

Don't Stand So Close

by Sevy

Infatuation can last a lifetime. Who knows where a secret schoolgirl crush can take you...

One: Admiration

Chapter 1 of 5

Infatuation can last a lifetime. Who knows where a secret schoolgirl crush can take you...

Severus Snape is not mine (more's the pity); I am merely borrowing him for the purposes of fiction. I give grateful thanks to J.K. Rowling and the magnificent Alan Rickman who have both brought him into existence.

Young teacher, the subject

Of schoolgirl fantasy

She wants him so badly

Knows what she wants to be

Inside her, there's longing

This girl's an open page

Book marking she's so close now

This girl is half his age

Don't stand, don't stand so

Don't stand so close to me ...

(Lyrics by Sting, from The Police hit: Don't Stand So Close To Me)

She had dreamed of the black so often; the dark, mysterious all-encompassing black that she seemed unable to escape from ...

And now, standing at the top of the dungeon staircase, Sara shook uncontrollably; her heart was beating so fast that she was afraid it would burst through her chest and her knees felt so weak she thought they would simply buckle beneath her. But she fought valiantly against her instinctive desire to run, and steadily, methodically and forcefully mastered herself, muttering quietly, *'You can do this, you can do it! Don't be a fool; he feels nothing for you!'*

In the depths of her mind, Sara knew her words were true, but even having spoken them out loud to herself, she knew her heart, as always, was in conflict with her head. It was not easy to forget the past, harder still to just dismiss her feelings for him and to hang on to the tiny glimmer of hope that, after all this time, he might feel something for her - yet alone actually remember her!

But she had made up her mind - there was no going back now - and slowly, slowly, she started to make her way down the steps, taking them tentatively one at a time, as if at any moment a particular individual step would prove to be the rogue one and suddenly snap off her ankle! The heavy, closed, dark, wooden door loomed ever nearer.

This was the one remaining barrier between herself and her former Potions master, the formidable, darkly mysterious and awesome Professor Severus Snape. The man's mere presence was enough to evoke total unrivalled fear in a first-year student, panic in second, third and fourth years and... Sara hesitated in her thoughts. She supposed it was in her fifth year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry that her feelings had changed. No longer had she trembled from then on with the aforementioned fear every time she could feel the hot breath of that dark, brooding figure on the back of her neck as he passed her by amongst the line of her fellow students, but instead it was something else, something much stronger and longer lasting - desire!

Yes, from her fifth year onwards, Sara Elise Faraday, shy, studious and highly talented in the art of potion making, had started a crush with a vengeance on that domineering, dangerously menacing and surprisingly sexy school teacher: A crush that bordered on obsession. An obsession she had never got over during her six years absence from Hogwarts and, in fact, if anything, had become even more fuelled by the intervening years. The long time of not actually seeing his imposing figure, feeling those dark, fathomless eyes boring into her or experiencing her entire body quake in rhythm to that delicious, sensual voice whilst watching those amazing hands perform the intricacies of potion making with all the skill of the true master that he was, had done little to evaporate those deep-held desires.

When Professor Snape had discovered that Sara had a natural talent for Potions (quite early on in her schooling as it happened), he had shown her particular attention and was perhaps less harsh and more lenient towards her than he was with most other students. This was something that was picked up on by numerous class-mates around third or fourth year and for which Sara had been given more than her fair share of torment and teasing. But talented she was and, under said Professor's tutelage, she flourished and succeeded - gaining top grades in both her OWLs and NEWTs exams.

Sara well remembered the day that she was called into Professor Snape's office to discuss her future options and thoughts on a career. Although he wasn't her Head of House (she being a diligent Ravenclaw, he Head of the formidable Slytherin), it was deemed he should see her in view of her distinctive Potions prowess.

Just like now, Sara had been shaking from head to toe when she gingerly sat before him; watching his every move, every facial expression, from behind his desk as his mesmerizing eyes seemed to drink in every last detail of her from across the room and as her heart beat itself to an almost stand still.

But he had smiled at her, actually smiled - a rare, delicious, genuine smile - and she had thought she was in heaven. With just a few months to go before she left Hogwarts, he was almost no longer her teacher, nor she his student. She had realised then, and not for the first time either, that the serious, scathing, seemingly hard-to-please, austere man who stood so formidably at the front of the classroom each lesson, evoking such an awesome presence, was in fact nothing like the real man she saw before her. She had often thought that it was as if he put on an act for the world to see, like an outer skin; played a part like an actor to an unsuspecting audience.

