and when he hugs you it is as if the weight of the world leaves your shoulders. Go to Harry."

The werewolf's suggestion is ridiculous, thought Severus. Nevertheless he rose to his feet as the overwhelming need to see and hold his son took hold of every nerve and blood cell in his body. He looked down at Remus. "I do not have anticipate any detentions today, Remus. Take your dinner and then meet me in my office at 8 of the clock this evening. Be prepared. I will discover a cure."

Severus turned and billowed out of the Shrieking Shack.

Remus frowned as he realised that twice the Potions Master had referred to his first name.

15 October 1985 Hogwarts, Dungeons - A Bit Later in the Morning

Severus did not immediately go to his apartment and thence to his son's bedroom. He stopped in his classroom, prepared it for his first class, and then he vanished to his private lab. Once in his own domain he destroyed every single note in regards to the Essence of Dementor potion and its curious, teardrop, container. His demolition did not end there. He included the cauldron he had used, a precious cauldron carved from a single piece of iron. He melted it down added a fine powder of clear quartz to clean the liquefied metal. The quartz, now smutty with the 'filth' of the iron was extracted and Vanished so that it would never defile anything ever again. Severus then shaped the 'new' iron into a cauldron.

By that time it was five in the morning. Severus was loathe to disturb his son, and in turn his godson, from their blessed sleep. However, the need to see Harry, to hold him, even tickle him so he could bathe in the innocence of his laughter, had only grown with the passing of the hours. Leaving his lab behind the Potions Master made his way to his apartment.

Upon stepping into the sitting room he was rudely reminded that he had not expanded the kitchen, and his plans for a bedroom for Neville had not been done. Making a mental note to address both the moment he could he headed for Harry's 'Jungle Bedroom'.

At the door to his son's bedroom he paused. Harry's bed, which had been at the room's center, was now against the far wall on the right side of the Enchanted Window. Neville's bed was on the left.
Harry, now more relaxed in sleep, sprawled over his twin bed with Nellie asleep against his side. Neville, curled up to near obscurity beneath his covers, slept softly and peacefully.

The older wizard was very tempted to waken both his children but a full day of school awaited them all. He felt peace descend upon him, though, as he listened to the boys' gentle breathing as both slept. Making up his mind his transfigured one of the chairs in Harry's bedroom into a cot for himself. He removed his robe, and long jacket, then his shoes. Pulling back the covers of the cot he crawled in, lay down, and before he expected it, he slept.

Severus was not plagued by nightmares.

---

15 October 1985 - Breakfast

Severus was pleasantly startled awake when his exuberant son bounced on his cot, fell on his chest, and kissed him. Neville soon followed and the Potions Master actually laughed as his two boys cajoled him from bed.

"What are you doing in here, Shadow?" asked Harry as he nestled against his father's side.

Severus yawned and curled the more shy Neville against his other side. "I just needed my boys, Magpie." he kissed Harry's forehead. "And you, my Mouse, did you sleep well?"

Neville nodded. "I had a dream where I had my own garden, Shadow."

"Did you now?" He kissed Neville's cheek. Severus then pushed both boys from his cot. "Time for us to get ready for breakfast. Hurry now. Your grandfather would like to see both of you having breakfast in the Great Hall this morning."

Harry and Neville sprinted to their bathroom and soon there was the happy sound of water running as Harry began his shower, and Neville brushed his teeth. Severus roused himself, transfigured his cot back into a chair, gathered his coat and robe, and went to his room to make himself ready for the day.

Twenty minutes later all three were fresh, dressed, and quite hungry for breakfast. Severus escorted his boys to the Great Hall where they were greeted with smiles from nearly all of the students. Bill and Charlie Weasley waved, and all at the Slytherin table smiled, waved, or nodded in greeting.

The staff all greeted the Snapes and Neville and the two little boys took a moment to embrace their grandfather. Albus had each of the boys sitting on either side of him while Severus sat beside Harry to the left. Just as Severus was tapping the table for his son's breakfast, he felt the warmth of a hand to his shoulder. He looked back and up, and was pleased to see Poppy.

"I hope you don't mind, Severus, but Albus moved me from the end of the table to beside you," she said with a smirking smile.

Severus nodded, rose, pulled out the Healer's chair, and helped her into it. He noticed that she no longer affected the Glamour that aged her. No less beautiful to him with the Glamour he did notice that she had a much fresher look that had matured with her own natural age. Her eyes, a blue that was nearly gem-like in their richness, sparkled with warmth. He did much prefer Poppy without the Glamour.

Breakfast passed with agreeable chatter and Severus observed that everyone around him appeared more relaxed than they had been since returning from their Summer vacations.
"The last of the magic exhausted students, DeWayne Johnson, was sent back to Hufflepuff today, Severus," commented Poppy.

"Very good," nodded Severus as he sipped at his coffee. "There is a general air of vitality that was absent before, Poppy."

Poppy smiled. "I woke up feeling as though I were free to breathe without restriction."

Severus gave her a small smile as he nodded. "I must admit, I slept better than I have in years." He placed his coffee mug on the table and turned to the Healer. "Poppy, I am beginning a project where I would welcome your medical opinion, and expertise. Would you be available?"

"Of course, Severus," smiled Poppy demurely. "Any time that you need me I will be available for you."

Severus raised his gaze to the witch sitting beside him. She nodded, winked, and he felt suddenly rather pleasantly… uncomfortable. He did not return her smile but his black gaze glittered in understanding. When she turned away to concentrate on her breakfast Severus rested his hand on Poppy's thigh. He smirked as she jolted. However, the wily witch did not move the Potions Master's hand.

Manchester Primary School for Witches & Wizards

Draco and Neville applauded as they watched the blue crayon skate easily across the surface of the paper. Harry had finally managed to control the crayon with his magical intention. And, he noted to himself, he was not frowning, glaring, or glowering at the crayon. It moved as if it coloured across ice.

"Very good, Harry!" praised Madame Bilcross. "That will be an extra star for you today. Your father will be very proud of you."

Harry blushed. "Thank you, Ma'am."

"All right, Draco. It is your turn. Show me what you can do with that crayon," said Madame Bilcross.

Draco nodded, grabbed the crayon, and set it down on the paper. He then looked at it and tried not to frown. He recalled his father telling him once that the best magic was done when the caster was relaxed and confident. When the crayon did not move he huffed out a breath, closed his eyes briefly, and then looked at the crayon again. This time he filled his thoughts with his desire to see the crayon drawing across the paper. In that moment of thought the crayon flew across the paper leaving behind a straight but solid line of blue.

"Very good, Draco," smiled Madame Bilcross. "You get an extra star today as well."

"Thank you, Ma'am!" grinned Draco.

"Now, Neville, it is your turn. Let's see how you do."

Neville nodded, picked up the crayon and placed it in front of himself on the paper. His glance was worried as he looked at the crayon. It wobbled but did not move. He glowered and crossed his arms tightly over his chest.

Harry moved over to Neville and whispered encouragingly, "You can do this, Nev. You just showed
me how to do it. Right?” Neville nodded and uncrossed his arms. "Okay, breathe and make that crayon colour lots."

Neville breathed in and out, put his hands on the edge of the table in front of him, and leaned slightly forward as he watched the crayon. In his mind he thought of the crayon colouring a huge expanse of blue sky for birds to fly in. Suddenly, and to everyone's surprise, the crayon melted and the colourful wax smeared across the paper.

"Wow! Wicked!” cried out both Draco and Harry as they clapped. Neville was not smiling. He was embarrassed at having destroyed the crayon.

Madame Bilcross knelt beside Neville and patted his back. "You did well, Neville. Your intent was a bit overmuch but you will learn to focus that."

"But I just made a mess, Madame,” sighed Neville mournfully.

"You did not,” the witch admonished sternly. "Tell me, what did you imagine for that crayon to do?"

"Well, I was thinking of a big sky with lots of birds to fly in it," replied Neville. "Too much?"

"Ambitious I would say," said Madame Bilcross. She then tapped the paper with the swath of blue.

"And, you did create a sky as you intended. Therefore, an extra star for you, Neville."

"Ohhh, thank you!"

---

15 October 1985, Hogwarts - Evening Before Dinner

Albus stood looking out of his tower window with his hands together, resting against the small of his back. The sun was just a thin sliver in a dark blue sky with artistic shades of purple, burnt orange, dull pink, and quiet yellow. An entire day had passed of classes, points gained and lost, and detentions set. All this without the looming threat of Voldemort.

The Headmaster had collected from his son the pensieve memory of the Dark Wizard's final dissolution. He had made an acceptable modification which stripped out Severus' emotion as he poured the Essence of Dementor over the creature that was the remains of Voldemort's Ka. In the privacy of his bedroom he had wept for his son who had held such a great and painful hatred of the thing that had once entrapped his soul as his slave.

Albus had, for a long time, chosen not to think of what his spy was going through when he had to face his Dark master. The abuses Severus tolerated in order to gather intelligence upon Voldemort and his Death Eaters the older wizard only now realised had nearly destroyed his son.

Harry coming into the younger man's life had changed him. Severus was now free to love and to be loved. This he had embraced so quickly, as a parched man might thirst for water, that Severus had taken Neville into his family. That had been quite unexpected to Albus who had been thinking of seeking a good family for the small boy. Instead, Severus had not only taken guardianship of Neville but he had made the boy his godson. It allowed Albus to claim the child as his grandson, though only in name.

As Albus spied the creation of magical lights down on the front lawn of the castle he saw that nearly two dozen students had gathered just before the evening meal for an impromptu snow fight. He was pleased to be a silent witness to this youthful joy. He was pleasantly stunned when he realised that the students were being refereed by his son, Severus. The captains of each team appeared to be Harry and Neville.
Levitating one of his chairs over to the window Albus settled in to watch as the snowballs began flying. With a wave of his wand he was able to hear the joyous screams and laughter as the snowballs hit their targets or missed. Much too soon the snowball fight was ended with Harry cheering on the winner's team, Neville.

Albus muted the sounds, smiled and returned to his desk. Not before murmuring, "100 points to Slytherin."

Much later as Severus was just ushering his Slytherins out of the Great Hall after they had eaten dinner he glanced over the staff table at the large hourglasses that held the gems for each of the Hogwarts Houses: ruby for Gryffindor, sapphire for Ravenclaw, citrine for Hufflepuff and emerald for Slytherin.

"Two-hundred and eighty-three points for Slytherin?" the Potions Master frowned. "How did we earn 100 points in one day?"

"Don't worry, Severus," smiled Minerva McGonagall as she passed him. "I'm sure your Slytherins will lose at least that much in the next Quidditch game."

"Unlikely, Minerva, I understand that your Seeker has a difficulty with heights," he smirked.

Minerva scowled. "I do believe you are misinformed, Severus. Mr. Jackson is simply not fond of heights above the playing field." The Transfiguration teacher sauntered after her Gryffindors.

Severus smirked smugly. "Afraid of heights, I dare say."
Hallowe'en Part I

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hallowe'en 1985 - Part I

For possibly the 1,000th time that day Harry and Neville looked at the box of inks and the glass pen they had bought for Severus at the Hogsmeade Winter Faire. Poppy had decided that the gift ought to be given on Hallowe'en since Severus, at the least, did not look upon the holiday as one to celebrate. Whether he drank or broke things Poppy could not say. She had only ever seen the aftermath in the portrait of a Potions Master who took too many points from students, and overloaded Filch with detentions. That, and he tended to bite the head off of any adult that tried to say good morning, or wished him well.

Poppy knew that Harry and Neville would keep his thoughts busy so he would not mourn and the gift of the drawing pen and inks would give the Potions Master a good memory for Hallowe'en.

As for Harry he had not, yet, realised that his parents had been killed by an evil wizard. He still believed what his aunt and uncle told him which is that his parents had been killed while James was driving drunk. He had not been told the truth and no one had ever told him that the Ka of the nearly dead Dark wizard that killed his parents almost took over his body.

As Severus watched his last class of the day finish a test he had set for them he found his mind occupied with these thoughts about his son. Harry had to know the truth but Severus had neglected saying anything beforehand because he had been busy. And, to be honest, there just never seemed to be a right time to tell a child the truth about his parents deaths.

Making his decision he drummed his fingers on the surface of his desk and rose to his feet. "Bring your tests to my desk and get out of here," ordered Severus.

Without question ink and quill were put into book bags and the class made an orderly rush to place their tests on their teacher's desk. No student complained about not finishing due to the fact that no one had ever finished one of Professor Snape's tests. Finally, the last student left and with a wave of his hand the door slammed shut. Taking a deep breath he prepared to meet with his son and to disclose to him what he never wanted to think of.

A chorus of "Shadow!" greeted Severus as he opened the door to his apartment and he hugged each boy that hugged him tightly back. "So, did the two of you have a good day off from school?" asked Severus as he took off his teaching robe, unbuttoned his long coat, and settled into his chair.

"Of course we did, Shadow," smiled Harry. "We fed the Thestrals, and Buckbeak, watched the Unicorns for awhile, and then we played with Fang and Droopy."

"Droopy's getting so big, Shadow," added Neville.

"How big is that puppy, Mouse?" asked Severus as he tickled the child's ribs.

Neville burst into laughter and ducked away from the Potions Master's long, tickling fingers.

"Droopy's half the size of Fang now, Shadow."

"He still steps on his ears, though," smirked Harry.
"Dear me, Magpie, that is… terrible!" Severus tickled Harry's ribs until he burst with giggles. "I'll find your tickle spot someday, Shadow!" smiled Harry.

"Never," Severus declared smugly. He glanced around. "Where is your elf?"

Neville shrugged as he looked down sternly at his feet. Harry replied, "Fry just dropped us off and told us that someone in Slytherin was Summoning him."

Severus scowled. "That does it," he growled. "House elves as sitters are terribly unreliable."

"Then who's going to watch us, Shadow?" asked Neville worriedly.

"We could watch ourselves," asserted Harry. "We're five years old so we should get some 'sponsibilities, right, Shadow?"

"Responsibility, Magpie. And, I do believe that your chores are enough responsibility. I would feel much better if someone were with you when I cannot be," said Severus firmly. "Perhaps one of my seventh year Snakes might be available for a few galleons." He then drew his son into his lap. "Neville, I need to speak to Harry. Would you mind going to your room for about a half hour?"

Neville was about to agree but Harry, instantly worried, shook his head. "I want Nev to stay. Please, Dad?"

Severus hesitated but then nodded. Rising from his chair he moved to the sofa where both boys could sit on either side of him.

Harry began to twist one of the cloth covered buttons on his father's vest. "Am I in trouble?"

"No," Severus said softly as he stroked his son's worried fingers. "I have something difficult to tell you that you should have been told long ago, Harry. I was… remiss… in my duty as your father and your protector. I promised you that I would always speak the truth but in this, I simply said nothing."

Harry gulped. "Dad, just say it 'cuz you're scaring me."

"Me, too," whispered Neville.

Severus decided it was no longer good for him to stall or hedge. "Harry, what did your aunt and uncle tell you of your parents deaths?"

"That my father was a drunk and he was driving and got into an accident that killed him and mum. I survived," Harry replied rapidly. "But… uhm… after you and grandpa told me that they lied to me about everything to me I figured that was probably a lie, too." Harry slowly looked up at his father and Severus saw in his son's eyes something that both warmed him and tore his heart in half; Harry completely trusted him. "How did my parents die, Shadow?"

Severus brushed Harry's hair off of his forehead, and kissed the smooth brow. "Your mother and father were never drunks, Magpie. They were two, very courageous people who fought for what they believed in which was a tolerant wizarding world that accepted all people with magic whether Squib, Muggle-born, or Half-blood." Harry smiled wanly. He was proud of his parents but a tiny part of him was mad because they were not with him. "At the time they, and others, were fighting for Light, a Dark wizard rose. It was he who believed that you would someday have the power to destroy him. Your parents, my dearest Magpie, lost their lives so that they could keep you safe."

"That's stupid," muttered Harry. "I was a little baby."
"It is stupid, Magpie," agreed Severus. "For, as it turned out, it was your grandfather, myself, Remus Lupin, and Lucius Malfoy who ultimately destroyed the evil of the Dark wizard." He smiled softly.

"So, that's what you were doing when all of you got exhausted, Shadow? You were saving me and everyone?" Harry grinned with pleasure as he hugged his father.

Severus started to embrace his son but he felt a tentative tug upon his sleeve from his opposite side.

"Mouse, what is it?"

"Shadow, do you know what happened to my parents?" asked the small boy.

Severus did know but he never knew that Neville was as in the dark about his parents as was Harry.

"What did your grandmother tell you, my little Mouse?"

"Gran told me that a horrible, evil witch took them away and that I'd never know them. I figured out that it probably happened on Hallowe'en 'cuz she and Uncle Algy would get drunk together that night while I was locked in my room."

"Hallowe'en?" gasped Harry. "When were my parents killed, Shadow?"

"The same night, Magpie." He watched, somewhat sorrowfully, as his son slid off the sofa and trotted over to Neville. Harry climbed up beside his new cousin, hugged him, and looked up at his father.

"Did Nev's gran tell the truth, Shadow?" asked Harry.

"Not quite," Severus replied. "While the Dark wizard went to your home, Magpie, a witch of horrid darkness went to Longbottom Manor. Bellatrix LeStrange cursed your parents until their minds became so lost they could not recover. They now reside at St. Mungo's."

"So they're alive?" Neville asked hopefully. "What does that mean that their minds were lost? Can I see them?"

Severus leaned back in the sofa and drew Harry onto his lap and tucked Neville into his side. "To lose one's mind means that the mind is so far away it cannot be reached. The body functions as it needs but that which makes a person who they are no longer exists." Neville sniffled and Severus cupped his hand over the child's head as tears began. "I can tell you, little Mouse, that your parents loved you dearly. They always brought you to the Order of the Phoenix meetings, or they had photographs of you. Never did Frank or Alice Longbottom stop in extolling the virtues of their progeny."

Neville sniffed back his tears. "Did you like me then, Shadow?"

"Certainly not, Mouse," he declared, but smiled enough to show the sensitive boy that what he felt then did not matter now. "You were an irritatingly happy brat that gurgled at everyone, and played with your mother's hair."

Neville giggled shyly. "Was I really irritating, Shadow?"

"Nearly always," Severus replied nonchalantly. "Of course, there was that one time that Black… Sirius Black held you in his arms. You gurgled and grabbed so tightly onto his beard that you would not let go. He screamed like a little girl until your mother took your hands from his beard." He nodded at the memory. "I rather liked you then."

Both boys chuckled. Harry piped up, "How about me, Shadow? Did my parents ever bring me to
"Oh yes," moaned Severus as if he were in pain. "Nearly as much as Frank and Alice brought Neville." He shook his head with a mockingly dark glare. "How we ever got anything done with two infants turning all the adults into babbling fools is beyond me." He then sobered and eyed his two boys. "Are the two of you going to view Hallowe'en with depression now that I have told you the truth of your parents?"

Both boys shook their heads but Neville spoke up, "Our parents loved us as much as you love us, Shadow. I don't think they'd ever want us to be sad. Don't you think so Harry?"

Harry nodded. "The ones who need to be sad are the bad people that hurt our parents. Right, Shadow? They're sad now, aren't they?"

"Very sad. The Dark wizard is dead as dead can be and Bellatrix LeStrange will only leave Azkaban in a pine box," assured Severus. Severus then Summoned a rather old looking volume of stories. "Now, since I heard the two of you whispering about Hallowe'en I thought you might enjoy knowing its history in our world so I have a little story here for the both of you." He flipped open the book as Harry scurried back over to his father's right side and Neville tucked himself into his godfather's side.

"Ten centuries ago, so they say," began Severus. "The story of Samhain and Féile na Marbh (the Feast of the Dead) wove themselves into the Celtic mysteries of the Emerald Isle. Samhain was the celebration of the last harvest during the year which yielded a wealth of fruit and nuts to all. Therefore, in honour of those who harvested such delicacies, fruits and nuts were gifted to all good children in sweets. Those sweets were not served at mealtime but in the hours when the Veil, the thin fabric between the worlds of the living and the dead, was at its thinnest. This was when all the houses were alight with fires, candles, and torches. The children would visit these houses, offer their blessings of health and happiness, and the owners of the houses would bestow their sweets filled with nuts and fruits to their guests."

"That's like the trick or treating the Muggles do," said Harry softly.

"Somewhat, Magpie," nodded Severus. "Muggle children bargained for sweets and left a trick if a sweet was not given. In the wizards world it is innocence, the child, that gives the gift of a blessing and in return is given a sweet."

"That's nicer," commented Neville.

"I like it," agreed Harry. "Will we get to do that?"

"Something like it, Magpie. Our tradition at Hogwarts has meshed a little with Muggle tradition," explained Severus.

"What's Fay No Mar, Shadow?" asked Neville.

"Féile na Marbh," Severus pronounced the Gaelic carefully. "It is the Feast of the Dead."

"That sounds scary!" shuddered Neville.

"Do they eat gross, dead things?" worried Harry.

Severus chuckled. "Not at all, my inquisitive ones. The Feast of the Dead serves two purposes. First it is to celebrate the bounty of the year's harvest with a feast of all the good food the community cooks and shares with each other. The second purpose is to provide the Dead of loved ones with the
memories of the comforts of hearth and home in order to receive their blessings of long life to the living."

"What about those ghosts who aren't loved, Shadow?" asked Harry.

"That is what the lighted pumpkins with the frightening faces are for, Magpie," said Severus gently, "The terrible faces, and the light from candles made of beeswax scare the spirits that are not wanted away."

"Is that why Hagrid grew all those giant pumpkins?" asked Neville.

