

A Man's Best Friend

by quaffswinegaily

Severus Snape mourns the death of the werewolf Remus Lupin in the Final Battle.
Why? And how could it involve Hermione Granger?

Mourning

Chapter 1 of 31

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Mourning

Disclaimer: Ms JK Rowling makes all the money; she owns it all.

Can't they leave me to grieve in private? Do I have to attend yet another miserable memorial service? The Golden Trio will be paraded in front of their adoring public. And me? I'll be thrown to the wolves. Ha! The wolves. That's funny, seeing as it's Lupin's memorial service.

He snorted as he recalled the last time he saw Lupin. *That daft wassock.*

The werewolf had fought his way across the battlefield to where Severus was protecting Potter's back as the Boy Who Had The Love duelled with Voldemort. He was closely followed by his rainbow-hued wife. Taking up a stance elbow-to-elbow with Snape, Lupin had turned slightly towards him and yelled to be heard above the roar of the battle.

"Thought you were dead, mate."

"Not yet."

"Good. I would have missed you."

With that, Lupin had hugged Snape fiercely. As he had grasped Snape, a Death Eater's curse had hit him in the back. His mouth and his tawny eyes had flown open wide in surprise.

"Remus!"

Severus had caught him as his body went limp. Gazing deeply into the gentle depths of his eyes, with a quiet *Legilimens* Severus had captured the dying man's last thoughts.

"Tell her... love... 'bye..." Lupin gasped.

With a soft sigh, he was gone. Tonks had shoved Snape aside and had crouched over her husband's crumpled body, crying into his shaggy hair.

Not your best defensive stance, Auror Nymphadora.

Oblivious to the battle in her moment of loss, Tonks had succumbed to an *Avada Kedavra* from Bellatrix, despite Severus's attempts to shield her.

Hot, angry tears pricked Severus's eyes as he remembered. He tried to lift a hand to dash them away. Magical bonds immediately tightened around his wrists. His head dropped forward in frustration. Gripping his knees, he stared at his whitened knuckles. Silent teardrops trickled down his cheeks and dripped from his chin onto the back of his hand.

When the service finished, everyone stood and shuffled out of the hall, passing Severus, who sat at the back of the room flanked by an Azkaban guard and an Auror. He watched the crowd from the corner of his eye. Many stared at him with blatant loathing while others averted their eyes as they passed. Last to leave were the Golden Trio, walking arm-in-arm, deep in a murmured conversation. They glanced at him, and Harry gave him a small nod of acknowledgement.

It was over.

Severus slumped further forwards. Quiet sobs wracked his frame. A trail of mucus elongated from his nose towards his clenched fists.

"Here."

A grubby handkerchief was pressed into his hand.

"Perfect," he snarled. Lifting his head sharply, he glowered at his benefactor.

"You ungrateful—"

"With these manacles on, I cannot reach my own nose to blow it."

She snatched the scrap of linen back from him. Quickly and efficiently, she wiped his eyes and nose before shoving the hanky back into his hand.

"Keep it."

"Spare me your charity, Miss Granger."

"I've had enough use from that hanky. I cried myself dry. You keep it."

"Such a charming gift for your beloved professor," he said, curling his lip as he glared at the tear- and snot-soaked rag in the palm of his hand. He lifted his shaven head and, with as much dignity as he could muster, looked directly at his former pupil, as if waiting for an answer.

"Consider it a thank you present," she muttered. "I'll be speaking in your defence at your trial, Professor."

"I can hardly wait."

He held her eyes for a moment longer before directing his gaze beyond her.

Ducking her head, she turned on her heel, dismissed.

How did it come to this? he wondered as he clutched the dirty scrap in his clenched fist, absent-mindedly thumbing the embroidered monogram on its corner.

A/N: Sunny33 gave me a challenge. Remus is dead and Severus is mourning. Why? Anything prior to Remus's death has to be canon. Hermione should be in there as well. How hard can that be? Here we go...

A Real Dog or a Right Bitch

Chapter 2 of 31

Hogwarts gets a new Potions professor

A Real Dog or a Right Bitch.

Disclaimer: Ms JK Rowling makes shed-loads of money because she owns it all. I make no money from this.

"You've got to see the new Potions teacher, boys. The headmaster said she's just moved here from France. She is an absolute honey!" Sirius Black smacked his lips before letting out a short howl.

Potter laughed. "I bet she's a real dog, Sirius. You have no idea what a real woman is. Anything in a skirt has you sniffing around. You're as bad as Moony here." Boisterously, he elbowed Lupin, who glowered back at him.

"I'm serious, James. She can't be much older than us. And her accent! It's dead cute."

"I heard she's a Mudblood," said James.

"Well, I'd be willing to get down and dirty with her." The boys sniggered.

Severus overheard their conversation as he hung back behind them on his way to the Potions classroom. This was his best subject, and he didn't want an inexperienced teacher, no matter how much those jerks raved about her.

He slunk into the classroom with his head down and slid into the last empty seat next to Lupin. Snape's nose wrinkled in distaste. He hated sitting next to Lupin, with his horrible wet-dog body odour. Peering through his stringy locks, Severus took his time observing the new teacher. He noted her nice figure, wavy, brown hair and soft, caramel eyes. She was pretty enough, but not as beautiful as his golden Lily, he thought.

She looked up, catching him in his observation. Her gaze locked with his, and she gave a small nod of acknowledgement. Severus's eyes slid from the contact, and his cheeks burned with embarrassment. The witch turned and, with a flick of her wand, closed the door.

"Eh, bien! Bonjour, mes étudiants. Je m'appelle Mademoiselle Charmaine Bien-Aimée. Normally, I would start my first lesson with a short speech I learned about potions bewitching the senses but, as you are an advanced Potions class, we will get straight to work."

Her light, French accent lilted across his brain. Luscious lips wrapped themselves around her words. Suddenly, the lips stopped moving and pursed. She looked pointedly at him.

"Monsieur Snape, do I have your full attention?"

"Yes, miss," he breathed. "Completely." He blushed and hid behind his greasy fringe of hair.

With a few sniggers the class settled down to work on the assignment Mlle Bien-Aimée had set.

"Potion samples to the front desk, please," the Potions professor requested at the end of the lesson.

As Snape passed Potter's workbench, carrying a tray of potions, James pushed his book-bag into the passageway with his foot. Severus's toe caught in the strap, and he fell full-length with a grunt. The tray clattered to the ground, and with a tinkle of glass the small bottles shattered on the stone-flagged floor. A faint, acrid smoke and a sticky sludge was all that remained of their work.

"What did you do that for, you gits? Those were my samples too," whinged Lupin, frowning at Snape and Potter.

The class stilled. Everyone looked at Mlle Bien-Aimée expectantly. Her eyes were flinty.

"Potter, leave my classroom."

"It wasn't me, miss. He just tripped."

"Ten points from Gryffindor for lying."

"Bitch!" he muttered under his breath.

"Twenty points from Gryffindor. Get out!"

Mlle Bien-Aimée quietly reminded the rest of the students of their homework requirements and dismissed them.

"Monsieur Lupin and Monsieur Snape, please remain behind."

"I'd stay behind with her any day," Sirius whispered to Lupin as he left the room, leering.

Lily Evans patted Lupin's shoulder as she passed and smiled briefly at Snape. "You'll be fine."

Snape and Lupin slouched to the front of the classroom. They stood round-shouldered, hands in pockets, gazing down at their shabby, scuffed shoes.

"Regardez-moi!"

The boys shuffled uncertainly. Severus sneaked a look from under his drawn-down eyebrows.

"Look at me!"

Cautiously, they raised their eyes. As they straightened up, Snape realised both of them easily towered over their newest teacher.

"Better. Now explain."

The young wizards looked at each other and shrugged.

"Explain what, miss?"

The young woman sighed and rubbed a hand across her forehead. She bit her bottom lip.

"No. You're right. Sit down," she said, indicating the closest workbench. "The headmaster has requested I give both of you special tuition."

"But, Miss Bien-Aimée, we're the top students in Potions. I don't think we need extra tuition," Severus replied haughtily.

"I observed your work during this session. Certainly, you are both adequate."

Lupin huffed.

"Individually, you are good, but if you cooperated you could be better. I have a specific project for you to work on together."

That caught their interest.

"A project, miss?"

"Yes. Wolfsbane."

"No." Lupin paled and shook his head.

"Why would I want to work to help a filthy werewolf?" demanded Snape. He felt a subtle increase in tension from Lupin but ignored him.

"Why wouldn't you?" she asked.

"They're just dumb, dirty animals."

Mlle Bien-Aimée sighed.

"May I suggest you consider the offer overnight. I will speak to you both before your double Potions lesson tomorrow. Meantime, clean up this mess," she said as she stepped carefully around the noxious residue on the floor, "without using your wands."

Withdrawing to her private chambers, Charmaine sat down heavily on the sofa. Distractedly, she chewed on her bottom lip and twiddled with her wand, deep in thought.

This was not going to be as easy as she had hoped. Her instructions were to get the two young wizards to work together, but there appeared to be a gulf of animosity

between them. Shaking her head, she marvelled at Snape's arrogant ignorance.

That's it! He doesn't know about Lupin. How am I going to get this to work?

A/N: Thanks, Sunny33, for the beta work.

Wolfsbane

Chapter 3 of 31

Severus decides whether or not he will work with Remus.

Wolfsbane

Disclaimer: They are all hers, not mine.

Severus was ticked off. He scowled as he tucked into his breakfast of kippers, toast and marmalade.

How dare that witch imply I am merely adequate. She has no idea. I could do the work, but who in their right mind wants to work on Wolfsbane? If I show her some of the alterations I have been making in my Potions book, she might reconsider and let us work on something else.

And Lupin! What's the woman thinking? He is such a non-event of a person; he's so bland. I suppose he might be smart enough, but he should really keep better company, being a Prefect. Those bloody Gryffindor twats.

Snape continued to muse on the Gryffindors, Potter and Black in particular.

They had made his life miserable ever since their first encounter on the Hogwarts Express at the start of first year.

Last year had been the worst, especially the incident when Sirius had lured him to the Shrieking Shack. Potter had only just managed to haul him away from the thrashing branches of the Whomping Willow. Now he owed the jerk a debt.

They had left him alone then, lying Stupefied on the lawn, in the middle of the night. He had listened to the howling from the Shack all night as he watched the willow tree's limbs outlined against the full moon, unable to escape back to the castle.

Arrogant pure-bloods.

He wondered where Lupin had been that night.

Tucked up in bed, no doubt, scared of the full moon or frightened of werewolves, the soft git.

On reflection, he realised Lupin seemed to be more on the periphery of their clique recently, and there were times when he disappeared altogether. Maybe those pure-blood tossers picked on him as well. He was a half-blood after all, the same as Snape. Perhaps it did all come down to blood in the end, like Avery and Mulciber kept telling him.

Now the Potions teacher wanted him to work on Wolfsbane, and he had to give her an answer before his Potions lesson today. He supposed it might be a challenge, especially if she let them do some research and a bit of lab testing. It would be more of a challenge working with someone he didn't really like. His thoughts circled around werewolves and Lupin again.

He paused.

Surely not!

He leaped to his feet and swirled out of the Great Hall.

Who should he talk to about his theory?

Lily. She had always been his confidante.

He couldn't find her in any of her usual spots in the library.

He sighed and started to drift back downstairs. As he rounded a bend in the corridor, he bumped into someone hurrying towards the Gryffindor common room. Lupin grunted and recoiled. He looked haggard and tired. Snape's nose wrinkled reflexively in disgust. A strong, musky odour rolled off Lupin. One would think by the smell of him he lived with a pack of animals. Severus couldn't be bothered trying to be polite, so he pushed past him without a backward glance.

Eventually, he found Lily in a quiet courtyard. Taking a seat next to her on the stone bench, he stretched out his long, skinny legs in the morning sun, leaning back with his hands behind his head.

"What do you reckon, Lil?" he asked after explaining the offer to her.

Before he could take his hands from behind his head, she gave him a quick hug and jumped up from the seat, facing him with excited, shining eyes.

"You're amazing, Severus. Imagine being invited to do research in Potions. I can't believe you didn't say yes straight away. I love you, Severus, but sometimes you need a real kick in the butt."

She was right. Standing up, he placed a hand on her shoulder and kissed the top of her smooth, auburn head in gratitude.

"Thanks, Lil. You're the best friend a guy could have."

"Best friend? Is that all, Severus?"

"Yes... No! What I mean is..."

"Boys! You're all hopeless," she muttered.

Turning on her heel, she stomped away from him, shaking her coppered mane.

"Lily, wait!" he called after her, but she strode on, ignoring him. Shrugging, he turned towards the dungeons in confusion. He hadn't had a chance to ask her about Lupin.

The Potions classroom door was ajar as Severus approached prior to his next lesson. He could hear someone moving things around inside.

Knocking quietly, he heard no answer. He hesitated briefly, then he eased himself around the edge of the heavy door.

Muffled muttering emanated from the Potions store room, piquing his interest. Peering into the small, multi-shelved room, he saw a pair of bare feet close to his eye level. Their owner was on tiptoe on the top rung of a ladder. As his eyes trailed upwards, he noted the shapely calves, then up past the creamy backs of a pair of knees, which lead his gaze higher. He realised he had an unobstructed view right up the short skirt of the delectable Mademoiselle, who was at the top of a step ladder vigorously cleaning shelves the Muggle way. Her blouse strained and clung to the curve underneath her breast as she stretched to pick up the final jar from the end of the top shelf.

He swallowed nervously and took a step backwards, trying to leave before she noticed him. His foot caught on a stack of cauldrons, knocking them over with a resounding clang.

Charmaine flinched, startled just at the tipping point, causing the ladder to wobble.

"Hold the legs," she yelped.

Severus lunged forwards and took a firm grip around her bare legs, catching her unceremoniously as the witch, ladder and jar crashed earthwards. A cacophony of splintering glass smashed around them. Her smooth, bare legs slid through his encircling arms until her fall arrested with his hands around her hips. He lowered her the remaining short distance to the ground.

Quickly, he removed his hands from the warm, smooth skin under her skirt. As she pulled down the hem of her rucked-up clothing, he surreptitiously pressed the palms of his hands together, savouring the subsiding sensation of her on his skin.

She performed a quick *Evanesco* before slipping on her shoes.

"I knew it was you, Severus. I could smell you," she said, without turning round.

Furtively, he sniffed and tucked his sensitised hands into his armpits protectively.

"I meant for you to hold the legs of the ladder, you know. I am a competent witch and wouldn't have fallen or hurt myself."

"Indeed, miss."

Spinning around, she looked up at him. In the enclosed space, he was much closer than she had expected, and he loomed over her. It caught her by surprise, and, before she realised what she was doing, she lifted a hand up to his face. Her eyes travelled from where her hand rested on his cheek to his lips and up to his eyes.

"Oh! Severus, you are so..." *Young... innocent... unmarked.*

A noise from the classroom disrupted the moment. Hastily, she withdrew her hand and looked down. "Sorry. Em, Monsieur Snape, thank you for your aid, anyway." She stepped past him and into the classroom. "Ah, Mr Lupin, good to see you."

Snape took his hands from his armpits and stared at them.

What the hell happened there?

He lifted his palms to his nose; her honey scent clung to them. Inhaling deeply, he stepped out of the store room.

A/N: Thanks to sunny33 for her wonderful beta work.

Working Like A Dog

Chapter 4 of 31

Severus uses the 'M' word.

Working Like a Dog

Disclaimer: I am not the owner; Ms Rowling is.

Severus thought the meeting with the Potions mistress and Lupin would be embarrassing after catching her in the potions cupboard, but she was the quintessential professional and acted as if nothing had happened.

Lupin's expression was mutinous. He recounted how Professor Dumbledore had advised him he had to take the extra tuition in order to make up for lost time. He had laid it on the line. No extra Potions sessions, no internal course assessment pass, no choice; it was unfair.

Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée agreed. *That manipulative old coot.*

Outlining her plans for their studies, she suggested they start the work. Perhaps the two of them could prove their worth. Neither was happy with the situation, but they put up no further objections to working on Wolfsbane.

Snape had never had a study companion before, and, despite his initial reservations, he actually started to enjoy working with Lupin. They spent hours in the library

researching. Huge tomes piled up around them as they pored over all the texts they could find that mentioned Wolfsbane. They discussed the pros and cons of various ingredients and preparation techniques. Snape appreciated Lupin's quiet confidence and clear thinking.

Twice during the term, Lupin excused himself from their study sessions. Each time, he returned from his break quiet and tired instead of refreshed as Severus had expected after respite from their heavy work load. When Snape enquired about his apparent fatigue after his second absence, Lupin shrugged and looked away.

"I'm as good as can be expected. It's hard for me this year. My old friends are getting more involved with girls and have less time to support me."

"Can I help?" asked Snape.

"Sure! You can put all your effort into our Wolfsbane project." Lupin's smile was fleeting.

"Is there something you want to tell me, Lupin?"

"Not today, Severus. I need a rest." Yawning widely, Remus rose from the study bench and shuffled towards his dormitory. Snape gave him a long, assessing look as he left.

The more time he spent studying with Lupin, the less time he had with Lily. He really missed her sunny presence as a counterbalance to his own dour nature. She, in turn, spent more time with her fellow Gryffindors. He tried to warn her off Potter and Black; he didn't trust them.

"You realise they're both pure-bloods and they look down on half-bloods like me and Muggle-borns like you, Lily."

"You're wrong, Severus. They're only teasing you."

He glowered. She always stood up for them faithfully.

"Take care, Lil. I don't want to see you get hurt."

She slapped him playfully and called him a big softy. Somehow, that didn't bother him when it came from her.

As the winter term wore on, Snape spent more time in the Potions laboratory. Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée took care to double check their suggested changes for the Wolfsbane and made a few recommendations for them to follow up.

Sometimes, he found himself watching the Potions mistress's hands more than necessary. They were small and dexterous, chopping neatly and stirring smoothly as she demonstrated at the front of the class. Fleeting, he wondered what she had been thinking when she had touched his face in the store room, but he couldn't imagine what had been on her mind. She never touched him again, but there were times he had the feeling she was watching him more closely than his fellow students.

His current musings were interrupted by Potter, who leaned back and 'accidentally' knocked his sample off the bench with his elbow.

"Oh, dear me! Watch what you're doing, Snivellus. You'll lose house points for clumsiness like that."

Severus gritted his teeth and growled at him. "At least I'll be taking the prettiest girl to the Yule ball next week, Snotter."

"Don't count on it, Snivellus. That Mudblood is mine," Potter countered threateningly.

"Mudblood?" Severus snarled, shocked by James's callous remark.

"Potter! Snape! Which of you just used that loathsome word?" demanded Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée. Everyone's heads snapped up to look at their teacher. Sparking energy was radiating from the witch in front of them.

"It was Severus, miss. He just called you a Mudblood. I told him not to be so rude." Potter gave the teacher a saccharine smile. She swept past him to stand in front of Severus. James turned and sneered at Snape as soon as she couldn't see him. Snape swallowed drily.

"Well?" she demanded.

Snape's mouth gaped open and shut in silence.

"Class dismissed," she said abruptly. "Monsieur Snape, remain behind."

Lily scarcely looked at him as she left the room. "I can't believe you said that, Severus."

Her quiet words wounded him.

Severus closed his eyes. *James effing Potter!*

He slammed out of the dungeon classroom soon after, rage swirling through him. Taking the stairs three at a time, he hurried to escape. Severus shoved open the castle's outer doors and strode out into the howling gale. He scowled up into the face-stinging, lashing rain, his mood as black as the looming clouds.

He had really stuffed up. Lily wouldn't speak to him. The Potions mistress had docked an enormous number of house points and cautioned him, but at least she had listened to his explanation. Why wouldn't his Lily listen to him?

He roared into the wind in frustration. Lifting his arms heavenwards, jagged streaks of uninhibited magic shot up to meet the forking lightning. Waves of energy shimmered around his angular frame as angry tears coursed down his soaked cheeks, mingling with the rain.

Unobserved at an upstairs window, Mlle Bien-Aimée watched the powerful display. Leaning her forehead against the rain-misted glass pane, she whispered, "Poor Severus. It's only going to get tougher. Be strong."

She noticed the ragged figure of Remus Lupin dodging out of the castle entrance and approaching the raging wizard warily. He placed a calming hand on Snape's shuddering shoulders, drawing the distraught young man into a brief hug before coaxing him back indoors.

A/N: As always, thanks to sunny33 for all her help.

Dances With Wolves

Chapter 5 of 31

The Yule Ball has its moments.

Dances with Wolves

Disclaimer: Sorry, JKR. I'm making a real hash with your characters. I'll try to sort them out later.

On the night of the Yule Ball, Severus had no partner. Lily still hadn't spoken to him. He stood, half-hidden in the shadows of the Entrance Hall, watching the elegant Miss Evans descend the main staircase in a golden glow. As she reached the last step, James Potter moved into Snape's line of vision, holding a hand out to Lily and drawing her into the Great Hall. Lily glanced back over her shoulder as she went through the doorway, giving Severus a small, apologetic smile.

Severus eased back into the shadows, scowling deeply, a tight constriction in his chest. Still watching the now empty doorway, he jumped when he heard Dumbledore right beside him.

"When you have finished checking the alcoves for errant students, Mr Snape, please make your way into the Great Hall for the festivities."

Bloody, twinkling festivities.

Severus skulked around the edges of the hall all evening, watching Lily dance enthusiastically with one Gryffindor after the next. She laughed as she danced with Lupin gangling beside her, hair flopping in his smiling eyes. As the music finished, Lupin took her hand and started to drag her towards Snape.

"You two have got to talk," Remus said.

Severus pushed off the wall he had been slouching against and stepped forward to meet them. Just then, the final dance was called.

"The mistletoe has been enchanted. Everyone pair up for the Grand Old Wizard of Jorvik," called the Master of Ceremonies.

To Snape's dismay, Black edged in front of him, barring his way.

"Back off. She's not yours, you poltroon," growled Sirius.

James Potter took Lily's arm to guide her back onto the dance floor. He smirked at Snape, mouthing "Mine" as he brushed past.

Severus stood rooted to the spot, glaring. Everyone paired up on the floor, leaving Snape standing alone on the sidelines. Cheeks flushed with the affront, he turned to leave the hall but was stopped by a gentle tap on his arm.

"Monsieur Snape, would you do me the pleasure?"

His heart sinking, he sighed and nodded.

Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée made her way to the same group as Lupin, Potter and Lily, with Snape lagging in her wake. As she took her place in the dance line facing him, she gave him a reassuring nod.

Lily and Potter were the couple at the top of the set. As they split and danced down the sides of their set, leading the others behind them, Potter fixed Snape with an aggressive stare. The couple formed an arch with their arms for all the others to pass under. As couples passed underneath, Lily and James were supposed to lower their arch to catch couples, who had to kiss to be released, but Potter held their arms aloft until the very last couple. Potter winked to Sirius when Severus and Charmaine approached, and he dropped the arch over them. Enchanted mistletoe appeared magically above their heads.

"Kissy-kissy," taunted Potter.

"Ha! You're a snivelling coward, Snape."

Pettigrew laughed.

Seething with embarrassment, Severus turned to push his way out of James' and Lily's encircling arms. A light touch on his sleeve stopped him. Gently, a fingertip on the side of his defiantly raised chin turned him back towards Charmaine, bringing his ear very close to her lips.

"You are not a coward, Severus Snape," she murmured.

As he gazed past her towards Lily, he fought back tears of humiliation. Maintaining eye contact with Lily, he bent slightly and brushed a feather-light kiss on the professor's lips. A flare of magical energy tingled across his lips. Caught by surprise, he looked down into Charmaine's honey eyes, catching a flicker of sighing thought... *Severus!*... accompanied by a sensation of profound sadness, longing, and *warmth*? There was a brief vision of a dark-haired wizard flying towards him with a hand outstretched.

She closed her eyes abruptly and dropped her head.

"Never do that again without asking," she snapped before breaking out of the circle and striding out of the room without looking back, her wavy hair bouncing with each angry step.

Black howled with laughter as Snape was left standing alone in the centre of the crowd, staring after the departing professor with a finger pressed to his still tingling lips.

A/N: Thanks again sunny33 for the beta work.

1. Jorvik = York, England

2. The Grand Old Duke of York is a simple dance much used at school ceilidhs. The boys and girls pair off, forming a double line, boys on one side and girls on the other, facing each other. The first couple dance down and up through the middle of the set, then the boy turns out and goes down the outside of the boys' row, followed in a chain

by the other boys while the girl goes down the outside of the girls' row, followed by all the girls. When they reach the far end, the first couple face each other, join hands and make an arch with their arms, under which all the other couples have to pass. The couple making the arch try to bring their arms down around a passing couple and capture them; caught couples can only escape if they kiss.

How come the greasy gits I had to kiss at my school ceillidhs were just greasy gits and not powerful wizards in training? Sunny says it's because Severus hadn't been invented, back in the dark ages, when I was at school.

Dog Days

Chapter 6 of 31

Dumbledore has a word.

Dog days

Disclaimer: No characters were hurt in the making of this story.

The Christmas holidays had been miserable for Severus. He'd spent a horrible time in a bleak, cold house in the bosom of his dysfunctional, arguing family. The relationship with his parents was strained. Money was tight, and his father had made it clear he expected Severus to get a proper job when he left school in a few months; he would not support Severus if he did not give up his connections with the magical community. Tobias's irritability grew as their finances dwindled. Severus's mother cowered in the kitchen, whispering her blessings and crying as she stroked her son's sulking head. At the end of the holiday, Snape left Spinner's End with few regrets, glad he would not have to return for another Christmas.

He returned to Hogwarts with some trepidation.

On the one hand, Lily had not owed him during the holidays, and he missed her. He hoped he would get the chance to make amends with her soon. Lupin had tried to intercede for him but with no luck so far. He actually looked forward to catching up with Lupin to discuss a few changes he wanted to make to their research. The more time they had spent working together, the more they had talked, and Lupin's dry wit had become apparent. More than once, they had been shushed by Madam Pince when one of Lupin's wry comments had started them snickering behind their books in the library.

On the other hand, he had received an owl from the headmaster requesting a meeting to discuss *something Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée has brought to my attention*.

Now, as Severus stood at the bottom of the headmaster's staircase, his stomach roiled with anxiety. Which indiscretion was he in trouble for? Was it the store cupboard incident, the name calling or the kiss? He touched his finger to his mouth again as he recalled the zingy-honey sensation of her lips on his.

You are not a coward, Severus Snape. He gathered his courage and muttered the password to the gargoyle.

As he stepped into the headmaster's office, Professor Dumbledore approached him with open arms, beaming.

"Severus, my boy, thank you for coming. Come in and sit down."

Snape sat on the offered chair with his head lowered, awaiting his punishment.

"Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée can't be here this evening because she has to prepare for the full moon. She has brought to my attention something that happened at the Yule Ball, which she wishes me to discuss with you."

Severus knew what was coming. His shoulders slumped in expectation of a discussion about appropriate behaviour from senior students followed by humiliation with twinkles. It had been only a brief kiss which he couldn't avoid. In fact, as he recalled it, she had invited him to join the dance.

"How long have you been a Legilimens, Severus?"

Snape's head snapped up to look at Dumbledore, who was standing in front of him.

"Pardon?" He had no idea what the barmy old duffer was rabbiting on about.

"Which spell did you use to enter Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée's thoughts?" the headmaster asked.

"Spell? I've no idea what you are talking about, sir," Snape replied, confused.

Dumbledore looked at him speculatively, stroking his beard.

"Hmm. So you are a natural Legilimens, just as she thought. Good. Good! This could be very useful." He rubbed his hands together and started to pace up and down the room.

Snape watched the Headmaster's prowling, perplexed.

"It appears you have an unusual skill, young lad. Legilimency is usually performed using your wand and spellwork. Being able to read another's thoughts without casting a spell is very rare indeed and usually only occurs between people who are intimate." Dumbledore paused in his pacing, giving Snape a questioning look. "You haven't... No, no... She would have told me," he muttered.

"You will meet with me fortnightly for private tuition to hone these natural skills. You can go now, Mr Snape; we will start next week. I will answer any questions you have at our first meeting."

Dismissed, Snape got up to leave. Dumbledore called to him as he put a hand on the door knob.

"Severus, I advise you should always ask before you enter someone's mind. It's polite, like knocking even if the door is open."

Leaning against the stone wall at the bottom of the stairs, Severus's mind raced.

A Legilimens? What did that mean? Had he actually read his professor's mind? If he had, he didn't understand what she had been thinking.

He needed to talk to someone. Normally it would be Lily, but she still wasn't talking to him, the sulky bint. Lupin would be a good sounding board, but he had done another vanishing trick.

Mademoiselle was an option. She knew already, but he didn't feel comfortable with the idea. Besides, the headmaster had said she was busy.

Instead, he set off for the library to do some research, head down, brow furrowed, deep in thought. Rounding a corner, he walked straight into James Potter and his Gryffindor cronies. He hurriedly tried to back track, but was soon surrounded.

"Where are you going, Snivellus?" asked Potter, getting right up into Snape's personal space.

"Nowhere."

"Right. You're going nowhere. A useless half-blood like you will never get anywhere."

"Guess where we're going, Snape." Black sneered in his face.

"To hell, with any luck," he muttered.

"Wrong! Bad luck. Guess again," taunted Pettigrew.

"Enlighten me." Snape sighed. "The suspense is killing me."

"James and I are on the school Quidditch team, and we're going to play in Moravia," Black boasted.

"Moravia?"

"Are you deaf or daft? We're playing the Moravian Mistixs."

"I think you'll find the national team for Moravia is the Chequered Eagles. The Moravian Mistixs on the other hand are—"

"Shut it, half-breed!" Three wands were pointed at his face. "We didn't ask you for a lecture, you wassock. You didn't even make the team, loser."

Their laughter eventually died away as they left him in the deserted corridor; his only started after they had gone.

A/N: Blank.

"What, no smartass comment?" asked my beta, Sunny33.

No, none. I'll leave that to the boys.

Fly Boy

Chapter 7 of 31

Moravia?

Fly Boy

Disclaimer: I'll bring them in from the cold when I'm done.

"Moravia?" Snape chuckled hoarsely to himself, leaning against the cold prison wall and wrapping his thin blanket tighter around his body. "The Mistixs play in the North of Scotland. Had those Quidditch freaks never heard of the Moravian Macbeth Manoeuvre?"

*

A keen, biting wind raced down from the Arctic, tore the clouds to shreds across the Moray Firth and snuck an icy finger inside Snape's collar. It buffeted the miserable Quidditch players haphazardly, forcing them to cling tighter to their brooms with cold-chapped hands.

Severus sat in the stands next to Charmaine Bien-Aimée. She had asked Lupin and him to attend the match with her, after which they were going to collect some potions ingredients from an area close by. Lupin had cried off when he found out the date of the match, wafting his hands in big, descriptive circles as he gave some lame excuse for not attending. To Snape's surprise, his professor didn't seem to mind and even wished him a safe transition.

Mlle Bien-Aimée shivered a little beside him as the wind tugged her hair this way and that.