And so it was that Sara decided on a career in Potions and went on to become a student at a wizarding university in London where she studied hard for the following three years to gain the necessary qualifications in the subject that had then enabled her to open her own apothecary and concoct her very own brews, successfully as it turned out and quite profitably too. But it had never quite been enough for Sara. She still yearned for her secure life at Hogwarts and one particular teacher whose memory she could never erase and whose image was ever-present in her fantasies and kept her heart a-flutter over the years.

Despite boyfriends and a couple of 'serious' relationships, she refused to allow this same heart to dally elsewhere - almost feeling she was betraying its *raison d'être* - forever comparing the men in her life to *him*. And of course no one could ever match that inflated perfection. No one possessed his dark, sexy presence; his towering height, his piercing eyes, his thick, raven-black, swaying hair, his sensuous mouth, that noble nose, those exquisite hands with the long, sensitive fingers and, heaven help her, that voice! God, that beautiful deep, resounding, articulated, spine-shivering voice! Even when raised in anger, frustration and scathing wit (and even in its merely memorised state as she could no longer actually hear it), it still had the power to reduce her to a quivering wreck!

Over the years, Sara had lost count of the fantasies she'd had about her former Potions master, on a daily basis no less. Sometimes she would daydream for what seemed like hours: Imagining how his lips would feel on hers. How his hands would softly and sensuously move over her. How his body would mould itself to her own. How warm and soft his exposed skin would feel against her own nakedness. She knew, from her intense study of him, that his arms (although usually kept carefully concealed behind the long, black sleeves of his teaching gown) were covered in a soft, dark, downy fur, and in her fertile mind she felt sure that much of his body would be covered like this too. After all, his whole being was dark!

His torso was slim she knew. Did he ever eat? She had watched him way too often than was good for her at the staff head table at Hogwarts meal times over the years, and he never seemed to eat with must gusto. Always delicately and, like everything else he did, sensuously - picking at the food tentatively before finally succumbing to eating and chewing in small, sensitive bites. And he always moved, she remembered, with a kind of cat-like grace. Sneaking up on students unawares seemed to be a favourite pastime but one Sara couldn't help but secretly admire. After all, in her opinion, he only ever caught out those who were up to no good and therefore deserved to be captured!

Beyond the liteness of his frame, Sara guessed there would be muscle - taut, firm, hard muscle, and his skin would be pale and porcelain soft and smooth she felt sure. Once, at a School Ball, she had seen him wear tight-fitting trousers (one of the few times she had ever seen him without teaching robes), and it had been enough to set off an entire tidal wave of girlish giggles and murmurings of admiration from those old enough amongst the female students to appreciate such things, as it was evident that he was clearly well-endowed! Obviously Mother Nature did operate a secret code when issuing out large noses, Sara had mused.

But she had realised then that perhaps she wasn't the only one to be aware of the Potion master's charms, that possibly he appeared regularly on the pages of other girls' diaries too, as the source of feminine fantasy!

And indeed, over the years, Sara had then witnessed numerous girly musings regarding this very subject and much more in the way of discussion as to whether said Potion master's abilities and perfection in the art of potion making were akin to his abilities in bed - even if some speculated as to which gender he actually preferred (if at all) in it! As if there were any doubt about his sexuality!

Sara, however, never joined in these conversations, preferring to keep her thoughts to herself and indeed never confided in anyone about her feelings for Snape. Like him, she was a loner and simply never trusted anyone enough to feel compelled to speak of such deep-routed and personal things. She would have died rather than have anyone know her true desires and, even though at the time she hoped they were a passing phase, she knew deep down that she was truly in love with the man; she did not want it passed off as a mere, silly schoolgirl crush.

It upset her intensely to think that other girls could be attracted to him, but she also knew that for most of them it truly was just a passing phase, there being little other 'talent' on the male teaching staff to fantasise about. (Apart possibly, she reminisced, from that Remus Lupin who had taught as Professor of Defence Against the Dark Arts for a short period not long before she left. He was almost worth a second glance, though not in the same way as the one-and-only Severus Snape of course! Then there was that awful Gildroy Lockhart, Professor Lupin's predecessor. He'd soon lost his charm with the ladies after that incident with the Potter boy.)

Whatever else, Sara felt sure that none of the other former Hogwarts students had continued any thoughts of their ex-Potions master once having left school and indeed would have all but forgotten him when their new lives took hold and carried them into the real world, real life, real relationships and real lovers.

