

A Nundu for A Pet Chapter 17 (Can a man still be brave if he's afraid?)

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Harry's eyes burned with fury as he stared into the face on the back of Quirrell's head. With those glowing red eyes, he felt like his body was boiling, and Itisa could feel his anger. It took all his willpower not to launch himself at Voldemort right there and then. His fingers tightened around his wand, knuckles turning white from the force of his grip.

Voldemort's lipless mouth twisted into a sickening grin. "Harry Potter...you have changed." His voice was cold, slithering into the room like a serpent. "I must say, you have grown since the last time we met. Yet, you remain a child."

"I don't think I'm the one who is just a head on the back of a useless Professor!" Harry spat through gritted teeth. He could feel Itisa growling, a low growl building up in her throat. But he kept his focus on the dark wizard before him.

"Stay Behind." He ordered her; while he knew she could fight and was more powerful than him, this was *his* fight, and he wanted to fight him by himself and not put her in danger, especially if he risked her being found out by the others.

"I know so much about you, boy. About your precious little friends. About what you cherish... and what you fear."

"Like you know anything about me," Harry shot back. Despite who was in front of him, he refused to lose control of his emotions, he knew emotions played a very important part on magic. The corners of the room seemed to blur as his magic surged, responding to his heightened emotions.

"Ah, but I do," Voldemort replied smoothly. His gaze flicked to Itisa for a fraction of a second, then back to Harry. "I know more than you think. I remember your parents, after all. Such courage... such determination..."

"Don't you dare," Harry hissed, his heart pounding so violently he thought it might burst from his chest. His wand was quivering in his grasp, begging to be unleashed. The room grew colder.

"Oh, I dare," Voldemort purred, savoring each word like a fine wine. "I remember their screams. How they begged for mercy. Your father... he tried to be a hero. Pointless, really. He died on his knees, just as weak as the rest."

"SHUT UP!" Harry roared, his voice echoing like a thunderclap. The room shook from the force of his rage, and a gust of wind erupted from nowhere, swirling around him. Itisa let out a low, menacing hiss, her body tensing as her fur bristled. Harry didn't notice, his entire being focused on the monster taunting him.

Voldemort's eyes glinted with a sick pleasure. "And your mother... Ah, she died for nothing, Harry. All her love, all her sacrifice—wasted. She died screaming, Harry. Screaming for you. And what good did it do? Here you are, all alone, a child playing at war. You are weak, just as they were."

"You don't know anything about them," Harry growled, his voice carrying a dangerous edge. The tip of his wand crackled with magic sparks flying in all directions as his emotions surged through it. He could feel the magic inside him; the living nundu core inside the wand started pulsating like a heart, responding to Harry's magic.

Voldemort merely smiled, undeterred by the threat before him. "I know they died in vain," he continued, his voice as cold and cruel as the winter winds. "And so will you. You are nothing, Harry Potter. Nothing but a pathetic child playing with power far beyond your comprehension."

Harry raised his wand, the anger coursing through his veins like molten lava. He opened his mouth to shout a spell, but then... he noticed. Itisa was no longer small. She had grown to the size of a lioness, her muscles rippling beneath her fur as she crouched protectively at his side. Her eyes blazed with an eerie golden light. Her hiss turned into a deep, reverberating growl that shook the very air around them.

Voldemort's eyes flickered to Itisa, his expression darkening with a hint of surprise. "What is this?" he snarled, suddenly wary as the Nundu fixed her gaze on him. Harry felt a surge of satisfaction at the sudden crack in Voldemort's confidence.

"You were too busy gloating to notice, weren't you?" Harry said, his voice cold and steady now. "You may know some things, but you know nothing about me. You know nothing about what I'm capable of."

Voldemort's gaze darted between Harry and the now fully-grown Itisa. Harry could feel the Nundu's power radiating outward, mingling with his own magic.

"This ends here, Voldemort," Harry declared.

Voldemort's eyes narrowed dangerously. "We shall see, boy. We shall see." He raised Quirrell's wand, the red eyes glowing with a fierce hatred. But there was also a flicker of something else—hesitation, maybe even fear—as he glanced at Itisa once more.

Itisa stood before Harry, her eyes fixed on Voldemort. For an instant, there was only silence.

"Typical, once again, using another body to protect yourself." Voldemort smirked with a smile.

