

Masters and Servants

by HogwartsHoney

Several months after Dumbledore's death Harry tracks down Snape to even the score, but what transpires is far from expected, for either of them.

****This story won the Multifaceted Awards Round 6 in 'Desire - Best Slash Fic rated R or NC-17'. Thanks to everyone who voted!****

Waiting

Chapter 1 of 5

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****This story won the Multifaceted Awards Round 6 in 'Desire - Best Slash Fic rated R or NC-17'. Thanks to everyone who voted!****

A/N: This fic was initially inspired by my favourite chapter of my ABSOLUTE FAVOURITE fanfic, 'A Lack of Foresight' by Keelywolfe. Love and snaps to my Nishles for picking and picking and suggesting, and to JackieJLH who always finds where my commas should be!

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Severus Snape had been on the run since the night of Dumbledore's death. After he had evaded the Potter boy's pathetic attempts to thwart him, he had Apparated from the grounds outside Hogwarts to the Malfoy Mansion where he had firmly deposited Draco in his mother's care with orders to remain there. He had informed Narcissa that their Unbreakable Vow was fulfilled and had left after he carefully set wards in many layers to better ensure their safety. He had then returned to Spinner's End in order to continue the appearance of being loyal to the Dark Lord, wherein he had awaited further instructions. The Dark Lord had been very pleased with his work, and although Draco's failure to complete his task had severely angered him, he had showed no immediate signs of retaliation. Snape had hoped that, were the situation to change, the wards on the Malfoy home would hold.

The Dark Lord had informed him that he was to lie low for several months until he was needed. Snape had quickly left Spinner's End and had Apparated directly into Hogsmeade, where he had taken a small room upstairs at the Hog's Head, a room, which smelled uncomfortably of stale beer and livestock. No matter; Severus Snape was not there for comfort.

Out of necessity he had kept his head low and employed the use of a glamour to conceal his true identity when he arrived. He had realized that whereas the night of Dumbledore's death had not gone strictly according to plan, it had bought them a little more time. He had sat heavily on the creaking bed and hung his head as his dark curtain of hair had all but obscured his view. He had felt his weariness deep within his bones and sleep did not come that night...

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Harry Potter had somehow managed to stumble through the days, weeks and months that followed Dumbledore's funeral. After the seemingly never-ending run up to Fleur and Bill's wedding in early July, he made his final and inevitable return to Privet Drive. Even if the Dursleys had wanted to interact with him in some way, he had been inconsolable and had spent all his time either brooding in his room or lying on the grass in the back garden. He had longed for solace and had hoped that the warmth of the sun would melt the cold chill in his heart, but despite his long hours on the grass and Uncle Vernon's glares of disapproval, the only evidence of the sun's warmth had been the tanning of his skin. He had yearned for solitude, then for understanding, and finally, for vengeance.

He had turned seventeen on a balmy day at the end of July and knew that his mother's protection would now stay with him permanently – he no longer needed the Dursleys. Silently he had packed his clothes and few possessions into his trunk and bade farewell to the family he no longer knew. His Aunt Petunia had given him a quick and awkward hug, but he had not even met her eyes as he had stepped from the house and into his adult life. Several members of the Order had collected him at the house and had taken him to their new Headquarters. Whereas it was certainly tamer than the house at Grimmauld Place, it was no less hectic, as various Order members came and went at all hours of the night and day. Ron and Hermione were still at the Burrow, involved in a project for the Order, so Harry had moved into a room upstairs and continued to remain apart from most of the others.

Although he was now seventeen and a fully-fledged member of the Order of the Phoenix, his feelings about Snape since Dumbledore's murder several months prior were no secret to the others. He had known that they were all as shocked as he to learn of Snape's betrayal, and although Mad-Eye Moody had been searching for any sign of the traitorous bastard, he had so far come up with nothing. Snape had apparently gone to ground and returned to his true Master.

Harry had protested, of course, and had demanded that he be allowed to pursue Snape. His demands were refused outright, and although he was livid and argued vehemently with the senior members of the Order, both at Headquarters and in private, the general consensus was that Harry was too emotionally involved to be rational where Snape was concerned. Infuriated by their absolute refusal to waiver, he had vowed to locate Snape using whatever information he could glean from other sources. Unfortunately, those sources were few and very far between, that is until...

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Several weeks had passed with no word from the Dark Lord, and Snape had wondered whether he had in fact outgrown his usefulness. He had become embittered and had paced his tiny quarters restlessly for nights on end. Finally, he had been summoned and the Dark Lord had announced that his plans for attack were now complete. As he had outlined his plan and detailed Snape's involvement, the Potions professor had fought to keep his emotions under control; his face a carefully schooled picture of composure.

Within hours of the Dark Lord's meeting, Snape had contacted Minerva McGonagall, the new Headmistress of Hogwarts. She had been the only person privy to the special arrangement between himself and Dumbledore prior to that fateful night on the Astronomy Tower, and she alone knew of his current whereabouts. He had briefed her on Voldemort's plan and had advised her to contact the senior members of the Order and apprise them of the situation. He had known that the entire Order had denounced him as a traitor and would hardly consider his information to be credible, but he had impressed upon Minerva the urgency of his message. He had specifically asked her to inform Lupin, and although it had galled him to rely on the werewolf, he knew that Lupin alone would be able to force the others to bring about the changes necessary...

