Roses in Winter

by anthroxagorus

Summary

People were never meant to survive being horcruxes.

Harry Potter's soul is detaching, his body is dying, and the research community couldn't be more elated. Of all the qualified people he could work with, Harry approached Severus Snape. The clock is set, the race is on.

Notes

Beta read by the ever wonderful Puppetwritter. Dear heart, you're good to me.
Chapter 1

Clearly, Snape is surprised that Harry comes to his doorstep. After the war, after Hogwarts, it seems they could call a truce and cut all ties

“I wrote to you,” Harry Potter announced, somewhat muffled with the scarf he has wrapped up his neck.

“And showed up because it went without an answer,” Snape noted, looking rough in a wrinkled white button-up, equally wrinkled jeans. He moved his way from the door. “I'll put on tea then. I imagine it's interesting.”

Harry looked a bit amused, a look Snape didn't catch from behind the back, but quite heard in his voice. “Have you been keeping up with the news?” Harry asked.

“No,” his voice echoed from the right, to which Harry moved toward. “No, I've been quite held up the past few days.”

If Harry had to pick a descript for Snape's kitchen, it would've been “quaint.” He liked it. It was a little small, the window above the sink did little to lend extra light, but the floors, table, and chairs were made of wood and looked comfortable, warm with use. After Snape had finished setting up the tea kettle, he turned to the table and motioned.

Harry sat. He was warmed to see an old-fashioned tea kettle, black, worn, going to work above a fire. He drew his cloak closer. After frowning a moment at the kettle's slow pace, Snape sat opposite of Harry and propped his head up one one hand with his pointed elbow on the table. “Continue.” It would've been a comical pose on anyone, but Snape did so with a sort of elegance. That was a strange word to fit with the old Potions Master...

Harry played with the ends of his cloak a moment. A prick started at his forehead. He sighed. “I'm—well, I, er.” He cleared his throat. “I'm going to die—sometime within the year.” He let those words sink in, tried to acknowledge the truth of them himself. “I've been to St. Mungo a few times—I felt off, really weird, you know. I mean, I guess you... don't? Sorry. They ran some tests and it's all weird, but they know it has something to do with, uh... with Voldemort.” He took in some air. “With being—being a horcrux. People aren’t supposed to be horcruxes.”

Snape pitched forward hard onto the table with a great snore, only to jump back up at the tea kettle's sharp whistle. Harry prepared a cup while Snape blinked rapidly and yawned a few times.

“I haven't slept in a few days,” Snape said, nursing the cup against him.

“I just told you I was dying, by the way.”

“Oh. Right.” the man muttered. “The... uh...”

“Horcrux,” Harry repeated. “I was a horcrux.” Wasn't there a muggle show with that kind of title? I Was a Teenage Horcrux.

“Right,” Snape said.
He blinked red-rimmed eyes at Harry, then pulled at the black tea before him. “How long have you got?”

“Maybe a year. No one knows. There's never been a case like mine.”

“That's... interesting.” He acknowledged. He paused to sip, seeming to gain clarity. “The object that breaks as a horcrux, I imagine you've seen, becomes damaged. Utterly irreparable. In a person one would think the effect as devastating, but you, in fact, were killed, dead for a moment, and... hm...” he trailed off suddenly. “I'm thinking out loud.”

“No, no, it's fine. I'm getting use to being an experiment.”

Harry let the man ruminate a moment, then chose his next words carefully.

“I was diagnosed yesterday, and I've had 57 offers so far on a personal researcher finding a cure. People from all over the world. Some of them are offering to pay me for the opportunity to investigate the effect of horcruxes and what it means to have a soul and all that. I mean, it looks like the research community hasn't seen much of anything since—”

“The successful completion of the philosopher's stone,” the other man supplied.

Harry fingered his own teacup, tracing the green floral design on the side. He took a breath.

“I think that kind of information could be used by the wrong guy. I'm not going to pretend I understand any of it, but it looks like some big stuff. So I want it to be someone I know and trust.”

“You want to offer it to me?”

Harry nodded.

Snape looked stunned. Harry could tell he was interested, already it looked like the gears in his head were working full force, now with permission. But would he go for it? He did hate Harry – that much had been clear. But Harry also knew that Snape had a thing for his mom – and that might count. Snape might be afraid of killing Harry in experimentation – but wouldn't he gain respect in the community by being picked by Harry personally? Unless people thought Snape forced him into it. There would always be people like that, but he had already planned to make an official announcement.

“Why are you picking me?” Snape croaked.

Hadn't he already answered that?

“I trust you, you're qualified, I need to pick someone before it gets completely out of hand.”

“And how do you know I'm qualified?” he asked, a bit stunned.

“I looked it up,” Harry admitted. “Dumbledore trained you personally, I think that counts for something.” What Harry didn't admit was of a faint certainty; Snape had also been trained by Voldemort.

“And for an abbreviated time, merely to qualify me for teaching. He's trained others with much more attention. I imagine you've had offers with truly prestigious credentials.” For added effect, he rattled off a short list. Indeed, Harry recognized some.

“But I know you,” Harry noted emphatically. “And you know me. I won't have to explain my whole
life to you, I won't have to go through an interview process or any of that. And you won't pity me like the rest.”

Harry crossed his arms.

“And I don't need to spell out what this could mean for you, do I?” Harry added.

“You don't need to patronize me,” Snape yawned. “Very well.”

“You'll do it?” Harry asked, scarcely believing it.

“If you will compensate me from my work, then I will be your researcher.”

They agreed upon a set, weekly amount, which Harry also agreed to advance the next time they met. They shook hands to finalize the deal, with Snape agreeing to show up for an official announcement later the next afternoon.

“Bring me your medical records,” was Snape's final request.

Harry bowed a bit, stood, and shuffled out of the house. He walked up to the end of the road, apparated near a train station and took the bullet north, twenty miles to home. From there, he apparated to the door, shucked off his cloak and dropped to the couch.

Of course, Severus didn’t waste too much time in locating a newspaper to see the headline himself, The Daily Prophet , of course, blowing the whole thing out of a proportion: THE BOY WHO LIVED IS DYING. What did they expect? The boy was outliving their expectations, and Fate had a way to retaliate to those that defied her wishes. Sleepily, he scanned the contents of the article while inhaling from his muffin stash (The weekly display of his culinary extent: spiced orange with chocolate)

The article, front-page and center, went on to recount much of what Potter had said, then followed with direct quotes, and another brief of Potter's heroic actions regarding the war. As if it hadn't happened six months ago. As if their ministry hadn't personally and completely denied the truth of Voldemort's return up until six months ago. It finally ended with musing how Potter's lover was going to handle the news. That did give him some pause – if not for the boy himself, but the people in his life that cared for him. Evidently, this news was a tragedy.

And entirely premature. Severus may not have all the necessary training, but he had an advantage of various training and felt fairly confident a solution would be found. Perhaps, even, he could stretch out the whole thing to secure a few more paychecks. Better than the little odd jobs he was taking every night and day. If not, well, everyone has to die, don't they?

He was itching to yank all his notebooks from the shelves and begin searching through his notes for bouts of wisdom either he had written or noted. He wanted to scan through his books, begin undoing the puzzle before him, but made it as far as his couch and crashed asleep, waking just an hour before his appointment with the Boy-Who-Lived. He showered, shaved, and drained a cold tea before all but diving into his fireplace.

And Harry, sitting by the covered fountain at the Ministry of Magic (Magic is Might, it bore underneath, desperately in need of a replacement statue), looked small and lost when Snape arrived.
That, too, gave him pause. Snape watched him a moment as Harry picked at his scarf and stared at his feet, people around him rushed by without seeing. Promptly, he pushed down any feelings of pity or empathy – those kinds of emotions were unfamiliar and useless, the moral of his own story.

Potter jerked out of thought when the man came near.

“Ready?” He prompted.

Potter mutely handed him a roll of parchment with the terms of their agreement. Fifty galleons a week for his undivided research, one year of guaranteed pay. That was the part that mattered, but Snape took a breath and sat by the boy, scanning the entire document, mildly surprised to see it appearing so official, so meticulous. “In the event of sickness or death of Harry Potter, Severus Snape has appointed guardianship, is afforded open access regarding his research, and to be recompensed as per agreement which does not violate the written will of the deceased.” Very thorough. Snape signed with a flourish, dated it, and folded it carefully.

Potter tucked the document among other papers. “All that's left is a public statement - that's in about an hour - and you're free for the day. Hungry?”

“If you're paying.”

“Yeah. They've got pretty good sandwiches 'cross the way, you know, that cart.” He didn't know it, and didn't say so. “I'll be right back.”

*Good Bacchae*, it was heavenly. Roast beef, savory, juicy, smothered with cheese. A little skimpy on the meat, but Potter had purchased a bag of chips to curb any more appetite. Potter, he noticed, chewed slowly and stared absentlty at the clothed fountainhead – the self-important obelisk inscribed with Magic is Might. Why hadn't anyone put a new sculpture there yet? Seeing Potter, Severus imagined he should see some physical indicator of the boy's impending death. Maybe in the hollow under his eyes, maybe his clothes hung too loosely off his frame. He slumped, but the boy had maintained poor posture his entire life.

Snape watched him take two bites and tuck the rest in his bag, with the chips, and with the papers. Snape medicalized the knowledge: weight loss, little appetite, fatigue. He needed a notebook, access to research journals. He should've bartered for those expenses to not come from his personal stipend. No matter, he had after all asked for an advance then and thought longingly of a bottle of firewhiskey, a new pair of gloves, of the exotic ingredients he'd purchase. Lost in thought, he missed Harry's soft prompting, his slow shuffle away toward their meeting. He quickly followed after him.

Chapter End Notes

First AO3 posting! I've had this plot bunny sitting in my computer for a long time. I use to be an active fanfic-er, then life happened. Now I'm ready to ignore life again. Cheers!
Snape left the file on the table, then scrutinized the boy across the old, wooden table. Harry stuck his hands in his coat pockets. Snape looked more alert this time around. The man licked his thumb and went through the files quickly, mumbled to himself. Harry closed his eyes, counted a moment, then went for a glass of water, quite as if he owned the place. All of Hell knew Snape wasn't going to offer it to him, though.

“You went in complaining about headaches. They ran ostrospecs, vitalines, cardidrax... focused on your forehead...” Snape shut the document. “Have you had pains elsewhere?”

Harry cleared his throat, closed his eyes and thought a moment. “They're not headaches,” he said, thought some more but gave up on better description. “It's something else. I just feel... off.”

“Mm,” Snape murmured, scribbling over the folder. “I need you to remove your coat.”

Harry didn't move.

“A full body scan was not performed. It may be useful, it may not,” Snape explained, grabbing parchment and sketching out two body-like outlines.

Still, the boy hadn't moved.

“If this has something to do with my sexual orientation, you can rest easy I will not try jumping your bones.”

Harry's head snapped in his direction. “You're gay?!”

Snape afforded his best 'You're-Wasting-My-Time' expression. “It's obviously not the type of revelation I make to the children I teach, but my peers were aware.”

“I didn't know.”

“Is this going to be a problem?”

Harry coughed. “I-It's fine. I trust you. I - just - do we have to do this in your kitchen?”

“Oh, of course” Snape murmured, gathering the papers all at once. Harry followed him, feeling small next to him, and very much like he was in trouble, following Snape to his dungeons, to Dumbledore, where-ever. He picked at his scarf. Snape stopped abruptly, froze when Harry ran into him.

They bounded past a blank hallway, to a simple living room. This room, too, felt cozy, small, if a little undressed. Harry wanted to make a joke about interior decorating, but couldn't quite put it
together. Snape took to the couch and spread the papers out around the coffee table. He summoned
for his mug of coffee from the kitchen and sipped at it, waiting.

Right. This is my life now, Harry thought, having unclothed many times now for tests. Harry shed
his coat, yanked at his top, the undershirt, tugged on the socks. “So... you're gay, huh?” he asked,
filling in the silence.

“This isn't a conversation I wish to be having with you... ever.”

“I thought you had a thing for my mum?” he continued, determined to make conversation. And if he
was going to go through this awkwardness, he was dragging Snape through it as well.

“It's refreshing to be reminded that things don't change.” Snape met his eyes “Harry Potter continues
not to listen. Do you understand why this information was revealed to you?”

“No?” he baited. Did he look like an idiot? You didn't undress in front of a girl if you were a boy,
and vis versa, but the whole system falls apart with the whole gay thing.

“Because I am not ashamed of who I am.” There was a hard edge to his tone.

Harry peered at him over the glasses slipping from his nose. “Underwear too?”

“Leave them for now,” he muttered, plucking Harry's glasses away. “I'm going to feel your magic a
moment. I was acquainted with it when I was attempting to teach you occulemency. You said it felt...
'off?'” This, he read from the paper.

“I feel like it's one of those movies where you can see their mouths moving but the sound isn't lined
up. I don't know if that -”

“Yes, I have seen a movie,” he said softly. He tapped his arm, moving up his skin. Harry felt light
ripples. The charmed pen moved to mark up the outlines, drawing arrows this way and that. Snape's
wand tickled his shoulder, his chest... Turned around. Touched the back of his legs, his back. Harry
coughed hard doubling over, felt a warm hand in the middle of his back.

“You may dress again.” Snape summoned Harry's water glass, then politely bent down to finish his
notes while Harry dressed.

Harry sat on the opposite side of the couch and watched the other scribble more notes. When he tried
focusing, the words swam upwards and tangled together a moment before he blinked and gave up.

“What do you wish to achieve in this process?” Snape broke into his thoughts.

“I don't know,” Harry said, settling back.

“What potions are you taking?”

“Calming draughts,” Harry said. “I mean, it... it doesn't hurt, I'm not in pain exactly. I don't know
what it is.” He tried to think of a better description, but couldn't. “I don't know.”

“You had a nurse recommend you use magic sparingly. That might be a good idea for the moment.
Until then, I can arrange you a portkey.”

“I don't like portkeys,” he said.

“Then what do you suggest?” Snape sighed. “Floo powder?”
“No.” Harry chewed his lower lip. “Look, I can get here just fine.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“Sure,” he confirmed.

Snape ran a hand through his hair. “I'll send for you when I've gone through all this.”

That was Harry's queue to leave, and just when he'd gotten comfortable. Of course, he'd have to get up. Maybe he could convince himself to drop by the Weasley's. Maybe. Maybe after a nap.

Harry arrived looking haggard. He pressed a hand to his chest and breathed heavily at the doorway. “Traffic,” Harry coughed out. It was a weak joke, but Harry thought it was pretty good.

“I'll need you to tell me everything you remember about the night you died,” Snape answered. “And also what you know about horcruxes would be good for me to know.” Straight to business, then.

“Dumbledore didn't tell you?” Harry asked, slipping onto a seat, trying to slow his breathing.

“You overestimated my abilities. I informed you as much.”

“Okay, well, what do you want to know about the dying thing?”

“Your phenomenological experience.” At Harry's blank look, he elaborated “How did it feel?”

“Well, I like woke up at King's Cross.”

“You stood up or woke up standing?”

“I…” Harry frowned. “I think I was walking into light when I woke up. Everything was bright, but it looked like King's Cross where the Hogwarts Express is.” Stupid, of course he knew that. “I remember a train going by. I remember seeing the piece of me that was Voldemort – he looked like a baby, but bloody, and was under a bench. It was like someone left him there. He was crying. And Professor Dumbledore was there. He told me I could leave.”

“Albus was there?”

“I don't know if he was really there. I think I asked him actually if I was just making the whole conversation up, but he didn't give me an answer. I didn't know if I was dreaming or if my soul or whatever was somewhere else.”

“What did Albus say?”

“He told me I had a choice, that I could go back if I wanted, but I'd already done my part. So the train pulled up and I turned around and went back. Didn't know what else to do.”

“Did Albus appear healthy?”

“Like he wasn't dead?” Snape nodded. “Yeah. I think so. He wasn't like the Hogwarts's ghost.” Harry thought longingly for a cup of tea. “Maybe I did make it all up. Maybe I wasn't supposed to come back. Do you miss him?
Snape looked a bit spellbound, the same way Ron had when Harry talked about his brief stint in the afterlife. It made Harry smile a bit. “He was a good man,” Snape answered. Harry didn't expect that level of honesty. He wasn't entirely sure he agreed with it.

Recalling the other question, Harry recited: “Horcruxes are pieces of soul infused in objects. The object doesn't matter. Voldemort tore his soul apart by murdering people. Seven times. Seven horcruxes.” Snape nodded, apparently knowing as much. “Professor Slughorn was the one that told me about them, but that's all he knew about them. Oh, and that it takes really powerful objects to kill them. Basilisk fang, Gryffindor's sword.”

“What were the horcruxes?”

“A family ring, a diary, a cup, a diadem, a necklace, Nagini and me. Oh yeah, Nagini was made into one, too.”

“So living things can be horcruxes,” he mused. “You were connected in some way to Voldemort, weren't you?”

Harry smirked. “What do you think the occulemency lessons were for?”

“Prat.”

“Yeah, he was able to get in my head and I could get into his. I saw things through him, once through Nagini. I felt what he felt, and I guess he felt things I felt.” Harry paused, then reluctantly added. “The thing with Sirius. Voldemort found out a way to make me see things that weren't really happening.”

They let the observation lay before a fight could break out.

“What sort of emotions did you experience through Voldemort?”

“Anger. Excitement. I was never entirely aware of why, and I didn't want to know.”

“Did you feel those emotions before he regained his body.”

“No.”

“Do you feel his presence affected you?”

Harry fought a rude remark. Of bloody course he was affected! “What do you mean?” he asked, civilly.

“Do you feel you are different from when Voldemort was a part of you. You, as a person. Your emotional state. Your wants and desires.”

“Oh.” Truthfully, Harry had thought about that several times, but didn't have an answer. “I think I was angrier back then. It's hard to tell. I've grown up since then, killed a man, junk like that.”

Snape didn't take the joke. Not for humor, that one. “Did you ever agree with his opinions?” he asked then, scribbling away in the notebook. Maybe he ought to get the Quick Quotes Quill. Maybe Harry would buy him one, save his hand the trouble. “By that I mean, do you think more passed between your bodies besides his emotional state? Memories? Convictions?”

“I didn't become a blood purist, no,” Harry said. “And I don't want to be immortal. And memories? No, nothing like that.” Harry's throat felt dry. “Could I put on some tea?”
Snape waved his hand in an impatient gesture that Harry took as an okay to proceed. He put water in the kettle from the spigot, searched for teacups and then for the tea leaves. Harry fought back a grimace - Snape had stores of black tea and nothing else. Harry thought longingly of Ginny's stash - every flavor of tea. How could a Potions Master not want the occasional herbal tea?

When Harry returned to his seat, Snape was still writing things down. “Can you think of anything else that might be useful?”

“Oh,” he said softly. “Voldemort nearly regained a body before - before the Triwizard Tournament.”

Snape abruptly looked up. “Go on.”

“When I met him in the Chamber of Secrets. Sorry, do you know about this? Okay, probably not, I guess. Lucius Malfoy slipped Tom Riddle's diary to Ginny.”

“I know about that part.”

“And Ginny,” Harry continued on, “was writing her feelings down, and eventually getting answers back from Tom Riddle. He fed off her until the night he made her come down to the chamber-”

“What do you mean fed off her?” Snape broke in.

“Like, the more she told Tom, the more he regained his body. He was able to possess her at some point and eventually he brought her down to the chamber and tried to lure me down as well. You know me, hero complex and all. When I met him in the chamber, he was a bit corporal, and Ginny was unconscious. I remember how pale she looked.”

“And you didn't feel any of his emotions then?”

“I don't remember. Probably not. I guess he was still just a horcrux then, but I was running for my life then, so...”

The tea kettle began whistling so Harry fixed them both a cup and sat back down. While Snape wrote things down, Harry watched his tea leaves furl and unfurl and was suddenly thinking about Divination class with Ron and Ron trying to decipher Harry's fate somehow between the giraffe looking thing: “You're going to suffer, but you're going to be happy about it.”

Harry must have looked stupid then, laughing out loud at the cup and then brushing away tears, if Snape noticed anyways. He probably didn't. “I'll be going then,” he told the top of his notebook, heard a noncommittal hum, and untangled from his seat. “Right, see you.”

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When Harry left Snape's house, he wasn't sure where he was headed, so he walked a bit. Where he wanted to be was at Hermione's apartment, but she was always studying. He'd just be an interruption. And he knew Ron wouldn't be happy to see him, if Harry happened to drop by while he was there. Harry didn't know of many places he could go - he hadn't explored much of the wizarding world and most of the time he was too tired to attempt it. The prospect of staying home seemed worse, but what other choice did he have?

Harry took a deep breath and apparated home.
Chapter End Notes

I've got about 12k words for this on the back-burner and hope to get this finished by the end of the year. I'd release it all at once, but I want to adjust some things first. And isn't delayed gratification nice?
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Beta'd by Puppetwriter, the purest of cinnamon rolls.

Ima just go ahead and give ya'll this chapter. It's been a good day, and this is where (I think) it starts getting good.

“There's something I want to try,” Snape said upon Harry's entrance.

“Hello to you, too,” Harry said.

This time Harry had caught his breath outside before knocking on the door and was pleased that he was coming off more normal today. He crossed his arms and waited for Snape to explain. Snape, too, looked marginally better. In school, he'd always been too pale. (Voldemort could do that to you, Harry relented. Dungeons, too). Now, he just seemed to battle with insomnia. He'd grown out his hair, made an effort to shave and groom. He stopped dressing solely in black, did wonders for his appearance.

“Are you up to try something?”

“Yeah, sure.”

Snape abruptly stood and walked from the room, which Harry guessed meant to follow him. Back to living room, this time Snape had made an effort to make tea. Harry wondered if something might be wrong with it, then shook the thought away. Old habits and all. He poured himself a cup. Snape took down a few questions with Harry (“Appetite?” Fine. “Sleep?” Enough), did some measurements waving his wand

“You mentioned legilimency in our last lesson and I think it would benefit us if you let me attempt a diagnosis of your mind.”

“Is there something in my tea?” he did ask, cup halfway to his lips.

“Nothing that isn't in mine.”

“You want to look through my memories.”

“Look without seeing,” he corrected, which didn't make sense. “I want to see if your mind feels different from the last time. If there are... rips or tears. I don't know how long this will take and I can't guarantee I won't see something you're not ready to share, but the more relaxed you are, the easier this process will be.”

Harry sipped. “Liar. There's calming draught in this.”

“As is in mine.” As if to prove the point, Snape took a gulp from his cup. “It'll be better if my own thoughts are relaxed as well.”

“Well, get on with it then,” Harry grumbled, taking an equal-sized gulp and setting the cup aside.
The spell hit him full-force, it was like his eyeballs had turned inside out and he was careening through a thousand emotions and feelings - the vague sickness, his initial hospital visit, Ginny laughing, emptiness, it sailed past him too fast to process. He could feel Snape prodding through his mind, sliding around the internal wall. Harry fought the urge to shove him back out, despite how full his head felt, how terrible and weird the whole thing was, he had to bare through the pressure. And the calming draught didn't do shit.

With a gasp, he felt Snape gone suddenly, but his vision was messed up. He touched his face, smashed his glasses against him. With a start he realized his cheeks were wet, he couldn't see because he was sobbing like a stupid bastard and this time Snape was clearly waiting for him to calm down, witnessing him having such a goddamn episode.

Snape shoved his teacup back into Harry's hand, filled, and Harry choked it down quickly. *Stop crying for Merlin's sake!*

“What - What did you find out?” Harry stuttered out, determined to move on from this embarrassment.

Snape seized onto the conversation turn. “Your mind is unlike any I've been in, including your fifth year self.”


“I'm not entirely sure what it means yet.” He pulled from his own cup. “Your memories are there, I imagine they are unchanged, but something feels different.”

“Could you tell I've killed someone?” *God, he could shoot himself for how weak he sounded.*

“Yes, but that's not what's different. It's...” He was searching for a word.

“Off.”

“Yes,” he admitted. “Off.”

“So what did you find in your research?”

Snape paused. Obviously Harry continued to deflect the conversation far from anything Snape might've seen, or the sheer fact that though he had stopped crying, he couldn't stop shaking. He cleared his throat, shuffled through his notebook. “Not much on horcruxes. I've put my attention in research that has separated soul and body.”

“People do that?”

“Theoretically. It hasn't been a serious study in centuries and experimenting on splitting the soul from the body, you imagine, would be highly illegal.”

“How the hell are you supposed to research that?”

“Philosophizing.” He scrambled for his notebook and began frantically writing. When he came back up to the surface, his eyes were bright. He opened his mouth, flapped it back close and tempered his excitement. “I understand that letting someone in your mind can leave you feeling vulnerable. “

“I remember,” he said mildly. “You don't have to apologize. I'm paying you to do this.”

“I should have warned you,” he said tentatively.
“I don’t really care.” He paused. “Can I buy some of your calming draft? It’s better than the stores, or anything I can make.” His shaking had finally subsided. Harry struggled to sit up, secured his scarf back into place and accepted the jar that Snape handed him.

“I’ll send for you,” he said, dismissing Harry and the coins he had tried to hold out, so Harry left.

After every session with Harry, Snape wrote down everything he could think of for the rest of the night. He then read over his previous notes and then turned to his mountain of books, all the while shoveling sandwiches down his throat. The devil was in the details and Snape was determined shift through every scrap of information he had gathered before introducing a new topic.

The whole enterprise was nothing short of incredible. What were souls? Could the body do without a soul? Where did the mind fit? Were ghosts the remainders of souls? The opportunity was unparalled to have a chance to even answer those kinds of questions, to affirm or deny theories left unsettled for centuries. How many jobs get thrown in your lap like that? Nil. The book - screw mere paper - would do wonders for Snape’s career, but it was beyond him why Harry had chosen him.

Here’s what Severus Snape had gathered so far in his notes, in short: To fracture a soul, trauma must be introduced to it such as the trauma of taking a life, the ultimate breach of humanity. This may point to questions of morality. Investigate later. A horcrux is a soul placed in a container. Living containers (bodies) interact with the host. The removal of soul adversely affects the moral character. The pieces within horcrux may be the accumulation of the host up until the point of removal (Voldemort as young Tom Riddle, first horcrux?)

Harry Potter: Had been host to a latent soul for 13 years, fostered this soul for 3 years, does not have memories associated with the soul before Voldemort regained a body. The destruction of the container (Harry's body, death) resulted in the death of the horcrux and the beginning of Harry's decline in health. The body cannot be healed separate of the soul.

Question: Do souls come together, become affected by their intrusion? Why would the death of one affect the other? (connection to be repaired?)

Mind does not seem to be affected. Mind was affected and altered by Voldemort as host. Emotional state affected. Visions? Not memories. Personality might be affected. (Potter seemed more agreeable now that he wasn't sharing hosting the dark lord parasite.)

Question: What is the mind exactly? What is a soul in relation to mind? Are they the same?

If mind, soul, and body were all separate things, why would one affect the other?

Finally, the big question, how could it be fixed without causing further damage.

The next thing Snape was curious about was how magic affected Harry's health. Having finished the most recent round of notes, he had sent off a letter requesting Harry that afternoon. Instead, his owl returned with an apology, the boy had plans without a follow-up. Gritting his teeth, Snape pushed the date to the weekend and was still, two days later, waiting for his owl's return. At 18 years of age, the boy lacked manners, but if he was determined to keep paying Snape for fuck-all, then he would do fuck-all. Read something fun. Give his mind a rest.

Wednesday he slept in and breezed through a book on fiction.
Thursday he went shopping and bought the ever-coveted Firewhiskey he'd been missing.

Friday was the repercussions of the Firewhiskey, mixed with reading through his stack of papers.

Saturday, his owl returned empty-handed. When Harry neither appeared nor responded, he was angry.

“Did you know your apartment looks like shit, Harry, because it totally does,” Hermione informed him. It was clear Hermione didn't know what to say to him most of the time, and opted to berate him on his housekeeping skills when she dropped by. She always eased the door open, peered through to see if he was still alive, and then came the awkward banter. All that aside, his apartment wasn't even that bad. He'd seen worse.

He could pick up after himself more, but Harry wasn't about to tell her that once he'd planted his ass on the couch a few days back, he hadn't been able to get up. (Fuzzy on the details actually. Sometimes his mind wandered.)

“How's classes?” he asked, unmoved.

She made her way to him, plucking at errant and misplaced items. Instead of sitting by him, she sighed and began tidying around him. “Fine, fine. It's been nice taking classes in the open air - they're still repairing the walls, of course. And I've been looking into universities.”

“Oh yeah?”

This set her off into a conversation that Harry had trouble following, but it seemed to make her happy talking about her options. Hermione knew she wanted to be involved with the ministry, but she wasn't entirely sure what department suited her best until she could take on the Minister position.

“How's it going with Snape?” she asked suddenly, or maybe not suddenly but after her answering him about university and her hopeful future.

“Fine. Still a bastard, still trying to cure me.” Harry tried wiggling his toes. “Does Ron still hate me?”

She hated that question. It was the perfect, subject-changing question.

“He's still angry, yes,” she said softly. “Ginny...”

“Ginny needed to move on with her life without me dragging her down.” Feeling like a martyr, he added. “You, too.”

“And let you fester away in this shithole?” Her voice caught at the end of the sentence. Harry hated it. “It doesn't have to be like this. You shouldn't be alone right now.”

“I'm fine,” he repeated. Don't cry, he thought. Please don't cry.

Part of him wanted to confront her, to be blunt. It was exhausting being careful around her, but what was he supposed to do? He realized too late that he wasn't in love with his girlfriend, he broke it off rather than drag her through his body dying or whatever. Getting back with her was out of the question, no matter how easy it would make it on everyone else. That, and he was tired of the crying, tired of the pitying looks they gave him, waiting on him hand and foot, waiting for him to collapse at
any moment. Why am I the one that has to be strong for everyone else?

What would Hermione even say if he told her he was literally incapable of moving and was waiting for it to pass, that sometimes the first-year spells exhausted him, that he sometimes woke up to places he didn't recognize and had to track his way back home in combination of appariting, buses and trains. He either slept too much or too little.

What would she say if he told her he was literally waiting to die?

He watched his toe wiggle. Success. He then tried looking at his friend.

“Are you really okay?” she whispered.

“Really,” he lied.

She finished some cleaning, talked about what their fellow Hogwarts graduates were up to, then kissed his cheek and left. Harry closed his eyes, sank back in the cushion. Now was the time for self-pity, for getting his bearings.

And then his front door slammed open.

“Where the fuck have you been?” asked his favorite voice.

“Are you making housecalls now?” Harry returned, struggling to return to a sitting position. Wow did Snape look mad. Two unsolicited visitors back-to-back! Was it his lucky day? Should he go for the lottery?

“What plans did you find more important than your life?” the man hissed.

Crap, his legs weren't going to cooperate. Harry took a breath and tried working on his toes again. Head, shoulders, knees and toes.

“Is that it, then?” His voice had become a deadly whisper. “You - You get bad news, and you give up, slack off, and refuse to entertain the idea you'll keep living.”

“No,” Harry answered calmly.

“No?”

“I can't move.”

It was as if all the hot air released from inside him. “What are you talking about?”

“I can't walk, I can't - move .”

Snape blinked a few times, noticed that he was indeed struggling, then crouched down next to him.

“I – I have to – concentrate.” Stupid. He'd focused too hard on moving, now his speech was fucked up.

“Are you eating?”

“I'm eating!” he snapped. “I'm doing what - I - can. I can - do magic - you know.”

To demonstrate, Harry made his arm flop around in a wave. He brought an apple from his kitchen into the room, caught it, dropped it onto his lap. Snape didn't seem impressed.
“Sit up.”

Harry both leaned forward and imagined a hand was tugging him by the shirt. Grinding his teeth, he sat up straight. “I don’t – need much,” he huffed.

“Why isn’t anyone here?” Snape demanded.

“You just missed Hermione.”

“But does she live here?” Snape scanned his expression. “Does anyone?”

Harry felt his leg twitch. Finally. Seemed to be gaining strength. “I don’t want them to see how useless I am. They don’t need to see me like this, they have lives.”

“They’re your friends.”

“I can take care of myself,” Harry announced, a bit too loud. “I’m fine.” Snape had an iron grip on his knees, as if he was holding Harry upright. This is how babies are held, he thought grimly, firmly rooted so they don’t pitch forward to their death. This was mortifying.

“Look,” Harry said. “I should have written back, but I forgot. Time slipped away. I...” his voice dropped. “I didn’t know you’d worry.”

Snape stared at him as if he had sprouted another limb. He closed his eyes, tilted his head up and let out a sigh. “I’m going to pack you a bag,” he said, decided. Preempting Harry’s protest, he added “There’s no way of knowing how much time you have left. Wait here.” As if he had a choice.

Harry groaned and waited. His spine felt stiff. He should stretch more. He tried and ended up flopping back against the cushion. It was a far better position anyways...

When Snape returned, Harry Potter had fallen asleep, his neck at an odd angle, limbs shoved underneath him. He felt the boy’s forehead - He felt the pits of his skin, the jagged scar, the soft lay of hair invisible to the eye. It had all the appearance of skin, but was neither warm or cold. Chilled, he hoisted the body upward with the aid of charms and apparated.
Harry woke to a soft sound of quill scratching into parchment. The specificity of the sound amused him, this ancient relic that wizards held onto. Harry would bring him a ballpoint pen, let it change his world. He turned toward the source, and saw Snape stationed at a desk on the opposite end.

