

# If You Can Keep Your Head When All About You...

*by janus*

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Additional Warnings: Misogyny, Transphobia, Violence, Bullying, Dark Themes and Manipulation

## ...You Will Be A Man, My Son

*Chapter 1 of 1*

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**Author's Notes:** With kind thanks to Slytherinlaurel for suggestions, encouragement and her wonderful beta-work, and to Christev for a kind alpha-reading of the first few sections. This was much harder to write than anticipated. It is a hard tale, not light-hearted, and perhaps not what you are expecting, but it has a happy ending. The misogyny in Severus' attitudes is not my own, but those of a young boy who does not want to be a girl and has had certain expectations laid upon him. The title is the opening of Kipling's *If*, which ends: "Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it, And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!" Thank you for reading.

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Dumbledore blinked, then looked more closely. One of the names seemed to be shivering slightly in his book of wizards - his book in which the names were inscribed of those who would be eligible to attend Hogwarts.

This was a name which had appeared on the last page of his book the moment the child was born. He had noticed it, because the date of entry to Hogwarts did not match the rest of the names that had appeared at the same time. Usually a child developed magic as it grew. This name had stayed at the bottom of the list for some time, though now it was surrounded by other names of its year.

But now it was again distinguishing itself, this time by moving. He looked over his glasses and bent close to the page. It slid from the girls' column towards the boys, the ink stretching and retracting as if it were walking. Then it slid back again, and finally sat shivering in the very centre of the page. He poked it with his wand, experimentally, but the little name did not respond. Nothing like this had ever happened before.

He watched over the time that followed. Slowly, it crept over to the column of boys' names, and eventually, there it stayed, shivering a little only occasionally. One day he noticed the name had also changed. The feminine 'a' ending had been replaced with a firm masculine 'us.' He raised an eyebrow. The parents were aware, then. He would see what happened when the child entered school. The boy. It would be a boy.

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The child more than remembered that he had been forced into this body and these expectations. He still felt it keenly. How could it have happened? His mother, perhaps, had used her magic to change him within her from his conception. Perhaps it had been *her* will that had made him a girl. It was his own will that allowed him to... *turn back*. That was what it was. Turning back. Righting the world.

With will and magic.

They had been happy: two young parents with a small baby girl. Oh, his father had wanted a boy, of course. He knew that. A son and heir. The child nearly spat at the memory of these words. It was assumed that another child would follow. The *heir*. His mother, for all she had ... she *must* have ... wanted a girl, smiled almost burstingly when his father spoke of the boy to come. They bought things for him too, storing them happily for 'when the time came.' They began saving money for when the new *boy* would go to school.

His mother told him stories of school as well, but there was *noimperative*.

"You throw like a *girl*," his father said. He didn't throw like a girl. He practiced until it was certain. But his father did not want to throw balls with him anyway.

*Why should I not be the special one, the wanted one?*

At three, he could read. At three, he had trained himself. He had trained himself not just for the bathroom, but to bathe as well. Because he didn't want them to look at him. At three, he was already changing. With will, he could hold himself changed.

At night he lay on his little cot, under the blanket. He clenched his hands, pinched his eyes shut, and pressed his heels against the mattress. He had no wand yet, but he had looked up Latin books at the library and fed his magic into *his* incantation, silent so no one would hear. He strained with all that was in him, focused with all the intensity he could summon. And yes, it appeared, the precious miracle of himself. It worked best at night.

He helped with the cooking, because it was *potions*, because someday it would help him change so no one would ever, ever, ever know. He did not cook as a girl would, with an apron, happy because her mama had one. His mouth had a little frown of concentration. His fingers were sure as he cut and stirred. He did not stop until there was no more need to stir, even though his arms were tired and ached. He needed to learn *everything*, and he needed to know how to *doeverything*. His mother was not pleased. He might have done what she wanted, but he never did it in the *way* she wanted. And often, the better he did, the more determined he was, the more she frowned. He was not soft, but thin and bony, and she did not hug him or hold him anymore.

There were clothes of carefully increasing sizes for the boy that was to come. He took them, replacing them with his hated girl's clothes. They were all a little tight, because he was older than the age of the child for whom the clothes had been made, but... he dressed himself as a boy. He was almost sepulchrally thin. The clothes were simply too short. His parents castigated him; they wailed and roared; they slammed doors; they took away the little trousers and shirts. Somehow he ended locked in his room, resentful, his arm wrenched, his skin stinging from their grasp and open hands. Was it his mother? His father? In the maelstrom, he hadn't distinguished. When he got the chance, he took the clothes again, and again discarded the girl's clothing. Again came the reaction, the retaliation. His lips tightened; his eyes hardened. He was *right*. And he would not give up.

