

Reincantation

by Alison

Could Harry Potter and Severus Snape ever become friends? Never in a million years?

Complete short story

Chapter 1 of 1

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By Alison Venugoban

Harry Potter lay on the ground, too winded to move. He felt disoriented; had he lost consciousness for a moment?

Without opening his eyes, he tried to gather his wits, thinking back to his last clear memory: dueling Voldemort at Godric's Hollow. The area was a graveyard now, but it was somehow fitting that the final battle be fought out here for Harry, the war had started here. It was appropriate to have it end here as well.

For he knew now that it had been the final battle. He remembered Voldemort towering above him, the light of victory in his red eyes, his wand raised like a sword and the words of the killing curse coming from his mouth. A poisonous green light striking Harry full in the chest...

But...that meant he was dead, didn't it? Harry opened his eyes. He was no longer lying on the trodden grass of the graveyard. Instead, his fingers were dug into gritty sand. There was a dull rumble of thunder in the sky above. An odd orange light suffused the atmosphere.

Slowly, painfully, Harry pushed himself into a sitting position in the sand. He was no longer at Godric's Hollow. In fact, he wasn't even sure he was still in this world. The eerie light came from a huge, bloated red sun whose bottom edge nearly touched the horizon. The plain of sand stretched to that horizon, featureless apart from a few jagged stones that cast long black shadows behind them. Lightning writhed in the roiling purple clouds above, and the thunder continued low and rumbling like a dog's warning growl.

Shading his eyes against the light of that horrible sun, trying to work out where on earth he was, Harry stood unsteadily.

"Mr. Potter. Back with us again."

Harry spun around, his hand searching for but not finding his wand. He knew that hateful voice.

Severus Snape sat idly on a large rock. Behind him rose a sheer wall, a mountain, its summit lost in the purple clouds overhead. Harry's hands dropped to his side.

"So. Snape," Harry said quietly. "Well, at least I know where I am now. This is Hell, I presume."

Snape sneered. "I keep hoping for a change in your reaction. Just once. It would be so refreshing. But no, every time you come out with the same arrogant assumption." Then he sighed, the attitude fading abruptly into weariness. "But I'm as bad. We've dug a rut so deep there's no way to climb out of it. I wish you were right, Potter. I suspect Hell would be a sight more pleasant than here. No, I call this place Limbo. We're not dead, you see. But we're not properly alive either..."

"I remember killing you one month ago, Snape," Harry snapped. "So if I'm talking to you now, I must be dead as well."

Snape just shrugged. "Think what you will, Potter. Why should I care anymore?"

Harry stared at him. The last time he'd seen this man, he'd been dead and empty-eyed, a victim of Harry's killing curse. Yet here he was, as real and solid-looking as ever. Harry tried to force down the incipient feeling of panic that was threatening to overwhelm him. He concentrated on what Snape had said.

"So," Harry stated slowly. "We're in Limbo. Not dead, but not alive. Would you care to explain?"

Snape sighed. "I always do," he answered quietly. "We've defeated Voldemort. It was a scheme of Dumbledore's, invoking ancient magic, magic which demanded a triple-fold sacrifice in order to work. He called it the Reincantation. Dumbledore was the first to sacrifice himself..."

"You murdered him, you mean!" Harry flared, taking a step forward, his fists clenched.

Snape didn't move, merely regarded him with one eyebrow slightly raised, his arms crossed nonchalantly. "You've already killed me once, Potter. If repeating the action would make you feel any better, please feel free to go ahead. As I said, I'd welcome a change. Although I don't believe death can happen here. Merlin knows I've tried often enough to kill myself. Nothing works, I always wake up in one piece afterwards, more's the pity."

Harry let out his breath slowly, forcing his hands to unclench. Snape appeared to be his only source of information for now. He nodded. "Go on."

Snape sneered at him. "Thank you so much for your kind permission," he said sarcastically. "Yes, I killed Dumbledore. It was his idea. He explained to me that we could never hope to kill the Dark Lord. He was just too powerful; he'd dabbled in too much Dark Magic to ever be physically destroyed. But we could ... trap him, as it were."

"What do you mean?"

"In a time loop. The spell as Dumbledore explained it to me would call for three sacrifices, as I've said." Snape's face twisted into an unpleasant expression. "He told me that if I did this, my physical death would not be permanent. I would be reborn after my sacrifice, and the Dark Lord would be unable to harm anybody ever again. But in essence, he lied. For you and I, Potter, are Voldemort's jailers. And that means we get to share his prison."

Harry stared about warily. "Are you saying Voldemort's somewhere here?"

Snape sighed. "The Reincantation spell, Potter! Use your ears, put your brain into gear and listen for once, boy! During your sixth year at Hogwarts, did you never notice Dumbledore's hand?"

"Yes, of course! He'd injured it destroying one of Voldemort's horcruxes."

"That's what he told you. In reality, he was expending all of his magical energy in creating this spell, this loop in time. That's what was killing him; Dark Magic of that sort demands a high price! And then, when the time came, I completed my part of the spell by sacrificing him at his request. Then your killing me one year later led to the spell becoming ready, the trap being set, as it were. Only I wasn't dead, not technically. I was here, waiting. And finally, Voldemort killed you, or thought he had. That sprung the trap. The third sacrifice had been made, the time loop closed, and the Dark Lord is trapped in a loop of time eighteen years long."

Harry drew a deep breath, controlling his renewed stab of anger and fear. "All right. So what happens now? Voldemort is trapped. Can he possibly break free?"

