

Summary: Third part of Adjustments

Categories: [Harry Potter](#) Characters: Albus Dumbledore, Harry Potter, Snape/Lupin, Voldemort

Genres: None

Warnings: Brain-Insane, Complete, m/m, m/m sex, Sex, Violence

Challenges: None

Series: Adjustments

Chapters: 1 Completed: Yes Word count: 12349 Read: 5 Published: 12/26/2017 Updated: 12/26/2017

Story Notes:

Written Post-OotP, but *before* HBP. Also not third movieverse - Lupin's wolf form is far more like a normal wolf/book canon description. (This last part of the story got interrupted by RL and procrastination far too many times. I apologize for the delay. Better late than never, though, right?)

Timeline - Christmas of Harry's sixth year.

1. [Chapter 1](#) by Nikita

Chapter 1 by Nikita

XOXOXOX

"You're spoiling the boy, Lupin."

Snape was giving him a warning glower over his cup of tea. Harry had finished opening his presents and was sitting amid the shreds of wrapping paper and ribbons on the floor before them. Harry, luckily, was too absorbed in his gifts to hear them.

Lupin chuckled and shrugged back. "Maybe I am...he could use a bit of spoiling, though. It's Christmas, Severus!"

"Why does everyone always delight in reminding me of that *every* Christmas day? I'm aware of the holiday, Lupin - it shouldn't be used as an excuse to spoil children..."

"Sure it should...and not just children. Happy Christmas, Severus." Lupin pointed to the remaining present under the tree and watched with delight as Snape stared at it with alarm. When he realized Severus wasn't going to react otherwise, Remus called out, "Harry, could you bring us that last present there? Under the tree."

Harry handed the present over - it was fairly heavy and wrapped in fancy paper with little sprigs of holly printed on it. Remus handed it to Snape. "Well...open it up," he said.

Severus glared at him, not liking to be ordered about, but he finally edged a fingernail beneath the crease of paper. Careful and cautious - he slowly unwrapped the present as if it were a bomb.

Remus waited patiently, aware that Harry was watching the two of them out of the corner of his eye as he pretended to study his Defense books. Finally, the paper was removed with care and Severus was staring at the large bar of chocolate Remus had chosen for him. Dark chocolate with toffee and almonds - Honeyduke's finest and most expensive concoctions.

Snape looked up from the chocolate with surprise. "How did you know my favorite?"

Remus let out a sigh of relief, "Lucky guess, I suppose." Actually he'd seen a young Snape eat an entire bar in the Restricted Section after a Hogsmeade weekend once. It was one of his fonder memories from school.

Harry stood then and gathered his presents together to take to his room. Remus was glad he'd chosen well in his presents as well. The books, more advanced than the ones he and Sirius had

chosen last year, had been received with a look of extreme interest and appreciation. The broom, though, had brought tears to the young wizard's eyes. For a moment - Remus had feared he'd gone too far, but then Harry had smiled at him and given him a fierce hug right in front of Snape's disapproving presence.

Before Harry reached the doorway, however, Snape shifted in his chair and called out, "Aren't you forgetting something?"

Harry turned around at the sound of his voice, his eyes narrowing in suspicion. "What?"

"This." Snape pulled a large book from somewhere in his voluminous robes and tossed it to the boy. Harry caught it with a free hand and looked down at it, surprised. "You may find that easier to comprehend."

Harry looked up with a flash of irritation, but then nodded. "Thank you." He then turned and left without another word.

Remus looked expectantly at Severus until the other wizard snapped, "What?"

"What book did you give him?"

Severus shrugged and pushed himself out of his chair. While Harry was in the room he was careful never to let on his aches and pains, but now that he was alone with Lupin, he rubbed at a spot on his lower back. "Another book on Occlumency. Albus sent me a Christmas owl this morning and included an update on the boy's progress. Old fool probably hopes I'll have pity and resume lessons with the boy..."

"Oh...so you decided to find a better book to explain it instead?"

Severus sneered at that before answering, "No. The first book I gave him was 'a better book' - the one I just gave him now is more along the reading level of a small child... Probably won't understand *that* one, either."

Remus rolled his eyes and stood as well - hoping to walk Severus to his room without being obvious that he was doing it because the pregnant man seemed a trifle unsteady on his feet. The glamour that Snape wore to conceal his pregnancy took a lot of energy and the other man looked ready to drop.

Apparently Snape was too tired to protest, as he made no comment when Remus failed to turn down to the guest wing and instead continued to walk with Severus down the hall towards his bedroom.

"How is it you came to be so good at Occlumency?" Remus finally asked. He had been curious ever since Dumbledore himself had praised Severus' abilities in shielding his mind. And obviously he must be to have been one before he'd begun to spy on such a powerful wizard as Voldemort.

For a moment he regretted asking as Severus' face turned sullen, but the other wizard was too weary to do anything but answer simply, "My father made it necessary."

"He taught you?"

"You could say that...he was a skilled Legilimens. I had to learn to hide my true thoughts and feelings as early as possible."

Remus tried to hide his horror at the idea of a father mentally assaulting his own son in such a

way. He heard Sirius' voice in his head - recalling how young Severus Snape had come to Hogwarts knowing more curses than most seventh years. Little wonder.

Severus seemed lost in thought now, his eyes distant as he walked along beside Lupin. "...my mother never mastered the skill, unfortunately," he murmured.

Remus glanced at the pictures in the hall - one of them was a picture of Helena Snape, a sad, pinched face peaking out of a curtain of long black hair. Obviously Severus' other features had come from his father. The picture next to Helena was a spitting image of Severus, but with short dark brown hair and, if possible, an even haughtier look upon his face than Severus had ever sported. The portrait sneered at Remus as they passed, his beetle black eyes daring the werewolf to come closer.

At least the portraits in Snape Manor never screamed insults - Lupin supposed that the Snapes thought themselves above such a thing.

"Well then," Snape said as they approached his door finally, "you've done an admirable job escorting the invalid to his rooms, Lupin. Good night."

Remus regretfully nodded and turned to leave. "Good night, Severus. Happy Christmas." He was halfway down the hall, heading towards his room, when he heard a soft reply.

"Happy Christmas..."

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Boxing Day. Remus and Harry had decided to celebrate an unusually sunny day outdoors in the snow having a glorious snowball fight. Harry had pelted Remus with snowballs the instant they had stepped outside and Lupin was finding himself tiring quickly under such unbridled teenage exuberance, but he was also having too much fun to care. He only wished that Snape was outside having some fun as well, but as he caught the swish of a curtain being closed on the second floor of the house he supposed that Severus' idea of fun would be having the two out of the house for the day.

"Oi! Are you forfeiting?" Harry called out just as a cold wet missile slapped in the back of the head. Severus had a point when he called the boy an impudent brat sometimes...

Remus turned around slowly and gave his best glare - he was no Snape, but he could look scary when he wanted to. "You'll pay for that one," he promised in a low voice. It was the same voice he'd use with Sirius sometimes...it used to turn his lover on to see his dangerous side. Harry, on the other hand, looked surprised and just a little scared.

"Okay, okay, I give!" he hurriedly said, throwing his arms up in surrender. It was too late, Remus growled and tackled him - shoving Harry down in the snow and shoving more of it down the back of the lad's shirt for good measure.