Voldemort's voice, chilling and otherworldly, echoed through the air as Quirrell's body stiffened. "You think you can stand against me, boy? A first-year with no real power?"

Harry's heartbeat quickened, but he didn't flinch. The fear was there, but he wouldn't allow himself to freeze in fear.

"I don't know what's worse," Harry muttered, his voice steady despite the terror he felt, "that you're too weak to even exist without leeching off Quirrell... or that you will lose to a first-year."

Quirrell's face twisted with fury, but it was Voldemort's sharp, inhuman scream that filled the room.

"You dare mock me?" Voldemort's voice was a low hiss, each word filled with venom. "I am Lord Voldemort! I have killed wizards far more powerful than you before they even drew breath! I will crush you where you stand!"

Harry didn't wait for Voldemort to attack. His instincts took over, and his wand moved in a precise, fluid motion as if it knew what spell he needed before he did.

"Expulso!" Harry shouted, sending a blast of pure force toward Voldemort.

But Voldemort was faster than Harry anticipated. With a flick of his wand, Quirrell's body shifted to the side, moving with unnatural speed as Voldemort controlled him like a puppet. Voldemort snarled, whipping his wand through the air.

"Protego!" A shimmering barrier sprang up between them, deflecting Harry's attack and sending the force crashing into the wall, shattering a set of old shelves and scattering broken pieces of wood and glass across the room.

"You'll have to do better than that, Potter," Voldemort sneered, his eyes gleaming with malice.

Harry didn't respond. His mind was racing, calculating his next move. He knew he couldn't match Voldemort's raw power. His fingers tightened around his wand, and he moved quickly, conjuring another spell.

"Stupefy!"

The stunning spell shot out from Harry's wand, but Voldemort effortlessly swatted it aside with a simple flick of his wrist. The red light ricocheted off the walls, narrowly missing Harry as it bounced around the room before dissipating into the air.

"You're wasting your time," Voldemort growled, his voice dripping with contempt. "You are nothing but a child."

Harry gritted his teeth, trying not to let the fear overtake him. His wand was already moving in another spell, his mind scrambling through the techniques he'd studied.

"Incarcerous!" Thick ropes shot out of Harry's wand, winding toward Voldemort.

But once again, Voldemort countered with ease. "Evanescio!" The ropes vanished mid-flight, disappearing into thin air as though they had never existed.

Before Harry could react, Voldemort struck back. "Crucio!"

The curse was fast, a beam of red light lashing out toward Harry, who barely managed to dive out of the way. He rolled across the floor, his heart pounding in his chest, his body trembling from the near miss. He knew what that curse was. He had read about the Cruciatus Curse. If it had hit him, the pain would have been unbearable.

"Stay still, Potter, and die like the pathetic fool you are," Voldemort sneered, Quirrell's face now twisted into a cruel, mocking smile.

Harry scrambled to his feet, his mind racing.

He needed to think. He couldn't just hurl spells at Voldemort and hope one landed. He needed to use the environment. He glanced around the classroom, his eyes darting to the desks, the shelves, the stone walls. There had to be something...

An idea sparked in his mind, and he acted on it without hesitation.

With a flick of his wand, he sent a blinding flash of light toward Voldemort, not to harm but to disorient.

"Lumos Maxima!"

The room exploded with light, temporarily blinding both Voldemort and Quirrell. Harry moved quickly, ducking behind a set of desks.

"Depulso!" He aimed at the heavy wooden desks, sending them flying toward Voldemort like a barrage of missiles.

Voldemort roared in frustration, raising a shield just in time to block the onslaught of desks, but the force of the impact sent him stumbling backward, his control over Quirrell's body faltering for a split second. Harry saw his opportunity.

"Expelliarmus!" Harry shouted, aiming directly at Voldemort's wand.

Voldemort easily dodged the spell and immediately lashed out with another spell.

"Serpensortia!"

A massive black serpent erupted from the tip of Voldemort's wand, hissing and coiling toward Harry. Its fangs gleamed in the dim light as it slithered across the floor, venom dripping from its jaws.

"Wingardium Leviosa!" Harry shouted, lifting one of the broken desks into the air and hurling it toward the serpent.

The desk slammed into the snake, but it barely slowed the creature down. Its body coiled tighter, and it lunged toward Harry, its jaws snapping inches from his face.

With no other choice, Harry twisted his wand in a desperate motion. "Confringo!"

