

Sacrifice

by Southern_Witch_69

Harry feels that the only way to keep Snape from serving an undeserving stint in Azkaban is to go through a bonding ceremony with him, thus proving that if Harry Potter has enough faith in Severus Snape to marry him, the man can't be all that bad. How long will it take before the ruse turns real?

Part 1

Chapter 1 of 11

Harry feels that the only way to keep Snape from serving an undeserving stint in Azkaban is to go through a bonding ceremony with him, thus proving that if Harry Potter has enough faith in Severus Snape to marry him, the man can't be all that bad. How long will it take before the ruse turns real?

DISCLAIMER: I've snagged some of JKR's characters for a bit of fun. No Galleons are being made!

This was written for meri_oddities in the Snapely Holidays exchange over on Insane Journal. I hope I've touched upon the elements you enjoy most, meri. Please enjoy and have a Snapely Holiday!

Thanks go to blue_paris and to Soul Bound for beta reading this.

Part One

Harry couldn't believe what he'd just heard. All of his life, people had looked up to him and thought of him as a hero...well, most of his life anyway...and all that fame wouldn't help in his current situation. He'd never tried to use it for anything, and now that he had, he'd been denied. Other than feeling quite stupid, he felt disappointed.

He needed help.

"Kingsley, are you certain? I mean, if they just listen to what I have to say, then..."

"I'm sorry, Harry, but the Wizengamot seems to be out for blood now that the Dark Lord has been killed and now that all those who worked here and went along with what happened at the Ministry have lost their jobs. They want all Death Eaters dealt with quickly."

"But he was on our side the whole time!"

"I know that, son, and most people believe you, but what of those who've suffered the last couple of years? How would they feel about Snape just going free without so much as a slap on the hand? He did kill Albus Dumbledore."

"I'd think the nasty scars on his neck, which he'll have all his life, mind, are far worse than a slap on the hand, Kingsley." Harry stood up, deeply disappointed. "It seems that the fight for me isn't over. I won't trade one Voldemort in for another."

"Are you likening me to him, Harry?" Kingsley asked in surprise, obviously offended.

"No, not you. Them." He nodded towards the doorway. "I won't let this happen."

"What can you do, son? It might take a little more than your word to ease their minds, and there's the public to consider."

"Watch and see," he said, turning and walking towards the doorway.

"Hold on, Harry. Let's talk about this."

"We already have. Sounds like I'd better get over to St. Mungo's before someone goes to snatch him out of his bed and toss him into Azkaban before he's well enough to be up."

"What are you going to do?" the new Minister asked.

"Whatever it takes to keep that man safe and out of Azkaban. He doesn't deserve it. He survived when we thought him dead, and this is the way he's rewarded? For all he's done?"

"But, Harry..."

"Oi! I've lived all this time as public enemy number one, yeah? Might as well be known that way for something worthwhile."

For the first time, Arthur Weasley spoke. He'd been sitting in the corner frowning as Kingsley explained that there was nothing they could do for Snape at the moment and that Harry's word might not be enough to keep him out of Azkaban. "Wait. There is something that you could do that would give Severus considerable credit, but it's..."

"Mr. Weasley," Harry began, "what is it? I'll do what I have to do." He shrugged slightly. "He loved my mum all his life, he saved us time and again, and he did only what Dumbledore asked. He deserves a chance."

"I expect it could be temporary..." His eyes looked off towards the window, and he was lost deep in thought until Kingsley cleared his throat. "Sorry. There's a bonding that can be done."

"Bonding?" Harry asked incredulously.

"Arthur, no," Kingsley said at the same time. "That's..."

"I'm sure Ginny would understand," he said softly, his expression troubled, "and it would buy Snape some time. This would prove that you will stand behind him and that you believe in him. Who would go against your bondmate? Why would you choose someone who wasn't absolutely on our side as your mate? Sounds good, yeah?"

Harry sat down in the nearest chair with a loud thump. "Married? To Snape?"

"It's just for looks, Harry," Arthur said.

"I hate to say it," Kingsley added, "but he might be right. The public would see it as..."

"Romantic. The stuff stories are made of." Arthur's cheeks splotted a color that matched his hair. "To hear Molly say anyway."

"What would this entail? I mean, you know, there doesn't have to be any... ~~any~~ *stuff* involved, right?"

"Live together, for sure. Make it believable in public. Just until this all blows over, and he would be in the clear," Kingsley said.

"No, Harry, you wouldn't need to be sexual with him. What happens in your home is your business." Arthur's coloring darkened even more.

"But Ginny...I don't know," Harry said, thinking about his options. He couldn't let his mum's friend go to Azkaban. If this man hadn't asked Voldemort to spare his mother's life, the old ancient magic would never have worked when she'd tried to protect him all those years ago, willingly asking to sacrifice herself for her son. Even though the man had been a right prick, he deserved his freedom. Decision made, he spoke. "I'll have to talk to her." He stood. "After I go to St. Mungo's and see Snape."

Arthur nodded. "I'll see that she is at home and waits for you." He extended his hand to Harry. "I'm proud of you, son, and what you're doing for Severus. Always respected him."

"Thanks, Mr. Weasley." He looked to the Minister. "If Snape agrees, will you handle things?"

"I will," Kingsley said, deep voice unwavering. "Good luck convincing him."

For the first time, Harry smiled. "I'll make him see reason."

Severus stared at Potter blankly. "Surely you jest."

The little brat was insane if he thought he would agree to this harebrained plan. While the thought of Azkaban made him shudder, a bonding with Potter was far worse...and then the need to hold up pretenses in public?

Bondmate?

Definitely not.

"No, actually I'm not." He adjusted his glasses and then ran his fingers through his messy hair. "I don't like it either, but I don't think you deserve Azkaban, Snape. Not after all you've done."

"The Wizengamot will see the truth. My stay there would be minimal at best, and there's..."

"They're being arseholes, Snape. Trust me." The boy began to pace the room once again. "It's simple. We do this, and they wouldn't dare try anything. It would prove something to them and the public. Even if they wanted to still *do the right thing* by seeking your imprisonment, they would worry that the public would oppose."

"The public, Potter, will be thinking that I've placed you under the Imperius or, better yet, have poisoned you somehow...forcing your hand." He turned pale. "You were my student! You know what they will think!"

"I'll give them a bloody interview and feed them some rubbish! You know that I let it slip about your feelings for my mum when I went up against Riddle. Mr. Weasley said... Well, he thinks that would help make this believable."

"Yes, a heterosexual male who's lived all his life doing things for the memory of the one woman he's ever loved would easily jump into marriage with her son." He sneered. "They will see through this easily enough."

"Not after I profess how I've grown to appreciate the man you are for me and were for my mother."

"Ah, so you're trying to give me a little payback then...hoping that you can replace her, being her son." He snorted hatefully. "Trust me, you have nothing that I find appealing, and I doubt I could keep up any pretenses for the masses."

Potter took off his glasses and stepped closer. "Look at me," he whispered. "These eyes are the last things you wanted to see when you died, Snape. Nobody would care if the reason you *love* me is because of the bond you had with my mother. It's easy to fall for someone who reminds you of someone else or who is part of someone else." His cheeks reddened slightly. "They'd think it was romantic."

Severus couldn't help but to laugh. Romantic? "Bollocks."

"Trust me."

"I'll take my chances."

"I could say how I've been helping you recover and just fell for you."

"You've been doing nothing but sitting here off and on since I woke up, annoying me the entire time with your pesky apologies and attempts to show gratitude."

"I've learned how to clean your wounds on your neck, and I was told that I could be the one to do it for you at home if you wanted to leave here early."

"I shall attend to that myself, thanks."

"You can't, Snape! And, hell, I know you don't want to stay here."

The glare Severus leveled at Potter would have had anyone else running the other way. Of course the insolent brat stood his ground, chin raised defiantly. Why did this mean so much to him?

"What's in this for you, boy?" he asked coolly. "There's nothing you owe me." He made certain to drive his point home. "Nothing I did *nothing*...was for you. I still hate you, Potter. You're just like James, always was. Your eyes are the only good things about you, and even that, no matter what I wanted while thinking I'd soon be dead, is not enough to make me agree to this!"

"I don't care if you..."

"And what about your beloved? Don't you know what this would do to her? Have you the self-control to wait until *oudivorce*? Do you think she would wait for you? Maybe someone else would be interested in comforting the woman Potter threw over for his old professor."

"I will explain everything to her. Ginny's a lot stronger than you give her credit for. It won't be permanent, and people won't be behind our closed doors, will they? How will they know what goes on?"

"I told you that I hate you, Potter. Azkaban is a much more welcome fate. Get out of my sight."

The boy swallowed thickly and nodded once. He quickly backed up and placed his glasses back on his face. "All right then."

And then something terrible happened.

His throat felt as though it was closing up, and he felt something oozing down the side of his throat and into his loose hospital gown. Pounding in his ears and blurring vision made it impossible to concentrate on anything...even the sharp pain.

"Now you've done it, Snape!" Potter hissed.

Blackness overtook him.

Harry looked around the small, shabby sitting room while trying to find a light switch on the wall nearest him. "Too dark," he muttered.

"Are you a wizard or not?" Ron asked from behind him.

"*Lumos!*" Hermione said. "Honestly, Harry."

"Poor sod lives here?" Ron looked around distastefully.

"Shut it, you."

"Er, well, to each his own, right, Ron?" Hermione said with a smile.

"Just dirty, that's all. I always figured Snape to live in some stone crypt actually. Hmm, well, this sort of feels like one." Ron shivered. "Doesn't smell all that great either."

"Look, Kingsley and Arthur are bringing Snape here in a few minutes. Let's split up and try to freshen the place up," Harry said, looking around skeptically.

Hermione sighed. "You know, I don't think it will matter to him one way or the other."

"Don't start, Hermione."

"You're kidnapping him and forcing him to agree to this ridiculous bonding!" She crossed her arms over her chest. "It's wrong, and you know it."

"She's right, you know," Ron said.

"It's for his own good," Harry said for what felt like the hundredth time.

"Let the git go to Azkaban."

"Ron, stop." Hermione reached out to rub Harry's arm. "He's going to kill you for this. If you'd had a rational discussion like two grown men..."

"Tried that already, thanks," Harry said. "Now if you know some cleaning spells that I don't, would you mind letting me know?"

Ron snickered. "I read one of her Muggle books about cavemen, and this..." He dodged Hermione's elbow. "What? Just saying. Harry's the caveman, and he's clubbing Snape over the head. Ahahahaha!"

"You are such an insensitive prat!" she said. "Never mind that your sister is at home, crying her eyes out over... Oh, er, sorry, Harry..."

His heart sank. "It's how I feel, too, Hermione. I don't like this any more than she does."

"Yet, you won't put your faith in the justice system to do right by Snape. You're jumping into a bonding that will take years away from your life, from Ginny's life."

"You didn't hear what they were saying, Hermione. Kingsley said Snape didn't have a chance." Harry frowned. "Do you think he deserves even a single day in Azkaban after all he's done?"

"No," she whispered.

"In good conscience, I can't let his happen. If I have to make a sacrifice, instead of him having to make one...for once in his life...so be it." He shrugged. "He used to be special to my mum, Hermione, and look at how long he's loved her. I think... I think she would appreciate what I'm trying to do here."

Hermione pursed her lips, nodded, and left the room. A moment later, she could be heard uttering several spells.

"Nice to have her around when you're in a pinch," Ron quipped. "Never did learn much about cleanings houses. Mum and Ginny usually..." His face turned red slightly. "Er, Harry, I wouldn't be a good brother if I didn't tell you something. I mean, don't get me wrong," he held up a hand to stave off Harry's comment, "I know why you're doing this, but what if, uh, something changes, you know? Think of what that would do to Ginny. She'll be hanging on and..."

Harry started laughing. "You don't seriously think I'm going to end up fancying Snape, do you? I'm not willing to sacrifice that much of my life for him, Ron. Ginny's my future. She knows that. This will just be a little hard for us...at the moment." Harry shrugged. "Whether Snape knows it or not, he needs me. Once he's off living a life free of prison bars or people demanding things of him, he'll thank me for this."

"All right, mate. Just making sure." He grimaced. "Let's go see what else needs fixing around here." He smirked, then added, "Before your husband gets here," and quickly ran out of the room.

Harry shook his head. "Some friends I've got." He smiled slightly. "Can't believe Ron said that. Me fancying Snape." His soft laughter filled the air.

Everything was blurry. Nothing made sense. Severus blinked and looked around at the expectant faces. What the hell were Weasley and Granger doing in his home? Was Kingsley officiating something? A bonding.

Who's getting married?

He tried to think about a conversation he'd had recently with someone. Who was that? What had been said? Something niggled at the back of his mind, but he couldn't place it. Shaking his head to clear it, he tried to pay closer attention to what was being said.

"Will you agree to this, Severus? Will you bond with Potter?" Kingsley asked.

Severus turned his head to the side and focused on the person crouching next to him. The most beautiful green eyes met his, and he was lost in them. All he'd ever wanted was Lily. Being bonded to her was a dream he'd lost long ago when she'd married Potter. And now was his chance.

Yes.

He must have spoken the words aloud, for something was being shoved onto his finger while a bright yellow light flashed to seal the bonding.

"Always," he whispered, succumbing to whatever potion was in his system and enjoying the warmth of the hand holding his own.

A/N: It's completed already. I'll be posting the rest over the next week after I have time to go over each part. I hope you enjoy it.

Part 2

Chapter 2 of 11

Harry feels that the only way to keep Snape from serving an undeserving stint in Azkaban is to go through a bonding ceremony with him, thus proving that if Harry Potter has enough faith in Severus Snape to marry him, the man can't be all that bad. How long will it take before the ruse turns real?

Part Two

The dark-haired man glared at him with a ferocity Harry thought impossible, given the state Snape was in anyway.

"What have you done?" Snape hissed through clenched teeth.

"Try to stay calm. Do you want to get worked up again and cause your neck to bleed? Cause the pain to return?" He held his hands in front of him and hoped Snape would take it easy. "This is going to be temporary. No St. Mungo's. No Azkaban. I'll stay on my side of the house, and you can stay on yours."

"Get out of my house. Now!"

"Until this blows over, it's *our* house, and you won't get me to leave."

"This is illegal. I didn't agree to this."

Harry smirked upon hearing this and tossed a parchment at the irate man. "Witnesses say otherwise." He nodded to Snape's left hand. "Go ahead. Try to take it off." Harry held up his own hand and smirked. "Magic, see. Mine won't budge either."

Before he could rip the parchment in half, Severus noticed the ring, and something flashed in his mind: blurriness, Lily's eyes, someone holding his hand. Angrily, obviously aware of what had transpired, he tried to rip the offending thing from his finger, dropping the bonding certificate to the floor as he did so. "You little bastard."

When Snape started to slide his feet over the side of his bed, Harry backed away. "Please, Snape, if you won't do this for yourself, do it for my mum."

Those words stopped him. Harry could see the indecision on his face before an expressionless mask stared out at him. He took advantage of this. "I won't be in the way, and I don't expect anything in return. I just don't want you to suffer for your sacrifices any more than you already have."

Snidely, Snape said, "How touching, Potter." Then he drew in a deep breath. "Fine. For now."

Harry nodded, relief filling his body. He couldn't believe he'd got his way. Hermione would be glad to know that Snape wouldn't murder him after all. "I'll leave you alone for a while then. I've got a few things to do, and then I'll come back and change your bandages."

"Don't rush," the man replied evenly.

"What do you want to eat tonight?"

"Amazingly," he began blandly, "I've lost my appetite."

"Fish and chips it is then. I'll be home soon."

"When I said don't rush, I meant it," Snape insisted, "and I'm not bloody hungry."

"But you might be later, right? It'll be here if you are, so no harm done, okay?" Being nice to Snape was harder than he'd thought. He wanted nothing more than to let the man know how much of an insufferable git he was being about it all, but he knew it wasn't the right time for that.

"Fine. Now get out."

"Okay."

Harry backed away and frowned before leaving. Once he was alone in the sitting room, he plopped down on the threadbare couch, hearing a slight crack. "I can't believe I'm married to Severus Snape."

His eyes widened. How crazy that sounded out loud! Snape? Married? He blew out a long breath. "What the hell was I thinking?" he muttered. His thoughts then drifted to Ginny, and his heart constricted as he thought of her sad expression and teary eyes. She'd said that she understood his motives and wouldn't mind waiting for him, as she'd been waiting all her life and another year or so wouldn't hurt, especially when they'd secretly still see each other.

The first sprig of doubt took root in his mind. Had he made the right decision? When would he be able to "divorce" Snape and not raise suspicions with the Wizengamot or the public? Was this fair to Ginny? His heart was hers, and he absolutely planned to steal as many private moments with her as was allowed.

Harry sighed and stood up. He needed to get to Diagon Alley and buy a few supplies. Grimmauld Place had been hard to clean when they'd first started going there, and from the looks of it, Snape's place wouldn't be that bad, but it still lacked a lot of comforts. Hermione and Ron had been a huge help already, so there wasn't much for him to do. He wanted to make the home nice in hopes that it would improve Snape's disposition. His smile faltered as he realized that he was likely wasting his time.

Severus couldn't believe the audacity of Potter. The brat had literally kidnapped him and tricked him into a bonding ceremony while he'd been drugged. If he were able, he would have got up and tossed the little blighter out on his arse, but thanks to Nagini...he shuddered in remembrance...he wasn't as strong as he had been.

