

CHAPTER 21

HALLOWEEN UN-EXPECTATIONS

The students of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry were all abuzz late Sunday afternoon of October with the word of a Grand School Ball being planned for them. Professor McGonagall, the school's headmistress, had arranged for the glorious event to unfold inside the castle on Halloween night in honor of the late Headmaster Dumbledore's favorite holiday. The students' excitement intensified when they learned that the members of the musical group, The Weird Sisters, had been commissioned to provide the entertainment for the evening's magnificent event.

By the close of the day, virtually all of the students had secured their dates for the affair and had taken to sending off owls to their parents requesting new dress robes and dresses to don for the celebratory occasion. Everyone appeared fully charged and ready for the event, all with the exception of Harry. He sat alone and miserable at a desk in the far corner of the Gryffindor common room, slumped over a lukewarm mug of butterbeer and a pile of endless class assignments. Ever since his visits to Grimmauld and his contact with Hannah had been ruthlessly revoked, he had spent the past fortnight sulking and skipping out on quality time with his friends, wanting nothing more than to concentrate on wallowing in his piteous and burning desire to be near her.

Given that Remus was at his side day and night and had confiscated his enchanted two-way mirrors, Harry had to rely solely on owls if he intended to communicate with her. This was proving more maddening than ever, as Remus had intercepted and confiscated over a dozen of his messages. By a sheer stroke of luck, Harry had managed to sneak a few of the owls through the post, including one he had sent earlier that morning requesting Hannah's companionship for the ball. Unfortunately, he received no replies from Hannah. Surely, he thought, Remus had seized and destroyed her correspondence.

After much contemplation, Harry resolved that if he didn't hear from Hannah soon, he would likely risk the journey to Grimmauld Place to see her. He would travel by means of the enchanted corridor inside of his walk-in wardrobe, which Hannah had secretly connected to her walk-in wardrobe inside of the secret room for them to use in the event of an emergency. Though only he and Hannah were privy to its' existence, the problem with him utilizing its magic was ensuring that no one, aside from Hannah, would be waiting on the other side of the entrance when he emerged through it. Since there was no confidential means of contacting her to coordinate such a perfect meeting, the risk of him being caught was great. He would never be able to forgive himself if he managed to bring her more trouble than he already had by trotting off at random without permission.

When he reached into his pocket to check the time on his watch, he noted it was nearing suppertime. Ron and Hermione were due back from their visit to Hogsmeade at any moment. This was the same excursion which he had turned down, yet again, to be alone

with his miserable moping self. As he gathered his belongings and began to pile them into his knapsack, Hermione came plowing through the portrait hole looking rapturous.

“Harry! Harry! Did you hear?” she exclaimed, bounding across the Gryffindor common room to reach the corner where he sat. “The Weird Sisters are going to perform at the ball!”

“Yeah, Seamus mentioned it to me earlier. That’s all anyone’s been going on about,” said Harry glumly, returning to stowing away his belongings.

“Oh honestly, Harry; lighten up, would you? Forget about Hannah! This is a once in a lifetime opportunity! Go ahead and ask Ginny to the dance. She’s waiting for you to ask her. She’s refused every boy who’s invited her so far.”

“I don’t want to ask Ginny, Hermione,” he murmured irritably, removing his quill from the inkbottle and tapping it impatiently on the lip of the container to drain it.

Hermione pulled up a chair beside him and pushed gently, “Harry, you have to stop this silly fantasy of yours. Hannah was your *guard*, not your girlfriend. She has promised herself to someone else. You must accept it and move on.”

“I’ll accept it when I’m sure she truly doesn’t want to be with me, Hermione. I know there’s something deeper between us. You’ve said so yourself that everyone thinks she’s falling for me!” he retorted.