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Harry had been alone in his room roughly a week after his arrival when Fred and George came upstairs under the pretext of fetching him for lunch. They had sat at the foot of his bed like a pair of matching bookends and had spoken in unusually quiet and serious tones. He had listened carefully as they outlined what they'd heard earlier that morning. Headmistress McGonagall had made a clandestine visit to Lupin, and they had locked themselves in a room, which had been heavily warded with silencing spells. Fred and George's latest set of Extendable Ears had been more than equal to the task of getting through the wards, and the twins had heard every syllable of the conversation. Snape's present location at the Hog's Head was to be of utmost secrecy as he allegedly had passed on news of Voldemort's plans. Harry had been attentive and had even pretended to heed their well-intentioned words of caution. He had then thanked them for their loyalty, and they had departed with cautious smiles, which he had returned. Then he had set his plan in motion.

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TBC

Unravelling

Chapter 2 of 5

Several months after Dumbledore's death Harry tracks down Snape to even the score, but what transpires is far from expected, for either of them.

Disclaimer: Jo owns them; I make them do naughty things.

A/N: Thanks to Nishles for discussing naughtiness and to Sun for your encouragement.

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Severus Snape was no man's fool, and although only a few days had passed, he was sure that eventually his contact with the Headmistress of Hogwarts would be discovered. He hoped that Minerva would be able to put his information to use and that a proper defense strategy could be worked out in time. Although he had very little in common with most of the members of the Order, and he knew that most of them had merely tolerated his presence under Dumbledore's explicit orders, he still grudgingly appreciated their bravery and dedication to their cause. He acknowledged that he would never be seen as an equal in their eyes, but he didn't wish to be regarded as anyone's equal. In fact, he'd rather not be regarded at all.

He wondered how long it would be before the entire ball of twine was unraveled, leaving only a tangled mess of confusion. He sat on the small wooden desk in the shabby room above the Hog's Head and pondered the implications of his double life. To be sure, he could feel that the end was swiftly approaching, and not for the first time, he wondered at the outcome. He pressed his fingers to his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose as if that would somehow bring any form of relief, but relief was elusive tonight. He abandoned that pursuit and began to clear his mind, as he placed his thoughts into the many small and carefully contained compartments within his mind.

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Harry's rage was palpable as he approached the Hog's Head under the cover of his Invisibility Cloak. In the semi-darkness, the sound of his Apparating had been masked by the screaming of a train as it hurtled through Hogsmeade Station without stopping. He managed to slip through the door unheeded, and as he ascended the filthy stairs one at a time, he slowly and deliberately withdrew his wand from the folds of his robes. Tonight he would have vengeance. Tonight, retribution would be swift.

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Snape's practiced Occlumency process had become routine, and on most nights he accomplished it quickly and efficiently. Tonight, however, he lingered over certain memories and images, the ones that caused him greatest pain. He knew that these were particularly powerful in the hands of the wrong people, and he examined them carefully, turning them over in his mind before he enclosed them in his mental boxes and sealed the lids. All save one.

He paid careful attention to a particular memory from his youth, the day that James Potter had hung him upside down with his underpants exposed. To this day, Snape could still feel the wind blowing against his thin white legs as that bastard Potter had toyed with him. The humiliation had stung him then, the feelings of embarrassment and helplessness were overpowering, and later he raged, cursing that his vulnerability had been so cleverly and ruthlessly exploited by his tormentor.

His ire rose as he recalled the taunts of the other students and the barking laughter of Sirius Black as he had urged Potter on. He relived the moment over and over again, not knowing why he was torturing himself this way, but he had been locked in this hovel of a room for much too long and needed something, some release, even if it were merely anger.

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Harry removed the Invisibility Cloak and shrunk it with a tap of his wand before he stowed it in his back pocket. He stood outside the door for a moment as he tried to compose himself. He knew only too well that Snape was a most gifted Legilimens, and he had never been able to keep the man out of his head. He recalled again their failed Occlumency lessons in his fifth year, the lessons that Dumbledore himself had instructed. Even now, the memory of Dumbledore's kindly face as he stood upon the Astronomy Tower that fateful night swam before Harry's eyes and tore at his heart, as he felt the anger rise inside him like a swirling tide of hatred. In his eyes, Severus Snape was the reason why his mentor was dead, and here he stood, poised on the edge of being able to avenge that death. He did not fool himself into thinking that it would be easy, but he knew that it must be done.

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Snape paused from his musings for a moment and raised his head. He listened carefully and cocked his head to the side as his skin prickled and he sensed... something. Something dangerous, yet strangely familiar. He searched his mind for a connection when...

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Harry fought the urge to kick open the door and create an unnecessary scene. He knew that Snape would have wards up on all the windows and doors, so he concentrated all his anger and rage into a single thought and focused it on the tip of his wand. He released the sum of all his energy with a single exhalation and cast the Reducto Spell. The force of the spell blasted the door open, and he swung into action as he prepared to destroy his enemy.

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Snape turned as the door burst open, and the rush of wind scattered the books and pieces of parchment from the top of the desk. His reflexes as quick as a cat's, he pulled out his wand, but with a glance he was able to discern the identity of his most unwelcome visitor. As the dust settled around him he saw a single body, male, his wand arm outstretched and pointed directly at Snape's chest. Snape could feel the hate as it pulsed from his attacker and noted the fierce gleam in his flashing green eyes -- unmistakably Harry Potter.

