

Awful Boy

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Severus Snape assists a classmate with a Defence Against the Dark Arts assignment

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Lily Evans lay sprawled over a bed in a brightly lit room. Hunched over the third year Defence Against the Dark Arts essay she was trying to write, she scowled at it as if it had offended her. By some act of negligence, she'd forgotten to check out a book containing any information on Dementors, and it was information she required to complete this essay.

It was the first Saturday of the Easter holidays, and as she was at home instead of at Hogwarts, she didn't have access to the books she needed, which were safely ensconced hundreds of miles away in the school library. Frustrated, she rummaged through a drawer in her desk and grabbed a grubby-looking pouch, then went downstairs. "I need to call on a schoolmate," she said to her mother, who was in the kitchen preparing lunch.

"Okay, dear!" her mother said brightly.

Lily strode confidently to the fireplace, smiling sweetly in response to the suspicious glare of her older sister. Petunia was perched primly on the sofa, very stiffly holding a copy of *The Daily Telegraph*, in which Lily knew full well a copy of *The Sun* was hidden. Ignoring the horrified gasp of her sister, Lily reached into the pouch she'd brought from her room, and throwing a handful of powder into the grate, leaned in to the resulting green flame and called, "Severus Snape!"

Lily's gaze came to rest on a tiny, dingy, dimly lit sitting room, full of what appeared to be second-hand furniture scattered haphazardly on threadbare carpet. She saw a hook-nosed man, clad only in dingy shorts, a greying t-shirt and ragged white socks, reclining in a battered armchair. His feet rested carelessly on a fragile looking table as he paged negligently through a ragged newspaper. Lily smiled as she recognised Severus' small, cramped handwriting on the crossword, and politely asked the man in the chair, "Hullo, Mister Snape, is Severus home?"

The man just grunted, then shouted, "BOY! GET DOWN HERE!"

Severus Snape started at the harsh call, which caused him to miss the fly he'd been aiming at. Instead of hitting the fly it was aimed at, the jet of green light bounced off the wall and rebounded into the mildewed ceiling. Giving the lazily circling fly a glare, he sighed and rose from the lumpy bed he was lying on, grabbed his faded black robe from the hard-backed chair it was draped over and struggled into it. He slunk to the door and staggered down the uneven stairs into the room below. "Yes, sir?" he asked, a cross look on his face.

"Don't take that sullen tone with me, you ungrateful git. You've a caller!" he said, gesticulating toward the fireplace with a scowl. "Teenagers," he muttered under his breath.

Snape leaned his head to see the fireplace, and his expression lightened. "Lily! What a pleasant surprise!" he said, as if it were perfectly normal for the head of an extremely pretty schoolmate to be poking out of a fire and surrounded green flames. Snape walked over to the fireplace, muttering an extremely insincere sounding "thank you" to his father on the way.

"Hi, Severus. Were you busy; did I interrupt anything?"

"Nothing that I cannot do later . . . Why? What do you need?"

"I was wondering if you could help me with my assignment."

Severus turned back to the older man in the recliner. "Sir, may I . . . ?" he queried formally.

Tobias only grunted again in response and waved his hand dismissively. He'd never taken his nose out of the paper. Severus shrugged, grabbed a handful of powder from a container on the mantle, and said, "Stand back, Lily . . . I am coming through." He barely caught his father's derisive "well, at least he's got the 'interest in girls' thing straight. . . ." as he spun away through the green flames.

With freshly bruised elbows, he spilled unceremoniously out onto the hearth. An ash-covered and greasy black spot in an otherwise immaculately clean living room, he didn't miss the scandalised look of horror that crossed Lily Evans' older sister's face.

"Good afternoon, Missus Evans, Mister Evans. Petunia," he said, nodding curtly to the latter, and was treated to Petunia burying her face in the paper after glaring at him as if he not only looked bad, but smelled bad.

Lily saw the look, too, and leaned over to whisper in her friend's ear. "She's a neat freak; don't take it personally. And she doesn't like wizards at all. She looks at me like that every time I use the Floo, too. . . ."

He shrugged. He wasn't about to take anything personally when it came from a Muggle, particularly one so stuck-up and obsessed with her superiority that she was rude to her own family. His father was certainly no prize, but at least he deigned to speak to his witch wife and wizard son, albeit not always civilly. "You are having difficulty with something?" he asked, not wishing to overstay his welcome.

"Yes. . . . I'm doing the essay on dark creatures, but I seem to have forgotten to check out a book which explains what, exactly, a Dementor is."

"Ah," he said. "You have a book, they are listed briefly in Fantastic Beasts, but in any case, they guard the wizarding prison, Azkaban," he said, following her dutifully to her room as he had every time they'd worked together over holidays. "They are somewhat like wraiths," he elaborated softly as they headed up the stairs.

"You mean, like a ring-wraith?" she asked, giggling.

"I beg your pardon?"

"A ring-wraith. You know, from Lord of the Rings!"

He shook his head. "I do not know what you are talking about, sorry."

"Ah, well," she said, grinning. "It's a Muggle book."