"You could cast a Warming Charm if you are cold, miss," suggested Severus as he pulled a strand of her wild hair from his mouth. *A Hair Binding Charm wouldn't go amiss either.*

"Stop fussing, Severus," she said, patting his knee distractedly without looking at him.

"Indeed, miss," he replied, watching her mittened hand tapping his leg with some alarm. He was uncertain whether to leave it or remove it from his person.

"Let's go now. The match is nearly finished. First, we'll gather the ingredients, and then we'll have a bit of Muggle fun. We are going to warm your soul, Severus Snape. You will have to Side-Along Apparate with me."

On arriving at the rough, windswept beach, Charmaine did not let go of Severus's arm immediately. She leaned slightly onto him to aid her balance as they walked over the rocky foreshore.

Severus liked the bleak beach with the wind nipping spume off the sea. Drawing his cloak around him against the chill, he felt at ease as he gazed out over the grey, choppy waves. He took a deep, cleansing breath and patted the hand resting on his arm.

"It's nice out here, isn't it, Lil?"

The hand withdrew from his arm abruptly.

Severus looked down at the woman beside him and felt a little wrong-footed to see a brunette instead of a red-head at his side.

"I'm sorry, miss. I was just thinking how much I like it here. As you said, it soothes the soul. I thought Lily might like it too, but on reflection she probably wouldn't. She's changed this year, or maybe I have." He looked out over the roughened water as he spoke. "We used to be best friends, but she hardly speaks to me anymore and... I miss her."

There was a slight catch in his voice, and Severus felt his eyes misting a little, but did not feel embarrassed. Even though she wasn't looking at him, he knew the witch at his side was listening.

"She spends more and more time with Potter and Black, and I don't like them much. I think they're a bad influence on her."

"Hard times are coming, Severus," she said, laying her hand back on his arm. "Your friendships and your loves will be sorely tested. You can't live your life with regrets about what might have been with Lily."

Frowning, he did not want to acknowledge the truth of what she was saying: that his Lily was slipping away from him. He loved Lily.

Looking at the witch beside him, he noticed a quiet tear sliding down her wind-pinked cheek. Brushing the tear away, she turned towards him, but would not meet his eye. He realised she was worried he might invade her thoughts again.

"I'm... I'm sorry for what I did at the Yule Ball. It was an accident." Gazing down on her riotous curls, he laid a hand on her shoulder. "You can look at me, miss. I won't do that mind thing again without asking. I promise. With the lessons Dumbledore has given me, my control has improved heaps. Why didn't you teach me yourself, if you recognised my skill?"

Shaking her head vigorously, she looked him in the eye. "It's not something I could teach you, Severus. I'm not a Legilimens, nor am I a very good Occlumens. There are things I know, and things in my memory, you should never see. It would do you no good."

She smiled amiably. "Now, let's go. We have work to do and our souls to warm."

She turned away from the windswept shore and into the shelter of the trees. He tagged along behind her as she talked about the potions ingredients she was gathering. She explained how, here at Findhorn, the Muggles lived at one with nature, working the land organically and deriving spiritual energy from the earth. He was a bit sceptical about the Energy Restoring Charms she performed, but he couldn't help admiring the quality of the ingredients they collected, and he felt an accumulating peace as they worked. The breadth of her knowledge fascinated him. His mind wandered from his task as he watched her animated expression.

They fell into an easy rhythm, with her cutting, collecting and chatting, and Severus working beside her bundling, storing and listening. When they had gathered sufficient stock, Mlle Bien-Aimée shrank the jars and packages into a small box, which she tucked into her cloak.

"Enough work, now for some fun." She took hold of his elbow and Apparated them to another spot not far along the coast.

Severus watched, intrigued, as Charmaine stood on a small paved area between the road and the sea. She peered off into the distance inland, tense and obviously waiting for something. Suddenly, he heard an enormous, rumbling roar. The noise increased and approached fast. Alarmed, he followed Charmaine's gaze and was horrified to see an aeroplane accelerating towards them.

She lifted her hands and clamped them over her ears. Severus could not see her face, but could just about hear her scream above the increasing roar of the rapidly advancing plane. Believing she was in danger and frightened, on instinct he reached around her, enfolding her protectively in his arms and pulling her back against him. Deep thrumming in his chest built as the Air Force jet took off over the top of them. He lifted his head and watched as it went.

The thrum in his chest did not stop after the plane had gone, and he became conscious that he still held his Potions mistress close to his body. She turned in his arms and looked up at him with a broad grin on her face. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes sparkling.

"Wow! Wasn't that a buzz?"

"Yes, miss," he replied, dropping his arms and his gaze self-consciously and taking a step back. "It must be a buzz to fly like that, though I think flying on a broom is more exciting. Wouldn't it be amazing if you could fly unaided?"

"You can... You... You could..." She stumbled over her words.

She took a deep breath and finished. "I can teach you, if you want. It's easy. All you need to do is take a couple of strides and gently push off from the ground with your feet, pushing down slightly with the hands. Like this."

Demonstrating, she stepped towards the sea and gently rose into the air, turning gracefully to land again in front of him.

"Come on. Have a go."

Severus strode towards the sea. Pushing off from the ground, he leapt high into the air. With a lurch and a splash, he landed at the water's edge. He cursed at his wet feet.

"Try again," she said, quietly casting a spell to dry his shoes.

Scowling, he returned to his start point and tried again. This time pushing harder with his long legs, shoving all his teenage anger and hurt into the motion, he surged into the air, only to land further into the rolling waves. He waded back to shore and slumped on the beach to empty the water from his trainers.

"I can't do this." His shoulders hunched as he angrily shook the last drops from his shoes.

"Try leaving your shoes off next time."

Standing up with a frustrated huff, he dug his long toes into the cold sand. He could feel the energy from the earth seeping up through the soles of his bare feet as he collected his thoughts for a third attempt. Taking a couple of long strides, he pushed off, feeling his own magic propel him upwards. He lifted off the ground with arms windmilling and legs flailing.

"Yes!" He laughed.

Losing concentration, he plunged into the frigid waters. He coughed and spluttered as he surfaced, grinning broadly.

"Now, that was a buzz!"

He shivered as he waded out of the sea towards her.

"Viens ici! Tu as froid."

"One more attempt before I die of hypothermia."

"Severus, you're a wizard. Cast a Warming Impervious Charm."

He smiled shyly at her. "Can you help me with that one, mademoiselle? I'm a Potions man, not a charmer."

"Not a charmer?" She snorted.

With a little, intricate wave of her wand, he was soon dry and warm.

"Once more?"

This time she took off ahead of him and turned to face him, holding an encouraging hand out. He could see her breath coming in short, steamy plumes. She brimmed with energy, magic vibrating and sparking from her as she floated away from him. He could hardly believe how stunning she looked. Smiling, she motioned for him to follow. He had to catch up with her.

Pushing off firmly, he soared into the air. Severus steadied himself with his arms before concentrating on catching up with Charmaine. With arms outstretched and a delighted grin on his face, he flew towards her. The keen wind blew his dark hair back as he picked up speed.

Catching her hand as he approached, his fingertips tingled where they came in contact with her skin. His forward momentum whirled her round, and they spun together upwards through the air.

"Yes! I did it! I can fly!" he shouted with delight.

"Severus, you're brilliant! I knew you could."

He looked down at the young witch as they floated back to earth. This beautiful woman thought he was brilliant *Charming Charmaine!* Her rich, honeyed scent invaded his senses. His soul warmed. Gently tucking a windswept lock of hair behind her ear, he bent to kiss her smiling lips and felt a swirling surge in the pit of his stomach.

A/N: Thank again to sunny33 for the beta.

1. Most famous Moravian: Macbeth, who was Mormaer of Moray.
2. Findhorn Foundation, Morayshire, has had a spiritual community since the 60s.
3. You can stand at the end of the RAF runway at Kinloss and watch the jets take off over your head. It is a real buzz.

Blue Moon

Chapter 8 of 31

Love and the 'M' word.

Blue Moon

Disclaimer: Ms Rowling owns them all.

Severus stumbled gracelessly as his feet hit the ground. He lurched and reached out his hand for support, catching hold of the iron bars of Hogwarts' main gate. Nausea swirled in the pit of his stomach. Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée was already several feet away and running towards the school.

"Hurry, Severus," Charmaine called to him. "I'm late."

Ignoring his rising nausea, he caught up with her, with easy, loping strides as she jogged up the hill.

"Late, for what?"

"For Remus."

She shoved the shrunken box of samples into his hand when they reached the castle. Hurriedly explaining how to bypass the Whomping Willow, she urged him to take the potions ingredients to the lab as quickly as possible before joining her down the tunnel under the old tree. Severus shot off on his errand, while Mlle Bien-Aimée ran to meet Lupin.

Trotting down the path to the big willow, Snape tried to figure out what happened when he touched the Potions mistress. Each time he came in contact with her skin, he experienced the same tingling sensation, and his senses were overwhelmed by a glow of calming warmth. Even if he didn't touch her, when he got close enough to smell her, Charmaine's honeyed scent subtly entered his subconscious. He was hit with a sudden moment of clarity.

"Oh Merlin! I fancy my professor." He groaned, slowing his pace. *And I tried to kiss her. Shit, I really stuffed that up. She must think I'm a right dork. And what about Lily? Lily will kill me. She has always been the one for me. What do I do now?*

"I'll talk to her."

Carefully, he negotiated the tree's raging limbs without injury. He shuffled, crouched over, down the dank, earthen tunnel. Making for the dim light at the tunnel's end, he heard raised voices. He stopped just outside the half-open door, listening.

"You left me alone." Lupin snarled.

"I'm here now, Remus. I was just a bit late."

"You were with Snape, weren't you?" he growled. "I can smell him on you."

"You know I was. I won't deny it."

"You told me you would look after me and wouldn't leave me alone. You said you loved me." Lupin whined.

Severus heard a long sigh.

"I do love you, Remus. I will care for you for as long as I can."

Clamping his hand over his mouth, Severus stifled a gasp. He turned away from the door and ran half-crouched, back down the corridor and out into the fresh air. He flung himself onto the damp grass.

She loved Remus. How had he missed that? What an idiot he had been. Severus slammed his palm on the ground and shook his head.

Inside the shack, Charmaine shut Remus into his barred enclosure.

"Stop giving me grief, you mangy cur," she chided him, teasingly. "You always get so grumpy at this stage. Every month it's the same. I've already explained how things are. I love you to death, you daft werewolf, but only as a friend. You know I'll stick with you. I was sent to look after you, and young Severus, for as long as I can."

Sighing wearily, she slid down the wall and sat on the floor watching Remus. "I wish Severus had come tonight. I could have done with his company through this vigil."

She winced when Lupin howled in pain. Though the transformations were easier with the improved Wolfsbane, it was still hard to watch. How much harder it must be for Remus to bear. She cursed his old friends who had reneged on their youthful promises of help.

Meanwhile, on the lawn outside, Severus heard the rising howls and covered his ears to block them out. With his hands still clamped to the sides of his head, he rose and walked, with long angry strides, down to the lakeshore, planning to spend some quiet time alone with his thoughts. He had to figure out what was going on. Finding an empty bench, he sat down. Elbows on knees, head in hands, glowering out over the water, his mood reflected by the sullen loch.

A sharp tap on his shoulder startled him.

"What are you doing here, Snivellus?"

"Nothing."

"Exactly! Shift. We need this bench."

"I was here first, Pettigrew."

"James has a romantic, moonlight rendezvous with Lily arranged. Shove off!"

Snape stood up to face the Gryffindor bullies, but they already had their wands drawn and rapidly hoisted him into the air by his undies.

"Put me down," he yelled as his knickers wedged up his bum.

"I don't think so."

"Potter, you need to stop this now."

"Stop what?"

"You are only pursuing Lily to get at me."

"You could be right," James agreed. "Don't get in a flap, though. I've come to find her flaming beauty quite attractive, despite her lack of breeding."

"Potter, you are such a hypocrite. You called her a Mudblood." Snape swung to and fro, trying to get his feet back in contact with the ground.

"Sorry, what was that you said?"

"You said—" He took a breath and tried to turn round in the air. "—Lily Evans is a Mudblood." He swung back round, and his heart plummeted as Lily's shocked face appeared amid the other Gryffindor's.

"Lily!"

Her eyes filled with tears and she shook her head. "How could you? I loved you, Severus."

Behind her, James Potter smirked and took hold of her shoulders. "Forget him, my gilded Lily," he murmured in her ear. "He's no good."

James turned her around and, taking a hand, drew her away towards the castle.

"No! Lily!" Severus shouted after them.

Black and Pettigrew ended their spells abruptly, sending Severus crashing to the ground. Running away laughing, they left him on the lakeshore.

Miserable tears ran down Snape's nose, dripping onto the ground as he pressed his forehead to the cold earth and wept, his fingers curling into the rough grass.

A/N: Sunny33 has done another great beta job.

A Dog's Life

Chapter 9 of 31

Time for a chat.

A Dog's Life

Disclaimer: None of the characters are mine, nor is any of the dosh.

"Budge up, Severus," said Remus, dumping his potions ingredients onto the workbench. He gave Snape an appraising look. "Blimey, mate! You look as bad as I feel this morning. What happened to you?"

Severus glared at him with red-rimmed eyes. He had spent the night outside the Gryffindor dormitory trying to apologise to Lily.

"Keep your hair on, Sev. I was just asking."

Remus started separating leaves from stalks on the bench.

"These are great plants you picked yesterday, Severus." Lupin chatted as he worked. "Did you two have a good day without me? Charmaine seemed to have enjoyed herself. She's gone for a quick kip just now. We had a rough night."

"I'm sure you did, Lupin, but I fail to see why I should be interested."

"Charmaine wanted you there last night, so she could tell you about me."

"I know all about you, Lupin," Severus sneered.

"You do?" Remus sounded pleased as he looked up to find Snape's black eyes boring into him. "Well, that's great, because I just wanted to say, what we've been doing has changed my life dramatically. I haven't felt so good in years."

Flicking his sandy hair out of his eyes, Lupin grinned.

"Spare me the details. I have no wish to hear about your dalliance with the Potions professor."

"What?"

"Lupin, I overheard the two of you last night." Snape's voice hitched just a little. "She told you she loved you," he whispered.

"Are you barking mad, Severus?"

"No. I heard it."

Remus's eyes crinkled with mirth as he started to snigger. "You crack me up, mate."

Severus glowered from behind his unwashed fringe. "Don't mock me, Lupin."

Throwing an arm around Snape's rigid shoulders, Remus gave him a quick hug.

"Stop mumping, Snape. Charmaine will get the sack if you spread that rumour. You picked up fag-ends of a conversation, and you're smoking them the wrong way round. Now, let me explain."

It took a while for Remus to explain about his lycanthropy. He worked as he spoke, sometimes emphasising a point with his stirring rod and occasionally pausing to let Severus ask questions. Only when he had finished did he look at Snape. Expecting to see disdain or disgust, he was surprised to see a look of intense contemplation on Severus's face.

"Merlin, your life has been as miserable as mine, Lupin. I don't often apologise, but I truly am sorry."

"Sorry for what, Sev? Sorry for my condition, or sorry for being a miserable git? Neither of those will change in a hurry, though you could work on improving them."

"Peace?" asked Snape, extending a hand.

"Mates," agreed Lupin, grasping the offered hand firmly and pulling Severus in for another hug. "You can call me Remus, if we're friends."

"Over my dead body, Lupin. Or yours, if you don't let me go," replied Snape through gritted teeth.

Remus grinned and ruffled Snape's hair.

"Keep your paws off me, wolfman."

"Chill out, you crabbit beggar."

"If I were any more chilled, Lupin, I would be frigid."

Remus choked on a laugh. "I'm saying nothing, Severus. C'mon, let's finish up here, my friend. I have some Honeydukes chocolates which need to be eaten before I get back to my dormitory. Better to share them between the two of us rather than the whole Gryffindor common room, eh?"

Severus savoured a spicy ginger chocolate as they tidied up. Soon, they were leaving the laboratory and heading for their dormitories.

"D'you fancy coming into Hogsmeade next weekend?" asked Lupin unwrapping another sweet. "I'm going to meet up with some of the guys who left school last year. They've all enlisted with Voldemort, who used to be at Hogwarts. He seems to be accepting all sorts, even half-bloods like us. Anyone who's interested is invited to join them. They call themselves Death Eaters, which seems grim enough to appeal to you. I've heard they hold revels. Sounds like they could be fun."

"Fun?"

"Heaven forbid, you should have fun, you antisocial wizard. You could just come along and catch up with the Slytherin old boys. Lucius Malfoy will be there. He's a bit of an arrogant prat, but no more than any of the other pure-bloods. You used to be friends with him when he was at school, didn't you?"

"If I agree to go, will you stop yapping and let me enjoy this chocolate?"

"Sure," agreed Remus, melting his chocolate in his mouth then sucking the brown goo in and out through his teeth. Severus shuddered, trying to shut out the image and enjoy his luscious treat in peace. Nearing the end of the corridor, Severus remembered his Potions book.

"Damn! I'll have to go back. See you later, Lupin." Turning, he tucked his last chocolate into his pocket and headed back the way he'd come.

He pushed open the Potions lab door and strode into the room in a swirl of robes, stopping abruptly at the sight of Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée.

She stood in the middle of the room with his Potions book held to her nose, eyes closed, inhaling deeply. The hands holding the journal shook slightly, and a single tear glistened on the tip of her eyelashes.

"Oh gods!" she moaned. "This is going to be so hard. I know what's coming. Why did you choose to send me? I can't do this. I'm not brave enough." She sniffed, clutching the book closer. "I can smell you, and I need..."

"Excuse me, miss."

The book clattered to the floor. Startled caramel eyes met his.

"Severus! What are you doing here?"

Stooping, Snape picked up his book from the floor at her feet. "I just came to collect this."

She turned away from him, resting her trembling hands on the work bench. Tears coursed silently down her cheeks, and her slender shoulders shook. A nimbus of swirling energy shimmered around her.

Uncertain what to do, Severus cleared his throat. "Are you all right, miss?"

He placed a tentative hand on her shaking shoulder, feeling an electrifying surge of magic through his fingers. To his immense surprise, she nearly knocked him backwards as she flung herself at him, clinging desperately to his robes.

"I don't want this," she wailed into his chest.

Bewildered, he held his hands away from her for a moment, trying to lean back and look at her before giving up and slowly folding his arms around her quivering form, drawing her into his protective embrace. Smoothing a hand over her bounteous curls, he murmured in her ear, "Whatever it is, it may help to talk about it."

She snorted a strangled, sobbing laugh.

"Just hold me, Severus." She took a long, shaky breath, leaning her flushed cheek on his chest. "You've always smelled so good. It's very soothing."

Burying his nose in her wild hair, he breathed her in. "You smell good, too."

There it was again, that honey scent swirling through him, bringing his senses alive. This vibrant witch, pressed against his body, stirred a maelstrom of emotions in him, and he wanted her. *Charmaine!* He groaned inwardly as his trousers tightened.

Two hands pushed firmly against his chest. "No! I... I can't do this. Please, take your book and go."

"Sorry. What did I do?" he asked, perplexed.

"Severus, it's complicated." She looked down and started to pull away from him.

Grasping her wrists gently, he enticed her back towards him. "So, explain. I'm not stupid."

"I know. Highest NEWTs score in the history of Hogwarts, so you kept telling us," she muttered, shaking her head.

"Pardon?"

Severus let go of her and perched on a high stool.

"Merde! I'm really screwing this up, aren't I?" Charmaine turned away from him. "Listen, Severus, this is..."

"It's complicated. Yes, I get that. Just explain, so I can understand. Please." He caught her hand again, pressing her palm over his heart and gazing into her tantalising, soft brown eyes. "Something big is happening, and I can't figure it out."

Climbing onto a stool next to him, Charmaine took hold of his hands, curling her fingers around his, drawing them onto her lap where she rubbed a thumb back and forth across his knuckles. Looking into the depths of his beguiling, dark eyes, she took a steadying breath to start her explanation.

Suddenly, the corridor outside erupted with shouting and the heavy pounding of running feet.

"Mademoiselle! Miss Bien-Aimée!" The groundskeeper roared down the corridor.

"Hagrid?"

Charmaine jumped to her feet, patting Severus on the shoulder.

"I must go. It's always the same, Severus, we end up looking out for others and never have enough time for ourselves. Another time, okay?"

Disconsolate, Severus watched as she ran for the door. Shoving his hands into his pockets in frustration, he found the uneaten chocolate. He pulled it out. It was his favourite, chilli flavoured dark chocolate; unctuous, warm and spicy. Glancing at the open door, he lifted the wrapped sweet to his lips, kissed it and laid it on the Potions mistress's desk with a short note. *To warm your soul.*

A/N: Thank goodness for chocolate and wonderful betas. Sunny33, I owe you one. Can I repay you in chocolate?

A Bit of a Dog's Breakfast

Chapter 10 of 31

Time for tea at Hagrid's.

A Bit of A Dog's Breakfast.

Disclaimer: I could do with the money, but make none from writing this.

"Snobby cow," Sirius grumbled as he shoved through the crowd of younger students waiting outside the Potions classroom. "Sallope!"

James jumped up from the bench where he had been waiting for his friend.

"How'd you get on?"

"She told me to go away and grow up," Sirius griped. "After I saw her in the grounds the other day hugging and kissing that oversized oaf, Hagrid, I thought she might be up for something with a good looking bloke. I fancied a bit of French action, but she wasn't interested."

"I told you she was a bitch, didn't I?"

"You were right, Prongs," Black agreed. "She said I should go and enjoy the friends I have, whilst I have them. As if a popular guy like me could lose friends. The stupid, French tart has no idea what she's talking about."

"Forget it, Sirius. Let's go into Hogsmeade tomorrow and find you a willing wench. Someone you can love and leave without a care in the world, like you usually do, Lothario."

"That's another thing; she said I'd have to face up to my responsibilities eventually. Pfft. What is she on?"

The pair failed to notice Snape where he skulked in a nearby alcove, eavesdropping on their conversation. He had been doing much the same when he saw Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée and Rubeus Hagrid outside the groundskeeper's hut several days prior, just as Sirius described.

*

When Hagrid came for her in the classroom, Snape was too slow-witted to follow them straight away. Running to catch up, he spotted them entering the Forbidden Forest close to Hagrid's cabin, but was unable to trail them. Instead, he concealed himself in the overgrown garden and waited.

His joints were stiff, and he was cold by the time he heard someone approach. In the gloaming he could not easily discern faces, but it was obvious from the lumbering, heavy-footed gait, Hagrid was heading home. Behind Hagrid was a smaller, more nimble, feminine figure, and between them was the unmistakable silhouette of the headmaster. The trio were deep in conversation. Intrigued, Severus crept closer as they stopped outside the cabin's door.

"I'm right sorry, Perfessor Dumbledore, sir. He was jus' bein' playful."

"Maybe so, my dear Hagrid, but Aragog is a full grown Acromantula now."

"He was only nippin' the unicorn, sir."

"His bite is extremely poisonous."

Hagrid hung his head. Hands clasped behind his back, he rubbed the toe of his enormous boot back and forth in the dirt.

"The unicorn'll be okay, won't 'e?"

"Thanks only to Charmaine's expertise."

"Aye. She's brilliant, is our lass."

Dumbledore rested a hand briefly on the large man's arm. "I have students to attend to. Your job is to look after the magical animals in our forest, Hagrid. Please take better care of them."

With that, he strode towards the castle, leaving Hagrid and Charmaine on the doorstep of the hut.

A loud, wet sniff was followed by a thunderous trumpet of nose blowing.

"Aragog never would have meant to hurt the unicorn."

"I know, Hagrid," agreed the witch, patting the giant's hand which did not hold the grubby handkerchief. Climbing up onto the porch brought her to the right height to put her arms around his thick neck for a fierce hug. She placed a soft kiss on his forehead before releasing him, grabbing his hand and pulling him into the house. "Come on, you great lummoxx, we have things to do."

Severus watched as they entered Hagrid's hut. Certain they would be gone for some time, he eased himself out of his hiding spot, catching a fleeting glimpse of a figure in the twilight shadows some distance beyond the hut as it scurried away towards the school.

As quietly as he could, he tiptoed to the door of the cabin, wincing when the old boards creaked a little under his weight. He bent to peer through the keyhole.

"Ow!"

With a resounding thwack, his nose smacked hard against the wooden door as a heavy hand descended on the back of his neck.

"Gotcha!"

Hagrid lifted Snape off his feet by the collar of his robes, shoved open the cabin door and thrust him inside, where the boy staggered and fell sprawling on the dusty floor.

"I caught this one snoopin' outside," said Hagrid, looming over the prostrate body, his fists on his hips, beard jutting and bristling. Snape glared up from the floor, but refused to cower.

"Ça suffit. Play nice, boys! Monsieur Snape, I will have to take points from Slytherin. Ten points for being out of bounds, five for spying and ten for getting caught." Charmaine laughed.

Nudging the half-giant aside with her hip, she held out a hand to haul Severus to his feet. "Hagrid, this young man is Severus Snape. He'll make a brilliant spy one day."

Hagrid raised a shaggy eyebrow inquiringly. "This greasy, wee git? Ye're sure?"

"Sure. Trust me."

Hagrid's lips pursed, and his beard wriggled before his face cracked into a broad smile. He cuffed Severus playfully, nearly knocking the slender boy off his feet. "Get away! This wee, beige jobby?"

Snape scowled darkly.

"Severus has a lot to learn, but in time he'll be one of the best," assured Charmaine.

Hagrid shook his head. "I dunno how ye know half this stuff, Miss Charmaine."

"Insider knowledge, mon ami. I could tell you, but I'd have to kill you, and that would mean no more tea and rock cakes." She grinned.

"Well then, I'll go and make tea, whilst the two of ye make yerselves comfy."

As Hagrid stomped around in his kitchen, Charmaine grabbed Severus, hissing conspiratorially in his ear. "Quick. I'll teach you a spell I learned years ago, which shrinks and softens Hagrid's cakes enough to make them edible."

Snape quirked an eyebrow. "I thought you only came to Hogwarts this year."

"No... Yes... Look, do you value your teeth or not? Just follow my lead with the wand-work. If all else fails, discreetly feed the rock cakes to the dog."

Severus looked around him. "I don't see a dog."

"You'd better learn this spell pronto then."

Hagrid carried in a laden tray, banged it down on the table and collapsed into his armchair. "I dunno if I can go back to the unicorn tonight, 'Mainie. I'm worn out after chasing off Aragog." His jaw cracked as it dropped in a cavernous yawn.

"We managed to stabilise him earlier, Hagrid, but I still have to finish the Poisons work."

Picking up a cake from the mountainous pile, the huge man squeezed it between his sturdy fingers and sniffed it suspiciously, muttering, "Something wrong with the mixture today, I reckon."

Severus smirked, then choked on an unexpected lump in his tea.

"I'll have to go back to the unicorn myself," said Charmaine, raising her voice to be heard over the convulsive hacking.

Hagrid slapped Snape on the back, nearly knocking him off his chair. "Ye could take this young whelp to help ye."

"Good idea. Then I can make sure he returns to the castle before curfew, so he doesn't lose any more house points. Au revoir, mon ami." Giving Hagrid a quick hug and a kiss on each cheek, she indicated for Severus to follow her out into the darkening evening.

Snape stuck close behind her as she walked briskly to the edge of the Forbidden Forest before plunging straight into the threatening wood. A shudder ran through him as he stepped into the murk below the forest's canopy. Leading the way, Charmaine wended, seemingly at random, through the trees. Severus blundered in the half-dark at her heels, trying to keep up. When she stopped abruptly, he stumbled into her, knocking her forwards into a silver-lit clearing. She gestured for him to stay where he was.

Kneeling reverently on the soft moss of the forest floor, she whispered to the prostrate animal that Severus could now see over the top of her head. She edged her way closer, creeping forwards on her knees until she could reach out a gentling hand and stroke the quivering muzzle.

With her free hand, she beckoned for Severus. He dropped to his knees, following her example and crawled forwards, all the time gazing in awe at the unicorn. Charmaine indicated for him to stop alongside her. Turning slightly and without stopping her gentle caressing of the unicorn with one hand, she crooked a finger at him, drawing him closer to her.

Her lips brushed against his ear as she whispered huskily. "Undo my cloak, Severus."

His eyes widened, his breath caught and his heart lurched. He looked at her questioningly.

She frowned.

"Take off my cloak and spread it on the ground, so I can lay my potions and equipment on it," she murmured.

Snape did as she asked. Then he removed his own cloak and laid it gently around her slim shoulders, protecting her from the encroaching chill. She looked up at him with her beautiful doe-eyes, mouthing a thank you before she turned back to her task.

Charmaine maintained her soothing physical contact with the unicorn, all the while whispering encouragement to the animal and quietly advising Severus.

"This is my real skill, Severus. I am a Poisons mistress, specialising in poisons and venoms, their uses and their cures. When I left school I studied under a Poisons master in Marseilles. We sometimes use poisons to cure, which makes this dangerous work. Please follow my instructions exactly."

Rolling up his shirt sleeves, Snape mixed ingredients, faultlessly, according to her directions. With trembling hands, he applied poultices to long welts on the unicorn's flank. They worked side by side for some time, and his hands steadied as his anxiety subsided.

Gently and confidently, he cleaned deep, silver-stained wounds on the unicorn's neck. The healing potion sizzled and fumed as he applied it.

Severus winced as the animal whinnied, flattened its ears and curled its lip. Replying soft whickers echoed around the glade from unseen unicorns.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you," whispered Severus. "I only want to help." His chin trembled, and his hands shook again.

Charmaine nodded encouragement and laid a steadying hand over his. "Go round to his head, and talk to him whilst I finish the spell-work."

Crawling to the injured animal's head, Severus laid calming hands on the lustrous neck. Not knowing exactly what to do, he leant in and crooned reassuringly into a twitching, hairy ear.

"I've no idea what to say to a unicorn," he admitted quietly. "I always found the notion of a big horse with a horn on its forehead a bit freaky, but I have never seen such a sublime being, and I will be most aggrieved if you don't get better after all the work Charmaine and I have done tonight. Just look at her wand-work."

Magic swirled and pulsed around the petite witch as her wand wove intricate patterns over the unicorn. Awestruck, Severus kept whispering in the unicorn's ear as he watched the amazing woman working.

"Merlin, she's stunning. I wish she would work that kind of magic with me," he breathed.

An equine snort at close quarters startled him.

Glancing at the unicorn, he saw its eye rolling, as a quiet snicker ruffled his hair. "Bloody Nora, you can understand me, can't you?" he whispered. The unicorn rolled its eyes again and whuffed a breath through velvety nostrils.

When Charmaine finished, she stood back, nodding to Severus.

"Can you get up?" Severus asked the stallion.

With a curling grimace of its lips, the unicorn staggered to its feet. Shaking its head, a long shudder rippled from its mane, right down its back and through to its tail, which flicked up at the end.

Charmaine ran a hand smoothly from its neck to its rump, checking the sealed wounds and grazes. Stepping back, she bowed to the unicorn, smiling. "It has been a pleasure to help you, sir."

