

You Don't Know What You're Missing

by CaramelMonkPA

Severus begins the Battle of Hogwarts a bit more prepared than we expected.

Je Saigne Encore

Chapter 1 of 2

Severus begins the Battle of Hogwarts a bit more prepared than we expected.

"Disclaimer: Submitted for your approval, an ALTERNATE universe in which J. K. Rowling's characters are entirely mine. Welcome to the Zone-that-cannot-be."

Chapter 1: Je Saigne Encore

When it had become clear to Severus Snape that the final battle he had worked towards for so long was finally upon the castle with the key appearances of Potter and the Dark Lord, he had resolutely swallowed the contents of a phial. Anyone caring enough to examine him from that point on would have noticed his much ghastlier complexion. He was certainly being proactive for his last day on Earth. He was anticipating finally paying his tribute, dying a martyr, and possibly getting absolution for his sins. Hell, he would settle for peace if forgiveness was forever out of his reach. If worst came to worst, he would not have to deal with a world under the Dark Lord's rule.

If Albus was right, and he had better be after all he had put him through, his mission was to give Potter the pieces of information he lacked. Then, Severus would assess the situation and be ready to get revenge on the Dark Lord. He would die happy if he could at least hurt him. Severus could not see how Potter would be able to destroy the Dark Lord. *Useless, mediocre boy...* But, he would rather not have the last trace of Lily Evans be tainted by murder, nor would he suffer the sight of James Potter's spitting image saving the day. As an added bonus, he might get posthumously celebrated as the savior of the wizarding world: "Severus Snape: The Unlikely Hero". That would be a kick in the nose to all those cretins who ever despised and mistreated him. He would go to his grave laughing at their stupidity.

The potion contained in the phial had been one of his latest creations, specifically ordered by the Dark Lord. Of course, he could have completed it earlier. But he had delayed the delivery as much as he reasonably could. "It can at least ingratiate you with Tom," Albus had argued ruefully. "And, the people getting it should mainly be dangerous fanatics." They could only hope that giving the Dark Lord the potion ultimately served to lower his ranks.

Undeniably, part of his mystique came from his death-defying stunts, although some whispered about Potter's similar ability. Consequently, he made Severus elaborate a potion that would allow him to "share" that power to reward faithful (expendable) followers. In the end, it was a tactic designated to encourage eagerness and awe while sending servants on dangerous errands. The Draught of Dead Living altered and strengthened the body structure and magic flow. As a result it could absorb the harmful effects of most magical attacks. What the lesser followers did not know was that the potency of the Draught depended on the power of the drinker and that after too severe an assault the drinker would gradually fall into an inescapable coma, until his or her life-force had been extinguished. Although it would initially appear to guarantee survival, the process was irreversible and deadly.

Severus' creations for the Dark Lord always had a merciless efficiency about them. That was another thing that probably weighed on his soul. But while he caused damages with compulsively perfected tools, he did not cause more pain than necessary. Not anymore, at least. Being terminated by his own creation suited him, and would thankfully give him enough time to deliver his message.

He had thrown away the phial, acknowledging the ominous sound of the breaking glass. Clucking his tongue in distaste, he had realized he had never had feedback on the bland taste or the severe dryness that settled in his mouth. He would never get around to improving the potion. Joining his masked companions, he had scowled at his misplaced perfectionism. Truly, he should have learned to relax and stop overthinking work, especially ill-used potions. In another life, if such a thing existed, he might have entertained the notion of going on vacation, preferably somewhere sunny and isolated. But in the meantime, he had to make it through another meeting with the Dark Lord, probably to discuss battle strategy.

xx

Notes for a smoother ride:

The peculiar uses of pronouns were deliberate and have everything to do with points of view.

If you are so inclined, pay attention to the chapter (song) titles which bring insights into the story. Sometimes, they are straightforward. Sometimes they have more to do with the general atmosphere, or a metaphorical inspiration. Just keep in mind, once again, that the points of view may not be what you expect.

My gratitude goes to all my inspirations, Zarathustra46, my Beta, and PennFana.

Enjoy!

How Can You Mend A Broken Man?

Chapter 2 of 2

Hermione and Narcissa take charge.

Chapter 2: How Can You Mend A Broken Man? (AI Green)

(After the battle...)