"It appears I've been mentally incapacitated as well," he muttered sourly, thinking of how easily he'd agreed to Potter's plan once Lily was mentioned.

He never could deny Lily anything in all of his life, and the boy was right. She would want this, wouldn't she? She would disapprove of the bonding, of course, but she would overlook that if it meant sacrificing a few months of time to ensure Azkaban wouldn't be waiting in the wings.

Then his mood turned even more bitter than before. *How dare they think to send me to Azkaban? Do they not know all I've done for them? That it was who saved their sorry arses?*

A sigh escaped. "That's not exactly right, now is it?" No, it was true. Potter had found a way to dispatch the Dark Lord, but he wouldn't have done that without his help. In fact, he'd come to realize that Potter would have been killed, along with his parents, all those years ago if it hadn't been for Severus' request that Lily be kept alive. She chose death when she didn't have to, sparking the old magic to protect her boy.

Oddly, a deranged part of him appreciated the fact that Potter was so bent on helping him and was finally treating him with the respect he deserved. A wicked laugh escaped him as he thought of a brooding James Potter's ghost watching the bonding ceremony of his son and his old school enemy.

"Ah, yes, not so bad at all." And it would be even better if the boy would keep his promise and remain out of his hair. He then noticed that his room had been rearranged.

"What the fuck?" he growled, taking notice of other things as well. The walls had been cleaned, lacking the layers of dust he remembered. And where the hell were his cobwebs? He'd decided to leave them years back, feeling it gave his room character. The wardrobe, desk, and small tables now gleamed in the dim light. There was even the light scent of lemon in the air. He hoped that the brat hadn't trifled with anything personal, but he was sure that his trunk remained unopened. It was warded too well. Thankfully.

Severus leaned over slightly to look at the floor. "Polished as well." He shook his head in annoyance and was about to hiss a few curses when he saw the bonding certificate on the floor. Grimacing, he reached as far as he could and was able to snatch it. After he settled back against his pillows, he looked at it thoughtfully.

Certificate of Bonding

Harry James Potter and Severus Tobias Snape

Were officially joined together by Kingsley Shacklebolt, Minister of Magic

On June 12, 1998

At six o'clock in the evening

At the very last house on Spinner's End

Northern England

~~Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame.~~

--Song of Solomon, Chapter 8:6

Witnesses of Union

Hermione Granger

Ronald Weasley

Arthur Weasley

Kingsley Shacklebolt, Minister for Magic

He felt a jolt pass through his body and felt his pulse quicken. It was official. He was the husband of Harry Potter. Curbing the instinctual desire to crumple the parchment, he carefully placed it under his pillow and tried to sleep in order to escape the niggling feeling that he should be a lot angrier than he actually was.

In his dreams, Lily came to him, smiling beatifically, green eyes sparkling mischievously. And then her face changed slightly, losing its soft roundness and taking on sharper angles. Her lovely red hair shortened and darkened, the smile fading to a wry smirk.

Had it only been two days since he'd moved to Spinner's End with Snape? It felt like longer, though he knew that was partly due to the fact that he had barely been sleeping, which melded the hours together and made them feel much longer than they were. He hated to wake his sleeping housemate, not knowing what to expect. They hadn't been getting along as horribly as Harry had feared, but the man was still a force to be reckoned with.

The scent of sweat wafted to his nose, and he took in Snape's greasy locks, wishing he'd been able to wash the buggers when he'd talked Snape into letting him give him a bath...if one could call it a bath! All he'd been allowed to do was bring a pail of warm, soapy water in and pass a sponge along the man's body. They'd both been embarrassed by it, and Harry had honestly tried not to look at what he'd been doing. However, when his hand had travelled too far up Snape's thigh and he'd heard the sharp intake of breath, his eyes had been drawn directly to Snape's crotch, his erection showing through the thin underpants. Neither had said anything, Harry looking away quickly, Snape growling for him to 'finish the job.'

He'd been relieved when Snape had announced the next day that he felt strong enough to clean his own body. Harry knew that the erection had been purely a physical reaction and that it didn't mean anything, attraction-wise, so he wondered how long it had been since Snape had had a good shag. Had he ever had one? It was possible that the man hadn't, not if he'd been living his life under the shadow of his precious Lily. *Poor Snape*, he thought, wondering if he would remain as loyal to Ginny if something happened to her.

It was best not to think such dreadful things. With a sigh, Harry looked down at Snape's sleeping face and whispered, "Snape? Awake?"

"I am now," came the annoyed reply.

"Sorry, it's just that I have to change your bandages."

Snape said nothing and simply turned his head to grant access to his wounds. Harry went to work immediately and gently peeled away the soiled bandages. The horrible wounds on Snape's neck never failed to horrify Harry. He'd been bitten by Nagini in the past as well, but she had only been trying to hold him then...not kill him as she'd been hoping to do with Snape.

If Snape hadn't dosed himself with enough antivenin over time to help counter her poison, he would have been lost. It was surprising enough that he hadn't bled to death. Luckily, the man's robes had a hidden pocket that carried a few phials filled with helpful potions...Blood-Replenishing Potion being one of them. If Lucius Malfoy hadn't gone back to check on him, Snape probably would have died.

Which would have been my fault. I thought he'd died, Harry thought uneasily.

"Get on with it, Potter. Stop gawping at me like a fool."

"Sorry."

It seemed all he'd been doing for the past couple of days was apologizing. And not only to Snape... everyone, it seemed.

The bite wounds on Snape's neck had to heal from within, so it couldn't be closed magically, or with Muggle stitches, as St. Mungo's had found out through Arthur Weasley's attack years back. Taking the bottle of cleaning solution, Harry used a syringe to squirt it along the deep rips in rigid flesh and gently parted it to get some inside, causing Snape to hiss.

"All right?"

"It's cold."

Harry had to bite his lip to keep from apologizing again. Instead, he placed the syringe and solution aside and snatched up the tube of dittany-laced anti-biotoxic crème, ironically made by Snape months earlier, and began to squeeze out a small portion to rub on the wounds. Once done with that, he used his wand to summon the packing cloth and lubricated it so that it would slide inside the wounds easily.

This part had been the hardest for Harry, as he needed patience and a steady hand to ease it into the wounds without making Snape uncomfortable or causing him pain. "Here we go," he warned, using a small q-tip to guide the saturated cloth inside. "Brilliant. I didn't have to push as far in this time. Looks like it's healing up quicker than expected."

"And the bleeding?"

"Nothing really. Just a little reddish liquid when I flushed it. No clumps even."

"That is good then."

Without saying anything, Harry finished packing the wound and placed a fresh bandage over the area to keep it clean. He smiled at his handiwork and realized that Snape had turned to gaze at him.

"Er... want to go to the loo?"

"I can walk on my own," Snape said, sneering slightly.

"Oh, okay, so the potion isn't making that too hard on you then?"

"Of course not. It's helped. All traces of the venom that was restricting muscle movements have been removed."

"I'll get lunch ready then."

"Potter..."

"Yes?"

"I'll come down to eat."

This surprised Harry. Snape hadn't left his room except to be guided to the toilet. "Sure. You'll want to read the *Prophet*, too," he said with a snort. "We've made the front page."

"Joy," Snape replied sarcastically, groaning only minutely when he stood. "Ah, no vertigo. Excellent."

Harry watched and followed as Snape slowly made his way to the bathroom. Once he was inside, he sprinted downstairs to fix sandwiches, crisps, and butterbeer.

Severus chewed his food as he read the article about his marriage to Potter and nearly spit out a chunk of beef as he saw one of Skeeter's comments.

"Potter and Snape make a dashing couple, and even though Snape's initial affections were probably based on some loyalty to his long dead lover, Lily Evans Potter, it is easy to imagine the passion he now obviously feels for Harry," he read aloud.

"I know," Harry said, snickering. "Like she's seen us together or something."

"Nasty harpy," Severus commented. "I don't appreciate this one bit. I shall have to owl her soon and give her a piece of my mind."

Harry shook his head. "I wouldn't bother. It's no big deal."

"Not a big deal, is it? I don't care for this whatsoever!" Anger bubbled up and spilled over. "You think this is a joke? Tell me, Potter. Does it make you feel good about yourself to be chained here," he gestured around the small kitchen, "in this dunghill with *me* for Merlin knows how fucking long? You've already got an Order of Merlin, First Class. Must you strive for another?"

The bitterness dripped from each word. He just wanted to be left alone. Hadn't he done enough to warrant that much?

"I don't care about recognition, Snape," Potter said, equally as cool. "It's just the right thing to do for you. That's all." He tossed his half-eaten sandwich down. "Stop trying to find a motive in everything and just accept that maybe someone is trying to do something nice for you because they..."

"*Care?*" Severus prompted snidely when Potter's words trailed away.

"I mean, that's not the word I would have used before, but yeah, I guess I do..."

"Spare me," he bit out.

"Fine, arsehole." Potter stood and briskly left the room without another word. Moments later, the front door slammed loudly.

Severus felt guilty for only a moment and then smiled. "Ah, alone at last. Maybe the brat won't return."

His eyes found the article again. The words he read made his gasp and gave him pause.

And it was apparent in Harry Potter's public statement at the Ministry two days ago about his feelings for Severus Snape. He claimed that when he'd asked Snape to be his bondmate, he knew he was making the best decision in his life, as no other person could complete his life the way the former Hogwarts Headmaster could. He then spoke words about respect, admiration, and latent feelings that emerged when he thought the man would die, but it was his eyes more than anything, readers, that convinced me of his devotion to Snape, who is actually a hero and has been working against Voldemort nearly all of his adult life.

"Well..." he mumbled, unable to think of anything else to say.

In his wildest dreams, he'd never thought he'd get married. Oh, he'd fantasized that Lily hadn't truly died and that he and she had married, as he'd always wanted. He'd dreamed of looking into her lovely eyes while sliding into her warm, waiting body and making her his own. He'd even imagined her holding a bundle wrapped in pink and declaring that they could name the girl after his mother, who'd been the only other person to ever truly care about him in his life.

He blinked away the moistness in his eyes. The closest he would ever be to marrying Lily was where he was at the moment, for her nearly eighteen-year-old son was now his spouse. *Strange the way things work out, isn't it?* he mused. And then he was horrified at the turn his thoughts took, for it wasn't Lily's face that his mind conjured as he thought of sliding into her heat. It was Harry's.

"Good Lord," he barked, appalled. Not once in all his years had he ever thought of another male in such a fashion. He'd never thought of many other women in such a way either. "Maybe I should make a call to Rosmerta," he said aloud, hoping a shag would clear his mind. Embittered laughter rent the silent room, for he doubted he would be up to shagging anyone in his condition. All the medicine in his system was making his body react strangely lately. Yes, he'd definitely have to wait until all was right again.

He realized that even then, he couldn't seek release with anyone. "Fuck!" If it somehow got out to the public, they would see his actions as cheating on his adoring husband.

Part 3

Chapter 3 of 11

Harry feels that the only way to keep Snape from serving an undeserving stint in Azkaban is to go through a bonding ceremony with him, thus proving that if Harry Potter has enough faith in Severus Snape to marry him, the man can't be all that bad. How long will it take before the ruse turns real?

Part Three

Days passed, and suddenly Harry was at the end of his first week of marriage. Each day had been filled with owls from all over the country...even farther than that. Some

really nasty things had been said about Snape in a few letters, but he'd not told the man, not wanting to make things worse. Surprisingly, a good portion of them weren't exactly angry that he'd married Severus Snape, just that he'd been married at all. And of course there had been Howlers from several witches saying as much. Snape had snickered about that and took glee in the fact that hundreds of single, young hopefuls had had their dreams dashed with the announcement.

What interested him the most was how open-minded the Wizarding world was with same sexes marrying. He knew that the Muggle world wasn't as accepting, especially people like his aunt and uncle. This caused him to smirk. He ought to send them a copy of his marriage announcement. It wasn't as though he'd ever visit them again, and he could feel smug knowing that Uncle Vernon's face had turned purple in anger, his veins threatening to pop out as he hissed obscenities.

"Just what do you find so funny, Potter?" Snape asked from across the room.

"Oh, talking to me now, are you?" he asked cheekily. Harry had taken to pointing out each time his housemate began conversation. He'd had enough of the snide remarks about his chattering, and Snape had claimed that he never initiated anything between them and that Harry was bothering him, which he'd promised not to from the beginning. "Thought you didn't want to disrupt your blessed silence?" he taunted.

"Several phrases come to mind, Potter," Snape replied abruptly and turned away, back to his reading.

"Oh?"

Silence.

"Oi, you can't do that," Harry huffed. "Can't just say something and then turn away. You've got to finish it." From Snape's profile, he could see an eyebrow arch just before the man spoke.

"Children should be seen, not heard."

"That's rubbish."

Snape looked at him. "I rather like the next one and feel it best suits our situation."

"I'm not sure I want to hear it, thanks," he said, deciding to take a page out of Snape's book by pretending to turn away and ignore him.

"Indeed? Very well."

A long minute passed and Harry could take no more. "I give. What is it?"

"Do not speak unless spoken to."

"Arsehole," Harry said good naturedly, noticing Snape's tight smile.

"So, in the spirit of being spoken to, Potter, what was so funny?"

"Well, I imagined my aunt's and uncle's expressions if I owled them a copy of the *Prophet*, the one that announced our wedding."

"My kidnapping and forced bonding you mean."

"If you must call it that," Harry said with a broad grin. "Is it really that bad?" he asked when Snape remained silent.

"You don't want to know the answer to that, Potter."

Harry simply nodded, not wanting to bother Snape any longer, seeing that he'd become irate. "These are addressed to you," he said, tossing a stack of parchments towards the man. "They came today."

"I told you yesterday and the day before and the day before that," he said through clenched teeth, "that I don't care to read them."

"Well, I'm not reading anything addressed to you, and I refuse to throw them into the dustbin. If you don't want them *you* are going to do it," he snapped in annoyance.

A tapping on the window cut into Snape's reply. Another owl had found its way to them, but this time Harry sighed in resignation. A Howler was attached to its leg and was twitching wildly in anticipation.

"Might as well get it over with, boy," Snape said.

Harry flicked his wand to open the window and frowned as the owl circled and tossed the Howler in Snape's lap. Usually, they'd been addressed to him instead.

An angry screech rent the air.

Severus Snape! What have ye done to little Harry Potter? Ye Death Eater scum! How long's this been going on? Were ye preyin' on the boy through his years at Hogwarts? Poor sod's probably afraid ter ask anyone fer help. I can't believe the Ministry were stupid enough ter let this happen. Right suspicious, that is! Watch yer back, wanker!

Harry let out a deep breath when the red envelope burst into flames. He knew from Snape's face that the Howler had hit a chord, so he tried to defuse the situation. "Don't listen to that rubbish. We know better..."

"So..." he hissed. "I've finally reached a new level of lowness." His sneer deepened as sarcasm dripped from his voice. "At last, I can add pedophilia to my outstanding resume. Yes, my life's goals are now complete."

"Snape, don't be so melodramatic."

"How can I not be?" the man yelled suddenly, rising and moving forward as though struck by lightning.

"One person, Snape, and by the sound of it, he had too many pints."

"I've got hundreds of letters! They're probably all like this!" He pointed to the ashes behind him.

"Never in my life did I think you actually cared what people thought of you! I mean look at you! You never wash your hair, you rarely change clothes...underclothes anyway...and you could do with owning a toothbrush."

"Are you finished?" hissed Snape.

"In fact," Harry said, having enough, "I am." He stood and shook his head in annoyance. "You're not the only one who's got it hard here, Snape. If you'd stop to consider that and get your head out of your own arse, you'd realize that."

Harry left quickly, ignoring the barked reply. Ginny was what he needed. "Fuck him," he muttered as he opened the front door. What did he care if someone caught him with her alone? This was a bit more than he had bargained for after all.

As quickly as he could, Severus made his way up to his room, carrying the stack of letters that Potter had given him. He was going to go through each one, as well as those he'd already received, and he would find out exactly what people thought about him. If people were as accepting as Potter made out, then why continue with their ridiculous ruse? Surely the Wizengamot wouldn't go against them now?

He began opening letters once he settled into his bed.

Snape,

You should be ashamed of yourself. How could you go and seduce that boy? He's got his whole life ahead of him, and he's already married off.

A concerned woman

"Thank you, concerned bitch," he muttered and crumpled the parchment, tossing it to his right. A pink parchment caught his attention.

Oooh, Death Eaters are so hot! If you get tired of Potter, let me know.

Ayasha

His eyebrow arched as a waft of perfume flitted up to his nose. "Interesting," he said, tossing the parchment to his left. Then he opened another.

How could Harry Potter fall in love with the man who killed Albus Dumbledore? That's two great wizards you've ruined, Snape. I hope they toss you into Azkaban anyway.

"What? No return address?" he muttered darkly, tossing it down to the right with the other rude letter. His mood darkened with each letter he read, not that they were all negative, but he hated that they felt they could intrude on his personal life in such a way. What gave them the right to do so?

As he opened a light green parchment, his fingers began to burn painfully. "Shite!" Only one word was written *Enjoy!* The sender had laced the page with bubotuber pus. "Perfect," he growled, hoping Potter was having a terrible time wherever he'd gone off to.

