

“I can’t believe he just *gave* me the harvesting rights to that monstrosity,” he muttered, incredulous. At that, Remus’ smile softened.

“Generous to a fault, our cub,” he mused fondly. His honey eyes grew teasing. “Once you’re rich from it, you can take me out for a proper night on the town,” he drawled lightly. “Muggle, of course.” They couldn’t risk being seen together anywhere magical, and they both knew it.

Severus smirked, bombarded with aching fond memories of a time long-past. “Fish and chips on Brighton pier, two litre bottle of Strongbow, and that awful underground poetry bar?”

Remus laughed, the sound still fully capable of stopping Severus’ heart. “Oh, you do know how to spoil a man,” he declared, leaning in for a kiss. “It’s not a poetry bar anymore, though. It’s a drag club, I think. Or maybe a leather bar. Something queer and seedy.”

Severus frowned. He supposed it was too much to ask for things to stay entirely the same, after sixteen years. “Hmm.” He let one long arm curl around Remus’ shoulders, pulling him close. “Could still be entertaining. Queer and seedy used to be right up your alley.”

Remus snickered. “You never complained too much about any of those places,” he reminded. His head came to rest on Severus’ shoulder, and so Severus felt it when the man’s whole body tensed. “Whatever it is, it’ll have to wait a bit. Albus is sending me back to the werewolf packs.”

Severus’ hand curled tighter around the Gryffindor’s bicep. “When?”

“I leave on Monday. Enough time to get settled before the next full. Should be back by Christmas at the latest.”

The Slytherin sighed, letting his chin tilt down until his nose was buried in Remus’ hair. Selfishly, he wanted to tell the werewolf not to go, that it wasn’t worth it. But he couldn’t bring Dumbledore’s suspicion onto him like that. Besides, Severus was stuck at the school, under even tighter watch than usual with Umbridge sticking her nose in all over the place. He hardly saw Remus as it was.

One day, he promised himself, neither of them would be beholden to anyone but each other.

“I’m going to talk to the pack elders about Harry’s offer,” Remus piped up, one hand playing absently with a loose thread on the hem of Severus’ shirt.

“So soon?”

“Better than letting them get swayed by Albus’ pretty words,” Remus pointed out. “Harry and his friends actually have a plan to back up their offer, rather than just a vague promise.”

Severus knew that was the problem for the allied werewolf packs; it was all well and good Albus Dumbledore promising them equal rights, but when the man hadn’t actually *done*