“I can never tell if you’ve passed on or not,” he said by way of greeting.

Harry shrugged himself out of the covers of Snape's bed and sat up. The scratching stopped. Harry glanced around the bedroom. Snape's room. There was bookshelves lined on the wall, surrounding them. Gadgets overflowed the shelves, some of which Harry recognized as those he'd seen in Dumbledore's office, may have been the exact ones. “I'm fine,” he said quietly.

“Can you stand?”

“Yeah,” he said. “I'm feeling better.”

“You looked like a Dementor got to you.”

Harry crawled toward the edge of the bed. “Can we get breakfast?”

“You almost died,” Snape said, sounding strained.

“Oh well, you know, false alarm.”

“Harry,” he said. “What is going on?”

“I hired you to figure that out.” Harry looked curiously over Snape's shoulder. To his surprise, he'd been sketching Harry. But with a quill? No, what the man needed was some good charcoal pencils.

“Harry...” he began, and stopped.

“I had a bad day,” he yawned. “I have them.”

“You couldn't move.”

“I'm better now. It doesn't hurt. Can we please get something to eat?”

But no, he was determined to press on. “I think I've been going about this research wrong. I should have... been aware of your life, I should have known what was happening, because those things are affecting you and they are affecting you more strongly than any person normally would be.”

“You wouldn't have cared.”

“You asked me to do this, Harry,” He faced Harry head-on, searched his expression. “Do you still want me to do this?”

Now Harry was getting pissed off. He gripped the edge of the bed, felt the frustration he kept inside letting loose. “Look, I don't need you to pity me. I don't need someone asking me dumb questions. I just want to get this over with, alright? I asked you, because I knew you wouldn't care. You'd just do the job. I'm not going to pay you to care about me, to talk about my – my life. I don't want to talk
about my life to anyone. If you don't want to do this, I don't care. We have enough data. We – ”

Snape stared at him, waited for him to finish. He licked his lips, said slowly. “What I am asking is whether you still wish to work with me. I missed something crucial and obvious nearly at the expense of your life.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “You're being dramatic. I'm dying.”

“I know you're dying, but I think there is a way to stop it and I'm not sure I'm the person that can figure it out. This is... out of my depth, Harry.”

“Well, whatever you did, I feel better.”

“I didn't do anything to you, but take you here. You've been asleep for days.” He touched his forehead, lingered. “Color's comes back to your skin though.”

“So I just needed some rest.” Harry stood and tilted his head. “And food? Food, right? We can have some food?”

“I need you to tell me what happened.”

“I left Ginny, alright?” Harry sighed. “If you think there's some connection between me being depressed and me getting closer to dying, that's not it. I don't know what it is. I broke up with her when I find out, but I've been like this since August.”

Now that Snape was convinced even the smallest event could upset Harry and rip his soul further, Harry had to do the exact opposite of what he wanted to do in the first place: talk about his feelings. But if it proved how right he was, than Harry could feel a little better going through it.

They approximated a timeline.

The final battle (and the day Harry died) was May 2. After the war, Harry and those around him had been involved in the recovery efforts, honoring the dead, and batting away interviews. They all lost someone, the Weasleys lost Fred, the last of the Mauraders fell, and recognized (if not known) bodies scattered the grounds. Meanwhile, Ron, Hermione, Ginny, and himself talked about getting a place together, none of them were prepared to be alone in the aftermath. Two weeks later, Harry felt sick (well, off).

Ginny had been the one to urge Harry to St. Mungo's when Harry had trouble getting up, when he went quiet and wouldn't answer for several moments. Harry remembered she called him a statue. Harry's medical records reflected all that had been ruled out, the final assessment that something indeed was wrong and was getting worse. The last of tests were unable to assess what surviving as a horcrux container might mean. They'd given him a death date then. October 30. (Maybe it was the symmetry of the date, though it didn't make sense.)

Ginny had talked about skipping school, had fixed herself permanently to his side, and with a dull realization, Harry knew that however much she cared for him, he didn't feel the same way. He wondered if he had ever had, or had wanted so badly to join the Weasley family. They were good friends, and she was attractive as all hell, but it wasn't here. So he broke up with her (First week of November.) Ron had taken the news personally. Of their core group, Hermione was the only one
that reached out to Harry still.

Harry didn't know how many times he disassociated; he guessed three times. He couldn't think of anything that connected them - weather, emotion, or otherwise. Obviously, this one had been the worst, but he hadn't been particularly upset. He admitted to using magical assistance to appear normal, but it was second nature at this point. There didn't seem to be any lingering affects today except Harry wanting to eat everything in Snape's cupboards and a faint stiffness in his back.

“Do you think you've lost the capacity to love?” Snape asked.

“No.” Harry spun the remembrall Snape requested he held.

“What are you feeling right now?”

“Bit annoyed, actually.”

“Do you feel sad about your situation?” he asked.

“I've pretty much accepted it.”

“Need I remind you the more honest you are with me, the better I can treat you.”

“You've mentioned that.” Harry stopped spinning the glass ball. “Do we have doctor/patient confidentially?”

“Sounds like a muggle thing.”

Harry went back to spinning the ball.

“We're not working on an exposé,” He relented. “But whatever relevant information would be included. In summary.”

“Yeah. Okay. Just weird to talk about this kind of thing with you.”

“You seem to be functioning rather well,” he noted, when Harry threw the ball up, caught it easily.

Harry flexed his fingers. “I have good days,” he said. And then: “I'm going to take a shit.”

Snape smirked. Good. Harry got a smile out of him. He should smile more.

“Take a bath while you're at it.”

Harry stuck out his tongue.

There was something satisfying about taking a shit before taking a bath, clean the bowels, clean the skin. It was a natural order - removed pants and underwear, shit, remove shirt, shower. Especially today it was such a normal thing to do as if his body was finally cooperating. Shivering naked, Harry took his time switching on the spout, feeling the temperature run ice cold, boiling hot, middling warm. The contrast of cold air and warm water bore the reminder he was there, present and alive.

He really did smell bad. It was actually kind of funny; now Harry was the greased-hair git. Harry
located a half-used soap bar (lavender?) He scrubbed his skin, scrubbed his scalp, then drained the tub, and refilled with fresh, steaming water. He lay back and felt the hum under his skin, warmed and relaxed under the water, partially buoyant. If he left his arms alone, they rose on his own, his knees hovered on the top. This weightlessness Harry felt reminded him a bit of how he sometimes felt. He'd have to tell Snape that; it was an apt enough comparison.

When he'd sufficiently soaked up the moment, Harry towed off and padded into Snape's room in search for fresh clothes. Ah, Snape had brought his gym bag, Gryffindor colors that stuck out in Snape's gray color scheme. Harry plucked through its contents and pulled on a maroon and gold sweater, black trousers, yawned and rejoined the man. Scratch, scratch, scratch.

“What are you working on now?” He asked.

“Letters,” came the short reply.

“Letters?”

“From your adoring public.”

“Oh, them.”

“They're desperate for news on your welfare.”

“Tell them I've already passed on.”

Snape glared at him.

“Joking,” he said.

“I've put tea on.”

“Thanks.”

Harry stretched his legs and leaned back, coming back to himself at Snape's sharp prod, his hand hovered over Harry's mouth.

“Were you even breathing?”

“Duh.”

“You haven't moved in two hours.” Snape looked wary. Harry wiggled his fingers, his toes, sat up.

“I don't think time works for me.”

“What time do you think it is?”

Harry blinked slowly.

“What does your internal clock tell you?”

“I don't know. Night? And do you mind getting your hand out of my face?”

Snape sat back on his heels, peered at him. Harry stared back. Let’s see how he liked that. Staring contest, you and me. Snape blinked. Ha.

“I think it’s time for bed. Can you sleep?”
“I can always sleep,” he said. No joke, it could’ve been a superpower at this point. He struggled to sit up.

“And where are you going?”

“To your... oh.”

“Yes. Mine.”

“So we're not sharing your bed anymore?” Harry asked.

“We weren't sharing to begin with.”

“I don’t bite.”

“No.”

Harry crossed his arms. Time to pull the pity card. “What if I can't walk in the morning?”

“Then it'll be easier if you stayed on the couch.”

“Aww c'mon,” he groaned. “Your bed is awesome!”

“And where do you propose I sleep?”

“Did I mention your bed was awesome?” Harry grinned. “There’s room for both of us.”

There was an awkward silence, as if all the sound been sucked from the air. Harry knew he’d messed up - he’d messed up on a royal scale, because Snape’s stare hardened on him. He’d seen it before in school, saw it when he’d been caught in the Pensieve, when he and Ron had driven the car into the Whomping Willow. Harry audibly gulped.

“Think that’s funny, do you?” Snape asked, rising up to full height so he could intimidate the fuck out of Harry. Which was working. Definitely working. “Think it’s good fun to bait me?”

Comprehension dawned. His face flushed. “I wasn’t-”

“What did you intend to imply?”

“I wasn’t talking about fucking!” Harry burst. “God! I know you can’t stand me, that’s the joke! That was the entire joke! You’d die if you had to be that close to me!”

Snape took a strained breath. “I don’t. Hate you.”

“Please. I’m pretty sure everyone that knows me, hates me at this point.”

Snape’s arm shot forward. Harry tried to back away, but instead felt his arms grab him and jerk him against Snape’s chest. His nose hit his shoulder blade, he felt himself go rigid. God, Snape pitied him so much, he was actually hugging him and Harry had to bare it with his own arms pinned to his side, and Snape’s hair on his neck and his arms... well, surrounding and embracing him. In a kind of nice way. When was the last time he’d been touched like this? He relaxed, let himself be held. “You don’t have to be nice to me,” he muttered.

“You could do with some kindness,” he replied, untangling from him. He held Harry’s shoulders firmly, keeping him upright. “We’ll share the bed. It wouldn’t be a bad idea for me to monitor your sleep. Is that agreeable to you?”
Christ. Now Snape felt too guilty to turn him down. “Fine,” he said, feeling cold and stupid and little.

Glasses deposited on the night-table, Harry settled into the indent he’d created from his three-day nap and buried himself in the sheets; he’d always been on the right side of the bed kind of guy. Still was in his apartment, even if he could technically roll from one side to the other and not worry about bothering anyone. He snuggled further. In a way, he’d won, he didn’t have to sleep on Snape’s narrow couch, but (it hit him) if Harry had stolen his bed for, what, three days, then had Snape been sleeping out there? He opened his mouth to ask, but heard a telling snore from the other end.

Harry watched the fuzzy outline of his chest rise and fall. The stubborn bastard slept on top of the sheets. He had to be freezing. Still, Harry was grateful (though loathe to admit) he wasn’t sleeping alone this time.

Chapter End Notes

We got the dream house!! Was it the power of fanfiction? Who knows. We don't move in until January, but we all (Boyfriend, Best Friend, Me) have all packing to do. We have to buy furniture! More importantly, we'll have our own library, it's awesome, it's-

Sorry, you wanted to know about the story? Oh, Fine. We're working up to a Christmas special. I'm working on future chapters to be ready once we're moving, so rest assured, the updates are going to keep coming! See you next chapter!
Chapter 5

Somehow, Harry and Severus fell into a comfortable routine living together through the week, after that first confrontation. Or more, Severus reflected, because Harry was too sick to cause too much trouble and there wasn’t a huge war surrounding them. He found it hard to believe that an alternate universe version of Harry that was healthy would sit still and be this compliant. This Harry let Snape take his measurements morning and night, ate whatever food was before him, and didn’t interrupt his reading. Sometimes he sat in his window with his tea, staring at Severus’s modest, slumbering garden, and sometimes he attempted reading the less intimidating books in Severus’s collection, but mostly he kept still and went into “statue” mode.

Snape felt he should have insisted on co-habitating earlier, but he’d been utterly blind to Harry’s dire state. They were salvaging his body, but his mind, too, was vulnerable. He’d been cocky that the answer would come to him with enough data. Now, he had an unfiltered access to what living was for Harry and was learning something new every day. For example, he was starting to pick up when Harry was using magical assistance and when he was using true physical motion. He was also starting to pick up on Harry’s double-speak - when he was joking, when he was bull-shitting, and when there was truth underlying the tone.

Most of his observations, he had a hard time putting words around. Something he’d catch Harry at an angle, and remember the student in his classroom. Was that student as world-weary and thoughtful? Severus had a hard time reconciling the student he loathed and the boy in his apartment. That Harry had pushed all his buttons, refused to follow the rules, and relied on others for his success, James’s son through and through. This Harry… well, this one had an illness that debilitated him, that had a death notice. This one had lost his fighting spirit. It might be as simple as that.

However, if he was going to get anywhere, he needed to talk to Harry’s acquaintances. He needed to hear their point of view, their honest assessments. Ms. Granger could offer her informed observations, Mr. Weasley’s with his blunt ones, and… if he could secure it, Ms. Weasley’s at Harry’s most vulnerable moments. He wrote them letters in turn, and heard from Granger first. They settled on an early time the following day.

“I need to go out to town for a bit,” he told the half-asleep boy.

Harry yawned and stretched out, jaws open so wide, it reminded Snape of a lion.

“Anything you want me to grab?” he asked, securing a scarf around him.


“You touch my roses, you’ll find our experiment cut short.”

Harry squinted one eye at him, the visible curve of his lips turned upward. “White tea, maybe?”

“I’ll see what I can find,” he hummed. “Stay out of trouble.”

“You know me,” he murmured back. “I’ve never done anything wrong in my life ever.”

This time Severus did laugh at outloud. He realized he was lingering, that Harry was perhaps delaying him. They’d grown accustomed to being together. He’d have to take Harry out the next time. Without another word, he left the room, then apparated to Hogsmeade.
The Three Broomsticks wasn’t crowded, but it took Snape a good minute to identify that the girl in the back with her wild curls tied up was Hermione Granger. That, and she was the only occupant reading a book in the pub. He sat across from her and they acknowledged each other briefly while Ms. Granger seemed to be finishing up a note. Rosmerta slid him a coffee before he could order. Funny, how bartenders thought you’d never changed your order up. As a professor, he ordered coffee for a good 15 years. Now, He was growing fond of tea.

“How are your classes?” He asked.

“They’re fine,” she said, dismissively. “How is the research?”

“Stagnant. I’m gathering information on horcruxes… and Harry.”

“Before I forget, she said, fishing through her bag and bringing out an armload of books. “Headmistress McGonagall asked me to pass these on you.” Straight from Hogwarts’s Restricted section, no doubt. He recognized some of the titles from the papers he read and was immensely grateful. “I wanted,” she started and stopped, started again. “I wanted to take notes for you. To help.”

“I imagine your studies have been demanding,” he offered.

“I was thinking… what if it’s just some stupidly obvious thing. What if his soul is leaking out from where Voldemort’s soul had to be removed, and we just need to plug it back up?”

“It wouldn’t explain why he gets better after getting worse,” he said, then politely. “I’ve wondered the same.”

“What I don’t understand is why he went to you.”

“It’s beyond me,” he said, masking his own expression. “I will do my best for him.”

She scrutinized him carefully. “What do you want to know about Harry?”

Severus realized he had a unique opportunity here. He wanted to know a great deal of things, but he had to quelch the temptation. “What I understand about the soul is that the body is not just a container – not in the way that a ring contains a horcrux – nor is the soul what animates the body. Scrivebriar – he tapped a title – has likened the soul as something that is of similar substance to magic. Of course, he thought muggles, being incapable of magic, were similarly soulless. He is correct to ask what is magic in tandem with soul. It is thought – and I think it must be – that the soul has something to do with a particular person. I confess I know so little about Harry, that it is not clear to me how he may be affected. It would be one thing if we could put dividing lines from his self before the activation of the horcrux, after the destruction, and now, but, as he has eloquently noted, he’s also murdered someone.”


“Yes. We know that a piece of Voldemort was a part of Harry, but I am wondering what a piece of soul might entail,” He said. “In particular, I’m interested in his emotional state.”

“How is he?” she asked softly.
Here, he felt like being a little spiteful. “He has good days and bad days. He says bad days feel like he is not aligned right, sometimes he has trouble moving.” He paused. “I have a fairly good understanding of Voldemort. What was Harry like in school?”

“You knew him,” she said, puzzled.

“Not quite.”

She mulled it over. “You promised you wouldn’t share this information. Harry would hate that.”

He nodded.

She played with her own mug. “Harry.. well, he was hard to relate to. We became friends, all of us, when Harry and Ron rescued me from that troll. Do you remember that? It was our first year. I was always really fascinated by him, but he was... he was very social, but he was also guarded. You know, an extroverted introvert. Talking to him, I don't think I knew all that much about him. I guess I could never understand what it would be like to live without parents and to have this whole prophecy on my shoulders. Ron and I never doubted he could save the world. I don't know if I'm much help.”

Snape vocalized his own impressions. “I remember him as highly opinionated. Good at Quidditch.”

“Hm... He couldn't stand to see a kid bullied. I don't think he cared when he was the one bullied, but it really bothered him to see it.” She faltered. He knew she was referring to him in some way, but it wouldn’t help them to revisit that part of his life. He cleared his throat.

“Do you think he was every depressed?”

She frowned. “Never. I saw him upset – with, uh, with Cedric Diggory. And Sirius. Not depressed though.” She sipped her coffee. “I remember seeing him angry though. He was terribly angry with us for not writing to him one summer – this was when the Order of the Phoenix was starting back up. He was angry about being left in the dark. I can't blame him now.”

She went very quiet. He’d struck on something. “Ron told me once about the night his brothers rescued him. They – his aunt and uncle – had put bars on his window and had locked his door. Ron said they were starving him – he may have been exaggerating. They drove that flying car out - you probably remember that - and took him to the Burrow.”

He frowned. “When did this...?”

“I believe it was Harry's 12th birthday. Now that I think about it, it must have really been an awful place to live. Harry didn't like it there, but he didn't talk too much about it. You'll have to ask Ron about it. He'll be here soon.”

“I find it surprising he never appeared depressed,” came Snape’s verdict. “He use to take walks frequently at night. I caught him a few times myself, but I'm not sure how often he did it.”

“I never knew that.”

Mr. Weasley joined their table then, kissing Hermione’s temple before tucking in. Rosmerta passed him an ale. “Hey,” he offered. Severus inquired politely on him, Mr. Weasley returned the pleasantry. They returned to the conversation, Ms.Granger asking Mr. Weasley if he remembered Harry’s insomnia.

“Huh? Oh, yeah, our first year he use to go see this mirror Dumbledore had hiding on the third floor. The Mirror of Erised. He said he could see his parents in the mirror. After that, I mean, I dunno, he'd
take his cloak and go. I woke up a few times to him leaving.”

“What do you remember about the night your brothers drove to his house?”

Ron shot a glance at Snape. “Not a lot. He was upset Dumbledore made him stay with his aunt and uncle, I know that much. Couldn't blame him there, they were real assholes. Harry did tell me about the time he set a boa constrictor on his cousin.” Ron grinned and explained “Where's Harry right now?”

“Resting, if he's listening to me.”

“Haven't heard too much from him.” Severus bit back a remark.

“Do you know anything else about life with the Dursleys?”

“He blew up his aunt once.” Ron took a gulp from his ale. “They use to lock up his wand and books in his trunk.”

Severus felt the prickle of a memory, Harry chased up a tree. “Did he ever mention his aunt’s dogs?”

“They had dogs?”

He’d have to ask Harry about that.

“How would you describe Harry?”

“I dunno, he was cool. He went with the flow.Liked quidditch, hated Malfoy. And you.” Another gulp. “He's changed though.”

“Of course he's changed, Ronald!” Ms. Granger nearly shrieked.

“Not that. I mean, I dunno. He really cared about my sister, she was going to move in and take care of him after the news and all, then he just dumps her out of the blue. That doesn't make sense. I don't know what to say to him anymore.” Ah, the truth.

Hermione studied her mug.

“What did he say to her?” Severus asked.

“I can't do this anymore,” he quoted.

“Who else did he date?”

“That’s it, unless you count Cho Chang. They were together, like, a week.”

Severus sat back, let out a sigh. The couple whispered back and forth, so he let his mind wander a moment. What was he looking for here? What had he gained? That Petunia had let her nephew be abused, that he’d been withdrawn with his closest friends, and that he’d had very few relationships. If he was doing a comparison, Voldemort knew many people, he’d always been looking for a way to utilize someone to his advantage. In this way, they were very different. What were the similarities? Harry and Voldemort were prone to anger, but anyone was prone to anger. Neither were particularly close to anyone.

He picked the first book from the stack Ms. Granger brought and thumbed through, unaware he was being watched. There were ripped out pages in here, Dumbledore’s doing perhaps. Some knowledge was thought too dangerous, but sometimes that knowledge was necessary to bring forth good. Did he
ever understand that?

“Do you think what’s happening to him - that it’s reversible?” Mr. Weasley asked.

He closed the book.

“If he gets better sometimes, there has to be something,” Ms. Granger was saying.

“So what makes him better?” Mr. Weasley picked up.

“I don’t know,” Severus said, staring at the ceiling, thinking. “All he ever talks about his tea.”

“Ginny loves tea,” Mr. Weasley said. He slammed his fist on table, narrowly missing his drink. “He’s drinking tea because he misses my sister. They have to get back together, right?” Severus gazed at him, confident, triumphant in his assessment. “Love’s the answer!”

He took a breath to speak, but Mr. Weasley powered through. “It’s worth a shot, isn’t it?”

“It doesn’t explain how he fell ill before they parted.”

“So they were having some trouble! Everyone has trouble,” He couldn’t be stopped. “They just need to talk things through again, then everything will go back to normal. They never had a chance to be together.”

“I’m afraid it’s not that easy.”

“You said you wanted to talk to Ginny,” Mr. Weasley. “Just ask her if she’ll try, okay?”

He rose to his feet, shrinking the books and putting them in his inside “book” pocket in one quick gesture. “I’ve got to be getting on. I don’t like leaving Harry alone,” he said. “We’ll keep in touch.”

Severus hurried through the streets. He didn’t like being in public longer than he had to, and he still had the last stop for tea. If anyone recognized him, it was only as the Death Eater that headed Hogwarts during that year of terror. No one could be bothered to keep up with the story, see how he’d done what he could. He’d protected Harry from the sidelines, minimized the Carrows’ abuse.

In the tiny grocery off Hogsmeade visitor’s path, He picked a white tea, a rosehip blend, chamomile, and green to round off the variety, then added his own favorite black tea blend. If the stupid sod missed his ex-girlfriend, so be it. He’d pull that information from him. Perhaps the most simple answer was simply the answer.

As it turned out, Severus didn’t need to rush back: the boy was still fast asleep.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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Dear Mr. Potter, Writing in hopes of meeting Mr. Potter in good health and many years... Mr. Snape, please find attached a collected vial of phoenix tears... basilisk fang... powdered unicorn bone... if it may be of use... if there’s anything to be done...

---

“Tell me your name.”

“Harry.”

“Full name.”

“Harry James Potter.”

“How old are you?”

“Eighteen.”

“Where are we?”

“Your house.”

“And who’s the Minister of Magic?”

“Shacklebolt.” Harry yawned. “Do we have to do this every morning?”

Snape was dispassionate to his pleas. “It’s a grounding exercise that Ms. Granger suggested and it takes little time. Drink your tea.” Scratch, scratch, scratch went the quill.

Harry had chosen the white tea that morning. “It hasn’t steeped long enough,” he informed him, as the teabag started glowing red. See? Harry mouthed, levitating the bag into the sink.

“What is it about tea you like so much?”

“Just do,” he answered.

“Are you having trouble with food?”

“Not really. It’s just nice. Warm.” Harry sent the teacup gently across to him. “Try it.”

“I’d rather not,” he said. “I’ve had white tea before.”

“If that were true, you wouldn’t drink the same stuff everyday.”

Snape took a sip, wiped the edge off. “It’s fine, good,” he said, passing it back. “Is it your favorite tea?”
“I’m not sure I have one.” Harry threaded his fingers around the mug. “Do you have a favorite… anything?”

Snape smiled faintly, tilting his quill upward. “I like fruit when they’re in season. Oranges, particularly.”

“Really.”

“I have fruit trees and bushes I’ve been preparing.”

“Your garden.”

“Yes,” Snape said. “There’s something absolutely perfect about an apple or orange you’ve grown and cared for. It’s perfect as it is. I’ll show you them when it warms up.”

“In summer.”

“And the summer after that,” he confirmed. “I need to read this, Harry. Otherwise, you’re paying simply for my company.”

Harry rolled his eyes, held the tea to his lips and settled his gaze out the window. It was snowing then, but it was always snowing. Harry wouldn’t say it out loud, but he wondered if he’d still be around when the snow stopped. From the corner of his eye, he watched Snape yawn, and knew he hadn’t been sleeping well.

Harry felt like he was always sleeping, but he sometimes drifted in and out to Snape touching his forehead, his neck, or his wrist. Checking for a pulse. Sometimes Snape was lying next to him, red-eyed and uneasy, and sometimes perched at his desk. Other times he tried to get Harry to drink water or broth or tea. It seemed he was never out of the room, prepared to save his life once again.

It wasn’t that Harry didn’t believe in Snape’s research capability. If anyone could, it would probably be him. He just felt somewhere within him that he wasn’t meant to stay in the world, that he should’ve taken the train at King’s Cross that night. And in a kind of stupid and romantic way, every day he got to drink tea and watch the snow fall and make Snape smile, they all felt like gifts. These were the days Voldemort were gone and everything would be okay. He wished he could express that to the other man, to see if he could convince him to sleep. However, it seemed he’d have to take up plan b, and just hide his quill.

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Could it be as Plato said, that the soul is all that is Good in people, wishing to be released from its bodily confines which are needy and too distracted from ethics, that the soul is something indestructible? Too much guesswork. Where do souls come from?

Could it be as Aristotle said, the soul is the animating part of the body, that they come together as a compound that is more than the sum of its parts, that once they’ve disassembled, there can no longer be that person? Does not follow with ghosts: Ghosts may be animated by the magic ability within them. Why would souls want to become alive?

Would any of the echoing philosophers know any better?

Another summary of notes and questions to be answered.
Are souls inherently immortal? Do horcruxes have “use-by” dates?

Is the soul what makes up the ghost of a person? How long can ghosts last visible to the living realm? (Oldest ghost sighting?)

Are the only distinctions that can be made body and soul?

Where do other souls go when they die, if not returned as a ghost?

Was Harry’s soul affected by eliminating Voldemort?

Are there reversing horcrux spells??

Magic test: Harry tires easily, but tires by any activity. Magic seems to come easier for him when tired. It is likely magic is unconnected and does not affect the rate of any decline. Spells tested and cast were divided in categories and performed on different days, cast by increasing difficulty - categories: Charms (inanimate objects), Charms (directed at self) Protectants, Offensive… Exact spells… In addition, no change detected in casting level before or after.

Would like to test physical endurance and whether it should be encouraged. Harry-

“Can I have my quill back?”

Harry pulled his hands from behind his back and showed how they empty they were. “Guess you’ll have to do something else for a bit,” Harry said. “Like sleep.”

“Harry-” Severus began, but the boy spoke over him.

“I hired you, I’m asking you to take a break. You’ve been sitting here for four hours.” Severus opened his mouth again; Harry derailed him once more. “At some point, you’re going to have trouble thinking properly, and you’re going to miss something. Sleep.”

Severus sighed; this was a point he couldn’t argue against. “A nap,” he argued weakly, moving to the bedroom. Harry followed him, determined to see him tucked in, and his eyes closed.

“When you wake up, I’ll have supper ready,” Harry promised as his eyelids closed. Severus snorted at him, as if he couldn’t cook. He’d show him that his Dursley days didn’t all go to waste.

But not yet. First, Harry was going to go into town and pick up Severus’s Christmas present. Then, errands of course, the bank, the bookshop, and maybe a bit of ice cream. Time and energy willing, he might stop by his apartment, grab a few more set of clothes.

Round two of the Potter interviews: Ginny Weasley, December 23.

Severus was trying to place the image of her as someone Harry had been romantically involved with. Round nose, bright eyes, long ginger hair (of course ginger), she wore a long skirt and jumper, and peered at Severus nervously from across his kitchen table. He had thought of her as a tomboy; today she was dressing for Harry. It was obvious, too, that she had been crying. Her feelings for him were still there, he supposed.

Severus was trying to picture whether she would be attractive to a young, straight man. He knew she
had had many boyfriends throughout Hogwarts, trying them on as clothes one-by-one. So what was Harry? The true bridal robe? Whether Harry took her back, it seemed she had settled on him.

Harry, now, was sleeping. If he woke and saw her, then Severus would assume it was the underworkings of Love’s Mysterious Ways. Either way, he was loathe to leave the house after Harry had fallen into another spell of being unable to move. Although, he did derive some pleasure knowing Harry was in his own bed, precisely what Ms. Weasley wanted in her own.

“How is he?” Ms. Weasley asked.

“Fine,” he said, because he wasn’t prepared to enter the details into the conversation. “How have you been?”

“Fine,” she sniffed.

“I spoke with Ms. Granger and Mr. Weasley about what they thought of Mr. Potter, whether he had gone through any changes after the horcrux in him was removed. What is your opinion?”

Ms. Weasley looked ready to burst. “He definitely changed! He stopped living after the war!” The force of that statement surprised her; she sat back, pink-faced.

“The two of you co-habitated, correct?”

“We…” she flushed deeper. “We couldn’t stand being alone after what happened with the war. It wasn’t official though, uhm, we stayed at my place mostly.”

“Did Potter ever seem upset about murdering Voldemort?”

“Why would he be upset with that?”

“Taking a life, no matter that life, is a great burden to carry.”

She frowned. “It had to be done.” So that would be a ‘no.’ “Harry was preparing for that moment his whole life.”

His quill paused in mid-sentence. “Wouldn’t Mr. Potter had been a more receptive student had that truly been the case?”

“If you weren’t a dick to him, yeah.”

“I’m discussing his overall schooling,” he hissed. He knew he was dangerously close to becoming angry with her and tried to mask his fury immediately.

“I’m saying he knew it was always going to be him that would fight Voldemort.”

“As Dumbledore led him to believe.” Deep breath, another. “You attribute heroism to someone who would not take that mantle.”

“Harry is a hero!”

He cut her down with a look, the scary teacher look that could knock back any student. “We will return to that question. What did you think of him in school?”

She, too, seemed to calm herself down. “I always knew he was special. He’s a good person. We met him on his first train ride to Hogwarts and he was so humble and polite to Mum. In school, he was nice to everyone. I was madly in love the moment I met him.” Obviously.
“Did he ever discuss his home life?”

“I asked once, he said they were a pain.” She smiled brightly. “He handled them.” Good god, he might vomit.

“Tell me about Tom Riddle.”

“Why?” She asked, the smile fading away.

“You corresponded with part of Voldemort’s soul,” he said. “I’m researching souls in order to save Harry’s.”

“Well…” she dropped her gaze to the table. “You knew him. He was… manipulative. I never wanted to…” she stopped. “What about him?”

“Harry said he used you in attempts to regain his body. What did that experience feel like?”

“Awful,” she offered. “I was unconscious for most of it, that night in the chamber. Sometimes I thought I was watching it… I’m not sure.”

“And when he possessed you?”

“I wasn’t aware of it. It was terrifying.”

“What about when you woke from that chamber?”

“It took me a long time to feel like my body was my own.”

“Could you elaborate?”

“I’d go to pick up something and it was like watching someone else control my arm,” she added quickly. “He wasn’t - It wasn’t him. It just took me a long time.”

“You didn’t feel secure.”

She neither denied nor confirmed. “Could I see him?” she whispered.

He paused. Would Harry be okay with it? “He’s sleeping.”

“I just want to see him.”

“Very well.” He pocketed his quill and led her to his bedroom, where Harry lay in the middle of his bed. Severus restrained himself from checking his breathing, instead looking for the small bob of his chest. He also knew Harry needed to be rotated soon, should try some water.

“Why is he in your bed?” She whispered and he knew then she knew his sexuality, was directly accusing him.

“It’s my only bed. I want him comfortable when he sleeps for days on end.” Further, he wants to be here, Severus bit back.

“It’s not good for him to sleep so much.”

She shot him a look, then advanced toward Harry, crawling over his own bed, his sheets and settled by his ward, in Severus’s place in bed. Still and unmoving, Severus watched her touch his cheek and he murmured her name and she spoke softly asking if he was alright, if he was being treated well at
which point Severus slowly moved away and retreated to his sofa..

If it could be easy, that Harry’s heart was confused and broken, then at least the research would have finality. And Harry would live.

And Harry would leave, and Severus would sleep alone, eat alone, return to the black tea blend he used. (Funny the things we get used to.) Back to his life before Harry. Maybe Harry would visit for summer, and he’d show Harry what a proper strawberry should taste like. They could be, however the odds seem, friends after this.

“He’s sleeping again,” Ms. Weasley cut into his thoughts. “I’ll be leaving now if we’re done.”

“Yes. Thank you for your time.”

