When Two Tribes go to War

by Scaranda [archived by ISF_Archivist]

Summary

A bottle of Ogdens, a hand of poker and a silly bet. NC17 for implication. My first attempt at MWPP, I’d welcome any observations.

Notes

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Author's notes: Thanks to Pauline for the beta reading

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Snape had managed to get himself tangled in the hangings of his bed somehow...If he had had the energy he would have wondered to himself whether that was good or bad. He tried to raise his
head, found his neck didn't care for the idea and gave up. Somebody was snoring lightly beside him, quite closely beside him, near enough for him to assume it was in his own bed...unless the dorm had been rearranged as he'd slept. He turned a tiny bit...that brought an ominous creak from the hangings and he decided against it, he'd prefer to know who was in the Slytherin dorm before subjecting himself, and whichever Gryffindor this was, to scrutiny this early. He hoped it was early...he didn't think this was Saturday or Sunday.

He lay back...he wondered how long he could go without a pee...now that he had thought about it. By careful manoeuvring he found that it was only his left ankle which had got caught...but he suspected he'd want the foot later in life, so he regretfully discarded the more drastic actions which offered themselves. The body beside him turned a little...but away from him...that hadn't been too helpful...He wished he hadn't taken on this stupid bet...but to refuse would have meant backing down to Black...and backing down to Black would have meant... well, backing down to Black was unthinkable. He wondered which, if any of the Slytherins, Black had taken last night.

The bet...as bets go, was quite a neat little thing. Snape had to take a Gryffindor every night for a week and Black had to take a Slytherin. That way, if the two honoured the deal, the prefect's head count wouldn't get confused...if Black honoured the deal...Snape wasn't sure that 'Black' and 'honour' were two words which had any business being in the one sentence.

He wasn't fooling himself...all this mulling over was to prevent himself remembering that the thing which lay in his bed, may Merlin have a handy Obliviation Spell, was Peter Pettigrew. It had been day one, get the nasty business out of the road straight away, fuck Pettigrew and get it over and done with. He groaned inwardly, it had been too awful to remember, cringingly embarrassing, at one point he had been sure he'd have to levitate Pettigrew's cock to something other than terrified flaccidity, his mind shied violently away as the pressure in his bladder increased.

He swore to himself that this was going to be the last time he let himself get drunk and play cards with Black...but he hadn't had the ten Galleons to pay the debt which he looked as though he might incur if Black saw his final hand...neither, he knew, had Black...and the bet had been born...Black had been bluffing, of course...two twos, a seven and...he couldn't remember what else...against his own pair of fours.

He wiggled his left ankle...maybe amputation wouldn't be so bad...old Pomfrey could always Magic his foot back on again, he supposed. Pettigrew snuffled...fuck, he had to get him out of here. He gave a half turn and with one last creak the hangings fell away from his ankle...one problem down, two to go. He wondered if he could trust the little rat not to move from the bed if he went for a pee...he'd have to be careful, he wouldn't want it to think he wanted it here. He had the first bit of real satisfaction in the whole sorry mess when he saw the fear light Pettigrew's terrified eyes at the fist he made under his nose.

He drew his hangings aside cautiously...the dorm was empty...thank Merlin for small mercies, he turned to the quivering heap of inhumanity that lay in his bed. 'Fuck off, Pettigrew...and get dressed first, we wouldn't want your little cock frightening the ladies would we?' he sneered. He wished he hadn't mentioned Pettigrew's cock as he felt another wave of excruciating memory flood over him. Snape listened to his terrified whimper in satisfaction as Pettigrew tried to put two socks on one foot; he stuffed his fat gut and tiny cock into the rest of his clothes and bolted.

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Snape caught Black's look from the Gryffindor breakfast table, damn him, damn that man, he
wondered if Black knew he had a cigarette behind his ear...ten points from Gryffindor, he thought to himself...post coitus was certainly more than satisfying than the actual event had been...one had to accept life's little gifts when they came along. He mentally ran down the Gryffindor table, tonight he'd earned something decent...He stopped at Potter, saw him look over appraisingly at him, fuck the arrogant bastard...but not tonight, Jamie boy, let him think he'd been passed over...Carter?...no, he was almost as bad...Lupin, then?...Maybe, Lupin might be interesting.

He noticed in amusement that Pettigrew was at breakfast, hiding behind Potter, there were no absentees from the Slytherin table either, just the odd slightly hostile look...accusing... Snape messing with the Gryffindors again...he wondered how long it would be until Lucius heard...he dared a glance along the Slytherin table, saw Lucius sitting with his seventh year cronies, watching him...damn, he knew already...no surprises there.

He watched Lupin, saw Potter whisper to him, saw Black join in, laughing...he reminded himself to check that Black had, in fact, shagged one of his fellow Slytherins...it would be typically Black to have allowed him to go through the purgatory of last night while he was up in the Three Broomsticks laughing his head off. He wondered how he was going to check...the whole fucking school was going to know about this soon, he had the uncomfortable feeling that the queue outside Black's dorm door would be bigger than the queue outside his own, he'd decided on Lupin. Snape stood as Black stood, their eyes met in challenge...Hmm, he thought, interesting, he knew from the look that Black had kept to the bargain...of course he would have to, he didn't have the twenty Galleons forfeit money any more than Snape had.

Black held back in the corridor, slightly behind his group of Gryffindors and caught Snape on the way out of the Great Hall. 'One down, six to go, Sniv.' His blue eyes were alight with challenge now.

'How do I know you kept your end of the deal?' Snape asked him, he'd make this quick, out of the corner of his eye he could see Lucius standing. He smirked at Black; the effect was totally lost on the arrogant sod.

'Didn't you see Roman Demarche limping?' Black laughed.

'No...I try not to look at Roman Demarche.'

'And I try not to look at Peter Pettigrew.' Black laughed again. 'Did you have to frighten the poor little bugger so much?' He flashed his hand under Snape's black robes and grabbed his cock. 'He says you're a big boy under all that black, Snape.'

'I let others be the judge of that...but if he only has himself and the rest of the Gryffindors to judge me against...I should set little store on what he says, if I was you.' Snape laughed inside as he pulled away, good, they were even so far, he was beginning to like this game. Lucius was walking across the Hall now. 'Send Lupin to me tonight, Black.' He looked down his nose. 'Let's see if he's any better.'