"Quite so, Mouse," nodded Severus. "Here at Hogwarts we have a Hallowe'en feast which will consist of all the foods the students and staff consider their favourites. The Great Hall will be decorated with the large pumpkins around the floor of the Hall and smaller pumpkins will float far above the revellers beneath the enchanted ceiling.

"I heard there's going to be bats and spiders at the feast," commented Harry. "Is that true, Shadow?"

"Of course there will be," confirmed Severus. "Most of the Muggle-born tend to believe that spiders and bats are just a part of Hallowe'en decor. However, both have long held strong meaning for witches and wizards. Bats represent the transition from life to death. It is the lowly bat that carries the soul from the living world to the world of the dead."

"So bats aren't really scary, then," mused Harry.

"I always thought the bats in the Longbottom belfry were kind of cute," observed Neville. "Gran just told me they were filthy and full of diseases."

"Hm," sighed Severus. "Bats can carry diseases but that depends upon their food source. If disease is part of their food source, bats will harbour the disease. However, there are many bats, especially in our world, that are treated as more than just a filthy, disease ridden pest. The next time you visit Hagrid, ask him about the colony of bats we have here at Hogwarts."

"We got bats?" Harry rose up on his knees in excitement.

Neville squirmed up to his knees. "Can we see the bats?"

"Yes, Magpie, we do have bats," smiled Severus. "And, Mouse, I am most certain that Hagrid will take you to visit the Hogwarts bats. Now, settle back down."

Both boys settled back onto the sofa and then Harry asked, "Shadow, you said spiders were going to be at the feast. Are they bad?"

Severus shook his head. "They are not, Magpie. Spiders weave webs which represent the threads of time, fate, and one's journey in life. They do not represent a thing of fear. As you might know one of our world's favourite fabrics is woven from spider silk."

"But, some spiders have poison," said Neville. "My Uncle Algy told me that I had a cousin who was poisoned by an Acromantula that he hunted and that the poison melted his face off."

"Eewwwww!" was Harry's sentiment. Severus tickled Harry who let out a giggling screech. The older man then tickled Neville.

When the tickling was done Severus spoke about the Acromantula. "The Acromantula are formidable opponents but there is much that is valuable about them beyond being a trophy. Their silk
web is the finest in our world. It creates a fabric that is soft, and is also the base in many medical plasters. Yes, they are poisonous but if one were stung by an Acromantula that person would die of organ paralysis." He raised a skeptical eyebrow at his godson. "It would not melt a person's face off." Neville smiled sheepishly. "Acromantula poison is the basis for many healing potions and also the basis for several, illegal, deadly potions. The meat of the Acromantula is highly prized in New Guinea and Australia. So, spiders deserve our respect, not our fear."

"I'll just squash 'em on the pavement if they ever bother me," muttered Harry.

Severus chuckled as Neville replied, "Acromantulas get really big, Harry. It would probably squash you!"

Harry sneered but then smiled at Neville. "Shadow? Are we still getting a story?"

"Yes, my impatient Magpie, you are," Severus squashed his son until he let out a giggling peep, and then he began to read. "Many years ago three little children, first year students from the House of the Brave, learned the meaning of Féile na Marbh… the Feast of the Dead on the night of Samhain."

"What were their names, Shadow?" asked Neville from the cocoon he had burrowed into against his godfather's side and the sofa afghan.


"And they were all brave?" asked Harry.

"Recklessly so, Magpie," sighed Severus. "A few days before Hogwarts Feast of Samhain the three friends, who wandered and explored wherever they could, were invited to a real Feast of the Dead by one of the ghosts of the castle."

"Who invited them, Shadow?" asked Neville.

"Nearly Headless Nick, the outgoing ghost of Gryffindor. He is the one that invited the three children to the ghostly Feast of the Dead. Rose, Hugo, and Jaime had always treated the ghost with courtesy whereas many of the students tended to ignore the ghosts the ghosts of the castle."

"Except for Peeves," giggled Harry. "No one ignores him."

Severus rolled his eyes. Peeves was a troublesome poltergeist that had given him three years of annoyance. He was about ready to go against the Headmaster's wishes and exorcise the slimy spirit.

"Yes, well Rose had read about the Celtic Feast of the Dead but she had found nothing about an actual Feast of the Dead held by the dead. Thus, her curiosity spurred her impetus. Hugo and Jaime, though," sighed Severus with a shake of his head. "They only wanted the sweets they had heard of that were at the Samhain Feast. The true Feast of the Dead was of passing interest to those two."

"Rose didn't think so," guessed Neville.

"Oh no," agreed Severus. "Rose was determined to go to the Feast of the Dead with Nearly Headless Nick and her two best friends were coming with her." Severus flipped one of the parchment pages and began to read, "The ghosts of Hogwarts had only one place within all of the castle that they congregated. This was the magnificent floating ballroom. This was the strange room whose door was never to be found in the same place twice. Due to this fact, it had long since been abandoned by the living and the dead had taken it over.

"Nicolas de Mimsy-Porpington was delighted on Samhain eve to escort three living children to the
floating ballroom. The dead were often wary of the living but Nick enjoyed his status as Gryffindor
Ghost and though many of the students simply ignored him and his brethren, Rose, Hugo and Jaime
all talked to him as though he still lived. A fact often forgotten by all four until Nick’s head would
slip, and nearly fall from his shoulders. Rose, the curious Muggle-born, had once asked Nick about
his nearly headless state and she had been told, 'Twas a botched execution - terribly painful to speak
of'. Therefore, she knew to curb her curiosity about a ghosts' death.

The Feast of the Dead for the spirits of Hogwarts was a maelstrom of activity. A Headless Hunt, the
Nick was barred from since his beheading was not a clean one, kept racing through and above the
ballroom. Couples from all time periods since the first year Hogwarts came into being danced, drank
champagne, and socialised. Along one wall of the glittering mica-gold ballroom was a buffet feast to
dazzle the eye… if you were a ghost."

"Why, Shadow?" asked Harry.

"Ghosts cannot truly eat or drink, Magpie. However, they can pretend with food of the past…"
Severus paused before concluding, "…food that has spoiled, is moldy, dried out… in essence it
has… died."

Neville grimaced and Harry shuddered.

"Quite so," agreed the Potions Master. "Rose, Hugo, and Jaime felt rather dismayed to discover that
the Feast of the Dead was literally dead."

"I'm hungry," complained Jaime.

"So am I," added Hugo mournfully.

"I'm hungry, too, but we can ignore that for now," stated Rose. "There's so much more for us to
observe and do."

"Rose, this is silly," chided Hugo. "We're not dead, we can't dance, we're certainly not headless so
we can't hunt, and we sure can't eat anything! Let's go."

"Nick's busy getting that Grey Lady to talk to him so he doesn't care about us. Let's just go, Rose,"
Jaime nearly whined.

"Rose was a curious child with an insatiable need to know… everything," Severus continued to read.
"She could not persuade her friends to stay, and so they left the Feast of the Dead to take part in the
Samhain Feast of Hogwarts. Jaime gorged on treacle tarts and honey cream puffs whereas Rose and
Hugo ate some vegetables and meat before indulging in the sweets."

"I bet Jaime had a tummy ache later," commented Harry.

"Most likely," nodded Severus as he closed the book and sent it floating back to the bookcase. "We
will join the Hallowe'en Feast with students and staff but then your grandfather and I will be taking
the two of you on a little midnight adventure."

Severus rose from the sofa and tugged his two little boys off the sofa. "Time to get dressed. Robes
are not needed. Go," he nudged each with a hand to their backs. "Get ready."

The boys sprinted to the 'jungle room' giggling. The older man shouted after them, "No ridiculous
socks!" Shaking his head he went to his bedroom. He had just noticed that Harry's influence over the
smaller boy had extended to Neville now wearing colourful socks. There was no doubt in his mind
that when it was time to replenish Neville's wardrobe he would want his own 'ridiculous' socks.
In the books, Nearly Headless Nick invited the Golden Trio to his Deathday Party which was on Hallowe'en. I took a bit of creative license in order to show tradition of Samhain (sow-whain) and The Feast of the Dead.
Chapter Notes

This chapter is dedicated to our dear dog Roswell who passed away on 22 April 2016 from heart failure. He was 10. Greatly loved, forever missed.

**Hallowe'en - Part II**

Harry sat to his father's right side between his grandfather and father. Poppy sat on his left, and Neville sat on the other side of Albus. Poppy leaned forward to glance at Neville eating quietly.

"Neville looks positively lonesome all the way over there, Severus," commented the Healer.

"Albus was adamant in having both of the boys sit either side of him," Severus leaned forward to look at his godson. The child not only looked lonely he was exuding an air of solitude. He turned to his son. "Magpie, bring your cousin over here, please?"

"Sure, Shadow!" Harry slipped off his chair to retrieve Neville. Severus waved his wand and Transfigured the chair into a bench. The boys were small enough; they would fit.

"Hi," said Neville through his grin.

"Severus?" asked Albus softly.

The Potions Master spoke, "I cannot tell if you are eating properly so far away, Mouse. I think you should sit beside Magpie from now on." He then gave his father a stern look as he concluded, "You are *my* boys and I should like you beside me… not split apart."

Albus leaned towards the two five year olds now sitting on the bench. "My apologies, Neville. I merely wanted you and Harry close to me and I was not even thinking. Will you both still talk to me at meals?"

Harry patted the older wizard's hand. "Course we will, Grandpa. Won't we, Nev?"

Neville smiled, and nodded. Severus whispered, "Speak, little Mouse."

"Sorry… uhm, yes. I'll still talk to you… uhm… Grandfather," Neville spoke aloud, smiled shyly, and then concentrated on his dinner.

Harry leaned towards his father. "Shadow? Can Madame Pomfrey come on our midnight adventure?"

"If she wishes to, she may," Severus murmured back. "Shall I ask her?" Harry nodded enthusiastically. Severus turned slightly towards the Hogwarts matron. "Poppy, would you care to join myself, my father, and the boys for a midnight adventure?"

Poppy lowered her forkful of food, and slowly smiled. "A midnight adventure? It sounds intriguing, Severus. Yes, I would very much like to join all of you."
Once the feast was finished all of the Hogwarts House tables were moved back along the walls. The tables then groaned with the appearance of marvelous and extravagantly presented puddings. The sweets were set upon by all of the students and not a few teachers groaned softly as they imagined the coming sugar highs… and tummy aches.

"…but why can't we have whatever we want, Dad?" complained Harry.

"I am allowing you to have whatever you might wish to eat, Harry," explained Severus. "However, I am only allowing you two treats each."

"But they don't have to stop at two," Harry said as he observed Charlie Weasley taking a treacle tart, a piece of butter rum cake, and several, colourful lollipops."

Severus caught his son by his shoulders and turned him away from a few girls that were decimating something pink, with whipped cream and sugar pearls. "My Snakes are only being allowed three treats, Harry. And, before you ask why you are only allowed two that is because you are five and your stomach is far too small for so many sweets."

"There's too many to choose from," Harry pouted stubbornly as he crossed his arms over his chest. Severus' gaze darkened as he glared down at his child. "Shall I reduce that choice to zero, Mr. Snape?"

Harry's head shot up as he heard himself addressed as 'mister'. If he wasn't Magpie, or Harry but Mr. Snape, that did not bode well for his father's temper towards him. He uncrossed his arms and the contrite look upon his face was genuine. "I'm sorry, Dad. Two's a lot. I'll choose two puddings."

Neville, who had been observing the little exchange, caught Harry's hand and dragged him over to one of the dessert tables. "Take a plate of cream puffs, Harry. There's five on each plate so that's like five puddings."

Harry grinned. "I like that!" He then pointed out another pretty dessert. "Look at that, Nev! Tiny cakes with frosting!"

Neville nodded, "I want some of those, Harry." Stretching up on tiptoe he tried to reach a plate with the small cakes but he was too short. He growled under his breath.

"I can't reach the cream puffs," huffed Harry.

"Hey, you two," a slim, petite, elfin looking seventh year Slytherin young woman walked over to the boys. Her blonde hair had been tamed with glossy curls and she wore a long gown of pink with green ivy on the bodice.

"Adelaide!" grinned Harry. "We can't reach the puddings we want."

Adelaide smiled. "Lots of yummy stuff, Harry. What were you trying to reach?"

"I want a plate of cream puffs and a plate of those neat, little cakes," replied the little boy. Adelaide handed Harry just what he wanted and he wandered back to the staff table gazing in wonder at his sweets. "Neville? See something you like?"

"I want the same thing, Adelaide, please?" Neville asked politely.

The Slytherin girl patted the small boy's shoulder and then floated down a plate of each of the
sweets. "I'll keep these floating, Neville, and take you back to Professor Snape."

"Sure!"

Adelaide took up Neville's hand in hers. The sweets floated in front of her, controlled by her wand in her other hand. The young witch walked up to the Staff Table and delivered her charge with his bounty. "Blessed Samhain to you, Professor Snape."

Severus nodded his head courteously. "A blessed Samhain to you, as well, Miss Ollivander. Thank you for escorting my boys to the Staff Table." Just as the girl started to take her leave her Head of House stopped her. "Miss Ollivander, you applied to the WCS for an apprenticeship, did you not?"

Adelaide sighed. "I did, Professor, but with their recent scandal in regards to the orphanage and its head Dolores Umbridge..." she shook her head. "I don't know where to look, Sir, and I really would like to work with children."

"Well, I cannot solve the problems of WCS for you, Miss Ollivander, but as a stop-gap I have a proposal for you," Severus suggested his idea for a replacement of an elf as babysitter. The young woman looked hopeful. "I find that I am in need of someone to take care of my son and godson after they have returned from school at 3:30pm during the week. That person would need to stay with them until I am finished with my office hours, and detentions until 8 in the evening. If you include additional tutoring in reading and writing, I would be pleased to write a letter of recommendation towards any apprenticeship you would like."

Adelaide beamed. "Oh, Professor Snape, I would love to be of help to you! When would I start?"

"Harry and Neville go back to school on Friday, the first of November," replied the Head of Slytherin. "Would that be acceptable to you?"

"That would be perfect, Professor Snape. Thank you!" Adelaide gave him a modest curtsey and then returned to the Slytherins where a tall, handsome young man with grey eyes and raven black, straight hair just below his shoulders, swept the young woman into a dance.

Adelaide Ollivander and her affianced Galen Burke were both from Pureblood families known as the Sacred Twenty-Eight. The Sacred Twenty-Eight were, according to the author of the Pure-Blood Directory (widely believed to have been Cantankerus Nott), the twenty-eight British families that were still "truly pure-blood" by the 1930s. Neither family had supported Voldemort openly although the Burkes had long been associated with the discovery and preservation of Dark Artefacts through arcaneology. Galen's uncle, Damian Burke, was a proprietor of the infamous Borgin & Burke's in Knockturn Alley. Damian, a Death Eater, was currently a resident of Azkaban. Galen had an aspiration of distancing himself from that side of his family and had a strong interest in arcaneology. Severus had written a letter of recommendation for the young man when he expressed a desire to follow his family's work but as an UnSpeakable.

Poppy leaned towards the Potions Master, "Adelaide is a good girl, Severus. She'll make a good nanny for your boys."

"Nanny?" inquired Severus.

"Being a nanny is a very noble profession, Severus. Isn't that what Adelaide wanted?" asked Poppy.

"Miss Ollivander spoke of working with children and thus I had suggested WCS for her training. Should I have encouraged her to look into the field of... nannies?" asked Severus a touch acidly.

Poppy glared. "Don't act as if being a nanny is nothing more than babysitting, Severus Snape. For a
young woman to be a nanny it requires medical training with young children, an Exceeds Expectations on one's NEWTs in Potions with an emphasis on healing potions and potions for children," Poppy took a breath and a swallow of her juice before continuing, "Education for the nanny must include the basics of reading, writing, and maths plus the basic education for young, magical children."

"Forgive me, Poppy, I truly had no idea," Severus apologised. "The majority of my Pureblood witches are only concerned with a good Binding to strengthen family lineage. I must admit when Miss Ollivander first mentioned her aspiration of working with children’ I did not take it seriously. It was only after she began to ask me questions I really did not have answers for that I paid more attention to her future. Do you have any suggestions to put her on the proper path to her goal?"

Poppy nodded, "I would suggest a one year apprenticeship in the Childrens Ward at St. Mungos to begin after she receives her NEWTs. I would then speak to Lucius Malfoy in regards to the wizarding orphanage he is now in charge of. Adelaide should have a position there as carer. Once she's had a year there then she ought to look for a position as a nanny unless she wishes to stay at the orphanage."

For a moment Severus watched the young couple as they ended their dance. A consummate gentleman, Galen escorted his fiance to a small table at the edge of the dance floor. "I am curious, though, Poppy. A nanny is generally single, is she not? Would not such a position be difficult for a young woman intending to be married?"

"Galen has applied for the UnSpeakables, Severus. It is a strict and thorough regimen and although he is allowed a relationship he will not be allowed marriage for at least 5 years. Once he receives his robes of office in the UnSpeakables, he will be allowed marriage and his spouse will be inducted into their secrecy vows." Poppy finished her drink. "Adelaide will need a position for that time. I believe either being a nanny or working as a carer at the Malfoy Orphanage…"

Severus chuckled. "Lucius would not like to hear it being called that."

Poppy smiled. "Too late, if scuttlebutt is truth. The orphanage is already being called the Malfoy Orphanage. It is quite a feather in his cap, though. The Ministry is looking very seriously at the orphanage and the wizard himself."

Severus finished eating, tapped the table with his wand, and his plate, glass and utensils vanished back to the Hogwarts kitchen. He and Poppy continued to speak quietly while Neville and Harry played wizarding checkers, wizarding chess battle (a game with the wizarding chess pieces that Harry, Draco, and Neville invented) and even danced with a group of Slytherins until the boys returned to Severus happily exhausted from laughing too hard.

"Tired, gentlemen?" smirked Severus to the two, panting boys.

"No!" gasped Neville with a grin.

"What's next, Shadow?" asked Harry.

Right at that moment the half hour before midnight chimed from the great, old clock high above the Entrance Hall.

Severus rose from his chair. "Father, time to go," he interrupted the Headmaster who was speaking to Minerva. Albus nodded to his son who was helping Poppy from her chair.

Albus Summoned Harry and Neville’s Winter robes, scarves, and mittens. The boys quickly donned
their snow-repelling outer wear and Severus ushered them through the crowd of students and out to
the Entrance Hall. He was followed by Albus who had given his elbow to the Healer so he could
escort them behind the Potions Master.

Harry grabbed Neville's hand and they both began to skip behind Severus Snape as they walked out
of the castle. The Potions Master, a wizard with exceptional hearing, heard the two chanting, "We're
going on an adventure! We're going on an adventure!"
The story of Prince Malachi owes its inspiration to Mandilove2007's beloved dog, Malachi and The 12 Dancing Princesses by Brothers Grimm.

This chapter is dedicated to Malachi.

Hallowe'en Part III - Midnight

"Maighdean ag damhsa Malachi ar," Albus harmoniously breathed the words that had come from the Emerald Isle.

Harry had fallen back to take his grandfather's hand as they stopped in the center of the seven, tall stones that stood in a ring between the Forbidden Forest and Hogwarts castle. "That sounds pretty, Grandpa. What does it mean?"

"That is the Celtic name of this magical circle, Harry," replied Albus. "Maighdean ag damhsa Malachi ar is the fanciful name of Malachi's Dancing Virgins." Albus drew the boys to a comfortable, wide sofa he had conjured and sat them down on either side of himself.

"A very long time ago, long before Hogwarts was even a dream in the sleep of the Founders there were seven, beautiful witches that were all sisters. Their father was a prominent wizard seeking a way to teach the dragons of the wizarding world to allow other wizards to fly them. Known as the Dragon Master he intended to marry all seven of his daughters to powerful wizards to make his family the strongest in our world."

Harry and Neville leaned closer to their grandfather as he continued his story. "The seven witches were young, free and had no wish to marry. Alas, in our world back then, they had no choice but to do as their father, Dragon Master, had decreed."

"That's sad," whispered Harry.

"Too true, Harry," Albus then smiled and the twinkle in his eye shone brightly. "Those witches were clever, though, and at night, at the end of every month, they ran away. Here they came and they danced with joy to the stars that twinkled above."

Standing behind his father, Harry and Neville, Severus waved his hand and conjured a beautiful, semi-transparent tableau of seven, lovely young women dancing beneath the stars. Harry and Neville clapped until the dancing beauties faded away.

"One night the Prince of the Unseelie, the Dark Elves that lived within the realm of shadows, was walking between the world of the Fae and the world of Wizards when he stumbled across the beautiful lasses dancing underneath the heavens. Prince Malachi was entranced."

With another wave of his hand, Severus conjured a tall, handsome man clothed in robes of dark blue midnight and silver. His hair was white as snow and fell straight to his waist. Prince Malachi hid behind one of the stones of the circle. Once more the dancing maidens came into being and were
now dancing for their unseen audience.

"Prince Malachi was a young elf of the Unseelie, only 2 centuries old," Albus smirked as Harry and Neville's eyes widened in surprise. "At such an age, it was time for the young UnSeelie Prince to wed so that he could become king."

"Did the prince fall in love with all of the daughters?" asked Neville in near shock.

Albus nodded solemnly. "He did indeed, Neville. All seven witches, daughters to the Dragon Master, were exceptional beauties that ensorcelled the Unseelie Prince. For a year young Prince Malachi returned to watch the beautiful maidens dance until one night, Samhain, they came to this spot but they were not happy."

"They didn't dance, Grandpa?" asked Harry mournfully.

