

# Unlikely Bedfellows

by *PlaidPooka*

What will it take to get the most unlikely of bedfellows together? A post HBP fic.  
Character Death Warning is for events which happen before the events of the story.

## Broken Silence

Chapter 1 of 15

What will it take to get the most unlikely of bedfellows together? A post HBP fic. Character Death Warning is for events which happen before the events of the story.

A/N: I wasn't planning on writing this fic, but when Tarah\_Fae teased NotSoSainly about writing this pairing, I just got to thinking about it... I know, I know, a thinking Pook is a dangerous thing! So here you go Tarah! I expect this tale to only take a few chapters, but we'll see how it goes.

The character death warning is for deaths which occur before the events of the story; there will be no deaths of the characters in the pairing.

This fic has not been beta read, (I was just too impatient!) so any mistakes are my own damn fault!

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

Warning: This fic occurs post HBP and contains a few spoilers.

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The two men never spoke to each other during the day. Indeed, the many people who came to see the younger wizard during visiting hours assumed that the two men never spoke to each other at all. This was almost true. However, in the evening when the ward was quiet and still, the wizards who had been made to share a recuperating room at St. Mungo's did speak to each other. Neither of the men could decide if they spoke out of pure boredom or out of a loneliness that neither would admit. But speak they did, and...as the weeks passed by...they spoke with growing frequency.

The end of the war had been hard on everyone; many people from both sides had died in the last confrontation. In the end, the side of the Light had persevered, but at a great cost. The heaviest losses had been suffered by the house-elves and the centaurs. The normally cheerful house-elves had gladly joined their "families" in fighting against "The Bad Man," as they called him. The centaurs had joined the fighting at the bitter end, when they were at last convinced that the stars expected them to pay more attention to their own future and leave less of it up to the fates.

The wizards also suffered losses. Both Percy Weasley and Cornelius Fudge had redeemed themselves by standing fast in the front lines, their wands emitting a frenzy of spell casting before they both fell. Some of the Order members were gone as well: Moody, Shackbolt, and Tonks among them. The Hogwarts' staff had fared amazingly well, though Firenze would no longer have to share the Divination position. Sybill Trelawney had been braver than she had been able; she'd fallen at a minor skirmish two weeks before the end of the war.

Immediately after the last battle--while Severus Snape had still been unconscious from his many injuries--a group from the Wizengamot had convened in the Hogwarts Headmaster's office to discuss Snape's fate. Knowing that Snape had continued feeding information to the Order after he went back to the Death Eaters--and knowing that Snape had openly fought against Voldemort at the last battle of the war-- the Wizengamot nevertheless intended to put Severus in Azkaban for the murder of Albus

Dumbledore. In the Headmaster's office, they found out the truth of the matter from Albus' portrait. Already dying from the potion he had drunk in the cave, Albus had taken advantage of Severus' skill as a Legilimens to order Severus to save himself and Draco by finishing Albus off.

"You do not win a game of chess without sacrificing a few pawns, gentlemen," Albus' portrait had chided. "Why do you seek to punish a man who has dedicated his whole adult life to ending the life of that madman? Has he not suffered enough?"

In the end, they had dropped all charges against Severus. When Minerva had come to visit Severus and tell him that he was a free man, the bedridden wizard had turned his face away from her and refused to speak. In fact, during the first six weeks he was at the hospital, Severus refused to speak to anyone--at least, not when he was awake.

The two men who shared the small room in St. Mungo's so unhappily were both considered casualties of the war at first, so battered and broken they had been. Two months after that last battle, they were recovering still. Unable to walk yet, Severus Snape was finally able to sit up in bed a bit, and tend to small matters like feeding himself. Ron Weasley could walk for short distances...enough to get himself to the loo...but only with the assistance of the brace of canes he kept close by his bed. It was perhaps this shaky ability to walk which got the two roommates talking at all; they had stubbornly refused to speak a word to each other for the first six weeks of their recuperation.

It started with the nightmares. Though Ron held the older wizard in the utmost contempt, he was...at heart...a very kind young man. Having been cleared of any wrongdoing by Albus, it seemed that Severus Snape had still not forgiven himself. The Dreamless Sleep potion could not be used long term, so after the first month of Snape's recovery, the Healers at St. Mungo's had been forced to take him off of it.

The first night Ron awoke because Severus was crying out in his sleep was perhaps the first time in two years that the young redhead had heard his former Potions master's voice at all. Never had he heard Snape's voice filled with the terror and sorrow that now rang in it. The man who remained so silent while awake now wept and moaned in distress. Over and over he muttered the same phrase, "No, Albus, no! I won't...I can't...don't make me!"

Though Ron had never liked the stern man, and had absolutely hated him as a teacher, he simply could not bring himself to ignore the man's pain when it was so heartbreakingly apparent. To hear that voice, which had always been so strong and sure, now full of pain and sorrow was more than the kind young wizard could take. For a week, he had stubbornly covered his head with his pillow and tried to ignore the pitiful cries of the man who spoke only when asleep. On the eighth night, Ron had been disgusted with himself. Snape's name had been cleared. It was true that he wasn't a nice man, but his only crime had been to follow the orders of Dumbledore himself...and now he suffered for it. Knowing that he would never like the man, Ron nevertheless also knew that it was wrong of him to ignore the pain of another. After all, they had both been through so much already. Perhaps the time for childish hatred was past.

Dragging himself out of bed, Ron grabbed one of his canes and hobbled over to Snape's bed. Still unsteady on his feet, he hesitated only for a moment before he gingerly sat next to the moaning man. Looking at him closely for the first time in weeks, Ron was shocked at how ill and pale Snape still looked. He knew that Snape's injuries had been extensive, but he hadn't realized just how bad off the other wizard was. The soft shine of the lamplight on his once-hated professor's tear streaked cheeks was another shock. This had obviously gone on long enough. Placing one hand on Severus' shoulder, Ron gave the distraught man a gentle shake.

"Wake up, Snape. Wake up now...it's all right. It's only a dream." Ron continued talking, muttering nonsensical comforting words; he was scarcely aware of what he was saying.

Abruptly awake, Severus grabbed Ron's wrist in a surprisingly strong grip for a man so ill. Confused, he blinked for a moment in the dim lamplight. Eventually, he spoke. "Albus?" he asked, his voice quavering and strange.

"No, Severus," Ron said, wincing a bit at using Snape's given name, "it's Ron. You're all right. You were only having a nightmare. You're safe now...here at St. Mungo's..." his voice trailed off.

"Nowhere is safe," whispered Severus, his eyes wide and staring, as if he wasn't quite sure who Ron was. New tears crept down his cheeks as he continued, "They should just kill me and get it over with. I should be dead...why am I still alive? I should be dead, he's dead. Oh dear God, he's dead...because I killed him," he wailed.

For a moment, Ron didn't realize why his sight was wavering. Startled to find his own eyes filling with unshed tears, Ron hastily blinked them away. So much pain. How could he hate a man who lay broken in his bed, weighed down by pain that no healer could take away?

Gently removing Snape's hand from its death grip on his wrist, Ron stroked the weeping man's hair as he said whatever came into his head. "No...you mustn't say that. You didn't kill him, not really. You're a Potion maker, for fuck's sake, you know he was dying anyway. He wanted you to live...he wouldn't want you saying these things."

Ron continued to murmur comforting words to the upset Severus until the older wizard stopped weeping and began to relax. Tired from even this small effort, when Severus finally closed his eyes, Ron knew he'd never make it back to his own bed. With a sigh of resignation, Ron simply stretched out next to the last person in the world he ever thought he'd share a bed with. Closing weary eyes, Ron drifted back to sleep. Later that night, when Severus once again cried out in his sleep, Ron firmly grasped one thin, pale hand in his own and softly spoke to Snape until he calmed once more.

Waking the next morning a bit disoriented, Ron turned his head to find Snape glaring at him, looking much more like the old nemesis of the Potions classroom than Snape had looked since he had first been admitted to St. Mungo's. Instead of instilling the old fear, Ron found himself inexplicably grinning from ear to ear. Somehow it seemed good to know that some things never changed; that the war hadn't ruined everything.

"Good morning, sunshine!" Ron said cheerily. After all, neither of them had been allowed their wands yet. Without his wand, and in his weakened condition, there really wasn't much an irate Severus Snape could do to him.

"Get out of my bed," Snape snarled in lieu of morning greetings.

"Believe me, it will be my pleasure," said Ron cheekily. Taking a moment to search out his cane, Ron managed to lever himself out of bed and headed for the loo. "Just see if I waste my time cuddling you the next time you have a bad night," he teased. He managed to shut the door of the loo just in time to protect himself from the water glass Severus lobbed at his head. Yes, some things didn't change, thank Merlin.

In spite of his teasing, when Ron was awaked that night by Severus' nightmares, he never hesitated. Climbing out of bed and hobbling over to where Severus thrashed in his sleep, Ron simply climbed into bed with the older wizard and once again held his hand. Quieting immediately, Severus slept peacefully for the remainder of the night. A restful night did nothing to soften the glare that Ron got for his pains the next morning. Once again Ron found the man's glare more a cause for amusement than upset. It was simply hard to be intimidated by a Snape who held onto his hand at night like a frightened child.

## Idle Chatter

\*This is a post HBP fic and contains some spoilers\* What will it take to get the most unlikely of bedfellows together?

A/N: Big, big thanks to Broomclosetravenclaw for catching a couple typos in the first chapter! Thanks sweetie, you rock!

Here is chapter two of my odd little tale. I hope you enjoy it. Once again I'd like to mention that this has not been beta read, so any mistakes are my own damn fault! If you notice anything amiss, please contact me at Plaidpooka@yahoo.com and I will get it fixed!

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

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For the next week, Ron ended up in Severus' bed every single night. The first few times, Ron would hobble over from his own bed when Severus' nightmares woke him. Soon the sneaky young Gryffindor simply stayed awake until the older wizard dropped off to sleep and then slipped in next to him. Ron told himself that it was easier that way, that he was tired of having to get up in the middle of the night, but he occasionally admitted to himself that it was nice to sleep in a man's bed again...even if the man in question was Snape. Never saying a word about his uninvited bedmate, Severus continued to glare daggers at Ron each morning until the redhead woke and got out of Severus' bed. More observant than most people gave him credit for, Ron ignored the glares. Despite the fact that the silent man gave him every indication that his company was not desired, Ron had noted that Severus had taken to sleeping on the far side of the bed--which made it easier for the still unsteady Ron to join him at night.

By the seventh week of their recuperation, Severus was still silent save for the occasional demand that Ron get out of his bed in the morning. Ron, on the other hand, had begun to take a stubborn delight in speaking to the surly wizard as often as possible. For hours each day, Ron chattered on about inconsequential things: Quidditch, chess, and the few articles he found in *The Daily Prophet* that had nothing to do with the war. When Ron had visitors, he patiently did what he could to include the mute wizard in their conversations. Though Severus wasn't speaking, Ron decided that the attention did the man good. Indeed, Severus looked more alert and interested in his surroundings than he had since they were first admitted to St. Mungo's.

Eventually, Severus broke his silence. Though he spoke only to complain...about Ron's chatter, about the food, about the dull little recuperating room...Ron was so happy to hear the morose man speaking at all that he found he didn't care what Severus said. There were other changes as well, changes which worried Ron quite a bit. When Ron had started going to Severus' bed to quiet the upset man, both men had stayed resolutely on their own side of the bed throughout the night. The bed was small, so a bit of contact was expected--often the men's shoulders touched or their legs brushed against each other. Until recently, the only time they touched deliberately was when Ron woke Severus from a nightmare by taking his hand. The past few mornings had been different. Ron encountered no glares when he awoke, in fact, Severus always seemed to be still asleep...though Ron suspected the man was faking it more often than not. The biggest change was that Severus was no longer sticking to his side of the bed. Morning after morning Ron woke to find the older wizard facing away from him but with his back pressed firmly against Ron's side. It couldn't really be called cuddling, but it was unexpected to say the least.

This "not-cuddling" disturbed Ron greatly, but not for the reason one might expect. It had taken Ron a bit longer than most to figure out that he fancied blokes much more than women. He'd been dating Hermione when he finally realized exactly why their relationship didn't seem to be going anywhere. Though hurt, Hermione had turned into his greatest source of support as he dealt with the changes in his life. The two remained fast friends throughout and now they could even laugh about their doomed relationship and the odd situation they had found themselves in. Therein lay his present difficulty. Ron was gay. Ron hadn't had a man in months. Ron was living in close quarters with a man who pressed up against him at night. Being certain that Severus was only seeking comfort--not sex--did nothing to stop the fact that Ron was finding the older wizard infinitely distracting. Ron didn't even know if the man was gay, in fact, he rather believed that his strange attraction to the man he once hated was as doomed as his relationship with Hermione had once been.

Now that Severus was talking a little, Minerva McGonagall visited him daily. It was obvious that the older witch was thrilled by the improvement in her friend. What disturbed Ron was that McGonagall always seemed to be touching Severus...patting his arm, tucking his unruly hair behind his ear, kissing his cheek, and giving him a quick buss on the lips as she bid him goodbye each day. What the hell was going on between the two of them? Were they just close friends or was McGonagall anxiously awaiting the day when her lover would be released from the hospital? Watching them covertly every time Minerva visited did nothing to help Ron figure out the situation. Though Severus did not protest Minerva's over solicitous attitude, neither did he seem to encourage it. Their parting buss was always friendly, never passionate, but Severus always returned Minerva's kiss--a fact that was beginning to make Ron jealous.

Why was he jealous in the first place? Why was he having all these stupid blasted thoughts about an unpleasant and rather unattractive man that he'd spent most of his life hating? Was it only because he was young, wasn't getting any, and Severus was the sole man he saw everyday? No matter how Ron tried to deny it, there was no ignoring the fact that he was indeed attracted to the other wizard and--even worse--that he was starting to feel that Severus Snape wasn't nearly as horrible as he had always assumed. Severus was quite sweet to Minerva, which infuriated Ron on a daily basis.

The days passed slowly by. Severus began to speak more frequently with each day that passed, but he remained silent when Ron had visitors. On occasion, Ron could talk Severus into a game of chess and he found Snape to be an admirable opponent. Both Hermione and Minerva had brought the two invalids books and each afternoon found the two men propped up in their beds reading. Even then, Ron was not quiet. Every so often Ron would break the silence by reading Severus bits from his own book or asking the other wizard about whatever book he was reading. Oddly enough, Severus no longer complained about Ron's chatter, not even when Ron interrupted his reading. Ron might have taken note of this if he hadn't been so distracted by the daily smooches between Severus and Minerva.

One evening found Ron more irritated than usual by Minerva's daily visit. The normally stern witch was constantly touching Severus and practically fawning over him. When their dinner arrived, Minerva insisted on feeding Snape, despite the fact that the man was perfectly capable of feeding himself. And Snape let her! Instead of glaring at her, he calmly let the old hag fuss over him, speaking to her kindly and thanking her for her concern. When dinner was finished, Minerva sat there holding tight onto Severus' hand while they chatted. Disgusted by their behavior, and more than a little jealous, Ron barely spoke to Minerva while she was there and only managed the curtest of goodbyes as she left. After Minerva left, Severus confronted Ron about his rudeness.

"Do you have a problem, Mister Weasley?" he growled.

"Not at all, *Mister* Snape. Whom you spend your time with is none of my concern," Ron snapped back.

"You were unspeakably rude to Minerva and I simply cannot understand why. Explain yourself!"

"I don't have to explain anything to you, Snape. Let's just say that I don't care for McGonagall and leave it at that, shall we?"

Glaring daggers at Ron, Severus growled, "Minerva McGonagall is the most amazing woman I know. She is brave, kind, and intelligent. If you cannot appreciate that, then you are more of a fool than I thought!"

For the remainder of the evening the two wizards sat sulking in stubborn silence. When it came time for bed, Ron was determined to never comfort that pig of a man ever again. Instead of waiting for Severus to fall asleep and then moving into Severus' bed, Ron resolutely closed his eyes. Eventually he slept.

Waking late that night, Ron's resolve broke into pieces when he heard Severus' pitiful moaning. Rising as quickly as he could, he managed the short walk without his canes and climbed into Severus' bed.

Shaking the sleeping man gently, Ron called to him, "Severus...Severus, wake up, love. It's just a nightmare, you're safe...nothing will harm you here."

Waking abruptly, Severus blinked up at Ron in confusion for a moment before he completely shocked Ron by wrapping his thin arms around Ron's back and burying his face in Ron's neck.

"Ron...please...don't leave me...don't leave me alone..." Snape whispered in a voice so quiet that Ron could barely hear him.

"Of course I won't leave you, don't be stupid," Ron gently chided. "I'm right here...I'm not going anywhere. Hush now. You're exhausted. Lay back and get some sleep; I'll be here."

Biting back a regretful sigh when Snape stopped holding him and lay back down to sleep, Ron was soon comforted by the older wizard's hand seeking out his own and clutching it tightly. In the morning, when Ron woke, their fingers were still intertwined.

After that night, Ron gave up all pretense of sneaking into Snape's bed after Snape had fallen asleep. When Severus shrugged out of his robe, drew the blankets up over his nightshirt, and prepared to sleep, Ron finished whatever he had been doing and climbed in next to him. After murmuring a quiet, "Good night, Ron," Severus would seek out Ron's hand and hold it tightly while he fell asleep. None of this did anything to alleviate Ron's frustrated attraction to the older wizard. Indeed, some nights it was a very long time before Ron could settle down enough to sleep. Having decided that he would have to be content with whatever contact he was offered, Ron did his best to ignore the bulge between his legs that seemed overly interested in the man who slept beside him. The matter of Severus' sexual orientation was still very much up in the air, and Ron wasn't about to risk Severus' anger by questioning him on it. Besides, Ron simply could not think of a way to approach the subject with any sort of subtlety. Snape never said one word about the fact that they slept together at night or the fact that they always fell asleep holding hands. The overly-friendly visits from Minerva continued as well, and while Ron made an effort to at least be civil to Minerva, her relationship with Severus still confused the hell out of him.

So things continued and they may have continued in that uncertain fashion until the two men were finally released from St. Mungo's, if something hadn't happened to change things. A change did eventually come about and Hermione was the catalyst that caused it. In for their twice a week visit, Harry and Hermione had been happily chatting with Ron while Severus sat silently reading in bed as he sipped a cup of tea. The calm was suddenly ended by a lighthearted query from Hermione.

"I know you've been cooped up in here for nearly three months now, Ron, but how are things on the boyfriend front?" she asked cheekily. "Are there any cute Healers you're interested in?"

Refusing to look at Severus and inwardly cursing Hermione for outing him in front of his (probably) straight crush, Ron's frantic search for some reply that would get him out of the uncomfortable situation was interrupted by Severus violently choking on his tea.

"Severus!" shouted Ron worriedly as he limped over to Severus' bed. "What's wrong? Shall I call a Healer?"

Following Ron over to Severus' bedside, Hermione calmly took the teacup from Severus' shaking hands as he continued to cough. With a sweep of her wand, the tea Severus had spilled over the bed disappeared. "He'll be fine, Ron, I think he's just choked a bit on his tea." As Severus' coughs began to quiet, she bent down to put a gentle hand on Severus' arm. "Are you all right, sir? Shall we get you anything?" she asked kindly.

For the first time since Harry and Hermione had started visiting Ron, Severus spoke in their presence. "I am fine, Miss Granger, thank you. You were quite correct; my tea went down the wrong pipe, I'm afraid."

"Would you like me to fetch a Healer?" Harry asked.

"That will not be necessary, Mr. Potter, thank you," Severus said simply before returning to his book.

In the excitement of the moment, Ron, Hermione, and Harry forgot all about Hermione's question, but Severus Snape did not. Later that night, when Ron had slipped into bed beside him, Severus brought the subject up.

"I did not realize that you were gay," he stated simply.

Mortified that he'd forgotten all about Hermione outing him, Ron's mind whirled for a moment as he tried to think of something to say. Damn! If he were able to walk, Snape would probably run screaming from the room! In the end, he settled on the only response he could think of.

"I am. Is that a problem?"

"No, I was merely surprised to hear it." With that said, Severus' hand sought out Ron's and they went to sleep just as if nothing surprising had happened at all.

When he woke the next morning, Ron found himself in a new situation. One of Snape's arms was banded tight around Ron's waist and Snape's leg was thrown over both of Ron's own. Turning his head enough to look at Snape's face, Ron noted that the man who was holding him as tight as a lover was still fast asleep.

## Calling Out

*Chapter 3 of 15*

\*This is a post HBP fic and contains some spoilers\* What will it take to get the most unlikely of bedfellows together?

A/N: Thanks to the folks who have left me a review; it means a lot to me!

Big thanks again to the lovely Broomclosetravenclaw, who helped me tidy up chapter two a bit. You rock!

Here is chapter three and I'll warn you that I've made my first foray into slashy smut goodness by the end of this chapter. So if you do not enjoy slash, now is the time to go read something else!

Disclaimer: I don't own them; I just take them out to play. Sometimes they play with each other. ;)

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The new torture that Ron now had to face occurred nightly. Bedtime would begin with Ron and Severus lying next to each other holding hands in a friendly fashion and it would end with Snape wrapped around Ron like a barnacle...something which made Ron feel far more than merely friendly. Waking each morning, Ron would find the former Potions master pressed intimately against him, Severus' arm wrapped snugly around his waist and his leg thrown over Ron's. The raging erection that Ron found himself burdened with each and every morning did nothing to help him keep his composure. Slipping out from under Severus as quietly as possible, Ron would then attempt to make it into the loo and take care of his problem before Severus noticed the tilt of his pajama pants. Doubting that he was all that successful, Ron wondered why Severus had never used his obvious morning stiffness as a subject to taunt him. Though Severus was speaking to him more and more with each passing day, the older wizard never spoke a word about them sleeping together, Ron's obvious arousal, or the fact that Severus had taken to clinging to Ron at night as tightly as a child to a teddy bear.

There had been a couple of occasions when Ron, barely awake, had sworn he felt more than Severus' hips pressed against him. However, by the time Ron was clear-headed enough to be sure, Severus had always scooted a bit farther away from him in the bed so that Ron couldn't be certain if what he had felt was real or perhaps only wishful thinking. The mere thought of Severus Snape's possible erection pressing up against him had become the main focus of Ron's early morning wanking sessions. So hard that he couldn't manage a piss, Ron would stand over the sink, drop his pajama pants to his knees, and take his cock in hand. Stroking hard and fast, Ron would bite his lip to keep from crying out as he came to visions of Severus grinding against him as they lay in bed. When he finished, Ron would find himself still frustrated and on edge as he rinsed out the sink and continued with his morning ablutions. True, he'd taken care of the obvious, but Ron's growing attraction to Severus could not be so easily handled.

Attempting to hide his feelings for the older wizard was getting harder and harder for Ron to manage. Now that he was able to walk short distances without his canes, he was beginning to help Severus. The Healers had told Severus that his shattered legs were healed enough for him to start trying to use them again, but it was a slow and painful process. When it became obvious that Severus had no patience at all with the orderlies who came to assist him, Ron began trying to persuade Severus to make an effort without the orderlies. It had begun slowly with Ron simply helping Severus out of bed and supporting him with an arm around the waist while Severus draped his own arm over Ron's shoulders. They would stand like that, pressed close together, for as long as Severus' weak leg muscles would allow. When the Healers realized that the easily irritated Snape made much more of an effort to improve when the young redhead was helping him, they told the orderlies to leave off their attentions. Unsure why Severus allowed his help over the hospital workers...perhaps he was simply more comfortable not showing his weakness amongst strangers...Ron encouraged Severus to do more every day and was astonished when Severus complied without hesitation or complaint. All that Ron knew for certain was that the constant physical contact between himself and the man he was lusting over was the sweetest torture he had ever been forced to suffer. He loved the feeling of his arm wrapped around Severus' waist. He loved the weight of the man leaning against him. Merlin help him, he even loved the way Severus smelled. Finding it a bit distressing how much he loved about the man, Ron was beginning to be very concerned that his little crush was far more serious than he had at first assumed.

After a week of standing for periods of time that grew increasingly longer as his muscles began to strengthen, Severus was at last able to manage short walks as long as Ron was at his side to steady him. This allowed him to go to the loo on his own, which was a bit of a triumph for Snape. Ron knew very well how disgusted Severus had been when he had to be helped by the hospital orderlies for the most simple of bodily functions. Now he could manage on his own if Ron helped him to get there. Helping Snape into the tub for the first time proved to be Ron's most serious trial to date. When Severus had insisted that he could manage on his own, Ron had reminded him that all it would take was one fall and he'd be stuck in bed for another month.

"Either you can let me help you, or you'll wait until I fetch one of the orderlies. Take your pick."

