This chapter was edited by Gladiusx.

A little girl was helping her mother set the dining table. Daddy would be home from work anytime soon, and the girl couldn't wait to jump into his arms so he could ruffle her head and throw her in the air like he always did.

A loud knocking reverberated inside the house, and the wide-eyed girl smiled brightly as she rushed to the door.

“Mafalda, wait!”

Too late, the girl didn't think why her father would knock on the door when he had keys, and by then, she was already staring blankly at the two hooded figures.

“Who are–”

*She did not finish her question before the girl was backhanded and struck her head to the wall, feeling something crack and **pain** explode in her mouth. She could not remember what happened then. Her mother screamed, and the hooded men laughed as one of them growled a word that sent shivers down her spine.*

“Crucio!”

It was her mother's ungodly screaming quickly turning into gurgling rasps that woke the girl from her pain, only to find a man placing his foot on her back. She tried to struggle but to no avail and watched in terror at another man pointing a stick at a writhing figure on the ground. Her mother's back was contorted unnaturally, and the terrible sound of bones and joints breaking would haunt Mafalda for eternity.

“Crucio!” The man laughed giddily as her mother shook, and he clutched his groin. “Blimey, this feels better than fucking!”

As Mafalda watched the man hurting her mother, her terror slowly morphed into anger, which turned into a blind rage as she screamed.

"MUM!"

.

.

.

Tuesday, 29th of June.

Leaky Cauldron

Mafalda woke up with a gasp, thrashing in her bed as she searched for the comforting presence of her father. It took her a moment to realise the bed was empty; her father was probably out on an errand. Mafalda breathed heavily as she sat on the bed, looking around the room for any signs of danger.

"…Dream. Just a dream."

Yet Mafalda Prewett knew that dream would continue to haunt her for a long time. Now that she was awake, she could recall the vivd details of that dark day.

Everything had gone blank for her as she watched her mother getting tortured and how her magic had erupted in a shockwave that destroyed their house. She did not remember much afterwards, only her father with blood on his business suit, standing over one of the *bastards* with a knife in his hand, and then… nothing.

Apparently, Mafalda had slept for three days, only to be crushed by the details.

Her mother… was dead. Her father was a wanted man in the *muggle* world. Her new life in this magical world should have made her ecstatic, as she could finally learn to practice those strange abilities that always made her father smile wistfully when he saw her.

A whole new world of magic for her to explore, and a school where she will go to study magic in a couple of months!

Yet she felt conflicted. This world had taken her mother, and her father had yet to smile again.

The girl groaned as she left the bed and made her way to the bathroom. After washing her face, she stared tiredly at the mirror, finding a clammy and pale face with sleepy rust-coloured eyes staring back at her under a tangle of brown hair. Her soft chestnut curls were just like those of her mother…

She opened her mouth, finding the two teeth still missing. The scum who attacked her had knocked them out, but the magical doctor said she was too young for *skely-grew* that would have grown her teeth in hours. Instead, she was to take a nasty-tasting potion with her breakfast, and her teeth should grow by the end of the week.

Just as Mafalda left the bathroom, and dropped tiredly on her bed, the door to their room opened. She flinched, only to relax when she saw her father enter with a large tray of food. “Good morning, love.”

Mafalda tried to smile, but she was certain it looked more like a grimace - she was self-conscious about the two missing teeth that made her smile ugly. Smiling also felt like a betrayal to her mother's memory; how could she smile when her mother was gone?

Her father still could not smile either; he was never one for smiling in the first place, but he always had one for her and Mum. Yet that smile had died with Holly Prewett.

Killian Prewett placed the tray of food on the table and stood over her, his arms outstretched. Finally smiling, Mafalda crawled out of the bed and into her father’s powerful arms.

“How was your sleep, Maddy?”

For a heartbeat, she entertained the idea of telling her father about her nightmares but quickly discarded that thought. He had enough on his plate already.

“It was fine, Daddy.”

Her father squeezed her tightly, and Maddy enjoyed the comfort and warmth for a few more minutes before her stomach rumbled.

