

Summary: Who takes care of Severus after a particularly nasty bout with Voldemort?

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Author's Notes:

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Severus

Crucio.

Pain . . . anguish . . . suffering . . . a stabbing fire that burned all the way inside.

A splitting headache that I was rather hoping would just put me out and keep me there.

No such luck, I found when the agony moved harshly through my legs, twisting them into positions that they shouldn't have been able to assume.

The panting was annoying me until I realized that it was coming from my mouth. It beat the screams that were about to break free.

Ribs finally broke and stabbed my lungs like so many sharp knives.

And there was no more breath, not even for screaming as I fell into the dark.

Dumbledore

Severus was late. More than late he was overdue and the glass ball that held a drop of his blood had turned dark and cloudy. I tried to be optimistic and thankful that it hadn't turned black but good cheer came hard to me in these horrible days. Pinching the bridge of my nose, I willed away the headache that threatened to overwhelm me.

"Where are you, Severus?" I asked the fire, almost glad that it couldn't answer me back.

A fluttering at the window aroused me and I hastened to open it, hoping that Severus had managed to get off an owl to me. But instead of an owl, a tiny green and purple Greeley wren chirped up at me and I blinked in surprise. "Do you have a message for me?"

The beak opened wide and spewed forth a pellet of green gauze. Looking down at it as if wondering how it got there, it flicked its tail and flew back to the Forbidden Forest. Summoning my wand, I gently levitated the message to my desk and unwound it carefully.

'Snape hurt - hippogriff lair - hurry'

The message was from Hagrid, the only mortal who wandered in and out of the Forest with impunity. I made sure that I had a full medical kit, including some of the potions that Severus brewed so carefully. Leaving the castle in Minerva's capable hands, I ventured into the Forest. The wren met me within a few feet of the edge of the Forest and flew ahead of me, her cheerful whistle guiding me through the dark undergrowth.

Bushes and grasses parted before me then closed back up again behind. How I was ever going to get out of here again, I hadn't the slightest idea. But my dear Severus needed me and I took a firm hold of my imagination, ignoring the odd illusions that kept pace with me. Fairies, naiads and dryads all beckoned to me with sensuous allure. I kept my eyes straight ahead and hurried as quickly as my 150 year old body could move.

Although, I might just remember one or two of the lovelies in the privacy of my own bed. I may be old but I'm not dead yet. Unlike poor Severus if I didn't get to him in time. I'd gotten rather good at patching him up even though I wish I didn't have to. Perhaps we were close to the final battle with old Tom Riddle. I prayed fervently that it was so. I didn't know how much more my Potions Master could take and still survive.

I came out of the trees into a glade of surpassing beauty. One of the hippogriffs stood waiting for me and I bowed to the silvery creature. She craned her head in return and the wren whistled at us both before flying off. She turned and pawed the ground three times before descending into the hidden opening that appeared. Taking a deep breath, I followed her.

A faint light appeared at the end of a seemingly non-ending tunnel. She might be able to see in the dark but I had no such ability. Luckily, a slight spell on the end of my wand enabled to keep up with her. The light grew brighter and we entered a cave filled with the rustling of a hundred life forms. I blinked, or perhaps a family of three hippogriffs.

"Headmaster, he's 'ere." Hagrid's voice came from behind the hippogriffs and his face was somber. When I approached the nest, I could see why. Severus lay as if dead, blood everywhere and bones sticking out of places where they had no business being. "He's right bad, Sir."

"He is indeed, Hagrid. We need some hot water. Is there a fire handy?" I was muttering spells under my breath and surrounding him with a levitation spell to keep weight off his shattered body.

"I'll see to it." The half-giant moved slowly away and I could see that he'd been very carefully holding Severus above the nesting materials, which seemed to be mud and twigs.

We'd need something better than that once we got him put back together. I worked very hard for almost an hour before the seeking spell said everything was in its proper place. I'd sent Severus' mind very deep to avoid the pain that was inevitable. It was unfortunate but his body had been shattered by pain and it was in pain remade. He was going to take a long time healing.

Sitting down with a bit of a thump on the mattress that I'd made from the previous bed, I took a deep breath and accepted the cup of tea that Hagrid had silently made for me. He sat beside me on the stone floor and watched Severus breathing. That was about all he'd be doing for the next few days and I tried to think where he would best heal. The castle was out of the question, too many eyes. St. Mungo's was also right out.

"He can stay with me here in the forest." Hagrid's deep voice was barely a whisper. "I'd look after 'im."

I was startled by the offer. I hadn't realized they were friends. "Thank you, Hagrid but I'm afraid that this cave is not the place that I'd choose for a speedy recovery."

"Not 'ere but in my summer cottage by the lake. It's real quiet like but you can visit by boat. It's kind of in the Forest but not, if you catch my drift." He looked earnestly at me. "I'd follow your directions and take real good care of him."

I thought long and hard but couldn't come up with anything else. "It will mean a lot of work for you, Hagrid. Once he wakes up, he's going to be a very bad patient."

The half-giant smiled at me. "I know he'll be a real handful, Headmaster. But I owe 'im."

This was a fascinating side light on their relationship. "Why do you owe him, Hagrid?"

He blushed and looked down at his hands. "I started having pains in my fingers. It was real bad and I got clumsier than usual. I was afraid that I'd 'ave to give up working with the animals. The Professor came by to harvest some scales from the sea dragon and noticed. He listened real careful like when I told 'im how bad it was gettin'."

Really, this was a side of Severus I'd never head of before. "What happened then?"

"He came back with a potion. Tasted real bad, it did. Made me burp something awful but the pain started going away. I've got to take it once a month but it works a treat and he wouldn't ever take anything from me." One large finger gently traced Severus' long elegant hand where it lay so limply on the cotton cover. "Won't ever rightly pay 'im back but I'd like to help 'im now."

I made up my mind. "Very well, Hagrid. I believe that you'll be just the nurse for Severus. Now, how to get him to your cottage? Is it far?"

"Nah, just a hop, skip and a jump. Wait a tick." He stood and spoke to the male hippogriff in their language. The magical creature nodded once and crowded me aside.

A tingle in the air told me that magic was being done but I couldn't see what until the mattress that Severus was lying on began to levitate. I almost held my breath but it remained level while floating towards the tunnel. Even at my age, I could still learn something new.

I bowed my thanks to the female and her grifflet. Hagrid carried my bag for me and we ventured back out to the Forest. The journey wasn't long at all but I was tired by the time we got there. Dawn was breaking over the lake, tinting the waves pink and gold. I was asleep on my feet but Severus was tucked into the rustic giant-sized bed and appeared to be breathing a little easier.

Summoning a boat, I said my goodbyes to Hagrid and settled in for the trip across the still waters. I left him the medical supplies in case he needed them. I promised him that the seventh year students would take care of the animals back at Hogwarts. He smiled down at me and waved goodbye, giving the boat a good shove off. I settled back to take a nap and gather my energy for the day ahead.

Hopefully, Severus would heal quickly.

Severus

Waking wasn't as painful as it should have been. Opening my eyes, I looked up into a lacy canopy that moved slightly in the cool breeze. Where was I? A tuneful humming came from just out of my sight and I slowly turned my head to see who it was. Something was teasing my mind, some memory that was just out of reach. My pillow was soft and placed just right beneath my neck.

"Morning, Sev," a gentle rumble came through the air and I smiled at one of the good memories. The half-giant crouched down to my level and grinned at me. "You're going to be just fine. The Headmaster fixed you up real good. You thirsty?"

I thought about that but shutting my eyes was a mistake. The sound of his voice lulled me right back to sleep.

This time I felt stronger. Flexing my feet was painful but more like the memory of the pain rather than the real thing. The humming was gone but I could still feel Hagrid some where nearby. His warmth and caring always flowed out and filled the space where he was. It's one of the reasons that he's such a good caretaker of our animals and the magic creatures that found a haven with the school.

Not all magic comes in a wand. Opening my eyes again, I was caught by the glow of a red and orange sunset through the window at the foot of the large bed I was in. Hagrid was leaning in the doorway, a look of wonder on his face. He wasn't in the least childish, just . . . perhaps a bit childlike in his approach to the world around him. I envied him sometimes and wondered what it would be like to take joy in a sunset.

Right here and now, I was determined to just lie and enjoy it. The breeze was fresh and slightly chilly so I was glad of the soft blanket over me. The sky kept changing colors like one of my

potions and my mind persisted in trying to name what each one was. But I was too weak to keep thinking and closing my eyes, I fell back to sleep with a sigh.

A fire was crackling near by and the sound of a teakettle steaming away, sounds that comforted rather than alarmed. The scent of herbs drying reminded me of summers in the country when I was a very little boy. Opening my eyes, I saw it was night again. Which one, I hadn't a clue and didn't really care. I was tired of the pain, tired of the duplicity, tired of my life. Perhaps Dumbledore had done me a disservice when he healed me.

"Sev, you're awake." Hagrid sounded glad and I felt the gentle touch to my hand that I realized I'd been waiting for.

"Hagrid." Was that husky whisper really me?

"Got the tea on, Sev, won't be a tick. That will help your throat." He bustled away and my eyes followed him while he measured out some tea into a brown teapot then poured the hot water over it.

I was feeling a little empty, come to think of it. He came back and very gently lifted me so he could put another pillow behind me. The aches were still there but nothing I'd not felt before. My head felt as if cotton wool was stuffed inside it instead of my mind. I smiled to myself, perhaps all my brains had leaked out of the sieve that had been me once Voldemort was done with me.

I should be dead, I realized my smile turning into a frown. I was sure that he meant to kill me once Malfoy had given him the proof that I was a traitor. Why wasn't I dead?

"Is there pain, Sev?" Hagrid's anxious tones brought me back to the here and now. He had a tea cup in one hand and he helped me take a small drink of the potent brew. It tasted more wonderful than anything I'd ever tasted in my life.

"Dead . . . I should be . . . dead." I managed to say before taking another sip. Really, we don't appreciate our national drink the way we should. It was better than any elixir that I could brew.

"Well, in a manner of speaking, you were. Um, kind of dead, I mean." He was blushing fiercely and I pondered that convoluted speech.

"Kind of?" I prodded him verbally while I drank some more tea and he held the cup. My hands were too weak to hold the cup for myself.

"You won't be mad, Sev?" He was biting his lip and I wondered what in the world he was talking about.

"Not mad, Hagrid." One of these days, I'd be able to speak in whole sentences. That day was not today.

"Um, you were leaking away something fierce there in the circle. They were just watching you and laughing." His gruff voice told me of his reaction to that. "So I asked the vampire bats that roost near there to drive them away. I told them they could have any of them but you if they wanted 'em."

"Good." I finished the tea and eyed the biscuit in his hand. For a giant, he was an excellent cook and I'd had those particular cinnamon sugar buns before. "Hagrid?"

"You want to try eating now?" He chuckled and brought it to my lips. It took energy that was in

short supply but oh, the delicious taste of the light fluffy biscuit and the tasty cinnamon.

"Hm-m-m," was all I could manage to say and he chuckled again, breaking it up into little pieces for me to savor. But just that small amount of chewing was enough to tire me and I swallowed the last bit with the last of my energy.

"Little more tea, Sev?" Hagrid seemed to understand without words what I needed.

I managed a nod and he poured some more of the steaming brew into his own cup and helped me swallow some more. It washed the biscuit down and I let him remove the extra pillow so I was once again flat. It felt wonderful and I sighed contentedly. Just one thing more and I'd let myself sleep again. "After the bats?"

He blushed again and smoothed the blanket over me. "Well, they all started running every which way and a few of the local hellbenders were feeling a little frisky so they kind of gave the ones on the ground the hot foot, which sent them all off flying so I could get to you."

Hagrid stopped and his large hands fidgeted with the blanket. I freed one hand and laid it on his. "Just tell me, my friend."

In a whisper he told me. How I wasn't breathing, how he breathed for me until his friend the unicorn had touched me with her horn and given me back a pulse. How he got word to Dumbledore and how the Headmaster had brought me back from the brink. It seems I am very lucky in my friends. The two of them had managed to bring me back. I should have thanked him then or something . . . anything. But I couldn't get the words out.

Part of me had accepted death and I was too tired to feel anything but empty. But Hagrid didn't want thanks, he just hummed me to sleep, stroking my hand and letting me relax into slumber. When next I awoke, I would thank him.

Dumbledore

It was three days before I could get back to Hagrid and his patient. Potion classes were on hold for the moment. I told everyone that Severus had been called away. Young Harry knew different since he'd dreamed the entire horrible episode. I made sure that he spent several hours a day with the animals and burnt off all that energy with Quidditch.

He would be fine eventually. I wasn't so sure about Severus. The devastation of his body had been so complete. In fact, I was pretty sure that only Hagrid's breathing for him had sufficed to keep his spirit in the broken body. Sighing, I settled in to enjoy the boat trip across the lake. The squid came up to wave hello and I fed him a loaf of the raisin oatmeal bread he liked.

Hagrid was nowhere to be seen when the boat beached itself on the white sand. I climbed out and gathered up the bag I'd packed for Severus. He was a very fastidious man and after several days of wearing nothing but one of Hagrid's nightshirts, I had the feeling that he'd be glad of a change. Knocking politely on the front door, I waited for Hagrid to answer it.

"Afternoon, Sir, come on in. Sev's resting but I just made tea." The smiling giant took the bag from me and opened wide the door.

I came in to find Severus nothing more than a lump in the huge bed. His color was better and his brow was unwrinkled, which meant he was truly sleeping and not dreaming. I'd nursed him through quite a few nightmares over the years and I would have thought that this last episode would have triggered them again. But it appeared I was wrong and I was glad of it.

"How has he been, Hagrid?" I took the cup of tea and sat in one of the chairs by the fire.

"He sleeps a lot, Sir." The giant took the other chair and looked sadly over at the Potions Master. "He told me thank you but 'e didn't really mean it. He said that I should have let him go, 'e wasn't of use anymore now that You-Know-Who knows he's working for you. I think maybe he's real depressed."

"Not of any use?" I sat up straight and looked over at Severus. "Nonsense, he's a valuable member of the staff and without him, things would be much worse. Although, they are rather bad at the moment." I slumped back a little and finished my tea. "There was another attack on Hogsmead. It left seven dead and three in critical condition. One of them was a fourth year student."

"Who?" The whisper of a voice came from the bed.

"Charles Bretton of the Ravenclaws. He took a Crucio spell for almost five minutes. Pomfrey thinks he may eventually recover," I sighed and crossed to the bed to sit on the edge of the mattress. "But it will take time. It was not your fault, Severus. It is none of our faults."

"None or all, Dumbledore." Coal black eyes gazed dully into mine. "I'll be of no more use to any of you. You should have let me go."

"No. I will not lose another friend to the Dark." I took one of those elegant hands in mine and warmed it with my own.

"Me neither, Sev. I don't 'ave so many friends that I can lose any." Hagrid said over my shoulder.

"True." Severus blinked slowly and I saw tears form but not fall. "I've only got two friends and they're both here. But I'll be good for nothing for some time to come. I'm tired."

I could see the exhaustion dragging his eyelids down. "Sleep then, my friend. Sleep and eat what Hagrid makes for you then sleep some more. One of these days you'll wake up and want to take a walk. When that happens Hagrid, owl me and I'll come again."

Sev didn't even give his trademark snort of derision, he just nodded and went back to sleep. I saw what Hagrid had meant. He was tired to death and it wouldn't take much to tip him over the edge to madness or suicide. And that was not going to happen. I hadn't taken great enough care of him when he was younger and I would not make that mistake again.

Silently I arose and beckoned Hagrid to follow me. He took a moment to twitch the covers up a bit and stroke Severus' hand on the coverlet. It felt like a very private moment and I wondered just what kind of friends they were. I stroked my beard while I walked down to the boat that had brought me.

Could it be possible that Hagrid might be what our Potions Master had been looking for all his life? Might he provide the grounding that Severus needed so desperately? I eyed the half-giant with a wondering look of appraisal. He was big of course, but he was also kind, gentle and a master of the earth magic that was his strongest element.

"Hagrid, would you mind me asking a personal question?" I ventured to ask when he appeared, unsure of my request.

He eyed me knowingly and blushed a bit. "I like him, Sir. I always have but we don't have a lot in common and I always knew that I wasn't good enough for him. He's pureblood and the smartest wizard I know. Beggin' your pardon, Sir."

"No, you're right. Severus is a brilliant Potions Master and one of the top three in the world. But blood, pure or otherwise, has nothing to do with suitability. His parents were both from ancient wizard families but his father was a monster. Septimus was," I paused, suddenly sure of my way, "what the muggles would call a 24 karat son-of-a-bitch. He abused Severus from the day he was born."

"How?" Hagrid's eyes were suddenly flashing fire and I was glad the elder Snape was already dead.

"Beatings over trifles, cold harsh words that flayed the sensitive boy alive, and expectations that not even our Harry could have fulfilled." I took a deep breath. "I didn't know of it until his mother died. I arrived unexpectedly for the funeral to find Septimus beating him for crying. He was just ten and at his first year at Hogwarts. The elder Snape passed it off as discipline and although I thought it excessive, I did nothing. To my everlasting sorrow, I let it go."

"You had a lot of kids to take care of, Headmaster. Is his father still alive?" Hagrid was opening and closing his hands carefully.

"No, just after Severus became a Death Eater, his father had a heart attack and died alone at the family estate. I went to the funeral and found Severus already closing himself off from everyone." I blinked back sudden tears. "I should have done more then but since we can not change the past, we must look ahead instead. He counts you as a friend as I do. Be that for him. Give him your friendship and what comfort he will accept. Perhaps he will finally find the healing that he needs to mend his broken heart."

"Thank you, Sir. I'll do my best." Hagrid helped me into the boat and gave it another hefty shove off the beach. "He may think I'm barmy, Headmaster. But gentlin' wild creatures kind of gives me an edge. I already know how to be patient."

That surprised me into laughter and I left with a lighter heart than when I had arrived. Hagrid might be just what the doctor ordered for our Potions Master. I would wait until summoned again. If only Voldemort would hold off for just a bit longer. I sighed and settled in for a nap. Oh, to be a hundred again.

Severus

Hagrid's humming made me want to smile. It always had but I had a reputation to maintain so I'd never given in and just let it out. I was propped up on two pillows again, watching the gentle giant brush the sable fur of one of his creatures. The two yellow eyes of the Nemean Lion watched me carefully but I was too bemused by his very existence to make any threatening gestures. I thought the last one had been killed by Hercules during one of his labors.

Obviously he'd had time to have a family but how in the world had they arrived in the British Isles from the Peloponnesus? For a moment, I thought about several potions that used snippets of fur from one of them but it couldn't hold my interest. I went back to not thinking and watching Hagrid's hands give the lion he called Ty a through brushing. I liked watching those strong fingers wield the brush like the expert he was.

Ty's rumbling purr announced his own pleasure in the thinning of his thick fur. His claws scratched the tiles on the floor as they kneaded the floor. Hagrid's face showed a single-minded concentration that I thought admirable. He was very good at his job and I thought about that. I had once considered myself an artist who used ingredients to create potions that ranged from innocent to lethal.

Right now, I couldn't make a kitten de-furball potion, which any of my first year students could manage . . . even Longbottom. Sighing, I rested my head against the pillow and went back to watching Hagrid. I didn't want to think or want or feel. I just wanted to exist enough to eat and drink and watch an overgrown feline get brushed.

"You feeling all right, Sev? That was a mighty big sigh." Hagrid stopped for a moment and looked worriedly at me.

"You're very good with him." I said idly. "Has he ever told you how his family came to the British Isles?"

"Ty?" He started brushing again. "His great grandmother arrived in the seventeenth century carrying his grandfather. Every couple of centuries, one of the family goes back to the Argolis Valley and mates with one of the Old Country lions. Keeps the breed clean without a lot of inbreeding."

I blinked. That was without a doubt the longest explanation I'd ever heard from the giant. "I see. Does the summer heat bother him?"

"Nah," Hagrid grinned at me and I finally let myself return a smile. "When he gets too hot, he comes to me and I brush him. You got any use for some fur?"

"It's used in . . ." I automatically began to answer and that startled me into silence.

He frowned a little but let it slide, working through the tangled mane with a delicate hand. "It's all right, Sev. You don't have to think about potions if you don't want to."

For the first time in a very long time, I felt . . . free. I didn't have to think about potions, Hagrid had said it so it must be true. Dumbledore had told me to take my time. Voldemort thought he'd killed me. Lucius had written me off. Ty could care less what I did. There was no one who needed me in any way what so ever. What an incredible feeling that was, I thought in astonishment.

"Tell me how you met him, Hagrid." I asked him and listened to his voice tell the tale. Somewhere in the middle of it I fell asleep.

When I awoke, it was dusk and Hagrid was stirring something savory on top of the wood stove. He was quite good at cooking on such a primitive device and I was slowly finding my appetite again. It had been months since I'd done anything more than eat to stop the hunger pains. His cooking was plain but did more than ease my hunger. It tempted me to eat a little more than was quite comfortable.

Perhaps I would become a glutton, I mused while watching him putter around the small area that served him as a kitchen. For the first time since I'd awakened to find myself not yet dead, I wondered where I was. It wasn't his cottage near the mews so it must be the mythical summer cottage that he'd alluded to once. It was obviously not a dream at all. Turning my head, I wondered where his bed was since I was in this one.

There was another door just beyond the large fireplace and I'd seen him go in there and then come out. "Hagrid, how many rooms does your cottage have?"

He looked up and smiled at me. "Just this one and the bathroom through there. Are you ready for dinner?"

"Yes, thank you." I looked around again. "Where have you been sleeping?"

Hagrid dished up some of the savory stew and brought it over to me. "I didn't want to disturb you with my snoring so I've been sleeping out." He made a vague gesture through the open front door. "Let's get you propped up then."

I let him move me into position and hold the giant sized bowl for me. I wouldn't let him feed me but I didn't have the strength to hold more than the spoon so we'd compromised. The first bite tasted as good as it smelled and I closed my eyes in enjoyment. His low chuckle vibrated the whole bed and I smiled again. I ate almost a quarter of the bowl before I could eat no more.

"That's good, that is. You enjoyed it, I think." He nonchalantly used my spoon to finish the bowl and I felt something like a blush steal over my cheeks. That seemed a rather intimate thing to do for some reason.

But I needed to re-address what he'd said before. "The wind is picking up. You should sleep inside tonight."

"No need, Sev," he got up and went to dish up some stew. "I like lying outside and watching the storm come up over the lake. Little thing like wind doesn't bother me."

I frowned and picked at a small hole in the soft coverlet. A few feathers escaped and I recognized the soft under-down of a swan. A quick mutter and the hole disappeared. Blinking, I realized that it was the first bit of magic I'd done since that night. Somewhere inside of me I still had the ability. If only I had the energy to spark it. Closing my eyes, I relaxed against the pillows and just listened to Hagrid eat.

He closed his mouth when he chewed. I couldn't abide a noisy eater. People who chewed with their mouths open were among the rudest of individuals. I slid into a waking dream where every sense mingled with each other. The only way I can describe it was hearing with my skin, feeling with my nose and seeing with my ears. Tea was being brewed and the cookie jar was opened. The sharp scent of ginger wafted to me and I could see the gingerbread men lined up on the plate.

That made me smile again and I opened my eyes to see him hovering over me. "You want your tea now, Sev? It can wait if you want to catch a nap."

"Now is fine, Hagrid." I could hold the cup since it was sized for a human. It was hot and sweet, just the way I liked it. The plate of gingerbread sat between us where he perched on the edge of the bed. And somewhere between finishing my tea and selecting a ginger cookie, I decided that it was time to take another step towards healing.

"Hagrid, I believe I'd like a bath. Is there a tub in that bathroom of yours?"

He blinked a moment then grinned wider than I'd ever seen him. "Sure it does, Sev. While you're bathing, I'll change the sheets for you."

"Thank you, that will be nice since you will be sharing the bed with me afterwards."

"I will?" He looked rather taken aback.

"Yes, there is no longer any way that you could hurt me so it's time for you to return to your own bed. Snoring has never bothered me. Now, do you have hot water or should we spell some?" I was determined to have my way in this.

"It will heat real quick. One of the hellbenders obliges me when I need to take a bath." He was

blushing. "Would you like me to wash your hair for you?"

I nodded. "Yes, thank you. It must be a tangled mess by now."

"Nah," he blushed again. "I brushed it out real careful like. But it will feel better when it's clean. I'll just go get the bath started. Don't you be trying to get out of bed just yet."

I nodded and closed my eyes to gather my strength. It would probably take every last ounce of energy I had just to take a bath. Poor Hagrid would be forced to see my scarred body but he'd already seen everything I had and it hadn't scared him off yet. He must be used to seeing his wild creatures both healthy and sick. I would be no different. I clenched my hands into fists then held them like that for almost a count of ten.

Appallingly weak was my diagnosis of my own condition. Just that little exercise almost exhausted me. It would be a while before I was back to normal. Opening my eyes, I looked into a future that was bleak, to say the least. I was going to be a burden to Hagrid and Dumbledore for some time to come. A great sigh built within me and escaped with almost the same force as the wind that was now howling around the cottage.

"Now, Sev, it will be all right. You'll see." The noise had muffled his reappearance. Hagrid stroked my arm with warm fingers. "Ready for your bath?"

I nodded, afraid that my voice would break if I spoke. Pushing back the down coverlet, I tried to sit up by myself and found I could not. Hagrid simply slid his hands under my back and legs, lifting me gently from the tangled sheets and bearing me into the warm bathroom. Sitting me on a stool by the tub, he whisked off my nightshirt and pulled off my warm socks.

The water gently steamed in the large white tub with the lion feet. He set me into it as gently as he'd lifted me out of bed. It felt heavenly. "There you go, Sev. You just soak for a minute or two while I change the bed. Then I'll be back in to wash your hair."

"Thank you, Hagrid." I relaxed against the sloping back and closed my eyes to enjoy the delicate scent of jasmine.

"You're welcome, Sev. Don't drown on me." A single gentle finger pushed the hair back behind my ear.

I hummed a reply and concentrated on the lovely feeling of floating. I could hardly wait for his return. I needed to wash away the last of the degradation that Voldemort had put me through. Once that was behind me, I'd figure out what I could do for the future. Events would interrupt this interlude soon enough. I was here on borrowed time, I'd always known that.

Just a few more good memories before I descended back into the darkness.

Hagrid

Severus could sit up for an hour at a time by the end of the first week. He was still real quiet but then he never did talk much when we were together. At first, I'd thought that he was so intelligent that we didn't have anything in common. But if I asked a question, he always answered me. And if I didn't understand his answer, he'd find another way to tell me. I usually got it by the third explanation.

I realized then that he was a born teacher. Some people have the knack of showing or telling others how to do something. He had that knack but he didn't suffer fools gladly and most of the

children he was teaching either didn't want to know how to brew a potion or only wanted the results and could care less about the process. He was so frustrated some days that he'd come out to the mews and spend time with whatever creature was roosting or nesting there.

Or with me. Once I realized he was coming out for some peace and quiet, I stopped asking him questions. But he didn't like that either so eventually, I figured out what I could ask and when to ask it. He wasn't talking down to me, he was just adjusting his mind to the person he was with. That probably made him a real good spy for the Headmaster but it surely did hurt him.

Not the physical hurts, although he always bore them real stoic-like, but the mental ones. Animals don't lie to each other. But humans sure do seem to spend a lot of time lying right to a body's face. And wizards seemed to have made it a fine art, right up there with say, potion making. I'm a pretty truthful kind of person because I don't have anything to hide.

Well, maybe one thing. I sighed a little to myself while I trimmed the hoof of one of the hippogriffs. He'd been real helpful with moving Sev the night I found him all broken up. So, I'd told him to come around when he needed his next clipping. I had him in the little paddock behind the cottage where I could keep an ear out for Severus. But so far, he hadn't stirred a mite since breakfast a couple of hours ago.

Running a file over the clipped edges, I rounded them the way that Ceyx liked them. The last hoof was a little ticklish so I took a firm hold of his leg and filed it real quick. Getting kicked by a hippogriff in his prime would hurt something fierce. But he held still for me until I was satisfied that he didn't have no hangnails.

Stepping back, I watched him trot around the paddock a few times. His hooves helped his sense of balance so trimming them evenly was real important. Stopping in front of me, he butted my chest in thanks and I scratched his ears to say 'you're welcome'. Then he took off for home while I gathered my tools together and went back inside.

I went in quietly in case he was sleeping but he was awake, staring out the window. "I'm going to make tea, Sev. Would you like a cup?"

Those coal black eyes moved to me and I thought I saw a spark of something glow. "What were you doing, Hagrid? Is it very hot outside?"

I glanced down and noticed the sweat gleaming through my chest hair. "I worked up a sweat on Ceyx while I was trimming his hooves. Sorry about that. I'll wash up while the kettle is boiling."

He nodded slowly. "Some tea would be nice."

I smiled and put the kettle on before going in to wash up. I didn't want to take the time for a bath but I was going to need one this evening. While I was splashing my face, a sudden picture came into my head of the two of us in the tub. We were both naked and he was lying on my chest while we kissed. And just like that, I was harder than hard and staring into the mirror above the sink with wide eyes.

Oh dear, this wouldn't do at all. If he knew, Severus would give me one of those icy cold looks, raise his eyebrow real disdainful-like and ask me cuttingly what I was playing at. I subsided a little and sighed. Maybe once he was healed and back in the castle, I could remember that picture again and find some release with my hand. The piercing whistle of the kettle startled me and I wiped my hands quickly to go and see to it.

But when I got out there, Sev had already tried. He'd managed about two steps before falling and the bewildered look on his face told me he hadn't realized just how badly he'd been injured. Reaching his side, I tenderly picked him up and carried him back to bed. He was shivering like it

was freezing and I wrapped him in my arms, trying to soothe him with my hands.

"Why don't I have any control over my legs?" His voice was tight with fear.

"They were all twisted, Sev." I rocked him slowly and rubbed his back like my mother had done for me when I was just a little-one. "Dumbledore had an awful time getting everything back in place. I think every single bone was broken. He spelled them right again but it's going to take time for them to remember how they're supposed to work."

His breath caught just a little and I knew if he was crying, he wouldn't want me to know.

"I'm going to get the kettle, Sev. You just rest a bit and I'll bring you your tea." I laid him back against the pillows and pulled the covers up, trying to ignore the little sniffs he kept giving. Risking a quick look, I saw his eyes all dull instead of sparkling. "Oh, Sev, it will be all right, really it will. Time heals all wounds, my mother says. And she's never wrong."

He nodded, his eyes closed and his hands listless on the cover. "I'll be fine, Hagrid."

"Yes, you will, Sev." I stood up and crossed to the now shrieking kettle. I made chamomile tea. He needed soothing instead of stimulating. Maybe I'd do a little baking this afternoon. Severus loved my cinnamon and sugar biscuits. They'd calm him down.

He stayed real quiet all afternoon even when I put the biscuits in the oven and washed up our dishes. I kept an eye on him but I knew he was taking his weakness hard. Sev didn't like anyone knowing that he wasn't a hundred percent. Course, he should have known by now that I wasn't going to tell anybody. His secrets were safe with me. He was safe with me and always would be.

The biscuits cheered him up a little bit and he dunked one in his tea after he saw me do it. He was real graceful but I had the idea that he maybe hadn't done that before. The Headmaster had talked about Sev's father being cruel to him and I still had a strong urge to go back in time and shake some sense into the man. Well, maybe a little more than shake him.

I felt real fierce whenever I thought of someone hurting Severus Snape. Hopefully, I'd be useful when it came time to take on Voldemort again. One of these days he was going to pay for what he'd done to my Severus. I blinked to myself and caught him looking strangely at me. I hadn't said that out loud, had I?

"Hagrid, I have always wondered about your family. Would you be willing to tell me about them?" He looked kind of hesitant but really curious and I cheered up.

"Well, it's pretty simple really. Me Mum was the giantess and Dad was the human. Mum was just sixteen when she met Dad, who was visiting the Forest to record the mating habits of the hippogriffs." I grinned a little. "Dad always laughed fit to bust whenever he told us that story. She got him out of trouble when he got too close to the half-mad beasts. He hadn't realized that all their senses are more acute then so they knew he was there in the tree. He was a scholar like yourself but Mum was the practical one. "

Was that a little smile he was hiding?

"They rushed the tree and began knocking their hooves against the trunk, shaking poor old Dad almost off of the limbs he was hanging on to. Mum heard all the commotion and asked one of the unicorns to lure them away. He did and Mum got him down. She read him the riot act all the way back to my Grandda's cottage. Well, one thing led to another and pretty soon they were married and I was on the way. They live up near Loch Ness. I like visiting them around the summer solstice. My brothers and sisters are scattered all over the Isles."

He looked faintly stunned. "How many siblings do you have?"

"There's six of us. I'm the eldest, then comes my sister Rhea, brothers Gration and Hossic - they're twins. Royan, my sister is next and Gersey is my youngest brother." I ticked them off my fingers, one by one. "Our reunions are pretty noisy but we have a lot of fun."

Severus blinked several times and then a smile slowly stretched across his face. "You're very lucky, Hagrid. I'm glad your family is so close. I always wondered what it would be like to have brothers and sisters."

"Well, I'd share mine with you but they can be a right noisy bunch, Sev." I told him and watched him chuckle. That sounded real good to me so I shared a few more stories with him until he was rocking with laughter and having trouble catching his breath.

That wasn't too good so I slowed a bit and shared how I'd left home and come to live at Hogwarts. The Headmaster had watched me taking care of a Hellbender who'd gotten involved with a muggle tar spreader. The poor thing had thought it was a flirtatious salamander and got covered with hot tar before he could make his escape. I'd come across him and taken him home to fix up.

Dumbledore had been called in to help explain to the muggles why their machine had exploded. He backtracked and found me helping the Hellbender to heal himself. We chatted for a long time while Mum made tea and shared those cinnamon sugar biscuits that Severus liked. A month later, I had an owl offering me the post of animal handler at Hogwarts. He was smiling by the time I finished and I sat back with a smile of my own.

It brought back a lot of good memories for me. Severus was already there then and we'd met when he came to check on the sea dragon. He collected the scales when Sedgwick molted once a year. We'd got to talking a little and pretty soon, I know that I considered him a friend. It took about three years before I was pretty sure he thought of me as one, too.

"Hagrid, I think that I would like to begin exercising my limbs. They won't get better on their own." He handed me his cup and pushed the covers back from his long legs.

"All right, Sev, but we're going to take it slowly. If you overdo it, you could actually take even longer to heal." I stood up and put the cups in the sink before coming back. "Flex your toes so I can see which muscles are weak."

He flexed and I saw that there was more weakness than I'd thought. The next twenty minutes hurt him a lot but he stayed stoic. I was the one who called a halt to what had to seem like torture to him. He was sweating quietly by the time I moved his left leg in the last in and down arc. A fine trembling shivered through his whole body and I wanted so badly to gather him into a hug but I knew he'd never allow it.

And that's when I had a kind of insane idea. "Sev, how about a nice hot bath to rest those sore muscles? I can re-use the water when you're done."

He looked a little startled but I could tell that a hot bath sounded real good. "Are you sure it's no trouble, Hagrid? I can wait until tomorrow. It's not like I got dirty with just that small exercise."

I smiled at the faintly disgruntled look on his face. "Nah, Sev, no trouble at all. I'll go run it now. It will feel good to get clean again."

Humming happily, I ran the water and added a little wintergreen oil to help relax him. I put the rosemary and oatmeal soap that Madame Pomfrey makes up for me by the washcloth so I could wash him once he was in the tub. When I went back out to get him, he'd sat up by himself and

swung his legs over the edge of the mattress. He was breathing a little hard with just that much exertion but I pretended not to notice.

All men have their pride and although it sometimes appeared that Severus had more than most, he didn't really. He knew his own worth and that wasn't really being prideful. His nightshirt had scrunched up around his thighs and he kept trying to pull it down. Outside of kind of boney knees, he didn't have anything to be ashamed of but I was betting that he didn't feel that way about it.

So, I pretended to ignore that too, scooping him up real gently and carrying him into the steamy bathroom. He sniffed once and a faint smile lifted the corners of his mouth. "Wintergreen, Hagrid?"

"Yah, it's one of Mum's favorites. She makes it for me every Christmas."

"Ah, I see. Your family believes in practical gifts." He held onto my arm while I pulled up the nightshirt and slowly helped him down into the hot water. Once he was down, I pulled it off the rest of the way and threw it in the clothes hamper. He needed a clean one anyway and I liked helping him dress.

"Truer words were never spoken, Sev. Mum makes sure that we stay practical and Dad reminds us that soaking up new ideas is what we need to grow." Kneeling by the tub, I found the soap and began to matter-of-factly wash his feet.

"Oh," was all he said and out of the corner of my eye, I saw his eyelashes flutter closed. There was this little smile that kept wanting to escape his lips and when I ran my knuckles firmly up his arch, it finally blossomed.

That looked wonderful to me and I wondered if I dared keep on massaging up his legs. I thought I might just have seen his cock twitch and although I'd like to see more, it wasn't fair to him to embarrass him. And he probably would be if I kept on going. Looking up, I caught him staring at me.

"Hagrid." His voice is so smooth and silky it reminds me of a unicorn's soft underbelly.

"Too much, Sev?" I worried that the pressure I used might have been too hard.

Those dark eyes stared at me while his forehead creased a little. "Hagrid, if I'm wrong please tell me? Would you like to share this bath with me? Or perhaps something more?"

I went hot and cold at the same time. He had noticed. But he didn't sound upset or anything so what to tell him? Swallowing hard, I nodded. "Yes, if you didn't hate the idea. I'd be real careful."

He nodded once then stretched out a hand to me. "No one's ever been 'real careful' with me. I trust you know how."

Never? He'd never been touched with slow, careful love? He trusted me? I suddenly felt about 100 feet tall. "I do know, Sev and I promise not to hurt you. I trust you, too."

And that's when he smiled at me, a real honest-to-goodness smile that made him look ten years younger. "Then I suggest that you remove the rest of your clothes and join me."

I was going to run out of breath if he kept on saying such amazing things. Moving over to the stool, I sat down to take off my boots and socks first. Then standing up, I unbuckled my pants and slid them down my legs. Sneaking a peak at Severus, I was real encouraged by the little spark in his eyes.

Throwing my dirty clothes into the hamper, I came back to the tub and hesitated. "Still all right, Severus?"

He moved up in the tub and gently reached out to stroke my hip. "Very much all right, Hagrid. Please join me."

So, I climbed in behind him and settled in while he leaned back against me. Just like my dream, I finally had him in my arms. And he felt very, very good there.

Snape

I'd gone completely and utterly insane.

I'd invited a man into my bath with the promise of more than just washing.

I'd invited a man who was a half-giant to . . . to what?

Make love to me? Was I ready to make love to him?

Hagrid was a man of simple pleasures but not a simpleton by any means.

I'd never been anyone's pleasure before.

And I wanted to be that for him more than anything I'd ever wanted in my life.

His body was warm and solid behind me. His arms wrapped loosely around me, loaning me his strength and kindness, which I needed so desperately. Taking a deep breath, I relaxed against the hairy chest that had made me so breathless before. The sweat gleaming among the dark curls had taken my breath away.

There is a gentle power in him that children and animals recognize instinctively. And I guess you could include Potion Masters, too.

Safe. He made me feel safe. It had been a very long time since I'd felt that way. With sudden clarity, I realized that I'd reached a crossroads in my life. Voldemort thought me dead. Dumbledore couldn't use me anymore since my cover was blown. Until the last battle when I would fight with whatever means I had at my disposal, I was free.

Free to do what I wanted. Slowly, I turned in Hagrid's warm arms until we were lying face to face. "Hagrid, I am unsure about one thing."

He chuckled. "Only one, Sev? I've got at least ten things I'm worried about. Tell me what yours is."

I couldn't help but smile. "I know the mechanics of making love and I know why it's supposed to feel good but it is all book knowledge. I'm afraid that you will be disappointed in my performance."

"Never, Sev? It's never felt good?" His gaze was so warm and yet sad.

I shook my head. "I was given to the others several times when Voldemort was angry with me or just feeling particularly nasty. I endured them and healed myself afterwards. That is the sum total of my experience."

"Oh, Sev," he pulled me up a little so we were eye to eye. "I love you so much. What they did was rape you and that's not something I would ever do."

I glared at him. "I know that, Hagrid. I was just explaining."

He smiled and stroked my shoulders with his big hands. "I understand, Sev. All too well, I'm afraid. When I was just a lad, I fell in with a bad crowd of giants for a couple of months. They seemed all right to me but Mum had a fit when she knew who I was going around with. And I found out the hard way what they really thought of me."

"What? What did they do to you?" I raised my head from where I'd pillowed it on my arms.

"Gang-bang," he said matter-of-factly. "Hurt me real bad while they taunted me about being a half-breed."

I was going to find out who they were and kill them slowly. "I'm sorry, Hagrid. No one should have to go through something like that." His mother could help me track them down. "They were nothing more than ignorant savages." I bet that the hippogriffs and the hellbenders would help, too. "I wish you'd never had to know such evil." His brothers and sisters might want to participate as well.

"Oh, Sev," he was chuckling while his warm fingers stroked the back of my neck. "You are not going to track them down and hurt them." I tried to look innocent. "They already paid for that and a 'undred other things. The family took care of them real nice and legal like, although the twins had the fun of beating up a couple of them."

"Oh," I had the sudden feeling that I was pouting, "good for them."

"Sev, I'd like to kiss you now. Would that be all right?" He was smiling through his beard and I nodded shakily.

Soft and bristly at the same time, that was what his kiss was like - soft lips and wiry hair from his chin to mine. He was moving slowly from one side of my mouth to the other, ghosting up my cheeks to my eyes, nipping at my nose, nuzzling little kisses to my lips. I'd never felt anything like it in my life and my heart was beating so fast that I thought I might pass out.

"So good, you smell so good." He murmured in my ear and I shivered at his gentle nip of my ear lobe. "I knew you would, Sev. Even when you came to visit after mixing up some smelly potion, there was still a touch of musk that was just you."

"Smelly . . . oh . . ." my thoughts fragmented while my whole body reacted to his. He still smelled of sweat and hippogriff but underneath was the earthy scent that I realized was his alone. "Hagrid . . . I could . . . oh there . . . say the same."

Finally the tip of his tongue tickled my thin lips and I parted them so I could breathe. In another moment, I'd be panting to get air into my lungs. When he slid inside, I was startled but the rich taste of him filled my senses while the rough surface of his tongue rasped against mine. He was everywhere and I felt surrounded by his strength and gentle self.

My brain couldn't manage a single thought. Between our groins, his shaft and mine were rubbing together and the friction was going to drive me right out of my tiny little mind. But when his hands slid down my back to cup my buttocks, it was too much and I spent myself against his stomach. Collapsing against his chest, I felt his shaft surge up between my legs.

He must have grasped it with one of his hands because it wasn't very long before I felt his hot

seed splash over my lower back. I closed my eyes and smiled into his throat. I was boneless, covered in cum and I'd never been so happy in my life. The sound of his heartbeat beneath my ear was a lullaby sweeter than any my mother had ever sung to me.

Perhaps a brief nap would help, I thought sleepily. Just a minute . . .

Hagrid

I knew the moment he went to sleep. I was still trying to catch my breath. It had never been that good for me, not ever in my life. All he had to do was wiggle just a little and let me kiss him and I'd gone off like a cheap firecracker. Gently, I cupped up some water to wash his bum and back. It had been a few months since I'd done more than take myself in hand for a wank so I'd sprayed him good.

Knowing that Severus was willing to let me touch him had made it better than anything. The feel of him coming against me and the smile he couldn't hide had gotten me so excited that all it took was a single pull of my cock before I erupted. Poor Sev was going to need some rest before we tried that again. I washed him as best I could without moving too much.

Trailing soapy fingers up and down his back, I felt the ridges that could only be left from beatings, beatings that had taken place when he was very young. I'd seen and felt them often enough on some of the magical creatures who'd fallen into the hands of muggles. Once I had him back in bed, I was going to kiss every single one. I still wanted to go back in time and take a whip to his father though.

Remembering the look on his face after I'd told him about the gang bang, I chuckled silently. He'd been having the same urge and that made me feel real good. My family had been there for me while I was healing but he'd never had anyone to hold him and tell him that he was still worthy of love.

But I would. I'd cuddle him and show him how good making love could be. By the time he was healed inside and out, we'd see what we could make of us. If I was real lucky, there would be an 'us' for a very long time. My fingers kept coming back to his cheeks, stroking the downy softness and trailing slowly down his cleft. His legs straddled my hips and he was open to every touch.

I had the urge to lick him, right over that little hole and down to his balls. My fingers felt really big there and when he shivered, I realized that he was awake again. "All right, Sev? If you don't like a touch, you need to tell me. I won't hurt you, not ever."

"It feels," he was biting his lip and I brought my hands up to rest on his lower back. "No, don't stop."

I tried to see his face but he was buried in my beard. "Does it feel good, Sev? My fingers are kind of rough, maybe I shouldn't touch your skin there."

"Calluses are a part of both our lives, Hagrid." His voice was dry like always but the hint of humor wasn't something I was used to from him. "And your gentle touch feels . . . wonderful. I think we need to finish our bath so we can go to bed. I can't feel my feet anymore."

"Damn, I forgot about your legs." I didn't panic but it was a close thing. "I'm not taking very good care of you."

"Nonsense!" He rose up and glared at me. "You are doing exactly what I want you to do. But unfortunately I will need a few days to gain more strength. Perhaps some of my exercises can be

reconfigured to include this?"

'This' was him wiggling over my cock while his hands stroked my chest. And I was instantly hard and aching again. "Maybe, Sev, we'll take it slow and figure out what feels good. A good come tenses a lot of different muscles so we'll definitely be working on that."

"Oh good, I was hoping you'd see it my way." He smiled down at me and wiggled again. "Are you always this quick to get hard again?"

"Only when it's you, Sev," I told him truthfully and watched him blush.

I could really get used to this, I decided. But for now, I had to get us both washed and safely out of the tub before he hurt himself. His face was all scratched from my beard and I decided right then and there to shave it off. I did that in the summers usually because of the heat so doing it now would seem natural. I didn't want anything marring that beautiful skin of his.

He was like fine porcelain while I was rough pottery. My thoughts were interrupted by the most amazing feeling. I'd helped him sit up between my legs so I could wash his front but somehow he'd gotten hold of the soap and was washing my arms. Those long elegant fingers of his looked real odd against my tanned skin. A good 'odd', of course and I was getting harder and harder with every touch.

But I still wasn't prepared for him to hesitantly touch my cock. I gasped and his eyes flew up to mine while he froze. "No, Sev, it feels good, almost too good. I'll go off like a rocket if you keep on doing that."

A pleased smile crossed his face while I watched him think about that. When he wrapped both hands around me and gently slid them up and down, I lost it. I squirted up at him like a fountain while he rubbed me again and again. I was so relaxed at that point that I almost slid completely under the water. But when he leaned down and cat-licked his way around my crown, tasting my seed I had the urge to get hard again.

But he'd drained me for the moment and he was shivering a bit so I roused and sat up straight. "Thanks, Sev, that felt real good. But it's time to get out of the tub and into a nice warm bed."

He nodded and slid back a little, losing hold of my cock kind of reluctantly. Leaning forward, I kissed him again and tasted myself on his tongue. The moment I got him into bed, I was going to be tasting something else and I could hardly wait. The rest of me got a hasty cleanup while he watched with sleepy eyes and an occasional touch. Maybe I could wait until after his nap.

Severus was shaking by the time I lifted him out of the tub and I wrapped one of my big towels around him while holding him close. Taking him into the front room, I sat him down in my chair before going to strip the bed of the dirty linen. Snapping out fresh sheets, I said a little tucking spell to get everything all nice and tidy for him. It was a spell that my mum had taught me when I was a little boy and I always thought of her when I used it.

When I turned back to him, I found him sound asleep, one cheek pillowed on his hand. He looked so young right then that I wanted to hold him close and keep every single bad thing that had ever happened to him far, far away. That wasn't possible but I could try to keep anything or anyone else from hurting him. Gently picking him up, I carried him to our bed.

"Hagrid," the sleepy voice made my heart clench. "Oh, that feels good."

I dropped a kiss on his head, unwinding him from the towel and tucking him in. "Sleep for a bit, Sev."

Those dark eyes opened just enough to smile up at me. "You too, Hagrid. Hold me while I sleep."

So I did, sliding in beside him and tucking him against my chest. "Good idea, Sev. A little nap is just what the doctor ordered."

"Um-um," he murmured and I felt a tongue dart out to taste my nipple. "You're so warm, Hagrid. Don't let go."

"Never, Sev, I'll never let go." I let my voice drop while I stroked his dark hair and tried to not get hard again. "Sleep and grow strong, love."

He yawned against me. "Love . . ."

Maybe he'd remember he'd said that when he woke up. I sure hoped so because I wanted to say it back to him over and over until he believed me. Closing my eyes, I mapped every inch of his skin where he touched me. His cool flesh was warming the way that I hoped his heart was. More than anything, I wanted to free the bright spirit that had been caged for so long.

But I was patient, kind of like a hunter who could scent his prey. I was willing to take it slowly and show him all the good parts of loving. We had the time for now to go step by step while we worked our way up to sharing with each other. Before he knew it, Severus was going to be smiling and laughing with me.

Soon.

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Parts 5 - 8 by Athea

Author's Notes:

The lessons continue.

Snape

I awoke slowly. My head was pillowed on a hairy chest and the heartbeat could only belong to one person. Hagrid, the animal handler, grounds keeper, general factotum of Hogwarts. Hagrid, my . . . well, what was he now? My rescuer, my nurse, my teacher in lessons that I'd never dreamed of taking. There was something hard beneath my cheek, something besides his hard muscles. Moving my head a little to rub against it, I realized that it was a nipple.

He had liked it when I touched it before. Turning my head a little more, I licked it a couple of times. Each lick made it harder until I just had to open my eyes to see what it looked like. It was a big pebbled brown peak surrounded by wiry curls of cinnamon brown. The salty sweet skin beckoned my tongue to explore further.

"Morning, Sev." The rumble beneath my cheek told me that Hagrid was awake. "How did you sleep?"

"Good morning, Hagrid. I slept quite well, thank you." I felt like a schoolboy on a sleepover. Not that I'd ever done that before but I did know the theory. Mother had always insisted on good manners but I'd rather let them go the last few years.

He chuckled and stroked my back with his large hands, waking up every bit of skin that he touched. "That's good, Sev. I slept great. Are you hungry yet?"

I thought about it while I kept licking that nipple that fascinated me. "I think I am, Hagrid. Are there any more of those sugar biscuits?"

"Sorry, we ate them all but I was thinking of bacon and eggs and maybe some fried potatoes." He

offered.

And suddenly my stomach thought that sounded like a fine idea. "Yes, all right."

He slowly rolled me off his chest and kissed me gently before sliding out of bed. "Then I'd best get to cookin'."

Hagrid stretched all over and my eyes widened. Unclothed, he was a veritable Herculean figure. The musculature of the race of giants was his, long lean muscles from his calves all the way up to his shoulder blades. Carelessly, he tied back his hair so it wouldn't interfere with his cooking. His long arms had been so tender in the night that I'd never once felt constrained; only comforted. His hands were callused but the fingers were in proportion to the rest of him. They were warm and gentle, I could attest to that.

Once he turned to beat the eggs with a whisk, I took a good look at his front. His chest hair was profuse and I'd greatly enjoyed the feel of it against my own mostly hairless skin. He had what I would call a barrel chest with muscles that rippled all the way down and across his flat stomach. His work handling the magical creatures and taking care of the grounds at Hogwarts kept him in tiptop condition.

My gaze finally fell to his groin and the organ, which had felt so huge to me in the bath. It was in proportion to the rest of him and that made me wonder just what it would feel like inside of me. I'd never thought that the act of sex might be pleasurable even though I knew it was touted as wonderful. People kept on doing it so somewhere along the line it had to at least feel good.

He'd said that he wouldn't hurt me and I believed him implicitly. However, that didn't solve the equation of his 12 organ inside my perhaps number 8 sheath. Perhaps there were spells that would help? I wanted to explore it some more, take it in hand, taste him, maybe stroke him to completion again.

"Sev, you're goin' to make me come just lookin' at me like that." He said good-naturedly and chuckled again.

Oops, caught looking. "Well, last night it was dark and this morning . . . it isn't." Well, that was coherent, I thought with a sigh of disgust with myself. I had no idea had to act with a . . . a lover. Sentimental statements were foreign to me and endearments did not come naturally to my tongue. It would be like learning another language and I didn't know if I could start this late in my life.

Still, he deserved my honesty and an acknowledgement of his place in my life. "Hagrid, I am sorry to be awkward but I do not yet understand what is happening between us."

"You're doing just fine, Sev." His teeth gleamed in the morning sunlight. "We don't either of us 'ave much experience making love. I've watched a lot of mating creatures though so I'll use them as teaching guides."

"Great heavens, you must be joking." Rutting like animals was not my idea of love making.

"Yes, Sev, it was a joke." He said patiently with a gentle smile. "We'll muddle through okay. Course, like anything else, we'll have to practice until we get it right."

I blushed like a new student in the first class of the year and that is exactly the way I felt. I couldn't seem to catch my breath at this new world into which I'd fallen. I was afraid that I'd botch it the way I had all my almost-friendships in school. Lupin had come the closest to being a friend but Black had soured that when he tried to use him to kill me. One day I hoped to find out why he hated me so much but until then I was going to do my level best to be what Hagrid wanted and

needed me to be.

"You want to eat in bed or sit at the table, Sev?" Hagrid was dishing up mounds of fluffy yellow eggs and rashers of thick crackly bacon.

"The table," I said, eyeing the delicious plate of food and finally remembering my manners, "um, please."

"Good, I'll come and get you once I grab your robe from the bathroom." He rescued the teakettle that was whistling away and poured the steaming water into the big brown pot on the table. Then he disappeared for a moment before bringing out the black silk robe that Albus had brought when he packed a bag for me.

I sat up on my own and he helped me slide the sleeves up my arms before picking me up and carrying me to the comfortable oak chair at the solid round table that served his dining room. It felt quite odd to be doing something as normal as sitting up. It had truly been days since I'd last done that and it felt good.

"Now, you eat as much or as little as you want, Sev. I don't want you to overfill after a week of not much solid food." He set a plate of eggs, bacon and potatoes in front of me and caressed my shoulder with his warm hand. "Whatever you don't eat, I will so nothin' goes to waste."

"It looks delicious, Hagrid. You're a good cook." I picked up the fork and took my first bite. It practically melted on my tongue and I sighed happily before spearing a slice of lightly browned potato. It was all so good that I had to force myself to slow down. It would be all too easy to overtax my healing stomach and I didn't want to do that.

He sat down and poured us both a cup of tea, stirring a spoonful of apple blossom honey into each cup. He'd remembered my favorite sweetener and I smiled at him, wondering what he was thinking when he smiled back. I didn't understand him at all and yet, I did trust him with my life but more importantly with my heart. Hagrid didn't have a cruel bone in his body and that was rare among my acquaintances.

Only Albus and perhaps Remus fell into that category with now the ever-lucky Mr. Potter to be added in. I abandoned that train of thought when my stomach tightened. Breakfast was too good to waste bad memories on it. I munched a strip of thick bacon and pondered the delicious taste of well-done pork. I didn't indulge frequently but this morning, it seemed like the perfect addition.

My taste buds were getting a good workout but I still wanted to taste Hagrid again. Perhaps after a short nap to digest our meal, I could explore more of his body. Of course, he would probably want to touch me, too. Glancing at him from under my eyelashes, I caught him looking at me with longing. I was going to enjoy my breakfast dessert.

Hagrid

Sev was so beautiful in the sunlight from the open windows. He was making these little moans while he ate and I don't think he even knew he was doing that. His hair was tousled and gleaming. All the lines in his face were smoothed out and that smile I'd been seeing over the last two days was peeking out. He had the cutest little dimple but I wasn't going to tell him that it was showing, in case he thought he shouldn't be cute.

And that almost shy look through his long eyelashes was making me harder than hard. But we needed to go real slow so he didn't get spooked. I know that I was kind of scary naked but I hadn't wanted to get a robe. It was better that he get a good look at me now so if he wanted to quit, he

could. I hated those nasty people who'd taken advantage of him with their raping and hurting.

Nobody deserved that, not even that nasty Malfoy or idiot Black. Severus didn't look scared but instead he was thinking real hard about something. He'd eaten real good for a few minutes but he was definitely slowing down now. That was okay with me. It had been a while since he'd filled his stomach and I didn't want him to overdo.

"That's all I can manage, Hagrid. It was very good." He laid his fork down kind of regretfully and I grinned at him.

"Ya did good, Sev. I'll finish it off." Taking his plate, I laid it on top of my empty one and finished eating the last of his eggs and bacon. He wrapped both hands around his cup and eyed me over the edge while he delicately sipped the black brew. Oh, to be that cup, I thought breathlessly.

"Hagrid," he paused and took another sip, his eyes never leaving mine. "Hagrid, I believe that I need to brush my teeth and wash my face. Then I would like to take you back to bed and . . . explore you. Would that be all right?"

I was going to come with just that little flirt in his voice and the shy smile on his face. "I, uh, I think that can be arranged, Sev. How about a shave, too? It's time I get rid of my beard for the summer."

"Really?" He sat up a little straighter. "May I watch?"

Watch me shave? I blinked. "Sure you can, Sev, but why?"

"I never saw anyone shave before. I learned how from a book in the library." He said with a little shrug.

Right then, I wanted to go back in time and throttle Septimus Snape before he could hurt the man on the other side of the table. He couldn't even be bothered to help his son learn to shave. What a nasty man he'd been. My Sev had a lot of interesting things to learn. "Well, I'll show you how I do it. In fact, you can help me out. I have to cut it first before I shave or I blunt the razor real bad."

"Ah, I see. Yes, I can do that if you'll get the scissors." He drank some more tea while assessing my face.

I could hardly wait to help him clean up. Finishing breakfast, I got up and put the dirty dishes to soak in the kitchen sink. Then I came back and lifted him in my arms for the trip to the bathroom. I'd been spelling him clean both inside and out while he was healing but it was time for him to start taking some of those things. That would give him a little more of the control that he liked to wrap around his body and heart.

He sighed in relief when I gave him an arm to hold while he relieved himself. I'd taken a whiz when I went in to get his bathrobe so I just looked away to give him a little privacy. When he was done, I flipped the lid down and sat him down so I could go get the scissors. He could reach the toothbrushes from there and when I came back he was attacking his teeth like they were really dirty.

I knew how he felt. That was one thing that Mum had always insisted on, clean teeth and gums. I pattered around, getting out the straight edge that Dad had taught me to shave with. I could hardly wait to get all that hair off my chin. Scratching Sev wasn't going to happen if I had anything to say about it.

"Sit in front of me so I can see what I'm cutting." He suggested after spitting and rinsing a couple of times.

That made sense so I sat down on the cool tiles cross-legged in front of him. He combed his fingers through it a few times before taking the scissors from me and starting to cut. In no time at all, it was so short that I felt lighter than air. He looked at me, turning my head from one side to the other with a real considering look on his face.

"You have a good strong jaw, Hagrid. It's a pity to hide it with such a long beard. Why do you?"

I chuckled. "It keeps me warm in the winter, Sev."

He thought about that for a moment then said confidently, "I can do that from now on, Hagrid."

My eyes had to be big as fairy toadstools on May Day. Did he mean what I thought he meant? "Next winter, Sev?"

"And all the winters to come, Hagrid. You'll no doubt be sick of me." He stroked a trembling hand to my cheek. "I have no desire to return to teaching."

"That would be a right waste, it would indeed, Sev. You're one of the best teachers I know. But ya' don't 'ave to decide that right now." I leaned up just a little and kissed him. He tasted of eggs and apple blossom marmalade. When I pulled away, he was smiling at me, those black eyes sparkling.

"You may be right. Now, I want to see you shave." He began to tidy the pile of hair in his lap and I knelt up before using the edge of the tub to help myself up. My knees creak something awful some days.

"Hagrid, may I have this?" He asked a little diffidently and I glanced over at him.

"My beard? What for?" I was confused.

"Hair is one of those items that confers great strength in a potion. Yours especially." He said quietly and I wondered what thoughts were teeming in that big brain of his.

"Sure, Sev, you can use anything of mine that you want." I started lathering my face with the lavender soap that I always used.

"Thank you." He said absentmindedly, watching me closely when I wet the cold steel razor and prepared to make the first pass.

No one has ever given me such an audience since the first time Dad showed me how to scrape my face without slitting my throat. I never got the hang of safety razors but I could see they might be a good idea for someone who shaved every day. Severus was absorbed in every little move I made and when I laid the razor aside to splash my face, he touched it hesitantly.

"You want me to shave you, Sev? You're probably used to those newer razors." I offered but he shook his head no, so I didn't push him. Maybe he'd decided to grow a beard while he was healing? "Ready for bed?"

And just like that, he laid the towel full of my beard aside and raised his arms to me. I picked him up and held him close, breathing in the lovely Severus-scent. His tongue hesitantly licked my newly shaven cheek and I trembled. Me, a big strong half-giant, was almost scared of the scarred man in my arms. He made me feel like no one ever had before.

"I'm ready, Hagrid." He hid his face beneath my chin and I felt his lips there.

I was ready, too.

Severus

I felt as if I were flying when Hagrid picked me up and carried me back to our bed. Without a broom, I still felt lighter than air like I might soar up to the sky without magical assistance. He was an amazing man and for the first time in my life, I felt lucky, not star crossed or hexed or cursed, just lucky. I'd pinch myself but I didn't want to let go of the gentle man carrying me to bed.

The bed was soft as down and he laid me down as if I were the most fragile thing in the universe. Even though I considered myself tough as old boots, I liked the tenderness. It was so different from anything I'd ever felt before that I literally didn't know what to do. It had been a long time since I was the student but Hagrid didn't seem to mind that I was a novice in these gentler emotions.

He lay down beside me and I turned to him instantly, my body knew what it wanted so I let it have its way. It wanted warmth and caring touches; the tickle of dark curls against my chest; the weight of a gentle hand stroking my hip; the taste of a warm, wet tongue slipped between my lips; the sound of little moans coming from both of us. I was drunk with love and I wanted nothing more than the power of him deep inside of me.

"Oh, Sev," he breathed my name and I felt unbearably smug. His hands were moving over my skin as if I'd break at his touch. "Ya taste better than apple blossom honey."

I chuckled and kissed him again. He was the one who tasted good. "If I could bottle you, I'd make a fortune." I tasted his newly shaved cheek. "A little soap but mostly your natural musk." I nibbled my way down to the spot below his ear that had felt so good to me when he did it. He shivered and I chuckled. "Even better here . . . salty." I sucked on the hollow below his adam's apple and his little moan was music to my ears.

"No fair . . . Sev . . . oh my . . . I want to taste you, too." He said a little breathlessly and I looked down into his dark gaze with satisfaction.

He did want me, really and truly wanted me. "Then show me how, Rubeus. Show me how to make love to you."

He caught his breath. "Ya called me by my first name."

Hadn't I ever done that before, I thought back over the years we'd known each other. It appears he was right. "Rubeus," a tender kiss. "Rubeus," deeper voice while I combed through the curls on his broad chest. "Rubeus," was almost a growl that time.

"Oh Sev, it sounds good when you say it." He was blushing a little, which was really quite charming when I thought about it. "Is it all right if I explore ya now then you can explore me some more later?"

"Yes, please. Show me what feels good." I felt safe here in his arms and eager to learn from my new tutor.

He chuckled and began to slide his hands over my chest. He had the gentlest touch and every place he stroked began to tingle. When he leaned over me and blew on my nipples, I shivered all the way down to my toes. Why were they so sensitive?

"Beautiful, Sev, you're so beautiful." Each puff of air made them a little harder. "Nipples are a real erogenous zone for most mammals, including humans."

"Really?" I would have been upset at the comparison but he was licking them and that felt so good that I just had to move. "Oh, more."

Rubeus kissed his way down my chest and it tickled when his newly shaved chin brushed over my stomach. His tongue teased my navel and I squirmed a bit before beginning to tremble. My shaft was rising with just that bit of teasing and when his warm fingers wrapped around it, I couldn't seem to catch my breath.

"Easy now, Sev. Don't be gettin' too excited." He stroked his hands over my stomach. "I want ya to relax now and let me do the movin'."

I took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I can't help it, Rubeus. It feels so good when you touch me."

"It's supposed to, Sev. If it ever hurts, ya have to tell me." His voice was suddenly serious. "I don't ever want to hurt ya."

He meant it. I looked into those dark eyes and saw only truth there. "You're the first person since my mother who has ever wanted to protect me from pain." I tried to swallow the lump in my throat. "Thank you, Rubeus."

"Oh, Sev," he lay down beside me and pulled me up onto his chest and into his arms so we touched everywhere. "I wish that I could go back and erase every bad memory, every bit of pain that ya ever suffered. I wish that I could have been there for you."

I blinked back tears and clung to him. "You're here now, right here making love to me. Showing me how to return that love. Maybe I had to go through all my past experiences so I could reach this place in your arms."

"Aye, Sev, I know that sometimes I wonder why things happen the way they do." His hands slowly slid up and down my spine until I felt like arching up like a cat into that warm caress. "But sometimes they happen because we're not paying attention to the world around us. Animals don't do that, well, those that survive are paying attention and the ones that don't are somebody else's dinner."

I chuckled a little and licked that small brown nipple over his heart again. "I feel like I've been 'dinner' for some years now. First my father, then Voldemort and now for Dumbledore. I'm tired, Rubeus. So very tired that I want to sleep for a thousand years."

"Nah, Sev, ya'd miss out on all the good stuff it ya did that." His rumbling laughter shook my whole body. "Let me show you some of the good bits."

I was flying again, only this time, it was Hagrid's fingers that were making me soar. For such strong digits, they were amazingly gentle. He stroked me from my feet up to my shoulders. Literally every place he touched became an erogenous zone. My inner thighs trembled, my knees flamed, my stomach rippled and my shaft rose up, demanding more. More of his tender grip, more of those talented fingers that rolled my balls so gently, I just wanted more of everything.

The first touch of his lips to my crown broke my control the way that Voldemort had never been able to. The rough tongue-washing made me shake from head to toe until I exploded into his mouth. I may have passed out, since I have no memory of how I came to be back in his arms while he rocked me slowly, petting my hair like the cat I felt like.

"Rubeus," I managed his name.

"Ya liked that, I think." He pulled far enough away to look me in the eyes. "Yeah, that felt good."

I blushed and admitted the truth. "I loved it. It felt like I was flying."

"Oh, Sev, I do thank ya for letting me touch you." He ever so gently kissed my temple and I felt something melt inside of me. Something that I thought I didn't own any more finally thawed.

My frozen heart began to beat again. "Rubeus, I am the one who's thankful. I . . . I don't think that I'm capable of giving you the gift you've given me so freely. I don't know how and you deserve only the best."

His smile was bright. "Silly Sev, ya never failed at anything ya set your mind and hand to. Iffn ya want to, ya can be absolutely the best lover in the world. I've seen the way that ya concentrate on your potions. Think of me as a new recipe that ya're learning."

I thought about that for a long moment. I could do that. I would do that.

Hagrid

I often lie awake in bed of a morning, just going over what needs to be done by day's end. But this morning was like no other. Severus had given himself to me at the same time that I'd given myself to him. We hadn't done much really, touching and tasting and talking. He was curious about all the different textures that we shared between us. I'd been right about him being able to focus.

I was the only man in the world when he touched me. We were the only two men in the whole Forbidden Forest. It kind of felt like being on the moon or something. I didn't want to waste time thinking about that, not when he was curled up against my side, his hand possessively gripping my cock. He'd had questions about foreskin that was endearing in a man of his age.

His father had had him snipped when he was a baby but giants don't go in for that so he'd investigated it with careful hands. Not for the first time, I wished that I wasn't so big. I couldn't see how I'd fit inside of him at all. I was looking forward to him coming inside of me though. He was going to feel real good. But we were taking it slow so I could be sure that every touch was all right with him.

I'd been pleased a time or two but he hadn't ever been so everything I was showing him was brand new. He'd come six times before he fell dead asleep on me. I'd gingerly slid out from under him and gotten a damp cloth to clean him up. I wasn't going to waste a spell on something that I enjoyed doing so much. He'd murmured my name and almost made me cry.

But when I slid back into bed, he'd immediately rolled towards me with a murmur that I think was the word 'warm'. I'd been told that before but from Severus, it was a real compliment. The sun was creeping up the west wall from the windows on the east side of the cottage and I could tell that it was going to be a beautiful day. Maybe Sev would like to come outside with me while I tended to my outdoor patients.

His tongue licked my nipple. "Good morning, Rubeus."

"Morning, Sev, you feel all right?" I asked a little anxiously. He was a hard man to read sometimes.

"I feel," he hesitated for a long moment before looking up at me with kind of a bewildered look on his beautiful face. "I feel happy and satisfied and hungry."

I laughed out loud and hugged him to me. "Good, I feel all those things, too. I'm thinking pancakes and honeyed rose syrup with a side of fresh grapes."

He actually licked his lips. "Yes, please. That sounds wonderful. May I help?"

"Sure, Sev, you can sit at the table and wash the grapes before we eat them. I always like to make sure that they're free of any kind of fairy dust or bird dander." I carefully separated us so I could slide out of bed and I immediately missed his touch. My cock did, too and I gave it a stroke to remind him that he'd already come more in a single night than he'd come in the previous six months.

But Sev was sitting up on his own and I could feel his eyes on my back so I squeezed my cheeks together a couple of times and pretended not to hear his little sigh. Gathering up his robe, I helped him on with it then carried him over to the table. "Stay here for a minute while I go out and gather the grapes."

"I wish I could help." He looked so sad that I just had to lean over and give him a kiss. He tasted great and I loved the way he slid his hands around my neck, under my hair. His hands had some strength in them and it felt good to feel them kneading my skin. When I pulled away, he still had his eyes closed and that little pink tongue of his was licking his lips like I tasted real good.

"You're getting better all the time, Sev. One of these days, you'll be out there helping me with the squid." I joked with him a little breathlessly while I thought about that tongue of his.

"I'm not that fond of the water creatures. Now the Nemean lion is another story." He teased me right back. "I must be drawn to hairy creatures."

I laughed out loud. "Maybe I shouldn't have shaved then?"

He looked up at me through those long dark lashes of his, kind of shy like. "As long as you don't shave your magnificent chest, I think it will be all right."

I looked down for a moment and tried to see what he saw. "Magnificent? Hairy, that's for sure but I don't see the magnificent part."

"That's all right, Ru'. I can see it and I believe I've never seen a more muscular one in my entire life." He ran his hands over the wiry curls, flexing his fingers and tickling me. "I think you should dress though before you go outside. I don't want to share you with who ever happens to be passing by."

He'd given me a nickname, I thought with a fond smile. I chuckled and stood up. "Doubt there's much traffic today but if you insist."

He watched me don a pair of shorts and smiled. "You never know, Ru'. Dumbledore has an appalling sense of timing. It would be just our luck to have him come whistling up to the front door at the exact moment I try to fit more of you in my mouth."

Shivering, I remembered the feeling of his hot, wet mouth around me and his tongue rasping over the tender skin. "Yeah, that would be right off-putting, it would indeed."

He chuckled and with a flick of his hand turned on the burner under the tea kettle. "Go and gather our breakfast so we can see what other kind of mischief we can get up to."

Grabbing the colander from the nail by the front door, I opened the door and left it open to let in all the fresh air. There was a sharpness to the wind that spoke of a storm brewing over the lake. Maybe I'd take the time to harvest a few of the apples, too. I could make apple upside-down crumble. Sev would like that, I thought happily while I headed for the grape arbor.

Casting a quick seeking spell, I picked the bunches of red-purple grapes that were completely ripe. The wrens seemed to like them almost fermented so I left a few that would ripen in the next few days. The apple trees were on the edge of my acre of garden and I strode over to them, seeking the brightest reds on their branches. Another kind of seeking spell and I'd gathered three for each pocket and two under my chin.

I looked pretty silly but I was pretty sure that Sev wouldn't mind a bit. Carrying them back, I found the teakettle steaming gently and the ingredients for pancakes neatly lined up on the table. "Sev, did that much magic tire you?"

"A little," he shrugged ruefully and smiled at me. "I stopped when I thought I might drop the teapot. It's coming back but so slowly."

"We've got time to bring ya back at your own pace, Sev." I unloaded my pockets and set the colander down in front of him. "I knew that I wasn't the only one who could do wandless magic. That come in handy when ya're stirring a potion?"

"Yes, indeed it does. I imagine that working with the magic creatures of the Forest gives you a bit of practice?" He accepted the bowl of water that I handed him and sat it on his lap before dumping the grapes in it and swishing them around. "Dumbledore is the only other wizard I know who can use a single gesture to more effect than most wizards can with a wand."