The Blasting Curse struck the floor between him and the snake, sending up a shower of debris and dust. The explosion was enough to send the serpent reeling back, momentarily dazed, and then Itisa lunged at the snake, easily tearing him in pieces, but she did not attack Voldemort.

A jet of green light shot from Voldemort's wand—Avada Kedavra.

Harry's instincts kicked in, and he threw himself to the side just as the Killing Curse whizzed past him, striking the wall with a deafening crash. The curse left a scorch mark on the stone.

Voldemort's fury was palpable now. His breathing was ragged, and his eyes blazed with hatred. "You cannot win, Potter! You are a fool, just like your parents. And like them, you will die screaming."

Harry knew he couldn't keep dodging forever. He had to think of something, and fast. His mind raced, searching for a way to turn the tide. Then, he remembered something—a spell he had read about in one of Tonks's books.

With a deep breath, Harry steadied his wand and focused his magic. "Obscuro!"

A thick, inky darkness suddenly enveloped the room, blinding both Harry and Voldemort. It wasn't a perfect solution, but it gave Harry the advantage. He knew the layout of the classroom, the placement of the desks and the doors. Voldemort, on the other hand, would have to rely on his other senses.

Harry moved quickly, silently, using the cover of darkness to reposition himself. He could hear Voldemort's frustrated growls as the Dark Lord tried to navigate the room.

"Is this your plan, Potter?" Voldemort snarled. "Hiding in the shadows? It will not save you. I will find you."

Harry didn't respond. He was already in position, his wand aimed carefully at where he knew Voldemort stood. His heart pounded in his chest, and his hand trembled slightly, but he forced himself to focus. This had to work.

With one final, precise movement, Harry cast his spell. "Petrificus Totalus!"

The Full Body-Bind Curse shot through the darkness, but it hit a desk instead of Voldemort, and the darkness around them disappeared when he cast a light spell, turning the class back to normal.

Harry took a deep breath, his mind racing. He needed something big.

"Accio desks!"

All the desks in the room lifted into the air at once, hovering above Voldemort's head. Harry sent them crashing down with a move of his wand, but Voldemort used a spell, causing all the desks to explode in small pieces, flying in the air.

Voldemort moved like a serpent, his wand carving intricate arcs through the air. "Crucio!" he bellowed. A jet of red light erupted from his wand, streaking toward Harry with speed.

Harry barely had time to react. His heart was pounding, and he dove to the side, narrowly avoiding the curse. The spell missed him by inches. He could feel the residual heat against his skin.

But Voldemort wasn't finished. "Imperio!" he commanded. The curse shot toward Harry, twisting and snaking through the air like an invisible tendril, seeking to wrap itself around his mind.

Harry's mind went blank for a heartbeat as the spell neared, and a creeping, cold feeling tried to invade his thoughts. Then, a voice echoed in his head like a bell; it was Loretta speaking to him.

"YOU ARE NOT WELCOMED HERE. OUT!!"

A brilliant flare of light erupted around Harry, breaking the curse's hold before it could take root. Voldemort's eyes widened briefly in astonishment. "You... resisted?" he hissed, his voice laced with disbelief.

Harry raised his wand, his face set in a fierce expression. "You are weaker than I expected!" he shouted, sending a barrage of spells back at Voldemort. "*Confringo! Stupefy! Depulso!*"

The room exploded with light as his spells flew toward Voldemort. The dark wizard deflected them, his wand moving in a blur as a shield of dark energy absorbed the impacts. "Impressive, Potter, but you cannot withstand me forever," Voldemort taunted, his voice smooth and deadly. "Let's see you survive this!"

Voldemort thrust his wand forward, his eyes blazing. "Avada Kedavra!" The curse sped toward Harry.

At that moment, time seemed too slow for Harry. The tip of his wand began to glow with a faint blue light, as did the Nundu core, pulsating, and then it spread, enveloping the entire wand in a shimmering azure aura. Everything around him moved at a snail's pace, the green beam of the killing curse crawling toward him as if struggling through water. Harry felt a strange calm wash over him.

Move! Now! a voice screamed inside his head. Instinctively, he threw himself sideways, feeling the air vibrate as the killing curse whooshed past him. He hit the ground and rolled, his heart pounding in his ears. Time snapped back to normal, the world speeding up in an instant as the curse struck the wall behind him.

