

# Look Not at the Things

*by kellychambliss*

"To see or not to see" -- that is the question Severus Snape must ask himself when he arrives to teach at Hogwarts. Set in 1981-82.

## Chapter 1

*Chapter 1 of 5*

"To see or not to see" -- that is the question Severus Snape must ask himself when he arrives to teach at Hogwarts. Set in 1981-82.

*"We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen."*

--2 Corinthians 4:18

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**December, 1981**

Severus Snape looked at the length of fabric lying on his bed and refused to let himself think about where and how he'd got it. His Death Eater past was past, wasn't it that what Dumbledore was always telling him? Fine, then "the past" it was.

As long as Dumbledore didn't say anything about the spoils of said past, then Severus wasn't about to discuss them, either. If he'd got himself an Invisibility Cloak on one of his DE forays now so firmly in the past he didn't see that it was anyone's business but his own.

It wasn't as if the original owner had any use for it now.

Besides, Dumbledore would probably approve of what Severus was about to do with his cloak, anyway. Hadn't he just been haranguing scratch that, make it "urging" Severus that very afternoon to get out more?

"You should get to know your colleagues better, Severus," he'd said. "They want you to succeed, and they'll help you if you give them the chance."

As far as Severus had been able to tell, the old man had been serious. He hadn't been twinkling, and his voice had mercifully free of that tone of false bonhomie that he usually employed when he was lying through his false teeth. (Not that Severus had any idea whether the headmaster actually had false teeth. It was just an expression his father had always used.)

Yes, Dumbledore had appeared to be dead serious.

Well, since Severus knew which side his bread was buttered on (another of his father's Muggle clichés where was *that* coming from, all of a sudden?) he hadn't laughed in Dumbledore's face.

But he'd been tempted. The idea that any of his "colleagues" wanted to help him was laughable. "Colleagues" fuck that, they'd never be his colleagues. They'd never see

him as anything other than a kid, an inferior. Just a few years ago, they'd been his teachers; they'd hated him then, and of course they hated him even more now that they knew he'd taken the Mark. What did it matter that he would give his very soul (assuming he had one) to undo the dark insanity of these last few years? His so-called "colleagues" wouldn't give a damn. They would never believe he had changed, and why should they? He didn't believe *they'd* changed, so why would they think it of him?

They were the same pathetic, sour bunch of hypocrites now that they'd been during his student years. Acting all butter-wouldn't-melt (his father's words again, dammit), offering to help him prepare for N.E.W.T.s. . . "You've got such a sure touch with plants, Severus," Sprout had said. As if she really cared how a Slytherin did on his N.E.W.T.s. Or inviting him to join the Hi-Wiz-Q Club "You've got one of the best Wizarding IQ scores I've seen in years, Mr Snape," Flitwick had said. As if Severus didn't know that Flitwick was just acting out of pity. He knew Severus had to buy his supplies through the Charity Scholarship Fund.

Well, Severus hadn't wanted their pity then, and he didn't want it now. Their hatred well, he had that whether he wanted it or not. He saw how McGonagall looked at him in the staffroom appraising him, judging him. "Professor Snape," she called him with icy politeness; he saw the name for the ironic insult it was.

And these were the people Dumbledore wanted him to turn to for "help"? Please.

As for "getting to know them better" well, now, *that* could be arranged. After all, he wouldn't want to disobey the headmaster, would he? Not after all Dumbledore had done for him like saving Lily, for example? Yeah, right. The only person who had ever mattered to Severus. Dumbledore had said he'd keep her alive, and she had been dead now for six weeks, four days, and thirteen hours.

And Dumbledore had the nerve to say that Severus disgusted *him!*

"Fine, old man," Severus said aloud (but not too loud; he took it for granted that his quarters were bugged). "You want me to get to know my 'colleagues'? Oh, I'll get to know them, all right. Just watch me."

Then he snapped his fingers and smirked, the way stupid Sirius Blackhead had always done. "Oh, wait, no you can't watch me, can you?"

Snickering to himself, Severus picked up the Invisibility Cloak, letting the material slide through his fingers like water, its magical threads warm to the touch. "I'll get to know them," he repeated. "And improve my spying skills in the process. Just what the headmaster ordered, eh, Albus?"

He went into his toilet cubicle to put the Cloak on, hoping he wasn't being naive to assume that not even Dumbledore would install magical surveillance equipment in a crapper.

Then he set out to "get to know" his colleagues.

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For a smart man, Filius Flitwick wasn't too bright about his wards -- they took Severus less than four minutes to dismantle.

Flitwick's quarters turned out to be only marginally more interesting than his security system. Severus wasn't sure exactly what he'd expected to find in Filius's rooms, but it wasn't this Spartan, minimalist neatness. Unless he'd charmed most of his personal possessions to be invisible, Flitwick owned very little.

His nearly-empty sitting room was dominated by a grand piano. Lucius Malfoy's family had one of the same well-known brand, so Severus had some idea of how much the thing must have cost. Of course Flitwick made more money than Severus did (hell, *everyone* made more money than Severus did), but he wouldn't have thought that even a Head of House earned enough to afford something the Malfoys had. Maybe the rumours were true, and Flitwick had goblin blood. If so, he'd get a share of the Gringotts' proceeds.

But if he did, then why in fuck's name was he teaching at Hogwarts? Severus would have resigned in an instant if he'd had some other way to support himself. This just confirmed what he'd always thought about Flitwick pleasant enough, but mad as a tick.

He spent a minute picturing Flitwick sitting at the piano of an evening, playing, his little hands moving across the keys, his little feet touching the pedals that Severus could now see were raised high off the floor. Did it relax him? Was he any good?

Severus had no idea, really, what good piano music even sounded like; he'd rarely heard any, good or bad. It wasn't like the Malfoys actually *played* their instrument; it was just for show. There'd been a battered upright in the corner of the pub Severus's da had frequented, but the only time it was ever used was when old man Boyle got drunk and maudlin and would pick out "The Mountains of Mourne" with two fingers while sobbing about the old country. Pathetic.

Well, whatever. Severus didn't really care what Flitwick did in his spare time. He turned his back on the piano and moved instead to a small roll-top desk against the far wall, intending to look through any papers he might find. You never knew what might be useful; knowledge was power.

