

The Train

by sylvanawood

Eleven-year-old Severus Snape learns how to make friends and enemies on his first train ride to Hogwarts.

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Nothing you recognize belongs to me. Just borrowed. Will be returned. Snape is welcome to stay, though.

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The young boy sat alone in a compartment of the Hogwarts Express and stared out of the window. Platform 9 3/4 hummed with life: children, parents, familiars -- everyone was milling around in bouts of last-minute activities. The whole scene reminded the boy more of a swarm of insects than of people.

"I wonder if I can zap them as easily as Mother zaps flies," he mused, only to reprimand himself immediately for those thoughts. He knew that people could be killed with the wave of a wand and a spell. And he knew that this was bad; this was Dark Magic. When people were dead, they stayed dead; not like the figures on his chessboard that could be sacrificed and revived over and over again. His great uncle Caradoc had told him that when he had caught him, as he did so often, reading forbidden books about the Dark Arts from his library.

"Killing is easy, boy," his uncle had explained, "and the Dark Arts will teach you many things, but you cannot bring people back from the dead. Use it, but don't let it use you. And steer clear of dark overlords, unless you want to be caught in one of their never-ending skirmishes and rivalries." He wagged his finger at him. "Our folk are better off without that lot. Salvage what they leave behind when they kill each other, sell them what they want, take their money, but don't let them run your life. Pay attention at Hogwarts and then come and work in our shop, if you like. I have no children, and you could do well with that clever head on your shoulders. How does that sound, little half-blood prince?"

The boy sighed. "Half-blood prince." His uncle always called him that; he just couldn't bring himself to call the boy by his first name, Severus. It had to do with his Muggle father, of course, and his mother's refusal to leave that "disgraceful marriage" and get joined up with a reputable wizarding family. His uncle had to remind everybody of that fact constantly. He couldn't forgive Severus' mother for stubbornly going against everything her family believed in and blatantly dismissing the values old pureblood families held so dear. Severus found it unfair that he should be the one to be singled out when his mother was to blame, but his uncle would be quick to point out that life wasn't fair in general.

"You are too young to understand," his mother always said when he asked why she had married his father despite the opposition of her family. Severus thought that she could at least have tried to explain it to him, but she only smiled when he complained. He didn't think that his parents had a very happy marriage, or what other people, like his great uncle or his gran, called a happy marriage. His father was shouting in anger far too often, and his mother either appeared intimidated or yelled back furiously. At those times, he was afraid of his parents.

"Why don't you hex him when he is like that?" he had asked her once. She had laughed between tears and explained that it wasn't a good idea to hex your husband if you wanted to keep the marriage intact. "You will understand that when you live with someone yourself," she had said. He wondered if that would ever happen, if anyone, apart from his parents, would ever want to live with him. Severus knew one thing though: he never wanted to have a relationship like that of his parents.

He leaned back in his seat. The hustle on the platform abated as a few last-minute good-byes were exchanged, trunks were moved onto the train, and forgotten familiars were handed through windows. It was almost 11 o'clock; the train would depart soon.

A rustling sound woke him from his reverie. The door to the compartment slid open and a grey-haired man looked inside. "Are these seats taken?" he asked.

Severus shook his head.

The man led a boy into the compartment. "There is plenty of space here, James, and this young man here looks like he is starting at Hogwarts, too. Isn't that right?" He smiled at Severus, who nodded. "Let's get your trunk up; then I'll have to leave," the man said to the boy and moved the trunk to the luggage rack with a wave of his wand.

While he was levitating the trunk, the door opened again, and two boys looked inside. "Is there room for two more?" one of them asked.

"The more, the merrier," the man said and helped the two boys with their trunks. "I have to go now, James." He patted the first boy on the shoulder.

James smiled and gave the man a brief hug. "Good-bye, Father." With a friendly nod to the other boys, the man left.

Finally, the train started moving and everybody settled down. Severus studied the newcomers curiously. These were young wizards his age. He hadn't had much opportunity to meet other children from wizarding families in the past, since his own family lived in a Muggle neighbourhood, where his father worked, and visits to his wizarding relatives were few and far between. Besides, his parents liked to keep to themselves; they had escorted Severus to the train station so early, because they wanted to avoid the crowd.

His thoughts returned to the present. These three boys here looked like ordinary eleven-year-olds to him; merely from looking at them, he couldn't have said that they were wizards.

"I'm James Potter," the first boy said. He was a thin boy with unruly black hair, a winning smile, and mischievous brown eyes behind glasses.