Lifting his wand high, he summoned every ounce of his magic. "*Inflammo Caeruleum!*" he cried, his voice ringing with authority.

A surge of blue flames burst forth from his wand, roaring through the air like a living torrent. They struck Voldemort head-on, engulfing him in a vortex of sapphire fire. The flames twisted and writhed, filling the room with a blinding light as they lashed out.

For a moment, Harry dared hope it was over, that he had finally won. But then, a powerful gust of magic violently blew away the flames, dissipating into the air like wisps of smoke. Voldemort emerged from the inferno, his face twisted in fury, his eyes glowing with an unholy light.

"FOOL!" he roared, his voice echoing off the walls. "You think you can best me with fire? Then let me show you true flames!" Raising his wand high. "*Fiendfyre!*"

A monstrous roar filled the room as a torrent of cursed fire exploded from Voldemort's wand. It surged forth, twisting and writhing, forming into the shapes of serpents, lions, and dragons made entirely of fire. The blazing inferno roared toward Harry, devouring everything in its path.

Harry's eyes widened in horror. *Fiendfyre*. The one fire that couldn't be extinguished by ordinary magic. It consumed everything, leaving nothing but ashes in its wake. He stepped back, his heart hammering in his chest. *There's no way to stop it...*

Just as the flames threatened to swallow him whole, Itisa leaped in front of him, her body expanding as she stood her ground against the oncoming firestorm. She opened her jaws wide and, to Harry's amazement, began to draw in the flames, sucking them into her maw as if inhaling a fierce wind.

The Fiendfyre writhed and fought against her pull, but Itisa persisted, her body glowing with intense heat as she absorbed the cursed fire. The room dimmed as the blazing light of the fire vanished into her. Voldemort watched, his expression shifting from triumph to shock and then to anger. "Impossible! What is she?!" he screamed, his voice cracking with fury.

Itisa's eyes glowed a brilliant gold as she finished absorbing the last of the fire. She stood there. Then, with a deep, guttural growl, she unleashed the spell back at Voldemort. A torrent of blazing fire erupted from her mouth, hotter and fiercer than before.

Voldemort barely had time to react. He raised his wand, conjuring a barrier of dark magic, but it was too late. The fiery blast collided with him, shattering his shield like glass. He was engulfed in the flames, his screams echoing through the chamber as the fire consumed him.

Harry watched in shock and awe as the bright red flames swirled around Voldemort, wrapping him. Quirrell's body writhed within the inferno, his skin blistering and burning under the relentless assault. His hands flailed as he tried to protect himself.

For a moment, it seemed as if the entire room was ablaze. The light was blinding, the heat intense. And then, just as suddenly as it had come, the flames dissipated, leaving behind a

smoldering, charred figure. Quirrell's body crumpled to the ground, his clothes scorched, his skin blackened and cracked from the heat.

Voldemort's face twisted with agony and hatred as he glared at Harry one last time. "This... is not over, Potter," he gasped.

Harry held his wand steady, eyes locked on Voldemort. His breath came in short, sharp gasps, his heart racing from the battle he had. It wasn't over yet; he knew that much. Voldemort was still clinging to life, and how was he still alive? Wasn't he supposed to be dead? He wondered if Dumbledore could answer that question.

But then, something unexpected began to happen.

Itisa suddenly tensed. Harry glanced at her, his heart skipping a beat as he saw her eyes. They were no longer golden. Instead, they glittered an ethereal blue, like stars burning in the night sky. A strange, almost divine light emanated from them.

Harry watched in stunned silence as Itisa's body began to transform. Her fur, usually a deep dark and red, turned stark white. Then, with a sound like the crack of thunder, a pair of majestic wings burst from her back, spreading wide. They were enormous, angelic, and covered in feathers so white they glowed.

The ground started shaking, and everyone inside could feel the floor shake under their feet, yet the castle stood strong and still. The paintings around the castle started screaming, fearing the castle would crumble to dust. Dust and debris fell from the ceiling as the ancient stones groaned, shifting like some ancient magic had awakened.

"Itisa..." he breathed, barely able to process what he was witnessing. She turned her head towards him. An overwhelming power engulfed him; his entire body felt like it was burning from an invisible flame that did not harm him.

Voldemort stirred, his gaze snapping to Itisa. For the first time, Harry saw something on Voldemort's face that he had never seen before fear. The dark wizard's eyes widened, his burned lips parting in a silent gasp of terror as he saw Itisa's transformation.

