The Making of a Prince

by Clue1117

Summary

It has been said that a person is the sum of their experiences. It could be said, then, that these pages contain Severus Snape.

Notes

This isn't a new work; it has been up on ff.net for some time, albeit incomplete, but I am transferring all of my works over here (a decision long overdue!) and will finally get around to editing the final few chapters.
Eileen Prince

Eileen Prince was not raised to marry a muggle. She was raised on the quasi-religious belief system based around the ideals of blood purity that is a fixture of childhood in every pure blood home. Growing up, her parents had been mysterious figures to whom she owed respect, but only saw once weekly for supper and, if she behaved herself, on holidays or occasions when guests asked after her. The day-to-day duties of grooming, teaching and comforting fell to the combination governess-nanny whom her parents employed.

What money they had, and there was enough of it for a decant standard of living, if not the lavish displays of wealth favoured by some of the prominent pureblood families, had fallen to Eileen’s father after the death of his own father some years before. The manor home that they inhabited was nestled among beds of rock in the chilly north of Britain and had also been a part of Eileen’s father’s inheritance, as the eldest son of the previous generation of Princes. The family employed a gardener, a cook, a housekeeper and the governess/nanny. Most put upon was the house keeper, who had seven bedrooms, nine bathrooms, a parlour, a dinning room, a study, two sitting rooms and a foyer to look after. The gardener had little to do because the climate and rocky ground were not conducive to plant growth.

Neither wife nor husband engaged in casual pleasantries with their neighbours, though, that did not offend anyone, as the nearest were easily a kilometre and a half away, and, as muggles, rather frightened by the Prince family. Distant relatives, often Blacks, Malfoys, or Peverells, would visit on occasion, but that manor house was a lonely place to grow up.

Eileen would be woken, bathed and dressed in time to eat breakfast at seven o’clock every morning from the age of two. Lessons would follow, focusing on such menial tasks as memorizing the family tree, how to identify those of unclean blood and embroidery. If she behaved and finished all of the assignments given to her by her governess, she would be allowed to play in the time between dinner and supper. Her favourite pass-time during these hours was to takes the polished metal balls used to make the joints on her dolls rotate and try to bump them into each other. The nanny, who was not entirely unaware of the preferences and skills of her ward, began to teach her a game that she had played as a teenager. They would go outside, where nobody would notice, let alone penalize them, for drawing concentric circles around one of the many holes in the rocky surface of the courtyard. They would play gobbstones together, and Eileen knew that no matter how vehemently the governess denied it, she enjoyed their afternoons of playing.

By the time she was eleven, Eileen had surpassed the governess’ talent and had even received her very own set of gobbstones, though she never believed that they were from some fat old man in a red suit who had snuck down the chimney. Her governess was a half-blood, not worthy of a higher position in the house so far as Mrs. And Mr. Prince were concerned, and she had some odd stories that Eileen knew better than to repeat to her parents. She also knew that the gobbstones had been a final gift from the governess before Eileen went to school.

On September 1st the governess brought Eileen to platform 9¾, whispering her final goodbyes once the train was already moving away and there was nobody around who bothered to listen. When Eileen got accepted as a member of the Hogwarts gobbstones team, she wrote to her governess at the address of her parents’ house, but received no reply. It was not until the Christmas holiday, when she returned home, that the housekeeper informed her that the governess had left, her contract expired now that Eileen was ‘old enough to look after herself’.

The loss of her earliest friend saddened Eileen, but in the social situations presented at school she
found other people with like interests. Her favourite was a half-blood boy from Hufflepuff, who also played on the gobbstones team. He had soft brown hair and pale eyes and they grew close over their years at Hogwarts. In the fifth year, on February fourteenth, he and Eileen went to Madame Puddifoots together. It had been his idea and she had been thrilled, elated that he noticed her in that way. Over hot chocolate and little heart shaped biscuits, their relationship changed. They stopped being outcasts thrown together by necessity and became a couple, kept together by love. They kissed and giggled and did homework together and played gobstones, co-captaining the team in sixth year.

When Valentines Day came again, in their seventh year, he stopped sipping the warm cocoa and got down on one knee in front of her, a simple diamond ring balanced on his palm. He asked her one simple question and she gave him one simple answer and they were, for the first time in either of their lives, entirely happy. They began to make wedding plans, and on a few occasions they practiced for their wedding night. When they both graduated they arranged to spend the first week of summer at Eileen’s parents’ house, so that they could meet her fiancée, about whom they knew very little.

He was not rich, pureblooded or headed for a job in politics. None of this bothered Eileen in the slightest, but her parents took a very different view of the man she loved when at last they met. Dirty blood they whispered to each other over supper on the first night of his stay. And that night, when he came to her room as he had promised he would, he had been vacant; lost to the imperious curse and under the command of her father, but Eileen was not experienced enough with dark magic to recognize the symptoms. All she saw and heard was the man she loved breaking off their engagement.

Eileen ran to the housekeeper, begging for an explanation. Being very observant and generally ignored by Mr. And Mrs. Prince, she was able to explain what had happened. But when Eileen went to find him, searched all over the house, she discovered that he had left, still under the influence of the dark magic, so he would not return.

Furious and heart broken, she did not bother to have any final words with her parents, opting to simply leave immediately. She found herself in a dingy muggle town, as far away from everything her parents had ever been as she could get. On her third day in the dull place called Spinner’s End she met a man named Tobias, the farthest thing from her parent’s ideal son-in-law she was ever going to find. They were married before the week was out and the wedding photo was the last correspondence she ever had with the family she could only assume had disowned her. What her husband was too drunk to notice was that the ring she wore was not the one that he had placed on her finger while a muggle priest droned on, but the one that she had received in Madame Puddifoots.

A muggle doctor had informed Eileen that she was pregnant after she had become nauseous and achy, her period having stopped. She had been entirely unable to self diagnose because she had never learnt such things, her parents having deemed such information ‘corrupting’.

The news pleased her, but Tobias just seemed irritated that there would be another mouth to feed. He went to the pub and came home completely incoherent. But he did not lay a hand on her, didn’t hit her once during the pregnancy. Odd, she thought some years later, considering his willingness to hit Severus once he was born. Perhaps he did have a sense of ethics, even if it was twisted almost beyond recognition. Whatever Tobias’ reasoning, Eileen was grateful for the reprieve, already feeling indebted to her unborn son.

A few days after Eileen and Tobias’ nine-month wedding anniversary, on the ninth of January 1960,
Eileen was taken to a muggle hospital to give birth to her son. Though there were doctors and painkillers she wished very strongly that Tobias would have let her go to St. Mongo’s for the birth.

He knew about magic, had since the beginning, when he caught Eileen using it to clean the kitchen and she had explained everything about her powers. Like everything else, he didn’t like it and forbid its use. “You live under my roof now and I want a proper wife. You will keep this house clean and you will cook, you’ll be like the women in the magazines, and that means no magic!” he had yelled on the sixth day of their marriage. Then he had come very close to her, the stink of alcohol heavy on his breath as he pushed her chin up so that she had to look him in they eyes, not that he was having very much luck focussing them, while he said with mock gentility “do you understand that, or is your skull too thick?” Eileen had made no reply but he seemed to take it as a yes and left her to finish scrubbing the linoleum floor. By the time she had finished, her knees were bruised to match the various places Tobias’ fists had already begun to find.

As she screamed and giped the sheets because Tobias wouldn’t come close enough for her to hold his hand, Eileen wondered how the birth of a child might have been different if she was married to the man she loved. She wasn’t sure, but she thought she might remember all the pain of labour with just a touch of something good to it under those circumstances. Of course, she found the baby itself a happy thing, but pain like this didn’t seem quite worth it, when it only pushed the one person she loved and had in her life out and farther away from her.

After too many hours for her to want to count them, a tinny baby was placed in her arms. His skin was sallow, this nose disproportionately large and his head already covered by black hair. The sigh of relief that Eileen breathed was not for the end of the pain, she would suffer almost anything for her child, what she was so comforted by was the fact that the boy looked so very much like her. *Is it selfish, she wondered, to be glad that your son will never be attractive if it means you don’t have to suffer frequent reminders about who his father is?* She knew the answer, but the idea that she might still have a part of the boy who’s ring she wore was far more appealing than that of being entirely selfless.
Snape and Lily lie under their favourite tree, by the bank of the river, but buried in a copes large enough that they are difficult to find. Snape has fitted himself between two roots, back against the trunk, while Lily is on her back, head turned to her companion and one hand trailing in the water.

“Sev, will you please tell me again about Diagon Alley?”

“What else do you want to know? I told you everything I could think of yesterday.”

“Can’t you tell me more about Gringotts?”

“I don’t know much about Gringotts…”

“You must know something… what does it look like?”

“The outside is large, with big pillars and all made of white marble, but I don’t know what the inside it like.”

“But you said it was where all the witches and wizards keep their money; you must have been in!”

“No.”

“Then where do your parents keep their money?”

“They don’t have any money that needs looking after.” He wants to change the subject. He doesn’t want to give her any reason to think that he isn’t a good person to be around, but he also just wants to hear her voice lull him into calm. “I tell you stories every day, don’t you think it’s your turn?”

“I don’t know…” She sounds nervous, but mostly he can tell that she just wants to know more about the magical world.

“Please?”

“Oh, fine. But only because I like you.” Her words make his heart light and her next words, “I’ll have to tell you a muggle story, because I don’t know any others” make him want to comfort her, because she sounds so afraid that he will think her stories mundane and not wish to continue.

He reassures her with words, as best he can. “A muggle story sounds great, Lil. Maybe something your mom tells you as a bedtime story? My dad’s a muggle, I don’t know if you knew that, but he’s never coherent enough to tell me stories before bed.”

“I didn’t know that at all!” She sounds so surprised. “I didn’t know witches and wizards could marry muggles.”

“I’m not sure if they’re supposed to, honestly.” He hates admitting that he doesn’t know, but this has confused him for some time. “Normally, when my father is mad, mom doesn’t try to respond. But once, when he was yelling but he was already leaving, so he couldn’t hit her, she yelled back about how if she’d known how awful muggles could be, she would have listened to her parents and married a pureblood like she was supposed too. I think it might just have been her family, but I really don’t know. She won’t talk to me about it.”

“What does that mean for me? I’m a muggle born! Will people not want to marry me?”
“You’re a witch Lil! You have nothing to worry about.” He has to resist adding that he would be happy to marry her.

“Promise?”

“Have I ever lied to you?”

“No…”

“Then can we move on?”

“Yeah.”

“Will you tell me that story now?”

“Sure. Why don’t I tell you a story about a prince?”

That brought him to full attention. He had always assumed that his mother had been a pureblood, just because of what she had yelled at his father. “Sorry, there are muggle stories about my family?”

“Ummm… I don’t think so…”

Clearly, they are not on the same page. It is then that he remembers something Lily said to her sister while he watched them one day; something about them being trapped in a tower and the Prince being on his way to rescue them. He hadn’t thought much of it at the time, because it had been immediately followed by Lily conjuring a burst of fire to act as the dragon that was guarding them. “Explain to me exactly what a Prince is to muggles?”

“He’s the heir to the throne or the son of a monarch.”

“Oh. That’s odd. My mother’s maiden name is Prince.”

“Well, there you have it! You really are my Prince. My half-blood Prince!” Lily giggled before settling back down to tell her story. But Snape likes the way the words had sounded, like a real title of honour, and he loved that she had given them to him.
When Snape had imagined leaving the house for King’s Cross, he had had Lily beside him on a London streetcar, just the two of them heading for a new life. In actuality, Lily’s mother and father had driven her, intrigued by the prospect of seeing so many magical people as well as, and more importantly, wanting to see their daughter off.

On August thirty first, just before Snape went to bed, Eileen came to him while he brushed his teeth.

“Severus,” she asked softly, “have you got your trunk packed and everything ready to go for tomorrow?”

Surprised that she was talking to him at all while his father was still conscious, he didn’t think to spit before responding and his words came out garbled. “Yes, everything is ready.”

“Good, it’s going to be an early morning. We need to catch the seven o’clock train into London.” She said no more, just wandered away leaving Snape to consider whether he liked the idea of being seen off by his mother. He decided that it would be all right, so long as his father didn’t come too. And there really wasn’t much chance of his father voluntarily leaving the house early in the morning.

He woke to his mother pulling the covers off of him and throwing open curtains that had not been shifted since the bed now in the room had replaced Snape’s infanthood crib. There was very little sun for the grimy window to let in, but it was enough to drag Snape out of bed. He dressed in his robes, not wanting to be seen in any of the awful muggle clothes he owned and went downstairs. As he began trying to find something for breakfast his mother came into the room, also dressed in robes for the first time Snape had ever seen.

“No time,” she said, her voice quiet and quick as she pulled on his hand, dragging him out on to the pavement and away from the essentially empty kitchen in which he wasn’t likely to have found anything to eat anyways. They walked quickly, Snape’s trunk being rolled by his mother until they were next to the old pool hall, and nowhere near the bus station that would take them to Manchester and the train.

“Mother,” Snape began, but was cut off.

“I know. Just trust me.” Snape wanted to laugh; his mother did not inspire confidence.

Eileen raised her right arm, a length of dark wood that Snape had never seen before, but knew must be her wand, clutched in the white fist. Then she lowered it and stood still, staring expectantly at the road in front of her. Just when Snape was about to ask what exactly she thought was going to happen, a purple triple-decker bus appeared with a loud bang and drove shoddily down the cobbled road, a number of mailboxes jumping aside to avoid it.

Eileen seemed entirely unfazed. Snape, on the other hand, felt as though he were having a door that he had wanted to go through all his life unlocked. By the time that the trip was over, he felt distinctly worse and wondered if the bus was some kind of test or deterrent for new wizards. He felt too nauseous to ask his mother.

He was so excited he didn’t hesitate at all to walk purposefully through the brick barrier between platforms 9 and 10. His mother followed, rolling his trunk and bent to kiss his forehead.

“You’re going to have a great time, Sev.” She sounds sad, which is new. Normally she’s just angry or defeated. “I’m going to miss you.”
“I’ll miss you too, mom.” The words surprise Snape, not for the utter normality of them, but because he finds that there is some truth to them. Now is not the time for attachment, not when the freedom of the perfect new life is this close.

He allows her to give him a hug and doesn’t notice how she shrinks away where his arms touch sensitive bruises on her back, where Tobias hit her when he saw the letter from Hogwarts. He is too distracted by the flash of long red hair that he glimpses over his mother’s shoulder.