He couldn’t be bothered to see her out. Rather, he retreated to his living room and lay back against the cushion, staring blankly at his ceiling. For some reason, he felt unnerved. He needed to digest the information he’d pulled from the girl, but was too wired to analyze it. He kept seeing that girl on his bed, and Harry waking to her touch, his sweet, slow smile...

Harry padded in later that night, fixed himself tea and settled by Severus, who was staring blankly at the Scrivebriar text. Up and mobile he thought, staring on.

“Hungry?” Severus asked.

“No.”

“Are you happy I let her in?”

“We had a good talk.”

Harry made an attempt to read over his shoulder, leaning his weight against Severus’s side. Totally unconscientious that boy; Severus thought of pushing back, putting his own weight on Harry and then he’d-

“That doesn’t make sense.”

“What?”

“That bit,” Harry said, pointing to his lap, “about muggles not having souls. Why are you reading it?”

“He could have other good arguments buried in his work.”

“S’long as you don’t believe it.” His chin fell to the crook of Severus’s neck. “Can’t move,” he mumbled. A slew of unpleasant thoughts passed Severus, you can’t move, Mr. Potter? Not if I... . Welcome one thought, welcome all.

“I’ll take you back to bed.”

“Okay.” And then. “Can we stay like this awhile? I forgot how good it feels to be touching someone.”

“It can be nice,” he relented.

“I shouldn’t have… let Ginny…” It was getting difficult for Harry to communicate. He let out a groan. Severus shifted their position and threaded his fingers through Harry’s long hair.
“You need a haircut,” he murmured.

“No,” Harry said, thickly. His eyes were closed, but he had the faint trace of a smile. Severus brought a blanket around them, using his wand to let it fall over them both, tucked them awkwardly with his hands.

Perhaps it wasn’t the best idea, given the state of his mind. Oh, he’d be ethical, he wouldn’t forcefully take Harry, but it was little use denying the appeal. Not that it was any better torturing himself with the acknowledgment of his lust. Jealousy, was it?

Chapter End Notes

While I'm enjoying the positive reviews, critique is also welcome!

Is it Christmas yet?
Harry didn’t improve after his visit with Ms. Weasley. Severus didn’t know whether to feel smug or defeated; perhaps it ruled out what was wrong with Harry, or it demonstrated how far left field they were looking.

Severus had been thinking first solely in physical terms, assuming the body affected the body. That was dumb now that he realized it. It left out the soul. He’d thought briefly of simple Magical Exhaustion; easily ruled that out. Now he’d pushed his focus to Harry’s emotional state and what effects it could have on the body. This seemed promising, but insufficient now. So where would that leave them?

If it wasn’t one thing, it was possible he needed to examine multiple components. He’d been thinking that a horcrux wasn’t simply a piece of soul. Voldemort’s horcrux had access to memories, thoughts, and emotions; Harry’s memories were intact insofar as he’d gathered, but his soul was compromised. Either the horcrux took more than someone’s soul, or…

Severus leaned forward and held his head. There was too much theory. They needed to start doing something. Severus had spells and potions up his sleeve. He wanted certainty before this part but it had been nearly two months. Begrudgingly he thought of putting together a conference, pooling together interested minds. It felt too much like failure to prompt it, but worse to do it too late. He couldn’t afford to be proud.

“Just hear those sleigh bells ring-a-ling, jing-jing-jingling tooo. Come on it’s lovely weather for a sleigh ride together with yooouoo-”

Severus stared bleary-eyed at the boy singing in front of his stove. There he was cooking, singing, making the most (he couldn’t help thinking) of his last Christmas.

“Outside the snow is falling and friends are calling you whoooo-” There was a clatter, Harry peered around the corner. “What’s the next line?”

“Same as the first.”

Harry seemed to be waiting.

“I don’t sing.”

“You have to for the holidays,” he replied matter of fact. He was so eager to get Severus in the mood, the man found himself tonelessly added “It’s lovely weather for a sleigh ride together with you.” They finished the song together, Harry working on bacon for their brunch. The smell and sizzle filled the house, Severus drifted into the kitchen. Harry started up “It’s Beginning to Look a Lot like Christmas” and Severus contributed “Deck the Halls” once they’d started on a Spanish wine he’d been saving for a good occasion.

It was only Christmas Eve, but Harry insisted they start celebrating while he was awake and alert. Severus wanted to ask, but didn’t, whether they would see Ms. Weasley or any of his friends. Rather, wouldn’t he go meet them? He should’ve offered, but he was enjoying having Harry to himself. Perhaps Harry would leave on Christmas Day to see them, in which case he should enjoy the day and not feel guilty in the least.
“So what have you made us today?”

“Bacon, omelets, le toast, gravy.” Harry beamed. “Freshly squeezed orange juice.”

“Those are most certainly not in season.”

“Not here!” Harry said, thrusting the glass in his hand. “But I bet they’re pretty good.”

“It’s alright,” he relented. Better than alright, they had to be imported.

“That’s not what I got you for Christmas,” Harry said, misreading his expression. “There’s something else. But I’m taking care of you today.” Harry switched on a radio station while they ate and Severus, a bit inebriated, thought about how Harry’s eyes didn’t look anything like his mother’s when you were looking at the shape of his eyes. It’s the emerald green that threw him off. He didn’t know if they were actually the shape of James’s eyes then. Or maybe now that Harry was older, his face was hardening into a man’s and losing the roundness of a child.

“What are you thinking about?”

“Your parents,” he answered honestly.

Harry stared at him, set aside his fork. Harry had stopped asking him about his parents the first time he spoke when he asked whether he’d loved Lily. *And here I am lusting after her son.*

He wasn’t thinking clearly, but a part of him felt certain he should say more, tell the poor kid anything he could. He wiped his mouth. “I was thinking if you’re more like your mother or your father.”

“Oh,” he said, leaning forward. “What do you - what did you decide?”

“You have your father’s nose and his hair, but you’re small and thoughtful like your mother.”

“And I have her eyes.”

“Her eye color. The shape, I’m not sure about it. That’s what I was trying to decide.” He examined Harry more, Harry holding still for him. “Your mouth seems like it could be hers.”

“Do you look more like your mom or your dad?” Harry asked, scrutinizing him. “A Prince or a Snape?”

“I look like neither.”

“What happened to them?”

“They stayed in the muggle world. I couldn’t tell you.”

“Oh.”

Not knowing how to carry the conversation, they took interest in their food, cleaned the kitchen together and gravitated back to the living room. Harry lay on his rug, stretching his limbs as if to begin a snow angel, and, being drunk, Severus made it snow briefly in the room, then joining Harry in the small place by the fire where the snow quickly reverted to rain before it dissipated above them.

“What would you be doing if you weren’t babysitting me?” Harry asked, moving to lie beside him.
“Nothing,” he replied, staring at the ceiling.

“Oh, come on.”

“Half my friends are in Azkaban, or out of country.”

“What about the other half?”

“Hogwarts.”

“Oh.”

Oh, indeed. He’d spent his every Christmas at Hogwarts, first as a student, then as a professor. At Voldemort’s return, he split his time between Hogwarts and the Malfoys, spy and godfather in one. Never fully involved with either. He told Harry all this out loud and once started, he couldn’t stop talking. He was telling him about Draco, about how he hadn’t heard from the Malfoys, how he had had a trial after nearly dying, but Dumbledore had provided him with enough memories to clear his name. Here he was left, a betrayer of both sides and entirely alone.

“Where have I got to go to?” Harry asked. “The Dursleys hate me, the Weasleys want me only if I marry Ginny and ‘Mione is too busy for me.”

“Didn’t you reconcile with Ms. Weasley?”

Harry frowned. “We talked,” he said. “Nothing’s changed.” Severus tried not to look too happy about it. Harry inched closer. “It was nice to be held is all.”

Severus brushed back the boy’s hair.

“You use to touch me more,” he murmured, closing his eyes.

“Did I?” He feigned, knowing full well he’d try to limit himself.

“Were you jealous of her?” Harry asked, smiling. Before he could protest, Harry was sitting up and reaching into his front pocket for a humming, wrapped package. Sheepishly, Harry added, “I didn’t know how else to hide it, but Brutus said it would be okay to shrink. Go on.”

“It’s not Christmas yet.”

“I’m tired of carrying this around.”

Severus rolled his eyes, sat up, lifted his arm and accio’d a package. “If that’s what we’re doing then there’s no use withholding yours.”

“You first!” Harry said, grinning.

Under the hasty packaging was a broom Snape didn’t recognize, sleek and black, vibrating under his hand in a way his own hadn’t for years.

“Your Comet looked a bit worse for wear,” Harry said, looking anxious. “I hope this is alright.”

“It’s beautiful.” It was the best gift he’d ever received. “Please don’t be disappointed with yours.”
Harry carefully unraveled the paper on his, smiled at the satchel below. “Roses.” Freshly picked, dried, and prepared.

“From my garden.” That was a horrible, sentimental gift. “For tea,” he said faintly.

“I thought some were missing,” Harry said, unperturbed by his shitty gift. “I thought you’d blame me, actually. I love it.”

“They’re much more fragrant than the dried blend you have.” More fragrant than modern roses, surpressed after years of breeding.

Harry held the gift to his nose, placed its wrapping back together. “Who would’ve thought we’d be sharing Christmas together.” He inhaled his gift once more, looked utterly pleased.

“Christmas Eve,” he corrected. And, because he hadn’ t: “Thank you.”

“You really like it?”

He brought it to full scale and ran his fingers down its shaft, through the fine black hairs. “It is perhaps the nicest thing I’ve ever owned.”

“It’s called a Black Mass,” Harry explained. “Sturdy, with speed, and it learns your riding style. The Firebolt X was all about speed, but a bit unsteady and erratic, and the Comet, you know, lasts a long time. They’re dependable, so, uhm… Well, Brutus said it would be good.” Brutus was upselling you into the newest model, he thought, but couldn’t deny its craftsmanship.

“Gwenog Jones swears by them. With the Holyhead Harpies,” Harry finished feebly, touching the broom as well, his hand slid up, toward him, Severus’s vision went hazy. When had he gotten this close? How far was he going to come?

“Don’t,” he said, finding him alarmingly close.

Harry’s mouth hovered over his. “Please. Hold me then.”

They pushed the broom aside, Harry settling half on his lap, warm, alive, writhing. Severus brought his arms around him, touched him freely as if he aimed to memorize this lone moment. He wanted to know the space between his shoulder blades, the coarse hair on his chin. He should’ve known that when Harry tilted his head upward, knew he would be pushing against him at just the angle, Severus wouldn’t be as quick to deny him. He touched his lips to Harry’s forehead, his cheek-

Bang, smash, they were kissing and he had no idea how it was happening. Severus was pulling the boy desperately against him and Harry was pulling him to the floor, and they were prying one another apart in the hope of merging or something utterly animalistic. As often as Severus had touched him, he’d never felt so alive against him, had no idea how long he’d gone without being touched and, why, god why, had they waited so long? Harry was just as eager to feel him, equally receptive to Severus.

He pulled back for air, discovered his new ability to mark kisses around his throat. He tasted salt, felt and heard the unconscious groans Harry was vocalizing and bared his teeth down on the thin skin. His hands tamed Harry’s hips from grinding against his own, trailed to the front and groped experimentally. He should’ve asked, he lifted off Harry and tried to catch his breath.

“Can I?” He asked, astoundingly breathless and ragged. “Can we?”

“Fuck,” Harry groaned. “Please.”
Severus leaned back and grabbed for Harry’s zipper. He trembled with the effort of focusing, releasing his hard cock (god) without harming him and stared at the deep red, leaking, young cock before him. His eyes flickered up, he had to check on him, but Harry’s back was arched at a desperate angle, his chest heaving. Impatient, unabashed, juvenile, needy, without the flair of mature sex, with its foreplay and choreography.

“Fuck, please, please touch me.”

He did and Harry’s eyes rolled back. Overexcited, overstimulated, he jumped as Severus teased him with the barest touch. How was any of this real?

Without ceremony, he crouched before Harry, took him into his mouth and sucked the froth of his pre-come, salt and bitter and something unexplainably erotic, swallowed that mix of bodily fluid and watched Harry thrash underneath him. His hands flailed, gripped uselessly at the floor, his shirt, haltingly above Severus’s head. He took that one, squeezed his fingers, the other holding Harry’s thigh in place. Harry jolted up suddenly, was trying to warn him, but he’s guessed as much by his frantic breathing, how hard he’d squeezed his hand.

After, he came and Severus had swallowed the mess down, he finally allowed Harry to tug him upward, settled against the overheated body. Harry kissed him, seemed determined to do so, although he didn’t need to, given the circumstance...

“Now you,” he whispered, pulling now at his robes while Severus gasped against his shoulder. “Not that I - I don’t really know-” Harry brought his other hand around and tugged Severus’s cock loose, cool air rushing against his extremities. “Just tell me if it’s not good.”

“Good,” he mumbled, helpfully.

He was immobilized by Harry’s touch, anchored in place solely by the clumsy but gentle slide of Harry’s hand on his cock as he tried to form a rhythm. He was already close, nearly so when Harry arched into his mouth, and shortly after he panted his own warning, grasping Harry’s small shoulder as he came.

“ Fucking Christ,” Severus groaned, grappling for his wand. Accio every towel in this house.

“That good?” Harry laughed. “I’ve never… oh, wow, I’m dizzy.” Severus took his arm and wiped away the stickiness. He grinned at him, no, had been glowing since he’d come. “That was brilliant.”

“I’m pleased you liked it.” His voice sounded strained in his own ears. “But we shouldn’t have done that.”

“Says who?”

Not knowing what to do, he lay next to Harry again and watched him carefully. Harry reached for him, kissed him slowly, a bit sloppily, wonderfully. Oh, many people would disagree with his actions that night, but he didn’t want this dream to end just yet. He didn't want to think about it. There was snow falling slowly above them, but he was warm and alive, and something close to content.

Chapter End Notes
Merry Christmas, all! Have a cookie, have some tea!

Now, I have no idea if wizards would sing Christmas carols. I also don't know if they would say "oh god" on the throes of an orgasm, rather than like "Oh, Merlin" or "Voldemort's Nipple." But I do know that I'm about to put these boys through a world of pain, and ultimately, neither are going to be bothered by synthax. :) :) :)
“There are multiple ways to seduce the man researching your weird, semi-soulless body, especially when you’re both living in the same house together. For example, you can subtly walk about in a towel after a bath while he attempts to read. It might take a few tries, but it’s well worth the surprise. You could also drop onto his lap at any part of the day and it’ll be go-time. Remember, any situation can be sexualized. Eating? Use your tongue more. Sleeping? Just jab him with your erection while he’s waking up. Alternatively, snuggle against his morning wood while he’s too sleepy to reject you. It’s all about perseverance!...”

“What is this, Harry?” Good. He’d found it.

Harry grinned at Severus and tapped his glasses when he rounded the corner. “Just thought I’d work on my own research.”

“Is that so?”

Harry grabbed a fresh piece of parchment and gave the other man a searching look. “Tell me, Professor, how hard are you after reading that paper I strategically placed?”

He watched him turn an interesting deep shade of red.

“Oh! I nearly forgot that one,” He transcribed out loud. “‘Be sure to call him ‘Professor’ or ‘Doctor’ playfully.’ I think that one’s been effective with you. What else am I forgetting?”

“Harry?”

“Should I call you ‘Daddy’?”

“I don’t find any of this amusing,” Severus muttered. “I need to take your measurements.” Harry stood up, spread his arms and waited. He bit back asking whether he wanted to measure his dick too, because, honestly, that was the only thing growing.

There hadn’t been a repeat performance since Christmas Eve. It wasn’t from lack of trying on Harry’s part, Severus had been entirely stubborn about the whole thing pretending first that it never happened, then that hadn’t meant anything, and finally that it could ever happen again. (The last Harry was starting to believe.)

If Harry broached the subject, Severus would just stare him down as if he’d suggested they do a crab dance across the room. And, okay, he hadn’t tried any of the seduction techniques he’d written out besides the jabbing him with his hard-on bit, but that one happened on its own. (And that was a mistake because Severus stopped letting Harry lay against him at night.) Okay, and arguably, the sexy eating stuff.

Why was it that you can go without sex fine up until you do it again, then it’s all you can think about it? Or was it about the person? Not that Severus seemed the feel the same. They’d gotten drunk, they were vulnerable, and then wham, bam, that’s all folks.

“What gives?” Harry finally asked. The other man stiffened, leaving the measuring tape fashioned around his skull. He wouldn’t even do it by hand? “Can’t we at least talk about it?”
“Was that how you wished to introduce the subject today? By mocking me?”

“No? I just-” Harry pulled the tape from around his head and thrust it back in his arms. “Nevermind.”

And then the stare all over again. “Are you finding that your sex drive is more active than usual? Is that what this is about?”

You barely look at me! He wanted to shout. You never talk to me like you used to! He had no idea why it bothered him so much that Severus had gone from spilling his family history to going out of his way to ensure they wouldn’t accidentally touch, but here he was asking him if it was just another weird thing his body was doing.

“My sex drive is fine,” he said mutely. “It’s not different.”

“Straighten your back.” He did.

Unbelievable. They’d sang Christmas carols together. They’d had something nice! And Harry was starting to hate the fact he’d bought him a broom, that he’d entirely overshot their closeness. Severus had locked the stupid thing away and, as far as Harry could tell, has never looked at it since.

“Was I bad at it?” Harry then asked, because fuck all. At least Snape hadn’t left the room.

And cue the stare, back with a vengeance. “It’s not,” he said carefully, “a matter of your proficiency.”

Yep, he was terrible. Of course he was, he’d only been with girls and even then, he wasn’t entirely sure if he was any good.

“Are we done?”

The other man curled the tape in a tight circle, then let out a sigh. “We’re done.”

“I’m going for a walk.”

“Please track the distance you go.”

As if he even knew the goddamn distance. “Fine.”

If there’s one thing Harry Potter lacked, it was definitely tact. All around brains probably. Severus held up Harry’s perverse writing, determined to crumple it up, burn it, and discard it forever. No, it needed to be apart of his notes. All information was game. He sighed again and sat at the desk Harry had sat in, his desk.

“Weird semi-soulless body” he mentally underlined. Was that how he saw himself, as something half? And the towel thing? What had he been thinking to do that in the first place. Was Harry planning to do those other things? Despite himself, he felt the telling twitch at his crotch, at the memory of Harry smiling at him, lips curling around every word: “Tell me, Professor, how hard are you?” Bloody hard now.

What the hell had possessed him to fuck Harry? His concentration was shot, Harry was upset with him, and - no, above all, he’d compromised his position as observer. As if to punish himself Severus
snapped back a few pages in his notebook. There, shakily written in his notes for 12/24 - *sexual encounter (oral, manual), motivated by subject, no difficulties, alcohol involved...* God, he hated himself for being disgusting, for not stopping himself, and for wanting it now.

He placed Harry’s note in the journal too and recounted their conversation. He might as well have signed off on his will too, because once this was released, he could look forward to a life of zero career prospects. They’d see what he’d done in the worst possible light, the homosexual corrupting. Harry would look back on it and despise him. But, hey, at least he retained some of his integrity.

It could’ve been as easy as omitting that information if Severus wasn’t committed to professional honesty. Editing the study meant compromising the truth. They had no idea what they were handling, and would have no idea what would truly affect him. He was tempted to leave out his indiscretion if the solution to Harry’s welfare was made clear, but, until then, he just didn’t know. The fact Harry desired sex could be a signal; he just didn’t know what.

And didn’t Potter have any semblance of sensitivity to the mere fact everything they did together had the potential of affecting Harry’s life?

Didn’t he consider that all they did he obligated to record? Wasn’t he aware that every second he wasn’t studying, he was letting Harry’s life slip away? He was doing it now, trying to ignore his cock, trying to shove the memories of Harry’s body moving below his. How was he this bloody useless? No, it had to be dealt with.

He took Harry’s note to the bathroom, locked the door and rubbed himself through the fabric. This had to be quick, he had to check on his potions soon. So he called up the image of Harry’s body in full-force, the way he rubbed against him then, that perfect cock he’d had his mouth on, and Harry’s mouth, tasting of tea. God. (He had his cock firmly sheathed in hand now) He wanted to kiss him again, thought about it every morning, seeing his lips, dark as cherry, sensuous. He pumped himself, staring at Harry’s note and imagined him just then in the shower, enveloped in steam, and turning slowly, offering himself to Severus. His mind turned to the mornings he found Harry latched against him, and imagined himself rolling on top of him, and hell, it was his imagination, he pushed Harry’s knees to his chest and breached him (Harry was open to him in this fantasy, ready for him) he- fuck, he was coming, (already?) loudly, fucking embarrassingly into the toilet.

He was so goddamn disgusting. Severus forced himself to look at himself in the mirror, an old man pineing after and seducing a younger boy. A flushed, ugly wizard that couldn’t keep his dick to himself. He wiped his cock off, washed his hands, and waited for his heart to quit racing.

Starting today, he’d have to do something. He wouldn’t encourage Harry any further. He had to fix their sleeping arrangements in a way that didn’t compromise his ability to observe. A cot? Something. And he could address Harry bluntly. To do that, he had to guess what Harry was thinking, how to explain it, and how to finally end it.

Harry was young and confused, lonely and horny. He had asked Severus to hold him and had initiated sex. Their judgment was compromised and they’d been reflecting how alone they were. *That* happened. Harry had reciprocated the gesture and had kissed him. They had fallen asleep on the rug, embracing. Severus had carried Harry to bed and had been unable to stomach sleeping next to him. It felt too much like preying on Harry’s vulnerabilities. Harry… (His stomach clenched) Harry had smiled sleepily at him and made to kiss him at his desk. Severus had bared it, told him to prepare for lunch, and Harry slowly backed from him when it was clear he wasn’t acknowledging it. (Why had he wanted to do that?)

He should’ve been direct that morning. Harry had thought something was wrong with his *technique*. Severus was loathe to correct that he’d never come so hard in his life before Harry. He’d never felt
so compelled to kiss and touch someone before. There was not a thing wrong with Harry in that way. It was - he tried to accept - the best night of his life. That part, he wouldn’t say. He had to lay down the practicalities of the situation.

Resolved, Severus pocketed Harry’s note and moved to his potions room. He tested the temperatures, added a dragon scale to the third bottle and unicorn blood to the fourth and fifth. A family of toads watched Severus, anticipating and expecting nothing of him. He selected one of them and put that one in a separate glass case with a drop of the first potion he worked on. More notes.

He yawned. It was debatable if they had souls, but they could detect harmful potion combinations rather effectively. He wondered if Harry would be bothered by these tests. He’d be more bothered by a rash inducing concoction.

Severus decided he needed to do something nice for Harry. Harry’s confidence was low and he needed, bare minimum, his friendship. They could do that, couldn’t they? Just talk. Harry would make his jokes and Severus would return them with an exaggerated eye roll and as long as they weren’t touching, there didn’t need to be any tension.

He made Harry’s favorite meal, a vegetable rice soup and suspended that and a whistling kettle until Harry returned from his walk. For conversation, he intended to keep it neutral and off of himself. He had a few stories about a younger Draco that could amuse the boy, or perhaps some on his mother if the conversation went stagnant. He also wanted Harry’s opinion on what he should add to the garden if Harry seemed receptive to conversation. Plus, he really did need a break from the research before his eyes bled through.

The door creaked open and Harry slipped through, kicked his shoes off, and stood in the middle of the kitchen. “That ready?” he asked, indicating their dinner. Severus hid a smile and stood.

“You have a seat, and I’ll serve you.”

He plunked down and started undoing his coat and scarf while Severus brought him boiling water and tea leaves (he always preferred to steep them himself), and then the soup.

“Did you have a good walk?” he asked, making us own bowl.

“Alright,” he tested the temperature of the broth before swallowing. “I probably went 5 kilometers. I don’t know. I just kind of walked around a bit.”

“It sounds like you’re regaining your strength.”

“Maybe.”

Severus settled down at the seat across from him. “Taste alright?”

“Yeah, s’alright. Thanks.” Harry kept his gaze fixed on the table.

“I was reading from your favorite author - the pure blood enthusiast,” he launched in. “You were right to suggest I drop it. He started arguing muggles should be classified as beasts. Can you imagine muggles in the same sphere as goblins?”
“I don’t think either would want to be categorized as lower than us.”

“I’m saying, yes, it is a ridiculous notion.” He opened his mouth to launch his Draco story at the same time Harry cut in. “You know when-” / “By the way, I-”

“You first,” Severus said.

Harry cleared his throat. “I invited Ginny over for tomorrow. We won’t get in your way or anything.”

“That-That’s fine.”

Harry pushed the soup away. “And I’m going to take the couch for tonight if you’re not going to need it.”

“No, I can work from here.”

“Good night.”

“Good night, Potter.”

There was was then, they were just going to be civil to one another. Professional. Severus cleared the plates with his wand and took the rest of Harry’s tea, black. He always made it better than him somehow, a secret culinary intuition there. Severus wanted to keep learning things about Harry, too little, too late. He’d already damaged the fragile relationship they once had.

She tucked into his arm, running her fingers across the clothed chest; he, hugging her one armed, soaking up her affection. His kept his eyes on her, his entire attention. She said something, and he’d toss his head back and laugh. No matter where Severus was in the house, he could hear them chatter on. Harry made sure of it. He had to.

But he didn’t need to see it. If one of Harry’s still moods occurred (or anything else), Ginny could inform him. He could easily walk from the room and begin work on something else, but all his potion containers were brewing now and he’d either have to walk through them to his room (why) or leave the house entirely (would that admit defeat? Defeat of what?)

He had to leave. He wasn’t wanted. It would good for them to have privacy. But he couldn’t move just yet. His galleons were in his room, as were his winter garments. He clenched his fists, heard Harry’s laugh and her giggle. Be happy for him, you goddamn prick.

This was juvenile. He steadied his resolve and marched through the hallway, saw Harry alone. It caught him off-guard, and they gazed at each other, Harry propped on the couch, and defiant; and he, pathetic? No, masked, the face he held throughout Hogwarts.

“I’ll be out for a bit,” he said.

“You’re going to leave us alone?” Harry asked.

“Have you become an exhibitionist?” he returned, then walked to his room.

Unphased, Harry followed behind. “So, where are you going?” As if he wouldn’t come back.
“Grocery shopping. I’ll be two hours at the most” He numbly added another layer, put his satchel of coins in the inner pocket. “Do you want anything?”

Harry stood before the door, seemed to work up to say something. Severus was sure he didn’t want to hear it. “No,” he said finally. “Nothing.”

Severus found himself twenty minutes later at the specialty tea shop (adjacent to a potion ingredients shop. Imagine that.), where the elderly hag was starting to recognize him.

“How did your roses come out?” She asked, grinning.

“Its recipient was pleased.”

“And what does your friend want today?”

A ginger-haired witch, who may or may not have her face buried in his crotch, or worse - *God! Stop thinking about it!* “He wants to torment me.”

She laughed. No, he wanted to correct, you don’t understand the nature of being around a hopelessly beautiful young man and possessing perpetual blue balls, of having bent over him once knowing it could never happen again.

“How does he torment you?”

“He’s disobedient.” Did she not guess his “friend” was Harry Potter, biggest troublemaker the universe spat out? Did older witches bother with the news? “I want to extend his life; he disagrees.”

“The youth are always invulnerable.”

He crossed his arms across his chest and bought his black tea, a green tea, and at the women’s suggestion, some mint. It would pair well with the roses, it was refreshing on its own. And perhaps, Harry would like it.

God. He had to stop thinking about him. At the same time, he’d been doing it for so long. He’s been doing it while Harry was his student; he was being paid to do it now. Somehow he had to separate his emotions from the situation.

There it was, his New Year’s Resolution. He had to move on.

Chapter End Notes

Moving is hard.

Not that I'm making it an excuse. That's just a warning. I know where I want this story to go, but I'm not too sure about these next few chapters. So actually... writing is hard, haha. I'm done trying to tweak this, because it's been far too long.

Hope the holidays met everyone well!
They saw Ms. Weasley again throughout the week and the week after that. If Harry was sleeping, she planted herself by him and when Harry was awake, they took over his living room and laughed about every banal thing or played Wizard Chess or whatever useless activity they could come up with. Sometimes Ginny forced Harry to walk around outside. Sometimes she took over Severus’s tea kettle and they had a grand old time drinking that damn white tea and catching up.

Severus was getting used to working around them, was complacent about taking meals with them (in separate rooms, let’s not be crazy). Harry was happy, anyways. Harry was kept busy and no longer had to rely on Severus for company. Plus, they’d been snogging one another in fevered attempts (red light, green light), probably more. Obviously. Of course, he’d caught them once as Harry noticed him and pulled away, flushed, aroused (no doubt), and she only mildly embarrassed.

What would Ms. Weasley think if she knew Harry had latched onto him, had begged Severus to make him come, had made him come? Could she fathom the note Harry had left for him, so clearly in Harry’s scrawl? What would she think if she saw Harry the way Harry had presented himself to Severus - vulnerable, trusting, beautiful. He doesn’t want you! Harry belongs to me!

Severus paused. He’d been torturing a toad and nursing a potion and thinking once more about Harry and now, somehow, he was being utterly possessive over the boy? Severus was sick with himself - he’d come on Harry once and suddenly had been thinking of Harry as his. God. He looked forward to the days Harry wouldn’t be there, the constant, visual reminder of what he couldn’t have, what he’d never have.

It had been like a dream, for the brief moment Harry had been kissing him and he kissed him back and he thought they could be like that every night, even, insanely, the parts where he cared for Harry, feeding him, holding him and sometimes where Harry cooked for him. They would tend his garden together, add the flowers and herbs Harry wanted by the beds of his own. It was a stupid fantasy, but he thought for one, absolutely insane moment, of that perfect reality where they were together.

When she kissed him, she felt victorious and assured. Until then, Ginny had wondered if Harry still loved her. He missed her, that she was sure of. They had always been good friends, but you don’t kiss “just friends.” And how can girls and guys that have dated be just friends?

Harry should love her anyways! Any other girl would’ve run away by now. Who wanted to deal with a dying boyfriend when a girl could be going on fun dates, or getting ready for an engagement? Even for a celebrity (which okay, Harry was) that’d be too much to ask for a young woman. That’s what her mother and sister-in-law had said, but, honestly, she agreed.

Well, once Harry got over whatever this sick thing was, Ginny imagined a wedding (possibly white, but she’d played with the idea of using Gryffindor’s colors). When Harry got better, he could take her to the Holyhead Harpies games on homegrounds. (Carnations? Roses? Lilies?) They could have
a stroll down Lockalyn’s Lane. (Would he propose to her there? Or where they first met?) They
could do whatever they wanted. They just had to get through this. Ginny waited until Harry had
fallen asleep before slipping away, humming the songs she might want to dance to with Harry.

She kissed him when he hadn’t expected it. They had been spending a lot of time together and Harry
was use to her staring at him and being touched by her. She squeezed his shoulder or knee, or
threaded an arm around his. That stuff, he liked. Then one afternoon she leaned forward and kissed
him. That use to be normal for them, they use to be dating, but they weren’t together now. She
smiled at him, but he hadn’t known how to feel about it.

Harry missed being kissed and kissing. He had been caught off-guard and forgotten who was kissing
him and why and what the implications of that kiss could be. Her lips were soft and the kiss was
gentle; he was caught up in its familiarity. Then he came to himself and backed away, and caught
Snape’s stare. No. Severus. Watching them from the other room, his eyes wide, features frozen, and
his lips parted. Had he meant to say something?

Harry didn’t know what to make of the situation, but Ginny was all too ready to fill in the blanks.
Severus disappeared around the corner while Ginny was saying something, he missed half of it, but it
was, oh, how they would survive this like they had survived everything else. (They, was it?) Harry
lay back on his couch and felt tired all of a sudden. She made a spot for herself and he’d closed his
eyes and submitted to her petting until he’d nearly fallen asleep.

When she left, Severus was in the habit of reclaiming his space and resuming his position of
watching Harry. The winter sky grew dark earlier now which made reading difficulty. He could light
a candle but at the risk of disturbing Harry, he used the that time for quiet contemplation. He went
within himself and reviewed the day, how he had done, and what needed to be done the next day. It
was how he got through everyday, his meditation while watching Harry, until he needed to go to
bed.

He was angry with Harry, but he was trying hard not to ascend to that emotion and let that irritate
him. The star, the little celebrity had been flaunting his girlfriend, then pouting when Severus
wouldn’t entertain them. She wasn’t useful...

He’d had no idea Harry was aware of him until that night his voice cut through his thoughts.

“Hey,” Harry croaked. “Sev…?”

“Yes, Harry?”

If possible, his voice became smaller. “I’ve got to go.”

Severus walked over to him and crouched to his level. “I know a spell for that.”

“Oh, uh, you do?”
“What do you think I do when you sleep for multiple days?” He stroked Harry’s forehead, a calming gesture he hoped. “This might feel strange,” he warned, murmuring and waving his wand.

Harry flushed a bit. Good that he had some color in him. “No wonder - you… ha. That is - pretty weird.”

“No wonder what?”

“No wonder you don’t find me appealing.”

“It’s a normal wizard function,” he said slowly. Why would he need to find him appealing?

“Have I had accidents with you?” Harry groaned. “Oh god, I have, haven’t I?”