"Sirius Black," one of the other newcomers introduced himself. He was a tall boy with shiny black hair, gray eyes, and a handsome, aristocratic face that held a bored expression.

"Peter Pettigrew," the third boy said, slightly out of breath. He had a round, friendly face with a pasty complexion, watery bluish-grey eyes, and oddly colourless hair. Severus couldn't decide whether it was blond, light brown, or gray. Except for being a bit chubby, Peter lacked true distinguishing features.

Three pairs of eyes turned to Severus. "Severus Snape," he said.

Severus shrank back in his seat when the three boys studied him critically, making him painfully aware of his faded, ill-fitting, second-hand clothes that contrasted sharply with the new and fashionable jeans and sweatshirts they were wearing. He was expecting the taunts to start soon. He had never been the type of child other people crooned over. No one ever called him pretty or handsome with his pale, thin face, sharp, critical black eyes, and large hooked nose. When he grew older, the other children in his neighbourhood had started to call him ugly and weird, and either avoided him or pushed him around.

His mother had explained to him that what those children called "weird" was his emerging magic and it was perfectly normal, but they didn't know that, and he wasn't allowed to tell. He had to put up with the mocking and the bullying and wasn't very good at fighting back; he had always been somewhat sickly and weak, too thin and small for his age.

When he learned about Severus' problems, his father had sneered, "Be glad that you inherited my ugly mug, son. That will scare most of them away. When you're older, I'll teach you a few tricks about fighting."

Severus didn't want to wait that long, and so he had started to copy out hexes and curses whenever he could get into his uncle Caradoc's library. And when his mother wasn't paying attention, he "borrowed" her wand and practised those spells. He knew that he couldn't get back at his tormentors without a wand of his own, but he could at least daydream about hexing them into next Tuesday.

The boys here, however, weren't his old enemies. They were wizards, like himself, and instead of the half-expected mockery, the round-faced boy, Peter, asked, "Do any of you play Quidditch?" and that started an animated conversation.

Severus was mostly quiet, watching and listening. The two black-haired boys, James and Sirius, seemed to have taken an immediate liking to each other. They both supported Puddlemere United and were happily discussing players and tactics. Severus learned that James' father had bought him a new Comet 200, that James was keen to get on his house Quidditch team as soon as possible, and that his family was rich. Sirius asked questions and James answered, while Peter was making excited comments and marveling at everything James said.

"Do you play Quidditch, Severus?" James asked suddenly and once again Severus was subject to the curious stares of three pairs of eyes.

"N...no," he stuttered. "I never had a broom. I like the Montrose Magpies and would really like to learn to play." When he saw that the other boys looked unimpressed, he hastily added, "I'm pretty good at Gobstones, though."

"Gobstones?" James snorted, but tried to suppress his laughter. Sirius grinned and Peter looked at Severus wide-eyed, mouth open.

Severus frowned. He didn't get the joke. He decided to keep his mouth shut and wait; perhaps there would be an explanation later.

He didn't need to wait long. James tried to calm himself, but each time he looked up at a grinning Sirius, he had another laughing attack; the suppressed laughter was shaking his whole frame. Peter had started to snicker tentatively whenever he saw James succumb to another fit of the giggles.

Severus couldn't take it any longer. "What's so funny?" he asked with a scowl.

"You are... trying to impress us with Gobstones! That's what's funny," James gasped. "You can't compare a game like that to Quidditch. Quidditch is the sport of warlocks."

"And Gobstones is the sport of warhogs!" Sirius quipped and James almost choked. Peter shrieked as if he had never heard anything funnier in his life.

Severus glared at them. "My mother was captain of the Hogwarts Gobstones team. She even went to inter-school competitions," he said defiantly.

"Why, really?" James chuckled. "Did she win the Gobstones Cup, too?" He collapsed in another fit of laughter.

Severus ground his teeth. He felt a dark wave of anger rising up from deep within him. He secretly grabbed his wand that was hidden in his pocket and yelled, "Don't you dare make fun of my mother!"

Sirius scowled at him. "Or what?"

"You'll see!" Severus growled in as threatening a manner as he could manage.

"Oh, come on, be cool, I didn't mean to insult your mum," James said, calm again. He looked Severus up and down and added, "I'll ask Father to send you my old broom."

You could practice with that at home."

"I don't need your bloody old broom," Severus yelled. "My mum and dad can get me my own stuff."

"Doesn't much look like it, does it?" Sirius sneered, pointing to Severus' clothes.

"Yeah," James added, "doesn't look like your folks could afford it. With your looks, one would think you'd come right out of Knockturn Alley. My father says that only Dark wizards, drinkers, and other riffraff live there."