After he medicated his fingers, he thought about what Potter had said earlier. Gazing into his bathroom mirror, he tried to see himself as others saw him. It was true, wasn't it? He'd never cared much about his appearance, only his studies and, later, his duties. Why should he start caring what people thought of him now? No student had ever given him a single lecherous thought. *People will think what they will anyway, yes? Maybe I should lighten up a little.*

Feeling a small weight lifting from his shoulders, he slid the shower curtain back and stepped into the bathtub. A hair washing and body scrubbing was in order. Instead of using his usual potion, he opted for a squirt of Potter's shampoo and took extra care to lather his body thoroughly. What he hadn't expected when done was to feel better about himself. There was something to be said for cleaning oneself the manual way, leaving magic and quick wash ups a thing in the past.

And, he decided, it wouldn't hurt to actually use his toothbrush. Potter had been right about that. He'd always assumed that using his wand was just as healthy, but a wand didn't actually scrub like a toothbrush. "Interesting," he said when finished, moving his tongue along his teeth slowly.

He retrieved his dressing gown and a fresh pair of underpants and padded back to his bedroom. The evening's events had taken a toll on him, and he wanted nothing more than to relax in bed and read until sleep claimed him.

"Ah, to get rid of this rubbish," he said lightly, flicking his wand at the letters he'd read earlier. Deep down, he was satisfied that the pile he'd accumulated on his left was larger than the pile on the right, which held each negative owl he'd received. He floated them to the dustbin, retrieved his book from his bedside table, and slid beneath the duvet.

Severus only made it through three pages when he heard Potter thumping up the stairs. He didn't have to wonder if the boy would go directly to his room, for he suddenly stood in his doorway. The small amount of guilt he'd felt earlier bounded back to him when he took in the boy's appearance.

"All right, Potter?" he asked.

"M fine," he said, slurring slightly. A few unsteady steps carried him forward.

"What are you doing?" Severus asked, dodging Potter's fingers as they reached out for him.

"Don't worry," Harry said snidely, green eyes blazing. "Your virtue is safe with me, Snape. I've had my fill already." His fingers found Severus' throat and, more gently than Severus thought possible in Potter's current intoxicated state, peeled away the bandage. "Look at that," Potter said in drunken amazement. "It's nearly done with now. Soon you won't have to suffer my touch."

"Good," Severus muttered, closing his eyes as Potter's warm, soft fingers carefully worked to clean and treat his wound. He could smell the whiskey on Potter's breath, as it shot out against his cheek in hot spurts. It was over in a matter of minutes, and Potter left without another word, slightly stumbling towards the doorway to find his room across the hall.

His book no longer interesting, he closed it and placed it beside him on the bed, whispering, *Nox,* as he did so. Many thoughts flitted through his mind at once: *Potter had sex with someone tonight. Surely it must be Ginevra.* He supposed this meant his previous wishes that Potter would have a miserable night remained unsatisfied. *His eyes, though a little unfocused, looked more like Lily's than ever. There was something in the way he gazed at me.* Severus felt a small tingling sensation in his abdomen and dared not examine its origin.

If he looked at it too closely, he knew he might not like what he might learn. He rolled over and prayed that he could dream of Lily, as he'd done most nights of his life. But he needed her now more than ever.

Small visions flittered through his mind as he thought of making love to Lily. Would it have been everything he'd ever dreamed of? *Potter!* he thought bitterly. *Why did it have to be Potter?* Instead of seeing himself gently easing into Lily, he saw James doing it and heard James whispering words of love...the words Severus had wanted to tell her. And then his mental picture changed. Lily's red locks shortened as she became Ginny Weasley, and James morphed into Harry.

His imagination jumped into high gear as Potter took the moaning girl roughly, his arms curled around her thighs as he lifted her up slightly so that each thrust slid home as deeply as possible, jaw clenched and sweat forming at his hairline. Smoldering green eyes met black.

"Let me fuck you, Severus," the apparition said.

Jolted awake suddenly, Severus wildly gazed around his dark room, heart pounding. *I am alone.* Relief? "Where the hell did that come from?" he asked the darkness as if it would know the answer.

Then he figured it out for himself. Potter had gone and made love to his hush-hush girlfriend and had been able to relieve himself of the stress, worry, and disgust of their situation. Severus yearned to do the same with a lover, but he dared not to venture out, lest he be caught.

"I'm jealous," he said with a nod. *Yes, that's it. Just the other day I would have loved to pay Rosmerta a call of this nature, and here's the little arsehole stealing my idea.*

He'd better hope nobody saw him, else he'll have me to deal with!

A smirk curved his lips as he thought of what James Potter would say if his only son said such a thing. What he wouldn't give to make the man feel the same helplessness he'd felt when he watched his enemy lure in the one he'd loved, seeing him take what he shouldn't.

AN: More up tomorrow! :)

Part 4

Chapter 4 of 11

Harry feels that the only way to keep Snape from serving an undeserving stint in Azkaban is to go through a bonding ceremony with him, thus proving that if Harry Potter has enough faith in Severus Snape to marry him, the man can't be all that bad. How long will it take before the ruse turns real?

Part Four

Harry wasn't sure how much more he could take of Snape's cold shoulder. For the past few days, the man had been very quiet, not making any small talk whatsoever...not that there was much before but certainly more than the glares and grunts. While they hadn't become friends, they had made some progress, but now, they'd taken a few steps back.

"Brilliant," Harry muttered scornfully.

Although Snape was across the room, lost in a book, he ignored Harry. At least before when Harry would make some off-the-wall comment, the man would try to find out its meaning.

Silence.

"Lovely day, isn't it?" he said loudly. When stillness again met him, he replied to himself, saying, "Why, yes, Potter, it certainly is."

The man said nothing.

"Are you still alive, Snape? I don't think a book about a slug's lungs, or whatever weird shite you're reading, is keeping you that fascinated."

Snape looked up and curled his nose in disdain before shaking his head and returning to his reading. It was obvious that Harry was getting to him.

So he pushed on. "What's got your wand in a knot lately? Still on about that bloody Howler? Is that it?"

Nothing.

"WILL YOU ANSWER ME?"

Placing a bookmark on his page before he closed his book, Snape quietly said, "I'd appreciate it if you'd leave me alone, Potter. I don't want to talk to you. I don't like you. I hate living here with you. You agreed to give me peace when you forced your way into my life. Are you reneging?"

"I'd leave you alone if you'd just talk to me," Harry replied, sitting forward, elbows on his knees. "I need *some* conversation, but ever since you heard that berk's Howler, you won't even do that. I thought we were getting on fine enough." He growled in frustration. "That git is going to think what he wants anyway. *We* know nothing like that has ever happened," he snorted, "and that it never will, so I don't get what this is about."

"It's complicated," Snape allowed. "Let's just leave it at that."

"I've learnt lots of things over the years. I'm sure what you have to say won't be too much for me to handle." Harry was surprised that Snape honestly seemed uncomfortable and felt suddenly guilty. "I'm out of line. I apologize. You don't have to answer that."

He sat back and reached for the glass of whiskey he'd poured for himself a few minutes before, knowing it would help soothe him. Before the tumbler reached his lips, Snape spoke.

"You've been drinking a lot lately."

Harry looked over at his housemate. "What?"

"You heard me, Potter."

"One or two glasses every other night aren't much, Snape." He smirked. "Why, I didn't know you cared."

The man shrugged. "I don't, not really, but what would your adoring fans say?"

"They'd say, 'Brilliant, come round the pub with us, mate.'"

"Everything's a game with you, isn't it?"

"A *game*?" Harry gestured around the small room. "Look at where I am, Snape. Look at what I'm giving up to be here... to help *you*, and you don't even appreciate it. Not one bit." He shrugged his shoulders and placed the glass on the rickety table in front of him. "I'm making a big sacrifice, too, you know!"

"This is very hard for me."

The words were so softly uttered Harry nearly thought he'd imagined them. His eyes found Snape's an instant later, and he saw that the man's expression was unlike he'd ever seen it...in person anyway. He'd seen Snape in pain via memories, but they'd always seemed surreal. This was different. Knowing that speaking would break the

ceasefire, Harry remained silent.

"I loved your mother so much," he whispered. "My mum and dad were always arguing about something, so I took refuge in hiding away in secret places...the attic, this room, a copse of trees near the park down the way, down by the river, and even in the mill.

"Your mum attracted me right away. Her smile was simply carefree. From the first moment I saw it, it gave me hope. I knew that not everything was dark and dingy or ugly. Things could be colorful and beautiful and happy. I had to befriend her, even if her horrid sister was always about.

"And I did one day," he said, sounding proud. "You saw the day I told her she was a witch. I gave that to you."

Harry nodded. "Yeah. I wish I could have known her. Even at that age, she seemed so..."

Snape nodded this time. "I strove to better myself, wanting to do good things with my life for her, and I knew that I could do anything with a friend such as Lily in my life. She was always supportive, never judgmental, and genuinely cared for me." He stood and strode over to the window, peeling back the thick curtain for a look out into the gloomy evening.

"Lily," he continued, "was all I ever wanted as I grew old enough to know what men need, and I don't mean sex. I wanted her to be my partner, my equal, my wife and lover, my everything." A sigh escaped his lips. "That was easier said than done. While her feelings for me did develop, I made bad choices and ultimately ruined any chance I could have had with her."

"I remember that."

"It wasn't only that, though that is definitely my worst memory." A hand lifted, and his fingers gently brushed the protective gauze on his throat. "Well, not now, of course, but for years. After she died, I thought I could make up for everything, thought I could live for what might have been and help you live because it's what she would have wanted."

"And I never appreciated it," Harry said sourly. "I do now."

"Don't get sentimental, Potter. I didn't do it for you." He spun around to face Harry. "You see, I hated that she chose you over life. For a long time I blamed you, hated you for that. He would have let her live. Don't you see?"

"She still wouldn't have been yours, Snape," Harry said firmly. "I don't think she would have just forgot her family that quickly and gone off to play house with you."

Snape winced. "I know that, but it doesn't stop the mind from wondering, does it? From having fantasies."

Shaking his head, Harry rose and walked over to where Snape stood and noticed for the first time that he was able to look the man directly in the eyes without so much as tilting his head. Had he grown so much over the last couple of years? He was glad for his height in that moment. It made him feel like the adult he was and made him feel like Snape's equal.

"I understand your feelings," he said. "I would have felt the same way if it were me, Snape." He blinked and looked away. "If I felt that way for someone as you did for my mum."

"Don't you?" Snape asked, stepping closer. "Just the other night you went to Ginevra, whom you proclaim to love."

"I *do* love her. I just..." He nodded. "You're right. I don't know what I was..."

"Explore that for a moment. What were you thinking just then?"

Since Snape seemed interested, Harry quietly said, "It seemed different."

It was Snape's turn to blink. "I see."

Harry laughed nervously. "This isn't about me. What did you do with yourself after my mum died? Are you a... er... virgin?"

Snape's lips twitched violently, and his head tilted back suddenly, his shoulders shaking with rich, deep laughter. His Adam's apple moved against his throat in his mirth, and when he gazed at Harry again, his black eyes gleamed with amusement.

"Of course not."

Blushing, Harry said, "Oh, right. I just thought that since you seemed to still, you know, love her that maybe you hadn't." Something dawned on him. "Hang on! Voldemort as much as told me that you'd moved on. He said that you'd realized there were other women for you, women with purer blood."

"There were other women, yes." He flashed what Harry perceived as a smug smile. "And for the last few years before this happened," he pointed to his neck, "there was a witch in Hogsmeade I could call upon for a few hours of passion if needed."

"Sorry. Just never imagined you, er... having a shag before." He caught the light splotches of red on Snape's cheeks and wondered why the man would blush. "You being my professor and all that."

"Oh, come now. Have you never speculated about any of your professors' sex lives before?"

They walked to the couch together and sat down comfortably, facing each other. "I have, I guess," Harry admitted with a sly grin.

"Who?" Severus asked.

"Hooch."

"Rolanda? Why her?"

"Well, I thought she might be the rough sort. She'd probably have the bloke tied to a Quidditch hoop tossing Bludgers at him." He shuddered. "I don't mind letting Ginny have her way with me, but I don't think I'd ever put up with that. I expect I rather like being the one who's doing the...bloody hell, did I just tell you that?"

Snape snickered lightly and waved away his words. "You did." An elegant eyebrow arched. "I always took you for the submissive sort I'm afraid."

"You've thought about *me* that way?" Harry asked incredulously.

"What? No! I didn't mean that the way it sounded." Snape was obviously flustered. "What I mean to say, Potter, is that... Say, did you not know that Rolanda has a female lover?"

"No! Anyone at Hogwarts?"

"Grubbly-Plank actually."

"I thought she was married."

"Widow."

"Wow! I hadn't thought of that."

That Snape had evaded his question hadn't slipped Harry's notice, but he wouldn't point it out. Instead, he decided to give a quiet confession of his own. "I lied before... when I said that I'd never thought about you doing the deed."

"Is that right?"

"I have." Harry shrugged. "Hang on! Does this mean we're talking again then? No more silent treatment? No more brooding over that wanker's Howler?"

Snape nodded and extended a hand. "I think we should stop this nonsense and make the best of the situation."

Harry grasped Snape's proffered hand firmly and shook it, realizing how warm and clammy the man's pale hands were. *Poor sod's probably exhausted and needing his bed.*

"I'm glad, and I'll try to respect your privacy." Noticing he still held Snape's hand, he released it abruptly and said, "Guess we should go on up to bed then." His eyes widened, and he blurted, "Separately of course."

Sneering, Snape said, "Perhaps you should drink that firewhiskey after all."

"How's the throat tonight? Any itching?"

"Not much."

"Let's see then," Harry said, scooting closer. With practiced fingers, he peeled away the bandage and studied the healing wound. He plucked away the tiny scrap of cloth packed into one of the slashes. "You won't need me to pack that anymore. It's about as good as the other. Now's just the time for the final healing." He smiled. "You'll be able to apply the salve yourself from here on out."

Strangely, to lose such an important responsibility disappointed Harry. His fingers lightly caressed the raised, bumpy flesh. Even after they had to cut out the parts that the venom destroyed, the skin had come back and would one day just be small, faded scars.

"Speaking of scars..." Snape began. A pale hand lifted and brushed away Harry's fringe so that his lightning bolt-shaped scar showed. Snape's index finger traced it slowly.

Harry's face inched closer to Snape's, and he was certain the man's face had moved forward as well, for their lips were only inches apart, their quickened breaths mingling. He couldn't bring himself to pull back, and his eyes, which had locked with Snape's, refused to lower.

Closer.

Snape never had finished the tale he'd started, had he? What had been the point of it before they'd gone off track?

Closer still. If he just tilted his head a little to the side, he'd be able to get where he needed...

Tap, tap, tap.

Both men jumped apart guiltily. Harry recovered first while Snape simply stared at him in disbelief. "What the hell's that?" he said, leaving the couch and heading to the window they'd both been standing at only minutes before. "A bloody owl."

"Weasley's owl," Snape said, finding his voice once Pigwidgeon flew in.

"Come here, idiot," Harry said, trying to snatch the letter from the owl's leg.

Instead, Pig landed on Snape's outstretched arm and allowed him to retrieve it. "Here you are, Potter."

"Thanks."

Harry frowned as he noticed Ginny's loopy longhand writing. *Did that just happen? Was I about to kiss Snape?* He'd have to examine those thoughts later. "It's from Gin," he said aloud and unrolled the parchment further.

Harry,

We need to talk. Now. Try to get away. I'll be out by the stream in ten minutes. Alone.

Ginny

"She wants me to go..." His words cut off abruptly when he noticed that Snape had slipped from the room. *Damn.* Swallowing thickly, he fetched a quill to reply that he'd be there.

Severus paced the floor in his room until he heard a plank of wood starting to creak. He'd been about to kiss Harry Potter! How the hell had that happened anyway? He'd resolved to keep the brat at arm's length to make certain he'd not have any more strange thoughts or dreams, and then they'd ended up talking about sex and had nearly kissed.

What he couldn't believe was that Potter had been the one to initiate it.

"Right?" he wondered aloud. "Yes," he confirmed with a nod as he remembered the fingers caressing his neck, the burning look of need in his green eyes.

Confusion settled over him like a blanket. He'd never been attracted to any man in all his years, yet he knew without a doubt, now anyway, that he thought of Harry differently.

But I hate Potter! Why him? Why now? He fumed. *How could hate develop into this shite?* Hate was a very strong word, wasn't it? His feelings for his young husband were definitely not loathing, not now.

"Oh, my God," he said, horrified. "I've gone and done it now."

He'd thought of Harry as his husband, not as the brat or even as Potter. "It's being in such close proximity with him all this time. He was a right pest at St. Mungo's and now this. Married for a month! It's misguided appreciation for the care he's been giving me, for keeping me out of Azkaban, and for pretending he cares."

He does care, a voice said. He told you as much, remember?

But Harry was involved with Ginevra, still in a relationship that was quite deep. The girl had loved Harry for years and had bided her time patiently, waiting for her chance to have him, and though Harry had left her for a long time, everyone knew that the pair would marry and have a family one day.

How could they deal with this without causing hurt feelings on either side? And deal with what exactly? While he didn't hate Harry, he knew that he didn't love him. Love was an equally strong word. His feelings bordered on the baser side of things...affection, appreciation and, dare he admit, lust?

"It's simple. Nothing has to change. We'll continue this farce as long as it takes, we'll get along amicably while we're here, and then when the time is right, we'll announce that we'd be better off going our separate ways."