'You're on, Remus.' Black called over to the Gryffindor knot and anyone else who was in the corridor.

Fuck...Snape recoiled, the whole fucking school knew already, how was he supposed to perform under that sort of pressure...He watched Black walk off as Lucius glided up...all white hair and white teeth. He wondered why he wore his trousers so tight if they were giving him so much trouble walking properly. Lucius dismissed his minions with a toss of his head and took Snape's
'I am going to be late for class, Lucius...Can we talk later?'

Lucius smiled what Snape assumed he hoped was a slow dangerous smile, it left Snape unmoved, but he always remembered to feign terror to Lucius... when there were others around. He was expecting Malfoy to go into overdrive about the bet, he obviously knew about it, he didn't have time for a tirade about mixing with the Gryffindors and letting the house down...instead Lucius fixed him with a look. 'Make sure Slytherin win, Severus.'

Wonderful, just what he needed...more pressure.

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When he went down to the Hall for breakfast the next day he noticed that Lucius was sitting in the seat next to the one he always sat in, he debated going to sit in the seat next to one Lucius always chose... to return the compliment ...he discarded the idea, primarily because it was already occupied by Goyle. He didn't really want to sit beside Lucius, he'd rather replay last night in his mind a little, Lupin had proved to be as good as Pettigrew was bad, he hoped the Silencing Charm he'd cast had worked okay, the guy howled like a fucking wolf when he came. He was hoping to mull over the events of the night and catch up on a quick doze before lunch.

He noticed all of the Slytherins were watching him. He stole a quick look at the Gryffindor table, Black and Potter and Lupin...Pettigrew hiding in the middle...he noticed that Aurelius Marchbank had moved away from the rest of the seventh years to sit beside Black, balancing Lucius's move... he had an uncomfortable feeling that the two houses were drawing up battle lines. He sat down, Lucius seemed to have elected himself as his second, that was an uncomforting thought.

'Take Potter tonight, Severus.' Lucius purred as he pushed his white blond hair back over his shoulders. Snape thought he looked faintly ridiculous and had told him so often, in private of course, he let Lucius maintain his outward superiority, it was a small price to pay for his servitude in bed.

'Thank you.' Snape sneered as he looked with distaste at the ruins of Malfoy's breakfast. 'You are going to get fat, Lucius...nobody loves fair, fat and forty.'

'I am seventeen.' Malfoy looked startled, Snape noticed in satisfaction that he stole a look at his gut though, saw him draw it in. Lucius knocked a glass of fresh orange juice over his throat as though to neutralise the effect of whatever he had already eaten. 'Perhaps I need exercise.' He widened his grey eyes in what Snape supposed was a come hither look.

'I am busy exercising the pride of Gryffindor just now.' Snape observed and was rewarded with a crestfallen look from the pride of Slytherin, Merlin help us all. He relented, it was Saturday anyway and the Gryffindors would be knocking seven shades of shit out of the Hufflepuffs this afternoon on the Quidditch field. He hoped Gryffindor won, it would be nice to take Potter down a peg or two if he was on a stupid high...he might even stuff his precious Snitch up his arse...if he was good. 'Oh, very well...come to my room before lunch...and you are not staying all day...I might need some small amount of energy to deal with Potter...not much though, I suspect.' That was a lie, he knew Potter had it in for him, almost as much as he had it in for Potter... he couldn't remember why, though.

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The Gryffindors were waiting in the corridor outside the Great Hall again; their ranks had swelled somewhat...but he noticed that he had drawn a fair few Slytherins behind himself. Black moved away from them. 'Well, Sniv...who's on the menu for tonight?' He noticed that the challenge was still there, and something else, he wasn't sure what it was, but he thought he'd like to bend the arrogant fuck over a table and shag it out of him.

'I think I'll give Potter a ride on a real Broom tonight.' He smirked, suddenly glad that the Slytherins were at his side, he didn't need their muscle, but he wanted the Gryffs to see that he had his own following.

'Some other time, Snape...thanks all the same, but I've got a game of Quidditch this afternoon...I've more important matters to spend my energy on...not that you'd need much of it.' Snape noticed Black's laugh but he could see he was disappointed in James.

'What's the matter, Potter, don't you think you can hack it?...I tell you what...You've got your Quidditch game and I'll shag Lucius this afternoon...that way we've both been handicapped.' He spread his hands. 'Unless you fancy a swap.' He decided not to look at Lucius, he could feel the way he'd drawn himself up, he could feel his nostrils flaring in fury without looking at them.

He knew Potter couldn't back down, not in front of what looked like most of the fifth, sixth and seventh year now. He could hear Argus Filch coming down the corridor from behind the Gryffindors. 'Clear off, you lot...what's going on?'

'Make sure you change your sheets then, Sniv...I don't want to be breathing hair that fat bimbo's shed all over your bed.' Potter nodded curtly.

Snape felt a warmth in his belly, he decided not to expend too much energy on Lucius, in fact he decided not to even look at Lucius for a few moments. He caught Black's eye again, saw the amusement... caught Lupin's almost shy half smile...He began to hope that Potter got knocked off his Broom and broke a few bones this afternoon...in his neck would be good.

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He could hear the roar wafting up from the Quidditch pitch...it came to a crescendo...Potter...Poter...Poter...Fuck...fuck...fuck, Snape thought, the bastard had obviously caught the Snitch, in his mouth most likely...it was big enough.

'Seems your prize for tonight has won, Severus...make sure it's the only prize the Gryffs win.' Lucius murmured from his side. He'd raised himself up on one elbow and rested his head on the palm of his hand. His hair looked like a haystack, Snape refrained from pointing that out.

'Bugger off, Lucius...I need to tidy up in here.'

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Snape was late for breakfast for the first time since he'd come to Hogwarts. He noticed that Lucius was sitting in the seat he elected for his own the day before. He looked at the Gryffindor table, noticing with pleasure that Potter hadn't made it down to breakfast before him. The quintessential Gryffindor had presented himself at midnight the night before...he'd been good...damn him...but Snape smirked to himself in satisfaction, he thought he'd fucked a bit of the arrogance out of him...he'd a had a few anxious moments though, he had to admit that.
'Well?' Lucius hissed at him. 'What kept you?...You almost missed breakfast.'