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Harry stood in the doorway and regarded the enemy, his wand pointed unwaveringly at Snape's thin chest as he considered his opportunity. Severus Snape -- alone in a dark hole of a room in a cesspool of a tavern on the edge of town. He would kill him in this very room, and he doubted that anyone would find the traitor's body for many days, a fitting end for a murderous bastard. He stepped into the room, and the force of his anger swept before him, but his wand never wavered as he almost felt pleasure that Snape's death was mere moments away...

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Snape was both furious at this intrusion and alarmed at the possible implications. Surely nobody in the Order would have let slip the nature of his position there, but for him to be seen in the vicinity of the Potter boy would be most unfortunate for all sides.

'Finally come to kill me, Potter? Come to avenge your precious Dumbledore's death? Even your father would have had better sense than that.'

He rose to his full height as he walked around the corner of the desk. He leaned against the firm wood, and although he spoke lazily, he kept a firm grip on both his anger and the wand in his hand. The boy's rage was unmistakable, and Snape acknowledged that he was more than likely to do something extremely foolish.

*Just* like his father ...

TBC

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Reviews welcome!!

## Accusations

*Chapter 3 of 5*

Several months after Dumbledore's death Harry tracks down Snape to even the score, but what transpires is far from expected, for either of them.

Disclaimer: Jo owns everything.

A/N: Thanks to Nishles, as always.

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Harry heard Snape's mocking words and felt the memory of Dumbledore's death cut like a knife into him yet again. He glared at the face of the man who had tormented him during his entire time at Hogwarts; the very traitor who had taken from him the only mentor, the only *father* he'd ever known. His emotions spun through his mind, and he was all at once bitter, saddened, and enraged.

'You murdering bastard. He trusted you.' Harry grasped at understanding. 'He trusted a filthy Death Eater, Voldemort's henchman, and you BETRAYED THAT TRUST!'

Harry was shouting now, but he didn't care. He felt as though his sanity might slip and he struggled with himself; on the one hand he wanted to know why, but on the other hand he simply needed to dispatch this betraying double-crossing...

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Snape spat at Harry with more than his usual venom.

'You foolish boy. As usual, you've gone off half-cocked with no idea what's really going on.' He didn't allow Harry any time to do more than shake in fury as he continued biting, twisting the verbal knife that he knew was buried to the hilt in Harry's gut.

'You fancy yourself such an exemplary wizard, Potter, powerful enough to defeat the Dark Lord himself, but that is where you are wrong. The only reason you stand before me at this moment is because the people sworn to protect you have managed to prevent you from killing yourself at every foolhardy turn. *Thus* far.'

He could see Potter fighting to control himself as his emotions waged war across his face. Snape's every carefully metered syllable dripped with disdain.

'The fact that you have chosen to challenge me like this confirms both your cowardice and your selfishness, you foolish child! Your ridiculous behaviour only convinces me that you are no better than your arrogant, bullying father. In fact, you're worse.'

He flayed him with his words and pushed into the furious boy's mind with his considerable ability. He knew that he had struck the ultimate nerve as Harry's eyes flashed dangerously, and he raised his wand to Snape's face...

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'DON'T YOU DARE TALK ABOUT MY FATHER! YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO TALK ABOUT HIM, YOU *BASTARD!*'

Harry was almost beside himself with rage, and his entire body shook uncontrollably, but he kept his eyes locked in deadly combat and never turned his wand from Snape's chest. Snape's face became even stonier as he advanced on him, and Harry began to feel a familiar *push* as Snape entered his mind. He fought against the intrusion, demanding that his mind close itself to this unwanted encroachment, but Snape's mental thrusts were spurred on by his own unmitigated anger.

Harry felt the difference and was unable to prevent the memories ... his parents waving to him from a picture in a frame ... Dumbledore's kindly face wreathed in smiles ... Ron's look of triumph as he trumped Harry again in wizard chess ... Dudley's pudgy face curled into an expression of disgust as he pushed Harry down the stairs ... Sirius' face as he fell backwards through the veil ... Dumbledore as he was struck with Snape's Killing Curse ... his own screams ... his screams ... more than just in his mind ... the screams were audible now ...

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Snape was undeterred by the screams of the enraged boy and pushed harder into his mind, hardly bothering to suppress his full power. Typically, the boy failed to parry the onslaught. He felt the dark pull of Potter's anger, so powerful, so dangerous, and strove to control his own ire. This arrogant cretin would never learn, and he mentally railed at the injustice that Dumbledore had sacrificed his life for this anti-hero, the Boy Who Should Never Have Been.

'Tsk tsk. Still unable to control your mind, Mister Potter. I always knew you were useless, but Dumbledore insisted that I work with you. He was a fool to believe that you were anything more than a weaker version of your father,' Severus Snape berated scathingly as Harry once more failed to elude his Legilimency.

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Something in Harry snapped...

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Snape saw a momentary flash in his opponent's eyes and felt the rush of change as it swept through the room. The hairs on his arms and the back of his neck stood on end and shivers of an unpredictable origin ran up his spine. His eyes narrowed as he regarded his attacker.

Something is different...

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TBC

## Ascendence

### Chapter 4 of 5

Several months after Dumbledore's death Harry tracks down Snape to even the score, but what transpires is far from expected, for either of them.

