

Mentoring

by juniperus

A psychological study of Severus Snape in three acts.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Tormentor

Some make excuses for the follies and vagaries of youth; some even think to protect the young and still-hormone-addled dunderheads from themselves.

Others take full advantage of them.

It is because of the latter that the former are both necessary and an incorrigible bane. It is unfortunate, then, that they are usually so bloody ineffective at best, and at worst behave with enough lack of forethought and reasoning to all but guarantee the result they are hoping to prevent. *When the things you've planned...*

This wasn't the plan. No. Severus Snape's plan, as a frustrated, bullied, and emotionally stunted (but tremendously intelligent) young man, seemed simple. What he wanted, what he craved with every fiber of his being, was so damned *simple* recognition. His scores on his OWLs and NEWTs were the highest the school had seen in nearly a century, he had a gift for spell and potion creation and creative modification, he was serious and studious and not greedy for money or fawning sycophants. Was it asking so much to be recognized for his intellectual efforts? He was derided, he was targeted for pranks and attack, he was unpopular and these things he could, and did, tolerate with seething fury hidden behind the façade of a stoic. These injustices he tolerated because he knew his intellectual worth, and he had a plan to *finally* be measured by it instead of his humiliating poverty, brooding appearance, and surly personality.

It seemed so *simple* he already possessed the intellect, it was just a matter of being seen, *seen*, for it. He'd read Aeschylus as boy, he remembered reading "The words of truth are simple." Smart, talented - these were truths. 'I am a Slytherin, after all,' he sniffed to himself. 'I was *made* to execute a plan this pure and simple'. Pure. *Truth*. 'Yessss.'

Simple is elegant, some say. If one ignored the blood-red eyes of this older gentleman, he was both elegant and dashing, but far from simple. His former housemate and rudder through the murk of Slytherin politics and Hogwarts introduced them with a conspiratorial whisper. "This is it, Severus, and he's willing to ignore that you're only a half-blood! You'd be a *fool* to refuse!" Fool. Yes. 'Yessss.' Rarely does one see clearly during those moments when one's very life hangs in the balance, for if one is close enough to *almost* reach a dream, one is invariably too close to notice the forest lurking behind that single blessed tree. This is one of the ways Snape describes his folly-twisted pride, when he later relives (and relives, and relives) this moment in his head. The rest of the ways involve no small amount of Old Ogdens and a great deal of foul language and breaking glass.

And so it was that he brushed the snow off himself in the doorway of the Hog's Head in late March (leaving as much a lion as it had come in) under-dressed for both the meeting and the weather in his "best" robes. It was a Hogsmeade weekend, the first since his eighteenth birthday, but he was one of the few who dared venture out in the ghastly weather drawn not by the sweet confections of Honeydukes, but the sweet promises of a madman. Lucius had already told him he should feel honored that he was asked to meet this new mentor before the Leaving Feast (and that he should behave accordingly). Snape drew himself up to his full height, smoothed the front of his robes,

and affected the haughty look expected of all Slytherins as he turned away from Lucius and silently took in the form of the shadowed figure tucked into a rear corner of the inn. He was offered his first opportunity to see what lay beyond the tree on which he was so determinedly focused, the opportunity to heed the sudden knot in his gut and the feeling of chill fingers walking down his spine that his mother used to refer to as "a goose walking over my grave." Apt.

He did *not* heed, however. Snape later recalled those leaden steps forward as having the sensation of trying to pass through walls without Apparition. At the time, however, his thoughts were a nervous jumble of concern for his parentage, poverty, and the promises already made to Lucius for using his pull to get him this far.

He stopped before reaching the edge of the table that separated him from the finely dressed man holding court in the corner. He barely registered Lucius' smirking introduction as he stared into the unnatural and unblinking eyes of the Dark Lord, Voldemort, and willed himself to breathe while he was being so obviously (almost lecherously) scrutinized. After minutes that seemed like eons the Dark Lord nodded to Snape and smoothly drawled, "I've heard things about you, Mr. Snape, impressive things." At this, his mouth curved with all the warmth of a smile that stops somewhat lower than the eyes. "Mr. Malfoy has told me of your talent. You are far too intelligent to waste away behind closed doors working for lack-witted fools who cannot begin to understand your true potential." He leaned forward slightly and his smile twisted into a leer before he licked his lips and whispered, with a seductive purr, "You can have power at my side, your intellectual superiority over the filth the Ministry forces upon those of higher skill and breeding will be recognized and prized, you can be *great*, indeed. Join me. Swear loyalty to me and I will raise you to heights you have never imagined possible." Recognition.

Recognition. All he'd worked for in exchange for a simple vow of loyalty?