"I'm a grown man, for fuck's sake!" Severus snapped. "I think I can manage to get into the tub on my own."

"You are weak as a kitten. You can barely walk--even with my help--and you think I'm just going to stand here and let you crack your skull open?" Ron shouted. "We can stand here all fucking day, Snape. You are not going to get into that tub unassisted! I will not allow it!"

"You won't *allow* it?" Snape shouted back. "You have no authority over me, you insolent boy! Exactly who do you think you are to order me about?"

Practically nose-to-nose with the furious Snape, Ron snapped, "I'm your fucking friend, that's who! And I lost enough friends, thanks to the ever fucking war, so forgive me if I'd rather not walk in here and find you lying on the floor with your fucking, stubborn-arse head leaking all over the fucking tiles..."

His voice breaking a bit with emotion on the last phrase, Ron turned away from Severus in sudden embarrassment. Waiting in silence for the stubborn wizard to begin shouting again, Ron felt how warm his face felt and knew he was blushing. Fully expecting Snape to deny his help, deny that they were friends, and deny him, Ron was completely gobsmacked when the wizard behind him spoke in a quiet voice.

"Ron...would you help me with my nightshirt please? I can't get it off one handed and if I let go of this towel bar, I will probably fall."

Turning in astonishment, Ron saw that Severus had unbuttoned the placket at the neck of his old-fashioned nightshirt and was patiently waiting for his assistance. The man looked decidedly uncomfortable...he wouldn't meet Ron's eyes and his cheeks were brightened by a slight blush. Ron didn't know if he was embarrassed by needing help or if it was because Ron was gay and about to see Severus naked. Oh dear gods! He was about to see Snape naked! Closing his eyes for a moment, Ron prayed he had strength enough to deal with this situation and tried to speak in the same bantering tone he used with Harry and Hermione.

"Of course I'll help you, you great git! That's what friends are for."

Stepping up to Severus, Ron gently helped him out of the nightshirt. He then steadied Severus as the weak man stepped into the tub while resolutely keeping his eyes off places they had no business straying. When Severus tried to lower himself into the water he lost his footing, and Ron's Quidditch reflexes saved Severus from a fall. Grasping him under the arms, Ron lowered Severus into the water until he was securely seated.

"I'll leave the door ajar," Ron said as he headed for the door to give Snape some privacy. "Call out if you need anything and please call me when you are ready to get out."

"I will," Severus said quietly. As Ron stepped through the door, Severus called him back. "And Ron?"

Turning back, Ron saw that Severus was meeting his eye for the first time since their shouting match. "Yes?"

"I obviously overestimated my capabilities. I will not cause such a fuss in future. Thank you. You are...a good friend."

"No trouble," Ron replied with a grin. "Mates watch out for each other."

"Yes," Severus agreed, "that they do."

When Severus called to him and Ron went to help him out of the tub, Ron was faced with yet another nail in the coffin of his self-restraint. Helping a very naked and very wet Severus out of the tub was bad enough. Helping him dry off was pure, unadulterated torture. Once he'd gotten Severus standing with one hand on the towel bar to steady himself, Ron grabbed two towels from the freshly laundered pile on the counter.

Thrusting one towel into Snape's free hand, Ron said awkwardly, "Why don't you dry off the...er...front bits while I dry your back and legs?"

The body of the man he was drying off was still thin and pale, but the feel of it--even through the plush fabric of the towel--was like heaven. This time, with Severus facing away from him, Ron could not keep his eyes respectfully off the man's body. Knowing he was tormenting himself, he still couldn't help but admire the man's broad shoulders, his thin but shapely legs, and the deliciously tight curve of his arse. It was true that the man's face would win no prizes, but Ron could see that with a bit more meat on his bones, Severus would have a body that any wizard could be proud of.

At last both clean and dry, Ron helped Severus into a fresh nightshirt and then guided the tired man back to bed. Sitting Severus on the bed's edge, Ron went to fetch a comb. When Ron climbed onto the bed behind Severus and began carefully combing his hair, Severus grumbled.

"I think I can manage to comb my hair without cracking my skull open," he said, his tone more teasing than upset.

"You're exhausted. Just let me do it, it will be faster."

Carefully combing the tangled mess that Severus called hair, Ron couldn't resist following the comb with his fingers as if to smooth it. He found that Severus' hair was really quite soft and smooth when it was clean, and he combed it for far longer than was strictly necessary simply because he enjoyed the task. Not seeming to mind, Severus sighed softly and leaned back against Ron as he combed. Eventually, Ron remembered that Severus really was tired and helped him stretch out in bed for a nap. As soon as the older wizard was asleep, Ron snuck back into the loo for his second wank of the day.

The ritual of Severus' bath and hair combing was added to the list of Ron's daily trials. Some days, it seemed that he walked around half aroused every single minute of the

day. Never having been a particularly patient man, Ron feared that one of these days his patience would run out and he would do something unforgivably stupid. So much pressure was bound to cause an explosion at some point.

The day of the explosion soon came. Ron was sitting behind Severus, combing his hair, when the door opened unexpectedly and Harry and Hermione walked in. Reacting instinctively, Ron jerked his hands away from Severus' hair as if they had been burned. Scrambling up off the bed, he went to greet his friends as if they hadn't just caught him combing their ex-Potions professor's hair. It wasn't so much that Ron himself was embarrassed by the situation, but he doubted Severus would want his ex-students seeing him with his admittedly gay roommate's hands all over him. Praying that Harry and Hermione wouldn't tease him about it in front of Severus, Ron did his best to make small talk, though he was rather clumsy about it.

During the awkward greetings of the three friends, Severus lay down and turned to face the wall. Of late, the once irritable man had seemed to be making an effort to speak to Ron's friends, but on this day he said not one word. Cutting the visit shorter than usual by telling his friends he was a bit tired, Ron saw them to the door and then turned to deal with Severus.

Severus was not in his bed. Leaning against the wall, arms crossed over his chest, Severus stood glaring at Ron, looking every bit the terror of the dungeons that he had been when Ron was in school. Shocked to see him standing on his own--not to mention the ferocious expression on his face...Ron nevertheless noted how heavily Severus leaned against the wall behind him. Despite his attitude, it was all too easy to see how weak the proud man still was.

"I see how it goes," Severus growled, his voice low and menacing. "You've obviously no problem cuddling up to me at night or fondling my hair...so long as no one is looking. But let your insipid friends come into the room and you pull away from me as if they caught you snogging the giant squid!"

"What are you on about?" Ron asked, honestly confused.

"I'm 'on about' the fact that you jumped out of my bed so fast that I'm surprised you didn't do yourself an injury!" he shouted. "What's wrong, Mr. Weasley? Afraid your little friends will catch you touching the greasy git of the dungeons?"

"You've got it wrong," snarled Ron. "And why exactly is it that you're standing there shrieking at me like a jealous..." Wait a minute...*jealous*? Eyes opening wide with shock as he calculated the meaning of Severus' anger, Ron abruptly changed tactics. "What's going on between you and McGonagall?"

Pausing his tirade in momentary confusion over the sudden switch in topic, Severus snarled, "I fail to see what the bloody hell Minerva has to do with this conversation..."

"She's always touching you," Ron snarled back. "Fondling you...kissing you...exactly what is the relationship between you and McGonagall? Hmm?"

"That's disgusting!" yelled Snape. "Minerva is like a mother to me, you imbecile! Even if I were so inclined, I would hardly choose Minerva as a female paramour and I expect she feels the same way..."

Quite frankly, Ron had completely stopped listening to Severus at the phrase 'even if I were so inclined.' Walking up to the man, Ron pulled him into his arms and stoppered Severus' words by kissing him hungrily. The man in his arms had stiffened for an instant and then the mouth beneath Ron's own had come to sudden life. Returning the kiss with an almost desperate passion, Severus brought both his hands up to wind tightly in Ron's hair. When Severus' legs gave out halfway through the kiss, Ron solved the problem by pressing Severus firmly against the wall at his back.

The two men were nearly the same height. When Ron instinctively thrust his hips against the older wizard's, his already hard cock met the proof of Severus' arousal with enthusiasm. Growling huskily into Ron's mouth, Severus' hands gave up their place in Ron's hair in order to clasp Ron's hips and encourage their thrusting. Breathless, Ron reluctantly left off kissing Severus to nip and lick at Severus' neck.

"You impossible...brat..." Severus spoke between panting breaths. "You've been...driving me mad...for weeks..."

"You might have mentioned that you were gay," Ron grouched. "I wanted to throttle Minerva every time she touched you."

"I had thought that I made it obvious enough even for an obtuse Gryffindor. And--if you'd drop the subject--Minerva is hardly an image I want in my head at the moment." Hissing in pleasure as Ron's tongue made a skillful foray into his ear, Severus tangled his hands once again in Ron's hair in order to drag Ron's mouth back to his own. "Don't stop..." he murmured against Ron's lips, "good gods don't stop...need you...need you so badly..."

"Yes," groaned Ron. Closing the small space between their mouths, Ron kissed Severus until they were both breathless.

Pressing Severus against the wall was heaven, but Ron was growing desperate for more contact. With trembling hands, Ron pulled Severus nightshirt up over his hips before he pushed his own pajama pants down to his knees. When bare cock met bare cock for the first time, both men moaned in pleasure. Simple frottage shouldn't feel so good or so exciting. When Severus ran his hands down Ron's back to knead and squeeze Ron's bare arse, Ron almost came then and there. By the unending stream of hisses and groans Severus was giving voice to, Ron knew that the man in his arms must be near his own release. Working a hand between their grinding bodies, Ron wrapped it around both their cocks, stroking them both at once and squeezing them tightly together.

Bringing his mouth to Severus' ear, he whispered hoarsely, "Come for me, Severus. I want to feel you. I want to hear you. Come for me, love."

"Yesssss...Ron...yesssss...I...oh...I..."

Severus hissed like a snake when he came, the sibilant sound sliding into Ron's ear like a caress. The cock held tight against Ron's twitched wildly and Ron felt the hot liquid of Severus' release coating his cock and dripping down over his balls. It was more than the over excited wizard could take. Stroking erratically, Ron growled Severus' name as he came hard and fast.

The two men rested against the wall for a moment, but when Ron felt Severus' legs trembling, he knew the wizard had been standing too long. Pulling up his pajama pants, he gently helped Severus to bed.

"I'm all sticky," grumbled Severus petulantly. "Why won't they let us have our blasted wands?"

Chuckling at Severus' familiar complaining tone, Ron chided, "Don't fret, I'll fetch you a flannel." Retreating to the loo, Ron took a moment to clean himself up a bit before he returned to Severus, a damp flannel in his hand. When Severus tried to take it from him, Ron batted his hands away. Lifting Severus' nightshirt, Ron tenderly cleaned the protesting Snape off and then bent to place a gentle kiss on his spent length. Tossing the flannel to the floor, Ron climbed into bed and wrapped his arms around Severus. Severus returned the embrace and for the first night since they came to St. Mungo's, the two men fell asleep wrapped tightly in each other's arms.

That night, there were no nightmares.

## Rough Talk

\*This is a post HBP fic and contains some spoilers\* What will it take to get the most unlikely of bedfellows together?

A/N: Here's the next chapter of my first all-out slashy fic, and I'll warn you it's a bit smut-ridden. ;) We'll get some more plot squeezed into the next chapter, but at the moment, I'm afraid Severus and Ron had other plans.

Thanks to everyone who has taken a moment to review, it means a lot to me, and big thanks to Broomclosetravenclaw for helping me tidy up a bit after the fact. Once again, this chapter has not been beta read and any mistakes are my own blasted fault! (Or 'basted' fault, as Broom and Wolf Moonshadow were kind enough to point out to me in the last chapter.) :)

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I just take them out to play. Sometimes they play with each other.

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When Ron woke up the next morning, he found Severus propped up on one elbow, staring down at him. Though he wasn't glaring exactly, the expression in those black eyes was very intense and Ron thought he detected a hint of uncertainty in their dark regard. Why uncertain? Severus was hardly shy about speaking up when he was unhappy about something, so it was unlikely that he regretted Ron's pouncing on him the night before. Bits of the previous night's argument sifted through Ron's mind as he blinked sleepily up at the wizard staring so intensely at him. Ah! Remembering that Severus had rather backhandedly compared himself to the giant squid, Ron decided that the staring wizard was most likely unsure about his reception now that they lay here in the light of day, so to speak.

"Good morning, sunshine," he drawled in a husky voice that had little in common with the cheeky manner in which he usually made that statement.

Though Severus rolled his eyes, Ron could see that uncertain expression begin to fade. "I absolutely loathe it when you call me that," he grouched.

"Well, I suppose you'll have to make an effort to get used to it," Ron teased playfully. Sliding a hand into Severus' black hair, he drew Severus down into a heated kiss.

Soon Ron was experiencing a hands-on version of the image that had driven him to distraction during his early morning wanking sessions. While they heatedly explored one another's mouths, Severus pressed close against Ron, unashamedly grinding his erection against Ron's hip.

"Sweet Merlin, love," Ron murmured as Severus left his mouth to trail kisses down Ron's neck. "You have no idea what you're doing to me. I've imagined this...every blasted morning when I've snuck off to..." Ron's voice trailed off in embarrassment.

Stopping his assault on Ron's neck, Severus raised his head to smirk down at his young lover. "And exactly what do you think I've been doing every day when you politely leave me in the bath?" he drawled.

"You've been wanking over me?" Ron asked incredulously.

"Indeed," Severus answered simply as he dragged the blankets off Ron's chest so that he could eye it appreciatively.

"Brilliant," Ron murmured, his eyes closing as Severus licked him from sternum to chin. The two men lapsed again into silence as they continued to kiss and caress each other. The quiet was broken when Severus tried to slide further down in the bed and stopped suddenly, hissing in discomfort rather than pleasure.

Immediately concerned, Ron asked, "What is it Severus? Are you all right? What the hell was I thinking...you aren't well enough for all of this..."

"Rubbish!" Severus snapped. "I assure you that I am perfectly fine. It's only bloody frustrating not to be able to move as I wish. We managed fine last night. More than fine..." His voice trailed off as he bent his head to taste Ron's mouth again.

When Ron got the use of his mouth back, he spoke again. "You're right. We were more than fine last night. What did you want to do, love? Tell me...let me help."

One of Severus' hands slid down Ron's stomach and curled around Ron's pajama covered erection. "I want to taste you," he growled.

Pressing his cock eagerly into Severus' hand, Ron said, "I think that can be arranged." Unable to keep himself from throwing a worried look at the door, Ron whispered, "Do you think we have time? What if one of the Healers walks in?"

"It is still early...we should have time enough. To be quite honest, I couldn't be arsed if the entire Wizengamot parades through here in the next ten minutes so long as I get your cock in my mouth," Severus growled.

Answering only with a throaty groan, Ron pushed the blankets off the bed, stood long enough to yank off his pajama pants, and climbed back into the bed, arranging himself so that he and Severus faced each other head to crotch. Tugging Severus' nightshirt out of the way, Ron took a moment to eye Severus' impressive length hungrily.

"You...you want to..."

Taken aback by the hesitant tone in his lover's voice, Ron looked down and met Severus' eye. The uncertain expression was back, which almost broke Ron's heart. Determining that he would do all in his power to erase that uncertainty for good, Ron kept his tone light as he said, "Hell yes! You don't think I'm going to let you have all the fun, do you?" That said, Ron turned his head back to Severus' cock and sucked it greedily into his mouth. The hiss of pleasure this drew from his lover was music to his ears. When Severus soon returned the favor, Ron hummed happily around the cock in his mouth and began to bob his head in earnest.

In the corridor, a Healer paused outside the door to Ron and Severus' room to politely check the monitoring ward before opening the door. The Healers at St. Mungo's did their best to respect the privacy of their patients as much as possible. When the ward alerted Healer Patricia Cotton to exactly what was going on in the room beyond, she removed her hand from the doorknob. Well, that was unexpected. While she knew that the two wizards had been getting along better, she hadn't thought that they were getting along quite that well. It was nothing to worry about, at any rate. If anything, the exercise would do them both good. Aside from matters of their health and recovery, it was really none of her business. Leaving the door unopened, Healer Cotton went off to alert the rest of the staff that they should check room 309's privacy ward carefully before entering.

Within the room, muffled groans filled the air as the two wizards writhed together on the bed. When Ron lost control, spending himself deeply in Severus' throat, the husky groan that vibrated around Severus' cock encouraged his own release. After catching his panting breath, Ron gave Severus' spent cock a gentle kiss before turning around in the bed to wrap Severus in his arms.

Grinning at the smugly pleased expression on his lover's face, Ron said, "Now that was an excellent way to start the morning."

"Indeed," Severus answered. "But I wish..."

By now, Ron realized that though Severus was speaking more and more each day, there were some things he simply had trouble talking about. Mostly, he seemed to hesitate over expressing any personal desires. Oh, he could complain about trivial matters well enough--and did so. Often. However, Severus seemed almost incapable of giving voice to any request of a serious nature. It was as if the man thought he wasn't deserving of anything. Trying to be patient, Ron said softly, "Tell me, love. Tell me what it is that you want."

Glancing at Ron uncertainly, Severus silently took Ron's hand and drew it down his body, down past his spent cock and behind the soft swell of his balls where he pressed

Ron's fingers against the tight pucker of his arse. Closing his eyes, Ron sighed shakily as he gently caressed Severus' entrance.

"You have no idea how much I want that...how much I want to make love to you...but not yet, love." Opening his eyes, Ron gave Severus a heated look. "Believe me, when you're stronger, I'm going to bury myself to the balls in that tight little arse of yours and fuck you until you beg me for release."

"I do not beg," Severus said haughtily, but it was apparent from his pleased expression that Ron had said the right thing.

With a regretful sigh that he made no effort to hide, Ron reluctantly pulled his fingers away from Severus' arse. "As much as I'm enjoying that," he said, "there is only so much temptation I can stand. Not to mention the fact that I'm lying here in your bed absolutely starkers and we are pushing our luck with the Healers. I'd best get dressed and then I expect we both could use a trip to the loo."

When Healer Cotton returned to the room a half hour later, she found both men demurely garbed in their dressing gowns. Severus was sitting propped up in his bed, and Ron had brought a chair close to the bed to sit near him. After checking the wizards with a simple diagnostic scan from her wand, she praised them both for doing so well.

"You are doing very well indeed, Mr. Snape," she said kindly. "Keep up the good work; just try not to overtax yourself. I don't think you are quite steady enough to try canes yet, so let your young friend continue to help you until you are steadier on your feet. In the meantime, try sitting in a chair more often during the day as it will improve the circulation to your legs and feet." With that said, Healer Cotton called a house elf to bring the men their breakfast and left the room.

It was with a spirit of celebration that Ron gallantly escorted Severus to the small table in their recovery room and they sat down to eat their eggs and toast in a civilized fashion. Chatting companionably during the meal, Ron realized he could not keep his eyes off the man sitting near him. As Severus seemed to be having a little difficulty keeping his eyes off Ron as well, Ron decided that Severus didn't mind the attention. In fact, he seemed to thrive on it. This left Ron wondering if the seemingly unfriendly man had truly changed so much or if he had never known Severus as well as he had once thought. In the end, he decided the answer to that question didn't matter. Ron was getting to know the present-day Severus more and more each day and he liked what he discovered--he liked all of it, good and bad.

What he liked best at the moment was the obviously pleased expression that lit Severus' dark eyes every time Ron reached out to touch him. Completely enchanted by this, Ron took every advantage he thought he could get away with. During the meal, Ron paused in his eating over and over to touch Severus' hand, his arm, and to reach out and tuck a strand of Severus' untidy hair behind a pale ear. Every time Ron did this, he half expected Severus to bat his hands away. Instead, Severus was subtly encouraging about the whole thing. He was quick to twine his fingers with Ron's or to lean slightly into Ron's caress and each time it happened Severus' eyes shone like stars. Ron wondered how this could happen. How could he have been so quickly taken out of the frustrated hell in which he'd been living and abruptly plopped down into heaven? Oh, he knew it wouldn't all be smooth sailing-- nothing worth doing ever was...Ron was simply unbelievably grateful that he was even being given a chance. He could only hope that he didn't cock it up too badly.

When the meal was finished, it was obvious that Severus was a bit tired. Helping Severus to bed, Ron handed Severus the book he was reading before going to fetch his own. Then Ron climbed in next to Severus and they spent the remainder of the morning reading and chatting as they sat propped up against Severus' headboard. After they had eaten lunch, Ron looked at Severus with what could only be described as a leer.

"Why, I do believe it's bath time!" he said saucily, waggling his eyebrows suggestively.

Though a bit surprised by Ron's blatant flirting, Severus couldn't help flashing his crooked smile. "I trust that my bath will be far more interesting now than usual?" he asked dryly.

"Oh, I do believe that can be arranged," Ron replied with a smirk.

Severus' bath began much as it had before with Ron gently helping him get undressed and lowering him into the tub. The major difference was that--for the first time--Ron made no effort whatsoever to keep his eyes off the naked man, nor did he hide his obvious appreciation. Kneeling next to the tub, Ron picked up the soap, dunked it into the water, and began lathering his hands.

"You seem rather overdressed for this endeavor," Severus said, glowering at Ron's pajama pants.

"All in good time, love. I'm impatient enough as it is...it's best I keep my pants on until I give you The Royal Bath treatment." Not waiting for Severus to argue, Ron brought his soapy hands up and began washing Severus' lightly haired chest. His motions fell somewhere between washing and a massage. By the time he finished with Severus' chest, arms, and hands, Severus was practically purring.

"You have no idea," began Severus, his voice deliciously breathless, "how often I've imagined your hands all over me."

Moving on to give Severus' feet and legs the same treatment, Ron asked quite seriously, "Severus, if you fancied me, why did you cause such a fuss when I tried to help you into the tub that first time?"

"While I shall be forever grateful to Miss Granger for alerting me to your inclination, it did not necessarily follow that you were attracted to me. I could not tell whether you reciprocated my desires or you were only being kind. Because I was unsure, I was not eager to press the matter by being nude and unable to hide my obvious response to you."

"You had a stiffy over me?" Ron asked with a huge grin.

"Constantly," Severus growled. Taking one of Ron's hands, Severus drew it between his legs and wrapped it around his hard length.

Giving Severus' cock a firm squeeze, Ron then released it, which made Severus growl again. "Oh, no you don't," Ron teased. "I intend to save the best for last!"

Returning a bit impatiently to the bathing, Ron washed Severus' back and shampooed his hair. Once Severus' hair was rinsed, Ron quickly removed his pajama pants and climbed into the tub behind Severus.

Eagerly leaning back into Ron's embrace, Severus pressed his arse against Ron's erection for a moment before dryly saying, "As lovely as your bathing me has been, I do believe you've missed a spot."

"Never fear," said Ron. "I plan to wash that spot most thoroughly." Reaching down with both hands, Ron began slowly and firmly stroking Severus' cock. Hissing with pleasure, Severus thrust himself into Ron's eager hands. Leaning back, Ron drew Severus up until he lay completely on top of Ron's body. This was heaven. Ron loved the weight of his lover pressing him down, the way his cock was firmly pressed between the cheeks of Severus' arse, and the way Severus leaned his head back over Ron's shoulder, baring his neck to Ron's hungry mouth. The tub was not deep. With Severus stretched out on top of him, Ron had a delightful view of the cock he was stroking as it thrust up out of the water.

"Oh gods," hissed Severus. "Every blasted day I have lain here wishing it was your hands on me instead of my own. So good...gods you feel so good..."

"So do you, love," Ron murmured into Severus' ear. "I was going mad wanting this...wanting you." Slipping his tongue into Severus' ear, Ron earned another one of those delicious hissing moans that seemed to travel straight to his cock.

"Touch me," Severus growled. "Touch me...please..."

"Where, love? Where shall I touch you?"

Unable to speak, Severus took one of Ron's hands off of his cock and thrust it between their writhing bodies until Ron's fingers were pressed against the puckered opening of his arse. "Please..."



"Yes," moaned Ron. "Sweet Merlin, yes!"

At first, Ron simply caressed Severus' entrance, pressing and rubbing at the tight opening. When Severus ground down against his hand, Ron slowly slipped one finger inside. Though Ron had little room to maneuver, Severus immediately took over by raising and lowering his hips to fuck himself on Ron's hand. The complete abandon with which Severus moved against him was the sexiest thing Ron had ever seen. Still firmly stroking Severus' cock, Ron began thrusting his own hips up against Severus' arse as Severus continued to grind himself against Ron's hand. When Severus breathlessly demanded more, Ron slipped a second finger in to join the first.

"Oh, yes..." Severus breathed while thrusting down hard and fast onto Ron's fingers. "So good...so fucking good...ahhh...Ron...can't wait...going to..."