Harry screamed a distinctly girly scream and then began to laugh so hard there were tears running down his face. Remus leaned on his side in the snow, laughing, too. Damn, but it reminded him of all those snowball fights he used to have with James, Peter and Sirius...they'd had so much fun. Harry's face was red with both cold and exertion. He was huffing a little as he tried to catch his breath, his black hair poked out in wild directions under his winter cap and his green eyes sparkled. Reminding Remus of both James and Lilly in the same instant. It was enough to sober Remus from his hilarity.

"Had enough?" he asked Harry.

"Yes...I think I'm completely numb," the young man chuckled. The two helped each other up from the snow and trudged back to the house for hot cocoa and dry clothes.

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The next day Harry was gone - off to visit with the Weasleys for the rest of the break before returning to school. Remus was sorry to see him go, but also grateful to be alone with Severus once more. He had missed the other man the past three days. Harry's presence had made Snape rather guarded and quiet - keeping to his rooms unless strictly necessary. It was sad that Severus could not take more joy in the holidays, but at least he'd been on his best behavior with Harry. Remus knew he owed Snape quite a lot for that one.

But apparently his hopes that Severus would crawl out of his nest of books and papers were in vain. Snape didn't come out for breakfast that morning and by teatime Remus was becoming anxious. He knocked on Severus' bedroom door, but there was no answer. Torn between annoyance and worry, Lupin interrogated the house elves as they polished the silverware only to find that the man had remained shut up in his study since the night before with strict orders not to be disturbed.

Remus took a tray of tea and sandwiches from the house elves and marched purposely towards the study. He knocked on the door, fully prepared to argue with the stubborn man within and blast the door open with his wand if needed.

The lock clicked and the door swung open. "Come in, Lupin."

He entered cautiously, unsettled at the easy capitulation and wondering suddenly if it was a good idea to confront a temperamental pregnant man.

"Quit hovering."

The voice came from behind a large stack of books on the desk. Lupin set the tray down on a stack of parchment, as it was the only place available.

"Don't!" the voice snapped at him and he snatched the tray back up without a word.

Snape finally emerged from behind the desk and started gathering up the parchment Lupin had just disturbed. "Bloody careless...damned werewolf..." the other wizard muttered.

Remus rolled his eyes and set the heavy tray down gratefully once Snape finally moved aside. "I brought you some food since you clearly can't be trusted to take care of yourself," Lupin said as he held out a plate piled high with sandwiches and carrot sticks.

Snape didn't move to take it. "I'm not hungry."

"You should eat, anyway."

"I'll eat it later - I'm busy." Severus turned and moved back to his work.

Lupin crossed the floor quickly and intervened before the other man could sit down. "You have to eat, Severus. If not for yourself then for the baby."

Snape glared at him, but finally took the plate - moving to sit at another chair by the window.

Remus sighed with relief and sat down in the chair Snape had intended to sit in. He resisted the temptation to look at what the other wizard was working on and instead focused on Severus. The pregnant man was chewing methodically, the expression on his face made it look like he was

eating glass instead of a chicken sandwich.

"Would you have preferred something else? I could ask the house elves to make you some soup or a stew if you like."

Severus dropped the remaining food back on his plate and set it aside. "I told you - I'm not hungry. I've eaten as much as I can stomach. Now - may I please have my chair back?" his voice was courteous, but his eyes made it clear that if Lupin didn't jump out of his chair immediately there would be consequences.

Remus relinquished the chair, but as Snape sat down he was confronted again with the plate of food. "Perhaps you could try just a little more."

"Perhaps you would like my foot up your arse," the other man said coldly, but he picked up his sandwich again.

"May I ask what is so interesting to keep you locked up in here day and night?" Lupin glanced around the room and noted that the house elves obviously hadn't been allowed to clean it for some time. There were several empty teacups littering the table by the window and the shelves were in need of dusting.

"Work." Severus muttered helpfully between bites, but when Lupin continued to stare at him he finally sighed, "I'm making plans - sorting out my affairs. I've had to make quite a few changes..." the other man trailed off, his eyes focused on his work hard enough to bore a hole in the paper - he was avoiding Lupin's gaze.

"What changes? What are you talking about?"

Snape pushed back from his desk suddenly and pinned Remus with his gaze, his face was the cold sneering mask that Remus remembered from Hogwarts.

"You love the idea of this child - Black's child. A reminder of your dead lover and a way to keep a part of him with you," he said disdainfully, "Well, you'll be pleased to know that I have decided you are right...the child should have a human parent to watch over it - teach it how to defend itself properly..." he shuffled the papers on the desk and then held out a piece of parchment to Lupin, "This is the birth certificate - you are named as the father and I have made up a muggle woman for the 'mother'. That should make things easier to explain and harder to disprove should anyone doubt you. You will have to fill in the details of the sex and measurements and such...and I'll leave it to you to come up with a suitable name..."

Remus blinked and stared at the parchment before him. The words on the page swam before his eyes and Snape's voice echoed loudly in his head. "What...what do you mean? Why have you put me down as the father?" He looked up to see Severus sneering at him in contempt.

"I thought I made it reasonably clear, Lupin - I have decided to let you raise the child. Having you on the legal documents will make it easier for you to keep the child. Werewolves aren't considered prime adoption candidates and I certainly can't have my name on the papers as the mother," he spat the last word out and turned away from Remus to shuffle the papers on his desk back into neat piles.

Remus used the opportunity to scramble his wits together - Severus was giving the child to him of all people? And letting him take the official title of father as well... And all this meant that Snape hadn't changed his mind about sacrificing himself, either - he was simply making different arrangements for the child's care after his death. His DEATH.

Merlin, the reality of Snape's suicidal plans had become all the more immediate.

"Severus...you can't do this..." he started.

Snape turned back to him and crossed his arms over his chest, just above the swell of his stomach. His impassive mask was in place once more, "I can. I already have. It's done. The moment the child is born it is yours - raise it as you will. Consider it a belated Christmas present - not quite as sweet as chocolate, but perhaps worth a bit more."

"That's not what I meant," Remus argued hotly, feeling as if the ground was slipping beneath him, "You can't go through with this plan of yours to sacrifice yourself to Voldemort!"

Snape's eyes turned to slits as he spat back. "Don't tell me what I can and cannot do! This is my decision to make, not yours. Unless you're trying to tell me you don't want the brat."

Remus shook his head. He felt sick, his hands were shaking and he wanted nothing more than to yell some more at the stubborn man before him, but he knew that there was nothing he could say to change Snape's mind. Defeated, he looked into those black eyes that still pierced his own. "Why me? Why give the child to me?"

Severus seemed surprised at the question, but his face seemed to soften ever so slightly, "You seem to care for it already...and I suppose Black would have wanted you to raise it, but that wasn't what changed my mind..." he looked over Lupin's shoulder at the snow blowing past the window. "It was these past few days...young Mr. Potter listens to you and respects you - a Herculean feat to be sure. You are a decent teacher and a better father figure than either Black or I had as children. I can't think of anyone better suited to raise it."