“I have to go mom.”

“Alright, Sev. Promise me you’ll write?” She doesn’t try to hold on. She knows that Hogwarts will be a much safer place for her son, even if it means that she will be alone with her husband for the first time in eleven years.

“I promise.” He doesn’t mean it though. His father would be horribly mad if he found evidence of owls in the house, and he finds he can’t condemn his mother to more pain than is unavoidable.

They stand next to each other, Snape searching for the flaming hair of his friend, about to go to her side, when he sees that she is arguing with her sister. Knowing better than to get in the middle of arguments, he remains by his mother’s side. When he sees Lily glance guilty his way, he begins to think that maybe he ought to get just a bit farther way, to ensure his non-involvement in the unpleasant family business.

He has no doubt that they are fighting because of Petunia’s letter to Dumbledore, or rather, because Snape found it, and he doesn’t like the funny churning feeling in the pit of his stomach that knowing that he has caused Lily pain is giving him.

He turns and says a final goodbye to his mother before dragging his trunk onto the train, only to hear the warning whistle blow. As it screeches, he sees Lily looking up at the window above which he is stowing his trunk. She looks furious and miserable and when Snape catches her eye, she turns quickly, projecting as much hate into he swivel as possible. And it hurts Snape. But the idea of going for the rest of his life without her is much worse.

So, even as he thinks that friends were inordinately difficult work for something with so little return, he contemplates the course of action least likely to offend Lily further. He watches as she enters the train in the next carriage over, then follows her down the train, going as quickly as he could without attracting the wrath of an over eager prefect, he darted down the corridor of the Hogwarts Express, checking for Lily’s flaming hair in all the compartments he passed.

As he went, he also wondered why he felt compelled to mend this. Lily’s bloody sister was just a muggle for god’s sake! But here Lily was, crying and running away in distress because her sister wasn’t superior enough to make it in to the elite Hogwarts academy, a place he had waited his entire life to attend.

He didn’t have long to ponder the mystery. Lily was there, in the eleventh or twelfth compartment, face pressed against the window, firmly ignoring the two dark haired boys occupying the other seats. They looked rowdy and arrogant, but too self absorbed to bother interfering with a private conversation.

So he slid open the compartment door and took the seat opposite the distressed Lily.

“I don’t want to talk to you.” Her voice was constricted and there were tears smeared on her cheeks, but she was fighting against the fresh set of salty drops that clearly lurked just below the surface.
“Why not?” He doesn’t mean to sound accusatory, but emotions have never been his forte.

“Tuney h-hates me. Because we saw that letter from Dumbledore.” The tears were beginning to win.

“So what?” This time it is exasperation and impatience that stain his voice without his consent.

“So she’s my sister!” The anger in her voice is harder to deal with than the sadness from before, despite years of experience with the brutal emotion. Lily was supposed to be his escape from all the rage and the yelling and the fists, but her anger was quieter; she didn’t want to be overheard. So he can stop the mental wards from going up; he doesn’t pull into himself as he would under his father’s heavy, alcohol soaked words.

He finds his own anger seeping into his words as he retorts “She’s only a –” he catches himself, checks the anger and buries it down deep, because the prospect of letting that anger touch Lily, of letting it hurt her, is even less appealing than giving it to his father, even though he knows that would end in physical pain.

She hadn’t noticed his slip, too busy trying to wipe her eyes without garnering the notice of the three boys in the compartment.

“But we’re going!” He said instead, changing gears entirely; pushing the last of the emotions he associated with the hovel he was forced to call his house (never home), to the bottom of his being. Wishing with all his heart he could leave them behind on Kings Cross, with the life he had finally escaped. But he knew better than to be so optimistic; they were so tightly woven into him he wasn’t convinced he wouldn’t unravel entirely without them. Even Lily wasn’t enough to make him try. So he elaborates, with all the enthusiasm he can muster with the hate still so nearby “This is it! We’re off to Hogwarts!”

He likes the way her lips turn up in a little half smile, her face still damp and her eyes a shade pinker than normal. He loves those eyes, the green of them. It makes him think of the soft grass in the forest where he goes when the yelling and the hitting become too much. They are like perfect olives and exactly the shade that polyjuice potion turns when he puts his own hair in it; exactly the colour of the Slytherin emeralds.

“You’d better be in Slytherin,” he can’t help but say, encouraged by the slight upturn of her lips and the thought of those eyes on him as he showed her the castle, and, best of all, the huge hourglass that counted the house points in stunning emeralds, though he had only seen it all in the books he bought in Diagon Alley or stole from his mother’s hidden stash. And on those pages they hadn’t shone, hadn’t been anywhere near as spectacularly pretty as the emeralds regarding him from a partial curtain of brilliantly contrasting red hair. The wavy strands were clumpy in the front where they had become wet with tears, but that didn’t make Severus like them any more. Reds like those dancing on Lily’s head belonged to Gryfindor and he hated sharing.

“Slytherin?” Lily’s lips hadn’t moved; it was one of the other boys in the compartment, a slight boy with dark hair that looked like it had never met a comb. “Who wants to be in Slytherin? I think I’d leave, wouldn’t you?” The question wasn’t directed at Snape, but at another boy, also with black hair, but more of a catcher’s physique, his whole face radiating a haughty superiority that Snape knew went with money.

Unsmiling, the boy responded, “My whole family have been in Slytherin,” and for a moment Severus thought, perhaps, this boy would be someone he could get along with.

“Blimey,” said the first boy, the one that looked like a seeker “and I thought you seemed all right!”
A cocky grin graced the second boy’s lips and Snape chastised himself for being so hopeful. People didn’t like him at home, why should they like him here. Then he thought of Lily. What if he lost her? Here, in a school full of others with the same abilities as themselves, would Lily leave him, find new friends? Yes, he decided, she would. He wasn’t the sort of person who could be loved and he knew that. But maybe, if he could keep her away from the prying eyes of those who might take her heart…

“Maybe I’ll break the tradition. Where are you heading, if you’ve got the choice?” It is the second boy, the one who looks a little neglected, but not hard done-by: his robes are brand new, clearly tailored to fit him, his shoes are also new and patent leather, his hair has been recently cut, but Severus recognizes the reclusive, needy seed of loneliness buried in his grey eyes. A pueblood, he assumes, perhaps a Black. Maybe they will get along yet; the Blacks have money and power, and are known to be sympathetic to the Dark Lord’s dislike of Muggle borns and Mudbloods.

The first boy, who has an air of being used to being adored, makes an odd motion that Snape only identifies to be the raising of an imaginary sword when he begins to speak. “‘Gryffindor, where dwell the brave at heart!’ Like my dad.”

Unable to hold back, a small exhalation of disapproval escapes Severus’ hooked nose. He has long understood the rivalry between Slytherin and Gryffindor and he can’t understand why anyone would want to be known as a self-sacrificing hero; those were the sort of things that got you labeled as a pushover; much better to be known as quite capable of poisoning an enemy’s morning pumpkin juice.

“Got a problem with that?” The boy’s sword arm is back by his side.

“No,” A sneer twists this thin lips; this is the sort of boy to whose goblet Snape might just find himself making a little trip… “If you’d rather be brawny than brainy – ”

“Where’re you hoping to go, seeing as you’re neither?” The second boy buts in, cruelty in his voice, his aim to injure.

In front of him, Lily stands up and a thrill of pleasure runs down his spine at the look of dislike she directs towards the two boys. He loves that she prefers him.

“Come on, Severus, let’s find another compartment.” The tingles dancing on his spine come to an abrupt end at her words. How dare she demean him like that; he is in control.

“Oooooo…” The other boys’ mocking laughter makes Snape’s skin crawl, makes him want to force-feed them both Morticain. It’s almost enough to distract him from his anger at Lily, to stop the shaking in his fists.

James tried to trip Snape as he passed, but Lily held his arm forcefully, steering them out of the compartment and preventing him from turning to spit insults.

“See ya, Snivellus!” one of the boys called just before the compartment door separated them.

As Lily began walking down the corridor, looking for a new compartment, she continued to guide Snape away from a fight she could see him itching to start. “Those boys were awful; if that is what can be expected of Gryffindor I don’t want to be there at all.”

Torn between a still lingering anger at Lily and elation at her hand on his arm, Snape half grunted “Slytherin it is then.”

“I thought it was up to the sorting hat?” She is genuinely confused, so unsure. She would be lost without him and he finds pleasure in her reliance; he has something to keep her at his side.
He pauses before he answers. He had to tell her just enough to keep her coming back for more, to keep her always with him. “Yes, but there are rumours…” She’s hooked; they are fish and fisherman and Severus wants it to stay like that forever.

If this tingly, warm, powerful, needed, sharing of one’s life was love, his parents had lied to him; it isn’t hell at all.

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When at last they arrived at the school there was little time for chatter. Nobody wanted to break the silence in the old classroom they were waiting in and once they made it to the Great Hall the ceremonies began and it was made very clear that talking would not be tolerated. Though, Severus and Lily had had time to agree that the Deputy Headmistress was a formidable seeming woman indeed.

As they stood in the crowd of children waiting to move to one of the long tables, already mostly full of older students in the standard black robes, Snape kept up a constant hiss of “Slytherin” while Lily fidgeted with her hair.

When Lily was called, her voice echoed in Severus’ ears, mixing with his quiet chant. The old hat seemed too slow to touch her head, as if Professor McGonagall were trying to prolong his suffering, just as his parents always did. When at last it’s ragged brim brushed the deep red of her fiery mane, so much the lion’s, it didn’t seem to look further, to consider the emeralds currently avoiding him, and everyone else in the cavernous room. “Gryffindor!” it called and he felt her slipping away. His chant became a hissing groan as she left him for the tide of scarlet and gold that was cheering her on. A last glance his way, something akin to pity, (she would tell him later it was apology), and she was approaching a seat and a life he thought he wouldn’t be allowed to be a part of. But the little flame of hope was stoked once more when she recognized the haughty boy from the train and refused to sit beside him, opting instead to sit by a tall blond boy.

When at last he was pronounced a Slytherin, he found himself comparing them, all the others at the table, to her, and his heart sank. Among so many people who thought like him, who followed a similar, sketchy code of ethics handed down from dodgy parenting techniques, he had never felt so alone, and that was including the days his parents never even bothered to come home.

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At Dumbledore’s command, Lucius, and all the other prefects, got to their feet. Snape, along with the rest of Slytherin house, both new and returning, followed Lucius to their feet and out of the Great Hall. At the bottleneck of the wide double doors, Snape wound up next to Lily who looked confused and nervous, as if she wanted to reach out and grab the robes of the prefect in front of her. Emeralds the size of strawberries meet the grey pools sunk low in Snape’s sallow face.

“Sev” she squeaks, a delicate hand reaching for Severus’, desperate for an anchor.

In the quick moments before Lily’s house begins to move, Snape, keeping his voice low to avoid being overheard by any of the students around them, speaks rapidly to Lily. “Come early to breakfast and we can find a time to talk properly.”

A quick nod, and she is gone.

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Guided by memories of the night before, Snape makes it to the entrance to the Great Hall. It is early
and there are few people to be seen yet, so Severus has no difficulty in spotting Lily as she descends the main staircase, red curls burning particularly bright in contrast to the plain black of her robes.

She looked amazing in her proper setting. In Snape’s mind, something had always been wrong about so powerful a witch dressing like a muggle, as if she was hiding. But Lily couldn’t hide; that was his job, she was supposed to be bold and friendly and confident. Now, with her new books in a bag over her shoulder and a small white hand trailing along the stone banister, she seemed complete, which gave Snape a thrill.

“I’m sorry.” She sounds genuinely miserable.

“For what?” Honest confusion.

“For not being in Slytherin. Now I’m going to be compared with those awful boys from the train!”

“Lily, it’s alright; I know you’re better than them.”

“But will everyone else?”

“Of course! If you had actually listened to the sorting hat’s song, you’d have noticed that ‘cocky idiot’ was not on the list of requirements for being a Gryffindor.”

“What if they think I’m stupid, Sev? I don’t know all about spells and potions and magical history like you, and now I’m in Gryffindor, and you said, on the train, that they weren’t brainy…”

“There are plenty of people here who have been raised without magic, those like you whose parents aren’t wizards and witches. Lily, you aren’t stupid, you’ve already learnt lots and you’ll learn even more in the next few years. Just don’t forget who you are, just you, without your House, and everyone will see how smart you are. Please, Lily, promise me you won’t forget.”

“I promise, but I want you to do the same. I saw those boys last night, they were taking the mickey out of that poor girl, just because of her glasses and I don’t want you getting involved in that, I want my Sev, and I want you here, at school with me.”

“Alright Lily, I promise not to do anything nasty or that could get me expelled. Happy?”

“Very.”

“We should meet tonight, in the Library, after dinner, and we can discuss our schedules and what our houses are like.”

“Why can’t we do that now?”

“Different houses.” An apologetic, but unconcerned shrug. “We can’t just mingle at will, Lily. I’ll see you after dinner.” With that, he turned and walked into the Great Hall, joining the increasing stream of students and finding a seat next to Avery.
Wrong Directions

At dinner Snape had asked Lucius for directions to the library and had been informed that he would need to go up a floor, turn right and walk to the end of the corridor. Unfortunately, after following these directions, he was standing in a bathroom. A girl’s bathroom.

As he backed out, pondering the unfairness of such a test, and the level of disappointment he was feeling about not being able to see Lily, he caught the faint sounds of sobbing. Thinking there was a girl in the damp room with him, he sped up his backwards steps, hoping to avoid any awkward questions or conversations. Never having been the most coordinated person, he stood on the hem of his too long robes and found himself sitting in a puddle of water.

“Sorry I’m so late!” He says breathlessly as he walks to Lily as quickly as he can without inciting the wrath of Madame Pince.

“Where the hell have you been?” She asks, both annoyed and relieved.

“I got lost…” he answers, unwilling to give her fodder for her anti-Slytherin arguments.

“What?”

“I just got lost.”

“You never get lost!”

“This school is huge…”

“Why didn’t you ask for directions?”

“I did, they just weren’t very helpful.”

“It looks as though they led you to the lake! You’re dripping.”

“I just tripped.”

“In to the lake?”

“No, there was a puddle on the bathroom floor.”

“Oh, does one of the boy’s bathrooms have a ghost too?”

“Umm… I don’t think so. Does one of the girl’s have one?”

