

# The Secrets of Severus Snape

by snapesgirl21

Severus Snape survives the attack from Nagini, only to become the next victim of a Rita Skeeter tell-all. Fleeing to his new home, Snape finds he must confront the demons of his past to prepare for an unexpected future. Compliant up through DH, with the exception of Snape's death.

## New Beginnings

Chapter 1 of 5

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*'What more can they tell you? I am neither good nor bad, but a man.'*

– Pablo Neruda, "And Love Battles On".

Severus watched on as the house on Spinner's End burned. The roof had caved in and flames were shooting from the windows. The houses to either side of his were abandoned, and no one was out on the street at this time of night to notice the engulfed home. His pale face glowed orange with the reflection of the fire. The crackling of the flames and the falls of beams and walls inside the home reminded Severus of his childhood. Neighbors often heard loud thuds from inside the Snape home: of chairs being thrown, fists (or bodies) hitting the wall, often going through the plaster, or someone being pushed down the stairs. Those were always accompanied by raised voices or cries. Tonight, however, there were no screams. No angry words, no pleas for mercy, no tearful apologies for falsely perceived wrongs.

Severus felt a sadistic joy at watching the house burn. Even though it would not burn away his memories, it would destroy the reminder. He had returned to this home every summer holiday after he began teaching at Hogwarts, merely because he had no other home to go to and could not afford one on a mere teacher's salary. That and he had no desire to skulk about the castle with Dumbledore and Filch all summer. Though now, as Severus was surprised to learn, Dumbledore hadn't skulked around the castle during the summer either. Severus had been told upon awakening from his coma that Dumbledore had left Severus his French summer home in his will. Since Severus had been on the run from the Ministry when Dumbledore's will was initially released, the Ministry deemed him unworthy of receiving his inheritance. The Battle of Hogwarts had changed that.

Severus' ruminating was interrupted by the shrill sounds of sirens approaching the neighborhood. Someone must have noticed at last that the house was on fire. Severus turned and walked away, not looking back on his old home. He walked through several streets of identical houses, many abandoned and boarded up. After reaching the end of the row of houses, Severus found himself in a familiar neighborhood. The houses were livelier, painted in bright colors, with well maintained front lawns and nice cars parked in the drive. Severus walked another several streets to the house he had watched and envied as a young boy. It was still painted yellow, as it had been in those days, with a large oak tree in the yard, providing it with a comforting shade during the hot summers and protection from the frequent rain. Severus watched the house for a few moments before continuing on to the nearby park, where he and Lily had played together as children. The swing he had watched Lily so gracefully fall from was still there, swaying slightly with the breeze, the chains creaking. Severus walked over to it and sat down. He looked at the bush he had hidden behind, watching her, as a 10-year-old boy. It had grown wider and taller since then. Severus pulled the *Daily Prophet* out of the pocket of his coat. Rita Skeeter's smirking face looked up at him and the headline above read 'Late Rita Skeeter Posthumously Publishes Snape Tell-All.' Below, the author of the article had written a short blurb about the surprise of the book and published the book's introduction in the article.

## The Secrets of Severus Snape

*The last few years has seen our world turned upside down, as it was two decades ago. The return of Voldemort (yes, I dare to publish his name) had caused widespread fear in both the Magical and Muggle worlds, though the Muggles were oblivious as to the exact problem. But now, it is assumed he is gone for good and we are allowed to attempt to put our world back together. And the question remains: to whom do we owe the greatest thanks for the downfall of the most dangerous Dark Wizard of all time? Is it Albus Dumbledore, late Headmaster of Hogwarts who founded the Order of the Phoenix, which led the resistance in both Wizarding Wars? Is it Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived-Turned-Chosen-One, who blindly followed the direction of Dumbledore and actually sacrificed his own life (though, of course, he didn't die) to bring Voldemort down for good? Potter says no. Potter attests that the gratitude of the wizarding world is owed to a man who had been viewed as a highly ambiguous character up until the murder of Albus Dumbledore, to which Harry Potter himself had provided testimony to the events that unfolded and branded him a traitor. That man is Severus Snape, the Hogwarts professor who was a Death Eater, turned spy for the Order and who murdered the leader of the resistance.*

*Potter provided the Ministry with the memories Snape had bestowed upon him after being attacked by Voldemort's snake, Nagini. These memories showed the motivation for Snape's actions throughout the years, the orders that Dumbledore had given to him and Snape's ultimate loyalties. Potter has worked tirelessly in his attempts to restore the reputation of the man who he once hated and thought a traitor as Snape, initially thought to be dead, lay in a coma at St. Mungo's Hospital.*

*Upon awakening from his two-month-long coma, Snape was extensively interrogated by the Magical Law Enforcement regarding his life, going all the way back to his days at Hogwarts as a student, where he was initially introduced to the Death Eaters and Voldemort's movement for Wizarding supremacy, up until the final Battle at Hogwarts, where he nearly lost his life at the orders of his former master. Snape was required to provide the memories of everything to the Ministry for review to determine if Snape should be charged with any crimes.*

*I, Rita Skeeter, award-winning author, have obtained this information through a personal source of mine from the Ministry and will be revealing it all to you in this book. I have been told I only have weeks left to live, so I have no fear of repercussions, as this is not being published until after my death. I have managed to provide you with a look into the highly secretive life of Severus Snape, starting with his sad upbringing in a rundown Muggle home and following him through the years of pain, loss and dark magic. Accompanying the information obtained from the Ministry, I have managed to locate and interview an estranged relative of Snape's, several former students, current Hogwarts colleagues and former Death Eaters to provide us the details of this secretive life. And through this, you can decide the answer to the question: Is Severus Snape to thank for saving us from Voldemort?*

Snape shook his head in disgust and threw the paper onto the grass. He had thought he was safe from such exposés since Skeeter had died soon after he had awoken from his coma. Apparently, even the dying liked digging into his life. Severus looked down at his watch. It read a quarter past four. He was due to catch a ferry across the Channel in forty-five minutes. Looking around to ensure that there was no one in sight, he Disapparated on the spot where he and Lily were introduced for the first time, and his intention was never to return.

# Lac du Grenouilles

## Chapter 2 of 5

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*I'm so tired of this town*

*Where every tongue is wagging*

*When every back is turned '*

*-Sarah McLachlan, "Dirty Little Secret"*

As the residents of Sept Batons were beginning their day, Severus Snape was hoping that his own would soon be coming to an end. He had been awake the entire night preparing to leave, along with burning down Spinner's End and the tedious adventure of travelling out of Britain via Muggle channels.

He Apparated to the spot on the map, indicated by Dumbledore, which was in a wooded area outside of Sept Batons, France. The town was named such due to the presence of seven trees by the entrance to the town, which continued to grow, but did not have any branches or leaves, merely trunks. The Muggle residents of the town just saw it as an environmental mystery, but the Magical residents knew better. The area had been a favorite of Merlin, and in to order locate it he had charmed seven trees to grow in the form of wands as a way of allowing himself and other Magical folk to recognize the area, while keeping it concealed from Muggles. The current Sept Batons was a mix of Muggle and Magical folk, similar to the village of Godric's Hollow in Britain.

Dumbledore's instructions made it clear to Severus that he would have to walk the remainder of the way to his new home, as Anti-Apparition Jinxes had been placed around the lake upon which Dumbledore's cottage lay. There were also Muggle-Repelling Charms, due to the fact that Dumbledore's wasn't the only magical home on the lake and the residents of the area liked to be able to exercise their magic without caution.

Severus pulled out his wand and performed the Four-Point Spell, which told him that north was to his left. He began walking in the direction of his destination, which was through the forest.

A quarter of an hour later, Severus could see sunlight streaming into a clearing ahead. As he emerged from the woods, his eyes were met with the dawning sun reflecting off a blue lake. Severus' eyes took a few seconds to adjust to the blinding light before he could begin to look around for the cottage. Dumbledore's note in his will, which had given Severus his instructions on locating it, described it as a grey stone cottage with a garden and lay on the west side of the lake.

Severus was able to spot the house to his left and began walking towards it, admiring the environment. Despite all of Dumbledore's shortcomings, he had excellent taste in his surroundings. The lake, which was smaller than the Hogwarts' Black Lake, was crystal clear and inviting. The mountains rose above it, looking tempting for days of journey. Severus surveyed the rest of the lake and saw three other homes around it. According to Dumbledore, all of the inhabitants were witches or wizards, so magic could be practiced freely.

Once Severus reached the door to the cottage, he muttered, "Alohomora", and the door unlocked. He turned the knob and walked inside. Candles lit as Severus entered

the room, exposing a high ceiling with dark, wooden beams. The walls were made of the same dark wood, as was the floor. In typical Gryffindor fashion, the sofa and the chairs were a burgundy color with gold pillows. The rug on the floor reminded Severus of a Native American design, with its contrasting browns and reds and geometric shapes. He recalled that he had once heard Dumbledore say his mother had been a Native American witch, a very rare phenomenon, and had been forced to leave her tribe, as they considered her powers to be the work of some evil spirit. On the wall opposite the door was a large, stone fireplace. A dark wooden mantle flanked the opening and, to Severus' dismay, a portrait of Albus Dumbledore was hanging over it, the late Headmaster pretending to be dozing in his chair. Severus rolled his eyes and walked over to the fireplace.

"Dumbledore, why do you have a portrait here? Did you not torture me enough while I was Headmaster?" he asked, sneering at the man he murdered. At that moment, he almost derived pleasure from the fact.

Dumbledore feigned awakening and looked at Severus, smiling serenely.

"Ah, Severus, glad you made it, my boy. Do you like the place?"

Severus peered down the hall, which led to the rest of the house.

"I don't know. All I've seen is the living room, but if every room is done up in those bloody Gryffindor colours, I shall absolutely loathe it."

Dumbledore chuckled. "I assure you, Severus, they are not. Now please, finish exploring the house and then come back and tell me what you think. We have much to talk about."

Severus glared at Dumbledore, his wand itching to set the portrait on fire. "Yes, we do, Dumbledore. You had better be here when I return or I shall destroy this damn portrait and finally banish you from my life."

Severus turned to walk away down the hall, ignoring Dumbledore's muttering. "He thinks I hadn't already prepared for such threats."