Severus hoped it would be that simple. The worst part of this was the awareness that those beautiful eyes, his favorite shade of green, were no longer what he'd always considered Lily's eyes.

They were now Harry's eyes, and oddly enough, he didn't care that they were framed in glasses much like the style James Potter had worn when he'd lived. Panic gripped him viciously in that instant, for he couldn't conjure his beloved's face. It was only Harry's that he saw.

"FUCK!" he roared.

Something would have to give. In a few days when he was completely back in top form, he decided that a few drinks at the Three Broomsticks were in order. Rosmerta could remind him of what he'd been missing all those years...could take away this strange attraction to his Lily's son.

AN: Thanks go to blue_paris and soul bound for reading this for me!

Part 5

Chapter 5 of 11

Harry feels that the only way to keep Snape from serving an undeserving stint in Azkaban is to go through a bonding ceremony with him, thus proving that if Harry Potter has enough faith in Severus Snape to marry him, the man can't be all that bad. How long will it take before the ruse turns real?

Part Five

Harry had smelled of perfume when he'd returned home the night before. Severus had noticed the scent straightaway, as it was the cloying type that tried to incapacitate those around the wearer. So Ginny had owed Harry and requested that he meet her for a tryst, Severus surmised. He knew it was unreasonable to feel any anger about that, but he did feel a little annoyance.

They'd nearly shared an intimate moment, and if the owl hadn't appeared at that moment, they would have. And what had happened next? Harry had fled to his lover's arms. Had he not felt strange about that? Or was it that the almost-kiss meant nothing to him, just something that had almost happened but hadn't? "Or," Severus grumbled, "I'm the only one being ridiculous and reading more into it than what there actually is."

Severus retrieved a teacup from the cupboard for himself and for Harry, knowing it wouldn't be long before he was joined for breakfast. He'd already decided the course of conversation he'd have with Harry, as he wanted to put space between them without it straining their newfound friendship.

The shuffling of feet and loud yawning alerted him to Harry's presence. "Morning," his housemate mumbled as he tried to pat down his messy hair.

"Where are your glasses?" Severus asked.

"Ah, broke them last night and haven't fixed them yet," was the sleepy reply. "Bloody tired this morning. Oh, thanks," he said as he accepted a steaming cup from Severus.

"You're welcome." There was silence until Severus spoke again. "When are you going to do something productive?"

"Such as?"

"Work, perhaps?"

"I'd originally planned a few months off before I started my Auror training anyway."

"Why do I sense a 'but' in there?"

"Because," Harry said after sipping his tea, "why would I want to work for the Ministry when they were being so unfair about you?"

Severus hadn't expected this. He'd simply thought that Harry was being lazy and never dreamed that ~~he~~ was the reason behind the boy's lack of employment. It humbled him slightly. "You don't have to put off your career because of me."

"It's not just that. My whole life I've seen people getting pushed around by others, have been pushed around by others. It's time for a change, Severus. I can't be a part of the Ministry until there truly is change." He took a deep drink from his cup before continuing. "Oh, sure, they're trying to do right by us now, and yeah, they are getting to the bottom of the corruption there, but what about you? They weren't even going to give you a fair trial just to save face."

With each word Harry spoke, Severus began to feel something tugging at him. "You've changed," he pointed out.

"So have you."

"Perhaps," he allowed.

"No, it's true. You're really not the person I thought you were."

"Harry, why? Why are you really doing this?" Unconsciously, they'd both leaned closer while talking. Severus sat back when he noticed this, not wanting anything to happen...not that it would, but just in case.

"You're so much more than the bitter, cruel man I thought you to be. I can't explain it exactly, and I know that when you gave those memories to me, it made things clear. It was like pieces of a puzzle fit together." Harry smiled. "You knew my mum better than anyone else I know, and she knew you as you truly are and..."

"So you are using me to find out more about your mother?"

"NO! That's not what I mean."

"What then?"

"I think that maybe I'm finally seeing you the way she saw you." His green eyes lowered. "And I like it. I want to know you better."

This had gone far enough. "About last night..."

"Don't," Harry said, holding up his hand to stop him. "That was my fault."

"How so? I believe we both..."

"And I told her when I went that she can't just call on me like that, you know? We've got to keep up appearances, or else you'll never be free."

What the hell is he on about? Is he not talking our 'almost kiss'? Severus felt foolish suddenly. It was obvious that Harry hadn't given it another thought. In fact, had he imagined it?

"I have someone I'd like to see as well, but you don't see me traipsing about," Severus snapped.

"I'll be more careful," Harry said quietly. "Who is it?" he asked a moment later. "The one you see sometimes. You'd said she lives in Hogsmeade."

"That's none of your concern, now is it?"

Harry nodded. "You're right." He downed the rest of his tea with a slight grimace and said, "I told Hermione I'd go round today and help over at Grimmauld Place. Looks like the Doxies are trying to move back into the drawing room draperies."

"Fine, fine," Severus said, waving him away.

Long after he left Spinner's End, Harry still felt as though he'd once again disappointed Severus. He supposed he had been selfish, doing mostly as he pleased...sneaking off a few times to see Ginny, leaving the house to run errands, and doing as he pleased inside the house while home. Severus hadn't left once since they'd brought him home from St. Mungo's.

The scroll of parchment Hermione had handed him earlier suddenly felt very heavy in his pocket. He'd have to insist that Severus accompany him...even though the gathering was to be held at the Ministry. It would do the man some good to get out of his home, and it would be their first public appearance. Maybe if there was a small article on them in the *Prophet*, people would stop owling them and stop speculating on the true nature of their relationship.

The last owl he'd received came back to mind, angering him. The writer had insisted that Severus was evil, had placed him under a spell, and had pointed out all of his husband's shortcomings.

Harry smirked. *Husband, how strange that sounds and yet... oddly okay.*

"What are you laughing at?" Ron asked darkly from across the room, his face covered in a black inky substance.

"You," Harry lied smoothly. "Ever thought we'd be doing this again?"

"No," Ron said glumly. "And Hermione's worse than Mum was about all this cleaning shite. It's your fault, you know."

"What? How?"

"She's been in the cleaning mood ever since we helped you with Snape's house."

"Oh, sorry, mate," Harry commiserated, "but that place definitely needed it."

Ron nodded. "How's that coming along, you and him?"

"Not bad. Sometimes we get on, sometimes we have a row... but oi, nobody's dead, right?"

"I wanted to tell you something, so I expect now's a good a time as any," Ron began quietly, looking away.

Harry stiffened, certain it had to do with Ginny. "All right."

"I'm not going to be an Auror."

"Why not?"

"I want to help George out. Since Fred's not there, I've been helping out, and I found that it suits me. I mean, I can still do the Auror thing later if this doesn't work out. Kingsley told me the door would always be open."

"I don't see anything wrong with that."

"You don't? I thought you'd be right mad about it."

"Until things truly change with the Ministry, I'm not going to be an Auror either."

"Wicked. Great minds thinking alike."

"Great minds, eh?" Hermione said, breezing into the room. "One of you is covered in Doxy dung..."

"It's not dung!" Ron interrupted hotly. "A few of them flew in with a goblet of... something and bung it at me!"

"Might as well be dung, it stinks," she replied with a smile, "and the other's just standing there, looking about blankly, his wand pointing uselessly to the floor." She flicked her own wand and cleaned Ron's face up. "At least they didn't get any of their venom on you."

"Yeah, lucky me," Ron retorted.

"There's another spray bottle of Doxycide on the desk there if you need it." She turned to Harry. "Come along. I want to show you something."

"All right," Harry agreed, shrugging at Ron apologetically as he followed her out.

Once alone in Hermione's room, Harry asked, "What do you want to show me?"

She said nothing, simply frowned and crossed her arms over her chest.

"You... got a new hair cut?" he asked uncertainly.

"Last week, but that's not what's wrong," she said.

"What then?"

"Ginny."

"What about her?" he asked, tensing up. What could have happened since the night before? "Is she okay?"

"No," Hermione said primly. "She claims to be, but I can tell. She's listless most of the time, and hearing your name makes her sad, though she tries to hide it."

"This is a hard situation for both of us, Hermione."

"You're taking things much better because this was *your* idea," she said accusingly. "Besides, you only see her for a few minutes at a time, so you don't see what I see."

"Can't you just mind your own business?"

"Would you...if this was the other way around? What if I'd married Snape to keep him out of Azkaban? Wouldn't you be doing the same thing if you saw Ron affected so badly?"

Harry nodded and looked down. "I expect I would."

"You've proven your point, Harry. I don't think that..."

"You don't read the owls we get. You don't hear the Howlers. You don't have Kingsley Flooding in to give you the progress, or lack of, every day." He turned away from her. "It's not enough. Not yet."

"You don't owe him your life, Harry," she said smartly. "What are you going to do if this takes ten years?"

"Then it just does!" he yelled.

"And Ginny's supposed to wait that long."

He sighed. "It won't go that long. Just a few more months or so, really. Maybe a year."

She stamped her foot impatiently. "If you love her, how could you ask this of her?"

"Oi! She's the one who said she'd wait for me as long as it took! If she'd asked me to not go through with it, do you think that I could have?"

"How could she have asked that of you? It was her father's idea!"

"I'm out of here," he said angrily. "I deal with enough shite on a daily basis. I don't need it from you, too." As he opened the door, he said, "I'm your friend, too, Hermione. Funny how you don't seem to care about what's going on with me though."

"What *is* then?" she asked, hurriedly following him down the stairway.

"Doesn't matter. Forget it."

"Harry, you..."

He quickly Disapparated before she could finish. What he'd wanted to say to her was that he was confused and that he loved Ginny but there was something about Severus he couldn't seem to pull away from.

Maybe it would have been better to end things with her before this happened, he thought glumly, but I swear I never planned on this happening.

Was there a 'this' though? Severus hadn't mentioned the fact that they'd nearly kissed when Ginny's letter had shown up. It seemed the man was trying to act as though it hadn't happened.

"Did it?" Harry asked himself. "I didn't imagine that." Frustrated, he strode to the doorway of his new home and steeled himself for the row he was sure was coming, for he would have to insist that Severus accompany him to the Ministry function.

The house was quiet, as was normal, when he entered. "Severus?" he called out, finding it odd he wasn't sitting before the fireplace reading, which was his favorite pastime. After checking the rooms on the first floor, he trekked upstairs to see if he was up there.

Severus' bedroom was empty, as was the spare room that had once belonged to the Snapes. Puzzled, Harry made for the doorway that led to the tiny attic, but he stopped just outside the door to his own bedroom, hearing soft snores from within. He peeked in to find that Severus was lying on his bed, sound asleep.

Unable to help himself, he walked forward and looked down into the man's sleeping face. It wasn't as harsh when he wasn't guarding his expressions. It hadn't been lost on him that Severus had been taking better care with his appearance after the row they'd had where Harry had mentioned what was lacking. That had been uncalled for, but it had brought about surprising results. Snape already looked healthier and younger. In his sleep, it was even more noticeable. The scowl lines were smooth, his expression had relaxed, making his nose seem less hooked, and his thin lips were slightly open, as if inviting him. What would Severus do if he woke up to a kiss?

Harry nearly choked. What the hell had happened to him? He'd lived for years in his dorm rooms at Hogwarts with other blokes, and he'd never once watched any of them sleep in such a way, let alone thought about kissing them. Hell, he'd practically lived with Ron for the last few years, and the close proximity did nothing to him. He'd even stayed alone with Hermione in a tent for weeks, and he'd never once thought about crossing the line. To be fair, he supposed he only ever thought of them the way he'd think of siblings, but... why Snape? Why now? Was it really some misguided loyalty because Snape had once loved his mother?

It seemed to be more than that. Harry felt disappointed in himself. Ginny and he had been made for each other. He'd never seen it until his sixth year, but once his eyes had been opened, he knew he'd never want any other girl in his life. She didn't deserve this, however. No one did. Technically, he'd done nothing wrong, but part of him wanted to. And the things he thought about lately...usually just before succumbing to sleep.

What could he do about it? How did someone fight a growing attraction to his spouse?*It shouldn't be too hard. This is Severus Snape I'm dealing with. The man probably came in here to devise a way to be rid of me and just happened to fall asleep in my bed... holding my pillow gently.*

No.

He knew better than that. Snape felt it, too, whatever this was that was developing between them, but he seemed to want to fight it*Well, aside from the fact that he's sleeping in my bed.* But when awake, the man made an effort to keep things friendly, if one could call it that, only. Harry would try as well. He couldn't do this to Ginny. Quietly, he backed out of the room and went downstairs to prepare lunch.

Part 6

Chapter 6 of 11

Harry feels that the only way to keep Snape from serving an undeserving stint in Azkaban is to go through a bonding ceremony with him, thus proving that if Harry Potter has enough faith in Severus Snape to marry him, the man can't be all that bad. How long will it take before the ruse turns real?

Part Six

Harry sucked in a deep breath when he saw Snape descending the stairs. The man had never looked better. It seemed that all the cooked meals had added much-needed weight to his frame. For once, Snape didn't look starved. Instead, he'd filled out, and the new dress robes Harry had bought for him to wear to the Ministry party (Snape had refused to go on grounds he had nothing suitable to wear) seemed to be made for him. The man's hair, which had grown down just below his shoulders, seemed fuller and shinier.

Severus' eyes met Harry's for a moment, and they narrowed slightly, as if daring Harry to make some snide comment.

The words Harry wanted to say wouldn't come...words such as radiant and handsome...so instead he settled with saying, "You look great," which sounded a little lame to his ears, though it seemed to please Severus. "Ready?"

"I am," said the man tightly. "But remember what I said, Potter. I won't be... affectionate in the least. They can think what they'd like, but I shall not degrade myself in public."

"How many married couples do you see acting out like that, Severus? I told you, just think of Molly and Arthur. They don't paw on each other or say sappy things. Just think of them, and we'll be fine."

"Very well." There was a long sigh. "I can't believe I let you talk me into this."

"You're completely healed now and as strong as you ever were. You need to get out of this house for a change before you get cottage fever or something!" Harry smiled. "And besides, won't this be a little fun? We're pulling one over on those gits!"

"As you pointed out, if people get used to seeing us, we may soon be forgotten and then allowed to get on with our lives."

"Absolutely. I'm tired of all the owls to be quite honest. I'm also tired of all the questions when I get cornered some place." Harry frowned then. "When I tried to go see Ron yesterday at George's place, I was accosted by at least six people asking questions, and I knew two of them were reporters!"

"You didn't mention that to me."

"I didn't want you to be nervous."

"I'm not nervous!" Severus snapped. "It's not like this," he pointed between the two of them, "is real. I just want to be prepared."

"Sorry then. I hadn't thought of it that way."

"Well? Come on then. What did they ask?"

"Nosy blighters."

"Shall I hex you to find out?"

Harry held up his hands in surrender, dreading Snape's reply to what he was about to tell him. "They wanted to know personal things mostly: how we met, how we fell in love, and, er, how we... got on together."

Severus' eyes glittered dangerously. "I look forward to answering any questions that might be asked tonight."

"Good Lord, what are you planning? You look like the Kneazle that ate the canary!"

"You'll see," came the quiet reply. "Now, come along,*husband.*"

Pausing, Harry did a double take. "Did you just call me 'husband'?"

"Hearing problems?"

"Sounds strange."

"I agree."

To give himself a moment before joining Severus, he took off his glasses and pretended to be wiping the lenses on the sleeve of his new green dress robes. He paused and looked up when he felt Snape's gaze on him. "What is it?"

"You, uh, look rather nice without your glasses."

"As opposed to when I have them on?" he asked cheekily.

"Brat. You know what I mean."

"Thanks." Harry put them back on and strode forward. "There's that new place Hermione was talking about in Diagon Alley. It's open now. Saw it yesterday on my way home."

"The wizarding optometrist bloke's place?"

"That's the one. Maybe I'll go see what he can do for me."

There was no reply, so Harry opened the door and gestured for Severus to precede him. Once he'd closed the door behind them and warded the house, he stepped closely against his husband, wrapping one arm around his waist so that he could Side-Along them to the Ministry. Though he needn't get that close to Disapparate, neither said anything, and Harry only hoped that Severus couldn't feel the slight tremble in his embrace.

The instant they were spotted, people swarmed around them; it seemed that everyone wanted to get a look at the newlyweds...all of them looking to see if the union was real.

"And so it begins," whispered Severus before Harry pulled back from his embrace.

"I LOVE YOU, HARRY POTTER!" someone cheerfully called out from the back of the group.

"Bless you, lad," said another.

"Thanks," Harry said, taking a step forward and hoping a path would clear for them. However, nobody wanted to move aside without having a word with him. "I appreciate that you want to talk to us, but we have to meet those at our table. I'm sure we'll get to chance to talk after the meal is served," he said as kindly as he could. Reaching behind him, he took Severus' hand and firmly guided him through the crowd, making a path where there was none.

"All right?" Harry asked once they were out of earshot.

"Fine. You can let go of me now if you don't mind. You're making a scene."

Harry simply nodded and released Severus' hand. "Look, there's Hermione and Ron."

"Oh, joy," came the sarcastic reply, "the know-it-all and the self-proclaimed chess champion."

"Don't start that. They mean well." Here Harry smirked. "You're just mad because Ron won that game against you!"

"He most certainly did not! I had to forfeit because I was feeling unwell."