“Yeah, one of the bathrooms on the second floor. Apparently her name is Moaning Myrtle and she’s always miserable and floods the bathroom. The prefects warned us all to stay away.” Snape has no doubt that the bathroom Lily is describing is the one to which Lucius sent him. He feels a brief twinge of jealousy, that the Gryfindor prefects are so much… it takes him a moment to think of an appropriate word… nicer. He does not dwell on the idea, instead squashing all related emotion behind a brick wall in his head.
Horace Slughorn loved to collect. As a child his mother had taken him to the beach on many an occasion, where he would toddle along the shore, picking up shells. Rubbing them with chubby child’s fingers, he would inspect the swirls and colours of the delicate pieces of conchiolin and calcium carbonate. When it was time to leave, and his mother came to collect him and remove the layer of sand, she could never get it off of his fingers, because they were clutched around those shells he had deemed worthy and had not discarded.

As he grew older, his passion for favourites never waned, but it did shift. In adolescence, he had found the value of old coins alluring, but when he grew into adulthood he realized the worth of people; not them for who they are, but for what they can do and the power they can hold. As such, he became very adept at recognizing talent, ambition, and powerful relatives. And when Severus Snape walked into his second block class on the first Tuesday of the school year, he saw none of these things in the greasy hair, hooked nose and reclusive posture of the pale boy. Twenty minutes later, when he had set the class the task of brewing a basic tonic for queasiness, he had entirely changed his mind.

The sickly looking boy was half finished, only being held back by the necessity of a five minute steeping period, while the rest of the class tried to mix in the salmon berries or oats, while one boy had lit his cauldron on fire and a girl with long braids had melted the glass stir-stick as she had stirred counter-clockwise, despite the explicit instructions.

The sallow skinned boy had the standard issue book open next to him, but there were words in the margins, and Horace wanted to know what those slanting letters spelt. Though Slughorn was a talented potions master, he had never felt the urge to alter pre-tested and approved potions. So, when the boy brought a flask with a sample of his work up to the front desk, Slughorn politely requested the boy’s name. Before the boy, who he now knew to call Snape, left he made a good-natured request to see his textbook, only to be declined, which was not something Horace Slughorn was used to, even if it was with the utmost courtesy.

His mind a muddled combination of irritation and intrigue, with just a hint of being impressed, Slughorn made a quick decision. The boy had not moved away from the desk, seemingly waiting to be dismissed, so Horace still held as much of his attention as anyone ever did when he made an invitation, “I am hosting a start-of-term supper for a few select students the evening of the coming Monday, you aught to come.”

Invitations to prestigious events were not something Snape had a lot of experience with and he wasn’t sure how to respond. “Yes, sir.” When that did not seem to garner approval he tried “Thank you, sir,” to slightly better avail.

Slightly bemused by the awkwardness of this genius potion maker of a first year, Slughorn quickly dismissed him, “Off you go then, don’t want to be late for your next class,” and Snape left the dungeon classroom he would become so familiar with in the years to come.

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Nervous and unsure, afraid that he had gotten the date or location wrong, or, worst of all, this was another test designed by the older Slytherin students, Snape knocked on the heavy wooden door that lead to Professor Slughorn’s office. The dungeon hallway was chilly in the fall air of the second Monday of school, with the edge of dampness that the flaming wall sconces were not enough to banish. As the door opened the warm glow of a fire threw it’s light across the dungeon hallway.
Silhouetted in the open door was the wide frame of Horace Slughorn.

“Hello, Severus. Please, do come in. We are just enjoying some appetizers while we wait for all the guests to arrive.” As he spoke he stepped to the side and ushered a very relieved Snape into a well-lit and cozy room with couches around the walls and a large round table with nine chairs of dark wood and one that was upholstered in emerald velvet. There were platters with glasses of champagne and dainty finger foods on low tables between the couches. Everything was elegant and tasteful.

Snape felt instantly out of place. Everyone was talking, polite and civilized, even to those in other grades or houses. It was then that he noticed, not all the students present were from Slughorn’s own house. Though Lucius stood talking to Avery by the fire, there was also Gwenog Jones, Wendy Slinkhard, a boy Snape didn’t know, though he was wearing the blue and bronze of Ravenclaw house, and to his surprise and delight, Lily. She was sitting on a couch, her hands folded neatly in her lap and her toes tapping lightly on the floor.

Slughorn was already distracted, drawn into a conversation with Lucius that seemed to involve the best method to pickle newts’ eyes for use in the Strengthening Solution Lucius’ class was studying, so Snape hurried over to the couch where Lily was sitting.

“Hi” he said, relieved to not be on his own.

She looked up and her eyes widened, becoming bright and happy. It sent a thrill from the tips of Snape’s ears to the base of his spine that he could evoke that sort of emotion in Lily. “Thank god!”

She is talking very quietly, seemingly trying to avoid notice by the other students and the admittedly somewhat flamboyant professor. “I thought I was going to have to get through this alone, and I really didn’t think I’d be able to.”

“Why? Slughorn doesn’t seem that bad.”

“He’s crazy. I was in Charms and he walked in to talk to Flitwick and I knocked his hat off with the pillow I was levitating; that’s when he asked me to come to this, and I thought I was in trouble, but he just keeps asking me how I learnt to cast so well in a muggle household. Plus, I keep hearing him mumble about what a pity it is that I’m not in his house, that it is a waste of potential.”

“Oh, he didn’t seem that bad to me. A little full of himself, but nothing worse. He invited me during potions.”

“I wonder if everyone here has to be really good at a subject?”

“I don’t think so. According to Lucius, Avery isn’t much good at anything except transfiguration, but his father’s got a decent bit of money and a good position in the ministry. I think it’s based off of a sort of net-worth of how likely you are to go places in life.”

“Like, everybody here has money or power in their family? Because, I don’t belong here then…”

“No, from what Lucius said, I think he takes into account family ties, ambition, money and talent. Based on what you’ve said, he chose you for your skills with charms, but he’ll try and find out everything he can. Avery described the Slug Club, which is what he called this, as Slughorn’s personal collection of the students with potential. You only get in if he thinks there’s something in it for him.”

“Isn’t that, well… not allowed? I mean, I thought teachers weren’t supposed to pick favorites?”

“I was under that impression too, but Professor Dumbledore has never done anything to stop it. Though, from what I’ve heard, it’s been going on since Slughorn arrived, which was when the
school was still under Professor Dippit, and he had a better idea of what was good for the school; he knew how to ensure continued support from successful alumni. At least, that’s what Lucius was talking about last night.”

“And Lucius is the blonde one, over there, right?” she asks, pointing to where Lucius is still holding Slughorn in conversation.

“Yeah, he’s a prefect. Really knows the school.”

“Seems like a jerk to me. He’s the one who should have given you proper directions, and he’s rude about the headmaster, and he condones the choosing of favourites. You can’t honestly think he’s a good influence.”

“He’s a prefect, isn’t he? Dumbledore chose him to be a student leader in the school, so he can’t be as bad as you seem to think.”

She did not get to pose a counter argument, or respond in any way, because at that moment Slughorn arrives, a glass of champagne in one had and the other bringing a piece of crystallized pineapple to his lips. “Hello there. How are you two enjoying the festivities?”

“It’s lovely, thank you, professor.” Lily is the one who manages to respond, her voice courteous.

“Glad to hear it. And pleased to see the two of you getting along, perhaps you can share some of your secrets to success in your respective fields. You both have great potential!”

I recognize the symptoms of the alcohol, but he shows no sign of being about to yell or lash out. Again Lily responds, “thank you, sir.”

“Severus, my boy, have you rethought your decision on allowing me a peek into that textbook of yours? I might be able to give you a few pointers. I know a few things about potions!” He laughs at his own wit, a happy sound, and Snape is taken aback by such a pleasant emotion coming with the drunkenness.

He is saved having to explain that that book is for his consumption alone by another knock on the door and Slughorn wandering off to open it once more to reveal Dirk Creswell and Barnabus Cuffe, whom he ushered inside and called the whole room to order. “Please, if you will all take a seat, we can begin the meal, as I know all of you must be hungry. It’s all a bit informal, so there are no place settings, but I do encourage mingling! We have new students joining us today and I think we should all get to know each other.” As he spoke the students all chose seats, Lily and Snape finding places next to each other, with Lucius on Snape’s other side and Wendy Slinkhard to Lily’s left.

Once Slughorn had fitted all of his bulk into the velvet wing-backed chair, he summoned an array of dishes Snape didn’t recognize, including one that looked like the roast head of a large grazing animal. Snape hoped he wouldn’t be expected to eat it. He also hoped that either Lily or Lucius would know what to do with the multiple forks and array of other cutlery provided, because he had never used anything beyond the basics and was fairly sure that misusing the array of silverware would result in some form of reprimand. As soon as Slughorn said “please begin” and every student in the room immediately picked up the smallest of the three forks available to them and began passing around only the dishes containing salad of some variety, Snape felt more like an outsider than usual, which was saying something.

Taking his cues off of Lily, who was less likely to criticize him if she saw his glances at her as he tried to pick up on appropriate table manners, he accepted the bowl of what appeared to be a plain salad of greens passed to him by Lucius. As he carefully used the serving spoons to place a small pile
of the lettuce and spinach mixture onto his plate he caught Lily’s eye and she nodded, so he passed the bowl to her, only to receive another from Lucius. This continued until Snape had been handed five different salads, at which point everyone began eating whichever salads they had chosen.

The whole process was entirely too confusing for Snape to understand after just one experience with it, but he did relax a little once everyone was eating and Slughorn had initiated conversation. At first he just welcomed back some of the senior students, inquiring after their summers and important family members. It was not until the general pleasantry was complete that he turned to Snape and Lily.

“As I mentioned, we have two new members, both first years and very talented in their own right. Everyone, please give Severus and Lily a warm welcome.” He paused here to allow the other students to clap politely and make approving noises. “Now please, do continue with the meal. If we could begin passing around the main courses, I highly recommend that we all become well acquainted with our new arrivals, as I suspect that they will become regular fixtures in our school community.” With the end of his introduction of the first years, he picked up a platter with a whole pheasant on it and began serving himself while others did the same with array of other dishes. (Thankfully, Snape noted, not the whole animal head. It seemed to be intended as something along the lines of a centerpiece.)

He waited for Lily or Lucius to choose a fork before he began eating, so that he could mimic them. Lily picked the largest fork and Snape followed suit, feeling comfortable to initiate conversation now that the whole table had broken off into pairs and threes. “Do you recognize all of these foods? Because I thought a couple of them were potions ingredients.”

“I have no idea what most of them are, to be honest, and I’m not sure I want to know. I think it’s best if we just stay quiet and out of the way.”

This sounded like a great plan, right up until Wendy Slinkhard engaged Lily in a conversation about muggle schools; apparently she has a fondness for something the muggles call anthropology. It is then, while Snape takes tentative bites of what he hopes is edible, that Lucius turns to him, abandoning a conversation with Avery. “When did you meet her?” His voice is quiet; this conversation is between them alone, though he doesn’t try to hide the fact that they are conversing and turns slightly to speak directly to the younger boy.

Still out of his element, Snape glances up, unsure if the words are actually directed to him. They are, so he swallows and asks “sorry, who?”

“The pretty Gryffindor. Lily.” Still his voice is soft, calm and conversational.

“Oh, umm, we met during the summer. Why?”

“Because, she’s a mudblood, and you are awfully familiar.” He has kept his tone even, careful not to alert the others at the table that their conversation might be something to pay attention to.

Snape takes his cues off of Malfoy when he responds. “I fail to see your point.”

“We, being those on the path to the new world under the Dark Lord, must make clear to you the importance of blood purity.”

“She is none of your business. I admit that we are friends, but I have made my loyalties clear.”

“And if the Dark Lord asked it of you, would you step aside and let her die?” Still with the pleasant tone.
Snape struggles to answer. He knows that his relationship with Lucius is tenuous and if it should fall through his life would become a living hell, to the point where summer holidays might actually be a relief. But then, life without Lily would be a thousand times worse.

“Yes.” One word and a curt nod signify the end of the conversation. An odd feeling builds in his stomach as he turns back to Lily, his mind not engaging in her conversation at all, too occupied by a single thought. *Thank god, he kept coming back to, thank God, I know how to lie.*
Etiquette Lessons

“I thought we weren’t allowed to eat in the library?” Snape asks as he approaches Lily where she sits at a round table between several high shelves of books. He had arrived as per her request, given as they had left Slughorn’s start-of-term supper. She had not explained why he was to arrive in the Library after dinner the next day. But he had arrived, only to find that she had laid out a set of ceramic bowls, plates and cups, along with cutlery, in the same fashion as Slughorn had arranged them for last night’s dinner.

“Madam Pince inspected all of it, making sure it was completely clean, then searched my bag and pockets for any sign of food. I can assure you, we won’t be eating anything right now.”

“But we will be in the future?”

“Well, not until Slughorn announces his next dinner, but I saw no reason to put off the lesson.” She speaks so matter-of-factly that Snape thinks he forgot about something, that he aught to know what all of this is about.

“Sorry, but what lesson?” Hopefully the question won’t offend her.

She seems not to notice his confusion, not letting anything distract her. “I saw how much trouble you were having last night, with all the different forks and stuff, so I thought I’d teach you.”

“You’re going to give me manners lessons?” He can’t help the slight quirk to his eyebrow or the hint of skepticism in his voice. Even after watching her deftly handle the dinner last night, something about her has always seemed too frivolous to have an amazing grasp of etiquette.

“That was the plan.” He can hear the nervousness in her voice and knows that she wasn’t sure that this would go over well with him.

As much as he doesn’t want to offend her, he really wants to be sure that she won’t miss-teach him anything, because any folly at the dinner table would get him ridiculed by Lucius. “And why exactly do you think you’re qualified to teach me this stuff?”

She blushes. It compliments her fiery hair and Snape finds it impossible to look away from her, even though her green eyes make his stomach twist and send warm heat all through his torso. “Well, it’s a little embarrassing, really. Are you sure we can’t just continue on and ignore that particular question?”

Curiosity piqued, he can’t allow her to close this door into her life with such ease. “I rather think not.”

