

Parlor of Broken Dreams

by Amita

Can Severus overcome his growing darkness and unite with his soul mate? Does he want to?

A Bad Day

Chapter 1 of 4

Can Severus overcome his growing darkness and unite with his soul mate? Does he want to?

A Bad Day

Nagini venom.

He was assuming that was the reason for his bad dreams as he headed for his morning shower. No matter. Off to hospital cafeteria to meet Emil, the other medicinal potion master, for breakfast. Coffee, orange juice, bran muffins. *We're becoming Yanks*. They listened to the speculation about the disappearance of a witch named Hermione before heading to the lab.

Some days were good. Some days were bad. It had been a bad day. He and Emil had botched every brew. But it was the end of the day. Emil had perfunctory sipped a tea before inviting Severus to go bar hopping, but Severus, dreading calling up the night demons before their time, had declined whereupon Emil had declared he would head home where his wife would commiserate and, once again, urge him to retire, which was comforting in its own way.

Some days were bad. Late that night, Severus answered a knock on the door to see a face he had hoped to forget. She swept in and plunked herself in a chair.

"Hermione ... Something," he said. "Welcome to my parlor. What happened? Did you have a spasm of emotion and injure your ex and go into hiding? Is he in hospital? Are you going to ask me to deliver flowers and the best wishes you can muster?"

"What a vivid imagination you have, and they told me you had laid off the snark."

"Something caused a relapse," he said.

"The recent past is still painful, and it is very much with us."

"Let me try again if you're willing to give me a second chance. Can I offer you a tea?"

"Thank you," she said, remaining sitting, forcing him to make good on his offer of tea.

He handed her the tea. "Welcome to my parlor."

"I need to stay here," she said.

"Everyone's been wondering where you've been," he said.

"On the run. I daren't stay anywhere I could be found. I've been hiding in hotels, but I'm out of money. I haven't eaten in two days."

Severus leaped up. He returned with a sherry. He busied himself in the kitchen, He returned with a mushroom omelet. Another sherry and she told the story.

Magical enterprises and ordinary commerce required the exchange and transportation of gold, silver, and items of even greater value. A gang, however, knew the times and routes of the shipments. They appeared on dragons.

"I suppose they hold the emissaries of robber barons at flame point while they relieve them of loot taken from the toiling masses," he interjected.

"That's what they do," she said. "That's what they say.

"What did you do? Try to set up a system that helps the raiders-of-the-lost-profit redistribute their well-gotten gains to the less fortunate, beginning with house elves?"

"No," she said. "I'm an officer of the court and it was my job to apprehend them and whose side are you on, anyway, and that's not fair."

"Let me guess," he said. "For robberies of that magnitude, powerful and ruthless people are involved. If they know the times and routes, it's an inside job. You were betrayed, and you're running for your life. But I don't recall you ever taking on dragons."

She lifted her chin. "It's everyone's duty to fight for justice."

"That part I recall," he said.

He covered the obvious points. She had done a background check on all the relevant administrators and finance officers. She had drawn a blank. She had tried shadowing them. Nothing. Somewhere along the way, she had noticed she was being followed. Strange things had happened to her friends. She had had several close calls.

She nodded.

"You're too class conscious," he said. "You're assuming the mastermind is a high official. Did you investigate the tea ladies and the mail room clerks?"

She shook her head no before glaring at him. "What are you, a social democrat?"

He was formulating a reply when he noticed she had fallen asleep.

He left for work the next morning and returned to find her still in his parlor. She thought he could be her secret partner and continue the detective work, but he replied that he was an outsider with no contacts. Besides, he was a broken man. He suggested he brew a bitter tea to celebrate his refusal.

She took a sip. "We face dragons and it's an inside job and there's a master mind and you're the only one I can trust."

Perhaps the bad dreams had been premonitions instead of signs of creeping darkness. Was facing dragons better? A weighty question.

"Protecting oneself is always a priority," he said. "If we encounter the gang, we'll need a sneeze powder of draconian strength."

She smiled. "I knew you were the man for the job."

She looked wistfully at her empty cup. "I could get used to bitter tea. Brew something up for me, Severus.."