"What... what are you?!" Voldemort rasped, his voice choked with a mix of awe and horror. He attempted to raise his wand, his movements sluggish and filled with pain. But before he could utter a spell, Itisa moved.

Itisa lunged forward. Her wings unfurled, blowing out the smoke. Her teeth glinted like silver blades as she closed the distance between herself and Voldemort.

Voldemort lifted his wand, but it was too late. Itisa's jaws closed around his neck, her teeth sinking deep into his flesh. A blinding blue light erupted from the point of contact, flooding the room like water.

Voldemort let out a hollow, gut-wrenching scream, his body arching upward in agony. The scream echoed like thousands of people screaming in pain at the same time.

Harry stared, unable to move, unable to look away. The place where Itisa's teeth had sunk into Voldemort's neck was glowing an intense, pure blue. It wasn't just light; it was as if stars had been ignited within Voldemort's flesh, burning through him. His skin crackled and hissed, the blue glow spreading outward like cracks in a porcelain vase.

Quirrell's body, which had housed Voldemort, began to convulse violently. The blue light spread, crawling up his neck and his face, illuminating his eyes from within. Voldemort's scream became a wail of despair. Itisa growled, her teeth clamping down harder, and the blue light intensified.

Then, with a final, desperate shriek, Voldemort's soul was torn from Quirrell's body. It emerged as a shadowy, twisted form, its edges flickering like black flames. Harry saw its eyes—red, burning, filled with an unfathomable rage and fear. The soul writhed and twisted.

Voldemort's soul hesitated, hovering in the air, then fled with a final wail. It shot upward, passing through the ceiling and out into the sky like a wisp of dark smoke caught in a gale. Itisa snarled after it, her teeth still glistening with that unearthly blue light, but she did not pursue.

Harry watched in stunned silence as the room began to quiet. The blue glow faded from Itisa's fur, and her wings slowly retracted back into her body. She turned to Harry, her eyes still blue but soon returning to their familiar golden eyes. Her fur returned to reddish.

"Itisa..." Harry whispered, his voice trembling. She padded over to him, and when she reached his side, she nuzzled against his arm, her purr resonating deep within his chest. Harry hugged her close, his face buried in her fur, as she licked his cheek.

"Thank you, Itisa. I'd be lost without you," Harry said softly, his voice filled with warmth. He petted her head gently before standing up. Slowly, Itisa began to shrink, her form diminishing until she was once again the size of a cat.

He glanced down at Quirrell's lifeless body, now a hollow shell. The spot where Itisa had bitten him still glowed faintly blue, but the light was fading fast, leaving only charred, dead flesh.

Suddenly, a wave of dizziness hit Harry. His vision blurred, and before he could call out her name, the ground rushed up to meet him...

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Harry stirred. He opened his eyes to find himself once again standing in the vast, golden field, the same dream world he had visited before. The warm, golden petals of the flowers beneath him shimmered in the soft light.

He blinked, trying to clear his mind, but the sight before him stole his breath.

There she was, Loretta Emrys, standing in the distance, her back turned to him as her long, ethereal white dress swayed gently in the breeze. Her silver, cascading hair gleamed in the sunlight, and even from afar, Harry could feel the warmth of her presence.

As if sensing his presence, she turned slowly, her gaze locking onto Harry's. A soft, radiant smile graced her lips, and her eyes sparkled like stars.

"Harry," she said softly, her voice like a sweet melody on the wind.

Without a word, Harry walked toward her.

When he reached her, Loretta gestured for him to sit beside her on the grass, patting the spot gently.

Harry sat down beside her, his heart still racing. He tried to settle himself, his mind buzzing with emotions he couldn't quite understand.

Loretta turned to face him, her gaze searching his. "Something weighs on thee heart, young wizard," she said softly, tilting her head slightly. Her eyes sparkled with curiosity, but there was a kindness in them, as if she already knew what he was feeling but wanted to hear it from him.

Harry quickly shook his head, forcing a smile. "No, I'm fine. Really." The words sounded hollow even to him, but he didn't know how to explain what he was feeling.

Loretta's soft, musical giggle broke through his thoughts, and Harry's face flushed with embarrassment. It was as though she could see right through him.