In a corridor, not very far from a few dead bodies that had not been disposed of, Narcissa was struggling to calm the rhythm of her heartbeat. Her fingers were clutching her husband and son's arms almost painfully. She revelled in the calming feeling of their cool foreheads against hers. Potter had just defeated the Dark Lord, thus liberating her family from that tyrant. But as she was beginning to regain her composure, it felt as though some sizzling liquid was creeping up her spine only to end up causing a freezing sensation in her right hand. She deduced from the peculiar pressure and the fact that her son was safe that, contrary to what she had heard, Severus was still alive, though barely so. Indeed, an Unbreakable Vow was not purely a one way promise. How could one really expect someone to risk her or his life without any compensation? When Severus had vowed to go out of his way to protect her son, she implicitly ...in her flesh... vowed to protect Severus to the best of her abilities, until the threat was removed. The threat in question had been effectively removed. For whatever reason, the Dark Lord having attacked Severus, or him still being alive, the link still remained. Even though she could ignore the numbness in her hand until he succumbed, she felt compelled to assist him. She owed him for having preserved Draco's life. Moreover, despite his unfortunate upbringing and all politics aside, he was a family friend. She was no ingrate, nor was she inclined to ignore a debt of honour or a life debt. She repressed her current jubilation in order to explore her options ...or rather, his options. Time was of the essence; that, at least, was a certainty. The Dark Lord said he had killed (well, mortally wounded) him three hours ago. Settling on a course of action, she let go of her family and firmly called out, "Mysty!"

Instantly and without a sound, the elf who had fathered Dobby appeared in front of her. If Harry had seen him, he would have thought him the most unfathomable elf he had ever met, and that was saying something. Although he looked like an older version of Dobby, his ancient eyes and the white cloth he wore as a toga gave him an air of dignified secrecy.

If Draco or Lucius were surprised, they did not show it and waited for her to be finished. She pursed her lips at the sight of the new arrival. He bowed respectfully in front of each of them. He had known Lucius and Draco for all of their lives and took pride in preparing the future for the next generation of Malfoys. Wasting no time, Narcissa gave him his orders. "You will go back to the Manor and retrieve the object under the camellia tree in the greenhouse. Bring it back to me. Now."

With another deep bow, he was gone. She turned to the two men. "We need to make ourselves useful. Draco, I want you to go see Madam Pomfrey and offer help to her with the wounded. Avoid touching them as much as possible. Lucius, you know what to do." Lucius nodded and left to join the Ministry officials after giving them both a significant look. Draco started to move gingerly between the bodies towards the Infirmary. But his mother stopped him.

"Draco, who do you think would be most willing to offer himself or herself up to save the life of Severus Snape?" His mother's tone clearly indicated she would be suffering neither questions nor delay. *After all that had happened, is she requiring me to deliver a human sacrifice? Can Snape really be saved?* After careful consideration, and despite his doubts, Draco supplied "I think that people from the Order of the Phoenix believing in his innocence might do it, assuming they don't believe their sacrifice to be lethal." His mother apparently not being inclined to reassure him on that account, he went on. "Potter, McGonagall, or Granger, I guess."

In deep thought, she absently brushed a nonexistent stain on her left sleeve. Mysty's popping in coincided with her making a decision.

She took a small dark blue satin pouch from the pillow the elf presented to her. She then ordered him to keep an eye on Draco while he was in the Infirmary and to be ready to assist Lucius in case of an emergency. Before carrying on with his own mission, Draco hesitantly asked his mother if the device would kill them. "I do not think so," were her only words of comfort as she left him and made her way to the Great Hall in search of yet one more body to add to the pile of sacrificed magical beings.

Leaning against the faintly vibrating stones of the Great Hall, Hermione Granger was on her own, reflecting on everything that had happened that night. After so much pain, so much blood, and so many deaths, victory left a bitter taste in her mouth. Obviously, she was glad Voldemort was gone forever. How could she not be? But at the moment, as her relief at her people's survival was settling in, all she could see was the randomness and the unfairness of the wasted lives. Some of those deaths could have been avoided, she was sure of it. And that made her furious at Voldemort, at the Ministry, at all of the wizarding world, and most of all at herself. She knew that part of her anger was fuelled by her fear of drowning in her own sadness. On an unconscious level, she also knew it was not only blood, nor tears, nor even souls that were flowing through the cracks in the old walls, floors and ceilings. Voldemort had torn the fabric of magic itself through his wicked ways. Magic was natural and took many forms. It seemed human feelings and consciousness had a way to make it tangible in an obvious way. Voldemort was void of those feelings, and had endeavoured to conquer the world. Consequently, as they were supposed to celebrate, her magic was echoing with that disharmony. Unwittingly she was having visions of Magic bleeding: flakes of light in pearly shining tides leaking from every corner of the Hall: from bodies back to the earth, back to the air, back to the water...