"Yes," growled Ron. "Come for me...come now, love...now."

Once again Ron heard that passionate, moaning hiss as Severus' cock twitched and jumped in his hand. He could feel the inner muscles of Severus' arse clenching around his fingers. Grinding his hips up against Severus, Ron came hard, Severus' name flying from his lips.

One good thing about sex in the bath was how easy it was for the wandless wizards to clean up after. In fact, they stayed kissing and cuddling in the bath until the water had gone too cold for comfort. Helping Severus out of the tub, for the first time Ron got to dry the front bits as well as the back. After getting them both dressed, Ron then gently helped his lover back to bed and crawled in next to him for a nap.

They were still napping in each other's arms when the door to the room opened. Minerva had arrived for her visit.

## Telling Secrets

Chapter 5 of 15

\*This is a post HBP fic and contains some spoilers\* What will it take to get the most unlikely of bedfellows together?

A/N: Here's chapter five!

Thanks to everyone who has left a review, it means a lot to me!

This fic is finally being beta read, so Broom, NSS, and Wolf should be able to relax and enjoy now! ;) The lovely Vaughn has offered her expertise for this fic, and she's a slash beta! Isn't that cool? She told me that she'd "Help me make sure all the willies were in the right place." I'm still snickering about that one! Thanks Vaughn! You rock!!!

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

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Stopping abruptly just inside the door, Minerva stood gaping at the cuddling wizards in amazement. Beginning to recover from her shock, Minerva quietly shut the door before regarding the sleeping men seriously. A small smile played for a moment on her lips as she looked at them. They made a pretty picture. Severus' head was resting on Ron's shoulder and his arm was tightly clasped around Ron's waist. Ron was cradling the older wizard protectively and he rested his cheek against the top of Severus' head. Both men slept on with expressions of content on their slightly smiling faces.

In truth, Minerva had never seen her friend look so at peace. It would be easy to assume that anything which made him appear so was a good thing. However, Minerva had never been one to take things at face value. She loved Severus like a son and she would protect the boy with her dying breath. When Minerva had assumed that Severus had killed Albus out of hate and gone gladly back to Voldemort's side, it had nearly broken the witch's heart. When she has seen him in St. Mungo's after he had been vindicated, Minerva had found a man broken in both body and mind. Swearing to herself that for the rest of her life she would do whatever it took to see to her friend's peace and happiness, Minerva had visited him every day. After nearly two months of visits, when Severus had spoken to her for the first time, she had wept out of pure joy. She did so love this cranky, difficult, brave, and brilliant boy; she always had done so. Now her greatest hope was that he would somehow learn to pick up the broken pieces of himself and have a decent life--for perhaps the first time since he had been born.

Covering her mouth, Minerva had to bite back a chuckle. She wasn't ready to wake them yet; she wanted more time to think. It became clear to her exactly why young Weasley had been treating her so rudely. True, he'd been making an effort to be more friendly of late, but it was obviously just that...an *effort*. Minerva hadn't understood why Ron had been so gruff with her in the first place. Now, seeing the protective way that Ron held her friend, she almost chuckled again at the realization that the young wizard had been jealous. Her expression growing more serious, Minerva thought about the matter.

Was this a good thing? It was true that Ron was a kind young man and he came from a family that Minerva had nothing but respect for. However, she had always considered Ron to be a bit flighty where relationships were concerned. Indeed, she hadn't even been certain that the young man was gay! If he decided on Severus, would he stick to his choice through good and bad? Severus was a strong wizard and a brave one. Now that Albus and You Know Who were dead, Severus was the last wizard on earth that Minerva would want to cross wands with. Love, however, was another matter entirely. Having always suspected that her stand-offish friend would fall hard if ever he fell at all, Minerva now worried over his choice. Severus was indeed a strong man in many ways, but he was nearly as bad as a schoolgirl when it came to matters of the heart. When it came to love, the formidable wizard was rather shy and unsure, almost fragile. Minerva wasn't at all certain that Ronald Weasley would be patient enough, or discerning enough, to make Severus a good match. Unfortunately, the matter wasn't up to her.

Deciding it was time to wake the sleeping beauties, Minerva told herself to wait and watch before she made any sort of judgment on the situation. Sitting down in a nearby chair, Minerva gave a small, muffled cough.

Waking immediately, Ron looked to Severus with concern. Seeing that the man in his arms was still resting peacefully, Ron relaxed. His relief was short lived. Spotting Minerva where she sat quietly in her chair, Ron's eyes widened in surprise. Minerva noted that he did nothing to disturb the man in his arms. Pleased, she gave Ron a small smile as she inwardly congratulated him on not leaping from the bed in shock.

Turning to Severus, Ron gently stroked his hair as he called softly, "Severus? Wake up, love. Minerva's here for a visit." While Ron wasn't at all sure how Severus would react to being caught by Minerva in such an intimate embrace, he remembered all too well how Severus had acted when Harry and Hermione had caught Ron combing Severus' hair. Determined not to give Severus any reason to think that he was ashamed of him, Ron smiled at Severus warmly as the sleepy wizard opened his eyes. "Good morning, sunshine," he said softly.

With a token roll of his eyes, Severus said, "Did you say *Minerva*?"

"Yes, Severus, he said Minerva," Minerva said dryly. "Do you think you could unwind yourself from that young man long enough for a visit?"

He'd been spy for years as well as a master of Occlumency, but Severus' reaction to the situation he now found himself in was all too transparent. First he blinked at Minerva, blushing slightly. Then he looked at Ron, who was still holding him firmly and smiling at him with obvious affection. The expression on Severus' face could only be described as wonder. True, it was a slightly embarrassed wonder, but wonder nonetheless.

"Would you like to go sit near Minerva, love?" Ron asked gently. "I would be happy to help you."

When Ron used that endearment right in front of God and Minerva McGonagall, Severus' eyes got that same light that had lit them when Ron fussed over him at table. It was then that Ron knew that though Severus was embarrassed, he was also very pleased.

"Yes, Ron, I would like to sit with Minerva. Thank you," Severus said softly.

Giving a small sigh of relief that he had played the situation correctly, Ron helped Severus out of bed and into a chair by Minerva. Ron then pressed his luck by giving Severus a small kiss on the top of his head after he'd been seated. Though Severus rolled his eyes at the blatant sign of affection, it was clear that he was pleased by the attention.

For a while, Minerva sat chatting with Severus as she usually did. All too soon, she asked a question that caused a reaction similar to what would have happened if she'd let a cobra loose into the room.

"So tell me, Ronald," she began innocently as she turned her attention toward Ron, "exactly what are your intentions where Severus is concerned?"

Gaping at the woman in shock, Ron blushed like the red-headed Weasley he was. Still staring at Minerva, Ron desperately tried to think of something to say. Nothing came to mind. All he could think about was that he would no longer have to worry about scaring Severus off because Minerva McGonagall had probably just saved him the effort. Ron's inner quandary was ended by something rather unexpected.

"How dare you!" Severus said, his voice low and cold. Standing up on legs that shook almost imperceptibly, he gave Minerva a look of such fury that Ron was certain the witch was lucky that Severus was without a wand. "How dare you embarrass Ron by asking such a rude, thoughtless question! This is none of your business, Minerva. We are none of your business. Ron has been kinder to me than you could possibly know and I will not allow you to interrogate him."

"You *are* my business, Severus," Minerva snapped back. "We've known each other since you were eleven and we've been friends for twenty years. I'm the closest thing to family you've got and I'm going to look after you."

"I don't need looking after, Minerva. I'm forty-two years old for fuck's sake!"

"You may be a strong man in many ways, Severus, but you know nothing about relationships!"

"You've told me for years I should get a boyfriend," growled Severus, "and now you have the audacity to question my choice?"

Having been watching the argument like a spectator at a tennis match, Ron gave a sudden start. Boyfriend? Severus actually referred to him as his boyfriend? Bloody brilliant! Ron continued to watch the ongoing fireworks with a rather dopey grin on his face.

"I wasn't questioning your choice, you dolt! I know Ron is a fine young man, but he is rather young. I was merely inquiring into Ron's intentions ..."

"I may not have the *vast* experience that you gathered in your wicked youth, Ms. Wiggle-arse, but I am hardly a blushing virgin," Severus shouted, "and even I know you don't go babbling on about people's intentions when the relationship in question has only begun two bloody days ago! What are you trying to do, scare the man off?"

Mmmm... First 'boyfriend' and now 'relationship'. Noting how sexy his boyfriend looked when angry, Ron's dopey grin widened. "Severus?" he asked quietly.

When Severus turned to Ron and saw Ron's adoring expression, the anger fled his face to be replaced with a rather endearing look of puzzlement. "Yes, Ron?" he managed to mutter.

"I don't mind answering Minerva's question," Ron said simply. Turning to Minerva, Ron said, "I haven't a clue what my intentions are. As Severus said, we've only been in a relationship for a brace of days. To be quite honest, I've spent most of that time trying not to cock things up too badly. I have no idea where this is going--I expect that Severus and I will have to work that out together. I can tell you that this isn't a casual fling...at least, it isn't to me."

Turning back to Severus, Ron saw that the older wizard looked stunned. When Ron noticed that Severus' legs were beginning to shake rather badly, he quickly stood, walked over to Severus, and wrapped an arm around his waist.

"Severus, you should sit back down, love."

Severus did not sit back down. Severus twined both hands in Ron's hair and drew him into a short but heated kiss. The kiss ended and Ron helped settle Severus back into his chair. For a short time, Severus looked fidgety and uncomfortable, but Minerva soon had him chatting about less flammable topics. Sitting quietly and listening to their conversation, Ron wondered if the dopey grin he still sported had frozen onto his face.

Minerva's visit eventually ended and this time she gave both wizards a quick smooch before she left. After she had gone, Ron could see how very tired Severus was. The argument, the standing, and the emotion of the past hour had taken its toll. Tired himself, Ron was glad to help Severus into bed and crawl in after him. When Severus snuggled close to him and laid a hand suggestively over Ron's crotch, Ron gently dissuaded him.

"Severus, I think we are both a bit too tired for that tonight. It's been a rather eventful day, love. Sleep now. There's no hurry, after all. We've all the time in the world to have fun together."

"Do we?" Severus asked baldly.

"We do, if that's what you want."

Ron was almost asleep when Severus' soft voice broke the silence of the room.

"Ron...this isn't a casual fling for me either."

"Good," Ron said simply. Pulling Severus tighter into his arms, Ron slipped into sleep, the grin never leaving his face.

When Ron woke the next morning, he found himself in a wonderfully familiar situation. Severus' arm was tight around his waist and one leg was thrown possessively over both of Ron's own. What once was torture was now pure bliss. Seeing that the older wizard still slept deeply, a wicked light sprang to life in Ron's eyes. Severus had been brilliant the night before when he sprang to Ron's defense. He deserved a prize. Gently, oh so gently, Ron rolled the sleeping man onto his back. Though Severus stirred, he did not wake. Slowly, inch by careful inch, Ron drew the blankets off the man lying beside him. Creeping slowly, and pausing dramatically whenever Severus showed signs of stirring, Ron made a careful journey until his head was poised over Severus' conveniently tented nightshirt. It seemed to take a small eternity to carefully slip the hem of Severus' nightshirt up far enough to bare his prize. Finally, Ron lowered his head to take Severus' cock in his mouth. He started slowly, with gentle lips and a tasting tongue. The previous morning, Ron had been too impatient--and too distracted by Severus' hot mouth on his own needy flesh--to take his time. Now he took all the time he wished to explore every delicious inch.

Soon Severus began to stir, though he had not yet awakened. The sleeping man's legs moved restlessly, his back arched, and his mouth let slip small, delightful sounds of pleasure. Speeding up his ministrations slightly, Ron swept his tongue over the sensitive underside of Severus' cock with every bob of his head.

As his hips thrust up off the bed instinctively, Severus' eyes fluttered open. Lifting his head up off the pillow, Severus blinked at Ron in confusion even as another needy groan rumbled from his throat.

"Ron...what are you...what...oh bloody fuck!" Severus muttered almost incoherently, his voice rough both from sleep and desire.

When Ron heard that husky voice, he added the last touch to his ministrations. He hummed. Severus' hips bucked off the bed in reaction.

"Ron...oh sweet Merlin...yessssss...oh yes!"

Ron could feel a tremor pass down Severus' body and then he was distracted by licking and swallowing as his lover gushed into his mouth. When Severus' cock had given all it had to give, Ron gave it a soft kiss before he climbed up Severus' body to look down at his face.

"Good morning, sunshine," he said huskily before lowering his head for a heated kiss. Then, while Severus panted, he rolled to Severus' side to nuzzle at the older wizard's neck while his hand stroked up and down Severus' chest.

When Severus had caught his breath enough to speak, he said, "You certainly know how to wake a man up, you incorrigible boy! But surely there is *something* I could do to return the favor?"

"I think...If you just..." Words failing him, Ron grabbed Severus' hand and brought it down to slide into his pajama pants. "I'm already so close..."

Rolling until he lay half over Ron, Severus wrapped his hand around Ron's erection and gave it a firm squeeze. "Close are you?" he growled suggestively. "You must have been doing something you enjoy..." Giving Ron a downright wicked grin, Severus lowered his mouth to Ron's and kissed him fiercely as his hand began to pump Ron's cock in long, firm strokes.

Ron hadn't been kidding when he told Severus that he was already close to coming. Giving his still sleeping lover a blow job had been one of the most heated experiences of his life. It didn't take long at all before Ron was moaning Severus' name as he pumped his release into Severus' waiting hand.

When Severus then brought his hand up to his mouth to slowly lick it clean as he stared into Ron's wide eyes, Ron wanted to roll Severus onto his back and do the whole lot all over again.

So he did.

## Explanations

*Chapter 6 of 15*

\*This is a post HBP fic and contains some spoilers\* What will it take to get the most unlikely of bedfellows together?

A/N: More fun with Ron and Severus! I must say that I love playing with those two; it's big fun!

Thanks to everyone who has left me a review; I'm absolutely addicted to instant feedback!

Once again, thanks to my beta, Vaughn, for both keeping me honest and making me giggle. Vaughn, you're the best! :)

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

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The next three days passed rather idyllically in St. Mungo's, room 309. Severus and Ron spent their days reading, talking, and fooling around as much as they thought they could get away with. Determined to get stronger as soon as he was able, Severus spent much of the day standing, taking short walks with Ron to support him, and generally spending as little time in bed as possible--unless, of course, there happened to be a naked redhead in it. While Ron was impressed by Severus' enthusiasm, he was worried that the weak man was pushing himself too hard. Severus refused to let Ron 'mollycoddle' him, and ignored his gentle fretting. The whole business confused Ron. He simply didn't understand why Severus was pushing himself so hard. It never occurred to Ron that it was his own fault.

Though the days passed smoothly for Ron and Severus, there was a sneaky, growing tension. By the third day, Ron could tell that Severus was fretting about something, but the stubborn man refused to discuss it. It wasn't until the next morning that Ron got any inkling about what was bothering the increasingly cranky older wizard. When Ron did find out what the matter was, he reacted badly.

Their early morning session of fooling around had become a habit that they both looked forward to. On this particular morning, all hell broke loose. Lying on top of Severus, Ron carefully kept most of his weight off the weaker man with braced arms. Severus' legs were spread and Ron's hips were happily nestled between his thighs. The gentle motion of Ron's hips as he stroked their cocks together abruptly stopped when Severus leaned up and whispered huskily in Ron's ear, "Fuck me."

"What? No!" Ron said, his voice going almost an octave higher in shock. The mere thought of taking advantage of Severus like that, while he was still so weak, caused Ron's arousal to abruptly deflate. Finding himself confused and lying atop a suddenly angry wizard, Ron tried to make up for his abrupt reaction in vain. "You're not strong enough, love. You know I want that, but it's too soon..."

"Rubbish!" Severus snapped. "There's no need to try to spare my feelings." Sliding a hand down to roughly caress Ron's limp cock, Severus continued, "I can feel exactly how disgusted you are by the very thought of making love to me. Get off of me."

"But Severus, you don't unders..."

"Get off of me!" Severus screeched while beginning to struggle and attempting to push Ron away. "Get off and get out of my bed! Get out!"

Ron fled. His eyes filling with sudden tears, Ron could barely see as he scrambled from the bed and stumbled across the room to the lav. Slamming the door behind him, Ron collapsed to his knees on the hard tile. His head automatically fell into his hands as he began to sob. How could he have been so stupid? He knew Severus was touchy about asking for things, yet when Severus had wanted to take their pleasure further, what had Ron done? He'd shrieked "no" at the man like a fucking banshee. He'd never fix this. Severus would never forgive him. Not one week into their relationship and Ron had already cocked it up beyond all hope of repair.

A sudden thud from the other room and a sharp cry of pain brought Ron abruptly back to the present. Rising quickly to his feet, Ron flew to the door only to pause and open

it cautiously, uncertain of his welcome. Seeing Severus sprawled on the floor made Ron rush into the room like a flash. Flying to the prone man, Ron dropped to his knees and gathered Severus up into his arms.

"Severus! Are you all right? Should I call a Healer? What the hell were you doing trying to walk on your own?"

"I forgot...I wasn't thinking..." Severus mumbled into Ron's neck.

"You forgot?" Ron's voice had gone a bit high and squeaky. "You almost killed yourself because you forgot? Were you in such a hurry to get away from me that you *forgot* you couldn't walk?"

"No! Never!" Severus said forcefully. Pulling slightly away from Ron, Severus wound both hands in the hair at Ron's temples and brushed Ron's wet cheeks with his thumbs. "I heard you crying," he murmured. "You were crying and it was my fault." Winding his arms around Ron, Severus pulled him into a fierce embrace. "I forgot about my blasted legs...I only thought of getting to you." Giving Ron a rough shake, he continued, "Damn it, man! You can't go running off when I'm unable to chase you, it's completely unfair!"

"You told me to get out," Ron muttered into Severus' neck. Though Ron couldn't see it, he could practically feel Severus rolling his eyes at him.

"I believe," Severus began dryly, "that you know me well enough by now to realize that I tend to overreact from time to time."

That comment caused Ron to giggle a bit, which earned him another brief shake. Pulling away from Severus far enough to look into his eyes, Ron asked, "Are we all right then?"

"No, we are obviously not all right," Severus said simply. He hushed Ron by putting his fingers across Ron's mouth when he opened it to protest. "This never would have happened if I had not been so reluctant to speak of certain matters. Now help me up off this blasted floor, we are going to have a talk."

Helping the older wizard up and over to the bed, it was Ron's turn to roll his eyes. "It's never a good thing when your boyfriend tells you he wants to have a talk," he grouched while Severus chuckled lightly.

Once they were arranged comfortably on the bed, and Ron had satisfied his fears that Severus' fall had done him no injury, Severus regarded him quite seriously as he began to speak.

"Ron, can you please explain to me exactly why you have been so reluctant to make love to me?"

"You aren't strong enough..." Ron began hesitantly, unable to meet Severus' eye.

"Enough!" Severus snapped, interrupting him. Taking a moment to calm down, Severus continued. "It's little wonder that I get...upset...when you insist on sticking to such nonsensical arguments."

"It's not nonsense..." Ron began.

Taking Ron's chin firmly in one hand, Severus turned the young wizard's face until Ron was forced to meet his eye. "It is nonsense," he began calmly, "and I think it's about time you stopped expecting me to allow you to get away with it. With the games that we get up to in the bath, you might as well be fucking me. It's obvious that you are not causing me any harm, and I believe I have made it equally obvious how much I enjoy it."

"How can you?" Ron asked bluntly, his expression both puzzled and earnestly horrified.

"I don't understand..."

"How can you like that? It hurts! It bloody well hurts and you've been hurt enough, for god's sake. I'm not doing that to you. I'm not going to hurt you. I don't care how angry you get, I'm not causing you any more pain!" he said fiercely.

Severus Snape's eyebrows rose practically to his hairline in sudden understanding. "Come here," he whispered as he pulled Ron into a firm embrace. Pillowing Ron's head on his shoulder, Severus held the trembling wizard tightly and stroked one hand up and down his back as he gave Ron time to quiet down. When the trembling stopped, Severus continued in a calm and gentle manner.

"Ron, how many times have you bottomed?"

"Just the once," Ron answered softly.

"I assume it was not a pleasant experience?"

"It was awful," Ron said before turning his head to bury his face in Severus' neck.

"Tell me," Severus gently encouraged.

"It hurt," Ron muttered into Severus' neck, unable to bring himself to look his lover in the eye. "I didn't know it would hurt so much...and I bled..." His voice trailed off.

Severus' arms tightened even further around Ron and it was a long time before he spoke. Though his eyes flashed with anger, when he spoke, his voice was calm and unwavering. "And have you ever topped, Ron?" he asked simply.

"Yes," Ron whispered, his body breaking into fresh trembling. "I've had partners who...wanted that...I didn't want to hurt them like that but they wanted..." His voice disappeared and Severus could feel Ron's hot tears running down his neck.

This time, it took quite a long pause before Severus was able to speak calmly. "And did any of your partners ever seem like they were hurt?"

"No...no, they didn't...I thought maybe they were just braver than I am..."

Now Severus could no longer remain calm. Rolling Ron onto his back, he leaned over him and looked him earnestly in the eyes. "Ron, you are the bravest young man I have ever met in my life. Don't you dare call yourself a coward in front of me. The only coward in this whole tale is that first bumbling fool who tried to top you, and if I ever get my hands on the man I'll choke the very life out of him for daring to hurt you."

"He's already dead," Ron whispered, wide eyed. "In the war...Kingsley..."

Pulling Ron roughly back into his arms, Severus growled, "That ham-fisted lout! If I were a Necromancer, I'd bring him back to life just to have the pleasure of killing him again!" Pulling away from Ron, Severus stared into Ron's eyes as he said, "I need to tell you something. I want you to listen to me carefully and try to trust me...will you do this?"

"I'll try," Ron said quietly.

Giving Ron a firm nod, Severus continued. "The first time a man bottoms there is likely to be some discomfort...discomfort Ron, not major pain and bleeding. If the top knows what he's about, and cares enough to take his time, then the discomfort is fleeting. It was just bad luck that your first partner either didn't know enough or didn't care enough to insure that you had pleasure from it."

"It can feel good?" Ron asked, his face an expression of blatant disbelief.

"I assure you that it can feel amazing. Do you honestly think that I would beg you for it in such an unbecoming manner if I thought you were going to hurt me?"

"No...not when you put it like that. But what if I don't know enough, what if I hurt you?"

"Then I will tell you to stop and we'll try again. However, I seriously doubt that will be necessary. Ron, you told me that your other lovers never complained of pain; I think that is because you never hurt them, not because they were trying to be all manly about it. You are the most passionate and gentle lover I have ever had in my life. I'm not used to gentleness...it's little wonder I'm so attracted to you."

"Oh, so that's the reason," Ron teased, his mood lightening. "I had been wondering..."

With a growl, Severus rolled Ron underneath him. "That's not the only reason," he said, before lowering his mouth to Ron's to kiss him fiercely. Ending the kiss, Severus gazed down fondly at the panting young wizard beneath him. "Now, before I do my level best to distract you from all of this, is there anything else you wish to ask me about this subject?"

"Have you ever topped?"

"Yes. There is a rather primal excitement to topping, though I enjoy both being the top and the bottom."

"But," Ron began hesitantly, "you've never asked to... Were you only being polite?"

Quieting Ron's stumbling words with a quick kiss, Severus spoke, his voice gone deep and husky. "I assure you that there is nothing *polite* about the way I feel when I imagine you thrusting inside of me. I *enjoy* being on the bottom, Ron. While topping has its pleasures, there is no equal to experiencing an orgasm when your lover is thrusting deeply inside of you. It magnifies every good feeling to an intensity which you cannot imagine." As Severus spoke, his voice growling into Ron's ear, his hand wandered to pinch Ron's nipples lightly, to slip down to caress the muscled stomach, and to come to rest inside Ron's pajama pants where it firmly stroked Ron's renewed erection. "I promise you Ron...someday when you're ready...someday when you are no longer afraid...I'll show you exactly how wonderful it can be. I will prepare you so slowly and so carefully that you will beg me to fill you. And when I at last thrust into your delicious little arse, you will know only pleasure, only delight. I will dedicate my very soul to erasing forever the memory of what that imbecile did to you."

By this time, Ron was writhing under Severus' ministrations. Severus had never before been the aggressor in their sexual games. Now Ron suspected that this had been a result of Severus' weakened state rather than his temperament. The demanding voice rumbling into his ear and the forceful manner in which Severus covered him had more to do with Ron's building excitement than the firmly stroking hand within his pajama pants.

"Severus...oh gods...kiss me...please..."