Snape looked at the devastation in front of Malfoy. 'I am sure you more than made up for it.'

'Damnit, Severus, I'm a growing boy.' Lucius muttered defensively, shoving his empty plate over to the side, not caring that it swept Aldus Nott's cornflakes down to the next boy and his breakfast to the next, somewhat like a domino effect, Snape waited for them all to stand up and move along a seat. 'What was he like?' Lucius asked.

'Bugger off, Lucius, I don't see Potter describing me to the Gryffindors.' He didn't see Potter at all, but that was beside the point, he didn't want Lucius turning this into any more of a circus than it already was. He noticed the Gryff table turn as one to the doorway, their hero of the night had arrived, Snape was pleased to see he wasn't walking awfully quickly.

'Severus...It's important that you keep your end up...' Malfoy muttered. 'And everything else.' He smirked at his pathetic attempt at humour.

Snape frowned. 'Why?'

'There's a lot of money riding on this.'

Oh great, now they were running a book, he wondered what they were awarding points for, how they were calculating the odds, he was willing to bet Ariel Finnegan was handling that, he was glad he'd beaten Potter to breakfast. He watched as Potter sat down carefully between Black and Aurelius Marchbank. Black looked across at him, he raised his eyebrow in query and Black nodded to the door. 'I'll be back in a minute, Lucius.' He frowned and followed Black out into the corridor, he noticed he'd left alone.

'Well, well, Sniv.' Black began, but Snape could tell he wasn't quite as hostile as usual, the two of them were the centre of attraction at Hogwarts just now and he knew there was only one thing Black would like more than that... but he wasn't leaving right now so Black would have to content himself with half of the limelight, he'd been holding his own end up admirably from what he'd heard...in all ways. 'Who would have thought you had it in you.'

Snape flashed his hand to Black's crotch the same way Black had attacked him the other day. 'What's the matter, Black...running scared?...Not got enough to keep the Slytherins happy?'

'Fuck you, Snape.' He laughed, unruffled by the fact that Snape had got a better handful than he'd expected, the tart was hard. 'I'll send you Carter tonight.' He looked away for a moment. 'You'll need to shag a couple of them twice, Sniv, we've only got five sixth years...unless you want a couple of girls.'

'No thanks...and I'm not doing Pettigrew again.' He suspected that Black hadn't realised that he'd counted himself in the five.

Sirius laughed again, his blue eyes danced, the arrogant idiot had grown his hair almost as long as Lucius's now, Snape had to admit it looked better on Black though. 'Nah...I don't think Peter's heart could stand it.' He looked away for a second down the Hall from where he and Snape stood at the side of the doorway. Aurelius had gone over to the Slytherin table, he was talking to Lucius, head boy of Gryffindor to head boy of Slytherin, Snape suspected that even the staff would be watching this one.
Snape watched them. 'What are that two up to?' He could tell that Black didn't know either.

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By the end of the sixth night Snape had shagged Lupin twice, Potter once, Pettigrew once and Carter twice. He sat at breakfast on the seventh morning and looked across to the Gryffindors. He turned away as Lupin flashed him a smile but not quickly enough to miss Potter's enquiring gaze.

Lucius leant across to him. 'I had a meeting with Aurelius last night...at the Three Broomsticks.' He said as confidentially as a mouthful of bacon, eggs, toast and Merlin alone knew what other calories would allow.

'Uhu?' Snape asked, helping himself to the only piece of toast left before Lucius grabbed it.

Malfoy looked at the toast in regret. 'Tonight it's you and Black.' Snape looked at the Gryff table, he could see from the look on Black's face that Aurelius had just imparted the same gem of knowledge to him. 'You're both standing even on points, Severus...make sure you win, Finnegan won't pay out on a draw.'

Snape hadn't been prepared for the flutter of excitement he felt, he'd always wanted to shag Black, he had a funny feeling the tart had always been begging for it too ...but as sworn enemies they had never had the opportunity...now they had...and the honour of the Houses rode on it...literally. Black looked over. Oh I hope you're ready, boy, Snape thought to himself, you're about to get what you've always asked for. 'The venue?' Snape asked, he wanted his own dorm, he didn't fancy an audience of Gryffindors.

'Ariel Finnegan's going to toss for it with myself and Aurelius watching, immediately after dinner tonight.' Malfoy replied thoughtfully. 'Have a good lunch but don't eat too much at dinner, Severus...I don't want you letting me down.'

Snape looked at him in amazement as he spluttered his indignation. 'I don't stuff myself so full of food that I can't breath...You're the one who has to undo half your buttons under your robes.'

'I do not.' Lucius said defensively. Snape noticed that he didn't lift his robes to disprove the fact but took a swallow of fresh orange juice instead. Malfoy flicked his hair back over his shoulders, lifted his chin to harden his jawline and looked at Snape in alarm. 'I'm not fat...am I?'

'Not yet.' Snape murmured, he was more concerned about the fact that the bet had become awfully official, part of the public domain. He knew that the Ravenclaws had aligned themselves to the Slytherins and the Hufflepuffs to the Gryffindors, they had a bookmaker and bets on the bet, Lucius and Aurelius had got involved ...and it was all becoming very complicated, he hoped there wasn't going to be a fucking referee.

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There was a constant shuffling about in the Hall at dinner time, most of it centring around the Hufflepuff table where Ariel Finnegan was sitting...looking enormously pleased with himself. Even the teachers seemed to be interested enough to do an unusual prowl through the Hall... halfway through the evening meal. Snape wondered with discomfort whether they were just being nosy or if they were placing bets too. The whole thing had become ridiculous, it had taken over from the House Shield, which admittedly everyone had lost interest in because Gryffindor
and Slytherin were lying joint bottom in negative points... mainly due to the fact that Greenhouse four was now a large hole in the ground and it was only by a stroke of luck that the Herbology Professor wasn't lining it.

Snape didn't eat at dinner at all, he stole a few glances at the Gryff table but they seemed to have closed ranks. The meal dragged to an eventual end and Snape made to stand.

'No...' Lucius purred, he'd taken a lot of care dressing, Snape noticed, he looked good in black. He had his hair tied back in a velvet ribbon, it looked much better, he suspected Lucius had set his sights on Aurelius. 'I think we shall let them come to us, Severus...let us set out our stall, so to speak.'