Severus continued down the hall, upon which he found the bathroom, which was done in simple black and white. Across from the bathroom was the kitchen, which was a Hufflepuff shade of yellow, making Severus slightly nauseous. Thinking he would be changing the colour later, Severus left the kitchen and found two more doors in the hallway. The bedroom, done in a shade of blue that remind Severus of robins' eggshells, had a brown duvet on the bed and dark wood furniture. Severus shook his head. Until Severus had read Rita Skeeter's biography on Dumbledore, Severus had been skeptical about the Headmaster's sexuality. Apparently, Severus need only have made a trip to this house to confirm it. He clearly exhibited his homosexuality in his décor. Severus almost didn't want to open the last door. He could only imagine what atrocities awaited him. Pink bunnies, puppies, a mural of Harry Potter on the wall... all three together? Severus steeled himself and held his breath as he opened the door. What met his eyes was enough to forgive Dumbledore for the other horrid rooms. A library, with bookshelves from floor to vaulted ceiling, a beautiful stone fireplace, and two brown armchairs sat facing each other in front of the fireplace, along with a brown sofa that sat in between the chairs, facing the fire. What amazed Severus the most was the wall upon which the fireplace was built. The enchanted wall allowed him the view of the lake and mountains. From the outside, he knew it had appeared a normal part of the cottage.

Through all of his amazement, Severus realized he had overlooked an envelope with his name on it, resting atop the mantle. He picked it up and opened it, recognizing the handwriting as Dumbledore's.

*Dear Severus,*

*As you know by now, I have left this home to you, a mere token of my appreciation for all you have done for me and for what you will be doing in the near future. I should only hope you live freely and are able to come here. The home is a wonderful place and this area is truly magnificent.*

*I know you are asking why I would write a letter when my portrait is in the living room. I assumed it would be better this way, in case you have destroyed the portrait before I was able to share some important information with you. Along with inheriting the house, you have inherited my house-elf, Bijou. She works at Hogwarts during the year, as you know, but she tends to this house as well and works here full time during summer holiday. Should you decide not to return to Hogwarts, you may recall Bijou to remain here permanently. Since she only worked for me, she will not be greatly missed; there are more than enough house-elves to make up for her absence. If you are returning to Hogwarts, as I hope you are, she will become your personal elf there and will still maintain this home. I had already informed her of this change, as she and I were very close. She is actually a cousin to Dobby, the Malfoys' former house-elf that works at Hogwarts. She had belonged to the Lestranges and had been poorly mistreated. I took her in once they were imprisoned, as she no longer belonged to anyone.*

*In terms of the neighbours, everyone is magical that live around the lake. No Muggles can come here due to the Muggle-Repelling Charms around the area. In the brown house across the lake live Jean-Paul and Marie Schneider. They are quite... eccentric. Think of the French-German equivalents of Xenophilus Lovegood. They are very kind people, despite their hunts for unknown creatures and odd theories. Next to the Schneiders are Noelle D'Azur and Louise Marchand. They are quite the opposites of the others around here. They are more like the Malfoys in their view of the world. They are sisters.... of the Sapphic variety. They never acknowledge it, I don't know why, but it is fairly obvious. They are also incredibly inquisitive and may ask you a hundred thousand questions within your first visit. Please try not to hex them. Annoying as they are, they do possess some of the best potion-making abilities, next to yours, of course. They work from home and quite successfully, so should they die, many people would want to hunt down the murderer. And finally, in the house next to this one lives a young American witch named Sara Andrews. She is very kind and intelligent, with a quick wit, though she's been through a lot in the last several years, thus the reason for living in such an isolated area. She teaches History of Magic and Muggle Studies at Beauxbatons. She is quite fond of Muggle devices. You may be familiar with some of them and find them dull, but I was fascinated. Just don't tell Arthur Weasley. He would want to move in with you. Of all of the neighbours, I believe you will like and get on with Sara the best.*

*In conclusion, I hope you like this place and can come to think of it as home. I have enjoyed it for many years, and I hope you do too. Words and possessions can never truly express my gratitude to you for all that you have done- particularly, in saving me an undignified death.*

*Albus*

Severus folded the letter and replaced it in its envelope. Putting the letter into his pocket, he returned to the living room to find Dumbledore sitting in the armchair, waiting patiently.

"Ah, Severus, come back to hex me?" he asked, not meeting Snape's gaze, but playing with his wand as though it were a conductor's baton.

Severus let out a tired sigh. "No, Dumbledore, I won't destroy your portrait today. It is a very nice home, though I shall be making some changes to it in terms of your taste in design. Thank you."

Dumbledore bowed his head in welcome. "Get some sleep, Severus. You look exhausted."

Severus looked up at the portrait and let out an ironic chuckle. "You cannot possibly know how tired I am. I feel as though I haven't slept for the past eighteen years."

Extinguishing the candles, Severus left the room and headed for the library. Closing the door behind him, he walked to the nearest shelf and examined the books. That particular section contained books on magical history. Severus pulled down a book on Medieval Wizardry and went over to the fireplace. With a flick of his wand, the fireplace burst to life, its flames crackling. Severus unbuttoned his coat and took it off, laying it to rest over the arm of the sofa. Severus unbuttoned the top button of his shirt and the cuffs and rolled up his sleeves. Upon his left arm, the Dark Mark was visible. Severus looked down at the tattoo in disgust. He had hoped with Voldemort dying for good, that the Mark may have disappeared, but it was a faded black, the color it had been for the years when Voldemort was thought dead. Pulling his thoughts away from the Mark, he opened the book and began to read. Within minutes, Severus was asleep, the book falling from his hand. The book did not hit the floor, however, as Bijou had

been summoned to the home by Dumbledore. She caught the book as it fell and placed it on the table. Bijou watched her new master sleep for a few moments before leaving the room, to change the décor of the kitchen and bedroom that her new master so hated.

## A Life Exposed

### Chapter 3 of 5

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*They're telling secrets that should never be revealed. There's nothing to be gained from this but disaster...' Sarah McLachlan, "Dirty Little Secret"*

Twenty hours later, Severus walked out of the library with a stiff gait. He had slept in the chair in the library for so long, he wondered if he would be able to relieve any of his tense muscles before the day's end. He turned into the bathroom and found fresh towels awaiting him, along with a jar of muscle relaxing cream. Severus felt begrudgingly grateful towards his newly acquired house-elf. His original plan had been to order her back to Hogwarts, but at that moment, he was reconsidering his decision, if she were to remain as resourceful as this in all other aspects.

After a long, hot shower and a liberal application of muscle-relaxing cream, Severus Summoned clothing and dressed quickly, as he smelled breakfast in the air. He arrived in the kitchen to find it much changed. What had originally looked like an explosion of a group of Hufflepuffs, the kitchen was now a tan colour, with bits of deep purple and dark green standing out in various locations around the room, giving it a pleasant feel. There was also a tiny house-elf dressed in a Hogwarts tea towel, standing on a wooden stool in front of the stove, cooking what looked like eggs and bacon. She turned when she heard him enter the room.

"Master Snape, please sit. Bijou will bring your breakfast in a moment." Her voice was higher pitched, and she was much tinier than the average house-elf.

Severus seated himself at the wooden kitchen table and a cup of very black coffee floated across the room, settling down directly in front of him. He took a sip of the coffee gratefully, realising that the only thing missing from his morning routine was the *Daily Prophet*. He surmised it was going to be arriving later in the day, due to the extended distance the owls had to travel; though why he still wanted to read the paper was a mystery to him. That day's *Prophet* would reveal the release of his 'biography' for sale to the public. It was the day that his entire life would be exposed to the whole of the wizarding world. Whether much of anything Skeeter had written about him would be the actual truth, Severus did not know. Despite that fact, Severus could not decide what he would prefer: the truth or a lie.

The truth would show a friendless, neglected little boy who was desperate to prove himself to anyone who would pay him the slightest attention; a boy who grew into a secretly insecure man who lived to avenge the death of his only love, a woman who was ultimately dead due to his own stupidity. And this reality showed a man who had maintained a duplicitous existence for so long, he hardly knew himself anymore. The truth would reveal a man who had almost died and yet wasn't grateful to be alive.

Fiction, on the other hand, could be either very helpful in boosting Severus' image or it could turn him into someone even worse than he actually was. He could be painted as the ultimate spy, saviour of the wizarding world, who had women falling over themselves to shag him and every man envious of him.

Severus took another sip of coffee as he thought of the harm that fiction could bring to him. He could be labelled as Dumbledore's sex slave, a lover of opera or even the best friend of James Potter. The last thought caused Severus to choke on his coffee. It then struck him that he was more repulsed by being James Potter's best friend than Dumbledore's sex slave. Severus shook his head, mentally berating himself for turning into an over-analytical loon. Bijou's sudden appearance with his plate of food was a much welcomed distraction.

"Does Master require anything else of Bijou?" she asked, her eyes on the floor. "Bijou is needed at Hogwarts to help with repairs to the castle from the battle, if Master can spare her."

Severus took a bite of his breakfast and swallowed before answering question. "No, you may go. Be back in time to prepare my dinner. I prefer to take dinner at seven o'clock."

Bijou bowed deeply before disappearing with a loud crack. With another bite of his breakfast, Severus was glad he changed his mind about sending her back to Hogwarts permanently. She made great food and seemingly read his mind.

Severus continued to eat his breakfast in peace, debating how to spend his first morning in his new home. He became so lost in his thoughts of exploring the library, taking a walk around the lake and unpacking his trunks that he lapsed into an old habit from his days as a young child at home with his parents; physically carrying his dirty dishes to the sink and rinsing them. Severus cursed at himself once he realized what he had done. His father had hated magic and demanded that everything be done in the Muggle way. Once, his father had seen his mother use her wand to clear the dishes. He had broken Eileen's wand and from then on, would sit in the kitchen and watch until Severus and Eileen had finished their meals and had taken their dishes to the sink to rinse them before he would leave the room.

Irritated with himself, Severus decided his best course of action would be to take a walk around the lake to clear his head before getting into anything more complex around the house. Ignoring the snoring portrait of Albus Dumbledore, Severus walked outside into the front garden that looked out over the lake. A gentle breeze blew across the area and its ever-so-slight chill told him that autumn was only a few weeks away. He peered around the side of the house at the pathetic-looking garden. In it grew a variety of herbs that he could use to brew any potions he might need while he was there, but it looked neglected, with weeds growing as high as some of the plants. Severus decided he would salvage whatever good bits he could find later, before the first frost killed everything. Next spring, he would try to plant more vegetation that would be of use.

Taking in his surroundings, Severus decided to start walking anti-clockwise around the lake. He would first be reaching the house that Dumbledore's letter indicated belonged to the American witch, Sara... something. As he got closer to her home, he noticed it was painted a pale yellow, painstakingly similar to the colour of Lily's old house. A white porch was attached to the house, overlooking the lake. A few minutes later, as Severus was becoming level with the porch of the cottage, he noticed a woman sitting on a wooden swing, suspended by chains that were attached to the ceiling of the porch. Her long legs were stretched out on the length of the swinging chair. She was wearing a black shirt and white pants that only went to her mid-calf. She was barefoot and reading a very large black book with gold letters down the spine, her long blonde hair falling down her back. She looked up as he was passing her house. She gave him a suspicious glare and averted her eyes back to her book. Severus noticed she used her free hand to ensure that her wand was still resting next to her on the swing. He turned his gaze away from her house and back on the lake, but could feel her eyes resting on him.