Now it was Ron who lay trembling and begging as Severus took the lead. Tugging down the waistband of Ron's pajamas just far enough to hook it under Ron's balls, Severus then lifted up far enough to gather his nightshirt up around his waist. Thrusting his hips, he ground his cock against Ron's hard length as he lowered his mouth to kiss Ron hungrily.

Returning his mouth to Ron's ear, he hissed softly, "Imagine it, Ron. Imagine you lying beneath me, pushing your arse up wantonly as you beg me to thrust deeper, harder. Imagine coming so hard that you lose your senses from the sheer pleasure of it."

That was as much as Ron could take. With a sharp cry, he came. As his orgasm poured out between them, Severus pounded against Ron, his husky words deteriorating into a throaty hiss as he found his release.

Ron eventually recovered enough to wander into the lav and bring back a flannel to clean his lover off. The two men then lazily napped until lunch arrived. Severus' bath time occurred as it usually did. Indeed, now that Severus understood Ron's reluctance, he seemed more than willing to be patient with the young wizard until Ron had time to think about the matter.

For Ron's part, he scarcely thought about anything else all that day. Considering the matter carefully, he revisited the memories of both his first and only time as a bottom and of the lovers he had topped. Looking at the situation with fresh eyes, what Severus had told him began to make sense. Kingsley had been rough and in a hurry when he'd pounced Ron one night at Order headquarters. If Ron had known what to expect, he would have stopped the man at the first sign of pain. Looking back at his other experiences, Ron admitted to himself that his lovers had shown absolutely no sign of experiencing any pain at all. In fact, the few negative comments he'd had from his partners were more along the lines of telling Ron that he didn't have to be so careful. By the time Ron and Severus had finished bath time and sat side by side on Severus' bed reading, Ron was thinking about making love to Severus with far more interest than fear.

If they hadn't then been interrupted, Ron might have chanced being caught by the Healers in order to explore the subject further. As luck would have it, Harry and Hermione arrived for a visit just as Ron was trying to gather the courage for a mid-day romp.

Having paused just inside the doorway, Harry and Hermione stood looking absolutely gobsmacked at the sight of their friend and their ex-professor snuggling together reading in bed. Glancing at Severus, Ron noted that he had closed his book and now was looking uncomfortable and avoiding meeting Ron's eye. Doubting that Severus gave a damn about being caught by Harry and Hermione, Ron decided that Severus was remembering his reaction the last time his friends had walked in on them. Taking one of Severus' hands in his own, he squeezed it tightly.

Grinning unabashedly at his friends, Ron said cheekily, "Hello. 'Bout time you lot showed up, I was expecting you yesterday."

His grin widened as he watched his friends blush and stammer.

## Bickering

Chapter 7 of 15

\*This is a post HBP fic and contains some spoilers\* What will it take to get the most unlikely of bedfellows together?

A/N: Big, big thanks to everyone who has taken the time to review. It means a lot to me! I'm sorry that this update took so long, but I've been busy and writing has been slow. I'll try to get to work on the next chapter soon.

My fantabulous beta, Vaughn, remains the cream in my coffee. Hell, she's the coffee in my coffee! She is definitely the comma in my run on sentence! :D Thanks, Vaughn!  
You rock!

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

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The sight of Ron snuggling in bed and holding the hand of one Severus Snape, former terror of the Hogwarts dungeons, was so shocking to Harry and Hermione that it took them a good few minutes of gaping silence before they were at last able to find their tongues. Once awkward and stumbling greetings had been exchanged, Hermione uttered the first coherent sentence of the visit.

"Ron, we were just speaking to one of the Healers. Healer Rayon thinks that you're strong enough to go with us to get a cup of tea or something. There's a shop on the next level up...that is...if you'd like to go."

"What? Leave this grand and exciting room I've been shut up in for ages? Of course I want to go!" Ron said with a happy grin. His grin faded as he remembered Severus. Turning to the man whose hand he still held tightly, Ron said, "Listen, love, do you want to come? I'm sure we could round up one of those chair things with the wheels on."

"Don't talk rubbish," Severus grumbled, his tone of voice much softer than his words. "If I had wanted to make a spectacle of myself in one of those ridiculous chairs, I'd have mentioned it long before now. Go with your friends, brat. I'll still be here when you return, I daresay."

"You'd better be, sunshine."

"Impossible brat," Severus murmured. With a grin that could only be called wicked, Severus hooked a hand around the nape of Ron's neck and tugged him into a kiss that left no doubt as to what was going on between the two men.

Reluctantly pulling away from Severus in order to fetch his slippers and dressing gown, Ron snuck a glance at Harry and Hermione as he hastily got dressed. While Hermione looked slightly surprised, she didn't look displeased in the least. Harry, however, looked like he'd swallowed one of Fred and George's more nasty Skiving Snackboxes. Shifting uneasily from foot to foot, Harry refused to meet Ron's eye. Once Ron was dressed, the three friends walked in silence to the small shop on the fourth floor which sold tea, coffee, and baked goods.

Harry ordered for all of them and paid for the lot while turning a deaf ear to Hermione and Ron's protests. Once they had been served, silence again fell between the friends.

"Go on," Ron began, "I'm sure you both have plenty to say...might as well get it over with."

Hermione stepped bravely into the breach. "Well, Ron, I can't say it isn't a bit of a shock...I mean...you've always hated him so much. But if things have changed, I think the two of you could be good for each other."

"Good for each other?" Harry snapped. "How can you possibly say that, Hermione? What could possibly be good about Ron shagging that great bastard?" Standing up so fast that he knocked his chair over, Harry stormed away from the table.

Ron assumed that his angry friend would leave, but Harry didn't leave the shop. Storming over to a window, Harry stood there, quietly fuming. "Maybe you should go talk to him, Hermione."

"No, Ron. We should let him be for a bit. He'll calm down. You know he's been touchy since the whole Ginny thing and we went to see Remus today as well. He was bound to go off at some point, with or without seeing you and Snape snogging."

When Harry, Ron, and Hermione had left school after their sixth year, Harry and Ginny had declared their feelings for one another. Harry had then told Ginny that they would have to put their feelings on hold until Voldemort was defeated. It had seemed so noble at the time. Harry was worried about Ginny's safety and he had his hands full with the war effort. They'd still believed that Voldemort would be defeated within a year. It had never occurred to anyone that the war would drag out for five long years...five years where Ginny had gotten progressively more worried, more lonely, and more impatient. Ginny hadn't cared about the danger; if anything, knowing that they might not have much time left had made Ginny even more adamant about not putting their love on hold until the end of the war. Knowing very well that the war could end either of their lives at any time, Ginny grew increasingly insistent that she'd like to have some sort of life worth losing, beyond school and fighting.

Both Hermione and Ron had tried to talk some sense into Harry, but he had been stubborn to the end. It was obvious to everyone that Ginny was desperate for love, companionship, and comfort, yet Harry refused to see any opinion other than his own. Three years after the friends had left school to dedicate their lives to the cause, Ginny had married a man eight years her senior. Joseph Wood, Oliver's older brother, had been a Hufflepuff while in school. He was loyal, kind, and fierce as a rabid badger in combat. Both he and Ginny had survived the war and they were now expecting their second child. Joseph treated Ginny like a princess, and anyone who saw the two together could see that she doted on her husband as well. The war finally over, Ginny was a happy woman who was raising a family with a man she both loved and respected.

And Harry? Harry was bitter. He eventually acknowledged that his "noble" act of pushing Ginny away had been the self-centered justification of a young man too busy to truly consider the honest needs of the woman he loved. However, he still could not get over the dream of what might have been if he had noticed how desperate Ginny had become before it was all too late. Never dating anyone, Harry spent most of his free time with Hermione. Ron often thought that his two friends needed to look a bit more closely at each other. Though they practically lived in each other's pockets, neither had ever seemed to realize that there might be more to their friendship than they suspected. Ron supposed that Harry was still too hurt about losing Ginny. Hermione might have some insights, Ron admitted, but she was a patient and perceptive young woman. Even if Hermione knew that she felt more than simple friendship for Harry, she would wait until his heart had healed. Stubborn as Harry was, she may be waiting quite a long while.

Ron's musings were interrupted by Hermione saying cheekily, "We may as well take advantage of Harry's sulking and have some girl talk. So tell me, Ron, exactly how long have you and...er...Severus been an item?"

Rolling his eyes in an unconsciously good impression of his sarcastic boyfriend, Ron muttered, "About a week, I guess."

"And when, may I ask, were you going to get around to telling me? Hmmm?"

"Hermione, it's only been a week! Give a bloke a chance! You know, when you two walked in, Harry looked on the brink of having a complete eppy. You, on the other hand, looked only mildly surprised."

"Well, we did catch you combing his hair before. And Severus' reaction to me mentioning your swishiness was rather telling, to say the least. I had no idea that the two of you would get together so fast though. You're both so mule-headed sometimes! I did go so far as to mention the possibility to Harry, to try to prepare him for it somewhat. Not that it did any good. Now, I'm not quite sure whether he's sulking because his best mate is shagging the "evil Potions master" or because he's mad that I was right about it."

"Probably a little of both," Ron said with a slight grin. Then his grin disappeared and he blushed lightly as he muttered, "Though we haven't exactly gotten that far yet...er...shagging, I mean."

"Why ever not?" Hermione said in honest surprise. Hermione took her position as Ron's female confidant very seriously. They had, in the past, spoken very frankly about sex, relationships, and dating. When the war had allowed, they had even nipped off to pubs on rare occasions to chat up men together. Hermione knew more about Ron's love life and sexual hang ups than anyone else in his life. "Don't tell me that arse, Kingsley, is managing to muck up your sex life from the grave. I've tried to tell you--"

"Stop! Just stop!" Ron interrupted. Leaning closer to his friend, he continued in the conspiratorial manner favored by girlfriends discussing sex the world over. "Look, you'll be thrilled to know that Severus agrees with you on the matter. In fact, he went so far as to mention that he'd like to raise Kingsley from the dead just to kill him again."

"Did he really?" Hermione whispered with a glowing smile. "How wonderful! But Ron, if you're starting to see the light, so to speak, then why haven't you--"

"We've only been together a week, Hermione!" he hissed. "We just had that bloody discussion this morning...give a bloke a chance! Besides, there are other things to be dealt with as well--"

This time, Hermione interrupted Ron. "Don't you dare try to give me any of your lame excuses--"

"Hush! It's not lame! We're in a hospital, for Merlin's sake. Don't get me wrong, we've had quite a bit of fun, but it's off putting, to say the least, knowing that at any moment one of the Healers can come bouncing in the door. Most of the time we try to stick to the bath, so we at least have another closed door between us and the staff, but we can't even use our wands for locking charms or anything." Ron stopped speaking in astonishment when Hermione dissolved into a fit of giggles.

"Oh, Ron!" she said when she had calmed down enough. "Don't you ever read the books I bring you? I know I brought you St. Mungo's: A History."

"Now hold on, love. I've read most of what you brought me, but that dry old tome puts me to sleep faster than a draught."

"Well, if you'd bothered to read the more interesting bits, you would know that your recovery room has both monitoring and privacy wards up. Your door won't let visitors in at all if you are...er...indisposed in any way and no Healer would walk in without checking it first. They consider a patient's privacy a very serious thing here."

"You mean that they *know* what Severus and I have been getting up to?" Ron said, his voice going a bit shrill.

"Of course they do, Ron, it's part of their job. But don't make a fuss; they'd never embarrass you by mentioning it. Not unless they thought it was detrimental to your recovery, and if that was the case, they would have said something by now. Don't worry about that, just be happy knowing that no one will be walking in on you if you and your new boyfriend decide to shag like rabbits," she concluded with another giggle.

It took Ron a moment to recover from his mortification, but soon, even his embarrassment paled in comparison to the excitement of knowing that he and Severus didn't have to be so careful all of the time. Eventually, Ron leaned very close to Hermione and whispered, "There is another problem I need to sort out. Perhaps you could help. You know very well that shagging between boys is a bit different than what you're used to. I don't have my wand, and I'm not about to ask the Healers or the house-elves for a jar of lube."

Giggling again, Hermione was quick to volunteer her help. "Not to worry. I'll take care of it as soon as Harry and I leave. I'll send it with Dobby; he can be trusted to keep his mouth shut, and if I send an owl, the Healers will check the package before they give it to you."

His head thumping onto the table, Ron growled, "Oh, I can just imagine that! Healer Cotton coming in and announcing in her terminally chipper voice 'Why Mister Weasley, that nice Hermione Granger has sent you a lovely pot of Master Biggerstaff's Better Boffing Ointment.' I think I'd rather never shag again!"

The girl talk was interrupted by Harry coming back to the table. Ron and Hermione immediately grew more serious as they waited for their friend to speak his mind. Neither of them expected Harry to start by apologizing rather than shouting.

"Look, I'm sorry. I've been behaving like a prat and I know it, but I just can't seem to stop myself sometimes."

"Harry, it's all right!" Ron said. "I'm your best mate. We've been through worse than this and come out all right. There's nothing you can do that's going to stop me from being your mate, you know."

"And there's *nothing* you do, or *anyone* you chose to do it with, that's going to stop me being yours. I hope you know that," Harry said quite seriously.

"Well, I wasn't sure," Ron said softly, "but it's good to know, though I am a bit puzzled by your sudden turnaround."

"I'm sorry I stormed away. I needed some time to think. All my life I've been in the habit of acting without thinking and I'm determined to put a stop to that. You know what I was thinking about? I was thinking about Remus."

"Remus?" Hermione asked quietly.

"Yeah. We went to visit him today. He's been a mess since Tonks--" Harry's voice trailed off.

"I can imagine," Ron said softly. "He loved her very much...he must miss her terribly."

"That he does," Harry said with a heavy sigh. "You know, I always expected Remus to go on about how they never should have gotten together, what with the war and all. I expected him to say that it would have been a lot easier to lose Tonks if he didn't really know what he was missing, but that's not what he says at all. Instead he beats himself up about how he pushed her away for years because he was a werewolf. He keeps telling me that he was a fool for wasting so much time. I did that, Ron, I wasted time. I ignored the happiness of the one woman I honestly loved and I wasn't smart enough to even realize that Ginny was a grown woman, capable of making her own decisions about her life. I was far more a fool than Remus ever was. If...Severus...makes you happy, then you should grab onto him with both hands and never let him go, do you hear me? Don't do what I did. Don't end up like me."

"You talk like it's all over for you, Harry," Ron said earnestly. "I know how much you loved my sister, and nothing could have made me happier than having you for a brother, but sometimes things just don't work out the way we expect. Ginny loved you, but she is happy with Joseph, she truly is. I'm not like Lavender and Parvati, who go around spouting all that rubbish about how there is only one 'soulmate' out there for each of us and if you cock it up, you're fucked for the rest of your life. I'm living proof that sometimes love comes up and bites you on the arse when you least expect it. And where you least expect it. And with whom you least expect it," he finished with an embarrassed grin.

An amazing thing happened then: Harry laughed. He laughed loud and long as he had not laughed since they had been school children. His laugh was infectious, and soon the three friends were laughing together, tears in their eyes.

"Is that what he did, Ron?" Harry managed between giggles. "Did he bite you on the arse? No, on second thought, please spare me the details. You and Hermione can keep those discussions between yourselves."

"Oh my!" Hermione said, still shrieking with mirth. "Now that's an image even I didn't need!"

"Well," Ron said with a wicked grin, "if you must know--"

"NO!" Harry cut him off. "Absolutely not! I'll be nice to the great bastard, I'll support you in your choice, I'll even come to your blasted wedding, but I am not, under *any* circumstances, going to listen to what Snape gets up to in the bedroom! Have I made myself perfectly clear?"

"Crystal," Ron said, the grin still on his face despite the fact that he had found what Harry said very distracting indeed.

The rest of the visit was very pleasant as the three friends left off serious subjects and reminisced over their school days. Eventually, Harry and Hermione left and Ron walked back to room 309 with a smuggled cup of coffee for his boyfriend. The Healers wouldn't yet allow Severus any coffee, a thing that Severus complained bitterly about daily, but Ron reckoned that one smuggled cup wouldn't do the man any harm. The delighted expression on his boyfriend's face when Ron delivered the ill-gotten booty to him was well worth the effort.

While Severus smugly drank his coffee, Ron chatted about his visit with Harry and Hermione while carefully steering clear of everything that had been said about their new relationship. He had just finished explaining about the privacy ward on the door to their room when Dobby appeared with a sharp crack.

With little fuss, the small package from Hermione was delivered. Dobby was thanked and sent on his way.

"What have you got there, Ron?" Severus asked curiously from where he sat near the small table in their room.

Sitting down next to Severus, Ron said in a very nonchalant manner, "Oh, just a little something that Hermione picked up for me. Want to see?"

Removing the jar from the box in which Hermione had packed it, Ron set it into Severus' hands with no explanation. Severus gave the jar only a token glance before his eyes snapped to Ron's, their black depths filled with sudden fire.

"Do you want to try it out then?" Ron asked softly.

Standing, Severus tossed the jar unceremoniously onto his bed. He then grabbed one of Ron's hands and tugged him out of his chair so sharply that Ron landed heavily against Severus' chest with enough force to make them both stumble slightly.

"Yes," Severus growled demandingly. "Now."

All Ron's insecurities were swept away by the hungry mouth that descended onto his own.

## Smooth Talker

*Chapter 8 of 15*

\*This is a post HBP fic and contains some spoilers\* What will it take to get the most unlikely of bedfellows together?

A/N: After a half-year bout of writer's block, I have finally managed to continue this tale! I'm quite relieved, as this fic means a lot to me and I have long wanted to finish it. So here is chapter eight and I'm pleased to say I've started chapter 9 as well! Hopefully, there will be no more long breaks between updates. Keep your fingers crossed!

My especial thanks to the lovely (and comma-wielding) Vaughn. Despite my long break from writing, she has graciously continued to be my beta, and a fantabulous beta she is! Vaughn, you rock!

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

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Smoothly, Severus used Ron for support as he deftly maneuvered Ron to the bedside. Sneakily, Severus leaned upon Ron as he swiftly divested Ron of his pajamas. Indeed, the older wizard was so slick that--had Ron not known better--he'd have no idea that he was dealing with a man who could scarcely stand unassisted. Thoroughly distracted by both Severus' aggression and the hot, demanding mouth that never broke free of his own, Ron was startled at how quickly he was tumbling naked onto the bed with an equally nude Severus landing atop him. Then it seemed that Severus' hands were everywhere, stroking, squeezing, pinching, and caressing.

It never failed to drive Ron wild when Severus showed his aggressive side. Certainly Ron enjoyed it when the sex was slow and easy, but times like this--when his lover turned demanding--literally made Ron's toes curl. Even when Severus was at his most aggressive...as he was now...Ron knew that his lover would never hurt him. Indeed, every move Severus made seemed specifically calculated to melt Ron's every nerve. When Severus took the lead in bed, he did so fast and firmly but with an underlying gentleness that aroused Ron's heart as much as his body.

Ron lay flat on his back in Severus' narrow hospital bed with Severus pressing him firmly into the mattress. While Ron moaned encouragement, Severus attacked Ron's mouth as he shamelessly rubbed their hips together. It wasn't long before Ron and Severus were both panting hard, their bodies straining against each other as if they wished to crawl inside each other's skin. The very moment that Ron feared he was going to lose his mind if they didn't proceed to the main event, Severus rolled them over so that Ron lay half atop his lover.

Pulling Ron down into one more ravenous kiss, Severus then pressed the jar into Ron's hand as he growled, "Now!"

All at once, Ron's earlier fears came crashing back. He loved Severus with all his heart; he couldn't bear the thought of causing him even a moment's pain. Severus seemed to read the worry in his eyes.

"It's all right, love," he said softly. "It's time. I need you...I need you now."

"Don't you," Ron began, pausing with surprise at how rough with emotion his voice sounded, "don't you want to turn over?"

"Indeed not," Severus replied, that aroused growl slipping back into his voice. "I want to see you. I want to see your eyes as you slide into me for the first time. I want to have your mouth as you thrust into me again and again."

Severus' obvious desire did much to sway Ron's feelings on the matter. When Severus finished his short but devastating speech, he tugged the pillow from under his head and handed it to Ron. Lifting his hips so that Ron could place the pillow underneath them, Severus then pulled Ron's head down into another searing kiss. Ron's last fears fled at the naked need in that kiss. Opening the jar of ointment and slicking a generous amount onto his fingers, Ron returned to kissing Severus' insatiable mouth as he began to carefully prepare his partner.

This, at least, was familiar territory to them both, and the ointment made for far easier passage than soap and bathwater ever had. Ron had scarcely slipped a second finger into his love's tight channel before Severus was moaning into his mouth, biting at his lips, and thrusting his arse fiercely onto Ron's hand. Before Ron could add a third finger, Severus clenched his hands in Ron's hair and pulled the redhead back far enough to look into his eyes.

"Now," he hissed.

"It's not enough--" Ron stammered.

"It's more than enough," Severus interrupted firmly. Bringing his mouth to Ron's ear, Severus nibbled on Ron's earlobe as he softly hissed, "Now, love. I need you inside me now before you drive me mad. Please...please."



As always, that softly spoken 'please' was more than one Ronald Weasley could withstand. With a heartfelt groan, Ron gently removed his fingers from his lover's channel and, after rubbing more ointment on his twitching cock, he placed its head firmly against Severus' entrance.

"Yes..." Severus hissed into his ear. "Yes, love...now."

Bending his knees and wrapping his legs high on Ron's waist, Severus left his hands clenched in Ron's hair. He lowered his head onto the bed so that he could look deeply into Ron's eyes. Ron saw no fear there, only desire and love. Severus' black eyes shone like stars, his lips were parted and swollen from kissing, and his breath came in uneven panting gasps. Here, locked in this eternal moment, Ron's rather unattractive former Potions master was the most beautiful sight he had ever seen in his life. He stared at Severus for a moment, as if memorizing this instant, burning it into his mind so that he would never forget it. Then, while he held Severus' intense gaze, he slowly slipped inside his love.

Severus hissed loud and long as Ron entered him, but his eyes never closed, and it was easily seen by the fire that kindled in those dark eyes that he was not hissing from pain. Before Ron was halfway inside, Severus was thrusting his own hips up to meet Ron's and Ron suddenly found himself buried balls deep in Severus' arse.

"Yes, oh yes," Severus murmured. "I've wanted this for so very long. Gods but you feel delicious."

That was all the encouragement Ron needed. Severus' body was tight and hot, wrapped around his aching cock. Though Ron started with gentle strokes, Severus' flashing eyes, his eagerly hissing moans, and thrusting hips were all the proof Ron needed that his lover was enjoying this as much as he himself was. It took only a few exploratory thrusts until Severus' hoarse shout told Ron he'd got the angle just right. Soon he was pumping into Severus with long, firm strokes and moaning as desperately as Severus was. Leaning forward, Ron recaptured Severus' mouth, thrusting his tongue between those kiss-swollen lips in time with the pumping of his hips. Their bodies were pressed close together; Ron could feel Severus' hard cock where it was firmly trapped between their sliding bellies. The combined sensations of Severus' cock against Ron's stomach, the legs wrapped so firmly around him, Severus' hungry mouth, and that slick, tight, trembling channel that surrounded his cock were quickly bringing Ron close to the edge of reason. Removing a hand from where it had been clutching Severus' shoulder, Ron started to work it in between their heaving bodies.

Severus stopped him. "No need," he hissed breathlessly. "So close...so bloody close. Harder, Ron. A little harder. Oh yesssss... Like that...just like that."

This time, the hiss that Ron was so addicted to was absent. As Severus came, he shouted; a quavering, triumphant cry so loud that it was lucky that the St. Mungos' rooms had an automatic Silencing Charm. As Ron heard that shout and felt the cock pressed against him pulsing as it bathed him in liquid heat, Ron gave one last thrust and shouted with pure joy as he pumped himself deep within his lover's body.

Almost immediately, it felt as if every muscle in Ron's body had turned to mush. He collapsed heavily onto Severus. Mind reeling, he was only dimly aware of Severus unhooking the ankles which had been firmly locked around his waist and letting his legs drop weakly to the bed. When his gasping breath had slowed and his heart had stopped trying to pound right out of his chest, Ron realized that he had to be thoroughly squishing his partner. When he tried to roll off of Severus, the hands that had still been clenched in Ron's hair moved to Ron's back as Severus clutched him close.

"Don't you dare move," Severus growled.

Shifting only slightly, so that he could rest some of his weight on his elbows, Ron said, "But I'm too heavy--" He stopped speaking abruptly, distracted by the sated and nearly joyful expression on his lover's face.

