

Untouched

by chivalric

In the night of the final battle, Snape gets hit by a curse. Lupin goes to great lengths to save the Potions master's life and sanity.

Desipentia

Chapter 1 of 11

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1: Desipentia

The wind howled, and the night was filled with cries of fear and pain. Shadows fought in the distance; the flames from the burning school made the darkness lighter, but not less cruel.

Near the Shrieking Shack a man lay unconscious on the dry grass, and another knelt beside him. They weren't alone: the Headmaster, dirty and tired and full of battle rage, looked down at both men. "Are you absolutely certain, Remus?" he asked, his eyes darting back and forth, piercing the darkness, and looking out for enemies.

Remus nodded; his face was smeared with ash, and he looked tired. "Yes. I stood right next to him when the curse hit. Square into his groin, and Bellatrix laughed like mad when she saw she was successful. Severus fell like a log." The werewolf wiped his dirty hands on his trousers and then felt for the Potions master's pulse; it was there, but unsteady and racing.

Dumbledore frowned with concern. He was distracted, as the battle still raged on; his eyes, like restless flashlights dashed to the burning school and back to the two men on the muddy ground. Making a decision, he pointed his wand at Snape. "I will put a stasis spell on him until we have time to find a solution," he said. The wind blew his beard aside; smoke and screams filled the air. It was the night Voldemort would die; if not, a catastrophe was inevitable.

Remus reached out and wrapped his fingers round Albus Dumbledore's wrist. "Don't," he urged. "You know the curse that hit him reacts badly to magic; you might kill him with an additional spell. There is only one solution. You know that, too. The sooner it is done, the better for him."

Hogwarts' Headmaster hesitated and then lowered his wand. "What do you suggest, Remus?" he asked, clearly wishing to be back amongst the fighting. Fewer than expected had died tonight but still too many to call this a complete success. That one of his friends lay unconscious before him in the blood-soaked grass visibly unnerved him.

The werewolf scooped up Snape with a swift move, as if the Potions master didn't weigh more than a child. "I will take him to his quarters, and I will stay with him," Remus said and turned to walk away.

Dumbledore called after him. "He will attack you when he awakes; attack you with the intent to kill. Can you cope with that?"

Remus continued walking, his burden cradled safely in his arms. "He won't stand a chance against me. I'm stronger than him even under the best of circumstances. He is weakened; I can handle him."

A step, and the Headmaster was beside the werewolf. Casting a *Lumos*, he brightened the path for Remus Lupin. "To break the curse, to undo what Bellatrix has done, to prevent his mind... you have until sunrise," he said quietly. "And you will have to force him. Bind him, possibly gag him. Can you cope with that as well?"

Now Remus halted. The light of a half moon shone on his brown, grey-streaked hair. Staring into the night, he nodded. "He's my friend, Albus, although he has a different opinion on that matter. I will stay with him. I will do what is necessary. I will not allow Bellatrix to win, and I certainly will not watch Severus go mad and kill himself as a result of this curse."

"Goodness," Dumbledore whispered and followed the werewolf for a moment with sad eyes. Then he turned and shot a hex towards Antonin Dolohov, who had been just about to send an *Avada Kedavra* after Remus Lupin.

The wards around Snape's door recognised their master and allowed Remus to enter his friend's private quarters. When he entered, the flames in the fireplace sprang to life, warming the dark room and casting light. Candles lit themselves along the walls, revealing large bookshelves and a surprisingly cosy living room.

A quick look round and the werewolf found the door to Snape's bedroom, kicked it open, and finally lowered the unconscious body gently onto the mattress. The bed was small, clearly made to harbour only one person. Snape was a solitary man; Remus had the strong feeling that he preferred to seek relaxation outside of Hogwarts instead of bringing bed partners into the school.

Wiping his face with the sleeve of his shirt, Remus took specific care to ward the doors with a stronger spell than usual. Outside, a battle was going on: inside, there was an extremely skilled wizard who would be close to madness by the time he woke. Remus couldn't allow Snape out of here before he had either broken the curse or...

No. There was no 'or'. The curse needed to be broken or Severus would be as good as dead. Therefore, Remus searched for the Potions master's wand, found it, spelled it against its master's access, and hid it under a charm. Severus wouldn't find it, wouldn't be able to conjure it, and would be a lot less dangerous without it.

For good measure, Remus hid his own wand as well. Now it would be physical strength only, and in that area Severus stood no chance against the werewolf. Wandless magic was out of the question as well that required a lot of concentration, and Severus would be too far gone with pain and panic, madness and lust to perform as much as a *Lumos* successfully. At least, Remus hoped so. After all, the night had just begun, and it would take hours before Bellatrix's curse would embody its full strength. Who knew what Severus would or would not be able to do?

It was several minutes before Remus was able to sit down next to the bed, waiting for Severus to wake up. He was nervous and restless. It felt wrong, in a way, to be here. First of all, he had never been in the Potions master's private rooms before. He doubted that anyone had ever been invited in, and it was a massive breach of trust to be there now. Secondly, he should be on the battlefield, protecting Harry, protecting the school. Instead, he was here, in a safe and warm room, warded strongly against attackers. Remus felt like a coward, running away from danger, but knew at the same time that he would have to do something horrific in a few hours time, something much worse than fighting and protecting innocents.

Severus stirred on the bed. His hands clutched at the sheets, and he moaned once.

Remus closed his eyes in despair. He didn't want to do it. The problem was that if he refused to break the curse Severus would go mad in a very short time. He couldn't let that happen.

Severus tossed and turned. His legs kicked the bedcovers away.

Carefully avoiding touching the Potions master, Remus took off the man's boots and his socks, eased him out of his robes, and then began unbuttoning his shirt. He wanted to undress his friend as much as possible without leaving him nude; Severus would be terrified enough upon awaking. Nevertheless, the fabric would burn him, and wearing only trousers and open shirt would make it easier for him to shed them quickly.

Remus shuddered at the thought.

A strangled cry; Remus jumped. The Potions master had woken up and now threw his lean body round, pressed his face into the pillow, and screamed.

"Severus," Remus said as quietly as possible. "Severus, listen to me!"

The man on the bed pushed himself up with a violent passion that seemed to surprise himself but not the werewolf. Wide-eyed, Snape stared at Lupin, obviously not understanding what his old enemy was doing in his rooms. Then he observed his own naked feet, the unbuttoned shirt, and his pale, uncovered chest. He realised that he was in bed, in his own bed, although he should have been on the battlefield.

"What the hell happened?" he hissed with narrowed eyes. "I was near the Shrieking Shack; I fought... someone. Why am I here? Why are *you* here?" His hands moved whilst he talked. They raked his hair back and out of his strained face and wiped across his mouth. Finally, they dug into the fabric of his shirt, ripped, and tossed it away. Half naked now, Snape sat on his bed, becoming more and more bewildered by the second.

Remus tried to stay calm, although each word and each movement scared him. The reaction was stronger than he had expected. "You've been hit by a curse, Severus. Bellatrix. You were fighting her when she cast a *Desipentia*. It hit you directly. You fell. I carried you back here and... waited."

Snape gasped with shock. Simultaneously, he left his bed and began pacing like a wild panther in too small a cage. "Bitch," he murmured. "Damn, fucking bitch." Then, without warning, he attacked.

Remus, despite knowing that the curse caused unexpected actions, was caught off-guard simply because things had happened so very fast. Usually, a victim was able to stay calm and focussed for at least a little while, until the curse tightened its grip. Severus, though, was behaving as if he'd been under the influence of *Desipentia* for longer than he really had, acting like a man already in the arms of madness.

He attacked swiftly and efficiently. Somehow, the werewolf had assumed that the Potions master, being an extremely skilled wizard with or without wand, had never learned how to fight with his fists. He was wrong there. Severus leaped at him, punched him hard in the stomach, and had him on the floor in less than a heartbeat. A second blow and Remus's head snapped back. Painfully, his skull was beaten against the stones underneath him.

Then he reacted, dizzy and with blood streaming out of his nose, caught the Potions master's hands in his, and threw him halfway across the room. Rising quickly, Remus put the bed between them, discouraging a second attack. "Severus, you need to calm down," he panted. "I'm here to break the curse. The faster we do it, the easier it will be for the both of us."

Snape laughed, deeply and bitterly. The werewolf easily heard his wild heartbeat. "You won't touch me, wolf," he snarled. "No one has ever touched me against my will, and you won't start whatever the reason." Sliding down the wall, the rough stones scratching his back, he sat in the corner and wrapped his arms around his knees. He looked horribly lost and vulnerable.

"You are going mad, Severus," Remus argued. "At the moment you can still think, and your skin can bear touch. It won't stay like this and you know it. You've already discarded your shirt because it hurt you. Very soon you will shed the rest of your clothing, because it burns your skin, but by then, my touch will hurt you beyond belief as well. If you allow me... now..."

"Get out of my rooms, Lupin," Snape growled and grabbed a fire poker. He got up and swung the makeshift weapon dangerously. "Now, or I will kill you. I wouldn't mind. You know I despise you. GET OUT!"

Remus turned and fled, the wards letting him through since he had created them. He slammed the door shut and leaned against it, sweating and shaking.

Then he waited. Severus wouldn't be able to stick with his decision: in a few hours time, he would start screaming, would crave a touch, anyone's touch, even if the one who touched him was someone he loathed and the touch would bring only more pain.

Sighing, he summoned a rope: he knew he would need it later that night.

To Snape, going mad felt like maggots crawling through his brain and like flames licking at his skin. The soft, grey flannel of his shirt resembled nothing more than barbed wire, slashing him, cutting him.

Thinking became impossible. His mind went in circles, sound and light was torture, and when he saw the werewolf sitting next to his bed, fear and hate flooded him. Although he would have considered Lupin an acceptable companion during Order meetings and at the High Table, he now considered killing him, beating the life out of him, and ending it with a quick break of the neck a worthy option.

At the same time, Snape felt like kissing the werewolf, like ripping the clothes off the man's body, like... like what? Hadn't he said he despised him? Then how was it possible that he desired him at the same time?

This curse what had it been? Desipentia? Now that was bad, really bad. A curse that caused madness and lust alike, a curse he had no clue why it wasn't considered an Unforgivable. It inflamed desire but forbade touch. It ripped one's mind apart and hindered logical decisions. True, Lupin would have been able to break the curse, to end it before it had really begun. However, Snape was unable to see that reasoning. He would have killed the werewolf if he hadn't left his rooms voluntarily. Killed him or raped him, whatever possibility had occurred first.

Pacing, up and down, from one wall to the other. Ripping at the long strands of his hair, scratching his skin, trying to extinguish the feeling of fire burning him. Muttering unintelligible words under his breath and hating himself for his lack of self-control. He should be able to control the curse; he should be the master of his body and his mind. Shouldn't he?

How did he get into the shower when had he undressed completely? Why did the water feel like lava, and why was the water that ran into the drain red?

Whilst the spray hit his head, Snape stared at his hands. Under his nails there were flakes of his skin, scratched from his shoulders and arms. Down his thighs, pink rivulets trickled blood, mixed with water. "Hellfire," Snape murmured and managed to get out of the bathroom, although he didn't know how. Or why.

Naked, he picked up pacing again, but his feet were unsteady, and his muscles cramped with every step. He wasn't aware that he bumped into furniture, wasn't aware that his body was covered in bruises and cuts. He thought he was thinking about a way to get out of this mess, of figuring out a potion to break the curse; in fact, he had his arms wrapped around his shaking body, his nails dug deep into his flesh, and he stared into nothingness whilst his feet left bloody marks on his floor.

Screams in the darkness. Was that him crying out in pain? Where was he, when was he, and come to think about it, who was he? Had he had a name at some time in the past? Was there a purpose for this exceptional pain? Had he sinned or failed? Had he earned this torture?

Snape crawled under his workbench, shivering with cold and banging his head against the table leg. Blood ran into his eyes and down his cheeks.

Desire washed through him, so strong it forced another scream out of him. It took his heart and squeezed; it grabbed his cock and crushed it in its grip. *Lupin*, he thought. *I want him. I need him.* But he was unable to articulate his thoughts, and therefore, the torture continued. One word and the werewolf would have been by his side, breaking the curse. Pity he'd forgotten that there was someone outside his rooms who was willing to help him.

Screams became howls. Another fifteen minutes, and the Potions master's mind would be crushed as well, crushed in the curse's cruel hands, crushed for good. This was happening too fast. The pain, the screaming, the feeling of his mind leaking out of his head like yolk out of a cracked eggshell... That should happen close to sunrise, not now, not before midnight, so shortly after the curse had hit him.

Snape staggered out from under the workbench, scrambled to his feet, and ran head first into the next wall, trying to end the pain and the madness and the burning desire by breaking his skull.

Remus heard the screams and knew it was time to end this. Earlier, when Severus had woken up, when he had found a weapon, it had been impossible to get anywhere near him. A *Stupefy*, a *Petrificus Totalus*, any hex or spell couldn't be used, as it would interact with the original curse, making it worse. And a fight, back then, might have ended in death for either the Potions master or Remus. Not a happy prospect. After all, he thought he had time until sunrise.

Now Severus screamed, and that was not good at all too early for that, and he sounded in far too much pain. Now, only two hours after the curse had hit him, Severus needed help, needed it desperately, and clearly cried out for someone to help him, anyone to end the torture he suffered.

Goosebumps ran along the werewolf's spine when he entered the private rooms of Hogwarts' Potion master once more he had reset the wards and they let him in without a problem. He expected the situation inside to be grave, but he hadn't considered that he might find Severus attempting to bash in his own skull by running into the wall. Given the blood that covered the dark wizard's pale face, it wasn't the first time his head had hit the stones.

With one long stride, Remus blocked his friend's way, catching him by the shoulders. The Potions master's face was covered in blood; ugly wounds disfigured his forehead. Shaking violently, he tried to get around the werewolf, bumped into him once more, and only then realised that he wasn't alone anymore.

He blinked, stared, and then seemed to recognise the one who had hindered his poorly designed suicide attempt. "End it!" he rasped. "I beg you, end it. Please, Lupin, I can't stand this any longer!" Reaching out, he clutched at the werewolf's robes in despair, ripping the fabric, crumpling it, tearing it apart.

When his bare hand touched the werewolf's skin, he jerked back. "Hurts," he groaned and fell to his knees. "Everything hurts. My brain melts. Kill me. End it!"

Ashen-coloured and shocked, Remus retreated until he hit the wall behind him. "It shouldn't be that bad yet!" he whispered. "You should be able... it should have taken hours for you to reach this stage of the curse!"

Snape's bitter laugh was overlaid with hysteria. "Good to know. So good to know that usually everything would be different. Isn't it always different for everyone apart from me?" Eyes wild and haunted, he seemed to look for a way to escape this the situation as well as his rooms. On his hands, where he had touched Remus's skin, blisters showed, cracked, and left raw flesh underneath.

It didn't change the fact that he wanted to touch Lupin again, and wanted, needed to be touched in return.

Slowly he got up, like a man much older than he actually was. Remus saw the long scratches on the pale, lean body, the haggard, dirty face. Severus looked like a creature from hell; undoubtedly the Potions master considered himself in hell already.

One step, and another one, and Severus stood at arm's length from the other man. "You smell of death, wolf," he rasped. "Death and ash and smoke. Blood. Battle. Why are you here?" Apparently, he had forgotten their earlier conversation.

"To help you survive the night," Remus whispered. Had he really thought he could deal with this, with the man in front of him? How naïve. He was no match for the Potions master, and this was a most unfortunate time to find that out. But without him, Severus was lost as surely as tonight was the night of the final battle. "I will do what is necessary; I will not allow Bellatrix's curse to cause you further harm."

In between heartbeats Severus had come close, stood only a hand span away. He was just an inch or two taller than the werewolf, so it was easy for Remus to look into the other man's eyes.

They were no longer black, but a fading, unearthly grey. All colour had seeped out of the naked man's eyes and his body as well; his lips were as white as his skin, and only his hair, still wet and dripping from his shower, was darker than ever. His pupils were huge, and he radiated an eerie coldness. "End it," he breathed. "Going mad is horrible. Please!"

Then he swayed, staggered backwards, and fell to the ground. Cramps shook his body, and he screamed once more. His nails dug into his shaking shoulders, ripped his flesh open; his fingers, his hands were covered in blood.

Remus reacted fast, much faster than he had thought he'd manage a moment ago. But the sight of his friend lying twitching on the cold stones nearly broke his heart, and so he took the rope from his pocket and went down, pressing his knee into Severus's back. With his free hand, he snatched the Potions master's flailing wrist and forced his arm behind his back, ignoring the gasps of pain and the feeling of skin breaking under his palm.

"Hold still," Remus murmured and bound Severus's hands behind his back. Bound him tight, then let him go. Now Severus was at least unable to hurt himself any further.

Snape, though, quite obviously disliked being restrained. He brought his knees underneath him and managed to get up. Under the lanky strands of his hair, he stared at the werewolf, pure loathing in his eyes.

Then he muttered a word, and Remus felt an invisible hand clutch at his throat, pressing tight, strangling him. A thin, cold smile crossed the Potions master's lips, and Remus, disbelieving that Severus was able to conjure magic in the state he was in, needed all his concentration to break the spell, his lungs screaming for air.

Gasping, and accompanied by mad laughter, Remus now attacked, slammed his friend against the wall, and gagged him with a cloth from the bedside table. Severus, struggling but weak, tried to bite, tried to head-butt, tried to kick him, but failed.

Suddenly, the Potions master's eyes rolled up, and his legs gave way. Remus just managed to catch him in time; otherwise Severus would have hit the ground hard, unable to slow his fall.

Unceremoniously, the werewolf carried his unwilling, helpless victim into the bedroom once more. Muffled cries rang in his ears, and blood seeped into his shirt. Remus knew that body contact caused pain, but he couldn't help it if he was to break the curse, the bed was definitely the best place to attempt it.

Down on the blankets he lowered the pale body, then knelt on the bed to hinder his friend from rolling out again. One hand was on the Potions master's shoulder, and as the werewolf was a lot stronger than his victim, it was easy to keep him under control.

But he hated it. He hated to be here, in these rooms he hadn't been invited into, with a man who had made it clear how much he despised him. Remus hated that he would have to perform a ruthless, cruel act in order to save the life and sanity of a man who held his privacy and dignity so very dear.

And he hated that he was, in a sick, horrible way, looking forward to doing it. Looking forward to getting closer to the man on the bed, to being able to touch him, to feel him, to smell him. A burning fist twisted in the werewolf's stomach at that thought and at the fact that he was longing for Severus even now. True, he had hoped for years to get closer to him. But this was an abomination, a scene from a horror cabinet: the werewolf with his victim, struggling underneath him.

Remus feared he would throw up, and so he banished those thoughts from his mind, telling himself that this was necessary. Nothing more. Nothing less.

Severus groaned as the hand on his shoulder left bloody imprints. And Remus realised that, before he did anything else, he needed to take care of those wounds.

Breaking the Curse

Chapter 2 of 11

In the night of the final battle, Snape gets hit by a curse. Lupin goes to great lengths to save the Potions master's life and sanity.

2: Breaking the Curse

With a few adjustments, Remus tied Severus's hands to the bedpost and gagged him as well to hinder him performing magic. He hoped that Severus's condition was too poor to do wordless magic, but he couldn't be sure, and so he hurried, went back to the living room and to the sideboards which held pots and skillets, as well as phials and bottles filled with various potions.

There was one potion he needed for himself if he wanted to perform the necessary act, and yes, there it was, hidden behind a jar with Ashwinder eggs. Nearly embarrassed, Remus snatched up the phial, downing the contents before picking up a pot of salve. Remus returned to the bedroom only to find Severus kneeling next to the bed now, his arms painfully twisted, and with so much murder, hate, fear, and madness in his eyes it was almost unbearable to see.

The Potions master's hair clung to his skull and his bloody cheeks; he ripped once at the rope, nearly managing to dislocate his shoulder. Through the gag he shouted and screamed, then pulled hard enough at the rope that the bed moved away from the wall. His chest heaved, and big beads of sweat rolled down his temples. Every now and then, a drop of blood hit the floor. His skin was no longer white, but smeared red. He looked like the devil himself and tried once again to get up and away from the bed when Remus came into the bedroom.

For a moment, the werewolf closed his eyes, steeling himself. He had no idea why Severus suffered so very strongly from the curse, but one thing was clear he did not have hours left. Maybe not even one hour. The curse needed to be broken quickly, he was the only one who could do it, and therefore, he would perform the task, whatever his own hopes and fears might be.

Remus grabbed his friend and threw him onto the bed face first, immediately pressing his knee into the back of the naked man. Trying to avoid body contact wasn't easy under the circumstances, so he quickly dug some salve out of the pot. "Damn Bellatrix," he murmured through clenched teeth. "I hope someone kills you tonight, or I swear I'll do it myself if I survive."

There were some long, deep wounds on the Potions master's shoulders, caused by sharp nails and strong fingers. Remus decided he could begin there as well as anywhere and traced the wounds with the salve from neck to bottom. With relief, he saw that his actions left healed skin the salve was strong, and as his friend's hands were bound, he couldn't hinder the werewolf from performing his task. Remus knew that Severus had invented the concoction years ago when it had become clear that they could expect many wounded in the battles. Now, it served its designer, and Remus closed his eyes for a moment, thankful it worked so fast and so well.

Shoulders and arms, sides and hips. Soon, the scratches were only faint marks, and even Severus, trembling under his strong grip, managed to stop fighting for a moment. "The curse makes your skin extremely sensitive," Remus murmured whilst he worked, not only because the harsh breathing of the Potions master unnerved him but also because he hoped that the explanation would reach the burning brain of his friend. "Fabric hurts, which is why you undressed. Unfortunately, the skin of another human will hurt more. What I have to do..."

Damn. How could he explain? Under normal circumstances, Severus would, of course, know what was necessary to break the curse, but this nothing of this was normal. Remus didn't know whether Severus understood or not. "The curse causes madness. Every victim so far has first killed others, then themselves... unless the curse is broken."

Snape resumed fighting against Remus's knee in his back and tugged hard again at the ropes that bound his hands to the bedpost. A strangled grunt indicated he knew very well what was necessary to save his life and he wasn't happy about it.

"Sexual intercourse," Remus whispered, talking to himself as well as the man struggling on the bed. "Of course Albus couldn't allow you to just rape someone, and you would have raped in your rage. Most likely killed your victim whilst doing so or afterwards at the least. Therefore, I am your only option. I am very sorry, Severus."

A flick, and Remus turned his friend onto his back. Now the werewolf placed his salve-covered hand in the middle of the Potion master's chest, and there were those colour-drained eyes, narrowed and thoughtful in their near madness.

"I'll make it quick," Remus said, and at that moment, Snape brought his knees up and slammed his ankles between the werewolf's legs. Had he made full contact with his target, Remus would have been thrown off the bed, howling with pain, but the Potions master only caught the werewolf's thighs unpleasant, but not a bad hit. Hissing with hate and frustration, hissing through the gag that prevented him from cursing, hexing, and biting, Snape then threw his body around, stretched himself as far as possible, not caring that the ropes dug deeply into his wrists. He kicked and fought, but Remus backed off, caught by surprise and relieved that he had another few minutes' delay from his task.

Then Snape flung his body half off the bed, trying to get his legs onto the ground he wanted to rip his hands free and didn't care that his body wasn't in any condition to fight anymore.

His bound hands turned in the ropes, but the angle was too steep; the strength Severus used was too forceful. Blood ran down his hands. One last pull, and his right wrist snapped in half, a dry little sound accompanied by the eerie, horrible scream of a wounded animal.

Remus's face was grey with horror. Seeing Severus kneeling next to the bed, hands twisted in the rope and tears of pain and panic streaming down his face, was too much. With one swift move, he grabbed his friend around the waist, picked him up, and lowered him face down back on the bed. The fact that Severus's wrist was broken couldn't be helped. In fact, it might come in handy. He had stopped fighting, not calmed, but stilled at least by the pain. Snape couldn't move anymore without causing himself further harm, and so he lay motionless on his own bed, but still groaning and hissing and trying to bite his way through the gag.

This was the time. Now was the moment. Remus knelt on the bed and opened the belt of his trousers.

All of this was so utterly, totally, and completely wrong: that he was here in this room, now, whilst everybody else fought in the final battle. That he was here, although Severus hadn't invited him. That he was naked and so very painfully hard. That the man underneath him, a man he had desired for years, was bound and gagged instead of waiting for him with longing in his eyes. The heat on his skin was wrong, the lust that rushed through his blood, the way his eyesight had sharpened because of the potion he had taken earlier... All of it was wrong. It was surreal, happening in another timeline, another reality. Therefore, Remus chose the easiest path: he shut out reality, forgot how much he hated to do this and how horrible it would be for Severus.

I can't just touch him, he thought and reached for the pot with salve once more. I have to protect him as much as possible; I can't hurt him any more than necessary. Quickly, he covered Severus's chest, abdomen, and thighs with the creamy substance, his hands and his arms and finally, his cock, using the salve as a barrier to direct skin contact. Severus's shoulders trembled underneath him; the Potions master groaned with pain as well as with need it was of minor importance. All that counted was the now, the here, and that he had to hurry.

Due to the potion he had taken, Remus was more aware of his own body and of the body he had to invade. Touch brought arousal, smell increased his desire, and Remus could barely hinder himself from kissing Severus's neck, the pale, bloodied shoulders, and the side of his face that was not pressed into the pillow. So still his friend lay, not moving, just shivering. One bound hand was pushed under the other, holding the broken wrist. His joints were limp, and it was easy to push his legs apart. Snape didn't struggle; didn't fight.

Penetrating a man who was cursed was horrible; pushing his cock into someone who hated him, who would have stunned him under normal circumstances for as much as suggesting sexual intercourse, was an abomination. Remus felt his stomach twist, felt bile rise in his throat, felt his eyes burn with unshed tears. However, he had no choice. A forceful thrust of his hips brought him all the way in, and although Severus screamed against the gag, Remus neither stopped nor retreated.

Shagging an unwilling partner was the most awful, cruel thing Remus Lupin had done in all his life. It was worse than killing an enemy; it was worse than losing someone he loved. He hated himself for having offered to do so, hated that he had even carried Severus back to his rooms. He hated the fact that they were both here, and that his friend, for whatever reason, reacted much stronger and faster to the curse than usual. Remus wished he were anywhere else on the battlefield, upstairs, fighting, or even dead, lying in the Great Hall covered by a blanket.

Instead, he was here.

To his horror on some very dark level he was enjoying it! The body underneath him, Severus's body, was responding to his attention. Remus was in heaven; the fact that the response was caused by the curse, simply because the body was as cursed as the mind, didn't matter at the moment. They moved together, and when Remus brought one salve-covered hand to his friend's cock, he was delighted to find it was hard. For one brief, endless moment he imagined that Severus not only needed but also wanted this fuck as much as he did.

Remus felt his conscious and his scruples slipping away. He forgot that the man underneath him was essentially a rape victim. It hadn't been more than a minute or two since he had begun to move his hips, since he had started shagging his friend. But... it felt so good. *Severus* felt so good! Warm and lean, he moaned with every thrust he received, and gods, how perfect the Potions master's cock felt in the werewolf's stroking hand, and how marvellously hot and narrow his arse was.

Severus's trembling subsided, but the gasps and groans, although muffled by the gag, became louder and clearly spoke of pure pleasure. Many long moments later, the Potions master threw his head back as he orgasmed, and Remus felt warm seed spill over his hand. Happily, he smiled and thrust deeper a little while longer, only a little while, and he would come himself, would...

Cold dread washed through him as he realised what he was doing. Instantly, Remus froze in mid-action. *Wrong!* his mind screamed, and he pulled back his far too enthusiastic, still hard cock. Horrified, he stared at the hand that was placed on his friend's shoulder. Disbelieving, he felt the stickiness on his other hand, and Remus moved away from the pale, still man, moved away fast enough that he fell off the bed.

The combined smells of cum and blood strangled him and made him choke. How the hell was it possible that he hadn't smelled the blood on the sheets, blood that had seeped from the scratches on Severus's skin? How could he have forgotten that this was not consensual sex, that this was rape, nothing but sheer, brutal rape no matter how much Severus might have appeared to enjoy it? His reactions had been curse-induced, for Merlin's sake, and how could he, Remus, have dared to enjoy it for as much

as a second, not to talk about... how long? One minute? Two? Ten?

Too long in any case.

Staggering, Remus stood and searched for his trousers, pulled them on, and closed the belt with shaking hands. His shirt... there it was, half under the bed, and he ripped off half a sleeve with clumsy hands, thrusting his arm in. A small nod summoned his wand as well as Severus's. His own he stowed in his trousers; the Potions master's wand he placed on the table next to the bed.

