



l'ouragan.

by femmequixotic

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*Broken windows and empty hallways,
A pale dead moon in a sky streaked with grey.
Human kindness is overflowing,
And I think it's going to rain today.*

Written April 2009

Warnings: Semi-epilogue compliant

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Photo by sugar_cookie

i.

Monday, 29 August, 2005

2:30 a.m.

Ninth Ward, New Orleans

The rain was already falling, had been falling for hours, so heavy and hard that even an *Impervius* was useless. My white cotton shirt was plastered to my skin, my soaked hair pushed back behind both ears, save for the few limp locks that the wind slapped angrily against my cheek.

I stood over the rich, muddy reek of the Mississippi churning, sullen waves already rolling against the embankments meant to keep them at bay. There was a hint of chill in the thick, heavy air for the first time since spring had faded, but I could still feel the humidity, my sweat mixing in with the rain that ran down the back of my collar.

"Last of the little bastards are back to their kin," Honoré said, coming up next to me, his boots squelching in the mud. "Michel Decoudreau was the last one over St Bernard's way." Rivulets of rain poured over the headmaster's short grey curls, down his angled black cheeks roughened by two-day's stubble. His mouth tightened as he stared out over the river; he crossed his arms over his chest, pulling his wet robe tight across his shoulders, the frayed grey hem catching on the laces of his worn boots. He glanced over at me, looked me up and down, then smiled faintly. "Pardon my patois, Severus, but you look like mule shit on a dungpile."

I snorted. "I'm quite afraid you're no beauty yourself at the moment, William." Honoré looked exhausted and drawn, a greyish pallor to his dark skin. I wasn't surprised. The entire bloody staff of St. Louise de Marillac School had spent the past thirty-six hours evacuating students—and in many cases, their families, their familiars and, for a fortunate few, their homes—to higher ground. No thanks to the imbeciles employed by the Louisiana Department of Magic and Wizardry who were utterly incapable of finding their own arses with both hands, in my opinion—which I had quite clearly stated to more than one of the fools. My nostrils flared. Bureaucrats were incompetent worldwide, it seemed.

The wind picked up, twisting around us, knocking me back a step. Rain stung my face, salty and sharp.

Honoré frowned into the storm, tall and solid in the rough gusts. His robe whipped around him. "Best get yourself someplace safe, and soon." He squinted up at the roiling black clouds. "'Bout to be one hell of a storm."

"And what do you intend to do?" I asked, eyeing with unease the choppy river that slapped over the embankment, seeping into the puddles at my feet. After six hurricane seasons, I'd learnt there was little even magic could do against Mother Nature in a snit, and that realisation disconcerted me.

Honoré ran a hand over his jaw, scratching. "I'll stay back at the school. Make sure she doesn't blow away— "

A loud, cracking boom echoed over the roar of rain. We stared at each other, the puddles nearly covering the toes of our boots.

"The levees," Honoré shouted in to the wind, grabbing my arm.

Fucking hell.

We ran.



Photo by stevecadman

ii.

I hadn't meant to survive the war.

In fact, I was rather perturbed when I woke in St Mungo's three weeks after Voldemort's defeat, being jabbed by a former student whose Potions marks had most certainly *not* qualified her for work as a mediwitch, a fact which I lost no time in informing her. My one pleasure in the moment had been startling her into sticking the needle in her thumb rather than my forearm.

I had been even less pleased to discover that a) Potter of all people was responsible for my current condition (and really could the brat for once not play saviour?) and that b) the fool had made me out to be a hero in front of the entire damned wizarding world, which had the opposite effect from what the idiot had hoped for, which surprised me not in the least. If there was one thing I had realised about British wizarding society in my thirty-eight godforsaken years at its fringes, it was that society loathed being informed that its carefully calibrated opinions were incorrect.

After another month of recuperation—or a regimen St Mungo's considered to be recuperative which was an entirely different horse in my bloody opinion—I had found myself ousted from hospital. I had no home to return to, courtesy of the Ministry's seizure of the assets of all known Death Eaters, spies or otherwise, the fools. I also had no position to speak of, courtesy of my upcoming appearance before the Wizengamot on charges of treason, a situation that I had distinctly hoped to avoid by manipulating that red-eyed megalomaniac to sic his overfed snake upon me.

And then Potter was there, holding out a hand to take my bag from me. He brought me to his flat, ensconced me in a spare room. I argued with him only superficially. I'd nowhere else to go, after all.

The Wizengamot charges were dropped in October. Out of the entire wizarding world, only I seemed not to give a damn about the opinion of the Saviour of the Wizarding World. Potter's patronage, in fact, netted me an Order of Merlin and the dosh from Gringotts to go along with it.

Over breakfast shortly thereafter I informed Potter I had taken a room in Knockturn. He didn't look up from spreading his Marmite over toast as he said calmly, *Bollocks that*, and stopped my protest with a kiss.

I returned the key that afternoon, much to the annoyance of the estate agent.

By Bonfire Night Potter had become Harry, and I had moved into his bedroom. No one knew. Not even his idiot friends. Neither of us wished them to. During the day we kept up the pretense of merely tolerating each other. At night I fucked him, roughly, desperately, seeing Lily in his wide green eyes, until he left stinging claw marks down my back and I begged him to let me come.

On his birthday I made dinner. It grew cold waiting for him to come home. When he finally slipped in, closing the door softly behind him, I was waiting. I'd startled him, coming from the shadows, closing my fingers around his wrist.

He'd been at the Burrow, he'd said, chin raised, as if daring me to comment. I'd not given a damn whom he was with, or where for that matter. Neither of us had made any promises to each other, and I was quite aware he spent certain evenings in the company of the youngest Weasley. Harry and I were only fucking. Nothing more. Nothing less.