“You’re being too demanding of your body, given the state you’re currently in.”

“Just kill me now,” Harry groaned.

“And let my research go to waste?”

Harry offered a faint, pitying smile.

Unconsciously, he was stroking Harry’s hair as he used to. What did Harry do when he was immobile around Ginny? Was he holding it that entire time? He swallowed hard. No, perhaps Harry was using magic to get around and tonight he was exhausted. In that case, Harry was unable to communicate with her honestly. How could she demand his attention and love, to fail him when he needed her? His heart surged with emotion. Severus swallowed hard.

“Do you - think I - could sleep with you to - tonight?” Harry whispered.

“I believe that will be okay.” He stood, spelled Harry to a lighter weight and grabbed him around the shoulders and under the bend of his knees, the blanket coming away with him. Harry buried against his chest; Severus wanted to walk slower, to cradle him for a moment longer. Instead, he deposited him on the usual side Harry had once slept on. Harry’s eyes followed him as he prepared for bed and joined him on the other end.

“Can you hold me?” was Harry’s follow-up request. “I mean - not like - just-”

“Yes,” he cut in before Harry could vocalize that sentence. He would ignore it. “I can do that.”

Severus scooted toward him, attempted an embrace, then realized he needed to scoot closer. Harry closed his eyes and settled against him. His fingers rested lightly on his ribs; Severus’s were stroking the boy’s back. This was normal, he assured himself, it’s soothing, it’s what Harry needs.

“Is this okay?” Harry asked. “Do you mind?”

It was perfect. “I don’t mind.”

“Okay.”

“How are you feeling?”

“Stupid. Warm.”

Severus buried his nose in the other’s hair. “How’s your mobility?” he murmured.
“Fine. I’m just exhausted.” Harry nuzzled up against his neck, Severus could feel his breath, light. “I feel like I’m made of stone.”

“It’s those exercises she makes you do.” Severus sounded bitter, but he didn’t care.

“She thinks they might help.”

“That’s not for her to decide.” He was thinking about anchoring his legs around Harry. That felt too intimate. Was it? He wanted to wrap his entire body around him. That was definitely too intimate.

“Then tell her to knock it off,” Harry mumbled.

“Why do you want her company if she ignores your wishes?”

“Because you ignore me,” Harry replied, adjusted his position. “Mostly.”

He was too tired to acknowledge the statement, to deny or affirm that he’d been keeping away from Harry since that night and his note and his questioning stares. As he should, too. Didn’t Harry understand how complicated this was?

“I keep thinking I was supposed to die that night in King’s Cross,” Harry said suddenly. His grip on Severus’s shirt tightened (good grip, strong, he noted). Severus pulled him closer and Harry’s confession rolled out. “All I was supposed to do was die, but I came back and I - I don’t think I should have. All she wants to do is talk about is when I’m better. I don’t know what to say, there’s no future for me. I’ve done what I was supposed to do.”

Harry braced himself for Severus’s reply, as if he might berate him. He felt the curve of Harry’s spine, trailing slowly as if to delay his reply. He measured his own words carefully, mentally. He sighed. “I feel the same way sometimes,” he confessed. Harry stiffened. He powered on. “I made a mistake when I was young and I paid for it for seventeen years. What am I supposed to do now?” His voice was raw and rough. Should he have said that? He couldn’t stop himself now, he’d been holding that particular thought in for far too long. “I would have preferred dying.”

“Oh,” Harry whispered, clinging to him.

“I can’t say I understand why you are ready to go when you’re finally free of Voldemort, when you are so young, but I,” he sighed again. “I know that feeling.”

Harry made a strange, soft noise.

“What would you have me do?” he asked him. “You are the sponsor of this project and the benefactor. Are you asking me to give up?”

“No,” Harry responded. “I know it’s important. I know it could help someone. And… I know you work hard to help me.”

“It seems caring for you is what I’m meant to do.”

To his surprise, he could hear Harry chuckling. “What’s funny about that?” he mumbled.

“Caring for me in your own way,” Harry said. “You know we’ve always clashed.” He twisted upward, made to look him in the eye. “Actually, I don’t think you ever gave me a chance.”

“I saw your father in you. It was all I needed to know.”

“I wouldn’t.” He caught his breath. “I wouldn’t have done what he did.”
“The things you did to Draco—”

“God, really?” Harry shook from his arms, made Severus look him in the eye now. “Look, he started it. Do you know how pissed he was I didn’t want to be his friend? That’s why he hated me. What did he tell you?”

It appeared Harry was feeling better. He restrained himself from flattening the boy’s unruly hair. “You never gave him a chance. He said you were quite snobbish.”

“He was the one going on about the pureblood and muggle crap when we met. He was such an ass.”

“He’s a product of his father.” Severus yawned.

“Oh, please.”

“Your dismissal hurt his pride.”

“Seriously?” Harry groaned. “Are you, like, best friends with his dad?”

“Something like that.” This time he did tuck hair behind Harry’s ear. “I am Draco’s godfather.”

“That makes… so much sense.”

He was staring up at Harry, wanting to pull him back in his arms, wanting (oh those lips were so dark)… Harry grinned. Was it on his face now, the desires welling inside him?

“I like talking with you,” Harry said quietly. ‘This honesty thing. It’s nice. I missed you.” Harry came closer to him, seeming to move fast now that Severus was having trouble staying keeping his eyes open.

“Don’t,” he muttered.

“I won’t,” Harry promised, settling against him again. He laced their hands together, stitched by their fingers. “Can we do this tomorrow night?”

By way of answer, Severus squeezed his hand, ran his thumb along Harry’s palm.

“Good night.”

Chapter End Notes

You guys are sweet. Have another chapter.
“So, why did you become a Death Eater?” Harry asked him, chin propped over his arms. He smiled serenely at Severus and the toads he was examining.

“Back to interrupting my studies, then?” Severus replied.

“I’m pretty sure you gave me permission to.”

“At night.”

“It’s dark out.”

“In bed.”

Harry rolled his eyes, which Severus totally missed. Feeling bold, he murmured. “Come to bed then.” He smiled sweetly when the man jerked upward, scowled. What did the guy expect? Harry had to catch up on the teasing, now that they were on good (although tentative) terms. He just had to time the jokes just right.

Harry wasn’t sure what changed between them, but they were amicable now. Severus had let Harry sleep with him again and they took meals together. Severus did his measurements and they talked back and forth. When Ginny dropped by, Severus didn’t immediately leave the room. He actually visited with her and talked to her. It was weird, but good. When she left, they moved to his mini lab and Severus told him about the potions he’d attempted. Harry had no idea how feeding toads weird combinations of magical ingredients would help fix Harry’s body/soul issues, but he amused Severus by naming the toads: Steve, Gary, Todd, Rachel, and Draco (the wartiest one of all). They’d had fun.

The million galleon question though was what had Christmas Eve meant, if anything. The part that confused him was not that they’d kind of had sex, but that he was pretty sure Severus wanted to do it again, but absolutely refused to acknowledge it. Harry thought it was a one-time thing up until last night when Severus looked at Harry and, he totally didn’t imagine it, they were thinking about kissing each other. Severus asked him not to (just like Christmas Eve) and this time he didn’t. But Harry could have kissed him, and Severus would have kissed him back. He’d just probably ignore him for another few weeks afterwards. It didn’t feel worth it.

So maybe it was a waiting game. He’d tried confronting the man and was shunned. So Harry retreated until Severus was ready to make peace with him. Or maybe Harry had been so pathetic that the man couldn’t help being nice to him again. The whole thing was confusing if he thought about it too much. He confused himself.

“I think we’re done for the night,” Severus relented. Harry blinked, saw the man was finishing writing something down. He must’ve zoned out again.

“Will you carry me?” he tried.

“I suppose. Is your mobility alright?”

“It’s fine. I’m lazy.”
Severus piggy-backed him, which meant Harry got to hug his neck for dear life and duck every time the man approached a doorway. Regardless, they made it to his room in one piece.

“What were you asking me about being a death eater?” He called out from the adjoining wash room.

“Why you became one,” Harry called back.

“Oh. I thought it made sense at the time.”

“What made sense?”

“That mudbloods were the problem, why (he came back in the room) there were so many issues in the wizarding world. I don’t know what to tell you, I was young and angry and I wanted an answer.”

“But Voldemort was so-”

“Persuasive,” he cut in. “And believe or not, he use to be handsome.”

“You had a crush on him?”

“Many witches and wizards found him handsome,” he replied defensively. He joined him in bed then and gave him a look over. “You might’ve.”

“No, I don’t think homicidal maniacs are my type.” Harry latched onto him as soon as he settled under the covers.

“Then what is your type?” Severus asked.

“I don’t know. People I can talk to.”

“I’m talking about looks. Appearance. Features.”

“Oh, I dunno. Doesn’t matter. You?”

Severus didn’t seem to believe him, but didn’t comment otherwise. “Homicidal maniacs,” he yawned.

“Good luck with that,” Harry said. “We’re not due for another one for at least fifty years.”

He touched his hair again. Severus seemed to love his hair, which was fine because Harry liked when he was touching him. He snuggled further into his arms, pressed his luck and pressed against him.

Ginny came by the next day, with Ron and Hermione in tow. Harry practically flew from his seat to the front door, lunch abandoned, and hugged them all in turn. Severus was cordial with them all, offering them tea and then a batch of muffins, it was great. Harry half-thought Severus would be angry with the intrusions, but he seemed to understand how important they were to him. They piled up in the living room, hugging mugs and each other.

“He’s looking better already, isn’t he?” Ginny said, squeezing Harry’s shoulder.
“Loads better,” Ron agreed.

“It’s really good to see you,” Hermione said.

Harry couldn’t stop grinning. He was so excited he could hardly keep up with the conversation, but they talked about Christmas (“Why didn’t you come out, Harry?”) and Quidditch. (“We should go to a game when it warms up!”) and life in between. “What’s been going on?” he murmured, hiding behind his teacup.

“We’ve got the joke shop going strong!” Ron announced. He talked about some of his own inventions and how George had been. (He wanted to come, but someone had to be in the store, of course.). It had been a long time since Harry had seen Ron, and he was entranced with the hair on his chin, the muscles on his arms. He was strong, and confident in himself. Healthy.

Hermione, who Harry had some correspondence with through Ginny, told Harry about a research project she was doing with Hagrid. Together, they were communicating with Centaurs and trying to improve their relations with the wizarding world. She had also been talking with the house elves and was going to tackle the acromantulas and giants. She’d even got an ancestor of Scamander to help her out, who was letting her borrow Newt Scamander’s old journals from traveling around the world.

“And I’m failing!” Ginny told them all cheerfully. She clarified it really wasn’t that bad when Harry and Hermione cross-examined her exclamation, Hermione baffled, and Harry horrified.

“She does it for you, you know,” Ron told him, a bit put out. “When the person you love needs you, it’s what you do.”

Harry’s mouth flapped open and closed, he stared at Ginny, who merely smiled at him. “L-Love?”

“Of course, Harry.”

“But—”

“God, I’m so glad you guys worked it out.”

“I knew it would sort out.”

“I told them, I’m sorry. Was that okay?”

“What did you tell them?” Harry managed. His chest was starting to feel cold. Shaking, he set his teacup down.

“That we’re back together,” she said, as if were the most sane thought ever.

Harry closed his eyes, he covered his face. He wished Severus was here, because as soon as he opened his eyes, this was all going to go away. The warmth they had between them, it was tentative, dream-like, because it hadn’t been real. It was conditional. He braced himself.

“Harry…?”

There was a crash. Shouting. Incoherent from the lab.
Severus rushed from the room to the noise, having no idea what to expect. A million images rushed through his mind, Harry slumped over the most prominent. Ginny jabbing a finger in his direction was the least of his expectations.

“What did you do to him?” She demanded, as if she dare had the right

His eyes flew to Harry, and saw him, miserable, scrunched on the sofa and alone. They’d overturned the table, someone had, and his friends (friends?) were looking between them, a mixture of anger and confusion and disgust. They know, he thought wildly. They know what I did. But why would they be angry at Harry? He stared helplessly at him, wanted to run to him, to comfort him. Someone had to.

“What is going on in here?” he managed to ask, his voice even.

“I know you’re a fag, I see how you look at him,” Ginny said, sounding hysterical. “What did you do to him?”

“He didn’t do anything,” Harry said. Gods, he was shaking.

“Then why don’t you love me?” she directed at him.

“I-”

“You did something to him,” Ginny said to Severus. She sounded convinced, but it was baseless. She had no proof. She was scared.

Yes, he bit back, I’m infecting him with my gayness. “Just what are you accusing me of, Miss Weasley? If my patient does not return your romantic feelings, then it has nothing to do with me.”

“He was normal before,” she said. “You-”

“I, what?” he hissed, moving a step closer to her, pushing into her comfort zone. “If you lot don’t leave my property, I will take action. Get. Out.”

“We’re not leaving without Harry,” Ron said firmly.

“I’m not going with you,” Harry said.

“Everyone please calm down,” Hermione tried. “We need to-”

“Mate, c’mon, he’s-”

“My friend!” Harry said, flushed. “I don’t care if he’s gay!”

“Are you one of them?” Ron asked, his expression twisted. There was a sickening, brief silence.

“Well done,” Severus answered for him. “If he’s not attracted to one woman, then he must be a homosexual.” To Ginny: “It’s unbecoming of a woman not to accept a rejection.” And to all of them: “You’re upsetting my patient and you are not welcome in my home.”

“But Sir-” Hermione tried

“I will not be talked this way in my own home and I will not ask again. Go.”

Ron drew his wand, far too slow. Severus sent a spell at the three and shoved them out of the house with a rush of wind, another spell that locked his house. He heard their shouts, then the faint pops of
apparition.

“I didn’t…” Harry began. He dissolved into sobs at the same moment Severus had grabbed for him and cradled him tightly in his arms. He rocked the small body, felt his shirt grow damp. Harry clung to him. He cried and cried. Harry didn’t tell them; Harry was protecting him and he shouldn’t have to.

Severus never thought he could hate anyone as much as he had hated James Potter or even Albus Dumbledore, but the way he witnessed the way his “friends” abandoned him at the faint accusation of being gay, the way they talked over him, dropped by as if it was a goddamn charity before they went on with their lives… He despised them. “They’re not welcome back,” he told him. “I won’t let them hurt you again.”

Harry said something, muffled into his shirt and distorted by Harry’s frantic breathing. They clung tighter.

“I promise, Harry.”

Harry’s breathing didn’t slow down until they were lying side by side on his couch and Severus had worked out a soothing rhythm on his back. He’d stopped crying, but had trouble catching his breath. Severus half wondered if he’d held him too tight. Severus was panicking and he was angry, but remained calm so as not to alarm Harry. But he’d never seen Harry this upset before.

At first, he sobbed uncontrollably, then they entered the same conversational loop between gasps for breath over and over again

“I’m sorry. I didn’t tell them,” Harry would whisper.

“It’s okay, it’s okay, we’ll talk about this.”

“Please don’t be mad at me.”

“I’m not mad, Harry.”

“Please don’t leave again.”

“I’m not leaving.”

And then: “I’m sorry.” Once more until Harry seemed to exhaust himself to sleep, clinging and jerking against him.

Severus wished he knew what to say to help him. He wished he could figure it out before they talked again. He tried variations of apologies and words of comfort, but Harry just shuddered and they repeated their cycle. But what could he say? At the mere mention of Harry being queer, he had been readily abandoned by his peers. It didn’t have to be true, either, as long as Harry was acquainted with himself. While Harry was willing to stand by him, he risked his reputation.

And he’d made it all the worst for dragging him into his life, tangling an already confused boy into new fields of sexuality. And what for? Because he was selfish. Lonely. Because the opportunity presented itself and he was too much of a bastard to turn it down.
How did he deserve Harry’s loyalty, his proclamation of friendship after what he’d done? Were they all each other had? God. What was the right thing to do?

Chapter End Notes

:(

“How are you feeling?”

Harry groaned in reply.

“Alright, up. I’ve got to stretch my legs.”

Harry slowly pulled himself up, let out another groan. He was cold now, his eyes felt swollen. “So that stuff really happened.”

“Yes,” Severus said extending his legs out one at a time.

“God.” And then: “I’m sorry.”

He’d fallen apart. He’d lost control of himself.

“You shouldn’t be sorry,” he replied, sounding weary. Harry looked at him. Severus offered him a cup of water. “None of this is your fault.”

A slow sip. “I know that the last thing you want to do is deal with all this.”

“It’s your association with me that’s causing you problems.” He stared back at him. “Do you think you might be gay?”

“I’m not sure,” Harry said, then joked weakly. “You should kiss me again.”

Predictably, his comment was ignored. “I don’t think they are good friends for you.”

“We’ve been through a lot together.” The argument sounded hollow even to him. They had been through a lot, but it didn’t seem to count for much now. He felt a prickling ache around his eyes and let out another groan. God. It was nearly insane, he could have his whole life back if he would just be who they wanted, or be himself with his former teacher, who harassed him for half his life. Okay, and saved him a few times. And gave him an amazing blow-job.

“I don’t know if you’re ready to hear this, but your friends should not force expectations on you. It’s not friendship if they are not available for you when you need them, when the same courtesy is not returned.” He sighed. “Not that I’ve made any of this easier for you.”

“You help me loads.”

“Don’t do that. You should be angry with me with… with how I behaved. Are you ready to talk about this?”

“I’m… tired. That’s all I am. Seriously.” Harry said. “I just want you to hold me.”

“Harry…”

“We got drunk, we had sex, It didn’t mean anything, I get it. It just happened. We don’t have to talk about it.”
He swallowed, Adam’s Apple bobbed. “Harry, that’s not…” What was he trying to say? “I don’t know what I’m doing. It’s complicated. I can’t afford to think about it.” Harry watched him pick at the bottom of his pant leg, his eyes trained on his grey socks.

“What’s complicated?”

“You. Everything about you.” He took a breath. “I don’t know how to do this, but it wasn’t -” He rubbed at his face. “Shit. It was… good.”

“You liked it.”

“Of course I liked it.” His cheeks were red. “If I had my way, we’d be - you know.” He made a vague, circular gesture.

Harry smirked, settled down beside him. “What would we be doing?”

His blush deepened. “Don’t be vulgar.”

“Oh, I’m the vulgar one-” Harry laughed, leaning in while Severus stared dumbfounded. But, oh, he wanted all of it then.

“You’re incorrigible, is what you are,” Severus said, petting his cheek. “Oh, I do want you, but we can’t. You know we can’t. It’s not realistic.”

He wants me, oh god, he does want me. “Why not?” Harry murmured, knowing he was close to victory, just one step more. He needed this so badly, for someone to touch him, to feel loved. Severus was cradling him, and they were moving closer. He just wanted to feel warm, now before the man could second-guess it.

“It’s unprofessional, unethical, and if I kiss you now, I won’t stop.”

“God, well, I’m paying for your services, aren’t I?”

Severus fixed his attention on his hand, kissing his palm, and his fingers. “I’m determined to heal you first.”

“I’m feeling pretty good.”

“You know what I mean. Oh, we really shouldn’t.”

“How about for the holidays?”

“January 15th is not a holiday,” he murmured against Harry’s wrist.

“Your birthday?”

“It’s passed.”

“Well, we, uhm... wait, when?”

“Not important.”

“Sounds like we’re behind. We’ve got New Years to make up for. New Years Eve. Christmas Day. You know.” Harry smiled. “Weekends are holidays too, right?”

“Oh, Harry.” He was pulling him closer, moving his mouth to Harry’s neck. His cock throbbed, met
Severus’s thigh, if he could just move in just the way… if he could move…

“Fuck,” Harry muttered, exposing his neck

“Fuck,” Severus seemed to agree, moving above him, his weight tentatively over him. Harry imagined the play of tongue and teeth was nice, but he couldn’t focus on it, could hardly feel it.

Harry’s tongue felt thick, his jaws locked. “No,” he groaned. “No. I’m - I can’t - Please - stop.”

He felt him move away. When his hand slide from Harry’s, that arm flopped down to his side.

“Sorry,” Harry mumbled.

“Oh, you’re-” (Broken, Run Down, Fucked up? Harry thought) He pulled back. “Give me a minute.”

Take your time, Harry thought, irritated. Just had to be when the man of his dreams (wait, what?) was about to take him that his entire body spazzed out on him. Was anything going to go right?

“Are you still with me?”

“I’m bloody-”

“Alright. Don’t talk. I want you to drink some water while you’re conscious.”

How was I supposed to answer? Liquid hit him, but he wasn’t sure when to swallow until he felt Severus stroking his throat. Okay. Nailed it.

“Good.” He was readjusted back down onto the couch.

“Wonder what else - I could swallow.”

Sharp intake of breath. “You must be incapable of shutting up.”

“I’m horny.”

“I can see that,” A pause. "Can you feel this?"

Harry wasn’t aware he was being touched until he focused a bit. He had to look for it, felt pressure on his knee. He couldn’t really lift his head to look.

“What about this?”

“I felt both.” And he kind of felt Severus kiss his forehead, but he probably didn’t need to say that.

“This is stupid,” Harry said.

“It is temporary.” A pause. “Tell me how many touches you feel.”

He just wanted to go to sleep, but he obeyed for as long as he could. His answers got shorter. He had no idea if he was ever right, but eventually they stopped and Harry dropped off.
I’ve done this to him, Severus first thought. He watched Harry’s chest: still for several minutes, a short breath, and unnaturally still again. He’s made his notes, checked his potions, and returned to Harry’s side, a book optimistically propped open on his lap.

Or maybe he hadn’t done this to him, because Harry had been fine the first time they had done, well, that. But, he’d certainly done something.

He’d crossed the line. The big one. Fucking ran over appropriateness. Once could be a mistake, but twice: He might as well resign himself. And Harry? Harry… had wanted him. He had wanted all of it. Severus still had no idea what to make of that, finding it better left unexamined.

Practically, he couldn’t be sure if sexual activity had a positive or negative effect on Harry. The scoreboard was 1-1, so, reasonably, there needed to be a tie-breaker. And… he wasn’t sure if he could deny Harry again. No, what a piss poor excuse - he couldn’t be responsible enough to turn down a hormone-driven teenager because Harry would be upset? Merlin.

Every mental debate he had regarding Harry had him running in circles, both hands towering with the pros and cons of their situation that was blocking a viable path for him to move forward.

He’s already made his decision. Now he would follow through.

“I think you’re mental,” Severus greeted Harry with.

“What?” Harry mumbled, pulling out of deep sleep.

“Your attraction to me.”

“God. I thought you were being serious.” Harry searched the floor for his glasses, set them on, then yawned.

“How do you feel?”

“Cold.”

An appropriate, flirtatious response might have been “let me warm you up,” but it died on the back of his throat.

“Can you stand?”

Dutifully, he rose to his feet, though a bit shaken. Stiff. Severus stood in front of him, meaning to catch him if necessary, but Harry held the stance well. Rather, he gazed at him uncertainly.

“We could pick up where we left off,” Severus said, holding breath at Harry’s response.

“Yeah?” A flush rushed to his cheeks, he leaned into him. Severus steadied him. God, youth.

“Let me examine you first,” he said, stroking his shoulders. “Are you hungry?”

“No.” He hadn’t eaten in a day at least. Severus frowned. He felt Harry’s pulse, counted his heartbeat (accelerated). He found his every touch elicited a quickened breath, that he was feverish, that he was sensitive, and fuck, aroused. He was just aroused. Of course he was aroused. He cleared
his throat.

“I-” He licked his lips. “I want to do this proper.”

“We’re really going to?”

He closed the gap between them, absorbed and shared warmth with the other body. “You have to tell me if anything is wrong.”

“Yeah,” he breathed.

“How are you feeling?”

“I’m - I’m fine,” he said. “Feeling’s come back.”

He should ask questions (where did it start coming back? How numb?), but his mind was going blank because they were about to kiss, about to, oh god.

“Wait for me in the bedroom, Harry. Alright? Give me a minute.” *To calm down, to get together a plan.*

“Okay.” He smiled, tentative and slow, then brought their lips together. He could’ve lost it then, made love to him there and then. His resolve was fragile. “Go,” he rasped.

“How up,” he responded.

*God.*

He was shaking. A grown man, entirely caught off-guard with sex. He used to mock the older wizards that would chase young men, used to think of himself as above that perversion. And then there was Harry. For once, he stopped thinking about how utterly wrong the circumstance was. Deliberately, he turned off his reason before he went to his room.

Harry peered at him, a bit awkward on the edge of his bed. If he could’ve, Severus would’ve swallowed him whole then. Abandon thought, and let the dream begin.

“I didn’t know if, er, if I should have undressed.”

“No,” Severus responded. “I would like to do that.”

They stared at each other, Severus taking in the contrast of the cocky, flirtatious boy of earlier with this shy, near virgin. Harry was made of contradictions, it seemed, because neither label wholly suited him. Severus wanted to pin down Harry’s true self. He wanted to know every inch of him.

Harry stood up, walked the short distance to stand before him.

“If you’re sure…” Severus tried weakly.

“I’m sure.”

Bang. Smash.
For a whole minute, Harry forgot how to kiss. He couldn’t believe it was happening, and while he waited for the man to pull away or his body to do another weird thing, he tried to remember what he liked, what Severus might like. Harry pushed his tongue into the man’s mouth, put his weight against him, and, oh god, _that groan_. He had to be doing something right, even though that first time had been - well, not that he remembered the details much. But…

Harry nudged the man to the bed, a type of backwards dance until his own knees touched base. “Sit,” he said, sounding hoarse. And then: “Please.”

He complied, giving Harry a wild, glassed look, waiting for him. God, he was hard. They both were. And it was weird and cool that he could see it, that he was definitely into this.

Harry kneeled before him. He was determined. “I want to, uhm, return the favor,” he said, touching his knees. “I mean, if you’d like.”

Harry had the brief memory of staring up at this man. God, he was a first year then and Professor Snape looked tall. Villainous. And now, here they were…

“You don’t have to,” he said.

He touched his hand, ran a finger along his knuckles. _He can’t stop touching me_ , Harry realized. Harry kissed his hand, which transferred to his cheek, touched his throat. “I know,” he murmured, his throat bobbed against his touch. “I want to.”

“I don’t want to come yet,” he said. He was now touching his hair. “And I don’t know if you’ll like it. Next time.” _There would be a next time!_ With sudden inspiration, he took hold of Severus’s hand and sucked on his index finger, tasted and savored the slight salt of his skin. And Severus sat unmoving, watching, entranced. His finger dipped down Harry’s throat; he swirled his tongue. He heard a low moan, felt dizzy. There would be a next time.

Severus removed his finger, tugged him upwards and onto the bed, so that Harry found himself covered by the other. Harry thrust his hips upward, seeking blindly for contact. Yes, _there_. He pulled Severus toward him; their lips met, crushed, their hips tried to move together. When Harry replayed the scene for himself later, he’d linger on how secure and covered a man’s body felt in comparison to Ginny’s. Severus was almost heavy, almost too much so. And she’d certainly never stared at his bare chest with as much lust as Severus could. Harry lingered on that image of the other man, straddling him, staring down at him with a mixed look Harry couldn’t place.

“You’re beautiful,” the man croaked.

It was stupid, but it made Harry felt warm, wonderful. He thought he should say it back, felt it might be stupid. Instead, he reached upward, tugged at the man’s sweater, and silently he removed it, as well as an undershirt. Harry reached upward and they kissed again at that odd angle, slowly, adjusted to lay horizontal, their lips unable to stray too far. Their skin touched, felt like fire. They’d found a rhythm and Harry thought they might come rocking against one another. But this couldn’t be how men would have sex, they would have to stick it in - _oh_ .

“Don’t,” Harry tried. “I don’t think-”

He stopped moving. “Harry, what’s wrong?”
God, he didn’t want to say it, to ruin things. “I’m not ready for that,” he nearly whispered. And he really wasn’t. Would he ever be? Oh god, how does anyone enjoy that??

“You’re not,” he agreed, lifting from him. Harry grabbed at his arm only to realize he was readjusting, not leaving. He lay back against him now more to his side.

“I want to do other things,” Harry tried clarifying, feeling more and more stupid. “I mean, I don’t want to stop, if that’s okay.”

Severus pushed his hair back; Harry realized he was breathing very fast and tried to slow down.

“I want to do whatever you are prepared to offer me,” he said finally, gazing at him with another new and strange expression. “Whatever you like.”

Harry had no idea how to read these expressions after the years of grimaces and scowls. Even though they had slept together, this all felt like new territory. Was Severus challenging him to keep going? Was he upset with him? Or was he really… genuine? He closed his eyes and leaned into his touch.

“But what do you want?” Harry asked quietly.

“I want to make you come.” His hand trailed down Harry’s front, his cock came back into attention. “Ohh,” Harry said, then letting out a soft moan.

“I want to watch you as you come.”

“Don’t you - oh god.” His hand ghosted over his crotch. “Don’t I…?” The pleasure was clear in his voice, in his eyes. He flushed under Severus’s heated gaze. Was this the game now? Harry slid his hand between them, watched the man’s eyes roll back in pleasure. “Yes, Harry. Oh, yes.”

They reached for one another, the game abandoned as quickly as started, (neither of them good for teasing), Harry nearly tearing the man’s pants, the other no more graceful. He groaned at first touch, bucked wildly against him. No one had ever made him feel this hot, this out of control. It’s not like he’s never held a cock before (his own) but Severus’s felt thick and wet, it fit his hand, slid easily in his grip, and oh god, he really was going to come, being stroked off by him, stroking him, he was going to come, he was going to come, he was going to come

Hot liquid spurted up his wrist, coated his fingers, pushed him over the edge of his own orgasm that Severus was gently guiding him through, moving away just before he was sensitive. Harry sucked in cool air, hadn’t realized he hadn’t let go yet of the man’s cock, and now didn’t want to end the moment, didn’t want to be alone again.

“Allright, Harry?”

“Hang on.” He squeezed his eyes shut, hid himself against the other’s chest, inhaled sweat, musk, sex? God, was that the way sex smelled? He breathed deep a final time, aware this could be the last time Severus would let him do this no matter what he did say. “All right.”

He cleaned them off (where did he keep getting towels?), then let Harry settle back against him. Harry did so by flinging an arm around him, followed by a leg. “You’re not allowed up,” he murmured. He waited for what the other man to protest but instead was met with silence. The embrace returned. He started to feel comfortable. He started to relax.
To quote some dumb literary advice I like "Everything is about sex, except for sex." I feel like Harry and Severus are so shit at communicating (Harry doesn't think, Severus thinks too much), that they try to do it through touch, but I think sex should be messy and awkward for them. The first time was drunk, instinctual, and with dubious consent. Now they're sober and working through their desires and emotions. On the other hand, maybe that's what happens when an asexual person writes sex scenes. :/

so tl;dr sorry if it's not very sexy, haha
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It was February. That Monday had been relatively warm, the Tuesday warmer, and the Wednesday, a freezing rain. Severus spent most of the day adjusting the temperature surrounding his roses and ensuring their comfort while Harry looked on. He watched how seamless and easy magic was for the other man as he maintained an invisible umbrella, guided a warm, ethereal cloud through the thorny bushes, as (he could have sworn) the flowers leaned into it.

It was actually a bit romantic, Harry thought, the way he cared for his roses, the way he cared for him with careful attentiveness. He hoped the roses felt as secure as he did. Perhaps even… oh ha, no. He couldn’t even think it.

‘I don’t know what this is going to be,’ Severus had told him. It was nice, whatever it was.

Still… Valentine’s Day was coming up. Harry imagined sending Severus a singing card on the 14th and was smirking just as the man checked on him. To his lifted eyebrow, Harry merely waved innocently. No doubt, a singing card would horrify the man, but Harry wanted to do something. He’d apparently missed a birthday, and Christmas had been awkward. And it wasn’t like they had much time left, so, yadda yadda, make the most of it.

Harry wanted to do something meaningful, but subtle, or give something sentimental without being overwhelming. That all depended on how his body was acting, too, which was rather hard to plan around. For all his planning, he might end up sleeping through the week or something equally obnoxious. But still…

His mind drifted.

They’d had sex that morning. They’d had sex the night before, and the night before that. Well, sex in their own way. They’d be lying together, Harry would reach for him, and Severus would wrap their bodies together, and… oh god. His cock gave a feeble attempt for a round two. He readjusted his legs and took a steadying breath.

It was the moment before he came that everything felt perfect, that they were as close as they could possibly get. It was like the moment he knew he was falling asleep in Severus’s arms that he felt completely comfortable. And he felt that warm and wonderful feeling sometimes when he was watching him work and Severus was absorbed in that work, sharing that space with him unconsciously. Like now.

Harry wanted to tell him all those things, to thank him.

But Severus would probably find it all weird.

“What have you been thinking about?” Severus asked, brushing dirt and snow from his gloves before taking a seat at his table. “You look mischievous.”
“Nothing,” Harry replied. “My face got stuck like that during school.” He seemed to be suppressing a smile. “What are we doing today?”

“We…” He yawned, rubbed a hand over his eyes. “I don’t know.”

Harry brought him a cup of coffee, to which he was immensely grateful. Coffee you didn’t have to retrieve tasted better than the one he made himself, though he had no idea why.

“I’m going to check on the toads.”