But then caution reasserted itself. Flitwick might have untraceable wards on his desk, the way Severus did on his, and in any case, anything important would be charmed to look like old copies of the *Prophet* or something. Even hapless fourth-years managed to put concealing charms on their dirty magazines; no one left sensitive material out in the open. And besides, what could old Flitwick have to hide, anyway? A boring little man who actually enjoyed talking history with Binns in the staffroom. There was nothing of interest here.

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Pomona Sprout's rooms, which he visited a few days later, weren't much better. They were so full of plants and incubator pods that he wondered why she bothered with personal rooms at all; she might as well just sleep in corner of Greenhouse Three and be done with it.

Irma Pince's rooms smelled like a musty old library, and if she had any books on dark magic or any copies of *Philosophy in the Wizarding Bedroom*, by the magical twin brother of the Marquis de Sade, Severus couldn't find them.

Silvanus Kettleburn's quarters were exceptionally tidy and more sweet-smelling than one would have expected, given the amount of time the man spent among animals and manure; Severus suspected an air-freshening charm.

He no longer tried to tell himself that he was searching the staff's private rooms as a way to spite Dumbledore or to hone his spying skills. The truth was, every moment he spent under his Cloak, looking at other people's lives, was a moment that he didn't have to spend in his own life, didn't have to think about Lily or be constantly aware of the Mark on his arm that burned even when it didn't. Every moment under the Cloak was a moment that he could look away from the total fucked-up mess that was his existence.

Yes, he was as pathetic as old man Boyle playing the piano in his cups, but he didn't give a shit. The Invisibility Cloak let him be someone else, someone other than a stringy, ugly failure, and for a few short minutes, he could breathe.

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It was not long after the Christmas holiday that Severus paid his first visit to McGonagall's rooms. He'd been saving her for last. He'd always been curious about her, even in his student days, though it was curiosity mixed with a sort of loathing: she was Head of hated Gryffindor, after all, and he had been both compelled and repelled by her in equal measure. He'd been put off by her prim, high-collared exterior at the same time that he'd wanted to know what lay behind it.

He still didn't trust her didn't trust any of them but McGonagall intrigued and infuriated him more than the others. She still called him "Professor Snape," greeted him by name every morning, asked nosy questions about his weekends and his thoughts on Quidditch and how his classes were going.

"Why does she talk to me like that? Have you set her to spy on me?" Severus demanded of Dumbledore during one of the weekly "chats" the old man insisted on having with him. Keeping tabs on him, Severus knew. "If you don't think I'm up to the Potions job, feel free to sack me."

"If you don't think I've been more than fair to you, Severus, feel free to berate me." Dumbledore was smiling, but Severus didn't miss the steel in his voice.

So it was to be like that, was it? Severus was expected to grovel and be grateful? Well, why should that surprise him?

"I have not asked Minerva to spy on you," the old man continued, "or to do anything with you. But let's turn our minds to this puzzle, shall we? Why would a colleague speak to you in the staffroom or at breakfast? Make casual conversation with you?" To his smile he added his annoying twinkle. "Can you think of no reason?"

Severus shrugged. "I don't know," he said.

"Don't you? Well, I have a theory. You'll find it far-fetched, no doubt. But I do think it's possible just possible, mind that she's trying to be friendly."

"Why would she?" Severus demanded. McGonagall was at least twice his age, and a Gryffindor, and probably thought of him if she thought of him at all the same way he thought of his own students: as a snot-nosed, irritating burden. And in his case, he was burden who had turned around and joined the Death Eaters.

"Why in Merlin's name would she want to be friends with *me*?" he asked again.

"Why, indeed?" replied Dumbledore. His benign expression immediately told Severus that the old man was making fun of him. "Perhaps you could ask her."

"And perhaps you could go fuck yourself," Severus thought, but not too strongly. He wouldn't put it past Dumbledore to use Legilimency without permission, for all that he swore he never would.

No, Severus didn't intend to ask McGonagall anything, but that didn't mean he wasn't going to find out things about her. The very week of his conversation with Dumbledore was when he decided that the time had come to penetrate the spinster's lair.

So to speak.

## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 of 5

In a night of surprises, Severus sees a few things he'd rather not see -- and imagines a few that he would.

### Chapter 2

McGonagall's wards were set at just the standard Hogwarts minimum security level, and under his Invisibility Cloak, Severus shook his head in exasperated wonder. Were they all really so foolish as to believe that just because the Dark Lord was in abeyance (only temporarily, Severus was sure), there was no more threat? "The Dark Lord's ideas aren't just going to go away!" he wanted to shout, when some idiot in the staffroom started bleating about what a relief it was that You-Know-Who was dead. "It's just as dangerous now as ever!"

But then again, what the fuck did he care? His own life was ruined; why shouldn't other people's be? It would serve someone like McGonagall right, always so smug and sure of herself, to have her secure little Hogwarts world disturbed by Darkness. Or even just by a mill worker's lad from Spinner's End.

He slipped past her guardian portrait a snoring old Gryffindor knight with ease and soon found himself in her sitting room. He was fairly sure what he'd find there: heavy old Victorian furniture (and too much of it), chairs with needlepoint seats, pictures of simpering children on the walls. He didn't actually expect antimacassars, because not even a walking spinster stereotype like McGonagall tight bun, pursed lips and all could be *that* much of a cliché. But he had no doubt that her rooms would say "vinegary virgin" as clearly as if they'd been a talking mirror.

Except that they didn't. He wasn't sure *what* they said, exactly, except that a reader lived there. The walls were covered with bookcases, not the sentimental lithographs of Severus's imagination. There was a small table (heaped with homework parchments) and two straight-backed chairs. Near the fire were a wing-backed armchair and a low settee. This last was draped with a tartan throw (of course), but the frame was made of light wood and didn't seem too old-fashioned.

So all right, McGonagall's sitting room wasn't your typical old-maid's paradise (except to the extent that an old maid lived in it). Fine.

But the bedroom, now. . .

Severus felt a smirk tug at the corner of his mouth as he made his way to the door. A historic occasion, this the first time a man entered McGonagall's bedchamber. With her actually in the bed.

His breath came faster, and he could feel his pulse begin to thrum in his neck. About the only time in his life that he felt powerful was on these secret forays into other people's bedrooms in the middle of the night. Even if the occupants weren't present, he was seeing their most intimate space, and if they *were* present, they were usually asleep at their weakest. Severus had no interest in harming them, of course, but it gave him a rush to see them vulnerable: snoring or drooling, their mouths open. Or wearing a silly nightcap, like Flitwick did, or sleeping with a cat on a beribboned pillow next to them, like Filch.