Half an hour later, Severus was on the opposite side of the lake, approaching two homes. One belonged to the potioners and the other to the French version of the Lovegoods. Severus had no intention of becoming friends with any of the neighbours, so he didn't care to remember their names. The grey house that he reached first had an extensive garden, protected by a large dome. Severus assumed that this house belonged to the potion-making duo that worked from home. The cottage looked empty,

its occupants possibly out on business. The brown house he reached next clearly belonged to the odd couple. There were signs scattered about declaring "Méfiez-vous des Wrackspurts" and "Nous sommes à la recherche de Crumple-Horned Snorkacks. Soyez de retour en Octobre." Although he didn't speak French, Severus could distinguish enough to recognise terms he had heard from Luna Lovegood. Severus shook his head, hoping that he could avoid these people if all possible. Miss Lovegood had tried his patience extensively in school with her crazed theories, despite the fact that she was highly intelligent and always achieved high marks in his classes.

Walking back into the cottage, Severus noticed the post lying on the table in the sitting room. The *Prophet* was resting next to a few other scrolls, along with a brown parcel. Even though the *Prophet* was rolled up, he could see his own face on the front page. Ignoring the newspaper, Severus sat on the sofa and began opening the remaining scrolls. The first was a letter from the *Prophet*, requesting an interview. With his wand, Severus set the scroll on fire before moving onto to the next. That was a letter from Lucius Malfoy.

Severus was surprised to hear from Lucius, as he assumed the elder Malfoy would be in Azkaban. Lucius was writing to report that he, Narcissa and Draco had been pardoned by the Ministry due to the fact that they defected prior to the final battle and, in reality, had been prisoners in their own home for the year before the final battle. They had initially been sentenced to confinement at home and stripped of their wands until the Wizengamot reached a decision. They were notified a few days prior to the letter that they were being pardoned and their wands had been returned and they were free to travel again. Lucius had learned that Severus was in France and felt anxious to meet up with his old friend. Severus' eyebrows arched as he read Lucius' request to meet up. Suspicion was second nature to him; therefore, he didn't really know if he could believe that Lucius just wanted to meet up for a friendly chat and a Firewhisky. Even if he were to meet up with the Malfoys, he certainly wouldn't be inviting them to his home. Severus cherished the fact that no one that he was aware of knew the location of his new house. He wasn't about to ruin that just for Lucius Malfoy.

Putting Lucius' letter on the table, he opened the last scroll and recognized Minerva McGonagall's familiar handwriting.

'Severus,

I hope you are well and enjoying the house Dumbledore left for you. I've been there a few times, and it is a truly beautiful place and exactly the kind of place that a person should spend their recovery time. I know today is the day that the Skeeter book comes out. I won't lie to you; I have ordered a copy, in order to see if any of it is actually true. I feel like I know so little about you, that I can't be sure if I'll be able to distinguish reality from fiction. I will have to rely on you for that. I will come to visit you during Easter holidays, and hopefully you can inform me of your decision regarding my offer, and we can comb through the book and I can finally know more of the real you.

Take care,

Minerva.'

Severus put the letter on the table and stared at it, remembering McGonagall's visit at St. Mungo's. She had come in the day after his interrogations had ended. She had looked much older than normal and extremely anxious. She hadn't apologized for not believing in him. She had understood that was the point of the plan. She asked him what his plans were after he left the hospital. He had merely shrugged. He hadn't expected to live that long, so he hadn't planned for the future. McGonagall surprised him with what she had said next.

"Severus, I would like offer you the Defence Against the Dark Arts position, along with Deputy Headmaster, but it comes with a condition." She had begun, looking at him as though he were sitting in her Transfiguration class once again.

"And what would that be?" he had asked, sarcastically. "Chop off my arm to get rid of my Mark?"

McGonagall had narrowed her eyes at him. "No, I want to you take a year off to heal and relax. And I don't want an answer to my proposal until April."

Her response had surprised Severus so much, he found himself speechless. Part of his brain told him to protest, tell her no immediately. His tired body told him that he didn't have the strength to argue. And a small voice inside him asked *What am I going to do with the rest of my life?*

He had nodded quietly, unable to connect his brain and his mouth.

With a small groan, Severus reached out for the parcel, having a feeling that he knew what it was. McGonagall was entirely too much like Dumbledore, though less manipulative. Ripping away the brown paper, Severus found his face staring up at him once more. The green book was outlined in silver along the spine and around his picture. Above his photo, which he recognised as the picture taken by the Prophet when he was named Headmaster, written in silver was *The Secrets of Severus Snape*. Below the photo was written, in the same loopy writing and silver ink, *By Rita Skeeter, Author of 'The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore'*.

The book felt as though it weighed a stone in his hands. There it was: his life exposed. He could see now whether Skeeter had actually got to know the real Severus Snape, or if she had written a book of lies before her death. If she had found out the truth, he would have to relive his horrible past by reading it. If it was false, he could potentially laugh or be extremely angry over the lies she had created about him. He continued to weigh the thick book in his hands, his pulse beginning to race in anticipation. He opened the cover of the book to help alleviate some of his nerves and found a note written on the blank white page that led to the title of the book. It was McGonagall's writing once more.

*Use the present to make peace with your past and prepare for your future. M. McGonagall.*

Severus' pride had got the best of him many times, and he had the feeling it was going to get the best of him again. He couldn't sit idly by, twiddling his thumbs, while the rest of the world potentially read his deepest, darkest secrets. Taking a deep breath, he turned the first few pages, skipping the introduction that he had read in the *Prophet* a couple of days previously and found the first chapter, titled "The Pureblood and the Muggle".

Not allowing his eyes to leave the title, Severus flicked his wand and Summoned a bottle of Ogden's and a tumbler. The bottle poured whisky in the glass mid-air and floated over to Severus. He took the tumbler and downed the drink in one swig. He closed his eyes as the amber liquid burned his throat. He would need the sedation. Finally able to breathe again, Severus let his eyes fall back to the page and began reading.

*In order to truly understand this mysterious man, we must look at his roots. In my search to learn more about Severus Snape, I located a few people that were very helpful informants; Cygnus Prince, the older brother of his mother, Eileen and Tobias Snape, his father. From their interviews, I was able to put together a sad family history which seems to have shaped young Severus more than he may realize.*

*According to Cygnus Eileen Prince, Severus's mother, was the only daughter of Claudius and Olivia Prince. She was born on 25 November 1931 in London. The Prince's are one of the oldest pureblood families in history, though they have quickly been forgotten about in the current years. Eileen had two brothers, Cygnus, who was two years her senior, and Marcus, who was her twin. Eileen was sorted into Ravenclaw, like her older brother. She was described by those who knew her as quiet and brainy, though always with the look of someone who was clearly unhappy with life. And it is no question why: I discovered a picture of Eileen published in the Daily Prophet in 1946 that showed a very unattractive young woman who was the captain of the Hogwarts Gobstones Team. Cygnus, who is rather handsome, reported that she was born with a liver condition that left her with permanent jaundice, but one rather thinks that was just an excuse to ease Eileen's pain of being so ugly.*

*Eileen didn't have many friends in school, but one friend she did have seems to have been the friend who changed her views on Blood Status, coupled with teasing from the boy she liked. Eileen had developed a crush on a Slytherin boy who was older than her, Tom Riddle. When he learned of her liking, he taunted and teased her mercilessly. He also tortured her about her friendship with a Muggle-born witch named Lisa. Riddle (who later became the man we knew as Lord Voldemort), was relentless until he finally graduated in Eileen's third year. Lisa, who had just been a nice girl who tried to befriend the lonely, ugly Ravenclaw, became a much closer confidante to Eileen. By the time Eileen finished her education at Hogwarts in 1948, she had become a firm believer in the irrationality of the prejudice related to Blood Status, unlike her family who had been firm supporters of Grindelwald's reign of terror on the Continent and had been working to try to bring him to Britain, prior to his*

infamous duel with Albus Dumbledore in 1945. Eileen's twin brother Marcus had been sent to Durmstrang by their parents, but Cygnus had known of her friendship with Lisa and hadn't told their parents, knowing their beliefs.

Eileen tried, and failed, to change her parents' views on Blood Status, and the falling out they had led to her parents kicking her out of their home and never speaking to her again. Claudius and Olivia both died in the 1960s, never knowing, nor does it seem that they cared, what happened to their only daughter. Cygnus has attempted to find Eileen in the years after she was banished from his parents' lives, but failed to find her. Cygnus went on to marry a French witch, moved to France to teach at Beauxbatons and had three children. Marcus, according to Cygnus, had been one of the first people to begin following Voldemort in the mid-1960s. He was homosexual and rumoured to have had an affair with one of the great Quidditch players of the day, though Cygnus had never had that confirmed to him. Marcus was killed in 1969 in the first significant fight between Death Eaters and Aurors.

In the years following her banishment, according to Tobias, who met with me in his drab flat, Eileen had become a waitress at a Muggle restaurant, as her father had put her on a 'black list' of sorts, so that no wizarding establishment would hire her out of fear of being ruined (or worse) by Claudius Prince. She had been working for a year at a greasy, all-night cafe when she first met Tobias Snape. He was actually an almost handsome man, if you could look past his enormous nose. He was a worker in the cotton mill in nearby Ashton-under-Lyne. He was ten years Eileen's senior and the son of two neglectful alcoholics. Eileen, desperate to be loved by anyone, told him she was actually a wealthy heiress and that she only used her current job to 'see what the common man does'. Tobias, seeing money and a life of leisure in his future, was quick to court Eileen and they were married within three months, in 1951. For almost a year, Eileen was able to keep Tobias' hopes up, giving excuses that her parents were occupied with their business or on holiday on the continent for the summer. Eileen became pregnant and on their first anniversary announced both her pregnancy and the truth about her family to Tobias. That was the first time Tobias ever beat her. And he beat her so badly that she miscarried their first child. Tobias told me during our interview that he never understood what kept him with Eileen and claims that she must have been using some sort of spell on him. But stay he did, through two more miscarriages, caused again by his physical abuse.