"Did I hear my name mentioned?" The Headmaster's cheery voice startled me so badly that I almost dropped the pancake batter.

Sev raised his eyebrow at me and I thanked Atlas that I'd pulled on a pair of shorts. This was going to be a very interesting breakfast.

Dumbledore

It was good to see Severus up and sitting at the table. Hagrid drew up another chair with a mumble and turned back to the stove. He'd shaved off his beard for the summer and I pondered the change in his looks. Without it, he looked less like a giant and more like a very large Man. It's odd how hair changes a person, I thought while I stroked my own beard and watched the two of them.

Something had changed but I wasn't sure what. Severus had gone rather quiet although I'd heard him talking to Hagrid when I came up the path from the beach. My poor Potion Master had every right to be wary around me but it hurt just a little that he trusted me so little. Of course the news that I was bringing would dent that trust even more.

Those black eyes looked at me while passing the colander full of fruit over to Hagrid. "It's bad news, Albus, I can tell that from here."

"You've been declared dead, Severus. The Ministry has taken your manor and lands by eminent domain after declaring you a rogue wizard." I said it all in one breath and sat back to await the explosion.

Severus sat very still and silent while Hagrid dropped the teapot to shatter on the floor and knelt by his side. They looked at each other solemnly and I could almost hear a conversation pass between them with just the raising of an eyebrow and the clasp of a hand. Really, this was fascinating, I thought while levitating the pieces of pottery over to the garbage bin. Visualizing one of my bookshelves, I spelled the big white teapot that was too big to use for everyday in to take the broken one's place.

"Good riddance," Severus said quietly and stroked Hagrid's cheek. "I always hated the place. Are the Hogwarts dungeons still locked up?"

"Yes, indeed, I took care of that once Fudge owled me. I told him that we'd use them for the new potions instructor. The hidden rooms are still invisible to everyone but me and Minerva. She is also the only one who knows that you're still alive." I busied myself in making the tea while they continued their silent dialog.

"Ya're really all right, Sev?" Hagrid was holding Severus' hand now and stroking it gently. "It's where ya were born after all."

"The old Severus was born there. He died in the Forbidden Forest." Those graceful hands of his cupped Hagrid's face and for the first time in a very long time, I saw Severus smile. "The new Sev was reborn here, in your cottage. He could care less about the possessions of his predecessor. So long as he has his books and his potions, he is content to stay right here for the rest of his life."

Hagrid gently rested his forehead against the man the chair. "The new Sev can stay forever right here so long as he lets me stay by his side."

"Forever, Rubeus, I think that might just be long enough." Severus sighed and rested his head on top of the half-giant's head.

Goodness, I was witness to a bonding ceremony and I could hardly wait to tell Minerva. Beaming at them, I said. "Congratulations, gentlemen, I'll serve as your witness, shall I?"

Severus' mouth quirked upwards just a trifle in the sardonic smirk with which I was more familiar. "If you would be so kind, Albus."

Hagrid started and looked over his shoulder at me. My smile must have reassured him because he gave me a blinding smile of his own. "That's right kind of you, Sir. Me mum will be ever so pleased once we tell her. When we have the party, we'll invite you up to Scotland. Now, I need to start making breakfast. What other news do you have for us?"

He rose and I pretended not to see him kiss Severus gently. "Well, the summer school session has started and for the first time without a class on potions. Severus, do you have any recommendations for an instructor?"

"My lesson plans are already in place as well as the ingredients for them. If I were you, I'd give them the lessons yourself. You were once quite an adequate potion maker and they'll be less likely to blow anything up with you in attendance." He idly ate a grape then another. "Actually, I'd be glad to grade the essays for you if you'd owl them to me. Also, I would appreciate it if you could keep the redoubtable Mr. Potter from messing about in my private quarters. Is there a way to get my books to me by any chance?"

I'd known that was coming and I drew out the one inch square boxes from my belt pouch, lining them up one after the other until all 30 were in place. "If Hagrid will make some bookshelves for you, these should fit quite nicely on them."

The half-giant set a stack of pancakes between us and took a look at the miniature boxes. "Those'll need a lot of bookcases. I reckon I'd better just build onto the cottage so we've got a room the creatures can't get into and the books can't get out of."

"Excellent thought, Hagrid. I'll help, shall I?" I speared a fluffy pancake and poured some of the dark red syrup over it. My first bite was pure ecstasy. He really was an excellent cook. We ate every last one of them and the subsequent two batches as well.

"Actually, Severus, I was wondering if you'd mind too greatly if young Harry helped us with the building." I caught his grimace and smiled a little. "I know the two of you are like fire and water but he's already come to me with one of his prophetic dreams about you. He saw you bathing in a moonlit pool of water with a dragon watching over you."

His bark of laughter surprised me but his affectionate look at Hagrid did not. "My fierce dragon, Ru', that's who he saw. I suppose if we keep him busy, we can keep him out of trouble, but only if he comes with you, Albus. Perhaps I can catch him unawares with some potions homework?"

The sardonic look was much more like the Potions Master that I knew and loved. "Of course, my boy, I'm looking forward to it. What story shall we give out for the lumber delivered to the Forest?"

"I've been meaning to build on a small animal hospital for the creatures of the Forest." Hagrid said quietly.

Severus nodded. "Then get enough lumber for two rooms, Albus. I will not have Hagrid be in the position of having to lie. Are there sufficient rocks nearby to provide a basement room, Ru'?"

"Aye, Sev, there's plenty within a mile or so." Hagrid and I both looked at him.

"Then we'll build a good foundation under both rooms and that will become my potions laboratory." He said calmly and I saw Hagrid light up with joy.

"Sev, that's a wonderful idea. I'll ask my brothers to come for a visit. We'll have it up in no time at all." Hagrid positively beamed. "While we're at it, I think we'll build on another bedroom. Be a bit more private, that."

Severus blushed beautifully and I busied myself with pouring some more tea for all of us. This was just what I wanted young Harry to experience. He'd already come to me with questions about same sex loving and these two would be the perfect example of the old adage that opposites attract.

I could hardly wait to begin the building. In such a time of darkness, it was good to see their light.

Hagrid

Dear Gratian and Hossic,

I hope this letter finds you well. The weather here has turned real hot but the lake stays nice and cool, kind of like Loch Ness. I was wondering if the pair of you would like to come down here for a week or so. I finally got the lumber that I need to build on to the cottage by the lake. I need a place where the little ones can be safe while they're healing.

I'd really appreciate your help, although the Headmaster and one of the students are going to help, too. In fact, one of the instructors has been staying with me while he heals up from a real

bad illness. I think you'll like him. I sure do. Please let me know if you can come and when. I'll meet your train.

Oh, and bring your camping gear. Severus needs the bed.

Love, Hagrid

I read it over twice and decided that it would have to do. I wanted the twins to meet Sev first before I took him home to meet the folks. With my family, it would be better to kind of get him used to a few at a time. Like I'd told him before, we could be real noisy. I rolled it up and made it small, going outside to find someone to take it north. The same Greeley wren who'd taken my letter to the Headmaster chirped a yes and swallowed it up before taking wing.

Sev was taking a nap so I checked on him before heading for the side of the cottage where the new library bedroom would be. We'd decided that it would be better to have that room and the animal hospital on opposite sides of the cottage. Safer, too. I could see Sev being disturbed by the warble of a drunk phoenix. Those crazy creatures love the malt liquor and they can be right rude singers when they're pissed.

Or the whistling of a wounded snipe. Or the bellowing of a molting sphinx. Poor things can't help being smelly and noisy but with a good spell or two, our bedroom would be real quiet. I smiled while I began digging down further. The potions lab would be here and I wanted it nice and deep for Sev, about fifteen feet down would give us a good foundation where a hellbender or two could over-winter with us.

They would keep it warm for him and also have a safe place to hide. While I was at it, I'd decided to tunnel under the rest of the cottage too so they could swarm in and out without bothering anybody. That would go a long way towards heating the rest of our home on those cold winter nights. We were about three miles from Hogwarts and I'd decided to just commute like the muggles did.

It would be safer for Sev to stay here and I didn't want to be away from him any more than I had to be. I'd worked long hours before to fill up my days but now that I had Sev, I wanted to be with him. I had the urge to sing out loud but I've not got much of a voice, not like his beautiful, silky tones. Just thinking about his voice made me hard. But then, the sight and the taste of him made me hard, too.

Everything about him was so beautiful that I just wanted to worship him night and day.

He was getting stronger and he'd actually walked a few steps this morning. He'd had to hold onto my arm real hard but he made it all the way to the table before having to sit down. He'd smiled so big that I'd just had to kiss him. That delayed breakfast a bit but he tasted better than anything I could cook.

"Hagrid," the Headmaster's voice surprised me and I turned to see him and young Harry standing by the pile of dirt that was growing just beyond the new basement.

"Hello, Headmaster. It's good to see you 'arry." I climbed up the incline that we'd dug to get the rocks down where they were needed. "How about a nice cup of tea?"

"We've come to work, my friend." Dumbledore smiled at me. "We brought the first load of lumber with us. Is there some place that you'd like us to put it?"

"All ready?" I hadn't expected to get that quite so soon. "Let's see, how about just behind the

cottage with a spell to keep the rain off?"

Harry nodded and trotted back to the shore with me right behind him. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the older wizard go in the front door. I was torn between wanting to be there when he and Sev talked and wanting to give Sev his privacy. It's a fine line some days but I wanted him to have anything he wanted and he was surely used to being alone rather than with somebody 24 hours a day.

"Hagrid?" Harry's voice brought me back to the shore and the unsure look in his eyes. "Is Professor Snape really here?"

I sat down on one of the shorter stacks of lumber and gestured for him to join me. "He is 'ere. He's still healing from a real bad beating. 'is legs were all twisted up and he's just now able to walk a few steps every day."

He shuddered. "I dreamed him being hurt, Hagrid. It was awful and there was nothing I could do to help."

I hugged him close and felt him bury his face in my shoulder. "I know that if you could have, then you'd of been right there helping 'im, Harry. You're still a little young to be rescuing Professors. I got to him just in time and the Headmaster fixed him up real good."

He sniffed a little and pulled away to blow his nose on his handkerchief. "I'm glad, Hagrid. He used to scare me a little when I was younger and I'm not ever going to be very good in potions but I don't want him to get hurt in place of me."

"He weren't taking that punishment for you, Harry." I raised his chin and looked him straight in the eye. "He chose to be a spy for Dumbledore and even if you weren't 'ere, he'd have still been fighting for the Light. And he's safe now."

He looked at me with that wide-eyed look that I'd seen a time or two before. "Um, Hagrid, are you really the dragon that I saw with Professor Snape?"

I blushed at the unexpected question. "I surely do hope so, 'arry. I love him something fierce and he loves me back."

Harry blinked at me then smiled that sweet smile that I remembered Lily having. "I'm glad, Hagrid. You kind of fit together now that I think about it. He'll be safe with you, won't he?"

"As safe as safe can be in these frightening days." I smiled at him. "So, don't ya be worrying about what ya might have done, ya just soak up all the learnin' ya can and listen to the Headmaster. Now, let's get this lumber off the beach and up to the cottage."

He jumped up and we soon had it all nicely levitated to the spot behind the cottage where I thought it would be safe. I had him cast the protection spell, reminding him of all the things that it needed to be protected from. We'd worked up quite an appetite before Dumbledore called us in for tea.

Sev was nicely dressed in a shirt and pants with a pair of black slippers on his feet. He and the Headmaster were seated at the table, acting all unconcerned but I could see the little tremors that my lover was trying to hide. It was the first time that he'd been with anyone but the two of us for weeks now and Harry and him had a kind of love/hate relationship.

Harry though, he marched right up to Sev and held out his hand. "I'm glad that you're all right, Professor Snape. I wish I could have helped."

He relaxed just a little and shook the lad's hand. "Thank you, M- Harry." He caught himself and tried a tiny smile. "I will be fine and I appreciate your concern. Although we plan on working you very hard over the next few weeks."

Harry laughed and sat down by Dumbledore. "I've never helped build a house before. I think I like building something up rather than tearing something down."

"Yes indeed, Harry, you'll have some interesting lessons here with Hagrid and Severus." The Headmaster smiled genially and began to pour the tea. "I believe that we can create a safe path through the Forest so that Harry can come every day. Do you think that's doable, Hagrid?"

We started to plan out our work schedule. I was looking forward to building up, too.

Hossic

"Yo, Gra'." I called to my brother who was currently working under one of our trucks. "We got a letter from Rube."

He rolled out and sat up so I could hand it to him. I was already thinking about where we'd put the camping gear. "Whoa, never mentioned anybody's name before has 'e."

"Yeah, I noticed that, too. Think it's the same one he's been sighing over for the last few years?"

He sniggered and handed it back to me. "I wouldn't take any bets on it. Best let Angie know that we'll be away for a bit. You sending that on to Mum?"

"Aye, I'll no be keeping this from her. She'd snatch us both bald if'n we kept 'er in the dark." I headed for the front office of Hagrid & Hagrid Movers and our office manager, Angie Setters, to let her know we'd be heading south. I could hardly wait to meet this bloke who had our Rubeus all in a twitter.

Severus

The building was going faster than I'd dared hope. Between the two of them, Rubeus and Harry had finished digging out what would become my new lab and started on cementing in the tunnels, floor and walls. I watched from the shaded nook where Hagrid had prepared a veritable bower for me. My job was to read aloud to them and if I may say so, I did it quite well.

Hagrid's education had been a bit spotty and Harry was still behind in his reading so I read to them from some of the textbooks that were a part of my library. Slowly but surely, I was strengthening both in body, magic and spirit. I tired easily though and knew that my stamina was almost nonexistent. Of course, I preferred to keep my strength for the inspired lovemaking that took place when Harry left us each evening.

Smiling into the distance, I listened to the birds singing overhead. There was a gentle breeze tickling my cheeks and the pillows that I reclined upon automatically moved when I did so I was never uncomfortable. Really, Hagrid had proven to be quite resourceful in his magic abilities. I thought I knew why he hid some of those abilities but we had yet to speak of it. This place was truly enchanted with peace and healing. I never wanted to leave it or the gentle man who held my heart.

"Purr-rr-rr," Ty, the Nemean Lion had come to pay Hagrid a visit and I'd been brushing him while reading aloud. He butted his large head into my leg as a gentle reminder to cease thinking and get back to brushing.

I chuckled and started where I'd left off after first collecting the hair from the brush and putting it carefully into a sterile specimen bag. Ty had proven to be most accommodating about me using his fur in a potion or two. Between Hagrid and him, I was on my way to preparing some very powerful potions.

"Sev, you all right?" Hagrid's head appeared above the walls of dirt.

"I'm fine, Ru'. I was just resting my voice." I reassured him, watching for the grin that he always sent me. It wasn't sexual in the least but it always made me think of warm, dark honey dripping down the sides of a stack of his griddle cakes. In other words, it turned me on almost immediately.

His head disappeared. "What do you think, Harry? Is it time for a break?"

"Yes, please." Harry's rather breathless voice answered and I levitated the pitcher of iced tea from the cooler out to where I sat.

The rose and yellow quilt bag yielded three glasses, a pan of brownies that Hagrid had baked for us and a box of the chocolate frogs that Harry liked so much. The two appeared briefly then disappeared into the cottage for a quick wash-up. Ru' had shed his shirt and I watched him flex his muscles just a bit for me. That little warm glow in the pit of my stomach was back.

It pretty much appeared every time I saw him these days. I finished brushing Ty's tail and watched him wriggle all over in contentment. But when his head whipped around and he sprang up to stand guard over me, I almost dropped the brush. Casting a quick glance around, I couldn't see anything that might be dangerous. The sharp crack of a limb breaking sent my gaze towards the shore.

Dumbledore always announced his presence with a cheery call so it wasn't him. I groped for my wand before remembering that it didn't exist anymore. I had watched Voldemort burn it to ash in front of me, after all. I was struggling to my feet when two large men burst into sight. Luckily, I recognized them from the family picture on the mantle. I sagged back in relief only to sit bolt upright again.

Hagrid's brothers had obviously come to check out the strange man in his life.

I wasn't sure that I was going to pass their scrutiny. All the reasons for me cluttering up Hagrid's life seemed miniscule next to the reasons why I should protect him from myself.

"Hossic! Gration! You came!" Hagrid had just emerged from the cottage and he met them with a three-way hug.

Harry came over to me and dropped down to sit next to Ty, who was slowly relaxing on my right side. "Who are they, Professor?"

"They are Hagrid's twin brothers. Let's see if I have their genealogy down. There are six children in the family. In descending order, there's Hagrid, Rhea a sister, twins Hossic and Gration, then Royan another sister and Gersey his youngest brother."

"Wow, that is so cool to have such a big family." He beamed at them and I realized that I too thought it 'cool'.

But Hagrid was bringing them over to meet us and I took quick hold of my courage. "Sev, let me introduce ya to me brothers, Hossic and Gration. Boys, this is Professor Severus Snape and one of our students, Harry Potter."

"Pleased, I'm sure." Hossic was a little taller than Hagrid with wide shoulders and a muscular figure dressed in muggle jeans and a t-shirt. He knelt down next to Harry and shook hands with us both.

Gration's hair was almost as red as the hair of the Weasley clan. He looked more like Hagrid than his brother, something about the square-ness of his jaw and the lines around his eyes. He sat down squarely in front of me and also shook hands with us. I was almost hidden behind Ty and I was just coward enough to use him as a buffer.

Hagrid guessed, of course and made sure that he sat down so close that he could touch me. "Well, boys, a letter would 'ave been nice. Ya come to work or just check out Sev?"

Hossic laughed out loud. "Nah, Mum's comin' to check out Sev. We came to work."

"Dear god," I muttered under my breath and contemplated a quick run for the border.

"Not to worry, love. She's going to love ya just as much as I do." Hagrid squeezed my ankle gently.

Gration was looking at me with narrowed eyes. "Didn't I read something about a Snape bein' dead and a rogue wizard?"

I straightened my back and sat up straight. "Technically, I was dead when Ru' rescued and breathed life back into me. I'm also a former Death Eater, spy and teacher. What else would you like to know?"

"Hm, he's a feisty one, Rube. I think you better hang onto 'im." Gration grinned wide and slapped his brother on the shoulder. "It should be a great bondin'."

What? That was it? They just accepted my word?

Hagrid was blushing again. "Um, we kind of already bonded when the Headmaster was here as a witness." Actually we both blushed and looked at each other with what I am sure were very foolish smiles.

"Whew! You can explain that one to Mum." Hossic grinned. "Those brownies the kind with double chocolate?"

My head was still reeling at their matter-of-fact acceptance of our relationship but Hagrid simply started cutting into the still warm pan of brownies. I'd thought the size of the pan excessive but within a few moments, only crumbs were left. Harry was wide-eyed but smiling while they quizzed him about his Quidditch playing. Their amazing tact was truly astounding.

They did what I'd been trying to do for the last five years, accept him as a fifteen-year old boy and not as some kind of savior for the wizarding world. Slowly I began to relax a little and with a start I realized that Hagrid was still stroking my ankle - my very sensitive naked ankle that was even now sending signals to my brain and other parts south.

And he was doing it on purpose, crafty giant that he was. I glared at him and he just smiled harder. I was definitely going to give him a piece of my mind if I had any left after it exploded into bliss. Merlin, what those fingers could do, I decided with a quick gasp to get more air into my lungs. Ty gave a big yawn and sprawled out for a nap, his head resting on my thighs so that I

found myself with a lion blanket.

The brothers snickered a bit then got up to pitch their tent near the cottage while Harry carried their bags in. Hagrid leaned over to kiss me and I opened for him automatically with welcome relief. It appeared the worst was over for now. The little confrontation had exhausted me and I lay back when Hagrid left to join his brothers and quickly fell asleep. Ty's purr sent me deep where dreams couldn't find me.

Hagrid

We got a lot done although I had to keep checking on Sev. I knew that Ty was guarding him but I also knew how much he'd feared meeting my brothers. Hossic was giving Harry lessons in stone-laying while Gration gave me what the Yanks would probably call the third degree. He kept asking questions until he was satisfied that he'd wrung me dry. Then he told me that I never did anything easy and hugged me close.

I felt a lot better after that. We finished laying the floor and three of the walls. I'd had a pot of stew simmering on the back burner since morning and once we'd cleaned up, we had a picnic in what I was calling Sev's nook. He looked more rested and at ease with the twins although he was still real quiet. He'd been an onlooker most of his life and this had to be hard for him.

But Gration liked his dry comments and pretty soon Sev had them rolling on the grass with his tale of the first time he met Sebastian the sea dragon. It was just a good thing that he usually shielded himself when he was gathering magical scales. In this case, let's just say that Sebastian's breath was worse than his flame, especially after one of my jalapeno pepper mashes.

Harry went off to Hogwarts about eight o'clock with Ty keeping him company to the edge of the Forest. The twins went to wash up in the lake and I carried Sev in for our bath. I'd already told Gration that we were going to bed early and he just winked and promised not to interrupt us. I know I was grinning but I was so relieved that they'd accepted Sev and me that I couldn't seem to stop.

"Ah, alone at last," I said, kicking the door shut behind me.

Sev chuckled. "It's going to be an interesting week, Ru'. Are they really all right with us?"

I kissed him while carrying him into the bathroom and setting him down. I made sure he was steady before moving to the tub and turning on the water. "They're fine, Sev. I'm the first to bring a mate to the family. We're going to be a Hagrid family first in a lot of ways."

He was undressing slowly and I watched each piece of cloth flutter to the tiles, revealing more and more of that beautiful ivory skin that I love to touch. I didn't have as much to take off so I was in the tub when he finally stepped over the side and sank into the steaming water. He lay down on my chest and kissed me slowly. This was the moment of the day when everything went away but us.

We were once again the only people in the whole Forest. This small space was ours alone while we reconnected after being apart for most of the day. Our washing was leisurely, the soap slicking our skins while the bubbles tickled us. Sev loved soaping up my chest and watching the curls spring up to greet him. That's not the only thing that liked to spring up when he was lying naked on my chest.

Getting hard around Sev had become a habit that I really enjoyed. He'd wiggle over me and

pretty soon, I'd be growing up through his legs. I'd given up hope of ever coming inside of him, I just wouldn't fit in there. That had always been a possibility and I'd taken it philosophically. There were lots of other things we could do and Sev was learning real fast what turned me on and made me explode.

"Ru', may we please take this to the bed?" He was kneeling between my legs, holding onto my cock with both hands and he had a real thoughtful look on his face.

"Good idea, Sev. This bathtub isn't big enough." I sat up and made sure that I was rinsed off. I hate the feel of dried soap flaking off me. He let me go reluctantly and I watched him climb out and pick up a towel. He has the most beautiful body of anyone that I know and I loved the long lean lines of him. He's got muscle where he needs it although I still thought he was a little too skinny.

His appetite was good though and he ate most everything I set in front of him, which reminded me that I needed to harvest some more of the apples. He'd really liked the apple crumb cake. I almost forgot to dry off myself because of watching him but he shook his head and began helping me. I was hard as a rock by the time we were both dry. I picked him up again, even though I knew he could walk that far.

I just liked holding him and so far he hadn't called me on it. He'd been a little scared, I think, about whether my brothers would like him touching me. But at the moment, he was kneeling beside me on our wide bed while he contemplated my cock, tracing some kind of pattern on it with one finger.

"You're beautiful here, Ru'," his voice was lazy and thoughtful at the same time. "I've measured you and measured me and it just won't work."

"I know, Sev." I reassured him. "But that's okay, I love it when you rub me and lick me all over. I'd really like it if you came inside of me. You can't hurt me or anything. It will just feel real good."

He looked at me with his head to one side and a little smile on his lips. "Thank you, Ru'. But that's not quite what I meant. I like your size and I very much want to feel you inside of me. I did a little research," he raised his hand and a bottle of oil appeared in it. "This is a rather rare potion just for lubricating." He poured some on his hands, spelling it away and beginning to slide them up and down my cock. "You actually had most of the ingredients and Harry brought me the last one from my stores just yesterday."

It felt so good that I was sure I was going right out of my mind.

"There, that's better." He smiled at me before straddling me. "Give me your hands, Ru'."

I clasped his tight. "Wait a minute, ya're not ready yet."

He chuckled and wiggled just a bit. "Amplificare, consummare."

And slowly, I slid into the tightest, hottest place I'd ever been.

The end of part 8

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Parts 9 - 12 by Athea

Author's Notes:

Their bond grows stronger.

Severus

I had him all . . . inside of me . . . as far as he could go . . . was I insane?

I'd done some research and found a spell that would widen my channel to accommodate his length and girth. It still felt like his whole arm was up there and I was afraid to move. I had a death grip on both of his hands while I slowly relaxed enough to shift half an inch or so.

"Sev?" He was whispering and looked more afraid than he had in the last attack on Hogwarts. "Am I hurting you?"

"No, not exactly. It feels a little strange, that's all." I concentrated on lifting up a tiny bit and he bit his lip. "How does it feel for you?"

"It feels . . . wonderful . . . oh, Merlin. So good that I'm about to come already." He was panting a bit and I felt rather proud of that.

I leaned forward and rose up a little further before sitting back down again onto his thighs. He groaned so I did it again, but this time I felt sudden warmth flash through my whole body. It was my turn to moan.

"What is that, Ru'? Warmth," I moved to try and recreate it. "Oh my, that feels . . ."

He was watching me closely. "Warmth like a flash of heat lightning through your whole body?" He waited for my nod and I felt him relax just a bit. "That's your prostate, Sev. It's why making love feels so good."

"Really? I wondered why people talk about it feeling good. It never has before for me." I was rocking up and down and flushing from head to toe with all the lovely warmth flooding my body. "I can see why you like it, Ru'. We'll have to practice this a lot."

"Morning, noon and night, Sev, we'll take turns makin' each other feel good." His eyes were slitted with pleasure and I felt a glow around my heart that it was me making him feel this good.

"Yes, I'll make up that lubricant by the gallon. Oh," I gasped and came all over his stomach.

He thrust up once and flooded me with his seed. It felt like a hot enema swimming through my bowels and I was glad that I'd flushed myself out or I'd be embarrassing him once he came out. We were both shaking all over and I think I was crying but it wasn't because of the pain, although there had been just a bit. It was because I had made him happy and in the attempt found a part of myself that I didn't know I had.

Rubeus rolled us carefully to our sides so I could relax completely. He was still hard inside of me and I tried to flex those inner muscles around him. His gasp told me that I'd done it right and I smiled happily.

"Damn, Sev, that feels better than anythin' ever in my whole life." He nuzzled kisses all over my sweaty face. "Beautiful Sev, you're just full of surprises, aren't ya?"

"Did you really like it, Ru'?" I had to ask although he'd never lied to me.

"I really, really liked it, Sev. It's a good thing we're already bonded though. This way I'll always 'ave you right by my side." His hands stroked my back all the way down to where he pierced my body and I shivered at how good it felt. "We're goin' ta be busy, Sev. There's a whole lot of positions we need to try out. But next time, I want you to come inside of me."

I liked the way his big hands stroked my cheeks. He moved one of my legs up over his so he

could reach my balls and I started tingling again. "Ru', that feels good." He rolled them tenderly and kissed me again, sucking my tongue right into his tasty mouth. I felt his hips flex ever so gently and the fire was back.

We moaned in unison and I gave a thought to how sore I'd be in the morning. But it would be worth it, knowing that I'd given him this pleasure. And I was willing to bet that he'd help sooth some healing ointment inside of me. I needed something more but I wasn't sure what.

"Ru', I can't move well enough in this position." I told him fretfully.

He chuckled and gingerly moved me onto my back with him between my legs. That did feel better and if anything it felt like he was even deeper than he'd been before. "How's that, love? Better?"

Moving in and out very carefully, he made me feel like the most cherished person in the world. "Oh yes, Ru', much better. A little harder, please. Oh . . . yes . . . oh my god that feels good. More, Ru', a little more."

"I won't hurt you, Sev." He told me sternly, the sweat dripping off his face onto mine.

"I won't break, Ru'." I told him fiercely and framed his face with my hands. "I love you, Rubeus. I love you so much."

"Oh Sev, I love you, too." He leaned in to kiss me and I wrapped my legs around him to get him deeper. Our tongues entwined and we started rocking faster and faster.

I was going to spontaneously combust if he didn't do something soon. My shaft was caught between our stomachs and it was leaking so much we were going to be glued together. Every time his hard shaft hit that spot inside of me, I felt it all the way down to my toes. Nothing had ever felt this good. I was going to be on my back for the rest of my natural life just so I could feel this over and over again.

And suddenly I felt my toes curling and every muscle in my body exploded.

Hagrid

I wanted to pass out in the worst way but I'd squish Sev if I did, so I rolled us to where he was on top before I relaxed all over. He'd fainted or something but it would be a moment until I could check. I'd never come that hard in my life. After being afraid that I'd never know this sweetness, it seemed like a miracle how well it had gone. I was shrinking a little and I knew that Sev would be sore as hell when I came out.

Stroking his ass, I real slowly began inching out of him. Every muscle in his body had seized up when he came but they were all limp now so I moved him easily. Nuzzling his temple, I thought about how brave he was and how glad I was that I'd been the one to rescue him. It was so sweet that he hadn't known about the prostate gland. Those bastards who'd taken him against his will had never come close to making him come.

All he'd known is that I wanted him and he'd set his mind to giving me what I wanted.

And he'd said, 'I love you'. Right out loud, he'd said it. I hadn't been joking about how much I loved him. We were forging the kind of bond that my parents had and I couldn't help smiling at the thought of what Mum would say when I told her. She'd give him such a hug that he'd be feeling it for a week, the way he was going to be feeling me if I didn't get some salve inside of him.

My cock told me that he was real happy where he was but I knew better. I'd give him a stern talking to later, right now I had to . . . there. We were going to be glued together if we didn't get cleaned up. Sev was still limp so I moved him off to the side so I could sit up. I inspected myself to check for blood but thankfully there wasn't any. I checked the trickles coming out of him and they were clear, too. So I hadn't permanently hurt him, just made him sore.

Standing up, I was a little dizzy but once the room quit spinning, I was okay. I picked him up gently and carried him back into the bathroom. Luckily, I hadn't drained the tub. A quick heating spell and I lowered him into the steaming water. He moaned a little and I tensed up. The hot water had to hurt a bit.

"Ru'," he said groggily and I hushed him while running the washcloth over his flushed skin. "Feels good."

"Good, how do ya feel otherwise?" I rinsed away the soap and tenderly cupped his poor cock. He hissed a bit and tensed then relaxed.

"Well fucked, that's how I feel. Dearest Ru', you are a giant among men." His dark eyes were sparkling and his grin was the biggest one I'd ever seen. "Get in here so I can wash you again. You are definitely messy."

I chuckled and climbed in a little wearily. It had been a hard day in more ways than one. "I hope ya made up something soothin' that I can stroke inside of ya."

He ran the soap over my messy stomach and said saucily, "Of course, I did, Ru'. I knew how powerful you'd be." He made sure that he got all of his seed out of the hair there and teased me at the same time. "It aches a little but part of that could be from the spell, too. I'll do some more reading about that particular one once my library is unpacked."

"It's not one that you've used before?" I asked him while he washed my face for me.

"I used something similar when I knew that Voldemort was likely to punish me that way. Done well in advance, it loses something but then none of them were as big as you are." He sighed and swarmed into my lap for a kiss.

He's getting good at that, I thought muzzily while I wondered where his energy was coming from. I could already feel his cock rising up and I just had to laugh to myself. Who knew that he'd be so energetic in bed? My brothers would laugh themselves silly if they found out.

Severus

I felt like I could fly. Truly, if I'd known how much fun making love was, I'd have thrown myself on Hagrid's mercy years ago. Maybe his seed was energizing me or something but I was ready to go again. "Ru', would you like me to come inside of you? Or are you too tired?"

He sat up straight and looked indignant. "Of course, I'm not too tired, Sev. I think that's a real good idea. I may need a wee bit of help standing but then I'm all yours."

I kissed him again then jumped up and pulled him up with me. He's a beautiful sight when the water is cascading off all those bulging muscles of his. And he was mine, all mine, he'd said so. Suddenly I was feeling extremely possessive and determined to stake my claim to this beautiful man in front of me.

"I love you, Ru'." I finished toweling off and used my damp towel to stroke over his back and

down to his firm cheeks. Leaning over, I kissed each one while he started and peered over his shoulder at me. "Don't worry, Ru', I'm just letting them know that they belong to me now."

"All of me belongs to ya, Sev, but they appreciate the gesture." He was chuckling a little and I slid my arms around him, plastering myself against his back.

He was so warm and big and beautiful. I had to remember to tell him that everyday, the same way that he reassured me all the time. I was a taciturn man but he would need the words and I found that I wanted to say them, over and over again. "Bed, Ru', we need a bed right now."

He caught my hands and started moving out of the bathroom, pulling me along with him. His buttocks flexed against me and my shaft hardened even further at their tantalizing nearness. It was a good thing that I'd made up a quart of the lubrication. Now that I knew how good it felt being taken, I was curious how it would feel to take. I was pretty sure that I wasn't big enough to hurt him but I might not be big enough to satisfy him either.

His eyes were drooping a bit and I wondered if I should wait until the next day. But he had the oil in his hands and just that touch hardened me completely. With a little kiss, he turned around and went onto all fours for me. Spreading his legs for me brought him down to just the right height and I parted his cheeks to inspect the seemingly tiny hole. His balls hung down and I stroked my hand over my cock to get some of the oil so I could massage them.

That seemed to wake him up and his moan was music to my ears. Hesitantly, I rubbed the little hole and then slid my longest finger inside. He moaned again and pushed back so I knew I'd done it right. His breathy little moans had turned me to steel and I stroked in two fingers for a long moment before he was pushing back again and saying my name over and over.

I couldn't wait any longer and I put my crown to the hole that still looked impossibly tiny. But the decision was taken out of my hands when he pushed back hard and I popped inside. "Ru', are you . . . all right?"

"Ya're inside me, Sev." He flexed his cheeks and I felt his muscles ripple around me. "Course I'm all right, I'm bloody fantastic. Move, Sev."

So I moved on in until I couldn't get any further. Stretched over his back, my hands on his hips, I knew that it felt almost better than when he'd been inside of me. "You're so hot inside, Ru', and tight."

"No more than ya, Sev." He flexed again. "He feels good in there, yes, he does. Move, Sev and he'll feel even better." He peeked over his shoulder at me and I freed a hand to brush his hair aside so I could see his eyes. "Love ya, Sev. Now move."

I chuckled and pulled out a little then back in. Out a little further then back in a little harder. I was pretty sure that I wouldn't hurt him but I had yet to hit that spot that had felt so good to me. Varying the angle each stroke, finally I found it. His whole back flushed a light rose color and I hit it again just to see if I had it right. Groaning, he told me in no uncertain terms to keep it up.

So I settled in to make him feel as good as he'd made me feel. It felt like liquid metal around my shaft, like he was remaking it into something beautiful. I'd thought of sex as a messy, disgusting business but it wasn't at all. Of course, the men who'd taken me didn't love me. No one had ever loved me the way that Rubeus did. I was the luckiest wizard in the world that this man of infinitely beautiful soul loved me.

Wanted me. I felt reborn again, the way I felt when Albus had told me that I'd been declared dead. Free, that was it. I felt free of the old sour me. I loved someone else and they loved me back. The years of degradation and fear were gone from my soul. For a moment, I wished that everyone

could feel this happy.

And the next moment, I was coming so hard that I almost passed out again. Panting, I finally heard the high-pitched keen that told me Ru' had come, too. The bed was a mess. We were glued together again and I had the feeling that Hossic and Gration had just heard us come. But I really didn't care, not if my lover didn't.

"Sev, I think ya've got a natural talent at that." Rubeus said quietly, in between the pants. "A real talent that ya're going to have to practice with me."

"Equal . . . turns . . . Ru'," I took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "We'll take turns, giving and taking."

"Now I really did make a mess," he chuckled tiredly. "Three baths in one night is a bit much, love."

I gathered my strength and slowly eased out of him. He caught his breath when I popped out but I couldn't see any blood so I hoped that I hadn't hurt him. "Hold on and I'll do a quick clean up." Concentrating, I removed all the body fluids from the bed and dropped them into the tub of now cold water. "Sleep, Ru'."

Flicking off the lights, I moved into his arms when he finally lay down and turned over. This was a night that I'd keep tucked away in my heart. For the first time, I truly felt the bond between us. Strong and sure, it was warming that thawing heart of mine.

Hagrid

Both additions looked great, if I do say so myself. Well, the outsides did. The insides still looked a little unfinished. The walls were plastered smooth and painted white. The floors were sanded smooth and the Headmaster had come and done a beautiful job of staining and sealing them. No matter what we tracked in, they'd clean up with just soap and water.

I like being practical. So does Sev but he's also got a real eye for beauty and when the Headmaster sent a rolled up rug made small with Harry one day, I learned just what he'd been used to in his life. Sev tensed up a bit when he took it from Harry's hand and he took a real deep breath before unrolling it. We were standing in our new bedroom, fitting the bookshelves into place while the sun shone in through the east window.

It was early morning so the light was pouring onto the honey oak floor and bouncing onto the white washed walls. He laid it on the floor and muttered the enlarging spell. Slowly it began to return to its normal size while the colors grew more vivid and the design finally showed itself. It was gold and green mainly but with flowers of every color of the rainbow growing in profusion among the golden stems of grasses that I didn't recognize.

He knelt and stroked a patch in the left corner where a bouquet of blue gillyflowers grew. "This was my mother's favorite flower. I remember her teaching me all the names of the plants in her garden and what they could be used for. She was a master herbalist and a fair potion master in her own right. Father told her that she wasn't to do the manual labor, it was undignified. She'd nod and agree then head for the garden the moment he left. This rug lay in her sitting room and I played on it when I was very small. She'd sit right down with me and tell me stories about when she was young."

"Ya loved her very much, didn't ya, Sev?" I sat down beside him and pulled him into my lap,

gesturing to Harry to go find the twins. "She sounds like a great mum."

He laid his head on my shoulder and clung to me. "She was the only person who loved me, Rubeus. Until you came into my life, she was the only one who cared whether I lived or died. I still miss her."

The little sniff just about made me cry, too. I rocked him slowly and patted his back soothingly. "She's still got a place in your heart, Sev. Course ya miss her and ya probably always will. But I'll share me mum with ya if that's all right."

He sniffed harder and clung a little tighter. "She may not like me at all, Ru' and won't want to be shared. I'm not what she'd want for her son."

"Mum loves me and wants me to be happy, Sev. You . . . make me happy." I said it very distinctly so he'd know how serious I was. "I . . . love . . . you."

"I love you, too." He was blotting tears on my shoulder but I just kept rocking him. "Do you mind if we keep this rug in here?"

"Nah, it's gorgeous. We can put it right by the bed so everyday when ya get up, ya'll step on it and remember ya mum." I dropped a kiss on his soft hair and wondered about all the layers that Severus had to him. He was like an onion that you had to peel the rough skin off of before you could find all the lovely white layers underneath.

"That would be very nice, Ru'." He sat up and cupped my face in his hands, leaning in for a long kiss, a comforting kiss.

Then we got back up and finished putting the bookshelves all around the walls. He got tired pretty quickly but not before I enlarged a box of books and he put the first few on the shelves. I decided that we didn't really need color on the walls since the books were colorful enough just by themselves. Hossic stuck his head in next to see if we were ready to move our bed into the new room.

It looked great once we got it in just the right place. Since the walls were covered floor to ceiling and wall to wall with the bookcases, the bed had to go in the middle of the room. That was kind of odd but the window at the foot spilled light onto us in the morning and the small desk and leather covered chair from Sev's sitting room that the Headmaster had smuggled out to us masked the headboard from the doorway.

The rug just fit, like somehow his mum had known how much room we'd have for it. I kind of thought she must have hoped that Sev would find someone who loved him as much as I did. Some day, I'd tell him that but not now when his emotions were so close to the surface. He was okay with showing them to me but I knew he wouldn't want the twins to see.

Although he had relaxed around them quite a bit, I just hoped that he had a rest before the rest of the family showed up.

I shook myself from the memories of the last week. The twins had left this morning, walking with me to the gates of Hogwarts and the Harley Davidson motor bikes they'd left in my shed. They roared off with me waving good bye then turning to the mews to catch up on all the work I'd been missing. Severus had insisted that I go at least once a week to my job. The kids had been doing a great job and the mews were mostly empty of magical creatures.

It's the harsh winters that mostly send patients my way and lately our winters had been real hard.

Severus had told me once that he thought it was all the discharge of energy in the battles between the Dark and the Light that was causing all the bad weather. He might be right I thought but for now it was still summer and the nights had been just lovely.

Of course, I was spending them with my Sev so even a snowstorm wouldn't have bothered me. I grinned at the thought and finished mucking out the stables. The kids had tried but without me there to show them how, lots had been missed. All of it went on my compost pile and I turned it over carefully, gauging how ready part of it might be. Sev wanted to grow some herbs that he remembered from his mother's garden.

And I wanted Sev to have everything his heart desired so that included improving the soil so those herbs would grow. I remembered my mother hanging stalks of herbs from the broad oak beams that crossed all the ceilings of the house I grew up in. They always smelled so good that I'd wanted to eat them when I was very little. For an instant, I saw a little black haired boy playing in front of the fire of our cottage front room.

Odd, he looked more like Sev than me. I shrugged and finished mowing the fields around Hogwarts. Maybe I was visualizing him as the happy little boy he'd been while his mother was alive. I wanted him to be happy like that again. Wistfully, I wondered what it would be like to have a little boy or girl made up of bits of both of us. Shaking my head at my fancies, I cleaned up and put away my mower.

It was time to go home to Sev. I begrudged every moment that I wasn't with him so I didn't even take a break and go up to the school to have lunch. I'd put a pot of stew on the stove to simmer before I left so I just hurried into the Forest to walk home. I've got a long stride so it didn't take me any time at all to go the three miles. The cottage still looked odd to me with the east and south wings growing out of it.

But there was purpose to the new additions. Our new bedroom reached to the east while the new animal hospital came off the main room to the south. Sev's herb garden would grow out from the point where they met to the end of each addition. That way the plants would be protected from the north wind that sometimes howled off the lake in the middle of winter.

I walked in and looked for Sev but he wasn't there. Sticking my head in our bedroom door, I saw a pale hand lying just off the mattress. Sudden fear hit me and I took two giant steps to the side of the bed only to find him sprawled out with a smile on his face. He was just tired, I decided when I looked at the bookshelves. Four more crates were empty and stacked by the door and the shelves were a dizzying riot of reds, greens, blues and blacks. He'd been working hard.

Severus

I awoke to a soft kiss and Rubeus' smiling face. He'd been working hard and I could smell the rich scent of him. Pulling him closer, I slid my arms around his neck and began licking his face. He was slightly salty and I decided right then and there that I needed more of that in my diet. But he was pressing little kisses all over my face and that felt so good that I slid my lips to meet his for more of the unique taste that is his alone.

His stomach growled among our little moans and I pushed him a little bit away. "You forgot to eat again, Ru'."

He shrugged ruefully. "Didn't so much forget as didn't want to take the time."

"Bad Rubeus," I scolded him, sliding out from under him and rolling to the other edge of the bed so I could stand up. The room moved a little around me and I clung to the bedpost for a moment

before heading for the door. "Your stew has been tantalizing me while you were gone. I had one bowl already but I'll have another while you're eating."

"Good for ya, Sev." He joined me, pressing me down into my chair. "You've worked hard enough today, love. I can dish up me own stew."

"The bath is ready, Ru'. I knew you'd want to take one." I'd already set the table so all he had to do was ladle out the stew into the bowls by the stove.

"I stink that bad, huh?" He chuckled and sat down beside me, placing a bowl of his delicious stew in front of both of us.

"Stink is too strong a word, Ru'." I leaned against him and took another deep breath. "You smell of the stables but mostly of new mown grass. I've always liked that scent. My mother would take me out after the outside elves had mown around the manor and we'd sit under a tree while they were raking. All kinds of insects would fly out of the grass and she'd name them for me until I was a little older then I'd name them for her."

"That's a good memory, love. I like 'earing about when ya were just a little." He kissed my temple and got up to get another bowl of stew.

I wasn't done with mine yet and my bowl was half the size of his. Perhaps a trip was in order to Diagon Alley to the bookstore where I could find a basic cookbook. I was a Potion's master, surely I could manage a simple recipe or two. When autumn came, Hagrid would be working at Hogwarts everyday. I shivered a little. I would not be leaving this cottage so it would be up to me to have food on the table when he came home.

"Ya cold, Sev?" A concerned hand touched my shoulder and I managed a smile.

"No, Rubeus, I was just thinking about . . . autumn when you go back to work full time." I took another bite of stew and might as well have been eating some of the sawdust that we'd made so much of while building. I swallowed it anyway and contemplated the five spoonfuls left in my bowl with dismay.

"Ah, Sev, don't be thinkin' about that now. It's still two months away." He sat down and pulled me into his lap, wrapping those strong warm arms around me. "Ya'll be feelin' better by then. Ya may even want to go back to teachin' kind of on the sly like. The Headmaster told me that he's goin' to make a port key for us. We'll be able to leave here and go to your hidden rooms in the school and then come back again."

I clung to him, burying my face in his cotton shirt. A port key would be handy in case of emergency. "Teaching?"

He chuckled. "I know that 'mione would like to learn from the best and that's ya, Sev."

I thought about Miss Granger and her thirst for knowledge. She had the mind and will to be an inspired potion maker. "She is a good student."

"And there's 'arry askin' questions and all from his potion text book." He reminded me of the young man on whom so many hopes were pinned. "Now that he's a little less scared of ya, I think he might learn a little better."

"There are certain lessons that he needs and they're not in potions." I relaxed a little more. "If Albus would just hire a good DADA instructor, Harry might live long enough to put an end to this chaos. Until then, I'm hoping that he'll let me show him a few things that might give him an edge."

"There, ya see, it will be all right." Rubeus picked up his spoon and went back to eating, every now and then sharing a spoonful with me until I really couldn't eat anymore. "Now, what brought up thoughts of autumn?"

So I told him about my idea about getting a basic cookbook so I could prepare dinner for him. He kissed me hard and told me that he didn't want me to do anything I didn't want to do. That made me smile and hug him close. No one had ever told me that before, they were too busy telling me all the things I had to do. Once again, Hagrid was freeing me from my old life and showing me a bright future.

We washed the dishes together and tidied up while Cyrus, the hellbender, heated our bath water. He really liked the tunnels that Hagrid had made for him and he'd brought his mate to see if she'd like to nest here. So far, she had a favorable impression and we'd had all the hot water we could possibly use.

I soaped him from head to toe while he lay back and let me. I loved his body with all its differences, but I especially loved his beautiful shaft. He liked me to grip it really hard and slide his foreskin all the way down then back up again. It seemed such a fragile hood of skin to me but so far I hadn't hurt him. When he moaned and clutched the side of the tub, I knew that he'd reached the point where I needed to take him in my mouth or into my body.

I was getting really good at the enlarging spell and the familiar ache that stretching myself for him always brought me. But no ache could last when he slid inside of me so I cast it hurriedly and rubbed some of the special lubricant onto the silky smooth shaft. Then I straddled him, guiding him to my entrance. The blunt pressure always made my eyes water but once he pushed through, there was nothing but the heated length of him forging deeper into me.

"Oh, Sev, there's nothin' like ya." His hands held my hips so he didn't slide in too fast. "So tight, love, ya're always so tight."

"I think . . . you . . . grow when you're away for the day." I panted with the effort of seating him within me. Finally, I had him held fast and I took a deep breath, stilling my hands on his chest and tickling his big brown nipples into peaking for me. "All right, Ru', I've got you."

"Ya do, Sev. Ya got me forever and a day." His big hands slowly lifted me a couple of inches then let me drop. He was always so careful of me and this way he could watch my eyes to see if there was pain.

"Good, I want you forever and ever." I wiggled a little and he gave that little growl that is so exciting, picking me up a little higher before letting go. My gland was heating up and sending tingles throughout my whole body. I pinched his nipples and he flushed all over. My own shaft was caught between our stomachs and I was deliciously hard by the time we were both panting.

Then I tightened all over and came while he pulsed within me.

"Sev, I think it's time we went to bed. I need more room than we've got here." Hagrid very slowly lifted me off his shaft and set me back far enough for me to grasp the sides of the tub. "I don't want any of those bathtub accidents they always talk about."

I was trembling from coming and he thought I was too cool so he hurried us out of the tub, not even taking time to dry us off. I nibbled on his ear since it was close and his moan was music to my ears. I liked that I could give him pleasure with my body. No one had ever wanted that from me so I had a lot saved up with which to gift him.

We tumbled onto our bed after a hasty drying spell and I spread my legs for him, reinforcing the 'amplificare, consummare' of the enlarging spell. He took a moment to lick my seed from my

stomach, scooping up the slippery stuff from his groin and painting the ruby red crown of his magnificent shaft with it. That seemed so intimate a thing to do that I groaned breathlessly and demanded he come back inside of me.

Grinning, he lifted my hips off the bed and nudged my entrance with his re-anointed crown. The flared head stretched me so wide that I felt as if his girth would split me in two. We both groaned while he slid slowly inside until he could go no further. I felt possessed by this wonderful caring man in my arms. Tugging him down to my lips, I kissed him with all my heart and received his in exchange.

"Oh, Sev, ya're so beautiful like this." He murmured while beginning to move within me. "I wanted to mow a big heart in the far meadow and put our initials in it. Sippy, I know."

I groaned and lifted my hips to meet his downward thrust. "Sippy, indeed. I prefer to think of us as a potion with two powerful ingredients that have to be mixed in just the right proportions."

He chuckled and thrust a little harder while I felt lightning zing through me from my head to my toes. "I had a kind of vision today about a little boy made up of both of us. That'd be a great potion, that would."

"A child?" I'd never thought of children. If I was a woman, I'd be able to give him what he wanted. He deserved to have a child of his own but if he stayed with me, that dream would never come true.

"Sev, look at me." His voice brought me out of the despair into which I'd begun to sink. "I love you. I don't want anyone else, not ever. Ya're my very own bonded and I'm yours. A child would be nice but not if meant we'd have to be apart."

I blinked back tears. I truly did not deserve this man and his love but I'd fight to the death to keep them both. "I love you too, Rubeus. We can pretend that it's possible and make love as if we were making that son."

He kissed away the tears that escaped. "Love ya so much, Sev, my very own love."

I held him close and moved with him, wishing with all my heart that I could give him in return all the beautiful feelings that he gave to me. He was moving faster now and the heat built until it had to explode. If I could, I would give him everything he wanted. And from deep inside of me, I felt his seed rush in and fill me with his life.

Had Dumbledore been there he would have cautioned against the enlarging spell that Severus had used. He probably would have also gently reminded them what heart-felt wishes can become. And he definitely would have given them a lecture on combining sperm while making love.

But since he wasn't there, they joyfully made love and created a child, all at the same time.

Hagrid

I came back from a trip out to the Frozen Caves to fix up an old friend. Siggerrrd, the Ice Drake, needed his yearly colonic and Sev had helped me brew the gallon of Dispose-All that did the trick. He wanted to go and watch since he'd never seen a drake before but I talked him out of it.

Even drakes need a private moment or two when they're purging out all the bits and pieces left behind by their prey.

For some reason, they can't digest claws. So, I go in with the six foot enema tube and clean out Siggerrd's colon with the Dispose-All potion and wait for it to flush those bits that get stuck. He's usually pretty grim when I come but then he relaxes all over once he's cleaned out and we trade a few stories back and forth. He's not a great conversationalist but then I'm not either.

Sev was all curled up in his outdoor nook with Ty to watch over him and a good book that he'd unpacked when I left. I'd kissed him breathless before heading off. I had a casserole of tuna and noodles baking in the oven and Sev promised to take it out if I wasn't back in two hours. The Frozen Caves are about a half hour walk for me and the treatment takes an hour so I was right on time when I walked into the clearing.

Sev wasn't in his nook so I figured that I'd surprise him. But when I went to open the front door, I heard voices, female voices that I recognized. Flinging open the door, I stepped into a hug. "Rhea, when did ya get in? Why don't any of ya let me know ya're coming?"

She giggled and hugged me tight, her reddish hair curling all over the place like it usually did. "We're not going to let you hide the evidence from us, big brother. Besides, we had to hurry to beat Mum down here. We figure you've got about four days before she and Dad come calling."

"Royan, ya, too?" I grabbed my little sister with my other arm and squeezed them to me. "I'm so glad that ya both came."

"Well, Hossic told us that you were so happy, you could fly and I think I see why." The youngest girl in the Hagrid family was also the smallest of us. She didn't even reach my chin. Her dark hair was like Dad's and straight as straight could be. But her eyes were watching Sev and I looked over to make sure that he was all right.

He was standing kind of stiff by the stove but he looked all right with that shy smile that just melted my heart. "We've already introduced ourselves, Ru'."

"Good, we'll have to celebrate." I let my sisters go with a kiss on their cheeks before heading to Sev. I kissed him limp and then guided him to a chair while he was still dazed. I wanted him to know without a doubt that he came first with me. I'd explain it to the girls later if they still had a question. "Let's have lunch then bake a cake."

When the Hagrids gather in the kitchen, it should be chaos but somehow never is. The casserole was demolished quickly then the girls made free with the ingredients while I put Sev to grating the chocolate. Triple Fudge Mocha Delight is a family favorite and I shared the recipe with him with the girls chiming in on the repetitious instructions. There really was a lot of stirring in it, but it's worth it once you sit down to eat.

Somewhere in all the hustle and bustle, Sev's wish for a cookbook came out and the girls immediately demanded that we go to Diagon Alley to shop. Sev looked kind of downcast when he told them that he was supposed to be dead. Rhea chuckled and told him that no one would recognize him once she fixed him up. She works on all the productions of the Scotland All Giant Extravaganza Society or SAGES for short as their head of makeup.

Sev was real interested when she started the tale of how they put on Gilbert and Sullivan's Mikado over the winter. Rhea's the storyteller in our family and she had Sev chuckling in no time. I was beaming at all of them by the time the cake came out of the oven and onto the table. The girls liked him and he was enjoying them so all was right with my world. Mum and Dad would like him too, I just knew it.

The rest of the day was spent in showing the girls all the changes we'd made in the cottage. Sev tried to offer them our bed for sleeping, telling them that we could sleep out in the tent. But they just hugged and kissed him, explaining that they preferred camping in the summer rather than sleeping indoors. When we had a quiet moment together, I reassured him that they really did hate sleeping in. In fact, they'd be up early to skinny dip in the lake.

He shuddered instantly and I hugged him again, reminding him that our bath would still be nice and hot. Smiling, he kissed me slowly and hugged me close. I could hardly wait until it was bedtime. After dinner, the girls pulled up a couple of chairs and I pulled Sev into my lap the way we always sat in the big leather chair in front of the fire. He kept sneaking little peeks at them until finally Rhea smiled at him.

"Sev, you're now our little brother. Rube loves you and I can see how much you love him. I like seeing the two of you snuggling." She sighed a bit. "It makes me want that for myself. It's hard sometimes for half-breeds like us to find someone who looks beyond our parentage to the individuals we are."

"I had no idea that prejudice was still so rampant." Sev settled back against me and held my arms close around him. "I wish that there was something I could do to help."

Royan smiled at us. "You're doing it, Sev. You love Rube and that gives us hope."

"I'm not any kind of a role model, I'm afraid." Sev looked at them both. "I made a lot of bad decisions when I was younger. I joined Voldemort for a time. I didn't see through him when I should have but once I did I came back to Hogwarts looking for redemption."

"Ya more than made up for any bad decisions ya made, Sev." I kissed his temple and thought about all the times I'd awakened him from a nightmare. "Ya paid any dues that anybody could possibly ask."

"Ah, Ru', you have an infinitely forgiving nature." He sighed a little, his beautiful hands stroking mine where they lay on his stomach. "Others are less sure of me. But now, I've left all of that behind until the final battle."

"You think there will be one?" Rhea asked with a frown.

Sev nodded. "He's failed again and again but each time he takes a little more ground, a few more souls until eventually we'll be on the losing side. He doesn't care how many men die because there are always more looking for power or wealth."

"And the Light does care about its warriors." Royan said softly, meeting Sev's gaze with her own. "I wouldn't have it any other way, Sev. Watch out for each other, please. I don't want to lose either my elder brother or my new one."

I saw Sev blush and I hugged him so tight that he squeaked. We talked on for another hour but then the girls said they needed their beauty sleep so they took over the bathroom first while we retreated to our bedroom. I liked undressing Sev and we played the game that we usually played in taking each piece of cloth from each other's body.

Rhea knocked on our door and called out that the bathroom was all ours. We called back a goodnight then waited for them to retreat to the roomy tent that the twins had left. We took our time cleaning up but saved our loving for our bed. Sev was still a little unsure of the proprieties so we made real gentle, slow love until we both sighed in contentment.

Cuddling close to me, he quickly fell asleep in my arms. I followed him soon after, although I was kind of excited about our shopping trip the next day. We'd not been out in public together so this

would be fun. I wondered how Rhea planned to disguise my beautiful Severus. Hopefully, he wouldn't get too tired. I rested my chin on top of his head. If he did, we'd stop and get a cup of tea so he could rest.

Satisfied that we would be all right, I settled myself and went right to sleep.

Severus

Rhea was indeed a magician with makeup. I didn't recognize myself once she was done with me. My face and hands were the same shade of tan that Rubeus sported; she'd trimmed my hair and braided it, changing my face completely; then she braided a silver bell into one of the long braids just in front of my ear before picking out some of my more revealing muggle clothes.

Rubeus watched in fascination and I could see the fire in his gaze that normally remained in our bedroom. Every time I moved my head, the bell gave a single sweet chime. It should have been distracting but instead, I found myself turning my head a little more quickly to make it ring. I thought that I'd wear that again even if it was only in our bedroom.

I liked that light in Ru's eyes. We had a full breakfast although I suddenly turned nauseas and only managed tea and toast. It was only to be expected after the rich cake of the day before, I reassured my hovering lover. He nodded but I could already see his protective streak grow a little more. That should have made me feel claustrophobic but I found that I liked being held close.

Someone cared whether I lived or died, felt well or ill, and there was someone for whom I cared. That was the best gift that I'd ever been given but I hoped to find something for him on our trip. There was a book on hippogriffs that I'd seen once but not bought. I was hoping that the bookstore would have it. I took Royan aside for a brief moment before we hopped through the fire and into the floo network.

"Would you be willing to take this message to Gringott's for me?" I handed her the envelope with my pseudonym on it. "I set up an account under this name almost fifteen years ago. I always knew that someday Severus Snape would have to die. I hoped to survive my death and it seems that I have. This is my rainy day fund."

"Won't they need to see you?" She took it and smiled at the name.

"Phineas Bane is a recluse and always sends another to transact his business." I told her truthfully. "My signature will vouch for you and I've given them instructions to pay out a thousand galleons from my vault."

"That's a lot of money to entrust to me, Sev." She gazed straight into my eyes.

I wasn't used to a woman my own height. "I trust the Hagrid family with my life. I think I can trust you with my money."

She chuckled and linked her arm with mine. "You've got a deal, Sev."

Taking a deep breath, I prepared to face the outside world for the first time since my 'death'. Ru's big hand radiated warmth to the small of my back and I took courage from his touch. I was part of a family now and that was armor that I would gladly use.

But actually it wasn't too bad, I discovered. Surrounded by taller people, I actually felt rather petite and almost invisible. We were pretending that I was their young nephew who was tagging along after his elders. Our stop at Gringott's went well and a small part of me who'd rather feared the

sharp eyes of the goblins finally relaxed. The galleons made a satisfying weight in my belt pouch.

Diagon Alley was bustling with wizards and I found myself shrinking into Rubeus' side. I'd never done well in crowds and I felt a touch of my old agoraphobia rise up. But by concentrating on the sound of Ru's voice, I was able to keep walking. We stopped at a dress shop to let Rhea and Royan shop for new outfits to celebrate our bonding. Even though it was summer, part of the store had displays of silk long underwear for winter.

I had an odd thought and took Rhea aside while Royan and Rubeus were arguing over whether burgundy or wine was the better color for her. "Rhea, would Ru' wear silk long underwear?"

"He would if you gave them to him, love." She chuckled. "I know his measurements. What color would you like to see him in?"

Passing her some galleons, I blushed. "Green - for the healer that he is."

She dropped a kiss on my head. "Green it is. Why don't you take him to the bookstore and we'll meet you there. That way I can order them without him knowing about it."

Nodding, I signaled to Ru' and he left off trying to convince Royan that burgundy would go with her red hair. He and Albus shared a taste for bizarre color combinations. But then we were outside and striding for the Dragon's Lair, one of my favorite bookstores. The front of the store catered to the new book trade and was bright and airy. But once you passed through the gray granite arch in the back, you entered the original shop.

Ancient shelves of old oak, blackened with age, held row after row of used and rare books. Taking a deep breath, I relaxed even more. This was my vision of nirvana, more books than could be read in five lifetimes. Ru' chuckled and patted my shoulder, whispering in my ear, "I'll meet ya back here, love, in half an hour. If ya get tired, we'll take a break then. Okay?"

His rumble and the soft puff of Ru'-scented air made my stomach clench but in a good way. "Yes, all right. Did you know that the back entrance here conjoins with the back door of Rivendell's Café?"

"No, but that's good ta know, Sev. I'll stay in the front part and wait for the girls. Then we'll come find ya." He caressed my shoulder and I could see that he wanted to kiss me almost as much as I wanted to kiss him but we were in full view of at least three other patrons so we parted without any further public display.

I headed straight for the magical animal section and browsed there for almost the entire time. They had not only the hippogriff book, but tomes on hellbenders, griffins and a dozen other magical creatures that I knew only by name. I staggered up to the witch at the back counter juggling thirteen oversized books that were heavy as lead. She took my galleons after asking me if I wanted to be an animal handler when I grew up.

Really, Rhea was a master craftswoman with a makeup brush. I blushed and nodded, asking her if she'd spell them small so my uncle wouldn't know what I'd bought. I told her some of them were a surprise for him. She smiled and gave me my change after wrapping them in a tidy package of brown paper with a twine handle. Then she spelled them small with a flash of her wand and wished me good luck in my studies.

Odd but part of me wished that I really was going to make a new start. Instead of becoming a Death Eater, I could become Ru's partner in the healing business. I knew a hundred ways to kill with my potions and only half that many to heal. How sick was that? My knees suddenly grew weak and I had to hold onto a nearby shelf to stay upright. It was definitely time to sit down and take a break.

And as if on cue, I heard Ru's voice arguing with Royan while Rhea laughed at them. Turning the corner, I saw my new family looking for me. How wonderful to see their smiles and know that they wanted me, truly wanted me. My heart gave a funny little leap at the fire in Rubeus' eyes and his hand outstretched towards me. I hurried to join them, enjoying the hug that Rhea gave me and the teasing question about my purchases from Royan.

We threaded our way through the narrow stacks to the back door that opened on a little courtyard. Tables and chairs were set up on the flagstones among the herbs growing in a patchwork pattern. Half of them were taken already and Rubeus chose one almost hidden in a wisteria arbor. He'd seen my hands shake and he pressed me down into the back chair with a gruff reminder to rest while he went to get our tea.

Royan joined me, waving Rhea off to bring back some of those cranberry muffins that she liked. Once they were gone, she opened one of her shopping bags and showed me a scrap of silk in a brilliant emerald green, telling me that was what Ru's new underwear would look like. It was just perfect and so I told her. She coaxed me to tell her another story about my mother and I happily complied.

But right in the middle of my story, my arm blazed with pain and a scream rang out from the Café. Royan and I were out of our seats and running for the front before it had a chance to die away.

Hagrid

Damn Voldemort, I cursed silently while throwing another wrought iron chair at the wizard who had hexed a pair of witches sitting at the table in front. Rhea was lobbing rock cakes at the second villain after first spelling them into real rocks. The others in the café were screaming and pushing but not doing anything but get in the way. A tingle in the air told me that Severus had just arrived and I redoubled my efforts to get the two attackers to back off and apparate away.

He'd just begun healing and I wasn't about to let any of them hurt him again. The one that I clubbed with a chair stumbled out the front door and I followed him to make sure that he didn't try anything else. All up and down the Alley I heard screams and saw blood being shed by friend and foe alike. The tingle was back and I found Severus right by my side looking with sad eyes at the mayhem.

I just wanted it all to stop and for them to go away without killing anyone. Sometimes when I see animals being tortured a red haze seems to fall over me and I have to work really hard not to hurt anyone. And I certainly didn't want to do anything with Sev there. But there was something building inside of me that I wasn't sure I could stop. Then I felt one of his hands slip into mine and he was pointing the other at the men in black cloaks.

"Ferro ignique vastare." He said real quiet-like and I felt all of my anger channel through our hands to his pointing fingers.

And just like that, the bad wizards went up in flames. But Sev was swaying and I swept him up in my arms when he began to crumble to the ground. I've never been so scared except for the night I found him being tortured.

"Good heavens, Rube, what did the two of you do?" Rhea was at my shoulder and I shuddered.

"I don't know. It was mostly Sev but I don't want him here when the Aurors come." I didn't want to let him go but I had to. "Take him to Hogwarts." She gathered him into her arms and held him

close. I dug in my pockets for the portkey that the Headmaster had given to me. "Use this to get into his hidden rooms at the school. Then go find Albus Dumbledore. And get Poppy to look over him."

The bright flashes of Aurors popping into the street told me our time was up. Looping the chain around her neck, I twisted the center section and watched them disappear. Royan linked arms with me and we stood ready to answer questions. Several people had noticed Sev pointing towards the attackers so the Aurors asked us to sit to one side while they kept questioning the others.

The inside of the Rivendell Café was a shambles so Royan and I started picking things up and setting them right. The staff overcame their shock and began to pitch in, too. The broken tables we set to one side and since the chairs were wrought iron, they mostly survived the battle. Royan began sweeping up the remains of the snacks that had hit the floor. A witch who'd survived the melee, cast a drying spell so the tea and coffee was easier to sweep up.

It was better to keep on doing something but inside I was so afraid that whatever we'd done had hurt Sev. I wanted to be with him in the worst way but I had a duty to the rest of the wizards who'd been attacked. Dad and Mum had always taught us to do our duty faithfully but right now I wished I'd taken Sev myself to Hogwarts.

"Hagrid." One of the Aurors came up to me. "Rubeus Hagrid, grounds keeper at Hogwarts, we're ready to take your statement now. This is your sister, Royan?"

"That's right. And what's yar name?" I asked him quietly.

He looked startled that anyone would dare ask him such a question. "I'm Auror Bentley. Now, who was the young man that disappeared as we came. You should know that is a direct violation of Regulation 647, 'all witnesses to acts of violence are to remain in the vicinity of the crime'."

I'd been afraid of that question but I still hadn't come up with a good lie.

"Ah, Auror Bentley, how nice to meet you again." The Headmaster's voice came from over my shoulder and I almost fainted in relief. If he was here then that meant that Sev was safe. "Hagrid is naturally reticent about the young man since he is a student at the school. And his first instinct was to send him out of danger but since you have everything well in hand here, I've brought him to answer your questions."

I looked over my shoulder real quick and saw Harry wearing almost the same outfit that Sev had been wearing. He even had his hair done the same way with the pretty little bell in his dark hair.

"I'm sorry, Sir, but I was really scared by all the nasty wizards. My name is Harry Potter." He said with a shy smile at the suddenly voiceless Auror.

I relaxed all over. That should take the stuffing out of them, I thought with satisfaction. Harry had been on this firing line before and he was getting good at handling them. All the wizards and witches knew his story so I only had to lie a little when I said that we'd pretended to be his aunts and uncle so we could go shopping. We were dismissed as nonessential and we faded into the background. Royan went to the back and got all our packages together so we could apparate back to Hogwarts once the Headmaster and Harry were done.

I listened to Harry deny all knowledge of how he'd set them on fire. He just opened his eyes real wide and shook his head with a bewildered shrug. "I just wanted them to go away and stop hurting everyone. I wished that I was a fire-breathing dragon and could just make them disappear."

Auror Bentley looked real wise and nodded gravely as if he understood. "Naturally natural, young man, I can see you haven't got far enough in your lessons to understand the effect of such a cause. Cause and effect are natural pairings in the world of magic."

"Quite right, my dear boy." The Headmaster patted his shoulder and smiled at him. "Now that you have our names and explanations, I think it's time we left you to handle the hordes of reporters that I can see gathering outside this lovely little shop."

The Auror preened at the suggestion that he could handle the news media, nodding importantly and waving us away. Finally. I wanted to be with Sev right now. The Headmaster stopped a moment to speak a few words to the staff of the café and Harry leaned into my side and whispered real quietly that Sev was all right, just a little shaken up. He was with Poppy in his hidden rooms and we'd go straight there.

Thank Merlin, I sighed and gathered up the bags, waiting impatiently for Dumbledore to finish so we could leave. He joined us with a box of pastries that the staff had insisted on giving to Royan and me for our clean-up. Then we apparated to the front gates of Hogwarts before using the portkey for Sev's hidden rooms. I'd never been there before but all I could see was him, lying in the big old bed with Poppy at his side.

"Ru', are you all right?" The moment he saw me, he tried to sit up but he got all white and shivery and fell back onto the pillow.

"I'm fine, Sev." I dropped all the packages on the floor and crossed to his side, gathering him up in my arms and rocking him slowly while breathing in the lovely Sev-scent that spelled home to me. "How are ya?"

"Rubeus, is it true that you've bonded?" Poppy sounded kind of awed but stern.

"Yeah, we bonded a couple of weeks ago. Why?" I looked at her and held him even tighter in case she disapproved.

But she was smiling a big smile that I'd never seen on her before. "Congratulations, Rubeus and Severus, on your bonding. May you have many years of happiness together. I look forward to the party." She laid a hand on top of ours and took a deep breath. "And I expect you don't yet know it but congratulations on the baby that Severus is carrying."

Severus

I was safe in Ru's arms but it still felt like I couldn't catch my breath. "Baby?"

"Sev's pregnant?" Rubeus stumbled over the words as if they were a foreign language.

"Yes, I'd say a couple of weeks along. Channeling the magic disturbed the baby and it took part of Severus' energy to protect itself. I'm going to recommend that he not channel anything but the very smallest of magics until after the baby is born." Poppy smiled at us both while I heard Dumbledore in the background being happy for us.

"A baby," I seemed to have a need to say it over and over. Holding on to Rubeus, I rested my head against his hard chest and tried to understand. We'd taken no potion nor had we prepared ourselves for the usually difficult task of getting a male wizard pregnant. It appears that we'd simply gone ahead and done it. A baby was growing inside of me. A new person made up of a little bit of me and a little bit of Ru' was even now rooted deep within me.

"I had a vision, kind of like a picture of a little boy playing in front of the fire in our front room." His deep voice came softly to me. "He looked like ya, Sev and just maybe a little bit like me. Are ya mad at me, Sev?"

That brought my head up so I could look into those honest eyes of his. "Never mad, Ru', maybe a little scared. I'm not fit to parent anything."

His eyes crinkled into a smile and he dropped a kiss on the tip of my nose. "Nah, Sev, ya're going to be a great mama. Just like your mama was good to ya, ya're going to be good to him."

"You really think it's a boy?" I was so tired and bewildered that I just wanted to put my head down and sleep for a hundred years.

"Yeah, love, I think so. Lie down and sleep for a bit, Sev. I'll be right here." He snuggled me down into the pillow and shoed everyone to the outer room before lying down with me and holding me close. His humming sent me right to sleep.

It was late when I awoke feeling hungry. I stroked my stomach and thought about the new life held somewhere in there. I was going to need to read up on male pregnancy so I knew what to do to keep him safe.

"I can hardly wait to feel him moving." Ru's rumbling whisper came to me in the soft darkness of the bedroom which had never known a visitor before today. "I love ya so much, Sev."

I rubbed my cheek on his shoulder, breathing in his scent. "I love you, Rubeus Hagrid. What is your mother going to say about this?"

He chuckled and brought me up onto his chest in our favorite position. "She's going to be so happy that she'll dance over the cottage when she hears. I better tell ya now that she believes in big families. She's going to want a lot of grandkids."

"Then we'll need to find good husbands for Rhea and Royan because I'm not going to be the only one giving her grandchildren." I tried out a glare on him but it just bounced off into a smile. I feared that I'd permanently lost my glare to happiness. Ah well, I'd practice it in my spare time.

"We'll start looking right away." He promised me before chuckling at my stomach growling. "Ya're hungry, Sev. That's good since ya didn't have much breakfast."

"The nausea must have been the baby." I said, suddenly realizing that the words 'morning sickness' might have just entered my vocabulary for a long stay. "We need to go back to the bookstore so we can get some good books on pregnancy."

"We'll let Rhea and Royan go once the twins come back for another visit so they can protect them." He said quietly but with a little shiver. "I won't risk ya, Sev. I want ya safe always."

