

Always By Your Side

by morgaine_dulac

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

I: Unshed Tears

Chapter 1 of 40

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Chapter I: Unshed Tears

Morgaine's eyes were lingering on the birch tree by the river. And as so many times before, she found herself unable to turn away or to even blink. The tree had her under its spell and made her mind and heart open up to memories that she normally kept carefully hidden away in the most secret corner of her heart: memories of the world she had left behind, memories of the war that had taken almost everything from her, memories of the man she had loved with all her soul and who was now forever lost.

Morgaine hated that birch tree. She had considered pointing her wand at it and blasting it to smithereens countless times. She wanted it to burst into flames and burn to ashes, taking with it all the memories it held. But as much as she hated that tree, she was unable to destroy it. It was a link to her past, and one of the few things she had left. And as much as the memories hurt, she was grateful that she had them.

That birch tree had seen so many things: a tentative hand reaching out to embrace a dear friend, a first shy kiss, tears of joy and tears of endless despair. It had heard two lovers beg for forgiveness and heard them vow that they would never leave each other's side. But the vows had been broken. Severus was gone. He had lain down his life for the greater good and had left Morgaine behind. And the day she had buried him, her heart had broken into a thousand pieces, and her soul had been split in two.

She had returned to the home of her childhood with tears in her eyes and her hands shaking from exhaustion. And although she was surrounded by people who loved her and cared deeply for her, Morgaine had never felt so alone in all her life. She felt like half a person. Half a person with half a soul, a shadow of her former self. And there were days when she wished that she could put an end to it all. But she could not. There were still things she had to do. Once more, she had to be strong. Just like she had been strong for Severus.

A discreet cough from the woman sitting on the other side of the table made Morgaine avert her eyes from the birch tree and lock away her memories, and she returned to the present, remembering her role as a hostess.

'More tea, Minerva?' she asked, willing her voice to be steady and her hands not to shake.

The older woman nodded. 'Yes, thank you, dearest.'

Morgaine filled up Minerva's cup and then settled onto her chair again, once more casting a furtive glance towards the birch tree. It seemed to be calling for her, but she closed her mind and pretended not to hear, knowing that it was in vain, knowing the power the tree held over her. She would soon look at it again, unable to break the spell, unable to forget.

She wrapped her shawl tighter around herself as a chill went down her spine. She felt cold. She always did nowadays. The coldness seemed to inhabit her very bones, her heart and her soul. And not even the Midsummer sun could warm her.

'I always imagined Iceland to be covered in snow.' Minerva smiled and shook her head. 'How silly of me.'

'Not silly at all, Minerva,' Morgaine replied, her voice soft and her gaze wandering over the moss-clad hills. 'It is quite common for people to underestimate the powers of the Gulf Stream. It is much warmer here in Iceland than people expect. But I have to disappoint you: you will find no polar bears roaming the geyser fields.'

'That I knew, dear child.' Minerva smiled again and let her eyes follow Morgaine's. 'But it certainly is a lovely piece of earth you have chosen to live on.'

Morgaine nodded silently, although chosen was not the word she would have picked. She had never had a choice. She had not had anywhere else to go. And she had a task to fulfil.

'I understand why your great-grandmother came to live here,' Minerva went on. 'It is very peaceful here.'

Morgaine shifted in her chair and turned to look at Minerva. 'If you should ever feel like retiring, you are always welcome here.'

A short laugh escaped Minerva's throat. 'Retiring? Dear child, I have a school to run, children to teach and parents and governors to please. I do not have time for retirement.'

Morgaine nodded. 'Hogwarts it taking up all of your time then?' she enquired.

'Yes, yes it is. The Wizarding world has settled down, things are back to normal, and parents have started to send their children to us again. There is no need to keep them at home anymore.' Minerva sighed and sipped at her tea. 'Horace has handed in his resignation, and I fear that nothing will keep him at Hogwarts this time. And finding a decent Potions master, or mistress for that matter, is proving to be harder than I thought.'

Morgaine felt the muscles in her neck tense up and clutched her tea cup as if it were a Portkey that could help her escape. So that was why Minerva had come. She should have known that this was not just a social call. But before Morgaine had a chance to even change subjects, the older woman had taken her hand and squeezed it tightly.

'Isn't it time for you to return to the Wizarding world, child?' she asked. 'It has been five years.'

Five years, one month and six days to be precise. Morgaine was well aware how many days had passed. Each and every one of those days had been filled with loneliness and despair. She felt so forlorn since the day ... since Severus ... She couldn't make herself finish the thought. Not now. At night, perhaps, when she was alone, she would allow herself to remember. But not now.

She bit her lip and swallowed to make the lump in her throat disappear. Five years, one month and six days. She knew exactly how long it had been. But it could just as well have been yesterday. It still hurt so much.

'I cannot, Minerva,' she replied, her voice not much more than a whisper. 'I cannot return to Hogwarts.'

'Your little one turns eleven in October,' Minerva pressed on. 'She will come to Hogwarts next year. Don't you want to be there with her, Morgaine? Don't you want to see Demeter turn into a young woman, a witch?'

Morgaine turned her head towards the garden where her daughter was working with the other girls. She would love to be with her child, she would love to have more time with her. But if that meant returning to Hogwarts ...

Minerva, too, was looking towards the garden now. 'The girl looks so much like her father when he was her age,' she pointed out. 'The pale complexion, the dark hair. Even her posture reminds me of him. But she has inherited your eyes.'

Thank heavens for that. The girl was indeed the spitting image of her father: pale skin, tall and slender, already a full head taller than her mother, hair straight and black as the feathers of a raven. She looked so much like *him* that Morgaine at times felt that if she looked at her daughter one second longer, her heart would break into a thousand pieces. But she had grown to love that girl more than anything else in the world. Demeter was her reason to go on. If it wasn't for her daughter, Morgaine would have given up the fight years ago.

As if Demeter had sensed that they were talking about her, she looked up from her work and waved at her mother and her guest. And even from the distance one could see her radiant smile.

'Your eyes and your smile,' Minerva went on as she waved back. 'You both have such a lovely smile.'

Had, Morgaine thought. *I had a lovely smile*. For as much as she tried nowadays, she could not make herself smile. The muscles around her lips still worked, of course, and the corners of her mouth would still turn up and create the impression of a happy face when necessary, but it did not feel like a smile anymore, not deep down in her heart.

She did not want to smile either. She had loved to smile once and had been proud when her smile had made others smile as well. But now she seemed to lack the strength, and all she really wanted was to cry. But she found herself unable to do that, too.

She had held back her tears and had been strong for so many years, *for his* sake. And first when she had closed Severus' eyes in the Shrieking Shack, when she had realised that he had gone forever, she had allowed herself to cry. There, kneeling on the dusty floor by Severus' side, she had cried for him and herself, for their friendship and their love. But most of all, she had cried for all the time that they had wasted.

After that she had cried only once more, at the memorial service at the Weasleys'. When Harry Potter had raised his glass to the skies and toasted to the man who had protected him all those years, she had broken down. That day she had realised that she wasn't strong enough to stay. She had returned to Hogwarts, packed her bags and ran away. And she had never cried again.

Now she wondered if she had forgotten how to shed tears. She did want to cry and sometimes, at night, when she allowed herself to remember, she would feel her throat become tight and tears burn in her eyes. But then she would close her eyes and the tears would dry, and by the morning they were gone.

Once more Morgaine felt Minerva take her hand, and she looked up to meet the older woman's gaze.

'Why did you not tell him, Morgaine?' Minerva's voice was just as soft as the touch of her hand. 'Why did you not tell Severus about his daughter?'

Morgaine felt her heart stop beating for a moment and found it hard to breathe. She had asked herself that question so many times and had always given herself the same answer, an answer that she despised and which became more stupid every time she gave it.

'When I found out that I was pregnant, I was already at Durmstrang, Minerva,' she started. 'I did not even know if I would ever be allowed to return to Hogwarts.'

She had been more or less banned from Britain shortly after Demeter had been conceived. Lucius Malfoy had seen to that. He had made her leave Hogwarts, Britain, *Severus*. He had wanted to make sure that she was far away from the Light, far away from the meddling hands of Albus Dumbledore and the protective hands of Severus Snape. Back then, Morgaine had believed that Lucius had been jealous, that he had been angry with her for turning him down and that he had banned her out of spite. But he had had a completely different agenda. One that was much more selfish. One that was much more cruel.

'But you did return, child,' Minerva pressed on. 'Why did you not tell him then?'

'Severus and I weren't really on speaking terms that year, Minerva. Having Remus at the castle, one of his childhood enemies, did not exactly make Severus an approachable person. It took us quite some time to find our way back to each other. And then the war started, and Severus had to return to Voldemort. I could not have told him then, could I?'

'You protected your child,' Minerva concluded.

And Morgaine nodded. But the lie tasted bitter in her mouth. Not telling Severus had not been *her* choice. Dumbledore had made that choice for her. He had told her that Severus had another child to protect and that telling him about his daughter would endanger both him and the child. And so Morgaine had kept silent for *their* sake, for Severus and Demeter, and because she had trusted Albus Dumbledore.

'I believed that I had made the right decision when I sent Demeter to Iceland. If anyone had found out that Severus Snape had a child, they could have used this against him. They could have threatened him with hurting her, and I could not endanger my child in such a way. Nor could I endanger Severus.'

'Do you regret it?' Minerva asked. 'Do you regret not having told Severus about his child?'

Morgaine freed her hand from Minerva's grip and brought it to her face to rub her eyes. She could feel the tears. They were burning in her eyes like acid, but she blinked them away. If she started crying now, she would never be able to stop again.

There were so many things she regretted. She regretted not having told Severus about their daughter. She regretted not having given the girl the chance to know her father. And she regretted not having confessed her love for Severus the very second the feeling had blossomed in her heart. She had wasted so much time.

But most of all, she regretted not having said goodbye.

She felt Minerva's hand on her shoulder and heard the old woman speak once more: 'Morgaine, child, you need to come back to Hogwarts with me. You need to take farewell.'

'Every stone of the walls of Hogwarts will remind me of him,' Morgaine replied, willing her voice to be steady. 'Tell me, Minerva, how will I ever be able to take farewell?'

'By looking him straight in the eyes and telling him all the things you never got the chance to tell him when he was still alive.'

Morgaine blinked and looked incredulously at the older woman. She did not understand. What was Minerva talking about? How could she look into Severus' eyes? How could she talk to him? He was dead. Dead and buried at the edge of the Forbidden Forest. She had laid him to rest herself.

Then Minerva took a deep breath and started to explain: 'Severus has not passed on, child. His ghost is still at Hogwarts.'

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Morgaine did not even react to the screams the wind carried from the river bank. Neither did she care about the smell of burnt wood that hung in the air. She knew what was going on. She knew that the birch tree was ablaze. She was responsible for it.

'Lammas isn't for another week. You have lit the bonfire too early, my child.'

Morgaine turned to look at her grandmother, and the old woman met her gaze with kind blue eyes.

'This fire is not to give thanks for the harvest,' Morgaine explained, for the first time looking out the window. There were people trying to extinguish the flames, but they would not succeed. The fire was magic. 'This fire is to take farewell.'

'You have made your decision then? You are leaving?'

Morgaine nodded. 'I don't know if it is the right choice. I don't even know if it is wise. But I will return to Hogwarts by the beginning of August.'

She did not flinch away when her grandmother reached out for her. And she did not know what was more soothing, the old woman's tender touch or the sound of her voice.

'I was hoping you would go, child. I think you need to. I have watched you carefully over the last five years. I know that you have been hurting beyond anything I can imagine. And there were times when I was afraid you would break.'

*I have broken a long time ago,* Morgaine thought.

She caught sight of Demeter standing by the burning birch tree. And once more, Morgaine felt her heart ache as she looked at her daughter. The girl had been her reason to survive, and at the same time a painful reminder of what once had been, of what could have been.

'Is it right of me leave my daughter behind once again?' Morgaine asked. 'Is it right to once more abandon her?'

'You have never abandoned her,' her grandmother chided her. 'You had a war to fight, and by leaving her here you protected her, just as your mother protected you during the first war. And now your first priority must be to heal your heart, my child.'

As so often over the last weeks, Morgaine felt treacherous tears burn in her eyes, and she blinked fiercely. She would not cry. Not now.

*How does one heal a broken heart?* she wondered.

Was it even possible? What would she say to Severus once she stood opposite him? And how would she ever be able to take farewell?

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A/N: Demeter: Means "earth mother", derived from Greek  $\delta\epsilon$  (de) "earth" and  $\mu\eta\tau\eta\rho$  (meter) "mother". In Greek mythology Demeter was the goddess of grain and fertility, the pure. Nourisher of the youth and the green earth, the health-giving cycle of life and death, and preserver of marriage and the sacred law.

## II: Ghosts

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

## Chapter II: Ghosts

The ghost of Severus Snape floated listlessly around in the Potions master's old study with absolutely nothing to do. Being a ghost could be extremely dull some days. This was one of those days.

Severus had practised his telekinetic skills all morning. He was becoming really efficient at moving objects by willpower alone. No surprise there, he thought with a smirk. His mental powers had always been superior. Of course he would have no trouble moving things around.

Oh, he was bored, so endlessly bored. And for the thousandth time, he contemplated the question of why had he become a ghost. And once more he had to give up. He had no answer to that question.

At first, he had not even understood that he had not passed on. He had been dead, but somehow he had still been there, invisible, untouchable, a whisper. He remembered looking down at his blood-covered body at the Shrieking Shack in the early hours of morning, fascinated by his corpse. His death had been painful. Slowly bleeding to death had not been a pleasant experience. But the expression on his pale face had shown nothing of the struggle. He had actually looked rather peaceful. And he had hovered by his dead body and waited for something to happen. But the air had been still, and nothing had happened.

And then Morgaine had come. She must have known that he had fallen. She must have known that she would find his remains in the Shrieking Shack, otherwise she would have reacted differently. But she had not even flinched when she had caught sight of his mangled body. She had just looked down at his corpse, her back straight and her face calm. And Severus had been proud of her.

It was not until she had knelt down to close his eyes that the tears had started streaming down her face, and Severus had heard her heart break. He had never seen her cry like that. There had seemed to be no ends to her tears, and her sobs had been the sound of sheer despair. She had buried her face at his blood-covered chest and cried, her body shaking and her hands tearing at his robes. And Severus had felt so helpless. He had wanted to embrace her, hold her close and tell her that he was not gone, that she was not alone. But he had not been able to. Back then he had not yet known how to materialise or make himself heard. And so he had been forced to let Morgaine kneel beside his cold body, unable to comfort her, unable to ease her pain. And he had been so unspeakably sorry.

Eventually, Morgaine had dried off her tears, wrapped his body into a black shroud and put him to rest at the edge of the Forbidden Forest. And again, Severus had tried to talk to her, to tell her how grateful he was, but she had not heard him. Just once, he thought that he had seen her look into his direction as if she had sensed his presence. But she couldn't have. She must have heard the wind whisper in the trees.

He had never left her side. He had followed her to the castle, had seen the crumbling walls and the blood on the flagstones. He had stood behind her as she took farewell of the fallen. And at night, he had tried to comfort her by whispering words of comfort into her ears, desperately hoping that she would hear him, that he would be able to soothe her the way she had soothed him for so many years. He had heard her sigh a few times and call out his name in her sleep. But she had not known that he had been right by her side the entire time.

After a few weeks Morgaine had left the castle, and Severus had expected that he would fade away. But he had been left behind, stuck somewhere between the shadows. And he had not known what to do.

It had taken him about a year to learn how to focus his energy and materialise. At first, he had been nothing but a faint shimmer, invisible to human eyes. But the other ghosts had seen him. They had taken care of him, taught him. And eventually he had become visible.

'Why am I a ghost?' he had asked the Bloody Baron one day. 'Why did I not move on?'

'You have some unfinished business here, Severus,' the Baron had replied, and Severus had frowned.

Hadn't he done enough? Hadn't he paid dearly for all his mistakes? Hadn't he made amends? The Dark Lord was defeated. The Boy Who Lived had triumphed once more and so had the Light. And Morgaine had gone. There was nothing left for him to do. Why was he stuck here?

Four years had passed since that day, and still Severus had not found any answers. He spent his days in the dungeons, in his old study. Nobody had claimed the room. Horace Slughorn, who until a few weeks ago had been teaching Potions and acted as Head of Slytherin House, preferred lighter quarters, and nobody else had any reason to enter Severus Snape's old study. Hence, the rooms had not seen any human being in years except for the Headmistress.

Minerva came down a couple of evenings every week. She had done so since the day she had realised that Severus was still there. At first, Severus had not understood the reasons for her visits. He had preferred to be left alone and had been rather snappish towards her. But Minerva hadn't given up, and eventually Severus had understood that she was not coming down to pity him but to talk to an old friend. She, too, was making amends and had on countless occasions apologised for the things she had said and done during Severus' year as Headmaster. And he had accepted her apologies. He had, after all, made it hard for people to trust him.

'Severus, are you there?'

The knock on the door and Minerva's voice ripped Severus out of his thoughts. It was almost amusing how she insisted on knocking. It was not like he would be prancing around naked or something.

He floated towards the Headmistress, a sneer on his face. 'You called, madam?'

He saw her eyes flash at his tone. 'There are days when I wonder why I insist on coming down here to talk to you,' she retorted, her voice dripping with irony.

Severus raised a mocking eyebrow. They had been through this before. Actually, their banter was one of the few things he considered worthwhile nowadays.

Then he saw the look on Minerva's face. She looked even sterner than usual, and her lips were tight. She had definitely not come down to the dungeons to make small talk.

'I have just returned from Iceland,' she declared

If Severus still had had a heart, it would have skipped a beat. If he still had had breath, it would have caught in his chest. If Minerva had been to Iceland, that meant that she had met Morgaine. His beloved Morgaine. The one person he hoped to see every time the dungeon door opened.

'How is she?' he asked, trying to sound indifferent and failing miserably. 'How is Morgaine?'

Minerva sank onto a dusty chair.

'I almost did not recognise her, Severus,' she started, her voice thick with tears. 'She is a mere shadow of her former self. Gone is her laughter, her smile. And so is the light in her eyes.'

Morgaine's smile. Severus remembered it very well. Already when she had just come to Hogwarts, a mere girl of fourteen, her smile had warmed his heart. And on the darkest of nights, her smile had been all it had taken to light up even the darkest of corners in the dungeon.

'I should have gone to see her earlier,' Minerva went on. 'If I had only known how alone she felt ...'

'Do not blame yourself, Minerva.' Severus floated to his friend's side and brought a bottle of Firewhisky with him. 'Both you and I know that Morgaine has never been one to carry her emotions on her sleeve. If she did not want to tell you how she felt, then you had no chance to ever find out.'

Minerva took hold of the bottle that came floating towards her and poured herself a healthy measure. 'I have known that girl since her sixth birthday, Severus. A quarter of a century. I should not need her to tell me. I should know how she feels. And I should be able to help her.'

Severus almost smirked. Minerva had no idea just how good an Occlumens Morgaine was. He had taught her himself. He knew that she was good. Too good, maybe.

'I should have understood the day she left,' Minerva went on. 'No prior notice, no goodbye. It was not like her.'

No, it wasn't. After the final battle, Morgaine had worked relentlessly. She had organised and attended funerals and memorial services. She had, together with Minerva, overseen the start of the reconstruction of Hogwarts and tried to find other facilities to teach and host students until the castle was inhabitable again. She had been busy as a bee, and not once had anyone seen her lose her composure. Not once until the afternoon when she had returned from the memorial service at the Weasleys'. Her eyes had been all red and puffy, and her hands had been shaking. And she had gone straight to her quarters to pack her bags. Within an hour, she had left the castle, without a single backward glance. She had not even gone down to the dungeons.

Severus had seen her leave, and as much as he had wanted to, he had not been able to hold her back or even say goodbye. And it had pained him that she had not even known that he had been there.

'Does she know, Minerva?' he asked. 'Does Morgaine know that I am still here?'

Minerva nodded slowly. 'I almost did not dare tell her. I had seen the way she flinched every time someone mentioned your name. And I wasn't sure if her knowing that you are still here would do her any good. But yes, I did tell her.'

'How did she react?'

'She didn't.' Minerva held on to her glass harder than ever before. 'I was prepared for many reactions: surprise, joy, shock, even tears. But there was nothing, Severus, nothing at all. I could just as well have told her that I had decided to re-carpet my office.'

Severus crossed his arms in front of his chest and frowned. Maybe, Morgaine was indeed too good an Occlumens.

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'Is this why I am still here?'

The Bloody Baron shrugged. 'I cannot tell you your destiny, Severus. No one can. You have to figure it out on your own.'

'But is it possible?' Severus pressed on. 'Is it possible that I am still here because of Morgaine? Am I still here so she can take farewell?'

Again, the Bloody Baron shrugged. 'It is indeed possible, Severus. I saw Morgaine, too, after you had died. I saw her smile disappear and her heart break into two. I heard her soul cry out for you at night. And I know that you were there, right by her side, trying to comfort her.'

'I seem to have failed,' Severus stated, a bitter tone in his voice. 'According to Minerva, Morgaine seems to have been grieving for the last five years.'

'Sometimes, it takes more than time to heal a broken heart, Severus,' the Baron explained. 'You should know.'

Yes, he knew. After Lily had died, Severus, too, had thought that his heart would break, that he would never be happy again. And he had mentally hidden away for many years and built a wall around himself that had kept anyone from reaching him. He had pushed away any form of kindness anyone had offered. He had lashed out and bitten, just so no one would be able to touch his heart again.

But then Morgaine had come. In her innocent way, she had offered him a hand in the dark, and he had taken it reluctantly at first and she had held on to it and promised that she would never let go. And she had not. During so many years, she had stood by his side and given him strength. And when he had pushed her away on those days when he had not even been able to stand himself, she had waited in the shadows until he had been ready to take her hand again.

Yes, Morgaine had always been there for him, and she had always been so strong. And now, when she didn't need to comfort him anymore, but take care of her own well-being, she seemed to have lost that strength. For a moment, Severus wondered if she cried at night, but then he shook his head. Of course she did not. That was one thing they had in common, him and her. He had not cried either. And now it seemed stupid. Why not shed the tears that burn in your eyes and poison your heart? Why not release them and all the pain with it?

'How can I help Morgaine mend her soul?' Severus asked. 'How can I make her find the piece which she seems to have lost? Where is it?'

'I do not know, Severus,' the Baron confessed. 'I expect that it is here with you. But I do not know. You will have to find out. Together.'

And then he drifted away, leaving Severus behind in the dungeon.

Together? Severus frowned. Morgaine wasn't even here. She had left, run away from her pain and her tears. And he could not blame her. He, too, had run for many, many years. But he had learnt that one could never run fast or far enough.

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Morgaine parted the grass and wild flowers that covered the small slab of granite that marked the place where she had laid Severus Snape to rest five years ago. No one seemed to care about his grave, but Morgaine was not saddened by that. In fact, that had been one of the reasons why she had chosen just a small slab of granite instead of an ornate headstone. She had wanted Severus to truly rest in peace, undisturbed. He had never had any peace in life. The least she could have done for him was to give him peace in death.

The inscription was still clearly visible: *Never Forgotten*. It had seemed the right thing to write five years ago, but now those two words seemed like a self-fulfilling prophecy and cut into Morgaine's heart like a knife. She for one had certainly not forgotten Severus Snape, and she doubted that she ever would. Not that she wanted to forget him, not really. She just wished that, one day, the memory of him would hurt just a little less.

She had meant to go straight down to the dungeons upon her arrival at Hogwarts, to the Potions master's old study. Minerva had told her that this would be the place where she would find Severus' ghost. But she had frozen at the top of the stairs and just stared down into the darkness of the dungeons, unable to take one more step, almost unable to breathe. And then she had fled. She had turned on her heel and run out of the castle as fast as her feet could carry her. And she had not stopped running until she had reached the edge of the Forbidden Forest, the place where she had laid Severus to rest five years ago. There she was kneeling now with her eyes squeezed shut tight and her fingers caressing the black granite.

She did not need to open her eyes to know how her surroundings looked like. She imagined the sun casting a blood red veil over the hills. She imagined the tree-tops swaying in the wind. And she could hear the whisper in the leaves, silently comforting.

How many evenings had she spent kneeling here five years ago, when the earth on Severus' grave had still been loose and the wound in her heart still bleeding?

It had hurt less then, much less. And back then, she had still had hope.

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Why had she not come yet?

Severus was floating through his study, every now and then casting a glance towards the door or listening for the sound of footsteps in the corridor. But nobody came.

Peculiar. Minerva had said that Morgaine would arrive at the castle in the morning. And it was almost lunchtime now. Had she changed her mind? Was she not coming?

'Shame to be hiding down here on a sunny day like this, Professor.'

Severus spun around and found himself confronted with a memory that he had treasured for many years: he saw a young girl who had just returned from St. Mungo's leaning against the doorframe, her chestnut hair messy and her cheeks pale. And he remembered a smile that had filled the whole dungeon with sunshine. He had wanted to wrap his arms around her then and tell her how much he had missed her. But he had been her teacher, and she had been his student. Hence he had kept his distance. He had wasted time.

Morgaine's hair was still messy and her cheeks once more pale. And she was again smiling at him. But her smile seemed forced, and it did not reach her eyes. And once more, Severus was unable to embrace her. Instead, he floated closer towards her, and ghostly pale eyes met heavenly blue ones, and as they locked so did their minds.

'Welcome back, Morgaine of the Lake,' Severus whispered. 'You have been missed.'

## III: The Pain of the Heart

*Chapter 3 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter III: The Pain of the Heart

The meeting of their minds was brief but intense. Severus saw five years of sleepless nights, five years of longing and sorrow. And he also saw the birch tree burst into flames and sensed the will to go on as well as the need to let go. Then Severus withdrew and looked at Morgaine. From what he had seen in her mind, he had expected her eyes to be red-rimmed, filled with a desperate pleading for freedom. But there wasn't a trace of emotion in those heavenly blue eyes, and they were empty even of tears. And Severus wondered if Morgaine had ever cried or if she had been stupidly fighting the liberating tears, just as he had been fighting his for so many years.

Morgaine blinked and turned away, and a flick of her wand was all it took for the dust to rise from the two armchairs in front of the fireplace. A second flick started a fire in the grate. And as Morgaine settled in the armchair that had become hers already when she had been his student, Severus felt a warmth flow through his ghostly body which he had not experienced for years. He had missed Morgaine dearly, but it had never been so clear to him as it was now.

'How have you been?' he enquired as he took to hover over the chair opposite Morgaine.

'Busy,' she replied, her voice just as soft and warm as Severus remembered it. And he wished that she would say his name and tell him that she had missed him, too. He also wished that she would look at him. But she kept her eyes firmly on the fire that was slowly growing in the grate. The flames were reflecting in her eyes and gave her hair a warm, fiery colour. Severus would gladly have sold his soul to be able to run his hand through her hair. And he wondered if it still smelled of sandalwood and honey.

'There are still people coming to the village all year round to study herb lore or just to take a time-out from their busy lives,' Morgaine went on. 'There is a lot to do. My grandmother is getting old, but she refuses to hand over her responsibilities to anyone else. It's quite a task to take away work from her without her noticing.'

'I can imagine that your grandmother would not let anyone tell her to slow down,' Severus stated. 'Stubbornness runs in the family.'

'You're one to talk about stubbornness, Severus Snape.'

Severus gasped as Morgaine said his name, and when a short laughter escaped her lips, he could only stare at her. Her laughter was the loveliest sound he could imagine, and it spread through his study just as the light of a newly lit candle lights a dark room. But unfortunately, it died away far too quickly.

'These walls have not heard laughter for years,' Severus said, once more trying to catch Morgaine's eyes. 'And neither have I. I have missed your laughter.'

*And I have missed you* he added in his thoughts. But he did not dare say it out loud. If Morgaine had really been unable to get over his death, if she were still mourning him, he would have to help her to let go. And if that meant keeping his distance, he would do that, even if it hurt.

When Morgaine finally turned to look at him, Severus felt a shudder go through his ghostly body. Nothing in her face suggested that she had been laughing moments ago. In fact, her face resembled a mask. And there was a questioning, almost calculating look in her eyes.

'Why are you still here?'

Her question staggered Severus almost as much as the matter-of-fact tone in her voice. 'I do not know, Morgaine,' he lied. 'The other ghosts think that I have some sort of unfinished business that prevents me from passing on.'

'Do you know what it is?'

'No, I do not.' Again, this was a lie. He had a pretty good idea, but he did not dare tell her.

He had understood the moment she had entered his study and he had seen her empty eyes. His unfinished business must be her. His task was to re-ignite the light in her eyes and to help her mend her broken heart. She had stood by his side for so many years. The least he could do for her was to make sure that she could smile again. But he had no idea about how he was supposed to do any of this. If he told her about his task, she would surely blame herself for being the reason for him not finding peace. And that would hurt her even more than his death had. Therefore, Severus decided to hold his peace.

Morgaine nodded slowly with her teeth gnawing at her lip and her eyes slightly narrowed. She did not believe a word he had said, Severus was well aware of that. But she didn't say anything.

Instead, she got up and straightened her robes. 'I was planning to use your old classroom for Potions, if that's alright with you. It's by far the most suitable room in the castle.'

'Of course I do not mind,' Severus replied, somehow relieved that Morgaine had changed subjects, and at the same time disappointed that she was about to leave. 'You are welcome to use the study as well.'

'No. No, that's alright. This ... this is your study. I ... I would not want to intrude.'

Severus frowned. Stammering was not a trait he attributed to Morgaine, neither was nervousness. But he could clearly see that her pupils were dilated and that her breathing had quickened. She reminded him of a trapped animal. And for some reason, she seemed to want to leave his study as quickly as possible.

Once more, Severus tried to touch her mind, but ran headlong into a solid brick wall. And he did not need asking. He knew what that meant. It had been him who had taught Morgaine that technique in the first place. She had shut him out, and he figured that she had a good reason for it.

'I'll be using my old study on the first floor,' Morgaine declared, already heading for the door. And Severus almost didn't hear it when she silently added that he was welcome to visit at any time.

He found it hard to take his eyes off the door once it had fallen close behind Morgaine, and he hated the sound of her heels against the stones in the corridor beyond. She was walking away far too quickly. It seemed almost as if she were running away.

This was not how he had hoped their first meeting would be. Minerva had prepared him that Morgaine had changed, but he had not expected this. She had always been his light in the dark, and her calm voice and kind eyes had warmed him during those nights when his very soul had seemed to be frozen to ice. But now, Morgaine seemed distant, even cold. And she had even denied him access to her mind.

'Stubborn indeed.'

The voice of Albus Dumbledore made Severus spin around, and he glared at the old wizard who had appeared in a so far empty picture frame in the back of the study.

'What do you want, Dumbledore?' he snarled.

'There, there, dear boy,' Dumbledore replied with a kind voice, and his eyes were twinkling behind his glasses. 'After five years, I would at least have expected ~~hello~~, Albus. How are you doing?'

Severus sneered. It had been even more than five years since he had last spoken to Albus Dumbledore, and most words in their last conversation had been drenched with hatred. And after his death, when he had learned how to materialise and move around in the castle, Severus had had no desire to speak to the old man.

'What do you want?' he repeated.

'I came to see if my great-granddaughter has safely arrived.'

'In that case, Dumbledore, visiting Morgaine in her own quarters would have been a much brighter idea.'

'I don't think I would be welcomed, dear boy.'

Dumbledore sighed, and for a moment, just the tiniest of moments, Severus thought that he had seen a shadow of regret flicker over the old man's face.

And he might just be right. The days when Morgaine had seen her great-grandfather as a hero had long since passed. As far as Severus knew, she had never spoken to the portrait during their last year in the castle. He himself had kept her away when he had realised that Dumbledore had used his own flesh and blood as a pawn in the war against Voldemort. Now he wondered if keeping Morgaine away from Dumbledore's portrait had even been necessary. Maybe she would not even have wanted to talk to him at all.

'Morgaine has changed, has she not?'

To that, Severus could only nod. Of course, he had noticed that himself. And it pained him so much that he could almost feel a physical pain, despite him being a ghost. And he did not know what to do.

'Don't let her fool you, Severus,' Dumbledore continued. 'The smiling girl you once knew is still there. So is the woman who loved you. Don't let them hide, Severus. And don't let Morgaine forget them.'

And then the old man left his frame, once more leaving Severus Snape with a task that seemed impossible to carry out, and which only Severus Snape could handle.

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Morgaine's hands were still shaking when she arrived in her quarters, and she flung open the window, inhaling the warm summer air. Still, she felt as if she were suffocating, and there were treacherous tears burning in her eyes.

It had been him alright. *Her* Severus, the man she had loved since her school years and whom she had missed dearly for five long years. His voice was the same and so were his eyes, even though they had lost their beetle-black colour. They still were bottomless, unfathomable and seemed to be able to see into her very soul. And she had almost drowned in their infinite depths.

She had managed to escape just in time. Had she stayed just one minute longer, she would have broken. She would not have been able to keep her mental barriers up any longer. She would have sunk to her knees and cried and released all the pain she had held in her heart for so many years. But Severus mustn't know. Not yet anyway.

'You are welcome to use the study,' he had said. *His* study. How could he suggest such a thing? How dare he?

But Morgaine could not blame him. Severus had certainly meant well. He had of course no idea how many memories that study and the adjoining quarters held for her. Far too many. She had fallen in love in those rooms. She had cried bitter tears which he had never seen. And now that study was heaven and hell at the same time.

It had taken Morgaine all her strength to keep her mind closed. She had not wanted Severus to know how much she was hurting. If her suspicions were right, if Severus was unable to pass on because of her, because they had not had a chance to take farewell, then she must not show him. If he knew that his death had split her heart and soul in two, he would never find peace.

But how would *she* ever find peace, Morgaine wondered. She was keeping so many secrets, and the burden seemed to slowly break her.

When Severus had died, she had been endlessly sorry for not having told him about his daughter. Maybe, just maybe, the little witch would have given him some comfort. He had always struggled with his Dark side, and some days he had believed that he truly was a Dark wizard. Seeing his daughter a little innocent child, a White witch would have shown him that he was good at heart, even if his outer shell were stained with blood. But they had never met. Morgaine had never told him about their child while he had been alive, and now she did not dare tell him.

Another thing Morgaine had been unspeakably sorry about was the fact she had never told Severus just how much she loved him. She had shown him, of course. She had been right by his side when no one else had trusted him. She had claimed that he was innocent when the whole Wizarding world had seen him as a ruthless killer. And

she had whispered words of love into his ear during those nights when he had hated himself so much that she sometimes had wondered how he found strength to rise in the morning. But she had never told him that her whole heart belonged to him, even her very soul. And if she ever wanted him to find peace, she could not tell him now either.

With a sigh and a heavy heart, Morgaine closed the window and the curtains, shutting out the sunlight and the warm breeze. She longed for darkness, she longed for sleep. She wanted to close her eyes and forget about everything that made her heart ache, just for a while.

She ignored Minerva's knocking on the door and crept into bed, wrapping the blanket tightly around her. And for the first time in five years, she did not fight the tears that slowly rolled down her cheeks.

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Severus felt like he shouldn't be there when he drifted through the wall into Morgaine's quarters. She had told him to come and visit at any time, but still he felt like he was intruding, like he should at least have knocked.

Morgaine had decorated her quarters in much the same way she had when she had been teaching at Hogwarts for the first time. The furniture looked comfortable and inviting, and the bookshelves were well filled: Potions books to the left, followed by Defence Against the Dark Arts, then Herbology. Severus smiled at the tidiness. Even when Morgaine had been a student, her bookshelf had resembled his own. He had taught her well.

He should not be here, he thought once more as he drifted through the room. He should have waited to be officially invited. He should not intrude on her privacy like this. But still, he felt unable to leave.

Their short meeting had troubled him immensely. Morgaine had seemed so cold and at the same time so terribly forlorn. And when he had tried to touch her mind and she had pushed him away, Severus had understood that something was terribly wrong.

He had not held her back when she had left his study. How could he have? Instead he had hoped that she would change her mind and come back. When she had not, he had gone looking for her in the Potions classroom and in the staff room, but in vain. And when she had not come to the Great Hall for dinner, he had grown worried and decided to visit her quarters.

The shutters were closed and the fire in the grate extinguished, and for a terrifying moment, Severus feared that once more, Morgaine had fled. But she could not have. He could still sense her.

He drifted towards the bedroom and found Morgaine tightly wrapped up in her bed, fast asleep despite the early hour. There was a candle burning on the bedside table, and the faint light was enough to make her hair resemble dancing flames and her cheeks look slightly flushed. She looked peaceful, and Severus did not dare wake her, so he started to retreat.

'Please, stay, Severus. Please, don't leave me alone.'

Severus froze. Morgaine's soul was crying out for him, and in her sleep the walls behind which she had been hiding earlier that day did not exist. Her mind lay open before him, and Severus lowered his own mental barriers.

'I have never left you, Morgaine,' he replied, caressing her soul in the same tender way he wished that his fingers could caress her face. 'I was right behind you when you left the Shrieking Shack. I followed you to the edge of the Forbidden Forest and back to the castle. I was by your side until the day you left the castle. I was always there.'

'I didn't know,' her mind whispered. 'I didn't sense you. I thought I had lost you.'

Morgaine's eyes snapped open, and Severus felt himself being pushed from her mind. And he felt guilty for having been nosy, guilty for having intruded upon her most private thoughts. But the look in Morgaine's eyes was soft, and as she sat up in her bed, Severus could have sworn that he had seen a fleeting smile.

He floated towards her and came to hover beside her, so close that he could have embraced her had he been made of flesh and blood. Once more, their eyes locked. And this time, Morgaine did not turn away.

'Why did you leave, Morgaine?' Severus asked. He had pondered that question for five years. And now he wanted an answer.

'After your death ... after you had gone, I felt so alone, Severus,' Morgaine started hesitantly. 'I didn't feel like I belonged here anymore. I had to leave.'

'Not belong?' Severus couldn't believe it. 'Morgaine, you are a powerful witch by your own right. You are the great-granddaughter of Albus Dumbledore. You do not need me to maintain your position in the Wizarding world.'

'You have always been there, Severus,' Morgaine said. 'From the very day I came to Hogwarts, you were there. Our minds touched before I even knew your first name. You took care of me, you guided me. And over the years you became my best friend and the love of my life. I do not know a Wizarding world without you, Severus. And I do not want to either.'

## IV: Drying Off the Tears

*Chapter 4 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter IV: Drying Off the Tears

Morgaine was sitting with her knees drawn up to her chin and the blanket tightly wrapped around her shoulders. Her face was pale, and she seemed to be staring at something in the darkness that only she could see. And for the second time that day, Severus was reminded of the young girl she had once been.

He had been sitting by her bedside before. That night, he had learned that Morgaine's father had been a Death Eater and that the Dark Lord had made her point a wand at her own mother when she had still been a child. That night, he had tried to chase her shadows away. That night, he had promised to protect her.

'I am sorry, Severus.'



He saw Morgaine chew her lip and frowned. 'What do you have to be sorry for, Morgaine?'

She rubbed her neck as if it were aching and sighed. 'It's not fair that you're stuck here. If anyone deserves peace, then it's you.'

'I must ask again, Morgaine: why are *you* sorry for this?'

'You said that you had never left my side, that you followed me from the Shrieking Shack back to the castle. And I cannot help but wonder if it is me who is keeping you here.'

She sounded so unspeakably sad. And for a moment, Severus forgot that he had no body, that he was a ghost, and reached out for her. His ghostly hand brushed her pale face, and Morgaine shivered. Severus withdrew, fully aware how uncomfortable it was to be touched by a ghost. The feeling chilled one's very bones, and the cold could stay for hours.

'I told you that I do not know what is keeping me here, Morgaine,' Severus said, trying to comfort her with his voice in the way his touch could not. 'I might indeed still be here in order to look out for you, just as you have looked out for me for all those years. And if that is my task, I will fulfil it gladly.'

'Nothing has changed then.'

Morgaine abruptly got up and walked towards the empty fireplace. And as she stepped out of the candlelight and merged into the darkness, Severus wondered if she were trying to hide the tears he could so clearly hear in her voice.

'Like your life, your death is filled with the responsibility for another. When will you be allowed to be free, Severus?'

'There is a significant difference here, Morgaine,' Severus started, his voice calm. He could not have her believe that him still being there was in any way her fault.

'I protected Potter because I had no choice. I believed that protecting him would enable me to make amends. I did it because I believed that I could redeem myself and save my soul. I hated my task at times, but I carried it out because I had promised that I would. My new task, however, looking out for you, Morgaine, is no burden to me even if it means not being able to pass on. I do not know what the so called afterlife looks like. Paradise might be an awfully dull place to spend eternity in. And I would rather spend it with you.'

'I cannot ask this of you, Severus.' Morgaine was still not looking at him, and Severus saw that she was holding on to the mantelpiece so hard that her knuckles had turned white.

'You are not asking anything of me, Morgaine,' he tried to convince her. 'If I had been given a choice between passing on to an unknown place and staying here with you, that would have been the easiest choice I have ever made.'

He floated towards her and came to hover mere inches beside her, close enough that he could have sensed the warmth of her body had that still been possible for him.

'I have missed you.'

It was impossible to decide who had spoken the words first, but once they had been said everything seemed easier somehow, as if a big weight had been lifted from both of them. And for a tiny moment, Severus thought that he had seen a smile in Morgaine's eyes.

'I guess that there is no point in offering you a cup of tea,' she stated once she had lit the fire in the grate, and Severus shook his head.

'Will you keep me company?'

Of course he would. If it were up to him, he would never leave her side again.

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The air filled with the comforting scent of violets and elderflower, and as Morgaine settled on the armchair in front of the fireplace with a steaming cup in her hand. The situation felt familiar, but then again not. She and Severus had spent many hours in front of the fire, drinking tea and talking about everything and nothing. They had stolen those moments and hidden away in the darkness, in the dungeons, always in Severus' quarters, never in hers. Everything had always been on his terms.

Suddenly, without her being able to stop it, an uninvited bitterness crept into Morgaine's heart. She had always been there for him, had waited in the shadows and reached out her hand, but it had always been Severus who had decided when she was allowed to help.

She had offered him her friendship when she had still been his student. He had been reluctant at first, but in the end, he had accepted it. And when he had taken the hand she had offered, she had also gifted him with her heart. And already back then she had understood that she would never love another man.

Loving Severus had never been easy. To love a man who hated himself as much as Severus Snape had hated himself was a task that demanded more courage than any Gryffindor could ever muster and more loyalty than any Hufflepuff could ever feel. He had pushed her away so many times, and so many people had told her to walk away. But she had always stayed put, because she had promised him, because she had loved him.

Morgaine swallowed and put her tea cup down on her knees. She had mourned Severus and their love for five long years. There had been days when the pain of not having been able to take farewell had almost been unbearable. And now, he was sitting right across from her, and she finally had the opportunity to ask the questions that had been gnawing at her heart for so many years.

'How did you die, Severus?'

She saw the ghost cock an eyebrow at her. 'I assumed that Potter had spread that tale.'

Morgaine bit her lip. She had asked the wrong question. She knew perfectly well what had caused the death of Severus Snape's body. She had seen his wounds and heard Harry's tale. What she wanted to learn was how Severus' soul had fared in the moment of death. But now her courage was leaving her, and she knew that she had to act fast if she ever wanted an answer.

'Harry told us about Voldemort and Nagini. He told us about the memories ...'

She broke off as she felt a lump form in her throat. Would it be wiser not to ask? What if Severus gave her an answer she did not want to hear? But if she did not ask, how would she ever find peace?

'Harry said you wanted him to look at you. He said you wanted to see his eyes ...'

She did not want to anymore, but she had to ask. If she ever wanted to know, then she had to ask now.

'Did you see Lily, Severus?'

Severus nodded slowly. 'Yes, Morgaine,' he confessed. 'I saw Lily's eyes.'

His voice was soft, and so was the look in his eyes. But to Morgaine it felt as though he were driving a knife through her heart. Her worst fear had been true then. Until the moment of his death, Severus' heart had belonged to Lily.

The tea cup slipped from her trembling hands and shattered into pieces as it hit the floor, and Morgaine did not even try to stop the tears from streaming down her face. She could not have stopped them if she had wanted to.

She had never cried in front of Severus before. She had always been strong for him, but now she did not care anymore. Her pain was too much to bear.

'Were you ever happy with me, Severus?' she brought forth between sobs. 'Was I ever able to give you any happiness at all?'

Severus stood as petrified. He had no idea what just had happened. Mere minutes ago, he had thought that he had seen Morgaine smiling, and now she was breaking apart.

'Why would you ask such a thing, Morgaine?' He truly did not understand. He had spent his happiest and most peaceful moments in Morgaine's arms. How could she think that ...

'Your Patronus, Severus,' Morgaine interrupted his thoughts. 'Your happiest memory has always been Lily.'

He knew that it was physically impossible, but in this very moment, the ghost of Severus Snape felt as if someone had reached into his chest and was now crushing his heart. He had had no idea how much Morgaine had been hurting.

The night she had seen his Patronus for the first time, he had asked her if she were disappointed. She had said no. And he had believed her. She had never said anything. She had accepted that Lily was still in his heart and had suffered in silence. And he had not noticed.

How could he have been so dumb?

'Morgaine ...' For the second time that night, he reached out for her, but this time Morgaine shrank away from him.

'You did it for Lily. All of it. You protected Harry Potter to make amends to his mother. You lived for her. And you died for her.' The words came tumbling over her lips, and she couldn't stop them any more than she could stop her tears from running down her cheeks.

Her words might have sounded like an accusation, but Severus knew that they were anything but. Oh, how must it have hurt Morgaine to know that he had never been able to let go of Lily? She had suffered for him, with him, sometimes even because of him. She had given him her love, her heart and her soul, and part of his heart had always belonged to a woman he had never possessed.

'I beg you, Morgaine, listen to me,' he pleaded. He needed to make her understand, he needed to soothe her pain. 'Lily died because I had carried the prophecy to the Dark Lord. And I tried to make amends by protecting her son. Many times I feared that I could not do it. Many times I wished to be struck down by a stray Killing Curse. Many times I wished I were brave enough to put an end to everything. But then you came into my life, Morgaine, and you gave me something Lily never did. You gave me acceptance, and you gave me your love. And while protecting Lily's son was my reason to go on living, your love gave me a reason to survive.'

He came to hover in front of her, and he wished for nothing more than to be able to wipe away the tears that hung on her lashes.

'You gave me a reason to survive,' he repeated, 'and the strength to go on. And in the end, you helped me let go.'

He opened his mind and showed Morgaine the last moments of his life: he had seen green eyes fade and blue ones appear. And as he had looked into those heavenly blue eyes, he had heard Morgaine's voice as clearly as if she had been standing right behind him. She had told him to let go. She had told him that she loved him. And it had been her love that had set him free. And she had not known.

'I should have told you,' Severus whispered. 'I should have told you many years ago how much you mean to me. Forgive me, Morgaine.'

She was still crying. And every tear on her cheek was like a drop of acid on Severus' very soul.

'Is it too late, Morgaine?' he asked quietly, an ominous feeling growing inside him. Would he lose her now? Would he lose his best friend, his soul mate and the love of his life because he had not had the guts to tell her the truth?

Once more, Morgaine was not looking at him. She had buried her face in her hands, and for some agonisingly long minutes, her sobs and the crackling of the fire were the only sounds to be heard.

'If you want me to leave, I will,' Severus offered.

*The words of a coward*, he thought. But what good would it do if he stayed? He could not embrace her, and everything he had said over the last half an hour had seemed to upset her even more. And when Morgaine did not answer, he started to drift away.

'Please, don't go!'

He heard Morgaine's thoughts long before she spoke the words, and he had his answer ready.

'I will stay by your side as long as you want me to, Morgaine. It is the only place I want to be.'

Once more he floated towards her and looked into her eyes. Despite the tears, they seemed bluer than ever.

'I should have told you,' Morgaine whispered after she had dried off her tears. 'When I saw your Patronus for the first time, I should have told you what it meant to me. I had never felt so alone in my life, Severus. I was jealous, I was hurt, and everything seemed so unfair. I had stood by your side for years, always, even when everybody else told me to run away. You never needed to go looking for me. But still Lily was there, right in that heart which I had hoped belonged to me.'

Severus opened his mouth to explain, but Morgaine resolutely shook her head. She had to tell him now.

'I wanted to cry that night, Severus, scratch your eyes out and tell you how much it hurt. But what right did I have? Lily had been in your heart since the day you met her, although she turned from you, although I thought that she did not deserve that place in your heart. But how could you not hold her there? You had always been the most loyal. I had never expected any less of you.'

Severus was stunned. And once more, he asked himself the question he had never found an answer to: how had he deserved Morgaine? How had he deserved her love and loyalty? And how would he ever repay her?

'She came to me the night you brought Harry the sword of Godric Gryffindor,' Morgaine continued. There were still tears running down her cheeks, but her voice was steady. 'At first I thought that something had happened to you, that you had sent your Patronus to call for help. But then I realised that you would never send that Patronus to me. The doe had come of its own free will. And I understood that it had left you because it could not protect you anymore.'

'That was the last time I cast a Patronus,' Severus explained. 'I never saw the doe again. I doubt it will ever come back.'

What shape would his Patronus have now, Severus wondered. He had taken farewell of Lily in the Shrieking Shack. It had been Morgaine who had helped him to let go. Would his Patronus remind him of her now? Would it have her heavenly blue eyes?

'Why did you carry this alone for all those years, Morgaine?' he asked. 'Why did you not tell me?'

'I was afraid. I was afraid that you would tell me that Lily was the one you wanted to be with. That she was your reason to go on.'

Severus sighed. 'She was for many years. And when I found another reason to live, when I found you, Morgaine, then it was too late. I had promised to protect the boy ...'

'And I would never have expected anything less of you, Severus Snape.'

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Severus watched closely over Morgaine that night. They had talked for hours, begged for each other's forgiveness and granted it willingly. And by the time Morgaine drifted off to sleep, the fire in the grate had long since burnt down. But Severus did not need any light to see her face. She looked peaceful as she slept, and as the hours ticked by, the puffiness under her eyes disappeared. And now and then, Severus thought that he saw her lips twitch into a smile.

Ghosts do not need to sleep, but towards the morning, Severus drifted off into a meditative state in which ghosts collect new energy and process the things they have experienced. It was as close to sleeping as ghosts could get, and he did not notice Morgaine wake and slip out of the bed. It was the warm golden glow of the morning sun that first made him revive.

'Have you been here all night?' Morgaine asked in the very same moment, as if she had sensed him come round.

She was looking out of the window, a green shawl wrapped around her shoulders. Her feet were bare, and her hair had that golden red glow Severus had always found so enchanting. And he could have sworn that he was able to smell sandalwood and honey.

'I promised I would not leave your side,' he replied as he drifted towards the window.

'I am glad you stayed.'

Morgaine turned around to face him, and Severus could not help but gasp. He had not expected to see a smile on her lips. But that was not what surprised him the most.

'What is it?' Morgaine asked, obviously unaware of what Severus saw. 'You look like you've seen a ghost.'

'No, beloved,' Severus brought forth, almost too happy to speak. 'I have seen the sunlight. It is in your eyes.'

## V: Family and Children

*Chapter 5 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter V: Family and Children

One by one, the first-years were sorted into their Houses. One by one, they went to sit at their House tables. One by one, they forgot their nervousness and started eating and chatting with their House mates.

Morgaine, too, started to relax. She had entered the Great Hall with a knot in her stomach, remembering the last start of term feast she had attended. It had been a few months after Dumbledore's death, and Severus Snape, his alleged murderer, had taken over as Headmaster. The hatred and distrust in the hall had been tangible then. And it had taken Morgaine all her strength to stand by Severus' side. But she had not faltered. His side had been the place she had chosen to be at many years ago.

Today, the mood was cheerier, of course, and Morgaine let her gaze wander over the Slytherin table, her House table. She recognised some of the seventh-year students, as some of them had made quite an impression already during their first year, when Morgaine had still been at Hogwarts, both good and bad. But even some of the younger students seemed familiar. They were younger siblings of students Morgaine remembered from when she had been teaching, and some were children of people she herself had gone to school with.

She looked around the Great Hall to find out where Severus was standing. He was not a House ghost, and it had taken Morgaine quite some time to persuade him to attend the Sorting in the first place. He had entered the Hall at her side, but now she could not see him anywhere.

'Are you looking for me?'

Morgaine did not even flinch but raised an eyebrow as she turned around to face the ghost that had materialised right behind her. 'Sneaking up on people like that is going to give you a bad reputation, Severus,' she stated drily. 'Or are you just sneaking up on me?'

'I was unaware of the fact that sneaking up on you was even a possibility, Morgaine duLac.'

Morgaine smiled. Severus was right, of course. She had sensed him even before he had decided to materialise right behind her. It had been like that ever since that night when they had both gathered the courage to open up and reach out for each other. Since that night, the link between their minds had grown stronger with every day. And there were moments, when it seemed as if the link had never been broken. As if there were no secrets ...

At that thought, Morgaine broke eye-contact and let her gaze wander back towards the Slytherin table.

'Is Slytherin House safe now, Severus?' she asked in a quiet tone so none of the other teachers would overhear her. 'Or do we still have to worry about some of those children descending into the dark?'

Severus sighed inaudibly. Protecting his students had always been one of his top priorities. It had pained him immensely to see some of them being taken in by the Dark Lord's propaganda, and every single student who had taken the Dark Mark had felt like a personal defeat. And he was aware that even now, five years after the downfall of Voldemort, there were still Wizarding children who were taught similar beliefs by their parents, parents who still secretly hoped that the Dark Lord would one day return.

'They are your children now, Morgaine,' he pointed out. 'You can influence them. Teach them true, uncorrupted Slytherin values. Teach them to think for themselves.'

Morgaine nodded pensively and then directed her attention to the plate of food in front of her. The students of Slytherin House had been in danger for so long. Far too many had been taken in by the promises of power and wealth and had fallen victim to the Dark Side. She herself had experienced how it felt to be tempted. But she had been

able to resist because she had had someone to hold on to. And for now, she could only hope that she would not come to lose anyone who was dear to her.

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The first-years left the Hall in the wake of their prefects and were soon followed by the rest of the student body. Within minutes, the noise of their voices had died away.

'Are you joining us for tea in the staff room, dearest?' Minerva enquired, pointing at the other Heads of Houses who were already leaving the Hall.

Morgaine shook her head. 'Thank you, Minerva. But I am thinking about retiring early tonight,' she excused herself. 'Tomorrow will be a busy day.'

The older woman smiled kindly. 'As you wish. Are you nervous about meeting your House tomorrow?'

Once more, Morgaine shook her head.

'Slytherin House is a challenge,' Minerva continued. 'There is still a long way to go until it is rid of its dark reputation. But I have hope.'

'So have I, Headmistress.'

Morgaine excused herself and made her way towards the dungeons. She was indeed going to retire early, but she wanted to cast a last look into her classroom to make sure everything was in order for her first class the next day. And on her way back, she might just peek inside the Slytherin common room to assure everything was in order there, too.

Her nostrils filled with the familiar scent of Potions ingredients as she entered her classroom, and lingering on the threshold, Morgaine let herself remember an afternoon many, many years ago when she for the first time had had the opportunity to impress Severus Snape. It had not been easy, but she liked to believe that she had succeeded. And suddenly, she wondered if Demeter had inherited her parents' knack for Potion making.

'Professor duLac.' The sound of Severus' voice made Morgaine look over her shoulder, and the way he inclined his head towards her made her smile.

'Welcome to your domain,' Severus exclaimed, making a sweeping gesture towards the empty dungeon corridors.

'I had a feeling you would show up here sooner or later,' Morgaine stated and started walking down one of the corridors with Severus' ghost by her side. 'Controlling the corridors as you did in life.'

Severus smirked. 'Someone had to make sure the little dunderheads keep in line, especially on their first night. Let them do as they please tonight, and hell will be unleashed.'

'And you think that I am incapable of keeping them in line?'

'I never said that.' Severus glanced sidewise at Morgaine. She had sounded dead serious, as if she were truly insulted. But the little twitch at the corner of her mouth told him that she had been trying to confuse him.

'Peeves has been spotted down the corridor earlier,' he continued, cunningly changing topics. 'He needs to be kept in line as well.'

Morgaine nodded knowingly. She had had her fair share of encounters with the chaotic spirit already when she had been a student at Hogwarts. Funnily enough, he had never directed any of his malice at her specifically. She had been genuinely happy about that for many years. But now she wondered if the poltergeist had a reason for sparing her.

Her musings were disrupted, however, when she and Severus arrived at the corridor that eventually led to the Slytherin common room. The torches had been extinguished, and it was therefore too dark to make out anything. But the darkness did not hinder a distinct sobbing reaching their ears.

'Lumos.' Wand raised in front of her, Morgaine squinted down the corridor. 'That's a student,' she whispered and swiftly approached the cowering figure right outside the common room door.

Severus stayed behind. By the looks of it, the student in question was a first-year and with that probably not used to ghosts. Being confronted with one would probably distress the boy even further. And besides, Severus still did not like teenagers, especially not crying ones.

'There, there,' Morgaine said softly, crouching down beside the blond boy. 'What are you doing out here in the corridor?'

'I ... I ... my cat slunk out the door as the seventh-years came in,' the boy started, sobbing so hard that it was almost impossible to distinguish his words. 'I ... I ... I ran after it and then P... Peeves started throwing chalk at me and locked the door.'

'Peeves is responsible for extinguishing the torches as well, I assume,' Morgaine stated, her hand now resting on the boy's shoulder to give him some comfort.

As the boy nodded, she gingerly cupped his chin and made him look at her. His big blue eyes were all puffy, and there was a huge bump on his forehead that was already starting to get a bluish-green colouring.

'Melvin, isn't it?' Morgaine asked, mentally going through the first-years that had been sorted into Slytherin earlier that night.

The boy's eyes widened. He was either surprised that the woman in front of him knew his name or had just realised that this woman was his Head of House. 'Y... yes, madam,' he stammered. 'Am ... am I in trouble now, madam?'

Once more, Morgaine smiled, both at being called *madam* and at the terrified look on the boy's face. 'Of course not, Melvin. If anyone's in trouble, then it's Peeves. Now, let me tend to that bump on your forehead.'

The boy looked up at her in awe as Morgaine waved her wand over his injury, muttering a sing-song incantation that made the swelling as well as the bruising disappear. And when she asked if he was still hurting, he just shook his head, his mouth wide open.

'Good,' Morgaine stated. 'Then I suggest you join your House mates in the common room now, Melvin.'

'But, madam, I can't!' Again, there were tears glittering in the boy's eyes. 'My cat ...'

'The animal is hiding in the third suit of armour on the left side of the corridor,' came a low baritone out of the darkness, and the boy gasped as the ghost materialised right in front of him.

'You ... you're Severus Snape!' he exclaimed. 'I've seen your portrait in the common room. You ... you're the Hero of Slytherin.'

Severus scowled characteristically, but before he could make a biting comment to wipe the admiring look of the boy's face, Morgaine had risen to coax forth the terrified cat.

'Here you go, Melvin,' she said as she handed over the slightly ruffled animal. 'Off to bed with you now, and make sure your cat stays in the common room from now on. And most of all, try to avoid Peeves.'

'Yes, madam.' The boy walked towards the door Morgaine had unlocked for him but once more turned.

'Thank you, madam. And goodnight,' he said politely and then cast a careful glance towards the ghost. 'Goodnight, Professor Snape.'

'Hero of Slytherin,' Severus huffed indignantly as the common room door had fallen shut behind the boy. 'Is that what it says on the plaque under my portrait? That is ridiculous.'

'You are a hero, Severus,' Morgaine stated in a soft tone. 'You sacrificed everything for the Light. You even gave your life.'

She extinguished her wand and started walking up the corridor, suddenly feeling the urge to get away from Severus. The admiring look in the boy's blue eyes had made her think about how her daughter would react when she met Severus Snape for the first time. Would she admire him as well? And how would Severus react?

'You have a good hand with children, Morgaine,' Severus stated, drifting up behind her. And Morgaine quickened her steps. 'You would make a wonderful mother.'

Thank you, Peeves, for having extinguished the torches Morgaine thought. She would not have been ready to explain to Severus why his comment had brought tears to her eyes.

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Hours later, Severus was still patrolling the corridors of the castle like he had done when he had still been alive. But tonight, his initial purpose had not been to catch students that were out of bounds. He had meant to have a serious talk with Peeves. But even that intention was far from his mind by now. All he could think of was Morgaine.

She had bid him goodnight rather hastily after their encounter with that Slytherin first-year. And if he hadn't known better, Severus would have maintained that she had wanted to get away from him. But then again, that might indeed have been her intention. He had, after all, made an utterly obtuse comment. Why, by Merlin's beard, had he felt it necessary to make a comment about her being a good mother?

He and Morgaine had been together since the summer he and Dumbledore had visited her on Iceland. That summer he had lost his heart. He had kissed Morgaine then, despite him being her teacher, despite his better judgement. And when she had left a year later, he had longed for her return every single day. But he had been too proud and too scared to ever tell her.

They had never been an official couple. He had never courted her, never taken her out on a date. It had taken him years to confess his love for her. And they had never talked about marriage. Morgaine had just always been there, right by his side, as if it had been the most natural thing in the world.

Severus frowned. Why was he suddenly thinking about all this? Why did he suddenly find himself wondering if Morgaine would have said yes had he asked for her hand? And why had he never thought about it before?

There had been a war, he told himself. Officially announcing that he and Morgaine were a couple would have endangered her. He could not have asked her to marry him because it would have endangered her. Yes, that had been the reason. Or had that just been a convenient excuse? Would he have asked her if there had not been a war? Would he have asked her after the war, had he survived? Would Morgaine have said yes? Would she have wanted to build a family with him, with Severus Snape?

She had been so sweet with the boy earlier. She had wiped away his tears and healed his injury as if caring for children in such a way were a thing she did daily. And Severus had stood some meters behind her, watching her, and had suddenly unexpectedly found himself imagining how Morgaine would take care of their child, his and hers.

Shaking his head, Severus tried to free himself of the thoughts that had occupied his head. What was the point in pondering? There was no such child, no family. He had had his chance to start one and had not taken it. And now he was dead, a ghost, and it was too late. For him, at least. For Morgaine, there was still hope.

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'How are you doing, little one?' Morgaine was kneeling in front of the fireplace in her bedroom, smiling fondly at her daughter, who was kneeling in front of another fireplace many miles away in a little white cottage in Iceland.

'I'm fine. Granny taught me how to repot Mandrakes today. But I miss you, Mummy.'

'I miss you, too, Demeter,' Morgaine sighed. That night, she missed her daughter more than ever. 'But the year will pass soon.'

Demeter frowned, and Morgaine inhaled sharply. The girl's scowl was so similar to her father's.

'You are coming home for Yule, aren't you, Mummy? You promised.'

'I always keep my promises, little one. I will be there for Yule. Now, off to bed with you, it's late. And I need to speak to Granny.'

Mother and daughter bid each other goodnight, and before long, the kind face of her grandmother appeared in Morgaine's fire.

'You look well, Morgaine,' the old woman stated immediately.

Morgaine nodded. 'I am feeling much better,' she told her grandmother. 'I am able to sleep a whole night without waking up once now.'

'I knew that returning to Hogwarts was a good choice, dear child. I assume you have spoken to Severus by now.'

'Yes, we have spoken.' Morgaine heard the tremble in her voice, and suddenly she regretted having contacted her grandmother. She knew very well what questions the old woman would ask sooner or later. And she knew that she was not ready to answer them. And so she decided to lie. 'Everything's alright.'

Morgaine saw the doubting look on her grandmother's face and closed her eyes with a sigh. She had never been able to lie to her grandmother. Why had she even tried?

She rubbed the muscles in her neck that were all of a sudden aching and took a deep breath. 'He thinks I would make a good mother,' she whispered. 'He has no idea.'

Then the tears came. She had fought them so bravely in the dark corridor outside the Slytherin common room. Bravely and stupidly. 'I still have not told him about Demeter,' she sobbed. 'Severus still doesn't know about the child. Our child. I cannot tell him.'

'What are you afraid of, Morgaine?' her grandmother asked in a soft tone. 'Are you afraid that Severus will want to know why you have not told him earlier?'

Morgaine nodded. She was afraid that Severus would be angry with her, that he would accuse her of omitting the truth, of lying to him for so many years. But now, as someone had said it out loud, it seemed stupid. She had had a legitimate reason. She had decided not to tell him in order to protect their daughter. Their daughter, herself and him.

'Is it too late now?' Morgaine asked, wiping away her tears with the back of her hand.

And her grandmother smiled kindly, her blue eyes glittering. 'You will tell him when you're ready, my child. And Severus will understand.'

VI: Slytherin Pride

Chapter 6 of 40

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

Chapter VI: Slytherin Pride

'Good morning, Professor.'

'Good morning, Miss Parkinson.' There was one less name she would have to learn, Morgaine thought. There was no mistaking Pansy Parkinson's little sister: dark hair, just as hard-faced and proud as her older sibling.

'Good morning, Professor duLac.'

'Miss Zabini.' Yet another baby-sister. That one, Morgaine had recognised by her high cheekbones and slanting eyes. She was the spitting image of her older brother. Hopefully, the girl did not share his biased beliefs.

'Good morning, madam.'

Morgaine gave a friendly nod to the Slytherin students who were leaving the dungeons in order to get to the Great Hall for breakfast. Some of them resembled their older siblings so much that Morgaine wondered if she had been travelling back in time. And she could not help but wonder if those little mirror images shared more with their older siblings than just their looks. Blaise Zabini had, for example, never been very silent about his prejudices against Muggle-borns, and Pansy Parkinson had been closer to Draco Malfoy than had been good for her. So had Vincent Crabbe, whose little brother Morgaine had spotted among a group of seventh-years as she had entered the Slytherin common room. She would keep an eye on those.

Not much had changed in the dungeon-like room that made up the Slytherin common room. Naturally, the furniture was still mostly green: the chairs, the lamps, the carpets. Even the hideous skull-chandelier was still there. Morgaine had never understood the point of that special piece of decoration. Except for the Dark Mark, there was nothing in the history of Slytherin that justified skulls in the common room. Not that Morgaine considered the Dark Mark worthy of being remembered.

She tore her eyes from the chandelier and focused instead on the first-years who were waiting for her. Fourteen in number, all looking excited, some of them slightly scared and all of them most probably eager to get to breakfast and explore the castle. She wouldn't keep them long.

'Good morning, first-years,' she addressed them, surprised how her voice echoed from the low ceiling. She had never before spoken out loud in this room. 'As all fourteen of you are sitting right in front of me, I assume that you have all made it through your first night at the castle without any bigger problems.'

Her eyes fell on Melvin, the blond-haired boy Peeves had chosen as his first Slytherin victim last night. He was sitting with his head bent, holding his cat close to his chest. He was obviously determined to make sure that the little animal would never escape the common room again.

'Now, I assume that you all found your schedules on top of your textbooks as you returned to your dormitories last night,' Morgaine went on, and the students nodded. 'Good. Then you know what awaits you today. After breakfast, your prefect is going to give you a tour of the castle and show you the way to your classrooms. I suggest you be attentive. Your teachers may show lenience for tardiness due to you losing your way around the castle during the first week. But after that, you will lose House points if you come late. And I'd rather you didn't lose any points. The House Cup has been standing in the Gryffindor common room for far too long. It is time Slytherin House reclaimed it.'

Quite a few of the first-years sat up straight when the House Cup was mentioned. No Slytherin had ever avoided a challenge, especially not one that included beating Gryffindor House at something. And Morgaine knew very well what means Slytherins were willing to use in order to get what they wanted.

'I want you to win the Cup fairly,' she added warningly. 'No cheating, no tricks. Work hard and play fair. It will be rewarded.'

'Yes, Professor.' Some of the students gave their affirmation a little more silently than the others, but for the time being Morgaine was content.

'If there are no further questions, I will take you to the Great Hall for breakfast now,' she announced.

Promptly, a hand shot up in the air. 'Professor, is it true that the dungeons are haunted?'

Morgaine raised an eyebrow. 'I believe you met our House ghost at dinner last night, Mr Makdoui.'

'I ... I didn't mean the Bloody Baron, ma'am,' the boy clarified. 'I meant ...him.' He pointed quickly towards the portrait that was hanging over the fireplace and then lowered his head as if he were afraid that the portrait would yell at him.

'You mean Professor Snape?' Morgaine did not look up at the portrait. It was too realistic, the dark eyes too bottomless for her to dare look at them lest she'd lose herself in them. 'Professor Snape was Head of Slytherin House for almost two decades. As his ghost is still in the castle, it is only natural that it resides in the dungeons. Don't you agree, Mr Makdoui?'

'There ... there are rumours, ma'am,' the boy went on.

'Rumours? What kind of rumours?'

'That Snape was the true heir of Slytherin. That he never abandoned the Dark Lord. That his ghost is still here because ...'

'Enough!' Morgaine's voice echoed from the dungeon walls like thunder and made several first-years flinch and huddle closer together. The Makdoui boy was still looking at his shoes.

'Severus Snape has been Dumbledore's man through and through!' Morgaine started, desperately trying to keep her voice calm. 'He gave his life to bring Voldemort down. I will not allow his memory to be sullied by vicious rumours like those.'

She stepped closer towards her first-years and drew herself up to her full height. There must be no doubt that what she was about to say was serious. 'Fifty points will be taken from Slytherin should anyone ever again use the term *Dark Lord* within these walls. Furthermore, I want to know who is spreading those rumours about Professor Snape. Those of you who have any information will report to me personally, and no one else but me will ever know. If I have not received any information by the end of the week, I will call a House meeting. And I intend to interrogate every student until I know the truth.'

The look she gave her first-years could have made the sun freeze to ice. And some of them actually seemed to have shrunk a couple of inches.

'To breakfast with you now!'

She swirled around and left the common room, her robes billowing behind her and the first-years following in her wake. This was not how Morgaine had wanted to start her first day as Head of Slytherin House.

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Forty-five minutes later, Morgaine let her eyes wander over her NEWT class. There were five Ravenclaws, two Gryffindors, one Hufflepuff and three Slytherins. Those children had come to Hogwarts when Severus had been Headmaster, and Morgaine remembered most of them, though not all by name. She especially remembered one of the Slytherins. The girl was Muggle-born, and two weeks into her first term, she had beseeched the Headmaster to be allowed to transfer to another House as she had felt threatened by some of her House mates. Severus had refused and instead demanded to know the names of the bullies. How he had dealt with them, Morgaine did not know. But the girl had never been bothered again. And there she was now, one of the best achieving students in her year, and the pride of Slytherin House.

Slytherin ... Morgaine had expected a challenge, but she had not been prepared to discuss the Dark Lord and Severus' loyalties already before breakfast, especially not with first-years. They were supposed to be untainted still. But the seed of evil that had once been planted in the mind of Slytherin was obviously still growing. Morgaine had informed Minerva as soon as she had escorted the first-years to breakfast, of course, and the Headmistress had given her a free hand on how to deal with the situation. For now, Morgaine was hoping that someone would come forth and inform her who had started the rumours. How she would deal with them, however, she did not yet know. Part of her wanted to consult Severus, but another part was reluctant. She did not want Severus to know that he despite his death and despite Harry Potter washing his name clean was still suspected to have been loyal to the Dark Lord. If possible, she would avoid telling him. As for now, she had a class to teach.

All eleven NEWT students worked well, and as Morgaine weaved in and out between their work tables, a strange feeling of melancholy crept into her heart. Those children had been taught Potions by Horace Slughorn. None of them had ever seen what Severus Snape had been able to do with a cauldron. None of them had ever seen his passion. And they had no idea what they had missed.

Halfway into the lesson, the Hufflepuff student dropped a whole phial of Acromantula venom into his potion, which made it hiss and boil over, and when Morgaine had frozen the corroding liquid with a flick of her wand, she smiled at the boy's flushed cheeks and the mortified look on his face. None of those students had ever seen Severus Snape lose his patience in the classroom either. And for that, they should be grateful.

The first-year Slytherin and Ravenclaw class arrived after lunch, filing into the classroom with big eyes and curious expressions on their faces. The Slytherins looked slightly more confident than the Ravenclaws, certain that their Head of House teaching Potions would give them some kind of advantage. But any trace of smugness disappeared from their faces as Morgaine split them into groups of four, each containing of two Slytherins and two Ravenclaws.

'Welcome to Potions,' she addressed the class once they had settled down. 'This subject will demand utmost precision, thoroughness, concentration and caution. There is little room for chattering and drawing doodles on a spare bit of parchment. Potions is a dangerous subject, and there is a reason why the fireplace in the back of the classroom is directly linked to the hospital wing. However, I hope we will have no need to use it today. And if you do as you're told and follow the given instructions, you will find that a cauldron can hold just as much power and magic as a wand.'

She paused and let her gaze wander over her class. No one was talking, no one was doodling. And Morgaine continued:

'There are potions that can bewitch the human mind in a more effective way than the Imperius Curse. There are potions which can kill you in a blink of an eye. And there are potions which can cure illnesses that cannot be cured by any spell. But as in Transfiguration and Charms, there are rules in Potions, rules of physics and rules of magic, and those rules cannot, *must* not be breached. You will learn those rules along with your potions. And maybe, one day, you will be able to bottle fame, brew glory or even stopper death.'

A collective intake of breath told Morgaine that she had caught the children's interest, and as she gave them their first task, she remembered her first Potions lesson at Hogwarts and the man who had coined those words that had made students gasp for two decades: *bottle fame, brew glory, stopper death* That man had never sought fame or glory, and he had never even been given a chance to stopper his own death.

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'I see that the joys of teaching Potions has revealed itself, Professor duLac.' Severus sneered as he drifted towards Morgaine's desk and caught sight of a light blue potion in her cauldron: a Headache Potion. One of the first potions she had ever brewed for him.

'It wasn't that bad,' Morgaine murmured, absentmindedly rubbing her neck with her free hand. 'All cauldrons are still intact, and no student needed to be sent to the hospital wing. I'd say some of them are rather talented, actually.'

'Talented?' Severus cocked an eyebrow. 'I doubt it. The gift of Potions is a rare one. You have it. You proved that during your very first lesson.'

Morgaine snorted. 'Hard work and a studious mind. I wanted to impress you.'

'You succeeded.'

'I did?'

She added some drops of the potion to a goblet of water and downed it, putting the goblet down with a sharp intake of breath.

'That bad?' Severus enquired.

'It's not the classes.' Morgaine sighed and once more rubbed her neck, wincing at the pain that shot from her stiff muscles right up into her skull. She might just as well tell him. Severus would find out sooner or later anyway.

'It's our House,' she started, not sure where to begin. Did she want to tell Severus the rumours she had heard about him?

'You forget that I am a ghost, Morgaine,' Severus interrupted. 'I hear and see things without being noticed. I have heard the rumours. I know the mood in the common room.'

Good, Morgaine thought. At least, she would be spared having to tell him that he was suspected of being the true heir of Slytherin.

'I do not want this, Severus,' she declared. 'Slytherin House has been through enough. I do not want my students to be fed old propaganda about power and glory. And I refuse to watch another generation of Death Eaters being fostered in my House!'

Severus nodded pensively. He knew only too well what Morgaine was talking about. He had been in the same position while he had been Head of House.

Despite the rumours, he had never propagated the Dark Lord's ideals in his House. On the contrary. The use of the word *Mudblood* in the common room had been punished with the deduction of fifty House points. And whenever he had heard one of his students talk about the Dark Lord or the Death Eaters in enthusiastic tones, he had made sure to convey that being a follower of the Dark Lord was not all about power and glory but about mostly lies and murder, torture and betrayal. All this very much to the annoyance of his fellow Death Eaters. Severus could not remember how many times the likes of Lucius Malfoy had tried to backtalk him in front of the Dark Lord, saying that he was losing his touch, that he wasn't loyal to the cause. And each time, he had been forced to wriggle himself out of that situation by telling yet more lies.

Surprisingly enough, the Dark Lord had always believed him when he had said that everything was for show, that he was just trying to convince Dumbledore that he, despite all evidence talking against him, was loyal to the Light.

'Do you think Horace took care of them?'

Severus raised his eyebrow. He had not really been listening to Morgaine, so absorbed had he been in his thoughts.

'After the war, after Voldemort had fallen,' Morgaine clarified. 'Do you think Horace took care of those students whose parents had been loyal followers? Those students who were believers themselves? Those students who suddenly stood there with everything taken from them? Did Horace take care of them? Did anyone?'

Severus had no answer. After the war, Horace Slughorn had, like everybody else, probably been so relieved about Voldemort's demise that he had not cared. Well, maybe he had cared. But like so many others, he had hoped that the Death Eaters, their beliefs and their teachings would disappear along with their master.

Morgaine sank onto a chair and buried her face in her hands. 'I didn't care either.' She sighed. 'I knew that those children needed help, and I deserted them.'

'Don't you dare blame yourself, Morgaine,' Severus exclaimed. 'You had other things on your mind.'

'I should have cared.'

Severus cringed. He knew the tone in Morgaine's voice. Guilt, self-blame and regret. He knew that tone only too well himself.

He floated towards her, wishing that he could take her hands into his and cup her chin to make her look up. But in his ghostly shape, he was unable to. 'Morgaine, please, look at me,' he asked instead. 'You have always cared. You have always cared much more about others than yourself. Do not blame yourself now for once having put your own needs first. There is still time. Take care of those children that are in Slytherin House now. Show them that there is a choice between the Light and the Dark. Teach them that the choice is theirs to make. But never be fooled into believing that you can make their choices for them.'

'There are rumours in Slytherin House, you know.' Morgaine was looking straight at him now, her blue eyes filled with a pain that made Severus flinch. 'There are rumours that you had never abandoned the Dark Lord, that you were his most loyal servant until the very end.'

'You know that this is not true.'

'Yes, I know. But do they? The children, do they know?' Then the look in her eyes changed. Suddenly, there was a flash of fighting spirit, of determination. 'I will not have anyone believe those rumours, Severus.'

A smile played around Severus' lips. He was so proud of Morgaine, so impressed by her willpower. 'My reputation has always been tarnished,' he pointed out. 'I do not care about those rumours.'

'I refuse to let those rumours sully your memory, Severus Snape. You died for the Light. No one should ever have reason to doubt that.'

Dearest Morgaine. She would never stop caring about him, Severus knew that. And she would keep on fighting until his name had been cleared once and for all. What he did not know, however, was that Morgaine in that very moment had someone else on her mind. Someone whom she kept closely hidden away from him in the most secret corner of her mind.

It was only hours later, in the depths of night, that Morgaine allowed herself to think about that person, about Demeter. Today, she had had a chance to tell Severus about their child. Today, she could have told him that his reputation was important to her because she wanted their daughter to know that her father had been a hero. She could have told him, should have. But she had not. Once more, she had been cowardly and held her peace, and had hated herself for it.

With every day that passed, things became harder. With every day, the lie grew bigger and threatened to suffocate her. And worst of all was that Morgaine did not really know anymore why she did not tell Severus about their child. He would not be angry with her, she knew that. He would be surprised of course, probably shocked for a moment. But he would understand her reasons for keeping silent. He, too, would not have wanted their child to be in danger. But still, a dark, almost irrational feeling of fear kept Morgaine from coming clean.

But the lie was consuming her. The mental bond between her and Severus was becoming stronger, and it grew increasingly more difficult for her to keep parts of her mind shielded off from him without him noticing. And there were days when she considered opening up to give Severus a glimpse of the girl that was his spitting image, and then watch his reaction and eventually tell him the whole truth.

But when it came around to it, Morgaine did not dare that either.

VII: Facing the Past and Preparing for the Future

Chapter 7 of 40

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

Chapter VII: Facing the Past and Preparing for the Future

The knife lay feather light in her hand, and the blade reflected the fire that was burning beneath the cauldron. She chopped her ingredients evenly, precisely. Now and then, her eyes flicked towards the cauldron to check the potion's progress. This particular potion would change colour according to its temperature. Once it turned emerald green, it would be time to add the next ingredient and then stir the potion, twice clockwise, once counter clockwise, repeat the movement seven times. Then the potion would be done.

Severus' ghost hovered in the shadows, unable to take his eyes off Morgaine. The knife seemed like an extension of her arm, she needed no spell to check the temperature of the potion, and the way she treated her ingredients showed how much she cared for the plants that were spread out on the table before her. She would prepare each of them by hand, knowing that magic might alter or even destroy the plants' own magic. She had always worked like that. When she had come to Hogwarts, a girl of fourteen, she had already understood.

'I know there is no point in offering you a seat, but would you mind not hiding in the corner and staring at me?'

Severus smirked. Morgaine had not even lifted her head, and still she knew that he was there. 'You never liked being watched,' he stated.

'And still, you insist on doing it.'

'Can you blame me?' Severus drifted out of the shadows and towards Morgaine's working station. 'It is not often that one comes across a potion maker who shows such reverence to her ingredients.'

'I had a good teacher.' Morgaine added the last ingredient to the potion, started stirring and raised her head to smile at the ghost of the man who had taught her everything she knew about potions. 'He, too, loved his subject.'

'He loved the subject but hated teaching it,' Severus growled. 'I still think you are lying when you say that you are enjoying it.'

Morgaine stirred the potion for the last time and put down the ladle. 'I *am* enjoying it,' she assured Severus. 'I've been teaching Potions for three months now, and so far, I have not had the urge to rip off the head of any student.'

'Your Neville Longbottom will reveal himself one day,' Severus warned, a smirk on his ghostly face. 'You will pull your hair and pray every day that he will not blow up himself and your entire classroom with him. And I will sit back and say that I have told you so.'

Morgaine laughed, and Severus' smirk turned into a smile. He loved to hear her laugh and remembered a time when her laughter had lit up the dungeons like the rays of the sun. Unfortunately, he had seldom had the time or peace of mind to joke and make her laugh when he had still been alive. And during his last years, the opportunities to laugh had been few and far between.

'Do you miss it?' Morgaine suddenly asked.

'Teaching?' Severus looked up at her, frowning. 'I most certainly do not.'

'I'm not talking about teaching, Severus.' Morgaine was still smiling. 'I am talking about potion making. I have seen the look in your eyes when you watch me brewing. You cannot deny that you miss it.'

Severus inclined his head. 'Yes, I do miss it,' he admitted. 'I miss the weight of a knife in my hand, the feeling of moving my fingers through the fumes of a potion, the smell of the ingredients. I miss all of it.'

'Have you tried?' Morgaine enquired. 'Have you tried making a potion as a ghost?'

'I am unable to.' Severus scowled slightly. It was easy enough for him pour ingredients into a cauldron or to control a potion's temperature by willpower alone. What he could not manage was doing two things at once, like the simple task of holding an ingredient and moving a knife over it at the same time, or adding an ingredient to a simmering potion and stirring it simultaneously, or reducing the flame. It was utterly frustrating.

'Could we do it together?' Morgaine suggested. 'You may borrow my hands. I'll hold the ingredients, and you chop. I'll add them to the potion and you stir.'

Severus raised his left eyebrow as Morgaine held out her knife towards him. As any other potioneer, she was protective of her equipment. She did not lend her knife to just anyone. Gingerly, he mentally took hold of the knife and moved it through the air, carefully at first but then bolder. He should be able to do some cutting and slicing.

'What would we be brewing?' he enquired.

'*Advanced Potion-Making*, page ten.' Morgaine's eyes were glittering. 'The Draught of the Living Death.'

Severus' right eyebrow joined his left on its way upwards. 'A rather unconventional choice, Professor duLac,' he stated.

'Yes,' Morgaine conceded, spreading out the ingredients on the cutting board. 'I thought so, too, when you asked me to brew it for the first time.'

They complemented each other perfectly. And although the process of preparing the ingredients and brewing the potion with the help of another seemed tedious at first, Severus soon relaxed. Morgaine let him try as much as he wanted. She was calm and patient and seemed to be able to anticipate where he would have difficulties. She helped him without him having to ask her, and he accepted her help without scowling. She was a good teacher. And he was a better student than he himself had expected.

They worked in silence, and they were already bottling the potion as Morgaine suddenly inhaled sharply and her whole body tensed up. And Severus froze, too, temporarily at a loss about what had made Morgaine react in such a way. Then he realised that his ghostly hand had moved onto hers. Had his hand still been made out of flesh, he would only have to bend his fingers to take hold of Morgaine's, to feel its softness, its warmth. But as he was a ghost, he could not.

'My apologies,' he murmured and withdrew his hand, even moved away from Morgaine a couple of inches. 'I did not mean to ...'

'It's alright,' Morgaine said softly and gave him a little smile. But Severus could see that she was furtively rubbing her hand. And he knew that the spot where he had touched her felt icy cold.

'I should have been more careful,' he insisted. 'I know that it is highly uncomfortable to be touched by a ghost.'

'Really, it's alright,' Morgaine repeated. Her voice was suddenly much stronger. 'It feels different with you. I just wasn't prepared.'

'Different? What do you mean, it feels different with me?'

'Your touch is cold,' Morgaine started to explain, 'but it is not as chilly as the touch of other ghosts. It feels like stepping into the shadow of the castle walls after sitting in the sun by the lake. You shiver for a moment, and then you get used to it.'