Snape noticed Finnegan walking across to their table and noted Aurelius stand and glare at him...Lucius had been right, damn him. The Gryffindors began to amble over to the Slytherin table as Dumbledore walked across the Hall. 'I hope there is no trouble here boys... and girls...no fighting.'

Lucius smiled, he was good at this sort of thing. 'No, Sir... nothing at all... Just a little competition between Black and Snape ... a chess match.' He lied smoothly.

Dumbledore's raised eyebrow told them all what he thought of that excuse. 'I do not want to hear of any trouble, Lucius.' He looked across the table. 'From you either, Aurelius.'

As Dumbledore left the Hall Finnegan produced a Galleon from his pocket. 'Are we ready, gentlemen?' He nodded to Snape who found Black at his side and then to Aurelius and Malfoy. 'One toss or best of three.'

'Get on with it, Finnegan.' Potter muttered; he seemed pissed off with the whole thing now. He wasn't keen on anything which shoved him out of the limelight.

'One toss will suffice, Ariel.' Aurelius put in quickly, he wasn't about to give way to Lucius again.

Malfoy nodded his agreement, Snape noted that no one had seen fit to ask himself or Black.

Snape watched the coin flip into the air turning over and over in its ascent and then begin its downward spiral. Ariel caught it and slapped it onto the back of his hand. 'Heads.' Lucius said quickly and smirked at Aurelius.

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Snape sat in his dorm, it was ten to twelve, by common consent the rest of the sixth years were going to bunk up with the other Slytherins and the prefects had ceased to matter after night two, they all had money on the outcome anyway. He felt nervous for the first time since this had begun, he couldn't think why...well he could, Black was the only one of them he had ever really wanted to shag. He sat fully dressed sipping a small glass of Ogden's, just a small one, it wouldn't do to have brewer's droop tonight of all nights.

He heard the light footsteps on the stairs and turned slowly, the way he'd promised himself. Black stood at the top of the stairs, his blue eyes a mystery in the guttering torchlight. Snape was pleased to see he looked as vulnerable as he felt. He lifted the bottle of Ogden's and raised his eyebrow.

'Just a small one.' Black murmured.
He lay listening to the birds begin their dawn chorus. He heard Sirius's soft breathing, he watched
the gentle rise and fall of his chest, he suspected Black was awake too. He touched his shoulder
and Black turned to face him again, his blue eyes soft and wanting.

Sirius stroked a bit of his black hair off his face and held his eyes in question. 'A draw?' He asked
softly.

Snape nodded. 'I suspect so...Finnegan will be pleased.' He pulled Sirius to him once more, felt
his cock stir again as Black began to run his fingers across his chest.

By the time it was time to get up he knew what he'd always really known ... he was in love with
Sirius Black ... better than that, Sirius Black was in love with him. Now they had to make sure
that nobody found out.

'What do you mean...a draw?' Lucius spluttered. 'What's that supposed to mean?'

'I believe it means that the two sides in a contest have equal skills... that is the normal meaning.'

'Well... we shall just have to have a rematch. Go over and tell Aurelius that I want to see him.'

'Do it yourself ... No wonder you're putting on weight, Lucius, you never get off your fat
backside.' Snape muttered.

Malfoy flared his nostrils. 'Don't push your luck, Severus... I'm not at all happy about this.' He
stood and marched across to where Aurelius seemed to be having a similar conversation with
Black. Snape wondered when Lucius and Aurelius had adopted this bet as their own. He noticed
that Potter looked pissed off again, he'd been like that all week. The Gryffindor Golden Boy
didn't like second place, Snape reckoned he would have to watch out for that.

There was a Gryffindor and Slytherin summit meeting planned for next Saturday night at the
Three Broomsticks. Finnegan had agreed to roll all bets over onto a new competition, one which
could be monitored a bit more easily. The school was alive in anticipation, the Gryffs and the
Slytherins had been moping about bitching at one another for months since the greenhouseiasco
had effectively wiped them both off the house shield, suddenly all the rivalry had a focus, they
each had a Champion, although the Champions came in unexpected form. Under normal
circumstances Potter was by far the most likely candidate to have been Gryffindor's, Lucius
himself, in more energetic days would have been the most likely Slytherin. He would have
needed a few months hard training though, something Snape suspected he'd already begun, he'd
noticed Malfoy looking regretfully at food this last couple of days more often than eating it.

He'd spent last night in Black's dorm, telling Lucius he was studying in the Restricted Section and
the night before that, Black had spent in his bed. He didn't think he'd asked how he'd skimmed
past his prefects, probably Gryffindors were above making excuses for night time absenteeism,
they all seemed sleepy enough in class to suggest that nocturnal wanderings were the norm. He
found himself unable to concentrate on his schoolwork properly, especially if they were having
classes with Gryffindor.

He was sitting in his Potions class, one of the subjects they shared with the Gryffindors. He liked Potions, his favourite subject...except for Dark Arts. Occasionally he caught Black's eyes...once he was looking at Black, holding his eyes when he realised that Potter was looking at him too. He watched him nudge Sirius, muttering under his breath to him, as he was rewarded with a murderous look. He needed to be careful.

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Snape waited for Black that night, every time he almost fell asleep he woke himself again, it was almost dawn when he admitted to himself that Sirius wasn't coming. He was cold, he'd been hiding behind the statue at the foot of the Dungeon steps for hours waiting. He dragged himself along to his dorm and slept late on the Friday, the second time he'd slept late since coming to Hogwarts. He arrived in the Great Hall just in time to see Sirius stand up with Lupin, Pettigrew and Potter. He noticed Black didn't look his way, he noticed that Potter did. He felt sick, he knew something had happened and his mind churned with possibilities.

'You're late.' Lucius stated. 'Who were you shagging last night...It couldn't have been Black...he was up in the Three Broomsticks.

'What do you mean by that?' Snape's stomach had churned.

Malfoy gave him a cold look. 'Don't mess with the Gryffindors, Severus... I don't like...they don't like it.'

'I don't know what you're talking about.' Snape returned equally coldly.

'Let us get this stupid competition won and I'll say no more about it.'

Snape was furious. 'I don't remember anyone inviting you take part anyway...You and Aurelius are the ones who have turned this into a circus.' He spat at Malfoy.