He cried when he was taken to the market dressed in a frock. "Please," he had said. "Please. They'll think I'm a girl. They'll treat me like a *girl*. I won't be able to do *anything*. They won't let me do the real work." Real work was men's work. You had to be strong and carry things. His mother would clean and organise, then sit at the table selling preserves. He had cried. Like a girl. He cried like a girl, because he wasn't a girl. He would never cry again, he had decided, ashamed.

They had been happy - two young parents with a baby girl, and their baby boy would come soon. "I can make sure that it is a boy this time," his mother had said, pleased and a little smug.

"It would have been better if the boy had been the older one. Then he could have taken care of his little sister," his father had answered.

"I did not use magic last time," she had smiled, "but this time, it will be a boy for you. There are spells."

The extant child's cheeks and ears had burned. *Don't they know I can hear them?* he had thought. *I'm right here*. He did not believe his mother. She *must* have cast the spell that had changed him. Was there a hint of concealment, of prevarication? He could not detect it, even as he narrowed his eyes suspiciously. She sounded so definite.

It was a mixed family. His father had been glad of the prettiness and spark of his mother's magic. It had seemed a toy, a trinket, something that made her charming and desirable. His mother had been pleased with his father's masculinity, by the very differences from her own life that made him intriguing. He was so *real*.

Now they blamed one another for their disappointment ... more than disappointment ... in what their child had become. He had taken the heart and hope from their family. It was hollow now. There would be no son now, no heir.

His father drew back horrified from his mother's magic and, by extension, his mother. He set bars of prohibition against magic. There would be no son. What if, in joy and fulfillment, he were to be given that son, that *real* son, and it were to seize this filthy corruption of *magic* to rearrange itself as well. He could not bear it, could not open to the chance. Bringing more such children into this world was out of the question. His true child was scarcely a child at all but a disgusting changeling.

His father wanted to be warm. He had naturally been warm once and now exhibited odd bursts of fond emotion, mostly when drinking. The pub was his refuge. His mates were his conversation and his door to the world he had left behind. But equally often came the anger at the starkness and emptiness of his world. His life was over, would never ever move forward to the future. There was no son, no heir, and he was trapped.

His mother was not warm, but she was like the child in her determination and will. She would not bend, would not surrender to any joy, once she had decided that it was unwarranted. She too had bursts of lamentation, aimed at the child, loud and startling. She had committed to her marriage and her child, and even if there was no light, neither was there escape. She would allow no escape for any of them. There was no smile for her child now.

Against her husband, she renounced Muggle ways, even Christmas. Any pleasure or brightness of the Muggle world was prohibited as well as the magic his father denied the family. There were no movies, no music, no pleasures of anticipations of birthdays or holidays. There was no television or new toys. There was no family. The parents lived together, bitter and watchful of each other and their small child.

He had never understood them. Why was it not enough for him to possess genius, to work hard, to reach for a star of greatness shining beyond anything they could imagine?

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Dumbledore's lions, brave, loyal and true, had distinguished themselves in all these qualities, against all regulation and even expectation. As Headmaster, he had known about it, of course, but boys should have freedom for adventure and danger. Of *course* they should accompany and ease their afflicted fellow. Of *course* the mystery and wild joy of twilight under a silver moon beckoned like Faerieland. But they raced and danced into it as unaware as any of Faerie's victims. Dumbledore had laughed with them, shared vicariously in their forbidden stolen joy. Marauders, yes.

But marauders also...

*It's Hi Ho Hey, I am a bold marauder*

*And Hi Ho Hey, I am a white destroyer*

*For I will take you out by the hand and lead you to the hunter*

*And I will show you thunder and steel and I will be your teacher*

All his careful recruitment, his plans and even his base of operations could be snatched from him. Would Abraxas allow him to continue as Headmaster, searching as Governor Malfoy had ever done to find excuse to justify Dumbledore's deposition? No, the discovery Dumbledore had endangered the students by allowing werewolves and marauding Animagi would undo all he had attained, which was the position of greatest influence in Wizarding Britain. Every witch and wizard passed through his hands, walked through the refining fire of the experiences with which he moulded their hearts and minds.

This one student could ruin everything and cause him to lose not only that, but the war that depended upon it. It was a war. It was a war against a student, who years ago had slipped, smoothly cunning, through his grasp. It was a war against a boy who sought to overthrow all of the Heaven of the Wizarding World. It was a war against a second boy, long ago when Dumbledore had been young, with that same surety, that talent... no, he would not say 'talent'. It was a war against another, with that same unquenchable superiority.... It was a war against another boy, eternally a boy, who had snatched Dumbledore's political innocence and dangled it above his head, laughingly promising glory and immortality in exchange for duty. That boy had lost *his* war.