He pictured McGonagall sleeping in something long and high-necked, her hair probably still in its bun. Would she wear a hairnet, like his gran had? He hoped she wouldn't have the bedcurtains closed; he wanted to see her wanted, just once, to know what she looked like underneath that sharp teacherly authority. No glasses, no sarcasm, nothing to hide behind. Nothing to use as a weapon against him.

The light from her fire was enough to keep him from blundering against some obstacle in the dark. That would be all he needed, to be discovered creeping about the staff's bedrooms while they slept. It would be just his luck, of course.

Severus sidled further into the room and looked at the four-poster bed against the far wall. His da had always said that "Fortune don't never favour a poor man," but Fortune seemed to have taken pity on Severus this once: the bedcurtains were open, and someone clearly lay beneath the dark-patterned quilt.

Two someones, in fact.

Two.

The blood was roaring so loudly in Severus's head that it seemed impossible that McGonagall and her bedmate couldn't hear it. So faint did he suddenly feel that he had to steady himself with a hand on the wall.

Minerva McGonagall was asleep in her bed, and a man was in it with her.

The man was old. Severus could see whitish hair on the pillow, and for a heart-stopping moment, he thought McGonagall was sleeping with the headmaster. But then reason reasserted itself, and he could see that it wasn't Dumbledore at all. This man's hair was shorter and greyer, and if he had a beard, it wasn't visible.

It wasn't visible because the man's face was hidden against McGonagall's shoulder. He lay spooned behind her, his arm snaking out from under the duvet to curve around what must have been her waist. She had the bedclothes pulled up under her chin, but the man's arm was bare, as was his shoulder.

It took a moment for Severus's shocked brain to register what this naked shoulder meant: chances were good that the old man was wearing nothing at all.

And if *he* wasn't, probably she wasn't, either.

Almost as soon as he had this terrifying thought, Severus had another one: if only he and his Cloak had arrived earlier, he might have seen McGonagall and this old man fucking.

A wave of nausea washed over him, and for a horrible second, he thought he was going to be sick on the floor. But he mastered himself. Being a Death Eater had taught him that much, at least. And forced himself to face the truth: even though a part of him was repulsed by the notion of these old people actually having sex (especially her). . . another part of him desperately wanted to watch them.

Especially her.

Christ. Dumbledore was right. Severus *was* disgusting.

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He intended to leave then, but he didn't. Instead, he crept as close to the bed as he dared and peered through the gloom at McGonagall and her old man.

Her hair, he could now see, was loose and long, a black lock of it spreading far enough over the quilt to brush against the man's arm. And closer to, he could also see that the arm was really too high to be at waist height; it was just about at the right level to rest against McGonagall's. . . chest.

Shit. Severus would rather not have seen the pictures that now pushed their way into his brain, images of rounded smooth skin and nipples and the old man's hands touching. . . damnation. He focused on the man's arm instead. That naked arm looked possessive, looped around McGonagall as it was, and Severus felt a surge of irritation. Just who *was* this old duffer, anyway?

As if in answer, the old man suddenly stirred and sat up; Severus scuttled backwards in silent alarm, stopping only when he fetched up against the wall.

The man slid out from under the covers and padded quietly towards a door in the wall. Too, of course. As Severus had surmised, he was stark-bollocks naked, his white shanks gleaming faintly in the dim light of ember and moon.

McGonagall hadn't moved; the duvet still covered her as completely as her high-necked robes did during the day. Typical, Severus thought. She probably made the old man beg for it.

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Severus didn't really remember the walk back to his rooms; he was too busy grappling with the final shock of this already-surreal night: when the old man had come back from the toilet, Severus had seen his face clearly for the first time.

And he'd recognized him. It was the creepy old git who ran the Hog's Head Tavern. Aberforth Somebody. Keeper of pubs and raiser of goats. In other words, in shit up to his neck, one way or another. He was dodgy as hell, and although Severus had never seen the man with the Dark Lord, he was certain that old Ab was not to be trusted. He was known to turn a blind eye to Death Eater activity in his pub, and rumour had it that he'd ferry goods and information to and from anyone who could pay his price, no questions asked. Without a doubt, this Aberforth bloke was a nasty piece of work.

A nasty piece of work who was apparently fucking the ever-so-upright Deputy Headmistress of Hogwarts.

Jesus. Did the woman have any idea what sort of filth she was bringing into her precious school? Or had her spinster head been addled by the no-doubt rare chance to taste a bit of cock?

There was a part of Severus Snape, the part raised on the scandals and self-righteousness of Spinner's End, that still looked down on a woman who had sex outside of marriage. "No better than she should be," is what his mam would have said, her voice expressing both censure and excitement. She would have been pleased to see a neighbour's feet of clay.

Severus wasn't pleased, though. He was annoyed. McGonagall was always acting so prim and proper and superior, handing out detentions to snogging couples after curfew, and yet here she was, spreading her own legs just like any common slut. Hypocrite.

By this time, Severus had cleaned his teeth and flung himself irritably on his bed, still in his robes. He couldn't get the image of McGonagall and her lover out of his head. He kept seeing them. No, kept seeing *her*, naked and panting, her hair disheveled, lying underneath that old man.

Did Dumbledore know about this. . . this liaison, this "affair," or whatever it was, between his deputy and a disreputable barkeep? If not, he damn well ought to.

Severus decided to tell him. Tomorrow. It was far too late right now.

Besides, he desperately needed a wank.

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But to Severus's surprise, when he related his tale to the headmaster during their next "little chat," the daft bugger seemed totally unfazed.

"Minerva is an adult, Severus," he said, sipping his tea as calmly as if he hadn't just been told that his second-in-command was quite literally in bed with the enemy. "And Hogwarts is not a nunnery. It's her home, just as it is yours and mine, and we all have the right to our private lives."

"But she's having sex. In a school," Severus said, manfully resisting the temptation to speak slowly and carefully, as if to a mental defective. "A school where there are children." Not that he gave a damn about the brats, but it was the principle of the thing.

Dumbledore continued to be infuriatingly unbothered. "As long as she's not having sex in the Great Hall during dinner, or inviting students into her bed, I don't see that it's any of our business." He eyed Severus over the top of his half-moon glasses. "How do you know about Minerva and Ab?"