But she was not like them. She could not forget that easily. He had simply had too much of an impact on her; made too much of an impression. One could not just dismiss that or brush such intensity to one side like it was a meaningless wisp of offending cobweb blown across unintentionally by the breeze. Feelings like hers were made of stern stuff; iron-hard and unrelenting.

And so now here she was, six years later, descending the dungeon staircase, on her first day as the new School Secretarial Assistant. (She couldn't believe her luck when she had seen the job advertised in *The Daily Prophet* some six weeks previously, applied for it with great trepidation, attended an interview with the ever-unchanging

Headmaster Albus Dumbledore and - merciful miracle upon miracles - been offered the post!)

Six years on, however, she was still, at heart, that same shy, sensitive schoolgirl. But her thin frame of then had since filled out and had become more curvy, more womanly, her blonde hair now longer and thicker. (Her parents had never allowed her to grow it whilst at school and insisted on having it regularly cut into a neat, shaped little bob which she had secretively always hated.) Currently she had it scraped up into a loose bun secured with a comb-clasp, showing off her long, slim, swan-like neck to full advantage but making her more aware than ever of her rapidly flushing skin. She felt she had nothing to hide behind and wished she had left it full and flowing. Her wide, innocent-looking blue-grey eyes hadn't changed at all though and now darted from side to side as if still trying to seek out an escape route as the intimidating heavy wooden door, concealing the Potion master's office, finally came into view...

A/N: I wrote this story (my first ever SS fic really and complete in five chapters) more than two years ago now - albeit with no less than three different endings - and have just been summoning up the courage since then to post! I have always felt that the lyrics from this song seemed to fit SS so well.

As this is the longest fic I've attempted to post so far, I'd really appreciate the feedback of any of my fellow writer/reviewers who feel they can spare a few typed up words for me - preferably forming coherent sentences of course! :-)

Two: Expectation

Chapter 2 of 5

Infatuation can last a lifetime. Who knows where a secret schoolgirl crush can take you...

With a violently trembling right hand, Sara lifted her equally shaking arm and curled her fingers into a ball in order to knock. But she hesitated to actually do so until her breath had regulated slightly and her still overly-enthusiastic heart rate had reduced itself to erratic thuds.

Finally summoning up her courage and facing her long-held fear head on, she knocked, softly at first, then almost immediately afterwards more boldly. It was no good being afraid, she told herself; she was here on her first day of employment at Hogwarts, not as a student any more but a fully-fledged adult member of staff. Alright so she hadn't seen Professor Snape for six whole years, but he was no longer her teacher and she no longer his student. Would he even remember her? After all, hundreds of students had passed through his hands over the years and, although most of them not talented in Potions, some were - not just she - and many had gained good grades. She knew that he had never really singled her out nor looked at her in any special way. She had told herself these facts countless times, but it seemed she had great difficulty in accepting them.

All day, on this her first day back, Sara had waited with bated breath for a glimpse of him, furtively glancing around for the merest hint of all-encompassing black, the swish of a billowing cloak or the apparent sudden temperature drop as his icy stare announced his arrival, but to no avail.

And then opportunity had presented itself in the shape of needing to take some papers to him. Perhaps her enthusiastic volunteering to do the deed had surprised her superior, School Secretary Madam Villers, who had voiced that the task needed doing. But, if so, Madam Villers had shown no sign of it and appeared only too happy to delegate the task to Sara.

Of course Sara, for her part, had known that Professor Snape was still teaching at Hogwarts when she had applied for the job. She had known that he was still in his same position as Potions master. After all, there would have been little other incentive for wanting such a post without this prior knowledge.

She had waited years for such an opportunity. And, although not officially qualified as a Secretary, running her own business for the previous three years and having a natural predisposition to administration put her onto the short-list at the interview. As did the rapport she still seemed to have with her old Head of House, Professor Flitwick, who did not seem able to speak highly enough of her. Dumbledore's curiosity as to why she should want to return to such a meagre position within the school after running her own successful apothecary seemed to be quelled by Sara's convincing lies. She had told him that she '*simply wanted a change*' and that '*business wasn't currently doing too well*.' She certainly could not have blurted out the truth - that for years she had carried a torch for her former Potions master and simply wanted an excuse to be near him again!