Disclaimer: Don't own them. Sigh.

A/N: Thanks to my moufflon, and to Sun. I continue to do battle with those commas!

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*Something is different...*

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'*Fuck you, Snape!* Harry screamed with his voice and his mind, his body shaking uncontrollably. Snape, that hateful, malevolent, wicked, cruel excuse for a wizard! Dumbledore was wrong... He should have *known*...

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Snape was infinitely angrier than he had been in far too long and was furious at Potter's outburst, the kind of fury that only this *seprehensible* boy before him could evoke. *How DARE he?* He felt the rage and hatred in the Gryffindor's mind, heard it in his words and saw it reflected in every pore of his body.

'Fuck me?! *Fuck ME?* His own mind screamed as all reason gave way to reaction, and he lunged forward, closing the distance between them in few strides, his anger swirling around him like a cloak.

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Harry stepped back as Snape advanced on him and gasped as the man towered above him, furious, mirroring Harry's own anger and forcing his will upon him. Enraged, Harry pushed against the imposing force of Snape's body, moving quickly to put some distance between them, to be out from under his will. He stepped backwards until his legs met the desk, and he raised his wand once again as he tried to form a rational thought in his mind, to annunciate even one hex, one spell that would save his own life so that he could destroy the man before him ...

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With barely a wave of his hand, Snape had disarmed his opponent, and with his face contorted in fury, he advanced on Harry. The *rush* of danger preceded his gaunt frame as he struck the boy with the back of his hand, hard, across the face, and watched in savage appreciation as blood spurted from a gash on his lip. The boy staggered back against the desk, his back bent as he tried to recover from the assault. Snape stopped mere inches from Harry's flushed face and grabbed his wrists roughly, holding them still as he towered over the young man. He felt his own magic arc and flow through his body, straining for release, but there would be no magic used for this; magic would be too easy. This would be a lesson in physical dominance, and Harry would be the student, willing or unwilling ...

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Harry reeled as the bright light of pain exploded through his face and head. His ears rang and his face was on fire, his lip a burning ember as he fought to clear his vision. He tasted something salty and slightly metallic in his mouth - blood -- and barely had time to assimilate what had happened. He rocked backwards against the desk, but forced himself to turn, to straighten and stand tall against the man who had struck him. His glasses lay at his feet, broken, and as Snape grabbed his wrists, growling, gripping almost hard enough to crush the bones, he felt Snape's anger, palpable, swirling between them with a life of its own. In some way Snape's anger called to his own, matching it, fueling it, and urging it on in a savage entwining of emotion ...

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Snape gave in to his anger and reveled in the rush of power that flowed over him. He no longer bothered to tread carefully; what this ingrate needed was dominance; he needed to be *taught* who was in charge. The Boy Who Lived; indeed, the Boy Who Is Lucky To Still Be Alive would be a more apt term. And to be so foolish as to attempt to kill *him*, Severus Snape, former Death Eater, former henchman of Voldemort himself and a very dangerous man. He seethed. Oh, no, *this* young Potter would be made to understand that Severus Snape wasn't a weak, greasy-haired fool. Not this time, *not anymore* ... He plunged savagely into Harry's mind, barely hearing his own, '*Legilimens*' ...

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Harry's body twisted in Snape's grip as his mind fought furiously against the invisible fingers that pulled at the coverings of his mind. Snape was inside his head, he knew it, could feel him, probing, moving, uncovering, and Harry fought with new-found fury to prevent Snape from mentally raping him. His breaths sounded ragged in his ears as he struggled, physically and mentally, to escape. His anger fed his body, and he fought harder, pushing and twisting. He knew that his own powers were pitifully inadequate, especially when they came up against such a master of Legilimency.

Unbidden, memories rushed over him, Dudley and the snake at the Zoo, Hermione and Ron arguing with him, Snape taking points from Gryffindor, Malfoy's face on the train as he smashed his boots into Harry's body, Snape's sneering, hateful face, the memories raced by, faster and faster, and Harry was powerless. An image flashed across his mind, and suddenly he felt Snape jerk, his grip tightening. Only, the image was not of Harry's making, but rather, his memory of a memory seen in a Pensieve, many months prior, of a young Severus Snape suspended upside down by James Potter. Harry tried to close his eyes, to stop the images, to break the connection, and he fought against a wild rush of fear in his heart, as he stared into Snape's eyes. Eyes that were oddly darker ...

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Snape felt the anger in the boy's mind, saw it reflected in his thoughts. He could feel Harry's resistance to his intrusion, but, as always, the Gryffindor was virtually powerless to prevent it. Snape searched through the young boy's memories, searching, pushing. Flashes of his own face, contorted by hatred, sneering at the boy, images of him striding down the corridors, his robes billowing behind him, Granger and Weasley berating Potter for failing his Occlumency training, Potter being pushed out of the way by a large boy as they both made their way through a corridor, his own face again, dark and brooding, taking points from Gryffindor. He wasn't surprised to see himself associated with the anger, but as he moved through the images, he was hit with a cold rush at the sight of himself in his own moment of greatest anger and humiliation. He was shocked that it should be remembered so clearly and supremely annoyed that it should be cast upon him in such a way, at a moment when he was finally the victor, *finally* the one with the upper hand.