“Yes, but I also said that she is still very much in love with that man she’s seeing, a man she’s been seeing for years! I don’t believe she’s about to go dumping him over some frivolous attraction she has to you. Why must you torture yourself like this, Harry? Pining after someone you’re obviously not meant to have is not going to get you what you want. Come on, then; how about giving Ginny another chance? She still really cares for you and I know you still care for her. I know if you just ask her she’ll— ”

“Hermione — *enough!* Now, I’ve sent Hannah an owl this morning and I’ve asked her to go to the ball with me! I’m merely waiting for her reply!” spouted Harry angrily.

Hermione backed away for a moment, eyeing him intently. Then, leaning into him and cuffing her hand around his forearm empathetically, she said, “Harry...Hannah is going to the ball with Fred and George.”

Harry’s face flamed a fiery red and twisted with tremendous upset. It was as though Hermione had just ripped his heart out and slopped it on the table before him.

“Fred and George? You’re sure?” he inquired.

“Yes,” said Hermione, with swift certainty. “Remus told me. They’re to assist in chaperoning the event. McGonagall’s insisted on having members from the Order present

to keep watch over everyone. Remus, Shackbolt, Tonks, and Mad-Eye will be there, as well.

“God! Could Hannah be any more arrogant! She’s to have TWO dates for ONE event?!” he snarled. “You know what? You’re right, Hermione. It’s time for me to move on! I’m going to ask Ginny to the Ball!”

“That’s the spirit, Harry!” said Hermione, patting him proudly on his shoulder.

With that, Harry shoveled the last of his school supplies into his knap sack, tore out of the common room, and hurried up the steps to his dormitory.

The next few days rushed by like a massive blur and before Harry realized, it was October 31st. He now sat fixed begrudgingly between Hermione and Ron in the Gryffindor common room flipping impatiently through a pile of his Quidditch manuals to pass the time away until the inception of the Ball. The prestigious affair was set to commence in a few short hours with an elaborate seven-course meal, followed by an evening of lively musical entertainment and dancing until midnight. Just as Harry had said he would, he scored Ginny as his date for the affair. He never did receive a response to the owl invitations he had sent Hannah.

The last occasion Harry had had the privilege of so much as catching a glimpse of Hannah was a few days earlier, when he spotted her pulling guard duty in the castle. Reminiscent of his previous encounters with her over the past few weeks, each time she met his gaze and then spotted Remus beside him, she would hurry off in the opposite direction, ignoring Harry entirely as he cried out desperately for her attention. After a multitude of these repeat performances of frenzied emotional outbursts, he learned that Hannah had been reassigned to guard duty in Knockturn Alley and was spending her spare time between Grimmauld Place and Fred and George’s joke shop. Each day that Harry was forced to spend apart from her grew increasingly painful for him. He wondered how much more his heart could possibly ache.

Startling his attentions to the present was an energized Dean Thomas, who had blasted through the portrait hole of the common room, calling out, “Hey, you lot! Come quickly to the Great Hall! Seamus has just told us that the Weird Sisters are here and they’re warming up! And Harry, Neville said Hannah’s in there jamming with them. COME ON!”

“Harry, you never told us Hannah was a musician,” said Ron in slight surprise, jumping to his feet and scrambling for the portrait hole after Dean.

“I-I didn’t know,” said Harry, looking as though the wind had been knocked out of him.

He immediately took to his feet and pushed past Ron and Hermione to reach the corridor ahead of everyone else. Luckily, for him, Remus had taken a short reprieve from guarding Gryffindor tower, leaving Harry free to sneak about the castle at will. With the knowledge that he was only meters and moments from seeing Hannah again, his pace swiftly progressed from a quick walk, to a brisk jog, to a sprint while he cursed at his legs in his mind for not moving fast enough to get him there. *How he wished he could Apparate inside the castle.*

Hermione, panting wildly, stepped up her pace to meet his side and huffed out, “Harry, perhaps you ought not to go. Remus instructed you to wait for him in the common room. You’re not supposed to leave until he returns to fetch you for the Ball.”

Harry ignored Hermione and kept running. She and Ron were left lagging several feet behind him gasping for breath as they struggled to catch his speed.