Severus had been waiting for this question. "Professor Sprout mentioned Aberforth in the staffroom," he said, which was the simple truth. Of course, Sprout hadn't said anything about McGonagall's liaison with Aberforth; she'd only been talking about some Hufflepuff sixth-years who'd tried to buy firewhisky in the Hog's Head.

But still, she *had* mentioned Aberforth, so Severus wasn't lying. If Albus chose to assume that Severus meant that Sprout had been mentioning Aberforth and McGonagall together. . .well, that was the old man's lookout. Severus was merely reporting a fact; he couldn't be responsible for the conclusions people drew from that fact, could he?

Luckily, Dumbledore didn't press further. "Well," he said, "I know you'll respect Minerva's privacy. It's a precious commodity in a boarding school, as you know."

"And that's all you're going to say about it?" Severus demanded.

Dumbledore looked up from his tea, surprised. "What else do you want me to say? As long as she's not breaking any laws or endangering students, what Minerva does on her own time in her own rooms is her own business. There's nothing more to discuss."

"Nothing more to discuss? You're not even a little bit worried that a possible Death Eater is being given free run of the castle? After he finishes fucking McGonagall into a stupor, he could sneak out of her bed and get up to Merlin knows what!"

"Don't be puerile. Aberforth is no threat."

"But I just told you, he's shady as hell. I've seen him with Yaxley! What do you even know about him?"

To Severus's astonishment, Dumbledore gave a deep, fruity chuckle. "More than I'd like to, and he can say the same about me. He's my brother."

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Back in his quarters, Severus paced and muttered to himself about all that Albus has just told him. Brother? Aberforth the scummy Hog's Head landlord was Dumbledore's fucking *brother*? Whose dealings with the likes of Yaxley and Mulciber had been on Dumbledore's orders? A brother who was a charter member of the Order of the Fucking Phoenix, for chrissake?

And no one had seen fit to mention this little fact to Severus, the man who would most probably have to become the headmaster's double agent once the Dark Lord inevitably returned?

Oh, no, of course not. Severus was expected to snitch every tiny detail of his knowledge of the Dark Lord and his followers, even down to how often Voldemort took a shit. . .but nobody bothered to share with him even the most basic information about his new Hogwarts world.

Jesus Christ on a crutch, as his da would have said.

Severus paced some more.

Fine, dammit. If no one was going to tell him anything, then he'd just have to find things out for himself. And what better place to start than Dumbledore's deputy headmistress and his own brother?

## Chapter 3

*Chapter 3 of 5*

Severus continues to see and not to see, and then Headmaster asks a favour.

### Chapter 3

What with one thing and a-fucking-nother, it was Sunday night before Severus had a chance to sneak into McGonagall's rooms again. He had no way of knowing whether Aberforth would be there, too, but he thought it was a good bet.

Two pieces of evidence had led him to this conclusion. First, the Hog's Head had early closing on Sunday nights. Second, Sprout and McGonagall had an arrangement whereby Sprout looked after the Gryffindors on Sundays while McGonagall took the Puffs on Fridays so that Sprout could visit her sister. Previously, Severus had assumed that the favour of the Friday/Sunday trade was all on McGonagall's side, but now he realised that the arrangement was probably a *quid pro quo*: sister-visit in exchange for lover-visit.

(If it even *was* a sister-visit, of course. Given the revelations that kept coming about the staff's secret lovers and secret brothers and secret pianos, Severus wouldn't have been surprised to learn that Sprout was really headed off to a lesbian orgy.)

Anyway, all signs pointed to Sunday night as a prime opportunity for a little Aberforth/McGonagall hanky-panky. Severus still had a hard time believing the two of them could be an item, but apparently all it took to get into McGonagall's bed was a little anti-Voldemort sentiment. Let Aberforth Dumbledore do a little cloak-and-dagging for the cause, and he was in like Flynn, goats or no goats.

Severus could just imagine Ab and McGonagall sitting around congratulating each other on their moral superiority as Defenders of the Good. Probably considered it foreplay.

Gross.

Letting himself into McGonagall's chambers was as easy as it had been the first time, although Severus still moved just as carefully and stealthily as before, thankful for the coat rack that concealed the door as it opened. You could never take chances with this sort of thing. He'd also made sure to arrive early. After all, he couldn't hear anything useful if he spied on people who were asleep.

Plus, he might be in time to watch them fuck.

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They made a disgustingly domestic picture sitting together on the sofa in front of the fire, Aberforth with his legs stretched out before him, McGonagall nestled against his

side with her feet tucked beneath her. He had his arm around her and was idly releasing locks of hair from her bun as he talked. Astoundingly, she wasn't objecting.

". . . hate that I'm not going to be able to stay the night with you," he was saying. "But Moody's got it into his head that this time he has a real lead on the scum who tortured the Longbottoms. He wants to do a little reccy, just the two of us."

"And here I thought he had a staff of highly-trained Aurors to help him with that sort of thing," McGonagall said. "Silly me."

"No, it's nothing official at this stage, see? Only a spot of information-gathering. We'll just be two old goats asking a few questions, that's all. Nothing dangerous."

McGonagall snorted. "As I recall, that's exactly what Alastor said just before he lost his leg. Well, you're right about one thing, at least. You *are* old goats, the pair of you."

"Aye," Aberforth nodded, grinning. "Not the same kind of goats, though. Moody, now ... *he's* a paranoid old goat. Unlike me."

"Oh? There are some who might disagree with that assessment," McGonagall replied, smiling in her turn and tugging lightly on Ab's beard. Under his Invisibility Cloak, Severus stared. A playful McGonagall was the last thing he'd expected. Then again, cats did like to toy with their prey, didn't they?

"Well?" she asked finally. "What kind of old goat are you, then?"

"A randy one," said Ab, and dropped his hand to her breast.

Without the self-control he'd developed during the endless hours spent dancing attendance on an unpredictable madman, Severus thought he'd probably have given himself away by gagging. This old-person sex stuff was even weirder than he'd expected. Here was ancient Ab groping McGonagall's tits. Ew.

Severus sidled a little closer for a better look.

Part of him expected McGonagall to bat Ab's hand away or show some other sign of prim outrage, but instead, she leant in to kiss him, and he pulled her close.

It was a passionate kiss, as far as Severus could tell, and his breath came faster as it occurred to him that they might try a quickie before Ab had to leave.