Following her lead, Severus placed his hands on his thighs and bowed to the unicorn. "It has been enlightening, sir. May I suggest you avoid the Acromantula in future?"

The unicorn placed one front hoof in front of the other and bowed his majestic head. Then, with lightning speed, drove his sharp horn deep into the flesh of Snape's left forearm.

A/N: Wee beige jobby = the unflushable poop you always find floating on the surface in a public toilet.

Sunny33 still does all the comma wrangling for me.

Blaze

Chapter 11 of 31

Who cares for Severus?

Blaze

Disclaimer: Thanks to JKR for the use of her people.

"Fuck, that hurt." Snape rubbed a prison-grimed hand over the scars on his forearm. So much pain from such a small wound, he thought. Shaking his head, he tried to remember exactly what had happened, but his memory seemed a little hazy.

It burned. Scorching, white-hot pain radiated from the wound. He writhed with agony, clutching his arm.

"Fuck, that hurts," he moaned.

"He's waking up, Poppy. Please go and get her." A slim hand squeezed his. "Hold on, Severus; she's coming."

"She?"

"Hush." A cool hand brushed greasy hair back from his sweating brow.

Cracking open an eye, he discerned a familiar witch's silhouette against the white glare of the hospital cubicle. He groaned and squeezed his eyes closed again.

"She—"

"Madam Pomfrey has gone to find her. She'll be here soon."

"Who?" he whispered.

"Lily. I asked them to bring Lily Evans, to care for you."

He licked his dry lips. "Lily?"

"I know she was... is the love of your life. I did some research whilst you were unconscious. The old parchments say you must be cared for by your life's love after the Unicorn's Blaze in order to start the sealing. Then, when you... um... consummate the relationship, the bond becomes permanent. I will have to go and leave you in Lily's care."

"Charmaine, please don't leave me," Severus pleaded.

"Hush now. I'm right here, and Lily will be with you soon. She will look after you over the next few days whilst you recuperate."

"Talk to me until she arrives." His hoarse voice cracked. "Tell me what happened."

Charmaine pulled her chair closer to the bed. Taking his hand again, she rubbed her thumb across his knuckles. She ran her free hand up over his forearm. "How is it?"

"It hurts."

"I know." She pressed a thumb firmly over the small, argent wound. "This helped before. Does that feel any better?"

A violent shudder passed through him as the searing pain mellowed gradually to gentler heat, which flowed through his whole body. Finally, a warm, honeyed ecstasy shimmered through him.

"Yes," he moaned. "Feels good."

"When the unicorn pulled his horn from your arm, I pressed my thumb to the wound straight away. Silver unicorn's blood mixed with yours and oozed down your arm. It... It scared me." A soft sob caught at her throat.

"The last time I saw unicorn's blood was terrible," explained Charmaine. "The poor creature was dead, and someone had been drinking its blood. We were warned if the blood passes someone's lips, he will have a cursed, half life. When I saw the unicorn's blood mingling with yours, I was terrified, thinking you doomed to a cursed life." She sniffed. "It turns out the Unicorn Blaze is a rare honour. He was blessing you, my friend."

Wiping the back of her hand under her nose, she continued. "You fell unconscious. Panicking, I flew back to the castle with you. Gods, I thought you were going to die.

Don't do that to me again, Severus," she whispered, sniffing again.

He lifted a shaking hand, gently running his knuckle across her tear-damp cheek. "I don't plan to die yet."

Charmaine snorted hard.

Noticing a handkerchief in her top pocket, he pulled it out. "Here, blow your nose," he said, holding the hanky out to her. Unexpectedly, she paled and pulled away, avoiding the scrap of cloth.

"No!"

"What's wrong, Charmaine?"

"I can't touch it again, now someone has taken it from me. If I do, I will have to leave immediately. It's a special type of Portkey."

"I don't understand."

"Severus, it's complicated. You can give it back to me when you need me to leave."

He folded his fingers tightly around the grubby material and stuffed it deep into his pyjama pocket. "Never."

Charmaine sighed. "That time will come."

"In the meantime, you could explain to me what's so complicated."

She drew a deep breath. "Fine—"

From beyond the cubicle curtains, footsteps could be heard approaching, along with a girl's enquiring whisper. "I don't understand, Professor Dumbledore. What do I have to do?"

"My dear girl, it is quite simple. All you have to do is care for Mister Snape for a couple of days."

"But I've never looked after someone who's ill before." Her tone whined slightly.

"He is not sick, Miss Evans. He requires care. Madam Pomfrey will advise you what is required. Come along."

The curtains were drawn back with a flourish.

"Here we are, Miss Evans." Professor Dumbledore beamed.

Charmaine gave Severus's hand a firm squeeze as she rose from the chair at his bedside. Bending over him, she murmured in his ear. "Here she is. I wish you well, Severus. Au revoir, mon ami."

With her free hand she beckoned Lily forwards. "Come and take this seat, Miss Evans. Severus needs your help. May I suggest—"

"I'll take my instructions from Madam Pomfrey. Thank you, Mademoiselle." Lily Evans sat down primly on the hospital chair. A frown flitted across Charmaine's brow, and her lips pursed a little. Severus lifted an eyebrow questioningly.

She shook her head, so he gave her a brief wave before turning his attention to Lily.

Lily was already making herself busy. "Sit up Severus, so I can plump your pillows; then, we need to talk."

Charmaine left the ward with a sad smile hovering on her lips and Lily Evans's bossy instructions ringing in her ears.

Severus smiled shyly at Lily. "Long time, no speak, Lil. How are you?"

"Sev, I've missed you, but I'm not sure if I can forgive you for what you said."

"Lily, it wasn't my opinion. I was just repeating what Potter said."

"He told me you'd say that. Why should I believe you?"

"I have known and loved you longer than he has." He reached for her hand, but she moved just out of range.

"Don't, Severus."

He raised his eyes to hers, pleading, but the green eyes looking down on him held little softness. Memories of Charmaine's warm, brown doe-eyes drifted through his thoughts. His attention wandered away from Lily's haranguing, and his thumb rubbed absent-mindedly over the worn monogram on the corner of the handkerchief in his pocket.

A/N: Thanks again to sunny33.

Faithful or Faithless

Chapter 12 of 31

Severus recuperates.

Disclaimer: If I were as talented as Ms Rowling, I might own some cool characters.

Lily sat with him in the hospital wing for some time, but their conversation soon became stilted and strained as they searched for common ground. When Severus started to moan in pain, she called for Madam Pomfrey, made her excuses and left him in the matron's care. Dejection washed over him with the ebb and flow of his distress.

She returned to his bedside the next day after classes, bringing Remus with her. Lupin gave Severus a warm, lopsided smile, dropped a pile of books and scrolls on the bedside cabinet and flopped onto the edge of the bed. He grabbed Snape's hand, shoving the sleeve of the hospital gown up to look at the Unicorn's Blaze.

Pain lanced through Snape's arm with the rapid movement, and he tried to pull away. Remus pressed his large thumb-pad firmly over the silvered spot on Severus's forearm. The searing sensation subsided, soothed slowly by fuzzy warmth. It was not the same feeling of ecstasy he'd felt with Charmaine's touch, but calming and reassuring nonetheless. Severus wilted back against his pillows.

"Bloody hell, Lupin! How would you like extra jalapeños in the next batch of Wolfsbane, so you can experience my pain?"

"Sorry, mate," muttered Remus, pulling the sleeve back down. "She said it was bad, but I didn't realise it hurt you so much. Forgive me?"

Snape shook his head slightly.

"Aw, go on, Sevvy." Remus cracked a wide grin and held his arms wide in apology.

Severus frowned.

"You know I love you, buddy. I wouldn't hurt you intentionally. Please don't poison my potion."

The werewolf clasped his hands together over his heart in melodramatic supplication.

Severus rolled his eyes in response.

Smiling again, Remus mussed his friend's hair affectionately. "I heard the Blaze would have your love's initial on it, but all I can see is a wonky starburst. What do you think, Lily? Can you see your initials there?"

Lily shrugged her shoulders and looked away. "You can't believe everything that French tart tells you, Remus."

"Actually, Lily," replied Lupin, taking umbrage, "she's a bloody good teacher, and I trust her implicitly. She and Severus have changed my life this year."

Lily huffed and turned away. "Well, I don't like her. James says she's not a real Potions mistress; she's a Poisons expert. What kind of person is that to put your trust in?"

"The best, I reckon, as long as she's on our side."

"You and Severus can keep her. Something about her gives me the creeps." The young witch shuddered as she spoke. "She told the headmaster I had to come and sit with Severus, because she had *seen* how important I was for his future. What kind of twaddle is that?"

"What did she say about my future?" Severus inquired.

"Nothing much. She just said I was a major influence, but wouldn't explain any further. Dumbledore seems to agree with anything she suggests." She paused. "Y'know, when I went to the headmaster's office, she was talking to that scrawny bird of his as if it could understand her."

"Do you think she's a seer?" asked Snape.

Lily looked at him sharply. "No. I think she's just an interfering fruitcake. Inhaling too many poisonous vapours has made her a bit nutty, if you ask me."

"Well, I'm glad she suggested you spend some time with me, Lily. I've missed you."

The young witch pouted imperceptibly and rummaged in her schoolbag, avoiding eye contact. "I brought you some of my favourite chocolates, Sev. Sweet strawberry-banana creams. You like those, don't you?"

Remus pulled faces and made gagging motions when Lily wasn't looking, whilst Severus's lips thinned into a barely polite, thank-you smile.

"I'll leave them with you. I've got prefect's duties to attend to. Remus can stay and keep you company tonight." Lily handed Severus a tawdry box with lavish bows, kissed his forehead perfunctorily and left the two young men sitting side by side on the hospital bed. Neither spoke until they were sure she had gone.

Letting out a long, slow breath, Lupin slumped onto the pillow next to his friend. "Strawberry-banana creams! What planet is Lily on? These are hideous. Even in werewolf recovery phase, I can't eat these."

He leaned against Severus's shoulder and murmured quietly, "Charmaine told me, in confidence, what happened to you, mate. I read the ancient scrolls. They say you have to consummate your relationship with your life's love to activate the full potential of the Blaze. She thinks Lily is the right person, but I'm not so sure. How could it be a ginger harridan with such appalling taste in sweets?"

With a rueful shrug, Severus tucked the confectionery into his bedside cabinet. "She only has to care for me whilst I recuperate."

"Caring? You take better care of your cauldron than she's taking of you."

"I don't understand either, Lupin. I'll ask Miss Bien-Aimée when I'm discharged from hospital."

"Will you be out of here in time for the Hogsmeade weekend, Severus?"

"Why? What are you planning, Dog-breath?"

"Death Eaters! How does that sound, my friend?"

"Intriguing."

*

By the time Snape was discharged from the hospital wing, he was thoroughly fed up with Lily's disregard for him. Lupin spent more time in the ward with him than she did. The two friends studied, ate dark, spicy chocolates and made plans to attend their first meeting with Voldemort and his Death Eaters the following weekend.

Snape wanted to talk to Mademoiselle before then. As soon as Madam Pomfrey said he could leave, he walked straight from the hospital wing to the dungeons. Missing his scheduled Potions lesson, he arrived outside the classroom just as his classmates were leaving. Hanging back in the shadows, he overheard Sirius and James's conversation. A smirk flitted across his lips as he recalled the encounter he had seen between Hagrid and the Potions professor. It had hardly been the romantic encounter Black implied.

When the classroom emptied, he pushed through the milling crowd of younger students who were arriving for their lesson. Knocking first, he stuck his head round the door. Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée sat with one elbow on the desk top, resting her forehead on the heel of her hand. She appeared to be reading something in her other hand below the desk.

Severus cleared his throat. Startled,

Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée looked up. Hurriedly, she pushed the scrap of paper she had been reading underneath her textbooks.

"Monsieur Snape!"

"Can I have a word with you, please?" Severus asked. He shut the door and strode to the front of the room.

"I haven't time just now, Mr Snape."

"I need some answers."

"This is neither the time nor the place."

Severus planted his palms flat on the front of the teacher's desk, leaning down across the desk to bring himself to her eye level. "I want to know about the Blaze."

"Not now, Severus," she replied firmly. "I have a junior class waiting."

Severus's hands curled into fists where they rested on the desk top. His head drooped between his arms, and his lank hair fell forward over his face. "You know all about it, and I need to understand."

Gently, the witch touched the back of his hand with a finger. "I don't know it all. I can't tell you any more just now."

"Please, Charmaine." Severus's voice dropped to a pleading whisper. "Just tell me why you chose Lily. I don't love her, I lo..."

"No!" She rose to her feet.

Severus slammed a fist onto the wood, causing a small avalanche of scrolls. "You are not being fair," he shouted. "You left me in the hospital."

Lifting his head, he came nose to nose, across the desk, with the Potions mistress. The air between them resonated with angry vibrations.

Furious and frustrated, he leaned towards her. Breathing harsh and fast, he felt her heated breath flutter across the gap, echoing his own. Licking his dry lips, he tasted her and felt his heart rate lifting. Eyes locked with her sparking, amber glare. His own dark gaze glittered as he lifted a hand to her flushed cheek, cupping it roughly in his palm.

"I could just take what I want," he murmured menacingly, holding her gaze.

"Do not threaten me, young Snape. You promised you would never enter my mind without asking."

"Never trust a Slytherin, miss."

Charmaine felt the first stealthy slither of his intrusion into her mind. "No!" She drew back abruptly and slapped him hard. "Get out."

Severus whirled on his heel and stormed from the room in a ferocious swirl of robes, leaving the witch slumped at her desk.

"You promised me you wouldn't do that, Severus. You promised..." she sobbed.

A/N: I fluffed it, and uploaded the wrong chapter. No wonder no one could understand what was happening. My apologies. I hope it all makes more sense now.

Cave Canem

Chapter 13 of 31

Severus and Remus have a chat.

A/N: To those of you who have already read this chapter when I posted it in error, my apologies. I hope it makes more sense now.

Cave Canem

Disclaimer: Anything you recognise belongs to JK Rowling; the rest of the drivel is mine.

Severus took refuge in an empty classroom as his mind churned with the images he had stolen from Miss Bien-Aimée. He knew he should not have done it, but his curiosity, then his anger and his hurt had driven him further than he had intended.

He had hoped to understand what was so complicated that she could not tell him, only wanting to clarify what he felt happening between them. Instead, his thoughts now swirled in confusion.

The last time he had entered her mind, he had sensed warmth and seen the serene image of a flying wizard. This time, there had been only chaos. Visions of wounded students, shattered stonework and the strong impression of fear had overwhelmed him. Through thick smoke, he had glimpsed a sagging Potter cradled in Hagrid's arms, and in another image someone had been kissing Charmaine. Ginger hair had filled his view, and he shuddered at the thought.

Curling in on himself, he slumped against the wall. Obviously, he had been kidding himself. He meant nothing to her, and the realisation hurt. He was just another student to be cared for amongst all the others. Even Lupin meant more to her than he did. He had heard her tell Lupin she loved him.

Potter had stolen Lily from him, and now Lupin had stolen the witch he really wanted.

Charmaine, he whispered.

Anger spiralled up inside his chest.

"I hate that filthy werewolf."

*

Lupin wanted to grab the witch by the shoulders and shake her into agreeing with him. With an effort, he stilled himself and tried pleading again with Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée. No matter how much Lupin implored her, she still declined to help with the brewing of the Wolfsbane, and she would not come to the Shrieking Shack to keep him company this coming full moon.

Firmly, she advised Remus that Severus Snape was quite capable of doing both duties from now on, and it was about time he did.

Remus whined that she was abandoning him, that he needed her. She only shrugged and turned away.

"Why?" He wanted to know.

"Ask Severus. He broke a promise he made to me, and I can't trust him at the moment. You, on the other hand, must trust him implicitly, no matter how paradoxical that sounds."

Lupin muttered under his breath. "Severus sodding Snape. I hate him!"

Turning back, she gave him a wan smile. "He'll always be there for you, Remus, right to the bitter end." A slow tear crept down her cheek as she bit her lip and walked away.

Lupin's shoulders stiffened, and his hands clenched in anger. "Snape!" he roared into the empty corridor, setting off to look for him.

By the time he found Severus, Lupin was in a monstrous rage. He grabbed the other wizard by the robes and threw him across the empty classroom. Growling with menace, Lupin backed him into a corner. Snape stumbled backwards, fumbling for his wand, but Lupin snaked out a hand and grasped his wrist, shaking it brutally. Snape's wand clattered on to the floor.

Slamming Severus's wand arm roughly against the wall, he seized the wizard's other arm and pinned both wrists above Snape's head with one hand. He stepped in closer, leaning his lower body hard against Severus, trapping him against the stonework. Lupin's breathing ebbed and flowed raggedly as he glared at Snape.

Drawing his own wand, he held it to Severus's chest, pressing the point into the fabric over Severus's heart. Bending forward slightly, he put his mouth to Snape's ear.

"I could kill you, you greasy git," Remus whispered. He leaned back to ascertain Snape's response.

Severus nodded, swallowing.

"What did you do to her?"

Severus raised an eyebrow haughtily.

"Charmaine won't help at the full moon anymore. She's left me with you, because you fucked up and upset her. I hate you, Severus Snape!" Lupin's voice rose in anger as he jabbed his wand harder into Snape's ribs.

Leaning in again until their foreheads touched, Remus shoved Severus's captured wrists callously against the wall.

"What am I going to do? I can't cope without her now, and I fucking hate you," he shouted, spittle flying over Severus's face. Suddenly, the werewolf jerked his head back, then sharply forwards, head-butting Severus violently and smashing the back of Snape's head hard against the stonework.

Lupin's breathing wavered a little as he drew another ragged breath. Then, he dropped his wand to the floor, let go of Snape's wrists and sagged against the startled wizard, hugging him tightly and crying into the black cloth of Snape's chest.

"Don't leave me, Severus." Remus sobbed, holding on tighter. "Everyone abandons me. I'm an outcast. A freak. I'm a... a..." His arms dropped to his sides.

"You're a dirty, stinking, mangy, flea-bitten cur of a mongrel werewolf!" Snape finished for him.

Placing his hands flat on Lupin's chest, he pushed the crying wizard away from him forcefully. Severus drew himself up to his full height.

"Severus, please. I need you," Lupin pleaded.

"It's just the two of us now, is it? Half-bloods against the world," Snape snarled, prodding the werewolf angrily in the chest. "Won't your beloved Charmaine help anymore?"

Remus grabbed Severus by the throat, squeezing hard.

"It's your fault, you arrogant tosser," Lupin yelled, shaking him savagely. "I don't know what you did to her, but you screwed up royally. There's no way she's going to help me at the full moon now."

Snape curled a lip at him. "And you think I will?" he sneered, his voice wheezing through his compressed vocal cords.

Releasing his grip, Remus dropped to his knees and started to weep again, covering his face with his hands. "She said you would."

Severus sighed, running grazed fingers through his lank hair.

"Why would I, Lupin?" Severus asked. "You have dog breath, and you smell when you're wet."

He continued more quietly. "Like any stray you need someone to care for you. Why it should be me, whom you profess to hate, I don't know."

Severus laid a gentle hand on Lupin's heaving shoulder, rubbing his own bruised forehead with the heel of his other hand.

Remus snorted moistly. Rising shakily to his feet, he wiped the snot off the front of Severus's robe with his sleeve. "Sorry, mate," he muttered.

Snape sighed again deeply, casting a simple cleansing spell over his robes.

"Is there a Hogsmeade weekend after this full moon, Lupin? I need a distraction."

*

The school year slipped past quicker than expected. Before they knew it, students were studying for their N.E.W.Ts during the week and spending any free weekends in Hogsmeade. For many of them, Death Eater meetings were the highlight of their outings. Snape attended regularly with Avery and Mulciber, but, more often than not, it was

Lupin who was beside him on the walk down to the village.

On the whole, the gatherings were a chance to get to know the other younger members of the Death Eaters and enjoy the hospitality. As the end of the school year approached, the speeches became more frequent and more impassioned. Older Death Eaters were present more often and started to encourage the graduating Hogwarts students to join their ranks.

Voldemort rarely appeared, but when he did, it added a frisson to the occasion. The meetings he attended always ended with revels and sometimes the initiation of another member. Being too young to become fully initiated Death Eaters meant Lupin and Snape could not attend the revels or participate in the ceremonies, and both of them felt an increasing draw to join, to be accepted as part of the group. When, eventually, they received the invitation to enlist, they didn't hesitate.

Together, they made their plans. First, they would finish their exams; second, they would head into Hogsmeade to join the Death Eaters. After that, it would be the end of the school year, and they could leave the confines of school for the big, wide world. Lupin proposed renting a flat together in Edinburgh whilst they attended University, though he couldn't decide what course he wanted to study.

Snape was sure he wanted to study Potions, but was nervous about approaching Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée for a reference. He had been surprised he had not been hauled up in front of Dumbledore for his transgressions. Instead, Charmaine had retreated. She had been unapproachably polite and avoided his gaze since their altercation, only looking at him when she was teaching him. In class, she reverted to calling him Monsieur Snape, never by his given name.

Outside the classroom, he often watched her covertly as she walked the school's corridors. If she saw him, she would frown and turn on her heel, striding purposefully away from him.

His fingers itched to touch her bouncing curls, and he longed to look into her warm, brown doe-eyes again without seeing the horrific images behind them or the recriminations he knew would be there. Severus soothed his yearning by rubbing his thumb in absent-minded circles over the worn monogram on the corner of the old handkerchief he had taken from her. He could visualise the embroidery without taking the scrap from his pocket. It was quite frayed, but he was certain the initials were not Charmaine's. Idly, he wondered who the hanky belonged to.

A/N: sunny33 is a grammar goddess. Thanks to kittylefish for the admin work.

Carpe Canem

Chapter 14 of 31

Who wants to be a Death Eater?

Carpe Canem

Disclaimer: At the start of every chapter I have to write that I make no money from this; you already know that.

Voldemort was receiving the new initiates. An air of anxious excitement pervaded the room as each of them approached the dais to be introduced by their sponsor. Before accepting them as Death Eaters, Voldemort drew each young witch or wizard forward. Casting a firm *Legilimens*, he entered their minds and assessed each one. After they were judged, they were moved quickly into adjacent rooms.

Severus stood behind Mulciber as the line moved forwards and the room gradually emptied. Lucius Malfoy stood at his side, having graciously offered to be his sponsor. Last in the line, behind Snape, was Remus Lupin. No one stood next to him. None of the Death Eaters had offered to introduce him.

Severus could hear the werewolf muttering nervously to himself. "I'm not sure about this. What are we getting ourselves into?"

Leaning forward, Lupin put a hand on Snape's shoulder.

Severus patted the hand in reassurance. "It'll be fine, Lupin. What's the worst that could happen?"

"I don't know..."

"...Severus Snape."

Snape flinched. He had missed Lucius introducing him to Voldemort. Remus squeezed his shoulder, and Severus stepped forward. Bony fingers grasped his chin as Voldemort looked him over.

"I'm not sure if we need any half-bloods in our ranks. Are you worth having, Snape?"

Severus lifted his eyes and met the other wizard's cold gaze, resisting the urge to look away.

"You think you are worthy of a Death Eater's mask, do you?"

Severus nodded very slightly.

"If you take the Dark Mark, you will be tied to me until death. You understand that, don't you?"

Snape swallowed hard and nodded again, unflinching.

Before Severus realised what was happening, Voldemort entered his mind. With brutal force the older wizard pushed aside Snape's school learning, riffled through his early years, then hauled up the memories of Snape being bullied. He took longer examining these, before giving a mental nod and moving onward. Finally, he came to Severus's memories of Charmaine.

Severus struggled, mentally pushing him away. Subconsciously, Severus desperately wanted to keep those private. They were precious to him and not for anyone else to peruse at their leisure.

He sensed Voldemort trying to manipulate his mind in order to view the images, groping for another way to access them. Memories seeped out under the onslaught. *Charmaine*.

"Fascinating," murmured Voldemort as he withdrew. He released his grip, allowing Snape to slump to his knees on the floor. "Potions and Poisons. That's a dangerous combination, but with the two of you together we would be unbeatable."

He looked down at the wizard crumpled at his feet with obvious disdain. "Get up, Snape, for goodness sake. I will take you, even though you don't have the best breeding. Bring your Poisons mistress with you sometime. I would be most interested to meet her."

He motioned for Snape to move away. "Next."

Lupin stepped forward hesitantly.

"Have you no sponsor to introduce you?" Voldemort enquired with a malicious edge to his voice.

Lupin shook his head, shaggy hair flopping in his eyes.

Severus hauled himself to his feet, coming to stand next to Remus. "I will speak for him."

"Who is he, and what talents does he bring?"

"My Lord Voldemort..."

"*My Lord.* I like that." Voldemort smirked. "Continue, Snape."

"My Lord Voldemort, may I present Remus Lupin, the werewolf."

Remus shot him a startled look, and his mouth opened to protest.

"A werewolf? I expect your mind will be a howling void." Voldemort's mouth tightened in another smirk.

"How droll, my lord."

"Don't patronise me, Malfoy," Voldemort snapped.

Lucius appeared unruffled, despite the icy glare he received.

"I will accept the werewolf only because he could be useful in future communications with the wild werewolves. Please do not let any of the others know what you are, Lupin. They may panic, and we wouldn't want that, would we?"

Rising, he strode ahead of them into the next room, stopping just inside the doorway. Snape and Malfoy instinctively stepped to either side of him as they entered and stood slightly behind him, waiting. A susurrus of whispers rippled across the room at the sight of the blond and dark wizards flanking their leader, as if it were their rightful place.

Voldemort raised his voice slightly and, holding his arms aloft, invited the gathering to start the initiation ceremony.

Snape and Remus found themselves at the back of the line again. They watched in trepidation as the first initiate stepped forward to receive the Dark Mark. Expecting the Mark to be hot-branded on to the young wizard's forearm, they were pleasantly surprised to see Voldemort gently press his wand tip to the skin. A quiet incantation from the powerful wizard generated the tattoo, which blossomed in slowly intensifying greys through to black.

With an expanding smile and an ecstatic sigh, the initiate swooned into the waiting arms of his sponsor, who carried him gently through to yet another room. Before the door swung closed behind them, the strains of happy singing and joyous whoops seeped through to the waiting line of initiates.

"Well, that doesn't seem too bad," Remus commented.

Snape relaxed a little as the same happened with each new Death Eater.

"There's still time to back out if you're not up to it, Snape," Remus whispered as Mulciber was carried from the room. He gave Severus a feral grin.

Severus squared his shoulders and stepped up to the front. Rolling up his sleeve, he laid his bared left forearm on the table-top.

"What is this?" Voldemort hissed, touching his wand tip to the silver starburst on Snape's skin.

Pain lancing up his arm made Severus wince, and he tried to withdraw.

"No! You are mine now, young Snape, until death. We agreed. Hold him, Malfoy."

Lucius gripped hard, clamping Severus's arm to the table. Delicately, Voldemort touched Snape's forearm again with his wand and started to chant.

A tortured groan escaped Snape's lips as he writhed in agony, trying to escape Malfoy's vice-like grip and the searing pain of the growing Dark Mark.

As suddenly as it started, it was over. Severus collapsed to the floor, sweating and shaking. He cradled his left arm weakly. Remus grabbed his hand and pressed hard on the Blaze. Snape roared in pain as intense cold surged from the silver spot, through his forearm and into the new tattoo. Silvered crystals bloomed around the tattoo's edge before subsiding into a pearly grey, outlining the skull and serpent. Shudders wracked Snape's slender frame as the strange, burning cold subsided.

"Very interesting," murmured Voldemort, peering closely at the variation in the Mark. He gave Severus an appraising look. "Very interesting, indeed."

Straightening up, he smoothed his robes with long fingers. "And now, the werewolf. Stand up, Snape, if you are going to be his sponsor."

Voldemort motioned for the young wizards to approach him.

Severus held Lupin's wrist and pushed his sleeve up past the elbow with still shaking hands. He looked into Remus's warm, brown eyes as he did, with an unspoken question. Remus returned his gaze steadily and gave a small nod. "We're in this together, Severus, mate."

They turned to Voldemort, and Severus held Lupin's arm securely. As the Dark Lord started his spell, Remus yelped and pulled away. Snape's grip tightened, holding him firm.

"Severus, it hurts," Remus snarled, looking into Snape's darkening eyes. "No! Ow!" His voice rose in anguish. "Ow, ow, ow, oowowow!"

Lupin threw his head back and let out a deep-throated howl.

Voldemort finished his incantation and stepped back. Leaping away, clutching his forearm, Lupin growled a string of profanities softly to himself as he wriggled his fingers to relieve the pain.

"Show me your arm, werewolf." Voldemort held out a pale hand.

Cautiously, Remus extended his trembling arm, turning it so they could all see where Voldemort had made his brand. There was no skull, no snake, only a faint greying of the skin and a soft fuzz of fur.

Voldemort inhaled sharply before letting his breath out in a long, low hiss.

"There was always a risk it wouldn't work on the werewolf, but worth the attempt, I think. Yes, I expect it will still have some effect, though maybe not fully." He nodded to himself. "I have had enough experimentation for the night."

Looking up at the three wizards in front of him, Voldemort gave them a thin smile. "Snape, take this young man home. As I said before, I do not want the rest of my Death Eaters upset by his... differences." Turning away, he headed for the door. "Lucius, escort me. We have revels to attend."

Lupin slumped against Snape as the door closed behind the older wizards. He draped an arm around the skinny shoulders of his pallid friend.

Suddenly, the door burst open again. Mulciber stumbled through, looking flushed and intoxicated. He came to an abrupt halt, swaying slightly. "What happened to you guys? Merlin, you look terrible. I heard screaming and howling. It sounded like you'd been thrown to the wolves." He giggled.

"Lupin got a little animated by the ceremony," Snape sneered. "Lord Voldemort has asked me to escort him home."

Lupin scowled at Snape as the dark wizard grabbed his arm and dragged him out of the door.

"Let's go, Lupin, before he realises how close to the mark he is," murmured Snape.

"Owowow!" howled Mulciber behind them, staggering back through to the other room, laughing.

A/N: carpe canem = seize the dog. I apologise if the Latin is not quite right. It has been more than three decades since the dominie (complete with chalk-dust encrusted, academic gown and mortar board) asked me not to come back to the Latin class.

Thanks again to sunny33 for her beta work.

As Sick as a Dog

Chapter 15 of 31

The Dark Mark causes a bit of a reaction.

As Sick as a Dog

Disclaimer: All the usual legal guff applies.

Apparating back to the gates of Hogwarts was easy, but things went downhill from there.

Lupin started to shake uncontrollably as soon as they landed. Grasping his forearm, he collapsed, curling into a whimpering ball at Snape's feet.

"Come on, Lupin, get up."

"C... can't." The werewolf groaned through clenched teeth.

Snape crouched beside him. "Why not?"

"T... transforming," stuttered Lupin.

"But it's not the full moon."

"I know, you moron," Remus wailed.

"Fuck!" Snape stood up, trying to think what to do.

"Sh... shack."