She forgot all that when a voice resonated in the safe although increasingly unstable haven of her mind.

"Miss Granger, I would like to have a word with you. It's of the utmost importance."

The fresh reality of the war came rushing back to her. Standing upright, she put her wand out, ready to hex Narcissa Malfoy. Actually, she still had the wand of that woman's wretched sister. Her gaze lingered momentarily on the familiar piece of wood but did not mention it. The woman seemed so cold looking down on her that, even then, she could feel pity for Draco, growing up in such a loveless household. *Well, that isn't exactly true*, she pointed out to herself, *they protect each other, and care about their own kind. And someone who has violated her parents' minds, even with the best of intentions, should not throw stones*, she continued bitterly. *Who knows if anything from my own household is salvageable?*

"Sorry, what did you say?" she asked, trying to blink her weariness away, to Draco's mother who had gone on talking during her musings.

"As I said, something crucial to your cause needs your immediate attention. Would you consent to go somewhere more suitable for me to give you the particulars?"

"I can't see why not," she flippantly responded. Ron and Harry were probably still with the Aurors. "Which setting did you have in mind?"

People were still coming and going retrieving the bodies and transporting the wounded. An Auror was guarding the entrance. Argus Filch could be seen mournfully examining the damages done to the Castle, Mrs Norris never leaving his side.

"Outside would be preferable."

Hermione agreed but gave her conditions. "But it occurs to me that you, being who you are, having done what you've done, and believing what you believe in, would never want to be near me, least of all when your family is in such a delicate situation."

At that, a fleeting shadow appeared in her gaze, but Hermione was not in a state to decipher further a Malfoy's thought process and carried on. "I don't believe in the farfetched notion that you would want to help our 'cause', whatever that means, so you may understand why I would be reluctant to follow you. Contrary to what you may have heard, I am not gullible. So, these are my conditions. You will give me your wand, walk in front of me until we find the right spot, and make no sudden movement at any time. Do we understand each other?"

The young woman would not so easily be manipulated, Narcissa mused. Still, she was curious, eager to distract herself from morbid thoughts, and willing to a fault to do the right thing. That much was clear from the way she held herself and defied her. While silently handing her wand over, she did not have to fake a subtle hesitation. And it was probably for the best. Indeed, even though showing weakness would certainly help, she sensed Miss Granger would somehow be more trusting if she saw more layers in her behaviour. Narcissa was aware it was a complicated dance. She had to adapt her body language, her words, and even her breathing to serve whatever message she needed to pass across, and to literally "impress" on the other party her own design. It helped that she was about to tell the truth, mostly. She usually relished in achieving a graceful balance between her will and the other's resistance. But then, time was running out.

In an argument, Hermione could deduct some of the paths chosen or eliminated by her opponent as well as detect general changes in their moods. Winning verbal sparring was a gratification she usually appreciated. But she did not care for the song and dance. To her, it was a means to an end. Furthermore, she always felt uneasy with the amount of manipulation and versatility required. *Was it not disrespectful to merely view a person as a combination of strings to pull?*

Still, they did not know each other well enough to make the potential victor appear clearly.

Narcissa turned around and swiftly walked towards their destination. Granger's cautiousness was commendable, but she still displayed a surprising capacity to trust people despite of the war. She should have insisted on warning her friends of what she was doing or even bring someone with her, and check for a second wand. Someone with more insights into Hermione's psyche than Narcissa, or even herself, could have guessed that a small part of her wished to disappear, because of a sort of survivor guilt. Nevertheless, when they passed the Auror, Narcissa heard her say, "If I am not back in fifteen minutes, would you please warn Harry and Ron that I have left with Mrs Malfoy?" The Auror nodded in agreement.

Three minutes later, Hermione was talking with Narcissa Malfoy for the first time in her life. The daylight made her remember how tired and hungry she was. Narcissa herself cleverly showed another sign of weakness (or humanity as one might put it) by attempting to relieve her tension by pinching the bridge of her perfect nose. That being done, she endeavoured to pay her debt to Severus.

"I assume you know that Severus Snape was on your side. I will not pretend my situation is similar to his but I want to save him. I have a device which would allow someone to accomplish such a feat. I can't use it myself because my desire to save him cannot overcome my desire to protect my family. A purer intent is necessary to allow the device to work. Conventional magic won't save him, and it seems you are one of the few capable of putting justice above all."