It was two nights later, and he was on his way to the loo in the wee hours when he felt something damp across his face. He was wandless. He flailed. "You'll not get me, you soul suckers." Something was wrapping itself around him. He grabbed it and yanked. Something crashed. He lost his footing.

The light came on. Hermione was standing in the doorway. "Severus, what are you doing on the floor with my knickers."

He looked up from the tangle of clothesline and undies. "Perhaps you could hang them up to dry elsewhere."

"Where? In the front parlor? Suppose you get a visitor?"

She huffed. "Oh very well, but you have to help. What a mess you've made."

As they strung the line across the room, she admonished him. "Hang everything up carefully, but don't look."

Author's Warning: This story is threatening to run away from home.

Revelations

Chapter 2 of 4

Severus is distracted.

Chapter 2: Revelations

It was a week after Hermione had sought sanctuary and he was sitting at lunch and he was reflecting that a hospital potion master could do little about Ministry intrigue and he was noticing a lovely lady entering the cafeteria and he was admiring her but a gentleman does not stare and he was giving his pork cutlet his attention when he looked up to see her standing and looking hopeful beside his table.

"Would you like a seat, Miss Patil," he said, eagle eyes noticing the absence of rings.

Bad boys like good girls.

"You can call me, Padma, unless you want me to call you, Professor," she said, her refined manner striking him in the heart.

Beasts lust after elegant women. *Down Nagini.*

"We've been wondering where you disappeared to. That is, I assume you work here. Or are you visiting?"

Modest clothes and quiet demeanor. He admired them. He longed to get under them. *Nagini whispered that after he got past them, he would admire them even more.*

He confirmed he worked here and asked about her. She was an auditor in the Finance Division of the Ministry, and it was time for the annual review of the hospital records.

Intellect and discipline. He wanted to possess a woman with both. *Nagini knew he really wanted to strip her of both as he possessed her. Their reappearance would arouse him.*

"You're tucked away in your own world," she said. "You probably haven't heard the latest exciting news."

When he evinced interest, she continued, "A gang of dragon riders has been raiding gold shipments. Everyone's in a panic."

Nagini recognized Padma Patil. She knew a dragon lady when she saw one. They were rare. Don't let her go.

"Dragons? Isn't that overdoing it?" he asked.

"You can joke," said Padma. "Your family's not being hurt."

"I can observe the excess and condemn the outlawry at the same time," he said, realizing he hadn't previously identified Padma as a robber baroness, "and I recall you described it as exciting, not terrible, but exciting."

"Yes, you're right," said Padma, "but to us, it's a state of emergency."

There was a moment of silence before she said, "I should keep things in perspective. There's been cop-and-robbers for centuries, and there'll be cops-and-robbers for more centuries. It's exciting, but the real difference in our lives comes from medicinal potions."

He thought wistfully of looking into the eyes of a woman who admired him. *Nagini was stirring: You're halfway to getting her wet.*

"You give me too much credit," he said.

"Do you work here alone?" she asked.

"I usually work with Emil Fassbinder, but he's on holiday. A fascinating character. He made a series of brilliant discoveries in his fifties and sixties. Then he did nothing for six years. Now he's working again."

"What happened?"

"There are two theories," said Severus. "One, he became independently wealthy and not having to work unbalanced him. He took to drink, and it took him six years to recover."

Padma nodded.

"The other theory is that being independently wealthy eliminated the stress in his life and he stopped drinking. It took him six years to regain his creative daemon."

"That's a marvelous story," said Padma.

Her breasts were marvelous. His tongue was flicking out. Golden mounds and dark nipples. *Down Nagini.*

She paused. "Wait, if he became wealthy, it was from patenting new potions. You and Emil must be doing research, concocting new potions, contending against nature."

Padma eyes were wide in admiration.

He had never cared for strip tease, but he had a fantasy of an admiring Padma performing, performing just for him. She would clumsily undo her buttons. It would be charming. She would shyly drop her skirt. Down to lingerie of simple black silk. He would be speechless. His eyes would be wide in admiration. She would turn and pose. He would go wild. Padma reveling in his admiration.

He shook his head. "I no longer have the discipline your profession requires. I go by fits and starts. With Emil's help, I have been lucky."

If he were lucky, he would find himself slowly removing her garments, admiring every part of her that was revealed: the arch of her neck – graceful lady, the shape of her shoulders – strong woman.