"The shack. Shit. Yes." He started dragging Lupin's quivering body across the grass. "Don't you dare turn on me, wolf-boy."

Remus moaned loudly as he bumped hard along the ground.

"I need help," muttered Severus. Who could help them? Madam Pomfrey? The headmaster, perhaps.

Charmaine!

Propping Lupin up against a rock, Severus noticed a slight furring around his jaw-line. He needed help urgently.

"*Expecto Patronum!*" Casting the spell to send a desperate message, he was surprised to see a silver doe flow from his wand and bound across the lawn towards the school.

Charmaine's Patronus returned soon after. "I'll meet you at the shack. Fly, Severus."

"Fly?"

He slapped his forehead. Why hadn't he thought of that? Especially when the happy memory he had used to generate his Patronus was of Charmaine teaching him to fly. Of course, it would be quicker to fly, but he wasn't sure he could take off with the extra weight if he carried Lupin.

Gritting his teeth, he hauled Lupin into his arms. "I'm taking you to Charmaine."

Remus gave him a weak nod.

Snape held the wizard's trembling body closer and pushed off from the ground. The pair wobbled in the air for a second. Severus closed his eyes and concentrated. *Charmaine, we're coming.*

Magical energy intensified around them. Opening his eyes, he thrust forward, flying at speed towards the Whomping Willow.

"Flying. Jus' like Batman." Remus giggled shakily.

"Shut up, Lupin."

Unable to fly down the tunnel, Severus had to resort to dragging Remus again. The werewolf was shuddering violently and started snarling with every jolt and judder. Severus pulled him into the lit room at the end of the tunnel and was horrified to see how wolfish the young man had become. Hurriedly, he carried him into the cage, dropped him on the floor and turned to leave.

A deep and savage growl came from behind him. Snape's wrist was grabbed firmly, and he was hauled sharply through the half-closed door. Stumbling, he crashed to the ground as the cage door slammed shut.

"I hate you, Severus Snape. I'm going to kill you, you slime-ball." Lupin threw back his head and howled.

Severus lay face down on the dirt floor, quaking with fear. His muscles tensed as a hand gripped his shoulder firmly, shaking him.

"Severus!"

The hand turned him over gently.

"Severus." Charmaine's concerned gaze travelled over him. "Merde! That was close, Severus. Are you all right?"

Tears of relief welled up in his eyes; brimming over, they tracked down his grimy cheeks. His lips quivered into a small, tremulous smile. "I've never been more relieved to see a teacher."

"You're an arse-lick, Snape," Lupin shouted, crashing into the locked door and rattling the bars of his cage. "I smell your fear."

"That's enough, Remus." Charmaine patted Lupin's head through the bars. "He saved your skin just now. Settle down and stop being such a grouchy mongrel."

Lupin backed off, baring his teeth and growling.

Charmaine held out a hand to Severus, pulling him to his feet.

"Come and sit down over here. You can explain to me what has happened whilst we wait this out."

She led him to a couch against the wall, where they could sit and watch Lupin.

Severus slumped onto the couch, covering his face with his hands. As he did, his sleeve slid up, revealing his newly branded forearm. He heard the catch in Charmaine's breath as she caught sight of the Dark Mark.

"Oh, Severus," she whispered.

Snape hesitated, not knowing whether to keep his face hidden or to look at her. What would she think of him?

He felt her forefinger trace gingerly over the tattoo.

"I knew this would happen. I knew it," she murmured, "but I didn't want to face this truth."

Severus peered through his fingers at her. She was examining the emblem on his arm. Taking his hands away from his face, he laid them on his lap. Cautiously, her finger ran over the skull and snake on his left forearm.

"I've never seen one this close, but I think your Dark Mark looks different to the others."

"If you think mine is unusual, you should take a look at Lupin's."

"Remus took the Dark Mark, too?"

"Yes. I think it was the Protean Charm which triggered his transformation."

"I never realised he took the Mark. He never told me."

"I presumed he was still speaking to you. I thought you would know about the Death Eaters."

"Severus, I've known about the Death Eaters for a very long time, and I always knew you would join them, but it still hurts to see this blemish on your skin."

Her finger ran over the mark again, finally coming to rest close to the Unicorn's Blaze. It shone silver, close to the upper edge of the Dark Mark, looking like a star emerging from behind a black cloud. "I hope this Blaze will give you some protection."

Her voice faltered, and she caught her trembling lip between her teeth. Tears glistened on her lashes. With the knuckle of his free hand, Severus gently brushed an escaping tear drop from her cheek.

"I shouldn't have done it," Severus admitted.

"It's done now."

"I already regret taking the Mark. I was angry and hurting. You wouldn't speak to me."

"You betrayed my trust, Severus. You invaded my thoughts and broke your promise."

"You left me."

"You had Lily."

"I wanted you. I needed you."

Charmaine sighed, shaking her head. "No, this is all wrong."

"I shouldn't have done it. Charmaine, I'm so sorry. I love—"

"Hush. Don't say any more," she whispered, laying a finger on his lips. "You need to rest."

"Will you stay with me?" he murmured, eyelids drooping and muscles relaxing.

"I'll stay as long as you need me."

A/N: sunny33 does my beta work. Where would my commas be without her?

Bollocks

Chapter 16 of 31

"Charmaine, I need you."

Bollocks

Disclaimer: I own nothing, except the wayward commas.

"Charmaine."

She drifted towards consciousness, becoming aware of the crick in her neck where she had fallen asleep against the arm of the couch.

"Charmaine!"

"What?" She groaned sleepily, feeling the comfortable weight of Severus's head on her chest and his arm curled across her stomach. She ran languid fingers through his fine hair, breathing in his unique masculine scent.

"I need you."

A faint smile stirred her lips.

"Charmaine, please wake up. I need you."

"Mhmm," she hummed to herself, stretching.

"Oh, for the love of Circe!" Lupin grumbled. "I'm back to normal. I need you to unlock the door. Please, let me out."

Charmaine's eyes shot open, and she struggled to sit up, disturbing Severus in her attempts. "Remus! I'm sorry; I must have fallen asleep."

"It's all right. Just unlock the cage, so I can get out."

Straightening up, she pushed Severus off her chest and with a quick flick of her wand opened the cage door for Remus. She swung her legs off the couch and sat up, making space for Remus to sit beside her, at the same time elongating the seat a little bit to create more room. Lupin plonked himself next to her, swung his legs up over the arm of the sofa, and lay flat on his back resting his head on her lap, hands folded over his belly.

"Some night, eh?"

"Not one I plan to repeat," admitted Snape. "Lupin, you look like you've been dragged through a hedge backwards."

Severus pulled a couple of twigs out of Remus's hair. He yawned then laid his head groggily against the back of the seat.

"And whose fault is that, you dork?" replied Remus.

Snape smirked.

Stretching out her legs, Charmaine leaned back against the cushions. With one hand, she ran her fingers through Lupin's tousled hair, working quiet incantations to spell away the last of the dirt and twigs before yawning widely herself and resting her hand on Lupin's chest.

Remus looked up at Charmaine then tilted his head back to look at Severus. "Thank you. Both of you. You're the best." He snuggled down a bit more, covering Charmaine's small hand with his own. "This is just the dog's bollocks being here with you two."

Severus snorted.

"No, seriously. I love you guys." Remus closed his eyes in contentment.

Charmaine draped her other arm comfortably around Snape's shoulders. Shutting her eyes, she drifted back into sleep. "I love you guys too."

*

"Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée."

Charmaine woke with a start. Trying to get up from the couch, she was hampered by the entangled, slumbering bodies of her two students.

"Professor Dumbledore!"

"It appears, Miss Bien-Aimée, we have a bit of a situation to deal with here."

Charmaine shoved the torpid wizards aside and stood up, struggling to gather her wits.

"It's not what you think—"

"Oh, but it is, Charmaine, my dear girl." Dumbledore gave her a thin smile. "We have a serious problem. There are Death Eaters on the school grounds."

"No!" Alarmed, she drew her wand, ready to fight. "Where?"

Dumbledore sighed, rolled his eyes and indicated behind her.

Confused, Charmaine looked around at the young men sitting on the settee. Severus hung his head sheepishly, hiding behind his hair while Remus grinned at her and wiggled his fingers in a cheery wave. She lowered her wand.

"Them?"

"Yes, Miss Bien-Aimée. Them." The headmaster started to pace up and down the small room in front of Lupin's cage. "They cannot be allowed back into the school. I have to protect the other students."

"But—"

"But, nothing, Miss Bien-Aimée. They must leave."

"But, you knew this was going to happen. I told you Severus would take the Dark Mark. You must have made some plans for him."

"I have to do whatever is required for the greater good. There is the reputation of Hogwarts to uphold, and the safety of the other pupils to consider."

"You can't do this!" she shouted. "You can't just throw them out. Our arrangements are not completed."

"That, my dear girl, does not concern you. I believe your assignment was to get Snape and Lupin to work together." He paused, looking at the two young men behind her. "It appears you have done a remarkable job. Congratulations."

Severus leaped to his feet, grabbing Charmaine's arm and turning her to face him. "Assignment?"

"Yes, Severus," she replied, not quite meeting his eye. "It's complicated—"

"Fuck you and your *it's complicated*," he roared.

Holding both her shoulders, he shook her hard before releasing her abruptly. She stumbled back, landing with a thump on the couch. In an instant, his wand was out, and he was looming over her. With his wand tip under her chin, he tilted her head back. "Look at me and tell me."

Charmaine shut her eyes and tried to turn her head away.

He grasped her chin firmly. In a threatening whisper, he reiterated his request. "Tell me." Snape pressed his wand harder against her skin. "Tell me all of it."

Without opening her eyes, she started to speak. Her voice was tremulous to start, but gradually steadied. "My name is not Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée. It is... it isn't important who I am. I was sent by... I was sent by someone who knows what will happen in the future. I never met the person who organised my mission. My assignment was to ensure you and Remus Lupin worked together and became, if not friends, at least tolerant of each other."

Opening her eyes, she gave a wan smile. "At least that worked out right."

Snape exhaled a short breath.

"The old handkerchief is my Portkey. I was advised whoever took it from me would return it when they needed me to leave."

Involuntarily, Snape's hand went to the pocket containing her hanky.

He sneered. "Charming! My beloved professor, who are you, and when were you going to enlighten us about your true identity? Was it to be before or after the wolfman and the clown declared their love for you?"

"Merde! Charming... beloved! Charmaine Bien-Aimée. That's me. No. It's not me. It can't be me. Bollocks! This is all wrong," murmured the witch, scrubbing a hand down her face. "It's supposed to be Lily Evans."

Snape frowned. "What are you talking about? What has Lily got to do with this?"

Standing up, Charmaine pushed Severus away from her. "You need to go... now. Take Lupin and leave before I mess things up any further."

"No. You haven't answered my questions yet. Who are you?"

Dumbledore stepped between them. "That is enough, Snape. It is time for you to leave." Indicating for Remus to follow him, he led Severus to the door. "One of the professors has kindly offered the use of her Edinburgh flat for the pair of you. Professor McGonagall has organised a Portkey to take you both there. Let's go."

"Severus," Charmaine called as he neared the doorway. "Please, give me my hanky back, so I can go back to where I belong."

He clenched his fist tightly around the scrap of linen. "Never," he murmured as he turned and walked away.

A/N: The dog's bollocks = the best thing. What's so great about the dog's bollocks? Ask the dog.

The clown and the wolfman is a quick nod to the 80's Scottish film *Restless Natives*.

sunny33 deserves extra chocolate for the beta work.

Pissed or Pissed Off? (Or, Hair of the Dog)

Alcohol is not a panacea.

Pissed or Pissed Off? (or Hair of the Dog)

Disclaimer: All legal jargon about money and ownership applies.

Snape's attention wandered. Shuffling his bony bottom on the hard wooden seat of the trial bench, he tried to concentrate. The discussion swirling around the Wizengamot was of Snape's Final Memories, his Unrequited Love for Lily Evans and why he gave Those Precious Memories to Harry Potter as he lay close to death on the floor of the Shrieking Shack. Rolling his eyes, Severus stared up at the vaulted ceiling; it was the most he could do within his magical restraints. He sighed and let his thoughts drift.

*

"To University, the fountain of knowledge where students come to drink," said Lupin, lifting his pint in a toast and saluting his flatmate for the umpteenth time.

"Sláinte." Severus tilted his dram at Lupin then tipped the amber liquid down his throat before slamming the glass back down on the bar counter.

Coughing slightly, he wiped his eyes.

"This cheap, Muggle stuff isn't as smooth as Firewhiskey, is it?"

"No." Severus wheezed, slapping his chest. He waggled his empty glass at Lupin. "More."

"Drinking's not helping, Severus."

"No?" Peering into his empty glass, Severus scowled before holding it up again for a refill.

"You need to talk to her; it's been months now."

"Pssh!" replied Snape, almost articulately.

"I'll ask her to come down to Edinburgh for the weekend to... I dunno... to help me with my studies. She can stay in the spare room at the flat. You can apologise for shouting at her. And we'll all be friends again." Lupin nodded his head wisely. The action caused a distinct spinning sensation, and he wobbled a bit on his barstool.

"She's a poison... a poisoner... no, a poisoner. Is that the right word?" Snape looked at the other man for help. Lupin nodded again, a little less vigorously, and lifted his hand, indicating for Snape to continue. "Anyhow. What does she know about your course that she could help you with? I mean History and Philosophy of the Dark Arts, what kind of a... a..." His hand waved ineffectually in the air.

"Subject."

"Subject. Exactly. What kind of a namby-pamby subject is that?"

Lupin looked up through his shaggy fringe. "It's brilliant, actually. There's plenty of free time and loads of hot looking students to chat up."

"Why don't I get hot chicks talking to me in my classes?" Severus grumbled, staring at his empty glass.

Holding up his hand, Remus stared at it thoughtfully for a moment before counting down on his fingers. "One, you're doing Potions. Only geeks study Potions, not hot babes. Two, you're a miserable, greasy-haired, lanky geek who no-one would want to sit next to, let alone talk to. And three, you're not paying enough attention, because you're way too busy moping over Charmaine." He paused, tapping his pinkie finger. "Oh, and four, you're mingin'!"

Lupin giggled. "Mhairi MacDonald said that today. I'm not sure if she was talking to me or about me." He sighed, looking wistful. "Maybe my luck isn't so good either."

"What you need, Lupin, is the right partner." Severus swayed forward and prodded Remus in the chest with an unsteady finger. "You need a mate to brew your Wolfsbane, who can tolerate your dog breath and who appreciates the alpha male in you."

"Like you, y'mean?"

"Exactly!"

They both nodded sagely.

There was a pause, followed by a quick exchange of glances. Lupin cleared his throat and stood up. Struggling to his feet beside him, Severus placed a hand on Remus's shoulder. Snape swayed slightly, and his nose brushed along the curve of Lupin's ear, causing Lupin to inhale sharply.

Remus turned to face the dark wizard. Leaning forwards, he slid a hand around the back of Severus's head and pulled the other wizard towards him.

"Let's move on from here," he growled in Snape's ear.

Another long, dark-eyed stare.

"To the next pub for another drink, Sev, you tosser." Lupin gave Snape a gentle push towards the exit.

Somehow, a couple of drams at the next bar turned into a pub crawl, which in turn, eventually, led to Remus sitting slumped at the kitchen table the next morning pulling at something sticky in his hair.

He tried to sort through the memories of the previous night. Wincing, he thought he remembered telling Severus he loved him... like a brother.

His stomach rolled with nausea. *Merlin's hairy arse!* No, he couldn't have, otherwise he wouldn't still be alive, would he?

His head pounded when he glanced up as Severus shuffled in to the room. Snape's complexion was even more sallow than normal and his eyes were half-closed against the weak, morning light.

Remus cleared his throat, not knowing how best to approach the grim looking wizard.

"Morning."

"Yes, it appears to be morning, Lupin."

"About last night. What did we... did I...?" Scarcely looking at Severus, Remus muttered, "Whatever happened last night, we're still friends, right?"

"Indeed," replied Severus warily, inclining his head very slightly, the movement causing him to wince and put a finger to his temple. "To tell the truth, Lupin, it's all a little

hazy."

Remus snorted. "What were you thinking, knocking on Edinburgh Castle's gates asking to be let in?"

"I believe, I was trying to evade the werewolf with the traffic cone on his head."

Groaning, Remus put a hand up to the sticky patch on his head. "Tell me I haven't got road tar in my hair."

"For goodness sake, stop fiddling with it. You're spreading black grease through your hair. Once I have found the Hangover Potion, I will assist with its removal."

A short time later, Severus eased himself onto the settee. He indicated the seat next to him and waved two potions bottles at Lupin.

"Hangover cure. Sit here quietly, take this potion and I'll try to remove the tar from your rat's nest. Can you remember the spell Charmaine used?"

"Vaguely. I just remember laying my head on her lap like this, and she whispered sweet incantations whilst running her magical fingers through my hair." Lupin lay down with his head on Snape's knee, grinning up at the dark wizard.

"Spare me." Giving Lupin a very sour look down the length of his nose, Severus started spelling the black gobbets from the werewolf's hair. It was surprisingly soothing work and, now his headache was relieved, Severus felt himself relax. His already half-closed eyes drooped shut.

Suddenly, startled by a loud noise, Severus sat up, opening his sleep-heavy eyes wide. He was alarmed to find Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée standing looking down at him, arms crossed and foot tapping.

Trying to rise from the seat, Snape realised Lupin had fallen asleep with his head on his lap.

Severus gave him a shake. Slowly, Lupin woke and sat up, blinking like an owl caught in a dust storm.

"We were just..." Severus started to explain, but stopped abruptly as his brain registered a moist sensation at his crotch.

Looking down, he realised Remus had been drooling in his sleep, leaving a very large, damp patch on the front of his trousers.

"This is not as it seems," Severus assured. "I was just... and we... and I fell asleep."

"How very eloquent."

He cringed.

"Now, get up both of you and get ready."

"Ready?"

"Have you forgotten what day it is?"

Remus groaned. "Now I remember why we went to the pub last night, Severus. We were commiserating over Lily and James's wedding today."

"So, why are you here, mademoiselle?" Severus inquired.

"Professor McGonagall has Order... other business to deal with, so Professor Dumbledore sent me to escort you. As the only Death Eaters invited to the ceremony, you will sit at the back of the church with me. Hurry and get changed. The Portkey will activate soon. Allons-y!"

The wizards stumbled over each other in their haste.

They were breathing hard and still smoothing their dress robes when Charmaine pulled a small plastic unicorn from her pocket. As she did so, a scrap of paper fell from her pocket and fluttered unnoticed to the floor.

Touching the unicorn activated the Portkey, transporting them to the enormous, ornate, arched doorway of a large cathedral. A keen wind blew up the city street, whipping their robes against their legs. Both wizards automatically moved in closer to Charmaine, sheltering her from the cold. Opening the huge double doors, they escorted her inside.

The trio paused in the doorway, disconcerted by the sight of a virtually empty church. Only a handful of people sat in the pews close to the front.

Their footsteps echoed around the vast, vaulted interior as they strode down the stone-flagged centre aisle. Their approach elicited surprised looks and nudging of neighbours by the already seated congregation. One wizard started to draw his wand before the witch at his side stilled his hand.

"Close family and friends only," Lupin remarked, raising an eyebrow.

"Lift your chins and walk with confidence," murmured Charmaine. "You are invited guests."

Sliding into a pew, which Charmaine indicated, some way back from the rest of the guests, Remus grinned and waved to the Gryffindors in the front row.

"Trust Lily and Potter to want the big church wedding," muttered Snape darkly as he sat on the wooden bench next to Lupin.

Shuffling in next to Severus, Charmaine whispered to him. "Look at those bridesmaids' dresses. Is it legal to wear that shade of pink with those yellow ribbons and frills? I bet Lily's wearing a meringue of a dress, too."

"Strawberry-banana creams." Snape snorted. "Lily was my closest childhood friend, but I'm very glad I'm not the wizard marrying the Ginger Whinger."

Lupin elbowed Snape, lifting a finger to his lips and shushing him.

Severus leaned closer to Charmaine, murmuring in her ear. "When I get married, we'll have a private ceremony with our closest friends, and my stunning bride will wear an elegant, simple dress with flowers in her unrestrained hair."

Charmaine sighed. "That sounds very beautiful, Severus."

"Mmm, indeed," Severus breathed in her ear.

"You may have to discuss it with the witch involved, you know."

"I've already told her," he whispered.

"Oh!" The sound was pitiful. Charmaine looked at her hands resting in her lap.

Blushing with mortification, she scrunched her hands into fists. Her breath stuttered through trembling lips. "Well, I trust you will be very happy together. You and...?"

She turned to give him a questioning look, only to find him watching her closely. His deep, dark gaze was on her lips before it travelled upwards to meet her warm, brown eyes. Licking his lips, Severus raised a hand and ran a knuckle gently over Charmaine's flushed cheek. With his other hand, he teased her fisted hand loose and insinuated his fingers between hers.

He rested his forehead against hers, breathing her familiar scent deeply. Organ music swelled in the air.

"I love you."

"No, you can't." She turned away to watch the nuptials.

"I love you guys too," muttered Remus, elbowing Snape sharply. "Now, show some respect; this is a church wedding, not the back row of the cinema."

A/N: sunny33 says, I don't own my wayward commas. They're like cats, they own me.

There may be some delay with uploading the upcoming chapters, for which I apologise in advance. I am going to be away from my computer, in Scotland. This may involve visiting a few Edinburgh pubs. Jokay assures me this is purely for research purposes... you understand.

Slainte mhath! Cheers!

quaffswinegaily

Un Mauvais Quart d'Heure

Chapter 18 of 31

Time for tea and shortbread.

Un Mauvais Quart d'Heure

Disclaimer: The usual disclaimer about ownership goes here.

As soon as the ceremony finished, Charmaine reactivated the Portkey, taking them back to their Edinburgh address. Stopping at the foot of the stone stairs leading to the communal front door, she started to say her goodbyes.

"You can't leave us now," said Remus, grabbing her by the hand and dragging her up the steps. "Come up and have a cup of tea, some shortbread and a wee blether. I think we all have a bit of catching up to do and a few apologies to make." He glared pointedly at Severus.

Ushering them into the narrow, tiled entrance hall, Remus shooed the pair up several flights of stone stairs until they reached the top floor flat.

"Come in, sit down and unload. I'm just going to make us a nice cuppa," Remus called over his shoulder as he disappeared down the corridor and into the kitchen.

"So, how have you been?" Charmaine asked.

"Do you want the polite answer, or do you want the truth, Professor?"

"It seems rich of me to request the truth when I haven't been completely truthful about myself, doesn't it, Severus?"

"Indeed. Perhaps, I haven't always made the wisest choices myself." His hand inadvertently drifted to his left forearm.

"I'm very sorry, Severus, but I think it would be better for both of us if I were to say goodbye and go now."

"No, wait. Lupin has missed you. If not for me, at least stay and have tea with him." As he strode across the room towards her, Severus spotted a silvery scrap of paper lying on the floor. Bending down, he scooped it up and was about to throw it in the dustbin when he recognised it as the chocolate wrapper he had left on her desk.

Smoothing it out, he read the inscription he had written months before. *To warm your soul.*

"You kept it all this time. Why?"

"I wanted something I couldn't have, Severus. I was your teacher; I was on an assignment and wasn't supposed to get too involved." She looked down. "Then I got to know you, and I wanted more, even though I knew it was wrong."

Gently, he took her hand, raising her fingers to his lips. "I've missed you so much, Charmaine. I will take whatever you can give me, so long as there are no lies."

"No lies, Severus, just the truth, but not necessarily the whole truth." She raised her eyes to meet his intense gaze.

"Agreed." He nodded before gathering her close to him, hugging her tight and burying his nose in her soft curls. The smell of her and the closeness of her soft body sent warm currents through him. He was certain he loved her, but would not say it again, for fear of upsetting the fragile peace and losing her for good. This feeling was too precious; Severus felt like he was melting into her honeyed depth, and he never wanted to let her go.

A rattle of cups and the sound of Remus clearing his throat brought him back to earth. Lupin set down the tea tray before loping across the room and throwing an arm around each of them.

"I'm so glad you two are talking again. I love you guys." He kissed Charmaine on her temple and licked up the side of Severus's face before releasing them both.

Charmaine giggled as Severus grimaced, wiping a hand over the wet patch.

"Lupin, get off! You've slobbered on me twice today, you mad dog."

"Only once on your groin," noted Lupin, slapping his thigh and guffawing when Snape gave him a disdainful glare. "I only do it to ruffle your smooth veneer, my friend, and I'll stop being annoying when you start calling me Remus."

"He will, one day."

"Over my dead body," Snape muttered.

"I can see it now. Severus will hold me in his arms, gaze deep into my eyes and whisper my name lovingly." Remus grinned, but the spreading smile slowed and dropped when he saw Charmaine's stricken appearance.

She turned away abruptly, putting a hand over her eyes.

"No. I can't..." she said, pushing past the wizards and heading for the door.

"What?"

"Charmaine?"

A hand grabbed her arm, swinging her round.

"Don't leave."

"It would be unwise for me to stay."

Suddenly, the grip on her arm was released as Lupin's hand flew to his left forearm.

"The Dark Lord's summoning us. We have to go." He gave her a brief hug and kissed her cheek. Picking up his cape and mask, he left the flat.

Severus folded Charmaine into his arms, resting his chin on the top of her head. "I don't want to go. These meetings are getting harder all the time. The Dark Lord is becoming more vicious and vindictive."

"It's going to get worse."

He held her away from him, looking into her wary eyes. "You know this?"

"Yes."

His lips thinned, and he hugged her closer, kissing her forehead.

"We really need to talk." As he released her, he winced, pressing a hand to his forearm. "I must go, but I'm afraid you'll leave before I return."

Charmaine dropped her head without answering. He kissed the top of her head and left with long, purposeful strides, his cape swirling in his wake.

"Severus, I don't know what to do for the best. I shouldn't be here," she whispered after his retreating form.

Turning back into the flat, she wandered aimlessly around the room. Her fingertips trailed over the bars of Remus's cage, which was tucked in a corner of the large room.

I wonder what the neighbours think of the noise, she mused. They probably think it's just rowdy students or one of the Edinburgh Ghost Tours. If only they knew She smiled to herself and drifted on.

The mantelpiece over the fireplace was cluttered with unwashed mugs and sweet wrappers, but in a clear area in the centre sat a picture. Picking it up for a closer look, she saw Severus and Remus standing comfortably side by side. Remus had his arm flung loosely around Snape's shoulder, his hand ruffling Severus's hair.

Severus smiled tolerantly in the picture before ducking his head away from Lupin's hand and speaking to the photographer. Being a photo, she could not hear his words, but she knew them well. She remembered taking the picture herself.

"Please, save me." The picture's lips moved in time with the words in her head. The phrase repeated again and again as she watched the short scenario replay itself several times. He had been speaking in jest at the time, pleading for her to hurry up and take the picture so he could be released from the hair tousling.

"Please, save me."

Clutching the picture to her chest, she slumped onto the settee. How could she leave now? She would have to wait for them to come back, to ensure they returned safe. Then she would go.

The waiting was the hardest part.

Charmaine stared at the tea and biscuits Remus had made for them. Her appetite had disappeared when they left.

She knew how vicious and unpredictable Voldemort could be, and she feared for the young men.

Holding the image of Remus and Severus tightly, she lay down on the couch, curling herself around them in a protective ball. Consciously, she tried to maintain pleasant thoughts, but her mind kept flicking over images of violence and torture. A shudder ran through her as memories of her own torture returned. It had been years ago, but at times like this it felt more recent. Tears seeped from the corner of her eye, dripping quietly onto the cushions beneath her head as she rocked to and fro.

Waiting... waiting...

A/n: Un mauvais quart d'heure = a bit of a bad time

Sunny33 is my tea leaf wrangler.

Dogged

Chapter 19 of 31

Severus and Remus return.

Dogged

Disclaimer: They will all get home eventually. JKR still gets the money.

"Severus, she's gone!"

The front door of the flat stood wide open. Inside it was dark. No fire burned in the grate, and autumnal cold crept damply through the open window. The tea tray was untouched; the couch was empty, and the apartment was deathly quiet.

"No!"

The wizards drew their wands, moving cautiously into the room. Nothing was missing. Nothing, except Charmaine and the picture that usually sat above the fireplace.

It all felt wrong. An adrenaline surge of fear and anxiety prickled their skin.

Severus backed up towards the door. The touch of a wand tip between his shoulder blades halted his retreat. He tried turning around, but the wand dug in harder, and a sharp Stinging Hex sent an unpleasant pulse across his back and down his arms.

"Put down your wands."

Slowly, the pair lowered their wands, placing them with care on the floor at their feet.

"*Accio* wands."

A low chuckle came from behind Severus.

"That was too easy. Whatever happened to constant vigilance?"

"What?"

"Oh, my boys, you have a lot to learn."

Charmaine breezed past them into the room, plonking herself down on the couch. With a flick of her wand, she turned on the lights, closed the windows and curtains and lit the fire. She smiled at the bewildered wizards, holding out their wands for them.

"Don't frighten us like that," Severus grumbled, rubbing his still tingling arms.

"I was thinking whilst you were away gallivanting. If I'm going to stay around, I might as well be of some help to you."

Remus dropped onto the seat next to her. "I heard Slughorn is back at Hogwarts, which means you're out of a job, right? You could stay with us." He batted his eyelashes at her. "Please."

"Give over with the puppy dog eyes, Remus." Charmaine laughed, slapping his arm. "No, I can't live here. I have another job to do."

"What work could possibly be more important than your favourite wizards?"

"Can't tell you. Sorry."

"So, what can you tell us, Charmaine?" asked Severus, settling into a seat opposite her.

"I can tell you Voldemort is becoming more powerful and more dangerous. There are people already working in opposition to him, people I trust with my life and my loved ones."

"What do you suggest we should do?"

"The first thing I want you to do is get some security around this flat. It should be Secret Kept."

"Would you be our Secret Keeper?" asked Remus.

"I'm not sure how that would work when I leave."

Severus stared at her. "Leave? I thought you could only leave for good when I gave you the Portkey."

"I will have to go home some time, Severus."

"When you leave, will you be able to come back?"

Charmaine swallowed hard. "No." Her voice was a hoarse whisper.

Sighing, Severus closed his eyes. "I won't let you go."

"When the time comes, you must."

Severus shook his head vehemently, not wanting to look at her.

Lupin's attention switched from one to the other as they talked. "I have no idea what is going on, but if the situation gets as bad as Charmaine thinks it will, you must send her away, Severus." He reached a hand out and laid it on Snape's knee. "I'll be here for you."

Snape leapt up from his seat. Pacing the room with long, angry strides, he ran his fingers through his hair. He stopped in front of Charmaine, folding his arms across his chest. "Let me get this straight. You're going to leave; I must be the one to send you away, and you are leaving me here with him." He jabbed an accusatory finger towards Lupin.

"Yes." Charmaine gave a very small nod.

Severus let out a long breath.

"Also, I want you to get back in contact with Albus Dumbledore, soon."

"Why should we?" Lupin demanded. "He virtually expelled us from the school."