"They did not, my dear," sighed Albus. "The daughters were all too sad. Their father was going to marry them off the next day and they would never be allowed to dance again. Prince Malachi heard the lovely witches bewailing their fates and his decision was made. When they finally put away their tears to dance their freedom for one last time, Prince Malachi spelled all seven daughters into the tall stones you see around us. To us, they are stone, but to Prince Malachi the seven daughters became his wives and he became the most powerful King of the UnSeelie there ever was."

"That's kind of sad, Grandfather," Neville said softly. "Are the stones really witches?"

"Perhaps," smiled Albus. "I suspect, though, that since the legend tells us the dancing maidens became the Prince's wives, that they are only the stone of the Elements."

"Was Prince Malachi real, Grandpa?" asked Harry. Before Albus could answer a warm breeze ruffled Harry's hair, swirled around him, and everyone could hear the sounds of faint, joyous laughter and the strains of elvish music. "Shadow?!" Harry cried. He could not decide if he were afraid or excited.

Severus spoke, "The fae world is nearly immortal, Harry. It is extremely difficult to kill one of fae blood. We, of the wizarding world, believe that King Malachi still lives with his seven wives ruling the realm of shadowed fae beside him."

"Wow," breathed Harry. He looked around the darkened circle of stones. Only the stars lit their faces and the snow on the ground. It was enough, though. Harry rubbed one hand over his arm in puzzlement.

"What is it, Magpie?" asked Severus as he noted the gesture.

"I feel something, Shadow," Harry tried to explain. "It's like my blood is singing. It's not scary." He smiled up at his father. "Sort of like when I felt the magic in the gates at Hogsmeade. This is stronger, though, and it's like a song."

"I can't feel that," Neville grumbled with jealousy.

"Ah, but you are able to speak to plants, are you not, Mouse?" Severus said softly but firmly.

Neville looked up at his godfather, suddenly scared. "That's daft! Nobody talks to plants, Shadow!"

"Who was it that told you such a thing, my little Mouse?" asked Severus already knowing the answer.
Neville dropped his gaze to the ground to stare at the snow beneath his feet. "Gran and Uncle Algy both told me that anyone who said they could talk to plants were 'daft in the head.'"

Severus tapped a slim, index finger beneath the child's chin so he would lift his gaze. The Potions Master captured Neville's gaze with his own dark, glittering eyes. There was, the boy was able to discern, a gentle smile. Neville breathed deeply. "They lied to me didn't they, Shadow?"

"Harry is able to sense magic… you are able to sense what plants need. You are both very special wizards," Severus drew both boys to his sides and was rewarded with tight hugs from each.

"The Veil thins, children," Albus said quietly yet strongly enough to gain everyone's attention. He urged the boys over to Severus and he Vanished the sofa.

"Shadow," Harry asked in a whisper, "what's going on?" The Potions Master's only reply was to lay his index finger against his lips signalling that now was the time for quiet. Harry nodded and then leaned with his back against his father's legs. Poppy leaned forward slightly and drew Neville to her front. She crossed her arms over her chest.

The night seemed to stop; the stars were frozen in the sky. The sounds of night had silenced as if all the creatures had been put under a Sleeping Charm. Severus pulled Harry more solidly against himself as he felt the child's heartbeat increasing as the seconds ticked by. Finally, when it seemed they had only come outside to stand within the circle of stones the air shimmered as though a door were opening.

Two figures appeared before them. One was a witch with gentle, red hair and green eyes wearing a knee-length, silken blouse patterned with leaves of ivy, simple jeans, and bare feet. She smiled at Severus, and then down at Harry. The second figure was a wizard wearing horn-rimmed glasses over his blue eyes. His black hair was perpetually untamed and he wore the red and gold robes of his office in the Aurory.

What was mesmerising about these two colourful figures was that they were semi-transparent. It was a condition of the two being spirits that had stepped through the thin Veil.

The witch crouched down to Harry's height so she could look at him, green gaze to green. It was at just that moment that Severus discerned that Lily's eyes were a sea green whereas Harry's were more like the emerald.

"My little boy! You have grown, Harry," she smiled and raised a finger that felt to Harry like a feather had brushed his cheek.

"Are you my mum?" Harry asked in breathless wonder. The pretty ghost nodded.

Severus spoke softly so only Harry could hear him. "Harry, these are your parents, Lily and James."

"Hi," said Harry simply. Severus felt the boy press tighter against his legs. The child was unaware of his caution.

"You're looking good, Harry," said James as he crouched down on one knee. "Healthy, happy…"

Harry, now aware of the beating of his heart, was excited at seeing his parents but a tiny part of him was scared, too. His hand grasped his father's robes and pulled them so he slightly burrowed into them.

James, sensing that Harry was uneasy, rose to his feet and stepped back one step. He looked, then, at Severus. There was no unspoken accusation, recrimination, or insult. Instead, the spirit was
profoundly relieved that his son had been removed from a situation that had nearly killed him. He nodded to the Potions Master. "Thank you, Severus."

Severus slowly drew in a long breath. He had imagined so many ways this adventure might turn out, and to be honest, his own trepidation had nearly made him not tell his son about the magic of this night.

"Harry has allowed me to put to rest much of the past I was holding onto… James," said Severus. "For you and Lily, I will continue to protect Harry…” he looked down just as Harry smiled up at him. For once he smiled freely, unconcerned about who might see. "I will never stop loving him." He stroked his son's hair, and gently cupped his cheek.

Harry stepped out of his father's robes until he was looking up at Lily and James. "I promise to forever love my Shadow Dad for you so you can know that we're both forever happy."

James lowered himself to one knee, again. He smiled. "I know you will, Harry. You have a heart full of love." He drew a feathery touch to his son's cheek. "I miss you, my little Harry. Behave for Severus, okay?"

Harry nodded and discovered that tears were slipping down his cheeks. Lily knelt down by her son and very gently embraced him. Harry felt cool but not cold like the one time he and Draco walked through a ghost by accident. Cool feathers seemed to drift around him and they were scented of orange.

"Be happy, my little boy," Lily swiped at her own ghostly tear. "I love you so much." Lily stood and then walked closer to Severus. To his astonishment she wrapped her arms around him until he, too, felt the drift of orange scented feathers all around him. Lily whispered into Severus' ear, "I wish I'd hugged you one last time while I was living, Severus. Will you forgive that foolish, little girl?"

Tentatively, Severus placed his arms around his childhood friend. He could not truly feel her but he felt the strength of joyful memories in his arms. "Long since forgiven, Lily. And, thank you for Harry."

Lily pulled away and smiled with a slight smirk, "Thank you, Severus." Lily took Poppy by surprise as the ghostly woman brushed her fingers through her hair. "Poppy, hold tight to Severus. Don't ever let him go."

Poppy smiled, a bit uncertainly, but her smile widened as she felt the Potions Master's arm against her back as he drew her to his side. "I do not intend to, Lily. You can be assured of that."

James then crouched down in front of Neville whose eyes widened as soon as he realised he had garnered the attention of a spirit. "Neville Longbottom. I remember you were such a quiet but happy baby. Your parents think the world of you." He leaned a little closer. "Be brave, Neville. Go visit your parents. They will not show it but they will know you visit. And…" James whispered into the child's ear and slowly he smiled.

"Are you sure, Sir?" asked Neville.

James winked, and stood. "I'm a spirit, Neville. We got all the answers. Talk to your godfather. He'll know what to do."

Neville nodded. "Yes, sir! I will, Sir! Thank you!"

Severus glanced with curiosity at the small boy who turned a beaming, knowledgeable smile, onto him.
"Lily. James." Albus opened his arms wide. "You have blessed all of us immeasurably this night." He then brought his hands to his front, clasped them, and bowed. "I wish to tell both of you that I will apologise to the end of my days for not protecting you better. This old man misses you each."

Lily spoke softly, "Albus, James and I only hold Tom Riddle at fault. He took our lives, and took from us our precious son. You are forgiven for the past. Know that we love you." She and James each put their hands to their hearts, and bowed towards Albus.

"You've humbled me, my children," he lifted his beard to wipe at a tear. "Thank you."

Harry waved his hand at Neville to follow him. Both boys trotted over to their grandfather and hugged him tightly. He began to happily weep. For a moment Severus watched until Lily and James faded away. The Potions Master caught Poppy by the hand and tugged.

"Come, my dear," he sighed melodramatically. "We must not be left out."

Poppy laughed and happily joined in hugging Albus. Severus raised an eyebrow, and Albus caught his son's gaze. "Come, child," Albus said earnestly. "We are family." Severus gave in and managed to hug Albus, Harry, Neville, and most especially… Poppy.
Neville's Bedroom

The Ease of November - 9 November 1985, Saturday

The night of Hallowe'en, or Samhain, as Harry and Neville referred to the old wizarding name of the holiday, remained a strong memory. Harry woke one morning a week later to find his father adding to the jungle mural in his bedroom.

"Shadow?" Harry wiped at the sleep in his eyes and blinked away the blurriness that had recently begun in the morning to plague him. "What'cha painting?"

"I thought you might like your parents to be a part of your jungle, Magpie," replied the Potions Master who painted with a magical paintbrush attuned to his imagination. The spell had taken a bit of work that the Charms Master Filius Flitwick had worked on with him.

Harry slipped from bed and trotted over to his father to see what he was doing. He watched with awe as two of the trees on his wall came to life in a clever way that did not detract from the fact that they were trees. Hidden within the strength of the bark of one, and deep red leaves of the other were the ghostly faces of his parents from Samhain. The small boy was entranced.

"You're magic, Shadow," sighed Harry. "I can see just two trees but then if I blink I can see my parents. How do you do that?"

Severus smiled gently under his son's praise. "I am pleased you approve, Magpie. As for how… well, I must admit that it is not something I can clearly explain. Can you explain what you draw in the pages of your sketchbook?"

Harry shook his head. "It just happens," he tried to explain. "Like water flowing from my thoughts to my quill. But," he giggled softly, "it's fun. Is painting and drawing fun for you, Shadow?"

"Ohhhh, I think I would have to say they are, Magpie," admitted Severus as though it was a truth that was difficult to admit to. "Which reminds me, I am going to need a new sketchbook soon. How about you?"

Harry thought a moment then shook his head. "Not yet, Shadow. I got some pages left."

Neville, in his robe and slippers, walked into Harry's bedroom. "Good morning Shadow, Harry. What're you two doing?"

"Good morning to you, Mouse," replied Severus.

Harry went to hug Neville and then drew him over to where Severus was painting. "Mornin'! Look what Shadow's doing, Nev."

Neville peered at the two trees. "I like the trees, Harry…"

"You gotta blink then look again," smiled Harry like someone in possession of a secret.

Neville studied the trees closely, then slowly blinked, and a smile blossomed across his face. "Harry! Those are your parents!" Harry nodded. "That's wicked, Shadow. It's like you just see trees and then… whoosh! You see ghosts. I wish I could draw like you and Harry do."

Severus finished the last detail of his magical addition, and then tucked his brush into the painter's
smock he wore over his clothing. Albus had given him the silly thing recently, and the young wizard found that he actually liked wearing the soft earthen coloured cotton smock that reminded him of pictures he had seen of old artists.

"Little Mouse, you do draw," he began.

"Just plants," said the small boy.

"Just plants? Do not disparage your drawings, child. You draw that which most fascinates you and you draw them well. I expect that someday you will offer the world a book of your beautiful sketches." He ushered the boys to the seating arrangement near the fireplace in Harry's room where they all seated themselves.

"You really like those sketches, Shadow? They're just… impressions," said Neville.

"Aye, sketches of the beauty you have found in nature. They need not be intricate drawings or colourful paintings to be something treasured, Mouse. You and Magpie both do work I am quite proud of," insisted Severus. He then rose. "Now, time to begin our day. We will be taking breakfast with the Malfoys today and then we are going furniture shopping for Mouse's bedroom."

"Yay!" crowed Harry as he slipped from his chair.

"Fun!" echoed Neville.

Together both boys ran for the bathroom which Severus had recently expanded for them. Severus had extended his own bedroom with a private bath so he no longer had to wait for the little boys in theirs. He still had to expand the kitchen but that would wait until the Yule holiday when the students were back home with their families. Today was for Neville who had finally gotten his own bedroom.

Neville's room was divided in such a way that it appeared as though one entered the bedroom onto a wide, spiral columned veranda. The veranda's ceiling was a lattice of wood festooned with heavy fuchsia and wisteria. Severus had used his magic to give the flowers the appropriate drooping drape; they were paint but three dimensional. The veranda and spiral columns were aged a sort of golden coffee stain, and pitted with the beginnings of decomposition. It had the overall effect of appearing as of something from Leighton's painting of Tristan and Isolde; a painting Neville had shown Severus from one of his books.

Neville's bed, wardrobe, and fireplace were all within the veranda. Beyond a real low wall separating veranda from garden, could be found places for bookcases and a desk. The wall was painted to fit the colouring of the veranda. The Enchanted Window in one wall was a part of the garden and had ivy hanging from it with blooms of Night Glory that opened at night when the sky above shifted from morning to evening.

The garden itself painted on the walls, was a profusion of snap dragons, clematis, freesia, daffodils, hollyhocks, and more. Severus had not painted the flagstone floor of the bedroom since the colouring of the stone fit in well with the mural of the bedroom. He intended to find several throw rugs with colours that would mimic grass.

The entire bedroom was as much a place of dreams as Harry's 'jungle bedroom' was. Thus, Neville had dubbed his bedroom 'the secret garden'. That had given Severus an idea for a Christmas gift of the story, The Secret Garden. He had no doubt that Neville would enjoy that Muggle story.

9 November 1985 - Hogsmeade, Boromir's Interiors
Harry, Draco and Neville had parted from Severus and Lucius the moment they stepped through the doors into the magnificent shop of Boromir's Interiors. Severus was describing, for the second time that morning, Neville's bedroom to Lucius.

"...and, Neville's favoured colour is yellow?" asked Lucius who had noted that there were a profusion of yellow flowers in Neville's bedroom; sunflowers, daisies, daylilies, yellow English roses, and primula.

"As a highlight, I would say," replied Severus as he began to thumb through swatches of fabric for drapes and curtains. "Yellow makes him happiest, it appears."

Lucius nodded, and commented, "Rather a Hufflepuff isn't he?"

"With a good dash of Slytherin, Lucius," smirked Severus. "I have discovered that Neville has a bit of clever subtlety in regards to his collection of flora."

"Ah! Collection, is it now? Wasn't the child's plants just an amusing hobby, Severus?"

Severus shook his head, "Never, my Brother. Subtle, is he not?"

"Indeed."

"Why flowers?" asked Draco as he looked through the various coverlets arranged in a stack that revealed a rich corner of each one.

"They're happy," Neville said with his own secret smile in his eyes. "Sunshine, warm breezes, wildflowers blowing in the wind." The boy lifted his head. "I always wanted to go see the heather in Scotland. There's something wild and beautiful about the land." He lowered his voice. "Did you know Professor McGonagall is Scottish. I can hear her accent when she on a rise about something."

"Maybe you should talk to her," suggested Harry. "I've talked to Professor Flitwick because he has lots of stories about his grandkids."

"He's got grandkids?" asked Draco. Harry nodded.

"I overheard some of the students saying he's got Dwarf in him," added Neville.

"Well, he is short," Draco commented sagely.

Neville grimaced, "That doesn't automatically make him a dwarf, Draco."

"Wait," said Harry. "Do you mean like real dwarves? Like from Under the Mountain that mine giant jewels and gold?"

Both Draco and Neville frowned. "What's Under the Mountain?" asked Draco.

"It's from a cartoon that my cousin Dudley saw once on television," Harry explained. "These dwarves and a great wizard were going to the home of the Dwarves Under the Mountain but they found Smaug instead."

"Who's Smaug?" asked Neville with interest in the story.

"He's this huge, red dragon that sleeps in lots and lots of gold and jewels but his favourite jewel is the Arkenstone. Bilbo Baggins, who's a Hobbit, goes with the dwarves and the wizard to steal the Arkenstone from Smaug so the Dwarves can get their kingdom back. There's lot of adventure like
there's this huge spider…"


"He's the only spider, though, but he's really dangerous," said Harry. "The spider tries to eat Bilbo and the Dwarves and then the Hobbit finds Golem." Neville and Draco were rapt as the boys now sat on the floor with the coverlet, duvets, and quilts all around them. "Golem is this creepy guy that lives deep in the mountain that's looking for his Precious when Bilbo finds him. Bilbo finds the Precious and it's a gold ring with the power of invisibility. Bilbo steals it from Golem and gets away before Golem can hurt him."

"Do they get the Dwarven Kingdom back?" asked Draco.

Harry shook his head sadly. "No. Orcs ruined all of it and killed all the Dwarves, too. They did find Smaug and the Arkenstone, though."

"Did Bilbo steal the Arkenstone?" asked Neville.

"What about Smaug?" asked Draco. "What happened to him?"

"Bilbo stole the Arkenstone and that made Smaug really mad. He left his cave and was going to destroy all the humans but the Dwarves found a magical arrow that could kill Smaug." Draco frowned. He loved dragons. "Smaug was evil, Draco. I promise." This assurance mollified the tow headed boy.

"Is that the ending, Harry?" asked Draco.

Harry shook his head. "The Dwarves all died getting Bilbo back to Hobbit-land. Only Bilbo and the wizard Gandalf lived."

"That's not fair," declared Neville. "I don't like stories like that."

Harry shrugged. "Neither do I but it was still a neat story."

"What's a cartoon?" asked Draco.

Harry frowned. "I know there's no television in the wizarding world but don't you have comic books?" Draco and Neville both shook their heads. "Hmph." Harry stood and trotted away from the coverlets, duvets and quilts and went looking for his father.

"Shadow," Harry saw his father and uncle and tried his best not to actually run.

"Have you found bedding, Magpie?" asked Severus pointedly.

"Uhm… no. We're still looking. But, did you know that there aren't comic books in the wizarding world?" Harry appeared very concerned about this fact.

"We have animated stories, Magpie," revealed Severus. "Perhaps that might be what you are thinking of. I shall show you at The Book Wyrm. They have an extensive collection of books for young witches and wizards."

Harry nodded. "Okay. Me and Draco and Nev will find some bedding stuffs now. Thanks!" He started to run off but stopped himself before his father could chide him.

Severus smirked. "Did you ever indulge in animated stories, Lucius?"
Lucius nodded. "I was enthralled by the Dragonriders of Destiny when I was eight. My mother bought me the magazines since my father did not allow such frivolity. How about you?"

"Muggle world. I had comics," replied Severus. "My mother tried to introduce me to The Beano and The Dandy. Even at the tender age of six I recognised how insipid those were. I much preferred the Doctor Who comics."

"Doctor Who," mused Lucius. "Isn't he the time traveler?"

"In a blue police box," Severus said nonchalantly.

Lucius stared at his friend a moment. "A police box?"

"TARDIS," replied Severus mysteriously. "Time And Relative Dimensions In Space."

"Ah," nodded Lucius and then he shook his head, not understanding at all. Severus chuckled in dark mirth.

Two hours later the five gentlemen emerged from Boromir's Interiors. Severus' pockets were full of linen, quilts, curtains and drapes, and furniture for Neville's bedroom.

"Day to night, drapes, Lucius?" scoffed Severus. "Do you not think I could have spelled any piece of cloth with that ability?"

"Of course you could, Severus," agreed Lucius. "However, you really haven't the time, do you? Besides, you're only upset that I bought the drapes."

Severus' lips thinned in irritation.

Neville whispered worriedly to his cousins, "Should I tell Uncle Severus to take the drapes back?"

Harry shook his head while Draco spoke knowledgeably, "Just let Uncle Severus gripe at my father, Nev. They do that all the time."

Neville nodded but gave a quick glance over his shoulder at his uncles who were still bickering.

Harry nudged Neville. "It makes them happy to argue, Nev."

"Grown-ups are weird," concluded Neville. Both Draco and Harry nodded.

With Lucius gone to Malfoy Manor with his son Severus was blessedly alone with his two boys as they added the new items to Neville's bedroom. Severus had found irregularly shaped throw rugs that were white and spelled so that their colour could be chosen. The Potions Master chose a muted green interspersed with artful patches of brown. Upon the flagstone floor the throw rugs looked very much like gently flowing patches of grass growing in dirt.

The drapes were added next over the Enchanted Window. Sky blue with brushes of clouds during the day they faded artfully into sunset and then the night sky with actual twinkling stars in the evening. The Day to Night Charm of the drapes was triggered by the conditions of the sky outside a window including an Enchanted Window. Neville had insisted that he did not want curtains along with drapes and so there were none to hang.

Neville's bed, a simple sleigh bed, was given a new sleigh frame of distressed English oak. Simple pillowcases embroidered with krups and kneazles on the ends covered the four pillows the child
needed for his burrowing. His coverlet was a country quilt of patchwork squares of various fabrics from silk to velvet in varying patterns. The wardrobe matched the sleigh bed frame. Like Harry's wardrobe, it had six inner drawers, shoe cubbies, and a rod to hang shirts, trousers, and robes.

Although Neville had a good set of clothing at Longbottom Manse that had been brought with him. Severus had added a new pair of trainers, dress shoes, a set of black, white and 'ridiculous' patterned socks. There was all new underwear which included undershirts, three new shirts for school and five new shirts for play. He had lastly added two pairs of school trousers. In the warmer weather he planned to add a selection of shorts.

Harry and Neville took an hour to put away all of Neville's clothing, shoes, and school robes. They were then sent to their bedrooms for a nap before dinner.

Severus checked on each boy in their beds, and Neville peeked out from under his quilt and pillows to speak, "I love my bedroom, Shadow. Thank you!"