Remus felt hot tears pricking at his eyes and he blinked hard, trying to fight them. His throat ached and he swallowed hard against the lump that was forming. It was the nicest thing he'd ever heard anyone say to him - and coming from Snape it meant all the more...he only hoped that he could live up to those expectations.

Severus glanced back at him from the window and seemed discomfited by the emotional tension in the room as he quickly turned back to his desk once more, effectively dismissing Lupin from the room.

Remus didn't leave. Instead, he walked quietly up behind the other man and put a hand on one black-clad shoulder. "Why are you doing this?" he asked quietly.

The shoulder beneath his hand tensed and then slumped. Still not looking up, Snape spoke to the desk in front of him, "It has to be done." He then looked up at Remus, hair falling across his face in such a way that made him seem vulnerable...open. Remus saw something in those eyes that made him lean forward suddenly and kiss him. The kiss deepened as Severus leaned into it, opening his mouth hungrily - demanding more. Fumbling hands grappled at each other's robes as both men felt a sense of urgency taking over.

They very nearly ended up on the floor, but at the last minute Remus realized that a pregnant man really could *not* make love on the floor at this advanced state so they stumbled their way into Snape's bedroom - nearly tripping over the chair in front of the fireplace before they reached the bed. They pulled apart at last, but only to undo their clothes. Remus wore a simple pullover and trousers beneath his robes, but when he saw the number of tiny white buttons in the way of Severus' skin he growled in frustration and ripped the shirt open - several buttons rolled away on the floor. Snape chuckled dryly at his impatience, but quickly batted away Remus' hands from his trousers before they could suffer the same fate and quickly pulled them off himself.

It was only once they were off that Snape's ardor seemed to fade. He stood naked before Remus with a look of defiance on his face that was obviously hiding his insecurity. "Change your mind,

Lupin?" he asked sardonically.

Remus reached out and gently touched the swell of stomach that was the source of the sudden tension in the room. He wanted to tell Severus that he was beautiful - the fact that he carried a child, oddly enough, only heightened his attractiveness and lent him an exotic air of sensuality. But Snape wasn't one to want flowery words or sentiment so Remus decided to answer him by letting his hands slowly caress the taut skin of the stomach before dipping down lower - almost touching...

Severus shuddered at his touch and stepped closer to the bed, his face softening into an expression of desire once more with heavy lidded eyes. "Ah..." he gasped as Remus bit him on the neck just hard enough to leave a mark.

Snape grabbed the back of his head and pulled him away from his neck. Remus thought for a moment that he was protesting the mark, but then he felt his own neck being bared and sharp teeth bit him back - just as passionately. Remus moaned and dug his fingers hard into Severus' shoulders. He'd missed this. Missed claiming and being claimed...

Severus licked at the bite and pushed Remus backwards onto the bed before joining him. They lay on their sides, facing one another, unable to get to get closer because of the belly that lay between them. It didn't stop either of them from touching, though. They stroked, nipped, licked, and kissed - taking their time to learn each other in spite of their frenzy.

Severus came with a shudder and a groan loud enough to spark Remus' own release and they lay panting on the bed of sweaty, twisted sheets with contentment.

Remus turned his head to watch Severus breathe heavily and tilt his head back. His Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed and tried to slow his breathing. Remus' eyes slid down to look at the purpling bite mark at the base of his throat and then down at the chest still heaving until they rested on the swell of stomach below.

"You're wrong, you know," he said quietly.

Severus turned his own head and lifted one black eyebrow.

"You said I loved the idea of Sirius' child - a piece of him to keep with me..." Remus raised himself to one elbow and put his other hand gently on Snape's stomach. There was a flutter beneath his fingers and he marveled at the sensation. "That's not it at all...I love the child for itself. For being a part of you *and* for being a part of Sirius...but the child won't be a replica of either of you...it will be unique and precious all on its own."

Severus remained silent, but slowly put his own hand on top of Remus' and closed his eyes.

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The next few days were wonderful in Remus' eyes. Neither one of them mentioned Snape's plans or the none-too-distant future looming before them - instead they focused on their newfound closeness and ignored the world outside their doorstep.

Large stretches of time were spent in bed making love or simply holding one another as they listened to the wind howl outside the bedroom window. Remus delighted in touching Severus whenever he liked, much to Snape's consternation. The first time he touched his lover's hand at the table as they dined, Severus had twitched and glared at him, yet he hadn't withdrawn his hand. Not even when a house elf appeared to ask them if they wanted dessert.

It was inevitable that it would have to end, and yet neither of them expected the owl that arrived

late one night at Severus' bedroom window.

tap tap tap

Remus cracked one eyelid and groaned. Then sat up quickly when he realized Severus wasn't in bed with him. The door to the lavatory was shut and the light was on. Snape was obviously making one of his frequent trips to the toilet.

tap tap tap

Remus woke fully and realized that it was coming from the window - a great grey owl perched on the windowsill fluttered its wings impatiently as he hurried over to open the window. The owl hooted importantly as Remus retrieved the message before settling on the perch left there for Snape's raven, Mordecai.

"What is it?" Severus was barefoot and wore his dressing gown loosely tied just above his belly.

Remus scanned the parchment with a grim face. "Azkaban is in ruins - the dark mark over the site. There are at least ten missing among the dead."

All Death Eaters, it went without saying. Severus nodded silently and turned away, heading back towards the bed. "And when do you leave?" he asked quietly.

Remus looked up from the missive, "Dumbledore wants me to stay here." It wasn't quite a lie.

Severus pulled the covers up to his chin and closed his eyes. "I don't need a bloody babysitter - the Dark Lord is preparing something on a grand scale. We all know it - he doesn't want a protracted war - he wants to consolidate his power quickly...while the Wizarding world is still scrambling to its feet. You're needed at the front."

Lupin crumpled the parchment in his hand, but couldn't deny Snape's words. They cut him deeply...Harry would be in greater danger than ever before. He wished, not for the first time, that he could somehow be in two places at once. Here, with Severus - and at Hogwarts watching over Harry.

Remus wrote a reply out on a fresh sheet of parchment and sent the owl off without further delay. He then put out the candles and crawled into bed. Severus lay with his back to him, on his side, as it was no longer comfortable to lie flat on his back. Remus silently snuggled up behind him and spooned - they lay in silence the rest of the night. Neither slept.

XXX

"You shouldn't be alone."

"I'm not! The bloody house elves are constantly underfoot offering me sandwiches and back rubs. You've interfered with their orders since the moment you got here. They used to know their place. Now they're wet nurses, every last one of them."

Remus rolled his eyes. "House elves are all well and good, but they're not trained in Wizarding medicine." He was tired of fighting with Severus - he'd much prefer spending their final moments in bed. But the man was being his usual pig-headed self and refusing to make any concessions to Remus' fears.

Severus glared at him, in a fury he hadn't felt in months. How dare the blasted werewolf tell him how to live? He'd taken care of himself for nearly four decades just fine on his own, damn him. He knew more about potions, dark arts and defense than Lupin could ever dream learning...he

was a bloody virtuoso of deceit and an expert in survival. He could certainly handle giving birth alone.

Remus returned his glare in full measure. "If you don't agree to at least call Pomfrey when you go into labor I shall be forced to bind you and drop you off at St. Mungo's maternity ward for the rest of your term."