She vanished the knife and the cutting board and then settled onto the three-legged stool behind the cauldron, her eyes on Severus. 'Do you feel anything?'

Severus frowned. He had not really thought about that before. 'I feel ... something,' he started, growing frustrated at the fact that he did not have the words to explain exactly what he felt. 'It is like ...' Sunshine? Fire? A lover's caress? He could not tell.

Morgaine raised her hand as if to stop him. 'It's alright,' she mumbled almost inaudibly and got off her stool to lock away the phials in the cupboard behind her desk, secretly slipping one into the front pocket of her robes, hoping Severus would not see. She did not want to explain to him why she had chosen that particular potion for them to brew together. She was not even sure if she would ever carry out her plans. But she had the phial in her pocket now. She would treasure it until the day she might need it.

She smiled at Severus when she turned to face him again, but her heart was aching. What answer had she expected? He was a ghost. He did not feel the way she did. And even if he did, Severus Snape had never been one to put his feelings into words. Why would he start now? But still, Morgaine was disappointed. She had truly been hoping that touching her, even as a ghost, meant something to him. But there was no point in dwelling on that subject.

'Maybe you should talk to the other ghosts, Severus,' she suggested instead. 'Maybe they can give you some pointers on how to move several objects at once. They have, after all, quite some decades of experience.'

Severus nodded. His mind was already feverishly going through all the possibilities of how to improve his skills. As much as he had enjoyed working with Morgaine, he

longed to be able to brew potions without her help. He would most definitely talk to the Bloody Baron. And he would also try something he had not even thought of until yet, simply because he had had no use for it so far: he had been proficient in wandless magic when he had still been alive. And as wandless magic was connected to the wizard's mind and not his body, there was no reason why that ability should have disappeared with his death.

'Do you want me to give you some homework until I return after the holidays?'

Still, Morgaine was smiling. Severus, however, frowned once more. 'Return? Are you leaving?'

'Yes,' Morgaine affirmed. 'I promised my grandmother I would return to Iceland for Christmas. It is a busy time for her.'

She continued cleaning up, trying to avoid looking at Severus and knowing that it would be a busy time for her as well. She had finally made up her mind. It was time for Demeter to get to know everything about her father, both the good and the bad. And in January, Severus would have to be told about his daughter.

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Morgaine didn't sleep well during her first night back in Iceland. She had arrived late, and Demeter had already been fast asleep. Morgaine had stood in the door of her daughter's bedroom for a long time, watching the little one. With her eyes closed and the dim light of the candle illuminating her pale cheeks, the girl looked exactly like her father. Apart from one little but very important difference: the girl looked peaceful in her sleep, something which Severus Snape had done far too seldom. Even in his sleep, there had too often been a scowl on his face, and too often had his face twitched from pain or bad dreams. And far too seldom had Morgaine been able to give him peace at night.

She should not be having those thoughts, Morgaine knew that. She had done everything in her power to help Severus carry his burden. But when she settled down to sleep that night, the all too familiar feeling of guilt crept back into her heart. And she felt unspeakably sorry that Severus was unable to find peace even in death, unspeakably sorry because he most probably was unable to move on because of *her*.

There was no way of telling what time it was when Morgaine awoke from an uneasy slumber and made her way outside. When she had been a child, she had been able to pinpoint exactly the time of day or night, even in the depths of winter, when the sun would not bless the village with more than a couple of hours of dim light around midday. But now Morgaine was not in touch with the place of her childhood anymore, and it was only the fact that there was no one moving about in the little village that made her conclude that it was still very early in the morning.

She pulled her shawl tighter around her and looked towards the horizon. The Aurora Borealis was dancing across the clear sky, and the silence of the frozen expanse was disturbed by nothing other than the occasional hissing of a geyser somewhere behind the dark hills. Even the wind that had rattled the shutters earlier had stopped blowing. It seemed like the whole world had ground to a halt.

'You will catch a cold, child.'

Morgaine turned her head slightly and smiled weakly at her grandmother, who was draping yet another shawl around her shoulders.

'One would think that you would have learnt how to cast a Warming Spell after all those years in the Wizarding world.'

'I didn't bring my wand outside,' Morgaine explained. 'It's lying on my nightstand.'

'I know.' Margaret smiled. 'Demeter is ogling it with big eyes.'

'The little one is up then.'

'Yes,' the old woman affirmed and took Morgaine's hand. 'It is time for breakfast. Come inside and greet your daughter, child. She has missed you dearly.'

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'You have been studying hard, little one.'

Morgaine and Demeter had retreated to the child's room after breakfast, and Morgaine was now leafing through the books she had given her daughter before leaving for Hogwarts. *Magical Drafts and Potions* was her own copy, lying beside *One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi* which looked as well-read as if it belonged to Hermione Granger. So did the copy of the revised *Hogwarts A History*. Morgaine picked it up and opened it at the end, where the pages looked most worn and little bookmarks were sticking out. It was the chapter about the Final Battle, and one of the first things she saw was a picture of Severus Snape.

'You have read up on your father, I see.'

Demeter nodded.

'Naturally,' Morgaine concluded and sat down on her daughter's bed, the book still in her hands. 'I assume you have some questions. Don't you, little one?'

Once more, Demeter nodded and sat beside her mother. 'Father seems to have been a brave man.'

'Yes, he was. He risked his life to bring the Dark Lord down. I doubt we would have succeeded without him.'

Demeter shifted her weight and turned towards her mother, whose eyes seemed firmly attached to the picture of the dark wizard. Her mother had never talked about Severus Snape. All Demeter knew about her father she had learnt from books or heard from other people. And she could not help but wonder what had made her mother keep silent about him for all those years. He seemed to have been a great man, a hero, someone to be proud of.

'There is nothing in the book about his personal life,' Demeter started carefully. 'I could not find a word about you.'

Morgaine sighed and swallowed to make the lump in her throat disappear. 'Your father did not have the luxury of having a personal life, Demeter. Only a handful of people knew that he and I were involved. You have to understand that your father's position in the war was a difficult one. There were far too many people who would have tried to get to him through me had they known that we were together. It was far too dangerous to let anyone know.'

And even that handful of people was too many Morgaine thought. Too many of them had tried to twist or even destroy the love she and Severus had shared. From some, it could have been expected. From others, it had been the greatest betrayal Morgaine could imagine. But Demeter did not need to know that. She was too young to understand. And surely, the girl must have other questions.

'Is that why there is no mention of me either?'

There it was, the question that Morgaine had known would come, the question that sooner or later would be followed by an even harder one. And she knew that she had no other choice than to answer both of them truthfully.

'Your father, Demeter, never knew about you,' Morgaine started, putting her arm around her daughter's shoulders and pulling the child towards her chest. 'Had he known, he would have loved you and protected you with his very life. But there was a war, and his task lay elsewhere. He had another child to protect. And I could not endanger either of you by telling him about you.'

'Another child?' Demeter asked. 'Do you mean Harry Potter?'

Morgaine nodded. 'Yes, your father promised to protect Harry Potter long before I met him. And whatever can be said about your father, he always kept his promises. He was the most loyal of us all.'

Demeter shifted in her mother's arms, and Morgaine rested her chin on her daughter's head, inhaling the scent of her hair that was just as thick and raven black as Severus' had been. And the thought of never again being able to touch him made her heart ache.

'You miss him, don't you, Mother?' Demeter asked quietly. 'You always have.'

Morgaine swallowed her tears. 'Yes, little one. I miss your father more than you can ever imagine. I promised him my heart when I was not much older than you are now. And when he died, part of me died with him.'

'I wish I could have met him.'

Morgaine let her hand run through her daughter's hair and placed a tender kiss on her head. 'You will, Demeter. When you come to Hogwarts, you will meet Severus Snape.'

Demeter frowned and freed herself from her mother's embrace to look at her. 'You mean I will meet his portrait?' she asked. 'He must have one, does he not? He was Headmaster after all.'

'Better yet, dear child,' Morgaine replied and brushed a strand of hair from her daughter's face. 'Once you come to Hogwarts, you will meet your father's ghost.'

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Morgaine slept peacefully her second night in Iceland. She had spent the whole day with her daughter, talking about Hogwarts, the Wizarding world and, of course, Severus Snape. To her utmost surprise, talking about him hurt a little less with every question Demeter asked, and by nightfall, Morgaine was confident that telling Severus about his daughter would be doable after all. He would be surprised, of course, probably slightly shocked, and he would most certainly demand to know why he had not been told earlier. But he would understand, just as Demeter had understood.

It wasn't until the early morning that Morgaine's sleep was disturbed. Suddenly, the shadows of the past came creeping into her mind: red eyes, dark robes and silvery masks. She shot off her pillow with a cry, her heart racing and her nightshirt sticking to her back. She had not had those dreams for years. Why had they returned to haunt her now?

On shaking legs, Morgaine made her way to the kitchen to put the kettle on. Maybe, some of her grandmother's herbal tea would chase the nightmares away and enable her to go back to sleep. She was waiting for the herbs to seep in as her eyes fell onto a stack of letters on the kitchen table. The attached note told her that Minerva had sent them, and that they were the mail that she had received since she had left Hogwarts.

Absentmindedly, Morgaine started leafing through the envelopes, certain that most of them contained Christmas greetings and best wishes for the New Year. She was just about to put them back onto the table and return to her room with some tea, when her breath caught in her throat. She saw her name written in artistic, slender letters. The ink was silver. The envelope was dark green. And pressed into the sealing wax were two snakes and a peacock, the Malfoy crest.

VIII: You Can Run, But You Cannot Hide

Chapter 8 of 40

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

Chapter VIII: You Can Run, But You Cannot Hide

The handsome manor house had not changed: white ivy-covered marble, elaborate gardens, perfectly trimmed hedges, roving white peacocks and intimidating, yet artfully crafted sculptures. Even the full moon that was hanging in the velvety black sky seemed to be part of the sophisticated scenario, as if Lucius Malfoy had ordered it to shine at its brightest to welcome the guests to his famous New Year's ball.

Morgaine shuddered as she passed the wrought-iron gates, and it had nothing to do with her dress that was far too thin for a cold December night. She simply hated Malfoy Manor. Too many bad memories were attached to this place, memories of torture, betrayal and lies. And when the New Year dawned, the memories of this night would come to fit perfectly with her old ones, Morgaine was sure of that. This night was most certainly going to be filled with betrayal and lies once more. She was, after all, not wearing that silly little dress for fun, nor was she carrying a potion phial in her pocket because that was something to be expected of a Potions mistress. Everything was part of yet another cunning scheme.

Her first reaction to Malfoy's invitation had been to throw it into the fire. She had had no desire to meet the man who had haunted her dreams for so many years. The last time she had followed one of his invitations, he had almost cast an Unforgivable curse at her, and she had stopped him with a Dark curse she had not been supposed to know. And then the Dark Lord had punished Lucius, for her sake.

No, Lucius Malfoy and Morgaine duLac certainly had no good memories of each other. And still, he had invited her to his New Year's ball. When she had not replied by December twenty-seventh, he had sent another owl to Hogwarts, and yet another one the next day. He had even contacted Minerva and demanded to know if Morgaine had received his invitations. Minerva had truthfully informed him that she had indeed forwarded his letters to Morgaine, but she had certainly to Lucius' utter disappointment not told him where he could find her. After that, Minerva had immediately contacted Morgaine.

'Lucius seems very eager to have you at the Manor on New Year's,' Minerva had said. 'Dumbledore suggested you go there to see what he wants.'

Dumbledore. Morgaine had almost laughed. This was the second time the old man was trying to make her attend Malfoy's New Year's ball. He was still the same meddlesome old fool, even out of the frame of his portrait in the Headmistress' office. His interference alone had almost been enough reason for Morgaine to defy both him and Lucius Malfoy. But then the wheels in her Slytherin mind had started to turn, and she had to agree with her great-grandfather. She just had to find out what Lucius wanted from her.

But now, as she made her way towards the heavy oak door of Malfoy Manor, Morgaine started to doubt her decision. And when she knocked, she was ready to Disapparate the moment the door was opened.

To her surprise, it was not an elf that appeared in the doorway but the lord of the manor himself. Standing tall and proud, Lucius Malfoy smiled at her, his gray eyes

glittering.

'Welcome to my humble home. It is an honour to welcome you back, Morgaine of the Lake.'

He bowed to kiss her hand, and Morgaine had to fight her instincts not to pull her hand away as his lips touched her knuckles. She hated Lucius Malfoy with every fibre of her body and would have given her last breath to wish him to hell.

'It is an honour to have been invited, Lucius,' she replied with a smile that was so fake that it made her jaw ache. Lucius Malfoy never did anything for honour. He had invited her for a very special reason. But she would have to keep smiling if she wanted to find out.

'I have meant to invite you before, my dear,' Lucius purred, still holding on to her hand. 'But alas, even my best owls seemed unable to find you.'

'Maybe I did not want to be found, Lucius.'

For a split second, Lucius seemed confused, but then he chuckled. 'Why would you not have, my dear? The Wizarding world has missed you.'

His hand lingered on her bare shoulders just a moment longer than appropriate as he took her cloak, and Morgaine did her best not to flinch away. Lucius' touch made her skin crawl just as much as the sound of his voice and his flattering.

'But then again, you have my sympathies for keeping away, Morgaine' Lucius continued softly, offering her his arm to lead her to the dining hall. 'The last couple of years have been difficult for all of us. The old order has changed, and we all had to find our place in the new one. Some of us have succeeded, others have not.'

'I assume you count yourself to the first group, Lucius?' Morgaine asked innocently, and Lucius just smiled. Not that he needed to answer. His sumptuously decorated home with its ornate furniture, the gilded mirrors and magnificent carpets told any visitor that the Malfoys had not lost any of their wealth after the war and that they still held their high place in society.

When they entered the dining hall, Morgaine realised that Lucius had not lost any of his influence either. The people gathered around the banquet table were not just any wizards and witches. They were governors and members of pure-blood families, people in high positions at the Ministry and members of the Wizengamot. The good old gang, Morgaine thought wearily as Lucius pulled up a chair for her. He had obviously not forgotten the importance of rubbing elbows with the right people. All that was missing were a couple of Death Eaters. But those were either dead, in Azkaban or keeping a very low profile. Surely, Lucius was too smart to invite any of his old friends to his party. Or had he truly realised how wrong his choices had been? Somehow, Morgaine did not dare believe it. But then again, he might just have. Who could know? Had anyone ever known the true allegiance of Lucius Malfoy? And had he ever been true to anyone but himself?

Doubtlessly, the dinner served at Malfoy Manor that night was the most costly and most delicious in all Britain that New Year's night, and the goblets re-filled themselves with elf-made wine before they even were entirely emptied. Morgaine drank enough not to insult her host, but she was careful not to get too intoxicated. She would need her wits later that night.

'Tell me, Morgaine,' one of the guests started as pudding was served. 'How is my little pixie doing at school?'

Morgaine took her time to carefully put down her goblet and wipe her mouth with the delicate napkin. Lucius had not deemed it necessary to introduce her to all his guests, but the high cheekbones and the beautiful, slanting eyes made it clear that the woman addressing her was no other than the mother of the Zabini children.

'Your daughter is doing her House proud,' she replied, placing the napkin on her lap. 'She will, however, have to start studying harder if she wants to achieve an acceptable grade in Potions.'

'Potions?' The woman giggled. 'Why is it that the Heads of Slytherin House are obsessed with that subject? Snape threatened to fail my Blaise as well.'

'Then I suggest getting a tutor for your daughter,' Lucius advised, smiling knowingly. 'Morgaine here has studied under Severus Snape for many years. She might have picked up a trait or two from our dear friend.'

'That would certainly explain her little outburst at the start of term.'

Everyone turned to the dark-haired man sitting at the far end of the table who had interrupted the host.

'Outburst, Makdoui?' Lucius enquired.

'Yes, outburst. Or should I call it a defence speech, Miss duLac?' The man's eyes were glittering menacingly. 'My son is not accustomed to being scolded.'

'I do not recall having scolded your son, Mr Makdoui,' Morgaine replied calmly, glad that the napkin on her lap gave her something to occupy her hands with. 'I simply made it clear that I will not have anyone's memory being sullied by vicious rumours, especially not the memory of Severus Snape.'

'Rumours? Ha! So you still maintain that Snape was Dumbledore's man through and through, Miss duLac?'

Morgaine had already opened her mouth to give Makdoui and anyone else who would listen an explanation that would make the Dark Lord himself turn in his grave, but Lucius beat her to it.

'There, there, dear friends. I think we should let the past rest. Severus Snape has been cleared by the famous Harry Potter. Why should we doubt the Boy Who Lived? The Boy Who Lived *twice*, I might add.'

Polite laughter erupted around the table, and Makdoui did not say anything more. But the look in his eyes made it very clear that he did not consider the discussion finished. Morgaine on her side made a mental note to keep an eye on Makdoui junior. At the start of term, she had given the boy the benefit of the doubt and hoped that he had been influenced by older students when he had addressed the matter of Severus' loyalties. Now, she started to wonder if he had been taught his prejudices at home. And if he had, then how many more of the students in Slytherin House had been raised with the same standards?

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'Thank you for saving me at the dinner table, Lucius,' Morgaine said. 'I might just have given Makdoui a piece of my mind and regretted it later.'

'Forgive the man, Morgaine.' Lucius handed her a fine crystal glass filled with dark red wine. 'I am sure it was the wine talking. It is more powerful than any Veritaserum.'

'And still you insist on making me drink more?' Morgaine smiled and toasted towards her host. 'One could think you're up to something.'

Lucius laughed. 'Merlin forbid. I just thought you might need another glass. Or maybe you would prefer something stronger? Brandy, perhaps? Or Firewhisky?' He pointed to one of the bottles standing on the elegant mahogany table. 'This one is twenty-five years old.'

Once more, Morgaine smiled but shook her head. As much as alcohol seemed tempting, she had already drunk too much that night. One of her reasons for abandoning the ballroom and seeking refuge in the drawing room had been to keep herself from drinking more champagne. It would certainly have soothed her nerves, but she knew that she could not hold her liquor. Another reason had been to find a quiet place to gather her thoughts. Her suspicions had been confirmed at dinner. There were still some parents out there who taught their children lies about the war. What if the same parents were also handing down their old-fashioned beliefs about the superiority of Wizard kind? What if the children believed it?

That Lucius had followed her to the drawing room had not been planned. But Morgaine saw that development as not entirely undesirable. Maybe Lucius had drunk enough wine to loosen his tongue as well? Maybe she would learn now why he had been so eager to have her at the Manor?

'How is Narcissa?' she asked in a soft voice. The subject of Narcissa once again spending the holidays at a retreat had come up once or twice over dinner, and Lucius had seemed truly concerned about his wife's welfare. So Morgaine thought it to be the perfect topic to make him open up to her.

Lucius shrugged and poured himself another glass of wine before positioning himself on the chaise longue by the window. 'The war has been hard on Cissy,' he explained. 'Me being imprisoned, Draco being more or less held hostage for a year, then Bella's death ... Narcissa is a tender soul, she is fragile. She needs time to process everything. If it helps her to live by the sea for a couple of months, away from me, then I am more than happy to grant her wishes.'

What a noble gesture. Morgaine had seen Lucius and Narcissa run around on the battlefield at Hogwarts in order to find their son. She had also seen them huddled together in the Great Hall the day after, happy to be alive, happy to be together. Was she doing Lucius a wrong? Had he truly changed?

She was just about to offer him her sympathies when Lucius changed directions.

'How is your daughter, Morgaine?'

The hand which Morgaine had extended towards her wine glass froze for one treacherous moment. So did her smile. How the hell did Lucius know about Demeter? The girl had never once left the village in Iceland. The place was Unplottable. How had he found out?

Lucius lent back in his chair with a satisfied smile, casually swirling his wine. Any trace of concern for his wife's condition had been wiped off his face. 'You forget that I am a school governor, Morgaine,' he drawled. 'It is my duty to know whose children are about to attend Hogwarts. Demeter, is it not? A lovely name.'

Morgaine finally picked up her glass and pretended to take a sip of the elf-made wine, but she could not have swallowed it even if she had wanted to. Her throat was too tight. How daft could one get? Of course Lucius had access to the school files. Of course he knew about Demeter coming to Hogwarts in November. The question was, had he stumbled across Demeter's name by accident or had he deliberately been looking for it?

'The girl turned eleven in October, did she not?' Lucius continued and narrowed his eyes. He seemed to be calculating. 'That means you were pregnant when you were teaching at Durmstrang. No wonder you left somewhat ... hastily.'

'You have a child on your own who you seem to love very much, Lucius,' Morgaine replied, surprised how steady her voice sounded and endlessly relieved that it was not shaking like the hand she was now hiding in the folds of her robe. 'You have to concur that the North is a rather unfriendly place and not suited for either pregnant women or newborn babies.'

'You should have let me know, Morgaine,' Lucius said, once again sounding as compassionate as he had done when he had talked about his ill wife. 'I could have spoken to the Minister of Education. They would not have transferred you had they known you were with child.'

Morgaine resisted the urge to laugh. Who was Lucius trying to fool? She knew all too well that it had been *him* who had requested her transfer, just because she had refused to play by his rules on that fateful New Year's night twelve years ago.

'Demeter duLac,' Lucius mused. 'I was surprised to see that the child carries your last name and not her father's. She is Severus' daughter, is she not?'

'That is none of your concern, Lucius.'

He shot off from his chair as if stung by a blast-ended Skrewt, his cold gray eyes glittering menacingly. 'This concerns me very much, Morgaine duLac,' he spat.

Then his features softened, and he waved his hand in an apologetic gesture. 'Forgive me, Morgaine,' he begged, once more smiling indulgently at her. 'Too much wine. I told you it was dangerous stuff.'

Morgaine inclined her head as if to accept Lucius' apology, but her mind was working feverishly. Did Lucius know that Demeter had been conceived the very night she had turned him down in order to go after Severus?

'I am surprised Severus never mentioned the child,' Lucius began, letting Morgaine pour him another glass of the wine that made him talk too much. 'A child of a lineage such as yours would certainly have made him rise in the ranks of the Dark Lord. But then again, Severus did not really need any help.'

'What are you implying, Lucius?'

Still, Lucius was smiling. 'I am merely stating a fact, dearest Morgaine. Severus has always been the Dark Lord's most loyal servant.'

'Then you do not believe in Harry Potter's testimony either?' Morgaine enquired, blatantly ignoring everything Lucius has said about Demeter. Her mission was now to find out whether Lucius had abandoned his old ways, whether he had a hand in the rumour that circulated about the true loyalties of Severus Snape. The three drops of Veritaserum in Lucius' wine would make sure he gave her all the answers she wanted. And as he was already under the influence of the alcohol, he would never suspect anything.

'Morgaine, you are underestimating our dear Severus,' Lucius went on, taking yet another gulp of his wine. 'For almost two decades he tried to make the Wizarding world believe that he had abandoned the Dark Lord and turned to Dumbledore. All that for the love of a Mudblood, who had bred with his worst nemesis? Really, Morgaine, does that sound like the Severus we knew? Of course not. He was true to *our* cause Morgaine, until the very end, but smart enough to make sure to stand in a good light after his death. A clever man, the father of your child. A very clever man. Let's drink to him.'

Morgaine raised her glass with Lucius, but did not drink. Lucius would not notice anyway, he was too intoxicated.

'A truly clever man,' Lucius pointed out once more. 'Makes me wonder even more why he never mentioned that he had fathered a child. Just imagine how he would have been rewarded had he presented *your* child to the Dark Lord. It would have been made a true prince. But then again, handing your child to the Dark Lord would have lost him Dumbledore's favour.'

Then Lucius paused and suddenly laughed loudly. 'The cunning snake! Why did I not think of it before? Of course, keeping silent about your child made Dumbledore trust him even more. The old fool must have believed that Severus was protecting the child from the Dark. Oh, my dearest Morgaine, I take back everything I said. It seems that we all have underestimated Severus Snape. And I am sure once his daughter comes to join the Wizarding world, she will make him nothing but proud.'

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I own nothing of this. Hence I make no money from it either. My only reward is your reviews.

# IX: Who Will Protect the Innocent?

## Chapter 9 of 40

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter IX: Who Will Protect the Innocent?

An icy wind was howling around the castle as Morgaine returned to Hogwarts. But it was not the wind that made her shiver this time either, nor the sheerness of her dress. It was the memories of her conversation with Lucius Malfoy, the understanding of the horrifying truth.

She had listened carefully and refilled Lucius' glass until she had heard everything she had needed to hear. When he had started to slur, she had switched the elf-made wine for absinthe, which had made Lucius compliment her taste in the most colourful words. The Green Fairy for a Slytherin, what a fabulous choice. He had drunk with gusto and had been out like a light shortly before midnight, and Morgaine had made a quick exit through the back door without anyone noticing but the elf that showed her the way. Hopefully, Lucius would not question the poor thing the next day.

'Witches and wizards like you and I, Morgaine, heads of pureblood families, carry a great responsibility. It is our responsibility to teach our children the right values and to help them to greatness. They deserve to grow up in a kind of world that was denied to our generation.'

Thus had been some of the last coherent statements Lucius had made. His eyes had been glittering, not just with fairy lights but with the same kind of megalomaniac madness Morgaine had seen in his eyes many years before. And the look had chilled the very marrow in her bones. Right now, she doubted if she would ever get warm again.

The windows of the castle were still illuminated despite the late hour, and music could be heard all the way out onto the grounds. The students who had remained at the school for the holidays had been given permission to arrange a New Year's party in the Great Hall and were now happily dancing the night away. Morgaine directed her steps directly towards the Great Hall. She was certain that she would find Minerva there, chaperoning.

'Morgaine!' the older woman exclaimed as she caught sight of her Potions mistress, who had not even bothered to take off her snow-covered cloak. 'What are you doing here? We did not expect you back before the start of term.'

'Something came up,' Morgaine answered curtly, the look on her face so dark that it would have rivalled Severus Snape's any day. 'I need to use your office, Minerva.'

'My office? Why would you need to use my office on New Year's Eve?' The Headmistress sounded concerned.

'I need to speak to Dumbledore. It's urgent.'

Now Minerva did not only sound worried but looked worried as well. The expression didn't fit her otherwise so stern face at all. 'By all means, Morgaine. You know the password. But please, tell me, what is the matter? Has something happened? Morgaine!'

Morgaine heard Minerva call for her, and as much as it went against her nature, she turned her back on the older woman. She would explain herself later, when she had calmed down enough to trust herself not to snap at the Headmistress or worse. A nervous breakdown didn't seem too farfetched at the moment.

The clock struck midnight when Morgaine entered the Headmistress' office and slammed the door shut behind her. The inhabitants of most portraits were out celebrating the New Year, and Morgaine immediately put a blocking charm on their empty frames. The less witnesses the better. The other portraits were gifted with a *Muffliato*, much to the dislike of their inhabitants. Ignoring the indignant look of Phineas Black, Morgaine drew herself up to her full height and called for her great-grandfather.

'Don't pretend to be asleep, Dumbledore,' she snarled as the old Headmaster did not move.

Albus Dumbledore opened his eyes and blinked. 'Dear child!' he exclaimed. 'A Happy New Year to you.'

Morgaine glared up at him. 'This is not a social call.'

'You have been taught better than to turn down a blessing, child,' Dumbledore pointed out. There was the kindest of smiles on his wrinkled face, and his eyes were twinkling just like they always had when he had still been alive. The painter had done a marvellous job.

But Morgaine's heart was not open to kindness that night, and her eyes, just as blue as her great-grandfather's, were cold. 'Whether this year is going to be a happy one or not will not depend on blessings, Dumbledore,' she hissed. 'You know that just as well as I do.'

'Very well.' Dumbledore sat up straight in his chair, with his elbows on the armrests and his hands folded in front of him. Only his index fingers stuck up and came to rest against his chin. 'I assume there is something you want from me then, child.'

Morgaine's jaw tightened and her nails dug into her palms as her hands turned into fists. If he called her *child* in that patronising tone once more, she would rip his canvas to pieces with her bare hands. 'The truth, Dumbledore,' she started. 'That is all I want from you tonight. Just this once. I'm begging you.'

'Begging?' Dumbledore looked surprised. 'I was not aware that Slytherins knew how to beg.'

'Then maybe the Sorting Hat made the wrong decision.' Morgaine tilted her head to the side and fixed her great-grandfather with a look that could have burnt a hole into his skull. But it was also a calculating look, more worthy of a Ravenclaw than a Slytherin if one judged by House mottos. 'If it was the Hat's decision,' she added.

Dumbledore looked at his great-granddaughter as if he had no idea what she was talking about, and Morgaine closed her eyes. Suddenly her head was aching, and all she wanted to do was crawl into a corner, wrap her arms around herself and close her eyes, pretending that she did not know any of this. She felt alone, betrayed. And if Dumbledore did not tell her the truth tonight, if he played innocent as he had done so often before, if he refused to help, then she would not know what to do.

She took a deep breath and looked up. Two pairs of sapphire blue eyes locked. 'Why was I sorted into Slytherin House, Dumbledore?'

'You have asked this before, Morgaine. And nothing has changed,' Dumbledore started. 'You were sorted into Slytherin for your cleverness and your determination. When you were sorted, you had fought for three weeks to impress your teachers. It was very clear that you were determined to do whatever it took to be admitted to Hogwarts and

a little bit more if necessary. Your resourcefulness even impressed your dour Potions master.'

Dumbledore's mentioning of Severus made Morgaine flinch. 'My Potions master.' She gave a dry, short laugh. 'You planned this, didn't you, Dumbledore? You made him my mentor, you made him teach me Occlumency. You made sure we spent more time together than was appropriate for any other professor and student. You made sure that we were linked from the very start.'

'For once, I cannot be blamed of meddling,' Dumbledore responded calmly. 'You and Severus, Morgaine, were – are – two of a kind. You both possess Gryffindor bravery, Ravenclaw brains and Hufflepuff dedication and loyalty. But yes, the Slytherin traits are very eminent in both of you. Once you set yourselves a goal, not even the hounds of hell themselves could deter you. Hence, you were both sorted into Slytherin House.'

'This sounds like a very well-rehearsed speech to me, Dumbledore.'

'Are you accusing me of lying, Morgaine?'

'I accuse you of omitting things. Maybe you had no hand in my Sorting. For that I give you the benefit of a doubt. But you cannot deny that you did everything to make sure that Severus and I grew close.'

'You would have found each other even without me, Morgaine. You both balanced on the tightrope between the Dark and the Light. That rope is thin, and you were bound to meet sooner or later. Thankfully, and – maybe – due to my interference as you will call it, you met when you were still young. You held each other's hands and gave each other the strength to continue your balancing act. You both refused to let the other one lose equilibrium and fall into the Dark.'

'You used us, Dumbledore.' Morgaine's voice had lost any sound of accusation. As always, Dumbledore's motives sounded so noble, so pure. He made it sound as if he had wanted to protect them from the Dark, both Severus and her. She had heard it all before, and her heart told her to believe her great-grandfather. But all the other things she knew, all the things she had heard and seen, made it impossible for her to see Dumbledore as anything other than a puppet master. And the battle her heart was fighting with her mind was draining her of her strength.

She stepped closer towards Dumbledore's portrait and rested her forehead against the golden frame for a moment. She was aware that she was a pitiful sight, but she needed the support.

'What would you have preferred had you been given the choice, Morgaine?' Dumbledore asked, his voice as soft as if he were talking to a child. 'To be used by me in order to escape the darkness into which you were born, or to be used by them in order for you to take the place in the lineage you were born into?'

'I did not want to be used at all.' Morgaine fought bravely not to cry. Trust Dumbledore to make himself look like a saviour and make her feel guilty at the same time. 'Why was I not given a choice, Dumbledore? Could I not be trusted to choose the Light? Did you have to involve Severus? Merlin knows he had enough on his plate already.'

'I understood early that your excursion to Knockturn Alley and your experiments with the Dark Arts were for scientific purposes only, Morgaine. You trusted. But you were young. You could have been influenced by anyone. So I chose to give you into the care of someone who had seen the Dark. Seen it, experienced it and turned from it. I knew Severus would help you not only to choose the right path but to stay on it as well. In time, he grew to need you as much as you needed him. I had not expected that, but I welcomed it. You were a powerful union. And you created light in the darkness.'

'Dark is raising again, Dumbledore. If we are not careful, the light will be extinguished.' Morgaine lifted her eyes, knowing very well that they were filled with tears. 'Who will protect Demeter when she comes to our world? Once she leaves Iceland, I will not be able to shield her anymore.'

Dumbledore did not answer. He didn't need to either. The moment Morgaine had asked the question, she had known the answer. Maybe she had known it even before: once more Severus had been given the task to protect a child from the Darkness. At least this time, the child was his.

Now he only needed to be told.

~ ~ ~

The ghost of Severus Snape was listlessly drifting through the castle, as yet unaware of Morgaine's return as well as her conversation with her great-grandfather. He had attended the students' New Year's party for about an hour, mostly in order to make Minerva and the House ghosts stop accusing him of being anti-social. But he had soon discovered that student parties were even duller for ghosts than they were for teachers. So he had dematerialised and made a quiet exit. Once he had left the Great Hall, he had passed some snogging couples in the alcoves but done nothing else than tip off Peeves about them. He had done enough punishing and docking House points when he had still been alive. Now he figured that it was none of his business anymore. He had, however, been unable to stop a smirk from curling his lips when he had heard Peeves blow a raspberry and one of the girls shriek in sheer panic.

But the distraction, as sweet as it had been, had been a short one, and Severus found himself wondering how he had coped over the last years. Being a ghost was monotonous enough. Being a lonely ghost made one wish that one were dead for real. Dead, extinguished, gone for good, not a pathetic imprint of the person one had once been.

On top of the Astronomy Tower, Severus let his eyes wander over the snow-covered grounds. He wished he could smell the clean air and feel the icy winds bite his flesh. But he couldn't. All he could feel was a deadly chill, and that was not even a real feeling. It was a state of being. He had tried to explain this to Morgaine, had even invited her to join his thoughts, but she had not understood. How could she have? She was still flesh and blood, and thus she was spared the sensation of nothingness.

'Morgaine.' Severus found himself whispering her name in the darkness, his heart filling with the irrational hope that she would hear him. He missed her. He had missed her for five long years after his death, and when she had returned in September, he had been too grateful to express himself. And now she had left again, even if it was only for two weeks, and Severus could actually feel his heart ache.

Yes, Morgaine held the power to make him feel. That was yet another thing Severus did not understand. Being with Morgaine, even just thinking about her, created this ... *feeling*. Ungraspable, fleeting, but still it was there somehow, a tingling sensation in his ghostly body. When he had mentioned it to the other ghosts, the Bloody Baron had expressed his condolences and given him a pity-filled look. The Grey Lady had called it love, and then she had drifted off after the Bloody Baron, smiling serenely and leaving Severus in a state of uttermost confusion.

It was after midnight when he decided to return to his old quarters. They had been his haven once, and still the thick walls, the darkness and the silence of the dungeons provided some kind of comfort. To his surprise, Severus found the door to his old study on the edge, and the golden shine that fell through the gap told him that someone had lit a fire in the grate. Someone. Severus smiled. Only two people came to visit him in the dungeon, and Minerva was certainly busy keeping the students from raising hell in the Great Hall. The fire must mean that Morgaine had returned to the castle.

She was sitting in her armchair with her feet drawn up and a blanket wrapped around her shoulders. Her cloak was lying in front of the fire, still damp from the snow.

'You have returned early,' Severus stated as he drifted towards her.

'Something has come up.'

Morgaine was chewing her lower lip so furiously that Severus was convinced she would draw blood soon. He also detected an uncharacteristically deep crease between her eyes. 'Tea?' he suggested, knowing perfectly well that there was no point in pressuring her. When Morgaine was ready, she would tell him what worried her.

'Tea?' She sounded incredulous. 'Are *you* going to make tea?'

'I have been practicing while you were away,' Severus pointed out, slightly insulted. 'I am very much capable of such a simple task as putting a kettle on.' He saw a fleeting smile brush Morgaine's lips and forgave her. 'If you prefer something stronger, there is a bottle of Odgen's standing on the shelf behind you.'

Morgaine shook her head. 'I am well aware of that bottle, thank you. But I've been drinking enough today. Well, yesterday. Last year. Technically, that doesn't count anymore.'

Severus smirked. 'Tea it is then.'

The torrent of words told him that Morgaine most probably had drunk enough indeed. She had never had a liking for alcohol and had even turned down champagne at the most festive occasions. If she had drunk tonight, there must have been good reasons for it.

'I assume Lucius has been plying you with the best champagne Galleons can buy,' he mentioned in passing as he lit the fire under the kettle.

'Elf-made wine,' Morgaine clarified. 'And I was the one doing most of the plying.' She brought both her hands to her face and rubbed her eyes. Severus didn't need to know about the Veritaserum. He would not approve. 'Did you know that we have children at this school who are fed the old lies?' she burst out.

Severus abandoned the kettle and turned to face Morgaine. The crease between her eyes had, if possible, become even deeper. 'I thought we had established that particular fact already at the start of term,' he stated calmly.

'It's not just the older students who are telling their younger peers how glorious it was to be in Slytherin House during the last years of the war,' Morgaine started to explain. 'It seems they have been taught those things at home. And I am not just talking about the rumours of you having been loyal to Voldemort until the very end.'

'I knew that nothing good could come out of Lucius Malfoy holding a ball,' Severus remarked sourly and took to hover on the chair opposite Morgaine. Obviously, she was ready to talk now.

'That ball could easily have been mistaken for a Death Eater recruiting rally.' The tone in Morgaine's voice was bitter as bile. 'All purebloods, all Slytherins ...'

'You if anyone should know that being a pureblood Slytherin does not automatically make you a Death Eater, Morgaine,' Severus interrupted. He did not like the sound of her voice.

Morgaine snorted. 'Trust me, Severus, most of the people present at Malfoy Manor belong either in Azkaban or should at least be under Ministry surveillance. Did you know, for example, that Travers managed to stay out of Azkaban somehow? His granddaughter will come to Hogwarts next year. I do not even want to know how many fairytales the girl has heard about Voldemort. The same goes for the Makdoui children.'

'Travers or anyone else for that matter would be foolish to voice their opinions in public,' Severus pointed out. 'What they say in their home is, regrettably, out of our hands.'

'This matter must be addressed, Severus. We cannot allow this generation to be corrupted by their elders. That propaganda must be stopped. And if Slytherin House is the first place to statute an example, so be it.'

'What do you suggest has to be done?'

Once more, Morgaine brought her hands to her face. But this time, she did not lower them but kept her face covered. Her voice was muffled when she spoke. 'In the worst case, we have a bunch of future Death Eaters running about the castle. The faculty needs to be informed, of course. I would like you to attend the staff meeting at the start of term, Severus. You know Lucius Malfoy better than anyone.'

'Lucius?' Severus frowned. 'Lucius has been officially reformed ...'

Morgaine snapped back her head, her blue eyes glittering dangerously. 'Lucius Malfoy is up to something. He has cunningly kept a low profile since the end of the war, but he has not abandoned and will never abandon the old ways. He is biding his time.'

'To do what?'

'To reclaim the position he believes is rightfully his at the top of society, a pureblood society, Severus. All he is waiting for is for someone to follow.'

Severus fixed Morgaine with a penetrating stare. 'I doubt there will ever be a new Dark Lord. Not in our – in your – lifetime anyway.'

'Let's hope there won't be.' Morgaine sighed heavily and then gave Severus a tired smile. 'Does the offer for that glass of Odgen's still stand? There is nothing that can be done tonight, and I would very much like to be fast asleep soon.'

'Alcohol may help you sleep, but it will not be of any help when you wake up. On the contrary.' Severus sneered. He had been down that road more times than he cared to admit. 'If sleeping peacefully is your goal, than I suggest a Dreamless Sleep potion. Or even better ...'

He broke off, and Morgaine tilted her head to look at him. 'Even better what, Severus?'

'Company,' he murmured. He had meant to suggest this for some time now but had decided against it. He was just a ghost. What did he have to offer? But he would regret it dearly if he didn't take his chance tonight.

'The elves still change the sheets in my old bed every week, Merlin knows why,' he continued. 'Would you ... Would you like to stay here tonight, Morgaine? With me?'

She looked beautiful in her sleep. The flickering light of the candle on the nightstand made her chestnut hair look like dancing flames. She had insisted on a glass of Firewhisky, and the colour of her slightly flushed cheeks contrasted beautifully with the pale skin of her naked shoulders.

For a long while, Severus just hovered beside the bed, watching Morgaine and wondering how many nights he had stayed awake out of fear that she would be gone in the morning. There was no risk now, he knew that. She would stay. A genuine smile had lit up both her face and her eyes as he had invited her to stay the night, and now she seemed to be sleeping peacefully. So peacefully that Severus froze in his movement. Yes, they had touched before, and Morgaine had said that it was not all that uncomfortable. But what if his touch woke her?

It was worth the risk, he concluded, and carefully, tentatively, he inched closer, stretching out his long pale fingers towards Morgaine's cheek. He could have sworn that he could feel the warmth of her skin.

When he finally touched her, her lips twitched slightly, and Severus withdrew quickly, afraid that he had disturbed her sleep. But when a smile formed on her lips, all his fears disappeared.

He moved his ghostly hand towards hers that was lying on the pillow beside her head, bending his fingers to encircle hers. Once more, he thought that he could feel her warmth and smiled. He would hold onto her hand until the morning. And if it were up to him, he would not let go then either.



# X: Legacies

## Chapter 10 of 40

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter X: Legacies

'Just because Voldemort is dead doesn't mean his ideology died with him.'

Morgaine's voice was steady and composed, but she could feel a miniscule twitch in her right eyelid. She wasn't as calm as she pretended to be. Up until an hour ago, she had actually played with the thought of holding her peace. But she had responsibilities. Not of the kind Lucius Malfoy had been talking about, however.

What a way to start the new term! The Heads of Houses would have met that morning anyway, just as they always did on January third, to go through the preliminary list of students who would be admitted to Hogwarts in eight months' time. But Morgaine had asked Minerva to call everyone to the meeting, and so the Headmistress' office was crammed with teachers, staff and ghosts. Even the portrait of every single old Headmaster and Headmistress was occupied. The only ones concerned who had not been invited were the school governors.

Morgaine felt anything but comfortable with everyone's eyes on her. She hated being the bearer of bad news. And this certainly was bad news. 'There are still wizards and witches out there who firmly believe in the superiority of Wizardkind,' she continued. 'And they are raising their children with those beliefs.'

A murmur went through the room. No one had been so naive as to believe that the propaganda Voldemort and his followers had spread for decades had just gone up in smoke after the Final Battle. But they had hoped.

'The surviving Death Eaters have been rounded up and imprisoned,' Pomona Sprout started. She, too, was hoping that Morgaine was wrong.

'Like after the first war, you mean?'

Pomona fell silent, and Morgaine felt the need to apologise to the older woman. She had not meant to snap. Really not.

She had already opened her mouth to speak when she was interrupted as well.

'I do not need to remind you of how many people were lured into a sense of false security after Voldemort had supposedly been defeated by baby Harry, do I?'

Everyone in the room turned to face the portrait of Albus Dumbledore. The old Headmaster had risen from his chair and was looking down at his old staff, his friends and his great-granddaughter. The look on his face was unusually severe, and his blue eye weren't twinkling.

'We went out onto the streets to celebrate. "Rejoice," we shouted, "for You-Know-Who has gone at last!" Many of us hoped he would never return and were taken by surprise when he did.'

'It is different this time,' Filius Flitwick piped up. 'Voldemort is officially dead. We all saw his body.' Also he was hoping that everything was over.

Dumbledore's eyes wandered to his great-granddaughter. 'Morgaine, tell them what you have heard at Malfoy Manor.'

'There are those who believe that the Da... that Voldemort left someone behind, that the Heir of Slytherin will soon lead Wizardkind to greatness.'

'The heir?' Several people in the room asked the question at the same time. 'A child?'

'Not necessarily,' Dumbledore took over, and the shocked voices died away. Once more, all eyes were on him.

Morgaine glanced furtively at her great-grandfather's portrait and bit her lips not to gasp when she heard his voice as clearly as if he had been speaking aloud. But his lips were not moving: *They don't need to be told more, child. The innocent need to be given a chance to choose their own destiny. Just as you did.*

'Some of Voldemort's old followers indeed believe that Voldemort left an heir behind,' Dumbledore explained, 'someone who will finish what he has started.'

'Severus Snape.'

'What was that, Professor Riverbed?' Dumbledore asked politely.

Everyone in the room turned towards the young Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, who promptly blushed. He had obviously not meant to speak aloud, but his mere whisper had been clearly audible by everyone.

'I ... I'm sorry,' he stammered, eyes firmly on his shoes. 'I didn't mean ...'

Morgaine's eyes travelled from the embarrassed man towards the window where Severus had positioned himself. His ghostly shape was barely visible in the morning sun, and his face was an inscrutable mask. One could almost believe that he had not heard Riverbed say his name. But Morgaine knew better.

'Well, Professor Riverbed?' Dumbledore wasn't giving up.

'I didn't mean ...' Riverbed repeated. 'I have the greatest respect for Professor Snape. He ...' He lifted his head and looked straight at the ghost by the window. 'You are a hero, sir.'

Severus merely lifted an eyebrow. 'But?' he asked in a tone that didn't betray any of his feelings. There was no way of telling if he was offended, angry, amused, or simply didn't care.

'There are rumours, sir.'

The people standing between Severus Snape and Alek Riverbed stepped automatically out of the line of fire, and ghost and man came to look at each other without anyone obscuring their view. There wasn't a sound to be heard in the office. Even the fire in the grate seemed to have stopped crackling.

'Go on,' Severus said calmly, his arms crossed in front of his chest and his eyes boring into his opponent's forehead.

Riverbed cleared his throat. 'My nephew has been sorted into Slytherin House. You met him at the start of term. Melvin, Melvin Riverbed.'

Morgaine frowned. Nephew? Why had she not picked up on that? Riverbed wasn't that common a last name. She should have understood that there was a relation. But

then again, the boy was fair while his uncle was dark. One would never think they were related. Still, as Head of House, she should have known.

Her musings were interrupted by Severus' voice.

'What, Professor Riverbed, has your nephew to do with any rumours you might have heard about me?'

'Melvin heard them, in the Slytherin common room,' Riverbed explained. 'He was very upset. You made a very good impression on him, you're his hero. When he heard the rumours ...'

'I will ask you once more only, Professor Riverbed,' Severus interrupted, now using the voice that had scared hundreds of students over the years. 'What are those rumours?'

'The rumours are ...' Severus' voice seemed to have the same impact on the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher as they had on Severus' old students. The man was by now just as pale as the ghost he was talking to. 'You are said to have been loyal to Voldemort until the very end. You are said to have been chosen to carry on what he started.'

Severus snorted. 'For your information, Professor Riverbed, Voldemort had me killed.'

'I know that, sir.'

'We all know that,' Minerva interrupted and positioned herself between the ghost and the man. 'We also know that those rumours about Severus have been going around for quite some time. Unfortunately, they seem to be winning ground, not at least in Slytherin House. The question is: what can we do about it?'

'What we always have done, teach the children the truth. History. Facts. Cold, hard, verifiable facts.'

Professor Binns' wheezy voice had taken everyone in the room by surprise. And despite the seriousness of the situation, many were unable to keep themselves from smiling. Who would have thought that the ancient History of Magic teacher had been awake through the whole meeting? Or at least long enough to be able to have an opinion?

'I fear Cuthbert is right,' Minerva pointed out. 'Presenting the children with the truth is about all we can do. We cannot control what they are taught at home. We cannot control their parents' beliefs. We cannot force them to believe the truth, but we can present it to them.'

'What are we supposed to do about those students who are spreading rumours?' Filius enquired. 'And I don't just mean rumours about Severus but about the war and Voldemort in general? We cannot let them continue.'

'I have the names of the worst troublemakers,' Morgaine announced. 'They weren't as successful in their recruiting as they had hoped. It was only too easy to have their House mates tattle on them.'

All it had taken was the little threat to question every member of Slytherin House individually. After that, it hadn't taken more than a couple of hours for anonymous notes to appear on Morgaine's desk, pointing out the culprits. Trust Slytherins to be loyal only to themselves and save their hides, even if it meant betraying members of their own House.

'They know that I know,' Morgaine went on. 'And they know that Severus knows. For the time being, they are keeping a low profile.'

'Keep your eyes and ears open,' Minerva stressed once more. 'I want to be informed about anything your students do or say that can even remotely be connected with Voldemort and his ideas. We cannot make them or their parents abandon their beliefs. What we can do, however, is make it very clear that no form of Dark propaganda will be tolerated within these walls. And now I believe we have all earned some tea. The elves have been baking crumpets all morning. In half an hour, I expect all the Heads of Houses to be back here in my office. The lists of the new students arriving in September is ready.'

Swiftly, the staff left the office for the Great Hall. Promising freshly baked crumpets was always an effective way to make the staff move quickly. Professor Riverbed was one of the last ones to leave, lingering for some moments by the door, his eyes on the ghost by the window. Severus looked straight at the man but did not invite to any kind of interaction. He had no desire whatsoever to talk to Riverbed at the moment.

'I'm sure it just slipped out,' Minerva pointed out as even the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher finally had left the room. 'I'm sure he didn't mean anything by it.'

'Whatever do you mean, Minerva?' Severus asked innocently, his eyes still boring holes into the door Riverbed had closed behind him.

'Don't pretend, Severus,' Minerva replied in a kind tone. 'Even you cannot tell me that it doesn't smart to be falsely accused.'

'One grows used to it,' Severus stated drily. Merlin knew that he had been falsely accused and mistrusted for the better part of his adult life.

'You should never have needed to grow used to it.'

There was an apologetic note in Minerva's voice as there was so often when they discussed the role Severus had held during the war. Asking him for forgiveness had been one of the first things she had done once she had met his ghost for the first time. And Severus had wholeheartedly accepted her apology. It had not been her fault. He had played his role well. Minerva had not been supposed to trust him.

Silence settled over the office. That, too, happened frequently when discussing that specific topic. Maybe everything that needed to be said, had been said?

Then Minerva cleared her throat. 'I'd like you to attend the meeting with the Heads,' she announced.

Severus cocked an eyebrow at her. 'That was a rather unusual request. Why would you want me to know whose children will come to Hogwarts in September?'

'Indulge an old woman, Severus,' Minerva simply said, busying herself with some papers on her desk. 'Who knows, there might be someone of interest among the new first-years.'

Frowning slightly, Severus promised he would attend. He was certain that he would not be interested in any of the children on the list, but he was very curious about the reasons that made Minerva so resolutely avoid his eyes.

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'Professor duLac, may I join you?'

Morgaine looked up from her cup of tea and eyed the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. 'It's Morgaine,' she pointed out.

'May I join you, *Morgaine*? ' Riverbed repeated his question.

Morgaine smiled and picked up her book bag to make room on the bench beside her. The rest of the staff was still laying siege to the staff table, where the breadbaskets were being constantly refilled with fresh crumpets. Morgaine herself had managed to get hold of one of the first batch and had then retreated to the left-hand side of the Great Hall, where one of the benches was bathed in the January sun.

'Alek,' Riverbed presented himself and reached out his hand. 'Looks like you and I are the only ones not addicted to crumpets.'

'That might be a generation issue,' Morgaine noted. 'In a few years' time, you and I will surely be the ones hogging the breadbaskets.'

Alek laughed and took a seat. Obviously, his plan was to catch some golden rays as well, as he was now turning his face towards the window, eyes closed and his lips curled into a smile.

Morgaine observed the young man beside her. He had come to Hogwarts the year the school had reopened and had held the position of Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher ever since. The curse had obviously been broken. He must be four or five years younger than herself, Morgaine thought and suddenly found herself wondering why she had never spoken with him so far. But then again, she had been slightly preoccupied since she had returned to Hogwarts.

Alek's content sigh ripped her from her musings. 'Glorious sunlight,' he murmured. 'I cannot seem to get enough of it nowadays. I guess that's because I rarely saw the sun during winter when I was young.' He opened his eyes and looked at Morgaine. 'You must remember how disconsolate the winter months are at Durmstrang.'

Morgaine frowned. How did Riverbed know that she had been at Durmstrang?

'You don't remember me, do you?' Alek asked and looked almost disappointed. 'Why, it doesn't surprise me, actually. I didn't take NEWT Potions. I guess you never even saw me.'

'I'm afraid I didn't,' Morgaine confessed, mentally going through all the faces she remembered from her short stay at Durmstrang. No, she didn't remember him. 'So you were in your last year when I taught at Durmstrang?'

Alek nodded. Then he grinned. 'Come on, ask.'

'Ask what?'

'What everyone else asks: why I attended Durmstrang and not Hogwarts?'

Morgaine raised an eyebrow. The man obviously intended to make her get to know him. 'Why did you attend Durmstrang and not Hogwarts, Alek?' she asked, more in order to please him than out of actual interest.

'An excellent question.' He was still grinning. Somehow, he reminded Morgaine of the Weasley twins. 'Allow me to present myself with my full name: Aleksandr Riverbed Sadowski. My mother was Russian, you see. My father died when I was a baby and Mother moved back to Russia. Hence, Durmstrang was closer.'

'I see.' Morgaine sipped at her tea, but she didn't take her eyes off Riverbed. They had not said more than hello to each other during the whole last term. Why did he suddenly have the urge to tell her the story of his life?

'I sincerely hope I did not anger Professor Snape,' Alek suddenly blurted out. 'His name just ... slipped.'

Morgaine put her tea cup down on the bench between herself and the Defence teacher and fixed him with a blue stare. 'Prof... Severus Snape has been well aware of the rumours circulating in Slytherin House for quite some time now,' she pointed out. 'You didn't tell him anything new.'

Alek blushed, just as he had in the Headmistress' office. 'I'd hate to be on his bad side. Do you think I insulted him?'

'Wouldn't it be easier to ask Severus personally?'

The colour on Alek's cheeks turned from pink to deep crimson, and Morgaine had to fight hard to suppress a grin. She could just imagine Severus staring at the young man until he was reduced to a puddle of tears.

'My apologies,' Alek mumbled. 'I thought you might ... know.'

Any urge to grin Morgaine might have had disappeared. 'Me?' she enquired. 'Why would you think I knew if Severus Snape felt insulted?'

Alek had already opened his mouth to speak but was interrupted by Professor Sprout. 'Morgaine, come on. We wouldn't want to keep Minerva waiting, would we?'

'Of course not, Pomona,' Morgaine replied and got up. She would find out later why Alek Riverbed assumed that she knew how Severus felt.

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Severus had once more positioned himself by the window, where the sunlight almost turned his ghostly body transparent. He doubted that any of the Heads would object to him attending the meeting, but he did not need to make his presence too obvious, no matter if the Headmistress herself had invited him or not.

Morgaine arrived last, looking slightly flustered. No wonder, Severus thought. She had had a rough morning, accusing and defending her House and her students at the same time. And once more, she had been forced to listen to the accusations that were made against him. As little as Severus himself cared about his reputation nowadays, he knew that Morgaine cared a lot.

'There will be sixty-three students arriving at September first, twenty-seven of them Muggle-born,' Minerva opened. 'It has been a while since we received such a high number of students with no Magical background. I would therefore like to introduce a new subject: Wizard Studies.'

'Wizard Studies?' Filius' eyes were glittering as if he had just been presented with another plate of crumpets. 'That sounds delightful.'

'I suggest that Wizards Studies is to be a mandatory course for all Muggle-borns during their first term,' Minerva continued. 'This should be enough time for them to become familiar with the way of living in the Wizarding world. Unwritten rules, etiquette ...'

'Etiquette?' Pomona giggled. 'I know quite a few of our students who have been raised by Wizards and still do not have the foggiest about etiquette.'

'Maybe the course should be mandatory for all students?' Filius suggested.

The Heads engaged into a conversation about *today's youth*, and Severus inwardly rolled his eyes. He could not figure out why Minerva had insisted on him attending this meeting. This was duller than dishwater. And when the Headmistress finally called her Heads to order and started going through the list of the new first-years, Severus was so bored that he could not make himself listen properly. Instead, he kept his eyes on Morgaine.

She seemed distracted. She had participated in the discussion about the degeneration of the youth but had not once delivered one of the biting remarks Severus knew she was capable of. One could have thought that the topic didn't interest her at all. It wasn't like her.

*Davies, Peter. Delamay, Josefina. Dobbs, Andrew.*

Severus heard Minerva read the names on the list of students. Some of them he recognised as younger siblings of students he once had taught. Other names he had never heard before. But he did not care. Morgaine was all he cared about at the moment. She was sitting rigid on her chair, her eyes resolutely on her hands that lay folded in her lap. While her cheeks had been slightly flushed half an hour ago, she now looked pale, and her teeth were once more working the inside of her lower lip. Something was wrong.

'duLac, Demeter.'

Severus spun around to face the Headmistress. Had she just said 'duLac, Demeter'?

Then his eyes darted back towards Morgaine. Her shoulders had slumped, but only slightly, and Severus wondered if anyone except him had noticed. Then he realised that he was not the only one who was staring at Morgaine.

'I didn't know you had a daughter, Morgaine,' Pomona finally said in a soft voice.

'Not many people do,' Morgaine answered in a voice so shaky that Severus almost didn't recognise it, and he felt the urge to tell everyone to get out of the office and leave Morgaine alone. But they all stayed seated, they all stared at her, and Morgaine kept staring at her hands. Only Minerva was looking at Severus instead, a knowing expression on her face.

So was the portrait of Albus Dumbledore.

## XI: Placing the Blame

*Chapter 11 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XI: Placing the Blame

Severus sought refuge in the bright sunlight which turned him almost invisible. None of the Heads had looked in his direction when they had entered the Headmistress' office, and when Minerva had read the name of Morgaine's daughter, they had all turned towards her. For as much as Severus knew, no one had noticed that he was present. The only eyes he felt on him were those of Albus Dumbledore, but he refused to turn around and face the old Headmaster. He had to get his thoughts together first.

*Dylan, Helena. Elliott, Samuel. Emerson, Alvin.*

Minerva had resumed presenting the names of the next first-years, but their names and the information about them was completely lost to Severus. She could have read *Riddle, Tom Junior, megalomaniac and mass murderer in the making* Severus would probably not have reacted. His eyes were still on Morgaine, and his brain was working feverishly.

A child. Morgaine had a daughter. A daughter that was either already eleven years old or would turn eleven before the first of September. That meant that she must have been born ... When? Ten years back in time at least, or eleven. Almost twelve, maybe. When? By Merlin, when? Severus found it impossible to concentrate. Whenever had mathematics become so hard?

Severus started to wonder if Morgaine knew he was present. She had seemed preoccupied when she had entered the office, and when she had taken her seat, she had lowered her eyes immediately and not once looked up. Had she seen him? She must have felt his presence at least. She must have felt him looking at her. She always did. But when he carefully extended his mind towards hers, he found it firmly closed. Whether it was against him or just anyone, he did not know, but Morgaine's mental walls were fortified. Tall and imposing they stood, shimmering like dark granite in the sunlight, protecting her mind as well as her heart, and Severus retreated. He held too much respect for her to enter her mind by force.

Instead, he went back to calculating. Morgaine had returned to Hogwarts the same year Harry Potter had been a first-year. She could not have been pregnant then, Severus concluded. It wouldn't add up. Or would it? He had to fight to keep himself from huffing in frustration. All of a sudden, he found that he wasn't even sure what year it was.

He had been teaching Potter for one term, and then Morgaine had transferred to Durmstrang shortly after New Year's, at the end of January. Surely, she would not have got involved with some of Karkaroff's staff, would she? The mere thought seemed absurd, and Severus dismissed it quickly. After all, Morgaine had told him after the New Year's ball at Malfoy Manor that the only man she wanted to be with was ... *him*.

By the Furies and Hades' three-headed dog! Severus' ghostly eyes grew wider as the thought started to take form in his mind. He and Morgaine had shared a passionate night at the Leaky Cauldron that first of January, given in to the lust they had denied each other for too many months. But surely, they must have used some kind of contraceptive. A spell, a potion, anything. The rational part of Severus' brain struggled to remember, but the whole night was somewhat hazy. He had emptied almost half a bottle of Firewhisky that evening out of anger and out of fear that Morgaine might have preferred Lucius Malfoy over him. And when she had returned to the pub, when she had come to his room ... Surely she must have used something. Morgaine had always been a clever girl, and she had been sober that night. She simply must have! But then again, had she even had a chance to take a potion or to cast a spell? He had more or less ripped the dress from her body that night and taken her roughly against the wall. He had taken her, and she had let him. Neither of them had had a single thought about contraception that night. There was a considerably large chance that the child Minerva had been talking about, *Morgaine's* child, was ... *his!*

If physically possible, Severus' knees would have gone weak at the thought. His eyes darted first to Minerva, who was still reading from that blasted list, then to Morgaine, who was still staring at her hands in her lap. When his eyes met the eyes of Albus Dumbledore and the old Headmaster nodded almost imperceptively, Severus turned a whiter shade of pale. There was no doubt. The child was his! And Dumbledore knew!

The last name Severus heard Minerva read from the list was Green, Sarah, but he did not care. As far as he knew, no one except Dumbledore and Minerva was aware of his presence, and even if someone else had seen him, he wasn't answerable to anyone. He dematerialised and left the Headmistress' office for the dungeons.

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His old study provided less comfort than Severus had hoped for. None at all, to be honest. And drifting weightlessly from one end of the room to the other was considerably less satisfying than pacing. Not even levitating phials from the shelf and letting them crash to the floor did anything to ease his tension.

A daughter. An eleven-year-old child about whom Morgaine had never said a word. *His* child! Or maybe not his after all? Was that why Morgaine had never said anything? But it must be his child. Why else would Dumbledore have looked at him like that? Why else would Minerva have insisted on him attending the staff meeting and hence hearing the child's name? But why had Morgaine not said anything?

Severus Snape's otherwise organised brain was in chaos. He was barely capable of finishing one thought before another one a completely different one took form. One

second he was convinced that he must be the child's father. The next second, he caught himself considering insane ideas like Morgaine having fallen for Lucius Malfoy's charms that New Year's night and ... Merlin forbid!

Nothing made sense at the moment, not in the least. Why? Why had Morgaine kept this secret from him?

When there was a knock on the door, Severus pretended that he was not there. He even dematerialised in case someone had the audacity to open the door and look inside. But whoever was standing on the other side of the door just knocked once more, and then left without having received an answer.

'It is rude not to open the door to your friends, Severus.'

Severus resumed his ghostly shape and shot the portrait of Albus Dumbledore an icy look before he resumed drifting. 'I doubt Minerva will be offended,' he snapped.

'Why do you assume it was Minerva?' Dumbledore asked in a calm voice.

'She is the only one who insists on knocking.'

'Morgaine knocks,' Dumbledore pointed out.

Severus spun around, and the look he gave Dumbledore now that could have made the paint dissolve from the canvas. 'Morgaine has not deemed it necessary to come clean for four and a half months,' he flared up. 'Why would she come and talk to me now?'

Dumbledore sighed and settled onto the elaborately crafted chair that stood in the portrait he had chosen to appear in. 'I am afraid this was not Morgaine's choice, Severus.'

Not Morgaine's choice? Severus continued glaring menacingly at Dumbledore. Whereas his anger had been aimed at Morgaine's silence only seconds ago, it was now openly directed at Albus Dumbledore. 'What did you do, old man?' he snarled.

Dumbledore, however, did not seem to feel the least threatened by Severus' harsh tone or glare. 'I did what was necessary, Severus.'

'Necessary?' Severus' ghostly eyes flashed dangerously. 'Elucidate, Dumbledore. I beg you,' he added in a tone that was dripping with revulsion.

'Isn't it quite clear, Severus?' Still, Dumbledore was annoyingly calm. 'There have always been Dark forces that tried to win over Morgaine to their side. Demeter could have been used as a lever. The fewer people who knew about her the better.'

'Why was I kept in the dark?' Severus demanded to know. 'Could I not be trusted? Did you consider me a liability?'

Dumbledore fixed the ghost in front of him with his blue eyes. 'You already had a child to protect, Severus. I needed you to protect Harry Potter. And I needed Morgaine to stand by your side.'

'You made Morgaine hide and lie about her child to help me protect another?' Dumbledore had done many ruthless things in his lifetime, but this made Severus' bile rise. 'Do you even realise how cruel an act that was, Dumbledore? How could you ask a thing like that of a young mother? Your own kin. A girl who looked up to you and trusted you.'

For the first time during their conversation, Dumbledore looked stricken. 'Morgaine stopped trusting me many years ago.' His voice sounded frail, and there was a distinct note of regret.

But Severus had no sympathy at the moment. 'I seriously hope that this does not surprise you in any way, Dumbledore.' His own voice had risen to the volume of thunder, but he did not care if every inhabitant of the castle heard him. He had kept silent for too many years. 'You used her!'

'I made Morgaine swear that she would not tell you,' Dumbledore confessed. 'She couldn't tell you. It was too dangerous, for you, for her and for the child.'

'Who gave you the right to decide that?' Severus snapped. 'Who?'

'It was the right decision, Severus,' Dumbledore simply stated. 'There are things you do not know anything about.'

'Like me having an eleven year-old daughter, you mean?' Severus was beside himself with rage. 'I demand to know the truth now, Dumbledore. The whole truth.'

'I received a letter from Morgaine towards the end of her first term at Durmstrang,' Dumbledore began. 'She begged me to take her away. It was too dark a place for her, and she claimed to be ill. And indeed she looked dreadful when I went to see her, pale and worn. But Igor would not let her go. She was the best Potions Mistress he had ever had, he said.' He smiled kindly. 'I think the credit for that goes to you, dear boy.'

'Don't digress,' Severus hissed.

'There was nothing I could do until the end of term. Igor insisted on her staying, and he had the Ministry on his side. But I managed to bring Morgaine to Iceland for the summer, after having convinced Igor that the change of climate would do her good. That was when I learnt that she was with child.'

Suddenly, Severus felt a stab of pity. Morgaine had been all alone in a ghastly place like Durmstrang. 'How far along was she?' he asked in a somewhat softer tone.

Dumbledore raised an eyebrow and smiled. 'Shouldn't you know that better than I, Severus?' But Severus shot him a look that made the smile freeze on his lips. 'The child was born at the beginning of October. I could, of course, not let Morgaine return to Durmstrang in September. Firstly, Durmstrang is not a suitable place for an expectant mother. Secondly, I deemed it unwise for anyone to know about the child.'

'What did you tell Karkaroff?' Severus asked.

'The truth. Well, part of it. I told him Morgaine would not return due to her poor health.'

'And he bought that?'

'Igor wasn't blind. He, too, had seen that Morgaine was unwell. He would not risk her health. And neither would Lucius, of course.'

The sound of Lucius' name made Severus sneer. 'Why Durmstrang, Dumbledore? Why did Lucius send Morgaine there of all places?'

'Do you really not know, Severus?' Dumbledore asked calmly. 'Or do you not want to know?'

Severus frowned. He had his suspicions. But quite frankly, he didn't want them to be confirmed.

'Lucius always knew about Morgaine's past, Severus. He knew her mother, and he knew that Morgaine was born into the fold of Darkness. I was not even surprised when I learnt that the idea of letting a Death Eater breed with my granddaughter had sprung from his power-hungry mind.'

Severus flinched at Dumbledore's choice of words. He knew that Morgaine's mother had fallen in love with a Death Eater. He also knew that Morgaine's mother had not been allowed to leave the fold after her lover had died. None of this was new to him, but still he didn't like any of it.

'Morgaine's mother fleeing with her child and hiding her thwarted Lucius' plan. Once he realised that Morgaine had returned to the Wizarding world, he wanted to keep an eye on her and make sure she did not escape his grip once more. He also wanted to make sure that she did not forget her heritage. Hence, he sent her to the one place where he was certain that the Dark Arts had not been forgotten.' Dumbledore nodded appreciatively. 'He has always been a cunning man, dear Lucius. He knew the Dark Lord would return one day, and he wanted to make sure that he could present him with a welcome gift. So he sent Morgaine to Durmstrang, hoping she would fall for the Dark Arts.'

*She might be useful one day,* Lucius had said that New Year's night, Severus remembered. And he had congratulated him on bedding the great-granddaughter of Albus Dumbledore. If Lucius really had had those plans Dumbledore was talking about, he would certainly have seen Severus as a competition. Yet another reason to send Morgaine far away.

'Fortunately, Morgaine had already chosen the Light and was too strong to be tempted by the Dark,' Dumbledore continued. 'But you and I both know that Lucius doesn't take defeat lightly. I knew that he would keep trying. I also knew that Morgaine could take care of herself and that you would help her to keep her footing. The child, however ...'

'Are you telling me you kept that child hidden in order to protect her from Lucius?' Severus almost laughed. Trust Dumbledore to turn his deceit into a noble gesture.

'From Lucius, from Voldemort, from the Dark.' Dumbledore made a sweeping gesture with his hand. 'I knew Voldemort would return one day. I also knew that Morgaine would have to face him sooner or later and that she would have to make a choice.'

'Did you not trust her to make the right choice?' Severus interrupted, his anger flaring up once more. Then he shook his head. 'People have doubted your sanity for many years, Dumbledore, but this ...'

'As I have already told you, Severus, I feared the child could have been used as lever. What do you think Morgaine would have chosen if asked to join Voldemort or see her child get harmed?'

'She would have protected her child, of course,' Severus concluded. 'Any mother would.'

Dumbledore nodded, and for some moments, silence settled over the room.

Severus once more took to drifting from one wall to the other. Still his mind was racing. When he came to a halt and lifted his eyes towards the portrait, he found Dumbledore looking at him.

'You could have let me know, Dumbledore. Morgaine could have told me.'

Dumbledore slowly shook his head. 'Tell me, Severus,' he started, 'what would you have done had you known that Morgaine had a daughter? Would you have done anything for her? Would you have protected her?'

Severus answered at once. There were no doubts. 'With my very life.'

This time, Dumbledore nodded. 'And that is exactly why Morgaine was not allowed to tell you.'

Severus narrowed his eyes. What Dumbledore had said so far made perfect sense. Of course Morgaine would have protected her daughter. And if Dumbledore had advised her to tell no one about the child, she would have kept silent because she trusted her great-grandfather.

But the war was over. And still, she had not said a word.

Once more, Severus felt anger bubbling in his chest. Had he still had a body made up by flesh and blood, his hands would have been shaking due to all the emotions that were welling up in him. He had the urge to scream and smash things. But he would not lose his composure with Dumbledore still in the room.

'Get out,' he growled instead.

Dumbledore frowned and gave his old Potions master a puzzled look, but Severus turned his back on the portrait.

'Get out, Dumbledore!' he repeated, staring blankly into nothingness. 'Unless you want to find out if *Avada Kedavra* can kill portraits, I suggest you leave now.'

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Severus did not even have the mental strength to smash phials. There were too many thoughts on his mind and too many emotions racing through his heart.

Why had Morgaine not said anything? She had been back at Hogwarts for almost five months, and Severus had thought that they had once more grown close, that the bond they shared now was stronger than ever before. And still Morgaine had kept a secret. From him.

Why? Why?

The hours passed, and Severus cast himself from one theory to the next, one crazier than the other. At one point, he even suspected Dumbledore of having made his own great-granddaughter take the Unbreakable Vow. But that was mad, of course, even by Dumbledore's standards, just as mad as the idea of the child being Lucius'. One by one, Severus dismissed those crazy ideas, getting more and more desperate to know Morgaine's reasons for keeping silent.

A couple of times, he found himself drifting towards the door, but he never passed through it. He would not go to find Morgaine and make her talk. He would not beg her to tell him the truth. She had so far been the one to decide to keep quiet. If she wanted to come clean now, she would have to come to him. And he was sure that she would come, sooner or later.

When there was a knock on his door, Severus opened immediately, hoping she would get some answers now. But it wasn't Morgaine. It was Minerva.

Severus fixed her with an icy stare. 'You set me up, Headmistress,' he snarled and considered slamming the door into her face. If Minerva did not come up with a good explanation now, he would not be held responsible for anything.

'I hoped that it would help you two along,' Minerva confessed and tentatively entered the study. 'But Morgaine should have told you a long time ago ...'

'Does it come with the position of Headmaster or Headmistress of Hogwarts to turn into a meddling fool?' Severus spat. 'Or have you simply spent too much time with Dumbledore? Sometimes people do not need help, Minerva. Sometimes ...'

His rant was interrupted as Minerva pleadingly raised her hands. 'Severus, I will gladly apologise to both you and Morgaine another day. And if neither of you ever talks to me again, I will have to live with that. But right now, there are other pressing matters.'

'Like what?' Severus snapped.

'Morgaine,' Minerva started, and Severus frowned at the note of concern in her otherwise so composed voice. 'She has not been at lunch or at dinner. She is not in her quarters or her office. In fact, no one has seen her since the staff meeting.'

All the anger Severus had felt over the last hours washed off him in a blink of an eye. 'She might be down by the lake or in the greenhouse,' he suggested.

Minerva shook her head. 'I've sent Pomona to look for her in the greenhouse hours ago. Filius has asked the elves, and they have not seen her all day.'

'Have you spoken to her grandmother?' Severus asked.

Minerva nodded. 'Margaret received a note around lunch. All it said was "He knows." Severus, this is my fault. I should not have taken Morgaine unawares like that. Or you.'

'Save your apologies for later, Minerva,' Severus said, trying to keep the panic out of his voice. It was not like Morgaine to disappear like this. And all he wanted to do at the moment was find her.

'Ask Hagrid to search the forest,' he instructed. 'I will round up the ghosts.'

## XII: The Shrieking Shack

Chapter 12 of 40

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XII: The Shrieking Shack

The dungeons were the very first destination Morgaine thought of as she left the Headmistress' office. Where else should she go? The dungeons had always been a place of security for her. Even in her darkest of hours, the dungeon walls had provided comfort. Severus would certainly be there, in his old study, as he always was. Because those rooms were his haven, too. Morgaine now longed to go to him and beg him for forgiveness, on her bare knees if need be. It seemed the right thing to do, the *only* thing to do. Surely, Severus would listen to her and understand. Eventually.

She had already arrived at the top of the stairs that led to the dungeons when she stopped dead in her tracks. Suddenly, her courage and determination was failing her. She was sure that Severus would understand why she had kept silent about Demeter during the war. He would understand that she had not had any choice, that she had kept silent to protect her child, *their* child, him and herself. But how could he forgive her for not telling him when she had returned to Hogwarts? Why would he forgive her?

Morgaine grabbed onto the cold stone wall for support. She had felt Severus' presence in Minerva's office the moment she had stepped over the threshold. The same moment she had realised that she had walked right into a trap. She had meant to sit Severus down after the Heads of House meeting and tell him everything. She had planned it carefully and had been prepared to accept his reaction whatever it might have been. But it seemed that Minerva and Dumbledore, for sure had decided to beat her to it.

How had Minerva managed to make Severus attend the meeting of the Heads, Morgaine wondered. It had certainly not been his idea to remain in the Headmistress' office after the staff meeting. Most probably it had not been Minerva's idea either. Taking both herself and Severus unawares and confronting them with a fait accompli was a deceitful act worthy of Albus Dumbledore. Once more he had decided that he knew best and had now deprived Morgaine of her chance to explain herself. And he had given Severus the shock of his life. And his afterlife.

As so often when it came to her great-grandfather, Morgaine felt bitterness creep into her heart, but today she did not have the energy to fight it. Her mind was solely on Severus. He had been looking at her the whole time, but she had not dared look up. And when Minerva had read Demeter's name, she had applied every scrap of Occlumency she knew to shield herself from Severus' emotions. But she had failed. His surprise had been too big not to affect her, his shock too deep and his anger too fierce. And had she looked up and seen the disappointment in his eyes, she would have broken down. Severus deserved better than this.

Now Morgaine was staring blankly down into the darkness of the dungeons. There was no point on descending those stairs. Severus would not want to talk to her now, she was certain of that. And she could understand him. She would not want to talk to a cowardly liar either if she were him. It wasn't easy, but still she turned away.

She arrived in her quarters before she had even realised where she was going, and her hand picked up the box of Floopowder without her really noticing. She called out her destination, and moments later she stood in her grandmother's kitchen.

When Morgaine finally realised what she was doing, she regretted her move at once. How would she explain her sudden appearance in Iceland? What else had she to say than that her secret had been uncovered? Was she even ready to tell anyone? But thankfully, Morgaine found the small kitchen deserted. Neither her grandmother nor her daughter was anywhere to be seen. She would be able to return to Hogwarts without having to speak to anyone. Hurriedly, she picked up a quill and left just one simple message on the kitchen table: *He knows*.

Back in her quarters at Hogwarts mere moments later, Morgaine unlocked a small casket in the back of her bookshelf and retrieved two of the three small glass phials that were lying there, safely hidden away from anyone but her. The third phial, she did not have the courage to take with her. She did not even consider that leaving it behind was a far braver choice.

No one saw her leave the castle, Morgaine was certain of that. The weather was so ghastly that not even Hagrid was outdoors, and it was snowing so heavily that no one would see her from the castle windows. Her tracks would be covered with snow before she had reached the gates from where she planned to Disapparate. Using the tunnel that started under the Whomping Willow never crossed Morgaine's mind. It had probably caved in years ago anyway.

The odour of mould and wet wood assaulted her nose and she coughed, wondering if anyone had entered the Shrieking Shack since ... since she had gone there to retrieve Severus' body. Probably not. Why would anyone? No one had any business in the Shack, and it was still considered haunted. And as far as Morgaine was concerned, the rumours were true. Her ghosts had never left the Shack. But today she was going to cast them out.

*'Lumos.'*

She had to say the incantation twice before the tip of her wand ignited. But when the soft light filled the room, Morgaine wished she had failed in casting the spell entirely. She did not like what she saw, and her mind filled with memories that had haunted her nights for far too many years: The puddle Severus had been lying in had been deep crimson, she remembered it well. The blood had still been wet when she had arrived, and it had taken her days to get it off her hands. Her stained robes, she had simply incinerated.

The puddle was gone now of course. The blood had seeped into the wooden floor, and all that was left now was a dark spot. Still, it terrified Morgaine, and the unfairness disgusted her. Severus Snape had deserved to die a hero's death. Instead he had been attacked from behind and had miserably bled to death.

Morgaine placed the two phials on the dark spot in front of her. Harry had given her those two memories years ago. He had deemed it appropriate for her to see them. At first, she had refused to look at them. And when she had finally brought up the courage, the images had made her stomach turn. She had spent hours locked in her room that day, looking at those memories over and over again until they had been etched into her very mind. Nowadays she didn't even need a Pensieve to see them clearly in front of her.

She uncorked the first phial and let the silvery blue-mist rise:

*'Severus ...'*

Morgaine heard Dumbledore's voice as clearly as if he were standing right in front of her, and she felt a lump form in her throat. But she did not feel sorry for her great-grandfather, who had slumped against the ramparts of the Astronomy Tower. What made her heart ache was the look on Severus' face. Hatred and revulsion was all she could see.

*'Severus ... please ...'*

She saw Severus raise his wand and point it directly at Dumbledore. And as he cast the spell that sent the old man to his death and himself straight to hell, Morgaine's eyes filled with tears. What had the old man made Severus do?

She blinked fiercely, but as her vision cleared, the silvery-blue mist had already disappeared into thin air.

With shaking hands, she uncorked the second phial.

*'It cannot be any other way. I must master the wand, Severus.'*

Had Severus known that he was about to die, Morgaine wondered. Had he known all along that he would not survive the war?

They had never said goodbye that night of the Final Battle. But Morgaine could still feel Severus' last kiss on her lips. He had never kissed her so tenderly, and she had never loved him that much. The memory of their final moments hurt as no other. They had wasted so much time.

*'I regret it.'*

The cold tone of Voldemort's voice was the only thing that kept Morgaine from shedding the tears that were still burning in her eyes. Instead her eyes narrowed, and her hands started to shake with anger.

'You took everything from me,' she hissed, not sure which of her ghosts she was addressing.

With a bang, both phials exploded, and Morgaine sank to her knees, dropping her wand and cutting her left hand. And as her wand landed among the shattered glass, the spell was broken, and darkness filled the room once more.

~ ~ ~

She couldn't be far, Severus concluded as he looked around Morgaine's quarters. Her teaching materials lay neatly stacked on her desk, quill and parchment lay right beside them. The candles were extinguished, but the fire in the grate was still burning. Her teaching robes were hanging on their usual hook on the wall, but the one beside it was empty.

*She has taken her cloak, Severus thought. She has left the castle then.*

He should inform his colleagues that there was no need to look for Morgaine indoors, but Severus felt unable to leave the room. He told himself that maybe Morgaine did not want to be found. He knew that feeling only too well himself as he had felt it himself uncountable times during his life.

But Severus' true reason for lingering in Morgaine's quarters was another. He wanted to ... find something, anything. A picture, a letter, any proof that the child, Demeter, his daughter existed. But there was nothing.

What drove a mother to hide any image of her child, Severus wondered. There should at least be a picture on the nightstand. It seemed natural. And the fact that Morgaine did not seem to have anything that reminded her of her daughter made Severus realise how difficult the whole situation must be for her.

He was just about to leave when the crackling of the fire and a light voice made him freeze.

'Mother? Mother, are you there?'

Severus retreated into the shadows, out of sight for anyone who was using the Floo. He himself, however, had a clear view of the face that had appeared in the fire.

It was like looking at a younger, happier version of himself. The girl had raven-black hair, which framed her pale face like a pair of velvet curtains. Her skin was as pale as his had once been, but her cheeks were slightly flushed. Judging from the scarf around her slim neck, the girl had been outside in the cold.

'Mother?'

'Your mother would have answered already if she were there, Demeter.'

Severus recognised Margaret's voice at once. He had only met Morgaine's grandmother once, many years ago, but her voice was so kind, he doubted he would ever forget it.

Demeter's face fell. 'Looks like we keep missing each other today,' she said in a disappointed tone. 'May I call her again later? Can I, please?'

'We will see, child.'

Once more the girl looked around the room in front of her. Her eyes were as blue as Morgaine's, Severus noticed. Blue like the spring sky, curious and kind.

Eventually the flames faded and so did Demeter's face. Severus, however, stood as mesmerised. That was his daughter then? His and Morgaine's? He had not even considered the possibility that the girl would look anything like him. But she looked exactly like him. The poor thing had even inherited his nose. But she had her mother's eyes. Even in the fire, he had seen the flame of joy flickering in them.

Whenever had the flame in Morgaine's eyes been extinguished, Severus wondered. The day he had died? Or much earlier, maybe? Maybe the day she had been forced to choose between her child and the man she loved?

Suddenly, it did not matter anymore that Morgaine had not told him about Demeter. When she was ready, she would tell him her reasons, Severus was certain of that. The only thing he wanted to do at that very moment was tell Morgaine how much he loved her, how much she had always meant to him, and that there was no reason for her to carry her burdens alone. He would be there for her, whenever she needed him. But he had still no idea about where she was.

Minerva was uncharacteristically flustered as Severus met her in the Entrance Hall. The castle had been searched from the dungeons to the Astronomy Tower, but no one had seen Morgaine.



'You don't think she would do something stupid, don't you, Severus?'

Severus frowned. No, he did not think so. After a first wave of panic he was now certain that Morgaine had simply retreated to a quiet and secluded place in order to gather her thoughts. But before he could tell Minerva, they were approached by the Grey Lady.

'I found her,' she announced. 'Morgaine is in the Shrieking Shack.'

'The Shrieking Shack?' Minerva repeated. 'Whatever is she doing there?'

The Grey Lady just smiled sadly. 'Morgaine has spent many nights there since she returned to Hogwarts. The Shack calls for her at night when she cannot sleep. Like a ghost she haunts the place where part of her died. I'm not even sure she knows why she goes there. But if she doesn't leave soon, she will lose herself in there.' The she turned towards Severus. 'Go get her. You're the only one who can.'

~ ~ ~

Severus hovered in the cold outside the rumbling building. He had left the Shrieking Shack in Morgaine's wake the morning after his death. He had watched her lay his body to rest and then followed her to the castle. And never once had he even thought about returning.

He hated that place, always had. Ever since the night he had had the glorious idea to follow Lupin through the tunnel that started under the Whomping Willow. The werewolf had almost torn him to pieces that night. Had Potter not developed a sense of conscience that night, Severus would have died in the Shack that night. But he had escaped death, just to return two decades later to meet death in form of a gigantic snake in an enchanted cage.

He remembered the smell of the place, wet wood, tar and mould. He remembered that the stairs creaked, and that the floorboard right at the top of the stairs was loose. He was sure that the smell of decay was even more present now, and that the stairs were a hazard to walk on. But none of that mattered to him now. He was a ghost. His nose did not detect any odours, and his feet did not touch the floor as he moved forwards.

The door at the top of the stairs stood open, and Severus floated silently through it. The room was dark, but he did not need any light to make out the cowering figure in the middle of the room. Morgaine was on her knees, head bent and her black cloak tightly wrapped around her. As Severus approached, he thought for a moment that a silvery-blue mist was hanging in the room. But it disappeared so fast that he couldn't be sure if he had really seen it.