"And that he could have had check mate no matter what move you made means nothing, eh?"

"Shut it, you," Snape said acidly, though he gave a tight grin.

"Harry, Professor," Hermione greeted. "Please, sit down." She smiled a little nervously.

"Thanks," Severus replied, pulling a chair away from the table and gesturing for Harry to sit.

Feeling eyes upon them, Harry smiled and took the seat, pretending that his husband's gallantry was something he was used to. It surprised him, of course, but he wouldn't let that show. "How's it going, Ron?"

"The Cannons lost again. Five more seconds and the Seeker would have had the Snitch first," he grumbled. "One bloody game away from the finals! Can you believe it?"

"Not that again," Hermione said sourly.

"You wouldn't like it either if you lost your last three Galleons on the bet," Ron said.

"I wouldn't be foolish enough to gamble with those odds, Ronald."

"What? Too good for gambling, are you?"

"That's not it at all," she said, pointing at him. "You know I've had bets before."

"Oh yeah? When?"

"W-well, I can't just name a list off the top of my head," she spluttered.

"Because there aren't any," Ron said smugly.

"I bet that Viktor's team would win last year."

"Who'd you bet with?"

She looked away and bit her lip.

"Might as well say it now you've let it slip, Hermione."

"Neville. We bet on the game. He was going for Romania."

"And you just had to pick old Vicky's team, eh?" Ron seemed peeved.

"Oh, honestly, Ron! I was just supporting my friend."

"Friend, is he? Why'd he keep trying to interrupt our dance at the wedding last year? I think he was interested in more than friendship."

"Don't be ridiculous!" she said furiously.

"It's the truth. Ask Harry if you don't believe me." He nodded towards Harry. "He saw it all."

"Oi, keep me out of this," Harry said, holding his hands up in surrender.

"Just be quiet," Hermione said bossily. "The Minister is about to speak."

Harry felt a hand on his thigh and looked down when it tapped him. It took him a moment to realize that Severus was trying to get his attention. *Get a grip, Harry, he thought. It's not like Snape is going to try to feel you up.*

When he saw Snape's amused grin and the discreet nod towards Hermione and Ron, Harry smiled broadly. Snape had found their interaction entertaining as well. He leaned very close to whisper in Snape's ear. "They're always like that. Might as well get married and be done with it already."

Severus nodded and brought his lips to Harry's ear, allowing his chest to rest against Harry's shoulder. "I don't see how you can stand it, to be honest. Ah, so that's why you insisted on staying at Spinner's End, is it?"

Harry simply laughed and nodded, repositioning himself in his chair as Kingsley stood at the podium. He felt the hairs on the back of his neck rise as though he and Snape had been watched. He glanced around to find that most eyes were on them instead of the Minister. Ignoring them, he met Hermione's calculating gaze.

"What?" he mouthed, barely a whisper.

She simply turned her head and listened to Kingsley's speech.

"Thanks for coming here tonight," Kingsley said happily. "I am pleased to see so many people here." His eyes landed on Harry's table. "You know something important's happening when even Harry Potter shows up, him being a newlywed and all."

The crowd murmured in response, and Harry dared not look around. He'd have to pay Kingsley back for that one day, and he knew, deep down, that the man was only trying to point out that Harry and Snape were there together, but hadn't he noticed that there was no need to call attention to them?

"I wanted you, those of you who received the invitations, to be among the first to know the good news. I know it wasn't easy to be invited to something and to not know exactly what it was about."

"What's the news, mate?" someone asked, causing others to laugh politely.

Kingsley's voice boomed in reply. "I've been offered the position of Minister of Magic for as long as I'd like it, so you see," he said with a proud smile, "I'm no longer just a stand in Minister until we find someone else. I've accepted the position and will serve as your Minister of Magic to the best of my ability for as long as possible."

Cheers and applause rang out. Harry was among those clapping, forgetting his ire. "All right, Kingsley," he called out. He noticed that Severus was clapping politely, but he seemed annoyed. Harry hoped he wouldn't say anything ugly to Kingsley while people were about.

Once the cheers quieted down, Kingsley began informing them of changes being made, how some people were being let go for past actions, joining those that had already been released from their positions, and then he started talking about laws they were going to attempt to change and add. Nearly everyone in attendance seemed pleased with what was being said.

When Kingsley breached the subject of Death Eaters and their supporters being rounded up and put into Azkaban, Harry felt Snape stiffen next to him. In a show of support, not for the public but for Severus, he placed a hand over his and squeezed it, not caring who saw.

"And since I don't want to keep you from your meals any longer, I want to close by saying how much I appreciate all that Harry Potter has done for us over the years." Murmurs of consent passed through the crowd. "He had help along the way of course...Ron, Hermione, Albus, and Severus...but I believe that *he* is the reason for our good fortune here. Thank you, Harry." Kingsley lifted up a glass of wine. "To Harry."

"To Harry," nearly everyone repeated, all toasting him with their glasses.

"May you have many years of peace now, my friend," Kingsley continued, "and whenever you're ready, the job at the Aurory will be waiting for you. I know I'll feel a lot safer knowing you're one of those working with us to build a better future."

"I'll consider it," Harry said with an embarrassed smile, wishing the man would hurry up and stop spotlighting him.

"And here's to you, too, Severus," Kingsley said suddenly. "Thank you for all you've done. I'm sorry to have doubted you in the past." Many people toasted Severus along with Kingsley, though not as many. "May you and Harry have many happy years together."

Harry was almost afraid to look at Severus, but it would have been impossible to do anything else at that moment. He'd prepared himself for an angry man, and instead, he found someone calm and collected.

You've got to admire that about him, Harry thought affectionately, wishing he could hide his emotions just as easily. Years of spying had given Severus much practice.

After that, much of what Kingsley said went unheard as Harry thought about Severus and the things that the new Minister had said. When it was time to eat, their meals appeared before them, and Harry finally felt as though he could breathe normally again. They'd made it past the intense scrutiny. Anything else should be a piece of cake.

Before Harry could spear a jacket potato with his fork, he felt Snape tug on his robe to pull him closer.

"Did you know he would do that?" Severus asked suspiciously.

"No," Harry said honestly, meeting his gaze and willing him to see the truth in his eyes. "I had no idea, but I think he was just trying to help, you know? Showing that even he stands behind the decision to keep you out of Azkaban and that he stands behind us."

Severus nodded. "Eat. We'll talk later." His expression froze as he looked across the table at Hermione. "Did you need something, Miss Granger?"

"Oh, no! Sorry. Don't know where my mind was just then."

"Woolgathering?" Ron asked.

"That's a mighty big word for you, Ron," Harry said, snickering slightly.

Ron's ears turned red, and he mumbled something incoherent. Before Harry could ask him to repeat it, Hermione had squealed and planted a kiss on his friend's cheek.

"Did I miss something?" Severus asked Harry incredulously.

"I think we both have." He nodded towards the couple. "Strange relationship."

"Oh, shush," Hermione said brightly. "I'll have you know that Ron's practicing on bettering his vocabulary. Why, I gave him a list of words yesterday to study, and that's the first time I've heard him use one. Woolgathering."

Harry didn't want to say so out loud, but when Ron had said that, he'd imagined Hermione out in a field grabbing up shorn wool. "Good for you, Ron," Harry said.

"Piss off, Harry," Ron said, though he seemed pleased with the attention Hermione was giving him.

"I've heard of everything now," Severus commented dryly. "When shall I try to teach you a new vocabulary, Harry? You could do with using different words."

"Had enough of that in school, thanks. I'll pass on having *you* teach me anything," Harry replied cheerfully. "Next thing I know, you'll be giving me detention."

Both men laughed lightly and were surprised when Hermione and Ron joined in as well, apparently having heard their conversation.

It wasn't until after they'd finished eating and started to mingle on the main floor where a band was beginning to play that Harry saw Ginny. She'd been with George and her parents at a table across the room.

"Why didn't they sit with us?" he asked.

Hermione saw the direction of his gaze and said, "We thought it best. You know, the public and all."

"But she told me she'd decided against coming. We wouldn't have minded if they'd sat with us," Harry said, slightly annoyed.

"But Professor Snape might have," Hermione pointed out.

"What? He doesn't care one way..." He lowered his voice. "You know that doesn't matter to him."

"I know that," she hissed, clearly aggravated with him, "but the people here might think he should be, so..."

"So the decision was made without even consulting me. I see."

"Lighten up, mate," Ron said. "She just didn't want anyone to hurt, especially Ginny. I don't think it was easy for her to sit over there as it was. Imagine if she'd been stuck right here, all those eyes on her."

"They were probably on her, too," Hermione said knowingly. "I mean, think about it. She's the woman scorned here."

Harry wanted to yell that he'd not deserted her but knew he couldn't. He, instead, made a mental note to talk to her about it as soon as time allowed him the chance. When Severus excused himself to go to the restroom, Harry quietly asked, "She is okay, right?"

"I'm sure," Hermione said. "As well as can be."

"You know, Hermione, you always sound as though you don't think Ginny and I..."

"Shhh!" Hermione said, pointing behind Harry. "We're being watched."

He turned around, and sure enough, Rita Skeeter was there, smiling nastily, her gold tooth gleaming. "Ah, brilliant. There goes the party."

"Let's dance," Ron said suddenly, pulling Hermione up.

"Argh! Ron, let me stand on my own feet."

Not sure what had got into Ron, though Harry suspected his friend feared someone else would ask Hermione to dance, he decided to go to the loo, as he'd had a lot of wine during dinner. The joy he felt upon realizing that Rita was gone disappeared as he neared the corner of the room, just around from the entrance to the toilet. He heard her voice loud and clear, and there was no doubt in his mind whom she'd just asked a question to.

"Married life suits me just fine. If you'll excuse me, I..."

"Not so fast," she said, obviously pleased with herself.

Harry could see her green quill furiously scribbling on a parchment from where he was. He wasn't sure why he didn't round the corner and tell her to sod off, but he suspected he wanted to take pleasure in hearing Severus do it. Or he simply wanted to know what he would tell her.

"It's come to my attention, Severus, and of course I am only telling you this because I am one of the few people who doesn't believe Harry Potter is always very honest."

"He's not lied to me about anything. I can assure you of that."

"Right. So you use Legilimency on him to make sure he's telling the truth?"

"Of course not."

"Ah, Veritaserum then. Yes, that would be easy enough for you to brew." She laughed. "Don't look at me that way. I would definitely not blame you in the least."

"If you're finished?"

"I'm not actually. I have a bit of information that I will share with the public in my article tomorrow, but I wanted to divulge that to you first and maybe get a comment on it."

"What information?"

"I have it on very good authority that Potter meets Ginevra Weasley for secret trysts...was doing so before your marriage and, unfortunately, has been since then as well. How does it make you feel to know that he's not faithful to you? Unless this is just a ruse you two cooked up to keep the Ministry from carting you off to Azkaban, I expect it's not something you'd be too happy about."

"That's enough!" Harry said as he rounded the corner and stood next to Severus. "Don't you ever know when to quit? If you print those lies about me, I'll..."

"Not lies, Potter. The truth, and I have proof."

"Let me answer this," Severus said quietly, placing a hand on Harry's chest to keep him from accosting Rita.

"Severus, you don't have to listen to this crap."

"Ms. Skeeter, I know you are simply trying to do your job, and I can appreciate that. This, however, isn't the place for an interview. Pity. If you'd asked to meet me at my home, I would have agreed."

"Would you?" she asked eagerly.

"Now? After this blatant harassment? No, I think not," he said sharply before deliberately reaching down to take Harry's hand and interlacing their fingers. "All I have to say on the subject is that Harry never lied to me about anything. Yes, I do know that he had things to work out with Miss Weasley. It's not easy when you have to choose between two things you want and care for deeply. I understand that and approved of their meetings."

"That's outrageous! So you supported his..."

"Put another word in my mouth, Miss Skeeter, and you shall regret it."

She swallowed visibly. "Go on then."

"There is no need for Harry to meet with her any longer. Their issues have been resolved, and we are moving beyond this and looking to the future."

"You don't mind that a small portion of his heart belongs to this woman then?" she pressed curiously.

"No, I don't," he said softly. "Just as he doesn't mind that a small portion of my heart belongs to a woman as well."

Her face lit up eagerly, clearly wanted to ask more questions. "Lily Potter then? His mother? How do..."

"Enough for tonight," Harry said and pulled Severus away, forgetting his need to use the toilet. He went to the first place he could think of, wanting to be someplace that Skeeter wouldn't dare follow.

The dance floor.

"Do you mind?" he asked tentatively.

"No."

Awkwardly, he slid one hand beneath Severus' arm and let his palm rest on his shoulder blade while the other hand slid around his waist and rested on his back. A moment later, Severus mirrored his actions, and they began slowly swaying to the music.

"Maybe coming tonight wasn't such a good idea. I'm sorry about that," Harry said. "I just thought it would help things, and you really needed to get out of the house now that you're healed."

"It would have happened sooner or later. We might as well get this on with."

"Damn. Don't look now but we're being watched."

"By whom?"

"Everybloodybody!"

Severus chuckled lightly. "We should give them a show."

"We have been."

"Something more might be in order." Severus stepped closer, holding Harry more tightly, and lifted a hand to cradle Harry's head against his shoulder, resting his cheek against his young husband's messy hair.

Harry closed his eyes and simply listened to Snape's heartbeat and the music and let everything in the background drown out. It was ironic that Severus would suggest this when he'd been adamant about not showing any affection in public. His insides tingled as his body became aware of its proximity to Severus. How easy it would be to truly lose himself in the moment, to pretend that he loved Snape, and to kiss him passionately for all to see.

Severus' chest rumbled, and Harry opened his eyes, realizing the man had spoken. "Sorry? What?"

"The song has ended." Severus' voice was a choked whisper, and his eyes bore into Harry's.

Was he trying to use Legilimency? Harry didn't think so, as he didn't feel any intrusion. He was certain he would know if Severus tried it. "Guess we should stop dancing then," Harry said, hoping to sound nonchalant.

A small chuckle escaped Snape's lips. "We stopped about two minutes ago."

Harry realized they were standing still, simply holding each other. "Sorry," he said, pulling back a little. "I was, uh, just... you know, thinking about things."

Severus nodded. "As was I." His face lowered slightly, lips intent on meeting Harry's, but before it happened, Severus blinked and pulled back. "I apologize."

"Don't. I..."

"Harry, Ginevra is watching."

Stiffening, Harry feared looking her way, not wanting to see the hurt in her eyes. Even knowing that it was all a ruse, he was sure it still bothered her, especially if what Hermione had said was anything to go by.

"I didn't mean to overstep my bounds. I won't do it again," Severus said, releasing his hold on Harry and stepping back. "I'll go get a drink."

Harry wanted to call him back and to explain that he hadn't been the only one to overstep boundaries. He didn't, of course, because he knew he had to face the music. He took a deep breath and turned around to search out Ginny in the crowd. She was gone.

His heart dropped to his knees, and he felt as though he'd been punched in the stomach. What had he done? The need to go to after her burned through his soul, but he knew he couldn't...not now, not with Skeeter watching everything with an eagle eye and hoping to find something false about his relationship with Severus.

Deciding he needed a drink as well, Harry walked through the crowd, ignoring attempts at conversation, and found Severus at the bar. "I'll have one, too," he said, disappointed in himself.

"Cheers," Severus said, handing him a tumbler half full of Port.

Thanks go to blue_paris and soul bound for beta reading this!

Part 7

Chapter 7 of 11

Harry feels that the only way to keep Snape from serving an undeserving stint in Azkaban is to go through a bonding ceremony with him, thus proving that if Harry Potter has enough faith in Severus Snape to marry him, the man can't be all that bad. How long will it take before the ruse turns real?

Part Seven

Severus woke very early the next morning, despite the fact that he'd not slept very long. Something had definitely changed inside him. He knew without a doubt that he cared deeply for Harry Potter. Everything comfortable in his life had been turned upside down in the last few weeks. How could he grow to care about someone in such a short time? Someone he'd actually loathed at that!

And it wasn't just anyone either...no! It was Lily's son. What would she say about this? Would she be disappointed in him and feel as though he'd taken advantage of the situation somehow?

Nothing would come of it, he'd make sure of that, but it would scar him all the same. How would he feel when it came time to release Potter from his vows? Could he truly just walk away and give Potter and the Weasley girl his blessing? He shook his head at this thought. Things were complicated more than ever, for even Potter seemed to be considering the possibility of something more.

Taking a moment to peek inside Harry's darkened room, Severus felt his chest constrict. Only a few days before, he'd been into the room and had chosen to lie down on Harry's bed on impulse. Just the scent of Harry had overwhelmed him...making him feel secure and, for the first time in years, not alone in the world. The feelings that had overcome him then were nothing compared to what he felt now, for he wanted to go to Harry, lie beside him, and gently wake him with light caresses and confessed words.

Then he thought of Ginny Weasley's expression as she'd watched them dance. He was uncertain what she'd been thinking exactly, but he knew that she hadn't been pleased. He didn't blame her in the least. Harry was her lover...not Severus' lover...and while he was married to Harry in name only, he wouldn't like watching him being held by someone else either.

"What are you thinking about?"

He drew in a deep breath of surprise upon hearing the soft whisper. "I couldn't sleep," he managed to say finally. "I was just checking to see if you were still here before I went down."

"You were frowning just now. Why?"

"Harry," he said, sighing slightly, "you need your rest. We can talk later."