Or so I told myself. I *am* a world-class liar, after all.

We argued. Objects were thrown. Hexes were cast. And Harry sat on the stairs, face in his hands and told me Ginny Weasley had proposed to him and he thought maybe he was going to accept. He wanted a family, he said, eyes anguished behind his glasses, dropping his hands between his knees, elbows on his thighs. A proper one with children, and I'd never allow him that, would I?

No.

Harry had looked away at that, mouth twisted down. *You can't even see past my mother to me, can you?* he'd asked. *Sometimes you say her name when you're sleeping.*

I hadn't answered. What was there to say? Twenty years of my guilt had kept the bastard alive. I refused to justify how I felt about the matter to anyone. Not to Albus. Not to Harry.

He'd just sighed, said *Good night, Severus*, and climbed the stairs. The door to the spare room—my old room—had closed behind him with a quiet snick.

It took me twenty minutes to pack my bag.

I left England that night. I never returned.



Photo by jakeliefer

iii.

Even at dusk the heat was nearly unbearable, and a blanket of bloody fucking soul-sucking humidity hung in the air the way that it only could in the American Deep South, at the end of sodding September for Christ's sake.

I picked my way through the rubble. I'd not bothered with a robe; I'd no wish to boil in my own sweat. Instead I'd transfigured it into a proper pair of trousers to replace the other pair that had been ravaged by three weeks of daily wear and one unfortunately placed nail on a stud exposed by a collapsed load-bearing wall. My hip still ached from the fall, but I'd done what I could to knit the bone back together. No sense in bothering a Healer with something I could fix myself, albeit haphazardly. They'd others to attend to, after all. I wished for the hundredth time for even a bottle of that Skele-gro cack Poppy had insisted worked perfectly well on the students.

But there were no potions, no salves, nothing left to put on the scrapes, cuts, and punctures that marred the hands of the relief workers the department had finally sent to dig through the debris. The school was gone, reduced to piles of plaster and timber, even the wards unable to resist the fury of nature. They'd lasted as long as they could, and I had done my damndest next to Honoré to keep them up as the winds roared past and the waters rushed through the broken levees.

Nothing had stopped the destruction.

I turned slowly, taking in the devastation around me as I pushed up the sleeves of my filthy white shirt. I stank, I knew. There was little running water and I'd no idea when the last time I'd showered was. At the moment I didn't particularly care. Most of the houses surrounding the school were gone, Muggle and magical, nothing but waterstained piles and sagging facades. The waters had receded, leaving behind silt and sand and the rotting stench of death that hung over the whole damned city.

I closed my eyes. It was worse than anything the Dark Lord had done, and it was on our heads, this destruction. The Department of Magic and Wizardry should have stopped it, should have been more vigilant in regards to the levee wards, Muggles be damned. The wards, twenty years old at best, had burst with the levees. By the time Honoré and I had reached Seventeenth Street there was nothing to be done. The canal had topped the levee, and the filthy waters of Lake Pontchartrain were rushing through the streets.

We had tried, but not even magic could stop the rising flood. Instead, we'd turned to rescuing those we could, joining the wizards and Muggles traversing the streets of the ward in boats, pontoons, any damn thing that could float. We pulled people from rooftops, from attics, from damned *trees*, until the soldiers arrived finally and sent us away.

They were still finding bodies in the houses, under the collapsed beams, and the dead were commemorated only by scrawls on whatever solid surface remained. The house on the corner had *I body* in red paint on the sagging porch. Eulalie Fouche had lived there. Cantankerous old cow, but her apricot brandy had been prized throughout the ward. Two doors down, a circled 4 on the pavement. There were no walls standing there. A child's bicycle lay in the yard, bent in half, the tyre half off the wheel.

Idiots who ridden out Betty in '67 and were certain this would be no different, old men and women too ill or decrepit or mad to leave, families with no money for a hotel or a bus upstate, trapped by the fury of a storm and the collapse of an antiquated levee system the damned Muggles had insisted was adequate.

Their bodies now swelled in the heavy heat, their stench mingling with that of drowned animals and spoiling refuse, of rotting corpses washed from the cemeteries with the roil of floodwaters.

It made me ill.

A hand squeezed my shoulder. "It's nearly too much," Honoré said quietly.

I nodded. When we'd returned three days past, allowed through the wards surrounding the city only when accompanied by Aurors, the first thing I had seen was a body floating in the ditch, swollen and bloated and waxy, maggots crawling around the open eyes.

After all I'd done, after all the lives I'd taken over the course of two wars, it'd been that unexpected confrontation with death that had sent me to my knees, vomiting in the beaten-down grass.

I had nightmares every night about the boy's face.

"Even with magic it'll take weeks to dig through this, if not months," I said after a moment, looking at Honoré . "You can't push back term much longer."

The headmaster sighed and frowned, his forehead furrowing. He'd exchanged his professor's robe for jeans and a t-shirt loaned to him by one of the Muggleborn staff. "Our friends at the Department said others will be coming to help tomorrow."

I snorted. "And you believe them? The Muggles are idiots and our kind aren't much better."

"We've no other choice," Honoré said, exhaustion evident in his voice. "There's no way to hide the school now. And as much as a blind eye might be turned towards overt magic, I rather think there are certain factions on both sides which would object to our subjects being taught in plain view."

"I suppose." My mouth tightened. We'd lost everything—the books, the supplies, the sodding *blackboards*—and the students had been scattered now, families moving to other parishes, other states, until the government deemed it safe enough for them to return. The entire matter had been a cock-up from the beginning, in my opinion, and not just by the Muggle idiots.