“Right.”

“The new Spirits journal came out.”

“Yep.”

“The mail. In general.”

“Mmhm.”

“And what on earth are you grinning about?”

Harry scoffed at him. “Can’t I just be happy?”

Severus ran through responses mentally. He could tie Harry’s happiness to his multiple orgasms, but it seemed a bit crude. He could argue that Harry shouldn’t be happy while his health was declining and his researcher didn’t feel any closer to a cure. Which was cruder. He could flip the question: Can’t you be happy? Why not? He yawned, instead, and found himself staring at Harry blankly. He imagined he did that a lot these days.

Harry smiled back at him, though he honestly didn’t know why. Severus had become a poor substitute of the people Harry needed in his life - a lover, a friend, and guardian. 3-in-1. He was, starting backwards, a terrible choice of a guardian, with little experience in parenting, and a conflicting sexual role in the boy’s life. Plus he could take partial responsibility in offing his actual parents. He had a poor track record in friendships, no, relationships in general, and genuine ethical reasons to keep away from Harry Potter.

It came down to him being completely and utterly selfish. He didn’t want to see his boy (His? Good god.) upset and let down. He didn’t want to turn him down again. He didn’t want to confuse and hurt Harry from his own indecision. Severus meant to pleasure him, to fit the roles Harry needed, the same roles (if he was being honest) that he’d wanted growing up. It had already begun, whatever it was. It was happening before he could contain it, so he met this part of his life with quiet acceptance.

Harry advanced to his side, threaded his fingers into his hair and gave him a sweet kiss on his forehead, the sort that didn’t demand further action. Severus tempered the flush of pleasure that ran through him.

Men have bared far worse circumstances, he thought, meeting Harry’s lips with his own, kissing him as if they had all the time in the world and none of its consequences.

“We have your appointment tomorrow,” he remembered when they broke for breath. Severus had been reading over Harry’s old charts and decided it was best to speak with someone rather than rely on mere notes. Once they were acquainted in person, Severus anticipated he could write to him for any medical concerns once testing started.
“I was hoping you’d forget,” Harry replied, half-teasing. He stroked his hair, a gesture he was so unfamiliar with when performed on him. “Did you know you have grey hairs?”

“I know. You caused them.”

Harry laughed. He loved that laugh.

Harry kissed him again.

God, he loved him.

Harry flat-out refused to use floo powder and seemed no more enthusiastic for appariting.

“Can’t we just fly?” He tried.

“And get there at midnight?” Severus responded.

“I’m okay with that.”

“You’ll have to pick one.”

“Bugger,” he said, then smiled at his unintentional joke. “Wait, I like that option.”

“Ha.”

“Do you want to?” Harry asked, seeming more serious as he gauged the other’s reaction.

“Don’t try to distract me.”

Harry made a show of rolling his eyes before he’d take his arm. “Let’s go then.”

They apparated to a pub near St. Mungo’s and footed the rest of the way once Harry was ready. He clung to his arm now more for support.

“Hey Angela,” Harry greeted the front desk before leading Severus down a long hallway. Severus couldn’t even remember the last time he’d set foot in the hospital, but Harry easily maneuvered them through doorways and dimly lit hallways, greeting medi-witches and wizards along the way until they stood before the Special Cases Unit.

“Hello!” greeted a wizard behind the next desk. “Been awhile!”

Harry patted Severus’s arm, then leaned on the counter. “Been trying to keep away,” he joked. “How’s your daughter, Tyler?”

The wizard burst out laughing. “She’s sleeping through the night, but only in our bed. It’s been a good trade-off…” and he (Tyler apparently) went on to update Harry on the young girl, her pickiness with food, her magic bursts and the odd questions she asked. For the first time, Severus wondered if Harry had wanted children, from the bright, wistful grin he had on his face. Severus hadn’t given it much thought himself. Did he ever want kids?

“Dr. Stillwater’s about ready for you,” Tyler finished, shaking Harry’s hand, and addressing another
young wizard that had come up to the desk. While they picked their seats, Severus watched the young wizard shiver behind crossed arms, snake a hand out to sign a form, then crept to the farthest corner.

There were other patients present, but Harry leaned over the chair’s cloth border and propped himself against Severus entirely comfortably, and, not knowing what else to do, Severus stroked his hair gently. It seemed risky, a bit too familiar, but if it didn’t bother Harry, he wouldn’t let it visibly bother him.

But… what if their relationship was made public? How would Harry react? God, what a ridiculous idea, but he couldn’t help thinking it. For all anyone cared, Severus had become a father figure for the boy. Their intimacy could been perceived as innocent as a father and son’s. It’s exactly what they should have been, except touching Harry felt so damn good. It wasn’t sexual (at least, not always), but a strange, light and warm feeling. Being near Harry felt like an addiction. He was tempted to carry the comparison further, that Harry was intoxicating, a full-bodied drink he could linger all day with...

They were called back as Harry had just drifted to sleep, an older, short medi-wizard that scanned Severus once up and down, then led them to an examination room. Harry walked with their arms looped together, stifling a yawn with the other hand.

“How’s that friend of yours?” Dr. Stillwater asked

“Sorry?”

“The girl that use to accompany you.”

“Oh.” He squeezed Severus’s arm briefly behind the man’s back. “We broke up.”

“Then that’s why I haven’t seen you in awhile.”

Harry frowned, seemed to be working on something to say, but the man was directing Harry to take a seat. Reluctantly, Severus stepped aside.

“So any changes since I’ve seen you, Harry?”

Harry considered the question. “Since…”

“I saw you October 15th.”

“Uhm.”

“I’ve brought my notes,” Severus offered. “I’ve been seeing him since early November.”

“Harry?” the man prompted, ignoring Severus.

“The out-of-sync thing. It happens a lot more.”

“How often?” he asked. “Once a month? Once a week?”

“Once a week,” Harry said. “I think.”

“How are you eating?”

“I eat. Se-Snape feeds me.”
“He hand-feeds you?”

“No. Maybe.” Harry coloured, flickered his gaze to Severus briefly. “I just mean when I can’t move. He takes care of things. He’s good to me.”

“That’s good,” he said, in what he must of thought as soothing. More patronizing. “Can you walk across the room for me?”

Not knowing where to go, Harry aimed for Severus, touched the counter behind him, and shuffled back to his seat. Stillwater recorded this down.

“Can you show me a few spells?”

Severus reached over and handed Harry his wand. Harry cast a few first year spells, then, perhaps feeling cheeky, he showed his Patronus. His father’s stag. The translucent creature planted itself in front of Harry before dissipating. Again, Stillwater wrote something down, but what, Severus couldn’t imagine. The tests were meaningless.

“I’d like you to undress for me.” He then swiveled around to address Severus. “If you don’t mind…?”

“He’s fine,” Harry piped up, midway to removing his shirt. “He’s seen me.”

Stillwater lifted an eyebrow in his direction; Severus kept his expression neutral.

Once Harry was ready, Stillwater spoke softly to him, gently pressing on his chest, his back, moving his wand over him. The examination was nearly surreal, him watching Harry being touched (however nonplussed) by another man. God, don’t be so stupid! He’s a med!

He then brought instruments from around the room to Harry and watched them react or not, mumbling and recording as he did so. Harry was so unnaturally still, malleable to the doctor prodding and moving him. Finally, he let Harry clothe himself again.

“You said you brought charts?”

Unlocking himself from his position, Severus pulled out his rolls of parchment, his meticulous recordings of Harry’s “statue” phases, his sleep schedule, and points of activity. Another his food intake, his weight, and so on. He wasn’t formally trained in this particular area, but he did feel a certain pride on those charts. However, Stillwater merely glanced at them.

“Could I speak to you privately?” he asked.

“Of course,” he said, quick to stifle the paranoia in him. But god, he might know. No, this was fine. He needed to speak with him, run ideas by him.

Stillwater gave Harry a survey, then took them to an adjoining room, marked for consulting.

“I understand this is difficult for you to be apart of,” the man started, then stopped. “You are the man he’s chosen to perform research on him.”

“That’s right,” he answered, puzzled.

“And you’ve taken on an additional role as Caretaker now.”

“Well, yes.”
“That can be demanding, to care and attend another person.”

He folded, then unfolded his arms. The gesture was reminiscent of Dumbledore before he was going to say something that wouldn’t be received well. Severus waited for him to get the point.

“He also lives with you?”

For god’s sake. “It was easier than making him travel back and forth.”

“Of course, of course.”

“Look, I have some tests I would like to have approved before I do them, I have a potion I think will help anchor him to his body, an infused gormt and bellini to bind him down and, hang on -” He pulled another parchment out, but Stillwater held out his hand to stop him.

“It’s difficult to watch someone get worse,” he started again.

Well, no shit.

“It might be time to consider involving an experienced, in-care nurse before he takes a turn for the worse, or, if he prefers, a room in St. Mungo’s,” he plunged in while Severus tried to protest. “Mr. Potter has deterred into much worse shape than I could’ve imagined in such short time. He’s lost a lot of weight, has trouble maneuvering himself, and Mr. Snape, acting as his guardian, it would be irresponsible not to discuss these options with Mr. Potter before he is unable to communicate his preferences.”

“That’s not necessary.” He tried unsuccessfully to stave off his temper. “We are managing just fine.”

“Surely you’ve noticed he’s not well-”

“Well, no shit.

“Which is precisely why I am conducting my research! If you could please read over my proposal and if you might owl me with any further suggestions, I would greatly appreciate your assistance.” He nearly ripped the parchment, forcing it into the other’s hands. “As for his care, I will be providing it as long as it is necessary, as I have been hired to do.”

After a long pause, the old man relented. “Very well. I would like to see him in a month, or if any other changes occur.” He took a fresh parchment and waved his wand over it a moment, then sealed it with another spell. “Do feel free to write me.”

“Good day,” he ground out, silently vowing to never return, yet he shoved the parchment in his pocket and set out. The appointment was stupid, the doctor was a waste of time, and Harry was…

Admittedly small, hollow-cheeked in the office’s harsh lighting, and not at all up to their adventure that day. Harry should not have had to come out today, should not have had to brave the cold weather just to reiterate what they were aware of - that Harry was ill. Of fucking course he was ill, but it wasn’t permanent. He’d seen no reason it had to be. I’ll make you better, he silently promised, waking the snoozing boy and leading him along to the apparition area before he could protest.

Later that night, Harry pulled him into bed and rutted against him with a fevered enthusiasm that made it hard to believe that the boy had ever been seen as someone frail. Between his legs locked tightly around him and the insistent cries of pleasure, Severus found assurance he would be cured, was hardly that sick to begin with. Everything was going to be okay.
Chapter End Notes

Does the wizarding world even have doctors??

These are the questions that keep me up at night.

a/n: oh my god, Healers. That was the word I was looking for!
“What does sex feel like for you?”

“Uh… great?”

“Do you think it helps you?”

“Helps me what?” Harry ducked behind his tea.

That earned Harry a brief smile from the other man. Rather, Severus’s version of a smile, which was a twitch you’d blink and miss. Did he ever miss those twitches? Probably.

“What?” Harry said, grinning now.

“You…” Another twitch. “I’m asking as your researcher if you feel sexual activity has had a, ah, positive effect.” Severus tapped his quill and looked very serious about the question.

Harry tried to think of a scientific type of answer. “I like it,” he said finally, giving up.

“Th-that’s good.” A swallow. “Perhaps you should - we should abstain and see how it might affect you.”

“For how long?”

“A week, I thought.”

“Kind of a shitty Valentine’s gift.” Fuck. He hadn’t meant to say that. “Joking,” he followed up weakly. He drained his teacup. “Seems, er, logical. What else?”

“We could,” he said slowly, “finish the week as is, abstain the following week. The 16th, we would start .”

“Your call,” Harry said, now flustered and excited.

But, of course, he wasn’t awake for the day he fought for.

While Harry slept on, Severus was determined to demystify the equipment at St. Mungos, to understand exactly what Harry’s measurements had meant. He’d been too angry to ask that day, but now he wanted to know what convinced the medi-witches and -wizards that Harry had a firm deadline. What was the undeniable proof when they were in such unfamiliar territory?

He flipped to the front of his notes. St. Mungo’s had focused almost entirely on Harry’s forehead. He’d watched Stillwater trace Harry’s scar during his appointment. In their own records, they had observed and noted the chaos in Harry’s mind with the Somsametre. Severus had written off the instrument’s readings, as he had a natural gift for legillimency. He didn’t need an instrument to know
that Harry’s mind was abnormal, and he had the advantage of knowing what his mind had been like before.

He then flipped through a medical technology reference text for what the Somsametre was meant for, and, after a dull search, found it was used occasionally to confirm instability in wizards, but mostly to measure the deterioration in elder wizards and witches. Wimbly’s Sickness, that slow descent of the loss of self. Harry let out a soft sound; Severus paused long enough to smooth down the boy’s hair.

Harry wasn’t insane (though he did a number of insane things), but he, of course, was far too young to show similar readings as one with onset Wimbly’s. Second stage, even. But that was insufficient, because Harry didn’t fit any of the other criterias: he didn’t experience pain, he was lucid. He had good days and bad days at random, but… he was getting worse.

He should’ve considered this before, could’ve looked into the medicinal herbs that treated Wimbly’s, but no matter, he would now. In the meantime, he wished Harry had a doctor that wasn’t a complete idiot. He imagined the Miss Weasley had picked him, Harry had said she use to set the appointments. And rightly, he didn’t find those appointments necessary once Severus was hired.

His head hurt.

That damned doctor. He tossed aside the books, the notes, the quill, and turned toward Harry. He had thought Harry would be awake by now. A day was normal, sometimes two, but as it grew darker, he became more unsure.

“If you’re awake with your eyes closed,” he muttered, “have the decency to tell me, Harry.”

He’d pretty much made a personal rule not to bother Harry while he slept, but they were making the rules as they go, weren’t they? There was uncertainty in everything they were doing.

He leaned forward and touched his lips to Harry’s temple. “Wake up,” he said in a more gentle tone. “We have a wager, you know. I’m not ready to start abstaining from you just yet.” Another kiss. “I want to try something.” Harry’s face broke into a sweet smile; Severus kissed his lips. “Wake up, Harry.”

He made a soft noise. Severus met his deep green eyes, and felt relief. “Is it light or dark out?” Harry whispered.

“Just dark now.” He cupped his cheek. “How long were you awake?”

“Oh,” he yawned. “I don’t know. I just (another yawn, dragon breath) wondered what you were going to say next.”

“Me too.” He cleared his throat. “Nothing too interesting, I’m sure.”

Harry’s lips parted, he turned over and started his blind search for his glasses. After a moment, Severus leaned over and set Harry’s arm in the right path.

“What did you want to try with me?” Harry asked, blinking behind the large lens.

“Got you awake, didn’t it?”

“C’mon Sev, what was it?”

Sev. “It’s enough that you let me touch you.” He gave a gentle push on the boy’s hip. “Off to the shower, alright? I’ll get breakfast together.” And best not to think of you there, naked. Or in any
other situation, he thought.

Harry sat up, then began stretching his arms, then his back, then his neck in a series of pops and creaks. Severus watched him test the strength of his legs before he circled around the bed, a stiff-legged and awkward shuffle. He paused by Severus, and gazed at the door, at him, the floor, coughed and looked back at him. “Do you want to join me?” he said finally. “The shower, I mean.”

Carefully, he folded his book closed. “Do you need assistance?”

Harry flushed, an adorable pink. “No, it’s just something - well, er - I thought it might be nice.”

It did sound nice. Perfect, even. He felt the rise and fall of his heart, the excited push to gather Harry in his arms, feel his warm and slippery body against his own, and the catch that reminded him not to be so foolish, to not mistake Harry’s actions as anything other than boredom. Curiosity. Youth. Not affection.

But the words bubbled inside him when Harry kissed him, tugged him into to the warm shower moments later, and sighed under his touch. He thought them, pressing lips to Harry’s neck, and kneading shampoo in the other’s hair, and Harry, bless him, spread suds over his pale, sickly, horribly unattractive skin, acted as if he could enjoy seeing Severus unclothed, that he could enjoy any of this experience, that he could be aroused at all.

Oh god, his ass.

He’d admired Harry’s ass before, he had so many opportunities. If he could stomach the revelation, he’d admired that ass on the Quidditch field, as Harry was a student. And generally he avoided staring even now; he didn’t want to feel lecherous. But god... While Harry’s eyes were closed and he was rinsing his hair, he covered the short distance and squeezed a round globe. Harry gasped. He squeezed the other globe, drew him against him, and saw Harry’s grin. God, he was lucky.

“Oh, that’s...” he began, rested his head back against Severus’s shoulder. He squeezed again, kissed his cheek and met with wet hair. “I feel you against me.” Heart pounding, he slid his hands around to Harry’s front, and let his own cock nestle between the slope of his ass. He hadn’t fucked anyone in a long time. He hadn’t wanted to. He shared Harry’s hesitation, he was unsure of how good he could be at it, but god he wanted him, all of him.

He bit and licked the boy’s neck, felt the muscles on Harry’s hips tighten, his breath catching as he tapped his fingers on his hipbone, close, not quite touching. He felt Harry submit into his embrace, trusting him. Severus knew how Harry enjoyed being teased now and he knew how to tease.

Harry groaned as Severus tugged on the dark pubic hairs. He usually liked his balls fondled (oh if Harry arched up, if he could only reach). Harry could be reduced to sobbing when his nipples were played with. Shame his hands were busy, but now he had them firmly on Harry’s hips. Severus could pull him against him, feel the pressure and slide of his cock trapped between their bodies and he did so, enjoying the sweet torture building between them, each bounce against him made Harry’s cock bob, he was entranced, thinking of fucking him.

Then Harry was rocking against him, they were moving together, Harry twisting around to meet mouths. He touched him then, swallowing his moans as he pumped him, at rhythm with his now fevered movements. He thought of hiking Harry’s leg up, entering him, fucking him against the wall, and moaned himself.

“Oh, fuck, oh...” Harry said between the breaks of their kisses, his hands tried to reciprocate, landed on Severus’s own hips and tried to pull him closer. He groaned at Harry’s squeeze, pumped faster,
couldn’t believe he let Harry know how much he liked his ass being touched, how familiar their hands were with the each other’s body, they were a tangle of instinct and sensation and limbs. He could feel the tightening of his own balls, the frenzy of Harry’s movements, and the tell-tale sign of Harry approaching orgasm when he made to kiss him and hide his expression (He could sometimes be so shy). Severus drew back, panting, and watched Harry’s eyes roll back, the unrepressed cry, held onto him as his legs became jelly, as Severus knew they would. He knew so much about him now.

He got to know Harry in ways only a lover possibly could.

With the threat of abstinence looming, they spent the night alternating between making love and recharging. (The latter at Severus’s insistence.) They washed off, Severus had force-fed Harry, and they’d ended up on the table, on the sofa, trailed back to the bed. To his surprise, Harry had even asked him to rub against his ass again. They needed lubrication, but Severus carefully crawled on top of him, and rubbed against him, sheathed by those mounds. Even more of a surprise, Harry came suddenly, loudly, if a bit embarrassed. Yet the question of moving further hung silently before them.

“Don’t go to sleep,” Harry murmured, running his fingers through Severus’s hair where he’d landed on Harry’s chest and had been listening to the steady thump of his heart. At last spent, they lay together, sweaty.

“You are -” Severus began.

“Incorrigible?” Harry guessed.

“Insatiable.” He smiled with his eyes closed, tilted his head. “Wonderful.”

“You make me feel so good,” Harry said lightly. “Can’t help wanting it.”

“I love, ah-” He caught Harry’s hand and steadied himself. Don’t fucking say that, idiot. “I’d love every day to be like this.”

Yeah,” Harry said, sounding strained.

“It feels like a dream.”

“Yeah,” he repeated.

“Thank you.”

Harry rearranged their grip so that they were holding hands. “Don’t fall asleep.”

“I’m trying.” He was having trouble keeping his eyelids up, although sunlight had started coming into the room.

“Do you want some coffee?”

“I think I need a nap.”

“Then you’ll have to work.”
“Of course I have to work.”

“But not now.”

“No, not today.”

So they went back and forth until Severus slipped asleep and Harry took in the rare moment of being able to watch the other with unfiltered access. When he was certain Severus was in deep sleep, he leaned forward, whispered in his ear, and kissed his cheek, wondering if Severus was like that when he was the one asleep. He wondered how he could stay still, stay quiet, not bother him. Not when they only had so much time together

Chapter End Notes

Fixed some formatting through the chapters.

Happy Valentine's Day!
They spent day one of abstinence week extracting from one another from a cuddling session that had quickly become heated, flashing embarrassed smiles, and going on to take cold showers. Separately.

Severus had lost a full day of work and easily fell back into a research mode, motivated largely by guilt of not working for a whole day. Harry, on the other hand, tried amusing himself by reading, but soon got distracted by more pleasant fantasies. He tried ignoring those thoughts, or appeasing his need for physical touch by sitting by the man. Didn’t work. With a frustrated sigh, he tipped Severus’s book over and caught his attention.

“Can I masturbate?”

Harry watched him flush a dark red, stopped himself from kissing that sharp-boned cheek.

“I…” he frowned. “We are merely testing if sex affects you. We should act as if nothing more has changed. Did you use to masturbate before this?”

“Yeah. All the time.” He laughed at Severus’s expression. “I mean, you wouldn’t have me.”

“Before any of that.”

He shrugged. Before this, he’d been avoiding sex with Ginny. “Did you?”

“It’s,” Severus faltered. “It’s not relevant.”

He totally did. Harry smirked, and was met with a scowl before he returned to his notebook.

“Alright, then,” Harry said, getting up.

“You’re going to masturbate now?” He asked, incredulous.

“Could you have the decency to not announce your intention like that?” He said, glaring at his notebook. Harry could bet his ass that Severus was getting hard. “You’re impossible, you know.”

Apparently, he was a lot of things. According to Severus last night, he was insatiable, too. And wonderful. And beautiful. Harry glowed inside, and thought he should offer a little mercy. The guy was only trying to save his life. “I’ll go cool off,” he rephrased.

“Please do.”

Though he couldn’t resist sticking his tongue out before disappearing.

Harry hadn’t had to resort to masturbation in a long time. Which he was going to do. They had sex so often now and the real thing felt so much better than anything he did alone. He use to have a wank when he took a shower. He was already naked and it was easy to wash off. Now, as he was taking one now, he couldn’t stop thinking of Severus pressed behind him, playing with him.
Harry just wanted to feel the pressure of Severus against him. He pinched his own nipples, squeezed his own ass, and immediately felt stupid. And frustrated. How had he managed it before? It had been so easy. All he had to do was picture Severus jacking him off. It worked and it got him off.

Well whatever.

The wanking fantasy was very quickly replaced with being sucked off. Harry got a lot of mileage on that. He didn’t even like blow jobs before Severus, but Severus had done something with his mouth and he’d been good to go.

Now, a bit sullen, he called up mentally Severus and the way he watched him come, the way he held him, and touched him. He tried to bring up a play-by-play from the night before. His cum shot from him unhurried and unimpressed by the solo performance, but it took the edge off.

The rest of the day didn’t go much better. Severus’s measurements made him lose his breath. After their sex marathon the previous night, it was nearly painful to hold back from launching at the other man. Was it his fault if everything the man did put him on edge? The way he directed his hands, the way he’d bite his lips in mid-thought, his smell… Even their meals together were too much for him, every time he took a bite, swallowed, Harry felt it in the pit of his stomach. Harry had to close his eyes and focus on his tea.

Harry tried to think about other things; the best he could come up with was wondering if he was gay. Really gay. Like full-on gay. What he thought about seemed pretty gay. And Severus was gay, so that meant he was probably gay, too. Or maybe he became gay after whatever happened with Harry’s mom and it was possible to be gay later?

Harry couldn’t remember liking any guys. He didn’t like anyone the way he liked Severus, but he’d also never been with another guy. He thought back to Hogwarts, to everyone he knew. He concentrated on the guys in his dorm, mentally measured them next to Severus. Okay, Ron. He definitely didn’t want to kiss Ron or anything. He’d never even thought about it. He then thought of the Quidditch team, in the locker room, when they were all undressed. It kind of embarrassed Harry so he never really looked. But… Oliver Wood hadn’t looked… bad. Well, shit, any guy would know that. What did that prove?

Though he didn’t want to, he thought about Ginny and where she fit in. He’d thought she was really cool and funny. She was good at Quidditch and they had fun. She was pretty. He’d been the one to kiss her first, he remembered that, but when it came to dating, well, he had Voldemort to worry about. And after the battle, after Voldemort, he had the rest of his life to worry about. He had no idea what he was doing, but Ginny seemed to know for the both of them. She wanted him to work in the Ministry. She said it made sense to become an Auror. When she graduated, she wanted to get married. She pressed against him and begged him to touch her. Where? He thought, squeezing her breast, trying to keep track of his tongue and hers. None of it made sense.

Or maybe Severus was just better at sex stuff. Maybe that was why Harry liked him over her. Over anyone, even. Severus was better at blow jobs, at least. Better at kissing. Better at hugging, even.

He shook his head. He was going to get hard again. And what did any of it matter? Gay, straight, he was having sex with Severus Snape.

He turned his attention to Severus, who was biting the end of his quill. The question was on the back of his throat: How did you know you were gay? And yet Harry couldn’t force it out. He didn’t know how to ask, how he’d take it. It felt too personal for them. Not too personal for them to suck each other off, though.
“Can I kiss you?” Harry asked, hearing his own exasperation.

Severus jumped, blinked at him. “Kiss?” he repeated.

“It’s not sex,” Harry tried.

He carefully marked his place in his book. “Sex is not marked by actions but intentions.”

“So…”

A half-smile. Harry followed the curve of his lips with his simple denial “No.”

“Alright.”

“Sit with me.”

Sulking, he moved from his window seat and propped on the man’s shoulder, not caring if he was sitting “too close” or whatever.

“Do you feel different?” Severus asked, opening the book again. “Better?”

“No,” he responded, closing his eyes.

Severus roped an arm around him, and bedded his fingers in his damp hair.

“It’s not that I don’t want to,” Severus said.

“I know.” And then, reluctantly: “Should I sleep out here tonight?”

His hand stiffened. “No.”

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Mr. Snape,

In regards to your research proposal, you are right to be cautious of which potion you wish to base your own from, as some that treat Wimbly’s intend to alleviate the pain associated with the illness, while others target the mental symptoms. In particular,…. I’m sure you are aware of the risks and have weighed them as beneficial. No more can be said there. Please find attached corrections on the formulas you were kind to leave with me. Some other suggestions… Finally, the date of October 30th is albeit arbitrary and optimistic, as you’ve guessed, marking the year exact of the particular visit. Mr. Potter’s illness is progressing faster than expected. As to May 2 being a more appropriate date, I would find that date realistic. (What made you think of it?) Attached are the results from his last visit. I am relieved that Mr. Potter appears happy and well cared for, as is not always the case.

Do feel free to contact me direct with further inquiries.

Yours,

Dr. Albert Stillwater

The numerous attachments lay on the table, but Severus made no move to unroll them. His owl
huffed impatiently at him and fluttered to the boy across from him. Harry said something, but he felt himself moving inward, and Harry’s voice growing distant.

May 2. The end of the Second Wizarding War. The day Harry died, that the final horcrux died. He had taken it on authority they had to October 30, but magic and its tendency for symmetry made him think that it could be a year from the day of Harry’s brief death until - God.

God, that was two months from them. That couldn’t be right.

He stared at the flourish of the signature until he felt his mind clear. Then he calmly folded the letter back up with its contents for a later read.

“You’re very handsome,” Harry told his owl, who preened and nudged against the boy. He watched Harry feed him a slice of bacon, wipe the grease from his hands, and resume petting the spoiled thing. Catching Severus’s eye, Harry asked. “What’s his name?”

“Plumpton.”

“Plumpton,” Harry repeated. “It’s good to meet you.”

“You had an owl,” Severus recalled. “A snowy white.”

“Yeah. Hedwig.”

“Hedwig. What made you name her that?”

“Saw it in a book,” He said. Added: “She was a good owl.”

Was, he noted. So she was dead. Too much talk of death for one day, he thought, not wanting to meditate on it any further.

Severus drained his (now cold) coffee and accio’d a stack of letters from his desk. His owl clicked at him upon sight of a new job, and settled further in Harry’s arms. There’s nothing more he wanted to do personally than be petted by Harry, he wanted to tell the stupid creature. He wished he could push aside all the research he had.

“There’s work to do,” he told the bird instead. “Harry will be here when you return.”

“That’s a lot of letters,” Harry observed, withdrawing his hands from Plumpton. Defeated, the bird offered a leg, but refused to look at his master.

“He’s just got to take them to the post office,” he said. “Hardly a day’s trip. Off with you.”

And just as quickly, the bird was gone.

Whatever Harry read into his expression, he offered him a soothing smile. “Just three more day until the week’s up.”

We don’t have time, he thought. He wished the week was longer, that they’d stumble across a solution and, if Harry wanted, celebrated in bed. But now, he didn’t have the patience, couldn’t imagine wasting any more time. They were being foolish. Didn’t Harry understand? But he didn’t want to voice any of it.

“Three more days,” he promised, touching his lips to Harry’s forehead.

Then he returned to his work.
Harry counted down the hours, and then the minutes. He’d had trouble with his legs, so he’d announced all this from the bed, his head tilted toward their clock. From the corner of his eye, he could see the twitch of Severus’s lips into a smile with every announcement. So he kept doing it, even if Severus was hellbent to keep working at his desk and Harry’s own body was starting to give up on all prospects of sex.

Harry didn’t know how much he could actually do when it hit midnight. Maybe it was more that the barrier was placed between him that bothered him. Once it was lifted, he could lay with Severus and not feel stupid if he got hard. Severus would be his if he wanted him, he wouldn’t have to pull away.

“30 seconds,” he said softly. Severus lowered his quill. “15… (he had crawled into bed, pulled Harry against him) 10… 9… 8… 7… 6… wait (His gaze unnerved him) 3, 2,… 1.”

“One.”

“Happy New Year,” Harry mumbled.

He kissed him; he kissed back. They kissed slowly, moved against one another, and kissed more if only because they could. Harry wasn’t going to be awake for much longer, he could feel himself drifting off. Severus undressed him, undressed himself, and kissed the skin he’d uncovered, slowly, thoroughly. Harry wanted to feel every kiss, the press of their bodies.

“I don’t want to go to sleep,” Harry said out loud.

“Don’t,” he responded near his navel.

“I’m always sleeping.”

“Just wake up. Always wake up.”

Harry felt his hand shaking. Severus threaded their hands together, kissed his hip. Harry had a choice last time, in King’s Cross, but he might not when that time did come. And now he wasn’t sure what he wanted. Sleeping didn’t bother him before. The idea of not coming back didn’t bother him before. Now, everything was different.

With great effort, Harry sat up and hooked an arm around Severus’s neck, hoisted himself further up. The man met him in the middle, easily adjusted Harry onto his lap (was he that light?), and held him upright. Harry crushed his mouth against Severus’s, teeth meeting teeth, their tongues reaching out and grabbing hold. “I want you to fuck me,” he whispered when they broke for breath. While he knew he was awake, while they still could. Harry could feel his hesitation and was ready to respond.

“I’ve tried it out some,” he said. “I think I can take it. Can we?”

“Lubrication,” he said finally.

“Just do it,” he pleaded.

Maybe he was determined to prove Harry wrong. He dipped a finger in his mouth, then moved it under Harry and fingered the tight ring of muscle. He watched Harry carefully as he entered him, measured his breathing and darted that finger in and out. Harry bit his lip, squeezed his eyes shut. He
felt the finger withdraw and his back touch the blankets. It took a minute before the intrusion had left a dull ache.

“Ready?” he asked, a tin in hand.

“God, I forgot how big your hands are,” Harry groaned.

“My cocks’s at least twice that.” He sounded amused. “And I’ve never had my hands referred to as big.”

“Guh.”

He smoothed the hair from Harry’s forehead. “Your body isn’t used to being stretched there, that’s all. It takes patience.”

“Right.”

“Perhaps you’d rather fuck me.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “You’d let me?”

“Of course,” he said. His eyes flickered up at him. Harry swallowed.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” Harry replied weakly, but his cock was already hardening at the idea.

“I won’t let you.” He tilted the tin in Harry’s direction, who took it in hand and stared down at the light green goop.

“Smells good,” he mumbled.

Severus settled next to him, his back to Harry’s chest. Harry straightened his legs using the man’s shoulder as leverage.

“You have to prepare me,” the man said, as Harry dropped the tin, scrambled for it quickly.

“Right,” he said.

“I should be clean.”

“Got it.”

Harry traced a path between the man’s ass cheeks, just as Severus had. Once he found the opening, he pushed a slick finger inside and held his breath. With his other hand, he rubbed himself. No problem, he was going to stay hard. He tried to see Severus’s expression, but his eyes were closed, his breathing light though audible. Harry plunged further, instantly warmed, and slowly pivoted his finger around.

“You’re doing fine,” Severus cut in. Harry kissed his shoulder, added a second finger and pushed further. The man hissed, his hand went still.

“Okay,” he said finally. “It’s been awhile.”