"He needs you, though he just doesn't know it yet."

"What about the Dark Lord?"

"Lupin, you know Voldemort doesn't completely trust you because he's too scared to read your mind. I wouldn't want to either. I can't imagine what kind of dodgy stuff is in your head."

Severus smirked then became serious again. "He's becoming more paranoid about non-pure wizards, so it might be safer for you to quietly shift your allegiances to Charmaine's crowd."

"What about you, Snape?"

They both looked at Charmaine.

"Tell me what I should do."

"I can't, Severus. You'll have to make your own decisions and walk the fine line between both sides. I don't know how you'll do it."

"Ooh, could he be a spy?" Remus asked.

Charmaine shrugged. Snape's eyebrow lifted enquiringly.

"You are both powerful wizards, and my friends and I will need you fighting on our side. That's why I plan to spend some time with you, teaching you fighting skills."

"So you reckon we'll get to fight alongside you."

"I know you will."

"Sounds exciting." Remus grinned, rubbing his hands together.

"No. No, it's not. It was... it..." She covered her face with her hands as the images in her head overwhelmed her.

Snape knelt down in front of her, gently taking her hands from her face. He was taken aback by the terror etched on her features as she flung her arms around him. Drawing her closer to him, he murmured reassuring words in her ear.

Remus rested his head on her shoulder and rubbed her back in soothing circles.

"It's coming, and I'm so scared," she whispered shakily.

A/N: Sunny33 does all my beta work and pokes me regularly with a stick.

Fighting Like Cat and Dog

Chapter 20 of 31

The boys are fighting again.

Fighting Like Cat and Dog

Disclaimer: It all belongs to Ms Rowling and her associates... and offspring... and companies... and so on and so forth. Can I be added to the bottom of the beneficiaries list, please?

"In the name of the wee man! Ouch! Stop! Ow!"

"You are a feckless git, Lupin." Snape loomed over him aggressively.

Remus shook the pain from his wand hand. "What was that for?"

Snape snickered. "Constant vigilance."

Remus launched himself at the dark haired man, wrestling him to the floor and pinning him down by his arms. "Surrender, Snape."

Unable to use his wand, Severus thrashed his head from side to side and wriggled in an attempt to free himself. "Get off, you oaf. You forgot to reset the flat's protective charms, you gormless mongrel."

"I'm not an obsessive defence and security anorak like you, Severus. Jeez, I swear you're getting more neurotic. What's your problem?" He pushed down hard on Snape's upper arms.

Severus relaxed a bit. "Charmaine's coming to visit, and I want the place secure. I'll not take any chances with her safety. Merlin knows she risks herself enough as it is."

"Is she going to stay? Will she be here for long? Both of you visiting at the same time. Yes! That's fantastic."

Leaping to his feet, Lupin danced a quick jig as he pulled Severus up off the floor and hugged him. Severus held up his hands in a quieting gesture.

"It's good to see you home from Hogwarts, Sev. I miss you, now you're away teaching. How are your little student toerags?"

"Dunderheads and skivers, the lot of them," grouched Snape. "Much like you, Lupin."

"Naff off! Stop maligning me. I was quite chuffed with my skiving skills." Leaning closer, Remus licked the side of Snape's face. "C'mon, grumpy-bum, I can't stand around all day giving you puppy dog kisses. Pick those grubby kecks up off the floor, and let's get this flat tidied up for Charmaine."

"Lupin, you're incorrigible," Severus grumbled, wiping his slimed cheek.

"Ow! What was that for, Snape?"

"That wasn't me, Lupin."

A short silence fell. Suddenly, the room plunged into darkness, and the two wizards scrambled to find safety. Severus hid behind the couch, whilst Remus cowered up against the wall, trying desperately not to whimper.

A blinding flash erupted in the centre of the room, and shadows streaked across the living room wall. Sulphurous fumes and crackling spells filled the air. Snape reached out from behind the couch. Grabbing an ankle which had been illuminated by the flare, he tumbled the intruder to the wooden floorboards with a solid thump and a whoosh of expelled breath. Hastily, he threw himself on top of the escaping body. He held on tight, covering the person's whole body with his length.

Inhaling deeply, he whispered, "Be still. I know it's you."

The struggling beneath him quieted. "How did you know?"

He smiled against Charmaine's hair. "I could smell you."

Drawing back a little, he could just discern her features in the dim light, her mouth pouting slightly and the drifting smoke reflecting in the shine of her eyes. His hand traced across her cheek and snuck into her hair, which spread wildly across the floor behind her.

So beautiful. Desire for her flared within him. He wanted her; he ached for her, and yet he couldn't afford to lose her.

Charmaine was like a wild animal, strong and willful, but when cornered, she was frightened and skittish. One wrong move and she could be gone from his life forever. For months it had been the same; he felt it every time she was near: the yearning, the needing, the loving and the not talking about it. Frustration was building in him. He longed to kiss her but didn't dare, knowing the magic touch of her honeyed-lips would draw him in, lead him on, and he would never want to stop.

Cupping the back of her head, he hugged her close and placed a chaste kiss on her forehead before pulling her to her feet.

"Now, turn off the fireworks. You're scaring the neighbourhood animals," he said, nodding to where Remus still cowered against the wall. "Lupin, c'mon, it's only Charmaine testing us again."

The werewolf shivered and sighed as the remaining spells in the air petered out into stars and unicorns, which floated to the ground before dissipating as the air cleared.

"Bugger that for a game of tin soldiers," grumbled Lupin. "Why can't you just knock on the door like everyone else, you wee bisom?"

"Because, my friend, it has started."

"What's started?" Lupin asked, shifting some dirty laundry off the sofa before sitting down.

Charmaine looked grim. Now the lights were back on, the men could see the tight, drawn expression on her face.

"I'll just organise a cup of tea for us to have whilst we talk about it, shall I?" Remus hopped up and headed through to the kitchen.

"This is serious?" Snape inquired as he sat down next to her.

"Yes." She nodded wearily, her head drooping and her hands dangling between her knees. She looked defeated. "I've done all I can, but I know it isn't enough."

Severus took her hand, stroking the back of it. "Can you tell me about it?"

She looked up at the ceiling as if seeking inspiration, her eyes brimming with tears. "I have to now. We all have our part to play. It's about that prophecy you overheard, Severus."

"Regarding Voldemort and the boy?"

Charmaine nodded again. "There are two boys that fit the prophecy: the Longbottom's boy and young Harry Potter. I've been working for months with both couples using my Poisons expertise. Throughout their pregnancies, I was trying to ensure safe delivery of strong, healthy babies, and, now they are born, I've been improving their immunity and protection charms."

"I thought you were working on a research project, Charmaine."

"It was... sort of."

Dropping her hand and rising to his feet, Snape snarled. "So, when you weren't with me, you were staying with the Potters."

"Or the Longbottoms."

"You've been living with James Potter."

"This has nothing to do with you and your petty hatred."

"Petty! Have you any idea what he did to me?" he hissed.

"For goodness sake, I was working with them, not sleeping with him."

Snape stiffened in anger, and air rushed in through his nose. "Get out!" His voice was low and threatening. "Go back to your precious Potter."

Charmaine flinched. "Severus, please. I need your support with this."

"No. I will not help Potter."

"Think of Lily and her baby. They need protection from Voldemort."

"Don't you play the Lily card with me. I loved Lily."

"Exactly. She needs you."

Snape's tone softened. "What about you, Charmaine? Do you need me?"

Frightened doe-eyes skittered away from his intense gaze.

"Charmaine?"

"No."

"No, you don't need me, or no, you won't talk to me about it because it's too complicated."

Standing up to face him, arms rigid by her sides, she fizzed with pent up magic. "Don't push me, Severus Snape."

Hurt and frustrated, he turned away from her. "You don't really want to be with me; you only want the chance to get your Portkey back. Just go. Go back to my enemies, whichever one it is you're sleeping with."

"Grow up, Severus! I need your help, but I am not going to stay and listen to your childish accusations." As she reached the door, Charmaine turned back to Snape. "Go and speak to Dumbledore."

With that, she left.

"I shan't speak to Dumbledore!" Severus shouted after her furiously. "I'm going straight to Voldemort with my information!"

Lupin appeared through the doorway, carrying a laden tea tray. "Where'd she go?"

Snape glowered at him.

"You bloody, great numpty. What did you do this time, Snape?"

Severus groaned, lifting a hand to his eyes. "I fucked it up. I asked her if she needed me, and she said no. If only I hadn't asked. At least then I could have harboured some hope."

"Did you tell her you love her?"

Severus looked at Remus as if he were mad. "What do you think? I've told her once, and that wasn't a raging success."

"The two of you are as bad as each other in the communications stakes," murmured Remus. "Hey, where are you going?" he asked as he watched Snape pick up a cape and head for the door.

"To Voldemort. I said I would tell him, and I mean to keep my word."

"Take care," Remus called after him, but he was gone. "Uptight prick, doesn't know love when it slaps him in the face," he muttered to himself.

He sighed. "Well, I suppose I'll have to stock up on the chocolate; he's sure to come back in a right state."

*

It was the early hours of the next morning when Severus returned. Dragging his cape behind him, he staggered in and collapsed halfway across the room.

Lupin hauled him into bed, shoving chocolate into his sagging mouth, stripping him of his bloodied clothes and applying healing spells to the most obvious wounds.

"Shit, Sev, what did that mad blighter do to you?"

Violent tremors shuddered through Snape's body.

"It's over. They're gone." Snape's voice was hoarse.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Lupin carefully wiped dirt from Severus's tear-streaked face.

"She's gone... dead." Severus turned his face towards the wall. "I wish I were dead." His frame shook with silent sobs.

Quietly, Remus lay down beside him. Curling up behind Severus, he laid a calming hand on his friend's shoulder.

Severus cleared his throat as the constant shaking settled to irregular minor shivers. "Do you want to know what happened, Lupin?"

Remus pressed his forehead to the space between Snape's shoulder blades and nodded dumbly as fat tears slid down his cheeks.

A/N: Sunny33 = beta

kecks = trousers (Northern England) or underpants (Scotland); take your pick

bisom = difficult woman (Scottish)

numpty = a person lacking understanding (Scottish)

As Mad as a Cut Snake

Chapter 21 of 31

Telling times.

As Mad as a Cut Snake

Disclaimer: It's going to get messy. I could take them all home and keep them out of trouble.

A/N: I dedicate this chapter to my Moravian friends, who will be losing their jobs when RAF Kinloss closes (see chapter 7).

Telling Voldemort about the prophecy was the easy part.

The tall wizard listened intently as Severus talked. Leaning forward from his raised seat, he observed the younger man closely. "So it's about a young boy, is it?"

Severus nodded in response.

Steepling his fingers, Voldemort continued. "I wonder why you are telling me this now, and why you appear to be so upset, Severus." He touched his fingertips to his lips as he mused. "Could it be you know which boy this prophecy is referring to? Hmm?"

His gimlet eyes caught the slight shift in Snape's expression. "Aah! I'm right, aren't I?" The edges of his lips moved a fraction in what might have been a smile.

He beckoned to the wizard standing behind him. "Malfoy, tell me which of our opposition have recently produced offspring."

The platinum haired wizard leant down and murmured in Voldemort's ear.

"No, not the Lovegoods, they had a girl, and too young. The Potters... Interesting... Indeed. Thank you, Lucius." Voldemort waved him away. "It appears, Severus, I have no choice other than to annihilate everyone in the Potters' house. That should avert the problem, don't you think? Oh, don't look so shocked. What did you expect me to do?"

"Let me go there first, my Lord, and remove any innocent bystanders."

"You wish to save the witch you had a teenage crush on?"

Severus nodded, avoiding eye contact.

Voldemort tittered girlishly, then leaned forward in his seat. "Let me tell you something in confidence."

He spoke quietly, so only the two of them could hear. "The Potters' house is Secret Kept, and I know the address. Your information has been invaluable. We will attack later tonight, after the revels. I want you to be there, Severus. You must come to..." He bent his head and whispered the address in Severus's ear. Sitting back, he smiled again.

"Now, run along and prepare yourself for the fun, my boy."

*

Telling Dumbledore was harder.

Dumbledore didn't want anyone overhearing this conversation with Professor Snape. Mademoiselle Bien-Aimée had warned him something terrible was going to happen soon, and when it did, he would have to trust his staff all his staff. She had been most emphatic about that, but he still had reservations about young Snape. Severus was not an easy man to like, though so far he had done nothing to cause any mistrust. Albus felt uneasy. He intended to maintain the upper hand in this encounter, so remained hidden until Snape arrived.

He chose to meet at the edge of the Forbidden Forest, out of sight of the school, but close enough to summon help if needed. Dark had already fallen, despite the relatively early hour. It was one thing he hated about living this far north, that and the miserable weather. At Hogwarts, they were as far north as Moscow, or Canada where they have polar bears, for goodness sake. Louring clouds rolled in across the already bleak sky, driven by a howling wind which sent icy rain lashing down.

Snape arrived in full defensive mode, clutching his wand so tight his knuckles whitened. His stringy hair whipped around his thin face in the mean wind.

Dumbledore could not risk duelling with this powerful, wild young man. Instead, Albus disarmed him quickly, for his own safety, before making his presence known.

Severus appeared distraught as he explained how he had told Voldemort about the prophecy, how he had asked the Dark Lord to spare the innocents in the house, how everyone was going to be killed. Everyone, including the love of his life. Falling to his knees in his distress, he looked up at Dumbledore, pleading for him to save her.

Dumbledore was unable to hide his contempt. "And what will you give me in return, Severus?"

"Anything." His voice was no more than a breath on the wind.

"I'll see what I can do, Professor Snape," replied Dumbledore.

As soon as Dumbledore had left, it dawned on Severus the headmaster probably thought he was talking about Lily Evans.

"Shit! Charmaine!" Albus could protect the Potters, but who would protect Charmaine? That was his job.

*

Telling the Potters wasn't so easy either.

"What do you think you're doing, Snivellus, turning up at my door uninvited?" James Potter sneered at the dishevelled wizard, standing dripping on his doorstep.

"Let me in, Potter. This is important."

"You're not coming into my home with my family, you Death Eater scum."

"Please, let me explain."

"I don't want to hear anything from you, Snape." James tried to slam the door, but Snape's foot stopped it.

"Who's at the door, James?" a woman's voice asked from inside the house.

"No-one important, my gilded Lily," James called back in reply. "He's just leaving. You stay inside in the warmth, sweetheart."

Lily's face appeared briefly in the hallway behind James. She gave Severus a quick smile and a wave before disappearing back into the house as the sound of a crying infant increased.

Severus pushed his point. "Don't you realise, if I'm here, your Secret Kept address is no longer a secret. You're in real danger, Potter. If you won't listen to me for your own sake, at least hear me out for Lily's sake... and your son's."

James crossed his arms. "Go on and be quick."

"Someone has betrayed you, and Voldemort knows where you live. He..."

"Do you think we're unprotected, Snivellus?"

Disdain spread across Potter's face. "Our most powerful wizards and witches have been working to safeguard us, your beloved, ex-professor Charmaine among them."

"Charmaine... Is she here?"

"And why do you want to know?"

"May I speak with her?"

"I'm sure she's not interested in speaking with you."

"Please."

"Oh, for goodness sake, I'll get her. You stay here. Don't even think about trying to come into my house." James tried to shut the door, but Snape's foot remained resolutely in the way. Potter huffed. "I'll send her out to you, and then you will leave. I don't want to see your face at my door ever again."

*

There was no need to tell Charmaine. Somehow, she seemed to know.

"Severus!" She threw her arms around him. "I'm so glad to see you. Let's get out of here. You'll be in great danger if we don't go now."

Snape's mouth gaped open.

Grabbing his hand, Charmaine started to run, dragging him to the nearby Apparition point. "Come on. Now."

As they slowed down close to the spot, Severus tried to speak to her. "Charmaine, I'm sorry, I..."

She turned towards him abruptly. "No, Severus. I should apologise for losing my temper. I always expect you to be more mature than you are. You're still so young."

Snape's demeanour became rigid. "So I'm too young. Is that the problem?"

Gently, Charmaine took his face in her hands, gazing deep into his troubled eyes. "You cannot even begin to know the truth, Severus. One of these days, I'll have the time and the courage to explain everything to you. Not now though. We have to go."

"Where?"

"Take me to Voldemort."

*

Charmaine telling Voldemort was the worst.

As soon as they arrived, Severus regretted bringing her. Death Eaters' revels were underway, and the nauseating mix of laughter and screams jangled his nerves. What had started as fun events had deteriorated, over the last year or so, into gut wrenching torture sessions led by the Lestranges.

It was with a sense of pride that he watched Charmaine close her eyes, take a deep breath, square her shoulders and raise her chin defiantly. "I've faced him before, I can do it again," she muttered under her breath. Opening her eyes, she gave him a brief nod. "I'm ready. Take me to him."

She followed close behind him as he led the way.

As usual, Voldemort was not in the main hall where the revels were taking place, but in an adjacent room with a magically enhanced window, which allowed him to view the revels when he wished or to have a scene of his choice play across its enchanted surface. Tonight, he was watching sea-snakes swimming in azure waters.

"Ah, Snape. You have returned in time for our visit to the Potters. How appropriate you should join us."

Charmaine stepped out from behind Severus and drew herself up to her full height.

"Severus, you have brought a pretty witch for me, too. No, wait. This is the Poisons expert, isn't it?" Voldemort eyed her speculatively. "Come closer, so I can get to know you a little better. I could use a bright little witch like you."

Charmaine walked right up to his raised seat, stopping directly in front of him. Voldemort reached out a skinny finger and lifted one of her curls. "Yes. I think I might like this one."

She smacked his hand away. "Don't touch me."

"How dare you?" He drew his hand back to slap her, but she caught hold of his wrist as it descended.

"I dare... because I know you, Tom Riddle."

His features blanched slightly. A tight, high laugh escaped his lips. "And what do you know, Miss Know-it-all?"

"I know what you are planning to do tonight."

Voldemort glared at Severus. "Did you share this with her?"

"No, my Lord." Severus bowed his head, but kept watching Charmaine in his peripheral vision.

"No-one told me what you are going to do tonight. I know. I also know what will happen to you afterwards. I know... because I have seen it."

"What are you? A Divination expert? A Seer?" Voldemort's tone was disparaging.

Charmaine lifted her eyes to his and fixed him with a challenging gaze. "Do you want to know what I know, see what I have seen? Look into my mind, Tom Riddle."

Severus grabbed her hand, jerking her round to face him. "No, Charmaine! He is a powerful Legilimens; you can't occlude him."

She smiled wanly and laid a soothing hand on his cheek. "I know, Severus, but I have to do this." Turning back to Voldemort, she looked him straight in the eyes, pushing the images she wanted him to see to the front of her mind. "Go on then, Snake Face," she muttered.

Severus watched Voldemort hold Charmaine's gaze. Long fingers gripped her chin as Voldemort whispered a quiet *Legilimens*.

Snape could almost feel the force of the probing as the mental connection was made. Charmaine shuddered, her pupils dilated and her breathing became harsh and rapid. Severus kept a tight grip on her hand.

Suddenly, Voldemort broke the connection. "You are lying!" he shouted.

"Why would I lie?"

"*Crucio!*" Voldemort's curse was so forceful, Severus felt the violence jolt through her and into him. Charmaine crumpled to the floor, her hand jerking out of Snape's grasp.

A second Cruciatus was aimed at Severus, who fell to the floor, writhing in agony.

Charmaine's lips pressed tight as if suppressing a scream. When Voldemort lifted the curse, a short breath passed across her lips.

Voldemort hissed at her. "You're wrong, you filthy little Mudblood."

Charmaine's teeth chattered together as she struggled back to her feet. Her muscles, still cramping in spasms, scarcely held her upright. She lifted her head, brushed her wayward hair out of her face and stared at Voldemort, challenging him. A trickle of blood ran down from her nose and over her top lip. She wiped it with the back of her hand, smearing blood up her cheek.

"You're pathetic, Tom Riddle. You're a little man with a big complex. I have nothing but contempt for you. I know you will be reduced to nothing. I have seen you destroyed. You may kill me, but..."

"Enough!" shrieked Voldemort, raining vicious curses down on her. Charmaine was flung backwards across the room. Crashing against the wall, she slid to the floor. Voldemort stalked over to her. Savagely, he kicked at her limp body. "You know nothing, you stupid witch!" he shouted, punctuating each word with a solid swing of his booted foot.

Gradually, his fury abated, and he stood breathing heavily. Without looking at Severus and with a voice dripping with venom, he said, "Get rid of her... permanently."

Voldemort strode towards the door. "I am going to deal with the Potters. I expect you to be there, Snape."

Fear swept over Severus. Kneeling at Charmaine's side, he pushed her hair off her face. Her eyelids flickered open, and she ran her tongue over her bleeding lip. "Severus?" Her speech slurred.

"Gods, Charmaine, how badly has he hurt you? I thought he was going to kill you, and I was completely useless." His Adam's apple bobbed up and down as he swallowed. "He... he wants me to get rid of you."

She raised a hand shakily to his tear-streaked cheek. "I think I'm badly injured. This feels worse than last time. You've got to do it, Severus."

"No! Don't ask me to kill you. That's not... that's not a fair thing to ask of anyone."

Her smile was barely a twitch of her lips as she patted his chest pocket. "I know. I'm not asking that of you. Just... send me away."

Understanding dawned on Severus. "The Portkey."

She nodded slightly.

"Charmaine, I desperately want you to stay with me. I don't want to send you away, knowing you will never come back."

Her breathing was becoming more ragged. "Severus, I may not survive."

Making up his mind, he pulled the handkerchief from his pocket. "I need you, Charmaine, but right now I need you to leave even more."

He looked at the small scrap of material. "Where will this take you?"

She shrugged. "Don't know."

"Will there be someone there to look after you?"

Another small shrug. Her hand crept up inside his sleeve, and she pressed her thumb gently to his Blaze. Warmth and bittersweet emotions ran through him.

He held the handkerchief out towards her. "Here, take it."

"Such a charming gift for your beloved professor," she murmured, her head lolling back and her eyes closing.

"Charmaine! Charmaine!" Severus shook her gently, but there was no response. He hugged her limp body to his chest, kissed her hair and her blood smeared cheek. "No! Don't die! Don't leave me!"

Realising he still held the hanky clenched in his fist, he tucked it into her hand and curled her lifeless fingers around it.

And then she was gone.

*

Dumbledore had to be told.

"What do you mean, they're dead?" Snape demanded, incredulity sharpening his tone.

"We didn't get there in time."

"I warned you. You had plenty of time. I thought you were going to keep her safe. I thought... you were going... to keep her... safe," he ground out between gritted teeth. "They're all gone... dead... and you want me to protect her son. He doesn't need my protection. The Dark Lord has gone..."

"The Dark Lord will return."

"How do you know, Dumbledore?"

"Charmaine..."

"Charmaine is gone," Severus raged. "I tried to save her, and she's... gone."

Albus quailed at the young wizard's vehemence.

Slowly, Severus regained his composure. "Very well, I will do as you ask, but you must never tell anyone."

*

Telling Lupin broke his heart.

Let Sleeping Dogs Lie

Chapter 22 of 31

Of trials and memories.

Let Sleeping Dogs Lie

Disclaimer: Alas, no money for me.

Trials are all the same, long and tedious, and Snape's trial was much the same as any other. It had taken nearly a year for them to bring him to trial after dealing with all the minor players first. His deeds and personality were held up to scrutiny by one and all. There were the witnesses for and against, the interrogation and cross-examination. Through it all, Severus sat stony faced, watching his life pass through the courtroom. He gazed at his knees or up at the ceiling, and when he felt really bored, he counted the wooden panels on the courtroom walls.

He listened distractedly to the evidence. It was his life; he knew it well, and with the use of Veritaserum no-one could tell any lies about him. He was pretty sure of the outcome of the trial, so why waste any more time? Stretching out his long legs, he leaned his head back against the wooden bench. The restraints tightened a little on his arms and body, but not enough to concern him.

Eventually, it was the turn of the Golden Trio.

Harry Potter gave his testimony. Heads nodded, and lips pursed as the members of the Wizengamot heard about Snape's love for Lily Evans and his lifelong protection of her orphaned son. Dumbledore had promised not to tell anyone, but Potter had no such compunction. Around the room, eyes brimmed with tears as Harry Potter thanked his ex-professor for everything he had done. Snape glared at the faded scar on Harry's forehead, avoiding looking at Potter's eyes so he wouldn't be reminded of Lily. He did miss her, even after all the arguments and all these years, and he deeply regretted not being able to save her.

Weasley's speech was lamentable. It was full of stammering and blushing, a host of ums and ers, and very little content. Snape could hardly refrain from sneering and rolling his eyes.

The sneer only increased when Granger was called to the stand. What would that little know-it-all have to offer in his defence? He wasn't even going to bother listening, but something in the tone of her voice as she checked whether stored memories were acceptable snagged his attention. His gaze was drawn to the self-assured young woman who stood watching him from the witness stand. He expected another maudlin rendition of *Professor Snape was so mean to me, but really he has a heart of gold under his dark exterior*. What he got caught him by surprise.

Her eyes never left his face as she announced she would be providing the testimony of the werewolf, the late Remus Lupin, in defence of his best friend, Severus Snape. Shocked murmurs rippled around the room, and the drowsing audience sat up to pay attention. Snape's cheeks flushed a little, and his pulse skipped with uncertainty.

With an assured tone, Miss Granger advised the court of her friendship with Remus Lupin through his time as a teacher and, subsequently, as co-members of the Order of the Phoenix. She explained how he had approached her and requested she store his memories, to be used in the event they could help his friend, Severus Snape.

Severus looked down at his hands where they were gripping his knees. He wondered what kind of memories the mongrel had passed on. Please, don't let it be any of those daft drunken escapades of their youth. He nearly snorted at the thought and gripped his knees harder.

Granger's clear voice reiterated Snape's role as a double agent, a protector of Hogwarts' students in general and of Harry Potter in particular. She then enlightened the Wizengamot to Snape's befriending of, and caring for, the unwanted werewolf through his transition from school pupil to Death Eater. A few gasps followed that statement. Then, she divulged the truth about Snape's support of Lupin throughout his hard life after school, working against prejudice towards his friend, his role in modifying Wolfsbane and his efforts to improve the lives of werewolves, even though he never downplayed their potentially dangerous nature.

"Why would Lupin give you his memories, Miss Granger?" an ancient witch asked.

"I don't know," she replied, looking a little puzzled as the effects of Veritaserum ensured she told the truth.

"What did he tell you, my dear?"

"Remus said he couldn't explain because it was too complicated. He knew I would survive and he would not, and he needed me to help his mate."

The words rushed out as she looked pleadingly at Snape, whose head snapped up to stare at her. She continued to hold his gaze as she was thanked for the testimony and dismissed from the stand. Then, she was surrounded by her friends and whisked away.

Whilst the Wizengamot debated his life and judged him, Severus sat with his thoughts in turmoil.

How had Lupin known those things? It couldn't be animal instinct. And why had he chosen to tell that bushy-haired witch? The words she had used reminded him of something.

As he pondered, he scratched at the forearm where his Dark Mark had been, then shoved his hand in his pocket and pulled out his handkerchief to wipe his nose. He sighed, lifting a hand to comb long fingers through his ragged hair, which itched with prison dirt. Slowly, Severus took his hand away from his head. He stared at the grimed palm in amazement. For a moment he sat still, gulping deep breaths. There must be a mistake. No, there was no mistake. His hand was moving free of restraints. He was free!

*

Sitting in the cool dark of the small kitchen at Spinners End, Severus eventually had the peace and quiet he craved. He didn't like the place much, but no-one could find him

there. The only people who had known of its existence were long gone or disinclined to visit him. He sat, swirling the dregs of his tea round the bottom of his mug.

He was relieved, he could now return his own stored memories. It had taken a great deal of skill to remove the memories without it being noticeable to any interrogating wizards. He was grateful to Dumbledore and Lupin for sharing that skill. At the time he had stored them, he had been uncertain which side would win the conflict and unsure whether he would ever be able to view them again. Some of them had been in storage since before his first trial, and he wasn't sure how well preserved they would be.

He put his cup down decisively. His hand shook a little with anticipation as he dipped his ebony wand into the Pensieve.

First, out came childhood memories of Lily visiting him, here in this very kitchen, sitting on the worn lino and playing gobstones. Her laughter suffused the room, and even his work-wearied Da smiled with her as his Ma opened a packet of Jammie Dodgers biscuits for them to share.

He smiled and dipped the tip of his wand into the swirl of silver again. Their first kiss, youthful and embarrassing, but incredibly sweet, Lily's hair smooth, copper silk beneath his hands. He was glad he had saved that moment. It made up for the disaster their relationship had become as they grew older.

From there, he moved on to a meeting with Dumbledore. It was similar to the memory of Dumbledore's that had been donated to Harry Potter and used at his trial, but there was something extra. It was from the night Lily had been killed. His darling Lily. They weren't talking about Lily though; they were talking about someone else, and he was distraught. An enormous wave of emotion flooded over him. He tried to scabble backwards away from the overwhelming grief, but instead was plunged straight into another memory of himself and Lupin in the Edinburgh flat. Lupin's arms were wrapped around him as he howled out his despair. "I need her. I miss her. I love her."

Cold seeped through Snape's robes as he came to, lying face down on the grubby kitchen linoleum. His mind swirled. How could he have forgotten? The emotions were so huge and raw. How could he forget? But, his memory hadn't failed him, had it? It had been removed. He had removed it himself.

His limbs ached as he got up slowly. He lit the lamps and the fire in an effort to warm himself. Peering into the Pensieve, he could see one more wisp of memory in its depths. He felt very reluctant to look at it, a little scared of what else he might find. Why had it been so important to save this memory?

He sat heavily onto the rickety kitchen chair. A sheen of perspiration glistened on his top lip. Steadying his nerves and his hand, he snagged the last memory with his wand and touched it to his temple.

He flinched as the noise of battle surged around him. Yes, he remembered this, defending the Golden Trio. He hadn't expected to survive, and this was his final duty to Dumbledore. He was fighting for his life.

From the other side of the battlefield, Lupin approached, running through the strafing curses.

The daft beggar will get himself killed, thought Severus, distracted.

Reaching Snape's side, Lupin spoke to him briefly then threw his arms around him in a crushing hug. He didn't see the Death Eater's curse coming and looked very surprised as it struck his back.

Severus's arms tightened around him, holding the dying wizard close to him. He could see Lupin's lips moving and leaned closer to hear him. "What is it, Lupin?"

"Call me Remus," the werewolf whispered, his eyes searching Snape's face.

"Over my dead body," Snape replied automatically.

"Or mine, my friend." Lupin's body slumped against Severus.

"Remus!"

A soft, rattling laugh escaped from Lupin's bluing lips.

Severus cupped his friend's shaggy head with his hand and gazed deep into the tawny eyes, capturing the dying wizard's last thoughts.

"When you see her again...Tell her you love her... I love her... and you. I love you, Sev. You are my true mate." Lupin gasped for breath. "Say 'bye to Tonks."