I kissed his lips gently, more comforting than passionate right now. "I want both of us safe, Ru', even more now than before. I'll be afraid to let you out of my sight."

"We'll figure out somethin', Sev." His warm hands stroked me slowly and I felt like purring for him. "But right now, I think we need to get up and eat something. I'm that hollow."

Chuckling, I rolled off of him and waited for the room to stop spinning. "Yes, let's eat some dinner. I can hear voices from the sitting room so I expect we have company still."

"Ya going to be all right with them all knowing about the baby?" He sat up and asked rather diffidently.

"They are our friends and family, Ru'. It's rather nice not to have to keep it a secret." I slid out of bed and stretched just a little. My body decided that felt fine so I shook out my clothes and joined Rubeus near the door. Taking a deep breath and holding onto his hand and my courage at the same time, I led us into the outer world.

The lights were bright and the room seemed full of people but a quick glance stilled my wildly beating heart. Albus and Minerva were on the loveseat by the fire while Royan sat on the green hassock by the wingback chair where Rhea was seated. Poppy and Harry were nowhere to be seen.

"Ah, Severus, it's good to see you up. We've ordered dinner for eight and it should be here shortly." Albus stood and hugged me. "I'm so happy for you, my boy. You deserve all the happiness in the world."

"I have all I need in Rubeus, Albus, thank you." I almost enjoyed the hug. Really, I was getting almost maudlin.

"Dear Severus, how very glad I am that you're safe." Minerva kissed my cheek, leaving behind the scent of lavender that I always associated with her. "Rubeus, I know that you'll take good care of Severus. Congratulations on your bonding," she moved to kiss Ru'. "And on your little surprise, many best wishes."

Rubeus blushed but bent so she could reach his cheek. "Thank ya, Ma'am. I'll take real good care of Sev 'cause I love him so much."

It was my turn to blush but it was lost in Rhea's arms and whispered congratulations. She was drying tears when she let me go. "Sev, you are such a treasure."

Royan was weeping, too but her hug was tender. "Dearest Sev, thank you for loving Rubeus and being willing to carry his child."

I hugged her back and whispered, "I love Rubeus so much that there's nothing I wouldn't do for him."

She chuckled. "Well, once Mum finds out, you might just want to make a list of things you need done because I expect we'll all be helping him get them done."

"Darn it, Sev. We're goin' to have to build on a couple more rooms." Rubeus looked rather chagrined. "There's a nursery needed now and a spare guest room. Mum's likely to want to spend the last month with us to help out."

"Oh dear," I hadn't thought of that. "We're going to have to stop calling it the cottage. We're going to need a whole second floor."

He laughed out loud and hugged me close. "We'll do whatever we need to do, Sev. I can hardly wait."

"And here's dinner," Albus said, opening the door for Dobby and Harry.

Oh dear, yet another person who knew I was alive. Perhaps he'd take a vow of silence?

The end of part 12

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Parts 13 - 16 by Athea

Author's Notes:

Someone new enters the mix.

Remus Lupin

When Dumbledore invited me to come back to Hogwarts as the DADA instructor, I'd rejected it out of hand. But he'd written me again . . . and yet again until I told him that I'd think about it. That's when he invited me to spend the summer at the school while I was thinking. I hesitated for a day or more but the chance to rest in a place of safety while regaining my strength after an unending series of back-breaking temporary jobs was too great a draw and I owed my acceptance to him.

A port key arrived with return owl and I packed up my meager belongings and left Muggle London behind. Dumbledore met me at the gates and hugged me close. "My dear Remus, how very glad I am that you are here."

I hugged him back and thought he looked his age for just a moment. "I was sorry to hear about Snape's death."

"You held no bitterness against him?" Dumbledore asked me with a searching look.

I smiled sadly. "We had an almost friendship when we were younger. I still don't know why Sirius did what he did but I understand why Snape's reaction was to lash out. I hoped once that we'd be able to sit down and talk it out. It's too late now."

Dumbledore hummed an agreement, I thought while leading me to the rooms where I'd spent my time during my brief tenure as teacher. They were simple and homey and I felt safe for the first time in over a year. He left me with a reminder of dinner at six and when he shut the door behind him, I relaxed all over. Dropping my bag at the foot of the bed, I headed for the bathroom and a long hot bath.

Dressed in my best robe or rather the one least in need of repair, I went down to dinner in the great hall. There were only a few of us so we all ate at the tables near Dumbledore. Harry was at my table and he grinned when he saw me. We had little privacy to talk more than generalities but after dinner we took a walk around the grounds. They looked like they needed mowing and Harry said that Hagrid had been busy with building a small animal hospital in the Forest so he hadn't been able to do as much on the grounds.

I thought something was odd but he was talking about learning to build and his enthusiasm was good to see. I offered my help and he hesitated before saying that the Headmaster would probably have something for me to do. I was getting an odd feeling about Hogwarts and its inhabitants. The wards around the school had been strengthened but there was still an air of tension and unease in everyone I met. Hopefully, I'd find out what was going on before much more time had passed.

Two days later there were three separate attacks on wizards and our communities. Reading about them was frustrating but when I read that Harry had been involved in one while shopping with Hagrid, I was astounded. I'd seen him five minutes before eating an apple while reading a book in the crook of an old oak tree. Something odd was definitely going on.

But when I went to Dumbledore's office, he wasn't there. He and Minerva were both missing from dinner and Harry wasn't talking or eating much. He just smiled and said that Hagrid and his family had taken him shopping. I hadn't realized that Hagrid had any family but Harry chattered on about his sisters and how nice they were until I thought I'd never get a word in edgewise. I saw Dobby come up and whisper something in his ear right before he excused himself from the table and left in a rush.

Heading back to my room, I caught a sniff of roast chicken wafting up from the dungeons. There shouldn't have been anyone down there since Snape's death. The Headmaster had told me that he was taking the classes himself for the summer. So who could be there?

I hesitated only a minute then headed silently down the steps. Sounds echo oddly down in the lower levels of Hogwarts, they always have. Outside the potions lab, I thought I heard something but the door opened onto an empty classroom. My hearing might be chancy but my sense of smell had never let me down and I could smell a fire, the roast chicken and . . . I sniffed a little harder, an open bottle of red wine.

So I followed my nose back into what I'd always thought was an empty hallway only to find an arched doorway where there had never been one before. Or had it been be-spelled since I was a student? Should I or shouldn't I enter? The gentle murmur of voices decided me, I never could resist a mystery rather like the young Snape.

I pushed gently against the door and it swung open wide. The people in the room froze when they saw me standing there. Dumbledore rose instantly and strode forward to meet me. "My dear boy, how very enterprising of you to find us out. I expect you know most of the others here but may I introduce Rhea Hagrid and Royan Hagrid, Rubeus' sisters."

A statuesque redhead nodded to me while a slightly smaller dark haired woman eyed me militantly from where she stood with one arm around . . . Snape, a very live, very happy looking Potions Master. Hagrid stood at his back and his big hands held him protectively against him. Whatever was going on, I knew that I'd probably need a drink before it was over.

"Remus, how nice to see you again. Are you going to accept Albus' offer to be the new DADA instructor? I think this time you would have no . . . opposition." Snape's silky smooth tones were the same as ever but his smile was a real one and not one I'd ever seen from him before. "Why don't you join us for dinner and we'll catch you up on all the news?"

"I . . . yes, thank you I think I will." I stammered a bit but all my ideas had just been blown to smithereens. What the hell was going on here?

Dinner was even more surreal. Dobby kept flitting in and out with heavily loaded trays of delicious food. Harry had obviously saved his eating for this dinner and he kept the conversation on future plans instead of the past or present dangers. I kept quiet and observed the interaction around the table that Dumbledore had had to expand to accommodate all of us.

Minerva and Rhea were chatting about the theater. Hagrid was smiling at everyone but keeping a sharp eye on Snape, who was slow to eat the tempting dishes put in front of him. The other sister, Royan, sat on his other side and made sure that his water glass was kept filled. All of us were drinking the wine that Dumbledore had opened, even Harry had tried a half-glass but not the Potion Master.

He looked rested but drawn with the marks of old pain still there on his face. He was never a very talkative man, always keeping his thoughts and feelings locked away. But he was more relaxed than I'd ever seen him. I'd always found him driven to succeed, to learn more, to be in control at all times, in short the most anal retentive individual I'd ever met.

But that Snape was no where in sight tonight. His dry humor was still evident but the sting was gone. My eyes kept returning to him but slowly they began to slide to his side and the beautiful woman who sat there. I remembered she was tall as Snape, which put her almost three inches taller than me but I didn't think that would matter. The militant gleam in her eye when she caught me staring at them made me smile.

The conversation and the missing parts from it told me that I had to find out what the hell was going on here. I also wanted to talk to Royan Hagrid by herself. Something in her gaze, her tones, her vibrant face and expansive gestures pulled me like a magnet to iron. By the time that dessert arrived, she'd realized that I was watching her and not Snape. And just like that, her scent changed to . . . interested.

That meant that I was going to have to ask Hagrid permission to take his sister for a walk. He was in full protective mode of his family and that included Snape for some reason. He'd always been empathetic with the magical creatures of whom he took such good care. Snape just might fit that description if Hagrid was the one to find him and nurse him back to health.

Now, I just had to brave the half-giant's scrutiny and make sure that Royan knew that I was a werewolf right up front. I wanted no more lies of any kind in the people around me. The older I grew, the less I wanted to hide.

Hagrid

Well, this was a fine mess and no mistake. I'd always liked Remus Lupin. It weren't his fault that he'd gotten bit when he was little. Never any trouble with him, I remembered. It was always that idiot Black who was getting up nasty practical jokes. Remus would be a good DADA instructor and this time no parent was going to complain, not when the world outside was so insecure.

And with that reminder of violence, I just had to look at Sev again. He had taken a few bites of the raspberry sherbet and enjoyed them but his appetite was down. Could it be the baby? I just had to touch him again to make sure he was really here, beside me, carrying our son inside of him. That was such a miracle that I could still hardly believe.

"Hagrid?" Remus' voice distracted me from mooning over Sev.

"Yeah, Remus." I turned my attention to him.

"Does your family know that I'm a werewolf, Hagrid?" He asked me but his eyes were just beyond me to . . . Royan?

"Yes, we do, Professor Lupin." Royan answered him with a little purr in her voice that I'd never heard before.

"Ah, good. Would you like to take a walk, Miss Hagrid?" He asked her.

"I think that sounds lovely, if you'll call me Royan." She smiled at him while my gaze went back and forth between them.

"I'm Remus. Shall we go? The stars should be coming out any time now." He pushed back his chair and stood up, coming around Sev and me to pull out her chair.

She stood up and dropped her napkin on the table. "Dinner was delightful, everyone. I'm so glad to meet all of you. Rhea and I will be staying for another week or until after our parents arrive to celebrate Rubeus and Severus' bonding. I'll see you tomorrow, Rube. Take care of Sev."

Dropping a kiss on my bonded's head, she tucked her hand into the crook of Remus' arm and let him lead her from the room. I was still in shock, I think but Rhea's laughter brought me out of it. She and Sev were laughing together while the Headmaster twinkled at them both.

"What just happened, Rhea?" I asked a little plaintively.

"Royan just returned Remus' interest, my dear brother. Mum is going to be dancing for a month when she hears about this." She was smiling and cheerful while I tried to picture little Royan dating the new DADA instructor.

"She barely knows him." I protested. "She's just a baby."

"Remus has grown into a very interesting man, Ru'. I think we might like the person he's become. He was always more sinned against than sinning. I thought once that we might be friends." Sev slipped his hand into mine. "Perhaps that might happen now. As for age, well, Royan and I were born the same year."

"Ya really thinks she likes him?" I seemed to be slow tonight.

"Rube, I think she's willing to give him a chance. Isn't that what Albus is giving him with the offer of the DADA job?" Rhea smiled tenderly at me. "Perhaps everyone needs a second chance now and then."

"Albus gave me that chance more years ago than I care to admit." Sev said softly, looking up at me with those beautiful dark eyes of his.

"And that has made all the difference in this war that we're waging, Severus." The Headmaster smiled and reached across the table to add his hand on top of ours. "Perhaps that muggle writer had it right when he wrote 'all for one and one for all'."

"The Three Musketeers," Harry sat up straight and grinned. "I loved that book. I wish we had more muggle writers in the library here."

"Come to the cottage, Harry. I have it in my collection along with others by Dumas." Sev said gently. "And Remus is right, dinner was very good. Dobby, thank you. You do know that my presence here must be a secret? I must remain dead to everyone except those who are here tonight."

"Dobby knows." The little elf nodded vigorously. "Dobby is thinking that Mr. Hagrid and Professor Snape is needing a house elf to be cooking and cleaning for them."

Alarmed, I sat up and started to say no but Sev stopped me with a touch. "I think Dobby has a good idea, Ru'. With your mother coming very soon, some major cleaning needs to be done now. We have yet to solve the problem of where to put everyone who's due to arrive."

"I'll owl Mum to bring the caravans down with her and Dad." Rhea said confidently. "She and Dad will bring one and Gersey can drive the other one. Once in the grounds of the school, we can float them over the Forest to park near the cottage while the horses stay in the mews here. If Albus wouldn't mind?"

"Splendid idea, my dear, simply splendid." The Headmaster was beaming at all of us. "Dobby, do you know of an elf who would enjoy living in the Forbidden Forest?"

"Dobby is thinking that Ara might be liking it. She is not liking all the people who rush, rush, rush. She is liking quiet and green growing things. Ara is not liking talking all the time." The little elf nodded sagely. "Dobby is asking her tonight if Professor Snape is liking the idea."

"Thank you, Dobby, why don't you ask her and let us know in the morning?" Sev sighed a little and leaned against my shoulder. "I believe I would like to stay here tonight and have one of your excellent breakfasts tomorrow, Dobby."

"Sev, ya're tired, aren't ya?" I slid an arm around him and cuddled him right there in front of everybody. "I think that's a real good idea. Rhea, you and Royan want to sleep in my cottage here on the school grounds?"

"Excellent idea, Rube, I'll take Harry with me and we'll stroll around the grounds until we find the other two." Rhea stood up and rounded the table to kiss Sev's cheek and mine. "Come along, Harry, we'll go find the star watchers."

He grinned and bounced up, ready to go. "Goodnight, everyone. Thanks for letting me help today."

"Your assistance was most appreciated, Harry." Sev smiled at him. "Tomorrow, we'll sit down and go over what Rubeus and I did with the spell we cast. Remus may be able to help you understand the dynamics of the energy we used."

"Brilliant!" He said before leading my sister out of the room.

Within ten minutes, we were all alone and I was carrying Sev into the small bathroom just off his bedroom. He didn't even protest, just hugged me tight and sighed. He really was tired. The bathroom had a dinky little shower and tub, barely big enough for him, let alone me. But he was already half asleep so we just got in, washed and rinsed before drying off and going to bed.

"Rubeus, I love you." Sev said in between his yawns.

"I love ya, too. Sweet dreams, love." I kissed him gently and felt him smile.

"All my dreams are sweet when you're here, Ru'." He murmured and fell asleep.

I chuckled and settled in to hold him. All of my dreams were sweet, too.

Gersey Hagrid

I laid the letter down and looked around my comfortable flat in a daze, running my hand through my red hair. I'm gone four bloody weeks and the whole world changes. My oldest brother is bonded to a dead, rogue wizard and my sister is dating a werewolf. Pinching myself, I winced and picked up the letter again.

'Son, I know this is a bit of a shock but we're going down to Hogwarts to celebrate Rubeus' bonding and meet the teacher that Royan is dating. They're a bit strapped for accommodations so if you'd stop here and pick up the other caravan to drive down, we'd really appreciate it.

Your mother and I look forward to having all our children together to celebrate this joyous time. I hear the tour was quite successful so hopefully you'll have some time off to rest and recuperate. Love, Dad'

I laid it down again and picked up the phone. Three rings later, Peter answered and I explained that I'd be unavailable for a couple of weeks and why. He chuckled, telling me to have fun and give my congratulations to Rubeus. For a muggle, he's been pretty accepting of my family's oddities. He'd met Rube when he came to one of our concerts and I still have the picture that one of the camera crew took of the three of us together.

Picking up my suitcase, which was still packed from the trip, I reset the wards on all the windows and doors before leaving. If nothing else, the two days on the road in the caravan would be peaceful. I needed a chance to unwind from the frenetic schedule of playing and that should rest

me up in time to find out just what the hell was going on in my family.

I apparated to Loch Ness and found another note tacked to the caravan door. Dad had it all ready to go, including gas in the tank. He and Mum prefer the horse driven model but he knows how much I enjoy driving this one. It's about the only thing I do drive these days since I'm on the road so much and I gave it another careful check before climbing behind the wheel and starting out.

When I detoured to see the twins, I found them already gone. Angie told me about their first trip to help build an animal hospital then the call to come down again. Giving her a hug in thanks, I started driving south. I could hardly wait to see everyone and inspect my new brother-in-law for myself.

Rubeus met me at the gates and pulled me into one of his big hugs like he hadn't seen me for a year. But it had been six months so I hugged him back just as fervently. I love all my brothers and sisters but Rube was the one who was always looking out for us. He's the one who took me fishing so I could have some quiet time to myself. He'd fish for hours while I lay on my stomach and contemplated life and the universe.

We never told anyone that. We'd just smile and say it was a good trip. I cherished those memories and even today, I sometimes have the urge to go fishing without a pole.

"Where are ya, Ger'?" His finger tapped my forehead and I blushed.

"Sorry, Rube, I was remembering our fishing trips. Did I ever thank you for giving me that perfect silent space when I needed it?" I pulled back and smiled into eyes the same blue of my own.

"Sure ya did, Ger'. Every time ya smiled up at me or wrote somethin' that reminded me of the lake on a still day, ya were thankin' me." He patted my shoulder. "Now, let's get this thing inside so we can levitate it to the cottage. I already told the 'eadmaster that I'd be takin' off once ya got 'ere."

He held the gate open and I drove the caravan in, heading for the cottage and stables on the school grounds. But since he talked of levitating it, he must be living at the lake this summer. I got out and stretched, waiting for him to catch up to me. The sound of children playing nearby made me smile and I watched a couple of them make loops in the sky on their brooms.

"Hi, you must be Gersey." A youngish voice came from behind me and I turned to see who knew of me.

He was about a foot shorter than me, with messy black hair and the greenest eyes I'd ever seen. He couldn't be more than fifteen and yet his true age was there in his eyes. For one breathless moment, we locked gazes and the rest of the world went away. He was an old soul, this one was. My only magical talent was a small gift for fore-knowledge and it came in brief snatches when it wanted to.

But this fore-vision shook me to the core. No longer a child, he was wrapped around me like a second skin while we kissed with abandon. I blinked and it was gone, he was once again a lad with messy hair standing before me with wide eyes and a blush on his cheeks. But the warmth of that imaginary brief embrace would stay with me for some time to come.

"Good, ya're here, Harry. I see ya've met Gersey already." Rube interrupted our mutual stare and we turned dazed eyes to him. "Gersey, this is Harry Potter. He's been helpin' out this summer."

I pulled myself together and smiled at the young man who had so many hopes pinned to him. "Nice to meet you, Harry."

And his smile finished me off, shy but so bright it could have lit a stage. Dimly, I thought that it was going to be a long decade before I could claim him. Voldemort had been trying to kill him for years, if the papers were right. But Harry had his very own Hagrid now and no evil wizard had yet survived an attack on our family. This time I was going to personally see to his destruction.

Keeping a feral growl to myself, I helped Rube levitate the caravan over the tree tops while Harry walked between us. How the hell was I going to explain this to Mum? Because she was going to take one look and know that I was taken, I thought with a sigh. He was so very young and I was probably not what he'd been dreaming of. Would I be able to stand aside, if he fell for a beautiful little witch or handsome wizard?

Before I could get too depressed, I remembered the vision and slowly smiled. They hadn't been wrong yet so I just needed to settle down to wait for him; let him get to know me; kill Voldemort; get to know him; I definitely needed to write a song for him. Maybe a contemporary version of Green Sleeves, substituting eyes for sleeves? A hesitant hand on my arm brought me out of my daydream.

His hand was strong but so small on my forearm.

"We're here, Gersey." He said and I looked around to find us in the now crowded clearing around Rube's summer cottage.

"So we are, Harry. Thanks for stopping me from walking on into the lake." I watched Rube set the caravan precisely into the spot cleared for it.

He chuckled and I realized that he was still touching me. "I think you would have noticed it before then. What were you thinking so hard about?"

"I was rewriting an old song, Harry. Someday I'll sing it for you." I memorized every finger on my arm, knowing that every touch he gave me would go into my Harry-file.

Those green eyes met mine and I tried not to see the little spark there. He knew that something had happened but wasn't sure what. "Yes, I'd like that, Gersey. It feels like we've known each other for a long time."

"Call me Ger, Harry. Maybe we have, Har', maybe we have." I brushed the hair out of his eyes gently. "Now, where's this new brother-in-law of mine?"

Harry

I watched Mum Hagrid hug Gersey and I just couldn't stop smiling. I wasn't sure why but something had happened when I met Rubeus' youngest brother. I knew he was a musician and toured with a muggle band. They'd told me that he was one of the red Hagrids, taking after his mother instead of his dad. He was big and strong and when I met him, I felt like I was going to pass out.

He'd looked surprised to see me and we stared at each other for the longest time before Rubeus introduced us formally. I'd met all of the Hagrids now and I loved every single one of them but not like I . . . I smacked myself upside of my head mentally and gave myself a scolding. He's a grownup who was just surprised to meet me. I got a good grip on my imagination and watched him greet Severus.

My potion's master looked a little overwhelmed but Rubeus was rubbing his back and staying

right there to support him. He was kind of like me and needed quiet times when things got to be too much. A couple of times, we'd snuck away to a little glade with a brook running through it. I looked for tadpoles while he read quietly and we just hung out together.

I liked that and I wondered if Ger' liked to do that, too. He was looking real surprised at something Rubeus said so I figured that he'd just found out that he was going to be an uncle. That still surprised me, that two male wizards could have a baby. I'd heard Severus say that he'd not be a good person to have a child. He was wrong and so I told him the next time we were alone. He'd protected me and the other students for years just like a good mother would.

He'd been pretty surprised when I told him that and that I thought he'd be a great mother. Severus laughed and laughed but it wasn't hysteria or anything, just kind of joyful. He'd even hugged me and told me thank you. I wasn't a scared ten-year old anymore and I had grown up a lot since the Tri-Wizard competition. When I looked at the severe man who'd been so broken, I saw the man I might become if this war dragged on.

He'd been fighting all his life and I knew that he would have continued if Voldemort hadn't killed him. But Rubeus had saved him and now he was creating life instead of taking it. That's what I wanted to do more than anything. I got a warm glow in the pit of my stomach and found myself watching Ger' again. I was gangly and in the middle of another growth spurt where it felt like my bones were stretching overnight and my muscles couldn't quite keep up.

Ger' was tall with muscles everywhere. His arms were tanned and strong under the green t-shirt that stretched across his broad chest. When I'd touched his arm, the skin was warm with little ripples as he flexed. The warm glow moved to my groin and I hastily pulled my shirt a little further down. I'd been having that problem of getting hard now and then, especially when I saw Rubeus and Severus kiss or hold each other. Sometimes I just had to go down to the lake and swim until it went away.

And sometimes in the bathtub at night, I'd remember and get really hard but then I could stroke it and let it explode. That was happening a lot lately but the Headmaster had told me that was to be expected at my age. There'd always been a picture in my mind of who I would love and it had never been a girl, which is probably why Hermione and I were such good friends.

She was smarter than me in a lot of ways but she didn't threaten me the way that Draco Malfoy did. He used to be able to make my pants too tight with just a sarcastic drawl of my name. But when I thought of him now, it was just with sadness that he was being dragged into evil without any way out. If we hadn't been expected to be enemies, we might have been friends.

If we both survived Voldemort, maybe we still could.

"Penny for your thoughts, Harry." Remus dropped a hand on my shoulder and looked at me with concerned eyes.

"Hi, Remus, have you met Gersey yet?" I deflected his concern with ease and pointed out Rubeus' brother to him. I wasn't prepared for his reaction though.

His jaw dropped and his eyes practically bugged out of his head. "But that's . . . that's . . . my god."

"That's my little brother, Remus." Royan's amused accents came from over my other shoulder. "I take it that you like muggle music."

"Wow," Remus turned dazed eyes on his fiancé. "Your brother's sung for some of the most famous bands of the last decade. But it's his songwriting that has me in awe. What a talent. Why does he use a pseudonym?"

"He does all right and he prefers his privacy." She hugged us both, dropping her voice to a whisper. "You might even get a song or two out of him if you play your cards right."

"He said he was rewriting an old song when we walked here." I volunteered and watched her eyebrow quirk up.

"Really? Interesting, I wonder what sparked that." She waved at Ger' when he turned to look at us. "Prepare yourself, love. He's got that Hagrid look in his eye."

"The one your mother had when she sat me down and gave me the Spanish Inquisition." Remus sighed but stood up even straighter.

"Oooh, not the Spanish Inquisition." She and I chorused before we broke into giggles.

"That's the one, my wolf." She kissed his temple and left her arm around him. "Be brave."

He was really graceful for such a big man, I thought while I watched him saunter over. His legs were long and the muscles bunched in his thighs under the weathered denim jeans. The deep brown leather boots that came to his knees were a little scuffed but I remembered the scent of the leather had smelled really good.

The swelling problem was back and I tried desperately to think of something to make it go away but all I could do was watch him helplessly, wishing for what I couldn't have.

"Do you love him, Royan?" That deep voice sent shivers up and down my spine.

"Yes, Ger, I certainly do." She held out her hand and her brother took it while giving Remus a real searching look.

"And do you love Royan, Professor Lupin?"

Remus looked at the beautiful woman at his side and smiled. "Yes, I do, Gersey, and I always will."

"Good, try and keep some of it for your bonding night." He smiled at the three of us and made us all blush. "Now that that's taken care of, let's go swimming. I need to stretch." He shook hands with Remus and suddenly he was looking at me again. "Come on, Har', Rube told me that you keep a pair of trunks here. You can protect me from that amorous squid."

Royan laughed and tugged us both towards the cottage. "We'll all protect you, Ger. Maybe Mum can talk some sense into him. If you hadn't flirted with him six summers ago, he wouldn't still be mooning over you."

"I did not flirt with him." Ger turned back from the caravan he'd driven down. "I just happened to be singing a love song where he could hear me." Then he opened the door in the side of the caravan and disappeared still muttering.

I couldn't help but grin at that picture until I remembered that I was shortly going to be seeing him dressed in almost nothing. He was going to see me too and I sighed at how scrawny I looked compared to him. I was going to look like a stork, all arms and legs with nothing matching.

And how was I going to hide my reaction to him?

Hagrid

It was so good to see everyone and have us all together. I made real sure though that Sev had some quiet time every day. He's a private man who likes to sit and think so I tried to give him what little Gersey had needed, time to think and time to dream. Poppy had given us all the information we needed about pregnant wizards and we'd been reading it aloud to each other every night before we went to bed.

He already tired easily so the pregnancy tiredness on top of that made me want to wrap him up so all he did was rest. But Poppy had taken me aside and told me in no uncertain terms that he needed to test his own limits. He was committed to carrying our son so he would be safe and healthy. But she'd warned me that one side effect was to make us both horny. So long as we were careful it would be alright.

"Um, Rubeus, Sev, may Remus and I change in your bedroom? The girls took the bathroom." Harry stuck his head around Sev and I wondered why he was blushing.

Sev answered him with a little wrinkle between his eyes. "Of course you may, Harry. Is there something you'd like to ask us? You know that you can talk to us if you have questions."

He blushed so red it looked painful and I steered us into the house in case this was a conversation that needed some privacy. Remus wandered in with us and plopped into the wing chair with a wink and a little nod towards Harry. Sev walked him into our bedroom and sat him down on the bed, drawing the chair from the desk around so they could sit knee to knee. I sat down too and put an arm around the little teenager.

"Now, Harry, what is wrong?" Sev said in his no nonsense teacher voice.

Harry squirmed a little with a little side glance at me that I didn't quite understand. "It's kind of private, sir."

"I'm sure it is but there is nothing that you can't tell us. I promise we won't laugh at you or do anything but find a solution to your problem." Sev said sternly and I started getting hard the way I always did when he sounded like that.

"Um, I talked with Headmaster Dumbledore about growing up problems, 'cause it's kind of hard to talk to Professor McGonagall about . . . guy stuff." He sat up a little straighter and looked right at Sev. "I keep getting . . . hard when I see certain people and if I'm in a bathing suit, how do I hide that?"

I snickered and they both glared at me. "There's not a thing wrong with that reaction, 'arry. I got the same problem, only it's Sev that does it for me."

Sev relaxed and shook a finger at me while Harry tried not to laugh. "I'll speak to you later, Rubeus Hagrid. As for Harry, I have to ask if this is an old problem and if it has something to do with the walking sex-magnet who came this afternoon?"

Harry sighed while I started. "Yeah, he's so . . . so beautiful . . . and nice . . . and his voice is kind of like chocolate on a hot day."

"Gersey?" My voice squeaked, I was so surprised.

Sev smirked. "I'm glad that you can't see it, Ru', I might have worried otherwise. However, you are just going to have to accept that the man is a bloody wet dream and is going to cause Harry untold erections." He turned back to Harry. "Now, the problem is how to keep from embarrassing

yourself in front of him."

I stared in confusion while they debated the strategic use of towels, picnic baskets and other forms of concealment, including the myriad uses of water - both cold and hot. When they paused, I broke in. "Harry, you're not scared of him, are you? I mean the way he makes you feel?"

He looked real taken aback. "Of course not, Rubeus, I know that he'd never hurt me. I'll always be safe with him. I just don't want to look like a dork in front of him or upset him. Girls never have turned me on, just guys."

"We understand, Harry," Sev put a hand on my knee and stood up, rubbing his back a little. "Ru' and I will leave you to change. Your swimsuit is in your bag on the shelf just behind you. We'll make sure that you have some handy towels for the trip down to the beach. Come along, Ru."

He didn't give me a chance to say anything else, tugging me to the door. I shut up, knowing that he'd tell me what I missed when we got private. Remus was kissing Royan, who was sitting on his lap dressed in only her skimpy little bathing suit. Sev snorted with that little chuckle of his and pulled me on out of the cottage completely.

"We're going to have to hose everyone down if this keeps up." Sev chuckled then stopped dead in front of me. "Good God, no wonder Harry is practically hyperventilating."

I looked up and saw Ger in his blue swimsuit with a towel thrown over one shoulder and his arm around Rhea while he talked to Hossic. He looked the same as he always did to me. He's kind of a shrimp at only 6'9" but his workout program keeps him fit. He's certainly nothing to sneeze at but I tried to see why Sev would call him 'a wet dream'. Looking down at Sev, I was surprised to see him grinning up at me.

"Rubeus, I love you to distraction. On an aesthetic level, Gersey is the more sculpted of you two. Perhaps the more conventionally beautiful even." He reached up to cup my chin. "But I find you so perfect in every way that my appreciation of your brother is on a connoisseur level only. Harry, however, is a completely different story. If it's a boy's first crush, he could be hurt badly even if Gersey is merely kind. If it's what I think it might be, Gersey could be hurt."

"Sev, I can see ya're talking English 'cause I know the words, well, most of them." I said plaintively. "But understandin' 'em is something else."

"Sev's right," Mum's voice came from over my shoulder and I turned to see her smiling down at my bonded. "It's as plain as the nose on yar face that Gersey is took. He just admitted it. Poor lad is going to be waitin' a while ta claim wee 'arry. Voldemort just sealed 'is own doom. We don't much cotton ta nasty wizards tryin' to kill our mates."

Well, I agreed with that. I knew how much I'd wanted to hurt him after he killed Sev. But Gersey being claimed by a fifteen-year old? How had that happened?

"The heart has a rhythm all its own, Ru'. Why in the world would a beautiful man like you want a used-up, old battered professor in his life?" Sev leaned against me and I just had to lean down to kiss him. He'd been sneaking grapes from the arbor again and I made a mental note to check on which strain would ripen next. But underneath it all was the wonderful Sev-taste that was so addicting.

"That was ain of those rhe-tor-i-cal questions, weren't it, Sev?" Mum teased him when we came up for air and he chuckled.

"It was indeed, Mum." Sev grinned up at her and she stroked his hair back with a gentle hand. They'd taken to each other real good and once she knew about the baby, she was over the moon

with joy. It took a little while for Sev to be comfortable calling her Mum but it didn't really interfere with the memories of his own mum since he'd always called her mama in private and mother in public. Dad was so different from his own father that he'd had an easier time with him.

"Rube, Ger had one of his wee visions. Though he won't say exactly what it was." She chuckled and patted my shoulder. "I s'pect it was the sexy kind. Those are always the strongest."

"Ger has visions?" Sev asked with a fascinated air. "Oh, towels. Ru', we need to get some towels for Harry to carry down. He's noticed Ger, Mum."

"Aye, Ger's not one to hide 'is light under a bushel. Or in this case, 'is body." She laughed and sent me in for towels.

Sirius Black

I cowered underneath the dumpster and prayed that the patrol would pass on by. My collar was long gone, bitten through by a pit bull that had gone for my throat. I'd escaped by running away like the worst kind of coward but it had saved my life. Right now, I wasn't so sure that was a good thing. I'd gone almost two days now without even a scrap of garbage and I was starting to weaken.

Rubbing my paw over my nose, I watched the patrol go on by without checking under the large metal garbage dumpster. Safe for the moment, I chanted silently to myself, safe for now. Closing my eyes wearily, I wondered where Remus had gone. When I turned up at his latest flat, he'd been gone without a trace. He always had traveled light but right now I was wishing that he'd had enough to need a mover.

It was hot and I was thirsty but I needed to let a little time go by to make sure the patrols weren't coming back. The last attack had frightened a lot of wizards and made everyone edgy. I wasn't looking my best but it beat the way I looked as a man. I could feel my ribs slightly grate together where the butcher store owner had hit me with a rock. I'd run at once but I didn't seem to be healing the way I used to.

It takes energy to heal and that's hard to come by when you're not eating regularly. I'd eaten a rat or two at an antique store after first showing them to the owner. She'd fed me well and patted my head but then I heard her telling her assistant to call the dog patrol. I finished my meal then left in a hurry. That had been two days ago and I hadn't found anything since.

Poking my head out cautiously, I looked around carefully. No more patrols and there was a really good smell coming from down the alley. If I kept to the north side of the street and moved from shadow to shadow, I just might be able to make the café loading area. Meat scraps would be pure heaven right now but if they'd thrown out bread or rolls that would be fine, too.

Someone was coming and I ducked into a doorway, trying to blend in with the stonework. But the footsteps slowed and I tried to make myself smaller so I'd looked less scrawny and not threatening.

"Poor thing, he looks like he hasn't eaten in a while." A soft voice from above made me turn my head a bit so I could see him better.

"Looks like he has fleas too, Dad. Let's leave this one for the patrol to pick up. We don't need anymore strays. Rube wouldn't thank us for bringing him another patient." The gruffer voice had me shrinking back again. He was much bigger than the soft-voice man and I'd be no match for him.

"And who was it brought me that stray warg two years ago, Son?" The soft-voice said while stooping to gently rub my head. It felt good and I sat up to see if he'd get that itchy ear that had been bothering me. When he did, I wanted to wiggle all over, it felt so good.

"Aye, that was me, Dad." The voice wasn't so gruff now and he knelt in front of me to look me in the eyes. "He's in pain from some broken ribs that aren't healing right. There's something odd about him, though." He looked closer and I dropped my eyes to escape his penetrating gaze.

"Gration, some men just appeared in the middle of the street." Soft-voice said with a note of urgency that startled his son and me, too.

The sound of explosions going off preceded the screams by only a moment. Gration stood and had a wand out in a heartbeat. The black robes of the Death Eaters made me growl. Those bastards were getting worse and I arose to stand in front of soft-voice. Something told me that he didn't have the protection of magic.

He'd been kind to me and suddenly I had enough energy to at least try to help protect him. Gration was casting little spells that were distracting them long enough for him to get close. They weren't expecting a physical attack just magic ones so the tall human was able to knock two of them together. Their wands dropped to the cobblestones and I darted out to snap them in two with my jaws and teeth.

That was satisfying and I growled at one of them when he tried to kick the tall-one.

"Nice going, boy. Watch them while I try for the one by the butcher." He rubbed my head briefly and called over his shoulder. "Dad, stay there."

But soft-voice wasn't paying attention and he came out to check on a young woman who'd been hit by falling bricks from the exploded store front. She was crying but conscious and he helped her to her feet so he could get her away. Just beyond the safe doorway, another black clad wizard appeared with his wand out. Somehow I just knew that he wasn't an Auror but another Death Eater and soft-voice hadn't seen him.

Leaving the two cursing wizards in the middle of the street, I dashed over to soft-voice and the woman. A stream of something black came from the wand pointed at them and time seemed to slow. I couldn't call a warning or get both of them to duck so I did the only thing I could. I howled and leapt into the air so the black spell hit me instead.

The pain was more than I could stand and as I fell in darkness, I thought resignedly that I'd be lucky if the dog patrol bothered to cremate me and scatter my ashes on their garden. Harry and Remus would never know what happened to me and I felt regret. So many regrets and now I'd never be able to say I was sorry.

Noise. Voices. Gentle hands. Something cold over my nose. Something slid under me and just that much movement sent me back into the darkness.

There was a faintly medicinal scent in the air and I opened my eyes in sudden terror that the dog patrol had picked me up and I was in their kennels. But I was in a wooden box with soft rags beneath me and a rocking chair beside the box. Soft-voice must have brought me home with him.

"Awake are ya?" The voice wasn't his but it was kind. A large hand came down and gently scratched between my ears. "That's a good lad, I s'pect that ya're hungry. Before I feed ya, I need ta say ma thanks to ya. I'd not like to lose me 'usband after all this time and ya took a spell for

him. Ya're not to be worrying about a home from now on, wee lad."

I laid my head back down with a sigh. Sooner or later, I'd have to figure out how to let them know I was an animagus. For now, I just wanted to eat something and go right back to sleep. A bowl of freshly cooked beef heart was set before me and strong hands helped me sit up enough so I could get my muzzle down into the bowl. I've never tasted anything so good in my life.

Each succulent nugget was chewed a couple of times before I swallowed it pretty much whole. The warmth in my stomach was good to feel and I ate a few more bites before I had to stop. Licking the hand that had just fed me, I listened to her chuckle.

"Good enough, lad. There'll be more when ya wake up. Lie back down like a good boy and I'll watch over ya." She got me arranged so my ribs didn't hurt so much and I sighed in relief.

The creaking of the rocker sent me back to sleep and I thought sleepily that I'd never had this kind of care when I was in human form. I hovered between waking and sleeping, the sound of a guitar and singing coming faintly through the window.

"Green eyes are my delight; Green eyes, my heart of gold; Green eyes are my heart of joy; and who but my very own green eyes."

Odd, I should know that song. Tomorrow I'd think about it more. And I slipped into the comforting dark with the haunting refrain softly playing inside my mind.

Severus

I awoke in the position that I loved most, wrapped in Rubeus' arms with my head over his heart. One of the things that the books had mentioned was how soothing the baby in utero found his mother's heartbeat. Our child was mostly a mass of cells at the moment but I wondered if he was already soothed by the rhythm of my blood and heart.

"Ya awake, Sev?" His whisper disrupted my doze.

"Yes Ru', good morning, love." I raised my head and met his lips in our first kiss of the day. It was slow and sweet before we broke apart to smile at each other.

"Sev, I don't want ya upset today and I know somethin' that might." He said rather diffidently.

"Just tell me, Ru'. Nothing is so bad that we can't handle it together." I assured him while surreptitiously sliding to one side.

He turned with me and kept his arms about me as if afraid that I would flee. "The dog that saved Dad's life?"

I hadn't actually seen it since they'd hurriedly carried it into their caravan while calling for Rubeus to come and see to him. Gration had gathered us together and given us the whole tale of the attack. Dad Hagrid had come out while his son was still talking and had to be hugged by every single one of us before Gra' finished up. Harry was so silent that I was worried that he might be having a flashback to the last attack he'd been a part of.

I'd asked him if he was all right and he'd nodded sadly. He still felt that some of this was his fault and I wasn't sure how to make him see that it could never be his. He'd done nothing but fight against evil his entire life. Lifting my eyes from his downcast face, I'd seen the sorrowful look on my newest brother-in-law's face. That decided me and I'd rather imperiously beckoned him over.

In brisk tones, I'd sent Harry home and asked Gersey to walk him through the Forest. When Ru' had come out, he'd approved vocally and then we had to tell our missing two members about Ger's vision about Harry. Dad Hagrid had smiled and said that he was glad that Gersey was finally going to settle down. But he looked shaken still so after hugging him again we sent him to bed and followed soon after.

All of this flashed through my mind in a moment and I searched his face for a clue to what had him so unsure. "What about the dog?"

He swallowed hard. "I think it's Black."

"Of course it's black. It looked like a Labrador retriever." I was still lost until suddenly I made the connection. "No." I shook my head and began to tremble. "No."

"Fraid so, love." He hugged me closer. "He's in bad shape and not just from the attack. He's malnourished with some broken ribs and the dull coat that tells me that his diet hasn't been the best. He's also been in dog form almost too long. Some of his reactions are totally canine so we're going to need to encourage him to change. I left Mum watching him so I know he had a good night."

I couldn't stop trembling. I'd finally found a safe haven and someone who loved me. Black would try to push me aside and take his own place in this new family. Oh, they'd tolerate me since I carried Rubeus' child but I wasn't charming or good looking or had any of the traits that brought him so many friends.

Harry and Remus would be ecstatic over his return. I was going to be on the outside again, watching the rest of the family coalesce around his bright star. I swallowed the tears that I didn't dare show and tried to school my face into a semblance of calm.

"Everyone will be glad that he's not lost anymore, Rubeus. We'll need to get a message to Albus." I tried on a smile. "He'll be able to help if . . . Black needs some to return to human. Harry will be so pleased and Remus, too."

"But ya're not, Sev." He kissed my temple and rocked me a little. "It doesn't matter whether he is or isn't Black. Nothing will ever change how much I love ya. My family isn't goin' to throw us out because Black becomes a part of it. Since Gersey loves Harry and will be takin' care of him then his godfather will be welcome to be a part of us. I don't know if he's going to welcome Ger into his family. The half-breed prejudice is still rampant."

"What? That's ridiculous, Rubeus. Gersey is a fine young man with a talented voice and a razor sharp mind. Anyone would be pleased to have him join their family." I was incensed by the very thought. Rubeus smiled at me and I realized that he'd snapped me out of my funk with the perfect red herring. "You're getting very good at handling crotchety old professors, Ru'."

And just like that, the air heated between us and his eyes began to glow. "I like 'andlin' ya, Sev. Ya want we should 'andle each other?"

We kissed each other slowly, touching and tasting all the hot spots we'd found on each others bodies. His big hand cradled our shafts together and they slid slickly against his palm while I trembled with the need to come. His kiss drew my seed out and his also. We pulsed together until we were limp. I was still afraid but he'd reminded me that he was my constant lover and I need never fear losing him.

A knock on our door brought our heads up. Gration's voice rang out. "Rube, he's changed back into a man. Mum's giving him a bath and Dad is laying out some clothes. He says his name is

Black."

I closed my eyes and tried to hang on to the peaceful feelings of the moment before. I bit my lip and tried to think positively but that wasn't my forte and I feared I failed.

"I'll be right out, Gra'." Rubeus called to him before dropping his voice. "Sev, why don't ya have a bit of a lie-in this morning. It's going to be a hustle-bustle and ya could miss it all if ya just 'ad breakfast in bed and curled up with that new book Dad brought back from Dragon's Lair for ya."

Would that be cowardly, I asked myself? Yes, but at the moment I didn't care. "Please, Ru', I'd like that." I tried on a smile and saw that it wasn't quite right by the look on his face. "Please."

He kissed me gently and slid from our bed, picking up his robe from the floor and putting it on. "I'll send Royan in with yar tea. I think I smell the good biscuits. Think ya could eat one?"

I smiled at him and this time it was true. I did love those biscuits. "Yes, please and if there are any grapes picked, could I have some of them, too?"

"Sure ya can, Sev, between ya and Rhea there won't be any left for jam. We'll just 'ave to make do with strawberry this year." He teased me and dropped another kiss onto my forehead. "Curl back up, Sev and don't think of bad things. Think about what the nursery should look like for our son."

I hummed my reply while I watched the sun creep up the bed to where I lay. It was filtered just enough by the tall oaks with their summer leaves so it wasn't too hot. But it was golden and just bright enough that it felt good when it reached my hands. Looking at them, I noticed how many scars I had there. Acids, cuts, ingredients gone awry, they had all taken a toll on my fingers.

If someone didn't know what I did for a living, all they would have to do was look at my hands. I'd handled death more times than I could count. Could I handle life? Would these hands know how to hold a child, pat his back, play with his tiny fingers, give him baths, help him stand upright? I wanted to be able to do that. Perhaps some of the creatures of the Forest would allow me to watch them take care of their young, I mused.

I could travel deep into the Forest and not come out until Black was gone. If that was cowardly, then so be it. I would, however, ask Ru' to come with me. I wasn't stupid.

Hagrid

I must have had a real stern look on my face when I came out because Gra' took one look and put his hand on my shoulder. "What's wrong, Rube?"

As Mum would say, I shoulda s'pected that. "His name is Sirius Black and 'e was a classmate of Sev's. Royan, would ya make up a tray for Sev. Thanks for baking those biscuits, he really likes them. If'n there's grapes, could ya put some of those on, too?"

"Of course, Ru', I do that right away. Is it the morning sickness?" She asked anxiously.

"A little bit of that and a little bit of thinkin' about the past." I didn't want to go into it. "Where's Remus? Did he stay the night?"

She didn't quite blush. "He stayed. He's over at Dad and Mum's caravan helping with Black."

"Good." I was trying to be optimistic but I could just see our whole reunion going up in flames

over events that should have never happened. "Where's Gersey?"

"He's still asleep." Gra' said slowly, watching me like a hawk. "What's wrong with Black?"

I gave them the short version, just the bare bones. They knew that kids can be real cruel to each other but Royan was already a Remus-partisan and she was mad on his behalf. Then I asked Gra' to wake Ger up so he could go get Harry and Albus. He nodded and left silently. He'd withhold judgment until he saw if Black had changed any. I was trying to do that but it was real hard because I could see what it was doing to Sev.

Going into the bathroom, I cleaned up and grabbed my work clothes from the hook where I usually kept them. Dressing real hurriedly, I left the cottage and headed for the folks caravan. Repeating the healer's oath to myself over and over, I tapped on the door before going in. Dad was making tea while Mum fried up some eggs.

They both gave me a kiss and I hugged Dad tight again just because I could. I knew in my head that I'd probably out live them both but my heart didn't want to think about that.

"There, there, Ru'," he patted my back and hugged me back. "I'm safe and sound and likely to stay that way for many years to come. After all, I have to hold my grandson in the near future."

"I know, Dad. It's just . . ." I struggled to get the words out. "Ya could'a been killed. I owe Black for that."

Mum tapped me on the shoulder and I turned my head to see her squinting her eyes like she did when she caught one of us in a lie or a half-truth. "Tha' doesn't sound quite right, Son. I'm thinking tha' ya've got a bit of a history with yon wee animagus."

Damn! I was hoping to keep the past out of this but it looked like I couldn't. So I gave them the brief version of Black and Sev's past. Mum nodded thoughtfully while Dad frowned. Just then, Remus came out of the back bedroom with a big smile on his face. He didn't smile enough, I expect that's because there hasn't been much to smile about.

"Rubeus, could you take a look at him? His ribs are giving him trouble." He asked.

I didn't want to but I would because I can't bear to see someone in pain. Nodding, I went on back to find Rhea helping Black into one of Dad's shirts. "Morning, Rhea, Black."

"Hagrid?" He looked real surprised. Nobody must have introduced themselves to him.

"Ya're in me Mum's caravan." I kept it short and sat on the edge of the bed so I could look at his ribs better. "What caused this?"

"A rock about a week ago, I think." He sounded as tired as my Sev had been those first weeks. His torso was mottled all over with old scars and recent bruises. I could count his ribs, he was so emaciated. Against my will, I was starting to feel sorry for him. He'd obviously been through the wringer. Maybe it would smarten him up, I hoped silently.

"A bit of quick grow should do the trick," I told Rhea and she nodded. She was a nurse at the local hospital in Loch Ness and knew that ribs were always hard to heal. "Until that takes hold, I'll wrap ya up so they don't hurt so bad."

"I'd appreciate it, Hagrid." He tried to get the shirt off but stopped with a gasp.

"No moving, Sirius." Rhea told him and gently eased the shirt off. "Let me do the work. That's it, love."

He blushed and dropped his eyes. I looked at my sister and the way she was gazing at him and wanted to groan. It seemed the Hagrids were real susceptible to those in need. Her eyes were soft and her touch tenderly supportive of the battered man she had her arm around. What the hell was I going to tell Sev? Oh, by the way, Black looks like he's joining the family. And not only as Harry's godfather?

Praying I was wrong, I wrapped his torso in a long white bandage and fastened it off with a hold charm. Sev was going to have to brew the potion called quick grow since I'd run out and I didn't know if he was up to that. Certain smells made him sick now. Maybe Poppy had some on hand?

"Rubeus!" Rhea's raised voice brought me back to the here and now. "What in the world is the matter with you?"

I smiled real quick at her. "Just wondering if Poppy has any quick grow potion on hand. I sent Ger to get Harry, maybe I can get him before he leaves." I stood up and headed for the door.

"Can't Sev brew some for you?" She asked innocently and I felt Black's start.

"Sev? As in Severus Snape?" His growl was more of a petulant bark. "I thought he was dead."

I turned back and looked him straight in the eyes. "Yes, Severus Snape-Hagrid, my bonded. Not another word, Black."

He nodded, staying silent while I left fuming. Managing a smile for the folks, I left and caught Ger and Gra' just leaving their caravan. Telling them to ask Poppy for the potion, I headed for the cottage. I needed to cuddle Sev and listen to his plans for the nursery we had yet to build. The family would sort themselves out, we always did. The front room was empty but voices came from our bedroom so I followed the sound.

Royan was curled up on the window seat with a cup of tea and Sev was propped up on some pillows with a breakfast tray still filled with food on his lap. Sitting down beside him, he came immediately into my arms. "This looks good, Royan. How about one of these grapes, Sev?"

He let me feed him a grape but his eyes were asking me questions. I fed him a few more then took a sip of tea from his cup. "He's got three broken ribs and almost as many bruises as ya had a month ago, Sev. I wrapped him up tight and sent Ger and Gra' to get Harry and some quick grow from Poppy."

"I could have made some up for you, Ru'." He said slowly and plucked a bite of biscuit from the plate.

"I wasn't sure if any of the ingredients would make ya sick ta your stomach." I told him and kissed him gently.

"Next time, ask me, Ru'. I'm not so fragile that I'll break." H kissed me back and cuddled into my side. "Now, Royan had a good idea about the nursery."

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Parts 17 - 20 by Athea

Author's Notes:

Harry regains a godfather.

Harry

The summons to come to the Headmaster's office caught me daydreaming. Sitting in the window of our common room, I was thinking about Ger and our walk home. I wasn't afraid of looking like

an idiot anymore. Swimming had been fun but the impromptu water volleyball game afterwards had gone a long way towards making me feel more comfortable with him. Hossic and I had even ganged up on him and ducked him.

I could still feel his arm around my waist when he'd come up for air and thrown me across to Royan like I was the volleyball. It was better than flying a broom. I thought about family and what that meant to me. I was kind of a part of the Weasleys but only a visitor like a distant but enjoyable cousin who came to visit now and then. The Hagrids had taken me in and they already were making plans that included me.

Ger had promised me tickets to his next concert. Rhea was going to take me shopping for school robes. Royan was thinking about a job offer from the Headmaster to be the assistant Charms instructor and she asked my opinion. I thought she should say yes since Remus was going to be the new DADA teacher. Classes were going to be really interesting. It was turning out to be the best summer I'd ever had.

Dobby popped in to give me Headmaster Dumbledore's message and I followed him out of the Gryffindor tower. But I didn't need to go all that way because he was waiting for me along with Ger in the courtyard. My eyes lit up, I just know they did when I saw him. His smile was slow and made my stomach jump.

"Harry, we have some good news for you." The Headmaster smiled down at me and Ger nodded. "The dog that saved the Hagrids yesterday was your godfather. He came to himself this morning and we're going to go to him now."

"Sirius?" I almost burst into tears at the news. It had been so long since we'd heard of him that I was afraid he was dead. But Ger was there to hold me and I rested against him for a long moment while he stroked my hair. Then I straightened up again and smiled at them both. "Let's go see him."

We walked through the Forest, meeting Ceyx with his little griff when we were almost there. We all smiled at each other. Someday, I hoped that the Forest would no longer be forbidden, that light and peace might bloom here again. But then we were there and Mum Hagrid was welcoming us into their caravan. Sirius looked awful but his smile was bright and I hugged him so hard that he complained that I was breaking even more ribs.

But he didn't let go of me, stroking his hand over my hair over and over as if to make sure that I was really there. Rhea sat by his bed and smiled on us both when the Headmaster came in and gave Sirius the quick grow that Madame Pomfrey had given him. That reminded me of Severus and I wondered what would happen when the two of them met.

They didn't like each other at all. This could get really sticky, I thought. Maybe I could get them to tolerate each other? Either that or Rubeus was going to turn my godfather over his knee and spank him. I smiled at that thought and kissed Sirius' cheek. "I'm glad that we've found you again, Siri. There's been a few changes that you should know about."

"Hagrid said something about him bonding with Snape." He scrunched up his face in a kind of bewilderment. "But I read that Snape was dead. That he'd gone rogue or something."

"Severus has been spying for Dumbledore for over fifteen years. He was a Death Eater so he could find out what Voldemort was doing. Malfoy betrayed him to his Master and he killed Sev. But Rubeus got to him before it was too late." I settled in and told him the rest of it while he listened with wide eyes. It took a little while and I left out the baby since that wasn't something he needed to know unless he stuck around long enough to find out.

Rhea was still sitting by the bed and I could feel her weighing my version of the story against

what she knew. At some point, she sighed, got up and left us with a murmured apology. The moment she was gone, Sirius grabbed my arm. "I know she's Hagrid's sister and her name is Rhea. What else do you know about her?"

"Rhea's a nurse up in a town near Loch Ness. She bakes great crumble cakes and likes the color blue. She writes poetry, little haikus that are really neat." I thought back over the conversations we'd had. "She's serene like the brook that Sev and I go to sometimes to just sit and listen to the silence."

"You're spending time with Snape, on your own?" He looked worried and I laughed at him.

"Yeah, I am, Siri. He's nice even if he does want me to pay more attention to potions. I think you'll like him if you just let yourself." I smiled at his disbelieving face. "You're not the boys that you were seventeen years ago. For fifteen years he's been living a lie. The twelve years in Azkaban were a lie for you. Maybe it's time to let the lies get buried once and for all."

"Snape," he shook his head and laid it back against the pillow. "Anything is possible, I guess. Does Rhea like him?"

I smiled, remembering the way she'd babied him one night when his stomach was too upset to eat anything. "Yeah, she does and so does Royan, the other sister. I don't suppose that Remus said anything to you about her, did he?"

He snickered a little. "Oh, not more than every other sentence, Harry. I take it that she is the strong-minded one?"

"Oh, yeah! Royan has dark hair instead of red but she's got the passionate nature instead of the serenity of Rhea." I thought about them some more. "I think that maybe she and Remus will bond soon. Midsummer's Eve is just five days away and the day after is Remus' birthday so we'll all be here building on to Rubeus' cottage. That's been really fun, Siri, I helped them build on the library and the animal hospital."

He lay there and let me run on, still holding my hand with a big smile on his face. Five minutes later, I saw he'd fallen asleep and I quietly slipped out of the bedroom. Mum Hagrid was sitting in the rocking chair and I gave her a big hug for taking such good care of my godfather. She gives great hugs and before I knew it, I was sitting in her lap and pouring out the story as I knew it about the Marauders and Severus.

She's got the kindest blue eyes to go with her red hair and she informed me that all growing boys needed hugs. I kind of felt like she was making up for all those times when I was little and never got anything but blows. When I grew up and had kids, I was going to hold them all the time and tell them how much I loved them. Thinking about that made me think of Gersey and that made me think of having babies with him.

Could I be like Sev and carry our babies inside of me? "Mum Hagrid, what is it like to have a baby? Do you know what it will be like for Severus?"

"Ah, carryin' babies was always easy for me." She stroked my hair and I felt safe. "Sev will 'ave a 'arder time of it since males aren't exactly made to carry a child. But there are spells to help him deliver the baby safely although there will be pain. The pain is right bad when ya're a pushin' out and the contractions are coming all the time. But the joy when ya hold him or her in your arms is worth every little bit of it."

"Sev's suffered a lot of pain in his life. He'll ride it out all right. I don't know if I could be that brave." I admitted.

"Ya're a brave lad and a canny one, Harry Potter. Once Voldemort is dead and gone, we'll have a little chat, ya and Gersey and me." She dropped a kiss on my head when I froze. "If'n ya want him, 'arry, he'll be waitin'. Ya take yar time and grow up a wee bit more, then we'll see what 'appens."

"It's all right that I like him?" I sat up straight and looked her right in the eyes. "You don't mind that he makes me feel all shivery and good? Does he feel the same way?"

"Aye, he's seen ya together in the future." Her whole face crinkled into a smile. "Lad, ya'll be good for each other. But there'll be nothing between ya until ya're of an age to know yar own mind."

"I'll be sixteen on the 31st of July. Is that old enough?" I asked eagerly.

"Maybe a kiss or two, 'arry but not much more than that." She smoothed my hair back. "Take the time to know each other. Ya've got long lives ahead of ya and there's no need ta rush although I know that sometimes it feels like yar about ready to explode. Ask for a hug and talk to each other. Share what ya like and dislike. Music is a big part of our Gersey's life and will be part of yar's if ya spend yar lives together."

I would have bounced up and down but that would have been childish. "Okay, I can do that, Mum Hagrid." I leaned in and kissed her soft cheek. "I promise that I won't be impatient." She looked at me with a stern look. "Well, not too impatient."

She chuckled and slid me off her lap. "Go find Rhea for me, please. She and I need ta have a little talk before yon wee wizard wakes up again."

I leaned against the arm of the big oak rocking chair. "Siri likes her and he really is a good man, just kind of impetuous some times. He's been best friends with Remus since before I was born. He was falsely accused and tried for the murder of my parents. He escaped Azkaban and has been in hiding ever since. I think surviving that made him a lot steadier and not so quick to take offense over little things."

"Ya've got a good heart, 'arry. We'll no be rushing ta judgment on him. We giants like ta take things slow." She winked at me and got up to put on the kettle. "Off with ya, now."

"Yes, ma'am." I said and dashed out to look for Rhea. She was just coming up from the beach with Gersey and I got that fluttery feeling again when I saw him smiling at her. But then the smile was for me and I barely got out the message for Rhea, I was that nervous.

"Um, Ger, could we talk a little?" I looked up at him and wondered if I'd ever grow any taller or if I'd always have a crick in my neck from looking way up.

"Sure, Harry, where would be a good place?" He tucked a lock of hair behind my ear and I shivered at how good it felt.

"Sev and I go to the brook sometimes when we want to be quiet." I said eagerly.

Gersey

The testing of my willpower had begun and I let him lead me into the Forest towards a small brook that meandered through the trees. He was talking a mile a minute and I could see that something had happened. Whether it was Mum or his godfather, I couldn't decide. He'd tell me if I asked or maybe even if I didn't. I let my eyes rest on him and gathered in the way he looked so I

could pull the pictures out while I was touring.

The black hair was still messy and his green eyes sparkled up at me while his hands talked in the air in front of him. Once he filled out, he was going to be a powerful man. He was already a powerful wizard, the magic crackling around him like static electricity. I was going to stick tighter than glue to him. Voldemort was going to have to go through me to get to this bright soul.

The refrain of the song that I'd rewritten last night came to me and I smiled down at him, only hearing one word in three. He was worth the wait. When I heard him say something about Mum, I tuned completely in again. She'd told him? Why would she do that, I thought in consternation.

The small brook and the grove of ash trees at the bend in the stream were an inviting spot and my musician's mind immediately started storing up pictures to be turned into words another time. Harry sank down to sit cross-legged in front of a tree, leaning back against the white-gray bark and smiling happily. It seemed that we had arrived.

I sat down near him, copying his position so we sat knee to knee. That should keep my hands off him, I thought hopefully. "Now, tell me what Mum said."

Those green eyes were gleeful but also a bit hesitant. "She said that we both wanted each other, that you'd had a vision of us together. But . . ."

"I did have a brief look into a possible future, Harry. Visions can be perilous things if they dictate your actions." I said a bit sternly then relented at his crestfallen look. "But if we both wish it then it will come to pass. You're still so very young, Harry. Take your time and make sure that events aren't driving your emotions."

"Mum said that, too. She wants us not to do anything too soon." He said ruefully. "But I'll be sixteen on July 31st."

I smiled at him and risked taking one of his hands in mine. "I promise you a birthday present of anything you wish."

His eyes lit up and he laughed. "I will hold you to that, Ger. But Mum said that I could ask for a hug while we're talking."

I shook my head but held out my arms for him. He launched himself at me and we fell back onto the soft grass. He was light and love and laughter, I thought, pulling him closer while rolling us to our sides. That was safer right now when our emotions were high. He'd just had his godfather given back to him and he was still feeling that high.

We put our foreheads together and I breathed in his scent. "Tell me what's important to you, Harry."

He thought for a moment, his hands absentmindedly smoothing over my t-shirt while I gritted my teeth and tried not to react. "My friends are important, they help keep me sane when the attacks come. My magic is important to me, it's fun to learn why some things work the way they do. One word different in an incantation and the spell changes from good to bad and back again."

"True," I nodded. "It's the same in song making. Words have power and you have to be careful of what you say and how you say it."

He thought for a moment then he sighed. "There's so much to learn."

"You don't have to learn it all at once, Harry. I'm still learning myself and I'm twice your age." I couldn't seem to stop touching him but I tried to keep it to his hair or arm. It would be so easy to

take this too fast and go too far even though my heart was singing that he was the one I'd been waiting for.

"I know." He flattened his hands on my chest. "Do you think I'll grow anymore, Ger? Should I start working out?"

A brief vision flashed across my eyes. "You'll grow another three inches or so, Harry. Your Quidditch play is already helping to tone your muscles. I'd add a little weight training but don't go too fast. I've got a good book on yoga that I've been using for the last five years and I'll give it to you. Toned is not necessarily supple and yoga will help you with that."

"Yoga? I know what it is but you do it?" He asked curiously.

"The concert circuit is hard on a body." I admitted. "Some of the exercises help me keep my center when there's no peace to be found, not to mention, the long hours and energy draining performances."

"Wow, tell me more." He settled in, keeping a hand on my chest and I covered it with my own. I'd been told that I was a good storyteller and he was the most important audience I would ever have.

Ara

I finished setting the table for breakfast. The water was just right for tea since I'd put it on the moment I heard them stir. The small teapot was filled with raspberry leaves in case Master Severus awoke with nausea but the big teapot held the black leaves of the Assam blend that he usually drank. Master Rubeus didn't really care what kind of tea they had so long as there was lots of it.

Smiling, I darted into the bathroom to make sure that everything was ready for them. Since everyone else was using the caravans to sleep and bathe in, the masters had their privacy although they always made a mess big enough for six. When the baby came, that mess would probably double, I thought happily. I loved babies and this one would be so very special that it was an honor to help take care of him.

Master Rubeus thought it was a boy and I had debated whether or not to tell them he was right. Master Severus' aura showed he was carrying a male. Once every one left, I would tell them. Everyone, I thought with a sigh, there were so many everyones. When Dobby had asked me if I wanted to become their house elf, I'd thought it would just be the two of them and the visiting sisters would soon be gone.

I had always liked Master Severus and I'd heard good things about gentle Master Rubeus so I'd said yes. Then several others came, followed by even more and I hardly knew which way was up. But Mother Hagrid had come to me and we had a wonderful chat about what I should be doing. 'Take care of Master Severus and Master Rubeus,' she said. 'The others will take care of themselves.'

She liked my raspberry fool so I gave her the recipe and in return she gave me the recipe for Master Rubeus' favorite persimmon tart. She was a very nice giant and I could see that she loved her son and his bonded with all her heart. It was good to be part of a family who loved each other. My last family - I shivered and concentrated on putting out fresh towels for my masters.

I would not think of them on this beautiful bonding day. I'd gone out earlier and inspected the large pavilion they'd raised. The tables and chairs were from the school and Dobby was coming

to help me since he was the only elf who knew that Master Severus was still alive and bonded to Master Rubeus. Together we should be able to handle all the work, I thought with satisfaction.

Mother Hagrid was already awake and she was setting out beautiful flower arrangements on each table. We smiled at each other and I bowed to her before heading back to our house. Tomorrow, the cottage would begin to grow again so the nursery and a hot house could be added. Cyrus and his mate Cyrilla, the hellbenders had decided to live with us permanently so they'd be heating the cottage and the new green house.

Cyrilla had mentioned that she was expecting babies, too. I smiled happily, the more babies the better. I wondered if I should tell Mistress Royan as a bonding gift that she and Master Remus were having a baby, too. Maybe before they left for their trip to Loch Ness? I pondered that while I beat the eggs ready for pouring into the pan. They were going to be together forever; surely they'd want to know.

But humans were odd about things like that and not all families loved their young. I shivered hard and stopped to catch my breath. I would not think about that today. I . . . would . . . not.

Dobby's arrival distracted me, thankfully and I showed him around so he could see how nicely I'd arranged the kitchen. He liked it and praised me for how beautiful things looked before taking the first of the baskets of food out to the pavilion. It had been kind of messy when he moved me in and he'd promised to help if it was too much for me. But I did a little bit every day until things looked much better. Master Severus had complimented me on my hard work and told me 'thank you'.

No one had ever done that before. I'd blushed so hard that he'd taken my hand and stroked it comfortingly until I could whisper 'you're welcome'. He told me that if I so chose, I could stay here forever, safe and protected. If that was my wish, I still thought of that with wonder. Until Headmaster Dumbledore rescued me from . . . I stopped that reminder before it could replay the horrors.

It was nice to have choices, I decided before smiling at a sleepy Master Rubeus. Master Severus didn't follow him so I poured some hot water into the small teapot and put his cup on the silver tray with some of the ginger wafers that seemed to settle his stomach. Carrying it carefully into their bedroom, I set it on the chair that had been pulled up to his side of the bed.

"Master Severus?" I said quietly so I didn't startle him.

"Good morning, Ara, I'm feeling a bit queasy, I'm afraid." He said softly and such a look of misery crossed his face that I just wanted to hug him.

"This will help." I told him and poured a cup of the fragrant tea.

He pulled himself up and accepted it with shaking hands, taking tiny sips until it cooled a bit. "Better, indeed, Ara. Is everything all right elsewhere?"

I told him everything was fine and then I asked him about telling Mistress Royan and Master Remus about their baby. He froze in mid-sip and stared at me with wide-eyes.

"Werewolves are sterile. They can't father children." He said. "At least, they never have before." He thought very hard for a long moment while I handed him a ginger snap and he ate it absentmindedly. "Of course, Royan is a half-giant with a powerful theoretical magician father and a full earth-elemental giant mother. If Royan's desire for a child was strong enough, she could perhaps overcome the barrier of sterility?"

"Sev, what are you talking about?" Master Rubeus came in quietly while Master Severus was

thinking out loud.

So we told him about the newest baby and he sat on the bed with his mouth hanging open and his eyes wide with shock. Master Severus smiled at him affectionately and leaned over to kiss his cheek. "Beloved, if you and I can create a child between us then I expect they could, too. Your family's magic is stronger than the petty rules of wizardry. Thank goodness."

Master Rubeus smiled at him and I slipped out of the room, shutting the door quietly behind me so they'd be private. It looked like it would be all right if I told them. Master Remus would be a little frightened, I thought but Mistress Royan would be excited. They loved each other very much and that was the way a child should be conceived. I shivered again and determinedly thought about scrambling the eggs for my masters.

People began to bustle around, in and out of the cottage. The sound of so many voices should have frightened me the way they had at Hogwarts but it didn't. Maybe it was because I knew all the voices, knew that they were family and friends of my masters. Master Harry came in looking very nice in the new outfit that Mother Hagrid had sewn for him. The green of his shirt matched his eyes and the upright collar framed his face.

He looked beautiful and so I told him while he blushed and said thank you. I'd watched him and Master Rubeus' brother while they talked. They were going to be very powerful together and at first that had frightened me. Master Harry was so young that I was afraid for him until I began watching Master Gersey. When he sang to Master Harry, there were so many hopes and dreams in his voice that I began to see that it would be all right.

Master Gersey didn't realize how much magic he used in his singing. Anything can be used magically but music carries it naturally inside the notes. Not all music, of course, but the songs he sang vibrated with it. I thought maybe Master Severus had noticed that, too. Maybe that could be used to keep Master Harry safer. His power was great but he was still so unsure of himself.

The family he'd lived with had been almost as bad as . . . I stopped that thought from going any further and dished up the eggs for my masters. I'd been keeping an ear tuned to them so I knew when they were about to come out. Sometimes they'd fool me by stopping to kiss before they opened the door. But not today, it was going to be too busy.

Remus

I was nervous. Siri wasn't helping either. He was just full of advice on what to say but I'd pretty much tuned him out while I fussed with my collar and the cuffs of my new shirt. Mum Hagrid had sewn up new shirts for each of us and they were beautiful. I'd never had such a shirt in my life. It was a heavy silk brocade that shimmered when I moved.

The sleeves almost billowed from the dropped shoulders to the cuffs, embroidered in contrasting colors and secured with the wolf-head studs that were all that was left of my family. Mine was green to go with my eyes while Sirius' was blue to go with his. I had a premonition that Royan's was the same as mine, the way that Harry and Gersey's were. Sirius still didn't know that young Harry had lost his heart to Gersey nor that the youngest Hagrid was already heart-bonded to him.

That was going to be a very interesting conversation and I was just coward enough to hope we were still on our bonding trip when it occurred. I checked my buttons again and bloused out the shirt a bit where I'd tucked it into the black leather pants that Harry had given me. He'd whispered that Royan really liked leather and I had noticed that myself so the gift was most appreciated.

Siri had loaned me his emerald stud for my ear and I was wearing another gift from Gersey, a pair

of silk blue boxers so I had all the items from the muggle verse - something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue. I wondered how that came into being but I wished my new found luck to keep on happening so I was willing to be a bit superstitious.

"You're not listening to a word I'm saying, are you?" Siri said affectionately.

"Nope. I already know what I'm going to say." I checked myself again and wondered if throwing up would help the churning in my stomach.

Siri turned me away from the mirror and hugged me carefully. "You're going to be fine, Remie. You're marrying the second most beautiful woman in the Hagrid family which puts you head and shoulders above the rest of the wizards in the world."

"Second best?" I arched an eyebrow and hugged him back. "Royan is the prettiest Hagrid to me. I can't judge any of the others."

His eyes went a little unfocused and a dreamy look came into them that I'd never seen before, although I expect it was the same one I was wearing. "Rhea is so beautiful that she almost scares me. She's everything I'm not, serenity and compassion are just a part of her sweet nature."

I let him go and went back to making sure I looked okay. "She's more woman than any two men could handle, Siri. If you're serious about her then I suggest you tell her about who you are." My eyes met his in the mirror. "All of who you are, Siri, no leaving out the bad bits or the festering sores."

He sighed and rubbed his forehead. He was still recovering from his ordeal of the last two months. Siri was still sleeping almost twelve hours a day and once we'd moved him to Hogwarts, he'd slept for two days straight before surfacing. Dobby had been stuffing food into him every couple of hours so he'd lost that 'lean and hungry look' that Shakespeare wrote about.

"I know, Remie, I know. I have a special bonding gift for you that I'll give you after the ceremony." He tucked an escaping lock of hair behind my ear. "We'd better get going. I don't want Royan thinking that I delayed you. She's too scary for me."

I laughed and agreed. The three mile journey through the woods with Harry, Albus, Minerva and Poppy was spent talking about the coming school year. Albus had offered Siri a job as the assistant DADA instructor, working with me to prepare the kids for what they were going to find in the outside world. Harry thought that was a great idea and he excitedly talked about the coming fall term.

He was looking quite heartbreakingly beautiful in his shirt from Mum with a matching pair of green leather pants and knee-high soft sided boots that Royan had gifted him. I suspect that Gersey had something to do with them but I refrained from asking. Should he ever wear that outfit in school, he was going to be the most popular boy bar none.

