

Harry, thinking of Lockhart, didn't say anything about how the former could easily become the latter. "As long as I pass my OWLs, I don't mind either way."

"I think that's one subject you don't have to worry about, cub," Remus said, ruffling Harry's hair. "You could take your Defence OWL tomorrow and get an O, I'm sure of it."

Harry preened; truthfully, he couldn't wait to take his exams. To put in to practice all the studying he'd been doing in secret, all the progress he'd been hiding.

"It's Potions I'm hoping for the O in," he admitted. "I want to see Snape's face when he has to admit I'm not as hopeless as he insisted."

Remus laughed. "Severus has every faith in you getting an O. He wouldn't have let you ease off your Potions lessons earlier in the summer, otherwise." His smile turned fond, as it often did regarding the dark-haired Slytherin. "He'll push you hard in class, but that's just because he knows you can do well. Even if he'll have to put up a fuss about letting Harry Potter into his NEWT class," he added teasingly.

Looking at him, Harry couldn't believe no one in the house was aware of the true relationship between the two. Hell, that they had never let it slip as teenagers, let alone the adults they were now. "Hey, Remus?" The werewolf quirked an eyebrow expectantly. "How come even the Order don't know about you and Snape? I can understand keeping it secret at school and everything, but... everyone here already knows what side he's on." It had to be exhausting, to pretend to hate the man you loved even in the comfort of a place that was supposed to be safe.

The Marauder's gaze grew melancholy as he met Harry's eyes. "It's complicated, Harry," he sighed. "Part of it is just Severus' reluctance to let his guard down among people he doesn't trust. Half the Order think he's still loyal to Voldemort and just playing Albus to keep himself safe. If even one person were to say the wrong thing in front of the wrong people..."

Harry grimaced — it could spell Snape's death.

"But on top of that, we can't let Dumbledore find out. So much of his trust in Severus — so much of Severus' position, and the knowledge he gets from it — is because he believes Severus owes everything to him. He needs to believe that Severus does not trust anyone but him; that he has nothing of his own to live for." There was pain in his eyes — a familiar kind of pain, to Harry.

He wondered how long Snape had gone believing that was the truth.

"I'm sorry," Harry said softly. "That— that's no way to live."

"It is what it is," Remus dismissed, managing a half-smile. "We have always kept our relationship hidden, and it has served us well so far. Eventually it will not be necessary, but until then... I have him back in my life, and that's the most important thing. I don't need other people to be aware of my love for it to be real."