She knows Snape and is well aware that he is not about to relent on this one, but that doesn’t make the memories any less difficult. “When Tuney and I were little, before either of us ever considered the concept of magic being real, we used to host these tea parties together.” She pauses, hoping that the explanation to this point will be enough to satisfy her friend. It is not. “We would get dressed up in our nice dresses and bring out the tea set our grandma gave us. Mom thought it was so cute that she would help us prepare tea and cakes. But, when we started getting old enough to listen to her instructions, she decided it would be even more adorable if we had all the proper manners and acted like miniature adults. She thought the pictures of us having a proper afternoon tea made the best Christmas card pictures, so she taught us both how to dine like ladies.” By the time she has finished, Snape isn’t sure whether her hair or her cheeks are a brighter shade of red. The fact that, in some
way, Snape had made her look like that, made the heat spread lower and he wanted so badly to reach out and touch her hand where it lies on the table.

But, like table manners, his parents had never taught him that some touches were all right, nice even, so he pushes his fists into the pockets of his robes and answers Lily. “Alright, then. Teach away.”

He sits down, across from his friend, with a full place setting in front of him and lets her words be a lullaby. The soft, delicate caresses of her instructions play across his mind with the same delicacy as the petals of the flower she was named for. At the end of it, the only part of the lesson that he has retained is that the smallest fork is a salad fork, and that you will be brought a new fork with dessert. But her voice as she teaches, all the authority and strength mingled with the shy embarrassment, will be forever embedded in his mind. Not that that means he doesn’t want very dearly to hear it again. So, when Madam Pince arrives to banish them back to their dormitories because it’s so very late, he has a suggestion. “That was very helpful,” he says. “I learned a lot, but I think I still need a bit more help. Perhaps we could meet again tomorrow?”

“Of course,” she agrees, pleased that she knew something worth sharing with this boy who had taught her so much about the world in which she now lived.

“I think,” Snape responded as they left the Library with all the dinnerware in Lily’s bag, “that some practice in a real situation might be useful too. Perhaps on Saturday we could have a picnic together, by the lake. I overheard a couple of the older students talking about how to get into the kitchens, so I could bring the food if you brought along all the plates and bowls and cutlery and such.” Now it is his turn to blush, but against his sallow skin it makes him look ill.

Lily doesn’t notice his awkwardness, just responds pleasantly “Oh, yes, that sounds like a great idea, so long as you promise not to get in trouble for going into the kitchens. Let’s meet in the Entrance Hall at noon.” They come to the end of the hall, and Lily must progress up, while Snape must go down to the dungeons before they reach curfew. “Night, Sev!” she calls as she heads up a flight the grand flight of stairs.

“Good night, Lily,” he says, but she is already gone. “See you tomorrow,” he finishes, even though he knows she won’t hear him; it is for his own comfort, a reminder that despite everything he lacks, he still has her.
Tormented

It was the third Wednesday of the school year and the first years were just beginning to get into the swing of things. They no longer required maps or prefects to navigate the school and the resounding thuds of the giant school bell ringing had ceased to be a huge shock. Thus it was that Snape found himself moving across the grounds, having left the school after Transfiguration with the Hufflepuffs and heading down to the greenhouses for Herbology with the Gryffindors. There was a short break, allowing time for the students to make it from the Astronomy tower to the Greenhouses if necessary, but most students took it as an opportunity to socialize.

Snape, on the other hand, hurried straight to his next class, not wanting to go back on his promise to Lily about staying out of the more unpleasant business of the other Slytherins. The expanse of green that he had to cross was wet from the early fall drizzle that plagued all of non-colonial Great Britain and Snape’s old, worn-out shoes offered very little grip. So it was that he found himself half walking, half sliding, to class when a person with whom he held no expectations of pleasant conversation called out.

“Hey, Snivellus!” The unpleasantly arrogant voice of James Potter called from the top of the slippery hill.

Snape made no sign that he had heard the shout. He continued walking, focusing on the placement of his feet in self-preservation on two fronts: if he fell, James and Sirius would swoop in like vultures, and if he reacted Lily would scold him mercilessly.

“I don’t think he can hear you James. Perhaps you should speak up!” The Black boy was almost worst: he should have understood the loyalty he owed to Slytherin house.

But Lily had said to just ignore them. And Snape was trying, but there are some things that one cannot simply ignore. The solid splat of gooey mud contacting the back of his neck happened to be one of them. Before he could consider the possible repercussions of his actions, or perhaps in spite of knowing them - Snape himself wasn’t sure - he had his wand out. He had the advantage while the two arrogant boys and their rat-like companion laughed heartily. Remus did not laugh, or even smile, so he was the only one to see Snape lash out with his wand and cast conjuringo on James’ book bag, causing it to burst into high flames that easily jumped from the bag to James’ robes, as well as Sirius’, where his arm came too close to James’ side.

Immediately distracted, the two black haired boys began jumping about in a panic, calmed only when Lupin managed to extinguish the flames with an agumenti charm that, by all rights, aught to have been too advanced for him. But it was nothing in comparison to the curse Snape had cast. Lupin recognized it as a curse that most seventh years would have difficulty with, but more importantly, dark enough magic that Lupin doubted very much that detention would be the worst punishment for casting it. By the time James thought to look for Snape, he had long since disappeared down the hill, across the muddy field, and into the greenhouse.

They would not pursue. Both James and Sirius had burns that required immediate treatment, so Lupin lead them to the infirmary. Madame Pomfrey asked what had happened to cause such burns and both James and Sirius found themselves explaining that James’ book bag had simply caught fire, without apparent provocation. They themselves were perplexed by it, though, as they told Lupin once the nurse had left, they were sure Snape must have had something to do with it.

And Lupin, afraid of what his two friends might do if they knew the truth, assured them that it couldn’t have been; if it was anything more than a freak accident it would have had to have been
someone older, with more training. For Lupin’s sake, they agreed. Though neither boy believed it, they knew there was no evidence, so they would take revenge in their own way.

Snape, for his part, was greatly relieved that word of the altercation had not reached beyond those involved. He would have like to tell Lucius, but even that praise was not worth the risk of Lily discovering exactly what sort of spells he had been teaching himself from the books he had bought with money quietly taken from his father’s wallet; money assumed spent on drink. Yet Severus knew that the Lupin boy had seen, and had obviously not told. And he hated feeling indebted.
The dinners and parties and casual get-togethers in Slughorn’s office were becoming almost normal for Snape by the end of first year. The fancy food and the array of different forks no longer phased him, though the concept of being a part of something where people didn’t look down on him was still a bit odd.

Then summer holidays arrived and he spent two months back with his mother and father, miserable except for those brief moments he spent with Lily. But her family went away, on a regular vacation and he was left with only his parents for company. It was during that period, when he had nothing to remind him that Hogwarts wasn’t just something he had dreamed up, that he began to forget. Without Lily reminding him that if things got bad he could just disappear into the memories, he became stuck in Spinner’s End, trapped like an animal – scared, beaten and desperate.

He was so isolated, so desperate for time to move faster and the summer to end, that September 1st managed to creep up on him. Overall the return to school was a relief and he slipped back into his old patterns from the year before with ease.

It was not until the second week, when Slughorn hosted his usual start-of-term dinner that Snape got nervous about being back. He had arrived with Lucius, hoping that the older boy would take most of the attention. His hopes were realized, and Snape managed to slip away, off to the back of the room where Lily was sitting.

They did not have long to speak, though, there was little to say, as they had conversed the night before while doing homework in the library. It had been only a minute or so when the door opened and the final members of the Slug Club arrived.

“Now that everyone’s here, I welcome each of you to a new year and invite you to choose a seat so that we may begin the meal and get to know each other.” The students converge on the round table that Snape has become familiar with after many suppers eaten around it. He and Lily take seats near where they had been sitting on the couches. Snape finds himself beside a new member, a first year Slytherin that Lucius had showed some interest in, likely due to his name: Regulus Black. Snape had been wary at first, unsure that he would get along with the brother of his tormentor, Sirius Black. However, as Lucius drew him into the circle of those with high ambition, true beliefs and clean blood, Snape grew curious.

He had had very few opportunities to learn anything of Regulus and saw this dinner as an excellent occasion to acquire a new ally and, perhaps, a weapon against Sirius.

As Snape passed Regulus what he now knew to be a red cabbage coleslaw with shredded carrot and paprika seasoning he inquired politely “how has your first week been?”

“Quite enjoyable, thank you. And you?” His words are polite and well mannered in the way that only someone raised attending social events of a calibre much higher than this can achieve while accepting a heavy china bowl full of bright purple vegetables.

“My first week back has been most pleasurable. All the excitement of the new classes has been a pleasant way to usher in autumn.” As Snape finishes speaking he has to turn away slightly to accept the next bowl, but when he has accepted the tangerine and avocado salad with white truffle garnish from Lily, Regulus respectfully ignores the interruption.

“I am very pleased to have carried on my family’s legacy and made it into Slytherin, especially after the…” he pauses, trying to find the correct word, “difficulties my brother has been causing my parents.”

Carefully checking that Lily was engaged in conversation with Dirk Creswell and wouldn’t be
paying Snape much attention, he makes his first comment, testing Regulus’ loyalties. “And we are very happy to have you. You have some unique talents and… endowments, that will be very beneficial to you, should you choose to use them for the correct allegiances.”

“I can assure you, I have pledged myself entirely to the legacy of Salazar Slytherin.” He has taken his cues off of Snape and speaks in a low, conversational tone that makes the words passing between them seem uninteresting, deflecting attention, while also staying on a low frequency that posed difficult to hear for those not trying.

“Ah, Lucius hasn’t discussed the more distant future with you then.” Something about this thrills Snape, the fact that he has been trusted to initiate this boy of such high lineage, because he knows that the conversation they were about to have would not have fallen to him unless Lucius had ordered it.

“No, he has merely inquired as to my opinions on such subjects as blood purity and the acceptance of muggle borns into the school.”

“Then allow me to be the first to ask what your plans for after graduation are?”

“I admit that I have not yet made a decision on that front. Might I inquire as to what interest you hold in my future?” The question holds no emotion and Snape assumes that, being bright enough to make it into the Slug Club, Regulus has begun putting the pieces together, but does not want to say something that might be out of line, or inappropriate should he have misjudged the situation.

A slight smile, just a quirk of one side of his mouth, before Snape responds. “I merely thought, given your heritage, that you might have considered a career in the ranks of Salazar’s greatest disciple.”

“It had crossed my mind. My parents and I do agree with his principals, and I had so hoped to do something suitable with my life.”

“But?”

“I beg your pardon?” Raised well in the higher circles of society, Regulus remains ever polite.

“There was clearly a ‘but’ on the end of that statement, I want to know what it was.”

“Nothing of particular importance.”

“You can tell me, Regulus. I promise, I won’t tell. I might even be able to help.”

“Oh it’s not the sort of thing that requires help. I simply don’t know how the blight that Sirius has caused my family will affect my bid for entrance into his ranks.”

“It won’t.”

“How can you know that?”

“If you can prove your worth, he will not question the actions of estranged relatives.”

“And how might I go about proving my worth?” He can’t help the slight tinge of curiosity that pollutes his even voice.

“I suggest you turn to your left and begin a conversation with Lucius Malfoy. I am aware that the two of you are acquainted, for he has an interest in you already, but if you can demonstrate to him that you would be valuable to the cause, he can be a helpful leg up, so to speak.”
“Thank you” he says, giving a nod, which Severus returns, before Regulus takes his advice and turns to the tall blonde boy to his left, politely introducing himself into the conversation between Lucius and Avery.

Snape turned to his right, where Lily was still engaged with Dirk Creswell, preparing to join their conversation, only to be interrupted by Slughorn, who was introducing the new members and the next course of the meal, but Snape paid his words little attention, already having made all the introductions he felt were necessary for the night.
This was not Snape’s day. Hell, it hadn’t been his week, and, he mused as Lily walked into the Potions classroom, it was likely to get worse. He already had a fairly good idea why Lily had been being so cold, but it offered him little consolation when he considered that, unable to avoid her during the first of two shared classes, the culmination of this bout of unhappiness between them was likely to occur sometime in the next seventy-five minute period. Sure enough, she took a seat on his left, pulling out her textbook with unnecessary force and causing the professor to look up at the smack of heavy hardcover on wood.

“You’ve been avoiding me.” She doesn’t bother to actually look at me, just speaks to the chalkboard at the front of the room, which proclaims that we will be brewing a boil removing solution.

“Yes,” I reply, “You’re mad at me.”

“And you thought pretending I don’t exist would fix that?” She still hasn’t met my eyes, and I know she won’t because the lesson is about begin and she never fails to pay perfect attention. I look at her neck, held straight and taught, I want to kiss it – I can afford the distraction; I’ve known how to make three varieties of boil removers since first year, and five simple recipes to cause boils since second.

I have a brief moment to collect my thoughts, come up with the response least likely to invoke her wrath, because the teacher has begun introducing the subject of the lesson and putting instructions on the board. I know well enough not to talk when a lesson is being taught. After five minutes or so the class is set to the task of brewing their potions and as she begins snatching ingredients from her bag she gives me an odd look, with one eyebrow brought up and her lips pursed. Wanting to postpone the inevitable I don’t make any move to begin my potion, instead saying “Lily, can’t we do this somewhere more private, you know everything echoes in here.”

“No, you know I need all the help I can get with this stuff” her arm makes a general motion in the direction of her cauldron.

I can see the professor watching us, he will come over to see how we are progressing if I don’t get us out of here quickly. “I promise to teach you how to brew a boil-remover three times more powerful than this, though I don’t see what you need it for, if you just come with me.”

She knows I could teach her more about this than the professor and she gives a curt little nod of acquiescence. I stand, slinging my bag over my shoulder as I walk to the teacher’s desk. “Sir, Miss Evans and I have a prior engagement, may we be excused?” He agrees, with a pretence of reluctance, as I knew he would. We are both favourites of Slughorn’s. I catch Lily’s eye, jerking my head at the door and she stands, bag in hand, and walks to the door, where I meet her and we leave.

As our feet caress the worn stone floor of the deserted dungeon, she starts in again. “Well?”
“I hate it when we fight.” I pause, hoping this will be enough, but it doesn’t seem to be. She no longer hangs on my every word and with every conversation I felt her slipping away, falling to a place where I think only the tips of my fingers will ever brush her. “I admit, it was stupid and illogical, but I had hoped that if we just avoided the confrontation it would all go away and we could go back to normal.”

“That’s very well, but you need to deal with issues head on.”

“No, no, I don’t.”

“It’s not just you, Severus, it’s everyone.”

“No it’s not.”

“Are you just going to contradict everything I say today?”

“No!”

The eyebrow shoots up. “Fine, if you can’t deal with this I’m going back to class.” She turns to leave.

“Please don’t” my voice is high, like my mouth tried to hold on to the words so that the words were being dragged out of me in a squeaky, breathless plea.