*Incensed that he had been forced to endure it twice in one night..*

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Harry struggled against Snape, and finally, the connection was broken. He was almost frantic now, desperate to escape. He realized, belatedly, that his idea had been unusually foolish, even for him. His all-consuming anger at Snape had clouded his judgment, and now, here he was, about to meet his end at the hands of none other than Severus Snape. He was breathing heavily, as was Snape, but for all Harry's anger and confusion, there were still thoughts that he tried desperately to hide. He fought to remember everything that Snape had ever taught him about Occlumency, tried to summon a mental Patronus to keep those images and feelings entirely to himself. He was desperately afraid that it was too late...

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Snape grabbed Harry's chin and forced his face around. Their eyes met, and he again plunged into Potter's mind, where he was battered and assaulted by the images. Suddenly, Snape pulled up short, almost breaking their connection. He saw more flashes of himself, many more, but these surprised him. His face, elated during a dueling session with the fraud, Lockhart, he again, his body protecting the three teenagers against the werewolf Lupin, himself (in the memory) grading papers during detention, concentrating, the feathered end of his quill brushing along his cheek as he tried in vain to understand the blather on the parchment. He could see himself running the feather along the line of his jaw, probably unconsciously, but he was surprised at the power of emotion and *longing* that accompanied that particular image.

*What the bloody fuck?*

Cautiously, he searched the face of the boy in front of him, trying to read something else *anything else*, but he could see that Harry was fighting him. No longer physically, but mentally and emotionally. Harry closed his eyes, severing the connection once more, yet his body language spoke volumes where words would not. Harry was embarrassed, frantic, wounded, angry, afraid, hurt and...

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Harry shook his head in a futile attempt to rid his mind of the images of Severus Snape that bombarded both his eyes and his mind's eye. *Merlin, the man is EVERYWHERE!* He knew that Snape had seen into his mind, knew that he had breached into the inner sanctum, seen his thoughts and fed on his emotions. He knew himself to be a dead man, but his mind was numb, his senses a jumbled mess, his breathing rapid and shallow.

He realized that Snape still held his wrists tightly, and he unclenched his fists pointedly. Snape released his grip as though Harry's skin had burned him, and he stepped backwards. Harry sagged against the top of the desk, completely deflated and defeated, his eyes locked on the floorboards between Snape's feet. He never took his eyes from the floor, and his eyes were heavily lidded, half closed with dejection.

'Fuck you, Snape,' he whispered, his voice shaking, exhausted by emotion, as he waited for the inevitable...

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Snape was taken aback at the rawness of Harry's voice, the utter defeat that the words expressed, and by the array of images and emotion with which he had been presented. He mulled over his findings. That the boy had been angry and full of vengeance was obvious, but Harry's feelings *for him*, those *other feelings*, had obviously waged war in the Gryffindor's mind for quite some time. He examined his own feelings, difficult though that was, and waited a moment as he battled with himself. He cursed his betraying mind and body, and the sight of the brave lion in such a state of abject defeat was almost his undoing. He stepped forward and placed his hands on Harry's shoulders, registering only mild surprise as the boy flinched and closed his eyes. Snape no longer saw the boy, but only the man before him. His heartbeat sounded like cannon fire as he held Harry's head in his hands and pulled him forward...

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Harry stiffened as he felt Snape step forward, hoping that the end would be swift. He felt Snape's hands on his shoulders and winced, but was surprised when, instead of quick pain, Snape's hand on the back of his head pulled him forward into Snape's chest. Harry was still for a moment as his heart thundered, waiting. He felt the surprising warmth of Snape's body, as his arms encircled Harry's shoulders. They stayed like that, unmoving, until Harry finally succumbed to his emotions. He wrapped his arms around Snape's torso and clung to him, holding onto him like a lifeline, as his soul finally broke...

TBC

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A/N2: Although this scene appeared only in the movie, Snape protecting the kids from werewolf Lupin, I chose to use it as canon for this story only. Reviews?

Unwinding

Chapter 5 of 5

Several months after Dumbledore's death Harry tracks down Snape to even the score, but what transpires is far from expected, for either of them.

Disclaimer: Jo owns them. I simply play with them. Any recognisable quotations were taken from Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince.

A/N: Untold thanks to Sun for all her 'compound' work!

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Severus stood with his arms around Harry's shoulders, holding his head tightly against his own chest as the boy cried. Snape was not, by nature, a compassionate man, but the sheer energy of Harry's grief flowed over the two of them like water in a fast moving stream. He mentally shook himself as he tried to gain some perspective on the happenings of the last thirty minutes.

After he had searched his mind and heart and found the young Gryffindor firmly ensconced therein, he was faced with a dilemma. He had treated the son of James Potter no better than he himself had been treated and yet, astonishingly, he felt the need to atone for his wrongdoings. The boy had, after all, done nothing to deserve any of the things in his life, save the trouble he got himself into with Weasley and Granger. Ordinarily, Snape simply didn't have time in his mind or his heart for regret. There were too many bad decisions in his past to warrant the luxury of itemizing them and atoning for each sin...

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Harry's emotions seemed to come from every pore in his body. He was unprepared for the sheer power that swept through him at Snape's touch, and he clung to Snape as the emotions buffeted him. How could this one man be both the greatest source of his pain and his greatest comfort? Never had he felt so betrayed by anyone. To have Snape not only delve into his mind, but to then stand before him as he was flayed naked by those memories was a fate worse than death. Yes, death would be infinitely preferable to this.