After learning of Eileen's deception, Tobias had turned to alcohol, like his parents. He was in and out of work, depending on how drunk he was and how often he was able to sober up enough to convince his boss to let him come back. Tobias described his marriage to Eileen as a highly unhappy one, though he found it manageable enough when she was quiet, doing his cleaning and cooking, not talking about magic and readily available to satisfy his sexual needs. When Eileen became pregnant again in 1959, she did well to obey Tobias so that he didn't even know she was pregnant until her belly became very obvious. Tobias said at one point, he felt pangs of guilt for beating her so and making her lose their other children. When Severus was born on 9 January 1960, Tobias became almost excited, hoping that maybe Eileen had finally given up her magic and they could possibly lead a normal life. The delusion lasted only a year, when little Severus exhibited his first magic by summoning his favourite toy across the room. This display had been witnessed by both Tobias and Eileen, and when Eileen showed delight at her son possessing magic, Tobias went into a rage, destroying Severus' toy and beating Eileen for the first time in over two years. After that, Tobias had very little interaction with his son again, unless it was to berate him or belittle him.

Tobias Snape, now seventy-seven, with his once dark hair now covered with grey, looks older than his years. He tells me he has been sober for fifteen years now, following a stint in prison. Tobias left his wife and son in March 1977, while Severus was in his sixth year at Hogwarts. He moved to Manchester and worked in a factory until 1983, when he was arrested after using a Muggle weapon called a gun to rob a shop for alcohol. He was in a Muggle prison until 1986. He has had to work odd jobs since being released to make a meagre living, along with the benefits he receives from his government. He is currently living in a small, bare flat in Manchester. Surprisingly, a photograph of his wife and a then-three year old Severus sits on his table. When discussing life after he abandoned his family, Tobias begins to, ever-so-slightly, tear up.

'I left in March of 1977 and didn't bother to even try to find out how Severus or Eileen were doing. About a year and a half later, I stopped by the house. It was empty. I asked the neighbour what happened to Eileen and Severus. The woman, a right dozy cow, told me that Eileen had been murdered in July 1977. And no one had seen Severus since he discovered her body. I didn't know anything about their world, so I knew I'd never find Severus.'

Indeed, by viewing the memories that were obtained and copied during Severus Snape's interrogation following the battle, I was able to confirm that a sixteen-year-old Severus had in fact discovered his mother naked, bloody and two weeks into the decomposition process upon returning from his sixth year at Hogwarts. He had fled from the house, screaming at what he had discovered. The neighbours had called the Muggle police to the home. The Magical Law Enforcement squad was alerted, as there is a spell on all magical residences that indicates in Muggle law enforcement appears at the home. Oblivators sent the police on their way, their memories satisfactorily modified and the MLE squad conducted an investigation, under the ruse of being the Muggle police in order to interview the neighbour, whose memory could not be modified without causing suspicion of others in the neighbourhood. They confirmed she had been murdered by a man she had propositioned into her bed and not by her estranged husband. Severus, after his mother's body had been removed from his home, fled to the home of this old friend, Lucius Malfoy, where he resided in his final summer as a student.

I asked Tobias if he had anything he wanted to say to his long-estranged son, who was now being hailed as a hero in the magical world. Tobias took a deep breath before answering.

'That I am proud to have a son who is braver than I have ever been. And that I hope to be able to see him one day to tell him I'm sorry for being such a rotten father.'

Severus' eyes stung with tears as he let the book fall to his lap, the memory of finding his mother's dead body fresh in his mind. Even though he had killed and witnessed murders as a Death Eater, finding his mother's dead body had haunted him for over twenty years. Reading this chapter had been an emotional overload for Severus. It was not only surprisingly accurate, but also surprising in the fact that his father was still alive. He had assumed his father dead long ago, after failing to find him in the early 1980s. He had assumed his father had drunk himself to death and was probably discovered rotting away in some alleyway. This seemingly changed man made him angry. Fifteen years sober and wanting to apologize for being such a bad father? That was not the Tobias Snape that Severus had grown up knowing, and Severus was pretty sure he didn't want to know as an adult.

He was more intrigued to learn he had a surviving uncle, Cygnus, who had appeared to have wanted to have been in Eileen's life. Severus remembered his mother telling him about her parents and how they had turned her out when she told them her views on Blood Status had altered. When he was twelve, after witnessing another brutal argument between his parents, Severus had asked her if her views on Muggles had changed.

"There are good and bad people in all places, Muggle and Magical. It's a matter of figuring out which they are," she had told him.

Severus had thought his mother to be brainwashed by his father and that his grandparents had probably been right in their views of Muggles. That had only helped to cement his views on Muggles and Muggle-borns, with Lily always remaining as an exception.

Lily.

Severus groaned aloud as he closed the book and put it in his head in his hands. He dreaded to read the chapters about her. He already knew how pathetic he had been and knew that reading it in words would only make him feel worse. Shaking his head, he stood up, letting the book fall from his lap to the floor and leaving the living room, desperate for anything to distract him.

A/N: A great big thanks to hexgirl for being my beta and Brit-picker and Iza, for correcting my French.

# The Loner

## Chapter 4 of 5

Severus Snape survives the attack from Nagini, only to become the next victim of a Rita Skeeter tell-all. Fleeing to his new home, Snape finds he must confront the demons of his past to prepare for an unexpected future. Compliant up through DH, with the exception of Snape's death.

*'Cause I've relied on my illusions*

*To keep me warm at night'*

*...Sarah McLachlan, "Dirty Little Secret"*

Over the following week, Severus threw himself into changing the environment of his new home. Normally, he would have asked Bijou to do it, and he would have resumed his reading of the series of Alchemy books he found in the library, but remembering Skeeter's account of his mother's death, Severus was desperate for anything to distract him.

He started in the living room, ridding it of the atrocious Gryffindor colours in the sofa and chairs and changing them to a shade of brown that matched the rug, which Severus had grown to like. He considered trying to dispose of the portrait of Albus Dumbledore, which had been noticeably empty over the last few days, but knew that Dumbledore would have done everything in his power to keep the portrait from being removed.

Severus made the biggest changes in his bedroom. The once-blue room, now a creamy white, had been divided into two unequally sized rooms. The back section, which held a fireplace and the one window in the room, was going to be used for brewing potions and storing supplies. Severus mentally slapped himself for it, but he knew that he had been a Potions teacher for too long to give it up completely. And he actually did love brewing. It was an art form and would be one more thing to give him distraction from dwelling on the thoughts that invaded his mind from the first chapter of Skeeter's book.

By the time Severus had finished all of his renovations, it was the seventh of September. The new school year had been in session for a week and Dumbledore hadn't said anything to Severus. He suspected Dumbledore was waiting to be summoned by Severus to provide details about the students' first days back in the castle since the battle. The students had been sent home the day after the battle and most had been able to have an exam-free summer. The Ministry had administered the O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s later in the summer, after the students had taken time to regroup after the battle and do some studying.

Severus sat in the library early the next morning, resuming his reading with a cup of coffee on the side table and a fire crackling happily in the fireplace. He had a Headache Cure brewing in his lab that he needed to check on every twenty minutes, so he planned to spend several hours indoors. As the hours passed him by, Severus found that he wasn't getting much read, as he was lost in his own thoughts. His mind had wandered over to the fact that he was still engaging in the same habits as he had when he was at Hogwarts: isolating himself indoors, brewing. It was a habit he enjoyed and had been doing for such a large part of his life that it was now second nature, regardless of his surroundings. It was then that Severus realized that, for only the fourth of the past twenty-seven years, he would not be returning to the school.

Severus' feelings towards Hogwarts had evolved greatly since he had first stepped foot on the grounds at the age of eleven. Initially, it had been a haven for him. He was free of being taunted in his Muggle primary school for being 'weird'; free from his parents' fights and his father's humiliations, and he was finally able to spend ample amounts of time with Lily without Petunia's incessant lurking and eavesdropping. He and Lily were Sorted into different Houses, and the presence of the Marauders had diminished his excitement somewhat, but he had been determined not to let those barriers stand in his way. The Mudblood incident was the day his school years took a drastic turn for the worse. After the incident, he dreaded returning to Hogwarts, knowing that Lily was in the same building, often sitting in the same classroom as he, yet he couldn't reach her. Returning to school after his mother's death and finding that Lily had begun dating Potter nearly drove Severus to suicide. Or murder. He had found he didn't have the nerve to kill himself and eventually moved on to helping Voldemort rid the world of Muggles and blood-traitors. Once he had returned to help spy for Dumbledore, he had experienced a renewed excitement at being back at the school, knowing that he was doing it for Lily and thriving on the hope that he might get her back, if he could help to save her life. Of course, once Lily had been murdered, his time at Hogwarts reached an all-time low. The knowledge that Lily didn't breathe anymore, that she no longer existed, broke Severus to his very core. His decision to stay at Hogwarts had been based on the fact that nothing outside the grounds of the school mattered to him and because he swore to protect Lily's son.

Once his potion was brewed and stored away, Severus went outside to the little garden to start salvaging some herbs before the first frost killed anything that remained. Dark grey clouds overhead threatened either rain or snow, so he knew he needed to work quickly. He had shed his heavy frock coat, going out only in his white shirt, sleeves rolled to his elbows. He spent several minutes standing over the plants, ridding them of the overgrown weeds with carefully aimed Cutting Spells. Once he could actually see the ground, Severus knelt and began examining each plant, identifying them and pruning either leaf or flower or digging up the entire plant to obtain its roots, depending upon which parts were used. Severus made mental notes as he worked, deciding what needed to be replanted in the spring and what additional plants he would like to grow. Just as Severus began cutting an Aloe Vera plant that had survived some of the colder weather due to the protection provided it by the dense weeds, he was aware of a pair of green eyes staring at him through the leaves of a nearby tomato plant. He looked up to see a black cat peering at him. He gave the cat his best glare, hoping to scare it off, but failed. The cat gave Severus an almost equally malicious glare in return. Just as Severus was about to yell at the cat to bugger off, he heard a female voice calling out in the distance.

'Schadenfreude!'

Severus looked up to see his neighbour walking around, her wand in hand, parting shrubs with a simple wave. He peeked down at the cat, which seemed to cower at the calling.

'Is that you?' he inquired, as though the cat would answer.

The cat hissed and scurried off under a shrub next to the house. Severus looked up to see the woman approaching him. It was Sara, the American witch Dumbledore talked about and who seemed to distrust Severus based on appearances alone. He noticed she tightened her grip on her wand as she got closer and her posture became tenser. She wore jeans and a brown blouse. Severus noticed she was barefoot.

'Excuse me.' She made eye contact with Severus as she spoke, trying to show him she wasn't intimidated. 'Have you seen a black cat running around?'

Severus nodded towards the shrub, through which he could barely see the green eyes shine. With a wave of her wand, the cat flew out of the greenery, hissing and growling. A cage suddenly appeared and the cat was placed inside and bolted.

'Thanks,' Sara said, glaring down at the cage.

Severus nodded, hardly interested in her dilemmas with her cat. She seemed to notice his disinterest, but chose to ignore it.

'Who are you?' she asked, walking towards him.