“Are we going to have a proper conversation?” She sounds strained, her voice betraying her exhaustion where her body doesn’t.

“Yes.” It’s all I can say, because I need to keep her; she has become as tightly woven into my life as the anger. Without her, I would unravel, but not before the hate and the pain did their work and ruined everything I’ve built, all the alliances I have forged with the other Slytherins and the professors, it would all crumble as I lay helpless behind the steal bars of insanity.

“Alright then.” She is irritated, impatient. “Why don’t you want to deal with this?” I am quickly becoming another problem that she needs to solve, no better than a tricky equation on an exam.

“Why do you think?” At the irritation in my voice she begins to turn again.

“How can you say that? How can you pretend that you’ve never dealt with any of the problems in your life?” Apparently I’m a very difficult problem.

“I didn’t say I’d never tried, I said it never ended well.”

“And what have you dealt with? And please, please tell me that you didn’t deal with Ellen Zarazun, because if you did this conversation is over and we won’t be having another one.”

“Ellen Zarazun? What does she have to do with this? Didn’t she go to visit her aunt in London?” I am lucky: I don’t have to lie; I really hadn’t heard anything about Ellen, not from any of my classmates.

Lily can see my confusion and some of the tension goes out of her shoulders, but she doesn’t seem satisfied. “You swear to me that you had nothing to do with Ellen Zarazun?”

“Yes, I’ve never even had a conversation with her outside of Transfiguration. Why, what the hell
I feel this compulsion to make her understand, really grasp how much better for her I am. “I’m just
could I have done to make her go to her aunt’s?” I’m playing dumb, pretending not to have caught
ev...
trying to show you they’re not as wonderful as everyone seems to think they are.”
I love the blush that creeps into her cheeks; it makes me think of other ways I might evoke the same reaction.

“They don’t use Dark Magic, though.” She drops her voice and I lean in, mostly to hear her next words, but also, a little sliver of my brain admits, to catch the scent of cool grass and rich cinnamon always present around her. “And you’re being really ungrateful. I heard what happened the other night. You went sneaking down that tunnel by the Whomping Willow, and James Potter saved you from whatever’s down there – ”

My blood boils at the memories from that night and I become indignant once more. That horrible little git told her what he had done and expected some sort of gratitude? He was getting too cocky, too involved in her life. I would have to put and end to it, but that would displease Lily further. So instead I make an effort to defend myself verbally, even though words are not my forte. “Saved? Saved? You think he was playing the hero? He was saving his neck and his friends’ too!” I feel myself slipping as the words come, falling into the patterns of dominance she finds so degrading and I know I learnt from my parents. Like father, like son. But I hadn’t touched a bottle or Lily, I was better than him. Wasn’t I? “You’re not going to – I won’t let you – ”

“Let me? Let me?”

I have gone too far. I can barely see the emeralds that I love and I know I have to fix this. “I didn’t mean – I just don’t want to see you made a fool of – He fancies you, James Potter fancies you!” I hate say it, it makes it seem real and I can no longer pretend she hasn’t noticed his ridiculous advances. “And he’s not…everyone thinks…big Quidditch hero – ” I can barely talk he makes me so angry. I would consider hitting him, probably more so if I thought Lily liked him enough that it would make her mad.

Fortunately, she cuts me off. “I know James Potter’s an arrogant toerag, I don’t need you to tell me that. But Mulciber’s and Avery’s idea of humor is just evil. Evil, Sev. I don’t understand how you can be friends with them.”

The words seem stuck, ringing in my head on a constant loop and I don’t mind at all. Lily just insulted James Potter and it made this awful week seem almost worthwhile. The echoes are so loud I honestly don’t know what she said after that, don’t particularly care. She pushes off the pillar and starts towards the Great Hall. I follow, legs acting of their own accord to keep me close to her.

When I tune back in she is saying “I don’t suppose there’s any chance of my getting an answer to my earlier question regarding your constant avoidance of efficient ends to problems?”

I decide she deserves a little bit, just an idea of where I’m coming from on this one. “You know I hate talking about my parents” I say as we enter the Great Hall, just in time for an early lunch.

*****

When I return to my dorm I find on my pillow a folded piece of parchment, on it a quote:
A simple friend thinks the friendship is over when you have an argument.
A real friend calls you after you had a fight.

Under that, Unfortunately, telephones don’t work at Hogwarts, so this was the best I could do.

I’ll have to ask how she managed to get it into the dormitory. For now, I will enjoy the way her handwriting curves, and how her hand trailing across the page has left it smelling of her, and hope that it will be enough to keep the nightmares of alcohol soaked words at bay for the night.
The Fight

It had been a nerve-wracking walk up the many flights of moving stairs, past portraits the whispered behind their hands and moved with him, changing frames to follow him, hungry for the gossip they new the coming confrontation would provide. There were students too, with mocking grins and scathing glares. Clearly the whole school had heard about the incident by the lake. For such a large school, news travelled remarkably fast.

He reached the tower he knew housed the Gryffindor dorms out of breath with some crazy knight chasing him and shouting about recapturing the fair maiden’s heart as he tried to ride a very fat pony from painting to painting. Luckily, the Fat Lady seemed reluctant to allow the hyper man, who she referred to as Sir Caddagan, into her portrait, and he left quickly, out of boredom. Though, she looked just as disappointed by Snape’s arrival.

“I still can’t let you in without the password, no matter how many years have passed, or do pass while you sit there.”

“I know! I promise not to bother you, I’m just going to sit here and wait for Lily, or anyone else willing to pass on a message, to come out.” As he spoke he, he sat down with his back against the stone base on which a polished suit of armour stood. This immediately seemed a bad idea due to Peeves making an unwelcome appearance from within the shiny metal statue.

“Snivilous has the sniffles!” he cried in his grating singsong voice.

“Shut up you stupid git!” Now, Snape mused, was not the time for Peeves to taunt him.

“Ohh… what an angry Prince, soon to be the king of puffy eyes and runny noses!”

“Solidify!” Snape spat, his ebony wand giving a harsh jab in the direction of the poltergeist. It was one of many spells that Snape had been working on over the last few months. The notes were scribbled out in the margins of his various textbooks and he had not been sure it would have any effect, let alone the desired one. But in the moment after he spoke the wide smile on Peves’ face turned to a look of terror and mystification as he scrabbled at the air, trying to avoid the pull of gravity for the first time in his life. Crashing to the floor like a lead weight made Peeves give Snape a look so pathetic he probably would have pitied him on any other day, under any other set of circumstances.

But today was today, so he said hollowly “the effects will wear off in a couple of minutes. I suggest you go hide; wouldn’t want it getting around that there are ways to thwart your pranking. And if you leave me the fuck alone, I promise to keep it quiet.”

The poltergeist did not bother to respond, instead he just crawled behind a nearby statue, from which Snape didn’t see him emerge in the time that he sat there.

Snape’s perch remained uneventful for some time. Having missed the dinner rush due to the meeting with Slughorn and Dumbledore about his use of foul language and continued antagonism towards James Potter, he was forced to wait for a student to wander back from the Library or the grounds. The first one to do so was Remus Lupin, and though Snape was loathed to talk to anyone that considered James Potter a friend, he was afraid of missing his opportunity and hailed the sandy-haired boy as he headed for the portrait with his nose buried in a thick book.

“Lupin,” he called, the words loud in the circular room of stone.
It took the other boy a moment to register that he was being called, but when he did he glanced around and eventually caught Snape’s gaze. “Hello, Severus.”

Snape felt almost guilty for his rude call when Lupin, with whom he really had very little quarrel, was willing to be a gentleman to someone he knew hated him at least a little.

“I need you to ask Lily to come out and talk to me.” He wanted this to be over; he hated feeling obliged to be nice to people. That was something that had always appealed to him about Slytherin; nobody expected kindness.

“After what you said to her today? I don’t imagine she’ll be too cooperative.” His tone was friendly, he honestly didn’t seem to be insulting Snape, and with a jolt Severus realized he never had. Even when huge fights broke out between the three black haired boys, Lupin had always stayed to the side and pretended none of it was happening.

“I know what I said was wrong. I’m a blundering idiot and I really want the opportunity to apologize because Lily means the world to me. Please ask her to come out.” The usually snide voice held none of its typical contempt; instead it was honest, and Lupin had always appreciated the difficulties of being honest.

“I’ll pass along your message.” He begins to walk back towards the portrait, seeming to want to get away quickly. Probably a smart choice; Snape, too, would very much like to run away from this crazy man with dark hair tangled and the salty lines of dried tears decorating his face.

“Thank you.” The words feel foreign against Snape’s tongue, almost choking him, perhaps because he can’t recall saying them with any sincerity even once in his life.

Snape paces for some minutes, but when it becomes blatantly obvious that Lily is not about to emerge from behind the portrait he goes back to the suit of armour and ceases to move for another two hours or so. It is then, at about ten thirty in the evening, that one last Gryffindor, a girl named Mary Rosesmith, hurries up the stairs, hoping to avoid curfew.

“Mary!” Snape had met her on a couple of occasions, a long time ago, when Lily still tried to integrate Snape into her group of Gryffindor friends. She was a bit scared of him, always had been, so he wasn’t surprised when she made no answer. “Can you please ask Lily to come out and talk to me? I’m not going away until I have the chance to apologize, and if that means I have to sleep out here, so be it.”

She gave an odd sort of nod that shook her entire upper body and turned, disappearing behind the portrait and into the Gryffindor common room. Again, Snape waited, but this time it was only ten minutes and the Fat Lady swung open to reveal an irate Lily, wearing her dressing gown and with her hair brushed for bed.

Leaping forward, Snape tries to get as close to Lily as he can. She steps out of the hole behind the portrait and it swings back into place. Then she steps back, out of his reach as he speaks, a desperate “I’m sorry.”

Her arms fold across her chest and Snape knows it has nothing to do with the cold. “I’m not interested,” and she made an effort to turn away, go back inside, but was stopped by Snape’s words.

“I’m sorry!” His voice holds the uncertainty that comes with being on the verge of tears.

Hers holds bitterness. “Save your breath.”

A whimper. He curses how much he sounds like the filthy mutt Black.
She wants to hurt, to make it clear that she is doing this for herself and her house, not for him, that he is not worthy of favours. “I only came out because Mary told me you were threatening to sleep here.”

He was caught somewhat off guard. “I was. I would have done.” He tried explaining, while he had her attention. “I never meant to call you Mudblood, it just – ”

“Slipped out?” He has never heard her voice this harsh before. Even talking about his fellow Slytherins she had kept some level of control on her fury. An old muggle quote, something from a distant story that Lily had once told him while they lay under their tree by the river during summer break. Something about hell having no fury like a scorned woman. He wished he could go back to when those were just words. “It’s too late. I’ve made excuses for you for years. None of my friends can understand why I even talk to you. You and your precious little Death Eater friends – you see, you don’t even deny it! You don’t even deny that’s what you’re all aiming to be! You can’t wait to join You-Know-Who, can you?”

His mouth opened as he prepared to object, but he never had been able to lie to Lily. He closed it without managing any words in his defence.

“I can’t pretend anymore. You’ve chosen your way, I’ve chosen mine.” Now some level of sadness does touch her voice, but it is more a sadness at the reality of what he has become than at the loss of their friendship; she had known they were slipping away from each other for some time.

His words are desperate, like he is falling and scrabbling desperately for a handhold in a sheer rock face. “No – listen, I didn’t mean – ”

“ – to call me Mudblood? But you call everyone of my birth Mudblood, Severus. Why should I be any different?”

He needed to explain, to get across what he felt for her because he knew this would be his last chance, as much as he hated to admit it. He felt compelled to make her understand that she was the only one that he didn’t think of like that, that her family didn’t matter to him, just like his hadn’t mattered to her. But he couldn’t. He couldn’t form the words of express the emotion and she turned, red hair a spray of fire around her head, green eyes full of contempt, and stepped back through the portrait hole, leaving Snape alone to make a new life for himself, one where old promises didn’t matter, one where he could do anything he wanted with the other Slytherins. But he already felt like it was over, because nobody could live without the sun.
A Death in the Family

Severus returned very rarely to his childhood domicile in Spinner’s End during his time at Hogwarts, opting to spend the holidays at school when possible. The two summer months were the only time when he was forced to return to the screaming and fighting and alcohol that went hand in hand with returning to his parents. Over seven years, this aught to have added up to a total of four hundred and thirty four days spent in the company of Eileen and Tobias, yet, in his school career, Severus spent four hundred and thirty seven days in the desolate old house.

The extra three days were the result of the death of his mother in the last week of January, during Snape’s sixth year. He had been in Slughorn’s office, enjoying a conversation about the uses of armadillo bile in restorative potions with Slughorn, and a third year boy named Robert Jeffstone who had proven himself quite adept in the art of potion making when a scared looking Hufflepuff first year entered and told him in a quivering voice that the headmaster needed Snape to come to his office immediately. He had, of course, obeyed, bidding the others good night and heading to the gargoyle with the little blonde girl. She had spoken the password and then ushered him into the office, at which point Dumbledore handed her some sort of muggle candy and bid her goodnight.

“Please, take a seat, Severus.” His voice was calm, but there was something underneath the tired old man façade, something that Snape knew meant bad news. He thought back to the many detentions he had received, the inquisitions about dark magic that had been carried out by students, but to the best of his knowledge nothing worthy of this level of gravity had occurred recently. So he did as he was asked and perched in the high backed chair facing the heavy dark wood desk.

“I have some very sad news, Severus.” Pity, that was what had been so well veiled, not anger or disappointment.

“Sir?” What could cause Dumbledore to feel sympathy for such a student as himself; one who had been in so much trouble, was a known friend of many of the members of the Dark Lord’s inner circle?

“Your mother, Severus. She passed away a few hours ago, but I just got the owl. I am so very sorry.” The wrinkled old hands reach out trying to comfort, but Snape draws away, all too familiar with the hurt palms can inflict.

He is seven again, cowering at the kitchen table while his father yells. “Filthy son of a bitch! Or should I say witch? Fucking magic. Right lot of good it’s done us, just look at the state of this place, and now you’ve gone and killed the puppy. If you weren’t so useless, maybe you could have magic-ed up enough food, so that even that mangy little flea bitten mutt could have eaten! Eileen! Come do something with this fucking carcass, cook it for dinner maybe, make both of you useful. Either way, take it and get out of my hair, I need to deal with the boy!” Snape watches the hand come down, waits for the sharp crack as whatever convenient hard object his father has strikes him somewhere it will leave a lasting reminder of his message. Instead he feels warm skin against his knuckles and realizes that Dubledore’s hand has found his, even though it is hugging his legs, where he had unconsciously brought them up against his chest.