"You're embarrassing me, Remus. Stop talking, you wassock," Snape chided gently.

Remus's lips lifted in a faint smile as his eyes drifted shut. Severus kissed the top of Lupin's head, just as Tonks arrived, pushing him aside.

Whilst Tonks crouched over Lupin's body, grieving, Severus tried to protect her.

"He said he loves you and said goodbye, Tonks!" Severus shouted over the battle's din.

Bellatrix's *Avada Kedavra* burst forth, striking the younger witch. As Snape watched, her hair rapidly changed hue from vibrant purple through to sickly green, before fading more gradually to mousy brown. He crouched alongside her, murmuring for the dying witch to hear. "He loved you."

Withdrawing from the memory left Severus confused. He felt the aching grief in his chest, like losing Remus all over again. Lupin had frequently told him he loved him, often in jest and usually after a few drinks. He had said it again in this memory, but this time Severus knew it to be true. He realised the depth of feeling behind the words, and what was more, Severus realised he loved the mongrel too. He slammed a fist down on the cup-stained kitchen table. Bloody werewolf... ruddy lycanthropy got under everyone's skin.

But, Lupin had said he loved Tonks as well, and Severus knew that wasn't completely true. It had been a marriage of convenience, to start with. They had married because they both had needed to prove they were stable, trustworthy members of the wizarding community, not just a couple of freaks. With time, they had cared deeply for each other. Like many arranged marriages, the necessity of cooperation had brought them closer together.

Remus had not said he loved Tonks, he had said *tell her you love her*. Tell whom? He had said he loved this other person too. Severus stroked his chin as he thought. It couldn't be Lily, because she was already dead. Severus couldn't think. He reran the memory of Lupin's last words through his head. Grief overwhelmed him again, the same sense of enormous loss he had experienced in the previous memory. Someone had gone. He and Lupin were grieving. Who?

He sat in the grim little kitchen with his elbows on the table and his head in his hands, running his fingers through his straggly, regrowing hair.

Why couldn't he remember?

He peered into the Pensieve, but there were no more memories.

A/N: Again the beta work is done by sunny33.

A Bit of a Dag

Chapter 23 of 31

Who is that woman?

A Bit Of A Dag

Disclaimer: Take them home, Ms Rowling.

Minerva McGonagall folded her arms. She looked down at Severus, a haughty expression on her face. Her eyebrows arched and her lips pursed tight. Like a cat's bum sucking on an acid drop, Remus would have said, and Severus smiled at the thought.

"Stop smirking, young man. Do you find this amusing?"

"No, Headmistress," answered Severus. Coughing a little to cover his growing smile, he looked into the fire to avoid the sight of Minerva in a tartan Flora MacDonald outfit. The lace frills round the mob cap and ruffled skirts bounced jauntily as the headmistress tapped her foot in frustration.

"If he wasn't already dead, I could kill that diddy Albus for this. Every Hallowe'en it's the same. The castle decorates itself, and the staff's robes transform into fancy dress. I haven't managed to deactivate the Charms, and every year I end up in some tartan monstrosity. It's such a scunner." She turned around, presenting her flounce-clad rump to Snape. "I know I'm no skelf, but does my bahookie look big in this?"

Severus grimaced and shook his head at the vast expanse of layered, tartan skirts. "I have no idea what your bahookie is, Minerva, but I'm sure it looks its normal size."

She plumped down on a seat opposite him. "Ach! Listen to me blethering on, Severus. You didn't come to have me chew your lug about my sartorial problems, did you?"

"Indeed, no."

"What has dragged the recluse away from the esoteric Department of Mysteries?"

Severus frowned, not sure where to start. He took a deep breath and decided to get straight to the point. "I need help."

McGonagall fixed him with her sharp gaze. "Help?"

"I've been working trying to stabilise some of the prophecies which were damaged during the fiasco with the Golden Trio and Potter's prophecy. A corrupted prophecy has been found in the Department of Mysteries, which may relate to me. It mentions an emblazoned wizard, a wolf, a spell of time, and after that the sound quality is severely distorted. We think it may mention a dog... a bitch. Does that mean anything to you, Minerva?"

Professor McGonagall opened her mouth; her jaw worked up and down but no words came out, so Snape continued.

"The problem is my memory is unusually fuzzy, so I thought you could help fill in some gaps. I need information about my last year here at Hogwarts when I received the Blaze and the time just after I left when I stayed in your flat in Edinburgh."

"My flat in Edinburgh?"

"Yes. The one you lent to Remus and me."

"I never had a flat in Edinburgh, Severus."

Snape rubbed his forehead as he tried to remember. "I'm sure Dumbledore said it was your flat."

"No. It belonged to... to..." Minerva's face screwed up with frustration "... her."

"Her?"

"Yes, *her*."

"That's what I need help with. I can't remember, and I need to know about her."

"Are you asking me to tell you about her?"

"Yes, Minerva, I am."

The witch shuddered slightly. She stretched her mouth wide a couple of times and ran her tongue around her teeth before starting to speak. "That feels better. Now, my tongue is loosened."

Snape gave her a quizzical look.

"Another of Dumbledore's spells," she said in explanation. "He didn't want you distracted from your job of protecting Harry, so he placed a tongue-tie on those of us who were close to you. We couldn't mention her name, unless you asked directly about her."

"About whom?"

"Charmaine Bien-Aimée."

"Charmaine?" Severus frowned. The name rang a bell, but he could not recall why. He rolled the name around in his head. "Charmaine Bien-Aimée. Charmaine well-loved."

"Yes. Our beloved Charmaine." Minerva smiled at her memory.

"No, I don't remember her."

"Severus, my dear boy, how very sad. I didn't realise that manipulative, old bastard had modified your memories, making you forget her. Circe's hairy oxters! That's outrageous!"

Snape rubbed his fingertips in circles over his temples. "I'm not sure he did, Minerva. I've worked at the Department of Mysteries for a couple of years, and in my spare

time I have researched my memory deficit. Having some absent memories meant I had no reference point to start from, but, even when I returned those stored memories, I still can't remember things clearly. My study suggests I might have done this to myself, or it might be something to do with the protection from the Unicorn's Blaze. Now you have given me a name, which is most helpful."

Severus rose from his seat, thanked Minerva and headed towards the fireplace.

"Is that all, Severus? Don't you want to know any more?"

His hand paused as he reached for the Floo powder. "It's enough for now, thank you, Minerva. I have to admit I'm more than a little apprehensive about what I may find out."

Crossing the room in a rustle of skirts, Minerva laid a hand on Snape's shoulder. "Dinna fash yersel', laddie."

Snape turned towards her, but was distracted by a ringing tone emanating from inside his robes. "I'm needed back at work."

"If you want any more help, you know where I am," Minerva called after him as he swirled away into the green flames, adding more quietly, "and I know who she is."

*

Snape's Head of Department was waiting for him.

After years working in Australia, Joanna Megansdochter was more used to a relaxed work atmosphere and found working in the Ministry conventional and claustrophobic, not to mention rife with nepotism. Occasionally, she wished her red hair was due to Weasley genes. It certainly would have moved her up the promotional ladder faster. Instead, she had worked hard and gained the promotions on her own merit, whilst still maintaining her unique Aussie attitude.

She liked nothing better than to invite her straight-laced colleagues to sling some tinnies in the esky, put on their stubbies and thongs, and join her to throw another snarler on the barbie in the arvo. Their confused reactions to the invitation made her giggle. Severus, on the other hand, had smirked and turned up to her afternoon barbeque in his normal robes with flipflops on his slender feet and a few cans of beer in his hand. The drongo said he didn't want to give her family nightmares by wearing shorts.

The auburn-haired witch smiled as Severus approached. Joanna had worked with Severus for a couple of years and rather liked the dour wizard. He made her laugh, and when she did her eyes disappeared further into their merry crinkles. She was only a couple of years older than him, and when he had first arrived, not long after his release from Azkaban, she had harboured a bit of a fancy for his brooding looks.

She had thought if she invited him out for a few drinks, she might be able to divert him from his well publicised obsession with his teenage love. Maybe, she could entice him to shift his feelings from one red-head to another, she had joked with a colleague. Instead, she had found he was not obsessed with Lily Evans at all, but still had a huge void in his life which he now tried to fill with work.

It wasn't just the memory loss. In fact, he did not describe it as loss of memories. Severus described his memories as insubstantial. He could remember most things, but if he tried to concentrate too hard on certain people, they seemed to shift and fade or blank out into whiteness. The problem appeared to frustrate and sadden him.

Joanna watched Severus approach with his customary long strides and severe expression. At times, she felt like a frowsy granny next to his austere elegance, but she would rather her home was cluttered with laughing children and rescued animals, than the emptiness she perceived in Severus.

Tonight, however, Snape's lack of family commitments worked in her favour. Joanna had a couple of grandchildren she needed to get home to care for, and she was handing the final stages of their project over to him.

She had some reservations about giving Severus the final assignment, especially as he would be briefing their operative on Timeportkey travel and sending them back to aid his own younger self. It seemed wrong for him to have that job. Unfortunately, it could not be avoided. The agent was arriving soon, and Jo had to leave early.

Quickly, she ran over the assignment again with him.

"Right, I'm off now. See you tomorrow. I owe you for this. It'll be my shout next time we're at the pub."

"You might want to put a bit of a glamour on that," she said, indicating the scar on Snape's neck as she headed for the door. "We don't want the girl frightened out of her wits before she starts her mission."

*

Megansdochter's friendly eyes peered back from the mirror, scrutinising her features. The hair colour was fading a little and greying at the edges. The freckles were also disappearing. Weren't freckles supposed to fade during your childhood? Better late than never. Her mouth curled up in a smile, plumping the apples of her cheeks.

Finally, there was the nose. Snape had politely called it retroussé, but truthfully it looked as if the witch's maker had run out of time whilst moulding the clay. Unlike Snape's finely sculpted appendage, hers was more of a freeform splodge.

Sighing, Severus turned away from the mirror.

Transforming into his Head of Department was not a particularly difficult spell, but it made him feel uncomfortable in his skin. He had only glanced briefly at the final pages of the assignment. When he had seen the operative's name on the file, he had felt a simple glamour would not have been enough to prevent the young woman from being traumatised. Just the sight of Severus Snape would probably be enough to send any unsuspecting witch screaming.

He drew himself up to his full height, which was considerably shorter than he was used to, and strode towards his meeting as purposefully as he could in women's shoes.

*

Travelling down in the lift to the Department of Mysteries, Hermione shivered. Why hadn't she arranged to meet Madam Megansdochter elsewhere?

It was after hours, every sane person had gone home and she was walking down the short, dark corridor to an unknown assignment. The last time she had been here it had been this quiet, and she remembered well the mayhem which had followed. This time she didn't have Harry and Ron with her for support. She felt naked and exposed without them now, but, in truth, they had rarely been at her side since they'd left school.

She stood before the Department's plain, black door for a moment, muttering under her breath to herself, trying to fortify her resolve. As she raised her hand to knock, the door swung open silently of its own accord, allowing her access to the circular room within. A witch stood in the middle of the floor.

"Come in, Miss Granger, and close the door."

As Hermione shut the door behind her, the circular room began to spin around her. Feeling vertiginous, she lurched forward, grabbing the other witch's hand and closing her eyes.

A/N:

Scottish / English translations:

diddy = daft person, scunner = nuisance, skelf = splinter or thin person, bahookie = bottom, blether = chatter, lug = ear, oxters = armpits, Dinna fash yersel' = don't get upset / don't worry yourself.

Australian / English translations:

dag = idiosyncratic person / comedian, drongo = daft person, snarler = sausage, tinnie = can of beer, esky = chiller bin, stubbies = very short shorts or tins of beer, thongs = flipflop sandals, arvo = afternoon.

Thanks to Jokay for her inspiration. Love your skinny blister. As ever, sunny33 does the beta work.

As Straight as a Dog's Hind Leg

Chapter 24 of 31

Who's confusing whom?

As Straight as a Dog's Hind Leg

Disclaimer: I love them dearly, but would love the money better.

Severus flinched as the young witch grabbed his hand. A sharp tingle of magic rippled across his skin. He drew in a sharp breath and snatched his hand away from the woman's grasp.

"*Merde!* Did you feel that?" Hermione asked, opening her eyes and looking directly into the startled eyes of the witch in front of her. "That was a bit of a shock, wasn't it?"

"Indeed, Miss Granger." He frowned, feeling rather exposed. By being shorter in Megansdochter's guise, the younger witch could look at him eye to eye. He had managed to change the body, but the eyes were still his own, dark and intense.

With a faintly quizzical look, Hermione continued. "I don't like to be rude, Madam Megansdochter, but can we get on with the briefing? I find this place a little disconcerting after my last visit here, you understand."

"Certainly, please follow me." Snape wobbled slightly on his heels as he walked to the edge of the room. Pushing an unmarked door open, he immediately realised his mistake. He should have taken Granger to Megansdochter's office, not his own. *Too late now.*

Hermione followed close behind him as he stepped into the room.

*

The office smelled reassuringly familiar to Hermione. She breathed in the calming scents of parchment and masculine spices and began to feel more at ease, despite the niggling anxiety of being deep in the bowels of the Department of Mysteries.

Settling herself in the comfortable seat, the other witch had indicated, Hermione's gaze drifted over the room before returning to the smiling woman in front of her. There was something which didn't quite ring true, and Hermione's concerns did not abate completely. Something stirred in her memory... something familiar.

*

"Miss Granger..."

"Please, call me Hermione."

"Certainly, Miss... Hermione."

"Just Hermione is fine."

"Indeed."

"You know, this is my first assignment, and I'm a little nervous about going undercover."

"You're a competent witch, aren't you?"

"*Oui.* Although I've been out of the country for a while, people may still recognise me in Britain."

"As the renowned heroine from the Golden Trio?"

"Exactly. It's not easy to hide this wild hair and my propensity to be..."

"A hand-waving know-it-all?"

"I have matured a little in the years since I left school."

"No need to huff. I'm sure you have."

"No need to sneer, Madam Megansdochter."

"I'm not sneering, merely stating a fact. Besides which, it's unlikely you'll meet many people who will recognise you."

"Oh good. Am I going overseas?"

"No. We are sending you somewhere much closer to home. You are familiar with time travel, I believe?"

"As a concept, yes..."

"Hmm."

"Don't give me that look. All right. I admit I have used a Time-Turner in the past."

"I knew it! Dumbledore denied it, but I knew it."

"*Bien*. So, you know I've time travelled before. Madam..."

"Please, call me Se... Jo."

"Se-Jo?"

"No, just Jo, dammit."

"Jo?"

"Yes, Miss... Hermione. Jo will do just fine."

"Shall we discuss the assignment?"

"Your skills as a Poisons and Charms Mistress are required. Your assignment is to help me... to help Remus Lupin."

"I have to time travel?"

"Yes."

"And I get to meet Remus again?"

"Please, calm down and stop hyperventilating, Granger."

"I can't believe I'll see Remus. I've missed him these last few years."

"As have I."

"You knew him too? I thought you were from Australia."

"Australia? I have been here in Britain for some time."

"So how did you know Remus? The Department of Mysteries deep in the Ministry of Magic is not the most likely place for that werewolf to be a pub in Edinburgh or a chocolate shop in Hogsmeade, perhaps."

"I get out sometimes."

"My parents live over in Australia, you know."

"Do they?"

"Yes. Sydney."

"Sydney. I know it well."

"So which part of Sydney are you from, Jo?"

"Um... Darwin."

"I thought that was in the Northern Territory."

"Northern Territory, Sydney."

"*Quoi?*"

"I am jesting, Miss Granger. Jo comes from Darwin in the north of Australia."

"Do you always talk about yourself in the third person?"

"No."

"Where is Jo tonight?"

"She had to go home early and asked me to give you her apologies."

"So, you aren't actually Madam Megansdochter."

"Did I say I was?"

"No, you didn't, now I think about it. You look like the photo she sent of herself, so I just assumed you were."

"Exactly, Miss Granger. Do not make assumptions."

"Is there anyone else I may know when I go on my assignment?"

"Sirius Black."

"Really? Harry would love to see him again."

"I'm sure he would. Black was a faithful dog with a certain affinity for Potters, but not a particularly likeable man."

"You're sneering again."

"I am not. I'm merely stating my opinion."

"I happen to agree with you. I always warned Harry about him. There was a persistent wildness about him, and he was particularly unpleasant to an ex-professor of mine."

"You appear a little bit pensive, Hermione. Do you have some qualms about taking on this task?"

"I have to admit I have a twinge of concern about travelling back in time in case I divulge someone's future to them, or interfere with something I shouldn't, or cause some sort of paradox. I mean, what would happen if I were to save a life, or fall in love, or something major like that? It might affect what happens in the future now."

"Nonsense, Hermione. You know from your previous escapades that anything you do won't change the course of the past. If it was going to happen, it has already happened. Do you understand my meaning?"

"Vaguely. Is there anyone else I may meet?"

"Professors Dumbledore and McGonagall... Snape."

"I'm going to Hogwarts?"

"Please, stop jumping about and clapping, Granger."

"Wait. I'm not going to have to go back as a student, am I?"

"Would that be so terrible?"

"No, but I don't really want to go back to school robes, inter-house rivalry and detentions. Oh, and teenage boys. Eww!"

"If you do not wish to work with teenage boys, we may need to find another operative."

"I'm sure I'll be fine. I'll have Remus Lupin and Severus Snape to help me keep them in line."

"They are the teenage boys you'll be assigned to help."

"Professor Snape will still be at school?"

"Yes."

"Don't sigh and roll your eyes at me, please."

"I'm just trying to imagine what kind of use you could be to him. I can't recall why we chose you."

"Perhaps I was his favourite teacher or his first love."

"Did you see yourself in his memories at his trial, Miss Granger?"

"No."

"Well, then. Let's focus on your job, not your bizarre flights of fancy."

"How would you know I wasn't in his memories? He's a legendary Occlumens. He could probably hide anything from us in plain sight, like the consummate spy he is."

"I would know. I would remember you, Miss Granger. Your riotous hair and energy are hard to forget."

"You weren't at Hogwarts, and I don't remember you being at his trial. How do you know what memories he has of me?"

"You are going off on tangent. Can we get back to business?"

*

Hermione frowned slightly as she concentrated on the finer details of the plan. It didn't sound too difficult, really. Get Snape and Lupin to work together, help them improve the Wolfsbane, then leave once the Timeportkey was reactivated and returned to her. She already knew the formula for Wolfsbane. How hard could it be?

Looking up from the paperwork, she caught the other witch observing her. Hermione smiled. Wasn't it just typical of the Department of Mysteries to have a mysterious spokesperson? She wondered who the smiling, but evasive, witch really was.

*

Severus watched Hermione as she worked. She had matured since she had left school and had turned into a vibrant, confident young woman. Magical energy radiated from her. His palm still tingled from the surge of it when she had touched his hand.

Her hair was not quite as wild as it used to be. It hung in tumbling, lustrous waves. His fingers yearned to reach over and feel the silken locks. He wondered if he would feel the same rush of magic touching her curls as he did when he had touched her hand. Maybe it needed skin-to-skin contact, or maybe it was like static electricity and was only a one off transfer of energy.

He brought his errant thoughts back to the job. At least he would be rid of the witch soon. He would send her on her way, back into the past... into his past. It was interesting he couldn't remember meeting this young woman at all. She certainly wasn't his teacher or his lover like she had suggested. He would have remembered that, surely.

Perhaps she handed the information to Dumbledore and returned straight away. In which case, he would have to hang around the Department tonight, waiting for her return. He had been looking forward to a quiet night at home with a glass of Firewhiskey.

He took a deep breath and sighed. At least she smelled pleasant.

His mouth twitched up into a smile, a little wider than he expected. She looked up at him, and he tried to stop smiling, but found the sight of her made him want to grin even more.

Her soft, brown eyes held a questioning humour, as if she was trying to figure him out. Severus found he couldn't stop his mouth from turning up at the edges. It wasn't normal. Damn this woman's body he was disguised in. Idly, he wondered if his eyes twinkled when he smiled.

"Shall we finish this final paperwork? Then you can send me on my way."

Snape cleared his throat, trying to bring his thoughts back on track. How had his attention drifted so easily? After years of being a double agent, surely he could maintain his concentration properly. He tried to focus.

"What do we have left to do?"

"As far as I can see all I need is a Portkey. Do you think I should use a pseudonym?"

"A pseudonym?"

"You know, a ..."

"I know what a pseudonym is, Miss Granger, and I think the word you're looking for is an alias, unless you are planning on becoming an author. Then, you can choose something as bizarre as you like. For an alias, however, you'll need a name similar to your own, so that you won't get caught out or forget it. May I suggest you use your fiancé's surname."

"I'm not engaged."

"I had heard you and the Weasley..."

"You heard wrong."

"Your boyfriend's..."

"I'm single. As if it's any business of yours," Hermione huffed.

"Your mother's maiden name?"

"Hermione Genevieve Ramsbottom-Smythington. Maybe a little too ostentatious?"

"Perhaps." Severus smirked.

"Why don't you get the Timeportkey whilst I'm thinking."

"The Timeportkey?"

Hermione sighed. It was like dealing with the boys when their minds were on Quidditch and not on the task at hand.

"The object that sends me away and brings me back," she prompted.

Consternation washed over Severus. Joanna had left all the paperwork but no object. He would have to cast the spells himself on something. His mind raced over the things in his office. What could he give her she could carry inconspicuously? Something she could tuck into a pocket.

He looked around the room, but failed to gain any inspiration. Books were too obvious, and, if she took one back twenty years, the condition or edition might not be right. A paperweight? No, that was far too clumsy. How would she explain carrying a paperweight with her at all times? He needed something smaller.

He opened the drawer of his desk and gazed in at the clutter it held. A paperclip? Too easily lost. As he rummaged, his hand closed on something perfect. Withdrawing the object from the drawer, he held it up.

"My handkerchief," exclaimed Hermione.

"Is it yours?"

"Well, technically, no. I gave it to Severus Snape several years ago at Remus's funeral."

"These aren't your initials on the monogram."

"No, they're Remus Lupin's."

"Why did you give Lupin's handkerchief to Snape?"

Hermione frowned. "When Remus gave me his memories for Snape's defence, he gave me the hanky at the same time. He said I was to give it to Severus, then I'd have to ask him for it back when I needed it. Well, I guess I need it now. So, can I have it back, please?"

Snape's fingers curled around the small piece of material he had carried with him for the last few years. He rubbed a thumb over the monogram on the corner and lifted it to his nose smelling the familiar but fading scent. "I don't know."

"I'm sure it will be fine. It's not like it's anything important, is it? When I gave it to Snape, he sneered at it, so I'm certain he wouldn't miss it. Actually, he said it was a charming gift for a beloved professor, and then he sneered." Hermione shrugged. "I don't think he ever realised how much I respected him."

"Charming! It was soaked in tears and snot!"

Hermione stared at the witch sitting behind the desk.

Severus cringed and cleared his throat again. "I'll just finish the spell work. Then we can get you on your way, Miss Granger. We need to go through to the Time Room for this. Follow me."

As he stood up, the woman's shoes pinched his feet. The Transfiguration spell must be wearing off. He would have to work fast to complete the Timeportkey and get rid of Granger before he transformed back into himself again. Kicking the shoes off under his desk, he walked barefooted ahead of Hermione.

As he walked, he ran her words through his head again.

Remus gave her the handkerchief to give to me, in order for me to give it back to her again.

It didn't make sense, but it did trigger a faint memory, something to do with a hanky and the witch McGonagall had named.

What was the name again? Charming... no Charmaine.

He stopped abruptly, and Hermione nearly barrelled into the back of him. "Charmaine!"

"Charmaine?"

"Your name. It's Charmaine."

"That'll do. It's close enough to Hermione for me to remember. What about a surname?" she asked as they entered the Time Room.

"Let me make the Portkey first," Severus answered as he completed the intricate incantations and wandwork. When he was finished, he handed her the handkerchief. "This will activate soon. I'm sure young Snape and Lupin will appreciate all the help you can give them. Take care."

"My name?"

"Mademoiselle Charmaine Bien-Aimée." Snape's voice cracked slightly and deepened as he started to return to his normal form.

The Portkey activated, and Hermione faded from sight.

"Severus Snape, is that you? I thought I could smell you." Her voice echoed as if from a distance.

She was gone.

A/N: Sunny33 does the beta stuff in between her work and ballroom dancing. Isn't she magic?

La Biche

Chapter 25 of 31

Severus waits.

La Biche

Disclaimer: This is merely a tribute, not a source of income for me.

Why did I call her that name? What if I was wrong? I don't even remember this witch... Bien-Aimée.

Severus ran his fingers through his hair as he paced up and down his office. He wondered if he should go and speak to Minerva, but then he thought he should hang about the office in case Miss Granger, Hermione, returned rapidly after delivering her message. He wouldn't want her to arrive back in the Department of Mysteries alone, at night. Not after what had happened to her the last time she was here.

He shuddered. They were still trying to repair the devastation the Prophecy Room had sustained during that episode. That's how he and Joanna had found the damaged prophecy about himself, the wolf, and the bitch. A short snort rushed down his nose. He could think of any number of witches who suited that description.

Sitting down at his desk, he opened the drawer and reached automatically for the handkerchief which had been his talisman ever since he had been given it. It reminded him of Lupin, and it still smelled faintly of a young woman. His hand stopped in mid air as he realised it was gone. What had possessed him to give away his final tie to Remus? But then, Hermione had just told him Lupin had expected her to give it to him, for him to give it back to her. His thoughts whirled in circles.

He reached for another object tucked at the very back of the drawer. Pulling it out, he looked at the picture of himself and Remus. It had been a while since he had thought about Lupin. He smiled a little at the picture. They both looked so young and innocent, so... unscathed. The photo must have been taken near the end of their time at Hogwarts, but he couldn't recall who had taken it. Watching the werewolf tousling his hair, he wondered how Lupin had known he would meet Hermione again to give her that hanky.

It was all too convoluted and confusing.

A slight shiver of anxiety ran through him. Had he done all the spells correctly? Of course he had. He was a competent wizard, wasn't he? He knew the Portkey would take Hermione to Hogwarts, but not when exactly. The spells were more tuned to need than to an exact time, and this was the first use of a Timeportkey over such a time span.

What if it didn't work? He felt nauseated.

Shoving back from the desk, he resorted to striding up and down the room again. That bloody Granger witch had stirred up a whole slew of unanswered questions, and now he was waiting for her with no idea when she would be back. Damn her!

With a few angry slashes of his wand, he Transfigured the seat Hermione had sat on into a couch. He dropped onto it, clutching the picture to his chest. Swinging his legs up onto the seat, he leaned back against the armrest. As his head drooped back, he tried to remember something about the witch named Bien-Aimée. Nothing came to mind, except the very recent memories of the rather delectable Miss Granger.

The last time he had seen her, she had been a tear-streaked, snot-nosed schoolgirl. No, that wasn't right. The last time had been at his trial when she had been a poised, self-assured young woman.

She had delivered her testimony with clarity and maturity, her intelligent brown eyes watching him the whole time, only looking away when the questioning caused her some confusion and finally when she had been asked to leave the witness stand. Her expression had been open and accepting throughout her speech. Even when he had scowled and curled his lip, she had not flinched.

The information she had reported to the Wizengamot made much more sense since he had restored his own memories of Lupin. He shifted restlessly on the couch. Staring up at the ceiling, he realised he was not going to get much sleep tonight as he kept his lonely vigil. He sighed again deeply and looked at the picture he held in his hands. Lupin tousled his hair over and over in a repeating loop. His own lips mouthed the words, "Please, save me." He watched the brief scenario replay. "Please, save me."

*

"Save me!" he yelled as he jerked awake. A cold sweat sheened his skin, and he felt a surge of panic. Leaping to his feet, he automatically grabbed his wand. Severus peered into the gloom, but no one was there.

Slowly, he sat back down, swallowing a rising lump of nausea and fear. He ran a finger round inside his collar, pulling at the constricting sensation of his robes around his scarred throat.

He realised he had drifted off to sleep, but Miss Granger had not returned in the meantime. Where was she? He glanced at the chronometer on the wall. Shouldn't she be back by now? He wasn't sure. The uncertainty unnerved him almost as much as the nightmare he had been having.

Severus groaned as he laid his head back against the cushion. Thinking about Lupin had stirred his memories, causing him to have his first bad dream in a long time. He tried to remember why the dream had frightened him so much. Covering his eyes with his hands, he thought about it again.

It started pleasantly, with Lupin's laughter as he ruffled Snape's hair. Her laughter joined with Remus's, making Snape's lips curve up in the hint of a smile. He was one of her friends... her favoured one. He tried to focus on the woman, but couldn't see her clearly. It was as if she was standing in front of a bright light. Severus squinted into the glare. Warmth radiated from her. He flew towards her, arms outstretched.

Dark clouds rolled across the sun, and the chill crept over him. Suddenly, he was falling out of control, plummeting, to land sprawled in the dirt, cowering at Voldemort's feet. He tried to cover his ears with his hands as the screaming started. Voldemort was torturing her, and she was screaming.

No! No, the screams were his. Then, Lupin's strong arms held him tight as Snape thrashed and howled. "Save me. Save me!"

Severus ran a hand down over his throat which hurt from shouting. He conjured a soothing honey, ginger, and lemon drink. As he breathed in the vapours, he relaxed. The spicy, sweet smell reminded him vaguely of Miss Granger. Similar scents had wafted in with her when she had arrived earlier. Severus wondered where she was right now.

Gadding about with Potter, no doubt.

He huffed and stretched out on the sofa again, tucking his hands behind his head. Snape had to admit he didn't like the idea of Hermione fraternising with the enemy. He could visualise her as a student, arms crossed and chin up, standing her ground against injustice. She still retained that feistiness.

He recalled her as she matured at Hogwarts, her glorious mane of hair tossed back over her slender shoulders or flying free in the wild Scottish wind. His hands twitched again with the desire to feel those tresses under his fingertips.

In the dark, he lay still, thinking about her.

Severus imagined her earnest face and frantically waving hand. How he had loved to watch those same, capable hands working deftly in the Potions laboratory. Their skill and precision was breath taking, and her teaching was inspirational. He had drawn on that inspiration when he had started teaching himself. No, wait... That wasn't right. Granger was his pupil, not his teacher. He sat upright, planting his feet firmly on the ground and running a hand over his scalp.

She couldn't possibly have been his teacher; he would have remembered.

He turned his mind back to the Potions lab. There was Granger sitting next to Potter, her eager, brown eyes sparking with interest. There she was, helping to clear up after another Longbottom disaster. In his memory, she wafted past him, and if he closed his eyes, he could almost smell her.

Here she was again, another disaster, another pair of boys clearing up. She loomed over Potter, castigating him for his bullying, backing Lupin and *me!* Snape's breath rushed out with the whispered exclamation.

His eyes flickered open, gazing unseeing into the darkness of his office. Suddenly, the memories were rushing back. She was there with him, standing up for him, helping him and making him stronger. Her presence filled his mind. Her teaching... her friendship... laughing... flying... her eyes... her tears.