A shout from one of the Aurors down the block caught my attention. The Auror—broad-shouldered and crewcut in that oh so very American way—waved us towards him. Time to go; darkness was falling, and it was nearly curfew. We weren't allowed to be in the city at night.

"We should go."

I ran a hand through my hair, frustrated. There was too damned much to do to be herded off the moment the sun set. "This is ridiculous," I muttered.

Honoré smiled faintly. "Tomorrow's another day." He slapped my shoulder. "Come on, boy. I'll buy you a whisky at the Chipola."

"Or three," I muttered.

We Apparated.



It took four days for help to come.

I was standing on the remnants of my potions laboratory, levitating water-logged plaster through the collapsed exterior wall and into a large, rusted metal bin. Evangeline Bellefontaine, the

Charms professor, was perched on the edge, wand in hand, waiting to disintegrate it into dust before it hit the bottom.

Sweat trickled down my back. I'd shucked my shirt to one side, modesty be damned, and had pulled my hair back with an elastic nicked from the dean of girls in a vain attempt to keep it out of my eyes. The humidity conquered even cooling charms at the moment. There was a tropical storm forming on the Atlantic coast of Florida, the radio presenters were reporting, with no small amount of tension in their voices. Hurricane Rita had hit Cameron and Calcasieu parishes near the Texas border ten days ago. The last bloody thing we needed was more rain.

A series of pops caught my attention. I looked back towards the street. A group of wizards had just Apparated in. I tensed for a moment, recognising the red and black robes of the Auror Force of the United Kingdom. Of course. It *would* be the Brits, now wouldn't it?

Shit.

And then they parted, revealing their leader, laughing at something Honoré had just said, and I nearly fell off the desk I'd been standing on. Same messy black hair. Same round glasses.

"Severus," Honoré called, waving me towards them. I didn't move. I couldn't. Of all people...I might have known. My lip curled. Harry bloody Potter, Saviour of the Whole Bloody World now, it seemed. He looked at me, met my eyes.

My breath caught. Six years had been good to him; his shoulders were broader, his gait even and steady as he excused himself and walked towards me, his hands in his pockets. There was none of the unsettled boy in him any longer.

I found it oddly disconcerting.

"Mais, I think the cavalry arrived," Evangeline said in her Cajun lilt, pushing her Fitchburg Finches cap back, dark curls escaping. She whistled softly. "And looks damn pretty to me, n'est ce pas?"

I snorted. "Only if you're desperate."

"Call me desperate, then." She watched Harry with interest. "Qui c'est q'ca?"

"No one you need concern yourself with." I sent half a wallboard careening into the bin, nearly decking Evangeline in the process. She glared at me. I shrugged and shoved my wand into my trousers, then grabbed my dirty shirt and wiped my damp brow with it.

"Hello, Severus," Harry said when he reached me. He let his gaze slide down my body, and I scowled, pulling on my shirt, heat be damned.

"What the hell are you doing here?" I snapped. I buttoned three buttons, then rolled up the sleeves. I could feel my pulse pounding in my throat.

Harry didn't smile, didn't look away from me. "The Minister's been attempting to build bridges with the American Secretary of Magic. When he heard about what happened here, he offered up an Auror force to help however possible, and when the information came through about this school and its staff..." He shrugged, but he kept his gaze fixed on me. "I volunteered."

"Of course." My mouth twisted to one side. "Never could leave well enough alone, could you, Potter?"

He flinched at my use of his last name. Good. "I've been looking for you," he said quietly. "Since you left."

I was all too aware of Evangeline's avid interest in the conversation. My colleagues know very little about me, much to their frustration. I do not hold with the ridiculous American practice of oversharing, to say the least. I clambered off the desk, my boots squelching into the still soft ground, and headed for the oil barrel half-filled with melting ice and bottles of Muggle water. Harry followed me. Of course. I swore beneath my breath.

"How is Ginevra?" I asked pointedly, plunging an arm into the barrel. The freezing charm on the ice prickled against my skin. Even it couldn't stand up against this bloody heat. I pulled out a bottle of water, refusing to look at Harry.

He didn't answer for a moment, then he sighed. "Fine, I guess."

"You guess?" I shook water droplets off my fingers and unscrewed the bottle cap. "How romantic."

"We split up in March," Harry said quietly. My stomach twisted.

March. I refused to ask why. I lifted the bottle to my mouth and took a long drink. Of all the Muggle conveniences American wizards have adopted, bottled water was the one I had become most enamoured with in recent weeks. Environment be damned. It was a necessity when surviving for a month with a tainted water supply. Spells were only so effective after a time.

"Are you going to talk to me?" Harry sounded tired.

"About the dissolution of your marriage?" I snorted. "No. I have entirely no interest in your life, Potter."

His mouth tightened. "My name is *Harry*."

We glared at each other.

Harry looked away first. "It's been six years, Severus."

"And two months." I studied the curve of his jaw. I hated him. I missed him. He infuriated me. Insolent brat. "And four days. To be precise."

Harry turned his head, met my eyes. "Not that you're counting."

"Whyever would I wish to do that?" I drained my bottle of water and binned it to be recycled. That was Evangeline's insistence. Wretched cow. I didn't know why we couldn't just banish the damned things like any self-respecting wizard would do. Harry watched me, eyebrow raised. I shrugged. "Americans. Far too many damned Muggleborn wandering about spouting off in favour of idiotically idealistic causes. His Lordship ought to have set his eye on the fields ripe for culling here."

Harry snorted. I was surprised. Six years ago I would have been lectured on my anti-Muggle sentiments. Instead he rocked back on his heels, his arms crossed over his chest. "Might have gone down better here in some circles."

"In some circles," I agreed.