Severus' eyes narrowed to slits. "Try it and I'll pull my knife from my boot and teach you some manners."

Both men continued to stare at each other with concentrated force of wills - daring the other to break down first. Finally, Remus broke the tension with a rueful chuckle. "And I have no doubt you'd do it, too...you pig-headed bastard."

"Insolent wolf. Get going - you're late enough as it is."

Remus made no move to go.

Severus sighed and allowed himself to soften his voice enough to soothe, "No place is safer than this house for me...and I'm too close to term to travel anyway. Portkey, flue and broom are out of the question...and apparition is a risk I don't wish to take just now."

Lupin hated it, but he was right. At this stage Severus should actually be in bed - male pregnancies being a trifle more dangerous than normal ones. Still... "All the more reason I should stay - what if he summons you? Or sends someone - "

"The Dark Lord will want his potion done just right. I have two more weeks until he will disturb me."

Two weeks was cutting it close. "Fine, fine...you win! I'll go - but only if you promise to call Pomfrey when you go into labor - I want someone with you."

Severus growled deep in his throat, but finally nodded. "Very well - I'll call her. If I have trouble."

"You'll call her anyway."

"When I need her. Now go!" Remus' portkey was timed to activate within minutes and he still had yet to reach the edge of Snape Manor's wards.

Remus kissed him hard before spinning around and racing out the door. Severus watched him quickly disappear into the edge of the woods with a heavy heart. He doubted he'd see the man again...

XXX

With Lupin gone the large house was empty and quiet - too quiet. Snape had never imagined he would come to loathe the very silence he'd once longed for. Reading a book in front of the fire no longer held his interest. He found himself staring out the window or into the flames for hours on end.

Three days passed before he finally caved in and sent for a subscription to the Daily Prophet. He told himself that he was scanning the articles for hints of Order business purely for the sake of staying abreast with the defense...not because he was desperate for news about Lupin. Surely not.

But it was to no avail. There was not the slightest hint of Order business in the Prophet. The only

mention of a member at all was Dumbledore's bi-annual submission in the recipe column, 'Lemon-drop Chicken and Rice' this time. Disgusting. Severus tossed the paper in the fire and resumed his meditations...and sulking.

The first summons came as he slept; a low level burning that was slow to wake him. When he opened his eyes he could see the mark glowing green in the dim moonlight.

"Time's up," he whispered.

XXX

Lupin slumped onto his bed with a weary sigh. He hated sleeping in his old bed at Grimmauld Place. It was musty, too big and too damn lonely. He missed having a warm body next to him. The constant shifting of a man far too pregnant to get comfortable for more than two minutes at a time and the hourly dip of the mattress as Severus heaved himself up to shuffle to the loo. Remus stared at the cracked ceiling above him and wondered how Severus was fairing at night.

Probably the other wizard was glad to have his bed to himself again. He'd constantly complained about fur on the bedcovers and drool on the pillow. Lupin smiled wistfully and closed his eyes. It would be another long night.

There were a few other members of the Order staying at the house, but they tended to respect Remus' peace and quiet in the evenings. They most likely thought he was still mourning for Sirius - and they would be partly right. Living in Snape's home had taken him away from the constant memories of his former lover and being in Sirius' childhood home again certain reminded him of the brief time he'd lived there with him. But he could honestly say that he was finally healing from the loss. Seeing photos of a mischievous Sirius dunking James' head in the lake their third year didn't make him feel hollow inside anymore. More like a dull ache, but with fondness as well.

It was Snape that he missed the most right now. He truly hated being away - especially with Severus so close to his due date. Male pregnancies were a far trickier than female ones - Snape had been at a high risk to miscarry. And while the danger was past and it seemed he would carry to term there was always a chance that the magical opening for the child's delivery wouldn't form wholly on its own. Which was why Lupin hadn't been too keen on Snape's insistence at doing it without a mediwizard or witch in the first place.

Certainly the potions master was capable of casting a spell on himself under normal circumstances, but when someone was in a great deal of pain and stress - magic, especially on oneself, wasn't a very good idea. Still - there were house elves on hand. And Snape 'had' told him he had trained them in emergency medical wizardry and even promised to call Pomfrey just in case when the pains came.

But it didn't stop the gnawing feeling deep inside that Remus should be there.

Which is what he'd told Dumbledore finally as he returned to the Order. Both he and Snape had suspected the older wizard knew about Severus' condition and they had been right.

"Yes, I am aware of the situation...and I do wish Severus had told me himself, but I wanted to respect his wish for secrecy in this matter. I have also informed Pomfrey to be on alert for Severus' requests for aid. She has a special bag packed just for the occasion, I believe. And a portkey strong enough to place her at his side despite the wards."

Remus didn't feel all that reassured, but he was grateful to know he wasn't the only wizard in the world carrying the secret.

XOXOX

The first summons wasn't too difficult to ignore - the cruciatus curse certainly put pain in perspective for anyone suffering the Dark Lord's displeasure. The second summons, though, was more insistent as the pain increased and for a longer duration. Much the way contractions were described in the Big Book of Magical Pregnancy on Snape's bedside table.

"Bugger!" Snape spat as he through a pillow off the bed and bit down hard on his lower lip. The pain eased finally for the time being and Severus looked down at his forearm to see that the dark mark was inflamed and red at the edges. Not a good sign. The baby seemed to agree, it kicked and writhed furiously. The distraction was almost welcome - he stroked and soothed it to a mild squirm and occasional thump.

"Master Snape called for Frizzy?"

Severus started at the voice behind him and turned to see the house elf standing timidly at the foot of his bed. "What? No. I didn't call."

The house elf nodded once, but frowned as she continued to stare at him, "You is looking ill...Frizzy is making Master Snape a bath?"

Severus sighed and shook his head he'd never get out of the tub again. Not without help, anyway and he certainly didn't want to be magicked about by a house elf. "No, thank you, Frizzy. I'm fine."

Which didn't mollify the house elf any. "Master Lupin is telling Frizzy to call on Madame Pomfrey at Hogwarts if Master Snape isn't well..."

Damn the werewolf for meddling with his help. "I'm FINE. I am fully capable of firecalling a mediwitch when and if I need one. Now go away and let me rest!" he snapped.

Frizzy gave him a dubious look, but obeyed as it was a direct order.

Severus struggled out of the bed and into the lavatory to wash his face. Looking at his pale reflection in the mirror, he couldn't help but note that the house elf was right. He looked awful. But he defied any wizard to be nearly nine months pregnant and look good.

He felt like he'd swallowed a hippogriff egg and he certainly looked it. His skin was taut and stretched so much that there were marks on the sides of his belly. A simple skin balm would have cured it, but he didn't see much point in caring what his body would look like after the birth. It wasn't like he'd be around long to care.

Possibly not even long enough to give birth at the rate Voldemort was summoning him. The continued magical commands could not be ignored - the pain would likely trigger a premature labor. Or perhaps it would simply drive him insane.

It was something to look forward to at any rate.