“Let’s tuck in before the food grows cold. I got your medicine ready as well.”

They sat at the dining table next to each other, eating the standard breakfast the pub's owner made. Scrambled eggs, cheese, sausages, potatoes, and bread. Once they finished, her father brewed tea for himself and gave her the medicine. Mafalda grimaced as she drank; it was too bitter. Once she forced herself to swallow it, she grabbed the glass of juice her father had prepared and chugged it all in one gulp.

Maddy still grimaced as she was unused to the strange taste of pumpkin juice and wished she had orange juice instead.

Once done, she followed her father to the bathroom, where they brushed their teeth and Daddy had her sit on a stool as he combed her hair. The simple act was so relaxing that she nearly fell asleep from the comforting feeling of the comb flowing through her hair.

“Are you ready for today?” Daddy suddenly asked when they returned to the room, “Our meeting is at noon. Do you want to walk around the alley or wait here?”

“I'm staying here.” She had only been released from that hospital, Saint Mango or something, last night, but she had no desire to go anywhere without her father. Maddy did not even know what that meeting was about, just that their benefactor wanted to introduce them to someone. She met the older girl and her healer father when she woke up; Tonks was nice, even if her hair looked weird.

Killian Prewett nodded, his face unchanged, but his eyes softened as he brought a book from a drawer. “This was something that my… *family*,” Maddy flinched at her father's tone, causing him to grimace. “Sorry, I will tell you the full story later. Anyway, this is a children's book that every magical child reads. I borrowed it from Tom.”

Maddy accepted the book and checked the title. “The Tales of Beedle the Bard?”

“It’s interesting enough. You can read it until our meeting. I need to help out Tom with some of his muggle errands. His patrons have *really* liked the soft drinks I managed to bring in through that disguise of his.”

Maddy nodded and waved bye to her Dad as he left the room. Then she moved to the chair by the open window. Her Dad mentioned in the hospital how he managed to do some errands in London using a magical necklace that glamoured him into someone else… or something like that. Regardless, she opened the book and started reading.

.

.

.

“Maddy, wake up, sweetie.”

She jerked awake, nearly dropping the book from her lap, but her Dad caught it. Looking outside the window, she noticed the sun was high in the sky. How long did she sleep?

“About four hours.” She turned to her father, realising she had talked aloud, only to find two people sitting at the table and watching her in amusement. “Come and join us. We're already done with the important stuff.”

Feeling embarrassed that she missed the meeting, Mafalda followed her father to the table and sat beside him. She gazed at the two visitors. Maddy recognised Tonks, the bright-haired daughter of her doctor - or healer as they called them, was dressed in a black *Radiohead* T-shirt. Her red robe uniform was draped over the coat hanger.

Tonks smiled kindly when their eyes met, and Maddy simply nodded.

The other visitor was a child. A boy a couple of years older than her with green eyes and dark hair. Was he Tonks' brother?

“Hi, Maddy. This is Harry Potter.” Tonks declared in a way as if she should know the name, but Mafalda just stared blankly at the woman, causing her to grimace. “Never mind, I forgot you have no idea about him.”

“Is he some child actor or something?”

Tonks chortled, even her father's lips twitched, and the boy across from her smiled warmly. “Or something. Nobody of importance to matter, Miss Prewett. I have already discussed everything with your father.”

“What are you talking about?”

Her Dad shrugged helplessly at her question.

“You don't have to worry about it.” Harry Potter waved his hand away, and Maddy started feeling irritated. She did not like being treated like a child.

She was nearly eleven and old enough to buy snacks from the store by herself!

“Over there is my old trunk. It has all the stuff you will need for your first year in Hogwarts,” the annoying green-eyed boy pointed at an open trunk in the room’s corner. “My first-year books and notes should prove helpful, even if I wasn't the most diligent of students.”

Mafalda’s curiosity almost made her rush to the trunk, but she waited until her father gave her a nod of approval. Inside were the books that Potter mentioned and a few notebooks with messy handwriting that she struggled to read.