Harry wanted it to be good for him. He wished he knew what it was doing. With Ginny (Oh god, don’t think about her now), it had been marginally easier to breach her, but this way, he had no clue. He hadn’t dreamed Severus would let him. He was determined to not mess up. He rocked his fingers in and out of him, but was at a loss. His cock throbbed.
“Should I add another finger?” he asked.

Severus held up his two fingers and swished them back and forth in Harry’s view.

“Oh.”

With effort, especially at the angle, it took a few tries to be able to swing his fingers outward inside him. Would it be enough? God, he was dumb about this stuff.

“When you enter me,” he said softly, strained, “do so slowly. And hold it in place until I can get acclimated to it.”

“O-Okay.”

Harry withdrew his fingers and examined them curiously. He sniffed, but only smelled the lubricant. He wiped those fingers on a sheet and applied some to his cock, more than ready. He shifted his hips, felt a dull ache, tried adjusting and lining his hips.

“Harry,” he breathed. “I can’t wait.”

“You’re so sexy,” Harry said, surprising himself for saying something so bold. But he meant it. He’d liked the feel of fingering him, the sight of his flushed skin and parted lips, especially hearing his voice. Severus was usually quiet in bed, while he was reduced to a litany of moans and sobs. To hear him now was too much, too wonderful.

And then he pushed.

Together, they made an unintelligible sound, Harry squeezing the other man’s side, and Severus tightening around his cock. His body was on fire, he pushed further and heard Severus cry out. His legs were still weak, but he could do this much, to press and be held inside by him.

“Harry,” he pleaded, and Harry slid further, lay against him. He sucked in his breath, felt his heart pounding. He moved his hand to Severus’s front, felt his damp, hard cock, and felt Severus seize up against him, pushed him further in. Harry kissed his neck, stroked his cock.

“Oh fuck,” he groaned.

“My legs,” Harry panted. His stupid legs, stupid body, but luckily Severus understood.

Severus took over, lifted from him, pushed back; Harry saw stars. He was fucking him, fucking himself on Harry. This was fucking, gay fucking, he was delirious, it was so damn good. He steadied his hand and felt Severus sliding into the circle of his hand, back onto his cock, sandwiched between them. He groaned out loud, tried to move with him.

“Harry, Harry,” he said. He’d never said his name so much, he grinned, feeling his breath hitch, and then the spurt of warm cum on his wrist.

“Can I?”

“Yes,” a soft hiss. Harry grabbed his hips, gritted his teeth, and rocked against him until the familiar tightening, the release of his own cum.

“God,” Harry laughed, falling back on the bed, his arm draped around Severus’s middle.

“Fuck,” he said, taking his hand.
Harry felt a warm feeling run through him, a gentle embrace. Happiness, even.

Severus sat up suddenly, perched on the edge of bed. “Will you be awake when I get back?”

“I’ll try,” Harry said, though his body weighed a ton, though his eyelids felt raw and heavy, and he could barely register Severus wiping him down, watching him with one of his odd expressions.

“I’ll be here when you wake,” he said, as Harry’s eyes closed. “Right here.”

“Good night, Sev,” he said with a sleepy smile.

A pause. A kiss. A strained voice. “Good night.”

But that night seized Severus with a sense of dread and confusion, that every bit of himself he once understood was challenged. As he stood under the shower spray, feeling the dull ache where Harry had been, he felt himself crumbling. He’d once thrived in his independence, he’d been perfectly fine relying and caring for himself. And now he’d offered himself entirely, could feel how weak he’d become, how impossible, how he demanded for Harry to stay with him and couldn’t accept less. He couldn’t stand the trust and openness in Harry’s eyes, at levels more than he was capable of returning. How could he?

It was too much.

It was not enough.

Chapter End Notes

That sense of dread when you accidentally fall in love but aren’t ready for the emotional roller-coaster of baring your soul and not wanting to watch the other person die and now you’re totally dependent on that other person like man I sure hate that feeling.
“ ‘It is difficult,’ [Hume] wrote, ‘to be more detached from life than I am at present.’

Over the last few days, I have been able to see my life as from a great altitude, as a sort of landscape, and with a deepening sense of the connection of all its parts. This does not mean I am finished with life. On the contrary, I feel intensely alive, and I want and hope in the time that remains to deepen my friendships, to say farewell to those I love, to write more, to travel if I have the strength, to achieve new levels of understanding and insight.

This will involve audacity, clarity and plain speaking; trying to straighten my accounts with the world. But there will be time, too, for some fun (and even some silliness, as well)... I feel the future is in good hands. ”

-Oliver Sacks*, “On Learning He Has Terminal Cancer”, NYT

Harry didn't find Severus next to him when he woke that morning (evening?, he wasn't sure), and immediately (childishly), he set out to find him. Severus was usually next to him when Harry woke up, but no, he was crouched at the kitchen table, staring emptily at a letter before him.

“Hey, what...?” He began, and Severus jumped, startled. He stared at Harry, opened and closed his mouth and said then. “Please give me a second.”

Harry, waking up, took a seat across from him and was immediately anxious. He'd never seen the man speechless, or lost. What did he need a second for? Harry reached out and took the man's hand. Severus covered his mouth with the other.

“Please tell me what's going on,” Harry pleaded.

“I'm just an old fool,” he said finally. “I'm going to talk as your researcher.” He then switched his grip with Harry so that his hand was on top. They both felt the mutable warmth between them. Severus, or no, Snape? Waited.

“Alright,” Harry said, already confused.

“I've been conversing with your doctor and-”

“I thought you said he's an idiot.”

Faint smile. “He is,” he relented, “but I believe he is right that I should keep you updated on your condition.” He pushed through before Harry could comment, squeezing his hand. “The October 30th date was an arbitrary date.”

“Right, a year from the day. He said I had a year t-to live.”
“I think, and Dr. Stillwater agrees, that if there is any time-frame of a year, it would begin with the tearing of your soul, when it first occurred.” He kept squeezing his hand, peering at him with his dark eyes. “At the battle of Hogwarts. Do you understand?”

He tried to jerk his hand away, beginning to feel cold, but the other man held on. That was May 2, he'd never forget that date. And that was only a few months away.

“We don't know anything, you know it's all guess-work, but if that is our time-frame, you should know in the event you...” A breath. “If there are experiences you want to have, if you would regret something, if-”

“If I die.”

“We will have to talk about arrangements.” His voice cracked. “If there's a chance you are not able to communicate your preferences.”

Harry lowered his eyes. “It's in our agreement. Whatever you think is best, if you want to ship me to St. Mungo's or hire a healer to come here or just Whatever. Gold's not an issue.”

“It matters to me what you want,” he said. “Please think it over.”

This time Harry did pull his hand away, began an angry pace around the room. “There's nothing to think over,” he huffed. “I'm going to die.”

“Can I speak as your - whateverIam?” the last bit came out in a rush.

“Fine, sure.”

“I don't know how to imagine my life without you in it.”

“You've got years to figure it out,” he said bitterly.

“I'm not convinced this is permanent, what's happening to you. You know I'm working on a cure.” He swallowed. “But I imagine my life without you in it, when you're better, and I can’t see it.”

Another sigh. “Despite my best efforts, you've become important to me.”

He sighed. “You think I'll just leave?”

“What about us would make a sustaining... relationship,” He quickly added, “For lack of a better word. We have never been on good terms, and you've seen how anyone would react at the mere possibility of-”

“Of us being together,” Harry said firmly. Harry glanced at him and was surprised to see the emotion in his expression, his wide, wet eyes, as if he'd been slapped, he followed Harry's movement as he came toward him, and stiffened at his touch. “I'm not going anywhere,” Harry said softly, reaching for him as he would a startled creature and began stroking his cheek.

“What good am I to you?” he said, his voice thick. Harry didn't know how to answer that kind of question, but the answer felt obvious. Severus was taking care of him and keeping him alive. And he seemed to understand him, at least in ways that Ginny didn't seem to. She pushed him, talked with him, begged him to react to her, but Severus let Harry come to him. Harry could relax around him. How could he say the hardest part of dying, what he wasn't ready to accept, was losing what they had now?

“What good am I to you,” Harry said finally, “when most days I can't even kiss you.” When he
could barely fuck him, when he was asleep all the time and missing so much. He was so frustrated with himself.

“Oh Harry,” he murmured against him, embracing his middle. Harry wrapped his arms around his head, buried his face into his dark hair. “Oh Harry.” And then he went silent, pulling from Harry, rising and, embracing him once more. “Oh Harry.”

“Can we go lie down for a bit?”

“Oh of course.”

In Harry’s mind, the day was reset. He hooked his leg around and clung to the other man and, even though it felt stupid, inhaled his scent, knowing when he opened his eyes, when he was ready, he would be there. The day could begin.

One of the toads had died that night; they found it the next morning, awkwardly on its side. Neither Severus nor Harry was entirely sure of its name. Severus stared at a long time at the toad in a separate cage, as its mates stared silently on. Unceremoniously, he lifted the corpse, set it on his table and began cutting and whispering spells over it. Harry slid away, unable to watch past the first cut.

Severus was in a dark place, and knew it. Below him and within his skin, emotions churned and crested against him, waves rose up his throat. He felt sick. It was one thing to be in love, and quite another to actively, destructively love, to admire the beloved, and now to demonstrate that love. If this was love, than he'd never felt it before, but the cheap imitations of adoration. And so, if he didn't remain grounded, he'd be swept under the waves. There had to be a balance.

So he couldn't cut into the stupid toad and imagine it could've been Harry lying sprawled across his table, pale, poisoned, and he couldn't dwell on the image of Harry waking in his arms and replaying the scene for how perfectly normal, innocent of an image it was in his life. “I’m not going anywhere,” Harry had said; his heart momentarily lifted. No, he had to focus. Harry’s life depended on it.

Dutifully, he took down notes, the potion he’d used, the abnormalities he detected, and what else magic could tell him. He then packed the frog in an unassuming box, summoned his owl, and sent the specimen off. When the tide passed, and he could trust himself, he’d switch roles, loving Harry as he deserved.

But now, he began a list once more of what he felt he learned. Abstinence from sex hadn’t affected Harry, but it had brought clarity to Severus how sluggishly he worked with his mind preoccupied. The week had given him a chance to clear his mind. The articles and journals he read seemed to blur into one, circular tangent, but the theories had solidified in his mind. This part was reassuring, somewhat. Now he’d be writing into the existing canon.

He also had the clarity to revisit old questions with marginally better objectivity, namely how did personality relate to the soul, and a deeper question he hadn’t thought to ask - where did sexuality come in? Was it fixed into personhood, or entirely mutable?

As for personality, he’d felt as if the subject would be difficult to assess. While Harry’s friends had felt Harry had changed drastically, Severus was cautious. Severus’d been reminded of the way he’d seen his own peers mature, the difficulties that Harry had faces during the war. That is, people
without extenuating circumstances change as they grow older in some ways, and anyone would be altered by being in the middle of a war, committing a murder no matter how just. What he hadn’t considered was, while Harry was the one to take down Voldemort, other Hogwarts students had been involved in the battle. Here he had a number of samples that he could survey, determine the degree of change if any. Hell, he, himself, had grown up in the middle of a war.

The implications here would be how much of our personality is fixed, our leanings, how much could we accountable for, and perhaps, how culpable would one another be if one’s base nature is naturally declined towards evil? At how much fault would his peers be? At how much fault would be find himself? His friend Lucius? His former masters, Voldemort and Dumbledore? That was a bold claim, but it interested him. Above all, how much of Harry was Harry, and how much had been Voldemort.

Sexuality, he hadn’t thought would yield anything, unless Harry himself was a homosexual. That fact had only held personal interest. If one thing had seemed to change, Harry’s sexual attractions, then a wild claim could be that Harry, himself, had always been a homosexual; while Voldemort had been a heterosexual, if his affairs with Bellatrix were any indication. (A shudder.) Could Voldemort’s desires overridden Harry’s? Could that account for his sudden coldness toward Ginerva Weasley? This, too, was complicated. Wizards resisted same-sex attractions, some finding it as inconvenient, some never acknowledging it. He thought of Lucius, who married out of practicality, and only occasionally would acknowledge his attractions. However, he clearly loved Narcissa deeply, romantically, and believed in fidelity. He was firm that he could never betray or disgrace her. Then again, he’d heard of sexuality being fluid, or that some wizards (and witches) had no preference toward man or woman. So he had to tread lightly.

The conclusion of either finding may yield that Harry was an entirely different person now that Voldemort’s presence had left him. And as Harry’s, well, (boyfriend? Partner? Lover? Good god) whatever, it unsettled him.

Further, while these were precisely the types of conclusions he needed to be researching, that this situation could not be replicated, neither pursuits would cure Harry. He couldn’t understand why so many letters offered condolences, not suggestions. He’d read as many as he could, and too many wasted his time with empty platitudes.

When he could finally withdraw from the study and slip off the mask, he found Harry in the bath, the water still warm. Harry made room for him; he eased in, pulled Harry against his chest, rested his chin on the hollow of his shoulder. “I love you,” he said, not entirely sure if the other was awake, but he didn’t know why he couldn’t just say it before.

“Oh,” Harry said in a small voice.

His heart drummed hard on his chest, hard on Harry’s back. “If you-” he began.

“Yes,” he let out his breath, Severus could feel his heart then under his wrist. “I… I’m just…” he trailed off.

“You don’t have to return my feelings,” Severus said. “I’m only concerned about (A breath, god, his heart) pressuring you, that you are comfortable with whatever we’re doing. But I do love you.”

“I’m comfortable.” He felt Harry’s chest rise and fall. “Do you really love me?”

“Yes.” He pressed a kiss to his neck. “I can’t say I’m very good at expressing it. I’m sorry.”

“Oh,” he said. “I think you are. I just - I was afraid.” He seized him closer, Harry hugged his arms. “I love you too.” The air felt palpable.
They soaked in the new knowledge, tangled together, of something they had known but had never verbalized. Then Harry began laughing and sobbing and hugging his arm tighter. He then twisted around and kissed a surprised Severus, spilling water over the tub. Severus steadied him, pulled him into another kiss, basking in the warm and writhing body on him.

“Do you think we could try it again?” Harry asked shyly when they broke apart.

Yes, he thought, he wanted to start it all over again, with a better ending.

Dripping water, they moved to the bedroom, Harry moving on top of him. He guided Severus’s knees to his chest, kissed his hairy leg and reached for him. Severus held the tin out for him, groaning as a slick finger entered him. Already, his body was remembering, opening. Harry smirked, breached him and took hold of the man’s legs, fucking him with newfound energy, the way he’d wanted before. I love you, he thought with every thrust, I love you, as he came inside him, and pumped him until Severus followed, his back arched in half. I love you, he murmured, pulling slowly out from him, relishing the chance as the other man recovered to be the one to clean them off.

And later, while they lay in the wet sheets, Harry pulled him in an embrace and let his breath fall on the man’s ear. “I love you.”

Chapter End Notes

*Because it bears mentioning, Oliver Sacks was one swell dude. He was a physician (into neurology) and a writer. He thought people were interesting, while being intensely embarrassed about himself. At 82, he came out of the closet at the release of his autobiography (On The Move) around the time he learned of his diagnosis. The book was dedicated to his partner. In return, his partner released a memoir about how much he loved and adored him (Insomniac City) after he died. If you don’t think that’s the cutest shit ever, get outta my face, homefry. Anyways, Oliver Sacks wrote and documented his feelings about being sick and wrote several essays about it. Part of me stubbornly thinks his best writing came at the end of his life. I’m just really missing him right now.

Also, I just wanted to acknowledge how weird the idea of advocating the nature over nurture theory is, when the Harry Potter series is pretty much about choice and moral ambiguity. If that didn’t bother you, don’t worry about it.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I took a deep breath and listened to the old brag of my heart: I am, I am, I am."

-Sylvia Plath

Harry ate ten eggs and seven slices of bread, not that he actually counted. He hadn’t meant to, he’d been frying bacon, but got hungry waiting and crammed them down his throat. Eggs actually didn’t taste too bad raw, Harry found, but he wasn’t going to try bacon that way anytime soon. Besides, Severus liked bacon, and he hoped the smell would wake him up. But if he didn’t wake up soon, Harry was going to finish off the eggs.

He poured himself juice while he waited, methodically flipping the strips. God, he loved the smell of bacon now. He use to hate the way the pan would smoke up, how it meant his cousin would come bounding down the stairs at any time. His stomach would churn while his aunt told him to make six slices of toast, to keep an eye on the eggs, to not let the bacon burn. At least he could say he was damn good at making breakfast now.

And apparently at fucking, if the sounds Severus made last night were any indication.

He realized he was grinning down at the stove. So sue him, he was happy. He was in love, and loved in return.

He woke up feeling good for once. He’d had a normal amount of sleep, his joints didn’t ache, and Severus was curled around him. For the first time in a long time, he felt hungry. Ravenous, even. He’d hadn’t ridden his broom in a long time either, and it didn’t look that cold outside. Or maybe he’d go for a run?

“Harry?”

Harry spun around, burned his hand, and quickly lifted it to his mouth to suck on the wound.

“Are you cooking?” Severus asked, his hair in odd fluffy angles. Bed-head. Harry took in the other man, restrained himself from touching him.

“No,” he said, letting himself grin. “I’m summoning Mephistopheles.”

Severus blinked at him.

“Sit,” Harry said, turning back to the pan. “It’ll be ready soon. I mean, it’s pretty much bacon at this point.”

Instead, Severus came to him, examined the nearly empty carton of eggs, the packages across the counter.

“I got hungry!”

“That’s…” he began, but never finished. His hands roamed along Harry’s shoulders, lingered on his chest, moved to his belly. Harry sighed, sank against the embrace. “Am I asleep still?” he murmured
in his ear.

Harry reached around with his free hand. “I could pinch you,” he offered.

Severus kissed his neck, hugged him closer. “Not yet.”

Harry laughed, twisted around to kiss him.

“Are you really alright?” he said, pulling him from the heat of the stove. He cupped Harry’s cheeks and examined his eyes, but Harry had no idea what he was looking for. “You couldn’t walk without assistance yesterday.”

“I wasn’t that bad!” Harry exclaimed. “I feel great.”

Severus tried to pull him toward the table; Harry’s stomach groaned in protest. He touched his wand and had the bacon follow them to the table.

“Harry,” Severus said again, as Harry inhaled meat. Hell, if he wasn’t going to eat it, then he wasn’t going to just let it sit there! “Harry, I haven’t seen you exhibit any type of appetite in weeks.”

“So it caught up to me?” Harry tried, mouth full. He swallowed.

Severus grabbed his hands. “Are you in pain?”

“I told you I feel fine.”

“You’ve… you’ve been sick.”

“Could I have my hands back a second?”

He released them. Harry reached for his glass and gulped down the rest, all the while Severus watching him.

“What are you getting at?” Harry asked, returning his hands to Severus’s.

“Do you… remember being sick?” Severus asked slowly.

“For gods’ sakes, yes, I know I’m sick.”

Severus scanned him from head to toe. “You don’t appear sick today.”

“Well, I…” Harry paused. This was the best he’d felt in a long time. “I’m having a good day,” he finished, cautiously.

“Let me take your measurements,” he said.

Harry helped himself to more bacon, then held himself still while Severus’s wand passed around him, his hands touched and probed him. It rested on his chest, the full minute while he counted.

“Your heartbeat is… strong,” he said softly, lingering.

“I don’t know why you’re being so weird,” Harry sighed. “You told me you loved me. I’m just happy.” That’s all it had to be. Right?

Severus stared at him, always with that stare.

“You don’t have to look so horrified,” Harry continued. “I mean, it’s mutual and all.”
“No,” he croaked. “There’s something your friend said…” Severus began frantically turning the pages of his book.

“‘Fuck off, Queer?’” Harry tried.

Severus paused long enough to give him a pained expression.

“Okay, what?” Harry prompted, leaning over to read.

“It’s… probably in another notebook.” Severus sighed, closed his notebook. “Mr. Weasley asked if… if love was the cure for you. I mean, I don’t, I don’t mean to suggest - It’s too soon to tell, but I wonder if there’s the possibility-”

“You think I’m better?” Harry asked quietly.

“I-I’d have to monitor you for a few days, for stability, but perhaps, perhaps,” He pinched the bridge of his nose. “I don’t want to say, I could be wrong.”

“Wait,” Harry said, smiling again. He was doing that a lot today. “Did Ron really ask you that?”

“He was speaking of his sister, of course.”

“He’s going to be a bit surprised when he finds out,” Harry said, pleased at the image in his head. He dipped his hand in for more bacon and thought of the way Ron’s eyes would roll back when they’d make the announcement of Harry’s recovery, hand-in-hand, a kiss for the camera. “Oh.” His hand came up empty.

“Well, if this is any indication of what living with you is like, I’d better start stocking up,” Severus said with a wry smile and a wink. He took an orange and peeled it with his long fingers, slipped each perfect slice between his lips and smiled involuntarily as the tart taste hit his cheeks. Harry watched him, this man that he loved so much he could feel his heart swell when they were sitting together, when he so much looked at him, and offered him a slice, though Harry had nearly wiped out the pantry. _So this is what love is supposed to be_, he thought.

Severus ran every test in the book throughout the day, and then some. He watched Harry’s movements, measured his height, weight, his heart, his breathing, all with trembling hands.

“What I think…” he would start, then abruptly cut himself off and start writing. And then he’d ask him to do another ridiculous task or then ask a series of questions.

“We’ll need an appointment with St. Mungo’s,” Severus settled on, reaching for his coffee. “I’d like to see what their instruments read now.”

“Bored,” Harry announced at his side, “Can’t we go flying? Do you want to measure how I fly?”

“We do need to do some shopping,” he replied.

“Alright then, let’s go!” Harry’s eyes went wide. “We could look at _brooms_!”

Severus’s lips twitched.
“We could ride there on brooms.”

“Indeed. We could also try floo.”

“God no.” Harry wrapped his arms around him, sank his weight against him. “One time I ended up in Knockturn Alley. Did I tell you?”

“Mm.”

Harry nuzzled the hair from the other’s neck, kissed him lightly, then settled again. “I was trying to go to Diagon Alley, I don’t know. I ran into Malfoy. Junior.”

“Borgin and Burkes?”

“Oh yeah.”

“He was obsessed with that store,”

Harry shifted up. “You knew all about the vanishing cabinet, didn’t you?” he asked. Severus made another “mm” sound.

Harry hadn’t been giving it much thought until then, but under the arm he was laying on, Severus still had the Dark Mark and an entire life Harry didn’t know much about. He’d been close to the Malfoys, closer to Voldemort, and all of that seemed important if he was planning on… being with him. Actually being with him. And did that mean a life with Severus meant being nice to Malfoy?

Harry took a breath. …He hadn’t thought of any of that. But it was nice, a somewhat normal problem to have. He chuckled out loud, startling the man. My life is never going to be normal.

“Hogsmeade?” he prompted, instead. It was close to Hogwarts, but Diagon Alley meant almost certainly running into one of the Weasley’s.

“We can do that.”

They had eventually settled on side-apparating to Hogsmeade, because it was the “safest” mode of travel. Once they landed and regained balance, they extracted their arms from each other and Severus gave him A LOOK that Harry had interpreted as a warning. Or something. (He was still learning.) They landed just outside the non-Hogwarts arch, witches and wizards brushing past them.

“Wanna have a go in the Shrieking Shack?” Harry murmured, making a show of adjusting Severus’s collar.

“I cannot bare the romance of it,” he returned, flushing all the same. “Why did you want to come here?”

“Honeyduke’s,” Harry said, dragging him along. God help him, he was going to spend all his money in that goddamn candy store. “C’mom!”

“Of all places…”

Harry stared at the door, hardly believing they were there together, that such a magical place could exist. “When was the last time you were here?” he asked, staring ahead. Even the door seemed magical.

“I can’t remember,” he said. “It was always filled with students.”
“Well, it’s…. It’s not the weekend. We should be fine.” They all had to be in their classes.

“Yes,” he said. “Are you ready?”

“Ready.”

The heavy wood door came open, a kaleidoscope of color that blinded Harry momentarily. Harry zeroed in on the Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour Beans barrel, the licorice wands, then followed the zig-zagging path of the sugared butterfly wings. Without a doubt, Honeyduke’s was the best place in the world and, again, Harry felt grateful to be alive.

“Pinch me,” Harry said, while Severus eased him out of the doorway. “Seriously.”

“This is real,” he murmured. “By god, I think it is.” Harry felt the lightest twist on his arm and broke out into a grin.

There were more people than Harry expected in the store, quietly picking treats and moving to the register, but Harry wanted to go to every table. Somehow, Severus was super patient with him. (“Acid pops?” “I wouldn’t.”) (“Harry, they are serious about the ‘every flavor’ part, you know.” “I know, it’s awesome!”) (“Do you collect Chocolate Frogs?” “No. Your mom use to.”) (“What’s your favorite sweet?” “Toffee, I suppose.”) By the time, Harry had made it to the counter, he’d racked up a bill of an astonishing 20 galleons, which Severus had to cover.

“Gotta live a little,” Harry said with a shrug.

They drifted from store to store. Some owners recognized him and greeted him, and some recognized Severus, but were not as friendly. To those, Harry turned cold and pulled Severus away. They looked at some pets, broomsticks and books. They replenished Severus’s pantry, a special stop for tea, and made a final pass at the Three Broomsticks, facing one another, and letting their knees touch under the table.

“You’re not tired at all?” Severus asked, watching Harry dig into the greasy pub food. .

“Not even a little,” he said, draining his mug. “God, I haven’t had Butterbeer in so long.”

“Incredible,” Severus murmured. “You have no idea how strange it is to see you like this.”

“I don’t-” He swallowed a wad of food. “I don’t think I’ve ever felt this good.”

“I’m glad.”

Severus was smiling at him, that strange, awkward expression of someone not use to smiling.

“Can you imagine doing this when I was in school?” Harry asked, nudging his knee under the table. “What if we would sneak off here to hang?”

“It’d rather not imagine it,” he replied after a quick look around them. “You would’ve been underage.”

“Oh, fine, imagine if….” Harry thought a moment. “Imagine there wasn’t a Voldemort, and I went to Hogwarts for my seventh year. I would’ve been of age then. Do you think this would’ve still happened?”

“It’s impossible to say,” he said in a low voice. “But I’m sure you know that teacher/student relationships are explicitly forbidden. And I would hope I wouldn’t… but I don’t know. I hope that it
would somehow happen, if you must know.”

“Maybe in detention,” Harry mused. “I mean, you would probably still give me detention no matter what situation.”

“That mouth of yours,” he supplied.

“We’d be alone in your office,” Harry thought out loud. “Maybe you’d make me scrub out cauldrons, I don’t know.”

“Maybe.”

“You’d be watching me, that way when you’re trying to figure something out.”

“I’d be wondering when you’d grown into a fine young man.”

“Professor,” Harry said, adopting a cheeky tone. “You didn’t have to give me detention to stare at me.”

“Why is it I believe you would say something so asinine?”

Harry grinned and shrugged. “Maybe I’ve always been like that.”

Severus sipped from his own butterbeer, a slow swallow that Harry watched travel from his lips, descended down his throat.

When they arrived arm-in-arm with all their parcels home, Harry dropped his and pulled the man into a kiss that felt immediately different from every other kiss they share. He had no idea kissing could be like that, but this one felt reassuring that they were there, together, feeling one another. Harry inhaled, opened his eyes to Severus’s eyes closed, and pressed their bodies together again.

“Do you think we could…?” Harry trailed off, having nearly pushed the other man onto the counter already.

“Here?” he rasped.

“Now,” Harry confirmed, pushing the hair back from his face. “I want you so bad.”

“God,” Severus said, shuddered. “Do you know what you do to me?”

“I have an idea,” Harry responded, dipping into the curve of his neck. “I like being able to take care of you,” he said against heated flesh, his hand moving into the man’s pants, grasping his prize. And then, knowing the effect it would have, he added, “I just want to make love to you.”

Harry listened to his breath hike upwards with pride. It made him delirious. He kissed him again and again, not entirely clear what he was attempting. Harry stepped on their bags, kicked them away, and moved against the other man until they worked out a position with Severus’s legs firmly anchored around Harry’s hips, his palms flat on the counter behind him. It was tricky, Harry bumped his head a few times, but Harry was supporting his legs and pulling Severus to him, maneuvering them in ways he couldn’t before. He felt healthy, and strong. He felt powerful and alive, he thrust himself up into his lover, and spilled his seed deep inside him.
When did Snape become such a bottom? More questions I ask myself.

(Answer: The same time Graves become the sexiest bitch in the entire Wizarding 'verse like oh my god, you KNOW that boy just wants to be punished.)

Anyways, we're getting toward the end, but we're not quite there.

:)
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“No one knows whether death may not be the greatest of all blessings for a man, yet men fear it as if they knew that it is the greatest of evils.”

-Plato, Phaedo

Harry wanted to fly. He hardly slept, his body was tired of being tired, and he needed to do something. Out of respect, he didn’t take off with his broom; out of the torture he felt, he asked Severus if he could fly every five minutes until he wore the man down on a particularly warm day. “And it might tire you out some,” Severus said. “This old man can’t keep up with your newfound stamina.”

Harry wouldn’t say it, but flying always made him feel a certain affinity to his father. Flying was wholly something of his that had never been Voldemort’s, a Potter thing even. Flying solidified the existence of his parents, that at some point he’d had a mom and dad, and had been loved. That he belonged with someone. Harry had been thinking about how he’d finally get to be reunited with them, but now… well, it might be a little longer. He felt they might understand.

Harry sprinted straight into the sky, and zoomed in a tight whirlwind before dashing into the sky, dancing around invisible obstacles and coming to Severus’s side.

“What do you want to race?” Harry asked, bumped into Severus’s broom lightly.

“While I have nightmares of you spiraling off your broom again? No.”

Harry rolled his eyes, and took off with a spirited yell. Something whizzed by, a gray blur that circled back to Harry, baring a grin. Harry grinned back; his gift really did live up to its speed. But Harry hadn’t been trying on his own. Harry floated to him, kissed him in the air, and took off once more, outstripping him easily.

They were seeing his doctor today; then they’d have proof that he was actually better again. Severus wouldn’t believe it until he saw it, and kept saying it didn’t make sense, but Harry didn’t need the proof, and he didn’t need answers. He was fine. Better than fine. He was finally himself again.

Everyday, Harry felt like he was learning something new about himself. From his candy stash, he learned that while he still liked cauldron cakes alright, he found that he really enjoyed the texture of sugar quills. He also had a lot of fun going through the Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour Beans, especially when Severus indulged him by trying a few as well. From there, he discovered how much he enjoyed lavender and garlic and a type of curry that he made Severus try as well. And, of course, he liked bacon.
The part that made Harry uneasy had to with the aftermath, the conference announcing his recovery, and, perhaps, the announcement of their relationship.

It had to come out sooner or later, didn’t it?

Harry glanced at the Severus’s kitchen clock, and saw they had still had an hour. They’d been sitting stiffly at the table, ready to go for some time now. Harry had made tea and had several cups before Severus made him stop (He had enough energy as is). Severus had his notes ready, but seemed to only stare beyond the words.

Some days Harry wanted to scream into the sky he was in love; other times, he’d remember the look on Ginny’s face and felt himself grow cold. The reality was they had a tough relationship. Harry knew that. Against every odd, they’d fallen in love. And yet, that seemed like it meant the love they had was that powerful. It was real, the most alive he had ever felt.

No matter what it came down to, Harry knew he’d fight for that love. He’d lived through a reality where he couldn’t do what he wanted, where he had felt helpless; now, he was determined not to waste another second of his life. His near-death experience had given him a new perspective on life itself. Rather his ten or so near-death experience, but who was counting?

“What are you thinking about?” Severus cut in. “You keep frowning and smiling and then frowning again.”

“You,” Harry said, unaware that Severus had been watching him. “This. Mostly.”

“Ah,” he replied, and Harry thought he felt the fullness of what Harry meant. “Perhaps we should just leave…?”

Harry nodded. Before they went crazy with waiting. He was so tired of being in his own head.

St. Mungo’s was brightly lit. The sun was out and it felt to Harry as if the light was following him through the halls. He wanted to run to the end, Severus was so slow! Luckily, their wait was short; Stillwater admitted them at once.

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” Dr. Stillwater told them after a long silence and many of his weird tests. Harry let out the breath he’d been holding. “If I didn’t know better, I wouldn’t think you were the same person, Mr. Potter.”

“You think he’s better,” Severus repeated faintly.

He gestured to his instrument. “It’s not a perfect reading, but it’s astounding how much has been recovered and in so little time.” Harry held still while his doctor demonstrated to Severus whatever he had been looking for. Like a good model, he grinned and didn’t complain at how long it all took. “I think it’s a miracle of sorts. What did you try?”

“That’s the thing,” Severus said smoothly. “We didn’t try anything.” Harry rolled his eyes. How about anal sex, he so badly wanted to say out loud. How about love?

“A miracle,” the man repeated.
Harry’s stomach growled. He grinned. “The downside is I’m always hungry,” he joked. “Making up for lost time.”

“He’s eating me out of my pantry,” Severus confirmed.

“How are you sleeping?”

“Definitely not as much,” Harry reported happily.

“He won’t sit still.”

“Sev’s just gotta catch up to me.”