"You would not be here if nothing were troubling you," she said gently, brushing a strand of hair away from her face. "You come here only when you need something, Harry, and there's nothing wrong with needing help. I'm here to help you, if I don't help the one wizard who is like me, then who am I going to help." Her eyes glinted playfully as she leaned in slightly. "Now, shall we try again? What is truly bothering you?"

Harry opened his mouth to argue, but the words stuck in his throat. He remembered his encounter with Voldemort. For a moment, he wasn't sure if he wanted to speak them aloud. But Loretta's presence was calming and inviting, as if she were offering a safe space where he could be vulnerable.

He sighed deeply, running a hand through his messy black hair. "I... I guess I've been thinking about what happened with Voldemort," he admitted, his voice barely above a whisper. The memory of that confrontation still haunted him—the blinding green of the Killing Curse. "If it wasn't for Itisa... he would have killed me."

Loretta's smile faded slightly, her expression growing serious as she listened. Her gaze never wavered from Harry's, and she seemed to be absorbing every word he said with quiet understanding.

"I don't know if I can protect her," Harry continued, his hands tightening into fists in the grass. "Itisa... she saved my life, but what if I can't save hers? What if next time, Voldemort—or someone like him—comes for her, and I'm not strong enough to stop them? What if I'm not strong enough at all?"

Loretta watched him quietly for a moment, letting the silence settle between them. Then she reached out, placing a gentle hand on his shoulder. The warmth from her touch spread through Harry, easing the tension in his muscles.

"You're afraid," she said, her voice soft and soothing. "Afraid of failing, of losing those you care about. That fear is natural, Harry. It shows that you have something worth protecting."

Harry glanced at her, his brow furrowing. "But what if it's not enough? What if no matter how hard I try, I'm still not strong enough?"

Loretta's hand slipped from his shoulder as she sat back slightly, her eyes thoughtful. "Strength isn't always measured by power or skill, young wizard," she said softly. "It is measured by your willingness to stand, even when the odds are against you. Itisa chose you, and in doing so, she saw something within you that you may not yet see in yourself."

Harry looked away, staring down at the golden petals beneath him. "But what if I fail her?" His voice was barely a whisper now, thick with the fear that had plagued him since the moment Voldemort had appeared. "What if I can't protect her?"

Loretta's expression softened, and she leaned closer to him, her presence comforting and steady. "You have nothing to fear, Harry. Do you know why?"

Harry looked up at her, waiting for her to explain.

"Because you fought someone stronger than you, Harry. Despite knowing that, you still fought against him, and even if Itisa wasn't there, you would have been able to come out victorious." Loretta said with a calming voice; she grabbed his wand and pulled it out, and only then did Harry notice the nundu core inside the wand pulsating like a heart as if it were alive. But then he remembered something: when Tonks had grabbed the wand from his hand; he remembered her getting tired very fast and looking exhausted despite holding it for a few seconds.

"How are you holding it? Why aren't you getting tired?" Harry asked, and Loretta smiled before revealing her own wand to him. It was similar to his, with its own Nundu core.

"Only you and me can use a wand with a living Nundu core, Harry. This wand is not like the others, Harry. Tell me, did something strange happen during the fight?" Loretta asked with a knowing smile, and Harry's eyes widened, remembering when time slowed down for him for a few seconds when Voldemort used the killing curse on him.

"The time slowed down." Harry mumbled under his breath,

"Exactly, but that's not something you can use anytime you want, Harry. Be careful with how you use this wand, there's a reason why a living Nundu core is extremely powerful. But this wand can help you to get stronger, and protect Itisa from the world."

"I don't know if I'm ready," he admitted quietly, his voice barely above a whisper. "But I know that I will do whatever I can to protect Itisa. I will never abandon her."

Loretta's soft and gentle smile returned. "You are ready, Harry," she said, her voice filled with quiet confidence. "You have been ready since the moment you chose to stand up and fight. Choosing to fight does not mean you are without fear or doubt—it means you face those fears and still choose to act."

Harry took a deep breath, her words sinking in. He hadn't thought of it that way. It wasn't about being unafraid or completely confident in his abilities. It was about choosing to act, despite the fear.

"Itisa believes in you," Loretta continued, her gaze unwavering. "She trusts you to keep her safe, and that trust is a powerful thing. She is not just your companion—she is your partner. Together, the two of you are far stronger than you realize."

Harry glanced up at her, and a small smile tugged at his lips. He thought of Itisa, the bond they shared, the way she had risked everything to protect him during that fight with Voldemort. She had believed in him, even when he doubted himself.