Monster! The thought crossed Remus's mind and he agreed whole-heartedly. He was a monster, had been one ever since he had been turned into a werewolf. What had happened here tonight only proved it once more. He had lost control; he had dared to enjoy this most brutal act, and that was unforgivable.

Swallowing heavily, Remus stepped around the bed and lowered himself to one knee. He needed to know. It was impossible to go before he knew if it had worked.

Severus lay still, barely breathing. His eyes were closed, his face covered by sweaty, blood-matted hair. Hunched shoulders and one balled fist he was neither asleep nor unconscious; that much was obvious.

With unsteady hands, Remus unfastened the knots that bound his friend's wrists. Severus flinched: not from the brief contact, but because of his broken wrist.

Something like hope fluttered in the werewolf's chest. When no blisters appeared, when the skin stayed smooth and didn't break under Remus's touch, the werewolf considered the possibility that it was over, that the curse was undone, and that his crime had actually saved Severus Snape's life and sanity.

Carefully, Remus took Severus's broken wrist between his hands and lowered it slowly, very slowly, to the mattress. He didn't dare cast a Healing Spell he was no expert and could do more damage than good, and therefore, he just steadied the joint with a Stasis Spell, thus keeping it immobilised. As if dealing with a terrified animal, the werewolf murmured nonsensical, reassuring words whilst doing so and then fished for the blanket, covering his friend up to the shoulders.

With his uninjured hand, Snape took the blanket and pulled it higher. Then he opened his eyes and stared at the werewolf kneeling in front of him.

His eyes were nearly black again; only a faint silver shimmer bore witness to the curse that had hit him hours ago. All the madness was gone; they were empty of emotion. The depth of Severus's eyes was endless; Remus felt himself drawn into them, into the abyss behind them, and into the horrors he must have caused.

Impossible. He couldn't stand it. Jerking his head away, Remus jumped up and ran, ran for his dear life and now for his own sanity. Pushing a chair out of the way, he reached the door and halted. There had been a sound.

He turned, slowly and unwilling, and looked back to the bed.

Severus had pulled the blanket a bit higher. His injured arm was still lying outstretched on the mattress. His head, though, was covered and cradled in the crook of an elbow.

Once more, Snape's shoulders trembled, but not with pain or cold, nor because of madness thundering through his veins. Remus could hear the dry sobs, and he could see how Severus half turned and pressed his face into the pillow.

He wouldn't have believed the Potions master could cry. But then, Remus wouldn't have thought he himself was monster enough to be able to enjoy rape.

Remus ran upstairs, out of the dungeons, away from the Potions master's rooms and the horrors he had caused in the past hours. Despairing, he hoped that someone a Death Eater, an enemy would see him, would kill him. He was barefoot, as he had forgotten his shoes in Severus's rooms; he was freezing because of his naked feet and because he hadn't eaten in more than twenty-four hours, and he feared someone would see him and ask him where he'd been.

Then he heard the cheers and knew the battle was over.

They had won.

Like a puppet on strings, the werewolf felt himself move towards the Great Hall. There was the noise; there was the source of the cheers. People were there, and when he looked through the doors, he saw that he knew them, most of them, at least. Former students of his were there, colleagues, friends. He saw Tonks waving at him but was feeling too numb, too lost, to so much as nod back at her.

And Dumbledore. He stood at the High Table, one hand on Harry's shoulder. He was talking, but through the noise Remus couldn't understand him. Only one thing was clear Voldemort was dead, Harry had won, and the war was over. Finally.

Suddenly, as if Dumbledore sensed the werewolf standing in the doorway, he looked up, right into Remus's eyes. Remus nodded once before he turned away.

His rooms, the rooms he had lived in this past year, although he no longer taught at Hogwarts, were dark and cold, and he welcomed it. Light would have pierced his eyes; warmth would have felt uncomfortable on his oversensitive skin. Warding the door, Remus threw his wand onto the table and headed for the bathroom. He felt dirty, filthy, and longed for a shower.

Bit by bit, he dropped his clothes. Icily, the water splashed on his head, his skin, his hair, and face. With shaking hands, he took the soap, but washing didn't make him feel clean.

And the pain between his legs, the longing, the need, didn't subside. He was still so hard that it hurt, and he knew that if he didn't take care of this problem, the pain would increase. The potion he had taken that had made it possible to fulfil his task in his friend's rooms the strongest lust potion he had found now demanded release.

He didn't want to do it, though. Touching himself, in the darkness of his own bathroom, whilst he was nearly freezing to death, and whilst thinking of... It was a horrible thought, having to do it like that. Nevertheless, his body screamed for the attention of his hand, and his hand found its way without guidance. His forehead pressed against the cold tiles, his fingers wrapped around his length, and he had to bite his lips to keep the lustful moans inside.

Wrong. This. Was. *Wrong!*

Still he had to do it. He needed to come, and how could he control his own mind under the circumstances, keep control over his thoughts?

After he had spilled, he sunk to his knees, water still splashing onto his bluish skin. Maybe tears mingled with the water. All thoughts were gone, all need, and he felt empty, hollow, like a rotten, worm-eaten apple where only the skin was left.

Morning After

Chapter 3 of 11

In the night of the final battle, Snape gets hit by a curse. Lupin goes to great lengths to save the Potions master's life and sanity.

3: Morning After

Snape didn't wake up the usual way: asleep one moment, wide awake and alert the other. This time he woke screaming, gripped by pain and panic, wanting to jump up, to flee, without even knowing what scared him so much.

Pain pinned him to his mattress; after some endless moments, he located his right wrist as the main source of it.

He realised that there were tears streaming down his face. "What the fuck is wrong here?" he murmured and was shocked at how weak and hoarse his voice sounded. Slowly, he managed to sit up in his bed, resting his aching back against the headboard. Aggressively, he wiped his left hand across his face, wiping the tears away. It had been decades since he had woken up crying; why now? And why did he hurt so much?

At least this question could be answered easily. He ached because he was injured. His wrist was broken, there were barely healed scratches along his arms, his chest, and very obviously at least partly on his back as well. There was blood on the sheets, mixed with a substance Snape couldn't identify at first. Confused, he touched the stuff, rubbed it between his fingertips, and then smelled it.

A Healing Salve. One of his own, designed to cure severe damages of the skin. Like many other potions, he kept it on the shelf in his living room he liked to have the products of his work close for further experiments.

Apparently, he had needed the salve last night. The wounds on his chest had been healed with it. The question was who had caused the wounds, and why? Equally interesting was the riddle of who had applied the salve clearly, it hadn't been himself. He was certain he would remember it if he had.

But then... he didn't remember breaking his wrist, either. A stasis field kept it immobilised, and when he removed it, he cursed nastily at the sight: the joint was swollen, the fingers couldn't be moved, the pain shot up to his neck and he couldn't suppress a low scream. Instantly, he renewed the spell that covered his wrist; he'd need to go to Poppy immediately to sort this out, otherwise the damage might be permanent.

Determined, he swung his legs out of the bed and discovered, stunned, that he was naked. "I never sleep naked!" he said indignantly to the flickering candles. "I can't afford to sleep undressed. If the Dark Lord calls me..."

The Dark Lord. The battle. Last night, there had been a battle, and he had participated. He had fought, he remembered it clearly. He had seen people die; some of them he had taught only the day before. There had been flames and screams; he had killed as many Death Eaters as possible, for the first time in twenty years openly taking a side. He had ignored the burning of the Dark Mark on his arm, had refused to follow the summoning of his master.

Dumbstruck, Snape turned his left arm and stared at the place where the Dark Mark should be, but wasn't. Instead, there was only a deep, red wound on his skin. No wonder he had woken up screaming. Too much pain. Too many changes in just one night.

The Dark Lord was dead this was the only logical explanation for the fact that the mark was gone *Potter must have won*, Snape though distractedly. *I should be dead*, followed closely after. He had openly chosen a side last night, and it hadn't been the side of his insane master.

His legs were weak, but Snape needed to go to the bathroom, and so he ignored the fact that he had to stabilise himself against the walls. Why he was feeling so lousy? Why was his bed soiled with blood? Why was he naked? These were questions he could try to find the answers to later. First a piss, he decided, then clothes and food.

Good plan. Easy to follow.

Then he reached the bathroom and saw his image in the mirror.

The sight nearly knocked him out.

His face and throat, the shoulders, his chest, and even his hair covered in a mixture of salve and blood. Faint marks showed that someone had practically slashed the flesh from his bones. His hair was plastered to his skull; there were nasty cuts and bruises on his forehead; and his lips were cracked and raw as if he had bitten them.

Snape couldn't hinder his mouth from sagging open.

Sexual intercourse, a voice suddenly whispered in his mind. *I'll make it quick*.

Snape paled and had to steady himself at the sink. "Impossible," he croaked and remembered how he had broken his wrist. He had tried to attack someone, someone behind him, someone he was scared of. Flinching at the memory of pain, the Potions master inspected his hands again, more carefully this time, and saw the rope marks on his skin, telling him that he had been bound.

Someone... he vaguely remembered that someone had bound him to the bedposts.

I will do what is necessary, Lupin's gentle voice promised, and Snape jerked his head up and stepped closer to the mirror.

There it was. A silver shimmer in his eyes, barely visible now, hours after the curse had been undone. But it was there; his eyes weren't as immaculately black as they should be.

"Desipentia," Snape stated to his image and felt his stomach clench in panic. Like a waterfall, memories poured down and threatened to drown him, awful memories of madness and pain, and the sensation of losing himself in an ocean of craziness. No wonder he had tried to dig his soul out of his body, to break his head in order to hammer some sense into his unwilling brain.

Actually, he should be dead. Everyone who had been hit by the curse felt an urge to rape and kill, accompanied by the madness, and therefore, was likely to be killed in turn. Either that, or the madness overtook and the victim hanged themselves, cut their veins, ripped out their windpipe whatever, if only to get away from the abyss one was falling into because of the curse.

There had been no corpse in his rooms, so he hadn't killed anyone. He himself was neither dead nor mad.

"Lupin." One word, one name. Memories. Emotions. The werewolf had broken the curse, had tied him to the bed, had...

...touched him. Caressed him. Had tried to talk his fear away, had healed his wounds, and bound his wrists before he had done what had been necessary.

And then he had left, just like that.

Snape sunk to his knees and didn't even feel the coldness that seeped from the floor and into his body. Without seeing a thing, he stared at the ground, remembering what had happened last night. He didn't want to remember, but then, he hadn't wanted to get hit by this specific curse, either.

After a while moments or hours, he didn't know he decided that now was a good time to mend the broken bone. Going to the infirmary was clearly not an option anymore, so he just removed the spell that kept his wrist still. Pulling, he felt the bone-ends scraping against each other. Maybe he screamed; it didn't matter. All that counted was the fact that whilst his mind was occupied with this fresh, raw, blinding pain, he couldn't think about Lupin's eyes, staring into his. Fixing his broken wrists made it impossible to remember the disgust he had seen in those brown eyes.

At least for a little while.

Shower. Clothes. Living room.

Sitting down.

Candles, light? Unimportant. Food? Unnecessary.

Firewhiskey, though, was mandatory. The heavy glass with golden liquid wasn't easy to hold. He needed both hands, and both hands screamed in protest, but what the hell... It smelled good, and the alcohol promised an easy way into oblivion.

He should be dead! He had expected to die last night. Everyone had expected it, including the Headmaster. The Dark Lord had mistrusted his most devoted follower, as he had never managed to deliver Potter into his hands. In the end, Snape had openly fought on Dumbledore's side during the final battle it hadn't been necessary anymore to hide who he really was. Snape had been able to kill many Death Eaters simply because they hadn't expected Snape to turn against them.

And now the Potions master wondered why no one had managed to cast a proper Killing Curse at him. "How very unfair to use a Desipentia instead," he murmured and swirled the whiskey in its glass.

Snape sat in the darkness and wondered about the consequences of his survival. And because he didn't like not to know things, he got up around lunch and searched in his library for books which would tell him about the curse and, hopefully, how to deal with it if one survived.

The knock on the door came close to midnight, and again, Snape sat in his chair. Three books lay on the floor, read and abandoned afterwards. A full glass of Firewhiskey stood on the table next to him; no bottle, though, was to be seen.

The knock was repeated. Snape wasn't surprised Albus had tried to contact him throughout the day, to no avail. He hadn't answered the call through the fire, he had refused to open his Floo, no owl was allowed in his rooms, and he had strengthened his wards against any other form of contact.

He could do nothing about a knock. Therefore, he ignored it.

Only that Albus didn't go away. And it had to be Albus only the old man was annoying enough to ignore his wish of silence.

"Severus!" the voice called through the door. "You either open up now if you are alive, that is or I will enter without your permission. If you are dead... well, I really hope that this isn't the case. Open up, Severus!"

"Come in," Snape said and waved a tired hand. The door opened.

Carefully, hesitantly even, the Headmaster stepped in. Dressed in blue, his white beard carefully combed, he looked as if he didn't know the word 'war', not to mention the fact that he had fought in one less than twenty-four hours ago. His hands were empty, and for that, Snape was grateful he had feared the old man could carry a tray with food. The simple thought of nourishment made his stomach heave.

"What do you want?" Snape asked, picking up the chilled glass and rolling it between his bandaged hands. "The Dark Lord is dead. Potter won, I presume. Unfortunately, I failed to die. Sorry for that."

"Severus," Dumbledore said calmly and took a step, waving the door behind him close. "Severus, how are you?"

At that question, Snape quirked his lips into a bitter half-smile. "Lousy," he answered, equally calm. "Awful. Terrible. Why do you ask?"

Dumbledore sat on the empty chair. "I ask because I want to know. Because I am concerned about you. You were hit by..."

"I know." Snape sounded nearly bored. "It took me a while to remember, but in the end, my image in the mirror helped a lot to gather at least some memories. Interesting experience, going mad. You should try it sometime. It makes you humble. In fact, it makes you wish you were dead instead." Frowning, he looked at the glass in his hands. "I tried to kill myself last night. I tried to kill Lupin. I suppose I can be glad that I didn't manage the latter whilst being under the influence of Desipentia."

Dumbledore leaned forward and stared at him. "Are you drunk, Severus? You are surprisingly talkative, given the circumstances."

Snape chuckled humourlessly. "I have been trying to drink this one glass of Firewhiskey since lunch time," he mused. "Haven't managed it yet. Whenever it gets too close to my mouth, whenever the smell gets too intense, I can barely keep myself from retching. Pity, though. I would very much have liked to get royally pissed." Absently, he rolled the glass between his slender, strong fingers. "Concerning my willingness to talk about most unpleasant and private matters, this is a side-effect of the curse. I would talk to everyone, telling this someone everything, which is why I didn't go to the infirmary, and why I wanted to be left alone. Don't ask improper questions at the moment, Albus. I would answer them, but I am sure you wouldn't want to know."

Dumbledore closed his eyes for a brief moment. "Because of you, Severus, the losses were considerably less than had been expected. With you taking sides... You saved many lives. I am sorry you..."

Snape nodded. "I should have died. I know. Don't worry. It is unlikely that I will survive the curse despite the fact that... Lupin... had been kind enough to break it." At the werewolf's name, his voice hitched involuntarily.

The Headmaster's eyes darted from the Potions master's bruised face to his bandaged hands to the books on the floor. "It's a rare curse," he said and cleared his throat. "Not much is known about it, nor about the after-effects. What did you find out, and where?"

Lazily, Snape pushed one of the books closer to the burning fire. It was a thin, light volume, but for some reason, he sneered at it as if it were a poisonous snake. "It's a dark curse, Albus. I found information in dark books. Not many. The basics, of course. How to cast it, its effects, how to break it. Lupin can be glad he survived the night." A flick, and the contents of the glass splashed into the flames. Brilliantly, the wood flared up before an intense smell wafted through the Potions master's living room. Disgusted, the pale man turned his head away. He looked grey and ill in the dim light.

"What else?" Dumbledore pressed.

Snape grimaced. Both his hands lay in his lap like thin, dead animals, motionless, lifeless. "Few survive the actual curse. The ones who do are usually unable to cope with

the memory of being so very close to madness. They lose their appetite, they get depressed, and they shun company. They fear light, sound, and touch. Result: suicide. Nasty spell indeed. Do you know why it isn't commonly used?"

Apparently, Dumbledore hadn't even considered that question.

Leaning his head back against the back of his chair, Snape said, "Because it takes a crazy mind to wield it. A sane wizard, a sane witch, wouldn't be able to pronounce it properly. Which leaves only two possibilities: either the Dark Lord has cursed me or it was his pet, Bella."

Sighing, Dumbledore said, "It was Bellatrix. Remus fought by your side, saw you fall, and offered... his help. There was no other possibility." Getting up, he looked at his Potions master with a pained expression on his face. "Don't allow this curse to destroy you, Severus. Despite all odds, despite everything I have asked you to do in the past years, you survived the war. Tom is dead. You won't have to spy anymore. I am certain you can deal with the side effects of Desipentia!"

"Get out, old man," Snape said casually and summoned himself another glass filled to the rim with Firewhiskey. "I'm trying to get drunk. And if you see Lupin, tell him to stay away from me or I will break his neck."

It took Snape the entire night before he managed to persuade his unwilling legs to move. With aching muscles, he got up shortly after sunrise and placed the still full glass he had held for hours on the table next to his chair. Stretching, he winced at the pain that shot through him. His empty stomach growled, demanding food. His mind, though, demanded darkness and silence.

He had no intention to give in to his mind. His mind was unreliable. It had been bathed in madness; it had tried to kill him, convinced that death was better than madness. Since he could not trust himself, he would leave his quarters to go upstairs for breakfast.

Leaving his rooms was nearly impossible. Every step cost him strength, and his legs trembled with the need to carry him back downstairs, into the safety of his own rooms. He had expected it the books had been clear about that, telling him that company was something a victim of Desipentia simply couldn't stand. Additionally, Snape feared, truly feared, he could see the werewolf somewhere up there, could maybe even bump into him and...

What then? he asked himself. *What if I see him? Will I kill him? Will I flee? Will I shout at him, behaving like a child, embarrassing myself?*

Step by step the Potions master worked his way upstairs, step by step he ignored his wishes and the demand of his mind to hide. He wouldn't give in to this damnable curse.

Finally upstairs, his eyes grew wide involuntarily, and a few heartbeats later, he began to laugh. Hogwarts, his home, his school, the place he always had felt safe, was destroyed! The big gates hung broken on their hinges, the walls had holes as big as dragons, and there wouldn't be a meal in the Great Hall anytime soon. Fire still licked at the wooden benches. Smoke wafted through the air, and out of instinct and habit, Snape flicked his wand and quenched the flames.

Some students saw him, but didn't take notice. They looked as bad as he felt, and Snape realised that he fitted perfectly amongst them. The battle had taken its toll; now all that could be done was to undo the damage, to bury the dead, and to get to repairing the school. "Pick up our lives," Snape murmured and sneered. He hadn't had a life before the final battle. There was nothing he could pick up.

But he could do his share in repairing Hogwarts. It would take his mind off last night; it would ease the pain that sang in his bones. It would keep him occupied for ages, if he didn't work too fast.

Perfect, he thought and slowly raised his wand to bring the huge gates back into position.

Snape worked without a break until late afternoon. Then his legs gave way, and he sunk to his knees. He hadn't seen that coming; he had not felt the exhaustion creeping up on him and was quite surprised when his body so unceremoniously gave up service.

He was so hungry that it didn't feel like hunger anymore. His stomach was a burning stone inside his ice-cold body, but he knew that if he tried to eat he would throw up even the smallest bite. Sweating and shivering, he leaned against the wall, glad that there was no one else in the corridor he had been working in.

Maybe he had exaggerated a bit, he mused. For hours, he had been undoing damage, had mended holes in the stonewalls as well as dozens of broken windows. Time had flown past with swift wings the sun would go down soon, and he figured he hadn't eaten a bite for more than forty-eight hours.

With a pained grunt he got to his feet again and stood, head hung low, in the empty corridor. Faintly, he could hear voices in the distance. Magic surrounded him he wasn't the only one doing repairs, but he was the only one doing it alone. Earlier on, when students had come by, one look had been enough to make them reconsider their offer of help, and they had hurried away as quickly as possible. "Food," Snape murmured and felt sweat breaking on his brow. "Or maybe not."

Slowly, he put one foot in front of the other on his way back to the Great Hall. Not that he had any intention to join the ones who would dine there, but he wanted to be seen at least, wanted to prove to himself that getting close to others was possible, if not something he really wanted to do.

The voices grew louder, and the smell of meat and vegetables tickled his nose. Irritated, he realised that he had halted and now hid in a corner, a few steps away from the entrance of the Great Hall. *Too many people*, his mind whispered. Too much noise!

Clenching his fists, he took a step and another one with every intention to get in, to sit at his usual place at the High Table. There were still holes in the roof, and the stones were black from the fire that had blasted through Hogwarts; still, a peaceful mood reigned in there, heavy with joy at the fact that Voldemort was dead and the war finally over. He wanted to join them, his colleagues as well as his students, wanted to sit down with them, eat with them. He had taken sides just in time, had made it clear that he had been always Dumbledore's man, never the Dark Lord's.

He couldn't. Albus saw him standing in the doorway and beamed his ridiculously happy smile, some students from his house began to cheer and clap their hands, and...

There was Lupin. Damn, fucking Lupin, sitting between Sybill and Minerva. A moment ago, Snape hadn't seen him; then, the werewolf's head had snapped up as if he had smelled his childhood enemy. For a brief moment, their eyes met; for a heartbeat, time stood still. Then the small, hard stone that was the Potions master's stomach clenched even further and nearly forced a cry out of his lungs.

He turned and fled.

Down, always down and into his dungeons, into his private quarters he ran, not caring if someone saw him or might consider him out of his head. It was unimportant what others thought. The only thing that counted was what he thought and felt and how to come to terms with both.

A slam, and his door closed behind him, leaving the world locked outside. Inside, only darkness greeted him, accompanied by coldness. He didn't mind. Both were more than fine.

Snape sat slowly in his big wingchair by the empty fireplace. The hunger was forgotten; the dizzy feeling subsided. What was left was despair. Despair and the need to face facts he couldn't close his eyes to any longer. He had tried to ignore it all night and all day, to no avail, but now, after he had seen Lupin, it was necessary that he was at least honest to himself, if not to anyone else.

He had been cursed, had been as close to madness as possible. He had injured himself and tried to commit suicide. Lupin, a man he'd known for more than twenty years,

had broken the curse simply by shagging him. Which was, of course, precisely the problem.

He had enjoyed it. Damn the gods, damn Merlin, damn every living being, he had enjoyed getting fucked by the wolf!

A low, strangled sound pierced the silence in the Potions master's room. His hands, both burning with pain seeping in from the injuries, clutched at the armrests. Snape really wanted to jump up, to pace, to run away from this fact. But he didn't. He had always mastered his own emotions, sparse as they had been. He had never lied to himself, and he wouldn't start now. Therefore, he opened his eyes wide and remembered.

Memories, crystal clear and brilliant in their colouring, overwhelmed him. Willingly, he gave in; willingly, he remembered the night of the final battle, the curse that had hit him, and the fact that he had fallen unconsciousness on the battlefield and woken up in his own rooms. There was no terror in those memories.

He hadn't dared to remember the actual breaking of the curse so far. Now he did.

Pain, excruciating pain in his broken wrist hindered him from moving. A moment ago, he had been fighting; now, he lay still and awaited... whatever. Something had to be done, and someone was there who would do whatever was necessary to ease his pain. Lupin. Lupin had made a promise, and somewhere in his madness-hazed mind, Snape trusted the werewolf to keep this promise.

Pain on his skin, burning, bleeding pain. Need in his groin. A faint smell of salve in the air and now touch, the touch of a hand, of skin against skin. Surprisingly enough, it didn't hurt, not much, anyway. The salve, he remembered thinking. The salve keeps the pain away.

Madness bubbled up behind his closed eyes, joyful, yelling madness, and he screamed in terror against the gag in his mouth the very moment he felt Lupin getting even closer, closer than possible, unbelievably, impossibly close. Somehow, Lupin was inside him, moved inside him and it felt like nothing Snape had felt before.

Madness shattered to pieces. Just like that, reality came in focus again as if nothing had happened, as if he hadn't been cursed, as if he hadn't tried to break his skull not too long ago. Pleasure, sexual pleasure washed through him and he knew what Lupin was doing. He got fucked by a werewolf, and he loved it. Every powerful, yet gentle thrust, each moan he could hear out of his own throat, and now his body woke up, reacted, picked up the dance with the man behind him, inside him.

He enjoyed it. Every moment, every second. His eyes were wide open, and he heard the ragged breathing of the werewolf. If he hadn't been gagged, he would have begged for more.

He got more. Lupin's hand touched his cock, stroked it, squeezed it. He never ceased to fuck him, either.

Too much pleasure. Snape remembered spilling into Lupin's hand, remembered only too clearly the waves of his orgasm rolling over him, through him.

He remembered smiling. He hoped Lupin wouldn't come too soon himself because the feeling of being penetrated, being filled, feeling complete for the first time in his life was simply too good to end so soon.

He enjoyed it so much he wished it would never end, this dance, the joining of their bodies.

Lupin must have felt it. Snape realised how disgusted the werewolf must have been at the fact that the loathed Potions master, someone he disliked since childhood, dared to enjoy a simple, meaningless necessity.

Snape felt the werewolf freeze again so horribly suddenly. Shocked, he heard Lupin jerk away from him, eager enough to bring distance between them that he even fell off the bed.

Snape's eyes were wide, his teeth clenched. His right wrist throbbed sharply at the pressure it had to endure, pressure caused by too hard a grip around the armrest.

"Damn bastard," Snape whispered. "Damn, lousy bastard."

He had always suspected that the easy, friendly manner Lupin showed in their daily communication had been nothing but mockery. Now he was sure of it. Like Potter and Black, Lupin despised him. Always had and now would even more.

"How much he must have hated it," Snape said coldly to the darkness. "No wonder there was disgust in his eyes when he looked at me afterwards. I can be glad he didn't leave me bound to the bedpost until someone found me."

A dry laugh, and Snape got up, heading for the bedroom. *So what?* he thought. *He's not the only one who's disgusted by me. Albus had been the first to say so two decades ago, and even today, most students think the same. I really should be used to it by now.*

Carelessly, he let himself fall onto the bed, his dirty boots leaving ugly stains on the white sheets. The house-elves had cleaned up his rooms whilst he had been gone, but he didn't care. He would sleep, and in the morning, he would go back to work. He had been cursed before. He had been tortured before. He could cope with it.

Maybe, he would even learn how deal with the feeling of loss he had felt when Lupin had run from his rooms.

Consequences

Chapter 4 of 11

In the night of the final battle, Snape gets hit by a curse. Lupin goes to great lengths to save the Potions master's life and sanity.

4: Consequences

The Potions master didn't find much sleep that night, nor the next ones. Whenever he closed his eyes he saw the werewolf, staring at him with that disgusted frown on his face. Whenever he drifted into dreamland, he felt pain and longing in a cruel, twisted combination. More than half a dozen times each night he woke, confused and disorientated, and in the end he always decided to get up. It was never later than three in the morning, and always he felt like he had been clubbed.

He truly and honestly tried to eat, but didn't manage it. Once, he had forced a piece of bread down his clenching throat only to throw it up seconds later. Weakness claimed him. He could drink water, and that was about it. No sweetened tea, no broth, no Strengthening Potion nothing. In the end, and so not to fall unconscious, Snape decided to inject the potion directly into his veins twice a day, hating it, feeling like a drug addict, but having no choice nevertheless.

The days became cruelly long, the nights ridiculously short. Snape grew paler than ever, and sometimes he just sat and stared into nowhere instead of casting a spell or a charm. Tiny specks danced in front of his eyes when he tried and it scared him beyond reason as it was far too close to the hallucinations he remembered when the curse had ruled his mind.

"You should see Poppy, my dear boy," Albus told him one evening when Snape refused to go into the Great Hall once more. "You look decidedly ill."

"I'm fine," Snape snapped and headed for the dungeons. He could feel Lupin's presence although there was quite a distance between them. The werewolf didn't even look in his direction. "Just leave me alone, old man."

Dumbledore sighed and nodded, watching Snape disappear round the next corner.

Six days after Bellatrix had cursed him, Snape was as close to a breakdown as never before in his life. Encounters with the Cruciatus Curse the Dark Lord had used on all his followers every now and then, battle injuries, losses of friends and comrades nothing had drawn on his strength as badly as this curse, or rather, the side effects.

One evening, Snape went into the library and searched for more information about Desipentia. Believing his own books had told him everything about the curse, he hadn't bothered before, but it became more and more obvious that they hadn't been able to warn him about what was happening to him right now. He wasn't depressed, he had only small problems to face such as students or colleagues, and he had no intention of killing himself. Yet, he couldn't face food, couldn't sleep, and couldn't get Lupin out of his head. Instead of what he had expected, what was described in the books, he longed for the werewolf's touch, his mouth, his damn cock, and that was just unacceptable.