Now, in the few seconds space following her knock on the door, and as she waited anxiously for his response, her mind quickly flashed through the thoughts that kept occurring ever since she found out that she had secured the job. Would he have changed much in six years? She knew he was 13 years her senior, so with her now being 24, that made him 37 - hardly old! In fact she often forgot that he was a newly qualified teacher of just 24 himself when he had first started at Hogwarts, during her first year there, taking over from a previous Potions professor whose name had been so meaningless to her that she could not even remember it now.

By the time her 'crush' had been in full swing, at the ages of 16 to 18, Snape himself had only just turned 30! Yet he had always seemed so much more mature, so confident and alluring, while that deeply dark, brooding side exuded the mysterious sexiness, with the merest hint of an underlying passion and even vulnerability and tenderness, that so intrigued her.

One part of the equation that she had never been able to come to terms with of course was the fact that she knew nothing of his actual life outside of Hogwarts. Perhaps he had a lover? She knew he was unmarried for she had heard it discussed many times. But that, of course, wouldn't have excluded other more permanent, or even temporary, arrangements. Then there were the rumours that he was or had been a Death Eater and that he was a spy of some sorts for Dumbledore. Was that still the case? He-who-shall-not-be-named was getting stronger again, she knew, ever since that Harry Potter had come to Hogwarts.

So what secrets did this great man of mystery still hold? she pondered. She could not and would not think ill of him. She had looked into those deep, dark eyes too many times to realise that they were merely the outer shutters into an even deeper and more secretive soul. But - and this was her biggest and worst fear of all - how would *she*, Sara Elise Faraday, actually feel when she finally saw him again?

This last flash of questioning did not have long to be answered as the familiar deep, resounding voice penetrated through the thickness of the door and into her very being.

The beautifully enunciated 'Come in!' (Sara was expecting him to say 'enter' in colder tones) hit her ears with a resounding jolt, springing her into pushing the door wide open.

Suddenly the last six years of her life seemed to skitter away like soft smoke on the breeze, and she was once again that schoolgirl of 16, trembling yet eager and fighting to quell the tide of anxiety rising up from the pit of her stomach.

Then she was in the room and there he was. Stiff, up-rightly rigid in the chair behind his desk, regal-looking as ever, and just as she remembered him. Apart from possibly a few more deep lines etched across his already furrowed brow, Sara could see little change, and for a few seconds their eyes met and they held each other's gaze with a kind of dignified yet expectant silence.

'Miss Faraday?' he said at last, and at the sound of her name on his lips after all this time, Sara blushed, wholeheartedly reinstating in her the feeling that she really was still the schoolgirl sent on an errand from the office.

'G-good afternoon, sir,' she stammered. 'I've brought some papers for you. Madam Villers said you needed them today.'

'Indeed,' he replied, still not taking his eyes off her, which only further added to her heat and the feeling of a terrible constrictive tightness around her throat and upper abdomen.

'Shall I put them here?' she questioned, not sure if her voice had come out steady or not, as she placed the papers in a neat pile on the near side of his solid, rather grandiose, desk.

'That's fine, that's fine,' he said confidently.

'Thank you,' he added politely, this time casting his gaze down to the newly placed paper stack to one side of him.

At a loss as to what to say and feeling as if her arid throat could no longer rise to the task of creating speech nor her lips form a coherent sentence any way, Sara backed slightly from the desk, head bowed as if in submission, while the new silence was broken with the Professor's assertive words again.

'How are you?'

To her own amazement, she stammered that she was well, whilst managing to avert her gaze from those dark, fathomless eyes of his. Instead, she turned her attention to the neatly manicured fingers of her hands, both of which, she was embarrassed to notice, had become tightly entwined around each other in the absence of the papers she had previously been carrying.

From the tone of his voice, Sara knew that he was smiling, a kind of half-amused, half-sympathetic smile that she guessed to some would almost pass as a smirk.

'The Headmaster tells me you've been running your own apothecary in recent times. Is that correct?' he asked, the words sounding soft and almost lyrical in the way he gently expressed them.

'Y-y-yes, sir. It is true,' Sara replied, perhaps a little too quickly.

This time she looked up to see the smile upon his face deepen and his eyes sparkle - almost twinkle - as he said, 'There's really no need to call me 'sir' any more, Sara. You're no longer my student. We're colleagues now. No need for such formalities!'

'It's been a long time since I last saw you,' he went on, 'You've changed somewhat. Grown up of course.'

'Y-yes, s...I mean,' she flummoxed, once more desperately averting her gaze.