And Dumbledore's war could be lost now, just because there was a student who was determined to expose all the good nature and generosity he had offered freely to the werewolf and these bold lions, his friends. This student could take from him that very ability ... to select and protect those who struck him as worthy. It could all be lost ... Hogwarts itself could be lost to him ... because this thin, grasping, hungry student with black greasy hair and black scowling eyes simply desired it. It must *not* be. He must *not* lose the stronghold and centre of his war and world. He had aspired to the role of Headmaster as more influential and powerful than the post of chief of the Wizengamot itself. These bright young ones must *not* lose their freedom, their chances, their lives, to this boy whose arts were as dark as his features. Wait... this boy...

But he had not always been a boy, had he? Dumbledore's frown smoothed somewhat and he turned again to the great book, thumbing to this year, this group of students. He found the little name at once. It was quivering again, still in the column of boys, but stretching to the column of girls. Ah, puberty. And the child would be preoccupied with this struggle of body and soul. With his fine pureblood friends, and his mentor so aristocratic, he would not want this secret known. Taint, among these, rendered one a worm, or perhaps a cockroach, to be caramelised into a cluster and crunched without thought.

It was time for a little chat. The blue eyes regained their twinkle.

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The child, the boy now, was indeed struggling. He struggled with all his magic and will in the night. He struggled with potions and secret extra studies during any extracurricular moment. During this time he worked hard at his classes too. He was excelling. He *had* to be great. Every assignment and every test *counted*. And there were Mr. Malfoy's projects and assignments too. He didn't have *time* for this. But perhaps the things he did with his body counted now as well, perhaps this time would 'fix' them if he succeeded, even as they were slipping for the first time since childhood.

He listened to the girls' excited whispers about their bodily changes, a little smug. Not me. Not ever. I've forestalled it all. But one night he woke in agony and there was blood on the sheets from his... from his... from himself. It could only be a... a female change. He separated it from himself even as he tried to twist to avoid the terrible wracking pain. He couldn't go to the Hospital Wing. What he had done would all come out. He couldn't bear to be made to change to the girl he had never been, should not have been. How could his mother have betrayed him so? He held his precious self protectively, proud it was growing larger now just like those of the other boys.

What to do then? He spelled the blood away in a whisper, then dressed painfully and downed his work-in-progress, sweat sheening his forehead, his face waxy as he clutched his stomach - no, not his stomach. He would say his stomach because to say otherwise was to say he possessed something no boy had. Sheer will had worked before, but now he needed more, and oh Merlin, it *hurt*. His potion had not been quite ready yet, but this was an emergency. He made his way to the potions laboratory, even before dawn, to brew himself a draught against pain. He would not say anything, not a word, not a gesture. He would endure any pain. But for now, in private, he gripped his... stomach, as if this would help.

Then will. Sheer will and magic had worked before.

Oh, yes, he was struggling. And then had come the nightmare and the chat with Dumbledore.

Certainly he would not tell now, would never tell Dumbledore's secret, and his Occlumency waxed strong enough to hide it even from the Dark Lord, with his own secret. Mr. Malfoy had given him everything ... the possibility of the shining star that would become greatness. He did not quite believe the great man would hate him if he knew his truth, but he could not risk it, for it would be risking everything.

He would make his mentor proud. After his OWL exam he carefully tucked his Defence Against the Dark Arts essay into his bag, then took it out again. He went down to his tree to read it again. He planned to send it to Abrax... to Mr. Malfoy, so he began to look over it for phrase and grammar once again.

Moments later he was wandless, upside down under the tree, victim of his own spell, his pants airing for all to see. He had managed to store his essay safely, but that was all. Oh, Merlin, no. No, no, no, no. His... stomach clenched and his mind clenched as well ... against any visible trace of his secret. Please no blood now, not a betraying drop... They *couldn't* know. Even as he fought to free himself, flailing impotently, his mind thought to maintain iron will over his body.

And, worse ... Merlin, how could it have become worse, yet it had; there was Lily, trying to save him as a knight would save a princess. A fucking princess. And though he was telling her, desperate, his mind otherwise occupied. *She was not going away*. She *had* to go away. What if she remembered the market, long ago? What if she saw the dark secret, saw and never wanted to talk to him again? She was *not going away*. He *had* to make her go away. He could not bear to watch her face changed with revulsion at this... this *thing* that he had done his utmost to obliterate.