Harry had long been lauded as the saviour of the Wizarding world, and yet, he was unable to protect his mind from Snape. He knew that his particular weakness where the Potions master was concerned was a significant problem, but he wondered again how he could possibly succeed against Voldemort? He felt hopeless, gutted, burned raw by his rage and guilt and death. Death was wrapped all around him, even as he was enveloped by the arms of a Death Eater...

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Severus Snape was not an apologetic man. Quite frankly, the boy got under his skin. Harry infuriated him, enthralled him, defied him, excited him, concerned him, and liberated him. Throughout Harry's school life they had battled with words and wits, and each time that Potter had rolled with the punches and come out on top, Severus had found that a little more of his heart had been lost to the lion. He had denied it of course, any sane man would, but somehow, even as he locked those thoughts away in the labyrinth of his mind, he knew that he was sinking further into an abyss from which there was little chance of rescue.

He gently caressed the untidy black locks pressed against his neck and remembered the last time he had seen Harry. They were on the grounds at Hogwarts engaged in fierce battle, and Snape was trying to save Draco while trying to avoid getting Harry killed. He had fought cautiously, still burning with the horror of his own actions. Killing Dumbledore in accordance with his demands while looking into the face and eyes of the gentle man he beheld as his *friend* took more courage than Snape knew he possessed. The hatred for his actions had swelled inside him and bubbled with a toxicity that was all consuming, and to hear the young man before him accuse him of being a coward the irony was almost too much to bear. He had merely parried Harry's spells and hexes, unable, or unwilling, to engage him in battle. He had been able to

read the boy's mind with more than his customary ease. *Harry was too angry, too emotional. He would never be able to defeat the Dark Lord this way...*

Snape remembered only too well Harry's words 'Kill me like you killed him, you coward', and his self-loathing had been replaced with a pain that rivaled Crucio. He had looked at the boy, wandless and lying on the ground before him; *still* defying him. The blinding rage that those words had caused sparked a furious blaze within him and he had screamed at Harry, his words echoing in his mind as they scraped past his lips and seared everything in their path.

Severus Snape had considered his own emotional state and conceded that he, too, was too conflicted to be in the presence of the Dark Lord. Pursued by the hippogriff, he had Disapparated at the edge of the grounds

Coward! If the boy only knew...

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Harry felt a gradual lessening of his grief, and somehow, inexplicably, he was lighter. Snape's arms around his shoulders had not moved, but the taller man shifted his weight closer to where Harry leaned against him. He looked up into the face of his tormentor, his saviour, and saw the vestiges of compassion arranged across the sharp features. He was surprised to see this side of Snape, although he had spent many a sleepless night wishing for just such a moment: to be held safely in the man's arms.

Harry blinked as Snape raised his hand to brush away the remnants of his tears, and he wondered again what Snape's reaction to his memories would be. Although Snape's features were blurred and Harry's glasses lay broken on the floor, he could clearly see that an enormous barrier had been crossed, or destroyed, made null and void. He tried to stand, and Snape stepped backwards to allow him room. Harry was surprised that his eyes came up to Snape's chin, and that, with a mere backward tilt of his head, he was able to meet the man's gaze. His body felt oddly drained, but his heart beat with disturbing force as he moved his hands reluctantly away from the warmth of Snape's back and waist. Snape's hand had still not moved from Harry's cheek, and Harry could feel his own flesh burn under the fingers. Every atom of his body seemed focused on that spot as every nerve ending screamed out to the others that the sensations of that touch were too much to bear, but too delicious to abandon.

Harry closed his eyes for a moment to savour the reactions of that touch through his body, but quickly snapped them open as Snape moved closer to him again, his hand now moving into Harry's hair...

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Snape still held Harry to him, swaying slightly with the remembered pain of a night that should have never come to pass. He remembered the pain of Harry's words and, more importantly, the knowledge that he could not have that which he desired most. The irony that he now stood in a dingy room in the Hog's Head with his arms wrapped firmly around Harry Potter did not escape him, and he allowed himself a moment to relish the feel of the young body against his. He could feel his resolve failing as the boy sobbed, clutching to him as though afraid of drowning in his very tears. Snape could only hold him and wait; wait for the dam to break, for the tears to dry and for Harry to once again stand on his two feet. He dared not hope for more.

Eventually, he felt Harry shift, and he moved back to assess the young man's frame of mind. He appeared to be somehow calmed, and Snape was drawn to the mesmerizing depths of Harry's eyes, the still-drying tears giving the green eyes the impression of deep pools. Helpless, he gently brushed a stray tear from Harry's cheek, noticing the boy's quiet intake of breath. He felt it too, the indescribable *pull* of yearning for more. Snape allowed Harry to stand, but somehow he was still unable to remove his hand from the boy's face. He was surprised to see that Harry had grown even more over the summer and he was almost as tall as Snape. He smiled mentally as Harry cocked his head backwards and looked up into his eyes. Snape fought against everything he felt, knowing that this was wrong, that they were fools, that it was *dangerous*, but as Harry closed his eyes, Snape's resolve broke. Desire pooled in his stomach and he curled his fingers through the untidy black hair beneath his fingers.