"Nonsense, love," Severus said as he hugged the young redhead even tighter to his chest. "While I know that we must inevitably part, it's taken me so long to get you inside of me that I fully intend to hold you there as long as humanly possible."

They remained where they were, kissing gently and murmuring soft words into each other's ears until Ron's softening cock slipped gently from Severus' body as they both gave voice to a regretful sigh. Rolling them over, Ron cradled Severus tightly against him. A slightly muffled voice came from where Severus had placed his head on Ron's chest. Muffled as it was, the smug tone was crystal clear.

"I trust that I shall not have to wait such ages before we do that again," Severus said, more statement than question.

"Not to worry, love. I definitely think that can be arranged," Ron replied, his smile apparent in his voice.

As Ron began to fall asleep, he suddenly realized that Severus had called him 'love' for the first time. As he napped, the smile never left his lips.

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The next day, it was Healer Ester who came to room 309 to check the status of the two men. Healer Ester was not a favorite of Severus', she was so banally chipper that the normally rather somber man had to make a great effort to effect a barely civil attitude in her presence. However, this day was different. Healer Ester found both men to be in fine spirits as she worked her diagnostics.

"Well Mr. Snape," she said in the chipper, sing-song tone one might use with a particularly dim-witted child, "you have been making speedy progress indeed. You may feel free to try the canes if you wish. I rather think that you won't need to use two of them for long if you keep improving."

"Be still my heart," Severus said in a tone so droll that Ron had to clear his throat quite loudly to hide a chuckle.

"Mr. Weasley," she continued, her voice getting even more insipid, "I see that you no longer need a cane at all. Good for you, young man!" Here, both men cringed as her voice got a bit high and squeaky. "To be quite honest, Mr. Weasley, I'm surprised that you are still with us at all. You're perfectly ambulatory and my diagnostics show that your magic has returned to a level where you could easily manage your wand. That is, as long as you didn't try anything too strenuous. I can't imagine why healer Cotton hasn't already released you, but I'm sure you'll be out of here any day now."

Healer Ester was rather surprised that her good news wasn't met with more enthusiasm. The young man in question went suddenly pale and his usually disagreeable roommate began to look his old self. She simply didn't understand it. One would think that the sweet and vivacious young man would be eager to be free and in more cheerful company, she thought, as she cut her visit short and left in search of Healer Cotton.

It likely does not need to be stated that Healer Ester wasn't the most observant of the St. Mungos' Healers.

After the Healer had left, Ron sat quietly thinking for some time. The Healer's news had not gone over well at all. Ron had been focusing so much attention on simply enjoying Severus' company and on sorting out the beginnings of their unexpected relationship that he hadn't spared one thought on what would happen when he left. While the thought of getting back into the world was nice enough, Ron didn't want to leave Severus alone in this drab little room. Not to mention the fact that he would miss the other wizard horribly. A bit taken aback by how upsetting the thought of being away from his new lover was, Ron tried to make some sense of the situation.

When Ron had first come to his senses after the last battle and discovered who his roommate was, he had been furious. Never having liked the man when he was at school, Ron had also considered Snape a traitor and a murderer. Only his terribly weakened state had kept the hot-headed young wizard from physically attacking the older man. By the time Ron could leave his bed, Severus' name had been cleared. Then the nightmares had started.

It still amazed Ron how quickly a relationship based on distrust and mutual hatred had turned into one of love and respect. Ron now cherished his budding relationship with Severus and the last thing he wanted to do was jeopardize it. But what was to be done? Would they suddenly kick him out? Would he be now limited to a few precious visiting hours everyday? And who would take care of Severus in the meantime? Certainly the Healers and orderlies were very kind and helpful, but his distrustful boyfriend hated relying on either, and Ron was very sure that if he wasn't around to help Severus, Severus would try to do too much on his own.

Those fearful thoughts led to others. The two men had never discussed what they expected to happen when they left St. Mungos. It was true that Severus had told Ron that he didn't view their relationship as a casual affair, but what exactly were his feelings on the matter? Ron was hyper aware of how little he had to offer. He had left school

and never held a job; he'd been too busy fighting and then recuperating to worry about money. Hermione and Ron had both lived with Harry while the war raged. Though Ron knew that Harry would be happy to help him, he already felt so indebted to his friend that he knew he could never ask for anything more. Hermione was in the same trouble as he, save that she had not had to spend so long in hospital and now held a job as a clerk in a shop in Diagon Alley. It wasn't much of a job, but it paid the bills while she studied to take the Practical Recognized Adult Test, which the Ministry offered to anyone unable to take the N.E.W.T.s while in school. Ron supposed that he should take those at some point as well. However, at the moment, studying was the furthest thing from his mind. He wanted to make a life together with Severus, but with what? While Severus might enjoy Ron's company just fine here in the hospital, that was hardly a guarantee that the man would want to be saddled with a penniless wizard once they left. Well, he'd have to cross that bridge when he got to it. The immediate problem was that Ron needed to find out if he was on the verge of being thrown out on his ear and whether there was any way to stop it if he was.

When Ron looked toward Severus, meaning to tell him that he needed to go out for a moment, he was shocked by the cold and shuttered expression on his boyfriend's face. Severus sat quietly at the table, staring resolutely at the bare tabletop. There was no help for it, Ron needed to find out his status and he needed to find out as soon as possible. He would just have to try to smooth Severus' ruffled feathers after he knew exactly what the situation was.

"Severus, I need to go run an errand. I shouldn't be gone long. Is there anything you wish? Shall I fetch you another cup of coffee?"

"You needn't do me any favors," Severus snapped. "It's obvious that you cannot wait to be quit of this situation, so by all means take yourself off with all speed. I assure you that I'll manage to survive your absence."

Looking at Severus' steely expression, Ron knew that it would do no good to try to explain himself, but he had to try.

"Severus," he said softly, "you don't understand..."

"I believe I understand perfectly well," Severus shouted. "Stop that unattractive sniveling and get out of my room."

With a heavy sigh of resignation, Ron decided it was dead useless to try to quiet the furious wizard. As he put on his slippers and headed for the door, he only said softly, "I'll be back."

Severus' only response was a disbelieving snort.

After Ron had shut the door behind him, it was only a moment's work to find the nearest orderly and ask the way to Healer Cotton's office. Another moment and he was standing hesitantly before the Healer's open door. Ron cleared his throat to get the busy witch's attention.

When Patricia looked up, she greeted Ron with a genuinely happy smile. "Mr. Weasley, how nice to see you. I just had a bit of a chat with Polly, so I can guess why you're here."

"Healer Ester said that she was surprised I hadn't been released yet," Ron muttered glumly.

Misunderstanding the young man's distress, Patricia's smile tuned a bit guilty. "Well, Mr. Weasley, about your release. You see, I have a bit of a confession to make. Won't you please take a seat?" she said kindly, gesturing at the chair in front of her desk.

With the air of a man walking to the gallows, Ron entered the office and slumped into the indicated chair.

## Confessions

### Chapter 9 of 15

What will it take to get the most unlikely of bedfellows together? A post HBP fic. Character Death Warning is for events which happen before the events of the story.

A/N: Not much to say except that after so long a writing draught, I can't believe that I'm updating again so soon. If you've been away from the fic for a while, do make sure that you didn't miss chapter 8. (As it's got the naughty bits, you know!) Needless to say, but I'll say it anyway, this quick update would not be possible without Vaughn's kind beta help. I tell you, it's not horrendous or anything, but you really don't want to read it until Vaughn pretties it up!

My especial thanks to Wolf Moonshadow, for catching a wee "trusting" error that slipped through in chapter 8. Thanks, my favorite Wolf! :)

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

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"As I said," Healer Cotton continued once Ron was seated, "I'm afraid I owe you an apology. I've made some decisions regarding your stay with us that I should have consulted with you about first...but I did not...and for that I am truly sorry. What Polly told you was quite true, you are ready to be released and you may leave at as soon as you wish."

"But I don't want to go!" Ron blurted out. "I mean, I suppose it would cost you money, my staying on when I should go, but...maybe I could do some work or something? Earn my keep in some way? I just--" At this point Ron's voice trailed off and he was mortified to find that he was on the verge of tears.

Her concern showing plainly in her face, Healer Cotton rose from her seat and hurried around the desk. Kneeling down by Ron's chair, she took both of his trembling hands in her own and looked earnestly into his face. "Mr. Weasley," she said softly, "dear boy, you have misunderstood what I have said. I said that you may leave when *you* wish. St. Mungo's is not in the habit of shoving patients out of its doors when they are not yet ready to depart. I assure you that you may stay as long as you need to, whether that ends up being days, months, or years. Yes, we encourage people to let us discharge them when we feel they are ready, but we never simply thrust them out into the world if they are not prepared to leave."

The Healer's soft words did much to calm Ron, yet he could not put all his worries to rest. "But the expense..." he mumbled.

"The expense, in this case, is handled quite efficiently by a fund set up by the Ministry to aid the war wounded. Besides, Mr. Weasley, you no longer really need medical attention, just rest. All you are costing this institution--now that you are almost well--is a little food, and I promise you that the expense of your meals in an institution of this size is not even noticeable." Releasing his hands, Healer Cotton gave his shoulder a comforting squeeze before returning to her seat behind the desk. "I think," she said, "that we could both use a nice cup of tea."

Pulling a scrap of parchment from a handy stack, Patricia penned a quick note, tapped it with her wand, and calmly watched it flutter away through a slit in her office door. Within moments, there was a soft popping sound and a tea tray appeared on her desk. While she poured them both tea, Ron was glad to have a quiet moment to both calm down and to think about what the Healer had told him.

"Healer Cotton," he said, after they had both spent a few moments sipping from their cups, "I don't understand. When you said that you had a confession to make, I assumed you were going to tell me that you forgot to sign my release or something. What did you mean?"

"It's past time I told you, and knowing that you are not quite ready to be discharged eases my conscience greatly," Patricia said with a relieved smile. Then her expression turned more serious. "I made a decision on your behalf which I should, by St. Mungo's rules, have consulted you about. Before I tell you of that, I would like to tell you a bit of background. Before you forgive me or condemn me, I would like you to understand exactly why I did what I did."

"All right," Ron said simply, his puzzlement clear on his face.

"After the last fight of the war," Patricia began, her eyes going distant as she remembered, "all the healing institutions in Britain and Ireland were in an uproar. There were so many wounded and so very many in critical shape. Healers appeared on the battlefield from everywhere, and most of them simply took as many wounded as they could handle back to their places of healing. We Healers from St. Mungo's had a special order from our head to grab as many of the enemy wounded as possible."

"You mean to tell me," Ron interrupted, his voice a bit high from surprise, "that you specifically went for the Death Eaters? Why?"

"Don't misunderstand me, Mr. Weasley. We gathered up many from our own side as well, but the head of our Healers was worried about how the enemy's wounded would be treated. She was right to worry."

"How do you mean?" Ron asked, honestly puzzled. "And why was there such concern for a bunch of murdering bastards!"

"Mr. Weasley, please calm yourself," Patricia admonished gently. "To answer your second question first, we are *Healers*. What we see in the aftermath of a battle is a lot of people who need our help. No one...well...at least very few people," she corrected with a sad smile, "deserve to die in a bloody field like a pack of dogs. We heal where we are needed. If the people that we heal have crimes to pay for, then they can then pay their debt as the Ministry sees fit. There is no need to torture them further. Besides which, many of the Death Eaters were coerced into joining, both through magical means and otherwise."

"I read about that in the paper," Ron said softly. "He Who...er...Voldemort kept a lot of hostages, didn't he?"

"Yes, and they were all killed before his final attack," Patricia said bitterly. "Mr. Weasley...Ron...there are many people who would die for a cause, but few who are strong enough to let their whole family die for one. I simply cannot condemn people for protecting their families the only way they know how."

"I understand," Ron said simply. "I never thought about it quite like that. So is that why you tried to get as many Death Eaters as possible?"

"Partly. The rest of it was pure humanity. We are the largest healing facility in the area; we had both the room and the desire to see all the wounded fairly treated. The next biggest facility is St. Assisi's in Dublin. They were very crowded after the war. They..." here the Healer's voice paused and her eyes were full of sorrow, "they focused most of their attention on our own wounded. Ninety percent of the Death Eaters that they took there died."

"Ninety!" Ron whispered, his eyes wide in alarm.

"Yes. They died from neglect and lack of supplies. At least in Dublin they were not purposely tortured, as happened at some of the smaller facilities."

"Tortured," Ron mumbled, his head bowed and his fingers clenched around the cup of tea going cold in his hands. "If Severus had gone anywhere but here--" his voice trailed off.

"He would be almost certainly dead, and wrongly so. Even if Mr. Snape had not been acquitted of his crimes, I would not wish such treatment on anyone. As it was, we almost lost him anyway."

"What do you mean you almost lost him anyway?"

"When the two of you were brought in, you were both an inch from death. One of the reasons we risked putting the two of you in the same room was that we knew you would both be unconscious for days and we were so very pressed for space, what with so many wounded. When Mr. Snape was brought in, despite my knowledge of his crimes, I could feel nothing but pity for him. We Healers did all we could to ease his pain and heal his broken body. When he was barely beginning his recovery, his name was cleared, and my pity turned to honest sorrow for all that he had suffered. I had thought that his name being cleared would speed his recovery, but it had no effect whatsoever. Even though he was conscious and not in immediate danger, he was slipping away from us. He barely ate, he wouldn't speak, and his magic level was not recovering at all."

"Why?" Ron asked earnestly. "Why was that so? I was as injured as he, we received the same good care, but he's always been so much worse off than I was."

"He'd completely given up, Ron," Patricia said softly. "No matter how carefully we try to heal those in our care, it's my experience that those people who no longer wish to live rarely do. They just slip away from us."

Ron could not keep the quiet tears from slipping down his face as he listened to what a near thing it was that Severus was still with him at all. Gracefully handing Ron a clean handkerchief, Patricia continued.

"I do not tell you this to make you sad, Ron. After all, Severus is still with us and he is now doing remarkably well. I only tell you this so that you might truly understand what I did next."

"And what was it that you did?"

"As I said, Mr. Snape was slipping away from us, and it nearly broke my heart. I knew there was so little the Healers of St. Mungo's could do about it. And that's when the miracle happened."

"A miracle?" Ron asked in awe, completely enthralled by the Healer's story.

"Yes, indeed. A fine miracle. You see, the kind young man who was Mr. Snape's roommate throughout all of this took pity on the broken man who shared his room. Pity soon turned to kindness and care. Because of that care, Severus Snape's condition began to improve. Soon it was improving so rapidly that we Healers were all completely astonished."

"You aren't..." Ron stammered, "I mean to say...that wasn't a miracle! That was only me!"

"There is nothing 'only' about you, Ronald Weasley. It is solely because of your kindness and your care that Severus Snape lives today. You are a fine young man, and I am proud to know you."

Staring at his hands, Ron blushed furiously. Patricia kindly gave him a moment to collect himself before continuing. "And now I must tell you why I owe you an apology. You see, Ron, you were ready to be released four weeks ago," she said, a slightly chagrined expression creeping onto her face.

"And you didn't tell me, because you were afraid--"

"That Mr. Snape's condition would begin to once again rapidly decline if his kind young man was taken away from him. I should have consulted with you. It's against St. Mungo's policy to keep such things from our patients. But your Mr. Snape had already lost so much..."

"It's all right!" Ron hastily reassured the Healer. "I didn't want to go anyway! I was terrified today that I might be forced to leave him. Not only because I didn't want to go, but because I feared the same thing that you did. I was afraid of what would happen to him if I wasn't around to help."

"Then we appear to be of the same mind," Patricia said in obvious relief. "As I said before, you may stay as long as you wish. However, it eases my mind to know that you want to stay until Severus is ready to go as well."

"Of course I'll stay," Ron said firmly. "I...I mean he...well, he means a great deal to me."

"I know he does," she said kindly. As Ron blushed anew, Patricia was quick to reassure the embarrassed young man. "Your privacy here at St. Mungo's is carefully guarded, Mr. Weasley. But, if you would let me be so bold as to admit it, I am very happy that two fine wizards of my acquaintance have grown to care for each other."

"Thank you," Ron said softly, still blushing.

"No, Mr. Weasley. It is I who thank you. Now then," Patricia began, her tone purposefully light, "is there anything I can do to aid you? You know, you may have your wand returned to you if you so chose."

"No, no, thank you. As much of a relief it would be to have it again, I think it would be wiser to go without until Severus can have his as well. It upsets him a great deal to be without his wand, and I think that if I...well..."

"Perfectly understandable. You are not only a kind young man, I see that you're a smart one as well," Patricia said with a smile.

"Well, there's no sense looking for trouble," Ron said with a smile of his own. "There is one thing though, is there any way that you could...er...discourage Healer Ester from helping us?"

"I believe that I can assure you that you will never have to put up with Polly again. I was appalled at her lack of tact earlier in the day. We've moved her to the children's ward. Oh, the children don't like her anymore than the adult patients do, but we can't afford to let her go completely. She's a brilliant Healer, but her bedside manner leaves much to be desired."

Leaving the Healer's office, Ron took the time to visit the sixth floor shop before returning to his room. He knew that he still had a prickly wizard to deal with and he hoped the coffee he was smuggling in to Severus would help to calm the angry wizard down. Pausing at the doorway to take a fortifying breath, Ron then opened the door and went in. He was shocked to see that Severus hadn't moved in the time that Ron had been gone. Sitting at the small table, his hands clenched together on the tabletop, Severus was still staring, unseeing, down at his hands. Ron walked quietly into the room, pulled the other chair close to Severus', and sat down.

"Have you come back to pack your things?" Severus said, his voice emotionless and flat.

"No," Ron said simply. "I told you before, I'm not going anywhere. I brought you a cup of coffee." Taking Severus' clenched hands, Ron rubbed them until Severus relaxed them enough for him to slip the cup of coffee into Severus' stiff fingers. "There, love. You relax and drink your coffee."

Still not moving, Severus' only reaction was a strangled gasp that sounded almost like a sob. Ron put a hand on the upset man's back and rubbed it gently up and down. Wanting desperately to take Severus in his arms and hold him, Ron did his best not to rush things for fear that Severus would push him away.

"Ron, I reacted badly...selfishly. If you are free to go, you should not be stuck here with a battered old wizard..."

"Stuck here?" Ron yelled. "I'm not stuck here! Don't you understand? I was terrified when I thought they would make me leave! I'm exactly where I want to be. I'm exactly where I belong. With you! I couldn't bear the thought of being separated from you. I--" Abruptly aware that he may have said too much, Ron shut his mouth so fast that his teeth clicked together. Though he could stop his words, he could do nothing about the tears that were beginning to slip from his eyes.

The effect of his words on Severus was immediate. With one startled look at Ron, he abandoned the cup of coffee still locked in his hands, threw his arms around Ron, and drew the weeping wizard tight to his chest. "Ron," he murmured, "Ron, it's all right. Hush, love, don't cry." Placing a hand under Ron's chin, he gently lifted Ron's head until their eyes met. "That's exactly where I want you to be as well, with me," he said softly.

"And when we leave here?" Ron couldn't stop the words, or the worry that was apparent in his voice.

"Then we will leave here together, if that is what you wish."

"Yes," Ron whispered. "I want to stay with you."

"Then you shall," Severus said decidedly. Pulling Ron face closer, Severus kissed him gently. Though the kiss started gentle, it soon turned ravenous. Both wizards had been shaken by the events of the day. It seemed as if they would eat each other alive as they desperately kissed each other, crying out each other's names as they clung together. Soon the constricting chairs were abandoned for the relative comfort of Severus' narrow hospital bed. They stripped each other's clothes off with great speed and little finesse before they fell, tangled together, on the bed. In too much of a hurry for anything complicated, they simply pressed against each other, caressing each other frantically as they uttered whimpering moans and softly spoken words of reassurance. All too soon it was over, and the two men lay spent, still clinging tightly to each other.

After their racing hearts had quieted, Ron knew that there was still one more thing he had to say. "Severus," he said, blushing in embarrassment, "What shall we do when we leave? I...well...I haven't any money. I..."

"We'll be fine," Severus said calmly. "I have a little saved and a rather ugly old house I'd be happy to sell. It...well...it won't be grand, but we'll manage until we get things sorted."

"I don't want to be a burden to you, Severus," Ron whispered, ashamed.

Leaning over Ron so that he could look him earnestly in the eyes, Severus said firmly, "You, Ron, are not a burden. You are the man I love."

Staring in wonder at the wizard looming over him, Ron then pulled Severus down into a fierce hug. "And I love you...I love you so much," Ron murmured into Severus' ear.

"Good," Severus said simply before drawing Ron firmly into another ravenous kiss.

## Making Plans

What will it take to get the most unlikely of bedfellows together? A post HBP fic. Character Death Warning is for events which happen before the events of the story.

A/N: Look! I'm still writing! Lol, I'm a little frightened that I'll suddenly stop again! My work is being a bit of a bear at the moment, but hopefully I'll be able to update again soon.

As always, big, ginourmous thanks must go to my lovely beta Vaughn, (who would sweetly tell me that ginourmous wasn't really a word. \*giggle\*) without whom you would be wading through quite a lot of oopsies. You rock, Vaughn! :)

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

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Over the course of the next few days in St. Mungo's, room 309, there was a sudden flurry of unusual activity. Previously, Severus had seemed content to read quietly, nap in the afternoons, and play with his young lover whenever he got the chance. Though they still found plenty of time for play, the rest of Severus' day was abruptly different. Suddenly, Ron was reminded of the almost manic habits of his Potions Professor back at school, and he often found himself biting back a chuckle at the familiar sight of Severus fussing over scrolls, rapidly writing missives to be sent off by St. Mungo's owls, and muttering to himself as he made notes in the margins of a dog-eared book with a quill full of bright red ink. Severus was receiving two or three owls a day, and each arrival caused a new bout of muttering and the skritch sound of quill on paper. Often Severus was so distracted, Ron was certain that, had he not been handicapped by the two canes he still relied on, he would have paced about the room muttering and flapping his arms. It seemed that there was still a great deal of the Hogwarts' "bat of the dungeons" left in Ron's love, and it made him smile to see that it was so.

For Ron's part, he did his best not to be nosy. It was easy to see that Severus' sudden activity had started the morning after the two wizards had decided that they would stay together after they left the hospital. Ron suspected that all the owls, scribbling, and muttering had to do with Severus trying to sort out where they should move to when they were released. As Ron had no money to aid the endeavor, he felt he had no right to voice any opinion about the situation. To be quite honest, he didn't care if they lived in a cave as long as they stuck together. Quite content to stay out of the process and let Severus arrange it, Ron found that he had a lot of time to think about the other things on his mind. Something Harry had once said came back to him, and Ron decided it was past time he sorted out what to do about it.

The Weasley family might be poor, but they were also a rather old branch of a pureblood wizarding family. Ron's mother had taken great pains to fill all her children's heads with the proper wizarding etiquette when it came to formal situations. Indeed, Molly had seen to this with the same intense enthusiasm in which she did all things. Their family might be poor, but they followed all the standard rules of wizarding conduct just as such families as the Malfoys had done, if not in such an unbearably swotty fashion. Now that Ron had a quandary of etiquette, he knew that his mother was the perfect person to ask advice of.

That knowledge did not make the actual asking any easier. Ron's family, especially his parents, had visited Ron weekly ever since the beginning of his hospital stay. Molly and Arthur knew that Ron and his roommate had become friends, but Ron had never been brave enough to tell them exactly how close they were. The past few weeks had made for interesting visits. In the beginning, when Ron's parents had come to call, Severus had remained morosely silent as he did when Ron had any sort of visitor. Later, Severus had made the same quiet attempts to be civil that he had made with Harry and Hermione. The past three weeks, it was clear to Ron that Severus was making a decided effort to get to know his parents better. Though Severus and his parents had been in the Order together, they had never been close. It pleased Ron greatly to see his love make such an effort on his behalf. It was especially endearing to see Severus chat with his father for long periods of time about a variety of Muggle devices. Severus must have had quite a lot of experiences with such things, due to his Muggle father, but what surprised Ron most was that Severus seemed to enjoy the discussions as much as his Dad did. His lover was always very patient with Arthur, explaining things that Arthur didn't understand and even going so far as to sketch things on spare bits of parchment to illustrate whatever he was speaking of. This often made Ron a bit wistful, as it clearly showed what a fine teacher Severus would have made had his lot in life been different.