XOXOX

Remus sipped his drink and watched his corner of the tavern with hooded eyes. It was the last mission he was going to take for a while. After this he would tell Dumbledore he was returning to Snape Manor. It didn't feel right to be away from the other wizard now and if there was one thing Lupin had learned he should trust it was his instincts. If he'd listened to them before, Sirius might be alive now.

There was a crash behind him, but only a glass of firewhiskey dropped by the clumsy Tonks as

she tried, unsuccessfully, to blend in with the other patrons at the bar. At least her hair wasn't pink today - and her face was altered to look older and plainer as well. She wasn't his first choice in a partner for an undercover job, but the Order was limited in resources and she was the only one off-duty that night.

They were waiting for a contact - a semi-feral werewolf that had reluctantly agreed to meet Lupin at the bar tonight. Tonks was only there as back up in case it was a trap or the other werewolf got violent with him.

It was an hour past the agreed time when a hunted looking young man slunk through the door and scanned the bar. His hair was a filthy, matted nest of dark brown hair and his clothes were even more worn than Remus' worst robes, but his eyes were clear enough and Remus discretely caught his attention and led him to a booth near the back wall.

"Hullo," Remus said politely as the young werewolf slid into the seat across from him, "I was afraid you weren't coming. Can I buy you a drink?"

The young man shook his head, but didn't meet his eyes, preferring to look distractedly at the table or crowd of people around them. "I didn't come to chat. You said you had something to offer us - I'm here to listen."

Lupin wasn't surprised at the reception - the werewolf community, if it could even be called such a thing, was little more than a few loosely affiliated packs of men, women and children living in the magical forests without protection of the Ministry. They lived off the land or begged food in muggle villages and cities. As such, they tended to lack social skills. Lupin was one of the rare few of his kind that benefited from a Wizarding education as well as ties to the community to keep him from living in such squalor and lack of amenities. He could afford to be polite.

"Perfectly understandable. I'll state it plainly: the dark lord, Voldemort, has returned and is recruiting any human and non-human members of the magical community that he can in order to reclaim his former power and extend it. He will promise whatever it takes to get cooperation from the giants, vampires, goblins and werewolves in order to get them to join his crusade. If he succeeds, he will most likely win. And all of his promises will be useless as he will no longer need you. He and his kind believe in racial purity. He will wipe out all non-humans as surely as he will wipe out the impure of his own kind. Dumbledore has sent me to offer you and anyone else that wishes to join him his full support in offering werewolves equal rights in Wizarding society."

The young werewolf snorted and looked up finally from the table. "Oh really? An' what good are his promises? Wizards don't want us 'round and never will. They want us to do their dirty work for them and promise us breadcrumbs in return. Fuck their equal rights!"

This last exclamation was a bit too loud and several patrons turned to glare at them. Lupin smiled apologetically and leaned closer to the other man in the hope of keeping their conversation quieter. "I would feel the same as you, but I know full well that this is our only hope. Voldemort will simply use you and kill you. I have known Albus Dumbledore since I was a child and I trust him to help us in any way he can with the Ministry. He helped me get an education and he has employed me over the wishes and concerns of other wizards..."

There was a brief flicker of emotion in the other man's eyes, but it was gone before Remus could identify it. The young werewolf shrugged finally and stood up. "You haven't convinced me. But if you want to talk to the others that's your business." He then started for the door without looking back. Lupin frantically cast a look for Tonks, but she was nowhere to be found. He hurried after the other man and hoped she knew better than to follow. The group he was about to meet wouldn't take kindly to a non-werewolf tagging along. He needed her to inform Dumbledore that he was successful in getting to meet with the pack leader.

The air outside the bar was cold, but welcome after the hot, smoke filled atmosphere inside. Remus took a deep breath to clear his lungs, but was assailed with a mixture of stenches surrounding the bar opening - vomit, urine and other unpleasant odors made him gag. He turned away from the bar and looked around for the young werewolf.

There were many footprints in the snow around him, but one set deviated from the normal paths to the nearest apparition point. Lupin was on the trail for mere moments when his skull suddenly exploded in pain and he dropped to his knees. There was a shuffling behind him and the wind suddenly changed to bring him the scent of three unwashed males behind him.

"Dammit! I told you he's a werewolf - hit him harder!"

"Hex him!"

"Don't! You'll leave a trace - just hit him again - harder!"

"You can't crack that damn werewolf skull of his!"

Lupin blinked and tried to look at his assailants, as he fumbled for his wand. He cursed himself inwardly for having dropped it somewhere in the snow - oddly enough, his inner voice sounded like Snape. But before he could focus enough to see or draw his wand, there was another explosion of pain, and blissfully he was knocked unconscious before his attackers could level another blow.

X.X.X

Snape glared at his bedroom door for the millionth time that day and mentally dared a house elf to disturb him again. Lupin had corrupted them thoroughly - they used to know their place, but now they were actually ordering 'him' around! 'Master Snape needs rest - Master Snape needs to eat more - Master Snape needs warmer socks!' Really, it was too much to be tolerated. As if he didn't have bigger concerns at the moment than whether or not he drank the entire glass of milk they gave him or kept his blanket tucked around him in bed.

Severus' mind was normally occupied with three thoughts: the continued summons from the Dark Lord, the imminent delivery of his child and the most important one of all - what Lupin was doing for the Order. The last thought made him want to pace, but his body was anything but cooperative. Snape sighed and looked down in disgust at the mammoth proportions of his belly before struggling out of the chair he was sitting in. It wasn't easy, but he'd be damned if he'd ask for help. The house elves were already full of themselves.

Deciding a leisurely stroll throughout the house wasn't quite beyond his means just yet - he wandered down the hallway, peaking into the rooms he hadn't been in since a child. His old nursery was still set up as it had been more than thirty years ago. He glanced at the rocking chair in the corner and the wooden blocks stacked neatly on a wooden toy chest with a hint of nostalgia he wouldn't have admitted to anyone else. He hadn't had much of a childhood, but it had been one of the simpler times of his life. The baby kicked and Severus placed a hand over it.

He walked on through the halls and then down the stairs towards the kitchen. Much as he'd like to avoid the house elves, he was hungry for something sweet. Really sweet. Absurdly, he thought of the treacle fudge that Hagrid handed out every Christmas. This would have been the first year that Snape probably wouldn't have thrown it out.

There was a thud in the drawing room that had the house elves yelping and tripping over themselves in shock. Snape hurried as fast as he could, wand drawn and ready. A guarded glance into the room revealed a potted plant overturned and a chair pushed out of place. There

was a movement and a tousled head of hair popped up from behind the mess.

No.

No - absolutely not.

Snape stepped fully into the room. Damn it all - it was. Harry bloody Potter was clambering to his feet in the middle of his drawing room with a highly illegal portkey made from a Skelegrow bottle. He must have stolen it from Pomfrey's office. The boy had sticky fingers with other people's property.

Slowly, reluctantly, he lowered his wand, but kept it firmly clenched at his side. "What in the hell do you think you are doing, Potter?! Get out of that dirt at once, you filthy boy!"

It felt damn good to have someone other than a house elf to yell at and he wasn't going to waste his chance to unleash some of his anger on a proper receptacle. Potter glared at him, but stepped out of the mound of dirt that lay next to the overturned pot. A house elf skittered around him and cleaned up the mess with the snap of a finger.