So much might have been prevented had Snape read Niccolo Machiavelli as a boy, instead of Aeschylus. It wasn't until he was trapped in his own folly that he learned that simple doesn't mean easy, it means foolish. Machiavelli knew that "Men are so simple and so much inclined to obey immediate needs that a deceiver will never lack victims for his deceptions." Oh yes, simple. The whole farce was bloody fucking simple, indeed. *Need a helping hand...*

Escaping his fate was not simple. Not possible, really, for once he realized to what sort of devil he'd sold his soul (the night he took the Dark Mark, the night he was treated to his first reveal as the opening act to the Mudblood-shedding main event), realized that the reports he had formerly called mere malicious propaganda spread by those filled with envy and empty of vision were not the paranoia-filled dreams of self-righteous Gryffindors but his own waking nightmare, it was too late. He'd not considered that his dreams of recognition could shimmer and transform before him into a night terror of blackness, acrid smoke, and screaming dreams are, after all, what you make them.

It was not long before it was clear that what the Dark Lord valued was not intellect but the amount of damage a wand could do, the number of Mudbloods and Muggles tortured and murdered in the name of a cause that spoke of purity but sought revenge for centuries of fear of discovery by those greater numbers that couldn't begin to understand the mysterious power of the few. 'What have I done?' Snape had before felt fear, whether at his father's drunken bellow or the snarl of a werewolf, but weeks and months of sheer and debilitating terror was a new experience. 'What have I *done*?' No, escape is not possible. Who could help him, *would* help him, after this mockery he's made of his own humanity? Albus Dumbledore.

The Headmaster was blind to the bullying of the Marauders, never seemed to notice Snape's shining academic achievements in the face of the shadows his attempts at self-defense and petty acts of revenge cast on his sneering pallor he was, however, the enemy of Voldemort and the only wizard the Dark Lord truly feared. 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend.' Snape rationalized, 'Perhaps he will allow me to try and make amends for (*my folly*) my misdeeds.' Perhaps Dumbledore would, at least, make sure he was imprisoned ('it's no less than I deserve') and thereby kept from the clutches of the evil bastard. 'Perhaps.' *I will understand.*

And so it is that now (and then, and now) he is no more and no less than fresh meat suspended between two starving beasts. The only question that remains is which will break their chains first and consume him. And consumed he will be, for he is irreparably bound to this thrice-damned struggle of the blind against the mad. *Always.*

Dead Mentor

There is something to be said for the damnation of hubris.

Actually, there are many things to be said, and the vast majority of them have been uttered by Albus Dumbledore. It is mainly those unfit for polite conversation that have fallen from the lips of Severus Snape.

Pride goes before a fall. Oh, and what a fall it was. Falling. One might suggest *hefell* in with a bad crowd (he would not suggest such a thing, unless by bad crowd it was made clear what is meant is unspeakable evil and unimaginable insanity).

Don't mention *falling* in love. At the first sounds of that word uttered in connection to his person, his face undergoes a fantastic transformation from sallow pallor to reddish, then sheet white as his eyes take on the visage of the darkest storm clouds rushing across the highlands carrying rain cold and sharp as a thousand daggers. Then the shadow of the thunderhead passes as his brow turns to low-hanging granite over eyes now shooting those thousand daggers at the individual with so few instincts of self-preservation that they dared utter the words in his presence. On most days, that individual was Albus Dumbledore.

It might be said that the *fall* was the life of secrecy and duplicity Snape fell into after the dromedary stumbled, broken, and he offered himself to Dumbledore (body, mind, and soul). Fell. Jumped. Or maybe he was pushed. No matter, he suffers the ramifications of his youth-fueled pride each day from the moment he blearily, yet gracefully, falls from bed and moves deftly through the daily schedule he fell into upon taking his posts as Potions master and Head of Slytherin House at Hogwarts 'til he falls into fitful sleep. Since the Triwizard Tournament and revival of the Dark Lord, his suffering has increased a hundredfold, each summoning bringing the sensation of his heart falling into the pit of his stomach, and icy fingers of fear feather down his torso, mimicking the chill clutching his left forearm as his hands break into a cold sweat. No, not a fall from grace... a fall into a gaping maw, a dark abyss. *Days may not be fair always...*

Tea, a twinkle, and a crackling fire all served to warm the sodden and chilled boy-man who slumped, defeated, in the chair opposite the headmaster's desk. He did not beg forgiveness (he never did beg, not for anything), he did not expect it. Snape only wanted his epiphany, his turning, his imprisonment, his death to mean *something*. He neither wanted nor deserved a second chance at life, the life he threw away on pride and folly and (he was wont to admit, even to himself) his own naiveté and ignorance.

But that is what he was given.

A second chance impossible, inconceivable. Albus Dumbledore transformed a fall into a mere stumble, caught his elbow as he went down on one knee and hoisted him back upright again. He gave Snape life, surely as did the mother who birthed him, and in return asked for loyalty. In return Snape gave loyalty, yes, never wavering loyalty... and respect, and affection. The old man treated him like a son (and, in truth, was the first to have done so), an intellectual and professional equal, a friend. He was mentored and sheltered. He was showered with unwanted advice, unwanted students, and unwanted (but still desperately needed) affection. Mentor. Father. And, on those most difficult days (the days after the return of the Dark Lord), soul-damning slaver. Heart-breaker.