“You should be getting your Hogwarts letter soon. When is her birthday?”

“Fifth of July.” Her father grunted, “If I remember right, they sent the letters a few days before their eleventh birthday?” Tonks nodded kindly. “Normally, a teacher from school would be sent as a guide for muggleborns, but…”

“Normally, yes.” The pink-haired woman frowned, “I know they sent Hagrid for you, Harry, and your situation was similar.”

“Hagrid is a great friend, but I would not say he was an excellent guide.” Potter smiled sadly. “He knows many people and has interesting knowledge to share, but he is not a teacher and could miss some student essentials…like telling you how to get to the train station.”

“Regardless, we can write a letter to Dumbledore or McGonnogal explaining the situation. I’m sure they can accommodate you, or I can be your guide instead.” Tonks beamed at her, and Maddy smiled back awkwardly - she *really* wanted to open those books.

“Either would do.” Her father simply said.

“For now, I advise you start reading ahead and, once you get a wand, practice magic as much as you can. The rules for underage magic do not apply until you are in school.” Potter winked at her, and Maddy’s mischievous side had her lips stretch into a grin - until she felt the breeze through her missing teeth and shut her mouth in mortification.

“Hey now, teaching a young and impressionable girl how to break the rules? And in front of an Auror, no less?”

Tonks attempted to ruffle Potter’s hair, but the boy somehow fought her off.

“Rules are guidelines at their core. You can’t deny that the whole magic out of school law is utter bollocks.”

“True, but I get paid to enforce the law, not debate it.”

“I’m sure we can reach an agreement for you to look aside this time, and the next, and maybe a dozen more.”

Mafalda ignored the sibling banter between them as it quickly devolved into giggling and ribbing and found herself engrossed in reading The Standard Book of Spells: Grade one. She lamented that she would no longer be able to watch cartoons on the TV or play with her neighbours, but Maddy couldn't help but feel ecstatic at the idea of *magic* and learning how to cast it.

Still, something gnawed inside her—the way this happened made her feel like they were beggars getting charity.

Mafalda had taken pride in being rich. Her father was a successful accountant for a big company—or a stockbroker; she never really understood the difference. Either way, they owned a large house in a nice neighbourhood and two cars! To think all of this would melt away due to two maniacs.

Receiving Potter's old stuff was irksome. It was as if they were worthless, and he only did it to show off!

She could only bristle angrily at the injustice! She ignored the small voice in her head that reminded her she had done the same until recently; flaunting her wealth to her school friends by buying candy and snacks everyday.

"…Arthur Weasley will be in contact with you regarding what we discussed. Now, I got to go visit the Magical Menagerie." Harry Potter was saying, and Maddy stared at him with conflicting feelings. "Feel free to visit and tell them I sent you. The owners will help you with getting a pet for school."

"Thank you for all the help, Mr Potter." Seeing her father speaking politely to a boy her age was so strange. "We will never forget your aid, and I'm sure Mafalda will look forward to school life as well."

Her father looked pointedly at her, and Maddy reluctantly left the trunk and stood beside him. "Thank you."

The boy grinned, and she had to fight the urge to frown. She still had no idea what was so special about him, but she didn't care. Mafalda hated how they had to beg for scraps. She hated how her proud and strong father had to lower his head in gratitude when he was the one people always came to for help.

As Potter and Tonks left, Mafalda decided that this would not do. She vowed to become the greatest witch ever; to be rich and powerful enough so *she* could take care of her Daddy. No longer would he be forced to bow to others for her sake.

That did not mean she would refuse the gifts given to her. If she wanted to become the best, then she would need all the advantages she could get. Still, Mafalda had no desire to rely on Potter or others any more than necessary. She was rock bottom but Maddy swore she would crawl her way out to reach the top.

A*L*S*M

Wednesday 30th of June,

Malfoy Manor.

Two figures duelled on the grounds of the expansive manor. The term 'duel' was too flattering for what amounted to an utter trouncing. To think his godson would be so behind in fighting… at least Snyde had not lost her touch.