'I always knew you'd do well,' he added benevolently, almost as if trying to help her cover her own distress. She was grateful.

'As you can see,' he continued, 'nothing much changes around here, more's the pity!'

She smiled at this and raised her eyes to his, but this time, he looked away, and she somehow thought that she caught a fleeting glimpse of sadness in them and perhaps something else that she couldn't quite fathom. But, whatever it was or wasn't, she took this as her cue to leave and slowly began to turn towards the door.

'Well,' she said, 'I'll no doubt see you around?' She managed to omit the title 'sir' from the statement at the last second, just before her lips automatically formed the word on her tongue.

'You can count on that' was his reply, and once again, she sensed that his words were tinged with amusement.

From the corner of her eye, she saw him return to marking the same student essays on his desk that her earlier intrusion had clearly interrupted.

Once on the other side of the door, Sara let out a huge sigh and cursed herself for having been so flustered and tongue-tied in his office. Then again, she countered, what had she really expected? The important thing was that she had got through it, she told herself. The long out of reach barrier had been penetrated at last - surely it could only get easier from now on?

Three: Inspiration

Chapter 3 of 5

Infatuation can last a lifetime. Who knows where a secret schoolgirl crush can take you...

However, as the days turned to weeks, Sara saw little - if next to nothing - of Professor Snape. No other opportunities seemed to present themselves for her to have reason to visit him in either his classroom, office or elsewhere. Any actual sightings of him were usually just fleeting glimpses at a distance as he disappeared around a corner in a flurry of the obligatory, billowing black cloak. Or as he seated himself at, or retreated from, the staff head table at mealtimes, Sara's own seat being slightly too far to the left of the main table for him to be in permanent view.

Then one day, quite unexpectedly, as Sara made her way along the maze of Hogwarts corridors, precariously balancing a huge pile of student tests through to Deputy Headmistress McGonagall's office, an interconnecting door suddenly burst open with precipitous force. Such was the strength of it, that it immediately knocked Sara to one side and sent the paper tower tumbling to the floor. The perpetrator was none other than the Potions master himself, looking in thunderous mood.

On seeing Sara hurriedly stooping to retrieve the fluttering jumble of papers, his expression softened however and he too bent down to assist, whilst muttering his apologies.

'It's quite alright,' Sara said good humouredly, secretly thinking that the 'accident' was more fortuitous than annoying from her point of view.

'How are you settling in?' he suddenly asked of her, his voice almost betraying a tenderness he would normally have taken great pains in trying to hide.

As he raised to stand back up, Sara suddenly found herself having to suppress a gasp as she became aware that he towered over her. She had almost forgotten his

impressive height and liked the idea that he was so much bigger than her. He had a faint smell of aromatic herbs and of smoke and pine, a sensuous yet very male scent.

His closeness felt extraordinary, thrilling with a shiver of sex, yet somehow safe too, as though he were really familiar to her, as though she knew him intimately already. He stood back a little and smiled down at her. It was a sudden smile of startling candour, giving one side of his mouth a little crease. Sara had to fight very hard to resist the urge to suddenly reach up and touch his face. The thought sent a clear, bright line of sensation through her.

It was obvious then that he was clearly starting to calm down from whatever had triggered the rage responsible for his previous outburst.

'I'm settling in really well,' Sara said, in answer to his question. However, she smiled nervously, despite feeling that she had never felt so glad to be back anywhere in her entire life.

'Feels like I've never been away as a matter of fact!' she continued truthfully, starting to feel a slight blush creep up slowly again from the base of her neck. Why did he still have that effect on her?

Snape seemed to look thoughtful for a few seconds, then said, 'Sara, I've been thinking. With your knowledge of potions, it seems a bit of a waste that you're here now merely as a Secretary. I was wondering.' He stopped abruptly, clipping the sentence, then re-started almost at once.

'I have an important task coming up soon. Some work I have to do for the Ministry. It's basically a case of making up several batches of different potions, but I've been quite concerned for some while now as to whether I would be able to handle it all on my own, with my teaching duties as well I mean. Headmaster Dumbledore suggested a while back that I might like to enlist some help. Perhaps you would consider assisting me?'

Sara's heart felt as if it had leapt from her chest, and inside her head a multitude of tiny cheering voices seemed to have erupted so loudly that she almost wondered if he could hear them. But, in contrast, she became the usual stammering wreck she always seemed to be around him.

'Oh,' was simply all she said, followed hesitantly by, 'Yes. Yes, I suppose I could. But I don't know where that would leave me with Madam Villers. I - I'm not sure how it would affect my duties, you see.'