'What are you doing here, Morgaine?' he asked.

Although she could not have heard him enter the room, Morgaine did not flinch at the sound of his voice. 'I'm chasing shattered dreams and dusty memories,' she whispered.

Severus stayed behind her. Despite Morgaine keeping her voice low, he had heard that it was shaking and he wondered if she had been crying. In case she had been, he would give her a chance to dry her tears. He knew how much she hated it when he saw her cry.

He heard her draw a shaky breath and saw the fingers of her left hand trace the outline of the dark spot on the floor. He had died on that very spot, Severus thought. It had been his own blood that had darkened the wood. Why, for the love of Merlin, had Morgaine chosen this place to hide?

'I never meant to hurt you, Severus.'

The scene that unfolded before Severus was all but too familiar. After he had died, Morgaine had been on her knees beside his cold body, her face buried at his blood-covered chest and her shoulders shaking with her desperate sobs. And he had been unable to console her, unable to touch her or to tell her that she was not alone. At least this time, he could talk to her.

'I know, my love,' he whispered. 'I know.'

She had not hurt him. Of course, he would have preferred if she had been the one to tell him about their child and not Minerva. But who could blame her, really? She had been forced into that lie many years ago by a man more cunning than any Slytherin had ever been. And she had played along to protect her child.

Severus floated around Morgaine and knelt down beside of her, careful to keep his distance. In the state she was in, he did not know how she would react if he touched her. But he wanted her to know that he was there, right by her side.

'Look at me, Morgaine.'

Her eyes were so red and swollen that Severus wondered if she had been crying all day. Stupid girl. She had taken her pain, hidden it away and suffered in silence because she was too stubborn and too proud to ask for help. Just like Severus himself had been for so many years. What a waste.

'I didn't mean for you to find out in such a way, Severus,' Morgaine suddenly said, and a pair of red-rimmed blue eyes locked on to a pair that had once been dark and unfathomable as the Black Lake.

'Are you telling me you actually meant for me to find out?'

The sarcastic tone in his voice and his smirk evoked the exact tiny smile Severus had hoped to see on Morgaine's lips. But it died away far too quickly. And as she turned her face away, and Severus' eyes followed her, he caught sight of her wand lying among broken glass. But at the moment he did not even consider asking Morgaine what had happened. He was as lost for words as she seemed to be.

Had he spoken to her right after the staff meeting, he would probably have raged and yelled. Had he spoken to her after Dumbledore's confession, the sound of his voice would probably have betrayed his disappointment. But now Severus did not know what to say. All the feelings he had worked through over the afternoon were still there, screaming in his mind and wanting to come out. But he did not know how to express himself, and hence he didn't allow himself to feel any of those emotions.

'She was looking for you earlier,' he said after a while. 'Demeter.' Sooner or later, the topic of their daughter needed to be addressed. He could just as well be the one to do it.

'You met her?' Morgaine sounded surprised.

'She used the Floo as I was looking for you in your quarters,' Severus explained. 'She did not see me.'

Morgaine nodded silently. Her eyes were searching Severus' pale face, and he knew that she was hoping for him to speak.

'She is a beautiful child. She reminded me of you when you were about her age,' he said. 'She has the same look in her eyes, the same smile ...'

'Demeter has inherited far too much from me.'

Severus frowned at the bitter tone in Morgaine's voice, but he deemed it wiser not to follow it up. Hopefully Morgaine would let him in on all her secrets in due time.

One last time he looked at the broken glass on the floor. In due time, she would hopefully tell him about that, too.

He got up and reached out his pale hand towards Morgaine. He knew that she could not take it, but the symbolic gesture made her get up from the floor.

'Come back to the castle with me, Morgaine,' he said firmly. 'I want you to come to the dungeons.'

## XIII: Sharing Memories

Chapter 13 of 40

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XIII: Sharing Memories

Severus put every conceivable protective spell around his old study. Nobody, living inhabitant of the castle, ghost or portrait, was going to disturb him and Morgaine that evening. There was too much to be said to be interrupted.

When he turned to face Morgaine, she was tending to her left hand. Severus frowned. He had not noticed that she had injured herself, but now he saw that the cuts were bleeding rather heavily. Had she cut herself on the pieces of glass that had been lying on the floor in the Shrieking Shack? Did it even matter?

'Let me,' Severus murmured and placed a ghostly hand over the cuts. *Vulnera sanantur. Vulnera sanantur.*

The wounds started closing immediately, and Morgaine tilted her head to look at Severus. 'Did you just carry your wand for show?' she wondered.

Severus smirked. He had indeed been able to do wandless magic when he had still been alive. The more he had turned towards the Light, the easier it had become. And over the last couple of months, he had discovered that he could cast most spells as a ghost as well.

'You were a powerful wizard, Severus Snape,' Morgaine stated. 'You still are.'

'And you are a powerful witch.'

The cuts on her hand weren't much more than fine white lines now, and Severus abandoned his task to look into Morgaine's eyes.

'Did our daughter inherit our talents?' he asked. A direct approach seemed sensible, although risky. But the cat was out of the bag anyway, and secrecy seemed like a waste of time. Asking right out might just be the best alternative.

Morgaine seemed uncomfortable for a second but steadied herself quickly. 'Demeter is talented,' she started. 'She is studious and eager to try new things. Whatever task she is set, she will work hard and not give up before she succeeds. She is very ambitious.'

'With other words, stubborn,' Severus concluded. 'That must be a family trait,' he added dryly and smirked.

Morgaine gave a short laugh, and to Severus' joy, the smile lingered on her lips.

'Will you tell me about her?' he asked. 'Will you tell me about our child?'

Morgaine's eyes locked onto his, and Severus could feel that she was afraid.

'Please,' he added. If he had been able to, he would have taken her hand. But now he had to be content with brushing her fingers ever so slightly with his. 'Please,' he repeated. 'Let me see her.'

~ ~ ~

Morgaine's hands were shaking slightly as she, one by one, extracted her memories of Demeter and bottled them, ready to pour them into the Pensieve that one of the house-elves had brought down to the dungeons from the headmistress' office. This was it then. Severus was about to meet his daughter.

While Morgaine herself felt nervous, Severus seemed calm and composed. But she could see the little crease on his ghostly brow. And she had known him long enough to know that something was bothering him. Of course there was. He must have so many questions. Hopefully she would be able to give him answers.

'Where would you like to start?' she asked, realising at once that it was a dumb question! Did it even matter where they started? Severus would want to see everything, of course. And she wanted to show him everything. She was finally ready.

Severus seemed to be thinking the same. 'It is you who chose the memories, Morgaine,' he said. 'It is you who will have to decide what I am allowed to see. However, I would recommend that we start at the beginning.'

~ ~ ~

'What are you doing here, child?' Margaret sounded genuinely surprised.

Severus looked around and found himself in the small kitchen in Margaret's cottage in Iceland. Not much had changed since he had visited with Dumbledore that glorious summer when he had lost his heart.

He turned around and saw Morgaine take off her heavy winter coat and place it over the back of one of the kitchen chairs. 'I told Karkaroff you lay dying,' she explained. 'He had to let me come and visit.'

Margaret smiled and looked down her body. 'Dying? I must say I imagined that process to be slightly more straining. I must say I feel quite alive.' Then her smile died away. 'What are you doing here, Morgaine?' she repeated.

Morgaine turned towards the small window from which she could overlook the snow covered hills of Iceland. The calendar on the wall showed that it was the first week of March.

'I had to come home,' Morgaine said, wrapping her arms around herself as if to shield herself from the cold. She looked miserable.

Margret stepped behind her granddaughter and placed a tender hand on her shoulder. 'What's wrong, poppet?'

'I think I'm with child.'

The sound of Morgaine's voice made Severus shiver. She sounded as if she were carrying the pain of the world on her shoulders.

Margret took hold of Morgaine's arm and turned her around. 'You think you are with child?' she asked.

Morgaine closed her eyes for a moment and her shoulders slumped. 'It doesn't make sense. I shouldn't be. It was the wrong time of the month.'

'What do you mean?' Margaret seemed calm, but Severus detected a slight tremble in her voice.

'It must have been New Year's eve,' Morgaine started. 'It was the only time I ... But it can't be. The moon was full ...'

Morgaine's voice was shaking, and Margaret nodded knowingly. Severus, however, had no idea what Morgaine was talking about.

'The bleeding had just stopped that day, as it always does,' Morgaine continued. 'I should not have conceived that night. I cannot have conceived naturally that night. Malfoy must have slipped me a potion.'

Malfoy? The name alone made Severus flinch.

Margaret, too, paled. 'Child, you didn't ...'

'Of course I did not!' Morgaine sounded appalled. 'Oh, Granny, I played with fire that night. I finally wanted to know everything about my parents, and I hoped Malfoy would tell me everything I wanted to know if he thought that I ...'

'If he thought you would follow him willingly to his bed chamber,' Margaret filled in.

Morgaine nodded. Suddenly, she seemed ashamed. 'Oh, Granny, he was charming. And he almost succeeded.'

The tears started running down Morgaine's face, and Margaret wrapped her arms around her granddaughter. 'We should have warned you, child,' she whispered. 'We should have warned you.'

~ ~ ~

'Should have warned you about what?' Severus' ghostly eyes were glittering as he surfaced from the Pensieve, and his anger was tangible.

'Malfoy had been interested in the duLac bloodline for quite some time,' Morgaine started to explain. 'Ever since my mother ...'

'Don't tell me Lucius Malfoy is your father!' Severus interrupted. The thought was more than disgusting.

'No!' Morgaine shook her head vehemently. 'No, he is not. I checked that a long time ago. He and Narcissa ... they were on their honeymoon when I was conceived.' She paused and bit her lip. 'Do you remember Malfoy congratulating you on what were his words bedding me?'

Severus sneered. Of course he remembered. He also remembered Malfoy telling him that he would gladly take Morgaine to his bed himself.

'It is all about blood, Severus,' Morgaine went on. 'Lucius Malfoy wanted a duLac baby. Dumbledore said that it had most probably been Malfoy's idea to keep my mother as a prisoner until she bore a child that could be brought up by Death Eaters. Just imagine, a duLac and a direct descendant of Albus Dumbledore ...'

'Dumbledore knew?' Severus hissed. Why was he not surprised?

Morgaine sensed Severus' rage, but she once more shook her head. Her parentage was not something she wanted to discuss. Not now anyway. Instead, she uncorked a second memory.

~ ~ ~

Once more, Severus found himself in Margaret's kitchen. Morgaine was now kneeling at her grandmother's feet with her head resting against the older woman's knees. She had stopped crying, but the tears on her cheek had not yet dried.

'What are you going to do?' Margaret asked.

Morgaine drew a deep breath. 'The most sensible thing to do would be to get rid of the child. I cannot be pregnant at Durmstrang. Karkaroff will tell Malfoy. And Malfoy will ...'

Severus felt a shudder go through his ghostly body. What if Malfoy had succeeded in his evil plan? What if he had managed to take Morgaine to his bed that night and sire a child? Surely, he would have taken care of them both and worshipped Morgaine for giving him the child he had planned to father for so many years. But whatever would have happened to Morgaine and the baby the day the Dark Lord returned? The idea was too horrid to think about properly.

'Have you been thinking this through, Morgaine?' Margaret asked. 'Are you sure you do not want this child?'

'This is not a matter of what I want.' In a blink of an eye, every trace of emotion disappeared from Morgaine's face. 'I cannot have this child. I mustn't.'

~ ~ ~

Severus blinked and looked at Morgaine with big eyes. He had not been prepared for her telling him that she had ever considered aborting their child.

'I had prepared everything,' Morgaine explained quietly. 'My grandmother helped me to collect the right herbs and brew the potion. She cried the whole time.'

'What stopped you?' Severus asked, his voice shaky. He was in shock.

'How could I kill something as innocent as an unborn child, Severus? We had created life. You and I, we had created something pure and innocent. How could I destroy something that precious?'

Severus nodded. 'How did you hide your pregnancy from Karkaroff?' he enquired. Suddenly, he was interested in the practical details. Was it because he was unable to cope with the emotions that were welling up inside him?

'A potion against morning sickness and a simple concealment charm was all it took in the beginning,' Morgaine explained. 'But towards the end of term, it wasn't enough anymore. I was weak and felt ill. I feared for my own health as much as for the child's, but I couldn't see the nurse at Durmstrang, as she would certainly have informed Karkaroff. So I turned to the only person I trusted and whom I knew had the power to take me away from Durmstrang.'

'Dumbledore,' Severus concluded.

Morgaine nodded. 'He came to see me right away. But Karkaroff insisted I stay until the end of term. So I had no other choice than keep on fighting until the summer. Then

I returned to Iceland.'

~ ~ ~

'Albus, you must do something! Morgaine mustn't return to Durmstrang in September. It's too dangerous. For both her and the baby.'

'And what do you suggest I do, Margaret?' Dumbledore replied calmly. 'Karkaroff has the Ministry on his side. And what is even worse, he has Lucius Malfoy on his side.'

'She must not return!' Margaret repeated, drawing herself up to her full height before Dumbledore as if to shield Morgaine with her body.

Severus flinched as he caught sight of Morgaine, who was sitting on a wooden chair by the window with her head resting against the window frame. She was so pale that her skin seemed almost transparent, and judging from the dark circles under her eyes, she had not had a good night's sleep for weeks. Her shaking hands were resting on her rounded belly.

'I ask you again, Margaret,' Dumbledore repeated. 'What do you suggest I do?'

'Hide her.' Margaret's voice sounded determined. She would not take no for an answer. 'Hide her and the child like we hid Jeanne.'

Dumbledore frowned. 'You know what that means, Margaret. That spell demands that no one knows about Morgaine's whereabouts. And no one must know about the child either. Not even Severus.'

If possible, Morgaine grew even paler. But she didn't say a word. Margaret, on the other hand, was beside herself with rage.

'Do you have any idea what you are asking here, Albus?'

Dumbledore stepped around Margaret and looked down at Morgaine. 'Severus mustn't know, Morgaine,' he repeated. 'He has another child to protect.'

Morgaine didn't react, and Severus wondered if she had even heard Dumbledore's words. She seemed strangely detached, almost apathetic.

Margaret grabbed Dumbledore by his arm. 'What do you mean, Severus has another child to protect? This *is* his child. This is where his responsibilities lie and nowhere else.'

'Severus had promised to protect Harry Potter long before he ever set eyes on Morgaine. I need him to protect the boy.'

How could Dumbledore be so callous, Severus wondered. This was his own great-granddaughter he was talking about, his own kin.

'Severus is very well capable of taking care of two children at once,' Margaret pointed out, and Severus couldn't help but smile. He had only met Margaret for a couple of days, and still she held such a high opinion of him.

'It is too dangerous!' Dumbledore thundered, and Margaret flinched. Obviously, she had never heard Dumbledore raise his voice before.

'I need Severus to protect Harry Potter,' the old wizard repeated. 'I cannot take the risk of him being distracted by his own child.'

'Distracted?' Margaret shook her head in disbelief. 'This *is* his child!'

'Tell me, Margaret, what will happen when the dark forces who are trying to kill Harry Potter learn that Harry's protector has a child, that there is someone in Severus Snape's life whom he cares for?'

'They will use that knowledge against him.'

Morgaine's voice wasn't more than a whisper, but still it made both Margaret and Dumbledore turn towards her. She was standing now, supporting herself against the wall with her hand.

'Severus knowing would endanger both him and the child. I cannot put either of them at risk.' Morgaine let go off the wall and straightened. 'If keeping them both safe means not telling Severus about his child, then so be it.'

Severus felt his heart warm at Morgaine's words, and although he was perfectly aware that he was merely a ghost inside a memory and unable to keep her from falling, he rushed forwards as she collapsed, ready to catch her in his arms.

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'What happened?' Severus asked as he came up from the Pensieve. He was as concerned as if the Morgaine who was sitting in the armchair in front of him were the one he had just seen collapse.

'I was exhausted, both physically and mentally,' Morgaine explained. 'I spent the last trimester in bed, too weak to get up myself and too weak to fight Dumbledore.'

Severus felt his bile rise. Once more, he wondered how Dumbledore could have done this to his own flesh and blood. How could he have used Morgaine like this?

'I'm afraid I cannot show you any memories of Demeter being born or her first weeks,' Morgaine went on. 'I ... I wasn't feeling too well. And I don't remember much myself.'

'Was it a rough delivery?' Severus asked, completely at a loss about what else he could ask.

Morgaine shook her head. 'From what I've been told, everything went quite smoothly until ... until I was supposed to hold Demeter for the first time.'

She broke off and started gnawing at her lip and twisting her hands in her lap. Severus also noticed that her breathing was quickening. He drifted towards her and came to hover right in front of her so he could look in her eyes.

'What happened?'

'I don't know. It seems silly now, but I couldn't hold her. I couldn't love her. One moment I thought she was evil incarnate, and the next moment I was convinced that I myself was evil and that I would contaminate her. I know it doesn't make any sense.'

Severus frowned. It did indeed not make any sense at all. But then again, what made sense about the whole situation?

'And what happened then?' He felt stupid to be repeating his questions, but he wanted to know. He needed to know.

'I was considered a danger to Demeter, and she was taken away from me. Sometimes I cried and demanded to see my child, but as soon as she was brought to me, I did not want to be close to her. For a time I feared that I was losing my mind. So did the people around me.'

'How did you solve it?'

'I didn't,' Morgaine replied. 'Remus did.'

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It took Severus a couple of moments to recognise the room to which the next memory had brought him. It was Morgaine's old room in Iceland. He had slept there the summer he had visited her with Dumbledore. He had rarely slept as peacefully as he had in this room.

Morgaine, however, looked anything but peaceful. She was still terribly pale, and there was a haunted look in her eyes. Not even the serene view from her window seemed to have any calming effect on her. From the amount of snow that was covering the hills, Severus judged that it was December.

When there was a knock on the door, Morgaine tensed up like a trapped animal, and as the door opened, she seemed ready to cast a Killing Curse on anyone who dared enter the room.

There was a flutter of brown, shabby robes, and Morgaine was pulled into an embrace which she didn't fight. On the contrary. She clung to the man who had entered the room as if she were afraid he would disappear into thin air.

'It's alright, kitten. I'm here now. I'll take care of you.'

For the first time ever, Severus was overjoyed to hear Remus Lupin's voice. With every word that came from his lips, Morgaine seemed to relax, and Severus couldn't help but feel immensely grateful.

After some moments, Morgaine started to cry, and Lupin cradled her in his arms, rocking her like a baby and whispering words of comfort. But he seemed to be failing. It seemed as if Morgaine was unable to stop crying.

'I am so glad you came, Remus. This is the first time Morgaine is crying since she came here last summer.'

Severus caught sight of Margaret, who was standing in the open door. In her arms, she was holding the baby.

Lupin wrapped his arms tighter around Morgaine and whispered something into her ear which Severus could not hear. But he saw her nod, and Lupin gestured Margaret to enter the room and sit down on Morgaine's bed.

It took several minutes for Morgaine to stop crying, but when she finally did stop, Lupin tried to make her let go of him by carefully pushing her away from him.

'Let go, kitten,' he whispered softly.

The tears had brought some colour to Morgaine's face, and despite her red-rimmed eyes, she looked somehow calmer than she had prior to Lupin's arrival. But she still held onto Lupin's hand with an iron grip.

'Is that my baby?' she asked, cautiously peering around Lupin.

Lupin nodded. 'You have a beautiful daughter, Morgaine,' he said. 'Would you like to see her?'

Morgaine stiffened, but Lupin was already standing and pulling her up by her hands. As she trembled, he carefully laid his arm around her shoulders. 'There is nothing to be afraid of,' he said. 'I am right by your side.'

Morgaine took one tiny step after the other, seemingly ready to break into a run in the opposite direction at any moment. But Lupin held her close to his chest and directed her firmly towards her child. As they stood about half a meter from the bed, Margaret shifted and revealed the sleeping baby.

Severus heard Morgaine's sharp intake of breath and turned to look at her. Her eyes were once more glittering, but not with tears. And he could have sworn that there was a hint of a smile.

Curiously, Morgaine eyed the baby that was lying in her grandmother's arms. It seemed almost as if she saw her daughter for the first time.

'She looks like Severus,' she whispered and extended a shaky hand to brush the baby's cheek. That was when Demeter opened her eyes.

As if burnt, Morgaine withdrew her hand and threw herself against Lupin's chest. But the baby did not cry, and Lupin tightened his grip around Morgaine's shoulders and turned her around so she could once more look at her daughter.

'Demeter does indeed look like her father,' he whispered, and placed a tender kiss on Morgaine's temple. 'But look: she has your beautiful eyes.'

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I own nothing of this and don't make any money. Your reviews are my only reward.

## XIV: The Werewolf and the Wyvern

*Chapter 14 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XIV: The Werewolf and the Wyvern

Morgaine watched Severus as he emerged from the Pensieve. His ghostly face didn't betray his feelings, but his eyes did. They spoke of surprise, shock and terror. And as he turned away from her and started drifting through the dark room, Morgaine wished she had never shown Severus those memories.

How could he have been prepared for what he had seen? He had expected to get to know his daughter, to see her grow from a little baby into a young witch. Instead, he had been confronted with nothing but pain and sorrow.

She had not had a choice, Morgaine told herself. If she ever wanted Severus to understand why she had kept him in the dark, he would have to know everything. But still, she felt guilty. She knew Severus well enough to know that he would somehow manage to put the blame on himself. But none of this was his fault. None. Neither was it hers. But still.

'You should have contacted me, Morgaine,' Severus said quietly after a while. 'Even if you could not tell me about our child, you should have contacted me. Me, not the father of your child, but your friend.'

'How could I have, Severus?' Morgaine closed her eyes for a moment, not to blink away tears, but to gather strength. If Severus only knew how many letters she had written to him just to incinerate them even before the ink had dried. 'If I had contacted you, you would have wondered why I was not at Durmstrang anymore,' she tried to explain. 'You would have wanted to know why I was in Iceland and not at Hogwarts. And I would have been forced to lie to you.'

'Severus, look at me.' Morgaine didn't dare breathe. Severus still stood with his back towards her. What if he didn't turn around? What if he didn't forgive her? 'I never meant to lie to you.'

The seconds ticked by agonisingly slowly, and Morgaine was losing all her hope.

But when Severus spoke, his voice was calm and composed. 'I know, Morgaine. I know.'

When he turned around he found her curled up in her chair with her arms wrapped around her knees. Had she not been sitting by the fire, he would have guessed she was cold. But then again, she might as well be freezing. Those memories had chilled him to the core as well.

'I understand that you had no choice, Morgaine. The war forced us all to do things that should never be asked of a moral person.'

How many things had he himself been forced to keep from the person he had loved and trusted the most? He had always hated lying to her, but he had done it to keep her safe.

'Demeter ...' he started. 'I assume it was not that simple.' As much as he had relished the joy in Morgaine's eyes as she had looked at her baby daughter, he doubted that her demons had left her that easily.

Morgaine nodded towards the Pensieve and the remaining phials. 'Do you want to see more?'

Severus shook his head. 'No. I want you to tell me. If you can.'

Morgaine swallowed dryly. She had never told anyone about her year on Iceland, about her struggle to learn how to accept and love her child and the fight to keep her sanity. Not even Dumbledore had known. The only two people who had known were those who had never left her side: her grandmother and Remus Lupin.

'Most days were ... normal,' she began. Severus was hovering over the chair opposite hers, and she drew strength from the now calm look in his eyes. 'Demeter was a healthy, happy baby who didn't demand much more than to be held, fed and have her nappies changed. She was easy enough to love with her blue eyes and her infectious smile. And most of the time I did love her, more than anything else in the world. I would have done anything for her and wanted nothing more than to see her happy. The first time she was up all night crying because of a tummy ache, I felt like most incapable and worthless mother ever because I couldn't console her. And when she stopped crying, I was the happiest person on earth.'

'But there were other days,' Severus concluded.

'There were days when I couldn't stand being close to her, days when I could barely make myself stay in the same room with her. I was afraid I would hurt her in some way or that ...' Morgaine broke off and took a shaking breath. How could she tell Severus that there were sometimes voices in her head that told her their daughter was evil incarnate?

Severus, however, interpreted her silence differently. 'Do you remember our first Occlumency lesson?' he asked. 'When I made you remember that you had once pointed a wand at your own mother?'

Morgaine nodded. The Dark Lord had made her do that. She had just been a child, too little and too powerless to defend herself. But to this very day, she felt guilty.

'You cried that night,' Severus continued. 'And you asked me if you were bad. Do you remember what I told you then, Morgaine?'

Once more, Morgaine nodded. She remembered his words clearly. They had many times helped her to chase her demons away. 'You told me that I was a good person and that nothing would ever change that.'

'I also promised to take care of you.'

Morgaine suppressed a sob. She knew that Severus would have stood by her side through all of this, had he only known. And the knowledge of him blaming himself now for not having been there, made her heart ache.

'I wasn't alone, Severus. The people around me did all they could. My grandmother took care of Demeter just as she had taken care of me when my mother had been unable to. And Remus ... Remus stayed all winter, although the Icelandic nights were long and his transformation so painful that he was unable to leave the bed for several days after the full moon. But he fought for me like a man possessed, and he wouldn't let me run away. Every time I took a step away from Demeter, he pushed me two steps towards her. Eventually, I stopped running.'

Remus Lupin. Severus remembered a time when that name had made him feel nothing but bitterness and contempt. He had hated Lupin for so many years, and that hatred had become so natural that the reasons for it had barely mattered anymore. Now it seemed ludicrous to have wasted so much energy on hating a man who had simply happened to be one of the Marauders.

Severus remembered teenage Lupin, a thin, plain boy with seemingly no backbone whatsoever. He had never taken part in Potter and Black's pranks, but he had never stopped them either. Why would he have? Why would he have stood up for a sulky, greasy-haired Slytherin, who would probably have thanked him with nothing else than a sour comment and disdain?

The adult Lupin had been a similar one. He had never been one to openly doubt Severus' loyalties, but once more, he had never done anything to defend him either. He had always just sat there with his sad eyes and never taken a stand for anything or anyone. Or almost never.

To Severus' knowledge, Lupin had unleashed the Gryffindor lion twice. Both times, it had been for Morgaine. Both times, his words had kept Severus from going too far and alienating the woman who had stood by his side for fourteen years.

Severus mentally shook his head. Remus Lupin was not who he was interested in that evening. His goal was to get to know his daughter, and the reason why Morgaine had never told him about her.

'Demeter ...' he started cautiously, not wanting to pressure Morgaine. From what he had learnt so far, Morgaine had fought with more than simple postnatal depression. 'How ... how did you learn to love her?'

'Once more, Remus helped,' Morgaine said quietly. The she smiled. 'And so did you.'

Severus cocked an eyebrow in surprise. How could he have helped? He had not even known Demeter existed.

'You were my light in the dark, Severus.'

And before he knew it, Morgaine had uncorked another phial.

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'Concentrate, Morgaine.'

'Remus, I can't.'

'Of course you can't if you keep telling yourself that you can't.' The uncharacteristic frown on Lupin's otherwise so kind face didn't become him at all, and it made Severus frown as well. 'You must have a happy memory.'

Severus saw Morgaine gnaw at her bottom lip. The hand in which she was holding her wand was shaking, and she was so pale that it wouldn't have surprised him if she fainted.

'Remus, please.'

With a sigh, Lupin stepped closer towards Morgaine and took her wand from her. 'We'll take a break, alright? I think Demeter will be wanting her Mummy soon anyway.'

Severus followed Morgaine and Lupin to the blanket under the birch tree, where Demeter lay on her back, cooing happily and reaching out her tiny arms towards the two birds that sat on a branch above her.

Morgaine stopped a few feet away from the blanket, and Severus saw her jaw tighten. 'I don't think she misses me at all,' she said in a tone that no mother should ever use when talking about her child. 'We might just as well return to practising.'

'Nonsense.' Lupin took Morgaine firmly by the hand and pulled her towards the blanket. She did not struggle, but Severus doubted that she would have approached on her own accord.

She looked down at her baby daughter for what seemed like several minutes. And quite a few times, Severus thought she would break free from Lupin's grip and run away. But Morgaine stood still and just watched her child pensively. She reminded Severus of a cat that was trying to decide whether the second cat on the other side was friend or foe, ready to flee or attack any second.

Suddenly the two birds took flight, and Demeter started crying, startled by the sudden movement. And Morgaine did something Severus had not expected. She freed herself from Lupin and knelt down on the blanket to pick up her child.

'It's alright, sweetheart,' she whispered into the baby's ear as she held her daughter close to her chest. 'Mummy's here. Mummy will protect you.'

Beside her Lupin smiled.

Demeter soon stopped crying, and Morgaine settled under the tree with her daughter on her lap, and Severus took the time to analyse the scene in front of him. It must be spring, he concluded, judging by the new leaves on the birch tree. Demeter had grown quite a bit, too, but Severus knew too little about babies to judge her age.

Demeter certainly had her mother's eyes, blue like the spring sky, and full of life and laughter. But everything else about the child spoke of Snape genes: the black hair, the strong jaw line. And already, the unfortunate Snape nose was prominent.

What was going through Morgaine's head, Severus wondered. Did she see him every time she looked at her daughter? Did she think of him?

'Back to practicing now, kitten.'

Morgaine looked up at Lupin and nodded. She seemed almost reluctant to place her daughter on the blanket and walk away from her. Amazing, Severus thought. Half an hour ago, Lupin had more or less been forced to drag her towards her child.

'A happy memory, Morgaine,' Lupin instructed once he had given Morgaine her wand back. 'The happiest you've got. Focus on it and don't let it go.'

Morgaine cast a glance over her shoulder and smiled. Then she cast the spell. *Expecto Patronum.*

The Wyvern erupted from the tip of her wand and took flight towards the sky, and both Lupin and Morgaine watched in awe as the majestic winged dragon circled above the birch tree and then settled beside Demeter like a well-trained dog. And little Demeter smiled at the silvery figure beside her.

The Patronus dissolved as Lupin wrapped his arms around Morgaine and broke her concentration. 'I knew you could do it, kitten,' he cheered. 'And a Wyvern ... Do you even realise how powerful a Patronus that is? You must have found a very happy memory, Morgaine. Tell me what it is. Has it something to do with Demeter?'

Morgaine smiled and shook her head. 'No, it's not Demeter. It's the tree.'

Lupin frowned. He did not understand. How could a tree create a happy memory?

But Severus understood. He and Morgaine had fallen in love under that very birch tree on the night of the harvest feast. She had been seventeen, and he had still been her teacher. He had held her in his arms that night to protect her from the cold. Her hair had smelled of sandalwood and honey, and had it been up to him, Severus would never have let go of her.

But they had waited. All they had shared that night had been a kiss goodnight, and over the next twelve months, they had kept their distance. Not until the night of her graduation had Severus embraced Morgaine once more. He had kissed her and taken her to his bed. And it had been the night he had first clasped the Wyvern pendant around her neck.

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'Do you still wear it?' Severus asked once he had returned to the present. 'The Wyvern?'

Morgaine's hand went to her neck. 'I have never taken it off. I keep it right here beside my heart. Because that is where it belongs.'

She tilted her head and looked deeply into Severus' ghostly eyes. 'It might seem silly, but the Wyvern nestling up against Demeter meant the world to me. From the moment I had first laid eyes on our child, darkness had been tearing at my soul. There hadn't been a day when I didn't fear that either of us was evil. But when I created White magic and when that magic accepted our child ...'

Severus nodded. To him, Morgaine's sentiments it didn't seem silly at all. Before he had cast his first Patronus, he, too, had believed that his soul had been beyond rescue, that it was too tainted by the Dark to ever produce anything as pure as a Patronus. But Magic had seen beyond his mistakes, and it had let him cast the purest spell of them all.

'I don't know if Remus deliberately chose that place to practice, or if it were a mere coincidence that we ended up by the birch tree,' Morgaine continued. 'But that afternoon changed everything. I started believing in myself again, I started to love our child. And for the first time, I allowed myself to admit that I missed you. And when Dumbledore asked me to return to Hogwarts, I did not even have to think about it.'

~ ~ ~

'You know that I will gladly look after Demeter. But are you really sure that you are ready to return to the Wizarding world?'

Morgaine tucked Demeter in and kissed her daughter goodnight before straightening to look at her grandmother, who stood on the other side of the cradle. The look in her eyes left no room for doubt. She had made up her mind.

'To grow up here is the best thing I can offer Demeter. I was always happy here as a child, and I learnt of things that Wizard children can only dream of. I want Demeter to have the same chance. But I ... I cannot stay. I promised Severus I would be there when he needed me.'

'And does he need you?' Margaret asked. There wasn't a note of accusation in her voice. She only seemed concerned.

Morgaine nodded slowly. 'Severus' main task is to protect the son of the man he has hated since they laid eyes upon each other for the first time. And now one of his childhood nemeses is coming to Hogwarts to fill the position Severus has desired for so many years. And on top of everything, Sirius Black is on the run.' She smiled sadly and softly touched her daughter's black hair. 'There is only so much a man can take. Dumbledore fears Severus will wring Remus' neck before the Christmas holidays.'

'I don't doubt that you returning to Hogwarts will be good for Severus, poppet. But will it be good for you?' Now Margaret did seem concerned.

'The day I cast the Wyvern, it chased my demons away,' Morgaine started to explain. 'And I don't know why, grandmother, but it feels as if I need magic to exist.'

Margaret nodded. 'I have noticed. You are smiling again since that afternoon.' She reached out and cupped her granddaughter's chin. 'And I can see the longing in your eyes. Go to your Severus, child. You need him just as much as he needs you. As for Demeter, I will take care of her. I promise.'

'Are you ready?'

The two women turned towards Albus Dumbledore, who was standing in the door. He had arrived at the cottage shortly before dinner to tell Remus that he had been hired as Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. And he had barely given Remus the time to answer, before he had addressed Morgaine and ask her to return to Hogwarts. Now, only a few hours later, he was already prepared to leave again. And he wanted Morgaine to go with him right away.

'I don't understand why there is such a rush, Albus,' Margaret chided him. 'It's bad enough that poor Remus had to leave without dinner in order to get his things ready. Why you insist on him taking the train tomorrow is beyond me. He could Apparate. And why everything on such short notice, Albus? Are you getting disorganised in your old days?'

Dumbledore just smiled benignly. 'At my age, one has the privilege of being somewhat eccentric, Margaret. But I do have my reasons.' Then he focused on Morgaine. 'Are you ready?' he repeated his question.

Morgaine drew a deep breath and looked pleadingly at her grandmother. 'If anything happens ...'

Margaret patted her cheek. 'Don't worry, child. Demeter is in good hands.'

'May I kiss her goodnight?' Dumbledore wondered and approached the cradle. But as he bent to kiss Demeter, the baby shrieked, and Dumbledore was cast backwards. He landed on his backside a few feet away.

Severus couldn't help but smirk at his daughter's first display of magic. She did obviously not appreciate to be kissed by just anyone, and had conjured a protective field around herself as Dumbledore had come near. And a powerful one, it seemed. Severus gloated. It served the old man right to be flung through the room by a toddler. Hopefully the landing had resulted in several bruises.

Severus grinned at the thought, and turned back towards the cradle where Morgaine had picked up Demeter to calm her. Neither of them ever saw the concerned frown on Dumbledore's face.

## XV: Fire and Ice

### *Chapter 15 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### **Chapter XV: Fire and Ice**

There she was, bent over her cauldron, her eyes narrowed with concentration. Her teeth were gnawing at her lower lip, and Severus couldn't help but smile at the sight in front of him. There were days when Morgaine reminded him so much of the young girl he had once taught, that he almost forgot how many years had passed since she had been his student. Almost twenty years it had been since he, for the first time, had instructed her to brew a potion. Twenty years since their minds had brushed each other for the first time.

Morgaine stirred the concoction once more, and as the fumes rose, the room filled with the scent of eucalyptus. Severus frowned. How did he know? Ghosts had no sense of smell. Was he able to smell the eucalyptus because he knew how the potion smelled? Or had the mental bond between him and Morgaine become so strong again that he was sharing her experiences?

He tilted his head to the side and narrowed his silvery eyes. Morgaine was tired. To know that, Severus didn't need to use Legilimency. She had been working more or less day and night since the Headmistress had cancelled all lessons due to the flu epidemic half a week ago. About a third of the school, students and staff alike, had come down with high fever and coughs, and Minerva had decided that the wisest choice was to send the still healthy students home until the worst was over. Those students who were unable to go home were confined to their common rooms, and the hospital wing had been declared a quarantine zone. Minerva would do anything to keep the epidemic from spreading like it did in the rest of Britain.

The Apothecary at St. Mungo's was hopelessly overloaded with requests for antipyretic and antibiotic potions, and responsible for the well-being of the students of Hogwarts. Poppy had begged Morgaine to help her out. Waiting to get medicines from St. Mungo's could prove to be disastrous, and Morgaine had, of course, taken to brewing at once. Severus helped out where he could, but his ghostly shape still restricted him. So instead of attempting to brew, he supervised the seven house-elves that were busy chopping potions ingredients in the dungeon.

'Have you eaten today?' he asked Morgaine as she took the cauldron from the heat and placed it on the side table beside the numerous phials.

She didn't answer, but just nodded towards a plate on her desk on which lay a half-eaten sandwich. Severus raised an eyebrow. Two slices of soggy white bread with ham between them hardly counted as proper food in his opinion.



'And when was the last time you slept?'

'January,' Morgaine muttered and started bottling the potion.

'You will not be of any help to anybody if you collapse,' Severus stated firmly and gestured for an elf to take over the bottling. 'Take a break. Have some tea and food.'

At first, Morgaine shot him a look that suggested that he had lost his mind. Then a faint grin lit up her pale face. 'Yes, Professor Snape, sir.'

The way her shoulders sagged when she sank onto the chair by her desk suggested that she only then allowed herself to feel her tiredness, as did the shaking hand with which he rubbed her forehead.

'Headache?' Severus asked.

'Skull splitting,' Morgaine admitted.

'I suggest a walk in the fresh air.' Severus could still remember how his body had sometimes reacted when he had not left the Potions lab for several days in a row. Migraine-like headaches and nausea were not uncommon symptoms for potioners to suffer from. A swift walk down to the lake and back had often helped him, especially in the cold, fresh winter air.

'But the potions ...'

Severus cut Morgaine's protest short with a gesture of his hand. 'The batch you just made will be enough to grant everyone in the hospital wing at least one night of recuperating sleep,' he said. 'And you need to give the elves a chance to finish preparing all the ingredients before you start brewing anew.' He drifted closer and fixed Morgaine with a stare that had once made the cockiest students recoil. 'Are you going outside on your own, Miss duLac, or do I have to levitate you?' Not that he knew if he were actually able to levitate a person, but he could always make the threat. After all, Morgaine didn't know either.

She gave him a tired smile and rose from her chair. When she reached the door, she turned. 'Will you join me?' she asked.

Severus just nodded. For a moment, he had feared that she would not ask.

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The February air was cold, and there was the smell of snow hanging in the air. But the sun was shining, and its light almost rendered Severus invisible. But Morgaine didn't need to see him to know that he was there. She always knew when he was around. She couldn't explain the sensation, but it could be compared to the sensation of having someone observe you across the room. It was a tingling feeling, and it made her want to smile. She recognised it from many years ago, from the time when Severus had still been alive. She had missed that feeling dearly.

At the shore of the lake, she came to a halt and let her gaze wander over the frozen surface. Part of her, the little girl she carefully kept hidden away, wanted to venture out onto the ice, run towards the sun and see how fast she could run before she slipped. But another part, the grown-up, sensible part, told her that it was too dangerous. It was late February. Soon spring would come, and the ice might not be as strong as it looked. But maybe, breaking through and getting trapped under the ice, being dragged down by the icy current would not be that bad.

Morgaine shuddered at her dark thoughts, slightly startled by the fact that they had surfaced. She had no reason to have them. She was feeling freer and happier than she had in years: Severus was right by her side, and over the last couple of weeks, she had once more given him access to her mind as well as her heart. She had shared her secrets and let him get to know their daughter. But still, something seemed to be gnawing at her. She wrapped her cloak tighter around herself, but couldn't keep herself from shuddering yet again.

'Are you cold?'

At Severus' question, Morgaine shook her head. 'No, I'm alright.'

If she had been honest, she would have admitted that she was freezing. But admitting that might make Severus suggest that she cast a Warming Charm, and Morgaine wasn't sure if she would be able to muster the strength for the spell. Nor did she know if it would help. All of a sudden, the cold seemed to have crept into her very bones.

'You are a bad liar, Morgaine,' Severus pointed out.

Suddenly it felt as if there were warm water trickling down her back, and Morgaine turned around to face Severus, who was smirking at her puzzled look.

'I have been practising,' he pointed out. 'Wandless magic is not all that difficult to master.'

'I see.' The sensation of warm water had given way to something else. Now Morgaine felt as if her whole body had been wrapped in cotton. 'What more can you do?' she enquired.

'I can conjure fire, both magical and non-magical,' Severus explained. 'I am also proficient at Vanishing spells and *Accio*. But surprisingly enough, spells involving heat are the easiest.' His pale lips curled into a smile. 'Hold out your hands,' he ordered. 'And close your eyes.'

For a moment, Morgaine felt suspicious. Whatever was Severus up to? But she did as he bade her, held out her hands and closed her eyes. For a while, nothing happened. Nothing at all. Then, all of a sudden, her hands felt warm, as if ... Morgaine gasped. It felt as if someone were holding her hands in theirs.

Her heart started to race in her chest, and her eyes flew open. Severus was standing right in front of her, but due to the sunlight, she couldn't see much more than his silhouette. But she could clearly see his ghostly hands around hers. They shimmered in blue, and they were ... yes, they were warm.

Morgaine stood as frozen. This wasn't possible. It couldn't be possible. Severus was a ghost. And ghostly hands weren't warm. This was wrong.

'How did you do that?' She didn't allow herself more than a whisper, afraid that her voice would break.

Severus just shrugged, his hands still wrapped around hers. 'I do not know,' he confessed. 'I do not even know what made me want to try. It felt ... right, somehow.'

For some moments that seemed to stretch into hours, days and lifetimes, Morgaine stared at their hands. This defied any law of magic she knew about. Ghosts could *not* conjure heart. Ghosts could *not* hold hands. But there Severus could. His hands were enfolding hers, and the gesture awakened a longing in Morgaine which made her heart break into a thousand pieces. The longing to feel Severus' touch on her skin, to feel his fingers caressing her.

She felt her throat go tight, and for a moment, the world shifted out of focus. She blinked feverishly to make the dizziness disappear, but it lingered, and Morgaine thought she was about to faint.

Severus' grip around her hands tightened. Yes, he was truly holding onto her hands. 'I knew you have been working too hard,' he pointed out, taking the sudden loss of colour on Morgaine's cheeks for a sign of exhaustion. 'We are going back to the castle right this instant. And you are not going to touch any cauldron for at least twelve hours. I want you to go lie down.'

~ ~ ~

Morgaine walked several feet in front of Severus on their way back to the castle. Her pace was swift, and her hands were deeply buried in her pockets. But however hard she clenched them into fists, they still felt warm, and the feeling of Severus' touch lingered.

This was wrong. Very, very wrong. Morgaine willed her heart to beat slower and the emotions to leave her mind, but she couldn't think clearly. The only explanation for what she had just experienced was that she had indeed been working too hard and that she had been imagining things. Severus could not have held her hands! It was impossible.

But her heart wished for nothing more than that she had *not* been imagining things.

She was so absorbed in her thoughts that she almost knocked over Poppy's favourite elf in the Entrance Hall. The shipping from St. Mungo's had finally arrived, the elf informed the Potions Mistress. For the time being, the nurse was all set with potions.

Morgaine sighed in relief. Even if she would never admit it to anyone, she was beyond exhausted. A warm bath in sandalwood scented water, a hot cup of tea, a fluffy pillow and a warm blanket sounded heavenly at the moment. But what she was longing for the most was some private time to analyse the emotions that were raging in her chest. Still, she directed her steps towards the dungeons.

'Morgaine!'

The tone in Severus' voice made her stop dead in her track. He had scared the wits out of countless students with it, and even ruthless Death Eaters had understood that no one ever defied that tone and lived to tell the tale.

Morgaine took a deep breath and turned to face him, silently thanking the afternoon sunlight that fell through the windows. Once more, Severus was almost invisible, and Morgaine was spared to look into his eyes.

'Your quarters are not in the dungeons,' Severus pointed out, 'and neither is your bed, the only place where you belong at the moment.'

'Have you ever gone to bed without making sure your Potions lab is in order?' Morgaine required.

Severus inclined his head. 'Touché, Professor. You have half an hour. After that, I will levitate you to your quarters if necessary.'

Some part of Morgaine wished that Severus would not follow her to the dungeons, but another was relieved that he did. Maybe he would explain how he had managed to touch her. Maybe he would touch her once more and thus prove that she was not going crazy. Maybe she would gather the courage to tell him what his touch had meant. But Severus didn't say anything, and they had been cleaning her workstation and putting away tools and ingredients for almost twenty minutes when there was a knock on the door.

'Morgaine?'

A mop of dark brown, ruffled hair appeared in the door, and Morgaine couldn't help but smile. As so often, the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher reminded her of a cheeky schoolboy who was about to play a trick on one of his mates.

'Alek, what are you doing down here?'

Alek grinned. 'What? Do you think I'm too scared to come down to the dark and gloomy dungeons?' He screwed up his face and started making spooky noises. But they stuck in his throat as his eyes fell on Severus, whose scowl was dark enough to make the Bloody Baron shiver.

'Ehm, Professor Snape, sir,' Alek greeted politely and straightened his robes. Despite the gloominess of the dungeons, his blush couldn't be missed. Quickly, he turned back to Morgaine. 'The Headmistress asked me to come and get you. She wants you to have dinner in the Great Hall.'

'The Great Hall?' No one had eaten dinner there for almost a week. 'Has the quarantine been lifted then?' Morgaine wondered.

'Well, partly,' Alek explained. 'The remaining students are still supposed to stay in their common rooms, but if I understood it correctly, then Professor Flitwick and Madam Pomfrey have put some kind of Disinfection Charm on the Great Hall. The Headmistress thinks that it might lift the children's spirits to be allowed to eat together again.'

Morgaine nodded. The students had been cooped up in their respective common rooms for almost two weeks now. Surely, they would love to socialise with someone other than their House mates for a change.

'How's Melvin?' she asked. Alek's nephew had been one of the first Slytherins to fall ill. His condition had worried Poppy enough at one point to consider sending him to St. Mungo's. But the boy had pulled through.

'He's better,' Alek replied. 'He's been asking for his kitten.'

'I guess Poppy wouldn't allow it.'

'Of course not.' Once more, Alek grinned. 'But I bribed an elf.'

Morgaine gave a little laugh, wondering if Hogwarts had ever before seen such a mischievous Defence teacher.

Severus, however, did not find Riverbed's initiative funny in any way. 'Do you realise that you might have endangered your nephew's health?' he enquired. 'Cats can carry all kinds of germs.'

'I was always under the impression that cats were very clean animals,' Alek retorted.

The temperature in the room dropped several degrees as Severus drew himself up to his full height, and Morgaine saw a flash of anger in ghostly eyes.

'What did you say there was for dinner, Alek?' she butted in, trying to avoid yet another showdown between the two men.

'Yellow pea soup,' Alek said, his head resolutely turned away from the ghost that was hovering a few feet to the left of Morgaine. 'And there will be pancakes for dessert, with strawberry jam and whipped cream.'

'I guess some soup wouldn't hurt.' Morgaine's eyes darted between Alek and Severus. The young man seemed to wish for nothing more than to get out of the room as fast as possible. And the ghost looked as if he would very much like to help the man vanish. 'Do you think we are done here, Severus?'

'This is your lab now, Morgaine,' Severus replied briskly. 'It is up to you to decide.'

Morgaine flinched slightly at Severus' tone. He never been one to appreciate being talked back to, but his reaction seemed a little bit too vehement to be justified.

'I'll be going to dinner then,' she announced quietly. 'I'll be in my quarters later.'

'Enjoy your soup.' Still, Severus' voice was cold as ice. He nodded curtly into Alek's direction. 'Riverbed.' Then he dissolved into thin air. He had not even looked at Morgaine.

'What's got his wand in a knot?' Alek enquired as he and Morgaine stepped out into the corridor.

'This is the second time you assume that I know how Severus Snape feels, Alek,' Morgaine replied. 'Why is that?'

Alek blushed. 'Well, I ... Weren't you two ... together, sort of, when he was ... when he was alive?'

Morgaine frowned. 'What gave you that idea?' No one knew. Well, almost no one. Minerva knew, of course, but Morgaine doubted that the Headmistress would have told the Defence teacher. And any other witch or wizard who knew was dead. Except Lucius Malfoy. But how would Alek ...

'Don't frown at me like that, Morgaine,' Alek interrupted her thoughts. 'It doesn't become you. And forgive me, I was jumping to conclusions. Forget I said anything.' He stopped walking, and a pair of hazel eyes locked onto a pair of blue. 'Please, Morgaine?'

She wasn't able to give him an answer. The words stuck in her throat, and time itself seemed to stop as he took her hand into his.

~ ~ ~

Severus was fuming. Why, he did not really know, but he hadn't felt that angry in ages. Was it because Riverbed had had cheek to talk back to him? Surely, he, Severus Snape, was above such childishness. But there was something about Alek Riverbed that made his bile rise.

And why had Minerva chosen that snot-nosed twit to fetch Morgaine to dinner anyway? Were all the elves on holiday, and was the Floo network broken? And wasn't Morgaine old enough to go to dinner on her own?

Severus concentrated on one of the ladles that was still lying on the table. Slowly, the handle started to twist. Round and round until it resembled a corkscrew. One more twist and the metal snapped. Severus looked at the broken tool with satisfaction, wondering if he would be able to wring Riverbed's neck if he put his mind to it.

He frowned at himself before he had finished the thought. What had the young man done to deserve having his neck wrung?

'I doubt Morgaine will appreciate you breaking her tools.'

Severus groaned inwardly. There he was, in the dark Potions lab, a ghost, invisible, and still the portrait of Albus Dumbledore knew that he was there.

'Could your maltreatment of inanimate objects have anything to do with Morgaine having gone to dinner without you?' Dumbledore enquired. 'Or even worse, with Morgaine having gone to dinner with the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher?'

Severus had already opened his mouth but changed his mind in the last moment. This time, he would not rise to the bait. This time, he would not let the old puppet master play mind games with him.

He turned and wordlessly drifted through the wall into the corridor beyond, leaving Dumbledore wondering whether he were still there or not.

~ ~ ~

His hands were warm on her skin, but still their touch made her shiver. His lips were warm, too, and Morgaine shifted position to give him better access. She sighed contently and lifted her head to look into his hazel eyes.

She shot up from her pillow as if stung by a Skrewt. Her heart was racing, and her robe was sticking to her back. Yes, she was still fully dressed, but lying on her bed.

Her eyes darted towards the clock on the wall. Midnight. She had only meant to lie down for a couple of minutes after dinner and then take a bath before retiring for good. But she had obviously fallen asleep.

On trembling legs, Morgaine made her way to the bathroom to splash some water on her face. Hazel eyes. Why ever had she dreamt of Alek Riverbed? And why did the memory of that dream send shivers down her spine? Sure, he had been nice to her. He had even made her laugh several times at dinner. He was cute, carefree and kind. But that was no reason to have dreams of that manner.

She hadn't had such dreams for years. The day she had buried Severus, she had also seemed to have buried her desire for men altogether. But this afternoon, when he had used this spell that had enabled him to hold her hands, he had awakened feelings in her she had not been able to handle, a longing she did not know how to fulfil.

She wrapped her arms around herself and stared at her empty bed for a couple of moments as she returned from the bathroom. Maybe the best thing to do would be to take a shower, take a Dreamless Sleep potion and hope its effects wouldn't wear off before the morning.

But Morgaine decided against that option. Instead she grabbed a shawl and commenced her descent to the dungeons.

She was surprised to find the door to Severus' old quarters ajar, and even more surprised at the golden light that was shining through the opening. There must be a fire burning in the grate.

She closed the door firmly behind her, and her eyes came to rest on Severus' ghostly form. He was hovering in front of the fireplace, his hands extended towards the flames.

'I didn't know ghosts needed to warm their hands,' she said quietly.

'I did not light the fire for my sake,' Severus answered and then slowly turned towards her. 'I was hoping you would come down here.'

The tears started falling, and as much as Morgaine hated it when Severus saw her cry, she did not even try to stop them. There was no point. Her sorrow was threatening to tear her heart apart, and Severus needed to know.

'I miss it, Severus,' she confessed. 'I miss the feeling of your arms around me. I miss the warmth of your lips and the touch of fingers on my skin. I miss you.'

'I miss you, too, Morgaine.' Severus drifted slowly towards her. 'I miss the way you brushed the hair out of my face and caressed my cheek. And I miss the way you held my hand in the dark.' Just as earlier that day, he took her hands into his. Once again, his hands shimmered in blue and felt warm, as if he had really just warmed them at the fire. 'Why do you think I have been practising so hard?'

Morgaine blinked fiercely and looked down at their entwined hands just to look up moments later. A pair of tear-filled blue eyes locked onto a pair that had once been onyx and deep as the Black Lake.

'Don't let go tonight.' It was not even a whisper, but a silent plea shared by two loving souls. 'Don't let go. I beg you.'

# XVI: Apart

## Chapter 16 of 40

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XVI: Apart

'You have to be patient, little one. The term doesn't end for another month.'

'But you're coming straight home after that, aren't you, Mother?'

'You don't want me to go to London first to buy you a present in Diagon Alley?'

Morgaine smiled mischievously, and Demeter seemed to contemplate her mother's offer for a couple of moments. But then the girl shook her head resolutely, her black hair whipping around her face. 'No, I want you to come straight to Iceland because ...' She broke off, and her blue eyes darted from the left to the right, as if to check that no one was eavesdropping on her. 'I miss you, Mummy,' she whispered.

Morgaine swallowed drily. 'I miss you, too, Demeter. Not long now.' She tilted her head to the side and smiled once more, a kind smile this time, a smile reserved for the people who held a special place in her heart. 'You should be in bed, little one,' she added. 'One hour time difference or not, it is late.'

'But the sun's still up!' Demeter protested.

'If you wait to go to sleep until the sun sets and get up when it rises again, you will get very little sleep. Go now. Sweet dreams.'

Morgaine's tone was friendly but firm, very much like the tone she used in class, and Demeter didn't argue. She bid her mother goodnight and blew her a kiss through the fire. A moment later, she was gone, and the flames died not long after her face had disappeared. But Morgaine stayed on her knees in front of the now empty grate. There was still a ghost of a smile on her face, but it didn't reach her eyes anymore.

'She seems to miss you a lot,' Severus said in a low voice as he detached himself from the shadows from where he had been listening to their conversation. 'I assume you feel the same.'

Morgaine took a deep, shaking breath, and Severus could see her twisting her hands in her lap. 'I missed so much time with her,' Morgaine said quietly. 'And I cannot believe that there was a time when I was unable to love her.'

Severus drifted closer. 'It is not like you actively chose not to love her.' He did not like to have that conversation. They had had it before, and still he found it hard to convince Morgaine of what was obvious to him. 'You had a rough pregnancy, and Demeter's first year was a difficult time for you. No one can blame you for having felt overwhelmed. You must not blame yourself, Morgaine.'

She bit her lip in a very similar manner Demeter had moments ago, and despite the serious topic, Severus couldn't help but smile. The girl might have his looks, but from what he had seen of her so far, she was her mother through and through. The same annoying habit of biting her lip, the same smile, the same sparkling eyes.

Severus lowered himself to his knees and looked into Morgaine's eyes. As so often, far too often, they weren't sparkling. Her blue eyes looked haunted, and her body language told Severus that Morgaine did not want to talk but rather run away. But he could not keep quiet and leave her with her dark thoughts. 'You love Demeter,' he continued in a calm tone. He had to convince her. 'And most importantly, Demeter knows that you do.'

He could literally see Morgaine tense up. This, too, had happened before, and it made him feel utterly helpless. Most of the time, when Morgaine spoke about Demeter or shared her memories with him, she was happy, and he could see a mother's pride reflect in her eyes. But there were other times, times like this one, when a shadow passed over her face and she turned away from him to hide, blaming herself for things that had been out of her hands. Those moments were far too many, and sometimes Severus feared that he would never be able to convince Morgaine that she was not to blame.

Whenever had she become so fearful, so self-accusing? She had always been so strong, standing right by his side for years, taking the blows that had been dealt out by both sides. Tall and unwaveringly she had stood year after year, facing all sorts of evil and accusations. Now Severus doubted that she would have the strength.

She was looking at him now with that sad smile that made him ache deep inside his soul. There was a treacherous tear hanging on her lashes, and Severus wished for nothing more than to wrap his arms around her and let her cry at his shoulder. But he was unable to. No matter how much he practised, no matter how many other ghosts he asked for advice, the only touch he was capable of was holding her hand sometimes.

He concentrated hard, put all his mental energy into materialising, and as he extended his ghostly hand towards hers it once more shimmered blue and he managed to close his fingers around hers.

'You must not blame yourself, Morgaine,' he repeated. 'You must not brood on the past. It will not change anything. Trust me. I speak from experience.'

Morgaine laughed a little at his dry tone and looked down at their entwined hands. Severus wished she would squeeze back, but she never did. In some way, he could understand her. Him being able to hold her hand defied every law of magic he knew of, and he assumed that Morgaine was afraid. But at least she did not flinch away. Her hand lay still in his, small and warm, and Severus wondered if he was really able to feel the warmth of her skin or if the sensation was just an imprint in his mind, a memory from a time long gone.

'I've been thinking about something,' Morgaine suddenly said. 'When Demeter comes to Hogwarts ... I do not want the other students to think that she is receiving any special treatment just because she is a duLac. And in case she gets sorted into Slytherin ...' She took a deep breath to gather her courage. 'Severus, I was wondering ... would you like Demeter to carry your last name?'

For a moment, Severus was taken aback. Demeter carrying his name would mean telling the whole world that she was his child. Would she want to? So far, they had not even met.

'That it is up Demeter to decide,' he said, his tone low and calm. 'After all, the girl has never laid eyes on me. She might not want to carry my name.' He squeezed Morgaine's hand tighter as she opened her mouth to protest and smirked. 'Besides, Snape does not exactly have a beautiful tone.'

He stayed for another hour or two. Morgaine sat by the fire and drank tea, and when Severus saw her eyelids become heavy, he bid her goodnight. She would never tell him to leave, and as much as he liked to watch her sleep, he wanted her to sleep undisturbed that night. As he floated towards the door, he heard her call his name and turned around to face her once more.

'Demeter will love your name,' she declared. 'And she will carry it with pride.'

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Morgaine Apparated to the edge of the geyser field, almost an hour's walk from the tiny village she had grown up in. She could have Flooed directly to her grandmother's kitchen, but she had chosen differently. She was in a strange mood and needed some time on her own to clear her head before meeting her daughter.

She had spent her last night at Hogwarts in the dungeons, first curled up in the armchair in Severus' old study, then in his bed. They had talked, they had laughed, and when she had drifted off to sleep, Severus had once more held her hand. This time, she had dared squeeze back. Normally, she was too afraid that her fingers would go straight through his, that her moving would break the spell. But last night, another fear had been bigger: she had been afraid that it could be the last time they held hands.

It was a silly and utterly illogical thought, Morgaine knew that. Why would Severus not be at Hogwarts anymore when she returned in the autumn? Why would her leaving the castle mean that he would leave, too? He had been waiting for her when she had returned after New Year's. Her fear didn't make sense. But still, there was a knot in her stomach, and she felt frightened. Certainly, Severus had promised that he would never leave her side. But how could he make such a promise? He had still no idea why he had not passed on. How could he know that he would not just vanish into thin air one day? And what would she do the day it happened?

The hissing of a geyser made her snap up her head. She had to stop brooding, she told herself. Looking for answers that did not exist might just push her over the edge and make her tumble into the depths of insanity. Better to concentrate on the present, the tangible, the rational.

The village where she had spent the bigger part of her childhood had already come into sight. It lay peacefully embedded between the green hills, far away from any roads or other signs of civilisation, protected by ancient magic. Those who did not know of its existence or came uninvited would never find it. The village was detached from the real world and lay beneath it, behind it. Morgaine did not fully understand the ancient spells, but she knew they were there. They had protected her once, just as they were now protecting her daughter.

She narrowed her eyes, squinting into the sunlight, trying to identify the dark figure that had detached itself from the village. The figure was approaching quickly, and as it came closer, Morgaine could make out a dark blue skirt, a matching shirt, a pale face and raven black hair. Both mother and daughter broke into a run and almost fell as they embraced each other. And for a moment, Morgaine considered never to let go again.

'You have grown,' she pointed out as she held Demeter at an arm's length later. Not even twelve years old, and already Demeter had outgrown her.

*Snake genes*, Morgaine concluded, she herself being barely five and a half feet tall with round hips and soft curves. Demeter, however, was tall and lean. Her skin was pale, and her hair was framing her face like velvety curtains. Her father's daughter, through and through. Anyone who had known Severus would notice.

Demeter straightened and compared her height to her mother's. 'Looks like you can't call me little one anymore.' She smiled, and her eyes seemed to reflect the sunlight. They were blue and twinkling, just like Dumbledore's once had been. Just as kind. And Morgaine did her best not to turn away.

~ ~ ~

'A letter for Master Snape.'

At the former Potions master's command, the elf unrolled the parchment and put it on the desk. And as the ghost did not give any further instructions, the little creature Disapparated with a pop.

Morgaine's handwriting had changed slightly over the years, Severus noticed as he let his eyes travel down the parchment. It was still neat but now slightly cramped. And at some places, the letters looked shaky.

*It is almost midnight, but the sun has not yet set. Everyone else is asleep, and I will go to bed soon as well. But first, I wanted to let you know that I arrived safely.*

*I spent the evening alone by the Well. The place still looks the same, quiet and peaceful. Do you remember it, Severus? Up there, on the hill?*

Yes, he remembered the Well. Morgaine had brought him there when she had just been seventeen. He had been her teacher, and she had been his student. And still they had shared a kiss. It had been wrong, and still they had fallen in love.

*Demeter has grown a fair bit. She is almost two heads taller than me now. Your genes, I assume. Oh, she looks so much like you.*

How much must it have hurt to return to Iceland after his death and find that their daughter had grown up to look just like him, Severus mused. He knew how it felt to be haunted by one's past. *His* ghosts had once taken the form of a child as well. He had never been able to look into Harry Potter's eyes and not feel a stab of guilt. He had failed to protect the boy's mother, and those green eyes had reminded him of his failure over and over again.

A frown appeared on Severus' ghostly brow. Lily. By Merlin, he had not thought of her since the night Morgaine had mentioned his Patronus, and that was almost a year ago. Never before or after had the memory of Lily crossed his mind after his death.

Severus thought back to his last moments in life, when he had lain dying, looking into Harry Potter's green eyes. He had seen Lily's eyes then, but it had been Morgaine's voice, the memory of her and her love, that had made him let go. And since that moment, his whole heart and his whole soul had belonged to Morgaine. He would spend eternity by her side if it were up to him.

But was it wise, he suddenly wondered. Was it good for Morgaine? Or was she spending too many nights in the dungeons in his company and too many nights in his bed? Was he keeping her from living her life? She was still young, still alive but spent most of her time with a ghost. Even now, when she was in Iceland, thousands of miles away from him, her mind was still with him. Instead of going to bed, she was writing a letter to a ghost.

The cold hands of guilt gripped Severus' soul. He had thought hoped that his being there for Morgaine when she returned to Hogwarts would do her good. They had never said goodbye in life, and he had hoped that they would be able to take farewell now and that it would enable Morgaine to let go. But instead, they were steadily growing closer.

It wasn't natural. It couldn't be good for her. But Severus had no idea how to help her start living her own life again.

~ ~ ~

Many miles away, surrounded by green hills, hissing geysers and ancient magic, Morgaine lay awake in her bed. She had fallen asleep the moment her head had made contact with her pillow and slept dreamlessly for a couple of hours. But in the early morning, just when the summer sun had started to creep through the gap between the curtains, she had shot up, feeling chilled to the bones, her heart racing.

Her eyes darted around the room, and it took her a moment to realise that she was not at Hogwarts anymore. She was in her old room in Iceland, and around her was only silence. There was nothing there that could have woken her up. She closed her eyes again and took some deep breaths, willing her heartbeat to slow down and at the same time trying to remember her dreams. Surely, she must have woken up from a nightmare, judging from how her nightshirt stuck to her back and the fast beating of her heart. But as much as she tried to remember her dreams, she was only met by emptiness, and all that was left was a chilling feeling of cold and solitude.

There was no point in trying to go back to sleep, Morgaine knew that. So despite the early hour, she dressed and went outside. The house was still silent and so was the rest of the village. No one was up apart from her. They were all still sleeping peacefully, and Morgaine could not explain why she was not doing the same.

She wandered around aimlessly, breathing deeply and enjoying the peace around her, and before she knew it, she was walking along the river, her eyes fixed on a spot not far ahead, a spot where once a lonely birch tree had stood. A tree that had known so many of her secrets and which she had burnt to ashes a year ago, because she had hoped it would help her to start anew.

But nothing had started anew. She had hoped to be able to take farewell of Severus, to let him go, for both their sakes. Instead, they had grown closer. And Morgaine doubted that she would survive if Severus disappeared. Their souls had been connected for many years, but now it felt as if his had become a part of hers.

Abruptly, she stopped and turned. She would not go any closer to the place where she had fallen in love and promised her heart to Severus. She couldn't. She mustn't. She had to let go. But she had no idea how.

She fortified her mental walls and returned to the village. Today she would start tutoring her daughter. When the girl came to Hogwarts, she would know enough about charms and spells to be able to shine in class and impress her teachers. And she would also be prepared to meet her father's ghost.

## XVII: The Potions Master's Daughter

*Chapter 17 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XVII: The Potions Master's Daughter

Once again, Morgaine was wandering about the house several hours before any of its other inhabitants had even a thought of stirring. Should someone ask, she would blame the early sunrise and claim that the first golden beams had tickled her nose and coaxed her out of bed. But in fact, she had awoken long before the sunlight had peeked through the gap in the curtains. Just what had awoken her, Morgaine did not know. She never did. There was never any noise, nor could she remember any of her dreams.

She wrapped her cold fingers around a cup of hot tea, closed her eyes and inhaled deeply: valerian root, mint, camomile and lavender, her grandmother's own blend. The third morning Morgaine had ventured into the kitchen before sunrise, the tea had been standing on the counter, right beside her favourite cup. And as there were no house-elves around, Morgaine assumed that her grandmother had placed it there. Naturally, the old woman knew exactly what was going on in her house, even in the wee hours of morning. She must have known that Morgaine wasn't sleeping. But she never said a word.

The tea was sweet and made Morgaine unwind, but going back to bed was not an option. She wouldn't find any more sleep. Instead she opened the backdoor and placed a woollen blanket on the bench outside. She would await the morning there, as she had done so often lately.

The garden had not changed: lavender was growing close to the door for protection, kitchen herbs had been planted to the left, medicinal plants to the right. The little greenhouse, heated by an underground hot spring, still held exotic flowers and bushes, and all over the lawn grew flowers in small groups. Some were indigenous to Iceland, others were not. But all the plants and flowers had one thing in common: they were healthy and well taken care of. Margaret had always had green fingers, and she loved her flowers dearly.

Not far from the backdoor grew a tender rose bush. Only a couple of weeks earlier, that bush had looked as if it were ready for the compost heap. No wonder really. Despite the Gulf Stream, the Icelandic climate was harsh, and roses were delicate flowers. But Demeter had insisted on taking care of the bush, and now there were new buds, some looking ready to open any moment.

Morgaine smiled. She herself had never shown any talent for making things grow. And Severus, well, he had had a small garden at Spinner's End where he had grown plants for his potions. But he had never struck Morgaine as a devoted botanist. Demeter could certainly not have inherited her talent from either of her parents.

When Morgaine heard steps behind her, she did not need to turn around. Besides her, there was only one person in the house who would leave her bed at this hour. Moments later, she found the empty cup in her hand being replaced by a new one.

'How did you know back then, when Demeter was just a baby?' Morgaine asked as her grandmother had settled on the bench beside her. 'How did you know that she would have green fingers?'

Margaret smiled and brushed her granddaughter's cheek with the back of her wrinkled hand. 'Are you implying that I knew about Demeter's gift and chose her name accordingly?'

Morgaine nodded silently. She did not look up at her grandmother. Instead she concentrated on the trace of warmth that the old woman's touch had left on her cheek. It seemed to be seeping right through her skin and into her very soul.

'How do you know that it was not the other way around?' Margaret continued. 'How do you know that I did not just find the name pretty and that the Earth Mother later on blessed the child who carried her name?'

Morgaine frowned slightly. Despite having been brought up with the Old Faith, the idea of gods and goddesses had never appealed to her. She found it therefore hard to imagine that any deity had blessed her daughter in any way.

'Don't frown like that, child,' Margaret said and once more patted Morgaine's cheek. 'I have seen enough babes to just know that Demeter would have the gift of making flowers bloom.'

'You didn't choose my name, did you?' Morgaine asked. It was a stupid question, she knew that. She had not been born far away from Iceland, far away from the protective hands of her grandmother.

Margaret shook her head. 'Your name still fits you, child. Morgaine le Fay was a wise woman and a gifted witch. She was loyal and loved passionately. Just like you.'

'Depending on who you ask, Morgaine le Fay was also a traitor and an evil sorceress,' Morgaine interrupted. And all of a sudden, the early sunny morning seemed chilly and cloudy. And she wished she had not asked.

'Don't be silly, child,' Margaret chided, and Morgaine bit her lip as if she were indeed a little child that had just been scolded for being cheeky.

'I would have chosen a very different name for you,' Margaret explained, cupping Morgaine's chin and making the younger woman look at her. 'I would have given you the name of a protector, a caregiver. Because taking care of people is your greatest gift, Morgaine, no matter how much you are denying it. Just make sure you do not forget your own needs along the way.'

Two pairs of blue eyes locked onto each other, and Morgaine swallowed drily. Never before had she realised just how much her grandmother's eyes resembled Dumbledore's. Like her own, they were of the brightest blue, and they seemed to be able to look right into her soul.

She was, however, spared having to fortify her mental barriers by Demeter appearing in the door. 'I thought I'd be the first one up.' The girl yawned and rubbed her sleepy eyes.

Morgaine tore her eyes away from her grandmother's and looked at her daughter instead, who was standing in the door, her black hair ruffled and her feet bare. 'You will have to get up with the sun to beat me, little one.'

Demeter yawned once more and padded through the grass to inspect her roses. 'They will bloom soon,' she pointed out. 'I knew it!'

'I'll get breakfast started,' Margaret declared and once more tried to catch Morgaine's eyes. But Morgaine just gave her a sad smile and rose to join her daughter.

'Do you enjoy taking care of flowers?' she asked.

The girl nodded eagerly, and Morgaine pointed towards a cluster of dark blue and purple flowers. 'Can you tell me what this is?' No time better to test her daughter's herbal knowledge than this.

'Aconite,' Demeter answered at once. 'It's highly poisonous, but Granny uses it in an ointment against her rheumatism.'

The next flower Morgaine pointed at was violet.

'Belladonna,' Demeter answered. She was beaming with pride. 'It's a hallucinogenic and also highly poisonous.'

'Don't you think it is dangerous to grow all those poisonous plants?' Morgaine enquired.

'They are only dangerous for ignorant people,' Demeter explained with a serious tone. 'With the right knowledge, those plants can be very useful.'

Morgaine smiled. This was exactly the kind of answer she had expected from her daughter. 'Looks like there is a chance that we will all survive when I let you near your first cauldron.'

Demeter's mouth fell open. 'A cauldron? Does that mean you are going to teach me Potions?'

Morgaine nodded. 'Potions, Herbology, whatever you like. It is time for you to learn magic, little one.'

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Morgaine smiled at the amazed look on her daughter's face. The girl was staring in awe at the water goblet that moments earlier had been a little grey rat.

'Will I learn how to do this?' Demeter asked with an incredulous tone in her voice.

'This and much more,' Morgaine affirmed.

'Like what?'

'You have read my old books, little one,' Morgaine replied. 'You know exactly what you will learn.'

But it was obvious that the girl did not want to learn about magic from books alone. 'I want you to tell me, Mother. I want you to show me and teach me!'

Demeter was almost levitating with excitement, and Morgaine laughed lightly. She had forgotten that the child had grown up without magic. And she had also forgotten how she herself had stared at Remus in awe when he had shown her how to do magic all those years ago.

'You don't want to wait another few weeks and be taught at Hogwarts then?' she joked.

Demeter shot her a look that more or less declared her insane. 'Of course not!' she exclaimed. 'Teach me now!'

Once more, Morgaine smiled and extended her wand towards her daughter. 'Be careful with it,' she warned. 'This wand is getting old. I'd like to use it for a couple of years more.'

Demeter's eyes widened as she carefully took the wand from her mother's hand. 'What is it made of?' she wanted to know.

'Birch tree. The core is made of dragon heartstring. Ollivander said it was a protective wand.' Morgaine grinned. 'But I reckon it's quite good at Transfiguration, too,' she added with a shrug.

Demeter was still holding the wand reverently in her open hands, gaping at it as if were made out of pure gold and adorned with precious gems.

'It won't do any magic like that, little one,' Morgaine teased. 'Take a hold of it.'

Demeter hesitated for another moment but then closed her left hand firmly around the handle. 'It feels warm,' she exclaimed.

Morgaine nodded. 'Then it might just work for you.' She put a feather on the table in front of them. 'Now, the movement you want to make is a swish and a flick,' she instructed and mimicked the motion with her empty hand. 'The spell is *Wingardium Leviosa*.'

Demeter tried it at once, but nothing happened.

'Don't worry, little one,' Morgaine said in a calming voice as she saw the disappointed look on her daughter's face. 'It's not your own wand, and it's the first time you've tried.'

She stepped behind Demeter and placed her left hand on the girl's wrist. 'Swish and flick,' she repeated, guiding Demeter's hand until the movement was just right. Then she stepped away. '*Wingardium Leviosa*. Have another try.'

At the third try, the feather lifted from the table. Slowly, slowly it rose into the air, and the higher it rose, the broader became the smile on Demeter's face. 'I can do magic!' she called out. 'Look, Mother!'

Morgaine smiled happily. She had never doubted her daughter's magical abilities, but the girl's joy was like balm on her soul. 'I never expected anything less from you,' she pointed out.

Slowly she took her wand from Demeter and carefully tucked it away in the folds of her robes.

'Tomorrow we will see how well you do in Potions.'

~ ~ ~

Demeter had a hard time falling asleep that night. She was so excited! She had done magic today!

She had always known that she was a witch, and she had now and then been able to do things the other children in the village could not. She could swing higher than them, and when she jumped off the swing, she would soar through the air as if she were flying. Sometimes she could make small objects move without touching them. Once she had stopped a pot of boiling water from falling onto a little boy. Her great-grandmother had explained to her why she could do those things. Apparently, all wizard children could do some magic, even without a wand. But today, she had for the first time done magic because she had meant to. And it had been a glorious feeling that had made her heart beat faster in her chest.

But the best thing that had happened today had not been her making a feather levitate from a table. It had been the look on her mother's face. She had looked so happy today, genuinely happy. She had been smiling and laughing, and her eyes had been glittering. And that had meant the world to Demeter.

Whomever she talked to about her mother, they would sooner or later always mention her mother's smile and how her eyes smiled as much as her lips. But as much as Demeter wracked her brains, she could not make herself remember many such occasions. Her mother's eyes had always been kind and friendly, but smiling? No, they were rarely smiling. If Demeter were to describe the emotions she could see in her mother's eyes, she would choose the words sadness and loneliness. Especially over the last couple of years, since her mother had returned from the Wizarding world to tell her that her father had fallen in the war, those two emotions had always been reflecting in her eyes. Her mother had not cried the night she had returned from Hogwarts almost six years ago, but Demeter had sensed that something had died inside her. But she had never asked, because she had not wanted to make her mother even sadder than she already was.

Demeter slipped out of bed and lit a candle on her desk to be able to find her copy of *Hogwarts A History*. The pages she was intending to look at were so worn that she didn't need to bookmark them anymore. She knew exactly where to open the book to find the picture of her father.

Demeter let her fingers trail over the photograph. It was a strange feeling to look at it. They looked so much alike, Severus Snape and her, and still he was a stranger. Half a year ago, during the Christmas holidays, her mother had for the very first time talked about him. She had answered every question Demeter had asked, but still the girl was thirsty for more.

She was wondering why he had not moved on, of course, why his ghost was still lingering at Hogwarts. But her mother had said that she did not know. Demeter wondered if her father knew. Maybe, if she asked, he would tell her.

Or maybe he would not.

The thought of that possibility made Demeter flinch. What if he did not want to talk to her at all? He didn't know her. For eleven years, he had not even known that she existed. And now that he did know, he had never contacted her.

Maybe ghosts could not write letters or use the Floo, Demeter tried to calm herself for the umpteenth time. Yes, that must be it. He was unable to contact her. They'd meet each other once she was at Hogwarts. There was no rush and no need to worry.

Demeter extinguished the candle and returned to her bed. But as she lay down, the uncertainty crept back into her heart. Part of her wanted to get up again and walk to her mother's room to tell her about her fears. But she didn't dare. Her mother had been happy today, and Demeter did not want to spoil it. She would tell her tomorrow, or any other day when the time seemed right.

With a sigh, Demeter pulled up her blanket and closed her eyes, silently praying that asking about her father would not extinguish the light she had seen in her mother's eyes today.

~ ~ ~

'Now, if you stir the potion seven times clockwise, it will *cure* the hiccup,' Morgaine explained. 'If you stir it counterclockwise, it will *produce* a hiccup, and whoever drinks this potion will be hiccupping one hour for every stir you add.'

Demeter fixed Morgaine with a calculating look, obviously trying to figure out which would please her mother more, her producing a healing potion or a joke. Her mother seemed in a good mood today. Maybe a little joke wouldn't hurt.

'I think I will stir the potion thrice, counterclockwise,' she announced. And so she did. The potion turned pink, and Demeter grinned.

Morgaine stared at her daughter for a moment and then laughed. 'Your father would throw a fit if he had seen this.' She pulled Demeter into a hug and planted a kiss on her forehead. 'Remind me to avoid Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes when we get to Diagon Alley.'

'Why would we do that?' Demeter sounded surprised and disappointed at the same time.

'Because I don't think Hogwarts is quite ready for a prankster like you.'

When Morgaine let go of her daughter, she saw the little one chewing her lip. 'I'm only joking, little one. Of course I will take you to the Weasley shop.'

Demeter didn't answer at once but kept chewing her lip. There was a frown on her brow, and if Morgaine hadn't known better, she would have thought the child was about to cry.

'Do you think he'll like me?' Demeter finally brought forth. 'Father, I mean. What if he doesn't?'

The question hit Morgaine like a Bludger to the guts. 'Don't even dare thinking that, Demeter,' she exclaimed a little more vehemently than she had meant to. 'Why on earth would you think that your father will anything but adore you?'

Demeter had shrunk away slightly and was still chewing her bottom lip. Soon she would draw blood. 'He has never met me. He has no idea who I am. Why would he like me?'

'Because you are his daughter!' Morgaine brought her hands to her face and took a shaking breath. She had to calm down. Her raising her voice at Demeter and losing her composure was not helping. 'Sit down, little one. Please.'

Demeter did as she was told, and as she had sat down on the bench, she looked up at her mother with her big blue eyes and a questioning look. And the tear that hung at her dark lashes hurt Morgaine more than anything else. Now it was her turn to be biting her lip. What had she done? Her secrecy had hurt the two people she loved most in this world. Severus not passing on and her daughter thinking that her father would not love her was her fault. Hers alone.

'I am so sorry, Demeter,' she started. 'It should never have come to this. Even if it was too dangerous for your father to know about you, I should have told you about him many years ago.'

'Why didn't you?' Demeter's jaw was set, and Morgaine knew the girl would not let her off the hook. And she had every right to know.



'There is a reason why your mother wasn't Sorted into Gryffindor, little one. She's a coward.'

Demeter opened her mouth to interrupt, but Morgaine kept on talking. 'When your father was still alive, I thought I was making the right choice not telling you about him. I thought you would not miss him if you never knew him. I should have known better, of course. And after your father's death ... It simply hurt too much then.'

'If you hadn't met his ghost, would you ever have told me about him?'

Morgaine sank onto the bench beside her daughter. She suddenly felt exhausted and did not trust her legs to carry her anymore. 'I don't know, little one,' she whispered.

They sat in silence for a while, each of them absorbed in their own thoughts, and Morgaine did her best to keep her head from spinning and her stomach from turning. Why she was feeling that abysmal, she had no idea. But then again, she had not had a proper night's sleep in weeks. And she had been completely unprepared for Demeter's questions.

'Will he like me?' Demeter piped up after a while.

Still she was looking at her mother with her big eyes, and Morgaine couldn't help but wrap her arms around her child and pull her close.

'He does already, dear child. Ever since he learnt of your existence, he has been asking about you almost daily. He wanted to see you as a little child, he wanted to hear you first words and to see your first steps. And I showed him all of it.'

'You showed him?' Demeter sounded surprised.

Morgaine nodded. 'One of the wonders of magic, little one. There are ways to revisit your memories and share them with others.'

'And Father seemed to like what he saw?' Still, Demeter sounded uncertain.

'He is already very proud of you, little one.'

'So he will like me?'

'He will love you and adore you,' Morgaine assured her daughter. 'And trust me, little one. He is just as scared as you are.'

## XVIII: Diagon Alley

*Chapter 18 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XVIII: Diagon Alley

'Tell me about Diagon Alley once more.'

Morgaine raised a questioning eyebrow at her daughter. 'Once more? I bet you can draw a map of Diagon Alley in your sleep by now.'

'Please?'

Who could resist the pleading look in those blue eyes, Morgaine wondered, and abandoned her packing to sit beside Demeter on the bed.

The girl was already tucked in. She had a big day ahead of her, leaving her childhood home and entering the Wizarding world for the first very time the next day. She needed a good night's rest. But, understandably, she was far too excited to go to sleep.

'We will be staying at the Leaky Cauldron,' Morgaine started. 'To enter Diagon Alley, we'll have to go through the rear courtyard.'

'And tap a brick in the wall,' Demeter butted in, 'which can be found by counting three up and two across, three times.'

'I see you've been paying attention.' Morgaine ruffled Demeter's raven black hair. It was thick and silky. 'Do you remember which shops we will pass on our way to Gringott's?'

Demeter nodded eagerly. 'The Cauldron Shop, the Apothecary, Flourish and Blotts, the Owl Emporium, the ...'

'Breathe, little one.' Morgaine smiled. The girl was so excited, and her enthusiasm was certainly infectious. 'Tell me, Demeter,' she asked, 'if you could only go to one single shop, where would you want to go?'

'Only one?' Demeter's eyes narrowed, and she seemed to be contemplating her mother's question as if it were the most important one in the world. 'I would want to go ... to Ollivander's.'

'And why is that?'

'Because,' Demeter started in a determined tone, 'I cannot do magic without a wand. I will need a wand in every subject at Hogwarts: Charms, Transfiguration, Potions ... There's no point in showing up without a wand.'

Morgaine nodded in approval. 'A wise choice, little one. I have a feeling you might just be sorted into Ravenclaw House.'

'Would you mind?' All of a sudden, Demeter sounded anxious, and Morgaine looked at her in concern.

'What do you mean, would I mind?'

Demeter started gnawing at her bottom lip. 'You're the Head of Slytherin House,' she started carefully. 'You were in Slytherin yourself, and so was Father. I thought ... well, I ... Am I not expected to be sorted into Slytherin as well?'

Morgaine fixed her daughter with an intense look. 'It doesn't matter to me which House you're sorted into. All four Houses have admirable qualities, and wherever you end up, I will be proud of you.' She would, indeed. But if it were up to her to make the Sorting Hat's decision ...

'Now, close your eyes and go to sleep. You have a big day ahead of you.'

The discussion about the Sorting was far from over, Morgaine knew that very well, but Demeter did not argue. She never did. Instead, she snuggled down, and Morgaine packed down the last of the girl's possessions into a trunk before extinguishing the candles. She did not leave the room, however. She lingered by the door, leaning with her back against the wall, her eyes lingering on her daughter.

What House would the girl be sorted into, she wondered. As Head of Slytherin, Morgaine would be honoured to have the daughter of Severus Snape in her House. But as the girl's mother, she was not sure if she was willing to take the risk.

Only when Demeter's breathing had become slow and regular, and Morgaine was sure that the girl was fast asleep, did she sneak out of the room.

'That wasn't really the truth, was it?'

Morgaine quickly closed the door behind her and glowered at her grandmother. 'I have no idea what you're talking about.' Her tone was harsh, but the old woman did not seem to mind.

'Come, child,' she said instead, extending her wrinkled hand. 'I think some tea will do you good.'