"Well?" Severus snapped, "I asked you a question."

"I needed to talk to you," he said sullenly.

"How flattering," Snape sneered, "the Boy Who Lived wished to speak with his dear old potions professor so he broke into the infirmary and stole an illegal portkey to visit him. Never mind the rules. Never mind that there are reasons why you aren't allowed to wander around the countryside alone - "

Potter, the brat, interrupted him, "I need your help!"

That stopped Snape in mid-tirade. "Again? I always seem to be helping you, Mr. Potter - what is it this time?" he asked nastily, but in his mind he was frantically picturing Hogwarts burning to the ground and Death Eaters killing the students one by one.

"Remus is missing. He went on a mission and disappeared!"

Severus sank into a nearby chair and tried to sound nonchalant. "And?"

Potter scowled at him.

"What I mean, Mr. Potter, is that the Order is aware of this, yes? You seem remarkably well-informed of Order business, by the way."

"Dumbledore told me."

"The *Headmaster*," Snape corrected. The brat had no respect for him, but to disrespect one of the most powerful wizards living was too much to be borne.

Potter's eyes flashed angrily, "Yes, the Headmaster told me. And he also said there is nothing they can do. They've given up!"

Snape felt a growing panic within him, but focused his efforts on keeping the nasty, almost bored look on his face. "I doubt very much that is what Dumbledore said to you, but the sentiment is the same - the Order is not nearly as omnipotent as you seem to think it is. A handful of wizards fighting a shadowy opponent with precious little aid of the Ministry or public in general can only do so much. Anyone captured by the Dark Lord will not find much hope of a rescue. Lupin knew

that."

He knew that...he couldn't expect Snape to come after him...not with the child. His stomach churned and the life form within kicked more violently than usual - as if Sirius' child were trying to tell him otherwise. He put a hand up to soothe it.

The room was too quiet and Snape looked up to see Potter staring open-mouthed at him, flummoxed. Severus dropped his hand and scowled. "Shut your mouth, Potter - you'll attract flies."

"You're - You - " he stammered.

Snape snorted and pushed himself up from the chair, the robes were loose enough to flow over the bulge, but the form was still unmistakable. If Potter hadn't been so completely dense and intent on screaming at him before he would have noticed it at once. Snape hadn't had a chance to cast a glamour.

"What, Mr. Potter?" he asked snidely.

Potter continued to gape. While Snape found the silence refreshing, he was in no mood for this now. Lupin. Gone. The very thought hurt.

Was this how Remus had felt when Sirius died?

"As you can see I'm indisposed at the moment for rescue missions, Mr. Potter. And you should not be here. Order business is not your business. I shall contact the Headmaster and he will-"

"You're pregnant?!" the boy blurted out before he could finish. Potter stared at him with an open mouth again. Really, muggle dentistry left much to be desired.

"Yes, Potter - preg-nant," he repeated, stretching the syllables out for the idiot child. "Yet another sign of your ignorance of the world in general. Wizards can become pregnant." It wasn't exactly a fair statement as Wizarding pregnancies were few and far between in the history of magic and certainly not discussed in polite society when they did occur, but Snape rarely ever felt the urge to be fair, especially to a Gryffindor.

Potter wrinkled his nose in disgust, still staring at the large bulge of Snape's robes. "How?"

Severus snarled, "That is NONE of your concern! Shut up!" Snape had had more than enough. His house invaded, his privacy shattered, Lupin...

With the last thought, he turned to the nearest fireplace. He would have to reconnect it to the floor system. Snape raised his wand, surprised to see his hand shaking. Was it from rage? Fear?

Potter wasn't through behind him, though. "But - Remus! We have to find him!"

"He's gone, Potter. Forget about him." Forget about him...just forget about him, Severus repeated it over and over in his mind.

"Forget about him?! You fucking bastard! You don't care about anything but yourself!" Potter raged behind him.

Snape turned and unleashed the hurt within him. "Every word you utter is further proof of your own ignorance. Do not presume to know my motives, you fool! If I thought it would do any good I'd - " he stopped abruptly as the Dark Mark came to life. Pair flared and the edges of his vision blurred. He fell to his knees, clutching his arm in agony.

Potter was nattering on about something just outside his hearing, but he couldn't spare the energy to care - his entire being was focused on the pain radiating from his arm throughout his body. He became aware of the child inside kicking and squirming furiously, but the pain far out rode the sensation. He heard a distant thunder and wondered inately why the stone walls seemed to be raining dust and bits of rock.

"Move! Move, damn you!" A hand tugged at his robes and he blinked to see Potter's anxious face pressed close to his own.

Snape struggled to his feet. Another loud thunder clap - this time closer. The wall behind them crumbled as they struggled through the doorway into the hall. Potter was half-dragging him further into the building.

A sudden understanding and he managed to push the pain aside long enough to speed up his gait until he was the one leading the way. There was a staircase at the end of the hallway - Frizzy stood at the top of it, her hands wringing her tea towel frantically. Snape had never been so glad to see a house elf in his life.

"Take him to the room and seal it - don't let him out until it is safe!" Severus flung Potter at the house elf and watched them both disappear with a sudden *pop*. Behind him another wall crumbled and Severus tripped over a stone and fell heavily on his side, choking on the dust filling the air around him. The magic of the stones still fizzled with energy, but the wards were practically non-existent.

The rumbling slowly faded, as Snape lay there too hurt to move. Footsteps rang out clearly in the new silence. A figure finally appeared through the cloud of dust, followed by several others.

Lucius Malfoy, without a blond hair out of place or speck of dust on his robes, smirked down at him, "Hello, Severus, mind if we come in?"

XXX

Snape coughed and spat a glob of bloody saliva on the dusty ground beside him. His first thought was that Potter had somehow led them here, but as much as he wanted to blame the brat, he had to admit that the Death Eaters would have simply grabbed the brat if they'd been tracking him. Which led him to the next realization - they were here for him and most likely had no clue that Potter was here at all.

Severus thought of where the boy was now - safely ensconced in the very bolthole that Snape had made for himself for just such an occasion. Even now, the brat was making his life hell.

"Well, Severus? No greetings for your guests? What a shameful reception - your grandparents would never have approved. They knew how purebloods were supposed to act," Malfoy snarled the last sentence at him.

Snape chuckled despite his position on the ground. "Rather nasty temper you're showing, Lucius. Stress of Azkaban get to you?" he taunted.

Lucius' eyes narrowed, but the normal icy mask smoothed over his features once more. "Charming as always, Severus," he purred as he looked over Snape with interest. "And unpredictable. Would this be why you have been holed up here alone? Ignoring the Dark Lord's summons to have some bastard child?"

Snape saw no point in answering as he pushed himself up against a large chunk of masonry behind him. He had no hope of getting up under his own power.

It was Lucius' turn to chuckle. "Ah, Severus...knocked up and swollen like a mad toad. The Dark Lord will at least be entertained when he receives you - he hasn't been too happy with your absence."

X.X.X

Harry Potter was feeling rather useless as he paced back and forth. It was a windowless room with only a cot, toilet and washbasin in three of the four corners of the room. The house elf that had brought him there stood in the fourth corner, her hands wringing her already rumped tea towel. He'd tried to get her to take him back by order, cajoling and even threatening, but it was no use. He knew well enough from his experience from Dobby that house elves had their own rules and logic and she wasn't going to budge until she was ready.