“I have little choice.”

Harry squeezed the other’s arm, hardly baring they couldn’t touch now.

They were to set up a few follow-ups to check into Harry’s health. All standard procedure, if Harry didn’t mind?

Harry said he didn’t. Severus asked if the good doctor would consider attending the conference, to which he turned down - he had his other patients. Still, he hoped Severus would continue their correspondence, to hear some good news every once in awhile.

“I wish you the best of luck, Harry Potter,” he said, shaking his hand, a firm grip between them both. “And may we never need to see one another again.”

Harry wanted to go to his apartment first. Well, actually, he wanted to hold a conference, announce the good news, and be done with the sick thing, but Severus wanted a moment to formulate why Harry had gotten better. Harry thought he wasn’t ready for them to come out, but agreed to wait. They had time. They had the rest of their lives.

So they went to his old apartment and Harry plucked through his old papers, walked around the small rooms, and hovered over the couch he’d practically lived off of. He never had a chance to feel at home in his apartment, he realized, feeling entirely out of place. Ginny had liked the place more than him, and had decorated most of it. Hermione had been the one to clean it for him last, he remembered. He hadn’t attended to it much. Being holed up there had never been the plan.

Before he’d gotten sick, Harry was going to take time off from school, an actual vacation of sorts. He knew there would have to be more schooling for him if he wanted to train in being an Auror and that seemed to suit him well enough, but for awhile, he’d relax. Travel. Charlie had given him an open invitation to visit Romania. He also had Sirius’s house to take care of - daunting, but a project to keep him busy. His apartment was always going to be temporary, whether he took over the Black house or moved somewhere in with Ginny. It had been all open-ended then.

“I think…” Harry started, and flushing a little “Well, that I might move in with you,” He finished, fighting the blush even harder. “End the lease and all. If that’s okay with you.”

Severus hugged his chest in such a strangely insecure way that Harry felt his heart twist. “It’s… It’s not that I wouldn’t like that, but you might change your mind. I don’t have much to offer you.”
“That’s not true!”

“Harry,” he croaked. “I’m much older than you, and you might find, now that things are different, that you might, that we might not (a breath) It’s a lot to think about. I’m only asking you consider holding on to your apartment a little longer. Just in case.”

“A trial period,” Harry said.

“Yes.”

“I can do that,” Harry said, moving toward him. “I can wait until you’re ready for me.”

“Harry…”

“However long it takes,” he continued. He took Severus’s arm and pulled it slowly to him, pulled Severus to him. “I mean, your love saved me and all, so I think we’re okay.”

“I do love you,” he said, softening. “More than I ever thought possible.”

Harry threaded their fingers together and made sure their eyes were locked, that Severus might understand. “I love you, Severus,” he returned.

The man rolled his eyes upward. “I think I am dreaming,” he sighed.

“Yeah?” Harry said, pinching his bum.

In retaliation, Severus pinched his cheek. Harry pinched his arm and Severus pinched a nipple and then they were collapsing onto the couch, well aware they were grinning like idiots, and pinching madly at whatever skin they could reach until Severus moved against him in just the right way and the game took a quite different turn.

“I never got to enjoy being young,” Severus told him later that evening. He was sipping whiskey at the kitchen table, and Harry, wanting to do everything he did, gamely sipped at the strong liquor. It was the same Firewhiskey brand from Christmas Eve, but Harry swore it tasted different. Everything was different.

With his eye trained at the moon outside the window, Severus continued, “I don’t expect you to understand entirely, but I was in a hurry to be older, to be out of my parent’s house and done with school. I don’t know why I never slowed down.”

“You were in the middle of the war,” Harry said agreeably.

“I put myself there,” he said. “Sometimes I’m so happy with you, I can’t imagine how I was so angry. I regret it. But you remind me what it’s like to be young.”

“I think,” Harry said, fingering the tumbler in hand. “I have been thinking that all this had to happen the way it did, like maybe we were meant to be together. You didn’t die and I didn’t die because we had to have this.” If Harry hadn’t gotten sick, he wouldn’t have reached out to Severus. And we wouldn’t have reached out to him if he hadn’t been convinced the other man didn’t care enough for him. And maybe it could go deeper than that - if their fates weren’t already intertwined, Harry may never have considered him.
“It’s a romantic thought. However it happened, I’m glad for it.” He returned to the former subject. “What I mean to say is that I don’t want to rob you on your own youth. If you think we’re meant to be together, then we’ll have our lives to be together. Now is the time you should be living, having your own experiences, the like.”

“What I heard is that we’re going to do all of it together,” Harry said, though the subject felt pretty abstract to him. However, if he made Severus feel young, then they could be “young” together, couldn’t they? They could travel together, go out together, have fun.

“Perhaps.” He rose his glass. “I look forward to it. To us?”

Harry clinked their glasses together.

They wrapped around one another in bed when their glasses were properly drained, and Harry’s glasses were properly set aside and out of the way. Thinking about the next day, Harry let out a long yawn that Severus caught. They traded it back and forth between whispers and kisses, between promises and dreams and other pillow talk until exhausted, their eyes closed, and the breath evened out.

Harry didn’t wake the next day.

Chapter End Notes

We grow ever nearer to the end! So close, yet so far away...

I've picked up another job. I don't think that will affect the chapter updates too much. The goal is always one week, two max, and it's largely planned already. Hope you lot are well!
At first, Severus had thought he’d let Harry sleep, he’d had some busy days and seemed to be pushing himself further than his newfound energy would allow. By noon Severus began to feel anxious; Harry had hardly moved. His breathing was slow. Hating himself at first, Severus went to wake him, first by a kiss, then by pleading, and shaking. He removed his blanket, but Harry didn’t stir at the rush of cold Severus definitely felt.

He next thought he was overreacting. Harry was exhausted, he had hardly been sleeping before. Maybe part of Harry was recovering, he’d been going non-stop for days after having trouble moving. It was inevitable, his muscles needed to adjust.

Or, Severus thought, Harry had simply moved from one extreme to another. Already he had been oscillating between his good days and bad days. So Harry had experienced a period of high energy and strength; and now he’d face the direct opposite. If those periods mirrored one another, Severus could expect Harry to be unconscious for at least four days. After that… he didn’t want to think about it.

No, he had to. He had to examine every possibility. If the rate continued its perverse inversion, than either Harry could experience too much energy, or succumb to too low. His heart could move too fast, or stop entirely and he had no way of guessing which might happen first. That could be one possibility. Or perhaps, in the best case scenario, Harry would somehow level out. That somehow he was getting better in his own way.

So either he must do something, or nothing at all. Either he stood idle or took deliberate action.

But first, he just wanted Harry to wake up.

Severus had been content to stay near him before, before he had seemed better, normal. It had been easy to watch him sleep and wait out those periods, because Harry always came back. All he had to do was stay awake just a little longer. (Why else drink coffee?)

He’s sit at his desk, sometimes stretch his legs in bed and have his book, sometimes scrawling at his desk. Harry was always in his peripheral, always in the back of his mind. A nearly maternal instinct remembered to bring food and force-feed him, to check his bowels, to flex the boy’s muscles and turn him in bed. (Sores would be no good.)

He’d probably develop a complex around that, he thought deliriously. Harry could never be far from his sight, because what if something happened to him? What if he was alone and, oh god! He didn’t want to think it. Maybe Severus would never be relaxed around him Because what happened last time? What happened the night before when he’d thought it was over, that he could rest? He hadn’t been watching and now he was unconscious.

He had to wake up sometime, didn’t he?

Severus wanted to contact the good doctor. It felt ridiculous and overly cautious, but it was better than not reacting fast enough. A second opinion was good, even if the man was an idiot.

He paused to rub his eyes.
He still had his potions, a lot of good that they did. He could bewitch the mind and ensnare the senses (and all the dribble he used on first years), but how was he going to bind a soul to its body and then stabilize that body. He knew theory, potion bases and ingredients, but no one had ever entered this territory before him, so how the fuck was he going to do this without poisoning Harry? How could he recreate Harry’s metaphysical state with goddamn toads and find a way to treat that? Those theories didn’t even exist.

Because…

Because he was the one that would be starting it.

And someone would have to finish it. Because that’s where progress happened - the synthesis of thought. But until then, they were stuck unless they got damn lucky.

Another hour passed. He drained his coffee empty.

He should’ve been doing something, anything but staring stupidly at Harry, but what else could there possibly be? Translating old texts? Mixing potions? Reading and rereading his own notes in hopes of finding some new pattern, some mysterious code? What would any of that matter if he wasn’t there when Harry woke (god, he had to wake up)?

God, he felt useless.

Another hour passed. Or maybe two. He lit the pipe he’d taken from Dumbledore’s office and grimaced at the stale tobacco. From across the room, he aimed plumes of smoke into Harry’s open mouth, his nostrils, but still he wouldn’t stir.

A shadow was passing through the room. He steadied his shaking hand, wrote a quick letter to the doctor and sank into his chair, puffing deep, punishing breaths.

Dr. Stillwater first touched Harry’s cheeks, lifted his eyelids and peered at the unfocused pupil below. Severus watched frozen as he removed Harry’s covers and ran his hands down his body. He applied pressure, turned him in various directions, and spoke quietly in his ear all the while. He then pulled the machine Severus recognized from his bag and moved it around Harry’s head, all the while parchment reflected its readings.

Finally, he turned to Severus with a book (Severus quickly cast a silencing charm between them, chilled how they were speaking of him as if he wasn’t there) and showed him how Harry’s compared to the various stages of Wimbly’s (Not exactly stage four, certainly not healthy), and what other readings he could. Even Severus could see the jagged fractures, the deepened, abstract scars. The healer’s explanation washed over Severus (He should’ve been writing it all down, he should’ve been asking questions), but all he could muster was a faint, “He was perfectly fine.”

Stillwater paused, then let out a sigh. Reluctantly, he said, “Sometimes they get better before getting… worse.”

“Oh,” he replied, intelligently.

Severus didn’t know what else they could discuss, but didn’t want him to leave, and slowly he tried to form something coherent.
“What’s our next step?”

“We monitor him,” the doctor replied. “Continue to care for him, ease any discomforts he may face.”

A measured pause. “Did you discuss with him what his preferences were?”

“He put it in my hands,” he said quietly.

“Does he want to be kept alive by any means possible?” the doctor probed.

Severus didn’t know. That course could be painful, something worse than death as he understood it. Harry had once told him he wasn’t afraid to die, but that was months ago. The look in Harry’s eyes when he said he wasn’t ready to go to sleep, that seemed as if he’d changed that view.

“Will he wake up?” he asked then.

“I believe he will, but I can’t say when.”

Severus let out a shuddering breath. “I don’t know what to do,” he confessed, his eyes trained on Harry. “I don’t want to leave him, but I don’t want to stand idly by if there’s something to be done.”

The doctor studied him. “Love’s a funny, tortuous thing,” he assessed.

He lifted his gaze to him and waited to see any revulsion, any sort of judgment, but the doctor appeared objective.

“It’s mutual.” A mutual destruction.

“I see that.”

Did he? God, when had he become so utterly transparent?

“I’m sure we’ll know a little more when he’s awake. Until then, care for him as you have been. And talk with him, he’s not deaf.”

“Talk about what?”

“Whatever you like. Read to him if you must. Your voice will ground him, even soothe him.” Oh yes, his gravelly voice was just pure music. But what other options did he have?

“Please send for me when he does wake.” Here, he gave Severus a direct, firecall address. “And do give yourself a chance to rest, however impossible it seems.” No promises there, but he pocketed the address and bid him a farewell. He’d stay awake now, knowing Harry would be awake.

The silence felt deafening all over again, now that the doctor had left. But Severus had a fresh pot of coffee, and a lot of experience in evading sleep. He’d done so during the war, and he’d done so to meet with all the deadlines of his odd jobs, the meager income he could make after the war.

He’d never been so much for sleep anyways.

“Well, my love,” he tried, feeling stupid. Not that Harry could see the dark blush on his cheeks. “You heard the doctor, I’m to speak at you, because you’ll find it soothing. Although,” he took a sip of his coffee. His kidneys would give him hell. “Although, this might remind you of Hogwarts. You were equally as responsive back then to my lectures. Failed nearly all my pop quizzes.” His lips twitched into a mad smile. “I’m sure you would have called it unfair, but it was always from the reading. Nearly always from the first few pages. Sometimes I’d give the answer away in lecture.
How much easier could it have been? I wonder what you were thinking about back then for all those hours.

“Well, I won’t berate you any further. We’ll talk about it later. I’m going to read to you. It’s really for your education, it’s good for the soul according to Socrates. You’ll see why. Think of it as another quiz. It’s from Plato’s *Phaedo*, I’ll skip the introduction. *Phaedo* sets up the scene, how he was present to Socrates’s death and what his last words were. Ah, I should mention that Plato wrote in dialogues, so he’s writing with *Phaedo* as his main character. It’s thought to have made his philosophy easier to read, but it makes it harder to decipher what Plato really thought. It’s not agreed what was Socrates philosophy and what Plato’s was, but Plato certainly respected him. Anyways, Socrates was punished a death sentence for reportedly speaking blasphemy of the gods and for corrupting the youth of Athens. More likely, he pissed off the right people. This could be why Plato hides behind other narrators, too, by the way.

Nevertheless, *Phaedo* has nothing but positive words about Socrates. He says ‘Nothing gives me more pleasure than to call Socrates to mind, whether talking about him myself, or listening to someone else do so.’ He says, ‘Although I was witnessing the death of one who was my friend, I had no feeling of pity, for the man appeared happy in both manner and words as he died nobly and without fear.’”

Severus swallowed hard. He’d read *Phaedo* many times, he’d thought of it as Plato’s best even next to the overwhelming tome of *The Republic*, but now it felt grim. Too appropriate. No, he committed to this. He took another brave sip and began again.

“I’ll begin reading now, this is Phaedo speaking… ‘I will try to tell you everything from the beginning…’”

He reached all the way to Simmias’s lyre before he heard Harry stir before him and abruptly stopped. Green eyes met him, hallowed and uneasy.

“How long…?” he tried.

Severus felt for the address in his pocket, and sent the pre-written note through the floo network. “Too long,” he responded, his voice raw.

“I can’t move,” he said. His eyes glistened. “I can’t feel my arms.”

“The doctor is coming,” he said, marking his place, closing the book, and crawling into the bed to lie beside him.

“I’m not getting better,” he croaked.

He wished he could give him some semblance of hope, they had no idea what they were dealing with here, had no way of knowing if he’d pull through this stronger than ever, but even didn’t believe it at this point.

“No, it doesn’t seem so.” Harry shook underne him. Severus stroked warmth into his skin, kissed him, and held him, because he didn’t know what else he could possibly do, but ease his discomfort. To talk quietly with him.

Chapter End Notes
See last chapter's author notes for the biggest lie ever.

But we're back! Sorry about that cliffhanger, but that was in the works for months, ha ha. Got ya'll to talk at me though! Hope your days are good, I'm blowing my money on so many comics. And it's been great! Join me next chapter when I continue to disappoint my philosophy professor.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Sometimes I can hear my bones straining under the weight of all the lives I’m not living.”

- Jonathan Safran Foer, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close

Harry didn’t greet the doctor. If Harry opened his mouth, he was certain he would start sobbing again. The doctor probed Harry, turned him gently (when he couldn’t himself) and did the thing where he spoke softly. He wished he’d leave, he didn’t want to make a scene.

Severus took his hand when the questions started. That made it easier, he remembered, his voice felt stronger. The doctor had then asked Severus his own questions. That was when he learned Severus had been reading to him while he’d been out.

They asked if he could guess the material, Harry hadn’t remembered much of anything Severus had said while he’d been asleep, so Severus made the same weak joke about Hogwarts, that he had about the same attention span back then.

“I think I’m experiencing dé-jà-vu,” Harry had responded. Severus’s hands were dry and rough in his own; he tried to squeeze them and lost track of the conversation.

“There’s something I want to confirm,” the doctor cut into thoughts clearly. Harry’s eyes flew open. Was he about to go back asleep? His head was starting to hurt.

“Do you still trust Mr. Snape to make any decisions regarding your life when you are not able to?” Before Harry could answer, he continued, “Have you discussed your wishes?”

No, they’d been planning their future together, their coming out as a couple, the fine details of what their lives would be when Harry was well. Only yesterday, it seemed. He blinked hard.

“Finances,” he prompted, “Has that been discussed also? Burial arrangements? Property rights?”

Harry imagined they were going to get a dog, maybe a cat as well. Harry had wanted to make the move official, he had wanted-

“Harry?”

-children, maybe, somehow if it was possible. If Severus wanted, when things had settled, when they were ready-

“Harry.”

“I wrote it down,” he said, bitterly. “I was ready.” He flapped an arm around until Severus checked his bedside table, the one Harry had taken over, and located the scroll with its seal and enchantments. Their agreement. And below that, his will. He watched his lover’s hand tremble, and watched the pair of them locate the clause that Severus was in charge of his affairs. Severus was in control, that’s what Harry had to say on that.
That had always been the plan for Harry. Dying was dying. Vaguely Harry thought about being buried with his parents on Godric’s Hollow, vaguely he thought that he didn’t want to be in pain if it came to that. But he’d ultimately decided he’d leave it to the Researcher, for whatever purpose it might serve. Would parts of him be preserved? Reduced to ash? It was easier to not think too hard on it.

Deep down, Harry had known that Severus wasn’t cruel, and that he would make the proper arrangements. He’d hated him, but he’d protected him, such was the strange mark of their relationship. Of course, Harry had also hoped that Severus would’ve been able to approach his death in a detached way. Because he’d hated Harry (No, rather, he disliked him.), it could’ve been easy, efficient. The burden wouldn’t fall on his old friends or his surrogate parents. They’d had their own funerals to bare, loved ones to mourn. It was all easier before they fell in love.

Now, Harry knew he was asking much more from Severus, as his lover, and he held his breath while Severus stared at the paper and finally flickered his gaze to Harry for his confirmation.

“I trust you,” Harry said, hating the raw sound of his voice.

He nodded. “Of course, my love.”

The doctor left soon after, convinced there was no immediate danger, and Severus returned to his place beside Harry, his arm around him, their bodies hugged at every point. His eyes were red rimmed. Harry noticed the line of potions and cups on the table, and desk. The Pepper-Ups and coffee mugs. He wished he could kiss him.

“How long was I out?” Harry asked. His voice felt stronger this time.

“Four days,” he replied. “Give or take.”

“How long has it been since you’ve slept?”

A wry smile. “I napped.”

“Go to sleep. Now.” Harry couldn’t move too much but he was able to nudge against him. “I’ll wake you if I’m going to fall back asleep, if you want.”

“I’m so glad you’re awake.”

“Sev-”

“How can I? You’re here now.”

“I’ll be here when you wake up,” Harry said before he could think. The uncertainty between the words hung awkwardly between them. “You can’t just not sleep.”

“I’m aware.” A yawn slipped through. “But we have some things to talk about.”

“Alright.”

“I want to hire someone else to do the research,” Severus said. “We’ll bind them under secrecy, I will assist as needed, and I will be able to stay at your side.”

“You don’t-”

“Let me finish. Stillwater keeps insisting you will need a nurse aide, and I disagree. I don’t like the idea of anyone else touching you, and caring for you, and I doubt you fancy it much either. This is
the compromise I can work with. And I will rest easier, which you might consider a ‘win.’”

“So he thinks I’m going to get really bad.”

“It’s better to be prepared,” he answered, closing his eyes. “But yes, he does.”

“It… sucks.”

Severus’s arms twined around him, and pulled him closer. Harry’s mouth landed against the other’s shoulder, which he kissed successfully. Severus’s mouth covered his and slowly moved against his in gentle presses that Harry tried to keep up with.

When he moved from him, Severus asked, “Do you think you’ll be able to walk?”

“Uh-uh. Not yet.” Harry forced his arm to move so he could touch Severus’s cheek, to do anything to reciprocate. Severus kissed him again. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

It would become the exchange they would have when they couldn’t think of anything else to say. Maybe it was because neither were sure when the last time would be, so they were sure to remind one another as often as possible. Plus, every time it was voiced out loud, they both felt just a little lighter.

Severus pulled out the many letters he’d received from other researchers, the unsolicited advice, gifts, and words of encouragement, and went through them with Harry. They agreed Mr. Prewett Sr. was a nutter, but Mr. Prewett Jr. had promise. Mr. Gullerd had sent them the longest letters. Ms. Jalenfire, too, seemed to be okay (she’d sent them phoenix tears, after all, and most have access to other ingredients), but Severus had wanted to interview with a few other candidates all the same. Severus wanted a person with experience, but also open-mindedness. (It wouldn’t do them in any good if someone could not get past Harry’s sexuality.)

“I want at least two of them,” he told Harry, “so they’ll have each other’s company and leave us the hell alone.”

Harry grinned. “To do what, I wonder…?” the boy teased, although he’d only achieved being able to sit up in bed. Even with magical assistance, he’d been too afraid to try walking. None of that meant he wasn’t interested in sex, he just wasn’t able to participate.

Severus took and kissed the back of Harry’s hand. It was something that Harry had seen in movies, but never in person, certainly never to him. It spread a new warmth through him briefly, this new sensation. There were so many things he had left to feel.

He’d thought before about the things he wanted before he died. Right now he wanted Severus to kiss every inch of him which he told him and to which Severus compiled, a thorough press of his lips down his skinny frame. What if he’d never felt that? He closed his eyes and took in the entire ritual, but his mind kept racing.

“It’s not really fair to you,” Harry said. “You spoil me, and I’m just going to leave on you.”
Severus dipped his head lower. Harry knew he was partially guarding him from the expression on his face. Weighing his thoughts. But what could he possibly say? There was an inevitable, it didn’t need repeating. They loved each other, they’d repeat that anyways. And what then?

“You’ve gifted me with something I’ve never thought possible,” he said finally, kissing between his legs. When that part stirred, Severus smirked and enveloped him in his mouth.

Well, damn, Harry thought, that was pretty good.

Sev had conducted the interviews from another room, while half his attention remained on Harry. A dull connection was there (a powerful but relatively short spell) where Harry could hear what he heard, and Sev would be alerted by any changes. Any candidates whose eyes lit up at the mere idea of working with a celebrity were marked off Severus’s mental list. (Harry tried to hide his amusement, which he was afraid would send through.) In so many words, he’d told Harry who he’d preferred (Mr. Gullerd and Ms. Jalenfire), but allowed Harry the formality of meeting the candidates and having his own vote.

Harry surprised Severus by adamantly asking for Ms. Geralda Quif as well, a comparatively young witch, younger than they’d assumed from her letters. Severus had written her off by her strange dress, but conceded her style (and age) did not speak for her intelligence. Plus, when Severus had announced his affection for Harry and kissed his forehead, while Gullard and Jalenfire both had risen their eyebrows, Quif had only marked in her notebook. They agreed to meet the following night.

While Harry slept, Severus prepared his living room to become a sort of headquarters for new their team. He adjusted the furniture to accommodate four bodies comfortably, made the coffee table into a proper multi-person desk. He had his collection of books shelved nearby, lamps, writing utensils, instruments, and anything he thought might be of use. There was also his potions room, and he’d allow them full run of his kitchen and the guest facilities. Finally, he placed his own notes at the table, feeling a strange release. He thanked the remaining sliver of the moon, a practice his mother would sometimes do when she was working late, and returned to Harry’s side for the rest of the night.

Chapter End Notes

Ayyyy long time coming! Work is still a pill, but it’s a joy to write for you lot! Hope this finds you well, blessed be!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“If our friendship depends on things like space and time, we’ve destroyed our own brotherhood! But overcome space, and all we have left is Here. Overcome time, and all we have left is Now. And in the middle of Here and Now, don’t you think that we might see each other once or twice?”

-Richard Bach, Jonathan Livingston Seagull.

Harry and Severus found other ways to pass the time while he was in bed and Severus refused to leave his side, Harry generally prompting different scenarios their lives could have converged.

“What if I got to run away from the Durlseys when I was younger? Do you think we’d still have met?”

“What? You were going to run away?”

“Well, if I knew more about magic, yeah.”

“That’s a funny thing to wonder. Aren’t you concerned how’d you survive?”

It’s hypothetical.”

“Then hypothetically, we could have met. I’d know exactly who you are, of course.”

“So you’d bring me into the magical world.”

“And then I’d... raise you?”

“That might be weird.” / “You’d have to meet me when I was, I don’t know, 16.”

“That would be… more appropriate.”

“...Did you ever see me as a baby?”

“A picture. Everyone did, in the Daily Prophet.”

“Hmm.”

“I’d rather not think about it.”

“All right, what if you were the one to leave the magical world with the whole Voldemort thing, and then we met up.”

“Why?”

“Dunno. Maybe it’s after the war and you missed London.”

“So I’m a coward for leaving.”
“Well, being a Death Eater isn’t that much better.”

A glaring silence.

“It’s true. Just… okay, for whatever reason, you left and came back and Voldemort’s dead and I’m working in the Ministry or something. I play Quidditch on the side, but nothing professional, just a small league of our own. And I’m not with anyone, because everyone gets boring after a while.”

“What would you want to do in the Ministry?”

“I was thinking about being an Auror.”

“In that scenario, and supposedly we run into each other… Undoubtedly, I’d find myself attracted to you, regardless of how much you remind me of James... Is he alive in this scenario?”

“I… I guess he could be. But then, everything would’ve been different, too. The war would’ve never stopped.” A mischievous smile. “Father would not be happy of my association with you.”

“Even then, you think you’d want me?”

“Yeah, why not?”

“Because you might’ve been someone different. I would be someone different.”

“The weird thing is I don’t think I’d be that different. Right now, I feel more like myself than I ever have. Maybe it’s because I’m with you or maybe because Voldemort isn’t a part of me anymore. There’s a part of me that feel real. I mean, yeah, you can be a real jerk, but I think under that, there’s a part of you that’s more real, too.”

“I’m afraid ‘being a jerk’ is a part of my essential self.”

“I guess I’m into that,” Harry replied.

Severus turned toward him and made to reply at the same time a sharp knock came from the door. He groaned and rolled away, but steadily refused to get up. They were being interrupted after all.

Harry grinned. He’d noticed how whenever the “rookies” (as Severus called them) entered, Severus would rather tighten his embrace on Harry than let go.

“Come in!” He shouted.

Gullard came through, his eyes trained on the scroll on hand. It was usually Jalenfire, and if not her, than Quif. Harry usually didn’t see Gullard, and felt even Severus’s surprise. He was taller than Harry remembered, less put together than from their first meeting, but had the same blue robe as before.

“There’s a pattern,” he said, waving the scroll toward Severus, who stood for it. To Harry, it looked like a mess of circles and symbols, kind of like the sort of work Hermione had done.

“I don’t know how to read this,” Severus admitted. “I couldn’t get past Arithmancy.”

Gullard slid another piece of parchment out and impatiently waited for Severus to come to the conclusion. “His energy fluctuations, his periods of consciousness.”

“Harry’s,” came the sharp correction.

“Harry’s periods of consciousness have a distinct pattern. Not that it’s obvious, but even you have
been able to predict them.”

“Somewhat.” This, Harry noticed too. Not perfectly, but he was always waiting for him when he woke, he was the first to know when Harry was about to drift off. They’d become in tune with each other.

Gullard breathed heavily while Severus studied the lines and symbols, tracing Harry’s life until his finger rested at the end. Harry’s head spun as he rapidly explained the chart, throwing out words that sounded too funny to be real.

“It wasn’t easy work, and it took all of us, but Quif thought you’d want to know.” Another breath. “It’s good to know what we’re working with.”

Severus slowly rolled up his copy of the paper. “I thank you.”

“I would also like to conduct some of my own observations with h-Harry for the afternoon. They shouldn’t take any longer than 5:20, and, as you can see, you will have time with him for another hour after that. You may rest if you like; some portion of this I would prefer you not be present for.”

“Of course.” Severus directed to him. “Are you up for it, Harry?”

“Yeah, sure,” he said, attempting to sit more upright. It was getting more difficult, but he sent a surge of magic to help boost him and managed not to look too crooked. “What do I need to do?”

Severus crept from the room. Harry hoped he’d rest, he meant to tell him so, but Gullard was poking his arm and that took all his effort to see if he could raise it.
he’d unfreeze them and pulled at the weeds, trimmed dead growth, and fertilized. His roses had never given him trouble before. They had always been a brilliant, blossomed and fragrant red. Now, they were dull, nearly lifeless. Just a month more, he thought desperately, touching the leaves in turn until he’d become entirely absorbed in the work.

When completed, he knew what he needed to do now. He wiped his eyes, reminded himself to check their redness, and went to his desk. One step at a time, he thought. Focus up, in the face of the inevitable and prioritize. Get through each day. Do what must be done.

He wrote a number of letters and made a pot of tea, pulling strength from the warmth of the steam, and the scent of tea. He then prepared Harry a cup and brought it back, reminding himself to keep his disposition in check.

They wore him out with their tests, those rookie bastards, but Harry was nested against him, warm from a bath. They were clothed only by his bedspread. Baths were an exhausting venture on their part, but worthwhile. Harry’s weight on him, half held by magic, half held by himself, the silky press of skin. And now, drained, he held Harry and felt the soft drum of his heartbeat. According to the charts, Harry would be down for 18 hours after this. In a few days, he’d have a good few hours of higher energy. There were a few more days like that to look forward to.

“So I’m an auror and we run into each other,” Harry had prompted, his voice now a soft rasp after answering all those questions.

“We run into each other in… where? A club?”

“Ohh, yes. And this is the scenario where we don’t know each other.”

Severus took a deep breath, felt Harry’s small frame bob with him. “I’m sure I’d watch you dancing.”

“You…” a breath. “I’d notice you because you wouldn’t care if I saw you. You wouldn’t hide it.”

“No, I couldn’t help it. I’d be entranced.”

“I’d be dancing for you.” A breathy laugh. “Not that I’m very good at dancing.”

“Maybe not ballroom dancing,” Severus agreed. “But you weren’t so bad when the music picked up. At the Yule Ball.”

“You didn’t dance at all.”

Severus thought briefly they may never have the chance to dance together, and quickly pushed it away. You could have a lifetime with someone and not experience every possible experience.

“Imagine if we had danced at Yule together,” Harry continued.

“Why on earth would we?”

“It’s hypothetical.” Hypothetical had become Harry’s new favorite word.

“Ohh,” he groaned. “It would’ve been highly inappropriate . Think instead of that Hallow’s Eve
“The vampire’s party.”

“Yes. At least you were… sixteen.”

“For that matter, we could just imagine the Yule Ball happened in my sixth year, if you want.” A huff. “Fine. That party… what were you doing there, anyways?”

“Micro-managing.”

“Whatever. So someone spikes the punch and I’m dancing next to you and then I’m dancing with you. It just happens.”

It just happens, he thinks. Severus gave it some thought, imagined his own surprise, his pleasure, even if they hadn’t had a good rapport. He saw Harry, flushed-faced and nudging him to move with him “Our bodies would have known one another,” he said finally.

“I like that.” A mischievous grin. “Do you think I could’ve gotten you to snog me?”

“From dancing to snogging.”

“Sure.”

“More likely, we would’ve been horrified by that night, and, upon morning reflection, been unable to see each other eye-to-eye.”

“Because it was important.”

“I would never make the first move, in any scenario, if you must know.”

“Why not?”

“My attraction to you terrifies me,” he admitted. “I’d hardly believe you could feel the same way.”

A soft laugh, such a lovely laugh. “I’m glad you believe me now.”

“Yes.”

“You know… Mr. Gizzard-”

“Gullard.”

“Oh fine, Gullard, he asked me if I’d ever been attracted to men before you.”

“I’ve wondered that, too.”

“How did you know you were gay?” Harry asked.

He felt the tone in the room change. “Girls didn’t interest me.”

“Not even my mom?”

“I thought… maybe, at first. I liked many things about her.” He took a breath. “I did find your father irritatingly handsome.”

“Did you have a crush on him?”
“God, no. I do remember once agreeing with your mother that James was good-looking. The look she gave me… well, it didn’t bother her. Surprised her, more.”

“Ohh.”

“Lily would’ve accepted that in you. It’s… rare for a parent to be accepting of that.”

“Did your parents?”

“No.”

He could feel Harry’s fingers tapping nervously on his chest, his own heart tapping.

“I know you don’t like talking about this kind of thing,” Harry said slowly. “But I like knowing. I like knowing thing about you, everything.”

Severus thought you could spend a lifetime talking with someone, and still learn something knew about them in the afterlife.

He shifted their position, stretched his arm. “I am not used to talking about myself like this. I imagine you’re not either.”

“No, not really. I mean, I know people are curious about me because of who I am, but, I wouldn’t know what to say. I mean, my parents are dead, I killed a guy. You know?”

“You don’t want to talk about unpleasant things with people,” Severus said, remembering there was much about Harry’s home life with Petunia, with Lily’s sister, that he wanted to ask. Like why he had wanted to run away, why his windows had been barred.

“Yeah.”

“Because they would pity you more than they do, because you hate those things about yourself.”

“Yeah,” it came out softer, breathier.

He brushed his lips to Harry’s forehead. “Tell me everything.”