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'You do mind which House Demeter will be sorted in, don't you?' Margaret followed up in the kitchen some minutes later.

Morgaine settled on a stool by the empty fireplace and started fiddling with the folds of her skirt, her eyes on her hands. All of a sudden, she was feeling miserable. 'I'm sorry I snapped at you, Granny,' she apologised.

'Never mind, child. I must blame myself. Eavesdropping is a nasty habit and should be punished.' Margaret put two steaming cups on the little coffee table and pulled up her chair so she came to sit right beside her granddaughter. 'Like to share your worries?'

'All of them?' Morgaine sighed. 'That will keep us up all night.'

Margaret smiled kindly. 'I would love to hear about all of your concerns. But I know you won't talk, and I have no plans of forcing you.'

Morgaine's lips twitched into a tiny smile. 'There is no Veritaserum in this tea then?'

Margaret shook her head. 'It would take a very brave woman to try and trick the Potions mistress of Hogwarts. Or a very foolish one.'

The tea smelled of peppermint. Peppermint and honey. Definitely no Veritaserum, but it still loosened Morgaine's tongue.

'I could keep a close eye on Demeter if she were sorted into Slytherin,' she started. 'I could have the elves take care of her. And I am sure the Bloody Baron could be persuaded to look after her as well.'

'Does Demeter need to be looked after?'

'If she is sorted into Slytherin House, then yes.' It was a vicious circle. The House in which Morgaine could protect her daughter the best was at the same time the House that posed the most danger.

'There is a strange mood in Slytherin,' Morgaine continued. 'There are still children there who have been brought up with Death Eater beliefs, and some of them are convinced that the reign of Voldemort is not over yet.'

*And some are waiting for the Heir of Slytherin* she added in her mind. But she couldn't tell her grandmother. She did not want to worry her. Not yet anyway. Maybe it was all just propaganda. Maybe everything would work out just fine. No, there was no need to worry the old woman.

'And what are you afraid of?' Margaret asked. 'That Demeter will listen to foolish tales and be misled? You and I both know that she is too smart for that.'

'I know. I know.' Morgaine put down her cup and rubbed her eyes. 'I am tired, and I worry too much. Demeter will do fine whatever House she is sorted in.' She attempted a grin. 'Look at me. First one in our family who did not end up in Gryffindor. I still turned out alright, didn't I?' She waved her hand as to mark the end of the conversation and got up. 'I have to finish packing my things. We'll be leaving right after breakfast tomorrow.'

She accepted her grandmother's embrace and then quickly made her way through the dark corridor towards her room. Once inside she locked the door, holding hard onto the doorknob and resting her aching head against the wood.

'Stop worrying,' she whispered to herself. 'Demeter will do fine. Of course she will.'

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It was a tear-filled goodbye. As much as Demeter was looking forward to starting her new life in the Wizarding world, taking farewell of her great-grandmother and the children in the village was not easy. But by the time her mother had explained how a Portkey worked, the girl had bravely wiped away her tears. And when their feet hit the wooden floor in their room at the Leaky Cauldron, Demeter's face was glowing with excitement.

'So we're here now?' she enquired. 'Is this the Wizarding world?' She never waited for her mother to answer but ran straight to the window. 'That shop down there, is that the Apothecary? And that one, is that the cauldron shop?'

Morgaine placed a hand on her daughter's shoulder to make her calm down. The girl was literally jumping up and down with joy. 'I assume me suggesting that we'll go for a walk in Muggle London will not be well received?'

'Are you kidding me?' The girl swirled around and looked at her mother as if she had just suggested that the world was flat. And Morgaine couldn't help but laugh.

'I have a better suggestion then,' she said. 'We'll do some window shopping on our way to Gringotts, and then you get to choose where to go.'

'Ollivander's,' Demeter blurted out. 'No, Flourish & Blotts. Or the Weasley shop. Or, or, ...'

'The Apothecary, I think,' Morgaine pointed out. 'You, little one, need a Calming Draught.'

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Morgaine walked a couple of feet behind Demeter as they made their way through Diagon Alley. Even if she had wanted to, she doubted that she would be able to keep up with the girl. She was like a whirlwind, darting from one shop window to the other, her smile growing broader by the second. Never, not under any Christmas tree in the world, had a child ever looked happier.

'Well then, choose a shop,' Morgaine repeated once they were standing outside the burnished bronze doors of Gringotts again.

Demeter, however, looked slightly puzzled. Whether it was due to her first meeting with a goblin or whether she was overwhelmed by her surroundings, Morgaine did not know.

'Are you alright, little one?' she asked and took the girl by the hand.

'Mother, are we rich?'

Morgaine frowned slightly. That was not a question she had expected. Nor was it one she had ever thought much about. 'Well, the duLacs are an old family, and we have accumulated some gold over the centuries. We're not overly wealthy, but there is enough money in our vault to fulfil your wishes today. Now, tell me: where do you want to go?'

The choice was easy; Demeter had made it the night before, in her bed. The magical item she was longing for the most was a wand.

The Ollivander's shop was tiny and shabby, very much like had been many years ago, when Remus had brought Morgaine there to purchase her first wand. Her only wand, to be precise. Nine and a half inches. Birch and dragon heartstring. She had never even thought about replacing it. It had always served her well.

Demeter looked up and down the thousands of boxes that were piled up along the walls, some piles actually reaching up to the ceiling. 'However can anyone find the right wand here?' she whispered.

'No one needs to find their wand, dear child,' came a soft voice out of the dark. 'The wand finds the wizard. Or in your case, the witch.'

Ollivander looked ancient. His white hair was so thin that it could just as well consist of cobwebs. And the way he narrowed his silvery eyes made Morgaine wonder if his glasses were actually doing him any good or if his eyesight had become so bad that he had a hard time seeing his customers. But he still had the same kind smile.

'I assume that I cannot interest you in a new wand, isn't that so, Morgaine of the Lake?' he started the conversation.

'There is no point in replacing a wand that works perfectly alright, is there, Master Ollivander?'

The old man fixed her with his misty eyes, and Morgaine felt her heart skip a beat. Did he know that she, now and then, had problems casting even the simplest of spells? No, surely, he could not know. And even if he did, it wasn't any of his business. And Morgaine had no intentions of discussing that particular topic anyway. Instead, she pointed towards Demeter, who was still standing in the middle of the room, taking in her surroundings with big eyes.

'It's my daughter who will be purchasing a wand today, Mr Ollivander. It's her first.'

Ollivander let his eyes travel over the girl. 'Your daughter ... and Severus Snape's,' he stated.

'Does that matter?' Morgaine enquired, and Ollivander shook his head.

'No, dear. It doesn't.' He pulled out his tape measure and marched towards Demeter. 'Which is your wand arm?' he asked.

Demeter looked slightly taken aback. 'I ... I am right-handed, sir,' she explained. 'But when I tried my mother's wand, I picked it up with my left hand.'

'Peculiar,' Ollivander muttered. 'Very peculiar.'

The tape measure measured Demeter from top to toe and from the left to the right while Ollivander rummaged through his shelves, pulling out boxes, putting some of them on the counter and putting others back onto the shelf after having checked the tape measure. When it crumpled into a heap on the floor, there were but three boxes lying on the counter.

'I'd like you to try this one first,' Ollivander said. 'Birch and phoenix tail feather, ten and a half inches.' He held out the slender wand towards Demeter. 'Give it a wave.'

The sparks that erupted from the wand's tip were almost not noticeable, and Ollivander quickly held out the next. 'Ebony and dragon heartstring, ten inches.'

Again, some tiny sparks, but not enough to make Ollivander happy. However, he seemed somewhat reluctant when he handed Demeter the third wand. 'Yew and unicorn hair,' he said. 'Eleven inches.'

Green and gold sparks shot from the tip as Demeter waved the wand through the air and reflected in her blue eyes. 'It's beautiful,' she exclaimed. 'And it feels perfect in my hand. Mr Ollivander, is this the right wand for me?'

The old man nodded slowly. 'A peculiar combination,' he said. 'Yew and unicorn hair. Tell me child, do you like flowers?'

Demeter nodded, and Ollivander took the wand from her hand, putting it carefully back into its box. 'I'd say we can expect high grades in Herbology from you, young lady. Professor Sprout will be proud of you.'

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'How is everyone, George?'

Morgaine and George Weasley were overlooking the shop from the big window in George's office. There were customers aplenty, as usual, and Morgaine had long since lost sight of Demeter, who was exploring the wonders of Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes.

'They're all doing great. Breeding like bunnies, most of them actually.' George grinned mischievously. 'Only Charlie is still unknissed. I heard the last girl who tried to snatch him was eaten alive by a Swedish Short Snout.'

Morgaine snorted but quickly became serious. 'And how are you, George?' she asked, putting her hand on the man's forearm.

'I'm a proud father of two and an adored husband. Can't ask for more, can I?'

George sounded truly happy, and his smile was as cheerful as ever, but Morgaine had not missed how his eyes had flicked towards the wall behind her. She knew that there was a portrait of Fred hanging there, overlooking the shop. And she sensed that there wasn't a day when George did not miss his brother. But she also sensed that he did not want to talk about it. And as she knew all too well how George was feeling, she let the topic rest. For the time being, anyway.

He showed her his latest shipment of Love Potions and asked her about her opinion as a Potions mistress before he gave her the grand tour of the shop.

They found Demeter examining a Skiving Snackbox, and with her was a blond-haired boy whom Morgaine knew well by now.

'Are you two thinking about skiving off already before the start of term?' she asked in her best teacher's voice.

At once, Melvin put the box he had been holding back onto the shelf. 'P... Professor duLac,' he stammered. 'I ... I would never ...'

'Tut, tut, young man, letting yourself get caught by your Head of House? Tragic.'

Melvin blushed and stared at his uncle who had just walked around the corner. 'But I ...'

Alek tried to look serious but failed miserably. 'Now I will have to invite your Head of House to lunch in order to persuade her not to give you detention already before term commences.' He smiled at Morgaine. 'Or do you have other plans?'

'Actually, I do,' Morgaine replied, smiling as well. 'I was planning to take my daughter to Fortescue's for some ice cream.'

'Your daughter?' Alek's eyes lingered for a moment on Demeter. 'Yes, I should have figured that out on my own. The eyes ...' He winked at Demeter and then turned back towards Morgaine. 'You know, in certain countries, ice cream is considered to be lunch. How about I invite you both then? We fill the children with sugar, and you and I can discuss how Melvin can get out of that detention.'

It was a warm day, and Melvin and Demeter carried their ice cream bowl outside to sit in the sun. They had been unable to decide on which flavour to choose, so Alek had ordered them a huge bowl with every flavour Fortescue had to offer complete with whipped cream and sprinkles that changed colours every now and then. Now the two children sat on either side of the bowl, each armed with a spoon and happily munching away.

'Now there is a teenage romance waiting to happen,' Alek pointed out as he handed Morgaine her bowl. 'It would almost be a shame to disturb them. How about you and I sit inside? We can keep an eye on them and still give them their space.'

Morgaine smiled. The two children seemed indeed to be getting along splendidly. Not only were they sharing a huge bowl of ice cream, they were also chattering quite happily. And Melvin hadn't blushed once.

'What are you having anyway?' Alek enquired as he and Morgaine sat down by the window. 'Pistachio and ...?'

'Liquorice.'

'Liquorice?' Alek seemed appalled. 'That sounds disgusting enough to make me want to try it.' And without asking for permission, he dived into Morgaine's bowl. When he realised what he was doing, he promptly blushed. 'Forgive me, I was raised in a barn. I have no manners whatsoever,' he apologised.

Morgaine grinned. 'That's alright. Are you having anything good in your bowl?' she asked and craned her neck.

'Vanilla and chocolate. I'm seriously boring when it comes to ice cream. But if you like vanilla and chocolate ...'

He pushed his bowl towards Morgaine, but she declined with a small shake of her head.

'No, I wouldn't try it either,' Alek pointed out, wrinkling his nose at his own choice. 'But as long as I am already making a bad impression ... I couldn't help but notice ... Demeter ... dark hair, pale complexion ... Is she ...'

Morgaine slowly put down her spoon and looked straight into the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher's hazel eyes. She had two choices now. One was to make him even more uncomfortable than he already was and let him ask the question himself. The other was to give him a straight answer. She chose the latter.

'Yes, Alek,' she said. 'Demeter is Severus Snape's daughter. And once she arrives at Hogwarts, everyone will know.'

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A/N: I'd like to dedicate this chapter to my beloved grandmother. Like Margaret she has a blend of tea for every occasion in her cupboard. Surprisingly enough, it helps most of the time. She also firmly believes in the healing power of ice cream. Love you, Granny.

## XIX: First Steps

*Chapter 19 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XIX: First Steps

Demeter was sitting on the bed in their room at the Leaky Cauldron, balancing a pillow on her bare feet. She had just taken a shower. Her hair was still wet and the light of the candle on the nightstand gave it an almost dark blue shine which clashed violently with the light pink colour of her nightgown. She had wrinkled her nose as Morgaine had unpacked it, but as it was a present from her great-grandmother, Demeter hadn't argued but put it on wordlessly. But for the better part of the next five minutes, she had looked like she was going to be sick at any moment. She seemed, however, have grown used to the hideous colour by now, as she was happily humming and now and then kicking the pillow up into the air.

'Melvin's nice,' she suddenly pointed out.

'Is he now?' Morgaine abandoned the search for her own nightgown for a moment to smirk at her daughter. The girl wouldn't be smitten, now would she?

Demeter promptly blushed. 'For a boy, I mean,' she added quickly. 'And he is very well behaved. When we were eating ice cream, he always asked me if I wanted to try first when we found a new flavour.'

'A perfect little gentleman.' Morgaine was now hiding her grin behind the lid of her trunk. It definitely seemed as if Demeter was smitten. And who could blame her? Melvin Riverbed was an adorable little boy, indeed well behaved, polite and always helpful.

'He said he would wait for me at the station tomorrow and that I could sit with him and his friends on the train because I don't know anyone else. He said it did not matter that I am only a first year.'

That was so very much like Melvin. He would take care of Demeter on their journey to Hogwarts, that was certain. And Morgaine was already planning to make sure that the boy would find an especially big slice of cake on his plate when dessert was served at the start of term feast.

'He says he has a cat,' Demeter went on. 'If I am sorted into Slytherin House, he will let me play with it. That's nice of him, isn't it?'

'It most certainly is,' Morgaine conceded. She and Demeter had had a lengthy discussion about pets a few days ago. They had agreed that Demeter wouldn't need an owl. A toad had not struck her fancy, and while they had visited the Magical Menagerie, none of the numerous kittens had meowed itself into the girl's heart. So they had decided that they would wait with buying one. But Morgaine doubted that Demeter would be able to resist Melvin's little cat. Just like her owner, the little animal was adorable.

Finally having found her nightgown, Morgaine grabbed a bottle of shampoo and a bar of soap and headed towards the bathroom. 'You are allowed to rummage through your school supplies until I return,' she instructed Demeter. 'Then you will have to go to sleep. It is late, and you have a big day ahead of you tomorrow.'

She had almost reached the door when Demeter's words made her freeze on the spot. 'Alek ... Professor Riverbed, I mean. Do you like him, Mother?'

Morgaine just about managed to banish the frown from her face before she turned to face her daughter. 'Professor Riverbed is a colleague of mine,' she pointed out. 'Whatever makes you think I would like him?'

Demeter shrugged. 'I was just thinking ... I saw he makes you smile.'

Once more, Morgaine assured her daughter that Alek Riverbed was nothing more than a colleague and then marched into the bathroom. But as soon as she had closed the door behind her, her brow furrowed once more.

Whatever made the child ask such a thing, she wondered. Yes, Alek's comments and his boyish sense of humour did make her smile. And he was a handsome young man, with dark brown hair and mischievous hazel eyes ...

Morgaine vehemently shook her head. What was she doing, thinking about those hazel eyes again?

But how could she not? Alek had been looking at her from across the room every time she had looked up from her dinner plate earlier that evening. And when he and Melvin had finished their meal, Alek had come over and asked if Morgaine and Demeter would be interested in playing a game of Gobstones. And while he had patiently been explaining the rules to Demeter, he had every now and then looked up and smiled at Morgaine. And she had been unable to do anything but smile back.

Alek had let Demeter win the first round and Melvin the second, and when the children had started to yawn and Morgaine had decided that it was time to go to bed, for Demeter at least, Alek had concurred. But on the way up the stairs, he had grabbed Morgaine's hand and held her back.

'After the children are asleep,' he had whispered so neither Demeter nor Melvin would hear, 'would you like to come back down to the bar and have a glass of wine with me? And maybe we could check out if any of the other pubs has a band playing tonight. I wouldn't mind a dance or two.'

Morgaine had politely declined, saying that she did not like dancing. Now she was not entirely sure why she had told him that. She was indeed tired, but a glass of wine might just have done the trick to make her fall asleep a little quicker than usual. Certainly, they were colleagues, but that excuse did not hold. After all, she had never turned Filius down for a Butterbeer. As for a dance ... that would not have hurt anyone either.

Morgaine stepped into the shower, and as the warm water trickled onto her back, she rested her forehead against the cool white tiles. It was weird. The warmth of Alek's hand against her own seemed to be lingering on her skin. And so was the feeling of his breath tickling her ear as he had whispered his invitation. And Morgaine just couldn't make up her mind whether she liked this fact or not.

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'Time to wake up, sleepyhead,' Morgaine called from her chair by the window shortly after seven o'clock. She herself had been up since before dawn, silently pacing the room and busying herself with checking Demeter's school supplies over and over again. The last hour and a half, she had spent sitting in the wicker chair by the window, watching her daughter sleep.

The girl had looked so peaceful with her pale features all relaxed and her black hair fanned out on the white pillow. Heavens, she looked so much like her father, even more so when she was asleep and her blue eyes did not pose any distraction.

How often had she watched Severus sleep, Morgaine wondered. She had liked to watch him sleep, especially during those nights when he had been able to relax, his breathing had been slow and regular and the deep line between his eyes almost invisible. Unfortunately, those nights had been far too few during the last years of his life. He had been tired alright, exhausted would even be a better word, but most nights his sleep had been disturbed by nightmares. But he had seldom taken a potion. Should the Dark Lord have called in the middle of the night, Severus would have needed to be one hundred percent alert. And so his face had all too often been disfigured by a scowl even in his sleep.

Demeter did not even open her eyes but pulled the blanket over her head. 'Just five more minutes,' came her muffled voice from under the blanket, and Morgaine couldn't help but smile.

She walked towards the bed and as she sat down on the edge of the mattress, she slowly pulled the blanket away from her daughter's face. 'Whoever did you get your sleepiness from, little one?' she enquired.

Demeter blinked against the sunlight and then squeezed her eyes shut again. 'I don't want to wake up. I had such a nice dream. I was at Hogwarts, learning magic.'

'If you get out of bed, you might actually be able to catch the train and really go to Hogwarts,' Morgaine pointed out.

That helped. Within seconds Demeter was out of bed and at her trunk. 'Where are my school robes?'

'Rub your eyes, little one.' Morgaine laughed. 'Your school robes are lying right on top. But you will not need them just yet. You'll get changed on the train like everyone else. Or do you want all the Muggles to stare at you on our way to King's Cross?'

'No.' Demeter scowled slightly. 'Mother, will I be the only one on the train who doesn't know things like when it is time to put on the school robes? I mean ...' She bit her lip and blushed slightly. 'Will I make a fool out of myself?'

'Of course you will not make a fool out of yourself, little one.' Morgaine went to kneel down beside her daughter and laid a sympathetic arm around the girl's shoulders. 'Many of the children on the train are Muggle-born. Twenty-seven of this year's first-years, to be precise. Most of them have never set foot into the Wizarding world before. You will not be the only one who is feeling confused. And besides, you have one big advantage, haven't you, little one?'

Demeter turned her head to look at her mother. Her scowl had turned into a questioning frown. 'Advantage?' she asked quietly.

'You'll have your own knight in shining armour by your side, won't you?' Morgaine clarified. 'I am convinced that Melvin will do everything in his power to make sure that you will not make a fool out of yourself in any way. And by the time you get to Hogwarts, you will be the best-informed first-year on the train.'

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Demeter hung at Morgaine's skirts from the moment they had stepped onto platform nine and three-quarters. Suddenly, the whole situation was scary, overwhelming. She was surrounded by people she didn't know. There seemed to be hundreds of children on the platform, some her age and others some years older. Most of them were there with their parents, others were alone. There were hundreds of trolleys being pushed around, all resembling her own, all of them loaded with at least one trunk and others even with an owl cage. Some children were already on the train, and those who weren't seemed to know exactly where to go. All of them except herself, it seemed to Demeter.

'Can't you come on the train with me, Mother?' she asked and then quickly lowered her head, feeling embarrassed.

'No, little one,' Morgaine said softly and caressed Demeter's black hair that framed her pale face. 'Parents don't go to Hogwarts. You know that.'

Yes, Demeter knew. She also knew that there was no use asking. She knew that her mother would not come on the train with her. But her throat was becoming tighter by the second, and the butterflies she had felt in her stomach the day before seemed to have mutated into slimy worms that made her nauseous. She really felt like a scared little child, who wished for nothing more than her mother to stand by her side the whole day.

If Demeter thought that she was the only one feeling anxious, she was wrong. Morgaine had been chewing her lower lip for the better part of the morning, and now and then, she found herself wondering if sending Demeter to Hogwarts had been such a good idea. Beauxbatons would have been another alternative, or a private tutor. And who said that the girl needed a magical education at all? She would probably have been more than content on Iceland.

Rubbish, Morgaine chided herself. The girl was a witch, the daughter of a great wizard and the youngest member of two Wizarding families that had played an important role in the war. She had every right to become part of this world, and being educated at Hogwarts was the best she could wish for.

Morgaine took Demeter by the hand and pulled her towards a bench further down the platform, a few feet away from the bustling crowd. Once they had sat down, she cupped her daughter's chin and made the girl look at her. A pair of anxious blue eyes met a pair that was trying to look calm.

'Listen carefully now,' Morgaine started. 'There is nothing to be afraid of. None of the first-years knows what's awaiting them. Wizard, half-blood or Muggle-born, it's the same for all of them. For some, like you, it's the first time that they are surrounded by Wizard children only. They are all nervous. They are all scared.'

Demeter opened her mouth to speak, but Morgaine quickly shook her head and carried on: 'You have done your homework, and you have practised. Trust me, little one, I teach most of those children on the train. I know that your knowledge of magic exceeds some of the second-years' by far. And what you lack in magical education, you'll make up with your personality. You are your father's daughter, after all. Carry your head high and show them that no one messes with the daughter of Severus Snape.'

Oh, the irony. Sure, nobody with the tiniest survival instinct would have messed with the adult Severus Snape, but as a teenager, he had been one of the most bullied students at Hogwarts. But Demeter did not know that. In her eyes, her father was a war hero and a great man. And the way her eyes were sparkling now made it clear that she would take her mother's advice seriously and not let anyone give her a hard time.

'Shall we try and find Melvin then?' Morgaine suggested and ruffled her daughter's black hair. 'I'm sure he is waiting for you already.'

They scanned the platform for a mop of blond hair, but when they caught sight of Melvin, Morgaine wished Demeter had chosen another boy to befriend. Because beside Melvin and his uncle stood no other than Lucius Malfoy, his hair perfectly coifed as always and his long emerald cloak flapping slightly in the wind.

Morgaine felt the muscles in her neck tense up and instinctively closed her fingers around her wand in her right pocket. With her free left hand, she pushed her daughter ever so discreetly behind her back.

The children started chatting immediately, Alek made a crack about wizards being old-fashioned as they still let their children ride a steam train to school, and Lucius was as charming as ever. He talked to both Melvin and Demeter as if they were adults instead of children. And to Morgaine's utter annoyance, Demeter smiled at him.

'However could you think that people would not realise that this girl is Severus' daughter?' Lucius enquired as Alek helped the children load their trunks onto the train. He was still smiling, and judging by the indifferent look on his face, he could as well have been talking about the weather. But he was, of course, anything but indifferent. 'Two dragon eggs couldn't look more alike than those two,' he continued.

A muscle twitched in Morgaine's jaw, but she still managed to give the blond wizard in front of her a calm answer. 'Seeing as Demeter carries her father's last name now, there would be no point in denying her parentage, would there?'

'Demeter Snape?' Lucius smirked. 'Why did you decide to let her carry her father's name?'

'That is none of your business, is it, Lucius?'

His smirk turned into a charming smile, and he took a bow. 'Of course not, forgive me my curiosity, Morgaine. I am, however, glad you decided to present the child to the Wizarding world at last. Where have you been hiding her for eleven years?'

'Again, this is none of your business.' Morgaine was running out of patience. She had neither the time nor the energy to talk to Lucius Malfoy.

'I sense a certain hostility,' Lucius pointed out. The tone in his voice was still as sweet as honey, and it made Morgaine's skin crawl. 'If I didn't know better, I'd say you have been trying to withhold the child from us.'

Morgaine's eyes flashed dangerously. 'Who exactly do you mean when you say us, Lucius?'

He stepped closer, towering over her and fixing her with a gaze so cold that it made Morgaine shrink back. But he never had a chance to answer Morgaine's question, as Demeter, Melvin and Alek returned.

'Trunks stowed away, compartment chosen, students ready to go, madam,' he reported as if he were a soldier.

'Are you all excited then?' Lucius addressed the children. Every trace of menace had disappeared from his face 'Here, Melvin,' he said and handed the boy a shiny Galleon. 'Be a gentleman and treat your little friend to some sweets on the train.'

Morgaine had the urge to throw the coin back into Lucius' face and tell Demeter never to accept anything from that man, but making a scene would not do anyone any good. She would talk to Demeter another time.

The clock crept towards eleven, and after several bone crushing hugs and the promise that she would be allowed to visit the Potions mistress' office in the evening, Demeter boarded the train, gallantly escorted by Melvin, who insisted on carrying her backpack and opening the window for her. And Morgaine smiled at the little gentleman and walked alongside the train until it had picked up too much speed for her to follow. She would see her daughter again in a couple of hours, she knew that. She also knew that nothing would happen to the child on the train. But still, she could not ignore the knot in the pit of her stomach.

'You know, if you don't move soon, the train will be in the Lake District before you have left the station.'

Morgaine blinked and tore her eyes off the tracks. Alek was right, of course. The Hogwarts Express had long since disappeared from sight, and she, Alek and Lucius were the last persons standing on the platform.

'I forgot how nervous I was the first time I boarded that train,' Morgaine explained.

'Demeter did seem awfully quiet,' Alek admitted. 'But she'll do alright. I bet she and Melvin are munching on sweets right now and making plans on how to ditch their first History of Magic class. And who can blame them? Cuthbert is dull, even for a ghost.'

Morgaine grinned. Once more, Alek was right, about everything. Melvin was most certainly taking good care of Demeter, just as he had promised he would. And yes, Professor Binns was indeed duller than dishwater.

'What are your plans for today then?' Alek enquired. 'Are you Apparating to Hogwarts at once or what?'

'No,' Morgaine replied, finally able to focus fully on Alek. 'I am about to go back to Diagon Alley. I have some business to attend to.'

'I see. Well, I for one have been lazy over the summer and still have lessons to plan.' Alek screwed up his face. 'How a disorganised person like me ever became a teacher is a riddle worthy of a Sphinx. I guess I'll be seeing you at dinner then.'

Morgaine nodded and wished Alek a good day. Some moments later, he had Disappeared.

'Charming young man, isn't he?'

Morgaine swirled around and came once more face to face with Lucius Malfoy. They were all alone on the platform now. She could have hexed him, and no one would ever know. But neither the look on her face or the way she was clutching her wand seemed to impress or threaten Lucius in any way.

'Charming man indeed,' he repeated. 'And his nephew is lovely as well. Your daughter seems to be rather smitten.'

'Once again you are putting your nose into things that do not concern you, Lucius,' Morgaine hissed.

Lucius just shook his head. 'Tut, tut, Morgaine. Such harsh tones. I am very much interested in the well-being of your daughter. It's time you understand this.'

Now she had had enough. Morgaine drew herself up to her full height and glared at the blond wizard with a stare that would have made a troll shiver. 'I warn you, Lucius Malfoy,' she hissed. 'If you harm my daughter in any way, I swear this will be the last thing you do on this earth.'

But Lucius just tilted his head and smiled at her threat, his grey eyes glittering. 'You still don't get it, do you, Morgaine? I have no intentions of harming that child in any way. On the contrary. I will make sure that she is cherished and protected. Just like the valuable emerald she is.'

And before Morgaine had any time to react, Lucius Malfoy turned on his heel and Disappeared into thin air.

Morgaine clasped her hands over her mouth. Her breakfast seemed to be on its way up again, and the world around her seemed to be spinning. As usual, Lucius had not said anything precise, but the interpretations that could be made from his insinuations made Morgaine fear the worst.

Something had to be done.

She shook her head and then turned on her heel to Apparate. She knew where to turn to. She had made up her mind already in Iceland. To protect her daughter and get her own emotions under control, she needed magic that could not be found in Diagon Alley, nor at Hogwarts or in Iceland.

Once she had regained her balance, she let her eyes wander over the street in front of her. She couldn't detect anyone she knew. Good, no one needed to know where she was going. So she pulled up her hood and once more let her eyes scan her surroundings before silently slinking into the darkness of Knockturn Alley.

## XX: Approaching Hogwarts

*Chapter 20 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XX: Approaching Hogwarts

'Why exactly are we running around in a moving train?' Demeter enquired, but Melvin kept on walking, pulling her by the hand. He seemed very determined about where to go. He had, however, not told Demeter about their goal yet.

They had been sitting comfortably in their compartment, Demeter, Melvin and a blonde, shy girl called Sarah Green. Sarah was a first-year as well, Muggle-born and just as nervous about being on her way to Hogwarts as Demeter was. So the girls had chatted about their expectations and fears, and Melvin had listened to them, silently, blushing ever so slightly every time one of the girls asked him a question about Hogwarts or the Wizarding world.

Shortly after eleven-thirty, however, Melvin had started to grin and explained that it was time. For what, he had not disclosed. He had just taken Demeter's hand and beckoned Sarah to follow them. Now he was holding Demeter firmly by the hand and was weaving his way through the other Hogwarts students, who were lingering outside their own compartments, making sure no one stood in their way and that no one would bump into Demeter. Every now and then, he turned his head and smiled shyly back with an almost apologetic look on his face.

'Melvin, seriously!' As much as she liked Melvin and as charming as his smile was, Demeter hated being told what to do and not being given a reason, and she was slowly but surely losing her patience. If he didn't tell her soon where they were heading, she would just dig her heels into the floor and refuse to take another step.

Melvin stopped and turned around to face her, but he didn't let go of her hand. 'Sorry,' he muttered, his eyes not really meeting hers and his cheeks once more flushing. 'I ... I wanted it to be a surprise. It's right on the other side of this door, in the next carriage.'

Demeter bit her lip and glanced at Sarah, who was standing beside her. She had not meant to make Melvin uncomfortable. Sometimes, her voice just sounded snappy without her having meant it to.

'What is on the other side of that door then?' Sarah asked. 'It must be the last carriage. Isn't that where our trunks are stored?'

'Better,' Melvin replied, suddenly seeming to have found his courage again. 'This is where they stock up the food trolley.'

He knocked and then pushed open the door, and into sight came a smiling dimpled woman.

'I was wondering when you would show up, young man,' the woman said. 'I was just about to push out the trolley. And that must be your new friend. Demeter, was it?'

Demeter was slightly puzzled and looked at Melvin, who once again was looking at his shoes.

'I reckoned you had never had Wizard sweets, so I thought you would like to have a look in peace and quiet, without all the other kids standing in line behind you,' he murmured.

Demeter didn't know what to say, and even if she did, Sarah would have beaten her to it. 'That boy's a keeper,' the blonde girl whispered into her ear. 'It must be because he is a Wizard, because I have certainly never met such a nice boy before.'

And despite Sarah keeping her voice low, Melvin must have heard her, because he was yet again blushing. But his lips cracked into a happy smile as Demeter squeezed his hand.

There were too many sweets to count. Pumpkin Pasties and Cauldron Cakes, liquorice wands and Chocolate Frogs, Bertie Bott's Every-Flavour Beans, Drooble's Best Blowing Gum, Ice Mice, Jelly Slugs, all just waiting to be tasted. Demeter felt her jaw drop, as it had so often over the last couple of days. She had no idea what to choose, and by the look of it, neither did Sarah.

'May I choose for you?' Melvin suggested, smiling. 'After all, it's my treat.'

'You don't need to pay for me,' Demeter protested.

'It's alright.' Melvin held up the shiny Galleon he had been given by Lucius Malfoy. 'Uncle Lucius said it would be gentleman-like to treat you.'

'Uncle Lucius?' Demeter frowned. 'I thought Alek was your uncle.'

'Well, Alek is my mum's brother, so he's my real uncle,' Melvin explained. 'Lucius is like, um, a cousin of a cousin's wife ... kind of ...' He broke off and screwed up his face. 'Um, I actually have no idea. He's always been around, and I always called him uncle. I'm not even sure we are related.' He had said all this really fast and was now facing the trolley again, seemingly eager to change topics. 'Now, let's see ... I think we'll be having Pumpkin Pasties, some Drooble's, some liquorice wands and a box of Bertie Bott's. To start with anyway. Would you like to have some chocolate as well?'

He grinned and produced a paper bag from his left pocket to stow away the sweets and his change. Then he shook the bag in front of Demeter and Sarah. 'Care to join me in our compartment, ladies?'

Demeter shook her head in disbelief. 'You planned to stuff your face, didn't you? You even brought a bag.' She grinned just as broadly as the boy in front of her.

'I deliberately skipped breakfast,' Melvin replied in a whisper. 'Uncle Alek was trying to make me eat porridge with him.'

'And what did Uncle Lucius have?' Demeter grinned.

'Quail eggs and caviar.' Melvin shuddered theatrically. 'I tell you, they both have a screw loose.'

They made their way back to their compartment, every now and then fishing up a sweet from the paper bag, and Melvin was just holding up the door for Sarah and Demeter as a low voice made the smile freeze on his lips.

'Got yourself a girlfriend, Riverbed? Two, even?'

Melvin received a rather hard slap on the shoulder which almost made him lose his balance, and Demeter immediately turned in the door to glare at whoever had the audacity to shove her new friend.

The dark-haired boy's eyes widened in surprise. 'Riverbed!' he gasped. 'You've got good taste.' He extended his hand towards Demeter. 'Melvin's friends are my friends, too,' he announced, smiling and revealing a row of uneven teeth. 'Argyle Makdoui is the name. And you must be Snape's daughter.'

Demeter shook Argyle's hand, told him her first name and introduced Sarah. And her polite smile did not betray any of her true feelings. She did not like the Makdoui boy one bit. *Melvin's friends are my friends, too.* Ha! Who was Argyle trying to fool? There was no way he considered Melvin a friend. But the biggest question on Demeter's mind was how Argyle could have known that she was her father's daughter. But however curious she was, she deemed it wise not to ask.

'Are you alright, Demeter?' Sarah asked about half an hour later when Argyle had finally left the compartment. Melvin had more or less slammed the door shut after his House mate and even closed the curtains. He seemed to be eager to make sure the boy did not return.

Demeter shifted uncomfortably in her seat. 'I guess I will have to get used to this, other Wizarding kids knowing more about my father than I do,' she said quietly.

Argyle had waffled on about the great Severus Snape and his importance to Slytherin House and what an honour it was to him, Argyle, to be one of the first to welcome Demeter to Hogwarts. And the more he had talked, the bigger had the knot in Demeter's stomach become. This was just not fair. Argyle seemed to know so much about her father, and she herself knew almost nothing. She had never even met him.

'How did he know who you were anyway?' Sarah piped up. 'You said you'd never been to the Wizarding world before.'

Demeter shrugged and glanced imploringly at Melvin. Maybe he would have an answer.

'There is a portrait of your father hanging in the Slytherin common room,' Melvin promptly explained. 'Anyone who has ever seen it or met Severus Snape in person will notice the similarity. You two look very much alike.'

'That's what Mother always says.' Demeter lowered her head to stare at her hands in her lap, and her dark hair fell over her face like curtains, shielding her off from Sarah and Melvin. Just as well, she thought. Her jaw was tight and her front teeth were gnawing at her lower lip. She didn't want her new friends to know that she was upset. But they noticed anyway. Soon, they were sitting on either side of her, Sarah with her arm comfortingly around Demeter's shoulders.

'Sorry if I am asking stupid questions,' Sarah apologised in advance, 'but how can you not know? It almost sounds as if you have never met your father.'

'I haven't.' Demeter took a deep, shaking breath. She might as well tell Sarah and Melvin now. 'When I was born, my parents weren't really ... together,' she started carefully, not wanting to disclose too much. 'And then the war started and ... and Father ... he was busy.' Neither did she feel like sharing the fact that her father had not even known about her existence.

They talked about the war, about Severus Snape's role as spy against Voldemort and as protector of the famous Harry Potter, and while Melvin and Sarah were both in awe about the deeds of Severus Snape, Demeter was starting to dread the moment she would come to stand face to face with her father's ghost, the ghost of a man whom she only knew from history books and of whom she still did not know if he actually wanted to meet her.

'You know,' said Melvin, 'at least you know who your father is. I know nothing about mine, not even his name.'

He smiled encouragingly and handed Demeter another Chocolate Frog, which she accepted with a small smile of her own. But on the inside, she was anything but smiling and silently wondering if she would not be better off knowing nothing about her father.

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Many miles to the North, the ghost of Severus Snape was floating to and fro in his old study, restlessly. He was waiting for Morgaine. He had been doing that since exactly eleven o'clock.

He had assumed that Morgaine would see their daughter off at King's Cross and then directly Apparate to Hogwarts. After all, there were lessons to plan, the arrival of the students to prepare for and, to be frank, he had expected her to come and see him in the dungeons. But as far as he could tell, Morgaine had not even entered the castle



yet. Surely, he would have sensed her if she had.

Severus had been in the Headmistress' office the night before when Morgaine had contacted Minerva in order to inform her that Demeter had safely arrived in the Wizarding world. Morgaine had been smiling as she had told Minerva about Demeter's excitement and their day in Diagon Alley, and everything had seemed to be alright. And by now, Demeter was safely on the train. As were all the other students, Severus added in his mind. Minerva had received the note from the engine-driver of the Hogwarts Express shortly after eleven. And Riverbed, who had dropped off his nephew at King's Cross, too, had returned to Hogwarts shortly after eleven. So why was Morgaine not back yet?

A glance towards the clock on the wall told Severus that the students would arrive in less than three hours' time, and still the Head of Slytherin House was nowhere to be seen. That was neither good nor normal, and Severus decided to investigate.

Five minutes later, he floated, unannounced, through the thick wall into the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom, where Alek dropped the stack of books he had been carrying out of sheer fright. 'Professor Snape!' he exclaimed. 'You startled me.'

Severus cocked an eyebrow. *Fine Defence teacher, that one*, he thought. Startled by a ghost appearing out of a wall in a castle that was full of ghosts. Not even Quirrell had been that jumpy.

But Severus had the good grace to not tell Riverbed what he thought of him right now. There were more important things to discuss. 'Riverbed,' he started instead. 'I came to enquire whether you have happened to meet Professor duLac today.'

Alek flicked his wand to collect the books that now lay scattered on the floor. 'Morgaine?' he asked.

Severus resisted the urge to roll his eyes. Of course, Morgaine. How many Professor duLacs were there in the castle? Was that man really that daft?

The second urge Severus had to resist was hexing the Defence teacher for using Morgaine's first name. It would certainly have been irrational to hex him, as all staff members used each other's first names, but Severus could not help being annoyed whenever Riverbed said *Morgaine*.

Alek Levitated the books to a shelf and then straightened his robes. 'I did indeed meet Morgaine today,' he explained. 'We dropped off Demeter and Melvin at King's Cross together.'

Severus felt anger rise in his chest. Had Alek Riverbed, that incompetent nitwit, met his daughter before he himself had?

But Alek did not seem to notice how the ghost in front of him was narrowing his eyes. 'An adorable little witch, your daughter,' he continued merrily. 'Charming smile and lovely blue eyes. I'd say my nephew is already falling hopelessly for her. I've never seen Melvin talk so carefree to a girl like he was talking to Demeter yesterday afternoon.'

Yesterday afternoon? Severus did his best not to scowl. Morgaine had certainly not mentioned to Minerva that she had spent the afternoon with Riverbed.

'Morgaine said she had some business to attend to in Diagon Alley before returning to Hogwarts,' Alek went on. 'And it wouldn't surprise me if Lucius had managed to persuade her to have lunch with him.'

'Lucius?' Severus hissed, slowly but surely losing his temper. 'Lucius Malfoy?'

'Yes,' Alek confirmed. 'Melvin and I had breakfast at the Manor, and Lucius escorted us to King's Cross afterwards. That was where we met up with Morgaine and Demeter. I must say, Lucius seemed to be charmed by your daughter as well. And how could he not?'

But Severus was not listening anymore. He had left the Defence classroom as quickly as he had entered it, drifting right through the wall, not caring what Riverbed thought about his manners.

Had the whole Wizarding world had the pleasure of meeting Demeter before he himself had ever had a chance to even speak to the girl? And Lucius Malfoy, of all people? Had Morgaine not said that she wanted to keep Demeter away from the likes of Malfoy? And what, by Hades, was Morgaine doing having lunch with Lucius?

Severus was still fuming and about to dematerialise and disappear into the dungeons when a familiar feeling washed over him. It felt like the first beams of sunlight tickling one's skin after a long and dark winter, and Severus knew at once what it meant: Morgaine had returned to Hogwarts.

At first, Severus considered ignoring her. She had not deemed it necessary to come to him straight upon her return to the Wizarding world. Why would he now show her that he had been waiting for her? And would she even care? But he changed his mind as he sensed her presence in the dungeons. Her mind lay open for him to read, and what he could see was anger, confusion and fear. And he could not leave her alone.

One couldn't have guessed that it was the first of September and the weather still pleasantly warm as Morgaine entered Severus' old study. Her travelling cloak was wrapped around her as tightly as if she had been shielding herself from an icy wind, and Severus could have sworn that she was shivering.

'What happened?' he asked straight out. It seemed not the moment to waste time on empty phrases like *Hello. How was your summer?*

'Lucius Malfoy happened.' Morgaine's voice was hoarse, as if she had been screaming at the top of her lungs for quite some time, and it strengthened the idea of the lovely autumn weather outside having turned into an arctic storm.

*You are a fool, Severus Snape*, Severus silently chided himself. How could he even for a second have assumed that Morgaine would actually have gone to lunch with Lucius Malfoy and enjoyed it?

'What did Lucius do this time?' Severus snarled. He had no idea on how he would do it, but if Lucius had hurt Morgaine any way, he would wring his pretty neck.

Morgaine carefully closed the door behind her. 'As usual, Lucius neither did nor said anything. But he is up to something,' she added in a low tone, as if she were suspecting that someone was eavesdropping. 'Tell me, Severus, does Lucius Malfoy strike you as a man who would escort a second-year to whom he is not even related to King's Cross?'

Severus shook his head. He knew that Lucius had hated to escort his own son to the station, as it meant mixing with people Lucius clearly considered to be beneath himself. 'As far as I know,' he said, 'the Riverbeds had been invited to breakfast at the Manor. As the perfect host, Lucius would naturally escort his guests to King's Cross.'

He did himself not believe what he had just said, and he did not trust Lucius as far as he could throw him, with or without magic. Surely, Lucius had not gone to the trouble of travelling to King's Cross just to see off his breakfast guests. But Severus did not want to add to Morgaine's worries.

She did not, however, buy the explanation he had offered. 'Can you look me in the eyes, Severus, and tell me that Lucius was not at King's Cross to have a look at Demeter?' she asked. 'To make sure that I had finally brought our child to the Wizarding world?'

No, he couldn't. As much as Severus wanted to give Morgaine a reason to calm down, he couldn't. He knew Lucius. The blond wizard had been far too interested in Morgaine's daughter from the very start, before the child had even been conceived. So unfortunately, Morgaine was most probably right. Most likely, Lucius Malfoy was indeed up to something.

# XXI: Introducing Demeter Snape

Chapter 21 of 40

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

## Chapter XXI: Introducing Demeter Snape

'Firs'-years! Firs'-years over here!

Demeter's eyes widened in surprise as she caught sight of the giant who was standing on the platform, holding a lamp in his hand and calling for all the first-years. Her mother had of course told her about gamekeeper Rubeus Hagrid, and she had read about him, but still Demeter had not been prepared for his sheer size.

What else was she not prepared for, she wondered, swallowing hard and feeling as if she didn't belong there on the platform in Hogsmeade. She felt as if she knew nothing of the world she had entered only two days ago. And she definitely did not feel like a witch. She was an ordinary girl who had been brought up in a secluded Icelandic village. She had been happy there. What had ever made her think that this world, the Wizarding world, was where she actually belonged?

She started chewing her lip, and her eyes searched the platform for a mop of blond hair. She and Melvin had been separated when they had left the train, and right now, without her new friend and guide at her side, Demeter felt very, very alone.

But she wasn't alone.

'Would you look at the size of that man!' her other new friend, Sarah, suddenly exclaimed to Demeter's right. It was obvious that she had never before seen such a big man either.

'That is Hagrid,' Demeter explained, somewhat glad about Sarah's lack of knowledge as it meant that there was something that she could explain. 'He's a half-giant. That's why he is so big. And he will escort us to Hogwarts.'

'Half-giant?' Sarah seemed terrified. 'If he's a half-giant, how big is a real one?'

'About the size of half the Hogwarts Express.'

Neither of the girls had noticed Melvin approaching, they had been so busy staring at Hagrid. But there he was now, grinning.

'I'm kidding,' he added. 'I have never seen a real giant.'

'Firs'-years, over here now.'

'I guess you'd better go,' Melvin pointed out as Hagrid's voice once more echoed over the platform. 'I'll see you at Hogwarts. And who knows, maybe you'll get Sorted into Slytherin. In that case, I'll see you in the common room later.'

'What House to you reckon you'll be Sorted into?' Sarah asked Demeter in a low voice as they, along with the other first-years, followed Hagrid down a deep and narrow path. Whispering felt appropriate, as no one else was speaking. All their peers seemed to share their feelings, a strange mixture of anticipation and fright, and it made them very silent.

Demeter shrugged. 'Both my parents were in Slytherin,' she answered quietly. 'I guess I might be Sorted into Slytherin as well.'

'Would you want that?'

Once more, Demeter shrugged. She really didn't know. Part of her was convinced that being Sorted into Slytherin would make her parents proud. But she also had a nagging feeling that her mother would not approve. There was something about her mother's eyes every time she spoke about Slytherin. They seemed to darken somehow.

Demeter was spared having to answer as the group came to a sudden halt at the edge of a great black lake, and her eyes were captured by the enormous castle that stood perched on top of a high mountain on the other shore.

Hogwarts. Countless turrets and towers, hundreds of illuminated windows that reflected on the smooth surface of the Black Lake. Demeter felt her breath catch in her throat. This was for sure the most beautiful sight she had ever laid eyes upon. And judging from the awed silence that had fallen over the group of first-years, she figured that she was not the only one captured by the magic and beauty of Hogwarts castle.

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Morgaine was edgy to say the least and delaying her ascent to the Great Hall as long as possible. She just had to check the storeroom one more time to make sure that all the ingredients she needed for the first week of teaching had arrived. She just had to check that all the workbenches were clean and fully equipped. She just had to ... do something.

Her talking to Severus had anything but eased her mind. Oh, she had imagined her returning to Hogwarts differently. She had hoped he would tell her that he had missed her as much as she had missed him. She had hoped he would have learnt more magic over the summer. She had hoped that he would touch her. Heavens, how she had missed his ghostly caress. But instead, she had spoiled their reunion by bringing him bad news. And his silence on the topic of Lucius Malfoy had just added to her fears and confirmed that Lucius was indeed up to something.

'So you have returned. We were just about to send out a search party.'

Morgaine spun around and came face to face with Minerva McGonagall. She had not heard the Headmistress enter her classroom, so deeply had she been absorbed in her thoughts.

'Minerva, I was just ...'

'Trying to look busy so no one would notice how nervous you are about your daughter coming to Hogwarts?'

Morgaine gave a short laugh, shaking her head at her own silly behaviour. Yes, Demeter arriving at Hogwarts was another reason why she was hiding in the dungeons.

She was indeed nervous.

Minerva's otherwise so stern face lightened up with a smile. 'I cannot even imagine how it must feel to have your child arriving at Hogwarts,' she pointed out. 'I have known many of our students since they were babies, and it is always exciting to see them get Sorted. But your own child ...'

Minerva broke off and seemed suddenly terribly interested in one of the cauldrons that stood on a workbench in front of her, and Morgaine could not help but wonder why the old woman had never married, why she had never had any children. But she felt that it was not her place to ask.

'I spoke to Severus,' Minerva continued after clearing her throat. 'He said he will not be coming up to the Great Hall for the feast.'

'Does that surprise you, Minerva?' Morgaine asked. 'He has always hated spending time in the Great Hall.'

'Yes, I know that,' Minerva pointed out. 'But this is different. Your daughter ...'

'Severus and I have agreed that coming to Hogwarts and being Sorted is enough stress,' Morgaine interrupted the Headmistress. 'Demeter does not need a ghost staring at her in the Great Hall. And most of all, she does not need the other students noticing.'

Minerva huffed impatiently. 'Severus would not have to materialise. He must be curious. He must want to meet her. He ...'

'He will meet her,' Morgaine said softly. 'After the Sorting, I will take Demeter to meet her father.'

'They can meet in my office,' Minerva offered at once. 'We would not want to send the child down to the dungeons. It is too gloomy down here.'

'Not send her down to the dungeons?' Morgaine cocked an eyebrow at the Headmistress. 'So you think that Demeter will not follow in her parents' footsteps and be Sorted into Slytherin?'

Now it was Minerva's turn to raise her eyebrows. 'My dear child,' she started. 'Severus' bravery and nerve as well as yours have always outweighed your cunning and ambition. If your daughter is to follow in your footsteps, she will be Sorted into Gryffindor.'

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The oddest sensation washed over Demeter as Professor Flitwick opened the pair of double doors that led to, as he had said, the Great Hall. Part of her wanted to jump up and down with excitement and skip through those doors in the same manner she used to skip through her great-grandmother's kitchen door to greet the first snow every year. But another part of her wanted to run back to the tiny room where she and the other first-years had been waiting for Flitwick to return. Or even better, run out of the castle and back to Hogsmeade, board the train and never come back. And those conflicting feelings seemed to make it hard for her to remember how to put one foot in front of the other. How she would make it all the way down the Great Hall without tripping, Demeter had no idea.

'I hope they have a bucket up there,' Sarah whimpered. 'I'm so nervous I'm going to throw up.'

'Me too,' said a tough-looking boy with spiky brown hair, and several other first-years nodded in agreement.

'There, there, no need to be nervous,' Professor Flitwick squeaked, smiling at them all. 'Those students sitting in there might all look smug now, but I can point out one or two who were green in their faces before their Sorting. So don't worry. No one will laugh at you or anything. They know how it feels.'

Professor Flitwick's kind words lent momentary comfort, but when the first-years walked through the Great Hall, all Demeter wanted to do was pull up her hood and hide. Everyone in the hall was staring, it seemed. And not at her peers in general but at her in particular.

*Rubbish*, Demeter chided herself. *Your father might have been a famous man, and you might resemble him, but not everyone in this hall knew your father and notices the similarities. There are many people with black hair, even in the Wizarding world. So will you get a grip, for goodness' sake!*

She took a deep breath and looked up just in time to spot Melvin, who smiled, winked and gave her the thumbs up. But as Demeter tried to smile back, she found that the corners of her mouth did not seem to want to do as she wanted them to. Her lips were tightly pursed together, and she feared that she would indeed throw up if she as much as attempted to smile. So she lowered her head again and did not look up until she was standing right in front of the High Table. And the first thing she caught sight of was a pair of kind blue eyes.

Demeter swallowed and noticed at once that the lump in her throat had all but disappeared. And she also noticed that her lips had curled into a smile at the sight of her mother. Oh, she looked beautiful. And it was not because of the expensive looking emerald green robes. Demeter could not quite put her finger on it. Her mother's face was pale, and she looked stern and severe. But still. Something made her look beautiful tonight. Suddenly, Demeter came to think of roses. They looked beautiful in a delicate vase in the kitchen, but never as breathtaking as they looked in the garden, where they belonged. Was that it? Was it because her mother was where she belonged now, in the Wizarding world, that she looked so beautiful tonight?

One after one, the first-years were Sorted into their Houses: Slytherin, Gryffindor, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw. Sarah was Sorted into Gryffindor, and the boy with the spiky hair into Slytherin. A pair of twins boys were both Sorted into Hufflepuff, and the girl whose owl had somehow managed to get out of its cage on the train was Sorted into Ravenclaw.

Demeter started chewing nervously on her lower lip. If she still carried her mother's name, she would have been Sorted a while ago, she thought. But Snape started with an s. And that meant that she had to wait.

Smith, Kathryn was Sorted into Hufflepuff and Smithers, Peter into Ravenclaw. Soon it would be her turn. Demeter sank her teeth deeper into her lip.

'Snape, Demeter.'

Suddenly, Demeter felt the eyes of hundreds of people on her. The teachers had of course known her father, and most of the students had once studied under Professor Snape. But very few of them had known that he had had a daughter. Naturally, they were all curious to know if she had inherited anything more from him other than her looks. Understandable, but still Demeter wished they would not stare.

*My parents have both been in Slytherin*, Demeter thought as the Sorting Hat was placed on her head. *Would it make them proud if I were Sorted into their House?*

'Where do you want to belong?'

Demeter did not even flinch as the Sorting Hat's voice crept into her ear. She had never met a talking hat before, of course, but somehow, it seemed natural.

*I want to make my parents proud* Demeter thought. *I have been told that my father has once been the pride of Slytherin. I want him to like me.*

'I see talent,' the hat's little voice said. 'Your gift of making things grow and prosper would earn you the admiration of Professor Sprout. But I doubt you have the spirit of a Hufflepuff. You are too passionate, too fierce.'

*I want to show everyone what I can do* Demeter thought, remembering that one of the most famous traits of Slytherin House was ambition. *I want to make my parents proud*, she repeated. *I want to ...*

But she never managed to finish her thought.

'Gryffindor!' the Sorting Hat shouted, and the table far to the left, which was decorated in gold and red colours, erupted with cheers. And when Demeter made her way towards her House table, not really understanding what had made the hat Sort her into Gryffindor, she couldn't help but turn around and look at her mother. To her surprise, she found her smiling.

~ ~ ~

About two hours later, Demeter dropped onto her bed, looked around the room and smiled. Gryffindor. Who would have thought that she would be Sorted into Gryffindor?

When the Sorting Hat had announced its decision she had felt disappointed for a moment. Her parents had both been in Slytherin. Her father had been Head of Slytherin for almost two decades, and now her mother had taken over that position. And Demeter had wanted to make her parents proud. And so for one terrifying moment she had thought that she had let her parents down. But then she had seen her mother's face, and her heart had skipped a beat. A smile. Her mother had actually been smiling. And not just with her lips. No. For a fraction of a second, Demeter could have sworn that she saw a smile in her mother's eyes.

'Hi.' A light voice ripped Demeter out of her thoughts. There was a girl standing beside her bed, a girl with wavy dark-brown hair and green eyes, her hand stretched out.

'Hi,' the girl said again. 'I'm Livia, Livia Barker. Looks like we're going to be roommates.'

Demeter took the outstretched hand and shook it. 'My name's Demeter. Demeter Snape.' The name still felt strange on her tongue. It was the name of her father, the name of a man of whom she knew nothing at all. The name of a man whom she had still not met.

Livia's eyes became bigger. 'Snape? Are you Severus Snape's daughter? Wow. My father works for the Ministry, you know. He's colleagues with Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley. And they always say that Snape was a hero.'

Demeter just nodded and forced herself to smile. It felt strange that this girl seemed to know more about her father than she did.

'Tell me,' Livia went on, 'was he really as mean as everybody says?'

Demeter shrugged. 'I don't know. I never met him.'

'Oh.' Livia looked slightly startled, but before she could say any more, a third girl entered the room. It was Sarah.

'Can you believe our luck?' she asked. 'Same House and roommates?'

Sarah and Livia introduced each other, and the three girls were just about to open a box of sweets when the door opened and the Head Girl came in.

'Demeter Snape? You're to report to the Headmistress' office at once,' she said. 'How on earth have you managed to get into trouble already?'

Sarah and Livia exchanged a surprised look and repeated the Head Girl's question. But Demeter lied and said that she had no idea. She did not feel like sharing that she was finally going to meet her father.

~ ~ ~

'Demeter has been Sorted into Gryffindor.'

Severus spun around. When Minerva had called him to her office and then left, telling him to wait, he had expected that he was about to be introduced to his daughter. He had not, however, been prepared for Morgaine banging open the door and tell him that the girl had been Sorted into ... What had she just said?

'Gryffindor?'

Morgaine shut the door behind her and narrowed her eyes. 'Well, it isn't really that surprising, is it?'

'No, maybe not,' Severus replied. After all, there had been some very brave Gryffindors in the girl's family, Albus Dumbledore to name just one. But still, Severus did not have to like it.

'She is on her way up here now,' Morgaine informed him. 'Are you ready to meet her?'

Severus nodded. He had been ready for quite some time now.

'Don't scare her,' Morgaine beseeched him. 'It's been a busy day. Demeter is certainly tired, and she has never met a ghost before.'

'I doubt Demeter would be scared of the hounds of hell with you by her side,' Severus pointed out, attempting a joke to lighten the mood. But Morgaine shook her head.

'I won't be staying,' she said. 'This is your moment, yours and Demeter's. And I have ... things to do.'

'Things?' Severus frowned. 'What kind of things?' Whatever could be more important to Morgaine than the meeting between her daughter and the man who had fathered the child?

'I can't stay,' Morgaine simply said and had already turned to leave when she stopped dead in her tracks.

'Will you protect her, Severus?' she asked. 'Will you protect our child?'

Severus narrowed his pale eyes. 'What would the girl need protection from?' he wondered. 'Her House mates?'

Morgaine slowly turned around to face him again, and the look in her eyes told Severus that even his second joke had been anything but well-received. 'Will you, Severus?' she repeated her question. 'Will you protect our daughter?'

'Why would you even ask?' Severus enquired, the tone of his voice now reflecting Morgaine's seriousness. 'Of course I will do everything in my power to protect Demeter.'

Morgaine nodded. 'I needed to hear you say it,' she whispered.

Severus opened his mouth to ask for Morgaine's reasons, but he was interrupted by a knock on the door. His daughter had arrived.

~ ~ ~

When Demeter knocked at the Headmistress' door, her heart was beating so fast that she was afraid it might crack a rib. Whatever awaited her beyond that door? She had imagined meeting her father so many times, but now all the images in her head had been blown away, and she felt as if she were standing at the edge of the Black Lake, being expected to jump in headfirst.

She was surprised as her mother opened the door and slightly shocked when she looked at her mother's face. Only an hour ago, after the Sorting, her mother had looked so happy. And now she looked once more tired, so incredibly tired, and any trace of a smile had left her eyes. But her voice was warm and soft as always.

'We have been expecting you, little one.'

Curiously, Demeter craned her neck and looked around in the office. She knew that the former Headmasters and Headmistresses of Hogwarts all had a portrait hanging right there on the wall. Most probably her father had one, too. She located the portrait of her great-great-grandfather Albus Dumbledore. The old man was wearing purple robes and smiling kindly at her. And then he waved and stepped out of his frame.

'You father insisted on not having his portrait hung up here,' Morgaine explained, answering Demeter's unspoken question. 'He felt that he was not worthy of it.'

Demeter frowned. Severus Snape not worthy of having his portrait hung up in the Headmistress' office? Rubbish! But it did not feel like the right opportunity to ask about his reasons.

'I never asked to be made Headmaster, and I hated every minute of it. And I would hate having to spend the next hundred years in this office.'

His voice made Demeter spin around. She had never heard a voice like this. It was soft like velvet, cold like ice, both at once, and it made the hair on her neck stand up and a shiver go down her spine.

With her mouth slightly open, she stared at the ghost in front of her. He was shimmering silvery-blue. His hair hung like curtains around his face. His nose was hooked and his features severe. And he looked exactly as Demeter had imagined him.

'I'll leave you two alone.'

Demeter felt the faintest brush of a kiss on her forehead and saw her mother cast a glance at the ghost. And while he just gave a curt nod as a gesture of goodbye, Demeter could have sworn that she had seen tears glitter in her mother's eyes.

As the door had closed, Demeter swallowed drily and then turned to face the ghost again. She had never met one before. Well, she had met Sir Nicholas in the Great Hall earlier that evening, but she had never talked to a ghost face to face. To be honest, her first impulse had been to call after her mother, to tell her not to leave her alone. But she had kept her mouth shut and was now bravely facing the ghost of Severus Snape, who in his turn was eying here from top to toe.

'You have your mother's eyes,' he said after a while. And all of a sudden, his voice didn't sound so cold anymore. But the intense gaze with which he was looking at her still made Demeter feel uncomfortable. 'Otherwise you do not resemble her at all.'

'People say I look like you, sir,' Demeter said quietly. She did not dare talk loudly. She did not want the ghost to hear that her voice was trembling.

'Like me?' the ghost asked, his eyes boring into hers. 'Now that is a cruel thing to say to a girl. But it might be true. You have inherited my mother's looks,' he pointed out. 'And, unfortunately, my father's nose.'

Demeter bit her lip and lowered her gaze to the floor, not really knowing what to make of the ghost's words. Did he think her ugly? Or did he just think that she did not look like him at all, although everybody else said so?

'Your mother tells me you were Sorted into Gryffindor,' the ghost stated after a while, and Demeter nodded.

'That figures,' the ghost went on. 'Your great-great-grandfather was a famous Gryffindor. And your mother should have been Sorted into that House as well. She is one of the bravest people I have ever known.'

Demeter lifted her head to find the ghost still looking at her with those bottomless eyes. 'They say that maybe you should have been a Gryffindor as well, sir.'

To that, the ghost frowned. 'Who says that?'

'Harry Potter, for example,' Demeter replied. 'He says that you were one of the bravest people he ever knew.'

She saw the frown deepen on the ghost's brow and was startled by the coldness that had suddenly returned into his voice.

'Do not believe everything people tell you, Demeter,' he chided her. 'Gather facts and build your own opinion.'

Demeter bit her lip and nodded. 'I will, sir. Thank you for the advice.'

Silence settled over the office, and for some minutes, girl and ghost stood gazing at each other, both absorbed by their own thoughts. Demeter was looking for something to say, something smart that would impress the ghost, her father, and make him like her. But whatever she came up with seemed silly.

'You should not be here tonight, Demeter,' the ghost finally said, his voice back at a neutral tone. 'It is your first night at the castle. Go get to know your House mates.'

Demeter nodded and gave him a shy smile. 'It was nice meeting you, sir,' she said, not sure that it was the right thing to say. And she was not sure what to feel either. Partly, she was relieved to get away from his piercing eyes. But she also felt as if he was throwing her out.

To her surprise, a smile flitted over his ghostly features. It passed so quickly that she would have missed it, had she blinked at just that moment.

'It was nice meeting you, too, Demeter of the Lake.'

'Snape,' Demeter corrected him quickly. 'Mother wanted me to carry your name. Demeter Snape.'

'Demeter Snape,' the ghost repeated pensively. And for a minute, he was silent, as if he were contemplating the sound of that name. Then he nodded. 'Demeter Snape, I am sure we will meet again. If you wish, that is.'

'Yes, sir,' Demeter answered truthfully. 'I would like that very much.'

~ ~ ~

Far away from the Headmistress' office, in the seclusion of the Shrieking Shack, Morgaine was cowering on the dusty floor. In front of her, on the dark spot which had been formed by Severus' blood, lay three black obsidians.

She had held them tightly in her hand while she had listened to Severus' promise to protect Demeter, and she had not let go of them until she had reached the Shack. There she had washed them and placed them on the floor together with her wand. She would not need her wand. Neither birch nor dragon heart string would help her tonight. What she needed was Severus' promise and her trust in the Light.

She lit a candle and picked up the first obsidian, holding it over the candle, so close that she could feel the flame's heat on her skin.

'Obsidian, black as his hair, black as his eyes,

Guard her from harm, make her think twice.

'Sharp as his tongue, sharp as his pain,

Keep her clear-eyed and true, not vain.

'Hard as his courage, hard as his will,

Defend her from those who wish her ill.

'Obsidian formed in Earth's fiery core,

I ask protection for his child that I bore.'

Thrice Morgaine repeated the spell. Thrice she let the flame singe her skin. And thrice she prayed that Demeter would never need the protection of the stones.

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A/N: Thousand thanks to Kyria of Delphi for the spell and her blessing.

## XXII: Reflections

*Chapter 22 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XXII: Reflections

The gargoyle at the bottom of the stairs had said that Demeter had left the Headmistress' office almost twenty minutes ago, but still Morgaine decided to ascend. The girl might have left, but she hoped that Severus would still be there. Funnily enough, she was confident that Demeter had handled the meeting with the ghost of her father well. She was, however, not sure about Severus' reaction. Hopefully, he had played nicely.

Morgaine could not keep her lips from twitching into a grin. How many first-years, cheeky Slytherins and timid Hufflepuffs alike, had been reduced to a puddle of tears during their first meeting with Severus Snape? How often had it not taken much more than a well-chosen word from him to make them quiver?

But surely, he would not have done so with his own child? Or would he?

Outside the office door, Morgaine paused. Severus was not there anymore, she would have sensed him otherwise. She always did. Certainly, he had retired to the dungeons.

For a moment, Morgaine closed her eyes and listened inwards: Yes, Severus was indeed in the dungeons, in his old study. But that was about all Morgaine could read. His mental barriers were strong that night, and she decided not to attempt to break them. Not yet anyway.

Instead she entered the now empty office.

Although Minerva had added her own personal touch to the office, it was still Dumbledore's somehow. Minerva and the old headmaster had been good friends for many years, and Morgaine assumed that Minerva was reluctant to erase his trace completely. She had kept quite a few of his curious instruments, and even Fawkes' cage was still there, despite the fact that the phoenix had not been seen since the day Dumbledore had been laid to rest. She used Dumbledore's old chair, his desk, and on the coffee table Morgaine spotted his old tea set.

She did not even flinch as she heard his voice. She had expected him to be there, and out of sheer habit, her eyes flitted towards the chair behind the desk where she had seen him sit so many times, smiling benignly and his eyes twinkling behind his spectacles. But of course, his voice was coming from his portrait on the wall.

'What happened to your hand, child?' was the first question he asked.

'I played with fire and was burned,' Morgaine replied and then slowly turned to face Dumbledore's portrait, fixing its inhabitant with the icy look that was reserved for him alone. Any trace of wistfulness had disappeared from her mind.

'I assume you have not been visiting any of your other portraits over the last hour, have you, Dumbledore?' she asked.

'You saw me leave when you brought Demeter, did you not?' Suddenly the old man looked affronted. 'Are you accusing me of eavesdropping?'

Morgaine crossed her arms in front of her chest. 'Don't insult my intelligence, Dumbledore.'

Dumbledore tilted his head and looked down at the young woman in front of his portrait. 'There was a time when you called me grandfather,' he pointed out. The offended look had given way to an almost sad one, and he sounded regretful.

'There was a time when you deserved the title, old man.' She had not said the words loudly, and for the time being, Morgaine did not care whether Dumbledore had heard them or not. She doubted that her bitterness towards her great-grandfather would ever lose its sting. If she had a choice, she would never talk to him again, not after how he had used her. Her, Severus, even Demeter. But for the time being, she had no choice.

'How did it go?' she started.

'How do you think it went, child?' Dumbledore asked, his blue eyes twinkling so kindly that it seemed impossible that he could have heard Morgaine's hate-filled words. 'Demeter was very well-behaved. She answered her father's questions, and she answered them truthfully. As for Severus ...' Dumbledore broke off and a smile played around his lips. 'Severus was as we would have expected him to be: guarded, uncomfortable. Yet he was curious.'

As much as Morgaine tried to keep her stern look, she could not help but smile as well. She had expected nothing less of Demeter than that she would look her father straight in the eyes and try to impress him, driven by Gryffindor bravery and Slytherin ambition. As for Severus, she had not expected him to react in any other way either. Ghost or not, he would not let anyone inside his armour, not even his own child. Not yet, anyway.

'Was it evil of me to leave the two of them alone?' she asked softly, and caught herself looking up at her great-grandfather almost in the same way she had many years ago, when she had still been an innocent child and the world still in its order. Back then, she had believed that Dumbledore had all the right answers.

'No, my child, not evil,' Dumbledore replied. 'It was an act worthy of a Slytherin. You left them alone and hence forced them to get to know each other. The meeting could have ended in tears, but Demeter faced the challenge bravely.'

'She is doing her House proud already,' Morgaine pointed out.

'Indeed,' Dumbledore agreed. 'Telling Severus Snape that he had been Sorted into the wrong House does take a brave person.'

Morgaine's eyebrows shut upwards, and a short laugh escaped her throat. 'She told him what?'

Dumbledore nodded. 'They discussed House qualities, and Severus suggested that you should have been Sorted into Gryffindor because of your bravery. Whereupon Demeter told him that the same applied to him.'

The smile froze on Morgaine's lips and was replaced by a frown. 'I assume Severus did not react too kindly to that.' Over the years, many people had pointed out that Severus Snape had been a brave man, and it had seldom earned them anything but a sneer.

Dumbledore's eyes, however, were still twinkling. 'Severus told Demeter not to listen to what other people say, but to make up her own mind. And I like to think your daughter understood his advice.'

He paused and then fixed Morgaine with a searching look over his half-moon spectacles. 'I assume that we have now arrived at the point of our discussion where we should have started from the very beginning. Is it not so, Morgaine?'

Morgaine did not answer, but sank her teeth into her bottom lip. She hated it when Dumbledore read her mind. And she hated it when he was right. But Dumbledore did not need her to answer.

'You are relieved that Demeter has not been Sorted into Slytherin,' Dumbledore pointed out. 'You are relieved that she will spend her waking hours far away from the people you think could have a bad influence on her. You are relieved that she will sleep in the tower and not in the dungeon.'

'Can you blame me?' Morgaine's voice was soft now and had lost any kind of bitterness. This was not about her feeling towards her great-grandfather. This was not about her at all. This was about her daughter. She needed the old man. She needed his wisdom and his cunning. She needed him to help her protect her child.

Dumbledore nodded towards her left hand. 'Even in the Shrieking Shack, you cannot cast an ancient spell without being noticed,' he pointed out and raised his hand as Morgaine opened her mouth. 'You did the right thing, child. Demeter will wear the talisman gladly because you gave it to her. It will protect her and it will help you sleep at night. You can also count on the magic of Gryffindor House and the magic of a very powerful ghost. I think no child within these walls has ever been better protected.'

'Does she need protection?' Morgaine asked, clamping her hand around the three obsidians that still lay in her pocket. 'Is my child in danger?'

'Not tonight, Morgaine,' Dumbledore answered. 'Tonight, Demeter will sleep safely in Gryffindor Tower. You do not need to keep watch. Tonight, you need to take care of yourself. Go to the dungeons, child. Go to Severus.'

~ ~ ~

Morgaine was greeted by the sound of glass breaking as she entered the dark corridor that led down to Severus' old study, and her brow furrowed. Too often had she heard that sound. Too often had it been the result of Severus releasing built-up tension. Did that mean that his meeting with Demeter had not gone well after all, despite what Dumbledore had said?

She did not open the door at once, but let her hand rest on the doorknob, silently calling out for Severus. If his wall was still up, she would not enter his study, but leave him alone. But his mind was open, and he told her to enter.

There were no smashed phials on the floor. Actually, there was no glass anywhere. And Severus' ghost was hovering beside the fireplace, where a fire was crackling. He seemed calm, despite his slight scowl.

'Is everything alright?' Morgaine asked and carefully closed the door behind her. 'I thought I heard ...'

'Glass smashing?' Severus' scowl darkened. 'It seems I overestimated my magical abilities. I am apparently incapable of conducting a task as simple as transporting two glasses and a bottle of wine at the same time.'

There was indeed a bottle of elf-made wine standing on the mantelpiece and a fine crystal glass beside it.

'Why two glasses?' Morgaine enquired.

'Just because I am unable to drink with you does not mean that I have no manners,' Severus replied, his tone more annoyed than snappish. 'I meant to keep you company when toasting.'

His waved his ghostly hand, and the bottle seemed to uncork itself, floated up into the air, tilted and filled the intact glass with dark red wine.

'I am afraid you have to make a toast on your own now,' Severus pointed out. 'The other glass is beyond repair.'

Morgaine stepped closer. 'And what are we am I toasting to?'

'To our daughter's arrival at Hogwarts?' Severus suggested.

*Our daughter.* Morgaine smiled, accepted the glass that came floating towards her and repeated Severus' toast. He had said *our* daughter.

'How did it go?' she asked straightforwardly after the first sip. She wanted to know. She wanted to know now and did not have the patience for pleasantries.

'She called me sir,' was the first thing Severus said, and his tone spoke of uttermost annoyance.

But instead of growing worried, Morgaine had to fight hard not to grin. Could it be that the stern, otherwise so confident Severus Snape was feeling insecure because his daughter had addressed him in such a formal manner?

'Demeter is almost twelve and met you for the very first time,' she pointed out, feeling the corners of her mouth twitch, and quickly raised her glass to her lips. Heavens forbid she would annoy Severus. 'You did not expect her to call you *Daddy*, did you?'

'No,' Severus replied grumpily and frowned.

This time, Morgaine could not resist grinning at his reaction. What *had* he expected, she wondered. What had anyone expected? Surely, if Demeter had indeed called Severus *Daddy* and tried to wrap her arms around his neck had that been physically possible he would most probably have hexed her. No, not hexed. Physical violence was not something Severus resorted to. But he would certainly have chided her, and his words would have made the girl recoil in a more effective way than any hex would ever have. His sharp tongue had for many years been his weapon of choice, and he had wielded it well.

'Have you spoken to Demeter yet?' Severus suddenly asked.

Morgaine shook her head. 'It's her first night in the castle. The last thing she needs is me mothering her. She has friends to make.'

Severus smirked. 'I told her the same thing.'

'This means we are either good parents or make the same mistakes,' Morgaine pointed out drily. Now that she knew that the meeting between Severus and their daughter had gone well, her other fears came creeping back into her heart. Not even the heavy elf-made wine seemed to be able to make her unwind. And as she felt Severus' intense look upon her, she did not even try to hide her tension.

'Demeter is not the only one with a lot on her mind tonight, am I right?' Severus asked, his eyes narrowed.

Morgaine shook her head and put down her glass on the mantle. 'I know it's silly,' she started. 'Gryffindor is a good House. And Demeter is a good child and a talented witch. She will make friends and impress her teachers. But still ...'

'You would be a strange mother if you did not worry, Morgaine,' Severus pointed out and drifted closer, close enough that Morgaine could feel her skin prickle at his proximity.

'Demeter will do fine,' Severus continued. 'She seems bright and strong-willed.'

'She has inherited those traits from her father,' Morgaine interrupted.

Severus fixed her with a stern look. 'Do not diminish your own qualities, Morgaine.'

He tilted his head, and as Morgaine lifted hers, her eyes locked immediately onto his. They had been onyx once, she thought. As dark as the three stones she had handed over to her most trusted elf a short while ago.

'I have already noticed how much Demeter resembles you,' Severus said. 'She is openhearted and honest. And the light in her eyes is the same you once had. So is her smile. And both are sorely missed.'

Severus' voice was as soft as the most expensive velvet, and it seemed to wrap itself around Morgaine's heart. She felt her bottom lip quiver, and as much as she hated it, she could not stop it. Just as little as she could keep her eyes from filling with tears.

'I was so afraid that you would be gone when I returned, Severus,' she said in a low voice. She had not meant to tell him, but she could not keep quiet any longer. 'You have no idea why you are still here. You have no idea if you will still be here tomorrow or even in an hour. You could be gone the next time I blink.'

A tear ran down her cheek, and Morgaine wiped it off with the back of her hand, endlessly angry with herself. She should be focusing on the well-being of her child now. Instead she was crying for a ghost. And herself.

But Severus understood.

'I am afraid, too, Morgaine,' he confessed, surprised at how easy the words had come. Not so long ago, he would never have confessed his fears. But these were different times now. And for Morgaine, he would bare his soul. Maybe, if he were lucky, his confession would make it easier for her.

'I am afraid that I once more will have to leave without being able to take farewell from you,' he continued. 'I am afraid I will not see our daughter grow up. When I met her today ... Morgaine, I do not want to leave either of you. And I do not know how, but I will do everything in my power to be right by your side. Always.'

Always.

Severus had given this promise before, to the woman he had once loved and whom he had thought that he would love forever. She had kept a firm grip of his heart and soul for many years, and he had kept his promise and had protected her son until the very end, until he had been absolved.

He would keep *this* promise as well. For Morgaine, he would sacrifice his soul. For her, he would not do it out of guilt but true love. And this time, the child he had promised to protect was his own.

~ ~ ~

It seemed natural that Morgaine would spend the night in Severus' old quarters. He did not even have to ask her. And when she lay in his bed, her chestnut hair and pale skin contrasted so beautifully with the dark sheets, and her cheeks were flushed from the elf-made wine.

'May I?' Severus asked and carefully extended his ghostly hand towards hers.

Morgaine did not answer, but wordlessly lifted her hand from the bed. They met in mid-air, palm to palm, and for a moment Severus was afraid that Morgaine's hand would glide through his like a wanderer through the mists or a ship through water. But then he felt a tickling sensation, and his hand felt warm. And their fingers once more entwined as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

Severus kept his eyes firmly on their hands, transfixed by the sight. It was almost eerie, and somehow it felt wrong. Ghost and human were not supposed to touch. But how could it be wrong if it felt so good? Why would the gods allow it, if it were wrong?

The hours passed, and the fire in the grate had long since stopped burning when a whisper made Severus snap up his head.

'Would you want to come back to life?'

'Excuse me?'

But Morgaine did not answer his question. In fact, she had probably not heard him. She was fast asleep. She had either talked in her sleep or it had been her soul whispering to Severus' in the dead of night. It had happened before.

She looked so peaceful in her sleep. Gone were the frown on her brow and the tears on her cheek, and as Severus considered her question, he could only find one answer: Yes. Heavens, yes.

He had thought that being a ghost was enough. He was able to communicate and interact with the people around him and had even learnt to hold Morgaine's hand. Maybe one day, he would learn to do more, but so far, it had been enough. Their relationship had, after all, always been more on a psychical level than a physical. But not having been able to follow Morgaine to Iceland over the summer, not even having been able to use the Floo network to talk to her, and most of all not having been able to embrace her when she had returned, had changed Severus' perspective. Being a ghost, just being *there*, wasn't enough. Not for him and definitely not for Morgaine. He could hear her sigh of relief every time he touched her hand and could feel the strength in her fingers when they closed around his. And he could see the disappointed look in her eyes every time they let go. She needed more. And he couldn't give it to her.

And then there was Demeter.

Severus had never liked children, but this one was different. This child was his own flesh and blood, the daughter of the woman for whom he had returned from the realms of death. And the child reminded him so much of her mother.



*They look nothing alike*, Severus thought as he let his eyes rest on Morgaine's face. But still, when he had met his daughter earlier, all he had been able to think of had been Morgaine.

Had it been because of the girl's honesty with which she had answered his questions? Or had it been the fact that she had not trembled under his scrutinising gaze? Or had it been the look in her blue eyes, the look that said, *I am here to stay no matter how hard you are trying to push me away*?

Morgaine had been like that as well when she had come to Hogwarts. She had defiantly put out her chin when he had given her tasks he would not have given any other student her age. She had narrowed her eyes at his biting comments and returned them as well as he had dished them out. And when the whole world around him had seemed to sink into darkness, she had been waiting patiently in the shadows until he had been ready to accept her help, her friendship and eventually her love.

Slytherin determination and Gryffindor bravery. During their short meeting, Severus had noticed that Demeter, like her mother, possessed the two qualities the rivaling Houses valued most. She would have done well in Slytherin, there was no doubt. But the Sorting Hat had chosen Gryffindor.

Severus' lips twitched. Who would have thought that his daughter would be Sorted into the House he had once despised most of all? Yes, he had despised. Nowadays, he did not care that much anymore. He had learnt that the qualities people carried in their hearts mattered more than the colour of their House scarf. Certainly, Demeter would do her House proud. She would impress her teachers and her peers with her mind and her personality alike.

And all he could do was to stand by and watch.

A shadow fell over Severus' pale face as it hit him how much he would miss. He would never lift his daughter onto a broomstick and teach her how to fly. He would never guide her hand while stirring a potion or casting a spell. He would never ...

Would he ever be able to do anything for his daughter? How were they to interact, a ghost and a child? It was hard enough for Morgaine, and she was a grown woman who made her own decisions. Demeter was merely a child, and soon she would be busy studying magic and making friends. She would not have time for a ghost. And despite her telling him that she would like to meet him again, Severus had his doubts. He wouldn't impose himself on her. The child would have to come to him.

~ ~ ~

Up in her four-poster bed in Gryffindor tower, Demeter was unaware of her father's thoughts. She had her own troubles that made it hard for her to fall asleep, and the belly ache caused by seven Chocolate Frogs and half a box of Bertie Botts was not the main reason for her still being awake. There were a million thoughts in her head, and the most dominant was about her meeting with the ghost of Severus Snape.

It had gone well, had it not? After what she had heard of Severus Snape lately, she had been prepared to have her head ripped off. But said head was still firmly attached to her neck. He had not snapped or been mean in any way. He had been ... Well, how had he been?

*Reserved* was the first word that sprang to Demeter's mind. She had expected that. Her mother had told her that Severus Snape had never been a cordial man, and as this had been their first meeting, Demeter had not expected him to hug her or anything. But she would have liked him to be a little more, well, fatherly.

He had commented about her looks. Apparently, she had inherited them from her grandparents. And Demeter would have loved to ask the ghost about his parents, but she had not dared. If he had wanted to tell her anything, he would surely have done so of his own accord.

He had also commented about her Sorting. To Demeter's surprise, he had not seemed too disappointed that the Hat had put her into Gryffindor. Actually, it almost seemed as if he had a positive attitude towards the bravery of Gryffindor House. Who would have thought?

But then Demeter had made a mistake for which she now wanted to slap herself. She had had the audacity to tell Severus Snape that he should have been a Gryffindor as well because he, according to Harry Potter, had possessed a lot of bravery himself. After that, he had more or less broken off their little chat and told her to go back to her common room.

But he had also asked her if she wanted to meet him again. And when she had given him a positive answer, he had not objected.

Demeter once more turned in her bed. *It could have gone worse*, she told herself. He had asked her to come back, after all. But still, she had the feeling that she had not made the best of impressions.

Walking down the stairs from the Headmistress' office, she had not met anyone, no other students, no teachers, not even a ghost, and for some moments, she had considered trying to find her mother's quarters. But she had decided against it. Partly because she could barely find her way back to Gryffindor tower and would most certainly get lost, but first and foremost because she did not want to be a cry-baby. Her mother had obviously been under the impression that Demeter could handle the situation, otherwise she would not have left her daughter alone with the ghost. Surely, she would have been disappointed if Demeter had come knocking at her door to tell her that she was afraid that Severus Snape did not like her.

And so, Demeter had returned to Gryffindor tower and her dormitory, where Sarah and Livia had been waiting up for her, sharing sweets and silly stories about make-up, shoes and boys. And Demeter had joined in, eating more sweets than was good for her and smiling happily just so neither of her new friends would ask any detailed questions about the meeting with the ghost of her father.

When the clock crept towards eleven, sleep finally overcame Demeter, and she drifted off into the land of dreams, never noticing the elf that silently put a small parcel on her nightstand. It was not until the next morning that she unwrapped it and found a simple silver necklace with a Phoenix-shaped pendent. The bird held three black obsidians in its claws and seemed to be taking flight towards the heavens. Underneath lay a neatly folded note from her mother, telling her to wear the pendent as a good-luck-charm and inviting her to the Potions mistress' office after breakfast.

But before Demeter went down to the Great Hall, she unwrapped the second parcel that had appeared right beside the first one at the stroke of midnight, seemingly out of thin air. That parcel was wrapped in dark green paper and did not contain any note, just a heavy silver ring, encrusted with precious emeralds which were encircled by three coiling snakes. It was the perfect welcome gift to Hogwarts for the daughter of Severus Snape, had she been Sorted into Slytherin House. But as it was far too big for her to wear, Demeter carefully put it back into its box and stowed it away safely in the bottom drawer of her nightstand.

## XXIII: Slytherin Territory

Chapter 23 of 40

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

## Chapter XXIII: Slytherin Territory

'How was your first night in the castle?'