Standing in the dark, quiet library, Snape thought for a moment and decided that he should look for books about Love and Lust Spells rather than Dark Arts volumes. All of this had to be caused by Desipentia; still, there was more to it than would happen under normal circumstances, and he needed to find out what it was.

When he found the information he'd been looking for shortly before sunrise, he neither believed it nor had any intention of letting anyone know. "Impossible," he said quietly so as not to startle the Grey Lady who was dozing in one of the bookshelves. "Ridiculous." And he turned and left, went upstairs to the Owlery and mended the roof until he heard students running through the school and the sound of magic in use.

Around Lunchtime, he became really dizzy and it wasn't because he was hungry. The Strengthening Potion had seeped into his blood only a few hours ago; he wouldn't need another dose before dinner.

An hour later, when the sun was high up in the sky, sending brilliantly clear, warm beams through the windows of the Owlery, Snape wondered why it had become so very dark and cold.

Not too long after that, his heart began to race and his eyes made him see non-existent colours in the darkness that surrounded him. His blood boiled, or at least, it felt like it was boiling; cold sweat ran down his back, and he shook as if he were a rag doll in a child's hand.

"Damn fuck," Snape murmured and fell against a wall. "It's true then. Fuck." He sounded tired and weary. Absently, he rubbed his hands along his arms. His broken wrist had healed and where the Dark Mark had been was now a week-old scar, but both hands hurt as if the wounds were fresh and raw.

Staggering, he managed to get out of the Owlery. One thought ruled his mind, one desire, but he needed to get into the privacy of his rooms before he could give in to his needs, the needs of his failing body.

"Sir?"

A student, a seventh-year Hufflepuff, lightly touched his arm and Snape jerked his aching head up, momentarily not knowing where he was or who.

"Sir, are you all right? Shall I get Madam Pomfrey? Or Professor Dumbledore?"

"Lupin," Snape croaked. "Get Lupin. Tell him to come to the dungeons. Tell him I need him. Now."

The student stared at the Potions master, looked him up and down and obviously decided that he better hurry if Remus Lupin was to see Snape alive.

Snape already had forgotten what he just had said. Lost for words, he stared after the running boy, then turned and half-stumbled, half fell downstairs, all the way into the dungeons and not too far away from the doors to his private rooms.

"I'm getting sick of this," Snape murmured and got up on swaying legs. "Truly, this has to stop, even if I have to kill the werewolf myself."

Remus Lupin was helping a group of second-years to repair the greenhouses when Kincaid came running along, panting, a scared expression on his face. "Professor," he called out. "Professor!"

Remus frowned. It wasn't unusual for students to call him by his old title although he hadn't taught at Hogwarts for four years, but it was very unusual that they put so much emphasis in the words. "What is it, Kincaid?" he asked, wiping sweat off of his face. It was a warm, sunny day, and they had been working hard since breakfast.

The boy nearly fell over his own legs, managing to stop just in time or he would have bumped right into the werewolf. "It's Professor Snape," he gasped. "He sent me. Told me to get you. He looks like..."

Remus felt his heart skip a beat at the mentioning of Severus's name. Without even looking, he dropped the stone he had been holding for the past ten minutes. It crashed heavily to the ground and shattered. "What about him?" he asked. "He looks like what?"

"Like death, sir," Kincaid replied. "He looks like he's about to die. I mean, he looks awful ever since the war is over, but I haven't seen him in such a bad state yet. He was shaking and sweating and looked really grey and bad, and he told me to get you: he said he needs you and that you should come to the dungeons immediately."

Remus didn't hesitate and ran towards the castle. *How can it be that I hurry to his side when he just snaps his fingers?* He wondered, and feared to find his friend dead at the same time. Shouldering anyone in his way out of said way, he stumbled and would have fallen if Albus Dumbledore hadn't caught him.

"Remus?" the Headmaster asked mildly. "Are you in a hurry?"

"It's Severus," the werewolf replied shortly. "He's asked for me. Let me go and have a look what's wrong with him, will you?" Tugging his arm free, he stormed on.

"Dear me," Dumbledore murmured. "I guess I should make sure they don't kill each other."

This was precisely the thought that jumped into Remus's mind when he descended the staircase to the dungeons. "I bet he demands me to leave. Orders me down here to tell me to get the hell out of Hogwarts. I just wonder why he didn't do so a week ago."

Actually, he'd wondered himself why he was still here. He could have left after the battle had been won. Nothing held him here, and there were enough hands to help rebuild Hogwarts. Relatives in France and Germany would have taken him in willingly; as a war hero, he probably would have found a job now as a security guard all over the country on top of it.

Instead he had stayed. He worked hard each day, ate in the Great Hall, talked to his former students, to colleagues, to friends. Pretended everything was fine, made it obvious how happy he was that the war was over and Lord Voldemort was dead, all the while hiding how painful it was to be in the same place as Severus, to see him only now and then and to witness every single time how the Potions master turned round and stalked away whenever he saw him.

Had he really hoped they could talk about that night? Talk it over and come to terms and resume their...

Well. There had never been friendship between them. So there was nothing to get back to but hatred from Severus's side and longing from his. No problem that they hadn't talked.

Banging against Severus's door felt wrong. *I shouldn't be here*, Remus thought. *All that waits inside is disgust, and honestly, I don't need that.*

Slowly, the door swung open. It hadn't been locked, which made Remus feel even more uneasy than he already had been. Severus always locked and warded his doors. Something must be wrong.

Tentatively, Remus pushed the door open and was greeted by chilled darkness. "Lumos," he murmured, welcoming the light. "Severus?" he called, taking a step inside the Potions master's forbidding rooms.

"Close the door," a voice Remus barely recognised rasped, "and come over here."

"Severus!" Sitting on the ground, hidden behind his worktable, Remus could see his friend's legs outstretched on the stone floor. The werewolf wanted nothing more than to rush to his side, assuming that he was wounded, injured, in need of his help. Only in the last moment did he rein himself in. He knew with certainty that the last thing Severus wanted was him getting closer.

Something about the stillness of those legs unnerved him. It nearly seemed as if the Potions master was unconscious, which was of course impossible as he had just talked only a moment ago. Involuntarily, Remus took a step and then another one until he stood right in front of the man on the floor. "Goodness," he whispered with disbelief. "When did you last sleep, Severus? Or eat?"

The Potions master indeed looked close to death. Deep, purple, bruise-like shadows were under his eyes; the bones in his face stood out sharply like razor blades. He was even paler than usual, and his breathing came in harsh, painful rasps. Restlessly, Severus clutched his hands into fists over and over again. It was obvious that he was at the edge of a major breakdown.

"Lupin! Get over here!" Half unconscious or not, the commanding tone was unmistakable and Remus had no other choice but to obey. He lowered himself to one knee and tried to look as calm and unimpressed as possible despite his urge to hug and soothe the other man.

Secretly, deep inside, Remus shivered. Longing washed through him and the urge to touch Severus, to caress his sunken cheeks, to hold him close, to make him feel better was near impossible to resist. It was hard to suppress, this urge, this demanding, strong need. But resist it he must. Remus knelt on the floor, just managing to suppress the impulse to touch and waited for the man to issue his next order.

Snape, though, said nothing. He just reached out with his long, sinewy arm and grabbed the werewolf's neck, pulling him down, pulling him closer. Unceremoniously, he ripped open Lupin's shirt, pushed his ice cold fingers between fabric and skin, searching for the heart, the pulse of life; fast and determined, nearly brutally even, he pressed his palm against the werewolf's warm flesh.

Lupin, Snape's mind told him. *Wolf*, his nose confirmed, breathing in the rich, wild fragrance the man radiated without even knowing it. Under his palm Snape could feel the fast heartbeat. His blood sang with delight at the close contact; his own racing, staggering heart, after hours and days, finally calming down. The tremble in his muscles subsided, and even the cold stone that once had been his stomach stopped aching from one moment to the other. The sudden absence of pain was sort of painful in itself, and Snape nearly whimpered with relief when he was able to take a breath without having to force the air into his unwilling lungs. Where there had been fear there now was relief. Fear that Lupin wouldn't come and relief that he had done so nevertheless.

Deeply, Snape breathed in. Harshly, he pulled Lupin another little bit closer. He didn't give a damn how this must look. Like a lover's embrace. He just needed the physical contact, skin to skin. He needed to feel the other man's heartbeat under his fingers if he wanted to survive this day. He had denied facts long enough. He hadn't listened to his body's needs, and now, his body demanded its rights.

Slowly, Snape rested his head against the werewolf's shoulder. For the moment, for a few, brief seconds, he would enjoy this simply because he had no other choice. And he didn't even care that the werewolf's muscles were hard as stone, his hands balled to fists like a man who would rather beat his way out of this situation than just sit and wait to see what would happen next.

He hates me, Snape thought dreamily and couldn't suppress a sigh. *Well, he's not the only one. Damn pity I need him if I don't want to die; damn pity I don't hate him, too.*

Dumbledore came in only a few minutes later, and Snape reacted fast and instinctively. With a brutal push, he sent the werewolf flying through half his living room, either not seeing or not caring about the stunned, hurt look in the other man's face. Both men were on their feet nearly at the same time; both avoided looking at each other with determination written all over their faces.

"What is going on here, Severus?" Dumbledore asked and once more closed the door. Idly he strolled into the middle of the room, then flicked his wand and lit a fire. "Christopher Kincaid tells me you are dying; Remus nearly ran me over on the way into your dungeons. And you both look as if you'd rather duel than talk to each other. I want an explanation. A good one, my dear boy."

Snape brushed an invisible speck of dust off of his grey shirt. He didn't wear robes. They had proved to be too heavy for his weakened body. But currently he wished for the forbidding, black garment. "I needed him," he sneered and jerked his head towards the werewolf. "Apparently, I am..." At a loss for words, he paused.

"Yes? You are?" Dumbledore inquired mildly.

"Helpless without him," Snape snapped, crossing his arms over his chest. "I haven't eaten in a week, I have been living of Strengthening Potions I inject directly into my blood because I throw up everything else but water. I can't sleep for more than an hour at the time, and I hope you haven't found a new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher yet because Lupin will need to take on this job if you want me to continue to teach Potions."

"What?" Remus asked and sat down heavily on one of Snape's chairs.

Dumbledore hummed a tuneless little melody for a little while until finally, he said, "Ah," and then, "I don't understand, Severus. Helpless? In which way? And why can you neither eat nor sleep? You look quite awful, I give you that, but that is no explanation, merely a fact. Has your... problem to do with aftereffects of the curse?"

"My *problem*, as you call it, will cost my life if you don't keep him near me," Snape replied coldly. "Because of this sodding curse I am bound to him. A forced binding, mind you, but a binding nevertheless. It took me a while to realise and even longer to accept it, but it is true whether I like it or not. I have to keep his company. I have to be close

to him at least once in twenty-four hours, and close means at arm's length at the most. If not, the sodding Desipentia curse will drill its claws into my mind again. My body denies service because it needs the werewolf to function. I have denied contact so far and I have suffered for it. Today I had to give in and therefore sent for him. Satisfied with that explanation, Albus?"

Briefly, Snape closed his eyes, and gods, how much he longed to get near the werewolf, smell him once more, touch him, breathe him in just one more time!

Dumbledore's eyes had widened at Snape's words. Lupin, though, looked as if he had been hit by a Bludger right between the eyes. "You must be joking," he rasped. "That is impossible. I broke the curse and you can't be bound to me! A binding is a voluntary thing, it has to be performed willingly! There was nothing done willingly that night you were cursed, Severus, so..."

"I am aware of that, Lupin," Snape snarled. "No need to remind me how much you hated doing what had to be done. I hated it just the same. I can't help the facts, though. And you should have listened: this is not a voluntary, legal binding, it is a forced one. Until I find a way to break it, you are doomed to keep me company once a day. Your absence is the reason I am half starved and too tired to tie my own shoelaces. Get used to it. You were *kind* enough to relieve me of Desipentia; it should be a lot easier to sit next to me during meals." Sarcasm poisoned each word, and the Potions master saw Lupin pale. It didn't feel good though, this visible sign that his words had hurt. In fact, it felt lousy.

I felt lousy for two decades, Snape mused and got closer to the now merrily burning fire. *Why did I ever hope that after the Dark Lord's death I would begin to feel better?*

Dumbledore looked at the two men, one resembling quite accurately an underfed scarecrow, the other looking like a man doomed to the gallows. "Can you stay, Remus?" the Headmaster asked. "For as long as Severus needs to find another solution?"

"You believe him?" Remus sounded thunderstruck. "Desipentia doesn't work like that, Albus. You know that. It..."

"I can see it, Remus," Dumbledore interrupted him. "And Severus knows most about the Dark Curses. Desipentia is so very rare; I am not really surprised that it has even lesser known side effects. I must insist you stay. I wanted to ask you if you would pick up teaching anyway, but as it is, you don't have a choice."

"I could just leave." Remus stared at the old man threateningly.

"No, you couldn't," Dumbledore replied quietly, and Remus looked away.

With a sigh, the Headmaster got up. "Stay here, Remus, and order dinner for the both of you. Severus, I want you try and eat something. If your assumptions are correct, you should be able to keep at least some food down. Tomorrow, both of you will eat in the Great Hall. Your students, Severus, are waiting for you to do so anyway, and like that, there will be no reason for rumours. And in case I haven't made it plain these are orders. Understood?"

Snape gave a curt nod. After a moment, Remus did so, too.

Meals

Chapter 5 of 11

In the night of the final battle, Snape gets hit by a curse. Lupin goes to great lengths to save the Potions master's life and sanity.

5. Meals

When Remus and Snape were alone in the Potions master's rooms, the dark wizard picked up a pace from wall to wall. Steadily, silently, unnerving... Remus had to suppress the urge to grab the man's shoulders and force him to sit back down on a chair. Both of his friend's arms were firmly crossed over his stomach, his head was low, and he avoided eye contact.

Bound to him. Because of you. Hated it. Bound to him... The words went in endless circles, came back again and hurt more with each time around. Simultaneously, Remus couldn't stop thinking about the moment when Severus had pushed his hand under his shirt, had pressed his palm against his racing heart. For a shocked moment, Remus had thought Severus would rip out said heart, dig it out of his chest, and destroy it right in front of its owner's eyes. Had been even more shocked at the caress he received instead, the shuddering, relieved sigh that had emerged from his friend's dry, blue-ish looking lips.

"You are bound to me," Remus said helplessly, and Severus whirled round, stopped pacing the moment the werewolf said the words.

"Indeed. Funny, isn't it? Have a good laugh about it once you are out of my dungeons." The black eyes of the Potions master shot daggers in the werewolf's direction.

Remus sighed. "I have never laughed at you. Not since we were children, and I apologised for that long ago."

Snape just snorted. As he stood with his back to the werewolf he didn't see that his table had been magically set with dishes and bowls. Apparently Dumbledore hadn't wanted to wait until Remus or the Potions master ordered dinner.

"Look, you should sit down." Remus said it as coolly as possible. "Let's just eat without having a go at each other."

Snape shook his head. He still hadn't turned round.

Remus got up, unwillingly, but nevertheless drawn to the tall, silent man like a moth is drawn to fire. "You need to eat," he said hoarsely. "You can't live on Strengthening Potion; it will make you sick in the long run. You..."

"I know," Snape replied. Surprisingly enough, he sounded tired, not aggressive. Slowly, he faced the werewolf, who stood only a hand's span away from him. "I am so damn hungry. Have been for days now and never could get anything down. But since you are here, the revulsion at the thought of food is gone. Just like that. As if it never had been there." Looking at his table he saw the steaming bowls of rice and meat and sweet fruit: his nostrils flared in appreciation of the tempting smells.

Before he knew what he was doing, Remus touched him. Just his hand on his friend's shirt-covered shoulder. It could have been a supporting gesture but for the tremble that claimed Remus's fingers.

Snape gasped and clutched his hand over the werewolf's, squeezed hard, and closed his eyes.

Remus stood frozen to the spot. If he had thought about it before, he would have guessed that Severus would push him away, might even draw his wand. But then he realised that his friend wouldn't have been able to do so. "This binding... that you need to be close to me... You have fought against it for a week?" he asked quietly.

Snape nodded.

"Then your urge to be near me must have built up constantly. It must have turned into pain by now well, I can see it has. My touch... does it ease this pain?"

Another unwilling nod with still-closed eyes. The Potions master's grip was strong, but Remus felt muscles relax under his palm, could hear the slowing of Snape's heartbeat, and easily observed that at the moment, his friend didn't give a damn if he liked to be touched. He *needed* to be touched more than anything else.

I bet he would rather kill me, Remus thought, bitterly amused at the cruel irony of the situation. *He depends on me once again, he hates me, and still, he needs me. Wonderful. Fucking wonderful.*

Talking about what had happened had just become even more impossible than it had been before.

"Let's eat, Severus," Remus said and led his friend to the table, one hand on his shoulder. He was shocked how willingly the Potions master let it happen and how heavily he sat on the chair.

For many minutes, Snape just sat in silence, and then shrugged his shoulders, wiping the werewolf's hand away. Silently, slowly, he filled his plate. Even more slowly he began to eat as if he had forgotten how to bring a fork to his mouth. Throughout the meal he didn't say a word. When the dishes were gone, he didn't move.

Neither did Remus.

Around ten o'clock at night, the Potions master's head dropped to the surface of the table and he slept, for the first time in a week, deep and dreamless like a newborn child.

Food and sleep brought Snape back to his feet in just a few days' time. For the first twenty-four hours, Lupin had stayed by his side, and every minute that had passed in the werewolf's company had reversed the aftereffects of the curse. Snape wasn't cold anymore, nor did his eyes hurt in bright daylight. He performed his daily tasks with renewed strength, and Hogwarts became itself more quickly again now that one of the most skilled wizards in Britain could put all of his mind and heart into rebuilding the school.

At meals he sat next to Lupin, every day at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. He talked to Sybill, who sat on his other side, he occasionally commented on something Minerva or Albus had said.

He never shared one single word with the werewolf. He didn't even look in his direction. There could have been a wall next to him and he wouldn't have behaved differently.

Shortly before the new term began, nearly twelve weeks after the final battle, Snape seemed to be his old self again snarky, snappy, with an exceptional dark humour and sarcastic comments on everything that piqued his interest. No one would have suspected that without the werewolf by his side he would dwindle like a flame in the storm, given the icy silence he radiated whenever someone as much as mentioned Lupin's name. No one knew that without the werewolf, the Potions master would be a permanent resident in St. Mungo's.

Snape knew that last bit for sure. He had experimented methodically with the amount of time he could be away from Lupin without ill effect, and after he had recovered after he had ripped the werewolf's shirt apart in order to get in contact with his skin again the Potions master had made it his personal quest to find the exact terms of his binding. Quickly it had become clear that physical contact was not necessary to keep him healthy, but equally quickly Snape had realised that being near Lupin once in twenty-four hours might be enough to stay on his feet, but not enough to feel good.

Breakfast, lunch, and dinner that turned out to be the ideal routine if he not only wanted to function but to live. Three meals a day, three meals with the werewolf sitting close enough to smell him, to feel the warmth his body radiated, to hear him breathe and observe what he ate and drank.

It was possible. Unpleasant, annoying, but possible.

Snape knew, of course, that for Lupin, it was sheer torture. Throughout the weeks, the werewolf had become paler on a daily basis, and it had nothing to do with his transformations during full moon for which Snape still provided the Wolfsbane. It had everything to do, though, with the fact that he couldn't leave Hogwarts, couldn't live his own life, and couldn't follow a path he had chosen for himself. Lupin had to stay at the school because of Snape and because the Headmaster had ordered him to do so.

Snape knew from lifelong experience that Lupin was not one who would disobey an order from Albus Dumbledore. Neither would he decline a necessary duty, however gruesome this duty might be.

Snape, sitting in his living room, laughed dryly. "Breaking the curse was gruesome; staying here, having to sit next to me regularly brings him to his knees. He must hate it even more than I anticipated."

A swig of port didn't wash the bitter taste out of his mouth. Given the circumstances, he felt exceptionally good. For the first time in two decades, he could get fully undressed at nighttime as he didn't have to fear a summoning anymore. Sleep brought relaxation, not nightmares, and the days were filled with nothing more exciting than decisions whether he would like to teach Slytherins and Gryffindors together, as always, or go for a new match like Slytherins and Hufflepuffs. Finally, he could live a quiet life.

If only Albus wouldn't keep asking when exactly he would be able to undo the binding. "Before Christmas, Severus, or after?" the Headmaster had demanded to know only this morning. He wouldn't take an "I don't know," for much longer.

Not that Snape didn't want to break the binding: the problem was that it was impossible to do so and that he didn't know how to tell this fact to the Headmaster and the werewolf.

Another swig of the port. The fire burned low, and it was pleasantly warm in his rooms. It was late, the day had brought no catastrophes, and, nicely tired after a hard day's work, he had the leisure to muse. To muse about the past, the present, and a future. To muse about the binding, even.

Who was he trying to fool? He thought about the binding constantly, as he was reminded of it three times a day.

Being bound... now that was harder than the Potions master had anticipated. Not the fact in itself but what it demanded of him. That he was dependent on someone else in such a crucial way; that his well-being was based on close contact with another human. Until recently, Snape had thought of himself as a solitary man who despised company and who would have never, not in a lifetime, considered a partnership or just to think along this line a marriage.

The binding was both, and neither. In a partnership one might miss the spouse, but certainly wouldn't get sick over the beloved's absence. In a marriage, physical contact was something both parties craved, not despised. This binding, though, only offered the bad parts and denied him the good ones.

Concerning a forced binding... Snape sighed. He craved the werewolf's company, there was no use denying it. Worse, he craved Lupin's touch, and that was certainly something he couldn't allow himself to give into. The reason he was so exceptionally rude to his colleague, to the man who had saved his life, was simple: if he weren't he would begin stalking the man, wouldn't be able to keep his hands off him, would maybe even ask Lupin to join him in his private rooms again.

Impossible, of course. This had been initiated by the Desipentia Curse, and due to unfortunate and more or less unique circumstances, Lupin hadn't been able to break the

curse completely. Whenever Snape saw the werewolf, he could do nothing but try to keep his hands to himself, lest he rake it through those unruly, tempting brown locks.

Damn. And that Lupin was so very clearly unhappy here at Hogwarts didn't help, either. To Snape it was obvious that the werewolf would like to leave today rather than tomorrow. Only duty and the Headmaster's command held him at the school.

Snape drained the glass and got ready for bed. Since he had the time to do so, he very much enjoyed an evening bath, and he had even bothered to finally sort out his teeth with a few quite complicated spells. Now, after his evening toilet, he contently slipped into his bathtub, filled up to the rim with very hot, gently scented water. The bath would hopefully lull his mind away from the werewolf; equally hopefully, he wouldn't dream of the man again tonight.

"If only I could break that damn binding," Snape said to the clouded mirror above the sink. "But I can't. No one can."

It was the day before the full moon, and as always, Lupin didn't appear for dinner. In the past months since the term had started, he had always stayed in his rooms during that time of the month. Now, a week before the autumn break, it was no different. Lupin would stay in his rooms during the night; he wouldn't come to breakfast, wouldn't as much as put his head out of his rooms before lunch.

The thought made Snape uneasy. Since the werewolf had touched him that one evening back in summer, since Snape had told him and the Headmaster about the binding, it seemed as if his need to be close to Lupin had increased. A full two days without so much as setting eyes on him was now absolutely impossible to contemplate, not to mention a whole week.

"Tomorrow midday, he'll be back," Snape told himself. Tonight he hadn't managed to go to the Great Hall, either. The thought of the table, the food, the students, simply everything had made him physically sick. "It's because I need that damn bastard," he murmured and emptied his third glass of Firewhiskey. "Not because I miss his presence."

Snape slept poorly that night, and when he woke the next morning, his mood was even more foul than usual. When he saw that the werewolf's place was as empty as expected, Snape decided to skip breakfast. *Lunch*, he told himself. *He'll be back for lunch, he always is.*

Potions classes were a nightmare for his students; it practically rained detention on every possible and impossible occasion. Snape was hungry, but eating seemed out of the question. He was tired, but sleep didn't come when he had two free hours between classes. Instead, he paced from wall to wall and wished time would rush.

At that moment, the Potions master hated the werewolf nearly as much as himself.

When the bells called everyone to the Great Hall for lunch, Snape could barely stop himself from running. Amongst the students, he went into the hall, his eyes searching for Lupin, his heart racing and then nearly stopping when he couldn't see him.

Couldn't find him. Could neither see nor hear him.

Couldn't sense him. Nowhere. Not anywhere in the room.

Lupin wasn't there and Snape, for a very brief moment, didn't know what to do. His initial reaction was to turn and storm upstairs to the werewolf's room, bang on his door, and drag him out if necessary. Naturally, that was impossible – students and colleagues alike would consider him crazy, if not dangerous, and he didn't want to raise any suspicions. So he went on and sat at his usual place, being very aware of the empty seat next to him.

It felt wrong, though. He hadn't been close to Lupin in over twenty-four hours, and Snape could feel his stomach turning to stone already. Accompanied by ice-cold hands, nervousness, and a slight feeling of nausea, he had to clench his teeth to stop himself swearing filthily at the werewolf's absence.

Then Snape felt Dumbledore's eyes on him and raised his head. The Headmaster looked at him questioningly; Snape could do nothing but to shake his head once. He didn't know where the werewolf was, and the brief interlude with Albus had only confirmed that Lupin hadn't told the Headmaster either that he would be absent longer than usual.

Shit.

"I wouldn't be surprised if Remus finally decided to take meals in his rooms," Snape heard Sybill suddenly say.

"What?" he snapped, and the Divination teacher pursed her lips at him.

"Well, consider the way you treat him – I would refuse to sit next to you if you were behaving that badly towards me!" The haughty, dreamlike manner she usually cultivated was totally absent for the moment.

For some reason, Minerva assisted Sybill's accusation. "She's right, Severus," McGonagall said. "Since the beginning of term you've behaved as if Remus were a ghost. You don't look at him, you don't talk to him – that's extreme, even for you. I'm surprised you can bring yourself to brew the Wolfsbane every month, given your obvious dislike."

"I have my reasons to treat him as I do," Snape bit out, trying to ignore the fact that just hearing the werewolf's name soothed his nerves. "Reasons which are none of your business. Until now, I have always fulfilled my duties. Lupin needs the Wolfsbane if he isn't to turn into a monster. Only I am capable of brewing it. So where is your problem, Minerva?"

Gods, his hands dug holes into the seat of his chair. Very soon, he would begin to shout, if he weren't careful.

Dumbledore suddenly said, "Severus, dear boy, do you have that potion for my headache ready? The one I asked you for yesterday evening?"

Snape frowned. Albus hadn't asked him for a headache potion, neither last night nor the night before. Besides, he had enough pain-killing potions on his shelf, so why...

"I would be grateful if you could get it for me," Dumbledore said mildly. "Or brew it, in case you haven't done it yet. Now, if you don't mind – you don't look particularly hungry, and truly, that headache is killing me."

Snape just managed to hinder his mouth from sagging open when he finally understood the Headmaster's intention – with his words he had given Snape the opportunity to leave and look for Lupin without anyone realising it.

His chair nearly fell over as the Potions master jumped up hastily. "Of course, Albus," he murmured, and just managed not to run out of the Great Hall.

He did run upstairs, though, and broke into Lupin's rooms without hesitation. The werewolf's wards were strong enough to keep out the average student, but they were no match for Snape and he was inside in less than thirty seconds.

Cool, stale air greeted him. No candles burned, the fireplace was empty, the bed untouched. On the table stood a plate with uneaten sandwiches and the empty goblet which had contained the Wolfsbane. Clearly, Lupin had intended to eat before the transformation but had decided otherwise in the end.

Slowly, Snape turned around once to take in the sparsely decorated rooms. The bigger one contained a large couch, a table with a chair, some bookshelves. The bedroom

held the bed and a wardrobe. Both rooms looked as if their inhabitant wished to be anywhere but in here.

Snape couldn't blame him.

But the question about the werewolf's whereabouts remained, so Snape cast a tracking spell which would allow him to see the movements Lupin had taken in the past fifteen hours. Every step would appear on the wooden planks, every...

But there weren't any footprints. Not from feet and not from paws, either.

"He left his rooms before he'd transformed into a wolf," Snape concluded. "In that case he must have gone to the Forbidden Forest before moonrise, transforming there rather than in here."