The old man has walked around his desk and taken the chair beside Snape. “I know it’s hard. Loosing a parent hurts, Severus, I understand.”

Severus doesn’t respond, just stares blankly at a small crystal globe sitting in the desk as wet streaks paint themselves down his cheeks. The dampness feels alien; the last time he cried like that had been the night Lily had stopped talking to him. Or maybe it was even longer ago than that; he didn’t keep
close track of anything emotional. Maybe it was the night his puppy had died. It had shown up a week before his seventh birthday, wandering in the woods where he liked to play. When he had taken it home, his mother had said that he could keep it, so long as he kept it secret from his father. For three months he managed, but it got out of the shed one day and tried to become friends with Tobias. This had resulted in a swift kick that had broken its front paw, so he had taken it to his mother, hoping that she might be able to heal it. Her magic had waned as she became more miserable at the hands of her husband and, though the idea of making her son happy had given it a boost, she was no longer powerful enough to fix the bone. Instead, her spell caused the bone to shift, working it’s way through the skin. Hoping that he might be able to help it heal with some sort of potion, Severus had brewed a strengthening and healing draught. The only trouble was, he had no access to any hawthorn leaves and as a child this one ingredient had not seemed important. Unfortunately, he was very wrong and his potion caused more harm than help. The puppy, which he had never named, out of fear that he would be forced to get rid of it, died the following night. He told his father it had starved, not wanting him to know about his mother’s use of magic.

It is several minutes before Dumbledore speaks again. “I truly understand how upset you are, and it is completely understandable. However, you’re father has requested that you return to the family home in order to prepare for and attend the funeral. You will be transported by portkey in an hour, so you have a few minutes to mourn on your own, but then you must go pack your bag and return here.”

Snape had heard only the first seven words, those pertaining to being upset, because as he listened to them he was shocked to find that they were true. He had always thought that the death of either of his parents would be like the breaking of a shackle, but instead a new and crushing weight has been added to his shoulders. It pushes him into the chair, the pain of knowing that his mother was gone, that there was now nobody left who cared about him, not since his fight with Lily last year. He had expected that having no loyalties would be the sort of thing that set you free to do whatever was convenient, that he would feel some form of freedom. Instead, he feels drained and small, dreading having to face his father without the only protection that had ever existed in the small things his mother had tried to do for him. When he had hoped for a release, he had received more hurting, because, he realized, he had never told his mother that he loved her, and honestly, until that moment, he hadn’t thought that he did.

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There was a thick layer of snow over the graveyard in the desolate and miserable town of Sinner’s End on the day that Eileen Prince was to be buried. There had been no service because there was nobody to attend, only Snape and his father, who didn’t have the money anyways. So, early in the morning, Snape went to the florists on the good side of town, over near where Lily and Petunia lived. He bought a single flower, a final parting gift to give his mother before she was lowered into a gaping, hungry hole in the frozen soil.

Snape stood beside the coffin, wearing dress robes, because, as much as his father had hated it, his mother had been a witch. The priest spoke, droning words that meant nothing to the nonreligious pair of Tobias and Severus. The younger, at least, managed to refrain from fidgeting, using the same techniques as he might when under scrutiny during a detention. Desperate for a drink, Tobias continually shifted from one foot to the other. Finally, the priest ceased his tedious readings of biblical nonsense and Severus stepped forward, placing the flower he had bought earlier that day on the polished wood top of the coffin.

“The only flower I will ever love for the only person who managed to love me,” he whispered, too quiet for the others to hear, as his hand left the lily now framed against the surface of his mother’s final resting place.
“Class, I will ask that you all open your books to page four hundred and twenty three and study the method for the Patronus charm. It is a tricky spell that will require a fair bit of work and be difficult to practice in application….”

… Snape stood, back to the class, and lifted his wand, eyes fixed on the thin window in front of him. He could hear other students moving, but by N.E.W.T. year they were all more than proficient with silent magic. All thoughts focused on a day seven years before, when he and Lily had been on speaking terms – no, more than that; they had been friends. They were walking by the lake in crisp October air and they were studying for a quiz they had the next day in Transfiguration. It was simple, but it was enough. He felt the emotion rise, the usual knot at the base of his stomach unravelling and drifting upwards, to his throat. As the strands of cutting feelings – bitterness, anger, regret, but also contentment and belonging, from a time now long past – bit into his throat and mouth he struggled to dispel them. The nearest exit: his words, and all that feeling forms into the name ‘Lily’ and he can feel the breath leave him, but the word was all his. It is with some surprise that he sees the strands of silver fall from his wand, solidifying into a doe, which canters around him and tilts it’s head to one side. It is the closest he’s felt to the only person he ever managed to love for over a year. Then it becomes too sad, because all in silver smoke, this doe doesn’t have the bright emeralds in it’s eyes; they are glassy and blank, clean gray slates. Rather like his own.
Sirius' Accusations

When dealing with Sirius Black, Severus Snape was used to non-provoked attacks. That did not make it any more pleasant when, on a dreary September 1st, while on the Hogwarts Express, heading to his final year of schooling at the castle, the self involved Griffindor threw a nasty punch from behind, knocking Snape forward as he moved down the corridor.

“You fucking arse!” The words were venomous; this was not his usual ‘fun’ to impress his stupid friends.

Spinning in a swirl of black robes Snape made two quick movements: his wand hand pulled the thin piece of ebony from his cloak pocket and the other flew to his head, cradling the place where he knew a nasty bruise would form. “What the fuck was that for?”

“You! You and all your little Slytherin cronies. You fucking maniacs, with your ‘Dark Lord’ this and ‘Death Eater’ that, you have made my brother one of them!”

“You hated him and everything he stood for!”

“He was my brother! Now he’s just another murderer in training!”

“He made his own choices, he’s his own person and I can’t control him any more than you can!”

“But Voldemort can!”

“You dare say his name?” The voice dropped from yelling as loud as it could to a soft hissing accusation.

“Yeah, might as well. He’s family now, isn’t he? That’s what it is, being one of his Death Eaters, it’s like some sick, fucked up family!”

“Well, you’d know all about that wouldn’t you? Weren’t your parents siblings?”

“Those fucked up freaks are not my family!”

“Oh, that’s right, you ran away. Bit like your brother, only he had somewhere to go.”

“I had a family to turn to, not a fucking cult!”

“Oh, did the school dogs accept you into their pack?”

“You don’t know the first thing about family!”

“On the contrary, I have a very good idea of what not to do. I’ve learnt from the mistakes of those around me, unlike you. I can look at either of our family trees and give you a million reasons not to mix with those of lesser blood!”

“Yeah, ‘cause the pure-blood fanatics in my family are a glowing example of what wizards can achieve.” A bitter laugh, more like a bark.

“They are if they know where to put their allegiance. You’re brother had the right idea; he’s pretty well off and you could be too if you weren’t such an obtuse idiot. Times are changing and you fans of chivalry are a dying breed that the coming administration won’t make any effort to preserve.”
“You forgot brave; I don’t need some wanker with illusions of grandeur to hide behind, I come right out and say what needs saying: you, Severus Snape, are an evil and smarmy git, who really needs to make friends with a bottle of shampoo!”

“And you are an overgrown, fleebitten dog, so fuck you. Regulus is a big boy now, making good decisions all by himself, and you’d do well to follow in his footsteps and grow up, yourself.”

It was then, as Snape turned to push through the rather substantial crowd that had gathered that the first curse flew. Snape hung upside-down, his robes falling to reveal only a plain pair of black slacks.

Even in such a position he was a competent wizard. “Sectumsempra” he hissed, rage and embarrassment making him careless with his choice of spells. This was one that the school did not know about; Dumbledore would know he had invented it and the punishment would be even more severe. Sirius fell, wide gashes across his midsection pouring blood.

Snape muttered “Liberacorpus” and he too made contact with the floor of the train. With the number of witnesses, he knew there would be no chance of getting out of this without reprimand, so he simply stood up and leaned against the carriage wall, awaiting the arrival of a member of staff and making no effort to help the now almost unconscious Sirius.
Initiation

For Snape, his final day at Hogwarts was more of a beginning than an end. Lucius, with whom he had kept up a constant stream of correspondence, would be the one meeting him at King’s Cross Station when he arrived at Platform 9¾. It was not a social call, or even one with a particular level of friendliness behind it. Over the five years since Lucius’ graduation, Snape had acted as a correspondent, handing over information about the school while passing along orders and messages written in a confusing code of potions ingredients and obscure references to Slughorn’s classes. In the beginning he had shared duties with Avery, but when the older boy graduated Snape became the lead and only correspondent, as Regulus had made the choice not to return, opting instead to undergo whatever initiation posed necessary to join the Death Eaters and had been accepted during the previous summer. Snape too had considered this course of action, but had been advised not to by Lucius, who had cited a need for a trusted observer and organizer within the castle walls.

It was one of these letters, received by Snape in early June, that told him to be prepared to apperate by side-along immediately after the train pulled into the station. His trunk, he was informed, would be transported separately and he need not worry. It was made clear that these instructions were trifling matters in comparison with the final direction: do not mention any part of this letter to anyone. Snape took everything that Lucius said as gospel, because he knew that if he showed any sign of disrespect towards one so close to the Dark Lord doors in to the ranks of the Death Eaters would slam shut very quickly.

So, on June thirty first, Snape put aside personal grievances with the blonde boy who had acted as both a mentor and an oppressor and quickly spotted the bone straight locks of peroxide blonde.

“Hello, Severus. So good to see you.” The words have the same polite tone that Lucius has always used, like it’s a conversation at a dinner party.

A few of the muggles stare, intrigued by the oddly dressed pair, both still wearing full robes. They ignore the eyes and walk down the platform as they continue their conversation. “A pleasure indeed, Lucius. How have you been?”

“Excellent, thank you. Narcissa and I are very close to finishing the wedding plans. The date is tentatively set for August sixteenth. And you?”

“Equally well, though I am glad to be finished with school.” Malfoy makes no response; they have reached the door to a men’s washroom, which has a sign across it reading Out Of Order. When Lucius pushes the door open and enters, Snape does not hesitate to follow, knowing that everything he does today is part of the test.

Inside, Lucius holds out his arm and Snape grips it, prepared for the crushing tightness that goes along with dissaperating. When the restriction stops and he can breath again they are in a large entrance hall, high ceilinged, with every surface made of highly polished marble or some kind of precious metal. Narcissa is waiting, anxious while her fiancée was out.

Lucius nods to her, giving her a quick peck on the forehead before raising his hand and indicating for Snape to follow him. Narcissa remains, watching the two men disappear down a long hallway and into the formal dining hall, where she knew that he was waiting.

As Snape stepped into the dimly lit hall, he could make out the hulking shapes of an oval dining table that could easily seat thirty, but there was only one figure at it today. At first Snape thought that the curtained off high windows and unlit chandeliers simply didn’t provide enough light for him to make out the face of the man facing him across the polished wood surface, but as Lucius bowed deeply
and Snape followed suit he saw the figure raise hands so pale they seemed to glow and lower a hood that had been obscuring his features.

“Another one, Lucius?” The voice frightening, like having sharp shards of ice scraped down your back, but it is the face that made Snape feel frightened. On first glance it seemed almost human, but as the pale surface turned to look Snape over he saw that it was too smooth, the nose flattened into little better than two slits and the lips as colourless as everything else. When red eyes, the pupils deformed, find Snapes’ he cannot look away, frozen while skeletal fingers probe his mind and meet the crude barriers that he built as a child.

“So this is Severus…” The words are directed to Malfoy, who is standing behind Snape, awaiting the judgement. Still, the fingers poke and prod against the delicate structures in Snape’s brain, freezing the mortar of the brick walls in hopes that they will crack. “Has he proven himself useful thus far?”

“Yes, master,” Lucius softly with a respectful dip of his head. “He has been my correspondent within the castle since I left, passing out orders and collecting information.”

“Very well then,” Voldemort pronounces as he withdraws the searching digits from Snape’s mind, “we shall give him a chance, but you know the rules, Lucius: previously useful of not, he must prove himself and his loyalty.”

“Of course master, I leave that in your most capable hands.” There is a tone of reverence in Lucius’ voice that masks the usual dominant characteristic of supremacy. Again, Snape feels the knife-like edges of cold run smoothly up his spine, sending shivers that Snape suppresses through his limbs. “Excellent. I suggest then, that you go to your wife while Severus and I pay a visit to Spinner’s End.”

Lucius bows deeply and backs out of the room, leaving Snape, stock still and without any outward emotions, with the creature that is slightly more than human, but slightly less than man.

“I believe you know where to go.” Voldemort says as he rises from his chair and disappears with a sharp crack.

Snape does know, an image of his childhood home already forming in his mind no matter how much he doesn’t want it there. Just before the painful compression of apperation seizes him he knows that though the searching fingers did not succeed in collapsing any of the walls, they did manage to scrape away much of the mortar.

*****

When Snape arrives in the kitchen of the house where his parents lived it was exactly as he remembered it. Everything was filthy, the chequered linoleum so thick with mud it was impossible to tell that the tiles were white and black, not varying shades of grey-brown and the stove was caked in filth. Even his father was in his usual spot, reaching for one of the many bottles of liquor kept in the cupboard above the sink. Only one detail is off: the skeletal figure of Voldemort is beside Snape.

“I need to know that you are willing to remove any obstacles that stand in the way of progress, despite emotional ties. Kill him.” Snape cannot understand why his father has not responded to any of the happenings in the kitchen, but assumes that Voldemort has used the powerful magic of which Snape had heard tell.

“Any particular way you would like me to go about it, sir?” His tone is respectful, simply inquiring as to further orders.
“No, I find this is a good test of personality.”

“Very well sir.” From a pocket on the inside of his robes, Snape pulls out his wand of ebony.

“Father,” he says, conversationally, as if he were any other child announcing his return to any other father. Something in him wants to know what his father will think when his son reciprocates for all the years of pain and fear, wants to watch the abridged version of his life’s emotion flash through Tobias’ eyes before the spell banishes him from the wasted body, so he is pleased when the gaunt face turns to him at the word.