Which left Harry alone with his thoughts. His mind kept replaying his fight with Snape just before the walls had begun to fall on them. Snape was pregnant, the thought still hadn't really sunk in - part of him wondered who the other parent could be - but mostly it explained Snape's absence from Order meetings and secrecy. Obviously Snape didn't want anyone to know of his condition. Was this why Remus had stayed with the potions master? To help with his pregnancy?

It also helped explain why Pomfrey had told McGonagall about a portkey in her office that connected her to Snape Manor. Harry had overheard part of their conversation during one of his Quidditch related trips to the infirmary. Obviously Pomfrey knew of Snape's condition, so Dumbledore must know as well. Had Voldemort found out? Was that why the Death Eaters had attacked his home? No wonder Snape hadn't been willing to go after Lupin...and Harry had called him a coward.

Harry groaned and rubbed at his head, his scar burned dully - perhaps muffled by whatever enchantments kept him hidden there - but he had a horrible feeling that Snape and Lupin were suffering from Voldemort's temper.

X.X.X

Snape was pulled to his feet and made to watch as they destroyed the rest of his house. His great-great-great Aunt Matilda shrieked in her portrait as the frame caught fire. It was the last thing he heard before he passed out.

He awoke to find himself alone on a bed in a strange room. He sat up cautiously, every muscle hurt and his head throbbed painfully, but his clothes were free of the dust and blood that had stained them earlier. Another glance around the room and he had a fairly good idea where he was, Malfoy Manor. There was no one in the room, but he knew there must be someone guarding the door outside. The only comfort was in knowing that there was no way the Death Eaters could have found Potter - the hiding place was unconnected to the main house and unplotable. Only Dumbledore would be able to find it now.

Severus struggled out of the bed and into the loo. Might as well take advantage of the luxurious facilities while they were available. The taps were all gold and the floor was white marble. Well, wasn't it nice that Lucius still had *his* wealth and home. And that the Ministry was watching an escaped convict's home so well he could house a Dark Lord, Death Eaters and now prisoners without so much as an Auror knocking on the door?

Snape looked into the mirror and saw that while his clothes had been spelled clean before he was placed on Malfoy's silk sheets, his face was still streaked with soot and blood. He took a petty delight in turning the crisp white towels a filthy gray.

A house elf popped into existence within the bedroom, but didn't go to clean the towels, instead it

looked at Severus and nodded its head obediently before snapping its fingers and disappearing as quickly as it had appeared.

Severus shrugged off the incident and sat down on the edge of the bed then to wait.

X.X.X

Remus hadn't been enjoying his stay in the manor house half as much as Severus. His current quarters were the dungeons that the Ministry had apparently missed in their searches of the place nearly a year before. He wondered if he should register a complaint with the Minister of Magic if he survived.

Probably not - werewolf complaints went to the office for Dark Creatures and usually resulted in unwanted scrutiny on the Dark Creature itself. He rather wished at the moment that an office at the Ministry 'would' come to make him answer surveys on his condition. Remus shifted and listened to the chains clink behind. He was chained to one of the dungeon walls while sitting on a pile of filthy straw on a dirt floor.

The door of the dungeon opened and something was tossed inside the cell before the door shut again just as swiftly. Lupin could barely touch the object that was tossed in by stretching out the length of his chain. It was a raw hunk of meat, dirty where it had rolled in the straw. Remus rolled his eyes and sat back down in his corner of the cell again. Apparently Lucius found it amusing to treat him like the animal he thought Lupin was. Well...in a few days he might just find the bloody hunk of goat appetizing, but not now.

A few days was likely all he had left...no one had bothered to speak to Remus since he'd woken up in this cell, but he figured it had to do with his being a werewolf. They planned to use him for something, since they didn't seem to think he had any information worth interrogating him for. And anything they had planned for him during his change scared him more than any torture in his human state could.

Remus stared at the manacle around his wrist and tried his best at wandless magic for the thousandth time. The manacle remained locked and resistant to his attempts - engraved in a beautiful script in the center; the name 'Malfoy' mocked him.

XxXxX

Severus turned his head slightly at the sound of the door opening. Two masked Death Eaters stood silently in the doorway. Snape stood up slowly and was soon being led down a corridor and into the Malfoy ballroom. He'd been there once or twice as a teenager attending parties his father insisted he go to. It looked different now - the mirrors and gold sconces were missing and a large throne had been set up at the end of the room. Severus glanced around the room briefly before focusing on the figure sitting on the throne as he was led up close to it. Voldemort was resplendent in dark green velvet robes edged with silver snakes that writhed and twisted around his wrists, hissing softly. But the robes couldn't make up for the Dark Lord's gaunt, white face and glowing red eyes. Snape thought back to the handsome wizard that had first recruited the Death Eaters to his service - the creature before him now bore little resemblance to that charismatic figure. The outside now matched what had always lain within.

But as Severus studied his former master, Voldemort seemed to be studying him just as intently - and a mocking smile twisted his ugly face as he stared down at the swollen belly of the potions master.

"My, my, Sseverussss...you have been busy, haven't you? But not with the potion you promised me."

"My Lord, the potion was nearly completed. It was destroyed in the fire-"

Voldemort waved a thin, bony hand at this and dismissed it. "There were no potions being brewed. Do not insult my intelligence."

Snape fell silent and waited. He knew he had failed and now he would pay and the child with him. He felt something heavy slide over his feet, Nagini twining around his ankles.

"You were buying time to give birth to your bastard - and whose is it?" Voldemort asked in a singsong voice, his eyes glowing brighter as he stared into Severus' own. Snape didn't see any point in hiding it and let his former master see Sirius Black's face in his memory.

The Dark Lord chuckled. "Black? What an odd choice...however did you get him to touch you, I wonder? No matter. A male-born pure blood child has some value, but I can think of an even better use for you. A way to make up for your little treachery, hm, Severus?"

Snape flinched as two cold fingers stroked his cheek. Voldemort leaned in close and sneered, "You're nothing to look at, but your womb shall come in handy. A male-born heir...yes, I can see a strong son - an army of them. All loyal to me. They shall prove more loyal than some." Voldemort was nodding to himself, his eyes distant as if he were having a true vision. "Yes...my sons. My true family," he focused on Snape again, "and I have no desire to wait. Crucio!"

Severus screamed and clutched his belly as excruciating pain ripped through him. He was seized from behind by two Death Eaters and dragged away from the throne room. There was a distant roar of laughter before the doors shut behind them and he was being led down a flight of stairs.

XxXxX

The door opened with a bang and Remus' head shut up at the sound. A group of three Death Eaters came in. They were shuffling awkwardly and it took a minute to realize that it was two Death Eaters dragging another one in. A former Death Eater, to be precise.

"Severus!" Remus couldn't help blurting out as he saw the white face between strands of black hair. Severus' eyes were squeezed shut, grimacing as the two masked wizards cuffed him to the wall and left.

"Severus...?" The lack of response turned his stomach to a block of ice. Then, finally, there was a gasp and Snape opened his eyes.