He saw Harry's eyes open moments before his own eyes fluttered shut, and he reveled in the touch of the flesh beneath his fingers and the quivering of his own body. He leaned forward to brush Harry's forehead with his lips, the burn of need and desire and *want* suddenly so fierce that it threatened to chase logic from his mind. Harry's sharp intake of breath removed what was left of Snape's sanity, and he moved forward to take Harry's mouth with his own, lips crushing desperately together, tongue pushing for entrance and greedily taking what was offered...

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Harry tried to breathe; to gain a shred of sense out of the sensations and emotions that roiled through his body. He tried desperately to draw even one breath that could sustain him, but the pressure in his chest and the pulsing of the blood in his ears made it difficult to concentrate on anything but the sheer power of Snape's touch. For the second time that night, their magic surged between them, twisting and entwining the two men into a moment of their own doing. Harry felt the vibration of the energy as electricity sparked up and down his spine from the movement of Snape's fingers through his hair. His skin erupted in gooseflesh as Snape's lips brushed across his forehead, their dry heat eliciting such a response in his flesh that Harry could only gasp. He barely heard anything other than the pounding of his heartbeat, barely saw anything but the face before him, barely felt anything but pure, unadulterated desire as Snape's lips met his.

The kiss was forceful, born of desperation and longing, demanding entrance to Harry's mouth, and he gave it without question, hardly feeling the pain of his cut lip. Snape's tongue flicked across his lips, exploring, searching, and Harry's body shook with barely contained emotions. He was swirling, spinning in a heady rush, sucked into a vortex from which he had no desire to be free. He felt Snape's hand in his hair, his fingers tightening their grip as he held Harry to him with almost maniacal force. Harry moved his hands over Severus' chest and up his neck as their kiss deepened further, until they were both entwined, their bodies crushed together, Harry's moans echoed by Severus'.

He felt Severus' hands on him everywhere, as urgently demanding as his tongue. Hands everywhere, under his shirt, on his flesh, burning their way across his skin as desire pulled in his groin. Severus was pushing against him, pushing him down onto the desk, removing Harry's clothing almost without thought. He lay on the desk, naked and achingly hard, wanting nothing more than Snape's mouth on him...

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Snape delved into Harry's mouth with a hunger he barely knew he possessed, but which left him utterly breathless. Their kiss intensified as Harry first allowed entrance, and then responded with a passion that rivaled Snape's. Their bodies thrust together and as Harry's hands crept up his chest, his desire exploded, leaving him mindless. The feel of Harry's hands on his neck, in conjunction with the young body pressed up against his, hips grinding together was almost more than Severus could take. The passion built up inside of him, burning him with its intensity, and he groaned with his need, need to have this boy, to taste his bare flesh and feel the heat of his skin against his own chest.

He ran his hands along Harry's back, frustrated by the clothes he wore. He pulled at his shirt, undoing the buttons and casting it aside like so much rubbish. He fumbled with his trousers, removing them almost viciously as he pushed Harry backwards onto the desk. He felt Harry's need as clearly as his own, and he admired the young body as it lay before him, willing, eager, and *so hard*. Snape removed his own clothing almost without being aware of doing so, and he was once again pressed against his body, claiming Harry's mouth as his own. He could feel the waves of desire flowing from Harry, his moans echoing in the empty room as Severus ran his tongue down Harry's neck, sucking and tasting the writhing flesh, nipping and licking, marking and owning. Harry hissed his pleasure as he rocked his hips against Severus' and moaned his plea...

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Harry was on fire. His body shuddered with pure desire as Severus' lips and tongue ignited his very flesh with intense sensations. He wanted him, all of him, inside him and on top of him and all around him. His body cried out its need to be claimed and he groaned at every bite and lick. He wanted this, only this, *always this*, and he wrapped his legs around Severus' waist, communicating his need with his body, his mind and his voice.

'Severus, please.'

He felt the older man stiffen momentarily as their kiss was broken. Harry's heart beat faster and fear threaded through his mind as he wondered whether he would be rejected, whether Severus would rationalize their situation and decide that it was a mistake. He chanced to look into the face above him, and saw only understanding and desire.

'Is this what you want, Harry? Are you sure?'

Harry had never been so sure of anything in his life...

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'Severus, please.'

Harry's legs around his waist and the raw *need* of his voice shocked Snape, and for a moment he wondered whether the young man was talking purely out of sexual desire. He searched the face below him, flushed and *beautiful* in his want, and his body ached to be inside him, to give Harry everything he ever needed. Harry's breaths were hesitant, tinged with uncertainty as Snape asked what he must.

'Is this what you want, Harry? Are you sure?'

He had to be sure. He would not take any more from this young man without his express consent, although he craved the flesh below him more than life itself.

Harry's breathlessly emphatic nod was all he needed, and he lost himself in their desire...

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## AFTERMATH

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Snape came to his senses and glanced around the room. At first he only saw the pile of rumpled clothes that lay messily in a corner, his and Harry's. He saw the sleeping form beside him but had little knowledge of how he'd gotten there. He sensed that something wasn't right and felt a stab of fear as he realised with horror that Harry wasn't moving, nor was he breathing.

In his maddened haste to reach the boy, he hadn't seen the shadow in the corner. As he gently cradled Harry's head in his lap and searched him for signs of life, he never heard the swish of the dark robes as the hooded figure stood in front of him, Snape's own wand hanging loosely in the pale hand. His left forearm suddenly burned, and the hairs at the back of his neck stood on end as he felt the presence of...