Where else? The Forbidden Forest was safe for a werewolf in his wolf form, and out there, between the ancient trees, Lupin would have felt less caged. Snape left Hogwarts with long strides, trying hard not to think about the hundred and more possibilities which could have prevented Lupin from coming home that morning.

The grass was still crisp from last night's frost when Snape stepped out of the noon sunlight and into the shady greens of the wood. Quiet peace greeted him, and he understood very well why Lupin hadn't stayed inside. Maybe for the first time ever the Potions master admired the beauty of the Forbidden Forest. He heard the birds, smelled the last, late brambles and the autumn leaves, and sensed that soon it would be winter.

About an hour of searching, Snape found the werewolf's footprints. The tracking spell confirmed that they really had been made by Lupin, and only a few hours ago.

The fear that had pounded in the back of Snape's head since had seen the empty chair, the fear of finding the werewolf dead killed by one of the Forest's monsters or killed by his own hand subsided, but didn't disappear. When he followed the paw prints deeper into the woods, the Potions master allowed himself to hope that maybe the werewolf had injured himself, lay helpless in the midst of the Forbidden Forest and all he had to do was find him and drag him back to Hogwarts. A unicorn could easily wound a werewolf, a centaur, too, and... Ah. Here Lupin had turned back into his human form. His clothes must have been there, under the big fir tree. The paw prints vanished and were replaced by the impressions of naked feet. They glowed golden in the shadows, lightened by the tracking spell Snape used.

In the grass lay a shirt, a pair of socks, shoes: apparently Lupin had put his trousers on, but not the rest of his clothes. Question was, what had happened to stop him from doing so?

The footprints told Snape that Lupin had taken a step away from his clothes, had looked around, then headed back to his shirt.

Snape frowned. He had the strange feeling that he could very nearly see the werewolf's actions. "He transforms, dresses partly. Then he hears something and takes a look. Can't see a thing. He's probably still dizzy from the transformation. He decides that whatever he had heard was unimportant and..."

Snape's eyes fell onto a big old oak and he inhaled sharply at the sight of the pattern on the dark bark. It wasn't a pattern painted by age or the powers of nature; it was a pattern only a wand could cast. The problem was that Lupin never took his wand when he was about to turn into a werewolf he wouldn't leave it abandoned by his clothes and couldn't carry it in his mouth, either. So it hadn't been Lupin who had marked the tree.

Someone else had been here early in the morning, shortly after moonset and just after the werewolf had transformed back into his human form. Someone who had hidden behind the trees, protected by spells so the fine nose of the wolf had been unable to detect the stranger. Then, this someone had cast a curse and...

No. That didn't make sense. If someone had cast a spell and missed Lupin, the werewolf would have either attacked with bare hands or simply run away. He had done neither; instead, Snape saw an indentation in the grass where he had fallen. Conclusion: the first spell had hit the werewolf and had either killed or immobilised him. As there was no corpse to be seen, it was unlikely that Lupin was dead.

"Who would be so crazy to leave proof of a crime?" Snape wondered and cast another spell, one that would highlight the pattern on the bark. The sun was getting low behind the trees, and it was cool in the shadows. A constant drum in his blood reminded Snape that he had to find the werewolf soon if he wanted to stay sane and soon meant in the next few hours at the most.

Not many Death Eaters had survived the night of the final battle. A handful at best, and amongst them, Bellatrix Lestrange was definitely the most dangerous. Plus, she was completely insane. Insane enough to hunt a werewolf; insane enough to follow him into the Forbidden Forest.

The spell Snape had cast worked: the pattern on the oak became clearly visible. "Definitely Bellatrix," Snape said. Only she was arrogant enough to leave proof of what she had done written plainly into the bark of a tree: her initials, now glowing fiercely red.

Snape clenched his teeth and wished he could go after Bella and Lupin this instant. Instead, he headed back to Hogwarts, to the Headmaster's office, to report what he had found and to tell Dumbledore that he was going to find the werewolf. The Headmaster needed to know what Bellatrix had done in case he failed and that in this case, the mad witch might try to kidnap someone else.

A/N: Due to RL issues, I won't be able to post the next chapter before mid January. Sorry!

Bellatrix

Chapter 6 of 11

In the night of the final battle, Snape gets hit by a curse. Lupin goes to great lengths to save the Potions master's life and sanity.

6. Bellatrix

"Are you certain?"

"Quite so," Snape said, pacing the Headmaster's office. "Bella took him, for whatever reason. I found her initials burned into the tree, Lupin is gone, and I don't have a choice anyway. I just came back to tell you that I'm going after him."

Dumbledore steepled his fingers on the desk, looking solemnly at his Potions master. "This might be a trap, Severus. You must be aware of that."

Snape didn't even bother to comment on that; he just snorted, restless and eager to go.

"How will you find them?" Dumbledore wanted to know, obviously too curious about unimportant details to let his Potions master off the hook so soon. "She didn't leave you a hint, did she?"

"She didn't need to," Snape snarled. "I can sense the werewolf when he is close. The binding makes me vulnerable, but in this case it might save his life. I will check all of Bella's hiding places. She is mentally ruined; she would never think to go somewhere she hadn't been before. Now would you..."

"Do you really want to find him?" The Headmaster's voice was suddenly colder than a moment before. "Wouldn't it serve you better if he died? I assume his death would break the binding and you would be free. I wonder if you haven't thought of this, too."

Snape stopped dead in his tracks and stared into that old face, wondering how anyone could consider this man as being mild and friendly. "Always thinking the worst of me, Albus, aren't you?" he stated, bitterness lacing his words. "Whatever I do, you will always consider me the traitor I once was."

"It is a logical assumption, Severus," Dumbledore replied sharply. "I know how much you dislike Remus, and I have seen your face the night you told me of the binding. You were shocked. If Bella kills him or has done so already..."

Snape took a step towards the Headmaster, wondering if he could be fast enough to cast a curse at the old man. "He's alive," he stated as calmly as possible. "I'd know if he were dead. Because we are *bound* to each other, Albus, which means I can't live with Lupin being dead. He can't die without me following him within the hour. That's what a forced binding means. It's cruel and complicated and, no, it cannot be broken. I did consider killing him myself in order to end this situation for the both of us, simply because I see how horrible it is for him having to sit next to me three times a day. I didn't find the strength to do it, though. Letting him die is not an option, either. But even if it was I am not such a lousy bastard to leave him in Bella's hands until she's finished playing with him."

Dumbledore, all of a sudden, was white as freshly fallen snow. "You haven't told me that. Does Remus know about the strictures of the binding?"

Snape pushed the door open, now unable to stay for as much as another minute. "No. I will tell him, though, when I have found him. I am sick of being accused of crimes I haven't committed."

"Severus..." the Headmaster began, but Snape had already stormed out of his office.

In the end it wasn't that hard to find Bellatrix. There hadn't been many hiding places where the Dark Lord had felt safe. Snape went to all of them; when he Apparated to the Riddle House in Little Hangleton, he knew he was close.

Naturally, the Aurors had checked on the house and had put wards up in case a Death Eater sought shelter in the old mansion. But no escaped Death Eater would be daft enough to hide in this house, it being the place where the Dark Lord had risen some years ago. Snape was certain the Aurors' alarms hadn't gone off once since the end of the war.

There was a scent in the air, or a tone, or something similar to both whatever it was, the result for Snape was immediate. The pounding in his ears ceased, he got his trembling hands under control, and his urge to rake his nails across his skin disappeared.

Lupin was close. Not in the main house Snape didn't bother to even look at the rotten walls but in the woods behind the garden, in the tiny shed which was hidden well enough that no Auror had found it. Occasionally the Dark Lord had imprisoned a Muggle in there as a special treat for Bella. She liked to torture people; Snape was certain that Lupin was in a poor condition by now.

There was no use in trying to get close without getting noticed Bella was mad, but she wasn't stupid. She would have put up wards, and whatever her reasoning had been to leave her initials in the bark, she would allow no one to catch her by surprise. Therefore, Snape just followed the small path that led to the hut, his feet rustling the dry leaves on the ground. Ten minutes later he knocked at the door as if this was a social call, not by any means two enemies meeting.

Knock. It was a hollow sound, giving the false impression that the room beyond was empty and abandoned Bella had set up her wards with a careful hand.

Knock. Snape's nostrils flared. His nose was by no means as good as the werewolf's, but he could smell blood in the atypically warm autumn air. And now, he heard a scream, sounding as if coming from far away. It had pierced the wards that protected the little hut, giving audible proof of the torment the man inside endured that very moment.

One last knock, strong enough to nearly break down the old, wooden door. Bella always liked to play, and she hated to be interrupted during torture, so Snape wasn't surprised that it took her a while to realise that someone demanded entry. She would have to put her tools down, she might have to clean her hands, wipe her hair out of her face, and catch her breath.

It was a miracle that the werewolf was still alive, but Snape was close enough to feel him, sense him now. He longed to get closer to him; if Bellatrix hadn't opened the door that very moment, Snape would have got his wand out, forcing his way in.

"Severus," Bellatrix LeStrange purred, leaning in the finally open door. Her wand was pointed directly at Snape's heart. "How absolutely terrific that you could be bothered to come around. How are you? How did it feel to go mad?"

Snape bowed his head ever so slightly and forced his hands to open. They were empty, of course. Had he drawn his wand, she would have killed him instantly. This was a game, and he played it because he knew she loved to play. "Bella. Pleased to see you are alive. I would have thought you'd followed the Dark Lord into death by now, but obviously, you decided to stay amongst the living for a bit longer." A quick glance over his shoulder, and he added, "May I come inside? One never knows when a Mudblood might walk past."

Bellatrix licked a drop of blood from the corner of her mouth. She wasn't a vampire, as Snape had found out long ago, but she loved blood nevertheless. Once, she had ripped out a woman's throat with her bare teeth. "Of course, Severus. Do come in and see what I have found in Hogwarts' forest." She stepped aside and allowed him to enter the hut, never getting too close to him and never lowering her wand.

Inside, it was bright enough to see every speck of dust, every empty bottle on the floor, all the cobwebs in the corners. Mice shit covered the planks, a dead rat lay half rotten under a broken chair, and the windows were blind with dirt. Glass shards crunched under the Potions master's boots when he stepped inside, and the door creaked conveniently when Bella closed it behind him.

In the middle of the room was a table; it was the only furniture that was not broken. Naturally not: it had to carry the half unconscious man that lay on top of it, motionless, bleeding silently.

Involuntarily, Snape took another step towards Bella's victim, confirming his identity.

Lupin. Of course it was Lupin. Nearly naked, wearing trousers but no shirt, he was covered in blood. Breathing, alive. In pain, and unable to move as his wrists and ankles were safely connected to the wooden table.

Lupin. As if he hadn't known the moment he had Apparated to the main house. As if his blood hadn't reacted to the man's presence.

"He looks lovely, doesn't he?" Bellatrix said behind him, tender cruelty lacing her words. "I caught him this morning I hoped to find a student, but he was acceptable. Caught him right after his transformation. He was disorientated, didn't even have a wand. I Stupefied him." Stepping alongside Snape, never taking her eyes off him, she reached out and scratched one of her long, red fingernails across the werewolf's chest, leaving a thin, bleeding line. "So strong he is he's hard to kill. I was having fun until you came!" Like a little girl, her lips quavered a bit at the last words.

Snape walked round the table. Lupin was now between him and the mad witch who was still scratching thin, red lines in the werewolf's skin as if he were a piece of parchment she could use for her art. There wasn't much white left; she had worked on him for hours already, leaving wounds, gashes, screams and tears in her wake.

In a way, it was art that she had made. Horrible, cruel, brutal art. She was an expert, and she knew it.

"I've nailed his hands to the table," she said idly. "Then I broke a few of his ribs. And his right leg. Or was it the left one? And all those wonderful tools in here... He screamed quite loudly. I like it when they scream."

Impossible not to touch him. Slowly, Snape placed his cold hand on the werewolf's naked chest. Although he could see and hear the werewolf breathe, although he saw his wide-open, fearful eyes, he needed to feel his heartbeat, too.

When his palm touched the werewolf's bloodied skin, when he felt the wolf's rapid, uneven heartbeat, when he heard Lupin's breath hitch with pain and panic, the Potions master became calm and cold as ice. "I assume the past hours have been rather unpleasant for him," Snape said, sounding bored. "Why did you keep him alive?"

Bellatrix grinned, looking madder than before. "You know I like to play with my toys, Severus. The main question is, why did you come here? I guess you found my mark on the tree, but still, why bother me? I thought you'd hide in that ugly school of yours forever, given the fact that you are a traitor and all." A finger snap and she had a thin, long piece of metal in her hand. The end glowed dark red.

At the sight of it, Snape's hand twitched inconspicuously. "You use surprisingly unusual tools for your game, Bella. No curses, no hexes? What's wrong with you?"

"I'm already finished with curses and hexes," she answered, and with a long, greedy sigh the witch pressed the glowing metal right underneath the werewolf's collarbone. Lupin jerked, trying to get off the table and away from the pain, but the nails impaling his hands and the broken bone in his leg would not allow him to do more than wriggle ineffectually.

And he screamed. Harsh, deep, with an intensity that made Snape's hair stand up at the base of his neck. Clenching his teeth, the Potions master managed with a lot of effort not to snatch the bar out of Bella's hand and smash her head in with it. Instead, he increased the pressure on Lupin's chest, holding him down, wordlessly trying to calm him, to take some of the pain from him.

Seconds passed, or maybe an eternity. When the red, hot glow had ceased to a useless grey, Bellatrix tossed the bar away into a corner and then bent low, inspecting the damage she had inflicted. Her wand was still held in her right hand, and not for a single moment did her concentration break. Had Snape tried to draw his own wand, he he would have been dead before his fingers had touched it.

Lupin's muscles were hard as stone, his joints strained to breaking point as he struggled to get himself under control. His screams died down to a weak, helpless whimper, and his whole body shook in aftershock of the torture.

"Sweetie, I'm not done with you yet," Bella assured him and then, to Snape, said, "So, why exactly are you here?"

With a well-placed, long-practised, very disgusted-looking sneer, Snape wiped his bloody hand on his trousers, then crossed his arms over his chest simply because he feared that otherwise he'd do something stupid. "Actually, I came to ask you a question, my dear. I wondered why you hexed me with Desipentia instead of killing me. The damn curse has caused me a great deal of trouble, but I would have assumed you'd rather see me dead than mad."

When Bellatrix stepped away from the table, Snape closed his eyes for the briefest moment. The presence of Lupin was like a constant pull, a permanent reminder that he ought to get the werewolf out of here as quickly as possible. Simultaneously, he had to pretend that Lupin didn't mean anything to him, or Bella would kill him instantly. It was harder than he would have thought; it was equally shocking to confess that he cared for Lupin and that his caring appeared to have nothing to do with the binding.

"I love garden sheds," the witch murmured as she summoned a rusty pair of scissors. "So many nice ideas one can get by simply looking around. I will snip and snap a bit now, Severus. Fingers, toes, ears and nose and maybe, later, his cock. You might like to get farther away from the beast, or you will get covered in his blood."

"Desipentia, Bellatrix?" Snape reminded her mildly and didn't move an inch.

Bella was clearly annoyed by his constant questions as well as by his presence. She rammed the scissors into the table, only half an inch from Lupin's neck. The werewolf barred his teeth; the witch just spat at him. "I took pity on you, Severus," she snapped, dipping her fingertip in a wound on Lupin's chest and licking off the drop of blood. "You always looked so stiff, so unhappy, so unshagged. I thought I should give you the opportunity for one last fuck before someone kills you. Besides, Desipentia is such a wonderful curse. I know what I am talking about. Madness claims you if the curse isn't broken. I thought your colleagues would either kill you or you'd go mad and I'd have a companion. A mad Potions master at my side lovely prospect, don't you think?"

Snape could hardly tear his eyes off the scissors' blades, so dangerously close to the pulsating vein in Lupin's throat. "Logical reasoning," he finally said. "You didn't consider the possibility of someone simply breaking the curse?"

Bella threw her head back and laughed. Very nearly, Snape would have used the opportunity to draw his wand, but before he could do so, she stabbed her own weapon at him. "Break the curse? Fuck you back into sanity? No, I haven't considered that, Severus. You are ugly. You are nasty. You are the worst person I have met in my life, and that says a lot. I would have bet anything that no one would sink low enough to get near you, let alone *shag* you!" Shuddering, she pulled a face, obviously unable to get a certain image out of her mind.

Casualty, as if he were at a party and not in a tiny shed, playing for Lupin's life, Snape leaned against the wall. "You were wrong, though, Bella. Obviously someone was nice enough to do it."

"Who?"

Raising an eyebrow, Snape just nodded to the half-dead man on the table. He assumed that Lupin was listening; at least, the werewolf's eyes were wide open and fixed on the Potions master's face.

Bella followed his gaze. Her eyes widened, and she coughed in shock. "What! He? That animal... He..."

"'Fucked me back into sanity', as you so nicely phrased it. Yes. Don't ask me why, because he despises me as much as anyone else does, but he did. Which is the reason why I am here and not at St. Mungo's or the graveyard."

Bellatrix narrowed her eyes, clearly trying to figure out if Snape was making fun of her. Her wand steadily pointed at Snape's chest; then she swung it round towards Lupin in a wide arch and hissed, "*Legilimens!*"

The werewolf tried to fight her. Amazingly, he had enough life energy left in him to move his lips, trying to block the spell even without a wand. Useless, of course, but Snape wondered what Lupin was trying so hard to hide and stepped closer to the table again. He couldn't hex Bella she would have seen any hostile movement so he took the opportunity to learn what he could.

"Let me see your memories, little wolf," Bellatrix purred. "Let me see what happened that night, let me... Ah! There you are, Severus. Gods, you look bad! All bloody and naked and... huh! I didn't know you are that well hung! I would have had a more direct look long ago, despite that greasy hair of yours!"

Bellatrix crouched above the werewolf like a vampire above a victim. Her wand was drilled in Lupin's chest, her other hand nearly strangled him. "Desire," she whispered, reporting to both men what she saw, what she felt in the werewolf's memories. "A lust potion, he drinks a lust potion because otherwise he wouldn't be able to fuck you, love."

"No surprise there," Snape said and was glad that apparently, Bellatrix hadn't heard the pained subnote in his voice.

"He is scared of you... pities you... He binds you and gags you I like that, dear Severus! and drags you into the bedroom... He wants you so badly. He looks forward to... What? He looks forward to being with you, to touching you, and hey! He loves shagging you!" Briefly, she looked up at Snape, a confused frown on her face. "I can't believe it! He mounts you and hates himself for raping you but at the same time he wishes it would never end, it..." Bella broke off. Staring at Snape, still strangling Lupin half to death and ignoring the tears that ran down the werewolf's face, she continued, "He craves your touch, Severus. I bet you didn't know that. He wants you. You! The greasy git, the traitorous bastard! He broke the curse because he fucking *loves* you!"

"Highly unlikely, Bella," Snape answered coolly. "The pain has addled his memory. You managed to drive him insane in just a few hours. Well done, dear."

Bellatrix frowned and confirmed what she had seen. "No. He's dying, but he's clear. He was horrified when he realised that he had enjoyed what he'd done, he considers it rape, and he ran from your dungeons Oh, how sweet, you cried? Wish I had been there and went into his rooms. Where he... Yay! He had a wank in the shower, thinking of you! Needed to get the lust potion out of his system. He spilled with your image in front of his eyes and ever since, he can neither look at you nor at himself in the mirror. Sitting next to you at meals is worse torture than anything I have done to him so far. He knows you hate him for what he has done and..."

Her head jerked up once more. "Why does he sit next to you at meals?" she inquired. "He would so much like to spare you his company, but he has to be there. Why?"

Snape unfolded his arms. This had to end soon or they both would die at the mad witch's hand. "Didn't I tell you? I am bound to him. A forced binding, that is. Apparently, this happens when Desipentia is combined with virginity. I reacted more strongly to the curse than usual. An hour after it had hit me I was already nearly too far gone for Lupin to reverse it. Pity I hadn't known this tricky little detail. Took me nearly a week to figure it out. Brought me to my knees in the meantime."

Bella's wand, for the first time since Snape had entered the shed, quavered. "Bound to a werewolf?" she whispered in disbelief. She sounded more sane than ever before. "Virginity? But that's impossible. I knew at least one virgin who..."

Snape interrupted her. "Female virgins, Bella, and under thirty-five years of age. It seems as if age and gender adds to the basic cruelty of Desipentia. That bit of information I found in a book about love spells, by the way. Just in case you are interested."

Bellatrix giggled. Given her twisted face, her crazy eyes, and the blood on her hands, it was a most disturbing sound. "You truly were a virgin, Severus?"

"Until Lupin relieved me of the burden," Snape said, amusement lacing his words. "I must admit, I would have thought a first time to be a more pleasurable event. I certainly didn't expect to wish I were dead instead."

The wand dropped lower as Bellatrix's eyes grew bigger. Her gaze shot from Lupin to Snape and back. "That means, if I had killed him, you would have died, too! That means, he, a filthy animal, deflowered the feared Potions master." She began to tremble with suppressed laughter.

"Actually, it just means I should have made a bigger effort to get laid before you cursed me," Snape said casually, and Bella laughed until tears ran down her cheeks. Shrieks of laughter, loud and hysterical in their joy: her wand lost focus as well as her eyes. She even had to steady herself, needed to put both her hands onto the table Lupin was nailed to. Her wand was pressed flat against the rough wood, and she dropped her head, shaking with laughter.

Snape killed her without hesitation. His Avada Kedavra hit her squarely in the forehead, and she crumpled on the dirty floor, her laughter frozen on her crazy face.

Silently, the Potions master knelt down next to her, plucked her wand out of limp fingers and broke it in half. Then he broke her neck from experience he knew that sometimes it was better to make sure than to believe in the strength of spells. "Stupid bitch. I tell you an embarrassing, meaningless little secret, and you forget whom you are dealing with. I should have killed you years ago, Bella. Someone, anyone, should have killed you the moment you went mad." Thoughtfully, he looked at her, took in her twisted face, the blood on her hands and on her clothes, her damaged teeth and her hair, covered in cobwebs. Apparently she had been hiding in the tool shed for a while, given her sorry state. "Doesn't matter anymore," Snape muttered and got up. "Time to get out of here."

It wasn't as easy as he had thought to step back to the table. It was not easy at all seeing the beaten, bleeding body of the werewolf and his wide, frightened eyes. Although the Potions master had seen many deaths, many corpses, and far too many tortures, this here was the worst of all. *I care for him*. The thought came unbidden and sent goosebumps down his spine. *And if I don't hurry, he will die. I cannot let that happen*.

Remus tried to turn his head when he saw Snape, tried to look around him, fear painted in his face. "She's dead, Lupin," Snape said and flicked his wand. A clean, wet cloth appeared in his hand; swiftly, he added a strong sedative to the fabric "I killed her. Her corpse is over there on the floor; she can't harm you anymore." Nearly gently, he wiped the hair out of the werewolf's face, then pressed the cloth to the dry lips. With satisfaction he felt Lupin sucking moisture from the scrap of fabric to wet his throat. Snape had assumed correctly that the werewolf was horribly thirsty after hours of screaming. As the water was laced with the sedative, Lupin would lose consciousness soon.

Not yet, though. "Why?" Remus croaked.

Snape raised an eyebrow and cut through the thin wire round the werewolf's throat that was holding him down. "Why did I kill her? Because otherwise she would have killed us. I have no desire to die. I know you are not in the best condition, but that much should be obvious to you."

"Why..." Lupin coughed once, "are you here? Should have let... let me die."

Snape just placed his hand on the werewolf's chest once more, strangely comforted by touching the cold skin. Trying to convince himself that the gesture was nothing but an attempt to calm the injured man, he waited until the sedative would kick in. Until then, he might as well answer questions. "I am here because I have no other choice but to get you back in one piece, wolf. Besides, she could keep her victims alive for more than a week. You might be of a different opinion, but I am not that cruel. I would have tried to save anyone from her torturing skills. Be glad I found you before she'd found the scissors."

Remus closed his eyes for a brief moment as if to gather some strength. "True? Is it... true that... you die if I die?"

Snape just nodded.

"And you were... untouched?"

Snape sighed deeply. "Yes," he said simply.

"Sorry... so sorry." The werewolf's words were barely audible. Tears mingled with the blood on his cheeks. "If only she could have killed me... Would have been a nice... nice and clean... way out. For both of us."

"Don't talk nonsense," Snape snapped. "You don't want to die. I don't want you to die. I'll take you back to Hogwarts and Poppy..."

"Sh... shouldn't have told... she shouldn't have told you about my... memories," Remus rasped. "bout my weakness, my lack... of self... self-control." The werewolf's breath came in shallow gasps. "You were so warm; so much in need. Being with you was... what I wanted for so long. Apologise... didn't want to rape... hurt... you."

"Shut up, Lupin." Snape wanted the werewolf to spare his strength, and most of all, he didn't want to hear further confessions. But he couldn't help listening.

Remus's eyes widened as he fought the upcoming sleep that was about to embrace him. "You are right to loathe me. I'm an animal... monster... I'm... disgusting. Sorry... so sorry for loving you," he breathed just before his eyes dropped closed for good. His head sunk aside and his muscles went limp.

Snape stared at the unconscious man, not believing what he just had heard. For months he had believed Lupin's disgust had been aimed at him, only to find out under such crucial circumstances how wrong he had been.

Anyway. This was not the time to think about it. Snape blinked, took a pair of pliers, and pulled out the nails that held the werewolf's hands in place. Blood welled over his hands, blood was on his clothes and even in his face. He didn't care. Casting some basic healing spells, he managed to at least slow the bleeding, if not stop it completely. It would have to do until the werewolf was in Poppy's professional hands. The broken bones leg and ribs he steadied with a Stasis Charm. Then he slipped his arms underneath the werewolf and lifted him up as easily as if he were a bundle of rags, unaware of the fact that a few months ago, it had been the other way round.

Outside, the moon was just about to rise. Snape kicked the door open and stepped into the cold night air. One last glance backwards, a muttered word, and the shed began to burn. The flames licked hungrily at the dry wood, incinerating both the shed and the dead witch inside. "To hell with you, Bella," Snape said and Disapparated with his burden.

Bound

Chapter 7 of 11

In the night of the final battle, Snape gets hit by a curse. Lupin goes to great lengths to save the Potions master's life and sanity.

7. Bound

Dinner was over at Hogwarts when Snape arrived with Lupin at the huge gates. Students were walking down to the lake, some held hands, some argued, and others looked for friends or someone who would allow them to copy their homework. They were doing what students always did when the school day was over.

Until Snape arrived, tall and black and with a thunderous expression on his pale face. With long strides, nearly running, he headed for the main gates, pushing through students as if they were nothing but lifeless puppets. He paid no attention to the shocked cries; he didn't see them rushing out of his way. All he cared about was the unconscious man in his arms and the necessity of getting him into the infirmary as quickly as possible. Snape could feel the life energy seeping out of Lupin's body, like water seeping out of a cracked bucket; not much longer and he would be dead.

Hogwarts' walls echoed his steps, and the cries of the students who witnessed Snape's arrival. Laughter stopped, kisses broke, and one pupil called out called out in shock: "It's Professor Lupin! He's injured, or maybe dead! Snape brought him, and do you think it was him who killed him?" Snape heard the words, but didn't even bother to look at the speakers.

When Minerva McGonagall blocked his way, though, he had no option but to halt his steps.

"Severus!" she stammered, gaping at him and at the bleeding man in his arms. "What..."

"Get Albus," Snape snapped and shouldered her out of the way. "And hurry. I might need him."

"Good Merlin," the old witch murmured and pointed one long finger at a student. "Rufus, run ahead to the infirmary, and tell Poppy that Professor Snape is bringing a patient. Sheila, you go with him. Make sure that no one gets in their way."

"Yes, Professor," the two students chorused and ran off. McGonagall rushed to fetch the Headmaster herself. She didn't have to go that far. The old wizard had lingered in the Great Hall and had just emerged out of the darkness, a small bowl of whipped cream in his hand, one finger on the way to his mouth.

"Minerva," he said mildly. "I'm surprised. Weren't you supposed to oversee detention for two Slytherins?"

With a flick of her wand, McGonagall vanished the bowl in the Headmaster's hand. "Severus is back. Remus is injured. They are on the way to the infirmary, and Severus has asked for your presence. He said he might need you. What is going...?"

"Thank you, Minerva." Dumbledore turned and walked away, apparently unconcerned and without rush.

Snape ran upstairs, kicked in the door to Poppy's realm, shouting her name. By coincidence the infirmary was empty; obviously, no student had managed to get hurt or get sick on too many sweets or something nasty from the Weasley shop. Snape had the choice of five empty beds, and he took the one in the corner close to the walls and the window. "Poppy!" he roared, lowering Lupin onto the clean, white sheets. Without waiting for a response he summoned Blood-Replenishing Potion, using his wand to inject it directly into the werewolf's veins. It didn't do much good, though. Lupin was bleeding badly now, despite Snape's earlier attempts to heal the wounds. Bellatrix had done a thorough job with her curses and the garden shed tools.