"Ah, I see." He held the door open for her politely. "They are considered to be the darkest and most dangerous of all magical creatures; they feed off human emotions and their most deadly weapon is the Dementor's Kiss, whereby they suck the soul of their victim out of the mouth."

"THAT'S HORRIBLE!" Lily shrieked, flinging herself down on her bed.

"It is."

"How do you . . . What do you . . . Yikes!"

"You can repel them with a Patronus, provided you are capable of casting one, but to kill one, is another matter," he said, and manoeuvred the chair to face her as he sat down to explain nearly everything he knew about Dementors.

About twenty minutes later, Lily's mother came in bearing a lunch tray with sandwiches and tea. "I made turkey, roast beef and ham

will one of those do for you, dear? If not, I can make you something else," Mrs Evans asked with a pleasant smile.

Snape blinked at her, for a moment not understanding her. "Ah, yes, that will be just fine. Thank you very much," he said, finally, remembering his manners. He blinked at her as she retreated.

"What was that all about?" he asked Lily, bewildered.

"It's lunchtime, Severus!" Lily laughed. "Here, silly, have a sandwich. Which do you prefer?"

"I have no preference," he said, taking the sandwich nearest him and biting appreciatively into the fresh bread, which was still soft and warm from the oven.

"So, Severus," Lily asked him between bites, "why are you so interested in the Dark Arts?"

Snape eyed her cautiously, considering his answer as he slowly chewed and swallowed the portion of sandwich he had in his mouth, taking a drink and delicately wiping his mouth before answering.

"Magic itself, Lily, is not black or white, light or dark, good or bad. The intent behind it may be, but the Lumos Spell has no more or less sentience than an Unforgivable. However, should you cast Lumos into the eyes of someone with the intent to blind them, that would qualify as a dark purpose, correct?"

She nodded at the comparison and furrowed her brow. "Unforgivable?" Lily asked. They hadn't covered these in class yet.

"Avada Kedavra, also known as the Killing Curse. The Imperius Curse, whereby you can make someone do something they otherwise would not, and the torture curse."

Lily gasped. "Killing!? Torture?!"

He shrugged. "Of course. Of course, as I have said, the spell itself has no sentience. You could use the killing curse just as easily for food as defence. . . or offence, for that matter. How else would wizards fight wars, if not with magic?"

"And the others?" she demanded indignantly.

He sighed. "I really do not care to get into a tiresome discussion about every so-called dark spell, but given the choice between forcing someone to stop attacking you via Imperio and killing them outright, I believe I know which you would choose."

"Well . . . okay . . . but then, how do you explain a Dementor?"

"I cannot. Actually . . . that is incorrect; I can. Dementors are an accident. They are created when someone tries, and fails, to make a Horcrux."

"What is a Horcrux?"

"A Horcrux is an inanimate object, bewitched to encase part of someone's soul. It is thought to ensure immortality you split your soul, encase part of it in the Horcrux. Should you die by so-called 'normal' means, then you will be resurrected."

Lily raised her eyebrows, clearly captivated.

"They are considered the darkest of all dark magic."

"How would you make such a thing?"

"I am not entirely sure. I know it is very complicated. There is a spell, but I do not know it."

"You don't sound very sure. That's unlike you."

"There is precious little information on them. The spell apparently can only be cast correctly by a Parselmouth, which I am not."

"Parselmouth?"

"Someone who can speak in Parseltongue Salazar Slytherin was a Parselmouth, which is why the mascot of Slytherin house is a serpent, and it is not a language that can be taught or learned; it must be passed down genetically."

Lily snorted scornfully. "Leave it to Slytherin to make a spell to ensure immortality that would eliminate Muggle-borns from the pool of eligibility."

Snape sighed. "Lily, that is not fair. The original Horcrux itself was an accident, and was not originally dark magic."

Lily frowned. "That doesn't make sense. What do you mean? How is it dark magic now, but it wasn't when Slytherin did it?"

"Slytherin didn't do it, his grandfather Ambrosius did. Ambrosius was conducting a lengthy and complicated experiment, and the experiment itself was interrupted by an invasion of the local Muggles, who had been stirred up by the local priest. Unbeknownst to anyone, he was actually a Muggle-born wizard, but had some fanatical attitude that his magic was 'holy' and that traditional wizards were 'evil'."

Lily gasped in sympathy.

"They succeeded in killing Ambrosius' mother-in-law, Hestia, but apparently when they tried to kill Slytherin's newborn son, Valerius, the infant's mother, Hermene, who had not yet delivered the afterbirth, leapt in front of her son, invoking abakantos, an ancient maternal protection, and ensuring the Muggles would not be able to harm him."

"You can cast such a spell?!" Lily demanded, incredulous.

"Me? Of course not!" Snape blinked at her, expression vacillating between astonished and offended. "I will admit that I apply myself at non-verbal and wandless magic, but that is not a spell I will ever be able to cast. It is a women's spell, and even you would not be able to cast it, unless you have already had a child."

"Really?"

Snape nodded solemnly. "And you can only cast it on your own child. The caveat being, of course, that you lose your own life, but . . . in some cases, that may be acceptable."