Compared to his profession, Padma didn't see much merit in what she was doing except it provided a decent living. He suggested that with her acumen, she could make her family wealthy. She replied that a few families already controlled the wealth of Wizard England and the rest scraped by. He mentioned looking outside Wizard England.

"Certainly, your family knows some mundane businessmen," he said

"I'm not supposed to tell anyone, but suppose they do?" she asked.

She had heard of the stock and bond market, but regarded it as a combination of rigged game and mob psychology. He agreed, but he thought there was a core of rationality where one could invest in sound businesses.

She gave him an appreciative look. "You're trying to open a new world for me."

He would open a new world for her. A small world with the two of them, but a new universe. Deep kisses until she wanted more. Tending lovely breasts until she impatiently slid knickers past her hips. He would never get tired of seeing her legs open for him. His tongue would flick. He would make the baroness vibrate.

"You're suggesting penetrating a new market," she said.

Entering Padma. Spread beneath him. Soft sighs. Her feet waving in the air. Looking into those liquid eyes. He wanted to see everything. His ivory rod sliding into tawny folds.

"You're counseling patience. Capture the spirit of the rational investor. Hang in there as the market undulates," she said. "You're offering me a gift."

He would be gentle and patient. He would let Nagini capture her spirit. Padma undulating in animal passion. Her legs, those golden legs, wrapping around him. Turning sloppy wet for him. In and out of a gorgeous woman. Her mindless frenzy. Her gifting him with the most intimate clenches.

"Severus, are you listening."

"What?"

"You've got to stop thinking about potions all the time. I said Pansy Parkinson has taken a job in the mailroom. Isn't that interesting?"

"Yes," he said. "Yes, it is."

She would sleep sprawled across him. She would walk proudly beside him. He would be part of her life.

She said she had to run back to work, but she stopped at the door, turned, smiled, and waved goodbye. He supposed he had had unusual thoughts because of Hermione in his house. There was nothing romantic, but day to day life with her had made him think that women were people too. Or maybe it was Nagini. Feminine venom? No matter. If Padma had been flirting, he had not responded, and the chance was lost. The wave goodbye was goodbye.

Undercover

Chapter 3 of 4

Severus continues to be distracted. (Writing the dark side is too much fun.)

Chapter 3: Undercover

It was two days after meeting Padma when he looked up from his ham and cheese on rye to see another vision this one more hard-faced and determined and possibly less flexible, but still well-crafted well-crafted even though disguised.

"Can I buy you lunch," he asked when she arrived at his table.

"They told me you were here," said Pansy Parkinson.

She was looking for a refuge. Life with her parents had become impossible, but not everyone would take in a Parkinson. She was desperate, even if it meant sharing his home with whatever female he was currently hiding.

"You've been spying on me."

"You can call it that if you want if you want to be unappreciative of someone looking out for you," she said.

"Ah, yes, my welfare, your hope for the next Dark Lord."

"My hope for a champion, for someone who can fight for our rights. I don't want another Dark Lord," she said. "Besides, didn't you ever think my interest might be personal. Can't you ever get out of that self-centered head of yours. I did save you."

He acknowledged that she had a point. Pansy had found him abandoned after being attacked by Nagini and whisked him to hospital. He had already drunk his vial of all-purpose potion, but her effort had saved more of his functions. She and her parents had hidden him in their house until the commotion died down, but he had left when her parents discovered he had no interest in being the next Tom Riddle.

She was telling him that things had changed. Her parents had gradually become aware of the extent of the carnage, and they wanted no more of the struggle while Pansy was more determined than ever to set things right. She had sensed power in him, and she was certain she could bring it out.

For now, however, she needed a place to stay. If he didn't take her in, she would reveal that he was cohabiting. Since it was secret, it meant that reputations would be ruined if it were known. She wanted to move in this evening.

That evening, he approached his house with Pansy in tow hoping Hermione had received the emergency signal. They had located and prepared several abandoned places along the northern coast. His house seemed empty when he entered, but Pansy scoured the place and returned with her hands behind her back.

"So, taking up with that slag that left you to die," said Pansy.

"Not really."

Pansy's hands came out from behind her back, waving a pair of knickers with the initials HG. "Busted."