Sweat beaded Harry's forehead. A drop rolled down his temple, disappearing in his hair. I could remember how his body felt pressed to mine, hard and taut, skin slick as he rutted against my hip, gasping and begging me to take him. I closed my eyes.

"Severus," Harry said softly. My eyes fluttered open at the weight of his hand on my arm. He was looking at me, eyes warm. "It's not a random coincidence I'm here. I twisted Kingsley's arm to lead this team—"

"You shouldn't have." I glared at him. "There's absolutely no damned reason for you to have come. We're perfectly capable of handling this ourselves, so you can bloody well go home and tell Minister Shackbolt to kiss my damned arse."

Harry lifted his chin, mouth a thin, white line. His glasses, as always, were smudged. "Actually kissing your arse would be why *I'm* here." The unspoken *you bastard* hung in the air, understood by both of us. Harry had never been overly creative in his abuse of me when angered.

I scowled. "Just because you're done playing happy families with the Weasley bint—"

"Don't call her that," Harry snapped, his eyebrows drawing together. We were inches apart, fists clenched at our sides, breathing hard.

I had the intense urge to break his bloody jaw. Or something.

"Mr Potter!" Honoré hurried towards us, two Aurors at his heels. I wasn't entirely certain if I was relieved or annoyed by their intrusion.

Harry frowned and turned. "What?" he asked curtly, his body tense. The Aurors paused for a moment, exchanging a long glance. Honoré barely broke his stride, utterly unfazed by Harry's narrowed eyes. Well. He had dealt with me for years, after all. A pathological resistance to all strains of extreme irritation was the result.

Honoré studied us calmly. His curiosity was stoked, I could tell. Never a good sign with the bastard—only Albus and my mother had surpassed his meddling skills, and both of them barely. Damn it. I folded my arms over my chest and stared out across the fallen school. My shirt scratched my shoulders painfully; I was wretchedly certain I was developing a sunburn.

"The DMW representative's here," Honoré said in his deep lilt, drawing out the words more slowly than he normally did. Deliberately, I was certain. Honoré always did enjoy tweaking the expectations of others. I rolled my eyes. He smirked at me.

Harry ran a hand through his hair, leaving it standing on end for a moment before it collapsed into its usual unsightly mess. "I'm a bit busy at the moment—"

"Wants to talk to you specifically." Honoré looked between the two of us. I studiously avoided his questioning glance. The man saw too damned much for my comfort.

"There's some paperwork requiring your signature, Harry," one of the Aurors said, eyes sliding towards me then back at Harry. He seemed vaguely familiar. I was certain I'd taught him at some point—I'd likely taught the damned lot of them in their red and black huddle. Hufflepuff, I thought, perhaps. Their faces all blended together in one dully pleasant blob.

Harry swore under his breath. "Stay here, Severus?"

I snorted. "Oh, of *course*, Potter. As you wish." I dipped my head and mocked tugging on an imaginary forelock.

He shot me a narrowed glare. "Right. Fine. Whatever." He turned, heading back to the street. His Aurors followed him, the Hufflepuff giving me a curious look. I crossed my arms over my chest and bared my teeth. He flinched.

"Severus," Honoré said, shaking his head.

"Don't start."

Honoré *hmmmed* at me, eyebrow raised. "History there, I'd say."

I shrugged. "I've work to do, William." I turned and headed back to the ruin of my potions classroom, ignoring Honoré's speculative gaze.

Damn Harry James Potter to hell and beyond.



Photo by skatoolaki

iv.

"Hey," Harry said, sitting down on the bench next to me. He balanced a plate of étouffée and rice on one knee. He'd given up on his Auror uniform and had stripped to jeans and a white t-shirt in a vain attempt to acclimatise to the heat. He looked younger, more like my Harry. It made me distinctly uncomfortable. "You're avoiding me."

I sighed. "And yet it seems not to be working. Imagine that." We'd set up a base camp near Baton Rouge—or, more precisely, in St Helena parish just outside Greensburg, a tiny town of 631, a third of which were witches and wizards and nearly all of them, in true Louisiana fashion, related in some way to Honoré. Greensburg was a relatively short Apparation hop to Orleans parish and the Ninth Ward, and, for the Muggleborn at least, we had the advantage of being hidden away in a field tucked behind a cove of trees not far off Louisiana Highway 10. The clearing was filled with rickety tables and benches and chairs salvaged from wrecked houses, and one of Honoré's nephews had managed to get his hands on four trailers being handed out by the Muggles' idiotic emergency agency. The interiors had been expanded into wizard space and divided into makeshift dormitories.

Most of us had nothing other than our wands and a few changes of clothes—some transfigured from other garments taken from abandoned homes. We'd lost everything. For now, at least.

Harry poked at his plate with his fork and wrinkled his nose. "What *is* this?" he asked.

"Crawfish étouffée." I set my empty plate next to me. "Rather like lobster. It's boiled, then cooked in a roux with cayenne and the Creole holy trinity—onions, celery and peppers. "

Harry eyed it suspiciously. "What the hell's a roux?"

I rolled my eyes. He'd always had the culinary taste of the average twelve-year-old, to my dismay. I enjoyed food—it and ridiculously expensive whisky were among the very few pleasures in which I indulged—and the careful science of cookery had always reminded me of potions brewing. "Oh, for God's sake, just eat it."

He took a small bite. "Not horrible."

"This coming from a man whose idea of fine cuisine is toad in the hole followed by McVities HobNobs."

"I'm better." Harry licked the tines of his fork. "Ginny liked to cook."

I tensed. "I'm certain she did."

Harry looked over at me. "You haven't forgiven me."

"Why should I?" I uncapped my bottle of water. It was lukewarm, but it was wet and that was all I gave a damn about. Even with the sun down it was still warm and humid.