“Avada Kedavra.” Two simple words and a flash of green light, frighteningly like that of Lily’s eyes. His father crumples, hits the floor with a dull thud and Snape never saw the man’s sunken eyes, not until they are glassy and empty. There is the sharp smell of whiskey from the pool of amber liquid and broken glass abound his father’s hand. Somehow, the body does not look any different than it had in life; perhaps he had simply been too close to death to really count as living all this time.

He keeps his tone even as he asks, “shall I deal with the body, sir?”

“Yes, then return to Malfoy Manor.” Voldemort vanishes, and Snape is left alone with the closest thing he has left to a family member. He begins to work, cleaning spells and spells of burning, removing the body and the glass and the stains. With each spell he resolutely builds up the walls inside his mind, blocking these new memories while re-burying the old ones that had surfaced during the final visit to his father. Perhaps, he muses, as he considers the man he has just killed, he was right to hate magic. Really hasn’t done him any good. Difficult to forget images that he really doesn’t want float into his mind, pictures of how very miserable his father had been in life. Then again, maybe it has.
The Prophecy

The reprimand from his old professor had been degrading and terrifying, but Snape had endured much worse for much less. Dumbledore no longer had power over him in the way of a true master; that reverence had fallen to Voldemort. And in the words of the prophecy he had heard the strange woman Trelawny speak, he saw an opportunity to gain favour in the eyes of that dark master.

Dumbledore’s punishments for his eavesdropping had been light, consisting mainly of encouragement to abandon Voldemort, for he was nothing without his servants, the old man had said. Lies, Snape knew. He had seen the magic Voldemort could perform and it was formidable. There were few who would challenge such a wizard, as evidenced by his quick rise to power and the Ministry’s pathetic attempts to bring him down. In the ranks of the Death Eaters, Severus was a valued member, his skills with potions put to use and acknowledged. He was not about to give up the best life he had experienced yet for an aging professor who had never seemed overly interested in him up until this point.

So the slick-haired man apperated to the old mansion that his master used as a point of reference, where messages could be left and received. In the dusty sitting room that nobody ever bothered to clean he called his master with a light touch to his left wrist. Besides lowering both hands to his sides, he made no motion as he waited for the appearance of the Dark Lord, eyes fixed on the door and body positioned in the centre of the room where there was the most free space to stand.

It did not take an unreasonable amount of time for the hollow face and ethereal frame of Lord Voldemort to appear in the doorway. “What is it Severus?” He wasn’t one for pleasantries with his subordinates.

“I have news, master, that concerns you.” He speaks to his shoes, head bent in an approximation of a bow, respectful yet knowing that time was not to be wasted on formalities in such a situation.

“Let me hear it.”

“It is a prophecy, sir.”

“Very well.”

“The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...”

“When did you hear this?”

“Earlier in the day, sir. I was prevented from returning to you sooner by Albus Dumbledore.”

“And did the old fool hear the prophecy as well?”

“Yes sir, it was made to him by a woman whose name I believe is Sybil Trelwany.”

“Where were you?”

“The Hogs Head, master.”

“And was there anything further, any more to the prophecy?”

“I cannot say. I was interrupted by the barkeep.”
The derisive noise is difficult to identify as anything other than displeased. “A clumsy mistake.”

“I apologize, sir.”

“Very well, you shall remain with me until I can determine to whom this child will be born.”

“As you wish, my Lord.”

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Severus has been hovering just outside the door to the dark room, lit only with flickering candles for several minutes before he knocks on the frame of the open door. “My Lord?”

“Enter, Severus.” Voldemort had just been considering calling for the faithful servant, having known that he was outside the door and growing bored of waiting.

Head half bowed and gray eyes glancing nervously from underneath thick eyelashes, Severus forces himself to speak. “I have a request, my Lord.”

“Very well.” Being an intelligent man, and very good at legilimency, Voldemort did not need Snape to explain himself, but he had always enjoyed the discomfort of others.

“I ask this in the highest regard for you, and meaning nothing against your well-laid plans, but I would be forever grateful if you could spare Lily Evans, the mother, when you take the Potter baby out of the equation of your assured triumph and survival.” There is no fear in his voice, though it fills his head with an unpleasant buzzing.

“Why would you want such a thing? You are a worthy wizard, she a lowly mudblood.” This Voldemort truly wants to know, for Snape has many layers of defence around his mind, built over years and in the crude fashion of one with little training. Though indelicate, they are sufficient at preventing access to Snape’s memories and behind them lie newer, more intricate and skilled creations guarding his emotions.

“We knew each other as children, master. James Potter stole her when she ought to have been mine.” There is hate in his voice now and it leaks through thin cracks in the walls in his head.

“And would you step aside and let me kill the child if it were yours, Severus?” His voice is silk, the raw edges of the high, icy words polished away as he wheedles.

“I would, my Lord, do anything to ensure your continued survival.” Not strictly an answer, Voldemort notes.

“Very well, you have long proven yourself faithful and useful. I shall try to spare her, though I will never understand your obsession with one of such foul blood.” He is bored now.

“I thank you my Lord.” True relief; he believes the words of his master and turns to leave.

One more question, for the sake of entertainment. “Severus, understand that if she gets in the way she shall have to die. And that goes for both the time I find her and the child and any point after that, should she become your mistress. Keep her under control, Severus.”

“Yes, master. I understand.” How, he wondered, would he ever convince Lily to extinguish her fire
and live with him under the Dark Lord? Impirio, he mused, would be better than death…

Oh the ease with which one may manipulate those around him.

*****

Snape left quickly, apperating to a dark alley near the abandoned mill in Spinner’s End. For this, he needed privacy.

He conjured his patronus, and the doe made his heart break all over again. Or perhaps it was the memory of Lily telling him about muggle princes. Either way, it took more effort than he felt he could exert to sustain the spell and send it on its way, with his message.

There was no question that it would find Dumbledore, but Snape was not sure that he was ready for the confrontation. If he was granted an audience at all, that is. The dingy alley was too close to his childhood to feel comfortable at the moment, and Snape left, apperating dangerously without a clear destination.

He stood on the river bank where he and Lily had curled up against the big tree to his left, with the roots cradling them while they told each other stories. It was an even worse place to be, but he didn’t have long to consider the memories that must have brought him here. As he stood, tears overcame him and it was with blurry vision that he saw the silver phoenix swoop down. He had been granted his audience.
Lily's Death

As a child, Halloween had been used as a source of horror stories to scare Severus into behaving and an opportunity for his father to ridicule his mother, slapping her for telling him lies about her being a witch. “You’re a liar, you are! Are those the sort of ethics you want to pass on to our child? Forget ‘witch’, you, Eileen, are a bitch!” his father would shout and, if her cheeks weren’t so bruised the pain of talking wasn’t worth having the last word, his mother would shout back “Ethics? You’re one to talk, you filthy drunk!” The conversation, if you could call it that, would continue in this manner for some time, resulting in one of three outcomes: his father would turn on him and his mother would slip away, his father would pass out drunk, or his father would hit Eileen hard enough that she ceased to respond, in which case the focus usually fell upon Severus until the alcohol took his father out of the game.

It was these memories that tainted the celebrations on a yearly basis for Snape, and he tended to remove himself from the path of revellers. No pumpkins, no candy, and no costumes. The first two had been thrust upon him during his years at Hogwarts, but it was not odd for him to miss feasts and large gatherings in favour of some individual pursuit of knowledge. He was well known for his dislike of the distractions that existed in the classrooms during regular lesson times.

His master saw more use in the celebration of Halloween than Severus ever had. To him it was a case of perfect timing. While children in costumes sat in school, paying their professors as little attention as they could get away with, Voldemort had enjoyed a great success. He had broken the few defences and reservations Peter Pettigrew had harboured into nothing better than dust; he now knew where the Potters and their child, the boy of the prophecy, were hiding. The luck of the matter was that it had occurred on Halloween, a day when fright and sorcery were revered, and he could walk among the muggles without garnering undue attention.

Thus it was that Severus, currently in his master’s favour for having delivered the words of the prophecy, was left in the old Riddle house, awaiting the triumphant return of a now immortal Lord, Lily with him, prepared to become Snape’s wife. It was in this state, in the sitting room with Lucius, his wife at home nursing their young son, Avery, Belitrix, Rodulphos and Mulciber, the most loyal servants of the Dark Lord, that Snape felt his dark mark burn in a way he had never experienced before.

Based on the cries and exclamations of pain from those around him, they had all felt the searing cold, like being branded with dry ice, against the delicate skin of their wrists. Each person pulled back the sleeve of their robes, expecting to see some sign of their master’s success, preparing to rejoice, and instead stayed silent, afraid that they had been cast out of this inner sanctum, for each person watched as the skull marked against their flesh faded, though it didn’t disappear. The first to make a noise was Belatrix, an inhuman cry, bursting from her chest in an animalistic expletive of her pure anger, at what, nobody was immediately sure. After that, more silence until Avery asked, never the sharpest of Voldemort’s followers, “Is he immortal now?”

Nobody bothered to respond: only a severe decrease in power could cause such a drastic shift towards invisibility in their tattoos. “Perhaps we ought to each go home; it seems best that the minimal amount of physical evidence connects us, should the unthinkable have happened. We shall await contact from our Lord and the morning Prophet with bated breath. If questioned, be thoughtful with your alibi.”

Individually, save Belatrix and Rodulphos, the present Death Eaters disapperated, Belatrix leaving with a vow to find him. Snape made no effort to move. He remained in the moth-eaten living-chair
he had spent all evening in, staring blankly at the soiled flower pattern wallpaper. It was several minutes before he had looked at each possible situation and deduced that the chances of Lily being dead were high.

At that point, he wasted no time. He was in Dumbledore’s office with angry words dying on cold lips as he saw true remorse in the old man’s eyes. He had done what he could.

But it hadn’t been enough. And now all that Snape had left of the woman he loves (loved, he corrects himself quietly) is a baby who shares nothing with his mother but her eyes.

This is a broken heart he realises, worse than their final fight, worse than his mother’s death, worse than anything he can imagine. And as the man before him preaches Snape comes to know that he is right; he will do anything to mend the gap in his chest.
The man on the stand is sallow and pale. This in itself is not unusual for the man in question, or even really for the men that have sat in his place previously. Weeks under the care of Azkaban’s dementors will make anyone look a bit peaky.

What is unusual is that this man has pled guilty to the list of crimes read out by the plump little court secretary. He is not a raving maniac, endlessly proud of the atrocities he carried out in the name of a now dead master. Neither is he a snivelling mess, claiming the Imperious defence. What he is is a broken man, one utterly defeated by his past. But he is also a man being carefully, slowly rebuilt.

He doesn’t seem to have much to say for himself and it is clear as he sits limply in the wooden chair in front of the judge that he is not the one trying to rebuild Severus Snape. His hands are where they aught to be, laid flat on the arms of the chair, but the magic of the chains has seen no reason to slither up and hold him in place.

“Witness for the accused, Albus Percival Wotlfric Brian Dumbledore” says the secretary, voice high and bored; she has done this a million times and will do it a million more in the aftermath of Lord Voldemort’s fall.

There is a rustling as fifty bodies in matching maroon robes all sit up a little straighter at the secretary’s words. Perhaps, they all think, this case won’t be as open-and-shut as they had anticipated. The professor was a trusting man, willing to defend the most ill advised people, but he was also an intelligent man who was rarely wrong.

“Severus Snape did not ask me to defend him. In fact, he asked me not to.” The mass of bodies arranged on the wooden benches rising in tiers behind the judge has stopped shifting. The large stone room is dead silent, as though all fifty-three people have ceased to breathe. “He fears, I think, that I will reveal the best of him and leave him at your mercy without his well constructed armour.” Indeed, the accused’s strange limpnness in the chair seemed to give the impression of a man being held up by nothing but an exoskeleton built of hardship and cruelty (some of it his own, directed outward. Even that leaves its mark.)

“My question is, do I need to do this? Or can you judge now, on my word alone that this man has reformed? Because I am telling the absolute truth and I do not feel that a man that is now doing so much in the name of good deserves to be stripped bare for the satisfaction of strangers. I ask, with all kindness and respect, that Severus Snape be acquitted of all crimes, with responsibility for all further actions of his brought before this court resting on my shoulders.”

There is a long pause. Nobody knows what to think, least of all the sallow man with greasy black hair. He is perplexed and his head just slightly higher, just enough to meet the eyes of his defendant.

“All those in favour?” says the shaking voice of the judge, quiet until this point in the proceedings.

And fifty hands are raised, slowly and with varying degrees of confidence, but all are raised. These people may have little faith in the man on the stand, but their faith in Albus Dumbledore is near complete at this time.

“You are free to go.” And that is that; Severus Snape is a free man, at the beginning of a new life.

He takes the offered hand, pale and traced with veins, and stands. “I think now you aught to reconsider my offer of a teaching position.” Snape only nods curtly, but when his head stills it is
raised just a little higher again, and as he leaves the dark stone courtroom it doesn’t fall.
It did not take Lucius Malfoy long to find Snape. As soon as he returned to the fighting and the castle, a dark shape, soaring out of a high window like a large bat, caught his eye and he immediately recognized the man who had once been his protégé, before the sallow potion master had surpassed him in the ranks of the death eater.

When the man landed, on the outskirts of the fighting, where he could not be called a deserter, but neither did he have to kill anyone, Lucius advanced quickly. “Severus, the Dark Lord has requested your presence.” There is no warmth, nor even any malice, in Lucius’ words. Since his stint in Azkaban emotion seems too difficult to summon; instead he opted for a burning drive to regain his old position in his master’s high esteem.

“Very well, where is he?” The blank white mask hardly moves with the curt words.

“I shall bring you too him; better not to risk any members of the foolish Order overhearing his position.”

Snape offers nothing more than a curt nod before once more launching himself up, taking flight as only those loyal followers of Voldemort knew how. Hovering momentarily, he allowed the elder Malfoy to take the lead and they moved off, leaving the bright lights and loud flashes of the battle behind them. With the efficient means of transportation it took very little time before they were passing over the miniature buildings, like gingerbread houses, of the village of Hogsmead. The streets were deserted, as Snape knew they would be, with dementors prowling and hoping to come across anyone who actually had any happiness left for them to sop up.

When Lucius begins to slow down and lose altitude, Snape experiences a moment of scepticism; could Lucius have lied to him? They are over the shrieking shack, which seems a crude, unprotected and illustrious base for one such as Voldemort. Then Snape remembers that full moon so many years ago, when Sirius had told him how to enter the Shrieking Shack from beneath the Whomping Willow and it begins to make sense what advantage this location proves: a tactical one.

