

first, once the healer opened her kit. Casually, Sirius reached over the redhead for a bowl, glancing her way.

“I never caught your name, Miss,” he said politely. “Or gave mine. I’m Sirius.”

She eyed him amusedly. “I know who you are, Mr Black,” she told him. “You’re Harry’s godfather.” Her casual, slightly starstruck use of Harry’s name made him strongly suspect she was a Gryffindor. Then she stuck out a hand. “My name is Nashira.” Her smile brightened, and she giggled. “Like the star in Capricorn. Our names sort-of match!”

Sirius shook her hand, hoping it didn’t show on his face how wildly his heart was beating. “They do, don’t they?” he croaked.

Some higher power in the universe was playing a fine trick on him, to be sure.

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As always, Seren Du was a blissful sanctuary in the wake of the constant unease of Hogwarts, and Severus felt the tension drain from his exhausted shoulders the moment he and Ceri rematerialised. He snorted upon the realisation that the elf had deposited him straight in his bedroom, startling Remus, who was stretched out on the bed with a book in his hands — a sight that sent a strong shock of affection and *want* right through Severus’ whole body.

This was what he wanted to end every gruelling teaching day with; that man, in his bed, for the rest of forever. Having that would make everything worth it.

Instead of voicing any of these thoughts, Severus instead let himself fall face-first onto the empty side of the mattress, fully clothed. He heard Remus chuckle, warming Severus down to his bones, and a hand rested on the back of his neck, massaging the tense muscles. “Long day, love?” Remus asked lightly.

Severus groaned in reply, giving himself a few minutes of the glorious sensation before reluctantly rolling over, running a hand down his chest and murmuring the spell to undo all his buttons along the way. “I thought playing double-agent was exhausting *before* Albus left,” he grumbled. “This is *worse*.” With Albus gone, the levels of authority and power within the school were all to be rearranged; Slytherin house was in a quiet uproar as the students tried to figure out their standing now that all they knew had been turned on its head. They were pushing boundaries — with Minerva, with him, with Harry as the true heir of Slytherin. And those who were truly loyal to the Dark Lord were gathering, deciding their chance had come with Dumbledore no longer watching over things.

They were all idiots, thinking there was no reason to be wary of Harry Potter himself. Severus would enjoy watching them fail.

Not that he could do so publicly. He had to support those who came to him, and play his part flawlessly for those who didn’t — those he had no idea about, who would be reporting his every move back to their master. His master.