"I don't know." Harry stabbed a piece of crawfish and popped it in his mouth. He chewed slowly. "It's been six years."

I stared out over the clearing. Lights twinkled in the oaks, large and bright ones from the lanterns we'd strung up and smaller flashes from the fairies that had come to the New World generations ago in the trunks and bags of witches and wizards from Provence and Brittany and Cornwall. The Muggles called them fireflies, certain they were harmless insects; only the children who caught them discovered their secret.

"Grudges can be held for much longer than six years," I said finally. I took a long drink of water. "Especially by me."

Harry set his fork down. "Is this a grudge, Severus?"

My jaw tightened. I refused to look at him. "You made it clear what you wanted."

"I was *nineteen*," Harry said softly, fiercely. "All I wanted was a family—"

"And I allowed you an opportunity to have it," I snapped. The water bottle crumpled beneath my clenched fingers. "If you were fool enough to let it slip away—"

"I have a son," Harry burst out. I stilled, eyes fixed blankly on a dark-haired witch stirring the cooking pot. "He's nine months. Jamie, we call him."

"Of course you do," I said through a too-tight throat.

We were silent for a moment. Harry chewed his bottom lip.

"Ginny and I..." He stared down at his plate. A few grains of rice and a chunk of crawfish tumbled off the edge and onto the dirt. Within a moment a scrawny crup was at Harry's feet, nudging his trainer aside to get at the crawfish. Harry dropped another one. The crup inhaled it and looked up, whining hopefully.

Harry glanced over at me. "We'd just separated when she found out she was pregnant. We tried again for a few months, but really, our marriage had been shit for a rather long time." The crup whined again, and Harry tossed him another crawfish. "It probably always had been, really, no matter how much we pretended," he said quietly. "I missed you too much."

I didn't say anything. I drained my water.

"Severus." Harry turned towards me, eyes hidden behind the shadow of his glasses.

Sod this. "You made your choice six years ago. If it was the wrong one, then live with it. God knows the rest of us have had to." I stood up. He caught my wrist. My mouth twisted to one side.

"Severus," he said again, looking up at me. "Don't run away from me again."

"Go to fucking hell, Harry," I said quietly, and I pulled away from him, stumbling towards the silent darkness of the trees.

I could still feel his fingers on my skin.

Damnation.



Evangeline dropped a bottle of water down next to me. It rolled to a stop against the leg of a desk. "Boo, you don't have to be a complete jackass, you know."

"I beg your pardon?" I scowled up at her from the floor of the potions laboratory. Sun pounded down on my bare shoulders. It was warm still, but not as unbearable as it had been in recent days. Thank God. "And do not call me that. I am *not* your *boo*." My nostrils flared in disgust.

The desk above me creaked as Evangeline hopped up on it. Her trainers dangled in front of my face, the laces filthy grey. "Mais, non. I reckon you're more Harry's."

"Oh, do sod off," I muttered and returned to Scourgifying the wood planks beneath my knees. I'd ignored Harry for the past three days, and of course in the meantime the wretch had managed to ingratiate himself with all of my colleagues. Even Honoré had been singing the brat's praises last night and had only laughed when I'd finally told him to shut it for God's sake before I hexed his tongue to the roof of his mouth.

"He's a pretty boug, for true," Evangeline said. She pulled one knee to her chest and stared past the fragmented outer wall. I followed her gaze. Harry was on the side lawn, levitating a bin of splintered timbers to the kerb for proper banishment by the authorities. He was shirtless and his jeans hung low on his hips, showing the edge of his pants, the exhibitionist bastard. I glared at him, all too aware it was a futile gesture. He was too far away to appreciate my disdain, damn it.

"He," I said with a grunt, shoving back a desk to reach the next patch of waterstained floor, "is an arrogant, self-centred, self-righteous little *pillock* with the intelligence of a mentally impaired flobberworm and the social skills of a cabbage."

"Maybe." Evangeline leaned over the desk, following Harry's progress across the grass. She took a sip of water. "But pretty pretty, n'est ce pas?"

"Get out of my laboratory," I said, looking up at her.

"You should be nicer to him. He likes you, and, mon Dieu, Severus, you're too cranky. You need to get laid." At my narrowed eyes, she sighed. "Gar ici, it's not like I don't know. I have cable and a finely honed gaydar, merci."

I pointed my wand at her. "Out!"

She rolled her eyes and slid off the desk, her khaki shorts riding up her thighs. "Something's going on between you two," she said, giving me a dark look.

"I can assure you that you are utterly mad to even think that."

"Dis-mon la vérité."

I reached for the water bottle on the floor. I uncapped it and lifted it to my mouth. "That *is* the truth."

Evangeline tilted her head. She'd twisted her curls up. A few tendrils swung free. "So you wouldn't care if I gave him a go, oui?"

My mouth tightened. "Of course not."

"Liar." She grinned at me. "Might just do it anyhow to piss you off."

I stood up, brushing my hair back from my eyes, as she bounced off, heading straight for Harry. He waved at her, and I frowned when I saw his eyes were, most certainly, on her tits.

The bottle of water splattered against the wall before I realised I'd thrown it.



Photo by georgie_grd

v.

Honoré sat a cup of chicory coffee in front of me and straddled the bench, another mug in his hand. "Long day," he said.

"They're always long lately." I lifted the mug, inhaling the sweet steam that belied the coffee's bitter bite.

"True, that." Honoré leaned his elbows on the tabletop. "Your Brits have helped. Might actually be ready to start up again with classes come winter."

I sipped the coffee. I missed my proper cup of Earl Grey and milk twice a day. "They're not my Brits."