Severus sighed and put the herbs he had gathered off to the side before moving further into the patch.

'Severus Snape,' he replied, not looking up, but moving on to a group of surviving dandelions and beginning to dig them up in order to obtain the roots. He certainly hoped she would get the hint that he was not a social person and to leave him be.

Sara put the cage down on the grass and crossed her arms, wand still in hand.

'Why are you here and where is Albus?'

Her tone was wary, but determined. Severus could tell she wouldn't be leaving until her questions were answered to her satisfaction.

Severus looked up at her, noticing her eyes were a dark brown, like his own.

'Albus died last year. He bequeathed me his home. I have come here to establish residence.'

Sara's eyes widened. 'Albus died? How? Was it the curse on his hand?'

Severus looked at her quizzically. Had she been living under a rock for the past year and a half?

'Do you isolate yourself from everything? Surely this was publicised in France as well as England...'

Sara shook her head, her blonde hair swaying. 'I don't read wizarding newspapers. I prefer Muggle newspapers. They are more interesting and have much more variety. And I don't socialise with my colleagues. I go in, do the work I am paid to do and leave.'

Severus nodded, understanding the desire to avoid social occasions with colleagues. He had made an art form of it whilst at Hogwarts.

'Yes, the curse was killing him, but that wasn't how he died.'

Severus and Sara stared one another down for a few moments, apparently waiting for the other to speak. Sara's patience finally broke.

'Well?'

'Well, what?'

Sara huffed impatiently. 'How. Did. He. Die?' She emphasised each word as though Severus were a newcomer to the English language.

'He was murdered,' Severus said, enjoying the fact that he was aggravating her with his restraint.

'Murdered?' Her tone was one of surprise. 'By whom?'

Severus didn't feel that she needed to know that it was him. He didn't need to brag. He decided it was best to tell her, as he was sure she'd find out soon enough anyway.

'A young man had been tasked to assassinate him, but Dumbledore didn't want the young man to have become a murderer, so he asked someone older and less pure to kill him first.'

Sara seemed slightly taken aback, but nodded after a few moments.

'I can understand that. I did know there was an attack on Hogwarts last year, as we had to heighten security even further at Beauxbatons. I hadn't heard any more until May, when I learned Voldemort had finally been killed. Poor Albus, having to ask someone to kill him. At least he was able to die a peaceful death by his own choosing.'

Severus said nothing as he resumed his pruning. He no longer felt sympathy for Dumbledore. The old man had been a master manipulator who probably deserved being tortured, but got to take the easy way out.

Sara's suspicions of Severus seemed to have returned, as she was scrutinizing him once again.

'Why did he leave this house to you? Are you related?'

Severus sat up on his knees and pinched the bridge of his nose with his left hand. She was aggravating him and he was tempted to give her a demonstration of how Dumbledore died.

'No, we are not related. We were colleagues for many years. I don't know why he decided to leave me the house. And I'm beginning to wish he hadn't, since the neighbours seem to be so annoying.'

Severus looked up to see that Sara hadn't seemed to have heard a word he said, but was looking at his Dark Mark.

'You were a Death Eater.'

So she apparently read up on Voldemort, but knew nothing of Dumbledore's death. Unbelievable. Severus pulled the sleeve of his left arm down over the Mark.

'Were being the operative word. A serious mistake I made as a boy and attempted to escape from almost immediately afterward. And not without consequence, I might add.'

Severus immediately regretted opening his mouth. Why had he just divulged that information to her? He didn't even know the woman.

'We all make mistakes. We face the consequences of our actions and we move on. A concept you clearly haven't grasped,' Sara said, matter-of-factly.

Severus looked up to glare at her. She was beginning to remind him of Hermione Granger, the ever-annoying know-it-all.

'How could you possibly know anything about my feelings or my success in moving on from my past? You've only just met me.'

Sara raised her eyebrows. 'For starters, you are very precise in your cutting. Every one of those plants is cut to the same length. Your sleeves are rolled up in very strict layers and exactly even on each arm. You are wearing a collared shirt and have even the top most button done up, indicating that you rarely relax and work hard to keep your feelings close to your chest. You try to control everything around you in order to make your life feel more secure, since you clearly lost control over it a while ago. And I haven't even started on your defensiveness and carefully chosen words.'

Several moments passed as Severus took in everything she said. No one had ever said those things to him before. Nor had anyone assessed him more accurately. But that was food for later thought.

'Since you have interrogated me extensively and now psychoanalysed me, I am going to ask you one question before I go back inside to get away from you. Why the hell did you name that cat Schadenfreude? Have you any idea as to what the word means?'

Sara chuckled, her expression softening.



'It means to derive pleasure from others' suffering. This cat is a complete bastard. He is only happy when I'm in pain or suffering in some way, thus the name.'

Severus almost laughed out loud. He might begin to like the animal.

With that, she picked up the cage and turned to leave.

'I'm sure I will see you around again, Severus. Word of advice: don't eat anything the Schneiders give you. You'll be begging for death afterwards. And by the way, since you were too rude to ask, I'm Sara. Sara Andrews.'

Severus nodded and knelt back down to the ground to resume his extractions, but all the while watching Sara walk away. He weighed the pros and cons of his new neighbour. On a positive side, she was attractive and seemed to isolate herself. On the negative side, however, when he did see her, she would be annoyingly inquisitive and annoyingly correct in her interpretation of him.

Severus went inside half an hour later, having salvaged all he could. It wasn't much, so he would have to send off for more supplies or purchase them in a larger town. He knew there was a large wizarding establishment in Paris and was debating a trip when a large eagle owl pecked on his living room window. Recognising it as the Malfoys' owl, he opened the window and relieved the bird of the letter attached to its leg. The owl flew into the room and settled on the back of the chair, clearly waiting to be given a response to deliver to his owners. Severus shut the window and sat on the sofa, opening the letter. He had never responded to Lucius' first letter, asking if he could visit, so he presumed this would be a similar request. And he was right.

Severus,

*I have never received a response regarding my request to see you. I understand you may be hesitant, wondering where my loyalties actually lie and whether or not I can be trusted, but please believe that I can be relied upon. Narcissa and I knew we were in the wrong and that we were going to pay the price when Draco was first tasked with killing Dumbledore and we intend to spend our lives atoning for those actions. In spite of it all, you have always been a true friend to me. I understand that you may not wish to reveal the location of your home, so I wondered if I could ask you to meet me in Paris. Surely you have heard of Ville Secrète, which is the Parisian equivalent of Diagon Alley? Narcissa and I are staying at an inn there while conducting some business in Paris. It is accessed by tapping the carving of a hat inside the wall of the Arc de Triomphe with your wand three times. The inn is above a restaurant called Madame Rouge and is just after the main shopping area. We will be there from September 5th until September 18th. I do hope to see you, Severus.*

Your Friend,

Lucius

Severus contemplated Lucius' words. Lucius, who was now so apologetic, had been the one to introduce him to the Death Eater world. When Severus was a third year and Lucius was the Head Boy, he had told Severus all about the power that one could possess by joining Voldemort. Severus recalled Lucius talking to him about the 'Mudbloods' and how they were trying to dilute the magical or attempting to steal magical powers. When Severus had said that Lily wasn't like that, Lucius had laughed at him. But once he saw the angry expression on Severus' face, he had leaned in and said, 'Maybe if you are a faithful follower, the Dark Lord will let you keep her.'

Keep her.

Those words had tantalised Severus at the time. He had known at that moment that Lily would always be his, even if the Dark Lord began getting rid of Muggle-borns. He had pictured himself rising up the ranks of the Death Eaters, becoming the Dark Lord's right hand, with Lily on his arm.

An impatient click of the bird's beak brought Severus back to the present. Severus needed to decide if he really wanted to see Lucius again. Did he really think of him as a friend? What did they have in common, other than a shared history in the Death Eaters? Of course, during the years when Voldemort was gone, they had tried to lead normal lives, in order to prove worthy of staying in civilized company, but at the end of meals, when they would retire to Lucius' parlour room for brandy, talk always turned to the old days or of what the Ministry could do to rid the world of Muggles. Other than that, they had little in common. Lucius had cheated his way through school, had been born into money and never had to work a day in his life and bribed his way out of jail time after the first war. Severus, on the other hand, had always worked hard, fought to get a place in the world and had risked life and limb to keep himself out of jail.

And no matter whether they were friends or not, how could Severus look Lucius and Narcissa in the eye? He assumed they had read the book by Skeeter and would know everything, presuming the rest of the book was as accurate as the first chapter.

Deciding not to think more on the matter, but go with his first instinct, Severus summoned a quill and parchment. With a deep breath, Severus wrote a quick note.

Lucius,

*I will meet you for dinner on Saturday. I shall arrive at your lodging at half-past six.'*

Severus

Severus walked over to the bird and tied the note to its leg and carrying it over to the window, ushered it out quickly, before he could change his mind. He now had two days to prepare himself for what he imagined would be the most uncomfortable dinner he had attended since leaving Hogwarts. Every breakfast, lunch and dinner during his time as Headmaster had been unpleasant, what with most of the staff and students plotting his murder.

Feeling a bit tired, Severus decided to go and have a lie down. He was still on the path of recovery from his snake bite. Nagini's venom had taken quite a toll on his energy levels and he had been working to get them back to their normal levels ever since. He was almost completely back to normal, but still found that he needed a lie-in every few days.

His coat already discarded, Severus went to his bedroom, kicked off his shoes and stretched out on his bed. Putting his hands behind his head, Severus closed his eyes, hoping to drift off to sleep before dinner in a few hours. But as rain began tapping on the roof of the house, Severus found that he couldn't shut his mind down enough to rest. Thoughts of the Malfoys and his biography kept popping up and he couldn't quash them. Sitting up in bed, Severus grabbed his wand from the bedside table and gave it a quick flick, summoning the book.

Ignoring his own face scowling up at him, Severus opened up to Chapter Two, entitled 'The Ugly Kid'.

