

He splayed his wings, as if to show off their impressive span, and gave a couple of unsteady hops. “You want to try flying?” Harry presumed, and Draco’s head bobbed. “It’s really windy outside, love. Maybe wait for a calmer day?” He didn’t want Draco getting hurt. “Practice getting in and out of the form first. Make sure you can transform back.”

The owl’s eyes narrowed in a glare, but after a few moments Draco was human once more, kneeling on the mattress. Harry didn’t waste any time in pouncing on him, pinning him down and kissing him. “I’m so proud of you!” he enthused, watching Draco grin up at him.

“It’s so *weird*, being a bird,” he said, tone a mix of perturbed and reverent. “I should show Mother. And Uncle Sev!”

“In a minute,” Harry agreed, peppering more kisses down the Slytherin’s jaw. “I’m not done being proud of you yet.”

Draco snorted, but didn’t argue, splaying his knees slightly to cradle Harry between them. “If you must,” he mock-sighed, biting at Harry’s lower lip. “But then we’re going to show everyone. And teach me to fly. The ballroom’s big enough for it.” He gasped softly as Harry sucked on the sensitive spot on his throat.

“Sounds like a plan,” the dark-haired boy agreed, grinning against Draco’s skin. Snape was brewing anyway; they had some time to kill before Draco could go show off.

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It was only years of experience that kept Severus’ hand steady as he poured fresh-brewed Nerve Tonic into a vial while the Mark on his forearm burned with pain. He grit his teeth against it, finishing up his work. At least the summons had come at the *end* of his brewing session, not in the middle. He hated when he ruined work because of the Dark Lord.

Only when everything was safely stored did he summon his robe and mask, sweeping from the lab. Sirius happened to be in the main hallway, and he grimaced at the sight of Severus buttoning his dark robe. “I’ll let Moony know. Be safe,” he offered. Severus merely nodded. Then, he was headed briskly down the darkened driveway, footsteps muffled by the snow. The Mark burned hotter, more urgent; following its call once he was past the wards felt almost involuntary.

He arrived to a much larger gathering than expected, and his heart began to sink.

“At last, Severus,” the Dark Lord drawled, beckoning him closer. “I was beginning to think you would not arrive.”

“Apologies, My Lord,” Severus murmured bending to kiss the hem of the monster’s robes. “I was in the middle of a sensitive potion, it had to be stabilised before I could leave it.”

“Indeed.” The response was noncommittal, and Severus braced himself for a Cruciatus, but it never came. “No matter; you are here now. We can leave.”

“Leave, My Lord?”