"If there's a woman in the house, those things are going to be lying about," he said.

She was still holding them up, a lacy version of a captured banner.

"They get into everything," he said.

"Oh, now we're getting into them, are we," she said.

"You may as well be waving a tube of lipstick. Let's think like adults."

"I am," said Pansy. "I'm thinking about all the adult things you've been up to with a heartless slag."

"If you've quite finished, you can remove your disguise and unpack. I assume you brought the necessities with you. Otherwise, you could scrounge for more lingerie. Maybe you and the heartless slag are the same size."

Pansy told him that had to be the cruelest thing he could say. She tossed the garment into the air, vaporized it with a wave of her wand, and announced she was hungry. He went out and returned with fish and chips. They were on the sofa in front of the fireplace, and as they were eating, she edged closer and closer. By the time he levitated a brandy and two glasses for them, she had her feet under her and her head on her shoulder. He inhaled her scent.

"I'm on holiday," she said.

Gentle fingers stroked her hair. Glossy raven hair. So soft. Gentle tendrils stroked her psyche. Glossy raven psyche. Not so soft.

"I'm tired," she said, "so tired."

"Keeping everything together, all by yourself, is too much," he said.

Eyes flashed at him. "You know," she said.

She became erect and her face hardened and she reached for her wand. He grabbed her wrist. Her other hand went for his eyes. They toppled over. She was trying to knee him in the groin. She was trying to bite his nose. She was trying to head butt him. She was trying to twist free as he wrestled her to the floor. He was fighting to hold the struggling girl down as she tossed him about the room. She was finally exhausted. She was bruised. Her lip was bleeding. She was asking if he was going to kill her and collect the reward or if he was going to kill her and take over.

Or maybe, since her skirt was around her waist and her blouse was torn and one breast was out of her bra and she was already sweaty, he would be a beast first. Wouldn't he like to watch her face as he slid inexorably into her? Wouldn't he like to be the first to get in her pants?

He caught his breath enough to say, "That's a definite yes to both, Miss Pansy, but I want it to be with you clambering over me in unbridled passion."

"What a wuss," she said.

"Quite," he said.

"Wasted foreplay," he said as he helped her to her feet.

"You're not even going to help tuck my breast back into my bra, are you," she said as she ambled to the bathroom to freshen up, but she reappeared five minutes later looking like a schoolgirl on her first date.

"Did I hurt you?" she asked as she stretched out beside him on the rug in front of the fireplace, "and what were you thinking of doing?"

She raised herself to look into his eyes. "You weren't planning to take the money back, were you? The Ministry has been confiscating our property, taking family heirlooms that honored our ancestors, denying us a chance to make a decent living."

He agreed that the dragon gang had not harmed any couriers. They had arrived in overwhelming force, but the rich and powerful would prod the government into providing suitable escorts, and then, people would get hurt. They needed a new strategy.

She protested that her dragon riders couldn't remain idle. They would get into trouble. There was already grumbling that she was too restrained, that a witch wasn't bold enough.

Her eyes sparkled. She had an idea. Why didn't he appear as a Dark Lord, ready to take them to new heights? He could fly in. That and perhaps blasting a few of them would impress them and gain their allegiance. He could appear disguised, and he need only appear once. Afterwards, she would be his close lieutenant and deliver his commands. He remarked that she was as clever as she was lovely, and they would see what kind of plans they could come up with.

Severus was all too aware of the lady snuggling into him. It wasn't the shapely legs or the firm breasts. It was the whole girl, intelligent and vibrant, her warm breath. He wanted to consume her. Her wanted to make her ache for him.

He was staring at the ceiling and thinking the Nagini venom was winning.

"Spending an evening with you was fun," she said, "even though you were something of a disappointment at times."

This lady, too, was asleep before he could form a suitable reply.

He stroked her hair as he fell into a deep sleep. Later, he blearily opened his eyes as Pansy rose. He assumed she was headed to the bedroom to sleep, but she returned with a quilt and thoughtfully placed it over both of them. Near dawn, he was startled awake as Pansy suddenly sat up.

She was looking around wildly. "Where? Where?"

"You're here," he said. "It's okay."

She returned to snuggling.

