

The Winner Takes It All

by *HogwartsHoney*

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Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: The characters are not mine. We all know that.

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"The winner takes it all

The loser has to fall" - ABBA

Damn Lupin and the fucking rules. Always so *careful*, always trying to please everybody instead of pleasing himself.

Ah, well, that's not strictly true now, is it? He certainly has pleased himself, hasn't he, but it's not with you.

Not any more.

It wasn't always that way, though. It used to be that he'd both please and pleasure himself on you, with you, *for* you... and you'd let him because it pleased you, although you never did admit it to him, barely even to yourself. Yes, your pride certainly got in the way of that. Not bad enough that you're a Slytherin, but you're a stubborn one at that. You can't even say that you tried, not really, because you simply assumed that things would go on the way they were. It was a mutually satisfactory agreement with no entanglements, no commitments and no concerns.

Not easy. That's you. Definitely not easy to live with, to be with, to get along with, and impossible to love, but the sex was beyond good. The connection between you defied description or even understanding, but it was there - strong, powerful, almost a solid thing. You had thought that it would be enough, and perhaps it would have been in the absence of anything else.

Unfortunately for you, something else came along. *Someone* else. The change wasn't noticeable at first, although you were suspicious, perhaps unreasonably so. Maybe you pushed the thought into his head, accusing him the way you did, but you felt threatened, even though you didn't/wouldn't/*still* can't admit it, not even to yourself. Why you doubted him, you don't even know. Perhaps it was a morbid fascination to prove yourself right, a way to see that your past would become your future and that he, like everyone else, would leave you because you were/are acerbic, difficult, unloving, uncaring, foul tempered, intolerant, unbendable, insufferable.

Still, he might have stayed with you if you hadn't pushed him away.

But push you did, and mercilessly so, until all that was left was you and the empty house you once shared. *Good*, you thought, *don't need him. Better off alone that's how we all end up anyway, isn't it? Alone*. Only, the loneliness is different now, isn't it? Different from the way it used to be, before you knew him. *Really* knew him. Even though

you were alone before, and lonely, it was more of a general loneliness rather than the pervasive, specific loneliness that you feel now. You know what you're missing now, the way his skin feels on yours, his tongue, slick and wet against yours, his body wrapped around yours, his cock pushing inside you, muscles clenching around you, warm breath on your neck, arms holding you to his chest, the gently soothing sound of his heartbeats...

You cursed him and his gentle ways and easy smile, the same way you curse him now as those eyes meet yours, and you nastily hope that for one moment he can feel the vitriol that brews inside you, the slow steady boil that seeps into your bones, your skin, your self... but the gentleness is still there. How can it be? How can he find the strength to still be pleasant, what with all that's happened to him, everything that's been done to him, all the losses he's endured? Your narrowed eyes drink in the sight of him because you can't help yourself, and you itemize the differences, trying to make it clinical, not personal. He's a bit older, much like yourself, and you can't help but notice that his clothes aren't the same as before either. Time has been good to him, and despite yourself, your eyes follow his every move. You notice that *he* is never far away either, and you catalogue every look that passes between them, every casual touch, every brush of shoulders and every smile. That smile that used to be yours, only yours, and you try to lock down on those feelings as the ball of molten lead that's been in your gut ever since you saw him tonight twists and turns more, roiling along in the vitriol, combining into a noxious concoction that does nothing but burn, burn, burn.

He is everything you're not. Young, handsome, well built, with flaming hair and skin freckled by the sun, he exudes health as well as a wild and reckless energy. Risky, you've always thought, getting involved with that one could only be risky when all he wants is a quick fuck and a good time. You had dismissed the upstart out of hand when he'd thrown his hat into the ring; you hadn't bothered with it at first, but when you DID realize that he might just be serious, you refused to throw your own hat into the ring after all, he was just a child yet you were surprised when he stepped up, issued a challenge and took away what was yours.

Only... no-one *knew* he was yours.

Only you knew.

Only you.

But now he is happy; you can see it on his face, can't you? Yes, just look hard enough, push past your own unhappiness and you can see it. He is content, satisfied and peaceful with *him*. *He* is full of light and life whereas you are dark and surly, and he shouldn't be with darkness, not anymore. You ask yourself but doesn't light *need* darkness in order for it to exist? and although you know the answer, your breath still catches when you realize he's looking at you, measuring you, and you know the way his mind works... or at least, you used to. A quick word to *him*, significant looks are exchanged and now he's walking towards you with the smooth, controlled gait of the animal within the man, and you shiver, unwillingly, uncomfortably, unexpectedly. You crush the vestiges of any emotions that try to surface and push them mercilessly down beneath the layers, deep inside where they cannot hope to betray you, for betray you they will if given the slightest chance.