"Thank you for coming today, Severus. It means a lot to me and Draco."

Severus Snape glanced at Lucius's beautiful widow. Her black dress matched the dark robes he favoured, yet it was purely coincidental. Despite the foolish divorce, Narcissa *Black* was still dressed in mourning.

"I am his godfather. It is the least I could do."

Unsaid was how Lucius had forced him into the position, yet Severus swore an oath to take care of Draco to the best of his abilities. Thinking of Lucius, Severus gripped his knee tightly with his fist; what in the fuck was his *friend* thinking?!

Keeping a curse to himself and allowing his mind to get so addled that he would deal with *goblins*? That was beside how he was caught in the act that led to his death. Severus Snape would never claim to be innocent of the atrocities he had committed under the Dark Lord's employ, willingly or unwittingly. Yet, he was not foolish enough to attempt a harebrained ritual, especially not with a scrambled mind.

The woman's icy mask softened slightly as she gazed at him, "You always took great care of your oaths. I remember Regulus telling me that your word was worth gold."

“Regulus tended to exaggerate anything.”

The potions master took a sip from his wine glass as he reminisced about the young lad who disappeared without a trace barely a year into his service to the Dark Lord.

He might have been the younger brother of his *detested nemesis*, but they were still comrades in arms. Severus had learned that you could not choose your family. The thought of his father made him scowl inwardly.

“Regardless, I appreciate you coming on Draco's birthday. None of his *friends* had deigned *even* to send a letter.”

“They have proven fickle and fair weather. I'm certain that Draco shall learn to choose his friends better.” Speaking of the lad, his godson was trying in vain to dodge Snyde’s relentless barrage until a leglocker had him bouncing like a rabbit, causing the girl's grin to turn vicious as she transfigured the boy into increasingly comical caricatures.

“Indeed. I tried to have Draco befriend more of his schoolmates, especially those from houses other than Slytherin.”

“Oh? And how did it go?”

“Not as well as I hoped, especially as we are on summer holiday. Only Harry Potter seemed open to the idea, despite his misgivings.”

This time, Severus scowled openly, causing the blonde woman’s lips to twitch in amusement. “It appears rumours of your distaste for the boy are true. It is unbecoming to allow your dislike for a twelve-year-old to control your actions, Severus.”

“You know nothing of the boy. He’s a meddlesome troublemaker, always plotting and planning mischief with his friends. Just like his father and his band of misfits.”

Not to mention, the damned brat broke Lily’s wand!

“I found him to be quite charming and gallant,” he clenched his teeth as the blonde woman sipped from her glass languidly. “Perhaps you need to let go of your resentment toward James Potter and see Harry Potter for his own person. Give the lad a chance, and he might pleasantly surprise you.”

Severus did not deign to give a response and just lifted his bottle of wine for a refill. He brought the booze, so he might as well enjoy it. “How are the preparations for Draco's ritual?”

Narcissa’s amused face morphed into concern. “All seems well, but we are missing a key ingredient, and thanks to the *goblins,* we have no hope of acquiring it.”

The potions master nodded in sympathy. He had been told of how Gringotts had usurped Draco's accounts until he came of age. Sadly, his status as godfather was informal with no legal basis. The ministry and nobility frowned upon any such positions, for they risked complications during a succession. If any random lowlife could be declared godfather over an heir to a noble and ancient house…

“What is it you are missing?”

“We need a plant ingredient connected to the element of fire, and it has to match the rest of the ingredients we already prepared.”

“Ah, fire and plants for summer, a life attribute. Give me a list of what you already prepared, and I'll see what I can do.”

“You have my gratitude, Severus.”

“…Don't mention it. Consider it his birthday present.” He stood up, finishing the last of his drink. “Might as well go now while the day is still young. It's possible to complete the ritual a day before or after the birthday, but for optimal results, it’s better to do it on the same day.”

Narcissa Malfoy nodded as she walked with him to the solar and showed him what she had planned for the ritual.