But no such luck, of course. After a moment, Ab sat back and gazed at McGonagall, his hands still cupping her face, his thumb stroking her cheek gently. The look in his eyes was. . .

Well, it was a look that Severus didn't really understand. He only knew that he'd never have expected to see it on the face of a tough, grizzled man like Aberforth Dumbledore. It spoke of vulnerability and need and something more. . .

And it was making Severus damned angry. What right did that codger have to feel something like that for an old spinster schoolteacher, anyway? And to have her there, in his arms, when. . . ?

He shook his head violently to rid his mind of the sudden picture of Lily. She was dead, and he'd been an idiot to let her matter to him in the first place. He wanted to shout at Aberforth, who was still looking at McGonagall with that sappy expression on his face, "Forget it, old man! She'll just leave you, it's not worth it."

But he merely watched as Ab got stiffly to his feet and *daccio'd* his cloak.

"I'll see you next week, then?" he said, running a hand through McGonagall's hair.

"You'd better make certain of it," she answered sternly, but belied her tone by catching his fingers and kissing them lightly. She watched, smiling, as he stumped out the door, and when it had closed behind him, she rose and moved towards the other room, probably to get ready for bed.

Severus decided to get out while the getting was good. He still wanted to see McGonagall naked ... she actually did have nice tits, old as she was ... but somehow, he'd lost his taste for it tonight.

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She was all prim bun and high-necked robes at breakfast the next morning, as if she hadn't been hoping to spend the previous night in wanton fornication. After he'd retired to his own bed, Severus had spent some time imagining just what she and Ab would have done in hers: in his mind, he'd seen the old man take McGonagall from behind, work-roughened hands on her breasts; he'd seen her hair spilling over her shoulders, her neck arched as she responded to Ab's thrusts. She'd looked surprisingly hot.

*I know what you get up to* Severus thought as he watched her help herself to porridge. *Don't think I'm fooled by that strait-laced act.*

As if she heard his thoughts, McGonagall turned towards him. "I hope you had a pleasant weekend, Severus," she said. She'd started doing this lately ... using his given name instead of "Professor Snape." He suspected mockery.

"It was all right," he muttered.

"Excuse me?"

"I said it was all right!" he repeated loudly. "I stayed in."

"I see," she said, sprinkling currants onto her porridge.

He was sure she was judging him. "I suppose you're going to tell me I should get out more," he charged. "You know, socialise ... you're going to suggest I go to the Hog's Head or some rot like that." He watched her out of the side of his eyes as he said this last, but she didn't react.

"Not at all," she said. "First, I wouldn't presume to tell you what to do with your free time, and second, I know how you feel: a cosy private weekend can be just the thing after a busy week of teaching."

"A cosy private weekend," ha! Clearly she was speaking from experience. Well, if cosying up in bed to a naked old man was her idea of fun. . .

He gave her a grunt in response, since he'd reached his limit of morning conversation. Luckily, McGonagall seemed to take the hint, for she said nothing further.

But since no hint had yet been invented that could shut up Dumbledore, the headmaster just banged ahead, either not noticing or not caring how much Severus wanted to be left alone.

"Severus?" he said. "If you could spare me a few minutes after dinner tonight? I have something to discuss with you in my office, if you would be so kind."

Severus almost didn't answer ... it wasn't as if he were being asked a real question to which he could say "no" if he wanted to. Which he did. But Dumbledore just sat there twinkling and smiling and waiting, so finally Severus said, "fine," and went back to his sausages.

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"I'll come straight to the point," Albus began that evening, after Severus had refused his offer of tea or firewhisky, and they at last got down to business. "Despite everyone's relief over Voldemort's death, it is very unlikely that we have seen the last of your erstwhile master. And we certainly have not seen the last of his many followers."

Severus nodded. *Finally* someone was showing some sense about the state of the post-Voldemort wizarding world.

Dumbledore beamed. "Ah, I knew I could count on you to see things clearly," he said. "Well, then you'll be glad to hear that some of us from the Order of the Phoenix are continuing our clandestine monitoring of the political situation. I'm hoping that I can enlist your help in that endeavour."

Of course. More work.

"What do you want me to do?" Severus asked warily.

"Oh, nothing onerous," said Dumbledore, waving an airy hand. "Just collect a message or a packet from time to time. From the Hog's Head. As you know, the nature of my brother's business brings him into contact with some of the more questionable members of our society, and he often has useful intelligence to communicate to me."

"Why can't he just send you an owl? Or firecall you?"

"Even in these relatively peaceful days, I don't trust public channels. As Mr Moody says, we need 'constant vigilance.' I suspect your own experience has taught you the same caution." Dumbledore cocked an inquisitive eye, and Severus nodded again. It was true; he *did* believe that caution was still essential.

"So it will be a considerable help to me if you would casually drop into Aberforth's pub every fortnight or so, in case he has something for me."

Severus remained suspicious. "Why can't he just send it with McGonagall? Or bring it to you himself? He seems to *come* here pretty regularly, if you get my drift."

Under his beard, Dumbledore's lips drew together, a sure sign that his patience was thinning. "I'd have thought you'd outgrown that sort of adolescent sexual innuendo, Severus. I have my reasons for needing to collect Aberforth's information at the Hog's Head. But never mind. You're obviously unwilling to help, so I ... "

"No," Severus interrupted. "I'll do it."

He had no desire to antagonise Dumbledore ... at least not without a better reason. He still thought this story was pretty weak, but fine, whatever. He could manage a trip to the Hog's Head every couple of weeks. His first horrified thought ... that this was yet another ploy to get him to make new friends ... now seemed unlikely. Not even Dotty Dumbledore would consider a near-centenarian barkeep to be an appropriate friend for someone barely twenty-two.

"Excellent." Dumbledore was twinkling once more, and why not? He'd got what he wanted, as usual.

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Donning his Invisibility Cloak the way he always did for trips to Hogsmeade ... the nosy world didn't need to know where he was going or what he was doing ... Severus made his first visit to the Hog's Head. He went on a Tuesday afternoon, a time that he thought would probably be fairly slow for a pub. He was right: the only other person in the grotty public room was a shabby character snoring noisily in a corner.

Aberforth stood behind the bar, absently wiping a glass with a dingy cloth. "What'll it be?" he asked without looking up. His wand, Severus noticed, was in a holster right next to his hand.

"Nothing," said Severus. "The Headmaster asked me to stop in."