"I can't sleep. I've been trying to, trust me, just can't though."

"I was thinking about your Ginny."

"Me too," Harry confessed.

Severus nodded. "I could make some toast."

"All right. I'll be down after I use the loo."

By the time Severus set the jar of jam on the table beside the stacks of toast, Harry had joined him, yawning and scratching his head. Severus realized that he would never forget the feel of domesticity. All the years that he'd lived in the house with his parents and all those that followed, he'd never felt that way in his own home. And that was just it, wasn't it? Living there with Harry made it feel like more than a house; it was a home.

"I'm going to go talk to her today," Harry announced, snatching a slice of toast and crunching into it.

"You should," Severus agreed. "Please extend my apologies to her. I hate that she witnessed that, but it was a necessary action for us to take at the moment, what with Skeeter hounding us."

"Is that the only reason you did it?" The question was blunt, and it was obvious Harry expected an honest answer.

"No, but it was part of it."

Harry nodded. "I feel things I shouldn't."

It was this confession that had Snape looking up, heart beating wildly.

"How did this happen?" Harry asked, seemingly talking to himself. "I swear that I never intended for any of this to go on, but when I think of you, I feel..."

"You feel 'what'?"

"More for you than I should. You know, *inthat* way." He tossed his half-eaten toast down. "I'm not gay."

"Nor am I!"

"Then what's this between us?"

"Two people who are simply at ease in each other's company?"

"No," Harry said vehemently. "There's more to it than that! If that were the case, I wouldn't want to...wouldn't think about it as much as I do."

"Think about what?"

"About this!"

Harry shocked Severus by leaning over and roughly pulling Severus' face towards his and pressing their lips together forcefully. Harry's hands slid cupped Severus' face briefly and then traveled up into his hair and held him more closely as his lips parted, his tongue inviting Severus to part his lips as well.

With a small groan, Severus obliged, his tongue snaking out to meet and tangle with Harry's before deepening the kiss, each tasting the other's mouth. A jolt of sensation spread through his body, warming and exciting him as it moved. The sounds of deep breathing and noises of approval were the only things heard in the kitchen. Neither noticed the jam jar hitting the floor or the slices of toast being strewn about the table. When they finally pulled back minutely and gazed into each other's eyes, Severus noticed that hot liquid had seeped into his robes: the tea he'd poured in his cup minutes before.

"I'm not sorry," Harry said, panting slightly.

Severus shook his head. "Nor I." It had been haunting him as well...the almost kisses, wondering what Harry's soft lips would feel like against his own. He hadn't been prepared for the whoosh of emotion that now flowed through his veins. Kissing Harry had been everything it should have been, and it was more powerful than any other he'd ever experienced...even with Lily.

He needed to think things through before anything more could occur, and he felt that Harry should do the same. There was a woman who loved Harry, who still lived and waited for his return. This, coupled with the fear that Lily would disapprove, prompted him to disregard his own needs and feelings.

Before he could second-guess himself, he said, "And I don't think it should happen again."

"Didn't you feel it? The electricity?" Harry asked desperately. "Tell me I didn't imagine that!"

"Yes." *All the more reason for you to go to her, Harry, for if I kiss you again, confusion or not, I might just keep you for myself.* He decided to be honest. "I won't lie to you. I've never had anything like it, but this...we...shouldn't be feeling this way or doing this. Think of Ginevra."

"I know," Harry agreed disappointedly. "I don't know what's got into me. I love her, Severus. I do, but... I want to be with you, too. I don't understand this."

Severus stood. "I have to change. Go to her."

"We should talk about this."

"We already have."

"But what do I say to her?"

"Nothing about this, that's for certain." Severus opened his mouth to say more, fleeing the room instead, not trusting himself. Some things were better left unsaid. He locked the bathroom door behind him and quickly discarded his clothing.

The mirror caught his attention in his peripheral vision, causing him to stop and look at his naked body. What would Harry think? He was a thin man with pale flesh and wiry muscles. A trail of dark hair guided the eyes down to a thicker thatch of dark hair that surrounded his genitalia. His legs had the same dark hair, as did his pectorals, though the hair was sparser there.

He was definitely nothing special. Severus felt old suddenly...more so than his near forty years. *Why should someone as virile and young as Harry be tied down to one such as me? What could I offer him? We don't really have meaningful conversations, so it's definitely not that. And all I have is this,* he thought bitterly, looking at his body again.

Severus turned away in dismay and decided to take a shower. The warm spray was an excellent way to rid himself of nervous tension. Without bothering to fetch a washcloth, he began lathering his body with Harry's bar of green soap, which reminded him of the fresh air of the woods after a morning rain.

A thought occurred to him when he neared his groin. Had Harry done the exact same thing with that bar of soap? He closed his eyes and was instantly assaulted with the image of Harry, naked and soapy, grasping his hard cock and sliding his soapy hands along the shaft...slowly at first, squeezing gently as he did so, a moan escaping his lips.

It wasn't his imagined Harry's moan. It was his own, for his hand had found its way down to wrap around his thick erection, moving in time with the picture in his head. What would it feel like to have Harry's hand grasping him? Another moan rent the air. Harry's hand would be soft, warm, slick, and firm in its grip. God, what would his mouth feel like...hot and wet...surrounding him, his tongue sliding along his length as he did so.

Severus' free hand slithered down and cupped his balls, rubbing them firmly, helping to bring him closer to the edge.

"I'm coming, yesss," he announced to himself moments later just before release found him. Weakened, he leaned his head against the tiles on the shower wall, breathing quickly. "Harry..." he whispered in resignation.

Instead of a going directly to see Ginny, Harry decided that a flight on his broom was in order. There was nothing like the feel of cold wind ruffling his hair and hitting him in the face. He felt so free flying high above the ground, like he owned the world. Flying never failed to help him work out troubles in his mind.

Today he had three problems: Ginny, Severus, and himself.

Ginny, how he loved her and appreciated all she'd done for him in the past, how he appreciated her willingness to put her life on hold for him! How could he hurt her like this? What had he been thinking? Why hadn't he put up more of a fight when her father had suggested he take this route to save Severus from Azkaban?

Her brown eyes, misted with tears, flashed through his mind and made his throat tighten. There would never be any other woman for him. None could compare to her. Closing his eyes and plunging downward on his broom, he wondered if it wouldn't be easier for him to simply crash into the ground below. He wouldn't have to see that pained expression on her face again, wouldn't have to hurt her, wouldn't knowingly betray her.

As he thought of Severus, he opened his eyes and sucked in a deep breath. He couldn't do it. He couldn't leave him like his mother had. Tugging up on his Firebolt, he straightened and zoomed safely over the long weeds covering the frozen ground. Severus had never completely let go of his first love, and now that he seemed to care about someone else, it would devastate him to lose that person in such a way. Harry knew this and didn't want to hurt Severus any more than he wanted to hurt Ginny.

What gnawed at him now was why he wanted to be with Severus. When he'd thought that Severus had died in his arms, he'd been full of emotion...loathing, for he thought the man deserved his fate; regret, for he knew nobody should suffer that way; and wonderment, for why would he want to look into Harry's eyes as he died? Those things had been answered when he'd viewed the memories in Dumbledore's Pensieve.

He'd not had time until after the battle to truly think about what they had revealed. Oh, he'd boasted to Voldemort about his findings, but when all was said and done, he'd lain awake all night after eating a sandwich Kreacher had fixed him. His thoughts had strayed to Snape over and over again. The man had been so much more than he'd ever thought possible. The man had loved his mother. That was something very intimate, and no other of her friends that Harry had met...Lupin, Sirius, and Pettigrew...had ever been as close to her.

The tears Harry had seen him shed over her made him seem so much more human than ever before, and Harry had wished that he could comfort him somehow, that he could have saved his life instead of watching the light leave his eyes. When Harry finally had slept, he'd dreamed that nearly twenty years had passed. In that dream, he and Ginny were married with three children, and even Ron and Hermione were there with two of their own, all of them watching students board the Hogwarts Express.

It was everything Harry had ever wanted for his future: a scar that didn't burn, a family of his own, his friends, and a peaceful life. When he'd awoken, he'd thanked Merlin that it had only been a dream. There was so much living he wanted to do first, so many things he wanted to experience, being free for the first time. And an hour later, when it had been revealed that Severus Snape had been found alive, though barely, and was at St. Mungo's, Harry had felt a pull that couldn't be denied.

That was why he'd stayed at St. Mungo's as often as he could in the weeks following. Snape fascinated him. There were layers and layers of the man just waiting to be peeled away and explored. At first he'd told himself that he'd only wanted to honor the man who'd loved his mother...someone who could one day give him information about her, being the last of her friends left living...but it was painfully obvious now that he'd been slowly falling for the man, wanting to be the one the man thought of when

he drifted off to sleep at night.

Most of all, he wanted Severus to want to look into *his* eyes, not just eyes that reminded him of Lily's.

And now he had that chance. *This* had to be why he hadn't put up much of a fight when Arthur had suggested a bonding. He'd known, deep down of course, that it would be his only chance to truly know Snape. The kiss they'd shared earlier had been proof that something was there between them, begging them to explore. He'd never had a jolt when kissing someone...granted he'd only kissed Cho Chang and Ginny. Shouldn't he have felt that with Ginny at least?

Harry had never been more confused in his life, for he did love Ginny, but now, he was falling in love with someone else. He wanted them both in his life, but he knew that he would have to choose. That was the biggest problem of all.

If he chose Snape, he'd hurt everyone he loved...his friends, the Weasleys, Ginny, and himself. But if he chose Ginny, he would only be hurting Severus and himself. He frowned. Severus would step aside and give him a chance at a life with her, or so it seemed he would from what he'd said.

But could he do it?

Harry spiraled down again, enjoying the explosion of adrenaline rushing through his body. He'd have to decide something soon.

AN: Thanks go to blue_paris and Soul Bound for beta reading this.

Part 8

Chapter 8 of 11

Harry feels that the only way to keep Snape from serving an undeserving stint in Azkaban is to go through a bonding ceremony with him, thus proving that if Harry Potter has enough faith in Severus Snape to marry him, the man can't be all that bad. How long will it take before the ruse turns real?

Part Eight

The Daily Prophet

Kingsley Shacklebolt Accepts Permanent Position as Minister of Magic

By Rita Skeeter

In an impassioned speech, Kingsley Shacklebolt announced that he had decided to accept the nod from the Wizengamot to become our next Minister of Magic. As you know, Mr. Shacklebolt stepped in after Minister Thicknesse was arrested at the battle of Hogwarts, along with other Death Eaters and supporters of Voldemort. Since then, he has led the efforts to rebuild the Ministry in the aftermath of utter chaos. [...]

During his speech, he gave a nod to Harry Potter, who was seated near the front with his husband, Severus Snape, and closest friends, Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger. For more about Harry Potter and Severus Snape, see page 3 under the heading *Wedded War Heroes*. It seemed fitting that gratitude was conveyed in such a friendly, emotional way, as in the past the Ministry hasn't always been very supportive of Potter and the late Albus Dumbledore. It's been proven time and again that Potter's word should be heeded, for he never led us astray, always trying to warn us and help keep us safe from Voldemort.

And so, taking a page from Minister Shacklebolt's book, we at the *Daily Prophet* apologize to you as well, Mr. Potter, and want you to know how much we do appreciate what you've done for us and what you've sacrificed for the greater good.

Page 3

The Daily Prophet

Wedded War Heroes Make Appearance Finally

By Rita Skeeter

From the moment the pair Apparated into the Ministry, Potter and Snape were the center of attention. All eyes followed them as they greeted the other guests and made their way to their dinner table, which was shared with Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger. Many people have been sending owls to our *Daily Prophet* offices asking that we get more information on the couple, most wanting to know how the relationship came about so suddenly. Of course, many owls of concern were sent, and we are aiming to put our readers at ease.

Last night, I witnessed a couple who are genuinely in love and happy. Potter had an arm around him for Side-Along Apparation, seemingly pulling away reluctantly when crowds began to gather, and the couple's hands entwined as they walked toward their table. It wasn't forced and seemed as natural as could be. Many young women, and some men, will be disappointed to find out that this is the real thing. I would bet my favorite Dicto-Quill that there was nothing forced about the marriage, as suspected by some.

During the speech by our esteemed Minister, the Potter-Snapes conversed quietly with each other when not paying rapt attention to the speech, touching each other and leaning into each other as much as possible. And I can tell you from past experience that Severus Snape isn't a man who typically smiles just for the sake of it, but during the dinner, he smiled at his young husband numerous times. It was quite shocking, in a good way, mind.

I was able to speak with him when he left their table for a moment, and I asked him a few questions about some rumors that had been circulating. A trustworthy informant disclosed that she'd witnessed Harry Potter meeting with his former lover, Ginevra Weasley, a couple of times...after his bonding to Snape was announced. Further investigation proved that this was true, for I, myself, went to investigate, not wanting to print any falsities.

Upon hearing this, Severus Snape was unsurprised and even admitted that he knew of the meetings and had encouraged his husband to go to them. His exact words were, 'All I have to say on the subject is that Harry never lied to me about anything. Yes, I do know that he had things to work out with Miss Weasley. It's not easy when you have to choose between two things you want and care for deeply. I understand that and approved of their meetings.'

Admittedly, that is very noble of him. This new Severus Snape is quite engaging, and I appreciated that he wanted to speak with me. I must admit that when I'd heard that he'd been harboring love for a woman who left him for another man and then was killed by You-Know-Who, I was touched and felt that if more men stayed true to their wifely duties in such a way, the world would be a better place.

This is obviously a hard subject for him to speak of, so I didn't press him when he asked me to leave off on that subject. It's obvious that he still loves Lily Evans Potter, who happens to be his husband's mother. Some might find that disturbing, but there doesn't seem to be anything dodgy in their past. You can't choose who your heart wants, can you? It all fit together like a romantic puzzle when I asked the following:

'You don't mind that a small portion of his heart belongs to this woman then?'

His silken reply:

'No, I don't. Just as he doesn't mind that a small portion of my heart belongs to a woman as well.'

All in all, I can say nothing but good things about this relationship, and I do hope that once they have time to properly meet with me, they will allow me to write a book about their lives, past and present.

Potter whisked Snape away when he heard a slow number playing and escorted him to the dance floor. I, along with many others, simply watched the pair, and for the first time in my life, I can honestly say that I felt a pang of loneliness and wished I had someone to share my evening with. Apparently, however, this sight was too much for Ginny Weasley, Potter's former lover. She ran from the room in tears.



Photo taken by Scott Keller

After the couple danced and shared drinks, I made my rounds and asked a few questions about them, wanting other guests' opinions.

RS: Hello, Ms. Granger, it's been a long time, not nearly long enough of course.

HG: Not at all.

RS: I'd like to ask you a question...

HG: Let me guess. It's about Harry.

RS: It certainly is. During dinner, I saw you gazing at the couple intently. What were you thinking about?

HG: I'm sure I don't know what I thought of the entire time. Sorry.

RS: Very well. How do you feel about your friend's choice of spouse then?

HG: He looks happy, doesn't he? I expect it was a shock at first, but now, seeing them together...

At this moment, Ronald Weasley joined us, so I took the opportunity to ask him a few questions.

RS: Hello, Mr. Weasley. How are you tonight?

RW: Would be better if the Chudley Cannons had won.

RS: Right. Absolutely. I happen to be a Cannons fan as well.

RW: That right?

RS: Certainly. I wanted to ask you a question about Harry and your sister.

RW: What? Better not say any rubbish about my sister!

RS: Of course not. I've turned over a new leaf, Mr. Weasley.

RW: Oh. Well, what is it then?

RS: Are you disappointed that Harry has chosen to marry Snape instead of Ginevra?

RW: Yeah.

RS: Oh? But you seemed friendly enough during dinner.

RW: Just because I'd rather have him in my family doesn't mean I'll cast him off for doing something else. He's still my best mate.

RS: Very mature of you. How is your sister taking this?

RW: Er... I'd rather not talk about Ginny. That's her business. Excuse us.

He escorted Miss Granger to the dance floor at this point, so I couldn't ask any more questions to them, but I happened to see Arthur Weasley across the room and was able to speak with him for a moment before his wife rudely pulled him away.

RS: Hello, Arthur. All right this evening?

AW: Indeed. Good, good. You?

RS: Having a nice time. Congratulations on your promotion at the Ministry.

AW: Ta.

RS: I don't see your daughter. Has she gone home?

AW: Ah, yes. Ginny wasn't feeling well and my son George escorted her home.

RS: Sorry to hear that. I hope it wasn't anything she ate during dinner.

AW: If you'll excuse me...

RS: One question, please? Thank you. How do you feel about Harry, who was almost as good as your son-in-law, marrying Severus Snape?

AW: I think he did the right thing.

RS: What do you mean by that?

AW: Oh, er, just that you should marry the person you care for the most, yes?

RS: Absolutely. Some people say that maybe Severus seduced young Potter at Hogwarts. Do you...

AW: Rubbish. The only reason they've become... What I mean to say is that they've only just become close... recently. Severus would never overstep the boundaries with a student in his care.

RS: Really? I would think that acting as a Death Eater, he's had to do many things that involve stepping over the boundaries.

AW: I'm sure, but I can guarantee that he never...oh, here's Molly.

I apologize for not getting more, readers, but before I saw Snape pull his husband to him and guide him to an Apparition Point, I was able to get a few more interviews from others. It's amazing how many people want to comment about the wedded heroes. [...]