When they arrived in the Great Hall, they were greeted by at least four dozen other students. The crowd of his peers stood scattered amongst at least fifty large, rounded tables, which had been smothered in sheer satin sashes of black fabric and lavishly set with deep violet china. There was a soft, but sensational glow emanating from the muted pumpkin-hued jack-o-lantern centerpieces and the hundreds of white floating candles that were poised in the air throughout the space. The flagstone-inlaid floors lay beneath a generous sprinkling of orange, black, and purple sparkling confetti, while the cathedral ceilings had been bewitched to resemble the midnight sky, freckled with thousands of brilliant gleaming stars. Harry was electrified by his surroundings. He instantly recognized these festive furnishings to be the fine workings of Hannah’s extraordinary magic.

Working his gaze about the rest of the space, he spotted Fred and George sitting in the front corner of the room, tipped back in their chairs, tapping along to the beat of the music, and chatting away animatedly with one another. They were dapperly dressed in their finest wizarding robes and appeared to be having the time of their lives. Harry’s eyes followed the direction to where their attentions were drawn. In place of the staff table, which was usually positioned against the front of the hall, the area now housed a large, elaborately lit black and purple-swirled stage, whereupon the Weird Sisters had gathered to play their instruments. Planted in the center of the music group and tending to a shiny black baby grand piano, just as Dean had mentioned earlier, was Hannah.

Harry watched her fingers as they danced skillfully up and down the eighty-eight ivory fashioned keys of the finely tuned instrument creating the most delectable, tinkling reverberations. When his eyes moved to survey the rest of her, he felt as though he couldn’t breathe at the sight of her magnificence. She appeared incredibly becoming in her long, black, strapless swing gown, which featured a plunging heart-shaped neckline and a bushy multi-layered skirt. Her hair had been swept up into an intricate basket weave pattern and pinned about the back of her head by virtue of an array of tiny sparkling rhinestone clips. Harry watched her kick off a pair of black spike-heeled shoes and scoot them aside to better work the pedals on the base of the piano with her bare feet.

The members of the band didn't appear to be playing any song in particular. The bass player stood off to the far left of the group fumbling with the tuning of his bass strings, while the other musicians edged along to a soupy grunge-rock composition, sounding impressive all the same.

Minutes later, Harry heard the voice of the lead guitarist, Kirley Duke, calling out into his microphone, "Hey, Hannah banana! How 'bout you play us one of your songs?!"

Hannah banana? Harry thought. *That's a strange nickname.*

"Nah!" replied Hannah bashfully, waving him off with one hand, while she plucked away at the piano with the other.

"Aw, come on!" shouted Kirley in protest. "You mean to tell us that we finally got a chance to jam together again, and you won't even give us a little taste of what you've been working on since we've seen you last?"

"Yeah, come on, then! We've agreed to this gig for you! It's the least you can do!" echoed the short, starkly looking weird sister, by the name of Orsino Thruston, sitting behind the drum set and tapping lightly on the symbols in anticipation of Hannah's reply.

"Oh, Alright," said Hannah. "I'll give you one song and then I've got to go. I promised McGonagall I would help her go over the seating chart. Okay, I've actually just finished this one. It's called *Till I Reason All My Love of You*. It's a ballad, in A minor. It's a simple 1 4 5 1 progression to start, but then it changes up pretty quick. So, just watch me and I'll nod to you for the changes."

The crowd of students looked around eagerly to one another, falling completely silent as the Weird Sisters ceased the playing of their instruments to allow Hannah to introduce her song.

Slowly, she plucked out a hauntingly smooth melody, and one by one, the Weird Sisters joined in with the delicate strums of their stringed instruments. Lastly, there came a soft sprinkle of cymbals and a delicate mellow drumbeat, which enhanced the already enriching tones of the enchanting chord progression.