I was rather looking forward to that. It was time that he shone for something other than defeating Voldemort, again and again. I was praying that we'd be free of the fear soon. I don't know what Albus had up his bright blue sleeve but I could swear that something was brewing. I just wanted a week of nothing but Royan and me in the little cottage near Loch Ness where her mother and father had spent their honeymoon.

What used to be the clearing of Rubeus' small cottage was a beehive of activity. In short order, Mum Hagrid had us all on the golden beach of the still lake. The air seemed to sparkle all around us but I saw no one but Royan. Her dark hair spilled over a green silk dress that flowed all the way to the ground and matched my shirt. Her dark eyes glowed into mine and I found I was no longer nervous.

"I love you, Royan. Whatever time we have here in this life, I will spend with you." I said clearly.

"I love you, Remus. Where ever you go, I will follow, in this life and beyond." She said softly but so clearly she sounded like a bell ringing.

"Who witnesses this bonding?" Albus asked.

"We do." The beach rang with the voices of our friends and relatives but I was kissing Royan and the rest of the world went away. She tasted of tea and ginger snaps and I savored the odd pairing with joy. It was the sound of laughter that finally broke our kiss.

"Wow, three minutes and thirty seconds, that beats the old record of Aunt Delilah and Uncle Nicholas." Gersey's voice said with a laugh and we joined in.

Holding hands, Royan and I went up the path that we'd made from the lake to Rubeus' cottage. Cutting the famous Triple Fudge Mocha Delight, we feasted on all the tempting dishes that had been baking and brewing for days. But at one point, I looked up and spotted Siri beckoning to me from the door to the cottage. Leaving Royan with a kiss and a promise to return soon, I made my way over to him.

"This won't take but a moment, Remie." He said and ushered me inside to join Rubeus and Severus. I had an inkling at that moment my gift was going to be something I'd always wanted.

"Thanks for letting me have this moment with you all." Siri was sweating slightly, my nose told me. "I told Remus that I had a gift for him but Snape, it's for you as well." He swallowed hard and I saw Rubeus slide his arm around Sev. "I am a fool and a coward, nothing that you didn't already know. Seventeen years ago I did a very stupid thing and I hurt both of you."

Another deep breath and I found myself holding my breath. Those green eyes came up from the floor, first to me and then to Sev. "I was jealous of you, Snape. You were so intelligent and self-contained. I hated your friendship with Remus because I feared that you'd take him away from us. James already had Lily and I only had Remus for a real friend. I was afraid that he'd give me up to be your friend."

He sighed and rubbed his cheek while I gently patted his back. "I'm sorry that I almost got you killed, Severus. And I'm sorry that I used Remus as my weapon. I don't know if we can be friends after all this time but I'd like us to not be enemies any more."

The silence was electric and I watched Rubeus look anxiously down at his bonded. Sev's eyes were closed and his whole body trembled just a little. "After all this time." He said softly, resting his head against Rubeus' blue silk shirt. The black eyes opened and I knew it would be all right. "I accept your apology, Sirius. The past is just that, the past. We all have a bright future before us, I suggest that we celebrate that."

"Thank you, Severus." Siri sagged a little and I whispered my own thank you into his ear when I hugged him. Sev was right, this was a day for celebration.

Hagrid

The morning after Remus and Royan's bonding, we said goodbye to them and sat down for our breakfast. Ara had told them they were expecting last night and they'd had time to come to terms with their new blessing. Royan glowed and Remus looked like he'd just won the Irish

Sweepstakes. It looked like the Hagrid family was going to grow fast.

"Oh," Sev said quietly and hastily closed the paper. "Could I have some more tea, Ara? The chamomile is quite soothing this morning. What are your plans for the day, Ru'? I think I'll spend some time in the new lab rearranging the herbs."

"Nothin' much, Sev, the twins want to start on the green house today." I said slowly, wondering what he didn't want me to worry about. He was always protecting me. I smiled at him and he managed a little one for me before taking the tray from Ara and heading down the stairs to the underground room that had become his lab.

I looked at our house elf but she shrugged and pointed to the paper. "Page sixteen or seventeen," she whispered in her sweet little voice.

So I took up the paper and turned to those pages. It took me a bit but I finally found it. 'Snape Family Heirloom Sale' - On Friday the thirteenth (I checked the calendar and that was today) at two p.m., the household goods of the traitor Severus Snape will be sold at public auction . . ." I couldn't read any more. I was angry and sad, all at the same time. Severus was pretending not to care that he'd been labeled a traitor or that the manor had been confiscated. This had to be the final blow.

Having all your bits and pieces sold in public was a gross invasion of your privacy. And my Sev was a very private man although he had loosened up a bit. A hesitant hand on my knee reminded me that Ara was still there. So I told her what I'd read and she bit her lip, looking worriedly towards the stairs.

"I'll go down and hold him for a bit. He already had most of what he wanted from the Manor but maybe he thought of something he'd forgotten." I said and carefully laid the paper folded to the spot on the table.

Heading down the stairs, I found him sitting on the swiveling high-stool looking at the jars of herbs neatly arranged on the shelves above the work table. He had to know that I was there but he didn't move until I crossed to him and wrapped my arms around him. Then he sighed and turned into my chest, soaking my shirt with his tears. He always cried real quiet like and I rocked him a little.

When he finally stopped, his voice was muffled in the cloth but I could hear every word. "I didn't take the cradle from my mother's family because I knew that I'd never need it. The Snapes would end with me and good riddance to us." He caught his breath with a little sob and I couldn't stand it anymore.

Picking him up, I carried him back upstairs and into our bedroom. He needed me this morning more than the twins needed me to start building. Ara had the newspaper in hand, heading out the door so I knew that reinforcements would be coming soon. I had been a little unsure of her when she first came but she had proven to be a real blessing. I had the impression that she'd come from a really nasty place and that even Hogwarts was too much for her.

But right now, I had a despondent bond mate to cuddle. Sitting on the bed, I swung my feet up and snuggled him into my lap "Sweet Sev, we'll fix it. We'll get it for our little one even if we have to steal it from the Ministry. What else did ya leave behind that ya thought ya'd never miss?"

He sniffed and burrowed as close to me as he could get. "I had a trunk of toys that Mama had given me in the attic but I didn't think I'd need them either. And there were several trunks full of clothes spelled to keep out the moths." He rubbed his eyes and looked up at me, endearingly sad. "I'd thought of getting them for the students to use in their plays. Albus would be willing to say that they were found in an attic, I thought."

"That it, love?" I kissed him gently and he hummed tunefully.

When we parted, he was smiling again. "They're just things, Ru'. I don't know why I was so upset. Everything I need is right here in my arms."

I just had to kiss him again for that sweet compliment but when I pulled back, I prodded him again. "Anything that the others might like?"

He paused and nodded slowly. "Gersey would like the grand piano, I think. It's a Steinway and in excellent condition. I've got the Stradivarius violin in my hidden rooms. That was easily stored so I didn't leave it behind."

"Ya play the violin?" I asked excitedly. "I love listenin' to violins."

"You do?" This time his smile was bright. "We'll have Albus bring it with him next time he comes and I shall play all your favorites."

I squeezed him until he squeaked. "Great! What else, Sev? Is there anything our newly bonded might like?"

He frowned but it wasn't a sad frown, just a thinking one. "My mother's Wedgwood tea service is packed away. It was too painful to look at so I didn't bring it with me. After all, I had no one to impress with my possessions. Oh, I can have Albus bring my mother's portrait the next time he comes. I'd like to hang it in the new front room, if that's all right with you?"

"I'd love to see a picture of yar Mum, Sev. We'll hang her over the mantle in a place of 'onor." I wondered what she looked like and I surely did hope that where ever she was on the astral plain, she approved of me being with her Sev. "Let's make a list then we can send the whole family to the auction. We can stay here and cuddle without anyone hearing a thing."

He chuckled and kissed me again, this time with tongue. We tasted good together, we always did. He was calmer now and we said our 'I love you's' quietly before going out to the rest of the family. It had turned rainy so we all crowded into our front room while Severus mentioned the items that he'd told to me earlier. Gersey perked right up when he heard about the grand piano.

Rhea looked real wistful when the Wedgwood tea service was mentioned and I saw Black get a real determined look on his face. Mum thought the clothing sounded lovely and Dad questioned Sev on the books in the library that he hadn't taken with him. Sev hadn't been interested in his father's field of neuromancy, the theoretical beginnings of magic and its building blocks. But Dad was excited and I could see that the auction would be fully attended by the Hagrid family.

When Harry arrived to help build the greenhouse, he looked real disappointed at not being able to go, too. Sev and I looked at each other then at Gersey. With a sigh, he smiled at Harry and said that he'd take him if Harry promised to be quiet and self-effacing. Of course, he promised and Sev worked a glamour so the scar didn't show and his hair turned bright red.

He looked like a Weasley and we all teased him about it. He just smiled and hugged Sev real unexpectedly. My bonded was still surprised when someone hugged him but he was learning how to give them right back. Mum speculated on whether or not his mother might have kept his baby clothes in one of those trunks in the attic. Sev blushed and shrugged that he didn't know.

It would be nice to have some ready made clothing for our little one when he was born. I looked at Sev and thought about holding him while he held our baby. I could hardly wait to make that a true picture. But for now, we were planning how to pay for our buys. The twins told Sev that they'd get the cradle as an early baby present then Black spoke up to claim the tea set and Gersey

claimed the piano.

Everything else would get sorted out in time. I knew that Sev would insist on paying some of them back but he'd soon learn that we weren't real particular when it came to the family. We shared what we had with each other and I thought he'd like that when he got used to it. For now, I just wanted them to leave so I could take him back to bed and cuddle him.

Harry

I could hardly wait to get to the auction. I was going with Gersey and the family. For the first time, I was really and truly part of a family. But best of all, I was a part of Gersey and I'd get to hear him play the piano. I hoped it was still there. His voice was beautiful, velvety and deep. It made my stomach quiver but in a good way. We all said our goodbyes to Rubeus and Severus then apparated to Hogsmead where we could catch the bus to the Snape estate.

There were lots of people there already when we arrived and I kind of shrank back against Gersey. I'd forgotten how noisy a crowd could be. But with my red hair and no scar, I blended right in with the Hagrids. We all split up to look for the items we wanted to get for Sev and ourselves. Gersey and I headed for the music room where we found the piano gleaming in the candle light of a dozen tapers. There were books of music in the tall bookcases and one was open on the piano.

The others were just standing around looking at it but when Ger sat down and started to play, everyone stopped and listened. He played the Moonlight Sonata and I listened with my heart in my throat. Some where, some how I remembered that song and my mother playing it on another piano a long, long time ago. I sniffed hard and told myself to get a grip. I'd just have Ger play it again when we were alone and I could cry for her.

The crowd was murmuring approvingly and Ger nodded his head to them with a smile before starting another song. Gradually they all left for other rooms and I sat down on the bench with him. "That was nice, Ger. Thank you for playing it. What's this one?"

"An old lullaby that Mum used to sing to us when we were little. It's from the Middle Ages, we think." He shrugged gracefully and wound the song up with a somber chord. "I've always liked it. Someday, we'll play it for the next generation."

And it was my turn to have a vision. For just a moment, I saw myself sitting in a rocker and holding a baby with dark hair while Ger played on this very piano. I blinked when he patted my back and looked up at him. He'd been about three years older and so was I so it wasn't Sev and Rubeus' baby I was holding. Maybe it was ours? I smiled a big smile and reached up to kiss his cheek.

"I'll tell you later, Ger. How about the music books? Do you want them, too?" I asked and he ruffled my hair with a yes. We spent the rest of the hour before the start of the auction going through the books so he could see what was worth buying.

But a bell signaled the start of the auction and we joined the others on the velvet green lawn in front of the huge manor house. I wasn't going to be bidding on anything so I took a good look around and tried to imagine a little boy playing here. It was hard because everything was perfect and pristine even with all the people milling around. While Ger was busy signaling for a lot of books, I slipped away to find the herb garden that Sev had told me about.

The one where he and his mother had enjoyed so many sunny days, I remember the smile in his voice when he talked about it. The gardens were huge and real formal but I knew when I found it

that I'd reached the right place. It felt peaceful here, like you could sit down and meditate for an hour or two. Rounding a corner of the privet hedge, I found someone else looking for solitude.

Draco and I stared at each other across a lover's knot of blooming lavender. He'd been crying although he'd tried to hide it. Something in me twisted in pain at his pale features and lackluster blond hair. "Hi, Draco. How are you?"

"Fine," he said tonelessly. "Joined the Weasleys?" It was a poor imitation of his usual sneer. "I'm surprised that they let you out with all the Death Eater attacks going on."

"I'm here with friends." I decided to be frank with him. "You look awful, Draco. Can I help you?"

"Help me?" He said it bitterly with a harsh laugh. "No one can help me now. Snape was my only hope and he's dead. Father plans on taking me to the Dark Lord for my own mark at the full moon tomorrow." Another tear leaked from his eye and he brushed it away impatiently. "So no, Potter, there isn't anything you can do for me."

And in a split second I saw what I had to do. "If I told you that I knew of a place where you'd be safe and people who would love you and help you, would you leave now and go there?"

"Safe doesn't exist anymore, Potter." All the passion was gone from his voice and he looked deathly tired. "No one wants to love me and there never will be anyone now. It's too late for me."

"It isn't too late until that mark goes on your arm. You'd have to leave everything behind. Your money, possessions, maybe even your name. Could you do that, Draco?" I was merciless and for a moment he almost looked interested.

"Draco?" The voice came from behind the hedge and in a moment he'd see me.

"Go, Weasley." Draco straightened up and put his sneer back on.

"The music room in half an hour," I whispered while I ran in the opposite direction. When I was sure that I was safe, I circled back around and made my way to Mum Hagrid's side.

Tugging on her sleeve, I got her to follow me where we couldn't be heard. Then I poured out Draco's story and what was going to happen to him if we didn't save him right here and now. She had an angry look in her eyes when I finished but I knew she wasn't angry with us but with Lucius Malfoy. She agreed to give me the port key for Sev's rooms if I got Ger to help.

That's when she told me that he'd been the successful bidder on the piano and almost all of the song books. It would look totally natural for us to go to the music room and I hugged her hard while she slipped the portkey around my neck and tucked it into my shirt. She said that she'd alert the rest of the family to trouble and I nodded before heading towards Ger.

Funny, but I knew right where he was and I homed in on him as if he was that satellite signal that muggles use to find where they were. I slipped my hand in his while he was talking to the assistant auctioneer and pretended that I was really shy, kind of hiding behind him. That told him that something was wrong but you'd never have known it by his expression.

He just looked resigned and told me that he'd take me for an ice cream waffle in just a minute. Wrapping up the delivery information, he smiled and shook hands with the dealer before letting me lead him away. I told him in urgent whispers what was happening and he got really tense, the way that Mum Hagrid had. I didn't want Ger to get hurt but part of me wanted to see him punch Lucius Malfoy right in the nose.

We got to the music room really fast but it was empty. Ger sat down at the piano and began to

play softly while I paced back and forth. He was playing something really pretty when I heard the door creak open. Draco came in like Fang was after him and he ran right to me while Ger jumped up and grabbed us both.

Draco didn't know about Ger so he started to struggle but I just fished out the portkey and twisted it really fast. My stomach jumped and twisted the way I remembered from before at the Tri-Wizard Games. But before I could get too sick, we were in Sev's private rooms. Ger let go of Draco right away and I hugged him close instead.

"W-w-we're in Severus' private rooms." Draco stuttered right before he passed out, which I wasn't expecting so I almost dropped him.

Ger picked him up and laid him on the bed before dropping a kiss on my head and telling me that he was going to get his brother and Sev. I lit a candle and went out to the kitchen to put the tea kettle on. But then I went back to sit with Draco. We'd done it.

Severus

When Ger rushed in, we were snuggled together in my nook with Ty, the Nemean Lion, planning where the guest bedroom should be. He gave us the salient point, which was Draco's escape. In a heartbeat, we'd apparated to the edge of the Forest where the school wards began and were hurrying across the manicured lawn. I was praying that he was truly all right while I could feel Ru' worrying about who might see us.

Fortunately, Poppy was the only one who saw us from the infirmary window. She met us in the back hall and followed along in case she was needed. Ger filled her in on the day's happening and I could hear the sorrow in her voice. We'd all been worried about young Draco. We burst through the door of my former bedroom and found Harry on his feet with his wand pointed towards us.

Good boy, I thought, detouring around him to sit on the bed by the small body of my favorite Slytherin. He looked dreadful, skin tightly stretched over bones far too close to the surface. Even his hair was limp and lackluster. Poppy was doing a wand scan on him, whispering her findings.

"Broken arm, just healed . . . nasty bruise on his back . . . wrenched knee . . . oh dear." She said weakly and I shot her a questioning glance. She shook her head slightly and spoke to the others. "Gentlemen, if you'd leave the room for a moment while we get him more comfortable?"

They left reluctantly and shut the door behind them. She sighed. "Severus, he's been raped."

Dear Goddess, I closed my eyes and cradled his limp hand to my chest. "In preparation for receiving his Death Mark, he would be . . . relieved of his innocence."

"Damn them all," she said intensely and I could see the energy she sent from her wand into his healing. It sparkled like green snow and started flowing through his body from head to foot.

He moaned and opened dazed eyes. We looked at each other for a long moment while she finished her initial healing and quietly left the room. Not until she left did he speak my name softly. "Severus."

And I gathered him into my arms the way that Ru' had done this morning for me, rocking him slowly while he cried for all the things he'd just lost. I'd come such a long way since my death that I found myself murmuring all the little things that Ru' had told me.

"Safe . . . you're safe . . . my dear Draco . . . no more pain . . . no more fear . . . no more expectations that you can't fulfill . . . you're safe here . . . never again such pain . . . I promise."

He hiccupped once and slowly released his strangle hold on me. "I thought you were dead. I gave up then. No one else cared."

"I did die, Draco but Hagrid brought me back and Dumbledore fixed the majority of what was wrong." I smoothed back a lock of hair from his forehead. "I spent the better part of a month just sleeping and healing. Would you like to do that now?"

Tears welled again and he nodded slowly. "Please, can I stay here?"

"Yes," I promised without hesitation. "There are a few things that you need to know first. They may affect your decision."

But first, I laid him back down and went to get a damp washcloth to clean his face. He'd blown his nose by the time I came back. I wiped his face and helped him undress. Most of the bruises were already fading but he moved as if every joint hurt. I recognized the Crucio curse that had been very recently endured and cursed Lucius heartily but silently. Draco had enough to endure just now.

Once he was dressed in a flannel nightshirt that I pulled from my dresser, I got him snuggled down between the sheets after quickly warming them with a heat spell. His eyes were drooping from the release of tension so I told him to sleep. We could talk later. He nodded and fell to sleep in a heartbeat, still holding onto the sleeve of my shirt as if afraid that I'd leave.

I thought very hard at Ru' to see if our connection really was growing and he poked his head in right on cue. I beckoned him over and he knelt by me while I whispered that I wanted to send Draco into a healing trance while he was sleeping. He nodded and took my left hand while I laid my right onto Draco's forehead. Summoning the words, I spoke them softly and felt Rubeus' energy flow through me, picking up some of my energy and flowing into Draco.

And for one brief moment, I could have sworn that a third energy joined to ours. Our child was growing so quickly in power. His fingers unclenched and I tucked him in carefully, saying a charm to tell us when he awoke. Then Rubeus and I quietly left for the outer room. Poppy was still there but now Dumbledore was also. Ger was sitting on the loveseat with Harry curled into his side as close as he could get.

"Albus, I'm putting in a claim for Draco." I said abruptly. "His mother is an empty-headed fool but she is my second cousin. Poppy can testify to the abuse he's taken. If you read us under wizard's oath, our names don't have to be given."

"Rubeus, is this your wish also?" Albus asked my lover courteously.

"Whatever Sev wants is all right with me." He said calmly and hugged me tight.

I truly was the luckiest wizard on earth. Albus sat us across from him and a spell wrote down the necessary legal words that would prove just how ill a steward Lucius Malfoy had been of his only son. Albus was greatly saddened by the medical disclosures, especially the rape which we wrote but didn't say out loud and he put that under his seal to keep it private. Using Unforgivable curses would suffice to sever his guardianship.

Especially since Draco had already turned 16. We were enjoying a cup of tea while Poppy and I talked about what would be needed to help him heal when the charm went off and I quickly rejoined Draco. His eyes blinked open and closed several times before he recognized me. He

was calmer now but the lost look in his eyes was one I recognized from my own mirror.

"Draco, would you like to see Dumbledore now? He has a very important question for you." I asked him gently and he nodded after a long moment. I called Albus in and he pulled up a chair so he didn't tower over the boy.

"Draco, I'm very sorry that you've been hurt. Severus and Rubeus have asked to become your guardians until you reach your majority. Would you like that or is there someone else with whom you'd feel more comfortable?"

Those big blue eyes came to me and I smiled at him. "Rubeus and I bonded almost a month ago, Draco. That's one of the things I wanted to talk to you about. If you say yes, you'll become part of the Snape-Hagrid family."

"Goodness," he said faintly. He thought for a long moment. "F-f-father can't get to me here, right?"

"Exactly, my boy, you're safe here." Albus said quietly but firmly.

"Yes, please, I'd like to become a S-s-snape-Hagrid." He said, his eyes drooping again.

"Then so be it." Albus said, whipping a silver cord from the air and wrapping it around our wrists then tapping it with his wand. "The Snape-Hagrids have a new son. May you all be very happy together, happy and safe."

And just like that, our family grew by one more. I couldn't have been happier and I hugged our new son before sending him back to sleep for the time being.

Hagrid

I watched Sev watching Draco and wondered just what we'd gotten ourselves into. Well, I knew what we'd done, it was the consequences I was concerned about. But Sev looked so happy and Draco finally looked peaceful so I knew that we'd muddle through somehow. I did just wonder though, if the pure-blood dislike of half-breeds was going to raise a barrier between us and him.

I really didn't know much about Draco except for his public face. That had been pretty snippy but the poor boy had surely had a nasty set of parents. I wondered what had made Albus look so mad when they were writing down the medical part but if it was important then Sev would tell me. I guess I wasn't going to have to wait another eight months for a son, we'd just received our first.

Sev left off staring and came to me where I was waiting in the doorway. He came right into my arms and I hugged him tight. He was thinking hard about something and suddenly I got a picture of what had upset the Headmaster so. I gasped and he looked up with sad eyes, nodding to me shakily. I wanted to find Lucius Malfoy and strangle him. How dare he treat his own son like that?

Sev urged me into the outer room where Ger and Harry were waiting, with Dumbledore right behind. "Ru', I know you're upset but for now we just need to be calm for Draco, calm and loving and supportive, just like you were for me when you took me in. That's a trauma that only time can heal."

"Gr-r-r," I managed to keep it to a growl but it had been a long time since I'd been this angry. Ger and Harry were looking back and forth at us with worried looks on their faces. I took a deep breath, then another and slowly let it out. That little boy would be safe with us. Sev was right, our love and a lot of time would take away the anger and fear of the rape.

"I need to get back upstairs and file this with the Ministry, Gentlemen." The Headmaster said calmly. "I think you'd probably all better stay here tonight. Poppy will be close by in case you need her. Tomorrow will be soon enough for you to think about moving back to the cottage."

"Oh, here's the portkey, Rubeus. You might need it." Harry took off the chain and held it out to me. "I'll stay here so he sees a familiar face if he wakes up. I'll get my potion textbook and study awhile."

"Thanks, 'arry, that would be great." I said and put it in my pocket for the moment.

"Ru', why don't you and Ger go back to the cottage and tell the others what has happened." Sev looked a little tired. "I'm going to curl up beside Draco and take a nap. Harry will be right here in case we need anything. Will you come back here for dinner and stay with us tonight?"

"Course I will, Sev." I kissed him gently and he smiled. When we parted, our eyes said all the things we didn't want to say out loud. "Be back before ya know it. Come on, Ger."

We pretended not to notice when he whispered something to Harry and hugged him hard before letting go. The Headmaster looked on with a smile and I just knew that he'd picked up on the two of them. He followed us out into the dungeon hall and fixed Ger with a penetrating look.

"You and I shall have a little chat tomorrow, Gersey. I stand in loco parentis to young Harry and before the bond I see grows any further, I'd like to get to know you." He said kind of sternly.

Ger just smiled at him. "I'd be glad to, Headmaster. Talking about Harry has become my very favorite thing."

Dumbledore blinked once and smiled delightedly. "What a relief. I'm getting too old to chase after that boy. I gladly hand over that job to you."

He went on his way and we left the school by the back door, crossing the fields to the Forest and heading towards home. "We're definitely going to need that other bedroom before we build the greenhouse or nursery, Ger."

"Not to worry, big brother, we'll get it all done before we leave." He grinned at me and I hugged him close.

"I miss ya, Ger, when ya're gone so long tourin'." I hadn't had any time at all with him this visit.

"I miss you, too." He hugged me back and we just stood for a moment enjoying being close again. But things needed doing so we broke apart and walked on. "Can you say what made you so angry, Rube?"

Sighing, I rubbed my chin and thought about it. I was pretty sure that Harry would eventually find out and tell him but if Ger knew first then he'd have a better answer ready to help the youngster through it. "His father 'ad him raped as a prelude to him gettin' 'is Death Mark."

"Son of a bitch!" Ger stopped dead and swelled with anger. "I wish I'd stayed and punched him out. Slimy, no good . . ."

I nodded while listening to him swear. It was better that he get it out of his system before Mum and Dad heard him. Mum was still capable of washing out his mouth with soap.

"I want to kill him for torturing that little one." He finally started walking again and I nodded again. "What if it had been Harry?"

I threw an arm around his shoulders. "I know, Ger, I felt the same way. Worse yet, I know that Sev had the same thing done to him."

Ger got a real stricken look on his face. "Damn, I never even thought about Sev, Rube. I'm so sorry. This just gets worse and worse."

"Could have been a lot worse, I s'pect." I walked a little faster. The sooner we got home and sorted out, the sooner I'd get back to Sev. "What if Harry hadn't found him and we found out later that he'd been taken by Voldemort? That would have half-killed Sev and he'd be grievin' while trying to get through this pregnancy."

"You're right, it could have been worse, Rube, but not by much." He sighed real heavy. "I just want to wrap Harry up and keep him safe. Take him with me on the road and protect him from everything. Maybe even from me. I'm going to be taking a lot of cold showers in the next few days."

I chuckled, something I hadn't thought I'd be doing anytime soon again. "Just jump in the lake, Ger, that'll take care of any little problems that . . . come up."

"Ha-ha, very funny." He stuck out his tongue at me and I made a fast grab for it. That was an old game that still made us laugh.

Once we got home, we were grabbed by our very worried family and we all sat down in the outside pavilion where we'd celebrated our bondings the day before. I explained what had happened and why. And that Sev and I were now the parents of Draco Malfoy. Anger was high and it looked like Black was going to blow up but Rhea calmed him down enough so Mum didn't have to get out the soap.

The men of the family would get started on the building while Mum and Dad took care of putting all the auction items in safe storage for now. Rhea would help Sev with nursing Draco and since Harry would want to help out, we'd leave it up to him to choose what he wanted to do. I thought Black was going to pass out when I mentioned Sev's pregnancy. Rhea promised to explain it to him and we went onto the next challenge.

There were going to be a lot of them. But thinking of Sev and the small lad with the shocking white blond hair, I somehow knew that we'd meet them all. The Hagrid family was growing and while not all of it was planned, it was all for the best. Someday we'd look back on this and laugh.

Someday.

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Parts 21 - 24 by Athea

Author's Notes:

Draco and Harry both learn something.

Draco

Darkness.

Fear.

Breathing coming from my left.

The sound of pages being turned?

I inched my head towards the breather and felt myself relax.

It was Severus. He was reading with the aid of a tiny glow light that moved down the page when his eyes moved. It was one of the first spells I'd ever mastered and I almost smiled.

"Draco, are you thirsty?" His velvety voice had always promised safety to me.

I tried swallowing and it felt like glass shards. He laid the book aside and reached for a glass of water on the side table. Sitting up, he raised my head enough for me to drink. The first swallows hurt dreadfully but I'd been trained at an early age to withstand pain and by the fourth swallow it just felt good.

"You've been sleeping for almost 24 hours, Draco." He laid a hand on my forehead once my head was back on the pillow. "No fever, that's good. Would you like a bath?"

I almost smiled again. "You're reading my mind, Professor Snape."

He actually chuckled. "I think that now I'm your guardian, you might call me Severus. And I know how I felt when Voldemort killed me."

That sounded so strange but Father had conjured the picture of him writhing on the ground with his bones sticking out everywhere to show me his 'triumph'. I was shaking again but this time Severus was there to take me in his arms and say those soft things that he'd said before I passed out.

"I know, Draco, I know it hurts. The others do not understand the pain but I do. All you have felt, I did also. And I survived." He rocked me just a little. "You'll survive, too."

I realized that I was crying and I instantly stopped, appalled at my lack of control. Severus understood that as well, letting go a little and calling up the lights so it wasn't quite so dark. "A bath, Draco, hot, steaming water and some lavender soap to scrub away the past?"

"It will not disappear so easily, Severus." I said wearily.

"No, it won't." He said with a smile I hardly recognized. "But Rubeus and I will help in any way that we can. If you need silence then you shall have it. If you need to do ordinary things then that shall be what you do."

I remembered the amazing thing he'd said earlier. "You are . . . bonded to Hagrid?"

"Unbelievable, isn't it?" He said pleasantly. "The old me would have never thought of it but that Severus died in the Forest at the hands of the Death Eaters. I was reborn into a new life that I could have never dreamed of. I don't expect you to understand when I hardly do myself. But it's real and I am truly blessed with his love."

It didn't make any sense but then nothing much did anymore. My eyelids drooped. I was so tired. Severus hummed to me, laying me back down and tucking in the blanket. Sleep claimed me at once and this time it wasn't so painful.

When next I awoke, Potter was sitting in a chair by my bed, with his feet propped by me and his nose in a book. I must have made some sound because he looked up and smiled at me. That was such a shock that all I could do was blink at him.

"Good morning, Draco, you're doing better. It's only been fourteen hours since you last woke up." He laid the book aside and reached for the water glass. "Here's something more to drink. It's just water for now since Poppy did the last healing on you." He gave me the same help that Severus

had, raising my head up so I could drink more easily.

I didn't even think to refuse or check the water. I just drank until it was gone. He let me down gently and smiled again. "I'm glad that you're getting better. I'm sorry that you had to go through so much pain first."

Well, he should know about pain. "Thank you for offering to help. I don't know yet if that was good or bad."

He nodded and pushed his glasses back up. "I know what you mean. Lots of things have changed since Sev died and Ru' healed him. You're really lucky to belong to them now."

"I don't belong to anyone but myself." I rasped. "Severus is just my guardian for the next few years . . . provided I live that long." My strength failed again and I closed my eyes wearily. "Sorry, Potter, nothing's changed. I'm still a stuck-up git and you're still a goody-two-shoes."

He chuckled and patted my hand where it lay on the quilt. "You'll find out, Draco, when you're ready. We're going to be relatives eventually and I can hardly wait until you realize it."

I tried to snort in derision but I was already falling asleep.

Opening my eyes, I realized that I wasn't tired anymore. Moving cautiously, I had only some sore muscles from not using them and the lingering ache deep inside where that bastard had raped me. For a moment, white-hot anger flooded my body then with the ease of long years of experience, I tamped it down into the box where I kept the people I hated.

Taking a deep breath, I tested my arms and legs again before pushing back the covers. My flannel nightshirt was much too big so it must belong to Severus. I looked around, expecting to see him or Potter or someone but it appeared I was alone. How strange that I was already expecting things of them. I thought I'd had that trained out of me. Swinging my legs over the side of the bed, I pondered where I was going.

"Oh good, you're awake." Severus came in and tilted his head to one side. "You're slept out at last. How about that bath?"

"Yes, thank you." I stood on my own but needed his help to stay upright and walking.

"The weakness will pass once you start moving around, Draco." He said briskly and set me down on the toilet lid before turning on the hot water. The tub was Slytherin silver and for a moment the common room of our House flashed across my memory.

That was no longer my place, the others no longer my friends. I was more likely to become one of the Griffies than ever graduate from my former house. I was so caught up in the memories that I didn't even notice Sev was taking off my socks until he touched my bare skin and I froze.

He stopped for a moment and caught my eye. "When my father told me that I'd be getting my Death Mark at the full moon, he asked me who I wanted to 'rid me of my inconvenient virginity'. I picked someone that I thought wouldn't hurt me too badly. He nodded and chose the meanest son of a bitch in the order. I bled for almost a week because he wouldn't let me heal myself. 'Get used to the pain, boy,' was all he said."

I nodded and swallowed the lump in my throat. "MacNair was the one Father chose. Does it always hurt like that?"

He hugged me close. "Not when you love the person you're with and not when they love you in return. It's all right, Draco." He pretended not to see my tears. "Someday you will find the other half of your soul and on that day, you'll be made new again and you'll share your love without fear or pain. I promise you this."

Harry

We hadn't meant to overhear but I wanted to be sure that Sev didn't need any more help with Draco. Ger was with me and when I realized what I was hearing and started to cry, he picked me up and took me out of there into the front room. He sat down in the big wing chair with me curled in his lap. Sudden warmth told me that he'd flicked on the fire in the big fireplace but I was too busy trying to stop the tears.

"I'm sorry that you had to hear that, Har'." He kissed my hair and held me close. "Losing virginity is a major power surge for the person taking the wizard and the opening up of great reservoirs of energy for the virgin. It should be done only when love is involved. What Sev and Draco endured was rape, pure and simple."

Sniffing, I fumbled for my handkerchief and blew my nose hard before stuffing it back in my pocket. "I know it was rape but I'm not sure exactly how."

One eyebrow went up and he looked at the fire for a long minute. I watched him think while committing more of him to memory. His nose was kind of Roman and his eyebrows were sandy like Ron's but a little darker. His mouth made my toes curl and I really, really wanted a kiss from it, not just on my forehead or hair.

"Are you sure you want to hear sex education 101 from me?" His blue eyes caught mine and I nodded breathlessly.

"You're the only one I ever want to practice with so you're the logical person to tell me what to expect." I took a chance and lightly brushed my lips over his.

His arms tightened for a moment then relaxed. "Harry Potter, you are the most amazing young man I've ever met. And we're both going to be tested over the next few minutes so we should probably separate right now."

I gripped his shoulders with a frisson of fore-knowledge. "No, I have to be close. I just do, Ger."

He sighed and nodded. "I hope you know a good clean up spell. Now, you obviously know about kissing. That's the best way to start. Have you ever rubbed your . . . groin area?"

Blushing down to my toes, I nodded. "Watching Sev and Ru' together made me hard sometimes, kind of like seeing you does. When I take my bath, I remember what made me hard earlier and stroke . . . it until . . . stuff comes out."

"For now, why don't we call them your shaft and seed." He waited until I nodded. "That's one of the ways that men and boys have been pleasuring themselves since the beginning of time. In this case, muggles and wizards are exactly the same. Now, when making love with a partner you can stroke his shaft while he strokes yours. It's kind of like mutual masturbation only the hand giving you pleasure isn't your own. Kissing usually ensues while you're panting."

I was warm all over and I picked up his hand in both of mine, wondering what it would feel like to have his warm fingers wrapped around me. "That sounds really, really good, Ger."

He sighed and brought one of my hands to his lips, laying a kiss in my palm. I started to tingle. "It is good, Harry but there's a variation that's even better and one you can't do for yourself. A lover can kiss his way down your throat to your chest so he can lick your nipples, a major erogenous zone for both males and females."

Mine were hard as rocks with just his words and I could just guess how wonderful it would feel to have his lips there. "G-g-go on, Ger."

His smile almost made me come. "It gets better. While he's kissing his way down your body, his hands are still stroking you so your shaft is hard and aching. Then when he's down to your groin, he kisses your crown and starts to suck your shaft."

That was kind of hard to picture. "Um, doesn't that taste bad? I mean, you use it to go to the bathroom."

"Cleanliness is very much next to godliness, Harry." He chuckled. "The first time someone told me about it, I said 'yech, I'm not ever doing that'. But once a male is aroused, it's not urine coming out but seed from your testicles."

"Why are they so fragile?" I'd always wanted to ask that question. "I mean, sometimes they get pinched on your broom or hit in a fight and the pain is horrible."

"They are indeed, Har', but Mum told me once that the Goddess made them fragile so men would remember that making love needs to be gentle and tender." He brushed back that lock of hair that was always falling onto my forehead. "Anything else is just rape."

And that reminded me of Draco and Sev. "That's what they experienced?"

He frowned sadly. "There's more, Harry. Both men can suck on each other at the same time and that can be fast and furious or slow and tender. You can experiment when you're older. But like female-male sex, there can also be penetration of one lover by the other."

I couldn't picture that. "How? Men don't have a vagina like girls do."

Very gently his right hand pressed against the back seam of my jeans. "That's true but there is an entrance to the male body. There's a lot of derogatory names for it but let's call it the cavum for now."

Cavum for . . . my eyes widened. "No way! It wouldn't fit and there'd be . . . stuff in the way. That's worse than urine."

He nodded. "All valid points, Harry, it's why penetrative sex should never be done unless both parties want and desire it. Unlike male-female sex, the man's back passage doesn't have a natural lubricant to ease the way for the shaft. The man receiving the shaft needs to clear himself out with either a spell or an enema. Then the giver needs to very gently but thoroughly loosen the entrance with his fingers and a lot of slippery lubricant."

I shifted in his lap and felt the swelling at his groin. He felt bigger than me, not just because he was older but because he was just bigger everywhere. What would it look like? How would it feel to have his fingers inside of me? Slippery lubricant sounded kind of cool.

"Harry, that's something for the far future. Don't worry about it now." He tried to shift me to one side, I think because he thought I was uncomfortable.

But I hung on. "Slippery stuff sounds like fun. I'm thinking about it."

He paused and a tentative smile came back. "All right, after the stretching is done, the giver's shaft slides inside slowly. There's a gland inside a male anal canal that gives great pleasure when it's stimulated by fingers or a shaft."

"And it feels good?" I asked. "Even if it's a really big shaft and a really small . . . cavum?"

"It feels wonderful to both the giver and the receiver. The recipient gets a prostate gland massage that usually makes him come hard and the giver is squeezed by the tight channel until he comes, too."

Suddenly I was jealous. Ger sounded like he'd done both with someone else and I only wanted him to do it with me. "Ger, are we going to do both in the future?"

His smile was tender. "Only if you want to, Harry. Making love is a gift that both men give to each other. Anything else is rape. Sev and Draco could tell you about the way that feels."

I'd forgotten why we started this conversation. "That would hurt a lot, wouldn't it? If they were bleeding and everything then they weren't ready to . . . take a shaft."

"I doubt much preparation was done at all, Harry. The dark emotions give off a lot of energy and that fuels spells really well. Size does matter when you're talking penetrative sex. Ru' said that Sev has to use an enlarging spell for his channel in order to take his shaft inside of him."

That was interesting, I thought and moved a little over the hardness beneath me. "Is that how Sev got pregnant? Using that spell?"

He nodded. "I don't understand all the details but Dad said that it was an interesting side effect of a very ancient spell. Usually a male wizard has to take a potion or practice for months to create a womb for the baby. Sev and Ru' seem to have bypassed all that and just made a baby."

I tingled at that thought and I moved restlessly over his groin, feeling it swell a little more. "Ger, I think that I want to do everything with you. I know it will be later rather than sooner but can I practice the fingers and slippery lube in my cavum so I can start stretching for you?"

"Dear Goddess," he murmured and swelled even bigger. "I'm not going to make it to your eighteenth birthday."

I was so hard my teeth hurt and I pressed one of my hands on the bulge in my jeans while pressing the other on his. And that was all it took to make us both come. I relaxed on his chest while his arms came around me hard and squeezed me close. I wasn't ready for the penetrative sex yet but I would be.

"Yes, you can practice on yourself, Harry." He sighed and loosened his arms. "I plan to take a lot of cold showers and do a little practice stretching of my own. I like it both ways, Harry. And I love you."

I bounced twice, even though I knew that was kind of childish. "I love you too, Ger. Thanks for explaining everything."

"You're quite welcome, Har'." He hugged me again and muttered a quick clean up spell so we weren't so wet and sticky. "I'm here to answer any and all of your questions that I can."

"I'll save the ones about me getting pregnant for later." I smiled at him and watched his mouth drop open. Yes, the next couple of years would be fun.

Rubeus

The last of the stucco got ladled on in the same swirly pattern that we'd used everywhere else. The creamy white mixture began to harden immediately when I said the fixing spell. One really nice thing about magic stucco is the quick cure time rather than the days that the muggles have to wait and worry over. Even if the rain clouds that I'd been eyeing all afternoon opened up and it poured, our finish wouldn't be affected one bit.

Smiling, I began to clean my tools and put them away. The twins were finishing up the inside walls for us and Gersey and Harry had finished sanding the floors so they'd be ready for the Headmaster to stain and coat tomorrow. It was amazing what a determined set of people could do when they put their minds to it. Rhea and Draco were painting his room after first painting the new nursery.

That had surprised Draco. Hell, it had surprised me and still did when I stopped to think about it. But Sev was patient with me and I was getting more and more used to the idea of being a father. Of course, I was already kind of one to young Draco but we were still real wary around each other. He'd been brought up to believe people like me were inferior but he was making an effort to be polite.

I was trying not to crowd him or get jealous of all the time that Sev was spending with him. I knew in my head it was necessary but my heart just wanted Sev all to myself like we'd been before the family came to visit. Putting everything in the small storage shed that we'd built first, I took a good look at the new front of the house. It definitely wasn't a cottage anymore.

We'd built out twenty feet from the old front and put in the nursery next to our room, more front room with some proper furniture for everybody and then a small bathroom and bedroom for Draco on the opposite corner. It meant fewer pipes and bother since they were already there, plus it gave him the privacy that a young man needed at this stage in his life.

For the moment, he was staying in Sev's rooms at Hogwarts and walking out with Harry in the mornings. They were becoming friends, I thought but it was kind of hard to tell. I know Harry was trying real hard to understand what Draco had gone through but I really hoped that Ger's intended didn't know all the details. Boys didn't have enough time to play these days. But Harry had pushed and kept pushing until Draco flew with him over the Quidditch field.

Draco had seemed more peaceful after he came down. Maybe he realized that not everything was wrong in his life and some things he could still enjoy. I'd watched real closely but neither Hossic nor Gration had been anything but just friends with the white-blond boy. I had to breathe a sigh of relief at that. I wasn't sure we could have taken anymore bonding right at the moment.

Although, I thought with a smile, Sirius was still smitten with Rhea and her with him. I opened the front door and walked into orderly chaos. A sawdust covered Gersey had Harry in an arm lock, pretending to rub his nose with the sandpaper. Rhea and Draco were cleaning their paintbrushes and talking over furniture choices. The twins were pounding in the chair railings and Sev was nowhere in sight.

Maybe he'd gone to the potions lab to get away from the noise? I'd find him later, for now I wanted to make sure that everything was done that we could do.

"Draco! How about we go swimming?" Harry had escaped the arm lock and was a safe distance away, sticking out his tongue at Ger. "It's nice and hot so the water will feel good."

They all agreed that would be a good way to end the day so after a chaotic interlude where everyone got dressed in swimsuits, they all left for the beach. Ah, I thought, blessed quiet. "Sev,

it's all right to come out now."

His chuckle came from the stairs down to the lab and I watched him emerge with a smile. He came right to me and we kissed gently for a long moment before he pulled away, taking my hand and leading me into our bedroom. "I have decided, Ru', that a nap is just what we need."

I chuckled and closed the door behind us. He looked over his shoulder at me and deliberately began to unbutton his waistcoat buttons. That meant naked napping and I clicked the lock behind me before hurrying to get my clothes off, too. I love watching him get undressed; each movement is so graceful and sure. He's still moon-pale since he prefers the shade to the sun and every inch of skin was so beautiful when he revealed it to me that I was rock hard and hurting by the time I slid my pants off.

His eyes lit up. "Evil Rubeus, you weren't wearing any underwear under those pants."

I grinned and leered at him. "They just get in the way when we nap."

He turned and picked up the bottle of that special lubricant that he made up by the gallon, looking over his shoulder at me. "Then I'll have to find someplace warm for it to . . . nap."

In two steps I was by the bed and had him in my arms, picking him up and lowering us both onto the bed. "I'd really appreciate that, Sev. Ya're too good to me."

"Never, Ru'," he was suddenly serious. "You deserve only the very best of life. Your great heart has taken in two strays now and I can never thank you enough."

I kissed him gently. Mum had warned me that his hormones would be all over the map so I was ready for his lightning quick mood swings. "I love ya, Sev. I love ya more each day and I'm lucky that ya love me back. Draco will lend spice to the family."

He grinned just as suddenly as he'd turned serious and slid a hand around me. "A rather tart spice at the moment but I think I see some hints of mellowing. Now, I believe that I was going to find somewhere nice and warm for this beautiful cock of yours."

I gasped and trembled just a bit. "Yeah, that'd be right nice of ya, Sev."

Flipping him onto his back, I kissed my way down his body, making sure that I very gently licked his nipples. They were already getting more sensitive and sometimes he'd come with just me sucking on them. But I wanted his cock right now so I slid further back and held out my hand. He dipped two of my fingers in the wide-mouthed jar then set it aside for now.

Teasing his small hole with them, I suckled tenderly on his cock and listened to his moans with satisfaction. He'd really taken to sex and seemed to be making up for all those years that he'd gone without. Sliding both fingers through the tight muscle, I cast a quick silencing spell on the room to hide his moans. Hopefully the others were down in the lake and wouldn't be back too soon. But I never wanted him to be embarrassed by what we did in private and that meant making sure we were safe.

Turning my fingers this way and that, I could tell how far gone he was by the way that he was pulling on my hair and trying to thrust up with his hips. I hummed around his cock and rasped my tongue over the leaking crown and he shrieked and came, just like that. His inner muscles milked my fingers and I was so hard that I didn't know if I could last long enough to slide inside of him.

"Ru' . . . that . . . was . . . amazing." He panted and pulled me closer so he could kiss me. My cock stabbed him in the stomach and he chuckled, deliberately clenching those muscles around my fingers. "Let me turn over, love so you can see what you're getting into."

Gingerly I pulled out my fingers and helped him onto all fours. He moved like a sleek cat, arching his back then wiggling his hips just a little. Luckily, the lube didn't taste bad because I loved tonguing his entrance and forcing my tongue through that little hole. He always moaned when I did that and today was no exception.

"So good, Ru'. I love having you inside of me. Fingers, tongue, cock, they all feel so good that I want them all the time." He rocked back and forth and I slid a hand around to see if he felt like getting hard again. "Gods, only you could make me come back to life so fast, Ru'. More, Ru', give me your cock."

Damn, but I love his voice saying the word cock. I wiggled my tongue back out, swiping his balls with it for a quick feel and he groaned. He said the spell really fast and I watched his hole flutter bigger for me. Setting my crown there, I gently pushed until just the head was in. He was panting and finally I felt him relax so I could slide all the way in.

I hit that sweet spot that turned him wanton and he rocked back hard to seat me in place. Kissing the back of his sweaty neck, I thrust just a tiny bit and watched his skin blush for me. His cock was hard again and I held it gently, just warming it with my fingers.

"I love feeling you inside of me, Ru'." His voice sounded like he was contemplating a new spell or something. "It doesn't even ache any more when I cast the spell. It does however, still feel like you've just shoved your arm up my arse. And that's a lovely feeling that I never expected."

"It's not too much, Sev?" He'd never shared that particular picture with me and since I'd been fisted back when I'd been raped, I wondered at his using those words. It surely hadn't felt good to me.

He chuckled and tightened around me. "Never too much, my Ru', it just reminds me of how big you are and how much I love being connected to you. A little harder, please."

Relieved, I thrust a bit harder and pulled out just a bit further. He was moaning again, short little breathy moans that made me even harder, if that were possible. We'd made love just last night but it felt like it had been forever. Our rhythm began to speed up and he was pushing back at the same time I was pushing in. My balls slapped against his thighs and that was the extra bit that made me come.

Flooding him with my seed, I felt him spurt into my hand. Moving carefully, I got us down to our sides with my cock still inside of him. He liked me leaving it in for as long as possible and the gods knew I liked being connected to him. I kissed his shoulder and he sighed happily, turning his head enough for us to manage a kind of swapping of tongues.

It was kind of awkward but our height difference worked in our favor when we were stuck together like this. "Love ya, Sev."

"I love you too, Ru'." He stroked his stomach. "The baby will complain if you keep poking him like this. It feels like your cock is going to come out of my stomach."

That was a picture that started hardening me again. I stroked his stomach and rocked a little bit. "We'll have ta give this up once he gets bigger. I don't want to hurt him or ya."

"You love us, Ru', and we'll cross that bridge when we come to it." He said saucily and flirted up at me over his shoulder.

I just had to kiss him again for that and it was while we were kissing and stroking his stomach together that I felt it. A flutter or something quite like it traveled across the bond that connected

Sev and me. We broke apart and looked at each other. "Ya felt that, too, Sev?"

"The baby agrees with us, I think." His smile was so bright that it lit the darkening room. "Show us again how much you love us."

I kissed his neck and gently bit his ear lobe. That always made him shiver and harden. We made love very, very slowly until I let my seed flow out and he anointed my hand one more time. Then we really were done and I carefully eased out of him so I didn't hurt him. He was bound to be a little sore after me being inside of him for an hour but he didn't complain at all, turning in my arms and kissing me tenderly.

We cuddled for another half hour before our stomachs growled in unison and we did a quick spell clean up so we could get dressed and go looking for dinner.

Draco

It felt weird to come back to the house and know that Severus and Rubeus had been making love. I could tell because of the languid way that Sev moved and the tender care that Rubeus gave him. They were always really affectionate to each other and I'd watched them surreptitiously. At first, I just couldn't understand why they were together or what it was about the half-giant that could possibly attract the pure bred potions master.

But slowly, I was coming to see that they liked each other. They were friends who happened to also be lovers. I hadn't known that was possible having never seen it in my family or any of the other Slytherin homes. I'd been a bit contemptuous at first but lately I'd become envious instead. I looked at this family of half-breeds and saw that they all liked each other.

It was so strange to see them interact together. They teased each other but not in a hurtful way. Gration and Hossic played practical jokes just like those idiot Weasley twins did. I was beginning to think that was a twin thing but the Hagrids never made me the butt of their jokes and once they even got me to laugh. I just didn't understand them at all.

Now, Rhea was a different story. They should have named her Serena because she had the ability to remain serene under any conditions. She was so big that I felt like a child next to her but she never treated me like one. We worked well together while we painted. She would talk about her nursing and sometimes I would tell her about some of my studies. It felt almost like having a friend.

Friends weren't something that I'd ever really had. Father hadn't encouraged it; instead he made sure that I had worthwhile contacts. I was beginning to see what a difference there was between the two. I was looking at people with new eyes. Even Potter wasn't who I'd thought he was. Away from the Gryffindors, he was kind of fun. Somehow he'd known that flying again would make me feel better.

There's something about flying that frees me inside. Swooping and arcing feel good but going flat out to race for the snitch feels better than anything. Having a broom between my legs made me feel alive again. Potter even got me to laugh when he grumbled about my catching the snitch first. He was good-natured about it and actually told me that winning wasn't everything.

Really, he said that. What an interesting philosophy he had, I thought derisively. But part of me was taking notes and sometimes at night, I'd lie there and let those new thoughts come into my mind. It certainly beat reliving MacNair raping me. I'd only had two nightmares in the last week and that felt good.

"Draco, did you decide on the dark cherry or the oak for your bed?" Severus' voice broke into my thoughts.

I'd never been given a choice before. Father chose antiques that would appreciate in value, not furniture that was comfortable. "I thought maybe the golden oak to go with the floor."

He nodded. "Good choice, Draco, that will make the room seem bigger, too. Now, what about the desk and chair, oak for them as well?"

"Actually, I was thinking of the chrome and black desk that Gration showed me in that catalog with the swivel chair in green and silver." I said, casting a quick look at the twin with whom I'd spent the most time.

"Really?" He arched an eyebrow in that elegant way he had. "That will certainly look different. But if it's what you want then that is what we'll order. Rhea, are the curtains ready?"

"We can hang them once the floors are done." She said lightly. "They're going to look beautiful with the silver and green duvet on the bed and the tufted cushion on the window seat. Draco will have the most interesting room in the cottage."

I smiled. I was going to have my own room with all my own choices. What a thought.

Lucius

Warnings for extreme graphic violence. Skip if needed.

I knew I was in trouble when I awoke while being manacled to the Crucio frame. It was cold in Voldemort's meeting hall and the steel cuffs held me taut in an open X to the stone work. I was stretched open and when the Dark Lord's hissing syllables came from behind me, I prepared for the worst.

"Lucius-s-s-s, I am s-s-s-so dis-s-s-sappointed in you." His cold breath stunk of rat and I tightened my controls. "S-s-s-sweet Draco es-s-s-scaped from you. And now I can not harves-s-s-st him."

I held my tongue because begging would only make my torment worse. He moved slowly around me, his claws lightly scoring my flesh. "I s-s-s-see that you are contrite, dear Lucius-s-s-s. But I think MacNair wishes-s-s-s to show you his dis-s-s-spleasure."

The first blow of the scourge made me quiver, the steel tipped hooks lightly ripping open my back. Five blows later and I was bleeding from my head to my heels. MacNair then whispered in my ear. "Just the beginning, Malfoy. Our master is most displeased with you."

I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of a reply but when the bucket of cold salt water hit my back, I couldn't help a reaction. I burned everywhere it entered my bleeding flesh and I flinched. Voldemort hissed in amusement and beckoned to MacNair. "He may find it hard to be properly s-s-s-silent, MacNair. Let's-s-s help him."

The grinning giant forced my jaws open and shoved the ball gag in before tightening the straps behind my head. That actually helped me to relax a little because it was one less thing that I had to keep track of. MacNair leaned in close and whispered, "I'm going to enjoy this, Malfoy. You aren't."

Then he was gone from view and another five strokes of the cat-of-nine-tails ripped me open further. Another bucket of salt water, hot this time, and I was about ready to piss myself. Without

any warning, MacNair rammed his cock into me and I screamed into the gag.

"Your little boy was sweet, Malfoy. He was so afraid that he passed out when I rammed my cock up his tight ass. Bled like a stuck pig, he did. I was looking forward to taking that little boy-cunt again." He pulled out and rammed it back in again while I tried to keep silent. "I'm real disappointed that I've got to wait for him. We will get him back from those cursed Knights. They'll heal him all up so he'll be good as new when I fuck him again." His volleys were quick and brutal and I took them all while I tried to stay conscious. "But I've got to say that all the Malfoys have tight asses. You feel real good, Malfoy. Narcissa screamed and screamed when I flipped her over and rammed her ass good this afternoon."

My eyes flew open to find Voldemort picking his teeth with a glittering toothpick. It looked suspiciously like the emerald and diamond spike that I'd bought my wife when she gave birth to Draco. She was an empty headed fool but she wouldn't have given it up lightly.

"Do I forget to tell you, Lucius-s-s-s?" He hissed at me and slithered closer. "I gave her to my loyal Death Eaters for their pleas-s-sure. Her screams-s brightened my afternoon."

Alright, this was worse than I thought. Narcissa was dead but I'd tired of her within a year of our marriage so it was no great loss. Scalding liquid flooded me and I grimaced in disgust. MacNair was little better than an animal. A sharp pinch and I focused on my Master. He was beckoning to that little rat Pettigrew who was bringing over a tub of hot coals and a white cloth.

What the hell did he have in mind now?

"Malfoy, I'd hate for you to come too soon so I'll just make sure you don't." MacNair bowed to Voldemort and while the reptile cackled, he dragged on my cock, which I hadn't noticed was getting hard, and snugly wrapped it in the familiar liquid metal cage. If I got harder, the metal would shrink just enough to keep me from coming. He looped the wire rings around and between my balls to make them tighten further. Then, to add insult to injury, he suspended weights on them so they dragged towards the cold stone floor.

Now I really needed to piss but I wouldn't be able to unless he removed the cage.

"Very nice, MacNair. Res-s-s-st a moment, my boy while I introduc-c-c-e Lucius-s-s to a new s-s-s-sens-s-s-sation." His claws plucked my nipple before flicking it with his prehensile forked tongue. It burned like liquid fire since all his secretions were now acid. I hissed around the ball in my mouth but that was as nothing to what came next.

Red hot fire lanced through my nipple and I screamed or at least I tried. He was humming to himself and I felt something pierce my nipple and hang heavily from it. I almost passed out and when he lanced the other nipple, I think I did for a moment. My head hung down and from the corner of my eye, I saw a gold loop through my nipple with a large stone hanging from it.

"Very pretty, don't you think, MacNair?" He hissed and flicked a claw over the stone making it swing and torment my aching flesh.

"He doesn't deserve this sign of your favor, Master." The rough voice came from behind me again and I automatically tightened up.

"True, my boy. Why don't you play a little more while I eat some more of this delic-c-cious-s-s delicacy-c-cy?" Voldemort reclined on a pile of silken cushions stained a brownish red with dried blood and plucked a piece of grilled meat.

I was afraid to look too closely for fear I'd see something that reminded me of Narcissa. Then I was too busy trying not to scream again while MacNair whipped me with what sounded like a

bull whip. Then he moved around me and flicked it in front of me and I flinched.

It did no good, of course. I was now bleeding both front and back and tears were leaking from my eyes. I had no control at all and when Voldemort waved him behind me, I almost welcomed his cock. It hurt but then so did everything else. He was whispering to me again of all the vile and terrible things that he was going to do to me.

"Such a treat, we've planned for you, Lucius-s-s. Jus-s-st for you, I have s-s-spelled all your old friends bigger. Jus-s-st for your pleasure." He flicked a mirror beside me and I saw the others naked and erect, lining up behind me.

MacNair was twelve inches long and thick with it but they were sizes that only existed in nightmares. They took turns, ramming their flesh into me so hard that both my hips dislocated. The pain was beyond belief and I hung limp, having long since lost any feeling in the lower part of my body.

"Enough." Voldemort stood and threw a leg bone aside. He tilted my head up, his slitted eyes looking into mine. "I should keep you jus-s-st like this-s-s, Lucius-s-s. But I have another fate in s-s-store for you. Watch, my little traitor."

He stood back far enough so I could see the pouch that hung low on his reptilian body. Slowly, something began to protrude where a cock might hang on a man. Very slowly I watched it emerge while my mind began to gibber in disbelief. It was huge, bigger than my thigh and as long as my arm. It hung low then began to swell even larger and come erect.

When he disappeared behind me, I froze in shock. Then I heard his sibilant whisper in my ear and felt my body ripped open, to spill my blood with a hiss on the floor. "Take my las-s-st gift, Lucius-s-s. Then die."

And so I did.

Gersey

When Harry and Draco walked in Friday morning, I could tell that something was wrong. My little love looked like he hadn't slept all night and he'd been crying. Draco was closed up again, like he hadn't been in over a week. Mum noticed at once and she sent me off with Harry while Sev took Draco in hand.

I took Harry out to the little nook where we'd talked earlier and sat him down with my arm around him. "What happened, Har? What's wrong?"

He shuddered hard and turned into my arms so he was holding me tight while his tears soaked my shirt. I could barely hear his words but what I heard had me holding him tighter while I rocked him. He'd dreamed Voldemort killing Malfoy senior. He was practically hyperventilating when he described the sick torture that bastard had undergone.

He was so into it that he paled and pulled away to be sick behind the tree. I held him through the spasms and when he was done, I soaked my handkerchief in the stream and wiped his face and hands clean. He looked so wrung out that I wanted to go Voldemort-hunting right then and there. But instead, I sat him in my lap and reassured him that that wouldn't happen to me or Draco or him.

He clung to me, still shivering a little now and then but finally he calmed down enough to take a

brief nap. I held him close and stroked his messy hair with one hand while I kept the other in the small of his back to remind him I was there. They'd both been through so much, these two young warriors. One had been on the side of the Light since he was a baby and one had had to fight hard just to be allowed to make a choice.

The Ministry was a bunch of assholes that had no idea what they were doing. Voldemort was running rings around them and would continue to do so until either he won or somebody took him out for good. I didn't want that to have to be Harry, he was a brave soul but his tender heart would make him suffer the tortures of the damned afterwards. It was too much to hope that somebody that none of us cared for would do the honors.

It was highly likely that it would be one of us. I looked with unfocused eyes on the small stream and saw us lined up, all the Hagrids and our allies facing off against a towering lizard and a bunch of black robed men with savage faces. Blinking, I sighed and held Harry a little closer. It was going to be soon and my vision had no ending, it was just a snapshot of a moment to come.

Damn, I hated when that happened.

"Ger?" He'd awakened when I tensed up. "Did you have a vision?"

"Just a little one, Harry. Nothing that helps." I said honestly.

He sat up a little and rubbed his eyes, before blinking up at me endearingly. "I was kind of hoping it was one of those good ones where you see me kissing you."

I chuckled and cupped his chin, rubbing my thumb over those red lips of his. "One of these days, that won't be a vision but just a memory we bring out to comfort us."

He leaned in and brushed my lips with his. "You're warm and you taste good."

And just like that, I was hard as a rock. "Harry, what we did a month ago is still on the 'no-list' and you're not making it easy for me."

"Sorry," he looked guilty and I never wanted to make him think that kissing me was wrong. "I forgot."

"You do know that I love it when you touch me?" I sighed. "Heaven knows I think about kissing you and holding you close. I've taken to just jumping in the lake whenever I see you coming."

"You do?" He perked up a little and smiled at me. "I take a hot bath every night and stroke myself while I picture your hands around my shaft. Sometimes I come two or three times a night."

I did not need that picture going through my head when I was already hard. "Harry, you're a tease."

He chuckled and kissed my cheek. "Then I guess you don't want to know about the oil I got from Sev."

"What?" I pushed him a little away so I could see his flushed face. "Harry, you're not hurting yourself, are you?"

That urchin grin flashed out and he said not at all contritely, "I told you that slippery stuff sounded like fun."

My jeans were going to strangle me right here and now. "Harry, I think we should go take a swim."

He bounced once and got to his feet, leaving me to get rather arthritically to mine. Thinking about Mum and what she'd say if she saw me like this, cooled me down enough so I could walk. While Harry was changing into his swimsuit, I filled Sev and Rube in on what he'd dreamed. It was the same for Draco and we'd gotten an owl from Dumbledore saying that the remains of his parents had just been found at the Malfoy estate.

Said remains were 'gruesome' and we all looked pretty grim when Harry came back out. We told him the bare bones and all he said was 'poor Draco'. Sev had given Draco a potion to knock him out and sleep dreamlessly. Luckily Gration had gotten his new bed put together so Sev and Rube had tucked him in, in his own room here at the cottage.

The twins had left yesterday to fulfill their moving jobs but Royan and Remus were back and moving in to the new suite in Hogwarts that Dumbledore had given them for a bonding present. Rhea and Dad were in Diagon Alley with their faithful dog, Padfoot to do some shopping while Mum took out her stress in cooking. I changed clothes in the bathroom and let the towel hang down in front of me before coming out.

Rube snickered a little and Sev frowned severely at him before shooing us out of the cottage. Harry took my hand once we were on the path and I let him, needing the touch almost as much as he did. The lake sparkled in the sunshine and we dropped our towels and walked right into the cool water. With one accord, we started swimming towards the small island in the middle of the lake.

Once there, we climbed up on the one big flat rock that served us as a sunbathing spot and laid on our backs with just our hands touching. My cock had finally given up and leaked away into the lake. The squid was going to think I was interested again. He had kind of backed off since Harry was usually with me and our pheromones were off the charts when we were within a yard of each other.

"Ger, thanks." He said quietly and I turned my head to find him propped on an elbow watching me. "I want you to promise me something. If I ever get taken by the Death Eaters, I don't want you to come after me."

I shivered. "No, Harry, don't ask me that. You're not going to be taken but in the millionth chance that it does happen, the entire family will be right there to rescue you."

"What if he's already raped and drained me?" He was white as a sheet. "I won't live through that. I wouldn't want to."

I sat up and pulled him into my lap, wrapping my arm and legs around him. "That won't happen, Harry, I promise you. Voldemort is living on borrowed time and you're not going to be raped of your power or your innocence. We won't let it happen."

"Hold me and don't let go." He whispered and I rocked him slowly until he was calm again. "I love you, Ger."

Draco

I felt strange. Well, stranger than I'd been feeling for a while. My mother and father were dead. Dumbledore tried to break it to me gently but I'd seen then in my dream so I already knew in part what Voldemort and MacNair had done to them. Like Harry, I was now an orphan. But unlike Harry, I had resources yet untapped. Father had been grooming me to take over the businesses that he owned when he took over the wizarding world.

I'd often wondered what I would do with them if they were mine. Well, now they were and Severus had told me that whatever I wanted to do, he would back me one hundred percent. No one had ever trusted me like that before. So, I was thinking about them and how I could blacken the eyes of the remaining Death Eaters. I still couldn't think of MacNair without getting cold and shaky but I was working on it.

Right now, I was taking a walk. Everyday, I took a different route while I concentrated on the Forest and let my mind think only of it. Ty, the Nemean Lion had shown me the paths that would get me killed and eaten so I avoided them. Some of the paths changed between one day and the next though, so I kept a sharp eye out in case one of them was being tricky.

Potter was planning his birthday party and since it was only two days away, I knew our peace and tranquility would be rendered limb from limb by the Weasleys. What an odd family they were, they had actually asked Harry to come to them for his birthday. It seems they hadn't thought about the danger or even the logistics of hosting the Boy-Who-Lived.

Unthinking fools, my father had called them and sadly I thought the sentiments appropriate. Besides, the Hagrids planned better parties than anyone in the world. I found myself smiling at the little griff, Lisle. She scampered over to me so I could scratch her ears then she darted off in answer to a neigh from a parent. Going back to thinking about the Hagrids, I remembered the chaos of Rhea and Sirius' bonding party.

Stopping by my favorite oak tree, I swarmed up to the first branch then up and up until I was lost in the branches near the top. Resting back against the gnarled trunk, I lost myself in the bright pictures of the party. Rhea had been beautiful in a green dress that matched her eyes. Sirius was in a matching outfit of pants and a vest in the same shade of green, his hair brushed until it shone.

Even though she was taller than he was, they still seemed to go together. I didn't think he was good enough for her but I'd heard him say the same thing to her so maybe he wasn't the complete idiot I thought he was. He'd apologized to Severus so I guess I was going to have to get used to him. Harry had almost fallen into the cake and Gersey kept close tabs on him to keep him out of trouble. What Ron Weasley was going to say about that relationship would either make or break their friendship.

Granger probably knew that Harry liked males but Ron was so far over on the heterosexual side, he didn't know there was another side. I still preferred males although at the moment I was seriously thinking about becoming a monk. Watching Ger and Harry together hurt me deep inside. But it wasn't just them, it was Severus and Rubeus holding each other, too.

I was trying so hard not to be jealous that it was making me cranky. I sighed and looked around to see if any creature might have caught me feeling sorry for myself. Aside from the little wren on her nest, nobody else was around. Conjuring a couple of worms, I offered them and she accepted with a bright chirp. We were old friends by now. Sinking back against the bole of the tree, I decided to just take one day at a time.

Summer was half over and school would be starting before I knew it. Whether or not I attended school or stayed here and took my lessons from Severus, Rubeus and Remus, my time would be filled quite nicely. Approving of my decisions, I climbed back down to the soft loam of the Forest floor and brushed off the evidence of my tree climbing.

In the distance, I heard something come crashing through the leaves and hit the Forest floor hard, sending a tremor all the way over to me. I froze and began to run towards home but something stopped me. A keening cry like nothing I'd ever heard before rang through the trees. It spoke of pain and fear and all I'd felt just a few weeks before. Taking hold of my courage, I moved towards

the sound instead of away from it.

If it was Death Eaters, I would not go quietly. The sound was dying down now but the faint thread of pain drew me like a magnet. Suddenly, I found her. A silvery green dragon lay on the ground, wings crumpled and dark green blood flowing sluggishly from a dozen wounds. Her eyes were open and I froze when I met her beseeching gaze. But she was fading fast and I bit my lip, trying to think what to do first.

She was still moving a little but the high-pitched little keen was getting fainter. I took off my shirt and tried staunching the biggest wound in her side but it was too little and I wished frantically that I knew some of that wandless magic that Sev and Rubeus knew. As if my wish conjured him up, Ru' appeared with Gersey and Harry at his side. He had his wand out in a heartbeat and several of the holes stopped leaking, just like that.

I would have sighed in relief but the one I was plugging was still gushing. He came up behind me and laid his hands alongside of mine. "Concentrate on no blood, Draco."

I concentrated so hard I felt dizzy. But it seemed to be working and her breaths steadied for us. "Good boy, Dra'. Did ya see what attacked her?"

"No, but those look like wand shots to me. There's not much else that could get through dragon hide." I slowly straightened up and for a moment it felt like Rube gave me a hug. We'd been careful around each other. We both cared for Severus and wanted him to be happy but I know I was unsure of him and he was of me. I'm not a hugging person by training and I rather envied Harry of his ability to hug and be hugged.

Maybe I was learning. "Rubeus, is she . . . going to die?"

"Nah, Dra', ya got ta her in time and now we're going ta take her home and make sure she heals right." He patted my shoulder and it felt better than an award. "Ger, help me get her up."

Harry and I stood back while the two half-giants slowly floated her up off the ground and through the dense trees of the Forest. It was odd but the path seemed to widen to let us all through and I wondered again just what kind of magic lived here. Father had sneered at my question and said that when he was in charge, he was going to cut it all down and put the creatures he found there in a wizard's zoo, frozen in carbonite for the succeeding generations to gawk at.

Father had been a fool in many ways and I realized that with a sense of wonder. The two wizards holding up the wounded dragon were much more to my liking. They valued life instead of death and suddenly I knew what I was going to do with the companies that I'd inherited.

"That's a weird smile, Draco." Harry broke into my thoughts.

And I laughed out loud, the way I'd wanted to a thousand times in the past. "Once you're sixteen, Harry, how'd you like to be on a couple of business boards?"

"Me?" He looked at me like I was crazy. "Those businesses whose prospectus the lawyer sent you?"

"Yes, maybe the Weasley twins would like to be on a couple of them, as well?" I could see a very interesting future laid out before me. Life instead of death. Fun instead of drudgery. The wizards and muggles would never know what hit them, I thought with glee.

"You are seriously cracked, Draco." Harry was laughing at me and I grinned back at him. "But if that's what you want, then sure, I'll be on a board or two. How about Dumbledore? He'd really shake them up."

I smiled even bigger. "The more the merrier, Harry. I think there's more than one way to take on the Dark Hosts. If we can save that dragon, then we can do anything."

Her eyes opened again and the silver gaze met mine. Life - that was the important thing.

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Parts 25 - 26 by Athea

Author's Notes:

It's Harry birthday but Draco gets the first present.

Charles Weasley

I wasn't sure why I was here at Hogwarts celebrating the birthday of a boy that I only knew through my little brother. But I'd gotten my own invitation so I'd popped in with the rest of the family to find out what was going on. Next to the lake, a pavilion was set up and it looked like school was back in session by the number of people already here. Funny, but several of them looked like larger versions of our family.

Hagrid had always been my favorite instructor and had been one of the reasons that I became a dragon handler. Meeting his family was great fun and I started to relax once I got a pint of beer in my hand. It was tough getting British ale in Rumania and the local rotgut could singe a dragon's hide so I'd been a teetotaler for almost six months. This was heaven.

Ron and Hermione were talking a mile a minute to the birthday boy and the rest of the Weasleys were scattered among the staff, students and Hagrids. It was oddly like a reunion but none of my classmates were here and I wondered nostalgically where some of them were. The tap on my shoulder brought me back to the here and now and I turned to see Hagrid wearing a little frown instead of the smile I'd seen earlier.

"Charlie, it's good to see ya again." He looked casually around before coming to the point. "I've got a patient that I'd like ya ta see. She got hurt a couple a days ago and she's not healin' like she ought."

"A dragon?" I asked, interested in spite of myself. The dragons in the United Kingdom were strictly registered and protected.

"Aye, a pretty little lass who took on some Death Eaters and lost." He looked down on me and smiled apologetically. "Sorry to bother ya at the party and all but I'm that worried about 'er."

"No problem, Hagrid. The party will still be here when we get back." I drained my pint and set it on a nearby table. "Where have you got her?"

"This way," he signaled to someone across the field before leading me towards the Forest. "I'm in me summer quarters, Charlie and that's real near where she crashed."

I hadn't been in the Forest for years and it still looked kind of creepy to me. All the horror stories we'd been told about the place were probably nine tenths tall tales but it was the one tenth that was true that had me spooked. And yet, it looked kind of peaceful and green now that I was looking at it with adult eyes. Rumania had a lot of forests that looked just like this and yet . . . I looked around and listened intently. There was something different about the light here.