Snape acted on instinct. He was no Healer, but knew enough to keep someone alive for a considerable amount of time. He had been in the centre of the Dark Lord's wrath often enough himself; he knew how to deal with injuries, and he would be damned if he let the werewolf die now, after he had managed to get him out of the mad witch's murderous claws.

Lupin's breathing became irregular; the intervals between breaths grew longer. He lay very, very, very still upon the bed. The sheets had turned red; blood was dripping on the floor. Without even touching him Snape knew that the werewolf might have a few minutes left, no more. And then Poppy rushed in, pushed him aside, and cast a spell that sealed several wounds at once. She snapped her fingers for more potions, her wand flying and her hands flying as she worked on her patient, ignoring Snape and Dumbledore, who had arrived at last.

Snape blinked twice and slightly shook his head as he watched the matron perform healing spells. He took in Lupin's limp, white hand that hung over the bed frame, and abruptly turned away.

"Severus," Dumbledore said quietly. "Tell me what happened."

Snape needed to take a few deep breaths before he was able to answer, and for some reason, he looked out of the window where the moon was bright and brilliant in the night sky. A few early bats chased their dinner, and the Potions master was momentarily dumbstruck that everywhere else, things seemed to be perfectly normal. "Bellatrix is dead," he said, and, "I burned her to ashes," he continued.

The werewolf's breathing became shallow, barely audible even in the quiet infirmary. Snape felt icy dread creep up his spine. Strangely enough, it wasn't because of what it would mean for him. It was because Lupin would die.

"I am glad you have brought him back," the Headmaster said wearily. "Maybe Poppy will be able to save him."

"Don't be ridiculous," Snape snapped. "He's as good as dead. And I want your promise that you will cast the Killing Curse on me once he has taken his final breath." With those words he threw his wand onto a nearby table. "I won't fight."

Dumbledore paled. "I cannot kill you just like that, Severus!"

"Can't you? You expected me to kill you last year when you were stupid enough to put on the Resurrection Ring. When you talked me into believing that killing you would be a necessity to save Draco's soul and an act of friendship towards you. I didn't have to do it in the end but only because we found another solution. I would have done it, though, and I expect you to return the favour, old man. I will die screaming once Lupin is gone but not before trying to kill others. You know that. I consider it only fair that you do what you asked of me." Snape crossed his arms over his chest. Hadn't he done so, Dumbledore would have seen his trembling hands.

Behind them, Poppy swore. Snape didn't turn round: he had no intention of seeing Lupin die.

The Headmaster sat down heavily on one of the beds. "I had hoped that the killing would stop with Tom's death," he murmured. "And still one friend of mine is about to die and I will have to kill the other in a few minutes time."

Snape wanted to give an acid reply, but before he could find the words to say, he felt a deep, horrible pain in his chest. It was piercing and hollow, sharp and bitter, and suddenly his mouth tasted of fresh blood.

Suddenly, the silence in the room was too deep. The rasping, harsh gasps from Lupin had stopped.

Dumbledore raised his head, tears streaming down his cheeks and into his beard. A sob from Poppy fell into the silence like a raindrop into a puddle.

Time stopped.

Snape didn't know he had turned until he saw the ashen face of the werewolf, his still chest, the ugly line of blood that seeped from the corner of his mouth. Crimson drops still landed on the floor, but there was no pulse to be seen anymore in his throat.

Inside Snape, madness flared up like a bushfire. "No!" he roared and was at Lupin's bed with one large step. "You cannot die; I won't allow you to die!"

It wasn't because Lupin's death meant he would die as well. It wasn't because he wanted to live, or because he feared death. It was so much easier. His anger welled up because Lupin dared to leave him behind; because he wouldn't be able to sit next to him at meals anymore. "I care for you, and I forbid you to die," Snape hissed, red fury blinding him, and pressed both hands on the motionless, blood-smeared chest.

He reached out with his half-mad mind inside the dead body of his childhood enemy and touched his heart, his lungs, grasped for his fleeing soul. Snape didn't know what he was doing; he didn't even know that there was something he could do at all. What he did know was that Lupin couldn't die. Not now, not here, in safety. Not after he had tricked him out of Bella's hands.

Lupin's heart was warm, his last breath still fresh in his throat. Two broken ribs had pierced his lungs. Poppy hadn't been able to heal them. No wonder the werewolf had died. Snape could feel the damage through his palms pressed against Lupin's chest. He could feel the heart wasn't beating anymore, and then he thought, *What the fuck*, and *made* it beat. Forced it to beat with sheer willpower, or stupidity, or stubborn madness or whatever it was that fired his rage. Forced Lupin's heart back into service, forced the lungs to take another breath, forced the life back into his bondmate with such fury that Lupin's muscles cramped in pain. How dare the wolf attempt to sneak away, how dare he leave him alone?

A deep, harsh gasp emerged from Lupin's snow-white lips. Snape pressed his body down and didn't mind that the werewolf spat blood all over his hands. "Breathe!" he ordered. "Live!" And then he swayed, his legs feeling suddenly like jelly as his arms filled with lead. Snape would have fallen had Dumbledore not caught him.

"Merlin," Poppy said in a surprisingly unimpressed voice. Unceremoniously, she poured another potion down Lupin's throat as if the man hadn't been dead only a second ago. "Don't know what just happened, but you brought him back, Severus. Don't know how long for, though. He's awfully weak."

Sound returned, filling Snape's ears with the sweet music of the werewolf's short, gasping breaths. Snape staggered, then had to lean against the wall for support. Dumbstruck, he stared at his hands, red from Lupin's blood. "What have I done?" he croaked. "How did I do it?"

"Now that's something I'd be interested in, too," the matron said. "No one can bring people back from the dead. Not unless..." Her head snapped up and her eyes narrowed. Absently, she healed a burn mark on her patient's neck. "Severus, did you just share your life energy with Remus?"

"I don't know," Snape answered. He felt light-headed; not much made sense at the moment.

"Because if you have, it would explain why you were able to bring him back. The problem is that life energy can't be shared just like that. If you were bound to each other, though..."

Dumbledore pulled a chair close to the bed, took Snape by the shoulders, and forced him down on the wooden seat. "It is a forced binding, Poppy. As a result of Desipentia, cast on Severus by Bellatrix Lestrange during the final battle."

The matron simply raised an eyebrow. With one look she took in the shaking Potions master, pale from exhaustion of what he just had done. "I see," she said. "That explains a lot. Especially why he asked you to kill him. Dying from the Madness curse is truly horrible. I would prefer a clean death, too."

Snape didn't seem to hear her words. His eyes were fixed on the werewolf's hand, still hanging over the frame of the bed. Taking it seemed the most logical thing to do. His fingers entwined with the werewolf's, and the Potions master closed his eyes at the rush of emotions the touch brought. Relief, safety, worry, fear even, combined with a strange happiness that they both were, against all odds, still alive. "His lungs are pierced," Snape said in a dreamlike tone quite unlike his usual sneer. "He's still bleeding badly, but I think... Wait. Wait a moment."

Concentrating, Snape reached out once more. Now that he had done it once, the second time was considerably easier. It was a bit like wearing another man's coat, a coat slightly too large, with an unfamiliar smell and the buttons at the wrong height, but a familiar garment nevertheless. It wasn't an unpleasant experience to be part of the werewolf, and it was surprisingly easy to find the injured lungs and... "Poppy," Snape murmured. "Two broken ribs. Left side, the fifth and the sixth. If you mend them, I can heal the holes in his lungs and stop the bleeding for good."

The matron shared a disbelieving glance with Dumbledore but did as the Potions master asked. "Done, Severus," she said in a mild, low voice, as if Snape were really sleeping, dream walking, and she was eager to not wake him up.

"Hmm." Snape tightened his grip on Lupin's hand. There, there were the holes, now bleeding heavily as the broken ends of the ribs were gone. A deep breath, simultaneously taken by both men, and Snape felt them closing, healing.

Lupin coughed once. More blood sputtered out of his mouth. Then a second, deeper breath, and a third. No fresh blood followed: the blood on the werewolf's chin began to dry.

"I didn't know that was possible," Dumbledore said, his hand still on the Potions master's shoulder. "Poppy, do you think it is safe for Severus to do that whatever he is doing?"

The matron helplessly shrugged her shoulders. "I haven't a clue, Albus. I have only read about forced bindings and I've never seen anything like it. I suggest we leave them alone. I can't do much more but monitor them and make sure they are undisturbed." With that, she beckoned Dumbledore to step aside and raised a screen around the bed and the two men.

"What if Severus donates too much of his life energy?" The Headmaster sounded genuinely worried.

"His decision, Albus," Poppy Pomfrey answered sternly. "It's obvious that they need each other. I will check on them. Now go and tell the students that Professor Snape and Professor Lupin are out of danger for the moment."

Late at night or early in the morning? Snape didn't know and didn't care, either. Pale moonlight shone through the window next to the bed, the silver disk not completely full anymore. Shadows were blown through the infirmary, hid under beds and behind curtains and gave the impression of ghosts wandering around.

Snape was awake, but just barely. It was a state between sleep and wakefulness, and he was too tired to as much as think about it. All that counted was his hand in Lupin's. All that mattered was the light, easy way the werewolf breathed and the sound of his heart, pumping blood through his veins. Lupin was fast asleep, healing, dreaming. Snape was not quite awake, not thinking, not aware of the many hours that had passed since he had arrived at the infirmary.

Silently, Poppy Pomfrey stepped around the screen, as she had done so quite a few times in the past hours. It was nearly four in the morning, and each time she had checked, another wound on the werewolf's skin had healed itself. Occasionally, she had cast a monitoring charm, checking if the internal wounds had healed as well as the visible ones. They were: the damage caused by Bellatrix's curses and the tools she had used was undone. Scars and tender, new skin were the only witnesses to the torture Lupin had endured not that long ago.

Not making a sound, the matron pulled a chair close and sat down opposite the Potions master. Snape still held Lupin's hand in his. Long, black hair touched the sheets, and to the matron it seemed as if the Potions master hadn't moved once in the past hours. "Severus," she whispered. "Severus, it is time to have a break. You need to sleep or you will collapse."

Slowly, Snape raised his head. He looked at his hands, took in the werewolf's sleeping face, and saw that someone had cleaned off the blood. "Soon," he murmured. "Can't go yet."

Madam Pomfrey smiled. "I didn't say you have to go anywhere. I said you need to sleep. Those are two different things, Severus. There are enough beds here for you to take a nap."

Snape just shook his head. "He nearly died. He did die. Couldn't stand it." Whispered words in the darkness. One might have thought they hadn't been said at all.

Gently, the matron put her hand on the werewolf's forehead. "No fever, and the bleeding stopped hours ago. You have saved him, and you have healed his wounds faster than any spell or potion could have. He must mean a lot to you."

"I believed he hates me. I was wrong. He doesn't. On the contrary he..." Once more, Snape looked up, this time at the matron. "Bella Legilimensed him. Told me things I didn't know and wouldn't have guessed in a lifetime." He sighed deeply. "I felt him die. It was as if half of myself was being ripped out of me. It hurt, and it scared me. To imagine he'd be gone forever was unacceptable."

"Everyone thinks you loathe him, Severus." The matron spoke in a mild and quiet voice, as if talking to a scared child. Maybe she did so because it was late and Snape so obviously was beyond mere fatigue. Maybe it was because she knew that sometimes, in the small hours of the morning and after a particularly horrible day, people said and did things they normally wouldn't say or do, and because of this fact they needed to be handled with great care. "The way you treat him; that you don't talk to him or so much as look at him. But I believe... You don't, do you?"

"Of course not." Snape closed his eyes and lowered his head on his and the werewolf's entwined hands. "He is one of the few people who has always treated me with friendliness. I have known him since we were children. Secretly, I treasured his friendship and feared at the same time he was mocking me. I now know he didn't." With a weary hand, he wiped across his face. "I should have let him die, Poppy. I wish I had been strong enough to end this tonight."

The matron frowned. Snape didn't see it, but she was looking deeply confused. "Why do you say this? You like him. You care for him what you did was extremely dangerous for yourself, and it saved his life. Why do you..."

"Because there is no other way out of it." Suddenly, Snape leaned back in his chair, breaking contact with the werewolf for the first time in over eight hours. The moon shone right into his face, giving his skin a silvery shine. Shadows were painting strange patterns on his cheekbones; he looked like a ghost. Another sigh. "Apparently, a forced binding gets stronger with the months. When this began, I thought I only needed to be near him once in twenty-four hours. Then I realised that I craved more. In the past few weeks, three meals a day seemed to do." Snape's right hand moved as if it had a will of its own. Slowly, it touched the sleeping werewolf's wrist. The Potions master watched, slightly surprised, as his fingers wrapped around the slender joint, and his thumb brushed across the warm, soft skin. "I long for his touch so badly that it hurts. I want him, I need him, and if I weren't rude to him, if I so much as spoke a friendly word, my resistance not to touch him would break. Very soon, three meals a day won't be enough. In a month or two, I won't be able to spend more than two, three hours without him, and I know it will break both of us. Death would have been a neat solution. Now I don't know how... Poppy, I really do need a way out of this!"

For many long moments, the matron was silent, watching the wounded man on the bed and the dark one on the chair. "You two are so very different from each other, in nearly every way imaginable," she mused. "And still, I wonder..." She touched the Potions master's hand. "I wouldn't say that under any other circumstances, Severus. I am well aware that you are too exhausted to think properly, and thus, to hex me for my inappropriate words. But... did you ever consider the possibility that you are searching for a solution in the wrong direction?"

Snape pulled his eyebrows together. "I don't understand."

"You are tired," Madam Pomfrey said. "You need to sleep." She took her wand and gently pierced Snape's skin. A faintly golden liquid seeped into wrist. "A Sleeping Draught. In a minute or two, you will doze off. Until then, think about it. Why try to break the binding? Why not strengthen it instead?"

Snape shook his head, trying to get the hazy mist out of his mind. "I don't understand," he repeated. "What else is there to do other than try to break it, to free him from my presence? Maybe, if I kill myself, he will survive, although the prediction declares that he won't."

Carefully, she brushed her fingers across the Potions master's pale cheek. "Would he want to live without you?" she whispered, and Snape blinked at the question.

"No," he whispered. "He loves me. Bella said so, and he said so, too. But he can't." His tongue grew heavy with every word he spoke. "I'm a murderer, a traitor. Dungeon bat. Spy. I destroy the ones I love. I need to... to..."

Maybe, the matron would have objected to his words she surely gulped heavily at the self-accusing, bitter tone in Snape's voice but the potion worked too fast. Slowly, the Potions master sunk forward, his eyes dropping closed for good this time. Swiftly, Madam Pomfrey was up and around the bed, catching Snape before he slipped out of his chair. A Hovering Charm took his weight, and she was just about to put him into one of the free beds for the rest of the night when she realised that it wouldn't be in the best interest of either patient to separate them. Therefore, she modified the werewolf's bed so it was big enough for two and lowered the fast asleep body of the Potions master

onto the mattress. A second flick of her wand and the blood-soiled clothes of Snape were replaced by clean pyjamas. Finally, she pulled the blanket over both men, wondering how Severus would react when he woke. "I guess he will kill me," she mused, and adjusted the screen so that no one apart from her could take a look behind it. "On the other hand, if I had put him in a bed as much as a foot away from Remus, he possibly would have woken up again despite the potion, crashing to the floor trying to reach him. Men. Strange creatures, really."

Solution

Chapter 8 of 11

In the night of the final battle, Snape gets hit by a curse. Lupin goes to great lengths to save the Potions master's life and sanity.

8. Solution

When Snape woke up, it was in the usual way: asleep one moment, fully awake and alert the next. He had learned to wake like that when he had been a boy, a child, really, and needed to be out of his mother's way as fast as possible in case she was drunk and in a hitting mood.

So, being awake was not what flustered him. It was his surroundings: white walls instead of stone, bright light instead of the dim flicker of candles. A soft breeze tickled his nose, and that was strange, too, because in his dungeons there were no windows.

His sheets weren't white, either and there generally wasn't a screen around his bed. What for? No one could enter his private rooms without his permission. There was no need to shield his bed from curious eyes.

On the other hand... He felt extremely well. He had slept deeply and without dreams. Moreover, he wasn't cold he usually managed to push the bedcover away, and he often woke up shivering long before sunrise, unable to go back to sleep and unwilling to get up, either. Conclusion: he was neither in his bed nor in the dungeons.

Stretching his muscles, musing what he would have for breakfast, he suddenly thought *Bellatrix is dead. I killed her.*

And was there a reason why his right arm was numb?

Actually, Snape hadn't woken up the usual way. He wasn't as alert as he had thought or he would have realised that he wasn't alone in the bed the moment he had opened his eyes. Now, turning his head, he wondered how he could have missed the fact that a full-grown man was snuggled up to him, head on his arm, breathing deep and evenly.

"Lupin?" Snape said, dumbstruck. "What the..." Then he closed his mouth and remembered Poppy injecting him with a Sleeping Potion and assuring him that he didn't have to leave just to take a nap. "Didn't expect her to put me into the same bed with you, wolf," Snape whispered hoarsely. He didn't want to wake the werewolf. Not now, whilst they were so close together.

Come to think of it, shouldn't he get out of bed as quickly as possible? Shouldn't he be ashamed of the comfort he felt, the relief that washed through him at the fact that Lupin wasn't dead and, most of all, the genuine happiness that burned inside him like a small, hot flame? It was so rare that he felt good; it was even rarer for him to be happy. Rare enough that he hadn't even recognised the emotion at first.

Hesitantly, Snape touched Lupin's flannel-covered shoulder, which was so close to his chest that he could feel the warmth the other man radiated. His fingertips, unused to contact with something living, moved on curiously. They found the pulse in Lupin's throat, beating slowly and reassuringly strong. They sneaked on to the jaw, up to the cheek and cheekbone and a bit higher, where finally, they brushed over the soft, barely perceptible eyelashes. Yes, Lupin was asleep. More than that, he was in a healing trance, and wouldn't wake for another few days at least. Therefore, the werewolf couldn't feel the Potions master's chest pressed against his back, his breath on his neck, or the arm Snape had slipped protectively over his waist. There was no way Lupin would ever know how deeply the dark wizard inhaled his scent or how close he had been to kiss his neck, only lightly, just once, and quickly enough to declare it an illusion hadn't Madam Pomfrey chosen that precise moment to check on her patients.

"Good morning," she said lightly. "Or rather, good day. I see you are awake, Severus. Well, you've slept for forty-eight hours. That surely should have been enough."

Snape managed not to blush and to not jerk his arm away from under Lupin's head. Instead, he carefully turned to lie on his back again, looking up at the matron inquiringly. "What time is it?" he asked, casually and a bit impatient as if he'd asked a student for a potion ingredient. "And what day?"

The matron chuckled. "It is Tuesday, Severus, and two in the afternoon. It is time to get up and have something to eat. After you've taken a shower and got dressed, that is. By the way, how do you feel?" Not awaiting his answer, she flicked her wand at him and Snape felt the telltale tingle of a Health-checking Spell. Madam Pomfrey nodded approvingly. "Excellent. You have fully recovered from whatever you did to save Remus's life. I see no reason for you to stay in the infirmary any longer. Come on, get up. Remus needs another week to heal. Your presence has done him the world of good, and I will allow you to visit him as often as necessary. Will that suit you?"

Snape, having eased his arm out from under the werewolf's head, sat up. His bare feet dangled an inch or two above the floor, and the pyjama trousers were slightly too long. At first, the sight made him frown no one had ever seen him in pyjamas, no one had ever seen him without his heavy boots. His feet looked fragile in the mid-day sunlight. Fragile and so very human that Snape, for as long as a heartbeat, believed that if he looked human, he might actually be human enough to allow himself some more of the happiness he had felt but a moment ago. For so many years he had been a spy, a traitor even, and a murderer more often he cared to think about. He had not been human, though a servant of the Dark Lord shed humanity from the moment he took the Dark Mark.

But now the mark was gone, erased from his skin like dirt. *Am I human?* he wondered and waggled his toes. *Am I human enough to be happy?*

Suddenly, from out of nowhere came an urge to laugh at this, all of it, because it was so stupid to sit here, being ordered around by the school matron, and feeling so very much out of place. He shouldn't be here. He shouldn't have slept in one bed with Lupin, and he certainly shouldn't have enjoyed laying next to the werewolf, feeling his heart beating against his chest and wondering how Lupin would react if he woke in the Potions master's arms.

"Severus?" Madam Pomfrey prompted, and Snape just slipped off the bed and took the clothes she held out for him.

"You are right. I should take a shower and then leave," Snape said and walked past her to the small infirmary bathroom.

When Snape headed downstairs through the quiet school, he became aware that he didn't wish to hide in his dungeons just right now. The pupils and his colleagues were

busy in the classrooms, his own Potion students would be lounging in their common rooms, as he didn't have a substitute, so actually, he could go and have breakfast in the Great Hall rather than his own rooms. Down there in the dungeons, it would be cold and dark. Furthermore, the emptiness of his rooms would remind him of the fact that he still had a problem he couldn't solve and really didn't want to think about right now.

You think in the wrong direction The thought crossed his mind when Snape walked through the empty hall and sat down on one of the students' tables, and it took him quite by surprise. But a house-elf chose that precise moment to pop up on the table, asking him for his wishes. "Porridge, toast, butter and honey, black tea and milk," Snape said absentmindedly, watched the elf vanish and his breakfast appear with gentle *clinks* of the dishes. Pouring milk in his tea and adding sugar to his porridge, he began to eat and wondered what the thought meant. The wrong direction? Poppy had said it the night he had brought Lupin back, the night the werewolf had nearly died.

"Did die," Snape clarified. "He died and I brought him back out of sheer egoism. And what did Poppy mean why do I think in the wrong direction?"

"Sir?"

Snape half turned. "Potter," he sighed. "What a surprise. I'm out of the infirmary less than fifteen minutes and you decide to pester me with your presence. I'm eating, in case you haven't noticed. Go get your head crashed in at Quidditch, boy."

Harry took a step forward. He seemed determined to talk to Snape. "I'm sorry to disturb you but... Well, the Headmaster will only say that Remus is alive, and Madam Pomfrey refuses to let me or anyone else visit him and there was this article in the newspaper and..."

"Sit, Potter," Snape ordered and pushed his empty bowl aside. Fresh toast appeared on his plate, accompanied by golden butter and delicious smelling honey. Taking a sip of his tea, he asked, "Which newspaper article are you talking about?"

Harry hesitantly sat opposite his Potions master, clearly unsettled by the sight of Snape sitting at the Slytherins' table, and not at the teachers'. He placed a much-read copy of the *Daily Prophet* in front of Snape. "The article about you and Bellatrix Lestrange. Professor Dumbledore gave an interview the day before yesterday. It says..."

"Let me read it myself, Potter," Snape snapped and took the paper. Eating his toast, drinking his tea, he scanned through the article. "They printed a picture of me," he said when he was finished. "What the hell did they do that for?"

"Because you killed Bellatrix Lestrange? I mean, she was one of the last Death Eaters on the run. Most of the others are either dead or in Azkaban. Professor Dumbledore called you a war hero about fifty times during the interview. He stated that Remus had been taken by Bellatrix, and that you... got him back. He confirmed as well that she is dead, burned in a garden shed behind Voldemort's house in Little Hangleton."

Snape took a sip of his tea. "If you know all this, why are you here?" Unbidden memories jumped up at him Lupin's screams, his bloodied skin and the deep wounds, the smell of burning flesh. *Do I have to break the binding?* he mused and wondered why this thought seemed to be so right.

The boy young man, Snape realised raked his hands through his hair. "I saw you bringing back Remus. He was in a really bad condition and I want to know if he is really alive or if..."

"You truly believe Albus lied to all of you, including the press?" Snape continued with a snort. "Don't be ridiculous. Lupin is in a healing trance. Bella tortured him, and yes, she nearly killed him. I was there in time to prevent his death. Satisfied?"

Harry gulped. "Why then is no one is allowed to visit him?"

Snape could barely suppress a shudder at the thought of Potter coming to the infirmary, seeing him in close embrace with the werewolf. He definitely had to find a way to thank Poppy for her protectiveness. "Because he needs to sleep, not deal with annoying students," he answered coolly. "Give it a week and he'll be back teaching."

Now it was Harry's turn to snort. "Will he? I'm not sure about that. To me, it seems as if you will force him out of the school before Christmas. You did it once, after my third year at Hogwarts. You made it public that he's a werewolf; you forced him to resign." Accusingly, he stared into the older man's eyes; typical Gryffindor boldness mixed with typical Potter stupidity.

"I did that because I had to," Snape said and finished the last bite of his toast. "He knew I would do it; it was the only way to get him safely out of Hogwarts. The curse on the DADA post usually demanded a sacrifice after one year of teaching, as Quirrell, young Crouch, and Lockhart could tell you if they were alive, or sane. I didn't want Lupin to die back then any more than I wanted him to die at Bella's hands. I don't want him to leave Hogwarts, neither today nor in the future." Surprised at his own words, Snape thought, *Maybe I don't have to break the binding; maybe I can strengthen it instead.*

Silence. Snape looked up and saw Potter staring at him. "What? Did I just grow two heads?"

"No, you... You smiled. Sorry. Came as a surprise. Now, if you don't mind, I'll go up to the infirmary..."

"No, you won't." Snape was harsh. "Lupin needs his rest. Neither you nor anyone else will disturb him. But I promise you that if his condition deteriorates I will let you know."

That caused the boy's mouth to sag open. "You will... actually *visit* him?"

"Naturally," Snape said and then an idea sparked up in his mind, an idea mad enough to make him laugh out loud. He didn't see the dumbstruck face of Potter and wouldn't have cared if he had. This idea, the solution to his problem, was so very obvious he wondered why he hadn't thought of it before.

When Remus Lupin woke more than a week after Bellatrix had captured and tortured him, he did so slowly, with heavy eyelids and aching bones. Uncomfortably, he moved his shoulders and expected pain to shoot through him, pain brought upon him by a mad witch and her rusty tools. He expected to wake up on a wooden table in a windy garden shed, with Bellatrix bent over him, scissors in hand and ready to snip him into little pieces.

The ceiling was white. He was lying on sheets, not wood. And, most important, there was neither pain nor a mad witch in sight. His muscles were a bit stiff after... well, however long he'd been wherever he was. "Where am I?" he asked, not expecting an answer. Obviously, he had died; naturally, there was no 'where' at the other side of the veil.

"You are at Hogwarts, Remus," someone said, and the werewolf nearly jumped out of his skin before he realised that it wasn't Bellatrix's voice.

"Poppy," he croaked, struggling to sit up. "That means I didn't manage to die. Shit. Would have solved a problem or two."

The matron just shook her head. "Men," she said. "Truly, I can't believe how stupid you all are. You are alive and complain about it? Remus, Severus killed Bellatrix to save you!"

A memory stirred. "He... did he?" Remus lifted his hands and ran a finger over the faint scar in his palm. "She nailed me to the table. I remember screaming. I remember..." Another memory, a dark one, embraced him. "I remember dying, Poppy. How can... Why am I alive although I died?" Confused, the werewolf unbuttoned his pyjama top. The smooth, only lightly scarred texture of his skin was clearly not what he had expected to see. With his fingertips he traced a long, pale line from his left collarbone down to his right hip. "That one hurt," he rasped. "I felt the ribs break when she did that. I couldn't breathe afterwards. I knew I would die and then... Severus came. Talked to her. Touched me. Tricked her, killed her. Soothed me and told me... He said he doesn't want me to die."

The matron sat on the bed and gently rebuttoned her patient's pyjama top. "That was a week ago, Remus. When he realised that you were gone he went after you. It took him half a day to find you, and when he did, you were in a very bad state. When Bellatrix was dead he pulled the nails out of your hands, brought you to me, and stayed at your side constantly for nearly three days."

"But I *died*!"

Madam Pomfrey nodded. "You did. The broken ribs had pierced your lungs and you stopped breathing. Severus wasn't going to let that happen, though. Because of the binding, he was able to share his life energy with you and brought you back from behind the veil just in time before it fell close for good. You might like to thank him when he comes to visit."

Remus opened his mouth, and then closed it again, silently repeating what the matron had just said. Finally, he managed a croaked, "What?" only to decide that he must have misunderstood major parts of the matron's words.

With a sigh, the matron got up. "He visits you after breakfast, after lunch, and before dinner, Remus. Every day. And then once around midnight. Usually, he dozes off in the chair next to your bed, with his hand on yours. If I didn't insist he slept in his own bed for at least a few hours each night, he wouldn't go back to his rooms at all."