Harry felt his heart seize up in his chest the instant Hannah began to sing. Her arresting voice embraced the entire room from floor to ceiling with the most incredibly intense emotion he had ever laid his ears on. It was as though the weight of his soul had escaped his body, leaving him floating freely about the room as her powerful words consumed the whole of his mind...

*You whisper pale and deeply shallow
Your breath is on me, but my soul is ever hallow*

*Cuz' you don't know who I am
Your precious one has gone away and gotten wasted, and*

*You should need me before I'm going, going, gone
Find you want me, or it shortly won't be long
'Till I reason all my love of you, till I reason all my love of you, till I reason all my
love of you.*

*And I cannot escape this skin
This flesh and bone that I rot, ache, and weep in*

*Yes, inside my body's screaming
With every touch of yours you keep, it stops my make believing*

*You should need me, before I'm going, going, gone
Find you want me, or it shortly won't be long
'Till I reason all my love of you, till I reason all my love of you, till I reason all my
love of you.*

*Now, you run off and leave me feeling
To forget what's right, what's true, all to prevent the rain in*

*But, I cannot fake a happy ending
The sight, the smell, the thought of you brings on my grieving*

*You should need me, before I'm going, going, gone
Find you want me, or it shortly won't be long
'Till I reason all my love of you, And he fills the space where you once grew.
When I reason all my love of you.*

At the close of Hannah's spellbinding performance, the crowd packed the room with rich, booming cheers and standing ovations. Fred and George dashed over to her, smothering her in their usual sickeningly lavish praises. Everyone seemed entirely impressed; all with the exception of Hermione, whose gloom-stricken face made her appear as though she had never felt sorrier for anyone in her entire life. Hannah whirled around on the piano bench, gazing about the room in utter shock when she noted the large crowd that had gathered behind her. They were all collectively demanding an encore in response to her moving musical tribute. It was *quite clear* that she was not anticipating anyone other than Fred, George, and the Weird Sisters to be in the room with her. Harry's broad smile

and boisterous applause quickly faded as he watched her eyes dart nervously about the room; her face sported an immediate air of doom the instant her eyes met his. She grabbed her shoes and hurried off behind the stage, exiting the Hall behind a large wooden swinging door.

Harry started after her.

“Harry! Where are you going?” called Hermione, chasing after him and tugging on his robes.

“I need to talk to her!” he snapped, shaking her off him.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea! I mean, did you see her face when she saw you? She obviously did not want you to hear that song. Did you have a good listen to those words? They were just *dreadful*. HARRY!” Hermione called out pleadingly, seizing him by the arm, and anchoring him to a halt. “Harry, we’ve got to get you back to the common room before Remus discovers you’ve gone missing! He’ll have your head if he knows you’ve run off!”

“Leave me alone, Hermione! I need to find out what’s going on!” he hissed. Wriggling away from her, Harry charged off in the direction Hannah had gone, pushing through the exit.

The swinging doorway emptied into a long narrow corridor that stretched to the right and left of him. He peered off to his left and saw Hannah leaning against a large bay window at the far end of the corridor.

“Hannah?” he called out concernedly, pushing toward her.

The instant he met her side, she turned her back to him and looked out the window without saying a word.

Harry smoothed his hand gently down her back as he spoke. “Hey. What’s the matter?”

“Nothing, nothing, I’m fine,” said Hannah unconvincingly.

“Hannah, your voice, that song — they were incredible. You actually wrote that?”

She nodded her head subtly, her back still turned to him.

“It was about...him, your lover, wasn’t it?” said Harry knowingly.

Hannah said nothing, nor did she offer any remote form of acknowledgement to the delivery of his question.

“What did he do to you?” asked Harry, clearly disturbed when he turned her to face him and noticed a swarm of tears welling up in her eyes. “Talk to me. *Please.*”

“Harry, drop it. It’s none of your concern,” said Hannah miserably, choking back her tears. “You better get out of here before Remus catches you talking to me. He’ll go mad.”

“Hannah, I don’t care what Remus does. You’re my friend and I’m worried about you. Please quit shutting me out on the count of him and tell me what’s going on with you.”