"Um, Charlie, I need ta ask a favor of ya." Hagrid stopped in front of me and smiled apologetically. "Well, more than ya lookin' at the wee dragon."

I felt a tingle go up my spine. "What, Hagrid, what's stranger than a dragon in need?"

"A secret that can't get out or lives could be lost." He said simply and I blinked up at him. "And it's dangerous ta know what ya're going to see."

'Lives lost', that sounded extremely dangerous. Smiling, I shook my head. "I work with dragons, Hagrid. I know dangerous and I can keep a secret."

He looked deep into my eyes and finally nodded. "Welcome ta the club, Charlie. We'd best get ta steppin' or ya'll miss out on the cake."

We finished the trip with me telling him about a new way to use concrete as a wound dressing for ice drakes. I was taken aback when we stepped into the clearing where his small cottage used to be. There was now a house in its place and two caravans and the beginnings of a greenhouse. Another pavilion was set up but the flaps were closed on this one and when Hagrid whistled, it opened for a moment then closed again before I could see who it was.

Hagrid entered first, holding the flap open for me. Once inside my eyes adjusted from sunlight to dim light and I saw what secret Hagrid was keeping. "Professor Snape?"

"Ah, Charles, how nice of you to come. We're hoping that you can find the reason why Ss-serens isn't eating properly." He said with a smile that I'd never seen from him. "Would more light help? Draco, let's fasten the flaps back so Charles can see to work."

The second surprise was seeing Draco Malfoy dressed in jeans and a t-shirt, taking orders and smiling while he did as he was requested. The dragon was the least of it but I knelt beside her nose so she could sniff me first, while I tried to think of something to say to a man I'd thought dead.

"You can question me later, Charles." That velvety soft voice was just the same. "For now, focus on Ss-serens and then I promise that I will answer all your questions."

He'd never lied to me yet so I got to work. The wand wounds were healing nicely but she was listless and still weak. Checking her abdomen, I got an inkling of what might be wrong and when I asked to see her droppings, they confirmed it. Washing my hands in the disinfectant provided, I looked at the others anxiously awaiting my diagnosis.

"She needs some vitamins and a special diet for the next month." I knelt by her again and watched Malfoy stroke her nose comfortingly. "She's pregnant and her natural healing abilities went to protect the fetus rather than to help her heal."

Severus rubbed his stomach as if in sympathy. "What kind of vitamins and would I have them in my private lab?"

"Depends on what's in your lab, Professor." I grabbed a pad of paper and a muggle ball point pen out of my jacket pocket, starting to write down the supplements that she'd need.

"Come inside, Charles. We'll have tea and you can ransack my lab." Severus smiled again and I blinked in surprise. "Draco, I'll have Ara bring yours out."

"Thanks, Severus, and thank you, Mr. Weasley." His smile was almost shy but quite genuine and how the hell did the Malfoy heir end up with a dead wizard, a half-giant and a pregnant dragon?

The inside of the house was pleasantly disheveled although the small house elf was busy setting out tea. Severus sat down with a sigh on the brown leather sofa and Hagrid sat down as close as he could get to him, sliding an arm around him and cuddling him close. I sat down in a green leather wing chair in a state of shock because Professor Snape wasn't just letting him do that, he

was cuddling back.

"Well, Charles, as you doubtless see, there have been some changes in the last few months. Ask your questions but for heavens sake, call me Severus. You are no longer my student and you're an expert in your own right. What's your first question?" He said with another smile right before accepting a cup of tea from the house elf. "Thank you, Ara. Would you see that Draco has some, too?"

"Yes, sir," she all but whispered before pouring more for us.

Once she disappeared, I started asking questions. The next hour was surreal but exhilarating, too. The ramifications of his pregnancy in conjunction with trying to keep Draco alive and in one piece hit me hard. They were dancing around a full scale confrontation with Voldemort and it wasn't 'if' they'd be battling him but 'when'.

"I want in on this." I said baldly when my last question was answered. "You're going to need more allies than just Hagrids, although I can see they've done a great job so far. You're going to need more help with Ss-serens and I'll get Bill to help, too. A curse breaker might come in handy."

"I've thought of him." Severus nodded. "I'd like him to tutor both Draco and Harry in his field. A good knowledge of curses and how to break them might save their lives."

Draco

I stroked Ss's nose and thought about what Weasley had said. She was pregnant and she'd tried to protect her baby even if it meant losing her life. I looked down into her silver eyes and thought that her instincts were more human than my parents had been. In a lot of ways, she was nicer than they were and I felt closer to her than I ever had to them. Ara interrupted my thoughts and I smiled at her.

"Master Draco, tea is ready." She said quietly and set the tray down on my other side. She hovered for a moment then sat down beside it while I poured out the tea. "Wish to say something."

"Please do," I said politely while watching Ss' sniff my cup before wrinkling up her nose.

"Ara is sorry that Master Draco was hurt." She said while clasping her hands so tight that I was afraid that she'd hurt herself. "Bad man was master once and I hid when he hurt others. Ara was afraid."

I took a sip of tea and deliberately thought about her former master. "MacNair is an evil man. He will be punished soon for what he did to the Malfoys."

She nodded and took a deep breath. "Ara knows something that might help. I-I-I," she stuttered a little and I caught a glimpse of Weasley stopped outside the pavilion. I hoped he'd stay away until she finished. "Master told everyone that son died of small pox. Not true. Bad Spirit say sacrifice him. Master Michael only ten when Bad Master slit his throat and give blood to Bad Spirit. Ara ran away and hid for long time before Dobby finds her and gives her job at big school."

I swallowed hard and thought about that sad little tale. "Thank you, Ara. I always knew that MacNair was evil but to kill his own son." I shook my head and sighed. "I wonder if Michael has moved on or if he's lingering still?"

She got up and leaned towards my ear. "Master Michael stay." Then she hurriedly left for the house while I sat there and thought about a little boy who'd never had the chance to even come to Hogwarts.

Charles Weasley came in and sat down heavily. Our eyes met and he shook his head. "There's a special place in hell for men like that. I hope I get to help send him there."

I raised an eyebrow. "Interesting, Mr. Weasley, that's the most bloodthirsty thing I've ever heard one of your family say."

"We're not all alike, you know." He said that matter-of-factly. "Get to know me first before you pass judgment and until then, call me Charlie." He laid the bowl he was carrying on the ground near Ss's snout. "Here we go, sweetheart, this will help you start to feel better."

I watched anxiously while she sniffed it, thought a moment then licked up what looked like chocolate sludge. Her forked tongue darted in and out, delicately lapping it all up. Already, I could see a little difference in her. Her eyes shone brighter and a little rumble in her throat was almost a purr.

Smiling, I looked up to see a funny expression on We-Charlie's face. He was looking at me instead of Ss' and almost holding his breath. I checked myself but I hadn't spilled tea or cookie crumbs on my t-shirt so I didn't think it was me. Maybe there was something he'd forgotten to do?

"Draco, may I call you, Draco?" He said slowly and I nodded. "I'm staying and volunteering to help. Are you at all interested in learning about dragons?"

I sat up straight and smiled again. "Yes, I want to know everything about them. Sev loaned me some books and I've been reading up on them but so much hasn't been written down. And we can use all the allies we can get."

His smile matched my own and he chuckled. "Good, then I'll tutor you in dragons."

I remembered my plan to disrupt some board rooms. "Charlie, how would you like to spread a little mayhem in the corporate world? I'm looking for a few good men."

He looked at me with startled eyes then a gleam came into them that must be a Weasley trademark since I'd seen it from both of his younger twin brothers. "I'd have to say that I qualify for that. What did you have in mind?"

So, I settled in to tell him about Harrod's Magical Store in which I held a 51% share. They'd long dealt in credit for their most loyal customers, mostly Death Eaters, and I was about to cut them off without a farthing. And institute legal proceedings to collect what was owed. There was a definite gleam in his eye when I finished and we began to plot what should happen at the first board meeting.

I was planning the magical version of a conference call since I wasn't about to let myself walk into a trap. I asked him if his father Auror Weasley might help and he shrugged, saying he'd ask. It would be better coming from him, I thought and watched Ss struggle to her feet. She swayed a little but accepted a shoulder of support from me. Charlie crooned to her and I felt myself flush at the little flutter in my stomach.

'Don't be a fool, Draco', I silently scolded myself. 'He loves dragons, he's not trying to get your attention.' My internal chastisement continued while he helped her stretch out her wings so he could see the damage there. He looked grave and I started worrying about that instead of my silly fantasies.

I'd keep them for my bath. Rubeus came out and helped Charlie reset a broken wing panel while I held Ss's head still and Severus poured some kind of green goop on the dragon bone. It hardened within the moment and Ss purred in relief at the end of that pain. She stretched up to her full height before coming back down gracefully, licking my cheek with her tongue, which tickled me right into laughter.

That funny look was back on Charlie's face and the little flutter was back in my stomach. I'd never have believed that on Harry Potter's birthday, I'd get the present of another friend. Sneaking another look at him while he laughed at something Sev said, I smiled. Maybe more than a friend?

Ss-serens

My wing felt much better and the mixture that the small red-headed dragon-handler had offered me had finally quieted my stomach. It felt good to stretch and move about. I wasn't ready to fly but I would be. I licked my small protector's face and listened to him laugh. Young-Draco was interested in the dragon-handler and the other was interested in him if his scent was anything to go by.

I flared my nostrils and smelt the same emotion from both the giant and the potions master. They were mated and the small one was carrying a child, too. I listened to my little one's heartbeat and was satisfied that he was growing at the right pace. The egg shell was not quite thick enough so it wasn't time to prepare my nest just yet. I'd had my eye on the island in the middle of this lake for quite some time.

But when I flew in to check it, I met the black-robed ones in the air and they had surprised me. Their evil stench had sent me winging towards the Forest but they had pursued me with hurting spells that burned and pierced my scales like lightning bolts. When I dove for the Forest cover, I fully expected to die and take my child with me but the small protector was there and he'd brought the giant one and others.

The protector had been wounded himself, I could feel it in him. The sadness and despair still clung to him although it was dissipating slowly. He liked working with me and his spirit lightened when he didn't think about the black-robed ones. That was good, it showed that he was worthy.

I was suddenly tired and I curled up as best I could among the pillows they'd gotten for me. Now that my wing no longer throbbed, I would be able to rest. Young-Draco stroked my nose and leaned down to press his lips against my forehead. Yes, I thought, he is worthy.

Harry

I'd never had a better birthday in my life. It wasn't the presents, although there were lots. It wasn't even all my friends around me and that almost everyone I cared for was here. It was being part of a family for the first time in my life. I had so few memories of my mom and dad that they felt like ghosts in my mind. But the Hagrids had taken me in and made me a part of their family and that felt so good I could fly.

"Harry, what is with you today?" Ron thumped my shoulder and I grinned at him. "You keep spacing out on us."

"I'm happy, Ron." I said simply. "Everyone that I love is here; we're all having a great time and wait until you see the cake."

"It's good to see you smiling, Harry." Hermione smiled and looked around. "I never thought I'd see this many red-heads in one place. It looks like somebody placed an ad asking for all red-headed wizards to come to Hogwarts on Saturday, July 31st."

"The Hagrids are great," Ron said enthusiastically. "Mum and Mrs. Hagrid were swapping recipes when I last saw them. Dad and Mr. Hagrid are talking about some kind of magic that I've never heard of."

"And Gersey," Hermione got a kind of glazed look in her eyes, looking at Ger where he was talking to Sirius and Rhea. "Gersey Hagrid is such a hunk. I can't believe that we didn't know he was related to our Hagrid. By the way, I haven't seen Charlie and Hagrid since they went off into the Forest."

I went from jealous to worried in the space of a second. "Um, Rubeus has a difficult patient and Charlie has special knowledge of the species."

Those sharp eyes of hers suddenly were looking at me. "Species? Perhaps a dragon species? I thought all the dragons in the UK were registered and tagged."

"Not all, 'mione and it's kind of a secret." I said, gathering my courage to talk to my best friends. "Would the two of you come down to the lake with me? I need to tell you something."

They nodded and I glanced at Ger for courage. His blue eyes met mine and we smiled at each other. No matter how this conversation turned out, he would help me through it. We walked until the party noise was just a hum in the background. Hermione had her thinking look on while Ron just looked worried. I stopped under a willow tree that grew close to the water and got out my wand. Casting a quick seeking spell, I made sure that we were private before throwing a silencing curtain around us.

"Thanks, guys." I sat down on the ground and wondered what to say first. I'd planned it a hundred times but now I couldn't think of a single word. I looked at my first friends and hoped they didn't become former friends in the next few minutes.

"Just tell us, Harry," Hermione was on one side of me and Ron on the other. "We're ready for anything."

I took a deep breath and let it out slowly, remembering the yoga I'd done that morning. "Things have been happening here that haven't made it into the papers. Ger and I rescued Draco when we found him at the auction of the Snape estate. He was supposed to get his mark that full moon even though he didn't want it."

"Malfoy?" Ron said incredulously. "Didn't want it, my ass. He was probably chomping at the bit, the stuck up prick."

I tightened my jaw and looked at him. "Don't be an idiot, Ron. Draco's smarter than that. But he didn't have a choice until we met up and I offered to help him get away. Luckily Ger and I had a portkey so we were able to bring him here, where he'd be safe."

"Was he hurt?" Hermione asked clinically.

I shivered. "Yes, very hurt but Rubeus and . . . Poppy healed him. His parents were slaughtered a few days ago. Dra' and I both dreamed it." Anger flashed through me when I split a look between the two of them, which was better than the sick feelings I still got when I remembered the torture. "Don't ever let me hear you call him names again. You have no idea what he went through and continues to go through even now."

"That's the second time you've used Hagrid's first name. Why?" Hermione asked.

Freezing, I remembered all the things that I still needed to keep secret. "The Headmaster and I have been helping him build on to his summer cottage. He wanted a small animal hospital for his really sick patients." I smiled at the memories of building. "It's been great fun and I've learned a lot. Draco is living with . . . him now until all the legal stuff gets finished about the estate. We're friends."

"Does that include Malfoy?" Ron was trying but he just couldn't keep the sneer out of his voice. "Are you friends with him, too?"

I nodded. "Yes, we are. Not like the three of us are friends but more like the kind of friends you make in a war zone."

"War zone," Hermione said softly, her eyes catching mine. "There have been more battles than the rest of us know about?" I nodded, unable to say another word. "Will we ever know about them?"

Swallowing hard, I shrugged my shoulders. "That depends on how you take my other news." Another deep breath and I jumped up to stand in front of them so I could see them both at once. "Hermione probably already knows this but I need to say it out loud. I'm in love with someone and it's a . . . he."

"What?" Ron's strangled shout would have been funny if it hadn't hurt so much. "A guy? Harry, what are you talking about?"

"I've always known that girls are really nice but I didn't ever want to shag one." I knelt in front of them, dividing my attention between them. Hermione was nodding as if I'd just confirmed a hypothesis for her.

"It's not Draco, is it?" The look of horror on Ron's face was almost funny.

"No, it's not him. What are you thinking, Ron? Are we still friends?" I watched all the different expressions flicker over his face while almost holding my breath for his answer.

He just looked back at me mute and I felt my heart squeeze. But Hermione snorted and brought both our attentions to her. "Harry, you're an idiot. Of course we're still your friends. I've known since you dated Cho that girls wouldn't do for you. Liking guys is fine with me so long as it isn't Ron." She smiled affectionately at the look of horror on his face. "I have plans for him."

I had to laugh when Ron's look for horror turned to shocked surprise. "You do?"

His squeak made me laugh harder and 'mione joined in while he looked back and forth between us with a bewildered expression. Between gusts of laughter, I reassured her. "Nah, it's not Ron although he does have red hair."

And just like that, we were okay with each other. Ron hit my leg and turned a soupy look onto Hermione who ignored him for a minute while looking at me with a speculative gaze. "Then who?"

"Gersey Hagrid," I sighed his name and thought about how he made me feel. "We'll be together when I get older. Mum Hagrid said we have to wait for me to grow up more but it's going to be harder than hard to wait and not do all the things I want him to do with me."

"Gersey," she looked back towards the party and a dreamy look crossed her face. "He's so handsome and his voice is to die for."

"Yeah," I agreed and we grinned at each other while Ron went back to shocked.

We talked for almost an hour before I took down the spells and we went back to the party. Ron was mostly okay with it. Hermione wanted details about Gersey and I didn't once slip up and mention Severus. All in all, it could have been a lot worse. I found Gersey talking to Royan and I hugged her in place of hugging him. I wanted to be alone with him in the worst way but that was for later.

I still hadn't told him what I wanted from him for my birthday. But that could wait for now. Rubeus and Charlie were back so it was time to cut the cake and open presents. And there were a lot of presents. I opened them all and was astounded by how well they knew me. There were joke gifts from my friends, useful gifts from the Hogwarts contingent and wonderful gifts from the Hagrids.

I got new school robes from Mum Hagrid; Dad Hagrid gave me a book on theoretical magic that made Hermione's eyes light up; the twin's box had new supplies for broom maintenance; Sirius and Rhea gave me a subscription to the Hogsmead candy store's Chocolate of the Month Club; Remus and Royan's box had three books on Defense Against the Dark Arts and two new sweaters that matched my eyes.

The rest of the family presents would wait until we got home. I was getting tingles at the thought of Ger's gift. Everybody moaned when they took their first bites of the Triple Fudge Mocha Delight and Mum Hagrid beamed at our appreciation. Everybody had a good time and I went around thanking everyone personally for helping make this birthday the best I'd ever had.

But eventually people started saying goodbye and leaving. Charlie Weasley told his parents that he was going to stay over for a day or so, to keep an eye on the dragon. I thought that was pretty cool of him as I tried to gather up everything I'd gotten to carry back into Gryffindor hall. But there was just too much stuff and Dobby giggled before telling me kindly that the elves would carry everything in.

Hermione had already borrowed my new book from Dad Hagrid so that was one less thing to worry about. I took my new maintenance kit over to the locker room and stored it away in my locker. Later on, I'd come out and work on my broom. For now, I was ready for the next part of my birthday. Running back to the mostly empty pavilion, I found the Hagrids waiting for me.

Rhea and Sirius were hand in hand next to Remus and Royan. Dad Hagrid had his arm around Mum Hagrid and they were all waiting for me. But mostly I saw Gersey, his eyes bright and his warm hand just waiting to slide into mine. Sirius was still a little wary of Ger and anxious that I didn't do anything I'd be sorry for later. We'd had a long talk in between all the other events of the last few days. I told him that I was really happy that he was so happy with Rhea.

But I wasn't made that way and the Headmaster knew it, now Sirius did, too. We talked and talked about the past, about my parents and his friendship with them. I asked him if he thought that they'd be upset that I was gay. He thought for a long moment and sighed. 'They'd ask if you were happy and if you said yes then they'd be happy, too.'

That made me feel better and I think it made me realize a few things also. He was my godfather but I really didn't know him and he didn't know me very well either. We promised each other we'd spend more time together and get better acquainted. That was something else to look forward to and I leaned into Gersey with a happy sigh. This really was the best birthday I'd ever had.

Severus

Charles Weasley had lived up to his promise as a student. He was calm and knowledgeable in his field. He accepted our explanations with only a widening of his eyes when he heard about my pregnancy. His offer to stay and become an ally was rather exhilarating. He would be a most potent helper and he seemed rather taken with Draco and his dragon.

I smiled and rubbed my back. The baby's sudden growth spurt had pushed several interior organs around and I feared the ache was there to stay. Ru's hand obligingly began to gently rub the spot I couldn't reach and I hummed my approval. He kissed my cheek and I turned so I could lean against his chest.

"He'll be a good addition, Charlie will." His rumble vibrated through my cheek and I smiled into his shirt. "Did ya notice that he was surprised by Dra'?"

"Hm-m-m, I think that Draco will learn from him." I moved just a little and felt his groin swell against me. "Do we have time for a nap?"

"Nah, I can hear the others comin' back." He dropped a kiss on my head and said hopefully. "Everybody will be tired so maybe we can 'ave an early night?"

"We can but try, Ru'. Did Charles say that he was coming back to stay with Ss' tonight?"

"Aye, he and Dra' will probably sleep out in the pavilion. They've got to get more of that supplement stuff down her."

"True, we're going to need more of those ingredients, especially the dandelion roots. I wonder if Remus and Royan would be willing to go shopping for us?" I stepped back far enough to look up at him and he smiled at me.

"Royan is always ready ta go shopping. Ya should have noticed that, Sev."

I stuck out my tongue at him only to have him swoop down and capture it in his tasty mouth. We kissed for long moments until I heard Mum Hagrid laughing at us and we finally parted to greet the rest of the family. We all had a cup of tea and discussed what we'd do the next day. I enjoyed making plans that had nothing to do with potions or Voldemort.

Watching without seeming to, I saw Charles sit next to Draco on the floor. We'd run out of chairs again and the four youngest were all sitting together. Charles and Gersey looked almost like brothers and I pondered the two men. I liked them both and thought that Harry would be safe with Gersey but I'd watch Charles to see if he was good for Draco. With a start, I realized that I was thinking like a father.

How amazing that was, I thought and rubbed the bump that was our child. Ru' kissed my temple and whispered a question about the baby. I reassured him with a smile and went back to thinking about the amazing fact that I was part of a family, an integral part of the nicest family on earth.

Suddenly I remembered the gift that Draco and I had put away for Harry and I signaled him with my eyebrow that it was time. We'd gone in together to purchase the parts of a portkey that he could wear in public but not be recognizable as what it was. The small box had both of our names on it and Harry ripped it open hurriedly to find the Rolex watch.

He put it on at once and admired it before giving us his thanks. That's when Draco explained what it did besides keep time. Harry's eyes were wide as saucers when I told him that all he had to do was think of one of the Hagrids and he'd find himself with them. No matter where that happened to be. It's a tricky spell but each family member had given me a strand of hair that I'd carefully braided and sealed into the mechanism. And that included, mine, Draco, Remus and Sirius' in there, too.

Really, the Swiss wizards do know how to make a superb watch. Harry hugged Draco before the blond realized he was going to do that. Draco protested vociferously but returned it gingerly. He was still rather shy about being touched and probably would be for some time. Then it was my turn and I whispered 'you're welcome' to the young boy who had somehow burrowed into my heart.

This was not at all what I was expecting when I thought about my future even six months ago. I was truly blessed with family and friends. A yawn took me by surprise and I covered it hastily. For some reason, I was tired and it was only seven o'clock. The others noticed and our family evening began to break up. Charles and Draco left to keep Ss-serens company with a pile of blankets in case it turned chilly.

The Hogwarts couples left to walk back to the school. Mum and Dad told everyone that they would see us in the morning, leaving with a speaking look at Gersey, who had Harry back at his side. Ru' and I looked at them and wondered what to ask or even if we should say anything at all.

"I want to spend the night with Ger, in a bed, without all our clothes on." Harry said quietly, looking at us both with those big green eyes so much like his mother's. "I'm not ready to do lots of things but I do want a kiss," he looked at Gersey and licked his lips, "a real kiss, not on my cheek. And I want to explore some more. I trust you and I know we shouldn't do too much but I want to learn more."

Gersey closed his eyes with a sigh. "Harry, I'm glad that you trust me but I don't know if 'I' trust me, not if we're alone in a bed, clothed or not."

I smiled. "Gersey, I'm afraid that I trust you, too." I almost laughed at his look of shock. "Harry is not your ordinary sixteen-year old. He knows who he wants but not exactly what he wants. That can be your gift to him, Gersey. Show him what you like and see if he likes it, too."

Harry was so still while he looked beseechingly at his future lover. He wasn't even bouncing, he was so caught up in wishing. Ru' wanted to laugh, but he kept it to a cough. "Sorry, Ger, but I trust ya, too. If it gets ta be ta much, then breathe deep and come. I figure ya can wear Harry out in, oh, say four hours."

"You're trying to kill me aren't you?" Gersey said with a frown but one look at Harry and he caved. "All right, I promised you anything you wanted. But if I say no to something it means no. You're not ready for everything, little love."

Harry tackled him back onto the rug and hung on, hiding his face in Gersey's throat. "I know I'm not but oh, I do want to touch you and have you touch me."

Ger smiled and hugged him close. "Then we'll both get what we want tonight. Come on, we can start with a bath in my caravan."

Harry flushed bright red before practically levitating off his prone lover and pulling him upright. But before he dragged him out the door, he hugged both of us again, whispering his thanks over and over. I tousled his hair and whispered back, "Happy birthday, Harry. May this be just the start of very many more."

He kissed my cheek and then Ru's before taking Gersey's hand and leading him out of our suddenly silent house. Rubeus stood and drew me up with him. "Mum and Dad will be talking ta us tomorrow. But I think we did the right thing, Sev. Now how about we take our own bath and practice some of that touchin' we like so much?"

"Yes, that sounds like the perfect ending to a perfect day." I let him pick me up and carry me into

the bathroom, making one last wish for the evening. May all of the Hagrid family lovers, established and potential, have nothing but love tonight.

Harry

I was afraid I was going to pass out. Ger had said yes. I wanted to see him so badly I could taste it but I wasn't sure that I wanted him to see me. My body was still playing catch up and there were times I felt so awkward that I was tripping over my own feet. What if he thought I looked like that stork I'd thought of before?

"Harry, I think you're beautiful, with or without your clothes on." His deep voice made my stomach jump. "I've seen you with only that little scrap of material that Hossic calls a bathing suit on, remember?"

We were right outside the door to the caravan. "Really? I look at you and see somebody so perfect you can't be real."

He pulled me into a hug and dropped a kiss on my hair. "It doesn't have to be now, Har'. We've got all the time in the world."

A cold chill ran up my spine and I pressed closer to him. "We don't know that, Ger. We may not have much time at all. But for now, I . . . I just want to do some exploring."

He chuckled and lifted me into his arms just like I didn't weigh anything at all. Then he opened the door and carried me inside. I didn't notice anything but him and when he sat down in the old brown leather chair with me in his lap, I forgot about the cold chill because he was giving me his kiss. His lips were hard and soft in turn, first brushing lightly over mine then returning with a little more pressure.

When I opened my mouth to drag in a breath, he was inside of me. Just a tickle of his tongue at my upper lip at first but he tasted good so I moved a little to get more of me against more of him. He tasted better than chocolate so I had to lick his lips for more and the little growl he gave made my stomach clench, but in a good way. Then our tongues were sliding together first in my mouth and then in his while I tried to figure out how to breathe and not let go.

But then our foreheads were resting together and we were both gulping air like it was water in a desert. My eyes had to be as big as saucers because I was so amazed. "Ger, does it always feel like that?"

"Like you're about to pass out?" He started scattering little kisses across my cheek, over my nose and down to the corner of my mouth. "No it doesn't, Harry." Then he stopped and with a little flick of his wrist lit the candles over the fireplace. "But I expect it will feel like that for us until . . . oh seventy years from now."

I grinned and started stroking his face. There was a little bit of stubble on his chin and I wondered what he'd look like with a beard. "I hope you're right. Have you ever grown a beard or a mustache, Ger?"

He chuckled. "About ten years ago, I thought it would make me look older so I grew both. Mum finally took me aside and firmly but kindly told me that it looked like I was growing a fungus that had gotten out of hand. I shaved it off that night and never tried again."

I chuckled with him and let my fingers touch his chin and the long column of his neck. The skin

was softer at the hollow of his throat and I started unbuttoning buttons so I could see more of him. He sat still and let me reveal his chest. There were tight red curls every where and they felt wiry against my finger tips. But when I brushed across a reddish nipple, he caught his breath.

His lap was growing kind of lumpy and I suddenly wanted to see him all over. "I think it's bath time, Gersey. I want more of you."

He sighed and nodded. "More it is, Harry. Up, little love, and we'll see if Cyrus heated the hot water."

That was twice he'd called me that and I liked it. I liked it a lot. We headed for the bathroom and it was nice and steamy once we turned the water on and finished undressing. Ger wanted to undress me first and I was so hard that when he tried to ease my underwear off, it hurt. I was biting my lip but he just chuckled and very gently eased his warm hand inside to hold my shaft.

And I exploded at his first touch. I would have fallen but he held me close and lowered us both to our knees. I was shaking so hard that I couldn't catch my breath but he held me and stroked a hand down my back. "It's all right, little love. You'd been saving that for a while, I know. Don't worry, you'll find that your recovery time is in minutes rather than hours."

I took another deep breath and nodded. He swished the hand that had held me in the bath water then finished pushing my y-fronts down. I was already attacking the buttons on his jeans so I could get his shirt all the way off. When I pushed it off his shoulders, I just looked at him. I'd seen his chest before but not like this, not when I could touch him and hold him against me.

"Harry, we need to turn off the water or we won't fit in the tub without flooding the place." He chuckled and stretched around me for the faucets. That pressed my nose against his chest and I tentatively licked the skin, just to see how he tasted there. He gasped while his whole chest rippled and I traced the movement down to the waist of his jeans with both hands.

The bulge there looked promising and I felt my shaft start to get hard again. "Ger, it's your turn. I want to see you."

"I know, little love. Slide on into the tub for me and I'll let you see what belongs to you now." He helped me up, kissing the end of my shaft when I stood.

Okay, so I could see that the tasting thing would feel pretty good. I stepped over the side of the tub and into the steaming water, never taking my eyes off of him. He stood and pushed his jeans down his legs before stepping out of them. Then with a little wiggle, he carefully eased his boxers over his erection and let them slide to the floor.

He was big. My eyes were glued to his shaft. It was long and thick and it had kind of a hood of skin around it that mine didn't have. "Why is there extra skin, Ger?"

"Giants don't go in for circumcision, Har'. I've noticed that the pureblood families usually snip the extra skin off right after a baby boy is born." He stepped over the side and sat down with a bit of a sigh at the opposite end of the tub. His legs stretched out on either side of me so I was kneeling between them, still watching his shaft bob in the water.

"May I touch it, Gersey?" I wanted to so badly that I could taste it.

"He belongs to you now, Harry. Touch away." He sat back and let his hands lie loose on his thighs while I leaned closer.

One hand wasn't going to be enough, I decided. So I used both hands to wrap around him. My fingers had to stretch to enclose him. "You're big, Ger, really, really big. I don't see how you'd

ever fit inside of me."

His shaft jerked when I said that and he chuckled. "I don't ever have to do that, Harry. There's a hundred ways to make love that don't involve anything more than fingers and cocks."

I'd heard someone call their shaft a cock once but I wasn't sure if it was a derogatory term or not so I hadn't used it. I gently slid my fingers down his . . . cock and the extra skin slid down, too. "Am I being too rough? How fragile is it?"

"Not that fragile, Harry, it just feels good." His hands were twitching just a little and I decided that it was because he wanted to touch me some more but he didn't want to interrupt my exploring. "Oh yeah, right there, Harry, your thumbs are stimulating a major nerve center and it feels wonderful."

I smiled and rubbed a little harder where he said it felt good. The skin beneath my fingers felt velvet soft and the crown flared all around like a mushroom head. I brought one finger up to trace all the way around the edge, fascinated by the softness of the flesh and the tear that was welling up from the eye of the crown. Even the little slit was bigger than mine and before he could say no, I leaned down and licked the little bead right into my mouth.

"Harry!" He almost shouted and his hands gripped the rolled edge of the tub, I think so he wouldn't grab me. "That's part of the advanced course that you're not ready for."

I was afraid that he'd say that. "But Mum said that I could kiss you once I turned 16. She didn't say where I could kiss you."

He chuckled and his hands grabbed my shoulders and pulled me up to lie on his chest. "That's an answer I'd expect from one of my brothers. It appears we've corrupted you, little love."

His chest hairs tickled and I wiggled just to feel them against my skin. My cock was against his stomach and I was pretty sure that I was going to come again. "Not corrupted, Ger, I'm just . . . expanding my horizons. Is it okay if I come again, 'cause it feels like I need to."

I felt one of his hands slide between us and grasp my cock while his lips came down and kissed me again. It was so warm that I had to move, tingles were traveling down my spine while I shifted against him and his hand slid up and down until I exploded again. I relaxed all over and he tucked my head under his chin while his hands rubbed my back from my shoulder blades down to my waist and back up again.

But I wanted his hands someplace else. "Ger, thank you. I love you so much."

"I love you too, Harry." I felt his cheek resting on my hair. "I'm glad that I finally found you, Har'. I was searching for a long time before I turned around and saw you."

I nuzzled the curls under my cheek. "Do you remember that I said it felt like we'd known each other for a long time?"

"Yes, I feel the same way, little love." He sighed a little. "Part of me wants you to hurry and grow up but part of me wants you to have the time to be a teenager, do teen things like play Quidditch and practical jokes with your year-mates."

"I've been doing that all along, Ger." I licked that nipple again and he chuckled. "But the others mostly get to leave Hogwarts and go home to family and a life outside of school, while this is the first summer I've been free."

"The Dursleys," he said their name with quiet menace.

"Yeah, them." I pillowed my chin on my arms so I could look at him. "Playing around and being a kid is what your family let me do this summer. That's the biggest, bestest gift I've ever had. Except for you, of course."

"Of course," he agreed and stroked my cheek with his left hand. "I love you, Harry Potter. What do you want to do after you graduate and Voldemort is destroyed?"

I blinked. He said that name so matter-of-factly that I was still kind of amazed, and destroyed sounded really good. "I want to travel a little and see parts of England that I've read about in books. I've always liked puzzles so I'd like to find a job where I can solve them. Charlie's brother Bill is a curse-breaker. That sounds like a really cool job."

"Curse-breaking? I'll enjoy meeting him and so will Hossic. You should ask Hoss about his hobby, you'd probably enjoy it, too." He grinned at me and I smiled back.

"But I want to go on tour with you and listen to you sing every night." I thought that now wasn't quite the time to share my vision of a baby with him. He was still a little unsure that I knew what I was getting into.

"Not to worry, Har', I'll sing to you whenever you want me to." He pulled me up a little and we kissed again. I wanted it to never end but I also wanted something else.

When we breathed again, I wiggled against his stomach and watched him catch his breath. "Ger, I want to see you come."

Those beautiful blue eyes blinked at me and he gave a little gasp when I wiggled my legs around his cock. "Harry, are you sure?"

I nodded and pulled free of his arms so I could slide down between his legs again. He was still rock hard and I gripped his cock with both hands, wondering how in the world it would ever fit inside of me. Because it was going to fit, I knew that much. He was moaning a little while I slid my hands up and down a little more quickly.

It was fun watching him get tighter and tighter around me, his legs clutching my waist and his hands back squeezing the tub rim. I could feel the pulse in his cock and I noticed that his testicles were changing a little, getting harder and tighter. I bet myself that meant he was ready to come and a few moments later, he did. I loved hearing the strangled shout of my name.

Darting out to catch some of the seed that was spurting out of his cock, my tongue tasted him gingerly to see if he tasted the same as me. I was kind of blandly bitter and he was too but maybe saltier than me. He was relaxed all over now so I leaned down and licked a little more seed from his skin, deciding that the saltiness was from the slight sheen of sweat that had broken out all over his body.

"You're going to kill me yet, my brave Harry." His voice was deep and sexy. "What did you think of it? Bland or bitter?"

"Salty and good," I said teasingly and licked some more from the tall column of flesh I still held in my hands.

He chuckled and pulled me up over him again; taking my lips with his while I moaned and got short of breath. "Sexy Harry, that was the best birthday present that I've ever gotten."

I grinned at him and wiggled a little, suddenly hard again. "I'm the one who got the best present, Ger. Would you touch me some more?"

Sitting up, he hugged me tight and whispered in my ear. "Yes, but I believe you asked for something else so why don't we get out of our bath and go to bed."

"Yes!" I said enthusiastically and practically jumped out of the tub. He followed a little slower and I learned how much fun it was to have someone else rub you all over with a towel. But then it felt good to be able to touch him all over, too.

Eventually, we made it into the big bed in the bedroom at the end of the caravan. I'd been amazed at how much bigger it was on the inside than it looked to be on the outside. There was a bedroom at each end and Gersey had been sharing it with the twins until they left to go back to work. The storage was under the bed to save space but the bed still would have slept everyone in my dorm if we'd been really friendly.

But right now it held two of us and that was all right with me. The sheets were cool and I shivered a moment before Ger warmed them with a soft command. I was going to learn how to do that one of these days, I promised myself. But his arms were around me and his lips were brushing over mine before slipping over my chin and down my throat to the hollow where his tongue tickled me.

Sighing, I let my hands go where they wanted, over his broad shoulders and down his arms as far as I could reach. Muscles were everywhere and I made a mental note to work harder on the weights in the Gryffindor locker room. I'd never be a lot bigger but I could be stronger and fitter. But there were little sparks of fire arcing through my chest and I looked down to see his strong white teeth tugging on my right nipple while his tongue flicked it.

"W-w-why does that feel so good?" I moaned a little.

"It's a major erogenous zone for men and women. For male wizards who give birth, they're usually extra-sensitive. Rubeus mentioned that Sev is at any rate." He switched nipples while I panted at how warm it was getting. Then he was moving down and the stubble on his chin was rubbed over my navel until I wanted to scream.

"Ger!" I felt him chuckle while swallowing my cock and I came again without any warning. He sucked hard and I spurted over and over into his mouth. When I fell back limp and sleepy, he chuckled and held my cock gently while he licked my whole groin clean, including my testicles.

I'd lost track of how many times I'd come tonight but feeling his tongue down there made me start to harden again. "Ger, would you put your fingers in me, the way you said we could? I've been practicing on myself and it feels good but not special."

"What have you been using, Harry, oil or lotion?" He sat up gracefully between my legs and pillowed my thighs on his so I was kind of lifted off the bed.

That felt kind of scary but in a good way, especially since I could see that great big cock of his getting hard again. "I had some hand lotion that Hermione gave me for Christmas last year after I used up the oil that Sev gave me."

"Not quite slippery enough, Har'," he reached for the bedside table and grabbed a bottle of something from the drawer. "I'll give you this to experiment with for now. It's a lubricating oil and lotion combined. Since meeting you, I've had to use it quite a lot."

I giggled at his mock glare then laughed harder when he tickled my sides with his fingers. It was odd but I hadn't known that making love could be so much fun. With him, everything was brighter and better. Maybe that was the best gift of all, I decided before realizing that slippery warm fingers were sliding over my entrance, tickling the skin and frictioning the suddenly sensitive hole.

"Ready, little love?" He asked me softly and I nodded determinedly, I had to know what it felt like. "It's going to feel odd to have someone else in there so tell me at once if there's any pain. Yes?"

"I will, Ger, I promise. Oh!" I felt his middle finger push past my muscle and sink inside of me. "It feels big . . . bigger than mine . . . oh, what's that?" Warmth flashed through my stomach and I clenched around him to try and get it back.

"That's the prostate gland that makes it feel so good, Harry. Hang on." He grinned down at me and brushed against it again while moving his finger in and out of me. It wasn't enough and I asked him for two fingers, which he slowly agreed to. That felt really full and kind of burned a little but the warmth was even better.

And his cock was bigger yet so I'd practice until I was stretched enough to take all of him inside of me. Not tonight, I thought while I watched the serious look on his face, but sooner than later. We had a few things to do first then he would claim me, the way that he said I'd claimed him. Smiling, I decided this was the best birthday ever.

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Parts 27 - 28 by Athea

Severus

August sixth may well remain in my mind as the day the world changed forever. We'd survived Harry's birthday, Ss'seren's decision to lay her egg in a nest she created out of our new greenhouse and the arrival of Bill Weasley, curse breaker. I knew more curses than any of the others so I spent the better part of four days teaching them to Bill so he and Charles could teach them to Harry and Draco.

They practiced on the school grounds under the reinforced wards that we'd put up on the 30th. Draco came home exhausted, barely able to eat, shower and go to bed. Harry did the same at school with Minerva keeping an eye on him for us. Gersey had had to leave for muggle London and some time in the recording studio. Harry was pretty subdued but he threw himself into learning the curses and counter-curses with all the passion of which he was capable.

I spent my time brewing potions for healing, wound disinfecting and strengthening. Rubeus traveled the Forest, enlisting the magic creatures to become an early warning system for us. Some of them would fight along with us while others would remain neutral. We'd take what we could get at this point. Remus and Sirius with their bondeds, Royan and Rhea were settling into Hogwarts and already making some changes that had been long in coming.

But I still didn't regret being dead. My teaching was done on a one to one basis now and my students were motivated to learn. Harry would never be a brewer of note but he would at least be able to differentiate between a good or bad potion. Draco was a much more promising student even if he chose a different path and I suspected he was going to take the wizard business community by storm.

Several lawyers had come calling but between Draco and Albus, they'd gone away scratching their heads to do their bidding. While rumors abounded in the papers, the wizarding world waited with baited breath to see what the Malfoy heir would do. Draco and I agreed that he had a free hand and I would support what ever path he chose. He and Charles went everywhere together and I approved of their relationship.

Charles and I had a long talk about what Draco could take at the moment with the rape still fresh in his mind and body. The red-headed Weasley had gone quiet when I explained what had happened to the young man. He'd asked what MacNair looked like and nodded when I brought up a moving picture of him. If ever I saw someone decide to kill, I saw that in Charles' eyes. My Draco was in good hands with the dragon handler.

How odd to feel contentment at such a dangerous time in my life. The baby's growth had slowed for the moment and my body had almost caught up with the changes. I was showing a little more but instead of making me self-conscious, I felt more settled. More loved by the wonderful man who held me each night and told me over and over how much he loved me. I would have pinched myself but I no longer needed the pain.

My death mark had flared the day after Harry's birthday but no new atrocities were reported and Harry didn't dream. The others rejoiced but Draco and I exchanged a look of complete agreement. Voldemort was planning something big and just because we didn't know who had just died to give him that power boost didn't mean that we wouldn't find out shortly. But as the days went by and nothing came out, the order of the light relaxed.

Which made the revelation all the worse when it came in a screaming headline - Village of Hampstead Destroyed! The entire muggle village of 356 souls had been utterly destroyed by fire. Nothing living remained, not even the insects. The postal truck had been the first visitor on his weekly schedule to the little village off the beaten track. He'd found nothing but charred buildings and the bodies of the dead. Scotland Yard had been called in but the village itself was off limits.

Not a fluke, I thought and had Charles contact his father to alert the Aurors to the possibility that magic had been involved. Arthur Weasley couldn't get permission from the Minister's office to investigate but he took a trip to the area, cloaked from the muggles and it was a shaken man who apparated to the gates of Hogwarts. Albus decided that Arthur needed to become a part of our secret.

So he brought him through the Forest and to our home. To say that he was surprised would be a misnomer, he was shocked silent. Perhaps it was the knowledge that his sons were now on the firing line that caused him the most consternation. No father ever thinks that his sons are ready to face the evil that faced us today. I know that I was hoping with all my heart that Draco and Harry would be left out of the final battle.

"I . . . it's too much, Albus." Arthur sighed and pinched his nose. I silently put a cup of tea in his hand and pretended not to see the tremor that shivered the surface. Sitting down by Ru', I let him cuddle me close, no longer caring what the man before us thought of me or our relationship.

But when he finally looked up and saw us, a smile crossed his lips. "The age of miracles has come again, it seems. Congratulations, Rubeus and . . . Severus. Perhaps your bonding gives hope for our future, at least I hope so."

"Thanks, Auror Weasley, we're happy." Rubeus said gravely and I nodded my own acceptance of his congratulations. "Now, Albus wouldn't have brought ya here unless it was important. What did ya find at Hampstead?"

"Nothing." He said with a sigh and finished his tea. "The place had been scoured clean completely. Hampstead is a dead zone as if nothing live had ever set foot within its stone walls. There's no residue left of any kind, I've never been so shocked in my life. They've taken the bodies away but one of the policemen told me they'd found every sort of animal from squirrels up to men . . . burned alive."

"Nothing left," I said harshly and shivered. The boys didn't know what that meant but the older wizards did. I could see the bewildered looks pass from Draco to Harry and the Weasley boys. "Nothing means that all the energy and power generated by the living was absorbed by something or . . . someone."

"Voldemort," Draco said faintly and shivered, remembering the dream of his father's death. Charles put a comforting hand on his shoulder and Draco leaned into it while Arthur's eyebrow

arched upwards.

Harry had wrapped both arms around his knees and was rocking back and forth gently. "He's gathering power for another attack, a final sweep of those who oppose him."

Albus sighed and looked his age. "Yes, I'm afraid that is exactly what he is planning. And we have nothing that can raise that kind of power for our side."

I had an idea but it depended on further research so I kept quiet for now. Arthur came down on our side with a vengeance and promised to bring in some of his fellow Aurors who could be trusted. We no longer had much time to prepare but what little we had would be spent in gathering allies for this battle. The final battle if we had anything to say about it, I thought and rested my head against Rubeus' shoulder.

He pulled me in tight and I let him, needing his strength to bolster my courage. I wanted him to make it all go away, to make our lives safe and free of the threat of Voldemort. There were going to be sacrifices made in this battle and I wished with all my heart that those deaths would pass by this new found family of mine.

Thankfully, I had no talent at prevision so I could not be tormented by a look into the future. I thought that a blessing right now.

Rubeus

I couldn't hardly believe in such evil. To kill an entire village of muggles to gather power was beyond my ability to understand. Sev did though and I could feel his thoughts sicken and his need for comfort grow. So I pulled him in close and gave him my strength as best I could. He hugged me back and within the hour we were alone again.

"It was done on the first," Sev said almost absentmindedly, "the first of August."

I suddenly made the connection and looked down at him. "Lughnasadh, the first harvest leading to Mabon on September 21st."

"Yes, the old ways are still celebrated by the Dark. Mabon brings the end of the harvest and the reaping of great power." He leaned in and wrapped his arms around me, as far as he could reach. "And that leads to Samhain, when the walls grow thin between the worlds and creatures of both Dark and Light can enter our realm. That's his target."

Rubbing his back, I felt cold chills race over my skin and his. "We'll find a way ta stop him, Sev, we will."

"I hope so, love. Our lives and the life of our child depend upon us finding the power we need to counter him." He said quietly and I silently agreed.

The next six weeks passed so quickly that one day ran into another and rest became hastily snatched between periods of work. The school grounds became a mini-camp for the forces of the Light. Owls were sent to the students telling them that school was postponed because of a gnarly invasion. The exterminators were having a hard time eradicating the little menaces.

It gave us more time to keep enforcing our defenses and bringing new weapons into being. Bill was very much in demand and he taught curses right and left along with their counters. I learned a lot but I also worried as the days wound down towards the feast of Mabon. My family stayed near and became the nucleus around which our defenses grew. The twins returned and brought

another caravan with them so we weren't so crowded.

Bill and Charlie had the second bedroom in Gersey's caravan and my little brother had finally returned after six weeks in the music studio making a new album with the muggle band he was currently with. Harry practically levitated into his arms when he came striding onto the school grounds. I was introducing the hippogriffs to the others that had declared on our side so I wasn't the only one who saw their reunion.

Sirius was growing a wee bit restive by the time that Gersey let Harry down. If I'd been away from Sev for that much time, I'd still be holding him so I thought Ger had been real restrained. But Harry's godfather was glaring pretty good by the time he reached their side. I chuckled and went back to teaching the Aurors how to work with a hippogriff. Ceyx was training his kin how to work with humans so together we were training up some unbeatable fighting teams.

At least we hoped we were.

"Rubeus, could I have a word with you?" Dumbledore asked once the new teams moved off to practice in the Quidditch field. When I nodded, he pulled me closer to the Forest. "I have been approached by a representative of the MacPherson Family of giants. He requested a face to face meeting here at the school."

"They're bonny fighters, Headmaster. They've won the Highland Games three times in the last decade." I felt a kind of tingle in my head and I thought maybe it was Severus. "Mum is the one ya need ta talk ta. Her Mum is a MacPherson and Granny is always telling stories about her Family. Ya mind walking home with me, now?"

"Excellent idea, Rubeus, I've had no exercise today at all." He beamed at me and beckoned to Harry, who was still being talked to by Sirius while Gersey listened with folded arms. Not a good sign and one that my new brother-in-law would learn as time went on. Rhea distracted him and they made their escape to us.

We walked real fast for a little bit then slowed down so the Headmaster wouldn't get too tired. It was real warm for September and none of the trees had begun changing color so it felt like summer was still here. We were all enjoying it and it was good to see Harry so animated, telling Gersey all the things that had happened while he was away. My brother couldn't seem to stop touching Harry, even when it was just a caress to his hair or a hand on his shoulder.

Maybe I could get some alone time for them while the rest of the family conferred on the MacPhersons. We reached a home that still kind of surprised me. It was all so different from what had been there in late April when I found Sev and brought him home. But it was different in a good way and I was already smiling when I saw my bonded come around the corner of the house with my Mum.

They were smiling too and Sev's face lighted up when he saw me. "Ru', you're early. Gersey, welcome home."

It was kind of confusing for a bit but we all got sorted out and Harry dragged Gersey towards the little place where he and Sev liked to relax. Mum just smiled when they left. "They'll be back for tea. But Headmaster, ya can 'ave yars now. It's all ready for pourin'. Come along in."

Sev was hugging me right outside in public and he didn't hardly ever do that so I knew he had something good to tell me. "Ru', did you feel something a while ago?"

I kissed his cheek. "A tingle 'bout an hour ago?"

He chuckled. "Yes, a tingle."

"What was it? Ya come up with a new potion?" I rubbed his back and felt the swell of his stomach against me, bigger than ever. And that's when I felt it, a tingle in my mind but also a flutter where he touched me. "The baby?"

He smiled dreamily and stroked above the spot where we touched. "He turned over or around or whatever position he was in and I felt him. At first I thought it was gas but Mum came in and I told her about it. She laid her hand right here," he showed me and I put my hand there real gentle like. "And he kicked his little foot so we both felt it."

"A Quidditch player, ya think?" I could hardly get the words out over the lump in my throat. And our son kicked out again as if to say 'Yes!'

"Possibly, Ru', or perhaps he's a musician like his Uncle Gersey?" He smiled up at me and I just had to kiss him again to celebrate our son moving.

There really was a tiny baby inside of my love and he was a brand new person made up of little bits of both of us. I could hardly wait to get him out into the world and start loving him. Since I couldn't touch him just yet, I touched Sev instead and he kissed me back so sweetly that I wanted to pick him up and take him to bed right then and there. But we had duties still and we ended our kiss for the moment, walking in for tea.

Mum was listening to Dumbledore with a little wrinkle between her eyes and I got tense, just like that. Severus caught my change in mood instantly and looked back and forth between me and her. "T'was Ian MacPherson, ya say, Headmaster? Would ya be able ta describe 'im for me?"

Dumbledore pulled something out of his pocket and I recognized a pensieve. "I put the entire encounter in this to preserve it." He fussed a moment then a small moving picture appeared above the kitchen table. "There, that's got it."

It was a face that I'd never forgotten and Mum hadn't either. She got a real forbidding look on her face. "That's no Ian MacPherson but black-hearted Geil. 'e should still be in prison for hurting Rube and a dozen other crimes."

"Ru', is he one of those who hurt you?" Severus' voice was still silky smooth but the menace was back in it after months of being gone.

"Aye," I was confused and a little scared, big half-giant that I am. The old pain swamped me for a moment and Sev held me fiercely.

"He won't hurt you again, my love." He promised me and I saw him and Mum exchange a real scary look.

Dumbledore didn't understand what was going on but he closed the pensieve so Geil's picture disappeared and I began to get my courage back. Mum was furious and she left the table for the outside. When we followed her, we found her crouched on the plot of ground that would one day be our herb garden. Digging both hands into the black soil, she called out to the air.

"In darkness and in light; through earth and rain; by flame and wind; I summon thee to my side, my sisters of the dawn." Her voice had that eerie vibration in it that had scared me good when I was a little one and she'd had to call a meeting of her sister-kin.

Severus held on tight to me and I've got to say that I was holding onto him like I was afraid something would snatch him away from me. Dumbledore watched with amazed eyes as three giants appeared before us. Great-aunt Illona of the Gibson Clan was dressed in her Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes, her white hair braided over one shoulder with a bit of heather woven into the

end.

Granny MacPherson wore her tartans, her reddish-gray hair loose on her shoulders. Arwen Innes was the youngest of the four and her dark hair was piled high on her pretty head. Her flowing purple robe looked like something that usually didn't leave the bedroom. I'd done my share of sighing over my second cousin before I realized that no girl was going to do it for me.

"I thank ye, all for comin'. We've got a problem, a big one. Come ye all in and we'll explain." Mum nodded to them and they all nodded back before looking at us. "Ye all know me Rubeus and this is 'is bonded, Severus. And this is 'eadmaster Dumbledore of the Order of the Phoenix."

The Headmaster started a bit and the giants chuckled as one. Aunt Illona spoke first. "Congratulations, Rube and Severus. But what's this I'm seein'? Ya're expecting?"

Granny clapped her hands and took two strides to hug us both. "I'll be a great-grandmother at last. Wonderful!"

Her hugs can squeeze a body to death so I made sure that Sev didn't get the full treatment. "Thanks, Granny. We think it's a boy and he's got five months to go."

"It will be less than nine but more than six." Arwen said in a quiet voice, the one that she used when a vision came to her. I flinched but her lavender eyes came to mine. "But he'll be healthy and powerful from the moment he's born." Then she laughed out loud. "I can feel him from here and he's not yet five months formed. You're growing a prodigy, my dear cousin."

I blushed and Sev kind of sighed, smiling at her and resting his head against my chest. "Thank ya, Arwen. Let's go in for our tea."

I just hoped that we had enough apple crumble to feed them all.

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Parts 29 - 30 by Athea

Author's Notes:

The enemy makes a move to sneak past Hogwart's wards.

Harry

It felt so good to cuddle in Gersey's lap. It wasn't sexual although my body was taking notice of his scent and the feel of him against me. It was just . . . being with him. We had stopped talking finally and I relaxed against his chest, listening to his heartbeat. I didn't want to ever move again.

"I missed you, Harry. The next time I leave, I'm giving you a cell phone. Owls don't work when I'm surrounded by muggles." He nuzzled my temple and I smiled. "I'm not kidding, little love, I felt like you'd disappeared except for my dreams."

I sat up straight and looked at him. "You dreamed me? I dreamed you every night. It was almost like having you there. I kind of hated to wake up some mornings."

He smiled and brushed back my hair again. "Me, too. On the plus side, I wrote like a demon for Peter because I wanted to get back here so badly."

"Will you play some of them for us?" I asked eagerly.

"Certainly, since most of them were written for you, little love." He cupped my chin and ran his thumb over my lips. "Peter thinks I'm sickening for something. I told him that I was lovesick."

I smiled and blushed at the same time. I loved hearing him say that. "Me, too. I missed holding you and hearing your voice."

"Peter let me have one of the CD's we cut so you could hear the new songs even if I'm not here. I've got a CD player for you, Harry. Call it a late birthday present." He kissed me gently and I licked my lips to get more of his taste, while I thought about my wonderful birthday.

But just when I thought we might get serious, Gersey started. "Damn, Mum has called in the big guns. Up you get, Harry, I'll introduce you to some more family."

I wondered what he meant but hurried to get up so we could go see what was happening. We were soon back at the house and the front door was standing wide open. When we came inside, I saw three ladies that I'd never met before. One of them was tall, dark-haired and beautiful. She had a heart-shaped face and beautiful almost almond shaped eyes that lit up when they saw Gersey.

"Dear Gersey, how very virile you look." She stood and sauntered over to us while I fought with an urge to curse her so she wouldn't get too close. But then her gaze dropped to me and she raised an eyebrow. "Robbing the cradle, Gersey? I thought better of you."

"Arwen, you're looking beautiful as always." He smiled at her and put an arm around my shoulders to pull me close. I approved of that and hugged him with both arms. "I'd like you to meet Harry Potter. We'll be bonding on his 18th birthday so hands off unless you want to pull back a stub."

His voice never changed a note from compliment to warning and I grinned up at him for putting a date on our bonding. I just hoped that I could wait that long. She surprised me though and laughed a kind of tinkling laugh that made me want to join in. Her hand raised my chin a little so she was looking into my eyes and I saw them go unfocused for a moment.

"Earlier is better, little one. You will fight for what is yours and reclaim your heritage from the Dark." Her voice was odd and when she blinked, I knew that she'd had a vision. Her eyes went to Ger's and they exchanged a kind of cryptic look. "I wish you luck with this one. He's going to run you ragged and love you to distraction."

Gersey laughed and so did I. "Thank you, Ma'am. I promise I will."

"Goodness gracious me, little Ger is bonding, too?" Another voice came from behind Arwen and a white-haired giantess crossed to us.

"Granny," Ger managed to say before being hugged off his feet. I watched wide-eyed at the sight. "It's been too long since I had one of your hugs."

"Well, if'n ya'd coom to visit more than once a year on me birthday, ya would na be so lackin'. And this is yar brave young lad, is it?" She let Gersey go and gently brushed my hair back from my forehead. "Yar a wee one, aren't ya, laddie? But with a 'eart as big as the sun. Welcome ta the family, Harry Potter." And then I was lifted right off my feet and hugged really well but more gently than she'd done her grandson.

I'd finally figured out that she must be Mum's mother so I hugged her right back and kissed her ruddy cheek with a soft 'thank you'. The room was filled with people and all the chairs were taken so Gersey and I went to sit by the stove. I met the third giantess then and she told me to call her Aunt Illona while she pinched my cheek tenderly. Every time I turned around, my family was growing.

I couldn't seem to stop smiling and I leaned into Ger so he could put an arm around me. When Voldemort was destroyed, I had so much to look forward to. But once tea was passed around and some of those cinnamon sugar biscuits that Severus and I liked so much, they got down to business. And I got scared really fast at their news.

Draco

Charlie and I walked home through the Forest. How odd that the small house near the lake had come to mean home to me, I thought wistfully. Without seeming to, I watched my companion's far away look. His father had taken him aside after our training and he'd been distracted ever since. I hoped that Arthur Weasley hadn't told him to stay away from me, although I wouldn't have blamed him if he had. I knew that I wasn't what the Auror would want for his son, money and pure blood status aside; I really had nothing to recommend me to their family.

And I still had an irrational fear of sex that colored everything I did with Charlie. I'd be feeling really good, laughing and joking then he'd say something or touch me and I'd freeze. Severus had taken me through the whole rape once he realized that I was still dreaming it. He'd put me under a spell that I'd never heard of before. I floated between the past and the present and he guided me through the whole disgusting event.

But I was one step removed from it and I watched the old Draco get raped; heard every nasty word he'd poured into my ear; saw my father watching with an uplifted eyebrow; and watched the explosion of green energy pass from me to MacNair. While I was still between, Severus showed me the small tendril of energy that bound me to my rapist and he helped me cut it, severing any link between us.

I hadn't had a nightmare since and I felt stronger than ever before. Mainly because Sev had also shown me the golden reservoir of energy that I now had to draw upon. Did I wish that I'd had someone gentle to initiate me into power? Yes, but I'd learn a long time ago that wishes don't come true. That said, sometimes late at night, I still made a wish on a star even while part of my brain chided me for it.

Charlie Weasley was just as far away from me as those stars were.

"Draco, what's wrong?" His voice brought me back to the here and now.

I smiled a little, he sounded like Severus for a moment. "Nothing, just thinking about the past and wondering what's for dinner."

"Dad said that a new regulation just came down from the Ministry." He pushed back a lock of hair that had escaped his ponytail and sighed. "It makes it illegal for any Auror to take a position on the governing boards of any corporation."

"Really?" I thought about that and smiled. "They've got the wind up and they're trying to head me off before I get started. That's good."

"Good?" He frowned at me. "I thought that you wanted some of the Aurors to go on one of your boards?"

"I did but it's better if they're forbidden. This way I can go in front of the press and tell them sadly that the Ministry is keeping them from helping their fellow wizards. With all the chicanery that the lawyers have discovered, it would have been awfully nice to have intelligent, law abiding Aurors to help me bring my businesses back to honesty."

"Hell, Draco, you look like an innocent angel when you say that." Charlie was smiling again and he gently ruffled my hair. "So, it's not a bad thing?"

"No, it will work in our favor when I disenfranchise the current members of all the boards." I thought about it. "They should get their letters tomorrow by owl. I can hardly wait to hear the screams of outrage. Some of them depend on their salaries as trustees to keep up with their neighbors." I caught his quick flinch at that and inwardly sighed. He didn't have a ruthless bone in his body. "Of course, I've made sure that their children have scholarships to Hogwarts so they won't suffer."

"I love the way that you think ahead, Draco." He smiled again and I memorized it for later. He had the most beautiful smile and it always gave me a twinge whenever he flashed it my way.

"It looks like there's company." I said when we reached the crowded clearing. Raised voices from the house didn't sound familiar and our steps quickened to see who it was. The introductions were numerous when we got inside and learned what was going on.

Charlie looked pole-axed when he met Arwen Innes and I sighed silently. Damn, just when I was dreaming a little innocuous dream, reality had to crash in. I kissed each lady's hand and bowed politely, accepting their exclamations of 'more family' with a little wish that it were true. Although I'd never admit it, I felt safe being a member of the Hagrid family.

After getting a piece of apple crumble, I sat down on the floor by Harry so he could catch me up on the situation. It was the first time that I'd heard of Geil MacPherson and Granny was tight-lipped at his membership in her family. He was a black sheep of the clan and she was practically gnashing her teeth at his further betrayal. Voldemort was using him to try and get a toe-hold into Hogwarts.

Our elders were all talking back and forth above us but Harry had his thinking look on and I know that I was considering a way to let Geil in and at the same time, keep him out. I told Harry about my idea and he grinned then told me what he'd been thinking. It would work and still keep the Dark from the warded grounds.

Now, all we had to do was wait for a lull in the conversation to share our idea.

Charlie

I licked my fingers and wished we'd gotten back earlier. Rubeus' apple crumble was delicious but his Mum's was pure ambrosia. Without seeming to, I watched Draco to make sure he was all right. It seemed like that was my only goal in life these days. After Severus and I had our little chat, I'd had to swim the lake about six times to get rid of the anger or at least transmute it into energy I could work with.

When I first met the teenager, I'd only thought of how handy he was with Ss-serens. But something had happened when I came back with the vitamin supplements she needed and overheard the little elf tell him that one of the death eaters had murdered his own son for Voldemort. He'd taken it so calmly and I thought at the time how brave he was and how lucky that he'd escaped his father in time. I just hadn't realized that he hadn't escaped unscathed.

His cool blond looks had stirred something inside of me. Something in his wounded soul called to me. I've always wanted to take care of the rare and beautiful dragons from the moment I first saw one. Perhaps it was his name or his angelic looks or his acerbic wit but Draco was no less rare or precious to me now. I wanted to take care of him, make him smile and watch his Machiavellian plans unfold.

Dad had asked me straight out what was going on between us. I told him that I was his friend and that he might never return anything more than friendship. He sighed and hugged me close, telling me to be careful with both of our hearts. I didn't have the heart to tell him of the rape. Severus had only told me because of the direction our paths seemed to be taking. I'd been rather bewildered by his sudden freezing when I touched him even though it wasn't sexual at all.

But now I understood and I would be damned before I ever knowingly scared him. My attention came back to the here and now when I heard his voice. Those cool, educated tones always made me smile.

"Move the gates outwards into unprotected territory with an illusion and with wards that appear strong and sure." He spoke so clearly that the others began nodding. "Then the real gates should be made invisible. Those wards would remain intact so whatever they have planned would happen on neutral ground."

Harry spoke up next. "Then we could erect a magical mirror at the real gates so whatever they do is reflected back to them. Maybe all the way back to Voldemort."

I nodded and silently agreed, listening to the adults begin to elaborate on the bare bones of the teens plans. Draco smiled at me when I whispered 'good thinking' and I fought my urge to touch him, only giving in when he gently patted my knee. When that had become an erogenous zone, I didn't know but it was one now. I exchanged a look of commiseration with the returned Gersey.

I was jealous as hell that he could touch Harry in front of everyone while I had to hold back and pretend to just be a friend. Black's reaction had shown a bit of trouble in the works and I wondered what I could do to help. I understood why he felt the way he did but neither of these teens was the innocent that my littlest brother was. I love Ron dearly and perhaps he'd surprise me but I didn't think he'd survive being cursed the way these two boys had been.

Watching Bill throw curse after curse on them was an exercise in biting my tongue. Only after they were worn out and aching did I get to give them my lessons in the care of dragons and other magical creatures. How sick was that? I often wondered to myself. Rubeus had consoled me when I'd gone to him with my questions. He felt the same way, he said. But all we could do was what we knew best and that meant letting them make mistakes and taking care of them afterwards.

If I only could really take care of Draco, I thought. Hold him, be strong for him and take care of the pain, all of the pain. I found myself looking at him with longing and I quickly dropped my eyes. But it was too late and I heard him gasp. I had to make it right before he fled from me. "Draco, I . . ."

Slim fingers pressed against my lips and I had the insane urge to lick them. "Charlie, we're going to go and sit with Ss-serens while we talk about . . . this."

I nodded shakily and he smiled shyly at me. Looking up, I saw Gersey give me a smile and a subtle thumbs-up. One of these days, I was going to sit down with him and ask for pointers. Later today sounded good to me. The others were talking and dividing up the duties that would put the plan into action. Draco and I slipped out the door and around the corner to the greenhouse.

Ss-serens had claimed it as her own and laid her egg in the coziest dragon's nest that we could build for her. She barely stirred when we slipped inside for our talk. Draco dragged me down one side to the pile of pillows that Severus used when he was reading to her. She liked the Edda Sagas in the original Icelandic and he just happened to be fluent in that language.

"Charlie, I would like to know your intentions." Draco said almost quaintly to my ears but I could hear the note of uncertainty there. "I know that I'm not much of a catch except for the money but

are you . . . do you like me?"

Not much of a catch? I thought incredulously. "Draco, you're . . . brave and daring. Intelligent and so much smarter than I am that it's not funny."

"You think I'm smart?" He looked tentatively pleased. "We know different things and you're just as intelligent."

"You think so?" I was grinning foolishly, I just knew it. "You're sixteen and I'm ten years older than you." I had both of his hands in mine and I realized that he was shaking a little. I didn't want that but when I tried to let go, he wouldn't let me. "Are you afraid of me, Dra'?"

"Not really of you, Charlie." He swallowed hard. "But some of the feelings definitely scare me. I don't know anything about making love, being raped yes. Making love doesn't have to be like that, Severus told me so. He spoke to you too, didn't he?"

"Yes, I thought I was doing something wrong when you froze up or suddenly went silent." I brought one of his hands up to my lips and brushed a kiss across his white knuckles on first that hand then the other. "I don't want to hurt you, Draco. I want to hold you and kiss you and make the pain all go away."

He was blinking back tears and he pulled hard on his hands. I let go in dismay, thinking that I'd gone too fast, only to have him hesitantly move into my arms. I hugged him close for a moment than gently held him so he wouldn't feel constrained. He was rigid at first but slowly he relaxed against my chest and I let my hands begin to stroke his back. I tucked him into my side in case I got an inappropriate reaction to his slim weight molded against me.

He felt good and I turned my head just enough so I could lay a kiss on his fair head. We sat half-inclined against the cushions while Ss-serens purred beside us. It seemed we had her blessing too. "All right, Draco? Is this too much?"

I felt the tiny shake of his head and his fingers began to stroke my arm gently. "I was envious of Harry. He can touch Gersey any time he wants. And hug him without flinching or being told no. Watching Sev with Rubeus hurt too, because they love each other so much it makes me ache inside."

"I was jealous, too." I admitted. "I didn't expect to find you here, Draco Malfoy. I've been looking for a couple of years now for someone to be a friend and lover. Now that I've found you, I'm not letting go."

He looked up at me and slowly smiled. "It may take a while, Charlie, but I want that too, to be a friend and lover."

"Then that's what we'll do." I leaned in and brushed my lips very, very gently against his. Over his shoulder, I saw Ss-serens blow a little steam our way and wink a silver eye at me. There was one partisan on our side. Hopefully, there'd be a few more. Finally, I knew what I wanted. And he was definitely worth waiting for.

Remus

Royan stroked my hair and I quivered from the force of my climax. I was still buried within her, my head on her shoulder while I tried to get a little more air into my starved lungs. I'd never been so comfortable in my life or so fulfilled or happy. Sometimes I still pinched myself to make sure that I wasn't dreaming.

"Remus, do you think Dobby could find some more of those green olives?" Her soft voice broke into my stupor and I smiled into her throat.

"If you want them then Dobby will have them." I stretched a little and raised my head to look into her beautiful eyes. "Another craving?"

She grinned. "I just have this urge for that delicious briny taste."

"Well, today's the day that we go see Poppy for the three month check up so we can ask her if it's all right for you to have that much salt." I reminded her.

"I am getting big awfully fast." She looked down at the small mound that was replacing her flat stomach. "Wouldn't it be funny if we were having twins?"

Twins? I froze for a moment but the wolf inside of me barked in anticipation. "Are there lots of dual births in the Hagrid family?"

She chuckled. "Yes, there's at least six sets within my generation and four in Mum's. It's a MacPherson trait." She blinked and for a moment I heard a call inside my mind. "That's Mum calling in the Matriarchs. We need to get up and head for home."

I nodded and eased myself from her warm depths. She kissed me hard and rolled to her side of the big bed that had replaced my single. I joined her in the shower and we washed each other from head to toe before drying off and getting dressed. I looked around at the well furnished bedroom and felt . . . content. Such an odd feeling and most unexpected for the loner that I had been.

The wolf in me was ecstatic at having such a large pack and the man part was just grateful for being loved by the family who'd taken me in. The baby still surprised and disconcerted me. I'd thought that teaching would be my only link to children but now I was going to be a father and that frightened me. I didn't know anything about taking care of babies or nurturing them. What if I screwed up? What if I harmed them while I was in wolf-form?

"Sweetheart, it's going to be all right." Royan's warm hands cupped my face and she kissed me tenderly. "All new parents go through a questioning phase. Will I be a good mother? Will I be as good as my Mum was? What if I drop one of them?"

I didn't want to but I chuckled. "Or hold one upside down? Or stick him or her with the diaper pin? Or get boiled peas spit back into my face?"

"No child of mine will be eating boiled peas." She shuddered. "I hate peas with a passion. They'll have to go to their Uncle Rubeus' to get peas. Rube loves them."

We shared a laugh and finished getting dressed. Since school wasn't in session, we wore our muggle clothes and Royan complained that she'd outgrown another pair of jeans while pulling on a loose skirt. She grumbled all the way down the stairs to the front hall where we met Sirius and Rhea. Now, that was a surprise to me, the fact that Siri had fallen so fast and hard for a woman bigger than him.

Royan was three inches taller than me but slender. Rhea was a full figured woman almost half a foot taller than him. The painter Rubin would have paid a fortune to paint the voluptuous red head. If Siri had been a wolf, he'd have rolled over and exposed his soft underbelly to her, which is pretty much what he'd done as a man. He looked the way I felt.

Stunned but happy.

Rhea had gotten the same call that Royan had so we began the walk to the place that had become home to all of us. Odd that the Forbidden Forest had welcomed so many of us, strays that needed a good home and found one within its dark depths. We talked of little things like Royan's cravings, Siri's battle with the school librarian to get more muggle books on the shelves and my lesson plans for the coming school year.

We were so comfortable with each other that even silence felt good. I had my arm around Royan's waist and Siri had his around Rhea while I sighed in contentment. If only we didn't have a threat hanging over us, I thought with a little frisson of warning that I got some times when things were about to go bad.

The cottage came into view or rather what had been a cottage and was now a growing house. I could just see the top of Ss-seren's head through the greenhouse glass and I smiled at the thought of the beautiful dragon and her handlers. Draco was relaxing more and more with his training and the friendships that were growing between the members of the Order.

Walking through the front door brought us face to face with three giantesses. Once we all got sorted out and introduced to them, I almost had my spine snapped by Granny's hug. Arwen took one look at Royan and broke out into laughter.

"Dear cousin, you're such an over-achiever." She chuckled and gently laid her hand a few inches above Royan's stomach. "Congratulations, you're carrying triplets."

Triplets? I wanted to faint but Sirius was holding me up. Mum was exclaiming excitedly and the rest of the family was cheering. Royan was looking a little stunned herself and I could feel the wolf inside of me howling with delight. A litter of Lupins, that almost sounded like a song that Gersey might write.

Somehow I found myself in the big green leather chair with Royan in my lap and the rest of the Hagrids talking about whatever they'd been talking about before we arrived. Her head rested on my shoulder and I had one of her hands in mine while my thoughts began to slow. "Royan, is it all right that they're . . . triplets?"

When she raised her head, she was crying slowly and I almost panicked before I saw her smile. Our eyes met and said all those things that we'd later say out loud. But for now, we accepted our fate and quietly rejoiced. When I finally began listening to the conversation, my heart almost seized. An attack on Hogwarts would put Royan and the babies in danger.

