

It did, the hot water soothing Severus' aching muscles, releasing some of the tension that had gathered from the curse. Remus stayed out of the bath, though his hands trailed soothingly over Severus' shoulders. "Oh, my love," he breathed, kissing Severus' cheek. "My brave, brave love."

"It wasn't even a bad one," Severus insisted. Remus shot him a chiding look.

"And I'm grateful. But that doesn't mean I'm happy about letting you go off to *him*. Merlin, Severus, when Ceri came to me... it was like the first war all over again." Severus remembered it well; by the time he and Remus had reconciled, the war was well underway, and Severus was being summoned every few days. Neither of them ever knew what state he'd return in; sometimes, it was a bloodied heap on the doorstep. Every time, Remus picked him up and healed what he could and ran him a bath, just as he was doing now. Every time, he held Severus, loved him, soothed him until he felt human again.

Severus did not deserve Remus Lupin.

Remus reached for the shampoo, and Severus was treated to the sensation of skilled fingers massaging his scalp, washing the blood from his hair. He let his eyes fall shut, his own hands trembling too much to do anything but rest on his thighs and wait for the aftershocks to stop. He was out of practice at taking the Cruciatus. He'd have to build that back up.

Water poured over his head, careful to stay out of his eyes. Remus stood, dropping his dressing gown to reveal his bare chest. He looked healthier these days than he had even when they were in their youth; at peace with his wolf, well-fed by Ceri, reunited with at least some of his pack. The sentimental part of Severus liked to think he was a little responsible, too. Remus was beautiful.

"May I join you?" the werewolf asked. Severus nodded. There were some times, after a meeting, that he couldn't bear to be touched by gentle hands. This wasn't one of them. He needed Remus' skin like he needed air.

Remus unselfconsciously shed his pyjama trousers, stepping into the water. Remus had chosen their room because it was closest to the largest bathroom; the one with the bath big enough for three people, let alone two. The Gryffindor settled down and pulled Severus into his arms, his hands running up and down Severus' chest. Lips pressed against his shoulder. "I love you," Remus murmured, the words so earnest they rattled Severus' soul. "I'm proud of you. You're so, so brave."

Severus couldn't have said how long they sat there in the bath, Remus' hands and words drawing him back to himself again, back to his humanity. He was almost embarrassed; such a minor meeting shouldn't have sent him into such a state. He was about to face far worse in the coming months.

But Remus wasn't the only one who'd thought they were done with all this, for so long.

Severus relaxed into the embrace an inch at a time, letting his hands shift to settle on Remus' knees where they bracketed him. Remus' soothing murmurs paused. "Are you mine again?"