"Thank you," he said softly, meeting her gaze. "For everything."

There was silence for a long minute. Then, without warning, Loretta leaned down and pressed her lips to his cheek, her breath warm against his skin. The soft, lingering kiss lit his face on fire, red creeping from his neck to his ears in an instant. Embarrassment churned inside him. He liked the feel of her lips, full and soft, leaving a tingling imprint that stayed long after she pulled away. Then he remembered something else about Itisa.

"Loretta," he started, "before I go, I need to know... What exactly did Itisa do to Voldemort when she bit him?" The image of Itisa sinking her teeth into Voldemort's neck, the blinding blue light, and the terrifying scream that had followed—it all played in his mind.

Loretta's expression softened, but there was a shadow of seriousness in her eyes now. She didn't immediately smile, which told Harry that her answer wasn't something simple.

"What Itisa did..." she began, "was something few beings in this world can do. Nundus, as you know, are among the most dangerous creatures in existence. Their bite, their breath, can be lethal. But it's not just their physical strength—it's their magical essence."

Harry nodded slowly, his eyes narrowing with curiosity.

"When Itisa bit Voldemort," Loretta continued, "her venom—more precisely, the poison that flows through the magic of every Nundu—entered him. But what makes it unique is that it does not merely poison the body. It poisons the magic itself."

Harry's heart skipped a beat. "His magic?"

"Yes," Loretta confirmed. "Voldemort's magical core—is now tainted. It's like a slow poison that weakens him from within. He is suffering greatly, though you cannot see it. His spells will falter, his power will be diminished. It will take time, but the poison will wear him down."

Harry's lips curled into a slight smile at the thought. "Good," he muttered with a dark smile, the satisfaction evident in his voice. He could picture Voldemort writhing in agony, his dark magic turned against him. For the first time since their encounter, Harry felt good, he wished he was there to see him scream in pain. He deserved that and more, to scream and scream in agony, him and everyone who followed him. They all deserved to suffer like him.

But then, Loretta's gaze grew even more serious. "But, Harry, you must understand... Voldemort is still alive."

Harry's satisfaction quickly faded. "What? But—how? After everything, how is he still...?"

Loretta sighed softly, folding her hands in her lap. "Something is keeping him from truly dying. He has found a way to anchor his soul into the living world, despite his physical body being gone, his soul is not truly dead, so he can still come back Harry."

"What is keeping him from dying? Is there any way to destroy what is keeping him alive?" Harry questioned with a sense of heat in his words.

Loretta looked straight at Harry before answering. "...I don't know," she said.

Harry didn't know why, but he felt like she was lying to him. He couldn't understand why; she was always sincere and helpful to him. He quickly shrugged that thought away, unlike Dumbledore. He knew he could trust Loretta.

"However," Loretta added, sensing Harry's distress, "while he is still alive, the poison is working its way through his magic. It weakens him more each day. That poison has made it so that he cannot regain his full strength, at least not for a long time. He may try to fight back, but his power will never be the same."

Harry exhaled slowly, his mind trying to wrap around the complexity of what Loretta was saying. Knowing that Voldemort was still out there, wounded but not defeated, gave him a sense of unfinished business. But there was also relief. Voldemort wasn't as invulnerable as he had feared.

"So... Itisa's bite," Harry began, his voice steadier now, "it did more than just hurt him. It's like... it's eating away at his magic."

Loretta nodded. "Exactly. But I'm afraid it's only a matter of time before he finds out that Itisa is a Nundu, and trust me. He will try to use that information against you."

Harry had already concluded that much, despite not liking it, he knew sooner or later, the world would find out about Itisa. Whatever it was from Voldemort or someone else.

He glanced at Loretta, curiosity sparking in his eyes. "Loretta... why didn't you tell me that Nundus could grow wings?"

To his surprise, Loretta's expression shifted to one of deep contemplation, and for the first time since their meeting, there was a hint of uncertainty in her eyes. She shook her head gently, her voice soft as she spoke.

"Because, Harry," she said slowly, "Nundus can't grow wings. At least, they never have before."

Harry blinked, his mouth falling open slightly. "Wait, what? But I saw her—she had wings, and she used them to fight. She—"

Loretta raised her hand gently to stop him. "I believe you, Harry. What you witnessed was real. Itisa grew wings before your very eyes, but you must understand—she is the first Nundu in history to do so. No Nundu has ever been capable of growing wings before her."