Aberforth rolled his eyes and used his wand to cast a quick *Muffliato*. "Merlin's tits, man. And I thought you were supposed to have a been a DE spy. If this is an example of your technique, it's a wonder you're still breathing."

Severus felt himself flush. Did *every* fucking person in Hogsmeade know about his past?

"What, you want a secret handshake or code or something?" he sneered. "Fine, if you want to play that game. How about 'silly buggers' as a password?"

To his surprise, Aberforth grinned. "Aye, Albus said you were a prickly one. No, Twinkletoes, we don't need any passwords. Here's how it works: you come in ... and not always at the same time, mind; you don't want to be predictable ... you come in and sit at the bar. I serve you a shot of firewhisky. . .on the house, it'll be, and you stay for a while and sip. Chat with the other customers, if you've a mind, though I get the feeling you're not exactly talkative. Then when you're ready to leave, leave. If I've got anything for you, you'll find a parchment has been magicked into your pocket. If I don't, you won't. Got it?"

"Of course," said Severus. What kind of moron did the man think he was? "And I can pay for my own whisky." He wasn't going to take charity.

"Don't be daft. It's not me being generous, trust me. Albus pays. And why shouldn't he? You're doing a job for him. So take the whisky and shut up."

He poured two fingers as he talked and shoved the glass along to Severus. "Go on, sit down," he said, when Severus didn't move. "It will look suspicious if you just come and stand here like the Grim Reaper."

"Look suspicious to who?" Severus couldn't resist asking as he glanced over at the snoring drunk.

But Aberforth was serious. "It's the ones you *don't* see that you have to worry about," he said. "Now sit."

Severus sat. In truth, he was curious about Aberforth, about a man who could hold his own with Albus Dumbledore and who could get into Minerva McGonagall's iron knickers.

To his own amazement, he ended up staying for nearly half an hour. Aberforth turned out to be interesting: wry and funny and very sharp ... and one of the few people Severus had met in Hogwarts or Hogsmeade who didn't idolise the headmaster.

McGonagall's name didn't come up, of course, but Severus was more curious about her and Ab than ever. He could now see some of their similarities, their dry wit and quick minds and sarcastic turns of phrase, but their differences still seemed greater. He wanted to know what kept them together.

And he still wanted to watch them fuck.

## Chapter 4

Severus sees something he's been wanting to see. What he doesn't see, though, is that he might be making a friend.

## Chapter 4

In this project, unfortunately, he was constantly stymied. If he wasn't being waylaid on Sunday nights by disciplinary or medical crises in the Slytherin common room, or stupidly falling asleep on his own sofa only to wake stiff and cranky on Monday morning, he was arriving at McGonagall's rooms to find her either alone or already sleeping, Aberforth spooned behind her. Salazar on a stick, why were these old people always unconscious by midnight?

He did manage to see McGonagall naked, though. Some time after the Easter holidays, balked yet again in his hope of finding her writhing under Aberforth, he watched her drink a cup of tea in what she imagined was solitude and then head off to her bedroom.

He followed.

Even though she was alone, he vaguely expected her to undress the way his gran had. It would be just his luck, because if she did, Severus wouldn't get to see so much as a square inch of skin. When he'd stayed with Gran, she'd got ready for bed by pulling her nightgown over her head before she removed her day clothes. Then she'd dropped skirt and blouse and stockings to the floor one-by-one as she unfastened them under the voluminous yards of fabric. She must have slept in her girdle and brassiere, for Severus always waited in vain to see those.

But McGonagall, in more ways than one, was no Gran Snape. She didn't bother with modest nightgown tents. She merely stood in front of her wardrobe and removed first her robes and then her undershirt, folding each carefully away. Her bra and knickers were plain and white, and she took off each methodically, floating them away towards the loo, where, if her bathroom were like his, Severus knew a built-in hamper awaited them; the elves collected staff laundry from the hampers once a week.

And then there she was...naked at last. Her body was slim and pale and rather angular except for some softness around her stomach. Her breasts weren't large, but they couldn't be called small, either: they'd give Ab a good, round handful.

She looked. . .like herself, only without clothes. Ordinary. Nice.

As Severus watched, she Summoned a nightdress to her with wandless magic and slipped it over her head; it was neither the Victorian horror he'd once imagined, nor the lacy wisp of his more heated fantasies. It was simply a cotton nightgown, long-sleeved and very practical for a chilly spring night in a draughty castle.

When she went into the loo, Severus took the opportunity to make his escape.

Then he went back to his rooms and wanked himself raw.

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He didn't return to McGonagall's chambers for several weeks after that night, though he couldn't have said why. He did continue to visit the Hog's Head throughout the spring and summer, though. Often, when the pub was busy, he exchanged no more than a word or two with Aberforth; he'd merely drink his whisky silently and then, after fifteen minutes or so, depart.

A parchment would show up in his pocket about half the time. He never made any attempt to read one: he had no doubt that the contents would be encrypted, and of course the Dumbledore brothers would have covered the things in enough protective spells and hexes to blast Severus into smithereens if he tried to break them.

But occasionally, the pub would be empty, or close to it, and then Severus would stay longer and talk with Ab, enough to learn what kind of man he was. Severus didn't delude himself that he'd learnt Ab's full story...he could tell by the bitterness that sometimes crept into the man's tone that there was a lot he wasn't saying...but he knew enough to know that Ab had had a tough life, one way or another.

Still, Ab didn't whine about it or feel sorry for himself. He didn't hide the mistakes he'd made, but he didn't beat himself up over them, either. What was done was done, he'd sometimes say, which was something Severus's da had said, too.

To his surprise, Severus sometimes found himself talking in return...about his parents and his life at Spinner's End.

"He sounds a hard man, your da," Ab said once, and Severus couldn't tell whether he thought this a bad thing or a good one.

"He was," Severus agreed. Some of his earliest memories were of his da's angry voice. "He and mam fought a lot, especially in the year or two before I went to Hogwarts. But once I started school, it got better. They were calmer when I was at home."

As a child, he hadn't realised how much tension was caused between his parents by his being magical. But oddly, once he went to Hogwarts, things *did* get better. It was as if the magic had become official somehow. At any rate, Tobias had been more accepting of it. Or at least more resigned to it.

Yes, things had been better, and yet Severus had still gone ahead and fucked up his life royally.