He remembered the smell of her as he hugged her close and buried his nose deep in her curls. His palms relived the feel of her skin under his hands as she slipped through his arms. He lifted a fingertip to his lips at the memory of her kiss.

Most of all, he remembered her eyes. Her eyes had enchanted him. They had smiled at him and questioned him, with a penetrating glance. They had melted his core with their subtle warmth. What beautiful doe-eyes. No wonder his Patronus had changed forever.

Hermione.

Charmaine!

Charmaine? She was Charmaine.

Severus nearly laughed out loud at the over-brimming sensations of happiness swirling through his chest. Merlin, he was glad Lupin had chosen to send her and the handkerchief to him. Lupin had been a great mate throughout all those desperate, lonely years, right up to the end.

Snape's heart skipped a beat. Fear clenched tight around him. When had Charmaine disappeared from his life? What had happened to Charmaine... and where was Hermione now?

The nightmare crashed down around him. Adrenaline surged through his tensed muscles, and his heart pounded. He remembered grovelling before Voldemort. Fear and hatred burned in his chest as he recalled the vicious curses and the brutal beating. A sob rose up in his throat. He could almost feel the weight of her battered, limp body in his arms. Her beautiful face, smeared with blood and dirt. Severus had pressed the handkerchief into her lifeless hand, and with a whispered *Portus*, she had gone.

"Oh my gods, what have I done?" Severus covered his face with his hands as he wept.

A/N: Sunny33, the magic beta lady, has slashed and burned this chapter.

The End of Time

Chapter 26 of 31

And then he kissed her.

The End of Time

Disclaimer: I'm not an author, merely an unpaid copy-cat.

The toe of his boot struck her again and again. Trying to protect her face with her arms triggered her muscles into agonising cramps from the after effects of the repeated Cruciatus Curses. Hermione bit her lip, not wanting to give him the pleasure of hearing her scream. A quiet whimper escaped as he kicked her viciously, causing her to spasm again in pain.

"Liar!" he yelled. "You know nothing, Mudblood."

Seeking solace, Hermione looked towards Severus. The young wizard lay sprawled on the floor, terror etched on his face. A sense of outrage blossomed in her chest. She licked her swollen lip, tasting the metallic tang of her own blood. A small huff of defiant laughter bubbled up. "You've seen my memories, Tom Riddle. You have seen what I have seen."

Voldemort spat on her and kicked her again hard, forcing the breath out of her lungs in a painful rush.

With an agonising cough, blood trickled out over Hermione's lips. She drew in a shuddering breath.

"Only a coward kicks a woman when she is down."

She wheezed and coughed again, bloody mucus trailing from the corner of her mouth.

"Enough!" shrieked Voldemort, halting the swing of his foot. Then, he drew his leg back further, kicking her even harder before bending over her. Hermione flinched as he pointed his wand in her face, threatening her. His long fingers twitched where they clenched around the wand's handle. "I'm done with you, stupid witch."

"You will not win," she whispered, her voice strained.

Breathing hard, he turned his back on her, leaving her lying sprawled on the floor. "I never want to see her again. Snape, get rid of her... permanently."

No! Frantically, Hermione's eyes sought Snape's face. "Severus?"

One of her eyelids was rapidly swelling shut, and the other eye would not stay focused. His features blurred and shifted so she could hardly see him. Trying to lift a hand to his panic-stricken face caused a flare of pain in her muscles.

Mercifully, Severus enveloped her in his strong, gentle arms, hugging her close and murmuring into her hair. He smelled of blood and fear, but still, underlying it all was his own soothing scent. Her eyes drifted shut.

Don't let me die here. Not like this. Give me the Portkey, Severus. I can't hold on much longer.

He kissed her tenderly.

He kissed me. Severus!

She was gone.

*

Severus rocked backwards and forwards with his hands covering his face.

"Fuck! What have I done? Where have you gone? I'm so fucking stupid. I couldn't protect you. I'm so sorry. I deserve to die."

Searing, white agony surged through his left forearm. As Severus clutched at his arm, his fingertips chilled where they touched the clammy skin.

My love's gone.

Silver-white light blazed through his mind. Unheeding, Snape toppled face forward onto the floor.

*

The witch's lifeless form slammed onto the floor when it reappeared, and her head bounced off the stone flagging as she landed. After a brief twitch of limbs, her body lay unmoving.

The sickening thud roused Snape back to consciousness. His neck screamed with cramp as he turned his head to see her ruined shape lying on the floor beside him. Stiffness slowed his arm as he reached a trembling hand to touch her tangled curls.

"Charmaine," he whispered hoarsely, "you shouldn't be here."

Pushing himself up to sitting made Snape's head swim. He swayed slightly as he rose to his knees.

"You can't stay here, love."

Carefully, he lifted her into his arms, cradling her drooping head.

With a crack of Disapparition, they were gone.

*

Pain pounded through her head, increasing as she tried to open her eyes. Attempting to raise her hand generated jerking spasms in her muscles. Her breath hissed out through clenched teeth. A dull ache in her ribs increased sharply, stabbing her as she tried to breathe in again. Pursing her lips, she breathed out cautiously, closing her eyes tight.

*

Severus felt the soft breath brush across his cheek.

She's breathing.

With great gentleness he cleared her wild hair from her face, cupping it between his hands. Tenderly, he kissed her forehead.

"You're alive."

*

He kissed me. She smiled inwardly as she slipped back into oblivion.

*

Carefully, he carried her up the narrow stairs at Spinners End and laid her on his bed. With a quiet spell, he removed her dirty, torn clothing and covered her battered body with his soft bedcover.

Summoning a bowl of clean water, he started the painstaking job of cleaning and healing her. His hands moved smoothly as he applied unguents and dressings to open wounds. He hummed under his breath as he worked intricate spells to heal the contusions as best he could. Finally, he dripped a couple of drops of a fortifying potion onto her tongue.

She lay unmoving, her breathing scarcely shifting her chest. Eventually, it became less ragged and more regular as Severus finished his ministrations.

Pulling a comfortable chair up beside the bed, he settled down to wait. There was nothing more he could do now. As he took her hand in his, he rubbed his thumb over the back of her knuckles before lifting her fingers to his lips and kissing them.

*

She could feel the weight of his hand resting on top of hers. A frisson of magic tingled at the contact. It was a small thing, but it made her heart soar. He was still there.

She tried to open her eyes but could not. Her eyelids were still too swollen and felt leaden.

Her mind drifted again, conjuring a vision of his dark, searching eyes gazing down on her, watching over her and protecting her.

*

As he watched, his mind settled and cleared. The blazing white lights and fuzziness faded as his memories rearranged themselves and came into focus. He remembered her now.

This was not the young, newly qualified witch, Hermione, whom he had recently sent back in time. This was the feisty, smart woman he had fallen in love with all those years ago. This was Charmaine. Observing the fragile witch lying on the bed, he realised this was *his* Charmaine. He wanted to touch her, to reacquire his fingers with the feel of her.

Leaning closer, he breathed in. Underneath the overbearing smell of medicinal herbs was the subtle scent of her. How he loved that smell; it reminded him of warm summers, cold winters, flying and laughing. It reminded him of Remus.

With some sadness, he remembered the last time he saw Remus. His staunch friend died in his arms, and his last words were thoughts of love *Tell her you love her. Tell her I love her. I love you, Sev.*

This was the witch. This was her. Leaning closer still, Severus whispered in her ear, "Remus wanted me to tell you he loved you."

He was surprised by the soft sigh he heard. Looking at her face, he noted the slight curve of a smile on her lips.

"Mind you, he said he loved me too. The daft wassock," he muttered.

The curve of her lips increased. That had to be good, even though her eyes remained swollen closed. He smiled.

*

Hermione smiled.

He said Remus loved her. She knew that. Remus told her often enough. The *daft wassock* also told Severus he loved him, usually after they had been out to the pub together. He was so open and affectionate, and she loved him dearly.

Unable to open her puffy eyes, she could only imagine the two wizards. The memories of Lupin's vibrance were fresh, so were images of a young Snape. She could visualise his lithe young limbs, his bright eyes, and his youthful grin. The thought made her smile more.

Snape's voice penetrated the brain fog which enveloped her. It was so familiar and soothing, but the timbre had changed. There was a deeper, huskier quality. What was wrong with him?

A/N: Thanks, Sunny33, for all your help.

About Time

Chapter 27 of 31

A time of recovery and realisation.

About Time

Disclaimer: It's about time Ms Rowling took them all back.

Severus could hardly believe she had smiled. Her eyelids were still puffy, her lip swollen, and she appeared to be unconscious, but with that small twitch of the lips, he knew she was awake and could hear him. His voice thickened with emotion.

Hope blossomed; she was recovering.

Then, reality intruded. When she opened her eyes, she would see that he was not the youth she had just left, but the older ex-professor who had been the bane of her life. His sense of relief faltered. If only he had known when she was at school, he might have treated her differently. No, he wouldn't have. It would have been too out of character and a little bizarre, not to mention verging on paedophilia.

She would recover, open her eyes, and leave as soon as her battered limbs could carry her out of the house. He realised the fact, and the small blossom of hope withered. He squeezed her hand, relishing the contact, aware his time with her would be limited.

*

Hermione felt the slight tremor in his fingers as he held her hand. Recognising the subtle sign of anxiety, she wanted to reassure him.

"Severus?" Her throat and lips hurt, and she could not put any volume into the words. "Are you all right?"

His snort close to her ear ruffled her hair, and she reached blindly in the direction of the sound.

Catching her questing hand, he arrested its momentum before drawing her fingers to his lips. His kiss on her fingertip was feather-light.

Gently, she ran the tip of her finger along his lip, feeling the softness of his breath as he sighed. As she strayed off the line of his mouth and over his stubbled cheek, he caught hold of her hand again.

"I can't see you, Severus. Let me touch you."

"No."

His reply was firm as he pulled away. She heard him rise and stride rapidly from the room.

*

Snape stamped down the stairs to the kitchen and threw himself onto a rickety chair. She mustn't touch him. If she did, she would immediately know his age and know he was not the youth she had just left. The deep lines of his face were testament to a difficult life. She wouldn't want him as he was now, nor should she. A stunning witch such as Charmaine deserved someone better.

This was all wrong. He was her professor, but she had been his teacher. He taught her Potions because she had fostered his love of the subject as a student. He was her elder, except most recently for her he had been the younger one. It was too complicated. Now, he understood why she could never explain the complexity of the situation to his satisfaction. He grimaced at the thought of his brash, youthful demands for explanations.

She had brought him such joy as a young man, teaching him how to fly, befriending him, and caring for him, and he had repaid her by allowing Voldemort to beat her almost to death. At his trial there had been no acknowledgement of her pivotal role in ensuring he had joined the Order of the Phoenix. How must she have felt about that? He shifted in his chair, feeling discomfited by the conflicting thoughts.

But, no, at the time of his trial, her younger self had not known his younger self.

He ran his fingers through his hair as he tried to disentangle the complexities that her time travel had created. What confused him most was her apparent care for him. The least he could do in return for her regard was to provide his protection. He could give her that now. Last time, he had failed badly, but now he could care for her until she was well enough to leave. Keeping her at arm's length would be part of that protection.

A loud crash from upstairs startled him from his reverie.

*

Snape slammed open the door and raced over to the bed, only to find it empty. He spotted her, lying on the floor on the other side of the bed, the blankets still half-twisted around her. Fluid puddled on the floor around Hermione's head.

She groaned and touched her scalp tentatively.

"What do you think you are doing, woman?"

"You left me. I was just coming to find you."

Severus tutted as he crouched beside her.

"Let me look," he said, taking her hand away from her head. "No damage done. You knocked over the water jug as you fell."

Looping her arm around his neck, he lifted her off the floor.

"Get back to bed and stay there, you troublesome wench."

"You won't leave me, will you?"

The long pause which followed her question caused a flare of anxiety in her gut.

"No, I'll always be here. It is my house, after all."

She lifted a hand searching for his face. This time, with both of his arms cradling her, he was unable to stop her. He hissed, turning his head away from her touch. Dumping her unceremoniously back on the bed, he stepped back.

"Don't touch me."

"Severus?"

"I'll care for you as long as you need me. It's the least I can do." He moved further away as he spoke.

"I can't open my eyes properly, so I can't see you, but I can hear you shuffling away. Don't you dare leave me, Severus Snape."

"I'm not a coward, but I'm not the man you think you know. Don't presume to tell me what to do, you insolent witch."

Hermione giggled.

"Do not mock me."

"Oh, Severus, it's so good to hear your normal tone of voice."

He huffed and headed for the door. "You are not to get out of bed unassisted until I can trust you to walk without falling over and damaging my belongings."

"I wouldn't dare damage your chattels."

It was a good thing she couldn't see his twitch of a smile. "I'm going to prepare a meal. May I leave your presence in order to complete my task?"

Peals of laughter followed him down the stairs, and, he had to admit, he liked the sound as it filled the usually quiet house.

*

She ate the meal he fed her then drifted off.

Severus watched over her for a long time after she fell asleep. Rest relaxed the pinched, weary appearance of her face, enhancing her natural beauty. Her eyelids were still swollen, but improving. She was going to have outstanding black eyes. He ran a thumb across her cheek bone.

A small swell of bruising remained at the corner of her lip. He leaned forward and kissed it gently. Tingling magic flitted across the contact point.

A blaze of white heat erupted through Snape's body, and he collapsed forwards across the bed.

*

Hermione shifted in her sleep, feeling the comfortable weight of Snape's arm across her stomach. As she stirred, her hand ran over his silky hair where it spread across the bedcovers next to her. She twirled a lock around her fingers.

Her other hand ran lightly up over the back of his then further up over his forearm. Tracing the outline of his Dark Mark, she reached the small starburst of his Blaze. Of its own volition, her thumb pressed against the silver mark.

Mine.

The thought floated through her head as she drifted back to sleep.

*

Severus groaned as he regained consciousness. He tried to sit up from where he was slumped across the bed, but found himself entangled in the arms of the slumbering witch. Carefully, he peeled her fingers off his arm then started to untangle the other hand from his hair. A sense of loss crept over him as he pulled away from her.

A pitiful whimper stopped him in his tracks, and her hands scrabbled blindly for him.

"Hush. You're all right. I'll look after you," he murmured, stroking sweat-soaked hair from her too-hot forehead.

"Don't leave me, Severus."

"I'm right here."

"Hold me."

Severus hesitated. She was feverish and needed reassurance. It was dark, so she wouldn't be able to tell how old he was. What harm could it do?

Catching hold of her fidgeting fingers, he drew them close to his lips. He longed to kiss each one.

"Here I am."

The breath of his whisper ghosted over her fingertips as he cast a Cooling Charm. She sighed and relaxed. Her other hand snuck round to the nape of his neck, fingers splaying out over the back of his skull.

"Come closer." Light pressure urged his head closer to hers until all that separated them was the width of her fingers, still pressed gently to his lips.

She inhaled deeply. "You smell so good, Severus," she murmured, her lips so close to his he could feel their movement. "So... right."

"Charmaine."

His lips brushed her fingertips as he spoke her name.

Softly, her fingers traced the outline of his lips then sidled across to his jawline. Her other hand smoothed gentle circles on the back of his scalp. Licking her dry lips, she accidentally touched his lip with the very tip of her tongue.

She gasped. Her rapid intake of breath seemed to pull him towards her. He leaned in closer to kiss her, a soft reassuring kiss.

Magic hummed between them. His lips tingled at the contact, enticing him. Tenderly, his hand cupped the back of her head, comforting her, drawing her closer to him, and deepening the kiss.

The fingers which had been on his jaw tracked downwards. Following down over the sinews of his neck, they bumped erratically over the knots and scars of his snakebite. Her mouth broke contact with his as it opened with surprise.

"Oh!"

Severus froze, every muscle rigid with fear of rejection. This was the end, he realised.

A/N: Thanks again, Sunny33.

See a Man About a Dog

Chapter 28 of 31

Hermione's eyes are opened.

See a Man About a Dog

Disclaimer: They are all hers. Their current position is my fault.

Snape took a deep breath. Catching both of the witch's hands between his, he sat back away from her. Pale dawn light filtered into the room, and he could now see her clearly. Her mouth was round with surprise. Finally, she had realised who he was. There was no doubt from the startled look on her face that this was a metaphorical and physical eye-opener for her.

"Oh!" she said again. "It's you!"

Throwing her hands away from him, Snape rose to his feet abruptly.

"Yes, Miss Granger. It is."

He turned his back on her as his mind raced over the best way to minimise his utter humiliation. He needed to get her out of his house as quickly as possible.

"Well, that's... that's good."

"What?" he snapped. "Good?"

"I thought I was dreaming."

"More like a nightmare for you, Miss Granger."

"Well, yes, it was a nightmare."

Severus ground his teeth together. "I fully understand your predicament, Miss Granger. Now your condition is stable, I shall arrange for your immediate transfer to St Mungo's for the remainder of your recuperation."

"What? Why?"

"To abbreviate the time you must spend in my company."

"You want me to go?"

"Of course I want you to go, Miss Granger," he snarled. His body was rigid as he scowled at the wall.

"Turn round and tell me that to my face, Severus Snape."

"I do not wish to prolong your nightmare, Miss Granger." He sneered as he turned back to her. His heart lurched at the sight of her tumbled curls framing her still wan, bruised face.

Her soft, brown eyes caught his gaze. It was the first time he had seen her eyes since she had slammed back into his life, the first time she had been able to open them fully. Now, they were wide open. She watched him warily, like a frightened animal. One false move and she would be gone.

Slowly, her gaze ran over him. The corners of her lips curved slightly up.

"It is you. I can see you now."

"Yes, we already established that." Snape rolled his eyes. "Did the beating you received dent your intellect?"

"I thought this was a dream. I... I thought I might wake up again, lying on Voldemort's floor, dying... and that... that was my nightmare."

"I couldn't protect you back then."

"You have just saved my life, Severus."

"No, I haven't."

"For me, you have."

"From my perspective, I have only recently sent away Miss Granger. You appear to have aged several years in the time you have been absent."

"How long was I gone from here?"

"Not long, though the wait seemed interminable."

"Did you miss me?"

"No. I—"

She held up her hand to silence him.

"I understand why you don't want me." Her voice quivered. "You're older. You're Professor Snape. To you, I'm Hermione Granger, your ex-pupil. But, Severus, I'm not the same person you sent away. I'm Charmaine. I thought maybe as Charmaine..."

"I didn't miss Charmaine."

"Oh! Charmaine never meant anything to you, then." She took a shaky breath, looking down at her nervously twining fingers as she spoke again. "I wasn't even in your memories at your trial, was I?"

"No," Snape admitted, his hand covering both of hers, stilling them. "Why does that distress you?"

"Because... because..." She turned her head away from him, blinking tears from her eyes. "This isn't fair. Now I can tell you how I feel, you don't want me. You don't care."

Pulling her hands out from under his, she tucked her unruly hair back behind her ears and looked up at him. Sniffing loudly, she wiped her nose on the back of her sleeve.

"Charming!" he muttered, pulling a scrap of linen out of a pocket and holding it out for her.

"Where will the hanky take me this time, Snape? Is this your way of getting rid of me?" Her words stumbled a little on a nervous laugh.

Severus sat down on the edge of the bed. He glanced at her sideways from behind his hair. "It won't take you anywhere. It's only a handkerchief. A gift, from—"

"—from Remus."

"He loved you."

"He loved you, too, Severus."

"I know. Those were his dying words."

She nodded. "I believe he remembered me when he was teaching at Hogwarts. Why didn't you?"

"It's the Blaze, I think. It protected my memories. I was only able to remember fully when you arrived back."

Cautiously, she ran a hand up his left forearm. Her thumb circled the argent mark. "The Blaze," she murmured. "I regret leaving you with Lily afterwards. She wasn't your chosen mate, was she? Remus took better care of you than she did."

"Indeed. Remus always took care of me. We looked out for each other. He was the best mate a man could have. Thank you for bringing us together."

Her smile was brief. "Well, I suppose I've done the job I was sent to do. You can take me to St Mungo's now."

She moved to swing her legs off the bed, but Snape's hand stayed her.

"No."

"No?"

"We need to—"

"Severus. Severus?" A female voice called from downstairs.

"For the love of Merlin," Snape muttered.

"SEVERUS! Where are you, sweetie?"

"Stay here. I don't want her to know you're in my bedroom. She'll give me so much grief if she finds out."

With that, Severus whirled out of the room and ran down the stairs.

Hermione folded her arms across her chest, trying to hold in the rush of hurt. Not only did Severus not want her, he obviously had a witch already. How stupid she was. Of course he did. It was years since he had last seen Charmaine, and, since his most recent trial, she had no idea what he had been doing with his well earned freedom.

No wonder he hadn't wanted her to touch him. She flushed with embarrassment.

With some determination and only a little wobbliness, she got off the bed and, with a quick turn and an angry crack, she Disapparated.

*

"G'day, Severus." Madam Megansdochter's Aussie twang came through the Floo system.

"What do you want, Jo?"

"I was just checking how it went last night. You weren't at work this morning. I thought you were either throwing a sickie, or you might have gone walkabout with that Granger sheila." She grinned cheerily at him.

"I'm fine. She's fine," Snape replied curtly.

"And...?"

"I will return to work for a debriefing once I am sure she has recovered fully from her time travels."

"Beaut!"

"Indeed. Is there anything else, Jo?"

"I just wanted to let you know I've figured it out. It's not a bitch in the prophecy. It's une biche, which is a doe in French. I'm not sure what it means, but I'll speak to you later."

Severus opened his mouth to question her further, but she was already gone in a puff of sparkling green. What was it with his superiors and their love of sparkles, twinkles, and drama? Closing his mouth with a snap, he turned towards the stairs. He started mulling over Jo's information as he walked.

The prophecy talked about the emblazoned man, which was him, the wolf, which was obviously Remus, and the doe. He recalled how his Patronus had changed to a female deer during his final year at school, when he had first fallen for his Potions mistress.

La biche m'enchantait.

The doe had to be Charmaine.

A loud bang from upstairs startled him.

The daft girl has fallen out of bed again.

Taking the stairs two at a time, he was soon standing in his bedroom, which looked empty.

"Miss Granger?" He checked behind the bed.

Nothing.

"Charmaine? Charmaine!"

Frantically, he searched the upper floor of his house. She was gone. Just when they were going to sit down and talk everything through, she up and left him. He understood, really. He wasn't the young lad she had known. He was old, he was scarred, and he was cantankerous, but he still wanted a chance.

"Shit!" Severus kicked the rumpled blankets, which had been strewn across the floor in her haste to get away.

A/N: La biche m'enchantait = the doe enchanted me

Australian / English translation:

throw a sickie = to take a day off work, pretending to be ill

go walkabout = to disappear for a while

sheila = Australian woman.

Mooning

Chapter 29 of 31

There's a full moon rising.

Mooning

Disclaimer: Insert legal ownership jargon here.

Hermione's legs buckled as she landed. She crawled onto a nearby couch and lay down, her ribs and muscles aching, and her head thumping. Lying back against the cushion, she gazed up at the ornate plasterwork on the ceiling. As the swirling nausea of a dodgy Apparition settled, her mind cleared a little. She stared up more intently, focusing, then dragged her eyes down and looked around the room.

This was not where she had intended to go. When she had left, her only thought was to return home.

She looked around the large room with its high, corniced ceiling and bay window. Hugging her arms around her, she tried to work out what had happened. This was not her chic, little apartment overlooking the port at Marseilles, which had been her home for several years during her time as a Poisons mistress.

She had to admit the place she had arrived in felt more familiar to her than her French home. It was chilled, as if no one had been in the room for some time, but it felt homely. Even though it was unexpected, it made sense for her to be back here in the Edinburgh flat.

Her gaze drifted over the familiar clutter. Remus had never learned to pick up after himself, and it looked as if he had just left the room. Sadness welled up inside her as she realised he would not be walking back through the door, all smiles and hugs. He had left here for the final battle several years ago and had never returned. Having had contact with his younger self so recently, Hermione felt the loss acutely.

Sniffing back her tears, she rose from the sofa and limped around the room, touching familiar objects as she went. On the mantelpiece was the cheap, souvenir Scottish piper Remus had won at Lammas Fair. She smiled at the memory of his delight when he had won it honestly without using magic. When pressed, the bagpipes played *Scotland the Brave*, and Hermione hummed along to the tinny tune.

Standing next to it was a small plastic unicorn with a chocolate wrapper tucked under its hoof. She took the scrap of silvered paper and carefully smoothed it out. It still carried its message in Snape's spiky script. *To warm your soul.*

She sighed and held it close against her heart, as she had done on many previous occasions. It made her feel better.

Hermione drifted through to the kitchen, looking for something to eat. Grime and dust covered the surfaces. Nobody had been here for a long time, perhaps not since the final battle. She banished the contents of the fridge without a second thought and cast a Cleaning Charm on the bench tops. Opening the cupboards, she rummaged through the tinned food for something to eat. Cold baked beans, followed by canned peaches and condensed milk. Perfect.

Carrying the food back to the living room, she sat down in the window seat, looking down onto the grey, rain-lashed, cobbled street. Passers-by had their anorak hoods up or carried brollies, held low against the driving rain. The scene was a typical, dismal Scottish autumn. Hermione shivered, as if she too could feel the snell wind. Pulling her collar up did little to dispel the chill, and she was still too weak to maintain a Warming Charm.

Instead, she wandered through to a bedroom. Briefly, she considered lying down on the bed, but it didn't feel right. Taking a plump downie off the bed, she wrapped it around her shoulders. A pair of woollen socks hung out of an open drawer. Hermione picked them up, sniffed them, and, finding them not too malodorous, pulled them on over her cold feet.

Snagging a book from the bedside table, she shuffled back through to the living room, looking for somewhere to make herself comfortable until she felt strong enough to leave the house. The bars of Lupin's cage caught her eye, reminding her of the werewolf. She dragged a couple of large cushions into the enclosure and snuggled down to read, feeling secure and closer to Remus as she did.

Her mind would not stay focused on her reading and kept wandering off. Her eyes scanned the room again. Fondly, she recalled the time she had spent here with Severus and Remus. She realised those days had passed, and now she would have to look forward to her future alone, without either of them.

Hermione assured herself, she was relieved to be back in the present day. The threat of Voldemort was gone completely, but still an involuntary shudder ran over her. She had been certain she would die from his beating.

Severus had saved her, twice: once by sending her back, and the second time by healing her at his own home. How had she repaid him? She had demanded to touch him and forced her kisses on him. Groaning with embarrassment, she rolled onto her back, flinging an arm across her eyes.

She would have to thank him when she was strong enough to face him again. Not knowing where he lived might be a bit of a problem. She had only seen the inside of his bedroom. It would be highly inappropriate for her to Apparate back there thought Hermione with a grimace. Owling him would be wrong, too. What was the etiquette for thanking someone for saving your life in such a complex situation?

As darkness fell, Hermione dozed, and the moon rose above the tenement roofs. Peeking from behind the dispersing, dark clouds, it looked like Snape's Blaze appearing from behind his Dark Mark. The full moon's cool, silver light shone through the open curtains.

Smoothly, the barred door of the enclosure slid closed and locked with a click. Jerked awake by the soft sound, Hermione scrambled to her feet. She knew before she even rattled the bars she was locked in.

A quiet snigger from the other side of the room startled her. Reaching for her wand, she found it had gone, and anxiety roiled through her gut.

"Whatever happened to constant vigilance, Miss Granger?"

Her wand twirled slowly between Snape's agile fingers. She closed her eyes, thought hard of her French apartment and spun on her heel to Disapparate.

At the end of her turn she opened her eyes, only to find herself still in Lupin's cage, looking out through the bars at an amused Snape.

"Have you forgotten the charms you set to stop Lupin from Disapparating, after that disastrous time he escaped?"

Kicking the bars hard, Hermione swore furiously. The Anti-apparition Charms meant she was stuck until morning. She sat down heavily on her cushions, drawing her knees up and folding her arms across them.

"What do you want, Snape?" She dropped her forehead down onto her forearms, sighing.

"I came to check on you."

"It took you a while. I can't have been high on your list of priorities," she grumbled without looking at him.

"You didn't exactly let me know where you were going. I've been to France and to your parents' place in Australia. I even endured a visit to the Burrow." Severus shuddered slightly. He gazed around the room. "I haven't been back here since Lupin died, so I didn't think of it straight away. I suppose this is in your more recent memory, rather than the other places. I should have thought of that."

Hermione nodded.

Approaching the cage, Severus put one hand on the bars and held her wand out to her with his other hand. She snatched it from him, quickly tucking it up her sleeve as she shuffled back out of reach.

"Are you all right?" he enquired.

"I'm fine. Temporarily incarcerated, as you can see, but fine. Thank you."

"What were you doing in there?"

"I just felt a bit sad and... lonely. This reminded me of Remus and..."

"Still mooning over the werewolf, I see," Severus sneered.

Hermione leapt to her feet, grabbing the bars and shouting, "Piss off, Snape. I can't believe you're still jealous of a dead man. You prat!" She slammed a hand against the steel.

"Well..."

"...and you know how I felt... feel."

"Actually..."

"...and you've got your own witch now, so just go away and leave me alone."

"I..."

"Please, don't do this to me. I'm confused enough as it is with the time travel. Go back to your own life. Go!" She leant her head against the cage.

Severus slipped his hand through the bars and, with a finger under her chin, tilted Hermione's face up. "Are you finished shouting at me, you stropky bint?" he asked, his tone more gentle than she expected. She scarcely nodded.

"We need to talk."

Hermione huffed a laugh. "I've heard that before."

"Indeed." Snape smirked. "This time there will be no interruptions. No emergencies, no interfering bosses."

"Won't your witch wonder where you are?"

"She knows exactly where I am."

"She won't mind?"

Severus rolled his eyes. "As I was saying... nobody can interrupt us here. This place is still Secret Kept. Only you and I hold the Secret."

"After all this time? Why didn't you tell anyone else?"

"It was safer for Lupin that way. He led a dangerous life with one foot in each camp. Lucky he was a werewolf. It gave him more feet than the rest of us."

"I don't understand."

"Why do you think you were sent back?"

"To help you? To ensure Remus helped you."

"Wrong. It was to help Lupin. He was the lynchpin of the whole fight against Voldemort. It wasn't me or the Potter boy. Lupin was the man in every camp. He ferried information from the Death Eaters to the Order of the Phoenix and from the rogue werewolves to the allied werewolves. Did you never wonder why he looked so ragged? My role was to support him, help make his Wolfsbane, heal his wounds, and protect him as much as I could. A man like that needs a friend."

"You did an excellent job, Severus. None of your students ever suspected you were helping Remus before the Final Battle, let alone were friends with him. But why send me?"

"You were needed for your Potions and Poisons skills, to improve the Wolfsbane, and make Lupin's life a little easier. There were several possible agents, but Joanna thought you fitted the requirements best."

"I've done my job, now you can let me go."

"I can't."

"Let me go, Snape!" Hermione rattled the bars.

"I can't. The cage will stay locked until the moon sets. You know that."

"Then, you can just go now. I'll be fine. Go home to your life, Severus."

"Not before you give me some answers."