Hermione exploded, her voice having lost nothing of its invigorating shrill quality. "Is that a feeble attempt to rid the world of one more Mudblood? What makes you think I would be willing to trust you and put myself at risk? Do you think I have some kind of heroine complex? And you should get your facts straight. I was in the Shrieking Shack and I saw him die. You are wasting both your breath and my time." She was about to throw her wand back at her and threaten her with a nasty hex if she did not depart immediately when she heard the most surprising thing of all.

"I beg of you to just listen to me. This is not about my biases or yours. I know for a fact that Severus is alive because of an Unbreakable Vow he made to me." From the flicker of understanding she saw in the young woman's eyes she did not have to dwell in the intricacies of the spell, so much the better. "But he will not survive much longer, I feel it. I am handing you the device and instructions." Matching the action to her words, she carefully deposited the little pouch on the grass. "I don't know who else to turn to. You are his last hope. He deserves to live as much as anyone else. And now you know that you can do something about it. You have the opportunity to save one person before the day is over. Are you telling me you are going to let him die? If you are worried about this being a trap, I am willing to swear a binding oath that the ritual does not require your death." That was certainly a gamble on her part, but not the worst of the past hours.

The young woman was rather stunned. She silently pondered her possible choices. How could he be alive? If he truly were alive, were there other options? She realized she had little choice, not when he could die as she was trying to make up her mind. Mrs Malfoy had made sure of it. Although she very much valued her life and understood the dangers of trusting a Malfoy, she had to follow her own moral code to maintain some semblance of constancy and harmony in her life. In the past, she had only hurt those who in one way or another threatened her loved ones and innocent defenceless people. The battle was over and they had won. She simply could not let a person die if she could help it, let alone an innocent one, even though he had done many despicable things. She felt compelled to do the right thing, trapped and wanted to hate all the Malfoys and the Slytherins of the world for ripping her apart again and again by messing with her world. But blaming the usual scapegoats did not change her current situation. She mentally reprimanded herself for taking the easy road. Being a reasonable adult was certainly more of a burden than she had anticipated. But there really was no way around it. She could not unlearn what had been revealed to her.

She glared accusatorially at the older woman whose face remained impassive. "I'll go see his true condition for myself. As for your ritual, I understand that my death might not be a necessary sacrifice. But I can't help but wonder if it may be an unfortunate side-effect."

Narcissa's only answer was, "It might, but death is not the point of the spell. Life is."

"That does not reassure me at all. If something bad does happen to me, be certain that I or Harry and Ron will come after you." Mrs Malfoy nodded in understanding. After casting a few spells to detect Dark magic, Hermione traded the pouch for Narcissa's wand on the grass.

"I hope you'll give me back the pouch in person." Narcissa grabbed her wand gracefully and looked less pale as she returned to the castle without another glance at Hermione. Catching the worried eyes of the Auror, Hermione smiled wearily and waved dismissively.

Not wanting to distress the Weasleys and Harry any further, she wrote a note and Transfigured it into a bird-shaped messenger which flew in search of Luna.

"Dear Luna,

Professor Snape is alive. I am going to the Shrieking Shack. Please tell Harry and Ron.

Love,

Hermione"

Swiping her sweaty palms on her pants, she performed the Disillusionment Charm on herself and ran towards the Whomping Willow. In her hurry to reach the Shrieking Shack she acquired several cuts and scratches. But it did not matter because she could only think of the possibility of saving a life.

No matter how she looked at him, he seemed dead, dried up, and empty. It was sickening. She could hardly believe someone had inhabited that shell. Because of what Narcissa had said, she thought she could sense a very dim magical throb around him. But it was probably wishful thinking, unless he was becoming an Inferius courtesy of the Death Eaters. The moment of his death replayed in her mind, his desire to see Harry's eyes taking a new meaning with the knowledge of his love for his mother. She hastily made herself visible again and began her task, for fear of changing her mind. Gingerly opening the delicate pouch on the palm of her hand, she thought its contents rather anticlimactic: a parchment scroll, a minuscule box full of amber-coloured powder, and a long peculiar silver chain. Reading the parchment, she learned that she had to link both of them with the chain, which would end up in seven parts (that was a bad omen if she knew one), at seven points: the top of the head, the forehead, the throat, the breast, the solar plexus, the abdomen and the... *Oh no... Well, hopefully I will just have to drop the chain on that area and magic will do the rest.* Then, she would have to blow the powder on him and sprinkle it on her, focusing on where they would be linked. In order for the spell to be effective, she had to trace several runes and chant their names over the seven areas. The only information she could gather about the effect of the spell on them was those ambiguous words:

"An exchange in essence

A gift of time

A necessary loss

Fair price for a revival"

Kneeling beside him, she alternated putting one end of the chain on herself and on him. Concentrating on her task, she felt morbid, silly, and strangely soothed. She likened it to performing some kind of a religious ritual. Every time their corresponding points were connected, the ends of the chain appeared to dissolve in their flesh, through their clothes, and another length of chain flowed from him, allowing her to continue this strange mystical stitching. When dropping the chain on the area of his crotch, she hoped she was in no way being disrespectful to his memory. The last rune she traced in the air appeared in bright gold, only to be absorbed by the dark form below.

But nothing else happened. It was not working and she felt such a fool, even though nothing bad had happened to her. She berated herself *How could you be disappointed? You did not expect a Malfoy scheme to succeed now, did you?* She was shaking from painfully dry sobs as she spared a thought for that bitter and misunderstood man and the other chance she wished she could have given him. Slowly, her blood began to boil with anger in a way that no longer felt metaphorical. From head to toe, her body was sizzling. Without thinking, she gathered the body of a broken Severus Snape in her arms, as though she could warm him up. Plumes of smoke erupted from where they touched and were linked to each other. Bit by bit, that thick smoke enveloped them as though they were consumed by an invisible fire.

As she felt something circulating through the chains, her last conscious thought was of a hunger for life. If she made it out of this mess alive, she would truly enjoy life. She would grab it and devour it with a fiery passion.

Even before opening his eyes, Severus knew something was wrong. Call it a Sixth sense honed by years of spying, but something told him it was not his pure Lily by his side. If it were part of his coma, the smell of that room and the blood felt dreadfully real. Evidently, he had fatally miscalculated during his last encounter with the Dark Lord. *Killed with a venom I had an antidote for right there in my office! Now that is humiliating* Obviously, there was no use beating himself up anymore, but old habits died hard, especially with him. But the antidote could only be administered after having been bitten. And his Draught of the Dead Living had stabilized the body in its critical state for all the good it had done him. For all intents and purposes, he was dead. *So why am I able to feel something sticky against my skin?* Vivid sensations from the attack were forcing themselves upon him, until he could not take it anymore and opened his eyes. *Snake! Where is the snake?* Sitting up, he frantically looked around him. In doing so, he noticed a few things. Colours seemed altered. His own inert body was lying by his current body's knees. He had female attributes as well as long and messy brown hair. On the floor, he could see two wands, his own and Bellatrix's, parchment, and an empty box. Wasting no time, he read the parchment and uncomfortably checked his own pulse. It was almost imperceptible, but it was still there. He was still there. He was alive. Having embraced death and said goodbye to the only thing that had mattered to him on this earth, it was a disappointment. The scene of his demise looked harsh and mediocre... *This must be some kind of afterlife torment.* He had expected it. Unsurprisingly, it was awfully similar to his lifetime torment.

His uneasiness increased as he was affected by his current body's exhaustion. She had been fighting with the rest of them. And he was responsible for both of their lives at that point. And as much as he wanted to leave all that pain behind, he refused to cause one more innocent death. He had to act quickly before he lost consciousness. He grabbed his wand.

"Accio venom antidote!" He concentrated on the one he needed. "Accio Blood-Replenishing Potion!" The sound of that voice definitely erased any doubt he could have had about the person who had tried to save him. It is always a Gryffindor, always... The potions arrived from the Head's office. In the meantime, he put the other wand and the other important items in one of his body's pockets. After cleaning his neck and Transfiguring his Death Eater mask into a compress, he made sure to apply enough pressure on the wound. He administered the potions one after the other, carefully, drop after drop. He looked so broken, so fragile, and pathetic. It was disconcerting. He submitted to the compassion he felt for himself. He lowered his tiny frame, nestled his head on the crook of his body's unscathed shoulder, lay on his side, and took comfort in the feeble thumping echoing in his cage of bones. As the tension in his limbs was fading, the body he was occupying felt heavier. He wished the weight would draw his soul to its rightful place, make him whole and finally in control of his life. In the back of his mind, there was the tiny hope that this macabre and one-sided embrace might help his own body to heal.