Within an hour, Severus was back at his home in Spinner's End. His mind filtered through many choices for a fire-themed plant. Fireblossom Petals would be perfect, and they should be reasonably priced if he used his sources.

He sighed as he grabbed his coin sack and found it lacking. A visit to Gringotts was in order. Before he left, his eyes fell on a certain shrine, and he stared wistfully at Lily's smile for a moment before walking to the floo.

The things he did for love.

Bloody hell, as if dealing with the goblins was not bad enough.

"What do you mean you are completely out? I was here last month, and you had a full stock! Fireblossom Petals, while rare and valuable, are rarely in high demand."

"You know I would not waste your time, Snape. I am keen to do business, but I simply cannot sell you what I do not have. Some characters bought out my entire stock a few weeks ago, and I do not expect more supplies until late summer."

Severus glared at the spindly old woman of the Apothecary, only to receive a toothless smile in return. The store was the best place to find most of his potion ingredients and *more*. Even if they were not legal, if you knew the right people and had a reputation for discretion, the owners would still manage to supply what you needed, provided you had the coin - or something of similar value. The store was located in a busy spot in Diagon Alley and had such a good reputation that it was even sponsored by Hogwarts. Scarcely any people would suspect it of smuggling or fencing illegal items.

Not that he required illegal ingredients this time.

"Who would want such large quantities of Fireblossom Petals?" Severus wondered aloud, not expecting a reply. It was still midday, and Draco's ritual was scheduled for tonight.

“Couldn't tell you, deary. They were all disguised or had obfuscation charms on their faces. You know how I do business, so long as you have the gold, I don't care if you're Sirius Black himself.”

The reminder that his nemesis had escaped prison and was free doing who knows what caused Snape to grind his teeth. He did not need to think about that bastard now of all times.

The Potions Master turned away from the counter, his black cloak billowing behind him. He did not bother speaking more once the proprietress proved useless. If the apothecary did not have what he needed, he would have to gather them himself.

Yet it had been a long time since he had been in *that* place. Even then, he never ventured deep enough to be in the Wildland proper. Perhaps Hagrid could be of use.

“Ah, Snape, what's got yeh wanderin' over to my neck o' the woods, eh?”

Hagrid was jovial enough, yet Severus could detect the slight mistrust in the half-giant’s eyes. There was no point in wasting time with flattery, for while the gamekeeper was a simple man, he was by no means stupid.

“I have come to bargain.”

.

.

.

“I remember, alright. Saw a Fireblossom Rose, I did, deep in the Forest by a steamin' hot spring. It was tucked inside a hill, full o' vents, that one. Didn't go near it, though, not me size.”

They sat at the half-giant’s massive table, with a mug of tea in front of him that looked more fit to be a bowl of soup. The table was surprisingly absent of the usual clutter; Instead, there were plenty of parchment and books on Magical Creatures and how to care for them, along with a large baton.

Severus was reminded that Dumbledore had seen fit to assign Hagrid as a professor for COMC following Kettleburn's retirement. At least the gamekeeper was taking his studies seriously.

"How come? You could have earned a lot of gold from selling even a single petal."

"What use've I got for gold? None! Got everything I ever wanted, right here beside the Forbidden Forest, I have." The half-giant chuckled deeply, causing Severus' ears to ring and his bones to rattle. "So, back to business, then. I can take yeh there, navigate yeh 'round the Forest's dangers, calm any narky centaurs, and show yeh which spots to steer clear of, but what's in it for me, eh?"

Now, Snape was facing a dilemma. As a potions master, Severus Snape was considerably wealthy… for a half-blood with no house to back him. Yet Hagrid did not need gold. A simple glance around his hut told the potions master that the gamekeeper could easily make a thousand galleons if he sold some of the ingredients he kept as trinkets in his home.

"What would be a fair trade?"

The half-giant stared at him seriously for a minute before his beady eyes gleamed in determination. "I want what every kiddo comes to Hogwarts for - to learn magic, that's what!"