Demeter looked up from her tea and saw Melvin Riverbed smiling at her. His blond hair was a mess, his eyes were puffy, and he looked very much as if he had just climbed out of bed. Not surprisingly, really, Demeter concluded. She was up early, and apart from her, there were only a handful of other students in the Great Hall: four seventh-year Gryffindors sitting at the far end of the table, drinking coffee, three sleepy-looking Hufflepuffs and seven diligent Ravenclaws, the latter comparing timetables. Melvin, it seemed, was the only Slytherin who was already up.

'It was a very fine night, thank you,' Demeter replied not completely truthfully. She did not feel like sharing her thoughts with her Slytherin friend just yet. She had to understand her feelings herself first, she thought. She was still feeling confused and had not yet made up her mind about her first meeting with her father.

'How was yours?' she enquired instead.

'Awfully short.' Melvin rolled his eyes. 'Peeves decided to bang on the dormitory door all night. Our Head Boy had to go and fetch the Bloody Baron to shut him up.'

'Who's Peeves?' Demeter asked.

Melvin smiled. 'I keep forgetting that you have just arrived. Peeves is the castle's Poltergeist. He hates me, and I try to stay out of his way.'

He cast a look over his shoulder, and then looked back at Demeter. 'Seeing as none of my House mates are here yet, do you mind if I sit with you for a while? I guess your House mates won't mind, but mine are a little ... selective.'

'Selective?' Demeter asked and indicated for Melvin to sit opposite her.

Melvin flopped onto the bench. 'Some of my House mates think that it is, um ...' He broke off and blushed. 'They think it's inappropriate to associate with other Houses ... well, with Gryffindors, mainly.'

He had said the last part of the sentence very fast, and Demeter raised an eyebrow. 'And you don't agree?'

'Of course not,' Melvin protested. 'Just because Salazar Slytherin and Godric Gryffindor hated each other's guts a thousand years ago, doesn't mean Slytherin and Gryffindor House have to hate each other for all eternity. And besides ...' His cheeks went from pink to crimson, and he cast down his eyes. 'I'd come and sit with you even if you were in Hufflepuff,' he muttered.

Demeter had the good grace to cast down her eyes as well and smile under the cover of her raven black hair, pretending that she had not heard him. But in the pit of her stomach, she felt butterflies flutter their tiny wings once more. She had had the same feeling on their way to King's Cross station, when her mother had jokingly asked her whether she were smitten with Melvin. Demeter had scowled then and resolutely denied that possibility. But now she wasn't entirely sure anymore. Certainly, if she didn't care for Melvin in *that* way, his little confession wouldn't have such an effect on her, now would it?

Silence settled over the part of the Gryffindor table where the two friends were sitting while each of them feverishly tried to occupy themselves with something. A piece of toast fell victim to Demeter's crushing fingers, and Melvin drank one glass of pumpkin juice after the other, his own hands shaking so much that the jug clattered against the glass each time he refilled it.

'Can I ask you a favour?' Demeter asked quietly after a while, and Melvin snapped up his head to reveal a facial expression that suggested that he'd rob Gringotts if she asked him to.

'My mother asked me to come and see her after breakfast, and I don't know my way around the castle yet,' Demeter clarified. 'I was wondering if you could show me the way.'

'Of course.' Melvin was positively beaming. 'You know, your mum, Professor duLac, has just moved her study down to the dungeons, right beside the Potions classroom. The dungeons are my domain, you know. I'd be more than happy to show them to you.' Then he frowned. 'Why are you down here already anyway? In the Great Hall, I mean. Don't the Gryffindor first-years come here together with their Head of House?'

Demeter shrugged. 'We're not meeting Madam Hooch until after our first lesson. The Head Girl said something about it being character building for us to find our way to breakfast, our first class and back to the common room on our own.'

Melvin sighed theatrically and nodded towards the entrance. 'Looks like only the Slytherin first-years need escorting.'

Demeter looked up and caught sight of all the first-years that had been Sorted into Slytherin the night before. Most of them looked rather sleepy still, but they also looked very excited. Demeter, however, couldn't care less about her peers. Her eyes were firmly attached on the red-haired witch who was leading the group, and once again Demeter thought that she had never seen her mother look that way. There was a serenity over her Demeter had never seen before. And if she wasn't mistaken, there was a smile playing around her mother's lips as she directed the Slytherin first-years to their seats and made sure everyone had some food on their plates before she took her own seat at the staff table.

When Melvin excused himself and promised to come back after he had eaten breakfast to show Demeter the way to the Potion mistress' office, Demeter just nodded absent-mindedly, her eyes still on her mother. Suddenly, she wished that she, too, had been Sorted into Slytherin. It just did not seem fair that those first-years had been allowed to spend the early hours of their first morning at Hogwarts with Professor duLac while she, Professor duLac's daughter, had to wait until after breakfast.

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'You know, at home, I never have breakfast,' Sarah explained and helped herself to more toast and yet another flavour of jam. 'I always thought I did not like breakfast, but with that selection I think I can get used to it.'

'My mother would throw a fit if she saw what I am having,' Livia pointed out before sinking her teeth into a chocolate croissant. 'She's very healthy, my mum,' she continued with her mouth full. 'Thinks a bowl of fruit and a cup of herbal tea is what growing teenagers need for breakfast.' She rolled her eyes. 'I tell you, it's sugar I need! How about your mum, Demeter?'

From under the curtain of her black hair, Demeter sneaked a peek at the staff table. 'My mother has tea for breakfast,' she said quietly. 'And toast with honey.' At least, she thought so. That was what her mother had been having for breakfast the few times they actually had eaten together. Ever since her mother had returned from the Wizarding world six years ago, she had always been up before dawn, and by the time Demeter had her breakfast, she would already have been busy with something else.

'Are you alright?' Sarah asked and nudged Demeter softly in the side. 'You're awfully quiet.'

'Yes, I'm fine,' Demeter lied. 'I guess I'm a little homesick, that's all.'

Once more, she cast a glance towards the staff table, just to realise that her mother wasn't there anymore. Probably, she had gone to her office and was now waiting for her, Demeter thought.

'I'll see you in Transfiguration,' she told Sarah and Livia. 'I want to go and say hi to Melvin.'

'You're going to the Slytherin table?' Livia gasped. 'I mean, it's one thing to be friends with a Slytherin, but actually going to their table! That's, um, brave.'

Demeter smirked. 'Isn't bravery one of the most valued traits of our House?' Besides, she had no reason to be intimidated by any Slytherin. So far, she had not had any problems with any of them. But when she approached the Slytherin table, a very tall and very broad boy stepped into her way. Had he been one foot taller, Demeter would have sworn he had troll blood in him.

'Hey, little Gryffindor,' the boy sneered, towering over her. 'Not lost, are you?'

Demeter felt an unbidden feeling of fear rise inside her chest but defiantly put out her chin. The hall was full of other students, and the teachers were sitting only a few feet away. That big bully was not going to be able to do anything to her except maybe engage into a battle of words. But judging by his silly grin, Demeter doubted that he'd be able to pronounce any word that had more than three syllables. She would most certainly win. She was just about to give the boy a biting answer when someone she knew appeared at his side.

'Could you at least try to be civilised for a change, Miller?' Argyle Makdoui grabbed the tall boy by the shoulder and smiled his unattractive smile at Demeter. 'Excuse us for a moment,' he added before turning to the boy, talking in a low tone. But Demeter still heard him.

'Wrong Gryffindor to pick on, Miller. That is the Snape girl,' Argyle whispered, and Miller's mouth fell open. 'You know what we've been told.'

Maybe it would have been wiser to pretend that she had not heard anything, but Demeter's curiosity got the better of her. 'What have you been told?' she asked, loud enough for several Slytherins to look up from their breakfast plates.

Argyle seemed to hesitate for a moment, but when he turned to face Demeter, he was once again sporting that smile of which he certainly thought that it was charming. 'You're a friend of Melvin's, Demeter Snape. And if you're friends with one Slytherin, that means you're friends with all of us. Isn't that right, Miller?'

Miller nodded, his mouth still open. He more and more resembled a troll.

'Now, what gives us the honour of having you visit our table?' Argyle asked, his voice so sugary that Demeter could barely resist the urge to wrinkle her nose.

'Maybe she wants to see for herself if we Slytherins really drink snake blood for breakfast.'

Melvin stepped between Argyle and Demeter, first giving Argyle a dirty look and then winking at Demeter, who felt a sudden rush of affection for the boy. Argyle was at least one head taller than Melvin, and that Miller bloke looked like he could crush Melvin with his dustbin lid-like hands. But still Melvin stood up to them both. For her.

'Let's get out of here,' Melvin said, taking Demeter by the hand and pulling her after him just like he had done on the train the day before. But this time, Demeter didn't mind.

'You don't, do you?' she asked once they had left the Great Hall.

'Don't do what?' Melvin asked.

'Drink snake blood for breakfast.'

The moment Demeter had uttered the words, she realised how stupid they were and wished she had kept her mouth shut. Of course Slytherins did not drink snake blood. Not for breakfast or any other time of the day. Why on earth would she even ask?

Melvin looked back over his shoulder, his face serious. 'There are rumours that the Gryffindors have lion liver for tea on Fridays,' he said. 'Is that true?'

'How would I know?' Demeter burst out without really thinking about what Melvin had just said. 'I just arrived yesterday.'

'You'll tell me on Saturday morning, right?'

Then Melvin couldn't keep a straight face any longer. He started grinning, then laughing, and Demeter couldn't help but laugh with him once she had realised that he had been pulling her leg all along. And even when they were both bent double with laughter, Melvin did still not let go of Demeter's hand.

The stairs that led down to the dungeons were dark and steep, and the torches on the walls cast eerie shadows. A gloomy place, Demeter thought, and had she believed the stories one of the older Gryffindors had told the first-years in the common room the night before, she would probably have been scared and expected some ghost to jump at her. But she had already met a Slytherin ghost and knew that they weren't all that frightening. And besides, she was with Melvin. Nothing would happen to her.

'The Potions mistress' office,' Melvin announced as they stopped in front of a heavy oak door. 'Do you want me to wait for you?'

Once more, Demeter felt a warm feeling wash over her, and all she really wanted to do was give the boy in front of her a hug. But she did not dare. What if he thought she was acting silly? Instead, she shook her head.

'You need to go to class,' she said, and then assured him that she would do just fine when he asked her if she would find her way back to her common room. But her hand felt strangely empty when he let go of it, and she looked after him until he had disappeared in the dark corridor that led to the Slytherin common room. Only then did she knock on the door of her mother's office. When she was told to enter, she stepped inside.

She did not really know how she had expected the room to look like, but when she closed the door behind her, she was slightly startled by the office's gloominess. Not even the fire that was burning in the grate seemed to be able to light up the room. But when she caught sight of some of the glass jars that stood on the shelves along the walls, Demeter was quite glad the room wasn't illuminated. She wasn't sure that she really wanted to get a better look at the things that were floating in some of those jars.

'Your father's collection,' came the familiar voice of her mother out of the shadows, and Demeter flinched slightly. She had not seen her mother when she had entered the room. But there she was, sitting at her desk and behind her ... Demeter blinked. For a moment, she thought that she had seen the silvery outline of her father's ghost. But now it was gone, as if it had been swallowed by the semi-darkness.

'How was your first night at the castle?' Morgaine asked, rising from her chair and walking towards the two armchairs by the fire, beckoning Demeter to join her. 'Did you sleep alright?'

'Yes, I slept just fine,' Demeter replied, for the second time that morning not answering that very question completely truthfully. And her eyes kept darting back to the spot behind her mother's desk where she had thought she had seen her father's ghost. There was nothing, though, not even a shadow or a trembling in the air. But if he were there, she did not want him to know what kind of feelings their meeting had awoken inside her heart. She did not want him to know that she was afraid that she had made a bad first impression. She did not want him to know that she was afraid that he did not like her. If he did not know, he might give her a second chance.

Demeter sat down in the armchair opposite her mother and accepted the cup of tea she was offered. She did, however, turn down the toast. 'I've already had breakfast,' she declared.

'I happen to know that most of your breakfast toast was crumbled between your fingers, little one.'

Demeter's eyes widened, and she looked at her mother, trying to figure out how she knew.

Morgaine smiled kindly. 'If you don't ask me how I know, then I will not ask you why you felt like turning your breakfast into bird food.' Once more, she held out the plate. 'There's honey on it,' she coaxed.

At the promise of honey, Demeter's stomach gave a loud rumble, and she accepted a piece of the toast, nibbling on it as if it were the most expensive sweet from Honeydukes. She had always loved honey. The smell of it reminded her of her childhood. Actually, one of her most treasured memories was of her mother feeding her toast and honey under the birch tree by the river. She must have been very little then.

'Did you receive my gift?' Morgaine enquired, and Demeter nodded eagerly, pulling out the Phoenix pendent from under her uniform, holding it in her hand for her mother to see.

'Dumbledore owned a Phoenix,' Morgaine explained. 'His name was Fawkes. He had crimson feathers and a golden tail. I thought those colours would fit you, now that you have been Sorted into Gryffindor.'

'Where is Fawkes now?' Demeter wanted to know.

'He disappeared the day Dumbledore was laid to rest,' Morgaine answered, her eyes firmly on the pendent. 'No one knows where he went.' She closed her hand around Demeter's. 'This Phoenix, little one, is a charm. It will protect you. And I beg you not to take it off.'

'Why would I take it off?' Demeter enquired. 'It's the most beautiful thing I've ever owned.'

'Do I have your promise then?' Morgaine asked.

Demeter nodded gravely. She did not understand why this piece of jewellery was so important to her mother, but she did not ask. If her mother wanted for her to know more, she would certainly tell her. But Morgaine didn't mention the Phoenix anymore. She did not, however, take her eyes off it either.

'You said those jars were Father's collection,' Demeter started instead, attempting to break the awkward silence that had settled over them. 'Was this his office then?'

Morgaine nodded. 'It was his office for almost two decades, and now it is mine.'

'So the other Potions professor did not use it?'

'No, Professor Slughorn preferred a brighter study.'

'I can understand him,' Demeter pointed out. 'It's quite ...'

'Dark? Gloomy and creepy?'

Demeter blushed slightly but nodded.

'It is indeed a dark and gloomy place,' Morgaine started, looking around the study. 'But for me, it holds a lot of memories. Your father and I became friends here.'

Demeter looked up at her mother, not daring to make a single sound. Her mother spoke so rarely of Severus Snape, and Demeter did not want to miss the opportunity.

'I didn't come to Hogwarts before my fourth year,' Morgaine continued. 'Your father was my Head of House, and it was his job to make sure that I learnt everything I needed to know to keep up with my peers. I spent many nights down here, studying hard and trying to impress him. Sometimes I feared it was impossible.'

Demeter swallowed hard. Had her mother also found it hard to impress Severus Snape?

'I once spent a whole evening doing nothing else than cutting up hellebore,' Morgaine recounted. 'I seriously thought that he hated my guts and had given me this task out of spite. Some days later I was the only student in my year to receive an O for my Draught of Peace. The others didn't know that the plant needed to be cut in the exact right way.'

Demeter shifted in her chair. 'How will I be able to impress him?' she asked quietly. 'He isn't likely to make me cut hellebore or brew a Draught of Peace.'

'No, but I might.' Morgaine leant forward and cupped her daughter's chin with her hand. Two pairs of blue eyes locked, one pair kind, the other slightly fearful.

'Just be yourself, Demeter,' Morgaine advised. 'Show him that you are proud of who you are. Show him that you have a mind of your own. And most of all, don't let him scare you away. Show him that you are a true Gryffindor and brave enough to face him even when he tries to chase you away.'

Demeter felt her mother's eyes look right into her soul and blinked fiercely. It was silly of her to believe that her father had sent her away because she had dared telling him that the Hat had Sorted him into the wrong House. Surely, he had heard that before. And he had told her that he wouldn't mind meeting her again.

'Do you know why I asked you to come and see me here, little one, in the gloomiest room in the castle instead of my private chambers?' Morgaine asked. Her voice was so soft, so warm, and Demeter suddenly felt like a little child that had just awoken from a bad dream and wanted nothing more than to be in her mother's arms. Slowly, she shook her head.

'This is your father's old study, the place where his ghost resides,' Morgaine explained. 'He wanted you to know, so you can come and see him whenever you want, little one. All you have to do is call for him.'

## XXIV: A Caring Father

*Chapter 24 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XXIV: A Caring Father

'I thought I told you not to wait for me?' Demeter pointed out, trying to scowl at the blond boy who was leaning against the stone wall opposite the Potions mistress' office door. She failed miserably at looking stern, but the tone in her voice was enough to make Melvin lower his head. He never saw the corners of Demeter's mouth twitch, nor did he see the mischievous twinkle in her blue eyes.

'I wasn't waiting for you,' he mumbled, sounding like a miserable five-year-old who had been caught with his hand in the biscuit tin. 'I was just on my way to my first class

when you came out of the office.'

Demeter bit her lip. She had only meant to tease Melvin a little. Making him uncomfortable had been the last thing she had wanted to do. She had only known him for a couple of days, but she had already learnt that he was a sensitive boy and that he would blush for the silliest reasons. One well-worded, biting comment would certainly be enough to reduce him to tears, Demeter was quite sure of that. Not that she would ever want to make him cry. Already the fact that her playful chiding had made him uncomfortable made her feel very guilty in turn.

For some moments, both children stood silently in the corridor: one nervously shuffling his feet and the other gnawing at her lip; one feeling silly and the other not knowing how to apologise.

Gathering all her Gryffindor courage, Demeter gingerly nudged Melvin's shoulder. 'I wouldn't mind if you had been waiting for me,' she said quietly, lowering her head in order to catch Melvin's eyes.

When their eyes locked, they both smiled. And when Demeter added that she was actually very glad that he had been waiting for her, Melvin's face lit up as if someone had pointed a torch at his features. For the second time that morning, he looked as if he would do just about anything for the girl in front of him. But all she asked of him was to show her the way to the Transfiguration classroom.

As they started their ascent, chatting amicably and holding hands, the children had still not noticed the ghost that had been observing them ever since Demeter had stepped into the corridor. Lucky them. Had they seen Severus Snape's scowl, not even Demeter's Gryffindor bravery would have prevented them from fleeing the dungeons at the speed of a Firebolt.

Melvin Riverbed. Of all the boys in the castle, why did Demeter have to become friends with *that one*? And why, Severus wondered, did her choice annoy him so much?

His scowl turned a deeper shade of dark as he wasn't able to answer his own question. The boy was likeable enough, Severus had to admit that. He was well-mannered and friendly and had, as far as Severus knew, never been in trouble during his first year at Hogwarts. He didn't play Quidditch but was instead a member of the Gobstone Club. He also spent a great deal of time in the library. To sum it up, the boy was a polite, studious Slytherin with admirable social skills. What else could a father wish for in his daughter's first boyfriend? But the word *boyfriend* alone was enough to make Severus sneer.

'Why the dark face, Severus?'

He turned slowly to find Morgaine leaning against the door frame to his *her* study. Her arms were crossed in front of her chest, and the searching look in her eyes made it very clear that she would not let him off the hook before he had given her an answer.

'Are you aware of the fact that our daughter, a Gryffindor first-year, is socialising with a second-year Slytherin?' he asked in an icy tone.

Morgaine looked at him, a puzzled expression on her face. 'Yes, I am very much aware that Demeter is friends with Melvin Riverbed,' she declared. 'They had a very good time in Diagon Alley. And I have a feeling that Melvin took good care of Demeter on the Hogwarts Express as well.'

Severus flared his nostrils. So both Alek and Melvin Riverbed had had the opportunity to get to know his daughter before he had. Wasn't that just delightful?

'The boy is a coward,' he snapped before he could stop himself.

Morgaine frowned, either unable to make sense of his words or disagreeing with them.

'Do you not remember the boy's first night in the castle?' Severus continued. 'He let his cat escape from the common room and ran into Peeves. You found him sobbing behind a suit of armour.'

'Peeves had pelted him with chalk and locked the door to the common room,' Morgaine replied calmly. 'Melvin was hurting and scared. Sitting all alone in a dark dungeon corridor on your first night at Hogwarts, hiding from a poltergeist who is trying to bash your head in, would turn any first-year into a quivering bundle. In fact, I know a couple of seventh-years who would not only cry but probably become downright hysterical. I don't think calling the boy a coward for that is a fair assessment, Severus.'

'He blushes all the time,' Severus pointed out, growing more and more certain that he did not like that boy. And he did not want Morgaine to like him either.

'Melvin blushing does not make him a bad person, Severus,' Morgaine replied, her voice still annoyingly calm. 'He can't help it that he's sensitive.'

'Only fools carry their emotions on their sleeves,' Severus snarled.

'So I've heard.'

An uncomfortable silence settled over the corridor, and Severus saw a muscle twitch at Morgaine's jaw. He shouldn't have said anything about hiding one's emotions, not when he knew how much damage it could do. It had never done him any good and Morgaine ... He did not even want to think about how much grief Morgaine had hidden away over the years.

Just when the silence threatened to become overwhelming, Morgaine pushed herself away from the door frame. 'I find that it takes a special kind of bravery to dare show one's emotions,' she said quietly, not meeting Severus' eyes. 'And I for one admire people who possess that bravery. You are, of course, entitled to your own opinion.'

Her eyes were slightly narrowed and her jaw tight. Probably no one else would notice, but Severus knew Morgaine well enough to understand that his words had hurt her. He had not meant to. But as he reached out for her, he found her mental barriers were fortified. She would not let him in. He had gone too far.

'My NEWT class is arriving in ten minutes,' she declared and straightened up. 'I need to get ready.'

She was already about to close the door behind her when she spoke again. But she did not look back at him.

'Give the boy a chance, Severus. Demeter likes him, and as her parents we should be happy that she is making friends so quickly. And we should be grateful that she has befriended such a nice boy, no matter what his last name is.'

Severus stared for a while at the door Morgaine had closed behind her. Was she seriously implying that he had decided to dislike the boy because he loathed the boy's uncle? Now that was just the most ridiculous ...

He was about to float through the wall into his old study to tell confront Morgaine but heeded himself. What if she was right? What if he really was projecting his dislike of Alek Riverbed onto Melvin?

He had made that mistake before. He had decided to make Harry Potter's life miserable just because the boy had been the spitting image of his father. He had even gone as far as to deduct House points from Harry because he supposedly did something in the same way his father had. In hindsight, his behaviour was both juvenile and downright ridiculous.

So instead of following Morgaine, Severus dissolved into thin air and made his way up the stairs towards Professor Binns' classroom, where he knew that the second-year Slytherins were about to have their first lesson of the school year. Before he opened his mouth once more, Severus wanted to have a closer look at Melvin Riverbed.

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'How was your first day at Hogwarts?'

Demeter looked up from her book, and her eyes locked immediately with a pair that was almost as blue as her own.

'It was absolutely ... magical!' she replied with a smile. 'I could not have imagined that there would be so much to learn. I've only had Transfiguration, Charms and Potions today, and still it feels as if I cannot fit anything else in my head.'

'And still I find you sitting you here at the edge of the lake with a book in your lap.' Melvin flopped down in the grass beside Demeter and curiously peered at the heavy book she was holding. 'You do know that you were not Sorted into Ravenclaw, right?'

Demeter closed the book and turned it around for Melvin to see its cover. It was her copy of *Hogwarts A Revised History*. 'I'm not studying,' she explained. 'I'm reading up on Severus Sna... on my father.'

Melvin nodded pensively. 'You must have so many questions, never having met him and all. I know how you feel. When I was little, I had a long list of questions I wanted ask my father should I ever meet him. I never got the opportunity, though.' He shrugged and then fixed Demeter with his eyes. 'Have you met him yet? The ghost, um, your father, I mean.'

Demeter nodded and took a deep breath. At breakfast, she had not yet been ready to tell her friend about the meeting with her father. Now she was.

'I met him last night,' she started, 'in the Headmistress' office.'

'And?' Melvin asked curiously.

'I'm not sure he likes me.'

Melvin's mouth fell open, and for once it was Demeter who lowered her head. She had not meant to blurt out the truth like this. But the horrible feeling of having been a disappointment to her father had been gnawing at her all day, and now that the words had freed themselves, it suddenly felt to Demeter as if a huge stone had fallen from her chest.

'I ... What do ... Did you just say he didn't like you?' Melvin stammered, looking flabbergasted. 'You must be joking.'

Demeter sunk her teeth into her lower lip and vehemently shook her head, squeezing her eyes shut to will back the tears that were burning in her eyes. 'I'm not joking,' she brought forth. Her throat was suddenly feeling very tight.

'Why on earth would he not like you?' Melvin exclaimed. The shocked look on his face had given way to an annoyed frown.

'I was being cheeky,' Demeter explained, sounding defeated. 'I told him that he had been Sorted into the wrong House, that he should have been in Gryffindor because he had been such a brave man.'

To Demeter's surprise, Melvin looked relieved. He took *Hogwarts A Revised History* out of her hands and leafed towards one of the last chapters. When he had found what he had been looking for, he put the book back into Demeter's lap. 'Second last paragraph,' he said. 'Read it.'

Demeter looked at the page and frowned. 'I know Harry Potter has said that Severus Snape had been a brave man,' she pointed out. 'I know this part of the interview by heart: "I would not be standing here today without the help of Severus Snape. He has sacrificed more for the Light than anyone of us will ever understand. He saved many lives with his wits and his Slytherin cunning, and he fought with the courage of a Gryffindor lion."'

Melvin nodded. 'What I am trying to say is that your father has heard this before, Demeter. Surely, he would not be mad at you just because you pointed out what the whole Wizarding world already knows.'

Demeter shrugged. She had been through this in her mind countless times already and come to the same conclusion. But she had not dared believe it, and now that Melvin pointed it out, she felt utterly silly.

'Tell me, um,' Melvin continued, suddenly seeming uncomfortable. 'When you told him, did he, um, ... How did he react?'

'He told me not to believe what people say but to make up my own mind about things,' Demeter explained.

'And then?'

'Then he told me that I should go back to Gryffindor Tower to get to know my classmates.'

'Was that all?'

Demeter nodded, not sure what Melvin was after.

'Well, um, don't take this the wrong way, Demeter.' Once again, Melvin's cheek were turning crimson. 'You know I'm Slytherin, and, um, well, we have been told certain things about Severus Snape by the older students. One thing is that he has never been very ... friendly. There is a story that he once managed to make a whole classroom full of Hufflepuffs cry before they had even lit the fires under their cauldrons. So, what I am trying to say is, um ... If he didn't hex you, I'd say he likes you.'

He had said the last sentence so fast that he was now all out of breath, and Demeter was staring at him as if he had just declared that the Forbidden Forest was full of fluffy bunnies.

'If he did not hex me, then he likes me?' Demeter repeated in an incredulous tone.

Melvin's face fell. 'Damn, that really did not come out right!'

'It most certainly did not!'

Then Demeter started to laugh. Whether she was laughing at 'If he didn't hex you, then he likes you' argument or at Melvin's crestfallen facial expression, she did not know. But once she had started laughing, she could not stop, and when Melvin joined in, she did not want to stop either. It was far too good a feeling.

'What I actually came down here for,' Melvin gasped after some minutes, wiping tears from his eyes, 'was to ask if you'd like to come and play Gobstones. There are a couple of us meeting for a game two or three times a week after dinner.'

'But I am rubbish at Gobstones,' Demeter pointed out. She, too, was wiping away tears of laughter. 'I've only played once, at the Leaky Cauldron. And I think your uncle let me win.'

'My uncle would never ...' Melvin started, trying to look shocked. But he soon began to grin. 'Yeah, alright, he might have. But you can come and play anyway. That way, you can practice and next time we play at the Leaky Cauldron, you can be gracious and let Uncle Alek win instead.'

He got up and reached out his hand for Demeter, and she took it with a smile. Of course she would go and play Gobstones with him. Who was she to resist his Slytherin logic?

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'I told you I was rubbish,' Demeter sighed, once more wiping her face clean from the stinky liquid the Gobstones spat out every time a player lost a point. At the rate she was losing, she was amazed that the stones had any liquid left inside them.

'You're not that bad for a beginner,' Melvin tried to encourage her. 'Let's try again, shall we?'

Demeter shook her head. 'I'm sitting this one out,' she announced and pointed towards the stone bench on the other side of the court. 'I'll be watching you and figuring out a strategy.'

How bloody hard could it be, Demeter asked herself as she watched Melvin play against the Ravenclaw girl whose name she had already forgotten again. Jessica? Jennifer? She had wavy dark-blond hair, a cute smile and a very annoying laugh. She was Muggle-born and had claimed that she had never played Gobstones before. And still, she was winning.

Demeter kicked away a pebble that had been lying at her feet. She was feeling utterly disgruntled. They had been playing Gobstones for two evenings that week and now for half of the Saturday afternoon. And still she had not won a single game. However hard she tried, her stones were always the first to skip out of the rings. And there that little Muggle Ravenclaw was winning game after game, laughing ever so happily and batting her eyelashes at Melvin.

'Nursing our bruised ego, are we, Miss Snape?'

Demeter jumped at the whisper that seemed to come from out of nowhere. It was a deep baritone, smooth as velvet, strange yet familiar. It belonged to her father.

'Do not talk to me, or your peers will think that you have lost your mind. From where they are standing, they cannot see me.'

Demeter narrowed her eyes. The ghost might be right. She could hardly see him, and he was barely a foot away from her. The bright autumn sunlight was turning him almost invisible. All Demeter could see was his faint silvery outline.

'You do not like losing, do you?' Severus asked, his voice still barely a whisper.

Demeter shook her head almost imperceptibly.

'And you would do just about anything to beat the little Ravenclaw, would you not?'

Demeter swallowed. How could he know? Still, she gave a low sound of consent.

'Would you like me to give you some pointers?'

Demeter straightened, and suddenly there was a fire burning in her eyes. Being given tips to beat the Ravenclaw and being coached by her father? This was an opportunity too good to miss.

'Any means to achieve your goal, Miss Snape?' Severus asked.

'Hm hm,' Demeter replied.

'Fascinating. Maybe you should have been Sorted into Slytherin after all,' Severus pointed out. And had he been clearly visible, Demeter would have seen him smirk. 'But for now we will try to win fairly, shall we.'

Demeter felt a blush creep over her cheeks and quickly lowered her head, which made her dark hair shield her face from her father's eyes. She had, however, the feeling that he knew anyway that she was blushing.

'You will want to miss your first shot,' Severus explained and made a hushing sound as Demeter opened her mouth to object. 'It is almost impossible to score a point while taking a break shot,' he continued. 'If you miss your first shot, the Ravenclaw will have to take it. She will not score, and that will leave you with the opportunity to gain a point with your second shot.'

Demeter frowned, going over her father's words in her mind. But of course! The strategy was so logical and simple that Demeter could have slapped herself for not having figured it out on her own. She had been so eager to break the stones with her first shot that she had not even noticed that she never scored on that shot.

'Take advantage of your opponent's stones,' was Severus' second tip. 'Use them as shields to slow down your stone when you take a shot, and use them to hit into others.'

Demeter was taking mental notes, her eyes fixed on the game in front of her. Melvin was losing. Good, Demeter thought. That way, she would be able to challenge the winner.

By the time Melvin congratulated Jennifer to yet another win, Severus had provided Demeter with quite a few practical tips. She had listened carefully and was dying to try them out.

'May I challenge the winner?' she called across the court before getting up from the bench and giving her father a wink. Oh, she would show him that she was both a good listener and a quick learner.

She missed her first shot on purpose, just as he had told her, forcing Jennifer to break. And just as Severus had predicted, the Ravenclaw did not score. Demeter, however, scored with her next shot and was allowed to go on playing.

The game went well, and Demeter could not help but cast a quick glance towards the stone bench on the other side of the court every time she scored. She could not see the ghost anymore, but if he was still there, she was certain that she was making him proud.

The ghost was indeed still there, and had Demeter been able to see him, she would have witnessed something only a few people had ever seen: Severus Snape was smiling. And he was feeling proud. His daughter might have been Sorted into Gryffindor, but she certainly possessed the Slytherin spirit. And then and there, Severus decided that he would be right there by her side to promote it.

## XXV: To Spinner's End and Back

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

## Chapter XXV: To Spinner's End and Back

'Are you certain that you do not mind?' Severus had asked. 'I cannot go myself, but I can send an elf.'

'Of course I don't mind,' Morgaine had replied. 'I need to go to Diagon Alley anyway. I can Apparate from there. It's no trouble at all.'

She had actually been looking forward to visiting Spinner's End, but as she walked down the littered street on the afternoon of the last Saturday in September, her cloak tightly wrapped around herself, Morgaine was not sure anymore if it had been a good idea. There was a dull ache making its way from her neck into the centre of her skull, and she was quite certain that the goosebumps on her arms had nothing to do with either the biting wind, or the shadow of the immense mill chimney which seemed to stop any ray of sunlight from finding its way into the narrow street.

Spinner's End had barely changed since she had been there the first time, apart from there being even more boarded windows and more broken streetlamps now. Of course, Morgaine had not expected the street to be bustling with life, but after having spent the morning in Diagon Alley, the silence that hung over Spinner's End was almost eerie. It felt as if all the light and any positive notion had been sucked out of the place. For a moment, Morgaine was tempted to pull out her wand and prepare herself to cast a Patronus Charm. It would not have surprised her if there had been Dementors hovering around the corner.

She paused some feet away from the last house of the street, feeling a soft tingling on her skin. Magic, she concluded. Severus' wards were still in place, six years after his death.

Morgaine bit her lip. She had expected this, but still, it made her feel uneasy. Her mind told her that the wards weren't supposed to be there. Magic was supposed to vanish with the wizard. Severus' wards should have been lifted the moment he had died. Them still being in place defied the laws of magic.

The laws of magic. Morgaine suppressed the urge to laugh out loud. According to those laws, Severus' wards should have disappeared *Should have*. Just as Severus *should* have moved on. But the wards were still in place, and Severus was still at Hogwarts. Nothing was how it was supposed to be.

Morgaine straightened and approached the house, even though somewhat reluctantly. Suddenly, she felt that she really did not want to enter. She did not know what would await her inside. She did not know whether she was ready to face Severus' past and to unveil some of the secrets he had kept so carefully hidden while he had still been alive. She did not even know what she was afraid of finding.

Her hand already on the doorknob, she cast a furtive look over her shoulder. The street was deserted. If she turned around now and walked away, no one would see her or ask any questions. But she would have to tell Severus why she had not dared to enter his house. And how was she supposed to explain the reasons for her behaviour if she didn't understand them herself? So she tightened her grip around the doorknob and took a deep breath, tapping first her hand and then the doorknob with her wand. She muttered the incantation Severus had provided her with and waited patiently until she felt the knob turn in her hand. Then she pushed the door open and bravely stepped inside.

Why she even tried the light switch, Morgaine did not really know. This had been a wizard's home, after all, and she doubted that Severus had ever resorted to electricity to light up his house. And even if he had, the house had stood empty for more than six years now. Of course, the lights would not work now.

'*Lumos*,' she muttered, but the tip of her wand did not ignite until she had cast the spell a second time. It was annoying, but Morgaine did not dwell on it. She was getting used to the fact that any kind of Light or Warming spell took her several attempts nowadays. Now was not the time to try and figure out why this was happening. If she were honest, she did not want to know either. Instead, she closed her eyes and let her mind wander back in time, to the summer before the Triwizard Tournament.

She had returned to Hogwarts a year before because Severus had needed her. It had been one of the most demanding years of her young life. She had not been able to tell him her reasons for keeping away. Dumbledore had made her swear not to tell Severus about their child.

Not that she had had the courage to tell him anyway. He had been in a vicious mood for the whole school year, with one of his childhood enemies Sirius Black on the run from Azkaban, and a second Remus Lupin teaching at Hogwarts. Severus had snarled and hissed, and Morgaine had kept away, seeking comfort from Remus and crying at his shoulder on those days when everything had seemed to become too much. But no matter how weak she had felt, she had waited in the shadows, and when Severus finally had reached out for her, he had not needed to go looking for her.

But still, they had not parted on friendly terms for the summer holidays. Maybe it had been her fault, Morgaine thought. Maybe she had not tried hard enough to understand Severus' reasons for hating Remus. Maybe she had not tried hard enough to forgive him that he had let slip the truth about Remus' condition right there at the breakfast table in the Great Hall. But at the time, she had barely had the strength to keep herself from falling apart. She had still been suffering from what her grandmother had chosen to call post-natal stress, and standing for a whole school year between Remus and Severus her oldest and her best friend had taken its toll. She had needed a break. And so she had chosen to go back to Iceland for the summer, and Remus had come with her. He had made sure that she would take her daughter into her arms, and after three weeks he had sent Morgaine to Spinner's End. He had understood that neither her heart nor her soul were complete without Severus. He had understood from the very start.

She had arrived at Spinner's End in the middle of summer, a couple of weeks before the World Cup, unannounced, finding Severus in his little herbal garden. He had been so surprised that he had almost dropped the Belladonna he had been holding. She had bought him lunch, and he had invited her to tea. They had spent many evenings talking, and one evening she had just not gone back to the inn where she had been staying. That night, she and Severus had found their way back to each other. And Morgaine knew that he had stayed awake all night just to look at her.

She did not even bother having a look at the garden now. Already when Severus had come to stay at Spinner's End every summer, it had taken a lot of magic to make anything prosper between the cold brick walls of his backyard, and Morgaine doubted that any plant had survived. Most probably, even the weeds had withered. And dead plants were about the last thing she felt like looking at.

The sitting room, however, was not a cheerful sight either, not even when Morgaine had managed to light the candles in the lamp above the threadbare sofa and had gotten rid of most of the dust. The armchair by the fire had been Severus' favourite place during his summers. He would have sat there, ploughing through book after book, anything from Potions over Defence Against the Dark Arts to Muggle poetry. He had loved reading. But now his armchair stood empty, and his books had not been touched for years. It was a depressing sight indeed.

Morgaine resisted the urge to pick a book and settle into the chair. She would probably get lost in her memories, and for that, she had no time. In fact, what she had come for could not even be found in the sitting room. What she had come for was upstairs, in Severus' old bedroom. Not the master bedroom, he had made that very clear, but the room where he had slept when he had been a boy. It had been the only room she had never entered while staying at Spinner's End. She had felt that she had no right to. And despite Severus having sent her there now, the feeling lingered. This was *his* room, *his* past, *his* secrets. She had no part in them.

The hiding place Severus had chosen seemed almost ridiculous. Actually, it did not feel like a hiding place at all. There was a loose floor board by the window, and all it took was a slight tug to lay his treasures bare.

Why had Severus not used any magic, Morgaine wondered. Had he not deemed it necessary? Had he, when he had hidden his treasures, not dared to use magic? Or had he meant for someone to find them?

The old, battered tin box had once contained Scottish shortbread. Someone, probably Severus, had tried to rid the tin of the tartan label but had not entirely succeeded.



Even the price tag was still on. It had been on sale, two boxes for the price of one due to the expiring date having passed already.

Morgaine sat down on the bed and placed the tin on her lap, gnawing at her lower lip. Once more, she felt as if she were intruding on something very private, and she would rather not have opened the tin. But she had no choice. 'Just take out the Gobstones,' Severus had instructed her. 'I have no use for anything else that this tin contains.'

With shaking hands, Morgaine removed the lid.

The first object that was revealed was a letter, bearing a handwriting Morgaine knew only too well. It was addressed to Severus Snape, and Morgaine did not need to open it to know that it was the letter young Severus had been longing for since the day he had been told that he was a wizard. It was his acceptance letter to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the letter that would enable him to flee the Muggle misery he had grown up in, his ticket to the world to which he truly belonged.

Next, Morgaine found an old, yellowing Muggle photograph, ripped in half. It showed a thin, sallow looking woman with long, raven-black hair. There was no mistaking who this woman was, such as Eileen Prince's resemblance with her son. In the photograph, she was wearing a long white dress and carrying a bouquet of white roses. And if one looked closely, one could detect the faintest hint of a smile on her lips.

The next photograph was a Wizard photograph, depicting the Hogwarts Gobstones team. All the team members were smiling and waving, except their captain. Eileen looked sullen, and she was scowling despite her holding a trophy in her hands.

There were other pictures of Eileen: in some she was playing Gobstones, in others shaking hands with Headmaster Dippet or brewing potions in what looked like Horace Slughorn's classroom. Most of the photographs showed just her, and those that would have shown someone else as well, had been ripped in two, just like her wedding picture. Obviously, Severus had only wanted to keep the memory of his mother alive, no one else's, especially not the memory of his father. In fact, the tin did not contain a single hint about Tobias Snape.

Under the small stack of photos lay a crocheted bag made of emerald green yarn, the bag Morgaine had set out to fetch. Carefully, she untied the silver string and emptied the bag's contents on the bed with a small gasp of surprise. Whereas the bag was old and worn, the Gobstones were so highly polished that they almost looked like new. They must have been one of young Severus' most treasured possessions.

After putting the stones back into the bag, Morgaine once more flicked through the photographs, wondering if Demeter would want to have a look at her grandmother. After all, Morgaine had never been able to show her daughter any pictures of her own mother. She didn't possess any herself, and her grandmother had never shown her any either. But Severus had said that he had no use for anything else that is in the tin apart from the Gobstones. And as much as Morgaine wished for her daughter to learn more about her ancestors, she did not want to defy Severus' wishes.

She was just about to put the photographs back into the tin when her eyes fell on a dried flower, and Morgaine paused mid-movement, a puzzled look on her face. Why would Severus keep a flower in his tin, she wondered. The only plants he had ever been interested in had been potion ingredients.

Then she remembered. Severus had shown her this memory once, a long time ago. The very first time he had spoken to Lily, the day he had told her that she was a witch, this very flower had sat on Lily's palm, opening and closing its petals so the colours had reflected in the sunlight. It had made Petunia shriek in horror. And it had given Severus the courage to step out from behind bushes and tell Lily that she was a witch. She had not believed him that day, but had walked away from the scrawny, ill-groomed boy. And Severus, disappointed as he had been that the meeting which he had planned so carefully had gone so wrong, had picked up the flower that Lily had thrown on the ground. He had put it with his other treasures and cherished it for many years.

Morgaine picked up the flower, holding the dry stem between her thumb and index finger, twirling it, not sure what to think or feel. Of course Severus would have kept a memory of his childhood friend. It was the most natural thing in the world. But had Lily deserved it? Had she not treated Severus just like she had treated that flower? Had she not let them both fall and then just walked away, never looking back?

As always, the thought of Lily made something tense up inside Morgaine. It wasn't fair. It wasn't fair that the ghost of Lily had haunted Severus for all those years. She had not had any right to. Not after how she had treated him.

Furiously, Morgaine blinked back the tears that were burning in her eyes. Severus had freed himself of Lily's ghost. He had taken farewell of her when he lay dying on the dusty floor in the Shrieking Shack. He had said so. And Morgaine had chosen to believe him.

Then why was she crying now?

She set her jaw and hastily placed everything back into the tin: the Gobstones, the flower, the photographs and the letter from Hogwarts. The she put the lid back on and stuffed the tin into her bag. She knew that bringing the tin and its contents back to Hogwarts meant defying Severus' wishes, but for the time being she did not care. For her own peace of mind, she needed to know if Severus had truly let go of his past.

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She had not spoken to him yet. She had walked straight to the Potions cabinet, had taken out some ingredients and commenced brewing at once. Her eyes were narrowed, and her jaw was so tight that Severus could have sworn that he heard her grind her teeth.

Had Morgaine not noticed him hovering in the shadows, or was she blatantly ignoring him? Severus wondered, frowning. Neither of the two options seemed very likely.

'How was the house?' he finally asked, detaching himself from the shadows and drifting into the light so Morgaine could see him.

'Just as dark and gloomy as ever,' she replied, not taking her eyes off her cauldron. 'Somewhat dusty.'

'That was expected after all those years, was it not?'

'Then what was the point in asking?'

Severus flinched slightly as Morgaine put down the ladle a little more vehemently than necessary. Whatever was the matter? Morgaine was never snappish, especially not with him. And judging from the shocked look on her face, her own tone had surprised her just as much as his.

'Sorry,' she muttered, picking up the ladle again to continue stirring the potion. 'I didn't mean to ...'

Her voice trailed away, and Severus gazed intently at her. Her whole body seemed tense, and as he tried to touch her mind he hit a solid brick wall.

'What is wrong?' he asked straight out. She would not tell him of her own accord, he knew that. He was also aware that she might not tell him once he had asked her either. But he had to try at least.

He saw her close her eyes and her shoulders slump. 'Walking down Spinner's End was like walking into Azkaban,' she started, her voice barely more than a whisper. And with every word, her face seemed to become more ashen. 'It felt like being surrounded by hundreds of Dementors.'

'Then you should be having chocolate instead of brewing a potion,' Severus pointed out. 'Certainly, Remus has told you that.'

'He might have mentioned it.' The ghost of a smile flitted over Morgaine's lips. Severus knew how dear Remus had been to her, and him saying something positive about the werewolf always made her smile. But today, the tiny smile was almost immediately replaced with a pained expression again.

'Chocolate is no remedy against headaches,' Morgaine stated.

As on cue, the potion turned light blue, and she added a spoon full to a goblet of water. 'To good health,' she toasted and gulped it all down in one go.

By the time she had bottled the rest of the potion and cleaned up, she seemed more at ease. At least, the muscles in her jaw seemed to have relaxed. But her mental walls were still up, tall and imposing, fortified against any kind of intrusion. And Severus waited. There was no point in trying to breach them by force.

'Did Lily play Gobstones?' Morgaine suddenly asked.

Severus stared at her for a moment, unable to grasp the meaning of her question. Whatever did Lily have to do with Gobstones? And why would Morgaine mention Lily at all?

Morgaine reached for her bag and produced the battered shortbread tin, and placed it on the table where her cauldron had stood only moments ago. 'I was only wondering,' she said and took off the lid. Then she retreated to the armchair by the fire, letting the open tin stand in front of Severus.

His Hogwarts letter lay on top, bearing Dumbledore's slender handwriting. Beneath lay photographs of his mother. Then there was the bag that held his Gobstones and beside it lay ...

Severus whirled around, and his eyes locked immediately onto Morgaine's. 'Is this why you asked about Lily? Because of the flower?'

Morgaine nodded slowly, her eyes never leaving his, and Severus sensed a small crack appearing in her defensive wall. If he chose his words carefully, she might just let him in.

'Lily did play Gobstones,' he began quietly. 'But never with me. We could not play magical games in a Muggle town. And when we were at Hogwarts ...' He shrugged. 'Let us say that playing foolish children's games was not something that was appreciated in Slytherin House at that time.'

In fact, it had been highly discouraged, especially by Lucius Malfoy. Gobstones was a game for peasants, he had declared, and Severus, eager to please and fit in, had never once mentioned that he liked the game.

'I never played Gobstones with anyone but my mother,' he went on. 'It was our secret. We could only play when father was not around. He caught us once, I was twelve. He gave me a black eye and broke mother's hand. After that, we never played again.'

Slowly, Severus turned back towards the tin. 'Strange,' he murmured pensively. 'The contents of this tin were once my most treasured possessions.'

'Were?' Morgaine asked.

Severus nodded. 'All I have use for now are the Gobstones. I will give them to Demeter on her birthday. Hopefully, she will grow to become the best player in the castle. As for the rest ... Did I not tell you that there was no need for you to bring any of it here?'

'Not even the flower?'

Severus shook his head and concentrated on the flower to make it Levitate out of the tin. 'Not even the flower,' he confirmed. It had meant the world to him once. It had been a proof that Lily had been magical like him, that she had belonged to his world, that she had belonged to *him*.

How foolish he had been.

The white flower drifting through the gloomy dungeon chamber was almost an eerie sight to behold, and as it came closer and closer to the flames, its petals started to gleam red like the setting sun. Then it caught fire.

It was over in a blink of an eye, and once the flower was gone, Severus turned slowly to Morgaine. 'All gone,' he whispered.

Once more, ghostly pale eyes searched for a pair of blue ones, and the love Severus could see in Morgaine's eyes was deep as the pain he could sense in her soul.

'Tell me, Morgaine,' Severus asked. 'Tell me what is bothering you.'

Slowly, Morgaine nodded towards the fire, but her eyes never left his. 'It hurt,' she said quietly. 'Finding that flower hurt almost as much as seeing your Patronus.'

Severus fixed Morgaine with a penetrating gaze. Almost exactly a year ago, Morgaine had been cowering in the very chair she was sitting in now, shaking with tears at the memory of his Patronus. And Severus had been so endlessly sorry. He had had no idea how much the shape of his Patronus had hurt Morgaine. Was she still unable to let go?

'It is gone now,' he said. 'Both the flower and the memory it represented. It does not matter anymore.'

Morgaine took a deep breath, and for a second, Severus feared she would start crying. But when she spoke, her voice was firm.

'Gone,' she repeated. 'You let go of your past.' Then she gave him a sad smile. 'I guess the least I can do now is to try and do the same.'

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Hours later, Severus was standing on top of the Astronomy Tower, letting his eyes wander over the grounds. The lamps were on in greenhouse two. Pomona seemed to be working late. Severus craned his neck and saw her putting a charm on some delicate looking flowers. Judging by her wand movements and the colour of the light that erupted from her wand, it was a Warming Charm.

The windows of Hagrid's hut were illuminated as well, and there was smoke coming from the chimney. Hagrid himself was outside, covering his precious pumpkins with a tarpaulin and then closing the window shutters.

Severus gazed towards the Forbidden Forest. He could not feel the wind, but he could see the treetops sway in the increasing breeze. He could also see the surface of the Black Lake staring to ripple, and there were dark clouds gathering at the mountain tops. A storm was gathering, the first of that autumn.

Sure enough, the wind was howling around the towers and turrets of Hogwarts castle half an hour later, and the rain was smashing against the walls with a force that made every living creature run for shelter. Every *living* creature. The ghost, however, was still standing on the ramparts. The weather did not matter to him. He did not get wet, and he did not feel the cold. If anything, he was enjoying the spectacle the storm was offering: the winds were whipping the surface of the lake, making the black water rise; the flashes of lightning illuminated the grounds and the forest, causing the trees to cast the most eerie shadows; and the castle seemed to screech and moan like the Shrieking Shack itself.

Yes, Severus enjoyed the storm. And even if he hadn't, even if he had still been made out of flesh and blood and could have felt the force of the weather, he would probably still have been standing on top of the Astronomy Tower. He felt as if he had no where to go. He did not want to return to his study, not now that it was empty.

He and Morgaine had talked for hours, about everything and nothing, just as they had when their friendship had been young and blossoming. Every now and then, she had smiled, once or twice even laughed, and she had reminded him of the young girl that had melted the ice around his heart and then stolen it away.

Oh, yes, Severus loved her. He loved her enough to sacrifice his afterlife for her. But was it right thing to do?

Severus sighed. If he were honest with himself, he had known that for a long time that it was not right. Morgaine was still young, still alive. And she was wasting her life in the dungeons, in the company of a ghost. And he himself was not where he was supposed to be either. They were both keeping each other from moving on. Morgaine kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living. And Severus knew that Morgaine was just as much aware of this as he was.

Ha had not asked her to stay in the dungeons when she had picked up a stack of paper from his desk and said that she would grade them in her quarters. And he had not opposed when she had mentioned that maybe his old study was a little too dark for her taste after all. And so she had left for the night, letting the plans of moving the Potions mistress' study to a lighter location hang in the air.

Seeing her go had hurt, Severus had to admit that. And the mere thought that she one day might not return had hurt even more. But at the same time, Severus knew that Morgaine leaving and him staying behind in the dungeons was the right decision. Maybe, hopefully, it was the first step towards freedom.

For both of them.

## XXVI: Birthday Troubles

*Chapter 26 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XXVI: Birthday Troubles

He had tried. He really had. Ever since Morgaine had moved her study back to the upper floor, he felt as if he did not have the right to just barge in anymore. But knocking seemed to be beyond his ghostly abilities. Hence, Severus had simply glided through the door. He had, however, stopped and made a loud coughing noise to inform Morgaine of his presence.

'Have you seen Demeter?' he asked as he approached her desk.

'Have you checked the Gryffindor common room?' Morgaine suggested, not looking up from the essay she was grading.

'The Fat Lady informed me that there are no students left in the common room.'

'No surprise there, really. It's a beautiful day.'

Indeed it was, but one could not tell in Morgaine's study, despite the huge windows. The curtains were drawn, and she was working by candlelight.

'You relocated your study due to the dungeons being too dark for your taste,' Severus pointed out. 'And now you are shutting out the sunlight. Is there any logic behind your actions?'

Still, Morgaine did not look up. 'It's either that or brewing another Headache Potion,' she explained in an indifferent tone.

Severus frowned. Morgaine had brewed a cauldron full of said potion only a week ago. Surely, she could not have used it all already. And if she had, that was not a good sign.

'Have you seen the matron about that?' he asked.

Morgaine carefully put down her quill and finally looked up at the ghost in front of her, a calculating look in her eyes. 'How many times did you go to see Poppy about classroom-induced headaches, Professor Snape?'

Severus didn't answer, and Morgaine gave him a tired, forced smile. 'It seems that headaches come with the job. I don't mind the potions fumes, but the smell of melting cauldrons will one day be the death of me.'

She picked up her quill again and returned to her grading, and Severus kept hovering in front of her desk, silent and slightly annoyed by the fact that she was right. Over the almost two decades that he had taught Potions, the days with headaches had outnumbered the ones without, but he had never seen the matron about it. He had brewed his own Headache Potions and let his bad mood go out over his students, which on some days had been quite satisfying.

'Weren't you about to see Demeter?' Morgaine interrupted his musings after some time.

'I still do not know where she is,' Severus replied in a slightly annoyed tone. It almost seemed as if Morgaine were trying to get rid of him.

Once more, Morgaine looked up from her work. Once more, she smiled. But this time, the smile was genuine. It was warm and kind, and it reached her eyes. 'Have some imagination, Severus. It's Demeter's birthday. Where would you spend yours if you were twelve?'

Severus scowled. 'I would not know. I spent most of my teenage birthdays in the Slytherin dormitory or the library.'

Where else? He had not exactly had many friends to celebrate his birthday with when he had been a teenager. And the number of friends had certainly not increased once he had left school. His adult birthdays had therefore been spent in solitude, too. Most of them, anyway.

'Where did you spend your teenage birthdays?' he asked.

Morgaine leaned back in her chair and tilted her head. 'Most of them, I spent in the dungeons. With you.'

Severus narrowed his ghostly eyes. The smile on Morgaine's lips lingered, but he had not missed that it had disappeared from her eyes. And neither had he missed the slight change of tone in her voice. He could not quite define it, however. Was it melancholy?

But Morgaine did not give him the time to finish his thoughts. 'It's Saturday, and the sun is shining. Something tells me that you'll find Demeter in the rose garden, playing Gobstones with Melvin.'

Severus nodded absent-mindedly. Of course Demeter would be with Melvin. Of course they would be outdoors, playing Gobstones. He had observed them often enough to know that. He would not have needed to consult Morgaine about it. But still he had. Ever since Morgaine had decided to move her study back to the upper floor, he would use any excuse to see her.

'Would you like to join me?' he asked.

Morgaine shook her head, flicking through the papers in front of her. 'I have work to do.'

Severus cocked an eyebrow in disbelief. 'How can third-year Potions essays be more important than our daughter's birthday?'

He could literally see the muscles in Morgaine's jaw tighten, but he was not prepared for the icy look in her eyes as she looked back up at him. Nor was he prepared for the venomous tone in her voice.

'For your information, Severus, Demeter and I went for breakfast at the Three Broomsticks together to celebrate,' she hissed. 'I do honour my maternal duties, you know.'

Severus raised his hands in defence. 'Morgaine, I did not ...'

But Morgaine interrupted him, using a similar gesture. 'I'm sorry, Severus,' she said, bringing her hand to her face to pinch the bridge of her nose. 'I didn't mean to snap. It just ...' She shook her head and sighed. 'Tell you what, I'll finish grading these essays and have a lie-down. Why don't you go and find Demeter, and I'll come down in a while to see if you're still outside?'

Severus nodded. 'I did not mean to ...' he started again, but Morgaine once more shook her head.

'Go find the birthday girl, Severus,' she said. 'Give her my love.'

He lingered for some moments, observing Morgaine as she picked up her quill and returned to her grading. He felt the need to apologise but was unable to find the right words. Neither could he come up with a good argument to make Morgaine abandon her work and join him in his search for Demeter.

'Rub some rosemary oil on your temples before you lie down,' he suggested instead. 'I always found that helpful.'

'I'll try that,' Morgaine answered, but she sounded as if she had not really heard him. She seemed too absorbed in her grading. And as she did not look up anymore, Severus dematerialised. He knew when there was nothing more to say.

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Morgaine did not finish her grading once Severus had left. Instead, she let her shoulders slump and leaned once more back in her chair, letting the back of her head rest against the cool leather. Lying down would probably be a good idea indeed, as her head was pounding as if a herd of Hippogriffs were trampling around in it. But she doubted that she would make it to her private chambers without collapsing or at least without vomiting. She hadn't felt that abysmal in ages.

Maybe Severus was right. Maybe she should see Poppy about her headaches. But then again, what good would it do? What could that matron tell her that Morgaine did not know already? She would point out that the symptoms were most probably stress-related and order rest. But resting was about the only thing Morgaine could not afford to do.

First, she had lessons to teach. No matter if Severus thought her mad, she enjoyed teaching Potions. Of course, the sound of ladles scraping against cauldrons and the smell of burnt potions and melted pewter could not count as the best working environment, but everything was outweighed by the joy Morgaine could see in her students' eyes when they managed to carry out their assignments.

Second, there was Slytherin House, a slightly greater but by all means manageable challenge, even though Morgaine suspected that she had made herself quite unpopular as Head of House. The Quidditch season had started a week ago, and already during Gryffindor's first training session, some members of the Slytherin team had decided to improve their own chances by jinxing the Gryffindor Seeker's broom. Unfortunately for them, Madam Hooch had noticed. And even more unfortunate for them, Rolanda had handed over the punishment to Morgaine. Hence, the Slytherin team was now practising without a Chaser and a Beater as the two were serving nightly detentions. Certainly, that would make Slytherin lose their first match, but Morgaine did not care.

What she did care about, however, were the low whispers at the House table at meal times, and the small group of students that always kept to themselves in the common room. They might have thought that no one noticed, but they did not know that their Head of House had means to observe their every move. Morgaine had, however, not resorted to eavesdropping on their conversations. Yet.

And last but not least, there was Demeter. Morgaine was doing her best to keep a professional distance: while at Hogwarts, Demeter Snape was a student like any other, and Morgaine duLac was nothing more than her teacher. But secretly, Morgaine kept an extra close eye on the girl. As any mother, Morgaine could not help but worry. Did Demeter do her homework properly? Did she have friends? Did she manage to combine school work and leisure time in a way that benefited both her academic career and her social life? And how did her friendship with a second-year Slytherin influence her?

Had she not been convinced that it would hurt, Morgaine would have rolled her eyes at herself. What a hypocrite she was. Had she not told Severus off for condemning Melvin and Demeter's friendship? Had she not told him that it did not matter that the two were in rival Houses? And here she was now, having the exact same worries as he did.

Severus. Morgaine sighed once more and rubbed her tired eyes. She did not want to blame Severus, not really, but she could not deny that he in a way was responsible for both her headache and her state of mind.

It was all becoming too much. Being with Severus, being in the same room with the ghost of the man she had once loved whom *she* still loved and not being able to really be with him had started to cost Morgaine more strength than she possessed. Being with him had started to be almost more painful than being away from him. That was why she had suggested that she should move her study to the upper floor again. And Severus had not objected.

But ever since she had left the dungeons, Morgaine had not had a single whole night's sleep, food seemed to have lost its taste, and she felt like half a person, half a person with half a soul. The other half was still down in the dungeons firmly attached to Severus Snape. And Morgaine knew that she would have to sever their bond if she wanted to go on living. But she feared that she would not be able to live with the pain.

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'She scores! She wins! And Melvin Riverbed's history!'

Demeter performed a little dance, waving her arms in the air and repeating over and over that she had beaten her Slytherin friend at Gobstones. Oh, she was pleased with herself and rightfully so. She had played her best game ever, and Melvin had not stood a chance.

'You've either been practising or you've received a bag of luck for your birthday,' Melvin pointed out and levitated the Gobstones back into the bag. He was smiling. For a Slytherin, he was taking his defeat rather well.

Demeter was smiling, too. And why would she not be? It was her twelfth birthday, the sun was shining and she had spent the whole day with her best friend. Those things alone were reason enough to be happy. Beating Melvin at Gobstones was just a bonus.

'What *did* you get for your birthday?' Melvin asked as they settled onto one of the stone benches in the rose garden.

'I got some Chocolate frogs from Livia and a packet of Sugar Quills from Sarah. One would think they are trying to make my teeth rot.' Demeter giggled and then raised the bottle she was holding up into the air. 'And, last but not least, I got a bottle of Pumpkin Pop from you.'

Melvin promptly blushed. 'My present isn't Pumpkin Pop,' he muttered. 'You don't think that I'd give you something that stupid, do you?'

Demeter couldn't help but grin as her friend's cheeks went from slightly pink to crimson. He was just too sweet.

'I just haven't had the opportunity to give you your present yet,' Melvin continued, straightening and obviously gathering all the courage he could muster. 'I didn't want to give it to you in the Great Hall with everyone watching. And, um, it's not much.'

He started rummaging in his pockets and soon held out a small bag, made of red silk. There was a distinct clinking noise as he put it onto Demeter's hand.

'What is it?' Demeter asked.

'You'll have to look for yourself,' Melvin answered. 'But I can promise that it won't make your teeth rot.'

Demeter untied the piece of golden string that held the bag together and emptied the contents onto her lap. Out rolled the most beautiful set of Gobstones she had ever seen.

'Melvin!' she gasped.

'You don't have to play with them, if you don't like them,' Melvin blurted out. 'In fact, this was a stupid idea. I should have bought you sweets.'

'More sweets?' Demeter asked with a cocked eyebrow. 'So you do want my teeth to rot?'

'No. No, of course not. I just meant I should ...'

'Melvin!' Demeter said firmly, and Melvin's eyes locked onto hers, his cheeks now as red as the silken bag Demeter was holding in her hand. 'Just shut up.'

Melvin's mouth opened once more, but he never had a chance to speak. And the bone crushing hug he received surprised him just as much as it surprised the girl who had wrapped her arms around his neck. So did the kiss she planted on his lips.

It was over in a heartbeat, and Demeter withdrew, her cheeks just as flushed as Melvin's. Neither of them really knew where to look. They seemed, however, to agree that looking at each other was far too embarrassing. Instead, Melvin fumbled with the left sleeve of his robe, and Demeter took to examining the gift she had received.

'I thought you might want to have your own set now that you are starting to get the hang of the game,' Melvin mumbled, still not looking up. 'And, um, as red and gold are your House colours ...'

'They are gorgeous,' Demeter interrupted, holding one of the stones against the sunlight. It was sparkling.

'You like them then?' Melvin asked, chancing to glance up from his sleeve.

'Now that was a stupid question,' Demeter pointed out drily, but immediately switched tones as she saw Melvin's hurt expression. 'I love them, Melvin,' she added sincerely. 'But you shouldn't have spent so much money on me.'

'I wanted to give you something special,' Melvin said quietly and once more cast down his eyes again.

Demeter bit her lip. Why was it that anything she said to Melvin seemed to come out wrong? She had just meant to convey that he did not need to buy her expensive gifts, and now it sounded as if she were scolding him.

She shifted uncomfortably and then carefully extended her hand to touch Melvin's arm. 'Would you like to play another round? You know, to test the new set?'

Melvin neither answered nor looked up.

'I'll let you win,' Demeter added in a desperate attempt to save the situation. If Melvin turned her down now, she would not know what to do.

But fortunately, Melvin Riverbed was a Slytherin. 'Don't you dare let me win,' he snarled. But when he looked up, he was grinning. 'I would just hate having to take your new stones away from you. Besides, they are red. I couldn't take them down to the dungeons anyway.'

They played, both laughing and joking, but only a few minutes into the game, Demeter noticed that they were not alone. One could have thought that it was just another shadow in the alcoves, but Demeter knew that particular shadow well enough by now to know that it was a ghost.

'I need to practise some more,' she told Melvin after he had defeated her quite spectacularly. 'I have to get used to the new stones.'

'We could always play another round,' Melvin suggested.

But Demeter shook her head. 'I'd rather not lose once more today, thank you very much. And besides, I happen to know that you have a Potions essay to write.'

Melvin wrinkled his nose slightly, but didn't argue. And as Demeter promised that she would play with him once more after dinner, he took his leave.

'You lost the game with your third stone,' Severus pointed out, drifting out of the shadows as Melvin had disappeared from sight. 'You played it too hard.'

'I know, sir,' Demeter answered, shielding her eyes from the sunlight with her hand. But even so, she could hardly make out the ghost as he was standing in the middle of the garden.

'You know and you still let it happen?'

Demeter felt herself blush. She knew that her father had been observing her play quite often over the last month, and he had given her some good tips the last time they had spoken. That she had lost against Melvin now seemed utterly embarrassing.

'Maybe you should try a different set of stones,' the ghost suggested. 'Would you please extend your hand?'

'Extend my hand?'

Severus cocked his eyebrow at the girl. 'I am able to *Accio* objects, Miss Snape,' he pointed out, 'but as I am but a ghost, I cannot catch them when they come flying. Now, if you would be so kind?'

Demeter did as she was told and extended her hand, curious to see her father do magic. She had heard the rumours that he could do it, despite him being a ghost, but she had not seen it herself.

'This might feel a bit uncomfortable,' Severus warned her as he moved closer. 'But for this spell to work and you to be able to catch the object, I have to stand very close to you when I cast the spell.'

Sure enough, her right hand and arm suddenly felt as if they had been plunged into a bucket full of ice. But Demeter did not care. She was too busy staring up at the ghost who was now standing so close to her that his left arm and her right took up the same space. They had never been that close before.

'Accio Gobstones.'

Severus cast the spell, and mere seconds later, an emerald green, crocheted bag zoomed onto Demeter's outstretched hand.

'Good catch,' Severus commended. 'Have you considered trying out as a Quidditch Seeker next year?'

'I think I'll stick with Gobstones,' Demeter replied somewhat absent-mindedly. The ghost had drifted away from her, and while her hand and arm still felt uncomfortably cold, she felt herself longing to be close to her father again.

Severus nodded in approval. 'A wise choice. The risk of falling off your broomstick is considerably smaller when playing Gobstones.'

Demeter snorted at his joke. 'I doubt I will ever fly well enough to play Quidditch anyway,' she admitted.

'You might possess so far unknown flying talents,' Severus pointed out but changed subjects before Demeter had a chance to ask him what he meant. 'Why do you not try out those stones?'

She untied the silver string and let the Gobstones roll onto the ground. They were emerald green, just like the bag, and sparkled silver in the sunlight.

'They belonged to my mother,' Severus explained. 'Your grandmother.'

Demeter looked up at her father. 'Did she teach you how to play?'

The ghost nodded. 'We used to play in the back yard of our house where no one could see us.'

'Where no one could see you?' Demeter repeated. 'How come?'

'Gobstones is a magical game. Magic is not to be performed in front of Muggles.'

'Muggles?' Demeter felt stupid repeating everything, but she was curious. Why would her father and her grandmother have needed to hide their magic from Muggles?

'I grew up in a Muggle neighbourhood,' the ghost replied calmly. Obviously, he did not mind her asking, and so Demeter pushed on.

'You know, I tried to read up on you,' Demeter explained almost apologetically, 'but the books in the library have almost no information about your private life or your childhood. Why did you grow up in a Muggle neighbourhood?'

'My father was a Muggle.'

'You're a half-blood?' The question escaped Demeter before she could stop herself, and she clasped her hands over her mouth.

'Does it matter?' Severus asked.

'No. I mean, yes. I mean, no. I mean, I've never thought about it. I just assumed ...'

'You assumed that a follower of the Dark Lord could be nothing else than a pure-blood?'

Demeter felt herself go pale. Whereas her father had been making funny remarks about Quidditch only some minutes ago, he now sounded dead-serious, and the look in his pale eyes was suddenly cold. Why ever had she opened her mouth? Now she had certainly insulted him.

But to her surprise, the ghost seemed calm. 'My father hated anything magic,' he explained, 'and he would daily remind us of it. Any slip-up was severely punished. And there was a time when I deeply resented the fact that my mother had married a Muggle. But I learnt that heritage does not matter. We all forge our own destiny. And what matters is not our blood status but the values we hold in our heart.'

Ghostly pale eyes locked onto blue ones, and Demeter's mind filled with hundreds of questions: What had made her father see that blood status did not matter? What values did he deem to be the most important? What had happened to her grandmother and her grandfather? But she did not dare to ask and kept her mouth shut lest she would once more say something stupid. Yet still, she somehow had the feeling that her father knew exactly what she wanted to ask.

'These are not topics suitable to discuss on a girl's twelfth birthday,' he pointed out and broke eye contact. 'I only came to find you in order to give you your birthday present.'

He inclined his head towards the emerald stones on the ground, and Demeter gasped. 'But those were your mother's.'

'And now they are yours, Demeter,' Severus declared. And before the girl got a chance to protest, he had disappeared.

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Morgaine jerked awake, knocking over her ink bottle in the process. For a moment, she felt disoriented. Her desk was not a place she was used to waking up at. But the ink that started soaking through the third-year Potions essays made her soon snap out of her haze. So did the knocking at the door.

Quickly, Morgaine cast a Drying Spell on the spilt ink. She would attend to saving the essays later. The knocking at the door sounded too urgent to be ignored. To her surprise, the person knocking was no other than her daughter.

'Um, Professor,' Demeter started, 'I am having troubles with my Potions essay.'

Morgaine narrowed her eyes. Demeter having troubles with a Potions essay? Now that was a new one. So was Demeter calling her Professor when they were alone. But Morgaine decided to play along. She knew her daughter well enough to know that the girl surely had good reasons for her behaviour.

'It's about the use of unicorn hooves,' Demeter pressed on. 'I was wondering ...'

'Now, why don't you come inside, Miss Snape?' Morgaine suggested. 'I am sure we will find a solution to your problem.'

Demeter slunk inside, clutching her essay to her chest, and Morgaine carefully closed the door behind her before gesturing towards the sofa.

'Have a seat, Demeter,' she said, now deliberately using the girl's first name. 'And put that parchment away. We both know that you are not here because of your essay.'

Demeter's shoulders slumped several inches, and she lowered her head so her dark hair fell over her face. 'Melvin gave me a present today, a set of Gobstones,' she said quietly.

Morgaine bit her lip. She could put two and two together. She knew that Severus, too, had given the girl a set of Gobstones. But she decided to let Demeter talk.

'It's a beautiful set. Red and golden, Gryffindor House colours.'

'That is surely no reason to be upset,' Morgaine pointed out. Obviously, the girl was struggling, and an obvious statement like this might just help her to go on.

'I love the set. It's gorgeous. But ... Father gave me a set as well. And now I don't know which one to use.'

The words came tumbling over the girl's lips like water bursting through a broken dam, and as she looked up at her mother, Morgaine winced. The girl's eyes, that were an exact copy of her own, were glittering with tears.

Silently, Morgaine sat down beside Demeter and laid a comforting arm around her daughter's shoulders. 'Your father will understand if you choose Melvin's set. He knows how important friends are.'

'But I don't want to disappoint him!'

There was now a distinct note of desperation in Demeter's voice, and it cut right into Morgaine's heart. She knew the feeling far too well herself. But what hurt her the most was the fact that she had no advice to offer to her daughter. Wasn't that what a good mother was supposed to do?

'He won't be disappointed, little one,' she tried to convince Demeter as well as herself, although she did not know if it was the truth. With Severus Snape, one never knew.

And for the second time that day, Morgaine wondered if Severus' ghost still being at Hogwarts was a blessing or a curse.

## XXVII: Burying Some Hatchets

*Chapter 27 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XXVII: Burying Some Hatchets

Darkness. That was all there was, impenetrable, absorbing darkness. But still Morgaine knew that she was in Severus' old study. Five steps forward into the darkness and she would walk right into Severus' old desk. If she walked to the left, she would reach the shelf that held jars filled with what most people would describe as slimy-looking, horrid things. But to Severus, those jars had been treasures. To the left, she would find the ingredients cupboard, filled to the brim with wondrous things like powdered unicorn hooves, dried belladonna and wormwood. Yes, Morgaine knew where she was. She didn't need to be able to see to recognise the place where she had found her soul mate, the place where she had lost her heart, the place which now threatened to bereave her of her sanity.

But it was nothing but a dream, Morgaine knew that, too. A dream from which she was not sure that she wanted to awake. The darkness might be oppressing and the chill of the dungeons penetrating her very bones, but the dungeons of her dreams also offered a sort of emptiness which she embraced. In this darkness, there were no ghosts. In this darkness, she was free. And so was Severus.

Suddenly, a tiny light erupted in the far most corner, and slowly, the dungeons were illuminated, as if someone had lit a candle. The light spread, and the brighter it became, the quicker the dungeon dissolved. Morgaine knew that this was the end of the dream, that she was waking up, but for some moments, she kept her eyes tightly shut, willing the darkness to return, to fill the familiar room once more and drag her into the nothingness. But it was no use. The dungeon disappeared, and when Morgaine opened her eyes, she found herself, not in Severus' old study, but in her own bedchamber.

She blinked. The room was dark, not as dark as the dungeon had been, but still dark enough to conclude that it must be the middle of the night. What had awoken her? Why had she not been allowed to stay in the dungeon, in that blissful darkness?

'Is it morning yet?'

Demeter's drowsy voice made Morgaine let go of her dream at once, and she turned her head to look at her daughter, who was lying curled up beside her, not really asleep, but not completely awake either.

'No, it's not morning yet, little one,' she whispered, brushing a strand of black hair from Demeter's cheek. 'Go back to sleep.' She never received an answer. Instead, Demeter's breathing soon turned deep and regular again.

There was a beam of silvery moonlight travelling across the room from a gap of the curtain, illuminating Demeter's face. Her eyes were still puffy, and there were traces of dried tears on her pale cheeks. And with a bang all the memories of the last evening came back to Morgaine. Surely, she must be the worst mother in the world. Her daughter had come to her with a problem, and she had absolutely no idea how to fix it. She had not even been able to comfort the girl as she had started to cry.

Demeter crying had actually been the most difficult thing to deal with the previous night. Demeter was not of the weeping kind, had never been, not even as a baby. That she cried now showed Morgaine clearly just how desperate her daughter was. And she had not been able to give her even the tiniest piece of advice. So she had let the girl cry and just wrapped a consoling arm around her shaking shoulders, rocking her gently as if she were a baby. Neither of them had spoken; Demeter because she had been sobbing too hard to be able to form any words and Morgaine because she had not had anything to say.

Eventually, Demeter's sobs had subsided, and when Morgaine had looked down, she had noticed that her little angel had cried herself to sleep. Quietly, she had levitated her to her own bed and then called for an elf, which she sent to Gryffindor Tower to inform the Fat Lady that Demeter would not return to her common room that night. Instead, the girl would be sleeping in her mother's chambers.

Her *mother's* chambers. Morgaine smiled sadly and looked down at her child again. What kind of mother was she, anyway? Her own daughter had to call her *Professor* and had only dared to come and see her under the pretence of having a problem with her Potions homework. And Morgaine had had nothing to offer but a hug. No comforting words and most certainly no good advice.

Why was this so hard? She had given other people advice on much more complicated matters, sometimes on matters that had concerned life or death. Why did she seem utterly unable to help her child?

Silently, she slipped out of bed. There was no point in even trying to go back to sleep. She knew from experience that she wouldn't find the peace of mind to fall asleep again. Instead, she grabbed her dressing gown and tiptoed out of the room, leaving her daughter in the land of dreams. She would be better off there.

Closing the door silently behind her, Morgaine's eyes fell on the stack of essays still lying on her desk. She had never got around to trying to restore them last night. Probably, it would take her a while to get all the ink off the parchments. But however tedious it was to syphon the ink of every essay separately, it was nothing compared to the task of lighting a fire in the grate. At some point, Morgaine even considered resorting to using Muggle matches. She knew she had a box of them lying around somewhere.

'Maybe you should have Ollivander have a look at your wand.'

One might think that a voice seemingly coming from nowhere in the middle of the night would startle anyone, but Morgaine just slowly turned her head and looked up at the empty canvas that was hanging right beside the fireplace.

'There is nothing wrong with my wand,' she said calmly. 'You and I both know that, Dumbledore.'

Upon being addressed, Albus Dumbledore appeared on the otherwise empty canvas, and almost simultaneously, the flames erupted in the grate.

'Shall we say then that you are simply too tired to cast the spell properly?' he suggested, looking down at his great-granddaughter, who was still kneeling on the floor.

'Don't tell me you haven't spied on me enough times to know that I have been having trouble with that spell for almost a year now.'

'Spied?' Dumbledore sounded affronted. 'I would never spy on you, dear child. If you must know, Severus mentioned it. He noticed when he watched you brewing potions.'

'Of course.' Morgaine got up from the cold stone floor and settled onto the armchair that was standing in front of the grate, biting her tongue so she would not accuse Dumbledore of using Severus as a spy even now when they were both dead. She wasn't in the mood to argue with the old man that night. She was indeed far too tired.

'We are all concerned about your well-being, child,' Dumbledore continued, politely ignoring the slightly venomous tone in Morgaine's voice. 'I therefore hope that you are not too angry with me for looking in on you now and then.'

Morgaine shook her head. Of course she was not angry. She had noticed Dumbledore sneaking into the empty portrait already some nights ago. She had been grading papers and seen him out of the corner of her eye. But as he had not spoken to her, she had decided to ignore him. And when she had seen him again the next night and the next, she had understood that he was checking up on her. If she were honest with herself, she would admit that she appreciated the gesture. Him peeking around the frame once or twice every hour made her nights a little less lonely.

'You haven't been down to the dungeons for a week now,' Dumbledore pointed out, looking down at Morgaine over the rim of his spectacles.

'I teach in the dungeons, Dumbledore,' Morgaine replied defiantly. 'I am down there every day.'

'This is not what I meant, child.'

The tone in Dumbledore's voice was as kind as the look in his blue eyes. And as Morgaine locked eyes with him, she felt something stir deep inside her chest. If she were to describe the sensation, she would have compared it to ice melting in the first rays of the spring sun.

'I cannot go there,' she said quietly.

She kept eye-contact with her great-grandfather, desperately hoping he would give her some advice, just as he had done when she had still been a child. But Dumbledore kept quiet, and his silence forced Morgaine to talk.

'I am scared, afa,' she confessed, not even realising that she for the first time in many years was addressing Dumbledore, not with his last name, but with the Icelandic term for *grandfather*, a title which she had believed that Dumbledore had lost the right to carry.

'I am scared,' she repeated, 'scared that one day, I will go to Severus and then not have the strength to leave him again.'

'Are you longing to join him?' the old wizard asked, his voice still calm and without any trace of accusation.

'I am longing to be whole again.' Morgaine buried her face in her hands and squeezed her eyes shut. How could she admit to her great-grandfather that he was right? How could she admit that she sometimes longed for nothing more than to be at Severus' side for eternity? How could she admit that she had already taken the first steps to assure this, down in the Potions lab and in Knockturn Alley?

But it wasn't an option, not yet.

'I have to protect my child.'

Dumbledore nodded. 'And Severus will be right by your side.'

'It's not my fault then?' Morgaine looked pleadingly up at the portrait. 'He's not still here because I am making him? Because I am unable to let him go?'

'Dear child,' Dumbledore started, stroking his long white beard. 'I think Severus' role is the same as he had in life. He is to protect a child that belongs to the Light. He is to stand between her and the Dark. And once his task is fulfilled, you will both have to make a choice. Hopefully, by that time, you will be ready.'

'Mum?'

Demeter's voice made Morgaine spin around in her chair. Demeter was leaning against the door frame, her hair dishevelled, her feet bare and her arms tightly clutching a pillow towards her chest.

'What are you doing up, Demeter?' Morgaine asked, desperately hoping that the girl had just entered the room, that she had not heard.

'I know what to do with the Gobstones,' Demeter answered with a thick voice. 'I'll mix them, make two new sets out of them. Red and green stones in both.'

The girl's eyes were half-closed. Apparently she was more asleep than awake. And Morgaine rose from her chair to guide her daughter back to the bed, convinced that she had not heard anything.

As Morgaine tucked Demeter in, she found herself being pulled into an sleepy hug. 'I woke up, and you we're gone,' the girl mumbled. 'I was afraid you'd left.'

Morgaine inhaled sharply. 'I'll never leave you, little one,' she whispered, placing a tender kiss on Demeter's raven black hair. 'I will always be here.'

She sat with her daughter for a couple of minutes, watching her sleep. She looked so peaceful and was surely dreaming of Gobstones and her best friend. And Morgaine envied her for her untroubled sleep. She herself saw no chance of catching any more tonight. Her own mind was too troubled.

As she returned to her study some minutes later to extinguish the fire, the canvas beside the fireplace was once more empty, and she sighed with relief. With Dumbledore gone, she could pretend that the promise she had given her child was true. But in her heart she knew that she would one day have to make the choice to leave her daughter behind.

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'All alone, Mr Riverbed?'

Severus couldn't help but sneer at the way the boy jumped. He had grown up in the Wizarding world and had spent over a year at Hogwarts already. How could he not be used to ghosts appearing out of thin air? It was almost ludicrous.

'I assume an extra training session never hurts. There are rumours that you are being regularly defeated by a certain Gryffindor.'

Promptly, the boy blushed and lowered his head. Yet two other terribly annoying habits, Severus thought. But he decided to hold his peace for the time being. Morgaine had said that young Riverbed was a good boy. And if Demeter considered him to be her best friend, then maybe he was worth a second chance.

'Where is your playing partner, Mr Riverbed?' Severus finally asked after a minute or two of rather awkward silence. Him picking up the conversation again was just as well. There seemed to be little chance that the boy would be the one to do it. He seemed to be far too interested in his own shoes.

'I don't know, sir.'

'I beg your pardon, Mr Riverbed?' That mumbling was another thing the boy would have to stop.

As if he had heard the ghost's chiding thoughts, the boy straightened up and looked straight at the ghost in front of him. 'If you are talking about Demeter, sir, then I do not know where she is. We meet here after breakfast on Sunday morning for a game, but ... well, she hasn't arrived yet.'

Severus narrowed his ghostly eyes. He knew, of course, that Demeter and Melvin played Gobstones every Sunday morning. That was why he had come here. He was just about to ask whether the boy had seen Demeter in the Great Hall for breakfast, when Melvin spoke again.

'I'm not sure if she is going to come. She didn't show up last night either.'

'And why is that?' Severus enquired, frowning. He had clearly heard Demeter promise the boy that she would play another game with him before dinner the day before. It didn't seem like Demeter to break her promises.

The boy shrugged. 'I think it's my fault, sir,' he mumbled. 'I should have bought her some sweets for her birthday instead of a Gobstone set. That was a far too personal gift.'

A Gobstone set? Severus' frown deepened. He had noticed that Demeter had not been playing with any of the school sets the previous day but with new, red stones. Probably, the new set had been the reason why she had lost so spectacularly against Melvin during their last round. But Severus had been so eager to give Demeter *his* old stones that he had never even considered asking her why she was suddenly playing with a new set. 'Maybe you should try a different set of stones,' he had suggested and given her his old ones. He had not even asked her if she wanted them, but more or less thrust them into her hand. And then left her with them.

'Melvin!'

Both ghost and boy spun around as Morgaine's voice carried over the empty yard. But while Melvin looked apprehensively in the direction of his Head of House, Severus could only stare in awe. How could he ever have forgotten how beautiful Morgaine's hair looked in the sunlight? It was shining in a warm, golden-red tone, and all of a sudden Severus found himself being hurled two decades back in time to Dumbledore's office, from which he had observed the then fourteen-year-old girl play with Fawkes, the Phoenix. He had been enchanted by her radiant smile then, the smile which he now sorely missed.

The same sunlight that fell upon her hair also rendered Severus almost invisible from a distance, and therefore Morgaine could not see him until she was only a couple of feet away. But she didn't look surprised. Did that mean that she had sensed him, Severus wondered. And did that in its turn mean that she had not closed her mind completely towards him? Did he dare hope?

'Melvin, your uncle is looking for you,' Morgaine informed the boy as she had approached. 'He is waiting in your common room.'

The boy set off immediately, and for a moment, Severus thought that Morgaine was going to follow him. But she had merely turned to look out over the grounds, her hands deeply buried in her robes.

'The boy should really stop blushing,' Severus growled. 'It is utterly annoying.'

Morgaine shrugged. 'I find it charming. Or to use Demeter's words: cute and adorable.'

Severus huffed indignantly. He still could not understand what his daughter saw in the boy.

'He's a good kid,' Morgaine stated. 'And he cares deeply for Demeter. The Fat Lady told me he went looking for Demeter last night. As she would not grant him access to the Gryffindor common room or tell him whether Demeter was in there or not, he sat down on the cold stone floor and refused to leave until some Gryffindors left the tower and told him that Demeter wasn't there.'

Severus sneered. Luckily for the boy, he had waited outside the Gryffindor common room for a better reason than Severus himself had so many years ago. Should Melvin Riverbed ever mistreat Demeter in a similar way that Severus had treated Lily, he would rue the day he was born.