A spy, a double-agent, and a peddler of evil in that role this role Snape was resigned to live. A teacher of those who would not or could not be taught, that too he was resigned to be. The murderer of one of the few people alive or dead who had ever known him, truly *known* him, and loved him as he was loved in turn? *Never. Never!* How could Dumbledore have asked this abomination of betrayal, demanded it, of him? *That's when I'll be there.*

The screaming voice in his heart and mind and soul that cried 'NO!' could not out-shout the quiet reality of the situation: it must be Snape because it could be no other. No other could be trusted to obey the order. No other would be willing to risk all they are and all they have been and all they *could* and *would be* for Dumbledore and his softly-spoken request. No other could be trusted to understand the need for the death to mean *something*, to serve a purpose as great as the man giving the life. Without a doubt, Dumbledore was no more than days (and most likely hours) from an excruciatingly painful death, if not from the Dark curse destroying his insides as sure as it ate away his hand and arm, then from the foul poison the boy had fed him in the cave. That would never be understood, not completely, by anyone outside the pair. Without a doubt this death was an act of contrition, of mercy, of obedience, of personal bravery on Snape's part, the hardest thing he had ever and would ever be asked to do and that, too, would not, could not, be understood. Dumbledore gave Snape life, Dumbledore could take it away. 'Damn you, Albus.'

'Damn me, too.'

He misses the meddling old codger. Every day. *Always*.

Dementor

What the boy does *not* know is that he is not the only one who hears his mother's desperate last pleas in nightmares and the hollow, lingering chill of dementors.

He will never know.

The effort to extract the memories Severus Snape gave the boy was not inconsequential it's impossible to tell how long (Seconds? Minutes? Surely it cannot be as long as hours...someone would have come back for him, whether the goal to desecrate or to sanctify what remained) he had been unconscious. He shivers suddenly. Perhaps it is the blood loss, perhaps it is the thought of what awaits him at Azkaban, or perhaps it's the aching coldness that seeps into his psyche when he thinks of *her*. The reason is of little consequence, and he shrugs it off with the shadow of a sneer as he struggles to reach the contents of the pockets of the voluminous robes twisted under his weight.

Long had he prepared for this eventuality, though he felt certain he would see the gaping maw of that unnatural creature long before the final battle. Bezoar tucked between his parched lips, his hands shake violently as he pries open the vials with a desperate urgency: blood replenishing potion, pain reducers, and a draught of his own design to prevent shock while the other potions achieved their results. The years he spent slowly acclimating his system to the serpent's venom were not in vain he had survived the uncertain length of the blackout.

With a sigh Snape closes his eyes and waits. The sounds of a not-so-distant battle can be heard through the heavy shutters that hang askew over the single long-shattered window of the room. It's just a matter of time. Too exhausted to fight them, thoughts of *her* rush back to haunt him. Taunt him.

"I did what I could," he softly croaks, "what I was required, what I...*promised*. Now I wish to be free of it all." Despite the dryness of his mouth he swallows audibly. "I wish to be free of you *all*." His lolling head raises and he leans against the wall with slow, still-pained movement. "Free." His sharp, barking laugh sounds foreign to him, barely human, as it reverberates against the bare walls. Free of Dark bondage? Free of obligations and oblations and machinations? 'No,' he thinks, bitterly, 'free of those damnable eyes.' Damnable, mocking, defiant... beautiful, enveloping, shining green eyes that pierce his heart and rend his spirit. *I'll be loving you*.

'Damnable... damn.' A sigh. 'I'm damned.' *Always*.

The aching chill returns, unbidden, as it has every day since that fateful, painful, hateful day on the shores of the lake. He cringes and rubs his sternum through the thick, black, wool armor he long-since adopted rubs in a small circular motion, as he does every day, as if the pressure outside his chest could alleviate the pressure inside. It does not; it never does. "I'm sorry, Lily." He takes a harsh, shuddering breath and attempts to hoist his body up into a more dignified position but slumps back into the exhausted sprawl against the wood paneling. "I'm sorry," he whispers to his childhood friend, his best friend... to no one, as he does every day. "Please forgive me."

There is nothing more to prove, nothing more to do, nothing more to say *Not for just an hour, not for just a day, not for just a year, but always*.

Severus Snape holds no fear of Azkaban. He is his own dementor.

One deep breath. Another. After taking several tentative steps he decides the degree of yaw is acceptable and Splinching unlikely. One last vial uncorked and a grimace as the familiar (but no less acrid for that) taste of Pepper-up burns a trail down his throat. Weak though he remains, and temporary the burst of energy supplied by the potion, it is enough. The sounds of battle have quieted it is time. It's with no small effort that he stands his full height and steps away from the comforting support of the rough, claw-scarred wall. With a soft pop, he is no more.