"But..." Remus was thinking fast. That Severus would sit voluntarily with him was impossible. Therefore, there must be another reason for his behaviour. And the only reason was... "The binding is tightening." It wasn't a question, but a statement. "You know about the forced binding; you just mentioned it. Then you must be aware that he only saved my life because he dies when I die. He sits with me because he has to, not because he wants to." Gritting his teeth, he swung his legs out of the bed. He wanted to get out of here, feeling vulnerable in pyjamas, without his wand, hungry, and in need for a shower more than anything else.

Madam Pomfrey pushed a stubby finger into his chest. "You are as bad as Severus," she scolded. "But I won't interfere with your affairs. You two have to sort this out by yourselves, and I hope you will come to your senses in time, Remus."

Remus snorted dismissively, put on his clothes, and left the infirmary. The only thing he needed to gain right at the moment was a large bottle of Firewhiskey.

Getting back to the High Table for meals was a lot harder for the werewolf than he had thought. Everyone beamed at him, obviously happy that he escaped one of the most dangerous Death Eaters without apparent harm. They didn't know how badly he had been injured; they didn't know how close exactly he had been to death. Minerva hugged him tightly, Sybill shed a few tears, and Dumbledore twinkled at him as if he knew a secret about what had happened. It was, all in all, considerably unnerving.

And then there was Severus, of course. Sitting at his usual place, he didn't so much as look up when Remus walked in for dinner. If anything, he seemed unaware at the fuss his colleagues made about the werewolf and the noise of the students welcoming one of the best-liked teachers back amongst them. *I bet he would leave if he could*, Remus thought and took his seat next to the dark wizard. *I bet he wishes he could have let me die every wake or sleeping moment*.

"Lupin," Snape said, obviously as a way of greeting. The werewolf wasn't sure he was too surprised that the Potions master had said anything at all, given the fact that, until today, he had never spoken a single word to the man he was unwillingly bound to.

"Hand me the potatoes." It was more an order than a polite question. Still, Remus was somehow shocked Severus asking him to hand over a dish rather than reaching out to summon it over his head? That was... Yes. It was unique. And impossible.

"Are you feeling well?" Remus muttered the words before he could help it and reached for the required dish.

Snape took the bowl of potatoes out of Lupin's hand and spooned a few onto his plate. Just when Remus believed he hadn't heard the question, the Potions master hissed between two bites, "No, of course I am not feeling well. You left the infirmary this morning before I had a chance to see you. You hid in your rooms all day. Actually, I feel lousy, and it's your fault. Poppy told me you figured out yourself that the binding is tightening. I expect to see you in the teachers' common room at eleven tonight."

"Severus. I must admit I am shocked." The sweet, dreamlike voice of Sybill Trelawney interrupted the hushed conversation. "That you are actually talking to Remus without shouting at him is nothing less than a miracle. Of course I have foreseen this change in your attitude. I can tell you, though, Remus, that it won't last. I thought I should let you know in time that soon, a dark shadow will fall upon you like frost upon a blooming rose."

"Thank you, Sybill," Remus replied through gritted teeth. "That surely is quite a helpful prediction." Deep inside him, a pang of regret sparked up when Severus jerked his head back, focussing his attention back at his dinner. "I'll be there," he murmured nevertheless. "Common room. Eleven. As you order."

"The salt, Lupin. And stop babbling," Snape snapped.

Meeting at eleven at night in the teachers' common room became a regular pattern over the next weeks. After dinner, Remus would go to his rooms and prepare classes for the next day. It never took him long, and then he began to pace, restless, hopeless, knowing that there was no way out of it but death. By ten he was usually too tired to think properly; at a quarter past, he would take a drink, the first of several to follow. At a quarter to eleven, he was drunk; not too drunk to walk or pretend that he was merely sober, and yet not sober enough to feel too sharply the fear that claimed him with every tick the clock made, but definitely just drunk enough to meet his nemesis without shuddering all the way through the meeting.

This one meeting of the day, this additional time Severus needed to stay sane, was pure hell for Remus. Not because Severus was nasty, cold, or made acidic remarks he didn't. It was because unlike during meals, there was never anyone else around, as if their colleagues knew that eleven at night was the one time they should be anywhere else than in the teachers' common room. During meals, Severus was icily polite at best. He occasionally demanded a dish or a bottle to be handed to him. He nodded hello when he saw Remus, and gave him an even shorter goodbye, leaving with his robes billowing theatrically around him. There was no real conversation between them, and it was good because otherwise, Remus wouldn't have been able to eat a single bite.

The nightly meetings, though, were different. As they were alone, neither Remus nor Snape needed to keep up the pretence of nothing amiss for their colleagues and students. They could act as they wanted to, and for Remus, it was worse than torture.

Severus Snape was a different man at night. The most obvious change was his appearance: at night, he never wore robes, just dark jeans and a shirt in various shades of grey. Sometimes his hair was bound back into a braid, and he seemed taller even than in daylight. Either sitting in one of the armchairs in front of the fireplace or leaning against the mantelpiece, he was always there when the werewolf arrived, waiting in silence for the man who would ease his pain. Because in pain he was, Remus knew. He had learned a lot about the Potions master in the past weeks. Had to, as Severus, for whichever reason, usually was in a talkative mood late at night.

Which was precisely the reason why Remus had begun to get drunk beforehand. As soon as he had realised that the nightly meetings wouldn't be what he had expected: half an hour sitting close to Severus, without talking, without looking at each other, pretending they just shared the common room for a brief amount of time. He had tried to handle it that way, of course, only to find Severus frowning at him. "I would prefer to converse with you, Lupin," he had said. Not snapped; said, in a nearly friendly tone.

Remus had been acutely uncomfortable. Being forced to stay in the same room with the Potions master was bad enough, but having to talk to him was worse.

No use to deny facts. It was bad because hope flared in the werewolf's stupid, aching heart. Hope that there was a chance for friendship. Hope that they could leave the past behind them and just enjoy an evening together every now and then. Remus longed for Severus's presence so badly that it hurt, knowing at the same time that those nights in the common room were but an illusion, born out of necessity. By now, Severus was unable to be separated from him for more than eight hours at the time. Even sitting next to the werewolf during meals three times a day didn't prevent his body from aching, his hands from trembling, and his mind from worrying. "As soon as you are out of eyesight, Lupin, I can't help but panic that you won't come back," Snape had admitted a few nights ago, casually as if he was talking about the weather. "My urge to

touch you grows stronger with every breath I take. Very soon, I won't be able to suppress it. Best prepare yourself for that occasion."

"And how am I supposed to do that?" Remus had replied quite aggressively. "You know, this is as horrible for me as it is for you. I don't care to imagine how bad it will get once the binding gets so tight that I have to stay by your side twenty-four hours a day." He had been pacing the common room by then, nervously wringing his hands and trying to keep some of the chairs between himself and Severus. *Gods, the man smells delicious now that he takes regular showers*, the werewolf couldn't help thinking. *If I'm not careful, I will jump at him, devouring him right here on the carpet.*

That was the problem, wasn't it? The binding showed its effects on him as well as on his bondmate. He might not have problems with keeping food down or suffering from a pounding headache when Severus wasn't close, but he surely longed for him and wanted to be near him just the same. Which was impossible, of course. This, all of this mess, was still the result of a curse and a rape. No chance Severus would ever forgive him. No way the Potions master would welcome his touch.

Firewhiskey helped. It made the werewolf's mind mellow and hazy, it made his movements slow, and somehow it dampened his sense of smell.

Tonight, Severus wore a jumper over old denims. The fire had burned low, and only a warm shimmer lightened the common room. Remus hoped with all his might that maybe, there wouldn't be too much talk tonight.

"What do you remember of the torturing, Lupin?"

So much for not talking, Remus thought and shuddered involuntarily. Thinking of that day under Bellatrix's hands was something he avoided doing. "Not much," he replied, and poured himself another glass of Firewhiskey. "Pain. Humiliation. More pain. Screams. Her laughter. Her eyes. Can we change the subject, please?"

Snape raised an eyebrow at him. "I thought so," he murmured, leaving Remus at a loss about what he meant with that cryptic comment. "Well, let's discuss your transformation, then."

"What about it?" Remus snapped. "It will happen as usual. I will try not to get captured by another mad Death Eater. I shall stay in my rooms. I might manage dinner, but certainly won't show up for breakfast..." His voice faltered.

"That is impossible," Snape said matter-of-factly. "I will have to see you at least once that night. Leave your doors unlocked. I don't want to break in again."

Remus exploded. "You will not come anywhere near me whilst I'm a wolf!" he shouted. "That's private. I'm sorry to say so, but that night you will have to suffer, Severus."

"I always suffer." Snape sounded indifferent. "Full moon is on Thursday evening, which is two nights from now. I will send a student with the Wolfsbane Potion. I do expect you to show up at eleven tomorrow night, though."

"Fine," Remus said bitterly. "As you order. Do you wish to put a collar round my neck and a leash to make me walk at your heel?"

Snape didn't answer. He turned his back to the werewolf, and hadn't Remus known better, he would have thought a pained expression had crossed the Potions master's face at his cruel words.

As awful the nights were for the werewolf, so soothing they turned out to be for Snape. Admittedly, he hadn't expected this to happen once he had realised that he wouldn't manage a whole night without Lupin's presence. He had thought the hour in the common room late at night might be a torment, a constant reminder of how unlikely it was to go through with his plan. But on the contrary: though Lupin was very clearly anything but sober, he was nevertheless pleasant company. It was easy to talk to him, easy to ask questions and poke for answers. It seemed as if the gentle, friendly man wanted to share this hour with him as much as he wished to be somewhere else, and Snape didn't need to wonder anymore why this was the case. He knew why Lupin acted so strangely; it was obvious to him ever since Bella had told him about the werewolf's memories.

The man liked him. More than that, he loved him. Him, the Potions master, the dungeon bat. Despite their tumultuous past, despite the fact that they had never spoken much or even spent a considerable amount of time together, Lupin wanted him as much as Snape wanted the werewolf.

Unfortunately, there was no chance whatsoever that Lupin would give in to his needs and wishes voluntarily. Snape knew that the werewolf thought he had raped him, and that Lupin still felt guilty, massively guilty about what he had done. Talking about it was impossible: Lupin would with certainty run from him the moment Snape mentioned the night of the final battle.

Therefore, he had demanded Lupin's presence in the teachers' common room each night for the past three weeks. He needed this meeting; in addition he wanted to find out if his logical conclusions to get them out of this mess were indeed correct. That he was rewarded with a werewolf too nervous in his presence to speak two coherent sentences in a row was annoying but not insurmountable. Lupin always kept his distance, but not, as Snape once had feared, out of disgust.

"And one last counter-stir," Snape murmured to himself, finishing the Wolfsbane. Decanting the green-golden liquid in a goblet, he left his rooms, heading silently upstairs. It was the night before the full moon; another twenty-four hours, and Lupin would turn into a werewolf once again. Before that happened though, Snape needed to see his plan through: he honestly doubted Lupin would stand another month under the constant pressure of the forced binding. He equally doubted his own ability to resist; earlier on, during dinner, he had brushed across the werewolf's wrist with his fingertips, unable not to do so and sincerely hoping no one had seen it. Tonight had to be the night he changed their fate; tonight was the only night he could do so.

Naturally the Potions master had done some research on werewolves and their weaknesses. What he had found were little details, varying from werewolf to werewolf. One was sensitive to sunshine, the other disliked noise, many preferred not to eat before a transformation. However, one thing was identical in all sources he had questioned: the night before the full moon, the night before a transformation, was special. In that night, a werewolf was closer to his wolf-self, and instinct always took over when a situation went awry. That one night, a werewolf couldn't control himself, be it concerning danger, pleasure, or fear.

Naturally, Snape decided that this was the one night he might manage to catch Lupin in his trap, if at all.

Silent, like a black panther, the Potions master strode upstairs to Lupin's rooms, goblet in one hand and an ancient parchment in his other. Lupin was expecting the knock on his door: a student, bringing him the Wolfsbane Potion as announced by Snape the previous night. His guards would be down; with a little luck, the Potions master would have no problems gaining access to his rooms.

"Put the goblet in front of the door, please."

He sounds tired, Snape thought, hearing the tension in the werewolf's voice. *Tired and angry. Not the worst combination.* Knocking again, he refused to do as ordered; he needed this door to open, and he didn't want Lupin to greet him with a wand in his hand.

"I said... Damn." The door flew open, and Lupin stood only a foot or two away from him. Hair ruffled, shirt half open and pulled out of his trousers, feet bare clearly, he hadn't expected a visitor tonight, and definitely not Snape, of all people available at Hogwarts. "What the hell?" Dumbstruck, he even peeked past the Potions master, as if the student he had expected to bring him his potion was hiding behind the lean frame of his colleague. "What do you want?" he hissed. "I've been at dinner, although the smell of the food made me sick. I would have come to the common room. Later. Not now. Get lost, will you? I'm not in the mood for a chat."

"Lately, you seem to have lost your ability to talk at all, wolf," Snape replied coolly. "You barely bother me with your opinion about students, teaching, or the world as such. Here's your Wolfsbane. I finished it only a few minutes ago and decided to deliver it myself. Will you let me come inside or do you insist in being rude?"

"I... what?"

Snape sighed. "I want to enter your rooms, Lupin," he said and just pushed past the stunned man who unsuccessfully tried to block his way. Thrusting the Wolfsbane Potion into one of Lupin's hands allowed him the needed distraction to get inside. A lazy move and the wards were back up, raised by the Potions master: as he had broken into the werewolf's quarters not too long ago, he knew enough of his wards to use them if necessary. And now, tonight, it would be very necessary.

"Out," Lupin hissed, dangerously silent. "I don't want you in here. I want another few hours of peace before..."

"I found a way out of our dilemma." Casually, Snape sat down in one of the armchairs. Stretching out his legs, he then placed the parchment he had brought on the small table next to the chair.

That one statement got him Lupin's attention, as anticipated. Involuntarily, the werewolf's breath hitched at the words and he came closer. Not much, just a step or two, but close enough for Snape to see a thin film of sweat on Lupin's forehead. *He's nervous*, the Potions master realised with satisfaction. *Nervous because of my presence. Good.*

Hesitantly, Remus touched the parchment with a trembling finger. "Are you serious? You found a way to break the curse?" There was enough hope in his voice to stab right through Snape's usually so cold and calculating heart.

"No," the dark wizard replied, shattering this hope rather carelessly. "I said I found a way out of our dilemma. A forced binding cannot be broken. There is another solution, however. You might find it unacceptable, but be assured, there is no other way." With that, he opened the top button of the black shirt he wore tonight as if he were too warm, which was a ridiculous assumption in itself given the chilly temperature in Lupin's rooms.

The werewolf stepped back as if Snape had muttered a particularly nasty curse. His eyes, though, were fixed on the small, pale triangle that showed beneath the Potions master's throat. "Which other solution?" he managed.

"Drink your Wolfsbane first. It works best when consumed warm."

"It tastes worst when consumed warm," Lupin complained, and looked at the goblet in his hand as if it would jump at his throat any moment. Squeezing his eyes shut, he brought the rim to his lips, hesitated, and then downed the faintly shimmering liquid in one deep gulp. Shuddering, he wiped his sleeve over his lips; the goblet was placed harshly on the table. "Horrible. I truly wish I didn't have to drink this every month."

Snape snapped his fingers and summoned a glass with water. Getting up, he wordlessly handed it to the werewolf, who took it and gulped it greedily.

"Too sweet. This damn potion is just too damn disgusting," Remus muttered when the glass was empty. "I swear, there will be a day where the prospect of drinking the potion is worse than the prospect of..."

"I need you to marry me," Snape cast in.

The glass slipped out of the werewolf's hand as if it had grown hot all of a sudden. His eyes became round and wide, a shocked expression exploded in them, and the last drop of water went down the wrong way. Coughing, he turned away from Snape, who caught the glass in mid air and placed it gently on the windowsill. "Mad, you are mad, Severus!" Lupin's mellow voice had turned into a croak. He was cornered: behind him the window, in front of him the Potions master, who was now opening a second button of his shirt. The werewolf's eyes were drawn to those long, pale fingers; with visible effort, he ripped his eyes away from fabric and button.

"I'm not mad. I told you I found a solution. This is it. We marry. Unless you have a better idea, I would recommend we get the ceremony behind us as quickly as possible." Snape stepped back, giving the werewolf a bit of space. He picked up the parchment he had brought and held it out to the man who looked as if he had been struck by lightning.

Slowly, Remus raised his hand, took the parchment, and opened it. His lips moved when he read; clearly, he didn't believe what was happening to him. "That's a contract," he murmured. "A marriage contract. With my name in it and yours, Severus, and that is the contract for a legal binding, the rarest and strongest variation of marriage possible! Gods, man, are you *completely* out of your mind?"

Snape quirked his lips and pulled a string of leather from the pockets of his surprisingly tightly fitting jeans. With smooth movements, he pulled his hair back and bound it at the base of his neck. The shirt slipped out of his trousers, and for a brief moment, his bellybutton was to be seen.

Lupin swayed. Reaching out, he caught himself on the windowsill, knocking over the glass that stood there. It shattered on the floor to thousands of sparkling pieces. With his other hand, he held the contract in front of his eyes. He looked positively sick.

The Potions master was unimpressed. "Currently, Lupin, the forced binding holds a great deal of discomfort for both of us. In addition, it is life-threatening: if either of us dies, the other one is dead as well. Had Bella killed you, I would have followed you into the grave within the hour. Have you forgotten about this little detail?"

Hoarsely, Remus replied, "I don't remember much of that day. I've told you that already."

Snape nodded and took the parchment from the werewolf's limp fingers. "This contract will free us from those restrictions, as it is strong enough to override the original curse and with it, the forced binding. There will be no necessity anymore that you stay close to me; you could even die whenever you like without fearing I will follow you to the afterworld, pestering you for being too stupid to stay alive. Moreover, unlike a forced binding, a legal one can be undone after three months time. It's a trick, but I am certain it will work. As soon as the ceremony is performed and the parchment signed, you are free to leave Hogwarts. No more meals next to me; no more nightly meetings in the common room. So. Marry me."

Remus just stared. His eyes went from Snape's face to the parchment in his hand to the shattered glass on the floor and back up again to Snape's pale, hairless chest. Especially to Snape's chest, which was now clearly visible due to the fact that three buttons were undone. "I can't marry you. It would be... wrong. I..."

"I don't care whether you consider it right or wrong or if you feel uncomfortable with it," Snape snapped. "It is nothing but a necessity. It has no deeper meaning. The prospect of being able to pack your things and leave Hogwarts in the morning should be enough to convince you." Impatiently, Snape slammed the parchment onto the table, picked up a quill, and scribbled his often-used signature fluidly underneath it.

Remus watched the Potions master's name glow up in bright silver and green colours before he took the quill himself. Dreamlike, he stepped closer to the table; dreamlike, he signed the contract and watched his name glow up in red and gold. Then both names sparked up in little fireworks.

Snape held out his hand. Still quite visibly too stunned to do anything else but act as ordered, the werewolf placed his own hand on the Potions master's open palm. The sparks formed a thin, silver-green/red-gold band of stars and encircled wrists, fingers, and lower arms of both men. An eerie, thin voice filled the room, its source the parchment itself. "*Bound for life; bound in marriage. The legal binding is performed; may it never be broken!*" it whispered. "*Honour the binding; honour your love. No lies will stay hidden.*"

Lupin barked out a dry, bitter laugh and pulled his hand away as if he had burned himself. The sparkling stars stayed around his wrists for a moment and then vanished into nothingness. "That was it? We are... married?"

Snape flexed his fingers. "Indeed."

"It doesn't feel different. The binding, I mean. How do we know if it really worked?" The werewolf began pacing the room, up and down from wall to wall. "Actually, I feel as if I'm drunk. Or hexed. This can't be real. Did you put anything in the Wolfsbane to make me agree to this?"

A heavy sigh indicated that the Potions master slowly, but surely lost his patience. "Had you been drunk, hexed, or under the influence of drugs or potions, the parchment wouldn't have accepted your signature. You accepted because you were surprisingly enough, I must admit able to follow my line of logical explanation. The marriage will free us from the consequences of Bella's curse. Once it is completed, that is."

On the table stood a bottle of wine, unopened. Clearly, Remus had planned to drink it later. Snape uncorked it, poured himself a glass, and took a generous swig. His shirt hung nearly open on his lean frame; only the middle button was still closed.

The werewolf's eyes were glued to the spot where the Potions master's heart beat beneath his pale skin. "I want you to go now, Severus. I... really, you need to go. Now. I... beg you!"

Casually, Snape slumped back down into the chair and threw one long leg across the armrest. "Hardly. This is not over yet."

Lupin didn't seem to have heard him. Nervously he ran his hands through his already ruffled hair. "It's the night before the full moon, Severus. I am not myself tonight. The wolf... the wolf is close to the surface. I act on instinct, and that could be dangerous... for you. Go. Please, go."

Snape just shook his head.

"And what do you mean, the marriage needs to be completed?" Remus continued. "I signed the damn paper, I joined hands with you; what else do you want? That I wear a ring?" Remus nearly shouted the words. Trembling, he stood in the farthest corner, wide-eyed, breathing heavily, and tension radiating from him like heat from a fire.

Snape leaned his head against the back of his chair. It was a most leisurely, even invitingly open position he had chosen; he was well aware of the effect it had on the werewolf. "Sometimes, Lupin, I wonder how you managed to get through school, given your obvious lack of knowledge. The signature is only part of the marriage. Without the sexual act, it is invalid. And concerning rings they will appear on our fingers once we have shared a bed."

Remus stood with the back to the wall, so when he jumped back in shock, he hit his head hard on the stones. Wrapping his arms round his shaking body, he half turned away, staring into the darkness outside his rooms. Dark clouds had gathered in the sky; there would be a thunderstorm coming down any moment now. "This is a nightmare. Just a nasty, horrible nightmare. You are not here, and this is not happening."

Snape took another sip of his wine and waited for Remus to finish.

"I... can't. I wouldn't! I mean, I would never, ever touch you, Severus! Not voluntarily. Never. No. There is no way you will ever talk me into touching you!" Angrily, the werewolf wiped the back of his hand across his eyes. Outside, the first raindrops hit the frozen ground and the high windows.

"Quite insulting, Lupin. Be assured, before Bella had captured you, before I came to take you to the infirmary, your statement would have surely driven me out of here, assuring me you were disgusted by my presence." Rolling the glass between his long fingers, Snape asked, "You still can't remember?"

"Remember what?"

"What you said to me while lying on Bella's torturing table. She had Legilimensed you. She shared your memories with me, the memories she had found in your mind." Snape got up and took a step towards the man in the corner. Remus couldn't back away any further, but he tried nevertheless.

"Bella told me you wanted to sleep with me."

"No!"

"You took a lust potion because otherwise, you would not have been able to do what needed to be done: as much as you wanted me, you were terrified at the prospect of having to take me by force. So you drank the potion, you bound and gagged me to prevent me from hurting you and myself. Nevertheless, being with me was heaven for you, at least for a brief moment. Then you ran away, disgusted..."

"Please. No!"

"...at what you had done despite the fact that it had been necessary and that you had saved my life. In your shower, you thought of me whilst pulling yourself off."

"I did not!" Horrified, Remus pressed his hands against the cold glass. A flash made it vibrate, and the light gave the werewolf's features a sickly look.

"There is no use lying," Snape said mercilessly. "You love me; you yourself said so. You want me, which is the reason why you keep your distance. You fear you will attack me if I get too close. You shiver, you tremble, your nostrils flare, and you can't take your eyes off me. Right now, you smell me and wonder how I would taste, how my skin might feel under your fingertips; how it would be to have me underneath you."

Remus bowed his head and pressed his hands onto his ears.

Another step. Snape was now at arm's length. His voice was not entirely unfriendly when he said, "You can barely control yourself. I can see it, and I know it. The night before the full moon is the one night when instinct takes over and overrules your logic and your will. You want me. I advise you to take me, as it is the sole reason why I'm still here."

Wolf's Mate

Chapter 9 of 11

In the night of the final battle, Snape gets hit by a curse. Lupin goes to great lengths to save the Potions master's life and sanity.

9. Wolf's Mate

This is one hell of a realistic nightmare, Remus thought, staring at his friend, the man he feared the most and yet at the same time wanted so very badly *Severus forcing me into marrying him and now demanding to be taken is simply and absolutely impossible.* "Get out of here," he rasped, his eyes darting between the Potions master's jaw

line to the braid of his hair and then his chest, his naked, pale, delicious chest. "I am dreaming this, but I still want you to go."

"Not before the marriage is consummated."

"That is insane!" Remus shouted, although he wasn't known for raising his voice, not even in heated discussions. "You have no idea what you are asking for! You are in danger, you need to go, now, immediately, or I will... I can't..."

Severus reached out and brushed his fingertips across the werewolf's cheek. "You will lose control. I know. I chose tonight deliberately, Lupin. This has to be done, but I knew that even if I was able to talk you into signing the contract, my skills in seducing an unwilling partner are next to zero. You would have declined my request for a sexual act. But tonight, you don't stand a chance, and you know it."

Remus balled his fists. The brief contact had heated his desire more than he would have anticipated even under the worst circumstances *I want him. I need him. He wants it, too so why not do what he demands?* The thoughts rushed through his mind, blinding him, and he growled, deep and longing. "I cannot do that," he whispered hoarsely. "You deserve better than just another rape. I would just... fuck you, Severus. I would use you for my own pleasure, for the wolf's pleasure; I wouldn't give a damn about your wishes or feelings. Not tonight. I don't want to make love, I want to mate. You smell like... like a fleeing deer, like fresh blood, and I want to chase you, devour you. Get out of here, Severus. I beg you please, please don't let me do that to you!"

But goodness, how marvellous those warm fingertips felt on his cheek! The small hairs in Remus's neck stood up at the tender touch, light as a butterfly's wing. His eyes narrowed, and he moved closer to the silent, dark-haired man who just stood in front of him so invitingly, clearly waiting for his next move. The werewolf heard the rain and the wind howling outside, he felt the thunder and the lightning flashes rattling his very bones. He had been cold and scared only moments ago, but now he was warm, hot even, and he didn't fear the other man's touch anymore. On the contrary he craved it, and in a swift move, Remus put his own palm over those pale fingers. His other hand sneaked behind Severus's neck, pulled him closer, close enough to breathe in his wonderful fragrance.

Thunder and rain, wind and lightning nature went wild outside, and just like that the werewolf lost control, and gave in to the wolf's instincts and his need to mate. Rational thought was wiped from his mind; humanity, morals, friendliness and hesitation were gone within the blink of an eye. "You're mine." His voice the wolf's voice was deeper, darker, and his hands took what belonged to him. Pushing his friend *Mate! Mine!* towards the couch, he ripped the last button away, then the shirt as well, raking his nails lightly across his mate's chest.

The wolf smelled arousal and pressed the one he wanted down onto cushions and old, softened leather. No resistance, which was good he wouldn't have cared if his mate was in the mood for coupling or not, but the wolf preferred a willing partner. Naked skin under his fingers; warm breath in his ear. There was fabric still in the way. Unacceptable. More buttons, infuriating buttons, but in the end, the trousers were gone and he could see and smell and taste what was offered to him, what was his anyway. Sweet and musky was the scent, fragile those bones, irresistible the sight of his mate's exposed throat. His teeth found the vein, but he didn't draw blood; he just sucked, pressing his tongue against the pulse whilst his hand found a prominent hipbone, holding the body still underneath him as he pushed his mate's knees apart.

The tantalising smell of fresh sweat tickled the wolf's nose as did the unique fragrance of the man himself. He couldn't put a name to it a wolf didn't have names for the various scents in his world but he was drawn to it nevertheless. His need grew stronger and he moved atop his mate, who welcomed him by further opening his long, slender legs.

A forceful push and the wolf's length was surrounded by tight heat. A gasp, a shudder from his mate; then an arm pulled him closer as legs were spread even wider. Thrusting; penetrating. Taking his mate was what the wolf had wanted to do for months; thinking about his denied needs made him move his hips faster and bury himself deeper inside the one who was his. Skin to skin, cheek to cheek; the wolf moved, his mate moved with him and it was as it should be intense, fast, and wild. *Mine*, the wolf thought. *Mine, mine, mine forever*, and he came, howling out his lust and his orgasm and the joy that burned in him at the simple fact that he had found and finally taken the one who completed him.

