

Between a Sleep and a Sleep

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Chapter 1 of 1

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The Beginning

A small, scrawny boy with lanky black hair walked quickly, head down, to the stool at the front of the room. He sat hesitantly, knees pressed together. His thin shoulders were hunched forward protectively, bony fingers worrying the already frayed cloth of his robes. His eyes darted across the room warily, as though he were waiting for something unpleasant or embarrassing to happen. When a snicker was heard from the Gryffindor table, his head dropped, knuckled fists clenching tightly on his lap.

Well. This would be interesting.

She approached him, pausing when he flinched, surprised. She walked up to him like one would a cornered animal: warily, smoothly, softly. He relaxed just a fraction when he saw the Sorting Hat in her hands, sitting up just a bit straighter on his chair. His hands unclenched, a tiny spark of nervous excitement blooming on his face. She placed the Sorting Hat on his head, and a mere second later, the cry of *Slytherin!* resounded. She reclaimed the hat and stood back.

When he stood up to go to his new House's table, he stood tall, as though he had been vindicated from some secret wrong. And when the feast was finished, and his new classmates rose to escort him to his dormitory for their first night at Hogwarts, he looked at her. A small smile, soft, genuine, almost too quick to see, escaped from his lips.

That one would be one to watch closely.

The Heart

He was a good student.

His intellect was without peer, in certain areas of study. His social mores, though, left a bit to be desired. He was a Slytherin, of that there was no doubt, but he clearly had brains as well as loyalty, and as for bravery, she was sure it was hidden, carefully kept from prying eyes like a prized childhood toy.

She wondered what would happen if it were ever put to the test.

And then it was, and he returned to them, ink-stained and righteous and bitter, and when she realized what he had done, that he had chosen power and belonging over goodness and them and *her*, she closed herself up in her chambers and wept.

She blamed herself in many ways. For taking the easy route, for saying he was another's responsibility, for not having ever tried to intervene, for taking the sides of those in her own House, perhaps all too often unfairly. For only, only ever watching.

But then came the night in which the Headmaster pulled her aside and told her of the "new arrangement," such as it was, and a small, soft glimmer of hope blossomed

deep within her chest.

They would be colleagues. Equals. Perhaps even friends.

And the years went by, and she watched him move from thin, rangy, angry boy to lean, tall, caustic man. She comforted those whom he frightened and hushed those who gossiped, and all the while she watched, trying to understand, never entirely sure that she did.

The night that Dumbledore died nearly proved to be her undoing.

But in the year to follow, she saw things, things that made her rethink everything she thought she had known, and that small glimmer of hope, nearly extinguished, flickered to life once more, even as his eyes darkened to deepest black and his face became etched with the burden of his efforts.

The End

His broken and battered body was retrieved the day after the battle ended.

Aurors, students, townspeople and teachers alike scoured the grounds for survivors, but the longer they looked, the fewer they found. Soon, the Great Hall (what was left of it) was filled with bodies. Many she knew. Many she had never seen before. And many, many more she couldn't identify.

But then Hagrid carried him in and her heart stopped.

She watched as the faculty stepped back neutrally. She watched as some students hissed, or cried on each other's shoulders. She watched as one angry young man spit on him as Hagrid walked by. She watched as Potter strode forward, and Granger, and they protected him with their presence, for no one would dare to speak against them, not yet. She watched as the four of them walked carefully into the Hall and gently laid him down on one of the few empty cots still left, arranging his limbs and robes into some semblance of propriety. She watched as they stood there in silence, not knowing what to do next, not willing to leave him alone.

How very interesting, indeed.

She walked over to them, not caring that her hair was askew, or that her robes were torn in immodest ways, or that she was wearing the blood of dozens of people, herself possibly included. She sat next to him, deliberately, quite properly, and Summoned herself a cup of tea. She looked up at the three of them who were looking down at her in uncertainty and astonishment. She stared at them, not sorrowfully, nor dutifully, but fiercely, determinedly, and with great resolve. She took his hand, and they understood, and they left her there with him.

She straightened her skirts around her and began, once again, to keep her watch.

His speech is a burning fire;

With his lips he travaileth;

In his heart is a blind desire,

In his eyes foreknowledge of death:

He weaves, and is clothed with derision;

Sows, and he shall not reap;

His life is a watch or a vision

Between a sleep and a sleep.

--A.C. Swinburne