

The Potions Master's Nephew

by SeverelySnaped

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Prologue - In which a potion goes decidedly wrong

Chapter 1 of 1

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Prologue

In which a potion goes decidedly wrong

The air was cold in the Hogwarts dungeon. The flickering torchlight cast eerie shadows against the brushed stone walls, making a head of lank, greasy hair glint the same colour as the green flames it passed.

Severus Snape returned from his storeroom and placed the ingredients carefully onto his workbench. His face, usually bearing an expression of unpleasantness, was even stormier and stung with irritation that evening. The perfect consistency of the enormous cauldron's contents next to him did nothing to appease his mood, but rather the steam wisped slowly up at him, resembling the Headmaster's beard which he longed to yank on until the old man finally saw his way.

Dumbledore had managed to pull another Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher out of thin air, politely turning down Snape's annual application for the job. It was as if he thought that teaching Dark Arts would just whet Snape's appetite and tempt him back to the other side. Surely years of faithful service had proven exactly where his loyalties were.

"You know what I must ask you to do, Severus, are you ready?"

As if continuing to doubt him, Dumbledore's questioning voice echoed in his mind. While being examined so searchingly by the Headmaster's piercing eyes he had answered instantly, precisely, unfalteringly, *"I am."*

There was a long silence as Snape continued to stare at the swirling steam, pondering perhaps, if he had answered too rashly. It would be so easy to take a long-deserved trip overseas and just leave everything he knew behind. Hogwarts held next to no fond memories in his mind, and there was hardly anything else that he would miss. Perhaps the usual thoughtful book from the Headmaster at Christmas time...

Slight bitterness filled Snape's mouth at these self-pitying thoughts, and it was then that he realised how he could have answered Dumbledore's question so easily, and why he would stay and do what was needed.

He simply had nothing else.

Flickering his eyes from the steam, Snape strained the precise amount of lacewing flies into a small bowl and tipped it slowly into the simmering cauldron. The potion started to bubble gently as he stirred it, the thick liquid making a quiet gurgling noise. It was one of the few noises that Snape actually liked, and the look of unpleasantness on his face seemed to fade somewhat.

He was so absorbed in the slowly changing colour of the mixture that a light tinkling noise from the shelf above his head made him jump. Craning his neck upwards, he was rewarded with a glimpse of an old, mangy cat skulking around the rarest of his bottled potions. Reaching for his wand with his free hand, he tried to restrain the urge just to zap the cat out of existence, settling with glaring at it murderously whilst he levitated each bottle one by one onto his work bench below.

Barely had he reached his third bottle, however, when Mrs Norris realised that her shields against brutal assault were disappearing, and she crouched suddenly, as if poised for attack. Her sudden movement made one of the bottles wobble slightly, and Snape's concentration was momentarily broken. The cauldron made an angry gurgling noise at the sudden halt in its stirring, and the levitating bottle tipped precariously onto its side.

"Careful now," Snape ground out in what he hoped was a soothing tone. "Just move slowly away from the bottles..."

But the way the muscle was moving in Snape's cheek didn't sit well with Mrs Norris, and in a split second she bolted backwards against the wall, sending bottles flying and making Snape yell in anger. The bottle that had been suspended in the air fell to the floor with a smash, the splattering bits and pieces exploding suddenly as they hit the blue flames underneath the cauldron. Attempting to steady the shaking cauldron with one hand and stop further bottles from falling with the other, Snape waved his wand wildly, not bothering to restrain roaring his complete fury at the alarmed cat. In sudden panic she lunged through the rest of the bottles, launching herself straight at Snape's contorted face. Snape barely had time to register before a shower of bottles hit him front on, followed by a scratchy ball of tattered fur.

Although he heard the splash and fizz of potions hitting his mixture, he still tried one last attempt at levitating the entire cauldron backwards. But the floor was slippery with liquid and Snape only succeeded in slipping backwards himself, grabbing the rim of the cauldron for support and batting away the terrified cat scratching at his face. He gave one last unintelligible yell that turned into a gurgle before the cauldron tipped over; dousing him in scorching, blue liquid.