Abruptly, she buried her head into his chest and began to cry out, “I just — I don’t know what’s happening and I don’t know what to do! I keep trying to make it right, but it’s—”

“But, what, Hannah? What?” pushed Harry gently while he cradled her in his arms, trying desperately to appease her.

In the next moment, Remus burst through the swinging doorway roaring out ferociously, “WHAT’S GOING ON BACK HERE?!”

“Remus!” Harry called out in surprise, turning to meet the raging fury of his guardian.

“POTTER! What are you doing outside the common room *without* my permission, or my guard?”

Harry gulped, and still holding onto Hannah, he squeaked out, “I-I came down to see Hannah practicing with the band. It’s just that — you’ve been so insistent on keeping her and me apart and I knew you wouldn’t approve if I asked. And when I saw her run off all upset, I followed her and —”

“Perhaps, it would be best if *I* took care of this, *POTTER!*” snarled Remus, eyeing Harry over coldly.

Harry wrenched his face in bewilderment. *Why does he keep calling me ‘Potter’?* he wondered, as this was something Remus had never done.

“I’m sorry, Remus. I couldn’t leave her here all alone. She needed someone to comfort her and I — well I care for her. I wanted to help her—” said Harry, his voice trailing off into nothingness when he realized that with each passing word, Remus’s face grew more and more and more sour. Harry was left at a complete loss for finding the proper thing to say that wouldn’t get Hannah or himself in more trouble.

Remus studied him intently for several moments. Strangely enough, he completely relaxed his attitude, though he still sounded unusually callous toward Harry as he spoke.

“I shall see to it that she is taken care of, Potter. For now, you are to head back to the Gryffindor common room. The Ball is set to begin shortly and you have yet to dress for it. You are to wait there until I fetch you.” Turning to address Hannah he said, “Come,

Hannah.” He took her by the arm and ushered her briskly down the opposite end of the corridor and through a tall open archway to their left.

Harry stared after the two of them in disillusionment as they disappeared from his view. *Something isn't right*, he thought to himself. *Why didn't Remus insist on escorting me back to the common room?*

In a flash, Hermione and Ron came plowing through the doorway and into the corridor, rushing over to the spot where Harry stood.

“Harry!” shouted Ron.

“Harry!” echoed Hermione anxiously. “Did Lupin find you? He was asking where you and Hannah took off to. He was acting very...*strange*.”

“Yeah, he looked livid. I don't think I've ever seen him so angry,” said Ron agreeably.

“Nor have I.” said Harry. “And It's not like him to leave me lurking about the castle like he's done. Come on, guys, let's go. Something's not right.” He took off in the direction where Hannah and Remus had gone, motioning for his friends to follow him.

“Wha-? Harry, *hang on!* Where do you think you're going?” Hermione hollered, scuttling after him.

“Oi! Guys, wait up! What's going on?” called Ron, scrambling to catch up with them.

“*SHH!*” Harry hissed. “Follow me and stay quiet. I have a feeling I know where they're headed.”

Several thousand paces and numerous flights of stairs later, they pushed through a broad wooden doorway, coming to a brief standstill on the other side of it.

Hermione gazed anxiously about the eerily lit space and whispered in alarm, “Harry! This is the third floor corridor, the restricted side. What are we doing up *here?*”

“Shhh! Quiet! Just follow me,” he demanded in a barely audible whisper.

He motioned for them to follow him as he worked his way along the corridor with his back flushed against the wall. He was careful to conceal himself behind a row of tall stone statues, which stretched infinitely along the right side of the space. Obliging, Ron and Hermione simulated his action. Harry continued to survey his surroundings for any signs of life, but saw nothing and no one. He pitched himself roughly against one of the statues, letting out a soft flustered hiss.

“Harry, what’s this all about?” inquired Hermione in a curious whisper. She took a few steps ahead of him, and with her wand arm outstretched, she poked her head through a narrow archway to her left. Almost immediately, she jerked backward, sporting a severe look of disillusionment across her face.