'He went back to Gryffindor tower first thing this morning,' Morgaine continued. 'And once more after breakfast. He wouldn't accept that Demeter hadn't slept in her dormitory.'

'Where did she sleep?' Severus wanted to know.

'Demeter was with me last night,' Morgaine explained. 'I didn't have the heart to send her back to Gryffindor tower. She was very upset.'

Upset? Severus felt an all too familiar stab of guilt. He was almost certain that Demeter being upset had something to do with the two sets of Gobstones she had received. Why on earth had he not asked about the red set before he had forced his on her?

'It's not easy, you know, being a twelve-year-old girl and trying to impress a boy and your father at the same time,' Morgaine pointed out, her eyes still fixed on a point far out in the grounds. 'Not easy at all.'

'Demeter does not have to impress me,' Severus growled. He wished Morgaine would turn around. He wanted to see her face when she spoke to him. But he did not dare move in front of her. What if she turned away?

'You know what Demeter's greatest fear was before coming to Hogwarts?' Morgaine went on. 'It wasn't that she would not know anyone or that she had no idea about the magical world. She was afraid that she would not be good enough for you, that you would not like her.'

'What is this nonsense?' Severus snapped. 'Why would I not ...'

He broke off as Morgaine turned her head to look at him over her shoulder. There was a look in her eyes for which he had not been prepared, an anxious look from red-rimmed eyes which tattled of a sleepless night.

'Demeter was desperate last night, Severus. Melvin had given her a new set of Gobstones for her birthday, and only an hour later you gifted her with your old set. She did not want to disappoint either of you and did not know which set to choose. At one point, she considered the option of never playing Gobstones again.'

'She should pick the boy's set,' Severus suggested. 'It is new, and the stones are in perfect condition. And besides, that set carries her House colours.'

Now Morgaine turned to face him. There was the saddest of smiles on her face, and she was shaking her head. 'Do you really think, Severus, that Demeter would choose the friendship of a boy over the love of her father?'

He did not know what to say. He just stared at Morgaine, wishing she would tell him what to do, wishing she would tell him what to feel. But all she did was incline her head towards the lake.

'She is down there,' she said. 'She took both the sets with her and said she wanted to be alone. But I think she wouldn't mind your company.'

Then she turned on her heel and left, leaving Severus behind, and he did not dare ask if she wouldn't mind his company either.

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Two equal piles, both made up of equal amounts of red and green stones.

*Yes, that should do it*, Demeter thought. That way, she would always be playing with stones from both sets, and neither Melvin nor her father would feel insulted. Yes, it was a brilliant idea.

She picked up the two bags, filled each with a now mixed-coloured set of Gobstones and was just about to get up from the ground as she felt a familiar prickling sensation on the back of her neck. Someone was watching her. *He* was watching her.

'It is not very polite to not keep one's appointments, Miss Snape,' came her father's baritone from behind her.

Demeter did not even flinch. It had almost become natural that he would just appear out of thin air and start talking to her. She had, however, no idea what he was talking about this time.

'Your appointment with Mr Riverbed,' the ghost pointed out as he drifted in front of her, and Demeter's hand immediately shot up to her mouth to keep a rude word from escaping her. She had completely lost track of time while sorting the Gobstones, and now it was half past ten. She and Melvin always met a quarter past.

'I ... I should go then,' she stammered, shoving the two Gobstone bags into the pocket of her robes.

The ghost, however, shook his head. 'Mr Riverbed has been called back to his common room,' he informed Demeter. 'I am afraid your training session has been cancelled. This should not, however, stop you from trying out your new sets.'

Sets? Plural? Demeter's eyes widened in surprise. How could he know that she had two sets?

'Your mother told me.'

Demeter bit her lip, suddenly feeling very uncomfortable. Firstly, because the ghost had once more known what she had been thinking. And secondly, because she was afraid that he must think her a coward now. She should have mustered the guts to tell him about Melvin's present herself when he had given her his old stones. But she had been too afraid that he would take it the wrong way and think that she did not appreciate his present.

'Melvin gave me a set, too,' she started to explain. 'The stones are red and golden, my House colours. And ... I think it cost him a lot of money and ...'

'I think you should play with your friend's set.'

'No!' Demeter exclaimed at once, vehemently shaking her head. 'I want to play with your stones, too.'

The ghost nodded. 'A predicament, indeed. How are you planning to solve it?'

Her hand was shaking slightly as Demeter reached into her pocket to once more pull out the two Gobstone bags, one red, one green. 'I ... I mixed the sets,' she began tentatively. 'Do you think they'll work?'

To her surprise, the ghost smiled. 'I see no reason why they should not,' he replied. 'I know that at least the green stones have always played well.' He paused for a moment. 'How about we test them?'

'Test them?' Demeter repeated. 'We?'

'Seeing as your partner is otherwise engaged at the moment, Miss Snape, I offer my services.'

'But ...' Demeter felt slightly confused. 'You can't play. You're a ghost!'

'Well spotted,' the ghost replied drily, and Demeter felt herself blush.

'I'm sorry. I didn't mean ...'

But the ghost saved her the apology. 'I will not be able to play with you, but I will gladly watch you and offer my advice. If you want me to, that is.'

Demeter just smiled and nodded. Of course she wanted him to!

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I would like to apologise in advance that you will have to wait a little bit longer for the next chapter. I'm about to move and will be without any internet access for a couple of weeks.

## XXVIII: Christmas Suggestions

*Chapter 28 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

## Chapter XXVIII: Christmas Suggestions

'Highly diligent, Miss Snape,' Severus commented as soon as Melvin had disappeared around the corner to sneak down to the kitchen in order to ask the elves for some hot chocolate. 'Not many Gobstone players would voluntarily face those temperatures.'

Demeter shrugged and continued picking up the stones. 'It's not that cold. And besides, now that the ground is frozen it is much smoother and easier to play on.'

Severus raised his eyebrows. 'And what is the true reason for meeting your friend out here?'

Demeter blushed ever so slightly and quickly lowered her head, busying herself with the Gobstone bag. But Severus did not take his eyes off her. He knew that Demeter and Melvin were not playing Gobstones outdoors in late December because they were in dire need of practise. In fact, he had quite often seen them sneak into empty classrooms or deserted gardens over the last couple of weeks. Not to cook up mischief or do things which Severus did not want his daughter to do for at least twenty-five more years, but simply to get away from their House mates.

'I understand that Slytherin and Gryffindor House are not exactly on speaking terms since the last Quidditch match,' Severus pointed out as it became clear to him that his daughter would not give him an answer.

'That's one way to put it,' Demeter muttered and then finally raised her head again. Her eyes were narrowed, her jaw set, and Severus couldn't help but smirk at the characteristic Snape scowl that had replaced the blush on Demeter's face. But unfortunately, the animosities that had flared up between Slytherin and Gryffindor House were no laughing matter. Ever since the Slytherin Quidditch team had triumphed over Gryffindor two weeks ago due to the Slytherins' superb ability to hide their fouls from the referee and rather than their flying skills not a day had passed without at least one Gryffindor and Slytherin getting into a fight. And whereas neither Slytherins nor Gryffindors had done much more than roll their eyes Demeter and Melvin's friendship earlier, the mood had now definitely changed.

'Does your mother know?' Severus asked.

'Of course she does,' Demeter replied with a slightly annoyed tone. 'The whole Slytherin Quidditch team got detention for a month, and she said that any Slytherin who hexes a Gryffindor will have to join them.'

Severus fixed his daughter with a penetrating look. 'I am aware that the Head of Slytherin House is dealing with any wrongdoers. What I was referring to was the fact that you and your Gryffindor friend are hiding away from people in order to avoid hateful comments. Does your *mother* know about *that*, Demeter?'

'Mother has got enough on her mind.'

Demeter's answer came quickly, and it took Severus by surprise. Surely, Morgaine would never be too busy to turn away her daughter when she sought advice.

'It's okay,' Demeter assured him, her eyes wide as if she were scared of something. 'I mean, there isn't much Mother can do, right? And besides, it's the holidays soon. I bet people will have forgotten all about the little Quidditch skirmish after the New Year.'

Severus frowned. Somehow, he had the feeling that Demeter had not spoken to her mother at all. He did not, however, get the opportunity to ask Demeter about it as footsteps could be heard from the other side of the yard.

'That is my cue,' Severus announced, already dissolving into thin air. He knew that the Riverbed boy was uncomfortable in his company. Not that he had ever bothered about whether he made anyone uncomfortable. But he did not want to disturb the little time Demeter had with her friend.

'You know where to find me,' he whispered as Melvin was mere feet away, and Demeter once more lowered her head, pretending to tie up the Gobstone bag.

'Yes, I do,' she whispered back from behind the curtain of her black hair. 'Thanks.'

Severus lingered for a couple of moments, observing the two friends with an uncanny feeling in the pit of his stomach. He knew from experience how hard it was to be friends with someone from a rivalling House. He and Lily had hidden away, too, for a while at least. And he had foolishly enough believed that their friendship were strong enough to last. But it hadn't. Now he could only hope that Demeter and Melvin would not make the same stupid mistakes he and Lily had made.

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'How about we go abroad, you and I, over Christmas? You know, somewhere warm and sunny. The Caribbean, for example.'

Morgaine raised an eyebrow at George, an incredulous look on her face. 'I fear neither of us tans very well,' she pointed out. 'Red hair, pale skin. One day at the beach and we will look like lobsters.'

'We don't need to go to the beach,' George exclaimed. 'We can spend the whole day in a bar. I hear the rum's cheap there.'

He lifted the bottle to refill both their glasses, but Morgaine held a hand over her glass, shaking her head. She thought it too early in the afternoon to have a second glass. And she wasn't entirely sure that George having a second one was a good idea either. Neither was she sure about whether it really was only his second.

'So, Healer Bellewood thinks you're suffering from stress?' George asked after he had examined the rum bottle for a while and then put it back on the table without refilling his glass. 'Seven years of medical studies, fifteen years of practice and that's all she can come up with? Amazing. She told me the same thing, by the way. Said I needed a break. Doesn't realise that this shop doesn't run itself.'

Morgaine peered through the big window which enabled her to see almost the whole of Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes. As usual, the shop was packed with customers, and George's dragon hide boots looked expensive enough to suggest that business was indeed running very well.

'The Caribbean is off then?' she asked, winking, and George laughed.

'If you really want to go, I'll shut the shop down over the holidays,' he offered with a spark of mischief in his eyes that reminded Morgaine of the prankster he had been at school. But all too soon, the spark went out and was replaced by a frown.

'It would feel like running away, though, wouldn't it?' he asked. 'We'd get away for a couple of days, but we would leave our hearts behind. And sooner or later, we'd have to come back.'

'And face our ghosts,' Morgaine finished his thought.

George nodded and slowly turned to face the portrait of his beloved brother. And Morgaine did not need to see his face to know that his jaw muscles had tightened and that there most probably were tears shining in his eyes.

There wasn't any need for more words. Ever since Morgaine had visited Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes with Demeter, she had felt that she and George shared something few people could understand. They had both lost the person who had been closest to their heart and were now struggling to survive without a part of their soul.

They had not talked about it back at the end of August, but when Morgaine had visited Diagon Alley a month later, she had found George at the Leaky Cauldron, clutching a glass of rum at two in the afternoon. She had been worried for him, kept him company, listened to him and tried to console him, and after having persuaded him to switch

his rum for strong, black coffee, she had brought him home before departing for Spinner's End herself. Since that afternoon, she had looked in on him twice a month on her way back from St. Mungo's. Funnily enough, talking to George had a more calming effect on Morgaine than talking to the Healer had.

'Why are you seeing Healer Bellewood anyway?' George suddenly asked, turning around and fixing Morgaine with a questioning look. 'Why don't you talk to Poppy?'

Morgaine sneered. 'Because the walls of Hogwarts hear more than your Extendable Ears ever will.'

'And you don't want Severus to know.'

Morgaine cringed slightly. Sometimes, especially after a glass or two, George could be awfully blunt and straightforward. Of course, she did not want Severus to know that she was falling into pieces, and George was well aware of that because she had told him once after half a bottle of rum. But there was no need to throw the truth at her like this. George did not, however, seem to notice the effect his statement had on her.

'You know,' he went on, 'I envied you at first, Morgaine. I thought that you were better off than me because you have a ghost to talk to while all I have left is a portrait.'

Morgaine felt her throat go tight and swallowed drily. She did not feel that she was in any kind of favourable position. But she did not want to argue with George about which of them was suffering the worse fate.

'Just imagine the havoc Peeves and Fred's ghost would cause at Hogwarts,' she said instead, trying to keep her voice steady and swallow the lump in her throat. 'They would certainly cause more destruction than the Death Eaters did during the battle.'

'At least Fred's ghost would make people laugh,' George pointed out, approaching her slowly, still looking at her. 'I have the feeling that the presence of your ghost is creating anything but. Am I right?'

Morgaine tightened her grip around her glass, suddenly regretting that she had turned down a refill. Then she would at least be able to pretend drinking and win some seconds to think about her answer. But her glass was empty, and George did not seem to want to wait for an answer.

'How many times have you come to see me since that Saturday at the Leaky Cauldron?' he asked. 'Five, six times?'

Morgaine nodded.

'And how many times have you let me drone on without once talking about how *you* are feeling?'

Morgaine opened her mouth to respond, but George raised his hand, shaking his head.

'I know it's tearing you apart, Morgaine. I can see that you are itching to go back to Hogwarts and at the same time taking any excuse to stay here just a little while longer. I know how it feels. Some days I cannot make myself look at Fred's portrait, and other days I cannot make myself look away from it.'

He turned to face the portrait once more, and Morgaine squeezed her eyes shut as to will back the tears which she did not want to cry. George had no idea. He did not know that his and her pain, as similar as they were, were at the same time completely different. Fred was gone and would never come back, and there was nothing George could do about it. Severus, however, was still at Hogwarts, still around and at the same time gone. And while George had no other choice than to acknowledge that his brother was gone for good, Morgaine knew that she would have to make a choice: she would either have to learn how to live with a ghost or learn how to live the rest of her life without him. Healer Bellewood made her say this out loud at least once during every session, but saying it out loud did not make the decision any easier. And Morgaine wished for nothing more than that someone else could make the decision for her, just as fate had made the decision for George.

When she opened her eyes again, George was kneeling in front of her. 'I don't envy you anymore, Morgaine,' he said quietly, enfolding her hands in his. 'And I won't say that I understand your pain. I doubt I ever will. But my door will always be open for you. And should you today or any other day decide that you do not want to go back to Hogwarts, I will not throw you out. And I will listen to what you have to say. Hell, I'll let you drink my last rum if it makes it easier for you.'

Morgaine gave a short laugh as George picked up the bottle and presented it to her as if he were a waiter in a over-priced restaurant and the rum a bottle of the finest wine. And she wished she could talk to him, wished she could tell him those things which she could not make herself tell Healer Bellewood. Instead, she sighed and squeezed his hand.

'You know, George, in order to tell you what is going on in my heart, I will have to get my own head around things first.'

'Whenever you're ready, my friend.'

He rose and refilled both their glasses, and they toasted and drank to a merry Christmas, the Caribbean and the hopefully cheap rum.

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Rarely was the Great Hall filled with so much chatter and laughter as on the last night of term. Hagrid had as always put up twelve enormous Christmas trees, the elves had produced the delicious dinner, and the decorations put up and bewitched by Professor Flitwick were the most sparkling Hogwarts had seen in many years.

The mood could not have been more joyful. Most students were looking forward to going home the next morning to spend the holidays with their families, and those who were staying at Hogwarts were in their turn looking forward to two lesson free weeks during which they could explore the castle to their hearts' desires. Oh, the possibilities! Especially as caretaker Filch would be going away for a couple of days, taking Mrs Norris with him, of course.

Morgaine sensed the joyous mood as well, of course, but she very much wished for the dinner to pass quickly and for Minerva's end-of-term speech to be the shortest in the history of the school. Her ambition for the night was to sink into a hot bath and then hopefully retire for a full night's sleep. Considering the fact that she had had two glasses of rum at George's and that the toddy Hagrid had been serving in the staff room had been anything but weak, there was a slight possibility that she might actually go to sleep without a potion for a change. Then tomorrow, she would finally have the time and energy to spend the whole day with Demeter and do all those mother-daughter things that seemed inappropriate during the school year. They could go Christmas shopping in Hogsmeade or venture into the Forbidden Forest. Maybe, if they could persuade Hagrid to guide them, they would be able to see unicorns.

'It's actually a shame to leave all this, don't you think? I mean, where else can one find such a magnificent Christmas decoration? And the food ...'

Morgaine looked up at the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, who was refilling his plate for the third time. The young man sure had a healthy appetite, which Morgaine had noticed over the last couple two months. The first time Alek had chosen to sit beside her at dinner had been at the Halloween feast, and then he had eaten more cake, ice cream and sweets than one would think physically possible. Where he put it all was beyond her.

'Really,' Alek continued after a few mouthfuls of steak and kidney pie, 'if it weren't for Melvin, I wouldn't leave Hogwarts. I'd stay and eat until the elves go on strike.'

'You will be accompanying Melvin to his mother's?' Morgaine asked, trying not to grin at the way Alek was stuffing food into his mouth as if he had not eaten in days. 'Melvin mentioned he would be spending the holidays with her.'

Alek nodded and washed the pie down with a healthy gulp of ale. 'It's important to spend the holidays with one's family,' he stated, wiping his mouth with his napkin. 'We will be spending Christmas in Estonia. It's more or less a tradition. Our mother took my sister and me there every year, and I think her parents took her there as well. Our great-great-grandfather bought an estate when he realised that his wife was more annoying than a Banshee. It was where he escaped to every now and then, and his wife never found him. To this day, the estate is still unplottable.'

He reached for the mashed potatoes but heeded himself. 'I should save room for pudding,' he mumbled and then looked over at Morgaine's plate. 'You don't eat much, do you?'

'I sleep poorly if I eat too much in the evening,' Morgaine explained, looking down at her plate. Half of the mash and vegetables were still untouched. The pie, she had not even bothered with. 'And as I know what's for dessert,' she added in a conspiratory tone, 'I would advise you not have any more mash.'

As on command, the main course vanished and was replaced by a wide assortment of desserts. There were cakes and biscuits and uncountable flavours of ice cream and custards, and right in front of every person in the Great Hall appeared a plate filled with their favourite dish. On Alek's plate, for example, sat a huge piece of cream and coconut cake.

'Goodness,' he groaned as he put the first spoon full into his mouth. 'I think I died and went to heaven!'

He was completely unapproachable for the next couple of minutes, and as Morgaine watched him devour the cake as if it were the most delicious dessert on the planet, she couldn't help but smile. Alek was just adorable. So honest, so laid-back and always so friendly. Morgaine couldn't recall a single occasion on which she had seen him frown. There was always a smile on his face and a twinkle in his hazel eyes.

'You know, Morgaine, I'd rather you ate something yourself than watch me eat,' he suddenly said, looking up at her from his plate. 'In fact, I think you should try this cake. It's heavenly.' And before Morgaine knew what was happening, he had shoved his plate towards her.

'I am not going to eat your dessert, Alek,' she protested, indicating the Sticky Toffee Pudding in front of her. 'I have my own.'

Alek defiantly picked up his spoon. 'Don't make me feed you.'

Morgaine laughed. She could just imagine the look on Minerva's face if she saw her Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher spoon feed her Potions mistress. Certainly, such a thing had never happened before, and Morgaine doubted that the Headmistress would approve. There were other people at the staff table, however, who most probably would. Pomona, for example, had dropped quite a few hints over the last couple weeks. Obviously, she thought that Morgaine should encourage Alek's flirting attempts a little more. Morgaine had frowned at the Herbology teacher when she had mentioned that. Surely, Alek Riverbend was not flirting with her. He was just being nice. But she had to admit that she liked him, a lot even. They had become good friends over the last year. And friends did not flirt.

'Seeing as you are not going to eat the cake and will probably hex me into next year should I try to feed you,' Alek suddenly interrupted her musings, 'may I ask you a question?'

Morgaine leaned back in her chair, crossed her arms in front of her chest and eyed the young man. All of a sudden, he sounded rather serious and was shifting uncomfortably in his chair. And Morgaine felt a slight urge to let him sweat. But then again, that wouldn't have been fair, would it?

'You may ask whatever you want, Alek,' she said in a tone that very much resembled the one she used with her students. 'I cannot, however, guarantee you an answer.'

Alek cleared his throat. 'Well, I was thinking, um ... Demeter and Melvin, well, the two seem to like each other very much, and you and I ...' He broke off, blushing, but found his voice again before Morgaine could butt in. 'What I am trying to ask is: would you and Demeter like to spend New Year's with us? With Melvin and me? And my sister, of course.'

He had said all that very fast, and once he had finished, his cheeks had gone from pink to crimson. Morgaine stared at him for a moment, too taken aback to give him an answer.

'I ... I'm sorry,' Alek stammered, misinterpreting her silence. 'I should not have asked that. Totally out of place. I ... I apologise. I ...'

'Don't apologise, Alek. I think your invitation is rather ...' What was it, exactly? Sweet? Flattering.

'Totally out of place,' Alek repeated. There was a frown on his face now. Obviously, he was angry with himself. 'Please, forget that I ever said anything.'

Morgaine smiled. 'What a shame,' she replied, playing with her napkin. 'I was just about to ask you to give me some time to consider your offer.'

'You'll think about it? You really will?' The frown had disappeared in a blink of an eye, and Alek was once more beaming. 'Will you send me an owl? Oh, no you can't do that. Unplottable and everything. May I send you an owl?'

Morgaine picked up her spoon and reached for Alek's plate. 'Yes, Alek,' she said. 'You may send me an owl.'

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'May I come in?'

He still hadn't come up with a way to knock, so the least Severus could do was to halt once he had floated through the door and ask permission to enter. Not that he thought Morgaine would ever turn him away. He knew for certain that she missed him just as much as he missed her.

'I'll be right out.'

Severus nodded, despite Morgaine not being able to see it from her bedroom, and started to drift around her study. Tidy as ever, he concluded. And as always, the curtains were tightly shut. And on the desk stood once more a bottle of rosemary oil.

'You are still having headaches,' Severus stated as Morgaine entered the study a few minutes later, wearing a black dressing gown. Her cheeks were rosy and her hair wet. She had obviously just had a bath. And Severus could have sworn that he caught a whiff of sandalwood and honey. But that, he thought, could be nothing more than a memory. Ghosts were not able to distinguish smells.

'They come and go,' Morgaine declared, picking up the tiny bottle to shake it before Severus' nose. 'See? It's not even half empty.'

'And when did you break the seal?'

Morgaine smirked and put the bottle back down. She wasn't going to answer Severus' question, so much was clear.

'Are you taking potions as well?' he enquired.

To that question, Morgaine shook her head. 'Working in the dungeons has its advantages. It is dark and cool down there, and it makes things easier to bear. But you know that, of course.'

'Does Poppy know?'

Severus was growing impatient, even frustrated, but Morgaine did not react to his harsh tone.

'You didn't come here to discuss my health, did you, Severus?' she asked instead of answering his question. 'You are here because you are worried about Demeter.' She smiled. 'She does talk to me, you know. And I do have time for her, whenever she shows up at my doorstep.'

'I was not criticising your parenting,' Severus protested.

'I never said you were.' Morgaine was still smiling and settled in the armchair by the fire, wrapping a shawl around her shoulders.

'You are aware then that Demeter and Melvin are hiding away on empty classrooms and the frozen grounds to escape scathing comments from their House mates?'

'Her House mates,' Morgaine corrected him, both the look on her face and the tone of her voice uttermost serious now. 'It is the Gryffindors that are disapproving of Demeter and Melvin's friendship. There hasn't been a whisper in Slytherin House. And trust me, I do know what happens in that House.'

'Are they keeping a low profile because Demeter's mother is their Head of House?' Severus suggested. 'Are they fearing repercussions?'

Morgaine shrugged. 'That's a plausible explanation. Maybe we should be content with it. For tonight at least.'

'Maybe we should.' Severus eyed Morgaine with a frown. She had pulled her feet up and wrapped her arms around her knees. She looked cold, and the rosy colour had all but disappeared from her cheeks.

'You should go to bed, Morgaine,' he suggested. 'It is almost midnight.'

Morgaine gave a short, dry laugh. 'There is no point in me going to bed. I haven't had a whole night's sleep since ...' She broke off and sighed. 'I don't know when.'

'Since the night you left the dungeons,' Severus stated.

'Are you spying on me?' Morgaine asked. The tone of her voice suggested that she was attempting to jest, but her attempt was only half-hearted, and she failed miserably. 'Or has Dumbledore told you?'

Severus let his eyes wander to the empty canvas beside the fireplace from which he knew Dumbledore had been keeping an eye on Morgaine for many nights over the last two months. But tonight, the frame was empty. And he doubted that the old Headmaster would disturb them.

'I do not need Dumbledore to tell me whether you are sleeping or how you are feeling, Morgaine,' he said slowly, his eyes still on the canvas. 'No matter how good an Occlumens you have become over the years, no matter how hard you are trying to shut me out and I am trying to keep away, I can still sense you. Just as you can still sense me.'

'I wish you didn't have to.'

The sad sound of her voice made Severus look at Morgaine again. He would not have been surprised to see her crying, but her cheeks were dry. Her eyes, however, were filled with an endless sadness that cut right into Severus' heart.

It wasn't fair. Staying with him had not been good for her and had kept her from living the life a woman her age should live. Night after night she had spent with him in the dungeons, caring more about his company than socialising in the staff room. And when she had realised that it was not working out, that she could not live with a ghost, she had left, and he had let her go. But ever since the first night he had spent alone in the dungeons, Severus had heard her mind her heart whisper to him at night. No matter how much logic dictated that ghost and human were no match, they both knew that without the other, neither of them was whole and neither of them would survive.

'I want to sense you,' Severus declared, his eyes firmly attached to Morgaine's. 'There is nothing in the world, this or the one beyond, I want more than to be by your side for ever.'

He drifted closer and stretched out a ghostly hand. Morgaine did not shrink away, and Severus could have sworn that he was able to feel the warmth of her skin.

'You have been missed, Morgaine of the Lake. / have missed you.'

The moments passed, and neither of them said anything. But they needed neither words or Legilimency to know that they were both pondering the same question, the question of how they would ever be able to fulfil their most dire wish: to be at each other's side. Forever.

## XXIX: A Night of Memories

*Chapter 29 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XXIX: A Night of Memories

'How is this possible, Severus?' Morgaine asked, looking down at their entwined hands. 'It shouldn't be. You shouldn't be able to hold my hand.'

Severus nodded slowly. 'I have been thinking about this, too,' he replied. 'I think it is a memory.'

Morgaine frowned, not taking her eyes off the ghostly hands that held hers. 'A memory?'

Once more, Severus nodded. 'One of my dearest,' he started. 'Do you remember how your Boggart turned into a Death Eater into me in your sixth year?'

'How could I forget?'

Finding out that her teacher, her mentor, had once been a Death Eater had been a very unpleasant surprise, and at first, Morgaine had refused to believe it. Books could lie, she had told herself. Authors could be wrong. But every book about the First Wizarding War she had picked up had said the same thing: that Severus Snape had indeed been a Death Eater, one of the Dark Lord's most trusted servants. And although Albus Dumbledore had vouched for him, although his name had been cleared, Morgaine had been forced to admit that she did not feel entirely comfortable around Severus Snape anymore. She had kept quiet about her findings and thoughts for almost half a year, trying to convince herself that there must have been good reasons for Snape joining the Dark side in the first place. He had been young, foolish. Maybe someone had forced him to join, blackmailed him, or Merlin knew what. But deep inside, she had been scared, and her Boggart had delivered evidence of her fears.

'I thought I had lost you,' Severus confessed. 'I was convinced that you would turn away from me once you had found out about my biggest mistakes. Instead, you came down to the dungeons, and you listened. And instead of running away, you held my hand that night. You did it over and over again, at times when the rest of the Wizarding world judged me to be one of the most foul beings on earth. I doubt you ever knew how much that simple gesture meant to me.'

About as much as you holding my hand means to me now, Morgaine thought.

His hands looked like a ghost's hands, silvery-blue and semitransparent, but at the moment they felt solid, human, and Morgaine was sure that she would feel their grip tighten if she tried to pull her own hands away. But Severus had said it was just a memory.

'Are you saying that this isn't real?' she asked with a slightly trembling voice, feeling a knot form in the pit of her stomach. Heaven forbid Severus would give an affirmative answer. She wanted this to be real. She needed it to be real. She needed his touch.

Severus shrugged. 'It is only a theory, an explanation for why the only person I am able to touch is you. I cannot touch Minerva, for example, whom I have known since I was eleven. I assume touching her has never meant enough to either of us to enable me to recreate the sensation. And I cannot touch Demeter, who is my own flesh and blood. That, I think, is because I have never touched her while I was alive. There is no memory to recreate.'

Morgaine's heart skipped a beat as his eyes met hers. No matter what colour his eyes had now—silvery blue instead of beetle black—they were still bottomless and seemed to be able to see right into her very soul.

'The memory of your hand in mine is very strong,' Severus went on. 'And as you can feel my hands as well, I assume the memory is just as strong in your mind as it is in mine. That is the key, I think: a strong memory, shared by the both of us.'

Morgaine swallowed. 'Could this work with other memories?' she asked tentatively.

She regretted having asked even before she had spoken the last syllable. Why was she getting her hopes up? If Severus said no, or if they tried to recreate another memory and it did not work, how much would it hurt? Would she be able to handle any more pain?

But hope was all she had.

'Look at me,' Severus whispered. 'Look at me and remember.'

At first, Morgaine fought the memories. What if she got lost in them? What if she did not have the strength to return to the present? What if she didn't want to return? But Severus' hands around hers made her feel safe, and as his mind brushed hers, she let her guard down. One by one, the bricks of her protective wall tumbled to the ground and vanished into nothingness, opening up the path to her most treasured memories; moments long passed, hidden away but never forgotten.

Iceland, green hills and fiery skies, an innocent kiss and a loving embrace under the birch tree by the river.

Grimmauld Place, a dark shabby room and a whispered confession of love which no one else must ever know about.

The Black Lake, autumn leaves covering Albus Dumbledore's white tomb and a plea for forgiveness between two souls that didn't know how to exist without each other.

Again and again, they revisited the dungeons where—suddenly—Morgaine found her fifteen-year-old self sobbing on the floor on a Halloween night. That night, Severus had unearthed some of her most painful and disturbing childhood memories. Memories of Death Eaters, the Dark Lord and the night she had cursed her own mother.

Morgaine tried to turn away. She could not understand why she—her mind—had chosen to stop at this particular memory. Severus had asked her to remember something that was important to them both, a strong memory they could recreate. Surely, Severus invading her mind and finding nothing but horror wasn't a memory either of them was keen to live through once more. But she couldn't turn away from the memory, as little as she could turn away from the penetrating gaze of Severus' eyes. Together they looked down upon the girl that was crying in desperation on the cold stone floor and saw the black clad man wrap his arms around her and cradle her against his chest as if it were the most natural thing in the world. And the girl clung to him like a drowning person to a life raft.

Severus' eyes narrowed slightly, and his ghostly brow narrowed in concentration. 'Do not fight it,' he whispered. 'Close your eyes and hang on to this memory.'

Morgaine's hands twitched as Severus let go of them, and she felt a bubble of panic rise in her chest. She did not want him to let go. She did not want him to leave. What if he didn't come back?

But Severus didn't leave, and while his hands had let go of Morgaine's, his mind was closer to hers than ever, his memories intertwining with hers. And suddenly, it became crystal clear why her mind had chosen this particular scene.

'You took care of me that night,' she pointed out in a low tone, now clinging as desperately to the memory as she had clung to Severus that night almost two decades ago. 'You held me in your arms and kept me safe.'

'It was the least I could do.'

At first, his touch felt cold as ice, and for a moment Morgaine feared that the memory had not been strong enough, or worse, that it had not meant as much to Severus as it had to her. But soon the ghostly touch on her cheek grew warmer, and as Severus carefully wrapped his arm around her shoulder, Morgaine could have sworn that it felt warm and solid.

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Severus couldn't help but smile when Morgaine sighed softly and rolled around in her sleep. The glow of the fire that was still burning in the next room once more magicked some rosy colour onto her cheeks, and she looked calm and relaxed. Surely, her sigh could not have been anything other than a sigh of contentment.

He had been watching her sleep for a good two hours now. At first, her slumber had seemed troubled. He had heard her gnash her teeth and seen her toss her head from side to side, and he had been afraid that she would wake up again. And so he had whispered to her, told her that she had nothing to fear and that he was taking care of her, just as he had promised her so many years ago. Eventually, she had calmed down. The muscles in her jaw had relaxed, and her breathing had become slow and regular.

He had stayed by her side, watching her sleep, observing her movements and mapping every inch of her face, comparing it to the memories in his head. The fine lines at the corner of her eyes and mouth were still there, proofs of a smile that had once had the capacity to light up even the darkest corner of the dungeons. But now, there was also a deep, angry line right between her eyes, hardening her otherwise soft features. And the dark circles under her eyes bore witness of far too many sleepless nights. But tonight, she was asleep. Peacefully, it seemed, and Severus wondered what she was dreaming of.

As the grandfather clock in the study chimed, Severus frowned. That clock was bewitched to only make any sound when no living being within earshot was asleep thus not to wake anyone. It had struck midnight still, but since Morgaine had closed her eyes, the clock hadn't as much as ticked. That it chimed now must mean that Morgaine was awake.

'Are you trying to lure me into thinking that you are sleeping, Miss duLac?' Severus asked in a mockingly chiding tone.

Morgaine's lips curled into a smile, but her eyes were still closed. 'No, I'm not trying to lure you. I am just enjoying the feeling of having someone beside me,' she whispered, her voice so drowsy that Severus concluded that she had woken up mere seconds ago.

'Did you know,' he started in a low tone so as not to disturb her in case she was drifting back into sleep, 'that some nights, I would lay awake for hours just to watch you sleep? I would let my fingers run over your skin to feel your warmth and to assure myself that you were still there.'

'And did you know,' Morgaine replied sleepily, 'that some nights, I pretended to be asleep just to lay in your arms?'

'As you are doing now?'

Morgaine hummed in agreement, and Severus saw her wrap the blanket tighter around her shoulders as if to use it as a substitute for his arms.

'I knew,' he confessed.

He had always known, but he had always chosen to pretend that he didn't so he could hold her close to his chest all night, inhaling the warm, comforting scent that emitted from her hair and imagining that the world outside their bedroom did not exist. No war, no Dark Lord, no Dumbledore, no Order and no responsibilities; just the two of them.

'I miss it,' Morgaine whispered. Her voice had become clearer, but her eyes were still closed. 'I miss the feeling of having someone watch over me at night. I miss waking up in your arms. I miss ...'

Her eyes flew open and locked immediately onto Severus'. She did not even have to search for them.

'I miss you. All of you.'

Severus' ghostly brow furrowed. What was he supposed to tell her now? That he felt the same? That he missed the feeling of her body against his? That he missed her kisses and her warm hands on his back? That he missed making love to her?

For some moments, he tried to listen to the voice of reason in his head. Telling Morgaine that he felt the same way as she did would not help. If anything, it would mean another sleepless night for her, a night filled with regrets and unsatisfied longing. But the voice of his heart spoke louder. They had a chance now, and he couldn't let it slip away. He concentrated hard, and his fingers came to rest on her cheek. And as Morgaine eyes opened, he carefully let his thumb glide over her lips.

'Have you waited all this time?' he asked.

'I have never felt the need to be with anyone else,' she whispered. 'It didn't seem important.'

'Does it seem important now?'

Her answer consisted of a flood of memories: tender lovemaking in the dungeons, a forceful yet passionate coupling against the wall in a dark room at the Leaky Cauldron, tender caresses and a confession of love in a dusty room at Grimmauld Place.

'Which one?' Severus whispered, his fingertips now trailing down the side of Morgaine's neck. 'Which memory do you want us to choose?'

She didn't answer. Instead she closed her eyes, hiding the mental pictures from sight, and Severus realised that it did not matter which memory they chose. They were about to create a new one.

Her hair was soft as silk, just as he remembered it, and still smelled of sandalwood and honey. Her skin was warm against his lips and tasted sweeter than the most expensive chocolate Honeydukes had to offer. Her breasts were still firm, though somewhat heavier than he remembered. But they still fitted perfectly in his hands. He caressed them, kissed them, thoroughly enjoying the little moans that escaped from Morgaine's lips.

*It is real then*, he thought. All this wasn't just a memory. Somehow and he could not even try to explain how he was really touching her, pleasuring her. He could smell her, taste her, feel her. All of it was real. And Severus did not care that every touch and caress defied the laws of physics and magic alike. It did not matter that his brain was telling him that this couldn't be, that it shouldn't be. Nothing had mattered. Nothing, except the fact that this night belonged to them and that Morgaine belonged to him. Him alone.

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'I'm sorry, Severus.' Morgaine's tear-filled voice was muffled by the blanket as she apologised for what seemed the thousandth time. 'I didn't mean to ...'

'I told you that there is no need to apologise,' Severus interrupted her, rather surprised by the note of patience in his voice. 'Go to sleep, Morgaine. The world will look much brighter in the morning.'

He saw a shudder go through her body and heard her sniffle.

'Will you stay?' she asked anxiously.

'Yes, beloved,' Severus promised. 'I will stay.'

He would stay until the end of time if she asked him to. He couldn't leave her when he knew that she once more would cry herself to sleep. And especially not when he once more felt responsible for her tears.

When her sobs finally subsided, Severus sighed heavily. This was not how he had wanted this night to end. But if he were honest with himself, he should have seen it coming. He should have understood that being intimate would end in nothing but heartache.

But it had felt so right. The lightest of touches had been like balm on his soul. And every sigh, every moan, every syllable that had tumbled from Morgaine's lips had been like an elixir and had made him feel him rejuvenated, healed somehow. And all he had wanted had been to drive her over the edge so she would call out his name.

She had indeed called for him, with a hoarse voice and between gasps of breath, but not to urge him on. Instead she had begged him to stop, and he had let go of her hot skin and stared at her, at a complete loss to why she had stopped him. But before he had even drawn breath to ask her about her reasons, Morgaine had started to apologise, over and over again, until the flood of tears had become so intense that it had drowned her words. And all Severus had been able to do was wait. He had not dared reach out for her, neither physically nor mentally, out of fear that his touch was what had made her cry in the first place.

'Severus?'

She sounded as if she were suffering from a severe head cold, and the way she trembled under her blanket suggested that she was indeed running a fever. But Severus knew that neither was the case. Her voice was hoarse from crying, and the trembling was caused by nothing but exhaustion, both mental and physical.

'Didn't we agree on you going to sleep?' he asked.

'I wanted to know if you're still here.'

Severus drifted closer to the bed, not really knowing if he should frown or smile. He wished for her to sleep, to drift away and forget about her heartache for some hours.

'I promised that I would stay,' he said. 'You know that I mean it.'

Pulling the blanket tightly around herself, Morgaine sat up. It was too dark to make out her eyes, but Severus still knew that she was looking straight at him.

'Is this all we will ever have?' she asked with a note of resignation in her voice that made Severus cringe. 'Old memories patched together into new ones?'

Now Severus did frown. What they had shared was more intense and intimate than anything most lovers were ever able to experience. But he held his peace. He doubted that this argument would do any good.



Morgaine drew a shaking breath. 'I wish all this were real.'

'This is real,' Severus argued, but Morgaine wouldn't listen.

'It might be real in our minds, in our hearts, but ...' She sank her teeth into her lower lip, biting it so fiercely that Severus feared that she'd draw blood. 'I need more, Severus. I cannot live from memories alone.'

Severus nodded slowly, silently wondering what Morgaine wanted him to say. Did she want him to give her permission to be with another man? That permission wasn't his to give. He was dead, after all, nothing more than a ghost. And even if he had still been alive ...

'Will I ever be able to be with you again, Severus?'

Severus' head snapped up. 'What do you mean?'

Morgaine shrugged. 'I know that there are spells that ensure that one's soul does not pass on. But will those spells guarantee that my soul will end up at your side?'

'I forbid you to even think about this, Morgaine!' Severus realised that he was shouting, but he did not care. He did not want Morgaine to think about what was going to happen after her death. He did not want her to think about dying at all. He knew how hard it was to direct one's thoughts into another direction once they had got caught in this self-destructive spiral. Morgaine mustn't have such thoughts. She was still young, and her whole life lay ahead of her. By the Gods, she should not even have any reason to think such things.

'I wouldn't ask you for permission, you know,' Morgaine murmured, wrapping her arms around her knees. 'But you do not need to worry. My knives are blunt, and there are no poisons in my cabinet.'

She looked up at him, and despite the darkness, Severus thought he could see her blue eyes. 'I am not about to leave Demeter,' she declared, her voice firm. 'I know how it feels to grow up without a mother, and I know how it feels to lose someone you love. I am not doing this to my child.'

'Is that a promise?' Severus asked.

'Yes, Severus, this is a promise.'

She slipped under the covers again, lying so still that one could have thought that she had finally fallen asleep. But Severus knew that her eyes were open, searching the darkness for his outline without finding it but refusing to give up.

She would never give up searching for him.

## XXX: Leaving the Safe Walls of Hogwarts

*Chapter 30 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XXX: Leaving the Safe Walls of Hogwarts

Demeter yawned and pulled her cloak tighter around herself, shivering and frowning in annoyance. Surely, it couldn't be that cold, she chided herself. If she had slept a little more, she wouldn't be so frozen. But the end of term party in the Gryffindor common room had been far too much fun to go to bed any earlier than two o'clock. And then she and her room mates had lain awake for at least another hour, chatting and giggling, talking about everything from Christmas presents to boys. Hence, Demeter hadn't slept much more than five hours.

'I should have let you have a lie-in, little one.'

'No!' Demeter protested at once. 'I can sleep tomorrow and the day after that. I can sleep all the way through to New Year's if I need to.' She turned her head towards her mother and winced slightly at the bright light of the midwinter sun. 'Today is our day. I've been looking forward to it for weeks!'

Indeed she had. Ever since her mother had promised her that they would go to Hogsmeade together on the first day of the Christmas holidays, Demeter had been counting down the days. The older students had been boasting so much about their Hogsmeade weekend back in October, showing off their purchases from Honeydukes and Zonkos and Dervish & Bangs, and now Demeter very much wanted to see those shops herself, two years before she would be allowed to visit the village together with her peers. But first and foremost, she was looking forward to spending a whole day with her mother. It had been a while since they had been able to be on their own, without any students or teachers to disturb them.

'Where will we be going first?' Demeter wondered. If it were up to her, they'd start at Zonkos, but she wanted her mother to decide.

Morgaine smiled. 'Well, seeing as one of us missed breakfast ...'

Demeter blushed slightly, feeling as if she had been caught with her hand in the biscuit tin. She had indeed not had the time to eat breakfast. She had set her alarm clock to a quarter to eight, but by the time she had finally been able to make herself leave the warm covers, it had been eight thirty, which had only left her with half an hour to shower and get dressed before meeting her mother in the Entrance Hall at nine.

'Seeing as one of us missed breakfast,' Morgaine repeated, picking up her thread again, 'I'd say we start at Madam Puddifoot's tea shop. You look like you could do with a scone and a cup of hot chocolate.'

Her mother had the best ideas, Demeter concluded half an hour later as she was sitting in a very comfortable arm chair, warming her cold fingers at a cup of the sweetest hot chocolate she had ever tasted. She was convinced that every sip would cause a cavity in her teeth, but she did not care. She even wondered if she could persuade an elf to ask Madam Puddifoot for the recipe.

'Eat,' Morgaine insisted and pushed a plate containing two huge scones, cream cheese and marmalade towards Demeter. 'You'll need your strength if you want to do a proper Christmas shopping.'

'What about you?' Demeter eyed the cup of herbal tea her mother was clutching with a slight frown. 'Aren't you going to eat anything?'

'I was up much earlier than you, little one. I have had my breakfast.'

Demeter picked up the knife to cut one of the scones in half, glancing furtively up at her mother from under the curtain of her black hair. She hadn't noticed outdoors in the bright sunlight, but now as her mother was sitting right across from her, Demeter could see that she looked rather tired and that there were dark shadows under her eyes. In fact, she looked as if she as well had been at a party that had gone on for half the night. But somehow, Demeter could not imagine a Hogwarts staff party lasting until the wee hours of the morning. In fact, she had a hard time imagining a staff party at all.

Suppressing a shudder and trying hard not to think about Madam Hooch dancing with Professor Flitwick or, even worse, Professor Trelawney dancing with caretaker Filch, Demeter started questioning her mother about their plans for the holidays. 'So we're going to Iceland on January first, right? What are we doing until then?'

'I was thinking you could spend some days in the library to improve your grades.'

'What?' Demeter almost dropped her scone. Improve her grades? Now that was most certainly not necessary.

Opposite her, Morgaine grinned. 'I'm joking, little one. I know that you don't need to improve your grades. In fact, I happen to know that you are doing exceptionally well. And that is why I think that you should be the one to decide what we should do on our holidays. As a reward.'

'Me?' Demeter asked incredulously. 'May I decide?'

Morgaine nodded.

'Can we go away?'

Morgaine seemed to hesitate for a moment, but then she nodded again. 'I might be able to obtain another Portkey. The one we need to get to Iceland has already arrived.'

Demeter's mind started to work immediately. There were so many places she wanted to see. After all, she had spent her whole childhood in Iceland. She had not seen anything of the world.

'We could go to France or Italy. No, let's go to Egypt. Or Australia.'

Morgaine smiled. 'Anywhere you want, little one. But choose wisely. We will only be there for a couple of days.'

Demeter abandoned her scones and hot chocolate and started thinking in earnest. Her mother was right, of course. They only had a couple of days, and there was no point in choosing a place where there were enough things to be seen and experienced to keep them busy for several weeks. Better choose a place where they would have time to be with each other and do all those mother-daughter-things they couldn't do while at Hogwarts.

She was still pondering where to spend the next couple of days while she and her mother strolled up the high street in order to get to Honeydukes and was too absorbed in her thoughts to hear someone call her name. After all, she had not expected someone to do so. But Morgaine had heard.

'You should say goodbye to your friend, you know,' she pointed out, nudging Demeter in the side. 'Otherwise he might not talk to you when he returns in January.'

Somewhat confused, Demeter turned her head in the direction her mother was nodding towards and caught sight of a fairly big group of Hogwarts students, each of them carrying a small travel bag or a backpack. They were, obviously, on their way to Hogsmeade station to catch the train that would bring them to London from where they would travel home to their families. They all waved merrily at Demeter and their Potions mistress and then continued on their way, all except a blond-haired boy. He was carrying a huge backpack and a Gladrags package and seemed to have decided to hang back.

'Walk to the station with him,' Morgaine suggested in a low tone, pushing Demeter slightly into the direction of Melvin Riverbed. 'I'm sure he wants to say goodbye to you.'

Demeter hesitated. 'Are you sure you don't mind?' she asked, eyeing her mother. This was their day, and Demeter was sure that her mother had been looking forward to it just as much as she had. It didn't feel right to abandon her for Melvin.

'Go,' Morgaine insisted. 'I have some business to attend to which you would find dreadfully boring anyway. I'll catch up with you at Honeydukes.'

And without giving Demeter an opportunity to protest, Morgaine started walking, passing Melvin, who wished her a Merry Christmas, and then disappeared from sight as she turned a corner.

'Dress robes,' Melvin pointed out, indicating the Gladrags package as he approached Demeter. 'My mother insisted I pick them up on my way to the train. Looks like she is about to throw a fancy New Year's party again.' He rolled his eyes and looked somewhat disgusted. 'I hate those parties. I'm always the only kid there. You cannot imagine how dull that is.' He paused and smiled. 'But hey, this year, I might just have a dance partner who's about my own age and rather good-looking instead of a two-hundred-and-fifty-year-old hag. Do you think you'll be able to persuade your mother?'

Demeter gave him a puzzled look. 'Persuade my mother about what?'

'To come and spend New Year's with us,' Melvin explained, still smiling broadly. 'My uncle said he had asked your mother yesterday over dinner, and she said she would think about it, and ...' He broke off and blushed. 'I'm sorry. I shouldn't have assumed that you want to come.'

'But I do!' Demeter burst out. 'I mean ... I'd love to. I just didn't know. Mother hasn't mentioned it yet. But she said I could decide where we'd spend the holidays. I'll suggest visiting you and your uncle.'

'Maybe you shouldn't,' Melvin mumbled, looking down, seemingly very interested in his shoes all of a sudden. 'If your mother hasn't mentioned it yet, maybe that means that she doesn't want to come.'

'Rubbish,' Demeter opposed. Why would her mother not want to visit the Riverbeds? After all, she seemed to get along quite well with the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. And she knew that Demeter and Melvin were best friends.

'She just hasn't gotten around to mentioning it yet,' Demeter went on with a determined tone. 'I was moaning about the weather all the way here from Hogwarts. She hasn't had a chance to tell me yet. I'll ask her. I bet she won't turn me down.'

They walked to the station together, already planning their days and what kind of adventures they could get up to in Estonia, and when Demeter took farewell of Melvin by giving him a peck on the cheek, he once more adopted the colour of an over-ripe tomato. And Demeter smiled. Melvin was just too sweet, and she could think of no better way to spend the holidays than with her best friend. Finally, they would be able to spend time together without people making snide comments or whispering behind their backs. And surely, her mother would enjoy spending time with Professor Riverbed as well. After all, Demeter had noticed that the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher made her mother smile. And a smile, Demeter concluded half an hour later as Morgaine entered Honeydukes, was exactly what her mother needed. It would most certainly soften the deep line between her eyes and bring some colour to her far too pale cheeks.

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There hadn't been many people present in the Great Hall as most students had left shortly after breakfast to spend the holidays with their families. So apart from Demeter and her friend Sarah, there had only been two more Gryffindors left in the castle as well as three Hufflepuffs, one Ravenclaw and two Slytherins - namely Argyle Makdouni and his troll-like sidekick Peter Miller. But still, the elves seemed to have prepared food for about a hundred people, and no one would have been surprised if the big round

table, around which the remaining students and the staff had been seated, had collapsed under the weight of the main course. But it hadn't, not even when Hagrid had climbed onto it in order to recite a somewhat silly version of *The Thirteen Witchy Days of Christmas*. Minerva had looked scandalised at first, but to everyone's surprise, she had not scolded Hagrid. Instead, her thin lips had curled into a bemused smile, and Severus had concluded that the staff had most probably had some toddy in the staff room before coming down to dinner, and that said toddy had been strong enough to make even the stern Headmistress unwind a bit.

Two people who to Severus' utter annoyance and disappointment had not unwound, however, had been the ones he cared most about. Sure, both Demeter and Morgaine had been smiling and laughing, pulling crackers and singing carols like everyone else, but Severus had sensed that something had been amiss. And for that very reason, he had not given in to the Grey Lady's pleading to materialise and join the other ghosts to wish everyone a Merry Christmas. Instead, he had kept hidden some feet away from the table, his eyes firmly on his daughter and the woman he loved.

Morgaine excused herself shortly after pudding had been served, and Severus followed her to her quarters, just to find out that she had known all along that he had been watching her all evening.

'Just because I cannot see you, does not mean I don't know you're there, Severus. You should know that by now.'

Severus nodded. He was aware of this, of course, had been for quite some time. But he still found it peculiar that Morgaine succeeded in shielding her thoughts from him but still managed to keep her mind open enough to sense his presence.

'Are you going to tell me why you thought it necessary to check up on me all evening?' Morgaine asked in a light tone, pouring herself a goblet of water and adding some potion to it that turned the water light blue.

'I would say the reason for me *checking up on you* as you put it so nicely,' Severus started, 'is the same reason why you are once more taking a Headache Potion.'

'As you are aware, Severus, I did not sleep too well last night,' Morgaine responded and emptied her goblet in one go. 'And besides, have you ever been Christmas shopping with a teenage girl? Do you have any idea how exhausting that is?'

Severus sighed inaudibly. He had been wracking his brains all day, trying to find an answer to the question on how he was going to rectify what he had messed up the previous night. But he had failed, and by the sound of it, Morgaine was not too keen on discussing the matter. So he decided not to mention it either.

'Is that shopping trip the reason why Demeter had to try so hard to hide the trademark Snape scowl tonight?' he enquired instead, using a tone that suggested that he was talking about the weather.

'Demeter isn't too happy with her mother right now,' Morgaine pointed out, putting down her goblet.

'Did she not get what she wanted for Christmas?' Severus asked, still trying to sound trivial.

Morgaine pinched the bridge of her nose and squeezed her eyes shut for a second. Obviously, the potion wasn't working yet. 'Demeter and I have been invited to spend the holidays with the Riverbeds in their manor in Estonia,' she explained.

'That is no reason to scowl,' Severus pointed out, although he had to fight hard not to scowl himself. Who did Riverbed think he was, daring to ask Morgaine and Demeter to spend the holidays with him?

'It's a nice gesture,' Morgaine went on. 'Demeter and Melvin certainly deserve some time away from their House mates. Their friendship has been tested enough over the last months, but ...'

'But?'

'I am not sure I want to go.' Morgaine let herself fall onto a chair and started massaging her temples with her fingertips. 'I don't want to leave Hogwarts.'

Then she lowered her hands and looked right at him, her blue eyes boring into his. And Severus didn't need to hear her say the words to know that it wasn't the castle she did not want to leave, but him.

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Demeter was becoming more like her mother every day, Severus concluded as he watched her pace through the snow covered rose garden. They couldn't have been more different in appearance, but the way they acted was very much alike. They would both listen to other people's worries, observe their surroundings with their attentive blue eyes and give a kind smile to whoever needed it. And when they themselves were in dire need of someone to listen to them, they would hide away, stubbornly trying to solve all their problems themselves: Morgaine in her study and Demeter out in the rose garden, where she and Melvin Riverbed had played Gobstones every day right until the first snow had put an end to their games.

'I know that you're here, you know,' Demeter pointed out as she walked by him for the second time, and Severus raised an eyebrow in surprise. First Morgaine and now Demeter? He had once been a master of stealth. Was he now, as a ghost, suddenly unable to sneak up on people without them noticing? Was he losing his touch?

'It's always a bit colder in the proximity of a ghost,' Demeter explained once Severus had materialised. 'And the air seems to be flickering wherever there is a ghost standing. I have learnt to look out for those signs.'

Severus inclined his head. The girl had obviously done her homework on ghosts. Naturally, really, seeing as she had talked to one to him almost on a daily basis over the last four months.

'I hear you will be spending the holidays in Estonia,' Severus mentioned suddenly. He knew now that Demeter's reason for being upset was linked to her wanting to visit her friend and not being allowed to, so he assumed that telling her straight-out would be the right approach. Hopefully, it would make her smile.

Instead, Demeter's jaw dropped. 'Will I be spending ... in Estonia ... but ...'

Severus smirked. 'Do you not want to go anymore?' he enquired.

'What?' Demeter looked flabbergasted and opened her mouth once or twice without any sound coming out. She seemed more than surprised and slightly confused. 'Why would you think I was going to Estonia?' she finally brought forth.

'I hear you have been invited by young Mr Riverbed.'

'Well, yes, but ...' To Severus' annoyance, the scowl returned. 'I don't think I will be going.'

'And why is that?'

'I don't think Mother wants to go.' Demeter bit her lip, almost as if she wanted to keep herself from saying anything more. But she did not lower her head fast enough to keep Severus from seeing her blush.

'What makes you think your mother does not want to go?' he asked patiently. Of course, he already knew everything about the conversation Morgaine and Demeter had had over lunch at The Three Broomsticks and that Demeter had not reacted too positively when Morgaine had told her that she would need to think about Riverbed's offer, but he was curious to hear the girl's version.

'Melvin said that his uncle had asked Mother already last night if we'd like to visit them,' Demeter said, shrugging. 'But Mother hadn't said a word about it all morning. And when I asked her ... I don't know ... I just think she doesn't want to go.'

'Did she say that?' Severus asked.

Demeter shook her head. 'No. She just said she'd have to think about it.'

The girl had no idea then. She did not know that her mother was terrified at the mere thought of leaving Hogwarts, of leaving him. She did not know that Morgaine lay awake night after night, trying to figure out a way to be with him again. And she did not know that the only reason why Morgaine had not chosen to join him yet was her reluctance to leave their child behind.

'Your mother has thought about it,' Severus declared. 'And I am glad to inform you that you will be leaving for Estonia after lunch tomorrow.'

That was all the girl needed to know. There was no point in getting her involved by telling her the true reasons behind her mother's reluctance to leave the castle. Morgaine's issues were private, and only she could solve her them, hopefully with his help.

'Remember to pack warm clothes,' Severus advised. 'Gloves, coats, warm boots. Do you own a bearskin hat?'

Demeter snorted and seemed about to take her leave in order to go and start packing, but froze. And her grin gave way to a questioning, analysing look worthy of a Ravenclaw.

'Did you persuade Mother?' she asked, eyeing the ghost in front of her.

Severus didn't bat an eyelid. 'Let us say I pointed out some of the advantages to your mother. You know she has been working hard, and a change of scenery will do her good.'

'I suppose so.'

They talked for a while about Estonia, and Demeter wanted to know if Severus had ever been there, if he knew any Estonian and if there were any plants growing in Estonia that would be useful in Potion making. Severus answered all her questions to his best ability and taught her to say *hello* and *thank you*. But he couldn't get rid of the feeling that there were other questions burning in his daughter's mind. However, the girl did not ask, and he decided not to tell her anything.

When the clock struck nine, Severus accompanied Demeter to Gryffindor Tower. He doubted that anyone would deduct House points from her for being out that late, but rules were rules, and they were not to be broken. And no matter how much he enjoyed spending time with his daughter, she needed to go to bed now.

They had already bidden each other goodnight, and the portrait of the Fat Lady had already swung open when Demeter once more turned around to face the ghost of her father. 'I'll be missing you,' she said quietly, not really meeting his gaze. 'I like talking to you, you know.'

Severus swallowed and felt a strange warmth rush through his ghostly body. And had he still been made of flesh and blood, he feared he would have blushed.

'You will be missed as well, Demeter,' he replied, surprised at the slightly shaky tone in his voice. 'Make sure you have a good time in Estonia, and tell me all about it when you return.'

'I will.' Demeter looked up at him and smiled. 'I will tell you every little detail. I might even send you an owl.'

'I would like that,' Severus admitted. 'I would like that very much.'

'Goodnight, Father.'

She was gone in a blink of an eye, and the portrait had swung shut long before Severus could find any words in reply to his daughter calling him father for the very first time.

## XXXI: Ensnared

*Chapter 31 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XXXI: Ensnared

From the giddy heights of the Astronomy Tower, Severus watched Morgaine and Demeter walk towards the outer boundaries of the Hogwarts grounds, where they were about to pick up the Portkey that would transport them to Estonia. In only a few minutes, they would be gone.

For a few moments that morning, Severus had considered following Morgaine and Demeter to the boundary to see them off but had decided against it in the end. Him being close would only make taking farewell harder. And by Merlin, it was hard enough already. He did not want them to leave, especially not Morgaine.

Against his better judgement, he had spent the night with her, talking with her late into the night and then watching over her during the few hours of sleep that she had allowed herself. And when she had awoken in the early hours of morning, he had done his best to persuade her to start packing. She had used every excuse she had been able to come up with to delay opening her travel bag, but eventually, she had started to fill it. But now, judging by her hesitant pace, Morgaine seemed reluctant to leave. Her steps were measured, and every now and then, Severus could have sworn that she was hesitating and delaying her next step for a fraction of a second. Demeter, on the other hand, was literally bouncing with excitement, running back and forth in the snow, calling for her mother to hurry up.

*Go, Morgaine.* Severus sent out a silent plea towards her, a whisper between two souls that only they could hear. *You need to leave. You need to live*

Morgaine didn't answer him, and Severus did not know if she had heard him at all. But maybe that was just as well. He did not want her to think that he was sending her away. Because he wasn't, truly not. If he hadn't believed it harmful, he would have asked her to stay. But he meant what he had told her. She needed to leave and live her life. She needed to meet people, interact with them, laugh with them instead of withering away in the dungeons. Only when she stood firmly on both her feet in the world of the living again would it be safe for her to come back to him. If she still wanted to.

'I will be waiting for you,' Severus whispered as he watched Morgaine and Demeter cross the boundary and approach a rusty signpost which he had never noticed before. Surely, this had to be their Portkey.

They reached it with only a few steps outside the Hogwarts grounds, took hold and then vanished into thin air, leaving Severus staring at their footsteps in the snow.

~ ~ ~

'And this lovely creature is my sister. Aleksandra, this is my esteemed colleague, Morgaine, Potions mistress and Head of Slytherin House. And this is her daughter, Demeter.'

Morgaine couldn't help but smirk. Aleksandr and Aleksandra? This must be a joke.

But Aleksandra just grinned as she extended her hand. 'You're not the first one to react,' she assured Morgaine. 'Unfortunately, these are indeed our names. Our parents didn't have a lot of imagination, I'm afraid.'

'No, really not,' Alek added. 'I am quite glad we weren't triplets. They would have been cruel enough to call the third one Aleksis.'

'You're twins?' Morgaine asked. Why, she should have noticed. Aleksandra was the spitting image of her brother. They were both tall and slim, both dark-haired. In fact, the only thing that distinguished them was the colour of their eyes: Alek's were hazel whereas Aleksandra's were blue, just as Melvin's.

'Mother always denied it,' Aleksandra started, 'but I think she was superstitious. She believed in the old wives' tale that giving birth to twins was a bad omen. By giving us almost identical names, I think she tried to fool the fates. You know, pretending that we were one and the same person.'

'And Father crossed her plans by shortening my name from day one,' Alek butted in. 'I swear, I always found it odd when Mother called me Aleksandr. I never knew who she was talking to.'

'Maybe Aleksandr is the triplet then?' Morgaine suggested, smiling.

'The evil triplet,' Alek pointed out. 'Because Father only used my full name when I had done something I shouldn't have.'

While talking, they had wandered from the tall hedges outside the manor, the place to which the Portkey had brought Morgaine and Demeter, to the entrance door. It looked ancient, and the frame was decorated with old symbols among which Morgaine didn't know half.

'For protection,' Alek pointed out as he noticed her curious gaze. 'This house once belonged to Muggles, and they tried to keep out all kinds of evil. This set, for example,' he pointed towards a group of symbols on the upper left corner of the door, 'was placed there to keep diseases away, especially the plague. And this set,' he grinned and pointed to a set of symbols right beside the handle, 'is meant to keep witches out.' He chuckled. 'Fortunately for us, it doesn't seem to be working too well.'

Indeed, they were all allowed to enter. The door did not try to keep them out, and there was no flash of lightning coming down from the sky to smite them all. Muggle protection symbols seldom worked, but still, Morgaine made a mental note to examine the door frame more closely at some point. If she wasn't mistaken, some of the symbols were magical after all. And some of them, she thought she had recognised. But she couldn't put them in context for the time being.

'Our grandmother was very fond of flowers,' Aleksandra explained as they walked through the entrance hall, which was filled with a variety of exotic blooms. 'It was she who enchanted the floor in here. All the flowers you can see are growing right out of the marble.' She stopped to caress a tall, orange flower that resembled a parrot's beak. 'One of the best enchantments in this house, in my opinion. I could sit in here for hours and take in the scents and colours.'

Morgaine could certainly understand Aleksandra's sentiments as they continued their tour through the house. The entrance hall had been spacious, light and colourful, but the rest of the house reminded Morgaine of number 12, Grimmauld Place: there were only dark colours, thick curtains that shut out the daylight, furniture made of dark wood and portraits of grumpy-looking old wizards. The only things missing were the shrunken elf heads on the banister and the shrieking portrait of Mrs Black.

'Gloomy,' Morgaine heard Demeter whisper, but she knew that the girl was not talking to her. Ever since they had entered the house, Demeter and Melvin had walked about six feet behind the adults, whispering and giggling furtively.

'The guest rooms are upstairs,' Aleksandra pointed out at the bottom of the stairs. 'I thought you'd like to share quarters with your daughter, Morgaine. I know I always like to have Melvin close to me when he comes home for the holidays. There are two bedrooms, joined by a door which can be locked from both sides.' She smiled and winked towards Demeter. 'If you're anything like Melvin, you'll want to shut your mother out now and then.' Then she turned to her brother. 'You'll show them up, won't you, Alek? I need to get lunch started.' She rolled her eyes. 'Such a big house and no elf. It's a disgrace.'

'It might be a disgrace, but it's not surprising that our family doesn't own an elf,' Alek explained in a low tone as they ascended the stairs. 'Our grandfather on our mother's side, Ivan Sadowski, was known for having quite a temper. He beat our last elf to death with an iron poker because the poor thing had fallen asleep and let the fire in his bedroom go out. After that, our family has had a really hard time getting a new elf. Can't blame them for blacklisting us, really.'

'Have you tried getting a new one?' Morgaine asked.

Alek shook his head. 'Me? No. Our mother couldn't get one, so Aleksandra and I never tried. And Aleksandra is quite proficient at household charms. She can manage.'

He stopped towards the door through which Demeter and Melvin had disappeared a second ago and bowed. 'My lady, your quarters.'

Morgaine smiled at the younger man's gallantry. 'You should try,' she suggested. 'I think once the elves get to know the newest generations of your family, they might just change their minds. From where I am standing, the Riverbed Sadowskis seem rather nice.'

She froze on the doorstep right beside Alek and had to fight hard not to collapse in a fit of giggles. The sight was just too funny: in the middle of the room stood an enormous four-poster bed on which Demeter was bouncing up and down like a rubber ball, squealing in delight.

'Demeter, behave yourself,' Morgaine brought forth in the most motherly tone she could master, but it was no use. Demeter had not even heard her and was now turning somersaults. As even Melvin joined in, Morgaine considered the battle lost.

'Tell me, Alek, which elf in the whole world would find anything evil in this picture?' she asked instead, nodding her head towards the two children on the bed.

Behind her, Alek shifted uncomfortably and retreated back into the corridor, concealing the shadow that had flitted over his face.

~ ~ ~

*Dear Father,*

*I apologise for not having written earlier. But we are having such a good time that I never got around to asking Melvin if I could borrow his owl yesterday.*

*The Riverbeds own the biggest house I have ever set foot in. It is huge! Mother and I have adjoining rooms, and together they are about half as big as the Great Hall. There is also a revolving staircase, the one leading to the basement, and the portraits move as well, just as at Hogwarts. But there are no nice portraits here, only of grumpy-looking old wizards with beards and goatees. Some of them are actually quite creepy. I also think they are whispering to me, but Melvin says I'm off my rocker. But I think he's just jealous that the portraits have never talked to him before.*

Severus couldn't help but smile at his daughter's letter. It was bubbling with energy and joy, and he could tell from the first few lines that she was enjoying herself immensely. Even her handwriting seemed joyful. For some reason, Severus had expected it to be either cramped as his own had been, or flowing and artistic as Morgaine's. But Demeter had her own style, and all the i's were dotted with either minuscule stars or smiling faces, childish and sweet at the same time.

*Melvin and I have been ice skating today. The rink is right in the backyard. It's big enough to play ice hockey on it. Do you know ice hockey? It's a Muggle sport. Of course, you know. Sorry. We didn't play ice hockey, though, just raced each other. Melvin might be better at Gobstones than I am, but he skates really poorly. I didn't tell him, though, and let him win our second race.*

The little one was really having a good time then, and the mere thought filled Severus with an enormous joy. Although Demeter had never complained, he knew that the last couple of weeks had been hard on her. He knew himself how it felt to have to hide in deserted corridors to spend some stolen moments with one's best friend. It felt like a betrayal of the friendship. And at the same time, it was the only way to make the friendship survive.

*There is a hothouse in the backyard. I haven't been in there yet, but Mother says it's filled with all kind of magical plants. She spent the whole afternoon in there with Alek. (That's Professor Riverbed. He says I can call him Alek while we're not at Hogwarts.)*

Riverbed. Severus had to restrain himself from incinerating his daughter's letter before he had read it all. Yes, Morgaine and Demeter were supposed to have a good time and enjoy themselves. Yes, they were supposed to spend time with people they liked, but ...

Severus scowled and huffed impatiently, angry at himself. What had he expected? That Morgaine would keep far away from her host? That she would ignore him and lock herself into her room? Of course, she would spend time with Riverbed. They were friends, after all, and that was what friends did, spend time together. And so far, Morgaine had never as much as reacted to Riverbed's clumsy attempts of flirting. Why would she now?

*Melvin's mother told us today that they are going to host a big New Year's ball. Apparently, that is almost a tradition here. I panicked a little because I don't have a dress and don't know how to dance. But tomorrow, we will all be Flooing to Tallinn to buy dresses, and Melvin promised he'd teach me how to dance. I am very excited about the ball! Good thing I packed all my jewellery.*

*Sir Nicholas told me that the ghosts always have a New Year's party at Hogwarts. Will you be attending? I hope you will. Will you tell me about it in January?*

*I have to go to dinner now. Mother just called.*

Love,

Demeter

Had someone asked him afterwards, Severus would not have been able to tell what the last paragraphs of Demeter's letter had been about. He hadn't taken in a word. The snakes of jealousy had reared their ugly heads and were taking up all the space in his mind. And he could not for the life of him explain to himself why he had ever let Morgaine go.

~ ~ ~

'Are you sure you will have to leave tomorrow?' Alek asked with a look on his face that reminded Morgaine of a lost puppy. 'We love having you here, and Demeter, of course.'

Morgaine accepted the glass of wine Alek was holding out towards her and smiled. 'We've had a wonderful time, Alek. But I promised my grandmother we would come and see her before term commences. She misses Demeter.'

'I understand,' Alek assured her, but still, the sad look on his face lingered.

They toasted, and Morgaine turned towards the dance floor once more to watch Demeter and Melvin dance right in the centre. And she wasn't the only one watching: quite a few of the ball guests had abandoned the dance floor and were now watching the young couple instead. And who could blame them? They were a lovely sight to behold. Melvin was wearing his brand new Gladrags dress robes and Demeter a dark green gown sprinkled with fairy dust. They were both smiling, their eyes half-closed, embracing each other, and if Morgaine hadn't known better, she would have sworn that her daughter was actually floating a few inches above the floor. But that most probably had nothing to do with the fairy dust. If Demeter was truly levitating, it was with happiness.

Oh, it had been a joy watching her little girl being able to spend time with her best friend without having anyone whisper behind their backs. And only a few hours ago, while they had been getting ready for the ball, giggling and chatting like two schoolgirls, Demeter had confessed to her mother that she had an enormous crush on Melvin Riverbed. And there she was now, in the arms of her first big love, wearing the most beautiful gown and an even more beautiful smile. It would be a shame to separate the two in the morning, Morgaine had to admit that, but before returning to Hogwarts, Demeter would have to return to Iceland, even if it was only for a day or two.

'It's almost midnight,' Alek pointed out. 'Are you sure that you will not grant me at least one dance? I swear that if you do, I will not ask you again this year.'

Morgaine laughed. She had turned Alek down all night, telling him that she despised dancing. It was a lie, of course. She enjoyed dancing quite a lot, but for some reason, she did not want to dance with Alek. In fact, she had avoided any kind of physical contact with him over the last few days, ever since the morning he had sneaked up on her in the hothouse where she had been selecting seedlings to send to Pomona. She had been too absorbed in her work to hear him, and when he had covered her eyes with his hands, she had dropped the pot she had been holding. Of course, Alek had apologised about a million times for having scared her, but he had no idea what had really startled her. She had not dropped the pot out of fear but out of surprise at how violently her body had reacted to the proximity of the young man. His chest had barely touched her back, and the small of her back had not made contact with his hips for more than a second or two, but it had been enough to make her knees go weak and send an unwanted shiver down her spine.

'Please?' Alek repeated, once more adopting the look of a puppy. 'Just one dance? It's less than three minutes to midnight. You won't even have to endure me stepping on your toes for a whole song.'

Morgaine desperately tried to find yet another excuse. It was rude to turn down her host, and he was such a nice guy after all. But she really, really did not want to dance with him.

'Two minutes to midnight,' Alek pointed out, nodding towards the big clock on the wall. 'Please?'

Two minutes. She could do this, Morgaine told herself. After all, she had been taught Occlumency by one of the best Occlumens in Britain, if not the best. Two minutes were nothing.

But she was mistaken. As soon as Alek had pulled her close, she felt her cheeks flush and her breathing quicken. And had it not been a slow dance, and had she not had the opportunity to rest her forehead against his shoulder and close her eyes, she feared she would have fainted.

The next thing she knew, she felt the cold winter air slap against her face and heard Alek's voice.

'I know I am a horrid dancer, but I didn't know I was that bad. Are you alright?'

Morgaine blinked fiercely, willing the mist that seemed to cloud her sight to disappear. They were outside, on the terrace that overlooked the backyard. 'I'm sorry, Alek,' she managed to articulate, feeling both her lips and her voice shake. 'It's the wine.'

She felt dizzy, and had she not only had half a glass of wine, she would have sworn that she was indeed drunk. But this was something else. She tried to walk but lost her balance, and Alek caught her in his arms.

'Tipsy, are we?' he commented and smiled. 'That makes two of us.' He laughed. 'And here I was, thinking that I was too old to need Firewhisky to pluck up the courage to ask a girl for a dance.'

Morgaine barely heard him. Alek holding her tightly around the waist did nothing to steady her. Instead, she felt her knees grow weaker and weaker as her nose filled with his scent. It was musky, manly, and it made her head spin even more.

'Midnight,' Alek whispered as the bell started to toll. 'Happy New Year, Morgaine.'

She didn't resist when he kissed her. It was an innocent kiss, not much more than a peck, but it sent a shiver down Morgaine's spine and made her lips tremble. And as she looked up at Alek, she saw all her sensations reflect in his hazel eyes. His knees were weak too, his hands just as sweaty as hers, and inside of him burnt the flame of desire.

He claimed her mouth with a hunger Morgaine was not prepared for, and she couldn't have fought him off even if she had wanted to. But by the goddess, she did not want to fight him off. She needed this. She needed his touch, his kisses. She needed the warmth his arms provided and the heat he roused inside her.

She stumbled backwards and found herself being pressed up against a cold stone wall with Alek's lips still on hers and his hands on her backside, pulling her hips closer towards him. Almost automatically, she lifted her leg and snaked it around his waist, grinding herself up against him as his roaming hands started pulling up her dress.

'Do you want this?' he breathed as he broke their kiss to attack the sensitive flesh on the side of her neck with his lips instead. 'Do you want me, Morgaine?'

*Don't ask*, Morgaine pleaded silently, letting her head fall back to give him better access. *Please, don't ask.*

Yes, she wanted this. She wanted to feel his hands on her skin and his hot breath on her lips. She wanted him to kiss her, touch her, caress her. She wanted to feel his warm flesh against hers. She wanted to feel him inside her. It had been far too long since she had known a man's touch.

But she couldn't. It wasn't him she wanted.

'Alek, I ...'

The words died in her throat as his tongue caressed the skin right below her ear. Instead, a low moan escaped her lips. This felt so good. So incredibly good. And at the same time so terribly wrong.

'Tell me you don't want this, and I'll stop,' Alek murmured. His lips were still at her throat, and his hands were now slowly making their way under the silken fabric of her knickers. 'All you have to do is say no.'

Morgaine shivered as he touched her, and her mind filled with images from a night long gone: a dark room at the Leaky Cauldron, Severus' hands ripping her dress apart, his hot lips on hers. He had tasted of Firewhisky that night as well, just as Alek did now.

'Alek, please,' she whimpered, involuntarily bucking her hips against his hand. 'Alek, I can't.'

He continued fondling her, nibbling at her earlobe until her breath came in short gasps.

'Can't?' he asked, applying more pressure with his thumb. 'Or don't want to?'

Morgaine bit her lip, and her fingers dug into his shoulders as she clung onto him for support. One more stroke. One more stroke of his nimble fingers would be enough to make her come undone in his arms. Just one more stroke.

But she couldn't let herself go. She mustn't.

With the last ounce of willpower she could muster, she grabbed his wrist. 'I can't, Alek,' she repeated, her voice thick with tears. 'It wouldn't be right.'

Why did he have to ask? If he had just taken her, right there against the wall, if he had not given her a choice ...

For a moment, Alek didn't move. Then he placed a last, tender kiss onto the side of her neck and took a step backwards, releasing her and letting her dress glide back down. 'I would never make you do anything you don't want to, Morgaine,' he whispered. 'I am sorry.'

'Pathetic, Riverbed,' came a drawling voice out of the shadows that made Alek spin around. 'Truly pathetic.'

For the third time that night, Morgaine felt her knees go weak. She knew this voice. She knew it all but too well and knew that it meant trouble of the worst kind. And when Lucius Malfoy stepped out of the darkness, she felt the breath catch in her throat and the blood in her veins turn to ice.

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A/N: This chapter is dedicated to my dear friend, The Mugglechief. He knows why.

## XXXII: Malfoy's Plan

*Chapter 32 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XXXII: Malfoy's Plan

Morgaine jerked awake, at once tightening her grip around her wand. Her heart was pounding hard in her chest, and her eyes darted around the semi-dark room as if to make out an attacker. She was ready to hex anyone in her proximity, even to put an Unforgivable Curse on them, if need be. But there was no unbidden guest in her bedroom, and the only sound that could be heard was Demeter's soft and regular breathing. The girl was fast asleep.

Morgaine sighed and shifted in the chair in which she had dozed off, wincing at the pain that shot through her back. She had purposely chosen the most uncomfortable chair to sit on, as she had planned to stay awake and keep guard all night, but eventually, she had fallen asleep anyway. No surprise, really. She was beyond tired, had been so for the better part of the year, and putting multiple protective charms all around the room, taking extra precautions around the door and windows, had exhausted her energy depots. At the moment, she wasn't even sure that she would be able to throw a hex even if she wanted to. It would probably dissolve into nothingness the moment it left her wand.

Dawn was breaking, judging from the faint light that was falling through the gap between the curtains, and as Morgaine remembered hearing the grandfather clock in the hallway strike three, she concluded that she had most probably slept for three or four hours. Angry with herself, she freed herself from the blanket she had wrapped around her shoulders and started pacing the room, stopping every now and then to stretch her aching back. How could she have allowed herself to fall asleep with Lucius Malfoy in the house? What if he ...

What if he ... what? Morgaine stopped abruptly, frowning. Apart from him catching her in flagrante and not missing out on any opportunity to remind Alek about his abysmal performance for the rest of the New Year's party, Lucius had kept an unusually low profile all night. If he hadn't made such an entrance, Morgaine would probably not even have noticed that he was there. He had offered her only one drink and asked her to dance only once, and as she had refused both, he had not approached her anymore, but rubbed elbows with the most important guests and danced with the prettiest women. Just as Lucius Malfoy always used to. Maybe, Morgaine thought hopefully, he wasn't there because of her at all. Yes, him showing up was just a coincidence. Or was it?

She sighed heavily and walked towards the window, where she rested her forehead against the cool glass. It had been snowing all night, and the grounds were now covered with a thick layer of snow. The willows stood frozen, and so did the nearby lake. Everything was so peaceful. Now if only her mind could come to find some peace as well.

The first couple of days at Riverbed manor had been bliss. Demeter had blossomed, laughed and played with her best friend, and Morgaine had actually managed to enjoy herself as well. Firstly because she thought that she had never seen her daughter that happy, and secondly because she herself had felt quite cheerful. She had had the time and energy to read, had experimented with some Potions in the little lab in the basement and reacquainted herself with some aspects of Herbology in the hothouse. She had found a friend in Aleksandra and had even allowed herself to think about Alek as a friend and not only as a friendly colleague. But then he had come too close, and Morgaine had shrunk away.

Squeezing her eyes shut to keep unwanted tears from running down her cheeks, Morgaine turned her back on the window to look at her daughter instead. At least the little one had had a good time. She had laughed and danced, and she had fallen in love. Tonight, she had even received her first goodnight kiss and had fallen asleep with a smile on her face. What more could a mother wish for?

'Is it morning yet?'

Demeter's voice was so sleepy that Morgaine couldn't help but smile. No matter how ladylike Demeter had seemed last night, she was still a little girl.

'No, little one,' she whispered. 'It is still early. Go back to sleep.'

Demeter stretched out her arms. 'Will you cuddle with me?'

Of course she would. For the time being, Morgaine could imagine nothing better. She slipped under the covers, and wrapped her arms around her daughter, holding her against her chest as if she were a baby once more. And as Demeter's breathing had once more become slow and regular and Morgaine was certain that the little one was fast asleep again, she gave in to all the emotions that she had so carefully hidden away and cried silently, burying her face in her daughter's raven black hair. There were so many things she regretted, so many things she would not forgive herself for, and although she knew that her tears would not make her burden any lighter, she did not even try to stop them.

As Demeter shifted in her arms, Morgaine tightened her grip as if to compensate for all the time they had missed. What demons had possessed her a decade ago, she wondered. How could she have turned away from her daughter? How could she ever have left her?

What would have happened if she had defied Dumbledore's orders and told Severus about his child? Would he have come to Iceland? Would he have stayed? And would he consequently have survived the war?

Morgaine's mind filled with thousands of questions, questions which she had asked herself uncountable times already and to which she still had no answers, and her heart grew all the heavier. So heavy that she, for a while at least, forgot about Lucius Malfoy. He didn't matter right now. Him showing up must indeed have been a coincidence. He didn't want anything from her this time, otherwise he would already have made his move. And by lunch time, the Portkey she was keeping safely stowed away in her bag, a puppet depicting a tiny Icelandic troll, would activate and take her and Demeter to Iceland. It would take them away from Lucius, from Alek and, for some days at least, even away from the memory of Severus. It would take them home.

~ ~ ~

Many miles away, in the dark dungeons of Hogwarts castle, someone else spent a sleepless night as well. Not that ghosts slept at all, but Severus was restless and drifting back and forth in his old study after having haunted the empty corridors for the better part of the night. His mind, too, was filled with questions, and like Morgaine, he did not have any answers.

On his desk lay Demeter's letter. Severus had by now read it so many times that he knew it by heart, especially the part where Demeter had told him how excited she was about the New Year's party. It should have been his task as a father to teach the girl how to dance, Severus thought. But of course, as a ghost, he was unable to. Just as he would be unable to dance with her on her wedding day. He wouldn't be giving her away either.

Huffing slightly, Severus shook his head, quite annoyed with himself. How soppy to be thinking about his daughter's wedding day. The girl was twelve, for the love of Merlin. She wasn't about to get married any time soon. But of course, Severus' concerns were not just about Demeter's wedding. There were plenty of other things he could not do with her or for her because he was nothing but a ghost.

Had it been fair to allow the girl to get to know him, Severus wondered. Hadn't it been better for her to think that her father had fallen in the war, that he was dead and gone? Wouldn't that have been better for all of them, for the girl, himself and Morgaine?

He wondered if Morgaine had been dancing. He himself had danced with her only once, at the Yule Ball during the Triwizard Tournament. But they had danced as colleagues, not as lovers. It had been a waltz, and Severus had made sure that there had been a proper distance between their bodies throughout the whole dance. Afterwards, he had kissed her hand courteously and returned to the edge of the dance floor, letting her be asked to dance by a young man from Durmstrang. After that, there had been little reason to dance, and Severus had never held Morgaine in his arms in public.

Had she danced tonight, he wondered again. Had she danced with the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher? Had he held her close, closer than Severus had dared all those years ago? Had Morgaine let him? Had she enjoyed it?

Had he, Severus, even the right to wonder?

Wistfully, he let his gaze wander to the armchairs by the fireplace and remembered a sixteen-year-old girl falling asleep there after brewing potions all night. He remembered a grown woman taking him into her arms, telling him that she loved him despite his flaws, despite the Dark Mark that had been burnt into the flesh of his left forearm. And he remembered her waiting for him every time he returned from the Dark Lord, her eyes filled with worries and her heart filled with love.

He missed her. He missed her so much that he could feel physical agony, despite him not possessing a body anymore. She would come back soon, Severus knew that of course, but he didn't know if it was a good idea. Maybe Morgaine, just as Demeter, would be better off thinking that he was dead and gone. Maybe, if he were gone, truly



gone, Morgaine would allow herself to move on. Not today maybe, but one day, hopefully one day soon.

Severus sighed heavily. It was no use. He wasn't gone, and both Morgaine and Demeter knew it, and all they could do was try to make the best out of it.

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Breakfast on January first couldn't have been more different from the other breakfasts the Riverbeds and their guests had shared over the last couple of days. While Demeter and Melvin had always been whispering to each other, giggling and coming up with exciting plans about what to do later that day, they sat now both in silence, each seemingly very interested in their toast and jam. Alek, who had always been very courteous, making sure that Morgaine's cup was never empty of tea and her plate always warm, was sitting with his head bent, doing whatever possible to avoid looking at Morgaine, who in her turn was trying to at least eat some toast despite the nausea that her headache was causing. The lady of the manor, Aleksandra, was absent altogether.

'Mother, when will we be leaving?'