'Don't worry about that,' the Potions master said assuredly.

'Leave that to me. I'm sure we can sort something out. I'll catch up with you later.'

With that, he turned abruptly, simultaneously almost seeming to re-plant the scowl and steely look back on his face as he appeared to remember his original quest - whatever that was.

'Now, if you'll excuse me ...' He let the sentence hang in mid air and strode off along the corridor at speed, customary cloak whipping around behind him, leaving in his wake an almost tangible electricity in the air, like that just before a storm, as evidence of his intensity.

Sara could only stare after him, marvelling at how one man could have this effect on everything around him and, at the same time, render her personally to feel so enraptured and yet so small and insignificant in comparison.

She couldn't quite manage to control the urge to smile though, and she soon found a huge grin spreading rapidly across her flushed face. It seemed that all her dreams were about to come true at last. She felt that she couldn't have written that last meeting better herself if it had been a scene in a novel and she the author of her own destiny. Such was the strength of her joy, that she thought she might just burst into instantaneous flames of pure happiness ...

Two days later, and before she could get to see again the man she was so excited to at last be working with, came the news of his death. At the hands of Death Eaters, the rumours said.

Four: Desperation

Chapter 4 of 5

Infatuation can last a lifetime. Who knows where a secret schoolgirl crush can take you...

It appeared that Professor Severus Snape had indeed been working as a spy - a double agent clearly. He had obviously riled Lord Voldemort in some way. Sara neither knew nor cared of the reasons - or rather excuses.

Whilst the whole school seemed to sink into collective shock, all she was aware of was that a light had gone out. Her one and only light, the guiding beacon that had been leading her back to Hogwarts and kept her on a single track of thought since originally leaving the school in pursuit of a career.

As this light instantaneously flicked off, so it seemed did Sara's heart: It appeared to have simply expired. And, whilst the mechanics of it continued to pump blood around her veins to keep her physical body alive, she no longer felt anything, just a numb awareness of existing. For her there was now only dark and darkness ...

It was only a reflex, mechanical instinct that made her mind and hands react, she told herself as she gathered the last of the ingredients for the deadly potion she was about to brew and added them to the fizzing, bubbling base liquid resting on the table in front of her.

She hadn't slept, eaten or even drunk since hearing the news of Snape's death, more than 24 hours earlier. Nor had she moved from her room to where she had first walked, unseeing, robotically, on first hearing that devastating news that had rocked her world and torn it to smithereens.

No one had come looking for her - likely they had other things on their minds - and it was only in the last few hours, as the real shock hit home, that her brain had seemed to receive any kind of coherent thought process at all. Less time still since some sort of 'plan' automatically appeared to hatch from the dark recesses of her mind and had begun to transform itself instinctively into action.

As she tipped the newly-brewed concoction into a glass vial, Sara was confident of its abilities. After all, she had been taught at the hands of a master, she reasoned. She knew the process of making this potion by heart. She had never needed to read up on it, not that her mind was capable of such tasks in any case. Fortunately, up until now, she had never had need to brew such a terrifying substance. The thought that it was lethal - not to mention illegal - would ordinarily have horrified her. But these were exceptional circumstances, and she knew she would do anything in order to see her beloved Potions master again.

She had already performed the ritual to enable her to encompass the after-life and was no longer afraid. Consequently, her hands remained relatively steady as she raised the vial to her lips. She had decided that, without question, she could not live without the enigmatic Professor she had so long ago given her heart to. She was mature

enough to know her own mind and indeed that of her heart. But this did not stop her from crying out inside, desperately and in total despair. She wanted to somehow will the powers that be to hear her silent prayer. The fact that she had never had the chance to get to know the recipient of all her affections had truly broken her heart. She prayed that she would soon know him well, maybe even as a lover if she could finally tell him of her true feelings for him ...

Sara downed the vial's contents in one and felt the burning, hot liquid hit the back of her throat with merciless venom. She was surprised by the forcefulness of her own actions and yet spurred on by the clarity of her own reasoning. However, she was just as instantly shaken by their sudden loss, and indeed all loss - of thought, feeling, emotion, and even her own juxtaposition in the now violently spinning world - as she became less and less aware of her surroundings, her very being.

But she no longer cared. She only wanted to see darkness - to reach out and be engulfed by the black, that beautiful deep, dark, all-encompassing black.