Harry looked startled momentarily. He closed his eyes and then craned his neck towards the bed-side clock. “How long have I got?” Severus cupped Harry’s cheek, made to speak.

“I mean tonight,” Harry added quickly. “I know, I mean, I don’t want to know-”

“We have enough time,” he replied, although he refused to check himself, but it sounded good, comforting, and Harry nestled back against him. He touched his drying hair, stroking as Harry spoke, and he spoke. Harry told him about the cupboard, Severus told him about the closet. They traded stories of overgrown clothing, wild magic, and sharp words. Harry told Severus about Mrs. Figgs and her cats, Severus mentioned an unbalanced uncle. Severus learned about the barred windows, the second bedroom, and sparse meals, the night of the dementors, the blown-up aunt. Harry learned about his young mother, a young Petunia, the late Prince, and mid-yawn was telling Severus about the dogs he’d been chased up a tree when he curled in closer, and succumbed to sleep.
Is that another chapter you see before you, so soon? Yooouu'reeeee welcome!!
“How ridiculous and like a stranger to the world is he who is surprised at any one of the events of life.” - Marcus Aurelius, Epicureans and Stoics

In regards of your request on the philosopher’s stone, there is no surviving documents. At the stone’s destruction, so went any ‘recipes’ or surviving information. We ask there to be no further contact on the matter. Respectfully, The Flamel Family Estate

Gullard let out an enraged scream. “How can you destroy knowledge? ” he said, seizing the paper and throwing it as far from as possible. As a thin, aerial design, it floated a foot, turned, and returned to him. Jalenfire covered a smirk when his face went a deep purple. From the shared table, she plucked the next letter to review. These days, it was a roulette, either a crazed Potter fan, off-the-wall suggestion, or the rare reply from a colleague.

“How?!” he repeated.

“Considering the situation Harry Potter’s in now, there is some knowledge that needs to be forbidden,” Quif pipped up from her cozy chair. “If You-Know-Who didn’t learn about how to make a horcrux-”

“He would’ve found another and equally awful alternative,” Jalenfire cut in. “You-Know-Who was bad from the start.”

“I don’t think people are born one way or the other,” Quif returned. “You-Know-Who didn’t have to turn out the way he did, I mean, I’m convinced something happened to him when he was little and-”

“We know what you believe,” said Gullard.

“-If someone had ever been kind of him-!”

“He would've taken advantage of them!”

“You don’t know that. He might’ve known people were good, that muggles can be good.”

“We don’t know that,” Jalenfire said, placidly. “But it’s how he turned out and we have to deal with it.”

Quif huffed at her.

“Mr. Potter’s sexuality,” prompted Gullard.

“Oh, here we go.”
“Do you think he can change what he desires?”

“There’s a possibility he did!” Quif nearly shouted. “He was attracted to women, now he’s attracted to men. Sexuality can be fluid.”

“Or he discovered his bisexuality?” Jalenfire interjected.

“Then let me point out that even Mr. Potter can’t remember being attracted to men until after The Soul Split, but pursued relationships with women before The Soul Split. He was practically engaged.”

“People change! We’re talking about sexuality and desire. How is that essentially someone’s character? It’s something they do. Is it essential that I drink coffee and not tea?”

“MAYBE!” Gullard shouted. “MAYBE DEEP DOWN I CAN ONLY DRINK TEA!”

“THAT’S STUPID!”

“What were you saying before, Jonathan?” Jalenfire asked. “About the soul split.”

“I’m saying,” he gulped for a calming breath, “what if Mr. Potter’s essential self is coming out after the soul split? His true sexuality, his true personality - he’s a different person altogether.”

“We’re going in circles, then,” Quif said. “Mr. Potter’s matured. And he’s got a death sentence!”

“But how could a death sentence change your sexuality?” Gullard asked.

“You have an isolated, sick young man whose friends are growing up and leaving, while he spends his every free time with someone caring for him. Male or female, it’s practically Stockholm Syndrome!”

“They do care for each other,” Jalenfire said.

“That’s not the point,” Quif said. “Sure, it’s genuine, but it’s circumstantial. Everything’s circumstantial! Do you think fate exists? Do you think there are soulmates?” She spat the last word as if it were day-old coffee.

“That’s not related,” Gullard said.

“Isn’t it?” She retorted.

“What do you think, Amelia?” Gullard asked, turning then to her.

“I’m a natural-born skeptic, as you know,” Jalenfire said, smirking. “But how about we focus on what we do know?”

“Well, Socrates, I suppose that would amount to nothing.”

“Hey guys,” Quif said in an imitating monotone. “Do animals even have souls?”

To that, they collapsed into helpless, sleep-deprived laughter. It was an odd inside joke, but it pulled them back together into their joint work.
Their laughter bounced back into the room Harry and Severus were in. They, too, couldn’t help but
grinning from the raged, muffled shouting they’d heard only moments before, to this sudden merry
change.

“Steady,” Harry said. Severus crouched in front of him with scissors rolled his eyes, but the smile
hadn’t left his eyes. “Don’t leave me bald.”

“It won’t be pretty,” Severus promised. “But I think it might be nice to see your eyes again. Hold
still.”

He lifted Harry’s overgrown bangs and cut above his fingers, a jagged line that would have to do.
How had Harry been managing it before? Practice, he supposed. He wondered if he could snatch
those strands back and hold on to this piece of Harry. No, he didn’t want to ruin the mood. Those, he
used a spell to vanish. Instead he ran his fingers through Harry’s bangs and tried to direct them in
some way that wasn’t too bad.

“It’s better,” Harry said. Severus kissed him, careful that the shift of weight wouldn’t harm him.

“It’s terrible,” Severus corrected.

“S’long as it’s not too short.”

Severus then examined Harry’s chin. He liked its slight roughness, but knew he should shave it.
Slow as growth had been, he wondered if it would ever grow back. In that case, would he ever feel
those coarse hairs again?

“Shave it,” Harry said, decisively.

Those were Harry’s good days. Harry’s bad days were a mental fog for him, sluggish movements
and confusion. It helped knowing they were temporary, that they even knew when they would be
over, but unbearable in their duration. What Harry remembered from them was that sound was
amplified, but distorted, his vision tunneled. He would hold on the fuzzy outline of Severus, tried to
zero in on his voice. He’d had bad days before, but could wade through the confusion, even respond.
Now, his tongue weighed heavily in his mouth, his eyes flickering back and forth before he’d fallen
back into unconsciousness.

They’d imposed quiet hours for those time periods in the household. Only the sound of Severus
reading could be heard through the building. At any time, a spell could be placed to put up a sound
barrier, but the researchers had come to enjoy the soft reading. They had their own blocks for sound,
but worked quietly and communicated through hands and facial expressions. Through the
scratchings of their quill pens, they kept an ear open to the man’s voice.

Severus took great care in what he read to Harry, though it was unclear if the material made a
difference. It had been suggested to read what was positive and uplifting, but after a short experiment
(at the insistence of the rookies), there was no discernable difference. He read through Phaedo a few
times and some other dialogues. He tried Aristotle out of fairness, but found lyricism missing even in
his Poetics. After a fifth reading of Phaedo, Ms. Jalenfire silently handed him a clean copy of Marcus
Aurelius’s Meditations and following that, Epictetus’s and then Seneca’s works.

“Of a man’s life,” Severus read, “his time is a point, his existence a flux, his sensations clouded, his
body’s entire composition, corruptible, his vital spirit an eddy of breath, his fortune hard to predict,
his fame uncertain. Briefly, all the things of the body, a river; all the things of a spirit, dream and
delirium; his life a warfare and a sojourn in a strange land, his after - fame oblivion. What then can be his escort through life? One thing and one thing only, Philosophy.

“And this is to keep the spirit within him unwronged and unscathed, master of pains and pleasures, doing nothing at random, nothing falsely and with pretense; needing no other to do aught or to leave aught undone; and moreover accepting what befalls it, that is, what is assigned to it, as coming from that other world from which it came itself. And in all things awaiting death, with a mind that is satisfied, counting it nothing else than a release of the elements from which each living creature is composed. Now if there is no hurt to the elements themselves in their ceaseless changing each into other, why should a man apprehend anxiously the change and dissolution of them all?”

“What was it like for you when you thought you were dying?” Harry had asked him once, in the rare moments they became serious. “When Voldemort betrayed you and Nagini attacked you?”

Severus considered the question carefully, and came up with bleak honesty. “I had been prepared to lose my life for many years with the work I was doing, but I had begun considering what I would do had a I survived. Through the pain, I felt angry.”

“I used the resurrection stone before I died, before Voldemort killed the part of him in me,” Harry said. “I asked Sirius, and he said dying itself isn’t really - isn’t really anything. It was like falling asleep. And not waking up, I guess.”

“You called up Black?”

“And my parents, yeah. They were all there, together. They were watching over me. I guess they’re watching me now, and they’ll be there when - when it happens. I don’t think it’ll be so bad. Done it before. Kind of. Dumbledore had been there.”

“Maybe he’ll be there again.”

Quietly, Harry said, “I’ll be waiting for you. If you want me to then.”

“I’d like you to. Why wouldn’t I?”

“You might be with someone else. You might have years.”

“If that were to happen, I wouldn’t stop loving you then,” his voice choked then. “Any person I have will have to understand that.”

“Well that’s,” Harry faltered. “That’s good. I’ll be there.”

“Good. We have a date.”

Harry laughed, though his eyes were bright. “You don’t think I’ll be in Hogwarts, like one of those ghosts, do you?”

Severus smiled at him. “Well, then, in that scenario, I’d have to go back into teaching, so that we can keep up our affair.”

“Oh god.”
"In any case," Severus added, "I don’t think so. Lingering spirits are deeply angry and unsatisfied. You are, shall we say, better adjusted?"

"I’m ready," Harry said. "I wasn’t before, but I am now."

"That’s good," he responded. Harry touched Severus’s cheek, trembling with effort, and tried to wipe his tears which were falling suddenly and without his permission. "I just wish there were a way..."

"I don’t think there is," Harry said, blinking. "But it’ll be okay. I’ll be okay."

"You will," he affirmed affectionately. "You’re Harry bloody Potter."

And that made him laugh, that beautiful sound he couldn’t tire of. That laugh rebounded through the home, to the rookies in turn who shook their heads smiling, yawned, and continued their own work.

Chapter End Notes

For the record, that’s pretty much what philosophical discussions are like. Bit violent. Like the fireplace poker that Wittgenstein threw at Popper at Cambridge University. Good times.

The animals have souls thing is a poke at Descartes. He’s important historically, but a punchline in academic circles. He didn’t think animals could feel pain, either. My dog thinks Descartes is an idiot.

Have a good day out in the world, you guys!
Chapter 22

What do you do when you know you’re dying?

The question was only philosophically interesting if one wasn’t actually dying. For those that ignored the inevitable, it must’ve been a question of what was important, what was useless. How could someone live their best life?

It’s not the kind of question you’d ask a dying person, in any case.

The rookies had other sorts of questions to ask. Do Harry have access to the spiritual plane? Could he astral project? Did he think he was a different person altogether? What was his favorite xyz before and after the split? And what was You-Know-Who really like? (“You mean Voldemort?”)

They were mostly philosophical questions. Anything diagnostic seemed to lead to a dead end.

Severus spent short periods with the group, taking on his own questions. Of the four, he, of course, knew the most about Harry. In turn, he peppered them for solutions. And perhaps it was good for Harry to have some peace and quiet.

“If the soul is ready to go, it goes,” Gullard had said flatly. “How can you stop a soul? How can you treat a soul, not his mind, mind you?”

“You can’t think of anything?” Severus asked. “Some way to... steady him?”

“We’ve tried the grounding exercises, we’ve tried a humming exercise, a tuning-”

“Humming?” Severus repeated.

“If something about him, his energy, his aether, fluctuates from high energy to low, to clarity and confusion, then we thought we could bring it into balance with some sort of neutral vibration,” Gullard replied.

“As you can see, we’re grasping at straws,” Quif said.

“How far are you willing to go to cure him?” Jalenfire asked. The room took on a nervous energy.

Severus leaned toward her. "I would die for him."

“Harry Potter might have had a co-dependence with You-Know-Who’s soul; perhaps what he might need is a replacement.”

Under secrecy, Severus had told them about the Dark Lord’s horcruxes, about what they knew about them, how he had survived the killing curse once more. That knowledge was essential to understanding Harry’s condition. To the rest of the Wizarding World, Harry’s rebirth had seemed like a miracle, and, in some ways, it appeared so, but more likely the killing curse had severed one soul from the other. Harry had survived.

But to reproduce those sorts of conditions, would be to make Harry into a horcrux for himself. And to create the horcrux, he would have to commit a murder, an act to sacrifice his own humanity.
“It’s not something we could test,” Gullard said quietly.

“It’s a stupid risk,” Quif said, but among them, Severus sensed their burning curiosity.

Would he kill someone for Harry? Maybe he already had. Dumbledore’s death had been for the greater good, but that was a life willingly given up, one near death itself. He gnawed at his thumbnail and stood abruptly. He needed to attend to him.

Harry’s friends visited on one of Harry’s remaining high energy days. Severus had written to them, begged them to make amends. Severus hadn’t been entirely sure they would come, and only reluctantly told Harry of the possibility, more afraid of what the shock would be otherwise. They spent the day preparing. Severus propped Harry up on pillows and groomed him for the occasion. He stood back to admire his work, but hollow-eyed and nearly skeletal, Harry didn’t look well.

Quif had shown Hermione into the room first and stubbornly sat at Severus’s chair, intent to watch over Harry. They had read the notes, and had known the tension surrounding these meetings. These were his closest friends, who had only come to visit at a prompt, had done little to repair their relationship. Severus pecked Harry’s cheek and promised to be near, then guided Quif away, too. They must be allowed their privacy, he told her, but was pleased that she would protect Harry. He’d thought it best if they came one at a time, Hermione first as she was the least likely to antagonize him. From there, it was Harry’s decision if he wished to see any of them again.

This left him to face the Weasleys. They, Ginerva and Ronald, stood in the middle of the research room, arms folded, and stared him down. Gullard, he noticed was absently shuffling papers, and Quif had returned to her book. Jalenfire made no pretense of watching them. She stirred her cup of tea slowly, anticipating.

Severus waited for them to speak to him, to yell even, but the silence stretched on. Hermione returned, her face contorting from a smile to something more and more forced. Jalenfire reached out to her, guided her to the sofa where they began talking softly between them. Mr. Weasley looked between going to her, and going to Harry, but Jalenfire nodded to him, and Hermione was waving him on. Severus felt his every muscle tense, alert for any outburst.

Ms. Weasley, without any speaking partner now, went to him and spoke quietly. “Thank you for inviting us.”

Wouldn’t it be marvelous if you were the one I killed to save Harry? He thought, but outwardly he grunted.

“I’m sorry for accusing you,” she tried then.

He steeled himself, but had resolved to be truthful and responded, “I did care for him, then, and love him now. You were not entirely incorrect.” To his surprise, he saw her relax.

“I don’t know why I reacted the way I did.” She sighed. “I guess I felt like I was losing everything. Everything was planned out, my whole future was planned. Everyone said we were meant to be together, you know. He was my hero. Does that make sense? But it wasn’t… well, anyways, I’m glad that he’s - that he’s got someone for all this.”

This young woman had nearly destroyed Harry and now spoke calmly of the past. She admitted
defeat, but Severus bit back the venom rising from his throat. She might’ve been young, but she’d attacked them. Harry had been unwell, and she’d made him cry, hurt. She hadn’t been there for the aftermath, hadn’t been there when she had the chance, and came now as a spectator.

“Can I see him?” she asked then as Mr. Weasley was returning, and he wanted to rip her apart.

But that wasn’t what Harry would’ve wanted. His knuckles were white from their grip, and, strained, he told her she may. She disappeared through the doorway while Mr. Weasley flanked Ms. Granger’s side, hugging her shoulder, and she turned to him, sniffed, and closed the embrace.

“He’s not in good shape, is he?” Mr. Weasley said to him.

“It could be worse,” Severus found himself responding in something that sounded like comfort. It was more for his own sake.

“How long has he got?”

“Not long.”

Quif pipped up with the details, guiding the two through the damn chart, but Severus didn’t want them to hear them out loud and quickly turned away, as if that sudden movement would block out her voice.

“I never thought…” Ms. Granger began and gathered herself again. “I just thought he’d somehow pull through.”

“We thought he was,” Severus said, his voice thick with emotion now, damn it all. “There was a day he felt perfectly fine, that he appeared well. For those few days, we had thought that it had passed. We were going to make a formal announcement.” Harry had talked about how his old friends might react, how some things would be normal again. Severus pinched the bridge of his nose. “He fluctuates between consciousness, and unconsciousness, high energy, and low energy. Everybody experiences those fluctuations, but his are exaggerated, difficult on him.”

“We think his soul is restless,” Quif said.

“Harry thinks he was given a year to live, but that he was never meant to survive Voldemort,” Severus said. “That is my best explanation.”

“There’s no cure, then,” Mr. Weasley said.

“There is no cure for Death,” Severus said. “Harry’s hid from Him long enough.” There was no cure, but there were delays and back channels.

Ms. Weasley returned then, but Severus didn’t pause long enough to see how she might be faring. He needed to see Harry then, oh god, because they really had so little time left.

All-in-all, the visits had gone well for Harry, better than expected. He had worried they wouldn’t have shown up, but all three were there to see him, to be with him.

Harry had talked with Hermione about her studies, her career. She was going into the Ministry one day. (In Harry’s fantasy, he’d have been in the Ministry as well. All three of them would.) Harry
couldn’t stop noticing how healthy she looked next to him, upright, flushed, and vibrant. At some point, near tears, she apologized for not visiting more, for not being a better friend, but what more should she have done? “You couldn’t stop your life on my account,” he told her. Her dreams were too big for that. Truthfully, he’d never let on how bad he was. He’d refused to acknowledge he needed help, and, stupidly, his friends believed that.

Harry had told her some things about Severus, because he hated hiding it, hated that Severus had pulled away from him when his old friends arrived. He told her that he loved him, that Severus had been at his side, caring for him, that he was almost an entirely different person when you got to know him, but he really, truly loved him.

Harry told her about the moment he knew he was in love with Severus, because she was smiling faintly at him and kept nodding encouragingly. “I liked to make him laugh, liked to see him smile, but sometime over the kitchen table, I felt his smile in my chest. It was snowing out the window, I had tea, it was, I dunno, cozy. It’s what I wanted for the rest of my life. So I guess that’s love.”

“How did it start?”


“I mean,” she said, flushing. “Who made the first move?”

“Oh, uh, me,” Harry said, flushing back. “We weren’t together, when the, when that fight happened, I mean, some stuff happened, but, er, well, it took us awhile.” He remembered how much it took for them to reach the point they had in their relationship. He remembered the hurt and the fights and the way Severus had looked at him before they could admit loving one another. But those were the things he couldn’t tell her; those memories were his.

Hermione had reassured him that no one was angry with him, and that he didn’t have to hide his relationship with them. They’d love him regardless. And then, she’d hugged him tight, strong and awkwardly.

“So that’s girl-talk,” he’d joked, Hermione had laughed, genuinely, but left quickly he noticed.

Ron had been next. A tall, gangly redhead, he sat on the edge of Harry’s bed, unloaded bags from his coat pockets and started talking about the Chudley Cannons as if they were back in the dorms. They’d had a pretty good start to the season - for them, anyways. George had taken him to the game, as a thanks for helping in the joke shop. Harry hadn’t been following any news, so Ron told him all about that, too, about the stray Death Eater attacks, some of the trials.

All the while, he unloaded what looked like half of Honeyduke’s and invited Harry to share with one. Harry didn’t have the appetite for it, but they peeled open chocolate frogs (Harry needed some assistance here) and dared each other to try menacing Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour Beans colors. “Like when we first met,” Ron said, growing pink at the sentiment. Maybe, Harry thought, they would’ve always been friends. They’d gone through too much together, even if there were also things they could never discuss together. They would grow into different people, but they could still come together over Quidditch and Bertie’s Botts and be the two boys on that Hogwarts train, moving forward with their lives. Maybe Ron would come to accept Severus as Harry’s partner, and years down the line, their children could be friends. Harry blinked back emotion and Ron turned away.

Ron had then given Harry an assortment of products from Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes to use on Severus - or any of the other researchers. One of them grew huge mustaches when placed on the witch’s or wizard’s upper lip. There was also a nose-biting teacup, and the ever-classic whoopie cushion. He showed him a few more products, those in the testing stages. One left Harry’s eyebrows
bushy and yellow, as if he was now permanently surprised. It was left unsaid that Harry wouldn’t have the ability to plant the pranks, but he appreciate them all the same.

“I’ll see you again, alright?” Ron said, and then he’d ruffled his hair. Harry wasn’t sure if that meant now, or the afterlife, but he felt the promise under it.

“Thanks,” he had offered, and Ron grinned at him, their friendship preserved.

The person that made Harry the most nervous was Ginny, but she hugged him as soon as she came into the room, apologized for everything that had went wrong, and soon they’d taken up their familiar, friendly manner. Harry offered her some of his candy stash, and Harry asked her about her plans, if she was going back to school, and all that, but Ginny returned over and over to their failed relationship as if talking about it could rewrite it.

“We weren’t any good together, anyways,” she said, wincing at a particularly nasty flavoured bean. “I think that was Burnt Toast.”

“Stale Cake,” he responded. It was all awkward, but Harry wished they could’ve come to a point where it wouldn’t be awkward anymore.

She didn’t mean to stay long, she said, but before she left, she’d slipped Harry a silk ribbon and told him to keep it hidden. “You probably don’t know this wizard custom, but Severus will like it,” she promised, holding her pinky high as a truce.

Harry showed Severus the ribbon later, when they left, and Severus had rolled his eyes and held up his arm, then directing Harry to do the same. “If we can wind the ribbon around our wrists with our combined magic, we’ll remain together forever. It’s juvenile.”

“Let’s do it,” Harry said, and they held their wands aloft, wrists touching (Harry’s arm propped up with his elbow), and coaxed the silver strand to tie neatly around them. In his peripheral, Harry watched Severus concentrating intensely, mumbling spells and swears; he watched the look of triumph when the ribbon was turned into a neat bow.

“Til death do us part, then,” Severus said, plucking their wands from their bound hands. He settled by Harry, and linked their hands together, rested it between their warm chests.

“No,” Harry said, “that’s too soon,” even though he found the thought a stupid one.

“I could save you at the expense of another,” Severus told him, then. “If I separated my soul and put it with yours. Made you my horcrux. I could be a part of you.”

“If you killed someone.”

“I’ve done it before.”

“And who would you kill?”

“I’d murder the Carrows, both of them even. Double my chances.” He swallowed. “It would make for good research.”

Harry kissed him, a great effort for him. “I’ve made my peace, you know.”

“They’re probably slated for an execution, already.” He hadn’t been keeping with the news. “Someone is anyways.”
“And what would happen to you?” Harry asked, squeezing his hand. For Harry, it was a slight twitch at his full strength. “That’s not worth it, but I think you know that already.”

He did, of course he did. He knew he couldn’t do it, no matter how tempting the prospect. Even with a guarantee on the outcome, who knew what would become of Harry? How it could affect him? The price was too high.

They kept the ribbon tied around them as long as they could before Severus had to rise the facilities. By then, Harry was drifting off again. He watched Harry, thinking of how death and slumber would appear identical, if not for the bare rise for air. In the shadows, Death itself was near, lurking, and Severus faced it, asked quietly if it might be his time as well.

Those remaining days were full of love, and company. Harry’s friends came every day after that one, listening to Severus read while Harry slept, assisting the researchers, and cooking (the last more Ginny’s domain). Harry’s waking time, they left mostly for Severus. Begrudgingly, Severus warmed to them, beginning to dismiss the past as their youth. He’d said some words he regretted to a close friend of his, too, and hadn’t he wished that could have been fixed?

Other people stopped by, monitored in part by Mr. Weasley who knew who Harry would actually want to see and had no problem turning away others that passed as close friends. Headmistress McGonagall paid her respects one night, awkwardly patting his hand, and the Weasley clan in turn came, all a projection of well wishes. Hagrid had picked Harry off of the bed in a nearly suffocating hug that made Harry laugh out loud.

Harry stopped eating, and had trouble speaking on that last day, but he smiled reassuring at Severus. He clipped roses from the garden, the remaining blooms, and lay them by Harry so that their fragrance came with each inhale. Maybe it was too much, but Harry seemed to like it.

“Like falling asleep,” Harry mumbled.

“Just like that,” Severus responded, cradling him close.

He followed his every breath.

Chapter End Notes

One more chapter, lads and lassies.
Harry Potter passed that morning.

The memorial service had been lovely, an open space for the community to express their grief and all the complicated feelings of losing a hero. Who could they project their wishes onto now? Should a statue be built? The blurb of conversation around him was both the most fantastical, crazed dream, and the most real experience of his life. He was perfectly aware of the absurdity of the situation, and in perfect denial he was witnessing any of it.

The Minister of Magic said a few, official words, and other people in turn came to speak about Harry meant to them. Severus had taken a backseat on the activities and let the rookies gush about their first-hand knowledge of Harry, the little they could say. Few approached Severus himself, but he couldn’t bring himself to answer their questions. They well dull, and nothing that couldn’t be found out otherwise. Still, It was better than returning to his home, now gutted of any possible happiness.

Harry had left everything in Severus’s care, though Severus had no idea why. It took weeks before the court sanctioned Harry’s request after administrations of Veritaserum and other “legal” verifications upon Severus. Only when the rookies jumped to his defense did the Ministry finally relinquish Harry’s assets, but Severus didn’t know what to do with them besides pay off the rookies for their part. Harry had written in the will he’d meant for it to take care of Severus, but the wealth felt ill-deserved.

In addition to Harry’s belongings, it meant caring for Harry’s properties. Severus stood in the middle of Harry’s old apartment and hated how cold it was, how he couldn’t find Harry’s presence somehow. But Harry had told him the apartment had never been a good fit for him. Weasley and Granger had come to help him, dividing his clothing, finding homes for his old possessions, mostly a second-hand shop. Weasley, he noticed, held onto a sweater with an H sewn in, and Granger, had lingered on his school books with all their scribbles in them. She showed him some of it, the hangmen games, and doodles, and some of Harry’s “corrections.” Some of it was in her handwriting, some in Weasley’s, but at once he could find Harry’s.

He had then dug up scrolls of Harry’s school work and found the remaining papers from his classes, the written pieces that had both his and Harry’s writing together. There was Harry’s unsteady scribble, and his loopy, red, angry marks. Over some of them, Harry had responded to his comments, snide quips to his appearance and character. The cruelty in his hand surprised him, but he’d known that about himself, and loved that Harry had responded to them. He wished he could learn to be kind sooner.

The Black House, Severus found easier to handle. At once, he transferred the property to Ms. Granger and Mr. Weasley, absolved never to set foot in the house again, no matter what treasures might be in store.

Gradually, Harry’s friends shared other stories with him. Perhaps they didn’t know what else to talk about, but remembering the past helped to keep their thoughts from the bleak present.

The rookies stayed with him in his home for three more months. They would publish their findings, editing accordingly, probably make a substantial amount of money themselves. They said it would’ve been too much of a hassle to move their little station, too much to keep writing back and
forth with each other, but Severus found them cleaning, urging him to bathe, and eat, and so such. And he would. Eventually anyways. Severus’s contribution to the project, he felt, was little in comparison.

The researchers had come up with their own, individual answers and conclusions. Nothing could be entirely certain, but they each found supporting evidence. Gullard hypothesized that Harry had grown up with Voldemort as part of him, that his identity was a merge of both. At the soul split, he’d become himself. Souls, then, were essential. It did not explain why the split had been more traumatic, than relieving. Jalenfire had theorized that Harry’s death had opened his soul to take on other identities, that he’d become those he was around, because his was not contained. Or his might influence others. Privately, her reasons had to do with Harry’s sexuality, and their relationship. Severus found that theory the most threatening, but even Jalenfire had admitted she’d proposed it simply because it was interesting, and needed to be ruled out. Quif had the most simple theory - Harry had just been Harry. Her interest lied more in the metaphysics, the background work. Nevertheless, they proposed that these were questions they could finally ask, so something substantial had been recorded.

Other questions they’d asked was whether, if Harry had been allowed rest, whether he would have pulled through, rather than the rigorous testing, the talk of death. Had they made it a reality by talking about it? That question haunted Severus.

They brought up several questions about the nature of the soul itself, if it was individual, or essential, or if they were missing something. Was there such a thing as a ‘life force’ that had drained from Harry? Were bigger forces at play? They entered into heated debates about divinity, magic, and determinism, feeling closer than before, but no more certain of their beliefs.

Their biggest accomplishment was their chart, and they’d begun wondering if it could be applied to anyone, that the rhythm of the chart carried over to other people. Harry’s reactions had been violent, sped up in comparison. They had made themselves obvious. Were people on a continuum moving between periods of rest and periods of activity. In some ways, of course, they slept every night, but was there an underlying pattern? That one theory could explain all was quite tempting.

Severus didn’t know where he landed in his own theories. He felt that more than anything, he had only outruled other theories. Sometimes he would think of whether he should’ve tried to save him, if he could’ve. He replayed the conversation he’d had with Harry, and noticed that Harry had never turned down the idea. No, Harry dismissed the idea entirely as a possibility. A point he made later in his mind was that his soul was already forfeit, that perhaps he was the only person that could’ve made a horcrux, could’ve saved him. Maybe that was part of their fate. But Harry wouldn’t have gone for it, he realized.

It was sunny now, an English summer. Severus had remembered trying to take Harry out on a warm day, but that one was chilly, it didn’t compare to this. This kind of day would’ve been a good one to show Harry. And once he began remembering those details, he’d feel his grief take over and begin to sob.

Other days, he tried tending his gardens. His neglected fruit trees bore fruit, the herbs sprung up in rows, and flowers greeted him. The roses, however, had become dry husks, used up before the season. He’d learned since then that roses were temperamental, requiring periods of rest. Roses weren’t supposed to bloom in winter. Maybe distantly he understood that, but Harry had been so interested in them, and he’d forced them to stay, to come alive, to put on the show as long as they could. He’d just wanted something beautiful. Now, he wasn’t sure if they could ever return.

Eventually, Severus found the strength to visit the Dursley home. It was not some sense of duty that
he felt he needed to tell them, but that he wanted to see Petunia’s ugly face when he brought up Harry. He found her a divorced women, living in the country and proudly straightening her bushes in the front yard. She recognized him and the light instantly left her eyes.

“I wondered whatever happened to him,” she said quietly, and he told her refusing her offer of coffee. More patriotic than he had ever felt, he told her how Harry had died for the wizarding community, that he’d been brave, good despite the life he had. “Had I ever known…” he had started, but couldn’t finish the threat.

“I wish I could change things,” Petunia said. “Don’t think I don’t know what I’ve done. It’s cost me my marriage, my sanity.” It should have cost her more.

“But how are you?” she asked, softly.

“I watched the love of my life die,” he responded, and left. Let her puzzle it out, if she wished.

Holidays passed. Christmas was the most difficult. That first Christmas, he lay in the floor and drank until he could close his eyes and imagine Harry lying next to him. For too many years, Severus would observe Harry’s birthday, counting the year he would be.

There was a year he went in search of the resurrection stone, desperate to hear from Harry just once more. Harry had told him about where it was, in the Forbidden Forest, in passing when they talked about their lives. Severus stopped when he thought of the stupidity of it, that Harry was surely happy, with his family, with his many parental figures, when he did find the stone. He went to put it back down, only to see the ghostly outline of Harry smiling fondly at him, letting him he was alright, and he was around, before the vision had faded and the stone tumbled from hand.

If Harry was around him, Severus thought, then he should’ve been showing him something good, better than his bouts of grief. He spent years then, travelling the world, and visiting with other wizarding communities. He always returned home to check on his roses in winter, to nurture them back to life. His other plants grew wild.

Years later, the papers would speculate on the relationship between Severus and Harry based on a few passages of the publications. Like most scandals, it caused a scene and quickly dissipated, but was never verified. Rather, Severus thought the evidence was plainly there, but it didn’t matter to him whether anyone picked up on it. He was in South America when he heard the news, letters of support and disapproval pouring in from across the sea. Even then, it was beginning to blow over. He’d had a good laugh over them, but heartened that the support outweighed the push back.

In another life, in other circumstances, he thought they could’ve had a good, open life together. They could’ve loved, publicly. He thought of how that might be, cycling through Harry’s hypotheticals, and his own wishes.

Those were good fantasies.

Chapter End Notes

Bless you if you've reached the end of this story!

I debated a long time on the ending, but Boyfriend was the one that said it had to end this way. It would've cheapened the story to have Harry pull through, and there's
something to be said about the beauty in sadness. Or something like that, anyways.

This was a long time in the making (I think I started this story five years ago on my laptop??), but it was a joy to work with. Thank you to those that kept sending comments! (ALiveTodayToWrite, in particular, thank you so much for commenting, like, every chapter!!) This isn't a perfect story, and I'd love to return to it again, and clean it up more. I'd also welcome any and all feedback!!

Finally, there are other stories in the works that I'm excited to release to you guys in the future, with much happier storylines (but just a little angst, because it's Snarry, ya'll)

Thank you again for following this journey with me!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!