Warm seed trickled over the cushions when the werewolf slid down his mate's as yet unsatisfied body. He'd been too wild and thus, too fast. His mate was inexperienced, hadn't reached his climax yet and the wolf didn't like that. Slipping his hands underneath the warm body, the wolf pressed his fingertips to the left and right of the spine, feeling the tremble and anticipating his mate's hardness that now slipped between his parted lips. Slightly salty was this taste, as expected, rich and new in its own way. The wolf flicked his tongue; a moan, begging for more, was the result. Adding pressure to the sensitive area at the base of the shaft, massaging the tender flesh of the balls, he nipped and sucked the velvet head for further pleasure. A strangled yelp and his mate's hips bucked; far too soon it was over, far too soon his mate spilled his own seed.

Wind and rain outside; warmth and safety and satisfaction inside. All was well. They were both sated, and the wolf could relax, could lie down, resting his head above his lover's hip. With a smile, he curled one of the damp, black locks around his finger surely, the groin was the only place where Severus's hair was not straight.

An arm slipped across the werewolf's back, and Remus heard his friend sigh at the kiss he had just then pressed right next to the pale bellybutton. Warm flesh, soft skin who would have thought that Severus's wiry body could be so welcoming, so intriguingly seductive, so...

What? Remus thought bewildered and at the same moment felt the wolf inside him curl up for a content nap. Confused, Remus lifted his head. The flames of the candles cast golden shadows across the pale man on the couch, the man he was snuggled up to, the man he just had shagged and sucked off afterwards. Outside, the thunderstorm still roared; the rain had turned into hail. Not that much time could have passed since...

"I lost control!" Remus rasped, but he couldn't hear his own words over the noise of the tiny ice chips that threatened to shatter the windows. "I gave in to the wolf and I..." Disbelieving, he watched how his right hand stroked along Severus's flank. In his mouth he could taste his friend's semen, his fingertips remembered the feeling of soft, warm flesh, and in his ears he heard the fast pounding of both their hearts.

Without hesitation, Remus slipped off the couch, landing hard on his knees. Naked as he was, he staggered to his feet and over to his table, where he slumped in to a chair. He clenched his teeth hard enough that it hurt; his eyes burned, his heart raced, and he could barely suppress the urge to destroy the few pieces of furniture in his rooms. *I did it again*, he thought desperately. *I raped him. And this time, I didn't even have enough self-control to rein in myself after a few thrusts. I came. I actually enjoyed it enough to fucking come!*

The wooden surface of his table was covered with parchment, books, and quills. He didn't care. Remus buried his head in his arms and wished with all his might that this was indeed nothing but a nightmare.

Soft footsteps, barely audible. More light as more candles were lit. The smell of sex hung in the air, and then a hand touched his shoulder. It was unwelcome as much as anticipated, and Remus didn't know if he should shrug it away or clutch it like a lifeline.

"It hurts." Severus's voice, surprisingly tender. Remus hunched his shoulders, tried not to react, but looked up in the end nevertheless. With narrowed eyes and even more dread building up in his chest, he scanned Severus's lean, naked body for bruises he might have caused, scratches, wounds...

There. At the neck was an angry red spot, clearly caused by teeth. "I bit you!"

"A surprisingly strong erotic experience," Severus said, but Remus didn't really hear the words.

"Sweet Merlin, I dug my teeth into you like..." The werewolf gulped heavily. "Like the monster I am. I... I should say I'm sorry, but I can't. That's unforgivable, that's..."

Severus snapped his fingers, conjuring a blanket. Methodically, he put it around the werewolf's shaking shoulders. Strangely enough, his own nakedness didn't seem to bother him. "You ran from me. Again. After you fled from my rooms in the night of the final battle, I thought it was because you despised me. There was disgust in your eyes when you checked if the curse was broken. I never considered the option you could be disgusted at yourself."

Remus opened his mouth to answer. Severus, though, didn't give him a chance to do so. "I've been hated and despised throughout my whole life, Lupin. Naturally, I supposed your disgust was aimed at me. Still, you didn't let me die of Desipentia. You partly broke the curse; doing so nearly broke you. I only understood that when Bella told me about your memories."

"I am sor..."

"No. I don't want your apology. There is no need for it. I came here tonight because a legal binding was the only way to break the curse for good. I did it because it needed to be done and because I wanted to."

"You can't..."

"Come to bed." Severus calmly held out his hand. "You fled from me twice now. It hurts, getting left behind like that, feeling abandoned and neglected. I don't want to feel abandoned; I don't want to sleep alone tonight. Come to bed. Please."

"But..." Remus began. "But I raped you!"

Severus sighed and shook his head. "You didn't. Not the first time and certainly not tonight. A victim of Desipentia craves to be touched, but fights against it at the same time. I wanted you badly, I needed you, and then you used the salve to ease the pain a brilliant move. You were gentle, caring, and once the madness was gone, I wished you would continue forever."

Wide-eyed, Remus stared at Severus and finally allowed himself to think of that night. He remembered very clearly his own lust; now, he admitted to himself that Severus had indeed responded to his attention, had moaned out his desire and his orgasm. He hadn't imagined it.

Slowly, very slowly, realisation dawned. "You... you enjoyed it?" he asked hoarsely.

"Yes. Both times." There was no terror in the Potions master's face, no hate, and no disgust.

Could it really be that it has been just that: making love? Remus wondered. *That there was nothing to regret?* Tonight, Severus had welcomed him, had enjoyed the sex as much as he had. Last time, though... "But you... cried, last time," the werewolf whispered. "And I thought I were raping you and still... enjoyed it. I assumed... I thought you cried because of what I had done to you."

His friend laughed dryly. "The love potion you'd taken is one of the strongest draughts known. It affects body as well as mind. You didn't stand a chance against it, as I didn't stand a chance against the curse. You just reacted accordingly. Concerning my reaction... One moment I was mad, the next filled with unexpected, unbeknownst pleasure. After an eternity of painful, burning craziness, I was myself again between two heartbeats. You have no idea how relieved I was only to see you running away from me with horror written all over your face. Believe me, you would have cried as well. Now, will you come to bed voluntarily or do I have to carry you?"

"Whatever you wish," Remus answered and followed his friend into the bedroom. Disbelieving, he watched his friend *mate*, his mind whispered get into his bed. The dark wizard seemed to expect company, so Remus dropped the blanket and slipped between cool sheets. Hesitantly, he moved closer to Severus; slowly, he reached out, wondering if his touch was welcome. One arm went under his friend's head, the other found its way over a narrow hip.

Severus sighed contently.

"Sleep well," the werewolf murmured. "This can be only a dream, you know."

"Don't count on it," his mate replied and snuffed the candle's flame with wordless magic.

Snape woke in the early hours of the morning because the bright light of the moon was shining right into his face. Vaguely he wondered how the moonlight had made it into his dark, strong-walled and windowless dungeons before he became aware he was hearing a heartbeat that wasn't his own. Slow, strong beats next to his ear his head rested on someone's shoulder, his right knee pressed a pair of legs to the mattress. A mattress too big to be his own. This wasn't his bed, he concluded, nor was this his bedroom.

Lupin, he thought, not entirely awake yet. *He's warm; I like warm.*

A smile spread over the Potions master's face. Stretching his fingers, he found the curve of an elbow. Following it, finding the pulse in his lover's throat, he was reminded of the last time he had woken up next to the werewolf. Back then, Lupin had been in a healing trance. Now and here, he was merely asleep.

Maybe I should wake him up? The thought was intriguing, and slowly, Snape moved a bit closer to the delicious heat the man radiated. His groin touched skin and with unexpected, nearly shocking strength, desire flared up inside him. His cock hardened faster than he would have thought possible after just a few hours rest, and the most satisfying sex the previous evening.

Those memories did nothing to cool the Potions master's lust. Lupin had turned into someone he hadn't known before he had been wild and demanding, had taken what he had wanted, had bitten him, penetrated him without so much as asking, all of which had ended in a fabulous orgasm. Naturally, Snape had known something along that line was bound to happen after all, he had chosen the night deliberately so the werewolf's animalistic nature could take over but still, he had been slightly uneasy about the prospect of being taken by a wolf in human form.

He needn't have worried, Snape knew that now. Lupin, despite being overtaken by his instincts, had been surprisingly gentle and careful, simply because it was his nature. The bite hadn't been deep enough to draw blood; the strong hands had pressed the Potions master to the cushions, but hadn't imprisoned him. The sexual act in itself... Snape couldn't help but moan at the memory of it, and his length, pressed against his lover's thigh, became harder still. Feeling Lupin move inside him had been overwhelming, an exquisite intrusion combined with the smell of heated skin, the musky scent of his own pre-come, and the expectation of a breathtaking climax.

Impossible not to do it: Snape brushed his lips across Lupin's moon-bathed neck and slipped his hand under the blanket in search for the werewolf's groin. Last night had been marvellous; now he was curious about what else there was to explore.

"What are you doing?" Lupin's voice was sleep-slow but his eyes were open and clear.

"Trying to seduce you," Snape answered and found his lover's cock. Stroking it, he experienced the delightful sensation of feeling it harden under his touch.

The werewolf grinned sleepily. "Didn't we agree on you being a dream?" Slowly, he began to move his hips, thus sliding his member in and out of Snape's fist. "Although... A dream doesn't feel that good, not even in the middle of the night."

"I'm in an experimental mood," Snape murmured. "It is half past four, and I have already advised you not to insist on your dream theory."

"Gods," Lupin breathed, arching his back and grabbing hold of Snape's bum. "Half past four is too early for everything but...*Yes!... sleep.*"

"Yes?" Snape mocked. With his thumb, he brushed along Lupin's length. "I could stop. We could go back to sleep, if you consider the hour inappropriate to satisfy my curiosity."

The werewolf's hand on Snape's bum tightened an arousing feeling. With his other arm Remus pulled his lover lower, closer to his face. "What are you curious about, Severus?" the werewolf asked hoarsely.

"How it would feel to come inside you." Boldly, Snape pushed the werewolf's legs apart and slipped atop of him in one fast move, carrying his weight on his elbows. "Unless... my attention is unwelcome?"

Lupin hooked one of his legs behind his lover's back. "Never," he whispered, and murmured a Lubrication Spell. "Go on. I beg you. Please, Severus, fuck me!"

"As you wish," Snape replied and did as requested.

A/N: In case you wondered - this is not the end of the story ;-)

Full Moon

Chapter 10 of 11

In the night of the final battle, Snape gets hit by a curse. Lupin goes to great lengths to save the Potions master's life and sanity.

10. Full Moon

"Do you mind if I take a shower before I leave?" The words were spoken coolly, and Remus fully woke to the harsh light of the morning sun. A moment ago he had been lingering between half-sleep and wakefulness; now his eyes were blinded by the light and his heart stabbed by the fact that Severus was up already with a blanket wrapped around his waist and clothes tucked under his arm.

Trying to cope with the sudden change in the mood, Remus pushed himself upwards. The bed was too big all of a sudden, and he shivered in the chilly air the fireplace was as cold and empty as Severus's voice. The werewolf managed a, "Sure you can," before his throat tightened with dread.

It was morning. He had signed the parchment, they had completed the binding during the night, and now it was over *Nothing but a necessity. No deeper meaning. You can leave Hogwarts in the morning* the words Severus had said the previous evening rang in his mind, bounced up and down behind his eyes, and hurt more than he would have expected. Much more.

"You always were a stupid idiot when it came to relationships," Remus murmured to himself. He pulled the bedcover up to his chin, hoping in vain that his trembling would stop. But the tremble wasn't caused by the coldness in the room; it emanated from deep inside him. The prospect of having to leave Hogwarts was awful enough; leaving Severus was simply unthinkable.

From the bathroom, he heard the water gurgling down the drain and imagined Severus washing off the night's passion with calm, controlled movements. Remus promised himself he wouldn't tremble; he wouldn't try to keep the memories of the past night alive by hugging himself, imagining it was his lover doing so. "Damn shit," Remus murmured. "I didn't expect this to get worse. Obviously, I was wrong."

That was the moment when Severus came out of the bathroom, dressed in jeans and shirt, buttoned all the way up. The werewolf's bite was concealed by the shirt's soft fabric and the long, freshly washed, black strands of his hair. Severus had pulled most of it back into a braid again, but only loosely. It looked so damn good Remus nearly choked at the sight.

"You should get up, Lupin. Classes start in half an hour, and I assume you want to have breakfast first." The Potions master took his wand and turned to leave.

"I'm not hungry," Remus managed.

Impatiently, Snape crossed his arms over his chest. "Then get dressed at least. I had no intention of holding out your trousers for you, but it seems you are incapable of even the smallest tasks before a transformation."

Suddenly angry beyond recognition, Remus jumped out of bed, the bedcover held to his chest. "I prefer to get dressed without a witness," he snapped. "Get out, will you?"

Snape stared at him for a very long moment, then closed the distance between them with a few steps. "You are angry at me," he said, surprise in his voice. "And you feel uncomfortable because I am dressed and you are not. Considering that after last night I know your body in detail, this is positively ridiculous."

"Get. Out!" Remus snarled through gritted teeth.

"I can detect a pattern here. Whenever you don't want to talk about something that bothers you, you try to throw me out of your rooms. You should have learned by now that that doesn't work. So tell me: what's wrong?"

"I don't..."

Snape reached out and pressed his palm against the werewolf's cheek. His fingers parted the short hair; the thumb brushed across Lupin's lips. "You want me to leave?"

"Yes."

Snape's lips twitched ever so slightly. "Liar," he said and stopped the werewolf from jerking away by grabbing hold of his shoulder. "Did you forget that we are bound? *No lies will stay hidden*, wolf. We cannot lie to each other anymore, at least not whilst having body contact. Tell me again: do you want me to leave?"

Remus paled. The situation was bad enough for him without Severus standing so very close, and if this lying-thing was true... "I need you to go," he finally said. "It will be easier for me if you just walk out through this door and let me pack my things and..."

Snape raised an eyebrow. "You want to leave Hogwarts?"

"That was the sole reason for the damn marriage, wasn't it?" Remus bit out through gritted teeth. "You said the legal binding would nullify the effects of the curse. That means I am free to go. And if you don't step back, I will break your arm!"

Ignoring the threat, the Potions master pulled the werewolf another bit closer. Only the duvet was between them, trapped tightly between their bodies. "You could leave Hogwarts if you really wanted to. But you don't. And I never intended to end this marriage as soon as the contract was signed. I'm quite old-fashioned; once I marry, I think I would prefer to remain married for the rest of my life. Hold up your left hand."

Too stunned to do otherwise, Lupin did as ordered. In the morning sun, his skin looked golden. At his ring finger, a golden band glittered in the pale, wintry beams. Wagging his fingers, he could feel the ring now as well; it fitted perfectly. Not caring about his nakedness anymore, Remus dropped the duvet. It slipped towards the floor, and he raised his other hand to touch the piece of jewellery he couldn't remember having put on.

Severus let go of the werewolf's shoulder and pressed his own left hand to the other man's palm. On his ring finger a silver band was to be seen. When both rings touched, the same tiny stars as the previous night sparked up. "I told you the rings would appear after the contract was fulfilled," the Potions master said softly. "They can't be taken off; they can neither be destroyed nor concealed. Only if we decide in mutual agreement that we wish to end the binding can we demand the parchment to be destroyed, and only then will the rings vanish again. Do you want that?"

Remus shook his head.

"Nor do I. I am at a loss to understand how taking a shower might have offended you, but I clearly managed to do so. I apologise. I am grumpy in the mornings. Maybe I should have been... friendlier."

A disbelieving grin crossed the werewolf's face. "You are grumpy all the time. I should have expected it. I just assumed you wanted me out of your eyesight."

Snape snorted and took a step back. Taking in every inch of the werewolf's naked body, he said, "I didn't expect to ever get married, but now that I am, I consider you a good catch, so to speak. We're bound. Get used to it, Lupin."

Remus flinched.

"You don't like me calling you by that name?" Snape asked.

Remus shook his head. Stepping into the bedroom, he finally pulled on a pair of trousers. "I didn't mind until last night. But now... it sounds far too cold and distant."

"I see." The Potions master opened the door and stepped into the corridor. "Hurry. I dislike having breakfast without you by my side. Remus," he added and grinned when the werewolf blushed.

Snape was surprised at how hungry he was, and he devoured double the amount of porridge that morning. When Remus arrived about ten minutes after him, he cast him a thin smile and handed over the pot of tea and the sugar. "Good morning," he added belatedly. "About time you turned up."

He didn't expect the stunned silence from his colleagues that accompanied the small gesture and his words.

"Erm, Severus, are you feeling well?" Minerva asked. "Headache, maybe, or dizziness? You are unusually friendly this morning."

Sybill fanned her face dramatically. "Ah, the dark shadow is near!" she exclaimed. "Remus, you must be careful. It might be your end, getting too close to it."

The werewolf stared at her for a moment, and then looked at Snape. His eyes widened for a moment, then he chuckled. "I doubt it, Sybill. Occasionally, dark shadows turn out to be quite harmless. Although... harmless might not be the right word. Fascinating, maybe. Thanks for the sugar, Severus."

"Hmm." Snape just nodded. "Dinner in my dungeons tonight. I know you don't eat before a transformation, but I would like to see for myself how the Wolfsbane works."

This time, the werewolf nodded, having his mouth full with toast. "Eight o'clock," he suggested after he'd had a sip of tea. "You sure you want to see that?"

Snape barked out a laugh. "I've seen Greyback and most of his pack transform more often than I care to think about, Remus. One single little werewolf won't manage to terrify me. Especially not when the werewolf in question is you."

Every teacher at the High Table stared at the two men. Only Albus Dumbledore hummed a merry little tune and added some cream to his coffee. When the quite stunned silence stretched uncomfortably, Snape looked up from his plate only to see the questioning faces of his colleagues.

"What?" he snapped.

"This is the first time ever that you talk to Remus without a sneer in your voice," Pomona Sprout said accusingly and put her fork down. "And you called him by his given name! It is certainly a novelty that you volunteer to witness a transformation. And you, Remus. I know that you don't allow anyone to watch when you turn into a wolf. You yourself told me so. So what is going on here?" She'd been talking quietly, but already some students seemed to have noticed that something was amiss at the teacher's table.

"Damn," Snape murmured under his breath, realising that for once, he had talked too much. He watched the students chat over their breakfasts, he saw an owl flying in, delivering a parcel. He remembered that the Dark Lord was dead and he was free to do what he wanted. In between two heartbeats he made a decision. Lazily, he leaned back in his chair, holding his teacup between his hands. "Did you want to keep this a secret, Remus?" he asked, rolling his head towards the werewolf.

Remus coughed violently, and Snape had to slap his back for a couple of times. "You are kidding me!" the werewolf finally managed, wiping a tear out of his eye. "You don't really think about telling them? Now? Here?"

"Why shouldn't I?" Snape asked, pretending that he wasn't very aware of all the ears listening to their conversation. "Eventually, they will find out anyway. Like this, there won't be rumours."

Exasperated, the werewolf crookedly smiled. "You never fail to surprise me," he said. "Right. Go on. Tell them."

"Tell us what?" Minerva McGonagall asked sharply. "Severus, if there is any information you held back from us, either concerning Death Eaters or You-Know-Who himself, you must..."

"Good gods," Snape sighed, put his cup onto the table, leaned over, and kissed the man sitting next to him.

It was a deep kiss, filled with longing and the memories of the night they had shared. Tongues touched, and somehow, Snape's hand decided that it wanted to grab hold of the werewolf's neck. The fact that all his students and colleagues could clearly see what he was doing, the fact that this kiss was something he had never dreamed of doing in front of witnesses, didn't bother him. All that counted, all that mattered were Remus's lips on his, the warmth of his lover's skin under his fingertips, and the knowledge that his kiss was welcomed.

"Severus!" Remus breathed after a small eternity. His fingers had opened the top button of the Potions master's shirt. "You need to get away from me, or I will have to take you right here on the table, between butter, milk, and porridge." The werewolf's pupils were dilated, his nostrils flared. Snape could easily see how close his lover was to

losing control again.

"Interesting fantasies you've got, wolf," he murmured, but reluctantly leaned back into his chair again. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a Gryffindor stepping back from the High Table, red as a tomato and hiding something behind his back. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered but the simple fact that, for the first time in more than two decades, he had taken his life in his own hands and had steered it into the direction he wanted it to go. Tucking a loose strand of hair behind his ear, he looked at McGonagall. "The Dark Lord is dead, Minerva, his Death Eaters are either in the graveyard or in Azkaban. There are only my personal secrets to reveal. One, as you just have witnessed, is not a secret anymore. Any further questions concerning my friendly behaviour towards Remus?"

Minerva McGonagall blushed deeply and didn't say a word.

Snape got up. "I will see you later," he said to the werewolf and left the Great Hall.

Admittedly, Snape hadn't expected many reactions to the kiss he and Remus had shared at the breakfast table. After all, teachers were allowed to have a private life, and students as well as colleagues had never dared to make assumptions or talk behind his back.

Today, things were different. Wherever he went, he heard whispers; wherever he looked, he saw frowning faces. At first, he didn't think much of it. But after a few hours, he sensed a certain hostility towards him, something that hadn't happened since the end of the war. The stares were distinct, direct, and angry, and Snape didn't have a clue what he had done to earn them.

The last class of the day was double potions with Seventh-year Gryffindors and Slytherins. Usually this class was easy to handle since Potter had killed the Dark Lord with the help of Malfoy's mother, the enemies had buried the hatchet and behaved like civilised human beings. Today, though, teaching the class was nearly impossible. Whenever Snape turned his back, he felt their eyes in his back, and not one student seemed able to concentrate on the given task. Snape could nearly hear the unspoken questions without being able to understand what they were about. It was unnerving, and he was more than glad when the bell rang.

He was just about to leave the classroom when Hermione Granger raised a hand. "Professor Snape?" she said, and without waiting for his allowance to speak, continued, "Is it true that you put Professor Lupin under the Imperius Curse so he wouldn't fight you kissing him?"

The whole class seemed to hold its breath. Shocked silence followed the girl's words, and Snape, feeling as if she had punched him hard in the stomach, just managed not to sag against the doorframe. He didn't even give a sharp and nasty reply as he would have done under usual circumstances.

The girl got up. Every other student was rooted to his or her chair. Only she stood on her legs, chin raised, hands pressed to the table in front of her. Snape saw that she was trembling and wasn't really surprised that she seemed frightened to death he was quite close to strangling her, and he guessed this could be easily seen on his face.

"Is it true you put a potion in his tea so he would fall in love with you? Is it true you hexed him? Is it true that you tortured Professor Lupin last month and that you killed him and buried his corpse in the Forbidden Forest and replaced him with someone who just looks like him?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" Snape croaked. Only very slowly he regained control over his muscles. Stalking back into the classroom, he had to ball his fists or he would have taken his wand out, aiming at his students and maybe even risking committing murder.

"I'm talking about the rumours that are spreading through the school, Professor Snape. I am talking about the fact that Rita Skeeter arrived shortly after lunch, asking most private and improper questions and taking notes. Dennis made a picture this morning and Miss Skeeter convinced him to hand it over. It shows you and Professor Lupin kissing, and everyone thinks you forced him... somehow. He was so very pale this morning, and I figured you possibly didn't know about all what was being said, and I thought you should know, sir." Sweating slightly, she refused to look down when he took a step towards her table.

"Lupin was pale because tonight it is full moon. He's taught you for an entire year you should know that he always feels unwell at this time. Go and ask him. Tell him what you have told me, and he will answer all of your questions," Snape said, dangerously calm. *Hadn't the sole reason of the kiss been to avoid rumours?* he wondered. *Where do these children get such idiotic ideas?*

The girl nervously dug her hands into her open bag. It was lying in front of her, and Snape could see an Arithmancy book, parchments, and quills. "I would have, but... We all are very fond of Professor Lupin," she whispered. "He is not in his rooms. Rumours say he's under your spell or Polyjuiced or dead, and I don't believe any of that nonsense, but if you don't stop them now, they will get out of hand!"

"He is in my rooms, Miss Granger," Snape bit out. "He doesn't teach before the full moon, as you know. I advised him to take a rest, and I considered my rooms the better place to do so." Snape felt fury boil up inside him and decided that it would be best to leave before he did something stupid.

He was already at the door when the girl called him back. "Professor! Please, I know this will earn me detention for the rest of my life, but you need to answer my question!" There was a great deal of desperation in her voice.

Snape didn't turn. "It's none of your business, Miss Granger. Ten points..."

She pushed her chair back and went after him, interrupting his sentence so boldly that Snape couldn't do anything else but admire her nerve. "It might not bother you, but those rumours... they are bad. They accuse you of Dark Magic. You can't afford that, not after two decades in Voldemort's service. And Professor Lupin won't like to be called a victim of your magic. Everyone thinks... they think..."

Finally, Snape understood what she was saying the rumours weren't only about him, but about Remus as well, and for his sake, he needed to end them now and here. "Do you know what a legal binding is, Miss Granger?" Snape had difficulty keeping his voice calm.

The girl nodded. The rest of the class, even Potter, watched in silence, wide-eyed and with clenched fists, ready to start a fight if someone said a wrong word.

Snape forced himself to relax, enough to indicate that nothing bad would happen in his classroom as long as he was in control of the situation. "Then you know that it cannot be forced," he continued. "No spell, no hex or curse, no potion or drug must be at work. The contract can only be signed strictly voluntarily."

"Are you saying..." Slowly, a knowing smile spread on her face. "You and Professor Lupin are married?"

His short, brisk nod caused the class to gasp in unison.

Triumphantly, Hermione added, "And the contract is filed at the Ministry of Magic once it is validated, where it can be displayed, if necessary." She beamed, her wild, crazy hair standing up around her head like a dandelion. "In addition, rings appear on both partner's fingers. Magical rings. Impossible to overlook. Easy to recognise. And there's no way to fake them."

Deliberately slowly, Snape folded his arms over his chest. The ring on his left hand sparkled. He didn't say another word, but more gasps from his students indicated that they began to understand what the existence of the ring meant.

"I should have noticed them!" Hermione exclaimed, and then added, more calmly, "Thank you, Professor Snape. I assume you wish to spend the evening with your bound partner. If you don't mind, I will have a little chat with Miss Skeeter."

Another brisk nod; Snape finally left the classroom. Over his shoulder, he said, "Fifty points to Gryffindor for exceptional bravery and thoughtfulness," which caused several shocked outcries from the Slytherins and joyful Gryffindor cheers.

Remus was pacing the Potions master's rooms nervously. He had slept for the better part of the day, now feeling weak and dizzy and nervous at the same time. Odd dreams had plagued him, but that was nothing new the full moon always had this effect on him, and he had learned to cope with it many years ago.

What he hadn't expected was to wake up in Severus's bed, with the man's smell in his oversensitive nose and the knowledge that he was in the very rooms where it had all begun. Equally strange was the feeling of contentment that spread through him at the sight of the bookshelves, the stony walls, and the dozens of phials on the worktable in the next room. "I'm an intruder," he murmured, rubbing his hands roughly across his face. He had been the last time he'd been in these rooms, he certainly...

When the ring on his finger lightly touched his skin, he remembered. He wasn't an intruder Severus had given him the password to his wards and had told him to make himself at home as soon as it had become obvious that Remus needed a quiet place to rest. "Your rooms are out of the question, wolf," Severus had stated. "Too many students will knock at the door, demanding to know why you put up with me. Lie down and sleep. I will be back after dinner."

Now it was past seven, the moon, although not yet up, called for the wolf inside him and Remus longed to get outside into the woods. Except he needed the Wolfsbane first, of course, and then there was the problem that his human part was pretty much scared of the woods right now. It was only a month since Bellatrix had taken him to the garden shed, had bound and tortured and nearly killed him. A short four weeks since Severus had found him, had brought him back and not only saved his life, but had literally brought him back from death's dominion. The woods held a lot of horrible memories for the werewolf. Currently, he didn't have an idea what to do about the problem. Pacing from wall to wall, he tried to no avail to get rid of at least some of his tension.

It was nearly eight when, finally, the door opened and Severus was back after a day of teaching his own classes as well as the werewolf's. He looked tired and pleased at the same time. In his hand he held a steaming goblet of Wolfsbane. "I'm late. I had a task to attend that couldn't wait."

Remus couldn't help the wide grin that spread over his face. Too much had happened in too short a time, and every moment had a nearly surreal quality. He was alive, married, and happy on top of it now which part of that was most unlikely?

"Drink the Wolfsbane, Remus," Severus said. No sneer, no growl there was warmth in the Potions master's voice, and tenderness. Not much, but enough for Remus to hear it. It made his heart beat a little faster.

"I wish I could inject the stuff right into my veins," the werewolf muttered, took the goblet, and downed its contents. Naturally, he expected the potion to taste as it always had far too sweet, reminding him of foul fruit and rotten flesh. Instead, it tasted just bitter. Not too bitter, more like a grapefruit was bitter and definitely not sweet anymore. The taste still wasn't nice, but it wasn't unpleasant, either.