Someone had once so profoundly proclaimed: *You have to experience the dark in order to see the light ...*

A/N: I feel compelled to write a few notes regarding this chapter, in view of its contents.

Firstly, I would just like to explain that I, in no way, take the subject of suicide lightly. (Having, unfortunately, been suicidal more times than I care to remember, due to the pressures of constant debilitating illness, you can rest assured that this matter was actually very hard for me personally to write about.)

However, I apologise to those who are offended and saddened by it. This was never intended to be a happy story (there are plenty of those out there) but neither was it my intention to shock. I hope you will forgive me for allowing this to happen to Sara.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, I felt it necessary in order to emphasise the crux of my story: The futility of obsession/infatuation. Sadly, it seems such intense emotions are rarely reciprocated by the one being admired - sometimes to the point of that person not even being aware that they are subject of such idolisation - and most often the admiration is completely inflated and out of proportion (such as in the cases of fans with celebrities, for example. Or indeed fan girls with a certain Potions master, I guess!)

I hope that the epilogue (to follow soon) will go some way to explaining this opinion (which is only mine of course) in a way that will make better sense.

Thank you for reading.

Epilogue

Chapter 5 of 5

Infatuation can last a lifetime. Who knows where a secret schoolgirl crush can take you...

Minerva McGonagall watched, entranced, the awe-inspiring sight of an eagle from the Headmaster's high office window. She watched as it soared and plummeted, by turns, against the soft, shadowy back-drop of the early evening, and she suppressed the strange urge to shiver.

Turning away, she realised that her hands were shaking slightly, so she increased her already tight grip on the empty teacup and saucer which she still held. Placing both pieces of delicate china carefully on a nearby table, she then found herself facing the piercing blue eyes of her long-standing friend and colleague across from her.

For his part, Albus Dumbledore sighed, picking up on his Deputy Headmistress' mood.

'What I don't understand,' she said, her broad Scottish brogue emphasised in the stillness of the near-silent dusk, 'is why a talented young woman like her should choose to end her own life. Surely she had so much to live for?'

'My dear Minerva, you are going to drive yourself to the brink of madness if you keep asking these same questions over and over. There simply appears to be no answer. Perhaps we just have to accept that we shall never know,' came the practical, but not unsympathetic, response from the Headmaster.

Professor McGonagall turned again towards the window, and saw that the eagle still remained sky-borne and silhouetted against the rapidly fading, distant light. She was about to continue her train of thought when both professors were interrupted by a knock on the door.

'Come in!' shouted Dumbledore, knowing full well who was on the other side.

The door opened smoothly, despite it being old and heavy, and the tall, dark wizard outside stooped slightly in order to enter the room, obsidian eyes avoiding direct contact with the two occupants already there.

'Ah, Severus!' exclaimed the Headmaster, completely unfazed. 'I take it you've heard the tragic news about Miss Faraday?'

'Yes, indeed,' said Snape. 'I still can't quite believe it. It just doesn't make sense.'

'Minerva and I were just discussing how to handle things, as a matter of fact. What with your "death" and now this, the school will be in constant mourning,' the elderly Headmaster stated simply.

'I hardly think that anyone is mourning my loss, Albus. In fact, for most students, I suspect rejoicing would be a more appropriate choice of word, by far!' came the response from across the room.

The dryness of the younger wizard's humour was not lost on the recipient's ears, despite the seriousness of the situation.

'Now, now, dear boy--that's nonsense and you know it. You were--are--like a father figure to most of those students, whether they like to acknowledge it or not,' came Albus' quick retort.

'A strict father admittedly, but a remarkable, responsible and deeply caring one nonetheless,' he added for good measure.

Snape snorted resolutely at the Headmaster's comments and turned his own attention to the window, where the eagle still circled, almost expectantly.

He walked over and looked out, a serious expression adding to the hard planes of his distinguished, not-quite-handsome face. Minerva McGonagall moved, slightly hesitantly, to stand by his side. She reached out slowly and laid a tentative hand on his shoulder in a caring, motherly gesture.

'I hate doing this to the students, and my colleagues of course. I don't like lying, as well you know, Albus. Even though I always seem to have to do nothing but these days.'

'I know. It's not easy on any of us. But it's for their own good. It is best that everyone thinks you are dead for the time being. Once Tom is defeated and this ridiculous war won, all will be revealed. Believe me, I don't like this any more than you, and the second the truth can be revealed, and your part in the plan made clear, it will be. You can rest assured on that. Trust me, dear Severus. Trust me.'