"You are most welcome, Mouse. Sleep well." Neville burrowed until he was just a lump on his bed. Severus closed the door.

In his sitting room Severus settled into his chair. He meant to read his latest Potions Weekly periodical, but instead, he fell fast asleep.
I would like to dedicate this chapter to our dog, 7 yr old Hermione whom we learned has Spinal Degeneration. Baby aspirin is taking care of it now but it was really scary since we had so recently lost her buddy Roswell.

6 December 1985 - I Can See For Miles and Miles - Diagon Alley

Harry held tightly to his father's hand as they walked down a side street just off Diagon Alley. Allynaric Avenue held a variety of shops one being an Oculist whose shop front boasted a sign with large spectacles over bright, blue eyes that blinked winsomely. Severus' felt Harry's hand tighten on his own as they stepped beneath the large, blinking eyes and into the shop.

At first when Harry's father asked him a few days ago if he had ever had an eye exam, the child had been puzzled. Was there a test for seeing?

"An eye exam measures the strength of your vision, Magpie," explained Severus. "I know they have such exams in the Muggle world since my mother insisted on one when I, myself, was five. My maternal great-grandfather required glasses for reading and my mother wanted to know if I had inherited the deficiency." He sighed. "Muggle medicine is not able to accurately predict such problems. However, my sparkling eyed child, we need to measure your vision and deal with that temporary vision loss you had at school."

Harry frowned. "I wasn't scared!"

Severus lips thinned. He would not belabor the incident but Madame Bilcross had revealed that Harry had clung to her skirts for most of the afternoon after the short bit of blindness. "Of course you were not, Magpie. I believe you to be an exceptionally brave child." Harry had actually puffed up his chest and smiled at the compliment. "Bouts of blindness..." his son made as if to protest but Severus stopped him before he could say anything, "...even one incident are not to be ignored. I shall take you to an oculist who will examine your eyes to determine the problem."

Harry had not asked any questions about the exam and had spent a quiet evening drawing. Severus and Neville had begun work on the miniature cactus garden Albus had given the boy.

Harry took a long, slow look at the outer office of the oculist. Far from being the mediaeval torture chamber Harry's fancies had described in his worry the last few nights, the shop of the oculist was comfortably furnished and surrounded by cream and silvery grey wallpaper and warm browns. It all gave the room a rather homey look. The only difference was that two walls held a large selection of glasses frames and mirrors on either side of the narrow shelves of frames allowed witches and wizards to try on the many frames to see how they appeared.

Harry had to admit to himself that it was all very nice. Of course, the eye exam was a dubious matter.

At that moment, an oddly shaped man, thin of legs and arms but rotund of belly, stepped around his
counter at the rear of his shop to greet the Snapes. The man had sparse, brown hair above his ears, but none on his pate. He wore slim, silver rimmed glasses that perched on the end of a long nose that ended bluntly. Harry was reminded of some of the cartoon figures he had spied from his cupboard when his cousin Dudley would watch Saturday cartoons. This man looked very nearly like those cartoon people.

"Welcome! I'm Oculist Healer Reginald Jarvis. I expect the two of you are my two o'clock appointment? Harry Snape?" he asked with a smile made to disarm the wary.

Harry would not be disarmed and made to back up against his father's long legs. "Yes," said Severus as he nudged his son forward, just a bit. "I am Severus Snape and this is my son, Harry."

A second nudge to his shoulder prompted Harry to greet the cartoon man. "Hi."

"Hello, Harry. Have you ever had an eye exam before?" Harry quickly shook his head, then very quietly replied in the negative. "An eye exam is nothing at all to be afraid of…"

Harry blurted, "Dudley told me that you'll stick stingy stuff in my eyes and I won't be able to see for days and it will hurt. Lots."

The healer leaned back and glanced in puzzlement at Severus. The Potions Master explained, "Harry grew up with Muggles that were not… terribly nice to him." Severus turned his son to face him. "Harry, do you recall what I told you about what your relatives told you?"

"They lied, Shadow," Harry answered softly. Severus nodded. The child then drew in a steadying breath. "It won't hurt?"

"It does not hurt, Magpie," assured Severus. "And, I make this promise, should you feel uncomfortable at any time, you can stop the exam and take a break."

"I can go home?" Harry whispered hopefully.

Severus shook his head. "No, Magpie. You have been having problems with blurriness for a few weeks now and Madame Bilcross made mention of the panic attack you had when your sight just vanished on you whilst at school. That is something we must address."

"But it was only a few seconds…" Harry lamely tried to insist.

Severus laid his hands on his son's shoulders. "Harry, I am concerned. A little blurriness is one thing but to have your vision vanish for even a few seconds worries me. What if that became a few minutes? Hours? Days? What if it became permanent?"

Harry's jaw dropped. He had not thought that his eyesight could actually vanish forever! "I don't want my eyesight to go away, Shadow. I like seeing stuff."

"Then let Healer Jarvis do his exam. I will be right with you, Magpie." He nudged his son towards the oculist. "Healer Jarvis?"

"This way to my exam room, gentlemen," Healer Jarvis smiled broadly, bowed slightly, and ushered them through a short, narrow hallway, past an office with its door half open, and to the exam room at the end.

There was no big machinery in the exam room, nor did it smell of antiseptic. It was a cozy room with a simple chair for Severus to sit upon, and a large, comfortable chair for Harry to sit in. Upon the wall were various charts with alphabetic and numeric characters that started out large and continued
down to the end of the page until the last row was extremely small.

The lighting was dim and was actually provided by torchlight in wall sconces. The flames did not flicker.

"Harry, please take this chair," instructed the Healer as he Summoned a wheeled stool for himself to sit upon. Harry did so while his father sat on the only other chair.

The eye exam did not take very long, and but for a little itchiness when he had to close his eyes with some drops in them, there truly was no pain at all. Harry looked at various charts to measure his vision, answered questions, and finally it was finished.

The Healer patted Harry's shoulder. "You did a splendid job, young man," complimented the Healer. "Now, while I speak to your father I want you to just close your eyes so those eye drops will fade away."

Harry closed his eyes but only after his father nodded once at him. "What if I fall asleep?"

The Healer chuckled. "That's quite all right if you do, Harry."

A moment later Harry felt a slight pressure on his upper arm that was familiar. Severus spoke softly, "I shall be just a few minutes, Magpie. Rest now."

"Kay, Shadow."

The oculist showed Severus to his office and gave the stern appearing wizard the results of his diagnosis.

"Harry's vision acuity is currently..." and here the Healer rattled off a number that revealed a slight deficiency in his son's sight. "That's the slight blurriness that he has been experiencing in the morning, Mr. Snape. It's been caught early so we can compensate with eyeglasses until his tenth birthday. At that age he will be eligible for a corrective charm to remove the problem. Of course, there will be another exam at that age to be sure but I am confident I will be able to successfully restore Harry's sight so he will not have to grow up with glasses," the Healer nodded in confidence.

"What of the blindness that he experienced at school, Healer Jarvis?" asked Severus tautly.

The Healer's lips thinned before he replied carefully, "There is no physiological indication that such an event should happen, Mr. Snape." He hesitated, clasped his hands together on the surface of his desk, then leaned forward slightly. "Tell me, Mr. Snape, your son mentioned that he had symptoms of panic when the blindness occurred. Do you know if the blindness was the cause of the anxiety attack or a part of it?"

Severus thought carefully back to that day when he had been in the midst of his third class of the day when he received a memo to dismiss his class and go to the Headmaster's tower.

A worried Potions Master strode through the door of the Headmaster's office and right up to the elderly man's desk. "Father? Is something wrong?"

Albus rose from his desk and came around it. He drew his son over to the Floo. "I received a message from Madame Bilcross at Harry's school. She said that he is fine now but he is in a state and wishes to go home."

"I shall pick him up forthwith, Father. Is Neville all right?" asked the younger man who was on pins
and needles but was doing his best to not show his worry.

Albus nodded. "Neville is fine, my dear. I think you should bring them both home. I will take your afternoon classes."

Severus had thrown Floo powder into the flames turning them a safe green. He called for the Primary school and stepped into the flames and directly into Madame Bilcross's office. The older witch greeted him, and showed him his son who was seated quietly across from her desk appearing as though haunted.

"Daddy?" Harry breathed with a hitch in his voice.

"Harry!" Severus dropped to one knee before his son. "Little Magpie? Are you all right?"

Harry nodded, frowned, then shook his head. "I want to go home, please?"

The Potions Master scooped his son up into his arms and turned to Madame Bilcross who had been patiently waiting. "What happened, Madame?"

The witch explained that the students had all been doing their colouring exercise but today was with blocks in a variety of colours and shapes. It was when her assistant took out the blocks and floated them through the air to the center table where the students were to do their concentration exercises.

"Harry began to hyperventilate and then he began to blink..." Madame Bilcross said.

"I couldn't see, Shadow," Harry spoke softly and with embarrassment. "Dudley he..." Harry gulped as his eyes began to glimmer with tears.

"What about Dudley, Harry?" asked Severus firmly.

"Mrs. Figg, my babysitter who's got all those cats... she gave me some blocks for my third birthday... Dudley got mad... he and Piers took my blocks and threw them at me... Aunt Petunia just told them not to break her windows an' she left me... she didn't care... an' I got a swolled eye an' a cut on my cheek..." He then opened his mouth to show his front teeth. Nearly perfect except there was a chip in one front tooth. "Dudley threw a block really, super hard an' broke my tooth." Harry leaned against his father. "Daddy, please? C'n we go home?"

Severus listened as the Healer explained, "Hysterical Blindness is what it is called, Mr. Snape. It can occur many ways but in your son's case the blindness was caused by a particularly strong anxiety attack."

"Could it happen again?" asked Severus.

The oculist nodded. "If he has a panic attack or a flashback to previous trauma the hysterical blindness could come back. I will explain to Harry that it is simply a temporary situation that will relieve itself as his body calms down." The oculist Summoned a thin pamphlet that he handed to Severus. "This will tell you about a Mind Healer from Geneva that has worked with abused children; both Muggle and wizarding, that might be of help to your son."

Severus opened the thin pamphlet and scanned the headlines that touted the Mind Healer. "I will write to this Mind Healer and then perhaps Harry and I might visit when term ends. Thank you, Healer Jarvis."

The Healer smiled. "Let's go and get your son so he may pick out some frames for his glasses, then, Mr. Snape."
Head held high, back straight, and his hand securely in his father's Harry walked with the 'pride of ownership' as he wore his new, oval-shaped, silver wire-framed, glasses. In addition to that his gaze swept back and forth as he looked at everything surrounding him with new, clear vision. He had not known how blurry everything had become until he could see everything sharp and defined.

Severus smirked down at his small son walking like one of Lucius' peacocks. "Ice cream," the father intoned mischievously.

"Shouldn't we have Nev with us, Shadow?" asked Harry in concern.

Severus shook his head. "This would be a treat just for you for doing so well at the oculist today, Magpie."

Harry liked the idea of such a yummy reward but he was thinking of his near-brother at school on Friday… and then he thought of his cousin Draco also at school. His brow furrowed.

"Magpie?" Severus asked as he eyed the wrinkled brow. "What is it that concerns you?"

"I was just thinkin' of Nev and Draco at school and that I didn't have to go at all," he sighed. "And, I get ice cream."

"That is a dilemma," mused Severus. "Perhaps we ought to go to Sugarplums Sweets Shop and you may pick out a treat for all three of you to have together."

Harry brightened as his father deftly steered them towards the confectionery. "Draco told us about Sugarplum's, Shadow. He said the best thing he likes that they make there are called Witch's Hat. Maybe I should get some of those."

"Mmmm," agreed Severus recalling the one time he had one of those confections. "Have you ever had one, Magpie?"

Harry shook his head. "Draco promised me one for sometime. He told me they had cream, and strawberry fruit, and pecans, and cake and prob'ly a thousand other things that are good."

Severus chuckled. "I believe we are settled upon the mysterious Witch's Hat, then."

Harry nodded, and giggled as his father swept him into a shop that looked like a gingerbread house.

Sugarplum's Sweets Shop did resemble the gingerbread house of the well-known Muggle fairy tale, but the witch who owned the shop was no hag. Almira Gruese was a grandmotherly sort of witch with a silver bun of hair, silver spectacles perched on a rounded nose, and cheeks that were as flushed as two cherries. She wore a simple cotton dress of gaily coloured patches all in shades of green and a crisp, white apron that did little to protect the witch from flour and confectioner's sugar.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," greeted Almira. "Do you see anything that catches your fancy?"

Harry who was dazzled by all the marvelous looking pastries with creams, jellies, jams, and more, pressed his nose and chin against the glass display case. "Harry!" chided Severus as he began to pull his son away from the delicious looking display.

Almira chuckled, "It's all right, Sir. The display glass is charmed against nose prints."

"I'm going to share a treat with my cousins!" piped up Harry.

Severus spoke firmly, "One dozen Witch's Hats… Magpie, any colour preference?"
Harry pulled his gaze away from the sweets and looked up at his father. "Purple for me… uhm blue for Draco… and yellow for Nev."

"Four of each: purple, blue and yellow, please," requested Severus.

Almira packed the Witch's Hats into a box of frothy, pastel colours, and a red ribbon, and handed them over as Severus handed over payment.

Severus checked in upon Harry and Neville, each snug in their beds. Assured that both slept blissfully, he removed himself to the newly expanded kitchen in their apartment. There was a square dining table of heavy oak laid with a white tablecloth of silk edged with grey. Across from the table was a pantry, a magical icebox, and an iron stove. Severus had considered replacing the stove with a combination stove and oven but then he decided that anything that required cooking could be done by the elves.

The Potions Master started a flame in the stove and put the teakettle on. He moved to the table, Summoned the day's Daily Prophet from his sitting room, and turned the pages until he reached the classified ads section; the real estate section.

Not long after Severus had adopted Harry he began thinking of where they might live during the Summer months. Harry enjoyed the castle but he needed fresh air, a yard to play in, and perhaps a few friends beyond Neville and Draco. He had his childhood house in Cokeworth, Spinner's End, but the house and neighbourhood were all severely neglected. There were many houses around his own that had so fallen into disrepair that the structures had collapsed. Even if Severus chose to fix up Spinner's End there was no question that he would allow Harry to play around those fallen houses.

Of course, Severus had added to his thoughts; the house itself was a dreary reminder of a childhood he wished to now firmly put into his past. Therefore, a few months prior, just after becoming Neville's godfather and legal guardian, he put the house up to market. He had not expected it to sell for some time but a developer apparently had plans for Spinner's End and had simply been waiting for that one house to go on sale. His childhood home sold for 30,000 pounds more than he expected, and that widened the possibilities for the new home he would provide for his little family. He could now afford a little cottage in Manchester Borough where Harry and Neville went to school.

The Daily Prophet, which could often be a terrible source of gossip, was also a newspaper that was efficient for listing many homes and businesses for sale, job listings, and even listings for mentors advertising they were free to take on an apprentice.

Also to be found in this daily newspaper were coupons for shops at Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade. House elves could also find a generous offering of coupons aimed at the Elf Market; a place only house elves ever visited.

Severus marked a few possible listings in Manchester Borough, and made a note to send those listings he was interested in to his solicitor. The Potions Master's solicitor, hired by Lucius Malfoy for Severus in his first year of teaching, did much more than overlook the young man's legal interests. The solicitor kept an eye on his finances, got Severus into the Goblin Stock Market, and also did work in the Muggle world on Severus' "Plan B". An elaborate plan that would hide him from those seeking him, provided him an identity, a bank account, money, and means to fit in seamlessly into the Muggle world.

With the final death of Voldemort Severus doubted he required his "Plan B" any longer but it would behoove a Slytherin to keep the plan for at least five years until he was certain the danger was passed.
Once his letter was written to his solicitor Severus checked in upon Harry and Neville once more, then went to bed.
Welcome to our new addition to the family (rather unexpected) is American Eskimo, Sara. She is 6 years old and is already getting along well with our cat Lucius and dog Hermione!

13 December 1985 - Green Spots

Friday the 13th was not a day of good auspices in the Muggle world, where superstition sometimes overruled common sense. In the Wizarding world, the 13th of Friday was just a day like any other day of the week, with Saturday always following Friday and that meant, to Harry and Neville, a weekend.

At the end of classes and before dinner Severus had two detentions to deal with. He sent a note to his seventh year student Adelaide Ollivander who had become like a part-time nanny to the two boys. In his note he let her know that the boys would be with her until after dinner so she was to take them to the Great Hall to sit with the other Slytherins.

Both Harry and Neville enjoyed sitting at the Slytherin table because it made them feel grown up. It also helped that nearly all in the House treated Harry and Neville as though they were each intelligent, bright boys.

Adelaide made certain that her charges were set up with the dinner that Professor Snape had ordered earlier for them and then she sat down beside her fiancee' Galen Burke. Galen leaned over and chastely kissed Adelaide's forehead. Galen then spoke in that deep voice that had once been high before puberty and adulthood had appeared.

"What did you do in school today, Harry, Neville?" asked Galen as he put some vegetables on the boys' plates.

"We played with Mr. Glippy," replied Neville as he put a large forkful of string beans into his mouth.

"It was a dumb frog," groused Harry as he frowned and cut into his apportioned steak.

Neville, still chewing his string beans, forced out, "Is no' duhmm...!"

Adelaide interrupted, "Chew and swallow, Neville, then speak." Neville did so and was rewarded with a smile from Adelaide. "Very good. Now tell us what you were saying, Neville."

"Harry painted flowers for Mr. Glippy!" Neville grinned as though Harry's accomplishment was his own.

"No I didn't, Nev," sighed Harry. "It was all pretend. I didn't do anything."

Galen shook his head, "Oh no, Harry. I remember Mr. Glippy. He's the frog with glasses that shows you how to draw and paint." Galen chuckled. "I painted a yellow sky and a blue sun when I was a little'un."
"But I didn't do anything," insisted Harry.

"Of course you did, Harry," soothed Adelaide. "Mr. Glippy can only paint or draw what you want him to. Your imagination makes him do magic."

Harry narrowed his gaze at Adelaide. "All I did was wave my pretend wand…"

"That's how Mr. Glippy works, Harry," assured Galen. "The frog can see pictures in your mind and when you wave your wand that's how you paint or draw."

"I just got squiggles," Harry sighed still trying to be sullen.

"My yellow sky was a bunch of up and down strokes of colour and then my blue sun was a bunch of circles," said Galen.

"I drew a forest that was all sticks," laughed one fourth year boy. He then winked at Harry.

"So squiggles are really good?" asked Harry hopefully. Nearly everyone at the Slytherin table nodded. To Harry's pleasure other students began to tell about their experiences with 'Mr. Glippy'. Soon, Harry felt rather good about the squiggles he had made at school.

Once dinner in the Great Hall was finished Adelaide kissed Galen goodbye for a short bit, and then took Harry and Neville down to the dungeons to their apartment. Harry and Neville played with a set of tin soldiers in and around Neville's small indoor garden that he and Severus were putting together. Adelaide sat in the sitting room reading. Every 15 minutes she would check on the boys to see what they were up to. Two hours after dinner Adelaide found the two boys passed out asleep on Neville's bedroom floor with tin soldiers all around them.

"Wake up, Harry, Neville," Adelaide spoke softly but firmly. "Time to brush your teeth, get in your pyjamas, and go to bed."

"Don' wanna," Harry mumbled. Neville only managed a jumble of unintelligible mumblings.

"Come along now…" Adelaide stretched down to lift Harry just as the back of her hand brushed his forehead. "What?" She jerked her hand away. The little boy's forehead was very warm. She crouched down beside Neville, touched his forehead, and found it was also warm. "Oh dear…" she muttered. "Fry!" the young seventh year student called to the Slytherin elf. "I need you!"

The house elf arrived at once, and bowed. "What may Fry be doing for Missy Ollivander?" asked the Slytherin elf.

"Harry and Neville both have fevers. Please tell Madame Pomfrey to come right away," Adelaide instructed the elf. Fry nodded, and popped out of the bedroom. Adelaide levitated both Harry and Neville onto Neville's bed and covered them with the patchwork quilt. She tried again to wake them.

Poppy received Fry's news with the worry of a mother but her mien was all business as she collected her medical bag and stepped through the Floo into the Snapes quarters. She immediately strode into Neville's bedroom when she saw that Harry's bedroom was empty.

"What is wrong, Adelaide?" asked Poppy as she began a Diagnostic Charm over Harry.

"I came to check on the boys and get them ready for bed when I found them both asleep on the floor," replied Adelaide as she brushed gently at Neville's hair over his forehead. "I haven't been able to wake either one."
The Diagnostic Charm was quickly finished over Harry. Poppy acknowledged Adelaide's report with a short, "Mmm," and then she moved over to Neville and began the Diagnostic Charm over him. Once done, she spoke, "Tell Severus that I am taking the boys to St. Mungos," the Healer ordered. "They both have Dragon Pox."

Adelaide jumped to her feet, gathered the hem of her robes, and left the apartment. She knew that Professor Snape always held detention in his classroom. When she arrived, the Potions Master had just released his two detentions and was cleaning up his work of grading.

"Professor Snape!" Adelaide said breathlessly. "Madame Pomfrey just took Harry and Neville to St. Mungos. She asked that you come."

Severus felt his heart fall to his feet like lead. "What is the matter with my children, Miss Ollivander?" he demanded sharply.

"Madame Pomfrey said it was Dragon Pox," replied Adelaide. She felt as though she had failed her Head of House.

Severus noticed the young woman's hopeless tone of voice and briefly touched her shoulder. "Return to the common room, Miss Ollivander. 25 points to Slytherin for doing the right thing. Thank you."