Suddenly, he felt the phantom burn of the Mark on his arm, and all he could think of were the wasted dark years and his da's death. And Lily. For a moment, a black mist swirled before his eyes, and he wished desperately for the escape of his Invisibility Cloak.

But Aberforth was still talking, and Severus forced himself to concentrate on the old man's voice.

"No more fighting after you went to school?" Ab was asking.

"Oh, they always fought," Severus replied, once he remembered what their conversation was about. He marvelled at how controlled he sounded, and he talked on just to distract himself. "But I think it had become more habit than anything else. I used to wonder why they stayed together, but then I saw them when they got along with each other, and they were all right."

"Feisty, your mam, was she?" asked Aberforth, grinning wolfishly. "There's nothing like a good spitfire of a woman to hold a man's interest."

"Like you and McGonagall?"

The words came out before Severus could stop them, and he was furious with himself. Of all the dumb-fuck things to say.

Ab, who had been engaged in his interminable glass-wiping, put down his rag slowly. "Minerva told you about us?" he asked.

"No. But things get around. You know." Severus could hear how lame he sounded, and he fully expected Ab to take offense.

Yet Aberforth just looked at him for another few seconds before picking up his rag. "Aye," he said. "Like me and Minerva."

"You love her."

The words came out sounding like an accusation, but it was one Ab didn't deny; he merely studied Severus and kept wiping his damned glass. "And if I do?" he said finally.



"You're twice her age! She's twice *my* age!"

Wherever *that* had come from, Severus had no idea, but he knew he'd really crossed the line this time. He couldn't help himself: everything was spinning out of his control, and he could do nothing but let the tide carry him where it would. He waited for Ab to yell at him, to tell him to mind his own fucking business and get the hell out.

And he did, more or less, though not in those words, and he didn't yell. He spoke mildly, which in its own way was even worse.

"The first is not your concern, lad," was all he said. "And the second has nowt to do with owt."

He gave the glass one last swipe before setting it on the bar and saying, "I think maybe you should call it a night, eh?"

Severus stumbled off his stool and out into the darkness, and it wasn't until the next morning that he even thought to check his pocket for a parchment.

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He spent the better part of the next two weeks feeling like the world's most prize imbecile. How could he have sat at Ab's bar like such a gormless twit, bleating on about love? The memory was a constant *Cruciatius* in his brain.

To take his mind off his stupidity, he also spent a lot of time under his Cloak, escaping into other people's lives. He even started going back to McGonagall's on Sunday nights, hoping to find her in bed with Aberforth. He thought that maybe if he could watch them have sex, he could get his world back in perspective. Then their relationship wouldn't be about love, it would just be about fucking, and *that*, Severus could handle.

No luck yet, though; now that they were deep into the summer hols, McGonagall seemed to be spending most of her Sunday nights at Ab's place.

Ever since that embarrassing talk with Aberforth, Severus had been keeping a weather eye on McGonagall, waiting for her to upbraid him for meddling in her personal life, or at least to start acting differently towards him. When she continued to behave just as she always did, baiting him about Quidditch and entertaining him against his will with acerbic comments on students, colleagues, and Malfoys, he was forced to conclude that Aberforth hadn't told her the sorry story.

So it was only Ab that Severus had to worry about. Which shouldn't be a problem, he told himself, since he didn't really give a fuck with the old man thought of him.

Except that he did.

## Chapter 5

### Chapter 5 of 5

Finally, Severus sees some things that he never expected. Especially about himself.

### Chapter 5

It was a pleasant, even balmy August evening when Severus finally put on his Invisibility Cloak and set out for his regular assignation at the Hog's Head, but he was in no mood to enjoy the summer weather. He just wanted to get the meeting over with. With any luck, it would be a busy night, and he wouldn't have to talk to Aberforth at all. He could just sit silently at the bar, sip his whiskey, and get out.

But when did Severus Snape ever have any luck other than bad? When he got to the pub, not only was it not crowded, but Ogbert, the relief man, was behind the bar instead of Ab.

"Step through to the back," Ogbert said when Severus took his usual seat.

"What?"

Ogbert jerked his head towards the door to Aberforth's private quarters. "Himself says you're to step through to the back. Upstairs."

"Up to his personal rooms, you mean?" If so, it would be a first. Severus had never yet been up there.

"To the back," Ogbert repeated, like some kind of moronic robot. "Upstairs."

*Cretin*, Severus thought. Well, he'd try Ab's rooms, and if Ab tossed him out on his arse, fine. He could go back to Hogwarts and use his Cloak to watch Filch feed his damned cat. That was about the level of his life these days anyway.

He opened the door marked "Private" and climbed the stairs to Aberforth's personal rooms, wondering what the hell this was all about. It could be almost anything, from a dressing-down to a clandestine meeting with Albus to an unexpected face-to-face encounter with some former DE that the Order was keeping tabs on.

Whatever it was, Severus didn't plan to meet it unprepared. He drew his wand, knocked, and at Ab's gruff, "Come," he cautiously entered.

And froze.

Sitting in front of him on a sofa, a glass of Ogden's in her hand, was Minerva McGonagall.

Ab was there, too, standing under a large portrait of a little girl and pouring firewhisky into a tumbler.

"Well, don't just stand there; come in," he said, holding out the tumbler. "Have a drink."

Severus felt his gut churn. What the fuck was this? Why was McGonagall here? Were they going to yell at him? Make fun of him? Berate him? Well, just let them try.

He ignored the whisky. "Sorry, I've got better things to do," he said, using the rudeness to steady himself. "If you've a parchment for me, just hand it over, and I'll be on my way."

"Don't be an arse," said Ab. "You can spare five minutes. I'd have met you downstairs, but then I thought since you and Min are friends, and she's in the Order, too, we

might as well do our business in comfort."

"We aren't friends," said Severus, trying hard to ignore the memory of McGonagall's slender nakedness.

"Of course we aren't, Severus," she said, uttering her first words of the evening. "Let's take that as read, shall we? We aren't friends, so if you sit down and have a drink, you're not risking a thing. No strings, no expectations. You can remain as solitary as you like."

"Right," said Ab, coming round to sit next to her on the sofa and placing Severus's glass on the low table in front of them. "We're not friends. Got it. So will you stop scowling and sit the hell down?"