Severus stared at the keeper of keys in confusion before his eyes widened, "You want me to teach you?"

"Who else? Don't see no one else 'round here, do I?" Hagrid roared in laughter again before brandishing the baton that Snape suddenly realised was a *wand*, "None o' the professors are 'round the school. They've all got families or other matters, not lettin' 'em train me. Dumbledore went and cleared my name, and Ollivander whipped up a new wand for me. Always had a bit of a knack for transfiguration and simple charms, I did, but there's plenty I missed that they covered in school."

"Say I agree. What exactly makes you think I'm suitable for the job?"

"Don't sell yerself short, Snape. Yeh know more 'bout Defence Against the Dark Arts than anyone else in school—'cept for Dumbledore, o' course. Always had yer eye on that job, yeh did. So, why not show me yeh deserve it, eh?"

The potions master gazed at the gamekeeper intently. It certainly would be an interesting experiment, and while he would rather not waste his precious time teaching a massive dunderhead the basics of magic, he *really* needed Hagrid's help. The Forbidden Forest was not a place that could be conquered with potions and dark magic.

It helped that Rubeus Hagrid was a very well-connected man, and establishing a rapport with him might prove fruitful in the future.

"Very well, but only during the summer. My time is precious enough as it is."

"Do I have yer word?"

Snape scowled at the man, "Naturally."

Hagrid nodded smartly before suddenly standing up and grabbing his wand. "Well, let's go nab that Rose yeh wanted. Can't be wastin' daylight now, can we? Heh, brings to mind another young'un who had a bit too much curiosity 'bout the Forest than he rightly should've."

Exiting the hut, they found Fang raising his head at them for a moment before going back to sleep next to the pumpkin patch. Hagrid muttered something about *lazy mutt* before leading him to the woods.

Something that Hagrid said nagged on his mind, however.

"You said someone else asked about the Forbidden Forest. Who was it?"

"Aye, some student indeed. No need to fret 'bout him. Precocious little tyke, always seems to find trouble wherever he goes, he does."

For some reason, the image of Harry Potter came to his mind, and Snape scowled. He will need to keep a better eye on the brat. He might have sworn to protect him, but that never meant he had to make his life comfortable.

Detention for the rest of the year would certainly be a form of protection.

They walked in silence as they did their best not to disturb the wildlife, and within the hour, they were deeper inside the forest than Snape had ever been. They came across a centaur once, but Hagrid merely threw a greeting that had the horseman ignore them. Severus had known of the centaurs, but what they met next had him draw his wand as a handful of Acromantulas blocked their path before Hagrid waved them away. The potions master stared incredulously as the car-sized spiders rubbed their mandibles sadly like pups denied a treat and scampered off deeper into the woods.

“Why are there Acromantulas in the Forbidden Forest, Hagrid?”

“You mean yeh didn't know? I raised their leader from when he was a wee babe. Aragog, I named him. Dumbledore gave me the nod to make a roost for him in the forest, and then I found him a lady spider companion.”

“And the headmaster understands that the forest bordering his school is infested with potentially hundreds of man-eating giant spiders?” Snape tried to keep the incredulity from his voice, but he was beginning to question Dumbledore’s sanity - even more than normal, for the old man had always been eccentric.

“Hey now, they ain't all bad, yeh know. Sure, they've grown a fair bit in size and numbers, which gets the centaurs all riled up, but they're harmless, really. Long as I'm 'round, you won't be seein' any harm comin' from 'em, rest assured.”

As they continued, Snape noticed the further they went in, the stranger the Forest became. From dark and foreboding, it became more vibrant, and the air brimmed with magic. “Then what about when others venture into the forest?”

“Well, it's called the Forbidden Forest for a reason, ain't it? Who in their right mind would dare to venture here all alone, eh?” Hagrid chortled as he ducked under a branch sporting blue roses with fairies of a similar hue on their wings. Snape was startled as he recognised the plants as Winter Roses, which also explained the sudden chill that had him shivering. Winter Roses were incredibly valuable but useless for Draco’s ritual. He mentally marked the spot in case he needed them in the future.