Severus dismissed the student then went into his office where he used the Floo to transport him to St. Mungos.

Severus had been escorted to the Children's Wing upon Floo'ing to St. Mungos. He was not immediately allowed to see either Harry or Neville, but Poppy was there to brief him as to what had happened.

"They both fainted?" Severus asked in great concern.

Poppy nodded as she slipped her arm onto the Potions Master's elbow and directed him to sit beside her. "The Dragon Pox fever is a quick one, Severus. Children are flexible enough to handle it but adults find it much more difficult," she explained gently.

"But, how ill are they, Poppy?" asked the worried parent.

"Very, I'm afraid, Severus," sighed the Healer. Since Severus had been pacing she took him by the arm and directed him towards a bench where they both sat. She slipped her hand into his and he placed his other hand on top of hers. Poppy then explained, "Neither were vaccinated against the Dragon Pox. Harry simply has not had vaccinations for Muggle or wizarding children's diseases. If they had been the fever would have simply faded with a few potions and sleep. The Healers are working to boost the immune systems so infection cannot grasp hold."

Severus shook his head, feeling like the worst parent. "I never thought of the vaccines, Poppy. I should have had them vaccinated." He then looked into her eyes. "What of my son?"

"The Nutrition Potion helped to strengthen Harry's immune system so he is not as bad off as Neville. His skin has the tell-tale shade of green. Once the spots appear he can go home with a regimen of potions and rest," Poppy managed a smile but it revealed how tired she was. Severus drew her head to his shoulder and she sighed as she leaned against him. "Neville was moved from an unconscious state to a Healing Coma, Severus. They will have to watch over him for several days, at least in order to be certain that if infection takes hold it does not excessively last."

Severus sighed, squeezed Poppy's hand, and nodded. "Will I be able to see them soon?"
"A medi-witch will notify us when we can."

Poppy lifted her head just enough to kiss the Potions Master's cheek. He turned fully to face her and drew the fingers of his hand down her cheek. He then held on lightly to her chin and drew her close where he captured her lips in a kiss that left them both breathless. Severus then draped an arm over Poppy's shoulder and held her to his side. She melted against him perfectly.

Poppy had fallen asleep against Severus. She was still asleep when an hour later a young medi-witch entered the waiting lounge.

"Mr. Snape?" she asked.

Severus had not been sleeping but he had slipped into a meditative state. The medi-witch's voice brought him back and Poppy stirred at his side. "Yes? My boys?"

"You can see Harry and Neville now. Your son is awake but Neville is in a Healing Coma," she smiled softly. "I understand that patients in a coma can still hear you so speak to him if you wish."

The medi-witch escorted Severus and Poppy out of the lounge, a short ways down a hall with rainbows and dancing sprites on the walls that were far too cheerful for a concerned parent to be assaulted with. Fortunately, the room where Harry and Neville were was only three doors down from the lounge.

Severus and Poppy found Harry trying his best to keep his eyelids open while on the other side of him lay Neville in a near-death sleep. Both had skin that was weirdly tinged green.

"Magpie," Severus sat down on a chair between Harry and Neville.

"S-shadow?" Harry's lower lip began to tremble. "I'm sorry, Daddy. We were just playing…" a tear fell from the small boy's eye.

Severus wiped the tear away with his thumb. "Shhh, my little Magpie. You did nothing wrong."

"Nev won't wake up, Shadow," Harry rasped softly. "I tried to wake… to wake him…" Harry's eyes drifted shut.

"Our Mouse will awaken, Magpie. He is just sleeping very heavily," Severus sighed. He leaned forward and brushed a lock of hair off his son's forehead. "Sleep for me now, child. Sleep."

Harry, his eyes now solidly closed in exhaustion, nodded, let out a huff of breath, and promptly dropped into sleep. Severus kissed his son's forehead. He then turned to face Neville. The only sign that the child lived was the rise and fall of his chest as he breathed. Severus lay a hand gently upon the boy's chest so he could feel the faint thumping of Neville's heart beating.

"My timid yet brave little Mouse," sighed Severus. "It is too soon for me to allow you to leave. Sleep, but not forever."

Poppy stepped forward and placed a hand on the Potions Master's shoulder. "Severus," the Healer whispered. "Neville will return."

Severus raised his dark gaze to the witch. He did not weep but the pain in his eyes was enough to make Poppy's heart ache. "You cannot know that!" he declared sharply and shrugged her hand off his shoulder.

"Severus," Poppy said patiently as she replaced her hand on his shoulder. "You forget that I am a
fully qualified Healer… in childrens maladies. Neville is in a coma in order to heal as the pox runs through his system. He will awaken."

"Forgive me, Poppy," Severus bowed his head for a moment. When he raised his chin he drew his fingers down Neville's warm cheek. "I am… distraught."

Poppy leaned forward to kiss the wizard's brow. "As any father would be, my love. Will you remain this evening?"

"I should like to, Poppy," he replied.

Poppy nodded, left Severus' side and proceeded to set up a camp cot with pillow and quilt for him to sleep on. She could not settle the narrow bed between the hospital beds of the boys so she placed it against the far wall in front of the feet of their beds against the curtained window. That task finished she swept back over to him, and kissed his temple.

"I will be back in the morning after breakfast, love," she whispered. "I will tell Albus then what has happened since he will likely want to visit also."

Severus startled for a moment. "Father! I had not even thought… yes, tomorrow will be soon enough. Thank you, dear Poppy." He took her hand, brought it to his lips for a soft brushing of his dry lips and then turned his attention back to his children.

Poppy paused at the door to look upon the father and his sons; for Neville, though technically the wizard's godson, was no less his son then Harry was. She felt a painful warmth bloom in her heart. Turning away and closing the door gently she knew in that moment; she was in love with the Potions Master.
A grumpy Severus Snape had been sent out of his son and godson's room while they were examined and their bedding changed. The medi-witch had sent him to the waiting room but needing a walk he had found himself at the koi pond atrium of St. Mungos.

The koi pond was the center of a garden atrium beneath a glass domed enclosures that kept all within it a perfect Spring climate. Big, fat orange, black, white, koi and even some spotted with gold swam lazily in the gentle water fed by a clever, low height waterfall of water on the north edge that spilled over an artful arrangement of stone rounded by the constantly spilling water. Wrought iron benches sat around the pond. Behind each of the benches were trellised sprays of magenta and purple fuchsia. More plants, bushes, trees, ivy and flowers were spread about the garden in a way to create paths for visitor and ambulatory patients to wander amongst.

Severus was alone in the atrium but for the sound of twittering birds high above, and insects that buzzed among the flora. His head was bowed and his eyes closed against all but his thoughts. Thoughts that berated him for not being a good father.

Vaccinations. How many of his Snakes had he checked for vaccines and then sent them to Poppy for updates? How many times had he taken other parents to task about the wisdom of vaccines against the usual wizarding and Muggle-born childhood diseases. And, he had not even done so much as even think about such a thing for his son. Never had it struck him that Augusta Longbottom would never have had her grandson vaccinated.

The Potions Master had dealt with many Pureblood families where the parents paid little attention to the vaccines that had been developed in the last 50 years. It was a poor habit of the Pureblood to view any disease as something that could only be treated once contracted. Medical Prevention was considered Mugglish and therefore to be eschewed.

As to the Muggle-born student who was not vaccinated Severus had learned that many of the Muggle parents were under the impression that wizards and witches were invulnerable to sickness and therefore let the vaccine regimen slide.

Severus had always prided himself on being on top of the latest developments in Healing. Thus, it was a mortification to him that he had forgotten that his own child and his godson needed to benefit from his knowledge.

"What sort of fool am I?" Severus growled to himself.

"You are no more foolish than any first time father, my dear," said Albus as he settled himself next to his son.

Severus merely glared before aiming his gaze at the tips of his boots. "I forgot to have my son inoculated against the Dragon Pox, Father," he muttered. "I also never thought that Augusta Longbottom would never have vaccinated her grandson."

"You did forget, Severus," the older wizard tapped his son's chin in order to encourage him to raise his gaze. The younger wizard did so. "Fatherhood does not immediately bestow perfection upon you, my son. You did not learn overnight how to take care of your Slytherins, did you?" Severus replied by solemnly shaking his head. "I know that you have spoken to each one of your colleagues..."
for help in being a good Head of Slytherin House, Severus. You have done the same for Harry, haven’t you?”

"I… no, Father, yes, I…” Severus stuttered in frustration. "I have read over a dozen books on child rearing…”

"Have you spoken to anyone that has been a successful parent, my dear boy?" Albus scolded softly.

"You mean Arthur and Molly," Severus said tautly. "Does it mean nothing that I have spoken to Narcissa and Lucius?"

"No doubt they have given you a few pointers, Severus, but you cannot expect to rely upon them until Harry and Neville hit their majority. You need to consult other parents. I think that Arthur and Molly would very much like to help you."

"They are busy, Father," Severus shot back. He thought of the two youngest, a son and a daughter only a year apart and likely causing Molly double the headaches.

"Aren’t Lucius and Narcissa just as busy, my dear? Narcissa will be welcoming a new babe soon,” reminded the older man. "Simply because they only have Draco and soon the new Malfoy does not mean they are any less busy than Molly and Arthur are with their brood of seven.” He began to rub soothing circles over his son’s back. "Speak to the Weasleys, Severus."

Severus glared at his father, then smirked. "You are fortunate that I am a grown man, Father, and do not need worry yourself over me."

"You are wrong, child," replied Albus shaking his head. "You are my son and therefore I shall worry about you until I take my final breath." The older man then whispered to himself, "I regret I did not worry over you enough when you were a student."

Severus, a man of keen senses, heard his father and lightly kissed his brow. "It is the past, Father. As I have forgiven you it is high time you forgive yourself."

"There you are, Mr. Snape!" a medi-witch who had been looking for Severus walked into the atrium. Both wizards raised their gazes. "Your son is ready to go home, Mr. Snape. Everyone might wish to see Neville before you leave."

Severus nodded. "Come along, Father."

Harry stood on a chair so he could see his near-brother in his hospital bed. As he took Neville’s hand into his he glared at the little red spots on his hand. Those spots had awakened him in the morning with their persistent itching. A medi-wizard had arrived just when he thought he might go mad with the itch with a lotion that was pink with calamine root and smelled sweetly of other herbs. The medi-wizard had spread the lotion everywhere from his face on down to between his toes. The experience was uncomfortable and embarrassing but as soon as the lotion covered the little red spots the itching stopped. The lotion cooled him as well as bringing down his fever. The scent also lulled him into a sense of calm. He fell asleep through his subsequent examination and the changing of sheets.

Now, though, it was almost time for Harry to go home with his father. He did not understand why Neville wasn’t coming with them so he did the only thing he could do; hold Neville’s hand.

"There is my Magpie!" Severus said as soon as he was through the door of the hospital room.

"Shadow… Daddy!" Harry turned and smiled. He dropped Neville’s hand and perfectly jumped into
his father's arms. "I'm all spotty and green, Shadow."

Severus pressed his lips to his son's spotty yet cool cheek. "So you are, Magpie. How are you feeling?"

Harry shrugged and then lay his head upon his father's shoulder. "Sorta tired." He then lifted his head. "But, I'm hungry, too."

"Indeed," chuckled Severus softly. "Both are not insurmountable problems and we shall take care of those."

Harry yawned briefly and then saw Albus. "Grandfather! Hi!"

"Hello, my dear," smiled Albus as he tickled Harry's belly. "I am pleased to see you up and about. Are you ready to come home with us?"

Harry smiled at his grandfather but then looked at his near-brother. "Can't Neville come? Please, Shadow."

"I sincerely wish that he could, Magpie, but Neville is still very sick and needs to be here with the Healers," Severus replied.

Harry drew in a sigh. "Can't I stay with him, then? He's gonna be all alone and afraid."

"We will visit Neville, Magpie, but he must stay here and we must return home so that I may take care of you," the Potions Master ended with his own reluctant sigh. He then moved closer to Neville's bed where he cupped the cheek that was flushed in an unpleasant green mixed with the red of fever. He knew that the fever was being closely monitored and taken care of with potions but it was still uncomfortable knowing that the small child was still fighting the worst part of Dragon Pox.

18 December 1985 - The Blustery Day

On Wednesday, four days after the Dragon Pox arrived with a fever and a fainting spell, Neville's fever had broken and the spots, that always heralded a healthy end to Dragon Pox, appeared. Neville, slathered with the chamomile herb salve, went home with his godfather.

Harry was nearly spot-free but he still had to spend most of the day in bed. When Neville arrived through the Floo he was met by Harry and Madame Pomfrey and even Adelaide Ollivander. The two witches kissed Neville, completely embarrassing him and also making him smile. Harry just hugged him tightly and then dragged him to his garden bedroom.

"You got to get into bed, Nev," Harry urged. "Shadow's been really tough with me about that. I can't run or sneak out or anything." Neville had gone over to examine his garden of miniatures that he and his godfather had been working on. "Shadow and I fed and watered all of your plants, Nev. Don't they look good?"

Neville nodded. "They look great, Harry." He pointed at a tiny flower. "That wasn't there before. Do I have a new plant?"

Harry grinned. "Shadow planted it yesterday. Do you know what it is?"

"I have to look it up. I've never seen such a green flower before," Neville sighed as he gently stroked the air just above the flower. Harry had questioned this strange habit of Neville's to pet the air above his plants and had learned that the small, intelligent, boy was stroking the unseen aura of the plant.
"It's like a jewel, isn't it, Harry?"

"Yeah," Harry agreed.

"Gentlemen," Severus interrupted them as he entered Neville's bedroom. "It is time to get into your beds."

"Awww," grumped Harry. "Do I have to, Shadow? I've been sleeping forever and I feel better now."

"You are to rest until all of your spots are gone, my Harry," said Severus in the tone of voice of a parent who had said just this phrase several times before. "Now, go to your room and get into bed. I would like to get Neville settled."

Harry huffed, but it was mainly a touch of asperity for show. He smiled at Neville, gave him a small wave, and left the garden bedroom.

Neville waved to his near-brother then turned a concerned look at his bed, and then down at himself. "Mouse?" asked Severus as he pulled a set of pyjamas from his godson's wardrobe.

"Shadow, I feel yucky. Can I have a bath?" Neville asked wearily. He was tired but he really did feel like a film of dirt hovered over his skin.

With a wave of his hand the Potions Master had the tub water running. "Go get in the tub, Mouse. I'll bring you the soap, shampoo, a washcloth and a towel."

Neville suddenly raised his head. "You're not coming in there, Shadow, are you?"

Severus' right eyebrow arched. "You have yawned thrice in a half of an hour, Mouse. I daresay that if I do not watch you as you bathe you shall simply slide beneath the water… asleep."

"Will not," Neville scowled.

"Go, Mouse. Add some coloured suds and that will preserve your modesty," smirked Severus.

Neville nodded and vanished into the bathroom. Severus quickly had everything gathered, and lastly he drew the folded pyjamas behind him. He walked into the bathroom just as Neville, his eyes closed, started to slowly drift under his sea green suds and water.

"Neville Longbottom!" Severus shouted as he dropped everything onto the floor. He had dropped to his knees and caught his godson before he drifted into darkness eternal.

At the shout of his name Neville startled awake. His hands and feet flailed and he swallowed a bit of the green bubbles. "EW!"

Severus scowled and cast a Sticking Spell so Neville would not slide down into the water again. He handed Neville the soap and the washcloth. "Get to work on your body. I am going to cast a Hair-Washing Charm."

"I hate blbu-ub-blb!" Neville tried to protest but a small, plastic bucket of water spilled over his head and some got into his mouth. "Shadow!"

Severus smirked and rose to seat himself upon the closed toilet. "Awake now, Mouse?"

Neville managed a quick glare at his guardian as his hair began to froth with shampoo. Neville soaped up his washcloth and scrubbed at his skin. Severus remained quiet so Neville soon forgot his
guardian was in the bathroom. He spluttered in indignation when his hair was rinsed but that was the only protest as he finished his bath. Just as he started to step out of the tub, a huge yawn wracked his body and he wobbled unsteadily.

Once again Severus caught his ward with a large, fluffy towel and pulled him from the tub. He quickly dried him, and tickled the child's pink, red-spotted tummy, eliciting a tired, but joyous laughter. He then helped Neville into his pyjamas and escorted him to his bed.

"I'm glad to be… home, Shadow," Neville said in between a yawn.

Severus kissed the forehead still covered with spots. He smoothed his hand over them and was pleased to see that they were diminishing. "I am glad that you are home too, my little Mouse."

Outside, through the magic of Neville's charmed Enchanted Window, the windy day brought with it a flurry of snow that meant Christmas was in the air.

---

23 December 1985 — An Empty Hogwarts

The days before the Christmas holiday revealed a nearly empty Hogwarts; empty of students, that was. Sometimes a few students stayed behind but this year every student was home for the holidays. Of course, this meant that Neville, Harry, and when Draco visited, they were allowed in the Great Hall beyond just the evening meal.

Severus was in a Staff Meeting with Albus and the rest of the Hogwarts staff. It would kick off the holidays for those students staying at Hogwarts, and for those leaving. Three Gryffindors and two Hufflepuffs were staying so the holiday away was left up to everyone but Minerva McGonagall and Pomona Sprout.

While they met Lucius watched over his son, his newest nephew, and his now older nephew Harry, in the Great Hall. Lucius, who had always been a creative sort when it came to entertainment, had moved aside the four House tables against the wall and then charmed the floor with an Ice Charm making it slippery. Draco already knew how to ice skate but neither Harry nor Neville did. Harry, his hands being held by Lucius to keep him balanced, was doing a rather decent job skating. Draco, who had been given Neville, was starting to lose patience with the boy who had not even managed to stand on his skates.

"I… don't like… this!" Neville fell, once more, onto his backside just as Lucius and Harry skated past. His glower was deadly as those two passed effortlessly by.

"You're not even trying, you… you… Hufflepuff blancmange!" snapped Draco.

Draco let out a squeak that was half triumphant as Neville, hardly acting like a wobbly pudding, stood up, and started pushing along the icy floor. Draco seeing his life, for a moment was in danger, broke into a skating run. After several impressive lengths where both were skating at rapid speed Neville tackled Draco spectacularly. With Neville atop him, Draco was propelled on his back along the slippery floor.

By that time Lucius and Harry had stopped to watch as the two boys fled across the floor of the Great Hall. Lucius only intervened before Neville could throw a punch. He sailed gracefully over the icy surface and plucked Neville, still glowering, off of a now giggling Draco.

"What's so bloody funny?!" groused Neville in a bluster as he stood in front of Lucius.

"You skated!" burst Draco as he was wracked by another fit of giggles. Neville, very confused,
looked down at himself.

"Nev, you skated on the icy floor," smiled Harry. "And, really fast, too!"

"I did?" Neville asked uncertainly.

Lucius patted Neville's back gently. "That you did, nephew. And, impressively." Lucius then glared at Draco who had picked himself up. "So tell me, Dragon, what words of wisdom did you impart to Neville to encourage him to skate without any caution to himself?"

Draco froze where he stood. He recognised that tone in his father's voice. Also, he was five years old but he could clearly discern the rebuke his father sent to him in that question. "I… uh… well… um…" he dropped his head knowing he had to say something or it could go worse for him. "I called Nevablancmange."

"Slow down, Dragon. Say it again… slowly," ordered Lucius.

"Blancmange, Father," sniffled Draco as a tear escaped one eye. "I said Neville was a blancmange."

"A Hufflepuff blancmange," snapped Neville with a clarification of the insult.

Lucius glared. "Patience, Draco. How many times have I told you that you must curb your impatience?"

"But I… Neville was…" protested Draco.

"You were supposed to help your cousin, Draco, not make the lesson worse with your temper," chided Lucius sharply. "Apologise, and begin again."

Draco gave Neville a dark look. Neville, a little more brave then usual, glared right back. Neville continued to glare until Draco lost his attitude and sighed. "I'm sorry, Nev. Can we start again?"

Neville, his lips still thin, suddenly smiled brightly. "Sure! I got the balance down, Draco. What's next?"

Lucius smirked as both were now friends once more. He then looked down at Harry. "Are you ready to try on your own, Harry?"

Harry nodded. "I want to skate as fast as Draco and Nev did, Uncle Lucius."

"You shall but let us start leisurely. I shall skate beside you," Lucius assured.

Then, watching carefully, and proudly, he watched as Harry set himself into motion. Lucius kept pace beside his nephew and soon all four were easily skating across the icy surface of the Great Hall.

Harry enjoyed the fluid grace that drifted over him as the unease and nerves faded away. He sped up to join his cousins and the three linked elbows as they swept smoothly over the icy floor, giggles following like bubbles, and skated.

"Brother!" called Severus from the staff room doorway. "Shall we…?"

Lucius broke across the surface of glass like a bolt of silver lightning as he saw his brother step unknowingly onto the ice mimicking surface of the Great Hall floor. Severus felt his foot slip awkwardly in front of him and he let out a thunderous imprecation that froze the boys in place as momentum took hold of its prisoner. The Potions Master fell heavily to the floor, sliding. To his even greater horror Lucius had lost his elegant form and tried to stop his fast, aborted, rescue attempt, and
tried not to collide with the wizard now speeding towards him.

"DAD!"

"SHADOW!"

"UNCLE SEVERUS!"

As Lucius, now whirling his arms in a terrible parody of some sort of beautiful whirligig, could not stop himself as he collided with Severus. In a tangle of arms, legs, robes, and rather a bit of blue cursing, he fell right on top of his brother.