Slowly, Severus pocketed his wand and lowered himself into an armchair near the sofa. He felt both enormously stupid and idiotically pleased, and for some reason, he had a sudden clear vision of a moment from his childhood

It was one of the rare occasions when his mam and da had invited a neighbour couple over for a drink at Christmas. Severus had been put to bed early, but he'd sneaked down to watch through the crack of the lounge door; he remembered the grown-up sounds of tinkling glasses and laughter and his da's voice saying jovially, "One more for the road, Mrs Merkle?" And his mam had been wearing perfume.

Severus took a deep mouthful of firewhisky and let its warmth move through him as Ab spoke.

"We'll have to adjust our meeting schedule a bit," he said, putting his arm around McGonagall's shoulders. "Minerva and I are leaving next week for a holiday in Majorca. So make it three weeks before you come back."

"Majorca? Why? What's in Majorca?" Severus asked, more from a feeling that he ought to be making conversation than from any genuine interest. He didn't realise that his question might sound less than polite until he saw McGonagall's lips quirk in amusement.

"It's more like what is *not* in Majorca," she said. "Namely, work, rain, and the overly-concerned parents of incoming first-years."

"And drunks," said Ab.

McGonagall laughed. "Oh, I suspect there will be drunks a-plenty."

Ab chuckled, too. "Well, no drunks that *I'm* responsible for, any road," he said. Then he shook his finger at her solemnly. "And there better not be any owls from that brother of mine, either. He can damn well get along without you for a fortnight. Tell him I said so."

"Tell him yourself," McGonagall said. "He'll be stopping by, I'm sure."

"Aye, thinks he has to check up on me," Ab grumbled.

What with conversation and whisky, somehow fifteen minutes passed, then twenty, and Severus realised that he hadn't once checked the clock the way he usually did on social occasions, wondering how soon he could decently get away. He didn't think he'd enjoyed himself . . . not exactly, but . . . well, he hadn't had a miserable time, either.

Still, it was time to go. They'd be getting sick of him; probably wished he'd left ages ago.

He stood up abruptly.

"Oh?" said Ab. "Leaving then, are you?"

"Yes, Aberforth, don't you remember?" McGonagall asked, smiling a little wickedly. "Severus has better things to do."

"So he said," agreed Ab, getting to his feet. "Good night, then, Snape. Remember, three weeks."

"Good night, Severus," McGonagall echoed, and before he knew it, Severus found himself on the staircase outside Ab's flat, wondering if he'd imagined the entire encounter.

But he could hear the murmur of their voices behind the door. No, he hadn't imagined anything: they were still there, still talking...probably about him.

Laughing at him, no doubt.

He couldn't leave without knowing. Creeping back to the door, he cast a quick *Auscultatio* charm, for eavesdropping, and immediately could hear them clearly.

". . . have to admit I was sceptical when Albus brought him back here," McGonagall was saying. "Severus was such a bright student, but I never could reach him, none of us could. I was sickened when I heard he'd joined the Death Eaters, but I can't say I was surprised. And then for Albus suggest that he teach the children. . . as I say, I was sceptical."

"As I recall, you were more than sceptical," Ab said. "I seem to remember you gave Albus a right tongue-lashing."

"Well. . . I may have expressed myself rather strongly, yes. But now I think I was mistaken. I've watched Severus this past year, and he *has* changed. For the better. I'm glad Albus found a way to give him a second chance. It was an altruistic thing to do."

Ab grunted. "And in the process he got himself a new messenger boy and a forever-grateful subordinate, too. Funny how Albus's altruism always seems to result in benefits for himself."

"Aberforth. . ."

"I know, I know, love. I'm not going to malign your precious Albus." McGonagall snorted, and Ab chuckled. "All right, well, not much. Anyway, this time I think I even agree with him. You and Albus are right: Snape is worth saving."

There was a silence punctuated with soft, moist sounds and little sighs, and Severus realised with a start that they must be kissing.

"Snape..." Ab began, only to break off with a groan. "Ahhh. . ."

"What about Snape?" McGonagall asked after a moment, somewhat breathlessly.

"He fancies you."

"What? Nonsense."

"He does, trust me. He fancies you, and who can blame him?"

She laughed softly. "Flatterer. He does not. I'm old enough to be his mother."

"And I'm just about old enough to about be your grandfather. That doesn't mean anything. I tell you, Severus Snape fancies you."

"Well, I fancy *you*, Aberforth Dumbledore, mad though you clearly are, and I think it's about time you took me to your bed and ravished me, don't you?"

There were more soft sounds, and Severus stood back, his mind reeling. He couldn't yet make sense of all that he'd just heard; that would come later, when he had time, and space, and quiet. For the moment, he focused on the one concrete thing that *did* make sense: Aberforth and McGonagall were about to fuck, and if Severus still wanted to watch them, here was his chance.

Yet he hesitated. Dumbledore was always telling him that he was a better person than he thought he was, and clearly a better person wouldn't stoop so low as to spy on people having sex. A better person would respect his colleagues' privacy, would recognise their right to intimacy. A better person...a person worth saving...would have the decency to leave his. . .friends. . .in peace.

But Severus was not a better person. He was not. He was a disgusting person, and his cock was twitching, and he didn't want to think. Not about friends. Not about salvation. Not about anything in his life. He only wanted to watch someone else's life.

He drew his Invisibility Cloak out from under his robes.

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Ab's wards were more complicated than the Hogwarts staff's, but in the end, they were no match for Severus. In just a few minutes, he was slipping in to Ab's flat, following the trail of clothing that led from the sofa towards the bedroom.

Ab and McGonagall were evidently wasting no time.

They were standing inside the bedroom door, Ab wearing nothing but a pair of loose linen breeches, McGonagall in her bra...red this time...working to undo his flies. He had one hand in her hair and the other in her red knickers, pushing them down over her hips.

Then his mouth was on her throat, and her neck was arched just as it had been in Severus's fantasies, and she was moaning softly, whispering "Aberforth" and "please" and...

...and suddenly Severus no longer wanted to watch them. He found himself turning away, hastening out of Aberforth's rooms as quickly as he could move without making noise, hurrying down the stairs and through back passages to the rear door of the pub.

On the threshold, he snatched off his Invisibility Cloak and stuffed it under his arm. Fuck hiding. Fuck spying. Fuck it. He was done with all that.

Done.

He stood for a moment, listening to the summer silence and waiting for the pounding of his heart to subside.

Then, taking a deep breath, he stepped out into the heather-scented night and began his long walk home.

~end