*Severus attended a Muggle primary school for his early education. Based on the memories retrieved during his interrogation this year, I was able to find out that Severus was a very odd little boy, even by wizarding standards. Notes home from his teachers always indicated that he was exceptionally bright, but that he needed to work on his social skills. Severus was considered a loner and made many of the students and their parents nervous. More than once, teachers were confused by incidents that occurred between Severus and fellow peers that were beyond explanation. In one incident, his classmate ended up in a very large tree, hanging by his belt from the top-most branch after telling Severus that his nose was the size of an elephant's trunk, when the teachers had just seen the child on the ground a few seconds prior. Another peer ended up standing naked in the middle of the class after calling Severus a 'weirdo'. Severus excelled in all of his subjects, which only helped to prepare him for his Hogwarts years, though he could have benefitted from how to be kinder to people. Severus never appeared to have made any friends in his primary school days until meeting Lily Evans at age nine.*

*Snape's memories show that he had wandered over to the local park one day to see a pretty young girl with long, red hair playing with her sister. The girl began swinging very high and jumped out. Rather than landing with a thud, a cry and potential broken bones, she seemed to fly several yards, landing very gracefully on the grass. Severus*

immediately knew he had come across another witch in his town. Based on the baffled scolding that she received from her older sister, Severus surmised that she was a Muggle-born and unaware of her powers at the time. After watching the red-headed girl perform unintentional magic on a few more occasions, Severus worked up the nerve to talk to her. Dressing in the best clothes he owned (which were a very old pair of trousers, a shirt that looked more feminine than masculine and an overly large man's jacket), he returned to the park and attempted conversation with Lily Evans. Once he called Lily a witch, however, she appeared affronted and stalked off with her sister. Nevertheless, after thinking on what he said for a few days, Lily sought out the Snape boy and begged him to give her all the details of the world that she would belong to in a year's time. She asked him a question that would echo through our world for the next three decades.

'Does it matter than I'm Muggle-born?'

Upon viewing Severus's memories of his childhood, I notice discrepancies in his behaviours. When he initially meets Lily and her Muggle sister, Petunia, Severus refers to Petunia as 'just a Muggle', with a scathing tone. When Lily asks if it will matter that she is Muggle-born, he says 'no', with just a hint of hesitancy that went unnoticed by young Lily. What does this say about the views of Muggles by young Severus Snape? Of course, we all can understand a dislike, from the upbringing he had with a Muggle father, but why wasn't Lily enough to change his views?

When Severus and Lily arrived at Hogwarts in 1971, they were put in Slytherin and Gryffindor Houses, respectively. Despite being in rival Houses, they made strong efforts to maintain their friendship while also making friends in their own Houses. Severus, being in Slytherin, became friends with many people who later became fellow Death Eaters. Edward Avery and Charles Mulciber were the first friends he made at Hogwarts, along with Lucius Malfoy, who was a Prefect the year Severus started school.

For the first time in his life, Severus had found a group of people who accepted him. Some even looked up to him. As a young boy, Severus had spent hours on end reading his mother's books, which included books on Dark magic. Severus came to school knowing far more curses than all of the seventh years, save the ones in Slytherin House. Lucius, who was already destined to join the Death Eaters once he left Hogwarts, took a special interest in young Severus Snape. Memories show Lucius telling a thirteen-year-old Severus about the power that would come with being a Death Eater and the plans not only to rid the world of Muggles, but to make the Death Eaters and their leader, Lord Voldemort, immortal. When Severus asked about his Muggle-born friend Lily, with whom he had managed to maintain his strong friendship, Lucius commented that if Severus were a good Death Eater, perhaps Voldemort would allow him to 'keep' her. This seems to be what finally sealed Severus' fate.

Severus was never caught in any wrongdoing himself, but was often the brains of the activity or a silent conspirator. Mulciber was particularly sadistic and tended to taunt and tease the Gryffindors, using curses and hexes on them during weekends or whilst in the queue outside classrooms. Severus did have one rule that he was not silent about: absolutely NO ONE was to tease, taunt, hex or curse Lily Evans, lest they wish to face the wrath of Severus Snape. Considering how much Dark magic he knew, this demand was adhered to by all Slytherins.

Severus took what he learned in D.A.D.A to help him create his own spells and curses. What few people know is that the creator of the 'Levicorpus' spell, which causes a person to be hung upside down by the ankles and has maintained a reign of popularity over the last thirty years, was Severus Snape himself. Unfortunately for Severus, this spell was used against him by his biggest school enemies: the Marauders.

The Marauders were a group of Gryffindor boys: James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin and Peter Pettigrew, who were antagonistic towards Severus from their first encounter on the Hogwarts Express. Curses of the magical and verbal sorts were shared consistently between them, the worst offenders being James and Sirius. Things got so bad between them that in their fourth year, Black told Severus, who was suspicious of Remus Lupin of being a werewolf, to go down the tunnel under the Whomping Willow to the Shrieking Shack (two defences which had been put in place to allow Lupin to leave the grounds and transform each month away from other students). Black knew that Severus would meet a fully transformed werewolf and would likely to be badly injured, if not killed. James Potter, learning about the trick from Black, hurried along to get Severus away from the werewolf, Lupin, before he was killed. Severus was ordered by Dumbledore not to share the fact that Lupin was a werewolf with the school, causing Severus to become even more resentful of Potter and Black than ever. This only helped to drive a young Severus deeper into the depths of Dark magic, and ultimately, into Lord Voldemort's inner circle.

As a student, Severus excelled in all subjects, particularly Potions and Defence Against the Dark Arts. He cared more about doing well in classes and learning all he could about Dark Magic than caring about appearances, as he spent little time trying to have a social life outside of his Slytherin cronies and Lily Evans.

Severus' teachers, most of whom became his colleagues a decade later, praised the brilliance of the scrawny little boy.

'He was absolutely brilliant. Produced a Draught of Living Death like I'd never seen in all my years of teaching Potions,' said Horace Slughorn, who was the Potions master during Severus' Hogwarts days.

Slughorn went on to say that Snape had never received a grade lower than an 'E' on an assignment (and only once).

Severus received an 'Outstanding' on his O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s in all of his subjects, though he was never made Slytherin Prefect or Head Boy, nor was he ever a member of the 'Slug Club', the exclusive club created by Professor Slughorn for the students he believed had the most promise of future success. Maybe if Slughorn had paid more attention to Severus, he would have noticed the exceptional brilliance that was only rivalled by that of Voldemort and Dumbledore.

Severus started creating his own spells and tweaking Potions to make them better. Memories show Severus scribbling away in his copy of "Advanced Potion-Making", writing down notes and crossing out parts in the instructions. The book's inside cover marks it as 'Property of the Half-Blood Prince', an acknowledgement of his Blood Status and a nod to his pureblood half of the family. What Severus couldn't have predicted when he was a sixth-year was that his Potions book, originally his mother's, would pass into the hands of his least favourite student years later Harry Potter.

This view into Severus' early years shows that his dislike of Muggles seemed to stem from his abusive father and intolerant peers. Naturally, it would make sense that once he was embraced by Slytherin House and people such as Lucius Malfoy, that he would go on to become a Death Eater. The one discrepancy is Lily Evans. He befriended and defended her, actions that were completely incongruent with his ideological stance. I question why did he do that? And what effect, if any, did Lily have on his choices and ultimate loyalties later in life?

Severus closed the book and laid it on the table next to his bed, lying back down. The house was silent, save for the rain tapping on the roof. His childhood seemed merely pathetic when written by Rita Skeeter, not the nightmare that it actually was. The nightly arguments between his parents, the verbal and occasional physical abuse by his father and the neglect he experienced daily from both parents were damaging to Severus' mental and physical states. Physically, Severus had always been very thin, despite being tall, mostly due the fact that there was very little food in his house and he often only had one meal a day, occasionally, nothing at all. He had grown taller once he went to Hogwarts, but Severus had never been able to gain much weight. The damage had been done for too many years to be fixed.

Severus distrusted everyone as a result of his parents' inability to love or take care of him. When Lily abandoned him after he made a mistake, he learned no one was to be completely trusted. Despite this, he had mistakenly trusted Malfoy, Voldemort and Dumbledore. What a stupid man he was. Closing his eyes, Severus drifted off into an uneasy sleep.

# Old Friends

## Chapter 5 of 5

Severus Snape survives the attack from Nagini, only to become the next victim of a Rita Skeeter tell-all. Fleeing to his new home, Snape finds he must confront the demons of his past to prepare for an unexpected future. Compliant up through DH, with the exception of Snape's death.

*'Here's a good one...*

*Did you hear about my friend*

*He's embarrassed to be seen now*

*because we all know his sins'*

*...Sarah McLachlan, 'Dirty Little Secret'*

Severus left his house two days later for his meeting with the Malfoys. The sounds of twigs snapping and birds chirping merged with Severus' internal thoughts. He questioned himself during the hike through the forest about whether this was something he should be doing, or if he shouldn't just go back home and ignore the Malfoys in perpetuity. The idea that he could be walking into a trap also crossed his mind, though who Lucius could employ to be on his side in a fight escaped Severus. The few Death Eaters who had survived the Battle at Hogwarts were spending the rest of their lives in Azkaban. Severus liked to think he could hold his own in a fight with Lucius, Narcissa and Draco, but he still hated the idea of walking into a fight. He had spent too many years walking into uncertain situations.

Severus had opted to leave three hours early in order to do some shopping whilst in *La Ville Secrète*. He needed to purchase more ingredients to continue his potion-making and get settled in for the winter. He'd prefer to not have to make any more excursions until closer to spring, as the area was vulnerable to large amounts of snow.

Once he arrived at the clearing near the edge of town, Severus checked his surroundings for Muggles. He cast a Disillusionment Charm on himself to ensure he would not be spotted appearing out of thin air in the middle of Muggle Paris. He turned on the spot, disappearing into the suffocating blackness. Seconds later, he reappeared behind a large bush that was just yards away from the roundabout which encircled the *Arc de Triomphe*. The traffic was too heavy to cross the street, so Severus walked around, looking for the underground walkways that would take him beneath the roads and end at the *Arc*. Severus controlled his breathing and tried to keep the same pace as the Muggles, in order to avoid bumping into anyone. It was a bustling time of day in Paris. People were enjoying the weekend, shopping bags in hands, and chatting merrily. As he walked along, he was very glad he had cast the Disillusionment Charm, as he wouldn't have had the opportunity inside the tunnel.

Once he had made it into the inside of the *Arc*, Severus followed Lucius' instructions and tapped the carving of the hat on the wall three times. After the third tap, a silver door appeared, the colour blending in with the wall. Severus noticed it had no handle, so he pushed. As he walked into the alley, he was taken aback by its elegance. Every building seemed to be made of marble, giving it a very French feel. Witches and wizards bustled around, carrying packages and chatting, like their Muggle equivalents outside. Severus took in his surroundings for a few moments, attempting to see into the various shops nearby to see if they held anything he would need. Upon turning to his immediate left, Severus noticed a cart labelled *'Bienvenue'* and assumed this must be where he could get information. He noticed a blonde witch sitting behind the counter, reading a magazine and tapping her long red fingernails on the table with a strumming beat. Walking up to the cart, he stood there, waiting to be acknowledged, but the woman continued to read her magazine, oblivious to the fact that she had been approached. Annoyed, Severus coughed slightly to announce his presence, causing the woman to startle.

'*Oui?*' asked the witch, looking up from her reading.