He woke feeling more rested than he had in ages. He admired the aristocratic lines of Pansy's face, which now seemed angelic.

Nagini nudged him. A fighting angel. You need her. Avenging angel to guardian angel. Challenge her to improve the lot of all and capture her. Can't you tell that's what she wants?

He extricated himself from the sleeping lady and hurried to the lab. As he was selecting his breakfast, however, the cafeteria ladies begin tittering.

"Look, he has a long strand of raven hair on his shirt," said one to another.

"He looks refreshed this morning," said a third.

"He's late. I wonder what kept him in bed," chirped another.

"Does her family know," the first added. "They believe in traditional values."

"Our auditor only met him three days ago," said the first.

"My, doesn't he work fast," said the second.

He paid and was sipping his coffee when a message arrived accompanied by the knowing looks of the cafeteria ladies: Young lovers cannot bear to be separated. He opened the note. It was from Hermione. It was cold on the northern coast. The landscape was barren. She was going to run out of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Severus raged. Hermione was supposed to keep a low profile, not write to him the next day with a message that could be traced. Perhaps he was fortunate that the cafeteria ladies and any of the world who wanted to listen had their own ideas about who would send him private mail.

Nagini stirred. She's lonely and misses you.

Severus ignored the percolating venom. Fresh fruits and vegetables, for sooth.

Laboratory

Chapter 4 of 4

Severus begins to extricate himself.

Chapter 4: Laboratory

Hermione Granger was furious. Evil doers were going unpunished. Worse, they were being given respectable positions. And the sticky icing on this bitter cake was that she was a part of the whole charade.

Pansy Parkinson was ready to spit nails. Her plans for revenge and prosperity had been derailed. Worse, everyone else was happy about it. The cherry with a stone in it on top of this hot-fudged sundae was that the plan required her participation. And she was supposed to smile.

Padma Patil was a bit chafed. At work, she had told people she admired Emil and Severus for their work in medicinal potions. Her supervisors had seized upon the opportunity to assign her to audit the accounts of the research lab. Even though it inhabited the same building as the hospital, it was funded separately, and all previous auditors had avoided examining the bookkeeping mess that two researchers could make.

In addition, her supervisor had called her into his office and said, "You showed great initiative in volunteering to audit the researchers."

"I did?" replied Padma, not remembering any volunteering on her part.

"Yes, commendable. Because of that, you've been assigned to monitor the records for the recently formed dragon corps. If you can deal with researchers, then dragon-riding rowdies should be no problem. We know we can expect the highest performance from you."

Her personal life wasn't any better. She and a longtime family friend had finally been pressured into announcing an engagement. The two of them declared it would be a long one. The younger members of both families applauded the civilized decorum and restraint. The grandparents and great grandparents, while publicly pleased at their rationality, expressed a different opinion among themselves. Where was the passion? Where was the youthful flaunting of common sense? Where was the fire? At any rate, Padma now wore an engagement ring.

"Congratulations," said Severus and Emil as the three were having afternoon tea in a shop close to the lab.

"Are you certain you can socialize with the people you're auditing?" asked Severus.

"I'm working on lowering your guard," said Padma. "I will learn all your secrets."

"Oh no," said Emil. "Our absinthe distillery in the back room isn't safe anymore."

Padma was exasperated. "I already know about that, and don't you dare dismantle it until I've sampled your next batch."

"Let us rephrase things," said Emil. "A little socializing might be conducive to efficient performance."

Padma had expected the two to be constantly and completely engrossed with the lab equipment, but the two spent considerable time at their desks devising charts for the chemical interactions, and they weren't the dour and cranky recluses she had imagined. After an intense week in which she imagined they were concocting a cure for some malady, they approached her with a pomegranate seed and a beaker of liquid,

"You put the seed in your mouth and drop in the fluid," said Emil.

"Now we wait," said Emil

Two days later, she arrived to find the beaker had grown a flower. Its scent enveloped her. She placed it in her hair. When Emil and Severus appeared and greeted her, they took one look and stepped back, speechless.

"What if I placed the seed in a more intimate place before dropping it in the fluid?" asked Padma.

"A bold lady," said Severus.

Emil looked into the distance and managed to whisper, "The result would tempt anyone beyond what a mortal frame could bear."