You glance once more past the approaching man to where *he* stands amidst a group of his friends and family. Blue eyes fix you in their sights, and you feel the weight of it as he tries to threaten even from that distance. You lick your lips, tasting the hexes that dance and flirt at the tip of your tongue, and even though it is improper to cast curses in a social setting such as this, in the back of your mind and the front of your soul, they yearn to find their mark. A few boils, a rash or two, perhaps an uncomfortable few days in close proximity to a toilet... surely the chance to lighten your burden a little is worth the repercussions? But then your view is obscured as a man stands before you, golden and patient like the rising sun, and you feel the heat of his body, almost enough to warm your icy heart. But the ice is what keeps you from dying, even as it keeps you from living, and the suspended existence between what is and what could have been has become bearable. *Had* become bearable, until they arrived, and you saw again what was lost.

You haven't seen him either of them really since that day almost three years ago. You were beside yourself with rage and jealousy and had hatefully insisted that he... how did you put it? "*Go ride your flaming dragon tamer.*" Yes, those were your exact words, and a moment later they had disappeared before anything further could be said. There was no argument, only anger, and with no outlet easily at hand you had destroyed every last bottle in your cupboard. More furious, you had cut yourself repeatedly with the broken shards of glass, only to be found swearing profusely by an alarmed Poppy Pomfrey several hours later. You had paid for that outburst in more ways than one, the loss of your own blood and the valuable ingredients being just the beginning. You swore an oath that night that you would never allow him to affect you again, never like that. He had made his decision and followed the rules. Nothing more needed to be said, but now, as he smiles that familiar polite smile, despite your best attempts, your heart constricts, and you feel the change in its tempo. The rush of adrenaline tears through your entire body, heating and cooling you in turn, and everything around you seems to swell for a moment, somehow becoming bigger, more immediate yet still untouchable... but then everything returns to normal, except for the warm golden-brown eyes that hold you firmly in their gaze.

He parts his lips to speak, and you remember, powerfully, the way his mouth tastes. It hits you with the force of a physical blow, yet neither of you has moved. There is only the sound of your breathing loud in your own ears as your eyes flicker to his lips you know they do and you cannot stop it and they are just as you remembered them. Slightly dry, but not chapped, thin, but not too thin, gently pink, not brown like the rest of him. You feel your face flush as the picture of those very lips wrapped around your cock when he would take you deep into his mouth and wrench your orgasm from you as you roared your release. The blood rushes to your groin as you remember the tip of his cock, glistening an angry red, pulsing slightly with every beat of his heart as you tasted him, licked him, swallowed him as though you couldn't ever get enough...

He's speaking now, you're sure of it, and you pull your mind back to the present as you try to concentrate on what he's saying. Inane greetings and polite enquiries about your health and the state of your profession, and you answer stiffly because you must, but you don't even know what you say as your mind fixates on his mouth and those moving lips that part to show an occasional flash of teeth. Unreasonably, you want to know if he's happy. You don't know *why*, but you ask, even as you try to stop the words as they flow from your own lips. He smiles, that gentle, patient smile, and his serene face nods as he answers in the affirmative, and you realize that all you can do is hold on to the scene that is before you right now, because the moment he turns off his smile, he will turn off the warmth, and your heart will return to the ice in which it resides. It's better this way; he is better off this way, and you are nothing but a selfish bastard. You want to hope for... something, but daring to hope is a cruel indulgence, and you can't afford indulgences now.

Despite that, you need to tell him, need to let him know, just one thing, and you wonder whether you're seeking absolution. Quite possibly you are, but you can't be sure, and maybe it doesn't matter. You see the words in your mind and understand their necessity, but your stomach clenches at the mere *thought* of the admission, and you can't seem to get your mouth to form around the words.

He makes some more idle chitchat, and his body language shows that he's preparing to leave. You feel a certain tension, a gathering of some sort, and it isn't pleasant rather it makes you anxious but you keep your face impassive. He extends his hand in a gesture of farewell, and you are peripherally aware of the stares of others as their attention is centred on your exchange. His hand is close, barely a foot away, and you can see every contour of his palm, every callus, and your eyes find the small, brown line on the third finger of his hand. You remember that you and he always shook with left hands, never the right. It had started as a gesture of conditional acceptance and then had merely become habit; shaking left hands would keep your right hand free your wand hand. Your eyes fixate on the line, and a memory pushes through your consciousness, a scene of an early morning when he lay asleep in your arms and you first felt the painful pangs in your chest. You were alarmed that morning, partly because of the intensity of the pain, and partly because you knew the cause. You remember the way he murmured in his sleep as you ran the tip of your wand carefully around the base of his ring finger and whispered the spell under your breath. A thin, brown line followed the path of the wand and remained, forming a complete circle, and you knew in spite of yourself what you had just done.