"No, of course not." Honoré glanced over at the table where the Aurors sat, gathered around two of the younger staff, Marie Therese and Claude, Creole siblings who could trace their magical lineage to a witch sold two hundred years ago by her bastard Muggle stepfather to slavers off the Ivory Coast. The grandmother who had raised them had been missing since the levees broke. She'd lived near the London Canal. No one expected her to still be alive.

Claude had confiscated two wands, drumming them against upturned barrels as his sister sang, the Aurors clapping in rhythm with the song.

Look at my king all dressed in red, iko, iko, un day...

My mouth twisted. Evangeline sat on the tabletop, an Auror's arm draped around her shoulder. She turned and I could see Harry on the bench in front of her, laughing.

Bet you five dollars he'll kill you dead.

I sniffed. "One would think, given the circumstances, a display like *that*—" I nodded towards the Aurors "—would be considered poor taste."

Honoré clasped my shoulder. "Or one would think it to be a celebration of survival," he said gently. "Allow them a moment, Severus. Tomorrow morning they have to wake up and face all this again."

One day after another. I sighed and cupped my mug between my palms. "I'm bloody tired, William."

"I know." Honoré ran a hand over his face. He looked as worn as I felt. "Has to get better now."

"Perhaps."

An Auror pulled Marie Therese off the table and danced her around the bench. I'd never felt so damn old.

"Heard they might be going down to the Chipola later on," Honoré said. "They're young. Want to blow off a bit of steam." He nudged my arm. "Not like us ancient bastards, ready for bed by ten."

"I'm only forty-five, you twat." I rubbed my thumb over the rim of my mug.

"Indeed," Honoré said calmly. I glanced at him, frowning. He grunted and smiled into his coffee.

Evangeline slid off the table, practically landing on Harry's lap. I gritted my teeth. He ruffled her hair as she bumped his shoulder. *See that guy all dressed in green, iko, iko un day?* Marie Therese sang, twirled by her Auror as the others clapped and stomped. My gaze met Harry's across the clearing. *He's not a man, he's a lovin' machine.*

Harry laughed, eyes crinkling at the corners. I glared at him, flipping two fingers his way. He shrugged, still smirking, and leaned in to whisper something in Evangeline's ear. She shot a sideways look at me, her amusement obvious, and pulled him to his feet.

The cow had the utter gall to wink. At *me*.

And then Harry was striding towards us. He stopped in front of me, eyes hidden by the glint of firelight on his glasses. "Join us?" he asked softly.

My fingers tightened on my mug. "No."

Harry shrugged. "All right."

I watched him walk off, feeling ill.

Honoré nudged my shoulder with his. "Jockamo feeno ai nané," he murmured. He gave me a pointed look.

"Yes, thank you," I snapped at him. I slammed my mug down and stalked off, faint laughter and fragments of song still following me.

I had no intention of playing the fool.

Jockamo fee nané.



The Chipola was a ramshackle bar just off the highway between Greensburg and Darlington, a rundown haven for drunken wizards that reeked of beer and piss.

I'd gone to bed, lying in the dark, my body tense and stiff, until the conversations outside faded into silence. And then with a *sod it to hell and back* I threw the sheet off and grabbed my trousers.

This was all Harry's damned fault. I wanted him to go home, back to England where he belonged and leave me in bloody peace, for Christ's sake.

I pushed open the door to find the tiny windowless room packed, music and shouts echoing off the walls. Three Cajun wizards stood on top of the bar, one with a fiddle, the others with accordions, all playing recklessly, feet stomping on the worn wood.

This was not my first fais do-do. It was impossible to live in Louisiana for any length of time without being forced to attend at least one of the damned things. I caught sight of Harry in the whirl of dancers in the middle of the bar, arm in arm with two dark-haired witches, his head thrown back, cheeks flushed, eyes bright, laughing as one accordionist belted out *J'etais Au Bal*, aided by a wavering Sonorous charm.

He was fucking beautiful.

I shoved my way to the bar and shouted for a whisky. I'd lost my damned mind, I was certain. Whisky in hand, I leaned back against the bar, searching out Harry again.

It didn't take long. He'd been passed off to another witch, a tall blonde teaching him how to two-

step pathetically. I rolled my eyes.

"You should be out there." Evangeline slid up next to me, a bottle of beer in her hand. "Not playing pain pee po over here yourself."

I snorted. "I think not." I drained my whisky and set it back down on the bar, motioning for another. The music picked up; the couples twisted faster about.

"Scared?" Evangeline set her bottle aside.

I ignored her and picked up the fresh whisky pushed my way by the wizened barkeep. I'd barely gotten my first sip before the damned cow grabbed my arm and jerked me backwards, the glass flying from my hand. I found myself in the midst of the throng, Evangeline's hand on my shoulder, hard and determined.

"What the *fuck* do you think you're doing?" I snapped.

Evangeline smiled brightly at me. "Helping you not be a jackass, Boo." She shoved me; I stumbled back, straight into Harry's arms.

He caught me, eyebrow raised. "Are you pissed?" The blonde was gone.

"Not yet," I said grimly, turning to snarl at Evangeline, but she'd disappeared into the crush of dancers. Wretched twit. "I am going to flay the skin off that girl."

Harry grabbed my arm, pulling me out of the way of a twirling couple. I was pressed up against him; I could smell beer on his breath. "You could dance with me instead."

"The hell I could." I was all too aware of Harry's body, of his hand on my hip, his fingers around my wrist.

"Why not?"

I curled my lip. "You know damned well why."

"Are you ever going to forgive me?" Harry asked. I could barely hear him over the music. His eyes were ridiculously, brilliantly green. I could see the flecks of gold around the iris, so very different from Lily's. And then his hand moved, his knuckles grazed my cheek, his fingers curled around the back of my neck, holding me still as he stepped closer, those beautiful, mesmerising eyes fixed on me.

