

Wool

by moiramountain

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Chapter 1 of 1

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WOOL

From below came the sounds of pots being shifted on a stove, the savories of supper rising to his nose. A rain-dressed breeze ventured across the windowsill to tug at the back of his shirt.

Behind him was the open door of the mahogany wardrobe he'd begun to think of as his mummy's case, laden as it was with his heavy wools, each of them carefully hung, scented with attar of amber and myrrh. All of his familiar bindings, waiting to be worn – the burial robes of his life.

He found the thing precisely where they'd left it – top drawer of the bureau, folded neatly on the right hand side. Minerva and Poppy – such masters of sensible compassion. They knew bending for something in a bottom drawer was still not something he could accomplish without the blood rushing to the scars on his neck and making them burn. Something akin to the Mark, and far too familiar, he snorted to himself.

The wool of the gray jumper was thick, but carefully woven without cabling, so as to remain soft against his throat and shield his privacy. He'd always thought there was a strange forgiveness in wool. The saving grace of idiot sheep – they did not have to die to be worthwhile. He'd sorted that out as a boy when he'd found some small comfort in his father's cast-off watch coat. A portend of his future, that even then he'd carefully catalogued what must live or die in order to be considered useful.

Poppy had fervently insisted – and Minerva had speedily arranged – that they bring him to this cottage in Cumbria to convalesce, far from the sycophants who claimed they'd always known he was a hero and the zealots who still clamored to see him in Azkaban. With their frenzied eyes and twitching fingers, there was little to distinguish one mob from the other.

The two witches had the grace to bless him with as few smothering attentions as possible, which for Poppy might have been anguish, were it not for the fact that Minerva was there beside her.

Often enough, they'd left him to himself in a grove of trees with a hamper of food and a stack of books. Certainly, they were never far if he truly needed them, making sure that he could still see them or hear their voices drifting past him on the air.

Of course, he'd observed the change in their demeanor, the release from the confinement of prying eyes. The heaviness had left their faces, and they'd had a tendency to linger over tea. The warmth of summer had lulled them into shedding the robes of matron and professor, and even shoes seemed to distress them. He'd thought to make some snide remark about mature women acting like foolish chits but couldn't quite bring himself to be so harsh.

He'd been in pain this morning, though, and he'd not held back when they'd gifted him with the jumper. Cruel words came far too easily when he'd spat that he'd not wear the same trappings as a wretched Weasley. He'd sooner die.

Die. How sudden and vicious that word had twisted in the air.

In all the years he'd known them both, Minerva with her maddening courage and Poppy with her unfailing constancy (and he with his bitter occlusions), there had always been an established balance...

"You bloody bastard, you damn near did, and I'll never hear you say it again, that you hoped for it or deserved it. We'd rather have your silence."

Gods of every realm, the ferocity of Minerva's voice and Poppy's eyes...

He closed the wardrobe quietly with a strange sense of farewell. A better understanding deserved something different.

Wrapped in the warmth of gray wool, he allowed himself a brief moment with his reflection.

"It seems that they love one another, Severus," he whispered, "and the apparent reality is that you are loved as well."