Suspended inverted, like the proverbial Hanged Man, he sacrificed his first friendship to his awful secret. *Avaunt!* screamed the part of his mind that was not otherwise engaged, but the words that left his lips were, "Filthy Mudblood!" And oh, he was sorry, *knowing* that he was destroying the best part of his childhood as he did so *knowing* as he said it that there would be no more innocent reverie under the dappling boughs of the playground of Spinner's End. He was fully Abraxas' now, as he struggled out of the egg that represented the world he had left for Hogwarts. Oh, yes. He *knew*.

And Lily left. He turned back to the task of binding his body to his soul *in extremis*, and oh, yes, he was successful, but he discarded the shell which had inscribed that holy sphere around him since birth. The world was raw, and he entered it nearly naked.

He was a man, and Abraxas was his hope.

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It was Christmas Eve, and he had his hand set now with his mentor's ring circling his index finger, the little dark mark within warm against his flesh. He was in Abraxas' study, simply reading from the great man's library, comfortable in his presence.

"I have something for you. Not a gift, but a document. A Muggle legal document, if such a thing is not the oxymoron it ought to be."

It was a birth certificate, with the old rejected name and a gender that had never been his, even as he had torn it from himself. He felt his mind drawing back, his body aching to run with all its instinct, even as he sat still. He froze. His face blanched.

They looked at one another across the desk. "So," Abraxas encouraged him.

"So..." If Severus had dared he would have looked up into the corner of the room. There were so many unspoken questions. *Why didn't you tell me? How dare you have kept this from me? How can the Dark Lord trust you now? How dare I trust you now?* And then would come the banishment. How could he bear to return to his parents' dismal mill town? Or their Christmas dinner of tinned soup accompanied by tight-lipped unspoken denial that it was a holiday at all? It was too late to ask to remain at the school. He certainly could not afford an inn. He did not think he could face his friends. His world had ended. Perhaps he would simply walk out into the snowy Wiltshire plains and walk and walk until he continued out onto a beach at the far west of England and then into the sea...

But Abraxas was speaking again. "Rabastan will be coming tomorrow. Tell me, do you care for him?"

It seemed a nonsequitur. Did he *care* for him? They never spoke of hearts or feelings, of... caring. Severus was arrested, and only answered automatically, telling the truth, for it was Abraxas, and as the older man knew the larger secret, Severus would withhold nothing more. "Yes, sir, but..."

Abraxas interrupted whatever he had been about to say. "I think you should tell him. It is only right, if you care for him."

He was speechless.

"Severus."

Yes, *sir*? But he did not answer, standing guilty and a little confused.

"Severus. I will speak frankly. It does not make you a girl, if you care for Rabastan. It is not only girls that care for men, or that do things with them. You *are* a man. Whatever you do defines and expands what men do, as a group. Rabastan cares for you, and that does not make him a girl. Nor does his care make you a girl. He cares for you as a man for a man."

"I..." It was too late for apology. Gratitude would be obsequious and Abraxas spurned such show. He was honestly grateful for the chance to share the secret he had held so long in close fear.

"Severus. Hold up your hand."

He did so, wondering.

"You have my ring. My blessing. We need not speak of this again."

"Yes sir." And a grin broke across his face. His mentor *had* given him a gift. He had given him everything that mattered to him. And he had given him freedom from the darkness he had carried since birth. Abraxas knew, and there was surely no one who would dare oppose him. He still scarcely knew what to say, but there was no need. Now he felt he wanted to run outside through the fields where he had seen himself walking dejected. He wanted to run for joy, proud in the icy air, cold and clean and clear.

Abraxas called the House Elf for cocoa and cakes.

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The next day Rabastan Apparated inside the gates, in a green woollen cloak with a curly cape, and a muffler and hat. He was big and warm, and he bore presents and a smile. It was Christmas. It was not Severus' home, so he was not first to greet the guest, but he stood a little behind the Malfoys.

Rabastan's etiquette was perfect, but then he turned to Severus and put his arm around his neck, comradely, including him.

Severus shrank a little. Soon he would have to broach the awful subject. Even after Abraxas' kindness and oblique acceptance, Rabastan was still the close one, the warm one, the one who shared... everything. He was the one who had been his companion in school, his confidant, the one who had given him his confidences. He ducked his head a little, ashamed of keeping a secret, but somehow sheepish. The fear had lessened, but he felt very... odd.

And there was Rabastan's breath in his ear, not whispered, but spoken quietly and seriously. "Abraxas told me." The arm around him tightened supportively, still friendly, still warm, and lips touched his neck.

Everything was all right. Everything would be all right, now. He had his mentor, and he had his friend.