Hermione ran a hand through her unruly locks. A faint, silver glint caught Snape's eye. His hand snaked between the bars and grabbed her wrist.

"What's this?" He held her wrist firmly as he examined the silvered whorls on her thumb pad.

"I've had that for ages."

"I never noticed it before."

Hermione drew her hand back, looking closer at her thumb. "It's brighter than usual. Maybe it's the moonlight catching it."

"Remus had the same, but his was fainter."

"I've had it ever since you got the Blaze. I suppose it's staining from touching the Unicorn's blood. Did Lily have it too?"

"She never really touched me afterwards."

Hermione swallowed and looked away. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. It's old history."

"But Voldemort has just ordered the Potters... Gads, this time travel really screws with my head." Hermione scrubbed a hand over her face. "I wonder why Remus had the silvering on his thumb."

"He put his thumb on the Blaze to soothe the pain, soon after it happened."

"Really? He cared for you after you had the Blaze? That means he probably had some sort of bond with you, which would explain a lot. The old texts said you should be cared for by your mate in order to start the sealing."

"How do you know so much about my Blaze?"

"I was there, remember."

"No, I didn't remember."

Hermione chewed her lip as she thought. "Your memory loss must have something to do with the protection of the Blaze. It protects the Blazed person and their mate."

"That information wasn't in the old parchments."

"No. That came straight from the horse's mouth, so to speak. I went back and spoke with Douglas."

"Douglas?"

"Douglas... The unicorn." Hermione smiled at Snape's sceptical look. "What did you expect? Something pseudo-latin or a faerie name? He was Scottish."

"That doesn't explain my memory issues... or, perhaps it does." Severus raised an enquiring eyebrow.

"You're aware that unicorns mate for life? They're immensely protective of each other, and should one die, their mate will perish also."

"That's O.W.Ls level knowledge," Snape replied tersely.

"Bear with me. What if the Blaze gives the same kind of bond?"

"You mean, whoever cared for me afterwards should be my life partner?"

Hermione nodded.

"That means Lupin?"

Hermione nodded again. Snape sat down hard on the floor.

"Are you really saying the wolfman was my mate, bonded for life?"

Another nod.

"Now, that's where your theory falls down, because he's dead, and I'm not. Explain that, Miss Know-it-all."

"He died protecting you."

"He did not. The daft wizard gave me a hug in the middle of a battle..."

"Putting himself in the line of the fatal curse intended for you, you ingrate."

Snape frowned, shaking his head slightly. "But he died, and I didn't."

"In order to seal the bond permanently, the relationship must be consummated. Did you... um... did you ever... you and he?"

"No. We never did."

"Remus would have, you know. He loved you dearly, Severus."

"I am aware of that, but it never felt quite right for me. There was always something missing, as if I was waiting for something more, or someone else. He and I were mates, not *mates*. Besides..." His voice hitched a little. With emotions churning inside his chest, Severus covered his face with his hands as his shoulders started to shake.

Hermione crouched down to his level, laying a calming hand on his shoulder.

"Besides which," Snape continued, snorting, "he would have wanted it doggy style!" Laughter escaped from behind his hands.

Hermione slapped his arm. "Grow up, Snape! You're so childish. That's not funny," she admonished, an unexpected giggle bubbling up within her.

As he calmed himself, Severus wiped a tear from his eye and smiled at her ruefully. "I haven't laughed like that since Remus died. I miss him. We had a couple of decades as the closest of friends, and it has been very lonely for the past few years without him."

Pulling a hanky out of her pocket, Hermione handed it through the bars.

Severus stared at the small scrap of material, before taking it from her. "How many times has this passed between us now?"

"Don't you remember, Severus?"

"So many memories returned in a rush last night. I've not had much sleep, waiting for you, then looking for you, so I haven't had time to sort it all out in my head."

Summoning a sofa closer with a quick wave of his wand, he stretched out and made himself comfortable. "This is like déjà vu. I wonder how often I've sat on this couch, waiting for the cage to open. I'll keep you company until it does."

Tiredness encouraged his eyelids to droop, and Severus was soon sleeping, lulled by the familiar surroundings and the low hum of the caged witch muttering to herself. She wasn't going anywhere in a hurry, and they could talk in the morning.

A/N: Thanks for the beta work go to Sunny33.

Quick Silver

Chapter 30 of 31

Time for understanding

Quick Silver

Disclaimer: This is your last chance to take them back.

Severus sighed in his sleep and snuggled into the warmth of his covers. Moonlight glinted on his raven hair where it spread across the pillow, slim fingers threaded through the fine strands. The brightness of the full moon shining through the window exaggerated the grooves and shadows of his face. Hermione noted how he had changed with age. He was no longer the fresh-faced youth she had recently left. His strong features were still striking and more relaxed than when he had been her professor. Essentially, he was the same man.

She felt the familiar swirl and rise of her feelings for him. Sadness pervaded her thoughts as she wondered why she had meant so little to him that she wasn't in his memories. Had he really forgotten her, or did he just not care?

*

Snape's eyes fluttered open. A frown flitted across his brow, and his heart plummeted as he dragged himself up from sleep and focused on the cage in front of him. The enclosure was empty, the moonlit floor devoid of anyone and the barred door stood wide open. Either it had been a dream or she had left him again.

Moaning with misery, he rolled onto his back. Life was so unfair, and he'd have to get up and face it. Sudden, sharp pains snagged at his scalp as he tried to sit up.

"Ow! Shit!"

"Shush and keep still. I'm tangled in your hair."

"For the love of Merlin, woman, what are you doing?"

"I wanted to run my fingers through your hair, one last time."

"Were you going to leave without telling me?"

"I..."

"And, how did you get out of the cage before moon set?"

"I set the containment charms in the first place, remember. It didn't take too long to take them down. Now, keep still while I untangle myself."

"Ow! That hurts."

"Stop grizzling, Snape."

"I'd rather face an evil maniac than have some daft witch hanging off my scalp."

"I understand. I'll leave as soon as I can."

"That's not what I meant."

"What did you mean, then? You don't remember me. You don't want me. I might as well just go." Dismay tinged Hermione's soft voice as she turned away from him, preparing to leave.

Severus grabbed his forearm as white-hot pain exploded up his arm without warning. "No!"

"I'm not staying where I'm not wanted."

"Don't leave me!" Cold sweat beaded on his forehead.

"What's wrong, Severus?"

"The Blaze," Snape replied, his jaw clenched with pain. "The pain. It's the first time since... since... I need your help. You helped the first time. Only you..."

"Stop being so melodramatic, you drama queen."

A groan escaped through his gritted teeth.

"Severus?" Anxiety sharpened Hermione's voice as she turned back to him. He looked deathly pale.

"Since my memories returned, the pain of the Blaze has come back." The corner of his lip lifted in a sneer. "It's all the emotion."

"The what?"

"It's when I think you're leaving, or when I think I lo..."

"No, that can't be right." Hermione shook her head. "No."

"Listen t'me." Snape drew in a long, shaky breath. "I need..."

His voice faded as his eyes rolled back and he slumped against the cushions. Hermione shook his limp form, his skin clammy under her urgent grip.

"No, no, no. Snape! Shit!"

Grabbing her wand, she flicked a quick *Ennervate*. A white haze washed over him as his body juddered then fell back on the sofa. His pale complexion looked more ashen than before.

She shook him again, hard.

"Well, that was as good as useless. What the hell's wrong with you?" Hermione muttered, trying to work out what to do next.

Pacing the room, running fingers through her increasingly wild mane of curls, her concerned gaze returned frequently to Snape's prostrated form on the sofa.

"Think, Hermione, think! What was he trying to tell me? He needed help... the Blaze... the emotions... he needed... he needs me!"

Leaping onto the couch, she straddled his limp body, roughly shoving his shirt sleeve up past his elbow.

"Why didn't you just say you needed me, you stupid wizard," she growled at him as she pressed her silver-stained thumb hard onto the starburst on his forearm.

Nothing happened.

"Come on, c'mon, do something."

An overwhelming surge of magic burst within her as mercurial energy flowed outwards, and the air around her crackled. Concentrating hard, she channelled the magical force through the Unicorn's Blaze, watching as the quicksilver wave shimmered from the contact point with her thumb and tracked up Snape's arm before dissipating.

He didn't move. His face remained waxen, and his breathing sounded low and ragged. Memories of seeing him close to death after Nagini's bite crowded her mind.

Tears sprang to her eyes.

"Don't do this to me, Severus. Don't die now!"

Emphasising her point, she pressed firmly on his Blaze again. Silver power leapt across the connection, running up his arm and suffusing him in a pale glow. His pallid complexion took on an ethereal quality before the energy faded again.

His breathing stuttered and halted, and Hermione's breath caught in her throat as she watched him.

"My god, Severus, you are beautiful," she whispered. "I love you. Don't leave me. I love you, dammit!"

Resting her forehead against his, Hermione felt not a whisper of air pass his lips. She curled her trembling fingers into his silken hair. Slowly, she lowered her lips to his, kissing him with the utmost tenderness.

A long, low sigh stirred her, and soft warmth suffused her lips. A minute movement startled her, and she pulled back, gazing intently at his face. His lips... his lips were quirked up at the edges into a small smile. He looked happy.

Suddenly, his eyes flickered open, and his dark gaze met hers, intense and piercing. Sucking in a ragged breath, his features softened and his smile widened.

"Repeat that, please," he murmured hoarsely.

"The kiss or the declaration?"

"Either... Both," he whispered.

Gently, she kissed him, then, untangling her fingers from his hair, she punched his shoulder.

"Ow! What was that for, witch?"

"Don't do that again. I thought you were dying, you prat."

"So did I." He curled his arms around her waist, drawing her closer to him. "Aren't we about even on the *thought you were going to diescore*?"

"It's three of yours to two of mine."

He rolled his eyes. "You haven't really been keeping a tally, have you?"

"I still have one more to go before we're even."

Snape tugged her waist again. "Come here, and I'll do things to you that'll make you think you've died and gone to heaven."

Hermione snorted and slapped his arm. "That's not even funny. That's lame, and sad, and a bit sick." She frowned. "Hey, Snape, you're starting to go pale again. What's wrong?"

He tightened his arms around her, pulling her hard against him. "I need you."

Hermione struggled to pull herself away from him.

"No, seriously. This is scaring me. What is wrong with you? Are you ill or something?"

In reply, Severus lifted his left arm, showing her his Blaze. What had previously been a flat, white starburst scar was now swirling and pulsating with silvered magic.

"Sweet Merlin!" Hermione whispered, taking a closer look. "Do you know what this means?"

Tentatively, she reached a finger out to touch it.

"No!" Snape's hands shook as he caught her hands between his. "This is ancient magic. If you touch it again, I will have to... to..."

He turned his head away, struggling to maintain some control. "Miss Granger, it appears the Blaze has been reactivated. My intuition tells me if I don't... bond with the... uh... the appropriate witch, I might perish."

Hermione shook her head. "That's not right. It should be the person who cared for you after the event."

"And who was that?"

"Lily Evans."

"No," Severus groaned. "You silly little girl, it was you."

"I only took you back to the hospital wing. I didn't care for you... well, I did, but you know what I mean. And if that's the case, why aren't you already dead? Not that I'd wish it on you, but it's been decades since you got the Blaze. Explain that, smart-arse."

"The memory white-out must have been protecting me. I always felt I was in a kind of limbo. The Blaze just needed you to reactivate it."

"But, that means we have to... Oh, fuck!"

"Indeed."

"And if we don't?"

Snape shrugged. He tried to look nonchalant, but his stomach churned, and his hands trembled. Wiping sweaty palms down his shirt front, he muttered, "I understand, Miss Granger. You don't want..."

"Don't you dare tell me what I want, Severus Snape! I am not your student. I'm not *Miss Granger*. I haven't been Miss Granger for the last couple of years. When I arrived back I wasn't sure who I was or what I wanted. Now I know, and I won't have you telling me what to do. Understand?"

He maintained the blankest of expressions as he attempted to get up off the couch. "Absolutely. I will leave you to..."

"No, you will not!" Hermione's hands captured his face, turning him to look at her. Her eyes sparked, magic thrummed around her, and her hair cascaded wildly over her shoulders, falling forwards towards him.

Of their own volition, his fingers reached for her curls, tangling in them and drawing her closer. "Has anyone ever told you you're a very scary witch when you're riled up? Beautifully, enticingly, amazingly scary..."

Each breathy word brought her nearer.

Her voice shook as she replied, "I'm not scary, just very, very scared. If we do this, it's forever, bonded for *life if I die, you diesort* of stuff. I'm petrified."

Severus looked away, swallowing down his fear. He should just let her go; he knew that. He felt certain she would be all right and more certain he would die without her. *I'm not a coward. I can do this. She deserves her freedom.*

Turning to face her properly, he looked deep into her limpid doe-eyes, preparing himself.

Unbidden, he fell into her mind. Visions of them flying and hugging, laughing and kissing, whirled around him. Her warm, honeyed scent surrounded him, smooth and comforting. The gingered undertones warmed his soul. Gasping as he withdrew, he realised this was it. He knew what he had to do.

Pulling away from her, Severus held the witch at arm's length. He licked his lips nervously and looked sideways at her from underneath his curtain of hair.

"This is serious magic. Remus died because of this magic."

"He died because he loved you, Severus."

"His dying request was for me to tell you... to tell you he loved you."

"I already know that." Hermione smiled and laid a hand on Snape's cheek.

"He also wanted me to tell you..." His black lashes swept over his cheek as he looked down.

"Is it so hard to say it, Severus?"

He nodded dumbly, not looking at her. Her hand slipped to his shoulder.

"You should leave me. I'm..."

"You're right! I should leave you. You're ill-mannered and grumpy, pallid, sickly-looking, and uncommunicative... old... cantankerous..." She pushed him firmly away from her. "What's more, you can't even pass on a message from your mate to your... your..."

"Mate?" Severus nearly winced as he looked up through his lashes at her.

Hermione's expression softened, and she smoothed a stray lock of hair off Snape's forehead.

"My mate."

Leaning forward, she brushed his hairline with her lips, inhaling deeply before kissing down the side of his face and over his cheek. Her tongue flicked over the tight line of his pursed lips. "Merlin, you smell so good, and taste..."

Severus growled and cupped the back of her head, crushing her lips firmly against his. Talking without moving his lips away from hers, "So sweet, so right," he murmured, encouraging her questing tongue.

Breaking away from his kiss, Hermione trailed her lips and fingertips down along Snape's jaw line, towards the scar at the side of his neck. Cool fingers traced the gnarled outline as her soft lips whispered over his skin. Loosening his shirt, she eased it away from the old wound. Severus's breathing stilled and his muscles tightened as he resisted the urge to throw her off and cover himself up. Feeling exposed and vulnerable, he closed his eyes.

"It looks better than the last time I saw it, Severus."

"When?"

"In the shack. After Nagini..."

"I only saw Potter."

"I was the one hanging around in the background doing all the important stuff, like finding a jar to store your special memories."

He felt a small drop of moisture fall onto his bare skin. Tucking a finger under her chin, he gently coaxed Hermione's gaze up to his face.

"They were very precious memories, for Harry. My most cherished memories were still here, locked inside me. I never gave them to anyone. They are all yours." He swiped a stray tear from her cheek with his thumb. "It has only ever been you."

"But I heard a witch at your house."

"Jo? She's like a sister to me, and she's my boss, two good reasons not to go there."

"You mean you've never...?"

"Never, thanks to Douglas-the-mutant-horse's magical chastity belt."

Hermione snorted. "Me neither. Though, I was tempted. Once."

"Oh!"

"Yeah, there was this young wizard I knew. Tall, dark, and handsome, intelligent, witty, and... well, it never worked out."

"Oh?"

"He was too young." Sneaking a hand in underneath his open shirt front, she ran cool fingers rapidly downwards over his sensitive skin. "But he has matured magnificently."

Severus grabbed her wrist as her fingertips reached his waistband.

"Not so fast, you evil little witch. That's virgin territory you're heading for; are you sure you want to go there?"

A chuckle rumbled in her throat as she leant against his bared chest, snuggling in under his chin and licking along his collar bone. Ghosting her hands over his shoulders, she slipped his shirt down, kissing down the inside of an exposed arm.

Firm hands cupped her face, drawing her back to his gaze, seeking the answer to his question. Without taking her eyes off his strong features, she nodded her assent.

He hesitated. Her shoulders drooped as she sighed.

"Sev..."

"I've just remembered."

"Remembered what?" she huffed.

"My promise to a dying wizard. Remus said the next time I saw her I was to tell her I loved her."

"Good. Now shall we..."

"You don't understand. It's you. I love you."

"I know."

"You do? How?"

"You told me, remember? Big church, wedding, flouncy dresses, organ music? Ring any bells?"

"But, I don't want a big, church wedding."

"I know. Small, intimate gathering..."

"Perfect. When?"

"Severus, do you want to die a virgin..."

Taking her hand, he kissed her silvered thumb pad before pressing it firmly against the Blaze on his forearm. Blazing white light surrounded them as magic coursed through the connection.

"Hermione... Charmaine, I love you. Will you marry me?"

He was sure he didn't need to wait for her verbal response when the momentum of her throwing herself at him toppled him back on the couch as she smothered him in kisses.

A/N: Sunny33 supa-betagirl.

The Tail That Wags The Dog

Chapter 31 of 31

The tale's ending.

The Tail That Wags the Dog

Disclaimer: I am returning to Ms Rowling all of her characters whom I have had in my possession. There has been no exchange of money. I'm still waiting in hope...

Ron lifted the confectionery to his nose and sniffed it with suspicion. "I don't get it. Why do they like these spicy chocolates?"

"Lupin used to eat them. I thought it was just a werewolf thing."

"Isn't chocolate poisonous to dogs?"

Harry frowned. "Remus wasn't a dog."

"This wedding seems a bit rushed, if you ask me. No church, no big reception, just family and a few friends." Ron nodded towards the bridal couple. "Mum nearly had a fit when she saw Hermione hadn't had her hair done properly."

"She looks beautiful though, doesn't she?" They both sighed as they gazed at her.

"Yeah, France must have suited her; she looks so mature. Y'know, I don't remember 'Mione mentioning meeting Snape again after his trial, though she says she's known him for years. Personally, I can't understand what she sees in him."

Harry smiled and waved as Hermione looked over at them.

"He's still a git, but they seem really happy together. There must be some kind of magic between them, I reckon. He can't keep his eyes off her and calls her *charming beloved* at the drop of a hat."

Ron made a gagging noise at the back of his throat. "That's just gross."

"Yeah," Harry agreed, "but cute, too."

"Snape? Cute? You're off your rocker, Harry."

"What about his new tattoo? It's a Unicorn's Blaze, apparently."

"Is that why there are all these blasted, spiky-horned critters prancing about?" Ron pushed a miniature unicorn gently with the toe of his boot, stepping behind Harry quickly as it tucked its head down and charged at him.

"The Blaze is supposed to have his true love's initials on it. I had a bit of a shufti earlier. To me, it looked more like a C and a B, or maybe an R. I wonder what that means. He'd better not be messing around on our 'Mione."

"It's for his *charming beloved*, you dork."

As they watched, Hermione slipped her hand up Severus's forearm, pressing her thumb gently to the Blaze, and Snape smiled.

"Did Snape just smile?" Ron's face screwed up as he spoke.

"Eww!" Harry gagged.

"Blimey, Harry, it's a wedding. No vomiting allowed."

"Have you seen the hideous picture they got from Minerva? It's not something I'd like to have hanging on my wall. A werewolf mauling a unicorn. What's that all about?"

Ron shrugged. "Dunno, mate. It isn't even clean. There are lipstick kisses and slime marks all over the glass. Yeuch!"

"Maybe it's an in joke, which we're not getting."

"Wasn't it a bit strange, Snape not having a best man for the ceremony? When I get married, Mum's bound to make sure it's done properly with the big church, huge reception, and a heap of relatives in the bridal party. That cantankerous bat couldn't even rustle up someone to stand next to him at his own wedding." Ron glowered in Snape's direction.

"What was it he said about wishing his best friend could be there in person?"

"I don't know and don't care, Harry. Just show me the way to the wedding feast and I'll be a happy man."

*

"That's enough, you two." Hermione tapped the glass. "Stop fighting."

"He started it."

A silvery ripple ran through its long mane as the painted unicorn shook its head, denying the accusation.

"He did. He poked me," whinged the werewolf.

Hermione rolled her eyes and wagged an admonishing finger at the image. "Play nice, boys."

"It's no wonder Minerva couldn't wait to give us your picture," grumbled a deeper voice.

"She said we were driving her bonkers."

"I think she said you were irresponsible wan..."

"That's quite enough, boys! Now, give me a kiss before I go to bed."

Hermione pressed her lips gently to the glass as Remus licked it on the inside.

The unicorn gave a whinnying laugh and prodded the werewolf with its horn before galloping off into the distance with the growling werewolf in hot pursuit.

Snape stood behind Hermione, arms crossed, scowling over her shoulder at the pair. "Ridiculous delinquents," he muttered as he turned away. "I should move their portrait into the broom cupboard."

*

Pressing his forehead against the cool, glass pane, Severus gazed towards the edge of the forest, hands clenching the edges of the frame. He knew this was the only way to ease his discomfort when he couldn't sleep, but he felt like he was betraying his wife, sneaking out of bed in the dark of the night.

"I don't understand it, Lupin," he whispered. "I miss you more now than when you died in the last battle. It's almost as if Charmaine's return has opened a poorly healed wound. Now I have her, but I want... I need..."

The werewolf laid his head against the other side of glass, his hands splayed flat as if trying to push through the confines of his portrait. "Miss you too, Sev. Love you."

Hermione paused, unseen in the shadows of the doorway, watching the two men who stood head to head and eye to eye on opposite sides of the glazed barrier, their breathing laboured and synchronised. The depth of feeling between the wizards was palpable. Her heart lurched and stumbled before steadying again. How had she not realised?

Holding her breath, she waited for Severus to respond, but he remained silent, his shoulders shuddering with barely restrained misery.

Quietly, she approached. Laying one hand on Snape's arm, she placed the other against the glass, palm against palm with Remus. Severus flinched and glanced sideways at his wife, his hands gripping the frame more firmly.

"Hermione, I..." Snape's head drooped.

She rubbed her thumb pad soothingly across Lupin's silvered one. "Did you think I wouldn't know? ...That I wouldn't find out?"

"Hermione, you don't understand. It's the Blaze." Snape's voice cracked a little. "It's started to burn again."

"The unicorn warned me this might happen."

"What?"

"If you resist this, the burning will only get worse."

"Make sense, woman," Severus snarled.

Tucking a finger under his chin, Hermione turned Severus to look at her. His face was torn with emotion. "You have to tell him, Severus."

"Tell who, what?" queried Lupin.

Shutting her eyes, Hermione sighed. "Gads, you boys can be so thick at times."

"Tell who, what?" Severus repeated.

"Look at the two of you. Severus, you need to tell him what you feel."

A shuttered look dropped over Snape's eyes and he turned away. "I've told him once, and that wasn't a raging success."

"The last time I heard that phrase, you were avoiding telling a certain witch you loved her." Remus chuckled.

Snape scowled at him.

"Just tell him, Severus."

Snape shifted his scowling gaze to Hermione before laying his cheek back against the cool glass. "I told him once, and the inconsiderate git died in my arms. Remember?"

Lupin tapped a finger against the glass. "You... you..."

"Yes, you hairy wassock, I love you. Okay?"

"Ha, ha! I knew it." Remus threw his head back and howled with laughter. "I knew you couldn't resist my feral charms."

"At least, with you stuck in that picture, I don't have to put up with your mangy laundry scattered on the floor and your hideous scent pervading my rooms."

"Love you too, Sev!"

Severus could almost feel the rasp of Lupin's tongue as it licked up the side of his face, and he sensed the urgent burn of the Blaze soothe.

*

"Anyone there?" Harry called through the Floo connection.

He was sure he had seen a movement in the shadows of the Snapes' front room. Leaning a little more forward, he tried to peer further into the room.

"Buzzer!" he muttered as he lost his balance, pitching face first onto their hearthrug.

"Anyone there?" he called again as he dusted the Floo powder off his clothes.

"Harry?" a tall figure asked from the darkness beyond the firelight. "What are you doing here?"

The man's voice sounded familiar, and Harry tried to focus on his shadowed face. "Is Snape home? I... um..."

"The Snapes are out for the evening. Can I help?"

Harry moved further into the room, trying to see who he was talking to.

"I just wanted to have a word with Severus about... something." As he stepped out of the fire's pool of light, he was better able to discern the man's features. "I've seen you before, haven't I?"

The man's face tightened imperceptibly, as if flinching. Stepping out of the deep shadows, the firelight glinted off his silvered mane of hair, and his tawny eyes gleamed.

"Harry, it's me, Re..." A sharp rattle from the picture frame interrupted him. The wizard paused, watching the unicorn's horn clatter against the glass as it shook its head vigorously. "Douglas?"

"Douglas?" Harry echoed.

"Um... yes... Douglas. Reynard Wolfman-Douglas." The older man stretched out a welcoming hand, which Harry eyed with suspicion.

"You've been here a while, haven't you, Mr Douglas? At first, I saw you only in the background, a mere shadow amongst shadows. Then, one time I floored Hermione and caught you massaging her shoulders, but you ducked behind the couch, disappearing from view."

"We didn't want anyone else to know."

"Not even Snape. Or so I thought until the day I noticed you and Severus embracing behind Hermione's back whilst I was talking to her by Floo. Behind her back!" Harry snarled.

"Harry..."

"No, let me talk." Harry raised a quelling hand, stalling the wizard's advance. "Then, last night when I called, it was you on the couch with him, wasn't it? With your head in his lap and his hands... his..."

"Ah! Now that's not what it may have looked like."

"The way he ran his fingers through your hair was... was..." Harry's fingers ruffled his own hair as he thought, "...and that's why I'm here."

"Sorry?"

"He loves you, doesn't he?"

"Um... he... it's complicated."

"So, I... I..." Harry looked down at the hearth rug where the toe of his shoe was squirming its way into the shagpile. "I... um need some advice about... about a boy... a man I've met, and seeing you with Snape, I thought..."

"You thought... Snape and I?"

Harry nodded dumbly, then looked up as the man threw his head back with a sudden shout of laughter. The motion exposed a vicious, curling, silver scar which had been concealed until then by his hair. It tracked from under his collar, up the side of the man's neck, and over his jaw to his cheek, puckering the skin.

Clamping a hand over his mouth, Harry stared at the other wizard's disfigurement. "Oh, shit! I'm sorry," he muttered.

Harry rubbed at his neck unconsciously. The older man's hand automatically mirrored the gesture, running a finger along his long scar.

"You'd better sit down, Harry. I'll go and get us a pot of tea and some shortbread, and we can have a wee chat."

*

"Wolfman-Douglas?" Snape sounded incredulous. "Wolfman? How did you get away with that?"

"Just my wolfish charm?" suggested Remus, grinning.

Severus covered his eyes with a hand, shaking his head in despair.

"Harry didn't recognise you?"

"Look at me, Hermione." Remus spread his arms wide as he replied, inviting her inspection. "I'm not the same man I was when I taught him at Hogwarts. I've served as a spy and counter spy, been to hell and back, been unable to speak to my best friend about the love of his life, taken a fatal blow in the last battle, and spent several years trapped in a painting with a bloody unicorn. Some things change a man irrevocably."

The afore-mentioned painting snorted loudly.

"Not to mention the grey..."

"... Silver! Silver hair, thank you very much, Severus. Also, the scar which I can thank you for, my friend."

"You ungrateful mongrel, I've been working very hard trying to heal that. Don't imagine I enjoy sitting for hours weaving those restorative spells with your mangy head on my lap."

"Which Harry witnessed and misconstrued," Remus interjected.

Snape glowered at him before retorting, "Besides which, you stepped into the path of the curse, you daft prat. I can't be held responsible for your stupidity, Lupin."

"I seem to recall I was saving your worthless hide, you arrogant tosser."

"Boys!"

A vicious glaring match ensued, ending only when Hermione crossed her arms and tapped her toe imperiously. "Anyway..." she encouraged.

"Anyway," Lupin continued, "as I was saying before Snippy the Snape got his knickers in a knot, Harry and I had a bit of a chat. He was looking for a bit of advice about his love life."

"So, what did you tell him, Romeo?" Severus scoffed.

"Oh, you know, the usual guff about trust and friendship, standing up for one another, sticking together through thick and thin, watching each other's backs, never missing the chance to tell someone you love them..." Remus replied, throwing Severus a meaningful glance, "...all that malarkey. Harry seemed to accept that, but it made me sit back and think."

"And?"

"And... well, you know I love you guys to death, but..."

"But, what?"

"Well, it made me aware I'm no longer the teenager on the periphery or the endangered spy with his undercover sidekick." He grinned at Snape's growling response. "Nor am I the untrustworthy werewolf anymore, thanks to our friendly unicorn's magic. Remind me to ask him why he waited until we shared a portrait frame before he cured the werewolf thing."

"Please spare us the drivel, Lupin, and get to the point."

"I love you both dearly, and I know you love me. I hate to break this to you, but..."

"Please, tell me you've found someone else and you're leaving," suggested Severus.

Remus paused slightly.

"Actually, I have and I am. Stop punching the air, Snape, and you can wipe that sloppy grin off your face too, Granger. I've met a lovely witch, and I thought I would move out of here and into Charmaine's old apartment in Marseille, if you don't mind, Hermione."

"Where did you meet a *lovely* witch, Wolfman?"

"Did you think I was coming to visit you, Severus, when I kept dropping in to the Department of Mysteries?"

Severus looked perplexed.

"Whilst I'd love to stay and watch the cogs turning in your head, I really must be going." Remus hugged Hermione and kissed her lightly on the cheek before licking Severus up the side of his face and heading towards the door.

"But you can't speak French, you daft mutt."

"Can so, Sev. I had this gorgeous French teacher when I was at school, didn't I, Charmaine?" Remus countered with a lascivious wink in Hermione's direction. "Au revoir! Love you guys," he called as he left.

"That sly old fox," muttered Hermione. "He's hooked up with Joanna Megansdochter."

Severus sputtered. "That's just not right. What about the prophecy? You know, the one about you and me and Lupin."

"La biche and the emblazoned one with love and a spell of time shall free a man's best friend..."

"Now, remind me about the part mentioning Lupin."

"...and the wolf shall enter antipodean dreamtime."

"Exactly! I thought the prophecy was about us, so how does my Australian boss become his antipodean dreamtime?"

Chuckling, Hermione pulled her husband towards the bedroom. "It's not always about you, Severus. This one was actually about Remus."

A/N: I was given a challenge: Remus is dead, and Severus is mourning. Why? Anything prior to Remus's death has to fit with canon. Hermione should be in there as well. How hard could that be?

I have to admit I'm not very good at sticking to canon, and this was only going to be a one shot, but it got a bit carried away with itself. It's the first long fic I've written, so I hope you've enjoyed the read. Thanks for all the encouraging reviews.

A super-special thanks must go to sunny33, who suggested the scenario in the first place, then had to read and correct all my mistakes. Silly witch!