Albus, who had detected the silken sheen of the floor after his son began to slip, quelled the laughter that threatened, and worked to remove the Ice Charm. A powerful wizard he was but ending another wizard's spell was difficult and it unfortunately was not until the end of the wreck of Severus and Lucius that he managed to remove the ice.

"Lucius! Stop being so bloody helpful!" growled Severus as he disentangled himself from the older man. "Let go of me, you sodding bastard!" Severus, now up on one elbow with Lucius now sitting opposite him, looked right into his son's face. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Lucius smirking as Draco leaned against his father.

"You're going to have to eat soap, Shadow," Harry said a softly, chiding voice. "You told me we don't say words like that."

"You, too, Papa," whispered Draco into his father's ear. Lucius' lips thinned.

With Albus lending support, Severus stood, straightened his robes and dignity, and then stuck his arm out to Lucius in order to help him stand. "I did say that, Magpie. Was I washing your mouth out with soap at the time?"

Harry nodded solemnly. "I said the 'B' word." He shrugged. "I just heard Charlie Weasley say it and I thought it was just a neat word."

Draco interjected, "I said that to mother at dinner once when she gave me extra peas, she spanked me." He looked up at his uncle. "Is Grandfather Albus going to spank you for bad language, Uncle Severus?"

Lucius, who had been keeping his mirth to little smirks suddenly burst out laughing. Severus coloured duskily as his father chuckled behind him. "He would not dare, Little Dragon." Severus put a hand on his son's shoulder as he looked down at his ankles bent awkwardly in his skate boots. 
"Take those off, Magpie. You," he whirled upon Lucius whose laughter stopped at the younger man's deadly glare. "Stop that annoying braying. I do believe it is time to leave for Malfoy Manor."

"So it is, Severus," Lucius coughed in order to disguise one last, traitorous guffaw. "Skates off, gentlemen. It is time for us to leave!"

While the three boys huddled down to remove their skates, Lucius Summoned their shoes. Albus leaned closer to his son and whispered, "That truly was an impressive fall, my boy. You are not bruised, are you?"

Severus' lips thinned. "Only my dignity, Old Man."
The Beginning of Christmas Holidays

Malfoy Manor 23 Dec. 1985 - Upstairs Guest Bathroom

Mad. Angry. Beyond thought.

Severus, a trail of soap bubbles dribbling down his chin, glared with dark, murderous intent at his father. Albus, damn him, was smirking just enough to keep from blurring out into a full-fledged gasp of laughter.

*I agreed to this,* rattled the thought in Severus' mind. *Harry is not allowed to curse and neither should I. But,* and here his glower became dangerous as he looked upon the audience of his son, Albus, and Neville slightly behind the bearded menace, *Must such glee be so savoured at my distress? And, blasted Hades, this soap tastes terrible!*

"You can spit the soap out, Dad," Harry said with a tinge of regret.

Severus spit the soap into the sink, then thoroughly rinsed his mouth. To his astonishment, before he could turn fully, Harry had thrown his arms around his father's legs; the boy was only five and did not reach his father's waist.

"I'm sorry, Daddy!" Harry's words were slightly muffled against Severus' hip.

Severus dropped to one knee as he heard the distress in his son's voice. He pulled the little one into his arms. "Shhh, Harry, my Magpie. It is quite all right. I am the one who erred in using the language I did, not you."

"S'not that, Shadow," Harry sniffled. "I just thought this would be funny 'cuz you're my dad and I'm you're son, but it isn't. And now your mouth is yucky and you don't like me anymore 'cuz I punished you!"

"Oh, Magpie… my contrite little boy," Severus pushed aside his son's fringe that covered the ubiquitous "curse scar" received at the wand of Voldemort. It had faded since that villain's permanent death, but it likely would not vanish entirely for many years yet. He kissed the ghost white scar, and gave his son a hug. "I do not hate you for a little soap, Magpie. It was a silly thing, and as you can see, I have survived." Harry sniffled, and nodded at his father's intense gaze. "And, if I must be honest, just as I have told you to watch your language, so must I. However," he winked conspiratorially, "I would prefer that you just chide me in future as a reminder, rather than me eating soap."

Harry curled a lock of his father's shoulder length black hair around his finger, smiled, and then kissed Severus' cheek. "I can do that."

Severus tugged a lock of his son's hair as he rose to his feet. "Now, I do believe dinner is about to be served. Shall we go downstairs, everyone?" The Potions Master cast a baleful glance at the quiet one in his little audience: Lucius Malfoy. A smirk of amused proportion had settled upon the generous mouth of the aristocrat as he watched the "soaping of a filthy mouth". "I do believe that you threw a streak of blue cursing to cause the Fates to blush, Brother." The wizard's corner of his mouth twitched wickedly. "Shall I cast Lavare?"

"As I recall," mused Severus, "your language was no worse than my own when we collided." He paused in walking down the hallway and turned to face Lucius.
Lucius stopped sharply, his face contorting into a warning chagrin as Severus smirked devilishly, "Oh! No you don't...!"

**23 December 1985 — Grand Dining Room of Malfoy Manor**

The Malfoy Manor was a beautiful spectacle of marble (cream, white, and black), silver trim and accents also in silver, and a touch of gold as well. Although the Malfoys had been on the land of Malfoy Estates since the 12th century, the original castle had suffered great damage when the Muggle world had crossed magical wards layered by many generations. In the 17th century the peace of the Sir Granthym de'Malfoi was disturbed by the Anglo-Spanish War. Forced to fight with Muggles in order to preserve their home Sir Granthym led his 1500 knights through several battles that brought about an unfortunate attack upon Malfoi Castle. Not only was the structure burnt to the ground but all but the young lord, Alaric de'Malfoi, was slaughtered.

Alaric de'Malfoi became known simply as The Dark Knight since the Malfois were now criminals in the eyes of the English king. Alaric, a strong man with a shock of white hair "gifted" him when he witnessed the deaths of his mother and sisters, found safety and new life in France. In France he wed a sorceress of great strength who not only gave him four sons but helped Alaric to embrace his latent wizarding powers. The new Malfoy family returned to England and Alaric's wife successfully hid all of the Malfoy estates from the Muggle world.

Alaric built what was now known to contemporary wizards and witches as Malfoy Manor. It was still known to its family, as Alaric had named it, the White Palace. Alaric's sons and grandsons added to the White Palace and the surrounding structures as needed.

The White Palace dominated the land. Surrounding it was the village of workers (witches and wizards) that tended the Aethenon herd, the Malfoy White Peacocks, the four farms of produce, and most impressive; the silk worm farm that produced the well-known Snow Silk Fabric.

The White Palace was a structure that appeared on the outside as that of a square box with the front being a huge and impressive porch that had gained marble columns in the 19th century. The Malfoy house elves were all housed in the apartments above this porch. The first floor sported the Grand Ballroom that spilled gracefully onto the wide front porch and two side doors that led out onto east and west gardens.

Beyond the impressive Grand Ballroom with its marble floors, columns that supported the Grand Staircase, was an entrance beneath the stairs that led to the kitchens of the White Palace. Here could be found both working witches and house elves. Beside the kitchen was the Grand Dining Room. A room of such opulent nature that it had mirrored walls of thin, amber Mica that made the place seem much larger. The dining table stretched the length of the Grand Dining Room. It sat with a silk tablecloth of white and upon it were the beautiful silver and green enamelled candelabras with stems in the "S" shape of snakes. There were five of these beneath three equally impressive chandeliers of crystal drops handmade in Italy.

For all its beauty, it was lately unseen since the present family were not of a mind to serve the luxurious meals of centuries past.

Neither did the current Malfoys host great groups of acquaintances that stayed at the White Palace. Thus, but for the Malfoy Library which had expanded over the centuries to three floors of books, tomes, scrolls, journals, and more, the East Wing of the White Palace was closed. The West Wing held the hidden Family Parlour, the Family Dining Room, and the Family Kitchen. On the second floor of the West Wing were the bedrooms that housed Lucius and Narcissa, Draco, a Nursery and a Playroom.
Harry and Neville had visited the West Wing where Draco had an expansive bedroom with one corner that abutted a small, circular tower. From his tower he had a view over the backyard and the west side yard of the White Palace. The west side yard was a spectacular garden of roses that bloomed year round to give colour to that part of the grounds.

The backyard was artistically delineated sections of garden by tall English Box Hedge. The Malfoy White Peacock, painstakingly bred by Lucius since his years at Hogwarts, were free to roam in the Topiary Garden.

This corner tower was no less spectacular then the balcony in Draco's bedroom that opened onto an overlook of the backyard. The balcony, of course, stretched the entire length of Draco's room. The furniture in Draco's room held a canopied double bed with drapes of white velvet that were caught by a silver rope at each corner, a magnificent roll-top desk of white pine and inlay of pearl, a wardrobe built into the wall that matched, a fireplace with a mantle in which two dragons flanked the center. All white but for Draco's prize, a painting of King Arthur, the Round Table, and his knights over the marble mantle.

Narcissa, a modest seven months into gravidity rose from the dining table where she had been conversing with Poppy Pomfrey. Narcissa wore an elegantly understated gown in dove grey highlighted by ribbons of green that trailed down the bodice. Lucius glanced in appreciation at the benefits of a rounded pregnancy in the Empire gown. She smiled graciously at her guests and ended with a quizzical look for her rather disgruntled husband. "Lucius?" she asked as she touched his cheek with her cool fingers. "Is everything all right?"

Severus smirked. "Nothing that a little *Lavare* to my brother's mouth would hurt, Narcissa." With exaggeration he patted his abdomen. "I do believe we are all quite hungry!"

"*Lavare*?" Narcissa tried not to smile but her eyes were sparkling. That was the charm Lucius had used a time or two to curb their son's foray into the world of swearing. A mouthful of suds did the trick.

Lucius sneered darkly, sighed in acquiescence, and finally smiled. "I was merely presenting an example to our son, Cissy. Just as he is not allowed to swear and he is punished with a mouth-washing, so too, was I." Once his guests were seated Lucius took his chair. There was no head of the table as this one was round and put family and guests at the same status.

Severus, seated beside Poppy, took a moment to drink in the beauty of her dark gold hair in Renaissance ringlets, and an Empire gown of red silk, white lace, and ribbons that adorned her corset bodice.

"You are quite beautiful this evening, Madame," Severus whispered for her ears only. He was smug as a blush bloomed smoothly down her neck to her decolletage.

Poppy smiled, "Do I smell the faint smell of *Lavare* on your breath, Severus?" He glared and Poppy laughed.

Dinner had been a repast of delectable roast and baby potatoes diced with vegetables in which bits of crumbled bacon, sour cream, gravy, or butter could be added to. Neville, who was already showing a love of too much butter, had to be restrained. Harry, unfortunately, doused his potatoes with so much cheese and bacon bits before his father caught him that they were nearly inedible. Narcissa had just Vanished the serving for the little boy, and Severus served his son a dish of potatoes that were more modestly dressed up.
Dessert was an elegant English Trifle of snowy white cake layered with blueberries and strawberries. It was topped by rich whipped vanilla cream and brandy syrup dipped black cherries. All of this was finished by thimblefuls of an elven brandy for Draco, Harry, and Neville, and brandy snifters for the adults. With a cool heat the elven brandy cleansed the palettes of all.

23 December 1985 - That Night

Harry and Neville shared a guest bedroom that was so large it could swallow both their rooms at home. The bed was a canopied affair dripping with heavy, cream coloured drapes that had been pulled back and open on one side by cream coloured silk ropes as thick as the small boys' arms. A duvet of luxuriant, snowy velvet covered the bed as did round, cylindrical and large pillows that brimmed with softness halfway down the surface.

The room itself was warmth and comfort in soft shades of Autumn, gold, cream and delightful splashes of green upon the chairs and chaise lounge before the large fireplace. One wall moved lazily as Autumn leaves drifted endlessly down upon a snow-bumped ground.

"I've never seen a bed that big in my life!" gasped Neville.

"This room is like being in a snowglobe," whispered Harry. "I think…” He was interrupted when he saw a familiar face emerge from the mound of pillows. "Nellie!"

As Harry ran over Neville sighed with a touch of jealousy. He missed the Droopy pup that was now half his size that remained in Hagrid's care. He hoped Droopy was having a great Christmas. In that moment a large brown and black, smiling, droopy-eared puppy burst forth from the remaining mound of pillows and jumped with one bark into Neville's arms. Dog and boy fell to the floor. Neville giggled as Droopy furiously licked his face.

"Hagrid tells me that you have been doing a very good job of training Droopy, Mouse," chuckled Severus. "Therefore I see no reason why he cannot be with us as Nellie is."

"Thank you… Shadow!" Neville dragged himself out from under the dog and ordered him to sit. Droopy did so smoothly. "I'll take Droopy out for walks everyday."

"I'll go with him, Shadow!" Harry volunteered as he cuddled Nellie.

"All right, my boys, your bathroom is through that door. Go take care of your ablutions, brush your teeth, and then dress for bed." Both boys left their familiars and trotted to the bathroom. Severus could hear water running in the sink. He smirked, and left the room. He did, however, cast a quick glance at Droopy before closing the door to the guest room. "You had better be house-trained, furball." Droopy sneezed in indignation and Severus closed the door.
The Yule Ball at Malfoy Manor

24 December 1985 - The Yule Ball at Malfoy Manor

There was nothing in the world (and that was Muggle and Wizard) that could equal the Yule Ball at Malfoy Manor. The Grand Ballroom sat in the shape of a rounded rectangle at the foot of a wide staircase. The steps of white marble gleamed beside beautifully twisted rails of gold. The staircase split halfway up, settled at a landing that was overlooked by an over life-size portrait of the first Malfoi - Sir Granthym de'Malfoi - and led, not to either wing of Malfoy Manor but to a balcony that overlooked the ballroom.

Chandelier with crystals hand-blown sparkled as never-ending flames burned from small candles nestled within all the crystal. There were five such chandelier each boasting 100 flames to light the Grand Ballroom. Narrow columns of elf-carved marble had deep green ivy with very red holly berries twisted round them. The ivy followed the gold rail of the staircase, and then around the gold rail of the sumptuous balcony.

At one end of the ballroom was seated a string quartet resplendent in tailored suits of white, white wigs, and their instruments were golden brass and mellow, richly polished Maple. The music played was composed by musicians from the past that had been wizard, Muggle, and Squib.

Additional decor was added by the guests to the ball. The hair or headdresses sparkled with every possible gem one could think of, there were necklaces and bracelets, as well, that added more glitter. The style of gowns tended to an extravagance not seen since Europe of the 15th century. Those gowns were of silk, lace, and linen embroidered with precious thread and accented by jewels. The men were no less luxuriant in dark fashion that began with hose and doublets and beautiful dress robes, to Edwardian suits tailored and further enhanced by robes that split down the front and to the floor.

Both Lucius and Narcissa dressed in white that was woven primarily from the White Silk farmed on their own silk farm. Narcissa, her pale gold hair was drawn up to crown her head with ringlets that fell artfully over her ears and the back of her neck. A thin choker of diamonds wrapped around her throat with one teardrop that fell down to her decolletage. Her gown, Empire inspired, was a draping of floating silk that drifted down to her still dainty slippers, also white. The bodice, of silver thread and diamonds, was the last of her "jewellery".

Lucius wore a tailored suit of white linen. The jacket had tails that fell to his knees, and split open perfectly to reveal his waistcoat that matched his wife's bodice. A watch fob in silver draped in a simple curve from one small pocket on the left to his right where a watch was concealed. Over this was a robe of white velvet. His white hair had been left unbound to fall to his elbows.

Draco wore a suit that matched his father's but no robe. Once he and his parents had made their presentation of themselves on the landing of the wide staircase, he and his cousins, Harry and Neville, were whisked away to the playroom by a house elf.

Severus Snape had departed his usual, all black teaching attire. His suit, though, was the darkest of greys broken by a waistcoat of dark, forest green velvet embroidered with black thread. He, like Lucius, had a watch fob in silver that draped across his abdomen. He had worn an outside cloak of black but that had been removed once he, his father Albus, Poppy, and his boys, had entered the ballroom. His finely cut Edwardian jacket with its tails to just below his hips was enough ostentation. Severus' long black hair was held back by a ribbon of black satin tied in a bow.
For once Albus had been talked out of the loud colours and animated patterns on his robes. He wore a cassock-style robe of warm purple trimmed with green satin embroidered with green metallic thread ivy and red metallic thread berries. Opalescent fur trimmed the hem of the robes bell sleeves. His conical hat of velvet matched his robe. The embroidery spiraled around the cap to its tip. Albus’ slippers were also purple. His white hair and beard fell about him in a smooth cloud of softness that Neville kept wanting to bury his face into. Harry had declared his grandfather to look like a "proper royal wizard". Draco was certain that Albus was the legendary wizard, Merlin.

Neville and Harry both wore Edwardian suits like Severus in grey. The soft grey was highlighted by waistcoats of their favourite colours: sapphire blue for Neville and purple (very much like Albus' robes) for Harry.

Poppy Pomfrey wore a Victorian styled gown that belled outward with the help of a hoop skirt as luxuriant as the gown but it was decorated with lace. The gown was designed so that the hem of the lacy hoop skirt became an embellishment for the gown. The gown itself was of white velvet on the skirt sides and back and a satin panel down the front. The upper half of the gown was a black corset decorated with intricate black, silver flecked thread highlighted by black pearls. Poppy's hair which she often wore up or tied back had been allowed free to fall in honey-gold waves down her back. Such a style was considered, in the society of Pureblood wizardry to be risque'. Severus did not mind the daring fashion at all. He was itching to gather that beautiful fall into his hands and enveloping himself in the citrus aroma of Poppy's hair.

Narcissa smiled knowingly as she watched Severus pull a laughing Poppy onto the floor to dance. Harry glowered as he stood beside his uncle, Neville sighed, and Draco's comment was, "They're just like my parents, humpf!"

The little boys did not stay for the ball. They were more than happy to be taken to Draco's playroom by three house elves assigned to their care. They were in the middle of an intense game of Gobstones that exploded a variety of colourful goops when Draco blithely asked, "When's your dad going to marry Madame Pomfrey?"

Harry paused in shock and was caught off-guard by a red Gobstone that exploded in orange goop on him. He wiped his hand down his face. "What d'you mean, Draco?"

"Well, your dad and Madame Pomfrey like each other so they got to get married," explained Draco.

"Is it a law?" asked Neville as he tossed a Gobstone that hit Draco with a green goop.

"No… I don't want to play this anymore," Draco glared at the green goop on his trousers. "Dinky, clean me up," ordered Draco.

"Please," reminded Harry. "Don't be mean to house elves, Draco."

In moments the house elf Dinky had all three boys cleaned. Neville rose to his feet and went over to get their favourite boardgame, Wizard's Mousetrap. "Is it a law? Do Shadow and Madame Pomfrey got to get married?" He sat down and Harry lifted the lid off the box.

Draco touched each of the three mice which started them moving on the board as Harry spread it out on the floor. "It's not a law, Nev," replied Draco.

"Shadow and Madame Pomfrey like each other lots, Nev," added Harry. He smiled. "I like Madame Pomfrey."

Neville nodded. "Me too, Harry. She smells nice and kisses us."
"My mum does the same thing," sighed Draco with a smile. "Mum also told me that I was going to help her with the new baby. I'll get to feed it, and talk to it, and play with it. I'm not changing its nappies, though." He grimaced.

Harry shook his head. "You gotta do that, Draco. Babies can't change their own nappies."

"No, Harry," corrected Neville. "That's what parents do for babies. Draco, are your mum and dad going to change the babies nappies?"

"Course not!" Draco scoffed. "That what house elves are for."

"Didn't your mum ever change your nappies?" asked Neville innocently.

Draco's jaw dropped as he stared at his cousin. He then picked up a wandering mouse and threw it at Neville.

"HEY!" protested Neville. He picked up the animated mouse and soothed it. "That wasn't nice, Draco."

Harry grimaced at a terrible past memory of when he lived with the Dursleys. He was glad there were so few and that when he had a nightmare Shadow was nearby to hold him. Still, he recalled sitting in his nappies until his body could not stand the filth of his own body. And, he had been so young then!

Shaking his head to erase the images of the past he spoke over Neville and Draco who were now arguing. "I'd like my dad to marry Madame Pomfrey."

Harry's words got through to the two arguing boys. Neville spoke up, "I like Madame Pomfrey lots. Don't you, Harry."

"Course I do. I think Shadow likes her, too," smirked Harry. "I'm like a hundred percent sure he likes her."

Draco snickered, "Uncle Severus was drooling when he saw Madame Pomfrey. She's not supposed to wear her hair down."

"How come?" asked Harry as he thought of his Aunt Petunia who always wore her hair up in a stiff bun. He had hated it since it only made her more mean looking.

"Cuz he likes her, Harry!" Draco giggled. "You think Uncle Severus has ever kissed her?"

Harry was shaking his head but Neville was nodding. "I saw Shadow kiss Madame Pomfrey right after dinner last night."

"You did not!" Harry blurted hotly.

"Did too!" Neville shot back.

Draco jumped on the Wizarding Mousetrap board in between his two cousins. "I saw the kiss, too, Harry. Your dad likes Madame Pomfrey and he kissed her."

"So?" Harry said nonchalantly as he nudged Draco off of the playing board. "Doesn't mean anything. Boys and girls kiss all the time."

"Yeah, but your dad kissed Madame Pomfrey, Harry," Draco said again with more force. "That means he wants to marry her."
Harry frowned as he thought over what Neville and Draco believed. Neville interrupted his thoughts by saying, "It'd be nice having Madame Pomfrey as a mum... I mean aunt. A mum for you, Harry."

Harry looked up. "Mum for you, too, Nev, cause you're my cousin but you live with me and you're like my brother."