'Do you speak English?' Severus asked, not wishing to relay everything he needed in broken French.

'Yes, I spoke English. How I can help you, ma'am?' asked the witch, looking proud of her abhorrent language skills. She giggled at him as well. 'You have never come to *La Ville* before. You used old door.'

Frowning at being called "ma'am", Severus inquired as to where an apothecary might be, along with clothing shops and *Madam Rouge*. He also asked what she meant by the 'old door'. He was given a map of the area, with each shop and street labelled and was ushered away with an 'Enjoy *La Ville Secrète*, ma'am!'

Turning on his heels, Severus strode away quickly, wishing to get started on his shopping. He had plenty to purchase and only a couple of hours in which to do so. Walking down the cobblestone streets, Severus couldn't help but be in awe of the marble buildings. *La Ville* was clearly not as old as Diagon Alley, but had its own special kind of charm. He stopped off first at Gringotts. Severus was surprised that Gringotts had branches in France as well as in England and several other countries in Europe. Although they all used the same currency, each country operated differently in the weight of each denomination. Inside the bank, Severus traded his English Galleons for French ones and found he preferred the simpler French system, which dictated that there were ten Knuts to a Sickie and five Sickies to a Galleon.

After leaving Gringotts, Severus walked a few minutes down the main road to find the Apothecary. He pulled a list of ingredients he needed from his pocket. He knew he would need to brew various medicinal potions to store at the house for long term and liked to keep a broad variety of ingredients on hand to brew almost anything he might need at a moment's notice. Severus realised that he should have anticipated a language barrier, once he met the shop owner. She was a portly older woman with a kind smile and was of the generation that hadn't felt the need to learn too much English. Between her broken English and Severus' broken French, they were able to communicate to some extent. The problem was, the names of a few of the ingredients he needed were not directly translated and were nearly impossible to communicate with broken language skills, appalling sketches and poorly acted charades.

When Severus left the shop two gruelling hours later, he was still missing powdered Elm bark and essence of lilac, but had surrendered to the idea of ordering those by owl. Laden down with so many bags, he transfigured his largest bag into a black attaché and placed all of the other bags into it, as it was very awkward to juggle so many parcels. Looking down at his watch, he realized he only had an hour left before he was due to meet with Lucius. Severus had wanted to be fit for new clothes...dress robes were not needed in his current situation...but that would have to wait. Referring to his map, he decided to peruse a book shop on the same road as *Madam Rouge* to pass the time. It only took him a few minutes to find the shop, which was relatively busy at that time of day. Severus worked his way to the back of the shop, where non-fiction was kept. He spent a few minutes looking through the historical section, before moving on to biographies. Much to his dismay, he saw a small display of his own biography set up to be purchased at the end of one of the rows. Glancing out of his peripheral vision to see if anyone had spotted him, Severus quickly ducked into an aisle next to the display, hoping he might be able to get rid of it. He cast a hasty Disillusionment Charm on himself and had just walked around the corner when he nearly ran into a woman walking his way. He sidestepped her by going back into the aisle and with sudden jolt of recognition, realised it was his inquisitive neighbour, Sara. It had taken him a moment to recognise her, as she was dressed much differently from the last time he saw her. He noticed her black strapless dress, which drew his eye to her porcelain skin, the emerald pendant that gleamed from her clavicle and her silver high heels that clicked on the wooden floor as she walked. Her long blonde hair was pulled back into an elegant twist.

She was looking up from side to side at each aisle's sign, apparently knowing what section she needed. He saw her look over at the display of Skeeter's books, but she

didn't immediately recognize the face on the cover. Severus held his breath with the hope that she would pass it up completely and be unaware of what she saw. Within seconds, however, Severus saw the realization wash over her as she turned to face the display once more. The display was at the end of the aisle he was in, and he could see her expression as she stepped closer to the books, picking one up, a baffled expression on her face. She turned the book over and saw Rita Skeeter's face looking up at her. Severus watched as a woman who worked at the book shop approached Sara as she stood looking at the book.

'*Bonjour*, Sara. May I help you find a book?' the woman asked in English. She was shorter and stockier than Sara and clearly knew her.

Sara turned to look at her, book still in hand.

'What do you know about this man? Or this book, for that matter?' she asked, holding it up to the woman.

The woman laughed. 'Oh, that is Severus Snape. Surely you heard about him?'

Sara shook her head. 'Marie, you know I don't follow the news much. What makes him so extraordinary that he gets his own book?'

Marie looked nonplussed. 'I know it was in England, but it was still quite a story topic here in the last few months. Severus Snape helped to bring down Voldemort. He was a spy during the war with Voldemort and was the one who murdered Albus Dumbledore. Wasn't Dumbledore your neighbour?'

Sara's eyes widened, but she tried to hide her obvious surprise by attempting to look nonchalant.

'Yes, Albus was my neighbour. He was a dear man. Perhaps I'll buy this, just so I can catch up on what has been happening in the world around me. I tend to be a bit of a hermit,' she said, handing the book to the shop keeper.

Marie smiled, took the book and headed towards the front of the shop. Severus was impatient to escape the bookshop as Sara remained rooted to the spot, seemingly stunned by what she had learned. She stood at the display for a few moments longer, biting down on her glossy bottom lip. With a sigh, she walked back to the front of the shop, her original purchase long forgotten. Severus took this moment to leave the row he was in and head for the exit. He'd be better off just waiting at the inn. Walking away, he waved his wand at the display of his books, causing the display to disappear and the books to conveniently rest on top of the book cases, out of reach and completely out of sight. As he made for the door, he overheard Marie asking Sara why she was dressed up.

'My parents are in Paris for the day. They are travelling to Greece to visit friends and wanted to stop by to see me first. They begged me to have dinner with them. Well, my mother did. She made me feel guilty about living so far away and never coming home to visit, and God forbid something happens to them while they are travelling and I never get to see them again... I hate when she does that,' Sara said, rolling her eyes. 'And I had a specific reason for coming here, but got so distracted by this book that now I don't have time to look for what I needed. Perhaps you can just send it to me?' Severus listened to Sara talking about the book she needed while he waited for the exit to clear so he could leave unseen.

Severus repressed a chuckle as he walked out of the book shop. He and her cat would both be engaging in some *schadenfreude* over her dinner with her parents. She deserved to be interrogated to an annoying extent, as she had done to him. She already knew far more about him than he did about her. His feelings on this were mixed; while she might quit asking questions, anything she wished to know having been answered by the book, Severus knew he would still be embarrassed. She would know about the pathetic little boy he had been; all of the deep, dark, horrible things he'd done in the past; and most of all, she would know about Lily. He shuddered as he walked down the street. He didn't want this bloody American knowing about his love for Lily and how he had lost her due to his own stupidity. He would not be surprised if she used what she learned in the book to complete the psychological profile of him she seemed to be working on and probably spread the word to the other neighbours. Severus suddenly felt more vulnerable than he ever had, even during the war. He shook his head and put the thoughts of his neighbour aside as he came upon *Madam Rouge*. It was a marble building, with flowering bushes planted in pots outside of it. A balding man stood by the door, looking around. Severus ducked into a small alley and removed the Disillusionment Charm before walking back out onto the street and over to the inn.

'*Bon soir*, Monsieur,' the man said, opening the door for Severus.

Severus gave him a curt nod and walked inside. He was surprised by how elegant the 'inn' was, as he had been expecting something more rustic. He found the lobby slightly sickening, as it was decorated in deep red and gold, resembling the Gryffindor common room, but the plush carpet felt like clouds under his feet. Unsure of where he was supposed to go, Severus walked up to a desk against the opposite wall, where a brunette wearing crimson robes with the letters M.R. stitched in golden letters on the lapel was seated looking at a large book. She looked up once he approached, recognition immediately crossing her face.

'You are Severus Snape, no?' she asked, standing up.

'Yes. I have plans to meet the Malfoys for dinner here at half-past six,' Severus said, trying to ignore the girl's delight at being correct.

'Yes, *Monsieur* Malfoy informed us that he would have a *Monsieur* Snape joining him and *Madam* Malfoy. Please, follow me,' she said, walking around the desk and gesturing towards a hall to the right. Severus followed her into a large dining room, whose elegance was also surprising. It was filled with several round tables covered with white cloths. Crystal glassware gleamed from each table, and a bewitched orchestra of violins, cellos and basses serenaded the guests as they dined. Every table seemed to be full. Severus shook his head, unsure of why he had presumed this would be more like the Leaky Cauldron when Lucius referred to it as an inn. For the Malfoys, these were modest accommodations, and naturally they would think it quaint and simple. Severus followed the witch through the room to the very back corner, where two people were sitting at a smaller round table. Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy were looking better than when Severus had seen them at the Battle of Hogwarts, but something was missing from their looks prior to Voldemort's return. Perhaps it was less arrogance.

'Severus! So glad you could join us,' Narcissa cried, standing when she saw him. She took both of his hands and kissed his cheeks. Severus noticed her that her silver dress was made of silk, as her long sleeves had brushed his skin as she grabbed his hands.

Severus attempted a kind expression. 'Narcissa, you are looking beautiful, as always.'

Narcissa brushed away his compliment away with a wave of her hand as Lucius approached Severus and stretched out a hand.

'Severus, thank you for coming.' Lucius' voice and manner were much different than a few years ago. He seemed genuine and almost contrite.

The three of them sat down at the table, and a waitress poured them each a glass of red wine. Severus could feel the tension in the air once the waitress left. Their nervousness was evident, as Narcissa fidgeted with her napkin and the hand that held her glass trembled slightly. Lucius was avoiding eye contact, but taking several large gulps of wine whilst examining a point over Narcissa's shoulder. Their uneasiness made Severus feel empowered. He sipped his wine casually before speaking.

'I am surprised Draco isn't here. I was looking forward to seeing him as well,' Severus said, watching his former friends look relieved that he broken the awkward silence. Their relief, however, was short-lived.

'Ah, yes,' Lucius began, looking both uncomfortable and sad. 'Draco hasn't been well. That's why we are in Paris.'

Severus' eyebrows furrowed. He hadn't seen Draco since the battle, but knew he had made it out unscathed.

'What is wrong with him? I don't recall him being wounded in the battle,' Severus asked, concerned. He did like Draco. Draco had been born into a situation which gave him little choice in whether he hated Muggles and Muggle-borns. Had he been in a different family, Draco could have been a pleasant young man.

A sniff came from Narcissa, who was dabbing her eyes with a lace handkerchief.

'Oh, Severus,' she began, fighting back sobs. 'Draco has had a bit of a breakdown since the battle. He's...he can't...' Narcissa's words were lost in quiet sobs.

Lucius picked up where Narcissa had left off, his own voice strained with emotion.