A few minutes later, Hagrid stopped in front of a small cave dug into a hill, emitting steam from a few vents. “Here we are, then. Last time I was here, one o' them vents was clear, and I caught sight o' that fire rose pokin' through it. Can't squeeze myself in there, so yeh'll have to duck in and fetch what yeh need. I'll keep watch over yeh till you're done, but mind yerself—magic can be mighty finicky in these woods.”

Holding his urge to grumble, Severus Snape rolled his sleeves and trousers as he crawled through the small opening and ventured into the tunnel. The air was growing hot and humid, so he cast a bubble-head charm to avoid the stench of sulphur. Once he was through the rocky tunnel, the Potions Master stood up and couldn’t hide his awe at the beautiful scene inside.

The cave was massive, incredibly so considering its small size from the outside. Yet after decades in the magical world, Severus had learned that magic was wondrous—nature magic even more so. The walls and ceiling were made from smooth stone that reflected the reddish hue of the crimson crystals sprouting around the pools of boiling water dotted around the cave. His eyes widened, and his lips stretched into a smirk of avarice as he recognised them as Ignisite Crystals.

While not as rare as Hearthstone Crystals, they were still very valuable, with a crystal the size of his palm potentially netting him thirty galleons. Looking around the cave, there were easily thousands of galleons worth of crystals.

Snape quickly controlled his greed and slammed on his Occlumency shields as he realised something was wrong. He would not normally be so easily enticed by wealth, and as he took a calming breath and inspected the cave properly. He realised there was something else in the cave with him.

He drew his wand and looked around for any sign of trouble but found nothing… except what he was looking for. The Fireblossom Rose bloomed on a particularly large rock, its thorns stretching to the water and one of the Ignisite Crystals. It was large, nearly the size of a quaffle, and each petal was the size of a snitch’s wing.

Deciding to focus on what he came here for, Severus moved towards the rose. He only needed a single petal for the ritual, but since he was already here, he would take a handful more for his

potions. The rose easily had over two scores of the petals, so it should be capable of growing them back swiftly enough.

Before he could get within five feet of the Rose, a sinister giggle sounded out in the cave, making his skin crawl. He swiftly turned around, his wand pointed ahead, but found nothing.

“Who goes there?”

Silence, then more giggling, this time from right behind him!

Jumping around, Severus Snape found himself face to face with a beautiful yet terrible creature, its clawed finger an inch from the bubble around his head.

“Boo!”

Then it *poked* it, causing it to burst.

Panicking, the Potions Master whipped his wand at the creature, his trademark cutting spell on his lips. Yet his hand was empty, and he could only gawk as the creature somehow *had his wand in her hands!*

“Yoink! No need for that.”

Powerless and wandless, Snape glared at the red-skinned creature with fire for hair and two vibrant rubies for eyes. It was naked, and its skin looked more rock than flesh, yet it was alluring in a way that had him feeling disturbed.

No creature had any right to look so beautiful yet terrible, especially as it licked her dark red lips as she gazed at him hungrily - and there was no denying it was a *she*, not with her flaunting those supple breasts in the open.

“Now, then, to what do I owe the pleasure of such a visit.” The creature floated in the air, one leg folded over the other, while she rested her chin over her palm. Her other hand played with his wand in her fingers.

“What are you?” Severus blurted out without thinking. Vaguely, something in his psyche told him he was making a terrible mistake, yet, for the life of him, he couldn’t recall *why*.

“Come now, it’s polite to introduce yourself first before asking for a lady’s name.”

“I am–” Suddenly, it clicked, and Snape shut his mouth tightly, feeling fear he had not felt since being in the presence of the Dark Lord.

“Yes? Your ***name****?*” The creature breathed hotly, flames spewing from her lips towards him, yet they did not feel hot, only pleasant and *inviting*. “You are here for something, and I am always happy to trade. But first, we must introduce each other.”

As if he would give his name to a bloody *Fae* of all things.