'Just win, Severus ... Slytherin is depending on you.'

Snape staggered through his classes on the Friday, they doubled with the Hufflepuffs and the Ravenclaws, Friday was the only day they didn't double with Gryffindor for anything.

'Mr Snape...what is wrong with you today?' Professor McGonagall asked sharply, Tranfiguration was mercifully the last class of the day. 'Do you know the answer to the question?' She fixed him with a stare. 'Do you even know what the question is?'

He hadn't a clue. 'No, Professor... May I be excused?'

He saw the way she looked at him, he wasn't an inattentive pupil, far from it, she walked over to him. 'Yes, you may...perhaps you should go to see Madam Pomfrey if you are feeling unwell, you look a little pale.' She stated the obvious, he was always pale.

He gathered his books and fled to the Slytherin Common Room and then up to his dorm... at least he was alone. That night he took a blanket down to the corridor, surely Sirius would come tonight, something had happened last night, that was all, he'd come tonight. He went back to his dorm at six o'clock in the morning. For the first time ever he missed breakfast, he missed Black
looking over at his empty seat, he missed Potter's smirk and Pettigrew's stupid smile and Lucius making up for all the food he hadn't eaten over the past two days.

He was shaken awake by Lucius. 'Are you okay?... Severus?... What's wrong with you?'

He sat up and all the misery hit him again. 'Nothing... just a headache.'

'Well mix up one of your disgusting Potions... Black and his cronies are bragging about how they're going to wipe you off the map.'

Snape looked at him, resolve stiffening. 'Just let them try.'

Malfoy smiled. 'Indeed.' He stood up. 'Straight after dinner we'll go up to the Three Broomsticks... I want to be there early, let them come to us.' He smiled again. 'Oh, I forgot...this is for you, from Black.'

Snape waited until Lucius had left and opened the letter. He read it twice and then a third time until he felt his heartbeat come back to normal and the blood freeze satisfactorily in his veins. Then he read it out loud to himself, just to set his stall, as Lucius would say. 'Think you can fuck with a Gryffindor? ...Think again. SB.'

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The Three Broomsticks was mobbed to the rafters. Snape sat with Lucius, he'd dragged Bellatrix and Narcissa with him, Snape hated them both. Narcissa was nothing but a snobby cold bitch and Bellatrix's heart was as black as her hair... and her name. One of them would make a perfect wife for Lucius; he intended to make quite sure that he wasn't lumbered with the other.

After a while the crowd parted and the Gryffindors came in, all the Hufflepuffs had to stand, Snape suspected that Lucius had underestimated the power of coming in late. Then he saw him, in between Potter and Lupin, with the slimy Pettigrew behind them, all smirking as though they were Merlin's gift to the world. He sat back feigning disinterest as Ariel Finnegan began to map out the proceedings, he noticed again that Ariel addressed Aurelius and Lucius instead of himself and Black.

There were to be three tasks, that way there would be a winner at the end of the week. No draws. If necessary the whole school would vote on this one. Ariel took three pieces of parchment and folded them and put them into an empty glass which he'd borrowed from the bar. Lucius was to draw the task for night one, Aurelius for night two... and of course that only left the one for the final night.

Snape began to feel sick... all the resolve he'd stiffened himself with was dissolving rapidly. He was too near to Black, he kept his eyes steadfastly down, as though he was bored with the proceedings. Just once he caught Black's eyes, but he managed a cold sneer and Black looked away first. His attention was diverted by Ariel.

'Lucius ...take the first task.'

Lucius made a great show of selecting a piece of parchment. For fuck sake, Snape thought viciously, there are only three. 'Night one.' He drawled in an amused tone. 'Severus and Black have to make a romantic overture on behalf of one teacher to another.'
Snape blinked, romance... that was right up his fucking street.

Aurelius dipped into the glass and withdrew his task. 'Sirius and Snape have each to swim across the lake when the giant squid is out... naked, first one back wins.' Great, Snape thought, me the sportsman, that must have been Aurelius's own contribution.

Ariel picked the task for next Friday night, the last night. 'Each of you must steal something of value from Argus Filch's office.'

The babble arose immediately, it sounded like fun and a lot of house points, both houses hoped their deficit wasn't going to be carried over to next year. Snape looked over at Black for a moment, just caught his gaze, for a second he thought he saw something in the blue eyes before they went cold and flat. He stood, made his excuses and left, he couldn't bear to be there any longer. He met Lupin on his way out, he seemed about to say something to him, but Potter came over to him and grabbed his arm.

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He decided not to go for breakfast again on Sunday, it was becoming a habit, so was Lucius coming up to check on him. 'What is wrong with you?' Malfoy seemed annoyed. 'The fucking Gryffs are lording it up down there as though they've already won.'

Snape wanted to say he didn't care, he didn't care who won, he couldn't even remember what it was all about. 'Fuck them.' He said instead. 'I shall win, Lucius.'

'By the way... I meant to ask ... what was in Black's epistle?'

'It was a good luck note.' He said flatly.

Lucius sat on his bed and brushed his hair away from his face. 'It doesn't work, Severus, they are different from us ... believe me ... you'll get over it ... next time remember when you're with a Gryffindor, a shag is just a shag... it can never be anything else.' He leant over and held Snape for a while before holding him at arm's length. 'It's better it happens now while I'm still at school... who would watch out for you next year?'

Who indeed, Snape thought.

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He went down for lunch with Lucius, staying close to him, even Malfoy's company was better than letting people see how alone he really was... he didn't look at the Gryffindor table.

'I see you've let your diet go.' He said pointedly as he watched Lucius take a second helping of roast beef and Yorkshire puddings, three puddings, lots of gravy. 'Why don't you use my plate as well for roast potatoes, that way you'll save yourself the bother of stretching over for them.'

He was pleased to see Lucius looking hurt. 'I'm not on a diet.' He put his fork down and pushed the plate away. 'Really, Severus, you've begun to be tiresome, anyone would think I was on the road to ruin the way you go on.'

Snape caught his worried look, for someone so vain Malfoy seemed to take a great delight in abusing his body as much as he could. 'Be careful, Lucius ... fat and blond is bad... believe me.'
He had contented himself now that he'd managed to put Lucius in as bad a mood as he was himself.