Neville sighed wistfully, "I wish your dad was really mine, too, Harry. I don't care about ini-heritance. Longbottom Manse is creepy."

"You can fix it all up when you're grown, Nev," insisted Draco. "You'd have like a hundred, hundred, hundred galleons then!"

Neville shrugged. "Who cares?"

"Nev?" asked Harry slowly as though he were in the midst of an important thought. "You'd rather have parents than money, wouldn't you? I think that's why you call my dad Shadow." Neville nodded morosely at the truth.

"You want your parents, Nev?" asked Draco softly.

Again Neville nodded. "When we saw your parents, Harry, on Halloween..." he slowly drew in a breath and then continued, "Your first dad said something to me but I don't get it." The ghost of James Potter had whispered that night into Neville's ear. Words no one had yet to hear.

"I remember," said Harry. "What did he say, Nev?"

"James said 'your parents will always know you, Neville.'" Neville shrugged worrily.

Draco frowned. He was puzzled, too. Harry's eyes lit up. "You got to visit your parents, Nev! That's what my first dad meant. You gotta visit 'em in St. Mungo's!"

"Now?" asked Neville half hopefully.

"Yeah," gushed Draco. "Let's go now! Dobby!"

A curious looking house elf with large, green eyes 'popped' into the playroom. "What can be Dobby doing for Little Master Draco?"

"Take us to papa, Dobby," ordered Draco.

The house elf's long, thin index finger waggled in admonition. "Dobby is reminding Little Master Draco of what Mistress Narcissa told him. Little Master Draco is to be being polite to house elves."

Draco huffed and his lips thinned as his mother's soft, yet chiding voice threaded through his mind.

"You are becoming a little martinet, Dragon," sighed Narcissa as she drew the ivory comb through her son's fine hair. "You need to work on your manners and the best place to do so is with our house elves."

"I'm not mean, Mama," protested Draco. He loved when his mother combed his hair since she always had him sit in front of her so she could hug him against her.

"Of course you are not, dear, but neither do you show them the respect they deserve. The first Malfoy house elf chose to bond with our family. The bond is a matter of trust and loyalty." Narcissa stopped combing her son's hair for a moment as she kissed the crown of his head. "Show your father and I how kind you can be, Dragon."
Recalling that little scene of his past, Draco spoke quietly, "Dobby, would you please take us to my papa?"

"Master Lucius is telling all house elves that children stay in playroom, Little Master Draco." Draco was about to bluster a protest but the small house elf held up his hand. "Is this being an… emergency… Little Master Draco?" asked the elf deviously. Dobby was quite certain the child did not have an emergency but he did not see a reason for the children to stay in the playroom. Thus, he provided them an out.

Draco grinned. "Yes, Dobby. It is an emergency. So, will you take us to papa?"

Dobby's head bobbed positively. "Come along Little Masters. All of you hold tight to Dobby's arm. We fly!" As soon as all three children were gripping the house elf, he popped out with them.

Narcissa and Lucius sat at a small round table that had the advantage of allowing Lucius a good view of the entire ballroom. However, both were watching as Severus danced effortlessly with Poppy across the dance floor.

Lucius sipped smugly at his champagne as he declared softly, "I predict a Spring wedding, my dear."

"Rather certain about that, are you, love?" Narcissa smiled lightly, and knowingly.

Lucius, catching his wife's curious look leaned forward, "What is it you know, clever wife?"
Narcissa laughed at her secret which only gave it away. A very smug wizard settled back into his chair. "Soo, our Potions Master has been a bit naughty, has he?"

"Papa!"

Lucius nearly dropped his crystal flute of champagne as the unexpected appearance of his son's appearance shocked him. Narcissa caught the flute with a simple levitation charm as Lucius addressed his son, and his two cousins. "Draco! What are the three of you doing out of the playroom?"

Draco leaned towards his mother as his father's voice was a bit unexpectedly harsh towards him. "Um… we're sorry but an emergency sort of came up, Papa. Please don't hex us."

Lucius calmed the last of his quick beating heart and patted his knee. "Dragon, I have and never will hex you. Now, come here." Thankful that his father really was not mad at him Draco went over to his father and leaned against his thigh. Lucius carded his hand through his son's soft, pale hair and he then glanced over Harry and Neville. "Tell me what this 'emergency' is, Draco."

"We have to go see Nev's parents. Harry's first daddy told Nev that they would know him and Nev's grandmother always told him they were 'no better than potatoes' because they were brainless."
Neville nodded. Harry nodded to confirm what his almost-brother had told them. "Can we go?"

"I believe that we can…" began Lucius. He paused as the sound of a dropped crystal flute caught his attention. Narcissa had dropped her champagne mid-sip as pain rippled across her abdomen. "Cissy?"

The little scene of drama caught the eagle eye of the Potions Master. Severus led Poppy back over to their hosts just as Narcissa suppressed a groan of great discomfort. Poppy, instantly the Healer she was, had her wand out and was doing a Diagnostic Charm over the pregnant woman.

"Ahh, early labor, Cissy," Poppy informed them. "Let's get you to your Healer..."
"Labor?" Lucius questioned rather idiotically. "But, Cissy has another… month?" He hopefully asked anyone listening.

Poppy clucked her tongue in irritation. "A baby comes when he or she is ready to come, Lucius, not on a schedule. Now, help Narcissa to the family area," she ordered.

Narcissa stood feeling a bit wobbly now that the contraction had passed. "Is the baby all right, Poppy?"

Poppy smiled gently as she and Lucius helped her from the Grand Ballroom and through a second hidden panel that led to family area of Malfoy Manor. "You are both fine. Are you ready to meet your child, Cissy?"

Narcissa could not say anything as another contraction rippled across her abdomen. She managed a grimace of a smile, and then she, Lucius, and Poppy were met by the private Healer of Obstetrics that had been taking care of Narcissa during her pregnancy. The Healer, a grey-haired witch with kind but steely-blue eyes took waved them towards the room which usually served as the family parlour.

Healer Gaya quickly explained, "The house elves aided me in preparing a comfortable birthing room. Mr. Malfoy, you are welcome to stay with your wife but your friends must remain in the antechamber." She pointed towards a door that had plainly been added to lead to the other quarter of the parlour turned into a waiting room. Severus ushered all three boys through the door as Lucius, fully concentrating on his beloved wife, moved to the bed where she had been placed. Poppy had changed Narcissa's ball gown into a simple cotton shift, and then her own gown into her Healer's robes.

Narcissa let out a strong wail… Baby Malfoy was on the way.
Epilogue

Christmas 1985 - A New Malfoy

The parlour (which had served as a birthing room) had been returned to its proper decor - festive with all the signs of Christmas - once the newest Malfoy arrived and Narcissa had recovered from the six hour ordeal that ended precisely at midnight on Christmas Eve. The boys had fallen to sleep in the playroom around eleven so it was not until breakfast that Draco learned from his godfather Severus that he had a sibling. All three boys were instantly awake and thoughts of Christmas presents had vanished as all three wanted to see the new baby.

Harry looked over his mixed berry blintz and whispered, "Draco, do you think you got a sister or a brother?"

Draco shrugged as he spooned honey-sugar sprinkled grapefruit sections into his mouth as fast as he could.

Severus glared at his godson. "Draco, slow down before you choke. Harry, stop gossiping and finish your blintz." He gave Neville a quick nodding smile. The small boy was busy eating, slowly, as he should, and not speculating.

Severus was on perhaps his fourth or fifth cup of coffee since eleven at night. He had spent a few hours with Lucius after Healer Gaya had thrown him out of the birthing room. Lucius had paced until he collapsed near to midnight for a few minutes of precious sleep. Severus had tried to nod off only to be woken up a few minutes later by Poppy stirring Lucius awake.

He recalled that although she had no longer worn her Healer robes but just a simple grey gown with a white apron, and hair pushed messily into a bun that she was the most beautiful sight for him to see on Christmas morning. Poppy had shoved a nervous Lucius towards the door to the birthing room, and then she had gone to Severus and thrown herself tiredly, but happily so, into his arms.

"Normal?" asked Severus.

"Completely. The babe is a bit small but has all ten toes and fingers," sighed Poppy.

Severus had tried to get the sex of Baby Malfoy with a few judicious kisses, but alas his efforts were for naught. At least for that small bit of info. A few minutes later he had seen the baby for himself, and found himself struck by how tiny the creature was!

So, it was with a bit of a smirk that he ushered the three boys into the family room where Narcissa now sat upon the comfortable sofa with Lucius nearby. Narcissa, looking much better than she had the other night, held the small, wrapped baby in her arms. Lucius was hovering protectively.

"Dragon!" smiled Lucius. "Come see your new sister!" Draco was restrained from jumping beside his mother by an observant Poppy. Once settled, Draco leaned over to peek into the swaddling.

"Hi," whispered Draco in awe of the teeny tiny person his mother held. "I'm your big brother, Draco." Draco then urged Neville and Harry to join him. "I've got a sister. You got to see her!"

"Not so loud, Dragon," Narcissa admonished gently. "Her ears are very tender."

Lucius nudged a hesitant Harry and then Neville to sit beside their cousin.
"She's so small," marvelled Harry.

"She's got hair!" giggled Neville in surprise.

"She does," agreed Draco. Tentatively he reached up to touch the soft curls. "As beautiful as feathers on a pearl."

"Can I touch her, Aunt Cissy?" asked Harry politely.

Narcissa nodded. "Just be gentle, Harry."

Harry slid off the sofa and stood in front of Narcissa and his new little cousin. Putting out his index finger Harry lightly stroked the small baby's cheek. "She's so warm."

At that moment the baby opened her eyes to reveal two beautiful silver blue eyes. She then burped. All three boys giggled.

"You're lucky, Draco," said Harry as tiny fingers curled around his own. "You get to be a big brother."

Poppy stepped closer to Severus who had stiffened at that moment. He relaxed, and drew Poppy closer to his side. He had heard the wistful wish in his son's voice.

"What's her name, Mama?" Draco asked after there were several minutes of silent appreciation.

Narcissa quickly looked at her husband who nodded in agreement. "Well, your father and I thought of a name but after hearing such a lovely description of your sister - As beautiful as feathers on a pearl - I think Pearl would be perfect, don't you, Dragon?"

Draco nodded enthusiastically. *He'd just gotten to name his little sister! Nobody else got to do that, right?* "Maybe the name you and papa thought of would work as a middle name, Mama. Then we all named the baby."

Narcissa knew the name she and Lucius had thought of would fit perfectly. She said it softly. "Pearl Rose. Welcome to the world, Pearl Rose Malfoy."

Lucius gently cupped his daughter's head, and marvelled at how large his hand was to the small skull. He leaned forward and gently brushed his lips to the soft, pale white curls on her head.

"Welcome, Pearl Rose. My darling daughter."

Draco imitated his father and said, "Welcome, Pearl Rose. You're going to have such a lot of fun here!"

Despite the joyous arrival of the newest Malfoy the Christmas presents were not going to wait forever. They sparkled and twinkled beneath the tree - calling to the three little boys.

"As the big brother to your little sister, Dragon, I think you should start off. Go to the tree and pick something out," suggested Lucius.

Draco, appearing very serious, left his mother's side to walk over to the tree. He studied all of the packages with the care a child always has when preparing to dismantle all the gifts beneath the tree. "You and Pearl are first, Mama," declared Draco importantly as he brought a slim box wrapped in purple foil paper with a gold ribbon. Draco was certain he had not seen the gift with all of the others last night.
Narcissa handed Pearl to her father, and then picked up the slim gift. "To Pearl, our Christmas daughter." She lifted her gaze to her husband who was standing, bouncing gently his daughter. "When did you slip this gift in, Lucius?"

"A simple 'flick and swish', my love," smirked Lucius.

Narcissa chuckled and then tore into the gift. The bow she sent to Draco who caught it and promptly stuck it to Neville's hair. The witch's eyes widened in appreciation as she took in the small bracelet of amethyst, black onyx and snowflake obsidian beads spaced every three stones with the rune of Sowelu and two love knots (to represent the proud parents).

"Pearl is rather small for a bracelet, Lucius. How will she wear it?" asked Narcissa.

"The protection bracelet will resize to fit," replied Lucius just as Pearl caught several strands of her father's pretty hair in her fist. "I would suggest her ankle, for now." Lucius carefully removed his hair from his child's fist. "Come now, Daughter. Are you not just a bit young to be pulling papa's hair?"

Narcissa unwrapped a tiny foot and circled the ankle. Magic shrunk the bracelet to fit. Lightly she kissed Pearl's foot, eliciting a little giggle, and then Narcissa looked up at her husband. "Perfectly beautiful, Lucius." The aristocratic wizard pulled his wife's side as he first enlarged the over-stuffed chair, and then sat beside the witch. He kissed Narcissa and Pearl.

"I will keep my family safe, Cissy," murmured Lucius. Narcissa was well aware that Lucius had fashioned a similar bracelet for Draco when he was only a few hours old, and herself upon their wedding day.

Harry then brought forth a box wrapped in gaily coloured foil paper that rivalled the boy's taste for curious coloured socks. "Nev and I both got this for you, Shadow."

Severus put down his wine glass on the table at his side, and then firmly took the obnoxious looking box from his son. He started to open the gift, but then he held out his hand and silently Summoned a scroll with a gold ribbon on it.

"Mouse, I think you ought to open this first," said Severus with a gentle smile.

Neville hesitated but then took the official looking scroll from his godfather. He unrolled it, and read it. He had learned a lot at school, and although he read slowly, he was able to make out the gist behind the words (when he glossed over the large ones). He lifted his head and looked at Severus. Neville's face broke out into a broad smile.

Severus smiled in return but then his expression sobered as he spoke, "Although a Magpie and a Dragon took it upon themselves to inform me that you wanted more than just a godfather I had already been thinking that I wanted more, as well. There were a few legal snarls..." Severus glanced at Lucius who smirked knowingly. "Once those snarls were dealt with I was able to adopt you, my son, Neville Longbottom-Snape."

"You're my dad now," breathed Neville. He dropped the scroll just as Severus scooped the small child up into his arms and squeezed him until he squeaked and giggled. "Thank you, Dad. This is the bestest Christmas present ever!"

Harry leaned up against his father's knee. "Don't forget, Nev, you're my for-real brother, now."

Neville grinned. "And you're mine, Harry."

Severus slid Neville from his lap and his new son leaned against his other knee. "All right, I shall
open this gift from my two greatest treasures…”

Harry and Neville both smiled so brightly their joy could have blinded the sun.

Seeing the beaming joy in his sons faces, instead of carefully removing the colourful paper he suddenly ripped into it. Severus withdrew a heavily lacquered box of deep red and with vines of many shades of green all over the top and sides.

"A… box…” mused Severus with just enough puzzlement in his voice to worry his sons.

Harry stood straighter, and explained, "No, Shadow. It's not just a box. If you touch this corner," he pointed to the top left corner, "watch!"

He and Neville both grinned knowingly as Harry touched the corner. Draco clapped as a drawing tablet appeared on the top of the box. The box itself then lifted to an angle good for painting or drawing.

"A drawing tablet?" asked Severus with a slight smile.

Neville explained, "Me and Harry have seen you draw on spare pieces of parchment, Shadow, and we thought you'd like a drawing tablet."

"Yes," smirked Severus as he flipped the pristine, cream-coloured, slightly rough pages.

"There's more, Shadow!" burst Harry. "If you touch each of the sides you get paints, chalk…"

Neville quickly whispered into his brother's ear. "…I mean pastels, and sketching ink. There's also drawing pens and some neat brushes. Uncle Lucius helped with that extra stuff."

Severus nodded to Lucius. "My boys, this is perfect. I think the first thing I will draw is a mouse and a magpie playing together."

Just when all the gifts were opened Severus put down his 'art box' beside Poppy and walked over to his godson. He handed Draco a heavy, parchment envelope with a small gold bow at one corner.

"What could it be, Uncle Severus?" asked Draco as he broke the silver seal on the opposite side of the envelope. From within he withdrew a gold skeleton key. Draco looked up in puzzlement. "A key?"

Severus smirked. "I believe if you go to the door of your bedroom you will discover what it is for, Draco."

Draco scrambled to his feet and left his parents bedroom at a run. Behind him were his two curious cousins.

"Whenever did you find the time, Severus?" asked Lucius knowingly.

Severus smiled secretively. "Magic, dear brother."

Draco, Harry, and Neville all stopped in front of the door to Draco's bedroom. In the center of the pristine white door was an ornate gold lock. Draco held up his key, inserted it in the lock, and turned the key.

"Ooooo!" marvelled all three boys in a chorus of awe.

The door's facade changed from the white wood into an old, heavy looking door of stained oak
planks. Slowly it creaked open. Draco peered in and was instantly startled as a large axe wielded by an armored figure dropped the axe andimpeding their ability to step any further.

"Password!" demanded the silver knight in a deep voice that sounded suspiciously like Severus.

Draco glanced worriedly at his cousins. "What do I do? I don't have a password," he whispered.

"Check the envelope," suggested Neville.

Draco removed the envelope from his pocket and turned it several times as he studied it. He glanced within it, but there was nothing. Harry caught something glinting and he stopped Draco from turning the envelope again. "It's there," Harry pointed.

Draco smiled. There was a word there! "The password is 'Camelot'!"

The knight drew his axe sharply in front of him allowing the boys to enter.

Draco's room which suffered from a plethora of white was no longer. It was as if they were stepping back into 'days of olde'. The carpet was now several shades of grey done artfully so to appear like stone. The walls had that same grey stone but falling from floor to ceiling were four tapestries on each wall. Each of the tapestries depicted, in turn, a small boy struggling with a sword in a stone, a coronation, a wedding for a king and queen, and then a royal hunt.

The bed now took center stage as it had been shaped like a round table. Around the 'table' were thirteen chairs of dark oak each topped by upon their 'crowns' with crystals of varying colours. At the head of the table, the thirteenth chair was a throne looking cleverly like a headboard. It was the grandest chair of beautifully carved oak and gilded with highlights of gold.

As the boys studied the chairs they discovered that the seats became part of the bed's support. The chairs were deceptively tightly stuffed softness that they could climb on to get to the bed. The bed/table was covered in a thick duvet of goose down that looked like deep, burnished gold. Pillows with embroidery of leaves and ivy around the edges waited upon the throne headboard.

On the walls of the bedroom were twelve of the knights and their ladies. Each of the ladies wore beautiful dresses of all different colours.

The fireplace in Draco's bedroom was now more primitive, and rugged looking with a wide stone hearth and a wrought iron gate to protect from sneaky flames. The wardrobe also appeared to be a rugged, yet handsome piece of stained oak that was painted with all sorts of knightly weapons on its front and sides.

The best part of Draco's bedroom was the 3/4 tower at the corner of his bedroom. There had just been a window to look out upon the garden before but now there was a window seat in front of a tall, stained glass window that depicted the magnificent King Arthur and his beautiful queen Guinevere. On either side of the window seat there were bookcases that held all of Draco's favourite books, and several trinkets including all thirteen of King Arthur and his knights.

For awhile all three boys were captivated by the miniature figures of the knights. Knowledgeably, Draco pointed each one out. "The tallest is King Arthur and beside him is Sir Launcelot. Then there's Gawain, Geraint, Gareth, Gaheris, Bedivere, Galahad, Kay, Bors de Ganis, Lamorak, Tristan, and Percivale."

"You really know them all, Draco," said Harry with admiration.

"You must really love King Arthur's legend," added Neville.
"I love my bedroom!" Draco enthused. "I don't ever want to leave." However, in the same breath Draco dashed passed the knight at his door and raced back to his parents bedroom. He barrelled into his godfather, clambered up into his lap, and threw his arms around the Potions Master's neck. "Thank you, thank you, thank you! Uncle Severus my room is the best one in the world!"

Severus smirked and then drawled dryly, "I suppose you like it, then?"

"I... love... it!" Draco kissed his godfather's cheek, and whispered one last thank you.

Harry and Neville entered the Christmas bedroom. "It's wicked, Shadow!" gasped Harry.

"It's going to be fun visiting Draco," nodded Neville.

Draco slipped from Severus' lap and then went over to his father. He gave Lucius a hug as the man lifted him up to sit between himself and Narcissa. "Thank you for letting Uncle Severus paint my bedroom, Papa. There's a real knight in there that's got a password to let people in. I can't wait to see what Pearl gets her bedroom turned into when she's older!"

Hearing that, Severus groaned softly, "I should never have done Harry's bedroom."

Once all the gifts under the tree were opened, Albus arrived with even more. He carried a red velvet bag, wore green robes of velvet, gold slippers, and a gold hat that sparkled with shiny snowflakes. He looked like a rather ostentatious Father Christmas. Of course, he gave everyone hand knitted socks, as well.

The adults sipped an aged cognac that Albus brought for Lucius and Narcissa to celebrate the arrival of Pearl Rose (one of the few times he did not bestow hand-knitted socks on someone). The three rambunctious boys went outside with two house elves to oversee them as they went to play in the snow.

The family parlour of Malfoy Manor sparkled softly just at twilight. This was when all the Christmas magic in the world reigned in silent majesty and the warmth of family, love, and cozy fires. Albus had admired the newest Malfoy. By his gentle mien, and rather grandfatherly behaviour, he was most certainly caught by the babe's spell. The elder wizard had conjured a small rattle that perfectly fit her small hand. She held the rattle, and was now snoozing.

Severus had removed himself to the window seat where he was able to watch his sons and godson throwing snowballs at each other under the watchful eyes of two of the Malfoy house elves. The house elves had conjured soft amber balls of light to bring light to the snowy, night backyard. In Severus' lap was his new drawing tablet and he sketched between watching the boys play. Poppy also sat on the window seat at Severus' feet reading a book called "The Tales of The Healer" that Albus had given her for Christmas.