Biding his time, Ron hoped for a visit from his parents while Severus was busy. That would aid him in speaking to his Mum and Dad privately without arousing his far-too-clever boyfriend's suspicions. Soon the opportunity presented itself when Ron's parents arrived immediately after Severus had gotten another one of the mysterious owls. It seemed quite natural for Ron to kindly offer to take his folks up to the sixth floor shop so that Severus could have some peace. It seemed unnatural indeed to hear Severus Snape apologizing to his Dad for not having the time to chat with him that day, but that was exactly what Severus did. Who was this person, and what had they done with the surly "bat of the dungeons?" Though Ron wanted to make an outward sign to Severus of how much his manner was appreciated, Ron didn't want to give the situation away before he had the chance to speak with his parents privately. Though Severus had shown a gleeful sort of wickedness when it came to expressing his feelings towards Ron in front of his friends, the older wizard had shown an amazing amount of restraint when in the company of Ron's family. There was no sense rushing things now; his folks would know soon enough. Ron settled for asking Severus if he'd like a cup of coffee from the shop.

"That would be very nice, Ron, I thank you. It seems that I neglected to drink the last cup you brought me," Severus continued in a dangerously innocent tone of voice, "something must have distracted me."

Ron decided that there was no safe response to that, and hustled his parents out of the door before they had too much time to wonder why their son was blushing.

Once the Weasleys had made it up to the shop and had teacups in hand, Ron suddenly found himself tongue-tied.

"Ron," Molly said kindly, "is there something wrong?"

"No...er...not wrong exactly," Ron stammered. "It's just that I have to ask your opinion about something and I suddenly don't know where to begin."

"Begin anywhere you like," his Dad said jovially. "Whatever it is, I'm sure we'll soon get it sorted. Do you need more pocket money? We don't have much, you know, but I'm sure--"

"Oh, no, Dad," Ron hastened to reassure his father. "I haven't spent what you've already given me. There's not much I need money for, except for the odd cup of coffee."

"You're a good boy, Ron," Molly said, "to be so kind to Mr. Snape while you're both stuck here."

"It's no trouble, really," Ron said, trying not to blush again. "Severus is very kind to me. He's a good man."

"Of course he is, Ron," Molly hastened to agree, "but I imagine he's not an easy one," she finished with a smile.

"No, not easy exactly, but... Anyway, I'm thinking about getting married!" Ron blurted, suddenly unable to take the suspense any longer.

"Wonderful!" Arthur said enthusiastically as both his parents beamed happily at him. "And will you tell us who the lucky wizard is?" he finished with a grin.

Ron's train of thought came to an abrupt halt as he realized that his parents already seemed to know that he was gay. Well, they didn't seem to mind it, so that was one hurdle out of the way. Shocked again, by the next words his mother spoke, for a moment, all Ron could do was stare at her.

"Now, Arthur! Don't tease the poor boy so! Can't you see that this is hard on him? I'm sure he means Severus," she said matter-of-factly. "At any rate, it's to be expected."

"I do mean Severus," Ron said, still gaping at his mother. "Why do you say that's to be expected? Have Severus and I let something slip?"

"You and Severus have been perfectly proper at all times, a little too proper on occasion," Molly said, still smiling. "However, it would take a blind person not to notice the

way you both look at each other. It's obvious he cares for you and you for him."

"There's another reason it's to be expected," Arthur said with a chortle. "Throughout history, the Weasley men have behaved in a similar fashion when it came time to choose a mate. Look at Bill with Fleur. Fred with that Muggle singer. Hell, Charlie used to date a vampire, and I think your Great Uncle Richard was engaged to an actual hag."

"What are you saying?" Ron said, losing patience, and a little worried that his boyfriend had been compared to both a vampire and a hag.

"Weasley men tend to go for mates who are considered, well, a bit difficult by other people's standards. Not that the Weasley men ever complained, mind you, such people tend to be more interesting and the fight to capture their hearts is most satisfying. If I remember correctly, even Uncle Richard was quite happy with his choice before his hag ran off with a boggart."

"You're lucky, Arthur, that you never went for such nonsense," Molly said, archly.

"Yes, dear," Arthur said dutifully, smiling fondly at his wife. "Very lucky indeed."

When Molly then looked to her teacup, Ron had to stifle a laugh at the broad wink that his father gave him. "At any rate, considering that Severus Snape is one of the most difficult people of my acquaintance--and I don't mean any insult, Ron...it seems inevitable that he'd end up with a Weasley spouse."

"So," Ron began hesitantly, "you aren't disappointed then?"

"Not at all, dear, not at all," Molly said kindly. "Severus is a fine wizard, and while you may have your spats now and again, I don't see you having any real trouble with him. It's obvious that you truly care for him, Ron. In the end, that is all that really matters. Is that all you wanted to discuss with us?"

"No, not really. I want to propose to Severus, but I'm unsure of the proper forms, us both being wizards. And I don't have a ring; I don't even know if I need one."

"Of course you need a ring!" Molly practically shouted. "You can't go proposing without a proper ring! Not to worry dear, we've got Great Grandmother Silvia's ring stashed around somewhere. Hideous old thing it is too, but well made. I'll take it over to Minerva. She's the best person at transfiguration I know, and...as she's a friend to Severus...she'll have an idea what he might fancy in an engagement ring."

"As for the proper forms," Arthur began, "it's easy as can be. You use the same forms as anyone else--with the proper pronoun adjustments, of course. The proposing wizard becomes the "groom" for the betrothal period and bonding while the wizard who is proposed to becomes the "bride." Not that Severus has to wear a gown, or anything," Arthur joked. "It only determines who says what. Just keep in mind that Severus either keeps his own surname or takes yours. The "groom" never takes the "bride's" surname, even if they are both wizards."

"Why is that?" asked Ron.

"No one knows, really. Perhaps it's considered a prize for having the stones to ask first," Arthur said with a chuckle.

"Arthur, don't be crude," Molly chided.

"Yes, dear," Arthur said dutifully, giving his son another wink.

"What if he doesn't know the proper forms?" Ron asked worriedly. "Well, he is a half-blood--not that that matters to me--but what if he was never taught?"

"I wouldn't worry about that, dear," Molly said. "Severus' mother was a pureblood, I'm sure she taught him. Even if she did not, Severus is an intelligent man and has impeccable wizarding manners, when he chooses to display them. He has been acquainted with many pureblood families over the course of his life."

"But what if he doesn't?" Ron insisted. "I don't want to embarrass the man; I want him to say yes!"

"Ron," Arthur began calmly, "even if he doesn't know the proper response, I don't think he'll be embarrassed. The Proposal Form sounds exactly like what it is, a proposal of marriage. If he's inexperienced with the forms, the language will only sound a bit more formal than he is expecting. The worst thing that will happen is that he will just say "yes" instead of answering in kind. Somehow, by the way you are worrying about it, I don't really think you care how he responds, just so long as he agrees," Arthur finished with a grin.

"What if he doesn't?" Ron fretted. "What if he says no?"

"Not to worry, you're a Weasley!" Arthur said cheerfully. "Weasleys don't accept "no" for an answer! Why, it took four proposals before your mother agreed to be my bride."

"Arthur!" Molly groused.

"Yes, dear," Arthur said patiently before he added, "but it's quite true, you know."

Molly couldn't keep a grin off of her face, and soon the three Weasleys were laughing together. Ron found himself much relieved. It was true that he hadn't actually asked Severus yet, but he felt comforted just knowing the proper way to go about it. All he needed to do now was to practice with the Forms a bit in his head--so that he didn't trip over his tongue when the time came--and wait for his Mum to get the ring squared away. Unsure what Severus' answer would be, Ron decided to worry about crossing that bridge when he came to it. Ron was determined to trudge right into the fray in true Gryffindor fashion. For, as his father had pointed out, if Severus was stubborn enough to decline, Ron could always ask him again.

Returning to room 309, the Weasleys found Severus less occupied and stayed for a brief chat while Severus smugly drank his smuggled cup of coffee. When Ron's parents took their leave, Arthur shook Severus' hand warmly and Molly leaned up to give the startled man a smooch on the cheek. Soon, Ron and Severus were once again alone.

"You told them," Severus said quietly.

"Yes, I did," Ron said calmly. "It was about time, don't you think?"

"They...they didn't seem upset," Severus said, his usually confident voice strangely uncertain.

"Why should they be?"

"Well," Severus began bitterly, "perhaps because I was a Death Eater, because I'm a bloody murderer, because I killed--"

Stopping Severus' tirade by placing his fingers firmly against Severus' lips, Ron said firmly, "Or maybe my parents are growing fond of you, because you are kind to them, because you are patient with my father, because you are a brave and intelligent wizard who is in love with their son. Now, why don't you sit down and finish your coffee, love?"

Letting Ron guide him to his chair, Severus dutifully sat down and finished his coffee while Ron sat next to him, his arm a comforting weight around Severus' shoulders. The young wizard's impassioned speech had calmed him. Severus didn't know why he sometimes seemed hell bent on pushing Ron away from him when all he wanted was to keep the young wizard close. Oh, he assumed the Healers would blather on about how his guilt over certain events in his past kept him feeling undeserving of things. He supposed that they would be right. But knowing what the problem was did nothing to fix it. He was lucky that Ron was such a patient young man. Deciding that it was best to put his outburst behind him as quickly as possible, Severus turned to Ron.

"Ron, I would like to ask you something."

For one tense moment, Ron was certain that Severus was about to beat him to the punch. His mind reeling, he found himself both wondering about whether that meant that he would have to take Severus' surname and frantically trying to remember the bride's response from the forms--which he had never dutifully memorized as a child as he had the groom's forms. Then Severus spoke, and Ron was never quite sure whether he was relieved or disappointed.

"Ron, what do you want to do with yourself once we leave here?"

"I want to stay with you," Ron replied immediately.

"I know that, brat!" Severus said affectionately, wrapping an arm around Ron's waist and giving him a comforting squeeze. "What I mean to say is, what sort of occupation are you interested in?"

"I'm not really qualified for much, not having finished school. I haven't even taken the adult tests yet."

"It doesn't matter what you are qualified to do at this moment, Ron. You have been a bit busy the past few years, after all. Those things can be sorted later. What is it you are *interested* in?" he repeated patiently.

"Well," Ron began, hesitantly, "there is one thing I've thought about, but it's not very grand. I'm half afraid that you'll laugh."

"Try me," Severus said softly.

With that, Ron began to explain.

## Consultation

Chapter 11 of 15

What will it take to get the most unlikely of bedfellows together? A post HBP fic. Character Death Warning is for events which happen before the events of the story.

A/N: My muse seems to be on a roll! Here's another chapter already, thanks to Vaughn's speedy and fabulous beta reading! Vaughn rocks!

I also want to thank Wolf Moonshadow, for finding a few bits I missed. I tell ya, you proof read and proof read, and then your very clever beta does the same, but the occasional typo is still bound to slip by. Bless Moon's sharp eyes! :)

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

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"Well," Ron began, "I've always admired Fred and George's shop, and at one time I thought that I'd either help them out or start a shop of my own. But the more I visited them at work, the less I liked it. It looks like fun sometimes, but it's always absolutely frantic. Fred and George are always bustling about, solving problems, answering questions, and constantly being surrounded by a horde of people. I don't know...I used to like that kind of crush when I was younger, but now, after the war--"

"I understand," Severus said when Ron's voice trailed off. "It makes perfect sense that after fighting for so long you might wish for something a bit more...peaceful."

"That's it exactly," Ron said, relieved that his love had understood what he'd been trying to say. "I'm just not comfortable around so many people anymore. The noise makes me jumpy and I find myself trying to keep an eye on everyone at once."

"I feel the same myself," Severus said. "The idea of going someplace crowded, like Diagon Alley, rather puts me off at the moment. I'm certain we will both adjust to such things in time, but I have no more desire to rush into it than you do. So, a shop like your brothers' is obviously out. What else have you been thinking?"

"I thought at first that maybe I could try my hand at a smaller shop, but even that seemed too much. Then I realized I could still go into trade. I wouldn't have to open a place myself if I simply sold to other people's shops."

"And what did you wish to sell?" Severus asked with a smirk. "Not potions, I hope?"

"You know the answer to that, you berk!" Ron grouched. "I'm pants at potions and I'm happy to leave the whole lot to you! No, I've always fancied familiars, actually. If I could do whatever I wanted, I think I'd like to become a breeder." Now that his secret was out, Ron looked uncertainly up at Severus.

Though Severus did look surprised by Ron's choice, he did not look either amused or disappointed in the least. Taking a moment to think about it, he then spoke. "I know from personal experience how patient you can be and how kind you are. I think that you have a good temperament to raise and train familiars, Ron. It's a fine idea." As Ron smiled in relief, Severus continued, "Have you looked into the breeding business at all?"

"I've done quite a bit of research, actually. It won't surprise you, I'm sure, that Hermione dug up several books on the subject for me," Ron said, laughing. "The best thing is that I could start out small. Toads and rats are still very popular with young kids, so the cost of the first breeding pairs and the upkeep would be really low. Once I got things rolling, I could reinvest the profits into more expensive animals, like cats or owls. Eventually I could try some of the exotics, and that's where the money is. There's a large cat called a Savannah that's in big demand because there aren't many breeders--which isn't surprising because they cost nearly five hundred Galleons a piece."

"It's clear that you know what you're talking about, and I have to say that it's a relief to me because it will work in easily with my own plans," Severus said.

"And what are your plans, Severus?"

"Potions! What else?" Severus said with a chuckle. "But like you, I've no desire to run a shop. To be quite honest, I can make more money if I spend my time brewing and not shop keeping. What I want more than anything is to have no one to answer to, and if I sell my potions freelance--much as you plan to do with your familiars--I can do exactly that."

"No surprises there," Ron said, laughing. "Why do you say that our plans will do well together?"

"As I'm sure you have guessed, I've been trying to sort out where we'll live when we leave here. Hermione has been kind enough to act as my agent while I'm stuck here, and she's managed to find a buyer for my house. And before you ask, there was no question about us living there. It was a horrible house in a horrible part of town, and I shall be forever grateful if I never have to see the nasty place again."

"I understand, Severus," Ron said quietly. "You know that I couldn't be buggered where we live, so long as we stick together. You don't have to explain your choices to me, just pick wherever you like and I'll have my bags packed."

Here the discussion abruptly halted as the older wizard momentarily kept Ron's mouth busy with an activity far more enjoyable than speaking. Eventually, Severus released Ron to speak to him earnestly.

"Listen to me, love. This is a decision that we will be making together, as I want us both to be as happy as possible with it. The only reason I have not consulted with you until now is because I needed to get through the sale of the house and get some of my other affairs in order before I could ascertain what our options would be. Now that I know exactly what our financial situation is, it's important for me to know what your plans are so that we can choose accordingly."

"Why does where we live depend on what I want to do?"

"Because, if you had said you wanted to further your education, or apprentice, or work in a shop, then we would do best to live in the city. After all, potions can be brewed anywhere. However, I'd prefer not to live in town, and to be quite blunt, shabby cottages in the country are far cheaper than shabby flats in town. I'm afraid that wherever we live, it is bound to be a bit shabby. Your rats and toads won't be much of an expense, but it will take a good deal of our capital to get me the initial setup I need to brew."

"We're going to have a cottage? Brilliant!" Ron said happily.

"Now don't get your hopes up, brat. I told you that--"

"Severus," Ron interrupted. "I'm not concerned about how shabby our home is and I'm not afraid of the work it will take to improve it. You've seen my parent's house. I've had a lot of experience with shabby. I'm just happy that we won't be living in town and that we'll be together."

"It won't always be shabby, Ron," Severus said softly. "Potions making is a very lucrative business; it's just difficult to start from scratch. I believe your breeding venture will do well also, once we have the capital to expand it."

"It will help that we won't have seven kids to feed, like my folks did," Ron said with a laugh.

"Perish the thought!" Severus said with an exaggerated look of horror.

"It wouldn't be that bad," Ron said with a grin. "Just imagine it! Lckle Severus' running about the house."

"That, I think, is a dubious joy that the world can very well do without, besides," Severus said as he casually let a hand drop to ghost across Ron's crotch, "unless you've been wearing an *extremely* good costume, I do believe that it's out of the question."

Unable to keep his hips from tilting into the unexpected caress from his lover, Ron made a happy little humming sound when Severus increased the pressure of his hand as he stroked Ron's growing erection. Winding his other hand into the hair at the back of Ron's neck, Severus leaned into Ron, snuggling his nose behind Ron's ear and inhaling deeply.

"I do believe," Severus murmured into Ron's hair, his voice low and rough, "that it is time for my bath. Perhaps we could continue this discussion later, if you have no objection?"

When he couldn't manage an articulate reply, Ron decided that actions spoke louder than words. Standing, he pulled Severus to his feet and then swung the older wizard up into his arms. One of Severus' arms went round Ron's neck. With his other hand, Severus stroked and squeezed Ron's bicep.

"Never have I known such strength coupled with such gentleness," Severus said, his voice gone soft with wonder. "You take my breath away, Ronald Weasley."

"And you, Severus Snape, have stolen my heart," Ron replied, his voice just as effected. Staring deeply into his love's eyes, Ron carried him into the bath. As the bath filled, Ron sat on the edge of the tub with Severus on his lap. The two men kissed and fondled each other as steam began to fill the room. Once Severus was placed in the filled tub, Ron began the wonderful torture of bathing Severus from head to toe. Though Severus did his best to speed matters along, Ron would not be rushed. He loved having free reign to stroke every inch of his soapy, wet lover. After Severus' hair had been washed and rinsed, Ron slipped into the tub behind Severus and moved them into that same position they had found themselves in the first time they had bathed together. Slouched low in the water and leaning against the back of the tub, Ron was completely covered by his lover's body. Severus' cock, heavily aroused, stood proudly out of the bathwater. One of Ron's hands slipped happily around his lover's cock, while the other slipped between their bodies, to caress and tease at Severus' entrance. Soon the older wizard was hissing his pleasure and demanding more.

In fact, Severus was the most demanding and aggressive bottom that Ron had ever heard of. People who assumed a man who bottomed was a man who was submissive had never known the likes of Severus Snape. Severus rushed Ron through the preliminaries and he wasn't satisfied until Ron sank deep within his body. Hooking his feet over the edge of the tub and gripping that edge tight with his hands, Severus lifted his hips to sink again and again onto Ron. Starting slowly, soon Severus was fucking himself on Ron's cock with wild abandon. Ron loved this position; he loved it precisely because he wasn't in control. Each time they made love, Severus showed Ron how much he enjoyed it with both passion and enthusiasm. However, Ron was still working through his issues with penetration. This position, with Severus bottoming but dominant, took all decisions out of Ron's hands. He was free to simply enjoy the hard cock in his hands and the quivering, hot, sliding channel which surrounded his own needy flesh. As Severus neared the edge of his control, his head fell back over Ron's shoulder. Taking advantage, Ron turned his head to kiss and nip at Severus' long, pale neck.

"Ron...can't...hold out...much longer," Severus panted.

As Severus lifted his hips, Ron took over. His fist slid quickly over Severus' cock as he began to thrust up into his lover.

"There is no need to wait...no need to hold back," Ron whispered. "Come for me, love. Come for me now."

As Severus' cock began to jump in his hand, as Severus' body began to spasm around him, Ron pressed deep and held tight, needing no movement but the response of his lover's body to wrench the orgasm from him. It never failed to thrill him, this moment of bliss when he was joined so intimately with the man he loved. Still, there was something wanting...something yet to be experienced. The clear joy and passion that Severus showed when Ron was buried to the hilt inside of him had set Ron to wondering. What would it be like to have his lover thrusting inside of him? What would happen if he were to try again, this time with a man he both loved and trusted? Though he was still uncertain, at times such as this, Ron thought about asking Severus to make love to him with far more interest than fear.

It still surprised Ron that Severus turned into a snuggler after sex, though it certainly didn't displease him in the least. Severus had maintained the same attitude that he had shown the first time that Ron had made love to him. Whenever they reached completion, Severus would hold tight to Ron...or, in this case, relax on top of Ron...keeping Ron's cock inside his body with an almost greedy possessiveness until Ron's cock had softened and slipped out on his own. Ron loved these languid, glowing moments where he stayed intimately attached to his love. In that golden moment, all the ridiculous clichés that the Weird Sisters sang about on the wireless came true. It was as if Severus and he shared one body. It was as if they shared one heart.

Eventually, kisses and caresses were exchanged, wet wizards were dried and dressed, and Severus led Ron back to their little table. Once there, Severus took out the book that Ron had seen him with. Inside were adverts for homes and flats that were for sale. On each page were notes jotted down in the margins in Severus' rather cramped writing. Many of the pictures in the adverts had been crossed out, and the notes in their margins held snippets of information as to why. "Too expensive," was scrawled onto several. "Poltergeist," adorned one and "Hags living in copse" on another. Severus, with the help of Hermione, Harry, and Minerva, had been doing extensive



research.

"We've agreed that the flats are not what we are looking for, so we won't waste time on those," Severus said simply. "Of the cottages, there are two that would leave us enough capital for me to start brewing and you to buy your first rats and toads. This first one is in better shape, though it's still not what I would call nice, but it comes with only a small parcel of land. The second one comes with a great deal of land and a rather dilapidated barn as well, but, as you can see, shabby doesn't begin to describe it."

Ron studied the pictures thoughtfully. The first cottage was indeed in good shape. It looked as though it would only want some cleaning and a few cosmetic spells to be made livable. However, the cottage was small and the yard surrounding it tiny. If Ron wanted space for familiars, he would be hard pressed to find it. The second cottage looked, quite frankly, abysmal. It was in a great state of disrepair. The shingles of the roof were half missing. The door stood hanging awkwardly by one hinge. It was, however, much larger than the first, as it had a second story.

"That first one," Ron said hesitantly, "does look in better shape, but it would be mighty snug. How bad is this larger one? Is there structural damage?"

"The foundation is sound, as is the roof, once it gets new shingles. It also has a cellar, where I could set up a potions lab. I thought the barn might be re-fitted to house your animals, once we get the house in order. However, it would mean a great deal more work than the smaller cottage. I can understand if you don't want to get involved in such a large project. We could always start with the small cottage and move when our fortunes improve."

Despite his waffling, Ron could easily tell that Severus preferred the larger cottage, and Ron thought it was sensible as well. "There's no sense in buying a cottage we will have to move from," he said decidedly. "If the foundation is sound, then there's nothing wrong that a little elbow grease won't fix. I know it will take time, Severus, but I'm not frightened by a little rough living until we get things sorted. I like the idea of having more room, and, what with the cellar and the barn, that cottage seems just the thing for us."

Giving Ron a relieved smile, Severus was once again busy with writing and owls. Within a few days, the deed to the cottage was theirs, and Ron was touched to see that Severus had listed both of their names upon it. Though he hadn't scarcely a Knut to his name, Ron was now the proud half-owner of a rather horrid cottage just south of Scotland. Horrid or not, Ron and Severus had a home.

The next week seemed to fly by. Severus strengthened to a point where he needed only one cane to get around by himself, though he still preferred Ron's steady arm. Their new morning Healer, Fraichir, proudly told the two wizards that Severus' magic level was finally recovering and rising rapidly with each passing day. Ron felt almost like his old self. He walked easily unassisted, carried his lover around whenever he could get away with it, and was getting anxious for the day when they could leave St. Mungo's and start their own life. That was not the only thing Ron was waiting for. The day came when he got an owl from Minerva, asking him to join her in the St. Mungo's sixth floor shop. Excited, but trying to hide it from his over-observant roommate, Ron knew exactly what Minerva wanted to see him about. The ring! Ron had practiced the groom's forms in his head daily, he'd only been waiting for the ring. If all went well with Minerva, Ron planned to ask Severus to marry him that very night! With butterflies dancing wildly in his stomach, Ron made some excuse to Severus about coffee and slipped out to meet Minerva.

## Recitation

### Chapter 12 of 15

What will it take to get the most unlikely of bedfellows together? A post HBP fic. Character Death Warning is for events which happen before the events of the story.

A/N: Here's the next chapter of UB! It's a slightly long chapter, so I hope that will make up for the delay in updating. I tell you, those boys have a mind of their own! They took this chapter places I hadn't at all planned on! \*snicker\*

Big, huge, gi-normous thanks to Vaughn for beta reading this. You rock!

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Feeling nervous and excited, Ron had to hold himself down to a fast walk in his hurry to meet Minerva in the shop. Running was frowned upon in St. Mungo's, as it made everyone think there was an emergency at hand. When he entered, pausing in the doorway to try to catch his ragged breath, Minerva was already seated at a nearby table. Ron practically flew to sit next to her and he was barely able to take the time to greet her properly before he asked her about the ring. Chuckling at the excited young wizard, Minerva drew a small box out of the pocket of her robes and silently handed it into Ron's trembling hands.

Opening the box, Ron smiled in pleasant surprise. Gone was his grandmother's horrible, fluffy, Victorian ring. In its place was a ring that was quite manly and beautiful in its simplicity. The silver band was wide, but not heavy, and on it was a single, square cut sapphire.

"A sapphire?" Ron questioned. "I would think he'd like an emerald."