When the last drop was gone, Remus quite disbelieving stared at it for a moment, then slowly placed the goblet on the workbench. "What have you done?" he asked.

Severus's smile deepened. "I altered the potion. It's easily done, but a little time-consuming. Had you told me about the foul taste before, I could have done so years ago. Is it acceptable now?"

In a swift move, the werewolf grabbed hold of his lover's head and kissed him hard on his pale lips. "More than acceptable," he murmured. "For the first time ever, I don't feel sick after drinking it. Thank you. I wish it wasn't full moon tonight, though. I wish I didn't have to transform, but unfortunately..."

Snape pushed the door open. "Let's go, then," he said. "And don't look so surprised. I need to know if the altered potion has any side effects, and besides, did you really think I would let you go to the Forbidden Forest on your own again? You'd possibly manage to get stabbed by a unicorn or shot by a centaur. I'll come with you. I want to see you transform, and I will make sure that you are back home before sunrise."

A month ago it had been autumn; now it was winter. The ground was frozen, and the branches of the trees were bare of leaves. Like a dark, threatening wall, the forest seemed to forbid entrance to anyone who was human at least, this was how Snape felt when walking towards the ancient oaks that warded the wood. Next to him, Remus walked in silence. He radiated nervousness as well as anticipation, and every now and then, the Potions master felt his *lover; husband* friend's gaze drift towards him. "I do understand if you would rather be alone," Snape said casually, knowing well that he had forced Remus to take him along. "I assume a transformation is a very personal thing. I do not want to intrude on your privacy."

Remus laughed, deep and clearly amused. "I think we are past this point, Severus. After all that has happened, after last night, I consider it only fair that you see the real wolf as well, not just the one that hides in my human form every now and then." Nearly running now, the werewolf pushed past bushes and branches, feeling so obviously at home in the woods that Snape could do nothing else but follow him. Very quickly they reached a clearing, and before the Potions master could wonder what would happen next, Remus had already shed his coat onto a pile of shrivelled leaves. Next, he kicked his shoes off, standing barefoot on the winter grass, ripping away his scarf, dropping his gloves, and opening the first buttons of his shirt.

Snape leaned against a fir tree and watched. It was a strange and surprisingly private thing to do, watching someone getting undressed whilst the wind was blowing its icy breath in his own face.

Remus didn't seem to notice the temperature. Now naked, he just stood in the darkness, head down, waiting. "I don't want to scare you, Severus. The transformation is not a pleasant thing to watch. It is a brutal, painful change, and although it happens fairly fast, I suppose... I mean, if you'd rather turn round..." A shiver claimed the werewolf's body; he looked lost and vulnerable in Snape's wand light.

"I can deal with the wolf, Remus," Snape said firmly. "In all his forms. I want to watch, and you will stop talking nonsense."

Remus smiled, and maybe he wanted to give a reply, but at that moment the full moon came up and shot its silvery beams straight into the werewolf's waiting body. It didn't matter that he was surrounded by trees, that there were shadows and darkness preventing the light from actually touching his naked skin. The moon called, and Remus's physiology answered. Each cell did so, each muscle, each bone. A yell pierced the night, high and pained. Remus threw his head back, screaming, spread his arms wide and dropped to his knees. Where there had been fingers a moment ago, there were now claws. His spine arched and seemed to break, arms and legs changed, hair grew. The scream turned into a howl, and always, there were the pale beams of the moon, now streaming down through the dry branches and leaving a pool of light around the werewolf. He wasn't human anymore, but he wasn't wolf yet, either. He was somewhere in between, and with every heartbeat, he became more animal and less man.

It was a scary sight, eerie and tantalising. Snape, who had thought it wouldn't be a big deal to watch just another werewolf's transformation, discovered that it was a totally different thing if the werewolf in question was someone dear to him. Greyback had considered the transformation a matter of pride, had loved the sound of ripping fabric as he had never bothered to undress beforehand, and had eagerly welcomed anyone who wanted to witness it. Remus, on the other hand, was shy on that matter. As far as Snape knew, he had never allowed anyone to be there during the change, had hid either in his rooms, in the woods, or in the Shrieking Shack.

The fact that he howled with pain, being on all fours now and with fur and paws, a tail and fangs long as daggers, was disturbing, to say the least. He was bigger than any normal wolf and beautiful in his own way. Snape took a step, then hesitated he didn't know if his touch was still welcome, and he couldn't even guess how long the pain from the transformation would last.

He needn't have worried. Remus shook his huge head, quickly followed by his body and tail. The motion even lifted his paws off the ground, and when the wolf scratched himself heartily behind the ear with one hind leg, Snape couldn't help but grin at the sight.

Remus looked at him with big, golden eyes. They were lighter than his human eyes, but no less intelligent. "I take it the altered potion is still efficient?" Snape asked.

Remus bowed his head once in agreement. Then he jumped, and dug his teeth lightly into the Potions master's calf, being careful not to break the skin. Running away, he vanished between the big old trees, yelping once when Snape didn't follow. In less than a second, the wolf was back in the clearing, ears pricked, tail high. He circled the

tall man, clearly waiting for another chance to nip him.

"You want to *play*?" Snape made it sound as if playing was right next to child molesting. "I do hope this is a side effect." Then a smile curved his lips. "I'll show you how to play, wolf," he murmured, pocketed his wand, and threw himself with his full weight on top of the werewolf. Too surprised to react in time, Remus wriggled, tried to get away, and failed. Snape had dug his hands deep into the thick fur; they were rolling across the frozen ground, Remus yelping and Snape laughing.

Last full moon he was out here alone and I was hiding in my dungeons, trying not to scream with pain and fear Snape thought. *This here is much, much better. It's... fun!* Then he managed to get up, just for a moment, at least, before the wolf brought him to his knees again, stole his glove, and ran away.

"Wait till I catch you!" he murmured and followed Remus into the darkness. "I'll take you for a ride, wolf!"

Around three in the morning, Remus was tired in a way he hadn't been tired in a very, very long time. When he was a wolf, he usually went outside, as inside, caged by walls, doors, and furniture, he felt uneasy. However, outside, he never felt well, either. He was always aware that someone might see him, that animals fled from him, and in addition, he had to suppress the urge to hunt.

Being tired, just tired from running, playing, and a good bit of scuffling, was a wonderful change. The wolf inside him demanded exercise; the human had never seen a chance to innocently stretch his muscles.

Until tonight. Until Severus had come outside with him, had watched him transform, and hadn't been scared at the visible change in him. Severus hadn't turned away. Instead, he had come closer, had touched him, and on impulse, Remus had nipped his lover before considering the possibility that Severus might take it as an offence or even an assault.

And again he had been wrong. The tall, dark, snarky man had played with him! They had scuffled like boys over a favourite toy, and the close body contact, the easiness of the game, had made the werewolf happy beyond belief. As a human, he had found a lover, a husband, even. As a wolf, he had found a mate a month ago, even two days ago, he would have sworn both events to be impossible to achieve.

They were lying on the ground now, protected by a warming charm. Severus's head was resting on the werewolf's flank, and they both watched the bright, round moon setting slowly closer to the horizon. The wolf longed for sleep, right here in the grass. His mate, though, seemed to be of a different opinion.

"Let's get back home," Severus said and yawned. "Not too long until the moon is gone. And I need a bed for a few hours before I can consider teaching." Getting up, he brushed dry grass and dirt off his trousers.

Remus growled. Going back to the school was not an option, and Severus should know it.

His mate just raised an eyebrow, gathered the werewolf's clothes, and took a step.

Remus blocked his way and growled again.

"You are not trying to tell me you are afraid of Hogwarts?" Severus sounded genuinely surprised, and Remus shook his head in frustration, unable to explain where the problem was.

His mate seemed to understand, though. "I assume you don't like to go back home whilst being in your wolf form. Well, you are with me. If anyone sees us at all, no one will dare to say a word they know you've taken the Wolfsbane, and if they don't, I'm there to explain. I don't want to stay in the woods until morning, Remus. I think you don't want that, either. Let's go home. Now."

Maybe Remus should have refused, but he didn't. He wanted to go back to the school. After a night in the woods, he always longed for the warmth and the light, for the smell of humans and the small sounds the sleeping students made, reminding him that he was human himself. Therefore, he followed the tall man who carried his clothes and had promised to make sure no one would be scared at the sight of him once they were back behind walls.

They reached the dungeons without interruptions. Warmth greeted them, and Remus shook heartily in order to rid himself of at least some of the twigs and leaves that stuck in his fur. Dropping in front of the fireplace, he fell asleep quickly: he was safe, he was back home, and his mate was with him to make sure nothing happened to him in the few hours left until moonset.

Pain woke him, and Remus knew the moon would be gone in another few minutes. His muscles cramped, his throat was dry, and he felt panic wash through him as it always did when he was about to become human again. Getting up from the rug he'd been sleeping on, he staggered into the middle of the room and howled.

Instantly Severus was next to him, put a soothing arm round his neck, using his strong fingers to ease stiff muscles. It felt good, and the panic subsided. *I'm not alone*, the werewolf thought, and then the moon touched the horizon and he began to change. Claws became nails, fur vanished, joints cracked under the brutal pressure of the transformation. Bones became longer, and muscles stretched to a point that Remus thought they would snap in half. His howls became screams, and he shook violently, lying naked and freezing on the hard stones in the Potions master's living room.

Warm hands stroked along his aching limbs; long, skilled fingers worked against the pain. The werewolf's skin was damp and sweaty; he was dirty and exhausted and longed for sleep more than anything else.

"Get up, Remus," Severus said. "Come on, I'll help you. First a shower, then bed. You look horrible, wolf. You should have told me that the transformation is that painful."

"Always worse from wolf to man," Remus breathed and tried to walk towards the bedroom. His legs gave way, though, and his mate caught him, half carrying him towards the bathroom instead.

"No wonder Bella could catch you so easily," Snape snarled. "Come on. The hot water will ease the cramps in your muscles. Damn you, Remus, you complain about the taste when it is so very obvious that it is the pain that causes you the real problem? Didn't you ever consider asking me to blend the potion to make the transformation easier for you?"

"Please let me go to sleep." Remus was barely able to mumble the words. He shivered when his feet touched the cold tiles, and he knew he wouldn't be able to stand on his feet on his own. "I'm too tired."

"I'll make it quick," Severus said, and Remus ripped his eyes open at the mock in his mate's voice. "Come on, under the shower with you."

Warm water hit his head, became warmer, then hot. It washed away the dirt, and as predicted, the heat loosened his muscles. The pain in his joints didn't vanish, but subsided at least slightly.

The smell of soap; shampoo in his hair. The same warm, strong hands as before, now washing him, cleaning him from head to toes. All Remus had to do was stand there under the spray, leaning against his lover, his eyes closed, already half asleep. There was nothing arousing in Severus's touch, but still, it tightened their binding in a way neither of them expected. This was beyond sex, beyond desire. Severus caring for him, his easy acceptance of the werewolf's needs, meant more to Remus than he would have ever admitted.

A fluffy towel and rough, rubbing movement: Severus dried him and then, finally, led him towards the bedroom, one arm around his waist. Remus was as weak as a kitten

now and would have dropped to the ground without support. The sheets were warmed, the mattress soft and welcoming, and Severus began to massage his still burning muscles, working a salve into his skin as soon as he was stretched out on the bed. When he was nearly asleep, he felt the mattress dip under the additional weight of his lover, and Remus sighed contently when he found himself in a tight embrace, his whole body pressed back against the one who was lying behind him. "Sleep well, wolf," Severus murmured, placing a kiss on his neck.

"Night," Remus managed, and was gone.

Another day, more classes to teach, and as expected, there was curiosity written on the faces of the Potions master's colleagues as well as his students. It didn't bother him. Once he had made a decision, he would stick to it no matter if it was for the good or the bad. In this case, it very well might have been the best decision he had made in his up to now quite lousy, bitter life. Snape had no intention of having his happiness dampened by a few rumours or some nasty comments.

Not that there were any of the latter, though. Many couldn't suppress a knowing grin, and Poppy beamed when she saw him. "You look good, Severus," she said, leaning over at the breakfast table. "I want you to come to the infirmary at ten. There is a way to confirm if... well. You know."

He nodded. "At ten. Very well."

Albus caught him on the way to lunch. "Tell me, my dear boy, did it work? Poppy told me about the spell that can confirm if a forced binding is at work. Did it..."

"Yes," Snape hissed, eager to prevent anyone from eavesdropping in on their conversation. He could deal with the fact that the whole world knew he was married. That the marriage was the result of a forced binding was something he would like to keep a secret. "The legal binding, as expected, nullified the forced one. No more dangers. You are free to fire either Remus or myself or even both of us, if that is your wish."

The old man took off his spectacles and polished them with the end of his white beard. "I have no intention of firing either you or your husband, Severus," he said and grinned mischievously. "You would possibly turn me into a... I don't know... dungbeetle? for attempting to do so anyway. What I would like to know, though... Will there be a divorce anytime soon?"

"No," Snape snapped, very well aware that the old man was mocking him. "Now let me grab something to eat before I have to go and torment your precious Gryffindors."

The day went on like that. Unlike the previous day, students seemed neither scandalised nor horrified at the thought that one of their teachers had married another one. Hermione, though, came to his desk after classes and handed him a newspaper. "I thought you might like to have today's issue, Professor," she said. "It's a quite nice picture."

Still, Snape was more than happy when the day was over and done with. Instead of going to the Great Hall for dinner, he went back to his private rooms in order to see if Remus was awake yet. He was hungry and guessed his lover would be, too.

A muttered word and the wards went down, allowing him to open his door. Expecting the quiet welcome of his rooms, he was stunned to see that things were quite different tonight.

The candles burned and the fire was lit nothing unusual there. But it smelled of food and wine, his big worktable was freed from parchments and phials and potion ingredients and set up with plates and glasses, and there was Remus, awaiting him.

"Good evening, Severus," the werewolf said, gesturing towards the waiting chair. He was already seated, a glass of wine in his hand. "I hope you haven't eaten yet. I have prepared turkey, potatoes, and vegetables. Dessert, if you eat up. Sit, and have a glass of wine."

Stunned, Snape sat and took the glass. It was the first time ever someone had cooked for him, and he found it strangely embarrassing. So instead of saying some meaningless nonsense, he pulled out the newspaper the girl had given him earlier and placed it on the table.

Remus picked it up. Instantly, his eyes widened when he saw the headline on the front page and the picture that accompanied it. "Goodness," he breathed. "I didn't expect that!"

"Creevey made it yesterday morning. I don't know how Rita Skeeter managed to get it, but I know that without Miss Granger's interception the article wouldn't be as friendly as it is." Snape put some carrots on his plate and some meat. It smelled delicious. Remus had made an effort to order his favourite food. "I had thought that kissing you would stop any rumours before they started. I was wrong. The rumours spread faster than I would have considered possible, and they weren't nice. I was simultaneously accused of having cursed, drugged, Polyjuiced, and murdered you. Until yesterday afternoon, I didn't even know about it."

Remus, who had been just about to read the article, dropped the paper. "What? Why would anyone say something that ridiculous?"

Snape curved his lips to a humourless grin. "Because I am who I am, wolf. If I kiss someone and this someone doesn't fight me, it can only mean my victim was not in his right mind."

"Well, I am in my right mind, and if anyone dares to say anything like that where I can hear it, they will regret it."

"Read the article, Remus," Snape said, taking a bite. "Miss Granger intervened, as I have pointed out. She learned about the rumours, decided to ask a few very pointed questions, insisted I answered her, and obviously managed to blackmail Miss Skeeter to write a positive article about us."

Remus fished for the newspaper and read the article, which recalled Snape's background as well as his own. It was written without Skeeter's usual pathetic emotionalism; it was honest as well as true, and it ended with a short paragraph that called all nasty rumours a blatant lie. "I'm sure Hermione wrote that article," he said. "It's her style. Why did she do it?"

Snape snorted. "She did it for you. She likes you, or maybe I should say, everyone likes you. She couldn't stand the thought of you being in the centre of horrible rumours. I have to find out what leverage she has with Skeeter, though. Must be something big."

The werewolf had finished his own meal and waved his plate and the empty dishes away. "Unimportant, Severus. Right now, I am a lot more interested in dessert." Lazily, he leaned back in his chair.

"Not for me," Snape replied and vanished his own plate. The table was empty apart from the bottle and two glasses. "I can't believe you are still hungry, wolf."

Remus grinned and got up. A few prowled steps brought him close to the Potions master. Swiftly, he pulled him up. "I'm ravenous, and I'm not talking about food," he murmured. "One side-effect of the transformation is that I get into the mood for love. Sweaty, hot, demanding, all-night-long love-making." Inquiringly, he bent over and brushed his lips across the Potions master's cheek.

Snape felt himself blush at the quite clear words of his lover. "Are you sure you want this... all of this?" he asked hoarsely. "The rumours won't stop despite that article. They will assume you have been forced into this binding, and I..."

"I have been forced." Remus's voice was tender. "Nothing of this would have happened without Bellatrix casting that curse at you. And I am sure. I want this, I want you. Satisfied?" His hand pulled out Snape's shirt, his fingers sneaking between fabric and skin.

Stunned, Snape melted to the sensation of getting undressed by his lover *husband!* and willingly allowed the werewolf to push him backwards until his bum touched the wood of the table. The buttons of his shirts were opened one after the other, and his legs got pushed apart by an eager knee.

A kiss on his lips. "I guess I told you that I love you?" Remus murmured. "Although I can't really remember having said it, so I will say it again. I love you. I don't give a damn about rumours, and time will prove that this binding will last until one of us dies."

A hand high on his leg, whispering over the black fabric of his trousers. All Snape could think about was that hand and those lips and the fact that he was hard already. "What do you think you are doing, wolf?" he rasped and allowed his lover to press him onto the workbench.

"Trying to seduce you," Remus replied. "Unless my attention is unwelcome?"

The sensation of Remus's lips on his, warm and greedy at the same time, of his husband's hardness pressed against his own, was overwhelming. That he was wanted for the first time in his life, all aspects of him and without hesitation, without the expectation of something in return, took his breath away. "Never," Snape murmured and pulled his husband lower for a kiss and more.

Epilogue

Chapter 11 of 11

In the night of the final battle, Snape gets hit by a curse. Lupin goes to great lengths to save the Potions master's life and sanity.

Epilogue

Voices and laughter filled the living room at number twelve, Grimmauld Place; the fragrance of coffee, cake, and champagne wafted through the air. The place was crowded with people; they were smiling, talking, and everyone wanted to see the baby.

Potter's baby. Albus now how pathetic was that, to name a newborn after Hogwarts' Headmaster? Especially this Headmaster, the one who twinkled like mad above his half-moon glasses, his beard braided into a plait for the occasion, grinning all over his mild, gentle face that in no way showed what a calculating bastard he could be at times.

Snape leaned in a dark corner and scowled at everyone who passed by, wishing he were elsewhere. *Why the hell did I come here?* he wondered, melting into the shadows as he had done all his life. This joyful, happy atmosphere was not for him, never had been, and never would be.

Or so he tried to convince himself too much had happened in the past years for him to truly believe this. Remus had dragged him to more than one party; still, this here was definitely the lowest he had sunk so far: he was guest at a fucking christening. How did Remus manage to talk him into this, how did the damn wolf always find a way to make him comply?

Before he could find an answer to that, a young, visibly pregnant woman shoved her way through the crowd, heading straight towards him.

Involuntarily, Snape felt a small smile quirk his pale lips, and he pushed himself off the wall so he could accept Hermione's hug as gracefully as possible. She insisted on hugs; although he had tried to convince her otherwise, she wouldn't part with this rather disturbing habit of hers.

"Hi, Severus," she said and placed a kiss on his cheek. "I cannot believe Remus made you come here. I bet he will have to suffer for that crime." Protectively, she put a hand on her belly her baby was due in two months, and Snape had brewed a lot of Sickness Potions for her ever since she'd told him she couldn't keep any food down apart from oranges.

"I'll skin him alive once I've found him," Snape assured her and vaguely wondered how he had managed to befriend his former student. "Don't ask me how he did it. I vaguely remember him saying something about an urgent Order meeting. Fool that I am, I believed him."

Hermione sniggered, and Snape felt his lips twitch at the sight. She was, he had to admit, beautiful, and he cherished her friendship. Sometime after she had dared to ask him some questions in his classroom concerning Remus and the kiss that had made it to the front page of the *Daily Prophet*, she had decided that she liked him.

At the beginning, her attempts to talk to him had made him suspicious. He'd sensed her nervousness around him and thought someone had ordered her to be friendly to him. Remus, naturally, and had resented it. Only when Remus denied flat-out any involvement and had been able to prove it through their connection the Potions master had considered the highly unlikely possibility that Hermione had wanted nothing more than to talk to him.

After she'd finished school, she had spent countless evenings in his lab, brewing potions, learning as much as she could, and had asked him to write a letter of reference when she applied for the job as Potions mistress at Beauxbatons. He'd seen her fall in love with the Weasley boy, and both he and Remus had been there for her when she cried bitter tears at their fallout. Two years ago, he'd been forced to witness her wedding, and now, he was glad that pregnancy was quite becoming for her. "Where's your wretched husband?" Snape asked, and she laughed.

"He's organising me a drink. Oh, there's Harry, and he's got Albus. Sorry, Severus, but I assume it's too late for hiding."

"Damn," Snape murmured, and of course she was right. Potter had spotted him and came over, carrying his youngest son in his arms.

"Snape," he said, nodding curtly.

"Potter," Snape bit out, for old time's sake they had buried their animosities long ago.

"Hold him for a sec, Snape," the younger man said, and laid the baby into Snape's arms. "Got to find Ginny, and then we will finally give this little chap a proper name."

Scandalised, Snape stood in the middle of Potter's living room, Potter's friends all around him, with Potter's brat in his arms. "I doubt this day can become any worse," he muttered, and then the child opened its eyes and looked at him.

Green eyes. Lily's eyes.

Snape felt a pang in his heart, remembering his long lost childhood friend, his first love, the woman he'd killed by choosing the wrong side. The baby had his father's eyes; he had Lily's eyes, too, and suddenly, Snape felt a bit more at ease, holding him in his arms.

Potter returned with his wife. Unceremoniously, the young man raised his glass, and said loudly, "Let's name my son before the dungeon bat drops him!"

Sniggers came from all corners of the room. Ginny, though, smiled, a fact the Potions master found highly suspicious.

"Well, I know you will all call me insane, and I expect my son to stop talking to me lately at the age of seven when he finds out who he's named after, but then, I am well known for making rash decisions."

More sniggers and some laughs.

Grinning widely, Potter took the tiny hand of his son in his. Gently, he brushed across the soft locks on the baby's head. "I name you after the two men who made sure I survived long enough to actually get married and have children," he said softly. "I name you Albus Severus, son."

Snape, paling, turned to Hermione. "Did you know about this?" Snape asked through gritted teeth afterwards. "Because, if you have, and haven't told me, I'm going to murder you."

"Take your hands off my wife, Snivellus," Lee Jordan said with a quite convincing growl, "or I will tell everyone that you are scared of little babies. You nearly dropped the poor thing!"

"I can handle much more dangerous goods than a baby without dropping them," Snape replied dryly. "Now did you know about me becoming the baby's godfather or not?"

"We all knew it, and Remus did, too. Why do you think he insisted on you joining him?" Hermione wrapped her arm around Lee's waist. "Where is he, anyway?"

"I'll find him," Snape said. "And then I'll behead him. He could at least have warned me!"

Remus was nowhere in sight, so Snape went into the garden and was just about to wonder if his husband had gone home without him when the ring on his finger first warmed, then became hot in a sudden flash. The sensation reminded him of the Dark Mark, burning whenever the Dark Lord had summoned him, but this here was worse, as it was not only the first time that the silver band reminded him in such a painful way of their binding, but because he knew exactly what it meant, too. Remus was lying, and not about something small and unimportant.

Emotions washed through the Potions master, and they weren't his own. Remus felt guilty, ashamed, and excited. In addition, he tried to hide someone or something, which was what had caused the ring to flare up in the first place. It must be a big lie, or otherwise, he wouldn't have felt a thing given the fact that they weren't in physical contact.

Frowning, Snape followed where the ring led him, wondering what had happened. They were together for five years now, Remus lived at Spinner's End during the vacations, and until today, neither ring had been given a reason to cast an alarm.

The garden behind Potter's house was not that big; Snape found Remus quickly. His husband hadn't made a big attempt to hide, and anyway, as he was busy hugging a woman with long, blond hair, the werewolf hadn't seen him coming anyway. A little boy was standing next to the woman, looking up at her with big, brown eyes.

The resemblance to Remus was more than just a little evident.

"Tonks," Snape said, a hint of coldness in his voice, bowing his head just a tad. "Haven't seen you in a while."

Remus spun around. He was pale, shaky, and he didn't let go of Tonks. "Severus," he began, but Snape shut him off.

"As I assume this is your son, wolf, I think I would like an explanation in a more private place."

The flames were low in the fireplace; the room was cooling, but Severus Snape did not move. His long legs were outstretched; in his hand he held a glass of Firewhiskey. The golden liquid was untouched.

Silence stretched.

Thoughtfully, Snape turned the ring on his finger. "What did you tell her?" he asked. "The ring began to burn; I knew you were lying, and I want to know what about."

"I wanted her to leave; I wanted her to take Teddy and go somewhere else so I could meet her without fearing you would find us. So far, I always made sure there were miles between you and me when I met her and Teddy; over the distance, it was easy to hide this secret of mine from you. Today, she came to see me. I didn't know she'd be there, and obviously, I was terrified you would find out about my son. I cannot even remember what I said, but I didn't mean to hurt you. I just wanted to prevent... this." Remus said from the shadows where he had been standing, silently, waiting.

"I know. Too late now, though. I wish you had told me." Snape sounded tired. Wearily, he rubbed a hand across his face. "When did you learn of Teddy's existence?"

Remus barked out a bitter laugh. "I had a brief affair with Tonks a few months before the final battle. She didn't tell me she was pregnant. Teddy was born whilst you and I were suffering from the effect of Desipentia; Tonks, by then, was living in Romania. She wrote me a letter shortly after he was born and assured me she was happy with someone else."

"And you didn't see a reason to tell me that?"

"When you decided to twist the curse by marrying me, when it worked, there was suddenly a lot more between us than we could have expected, and I didn't want to risk it by telling you about my son!" Restlessly, the werewolf began pacing the room. "I love you, Severus. Tonks didn't want me to get involved, I haven't seen Teddy on a regular basis, and I don't see why his existence should change things between us."

Snape sighed and put the glass on the table. He still wasn't fond of Firewhiskey; he had only had a small sip. "It doesn't matter how this happened or why you didn't tell me," he said. "The subject is sorted. She needs you to take care of your son. Do it." He leaned back in the chair and closed his eyes.

"Severus, I don't want things to change between us!" Remus repeated. His voice sounded flat and pleading at the same time.

Snape shook his head. "Too late for that, wolf. And you don't have a choice anyway. Tonks needs to go undercover; she'll be gone for at least two years, and she cannot take Teddy with her. With her help, we'll be able to find the newly growing Death Eater groups and take them out before they can cause any harm. It is only logical that you take in Teddy. You are his father. Take up your responsibilities."

Remus stopped pacing. He stood before Snape, looking down at him; a muscle in his jaw twitched from suppressed anger, or maybe, fear. "So you want me to move out of here? You want to break the binding? Because I don't. I'm sorry I didn't tell you, but..."

Snape opened his eyes in surprise. "What are you talking about? Did I say anything about you moving out? I have no intention of breaking the binding, I never had, and quite probably never will. I just said you need to look after Teddy. That means he will have to move in with us, and yes, that will change things tremendously."

Remus stood at arm's length from Snape, looking as if he'd just been knocked hard over the head. "You want... you say..." He took a deep breath. "That means no more hot sex on the kitchen table," he finally came up with.

Snape laughed dryly. "Honestly, Remus, when did that happen the last time?"

Slowly, Remus took a step closer. His knees touched Snape's. "This morning?" he said, tilting his head. "Yes, definitely this morning. I clearly remember the cups shattering on the ground."

Snape reached out and caught his wrist, pulled him down until the werewolf was kneeling in front of him. "Precisely," he said softly. "Therefore, we should be able to keep our sex life behind closed doors for a while, don't you think?" Running his thumb over his lover's lips, the tension that had claimed his face and his body left nothing but relief and a deep feeling of gratitude that things had turned out so very right for him.

Remus closed his eyes and leaned into the touch. "Maybe for a little while," he replied. "After all, Teddy will have to see his grandmother every other weekend."

"Good news at last," Snape growled, and then they went to bed, together, as they had done every night since the night a thunderstorm had witnessed their binding.

A/N: Thanks to all of you who read the story although it started in such a dark and cruel way! *hugs all of you*