Harry instantly took notice.

“What? What is it? What did you see?” he inquired anxiously, pushing off the statue whereupon he was leaning, then inching in Hermione’s direction.

“Yeah, what did you see, Hermione?” asked Ron, moving forward and pumping out his neck trying to see past her.

“I think we should all head back to the common room, NOW,” she replied in an urgent whisper, tugging on the sleeves of their robes. “Come on, Harry, Ron, *PLEASE*.”

Harry eyeballed her suspiciously before electing to push past her.

“Harry, *don’t!*” Hermione pleaded quietly, reaching her arm out in a futile attempt to stop him. But, he maneuvered around the clutches of her scrabbling grip and was peaking through the archway...

There stood Hannah with her back flush against the cool stone surface of the corridor wall. And, leaning into her, kissing her about her neck, chest, and lips, smoothing his hands eagerly all over her body...was *Remus Lupin*.

Harry gasped and wrenched himself back behind the statue, his face colored in a thousand shades of shock, anger, and loathing. It was as though he’d just seen the death of his whole world standing before him. He thought to himself in utter bewilderment, *Lupin? LUPIN is the man she’s in love with?*

Ron had been privy to the same scandalous scene. He stood fixed along side of Harry just as floored, ghost-white, and speechless.

“Harry, let’s go back to the common room. Ron, come on,” whispered Hermione insistently. She took hold of both their hands and pulled them along with her. Harry and Ron trailed beside her blindly, dazed and confused, shuffling through the cool stone winding corridors of the castle in total deafening silence.

Once they reached Gryffindor tower, they climbed through the fat lady portrait and emerged into the common room. Harry plopped himself on the couch in front of the fireplace, staring vacantly into the flames. He couldn’t figure out how he had actually gotten there, as his mind had been totally consumed by the shock of discovering one of

his dearest, most trusted friends and the love of his life engaged in such a passionate exposition.

Hermione paced the floor in front of him, concluding aloud, “Well, I guess now we know why Remus has been sticking so close to Hannah, why he’s so insistent on keeping the two of you apart, and why no one’s ever met her lover. And it explains that *song* —”

“Would you knock it off, Hermione!” hissed Harry. Nonetheless, he couldn’t keep from agreeing with her. Everything started to make sense: Remus demanding access to the secret room, his insistence on taking over Hannah’s post, how enraged he’d become every time Hannah as much as held Harry’s hand. And just as Hermione had mentioned, that song, the song Hannah wrote and everything she had said in the corridor afterward.

“To think those two have been carrying on like that for the past three years and no one ever caught on!” said Ron tactlessly as he plopped down on the sofa next to Harry.

“Would the both of you BELT UP?!” Harry yelled. “I’m going up to my room. I need to be alone. Hermione, tell Ginny I’m sorry, but I just don’t feel up to going to the Ball.”

“HARRY! That’s *awful*! You CAN’T do that to her! She’ll be devastated!” shouted Hermione.

“Yeah, Harry, that’s my sister’s heart you’re talking about breaking, you know,” echoed Ron.

“It’s just—” Harry paused for a moment. “I can’t believe Remus would do this to Tonks, to *ME*. I’ve always looked up to him like a father,” he said, his voice trailing off in an overwhelming show of upset.

“Well, in all fairness, you can’t really blame the guy for giving in to the temptation. I mean, look at *him*, and then look at *her*. She’s every man’s greatest fantasy, really,” said Ron, unwavering in his resolve to completely miss the point, as usual.

Hermione shot him a discontented glare, then knelt beside Harry and said compassionately, “Harry, listen to me; I understand that you’re upset, but Hannah’s not your girlfriend. You have no say in who she sees. I mean, we’re all shocked at what’s happened here, but I think we need to stay out of it. It’s really *none* of our business.”