'Have you thought about your task yet?' Lucius changed the subject.

'Yes, I have it all organised.' Snape smirked, he hoped he hadn't gone too far, but with any luck there would be a good display at the teachers' table tomorrow night... he wondered what Black had planned.

****

Snape awoke on the Monday morning full of resolve, he shoved Lucius away and got up. Malfoy groaned. 'Is it morning?'

'Yes, get up, you fat lump.' Snape smirked down at him. 'I have things to do and I need you to help me.'

Lucius looked at him through an amazing tangled mass of silver blond, Snape wondered how long it would take him to make any sense of it, he must use magic on it, no comb could possibly work. 'I'm not allowed to help.' Malfoy looked at him in something approaching alarm, he wasn't keen to get his hands dirty. 'What time is it anyway?'

'Eight o'clock.' Snape lied, he wasn't sure Lucius's heart could stand the knowledge that it was only five thirty, not with all that weight he was beginning to carry. He watched Lucius drag himself out of bed and look suspiciously at the drawn drapes of the other sleeping Slytherins in the dorm.

'It doesn't feel like eight o'clock.'

'Shhh ... don't wake them.' Snape looked at him, with all that frizzy blond mess he looked like a very large stick of pale candy floss... with a fat handle. He didn't suppose Lucius was really fat, not yet, and he possibly wouldn't get there... as long as Snape kept needling him. 'Come on Lucius, get your fat arse moving.' He picked up a Potion which he'd cobbled together the night before when the others were at dinner, he'd stolen most of the ingredients from the Potions classroom. He'd had a nasty moment when Mrs Norris had stopped at the classroom door and turned her lamp like eyes on him but a swift kick in the arse had sent her off.

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Lucius stumbled along the quiet corridor in Snape's slipstream. Snape knew he hoped he'd get back to the dorm in time to do something about his hair before breakfast, given a choice between going to the Hall looking like a stork's nesting box and missing breakfast... well... he wasn't quite sure which Lucius would have to pick. He hurried him along, Lucius wasn't good in the mornings but even he would notice that not only was the corridor completely empty but he couldn't even smell breakfast. 'What time is it?' He asked Snape again as he caught up with him at the front entrance. 'Where are we going?'

'Stop whining, Lucius ... it's about six o'clock ... now keep watch.'

They made their way across the grounds towards Archie Kettleburn's cottage. Snape noticed with satisfaction that there was no smoke coming out of the chimney. He got to the front door and laid the Potion and the little scroll he'd taken great care over on the doorstep. He smiled to himself.
Lucius stood a little away from him. 'You could have done this yourself,' he complained ... but Snape wasn't looking at him he was looking at large long legged bird which was stalking out of the forest, it had an amazing array of white feathers on its head and it was looking at Malfoy's hair...it seemed to have taken a fancy to Lucius and it walked cautiously towards him clucking in an oddly affectionate way.

'Don't move, Lucius.' Snape said quietly, which of course had the opposite effect on Malfoy, he spun and froze in horror at the bird which had now spread its wings, although not apparently in preparation for flight...it seemed to have love on its mind. Snape knew there was going to be all sorts of hell to pay if Lucius became enveloped in those wings. He raised his wand and hit the bird with an Immobulis Spell...it faltered as Lucius bolted... Snape had never seen him run so fast, that ought to sweat a couple of pounds off him.

*****

Snape sat at quietly at dinner, Lucius hadn't quite got over the near miss with the bird, he'd spent a lot of time when they'd got back to the dorm combing his hair and tying it back in a ribbon. Snape found the whole incident had cheered him up enormously until he caught sight of the Gryffindor table. Black was sitting with the usual cronies, they had their heads together, there was a lot of sniggering and laughter going on. Aurelius stood up and came over to the Slytherin table.

'Well...what has your worthy Slytherin got to offer us?' He asked.

'What is your effort?' Lucius drawled back.

'Sirius has sent twelve red roses grown in the Dark Forrest and spelled with an enchantment spell to Minerva McGonagall ... from Archie Kettleburn.' He said pleased with himself. He frowned as Malfoy paled a little and looked at the teachers' table.

'Oh dear... perhaps we should have conferred before now.' Lucius said uncomfortably as he noticed McGonagall batting her eyes at a confused but beaming Kettleburn. 'Severus has delivered a aphrodisiacal love potion to Kettleburn.' He winced theatrically. 'From McGonagall.'

'Oh fuck.' Aurelius looked to the teachers' table as well, wondering where Archie Kettleburn's hands had disappeared to, the look on McGonagall's face gave him a big clue.

'Yes...' Lucius drawled. 'But hopefully not over the Dinner table.'

'Another fucking draw ... really Severus ... this too much.' Lucius snarled, when they got back to the Slytherin Common Room. 'Make sure you win the race across the lake.'

Snape didn't bother to point out that if he didn't he was likely to be eaten by the giant squid so it wouldn't really matter. He wasn't much of a sportsman, and he was sure the bloody water would be freezing, perhaps he'd die of shock at the coldness first.

*****

Wednesday dawned predictably cold, of course Snape thought bitterly, why should the sun come out to warm the lake? He could just stand naked on the shore while his cock disappeared somewhere towards his kidneys in frozen horror whilst the rest of the school laughed themselves silly ... Black wasn't likely to fare any better, there was always that consolation ... but he preferred
not to think about Black's cock right now.

At midnight the two heroes stood naked under their cloaks on the edge of the lake. They could see the over arm stokes of the giant squid as it paddled leisurely across the lake in the light of the almost full moon. Snape stole a quick glance at Black, he was glad to see he looked as doubtful as he himself felt. They had to swim across the narrow part and back, first one back would win ... outright, one winner, no draw.

Finnegan stood importantly between them. 'On my order.' He said as the two boys shed their cloaks. 'Three, two, one... go.'

Snape sliced into the cold water and gasped as he began to swim with his awkward crawl stroke. He reached the first side and touched Aurelius's hand just as Black touched Lucius's. They were neck and neck, apparently swimming wasn't Black’s forte either. They were about halfway across the homeward stretch when the squid cut in front of them and doubled back. He heard Black's cry of alarm as he felt something wrap itself around his own leg... Merlin, he was done for. He took a deep breath as he felt himself being dragged below the surface. He watched in horrified fascination as a frog swam leisurely by in front of his face, unaware of what all the fuss was about. He wasn't sure how long he could hold his breath, he hoped Black wasn't going to drown. He saw the moonlight growing closer and dragged himself upwards breaking the surface and gasping. He was above the surface for long enough to hear the startled shouts of the onlookers, he looked across the lake in time to see Black being dragged back under as he himself was.