My heart thudded, skipped. "No."

Harry kissed me.

His lips were chapped, rough, but warm and I breathed out, shakily, my hand settling on his waist. "Severus," he whispered. I could feel my name as his mouth brushed mine. It sent a shiver of want through me, the way it had so many years ago when he'd first crawled into my lap late one night, half-pissed and hard, the both of us miserably lonely.

I jerked away. We stared at each other, oblivious to the drunken swirl of music and colour around us.

"Severus," Harry said again, reaching for my arm, but I was already turning, shoving my way through the crowd until I was outside again, a faint breeze against my heated cheeks.

I leaned against the wall, rough bricks catching the back of my shirt. The air was cooler at night now, though barely, and I breathed it in.

The stars were bright above, glinting over the tops of the oak trees. Long tendrils of Spanish moss hung from the branches, swaying in a gentle gust of wind. A burst of music came from the door before it slammed shut.

"Hey." Moonlight glinted off Harry's glasses.

"Fuck off, Harry," I said, exhausted.

Gravel crunched beneath his trainers. "I don't want to."

"God forbid the great Harry Potter do anything he'd rather not." I ran my hand through my hair, pushing it back off my forehead. Harry stopped in front of me, his fists shoved in his pockets. He rocked back on his heels.

Neither of us said anything, then Harry sighed.

"I'm tired of trying to talk to you," he said quietly.

Disappointment washed over me. I told myself it was relief. I looked away. Lorry lights swung around the curve on the highway. The mournful strains of *Mood Indigo* drifted from the open window as it passed us. "Then don't."

Harry stepped closer. "All right," he whispered, and my breath hitched as he slid his hand over the front of my trousers.

"Get your hands off me." It was a token protest, and he knew it as well as I. My cock was already half-hard against his palm.

"Shut it, Severus," Harry said, smiling, and he was kissing me, rough and hungry.

I caught his face between my hands. "Harry," I said against his mouth, and his fingers were already unfastening my trousers, curling around my prick. I groaned and fell back against the wall. My thumbs slipped across his jaw, tracing the curve of his throat.

He stroked me, firm and quick and Merlin, I'd missed this, his touch on me, his lips against mine. I grabbed his hips and pulled him closer.

"Fuck," Harry groaned. I could feel his cock through his jeans, hard and hot, and then he slid down, his knees hitting the gravel. "I want to taste you again."

My hand slapped against the wall, fingernails scraping brick, as he pulled my cock from my trousers. "Yes—"

The drag of Harry's tongue along my shaft made me gasp. I caught the back of his head, my fingers sliding down to curl around the nape of his neck. His mouth closed on the tip of my cock, sucking lightly.

My hips bucked; my stomach clenched. "You," I choked out, and Harry was looking up at me, his lips around my prick, his eyes dark in the moonlight. So fucking beautiful. I touched his face. "Harry." My voice was tight, needy.

He sucked me, then pulled back, mouth wet. His thumb smoothed my foreskin, circling lightly. I groaned. "How many fucking times do I have to tell you I want you?" he whispered.

"Have you?" My fingers traced the angle of his jaw. He was looking up at me, his fringe falling away from his forehead. I could see the faint zigzag of his scar.

"God, yes." Harry's palms slid over my hips, pressing me against the wall. His breath gusted over my prick. "You never listen."

I closed my eyes as his tongue lapped at my balls. "Harry," I said again, and I tangled my fingers in his unruly hair. I drew a ragged breath. I wanted this. Wanted him. "Now."

Harry pushed my trousers open wider, his fingernails digging into the skin above my hipbones. He took me into his mouth, and I thrust up with a groan. Harry sucked me, hard and fast, his lips skimming my shaft and God, I'd forgotten how this was, what it felt like to have his hands on me, my prick in his mouth.

I was shaking, my back tight and tense, and when I bent over Harry, my hands scrabbling at his shoulders to catch myself, he swallowed around my cock, tightening his mouth and throat.

I came, crying Harry's name.

His mouth dragged down my prick as I gasped, his tongue licking away the come, his hands holding my trembling body up.

I smoothed my palm over his hair. Harry pulled back, licking his bottom lip as my cock slid free. He was looking up at me, and I brushed my fingertips against his lips. He kissed them, featherlight.

“Severus,” he said, and I pulled him up, pressed him against the wall as I kissed him roughly. I could taste myself on his tongue. I slid my hand up beneath his t-shirt; his skin was warm. Soft.

He groaned into my kiss.

“I want you,” I whispered. Harry rocked forward with a soft hiss. I could feel his cock hard against my hip.

“Please,” he whispered, dragging his mouth along my jaw. His hands slid over the small of my back, under my shirt, palms against my skin, and he nipped at my throat. “Fuck me, Severus. Please fuck me.”

I jerked at his jeans. My fingers were half in his pants when the door banged open, spilling out light and laughter and music. We froze in the shadows. Rural Louisiana was no place for two men to be caught shagging.

“Not here,” I murmured, pulling away my hand, and he nodded.

I wrapped my arm around him and, holding him tight, Apparated away.



Moonlight filtered through the window of my tiny room, pooling on the narrow bed. The air stank of sex and sweat, and the sheet over our hips was spotted with come. I was collapsed against the pillows, still breathing hard, body limp and pleasantly sated.

Harry traced small circles over my nipple, his head on my shoulder.

“Why Louisiana?” he asked. “You could have gone anywhere in the world.”

I didn’t answer for a moment, instead choosing to rake my fingers through his thick hair. “I didn’t intend to,” I said finally. “I spent a year in Canada—Montreal, to be precise. I met Honoré there; he was a professor at a wizarding school and I was brewing for an apothecary. When he returned to New Orleans to take on the headmastership of St. Louise de Marillac he offered me a position.”