You had marked him.

You wanted him.

And you would still *have* him if it weren't for the. Fucking. Rules.

The moment has stretched far too long, so you reach out to shake his hand, trying your best to appear nonchalant and undisturbed, but although the action is swift, you feel first the *push* and then the *pull* of magic, the same as always. You are surprised that it still happens after so long, but you fight to stay impassive, whereas he, ever the Gryffindor, is unable to keep anything hidden, and you see his eyes widen. You sense the change in his breathing, and you realize that he understands, despite everything.

He *knows*. Perhaps he's always known?

Perhaps you both have.

You study the ground beneath his feet as you force yourself to articulate the thought that has burned like a slow ember for so many years, driven by the knowledge that this may well be your only chance.

"I'm... s-sorry."

The almost rasping sound of your voice is foreign to your own ears, the words too harsh, you think, too harsh to properly convey their meaning, but you have said them. You shake with the effort that the admission has required, and your eyes finally meet his, the ever-present golden light now nearly incandescent as he cocks his head slightly to the side and wordlessly asks the question.

What about the rules?

The anger swells in you again, but it's different this time...

>>>>>>>>>

Damn Severus and his rules.

Remus feels the weight of the dark man's stare the moment he and Charlie enter the hall. He knows it is a mistake to come back to Hogwarts, but the reunion sounded like a good idea, and Charlie did have the time off from work. Besides, how often did the remaining members of the Order all get together?

Remus had dressed in silence as Charlie spoke with his Manager via the Floo. He longed to see Harry and Ron and knew that they were both enjoying their lives post-Voldemort. They had still continued with their Auror training even though everyone joked that both of them were too recognisable to be Aurors and that after defeating Voldemort, it was doubtful whether anybody would ever pick a fight with either of them. Hermione was able to get a couple days off work at the International Wizarding Foundation, and even Mad-Eye Moody was expected to surface.

Of course, Remus suspected that Severus would be there, probably coerced, cajoled and brow-beaten into attending by both Minerva and Albus' portrait. Remus remembered enough of their combined persuasive talents to be fairly assured that Severus would not only be there, but he would be in a right foul mood.

Charming.

The last time that Remus had seen Severus, he'd been so wound up that when he and Charlie came to the end of their trans-national Apparation, he had been sick on the ground, retching and vomiting for what had felt like days. Gentle blue eyes had searched his as the beautiful features creased briefly in worry.

"Remus," he had said, his voice unsteady. "Did I do the right thing? You *do* want to be with me, don't you?"

Remus had closed his eyes then partly from another wave of nausea and partly because he simply couldn't bring himself to look into the trusting face in front of him. He felt Charlie's hand on his shoulder, comforting and solid, and he had answered "Yes" even as his heart had said "No".

Charlie was exciting, full of fire and energy like his hair and the dangerous beasts he rode, and they had melded well together, Remus learning about Romania and the history of dragons as well as quite a number of Dark Creatures in the forests surrounding the Colony. Their days were often spent apart, but their nights were filled with friends. Many nights they would gather by the bonfire in the centre of the largest building and trade dragon stories or their school days and even their hopes for the future. Remus had become close with all of the dragoners and had even been persuaded to touch a sleeping dragon once, all the while clutching tightly to Charlie's hand. He had been crowned 'Honorary Dragoner' that night amid gales of laughter and too much drink. The laughter was easy with Charlie, and Remus laughed often.

He did want Charlie, but he wanted Severus more. He didn't often laugh with Severus, not like that, but the connection he felt to the dark, dour Potions master was something that he felt at an instinctual level. He swore often with Severus though, long and eloquently in the darkness of the night when the Slytherin would repeatedly take him to the very edge of excruciating pleasure and then expertly orchestrate his release. There had been many mornings when Remus had woken, and just the knowledge that someone else was breathing next to him, willing to be with *him*, a werewolf, was wonderful. That the person in question was Severus Snape was nothing short of a miracle.

Remus no longer believes in miracles. In fact, he's not sure he ever did.

Severus' eyes are as hard and as black as he remembers them, and Remus pauses, just for a moment, mentally steeling himself to absorb the expected anger. He meets and keeps the gaze now, and despite himself, he smiles. *Damn, he still looks so threatening* but Remus knows the man behind the sneer, or at least, he did. Severus is still pale and thin, shrouded in the midnight robes that only ever added to his mystique, and as he scans the stiff pose of the man in black, he remembers his rigidity, both in his personal beliefs and his physical self.

Staunch. That's Severus, unswerving in his beliefs and in his word. That's what made the rules so right, at first. They were basic and easily understood. Neither of them thought that there would be any need to append to them or even to change the terms.