Once he was submerged he looked across to see Black struggling, he hoped he could hold his breath, he hoped Black could too, he tried to swim across to him, he seemed to be in difficulty...fuck, so was he. He felt his vision begin to cloud as his lungs begged for air ...

He was lying on his stomach on the grass and someone was pressing water out of his lungs. He couldn't hear anything but a vague roar; he supposed he had water in his ears. He tried to turn, but someone's hands were under his arms trying to drag him to his feet. He shook his head to clear the water from his ears and heard... snatches of Professor McGonagall's voice, cold and low and furious. 'Could have been killed... I really cannot think what you are thinking of ... who's idea is this?' Dumbledore's 'Later, Minerva ...' Madame Pomfrey's. 'There dear, get that blanket around him.' He managed to turn enough to see Black standing as well... Lucius wouldn't be pleased, it seemed like another draw.

*****

Snape and Black stood in Dumbledore's office on Thursday morning enduring the Headmaster's wrath. 'There have been enough school rules broken to expel both of you ... what do you have to say?'

The two boys stood in silence, neither had anything to say, the whole thing was in danger of running out of control... had in fact run out of control.

'Something is going on in this school ...and I shall get to the bottom of it ... friendly rivalry is one thing ... getting one another killed is quite another.' Dumbledore went on and on. 'One hundred points will be deducted from each of your Houses.' He paused. 'At the beginning of next term ... perhaps that will have the effect of stopping what has become insanity.' Neither boy looked up. 'You may leave me now ... but ... I have my eye on both of you.'

'Yes, Sir.' Both Snape and Black muttered at once.
The two boys walked down the staircase and stole a look at one another, Snape was struck by the
look in Black's eyes, where had the hate gone? They had reached to bottom of the steps though,
the assembled ranks of Gryffindors and Slytherins stood at opposite sides, each went to their own,
Potter threw Snape a look as he put his arm around Sirius's shoulder.

'Come on, let's get away from here.' Lucius took his arm.

*****

Lucius had had another meeting with Aurelius. 'Just keep it low key, Severus, we can't back out
now, but don't do anything which is likely to get you expelled ... we'll take a draw, it's agreed ...
Just let's finish it.'

Snape would have been happier abandoning the whole thing but he could hardly back out now.
He looked across at the Gryffindor table, he could see Aurelius talking to Black, probably giving
him the same pep talk that he was getting from Lucius. He noticed absently that Lupin wasn't
there.

Lucius was talking again. 'Have you decided what to steal?'

'No ... I don't know what he's got.' But he wasn't thinking about tonight's task, he was thinking
about Black again.

*****

He stood in the corridor outside Filch's office, he was going to have to make this quite good after
all, he'd just heard that Sirius had stolen Mrs Norris and had her in a basket in the Gryffindor
dorm, he wondered why Black had completed his task so early. Damn him, that was quite good.
He looked each way, at least he didn't have to worry about the bloody cat. He'd upset two pots of
everlasting paint on the back steps leading to the Dungeon, hopefully that would keep Filch busy.
Lucius had let him know when the Caretaker had found the mess.

He looked each way again and slipped in the door which he had already opened. He looked
around, maybe he'd steal some of the chains he had hanging on the wall ... or maybe Filch had
some confiscated porn in those closed drawers of his. He saw the piece of parchment on the
caretaker's desk, it looked as though he'd just put it down and been called away. He stopped to
listen for sounds and heard none. He picked the parchment up absently and looked around. He
was about to cross the room to the chains when he heard footsteps, shuffling footsteps... bloody
Filch... he knew he had to get out of there immediately.

He waited behind the open the door, holding his breath as the footsteps seemed to pass the door,
he dared a look... looked up and down the corridor ...nothing ... then he heard the footsteps again,
just around the corner. He found he still had the parchment in his hand, that would have to do. He
didn't see Potter shuffling up and down the corridor around the corner or the rat which watched
him shut the door before scampering away or Black standing smiling. He was halfway down the
Dungeon steps when Pettigrew called to him, he looked anxiously nervous.

'What do you want?... you little worm.'

'Just wondering if you've completed your task, Snape.' Pettigrew said unctuously.
'Of course I have... what's it to you?' He was about to put the parchment in his pocket.

Pettigrew's eyes widened. 'Oh... You've got the Map... well done ...James will be pleased.'

Snape frowned. 'Why should Potter be pleased?'

'Filch only just confiscated it from him.' He smiled.

Snape opened the parchment, it was blank. 'Why should Filch confiscate a blank piece of parchment.' He grabbed Pettigrew by the throat. 'Tell me you little runt.'

He didn't see Potter and Black hiding in the shadows as Peter showed him how the map worked, or their slow smiles of satisfaction.

****

Black, Potter and Pettigrew were on the move, he couldn't see Lupin, he remembered he hadn't seen Lupin all day, but he was often away, Snape suspected he had some kind of recurring malady. He decided to follow them. Aurelius and Lucius had contented themselves with a draw, Snape suspected they were somewhere around having a shag. Ariel Finnegan had paid out quarter odds, nobody was much interested now, Snape didn't stop to think why he still had the map in his possession.

He followed the threesome across the grounds staying out of sight as well as he could. They were going towards the Whomping Willow... He stopped ... something was happening, Pettigrew had disappeared ... he couldn't have ... he looked at the Map .it still showed Peter Pettigrew ... right at the Whomping Willow. He lifted his head again in time to see Sirius Black transform himself into a dog...he stifled a gasp and watched in envy as Potter transformed himself to a stag. The Willow had begun to swing about and his mesmerised eyes followed its branches. Then he caught sight of something scurrying away from the tip of a branch...it was a rat. He watched as the rat ducked under a swinging branch ... he knew the rat was Pettigrew... what were they up to?... the other two couldn't hope to be missed... they were too big. He kept his eye on the rat and saw it scurry up to the trunk of the now violently thrashing tree. The Rat paused on a knotty part of the trunk and ... the tree stilled. The other two raced towards the trunk now ...and disappeared.