My wolf-self began to growl and I tightened my hold on her. Catching Rubeus' eyes, I saw my fears mirrored in his eyes. When we broke up into groups, I found us paired with Harry, Gersey, Aunt Illona and Dad. Aunt Illona and Dad were talking about the mirror that would reflect back the attack. I understood some of what they were talking about but I was still getting used to Dad's knowledge of magic theory.

It was immense and made me feel like a first year student trying to keep up with the teacher. But when he finished and Aunt Illona added her bit, I still wasn't quite sure that I understood. Harry was scratching his head and looking puzzled so I let him ask the questions. Royan knew what I was doing but she just smiled and kept my secret.

"Dad, how about I give it a try?" Gersey said with an affectionate smile at his father.

"Too much again?" Dad said with a sigh and combed his hand through his silky black hair. He grinned suddenly and I saw again how much alike he and Royan looked. "It's your fault for being such a good audience."

Gersey chuckled. "Harry, you like music. Why?"

The teen looked at him and tilted his head to one side. "Aside from the fact that I love your voice and listening to you play?" Gersey ruffled his hair and they exchanged the same kind of look that Royan and I did. "It makes me feel happy . . . and loved."

"Remus?" Those blue eyes came to mine and I thought about it.

"A good tune can make you laugh or cry. The songs you remember have words that stick with you. A really good song makes you want to sing along." I thought about what I liked best about Gersey's songs. "Even when I didn't know that a wizard was writing some of your songs, I responded to the rhythm and the harmonies that layer each of them."

"Harmonics is the key, Remus." Aunt Illona said briskly. "That's a good description of Gersey's talent. The layering you mentioned is mainly a series of dual harmonics. That is why we're paired as we are. Remus, you and Royan are perfectly matched - harmonically speaking as well as personally. Gersey and Harry are, too. And for many years, Petronicus and I have worked on matching our magic so we can work together."

Harry lit up with his biggest smile and leaned into Gersey's side. "So we're going to make the mirror with harmonics, three on each side?"

"Exactly, my boy," Dad beamed at him. "Remus and Royan are suited for the base of the mirror while Illona and I will take the middle and you and Gersey the top. Gersey, what would be the best instrument to use to keep us in sync?"

"I'm thinking drums, Dad. They'd be easy to keep the beat going." Gersey reached behind him and pulled forward a small drum, tapping gently on the stretched hide.

A shiver went up my spine at the same time that Harry shook himself. The simple tapping was slightly hollow and I felt the hair on the back of my neck stand up. The tap became more solid and began to speed up, combining the heel of his hand and his fingers. Royan put out her hands to the middle of our circle, palms facing me just above the floor. I copied her motion, feeling a tingle in my palms.

Dad and Aunt Illona mirrored that about a hands width above ours and in the space between us, something began to take shape. Harry cast a quick look at Gersey and put his hands above theirs while Ger stopped drumming and matched him. But the drumming was still in my head and I mentally visualized a mirror growing from the tingling in our hands.

And within a few moments, it was there . . . perfect and silvery. I smiled at Royan's giggle and Harry's muted 'brill' but it was Dad's almost silent 'yes' that made me smile. He was a perfectionist whose opinion I was beginning to seek. Aunt Illona nodded sharply and lowered her hands. But the mirror stayed intact while Royan pulled hers away next.

Gersey nodded to Harry and the teen slowly pulled his away, leaving the three of us sustaining the shimmering mirror between us. We held it for a long moment then Dad spoke. "Good, we'll try it outside next then practice growing it bigger until it is capable of catching anything the enemy throws at us."

Aunt Illona smiled. "Then we'll let the others try to bring it down. Royan and Harry will both need to get it started before moving to a safe distance."

"No," Harry exclaimed. "I want to help."

Gersey sighed. "I know you do, Har' but if they see you then they might concentrate on you and

notice the mirror."

The teen frowned but nodded slowly. Royan was looking a bit rebellious, too but Aunt Illona shook her head. "Child, you're carrying babies and your hormones are all over the map. Neither of those conditions is conducive to holding steady for long moments. The mirror is going to have to be in place long before they come so no stray energy betrays us to the enemy. I expect we'll have to sit there for about three hours."

Harry's eyes were wide and I could see him think about that. "Wow, that's a long time to hold a spell. Why don't you run out of energy when you're using it for hours?"

Dad smiled at him. "That's where age and experience win out over youthful energy, Harry. You're learning quickly but some of that knowledge needs to settle inside of you while you practice control and patience. Not unlike what Mum and I hope you're practicing with . . . other parts of your life."

Harry and Gersey both blushed at that gentle reminder that they were supposed to be going slow in their relationship. I was pretty sure that Sirius didn't know how they'd celebrated Harry's birthday after we'd left. Gersey had told me right before he'd left for London so I could give Harry my understanding and a shoulder to cry on if he needed it. I have to admit that I'd wondered if they'd gone too far but Harry's demeanor had quieted any questions I might have had.

He'd buckled down and studied hard. He was growing up so fast under constant scrutiny and expectations that I regretted the loss of his innocence. But I soon realized that his loving Gersey was the first thing that was his alone. It was just for him, Gersey's love. The musician loved Harry, not the Boy-Who-Lived or the student or the orphan or Hope-of-the-Wizarding-World. He just loved the teenager with the messy hair, enthusiastic smile and joyful spirit.

As much as I wanted to protect him from going too far, too fast with this love, it might well prove to be the one thing that kept him alive in the coming confrontation. I know that having Royan and the babies were keeping my nose to the grindstone so I could keep them safe. I wanted Voldemort dead and dispersed to the elements so he could no longer return or even manifest one . . . tiny . . . little . . . effect.

I wanted a future with her and our children. I wanted Harry to be able to finish growing up without fear. From one or two things he'd asked my wife, I had the funny feeling that he was planning to give Gersey babies. He helped Severus whenever he could and I'd seen him lay a hand on the latest kick spot, smiling big enough to burst. Sirius was going to have a royal fit. But I was betting on Harry and Gersey.

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Parts 31 -32 by Athea

Michael

I hated when Father had the others over and made me serve them. I was just a curiosity for them, just a pathetic ghost that Father kept around so he could drain me. Every time I saw the Light and began to move towards it, he dragged me back. He laughed at my pathetic attempts to escape him and at first I hated him. I hated every breath he took.

But my hatred fed his passion and I began to work on letting it go. He would have noticed, I expect but he was busy absorbing energy from all the muggles they were killing. So I kept quiet and did what he wanted while I watched and waited. Voldemort was planning his victory and that was something that I was terrified of. I'd never be free if He won.

I levitated the silver tray with the brandy on it and silently served the wizards around the great table in the dungeons where their plans were laid out. Laying the tray down, I dematerialized to

conserve my strength.

"Here, MacPherson, once you're within the gates, we'll follow. You are our wedge," Father said with a cold look at the giant who leaned on the table and pointed to the gate on the plans. "I hope you're worth what we're paying you."

"I'm worth twice that piddlin' amount." He said with a lazy brogue. "The only one on the grounds who might give you trouble is my dear cousin, Rubeus. I'll take care of him and enjoy wiping the dirt with his pansy ass."

Father smiled without any humor the way he always did. "See to it. Evans, I want you to transform and find Malfoy junior. We're not leaving without him. If you can find Potter at the same time, then let Hughes know so he can grab him. Our Master wants Hogwarts leveled to the ground and every single soul within it snack food for his delectation."

I shivered and thought longingly of the school that I'd once hoped to escape to. The Headmaster had been so nice when I met him that I had thought it would be great fun to go to school there. But that had been before Father killed me and sucked out all my energy. I was tied to the family estate now and my only hope was that Father would fail in his pursuit of power so I could escape.

I pitied the two he wanted, Malfoy and Potter, pitied them with all my heart.

Rubeus

I lay in bed and thought about the future. If I was thinking about our son being born then I wasn't thinking of this afternoon when I'd meet the boogeyman of my youth. We needed to go through the trunk of baby clothes that Mum had bought at the auction to make sure that they had escaped the moths. I was concentrating on that.

"Rubeus, stop brooding." Sev leaned up on one elbow and looked down at me. "That's my job and I won't have you usurping my prerogative." He leaned down and kissed me gently, his tongue stroking my lips until I opened to suck him inside. I loved his early morning taste so I concentrated on scouring his mouth clean.

His chuckle caught me off guard and I opened my eyes to look into his. His black eyes sparkled in the sunlight creeping in the window. "Ru', I love you. Geil MacPherson is a bully and a coward. You are neither. You are a brave man to love me and even braver to embark on fatherhood. That takes guts and strong determination."

"I'm no' feelin' very gutsy at the moment." I admitted shamefaced to my lover.

"Then, I shall inject some courage into you." He slid up and blanketed me with his warmth. "There will be no other in your memory, Rubeus Hagrid. No one belongs there but me."

He held my gaze while he moved between my legs and I began to burn while he prepared me for his beautiful shaft. Then he was in me, moving slowly but surely and staking his claim to my body and my heart. Our hands clasped between us and his swelling belly caressed my own cock to aching hardness.

"See me, Rubeus, see only me." He said fiercely and I nodded immediately. "I love you so much that there is no room for any other inside of me."

"Ya've filled up all me empty spaces, Sev." I realized that it was true. The long ago gangbang was like a pale memory that had happened to another me, not something that meant anything at

all now. Now was filled with my Severus and our child.

"Good," he said and continued to stroke into me until I fountained between us and he flooded me with his heat. I turned us so he could relax without squishing our child. We rested for a long moment and I realized that I was truly relaxed. Our focus today was on keeping Voldemort out of Hogwarts and we would not fail.

Sirius

"Rhea?" I said quietly in case she was still asleep.

"Good morning, love." She turned over and smilingly kissed me. That was something I hoped to never, ever get too used to.

But when we broke apart, I looked deep into her beautiful eyes. "Harry likes boys."

Her hand stroked my cheek lovingly. "Yes, he does and his heart is given to Gersey."

"And Gersey's is given to Harry?" I'd been watching them for over a week now.

"He's as taken as they come, Siri. He's been waiting for wee Harry since he first discovered that he liked his own sex. He experimented a bit but he kept his heart until he turned around and saw your godson." Rhea smiled and kissed me again.

It wasn't what I'd thought would be Harry's path but it could have been worse. He might have fallen in love with Snape or my new brother-in-law. Still, there was plenty of time for him to do some experimenting of his own. If we could just get through today's battle intact and with no casualties.

"Siri?" Rhea pulled back a little. "You do realize that Harry wants children and is prepared to carry them himself?"

"What?" I blinked at her in disbelief. "He's too young."

She shook her head and went up on one elbow to look down into my face. "He's an old soul, Harry is. I expect he'll wait until Voldemort is dead and his schooling done but I also expect within a year, he'll be ready and eager to get pregnant. If you've a problem with that, you'll need to be working on it."

I couldn't think of anything to say. I still couldn't bear to think of Snape as pregnant so Harry was right out. I opened and closed my mouth twice before looking miserably at my wife. There was just too much going on and my brain couldn't handle anything else. She smiled and kissed me gently, hugging me to her breasts while I hung on and tried to come to terms with all the changes in my life.

"I'll try, Rhea. Really I will but not today, not when we've got a battle on our hands." I murmured against her warm skin and held her as close as I could. "Be safe for me, love. I just found you and I couldn't bear to have anything happen to you."

"You too, my love." She kissed the top of my head. "May we all stay safe today."

Charlie

I checked Ss'seren's wings and she flexed them for me with a flirty hiss in my direction. Chuckling, I gave her the okay to fly reconnaissance for us. Draco was already up at the school with Dumbledore getting ready to hold a press conference. I didn't like being so far away from him and I don't think that Ss' did either because she hurried me up when I would have done one more check.

The hellbenders were egg sitting for her and we checked it one more time before I left to join the others for the walk through the Forest and she took to the skies. There is nothing more beautiful than a dragon in flight. She soared upward on a sudden thermal wind and I smiled before joining Gersey in front of the greenhouse.

"Everything all right?" He asked before striding out into the trees. Harry had stayed at the school with Sirius and Rhea so he hadn't seen him since yesterday.

I knew just how he felt. I'd gotten up early and had breakfast with Draco but had to watch him stride off into the Forest with Dad Hagrid and Aunt Illona. "Fine. Ss' will keep a dragon's eye out for trouble. What board did you end up on?"

He snorted and rolled his eyes. "Somehow I ended up on the Shetland Island Petroleum board. I know zip about oil drilling in the Northern Sea but Dra' seemed to think that I'd catch what was off at their meeting next Wednesday. He said something about disharmony slowing the drilling schedule."

"It could be that one of them is triggering little earthquakes to disrupt the platforms." I'd read something about it in the Witches Daily and quoted what I remembered to him.

His eyebrow went up and he began to whistle slowly. I envied him that ability and pondered why I'd never learned how. But thinking of pursing my lips led me to thinking of Draco and how focused he'd looked this morning, reading aloud to Aunt Illona part of his speech while Dad Hagrid looked on with a judicious air.

I had to chuckle and Gersey stopped whistling with another raised eyebrow. "Just thinking how easy it is to think of Illona as 'my' aunt and your Dad as another father."

"The lines are blurring among all of us and I can't help but think of that as a good thing, Charlie." He slowed a bit. "I also don't think it's an accident. The Light is good at drawing allies together and working them into a seamless whole. I want this whole thing over so Harry and Draco can finish school and get on with their lives."

"Me, too." I said wholeheartedly. "There's so much to look forward to. After we finish with Voldemort."

Albus

I listened proudly as Draco gave his speech to the handpicked reporters from the papers we'd selected. Dale Smithers of the Naiad Street Journal, a business daily, asked Draco about the reason behind the board shakeups and the dear boy looked properly horrified at the malfeasance he'd found among the wizards that his late father had trusted.

The list of names was new and he handed them out to the ten reporters with a sad look. "I grew up knowing these men and I couldn't believe what evil deeds the lawyers and I uncovered. Their families will suffer, I know, but Headmaster Dumbledore has agreed to let me pay for their children to continue here in school. Headmaster, if you'd explain that arrangement?"

He stepped back and looked at me respectfully while I silently applauded his demeanor. Stepping up to the desk of Minerva's classroom on the south side of Hogwarts, where we were holding the press conference, I laid out the plan that would keep the affected children here attending school for as long as they needed. My internal clock kept ticking away the minutes to the arrival of the duplicitous giant and his allies while I bantered with the reporters.

Smithers wanted to know why I was now on the board of the Cadbury Chocolate Emporium and I truthfully told him that I liked sweets. That got a nice laugh from the men and women of the press and a little quip from Draco about paying me in chocolate. Actually, I thought that was a splendid idea and so I told him.

Fiona Bailey of the Witch Daily asked Draco about the rumors about death threats. He acknowledged their existence and said that he'd turned all such correspondence over to the Ministry and the Aurors. "I have perfect confidence in their ability to track down and punish the criminals. I'm safe here at Hogwarts and looking forward to my seventh year. There's still so much to learn!"

They chuckled at his ingenuous look but I knew how very true that was. There was little time left and so much to be done to prepare Harry and him for the battles to come. Ten minutes to go, I realized and found Draco winding up the questions. Everyone looked excited, ready to go home and write up articles about the Malfoy heir and his amazing grasp of business.

Lucius had done a good job training his son to take over his businesses. It was just too bad that he'd been such a poor steward of his wealth and talent. I sighed silently. I'd failed him badly and the others of his generation. So many lost to greed and despair, I thought. Voldemort had much to answer for but then so did I. Gazing at Draco, I saw an almost affectionate gleam in his eyes when he looked at me.

Redemption was perhaps at hand.

Harry

I could tell that Sirius wanted to talk to me but I wasn't ready to talk to him. He was being stubborn about me being gay and really disgruntled about Gersey. Part of me understood but part of me was impatient and just wanted him to accept that I loved Gersey and move on. But that wasn't happening yet and I was praying that Rhea got pregnant really soon so he'd concentrate on something else.

Moving slowly, I finished the last position and lay breathing. Gersey's book on yoga had been a real revelation. I'd tried rushing each position but that didn't work. When I asked him for help, he went through them with me very, very slowly. I felt really stretched and limp when we were done and that felt good, not as good as flying but a close second.

Now I enjoyed the yoga just for itself and did at least an hour a day. Today was going to be frightening so I made sure that I moved really slowly, thinking only of each move. I had no desire to think too far ahead because then I'd just worry. I wasn't worried about me but about all of the family, any of whom could be hurt or killed. Unlike some of my classmates, I knew there was nothing exciting about battling the Dark.

It was scary business and people died. People I knew and liked had already died.

I set my jaw, no one I loved would die today. I would follow orders even though I wanted to stay with Ger, holding up the mirror. But Dumbledore was pretty sure that coming to Hogwarts to get

Draco and me was the reason for their push. Severus and Mum had told us the stories of Samhain sacrifices and I knew that we were just what Voldemort wanted.

Almost as if I'd heard him give the orders in his hissing voice, I shivered and sat up. I had time for a quick shower and then I'd head for the press conference so we'd all be together when the attack hit. Grabbing a towel, I thought about raising the mirror earlier and leaving Dad, Ger and Remus there to hold it up. Ducking under the stinging water, I wasn't even hard, the way I usually was when I'd been thinking about Gersey.

Once we were done with this attack, I was going to wrap myself around him and not let go for a day. I soaped and rinsed, getting out and drying off quickly. Dressing took two minutes and then I was flying down the stairs and across the lawn to the great hall where the Headmaster and Draco, with all the reporters should be.

I didn't want to be late. We needed witnesses to this attack so the wizarding world at large would know just what was happening. Voldemort was real and everyone needed to know that.

Draco

Baffling people with bullshit was one of my very favorite things, I thought with another smile at Fiona Bailey. She was a beautiful witch with raven black hair and the most beautiful green eyes so I was flirting shyly the way I'd been trained by my mother. For a moment I thought of Narcissa, she hadn't wanted to be a mother or even acknowledge that she could have a sixteen year old son.

But she didn't deserve to die, tortured by a big green lizard with delusions of grandeur. So now I was going to help bring him down in part for her but mostly so none of my new family or friends would get hurt. The other students really had no idea of the evil and death that followed Voldemort. But Harry did and I smiled at his entrance into the great hall.

The reporters were stunned for a moment then looked surreptitiously between us when Harry came over to me and stood close. I smiled at him then spoke to our audience. "Harry, do you mind if I tell them what board you're going to be on?"

"Let me, Draco." He ran a hand through that silky black hair of his and grinned at them. "I chose the board of the Manchester United Quidditch team that the Malfoys have owned since almost the beginning of the franchise. It's going to be great fun to see how a professional team works."

"Will you be flying with them, Mr. Potter?" Fiona asked while her colleagues were still stunned. "Are the two of you friends?"

"Harry and I have been flying against each other for six years now. We know each other pretty well and yes, I do consider us friends. He was there for me when I became an orphan." I'd known what I wanted to say earlier but somehow saying it made the pain come back for a moment, sharper than ever.

Harry just threw his arm around my shoulders and squeezed once. "We're friends."

"And your flying?" Smithers asked avidly.

"I'd love to fly with them some practice but Quidditch is still a game and not what I want to have as my career." Harry said with a smile. "I'm still deciding what that will be."

"Now boys, we need to let these ladies and gentlemen get on with their stories. And you too have

some homework, I believe." Dumbledore smiled at all of us and began moving them towards the doors.

And that's when we heard the explosions.

Fiona Bailey

I was badly frightened by the sounds of explosions but the two young men who I'd just been interviewing straightened up like hunters and sped for the door, the Headmaster right behind them. Dale took off after them and I wasn't going to let him scoop me on this story. The others followed me out of the hall and we saw through the gates of Hogwarts a battle raging.

There were giants and wizards in black with glowing wands and colored trails of spells zapping through the air. If I didn't get fried in the next few moments, I was going to have an even better story than I had right now. There were two giants trading blows and around them were the oddest group of wizards dueling that I'd ever seen. Short and tall, dark and red-haired, male and female, some of them had to be professors here while others wearing muggle clothing looked to be passer-byes.

I kept young Draco in sight and saw him side-by-side with Harry, their wands at the ready while chaos played out just beyond the gates. It was odd but I could have sworn that I heard drumming nearby. What I couldn't understand was why all the battle was going on outside the gates while another set of gates appeared about fifty feet in front of them.

They hadn't been there when we arrived. A particularly vivid green flash flew like lightning towards Harry and Draco from the wand of a tall wizard near a swirling black hole that had appeared behind the fighting. The young wizards might have been connected by invisible cords, their wands came up to the ready but a few feet in front of them the spell hit some kind of invisible wall and zapped back to the casting wizard like a speeding arrow.

I can truthfully say that the look of menace on Draco's face was almost more frightening than the satisfactory splat of the spell hitting the wizard. The fact that the identical look was on Harry's face told me more than any words just how far they'd gone in their training. And no matter what the Ministry had to say about the attacks on muggles and wizards alike, I was seeing the truth in vivid detail.

If it wasn't Who-wasn't-to-be-named, it was the nearest thing to him and I was suddenly afraid as I had never been before. I saw bodies on the ground and when Harry cried out, I whipped my head around to see a dark haired man crumpling to the grass. Something wavered in front of us and Harry darted to the man's side, taking a protective stance over his prone body and using his wand to solidify whatever the shimmering 'thing' was.

Dumbledore hurried forward with Draco and I saw a full-grown mastiff break free of the conflict and head straight for the young Malfoy. I shouted a warning and the blond had his wand up in a heartbeat. When the dog sprang, he was met with a curse that I'd never heard before. He twisted in midair and hung there before crashing to earth and beginning to change.

The Headmaster added something to the curse and the animagus froze half-transformed and immobile. The cries of curses flew through the air and spells were sent and countered in less time than it took to see them. I was getting dizzy trying to watch it all when suddenly it was over. The bad wizards dove through the black hole and disappeared, leaving behind some bodies and scorched grass.

Only then did the Aurors appear but I followed Dumbledore over to Harry and the fallen wizard.

Thankfully, he was sitting up with Harry's help and I was almost knocked over by a dark-haired woman calling out, "Remus!"

"He's all right, Royan, just knocked out." Harry told her and she sank down to his side, gathering him into her arms.

"Sweetheart," the wizard said, "I'm fine. Really, I am."

"Oh, Remus," she burst into tears and he cuddled her close.

I was jealous as Hades. They looked so sweet together and if I wasn't mistaken, she was pregnant. My mother would take one look and give me her lecture on finding a nice wizard and settling down. My biological clock was ticking but I liked what I was doing, reporting the news of the wizarding world. There weren't too many men out there who'd be willing to have a two career marriage.

At least I hadn't met many and I'd met a lot, just never the right one. While I was watching that little reunion, I looked up and saw the most beautiful man I'd ever seen come striding across to the couple. Blinking, I wondered who he was and if I could get his phone number.

"Harry, are you all right?" Were the first words out of his mouth and I watched him hug the young wizard while my jaw dropped to the ground.

Why were all the good ones married or gay, I wailed silently? Sighing, I got a little closer to eavesdrop on the conversation going on in front of me. Dumbledore was conversing with an older gentleman and a female giant with snow-white hair. They were talking about a mirror and its success with terms that I was going to have to look up later. It was some kind of magic that I'd never heard of.

Gersey

I held Harry and said a grateful prayer to the Goddess-who-looks-after-young-wizards. This could have gone bad in a big way and it was a good test of what we could expect in the next battle. I hoped that one would be the final battle. It better be. Remembering the reporters, I took a quick look around and found a pretty woman giving me an interested look.

'Too late, I'm taken', I thought with satisfaction but put a little distance between my little love and me. We weren't quite ready to out ourselves on the wizard news. "Harry, we'd better see to Ru."

"Oh, wow!" Harry dropped his arms and turned to where Ru and Geil had been fighting. "I forgot all about the MacPherson, I was so worried about keeping the mirror up."

We hurried over to where Ru was sitting on the big red-haired giant who'd hurt him so badly when I was just a child. Severus was going to take one look at his bonded and go into full protective mode. Geil was cursing up a storm while my brother calmly broke his captured wand into tiny little pieces.

Ru sported a black eye that was already swelling shut, a gash on one cheek, a ripped sleeve that showed a slowly bleeding gash from a knife and his left knee looked swollen. Geil looked much worse and I smiled at my big brother, glad that he'd finally put the last of his bad memories behind him.

"Good job, 'arry, ya keepin' the mirror up like that." Ru' squinted up at us and Harry beamed at him. "Any of ya seen Granny? She said something about taking care of Geil, 'ere."

The giant blanched and flinched when he heard Granny's dulcet tones from behind us. "Aye, Rubeus, I'm 'ere and so's the others. If ya'd be so kind as to stand up, we'll take 'im from 'ere."

I gave Ru a hand up and he stood with a wince while I wrapped my arm around him so he could take the weight off his sore knee. Harry moved to his other side and offered his shoulder to Ru. That might have looked silly because of their disparate heights and weights but all I could think was my love's great big heart was manifesting again.

"Geil MacPherson, ye no longer are a member of our clan. Ye be exiled as of this moment. No one shall give ye aid or shelter and if we need ta, we'll testify agin ye at your trial." Granny had never sounded so cold before.

"I witness, sister." Aunt Illona said quietly, appearing on his other side.

"I witness, sisters." Arwen stated from my other side. "Bonded by earth and rain."

"Bonded by flame and wind."

"Bonded in darkness and in light, ye are cast out of our clan forever." Granny finished up while all three of their wands cast a gray spell that covered his body like a fine ash. Then she imperiously beckoned to Auror Weasley. "Ye can 'ave this one now."

He bowed to her and called over two other Aurors to wrap him in bindings and transport him away. "Thank you, Ma'am. I'm sorry that you had to do that."

"Aye, I'm sorry as weel." Granny sighed and looked her age for a moment. Aunt Illona put an arm around her and Arwen joined the hug. "Is there any more that we can do to help ye 'ere, Arthur?"

"No, Ma'am, we've got them well in hand. Headmaster Dumbledore will come with us to undo the spell on Nigel Evans so we can question him." He bowed again and turned back to the animagus who'd been heading for Draco.

I looked around and saw Draco and Charlie standing with the good looking reporter that had been giving me the eye earlier. She was asking eager questions and I had the feeling that this battle was going to be all over the newspapers for some time to come. But for now, we needed to get Ru to his cottage so Poppy could tend to him. I called to Hossic who was being interviewed by two of the covey of reporters that had scattered to talk to all of us.

He nodded and smiled down at the man who was interviewing him, saying something and then striding over. "Well, you did good, big brother. But we'd best get you cleaned up before," he caught himself, ". . . your bonded sees you or we'll be in big trouble. Harry, I can take that side if you'd like to go and check on Remus?"

My little love smiled and let Hossic slip into his place before heading back to my brother-in-law and sister. Two Aurors were binding the animagus when suddenly he began to curse in a slow steady voice that was half-human and half-dog. The Aurors froze and we all had our wands up to the ready when a black cloud seemed to pour from his mouth and head for Harry.

I dropped Rubeus' arm and sprinted for my little love, afraid I'd be too late. But Draco was suddenly there by his side and together they raised their wands and chanted the curse-breaker that would send it back to him. The blackness hung in the air for a long moment, giving me time to reach them and reinforce their counter spell. Then it flowed back into wizard.

Suddenly he began to swell and I saw his eyes go from blank to knowing. "Master!" He cried out but he just kept on blowing up like a human balloon until with a pop he exploded into a million

pieces.

Harry

I was afraid that I was going to throw up but I held on hard to my control, sneaking a look at Draco to see if he had the same urge. He was pretty tightlipped but he was swallowing hard so that made me feel better. I could feel Gersey's warmth behind me and I wanted to lean back so much but I knew that would look bad so I didn't. But when he hugged me close and I saw Charlie hugging Draco, I knew it would be all right.

Turning into him, I slid my arms around his waist and buried my head in his chest. There was a little pitter-patter sound that made me go nauseas. It was raining body parts and that was just sick. Then I had a sudden horrible thought and raised my head. "Gersey, it wasn't our counter spell, was it?"

"No, Harry, it wasn't." Gersey sounded angry and tired. "It's something Voldemort did through a link with him. The Dark Lord doesn't forgive failure."

"Then I hope MacNair is writhing in Hades right now." Draco said quietly from the safety of Charlie's arms.

"We can only hope, Dra'." The dragon handler said just as quietly, stroking the blond hair beneath his hand. "Dad, I want to get them away from here. Is it all right if we go?"

I saw Arthur pat both their shoulders and smile at Draco. "Yes, go and wash away this horrible sight. Draco, you did a fine job today. I'm proud of all of you."

"Auror Weasley, is the Ministry now acknowledging the return of . . . the Dark Lord?" The pretty reporter who'd come up behind him hesitated then swept on. "Is this the beginning of new warfare between wizards?"

Arthur smiled at her grimly and moved towards her and the other reporters with Dumbledore approaching from the other side, so we could make our escape to the Quidditch locker rooms. I was starting to shiver a little even though the day was warm. Gersey stripped me bare and had me under the hot water inside of two minutes. I shook hard but slowly the heat began to get through.

He had his shirt off so it didn't get wet and he never once let go of me. Slowly my legs felt less like noodles and more like they'd hold me up. I picked up the soap and hurriedly washed away the nastiness that curses left behind, even though we'd countered them all. I didn't want to think about that right now so I concentrated on making sure that all of me was clean.

"That's enough, Harry, there's nothing left of them on you." Gersey's voice woke me up from my hard scrubbing and I dropped the soap. "It's all right, little love. I've got you."

He turned off the water and wrapped a warm towel around me, lifting me up and carrying me over to a bench. Then he sat down with me in his lap and hugged me close, rocking me while I cried a little into the wiry curls on his chest. "It's never going to end, Ger'. He's always going to be out there plotting to kill us all."

"No, he won't, sweetheart." Gersey kissed my temple and I turned so I could taste him again. His lips are always so warm that I wanted to crawl inside of him and never come out. He kissed me for a long moment before pulling away and looking into my eyes. "Harry, we beat him today with only a few casualties that can be healed. The Light is getting stronger with each new convert to

our cause. And I think we converted a few more today. The press saw for themselves what he can do, what he wants to do."

I nodded. "They won't let the Ministry hush this up, will they?"

He smiled and rubbed the towel over my back. "Twelve good reporters from as many newspapers? The Ministry is going to have to finally acknowledge what's happening. Maybe that idiot Fudge will get the boot and someone intelligent take his place?"

"Good, I've never liked him." I said vindictively. "He's always so condescending to everyone. He was really rude to Rubeus once." I stilled. "Oh no, we left Ru with just Hossic."

"Gration was headed towards them when I got you away, little love. Ru is probably being fussed over as we speak. Sev was waiting for them in the old cottage so I know that he's being well taken care of. The twins will make sure that nobody who shouldn't know that he's there." He finished rubbing my back and started on my front.

I turned on faster than a light bulb. He noticed and suddenly I had a lumpy lap to sit on. Kissing him again, I pushed inside of his warm mouth and tasted everything that I loved about him. His callused hand slowly stroked my cock from tip to root then back up again while I shivered but in a good way. I moaned a little because it felt so good and he swallowed it up like I wished he'd do the rest of me.

We had to breathe finally and with a last gentle squeeze, I came and came and came while he whispered how much he loved me and scattered kisses over my face. I wanted to sleep for a week but I also didn't want to let go. Dumbledore's voice from the other side of the door told us that the reporters were gone and we were going to meet in the great hall for a debriefing in half an hour. Gersey called back that we'd be there.

I sat up straight and looked into his beautiful blue eyes. "Thank you, Ger. I love you."

"I love you too, Harry Potter, and I always will." He kissed me and we both smiled.

Then we got up and finished cleaning so we could join the others.

A Spy

A small black widow spider crept through the tall grass and around smoking pieces of shriveled flesh. He shivered but kept on going. Evans had failed, he would not. None but he, MacNair and Voldemort had known that two animagi were going in to find the two young wizards that were wanted.

It was a long journey towards the school and he had to dodge some of the many pairs of feet that were moving to and from the main building. Once there he would spin a web and wait for them to come to him. The port key that he had around his neck would transport them straight to MacNair's manor house.

He dreamed of the reward that his Master had promised him. Wealth and power would be his when Voldemort ruled the world. If he'd had lips he would have been licking them at the thought of all the young girls that would serve him. The sweet young first years would be so delightfully frightened when he first stripped them.

So lithe with just the beginning buds of breasts and no pubic hair at all, he smiled and hurried faster. They'd be so tight when he thrust inside of them. They'd scream and plead while the blood

ran thick between their legs. Oh, he'd taken his turn with the Malfoy bitch but she was nothing but an old hag and he'd barely been able to keep his cock hard enough to rape her.

But his Master knew the secret desires that he kept hidden from the rest. And he'd promised him that the innocent flowers of Hogwarts would be his, all his when the Dark Lord assumed his rightful place. Creeping along, he spied the double doors that led into the school. Perhaps he would scout out the girls dorms first, just to see what would soon be his?

He saw another body part, perhaps part of an eye, and he decided not to take the chance. It would be better if he found Malfoy and Potter first. Voldemort had a nasty habit of punishing those who failed him. The doors were closed but he could wait until someone came by and he could hitch a ride inside. Until then, he'd dream a little.

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Parts 33 - 36 by Athea

Author's Notes:

The healing continues.

Severus

I'd followed the battle through my link with Rubeus and I'd flinched at every blow while Mum held me tight, humming soothingly. When the battle was over, I sighed and sat up, blotting away the tears that I was no longer afraid to shed. Mum Hagrid was the most magical person I'd ever met. Not in a tutored way, her training had been spotty but she held more magic energy within her than any other I'd come into contact with.

"He's cumin' now." She said and went to the door while I made sure that I stayed out of sight.

A sudden explosion of dark power flared and the pain sent me to my knees, hugging the child within me. A gentle glow suffused me and the powerful ache went away. I thanked him with all my heart and felt the love our son sent me with awe. Nothing I'd ever done deserved such abundance but I was thankful it was there. Levering myself to my feet, I watched with my inner eye as my bonded drew near.

Then he was in the cottage, supported by his twin brothers and I helped him down onto the bed that sat in one corner of the crowded room. "I'm okay, Sev, really I am."

"Oh, I can see that, Ru. Nothing but a black eye, a slight concussion, enough bruises to cover half your body, a wrenched knee and a nasty looking knife wound." I said dryly and began cleaning the cut. "You're just the picture of health."

He pouted a little and I gently kissed him before soaking the wound in hydrogen peroxide, which began to bubble and fizz. Mum had an ice pack held to his eye and Hossic perched on the end of the bed to tell us exactly what had happened during the battle. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Gration sidling towards the door.

"And where would ya be goin', Gra'?" Mum stopped him dead.

"I thought I might go out and help with the cleanup." He said nonchalantly.

"Maybe answer a few more questions from the pretty Fiona?" Hossic said with a wink.

"Be careful, Gration. The press is nothing to mess with, no matter how beautiful she is." I put in my two pence worth and watched him grin.

"I'm always careful, Sev." And with that, he was gone.

"That boy is wild as an 'awk." Mum snorted. "What is she like?"

"Pretty as a picture and smart as they come, she called the warning when the animagus tried for Draco." Hossic said cheerfully but he very carefully placed another ice bag on Ru's knee.

My bonded hissed a bit then relaxed as the cold started taking effect. "Mum can check her out later. If Gra' is serious then we'll be expanding the family again. How about ya, Hoss? Ya feelin' the need ta bond, too?"

The dark haired twin stilled and looked sheepishly at us. "Well, I have been enjoying the cursing lessons from Bill. He's a good man and he's got a great sense of humor. We've been havin' a bit of slap and tickle on the side."

"Don't toy wit' a good man's affections, Hossic." Mum said with an admonishing look at her younger son.

Hossic smiled again. "We're just having a bit of fun until this whole Dark Lord business is over. Then we'll see if we're serious. You wouldn't be disappointed in me, Mum, if I took this path?"

"If ya love and are loved in return, we'll welcome whoever he or she may be." Mum smiled at us. "Rubeus did very well so we'll expect someone just as good."

I blushed and dropped my eyes to see what I was doing. The knife slash gaped a bit and I wondered if he would need stitches. Touching it, I wished that he'd never taken such hurt and that's when it happened. Under my gaze, it began to knit shut while golden sparks flew from my fingertips to settle on the wounded flesh and seal it close. The child moved within me and I knew what one of his gifts must be.

"A healer, our son is a healer." I said quietly and Rubeus looked down in shock.

"Still in the womb and already he's 'ealing his Daddy's 'urts." Mum whispered while I gingerly touched the now un-torn flesh.

"Will wonders never cease?" Hossic moved the ice pack from the swollen knee and I reached down to touch it.

The golden sparks were even stronger this time and right before our eyes the knee resumed its normal size. My other hand reached up to his black eye and it healed, too. I felt a little faint then and I must have gone pale because Mum plucked my hands from Rubeus' body.

"That's enough for now, Sev." She kissed my cheek. "Rubeus is a quick healer and now he'll be just fine. Lay ya down beside him while Hossic and me go find the kitchens and see what's for dinner."

With very little fuss, she got us arranged on the bed under the covers before she and Hossic took their leave. Ru's arms were around me and the baby and we fit into his side as if we'd been meant to always be there. I was as tired as if I'd been working hard instead of just sitting safe on the sidelines.

"Ya were with me every step of the way, Sev." Ru's rumbling voice sounded from the top of my head where he was resting his cheek. "I could feel ya willin' me ta win. None of 'is taunts could 'urt me, 'cause I knew that ya loved me and always would."

"Always, Rubeus Hagrid, I will always love you." I tilted my head up and he kissed me the way only he can, savoring me as if I were the sweetest of delights. We feasted on each other for a long moment until our son kicked us and we separated enough to breathe.

"And me thanks ta ya, little one. Ya're taking good care of yar mama and me." Ru said solemnly and stroked a big hand over the mound growing before me. That felt so good that the baby and I both stretched towards him.

"Now would be a good time to take a nap, little one. Your daddy is going to ravish your mama." I said while reaching for my wand and whisking our clothes away. "Or maybe it's the other way around?"

He chuckled and reached for my shaft, tickling the underside of my swelling belly until I had to laugh out loud. "It sounds so good ta hear ya laugh, Sev."

"You're the only one who can make me feel this joyful, Ru, only and ever you." I told him quite honestly.

But he shook his head while he slowly stroked me to steel. "Nah, Sev, I expect our son will make ya laugh, too. After all, he's got some 'agrid in 'im."

I sighed and arched into his warm fingers. "So he does, Rubeus, so he does. Oh, there, love, stroke right there."

And he stroked there with fingers, followed by his slippery tongue until I cried out and came into the haven of his wet mouth. I relaxed everywhere and he chuckled while sucking me dry. The baby gave a contented murmur between us and I wondered what he thought about such goings on. Did he feel the love and caring? He must, I decided, to send back such strong emotions himself.

"Sleep for a bit, my beautiful Sev. I'll wake ya when dinner is ready." His murmur sent me straight to sleep and all my dreams were bright.

Hermione

After the news broke about the battle at Hogwarts, we all got owls telling our parents that school would reopen on Monday. I was relieved and more than ready to be back at school. Unlike most of the others, I enjoyed school because it meant that I was learning something new. And discovering new things was exciting for me, I sighed a little sorrowfully.

I was going to miss Potions with Professor Snape. I'd done more reading with that class than any other but I'd also learned more with him than from any other instructor. I'd begun to think that I'd like to go into potions after I graduated but who knew what teacher the Headmaster would get to replace him. I was probably one of the only people who mourned his death.

And I did not think that he'd turned rogue, I'd always had my suspicions about his position as a former Death Eater. Headmaster Dumbledore wasn't as idiotic as he led people to believe so I refused to believe that he'd been fooled all these years. I'd probably never know the full story behind that whole charade but maybe his replacement would be as intelligent as Snape had been.

I rode the Hogwarts Express with Ron and several of the other Gryffindors. Security was tighter than tight and Professor Lupin was there to take charge of us once we left the train. Hagrid met us at the gates with Harry, Draco and Charlie Weasley. The Slytherins were kind of standoffish with them and I suddenly wondered who was going to take over their House now that Professor Snape was dead.

Harry looked good but then so did Draco. He'd let his blond hair grow longer and all the slick stuff was gone so it flowed onto his shoulders. He and Harry were in school robes but Harry's were new from his birthday and they both looked comfortable together. The other Gryffindors were kind of like the Slytherins, they didn't know what to make of the easy friendship between the two former enemies.

Draco greeted me with a smile and an easy wave before chivying his House members over to their hall while Charlie tagged along. The rest of the students split up into Houses and headed for their dorms. I was glad to set my suitcase down and unpack in familiar surroundings. I really was going to miss this place when I graduated next Spring. Sliding my suitcase under my bed, I left to find Harry and Ron and walked right into a battle.

"What do you mean, you're staying with Draco in the dungeons?" Ron's voice could be heard outside of the tower.

Harry looked resigned. "The added security down there is to protect us from the death threats that we've started getting. I don't want to put any of the rest of you in danger and frankly," he cast a look around at the others. "Once the news gets out that I'm gay and I'm friends with Draco, I don't want to have to cope with all the aggravation."

Stunned silence greeted that announcement and I couldn't tell if it was the gay part or the friendship that they couldn't take. I'd been afraid of this and I knew that it was going to take some time to get over all the changes. I looked at Harry, really looked at him. He was leaner and harder with a grace that hadn't been there even on his birthday. He moved as if he owned the space he moved through.

He'd grown up. Whether the battles or the training, he'd grown beyond most of us in the room. I hoped that he and Gersey were happy together even if the tall red-head did still make my heart beat a little faster. It looked like I was going to have to wait a while longer for Ron to grow up. Sighing, I moved in and hugged Harry.

"It won't be that bad, Harry, unless Gersey comes to visit. Then both the boys and the girls are going to be jealous." I smiled up at him and he grinned back, kissing my cheek with a whispered 'thanks'.

The murmurs from my fellow Gryffindors were dismaying but also inevitable given the changing dynamics of our lives. Harry answered a few questions then excused himself, giving me a little look that told me he needed to talk to me alone. That made me a bit sad, since it heralded the break-up of our close trio. But Ron had his closed off look so I knew to leave him alone for now.

I gave Harry a five minute head start before looking at my watch and telling Ron that I was going to the library to check and see if our new reading lists had been posted. He nodded and went right back to talking to Dean. I smiled and eased my way out of the swelling crowd. Dinner was going to be interesting tonight.

Just outside, I saw Harry stretching gracefully against the warm red brick of the outside of the main hall. Joining him, I raised an eyebrow and he chuckled. "Hermione, I need you to come with me. No questions asked." His smile faded to a frown and he pinched the bridge of his nose. "And I must have your word that whatever you see or hear, you won't divulge to the others."

A shiver went up my spine and I nodded slowly. "I promise, Harry. This is about the battle against . . . Him?"

He pushed away from the wall, "Yes, it is, 'mione. Lives are at stake, more lives than I like to think about. Come on."

I followed him into the hall and down the stairs to the dungeons. He murmured something to the wall just beyond the potions lab and a door appeared. When we went inside, Draco was waiting for us. He grinned at me with a bright hello and I stammered back. I should have been prepared for him but somehow I wasn't.

"Hold onto my hand, Hermione. We're going somewhere so you can meet with someone who needs your help." Harry said and offered his right hand to me.

I took it while Draco took my other hand. "Close your eyes, Hermione. We're going to port to where we need to go."

Sandwiched between the two of them, I closed my eyes and winced at the feeling of being twisted. The soft murmur of voices greeted us when the world righted itself. Opening my eyes, I gazed around a living room with a curious gaze. Hagrid was taking something out of the oven and he called a cheery hello.

"Great, you made apple crumble, Rubeus." Draco dropped my hand and hurried over to take down some plates from the shelves of the wide-open kitchen. "Did Mum Hagrid help?"

"Oh, so ya like hers better than mine, Dra'?" The half-giant teased him and Draco grinned in a way that I wouldn't have believed he knew how. "Mum did a bit of stirrin' so we'll see what ya think. Welcome 'mione, ya're in my 'ouse by the lake in the Forbidden Forest."

"Hi, Hagrid, it's nice to see you again." I wasn't sure what to say because I still didn't know why I was here.

"Ah, Miss Granger, how good of you to visit." The silky smooth voice floated up from a staircase that I could now see at the end of the kitchen.

My mouth dropped open and I froze while the tall figure of my dead potion teacher walked up and into the room. He looked good, tanned and alert, not dead at all. But when he held out his hand, my gaze dropped to the bulky mound in front of him and I gasped. He looked pregnant, very, very pregnant.

When I dragged my eyes up to his, I surprised a blush on his face. "Yes, I am with child. Rubeus and I bonded in the spring after my . . . death."

I finally took his hand in both of mine and promptly burst into tears. Harry exclaimed and hugged me while I tried to stop crying. "It's not . . . I thought . . . you're alive."

His other hand came up to where I clasped his. "I am alive and in need of your exacting penchant for potion making."

Charlie

I signaled to Bill and we cut Ron out of the Gryffindor herd for a little chat. He had that stubborn look that can be a Weasley specialty and I knew we were in for a long, very long talk. He shared a suspicious look between the two of us while we chivied him outside and over to Hagrid's old cottage. It was empty at the moment although Remus and Royan were eyeing it for when the babies were born.

"All right, Ron, spit it out." I said when we closed the door behind us and Bill lit the fire with a flick of his wand. "You're in a snit and you won't get out of it unless you tell us what's wrong."

I sat down in the comfortable but still slightly hairy green wingback chair. Bill took the club chair after brushing out feathers while Ron paced between us with a scowl on his normally good-natured face. "Harry's gone nuts. He's cozying up to that Malfoy bastard and he's gone public on being gay. He says it's that singer but I think it's really that stupid git."

My own temper started to steam but I kept control by counting to ten. "Harry is heart-bonded to Gersey Hagrid. It's been blessed by the Matriarchs with the proviso that the two of them wait to consummate their love until after Voldemort is taken care of."

Ron had blanched at my saying of the dreaded dark lord's name. "How can you say that so easily?"

"Because he's not a myth, which is what that idiot Fudge wants us to believe. He's a wizard, a spectacularly evil wizard and maybe not completely human anymore." I leaned forward and pulled him over to the footstool.

"Yech!" He grimaced but sat down. "Then Malfoy is probably in it with him."

I gritted my teeth while Bill detailed what had happened to Malfoy senior and his wife. Ron was white faced and swallowing hard by the time my brother stopped speaking. I spoke about the attack on Hogwarts, which had singled out Harry and Draco; the way Draco had saved Ss-serens from an attack by dark wizards; the fact that he'd accepted help from Harry and Gersey; the lessons that Bill and I were teaching the two of them along with the Aurors that Dad had talked to.

He looked bewildered by the time I stopped talking. "But he hates Gryffindors."

"Grow up, Ron." Bill said impatiently. "House rivalries are for kids, along with playing Quidditch like it's the be-all and end-all of existence. Harry is a touchstone for the Light and Draco is doing his best to make life hell on earth for the Death Eaters who are left."

Ron was thinking and I wondered what he would say if he knew that I was the one dating Draco. Bill shook his head a little when I looked his way so I kept my mouth shut. Finally, Ron sighed and looked up. "Okay, maybe he has changed . . . a little bit."

"He's not Harry's best friend, Ron. I've got to say that you aren't either, little brother." Bill patted his shoulder. "Harry's grown up and moved on even though he's got this last year of school to finish. His best friend is Gersey, on all levels. If you're falling in love with Hermione, you'd better be thinking of growing your friendship, too."

He blinked in shock and I couldn't help but chuckle. "Ron, Hermione is waiting for you to grow up into someone that she can love. It's not fair but it's true that girls mature faster than boys. Mom loves her like a daughter and Ginny thinks of her as a big sister. You're not ready yet for the kind of loving that comes later, which is another reason why Harry has to wait for Gersey to claim him."

"Hermione really likes me?" He almost whispered, sharing a miserable glance between us. "I think she thinks I'm stupid."

Bill chuckled. "That kind of goes along with being sixteen and filled with rampaging hormones, little brother. And I have to agree that compared to her steel-trap mind, all of us come up a bit short. Opposites do attract."

I smiled, thinking of my intelligent but calculating almost-lover. Draco could think rings around me and probably always would. "She's being offered a chance to become an apprentice right now. How you react to that is going to go a long way towards deciding if you've got a future as a couple."

"Apprenticeship, who is offering her that?" He sat up straight and looked at us.

Bill and I shared a look. I still wasn't sure that Ron was safe enough to share the knowledge about Severus. Bill hesitated then spoke. "Someone that everyone thinks is dead. Dad knows about it and he thinks it's all right, so do Harry and Draco."

Ron's eyes got round like an owl's. "Professor Snape is alive?"

Interesting, I thought before nodding slowly. "He's offering her a place in the coming battle by helping him with a special potion."

"She'll say yes in a heartbeat. For some reason, she likes him." Ron sighed resignedly.

Severus

I was quite surprised by her tears. It had never occurred to me that she might have felt anything but respect for my potion making abilities. Harry hugged her close while I sent a little calming energy through our clasped hands. The baby sent some also and her eyes widened while she flushed from head to toe.

"That was the baby, wasn't it?" She sniffed and I took my hands back to fish for a handkerchief. "It's okay, I've got a Kleenex." Taking something from her pocket, she blew her nose and looked at my swelling stomach. "It's a he, isn't he?"

"Yeah, we're pretty sure, 'mione." Rubeus said from the table where he was cutting into the apple crumble. "Come sit down and have some crumble. Sev, ya want chamomile tea?"

"Thank you, Ru'. That would be just right." I came over to the table and let myself down slowly. The simplest things were getting harder and harder to do. My energy was beginning to flag sooner in the day and that was worrisome. "Hermione, I asked the boys to bring you here because of an idea I had. It will involve asking you something rather personal and if you'd like to talk to Mum Hagrid about it rather than us, she'd be glad to come over."

Miss Granger's eyes widened and her sharp brain went to work on the puzzle. "Does it have something to do with potions?"

"Twenty points to Gryffindor, it does indeed." I sipped the soothing brew and pondered how next to ask the pertinent question. "I've had an idea to combat Voldemort with a potion that needs some very special ingredients and a person with a particular condition."

Draco and Harry were devouring crumble cake as if they hadn't eaten in days. Harry wiped his mouth and nudged Draco. "Dra', let's go see if Gersey is back."

Really, he had a very advanced sense of the nuances needed in this delicate situation. Draco nodded, swallowing and getting up in the same moment. They left at a run and Ru' got up to close the door after them.

"You need a feminine 'something', Professor Snape?" She took a sip of tea and eyed me uncertainly through the rising steam.

"Are you a virgin, Miss Granger? I'm sorry to have to be so blunt."

She blushed but nodded. I allowed her to finish her tea, hoping the soothing qualities of that

golden herb would calm her further. "Excellent, has it ever occurred to you that Voldemort is surrounded by men but has no women followers?" I waited for her nod and it came much more quickly. "The question has been raised that perhaps he's suppressed his feminine side to the point of denying it altogether. I have been reminded lately that all men do have a bit of the female within them as all women have a bit of the male."

"Yin and yang," she said quietly. "I studied that over the summer when my father gave me a copy of the I Ching. What is it you need from a virgin female?"

"I've been preparing a base of wolfsbane and mugwort. Unfortunately, in my advanced state of pregnancy, I can no longer handle some of the other ingredients." I sighed and absentmindedly rubbed my stomach, feeling the warm glow that was our son and smiling at his contentment.

"I see," she nodded. "Not to mention, I'll bet that you'll be combining two different potions to create the end result."

"Exactly, Hermione," I smiled in approval, "I need another potion maker to prepare one while I prepare the other. You fit every category and I thought at the end of the last term that you were beginning to think of a career in potions."

She blushed again. "I was and still am. But you didn't answer my earlier question, Professor Snape."

Taking a deep breath, I nodded. "Menstrual blood, hair and some nail clippings will all be a part of your half of the potion. Harry will be contributing full moon blood and the rest in my half of the potion. Mum Hagrid and the Matriarchs will be combining them into the resulting potion which will coat all wands, swords, arrows and other weapons in the final battle."

Her pupils had dilated almost entirely black. "Against . . . Voldemort?"

I took her hand in mine and rubbed it warm again, the baby sending calming energy to the young woman. "We will bring him down and expunge him from the face of the earth with your help, Hermione. Will you help us?"

She straightened up and clasped my hand hard. "I certainly will, Professor Snape. Will I get to work with the Matriarchs?"

"You will, 'mione," Mum Hagrid stood in the doorway and smiled at the young girl. "Our Sev 'as been needin' an apprentice for a while now."

Hermione almost squealed and flung herself in my arms. "Yes, Professor, yes, yes, yes."

I returned her embrace gingerly but I thought I was getting the hang of this hugging business. "I shall work you hard, Hermione but I think you'll make a very good potions master once this other business is taken care of."

Harry

Draco split off to check on Ss-serens while I headed for the caravan. I found Gersey playing his guitar and humming to the haunting melody. I didn't recognize it but then he was always coming up with something new lately. He said that it was being in love that had freed his writing Muse. I liked that idea so I sat down beside him on the overstuffed couch, closed my eyes and listened with my heart.

A picture of the sparkling brook came into my mind, some green moss on a hillside with a pair of lovers entwined on that soft bed. I smiled and opened my eyes to look at him. His gaze was warm on me and I soaked in the wonderful vibes that he let off. His hands stilled on the strings and he looked at me with a question on his face.

"The brook, moss and us making love." I told him with a grin.

"Ah, you read my mind." He teased me and set the guitar aside.

That was all the invitation I needed and I leaned into him, raising my face to his for our first kiss of the day. He pulled me close, wrapping me in his arms and softly brushing kisses over my whole face. In between his nibbles, he asked about my day. "How did it go . . . when you told . . . them about not . . . staying in . . . Gryffindor Hall?"

I clasped my hands around his neck and pulled myself closer. "Not good . . . oh there . . . I told them about being gay, too. 'Mione was okay with it but Ron was really pissed off. Draco said it was like an icebox in Slytherin Hall. Some of them stopped him after his 'piss or get off the pot' speech and told him thank you. But I'm really glad that we'll be here instead of back there."

He stilled and ran one of his hands down my spine while I shivered and wished we could get naked so I could touch him everywhere. "I'm glad, too. I have a really bad feeling about the great hall and I don't know why."

"A vision, Ger?" I pulled back enough to see his eyes. "Of something happening to Draco or me?"

Ger's eyes went unfocused. "Something black touches Draco and he disappears. Then you go after him and we don't know where you are."

I shivered. "It sounds like a port key and I follow him using the Rolex."

"Then we're going to have to figure out a way so I can follow you because you're not putting yourself in danger without backup." Ger's voice was a growl and I almost came then and there.

"Maybe Dad knows of something that would work?" I suggested while wiggling around so I straddled him. That felt so good that I started rocking back and forth on his lumpy lap. Leaning in, I kissed him hard and he opened for me while his hands cupped my cheeks and pulled me in tighter.

We were getting really good at this and the more that we made love, the more I wanted to go all the way. My head knew why that wasn't an option. Severus had explained why I needed to stay a virgin until Voldemort got killed but it was getting harder and harder to hold back.

"Harry . . . little love . . ." he said in between kisses, "we've . . . got . . . to stop. This isn't going to help our thinking."

I nodded and clutched his shoulders while my body shuddered to a halt. We sat there for a few moments until it became marginally less painful to move. He sighed and rested his forehead against mine so our breaths mingled between us like I wanted our bodies to do. Mingling, I thought hazily.

"Mingling," he said with a rasp in his voice while he took a deep breath. "Maybe blood markers like they talk about with DNA."

I remembered an article that I'd read over the summer. "The guys who are mapping the human genomes?"

"Sev says that some of their research could be used for wizards, too. Dad thinks that there are markers that 'recognize' like markers. They speculate that true bonding comes from the attraction then mingling of their essence."

"But we can't mingle any more than we already have when we sucked each other off." I said in frustration.

"I know, little love." He stroked my back with both hands and I laid against his shoulder, breathing in his clean scent. "But there's an old bonding that was used centuries ago when blood-brothers were created."

Frowning, I searched my memory but couldn't come up with anything. A knock at the door made me scramble off Gersey. The last time that had happened, it had been Mum and she'd given us a stern lecture on not rushing. But this time it was Dad and Gersey mentioned blood-brothers. Dad knew immediately what he meant and I understood about every tenth word of his explanation.

We'd have to mingle our blood through cutting and binding. Sounded good to me.

Gersey

We stood facing each other in front of the fireplace in Ru and Sev's living room. Dad tied our left wrists together with a cord of braided silver, saying the words of binding under his breath while my brother and his bonded stood witness by my side and Draco and Charlie stood by Harry. Flicking the silver switchblade open, he looked at both of us then smiled and cut our thumbs.

"Colligare!" He called out, our thumbs coming together.

I felt his blood like a fire within my veins and by the widening of his eyes, he could feel mine also. The heat built until we burned for each other, hands clasping and lips joining. I kept it brief although I wanted more than anything to claim him body and soul right then and there. His little whimper when I pulled away mirrored my own.

"Gersey," he sighed my name and I smiled at his longing look.

Bringing his hands up to my lips, I kissed each one gently. "Harry, can you feel it?"

He blushed and Dad chuckled. "Son, close your eyes and feel within yourself, deep in your heart."

My little love nodded hesitantly and closed those beautiful green eyes of his while I pulled my hands from his so he could concentrate. The cord had vanished, the way that all bonding cords did but when I felt something at my throat, I reached up to touch what felt like a silken collar. I'd have to find a mirror to take a look later.

"Oh wow, it's like there's someone else inside of me." Harry opened his eyes and beamed up at me. "I can feel you, Ger, like the echo of another heartbeat. I hope that's what it feels like when I get pregnant."

Pregnant? My jaw dropped and I would have sputtered if I hadn't been shocked silent.

"Indeed, Harry that is very much what it feels like." Sev's voice cut through my confusion and he moved forward to steer my little love towards the table. "We'll talk about having children much later, Harry. We have enough on our plate at the moment. Let's have our tea and plan our next

move."

Harry

Darn it, I hadn't meant to let that out just yet. Gersey looked a little stunned but I was pretty sure that I'd be able to talk him around eventually. For the moment, I hit Draco who was laughing at me and glared at Charlie for not reining him in. When I turned my head, I felt something around my throat and I put up a hand to feel it. It was silky smooth but twisted on itself. I saw a glint of gold or silver at Ger's neck and when he sat down, I reached out to stroke it while he shivered at my touch.

Catching my hand in his, he kissed it again. "Yours is twisted silver and gold."

"Brill, yours is, too." I leaned in and kissed him again, just because I could. But then I sat down by him and accepted a piece of dark, gummy ginger bread smothered in whipped cream. Rubeus was such a good cook. There was nothing but little moans of enjoyment around the table until we mostly finished eating.

"Well, now that Harry is protected, we need to finish up the work on the potions." Sev looked tired and I wasn't the only one who noticed the circles under his eyes. Rubeus was gently rubbing his back and my potions master was beginning to lean towards him, although I don't think he realized it. "Hermione will be finished tomorrow on her half and Harry's half is done."

"How long will they last?" Dad Hagrid asked.

By now, Sev was totally supported against Rubeus' shoulder and his eyes were drooping. "Seven days uncombined but only four hours once the Matriarchs stir them together."

"Good, Draco, have you noticed anything different about the great hall?" Dad asked.

"No sir," the blond shook his head and I noticed that he was sitting much closer to Charlie than he had been just a few days before. "I get a feeling of cold near the front doors but the weather has changed so it may just be the north wind."

Charlie didn't look like he believed that. "I've been over the whole hall with a fine tooth comb and so did Remus before he sequestered himself for the full moon. He smelled something sour but it was so faint that he could never pinpoint the source."

"Damn," Gersey's hand was on my leg under the table, rubbing it slowly and warming me from head to toe. "It's there but I can't see anything but something black, no matter how hard I try."

"Draco, don't go into the hall unless one of us is with you." Dad is so easygoing that you could forget sometimes that he's a powerful wizard. "If something does happen, we need to know immediately."

Rubeus

I paid attention to the conversation but part of my attention was reserved for my hardworking mate. Sev was cuddled close and I finished putting him to sleep with a little mental nudge and some help from our son. He was working so hard that I was afraid that he was overdoing. The baby took a lot of energy from him and he was sleeping more and more.

It was October 30 and I just knew that the enemy was going to attack tomorrow. I could hardly bear to think of the lives that would be lost when that happened. But it needed to be now because I wanted our son born into a world without Voldemort. Harry and Draco were squabbling a little and I grinned at how normal they sounded. Gersey and Charlie were exchanging commiserating looks.

I wanted the shadows gone from all our lives. "Shadows . . . could it be someone with an invisibility cloak?"

Harry perked up but Gersey shook his head. "It's not that kind of dark, Rube. It's opaque like that black hole that MacNair escaped through."

Draco shivered and Charlie carefully stroked his hair, making sure that he didn't constrain the smaller boy. They were a good couple or would be once all this commotion was over with. I smiled at them both and Draco managed a real one right before he gingerly moved closer to Charlie's warmth, laying his head on the broad shoulder just waiting for him.

"Dad Hagrid, could . . ." Draco paused and shook his head, pulling away from Charlie and standing up. "I need to go check on Ss-serens."

He all but ran from the house and Charlie looked bewildered but stood anyway and started for the front door. Gersey called to him. "Would you be willing to blood-bond with Draco? Are you that committed to him?"

Charlie stopped and frowned. "Of course, I am, Ger."

Harry spoke up. "Tell him that, Charlie. He's still unsure of the place he holds in your heart. Dra' thinks that you're feeling sorry for him."

The dragon handler got a real determined look on his face. "Don't any of you go any where. We'll be right back."

I smiled and cuddled Sev closer, gently resting my head on his silky black hair. It looked like we had another son or very soon would.

Charlie

I found Draco wrapped around Ss-serens' long neck while she purred the way only a dragon could. He didn't look up when I came in although he knew I was there. "I'm sorry, Charlie. I don't know what I was saying."

Standing behind him, I very gently laid a hand on his gleaming blond hair and took a gamble. "You started to say what I wanted to say. You still aren't sure of me, Draco, and I do understand that a penniless dragon handler isn't someone that a Malfoy would want a permanent connection with. But for a moment I let myself dream that you'd want to be a blood-brother to me or maybe even bond with me."

He stilled for so long that I was afraid I'd lost him. But Ss-serens winked at me and he slowly let go of her and turned into my arms. His beautiful blue eyes looked up and I saw him swallow hard. "If we bond like that, you'll be stuck with me for the rest of our lives. Are you sure that you want that, Charles Weasley?"

"I want you, Draco Malfoy, every way I can get you and for every day we've got." I told him, sliding my arms around him slowly, in case he didn't want to be that close.

But he moved towards me, sliding his arms around my waist and holding me tight. "Then I guess we're stuck with each other, Charlie. But just so you know, I'm not the one getting pregnant if we want children."

I squeezed him so tight he squeaked. "That's okay, Dra', we can always adopt." And then I kissed him the way I'd wanted to do from the moment that I knew he belonged to me. Within a heartbeat, he was kissing me back and for the first time I felt his groin react to mine, growing and hardening.

"Oh, Charlie," he sighed before burying his head in the crook of my neck. "You feel so good. I want to feel you inside of me but I'm still a little afraid."

"I love you and I never want to let go, Draco. But for the moment, why don't we start by sharing our blood?" I dropped another kiss on his hair, breathing in the clean, sharp scent of him. "That will make me feel better than almost anything. As to this," I wiggled my hips just a little and he gasped, "we'll take great care and share our bodies one bit at a time. All right?"

He raised his head and a grin slowly blossomed. Pressing back, he looked mischievous. "Harry said that Ger let him explore his body for his birthday. Can we do that?"

"Yes," I took a deep breath. "We can explore to your heart's content."

Draco

"Let's get started." I couldn't seem to stop smiling and taking his hand, I pulled him out of the green house and back into the house. Dad Hagrid was waiting with another silver cord and the silver knife. We repeated the ceremony in front of the warm fire. I could feel his blood move through my body along all the veins and arteries until I was flushed with warmth from head to toe.

Even when we were no longer touching, I could feel him. It was the most reckless thing I'd ever done but it felt so right that I told the thinking part of my brain to take a rest and let my heart have its way. Now, if we could just get through Samhain, Voldemort and the end of the world as we knew it, I'd get to explore Charlie from head to toe. My body had finally responded to his so I knew that I'd mostly healed from the rape.

I didn't want MacNair anywhere inside of me and Charlie's blood was cleansing him out with every beat of my heart. Soon I wanted him physically inside of me to wash away the last of the Death Eater's touch. It might hurt but I was used to pain. What I wasn't used to was this sense of happiness that bubbled up whenever I saw Charlie or heard his voice. But maybe I'd get used to that too, I thought and grinned up at him.

This kiss was even better than the one we'd just shared and suddenly I wanted to get naked and explore every inch of his skin. But Gersey was laughing at something Harry had said and I realized that we were still somewhat public. It was going to be a while before I could drag him into my room so we could do that exploring thing.

Severus was laughing too so I drew away reluctantly from my new blood-brother to see what had caught his fancy. His hands were splayed across the mound that was growing in front of him. He was still skinny everywhere but there and I knew I should tell him how brave I thought he was to carry such a burden. Although, I'd better remember not to call the baby that since he was going to be my little brother once he was born.

"Draco, your brother has a gift for you." Sev held out his hand and I reluctantly let go of Charlie to go to his side. Sev has the most elegant hands even with the small scars left by his potions and

he took my hand in his then laid it on the spot where the baby liked to kick the hardest.

And the strangest feeling washed through me when I felt his touch. It was like a shot of pure love traveling instantly throughout my whole body and healing me inside and out of the trauma of the rape. There was a little giggle ringing in my ears and I couldn't help but smile at the laughing imp that was in truth my brother-of-the-heart.

"Thank you, little one. That helps a lot." I patted the spot gently and I got the impression that he was yawning and curling up for a nap. "Sev, you should probably lie down. He's going to sleep for a bit."

Severus

I nodded, my little nap on Ru's shoulder hadn't lasted long enough. "Draco, I know that I can depend on you and Charlie not to explore too far . . . at least for now. Take care of each other."

Ru grinned at Charlie when he stuck out his tongue. "Ya be good ta each other but not too good for now. Come on Sev, let's tuck ya up. Thanks, Dad."

Harry and Draco turned to Dad Hagrid and hugged him in unison while he chuckled. "You're very welcome, boys. You're just what Mum and I always wanted, four more sons to bring even more joy to the Hagrid family."

I felt a little teary at being included in his verbal hug. The further along I got with this pregnancy, the more emotional I grew. Ru cuddled me at every opportunity and I was beginning to expect such gentle handling. Had anyone told me a year ago that I would be bonded, pregnant and happy by this Samhain, I would have had them locked up in St. Mungo's.

But here I was being tucked into the bed that I shared with my Rubeus while my unborn son sent sleepy waves of love to me. With a yawn and a soft kiss, I was asleep.

//The stone hall was colder than a Scottish lake in January. Blood stained the floor, fresh blood. I could smell something rotting that wrinkled my nose in disgust. A body hung from chains in the middle of the room and I circled it until I could see the remains of Lucius. He was frozen in the moment of death, his face the picture of despair. I still had enough memories of our shared past to feel pity for the man I'd once known.

The feeling of power was unmistakable and I turned towards the throne that Voldemort had created out of the bones of his prey. He'd grown huge, twice the size of Ss-serens and I watched him speak to the men on their knees before him. But I couldn't hear his words only see his lips move. Not for the ring of Merlin himself would I go any closer to him, my hands going instinctively to my child.//

I awoke with a start, reaching for Rubeus only to find him gone. The baby was quiet and I prayed that he hadn't dreamt with me. Untangling myself from the covers, I sat up and unsteadily got to my feet. I needed the bathroom and my bonded in that exact order. Shaking my head, I walked to the door and opened it to find the room empty. That was rather disconcerting but I went to the bathroom to relieve myself with a sigh of relief.

I truly was looking forward to having my old body back. When I finished washing my hands, I cast a mental call for Rubeus. Excitement filled the bond and the unmistakable trill of a dragon hatching sent me out the front door to the greenhouse.

The Spy *****

My master was not pleased with me and I shivered in my web. The Potter boy had only been through twice and both times I'd been at the opposite end of the ceiling. Malfoy junior had been through twice as well but the dark lord wanted Potter more so I'd let him pass.

But I had sent back the news that they had become friends and were living together in the dungeons. The rumor that they'd become lovers had sent him into a frenzy and I was doubly glad that I wasn't there to have to absorb his anger. This morning though He'd told me to bring Malfoy even if I couldn't get Potter.

I was almost glad although I'd been enjoying watching my little flowers come and go. They were so sweet and I'd wiled away the hours deciding who I'd take first. One in particular had caught my eye and I had crept down to just above eye level when she and an older girl had stopped to talk.

Her auburn hair rippled down her back and her pale white skin was like the finest porcelain. Her chest was still flat, her breasts barely begun to bud. Her voice was so delicate that I could have listened to her for hours. When she left, I retreated to the corner of the ceiling where I spun yet another part to my web.

Imaging her voice begging me not to hurt her; her little hands beating at me while I pinched those budding nipples until she screamed; tying her to the headboard while she writhed on the black silk sheets; tasting her pale flesh while she whimpered in fear; levering her legs apart so I could see that virgin opening then tasting those fresh young juices with my tongue; then I'd watch her eyes widen when they first saw my cock hardening.

I'd place it just at the outside and nudge her a little while she begged me not to rape her. I love hearing that while I smooth my hands over her little tits and down over her flat stomach. I'd pretend to reconsider then holding her hips still I'd thrust with all my strength into that tight sheath while she screamed and screamed and screamed.

What was my little flower's name? Ah yes, Ginny.

Fiona

Something was going on and it wasn't this Halloween party. My eyes softened when they lit on Gration Hagrid. The more time I spent with him, the more time I wanted to give him. It had started at the attack on Hogwarts and it wasn't a day before I had an owl bringing me an invitation to visit the school again. My editor practically salivated when I asked permission to come back here.

My story had earned me a raise and I'd basked in that glow for half a day before starting to dig for the next part of the tale. The Minister of Magic was being an ass but we'd all gotten used to that. The red-headed Hagrid had sparked my attention after I'd drooled over his little brother. Luckily, it seemed that not all of them preferred men and I'd spent an hour choosing what I was going to wear when I met him again.

He'd met me at the gates and I'd felt that little lurch in the pit of my stomach when he'd kissed my hand. Charm was something the Hagrids had in spades. I'm an only child so it was fun meeting his sisters and his roguish twin. The students were coming back to Hogwarts and with Gration as my guide, I talked with them and attended some of their classes.

Security was tight and it was almost a week later before Gra' gave me an invitation from his mother to come for dinner. If I'd realized that it would entail walking through the Forbidden Forest,

I might have thought twice but by then I was head over heels for the half-giant. He explained that they'd all come down to help out his oldest brother, Rubeus and his new bonded then stayed to continue the fight against Voldemort.

I'd met Rube but not his bonded. There seemed to be some kind of mystery about her but when I'd overheard something about morning sickness, I figured that she was having one of those hard pregnancies that sometimes happen to women necessitating complete bed rest. I'd have time to meet her later once the Dark Lord was taken care of. Somehow Gration had convinced me that the Forces of Light would triumph.

With a little shake of my head, I came back to the kids decorating the great hall with the help of the house elves and instructors. Gration was helping little Ginny Weasley hang some bunting by levitating her high enough to stick it to one of the great big ceiling beams. She was giggling at something he'd said and I had a sudden picture of how he'd be with a little girl of his own. And I wanted to be the one to give him that child. My mother would be so proud of me.

Rhea

I swallowed hard and thought calm thoughts. The noise of the great hall was getting on my nerves for some reason. There were more than enough helpers so I slipped away to the back hall. Maybe if I laid down for a little nap, I'd feel less nervous. But first I'd stop by and see if Royan was feeling better. The triplets were growing so fast that she literally had no energy to do more than eat and sleep.

Smiling, I got to their door and raised my hand to knock when a thought hit me like a freight train. Pregnancy, could I be pregnant? Smoothing a shaking hand over my flat stomach, I thought with longing of the baby I wanted to create with my husband. And as if my thoughts had conjured him, he appeared at the end of the hall.

"Love, are you all right? I looked around and you weren't there." Sirius strode to my side and took my hand in his, looking up into my eyes. "Sweetheart?"

"Siri, I think we should go visit Poppy." I leaned down and kissed him gently. "I want her to do a wand-scan."

"Why? Are you feeling sick? Maybe I should have her come to you? You could lay down first and I'll go get her." He was urging me towards our rooms just beyond Remus and Royan's.

But I dug my heels in and stopped him. "No need for that, Siri. We'll go to Poppy, I don't feel that sick."

He nodded uncertainly but hurried me along to the open ward of the cheery infirmary. The medi-witch greeted us with a smile and a quip about co-opting me to help her nurse the students who ate too much tonight. But when I asked her to do a scan, she nodded and played her wand over my skin from my head down to my toes. Her face never changed once before she invited me to sit down on one of the beds.