The elderly wizard looked up quizzically at the younger and their eyes met in the understanding of a former mentor and student, and as colleagues, friends and comrades of old, though neither said any more on the subject in hand.

Instead, after a short discussion on other less pressing and less serious matters, Severus Snape took his leave.

Just before departing the Headmaster's office though, he transfigured back into the bearded and hunched-over appearance he had been disguised in before coming in.

He closed the door quietly behind him, and slowly, and as silently as was possible, made his way back down the spiral staircase separating the main corridor from the Headmaster's quarters.

He prayed that no one would spot him or deem it necessary to speak to him, lest he should have to reply and run the risk of suspicion or, worse still, recognition. Not that the latter was possible, he felt sure. He was a spy after all. In many ways this was just 'child's play' for a man like him. Nevertheless, he hated having to work 'under cover' for the Ministry like this, and he loathed having to fake his own death and have others believe him murdered. But he also knew it was absolutely necessary in order to avert the growing curiosity over the increasing hours he would have to spend on preparing the deadly poisons and antidotes, in equal measure, required for the on-coming onslaught against the Dark Lord.

The girl's death had left him saddened and in great shock, and not just because he had been relying on her help with the Ministry's covert potion making, although he could not deny that her loss from this was a devastating and forceful blow. He did not know who he could trust now to take her place. She had come highly recommended by Dumbledore, with his assurance of her ability to be trusted, her reliability, and her loyalty. Not to mention her potion making skills and experience of course--the real reason she had been recruited as 'School Secretarial Assistant' by Dumbledore in the first place.

Her death was such a waste, so seemingly pointless. He simply did not know what he was going to do but, equally, he did not doubt that there would be answers. With Albus Dumbledore at the helm there were always answers, he reasoned.

He hurried through a side door and out into the cold, crisp air of the increasingly darkening early evening. Keeping his head bowed, and grasping his cloak tightly around him, he tried to allow his thoughts to steer away from the suicide of Sara Faraday. He knew so little about her, and his only viewpoint was that she had been an excellent student in her time, and an attractive, polite--if a little nervous--young woman on her recent return to the school. He had no time to consider her much and, although her death was strange and, without doubt, sad, he could not afford to ponder on its motivation. He had much greater things on his mind and continued at speed in order to pursue them.

Overhead, the eagle he'd spotted earlier from the Headmaster's window continued its seemingly relentless, spiralling circuit of the school grounds, appearing to fly closer to the ancient castle with each turn.

Suddenly, it swooped low, extremely low, and startled him with its sharp, piercing cry, narrowly missing clipping him on his left shoulder as it dived.

In slight shock, he stepped back quickly into the lee of the castle building. He then watched it as it glided gracefully up into a nearby elm tree, shaking its impressive wing span briefly before settling there.

For a few short seconds their gaze met across the limited distance separating them. The image of the majestic wizard--masquerading as a weary, dishevelled, old man--was mirrored by that of the regal, sharp-eyed, hook-beaked bird.

Although only regarding each other for the briefest of time spans, the professor could have sworn, at that moment, that he caught sight of the flash of blonde and the glimpse of blue-grey eyes. Surely eagles had black eyes? But he concluded that he must have been mistaken. No doubt the fading light and his own tiredness were playing tricks with his mind. So he pushed the thought away as quickly as it came and scurried away to escape from the school grounds in order to enable the safe Apparation to his secret destination.

Meanwhile, the eagle soared once more into the now almost black sky, a perfect silhouette against the retreating brightness of the setting sun. It cut a smooth, dark swathe as it glided gracefully and confidently. It was almost as if it were intentionally in pursuit of the light ... the beautiful all-encompassing, forgiving, rejuvenating, loving, everlasting light.

A/N: I would just like to thank the lovely ladies at TPP admin for their help in getting this story posted. Most especially, I would like to thank Sempra for her patience with my constant struggle with compound sentences. I may actually write a story one of these days and get those pesky commas in their right places first time!

I would also like to offer sincere thanks to morgaine_dulac and star_girl (collectively known as sevs_starsisters of course) for their constant support and encouragement. Their work has brought me both inspiration and aspiration. And a special thank you must go to morgaine for introducing me to this fabulous site. Despite being away on holiday at the moment, she has still found time to review my work and keep in touch. I really do appreciate her 'friendship' and the positive vibes both 'sisters' regularly send my way ... thank you. :-)