

“If I can even look those students in the eye knowing they watched you *molest* me.” Remus barked out a laugh, grinning like the cat that caught the canary.

“Okay, I’m not sorry about that one. I couldn’t help myself. That has been a fantasy of mine since I was fourteen years old.”

Severus would never admit that he, too, had sometimes dreamed of staking such a public claim on Remus Lupin.

“I just don’t know what to do with all these people suddenly expecting me to smile or joke or *hug*,” he spat the word like a curse. “People I hardly know, even! Going to the Ministry has become impossible.” He’d gone a few times; first to sort out various family affairs, then to testify against some Death Eaters, and lastly to help the Department of Education with their plans to re-integrate the Hogwarts students who had spent the last year in hiding. Minerva had made him her deputy for some *god-forsaken* reason, and he was starting to think she’d done it just to make him suffer. “I blame your brat godson more than I blame you.”

Harry bloody Potter, the beacon of light and good and Gryffindor; if the public were wrong about Severus, they were even more wrong about Harry, but they would one day learn that he was a sneaky little Slytherin *shit*. Right now, they believed that the *hidden mentorship bond* between the pair of them meant that Severus was secretly some sort of warm, jovial father figure. Merlin forbid the Man-Who-Defeated be trained by someone who was exactly the miserly, severe, dark-aligned bastard that Severus absolutely was.

“Our brat godson,” Remus corrected. “I keep telling you, we share him now.”

“And I keep telling you, you can keep him,” Severus argued by rote.

He looked at Remus, studying the lines on his face — scars, yes, but the creases at the corners of his mouth and eyes, the furrow of his brow; those were all laugh lines, smile lines. Even though for twelve years Remus had had very little to laugh or smile about, he still remained positive, caring, compassionate.

Not for the first time, Severus wondered what the hell a man like that was doing with a man like him.

“Would you prefer it, if I were nicer?” he asked suddenly, cringing at the way it came out. “In public, that is. I understand that now our association is known, there will be... unavoidable social events. I have no desire to tarnish your reputation by being my usual self.”

All of a sudden, Remus used his grip on Severus’ hand to pull himself into a sitting position, his legs still flung over the Potions Master’s lap. “Severus,” he began, and Severus braced himself for the worst. “Severus, you have been an irascible bastard since the very second I met you, and that’s exactly the man I fell in love with.” The Slytherin blinked, and Remus’ honey eyes softened. “I don’t care what people think of me, if they judge me for being with you. Quite frankly it’s none of their business. I don’t care if they think you’re some soulless old bat — I know you, inside out, back to front and all over. I’ve seen you at your worst, and at your best. And I’ve seen what you’re like with people you *actually* care about; you are entirely capable of warmth and love. I see it every day when you look at me! As long as you