Albus ambled over to his son, conjured a chair and sat beside him so he could look at what Severus was drawing. "Curious, my dear. I thought with the way you keep watching the boys that you were drawing them."

Severus glanced up from his drawing which was a soft sketch of a dragon (small in stature), a mouse (rather large for a normal mouse), and a magpie (equal in height to the mouse and the dragon) that played in the snow. He smirked wryly, "But, Father, I am drawing the boys." He pointed with the end of his drawing quill, "My curious Magpie, my quiet Mouse, and my protective Dragon."

"Ahhh, very clever, Severus!" smiled Albus.
For a long moment there was quiet that was interrupted by Lucius. He announced, "I am taking Cissy and Pearl to bed, gentlemen. I shall return for a nightcap, and to gather my son, in about a half hour." Lucius then stood, removed Pearl from her mother's arms, and gave his elbow to Narcissa to help her to stand.

"Goodnight, Severus… Albus… Poppy," said Narcissa. "Thank you for making this a special Christmas."

Severus, Albus, and Poppy all echoed Narcissa's sentiment of a good night and watched as husband and wife left the parlour.

"Now," began Albus, "I have been wondering my dear Severus and Poppy. The wind has whispered that the two of you have a secret that is not so secret."

"The wind, Father?" chuckled Severus.

Albus smiled and gave his son a slight shrug. "It is poetic, perhaps, but I am not the only one that has noticed…"

Severus frowned, "Noticed what?"

Poppy touched Severus' thigh with a chiding pat. "Oh stop, Severus. Nearly everyone has caught you and I kissing. Why don't you just tell your father our news?"

Severus caught Poppy's hand and he drew her fingers to his lips and kissed them. His dark eyes sparkled with pride, and certainly love. Taking a breath, he then looked to Albus, and revealed, "Father, I've asked Poppy to be my wife."

"Congratulations!" Albus leaned forward so he could kiss Poppy's cheeks, and then he embarrassed Severus by kissing his cheek, too. "Is there, perhaps, a sibling waiting for Harry and Neville?" he asked hopefully.

"Certainly not!" "Good Gaia, no!" both Poppy and Severus exclaimed at the same time. While Poppy chuckled at the implication that she was now "expecting" Severus appeared affronted that his father thought he had compromised Poppy's honour.

Albus quickly smiled in apology, "Dear me, Poppy and Severus, my apologies. It is just that I have found it a joy to be around young Harry and Neville that I would not mind more grandchildren."

Severus continued with a sigh, "That is not to say that the possibility of us welcoming a third child into our family is out of the realm of thought, Albus. Poppy and I have discussed… children…” a light dusting of a blush reddened the younger man's cheeks. "Something to look forward to after the wedding?"

Poppy laughed as Severus' light blush deepened as she recalled how, in privacy, her beau had remarked that the 'practising would be a delight'. Albus took only a moment, but then he blushed as he guessed at his son's embarrassment.

Before any of the adults could dwell longer upon the topic of grandchildren a strong pop announced the arrival of three breathless boys brought in from outside by one of the house elves. "Shadow!" Harry sprinted to his father and launched himself at his lap.

Severus caught his son and was glad that the elves had made sure his child was dry and warmed. He then caught Neville's gaze as the boy waited patiently to have his new father's attention. Shifting himself so his feet were no longer on the window seat, he shifted so Harry was now at his side and
next to Poppy. He then raised his other arm inviting Neville to jump up beside him. Neville's smile widened and he did not hesitate to join his brother.

"We had great fun, Shadow," Neville spoke softly but his voice was shaded by the same exuberance Harry had.

"Yeah," added Draco. "A snowball fight at night! I bet nobody else gets to do that." The little boy smirked as his eyes sparkled, "And the best bedroom ever!"

Harry pulled back slightly from his father, and scrutinised him. "You look like the cat that ate the canary, Shadow."

"I… what?" Poppy giggled knowingly softly near him. Severus then scowled. "Wherever did you learn that phrase, Magpie?"

Widening his eyes into innocence, Harry shrugged as if he was completely unaware that there was an answer. Severus then smirked after catching Poppy's gaze. "My clever, little, Magpie." He then squeezed Neville to his side until he squeaked in protest. "And you, my dearest Mouse. The two of you, and myself, of course, are going to marry Poppy."

"Marry?" Neville gasped.

Harry was practically bouncing as he exclaimed, "We're getting a mum, Nev!"

"Mum?" Neville glanced shyly at Poppy who was sitting just beside him. The soon-to-be-mum hugged the small boy, and kissed his cheek. Neville's smile was as bright as the sun as he breathed, "Mum!"

The sun suddenly faded, and Poppy divined the problem. "We're planning a visit to St. Mungo's, Neville, and you will tell your parents all about us. I am certain your mother would not be at all saddened if she knows you are part of a family, and loved."

"Do you love me?" Neville asked wonderingly.

"Very much so, Neville. I am such a lucky woman to have two, wonderful sons," enthused Poppy.

"And, a nephew, Aunt Poppy," piped up Draco. "You wouldn't want to forget about me, right?"

Poppy chuckled and grasped Draco under his arms and brought him onto her lap. She embraced him, and when his arms went around her neck, she kissed his temple. "How could I forget the best nephew ever, Draco?"

"Are we getting married tomorrow, Shadow?" Harry asked hopefully.

"Not that soon, Magpie," Severus shook his head. "There is just a bit to plan and we have a few things to do first."

"Like visiting Neville's parents?" asked Draco.

Severus nodded, "Absolutely, Draco."

Poppy spoke up, "St. Mungo's isn't open for visitors the day after Christmas but I am certain I will be able to get us in."

26 December 1985 - St. Mungo's, Janus Thickey Ward for Irreversible Spell Damage
The family Snape were joined by a friend of Poppy's that was a Healer in the Janus Thickey Ward. Healer Anna Poule was a motherly shaped woman with a twinkle in her blue eyes when she smiled. Her brown hair was barely touched by grey, and there were only a few wrinkles upon her dark skin.

Anna Poule was not a tall witch but she was stocky (from Country stock she would always chuckle with pride) and had the strength she needed at times to deal with her patients. Her number of patients were few but they were the witches and wizards who would never recover from damage incurred by spells and curses. Two patients had been in residence for nearly five years: Frank and Alice Longbottom.

Voldemort had decided that Harry Potter was the boy he would kill but the toddler Neville Longbottom would be either severely disabled or removed, just in case. Voldemort had sent Bellatrix LeStrange with her husband and brother-in-law. The mad wizard did not have a care what those three would do. In fact, it is likely he counted upon the torture the parents received. Frank and Alice Longbottom had been tormented by the continued, sadistic application of the Crucius Curse until their minds retreated as far away from the pain as possible. Neville did not receive the Crucius Curse but he, only fifteen months old, watched the torture of his parents. It was only the abrupt end to Voldemort that disabled Bellatrix and her compatriots when the death of their master came through their Dark Marks that saved the child.

Neville could not recall the past when his parents were still themselves and raising him. Those wonderful months had been chased away by a child's fear as he witnessed the worst. He was then given to his grandmother who told Neville right away that his parents were dead. It was Uncle Algy, that horrid old uncle of his, that luridly told a tale of "imbecilic, brain-obliterated, parents" in St. Mungo's. Neville had pleaded for the truth from his grandmother who had simply told her grandson, "Your parents are in St. Mungo's but they are shells of what they once were. They know nothing. They don't know about me, and they don't know about you."

Neville, just barely two years old, understood that once again he had lost his parents. Much later, in the Snape family, his new father Severus carefully explained about his parents. His parents were alive but their minds had protected them by drawing 'that which makes us all who we are' far away from the pain.

"How aware are Frank and Alice, Healer Poule?" asked Severus knowing that Neville was listening to every word.

"Well, it's been very slow work, Master Snape, but there has been a little improvement," replied the Healer. "Frank draws with crayons. Not terribly well but you can clearly see the figure of a baby that he often draws and colours. Alice adores her picture books. She always hums but as a Healer I have learned that one must always pay attention to one's patient. Alice's hums are not one tune hummed over and over, the hummed tunes vary with her emotions." Healer Poule chuckled softly. "I've gotten rather good at reading the dear witch, at times."

They had stopped outside of a door marked Janus Thickey Atrium. The Healer settled her attention upon little five year old Neville.

"Neville, is it?" she asked in a gentle, mothering tone. Neville nodded as he reached for Severus' hand. "I know you've never come to visit your parents before so I wanted you to know that they appear normal but they are not."

Neville nodded sharply. "My dad… Shadow… he explained that what made them who they were is far away. That's because it was the only way to escape the pain."

The Healer glanced up at Severus. The child was too young to have known that. "I will not keep my
sons ignorant when they asked, Healer Poule. Neville wanted to understand, to know, and so I told him. He is not frightened… of them. Simply nervous."

"Right. Then, this way, please." Healer Poule opened the door to the Janus Thickey Atrium.

It was as if a lush garden had been captured beneath a huge dome of latticed glass. There were trees that brushed the ceiling above them. Grass carpeted the floor and moss sparkled beneath the running water of a waterfall. Everywhere else, as if there was no thought beyond the paths of wooden slats, grew a wealth of flowers, ferns, and flowering vines that twined about many of the trees. The atrium also sang with twittering birdsong, and Harry nudged his father when he spotted a crimson bird in a tall oak.

The Healer directed them along a path that went to the right. "This leads to the gazebo. Frank and Alice are there at this time of day."

Frank Longbottom was colouring one of the many pictures he would draw daily of a small family - a toddler and a mother and a father. As his mood was good this day the small family were outside beneath a cheery, yellow sun. Frank had short, brown hair and features that had been known to be soft and kind to all who had known him.

Alice Longbottom was humming and she was folding small pieces of paper into rectangles that she added to a chain that fell off her lap. Alice's hair went to here shoulders in a simple bob. Her hair was a dark honeyed brown. Her features were pleasant, with defined cheekbones and lush lips; a beauty from a Pureblood family.

"Frank? Alice?" said Healer Poule gently. "You have visitors. Severus Snape, Poppy Pomfrey, Harry Potter, and your dear child, Neville."

"Are you all right, Little Mouse?" asked Severus when he felt Neville lean back against his legs.

"Shadow," Neville whispered, "I don't know what to do." His eyes were wide. He really wasn't afraid, but he did feel lost. He could not remember these two people as being his parents. He wanted to, but that memory felt like it was being a skittery squirrel in his mind and he could not grab it.

Poppy crouched down to eye-level with Neville. "You've never really met your parents, have you, dear?" Neville just shook his head sadly. "Well, introductions are in order, then. Harry, you too. You should be beside your brother."

"Hi," said Harry as he grasped his father's cloak in his shyness.

The Healer directed them along a path that went to the right. "This leads to the gazebo. Frank and Alice are there at this time of day."

Frank Longbottom was colouring one of the many pictures he would draw daily of a small family - a toddler and a mother and a father. As his mood was good this day the small family were outside beneath a cheery, yellow sun. Frank had short, brown hair and features that had been known to be soft and kind to all who had known him.

Alice Longbottom was humming and she was folding small pieces of paper into rectangles that she added to a chain that fell off her lap. Alice's hair went to here shoulders in a simple bob. Her hair was a dark honeyed brown. Her features were pleasant, with defined cheekbones and lush lips; a beauty from a Pureblood family.

"Are you all right, Little Mouse?" asked Severus when he felt Neville lean back against his legs.

"Shadow," Neville whispered, "I don't know what to do." His eyes were wide. He really wasn't afraid, but he did feel lost. He could not remember these two people as being his parents. He wanted to, but that memory felt like it was being a skittery squirrel in his mind and he could not grab it.

Poppy crouched down to eye-level with Neville. "You've never really met your parents, have you, dear?" Neville just shook his head sadly. "Well, introductions are in order, then. Harry, you too. You should be beside your brother."

"Hi," said Harry as he grasped his father's cloak in his shyness.

Neville eyed both of his parents for another quiet moment, and then he spoke softly, "I'm glad I get to visit you both now." Neville drew in a very slightly, shuddery breath as he held the tears threatening, at bay. "I think about you both a lot, mum and da. I wish you were with me… but… my Dad Shadow is really great. We're going to marry Poppy Pomfrey. I have a nifty brother and a cool cousin." Neville stepped back against Poppy's legs and she caught his shoulders gently. Neville's brain was filled with a lot of things to tell his parents but they didn't do anything. It was a little weird speaking to someone who had no reaction whatsoever.

"Hi," said Harry as he grasped his father's cloak in his shyness.

Neville eyed both of his parents for another quiet moment, and then he spoke softly, "I'm glad I get to visit you both now." Neville drew in a very slightly, shuddery breath as he held the tears threatening, at bay. "I think about you both a lot, mum and da. I wish you were with me… but… my Dad Shadow is really great. We're going to marry Poppy Pomfrey. I have a nifty brother and a cool cousin." Neville stepped back against Poppy's legs and she caught his shoulders gently. Neville's brain was filled with a lot of things to tell his parents but they didn't do anything. It was a little weird speaking to someone who had no reaction whatsoever.

The silence hung, uncomfortably, as everyone waited. Even Healer Poule was feeling a bit wrong-footed. Was there anything else to be said? Just as Severus was going to suggest that Neville make his farewell, Frank Longbottom rose from the table where he had been colouring one of his pictures.
He did not look at anyone, just his feet, as he shuffled over to his son. He held out the drawing. Neville, curious and nervous, slowly took the drawing from his father. Frank turned away and went back to his table. He began to draw once more.

Neville stared at the drawing. It was crude but there clearly was a boy standing between two adults that smiled. Above them was a shining sun. Behind them was a simple house. Neville's eyes suddenly widened as he saw something of interest in the drawing. "Shadow! Look!" He turned and shoved the drawing at his father.

Severus took the drawing and studied it. His own eyes widened at the addition of two more adults and another boy. One adult was in black all black; beside him was a woman in a summery Peach coloured dress. Clearly, those two adults were Severus and Poppy. The second boy who had green eyes was most assuredly Harry.

Before Severus or Poppy could comment, though, Alice's humming changed. Healer Poule frowned. "It's a new tune I've never heard before."

A tear slid down Neville's cheek as a memory of love returned to his mind. "I know it. Mum used to sing that to me every night."

Alice stood, walked over to Neville, picked up his hand, and put several strands of the paper chain into her son's hand. She continued humming the lullaby that Neville remembered as she began a new chain of paper.

"Your father was right, Harry," said Neville with a smile. "My parents know I'm here."

Harry beamed and caught Severus' hand in his. "I always knew they would, Nev."

---

**New Year's Day - 1st January 1986 - The Garden Atrium of Hogwarts Infirmary**

Gathered within the atrium that was an adjunct to the Hogwarts Infirmary begun by Poppy and then added to by the other teachers stood a proud father and grandfather, Albus Dumbledore, as he officiated the wedding of his adopted son and his Healer Poppy Pomfrey. Albus wore the rich purple robes that both his grandsons, Harry and Neville, adored. Severus was handsome standing straight and tall in a suit of dark grey trousers and a coat of black with tails that fell to the backs of his knees. Harry had chosen his father's deep green velvet waistcoat to wear over a crisp, white linen shirt. Neville had chosen a silver-grey cravat pinned with an emerald signet of an 'S and P' Narcissa had had made for the new couple.

Poppy's gown was a simple 'slip' of white silk that flowed gracefully over her curves. She wore a platinum chain with an oval cameo that had a bas-relief of two roses intertwined that Lucius had had made for the soon-to-be wed couple. Her hair was loose and adorned by a web of tiny diamonds that were an heirloom gift from Albus.

Harry and Neville both wore suits that were just like their father's; dark green for Harry and deep blue for Neville.

Lucius and Narcissa were both dressed beautifully but Lucius was in dove grey whereas Narcissa was in ivory. Newly born Pearl was warmly wrapped in a lush, cashmere blanket of the softest cream. Draco wore a suit of darker grey that was just like his father's suit.

Each in the wedding party were gems of finesse and beauty; the nervous ('I am not nervous!') Severus and his delighted bride Poppy. Magic in cascades of sparkling, ghostly ribbons twined
themselves around the couple's wrists as each spoke words of devotion and love to each other. What
the words were neither Severus nor Poppy would recall later but the essence of what those words
meant would forever be etched upon their hearts and souls.

The ceremony was brought to a close by the bestowing of two rings given by Harry and Neville.
Lucius had taken the boys to a jeweller in France and they had picked out what they felt was perfect
for each parent. Harry gave to Severus a silver ring of Celtic love knots highlighted by a green
emerald. Neville gave to Poppy a similar silver ring of Celtic love knots that surrounded a modest
emerald in the shape of a teardrop.

Albus beamed as he ended the ceremony with a kiss of blessing to Severus and Poppy's foreheads.
He then nuded the newlyweds to face their small audience. "I give to you Severus and Poppy
Snape."

Lucius clapped in approval as he walked up to the man he had chosen as his brother during the most
difficult period in his life; the rise of Voldemort. He shook Severus' hand and then drew him into an
embrace that Severus returned.

"Splendid, Brother," Lucius smiled. He then turned to Poppy, cupped her cheek and drew her
forehead to him for a brief kiss of blessing. "I am so pleased for you both."

"Thank you, Lucius," Poppy bowed her head and then lifted it to bestow the most beautiful smile
ever upon her husband.

"We're married!" Harry crowed as first he hugged his father and then his mother. To Poppy he said,
"You're my real mum now!"

Neville hugged Severus, then just as quickly hugged his new mother. "Don't we have the best family
ever, Harry?"

"Of course you do!" replied Draco. "Do we get cake now?"

Severus' eyebrow rose sardonically as Poppy giggled. "Well, at least we know where are priorities
are." He looked to his father. "Albus, we need cake."

"Of course, my dear. The elves have made a wonderful cake…" he pointed towards a table that held
a two tiered cake with frosting that looked like swathes of cream-coloured lace over it.

Lucius spoke up, "I procured a perfect champagne when the boys and I went to get your rings."

"Elf made, no doubt, Lucius?" smirked Severus.

"But of course, Severus."

As Lucius went to pour the champagne Harry stepped over to his father… and his mother. He held
up a plate with a large slice of cake on it. Poppy took the offer as Severus knelt down on one knee
and impulsively hugged his son.

"Shadow?" asked Harry softly. "Are you all right?"

"Better than, Magpie," smiled Severus at his son. "I am most content."

Harry beamed and then hugged his father quickly. "Me too. Isn't it perfect now? You got me and
Nev, and we all got Poppy… I mean… Mum."
Severus rose to his feet just as Lucius walked over with two glasses of champagne. He handed one to Severus and one to Poppy.

"Everything is perfect, Magpie," agreed Severus. He turned to Poppy. "Mrs. Snape, welcome to my little family." He clinked his glass to Poppy's.

"I am blessed, Mr. Snape," smiled Poppy. Together they both took a sip of the champagne.

The three moved to a table where Draco and Neville sat eating their cake. Both had thin moustaches from the white cake frosting. Harry sat down in front of his cake and took a big bite. For a moment Severus watched as three cake slices were devoured. The boys were not careful and so crumbs began to drift everywhere.

With a wave of his wand the crumbs vanished. Severus glowered at the three troublemakers who slowly put down their forks, and swallowed what they each had in their mouths. "The three of you have better manners than this. Eat like civilised gentlemen, not trolls."

"Sorry, Dad," said Harry as he straightened. "Sorry, Dad," followed Neville as he wiped his upper lip with his napkin. "Sorry, Uncle," whispered Draco as he smiled showing a small dimple in his cheek.

"Hmph," grunted Severus as he sipped at his champagne. Poppy just laughed, her eyes sparkling.

1st January 1986 — 2am

The wedding of Severus and Poppy on the birth of a New Year was something to never forget. For three little five year olds it meant lots of cake until they were bouncing on a sugar high into exhaustion. Lucius and Narcissa took their children home when it was near to two. Pearl was asleep, Draco had dropped off not long after, and even Narcissa was beginning to yawn. Severus made sure to see all of them safely through the Infirmary Floo, and then he escorted his family home.

Poppy and Severus, each holding a sleepy child in their arms carried their sons to bed. Poppy put Neville to bed in his garden bedroom, and Severus put Harry to bed in his jungle room. Severus had just spelled away his son's suit and charmed his pyjamas on when Harry turned sleepily.

"Dad," Harry half smiled and half yawned. "It's been great."

"Has it, Harry?" Severus asked in the same soft tone his son had used.

"You know, I was afraid that this was all a dream and it would go away at the end of the year... it hasn't though. It's all brand new."

"I am not sure of what you are saying, my confusing Magpie," replied Severus as he tucked the blanket around Harry just as he liked it.

Harry drew in a deep breath as he prepared to explain himself. "We said goodbye to all that was old, all the nightmares of the past, when we shut off the tree lights. Christmas is a way of tucking all the bad things away. The New Year then makes all of it new like... uhm..." a yawn escaped and he giggled sleepily. "Like when you light a fire under a cauldron. We're all new. You are new because you have my new mum. I'm new because I have my new brother Nev." Harry giggled softly and began to snooze.

Severus leaned down, brushed his son's hair with his fingers then kissed his forehead. "We are new." He turned to leave his child when the little boy stirred.
"Shadow, I'm glad you founded me," purred Harry before dropping deeper into sleep.

"I am pleased that I found you, too, Magpie." Severus closed the door silently and then caught his wife about her waist. He kissed her. "Come, Mrs. Snape. I believe we have something to practise."

**Finis**

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!