AN: Thanks go to blue_paris and Soul Bound for reading through this!

Part 9

Chapter 9 of 11

Harry feels that the only way to keep Snape from serving an undeserving stint in Azkaban is to go through a bonding ceremony with him, thus proving that if Harry Potter has enough faith in Severus Snape to marry him, the man can't be all that bad. How long will it take before the ruse turns real?

Part Nine

Ginny waited for him in the garden, watching the gnomes, and his breath caught in his throat. Had she always been so beautiful? Harry walked closer and knelt down in front of her, only then noticing the tears in her eyes. With a sigh, he placed his head in her lap and felt her hands begin to caress him.

"I love you, Harry, you know that," she whispered passionately.

"I know. I love you, too, Ginny."

"I can't do this. I thought I could, but I just can't."

Harry lifted his head to look at her. "It won't be much longer. Things can go back to normal after."

She bit her lip and shook her head, reaching over to pull a copy of the *Prophet* towards them. "Look at this," she said calmly, no malice in her voice.

"We knew that Skeeter would write up something. Who cares what she has to say?" he said.

"Not her words, Harry." She pointed to the picture of him in Snape's arms when they'd danced. "All my life I've wanted to see that expression on your face, and now that I see it, it's not me who's making you feel that way."

"Ginny, I..."

She smiled through her tears and said, "This is so hard for me, but Mum says that when you love someone, you set them free, and if one day they come back, well, it's meant to be."

"That's rubbish," he said, suddenly afraid of losing her.

"I did it before. I let you go to date other people, and you came back to me."

"Well, then we're meant to be, right, if you believe that. I'm just confused. If I take some time to think things..."

"I've made a decision, Harry."

"No, wait, don't say anything."

"We're done, and I want you to know that I don't blame you for this." She sniffed loudly, trying to stave off more tears. "I know you didn't want this to happen."

"I love you, I do. It's just crazy in my head. I feel things I shouldn't." He frowned. "Can't we just wait..."

"No," she said firmly. "I will not keep waiting. What if you never come back to me, Harry? What if you keep falling for him? How many years would you have me waste waiting? Are you so selfish? Don't you know what this is doing to me, trying to walk away from you like this?" She took his hands in hers. "If we do this now, we can remain friends, but otherwise, I don't know what would become of us."

"There's no other woman who compares to you, Ginny."

"But there's a man who compares and exceeds, isn't there?" she said sadly. "I can't compete with that, and you know it, Harry. You looked so secure in his arms. I could never make you feel that way. You were drawing from his strength. I guess I've just never been strong enough."

"Bollocks! You're one of the strongest girls I know."

"Oh, sure, Harry, but I'm no Snape. Someone who attacked you would get through me much easier than they would him." She placed her fingers on his lips. "Maybe it's time that you were the one being taken care of instead of always trying to take care of us."

Sitting back on his haunches, Harry felt a shudder go through his body. He'd never meant to hurt her, didn't want to hurt her, and yet, part of him felt relieved...part of him felt that this was wrong.

"We can't end things, Ginny. There will be a way to..."

"I blame my father, you know. It was his idea."

"He didn't know this would happen."

"Are you having sex with him?"

"What? No! It's not like that at all. We sleep in separate bedrooms even."

She nodded, somewhat mollified. "I wondered about it after I saw you. You both looked so... How does Snape feel?"

Harry shrugged. "I think he cares about me, too."

Ginny held out her arms, and Harry didn't hesitate as he went to her, holding her as tightly as he could, noticing that his heart was breaking. He'd never be in her soft, warm arms again. Not caring what she thought of him, he joined her in tears, sobbing openly, for it felt as if someone were dying, and ironically, he wondered if part of him wasn't doing exactly that.

"Stop crying," she cooed some time later. "I know how badly it hurts, but I think, in time, we'll be all right."

"Hurting you makes me feel like shit."

"If it didn't hurt a little, that would mean that you hadn't cared at all, so I won't say I'm not glad that you feel badly, and it makes me feel better to know that if I wanted to stay with you, all I have to do is tell you."

"Of course, we could find a way..."

"I was just speaking hypothetically. I won't ask that of you. I wouldn't want you to live torn like that, and I wouldn't want to have live like this. I'd rather just try to move on somehow and be happy in knowing that you're happy."

"Just because you are ending things with me, it doesn't mean that Severus and I will ever truly be in a relationship."

"Maybe. Maybe not. I guess we'll see."

Harry frowned and stood up, dusting off his jeans. "Ginny..."

"Go home to your husband, Harry. It's where you belong now."

He looked up at the Burrow and felt his heart pound madly. This had been more of a home to him than Privet Drive. Inside this home was his family, something he'd always wanted to be a part of. How could he just throw that away for something he wasn't exactly certain about?

"They know that I'm ending things," she whispered.

"Oh?" His voice cracked.

"They understand and support my decision."

He nodded and looked down at his trainers.

"They said to tell you that you'll always be welcome here and still part of the family." She smiled and stood, embracing him. "I'll always love you."

"I'll al-ways love you, too."

"Now, please leave before someone spots you."

"I don't care about them."

"They're probably watching now and waiting to report back to the Ministry."

"So? I don't want..."

"Please leave for *me* then. This is hard enough. I just need some time, all right?"

"Oh. Right." He kissed her head and backed away. "Up," he said to his broom. It flew up into his waiting hand. "For what it's worth, I'm sorry, Ginny."

She waved him away and hurried towards the house. Harry was sure that he saw a curtain close. Molly had probably been spying on them. Heart and mind heavy, he mounted his broom and flew up into the clouds as quickly as his broom could carry him.

Severus could tell that something wasn't quite right the moment Harry walked through the door. "What's wrong?"

"I went for ride on my broom," he replied. "Have you read the paper?"

"I saw that it had been delivered, but no, I haven't read it. I'm not looking forward to what lies Skeeter might have written about us."

"Ginny saw it," Harry said, finally meeting his eyes.

He saw that Harry's eyes were red, as though he'd cried. "All right?"

"No." It was a soft whisper.

"What does it say? Shall I go and make things right? I'll tell her whatever it says is rubbish."

"She saw us dancing."

"Yes, I remember. I told you I saw her."

"What she saw wasn't just dancing. She's ended things. It's over."

He knew Harry was hurting and confused, so he stayed where he stood. "I'm sorry for you. Maybe she'll come around."

Harry nodded. "Maybe." When Severus could think of nothing else to say, Harry spoke again, "I'm going to go up for a shower, and then I might lie down for a bit."

"Of course," Severus said, waving him off.

Once Harry had left, however, he frowned and sat back down in his chair. This hadn't turned out the way he'd thought it would. He was certain that Potter would choose the girl, and he might have done just that, given the chance, but she'd ended it before he could.

He quickly went over to the desk in the corner and snatched up the copy of the *Daily Prophet* that the delivery owl had brought earlier. What was it that had bothered the girl so much?

Reading through Kingsley's comments made him cringe again. He'd been utterly embarrassed when the man had drawn all attention to their table, but inversely, he felt a little pleased with the words. He'd finally garnered respect, though not from everyone, but it was a start. He had Harry to thank for that, just another thing that gave him affection for him.

"Ah, Lily, what would you say about this?"

Severus wished he could go to the Forbidden Forrest and find the Resurrection Stone that Harry had left out there. He would use it to summon her and ask her how she felt. And what if she demanded that he leave Harry be? Could he do it?

Everything was just getting out of hand. He'd never been drawn to anyone but Lily before, not like this. Sure, he'd been with a few other women and had extended relations with Rosmerta, but there'd never been any emotional tangling, just physical. Without thinking any further, he quickly grabbed his cloak and hurried out onto the street, walking briskly towards the old playground where he'd first talked to Lily.

It was mostly overgrown now, as it was rarely used and not well kempt. The swings had long rusted, and he dared not sit on the wooden seat. He'd gone there to feel closer to her, and he couldn't capture the feeling he'd always felt there. Why? Where had it gone?

No... Lily, don't slip away, he thought sadly before Disapparating to Godric's Hollow. He knew the path to her grave well, having been there many times before. The cold wind whipped around him, which it always seemed to do, and it was the first time he'd ever been to see her that his insides didn't match the weather outside.

He was no longer cold and empty inside. There was a new spark there, and that was because of Harry and the possibilities. Things had moved so quickly. One day he'd detested him, the next he'd tolerated him, the next he'd enjoyed his company, and after that, he'd found that he cared for him a great deal.

A fraction of him worried that he'd only taken to Harry because he was part of Lily, but he couldn't fully embrace that any longer. It was getting harder and harder to close his eyes and imagine Lily's face or hear her laughter. Harry was engrained there now.

When he reached the tombs, he disregarded James' and sat beside Lily's, reaching out to touch the dead flowers placed there. "Lily," he said, "I don't know where to begin, but there's something I have to talk to you about."

He looked around to make sure that nobody was about. "It concerns Harry. Don't worry, I've kept him safe all these years. You probably know that already though. What you don't know is that he and I had to get married." He snorted. "Your bloody son thought he was being noble. I hated him for it at first, but now I realize that it was the best way possible to keep me out of Azkaban. I will be forever grateful to him."

Severus smirked. "Ironic, isn't it? How many years have I thought of him and loathed him, seeing only James, but when I finally got to know him, I knew that he was much more like you. And that drew me to him. Now that I know him, I see more than that. He's not James. He's not you. He's just Harry, and Lily..."

Taking in a deep breath, he finished what he wanted to say. "Lily, I would like to spend my life with Harry, or at least, I would like to try. It may not work out. Maybe we're both deluding ourselves here, but I want to try."

"I know you're remembering that he fell in love with a young lady, one who resembles you actually, but things are over between them. Great girl, Ginny Weasley. She would have been good for him."

Standing, he said, "I feel a little selfish, but I am glad that things won't work out for him. I'll have a better chance." Shaking his head, Severus added, "See? Doesn't seem I can change! I don't mean to say that I don't care if they're both hurting right now, I do, but it just feels like I might finally get a chance at happiness...the chance I wanted with you."

He straightened his spine and sucked in a deep breath. "If you object to this in any way, please find a way to let me know." He looked around. Not a single bird was in the sky or in the trees. The wind had eerily died down. "Is this a sign then?"

Nothing.

"Maybe a clap of thunder. Can you do that? Or show yourself. Move something." He looked around wildly, trying to see anything out of place. "Do you approve then? Is it all right to... to love him?"

Silence reigned for a few moments, and then a lovely song filled the air. Having been around Fawkes for so many years, he knew it to be the song of a phoenix. He couldn't see anything, and the song was quite distant, but he was certain that this was the sign he'd wanted. He should be with Harry. The song faded, the wind picked up, and Severus bid his Lily farewell.

AN: Thanks go to blue_paris and Soul Bound for reading through this for me.

Part 10

Chapter 10 of 11

Harry feels that the only way to keep Snape from serving an undeserving stint in Azkaban is to go through a bonding ceremony with him, thus proving that if Harry Potter has enough faith in Severus Snape to marry him, the man can't be all that bad. How long will it take before the ruse turns real?

Part Ten

"Where were you?" Harry asked as soon as Severus walked in. "You've been gone for a while."

"I went for a walk. Is something wrong?"

"I..." In truth, he'd been afraid that Severus had gone off to the Burrow to try to smooth things over with Ginny, but Harry hadn't been about to check, not wanting to invade Ginny's privacy or face her family.

He'd thought about going to Grimmauld Place to talk to Ron and Hermione, but he found that he didn't want to face them yet either. He knew Hermione would start in on him, and he wasn't certain how Ron would feel about the situation, as he'd warned Harry early on about hurting Ginny.

"Should we, er, talk about anything?" Harry blurted.

"What do you want to talk about?"

Harry had been practicing what he'd say for a couple of hours, and now, he'd completely forgotten all he'd thought about. Taking a deep breath and grasping for composure, he extended a hand. "Come into the sitting room."

He led Severus to the couch and handed him a glass of elf-made wine before scurrying over to put another log on the fire. Once done, he placed himself next to Severus and held his own glass of wine.

"I want to talk about us."

It was hard to gauge Severus' reaction to these words, as his face was closed off and expressionless. He'd hoped that his husband would be willing to discuss what lay in the future.

"So talk."

"What's going to happen to us now?" Harry asked, deciding not to draw it out any longer.

"What would you like to happen?"

"What would *you* like to happen?" he tossed back at Severus.

"I think first we must discuss Ginevra. Are you certain that you and she are over?"

"Yes," Harry said firmly. "She's pretty sure about it."

"But what about you?"

"I would have tried to stay with her if she'd asked, but my... I would have still wanted you. I know that already." Harry noticed that Severus had stiffened. "I hate that I hurt her, but I feel relieved that it's happened this way."

"Harry, I never expected anything like this."

"Yeah, I know."

"I don't want to try this only to have you change your mind." He smiled wryly. "As you might have noticed, once I... once I commit myself to someone, it's something I take very seriously. I'm not certain that I could cope well if you decided to have a change of mind."

"Severus, Ginny was everything I could have wanted in a woman. I would never want any other woman but her."

"And?"

"And she and I agree that it would be best to call it quits. It will take some getting used to, but it's what I want. Really."

Nodding, Severus said, "Very well."

"And I certainly never looked twice at any blokes before now, so you don't have to worry there." He smiled and reached out to touch Severus' free hand while he took a sip of his wine. Harry had never felt freer than he was at that moment. Nobody was waiting in the darkness to hex him, no friendly mentors were using him for the greater good, and no one would be pressuring him to carry on his career or education or to start a family.

Severus flipped his hand over and held Harry's, gazing down at their interlocked fingers. "I'm not sure what to say. What do we do? How does this happen? I've never been

in a... been like *this* before."

Harry squeezed Severus' hand tightly and said, "Let's just keep doing as we have been. There's no need to rush anything."

"Fair enough," Severus said with a nod.

Their eyes fixed on each other, green meeting black. Harry wondered how it would feel to be sitting exactly where they were several years later. Would the excitement bubbling in his stomach be gone? Would his mind still be filled with hope for a new life, something meaningful to come? Would his body ache to be closer, still need physical contact? He certainly hoped so. The way he felt at that moment, he never wanted it to end.

When Severus cocked his head to the side and gazed more intently at him, Harry felt his cheeks heat. "Er, so, where did you get this wine?"

"The Malfoys' elves."

"They have more elves? I thought Dobby was the only one."

"There was another, and they replaced Dobby not long ago."

"Shite! What will they say about this? What have they said about it? I... I never asked." Harry felt a little guilty about that. He'd only been worrying about his friends and had never thought to ask Severus how his friends had adjusted. Come to that, Severus had never mentioned anyone at all.

"Lucius thought it was ingenious of me to do this. He does what it takes to stay out of Azkaban. I thought it wouldn't hurt to let him believe that it was I who talked you into this." He smirked.

"So, he doesn't care that you weren't a real Death Eater and betrayed them?"

Severus shook his head. "No. He's glad to have that behind him now. Like me, he has a new outlook on life and is hopeful that things can change."

"What about Draco?"

"He was appalled, naturally, but I believe he understands why we decided to do this. And..." Severus' voice trailed away.

"And?"

"He confided to me that he respects you. Draco will not forget what you've done to save his life."

"I hadn't even thought about that."

"You know, he asked if you'd been bringing it up. Wanted to know what you thought he owed you." Severus placed his glass on the table and used his free hand to trace Harry's hand that held his. "I told him that you'd never mentioned it once."

"I would have done that for anyone who needed it."

"It's one of the many things I discovered about you, Harry. You aren't what I thought. I always thought you to be arrogant and attention seeking, and unfortunately, I would have bet money that you'd thought of ways to call in what he owed you."

"Surprise," Harry said blandly.

"At least I'm being honest."

"Yeah, and I appreciate that."

"What's different about me?"

"You're actually nice."

"How dare you!" Severus said playfully, releasing Harry's hand and taking the wineglass from his other. "There was no reason to show a different side of myself to students, especially not your lot. If you asked around, I'm sure you would find that my fellow co-workers found me quite affable."

"I already did and you're right. They saw you as I see you now."

"Before Albus..."

"Yeah."

"I don't care to talk about that."

"One day though."

"One day I might." Severus leaned closer, his eyes flicking from Harry's lips to his eyes and back. "I'd like to kiss you."

Harry's stomach fluttered in anticipation, his heart thudding loudly. "Of course, you don't have to ask."

"I thought it might be prudent. It's all so new for us." Severus closed the distance between them and tentatively brushed his lips against Harry's.

Heat radiated from Severus' body, and Harry leaned closer, lifting a hand to rest on Severus' shoulder. He wanted more and parted his lips, sweeping his tongue against his husband's mouth. When Severus granted entrance, feeling overtook Harry. It felt as though a jolt of energy was being passed back and forth, feeding off their magic and fueling their feelings. He slanted his head more, giving Severus complete access to his mouth. Each tangle of their tongues sealed their fates, for there would be no turning back, no divorce, no other lovers...ever.

When he breathlessly pulled away to speak, Severus shushed him with eager lips again, causing him to moan. Although it felt disloyal, he had to admit that Ginny's kisses had never affected him in such a way. He'd found ambrosia and wanted more, wanted it forever. "Severussss," he whispered moments later, resting his forehead against his husband's.

"Harry," came the soft reply.

A loud grumble rent the air. "Shit. Sorry."