"Re-" he started before squeezing his eyes shut again, howling in pain as he clutched his belly.

Lupin wrenched with all his might at the chains holding him, fresh blood oozing around his already open sores. He didn't feel the pain - all of his focus was on Severus and his need to be at the other wizard's side. Amazingly, a few of the links began to weaken with the strain, but still not enough to give way.

Remus sagged for a moment and tried to get Snape's attention. "Severus - look at me! Look!"

Snape groaned and opened his eyes again, but Remus wasn't sure if he saw him or not.

"Remus," he hissed through clenched teeth.

"Yes - I'm here! Look at me!" Remus took turns coaxing and demanding Severus' attention - trying to distract him from the pain and keep him focused. It was obvious that he was in labor and it wasn't going well.

The tortured sounds coming from the other man continued and Remus grew hoarse and increasingly desperate, but never stopped talking. He slowly became aware of something odd going on outside the dungeon after what seemed like hours of labor. A tremor in the air around them, a loud boom above...a discharge of magic so powerful that both Remus found himself flattened to the ground with it. He struggled to lift his head and saw Snape on his side, eyes closed, apparently knocked unconscious.

"Severus!" he cried out.

"Remus?!" The cry came not from Snape, but from outside the cell.

"Headmaster! Down here! Hurry!" Remus scabbled to his knees and leaned as far as he could towards Snape's body.

One of his hands suddenly came free and he saw that the wall behind him was in pieces and one of the manacles had come off at the base, a large chunk of stone still attached. Remus stretched out his hand and could just barely brush his fingertips against Severus' sweaty forehead. He brushed back a few strands of matted hair and stroked the clammy skin. "Severus...wake up..."

The door of the dungeons opened slowly and the Headmaster and three members of the Order cautiously stepped their way into the room. Debris littered the way, but the room was mostly intact. Remus was freed of his bindings and he was finally able to scoop Severus' body up from the floor.

"Gently, Remus - don't move him too much..." Dumbledore cautioned him, his wand scanning Snape's still form. "We need to get him to St. Mungo's as soon as Poppy says we can move him."

The next person to step into the dungeon was not Pomfrey, but Harry. The boy looked around wide-eyed at the scene, his wand hand was wrapped up, but still clutching his wand at the ready.

"What's going on? Is Snape-"

Dumbledore motioned for him to stay back with a grim smile. "We're waiting for Poppy - perhaps you could make sure she comes here directly from the portkey site?"

Harry nodded and left, but not without another glance at the huddled forms on the floor. Remus felt a sudden tremor in the body he held and noticed Severus was beginning to come around, his arms wrapping tighter around his belly. There was a faint moan and Remus held on tighter, murmuring nonsense in a soothing voice.

XxXxX

The birth was a bloody mess.

Snape's entire body seemed determined to fight the emergence of the child and no amount of magic could take away his pain or convulsions. Poppy had to force the opening to let the babe out finally. And even then both he and the child required constant care to keep them from slipping away in the night. Remus took turns by both bedsides, but spent the bulk of the time at Severus' side. Snape had always been pale and unhealthy looking, but now he was nearly translucent - blue veins stood out in stark relief on the backs of his hands and up his arms. Remus stroked the papery skin and waited.

The mediwitches were a constant in the background - casting cleaning and monitoring spells, bustling around and keeping busy as they waited. Dumbledore stepped in once to look in and there was a lull in mediwitch activity for the next hour. Remus mentally thanked the headmaster for the privacy and leaned close to Severus' ear.

"You had a girl, you know...she's beautiful. Curly little patch of black hair and ten fingers and ten toes. Doing better than anyone expected when she first came out. The curse did some damage, but she's a fighter...just like you," he whispered. There was no reaction from the sleeping man before him.

"She's going to need a name, you know. You didn't mention any names..." Remus squeezed the hand laying limply in his own. "...if you don't wake up soon I'm going to name her a muggle name. A really boring one. Maybe Jane. Or Jill. Missy? Nancy?"

No reaction.

Remus growled and stood up, pacing the room as he ran his hands through his hair. "You can't do this to me, Severus. Your plan didn't work - Voldemort's dead and there's no need to sacrifice yourself anymore. I'm not fit to be a single dad, damn it. Your plan was lousy to begin with. Who'll watch her during the full moon? Who'll help her with her Potions homework?"

The silence mocked him and Remus glanced at the shut door before returning to Snape's side. Sitting down, he picked up Snape's hand and squeezed it tight. "Come on, Severus. Can you really let me name her? Think about it. How about Harriet? I'll name her after the Boy Who Lived and everyone that meets her will think of her godfather. Yes, I'm making Harry her godfather - what do you think of that?"

"Over my dead body."

The voice was thin and broken, but the most wonderful sound in the world to Remus' ears.

XxXxX

Epilogue

Severus hadn't been too thrilled to find out he owed his life to Potter. Granted, he'd saved Potter's life more than once himself so he'd been owed, but still...it rankled. Nearly put them on equal footing - and that was something Snape would never admit to.

It was Potter's pet house elf, Dobby - the former Malfoy house elf, who ascertained their whereabouts and helped Dumbledore and the Order onto the property. And then, of course, the bloody Boy Who Lived killed the Dark Lord, thus assuring his celebrity status for all time. The brat's head had no doubt swelled to epic proportions, but living with Lupin meant he had to put up with Potter on holidays and the like.

Of course the estate itself had changed a bit since the Death Eater's redecorating of his family's ancestral home. Snape Manor had been burnt to the ground - the stones themselves had lain scattered in large heaps amongst magically smoldering ash, but the house itself would never stand the same no matter how much magic was applied. All of his ancestors' paintings were gone. There was little hope in recovering them - very few Snapes were ever hung elsewhere and therefore had no venue of escape from the burning house.

With the threat of war gone, the Order of the Phoenix had decided to put their efforts into helping Lupin and Snape construct a new home from the stones. It was nowhere near as grand or intimidating as his childhood home, but it suited their new family all the better for it. It was one of the last acts the Order did as a group before they split off into different directions - their lives no longer on hold. Potter and several of the younger members of the Order intended to do some top-secret business to do with the Ministry and that suited Snape just fine. He had more than enough to deal with now that the child was born.

Dirty nappies and bottles and being woken by screeching at all hours of the night were not his idea of an ideal retirement. Luckily for him, Lupin was feeling paternal enough to deal with the child and insisting Snape rest and recover from his ordeal. Severus had every intention of having that recovery last until the child was housebroken.

But as much as he complained - he did not completely loathe the reality of being a parent. Maura was no ordinary sniveling child, but his own. Her intelligent eyes and avid curiosity spoke of his own genes, but even Severus had to admit there was a great deal of Sirius' genes at work, too, in her small nose and sunny disposition. Of course the personality was probably more to do with Lupin. The man was utterly besotted with Maura and could often be heard cooing dreadful baby talk when he thought Snape wasn't nearby. It was a habit he'd have to break the other wizard from before Maura began to comprehend language, but until then...Snape was content to let Remus do as he liked.

END

And as a bonus to those that had to wait so long for this last part to post - there is a short vignette called 'Reparation' - which takes place not long after this.

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