"He'd like an emerald fine, Ron. However, though Severus is indeed a Slytherin, that house's colors hardly account for all of Severus' tastes. He wouldn't admit it on pain of death, but Severus is strangely sentimental about some things." Taking the ring from the box, Minerva held it up to Ron's puzzled face. "I did well," she said with obvious pride. "That stone is the exact color of your eyes, Ronald Weasley."

The puzzled expression on Ron's face fled to make room for an embarrassed blush. "It's beautiful, Minerva. I don't know how to thank you--"

"No thanks are necessary, Ron. It was a pleasure. Though that ring was rather...well, it was hideous, wasn't it?" Laughing, Ron nodded his agreement and Minerva continued. "The ring was horrid, but it was very well made and of excellent quality. It was an easy object to transfigure. Think of it as an early engagement present," she finished with a smile.

"Do you think," Ron began, pausing to clear his throat nervously, "do you think he'll agree then? To marry me," he added unnecessarily.

"Of course he will," Minerva said, giving Ron's shoulder a comforting squeeze. "Severus loves you. And while he may rather think that he doesn't deserve you, Severus is neither so altruistic that he'd push you away, nor so cowardly that he would fail to fight for what he wants. I hope you are quite certain about this, Ron, because I think that Severus is going to latch onto you with both hands and never, ever let you go."

Ron's happy smile speaking for his certainty, he only said, "Brilliant!"

"When do you plan to propose?" Minerva asked, with a fond smile.

"Tonight, I suppose," began Ron uncertainly, "but I wish...well...it doesn't matter. I love him, and that's the important thing."

"Ron, what's troubling you? You aren't truly concerned that he'll decline, are you?"

"No, not at all! I mean, I know he could say no, but my Dad proposed to my Mum four times before she said yes. If he says no, then I'll just keep asking until he changes his mind," Ron finished with a decided nod of his head.

"What is worrying you then?"

"Well, it's just not going to be all that romantic, is it? I'm supposed to be taking Severus to a nice restaurant with candles on the table and wine chilling in a bucket...or take him out for a picnic in a field full of flowers or some rubbish like that," Ron said, his head dropping a bit in disappointment. "It's just not going to have the same effect in that drab little room over a plate of bland Shepard's pie, is it?"

Chuckling a bit at his hang-dog attitude, Minerva then spoke to him encouragingly. "That couldn't be easier to fix. It's summertime, and the Hogwarts' house-elves have very little to do to keep them occupied. I shall mention to them that Ronald Weasley--Harry Potter's "Weezy"--is going to propose to one Severus Snape...the man who saved Dobby's Winky from certain death during the last battle. Then perhaps I'll let slip to them that young Ronald has to propose in a dreary little room over horrid hospital food. Believe me, Ron, their nurturing little hearts will be suitably outraged. All I need to know is a good time to send them to you."

"Really?" Ron said, his eyes wide with shock. "Would they do that?"

"I know that they will. Your only problem will be to get them to tone it down a bit. If you aren't careful, they'll repaint the place pink and serve pink, heart-shaped food," Minerva said, chuckling again. "Now what time shall I send them? Is there any way that you can get Severus out of the room for a bit?"

"I'll think of something. Tell them to come at five o'clock. I'll get him out of the room if I have to carry him. Will a half an hour be time enough?"

"More than enough. Fifteen minutes would be enough."

After accepting a fond smooch from Minerva, Ron left the shop and took Severus the cup of coffee which was meant to explain his absence. Seeing that Severus was still fussing with a stack of parchments and muttering to himself, Ron simply pressed the cup into one of Severus' hands and slipped back out of room 309 without further explanation. Walking to Healer Cotton's office, he was relieved to find her not only there, but not very busy at the moment.

"Mr. Weasley," Patricia greeted Ron with a warm smile, "how nice to see you. Is anything amiss?" she asked with genuine concern.

"No, not at all," Ron said, sitting in the chair that the kind Healer gestured to. "It's just that I'm involved in a bit of a plot, and I wanted to clear it with you...make sure that it's ok...and ask you for a bit of help." Ron couldn't help grinning at her as he finished.

"A plot!" Healer Cotton said with a grin of her own. "How marvelous! Now then, what is the plot and exactly how may I be of service?"

It took little time for Ron to explain what he planned to do as well as the probable help of the Hogwarts' house-elves. He then appealed to Healer Cotton for some excuse to get Severus out of the room for a bit.

"There's no trouble at all about the house-elves," Patricia said encouragingly. "Patients often have treats from friends and loved ones and we are happy to encourage it. Both you and Mr. Snape have been cleared to eat and drink whatever you wish...even that coffee you keep smuggling him," she finished with a grin.

"I should have known that nothing gets past the Healers of St. Mungo's!" Ron said, giving himself a sheepish smack to the forehead with one hand.

"Not to worry," Patricia said, chuckling. "If it had been harmful for him, I would have put a stop to it. As it is, Mr. Snape has been cleared to have coffee for some weeks, but--as it obviously pleases him to think he's getting away with something--we've neglected to tell him so. Now as far as tonight goes, you both may have anything you wish, even some wine if you take it easy. And may I say that I'm so happy for you both," she said with a warm smile.

"Thank you," Ron said simply, his voice suddenly low and serious. "It means a great deal to me."

"You are most welcome. Now then, about getting your intended out of his room. I think it's high time that Mr. Snape and I had a nice chat about his condition. Seeing how he is able to walk with only a little help from his cane, I see no reason why we couldn't have that chat here in my office. Your house-elves are coming at five o'clock, so I'll send for him around a quarter 'til, just to be sure. I expect that I can keep him occupied for at least three quarters of an hour."

"Brilliant!" said Ron, grinning again.

When Ron returned to room 309, Severus was done with his papers and groused a bit about where Ron had run off to. Thinking quickly, Ron realized he had an excuse which would work perfectly; not to mention that it would help along The Plot.

"Oh, Healer Cotton wanted to have a chat about my recuperation and whatnot. Rather boring, really. She said something about seeing you as well later today, so I'm afraid that you are in for the same rubbish."

With a roll of his eyes, Severus said, "I don't suppose it would help to tell her that I have better things to do than hear her ramble on, so I suppose I'd better get to it," he finished, rising to his feet and walking slowly, without his cane, towards Ron. Though his face was calm, there was a decidedly predatory look in his eyes and his slow steps made Ron feel like he was being stalked. Sudden heat washed through his whole body and Ron felt his cock harden so fast that he was surprised he didn't do himself an injury.

"What...better things...do you have to do?" Ron stammered.

Stopping close to Ron, so close that their bodies were nearly touching, Severus continued to stare into Ron's eyes with obvious hunger. "You," he purred. Then he pounced.

Once again, Ron found himself naked and on Severus' hospital bed with an equally naked Severus pressing him into the mattress. Ron barely understood how he had come to be there, not that he was complaining, but Severus moved so fast, and distracted him so well, that he had little recollection of how he got from standing fully clothed to writhing against his deliciously nude partner. It quickly became apparent to Ron that this was not to be one of their slow, gentle, lovemaking sessions. Severus was demanding and impatient as he devoured Ron's mouth and caressed him with strong yet gentle fingers. Though Ron enjoyed it when they took their time, he couldn't deny that when his lover got demanding, it turned Ron on so much that it literally curled his toes.

Though he loved it when Severus turned impatient, Ron was still shocked when Severus suddenly stroked ointment over Ron's hard cock and, without any preparation, lifted his hips and sat down on it.

"Yessss..." hissed Severus. "Oh, yessss..."

Whatever worries Ron had over hurting his partner vanished at the sight above him. Severus sat on Ron's hips, his hands braced on Ron's chest, his head thrown back, and his mouth open as he moaned in pleasure. Over and over Severus used his legs to lift up and then slide back down until Ron was once more balls deep inside his lover. With each descent, Severus came down a little faster and with a little more force. Soon he was riding Ron wantonly and Ron could barely keep from coming immediately as the hands on his chest moved to pinch at Ron's nipples.

This reminded Ron that he had hands as well. This position was far better for allowing Ron the free use of his hands than any they had yet tried. With wicked ease, Ron moved one hand to firmly stroke Severus' cock while he slipped the other gently behind Severus' balls to press and rub at the skin there. This resulted in another rush of

hissing moans from his partner, and it wasn't long at all before Ron felt the cock in his hand jump wildly as Ron's chest was spattered with wet heat. As Severus collapsed against Ron's chest, Ron rolled them over and plunged back into his lover's body. For the first time, Ron was able to let go of his fears completely as he pumped hard and fast into Severus' arse. Severus, recovered from his own orgasm, gripped Ron tightly to him while murmuring things in Ron's ear that were alternately sweet and deliciously obscene. When Ron finally came, it was as if some darkness in his mind had finally lifted. He collapsed against Severus, and was mortified to find that he was crying. Though he wasn't sad, great braying sobs were wrenching themselves from his throat and he could do nothing to smother them.

Holding him as tight as ever, Severus caressed Ron's back with one hand, rubbing it in soothing circles. "It's all right my love," he crooned. "Everything is all right now. I've got you. You have no idea how wonderful that felt...how long I have wished for you to give me everything...to hold nothing back. Never have I known such pleasure, such care, such love as I have found in your arms. Hush, love, hush. All is well. All is finally well."

Eventually quieting, Ron pulled his head up to look into Severus' eyes. "I'm sorry," he said, still embarrassed by his odd outburst, "I don't know what's wrong with me--"

"There is nothing at all wrong with you, love," Severus said firmly. "It happens like that sometimes. Sometimes the release is so strong, the emotions so great, that they simply have to get out." Raising a hand to cup Ron's cheek tenderly, he asked, "Better?"

"Yes," Ron said, cuddling his face into the caress. "I want you to know," he said softly, "that--despite any reactions to the contrary...I really enjoyed that."

"I'm glad to know that, as I did as well," Severus said, the hungry gleam reappearing in his eyes. "And I have every intention of repeating it as often as humanly possible." That said, Severus pulled Ron down into a hungry kiss. There was no more talking in room 309 for some time.

Later in the afternoon, Ron and Severus were lounging on Severus' bed and reading in companionable silence when there was a knock on the door. The door opened, and Healer Fraichir poked her head into the room.

"Good evening Mr. Weasley, Mr. Snape," she said, nodding at each man in turn. "Mr. Snape, would you mind coming with me to Healer Cotton's office? She'd like to have a word with you."

"I suppose I might as well get it over with," Severus said, rolling his eyes. "Though why I'm expected to traipse through drafty corridors at all hours..." Severus' grumbling voice trailed off as he grabbed his cane and slowly followed Healer Fraichir out of the room.

The Plot was afoot! As soon as the door closed behind them, Ron leaped up out of the bed and headed to the lav. He knew he didn't have much time, and he was frustrated by having only his pajamas and dressing gown to wear, but he wanted to look as presentable as possible. Hurrying, he washed up, brushed his teeth, and tried to get his wild, red hair to behave itself. Returning to the main room, he had just enough time to remove the betrothal ring from its box and place it carefully in his dressing gown's pocket before he heard the loud popping of Apparition. Spinning to face the sound, he was met with the sight of half a dozen house-elves, who were laden with baskets and packages.

"Harry Potter's Weezy is getting himself married!" squealed Dobby, while jumping up and down and wildly waggling his ears in his excitement. "We is all so pleased! And Mr. Weezy is marrying the dungeon Professor! Oh, but he is a fierce, brave man, Mr. Weezy. He saved my Winky, you know!"

"So I heard," Ron said, smiling down at the overexcited elf. "He's a good man...I hope he will say yes."

"Oh, he will be saying yes to the Weezy," Dobby said decidedly. "Specially with house-elves helping you." Looking around the bare little room, Dobby shook his head. "No, no, this nasty place will never do," he muttered to himself. "It's a good thing missy Headmistress told Dobby about this. House-elves are really being needed here."

With that, the house-elves got busy. Ron had little else to do but protest the re-painting of the walls. Within twenty minutes, all had been arranged. With much hand shaking and congratulations, the house-elves vanished as quickly as they had arrived. Ron was left with nothing to do but sit in nervous anticipation until Severus returned.

It seemed to take forever, but eventually Severus opened the door and stopped in surprise as he gazed at the changes the house-elves had wrought. On the floor was a thick rug. Their tiny table had been enlarged and covered with a fine linen cloth. The hard wooden chairs had also grown and become more comfortable. A hundred levitating candles lit the small room and several vases of flowers rested here and there. A small feast was spread out on the cloth covered table and on a stand nearby was a bottle of pale wine nestled in an ice bucket.

Blinking in the doorway for a moment, Severus then slowly entered the room, his surprise evident in his expression. Ron crossed to Severus and offered him his arm. Once he escorted his love to the table and seated him, Ron then sat in the chair across from him and began serving their dinner.

"What's all this, then?" Severus finally managed to say.

"Just a bit of a surprise for you," Ron said simply. "Lamb chop?"

"Please."

The meal began, and soon Severus recovered from his shock enough to enjoy it. The lovely meal was eaten between moments of hand holding and gentle caresses. After they had shared an apple tart and neither seemed to be able to take another bite, Ron knew that the time had come. Rising, he went to Severus' chair and pulled it slightly away from the table. When Severus made an effort to rise as well, Ron kept him in his seat with a gentle hand on his shoulder. Kneeling down on both knees before the man he loved, Ron clasped both of Severus' hands in his own. When he spoke, the words were formal but full of love.

"Severus Snape," he began softly, "long have I meditated on what you mean to me. After careful consideration, I have found that my head and my heart are in perfect accord. I love you, Severus. You would do my family great honor if you would consent to join with my house."

For a terrifying moment, Severus made no reply. He simply stared at Ron with wide, startled eyes. Just as Ron despaired of an answer, Severus spoke.

"Your suit does my house honor," he said solemnly.

This was the expected beginning of the formal betrothal Forms, and Ron felt one of his fears leave him. However, he still had much to worry about, as the "bride" had four possible responses, only two of which were favorable.

"I too have meditated on what you mean to me, Ronald Weasley. I have found that my head and my heart are in perfect accord. For I also love you, and it would give me great joy to join with your house."

The best of all possible responses! Letting out the breath he had not been aware he was holding, Ron fumbled in his pocket for a moment before he got a grip on the ring, and brought it out to slip gently onto Severus' finger.

Gazing for a moment at the blue sparkle of the ring, Severus then looked straight into Ron's eyes. "Beautiful," he murmured.

"Isn't it?" Ron said. "Minerva helped me, she--"

"The ring is indeed lovely," Severus interrupted, "but I was referring to you." Winding his hands into Ron's hair, he pulled Ron into a breathtaking kiss. Rubbing his cheek against Ron's he whispered into Ron's ear, "I never expected this...I never thought..."

"It's what I want," Ron said, just as softly. "It's what I want more than anything, if you want it too."

"Yesssss..." hissed Severus, pulling Ron back into another heated kiss.

How quickly the two newly betrothed men ended up in Severus' bed would surprise no one. But this night, one thing was very different. After the preliminaries, when Severus pressed the jar of ointment into Ron's hand, Ron firmly pressed it back.

"Not this time, love," Ron said. "I think that tonight it's high time that I found out what it's like to be made love to by the man I love."

The warm body on top of his froze in place. Severus' head snapped up to look Ron in the eye. "Are you certain, Ron? There is no hurry, after all. I would be perfectly happy...even if you never wished that of me."

"I know," Ron reassured him. "But I would not be happy. I want to, Severus, I want to know what it's like when it's with someone I trust...someone I love. Please, Severus, please make love to me."

Once Ron convinced Severus of his sincerity, Severus hesitated no longer. After another devouring kiss, he growled into Ron's ear, "Your every wish is my ardent desire."

Ron could not hide his sudden shiver of anticipation.

## Revelation

### Chapter 13 of 15

What will it take to get the most unlikely of bedfellows together? A post HBP fic. Character Death Warning is for events which happen before the events of the story.

A/N: Here it is. The chapter with the naughty bits you've been waiting for. \*grin\* I hope it does not disappoint.

\*sigh\* I think there's only one more chapter to this little fic, and I shall miss it. Ron and Severus have proven to be quite a kick in the head to write. Who would have thought?!

As always, big thanks to my charming and talented beta, Vaughn. Vaughn, you are the bee's knees! The cat's Pajamas! You're swell, and you're neat and keen as well! And better than all of that, you keep me from using such outdated things in my fanfics! \*Pook grins sheepishly\*

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Once Ron had made his decision, he was mortified to realize that, despite his desire, his body had tensed. He could not help but be fearful; Ron's one time at being a bottom had been a painful and unpleasant experience. Despite his willingness, his body still had fears to quiet.

Quieting the tenseness of Ron's body seemed to be Severus' new mission in life. For once, neither impatient nor hurried, Severus spent an unheard of amount of time caressing and kissing Ron. With slow, gentle determination, Severus spent half an hour worshipping Ron's body from head to toe. Feeling his body turning to jelly, Ron whimpered and moaned softly at the attention. Eventually, when Ron was a trembling pile of mush, Severus removed himself from Ron to press tightly against his side. Ron could feel the hard length of Severus' cock pressing at his hip, and the familiar proof of his lover's arousal did much to excite him.

Even so, Ron could not quite keep his body from twitching in alarm when he heard the unmistakable sound of the lid to the jar of ointment being unscrewed.

"Hush, love," Severus purred in his ear. "On my life, I shall do nothing to hurt you, nothing to cause you pain. Tonight is for your pleasure and I am a willing slave to that pleasure." Slowly, Severus encouraged Ron to lift his knees until he lay on his back, knees bent and legs slightly spread. As he arranged Ron to his liking, he continued to murmur into Ron's ear. "You have no idea how wonderful it feels for me, to have you thrusting inside of me, joined with me, so close that it feels as if you have crawled into my very skin." Here Severus began to gently caress and press against Ron's tight entrance with slick fingers. While Severus continued the caress, his voice rumbled with his arousal as he continued to murmur into Ron's ear. Ron trembled again, this time more from heat than fear. Severus seemed immediately aware of the difference.

"Ah, Ron," he growled, "you are so responsive, so perfect. I shall play your body like the finest instrument...I shall make you tremble in anticipation until you beg me to fill you...and when I do, when I at last sink to the balls in this delicious arse of yours, I shall make you scream in bliss."

Unable to hold in a quivering moan at the words murmured so hotly in his ear, Ron moaned again as a single, long finger gently breached his body. There was no pain, only a growing sense of desire and excitement. Severus continued to whisper sweet, ridiculous, and obscene things in Ron's ear. Indeed, the once silent man's voice now never paused, its growling tones a constant distraction and a never-ending spur to Ron's growing anticipation.

The finger lodged inside of Ron pressed and withdrew, circled and caressed. "So tight, my love. So tight and hot," the voice in his ear rumbled. "Beautiful, you are so beautiful." Here, Severus' other hand began to slowly stroke Ron's cock as the finger pushing in and out of him was gently joined by a second. The fingers inside of him began to rub against his prostate with each painstakingly slow press inward. Without his conscious thought, Ron began to press back against those clever envoys, seeking more of the wonderful tingles that they were causing with each determined stroke.

"Yessss..." Severus hissed. "Yessss... It feels good, doesn't it...so good to have your every itch rubbed." Here, Severus slipped a third finger in Ron's arse, and while Ron could feel them filling him, stretching him, the slight discomfort fled as those wicked fingers danced inside him. Ron was now thrusting back onto Severus' hand as eagerly as he thrust up into the hand that clenched around his needy cock. Never having realized that he could feel so much, he couldn't stop the whimpering groans pouring from his open mouth.

"Delicious...so delicious," the low voice continued in Ron's ear. "Yesss...it feels good, to have my fingers stroking deep inside you. How good shall it feel when I replace these fingers with my hungry cock? Hmmm? Yes...when I bury my cock inside you it will fill you, it will press deeper, it will rub harder. Hot...hard...smooth...it will feel so much better than these bony fingers."

"Yes!" panted Ron. "Yes, Sev'rus...want it...want you...now please!"

As if he had been only waiting for such a declaration, Severus rolled Ron onto his side and pressed his body tightly against Ron's back. His fingers briefly left their snug haven as he arranged Ron's legs carefully, the lower one straight and the upper one with knee bent so that Ron rolled partly onto his stomach. In an instant, the fingers were back in Ron's arse, plunging, delving, and circling. The hissing voice was silent for a moment as Severus kissed and sucked where Ron's neck met his shoulder.

As much as Ron was enjoying the intense new sensations, he couldn't help but be disappointed. "Severus," he whimpered, "I want to see you."

Lifting his hungry mouth from Ron's neck, Severus growled into Ron's ear once more. "Not this time, my sweet. This way is better...easier. Trust me."

"I...I do," Ron stammered.

"Good...very good," Severus mumbled, his fingers still pressing hard and fast into Ron's arse. "And do you want me now, love? Do you want me to replace these poor substitutes," he continued, wriggling his fingers in Ron's arse, "with my hot...hard...pumping cock?"

"Yes!" screeched Ron, his cock twitching madly just thinking about it. "Yes! Now! More!" The words were out almost before Ron could think, and with surprise, Ron realized that he was indeed ready; he wasn't afraid anymore. Severus, with his growling words and wicked hands, had seen to that.

Whimpering with loss when the clever fingers withdrew, Ron soon whimpered anew as he felt the head of his lover's cock press firmly against his entrance. Despite his eagerness, despite his will, Ron felt his body clench slightly at the thought of invasion. Then that calm, steady, passionate voice was once again in his ear.

"There will be no pain, my love. I have taken great care with you, prepared you most thoroughly. This night is for you, love. This night is for your pleasure."

The familiar body pressed against his back and the beloved voice speaking so reassuringly made Ron's body relax. A picture flashed into his mind. Severus above him, riding Ron's cock with obvious joy, his head thrown back in delight. Ron wanted that. Ron wanted it all.

Sensing the tension in Ron's body waning, Severus began to slide into Ron's body with excruciating slowness. "Press against me, love," he whispered. "Yes...just like that...oh gods, you feel so wonderful wrapped tightly around me."

It was amazing. There was no pain, no burn, just an indescribable sense of fullness, of being stretched to the limit. Though Ron felt no pain, he was relieved when, after sinking completely into Ron's arse, Severus simply held himself still while he allowed Ron's body time to adjust to its gentle invasion. Severus had leaned over Ron, his body a warm and comforting weight which pressed him into the mattress. His lover's hand once more found Ron's cock, and it began to stroke him with almost teasing caresses. The excitement making him brave, Ron pressed his arse more firmly against Severus' hips.

Then Severus was moving, slowly at first, a slow slide in and out of Ron's body. Severus' hand mimicked the rhythm as it stroked Ron's cock more firmly. With every thrust, Severus' hard length slid against that bundle of nerves that seemed directly attached to Ron's cock. With each time that Severus sunk into him, the tingling heat in Ron's cock increased unbelievably. Never had his journey towards orgasm been this exciting, this intense. If this was how it felt for Severus when Ron made love to him, it was little wonder that Severus practically begged for it.

Soon Ron was moaning with it, gasping and shrieking out his bliss. As the feelings grew even more consuming, Ron found himself thrusting back onto Severus' cock with as much enthusiasm as he had once pounded into his lover.

"Good, isn't it?" the beloved voice hissed as Severus increased the speed and force of his hips. "Now do you see why I love it? Why I am so impatient for you to fill me?"

"Yes," gasped Ron. "Oh yes...good...so good with you inside me. More...faster!"

The speed of Severus' hips increased; soon he was pounding into Ron's arse, his hand a blur of motion on Ron's cock. Each thrust caused a rush of heat through Ron's body. Each retreat made Ron cry out wordlessly for more.

"You think it feels good now," Severus growled, panting in his efforts, "just you wait...just you wait until you come with me pounding inside you. Nothing compares...nothing compares to coming while you have a hard cock pounding into you. Let me show you...come for me, love. Come for me."

With a loud, wailing cry, Ron did, the bliss of his orgasm streaking through his body in huge, never-ending waves. The whole world collapsed into that one, striking, unbelievable feeling and Ron was barely aware of his lover's sharp cry when the cock inside him pulsed and filled him with warmth.

When Ron came to his senses, Severus was leaning over him, a faint look of concern on his dear face.

"Ron?" he whispered. "Ron? Are you all right? Did...did I hurt you?"

Giving Severus his widest grin, Ron pulled him down into a forceful kiss. "Never better," he said decidedly, still grinning.

Relaxing, Severus pulled Ron tightly into his arms, rolling them over until Ron's head landed on his chest. "You--" Severus began, his voice strangely hesitant now that it was all over, "You seemed to enjoy it."

"Enjoy it?" Ron yelped, lifting his head to look into his lover's eyes. "That was bloody brilliant! See if I ever let you bottom again!"