Snape's black eyes glittered in the lurid light. "Not a hope. You see, he doesn't know he's there. When he killed you, he got flung right back to eighteen years in the past, to the time when he first attempted to kill you as a baby in Godric's Hollow. He relives that time again and again, never knowing that it's the same. That's how the spell works. It's an Ouroborus, a snake swallowing its own tail. Those eighteen years are outside of time now, they're looped endlessly." Snape smiled bitterly. "And you and I, Potter, are caught in the same loop of time. We relive the eighteen years from the time your parents were murdered, up to now. Over and over and bloody over again." He ran a hand through his greasy hair in frustration. "And I can't do a bloody thing to change it, for change is impossible once the spell has been activated. Only here, in Limbo, in the one month while I wait for your arrival, can I remember the plan in its entirety and change anything. Look around you Potter," and he gestured expansively at the flat desert landscape, devoid of tree or plant or animal life. His voice was sarcastic. "You can see I have a lot of scope for amusement. So I tidy up the place before you get here. Dust a little, you know, put fresh sheets on the beds..."

Harry licked his dry lips. "What... what happens to the others?" he whispered. "Ron, Hermione, Ginny? All those who died fighting Voldemort?"

"They're the lucky ones. Not being part of the spell, they only die once. When the loop restarts, they feel real, but they are merely echoes, like memories in a Pensieve. There are only three "real" people in our little time-loop, Potter. You, myself, and the Dark Lord."

"But... but you said... Dumbledore sacrificed himself...?"

Snape shrugged. "I have the sneaking suspicion that he knew what would happen to us once the loop activated. I believe he let himself be killed and passed away like any other wizard. Or perhaps I'm doing him an injustice. Maybe he's just on another part of Limbo, maybe just over the horizon. I searched for him early on, I admit, but never found any sign of him. No, it's always just been you and I here, Potter, at the tail-end of the time-loop. In a short time, we'll lose consciousness, and the eighteen years will start all over again..."

"We don't remember... anything?" Harry whispered.

"I've noticed, over the years, a faint feeling of déjà vu," Snape answered. "A weariness, perhaps. So much for immortality. What good is it when you wish only for death, for freedom? I find I don't need to eat here, or drink. I've tried throwing myself off the high peaks; I've made ropes from my robes and attempted to hang myself. Always, the magic in this place keeps me alive, and I come back to consciousness unharmed, in this spot, waiting for your arrival." He sighed tiredly, then turned and indicated the cliff face behind him. "See here?"

Hesitantly, Harry moved forward. Carved into the cliff face was a small number "18". The whole of the rock, stretching away on each side, as far as he could see, had the same number carved into its face.

Snape reached down and touched one of the 18s at the base of the cliff. "I carve a new one in the cliff," he said musingly, "at the end of each eighteen year cycle. I can control the magic here to a certain extent."

Running a hand over the smooth expanse of the cliff-face, he found a spot without a carving. He reached out with his index finger, and without actually touching the rock, began to trace. A tiny arc, like a spark of electricity, burnt a notch into the rock, deepened it, and within a minute another figure 18 had been added to the myriad.

Harry felt the hairs rise on the back of his neck. He stared wildly up. No, surely that was some trick of the light? The whole mountainside was NOT covered in pockmarked glyphs. It couldn't be...

He turned to find Snape watching him. For once, the man's face did not wear its familiar sneer. Now, his dark eyes almost seemed to hold ... sympathy.

"How long?" Harry whispered in terror. "How long have we been coming here? How many years?"

Snape nodded. "I'll show you," he said quietly. "Take my arm. I can levitate two."

Harry awkwardly gripped his arm, feeling absurdly as if he were an under-age wizard about to use Side-Along-Apparition with an adult.

Slowly they rose, gaining in speed as they gained in height. The mountain rose up and up, and crawling along its flanks was the number 18, repeated over and over, crowding together like ants climbing an anthill.

"The first time I carved that number," Snape said conversationally, "the rock was only as tall as me. It grew when I ran out of space, you see. But I suppose there's an upper limit to size, even here."

They were nearing the summit now, and the 18s continued in their awful, appalling regularity.

"The funny thing is," Snape said grimly, as they began to slow down, "I don't think there's any need for this spell anymore. The human race left the earth a long time ago. The Dark Lord would be no threat now, if he were freed. Humanity could most likely look after itself now."

"They ... left?" Harry felt as if his insides were freezing. "Why?"

Snape glanced at him. "I watched them leave, a long time ago, in their starships. They had to flee, you see, before a greater danger than the Dark Lord ever posed." Slowly, they pirouetted in mid-air, until they were facing the great bloated red sun, still sitting just above the horizon. "That's our sun," he explained. "It's coming to the end of its life. It became a red giant and swallowed up the earth... some time ago."

"Professor," Harry pleaded now, for the moment forgetting himself and returning to the childhood title, "please, please tell me we haven't been coming here that long?"

They turned again in mid-air, to face the mountain. They were well above the summit now.

"I'm sorry, Harry," Snape said, in an oddly gentle voice, "but I'm afraid we have been."

Harry stared in horror. The mountain was covered in symbols. But it was more than that. For the mountain was just the first of many. A huge range of mountains spread out behind this one, stretching away to the far horizon and each and every one of them was covered with tiny, ancient carvings of the number 18.

"NO!" Harry was screaming, now, as the full terror of it hit him. White fog obscured his senses ... big, blurred shapes were moving around him ... and then came a new voice, a man's voice, shouting, panicking

"Lily, take Harry and go! It's him! Go! Run! I'll hold him off "

The sounds of someone stumbling from a room a door bursting open a cackle of high-pitched laughter

The End

Author's note: If you liked this story, please have a read of my original story "Love Inhuman" at this link:

<http://www.thepetulantpoetess.com/viewstory.php?sid=11932>

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