Padma put her hand on his upper arm. "Sounds interesting."

The next few days saw Padma arriving with her hair brushed to a gloss, wearing shorter skirts, and smiling at Emil. He was gradually drawn into conversations with her until the day she talked about her engagement and the different reactions of her relatives to which he said, "The mature remember the pain caused by impetuosity. The old recall the loss of not acting."

He's more than a brilliant scientist, thought Padma, but the days stretched on and he became no more than friendly to her. *The regret of not acting*, thought Padma as she began neglecting her hair and clothes and the bookkeeping changed from interesting to dreary. The day came when she looked up from her desk and snapped.

"Emil, this is a mess. It's worse than a mess. I can't even make a mess to clean up out of what you have."

Emil, brave man, entered the lair of the dragon saying, "Not to worry. I can make a mess on the spot."

Padma glared at him. "Yes, put your creative mind to work, except you don't make a mess, you make an empty, barren wasteland. You've done to the paperwork what you've doing to my life."

"Is that your life?" he asked. "Whatever it is, we must celebrate it."

Paperwork is the cruelest task, breeding
Rage out of the mildest soul, mixing
Creation and scrutiny, stirring
Old failures with precise numbers.

Padma smiled. "Your poetic bent is not going to save you."

"Of course not," he said.

Well, don't stop there," she said. "Can't you go on?"

Padma kept us safe, covering
Our lapses with inspired bookkeeping, feeding
A little hope with a great figure.

"Out," she said. "Out."

Emil backed out carefully, but when he and Severus dared glance back in, they saw her primping in her compact's mirror, and when she appeared the next morning, her hair was in a sporting-looking pony tail.

Days later, however, no one had fluffed her pony tail, and she was tapping her pencil at numbers she wasn't really seeing. *I'm engaged*, she reminded herself. She bent her will to the task at hand. *He's treating me like a virtuous lady*, she told herself. The pencil snapped.

The air was crackling as Severus announced he needed a coffee. He dallied for a while over a cup before deciding he should see if either of his two friends needed medical attention. He approached the lab cautiously. Emil was in the office they had given Padma, but whatever they had said, she was giving him a soft look and approaching him. His arms were around her. He was stroking her hair as he held her. Severus thought she was crying. He held her for a long time before drying her tears. They kissed and returned to work.

The next day, Emil was helping Padma with the receipts. She was listening to stories from his life and nodding. Severus watched as she crossed the line. *It's dangerous offering understanding to a middle-aged man*.

It was mid afternoon when Severus announced he had errands to run and left the lab. When he reached the street, he remembered he had left his list in his desk drawer. He was telling himself it was an honest mistake and not Nagini venom surging through him as he quietly retraced his steps. He opened the door enough to see Padma with her arm across Emil's shoulders as he bottled his last result. Saw Emil stand and gently embrace Padma who grabbed him with all the hunger of her neglected years. Saw her pressed against the wall. Saw Emil Fassbinder's aura flare through all the colors as her tongue probed deep. Saw her fingers splayed as she enveloped her Emil. The forgotten engagement ring flashing its last.

Padma took Emil's hands and placed them on her breasts. "Gently, sweetheart," she said.

He was.

Padma luxuriated in the attention. She wanted more. She guided his hand to between her legs. "Do you mind, darling?" she asked.

He didn't.

She was nibbling his lips as his hand roamed under her skirt. She was sighing, "Oh, yes," when his hand found her sensitive spot.

As she wove at his touch, he whispered, "Make love to me."

She did.

She was all giving all over him. She was all clumsy with affection. He could not ask for anything better. He never would. Only for more. Her affection became desperate. Her fingers clawing at him. Her stillness.

His eyes were wild. Emil waltzing Padma to the edge of the desk. Her skirt up. Pushing her knickers down. Padma on the desk, her legs up. Her demure look as Emil pushed into her.

Severus had a vision. Twenty years from now, a more mature Padma would be even more beautiful. And she would be even more willing and more loving with her one and only Emil.

Shapely legs wrapped around Emil. Gasping and sloppy wet -- the sound of Padma.

Severus decided he didn't really need the list. Hermione had returned to a normal life and could buy her own fruits and vegetables. He could entice Pansy into another evening of sampling London street food.