I tugged Sirius down with me, having a premonition what she was going to say.

"Congratulations, Rhea and Sirius, you're pregnant." She said cheerfully.

Sirius' mouth dropped open and his eyes rolled up in his head right before he passed out. Poppy chuckled and told me that I was about four weeks along. We sat and chatted about vitamins and exercise until my bonded came to again.

He smiled, still in shock. "I love you, Rhea. We made a baby."

"We certainly did, love." And I kissed him. I could hardly wait to tell Mum.

Royan

When I awoke from my nap, I found Remus curled up beside me and back in his human form. He'd been so afraid that he might hurt me when he changed into the wolf that he had wanted to hide away for the three days of his monthly transformation. But I'd met the wolf and knew he'd never hurt me or his cubs. So when he changed, he did it in the comfort of his own rooms with me to rub his stomach and watch him play with his best friend, Padfoot.

Rhea and I drank tea and sewed little outfits for Rube and Sev's baby while our husbands played with one of those red rubber balls, spelled to move on its own, chasing it all over the room. Once the triplets were born, Remus was going to have his paws full with his new playmates. When it was time for bed, my beautiful wolf would join me under the duvet, snuggling close while I petted him until I fell asleep.

It was like having a furry bed pillow and I'd grown addicted to the feel of him. One of the triplets kicked me hard and I winced. Poppy and Rhea thought I'd be having them early and the bigger they got, the readier I was for that. Birthing them would be hard work but I wanted them out so I could hold them, nurse them and dress them up in those little outfits that I kept making.

We already had half a dresser full but with three babies, we were going to need every single one. Coming back to now, I watched my husband sleep and thought about how much I loved doing that, no matter what form he was in. Leaning in, I kissed him gently and his eyes flew open. He still has an amazed look in his eyes when he sees me. I have to admit to loving that although I was working on getting him to believe that I'd always be there for him.

"Royan, are you all right?" He rose up on one elbow and shook his head. "I had a horrible dream about Draco and Harry surrounded by Death Eaters."

I felt a cold chill under my skin. "We'd better tell the others. Today is Samhain and the boys are going to be here any moment."

He leaned over and kissed me softly. "They'll be okay, Royan. We're going to take care of Him this time so all our children will be safe."

I was praying that he was right. He helped me out of bed and steadied me while kissing my bulging stomach. "Hi, guys, take a break from kicking your mama. We're going to take a nice hot shower, you like it when we do that."

Laughing, I let him lead me to our bathroom. All five of us like showering together.

Arwen

This had been an eye-opening visit in more ways than one. In the back of my mind, I'd always thought that I'd be collecting Gersey Hagrid sooner or later. But I'd arrived to find he was so taken that it wasn't funny and every single one of his brothers and sisters were, too. I frowned and thought about the power they were raising by combining all the admittedly odd members to their family.

A Death Eater, a werewolf, an illegal animagus, a reporter, the Boy-who-lived, and a red-headed curse breaker - the children already conceived were mind-boggling. I didn't have the heart to tell Gersey that his and Harry's children were going to be wizards of great power and they were going to be started within the year. We just had to destroy Voldemort tonight so those children would be born safely.

There was something about this hall that made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. I slowly moved from one end of the giant room to the other, my bright red sequined evening gown swishing around my ankles. Someone evil was near but I couldn't figure out where. It was a 'he', I could sense that and I had the same vision of something black stealing Draco from us that Gersey had had.

But where was he hiding and how was he going to get hold of Draco?

"Ah, my little beauty, dibs on the first dance tonight." Hossic whispered in my ear and I shivered all the way down to my glittery red heels. He was dressed all in green silk as an Elf of the Forest. "Bill and I are going to take turns driving you insane tonight."

"Hm-m-m, that has possibilities." I leaned back into his strong silk covered arms and looked for the Weasley who'd actually taught me a curse that I didn't know. He was moving gracefully through the throngs of kids to his lover's side dressed in a pirate costume with a black patch over one eye. His skin-tight black pants and knee-high black leather boots had quite a few of the older girls panting.

A threesome just might be what the Goddess had planned for me. I never had visions of myself so I didn't have a clue if this was my future. But even if this was only a diversion it should prove to be interesting.

Bill and Hossic were two strong men. I had no false doubts about the power I channeled and had since I was sixteen. But maybe it was time to allow someone else to be strong. Maybe it was time to give up control and see what grew. So I reached out for Bill and pulled him in close so I was the filling of this Hagrid-Weasley sandwich. When the music started, we'd have to see what kind of dancers we were.

This was going to be fun.

Hermione

I'd finished my part of the complex potion that morning and I was tired but exhilarated at the same time. Severus was still the best teacher around and his tutoring kept me on my toes. I was in seventh heaven and what was even better, Ron had taken my absences in stride and given me his support. Charlie had told me that he and Bill had taken him aside and given him a stern talking to.

What ever they'd done, he'd grown up a lot and even listened now when I talked about potions. He knew that Severus was alive but not about the baby so I had to be careful when I talked about why he needed me to make part of it. Some of the herbs couldn't be handled by a pregnant person so I was dicing and slicing up all of those. It was such a rush to make something come together from bits and pieces.

And working with the four very different Matriarchs was a rush of a very different kind. They were so powerful in the four elements that I was learning so much more than I could ever learn in a classroom. Mum Hagrid made the earth sing and was teaching me how to hear the echoes. Aunt

Illona could call the four winds to her and I was learning how to recognize the different directions.

Granny Hagrid could make water dance to her tune and I could see where Gersey got his music talent from. Arwen rather scared me with her sinuous femininity or perhaps that was just because she commanded the element of fire, the one that frightened me with its power. I was drawn to it, the red and gold dancing flames of a fire. But it was dangerous and controlling it was difficult.

Fire had a life of its own and I wanted to tame it or at least learn it from spark to flame. I wanted to know all of them but that would take years. And even though I was intimidated by Arwen, I had gathered my courage and asked her for help with my costume for tonight. She'd laughed but not unkindly and helped me chose the fabric of deep green velvet inset with golden lace that Mum Hagrid had whipped into a medieval gown that brushed the floor and hugged my small breasts with its high waist.

Granny had braided my hair with more gold chord and Ron had taken one look at me and lost his voice. That made me smile and take his arm so he could escort me into the great hall. Arwen gave me an approving look and I watched her flirt with both Hossic and Bill. Something told me that they were all three in for a wild ride tonight. But then I saw Harry and Draco come in together and lost my own voice.

Harry was in deep green from head to toe and the tight pants and billowing sleeves were making more than one girl hyperventilate. But Draco was a match for him in the same outfit but all in black, his fair hair gleaming in the flickering candle light. They were both worth drooling over and once they split up, the whole room seemed to flock around the two of them.

Ginny

I watched everyone swirl around the room and wished I had one of those muggle video cameras so I could record it all. I felt like Cinderella at the ball just because I was here. My brothers were all here except for the twins and they'd all danced with me. Harry had too and I felt more feminine in his arms than I ever had in my life. He complimented me on my costume and I had to smile.

Hermione had helped me with it and the white feathers on my arms and all down my back when paired with my feather mask made me the perfect swan. Harry even kissed my cheek and I thought maybe I wouldn't wash that spot for a day or two. He was just so beautiful even with his glasses on.

Draco Malfoy was also beautiful but in a far off, kind of icy way. When he asked me to dance, I said yes but I was really nervous. Ron had almost choked but he didn't say anything against him so I moved out onto the floor with him. He told me that I looked like a little angel and that was sweet of him so I relaxed. He was a great dancer and I felt as light as one of my feathers.

We finished up near the punchbowl and he brought me a cup of the ruby red punch. We sipped it in silence but it was comfortable instead of uneasy and I felt so good that I wanted to dance until dawn. Harry was dancing with Hermione and they looked so good that I could tell that Ron was trying not to be jealous. But she'd already told me that my brother was growing up nicely and that she had plans for him.

I'd passed that on to Ron and he got this really goofy smile on his face. I was glad that I was too young to get all tangled up like that. Some day I'd fall in love but I kind of thought that I wanted to become the first Quidditch pro-player in the history of the game. Dressing up was fine but I was more at home on my broom than on the dance floor. When I found myself telling Draco that, he burst into laughter and kissed my hand.

Put his lips right on it and told me that he'd back me all the way. Maybe I wouldn't wash that hand for a while either. He asked me if I wanted more punch and went to the bowl while I chatted to him. Something caught my eye and I squinted a little to see what was moving through the air. Before I could say anything, it landed on Draco's shoulder and with a loud flash, he disappeared.

I screamed and Harry ran towards me, most of my brothers right behind him. "Ginny, what happened? Where's Draco?"

"Something took him." I stammered and burst into tears.

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Parts 37 - 38 by Athea

Author's Notes:

Draco finds himself in the hands of the enemy but help is on the way

Draco

I staggered to my knees before standing at the sight of someone I'd never wanted to see again. A spider hopped off my shoulder onto the stone floor and a disgusting little man popped up before I could stomp on him.

"Oh good, Stanton, you got him. Our Master will be pleased with you." MacNair said with an oily air that made me want to hit him. "But you should go back and see if you can entice Potter to join our party. Have you picked out your first little flower?"

"Yes, of course, I'll return at once." The little bastard was practically simpering. "She's just a little angel, MacNair. I can hardly wait to take her and strip off those feathers from her young body."

What? He had to be talking about Ginny and I wanted to hex him but I was frozen in place, unable to move a finger. //God, Harry get her away from there.// I thought as hard as I could, straining to twitch or make some kind of movement. But I was paralyzed and could only watch Stanton turn back into the spider and disappear, leaving me alone with my own personal nightmare.

I'd forgotten how big he was, I thought with the part of my mind that wasn't gibbering in fear. He sauntered over and ran his hands over my body like he had the right. "Well, boy, welcome to MacNair Manor. I've developed a taste for Malfoys and you'll be right back where we started soon enough. Our Master has promised me that I can collar and chain you once he takes over."

//Over my dead body, you bastard.// I was going to kill myself rather than become his little slave. If I couldn't belong to Charlie than I wasn't going to belong to anyone. I'd vowed that to myself yesterday and I'd find a way to do it if I had to.

"Yes," he fondled my cock through my pants, squeezing so hard that I almost passed out, "I look forward to taking you again now that you're all healed up. Remember how good it felt when I slammed into you, little slut?" He licked my ear and I wanted so badly to hit him but then he almost bit my earlobe off and the new pain swamped me.

"You're going to enjoy this time almost as much." With no warning, he tapped me with his wand and all my clothes disappeared. Then he rammed two meaty fingers into me while I wailed silently. "Yes, I'm looking forward to breaking you completely. But I need to report to our Master that part one of our plan is in place." With a murmured incantation, he apparated us to the game room of his manor. "Stay here and think about all the wonderful ways I'm going to make you pay for that eviction notice I received from Gringotts, my beautiful little slave."

With a last painful squeeze of my cock, he apparated away. I was shaking everywhere while blood trickled down my leg from where he'd torn me. I hadn't heard the spell he used to paralyze

me so I wasn't sure what would release me. Not to mention, I didn't want to be naked when Harry arrived.

A soft touch on my shoulder startled me and the floating figure that appeared would have frightened me but I recognized Michael MacNair. He looked so sad when he spoke. "I'm sorry, Draco, but I can't work magic any longer. Father used the Immobilis spell. It's his favorite."

Bill had taught us that one and the counter which could be done by concentrating really hard on something and wishing to move towards it. I focused on Michael's blue eyes so like my own. And within the space of a minute, I was free. Gasping, I collapsed and hit the floor so hard that I'd probably have even more bruises.

"Wow, that was so neat," Michael followed me down and knelt beside me. "You're good, Draco. He's spelled the room so you can't apparate out. He keeps forgetting that those spells don't affect me."

I was getting back my courage and I scrubbed away the tears that had fallen without me realizing it. Seeing a cloak on one of the side benches, I levered myself up and crossed the cold stone flagstones to grab it. I was freezing and shaking although the second was probably shock more than anything else.

"Michael," I turned back to him and found that he'd floated after me. So I sat down gingerly on one cheek, trying to ignore the pain inside. "Why did you stay once he killed you?"

"He keeps me here." The ghost of the young boy shrugged. "He drains me whenever he notices that I've absorbed any energy. And he likes to show me off to his fellow Death Eaters. I'm sorry that he hurt you, if I could get you out of here I would."

"How does he keep you on this plane?" I asked then answered my own question. "Never mind, he's tethered you the same way he linked to me after the rape. Michael, do you see a light anywhere?"

He nodded. "I see it all the time but he stops me when I move towards it. It's bright and warm and sometimes I hear Mama's voice calling my name. That hurts a lot."

And I remembered how it felt when Severus had shown me how to break the link that bound me to my rapist. "Michael, I want you to concentrate on where the energy rope is that binds you to him. Can you see it?" He nodded so I continued. "Is it black and twisted?" He nodded again. "I want you to picture a pair of scissors in your hand. Can you see them, all shiny and sharp?" I'd closed my eyes by now and even I could see them. "I want you to cut that cord with the scissors. I'll help you."

The shears neared the ugly looking rope and Michael used all this strength and a little bit of mine to cut it in two. He jumped back almost into my arms and in that moment the whole room lit up with a bright beam of light. A small dark haired woman stood in the radiance with her arms outstretched to the little ghost.

"Mama!" He ran to her and she caught him up in her arms with such a big smile that it glowed. "You came for me."

"I've been waiting for so long, my sweet son. My own dear Michael, we're finally together again." Her glowing blue eyes turned to me. "Thank you, Draco. Know that on this night, you have righted a great wrong and what help those of us who have gone before can give you, we pledge to you freely and without conditions."

"Thank you, Draco." The little boy separated from his mother and came back to give me a soft

kiss that sent healing energy through me like Sev's baby had done the day before. "I won't ever forget you."

"Come, Michael. Things are happening and we need to go." His mother gathered him up in her arms and the light faded, taking them with it.

I sat there, limp but exhilarated at the same time. No matter what happened later, I knew that I'd done something really, really good. And hopefully, I'd be able to kill his father and send him straight to Hell so he wouldn't be bothering them through eternity either. Now, I needed to get out of here before I drew Harry to me and we were both caught. Casting a spell, I watched it bounce harmlessly off the stone walls.

A loud humming sound and Harry appeared in front of me. Damn, too late.

"Are you okay, Draco? What did he do to you?" Harry was fierce in my defense and I blinked at how good that felt. "Draco?"

"He used Immobilis on me and fondled me a bit before leaving. Unfortunately, this room is warded so we can't get out." I stood and watched him toss a couple of quick spells off the walls.

"Damn." He said apologetically. "Sorry I didn't get here sooner."

"Come to me, little onessss." The loud voice boomed off the walls and they shimmered away to be replaced with the tall standing stones of Stonehenge and the nightmare figure of Voldemort. "I knew that you would come to his resssscue, young Potter. How good of you to repay my kindnesss."

//Oh shit, this was not good.//

Harry

//Shit, shit, shit! Gersey, where are you?// I stood up straight side by side with Draco in the black cloak too long for him. MacNair stood by Voldemort's side and his face was like that ugly mask of Dionysus, greedy and evil at the same time. The wizards that surrounded us were all masked and wearing black but Voldemort and MacNair were both naked and I had to keep swallowing because I was afraid that I was going to be sick.

Voldemort waved his hand and suddenly Draco and I were both naked, too. "Much better. It isss SSSamhain and tonight I take back the wizzarding world, desstroying the mugglesss by the millionsss."

He was drooling a bit at the thought and I kept my gaze on his chin instead of those crazy red eyes or his too big body. Draco was shaking slightly and I put out my hand to take his. Whispering while Voldemort ranted on, "Dra', promise me that you'll kill me if this doesn't work?"

"Only if you promise the same, Har'." His lips didn't even move. "I'm not living through a second rape."

And suddenly a third voice whispered in both our ears. "None of that, little loves. Nobody but bad guys are dying tonight." It was Gersey and I almost fainted in relief. "Be ready, I've got your wands and the others are almost in place."

Okay, this might just work, I took a deep breath then another. Behind the flat altar that Voldemort was standing on, a glimmer of light appeared that started small and grew slowly. At first I thought

it was some kind of dark magic but Draco shivered and started smiling.

"We're going to have more help than we thought, guys." He whispered softly.

"Who?" Gersey and I chorused.

"Everyone that they've killed going back sixteen years or so. The one in front is little Michael MacNair and there's his mother." He fell silent and I wanted to cry when slowly but surely I saw my parents solidify near the little boy and his mother.

Mom's eyes were so bright and Dad's were the same color as mine. I smiled back at them and Voldemort's voice slowed. "What are you smiling about, young Potter? You will not leave here alive."

"Yes, I will." I took courage from all the people who loved me, both living and dead. "You're the one who dies tonight."

And as if that was the signal, Gersey slid our wands into our hands and flung back the hood of my dad's invisible cloak. The dead flowed into a shield between us and the Death Eaters, absorbing the spells that they flung at us. But soon they were too busy trying to defend themselves from the fighters at their backs.

Voldemort's hissing tones swelled until I couldn't hear anyone else. Then suddenly the four Matriarchs appeared around him and with a flick of their wrists, a cauldron full of potion upended itself on his head. Everywhere it touched, part of him burned and it looked like acid eating away at his flesh. His cry shook the ground and fire darted from his fingertips towards them. But several of us darted in front of the ladies we loved and our wands fought back the fire.

Then Arwen pointed her wand at him along with Hermione who'd appeared out of nowhere and a fireball of gigantic proportions engulfed him. His shriek deafened me and he fell to the stone writhing in agony, still calling out curses. Luckily, we knew the counters and every one of them flew right back to hex him instead. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Charlie and Draco fighting MacNair when suddenly Ss-serens flew in and torched him with her flame.

That scream would haunt a few dreams, I was pretty sure. But Voldemort hadn't given up quite yet and Gersey and I found ourselves fighting off the Crucio curse. But Dumbledore was suddenly beside us and he lifted his wand to cast 'Avada Kadava' on the crazed would-be Dark Lord. Gersey and I reinforced it with green and gold fire spewing from our wands and Voldemort began to shrivel until finally there was nothing left but gray ash that blew away.

He was gone.

I was crying and laughing at the same time when Gersey's arms came around me. Part of me wondered if this was what hysteria felt like while part of me wanted to find a quiet place and snuggle so close to him that we became one person. A soft caress to my hair brought my head up to see Mom and Dad standing there.

"Dearest Harry, what a fine young man you've grown up to be." Mom leaned over and kissed my cheek.

"We're proud of you, son." Dad brushed back my hair from the scar. "Always remember that we love you and we'll be watching over you for some time to come."

"Gersey, take good care of our baby." Mom stood on tiptoe to kiss him. "You have our full support for your bonding. And Gersey, I'd just accept that Harry's going to carry your children. In fact, I believe your family is going to be quite large."

I beamed up at him. "You see, Ger, it will be all right. I promise not to have more than six." And while he was still sputtering, I kissed Mom and Dad. "I love you both so much. I miss you."

"We miss you, too. But we'll always be close to you, Harry." Dad looked over his shoulder and I noticed that the light above the altar stone was so bright it almost hurt the eyes. "Time to go, love. We'll be seeing you, Harry and Gersey."

"Love you, my angels." Mom blew another kiss to us and followed Dad into the light.

All around us, there were people saying goodbye to their loved ones who'd died but come back to help fight for the Light. It should have been sad but it wasn't although almost everyone was crying a little. It was hard to be so close but have to let them go again. Gersey slung my Dad's cloak around me and hugged me tight. I'd forgotten that I was naked.

"Thank the Goddess, Harry. I love you so much." His arms were so strong around me that I could hardly breathe but that didn't matter. We were safe and together and that was all I needed.

Well, maybe one thing else. "Gersey, can we please bond now?"

He started to laugh and Dumbledore appeared over his shoulder with that twinkle in his eye that I loved seeing. "Well, young man, I think a bonding could be arranged but only after you pass your Newts. And that may be sooner than you think."

Brilliant! I beamed at him while Gersey groaned. Once we bonded, I was going to start getting myself ready to take him inside of me. Sev and I were going to do some research on the spell he used to see how it worked. I wanted to be pregnant by this time next year. Sev had already told me that I could baby sit for him and Rubeus. With some practical experience under my belt, I'd be ready in no time for our own children.

But that was for later, now was for making sure that my new family had come through the battle all safe and sound. Dumbledore muttered a quick clothing spell so Draco and I were dressed for the party again. And that reminded me of how Draco got taken.

"Headmaster! What about the animagus in Hogwarts?"

"Good heavens," he apparated away with Gersey and I holding onto him.

In the grand ballroom, the kids were mostly gone except for a few. Royan, Rhea and that reporter Fiona caught sight of us and started for us but Ginny beat them over to us. "Are you all right? Where's Draco?"

"We're all fine, Ginny. But the animagus is still here." I gave her a hug and she snickered.

"Yeah, he was still here when you ported away. But I spotted him dangling from his web and got Professor McGonagall." She giggled. "She conjured up a fly swatter and let me smack him one. Then we got a glass bottle and scooped him up in it. I got some of that muggle spray stuff that Mom likes to use at home and squirted him really good."

She pointed to the table and the slightly squished spider who was feebly moving in the sealed jar. "She said we needed to keep him for the trials, otherwise I could do what I wanted with him."

Trust a Weasley to know what to do. I snickered myself and pretty soon all of us were practically rolling on the floor. It was just so good to be free.

Well, free and in love and finally able to look to the future.

This future looked very, very bright.

Severus

I was almost sick with fear and it didn't help that the Death mark on my arm was flaming red-hot. I wished that I'd been able to help instead of sitting here, babysitting the newly hatched dragon. I remembered the dazed look in Draco's eyes when the little dragonling first caught sight of him and staggered over to collapse in his arms. He'd cuddled him close and looked up in awe.

"He says his name is Ss-sarco and he's hungry." That had been accompanied by the high-pitched keening of an empty dragon and we'd all chuckled while Ara gave Draco the bowl of stunned frogs.

Ss-sarco had eaten all of them before burping a little flame and curling up in my son's lap. Charlie had hugged them both close and we'd left on tiptoe to leave them to bond. Now, they were all off fighting to save the world while we waited behind. As my oldest son would say, 'this sucked'.

An explosion suddenly went off inside my head and I cried out, scaring Ss-sarco awake. Ara came to my side and looked anxiously up into my face. "Master Severus?"

I felt grim satisfaction flood our bond while the pain in my arm faded. "I think they just finished off Voldemort." I concentrated hard and felt Ru get hit by a particularly nasty spell. The baby and I flooded him with warmth and he sent us a gentle acknowledgement before going back to work. "They're all fine so far. I expect a lot of healing will be needed when they come back though. It's all right, Ss-sarco, your mother will be home shortly. Have something to eat while we wait."

Ara set a bowl of newts in front of him and his golden eyes lit up before he dove in. He was an engaging little fellow and I was glad that Draco would have him to help take his mind off of the battles to come. Hopefully, those battles would be in the boardrooms of the wizard business world, using the weapons of words and bank notes instead of spells and bodies.

"Master Severus, tea?" Ara was doing her best to take care of me but I wanted Rubeus with all my soul to appear, safe and sound. But I nodded to her and took the cup of soothing chamomile.

"Thank you, Ara." I watched her polish the already gleaming table while I finished the tea and got up to restlessly move around the room. I found myself in the nursery the way that I seemed to find myself doing more and more frequently.

Soon a baby would be sleeping in the old oak cradle that Mum Hagrid had rescued from the sale of the Snape estate. Most of the trunks from the attic of the manor house had made their way here to our house. One of them had been filled with baby clothes, including the beautiful lace dress that I'd been christened in. It hung on a wooden hanger by the cradle, a reminder that this child had a noble heritage even if we'd dwindled to one slightly broken potions master.

Gratation had bought the old rocker that I remembered from my mother's room and I sat down in it, setting it rocking and listening to the creaks that took me back to when I was very small. I rubbed my stomach and listened in on my son's sleepy babbling. "Mama, what would you think of me now? You're going to be a grandmother. I wish you knew about him. You told me once that you wanted me to love someone as much as you loved me. I finally found him, Mama. He makes my heart sing and we've created a son."

The moon shone in the open window and I rested my head against the carved oak while I rocked

lazily back and forth. The linens that Mum Hagrid had sewn for the cradle gleamed white in the pale light and the stuffed silver snake that Hossic had found in another trunk curled up at the foot of the mattress, ready to protect his new playmate when I delivered him.

"Sweetheart, I do know." The gentle voice interrupted my musing and slowly a form took shape in front of me, slightly brighter than the moonlight streaming through the lattice window. It was mother the way I remembered her. "Dearest Severus, I love you and I'm so glad that you found your heart at last."

"Mama," I blinked back tears. Damn hormones, I told myself. "Why now?"

"Because you're ready to hear me, little Sev." She came closer and laid a tender hand on my cheek. "You were so closed off that I couldn't reach you. I was afraid that you would join me a few months ago but Rubeus saved your body then your heart. Tell him that he has my eternal gratitude for loving you. You're going to be wonderful parents and if you wish it, there will be two more children."

I wanted to say that one was sufficient but somehow I couldn't quite bring myself to say the words. She read my mind and laughed the tinkling laugh that I remembered from so long ago. "Sweetheart, it's time for me to move on. Always remember I love you and I'll never be far away since part of me stays in your heart."

Then she leaned down and kissed my cheek, a feather light touch like the brush of a fairy's wing. "My own little Severus, I love you."

I squeezed my eyes shut so I wouldn't see her disappear. "I love you too, Mama."

Another caress to my arm and she was gone. I was crying but there was no one to see me lose control so I let myself cry for all the times that I couldn't in the years since her death. My son sent little soothing pulses through my hand, filling me with the warmth that I'd come to associate with his baby attempts at healing. He was going to be so good when he grew up.

Suddenly the air displaced in the outer room and I sat up straight, hearing Rubeus' voice ask Ara where I was. Then my beautiful bonded was by my side, lifting me in his strong arms and telling me that everyone was safe and sound. I wrapped my arms around his neck and cried some more. I couldn't seem to stop and his worried voice asked what was wrong.

But I couldn't find the words to tell him about my mother's visit so I just shook my head and tried to stop the tears. He carried me out to the front room then into the bathroom which had undergone some changes since the rebuilding of the cottage into a house. We'd put in a bigger tub since we almost always bathed together now. The old one had gone into Draco's bathroom.

The reservoir under the house was three times the size it had been before the Hellbenders moved in. Our hot water was constant and plentiful so Ru set it to running while he sat me gently on the broad side of the tub and started to undress me. He told me about the battle and how Voldemort and MacNair had died. Ss-serens had flamed the wizard who'd harmed Draco and I thought vindictively that it was what he deserved.

By the time some of the others apparated in, I'd managed to stop crying. Ru called out that we'd be a while and Charlie called back that they were going to take Ss-sarco to his mother then turn in. I was able to say goodnight to them and I smiled at Draco's excited voice.

Then Rubeus was pulling off my shirt and we were both looking at my arm where the dark mark had been. The skin was clear and pain free. He lifted me into the tub then and cuddled me in the hot water while I slowly relaxed in his arms. When I thought I had my voice under control, I whispered my news to him.

He cried with me then, cradling me close and rocking me back and forth. We bathed in silence after that, soaking up the heat while I soothed my love over every bruise I could find on his skin. The baby helped and soon we were so sleepy that Rubeus had to lift us out of the tub, drying us with a quick spell before wrapping us in my silk robe. He pulled his own on before carrying us to bed, saying goodnight to Ara on the way to our room.

I was asleep almost before he'd finished tucking me in.

Rubeus

I held my beautiful Sev close and thought about what he'd told me about his mother. He'd needed that last little bit of healing of the wound from her death. And I was willing to bet that her last touch had removed the Dark Mark from his arm. It was amazing what a mother's love could do. I thought of the radiant look on Harry's face when he saw his mom and dad. And the proud look on Ss-serens' face when little Ss-sarco had hopped over to Draco.

My own Mum had given me such a hug when the battle was over that I could still feel it. I didn't like killing but tonight I'd done it twice, both times with my bare hands rather than with a spell. One day I'd tell Sev about how that made me feel but not now, not when he felt so vulnerable. Because if I knew him, he'd try to take the pain on himself and sooth his love over it. I was so lucky that he loved me.

The baby moved under my hand and sent me a picture of him sleeping so I chuckled quietly and closed my eyes to sleep. The next month or so was going to be busy.

Well, I hadn't been wrong, I thought and straightened up from shoveling. All that magic from the last battle had brought down a series of storms that had pretty much buried this part of England in about twenty feet of snow and ice. The Forest looked beautiful, dripping with diamond ice cycles but the number of broken branches would take a lot of cleaning up come the spring.

It was the first of December and it felt like I'd been shoveling snow for the entire month. The family had split up to take care of business. The twins were back moving wizards from one end of the country to the other. Bill had left for Egypt to wrap up his business there so he could come back to move in with Hossic. And to everyone's surprise, Arwen had joined them to bring the first triad to the family.

Gration was still dating Fiona and it looked serious to me. Royan was as big as a house and Remus waited on her hand and foot. She'd been stuck in Hogwarts since it was too dangerous outside in her condition. At five months along, she was already bigger than Sev and he'd just entered his seventh month. Rhea was just beginning to show a little bit but Sirius was already treating her as if she was made of glass.

They were good to see together. Gersey had gone back to London and the recording studio but he'd left behind a cell phone, just the way that he'd promised he would so he and Harry talked every night. They were already so close that it was probably a good thing that they were physically separated. Otherwise they might have spontaneously combusted by now.

Charlie had transferred to England from Rumania so he could take over the dragon management of the Forbidden Forest. It seemed that Ss-serens wasn't the only unregistered dragon on our island. Several had flown in after Voldemort's demise and we had five now, six if you counted Ss-sarco, our baby dragon. One of these days, we might get our greenhouse back but it wouldn't be

anytime soon. It was fun having the little one tagging after Draco and Hogwarts was getting used to having a baby dragon attend all his classes.

He was a great favorite and he got fed so much on the sly that he was even rounder than he should have been. He developed a real taste for chocolate frogs and his mother just shook her head at his appetite. I have to admit that I fed him a few on the sly myself but then I was always baking something to tempt Sev's tricky stomach.

Deciding that I'd done enough for the day, I put away my shovel and left for home. A nagging little pain in the back of my mind was finally translated to Sev trying to keep something from me. My stride lengthened and I contemplated apparating but I was so close that in a few minutes I'd be home.

The folks had stayed put and Dad was teaching some of the seventh years about abstract magic. He was Professor Emeritus of the Academy of Scientific Magic but he was enjoying teaching much younger children. Mum had taken over the kitchens and was sharing her recipes with the house elves that took care of the school. Meals were a lot better since she'd come.

All in all, we were doing pretty well. Everybody kept in touch by owl or cell phone and we were going to have a big winter solstice celebration in a few weeks. The kids would be gone for the holidays so we were going to be able to celebrate in the great hall of the school. There was plenty of room for all of us and the assorted animals we'd taken on. Smiling, I opened our front door and quickly shut it behind me.

Ara was there to take my scarf. "Master Rubeus, is good you are coming home. Master Severus is being very restless."

I headed for the nursery where I usually found him when I'd been gone. He was rocking in the old rocker and holding the stuffed snake that had been his when he was little. His name was Skip and he looked a little worn but obviously well loved. Sev's face lit up when he saw me and my heart fluttered the way it always did.

"Ru, you're home." He started the struggle to get to his feet but I quick came over and knelt by him. "Thank you, love, I've been up and down a dozen times today. I don't know if I'm going to last another two months. How Royan is coping with three kickers, I wish I knew."

"Gettin' ya all sore, is he?" I smoothed a hand over the spot he usually kicked and found nothing. "Sev, did he shift?"

He chuckled and moved my hand high up on his swollen belly. "I believe he did, Ru. He's kicking up here now."

I went hot then cold. In all the other mammals I'd taken care of, that usually meant that the baby was moving into position to be born, head down towards the birth canal. I wanted my mother and I wanted her now. Right then, Sev flinched and gripped my hand a little harder. "Sev, how long have ya been havin' those little pains?"

"Most of the day." He looked uncertainly at me. "I thought they were just the normal aches. They are, aren't they?"

I slowly ran my hands over the skin that held our son. Little tremors were rippling all over the mound and another pain hit him hard. "Sev, I think I'll send for Poppy and Mum. We still don't know if it's safe to let the rest of the world know you're alive."

He'd gone white but all he did was nod. He was so brave that it made my heart ache. Calling out to Ara, I asked her to floo up to Hogwarts and bring back the medi-witch and my mother. She

squeaked a yes and disappeared. I got Sev onto his feet and helped him walk around the room. I wanted to see if the baby had shifted any further. Suddenly he gasped and I saw bloody water splash the floor.

"Yar water just broke, Sev. It looks like Arwen was right, more than six and less than nine months right on the nose."

"Well, that's good news. I'd like to get my old body back." He said with a little smile. "But if my waters broke, how did they exit my body?"

That was a real good question and I knelt by his side to raise his robe and gingerly feel between his legs. "Good news, Sev, the baby just grew his own birth canal. For a while at least, ya've got a vagina and it's dilated about five centimeters. I think he's impatient ta come out and play with Ss-sarco."

He laughed and choked at the same time. The ripples were getting closer together and I picked him up to carry him into our bedroom. I set him down in the chair to strip off the duvet and put the protective rubber sheet over the mattress. We'd decided that we wanted our son born in the same bed where we'd conceived him. But birthing a baby is messy business so I'd been ready to make sure that we could clean up easy.

Severus was panting now and grimacing. I pulled him up and helped him out of his robe, easing him down gently on the rubber sheet after quick warming it up a little. He sighed and stretched a little before curling up into a ball around the baby.

"Oh, damn, this hurts, Ru. Remind me why this is a good idea." He said between pants.

"Because when ya're done, ya're going ta be holding our very own son in yar arms." I gave him my arm and helped him sit up. "It's better ta be sitting up, that helps remind the baby where he needs ta go."

"Oh good . . . can't have . . . him forget that . . . teeny, tiny channel he needs to travel."

I chuckled and slid my hand between his legs again. He was dilating fast and was already up to seven centimeters. But the pains were coming faster yet and he was struggling not to whimper out loud. So I encouraged him to say what he was thinking and feeling. That might have been a mistake because he started giving me all the reasons why he thought I should have to carry the next child.

That was when I learned that his mama had said that we might have two more children. I was smiling up a storm when Poppy and Mum charged in. Severus was blushing so hard when he realized they were there that he went beet-red.

"I've seen that private bit a time or two before, Sev. Maybe not on ya, but I promise not ta tell anybody." Mum was real no nonsense before she draped a sheet over him. "Rubeus, I need ya ta get behind Sev ta support him when he needs ta push."

Poppy was clucking and spelling the bed sterile. "You're doing fine, Severus, and so fast. Royan will be jealous when she hears how quickly you delivered."

He just panted some more while I shifted until I was propping him up with my whole body. "That's it, Sev. It's okay ta yell at me all ya want."

"I was going to save that for when it really hurts." He said between little groans. The pains were nigh onto continuous and two hours later I finally saw Poppy nod to me.

"Okay, my beautiful, wonderful Sev. It's almost time to push. Try and stay still, just let our son move into position."

"Ah-h-h," he strained to do what I asked but I could feel the pain all along our bond.

I hugged him close and felt his skin burn under my hands. Poppy nodded sharply but spoke real gently. "Severus, it's time to push."

"Push for us, my sweet Sev." Mum crooned to him while she and Poppy pushed his legs a little further up.

Sev pushed with all his might for a very long moment then collapsed against me. Poppy checked him again and nodded. "Good one, Severus, I can see his crown. Take some deep breaths and push when you're ready."

I tried to lend him my strength but he was the one doing all the work. He strained so hard that I was afraid he would rupture something. Mum had a towel in her hands but I couldn't see anything beyond Sev's contorted face. "Mum?"

And Sev relaxed all over while Mum raised the towel holding our bloodstained son in her big hands. Sev had done it. Poppy was murmuring about the afterbirth while Mum cleaned his little nose out so he could cry. And cry he did, just as soon as he could.

"Rubeus and Severus, meet thy son." Mum laid him gently on Sev's chest.

"Tobias Petronicus Hagrid." Sev's voice was a mere thread and his hands were shaking as he stroked the soft skin at our son's temple.

There was something in my eyes so I wasn't seeing all that well. "He's . . . he's beautiful, Sev."

"That he is, you two." Poppy smiled at us. "Let me clip the umbilical cord so you can cut it, Rubeus."

So I cut it with the little silver knife that Dad had used on the boys when they blood-bonded with each other. And then Sev roused enough to seal off the end with a bit of magic. Mum finished cleaning up and asked me to lift Sev off so she could remake the bed. It was kind of awkward but I didn't want to let go of Sev and he wouldn't let go of the baby.

But we managed with a minimum of fuss. Mum even managed to take the baby long enough to finish cleaning him free of the last of the birthing fluid and blood while I got a clean nightshirt onto Sev. I pushed a few pillows behind him so he'd have a prop in case I needed to move.

"Are ya ready, my bairns?" Mum smiled down at us. "I can hear an awful lot of aunts and uncles waitin' to see their new nephew."

Sev was barely awake but he nodded with a sleepy smile. "And he's eager to meet his family."

Tobias yawned in our faces and started sucking on his fingers. Those long perfect fingers and perfect toes, which I'd counted just a moment ago. Yeah, he was ready and so were we. This was going to be a Winter Solstice like no other in the Hagrid family. I could hardly wait.

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Parts 39 - 40 by Athea

Charlie

I'd never been so glad to be home. Leaving Rumania and the dragons there had been hard, but coming back to England and Hogwarts, well, that was easy. I'd stopped in for a quick visit with the folks before hauling my things to the school. Once winter was over, I was going to build a nice little house for two humans and six dragons. I could hardly wait.

Breaking the news that I was bonding soon was both a joy and a sorrow. Dad was prepared but Mom wasn't and she threw a bit of a fit when I told her that I was bonding within the year to a 'he' and his name was Draco Malfoy. But her reaction was probably going to be the one I got from Ron and the twins so I talked until I was hoarse. She finally agreed to accept it for now.

I knew she was going to work on distracting me so that's when I told them that I'd accepted the position of Dragon Master for the Forbidden Forest. Dad was pretty proud of me and even Mom was glad that I'd come home to stay. I couldn't say much with her there but when Dad and I went off on one of our walks, he filled me in on the trials and all the brouhaha that had followed the last battle.

Severus Snape had finally been declared a hero but no one knew where he was. The Ministry had grudgingly given him back the manor and the proceeds of the auction of his belongings. I clenched my jaw over the injustice but brought out my pictures of Tobias that Draco had sent me. Dad had to wipe his eye after seeing the drawn but smiling Sev holding the tiny bundle with the shock of black hair.

The Hagrids as a family were going to get a medal or twenty and they deserved it. Dad mentioned that Bill and I were also in the running for an honor or reward or something. That didn't matter, although it might go a ways towards placating Mom. Bill hadn't told them about Hossic or Arwen though so I had a good chance that that explosion would make her forget about me and Draco.

I told myself that it would all blow over so long as neither of us got pregnant. Dad wanted to know what the joke was so I told him. He hasn't laughed that hard since Aunt Esmerelda sat down and broke the antique chair. She still hasn't forgiven him. We walked back home making plans for the spring and just talking about little stuff. It had been a while since we'd done that.

It was so good to be home.

I put most of my stuff in the storage that Gration had reserved for me then caught the Express to Hogwarts. I wished I'd apparated once on the train because I wanted to be there 'now'. When had I gotten so impatient? I smiled to myself - when a slender blond with a sharp wit and an even sharper tongue came into my life, that's when. I'd missed him more than I thought I would even when we owled each other every other day.

I was back to wishing that the train would go faster. Bringing out the last picture that he'd sent of baby Ss-sarco, I smiled at the roly-poly dragonling sitting in Draco's lap. Harry must have taken the picture because the teenager was laughing, his whole face lit up with joy. I wanted to see that in person and better yet, I wanted to see him smile at me that way.

Swinging off the train, I apparated straight to the house on the edge of the Forest. Taking a deep breath, I knocked on the front door and waited for Ara to answer. But Rubeus opened the door and just about crushed me in his hug. He whispered that the baby was asleep but Draco was out in the greenhouse. So I gave him my suitcase and walked around the house to the heated outdoor room that was now a dragon playpen.

And that's when I got the best present of all when Draco caught sight of me. He smiled all over and jumped up to fling himself into my arms. My heart was too full to say a word so I just wrapped my arms around him and kissed all the bits of him that I could find. He was doing the same thing

so eventually our lips met in our first kiss in almost seven weeks.

I'd never get enough of his kisses, not if we lived as long as Albus. Each one was more special than the last and I'd grown addicted to the sweet taste of him. He was fond of caramel so I tasted that sweetness when I sucked on his tongue. We were both panting when we broke apart to look at each other. His hair had grown past his collar and it was in a kind of page boy style that fit his angular face.

Running my fingers through it, I thought it softer than swan down. He'd laid his head on my shoulder and I caught him taking a deep breath as if he was committing me to memory. Over his head, I saw Ss-serens looking on approvingly while little Ss-sarco dozed at her side.

"Draco, let's go in. I'm starving and something smelled awfully good when Rubeus told me where you were." I nuzzled his temple and took one of those deep breaths of my own. He smelled like fresh clean snow looks.

"Rubeus has been cooking up a storm for the solstice party. Mum has taken over the kitchens at school and she's been cooking nonstop for a week. Nobody is going to go away hungry over the next few days." He looked up at me. "Can you stay, Charlie?"

"I'm here to stay, Draco. You'll be sick of me in no time." I caressed his soft cheek and he turned his head just enough to kiss my palm. The tingles were taking hold with a vengeance.

"Never, Charlie, I'll never get sick of you. Do you think that we can . . . bond after my NEWTS?" He looked unsure for the first time in our conversation.

"Damn straight we're bonding after you pass your NEWTS." I said firmly and watched his eyes light up. "You'll have turned 17 by then so I won't quite be robbing the cradle."

"There's nothing childish about me, Charlie." He said affectionately before taking my hand and dragging me from the greenhouse. "We can have a double bonding with Gersey and Harry." He looked over his shoulder. "I'm still not getting pregnant though."

"That's okay, love, we've got Ss-sarco to raise anyway." I reminded him and he laughed softly while leading me into the house proper.

Rubeus was stirring something on the stove. "Great timing, guys. Dra' would ya set the table? It's just the four of us ta night. Charlie, why don't ya go in and see Toby? Sev's feeding him now."

I nodded and quietly opened the door to the nursery. It smelled of baby powder and the soft glow of candles illuminated Severus rocking in the old rocker that the Hagrids had bought at the estate sale. Draco had mentioned that Sev was nursing the baby but that hadn't prepared me for seeing the tiny lips suckling at an exposed nipple. I tiptoed over when Sev looked up and smiled at me.

"Welcome back, Charles. We all missed you." He looked down with a rueful smile. "I don't know how Ru talked me into this but it's quite satisfying in its own way."

"At the risk of sounding maudlin, I've never seen anything more beautiful, Sev. He's a dedicated eater, isn't he?" I said softly, kneeling by his side and gazing at the rosebud lips and ruddy cheeks.

The baby seemed to know that I was talking about him because he stopped sucking and opened his eyes to look straight at me. He seemed to think that I looked all right for he smiled at me then went right back to nursing, patting the gentle swell of Sev's right breast. He wasn't all that well-endowed, just a little plumper than my own. Idly, I wondered if he was more sensitive now than he'd been before he started lactating.

Rubeus stuck his head in and announced dinner was ready when we were. The baby dropped his nipple and turned his head to smile at his Daddy, even waving his little hand in Rubeus' direction. Sev chuckled. "Go wash up, Charles. By the time you're through your first course, he should be done and burped."

I dropped a gentle kiss on the baby's head and stood. "Just tell me when you need him burped. I'm good at that, you can ask my mother. I practiced on the twins until I left for school."

Sev was still chuckling when I passed Rubeus to go to the bathroom. Draco had set the table and he steered me to his bathroom, talking a blue streak the whole way. When I stopped him at the bathroom door with a quip about some things needing to be private, he tilted his head in his thinking pose.

"Shouldn't I get a chance for a look at something I'm going to become intimately acquainted with?" He said with a grin.

"Intimately, huh?" I grinned back and unzipped to take a whiz. In the mirror, I saw his eyes widen. "Well, it's true that all of me belongs to you, Dra'. What do you think?"

He sighed a little and I risked a look over my shoulder while shaking off the last drop and tucking myself back into my boxers. "I think I'm pretty lucky, Charlie. And the rest of the wizard world should go into mourning for what they're going to be missing."

I laughed all the way through washing my hands and drying them off. Draco looked way too smug but I just smiled and wrapped an arm around him to steer him back to the dining room table where a feast awaited us. Conversation was general until Severus joined us then we started talking about the solstice party that was scheduled on the 21st. It promised to be the party of the century and everybody was going to be there.

Severus even mentioned that Mum Hagrid had sent an invitation to my folks so it looked like they'd be meeting my intended sooner than I thought. I'd talk to Sev later about how to handle Mom, he might have some ideas. The one thing I was certain of was that she wouldn't hurt Draco nor would my brothers, not if I had anything to say about it.

Finally we rolled away from the table absolutely stuffed. Rubeus mentioned that my old room in Gersey's caravan was ready for me and the water was hot if I wanted to bathe away the trip. Draco looked hopefully at Severus and casually told him that we were bonding after he passed his NEWTS.

Severus was hard put not to smile but he gave permission for Draco to accompany me for a while. "Take it slow, Dra', that's what I'd like you to promise."

Draco beamed that joyful smile that I cherished from the picture I carried with me. "Thanks, Sev. I promise. I just want to do some exploring."

Rubeus chuckled. "We trust the pair of ya. Just don't go ta far and get in over yar heads."

"We won't, Ru." I gave my own promise. "We've got all the time in the world to explore now. Come on, Dra. Let's give them some privacy."

"Thanks for dinner, Ru." Draco unselfconsciously kissed the half-giant's cheek before moving over to his guardian and hugging him with another kiss. I would have bet that he'd be more formal with them even after the months he'd lived here.

Will wonders ever cease? I certainly hoped not. Picking up my suitcase, I slung an arm around

my soon-to-be-lover and let him lead me to the caravan where Bill and I had spent so many days. He told me that Gersey was due in tomorrow so tonight would be our only night, really and truly alone.

That was probably good since I was having a hard time keeping my hands to myself. It felt so good to hold him close. Once we shut the door behind us, I dropped my suitcase in the bedroom that Bill and I had shared and checked to see if the bed had clean sheets.

"I set up everything on Monday in case you came home in time for the solstice." Draco said offhandedly.

"Thanks for thinking ahead, Dra'." I kissed him softly but pulled back when it started getting hard and aching. "Bath time is play time, my dragon."

Draco beamed at me. "I like that nickname. No one's ever given me one except for the Hagrids shortening it to Dra'."

"You're my very own dragon and I promise to take good care of you, always." I promised him and he hugged me with tear-bright eyes. I rubbed his back a little, then started backing him towards the bathroom where Gersey had told me that he and Harry had done some exploring of their own.

Once we stripped off and slid into the hot water, I lay back and let him explore to his heart's content. His touches were magic and pretty soon he had both hands wrapped around my cock and I was shooting off like a geyser. He looked pretty proud of himself and I tugged him into my arms for a lush kiss. But even when we got pretty involved, I kept a small part of myself on guard to watch and be sure I didn't frighten him.

But when I traded places with him and deep throated his pretty cock, I let myself worship him the way he should have been worshiped his whole life. He let out an almost silent scream when he came and passed out. I savored his bitter taste and licked him clean before sliding him into my arms and leaning back to wait for him to come back to me.

"Charlie," he whispered into my throat, "is it always like that?"

"It will be for us, my dragon, because we love each other. There's so much more for us to share but we've got time now to take it easy and learn what we both like." I kissed his temple then his lips when he turned his head towards me.

He tasted so good that I promised myself the luxury of kissing him everyday until we bonded. When the water started getting a little cool, we hastily washed and rinsed before getting out and going to bed. All my traveling finally seemed to catch up with me and I groaned a little at the clean sheets and the soft duvet that floated over us.

My eyes were at half-mast and Draco snuggled close with an arm and leg over me while he told me more of the news I'd been missing. Pretty soon all I was hearing was the sound of his voice like velvet sliding over my senses. And two minutes after that, I was sound asleep.

Draco

I watched him sleep and thought about what we'd done and how it had felt. His cock had felt like steel wrapped in soft silk. We were both circumcised but that's all we had the same. His shaft was tall with a flaring head like a helmet while mine was straight with a sleek crown that only flared out when I was really hard.

He'd taken me in all the way and I was determined that I would learn how to do that for him. It had felt so good and just thinking about it had me hardening again. But that was okay, I was used to waiting for something really important. And Charles Weasley was more important to me than anyone in the world although Severus and the new baby who was my little brother came a real close second.

I couldn't see myself ever giving up control of my body for nine or even seven months like he had but the result was pretty amazing, I admitted silently. Maybe in ten years or so, I'd think about it again but for the moment, I was committed to safe sex. Giving control of my body over to Charlie had been surprisingly easy to do and I thought about that for a while.

Trusting Charlie was something that I seemed to do instinctively and I mused over why it was him that I trusted so much. Severus and Rubeus were trustworthy and the rest of the Hagrids had woven themselves into my life with seeming ease. I'd been blessed with a kind and caring family after sixteen years of none and that still had the power to amaze me.

Closing my eyes and taking a deep breath of Charlie-scent, I counted my blessings and went to sleep.

Remus

Royan shifted uncomfortably and I rubbed the spot in her back that was the usual culprit. She smiled at me and leaned into my side to give me more room to work. I could see Sirius doing the same thing for Rhea while Severus just looked smug and trim. It hadn't taken him long at all to lose the weight of his pregnancy or get his muscles back in shape.

He was carrying little Toby with an air of having always known how to hold an infant while Rubeus cuddled him with an astonished look of joy still on his face. They looked good together and I looked around the great hall to see my extended family sprawled on the furniture we'd assembled. Albus had arranged several groupings of couches and chairs all around the room so people could join and rejoin different family members.

The huge pine tree stopped a foot from the sturdy oak beams of the ceiling and it glittered with old and new decorations. The candles were spelled with magic flames to avoid the fire hazard and the twisted garlands were a riot of House colors threaded together among the fragrant branches. Dozens, perhaps hundreds of brightly wrapped packages nestled around the base and soon we'd open a few to take the edge of anticipation off for the kids.

Since I was one of the kids, I had to admit to being a little excited about that. I hadn't celebrated the Solstice or the muggle equivalent Christmas in years. But this year had been like no other in my life. I was working at a job I loved. I loved and was loved by the most wonderful woman in the world. I had a family again, one that didn't care if I was a werewolf. And I had friends who tested, challenged and liked me for myself.

The children that Royan carried were the bright star on my internal Solstice tree.

They'd begun moving around and we tried to guess which one was which when a little hand tapped out greetings on the right or left side. Ara had given us our gift early today when she told us that there were two boys and one girl. Royan and Rhea each had a baby name book in hand and were throwing out suggestions to an appreciative circle of family. I'd already nixed Pompalonia for my little girl.

She'd be immediately nicknamed Pompy and I couldn't see that at all. Royan had just laughed and told me that one of these days Mum would get out one of the picture albums so I could see

the original Aunt Pompy. I could hardly wait.

Sirius

I looked around and sighed happily. Remus and I had certainly landed on our feet this time. Sometimes I still pinched myself to make sure that I wasn't dreaming. Not even in my wildest dreams had I ever believed that this kind of warm shelter would ever be mine. From the moment I lost my two best friends and went to prison for their deaths, I'd faced the bleakest of futures.

Joy hadn't even been in my vocabulary. But here I was, surrounded by joy and good cheer, not to mention the blessing who was my wife, Rhea. She was everything that I'd never wanted. Family, healing and love weren't gifts that I'd sought but she gave them to me unstintingly and I'd begun to dream again.

Ara had brought us our tea in bed this morning and she gifted us with the knowledge that our child was a girl. The oddest picture flashed through my mind when I heard that. A little red-head with bright green eyes looked straight into mine and smiled all over. "Daddy" was all she said and I wanted to cry but Rhea was already doing that for me.

I held her close and thought that nothing I'd ever done in my life could ever equal the joy of hearing that word. I'd never aspired to be a father but now, I couldn't think of anything better. Albus had given me the chance to teach the first Muggle Studies class in the history of Hogwarts and I'd accepted his offer.

Snape was going to go back to teaching Potions after the New Year but he and Rubeus were going to port into school every morning. His old rooms in the dungeons were now just a part of the guest suites that the castle had begun creating. Little Toby would be watched over by Ara while Snape taught. It was odd but I'd begun to have the urge to call Snape - Severus.

Maybe wonders never do cease, I thought with a chuckle. I looked up when Gersey began playing another carol. The Steinway that he'd bought at the Snape auction had been set up here in the great hall for the holidays. Snape had brought out his violin and the two of them had been playing duets on and off for the last three days. Who knew that Severus had such a creative hand on the bow?

It was odd but it didn't seem to matter what they were playing, they kept coming back to the carols that I remembered from when I was a child. The oddest part of that was looking ahead to our next Solstice celebration when Rhea and I would be holding our daughter; Remus and Royan would be watching over crawling triplets; Severus and Rubeus would probably be dashing here and there after a walking Toby.

I'd probably be watching my godson, my pregnant godson, cuddle with his bonded. I'd finally accepted that Harry's life wasn't going to be what James and Lily had probably envisioned. It was going to be better.

Albus

I sat in one of the comfortable wing chairs from my office. Minerva sat in the other and we were both basking in silence while listening to all the conversations that flowed from one side of the room to the other. It was finally over, this war that had consumed almost an entire generation of wizards and witches. I could finally admit that I was tired, tired of planning and plotting and watching the children of my heart die.

I'd been snoozing off and on since waving goodbye to the last of the students. We'd begun the decorating of the great hall almost immediately and I'd watched it be transformed into a cozy nest for the extended Hagrid family. Truly, I'd never felt more relaxed in my long life.

The house elves had outdone themselves now that Elfrida Hagrid had taken over the supervision of the kitchens. I'd even gained some weight that Minerva was pleased to tell me I'd long needed. Petronicus Hagrid was dozing in another chair nearby in this quiet corner of the hall. Finally, I had someone to debate with, play chess with and be friends with.

Someone nearer my own age, who had a razor sharp mind and wasn't afraid to use it. It was exhilarating to no longer be so alone. The Order of the Phoenix was still intact but for now we had nothing better to do than relax and enjoy the holiday. I looked around again and spotted Severus weaving his way through the crowd. I sat up a little straighter and gazed expectantly at him.

He smiled and laid Tobias in my arms. "Well, Godfather Albus, it's time to watch your godson while I do some more playing. Try not to let him eat any more of your beard."

I cradled the little sprite with the snapping blue eyes and silky black hair. "Here we go, Tobias. Don't listen to your mama, I've just been waiting for you to come and play with me."

He giggled and immediately latched onto my beard. He had Severus' long elegant fingers and I waved my Potions Master toward the music corner while tickling my godson. He was such a happy baby and I wondered if Severus had ever been this joyful when he was just a child. I would not fail this little one the way that I'd failed his parent.

Tobias would always know that he was loved and cared for. He would also have the whole world of wizardry to choose from when it came time for him to choose a career. Whatever he did, he'd be supported. I felt laughing waves pass from him through my gnarled old hands. His healing touch had given me back almost all of my former dexterity. I might even challenge Gersey for the piano one of these days.

Gersey

I rippled through another arpeggio and listened with half an ear to the buzz of conversation around the hall. This Solstice was better than any I'd ever had before. We were all together as a family but that family had doubled in size. Add in the Weasleys and we'd tripled. I grinned down at the keys and caressed them a little harder. There was definitely a dearth of red heads in the rest of the British Isles.

Because most of them were here. Gazing around, I spotted Harry with his arm around Draco while they talked with Ron. There was still some tension there and Charlie hadn't announced that he and Draco were going to bond to any one other than his parents. Arthur seemed all right with it but Molly was being a bit stiff. So my little peace maker was doing his best to smooth over the raw edges.

I spotted Severus threading his way through the crowd to the corner where we'd set up all the instruments. Ever since I'd heard Severus play that beautiful instrument that at the moment lay gleaming on the stand behind the Steinway, I'd been working on getting him into the recording studio. He had a passionate touch that made an audience sigh at a ballad, weep with a dirge and smile tenderly during a love song.

When he'd played a gypsy melody to Rubeus, he'd practically set the rest of us on fire with

wanting. If I could just get him into the studio, Peter would go out of his mind. My muggle friend enjoyed an eclectic array of music and Sev would enjoy his acerbic wit. I hadn't given up but he was too content at the moment and I was so happy for him and Rubeus that I wasn't going to push.

I had however, made sure that I had a pensieve recording every performance this season. Little Toby deserved to know in coming years what his first Solstice had sounded like. It was also Harry and my first holiday together and I wanted something to remember it by. As if my thoughts had conjured him, he hugged me from behind while Sev started tuning up.

"Love you, Ger." He whispered in my ear, planting a little kiss behind my ear. "What are you guys going to play now?"

"Sev, have you had any requests?" I asked and he chuckled.

"Schubert's Opus 52, number 6," he said while plucking a string and listening intently.

"Oh please, Ger, Ave Maria is one of my favorites." Harry's eyes lit up and it was my turn to chuckle.

"Mum's too, Harry. Go and see if she'll sing it with us." I sent him off to the buffet table where Mum was setting out more food.

Rubeus

I sat near the music corner and watched my beautiful Sev begin to play. Life didn't get any better than this; my family surrounding me; the love of my life playing so sweetly that he made me want to cry; our son chewing on his godfather's beard; and best of all, there was no longer a Dark Lord to menace our world.

Harry dashed off to Mum and when she came back with him, I sat up a little straighter. She loved to sing and she was good at it, too. The familiar chords of Ave Maria swelled from both the piano and violin and she began to sing along. The whole room fell silent while the pure tones reached out to the rafters and filled the room. That song always brought tears to my eyes and this time was no exception.

Sev's eyes found mine and I watched him with my heart in my throat. He was so beautiful and he loved me. I'd received the best gift of all this year, make that gifts since I still was amazed by our son. He was so tiny but with a real tight grip that tugged at my heart. But it was Severus who brought me the joy that I'd kind of given up on ever receiving.

We ended each day snuggled in our big bed, talking over what had happened during our time apart. Just little stories about the birds I'd seen while shoveling or how Ss-serens had soared overhead during a snowball fight. He'd tell me every thing that Toby had done and how he was starting to notice the world around him. I'd stopped walking to and from Hogwarts, instead porting back and forth. I begrudged every moment away from my two beautiful loves.

I started when everyone clapped only then realizing that Mum had finished singing. Then Gersey asked everyone to sing along with the carols he and Sev began to play. They were old favorites and we sounded real good together. We had a pretty good range of voices so some of us could just hum along. My voice wasn't the best but I could provide a little bass underneath the rest of them.

We sang all our favorites until our musicians begged to be allowed to rest and eat some of the

tempting food that Mum and the house elves had been cooking. I crossed over to Sev once he'd carefully laid aside his violin and he slid his arms around me instead.

"I'm hopin' that ya'll play me like that in a wee bit, Sev." I whispered in his ear.

He chuckled and kissed me so sweetly that I almost forgot where we were. But then he pulled away just a little. "I promise that I shall play you like the rare and beautiful instrument you are, my dearest Ru. Once we're alone and Tobias is asleep."

I smiled and led him to the food already counting the hours until I could get him alone.

Severus

Mum had outdone herself. The Swedish meatballs practically melted in my mouth and the Greek spinach pie was so good that I devoured the good sized wedge I'd managed to spirit away before Harry saw it. That boy was a bottomless pit these days. He and Draco were both enjoying a growth spurt and they ate endlessly. I'd have worried but they were also expending copious amounts of energy enjoying the snow and ice of this magical winter.

Sitting close to Rubeus, I ate and listened while Royan read out some more baby names. Really there were an awful lot of horrid names out there in the world. Luckily, Ru hadn't minded us naming our new son Tobias after my mother's father and Petronicus after his. I wondered what name we'd have chosen if our child had been a girl. Helena was my mother's name and Elfrida was Ru's but neither of those had struck me as right.

But we wouldn't have to worry about that for a few years since I had no plans for getting pregnant any time soon. Of course, I thought to myself, I hadn't consciously decided to this time around. And as if the thought alone could get his attention, I felt Toby call for me. Chuckling, I gave Rubeus my plate to hold with stern instructions not to touch the rest of the pie while I went to get our son.

Albus was playing peek-a-boo with him but Toby was hungry and the long white beard just didn't fill an empty tummy. Plucking my son away from his godfather, I told him he could play some more the next day. Albus' pout was almost identical to Toby's but I managed to restrain my laughter until I got back to Ru. Discretely unbuttoning enough so Toby had access to my nipple, I pulled his yellow blanket over my shoulder so I didn't flash one of the Weasleys.

Ron was having a hard enough time coming to terms with all the changes in his young life. Fred and George had pretty quickly accepted all the twists and turns our lives had taken but young Ron still froze whenever he saw me holding Toby. What he was going to say about Charlie and Draco didn't bear thinking of.

I just hoped that his wand stayed in his pocket. Glancing down, I saw that Toby had finished that nipple and was patting my chest to tell me to switch him over. Once settled at the other, I continued to watch those rosebud lips suckle at my breast. The feeling was indescribable and I didn't think I'd ever be able to explain what I felt when I was connected to him like this.

I'd given birth to this amazing child and we were still connected whenever he nursed at my breast. To feel my milk spurt into his mouth was so exhilarating that I felt like feeding him all the time. Would I still feel like that five months from now? I didn't know but for now, I was enjoying it. Ru put his arm around me and I leaned into him, leaning my head against his shoulder.

Even joy can be wearying, I thought sleepily. This Solstice was so wonderful that I had nothing to which I could compare it. I was surrounded by family and friends after years of having none. But

best of all was the man beside me and the love he'd given me for the last eight months. I was looking forward instead of back and that felt very good indeed.

"I think he's finished, Sev." The soft rumble near my ear made me shiver with delight.

Checking Toby's progress, I found him sound asleep, my nipple falling from his mouth. Gently bringing him to my shoulder, I started the tender patting that usually brought out his burp. I cast my glance around the room, watching the rest of my family interact with each other. The Hagrids had taken in a rather odd bunch of strays but we were all grateful that they had.

I doubted that Sirius and I would ever be friends but we were managing to be civil to each other and that seemed to be enough to get us through those events where we had to share the same room. Perhaps fatherhood would civilize him, I thought sardonically. The little burp told me that Toby was ready for his nap. Rubeus got up first then helped me to my feet. Mum had loaned us the Hagrid cradle for use here in the castle and it was in a quiet corner of the great hall.

We'd pass it on to Royan and Remus when the triplets were born. Although I did just wonder how all three of them would fit. Ru was contemplating the construction of an extra wide cradle that might work better. Ara was waiting by it and she took charge of watching our son until it was time to go home.

Home, what a wonderful word that was. I leaned into my bonded's arms and felt like purring. His big hands rubbed my back and the slight ache that still remained from carrying Toby inside of me for seven months. I suddenly had the urge to make love to Rubeus right now.

"Ru, I think we should go and check on our rooms here." I wiggled just a little against his groin and felt him begin to swell instantly.

"Whatever ya say, Sev." He kissed me eagerly and I savored his spicy taste before pulling away and leading him towards the stairs to the dungeons.

I was going to unwrap my first present and I already knew it was just what I wanted.

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Parts 41 - 44 by Athea

Author's Notes:

The winter Solstice arrives with a bang.

Royan

I laughed myself almost sick watching the snowball war in progress. It was the Weasleys versus the Hagrids although some of us couldn't take part this year. Remus was standing in for me while Sirius took Rhea's place. Severus and Albus were officiating but all the rules had pretty much gone out the window when Gersey got smacked with an ice ball. It hadn't really hurt him but Harry had immediately retaliated with a snowball and a mini-whirl wind to scatter it all over George.

It was all out war then and Rhea and I had to hold each other up when our knees went weak from laughter. Mum finally strode out with her hands on her hips and gave a call for breakfast. She got hit from both sides by late throws. I don't think Ron or Harry's eyes could have gotten any bigger when she shook off the snow and lifted them both in the air with a levitating spell before dumping them in a snow bank.

"That's enough of that now, children." She scolded the rest of them and I snickered at the sheepish looks. But Ron and Harry were getting pulled out of the snow by Hermione and Gersey

and they were laughing too so everything was getting back to normal.

Rhea pulled me towards the great hall where the house elves had set up a huge buffet. Dobby had even remembered my green olive omelet. I still craved that salty brine taste so he made sure that I had something with them in it every meal. He spoiled me but then so did Remus. I thought about how the family had grown and sighed with happiness. We all fit together although Merlin only knew why.

We'd co-opted two of the Weasley family into ours or maybe it was the other way around. I just knew that we'd grown into a clan all our own. This was the first Solstice that had brought all the Matriarchs together and the power in Hogwarts was astounding. Of course, part of that came from our Harry and our brand new angel, Toby.

I stroked my little ones and thought about the shining power that haloed the smallest Hagrid. He healed with just a smile and I wondered what the next year would bring him. Well, aside from four cousins due to be born by the spring and summer solstice. By then he might well have another cousin on the way.

Harry was quite determined in his studies and Rhea and I were helping as best we could in his thirst for knowledge about pregnancy.

Rhea

I collected some towels and stood ready to dry off my husband when he came through the doors. His sheepish look was so sweet but he let me tousle his hair, which was sopping wet once he hit the warm air of the great hall. It took almost half an hour before everyone was finally dry and warm. By then all conversation had ceased while the sound of happy moans filled the air instead.

Little Toby had cured me of the morning sickness so I was hungry, too. Siri and I fed each other slowly the way we did most mornings. But this morning was blessed because of having all of us under one roof. That hadn't happened often enough when the family spread out over the Isles. We'd all met once a year either summer or winter but this year was different in so many ways that I could see we'd begun a new tradition.

With the coming of the next generation, we'd bonded closer together than ever before. I just knew that more happiness was on the way for all of us. The destruction of Voldemort had given us back a future free of fear. Our children would inherit a world that might still be dangerous but never hopeless. Perhaps it's one of the reasons that we'd all found our heart-bondeds and gotten pregnant so fast.

Even Arwen looked like she was getting in the mood. For a witch who never let herself look less than perfect, she'd become much more human the last few days. Molly Weasley still looked at her and Bill with a rather jaundiced gaze. What happened when she realized that Hossic was the third leg of that relationship, hardly bode thinking about. I wasn't sure that even wee Toby could heal that explosion.

"Rhea, are you feeling all right?" Sirius asked me anxiously and I smiled down at him.

"Fine, Siri, just thinking about the future." I put another one of Mum's blueberry tarts on my plate.

"The future is so bright that it blinds me." He said softly, taking a long look around the room and all the people in it. "I never thought to survive this long. And I know I never did anything good enough in my life to deserve you and my new family."

I dropped a kiss on his head and took a deep breath of lovely Siri-scent. "You survived to love me, sweetheart. Don't you know that I was just waiting for you to appear so I could give you my heart?"

He blinked and slipped an arm around me. "That still astounds me, Rhea-love, that you were waiting for me to grow up and show up."

That was a new nickname that made me blush and I just had to kiss him in thanks.

Hermione

I overheard Rhea and Sirius talking and felt like crying. It was so neat that two people who didn't look like they could have anything in common had found love after such a long time. Looking over at Ron talking to Harry, I wondered how much longer I'd have to wait for him to grow up. Knowing what he was going to find out today, I expected it to be some time.

Of course, I was going to be busy apprenticing with Severus so perhaps the time would go quickly. He wanted me to attend the University for a year to get some of the advanced classes outside of Potions out of the way. I was pretty sure the real reason was to expose me to the outside world so I could decide if I really wanted to devote myself to his craft.

That was fine with me, I thought while piling more of the cinnamon-sugar biscuits on my plate. I was growing addicted to them and planned on asking Rubeus to send me some once a month while I was away. Checking the mini-tower on my plate, I regretfully passed on the tarts and found a little room for the frozen grapes that Severus and I loved.

I set everything on the low table near where Severus was nursing Toby. Grabbing a pillow, I sat down on the floor and took my first bite of the light as air biscuit. My little moan couldn't be heard more than two feet away but Severus chuckled anyway. I stuck out my tongue at him and thought about how the world had changed in the last six months.

Who knew that this year would see me apprenticed to Severus, Harry heart-bonded to a giant and Voldemort destroyed for ever. I finished the biscuit and licked my fingers. Ron sat down beside me with two plates full and a quick look at the professor before his eyes dropped to his breakfast. He seemed to be okay with him and Rubeus bonding although I'd seen his disbelief that Severus could be pregnant.

Like I said, I was prepared to wait for him to get over being shocked. Of course, when Charlie and Draco announced their intention to bond after Draco graduated, he was going to go right back into denial. I was just afraid that his mother would follow him and raise a fuss that would hurt both of them. Oddly enough, I'd grown to like Draco. It helped that he had asked me to be on the board of the Magical Potions Agency.

He said that he needed someone intelligent but also nice to balance Severus' disapproval of their slipshod practices. That was a compliment that I'd take any day. My folks were still rather reeling over some of the twists and turns that our lives had taken lately. But they were sitting with the Headmaster and Professor McGonagall and seemed to be enjoying themselves.

I'd have to see about getting them together with Severus a little later.

Minerva

Albus was being his charming self to the pair of Muggles who'd hatched such a powerful witch. Jan and Peter Granger were doing quite well actually surrounded by a world they'd never known existed and people who practiced magic right in front of them. They were quite nice and pleased about Hermione's scholarship to University.

Severus had used part of his returned fortune to establish four scholarships to the London University of Magic. Hermione didn't know where hers had come from nor would the other three. Ginny Weasley would get one of them when her time came to graduate. The other two were going to Pansy Parkinson and Blaise Zabini.

Since I was thinking of Severus, I checked on him. He was feeding Tobias and chatting with Hermione while Ron listened with wide-eyes. I couldn't forebear a small smile at the unlikely trio. That Severus had found love with Rubeus and carried their child was one of the most amazing things I'd seen in a very long life. That Tobias was an incipient healer and empath was little short of a miracle.

I took another sip of tea and cast my eyes over the crowd gathered in the great hall. It was an amazing sight and I didn't think I'd ever seen a happier group of partiers. Without the fear of the Dark Lord, everyone was more relaxed than I'd ever seen. It felt like a great weight had been lifted from all our shoulders. I know that I had taken no joy in preparing students to face his evil.

Too many had fallen over the years for me to truly rejoice so soon after his defeat. But I found myself smiling more these days and looking ahead with delight instead of dread. Stroking the soft purple scarf around my throat, I luxuriated in the soft cashmere of my present from Albus. We'd exchanged our gifts the night before and I chose to wear it today because it was so very beautiful.

We'd been together for all of my life and a good portion of his. I'd been afraid that he would fall in the struggle against Voldemort and I would lose my best friend. But instead our young had succeeded where we failed and now we were free to live out our lives in peace and contentment. I smiled to myself. The coming graduation was going to loose some powerful wizards onto an unsuspecting world.

I was going to enjoy watching the havoc they would create. Albus was always chiding me on my malicious streak but I'd lived much too long not to give in now and then to watching others make fools of themselves. However, I was genuinely fond of little Remus and wished him nothing but happiness with his new wife and their incipient brood.

Harry, on the other hand, was proving to be a most perplexing young wizard.

Ginny

This was the best Solstice I'd ever celebrated. The blueberry tarts were delicious. My whole family was here and we were opening our presents a little at a time. I'd been a help in the final battle against Voldemort, Professor McGonagall had said so. And when it came time to graduate, I already had a scholarship to the University. Ripping open another present, I pulled out a book of recipes from Mum Hagrid and I jumped up to give her a hug.

She knew how much I wanted to learn how to cook well. It was kind of like potions lessons but these recipes filled stomachs and made people feel wonderful. I whispered my thanks and she hugged me gently. "Ya'll be a whiz once ya get in the kitchen, little Ginny. There's a school a'cookery in Paris that I can recommend. The wee French don't do ta badly when it comes ta a good sauce."

"I'll remember, Mum." I kissed her cheek and went back to my packages.

We all had more than enough to open and I soon had a lovely pile of books, chocolates and new clothes for the spring semester along with three beautiful hair clips. One was a golden butterfly with gossamer green and blue wings that fluttered once I clasped it around a lock of hair. I'd never had anything so grownup before and although I still wanted to be a professional Quidditch player, maybe I'd dress up now and then after a game.