"Saucy baggage," Severus grouched. "Don't you even dare to imply that I'm not going to get my fair share!" Though he looked at Ron with mock severity, Ron was happy to note that Severus was quite unable to hide the smug satisfaction burning in his eyes.

"Mmmm... maybe tomorrow..." Ron murmured. "In the meantime," Ron said, running a hand up and down his lover's chest, "how long do you think it will be until we can try that again?"

Ron found that, for an older wizard, Severus sometimes displayed powers of recuperation that seemed almost magical.

Both the emotional and physical adventures of the evening left the two wizards exhausted by the time they finally fell asleep, wrapped tight in each other's arms. It was therefore not surprising that Severus and Ron slept quite late the next morning. They were not disturbed in their slumbers. Healer Cotton had spread the news of their engagement and--as neither wizard needed much in the way of medical treatment--it was wisely decided that the newly betrothed couple be left in peace as much as possible. Dobby and his band of helpers did sneak into the room quite early in the morning and cast many a gleeful and pleased glance at the sleeping wizards as they quietly tidied the room. The rug and furniture they left as it was, but they vanished the spent but still floating candles and cleaned up the remains of the betrothal feast. In its place, they left a simple breakfast of bread, cheese, and fruit that could be enjoyed whenever the sleeping lovebirds saw fit to rise and greet the day. After a few last happy sighs and quiet giggles, the house-elves left as silently as they had arrived.

Eventually the two wizards bestirred themselves. After gentle kisses, soft assurances, and a much needed trip to the loo for both, Ron and Severus sat at their grand little table, nibbling at their breakfast, and discussing their future plans.

"When do you want to be married?" Severus asked simply.

"Harry and Hermione asked me that question and I'll tell you the same thing I told them. I *want* to be married right now, this instant. Let's call a preacher! However," Ron continued more somberly, "I know that idea is not sensible. I don't want us married in this box of a room. As soon as you are released, we can go home, and then we'll have a bit of work to make the place livable. I know that you will need to get brewing as quickly as possible, so I plan to take on what work is immediately needed myself."

"Ron," Severus interrupted, his tone serious, "I have no intention of leaving the grunt work all to you."

"I know you don't, love. But you are going to." At Severus' glare, Ron continued, his voice soft and persuasive, "It's only reasonable, love. You must work to ensure our income, so let me work to put our home to rights. I promise you, as soon as you get your work going smoothly, I'll take all the help I can get."

"I don't like it," grumbled Severus, "but you are correct. I'll need to get brewing quickly if we are to have enough income to get by. However, I fail to see what any of this has to do with when we get married."

"Well, once I get the house livable, we could get married at home. I know I won't get everything on the house sorted anytime soon, but if it's presentable enough to have visitors then all we would need is a tip for the preacher and the five Galleon licensing fee for the Ministry. Besides," Ron said with a grin, "I like the idea of us getting married

where we plan to live. I think it suits us. Or am I wrong? If you want a grand ceremony somewhere, we'll manage somehow--"

"That will not be necessary," Severus replied with an easy smile. "I think you know that, at the moment, crowds and grandness have little appeal. I would be far happier with a few friends and," here was heard an impressively melodramatic sigh, "your horde of a family than I would with some large gathering."

"Then married at home we shall be!" Ron declared, chuckling at his lover's attitude. "The only thing grand will be the red-headed masses of Weasleys in attendance!"

"I suppose I should endeavor to get used to it, as I will soon be one of those Weasleys. Without, of course, this ridiculous flaming head growth," Severus finished, ruffling a hand through Ron's hair.

"Severus," Ron began, his joking tone suddenly hesitant, "shall you keep your name or will you have mine?"

"We shall see," Severus said slyly, before abruptly changing the subject. "I am well aware that Healer Cotton's insistence on my visiting her office was a touch too felicitous not to have been carefully plotted. Even so, during our chat, she did give me some information which will have some bearing on our plans. It seems that, barring no unexpected setbacks, I will be ready for release by the end of the week."

"This week?" Ron asked, a surprised grin blooming on his face.

"Yes, brat. This week. If it suits you, I'll be able to see you slaving away on our cottage by Saturday."

Severus' teasing smirk did nothing to diminish Ron's joy at knowing that they would soon both be free of their tiny hospital room. It was true that Ron would look back on the time spent in room 309 fondly, for without such confinement it was certain that he would never have given his one-time Potions professor a second thought. But these fond musings would happen at a much later date. At the moment, Ron had only excitement and hopeful expectations at the thought of leaving the room where he had found both friendship and love. It was inevitable that Ron look happily towards their future together. Though Ron would never forget room 309 and all that took place there, when Saturday came, he gladly left the small room without a backward glance.

Both Harry and Hermione were present when the big day arrived. Properly dressed for the first time in an age--and finally having had their wands returned--Ron and Severus were anxious to make the journey to their humble cottage and get the work started. Impatient as the two wizards were, Harry and Hermione's attendance was absolutely necessary, for neither Ron nor Severus had been to the cottage they had already owned for nearly a month. They could not Apparate there, and Healer Cotton had cautioned them against Floo travel for at least another fortnight. So it came to pass that Harry took Ron's hand while Hermione grasped Severus' and the two wizards found themselves Apparated to their new home.

Neither wizard had the smallest inkling of what a great shock awaited them there.

## Flourish

### Chapter 14 of 15

What will it take to get the most unlikely of bedfellows together? A post HBP fic. Character Death Warning is for events which happen before the events of the story.

A/N:

Well I lied. This isn't quite the last chapter. There will be an epilogue after this. In any event, the fic is almost finished and I shall miss it. Who would have thought a little dare made by NSS and TarahFae would grow so big? Lol!

As always, big thanks to my beta, Vaughn, who wields commas with the greatest of ease and sorts out my canon opsies. Vaughn, you are the best!

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

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Ron stumbled as he and Harry appeared at the cottage. Thus his first look at his new home was straight down, as he tried to regain his footing. An errant thought wandered through his head about how the lawn didn't look quite as bad as it had in the photograph. Then Ron looked up, and all thoughts, errant or otherwise, completely left his head.

Hermione and Harry were supposed to have simply brought Ron and Severus to the house and then left them to get to work. Ron had rather expected that they secretly meant to stay and help, but he never expected the sight that met his eyes. A babble of voices met his ears and there, in front of the house, was a multitude of people. A veritable army of redheads was present. All of Ron's family were there, including Ginny and her husband, and there were also quite a few aunts, uncles, and cousins that Ron hadn't seen in some time. A small pack of red-headed children played on the newly improved lawn while being watched over by a dozen of Hogwarts house-elves. In addition to the impressive amount of Weasleys, Ron saw quite a few of the Hogwarts' staff. Minerva was there, as were Hagrid, Flitwick, Sprout, and Madam Hooch. Standing rather apart from the mass of Weasleys, but chatting with the professors, were a group of about twenty people that Ron couldn't at first identify at first. It wasn't until Ron recognized Zambini standing with his arm around an attractive and obviously pregnant young witch, that Ron realized that these must be some of Severus' Slytherin students. Slytherin house had been hit hard by the war, but there were many Slytherins who had not been Death Eaters, and some who had had a change of heart. Yes, there was Gregory Goyle, standing proudly next to his Hufflepuff boyfriend. It still rather rankled Ron that Goyle, one of the banes of his existence when a student, was now a respected member of wizarding society. Yet he couldn't really complain. Goyle might not be the brightest of wizards, but there was no doubt that he and his boyfriend had fought fiercely for the light in the last weeks of the war. Trying his best to put his childhood hatred of the man on hold, Ron was determined to give Goyle and the other Slytherins the respect that they deserved. It was good to see that his fiancé had people who cared for him, and Ron would treat them as civilly as he could manage for no grander reason than that.

No sooner had Ron gotten over his surprise at the crowd of people in front of the cottage before the throng parted to give Severus and Ron a better look at the same, and Ron was gobsmacked again. A new roof gleamed on the once decrepit cottage. The walls had been cleaned and repaired and had a new coat of white paint. The shutters had been replaced and painted a cheerful, kelly green, as had the new front door, which now hung straight on both of its hinges. What had been a rather dismal place in bad need of repair was now a cheerful cottage. Looking at Severus, Ron could see that he was as gobsmacked as Ron was. When he saw that his love's legs were trembling, Ron quickly went to him and put a steady arm around Severus' waist. Severus might now be cane free, but he was still a bit unsteady.

Gazing at Ron with wide eyes, Severus stammered, "What...how..."

"I'm just as clueless as you are, love," Ron said.

The throng before them burst again into sound as the witches and wizards reacted. There was much happy laughter and many shouts of "Surprise!"

Taking pity on their confusion, Hermione explained. "Harry and I started working on the house over a week ago. We were trying to get the cottage a bit more livable before you two moved in. Well, word got out about what we were doing, and before we knew it, we had more help than we could have ever dreamed of. It's amazing how much can be accomplished in so short a time when you have so many willing workers."

By the time Hermione finished speaking, the throng of well wishers had broken up and headed around the cottage towards the backyard. As Minerva came up to give Severus and Ron both a peck on the cheek, Hermione and Harry joined the mass exodus to the backyard.

"I know it's a bit of a shock," Minerva began, "and I know that neither of you is used to so many people being about. Don't fret about it. Everyone who worked on your place wants to see you, but they've been given strict orders not to crowd you. You can greet folks as you feel like it, or you can tell us all to bugger off when you get tired. We all know you've been in hospital; no one will be offended."

Ron, who was still trying to hold back a giggle at his rather straight-faced former head of house saying the phrase "bugger off," did his best to find his voice. "It's all right, Minerva. I think we'll be glad to see everyone as long as they don't crowd round us. Is that all right, Severus?"

"Yes," Severus said softly, "but I don't know--"

"Not to worry, love," Ron said, immediately understanding the problem. Ron had gotten so used to Severus talking that he had forgotten the silent man he had been early in their recuperation. "You don't have to talk much if you don't feel up to it. I think most folks will be happy just saying hello and seeing that you're doing well."

A look of relief flashed over Severus' features before he bent down to bury his face in Ron's neck for a moment. Holding his love tightly, Ron reminded himself that as much as Severus had improved, he was still healing. It would be up to Ron to keep an eye on him while everyone was here, and make sure Severus wasn't overwhelmed by the whole thing.

Waiting patiently while Ron comforted Severus, Minerva stood silently by, watching the couple fondly until Severus eventually raised his head and stood blinking at the sparkling cottage. "Would you like to see inside?" she asked softly.

Giving Minerva a quiet nod, Severus then let himself be led into the cottage by Minerva and Ron. Both Ron and Severus were a bit taken aback by the state of the interior. Not only had things been repaired and painted, but the whole cottage, top to bottom, had been furnished. None of the furnishings were exactly grand, but from the sofa and chairs in the living room to the big bed in the bedroom upstairs the cottage was filled with serviceable and attractive furniture. In addition to the furniture, there were even a few tapestries hanging on the walls and quite a good amount of books in the many bookcases.

"Minerva," Ron began hesitantly, "this is too much. I know that the repairs were mostly hard work, but all of this must have cost a fortune! How shall we ever--"

"Not another word, Ronald Weasley!" Minerva interrupted firmly. "No one here wants to hear one word about repayment, so don't start. At any rate, it isn't nearly as bad as you fear." Looking at Severus, she continued. "Hagrid and your Slytherins got the house into shape, then Harry, Hermione, and I worked on the furnishings. Many of these pieces came from Spinner's End and the Burrow, and some were things that we had in storage at Hogwarts that hadn't been used in decades. Hermione and I did a lot of transfiguring to make things look more like a home and less like a place full of castoffs, but most everything here was freely donated. I confess that I did buy that tapestry of Merlin and Nimue, but you can consider that a wedding present."

Next she showed them the kitchen, complete with a fully stocked walk-in pantry. This time it was Severus who fussed.

"Now Minerva," he began, "you can't tell me that all of this was transfigured. You simply must let Ron and I repay some of the expense."

"Piffle," Minerva said dryly. "I'd like to see you try to give the Hogwarts house-elves money. If you didn't want a fully stocked larder, then you shouldn't have gone out of your way to save them on the battlefield." Chuckling, she continued. "There's some odd magic in that room as well, that Filius and I haven't been able to identify. I suspect that you and Ron won't have to worry about going hungry for some time, if ever."

"But where do they get it all?" Ron asked, his confusion apparent in his tone.

"I have no idea, I'm sure," Minerva replied with another chuckle. "They may be bound to wizards, but the ways in which house-elves operate have never been much understood. I suspect that at least some of it came from Hogwarts. If it did, there's no sense in worrying over it. It makes the house-elves happy, and that's good enough for me. We always have more than we need at the school, so I can assure you that the students won't go hungry on your account." Turning to Ron, she said, "I'd like to show Severus the basement. Why don't you go out back and take a look at the barn. There's been a veritable army of Weasleys working on it all week. I expect that they are very impatient to show it to you."

"Will you be ok?" Ron asked Severus.

"I am not an invalid," Severus snapped. Then his voice softened as he continued, "I shall be fine. Go see your family."

A door in the kitchen led to the backyard. With a quick kiss and a cheeky grin, Ron rushed out the door, looking over his shoulder to say, "They'll soon be your family too!"

"Don't remind me!" Severus retorted as he gave an exaggerated fake shudder.

"Now, Severus," Minerva said with a smile, "how would you like to see your new potions lab?"

Eyes widening, Severus could only nod in reply. Taking his hand, Minerva led Severus to the stairs and down into the basement. With a word, the torches lit to reveal a large and tidy work space. There were several worktables in the middle of the room. One entire wall had been converted into a bookcase and Severus saw that all of his potions books from Spinner's End were there, as well as the books he had been forced to abandon at Hogwarts. Not only were his Hogwarts books there, but arranged in the shelves that lined another wall were all of his personal implements.

Looking at his things in undisguised wonder, Severus couldn't resist letting his fingers play over his precious books as he hesitantly said, "I had thought you would have gotten rid of my things."

Crossing to him, Minerva put a warm hand on his shoulder as she said, "I was furious when you...left. Furious and confused and heartbroken. But even so, I couldn't bring myself to destroy your things. I had the house-elves pack them up and put them out of my sight."

"I wouldn't have blamed you if you had burned them on the lawn. I'm sorry, Minerva," Severus continued, looking down at the older witch with sad eyes, "I'm so sorry that I couldn't tell you."

"Hush, Severus." Minerva drew the tall man into a firm hug. "It was very hard at the time--I grant you that...but I do understand."

Embarrassed, Severus drew away from Minerva and busied himself looking at the cabinets that lined the third wall. Striding towards them, he idly opened one, thinking to find empty shelves. When he found the cabinets already stocked with basic potion ingredients, he turned to Minerva, some of the old fire in his eyes.

"You can explain away the furniture, and the food, but this time you have gone too far! I can't accept this, Minerva. I won't have any of you spending so much money on us."

"I assure you that we didn't." When Severus opened his mouth to argue, she shushed him with a wave of her hand. "Listen to me Severus. Albus had quite a bit of money

when he died." At this statement, Severus went pale and the trembling returned to his legs. Minerva put a firm arm around his waist and guided him to one of the benches that flanked the work tables. When they were seated, she kept her arm wrapped tight around his waist as she continued. "He had many small, personal bequests, but most of his money went into a fund to help those wizards and witches who had been displaced during the war. Albus made one particular request that you were to have anything you needed to rebuild your life. He loved you so very much, Severus."

At this, Severus hung his head. Though he was silent in his grief, Minerva knew he was weeping. Pulling his resisting body firmly into her arms, Minerva held him tightly, rocking him gently. "It's all right, child," she said, her voice low and gruff with emotion. "I know you are still grieving. We all miss him very much. But it wasn't your fault, dear. I know that you loved him, and he loved you just as dearly."

Minerva continued to hold him, speaking to him gently, until Severus at last pulled himself together. Then she let him explore his new lab for a bit before suggesting they go take a look outside.

"There's still one more surprise waiting for you," she said, with a mischievous grin.

"There's more?" Severus asked incredulously.

"Oh, yes. Come," she said, holding out a hand to him, "come let me show you."

It was but a moment's effort to climb the stairs and go out the kitchen door. When Severus walked out onto the back porch, he caught sight of a large, shining object and stopped abruptly, gazing at the sight. There on the back lawn, just to the left of the path that wound its way back to the barn, was a new greenhouse. Its glass sides gleamed in the sunlight and, despite the slight misting of water vapor on the windows, it was easy to see that the greenhouse was already full of plants.

Taking pity on Severus' shock, Minerva explained how the greenhouse had come to be there. "Filius made the framework and I transfigured the glass myself. Then Filius put the necessary charms on the glass. Albus' fund paid for the pots and such, a minimal expense, I assure you. The plants are a gift from Pomona, with a lot of help from Neville Longbottom. They went through the Hogwarts greenhouses and got cuttings from every plant that they thought a potions maker might have a use for."

"Some of those plants are quite rare," Severus muttered, still staring at the greenhouse.

"Yes, and you have a bit from all of them," Minerva said proudly. "Neville couldn't be here today, but he's compiling a notebook of all your Hogwarts plants and how to take care of them. He asked me to tell you that he'd stop in soon and show you around."

"How shall I ever thank him?"

"Simple. Be nice to him," Minerva said simply.

"I think I can manage that."

Seeing that Severus was growing tired, Minerva led Severus to a sturdy stone bench under one of the lawns many oak trees. Severus continued to stare at the glittering greenhouse for a time, then he slowly dragged his eyes off of it to take in the rest of the view. The grounds had been tidied, the lawn trimmed. Towards the back of the property, the newly refurbished barn gleamed golden in the soft, afternoon light. Closer to the house, tables had been set up with a 'welcome home' feast. Gryffindors, Slytherins, Weasleys, and professors strolled around the grounds, chatting and admiring their handiwork. Children played tag in the grass while the house-elves watched them with obvious affection. All in all, it was a very pretty sight. It wasn't the back lawn of a shabby cottage. It was the backyard of a beloved home. It was a lot for a man who had been long confined to a small hospital room to take in, and Severus had a hard time believing that this wondrous place belonged to him and Ron. It was overwhelming, and Severus was content to quietly sit on the bench with Minerva until Ron came bounding up the path from the barn, breathless with news.

"Severus, you won't believe it!" Ron exclaimed as he collapsed to sit at Severus' feet. "The barn is amazing! Hagrid supervised, and my family fixed it up. It's got pens and places for all the animals I could ever want. It's even got some animals already. The twins...Severus, they got me a pair of Savannah cats! I told them it was too much, but they said it was a good investment, and if I give them each the pick of the first litter, they'd call it even! Can you believe it?"

"Today," Severus said, looking fondly down at the overexcited young wizard sitting at his feet, "I think I could believe in anything. Even the Crumple-Horned Snorkack."

Grinning up at him, Ron clasped both of Severus hands tightly and said, "Could you believe that Harry and Hermione have a preacher here, just in case we decide to get married today?"

"Do you wish to be married today?" Severus said, staring at Ron with a strange intensity.

"Yes, if you wish it as well."

Severus' Adams apple bobbed as he gulped audibly. "That's settled then. It looks like we are getting married."

Ron's grin rivaled the gleam of the new greenhouse.

## Epilogue

*Chapter 15 of 15*

What will it take to get the most unlikely of bedfellows together? A post HBP fic. Character Death Warning is for events which happen before the events of the story.

A/N: Not much to say except that I'm sad to see this fic end. Severus and Ron are an odd pairing to be sure, but I've grown so attached to them. Big, big thanks to all the readers who have stuck with this little fic, through thick, and thin, and writer's block. Your reviews have meant so very much to me and they've certainly helped me stick to this fic until the bitter end.

As always, huge, whopping, ginormous thanks to my charming beta, Vaughn. Not only is she the coolest beta ever, she always has kind words for me, and keeps me from thinking everything I write is crap. I don't know what I'd do without her!

Disclaimer: They are not mine; I only take them out to play.

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And so it came to pass that on a lovely, sunny afternoon, Severus and Ron were indeed married. On the back lawn of their new home, amidst the oak trees, they stood before a preacher and recited the brief and formally worded vows that would bind them together for as long as they both shall live. Each of them had endured a short, private meeting with the preacher before the vows, but it wasn't until the grey bearded man said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you Mr. and Mr. Weasley," that Ron realized Severus had decided to take the Weasley name. This time the brightness of Ron's smile far outshone the sparkle of the new green house. Indeed, it rivaled the very sun.

Severus never bothered to explain the reasons for his choice. Any attempt to get him to speak of it was impatiently waved off. Most folks assumed that since Severus had never much cared for his father, he likewise wasn't especially fond of his sire's name. Minerva had a different theory. Having seen Ron's smile--and Severus' reaction to it--she had decided that Severus made his choice for a no more complicated reason than the fact that he knew very well how much it would please his new husband. Minerva was probably correct.

The feast which had been laid out on the lawn was then eaten and enjoyed. It did double duty as both a welcome feast and a wedding supper. Much champagne was drunk by all and sundry and the last of the revelers did not leave until late in the night. Despite the fact that there were no more eyes left to spy, Severus still blushed when Ron lifted him into his arms and carried his 'bride' over the threshold in the traditional manner.

At last upstairs, there was a brief tussle as each wizard tried to thrust the pot of lubricant into the other's hands. The argument was only ended when Severus reminded Ron forcefully that he was the 'bride' and therefore demanded the traditional rights and privileges associated with such. The next morning, Severus let Ron play 'bride' and all was happily even.

All was well with the couple as the months began to pass. Free from their forced captivity, the relationship which had begun in a tiny hospital room now bloomed and thrived. Sure, there was the occasional argument. Married or not, Severus was still Severus, after all. But in the true manner of doting Weasley husbands everywhere, Ron learned to say "yes, dear" as he smiled fondly at his mate. Ron did argue with his husband on occasion, but it was more in the interest of having make-up sex than any real desire to prove a point.

Severus' potions business was a hit from the get go. The wizarding world in general didn't like Severus anymore than they ever had, but this didn't seem to have an impact on the fact that he was a brilliant potions brewer. The general public gossiped about him viciously, but they bought his potions even so. At times, Ron rather thought that Severus' infamous reputation did much to help the business along. Any publicity is often good publicity in such matters.

Ron's business ventures grew more slowly, but they grew steadily. By the end of the first year, Ron was already supplying many familiar shops with the fast breeding rats and toads. The sales from his first litter of Savannah cats gave him the capital to invest in some breeding pairs of owls, cats, and a few more exotics—for some reason Iguanas had become all the rage among school age children—and it was apparent that within a year or two, Ron's business would be very successful indeed.

Having little to do with their money—they did have a lovely cottage and a self-replenishing pantry, after all—Severus and Ron found other things to do with their rapidly growing wealth. Certainly they both spent money on trinkets and such--indeed, Severus' library would soon rival that of Hogwarts—they also got in the habit of giving extremely lavish Christmas gifts to those friends and family who had done so much to make their homecoming a grand affair. Also, they made a yearly donation to Albus' Displaced Wizard Fund. The fund that had started as a means to help people after the war soon grew to be a permanent thing. It became almost an urban legend, as wizards and witches began to firmly believe that donating to it was a source of good luck. Wizards are a superstitious people. The fund was likely to go on doing its good work indefinitely.

There came a time in the second year of their marriage when Ron realized that there was one more thing that Severus needed to do before he was truly recovered. Though Severus complained bitterly, and many arguments ended with one or the other of them sleeping on the downstairs sofa, Ron would not back down on this point. Eventually Severus agreed to do as Ron wished, if only to get him to shut up about the matter. So it came to pass that Ron and Severus went to Hogwarts and found themselves facing the gargoyles that guarded Minerva's office.

Expecting them, Minerva greeted them at the door and led them up and into her office. A sofa had been placed facing one wall, and Albus' portrait had been moved to hang before it at an easy level for conversation. Ensnared on the sofa between Minerva and Ron, Severus refused to speak or to even look at the portrait. As soon as Albus began speaking to him, Severus buried his face in Ron's neck and didn't come up for air until he and Ron took their leave. He may not have spoken to Albus, but he listened.

The trip to Minerva's office became a weekly visit. In time, Severus lifted his head from Ron's neck to at least look at the portrait of his friend. Eventually, he managed a word or two. Years later, it was a common sight to see Severus Weasley stalking around the office in his old manner as he participated in a heated discussion with the portrait of the former headmaster.

And so, with patience and time, Severus was at last able to put the last of his ghosts behind him and throw himself wholeheartedly into his new life. It was a good life, full of things he had never before been used to, many friends, an affectionate extended family, a wonderful home, and love. Throughout the whole, Ron stayed firmly by his side, not only a part of his family, but a part of his very soul.

Thus ends the saga of the most unlikely bedfellows that ever shall be.