Lily pondered that for a minute, then nodded. "So, back to how the Horcrux was an accident?"

"Ambrosius arrived on the scene as his wife jumped in front of what was probably a Killing Curse cast at his child, sacrificing her own life in the process. In his rage he dispelled them, but the combination of the experiment he was conducting and his own revenge against the invaders created a completely accidental Horcrux. A piece of his soul was lodged in his wife's wand."

"And how did they find this out?" Lily asked.

"Years later, Ambrosius took his own life," Snape elaborated, scowling as if the very concept was repulsive to him. "However, since he had created this Horcrux, however accidentally, he returned some time later in apparently perfect health. Valerius, and later, Salazar, spent many years researching the issue with Ambrosius before they were finally able to determine what had happened."

"What did they do?"

"They destroyed the Horcrux, and then Ambrosius was able to die in peace and stay dead, which is what he'd wanted to begin with."

"How did he die?"

"Ambrosius? Salazar killed him, using Ambrosius' own wand, using the Killing Curse, which Ambrosius had learnt from the Muggle-born priest who had attempted to cast it at Valerius."

"He killed his own grandfather? How horrible!" Lily shrieked in shock.

Snape sighed. "Ambrosius was a broken man and had been since his wife had died. By all accounts, they were a loving and devoted couple. He had wanted to die when she did, but could not leave his infant son to fend for himself in an unfriendly world. Once Valerius was able to fend for himself, Ambrosius lost all purpose. Salazar took pity on the old man and did him a favour."

"How do you know all this? I thought your whole family had been sorted into Ravenclaw until you came along?"

"They were. There was a book in my great-grandfather's library. He was Headmaster of Hogwarts, you know, so he had access to materials not commonly in circulation, particularly about the Founders. I am not entirely sure how that particular story ended up in the collection, however, as it happened after Salazar left Hogwarts."

"So the Dementor, then . . . ?"

Snape flinched. "The Dementor . . . is the by-product of a failed attempt at creating a Horcrux, as I have said. Since the sole way to create a Horcrux is to split your soul, which you may only accomplish by killing another, they are thought to be searching for the missing pieces of themselves. This is why they feed on the souls and emotions of others." He paused for a long moment, unsure of how to continue, or indeed, if he even should, then continued slowly. "I believe . . . that there has been some reconstructionist history, as any text published within the last five hundred years or so specifically states it must be an act of pre-meditated murder to achieve the splitting of the soul necessary to create a Horcrux. However, this may be proactively discouraging in nature, as there is some evidence to indicate that it is simply the act of killing, even in self-defence, that splits the soul. Few wizards even so-called 'dark wizards' are willing to commit cold-blooded murder for any reason, including immortality. Granted, typically although not always, and certainly not in Ambrosius Slytherin's case the act of killing that accomplishes the soul-splitting is an act of murder. And it is in this spirit that the Dementor is created."

Lily gaped at him, face ashen. "Surely not so many people have tried to make themselves immortal that there are enough Dementors to guard Azkaban!" she whispered hoarsely. It wasn't a statement, though; it was a question.

He closed his eyes, and at first, wouldn't meet her eyes. His chin propped in his hand, he ran a long finger over his thin lips. "No," he finally answered softly. "But hate begets hate . . . and they have apparently figured out how to breed."

"URCK!" Lily yelled, hands flailing slightly as if to shake off a spider's web.

"It may only be a certain strain of Dementor that is breeding, though."

"Strain?" Lily yelled. "There are 'strains'?!"

"Depending on how badly the attempt goes, it is possible to end up with the soul entirely outside the body which may result in the Dementors that started the breeding."

"And the body then has no soul?"

Snape shook his head.

"So . . . the body dies? Right?" Lily sounded desperate.

Snape shook his head again. "Not always." He took a deep breath. "Sometimes, there is the breeding Dementor . . . and an Inferius. Although, that is not the only way to create an Inferius."

"I have the feeling I will regret asking this," Lily opined, swallowing hard. "But what the devil is an Inferius?"

Snape paused for a long, tense moment, then continued slowly. "An Inferius . . . is a corpse that has been reanimated to do a dark wizard's bidding. Typically, when the Inferius is created, it does the bidding of the wizard that animated it. However, in the case of an Inferius that is created by a failed Horcrux attempt, it takes a great deal more to control them, since the wizard that created the Inferius in question now has separated body and soul, and cannot control either segment. It takes an exceptionally powerful wizard to control one of those at all, and they usually have to be burnt, more or less 'alive', although, as they are apparently lacking in any sentience, it is somewhat unlikely that they know the difference. It has been said that witnessing such an event is traumatic, however, because they scream quite convincingly. Salazar Slytherin cremated his grandfather's body to prevent just such an occurrence."

"That's disgusting, Severus! Why on earth would you want to KNOW about such things?" she said, her nose wrinkled with distaste.

"You have heard the phrase 'any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic'?" he asked, then continued when she nodded. "One of the things I have learned, Lily, is that if you do not learn about something, then you cannot control it. And if you cannot control something, then someone else can use it to control you. It is, after all, what the Ministry is doing, even as we speak."