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*A high, cruel voice stole into his mind as the words played out across the silent room.*

*'And so, Severus, this is how you would defile my nemesis?'*

*Snape could only look into the malevolent red eyes as he fully understood his situation.*

*'No, no, Severus,' the voice hissed. 'You must remember that his body and his blood belong to ME. I am the Master and I alone. Disobedience is not an option.'*

*Avada Kedavra!*

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EPILOGUE

Severus Snape awoke with a start, his left forearm on fire. His head reeled and he fought back the urge to retch as he examined his arm and the Dark Mark thereon, but it appeared innocuous in the gentle morning light. His ragged breaths resounded in his ears, and his body was covered with the cold sweat of fear as his eyes darted frantically around the room.

He saw the pile of rumpled clothes in the corner, the ones that were his and... the others. He turned, half afraid of what he might see, and his eyes fell on the back of the sleeping form beside him. He felt a stab of horror as the memory of how Harry had gotten there slowly crept into his mind, and his heart pounded loudly in his chest. He swallowed thickly and moved swiftly to kneel beside him as he checked Harry's breathing. A shudder of relief flowed through his body, and he slumped momentarily, taking deep breaths to steady himself. The significance of his actions was staggering and he groaned, burying his face in his hands.

In his haste to ensure that Harry still lived, he barely noticed the boy's glasses lying shattered on the floor beside the desk. Still mortified by what he'd done, and very shaken by his dream, he repaired the spectacles before he moved towards the sleeping form. He gathered Harry's clothes from their various piles and repaired them silently before he laid them out gently beside the sleeping boy, then he took his own Slytherin robes that he had worn the night before and carefully covered him. He regarded the young body before him as time stretched in order to accommodate the moment. He hesitantly caressed Harry's shoulder briefly before he gently shook him and flinched when the young man shifted violently awake...

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Harry awoke with a start as he felt something pushing against his shoulder. He rolled slowly onto his back and groaned. His body ached in very unusual places, and he opened his eyes cautiously, squinting in the early morning light. He couldn't immediately figure out where he was and why he was lying on the floor, *naked under a...!* Startled and not a little concerned, he raised his head and looked around, hoping for some clue as to his whereabouts.

He could not have been more surprised when his eyes locked on the face of a naked Severus Snape kneeling beside him. Suddenly, the memory of the previous night rushed through his mind, closely followed by the realization of why he ached and burned the way he did in the places that he did. He glanced down at himself again and noticed that he was covered in the green cloak that his former Potions master had been wearing the night before; the night when Harry had blasted open the door of his room and had been prepared to kill him, once and for all. Harry remembered how his blinding fury and all-consuming desire to extinguish Snape's life had coursed through his veins like possession. He also remembered how Snape had hurled his own anger back at Harry, how they had warred with words and more. Harry recalled again how his anger had broken within him like a fever, burning its way through his mind and soul, and now, on the other side of that blazing torrent of pain and anguish, he felt... mended, healed, or... something. The burden of his wrath had been lifted in the most unlikely way possible.

Harry opened his mouth to say... he didn't know what, but the movement caused a burning pain in his lower lip. Graphic images flashed through his mind. Oh, yes, he remembered how *that* had happened too...

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Severus noted Harry's confusion and fought against the impulse to explain. He thought it best that his former student come to his memories on his own terms, and in his own time. He saw Harry open his mouth to speak and, noting the line of dried blood on his face, ran a regretful finger along the bruised and swollen lower lip. He was mesmerized by the way Harry's emerald eyes were intensified by the Slytherin green of the robes draped over him. The sight of the brave young lion enveloped by the

snake's skin pleased Severus, and he felt as though his anger and hostility had been withdrawn, annulled. He felt oddly triumphant and yet, just a little broken.

He carefully regarded Harry's expression and waited for any sign of anger, remorse or danger. There was none. He watched as green eyes found the Dark Mark on Severus' forearm and marveled as Harry gently traced its outline with his thumb. He felt a shiver up his spine as Harry placed his own palm firmly over the Mark and completely obliterated it with his own flesh. For a fleeting moment Severus could almost see his arm as it once was, before life debts and the war, Unbreakable Vows and the Dark Lord...

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Harry regarded Severus' expression as the man touched his face and his lip almost apologetically. Such tenderness was completely unexpected, especially in the wake of all that had gone before. He searched Snape's face and body as he pondered those thoughts, and his eyes found the Dark Mark etched on the man's forearm. He traced it thoughtfully with his thumb as he considered the enormity of that branding and realized that what he knew of Severus Snape was coloured by this very Mark. He realized that, had their situations been different, their interactions would probably have been of a much better quality. If only there wasn't the war or the Dark Lord.

Harry covered Severus' Mark with his hand, as if by that act alone he could in some way begin to salve the distress and suffering that Severus must have endured. He felt a sudden freedom within his chest and strength within his own body, and as he looked up he sensed much the same in Snape. Their war was over.

~ fin ~

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A/N: Thank you all for reading and reviewing. I've been humbled by harsh but constructive criticism. As a result, the original plotline has been reworked and modified significantly, and I think it became a better story because of it.

However, the original plotline resides at Eros & Sappho, and can be found via this link.

<http://erosnsappho.sycophanthex.com/viewstory.php?sid=2049>