'After the post-battle shock wore off, Draco became very depressed. He wouldn't eat and would sleep all day. He had these bouts of anger over insignificant things or would start to cry over nothing at all. It got increasingly worse as time went on. When we were cleared by the Ministry, I thought he would get better. But he didn't.' Lucius looked to be on the verge of tears, and Severus realised that the severity of Draco's psychological state must be critical.

After taking a moment to compose himself, Lucius continued in a hoarse voice. 'The day after we received the news, Draco tried to cut his Dark mark out of his arm. He cut so deep, the bone was exposed. He had removed the skin, muscle and everything in between. He came out of his bedroom and walked into the parlour and showed us. He was holding the Mark and the flesh it was on in his other hand. He was emotionless, as though he weren't in pain and bleeding everywhere. He showed it to me and said "He can't control me anymore, Father." We summoned a Mediwizard to the house, who was able to get him stabilised enough to go to St. Mungo's, where they were able to put him right as best they could. He will need to do some exercises to make his arm work normally. But that's not the reason we are in Paris. Draco needs help dealing with the emotional weight of everything that happened over the last few years, and we felt he might be too vulnerable at the closed ward in St. Mungo's. He's actually at a Muggle hospital, here in Paris, where he can get help and be watched around the clock.'

Severus felt detached from his body. Draco was just a boy who had been put into a terrible situation. And now he was locked away in a closed ward, losing his mind. Severus recalled the day that Draco was born. Lucius had sent an owl with the news, his excitement contagious, even through written word. In the letter, he wrote that he and Narcissa wanted Severus as Draco's godfather, as they were confident that should something happen to them, Severus would raise their son with 'a proper perspective on life', meaning a pureblood fanaticism. At the time, Severus had felt honoured that his friend and one of Voldemort's inner circle of followers would entrust him with such a task, but the memory made him ill in the present day. Pushing those thoughts aside, he tried to focus on more logical aspects of the situation, such as the Malfoys' decision to commit their child to a Muggle institution.

'Why did you choose to put him in a Muggle hospital, rather than the wizarding hospital? And how are you ensuring that Draco's magical powers are under control and not exposed to the Muggle hospital staff?' Severus asked. He was having a hard time imagining the couple before him being willing to trust Muggles with caring for their only son, when mere months prior, they were still working to rid the world of people without magical blood.

Lucius and Narcissa exchanged meaningful looks, as though debating how much information they wanted to share with Severus. Lucius nodded, sighed and took a large drink of wine before he spoke again.

'I have an older brother, Claudius,' Lucius began, causing Severus to shuffle through his memories of Lucius' background to recall if he had known this information before. 'My parents knew there was something different about him, but didn't really know what it was until he was seven years old. He had never displayed any kind of magical ability, and it was at that time, they realised he was... was a...'

Lucius glanced around nervously to make sure no one was close by before learning towards Severus and speaking in a barely audible voice.

'A Squib.'

Severus looked from Lucius to Narcissa, taking in their expressions of deepest shame at this family secret, noticing that they still looked around to make sure Lucius hadn't been overheard. For some odd reason, Severus found the situation amusing. The idea of a Malfoy Squib was mind-boggling, and the fact that Lucius was more embarrassed about having a Squib brother than about the crimes he himself had committed whilst a Death Eater made Severus fight the urge to chuckle at the ludicrousness. But then his mind went back to Draco, and Severus no longer had the urge to laugh.

'And how is this relevant?' Severus asked, anxious to learn more about Draco.

Lucius cleared his throat and resumed a normal speaking volume. 'My parents were ashamed that my brother wasn't a wizard and didn't want it known that they had produced... you know. They sent him to one of the finest Muggle schools in France, where he excelled in academics. I was born a year after he left for school and was raised as an only child. Claudius stayed in France and went on to university to become what the Muggles call a 'psychiatrist'. He took a job at a Muggle psychiatric hospital in Paris, and that is where we have taken Draco. People are aware that we are related to the Lestranges. Between Bellatrix, Rodolphus and a few other family members, they have managed to put several people in the locked ward at the wizarding hospital, which makes it too dangerous to admit Draco there, so my mother recommended placing him at the hospital where my brother works. There are a couple of wizards on staff, so my brother has been able to make sure that only they work with Draco and that any anomalies that could possibly arise can be taken care of with simple Memory Charms.'

Severus watched Lucius for a few moments, with the expectation that at any moment, Lucius would start laughing and exclaiming that it had all been a joke. But Lucius did not start laughing and merely stared back at Severus, waiting for a response.

Severus had just opened his mouth to speak when he was interrupted by the waitress, who came to take their orders. After perusing their menus, Narcissa ordered salmon with mixed vegetables on a bed of rice, while Lucius ordered a rare steak with potatoes. Severus was not feeling very hungry after learning about Draco, but ordered the veal with asparagus anyway. Once they were alone again, Severus returned to the conversation.

'How did Draco handle it?' He asked, finishing off his glass of wine.

Narcissa opened her mouth to speak, but found she couldn't and began to sniffle again, so Lucius offered the information.

'Draco told us he didn't want to go; he wanted to die instead. We had to have him sedated to get him there. Once he was awakened, he told us not to come back to visit him and proceeded to search around the room to find something to harm himself with. That's part of the reason we wanted to see you. We hoped you would visit him from time to time. It's uncertain how long he will have to stay there and we can't stay in Paris indefinitely...' Lucius' voice trailed off, sadness evident in his entire body.

'Claudius has promised he will take care of Draco, but Draco doesn't know him and we hope that maybe Draco will open up to you,' Narcissa said in a small voice, tears running down her pale cheek. 'After all, you are not only his godfather, but were his favourite teacher, Head of House and Headmaster.'

Severus felt as though he were meeting the Malfoys for the first time. Lucius and Narcissa were different people now, with their aristocratic arrogance diminished, though Severus knew it was not completely gone. Lucius and Narcissa wouldn't be moving into a Muggle neighbourhood or be accepting a Muggle-born daughter-in-law at any point in this lifetime, but he could tell that they were suffering tremendous guilt over what happened to their son, as it had been their actions that led Draco into Voldemort's inner circle and now into his psychological hell.

'I would be glad to visit Draco, though I worry that I will not receive a warm reception from him either. After all, I was involved in the same activities as you.' Severus began, not sure how much they wanted to discuss in terms of the past.

Lucius and Narcissa visibly tensed up at the broach of the topic of Voldemort and all they had done. Severus, who had initially felt uneasy about discussing it, suddenly felt no uncertainty. After learning of Draco's breakdown, he was glad to see Lucius and Narcissa squirm.

'If I could go back and take a different path, I would,' Lucius began, his grey eyes looking directly into Severus' black. 'I caused far too much harm to my wife and son by joining the Dark Lord, and I can never take it back or make it up to them.'

'Yes, Lucius, you are right to feel ashamed for what you have done to your family. But what about what you did to other people? You led more than one young man into taking the Dark Mark in your time. I seem to recall you recruiting Avery, Mulciber and Rosier, along with Draco and myself,' Severus said, looking back into Lucius' gaze.

For the first time since he had known Lucius Malfoy, he witnessed true remorse for actions committed to someone outside of his own family. Lucius cleared his throat and took a sip of wine before he spoke.

'I can't even begin... to think about what you've been through, Severus,' Lucius didn't quite meet Severus' gaze as he continued. 'I read the book, by the way. The one Rita Skeeter wrote about you. Was any of it true?'

Severus now wished for a hole to open up and swallow him into the Earth. THIS was the conversation he dreaded most.

'I've read the first two chapters, which were surprisingly accurate,' he admitted.

Lucius and Narcissa glanced at one another, silently asking one another a question.

'Was it true, your feelings for... her?' Narcissa asked, timidly.

'If by her, you are referring to Lily Evans, then yes. It is true. I was her best friend when we were young, as Lucius was aware,' he began, feeling his blood pressure start to rise. 'I was in love with her, as Lucius knew, and I lost her because I thought joining the Death Eaters would help me to keep her, just as Lucius also knew.' His voice had risen in volume as he spoke, to the point that he could be heard over the music and was getting disapproving looks from the patrons at nearby tables. Severus took a large gulp of wine to help settle himself.

His sudden anger towards Lucius was surprising even to himself. He knew he resented his older friend for recruiting him to the Death Eaters, but until now, he had never been able to be honest about anything to do with Lily. It was just now dawning on him how much he had to say on the matter.

Narcissa furrowed her eyebrows, glancing over at her husband. 'You knew that he loved her? Even then?'

Lucius nodded wordlessly.

Severus closed his eyes and took a deep breath before speaking once more.

'You don't know how much I have hated you for doing this to me. Not only for my recruitment to the Death Eaters, but for manipulating me over Lily. You told me that if I were a faithful Death Eater, perhaps the Dark Lord would spare her and she would be mine. It was that belief that helped me to go through with taking my Mark. And it was that belief that ultimately got Lily killed.'

The food arrived, disrupting the atmosphere and giving Severus a chance to gain some perspective. This was not the place to continue having this conversation. And he wasn't sure he wanted to continue to have it. They ate silently, avoiding making eye contact with one another. Severus downed two more glasses of wine before speaking again.

'I must say, Lucius, that I can't completely blame you. I knew what I was getting into and knew it was wrong, so I am as much to blame.' Severus felt that he needed to clarify that before ending the conversation.

'This is not the place to discuss the past in much more detail,' he continued. 'And I'm not quite sure how much I want to talk about it. I've been forced to relive my past to the Ministry and exposed by a truly vile woman for the whole world to read. I want to spend more of my time focusing on the present and the future. If you are truly remorseful for your actions and want to begin to rebuild our friendship, I am willing to do that.'

Lucius half smiled and nodded. 'Yes, Severus. Even with everything that has happened, I count you as a friend. And possibly my only friend.' Narcissa nodded in agreement. 'You were always such a good godfather to Draco.'

Severus ignored the sentimentality. 'Very well, perhaps before you return to Britain, you can come out to my new home.'

Narcissa smiled and reached across the table to grasp Severus' hand. 'Thank you, Severus. We would love that.'

Half an hour later, after obtaining instructions on visiting Draco and giving directions to his new home, Severus departed from the inn, feeling more emotions than he expected. Relief at having made it through the meeting was predicted, but after learning about Draco, he was overcome with guilt. As much as he had tried to save Draco from the horrors of the life he had led, he hadn't been able to do enough. And Severus hoped that it wasn't too late for Draco to be able to recover and lead a normal life.

Referring back to his map, Severus found a second entrance to *La Ville* located on the next road. The map stated that it came out in an alley behind *Le Chaudron Baveur*. Once he arrived at the door, he made his way through it and Disapparated quickly, desiring more than anything to get away from crowds and noise to his quiet, solitary existence by the lake.

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