Ron had given Hermione a pair of gold and green combs for her hair and she looked so surprised when she opened them that I had to hide a giggle. Mom and I had selected them for him since he'd picked out the gaudiest set at the counter. Boys really don't have very good taste when it comes to presents. Of course, he'd gotten me some new broom wax and I really liked that so maybe the exception proved the rule.

Hermione had gotten him a book on Quidditch and he really liked it. He was blushing and everything when she kissed his cheek. I wasn't going to have a boyfriend until I was a lot older. Of course, the only one who made my heart beat faster was Gersey Hagrid. I sneaked a peek at him and found him laughing with Harry over another green sweater. So far, he'd gotten four of them, each one different in style but all green.

They were just so sweet together that I didn't begrudge Harry his snagging of the singer. So long as I got to listen to his gorgeous voice every now and then, I'd be satisfied. I sighed happily and went back to watching the others opening their presents. Draco was laughing at something that he'd just uncovered and I craned my neck to see what it was.

It was silver and green, good Slytherin colors. Why in the world would Charlie have given him grandpa's dragon collar?

Molly

It was too late. My sweet Charles had gifted that young Malfoy with the dragon collar his grandfather had left to him. My baby had vowed himself to the son of a Death Eater. I thought I'd have more time to show him the error of his choice. He's still so young and Malfoy junior might be a pure blood but he was not at all someone to be an equal partner for my son.

But he'd obviously made his choice and done it publicly. Arthur patted my shoulder and I tried to smile at him but I knew that he didn't understand. No one but another mother could possibly understand why I was so upset. My little boy might be a dragon master but he was still somewhat naïve when it came to his heart. We hadn't talked about life partners because it never occurred to me that he was looking for one.

I didn't even know that he liked males instead of females. Why had he hidden that from me? I hissed into my husband's ear. "Arthur, do something. He's throwing away his life on that little strumpet."

"Molly!" Arthur frowned at me but kept his voice low. "Charlie knows who he wants in his life. He has chosen Draco. I plan on congratulating both of them. If you can not bring yourself to also do so, at least keep your disapproval to yourself."

I was so taken aback that I watched in silence while he walked over to our son and hugged him close then did the same for Malfoy. How could he, I seethed. Our son Bill came over then and hugged me.

"Mom, I can see you're not too excited about Charlie and Draco." He patted my shoulder and I sniffed a little. "I hate to have to break it to you but I'm involved with a guy, too." I looked up at him

in disbelief. "Sorry, but Hossic and I are together now. He and I are going into business together, curse breaking across the wizarding world."

"Hossic Hagrid? I thought you were seeing that giant female, Arwen?" I said faintly

"Yeah, Mom, Hossic." He grinned at me and I tried to smile back at him but he could tell I was shocked. Taking a deep breath, he dropped a kiss on my cheek. "And I'm seeing Arwen Innes also, Mom. She's one of the Matriarchs. Together, we're a triad."

One of the Matriarchs, I thought dazedly. My oldest son was going to bond to a half-giant and a full giant. "Arwen . . . Hossic . . . and you?" I felt a bit faint.

"Surprise!"

Harry

Molly Weasley looked like she'd just choked on a chocolate frog. Bill was looking stoic so I figured that he'd told her about Hossic and Arwen. Arthur was hugging Draco so I finally figured out what the collar must mean. Gersey whispered to me that when a dragon master chose his bonded, he gave him or her a dragon's collar. It was kind of like wearing your house colors showing where you belonged.

Twisting in his arms, I looked up at him. "What will we use, Gersey?"

"What would you like to use, Har'?" He asked me after kissing me softly. "There are all kinds of symbols available to us in this day and age. Rings, ear rings, bracelets, collars, what would you enjoy the most?"

I leaned against him and stroked his arm, wishing that we were alone. "I think I'd like rings, Ger. It's traditional and somehow it just seems right."

"Then that's what we'll do, little love." Gersey hugged me close and I went back to nestling into his side.

This had been the absolutely best holiday in my entire life. Looking around, I saw Draco trying to keep Ss-sarco out of the punch while Charlie took magic pictures of them. I was going to need a whole new picture album after this Solstice was over. Mum had finally gone over to Molly and they were talking earnestly. I hoped that she'd be okay with everything soon.

It seemed a shame to have any bad feelings when everyone was so happy and we had so much to celebrate. I thought about the books and sweaters I'd gotten. The clothes were all made with love so I knew that I'd look good when I wore them. And the books, some fiction but mostly subjects that I was curious about, were going to be interesting to read when Gersey was away and I was finishing up school.

"Ger, are we going to bond after I graduate or are we going to wait until my birthday?" I looked up so I could watch his eyes.

They were serious when they met mine. "We should wait until your birthday, Harry. It seems like forever away, I know but I'd like you to take some time to do some of the traveling you told me about. I promise to show you muggle London and the music studio where I work in between tours. Gratian has some moves coming up in May to Ireland and France that you could help with. Dad is going to a wizard's convention in Switzerland in June and you could go with him and Mum."

"That would be brilliant, Ger." I sat up and beamed at him. "I've always wanted to go to Europe. Would you be able to come too?" I held my breath then let it out with a whoosh when he nodded.

"Some of the time, yes I will." He brushed back my hair and cradled my jaw in his warm hand. "But you need some time to explore the world with a few of your friends, Harry. I want you to have a chance to see some other cultures so you can be certain sure that I'm the one you want."

I sighed and shook my head. "I love you, Gersey. I appreciate you thinking of me and trying to give me time to know my own mind. But my heart chose you months ago and it will still be choosing you on July 31st."

He pulled me into another kiss, taking his time and mapping my mouth with his warm tongue. We were both breathing a little harder when we broke apart to breathe. "My heart is yours, Harry and it will still be yours on the 31st. Besides, we need to rest up and plan a bonding ceremony that will top this Solstice."

"That's going to be really hard to do, Ger." I looked around at everyone. "But just think, Royan and Remus' babies will be here and maybe Rhea and Siri's baby, too. That will be even better."

"Harry," he paused and I just knew what he was going to say. "Are you sure that you want to have children right away?"

"Yes, Gersey, I do." I took a deep breath and sat up to really look at him. "Toby is love and joy and a little bit of Severus and Rubeus all in one. He's part of the past but even more a part of the future. I want that with you."

His eyes were misty and he kissed my temple so tenderly that I wanted to cry. "I want that too, little love. I'm honored that you want to carry our children and if that's what you desire then that's what we'll do. But not until you are 17 and not until after we've bonded."

"That's okay, Ger, I was planning on practicing a lot between getting bonded and pregnant. Even though we can't really make love yet, I want to keep practicing you getting me ready. Sev made up some extra special lubricant and he gave me some for the holiday."

His eyes widened and his jaw dropped while I snickered.

It's been the best seven months of my life. Royan had Patrick, Harmonia and Lindir on the 1st of February. Remus was a nervous wreck by the time she'd been in labor for an hour but we were all there for him so he survived. The babies were even smaller than Toby had been but still just as perfect. Severus did the testing and was able to reassure Remus that none of the babies had inherited the werewolf gene.

Gersey and I held him while he wept in happiness.

Draco, Hermione and I passed our NEWTS at the Spring Solstice along with ten others. I spent a week with Gersey in muggle London while he was in the studio with the band. It was great listening to how songs were made. It was more exacting than potion making and they must have practiced each little part a hundred times before recording it for good. But just when I thought that all the joy was gone from making music, they sat down and jammed until midnight.

That was brilliant and I loved every minute of it. But I wasn't going to be a musician, I could tell and so could Ger. He kissed me hard before waving goodbye to the twins and me. Now that was fun, moving wizards from one place to another. Hagrid Movers had four moves to plan and

accomplish in four weeks. My scar was fading slowly but surely so I was just Harry, another mover to the people who'd hired them.

Even using some magic, it was mostly heavy labor, picking up something in one place and putting it down somewhere else. I ate everything in sight and Gra' told me mock seriously that I was going to bankrupt the firm with just my food costs. But I was hardening my body at the same time and along with my yoga, I started some serious weight training. Hossic helped me pick out some good equipment.

We moved it into the spare bedroom of Gersey's apartment along with the rest of my stuff. I didn't have much except for books and clothes and they all fit inside my trunk. But little things kept getting added, like a mirror that reminded me of one in Hogwarts and an American Indian flute that one of the moving clients had given me. It didn't intimidate me like some of the more complicated music instruments.

Once Ron passed his NEWTS, I spent a week with the Weasleys just doing fun stuff like flying and testing practical jokes from Fred and George's new Spring line. Ron had gotten more serious now that he had to think about the outside world. We talked a lot since neither of us really knew what we wanted to do with our lives. Without the threat of Voldemort, I felt like I'd fallen into a no-mans-land. He helped me think it out and I helped him make a tentative choice to go to the University with Hermione.

Mum and Dad apparated when it was time to go to Switzerland for the magic conference. Gersey and I took a muggle train so I could see the countryside. That was so much fun that I never wanted the trip to end but the conference was fun in a different way. I didn't understand half of what was said in some of the sessions and I was kind of feeling like an idiot when Ger told me that he understood about one word in ten.

But Dad took me to the wizard equivalent of a jam session after the last conference speech. The room was big and while Mum took care of feeding everyone, they all split up into groups and took a different problem to solve. Now that was fascinating and I even got to contribute something. Gersey was working with a group on harmonics and I was helping Mum hand around drinks to everybody.

A group of two wizards and a witch were talking about a way to extend the reach of a spell beyond the personal energy range of the wizard casting the spell. They ignored me except for a quick 'thank you' when I handed them their drinks. But I listened and remembered something that Gersey had taught me about the effects of sound waves and the amplifiers that muggle musicians used.

I didn't want to interrupt them since I was pretty sure that they'd think I was butting in but I had a little itch that told me I should do something about my idea. Going back to Mum, I told her about it while she listened closely and nodded several times. Then she told me to tell Gersey he had a call waiting. That was our code to get each other out of something boring and all the Hagrids used it once in awhile.

So I tiptoed over and whispered in his ear, making him check his watch and excuse himself from the others. He followed me out of that room to the small bedroom that was part of the suite. We went out on the balcony and he cuddled me real close for a moment while we kissed for the first time that evening. He tasted of Swiss chocolate and just a hint of the bourbon that he'd been slowly sipping all evening.

Finally we broke apart and I told him about their problem and the idea I had. He thought about it, throwing out another idea, which made me remember something from a Transfiguration class in sixth year. He smiled at me then and kissed me hard then took my hand and led me back inside. I hung back and suddenly got the shakes.

"Harry, you are a wizard with a very special talent." He knew why I felt so diffident. "You're younger than everyone else here, that's true. But youth doesn't always mean inexperience. Dr. Able is in that group and he's never so much as heard an Unforgivable curse, let alone survived one. You have and you bring a unique perspective that is just as valuable to those wizards as their maturity."

I nodded still unsure but willing to give it a try. Gersey walked over to their group and sat down while I leaned against the back of his chair. Then he laid out an experiment for them, putting in the elements of sound waves and the use of a harmonic synthesizer. They were very taken aback for a long moment but the witch suddenly postulated a slight change in the wording of the spell.

After that, it was almost like watching a Quidditch match where the beaters weave in and out of traffic and the snitch flies so fast between them that your neck gets sore snapping back and forth. Everybody was smiling when they finally had their experiment down on parchment and the quills had quit writing. That's when Gersey told them that the original breakthrough was my idea. Dr. Able's eyebrow rose really high but he told me 'thank you' and advised me to take Arithmancy with Professor Plum at the University so that I could hone my talent.

That felt good, he thought I had a talent. I'd just kind of thought that I was in the right place at the right time. But Dad Hagrid set me straight about that later when Gersey was telling him about our session. He told me that sometimes a talent could manifest in ways that you didn't expect. And he said that my talent appeared to be the ability to synthesize and combine new elements in unexpected ways.

Gersey chuckled and called me his acoustic amplifier. I stuck out my tongue at him and he kissed me sweetly. On the train trip home, we talked about the future and what we wanted to do. After all the traveling, I knew that wasn't for me. While lying in his arms, I told him what I'd begun to feel.

"I want a home, Ger. I need a place that's always there. It can be big or small, an apartment or a house, in the muggle world or ours, that doesn't matter." I stroked his chest, the red hairs curling around my fingers. "As long as you're there and our friends know where to find us, I don't really have a place in mind. I want us to create a home that brings people together, where everyone feels welcome and nobody wants to leave."

"Sweetheart," he brushed a hand through my hair and I wanted to purr. "I love you and that sounds like a small slice of heaven to me. For now, why don't we buy an apartment in London so I can work with Peter on this album and you can take some courses at the University? And yes," he placed his fingers over my lips, "we'll practice making babies until we get it right."

I licked his index finger and felt him shiver. "Can we get a loft apartment so we can look out over both Londons?"

He chuckled. "Yes, we can. We'll need room for the piano and a very big bed. These dinky little things aren't made for humans, let alone half-giants."

It was my turn to laugh at him. He'd been complaining since we got on the train that he had a permanent crick in his back. There's not much you can do in a muggle sleeper except curl up. But we were curling up together so I didn't really mind. We spent the rest of the trip planning our home and deciding what to do first. My birthday was six weeks away and I could hardly wait.

I stood in the middle of an empty space that echoed with forgotten voices. Mostly they were happy voices and I just knew that we could be happy here, too. Gersey was checking on the

utilities but I'd left him and the realtor to come back to this loft at the very top of the building. The view from the single window was nothing but more rooftops. But the closer I looked, the more differences I could see.

There was a fig tree growing on a fire escape a block over and on one tarred roof there was a wrought iron table and two chairs with a bright red geranium sitting on it. I was smiling at the splash of color when I heard Ger calling for me. We met in the middle of the vast space. "Is this the one, Harry?"

I nodded happily. "Yes, I think we can be happy here. Will the piano be okay here? Is it too echoey?"

"We'll put up some acoustical tiles and surround it with some magic quieters." He was already planning and I slid my arms around him happily. "We'll fill it with love, Harry, and that will make it perfect."

"Just a week more, Gersey, and then we'll be bonded forever and ever." I sighed against his chest and he dropped a kiss on my head. I'd grown those three inches that he'd predicted but he'd always be taller than me and that was okay. I liked tucking my head under his chin and cuddling close.

"A week, Harry, until then we've got a lot to do. Do you mind if we buy the whole building?" He asked.

I pulled back a bit. "The whole thing? Wouldn't that be too expensive?"

He chuckled. "I've got quite a bit put away, Harry. Since people like my songs, I've made a lot more than most musicians usually do. It would be nice to fix up the whole building and make spaces for the rest of the family when they come to visit. I'm selfish, Har', I don't want to have to be quiet whenever we have company."

"Me, either." I told him with a nod. "Okay, if it's not too much, let's buy it all. Then we can put the nanny and kids on the next floor down once we start having them."

He laughed out loud and hugged me hard for a moment then led me down to the waiting realtor. It didn't seem to take any time at all to buy a five story building. The ground floor would hold storage and motorbikes. Gration and Hossic loved their Harleys and needed a secure place to store them when they were in London. It was odd but once we told the family about our new home everyone contributed something.

But in the midst of all the hustle and bustle of cleaning, renovating and moving in, the plans for our bonding just quietly kept growing and growing. The only place big enough to hold it was Hogwarts and the Headmaster had offered it with a smile. Mum was cooking for five hundred; Royan and Rhea were decorating up a storm while Draco and Charlie had something planned with the dragons that made me nervous.

Who knew what a Weasley and a Malfoy would come up with? What ever it was, I was pretty sure that fireworks were involved. Severus had promised me healing potions would be readily available so I was resigned to being surprised.

And suddenly it was time to go meet Gersey.

I walked out with Sirius on one side of me and Ron on the other. I wasn't even nervous really. I was going to join the man who held my heart in his warm hands and I was ready to bind myself to him forever. Mum had made me a new set of dress robes in green and gold. I wore them with the most comfortable leather boots I'd ever owned in deep green suede.

Sirius and Ron were in formal robes of red and gold, Gryffindor colors and I thought maybe that my folks were kind of here, too. We walked down to the lake and I didn't see anyone but Gersey waiting for me in a matching set of robes, his beautiful red hair brushed out over his broad shoulders. My hair wasn't messy since Severus had made up a conditioning potion that finally tamed my dark mane.

Gersey still liked messing it up though and I could tell by the look in his eyes that he wanted to do that right now. I felt light as air when I walked up to him and took both of his hands in mine. Dumbledore and everyone was there but they could have all been stark naked and I wouldn't have noticed it.

"We are met on this beautiful summer day to witness Gersey and Harry acknowledge their heart-bond." He said simply.

"I dreamed you, Harry and suddenly there you were. I promise you laughter and joy for all our days to come." Gersey kissed the inside of my left wrist and I wanted to burst into flame.

"I saw you and ached for something that I didn't know how to express. I do now, Gersey. I love you with all my heart and I promise to love and care for you forever." I stood on tiptoe and kissed him gently.

Overhead, five dragons rose above us flaming a fire red heart in the blue sky. And the crackle of fireworks burst from all sides in every color of the rainbow. But I was too busy sliding a sapphire and silver ring on Gersey's hand while he slid an emerald and gold band onto my ring finger.

The cheers were deafening when they answered Dumbledore's call for witnesses. But all I could hear was Gersey saying 'I love you' while I tasted my first kiss from my husband. I could hardly wait for our honeymoon.

Charlie

Draco hugged me close and I marveled at how far he'd come since our own bonding on his seventeenth birthday. It was a much smaller ceremony than this but that was what Draco wanted and I made sure that he got it. My family was there but there was still some stiffness with Mom while the Hagrids had accepted us completely. My best memory was Hossic and Gration toasting us with a glass of fine aged scotch from the Malfoy cellars.

'Here's to a long life and all the happiness in the world for you both!'

Draco had glowed and I'd just had to kiss him again and again. Even now, I felt like he'd disappear if I couldn't see him. The dragons had performed magnificently and we'd just finished feeding them the kippered herring they loved so we had a moment to ourselves. I raised his face to mine and rejoiced in his happy look. Lowering my mouth to his, I tasted him slowly while he melted into my arms.

We were going slowly in our love-making because sharing his body wasn't something Draco was still quite comfortable with. I wanted to make sure that every touch was welcome and I loved watching him absorb each new sensation with delight. His skin was satin smooth unlike mine which had scars from my dragon handling. But he'd smoothed his love over each one so they no longer bothered me.

"Charlie, are we leaving early?" Draco teased me while slowly undulating his hips against mine. "Is there something about bondings that turn you on?"

I chuckled and thrust back. "Actually, there is but I can wait for another hour or two if you can."

"Hah! I can hold out just as long as you can, Charles Weasley." He said with that supercilious air that Harry always groaned at. It drove some of the board members wild when he pulled it on them with that arrogant look that his father had so perfected.

"Then again, we could slip out past the cake, through the Forest and be back home before anyone else leaves the party." I slipped my hands into the back pockets of his black jeans and pulled him just a little bit closer while he caught his breath and grinned up at me.

"I like that idea, Charlie-love." And he smiled the sweet smile that melted my heart.

Fiona

This was the bonding of the century and I had a front row seat. But most of my attention was on my date instead of the bonding pair. Dad had some reservations about the fact that Gration was half-giant but speaking as the interested lover, I had none whatsoever. Gra' was tender, loving and intelligent. And he turned me on with a vengeance. I'd never been so satisfied in my life.

Mom and I had a long talk about marriage, children and careers. I'd never known that she could have been a writer but had given it up to support my father in his career with the Ministry and have my brother and me. I told her that I must have gotten my talent from her and she'd blushed. So I hugged her and told her how much I loved her. We don't do that enough in my family.

But the Hagrids hug each other at the drop of a hat. I was getting addicted to giving and receiving them. Today had been no different, moving between laughter and tears both before and after the ceremony. Harry Potter had lived up to his name although I thought maybe the press should change the title slightly to the Man-who-loved instead of Boy-who-lived.

He and Gersey glowed with happiness and I kept getting the urge to cry for no apparent reason. When Ger started singing a love song to Harry, I completely lost it and had to grab for my hankie. While I was sniffing, Gration pulled me close and hummed along in my ear until I had another urge, which included stripping him naked and making another kind of music.

"Dreaming, I must be dreaming.
Or am I really lying here with you.
Baby, you take me in your arms,
And though I'm wide awake,
I know my dream is coming true."

"Fiona, have we reached the point where I ask you to bond with me and you say yes?" He looked a little uncertain for the first time since I'd known him.

Part of me sighed and I pulled him down so I could look into his eyes. "Yes, you ask me to bond with you."

"Bond with me, sweet Fiona, I love you." Those beautiful blue eyes gazed into mine and I melted.

"Yes, Gration, I'll bond with you." I managed before succumbing to tears again. "I love you, too." And then he swung me up in his arms and kissed me hard.

Sirius

I wished that James and Lily could have watched Harry bond with Gersey. I know that they'd given their approval after Voldemort's destruction but I hoped with all my heart that some of his joy could reach them. He glowed with it but then so did Gersey. I know they didn't need my permission to bond but I'd given them my love. I couldn't not give them what they'd given to me so freely.

"And oh, I just fall in love again.
Just one touch and then it happens every time.
And there I go, I fall in love again.
And when I do, I can't help myself
I fall in love with you."

Rhea was sniffing a little and I handed her my handkerchief with a smile. There was something about Gersey's voice that had all the women sighing. Harry was looking just a tad smug but also starry eyed. It was a good look for him and one I'd gotten used to seeing.

"Oh," Rhea gasped and I turned back to her. She had the most interesting look on her face. "Siri, could you get Mum for me? I'm so settled in this lovely rocker that I don't think I want to get up right now."

"Love, is something wrong?" I asked in concern. She was nearing her due date and her energy was starting to really flag.

"Not wrong, love, I just need her to answer a question for me." She smiled up at me and I leaned over to kiss her. I could still taste the tart lemon from the bars I'd brought her earlier. She joked about being addicted to them. "And could you bring me another cup of chamomile tea, while you're over there?"

Chuckling, I bowed to her. "Yes, Mi'lady, coming right up."

"Silly Siri," Rhea stuck out her tongue at me and I kissed her hand before leaving to find Mum.

She was talking with her mother and I waited, not wanting to break in to their serious conversation. But Granny saw me and beckoned me closer. "Cum ye over, Sirius. How is wee Rhea doin' in this 'eat?"

"She's got a question for Mum, Granny. She said that she couldn't get out of the rocker we set up for her in the shade." I joked with the elderly giant who gave out such great hugs. "And she wants some more tea."

Hermione

Harry's bonding was exactly what I wanted when I got married. I was wearing a green dress with gold braid again but this time it was soft and gauzy so the heat wasn't a factor. Maybe a winter ceremony instead of a summer one, I thought to myself while I watched Gersey sing to Harry.

"Magic, it must be magic.
The way I hold you and
The night just seems to fly.
Easy for you to take me to a star.
Heaven is that moment when I look into your eyes."

I sighed and wanted to stay there listening for hours. But I was pretty sure that we wouldn't get hours since Harry was looking hot enough to set something on fire. I giggled at the look on Ron's face when he came back carefully carrying two glasses of punch.

"You know, every woman in this crowd is about ready to faint." He said with a kind of bewildered look on his face. "Why is his voice so . . . sexy, was what I heard on the way back to you."

"It's the register and his intonation probably." I took my glass from him. It was frosty cold and I sighed gratefully after my first sip. "And part of it's the fact that he's singing to Harry and they're so in love you can feel it from a mile away."

"I still don't get it completely but then I'm not ready to settle down." He looked rather sad. "I like you, Hermione but lately it feels like we're growing in different directions. I'm willing to go to University but I'm not looking forward to it like you are. I guess I'm feeling restless."

"University may not be what you eventually do with your life, Ron. It's a means to an end for me. I need some more basics before I come back to apprentice with Severus." I wasn't sure if I was saying the right things. I knew my path backwards and forwards but I could see that Ron was really struggling.

He looked ten years older suddenly, more like Charlie. "I'm thinking of learning how to ride a motorbike and taking off on a tour of Europe. I'm not like you and Harry or even Draco. You know what you want and how to get it. I don't."

"Take your time, Ron. Harry and I will still be here when you do decide what it is you want. We'll always be friends, Ron. That won't ever change." I linked arms with him and finally got him to smile.

Severus

I held my breath and let go. Toby took a step then another before plopping down with a giggle. Ru joined in and scooped him up for a tickle attack. I said rather dryly. "Well, I don't think we need to worry about him getting very far if he ever runs away from home."

My bonded smiled up at me and I sank down to the soft grass under the willow tree. He looked beautiful to me and I'd told him so while he blushed. "Toby's not goin' ta be runnin' away from 'ome, Sev. He's got to figure out walkin' first. It's 'is balance that's still a bit off. Kind of like Ss-sarco when he hopped over to Dra' that first time."

"True, Rubeus. Rhea says the same and she's a nurse." I knew that I should just accept each step of progress but I worried about him. Mum had told me that was part of being a parent.

"Ma-ma-ma-ma," Toby chanted softly and I held out my hands for him to hold onto. He was immediately up on his feet, clinging to my fingers and putting one foot ahead of the other to take the four steps between Ru and me. Once in my arms, he kissed me sweetly and I melted the way I always did.

This small boy was flesh of my flesh and the greatest gift of my life. He patted my chest with a blazing smile and I chuckled while unbuttoning my shirt enough so he could nurse. I still found that amazingly satisfying and I didn't begrudge a single moment spent feeding him.

"Sev, ya glow when ya do that, did I ever tell ya that?" Rubeus said with a sigh and he moved closer so he could slip an arm around us. "Ya're the most beautiful man here, 'cept for maybe Harry and Gersey."

I leaned into his solid shoulder and watched his brother sing to the young man he'd just bonded with. "They are definitely beautiful, Ru but I think you might be a trifle prejudiced about me."

He kissed me while Toby giggled around my nipple. The baby was used to us and the rest of the family, too. When he pulled away, he brushed a lock of my hair behind one ear. "Nah, I'm just the man who loves ya, Sev. I 'ope that 'arry and Ger are half as happy as we are."

"They deserve all the happiness in the world." I watched them with a smile. "Harry looks like he's about to cry with joy. Do you know the song that Gersey is singing?"

Rubeus shook his head and we kept on listening while our son drowsily nursed.

Arwen

"And oh, I just fall in love again.
Just one touch and then it happens every time.
And there I go, I just fall in love again.
And when I do, I can't help myself.
I fall in love with you."

Gersey's voice was like the richest chocolate melting over Harry on this beautiful sunny July day. Half of his audience looked like they were ready to pounce on the other half. I know that I was seriously contemplating grabbing Hossic and Bill and dragging them into the Forest for a quickie.

It looked like it was time for the happy pair to leave for their long awaited honeymoon. If they got any hotter, they were going to set themselves and most of their friends on fire.

"Turnin' you on, is it?" Hossic's arms slid around me from behind and his breath in my left ear just about melted me. "Good thing I've got a couple of his muggle CDs, don't you think?"

I turned in his arms and kissed him, not a 'hi, lover' kind of kiss but a 'let's find the nearest bed' kiss. He started chuckling half way through it and I was prepared to be affronted but then I saw Bill hugging him from behind. Our triad was coming right along and I thought that maybe we'd be having a bonding ceremony of our own one of these days.

"I think Harry is going to be flying without a broom if Gersey sings one more song to him." Bill said with another look at the pair. "And something is up with Rhea, Mum and Granny just did some exclaiming."

Turning back to the shady nook where our most pregnant member was seated, I saw the waves of heat flowing from her body. "Oh good, it's time for the newest Hagrid to be born."

"Really? That's great." Bill chuckled. "What an addition to a beautiful day. No one will ever forget this celebration."

"So true, I'll be right back." I threw a sultry look over my shoulder. "When I do, be ready for me, loves. I'm in the mood to celebrate."

Bill and Hossic got identical looks of loving lust that dampened my silk panties. Hopefully, Rhea would have her daughter in short order so the bonded pair could leave for their trip to Scotland. And the rest of us could start our own celebration.

The song lyrics are from a beautiful song sung by Ann Murray on her 'Songs of the Heart' album. It's called 'I just fall in love again'. The tune and words are attributed to Dorff/Sklerov/Lloyd/Herbstritt whoever they may be. When I heard it today, I could just see and hear Gersey singing it to Harry.

Gersey

I carried Harry over the threshold of the house where I was born. We were silent, not because we had nothing to say but because our hearts were too full. Rhea had delivered Bonnie Hestia Black two hours after her water broke. Sirius had been speechless ever since. I'd never seen a man so full of joy that he literally could not talk.

Then Gration had announced his intention of marrying his pretty little reporter, Fiona. Granny had just about hugged her to death while Mum looked like she'd explode with happiness. It definitely wasn't a day our family would ever forget. But now I was alone with my bonded and there was just the two of us. We'd been bound for over a year but now it was legal and I could finally stop saying no.

"I love you, Gersey." Harry whispered.

"I love you too, Harry. Would you like to see the house now?" I asked him.

"No, I can look at it later. We're going to be here for two weeks. Right now, I want you to take me to bed so we can make love all night long." He smiled at me and I shivered at the heat in his eyes.

"Then up we go." I carried him up the narrow stairs while having to turn sideways. He laughed at me when I barely missed dumping us both back down the stairs. But then we were in the small room where I'd grown up. I'd slipped away from him while he was shopping with Sirius one day and apparated home to set the stage for our honeymoon.

His eyes were busy on the four walls of the fifteen by fifteen foot room. I had changed the bed clothes to fine Egyptian cotton the same color as his eyes along with the wedding ring quilt that Granny had made for me when I graduated from Oxford. I'd begun to wonder if she'd had a vision of the future when I pulled it out of the trunk where I'd been keeping it.

The main colors were blue and green, like a look from both our eyes. I had left up the posters of foreign lands because they were part of my youthful dreams. The bookcase was full of my childhood favorites and maybe once we were sated with passion, we could go through them to see what he might like to read. The trunk at the foot of the bed was a battered oak with shiny brass fittings.

"I like it, Ger. It looks like you." His eyes came back to me and I chuckled.

"Thank you, Harry, I loved it here especially when I was writing a song." I set him down but didn't let go completely. "I'd curl up in bed and scribble away while the birds sang outside. Up here under the eaves was like being high above the rest of the world."

"That's why you wanted a loft, wasn't it?" Harry leaned against me, his arms around my waist and his head on my shoulder. "I like being up high too and looking out over the world, like being in the top of a tree."

"There's a tree right outside that window and I used to climb out to spend hours sitting on the

highest limb." I stroked his hair and breathed him in like one of Mum's roses.

"We're bonded." Harry sounded suddenly breathless and he raised his face to mine. "Make love to me, Gersey. Take me to bed and love me until I pass out."

I kissed him slowly and started unbuttoning his silky shirt while his hands found my buttons and did the same. We undressed each other as if we'd never done it before. And in a certain sense it was all new since now we were bonded. The touch of his skin was like heated satin beneath my fingers. We done so much exploring that there wasn't much we hadn't experienced.

But not like this. This was my Harry and I wanted to imprint myself on every inch of his skin. I had to taste him, learn every bump and scar from the top of his head down to his toes. Then I'd reverse my course and come all the way back up. It should take at least a week, I thought breathlessly.

"Do something, Ger, I'm burning alive." He moaned and I felt the candles I'd set around the room flicker into life.

So I picked him up and laid him down on the soft sheets. He was panting and writhing on the bed, drawing me down between his legs. I was a moth to his flame and I swallowed his cock like I'd been doing it all my life. Perhaps I had, I thought, tasting him intimately and wrapping my tongue around his dripping crown.

"Gersey!" He shouted and came in long spurts down my throat.

I sucked gently, knowing that he'd be too sensitive now if I stimulated him any more. He relaxed all over and I felt his hand come up to stroke my cheek.

"I love you, Gersey Hagrid. Make me yours, Ger, here and now." His voice was smoky with a little rasp that made my spine melt and pool in my cock.

Letting his shaft slowly slip from my lips, I licked away a stray drop or two before answering him. "You are mine, Harry, just the way that I'm yours. For always and forever, little love."

His eyes went just a bit sultry and he smiled. "Yes, we belong to each other but I want all of you, Ger. You promised."

"I did, Har' and heaven knows I want you and have for months." I leaned down and kissed him slowly, taking my time and sharing his taste with him. His hands stroked through the long hair that curtained his beautiful face.

When we had to breathe, we just looked at each other as if we'd never seen us before. Well, we hadn't, had we? Bonded, married, mated, they were all just words for the powerful emotions we'd unleashed. I traced his scar with a single finger and he blinked slowly as if just awakening from a dream.

"I love you, Gersey. All my life I wanted someone to love me, just me. I always felt alone even when I was surrounded by the other Gryffindors. They saw parts of me but never all that I was. But you saw me, you knew me the moment we met." He slowly moved his fingers over my jaw and down my throat, pausing over the pulse in my throat. "Your heart beat is a little fast, Ger. Is it me that makes it beat faster?"

I smiled and kissed the tip of his nose. "Only and ever you, my beautiful little love."

He smiled that luminous smile that lit the room with its radiance. "I have a surprise for you, Ger. While you were talking with Severus, I got myself ready for you."

For a brief moment I didn't understand but then my eyes widened. "You didn't hurt yourself, Harry?"

"No, worrywart, I didn't. I just made sure that I had lots and lots of that special lubricant that Sev makes inside of me as far as I could reach." He grinned just a little cheekily. "But I expect you could get some more in really deep where only you will ever reach."

He was so brave, I thought with a catch in my breath. "I don't suppose that you brought any with you."

Harry laughed out loud and pointed to his pants, "Accio Lubricant." A small vial levitated out of his pockets and over to his fingers. "I'd really like you to put this to good use, Gersey."

Heavens knew I was hard enough to come all over him. "All right, little love, but if it starts to hurt you'll tell me immediately."

"Yes, Gersey, I'll tell you if there's too much pain. I know it will hurt a little just at first." He sighed at my touch. "But I want you deep inside of me, making me so completely yours that we can't tell where one of us starts or ends."

"I want that too, Harry." I poured the viscous liquid over my hands and pulled him slightly up off the bed and onto my thighs so I had access to his opening. "I love you."

Harry

I needed him badly but he was still going slowly. I know he didn't want to hurt me but I wanted him inside of me and I wanted him now. But he kept on stroking two fingers in and out of me while my cock perked up and started hardening again. The windows were open and the curtains were moving in the breeze but it felt like my skin was on fire and only Gersey could put out the flames.

Then there was a third finger and I started sizzling. It felt like champagne running through my veins kind of like when we blood-bonded. "Gersey, now, please now." I pleaded with him while I burned. "I love you."

"Gods, Harry, I don't want to hurt you." He sounded like he was in pain and I knew he was hurting as much as I was.

"Amplificare, consummare." I whispered and felt the spell take hold.

Then I felt myself stretch while his crown pressed through the tight muscle. Even with the spell and all the lubricant, I could feel the burn of his entry. But that didn't matter, nothing mattered but the feel of him sliding deeper and deeper inside of me. He was going to reach my heart if he kept going.

"Harry? Are you all right?" His voice sounded strangled and I forced my eyes open to look at him. "Sweetheart?"

"Wow, that's . . ." my brain had melted, "you're inside of me, all the way inside."

"You've got all of me, little love. And I've never felt anything like your heat." He leaned down and kissed me, his cock nudging that gland that made me want to explode.

I sucked on his tongue and moved my hips just a little to see what would happen. He gasped into my mouth and I felt his hands slide over my hips to pull me closer. I wrapped my legs tight around his waist and wiggled again. His little growl made me even harder if that was possible.

Then he was moving slowly out an inch or two before thrusting back in. If I thought that I was hot before now I really knew what heat was. It felt like my skin was crackling with energy and I could have sworn that I felt sparks flying off into the air around us. I was panting in order to get some air into my lungs and I felt dizzy even though I was lying down.

Sweat was dripping off of Gersey's face and onto my skin, making little pops of energy fizz. I slid my hands up his strong arms that were braced on either side of me. I could almost see the red trails of power that I left in my wake. We started to glow and suddenly I needed to move, needed to get him closer . . . deeper . . . harder. His little growl turned me into steel and his thrusts finally began to speed up.

The fire inside of me flowed from head to toe and a reddish golden glow like lava when it first bursts through the earth began to grow everywhere our skin touched. I wondered if the bed would catch fire soon while I clutched his shoulders and tried to stay conscious. I was going to pass out if this kept up. Opening my eyes, I saw his glow like the blue-red of a really hot flame.

"Come for me, Harry." His voice was so deep that it made me shiver.

And I came for him in a burst of white-hot seed that splashed between us. He managed one more thrust and flooded me. For a moment, I felt each little seed burning inside me and I wished with all my heart that one of them would find one of my seeds and start the nucleus of our first child.

Then I passed out.

When I came to, I was lying on top of Gersey with my head tucked under his chin and his cock still inside of me. His big hands stroked my back from my shoulders down to my arse then back up again. He was humming a little and I recognized the song that he'd sung to me earlier. I was so comfortable that I never wanted to move again.

"Love you, Ger." I whispered into his throat before licking away the sweat that had pooled there. "Let's do it again."

His laugh started deep inside of him and broke out at the same time he slipped from me. I let out a little groan before I could stop myself and he rolled us over at once. "Where does it hurt, Harry? Let me up so I can get something."

I held onto him with all my strength. "It doesn't hurt, Ger. It just feels like all my inner muscles have a cramp. Sev said it would ache the first few times until my body got used to having you inside of me. That's all it is, truly."

His big hand cradled my cheeks and gently stroked there. "Truly, Harry? I need to know exactly how it feels. Sev gave me some salve that will help the ache. Let me check and make sure that you're not bleeding."

I let him roll me over onto my stomach so he could check the trickles. His touch tickled just a little when he spread my cheeks. "Oh, that feels good, Ger."

"There's no discharge, Harry." His voice was kind of awed and I peeked over my shoulder to see his expression.

No discharge. I thought about that for a moment before feeling the biggest smile I've ever felt in my life break out. Turning quickly, I sat up and hugged him close. "It worked, Ger. I wished really hard that one of your seeds would find one of mine. It really worked."

He hugged me so tight I squeaked. "Goddess bless, Harry. You're pregnant?"

"I hope so. I know you think it's too soon but it isn't. All my life I wanted to have one person love me and now that you do, I made a new wish." I pulled back just far enough so he'd see my face. "And you've made that one come true, too. I love you so much, Ger."

"Ah, Harry, you're every wish and hope I've ever dreamed." He kissed me slowly, mapping my mouth with his tongue while I started heating up again. He always tastes so very good that I never wanted him to stop. But eventually we had to breathe. He cupped my chin in his warm hand and just looked at me.

"What? Have I got a spot on my nose?" I teased him and watched his smile bloom.

"You're glowing, Harry. It's like a dusting of gold powder over your skin." His thumb brushed over my swollen lips. "We should clean up and have something to eat. I think we're going to need our energy. I want you to come inside of me next."

I bounced and leaned in to kiss him again. Our tongues tangled together first in his mouth and then in mine. He tasted so good that I never wanted to stop. But come to think of it, I was hungry. I'd been too happy to eat much after the ceremony. "Yes, let's eat and take a bath so we can come back here and make love all over again."

Chuckling, he rolled out of bed and held out a hand to help me out. Even at rest, his cock was still slightly firm and remembering how it felt sliding inside of me, I suddenly wanted him again. But sliding out of bed and standing up reminded me of all the muscles that had just gotten such a workout. I couldn't stop from making a face and he immediately swept me up in his arms.

"Soaking in hot water will help, Harry. While you're doing that, I'll fix a tray so we can snack and bathe at the same time." He carried me out of his bedroom and down the hall to a nice bathroom with a big tub.

"Good, then I'll have enough energy to return the favor, Ger." I bit his ear lobe and listened to his laughter with satisfaction. We were just getting started.

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Part 45 by Athea

Author's Notes:

Back in the Forest, life goes on.

Severus

I powdered Toby's bottom and rewrapped him in the soft cotton diaper. I still found it amazing that such a small child could fill a diaper with such a disgusting wealth of waste. All mothers should get hazardous duty pay for taking care of their infants. Potty training could not come too soon, I thought to myself while Toby waved his arms and smiled up at me.

That still had the power to make me feel giant-size, his unwavering joy when he saw me or his father. His whole face would light up and he'd smile the kind of sunny smile that reminded me of young Harry. I had the lowering feeling that he was going to be a Gryffindor when he got Sorted. Oh, the horror. As if he knew what I was thinking, he crowed out loud and kicked up his feet.

"Yes, have fun while you can, young man. Once you start to walk, your father and I have plans to harness all that energy." I lifted him in my arms and he laughed again. I will never get over the

feeling of joy that washes through me at his touch. Hugging him to my chest, I caught his hand instinctively when he tried to grab my hair.

"Ma-ma-ma-ma, far." He chortled and I chuckled.

"Yes, we're going far today, Toby. We're going up to school so I can check on the supplies that should have come from Hogsmeade." I carried him into the outer room and found Ara just finishing putting breakfast on the table. "Good morning, Ara, that looks very nice. How about some scrambled eggs, Toby?"

"Ar-a-a-a," he greeted the house elf. "Gr-r-r-r." That was his attempt at 'eggs' and I congratulated him on it while pronouncing it correctly for him. He was very intelligent for nine months old and he picked up words like they were fascinating toys with which he could play.

"Master Rubeus is coming in soon." Ara tickled Toby's foot and he laughed at her soft 'there, there'. "Picking grapes, he is for breakfast."

That took me back to the day when Albus told me that I'd been declared dead and I had a lapful of grapes to wash. So much had happened since then that I could hardly believe over a year and a half had passed. Toby hadn't even been dreamt of let alone conceived. I was such a lucky wizard.

Rubeus

I came in with the colander full of the sweet deep purple grapes that Sev loved. But instead of a basin of water on his lap, he had Toby. Both of them turned identical smiles to me and it hit me all over again, how much I was loved. "Mornin', Sev - Toby."

"Da-da-da-da-da," Toby chanted and held out his little arms to me.

I traded Sev the grapes for our son and lifted him high above my head while he squealed with laughter. "How's my little Toby this beautiful morn?"

He just giggled and squirmed in my hands. I still had moments when I couldn't hardly believe that he was made up of bits and pieces of both of us. He was so tiny when I held him that at first, I'd been a bit afraid of accidentally hurting him. But I took my time and held him real careful-like until it didn't feel so scary.

It helped that he had a real strong grip with those long fingers of his. He definitely inherited his mama's hands but Sev said that he has my eyes and today I could see that was true. Sitting down, I thanked Ara for my filled plate and held Toby so Sev could fasten his bib over his front.

Then I held a spoonful of eggs for him and he grabbed them with his hand and shoved them into his mouth. He was kind of a messy eater now that he was starting on solid foods and half of it fell onto him rather than into his mouth. But his bib had a trough at the bottom so most of it ended up there.

"You do realize that we can't take him into public now until he learns how to eat properly?" Sev said dryly and I grinned at him.

"Nah, Sev, he enjoys his food ta much not ta take him ta Mum's." I ate a bite of the fluffy eggs before giving Toby some more. "We'll just have ta get some more of these bibs and always have a clean one with us."

He chuckled and Toby grinned up at me as if he knew what we were saying. I got that feeling a lot these days. Sev told me that he'd be going up to the school to check on some deliveries for the potions lab and I told him that I was going to mow the Quidditch field. He smiled at me and fed me a grape. We agreed to meet in his rooms so I could clean up for lunch.

Toby laughed out loud when he heard the word 'Mum'. He knew exactly who we meant and he loved her voice. She sang to him all the time and he'd croon along with her. Sev thought that he was going to be a singer like Gersey. I thought maybe he was right.

Charlie

"Draco, are we going to school today or to London?" I called up the spiral stair case to my bonded.

"London," he said and I watched his well-tailored charcoal silk-clad legs come into view. He was dressed for business and I reacted the way I usually did. The more tailored he looked, the more I wanted to mess up his hair and kiss him stupid. The smirk on his face told me that he'd caught my urge. "It's Cadbury's board today so Albus will be going with us."

"Albus and chocolate," I grimaced, "just kill me now."

He laughed and slid his arms around me, lifting his face for my kiss. I obliged him, thinking that he had finally begun to expect my affection rather than just wish for it. I helped him out as often as I could by showering him with hugs and kisses for no particular reason. That was no hardship at all and I doted on him the way that he doted on Ss-sarco.

Pulling back, he smirked again. "Wear your light-weight tan silk suit, love. I laid it out for you. I'm going to go check on Ss-serens to make sure she's not overheating."

I dropped another kiss on his nose and dashed upstairs to get dressed. I'd never had so many nice clothes in my life. But Draco liked buying me new suits so I kept on wearing what he picked out for me. I'd been busy with the dragons since dawn and I stripped off hastily and took a quick shower before drying and redressing. In twenty minutes, I was ready to go.

Hurrying down the wrought iron spiral stairs, I made my way out the side door of our new house. We'd finished it two weeks before and I still liked to stop and look at it. We'd fit it between two beautiful old oaks so it was narrow but tall. Draco had told me of his tree-climbing adventures and I tried to recreate that feel on our second floor. The whole floor was our bedroom, dressing room and bathroom. It was open and airy with all light woods and bright colors.

I'd seen Malfoy Manor and its gloomy, heavy feel was the antithesis of our new home. Draco had bloomed since our bonding and he was like our house now, open and loving. I'd never been happier and he told me that he was, too. Relations with the Weasley family were softening a bit but the Hagrids had become our surrogate family.

"Hurry up, Charlie or I'll let Albus visit the sweet shop before the meeting." Draco's sultry tones had me running to catch up with him.

Albus on a sugar high was something to be avoided at all costs.

Albus

It was board meeting day and I rubbed my hands gleefully. The candy makers were always experimenting with something new and they liked my input on their creations. The scent of chocolate, whipped cream and various flavors of liquors wafted to us and I took a deep breath.

"Ah, I believe I caught the scent of elderberry, my dear boys. I'll just stop off and catch up with you in a few moments." I headed for the back room only to be stopped with a double pull on my robes.

"Albus, we're almost late the way it is. I'll have Candace bring some of the new recipes up for our break." Draco was trying not to smirk at Charlie who was hanging on like grim death to my shoulder.

"Well, if you think we must," I tried not to pout but the young thing who'd appeared at the door of the experimental kitchen waved merrily at me and I winked at her. Candy was sure to bring me a good selection of the new goodies. "Lead on, my dear boy."

Draco smiled and led us up to the board room on the sixth floor of the Cadbury flagship store. It had been a century since I'd been inside a boardroom of any kind but they hadn't changed much in that time. The Slytherin chairman of fully half the boards in England was slowly but surely making some changes that I hoped would lighten up the wizard business world.

What was it the Americans talked so much about these days? Transparency, that was it, I beamed at my fellow trustees. They still had faintly stunned looks on their faces when ever they saw me and I'd dressed the part today. Minerva had laughed out loud when she saw my purple striped robes with the green ostrich feathers around my neck. It's part of my light weight, all-purpose clothing that gets me through the August heat.

Sitting down after shaking everyone's hand, I watched the door for Candy's entrance. Draco had explained to me that part of my job was to keep the others off guard long enough for him to get some reforms passed. All joking aside, I agreed with his strategy and the intent of his changes. When things happen in secret, evil creeps in. Promises under the table could and had led to travesties of decisions.

I was too old to live through any more of that so I was going to make sure that this generation got the chance to change it all. I was nudging Draco's Slytherin tendencies towards the harder task of working his will in the full light of day. Luckily, he enjoyed the challenge and I was pretty sure that Charlie was his sounding board.

I sat up when the door opened and Candy appeared with a silver tray filled with sweets.

Hossic

"What do ya think?" I asked Bill, who'd stepped back to take a good look at our handy work. The new windows we'd just put in flooded the top floor with light.

"They look good, if I do say so myself." He grinned at me and I pulled him into my arms for a kiss. He tasted of salt and tea, a heady combination. We'd been working pretty much nonstop since the day that Gersey bought this building. But they were due in today and we still hadn't finished off their floor.

Finally we had to breathe and I wiped a streak of caulking from his cheek. "Yeah, they do. What else is left on our list?"

"Actually, there's just some furniture to move into place and then we're done. Another hour or so and we can sneak down to the second floor. Arwen said something about having a bath ready for

us." He winked at me and pulled away to head for the shrouded pile of tables and chairs.

"Let's hurry." I suggested and enjoyed his chuckle. After finally finding the ones who made my heart sing, I'd settled into almost-bonded life with ease. I'd wondered if I'd be able to do that after a life of playing the gypsy, moving people here and there but never really settling down to one person, one place. Settling down with two seemed just right.

After consulting the map that Harry and Gersey had left us, we quick got everything placed approximately right. If I knew them, they'd be moving everything once they started living here anyway. Until you've lived in a place, you just can't know exactly where everything should go. Traffic patterns and, I paused in mid-thought.

"Is handiness a word?" I leaned against the back of the sofa we'd just slid into place.

"Sure, Hoss, it's a noun." He looked quizzically at me and I smiled. "Are we going to be playing word games tonight?"

I went hot then cold before beginning to stalk him towards the door. Words turned me on like nobody's business. "Yeah, that would be fun, don't ya think?"

He retreated until his back hit the front door and I closed in on him, one of my legs sliding between his while my lips took his. He still tasted salty and I scoured his mouth of every hint of it. We were both breathing heavy when we stopped and he fumbled behind him for the door handle. "We promised Arwen we wouldn't start without her. But why don't you think on the word stenosis and how it would feel when you slide right into my stenotic passage?" And he took off running for the stairs with me right behind.

Harry

Gersey carried me over the threshold of our very own home. After years of living at someone else's place, I was finally going to have a spot to call mine. I'd be sharing it with someone I loved and in a few months with the child we'd created. I wanted to laugh and cry all at the same time whenever I thought of that.

"Wow, it looks even better than I thought it would." I looked around and saw the front part of the room looking really cozy except for the pile of suitcases and boxes that peeked out from under the shroud of tarp in one corner. "Gosh, we're going to have to go through all the presents and write thank you cards."

"We'll get to that, Harry." Gersey smiled down at me and I pulled him in for a kiss. Even after two solid weeks of kissing and touching him, I still couldn't get enough. But part of me wanted to explore our new space so when we breathed, I wiggled to be let down and he let me go with a pout.

It took us almost an hour to look at everything and Gersey was checking the piano to make sure it was still in tune while I made up our bed with the smooth sheets we'd packed up in Scotland. We hadn't quite worn them out and I tucked them in with a firm desire to mess them up again. Soon.

He was playing something bright and cheerful when I came out from behind the Japanese six-panel dragon screen that Albus and Minerva had given us for a bonding present. His smile drew me to him and I hugged him from behind while he continued to play. The notes sang in the gently moving air and I laid my head on his shoulder so I could look out of the brand new windows that Hossic and Bill had gifted to us.

I liked getting practical gifts and the breeze from these had cooled down the entire room. Just how did you go about thanking someone for a brace of windows? I sighed happily. Mum would know and I was looking forward to flooing back to Hogwarts over the weekend for a hug and a meal. Gersey cooked just fine but I was lousy at it. I wanted to ask Dobby if he knew of a house elf who'd liked to cook.

There was so much to do that I didn't want to take the time to learn how right now.

"Harry, why are you frowning?" Gersey had stopped playing and turned around to pull me into his lap.

"Do you think I could squeeze in a cooking class at the University this fall? I'm so bad at it and I don't want you to have to get our meals, too." I admitted and watched him break into a smile.

"Mum already has a house elf lined up for us by the name of Skezer. He likes to cook and he's a whiz at cleaning, she told me. He loves music and volunteered when she asked around." He kissed the tip of my nose and I sighed in relief.

"Thank goodness." I wiggled over his lap and felt that little thrill in the pit of my stomach when he started hardening beneath me. "I made the bed, Gersey. I think we should christen it now."

"Well, far be it from me to say no to such a wonderful suggestion." He scooped me up and stood, pushing back the piano bench and carrying me into our bedroom space. With a quick spell, he undressed us both and slid into bed still holding me.

I loved the feel of his skin against mine. We'd mostly stayed naked the entire two weeks and it was going to be hard to get used to clothes again. We both had nice tans from our heads to our toes with no lines anywhere. I brushed my hands slowly over his chest, tugging gently at the reddish gold curls until I could feel his nipples peaking for me. I had such a feeling of power, knowing that I was the only one who could make him react like that.

"Ah, Harry, I'll never get enough of you, little love." He licked my nipple and I arched beneath him with a little groan. So he did it to the other one while I tingled all over.

But I wanted more so I tugged him onto his back so I could lie on top of him. His cock was hot and hard between my legs and I shivered all over when I felt it rub the sensitive skin between my cheeks. I had him almost right where I needed him so I spoke the words that had become second nature. "Amplificare, consummare."

Reaching back, I pushed him through my tight entrance and slowly slid him all the way inside of me. It felt too full like it always did but the burning ache was just the beginning of the wonderful sensations and the look of ecstasy on his face made me glow hotter. Thank goodness for Quidditch and the training that had made my legs so strong. Rocking back and forth was just the start of the tingles that would eventually take over my whole body.

"I love you, Harry Potter-Hagrid." His deep voice made me tremble and his big warm hands on my hips were starting to help me move on him.

"I love you too, Gersey Potter-Hagrid. And I always will." I had a home, friends and a family. The rest of my life was going to be blessed with the child we'd just created and as many more as I could talk my bonded into. Finally, I'd won the best fate of all. I could hardly wait to see what else the Hagrid family had in store for it. It was going to be fun finding out, I laughed out loud and Gersey joined it. The world would never know what hit it.

The end of Forbidden Forest

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Part 46 by Athea

Author's Notes:

Summary: Keeping up with a one year old can be exhausting.

***** Toby *****

I had to be really quiet. When I woke up early from my nap, I got down all by myself from my crib. It's nice and warm here in my room but I don't have time to play right this minute. I'm a big boy now that I've had my first birthday. The party was de-lis-ius, that's one of my new words. Mama says that I have lots more to learn but Papa just laughs and laughs when I say something the wrong way round.

Gama says her words different from most everybody else, 'cept for Granny. They sound really pretty when the words come rolling out like a song. But that reminds me that I have something to do today while everybody is gone. Well, everybody except for Ara who looks after me. I frowned a little because I needed to go and get my surprise for the big Solstice party by myself.

I opened the bottom drawer of my dresser and stood on the edge so I could reach the top drawer where my warmest sweater was. Aunt Rhea had knitted it for my birthday and it was my favorite-est blue. Mama said it was knitted from a glance of Papa's eyes but I didn't see how that could be since I'd seen the cotton myself in Aunt Rhea's bag while she was working.

Pulling it over my head, I real quietly closed up the drawer and jumped down. I'd probably need warmer socks so I got out the ones that my big brother Draco gave me. They're real thin but super warm because they're silk. They feel really good and I wanted to wear them everyday but Mama said that I couldn't play favorites. The other socks would feel bad if I didn't wear them, too.

My boots were by the front door and so was my coat. It wasn't horrible-cold like it had been for my birthday, just kind of damp and snowy. But I'd need to wear them both or Mama would be sad. I don't like making Mama sad because he gets such a horrible-frown that I want to cry. So I very, very carefully cracked open the door to my room and looked to see where Ara was.

There was humming coming from the big bathroom where we take our baths so I tiptoed out and tugged on my boots first. Then I got my coat down from the hook that was just a couple inches taller than me and put it on, remembering to button all my buttons and wrap my soft scarf that Aunt Royan made for me around my neck. I was ready to go.

The door knob is too high for me to reach but the open-spell is simple and I'd figured it out almost two weeks ago. I pulled it shut behind me and took a deep breath of the snowy air. There was more snow just about to fall, I could feel it. So I'd have to hurry to get there and come back. I jumped off the front step onto the path that Papa had shoveled for us. Once I got past the green house, the path disappeared so I made myself light so I could walk on top of the snow instead of through it.

Mama had been real surprised when I showed him how to do it. At first I thought I'd done something wrong because he sniffed a little like he was going to cry but then he smiled that soft smile that is just for me and Papa. He hugged me close and told me what a smart boy I was. We saved it for a surprise for later when I showed Papa what I could do.

Papa had cried but he told me they were happy tears because I was really, really talented. Mama told me what talent meant later. It was what Papa had when he was fixing one of the animals that got hurt and what Mama had when he played the violin. I like to hear him play and when he and Uncle Gersey play together it's wonderful. We were going to the Uncles home in London for Solstice this year instead of Hogwarts so there'd be lots of music.

I didn't remember my first Solstice because I was just a baby last year but Uncle Gersey had

played his memory box for me a few weeks ago so I could hear the neat songs everybody had sung. I could hardly wait for the party but right now, I needed to hurry to the cave where my presents were growing. Jenny Wren flew along with me, telling me all the stories of what was going on with her family.

Running meant that I couldn't talk back but then she liked to talk, kind of like Gampa when he was talking to Godpa Albus. I really don't know all the big words that they use but they sound pretty. Mama says that I'll learn them all when I grow up. I can hardly wait but for now, I was learning one new word every day. Papa picked one out of the big dictionary and taught it to me each morning.

I had to use it at least three times during the day and that was a fun game to play with my friends. The trees were getting closer together so I knew I was close. Calling out to Ty, I waited until he came to the entrance of his cave. He purred so I knew it was safe to come on in. Mama said to always ask to be allowed to enter someone's home even if there wasn't a door. Even without one, it was a lot warmer in their snug cave.

Tabalonia, Ty's mate welcomed me with a little purr, too. She led me to my Christmas gifts and they looked wonderful. I sat down by the soft nest and the kittens immediately crawled out to play with me. They were six weeks old today and I could hardly wait for everybody to see them. I'd found their mama all torn up, dragging herself away from the path.

I brought her to Ty since we were so close to his den. But she was having her babies too fast and even though I tried and tried, her light went out. That was sad and I felt bad that I hadn't helped more. But Papa told me later when I told him about her that we couldn't save every life no matter how hard we tried. He and Mama cuddled me real close for the rest of the evening until they tucked me into bed.

I'd forgotten to tell them about the kittens and when I remembered, I was already pretty sure that they'd make good Solstice presents so then I kept them a secret. Taba had almost grown kits and she'd kept my kittens fed with her rich milk. But she'd already told me that they were weaned and ready to go to their new homes. I took off my scarf and made a sling.

The orange marmalade kitten jumped right into it once I showed him by sending a picture into his baby mind. The white and orange one followed him then the tiger striped one joined his brothers. The little gray and gray-striped girls weren't sure about jumping in but Taba nosed them over and pretty soon I had my arms full. They'd grown so big that it was going to be hard to carry them all back.

It was kind of a long way and it was already dusk. But Ty snorted the way he does when he's laughing at someone and lay down by me, showing me with a picture that I was to ride him home. I kissed Taba for helping the kittens and she licked my cheek with her rough tongue. That always tickles so I was laughing when I sat down on Ty's back.

He got up real carefully and made sure that I was seated all right before leaving his den. The trip didn't seem to take any time at all with him loping through the trees, taking me through a part of the Forest that Papa told me not to go to if I was alone. Some parts are really old and have ancient magic creatures that aren't used to little boys. But it was all right if I was with him or Mama or Draco and Charlie.

I hoped that dragons liked kittens because I really thought that the tiger kitten was just right for my big brother. Draco was the best-est brother in the whole world and I wanted to give him something really special this Solstice. The kittens were getting a little restless when I heard Papa's voice. He sounded kind of worried so I called back to him. Within a minute, he was right there, all bundled up against the cold and his face all wrinkled in a frown.

"Toby, are ya all right?" He said while plucking me from Ty's back. "Thank ya, Ty, for bringin' him home ta us."

Ty purred and butted up against Papa's leg. I added my thanks before showing Papa my surprise. "See Papa, got kitties for Solstice."

"I kin see that, little one." Papa hugged me real gently and kissed the top of my head. "Ya should 'ave told Ara where ya were going. She and yar mama are right worried."

"Had to get 'em 'fore we left." I didn't think they'd be so worried about me. I was in big trouble. "Will Mama and Ara be sad wit' me?"

"Maybe a little, Toby but ya can make it up ta them by being a real good boy while we get ready for our trip. Me thanks ta ya, Ty and give me best wishes to Taba and the kits."

Ty nodded then turned and left for home while Papa tucked me into his big coat so I was warmer. The kittens thought that was really nice and they poked their heads out to check out Papa's beard.

***** Severus *****

Seeing Rubeus come striding into the clearing with Toby in his arms made me almost faint with relief. Our son was trying not to cry but his little lip was quivering. Once I saw the kittens, I understood completely. He inherited his father's need to heal the wounded and with his natural talent at healing, he succeeded more often than he failed.

"Toby, you're safe." I said thankfully while untangling him from Rubeus and his kittens. Once he was in my arms, I hugged him tightly. "I do love you, Tobias but please don't do that again. You worried all of us. Draco and Charles are searching for you, too."

He kissed me sweetly and almost throttled me with his hug. "Did't mean to, Mama. Love 'ou, too. I gots kitties."

"Are these your surprises?" I watched them crawl over and under Rubeus' coat with a chuckle. "Who gets which one?"

"Gots to t'ink 'bout it. But Tiger for Draco, for sure," he nodded emphatically and kissed my cheek with a smack.

"We'll certainly have fun figuring it out. Now, you need to apologize to Ara and help her set the table for dinner." I carried him in and brought him to our house elf who was sniffing a little by the stove. Once I set him down, he hugged her immediately and told her he was sorry while she hugged him back and patted his cheek with her small hand.

Peace restored, I went back to our bedroom to change out of my school robes and into the casual wear that suited the cottage. One more day of classes and then the break for the holidays would begin. After years of not celebrating, I'd entered into the festivities with both feet. Having a child will do that to you, I thought sardonically.

"Ya would na give 'im back, Sev." My bonded slid his big arms around me and hugged me tight. "I think ya kind'a like celebrating now."

Chuckling, I turned and reached up to kiss him. "True, Ru', I can not imagine not having him in our lives. And the Hagrid family must be the most welcoming family on Earth."

We kissed for a long moment until giggles from the outer room reminded us that we had one baby

and six kittens now with which we needed to cope. We pulled apart gently and Ru' went out to see what was going on while I finished buttoning my soft blue silk shirt. I'd taken to Muggle clothing with a vengeance and half the time I wore them under my robes. But the chill weather had sent me back to the woolens of my youth to stay warm in the old dungeons.

Did I miss living and working in them? Not at all, I'd decided with a smile. All the warmth in the world was mine here in this home that Rubeus and I had created for our love. Coming into the dining space, I found our son being separated from his surprises with many a backward look. Hand washing was always a bit of a battle since he didn't think it necessary.

Mum had warned me that little boys were like that and she was right. I corralled the kittens in a wooden box lined with a sheepskin I'd conjured from an old sheet. They really were cute little things and I anticipated giving them away with glee, although I did just have a premonition that we'd be keeping one. Little boys and kittens seemed to go together.

Yet another thing that I'd learned in the last two years, I smiled to myself and turned to greet our oldest son and his mate. "Draco, Charles, Tobias was out picking up his Solstice presents for the family."

Charles sighed while Draco closed those bright blue eyes of his in relief. "Really, Severus, we need to put a bell on Toby or perhaps a permanent locator spell that will move with him."

Rubeus and Tobias came out of the bathroom at that moment and our son lit up like a candle. "Draco! Got's 'ou present."

Draco chuckled and crossed to take his little brother in a firm hug. "I appreciate it, Toby but you had us really worried. I was afraid one of the spider's had gotten you."

Tobias shook his head firmly and kissed Draco's cheek. "Nah, Dra', got's kitties."

Charles was trying to turn his laughter into a cough at the taken-aback look on his mate's face. But Draco handled it quite well. "Really, Toby, kittens as in more than one?"

"Yes, six kitties." Tobias pointed to the box on the hearth. "Come see."

My sons bent over the box and I suddenly had the oddest feeling. Toby was growing up and soon these precious moments would just be memories in a pensieve. Firmly I told myself that I did 'not' want to get pregnant again. I tried to dredge up the horrible lack of energy, the body that tired just walking across the room, the hundred indignities and the pain of labor.

Rubeus was looking at me, I'm sure wondering just what I was thinking. Our bond had continued to grow but we were not telepathic. Feelings and general pictures were the most that we shared but that was enough to keep us in touch with our daily lives. His blue eyes were always full of love when they looked at me and heaven knows, mine were no different. If I didn't have twenty potion tests to grade, I'd be plotting how to get him to bed earlier than usual.

But Ara was serving dinner and we all gathered around the big table for the evening meal. Tobias was still at the pick-it-up-and-chew-on-it stage so our house elf made sure that the pieces of lamb and carrots were Toby-sized. With his father on one side and me on his other, he had someone to keep him half way clean although those bibs with a trough were still needed.

Conversation was mainly about the logistics of transporting all of us to London and our pied-a-terre for the holidays. Each member of the Hagrid family had one or two rooms, depending on if they had children yet in Harry and Gersey's home. The children's floor would hold us, Remus and Royan, Sirius and Rhea. The triplets had just started walking so the wards would need to be strengthened on their doors.

I thought ours might need to be just a touch stronger also. Tobias was much too curious for London, not to mention five kittens on the loose. Draco and Charles, our triad of Arwen, Hossic and William, Elfrida and Petronicus, Gration and his new wife Fiona, would be one floor down from us. The next floor down held the guest rooms for everyone else, including the Hogwart's contingent.

Hermione had said in her last letter than she and Ron were coming but so far that still meant separate rooms. Mrs. Weasley was slowly coming around to all the changes in her family so several of the rooms would hold their entire family starting on Solstice Eve. It would be nice to have everyone together again. Letters back and forth were just not enough for the family members who weren't at Hogwarts.

And I never thought I would ever say that even to myself. I shook my head to brush the cobwebs away and was just in time to catch a tipping cup of milk. It had two handles and Tobias got a better grip then raised it to his mouth. He was so proud of himself when he got it back down without a spill. His smile could light up the whole cottage and it always made me melt just a little.

Dessert was lemon pudding with fresh baked macaroons and Tobias let me spoon the pudding into his voracious little mouth. His father wasn't any better and even his brother's eyes lit up while he savored the smooth treat. Charles and I weren't that enamored of dessert but we certainly were of our bondeds and my gaze was soft on Rubeus' smiling face.

This solstice might be even better then our last one. We had much to be thankful for, not the least of which was the little boy who was leaning against my arm and making the little purring sounds that seemed to be a Hagrid trait. Looking over his head to Rubeus, I decided right then and there to bring out his father's purr. Perhaps I could finish off those tests while Ru' read the three stories that were a bedtime tradition?

***** Harry *****

Gersey was trying to kill me with pleasure. I know that I gave him permission when he asked me if he could try something different but who knew he had this in mind. I tried to move to help but he'd stopped me when he whispered that immobilitas spell. All I could do was lie there and accept every touch from those magical fingers and tongue. I was going to be crazy when he finished but that was pretty much a given with my bonded.

Those long elegant fingers of his were stroking my sides just firmly enough to not be ticklish while his long hair brushed across my inner thighs until I wanted to scream. My shaft was rock hard and had been for what seemed like hours before he licked across the weeping slit and I let go with a whimper. I must have pulsed out seed for a good five minutes before I finally went limp.

He's always tender when that happens. His lips are so soft while they brush across my skin. His tongue licked its way up to my lips and they parted automatically so I could get that taste that's a little bit me and a lot him. I felt like laughing and crying at the same time. Sometimes I burst into tears these days over the oddest things. Severus told me that's perfectly normal for being almost four months pregnant.

"All right, little love," Gersey whispered in my ear. "Feel a little better now?"

I sniffed, needing to hold him but the spell still had my arms out flung and pinned to the flannel sheet. He quickly muttered the release and I slid both arms around his neck. "Love you, Ger. I'm sorry that I was in such a bad mood. It's frustrating to be so behind in everything. I wanted it all to be perfect for the family."

"It's already perfect, Harry." He rolled me over to my side and cuddled me close. "The family

wouldn't know what to do if there wasn't something for them to do when they get here. It's not just that, is it?"

I sighed. "Classes this week have been weird." I thought about some of the comments I'd been overhearing, the nasty hateful comments that I in no way wanted to share. "The holiday spirit must have come early or maybe it's just my mood swings."

"Or maybe it's the too high expectations from professors and students?" He said calmly while my eyes widened. "Hermione ratted on you. Harry, you don't have to put up with such hateful little asides like 'I always knew the title was over-rated' or 'he thinks he's so special'. And let's not forget the ever popular, 'fag'. Ignorance is no excuse for most of them."

I blushed hard all the way down to my toes. "I thought that I'd leave that all behind. I really thought the University would just let me take classes and interact with grown-ups."

"Only to find that there's just as many petty-minded juveniles among the students and hateful bigots among the faculty." He kissed me softly and rested his forehead against mine.

"Sweetheart, there isn't an institution out there that doesn't boast its share of idiots. They don't know you and they obviously don't care to learn you first-hand. Once they find out you're pregnant, it's going to be even worse. Male births are still an oddity even in this day and age. Severus' was totally in secret except for our family and friends. You're going to ruffle even more feathers when you start showing."

I nodded and rolled back onto my back so I could smooth my hands over the growing bulge. "If it wasn't for school robes, I'd already be showing. He or she's getting so big, so fast."

"When is your next appointment with Poppy? Did you put it on the calendar?" He leaned over and kissed my stomach. "Hi, little one, are you ready to tell us yet if you're a boy or girl?"

We'd resisted the temptation to find out. "She's coming today for the party so I asked if she could just do the exam here. Ara already told me that if we wanted, she'd tell us when they came." While I was looking, I finally noticed that Gersey hadn't come yet and I grinned up at him before slipping a hand around his big, beautiful cock. "I can help you with that, love."

He bit his lip before kissing me hard. My lips parted to let him inside while I gestured for the tub of lubricant that we kept beside the bed. Wandless magic seemed to come more easily since Voldemort was destroyed. But right now, I needed Gersey inside me in the worst way. I slid a slick hand around him then up and down while he was stretching me. I was still pretty smug about having him all to myself.

I was getting too big for us to be face to face unless I laid flat and he pulled me up onto his legs while sliding inside me. And he must have read my mind because when I said the spell to open myself for him, he slid slowly in while pulling me far enough up so I could wrap my legs around his waist. I can hardly move at all in this position but that was all right because Gersey was doing just what I needed.

The long slide in satisfied something basic deep in my heart and body, knowing it was Gersey satisfied everything else. Opening my eyes, I watched that intent look on his face that he always gets when we're making love. No matter what else is going on in our lives, when we make love everything goes away but the feelings of owning and being owned.

From the moment I met him and knew he'd be mine someday, I'd stopped looking at anyone else. Mum told me that Hagrids were one person lovers and I guess the Potters were too because I just couldn't see anyone but Gersey. I belonged to him and he belonged to me and that was absolutely perfect.

His hands were smoothing caresses over my expanding stomach and every once in a while he'd stroke my shaft, which was getting interested again. His pace was picking up and I felt the familiar fire that always swept through me with each thrust of his cock. We burned each other right into the sheets but like Fawkes, we were reborn anew when we came. And that was going to be soon because Gersey was fisting my shaft and moving faster and faster while I trembled all over.

And it was now, his cock slamming into me and releasing his seed deep inside where it warmed our child. I froze and fountained all over his hand while we both shook through our climaxes. If I live to be two hundred, I will never get used to how much like one body we feel at that moment. I closed my eyes and dozed for a moment, the way that I seemed to do more and more.

A warm wet cloth cleaned us both up and I realized that he'd eased from me to spoon around me like a breathing blanket. This way I could feel him everywhere and his hands could stroke my stomach soothingly. I laid my hands over his and rejoiced at his much longer fingers. They made me feel so good that some days I felt like our piano, knowing he played beautiful music on and inside of me. It was too bad that we couldn't record our love songs although sometimes when Gersey wrote a new song, I could tell the notes that sang of our lovemaking.

Royan teased me sometimes about how inspirational I must be for him. I liked being that for him. Peter teased me about being Gersey's Muse and that always made me blush. Still, I could do a lot worse than be a music muse, I thought to myself. I still didn't know what I wanted to do with my life and the hassles at the university just underscored how much I didn't fit in with the rest of the wizarding world.

"Deep thoughts, little love, what has you worrying now." He was licking the sweat from the back of my neck and I felt like a kitten being groomed by his mother. "Share them with me."

"I just wish I knew what I wanted to do. Everybody else seems to already know except for me and Ron." I didn't want to sound like an idiot but it was beginning to bug me.

Gersey tongued my ear lobe and lightly bit it while I squirmed in pleasure. "Everybody goes through this phase, Harry. I wanted to be a song writer not a stage musician but I fell into my first gig and suddenly I was doing both. One of these days, I'll probably quit performing for the public and just write the songs inside my head."

"You'd better never stop singing for the family, Gersey," I turned in his arms to kiss him. "I'll discover my path sooner or later, I know that." I spotted the clock on our bedside table and winced. "We have to get up now. Family will be here in two hours."

We scrambled from our bed and headed for the bathroom. This Solstice was going to be even better than last years. I could hardly wait.

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