Harry stared at her, dumbfounded. "But... how is that possible?"

Loretta's eyes sparkled with intrigue. "That, Harry, is a mystery even to me. Itisa is unlike any Nundu I have ever known or read about. Something within her, perhaps her bond with you, has allowed her to unlock a power that no Nundu has ever had. Her wings are—an evolution."

Harry was speechless. The idea that Itisa was the first of her kind to develop wings, to break the boundaries of what had always been known about Nundus, left him reeling. He had always known that Itisa was special, but this was something far beyond what he had ever imagined.

"So... Itisa is unique," Harry whispered, more to himself than to Loretta. "She's the only Nundu with wings..."

"Yes," Loretta confirmed, her voice filled with wonder. "And that makes her even more dangerous to those who would seek to harm you. Voldemort will not forget what she did to him."

Harry felt a surge of pride swell within him. He looked down at the golden petals beneath him, his mind racing. Itisa was not only his protector but something far more significant—something ancient, powerful, and unique in a way no one had expected.

"But why wings?" Harry asked, his mind buzzing with possibilities. "What do they mean?"

"Wings often represent freedom, Harry. Itisa's wings may be a sign that she is breaking free from the limitations of her species, evolving into something new. Something even I cannot fully comprehend."

Loretta turned her gaze back to him, her expression warm but serious. "Remember that people will come after her."

"But why? Itisa will never harm anyone. I'm sure they will be able to see that she is harmless unless she is threatened." Harry asked with a hint of desperation.

"Harry, you are smart but still young to understand how this world works. To many, many people, it won't matter if Itisa is harmless; she is too powerful. It's as simple as that. You having her means you are powerful; whether you will use her as a weapon or not, it doesn't matter to them, and to many others. Having a Nundu that will do anything for you grants you enough power to be dangerous enough to a country. People, especially people in power, don't like having someone look down on them. Their pride will not allow someone to have a Nundu as a weapon. They will try to use every excuse possible to get hold of her, for her power, blood, core, and many things, and if you refuse. They will attack back and try to paint your Nundu as a threat, and you as a threat. People fear the unknown, and Nundus are known as dangerous and threatening to even their own cubs. Before you know it, people will believe that you are planning to conquer them, and when that happens..." Harry could see the struggle in her, her eyes filled with such rage in them as if remembering something she would rather forget.

Loretta took a deep breath, and looked back at Harry. "You understand what I mean. Now, it's time for you to leave. You will be questioned, and I hope you can come up with convincing answers."

Before Harry could ask her what she means, she kisses his forehead, and everything turns bright yellow.

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Harry woke up with a groan, the dull throb in his head pulsating with each beat of his heart. His entire body felt heavier than ever before, as if he had been drained of every ounce of energy. The familiar sterile scent of potions and herbs tickled his nose, and it didn't take him long to recognize the surroundings—the Hospital Wing.

He shifted slightly, wincing as a sharp ache flared through his limbs. Everything hurt. His head spun, his muscles screamed, and the exhaustion weighed down on him like a crushing blanket. But despite the overwhelming fatigue, the memories rushed back to him in a flood—Voldemort, the battle, Itisa.

Itisa.

Harry's heart raced, and he forced himself to sit up, the action causing his head to spin dangerously. "Itisa," he croaked, his voice hoarse and strained. He tried to swing his legs over the side of the bed, his limbs trembling with the effort.

But before he could stand, a voice—calm, firm, and unfamiliar—cut through the air.

"Mister Potter."

Harry froze. That voice wasn't Madam Pomfrey, nor was it anyone he had expected to hear. Slowly, he turned his head toward the source of the voice and saw two figures sitting beside his bed, their gazes fixed on him.

One was a tall woman with long, bright crimson hair, sharp eyes behind her square glasses, and a stern expression; her face reminded him of Susan, an older one.

The other figure was even more intimidating—a grizzled man with a heavily scarred face, one magical eye swirling in its socket, and the other eye narrowed with suspicion. The woman was Amelia Bones, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, and the man beside her was unmistakable—Alastor "Mad-Eye" Moody.

Both were sitting at his bedside, their gazes narrowing as they observed him carefully. Harry's heart skipped a beat. This was not a casual visit.

"Mister Potter, we need you to answer some questions,"

Loretta Emrys