Morgaine tried hard not to flinch at the sadness she could hear in her daughter's voice. How she hated to have to tear Demeter away from Melvin. She knew all but too well that the carefree time the two had spent over the holidays would be nothing but a happy memory once they were back at Hogwarts. There the name calling and taunting would start once more, and they would once again have to hide away in empty classrooms and snow covered rose gardens. And now, after they had spent a couple of happy days together, all of this would seem even harder than before. But Morgaine had no choice. They had no choice. Demeter had to return to Iceland to ensure that the protective spells that had been put over her at her birth would not be broken. And for the sake of her sanity, Morgaine had to return as well.

'At lunchtime, little one,' Morgaine answered, trying to keep her voice neutral. 'The Portkey will activate shortly after twelve.'

Demeter nodded. 'May Melvin and I go skating after breakfast?' she asked, and for the first time that morning, Melvin looked up from his plate, his eyes expectant and hopeful.

Morgaine was just about to give her consent when the kitchen door opened.

'One big, happy family. What a sight to start the new year with.'

Lucius looked immaculate as always, wearing dark green robes and a dazzling smile. One wouldn't have guessed that he had only slept for a couple of hours. And Aleksandra, who was hanging at his arm, was beaming as if she had just been given the moon. In their wake followed a tiny, ancient-looking house-elf, wearing a torn and filthy pillowcase bearing the Malfoy crest.

The little creature immediately started bustling around, opening cabinets and drawers, and placed Lucius' favourite breakfast on the table in such a speed that one could only conclude that the elf had been in the Riverbeds' kitchen many times before. Morgaine fought hard not to sneer. So that was why Lucius had come, to visit yet another of his mistresses. It figured, of course.

'Why the long faces?' Lucius asked joyfully after he had escorted Aleksandra to her seat and had taken his own beside her, opposite Morgaine. 'Come on, Melvin, after having spent the evening with such a lovely girl, you should be smiling. I know I would.'

His smile grew even wider, and he playfully kissed Aleksandra's hand, giving her a look which tattled of a night filled with diverse adult activities. Aleksandra giggled and lowered her head, blushing.

'Come on, Melvin, tell Uncle Lucius. Didn't you get a kiss goodnight?'

*Uncle Lucius!* Now Morgaine did sneer, silently wondering how many children in Britain had to call Lucius Malfoy *uncle*, just because he was bedding their mother. She also wondered if Narcissa knew.

Melvin shifted uncomfortably in his chair. 'Demeter will be leaving in a couple of hours,' he mumbled, his eyes once more on his plate.

Lucius clapped his hands. 'Ah, in that case, I have good news for you, dear boy,' he exclaimed.

Everyone's heads snapped up. Alek, Aleksandra, Melvin and Demeter were all staring at Lucius with their mouths open, surprised looks on their faces. Morgaine, however, felt the muscles in her neck tighten and gripped her napkin so hard that the fine fabric started to tear. And the smug grin on Lucius' face told her to expect the worst.

'Your Portkey has been suspended,' Lucius went on, his grey eyes glittering. 'It looks like you get to enjoy your friend for a couple of days more, Melvin. The same goes for you, of course, Alek.'

Melvin and Demeter broke into cheers, but Morgaine silently returned her gaze to her plate, carefully rearranging the torn napkin on her lap. For the children, the words 'Your Portkey has been suspended,' meant more time to enjoy each other's company. They were happy about it, because they didn't know better. But Morgaine did. She knew that Portkeys did not just get suspended, especially not on January first when no one was working at the Ministry, and especially one that had been applied for in secrecy like the one that should have brought her and Demeter to Iceland. And she knew that only one person in the room had the connections to find out about this particular Portkey and the power to suspend it.

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'You will, of course, not try anything stupid, will you, Morgaine?' Lucius asked her as he entered the room, closing the door behind him.

'I have no idea what you are talking about, Lucius,' Morgaine replied, calmly. As much as she hated to be standing with her back to him, she did not want to turn from the window. From this room, she had a perfect view over the back garden, where Demeter and Melvin were skating. If anything happened, she would see it. She had been on the lookout for the better part of the last hour now, although there had been no reason to. The sounds issuing from the room next door, Aleksandra's bedroom, had made it very clear that Lucius had been busy.

'I think you know very well what I am talking about, Morgaine duLac,' Lucius said quietly. He was approaching her now, she could see his reflection in the mirror. Amazingly, after rolling around in Aleksandra's bed for an hour, there wasn't a hair out of place.

'You understand, of course, that you will not be able to Disapparate,' he explained as he came level with her. 'Measures have been taken to ensure that. In fact, you will not even be able to leave the house. But I assume you have figured that out already.'

She had indeed. When Lucius and Aleksandra had disappeared again shortly after breakfast, Morgaine had immediately set out to find an emergency escape route. That was when she had figured out what the ancient carvings at the front door really meant. They were indeed meant to keep witches and wizards from passing them, and no one who had magic in their blood could pass them. No one, unless they were invited to by the master or lady of the manor. So that was why Alek had always played the gentleman and held open the door.

'You will not be leaving the grounds, Morgaine,' Lucius went on, his voice as casual as if he were talking about the weather. 'Nor will your daughter.'

'I have warned you before, Lucius.' Morgaine's eyes were still lingering on the children outside. 'If you are even thinking of harming Demeter ...'

'And I have told you before,' Lucius interrupted her, 'that harming your daughter is the last thing on my mind. She is too precious. She needs to be guarded. And which place could be better suited for this task than this manor, of which no one knows where it is and where people only can enter if they have been invited.'

'And who invited you, Lucius?'

'Why, in a way, your daughter did.'

Morgaine spun around, glaring at Lucius, but he just smiled at her.

'She didn't know, of course. In fact, I had not expected this to happen for a couple more years. But the sooner the better. Don't you think so, Morgaine?'

'What do you mean, Demeter invited you?' Morgaine hissed, trying hard not to lose control.

'With her ring,' Lucius explained, his facial expression suggesting that everything was quite obvious.

'What ring?'

Lucius tutted. 'My, my, Morgaine, were you too busy snogging like a horny teenager to keep an eye on your daughter last night? I am disappointed.'

Morgaine felt all the colour leaving her face. Lucius had always known what to say in order to hurt her the most. Him insinuating that she had failed to protect her child was a hard blow, especially since it was the truth. She had let her guard down last night. She had let her own needs, her longing for physical contact get the better of her. Instead of keeping an eye on her daughter, she had accepted Alek's wine and his invitation to dance, both against her better judgement. And who knew, maybe, if Lucius hadn't shown up on the terrace, she would have let Alek woo her once more. Maybe she would have followed him to his chambers and spent the night with him.

'Ah, guilt,' Lucius whispered, tracing Morgaine's jawline with one of his long fingers, obviously enjoying the pained expression on her face. 'It's such a useful weapon. But now, dearest Morgaine, let me answer your question. I was referring to this ring. Or should I say, those rings?'

He held out his hand, and there lay two almost identical rings, both forged in silver, encrusted with precious emeralds which were encircled by three coiling snakes.

'This one,' Lucius started, indicating the slightly bigger ring, 'appeared at your daughter's bedside during the first night she spent at Hogwarts. It was too big for her tiny fingers, of course, so she put it away in her jewellery box and forgot about it. All according to plan. She wasn't supposed to wear it and flaunt it in front of everyone's nose. You would have seen it and most probably confiscated it. Last night, when it was time to dress up like a princess, Demeter remembered it for the first time, and decided to wear it on her thumb.'

Morgaine was unable to utter a single syllable. She had indeed not noticed. The sleeves on Demeter's dress had been long, designed to cover the hands. Aleksandra had suggested that dress. Was she in on this?

Lucius was still smiling. 'This one,' he continued, now indicating the smaller ring, 'belongs to my son.'

'Your son? What does Draco have to do with ...' A short, almost hysteric laugh escaped Morgaine's throat. How could it have taken her so long to understand? A platinum blond boy in the midst of a dark-haired family. A boy who didn't know his father and who had been escorted to King's Cross by his dear Uncle Lucius.

'Melvin,' she whispered, casting a furtive look out of the window. They were still ice-skating, chasing each other across the rink, her daughter and Lucius Malfoy's son.

Lucius nodded. 'I wasn't pleased, at first, of course. I have always prided myself for being very careful when it comes to my, um, illegitimate excursions. But I had been out hunting with Igor Karkaroff all day, I was frozen to the marrow. And when we returned to Durmstrang castle that night there was plenty of Russian vodka and a very pretty sixth-year student.' He shrugged. 'I even offered her money to get rid of the child, but she refused. As I threatened her, she mysteriously disappeared. I guess she came here. She didn't contact me again until after Melvin was born.'

'So this is why Aleksandra wasn't at Durmstrang anymore when you sent me there.'

Lucius nodded. 'I offered to pay her well to keep everything silent,' he went on, 'but Aleksandra refused. She didn't want money. She wanted a father for her child. So I showed up at birthdays and Christmases so she would keep her pretty mouth shut. Eventually the little boy stole my heart.'

Morgaine didn't know if she wanted to smile or vomit all over Lucius' Italian shoes. As if he even had a heart. But then again, she had seen him and Narcissa run through the grounds of Hogwarts in a raging battle, dodging spells and risking their own lives in order to find Draco.

'Life is all about family, Morgaine. And I want my family to be at the top. Draco had the misfortune to grow up in troubled times, and the plans I had for him could never be fulfilled. But Melvin ... he will be great one day.'

'And what is in it for you, Lucius?'

'The same thing as for you, dearest Morgaine. One day, the whole Wizarding world will look up to our children, and you and I will stand right behind them.'

Morgaine looked out of the window. Demeter and Melvin were now bewitching snowmen to join their snowball fight.

'You are deranged, Lucius,' she said quietly. 'Why on earth would the Wizarding world look up to those children?'

Lucius smiled and carefully laid a hand on her shoulder, now gazing out of the window himself. 'Because of who they are, my dear Morgaine. Those two children are the Heirs of Slytherin.'

## XXXIII: Losing Touch

*Chapter 33 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XXXIII: Losing Touch

She felt as if she were falling, as if someone had opened the window and pushed her out. She heard the blood rushing in her ears and saw the ground speeding towards her with lethal velocity. The impact would kill her, quickly and painlessly. And Morgaine did not even care.

But she wasn't falling to her death. She was standing firmly on the wooden floor in the big room on the first floor, and the window was still closed. In the glass, she could see the reflection of her own face, deadly pale and worn, and the face of Lucius Malfoy, who was standing at her side, his left hand resting ever so gently on her right shoulder. They could have been posing for a family portrait.

'The ring,' Morgaine started tentatively. Every syllable seemed to demand more strength than she possessed, but to her own surprise, her voice was firm and clear. 'You said Demeter called you with her ring. How?'

'I knew you'd be curious,' Lucius purred, holding out the rings once more. 'As you can see, Melvin's ring is smaller than Demeter's. He is a boy, older than her, and consequently, his fingers are thicker. So while Demeter wore her ring in her thumb, Melvin wore his on his little finger.'

'They exchanged rings.' Morgaine did not even have to think about this. It was clearer than Veritaserum.

Lucius nodded. 'Childish naivety. When they realised that Demeter was wearing a ring that was too big for her and Melvin one that was too little for him, they simply swapped, never even questioning why they owned identical rings. And by exchanging the rings ...'

'They activated the charm.' Again, crystal clear.

'Ingenious, isn't it?'

'How did you know, Lucius?' Morgaine felt herself grow weaker by the second. Had she been alone, she would have let herself sink to the floor like a lifeless puppet. Whether she would have the strength to ever get up again, she didn't know. But she wasn't alone, and she was not going to give Lucius the satisfaction of seeing her break. So she carried herself tall and spoke in a calm tone.

'How did you know that Demeter and Melvin would exchange those rings? You did not just hope that they would fall for each other one day, did you?'

'Of course not.' Lucius smirked. 'I had it all planned from the very day I learnt of Demeter's existence. When you brought her to London last summer, for example, I was very well aware of the fact that the little princess didn't know anyone in our world. And as I had to make sure that she wouldn't make friends with the wrong kind, I sent Melvin to the Weasley store, strongly encouraging him to purchase a Skiving Snackbox. You know that he hates History of Magic.'

'You knew we were at the store that morning?'

'Of course I knew.'

'You spied on us.'

'Spied?' Lucius laughed and gave a theatrical shudder. 'Such a common word. No, Morgaine, I merely kept an eye on you. As I have told you before, we members of old, pureblood families have to stick together and look out for each other. I knew you were in contact with Weasley. Just as I know that you still spend at least one Saturday afternoon a month with him.'

After looking at Morgaine intensely for some moments without getting a reaction from her, Lucius craned his neck to get a better view of Melvin and Demeter. They had abandoned their ice skates and lit a fire and were now toasting magical marshmallows that doubled in size once they had reached a certain temperature.

'I observed the two well at King's Cross,' Lucius continued, nodding towards the two children. 'It was already quite obvious that they would become friends. I was, of course, hoping that Demeter would end up in Slytherin House, the House where she belongs, and was consequently a little worried when she was Sorted into Gryffindor. But, thanks to the mythical Gryffindor courage, Demeter visited the Slytherin table the very next morning and was welcomed with open arms. Birds of a feather, Morgaine. Birds of a feather.' He smiled. 'Now, I think I will have to go and tell those two not to eat too many sweets. It would be shame if they spoiled their appetites. Aleksandra is slaving away in the kitchen like a woman gone mad. Silly little thing. I told her to stay in bed and let my elf do the cooking, but she insisted.'

He took hold of Morgaine's right hand, bowed and brushed her knuckles ever so slightly with his lips.

'You will, of course, join us for dinner, Morgaine. I will send my elf to fetch you in due time. However, I hope you understand that I cannot let you wander around the house until then. It would be a shame if you ... got lost. And, if you please,' he added, extending his free hand. 'Your wand?'

It wasn't like she had a choice. If she didn't give it up voluntarily, Lucius had the means to take her wand from her. And fighting him was not an option, Morgaine knew that all but too well. So she handed over the slender piece of birch, and Lucius smirked maliciously as he pocketed it. He bowed once more and left, locking the door behind him, and all Morgaine could do was watch helplessly as he strode through the grounds a few minutes later, approaching the two children.

What was Lucius' plan, Morgaine wondered. Why had he gone through all the trouble of trapping Demeter and herself? What was it he wanted? And what made him think that Melvin and Demeter were the heirs of Slytherin?

'Be careful, little one,' Morgaine whispered to herself as Lucius guided the children inside the house. 'Don't let him fool you.'

But what chance did Demeter have? Lucius was friendly and charming. Surely he would shower her with gifts or treat her and Melvin to something special that afternoon. And he would certainly have a very plausible explanation in store should Demeter wonder why her mother was absent. Lucius always did his homework thoroughly. He was bound to know about Morgaine's health problems, and all he had to do was tell Demeter that her mother wasn't feeling well and that she was resting. And Demeter would believe him. The child had no reason not to.

The moment Lucius and the children disappeared from sight, Morgaine turned from the window. A very rational sounding voice inside her head was telling her that there was no point in even trying to find an escape route, but she couldn't just resign. Somewhere, there had to be a way out.

The door was locked, of course. Warded, most probably, and Morgaine doubted that she would be able to open it even if she still had her wand. Surely, both the door and the windows were sealed with magic just as powerful as the one that guarded the front door. But still she tried, again and again, using every spell she had ever attempted casting without a wand, everything from *Alohamora* to *Bombarda*. But the door didn't budge, and the windows stayed equally shut. In her desperation, Morgaine even tried asking nicely, a trick which sometimes worked on stubborn doors at Hogwarts, but nothing happened.

Not that it mattered, really. What would she have done if a window or the door had suddenly sprung open? Trying to send a message seemed out of the question. Surely the fireplaces were monitored, and Morgaine doubted that she would make it all the way up to the owlery without being seen. And Lucius had made it very clear the she wouldn't be able to leave the house. So even if she were able to leave her room, she would still be trapped.

She could try to find Demeter, Morgaine told herself, desperately searching for a reason to continue trying to open the door. If she were with Demeter, she could at least keep Lucius from wriggling his way into the girl's head with lies and false promises. But surely, Lucius would manage to get her out of the way somehow.

She kept trying for another hour. Or maybe two or three, Morgaine did not know. Outside the sky had turned grey, and once more it had started to snow. It was growing darker, but there was no way to tell if the lack of light was due to the clouds or the falling of the night.

Wind, snow and shadows formed bizarre phantoms in the twilight, giants and colossal riders, hooded figures with flapping cloaks. They fought each other, fell and rose again, and Morgaine watched through the frozen windows, hypnotised and appalled at the same time, trying to focus but finding herself unable to. There was an icy chill creeping through her veins, a chill that had nothing to do with either the wind or the snow or the gathering darkness. It was a deadly chill, a chill of pure desperation that seemed to be penetrating her very bones. It seemed to steal her energy and her determination. She was losing hope. She was losing herself.

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It had been a frustrating afternoon. Severus had tried to brew a potion, but had found it unusually hard to concentrate. The ingredients he levitated frequently soared into the wrong directions, he had troubles controlling the heat under the cauldron, and when the potion finally turned into a disgusting looking greyish brown instead of a deep mahogany colour, Severus declared himself defeated. It was just not his day. But it was annoying beyond reason.

Huffing indignantly, he Vanished the potion and the leftover ingredients and was just about to clean his cauldron and knives when the flames in the fireplace turned green and a woman's voice echoed through the dungeon.

'Severus, are you there?'

He spun around. It was unusual enough for Morgaine's grandmother to contact him, but what caused him to respond immediately was the worried tone of her voice. As he looked at her, he realised that the anxiety he had heard was even reflecting on her face.

'What is the matter?' he asked without ado, already drifting towards the fireplace.

Margaret attempted a smile but failed. 'I'm sure I'm overreacting, Severus, but I am worried. It's Morgaine ...'

Severus' ghostly face grew, if possible, even paler, and he felt an uncanny feeling of fear rise in his chest. Was Morgaine ill? Had she hurt herself?

'She and Demeter were supposed to be here by lunch,' Margaret explained. 'But they still haven't arrived. It's dinner time now.'

Severus frowned. Morgaine was never late. Never! Even when she had still been a student, she had always been five minutes early. Being late was against her nature, and it couldn't mean anything good.

'I assume Morgaine has not been in contact,' he pointed out, fighting hard to keep his calm. Margaret seemed worried enough. She didn't need him to lose his composure as well. And after all, losing his composure was something Severus Snape didn't do anyway.

Margaret shook her head. 'I haven't heard a word,' she whispered. 'So you don't know anything either?'

The disappointed tone in the elderly woman's voice suggested that she had been hoping for Severus to calm her and that he would be able to tell her where Morgaine was and why she hadn't arrived in Iceland yet, and the tears that were now glittering in Margaret's eyes added to the feeling of panic that was building up in Severus' chest. Something was wrong. Very, very wrong.

He called for the Headmistress, and by the time Minerva arrived in the dungeon, Dumbledore had also appeared in his frame. They discussed the matter, dispatched owls and took up contact by Floo to talk to people at the Ministry whom they knew could be trusted. But they met dead ends everywhere, and their last hope was shattered two hours later as they received a note from their contact at the Department of Magical Transportation.

'It says that no one has applied for a Portkey from Estonia for today,' Minerva announced, frowning at the parchment in front of her. 'And there is no record of Morgaine having applied for any Portkey either.'

'But she must have,' Margaret exclaimed from the fire. 'Morgaine always uses the same Portkey. A small, Icelandic puppet. It was the last present her mother ever gave her.'

'I watched her pack it,' Severus confirmed. He hadn't known that the puppet had been a present from Morgaine's mother, but he had seen her handle it with uttermost care.

But the knowledge of Morgaine having packed her Portkey didn't calm anyone. If anything, it opened up to new questions: Had the spell failed? Had Morgaine chosen not to use the Portkey? Or had something or somebody prevented her from doing so?

'We need to get hold of Alek Riverbed,' Dumbeldore suggested. 'He will know whether Morgaine and Demeter have departed in time.'

'I have already tried to contact him, Albus,' Minerva interrupted, shaking her head. 'He is not answering the Floo at his flat in London. Not that I expected him to. He is, after all, supposed to be in Estonia.'

'Is there a way to contact Alek there?' Margaret asked.

'No,' Severus interjected curtly, feeling the helplessness washing over him like a tidal wave, and thoroughly despising the feeling. 'The estate is Unplottable.'

'How do you know?' Minerva enquired.

'Riverbed provided Morgaine and Demeter with a Portkey for that very reason,' Severus explained, omitting the fact that he had been eavesdropping on Morgaine and Alek's conversation at the end of term feast, all the while considering shoving a spoon down the man's throat. Now he wished he had. 'As far as I know, one of Riverbed's ancestors used the place to escape from his dragon of a wife now and then.'

*And to entertain his mistresses,* piped up a tiny voice inside Severus' head. *And now Alek is following in his great-great-grandfather's footsteps.*

Severus clenched his back teeth and scowled, but the voice went on:

*Alek Riverbed is a handsome man. A handsome man who can offer warm embraces and tender kisses. A man who is alive.*

'I am going to contact Kingsley,' Minerva suggested, ripping Severus out of his bitter thoughts. 'Maybe he will be able to pull some strings. Margaret, get some rest. I will contact you the moment I hear something.'

The fire died down, and Minerva returned to her own office, leaving Severus behind in his study. But he wasn't alone. Dumbledore was still there.

'A Knut for your thoughts, dear boy,' he said.

'My thoughts are none of your business, Dumbledore,' Severus hissed, glaring at the portrait behind his desk. 'The times when you had access to my mind are long gone.'

'I do not need to use Legilimency to read your face, Severus.' The old man was keeping his calm tone, although the ghost in front of him looked as if he were about to explode. 'I have known you long enough to know that your worries are very different from Margaret's or Minerva's.'

'What are you insinuating?'

'I am *thinking*,' Dumbledore said calmly, 'that your worries are not as much about where Morgaine is, but about whom she is with.'

'You shouldn't think that much, Dumbledore,' Severus snarled. 'It is bad for your mental health.'

Dumbledore merely chuckled. 'Am I wrong then assuming that the thoughts you were having over the last five minutes have been solely about Morgaine and not about your daughter, who also seems to have vanished?'

'How dare you?'

'I can't blame you, Severus,' Dumbledore continued, either not noticing or blatantly ignoring the murderous expression on Severus' face. 'I know how much Morgaine

means to you. The thought of her being with Alek ...'

'Not another word, old man.' Severus' voice wasn't much more than a whisper, but like the hissing of a snake, it was threatening.

'Am I right, then?' Dumbledore asked.

He never received an answer. The phial of acid that Severus was levitating smashed against Dumbledore's portrait with such a force that it broke into a hundred tiny pieces on impact, drenching the canvas and dissolving it quickly. Soon all that was left were some burnt looking pieces of fabric that were hanging from the frame. Dumbledore would never again enter this study.

Momentarily, Severus was triumphant, but then the little voice spoke once more:

*The truth hurts, doesn't it? And Dumbledore is right. You're selfish, Severus Snape. All you care about is your happiness. You want Morgaine to come back to you. No matter what you are trying to tell her and yourself, you do not want her to move on. You're possessive. You want her to be yours and yours alone. You do not want to share her with anyone. Even the child she bore you is in your way.*

Had anyone passed the study at that moment, they would have heard an agonising wail, a scream of desperation from a tormented soul. And had anyone dared to look inside the study, they would have seen a ghost crouching on the floor, shaking with dry sobs.

Severus had never felt so desperate, either alive or as a ghost, not even the night the Dark Lord had gone for the Potters. It was a desperation that seemed to rip his very soul apart. He didn't want Dumbledore or the voice in his head to be right. He didn't want their accusations to be true. But deep inside, he couldn't help but wonder if they were.

## XXXIV: The Heirs of Slytherin

*Chapter 34 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XXXIV: The Heirs of Slytherin

Morgaine was surprised to say the least when not the ancient elf but Lucius himself came to fetch her for dinner. He was wearing expensive-looking tailored robes and a most charming smile.

'How are you feeling, my dear? Did you get any rest?'

Morgaine frowned. It almost seemed as if Lucius seriously believed that she had chosen to stay in her room all afternoon. He even looked concerned and kept his voice low, as if he were standing by someone's sickbed. But then again, he was right. Morgaine had indeed felt abysmal for the better part of the afternoon, and that feeling had had little to do with her being locked up. Her headache had increased to a point where she had been forced to lie down if she didn't want to throw up. And she had felt cold, so terribly cold. But both the headache and the chill had vanished a short while ago. It was as if someone had switched them off.

'I hope you are feeling strong enough to join us for dinner,' Lucius continued, courteously reaching out his hand towards her. 'We have missed you. Especially Demeter.'

What lies had he told Demeter, Morgaine wondered. Her and everyone else? And how much of it had they believed?

'Would you like to get changed?' Lucius asked next, his voice still sweet as honey. 'I can send for my elf.'

Morgaine declined his offer. The robes she was wearing were her own, and she felt safe in them somehow. She didn't want to wear anything Lucius had chosen. Goodness only knew what kind of outfit he would pick.

Two steps into the corridor, Morgaine hesitated, casting a furtive glance over her shoulder towards the door that had guarded her prison all afternoon. It was strange. She had felt desperate on the other side of that door, without hope, and had fought against tears for the last couple of hours. But now the feeling was gone, had been for about five minutes before Lucius had opened the door, just as her headache and the chill. Strange.

'Don't worry, Morgaine,' Lucius cooed softly, misinterpreting her look towards the door. He was holding her close and now gently brushed her cheek with the back of his fingers. Certainly, he thought it a comforting gesture. 'The Riverbeds have already eaten. There will only be Demeter and me. You don't have to be strong for us. And should you feel faint, then I will escort you back to your room at once. All you have to do is to tell me.'

He led her slowly down the stairs, talking in soft tones and holding her arm ever so gently, as if she were indeed ill and needed to be taken care of. And the looks he was giving her were filled with so much compassion that Morgaine started wondering if he had started to believe his own lies.

At the foot of the stairs, they were met by Aleksandra. Her hair was slightly dishevelled, and she looked as if she had put on her dress in great haste.

'Lucius,' she breathed, 'the potion ...'

'Aleksandra, my dearest heart,' Lucius interrupted her. 'This is not a good time. Morgaine is not feeling well. I told you so earlier.'

'But, Lucius!'

Aleksandra looked distressed, to say the least. And with a deep sigh, Lucius surrendered to the pleading look in her eyes.

'Morgaine, I almost don't dare asking,' he started, uncharacteristically tentatively. 'I know you must be longing to see your daughter and fill your belly with some warm soup, but ... There is this potion ... I would normally not bother you, but it is a holiday, and the Apothecary is closed. And you are one of the best in the field.'

'You aren't too bad yourself, Lucius,' Morgaine replied politely. If he was trying to flatter her, she might just as well do the same. The likes of Lucius always responded well to flattery. Besides, Lucius had indeed done well in Potions back in his days at Hogwarts, and Morgaine wanted to show him that she knew a thing or two about him as well.

'I wouldn't dare attempting this Potion myself,' Lucius exclaimed. 'Well, the brewing is simple enough, but collecting the ingredients ...' He gave a theatrical shudder and lay

his hand almost protectively over Morgaine's hand, that was still resting on his forearm. 'Aleksandra, I think we should wait. Morgaine needs more rest. We wouldn't want her hands to shake ...'

'What kind of ingredients are we talking about?' Morgaine asked. It was just as well to feign interest, she decided. No matter how much he was pretending, there was no way that Lucius was seriously concerned about her shaking hands. This was just a game, an act to make her believe that she had a choice, while in truth, he had long since decided that she would prepare those ingredients and eventually brew the potion for him.

'Ah, Morgaine.' Lucius patted her hand and looked at her. Never before had a man looked that grateful. 'Just the ingredients before dinner, I promise. I cannot have you brewing in your condition. You need to rest.'

They descended another flight of stairs to the little Potions lab where Morgaine had been working earlier that week, Lucius still supporting her as if she were made out of glass and Aleksandra walking in front of them, ever so often looking back over her shoulder. There was something in her eyes Morgaine couldn't define. Was it jealousy, maybe? After all, Lucius her lover had been rather short to Aleksandra while making a big fuss over Morgaine.

Once in the lab, Morgaine winced involuntarily. She didn't really know what kind of ingredients she had expected, but she had most certainly not been prepared for a glass container filled with snakes.

'Beautiful creatures,' Lucius whispered, 'but deadly. And I am not good with them.'

'What do you need from them?' Morgaine asked in a matter-of-fact tone. 'Fangs? Skin?'

'Their poison.'

She had feared that much. The snakes coiling around each other in the glass container were among the most poisonous on the planet: an olive-coloured Inland Taipan, a beautiful reddish Common Brown and a fierce-looking black Tiger Snake.

'You want me to milk them?' Morgaine asked.

'If you feel up to the task,' Lucius replied, once more giving her one of his compassion-filled looks. 'I would be forever grateful.'

As if she had a choice. Morgaine had no idea so far why Lucius wanted her to collect the venom of those snakes, but she knew that he would not let her go before she had fulfilled her task. And maybe, if she pleased him, he would tell her what he wanted the poison for.

'Will you separate them for me?' she asked with a small smile. 'I seem to have misplaced my wand.' There was a flash of annoyance in Lucius' grey eyes as she mentioned her wand, but Morgaine pretended that she hadn't noticed. 'I wouldn't want the other two snakes to attack while I pick up the first one.'

'Of course not.' Lucius' lips curled into a smile. Not an ounce of annoyance remained.

He drew his own wand, and soon the three snakes were separated by magical barriers within the glass container, and Morgaine stepped forward, observing the animals closely to decide which one was the calmest. She would start with that one.

'Fascinating creatures, aren't they?' Lucius pointed out from the other side of the table, caressing the snake head on his cane with his left hand.

'Indeed,' Morgaine replied absent-mindedly. She was concentrating on the Taipan. It wasn't the calmest of the three snakes, on the contrary. While the other two lay quite motionless in their part of the container, the Taipan was lifting its black head and hissing threateningly. But still Morgaine was unable to take her eyes off it.

'You are accustomed to them, of course,' Lucius continued, his eyes as intently on Morgaine as hers were on the snake. 'I assume you use snake venom on a daily basis.'

'Not many potions in the curriculum contain snake venom,' Morgaine explained, now picking up a glass jar with her left hand, still not taking her eyes off the Taipan. 'And in the rare cases we do need to use it, I order bottled venom. I wouldn't want a whole class of giddy teenagers attempting to milk snakes. Poppy would have my head for it.'

The Taipan seemed to be calming down now. Soon she might dare grab it.

Lucius chuckled. 'Yes, I assume that your reputation as a responsible teacher would suffer immensely should you have to send half of your class to the hospital wing at once. But for your own studies, do you extract your own venom?'

'I am not too fond of snakes,' Morgaine confessed. 'I was fifteen when I saw one for the first time, and I've never quite warmed up to them.'

Her hand shot into the container at such a speed that the snake did not even have time to react, and as Morgaine lifted the animal up, gripping it firmly by the neck, it did not even struggle. Instead, it willingly sank its fangs into the membrane that was stretched over the jar in Morgaine's hand, filling the jar up with yellowish poison. And when Morgaine put the snake back into the container, it coiled up immediately, looking as calm as a kitten.

'In any case, snakes seem to warm up to you rather quickly,' Lucius commented.

'Anyone can milk a snake. One needs to be patient and wait for the animal to calm down.'

'Or, one *tells* the snake to calm down.'

Morgaine looked up, and the look in Lucius' eyes made her almost drop the glass jar she had just sealed. He looked beyond excited, greedy. The last time he had looked at her like that, he had wanted to bed her.

'You do have the gift,' he said hoarsely, wetting his lips with the tip of his tongue.

'What gift?' Morgaine asked, not really wanting to get an answer to that question.

'You can talk to snakes.'

Morgaine snorted. 'Oh, don't be ridiculous, Lucius. I am not a Parselmouth.'

'And that, Morgaine, is where you have been fooled for many years.'

He came closer, and Morgaine instinctively took some steps backwards, scanning the room for an escape route. But Lucius was standing between her and the door, and the door was closed. Aleksandra might even have locked it when she had left.

'Why do you think you were sent to be brought up in a godforsaken place like Iceland?' Lucius asked, his eyes glittering. 'Why do you think you were taught to restrain your Legilimency only one year after your arrival in the Wizarding world? Wasn't that what Dumbledore and Severus did, teach you how to shield yourself from the voices in your head, instead of teaching you how to hear them properly?'

Morgaine didn't answer.

'Dumbledore wanted to destroy your gift,' Lucius hissed. 'He did not want you to realise that you can talk to snakes. So you were taught to shield your mind, and the snakes' voices just blended in with all the other voices you could hear. The more skilled you became at Occlumency, the less clear the voices became, and you never

realised that some of them were not human.'

'I am not a Parselmouth,' Morgaine repeated, taken aback by how shrill her voice sounded all of a sudden. Still she was backing away from Lucius, and he was coming ever closer.

'Prove it,' Lucius hissed.

'I will do no such thing!'

The door flew open, and in came Aleksandra, Demeter at her hand. And Lucius acted immediately. He crossed the room in a blink of an eye, grabbed the girl by the hand, pushed her into a corner from where she could not escape, Levitated the glass container from the table and let it smash right in front of her feet.

The snakes reacted according to their nature. Startled by the noise, infuriated at having landed on the cold stone floor, they rose and hissed and struck against the first warm-blooded being they could reach. The Brown missed, but the Tiger sank its fangs into the leather of Demeter's boots.

'NO!' Morgaine's scream echoed from the walls of the lab. 'You will not harm her.'

The scene froze. The Brown, that had been about to strike again, seemed suspended in mid-air, mouth open and fangs bared, and the Tiger lay quite still on the floor, almost as Petrified.

Lucius was the first to move. He lazily waved his wand, and the snakes vanished in a puff of black smoke. 'Funny,' he said in a light tone. 'Demeter reacted in exactly the same way. Didn't she, Aleksandra?'

Aleksandra nodded, an anxious look on her face. 'The snake struck his boot,' she whispered. 'I want to check on him.'

*His boot?* What did she mean, *his boot?* The Tiger had attacked Demeter not Lu...

Subconsciously, Morgaine knew what she would see long before she could tear her eyes from the spot from where the snakes had vanished. And as she had suspected, Demeter's raven black hair was already turning blond.

'You used Polyjuice Potion on your own son?' Morgaine exclaimed, her voice dripping with disgust. That was a new low even for Lucius Malfoy.

He, however, seemed perfectly calm. 'I couldn't use Demeter, could I? As she had already demonstrated her abilities, she would probably have called off the snakes herself. It would have been a shame if she had spoken Parseltongue before you had a chance to.'

'Where is Demeter?' Morgaine demanded to know. And if Lucius didn't tell her, she would be prepared to force the whole jar of Taipan venom down his throat.

'Demeter's in your room,' Aleksandra sniffled, wrapping her arms around Melvin, who had now returned to his own shape. His eyes, however, looked oddly blank.

'Why don't you bring Morgaine upstairs, Aleksandra?' Lucius suggested in his sweetest tone. 'I've seen what I wanted to see.'

'I am not going to leave Melvin alone with you,' Aleksandra shrieked. There were now tears streaming down her face, and she was clutching her son against her chest as if she were afraid someone would take him from her.

'Then for goodness' sake, take the boy with you,' Lucius seemed suddenly annoyed. 'I expected more backbone of you, woman. But then again, I should have know that you are ... weak. Just like the rest of your family.'

He approached her swiftly, cupped her chin and claimed kisses from her, which Aleksandra seemed most unwilling to give. But Lucius did not seem to mind. Judging from the way he ground his hips against her, he actually enjoyed her reluctance.

'Bring Morgaine upstairs,' he repeated as they broke apart. 'Make sure the door is warded properly, and then come to my room.'

'But Melvin ...'

'The boy is fine,' Lucius interrupted her impatiently as he cast a glance at Melvin's boot. 'The snake's fang did not even penetrate the leather. And the other effects will wear off soon enough. Bring him to your brother's room. They can recuperate together.'

He turned to leave.

'Half an hour, Aleksandra,' he said at the door. 'If you are not in my room by then, I will have to punish you. As for you Morgaine, try to rest. You and Demeter have an important day ahead of you tomorrow.'

Neither Morgaine nor Aleksandra spoke. As soon as Lucius had left, Morgaine wordlessly checked Melvin's foot, making sure that there had really not been any damage, and after that she followed mother and son up the stairs, not even thinking about making a break for it. Her daughter was waiting upstairs. And Demeter was all that mattered right now.

Outside the door, Aleksandra broke the silence. 'I am so sorry, Morgaine.'

'What are you sorry for?' Morgaine asked, her voice cold. Without having to think hard, she could come up with about twenty reasons for Aleksandra to apologise. Fraternising with Lucius Malfoy was one.

'I didn't know.' Aleksandra's voice was thick with tears, and her arms were still wrapped around her son. The boy seemed not to have any willpower whatsoever. 'I didn't know what Lucius was planning. I thought he had come to see me. I didn't know he was planning to trap you.'

Morgaine felt her heart soften somewhat. Aleksandra was not the first witch Lucius he had fooled. Nor would she be the last.

'And then after lunch, when he sent the children to their rooms and told Alek and me ...'

'Where is your brother?' Morgaine interrupted Aleksandra. Lucius had said that Alek was recuperating.

'He is in his room,' Aleksandra sobbed. 'When Lucius demanded that Melvin and I impersonated Demeter and you, Alek objected. He even threatened to throw Lucius out of the house. Lucius got angry and said that Alek had no choice since he had sworn his loyalty, and then Lucius ... Lucius cursed him. Oh, Morgaine, it was horrible. He was twitching on the floor, screaming in agony.'

So Lucius had used two Unforgivable Curses on the Riverbeds that afternoon. The Cruciatus Curse on Alek and judging by the oddly blank look in Melvin's eyes the Imperius Curse on his own son.

'Melvin did not want to trick you,' Aleksandra went on, hugging her son tighter towards her. 'So Lucius made him, and threatened he would torture him as well if I didn't do as I was told. I had no choice.'

Her sobs drowned any other words she tried to utter, and Morgaine just looked at her hostess, wanting to feel sorry for her but finding herself being unable to. There was no time. Her priorities lay elsewhere.

'Bring Melvin to Alek and ward their door against intruders,' she instructed Aleksandra. 'They both need time to rest. And on my door, put any wards Lucius has instructed you to.'

'But I don't want to lock you in!' Aleksandra exclaimed.

'Do you really think I'd be able to leave the manor?' Morgaine asked. 'Lucius is not dumb. He told you to lock me in to test your loyalties, nothing else. And you will do best to do as you are told, for all our sakes.'

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'This is my fault, all my fault.'

'There, there, Minerva, calm down. You couldn't have known.'

Kingsley Shacklebolt handed the distraught Headmistress a glass of Scotch, which Minerva to everyone's surprise declined. But then again, her behaviour over the last twenty minutes had been anything but characteristic for the otherwise so stern woman.

Severus hadn't been in her office when Kingsley had arrived with the news, but as he now read the parchment on Minerva's desk he could very well imagine her clutching her chest and sinking onto her chair. He himself couldn't quite believe what he was reading.

'How could the Ministry have missed such a vital piece of information?' he asked Kingsley, who flinched slightly at the look on the ghost's face. With every right. The scowl that Severus was sporting was of the darkest shade possible. But his voice was surprisingly calm.

'I am having my best people working on that right now,' Kingsley explained, his hands still resting comfortingly on Minerva's shaking shoulders. 'Trust me, I want to find out as badly as you do who is responsible for this.'

'Your best people?' Severus sneered. 'Are those the same people that didn't know that Alek Riverbed has been suspected of being a Death Eater?'

'There isn't any record of that in our archives,' Kingsley replied. 'I checked myself. Not a single file carries the name *Alek Riverbed*.'

'But the persons he associated with according to this report,' Severus indicated the piece of parchment in front of him, 'they have all been rounded up, found guilty and been sent to Azkaban. Why was Riverbed not investigated?'

Kingsley shrugged. 'That's what I am trying to find out.'

'I allowed a Death Eater into the school,' Minerva mumbled.

'A suspected Death Eater,' Kingsley tried to calm her, but with little effect.

'I endangered everyone. By the gods, I even encouraged Morgaine to befriend him.'

'This is not your fault, Minerva.' It was the first time Dumbledore spoke since Severus had entered the office. The hem of his robe looked slightly singed, but otherwise he seemed not to have suffered any damage from the ghost's acid attack. 'None of us knew about Professor Riverbed's connection to those people. And if he indeed is or was a Death Eater, then he managed to fool all of us equally.'

'If?' Kingsley butted in. 'You don't believe he carries the Mark?'

'Does it matter?' Dumbledore asked. 'He wouldn't be the first to have made that mistake.'

The old Headmaster's eyes came to rest on Severus, but the ghost ignored him. He would never talk to Dumbledore again, no matter what.

'But *if* he is a Death Eater,' Minerva interjected. 'If he is one, and if he's keeping Morgaine and Demeter hostage, what is it he wants from them?'

No one answered, and as the minutes ticked by and turned into hours, the only thing that could be heard in the office was the rustling of Kingsley's robes as he paced the room and Minerva's stifled sobs.

Then an owl arrived.

'They tracked down the Auror who was in charge of the investigation,' Kingsley announced triumphantly, but his face fell as he read through the parchment. 'He wasn't of much help. Janus Thickey Ward, severe brain damage, caused by some nasty spells and curses. Someone tried to shut him up.'

'So he couldn't tell the investigators anything about Alek Riverbed?' Minerva asked desperately. 'Nothing at all?'

'He gave them a name,' Kingsley said slowly, his face draining of colour. 'Just one name. Lucius Malfoy.'

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'Mother, I can talk to snakes!'

It was hard to tell if Demeter was excited or scared, and Morgaine just took the girl by the hand and made her sit down beside her on the bed.

'I know you can, little one,' she said calmly.

'Of course you know,' Demeter exclaimed. 'You heard me stop the snakes. They were about to bite you.'

'That wasn't me.'

Demeter looked puzzled.

'Lucius tricked you. He wanted to find out whether you can talk to snakes. He did the same thing to me.'

'You can talk to snakes, too?' Demeter seemed to be more surprised by that fact than she was shocked over Lucius Malfoy staging two snake attacks.

Morgaine nodded.

'Why have you never told me?' Demeter demanded to know.

'I didn't know. And I hoped we couldn't,' Morgaine replied. She sounded tired, just about as tired as she felt. 'I desperately hoped that neither of us was able to talk to snakes.'

'Is that a bad thing then?' Demeter wondered. Her blue eyes were inquisitive, and Morgaine tried to avoid them.



'Parseltongue doesn't just suddenly appear in a family,' Morgaine explained, wishing she wouldn't have to. Explaining everything to Demeter made the whole thing ... real.

'Parseltongue is a rare gift that can only be found in certain families,' she continued. 'As neither my grandmother nor Dumbledore can talk to snakes, we have to assume that we inherited this gift from my father.'

'And you never met your father,' Demeter pointed out. 'So you didn't know.'

'No, I didn't know.'

'You said Parseltongue was very rare. Now that you know that you can speak to snakes, wouldn't it be quite easy to find out who your father is?'

Morgaine couldn't help but smile at the girl's logic. She was right, of course. But Morgaine didn't want proof of who her father was. Not when the only known Parselmouth old enough to be her father had been one of the darkest wizards of all times.

They didn't talk more about Parseltongue as Morgaine cunningly distracted Demeter by starting to talk about Melvin. But she only listened half-heartedly to what the girl had to say. She had neither the energy nor the peace of mind. Then Lucius' elf brought some sandwiches, and after having eaten, Morgaine sent Demeter to bed.

She herself, however, didn't find any sleep. Although she knew that she would need all her strength and wits to meet Lucius the next day, she kept pacing the room, every so often casting a furtive glance towards Demeter. How ever was she supposed to protect her child, now that Lucius had found the answer he had been looking for ever since the day he had learnt of Demeter's existence? Or had he been looking for that answer even longer, Morgaine wondered. Maybe even since she herself had been born? And now that he had found the answer, what did he intend to do with his newfound knowledge?

The clock struck midnight as Morgaine looked out of the window. The storm had subsided somewhat, but it was still snowing, and despite the darkness, Morgaine thought that she once more could make out shadows in the back yard. Tall, hooded figures with flapping cloaks. And suddenly she imagined hearing their rattling breaths.

Her blood froze to ice, and she sank soundlessly to the floor, burying her face in her hands. And as the tears ran down her cheeks, Morgaine felt herself being drained of hope. It was over. Her past had caught up with her, and she had nowhere to run.

## XXXV: The Riddle

*Chapter 35 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XXXV: The Riddle

Lucius Malfoy. Severus rued the day he had first met this self-satisfied megalomaniac. Well, not the very first day. After Severus had been sorted into Slytherin House and had sat down beside Lucius, the blond boy had treated him ever so nicely and had even patted him on the back in a welcoming gesture. But Lucius had only done that because he had been a prefect. It had been his duty to welcome the first-years. After that, he had ignored Severus for quite some time. A stringy, black-haired boy in second-hand robes was obviously not considered to be a Malfoy-worthy playmate. Only about half a year later, when Severus had thrown a quite advanced and somewhat nasty hex at Sirius Black, had Lucius understood that this boy was someone to be reckoned with. From that day on, Lucius had feigned friendship, taken young Severus under his wing, groomed him and introduced him to the right people. Six years later, it had been Lucius who had introduced Severus to the Dark Lord. It had also been him who had held Severus' left arm as he had taken the Dark Mark. And Severus had let him.

Severus had never quite severed his bonds with Lucius. For that, he owed Lucius too much. They had associated, yes, on a quite regular basis, in fact, especially after Draco had come to Hogwarts and been sorted into Severus' house. And when the Dark Lord had returned and it had become crucial that Severus maintained the illusion of being Voldemort's most loyal servant, he had had no other choice than to play Lucius' lapdog once more. Anything else would have been suspicious. But friends? No, they had never been friends.

And now, as Lucius Malfoy seemed to be very much involved in the disappearance of Morgaine and Demeter, Severus Snape had become his fiercest enemy. Of course, both Minerva and Kingsley had objected and claimed that Severus was jumping to conclusions, but Severus had refused to listen to them. For him, the case was clear and the evidence strong enough:

With the help of Kingsley Shacklebolt, some trusted members of the Ministry and some dodgy characters Kingsley knew despite him being Minister of Magic, they had found out that Lucius Malfoy and Alek Riverbed had started associating when Riverbed had still been a student at Durmstrang. 'But Lucius Malfoy associates with many people,' Kingsley had interjected. 'And from what I've heard, Riverbed has a quite pretty sister.' But Severus had only laughed. Lucius Malfoy had never seen it necessary to play nicely with family members of the women he was bedding. There was no way that he was on familiar terms with Alek Riverbed because of Riverbed's sister.

After leaving Durmstrang, Alek Riverbed had now and then been invited to Malfoy Manor. That they had found out by using Dobby, Lucius' old house-elf, and Kelly, another elf which like Dobby had been dismissed from the Malfoy household by accident. Apparently, Lucius had thrown a pair of slippers at the elf one morning when the poor creature had walked in on him entertaining one of his mistresses. The elf had caught the slippers, and as even shoes were counted as clothes, she had been freed and joined Dobby at Hogwarts. Her loyalties lay now with no one but herself, and she had all but too willingly given information about her old master.

And last but not least, there had been some hushed-up transferring of gold from the well-filled Malfoy vault and to the considerably emptier Riverbed vault. That piece of information had been delivered by Bill Weasley. He was risking his job at Gringotts, but he and Morgaine had been best friends when they had been students at Hogwarts. 'And besides,' he had said, 'Morgaine has been good for George over the last year. If it hadn't been for her support ... Our family owes her.'

As usual, Lucius had covered his tracks well, but the little evidence he now had was enough for Severus. In his eyes, Alek Riverbed was either a Death Eater or at least a sympathiser, and for some reason, Lucius Malfoy had deemed it worthwhile to keep Riverbed out of Azkaban. He had hidden him, given him money and alibis, and in repayment, Riverbed had now delivered Morgaine to Lucius on a silver plate. Everything made perfect sense. Minerva and Kingsley could object all they wanted. They didn't know Lucius Malfoy as well as Severus did. And Severus knew that Lucius had been after Morgaine ever since the first time she and Severus had been invited to the famous Malfoy New Year's Ball.

Tired of listening to Minerva and Kingsley, Severus had dissolved into thin air and left the Headmistress' office, and now, in the seclusion of the dungeons, he was making plans on how he would tear both Lucius and Alek Riverbed apart limb from limb. If he ever got hold of them, that was. So far, he had still no idea where they were hiding, and with that, there was still no trace of Morgaine and Demeter. It was frustrating, infuriating, and Severus did not at all like the feeling of panic that was once more rising in his chest. He had to find them, even if it was the last thing he would do on this earth.

"Where are you?" he whispered into the darkness, for a moment almost daring to hope that he would receive an answer. But of course, Morgaine's voice did not ring out from the shadows, and his office lay as still as a tomb.

Severus closed his eyes and listened inwards. He and Morgaine had years ago overcome the need to communicate with words. When they were close to each other, they could hear each other's thoughts and whisper to each other without anyone hearing them. Maybe it would work even at a distance?

It was a long shot, Severus knew that. Even at times when their minds had been perfectly in tune, he and Morgaine had still needed eye contact to read each other's thoughts. But he had been able to sense her from a distance sometimes, like the day she had returned to Hogwarts. He had sensed her presence long before he had known that she was in the grounds.

He called for her once more, concentrating hard on the memory of her blue eyes, those eyes that their daughter had inherited.

"Where are you, Morgaine?" he asked. 'I am looking for you.'

The blue eyes seemed to look up at him, they seemed to recognise him, and Severus triumphed. But then he felt something, something that could be compared to a gust of icy wind, a wind that cut through flesh and bones and chilled the very marrow.

The look in the blue eyes changed, the wind grew colder. Severus heard a scream. And then the eyes were gone.

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How could the girl sleep so soundly, Morgaine wondered as she, for the umpteenth time that night, passed by Demeter's bed to adjust the blanket. How could she dwell peacefully in the land of dreams while a storm was raging?

Morgaine herself had lain down beside her daughter a couple of times, squeezed her eyes shut and concentrated on Demeter's regular breathing, but sleep had not come. And so she had risen again to pace the room, restlessly and aimlessly.

It was best for Demeter to be asleep, Morgaine thought and kissed her daughter softly on the hair. The little one had so far no idea about what was going on, and for the time being, it was just as well.

Morgaine sighed as she grabbed a blanket from the chair beside the bed and positioned herself by the window. She herself had no idea what was going on, either. All she knew was that Lucius Malfoy had succeeded in unearthing the secrets that had been kept well hidden for the better part of her life. What he intended to do with that knowledge, however, Morgaine did not know. And she wasn't sure that she wanted to know.

She looked at her reflection in the window and wrinkled her nose. No wonder Lucius kept asking her about her health. She sure looked dreadful. Her chestnut hair had lost its shine, and there were dark shadows under her eyes, telling of far too many sleepless nights. Her skin was pale and waxy, and her eyes ... oh, her eyes. Blue like Dumbledore's had been, just as kind, but in contrast to Dumbledore's, her eyes hadn't been twinkling for a long, long time.

*Where are you, Morgaine?*

Morgaine blinked fiercely. This couldn't be. Her overtired mind must be playing tricks on her. She had not just heard Severus' voice.

*I am looking for you.*

Morgaine looked up towards the black sky. Maybe she wasn't imagining things. Maybe Severus was indeed calling for her. All she had to do was to answer.

Then she saw them again, the shadows she had seen moving in the back yard earlier. They were tall, imposing, hooded, and they were drawing closer towards the manor. The candles in the room started to flicker. The air grew colder. And Demeter shot off from her pillow, screaming.

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'I do hope the children are having a good time. I would very much have liked to join them.'

There was a note of actual disappointment in Lucius' voice, and the look in his eyes was almost dreamy, as if he were indeed wishing that he was riding a sleigh with Melvin and Demeter. But as well as he was playing his role and as much as Morgaine was trying to keep her calm, that last comment of his made her lose her patience with the blond wizard.

'How much longer are we supposed to play happy families?' she hissed, her voice dripping with just as much deadly poison as she had just added to the cauldron in front of her.

'Just a little while longer,' Lucius replied sweetly and continued playing with the empty phials on the table. He still seemed absent-minded, but Morgaine knew very well that he was observing her every move, just as he had been observing her during breakfast.

Not that there had been much else to look at. Upon arriving at the table, Lucius had told Melvin and Demeter that he had organised a sleigh ride for them that day, and that they would not be allowed to do any magic as the man responsible for the sleigh and horses was a Muggle from the village. All too willingly, the children had handed over their wands to Uncle Lucius and had then spent the rest of their time at the breakfast table discussing their up-coming adventure. They had chattered and laughed, and neither of them had noticed that their mothers did not share their good mood.

Aleksandra had sat silently beside Lucius, casting him an adoring smile whenever he craved it, but the glow that had lingered on her face the previous day had disappeared. And the shadows under her eyes proved that she had slept just as little as Morgaine, who had been sitting opposite Aleksandra, deeply worried about the fact that Lucius was now in possession of three wands that weren't his.

He, in opposition to the women at the table, had been joyous, telling the children how envious he was of their sleigh ride and that he wished that he could come along. 'But alas,' he had said, pouting like a little child, 'grown-ups seldom have the luxury of excursions like that. But you will tell me all about it tonight, won't you?'

'Do you think they are having fun?' Lucius asked now. 'Melvin and Demeter, I mean. It's awfully cold outside. And they will not even be able to put a Warming Charm on the sleigh.'

Morgaine put down her ladle. 'As if you really cared, Lucius.'

'I do care!' Any dreaminess and soft tone had gone from his voice, and his eyes were as cold as the weather outside as he looked at Morgaine. 'How many more times do I have to tell you that the well-being of those children matters more than anything to me?'

'Maybe, if you told me your reasons, it would sink in.'

Lucius had already opened his mouth when he thought better of it. 'Now, now, Morgaine, that was not very nice of you,' he chided her, wiggling his finger at her. 'You almost got me there.'

He smiled indulgently and winked at her before craning his neck to peer into the cauldron.

'Are you about done?' he asked. 'Is the potion warm enough to add the final ingredient?'

Morgaine nodded. Lucius refused to tell her what kind of potion she was brewing and was only giving her one instruction at a time. She had been brewing for over two hours now, and the least odd ingredients she had used were the Taipan poison and powdered Mandrake root. The recipe didn't make any sense to her, and she had no idea either what the final ingredient would be or what it would do to the potion.

Lucius beamed and produced a tiny phial from his pocket. 'The most valuable ingredient of them all. I went to quite a bit of trouble to get hold of it.'

Morgaine reached out her hand.

'Oh, no!' Lucius shook his head. 'I will add it. I wouldn't want you to waste any of it.'

He uncorked the phial, still smiling, and stepped closer. 'Most valuable,' he muttered. 'And I am not just talking about the price.'

Seven drops he added. Seven drops of what looked like molten silver.

'Lucius, my love, I am longing for you.'

Seemingly out of nowhere, Aleksandra had appeared in the door, wearing a suggestive smile and a *négligée* that hardly left anything to the imagination.

'We're just about finished,' Lucius replied, straightening up and greedily licking his lips as he caught sight of his mistress. 'Morgaine is tired. She wishes to return to her room.'

Why Lucius was still bothering to keep up the charade, Morgaine couldn't understand. Surely, after the events of the previous day, even he must understand that Aleksandra did not believe anymore that Morgaine was ill. Especially not as Lucius had ordered her to escort Morgaine to her room and lock her in.

Lucius' behaviour wasn't the only thing that puzzled Morgaine. Aleksandra was also acting strangely. She looked like a wanton harlot, casting Lucius' lusty looks and touching herself in the naughtiest of ways. But as soon as he looked away, she changed completely. Her features hardened, there was a calculating look in her eyes, and Morgaine couldn't stop thinking that Aleksandra was trying to tell her something.

But it was impossible for the two women to communicate. As soon as Lucius was done overseeing Morgaine bottling the potion, he was immediately all over Aleksandra, cupping her breasts through the thin fabric and placing hot kisses on her pale skin. By the time his elf had arrived to escort Morgaine back to her room, he was already unbuckling his belt. What he was doing with Aleksandra by the time the elf warded the door behind Morgaine, she did not even want to imagine.

'Aleksandra poured a potion into Lucius' tea at breakfast.'

Morgaine spun around, and out of the shadow of the curtains stepped Alek Riverbed.

'Not that he needed one,' Alek said with a sneer. 'He'd bed her even if she were smeared with dragon dung. But better safe than sorry.'

Then his face contorted in pain, and as a spasm went through his body, Alek collapsed on the nearest chair, panting. 'I need to talk to you, Morgaine.'

Morgaine was wary. From the evidence she had, Alek had lured her into a trap. It had been him who had invited her and Demeter to stay, and it was in his house they were now held prisoner. But Aleksandra had said that Alek had refused to do Lucius' bidding, and by the looks of it, Alek had been severely punished.

'Did he use the Cruciatius Curse on you?' Morgaine asked, slowly approaching Alek, who was now gripping his right leg with both his hands to keep it from twitching.

'Never mind that now,' he brought forth between gritted teeth. 'I deserved some punishment. Not for defying Lucius, but for other things.' He looked up at Morgaine. His jaws were clenched, and the apologetic look in his eyes contrasted sharply with his tormented features.

'I made some terrible mistakes, Morgaine,' he said quietly. 'No punishment I can receive will ever make up for them. But I can at least try to save you. You and our children. I tried to send off an owl to McGonagall last night, telling her how to find the manor, but Lucius intercepted the letter. That was why I didn't come down to breakfast.'

'He cursed you once more?'

Alek nodded, and Morgaine instinctively extended her hand, wanting to comfort the younger man and hopefully ease his pain. But he shrank away.

'Do not pity me, Morgaine. I do not deserve it.'

Morgaine drew up a chair and sat down beside Alek. It wasn't her time to talk now, or to ask questions. Alek had come to her room for a reason, and she would listen to him.

'What I am going to tell you now, Morgaine, those things ... ' Alek broke off again, obviously not sure about which words to choose. 'I am not telling you all this to make myself look better or to find an apology for what I have done. But you need to know those things. You need to know what you're up against.'

Morgaine nodded silently, and Alek carried on.

'You remember that our father died when Aleksandra and I were still young?'

Once more, Morgaine nodded. Alek had told her the first time they had spoken properly at Hogwarts. She had then wondered why he felt the sudden need to share the story of his life with her. Now she was all ears.

'He was murdered,' Alek explained. 'My mother was the youngest daughter of a very old and very influential Russian Wizard family. She went to study in Britain, fell in love, got married in secret and had us. When her father found out that the man she had been breeding with was a Muggle ... You can figure out the rest, can't you?'

He took a shaking breath and stretched out his leg. It had stopped twitching now.

'My mother was more or less incarcerated here, and Aleksandra and I were always told that we were scum, filthy half-bloods. Even at school, there wasn't a day when we weren't taunted. And then Lucius Malfoy came.' Alek smiled bitterly. 'When Aleksandra told me that she had been with him, I was furious at first. The man was married and my sister barely seventeen. And when she got pregnant we did everything to keep it silent. We were more than ashamed. But when Lucius made contact again, when he started to visit Aleksandra and the baby regularly, showering both with gifts ... Morgaine, you cannot believe what this meant for us. If someone like Lucius Malfoy didn't care about our blood status, then that would mean that we would be accepted by other families as well. And indeed we were. Aleksandra was invited to tea parties at the most fancy manors, and Lucius introduced me to all the right people. Suddenly, we did not have to hide anymore. And when Lucius helped me to attain a teaching job at Hogwarts, one of the best Wizarding schools in the world, we were over the moon.' He sighed. 'We didn't know then that Lucius Malfoy never did anything from the goodness of his heart. But he was nice to us for years. The first time he wanted something in return was when you returned to Hogwarts. And even that seemed harmless. He just told me that you were of an ancient line and that it would do me good to befriend you and let him know how you were doing. He seemed worried for you. And then Demeter came along, and Lucius was just as nice towards her as he was towards Melvin. I swear, Morgaine, I never suspected anything. I had no idea that he was after those two children.'

'Do you know now?' Morgaine asked eagerly. 'Do you know what he wants from them?'

'He says they are the heirs of Slytherin.'

Morgaine sneered. When Lucius had told her that twenty-four hours ago, she had not had the faintest idea what he had been talking about. Now she knew about Demeter's

part in the scheme. But what about Melvin?

With some difficulties, Alek produced a piece of parchment from his pocket. 'Mother never talked about our father,' he explained. 'And I never bothered to get to know anything about him. For many years, I blamed him and his Muggle blood for all the misery in our lives. For me, he didn't exist. Lucius, however, seemed to have known for a long time, who my father was.'

He unfolded the parchment and held it up, however covering the upper left corner with his hand.

'Your family tree?' Morgaine enquired.

'Just one branch,' Alek clarified. 'My father's.'

Morgaine started at the bottom. Andrew Riverbed. Father of Alek and Aleksandra. Briefly married to Katarina Sadowski. Demised murdered shortly after the birth of their two children.

Tom Riverbed. Alek and Aleksandra's grandfather, son of Cecilia Riverbed. The line that connected Cecilia's name with the name of her son's father was interrupted, and Alek was still covering up the name.

'Your great-grandmother, Cecilia, was she never married?'

Alek shook his head.

'And why are you covering up the name of your great-grandfather?'

Alek swallowed. 'This name didn't tell me anything at first,' he explained. 'And when Lucius explained its significance, I wished I didn't know.'

Slowly, he removed his hand from the name, and Morgaine felt all the blood leave her face.

'Tom Riddle,' she whispered. '*The Tom Riddle?*'

'Yes, Morgaine,' came a drawling voice from the door. 'Tom Riddle*senior*.'

Everything happened incredibly fast. The same moment Morgaine realised that Lucius had appeared in the room, he was already pulling his wand. There was a flash of green light, and Alek sank to the floor.

'Stupid boy,' Lucius growled, stepping closer and looking down at Alek's body with disgust. 'He would not have had to die. I would have told you all this sooner or later myself.'

He bent down and tried to tug the piece of parchment out of Alek's hand. It tore. Alek wouldn't let go of the name *Tom Riddle*.

'He could have had his share of glory, our dear Alek,' Lucius announced as he straightened up. 'After all, his sister is Melvin's mother. But he chose to betray me. And betrayal, I cannot tolerate.'

'What are you planning, Lucius?' Morgaine asked, her voice shaking.

'I will tell you when it's time, my dear.' Lucius was smiling, but there was a gleam in his eyes that made a shiver go down Morgaine's spine. So did the touch of his fingers as he caressed her cheek.

'Don't you worry, Morgaine,' he whispered softly. 'Very soon, everything will be just fine.'

## XXXVI: Preparing to Fight

*Chapter 36 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XXXVI: Preparing to Fight

Lucius' elf came to take away Alek's body before Morgaine had the chance to close the young man's eyes. Somehow, she was grateful. She wasn't sure if she could have handled the look in his eyes. Everything had happened so fast that Alek had not even had the time to be surprised. And so his hazel eyes still carried the same look from when he and Morgaine had started their conversation. He had been sorry, so unspeakably sorry. And Morgaine had not had the chance to tell him that the blame was not his.

'How about Aleksandra?' she asked now in a whisper, her eyes still on the spot where Alek's body had lain mere seconds ago. Aleksandra, too, had betrayed Lucius by luring him into her bed so Alek could speak to Morgaine. Had she been punished as well?

'It would be a shame to dispose of her,' Lucius said in an tone that suggested that he didn't really care about the woman's fate. 'And I might just need her a bit longer.'

'Need her?' Morgaine couldn't help but sneer. She could just about imagine what Lucius needed Aleksandra for. The mere thought made her skin crawl.

Lucius tutted and smiled sweetly. 'We wouldn't be having dirty thoughts, would we? I can get distraction of that kind from any witch I fancy. I need Aleksandra for more important things.'

'Why don't you just get it out, Lucius? You are dying to tell me your plans. And as much as I would like you to drop dead right here on the very spot where you killed Alek, I want you to tell me the truth now.'

For a moment, Lucius looked almost surprised. Then his grey eyes flashed dangerously, and Morgaine feared that she had overstepped a line. One more murder today would probably not matter to Lucius, and if he pulled his wand now, she would not have any means to defend herself. But his features softened, and his lips curled into yet

another smile.

'You disappoint me, Morgaine,' he said, nodding invitingly towards the sofa. 'Shall we have a seat?'

Morgaine shook her head. She had no desire to sit comfortably beside Lucius Malfoy. He just shrugged.

'I understand your mind is full of other things,' he said in a sympathetic tone. 'But still. You have all the pieces of the puzzle right in front of your pretty nose. You, if anyone, should be able to put together the whole picture.'

Should she? Morgaine's eyes narrowed. What had she missed?

'Start with the children's lineage,' Lucius suggested. He was looking ever so kindly at her again, and his manner reminded Morgaine of a patient teacher who for the umpteenth time explained that two and two equalled four. 'Where do those children come from?' he helped her.

'They come from the same line.'

Lucius nodded slowly. 'Branches of one and the same tree. One healthy, almost royal. A direct descendant of the Dark Lord. The other ...' He made a dismissive gesture. 'I was not aware at the time that Aleksandra was a half-blood. The first time we met we did not exactly spend much time talking. I damned myself for not having been more careful when I learnt that I had fathered a bastard child, but when I found out just who the Riverbeds were ... Well, let us say that I quickly realised that the family had a certain potential.'

Morgaine still could not follow Lucius' logic. The Dark Lord, Tom Marvolo Riddle, had hated his Muggle father. He had hated him for his blood and blamed him for death of his mother. He had hunted him down and killed him. What use could Lucius have of a family descending from Tom Riddle senior?

'Morgaine, dearest heart,' Lucius exclaimed with a look on his face that suggested that he felt truly sorry for her now. 'Can't you see it? The blood of the Dark Lord's father runs in Melvin's veins. So does my blood. The blood of a devoted servant.'

Morgaine swallowed drily, and in the back of her mind formed a scene which she herself had never witnessed. Only Harry Potter had, and he had told Dumbledore: *'Wormtail used a spell. Bone of the father ... flesh of the servant ...'*

Surely, Lucius wasn't attempting to ...

'You are catching on, I see,' Lucius interrupted Morgaine's thoughts. Obviously, her body language had betrayed her. Most certainly, her face had become pale and her eyes wide with fear and surprise.

'It is more difficult this time, of course,' Lucius continued. 'Dumbledore and Potter succeeded in destroying all the Horcruxes the Dark Lord had left behind. But I think I have something better. A living child, a vessel.'

'Why the children, Lucius?' Morgaine asked, surprised that she was able to bring forth a single sound. It felt as if a giant had put his hands around her throat and was squeezing the life out of her.

'Aleksandra is weak,' Lucius spat. 'Melvin, however ... I made sure that the boy has been given the proper education from the very start. He has the right values. He has the right goals. And he knows whom he has to thank for it.'

'You?'

Lucius nodded. 'Yes, me. The Dark Lord's most loyal servant. I shall be rewarded.'

Morgaine could see Lucius' point. Melvin was his son, and once Lucius succeeded with his plan, no one would ever need to know that the child had been conceived by accident. He would tell everyone that he had planned everything from the very start.

'Now, about you and Demeter. The girl is still young, and with the proper training, she could be great. She *will* be great. Because she is not only your daughter, but also the daughter of Severus Snape.'

Severus Snape, the man whom Lucius still believed had never abandoned the Dark Lord, that he had been true to the Dark cause until the very end, but smart enough to make sure to stand in a good light after his death.

'You, on the other hand, Morgaine, you are tainted.' Lucius was once more smiling at Morgaine, but there was nothing pleasant in that smile. It was cold, threatening, and there was a mad gleam in his eyes. 'I blame Dumbledore for it, of course. Had he not taken care of you and hidden you away in a godforsaken place when you were still a child, there would have been hope for you. You, too, would have been brought up with the right values and beliefs. But alas, you weren't, and you chose the wrong path. You, Morgaine, are the enemy. And I cannot allow you to cross my plans.'

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When Lucius left, Morgaine finally sank onto the sofa, the seat which Lucius had offered her and which she had refused. But now her legs didn't carry her anymore. And the weight of the world seemed to be pressing down onto her shoulders.

Lucius had patently explained his master plan, and with every word, one thing had become clearer and clearer: he was mad. Barking mad. His plan was to take the children and foster them according to his beliefs and eventually use them their blood and Morgaine's to resurrect the Dark Lord. Just how he was planning to do this, Lucius had not unveiled, but the mad gleam in his eyes had made very sure that he wholeheartedly believed in his plan, no matter how deranged it seemed.

He would come for Demeter that very night, he had announced.

'My elf will escort you to the dining room where you and Demeter will have dinner. After that, you will both be brought back here, and I want you to make sure that the girl gets some rest before I come for her. She has a long night ahead of her.'

To Morgaine's surprise, Lucius had not forbidden her to tell Demeter about his plan. Neither had he encouraged her to. In his opinion, it did not matter. He was convinced that Demeter would do his every bidding, that she would willingly learn everything he had to teach her and accept his words as the law. In his mind, the girl was young enough to not have been blinded by the Light, and that any damage that had been done so far, could be reversed.

Morgaine thought long and hard about her options. As she understood, she wouldn't be allowed to see her daughter again until Lucius was sure that the girl had the right disposition. Only when he was convinced that he had her on her side, the Dark side, would Morgaine be allowed to see Demeter again. So if she wanted to warn her daughter, to prepare her, tonight would be her very last chance.

Morgaine's first instinct was to tell Demeter everything. That she knew how to speak to snakes because her grandfather had had that gift. That her grandfather had been Lord Voldemort, a monster that had ruthlessly eliminated everyone who had stood in his path. That Lucius was now planning to turn her and her best friend into minions and eventually use them to bring the Dark Lord back to life. But could she really tell her daughter all this? Would a girl of twelve be able to understand this craziness?

And what would Demeter do with her knowledge? Would it help her in any way? Or would it just scare her, make her fearful and uncertain and make her receptive for the speeches which Lucius most certainly had prepared very carefully? Surely, he would know exactly how to take care of a frightened little girl, convince her that he would take care of her and that everything would be just fine as long as she did as she was told. And then the trap would snap close.

No, she couldn't tell Demeter all the details, Morgaine decided. If she wanted to protect her child, she would have to appeal to the girl's talents, Gryffindor bravery and Slytherin cunning. And she herself would once more have to use the spell which she had hoped that Demeter would never need.

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'Mother, you know that dream I had last night?'

Demeter nervously bit her bottom lip. They were alone in the dining room, she and her mother. Melvin had been hurried away by his own mother the moment he and Demeter had returned from their sleigh ride, and she had not seen Uncle Lucius since breakfast. But still, Demeter checked the door. She didn't want anyone to hear what she had to say. It seemed so silly, so childish. But it had occupied her mind all day, and now she needed to get it out.

Her mother folded her napkin and put it on the table. 'Yes?'

'I know this will sound silly to you, but ...' Demeter was looking for the right words. 'It feels like ... like it wasn't a dream.'

'How do you mean?' Morgaine asked, and Demeter started to relax. She had not, of course, expected her mother to laugh at her or anything, but the look on her face was encouraging. She seemed truly interested in what Demeter had to say. She even seemed a bit worried.

'You know, when you have a nightmare, you go back to sleep afterwards, and then you just remember fragments of it the next day?'

Morgaine nodded.

'Well, it wasn't like this. Ever since I woke up, there has been this feeling in the pit of my stomach, like I should be afraid of something, and ...'

'And?'

'It feels like ...' Demeter cast down her eyes, fidgeting with her napkin. 'It feels like I can't laugh anymore.'

'Does it feel like you will never be happy again?'

Demeter snapped up her head. 'This is exactly how it feels. How could you know?'

She saw her mother take a deep, shuttering breath and suddenly feared that she had annoyed her somehow, that she had said something stupid. But Morgaine's voice was calm when she spoke.

'You didn't have a nightmare last night, little one. What you felt was a Dementor.'

'A Dementor?' Demeter was puzzled. 'Those foul things that guard Azkaban prison? Why would I feel one of those?'

'They are here,' Morgaine replied. 'Some of them, at least. I was hoping they were just shadows, that my overtired mind was playing tricks on me, but I fear that they are really here. And I fear that they are here for our sake.'

'Our sake? Why? What did we do?'

'We didn't do anything, little one. We are just not allowed to leave.'

'What? What do you mean, we're not allowed to leave? Who's keeping us?'

'Can't you guess?'

Demeter was confused. Why would anyone in the house want to keep her and her mother from leaving? Who would have a reason? They were Uncle Alek's guests, and Uncle Lucius was a guest himself. Aunt Aleksandra was very kind, and Melvin was her best friend. Would anyone of them lock up her mother and herself? It didn't make any sense.

But her mother looked deadly serious. The line between her eyes was deeper than ever, and Demeter could not understand how she could have missed the dark shadows under her mother's eyes.

'You need you to listen to me now, little one, very, very carefully,' Morgaine started. 'The one who is keeping us here is Lucius Malfoy. I know you think that he is a nice man as he is treating you and Melvin to all kind of fun adventures, but let me tell you that Lucius Malfoy never does anything out of the goodness of his heart.'

Demeter was at the edge of her seat. It seemed unbelievable that Lucius Malfoy, who had taught her and Melvin to bewitch snowmen to dance and organised a sleigh ride, would be anything but nice. But why would Mother lie?

'Lucius Malfoy has been a Death Eater,' Morgaine continued. 'He claims to have been one of the Dark Lord's most loyal followers, but what he was really after was wealth, power and glory. And as long as the Dark Lord could provide him with those things, Lucius would play along. Today he is still a very rich and very powerful wizard, but ever since the Dark Lord was defeated, Lucius has been forced to keep a low profile. And now, I think, he is bored. I think, he wishes to return to the old ways.'

Demeter frowned. 'What does all of this have to do with us?' she asked and was surprised to see her mother smile.

'You're the daughter of Severus Snape. Many followers of the Dark Lord, Lucius included, still think that your father had been the Dark Lord's most loyal servant, and that he, with his dying breath, tricked Harry Potter into believing otherwise so his name would be washed clean.'

'But father would never ...'

'Of course not, little one. You and I both know that. But Lucius ... Lucius thinks otherwise. And he wants to complete the task your father according to Lucius himself never had a chance to start. He wants to groom you, so you can follow in his footsteps.'

'Me?' Demeter couldn't help but laugh. This was just ridiculous. Why would anyone think that she would follow an ideology whose lunatic leader had been dead for years? But her mother seemed to be very serious.

'Lucius knows you and I can speak Parseltongue, a gift which is considered to be a dark one.'

Demeter opened her mouth to protest, but her mother silenced her with a gesture of her hand.

'For Lucius, possessing a gift that is considered dark is the equivalent of being a dark witch or wizard. And so he thinks that we, you and I, could help him reach his goals, to once more obtain the power he held when he was close to the Dark Lord.'

'But we can't help him!' Demeter burst out. 'I'd never make a snake hurt someone or anything. I'd use this gift to do good. And so would you, wouldn't you? We're not dark witches!'

'No, we are not,' Morgaine replied quietly. 'But we will have to prove it. This is why I have to ask you to be careful around Lucius, little one. No matter how many marvellous things he promises you, listen to your heart first. I trust that you can make the right decision.'

Demeter felt her heart beat hard in her chest. Her mother was so serious and seemed at the same time so calm. And what she was saying almost sounded as if ...

'Mother, will you be leaving me?' Demeter asked in a fearful tone.

Morgaine shook her head. 'I am not going anywhere. But I fear Lucius will try to keep us apart. He knows I made my choice years ago and that I chose the Light. He considers me a lost cause.' She smiled sadly. 'I will do everything in my power to be close to you.'

'Is that a promise?'

'Yes, little one. It's a promise.'

~ ~ ~

Demeter refused to go to sleep after dinner, and Morgaine couldn't blame her. The girl had so many questions: about Lucius' motives, about her role in his plans and about her parents' role. But most of all, the girl was afraid. Afraid that she would be separated from her mother, afraid that she would have to stand up against Lucius alone. And as much as Morgaine tried to convince her daughter that Lucius was not about to harm her, Demeter could not be reassured.

It broke Morgaine's heart. Her little one had always been so brave. She had been the first in her class to mount her broom in flying lesson, according to Madam Hooch. She had been the first and only one of the first year Gryffindors to have the guts to crouch down at the edge of the Black Lake, extend her hand to pat the Giant Squid. And she had been the only one not to shrink back when Alek had shown his Defence class a very hairy and very vicious looking creature that had been hiding in a dark cupboard in his classroom. But now the little Gryffindor lioness was scared, and there was nothing Morgaine could do about it.

With a loud crack, Lucius' elf arrived in the room some minutes after eleven, announcing that her master would arrive shortly, and Morgaine watched her daughter furtively wipe her eyes with her sleeve. They were the last tears Demeter shed that night, and when Lucius arrived, dressed in his best robes and sporting his most charming smile, Demeter stood tall and proud, just like it suited the daughter of Severus Snape, and followed Lucius out of the room without looking back.

Morgaine, however, stared at the door a long time after Lucius had locked it from the outside. What he was planning to do with Demeter that night, she did not know. He would probably try to make her perform Dark magic as to prove that not only the Dark Lord's blood but also his spirit resided in the girl. Hopefully, Demeter would be strong enough to resist. And Morgaine hoped that she would be able to help the child.

Shortly before midnight, she knelt down before the fireplace, clasping a silver pendent in her hand: a Phoenix, holding three obsidians in its claws. Demeter had never noticed that Morgaine had unclasped the necklace the last time they had hugged.

With some difficulties, Morgaine detached the obsidians from the Phoenix's claws and put them in a line in front of the fire. The Phoenix, she clasped around her own neck, together with the Wyvern Severus had gifted her with the first night they had spent together. He had told her that it was a charm and that it would help her achieve anything she wanted. Now she hoped that he had been right.

She picked up the first obsidian and closed her fingers around it, holding it over the fire, so close that she could feel the flames lick her skin. But the pain did not matter. The spell had burnt her skin already the first time she had cast it.

'Obsidian, black as his hair, black as his eyes,

Guard her from harm, make her think twice.'

Morgaine closed her eyes and thought of Demeter, willing her to listen carefully to everything Lucius told her.

'Listen and then think, little one,' she whispered into the flames. 'Think hard and carefully.'

She dropped the obsidian into the fire and picked up the second one, holding it even closer to the flames than the first.

'Sharp as his tongue, sharp as his pain,

Keep her clear-eyed and true, not vain.'

Again, she saw her child in front of her inner eye. The girl was standing tall in front of Lucius, who was smiling ever so indulgently.

'Don't believe a word, he tells you, little one,' Morgaine warned her daughter. 'He will promise you the moon, if it suits him. But he will keep it to himself, and you will be left with nothing.'

She dropped the second obsidian into the flames, and picked up the third. But her eyes were drawn towards the two stones in the fire. And as she stared at them, lying right beside each other, a new image formed in her mind, the image of two obsidian eyes.

She inhaled sharply, but not due to the pain that shot through her as she held the black stone dangerously close to the flames. She had just realised something. She had indeed felt him last night. When she had been looking into the reflection of her own eyes in the window, she had felt him, heard him. She had thought that her over-tired mind had been playing tricks on her, that she had finally snapped, but now she understood that Severus had been looking for her, and that he had actually found her.

Would she be able to call him back? Would she be able to let him know that their child was in danger and that they needed his help?

'Hard as your courage, hard as your will,

Defend her from those who wish her ill.'

Her eyes still firmly attached to the two stones, she lowered her hand into the flames. She should pull it back, she knew that, but she didn't dare. For the sake of her child and her own, she had to try this.

'Obsidian formed in Earth's fiery core,

I ask protection for your child that I bore.'

She opened her hand and let the third obsidian fall into the fire, still staring at the first two. But they weren't stones anymore. They were his eyes. Not the eyes of the ghost, but the eyes of the man. Obsidian black, deep and bottomless as the Black Lake. And they widened in shock as he caught sight of her.

'Morgaine!'

How she had done it, Morgaine did not know. All she knew was that she, all of a sudden, was standing in the dungeons of Hogwarts, looking right up at Severus Snape. Or at least, her spirit was.

Back in Estonia, her body had collapsed in front of the dying fire.

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A/N: Thanks go to Memory for the motherly advice.

# XXXVII: The Serpent's Revenge

Chapter 37 of 40

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

## Chapter XXXVII: The Serpent's Revenge

'Morgaine.'

Severus' shock and surprise seemed to have tied his tongue, and he was unable to utter anything but her name, over and over again. For some moments, he even wondered if it were possible for ghosts to go insane. Morgaine couldn't be standing in front of him. It was impossible. Yet there she was, just as transparent as he was, except for her eyes.

Severus moved closer, still speechless, to examine the apparition of which he was certain was Morgaine. She was, if possible, even more transparent than a ghost. If he had to, Severus would describe her appearance as a mist, impossible to grasp and fleeting enough to disappear in the wind. But the eyes, they were real. Blue like the spring sky, his guiding lights in the dark. They shone like two sapphires in the gloom of the dungeon and were looking right at him.

'How is this possible?' Severus breathed as he finally found his voice again. 'How can you be here?'

Morgaine didn't answer, and Severus concluded that his mind was indeed playing tricks on him, that he was just imagining her being here, just as he had imagined seeing her eyes the night before. She couldn't be there with him. Unless ...

'Are you dead?' he asked, his voice trembling now. It would be an explanation. If Morgaine were indeed dead, surely her ghost would come to seek him out to take him with her to wherever she was going. After all, he had been waiting for her all those years.

But no! Morgaine couldn't be dead. She mustn't be!

'I need your help, Severus,' she said suddenly, looking slightly surprised that there were words coming out of her mouth. 'Our child is in danger.'

Blue eyes locked on to black ones, and within seconds, Severus knew everything. All the things Morgaine had gone through since the clock had struck midnight on the last night of December were as clear in his mind as if he himself had experienced them. He knew about the enchantments that had been put around the Riverbed Manor, about Lucius and his demented plans, the snakes, the Dementors and the death of Alek Riverbed. And he knew about the danger Morgaine and Demeter were in; Demeter because she was in the hands of a lunatic, and Morgaine because she had breached the ancient laws of magic by leaving her body. She was not allowed to be where she was now.

As the connection broke, he hesitated for a moment. There was a little voice in the back of his mind telling him not to act. But he refused to listen. He mustn't listen.

'I will inform Minerva,' he announced. 'With the help of your information, the Aurors will have something to go on. It might take some time, but they should be able to find the manor.'

He never gave Morgaine time to answer, but vanished into thin air. He did not dare tell her that he would right back and that he hoped that she would wait for him.

~ ~ ~

Demeter listened carefully to everything Lucius told her about old, noble Wizard families, their values and the superiority of Wizardkind. He was passionate, and there was a gleam in his eyes that made it hard not to be fascinated. But Demeter remembered her mother's words well. She must not be blinded by his tales.

Now and then, Lucius would pause and ask if Demeter had understood, and she would always nod and reiterate what he had said. It wasn't hard. Demeter had always been a good listener and a quick learner. When her great-grandmother had taught her about herbs and plants in Iceland, she had never been allowed to write anything down and had therefore practised her skills of learning things by heart already at an early age. Even at Hogwarts, she rarely took notes, much to the annoyance of some teachers. From others, however, she earned praise.

Iceland and Hogwarts. Demeter felt something tighten in her stomach. Would she ever see those two places again? Or would Lucius keep her and her mother here in Estonia forever? But he couldn't do that, could he? Surely, if they hadn't returned at the start of term, people would come looking for them. Maybe, her great-grandmother had already wondered why they had not come to Iceland and had contacted certain people. But how would anyone find them here? Alek had said that the manor was Unplottable.

'Demeter, are you listening?'

Oh no! Demeter anxiously bit her lip. She had been so absorbed by her own thoughts that she had lost track of what Lucius had been saying. Would he be angry with her now?

But to her surprise, Lucius was kind. 'It's my fault,' he announced, crossing his hands in front of his chest and bowing in an apologetic gesture. 'I am blabbering, and if there is something sweet girls your age don't appreciate, then it is blabbering old men. I will have my elf bring us some sandwiches. Would you like some tea?'

Very politely, Demeter accepted his offer, yet silently wondered why on earth Lucius would offer her tea and sandwiches in the middle of the night. Surely, it must soon be two o'clock in the morning.

He told her to wait for him and left the room, and Demeter dutifully kept sitting on the sofa, looking around. For the first time since she had entered the room, she dared be curious.

She hadn't been in this room before, which she found odd. Melvin had said that he had shown her every room in the manor. Well, maybe he wasn't allowed to be in this room. It looked like a kind of library, and most probably, children were not allowed there. They could, for example, break some of the curious objects that stood on the table by the window. Some of them looked very old and fragile, others just plain weird.

Demeter slid off the sofa, but hesitated after a couple of steps. She should probably stay in her seat and leave the objects alone, she told herself. Lucius would certainly be angry with her if he caught her snooping around. But he had been gone for quite some time now, and Demeter was getting bored. She would only look, she promised



herself. That couldn't hurt, now could it?