Harry clenched his teeth in a desperate struggle to avoid having to swallow her advice, which couldn’t have been more on the mark. *She’s right*, he thought. But, at the same time, he felt as though his insides were melting. He wondered how much longer Hannah could carry on an affair that he *knew* was destroying her. He thought again of the pain in her eyes and in her voice as she sang the song she had written. Then he recalled every word she had said, to the letter, when she broke down before him afterward. He knew that neither was a result of mere happenstance.

Downstairs in the third floor darkened corridor, Hannah and Remus's encounter intensified. Smoothly, Remus worked the bottom of Hannah's gown up past her hips while his mouth adorned hers with his insatiable kisses. His hand traveled between her inner thighs, slipping into her knickers to explore the glorious pearl of her womanhood as his lips moved to trace along the top of her chest, and —

“Mm-mm. Stop. *STOP!* I can't do this; it's just too weird,” said Hannah, shoving away from him and shaking herself out.

“What's the matter? Come on, Hannah, close your eyes, and relax,” he said persuasively, pulling her back to him and reinstating their intimate embrace.

“No. *STOP! Ugh!*” — She shuddered — “I feel like I'm making it with my Uncle or something. What are you doing here like this anyway?” she inquired, wiping her lips off in repudiation and fluffing out her dress. “You're lucky you didn't get us caught, bursting in on Harry and me like that, yelling, and carrying on the way you did!”

“I needed to see you, and you didn't return my owl from this morning. I sent you a birthday gift. Did you get it?” he said warmly.

“*No.* I haven't been to Grimmauld since I woke up this morning. I told you I would be busy here all day today getting the band set up and everything. By the way, Severus, next time warn me when you use Polyjuice Potion to disguise yourself, would you? You nearly gave me a heart attack when you first kissed me,” she said with another predominant shudder. “You're lucky I didn't *HEX* you! And, *stop* touching me like that!” — She slapped away his wandering hand — “I'm not doing anything more with you until that stuff wears off! *Honestly!* I don't think I'll *ever* be able to look at Remus Lupin the same way again!”

“*Fine,*” Snape grunted. “How about we meet tonight at my place after the Ball? We can celebrate your birthday your favorite way.”

Hannah flashed her eyes suspiciously at him. “What's going on with you, Severus? You've never been *this* bold before. You're always lecturing me about taking extra care not to expose ourselves, yet here you are masquerading as my cousin's fiancé, trying to shag me in an open corridor! If the real Remus or anyone else from the Order were to catch you, the both of us would be in some *serious* trouble!”

Severus stood before her in complete silence.

Hannah studied him heavily before she abruptly came to her own conclusion. “Ah, I see. This is about *Harry* again, isn't it? You don't trust us alone together *at all* anymore, do you?”

“I just feel that perhaps I haven’t been there enough for you.”

“Oh, don’t patronize me, Severus! I think you should know by now that you can trust me. I’m *NOT* a cheat! And I most certainly wouldn’t do anything on purpose that would give Voldemort more reason to set that dreadful scheme of his in motion!”

“I *do* trust you, Hannah. I just want to make sure I’m keeping you satisfied.”

“*NO*, you want to make sure I don’t WANDER and perhaps give in to Harry. UGH! I don’t know who is worse, *you* or *Remus!*”

Severus frowned.

“Look, I don’t have time to quarrel about this, right now,” grumbled Hannah. “I promised McGonagall that I’d help her with the last minute details for the Ball and I’m certain she’s looking for me. I’ve got to get back to the Great Hall before anyone notices I’ve gone missing. So, I’ll see you around midnight...*And-DON’T*- kiss me,” she said, wincing and blocking his face with her hand. “I *swear!* It’s going to take me *ages* to get back into my own skin after this whole escapade of yours!”

“Very well,” sneered Severus. “My place at midnight, it is. I’ll see you then.”

With that, he retreated into the darkness of the third floor corridor, disappearing through the enchanted portal leading to the Grimmauld secret passageway. Hannah dashed off in the opposite direction.