As the two men, swathed in dark robes and looking menacing, walked across the unkempt lawn and into the ramshackle mansion neither talked. Snape listened to the distant, but still very audible, sounds of his comrades being killed. With any luck, this meeting would pose an opportunity to put a stop to the fighting; better late than never.

It was through a once-grand entrance hall, down a flight of rickety stairs and through a very dusty hall that they travelled at last to a dark room, lit by the silver, starry light Snape knew was cast by the prison Voldemort had constructed for Nagini. Around the edges stood stacks of wooden crates and in the centre was an old wood table, the surfaces splintered and covered with a sticky combination of dust and cobweb. Why the Dark Lord had not cleaned it was apparent in the fact that he was not sitting in the straight-backed chair of equal disarray placed beside it; he had more important things to deal with.

“My Lord,” Lucius bowed deep as he made their arrival known, “Snape, as per your request.”

The broken voice, too high and cold to be entirely human, replies “Good. Now leave us; I have things to discuss with Severus.”

“My Lord…” the retort, the request to stay, for is he not valued as highly as this half-blooded fool who spent so much time dangling off of Dumbledore’s arm, dies under the scrutiny of the red snake eyes that only a select few had ever looked directly into, and fewer still had lived to tell what they
had seen there.

“Go find you’re wife, Lucius, and help her fight. Her sister understood the importance of this battle and has taken her to the killing. I will call you all back should I require your services.” Clearly the nearness of his victory, of his absolute power has put him in a good mood, for he is being as kind as he ever is anyone other than the snake. Malfoy understands this and turns in a billow of black robes and blonde hair to leave, back down the hall.

“Is the fight an exciting one?” His voice is as close to friendly as it ever gets.

“What I saw of it, yes. I am unaware of how it has progressed since I left.” I know that he has been monitoring everything happening at the castle, and thus any further explanation is simply a waste of time, and thus his patience.

“And how many have been killed?” It is as though he is enquiring about the outcome of and interesting cricket match.

“None myself, sir. I was driven out of the castle by the heads of house. However, the bodies I saw were plentiful. I would like very much to do my part for you, my lord, and request permission to return to the fight, to kill my share.”

“That will not be necessary, Severus; I have other uses for you.”

“I know the castle and grounds better than any of the others, I could do huge damage to their assets…”

“I will not argue that point, but I want you here, Severus.”

They need someone strong, someone with strategy, someone who is not fighting based on blind rage, to follow. Unless you are planning on doing the grunt work, I suggest that you allow me to return; we could bring them down within the hour, my Lord, their resistance is crumbling--"

"--and it is doing so without your help," Severus knew before hand that his arguments would be shot down, the Dark Lord would not have summoned him unless he really wanted him here, but keeping Voldemort preoccupied seemed the rout least likely to result in Lily’s son’s immediate death. "Skilled wizard though you are, Severus, I do not think you will make much difference now. We are almost there...almost."

He continues his wheedling, his distractions, as he has had so much practice with. "Let me find the boy. Let me bring you Potter. I know I can find him, my Lord. Please." As he spoke, Snape moved around, closer to the thin man with the hands like bone, careful to pass around the table in the direction that would not alarm the large snake.

"I have a problem, Severus," said Voldemort softly.

"My Lord?” Snape was somewhat taken aback. It was rare that Voldemort did not directly answer his inquiries and requests.

As Snape watched, one of those skeletal hands was raised, the black sleeve falling back to reveal the soft brown wood and simple carving that Snape recognized as Dumbledore’s wand. He had long known it’s true name, for its old master had never hidden its identity from Snape, hoping that if it had to pass to a new owner it would be Severus. Of course, when Voldemort had begun his search Snape had played dumb, citing the child’s tale as his only source of knowledge. "Why doesn't it work for me, Severus?"

In the days of planning, when Dumbledore had made him promise to carry out the unpleasant task of
killing him, to save another, more complete, soul, he had been warned that this might happen. But, as with everything else he had done for Albus, he had accepted the risks. Of course, that didn’t mean that he had gone into those situations unprepared; he had always been very good at acting.

After a moment of nothing but Nagini’s light hissing he spoke. "My--my lord? I do not understand. You--you have performed extraordinary magic with that wand." His voice is laced with confusion. Perhaps if he had been this good at lying when he was still in school Lily would have remained his friend, perhaps if he could have hidden all of his own emotions at the time…

"No," That needle of a voice left no room for negotiation. "I have performed my usual magic. I am extraordinary, but this wand…no. It has not revealed the wonders it has promised. I feel no difference between this wand and the one I procured from Ollivander all those years ago." The tone was mild, as if they were discussing the whether, a calm mix of musing and almost forced interest.

This did not mean that Snape did not see the narrowing of his eyes, or the way his knuckles lost all hint of colour as they gripped the thin length of wood. As distant as he pretended to be, Voldemort was still human, still ruled by emotion. "No difference," said Voldemort again.

Remaining silent, Snape wondered what to say, how hard to fight it. He did not think Voldemort would notice if he were a little listless in the heat of planning another murder. Of course, giving in quickly would speed up the already short period of time in which he stood a chance of seeing Lily’s eyes one more time, of perhaps giving the other servants of Dumbledore time to save that last trace of the only person he had ever loved. And he honestly meant that; even Dumbledore had never worked his way as deep into his being as she had. He had not cried for Dumbledore.

Voldemort began to move around the table nearing Snape, and then passing him, taking the long way to his precious pet’s sorcerous cell. At the snake’s side he began to speak. "I have thought long and hard, Severus…do you know why I have called you back from battle?" Snape had made his decision; he would follow the promise he had made to Lily all those years ago until the moment of his death. He would not be a willing participant in anything she would not have approved of, and he was certain that stepping out of the way and letting her son be murdered would fall into things he had sworn not to do. The thoughts of her were difficult to surpass, knowing he was so close to whatever came next, to a place where he might get to see her again. Knowing that his mental defences were weakened, he did not look directly at Voldemort and his cruel red eyes, instead focusing on the swirling patterns formed in Nagini’s prison. "No, my Lord, but I beg you will let me return. Let me find Potter."

"You sound like Lucius." There is a harsh, hissing laugh, an exhalation of breath that makes most people shiver. “Neither of you understands Potter as I do.” The slit pupils shrink as he too turns and gazes at the coiling snake. “He does not need finding. Potter will come to me. I know his weakness you see, his one great flaw. He will hate watching the others struck down around him, knowing that it is for him that it happens. He will want to stop it at any cost.” No longer content to speak to Nagini, he wants Snape’s full attention and turns his burning gaze to the shadows under which Snape’s sunken, grey eyes hide. “He will come."

"But my Lord, he might be killed accidentally by someone other than yourself--" It would be easier if the inevitable would just occur; he is so very tired of this game of play-pretend.

"My instructions to the Death Eaters have been perfectly clear. Capture Potter. Kill his friends--the more, the better--but do not kill him. But it is of you that I wished to speak, Severus, not Harry Potter. You have been very valuable to me. Very valuable." A tint of regret has dulled the pint of the rapier voice. He truly believes him to have been useful; how foolish those who become over-confident are.
"My Lord knows I seek only to serve him. But--let me go and find the boy, my Lord. Let me bring him to you. I know I can--" He can feel the honorific tone he has spent years rebuilding after he lost all respect for this facsimile of a human when he broke a promise.

"I have told you, no!" A sharp turn has undone the slow rotation of his body towards his grotesque pet. Snape does not know whether master of pet was responsible for the sharp hiss following those words. "My concern at the moment, Severus, is what will happen when I finally meet the boy!" Never before had the impersonality of the title 'the boy' stuck Snape. Though he had been so much less than his mother in personality, he was her blood, and on his lips he felt a name forming, one he knew he needed to suppress. *Evans* he thought, the whisper spinning through his head.

He had to fight a little longer, for the *Evans* boy, for another generation of those emeralds that held more passion and fire than the cruel dictator he was facing had in his deformed little finger. "My Lord, there can be no question, surely--?"

"--but there is a question, Severus." The Elder Wand danced, dark against the emaciated, talcum powder hands. "There is." His legs join in on the dance, turning him back to Snape once more. "Why did both the wands I have used fail when directed at Harry Potter?"

It is not a true question; he does not expect Snape to be able to provide a true and complete answer. So he does not. "I--I cannot answer that, my Lord."

Perhaps he had misjudged the intentions of that question, for there is rage in Voldemort’s response. "Can't you?" Now Voldemort will begin explaining the logistics of the situation, and Snape feels confident that his input won’t be required for at least a little longer. "My wand of yew did everything of which I asked it, Severus, except to kill Harry Potter. Twice it failed. Ollivander told me under torture of the twin cores, told me to take another's wand. I did so, but Lucius's wand shattered upon meeting Potter's."

Now, he sees, is the time to begin showing signs of nervousness. Voldemort expects him to have caught on, and he will play that part. "I--I have no explanation, my Lord." Eyes averted, keeping his tone too steady, with pauses to show confusion. He could have taught this as a class.

"I sought a third wand, Severus. The Elder Wand, the Wand of Destiny, the Deathstick. I took it from its previous master. I took it from the grave of Albus Dumbledore."

Eyes back up, back on the snake-like features, he doesn’t have to fake the horror, just re-direct it. It should have been obvious from the beginning, but the disregard with which Voldemort talks of defiling the grave of the greatest wizard ever to live makes Snap feel ill; a gnawing in his abdomen and sharp needle points behind his eyes, now directed back at the man he had once willingly called master. Dumbledore had been very right, Snape thought, remorse was a powerful thing. Voldemort thinks that the slight shaking in his hands, and the loss of all blood and the freezing of the muscles in his face can be explained away by fear at a dawning realization. He does not notice that the eyes no longer seem to have anyone living behind them, that he has done enough damage over the years, that most of what Snape was had died long before this conversation, and what had been left had just been strangled; that Avada Kedavra was not all that necessary. With barely a movement of lips now as heavy as stones, Snape speaks "My Lord--let me go to the boy--"

"All this long night when I am on the brink of victory, I have sat here," said Voldemort, his voice barely louder than a whisper, "wondering, wondering, why the Elder Wand refuses to be what it ought to be, refuses to perform as legend says it must perform for its rightful owner...and I think I have the answer."

No question meant that Snape would give no answer. "Perhaps you already know it? You are a
clever man, after all, Severus. You have been a good and faithful servant, and I regret what must happen."

"My Lord--" Now was the time to become worried, to try to hold on to his life a little longer.

"The Elder Wand cannot serve me properly, Severus, because I am not its true master. The Elder Wand belongs to the wizard who killed its last owner. You killed Albus Dumbledore. While you live, Severus, the Elder Wand cannot truly be mine." Though he knew they were coming the words still hurt like a cut from a dull weapon, a sharp cut followed by the slow bruising as all the implications set in. It was at odds with the sharp voice.

"My Lord!" true protest; he so wanted to see Lily’s eyes again. And, he mused, as he drew his wand, instinct was a hard master to fight.

"It cannot be any other way." If he feels any regret it is now well hidden. "I must master the wand, Severus. Master the wand, and I master Potter at last." The wand is a blur of dark wood as it slices the air, but the expected green flash does not come. The rational part of Snape is relieved that he is not dead, the part all wrapped up in love had been so ready to move on, and so hopeful that it would be to a swathe of light so close in colour to Lily’s eyes. Then a movement catches his eye; the shining ball containing Nagini is rolling towards him, at a steady pace and steady height, until it is on top of him. He is fairly sure he yelled, but once inside, he can’t draw breath and thinks Voldemort is planning for him to die by asphyxiation. He quickly realizes that this is not the case; that it would be too slow for someone with so many important things to do.

The rasping hiss is clearly an order, in parsletongue and directed to Nagini. Perhaps ‘Kill’. He doesn’t have much time to contemplate it before fangs sink into the delicate flesh of his neck. He has no time to fight it, nor any particular urge to, not beyond the basic instinct to live. The pain is enough to make his knees give way and he falls to the floor, folding to the ground like a child’s doll. Around the puncture wounds there is fire, searing hot against his skin, but as the venom mixes with his blood it freezes the veins and it becomes increasingly difficult to move. Still, he remains as aware as one can be when in severe pain and he knows that this is not a kind killing, it is meant to hurt. There is no remorse and his words, "I regret it," are a lie. He blamed Snape for the whole difficulty with the wand and sacrifices must be made. Now he had a wand fully at his control, and he was not one to waste an opportunity. He turned and left, abandoning the man he believed to have been a faithful servant to the cold clutches of Death, for he had Death’s wand and did not fear that it’s true master may follow.

Snape could feel the warm stickiness of blood pooling under him, could see it running across the floor boards and mixing with the dust to become thick and brown, like the worlds most morbid time-piece it measured the draining away his remaining time. He could not turn to see master and pet leave the room, but he heard them go, even Voldemort causing the century-old floorboards to creak.

Almost silently, fearing his once-master’s return, he whispered a name. ‘Lily’, for he wanted so very badly to see her.

There was a movement to the side as a crate moved, seemingly on it’s own. A hole was behind it and out of it climbed nothing at first, only to have an invisibility cloak removed and Snape thought that James Potter had come to get him, to tell him that he would not be able to see Lily even here. Not wanting and eternity without her his hand goes stiffly to his neck, trying to staunch the bleeding.

Glasses he noted, covering grass green eyes. Not James, Harry he thought. Not much better, but perhaps he could pass along something to keep that little piece of Lily alive for a few more years, perhaps give an explanation as Dumbledore had always hoped he would. The eyes got closer as messy black hair fell around the pale face and the now grown body of the boy he envied knelt beside
him. His eyes were not capable of proper focusing and he needed those eyes closer, so he reaches up a bloody hand and grips the robes above him. Lips no longer fully under his command manage to form words after an odd gurgle clears his throat as best as he can. "Take...it...Take...it..."

Everything is slipping away and it is not difficult to release the flowing silver of his memories. They flow around him, not sure where to go until Harry begins directing them into a tiny flask, conjured by that insufferable Granger girl who had always been so talented.

Almost empty of everything he was as it dribbled and slipped away in the now muddy blood, the captured memories and off to wherever he was headed, Snape had to fight to see Lily’s eyes behind the glasses. "Look...at.... me..." And the emeralds did, they found the empty grey-black pools for seconds.

As Snape felt the last of his memories of her fade with his heartbeat, he didn’t mind. She was above him, emerald eyes alive, and he knew that they would continue on together, because even death couldn’t extinguish those blazing flames.

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