"Hungry, are you?"

They both laughed. "I popped out and got some take away. It's in the kitchen." He rose. "Coming?"

Severus nodded and brought the glasses and wine bottle with them, and Harry hoped he hadn't seen the redness on his face. It was quite corny, but the instant he'd said

'coming,' he'd imagined Snape doing just that...arched back against the moonlight, moaning, thrusting.

"All right?"

"Just thinking."

"Ah, Indian. Excellent." Another grumble sounded. "Now you've got my stomach doing it."

During dinner, they talked about the changes that were being made to Hogwarts, and Harry broached a subject he'd been thinking about. "Do you plan to go back there? To teach?"

"No, I don't think I will, if they'd even want me."

"I think they would now that they know the truth."

"Could be, but it doesn't matter now." He used the fork to stir the channa dhal around. "Lots of curry sauce tonight."

"The beans are good. Mmm. The chicken's good, too, but I still like these pakoras best. I could bloody well just eat those and be satisfied."

"There's no meat in them. I have to have meat." After he said this, he ripped into a chunk of tandoori chicken and chewed it viciously. "Mmm."

Harry wondered how he'd ever thought Snape's crooked teeth to be a mark against him. It was a shame the way immature people thought about others. He was pleased that he'd matured enough to realize that and hoped that when he had children, they'd learn the right way.

He froze. Children.

He would never have children, something he'd always wanted. Deciding not to bring this up, he redirected his thoughts, lest Snape guess something was amiss*ll's too soon to be thinking about all that. Wasn't I just annoyed not long ago with Mrs. Weasley's comments about wanting more grandkids soon? There is always adoption.*

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Just enjoying my food." Harry could see that Snape hadn't bought his lie, but he was grateful that he didn't pry any more. There were too many other things to work out. Hell, in the future, he might even find that he was satisfied with Severus without anything else in their lives.

Before their meal was done, a knock sounded on the front door. "Who could that be?" Severus asked in annoyance. "It had better be important, coming round when we're eating dinner."

"I'll go see." Harry wiped his mouth with a napkin and sprinted for the front door. With a wave of his hand, the wards slid away, opening the door slightly as they did so, and he peeked through a small crack. Bushy hair, lots of it. "Hermione, that you?"

"Yes."

He opened the door wider and saw Ron next to her. Both looked glum. "All right?"

"Are you going to invite us in or not?" Hermione asked carefully. "We want to talk to you."

Harry propped against the doorjamb and looked behind him to make certain Severus hadn't followed before he answered. "If you've come to give Severus a hard time, then I won't ask you in."

"We don't want to talk to him," Ron said sourly. "Just you."

"This is his home, Ron."

"And I'm sure he wouldn't mind if you had a talk with your friends," Hermione interrupted, stepping forward to push the door open. "Move aside," she demanded bossily.

Harry decided to give them a chance. They'd have to have the talk sooner or later. "Have a seat in there. I'll just go let Severus know."

"Fine. Come on, Hermione."

He didn't wait to see if they'd gone into the sitting room as he walked down the narrow hall and into the back entrance to the kitchen. "Severus? Ron and Hermione are here. They want to talk to me."

Severus wiped his mouth before answering. "You won't mind if I don't wait to finish the meal without you then?"

Shocked, Harry grinned and said, "No, go on. Don't eat my pakoras though."

Smirking, Severus said, "I might save a couple for you."

Feeling better about the situation, Harry joined his friends, almost laughing as they both jumped as if being caught doing something wrong. "It's just me," he said with a smile. "You're safe. Looks like Snape's in a good mood."

"What's going on, Harry?"

Leave it to Hermione to get straight to the point. "I'm sure you've heard by now that Ginny and I have mutually decided to end our relationship."

"So it's true then," she said with a nod, sitting back against the couch while yanking off her scarf. "I expected this to happen, but not so soon."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked in surprise.

"I was just telling Ron last night after the Ministry party that you and the professor looked rather..."

"Rather?"

Ron said, "She told me that it looked like you were a real couple, that you fancied each other."

Harry could see that Ron was hoping it wasn't true, and he knew that he would need to be very careful with what he said next. "I still love Ginny, Ron. I always will."

"Then what's all this rubbish?"

"It was her idea to break things off."

"You don't seem too broken up about it."

"Yes, he does," Hermione interjected. "His eyes, they're puffy and a little red. Cried earlier, I expect."

"It felt like I lost part of myself, and I suppose I did."

"Get her back, mate. You know she loves you. There's still time."

Harry shook his head. "I agree with her idea to break things off. It's a little complicated now because, you see, Ron, I do believe I have feelings for Snape. Rather sudden, I know, but there's something between us, and if we don't explore that now, I don't think I could ever live a full life."

Ron frowned. "I just thought that we'd be family. You know, me and Hermione, you and Ginny."

"We're still family, Ron. That hasn't changed. Not for me anyway."

Hermione had tears in her eyes. "I just want you to be happy, Harry, and from what I saw last night, it seems like Snape really has changed."

"He hasn't changed, Hermione. This was who he was before, just a different side of him that we never saw."

"Well, he did change some," Ron commented. "I mean, I've never see him looking so clean before."

"Ron, stop!" Hermione hissed.

"What? Just saying."

Harry laughed. "How's Grimmauld Place holding up?"

"All those bloody Doxies are gone, blighters."

"It's all right for us, if that's what you want to know," Hermione said knowingly. "Right there in London and all."

"Good." Harry gestured around. "This place isn't much, but it feels like home."

"Only... Kreacher's been asking when you'll be home. Seems rather anxious about it. I told him that he'll just have to wait, but he doesn't like listening to me."

"But he does at least," Ron said. "Grumbles all the time about Harry being gone, but I think he likes us being there a lot."

"You make him cook all the time!"

"Oi! He likes it, gives him something to do."

"Maybe I'll ask Severus to let him come here," Harry said thoughtfully.

"Maybe," Severus said from the doorway, "he only wants to serve the House of Black."

"Hadn't thought of that," Harry said.

"Hello, Professor," Hermione said, elbowing Ron.

"Snape."

"Miss Granger, Weasley."

"I guess I'll have to go round and talk to Kreacher. I'll give him a choice."

"You're letting us have your house?" Ron asked suddenly, having caught on. "Our own place?"

"I won't be needing another house," he said and looked up to Severus. "Or do we?"

Severus smiled and shook his head. "I think this will do, though," he looked around, "we might carry on with your renovation attempts."

"Sure needs it," Ron said, only to have another elbow pressed into his side by Hermione. "What? My house isn't exactly the best either."

"Harry and I were just having dinner when you came."

"Oh, sorry!" Hermione said, standing up. "We'll go."

"What are you having?" Ron asked curiously.

"You needn't leave," Severus said. "I was just about to retire to read. Stay as long as you'd like."

"No, really, we have to go. We're supposed to, uh... go round to the Burrow."

"We are...oh, yeah, right. Sorry. Maybe another time," Ron said with a slight shrug.

"I'll pop over tomorrow," Harry promised. "Let Kreacher know."

"All right."

"So, you're making a go of it then?" Ron asked, looking at Snape and refusing to allow Hermione to pull him away.

"I'd say so, yes," Severus answered.

"Considering we're already married and all," Harry added with a sly smirk.

"Indeed."

"Right then. Be good to my mate, Snape." Ron then turned to Harry. "And I'll look in on Ginny for you."

"Thank you, Ron."

The pair left and Severus said, "I put a Warming Charm on your dinner."

"Thanks."

"Harry, I think for now, while we're getting to know each other and exploring this, we should remain in our own beds. Otherwise, it might be tempting to move more quickly

than we've planned."

Suddenly nervous about that part of their relationship, Harry nodded. "Sounds all right with me."

"Of course if you want company, I could read from your bed just as well as from mine until we're ready to sleep."

"I'd like that."

"See you upstairs," Severus said with a nod.

Watching his husband leave the room, he couldn't help but to smile. Things would work out for the best. He'd have to remember to thank Arthur Weasley one day...after all this blew over. Harry hurried to finish his meal, wanting to be close to Severus.

AN: Only the epilogue left, mates! Thanks go to blue_paris and Soul Bound for reading through this for me!

Epilogue

Chapter 11 of 11

Harry feels that the only way to keep Snape from serving an undeserving stint in Azkaban is to go through a bonding ceremony with him, thus proving that if Harry Potter has enough faith in Severus Snape to marry him, the man can't be all that bad. How long will it take before the ruse turns real?

Epilogue

Harry walked through the garden at the Burrow and felt at ease. Everything in life had fallen into place just as it should have. He stopped in front of the stone bench that Ginny had sat on that faithful day three years before when she'd made the decision to move on with her life. She'd finished school at Hogwarts and then started at St. Mungo's as a Healer when she'd finished a medical course at the Ministry.

She'd dated a few people here and there but was more focused on her career at the moment. Nobody had to ask to know that she felt she'd made the right decision. Ginny was definitely happy with her career and the freedom that being single entailed.

Severus had taken up making potions from their home and had ended up bringing in a large amount of income each month. Harry had finally opted to become an Auror. Kingsley had generously waived the need for him to study at the Aurory for three years. He was, after all, Harry Potter. What could they do to prepare him for a Dark Lord that he didn't already know?

Laughter brought Harry out of his thoughts, and he turned to find Severus holding Teddy and pointing down at an angry gnome. Both were quite amused at something the little creature had done. Severus loved Teddy just as much as Harry did, and Harry hoped that somewhere in the afterlife, Remus and Tonks were pleased that Teddy's godparents took such good care of him. They'd eagerly accepted an arrangement with Andromeda Tonks when she'd decided she had to return to work and let the boy stay with them as often as he needed.

Severus had even painted and decorated the spare room for him. And while he wasn't quite talking in full sentences yet, Harry sometimes heard Severus trying to explain properties of potions ingredients to him. Soon, Ron and Hermione would be married. They'd finally set a date and had just announced it at Molly's Sunday dinner. Harry was happy for them, and to hear Ron tell it, Kreacher was looking forward to catering his new owners' wedding. It seemed the house-elf had a thing for cooking, much to Ron's delight of course.

The spark he'd first felt when Severus was near him had never faded. It was there with every kiss, every caress, and every gaze. He sat down on the bench and watched his family as they strolled through the messy vines and flowers. Severus would have made a great father, and Harry knew that he, too, would have been an excellent father. He'd never broached the subject of adoption, and he wasn't certain that he ever would. They were happy with each other, and Teddy visited them almost daily. Life was good.

All aspects of it...especially the sex. He closed his eyes and thought back to the first time they'd ever made love. They'd started out trying to sleep in separate beds, one or the other reading until it had been time to turn in. That hadn't lasted long. They'd decided that as adults, adults who were falling in love with each other, they could share a bed if they so chose.

And so Severus had refurbished his parents' old room for them...their very own master suite. The very first night that they'd spent between the brand-new sheets had been the very first time they'd made love.

He drifted back to that night....

"I guess it's time to turn in then," Harry said, feeling a little nervous. He watched as Severus slowly unfastened his robes, revealing small portions of his pale chest as he did so. Harry immediately wanted to go to him and touch his soft skin, to follow the line of hair down to the treasure it surrounded below his underpants.

When the robe fell to the floor, Severus was left in only his underpants and socks. "Harry," he said softly, "undress. I want to see you."

He'd never undressed in front of Severus before, even though they'd been practically sharing each other's beds for the past couple of weeks. He wanted Severus to watch him undress. He wanted this more than anything, needed it. His desire to finally become intimate with his husband didn't quell the shyness he felt. He'd never been with a man. What if he did something wrong?

"Don't be nervous." The words were whispered into his ear, causing goosebumps to rise from his shoulder down to his leg on the left side.

"I am a little." Harry grinned. "I've done this before, just never..."

"Then we are in the same predicament. Remember, *this* is also a first for me."

Those words, so honest and firmly spoken, were all Harry needed to be put at ease. His hands, now steady, pulled his shirt up and off. His fingers then found the button for his jeans, quickly flicking it open, before moving to the zip. Before he could finish, Severus' hands were moving his away, eagerly pushing down his jeans.

Harry took notice of the bared throat revealed to him and began nibbling on it with his mouth, knowing that Severus enjoyed it. Both down to their underpants, nearly naked bodies pressing against each other, they allowed their hands and mouths to roam, enjoying the sensations. "I want you," he whispered. Before long, he and Severus both kicked away their underpants, their erections jutting out and pressing against each other. It was the most intimate thing Harry had ever felt in his life.

A hiss escaped Harry's lips as Severus' hand closed around his hard cock. Severus had a firm grip, a steady stroke, and a hot hand. To Harry, it felt like paradise, and he felt the need to reciprocate. He slid one arm around Severus' waist and cupped his arse as the other hand dropped down to cup his lover's balls, his fingers softly fondling the sac.

"Ah, Harry," Severus whispered.

Their lips crashed into each other for a frenzied kiss, and Harry found himself being pushed back towards the bed, but instead of being pushed down, Severus turned and pulled Harry down on top of him. As he gazed down into Severus' eyes, Harry knew then and there that he'd never want to be anywhere else. "I love you, you know."

Severus smiled and cupped Harry's chin, his wedding ring shining. "I can say that as well."

"Then say it."

Instead of saying it, apparently wanting to show him, Severus rolled his hips against Harry's body, his lips latching onto his neck, sucking possessively, likely leaving a mark, which he seemed to enjoy. His long fingers glided up and down Harry's back, occasionally squeezing his arse.

Harry rocked against Severus and felt his cock stiffen even more. Would he ever be close enough? He moved his lips to Severus' ear and traced it before trailing open-mouthed kisses down to his collarbone, inhaling Severus's cologne as he did so.

"God, you smell good."

His mouth found a new path and maneuvered its way to each flat nipple, tongue circling and teeth playfully nipping. "Ah! Watch it," Harry said through a chuckle as one of Severus' fingers went too close to his arsehole. Exploring further, he worked his way down to his lover's impressive cock, and unable to resist, he tasted the reddened head, using his tongue to circle around the tip before roaming down the length and back up again.

A hand pulled him away. "I'll never last if you don't stop that."

Harry nodded and made a note to explore that further, for he'd enjoyed the way it had made Severus shudder with pleasure.

Severus cleared his throat. "I thought that we might do this, so I took the liberty of placing a tube of lubricant on the table, just there." He nodded to Harry's right.

Grinning, Harry said, "Are you sure you want me to do this? Be the person on top?"

"I think that would be best. This time," Severus said, red splotches brightening his cheeks.

Harry's insides quivered in anticipation; just the thought of sliding into Severus' welcoming body had him aching with need. He was certain that his dick could get no harder and that his bollocks would begin protesting soon if he didn't do something. He quickly reached for the tube and sat up, moving so that he knelt between Severus' legs. As he lathered his length with the clear, pleasant smelling gel, he gazed into his husband's eyes, not wanting to miss a thing.

Instinct took over, and he moved closer, putting more lube on his finger to ready Severus. This caused Severus' eyes to widen for a moment, and Harry bit his lip to keep from grinning. He tossed the tube on the side and steadied himself on the bed with one arm while the other hand helped to guide himself to Severus.

One, two, three times he rubbed the head of his dick against Severus' arse, sucking in air at how it felt. Ever so easily, he pressed closer, seeking acceptance. To his amazement, he slid in slowly, his shaft throbbing as the hot, tight flesh opened for his girth.

Severus had closed his eyes and tilted his head back against the pillow, one hand rubbing a small circle around one of his flat nipples, the other gripping the duvet beneath him tightly. "Don't stop," he whispered, keeping his eyes closed, causing Harry to realize that he'd stopped to watch his lover.

He closed his own eyes and concentrated on pushing in further, pulling back a little, pushing in more, pulling, pushing. Harry had never felt anything like it in his past and was uncertain anything in life had felt so good before. When he was all the way in, he placed his other arm on the side of Severus so that he was positioned over him fully and leaned down to kiss him chastely on the lips.

"All right?"

Severus opened his eyes and nodded, the hand on his chest moving to grip Harry's head and bring it closer for a heated kiss. Instinctively, Harry began to move, slowly at first, relishing the feel of being inside of his lover, and then more quickly, wanting to continue triggering Severus' moans and gasps.

He pulled back a little and looked down to where their bodies met, amazed at how erotic it was to see his dick sliding in and out of Severus' tight arse, seeing Severus' balls bouncing with each slam of his hips. *This is really happening. I'm doing it,* he thought. Aloud, he muttered, "Ah, fuck... yeah."

Severus' hand that had been clutching the duvet was now holding onto Harry's shoulder, as if trying to keep him close, and his other hand had now moved down to stroke his own abandoned cock. "Faster," he said suddenly. "Faster, Harry! Harder."

Harry obliged, moving in hard, steady thrusts. "Severus... Severus, I'm going to come. I won't be long. I'm...it's coming."

"Oh, shit!" Severus said through a moan, and Harry felt a few drops of warm liquid hit his stomach.

Knowing that Severus had come pushed him closer to the edge, and within moments, Harry felt as though something had exploded within him, wave after wave of feeling washed over him until he collapsed atop Severus, both panting heavily. Later, as Harry drifted off to sleep, he heard Severus utter three words of affection, sealing their relationship and love for all time. Oh, yes. Life was good.

AN: And that's all, folks! Thanks to merioddities for the request at the Snapely Holidays exchange and thanks to blue_paris and Soul Bound for reading through this. It's my first long Snarry. Whew!