They were the rules.

The rules never took emotion into consideration, and that's probably what made them so simple. Months later, when emotions had gradually become part of their equation, the rules didn't need to be changed because they had never really talked about their feelings. Later still, when emotions ran high and the threat of a usurper stood in the face of the rules, well, then there had been no recourse.

The optimist in Remus had thought that Severus would step up when Charlie made his intentions clear and that, rules be damned, he would fight for him. For *them*. The gaping sense of failure and betrayal he had felt that night had slapped him uncomfortably into reality, and now, as he finally meets Severus' eyes, he knows that Charlie at least had cared enough to do battle. Had given a damn enough to fight for what he wanted.

What he wanted. The thought finally strings itself out through Remus' mind, and it's the first time in almost three years that he's allowed himself to objectively analyze the events of that night. He had been under the impression that Severus wanted what he wanted, to be together, loving and sometimes almost hating each other, but *together*. Now, he isn't so sure, and he needs to put the matter to rest once and for all.

He feels Charlie's protective warmth beside him, his body language speaking volumes without him having to utter a word. The young Gryffindor is brave, but even he is uncomfortable under the glowering scrutiny of the head of Slytherin house. Remus turns, whispering words of encouragement and consolation to the handsome face that is little more than one big scowl, then strides towards the dark man in the corner. He can feel the tension emanating from Severus in almost palpable black waves, and Remus acknowledges that he is more than a little uptight himself.

"*Why does it matter?*" he asks himself. "*What do you have to gain by this?*"

But he knows his own answers the moment he asks them.

Resolution. A decision has been made, and he needs a proper ending in order to proceed with any new beginning.

Remus notices that Severus looks past him, the dark eyes focused on the other side of the room, and he doesn't have to look behind him to know that there is probably a battle of wills going on between the Slytherin and the Gryffindor. Charlie has always been so protective of Remus from the very first day he'd taken him away from Severus' wrath, but the very fact that, three years later, Charlie is still uncomfortable being in the same room with Severus speaks volumes. The young dragon tamer might be rash and sometimes brazen, but he's no fool. Despite Remus' best efforts, Charlie still feels that he is second best.

Remus greets Severus warmly, smiling in spite of himself at the obvious ire displayed before him. He continues with small talk, enquiring after Severus' health and the state of Hogwarts, but he can see that the man isn't listening to him.

"Are you happy?"

The question is unexpected, and it surprises Remus, more because of Severus' tone than the words themselves. It is softly spoken, barely more than a whisper, but with the strained quality of a man uncomfortable with the asking, and Remus knows how hard it must be for him to ask, for him to give so much of himself to step out of his bounds, if even only fleetingly. Remus smiles again, wider, understanding the question for what it is so much more than the mere words and he nods because right in this moment, here and now, he *is* happy, although he knows that Severus doesn't mean it that way. He isn't *un*happy with Charlie, but happiness is a fickle mistress, and he doesn't know whether he can really pinpoint precisely what it entails anymore.

Remus shrugs mentally and chats on for a few more minutes, filling Severus in on the difficulties with obtaining acceptable Wolfsbane in Romania and the inroads he's made with the werewolf population there. Severus seems distracted, and Remus realizes that he has probably overstayed his welcome, but his heart falls as he prepares to leave. He holds out his hand in a final gesture of farewell, not realising until it is too late that his left hand is extended towards Severus a handshake of days past, of lives past. He notices that Severus merely stares at his hand for quite some time, and he begins to wonder whether the memories of the distrust and caution will serve to hurt the dark man. Remus debates whether or not to simply turn and leave, thereby avoiding any further embarrassment on both their parts, but then he realizes that Severus' gaze seemed to be focused on one thing.

Severus reaches out his hand, clasping Remus', and a surge of magic flows between them, as powerful and as compelling as it had always been. The truth of the magic surprises Remus, and his heart beats loudly in his chest as he searches Severus' eyes for an answer. What he receives is so much more than that.

"I'm... s-sorry."

Remus tries desperately to remember a single moment in his entire life when Severus Snape had apologised for anything, but he comes up empty. Their hands are still clasped together, and Remus can feel the tremors coursing through the body of the man in front of him. He wonders, briefly, whether this moment marks a true ending or a new beginning. What about the rules?

Remus dares to hope as he searches Severus' face again, more carefully this time, for any hint of an answer to the question that has burned his memories for more than three years. He sees anger reflected in the harsh, angular lines of the pale face, and he briefly wonders why.

"Fuck the rules, Lupin."

Remus' heart soars, and he nods emphatically, with barely a thought to the redhead at the other end of the room, and as he closes his eyes and savours the incredible rightness of the moment, he knows that his decision is irrevocably made.

"Yes. Fuck the rules."

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