Snape scowled at the terrible situation he was in. He had never encountered a true Fae, but he had read enough to know that giving them his name *was a terrible bloody idea.* He could only remain silent and hope it would let him go or let its guard down enough for him to snatch his wand. They stared at each other for what felt like hours, until the creature lost her smile and rolled her eyes.

“Tsk, how boring.” To his surprise, the Fae threw his wand back at him, causing him to fumble as he grabbed it but smartly sheathed it away. He had no chance against a being of magic in its element. “So, why are you here, human?”

“I require a Fireblossom Petal.”

“Oh? But those are *my* petals, and I do not take kindly to thieves.” Her eyes narrowed, and Snape gulped as he felt a pressure on his shoulders. “Are you a thief?”

“No, I–”

“Excellent! Let’s trade, then. Show me what you have, and I’ll give you a petal.”

Snape clenched his teeth and seriously regretted coming here, even if it was for his godson. “I do not think I have anything on me that would be worthy of a trade. Perhaps if you allowed me to leave and–”

“No, I think not.” The Fae waved her hand at him, and as he felt something *alien* looking *through* him, he retreated fully behind his Occlumency Shields, adopting a completely blank face and killing all of his emotions. “My, you are such a grumpy one. Well, if you like being so grouchy, then by all means… **Here**.”

With another wave of her hand, a Fireblossom Petal was plucked from the Rose and floated in front of him. Snape was confused and felt irritated at the creature playing with him. “I thought you wanted a trade?”

“Oh, you silly boy, but we did finish the trade. You just haven’t realised it yet, although perhaps you might find out if you choose to lighten up a bit. Now, you bore me. **Leave.”**

Before he could retort, Severus Snape found himself outside the cave, petal in his palm, and its heat caused him to flinch.

“Blimey, yeh took yer time in there, didn't yeh?” He turned to find Hagrid stretching his arms as he stood from where he had clearly napped next to a rock. “Ready to leave? It’s already evening.”

Snape scowled and felt strangely irritable and annoyed. Had the imbecile slept through his guard duty? He shook his head in worry. What was that?

“Let’s leave. I’ll meet you tomorrow for our first lesson.” Severus turned on the spot, ignoring Hagrid’s shout of warning… only to feel like he slammed into a wall and bounced back on the ground. Standing up quickly and fuming in rage, his face contorted into an ugly sneer at Hagrid’s grinning face.

“Tried to warn yeh, I did. Apparition and Port Keys don't work too deep in the Forest. Even Dumbledore's phoenix struggles to come and go from these parts.”

Trying to control his rising irritation and feeling worried at his lack of control, Snape nodded and motioned for the half-giant to lead the way.

What the bloody hell had the Fae taken from him to make him so irritable and quick to anger?

Hopefully, it won't be permanent. He could hardly teach the large oaf if he felt like cursing him every minute. Snape shook his head at his thoughts. This was getting irritable. He longed to return home and pray to the shrine.

If only he could remember why he did that every night.

Harry's "Saving people thing" would not go away with Jon onboard. Especially when it does not cost him anything. Mafalda isn't some throwaway character either, but more of a long-term investment that would pay off in later years.

I just learned that Draco's birthday was on the 5th of June but it's too late for me to change this. Assume he was born on the 30th of June, for the sake of my sanity.

Ah, Snape. Despite my distaste of the character, and the firm belief he has a few shrines of Lily around, he is still a man of his word. Always stays true to his oaths, whether magical or not, and when his godson needs help, he would naturally provide it… reluctantly and grumbling a whole lot.

That it ended up with him promising to teach Hagrid magic (and we all know what kind of magic Snape knows) and getting duped by a Fae of all things is just the fun part. Speaking of Fae, this is my interpretation of the being, not specifically myth-accurate.

Snape might have been smart in not giving his name, but he still talked with the creature and was willing to trade. Keep guessing what she took from him.

If you would like to support me, or read five chapters ahead, feel free to join me on Patr(eo)n under the same penname.