Harry tilted his head, looking up at me. “And you stayed.”

"I hated the city for the first two years," I admitted. "It's hot and miserable and the mosquitoes are utterly vile. Not to mention it's filled with the bloody French." I curled my lip and Harry grinned. "But I needed work. And the city...well, I suppose it grows on you. Damned Frogs and all."

"It's the magic." Harry rolled onto his side, pressed up against me. "I can feel it, like it's thrumming through me sometimes, slow, just under the surface."

I nodded. "Even the Muggles sense it. It's everywhere. Voodoo. The Cajun's loup garou. Gris-gris. It's all here." I stroked my thumb over Harry's temple. "It can be rather heady at times."

Harry smiled faintly. After a moment he said quietly, "You never wanted to come home?"

A slight breeze rippled through the open window behind me, chilling the sweat at the nape of my neck before fading away. I studied the smooth golden curve of Harry's shoulder. "All the time."

"Why didn't you?" he murmured. He tucked a stray lock of hair behind my ear.

"You know why."

Harry splayed his fingers across my chest and sighed "I didn't want you to leave me, you know."

I stilled beneath his touch. "You certainly were convincing."

"I was stupid is what I was," he said bluntly. He propped himself up on one elbow. I didn't disagree with him, choosing instead to watch him warily. "I thought I knew what I wanted, and then I had it and I realised..." He broke off, chewed his bottom lip.

"What?" I didn't like that the answer seemed to mean so damn much.

Shadows shifted across Harry's cheek. "I wanted you instead."

I was silent.

Harry bit his lip. "I was afraid," he said after a moment. "And it wasn't just me, Severus. I didn't know what you wanted. You'd hated me for years, and then we were shagging like mad, and I didn't know if it was just the sex, or if you saw my mum in me—"

I shut him up with a kiss, long and slow. When I pulled back, he was staring up at me, his mouth wet. "What does that mean?" he asked.

"It means you're an idiot," I said, and I cuffed the side of his head, none too gently.

"Right." He winced and eyed me sceptically. "You never thought of my mother when you were inside of me."

“Almost every time at first.” I caught him before he drew back, pulling him up against me. “I said *at first*.”

Harry just looked at me, his eyes shadowed. "I'm not my mother," he said finally.

"Really?" I raised an eyebrow. "I wasn't aware."

His mouth thinned. "Don't be an arse."

"Oh, Merlin's balls." I sat up, the sheet twisting around my hips. I grabbed his chin. "You *broke* me, you wretch. Do you think that's even possible if I didn't give a bloody fuck about you?"

Harry blinked at me. "Oh."

"Imbecile."

A small smile curved his mouth. "Is that your way of telling me you..." He hesitated.

"That I would have preferred not to be tossed to the kerb in favour of Ginevra Weasley, yes." I brushed my thumb across his mouth. He nipped the tip. "Among other things."

Harry rolled over me, pressing me into the mattress, his hands on either side of my shoulders. "Other things."

"Yes." I ran my hands up his arms, tangling my fingers in the hair at the nape of his neck. "Other things."

"I missed you, too," Harry whispered as I pulled him into a kiss.



Photo by shelholtz

vi.

Tuesday, 24 February, 2009

10:15 a.m.

St Charles Avenue, New Orleans

"It's too damn early to be drinking." Harry set a Sazerac cocktail on the balcony rail in front of me. He caught James' hand before the boy knocked it off into the milling crowds below.

I pulled the twist of candied lemon from the glass and handed it to James. "This is New Orleans. It's never too early."

A roar came from beneath us as the captain of the Rex krewe turned the corner on his white horse, resplendent in gold embroidery. Harry pulled James back from the rail.

"But I want to see," James protested.

Harry pulled him into his lap. He looked at me in exasperation.

"Still want another?" I said over the rim of my glass. The half-year James spent with his mother Harry had spent attempting to convince me another child would be a brilliant idea. James was four now, after all. The perfect age for a sibling. Within two weeks after James' latest arrival, the previously incessant discussions had stopped.

"No," he muttered. I hid a smirk.

Ginny sat next to me, taking my Sazerac and sipping it before handing it back. "God, I love New Orleans," she said, leaning back in her chair. Her husband settled next to her, a bottle of wine in his hand.

"You love Mardi Gras," Krum said, smiling at her. He kissed her cheek; she batted him away with a laugh.

"That I do," she agreed, propping her feet on the balcony rail. I snorted.

Three and a half years and we were still rebuilding. Entire streets and neighbourhoods remained ghost towns. The traces of flood damaged still remained; houses were battered and ramshackle, waiting for the funds to be fixed. Families were still scattered across the country, slowly putting down roots in other states. A third of our students had yet to return.

Honoré had been right. We needed moments like this. Joie de vivre, the Cajuns called it. New Orleans would survive. We always did. Tomorrow would be ashes and mourning. Today? Today was a bloody damn good party.

The Boeuf Gras, an enormous float in the shape of a white steer draped in flowers, rolled towards us. James' eyes widened. "Dad!" He edged off Harry's lap; his father corralled him between his legs and the balcony railing. James stood on tiptoe, peering over to watch the masked chefs on the float toss golden coins at the crowd.

A jazz band followed, half-marching, half-prancing down the street, trombones sliding up in the air, drums keeping rhythm for the bounce of the trumpets. James bobbed up and down on the balls of his feet, smacking his hands against his father's knees in time to the music. He laughed, his brown eyes bright.

Harry ruffled his son's dark hair and smiled at me. He reached over, palm up, and I took his hand, twining my fingers with his.

Below, New Orleans danced.