She did indeed not touch anything, but some objects Demeter examined so closely that the tip of her nose almost brushed them. But only almost. She knew better than to touch things of which she knew nothing. They could be dangerous.

At the left edge of the table, closest to the window, lay a blue glass orb. Or at least, it seemed blue at times. Weren't there figures moving in it, Demeter wondered.

She edged closer, leaning over the table to get a better look, supporting herself against the window frame with her left hand so she wouldn't lose her balance. Yes, there were indeed figures moving around in the orb. Some of them, she thought she recognised.

A shadow flitted by. But not in the orb. Another, right outside the window.

Demeter quickly straightened up, staring out into the dark night. Tall, hooded figures were towering outside the window. Three, four, maybe even five. They seemed to be looking at her.

Dementors.

Demeter gave a little shriek and started to back away, but it didn't do any good. It felt as if one of those gruesome figures outside had reached through the window and gripped her heart with its long, icy fingers.

Demeter felt desperate and frightened. Suddenly, she was scared that she would never see her mother again, that she would be kept prisoner in the manor forever, and that her father would never know where she was.

'Go away,' Demeter whispered, her voice shaking. 'Leave me alone. I didn't do anything. Please, go away.'

But of course, the Dementors did not move. It is not in the nature of a Dementor to listen to pleading. Instead, they kept hovering silently outside the window, heartlessly staring down at the black-haired girl who had now crawled up in a corner of the sofa with her arms wrapped around her knees and her blue eyes filling up with tears.

~ ~ ~

Minerva didn't waste any time with asking questions about how Severus could suddenly know all those details about the Riverbed Manor. Instead, she immediately contacted Kingsley, not caring about the late hour or the Minister of Magic seeing her in her dressing gown. And by the time Severus returned to the dungeon, Kingsley had already roused the Estonian Minister of Magic and set heaven and hell in motion. But Severus cared little about what the Ministers and their Aurors could do. His priorities lay elsewhere.

He didn't materialise into his old study at once, but into the dark corridor outside. There he paused, staring at the heavy oak door. Was Morgaine still there, he wondered. Was she waiting for him?

He thought back at the moment when she had first appeared in front of him. He had been surprised, slightly shocked, then confused and in the end ... yes, if he were honest with himself, he would admit that he had been pleased somehow. This was how it was supposed to be, was it not? He and Morgaine belonged by each other's side, and as he would never return to a human form, it was only right that ... that she would come and join him.

No! Severus mentally slapped himself. He was not allowed to have these thoughts. The apparition on the other side of his door was not Morgaine's ghost. It was just an image, a messenger. Morgaine wasn't dead. And if the Estonian Aurors did their job properly, she wouldn't die that night either.

If he could make her return to her body, that was.

'She must return,' Severus growled, trying to convince himself and at the same time drown the little voice that was still nagging in the back of his mind. She must return! As much as Severus longed to have Morgaine by his side, he knew that her time had not come yet. And she had not come to be with him. She had come because Demeter, their child, needed their help.

'You should not be here, Morgaine,' he said firmly as he entered the room, half-heartedly trying to avoid looking at her. But her blue eyes seemed to be calling for him, and eventually he looked right into them. 'You need to return to your body.'

'I know.'

Morgaine's voice was feeble and shaking slightly, and Severus could see in her eyes that she had similar thoughts as he had. She, too, wanted to stay. And she, too, knew that she couldn't.

'Come with me,' she said quietly.

'Come with you?' Severus frowned. 'How can I come with you?'

'There are three obsidians lying in the embers. I will need them to return. If you concentrate on them, if you hold on to me ...'

'And then what?' Severus had to admit that he was reluctant. By leaving her body, Morgaine had already ventured into unknown fields of magic. What would happen if she went even further? What would happen if he did hold on to her? Would they ever be able to let go of each other again?

'I doubt I will have the strength or the courage to walk right past my body if I return to Estonia alone,' Morgaine confessed. 'And once I'm back in my earthly shell I will be no help for Demeter. I cannot leave the room. I have no wand. And I doubt that my magic would be strong enough to fight Lucius anyway.' She reached out a transparent hand for him. 'Demeter needs you. You promised.'

He had promised, indeed. And now Severus knew that Morgaine had taken his words and weaved them into a spell. He was linked to the obsidians just as much as Morgaine and Demeter, just as they were all linked with each other.

They moved closer, merged like two shadows and became one. Darkness closed in on them, and for some moments, Severus thought it was going to consume him. But then there was a fire, and the darkness began to shrink. And before he knew it, all that was left of the dark were three black stones.

~ ~ ~

'Drink your cocoa,' Lucius encouraged Demeter, looking down at her with what only could be interpreted as real concern. 'You look peaky.'

The way Demeter felt, she doubted whether all the cocoa in the world could do her any good. But she drank dutifully. If nothing else the hot cocoa would surely warm her up a bit. She was freezing.

'There, I had a feeling that some chocolate would go down better than tea and cucumber sandwiches.' Lucius was beaming. 'Your cheeks are already rosier.'

To her surprise, Demeter did feel better. She was still cold, but at least she did not feel as desolate anymore. That feeling, if she were honest, had started to disappear about ten minutes ago, when those foul beings outside the window had tired of staring at her and had drifted away. And shortly after, Lucius had come back, with hot cocoa and biscuits, and Demeter had barely been able to keep herself from wrapping her arms around him. Mother had said not to trust him, but at the moment, Lucius Malfoy was a knight in shining armour. It seemed as if he himself had driven the Dementors away and saved Demeter from eternal despair.

He continued his lecture, now and then pausing to ask Demeter about her opinion on a certain topic, and she answered him willingly and honestly, not even noticing how he twisted her answers and made them fit his expectations.

'I won't be long,' he assured her an hour later, his hand already on the doorknob. 'Smile for me when I come back, alright?'

Demeter nodded bravely, but she could not stop herself from glancing at the window where she could swear that she already saw the shadows gathering. And she desperately hoped that Lucius would hold his promise and return soon.

~ ~ ~

'What is Lucius playing at?' Morgaine whispered to Severus. They were standing by the window, invisible to human eyes, had done so for almost half an hour. Most probably, the Dementors had not seen them either.

'He is trying to make Demeter trust him,' Severus replied, his eyes firmly on Lucius. After having shared some chocolate cookies with Demeter, he had given her back her wand, and together they were now conjuring butterflies out of thin air.

'The Dementors appear as soon as Lucius leaves the room, and when he returns, they are gone,' Severus continued. 'Demeter will link the two events in her mind ...'

'And think that Lucius is the one driving the Dementors away.'

'A clever move from Lucius' side,' Severus admitted. 'Demeter is so afraid of the Dementors that she will soon do anything for Lucius, just so he will stay with her. There will be no need for him to force her or to threaten her into doing anything. She will do it voluntarily.'

'And soon it won't be about conjuring butterflies anymore.'

Severus nodded. He knew Lucius. He knew that the blond wizard would not rest until his goal was achieved. And if his goal was to let Demeter perform a Dark spell, a spell that would drag the girl into the depths of Darkness, Lucius would succeed. At any cost.

~ ~ ~

'I bet you are Professor Sprout's favourite student,' Lucius looked admirably at the rose Demeter was holding out towards him. It was dark red, and its scent seemed to be filling the whole room already, even though it had been dead and shrivelled up only minutes ago. 'Tell me about your wand, Demeter.'

'The core is made up of unicorn hair,' Demeter declared, beaming. Lucius had taken the rose she had re-awakened from her hand and was now inhaling its scent. He seemed to be very impressed by her skills. 'Unicorn hair is symbolic for healing and eternal life. Mother told me.'

'No wonder you can make dead flowers bloom then.' Lucius smiled. 'Has your mother told you anything about the kind of wood your wand is made of?'

Demeter swallowed hard. She knew almost nothing about the magical qualities of yew. Would Lucius be disappointed with her now?

'It's quite springy,' she blurted out. Professor Flitwick had pointed that out to her once. So it had to be of some importance. 'And there are a lot of yew trees growing in the Forbidden Forest.' That, she had been told by Professor Sprout. And now she could think of nothing more.

But Lucius didn't seem too disappointed. 'Yew trees,' he started slowly, 'are symbolic of death and resurrection. And your wand, dear child, will help us both to greatness.'

~ ~ ~

Once more, Lucius left, taking Demeter's wand with him. And Severus helplessly watched his daughter crawl up on the sofa with a pillow tightly hugged to her chest and her eyes flitting towards the window. The mere fact that Lucius had left seemed to terrify her, and when the Dementors appeared, the frightened girl was easy prey for them.

'We have to do something!' Severus exclaimed. The presence of the Dementors affected even him, and he was a mere ghost. He could only imagine the horror his daughter must feel.

'Materialise,' Morgaine suggested, her eyes anxiously darting between the Dementors and Demeter. 'Show her that she's not alone.'

Severus nodded.

'But don't tell her I am here.'

'Why not?' Severus demanded to know.

'This spell even frightens me, and I am the one who cast it. I don't think it's the right time to tell Demeter that her mother has left her body.'

No, probably not. But still, Severus was uncomfortable. Why would Morgaine want to hide?

Demeter's sobs ripped him out of his thoughts, however, and upon Morgaine's pleading, Severus materialised, postponing his questions.

'Don't be frightened, Demeter,' he said softly. 'You are not alone anymore.'

Demeter's head snapped up so quickly, Severus imagined hearing her neck snap.

'Father!' she exclaimed. 'What ... what are you doing here?'

'I promised once that I would always be there when you needed me. I am here to fulfil that promise.'

More Dementors were closing in on the window, Severus could see them from the corner of his eye. There were at least ten of them now. Demeter caught sight of them too, flinched and hugged her pillow tighter towards herself, trying to hide behind it. 'Make them ... make them go away,' she brought forth between sobs. 'Please, Father.'

Her plea seemed to rip Severus' heart into in two. How had his little girl deserved such horror? And how could he help her?

A *Patronus*, he communicated wordlessly to Morgaine. *Help me conjure a Patronus.*

*How?* Morgaine asked. *My magic is weak. And I don't have a wand.*

'I need you to think of something that makes you happy,' Severus said aloud, addressing both Morgaine and Demeter at the same time. 'Give me the best memory you have.'

Demeter sniffled. 'I can't,' she sobbed. 'I can't think of anything that makes me happy.'

*Help her, Morgaine,* Severus begged. But he wouldn't have had to ask. Morgaine had already moved behind their daughter, and as Severus looked into their direction now, he could see two pairs of heavenly blue eyes. And in that moment, he knew at least which happy memory that he was going to concentrate on.

'Mother,' Demeter whispered, and Severus did not know if the girl sensed Morgaine's presence or if she was telling him that her happiest memory was connected to her mother. But it didn't matter. Demeter was ready, and so was he. Looking deep into the blue eyes, he cast the spell.

At first, he could not make out the shape the Patronus had taken. It was moving too fast as it was charging towards the window and making the Dementors retreat in a matter of seconds. But when it came back, Severus froze. He had not expected a serpent. It seemed absurd that his magic would have been partly responsible for conjuring such a shape. After all, he had been killed by a serpent. Morgaine seemed equally taken aback, and considering the experience she had had with snakes over the last few days, Severus could not blame her. Demeter, however, seemed not surprised at all.

'I was thinking of you and Mother,' she said quietly, watching the serpent curl up at her feet. 'You were Head of Slytherin House, and Mother holds this position now. And no one has ever protected me as well as you two.'

Severus nodded slowly, observing the now slowly dissolving serpent. It wasn't hard to imagine a fierce cobra that would hold and defend its ground, hissing and spitting at any threat, rather than retreat. And just like snakes had served as guardians for treasures and sacred sites around the world for centuries, this serpent was now protecting his daughter.

'The Aurors are on their way,' Severus explained. 'I hope they will be arriving soon. But until then, keep a cool head, Demeter. Lucius is not going to harm you. You are too precious to him. There is no reason to be afraid.'

Demeter's eyes widened in fear once more. 'You're not leaving me, are you? I can't conjure that Patronus by myself.'

'You have no reason to be frightened, Demeter,' Severus repeated. 'I will be right here by your side.'

~ ~ ~

When the door opened, Demeter expected Lucius to come back and pretended to be upset again. Her father had told her that Lucius expected her to be frightened and that it was best to play along. And so Demeter once more hid behind her pillow and even managed to squeeze forth a tear.

But to her surprise, the mop of blond hair that appeared in the door was short and the eyes blue as opposed to silvery-grey.

'Melvin!'

The two children embraced, both overjoyed to see each other. But before they could tell each other anything of how they had spent the night so far, Lucius interrupted them.

'Touching.' He sneered. 'Unfortunately, we have no time for this now.' He threw Demeter a cloak. 'Let us go for a walk, shall we? Some fresh air will do you both good.'

Neither of the children dared oppose, and neither of them spoke as they followed Lucius down the corridor towards the big glass door that led out onto the terrace. But every now and then, Demeter cast a furtive glance over her shoulder, wondering if her father was coming along. He had promised that he wouldn't leave her alone, after all. Oh, if she could only tell Melvin! He looked so terribly frightened.

They crossed the terrace and made their way down the stairs into the backyard. There, at the edge of the ice skating field, was a cauldron standing in the snow, and beneath it, there was a fire burning.

'Your mother, Demeter, kindly assisted me with this potion,' Lucius explained as he ushered the children closer to the cauldron. 'It has been maturing for thirteen hours, and now you two are going to help me finish it.'

'Where is my mother?' Demeter demanded to know, but Lucius didn't seem to want to give her an answer.

'We don't need your mother now, my child,' he said instead. 'In fact, you and I will soon not need anyone anymore.'

The potion had come to a boil, and Lucius moved closer. The flames were reflecting in his eyes, and Demeter instinctively took a step backwards. He looked mad.

'Yes! Now, the final ingredients.' Lucius smiled ever so sweetly. 'Normally, this potion would require four people. But, luckily, you two combine all I need. You, Melvin, in your veins runs the blood of the father as well as the blood of a devoted servant. And in you, Demeter, runs the blood of the enemy and the blood of the Dark Lord himself. You two, my children, are perfect.'

The children looked questioningly at each other. Neither of them understood what Lucius was talking about. But neither of them dared ask. Not now. Something in Lucius' face has changed. His smile seemed more like a twisted sneer, and his eyes had become as cold as ice. He looked dangerous, deranged.

'Melvin, you first,' Lucius said, reaching out his hand towards the boy.

'First what?'

'What do you think, silly child?' Lucius hissed and grabbed Melvin by his left wrist. 'Your blood needs to be added first.'

Melvin tried to pull his arm away from Lucius, but the blond wizard held his wrist in an iron grip. 'Roll up your sleeve, boy,' he commanded, pulling a silver dagger out of a pocket of his robes with his free hand.

'No, Melvin, don't!' Demeter yelled, but Melvin was already doing as he had been told.

'Good boy,' Lucius praised Melvin in a sickeningly sweet tone. 'You wouldn't want me to send our friends to visit your mother again, would you, son?'

Melvin vehemently shook his head. 'No, sir,' he whimpered. 'I'll do anything. Please, don't send them back.'

'Send who back?' Demeter demanded to know, but at the same time the words left her lips, she knew. She should have understood the moment she had seen the look in Melvin's eyes. He, too, was frightened. He, too, had met the Dementors.

Melvin didn't struggle as Lucius' dagger penetrated the flesh of his left forearm. But he screamed with pain as the blade cut all the way from the crook of his arm to his wrist. Demeter clutched her hands over her mouth, muffling a scream. She wasn't of the squeamish kind, but the look on Lucius' face scared her more than even the Dementors had. He seemed to be enjoying himself, and Demeter doubted that he would even hesitate to cut Melvin's throat. If he thought it necessary, Lucius would certainly do that, too, without batting an eyelash.

The silvery potion started to hiss angrily as Melvin's blood trickled into it, and for a moment, Demeter thought the concoction would boil over or even explode. But after only some moments, hissing subsided, and once more, the surface of the potion was as smooth as glass. Lucius let go of Melvin, and the boy sank to his knees, clutching his arm and whimpering pitifully. But Lucius did not seem to care. He had only eyes for the potion, which he was now stirring with slow, regular motions.

Demeter took the opportunity to run to her best friend, pulling him some feet away from Lucius and the cauldron. The cut on Melvin's arm was deep and bleeding profusely, and Demeter could not think of anything better to do than wrap her handkerchief around the cut.

'Don't worry,' she whispered, cradling the weeping boy towards her chest. 'This cut can be mended in no time. It will stop hurting soon.' She cast a glance towards Lucius. He seemed busy still, and she dared to tell Melvin. 'We're not alone. Father says the Au...'

She didn't get around to finishing the sentence. Lucius had come rushing towards them with swift strides, grabbed her by her wrist and was now dragging her back towards the cauldron, just as he had done with Melvin. The dagger was already in his hand.

'It is your turn now, my sweet.'

Demeter struggled. She kicked and bit, but the only difference it made was Lucius gripping her arm even tighter. And he was laughing now, a cold, deranged laughter that made the hair on Demeter's neck stand up.

'There is no point in struggling, dear child. Your fate has been sealed. You will revive the Dark Lord.'

'I will not!' Demeter spat and aimed a good kick towards Lucius' shin.

He, however, spun her around like a puppet, pressing her towards his chest and trapping her with his arm.

'Don't make this difficult for yourself, little princess. I would very much prefer to have you in one piece.'

'Take your filthy hands off my daughter, Lucius Malfoy!'

Lucius' head snapped upwards, and so did Demeter's. They both gasped. In front of them stood a tall and imposing figure with a black cloak that seemed to be billowing behind him in the wind, creating the image of an enormous black bird swooping down on his prey. And his eyes! They seemed to reflect the fires of hell.

A shriek escaped Demeter's lips. She was used to seeing the ghost of her father, and she had expected for him to show himself now that she was in danger, but what she was looking at right now was a sight beyond anything. She seemed to be looking at the devil himself.

'Severus!' Lucius exclaimed. 'This can't be. You're dead!'

'Let go of my child!' Severus demanded once more, his voice like rolling thunder. And as Lucius didn't react, he raised his hand, and out of thin air appeared a gigantic serpent. It reared its head at once and bared its fangs.

'Now!' Severus bellowed.

The serpent struck, and Lucius, cowardly as he was, pushed Demeter away from him, right into the beast's open jaws. But of course, the animal did not harm Demeter. It was a mere image, a shield to protect the one it was created for. And it had indeed protected Demeter from Lucius. It could not, however, keep her from falling. The only thing Demeter could hold on to in order to break her fall was the cauldron.

'NO!' Lucius screamed and cast himself forward, all of a sudden ignoring the serpent he had fled only seconds ago. 'Not the potion.'

*Potions classroom rule number one: Never, under any circumstances, try to catch a falling cauldron with your bare hands.*

Demeter heard her Potions mistress' words clearly in her head as she rolled out of harm's way.

Lucius, however, had either never heard about that rule or had forgotten about it. He caught the falling cauldron in his outstretched arms, and the seething potion scalded his hands. But he did not scream. In fact, he did not seem to care at all. Instead, he straightened up and busied himself with putting the cauldron onto its tripod again.

'I can still carry out my plan!' he whispered triumphantly. Obviously, he had managed to catch the cauldron just in time, and with that saved some of the potion. 'The Dark Lord shall rise again tonight!'

He swirled around, his mad eyes darting around in the semi-darkness to find Demeter. That was when his robes caught fire. They were soaked with potion, and within seconds they were ablaze.

At first, Lucius did not seem to understand what was happening. He stood tall, his hands still clutching the handle of the cauldron. He only let go when the agony forced him onto his knees.

Some feet away, Melvin and Demeter lay in each other's arms, tightly huddled together and burying their faces at each other's shoulders. They never saw in what gruesome way Lucius Malfoy had to die. And thanks to Severus' Silencing spell, they did not have to listen to his death screams either.

By the time the Aurors finally arrived, all they could find in the backyard of the manor was smouldering ashes and two crying and exhausted children, who were unable to recount what had happened that night. They never saw the two ghosts that had been watching over them.

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A/N: The chariot-car of the Greek Goddess Demeter was drawn by a pair of winged Drakones (serpent-like beasts). The goddess also employed these monsters as guards and attendants. It seemed fitting for a Patronus conjured by Severus, Morgaine and Demeter to take shape of a serpent.

Thank you, star\_girl, for pointing me into the right direction!

## XXXVIII: Tying Up Loose Ends

*Chapter 38 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XXXVIII: Tying Up Loose Ends

Both children were fast asleep. Poppy had chosen two beds by the window, from which one could overlook the snow-covered grounds of Hogwarts. Melvin and Demeter would wake up to a familiar sight and, hopefully, a sunny morning.

They had been at Hogwarts for a bit over twenty-four hours now. The Estonian Aurors had brought them to the Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries in Tallinn for observation, but Poppy and Minerva had marched in only half an hour later to take them all home to Scotland. Aleksandra, however, had been in quite a state, and Poppy

had judged it wiser to transport her to St. Mungo's. But the children and Morgaine had been brought to Hogwarts. There, Melvin's arm had been treated, and then both he and Demeter had been given Calming Draughts and Sleeping Potions. And now, they were blissfully asleep.

Severus sighed. Blissful, indeed. Thanks to a well-placed Memory Charm, neither of the children would remember anything that had happened during their last night at Riverbed Manor. Once they woke up, they would be served with a carefully rehearsed story about the events at the manor. Severus had discussed this option thoroughly with Minerva and had not even minded Dumbledore giving his five Knuts. After all, the old man had for once been thinking straight. There was no need for the children to remember their encounters with the Dementors, no need for them to remember Lucius' lunacy. And they had also agreed that Demeter was better off not knowing anything about her bonds to the Dark Lord just yet. Instead, the children would be told that there had been a fire, in which Alek and Lucius had died and Aleksandra had been injured. What they would tell them about Morgaine, however, Severus did not know.

'I don't know what more to do, Minerva.' Poppy's voice sounded from across the room, and Severus turned to face the matron and the Headmistress, who were standing at Morgaine's bedside. They couldn't see him, as he had not materialised, and he thought it just as well. They would only ask him for advice. And he had none to give.

'There are no physical injuries,' Poppy continued. 'She should be awake. The Head Healer from St. Mungo's said so, too. I'm at a loss.'

For the umpteenth time, she cast a diagnostic spell over Morgaine's seemingly lifeless body. And for the umpteenth time, the spell confirmed what she had already said. Except from being exhausted, there was nothing wrong with Morgaine. And still, for some inexplicable reason, her vital signs were growing feebler by the hour.

'It is almost as if she doesn't want to wake up,' Poppy said sadly, and Minerva laid a comforting hand on the matron's shoulder, quietly looking back over her own. And Severus couldn't help but wonder if the Headmistress knew that he was present.

Slowly, he turned to address the shadowy figure that was standing right beside him. She had been there since shortly after midnight, and it very much seemed as if she belonged there.

'You have to go back, Morgaine,' he said, unheard by anyone in the hospital wing except the woman he was talking to. 'Your body is dying.'

'Are you sending me away?'

She did not even look at her body, hadn't done so once. And Severus knew why. She was afraid that her body would pull her back, and he knew that she did not want to leave him. But he also knew that she had to.

Severus slowly shook his head. Heavens, no! He wasn't sending her away! With Morgaine by his side, he felt complete for the first time in many years. If it were up to him he would hold onto her and never let her go. And he knew that if he asked her to stay, Morgaine would gladly do so. But he couldn't be that selfish.

'Demeter needs you now,' he said quietly. 'She needs to be told about her heritage, and she will need your guidance to find the right path. You cannot leave her now.'

He watched Morgaine turn towards the window, where Demeter was still sleeping soundly. She was torn, Severus could sense that clearly. She didn't want to return. And who was he to make her? Hadn't she done enough? Hadn't she sacrificed enough? Wasn't it time for her to finally be allowed to decide over her own life? Her own death?

'What if I regret it?' Morgaine asked. 'What if I regret returning to my body and blame Demeter for it?'

She hadn't turned to face him, and Severus wasn't even sure if she had been talking to him or herself or if she even was aware that she had voiced her concerns aloud.

'Have you ever regretted having Demeter?' he answered her question with another. 'Have you ever wished this child had never been born?'

'No. No, of course not.' Morgaine moved closer to their daughter's bed and brushed the girl's black hair with a ghostly hand. 'I love Demeter with all my heart. I'd die for her.'

'Live for her instead, Morgaine,' Severus implored her, although he felt as if his heart were breaking. 'Return to your body, and take care of our child.'

Morgaine turned to face him, and blue eyes locked onto black ones as so many times before. And Severus could sense that she was torn.

'Will you be waiting for me?' she asked, her voice not much more than a whisper. 'Will I find you when I die?'

'You have already found me once. And I have no intentions of leaving you. I will always be right by your side, Morgaine. And when you die, many years from now, I will be waiting for you.'

They would move on together, Severus was certain of that now. That Morgaine had found him, that she had been able to leave her body and seek him out when she had needed him the most was his proof. They belonged together. And they would spend eternity by each other's side. What did it matter if they had to wait a couple of years?

Morgaine smiled at him. It was a sad and longing smile, but nonetheless it reached her eyes. As she brushed his cheek with ghostly fingers, Severus turned his face and planted the tenderest of kisses on her palm.

'Until we meet again, beloved.'

And so they took farewell, and as the first rays of sun touched the surface of the Black Lake, Morgaine faded and returned to the world of the living, the world in which she belonged.

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Professor Riverbed's memorial service was held on the second Saturday of January in the Great Hall of Hogwarts. The House banners had been lowered, and only the Hogwarts coat of arms still hung at full height. Not a seat was empty. Students, staff, ghosts and elves alike had gathered to take farewell of the young teacher. They were all mourning his passing, but only very few of them knew in what horrible way Alek had died.

Aleksandra had come as well. She was sitting in the front row between her son and Headmistress McGonagall, head bent and her hands buried in the folds of her robe. She looked terrible. There weren't any visible physical injuries, but her pale face and the fearful look in her eyes spoke volumes. There was a woman who had been hurt beyond imagination, and when Morgaine embraced Aleksandra after the service, she could literally feel the younger woman's pain.

She took her for a walk through the grounds, away from all the people. Aleksandra didn't need people to pat her shoulder and tell her what a lovely man her brother had been. She knew that. What she needed now was a friend.

The first time either of the women spoke was at the edge of the Black Lake.

'Did he suffer?' Aleksandra's voice was croaky, and it was clear that she was holding back tears.

Morgaine slowly shook her head, only now realising that she hadn't spoken to Aleksandra since the day Alek had been murdered. 'No. It went very quickly. I doubt Alek even had the time to realise what curse Lucius was throwing at him.'

'He came to tell me afterwards, you know. Lucius. He said there was no need for me to play the harlot anymore, that he had seen through the charade and punished Alek for his betrayal. And he said he'd kill Melvin next if we didn't cooperate.'

Morgaine frowned. If Lucius had threatened Aleksandra with killing her son, then that must mean that he had never told her how important Melvin had been for his plan. And if Aleksandra had believed him and feared for her son's life, that meant that Alek hadn't told her either. He had taken the name of their ancestor to the grave.

For some moments, Morgaine contemplated whether she should tell Aleksandra how much danger her son had been in, that not only Demeter but also Melvin had been a part of Lucius' plan to revive the Dark Lord. But what good would it do to tell Aleksandra that her great-grandfather had fathered the darkest wizards of the age?

It wouldn't do any good at all, Morgaine decided. She knew herself how much it hurt to know. She knew how it felt to lie awake at night, wondering if the blood in one's veins would one day turn into poison. She knew how it felt to be afraid of the Darkness within oneself. And so she held her peace. Aleksandra didn't need to know.

A flock of birds took flight from a tree, and Aleksandra flinched and ducked slightly, as if trying to avoid an attack. When she realised that there was nothing to be afraid of, she gave a shrill laugh.

'I'm terribly edgy nowadays,' she excused herself, nervously flattening her robes with her hands. 'Jumping at my own shadow, and seeing Dementors lurking in dark corners.'

'That is only natural. You have been through quite an ordeal over the last weeks.'

'Have I?' Again, Aleksandra laughed. 'How about you? You came for some days of peace and quiet and ended up a prisoner, in my house.'

She started to sob, and Morgaine took her into her arms, held her like a little child. 'Hush, Aleksandra. None of this is your fault.'

'I loved him.' Aleksandra was crying in earnest now. 'I really loved him once. I was so stupid.'

'No more stupid than any of the other witches he charmed.' Morgaine tenderly stroked Aleksandra's hair. Many were the witches Lucius Malfoy had wrapped around his little finger in his time. He had possessed the gift to make the most insignificant witch feel like a queen. He would have pretended to worship the ground they trod on and promised them the moon when it had served his purposes. And they had all believed him. Just as Aleksandra had.

'Is it wrong to feel happy that he's dead?'

'No, Aleksandra. It's not wrong,' Morgaine replied calmly, trying to find the words to explain why it wasn't wrong, but failing. She had been taught that every life was precious, even the most wretched ones, but the night Lucius Malfoy had died, Morgaine had defied her grandmother's teachings. She had wished him dead.

She could have saved him if she had wanted to. All she would have needed to do was ask Severus to help her. Even in his ghost form, he was more than capable of conjuring water, and together they could surely have saved Lucius' life. But they had chosen not to. Instead, Severus had turned his back on Lucius to shield the children, and Morgaine had moved closer to watch Lucius Malfoy die, willing the flames to burn slowly so he would have the time to suffer for all the pain he had caused in his life. If she had held power over fire that night, Morgaine did not know. Most probably, Lucius had died just as so many witches and wizards before him had, but she remembered the whole scene as precisely as if she had watched it in slow-motion.

She had watched the flames climb higher and higher, incinerating the expensive fabric of Lucius' tailored robes. She had watched his blond hair catch fire and turn to ashes. She had watched his alabaster skin blister in the heat. And she had watched his grey eyes widen in horror as he had finally realised what was happening. Only when he had fallen to his knees, his arms spread wide and his death cries ripping through the cold winter air, had Morgaine finally turned away. In the moment of his death, she had wanted Lucius Malfoy to be all alone. He had deserved to die lonely.

'Lucius was guilty of many crimes, Aleksandra,' Morgaine continued, now holding the younger woman at an arm's length to look into her puffy eyes. 'If he hadn't been that influential, if he hadn't had the means to wriggle himself out of it, Lucius would have been sent to Azkaban many years ago and suffered the Dementor's Kiss. I think he got off easy.'

They talked for quite some time at the edge of the Black Lake, about their children, their future, everything and nothing at all. Lucius Malfoy, however, they never mentioned again. They had decided that he was not worth their time.

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'I am worried about Morgaine, Severus. She looks so tired, and she hasn't been to the staff room after dinner for weeks. It's not like her to be so ...'

'Anti-social?' Severus suggested.

Minerva nodded and took a sip of her tea. It must be cold by now, Severus thought. She had held onto the cup for about twenty minutes and talked about the weather before she had plucked up the courage to tell Severus why she had come to the dungeons.

'Poppy has talked to Healer Rosewood at St. Mungo's,' Minerva went on. 'She says it is natural to feel exhausted after having used such powerful magic as Morgaine used to call you. But it doesn't explain her change of personality. It almost seems to me as if Morgaine is actively avoiding people.'

*She is avoiding ghosts as well,* Severus thought, but he didn't say it out loud. Minerva didn't need to know that Morgaine barely came down to the dungeons at all now. The Headmistress was worried enough as it was already.

'Will you talk to her, Severus?' Minerva urged. 'Will you try to persuade Morgaine to rest?'

Severus nodded silently, but deep inside, he doubted that Morgaine would listen to him. She had not listened to Poppy either, and stubbornly insisted on teaching all her lessons already on the first day of term, only three days after they had returned from Estonia. She had not rested, and she had certainly not processed the things she had been through.

'It's enough trouble for Minerva to find a Defence teacher in the middle of the school year,' she had argued. 'She won't have to look for a new Potions teacher as well, just because I am a bit under the weather.'

And so she had left the hospital wing to teach her classes and fulfil her duties as Head of House. She did her job well, but social, she was not. She would appear in the Great Hall for meals, patrol the corridors when it was her turn, but otherwise she wouldn't leave her quarters unless she had lessons to teach. Whether she slept at night, Severus did not know. There were many things he didn't know about Morgaine at the moment.

Something had changed between them. Ever since Morgaine had woken up in the hospital wing, she had seemed distant, and Severus could have sworn that she avoided his gaze. Also her mental barriers were fortified, and Severus did not dare to breach them. If she didn't want to share her troubles with him, he couldn't make her. Most probably, she had good reasons to distance herself from him.

Severus sighed. Somehow, he felt that everything was his fault. Why had he sent her back? Why had he not just held onto her and let her stay with him? Being together was what they both wanted, wasn't it? And still, he had insisted that she should return. But he had not forced her, had he? He had simply pointed out that her time had not come yet and their daughter needed her. In the end, it had been her decision.

Yes, it had been Morgaine's decision. But still, Severus could not get rid of the feeling that him sending her back to the world of the living had driven a wedge between them.

Little did he know that Morgaine's reasons for keeping her distance were of a completely different nature. Nor did he know that she was already looking for help.

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'Are you saying that now, all of a sudden, it is alright for everyone to know?' Morgaine didn't know why she was yelling at the portrait of her great-grandfather. She had

come to him to seek advice, since she had not known whom else to turn to, and now that he was giving her advice, she didn't want to take it. She was too confused.

'Not everyone, dear child. And now have a seat, I beg you.'

Without having noticed it, Morgaine had been pacing the office for a good ten minutes.

'Please, sit.'

It felt as if all the energy were flowing out of her as she more or less collapsed on the chair that was standing right in front of Dumbledore's portrait. And as so often over the last couple of weeks, unbidden tears welled up in her eyes. Stubbornly, she blinked them back.

'Why, afi? Why did you never tell me?'

'I was a fool, Morgaine,' the former Headmaster replied. 'I thought that shielding you, keeping you in the dark about your father, would help you choose the right path.'

'Did it work?' Morgaine asked cynically.

'Don't be silly, child. You know you are a good person. You have proven this over and over again. The way you cared for Severus and still do. The sacrifice you were willing to make for your child. I think your actions prove my theory that it is not our heritage that defines us, but our choices.'

'And still you think that I need to tell Demeter?'

'More for your sake than hers, to be honest, child. You cannot spend every waking hour being afraid that Demeter will find out by accident, as you did.'

Morgaine shook her head. The last thing she wanted was her daughter to come across their family secret as she had, by accident and without any explanations. Knowing that she had been able to cast a Dark curse already at a young age had haunted Morgaine for most of her life. She wished better for her child.

Demeter would be shocked, of course. Being told that one's grandfather was none other than the Dark Lord himself was big news for a twelve-year-old. But Morgaine trusted that Demeter would understand. After all, the girl had already stated very clearly that she would only use her gift of Parseltongue for good.

Yes, Demeter would understand, accept and stubbornly prove that she was nothing like her grandfather. But Demeter was not the only one who needed to be told.

'What about Severus?' Morgaine asked quietly. Her throat was too tight for her to speak up. 'He will feel deceived.'

'By me, if by anyone, dear child,' Dumbledore said patiently. 'And Severus has already made very clear what he thinks about me. I cannot blame him, really.' He absent-mindedly tugged at his slightly singed robes, but then quickly focused on Morgaine again. 'What are you afraid of, child? How do you think Severus will react when you tell him?'

'The Dark Lord has destroyed Severus' life,' she said in a desperate tone. 'For goodness' sake, the Dark Lord took his life. How do you think he will react?'

'If I am not mistaken, Morgaine, Severus once said that you were his reason to survive. And I think, him still being here is proof for that. He will not turn from you for your father's sake.'

Morgaine flinched.

'Is that what you are afraid of, child?' Dumbledore asked. 'Is that why you are pushing Severus away? So he cannot push you away?'

'What else can I do, afi?' The tears Morgaine had fought back so desperately were now rolling down her cheeks. 'I cannot bear him turning his back on me. Not now.'

'Severus won't turn away from you, Morgaine,' Dumbledore replied softly. 'Trust me, child. He won't. Especially not now.'

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'Welcome, Demeter. I am glad you found the time to join us on such a sunny afternoon. I am sure you would rather be playing Gobstones with Mr Riverbed.'

'Melvin has homework to do, so we wouldn't have been playing today anyway,' Demeter replied politely. 'Besides, I have been taught to comply when called.'

'Such diligence.' Dumbledore smiled. 'A trait you have inherited from your parents, no doubt. They, too, have always put duty before pleasure. It is not a bad trait to inherit, I think.'

'Probably not.' Demeter cast a glance towards her parents. The ghost of her father had nodded towards her when she had entered and was now hovering by the window, arms crossed and a scowl on his face. Her mother sat beside him, hands folded in her lap. She had smiled at Demeter, but now she looked very serious, and Demeter started to wonder if her hexing that annoying Slytherin second-year earlier that week was a more serious offence than she had thought. But Professor Sprout had only taken five House points from her and not even given her detention.

'The reason we called you here, Demeter,' Dumbledore interrupted her thoughts, 'is to discuss some other traits you might have inherited from your parents.'

Demeter frowned and looked up at the portrait of the former Headmaster. She knew, of course, that he was kin to her, but she had never really spoken to him. He had winked at her a couple of times from a portrait and wished her a good day, but that was about all. She also knew that her mother and Dumbledore hadn't really been on speaking terms for quite some years and found it therefore a little odd that Dumbledore would be speaking for her mother. But maybe, they were about to discuss something her mother didn't really want to speak of. That would certainly explain why she looked so uncomfortable. What made her father look like thunder, however, Demeter had no idea. Neither did she know why he kept his back resolutely turned towards Dumbledore. As far as she knew, the two men had been very close when they had been alive, and her father had put himself in great danger to fulfil Dumbledore's wishes.

Once more, Dumbledore interrupted Demeter's thoughts. 'Tell me, Demeter, what traits do you think I am speaking of?'

'Blue eyes and a hooked nose?'

The words escaped Demeter before she could stop them, and she immediately wondered if her answer had been inappropriate. The adults seemed all so terribly serious. But to her relief, Dumbledore smiled.

'You certainly have your mother's eyes. And yes, your father's nose. You are a very beautiful girl.'

No reaction from her father, Demeter realised. It was almost as if he weren't listening to Dumbledore. Mother's face, however, had been lit up by the tiniest of smiles.

'I think,' Demeter said after having thought about Dumbledore's question for some moments, 'I have inherited my Potions skills from my parents. I think I am quite good. But don't tell my Potions mistress. She'll just make me work harder.'

Dumbledore chuckled. 'Wherever did you get your sense of humour from, child? It's rather charming.'

Demeter smiled uncertainly. She was only trying to make jokes because she had started to feel just about as uncomfortable as her mother looked. Why couldn't she just say something, or Father? But instead, Dumbledore went on talking.

'Are there any other traits or abilities you could have inherited from your parents, child?'

Demeter swallowed. There was one ability. An ability she hadn't known about before the holidays. But she didn't want to tell Dumbledore. It was private, a secret between her mother and herself.

'He knows already, little one. Dumbledore knows that you and I can speak to snakes.' Morgaine was standing now, back straight and hands closed into fists so tightly that her nails were cutting into her palms. 'What we called you here for, Demeter, is to tell you why we can talk to snakes.'

'You said that the gift of Parseltongue runs in the family,' Demeter said. 'You said that your father had probably been a Parselmouth.'

Morgaine nodded slowly and opened her mouth as if to speak. But no sound came from her lips. Instead she looked pleadingly towards the portrait of Albus Dumbledore.

'Demeter,' the old man started, 'we have reasons to believe that your mother's father, your grandfather, was no other than the wizard who once called himself Lord Voldemort.'

'Lord Vo... What?' Demeter gaped at Dumbledore for a few moments, but as the old man didn't seem to have anything more to say for the time being, she turned back to her mother. 'You said you didn't know who your father was.'

Morgaine flinched. 'I don't know. I mean, I didn't know. I ... Demeter, I'm sorry.'

'We do not know for certain, Demeter,' Dumbledore started to explain. 'Your grandmother never told anyone about your grandfather. But as I said, we have reasons to believe ...'

'What kind of reasons?' Demeter knew that it was rude to interrupt. But she didn't care. Dumbledore had thrown the name Voldemort at her without any explanation, and it didn't seem likely that she would get any from her mother at the moment. If she wanted to know, she would have to ask.

'Your and your mother's ability to speak Parseltongue, for instance.'

'That's no proof,' Demeter declared stubbornly. 'Unless you can prove that there is no other wizard in the world who can speak to snakes.'

'There is also the fact that Voldemort has always been very interested in your mother,' Dumbledore continued. He didn't seem to care about Demeter's interruptions. 'I know that Voldemort was looking for her when she was little. And, Severus, I think you can confirm that Voldemort wasn't happy at all when he found out that Morgaine had joined the Order of the Phoenix, that she had chosen the Light.'

Like Dumbledore, Demeter now turned towards her father and immediately wished that she hadn't. If Severus had looked angry before, he was looking positively furious now. And the loathing in his eyes couldn't be described with words.

'You knew,' he hissed, every syllable dripping with poison. 'You knew all along.'

'No, Severus, I didn't know,' Dumbledore replied calmly. 'I might have guessed, yes. And if we are honest, then we have to admit that we are still guessing. Lucius didn't present us with any proof.'

'Lucius?' Once more, Demeter didn't care if she was interrupting. 'What does Lucius have to do with everything?'

'Lucius firmly believed that I am the Dark Lord's daughter, little one,' Morgaine said quietly. 'And that you are his grandchild.'

'Why would he even come up with an idea like that?'

For some moments, neither of the adults said anything. Severus was still glaring at Dumbledore as if he were about to cast yet another Killing Curse on the old man, but Dumbledore seemed unimpressed. Morgaine stood silent, her eyes on her daughter.

'Well?' Demeter demanded impatiently. 'Is anyone going to tell me why on earth Lucius would think that Voldemort was my grandfather? That's just absurd!'

In the end, it was once more Dumbledore who answered her question.

'Lucius Malfoy has always been a very perceptive man. He saw that Voldemort was interested in your grandmother, and that he was furious when she fled with her child and hid her away. Lucius also saw that Voldemort was more interested in your mother than any other child that has ever been born into the fold. Then there was your mother's talent for Legilimency and her aptitude for the Dark Arts ... Lucius simply put two and two together. And when he learnt that you and your mother can talk to snakes, he thought that he held all the proofs in his hand.'

'Proofs for what?' Demeter heard her own voice crack. Why couldn't anyone just spit it all out and explain everything to her?

'Why would it matter to Lucius? Voldemort is dead.'

Again, the adults fell silent. Dumbledore looked at Morgaine, and so did Severus. But she didn't meet either man's gaze. Instead, she slowly approached her daughter.

'To Lucius it mattered a great deal, little one,' she said. 'He has always been looking for power, and being close to Voldemort gave him that power. For many years, Lucius Malfoy was untouchable. When Voldemort fell, all Lucius' power faded, and he was once more a mere wizard. A wizard with a good name and a Gringotts vault full of money, but still just a wizard. And he didn't like it, not at all.'

'But what has everything to do with me?' Demeter pleaded. 'With us?'

Morgaine took her daughter by the hand and led her towards the chair she had been sitting on earlier. Once Demeter was seated, she knelt down in front of her, taking the girl's hands into hers. For Demeter, it was the most comforting gesture in the world.

'Lucius wanted to gain us for his cause. He wanted to show the Death Eaters that the Dark Lord is still alive, in you and me. Imagine if he had succeeded. Imagine if he could have presented us to the old followers. They would have thanked him on their bare knees. And he would once more have held the power which has always been so dear to him.'

'Present us to the Death Eaters? Did he think we'd play Dark Lord for him? Was he mental?' Demeter burst out. 'Did he seriously believe that we would do that?'

'Lucius hadn't much hope for me,' Morgaine explained. 'But he was hoping that you were still young enough to be taught what he thought were the right beliefs. That you would help him back to power.'

'Me?' Demeter was shocked. What the hell had Lucius been thinking? That she was ... Demeter felt her eyes fill with tears. 'Mother, the worst thing I have ever done was throw a Bat-Bogey Hex at Makdoui the other day. You know I would never ... Mother, I'm not evil!'

'Of course you are not, little one. You are no more evil than I am. And the blood in our veins does not define who we are. We ourselves have to make our choices.' Morgaine was speaking calmly now, and it seemed to Demeter as if she were talking only to her. The portrait and the ghost did not seem to matter to her. And Demeter hung on her every word. 'Do you remember how I told you not to believe in anything Lucius told you?'

Demeter nodded. 'You said I should listen to my heart first.'



'Yes, little one. And I want you to remember that for the rest of your life. Trust your heart, Demeter. Trust that it is a good one.'

## XXXIX: Finding the Light Again

*Chapter 39 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

### Chapter XXXIX: Finding the Light Again

Nervously, Severus drifted back and forth in Morgaine's private study. He felt very much like an expecting father who had been thrown out of the delivery room and now had to wait outside, straining his ears to catch any sound from the other side of the closed door. But the sound he was waiting for was not the crying of a newborn, and the door to Morgaine's bedroom was not closed either. Still, he didn't enter, and he barely dared eavesdrop on let alone join the conversation between Morgaine and Demeter. It seemed so very private.

They had left the Headmistress' office about an hour ago, and already then it had been long past midnight. But neither Demeter nor Morgaine had shown any signs of sleepiness. There was too much to talk about, and, of course, the girl had a million questions. And Morgaine did her very best to answer all of them.

At first, Severus had hesitated to follow when Morgaine and Demeter had left the office. For him, too, the news about Morgaine's father had come as a shock. And then again, it hadn't. If he were honest with himself, Severus would have to admit to himself that he had seen the signs for many years. Had he been brave enough, he would have added up two and two, just as Lucius had, and would have come to the same conclusion. But he had not wanted to see the truth. And now, it had been thrown into his face, and he couldn't turn away from it.

Had the Dark Lord known, Severus wondered. Had he known that he had sired a child? Had he done so deliberately? Had he actively chosen the granddaughter of Albus Dumbledore to carry his seed? What had his plans been? Had he intended to use the child as a Horcrux maybe? The idea seemed at first absurd. But then again, the Dark Lord had been mad. Using a child in such a manner wouldn't have been beyond him. And tainting the bloodline of his sworn enemy would certainly have been a triumph bigger than any other.

But did it matter now? They would never know now what the Dark Lord had planned. Just as little as they would ever know exactly how much Lucius had known, how much he had guessed and what he had intended to do with his knowledge. And it didn't matter either. All that mattered now were the two souls in the room beyond that open door.

Severus could hear them whisper, Morgaine and Demeter. Sometimes he could hear a shaking intake of breath, as if one of them was stifling a sob. Other times he could to his surprise hear one of them laugh. Most probably, they needed laughter now. That innocent sound did not only drive Boggarts into retreat, but it was also effective to drive away the fear of the dark.

When silence settled over the room, Severus assumed that Demeter had fallen asleep and braced himself to face Morgaine. Surely, she would appear at the door any moment now. And he had no idea what he was going to say to her. Hopefully, she would have something to say instead.

But Morgaine didn't leave the bedroom. Instead there was yet another whispered question, a question that tore Severus' heart into a million tiny pieces.

'What if I am bad?'

He had heard that question before. Morgaine had asked him many years ago, the night when they had discovered her connection with the Dark Lord for the first time. What exactly he had told her then, he couldn't remember, but he knew that he had struggled to convince her that she was good. He doubted, however, that she had ever truly believed him.

'Do you feel like a bad person, little one?'

Severus frowned at Morgaine's response. Wasn't she as a mother supposed to assure Demeter that she was nothing but good?

Demeter, too, seemed confused by her mother's question, and she did not answer. Instead, Severus heard Morgaine ask a second question.

'Do you remember what you told me when we were talking about our ability to talk to snakes? What did you say you would use it for?'

'To do good,' Demeter answered quietly. 'Like saving people when they are being attacked by a snake. But, Mother, how will good intentions help if I am bad inside?'

'Because it is what you want to do, little one. If you were bad inside, you would never even have had the thought of wanting to do good. Do you understand?'

Once more, Demeter didn't answer, and Severus hoped that she was nodding. His little girl wasn't bad, just as little as her mother was. And he prayed that they would understand, the both of them.

Another half an hour he waited, half an hour filled with nothing but whispers and the rustling of fabrics. Then, finally, Morgaine stepped over the threshold, carefully and soundlessly closing the door behind her.

'Demeter's finally asleep.' She leaned with her back against the door and closed her eyes. 'What if I am bad?' she repeated her daughter's question in a low tone. 'No child should ever have to ask such a question.'

Had Morgaine forgotten that she had once asked that question herself, Severus wondered. She had only been a few years older than Demeter then.

'I think you gave our daughter a very good answer, Morgaine,' he said. 'Up in the Headmistress' office, when you told her to listen to her heart.'

'I hope it will be enough.'

Morgaine pushed herself off from the door and started making her way through the room, lighting the candles that had been placed on various surfaces. Severus followed her with his eyes. There was no need to light the candles, as the fire in the grate was already burning. The room was both illuminated and warm. Morgaine was just busying herself, and Severus wished that she would have a seat and take a deep breath instead.

'You did not tell Demeter everything,' he pointed out after a while when he realised that she would not sit down. 'You did not tell her what Lucius was really up to in Estonia.'

'What would be the point of telling her something I don't understand myself?' Morgaine asked. She was standing at the window now, with her back towards him, and Severus could see the reflection of her face in the glass. She looked incredibly tired.

'What was in that potion, Morgaine?'

She named the ingredients, one by one, and told him how she had brewed the potion. At the mention of snake poison and unicorn blood, Severus flinched. 'A Revival Potion,' he stated.

Morgaine nodded. 'I know. And with Melvin's blood, Lucius added the blood of the father and the devoted servant in one and the same drop. And with Demeter's blood ... Severus, do you think he would have succeeded? Do you think he would have been able to bring back the Dark Lord?'

'I do not know, Morgaine. The last time this potion was brewed, the Dark Lord was still alive. All he then needed was a new body.'

'What if the Dark Lord is not truly gone, Severus? What if ...'

'Don't even finish that thought, Morgaine,' Severus interrupted. 'The Dark Lord is gone. All that is left of him is his blood in your veins. And your blood does not define who you are. I am begging you, Morgaine, listen to your own words. Believe the words you want Demeter to believe.'

He saw her shoulders droop and heard that her voice had become thick with tears. 'I want to believe, Severus. There is nothing I want more. I will try. I promise I will.'

She turned around to face him, her eyes glistening with tears of which Severus knew that she would not shed them in front of him.

'Thank you for staying, Severus,' she said quietly.

'Were you afraid that I would leave you?' he asked, stating the obvious. He had seen the look in her eyes when she and Demeter had left the headmistress's office. Those eyes had been begging him to come along.

'I was terrified that you might,' Morgaine confessed.

'Do you think that little of me?' Severus knew that he should not ask. It was like kicking someone who was already lying on the ground. But he had to know.

Morgaine shrugged. 'I would have understood if you had left.'

Severus moved closer towards her.

'You did not leave me when you found out that I had been a Death Eater,' he started. 'Instead, you told me that a friend takes a step closer towards you and holds your hand when everybody else turns their back on you. And that was exactly what you did. You stayed. And I am not going anywhere either.'

For some moments, he just looked into her eyes. They were pleading for him to stay, begging for forgiveness and expressing an endless fear, all the same time.

'I can see nothing I would want to run away from,' he said, gently brushing her cheek with ghostly fingers. 'Knowing suspecting who your father was doesn't change who you are, Morgaine.'

'And who am I, Severus?' Her voice was so thin now that he could almost not make out her words.

'You are the mother of my daughter and the woman I love. You are my best friend, Morgaine. Nothing has changed.'

'So you don't care? You don't care that I am the daughter of the man who destroyed your life?'

'He also gave me life, Morgaine. He gave me you, and I do not know how I would have survived without you. Now, please, let me be there for you.'

It was the only thing he wanted. Now Morgaine just had to let him.

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From a distance, Morgaine observed the group of students at the edge of the lake. They seemed to be having a really good time. But then again, they always did.

The extra-curriculum Defence Group that Professor Siguri, the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, had set up had been a success from the very start. Students from all four Houses had signed up yes, even students from Slytherin House and now they met every Tuesday after dinner to try out spells and enchantments that were not part of the usual curriculum.

The structure of the lessons was simple enough. At the end of every lesson, Professor Siguri would tell the students what kind of spell or creature they would have to defend themselves against the next week, and then they would have the whole week to come up with a suitable defence. At the beginning of their next lesson, they would all share their ideas and then spend the rest of the hour trying out their methods. This week, Professor Siguri seemed to have brought along some imps. Either that, or he had put a Tripping Jinx on the whole class, because the students seemed to be tripping and falling over too frequently for it to be normal. But no one was complaining. In fact, Morgaine thought that she had seldom heard so much laughter coming from the edge of the lake. And she could not even start to describe the joy she felt in her heart about the fact that Demeter was the one laughing the most.

Demeter and Melvin had been some of the first students to sign up for the group, and according to Professor Siguri, Demeter was one of the most diligent. She was never satisfied with just learning one method of defence. Instead, she would always ask for more and practice until not even the foulest creature stood a chance against her magic. And after her lessons, she would always go straight to her mother and tell her everything.

And that was why Morgaine was waiting for her daughter now. The lesson would end in a couple of minutes, and she knew that Professor Siguri would tell the class to read up on Dementors for the next week. And Morgaine had a feeling that Demeter would have many questions on the subject. The girl might not remember her encounter with the guardians of Azkaban, but when she met them again, she might just recognise the cold feeling of despair. And Morgaine wanted Demeter to be prepared.

Sure enough, the girl started bombarding her mother with questions as soon as they had settled in their usual spot under the old oak tree: 'Mother, what is your Patronus?'

'My Patronus, little one, was a Wyvern once.'

'What's a Wyvern?'

'A Wyvern is a winged dragon,' Morgaine explained. 'It is a fierce and violent creature, but also very intelligent. It's a cousin of the basilisk.'

'Sounds strong,' Demeter pointed out. Then she frowned. 'What do you mean, your Patronus was a Wyvern once? Has it changed?'

Morgaine shrugged. 'I haven't produced a Patronus for a long time. I don't know if I can do it anymore.'

'You need a happy memory to produce a Patronus, right?' Demeter asked. 'Don't you have one?'

Morgaine flinched. A happy memory? By the gods, she would have to dig deep to find one among all the shadows in her mind. But surely, she should be able to find one. She had to. For the sake of her sanity, she had to.

Fortunately, Demeter didn't seem to have noticed her mother flinching. 'I know I will probably not be able to conjure one, but I'd like to try,' she declared enthusiastically. 'Please, Mother, will you help me? Will you teach me how it is done?'

Morgaine nodded. Of course, she would help her daughter. She would do anything to help Demeter learn Light magic.

'What you need first is a happy memory,' she explained, 'the happiest you can come up with. A memory so powerful that it makes you feel as if you can fly. A memory that makes you so happy that it feels as if your heart is going to burst.'

Demeter tried. For half an hour she stood by the edge of the lake, her face screwed up in concentration, saying the incantation over and over again. But as she had predicted, nothing happened.

'Don't be discouraged, little one,' Morgaine consoled her. 'Your magic isn't fully developed yet, and no one can conjure a Patronus on their first attempt. In a couple of years, when you have practised and your magic is stronger, you will be able to produce a Patronus. I am sure of that.'

Demeter looked slightly disgruntled, but she didn't argue. 'I would very much like to see one, though,' she said instead. 'I have read that just looking at one creates a warm and fuzzy feeling inside you. Please, Mother, won't you try? For me? Please?'

'Who am I to resist those puppy eyes?' Morgaine smiled and ruffled her daughter's black hair. 'I will try, little one. But I can't promise you anything.'

For some moments, she just stared at the wand in her hand. Birch, she thought, and closed her eyes. She and Severus had fallen in love under a birch tree, and under that very tree, she had also learnt to love her daughter, the daughter that now meant the world to her. She had to do it. She had to be able to cast the charm. But all that came from her wand was a silvery vapour. No Wyvern, no shape at all.

But Demeter seemed nonetheless impressed. 'I want to try again,' she announced, stubbornly putting out her chin. 'I don't care what you say about me being too young.'

'Then concentrate, Miss Snape.'

Demeter looked a little shocked as the ghost of her father appeared out of thin air, but Morgaine didn't even bat an eyelash. She had sensed him a while ago. He couldn't sneak up on her anymore.

'Come on, Demeter,' Severus said encouragingly. 'Make your father proud.'

Once more, Demeter screwed up her face and concentrated so hard that Morgaine could almost hear the girl's brain working, and for a moment, she considered putting an end to the exercise. What was the point in Severus encouraging Demeter to attempt a spell that was far beyond her abilities? The girl would only be disappointed. But she never had a chance to say anything. Demeter had already spoken the incantation, and to everyone's surprise, a silver vapour erupted from the tip of her wand, lingering for a few seconds and then disappearing into nothingness again.

'I did it! Mother, did you see? Father, did you? Merlin's beard! I can't believe it. Oh, Mother, Father, thank you. Thank you so much!'

'What are you thanking us for, little one?'

'I used a memory of you two,' Demeter explained in a tone that suggested that her parents were somewhat slow on the up-taking. 'Well, not really a memory, but an image of you. The way you look at each other. It always makes me so happy to see the love in your eyes.'

She tried once more and produced another vapour, but when her third attempt failed, Morgaine didn't let Demeter try anymore. Instead, she sent her to Gryffindor tower. Curfew was approaching, and even being the Potion mistress' daughter didn't justify being out in the grounds after hours.

'You helped her, didn't you?' Morgaine asked Severus after Demeter had bid them goodnight and returned to the castle.

Severus nodded. 'A bit,' he confessed. 'But I have no doubt that she might just be one of the youngest students to conjure a proper Patronus. She has it in her. So do you.'

Morgaine just shrugged.

'Try,' Severus urged her. 'Try, Morgaine.'

'Please, don't make me, Severus.'

'I will not force you, Morgaine. I just think conjuring a Patronus will be a good remedy.'

'And if I fail again?'

'You won't.'

She gave in, and once more, Morgaine contemplated her wand. She had done a lot of good with it, she had to admit that. And just because Lucius had had it in his possession for a couple of days didn't mean that it was tainted now. Just as little as being the Dark Lord's daughter made her a dark witch. This was her life. Her magic. Her choice.

It was just a vapour at first, not quite as pale as Demeter's had been but a vapour after all, and feeling discouraged, Morgaine considered giving up. But then she felt something. It felt like the warmth of the spring sun on frostbitten cheeks, like the caress of a mother and the kiss of a lover, all at once. And her mind filled with images she had not seen for a long time.

Hogwarts, seen through the eyes of a fourteen-year-old girl, who felt as if she were finally coming home.

A light-blue potion that captured the Potion master's curiosity and eventually his heart.

An armchair by a crackling fire in the dungeons, a chessboard and a steaming cup of tea.

A pair of obsidian black eyes that looked at her with a warmth they held for no one else.

A dark-haired baby girl reaching out her little arms towards her Mother.

And a ghost who stood firmly by her side and promised to wait for her.

Tears welled up in Morgaine's eyes, and as she felt the ice around her heart melt, she once more cast the incantation.

'*Expecto Patronum.*'

She merely whispered, afraid that talking aloud would chase the images away. But they stayed, attached themselves firmly to her heart, and the serpent rose majestically into the air, proudly baring its fangs before wrapping itself protectively around the woman and the ghost that were standing by the edge of the lake. Then it dissolved into

thin air, leaving Morgaine with tears on her cheeks and a smile in her eyes. And Severus took her hand, squeezing it so tightly that she truly believed that his hand was made out of flesh and bones.

'Welcome home, Morgaine of the Lake,' he said softly. 'Welcome home.'

## XL: Where They Ought to Be

*Chapter 40 of 40*

'She kept his soul from dying, and he kept hers from living.' After five years of mourning, Morgaine returns to Hogwarts to face the ghosts of her past as well as the ghost of Severus Snape. (Sequel to Morgaine's Story)

A/N: As this story is now coming to an end, it is time to say 'Thank You' to a couple of people.

Thank you, Apple Blossom, for being such a thorough beta reader. I hope we will be working together for a long time to come.

Thank you, star\_girl, for looking over my chapters and helping me out when I was stuck.

Thank you, Memory, for your motherly advice.

Thank you, Kyria of Delphi, for the lovely spell Morgaine used to protect Demeter and call for Severus.

Thank you, Mugglechief, for encouraging me to write this story. I learnt a lot from it.

And thank you, faithful readers and reviewers, for sticking with me and the story through forty chapters. Hopefully, I'll soon have something new for you.

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### Chapter XL: Where They Ought to Be

Leaning with her back against the wall, Morgaine let her eyes wander through the room. The moonlight that fell through the window illuminated the room just about enough for her to make out the outlines of the furniture around her. She couldn't see how shabby it was, or how dusty. Neither could she see the dark stain on the wooden floor. But she didn't need to. She had come to the Shrieking Shack often enough to know how everything looked, and when she closed her eyes, she could see everything even more clearly. She could even see the man whose blood had created the stain on the floor.

Fifteen years it had been. Fifteen years ago to the day, the Dark Lord had set his snake on the man whom so many had believed had been the most loyal of Voldemort's followers. Fifteen years ago, Severus had died on this dusty floor, his only company the boy he had protected and hated for seven long years. And then that boy had gone to save the Wizarding world, and Severus had been left behind.

Morgaine sighed. No matter how many times Severus had told her that he had not been alone in the moment of his death, that he had seen her eyes and heard her voice, she still wished that she could have been by his side to hold his hand and tell him that he did not need to be afraid. Maybe, if she had been there and said goodbye, he would have been able to move on.

Would have. Should have. Didn't.

Morgaine rubbed her aching neck and shook her head at herself. She shouldn't dwell on those thoughts. Severus had long since accepted that he was still tied to this world, to her, and he had gladly accepted his fate. He didn't mind waiting for her. So why could she not follow his example and accept his fate as well, and hers with it?

Most of the time, she did. She had learnt to live with Severus the ghost, and many times over the last couple of years, she had admitted to herself that she was more than grateful for what they had. Of course, she sometimes missed his embrace and wished she would be able to find something else than empty sheets beside her when she awoke in the middle of the night. But when she felt his mind brush hers, when she heard him whisper to her although they were in different parts of the castle, then she was happy. He was truly hers, and she was his. They were linked forever.

But once a year, during the night that marked the battle of Hogwarts and the death of Severus Snape, Morgaine would allow herself to mourn him. She would sneak out of the castle shortly before midnight, enter the Shrieking Shack and keep vigil in the room that was inhabited by nothing more than ghosts and memories. Every year so far, she had crouched on the floor where his body had once lain and had cried bitter tears that had fallen onto the bloodstained floor. But this year, she did not cry. This year, she felt calm. And somehow she knew that she would never return to the Shrieking Shack again.

She left at sunrise, gratefully breathing in the clean morning air. She didn't feel tired, and although she knew that she had a long day ahead of her, she did not even consider going to bed. Instead, her feet carried her to the same place they had carried her fifteen years ago.

Carefully, she parted the grass that covered the slab of black granite at the edge of the Forbidden Forest. Some years ago, she had played with the thought of raising a proper headstone or at least cast a spell that would keep the weeds from covering the inscription on the granite. But she hadn't done either. It seemed appropriate that no one knew where Severus Snape lay buried. He, if anyone, deserved to rest in peace.

'You have been missed, Morgaine of the Lake.'

Morgaine looked back over her shoulder. The ghost of the man she had buried fifteen years ago was barely visible in the light of the morning sun, but it didn't matter to her. When she looked at him, she never saw the ghost anyway. She saw billowing black robes, raven black hair and obsidian eyes.

'It still looks the same in there,' she said quietly, nodding in the direction of Hogsmeade and the Shrieking Shack. 'But the ghosts are gone. I didn't cry tonight.'

Severus nodded. He knew. Just as well as he knew about the tears Morgaine had shed in the Shrieking Shack over the years. Some years, he had feared that she would never stop crying, that her pain would one day rip her apart. And his inability to console her had almost done the same to him.

He had watched her leave the castle last night, and as so often before, he had followed her and waited outside the Shack. He wanted to be close to her in case she needed him, but at the same time, he did not want to intrude. He knew that Morgaine needed that night. He knew that it was the night when she fought her demons. But last night, the demons had not come. Morgaine had been calm all night, and when she had left the Shack at sunrise, she had held her head high.

Was it over now, Severus wondered. After all those years, had Morgaine finally found peace? She, if anyone, truly deserved it. For far too long, she had put her own needs

aside to care for others, for him, for their child. Only over the last couple of years, when Demeter had left Hogwarts and started a life of her own, had Morgaine allowed herself to relax. And only then had she realised how tired she was.

'Come on now, beloved,' he said and gently brushed Morgaine's cheek with his ghostly hand. 'Come down to the dungeons with me. You need to rest.'

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It was midday when Severus looked at his daughter, smiling. She had arrived at Hogwarts shortly before lunch along with many others who had come to honour the fallen and celebrate the defeat of Voldemort. But while everyone else had had gone to lunch in the Great Hall, Demeter had come straight down to the dungeons, just as she had done every year since she had left the school. Now she was sitting in the armchair by the fire with her baby on her knee, showing the boy his grandfather's potion bottles.

The boy was the spitting image of his mother, with raven black hair and heavenly blue eyes. But thankfully, Severus thought, he had not inherited the Snape nose. That feature, he seemed to have inherited from his father. The boy's name was Severus Aleksandr. Severus Aleksandr Snape, since Demeter had not taken her husband's last name when they had married two years ago. Melvin had not objected. He understood how proud his wife was to be the daughter of Severus Snape. And Riverbed, he had said, was too common a name anyway.

His little girl had grown up, Severus concluded once again. She was a mother now and a wife, and she was quickly becoming one of the most skilled and popular Trainee Healers at St. Mungo's. She had a knack for closing wounds and refused to give up on even the most hopeless cases. Many of her colleagues called her stubborn, but Severus knew that Demeter had a special gift, a gift which she used to do good in the world. And he was endlessly proud of her.

She had given him many reasons to be proud of her over the years. While still at Hogwarts, Demeter had been a diligent student, excelling in Potions, Charms and Herbology. And just as Severus had predicted back in her first year, she had been the youngest student to ever conjure a corporeal Patronus. She had done it in the beginning of her third year, down by the edge of the Black Lake, during one of those extra-curricular Defence lessons. Oh, so stubborn she had been that evening. Professor Siguri had urged her to give it a rest after she had tried for what seemed like a thousand times and produced nothing but a faint vapour. But Demeter had refused and kept trying. When curfew had been approaching, Siguri had gone to fetch Morgaine and found her in the dungeons. And so Severus had gone with her, hoping that together, they might persuade Demeter to go to bed. But Severus and Morgaine arriving at the lake together had had a very different effect. Demeter had beamed at them and raised her wand, and from it, her Patronus had risen.

Everyone, especially her Head of House, had been surprised and, maybe, even a little shocked, that a Gryffindor would conjure a serpent, but to Demeter and her parents, it had not come as a surprise at all. They had known at once what the serpent meant. It was Demeter's true guardian and a link between her and her parents. No other creature could have suited the girl better.

Thankfully, Demeter had never needed to use her Patronus. Peace had settled for good over the Wizarding world, and no Dark forces had ever extended their cold hands towards the daughter of Severus Snape and Morgaine duLac again. It seemed as if the interest for that child had died with Lucius Malfoy.

'Have you seen your mother yet?' Severus asked, slightly amused by Demeter's furtive attempts to make little Severus Aleksandr let go of her hair. The boy was stubborn already, it seemed. A family trait, no doubt.

'Yes,' Demeter replied. 'Up in the Entrance Hall. I think she was trying to persuade the Minister to cut down his speech from four hours to three.'

Severus sneered. Good old Kingsley. After fifteen years of giving speeches, he still had not learnt how to be brief. If anything, his speech seemed to get longer every year. Lately, he had taken to re-telling the whole story about the rise and fall of Voldemort. Severus himself found this more than tedious, but he could see Kingsley's reasons behind it. People needed to hear the whole story. Cold, hard, verifiable facts, as Professor Binns would call it.

'How is Mother?' Demeter suddenly asked, ripping Severus out of his musings. 'She looks pale.'

Severus nodded. 'Your mother did not sleep well last night,' he explained. 'You know that today is a difficult day for her.'

'Yes, I know.'

Finally, Demeter managed to get Severus Aleksandr to let go off her hair. Instead, the little boy promptly took hold of her necklace, the silver-cast Phoenix, which was once more carrying three obsidians in its claws.

'I'll go and keep Mother company,' Demeter announced, not even trying to make the boy let go of her pendant. 'I know she hates listening to those speeches, but she is too duteous to sneak off. One would never think she is a Slytherin.'

At the door, Demeter once more turned to look at her father. 'I assume you won't be coming up to listen to the speeches this year either, am I right?'

Severus shook his head. 'No, I will not,' he confirmed his daughter's suspicion. 'I have fought in that war. I know what happened, and I know how much pain it caused. I do not need to be reminded of any of it.'

But he accompanied Demeter all the way to the entrance hall, where he bid her good day and promised that he would have tea and chocolate ready once she returned to the dungeons after the speeches.

Standing on the top step of the stairs, he let his eyes wander over the grounds. Every year, there seemed to be more people coming, but Severus had noticed a change in generations. Many of those who had fought the Dark Lord weren't coming anymore. Some of them shunned the speeches, very much like himself, others were too old to make the journey to Hogwarts, and others had already passed away. Instead, their children were there now. In some cases even the grandchildren. Time had been flying, indeed.

Fifteen years. To his surprise, Severus caught himself wondering how his life would have turned out, had he survived the war. Would he have stayed at Hogwarts? He had always despised teaching, but still, the castle was the only place he had ever called home. Where else would he have gone?

Iceland, maybe. There, he had spent some of the most peaceful days of his adult life. Had he gone there, he would have seen his daughter grow up. She had been five when he had died, turning on six. Old enough to learn about herbs and fungi, and tall enough to reach up to a cauldron. And maybe, by the age of seven, she would have had a little brother or sister to play with.

Severus frowned. Now, what was that? He wouldn't be getting broody, now would he? On his death day of all days. But maybe, the day of one's death was exactly the right day to reflect upon one's life?

He would have deserved a nice and quiet life after the war, Severus concluded. He might have opened up an Apothecary, grown his own ingredients and just let life take its course without thinking too much about it. He might have bought a little house for himself and his family, somewhere secluded, by the sea perhaps, or up in the mountains. Morgaine would have helped him with his potions, and Demeter would have been home schooled until it was time for her to attend Hogwarts. Surely, they would have been happy.

Not that Severus had been unhappy over the last fifteen years. Certainly, the first years after his death had been dull beyond reason, and he had despised the fact that he had been unable to move on. He did not care to remember how many times he had cursed his fate then. But when Morgaine had returned to Hogwarts, Severus' life his afterlife had suddenly become meaningful again. He had made it his task to help Morgaine let go, to dry her tears and make her smile again. It hadn't been easy. And many times, Severus had wondered if him still being around just made everything harder. How he had hated to see the look in Morgaine's eyes, that look of endless longing and bitter despair. It had always cut right into his heart.

When Demeter had stepped into his life, he had been given a new task, the task to love and protect a child whom he had not even known existed. He had been clumsy in

the beginning, unable to show the girl how much he cared for her, but she had helped him. She had smiled at him and shown him that she was both brave and stubborn enough to learn what it meant to be the daughter of Severus Snape. And he had learnt what it meant to be a father. Surprisingly enough, it hadn't been half as hard as he had thought that it would be.

Other things had been much harder over those fifteen years: dealing with Morgaine's heritage, for instance. That revelation had come as a shock; claiming anything else would have been a lie. But once the first feelings of revulsion had subsided, Severus had told himself that it didn't matter. He had known Morgaine since she had been a teenager. He knew that she had inherited nothing from her father, except her ability to read minds and talk to snakes. There wasn't a trace of evil in her, and neither was there in Demeter.

Demeter. Severus couldn't help but smile. Of course, the girl, too, had been shocked at first when she had been told that Lord Voldemort had been her grandfather. But soon the stubbornness that she had inherited from both her parents had kicked in, and she had decided to show the world that she was nothing like the man who had happened to sire her mother. She had worked hard, had learnt her Defence textbook by heart and would even have made Hermione Granger pale at the speed with which she had ploughed through all the books about White magic in the library. And the way in which she now took care of her patients showed that she was, indeed, a good witch.

Severus saw them walking through the grounds now, Morgaine and Demeter. It looked as if they had decided not to listen to Kingsley's well-written speech after all. Who could blame them? Certainly, mother and daughter had more important things to talk about, Severus was sure of that. And he also knew that they would come down to the dungeons to see him once they were ready. Just as they always did.

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'When are you due, little one?'

'Early January,' Demeter replied, smiling broadly.

'Have you told your father yet?'

Demeter shook her head. 'I thought I'd tell him over tea later today. I'd like you to be there when I break the news.'

Morgaine grinned. 'You wouldn't be scared of his reaction, would you?' she asked.

Demeter vehemently shook her head. 'Of course not. I just thought you might keep him from giving me another lecture about the proper use of contraceptive potions.'

'He didn't mean it that way, you know that. He was just not prepared to become a grandfather. And look at him now. He can't wait for little Severus Aleksandr to start walking so he can teach him how to play Gobstones.'

'He's a good teacher,' Demeter pointed out. 'Melvin still cannot understand why I beat him in eight out of ten games.'

'Why don't you win all of them?'

'Because I like the way Melvin smirks when he wins. You know, Slytherin competitiveness. You guys feel ever so smug when you win.'

Both mother and daughter laughed heartily, and Morgaine crooked her arm into Demeter's, enjoying having her little girl so close and at the same time relying on the strength of her daughter's young body.

'Should we go back?' Demeter asked carefully.

'And endure Kingsley's speech?' Morgaine seemed appalled. 'Have you been Confunded, little one?'

'No, but I thought you might like to sit down.'

Morgaine straightened immediately and looked back towards the edge of the lake where Kingsley was giving his speech, thereby avoiding her daughter's examining gaze. She didn't want Demeter to know just how tired she was. She didn't want her daughter to worry. Not now. Not today.

'We can sit in the grass over there,' she suggested instead. 'There is something I want to show you.'

Once they had reached the edge of the forest, the sun had disappeared behind the clouds, and Morgaine felt herself shiver as she showed her daughter the slab of black granite. But she did not care. Her arms might be covered with goosebumps, but when she saw Demeter kneel down at her father's grave, Morgaine felt a warmth in her heart which she could not describe with words.

'*Never Forgotten*,' Demeter whispered, caressing the stone with her fingers. 'You knew you'd never forget him, didn't you? Even before you knew that his ghost was still around.'

Morgaine nodded. Yes, she had known. When she had buried him she had heard Severus whisper to her. But back then, she had thought that she had been imagining things. Now she knew better. He had been there, right by her side.

'Why are you showing me this now, Mother?'

For a second, Morgaine hesitated. She wasn't sure, to be honest. For fifteen years, she had kept this place a secret and had never considered showing it to anyone, not even her daughter. But today, it suddenly seemed important.

'I want you to know where it is, little one,' she said, the words forming themselves and leaving her lips without her really noticing. 'I want you to be able to show your children one day where their grandfather lies buried. And I want you to promise that you'll never forget him either.'

'Of course, I will never forget Father. How could I? I love him a lot.' A frown appeared on Demeter's brow, and she looked intently at her mother. 'And I love you, Mother. Very, very much.'

'And I love you, little one. I always have.'

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'You should be in bed, Morgaine,' Severus pointed out. 'You did not sleep last night either. You must be exhausted.'

Morgaine gingerly shook her head. 'I have too many thoughts running through my head to sleep.'

Severus nodded. 'Are you still trying to come up with a plan to keep Demeter from naming her daughter after you?'

Morgaine laughed. 'Morgaine Snape,' she said and shook her head once more. 'The poor child.'

'I think it sounds rather nice,' Severus said and repeated the name. 'Morgaine Snape. I wish you had been able to carry my last name, too.'

Morgaine swallowed drily and carefully put her tea cup onto the little table beside her armchair before looking up at him, and Severus looked back at her, unblinkingly.

'I wish I could have asked for your hand in marriage and be with you forever, Morgaine.'

She smiled wistfully at him. 'What difference would a piece of paper and a ring have made, Severus?' she asked. 'What promise could we have written down that we had not given to each other already?'

'For us, it would not have changed anything,' Severus admitted. 'But I wish the world would have known how much you meant to me, Morgaine.'

'I have never needed the world to know, Severus. And those concerned have always known.'

How he wished that he could embrace her now. How he wished that he could take her into his arms, cover her face with kisses and make love to her until the morning, feeling her body against his and savour the feeling of closeness. Instead, he looked deep into her blue eyes and brushed her mind with the greatest care and tenderness he could muster.

'I wondered today how things might have been,' he told her, 'if I had survived the war. I think we would have been happy.'

'I am happy now as well, Severus. Despite all the heartache and pain, I wouldn't want to miss what we have shared. I wouldn't want to miss what we have now.'

They talked for hours, about what they wished would have happened to them had Severus survived, about Demeter and their grandchildren. The only thing neither of them mentioned was their future.

When the clock struck midnight, Severus rose. 'I am going to give you a potion now, and you will not protest. You need to sleep, Morgaine.'

She nodded, and Severus floated towards the cabinet where he kept his potions. He had come halfway when Morgaine called for him.

'Severus.'

He turned to look at her and found himself looking at a scene he had not seen for many years. The fire was burning in the grate, making Morgaine's hair shine in a warm, golden-red tone. Her eyes were sparkling, and she was smiling, just for him.

'I love you, Severus.'

'I love you, too, Morgaine. I love you, too.'

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'Take care of yourself, little one. And Melvin, and the babies.'

'I will, Mother.' Demeter sobbed silently and furtively attempted to wipe away her tears.

'Don't be sad, little one,' Morgaine pleaded and carefully dried the tears of her daughter's cheek. 'Everything will be alright. And never forget that I love you, that I always have.'

Demeter shot off from her pillow, her heart hammering in her chest. The dream had been so real that she could still feel her mother's touch on her cheek. But how could that be? Her mother wasn't anywhere close. She was at Hogwarts, and Demeter herself at the Three Broomsticks, where she, Melvin and little Severus Aleksandr were spending the night. Could this dream have been a premonition?

Quickly but silently Demeter slipped out of bed and started pulling on her clothes.

'What's going on, love?' Melvin asked sleepily. He had rolled around in his sleep and reached out for his wife. As he had grabbed nothing but empty sheets, he had awoken. 'Why are you getting dressed?'

'I need to get to Hogwarts,' Demeter replied in a whisper so she wouldn't wake up the child.

'Hogwarts?' Melvin sat up in bed. 'It's in the middle of the night. What could be so important that it can't wait until tomo...'

'I need to be there now,' Demeter interrupted her husband and placed a quick kiss on his lips. 'Tomorrow morning, it will be too late.'

No one at Hogwarts was surprised by her early arrival. Minerva had dispatched an owl ten minutes ago, and now they all assumed that the bird had flown at the speed of light and that Demeter had Apparated to the castle as soon as she had received the message. They had no idea that the owl had not arrived at the Three Broomsticks yet and that it had been Morgaine herself who had called for her daughter.

'It happened very quickly,' Poppy informed Demeter, answering her unasked question. 'Her heart simply stopped beating.'

Demeter nodded wordlessly and looked down at her mother's face. She was pale, but at the same time, Demeter had never seen her so peaceful.

'We'll be in my office, child,' Minerva announced, wiping off her tears and offering Demeter a heartfelt hug. 'In case you need us.'

Again, Demeter nodded but did not say anything. And she barely noticed that the Headmistress and the matron left the room. She didn't even move until the door had fallen shut. Then she raised her head and looked straight at the ghost of her father, who was standing opposite her on the other side of the bed.

'Is it true?' she asked quietly. 'Did it happen quickly? Did she really not suffer?'

The ghost shook his head. 'Your mother could not sleep and came down to the dungeons. She drank tea, and we talked by the fire. At midnight I told her she needed to sleep. I was about to retrieve a Sleeping Draught from the cabinet when I heard her cup shatter on the floor.'

Demeter gave a little sob. 'Is she with you now?' she asked, desperately hoping that he father would say yes. She didn't think that she could bare it if he said no. 'Did Mother find you?'

Slowly, Severus nodded. 'She is right here by my side.'

Demeter blinked furiously and strained her eyes, staring at the spot to where her father had extended his hand, hoping against hope to see her mother once more. But she knew that it was in vain. Her mother would not become a ghost. She had no reasons to. She had no unfinished business, and she had never feared death. In the end, Demeter thought, her mother might even have welcomed it. Therefore, the spot where she knew her mother was standing, remind empty. To Demeter, at least. But she could tell from the loving look in her father's eyes that he was seeing more than she was.

'You will be leaving now, won't you, Father? You promised you'd wait for her, and now ...'

Demeter's voice broke, and she gave in to her tears. She knew that the sole reason for her father not having passed on a long time ago was that he had been waiting for her mother. They were soul mates, destined to spend eternity together. Now that her mother was gone, they would pass on together. But Demeter did not want her father to leave her. Not now. There were still so many questions she had never asked him, still so many things he could tell her. And he was supposed to teach her son how to play Gobstones, just as he had taught her.

'There is no rush,' Severus said softly, and Demeter felt his ghostly hand brush her cheek. It was the first time she felt his touch, and it saddened her to know that it would also be the last time.

'Your mother and I have waited for fifteen years, and now eternity lies ahead of us. This night, I will gladly spend with you, my child.'

For quite some time, they sat in silence, each absorbed in their thoughts. Minerva's owl returned with a reply from Melvin, who asked if Demeter wanted him to come, but she sent him back to bed. As much as she longed for her husband's embrace now, she did not want him to come. This night was all about her and her parents and taking farewell of them.

'People always pointed out that I had had my Mother's eyes,' Demeter suddenly said. 'Will you tell me about them, Father?'

Severus nodded. 'They say that the eyes are a window to a person's soul. In your mother's case, that was more than true, I noticed that early. When she first came to Hogwarts, she would look at me with a curiosity that rivalled any Ravenclaw's. And over time, those eyes started to hold something I had not seen for many, many years.'

His voice trailed off, and Demeter looked up at her father. His head was turned, but he wasn't looking at Morgaine's earthly shell. Instead, his eyes were once more lingering on a spot right beside him, and Demeter knew that he was looking at her mother, right into her eyes.

'Kindness,' Severus started again, talking slowly, as if he were describing what he saw in front of him. 'Warmth and trust. And a smile. The day that smile disappeared, my heart broke.'

Demeter remembered. Or she thought that she remembered. She had been little, and during the first years of her life, she had only seen her mother during the summer holidays. But she remembered the smile in her eyes. Some days, it had outshone the sun. And then it had disappeared.

'When Mother returned to Iceland after the final battle, when she told me that you had fallen, I understood that she was sad. But back then, I did not know just how much she had lost. I did not understand that she missed you so much that it tore her soul apart. She hid it well. She never cried, and she never talked about you. But everyone who looked into her eyes understood that something was terribly wrong.'

Demeter shifted uncomfortably in her chair, not sure whether to go on. What she was about to say was private, between her mother and her.

'Granny often talked about that smile in Mother's eyes, and when that smile disappeared ...' Demeter took a deep breath. If she didn't tell her father now, she would never be able to. 'For some time, I thought Mother was only looking at me that way. For some time, I thought she didn't like me.'

Severus swirled around. 'You mother loved you, Demeter! She would have done anything for you. She chose life for you.'

'I know that now,' Demeter explained quietly. 'But I was little back then. It hurt that Mother didn't smile when she looked at me. Today I understand how much it must have hurt, how difficult it must have been for her to look at me and see you. She missed you so much.'

'I missed her, too.'

With tears once more welling up in her eyes, Demeter looked up at her father. She had known him for almost a decade now, and they had talked about many things. But he had never before mentioned his feelings for Morgaine.

'You must know, Demeter, that your Mother was more to me than just a lover or a friend. For many years, she was my light in the dark. Her unconditional love gave me the strength to fulfil the promise I had given the night the Dark Lord had murdered the Potters. She was my reason to survive.'

He told her a lot that night, about how he had sometimes pushed Morgaine away in order to keep her from harm, and how she had stubbornly waited in the shadows until he had needed her. And Demeter listened, only now truly understanding how much her parents had meant to each other.

Severus stayed until the morning, giving Demeter the time to ask all the questions she had and take farewell. She also had the time to tell him that she loved him. And he told her that he loved her, too.

He disappeared with the first rays of sunlight, and Demeter stayed seated beside her mother's bed, blankly staring at the spot where she had last seen her father's eyes and where she thought that her mother had been standing all night, watching them. To her own surprise, she did not feel sad anymore. Despite having lost both her parents that night, she felt that their happiness outweighed any sadness she could feel. The two people she had loved with all her heart, her mother and her father, were now finally at peace. They were finally together, and no one and nothing would ever stand between them again. They were where they belonged, by each other's side. For eternity.

The End

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In loving memory of my dearest friend. He's sorely missed.

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