Snape hared towards the tree but it had begun to swing again, he couldn't hope to duck under it. He looked about, never wondering for a moment why there should be a convenient classroom window pole lying on the grass, its hooked end catching the full moonlight. He prodded what he thought was the knot in the trunk which the rat had paused at ...and the tree stopped. He ran to the trunk and saw the entrance to a passage at the base of the trunk, where the others must have disappeared. He was afire with curiosity now. He raced along what seemed like a corridor dug underground, he hadn't a clue where it led but he was going to find out soon.

He heard sounds, like yapping and growling, he supposed the dog was talking to itself ... he wished he was Animagus, he wondered if he could learn. He saw something at the end of the long tunnel...it looked bigger than the dog. Suddenly the rat fled past him, he saw Potter had changed back to himself, he had grabbed his arm... he looked shit scared. 'Come on, Sniv ... he can't hold it... we though we could... it must have smelt you.' Potter pulled at him, Snape thought he looked terrified. 'Fuck sake...move...it was only supposed to be a joke.'

'Can't hold what?' Snape looked towards the end of the tunnel to a room. The black dog was trying to wrestle with a full-grown Werewolf. The Werewolf turned and threw the black dog
aside, it made for Snape, its claws drew a gash along his leg as Potter almost dragged his arm from its socket hauling him away.

*****

No matter how much he objected Madame Pomfrey insisted that he stay overnight in the Infirmary. She drew the curtains firmly around his bed. He knew Black was here too, Lucius had told him, he was at the far end of the room in a bed which was also curtained off, but there would be no chance of seeing him, there was a constant guard of a teacher at the desk in the middle of the room...It seemed this had been taken very seriously indeed. Snape tried not to think, when he thought he felt the hate rise within him, they had lured him to a Werewolf ... all of them ... Black too. He’d realised that Black had left the map on Filch's desk when he'd stolen Mrs Norris, Lucius had told him that Filch had denied ever having seen it, he'd spent most of the evening looking for Mrs Norris. What a fool he'd been.... And now it looked as though they were all going to be expelled ... and for what? ... a lousy hand of poker and a bottle of Ogdens.

It must have been almost midnight when Dumbledore came. Lucius had been in and out a few times so Snape knew that every Gryffindor and Slytherin in sixth and seventh year had been interviewed individually by the Headmaster... Merlin alone knew what tales had been told. Lucius was sitting at his bedside eating the chocolate frogs he'd brought for him, knowing quite well that Snape didn't care for chocolate, it was the thought that counted ... Snape wasn't quite sure where that left them.

The Headmaster looked at him gravely, he had waved the Herbology Professor away and now nodded to Malfoy. 'Lucius, would you leave us... I wish to speak with Severus ... We may be some time, go to bed now... it is late... I shall see you at eight o'clock tomorrow morning in my office.'

Snape noticed Lucius looked worried at that, he also noticed that Dumbledore didn't smile or wish him goodnight.

Dumbledore waited until he saw the Infirmary door close behind Lucius and turned to Snape. 'What has happened here, Severus?' He shook his head. 'I cannot understand how things have come to such a pass.'

'Is Sirius going to be all right?' Snape asked without thinking or replying and he saw the understanding begin to dawn in Dumbledore's eyes.

'Ahhh ... I suspected as much.' The Headmaster said gently. 'You know that Sirius may be expelled, along with James Potter and Peter Pettigrew?'

Snape sighed, what good would that do... what good would that do anyone. 'What do you want to know?'

Dumbledore inclined his head. 'Everything ... I need to know how two otherwise intelligent boys can wreck such havoc over a few stolen moments in one another's beds.'

Snape thought for a moment, he had nothing to lose, Dumbledore obviously knew a fair bit, it was better he knew the truth than a pack of lies conjured up by the factions. 'If I tell you it all will you keep them on at Hogwarts?' He did not know that Sirius had crept out of his bed and stood behind the curtains, the way Dumbledore had told him to.
'I can make no such promise, Severus ... it will depend on what you tell me and if we can keep this within the school. ... I also have Remus to think of, he is the only innocent party here, I suspect.'

Snape found his words tumbling out, his story of the first week and falling for Sirius... and James's and Lucius's disapproval. He found all the hurt pouring out in a stream... and then he stopped.

'What changed it from a game, Severus?' Dumbledore asked. 'What turned it into this bitter inter house feud?'

'He never came back.' Severus said quietly. 'I waited and waited and he never came back ... and then he sent me a letter.' He looked towards the bedside table, at the piece of parchment which he always carried with him.

Dumbledore picked it up and read it. "Think you can fuck with a Gryffindor? Think again. SB" 'I see ... and did you not send this to Sirius?' He handed Snape a piece of parchment which Sirius had given him earlier.

Snape read it. "Think you can fuck with a Slytherin? Think again. SS." Snape shook his head slowly; it wasn't his handwriting, he knew who's it was though.

Dumbledore watched him come to terms with things. 'This was delivered to Sirius. I suspect on the night that he didn't come to you.' He said quietly. 'The handwriting is Lucius's ... is it not?'

Snape said nothing.

'The handwriting on the letter which you received with the equal but opposite sentiment is not Sirius's ... I suspect it belongs to Aurelius Marchbank.' Dumbledore turned away. 'Sirius, come in here now.'

Black pulled aside the curtain and looked at Snape.

'Aurelius and Lucius leave school in only three weeks time ... nothing is to be gained by their expulsion.' Dumbledore said quietly. 'However, they will both receive marked school reports... Both come from rich and powerful families, I suspect it will matter little to them.' He sighed and looked at Sirius. 'I think you have both learnt a valuable lesson, at least I hope so... and it would be unfair to punish James and Peter without punishing you, Sirius.'

Snape didn't know what he felt, he was too confused.

'I must ask you both, now.' The Headmaster said quietly. 'Is this finished?'

'Yes.' Snape said quietly as Black nodded his head. 'It's all finished.'

'I thought I could control him.' Sirius said quietly, he spoke more to Snape than to Dumbledore. 'I'd done it before, he was always okay with us.' His voice pleaded for understanding. 'I didn't mean to hurt you.' He turned and walked back to his bed.

Snape watched him go. It was all finished.
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