The anger in Severus had evolved into a rage that roared in his ears and blinded his vision. "Stop that right now," he screeched, whipped out his wand, and jumped up from his seat, "or I..."

"Ooooh..." James sneered and stood up, too. "Will you poke my eyes out with that wand? Or maybe you secretly practiced hexes, did you? Squeeze stinksap on me like your Gobstones?" He started to snigger again.

"No, much better," Severus said, suddenly very calm. He muttered a spell under his breath and slashed at the air. A white-hot, whiplike something hit James across the face and he was slammed backwards into his seat. James screamed in pain and fury. Sirius jumped up from his seat and grabbed Severus' arms. Peter stood paralyzed, a shocked expression on his face.

"What was...? That's... that was a Dark spell," James shrieked. "You freak! Get away from me. Get out of here. I hate Dark Magic!"

Sirius glanced at James thoughtfully and then pushed Severus towards the door. "Get out," he said quietly, "and don't come back."

"Why should I get out?" Severus howled, struggling against Sirius' grip. "I was here first. You get out if you don't like the company!" With this, he had wriggled free and raised his wand again.

"Oh no, you don't!" James yelled and came to Sirius' aid. He grabbed Severus' arms, and Sirius raised his fist and punched Severus on the nose.

Severus' vision turned red. Not from rage this time, but from pain. He held his face and doubled over, only to be grabbed again by Sirius and pushed out of the compartment. James and Peter had taken his trunk out of the luggage rack and they threw it so violently after him that it hit his shins. His back slammed against the wall of the corridor and he slowly slid to the floor. Before the door closed, he heard Peter say, "That was a fabulous punch, Sirius! Where did you learn to fight like that?"

Severus sniffled. His nose hurt and was bleeding; his pride hurt even more. He knew that his family was poor, but no one had ever shoved it in his face like that before. His parents were struggling so hard to send him to school... and that rich, arrogant git was just offering him his old toys... and then he couldn't even fight back for himself, the coward? Severus was certain that he could have dealt with either James or Sirius alone. Why did they have to go against him together? He hated them. This wasn't fair. He would pay them back.

The tears were falling in earnest now and his nose wouldn't stop bleeding. He pressed a handkerchief to his face and leaned his head back, when he heard a girl's voice say, "What happened to you, why are you crying?"

Two bright green eyes looked at him inquisitively. They belonged to a young girl about his age with a pleasant face and a mane of red hair.

"Never mind," Severus sniffed. "My nose started bleeding, but it has stopped now."

"Good," the girl said. "Let me see, I'll help you clean up." She got out her own handkerchief and spit on it. "Oh, don't fuss," she chided when he flinched away. "That's just spittle, not poison." She rubbed his face with the moist cloth. "How did that happen, did you fall?"

"No ...," Severus hesitated. Should he tell her what happened? Would she laugh, too? "I was in a fight. I hexed a boy because he insulted my family, and another boy hit me on the nose. They threw me out of the compartment together."

"You hexed him?" the girl said, her eyes shining. "Aren't you a first-year like me?" When Severus confirmed this, she asked him in an excited voice, "Did your parents teach you those spells? What spell did you use? How does it feel to use the magic, to control it?"

Severus was surprised. He had expected disdain or berating, but certainly not this excited interest. "It feels good. I don't quite know how to explain it. It's like... like something was missing and all of a sudden it's there." He looked slightly embarrassed. "How can you not know?" he asked. "Didn't you try anything yourself?"

"I'm the only witch in my family. I was told that we aren't allowed to use magic outside of school," she said, fascinated by his answer. "We had no idea about all this before I got my Hogwarts letter and Professor McGonagall visited us. But as soon as I got my wand, I tried a few spells from the schoolbooks." She spoke very fast now. "All I produced were a few sparks, but I read all about it. And I'm Lily Evans, by the way. Who are you?"

"Severus Snape," he replied, grinning shyly at her. "This wasn't a spell from the schoolbooks; this was something I read about in my uncle's library. I didn't know that it was quite so powerful, though. The boy I hexed was in quite a bit of pain."

"Oh--" she said. "Maybe you should go apologise then?"

"Maybe," Severus said and grimaced, "but he made fun of my mother, they laughed about me, and then they went against me together. I think they should apologise, not me."

Lily shrugged. "All right, just use a weaker spell next time. Something like a permanent itch, perhaps."

Severus chuckled, "I've read about a tickling hex. And something like a Jelly-Legs Jinx. I wonder if they'll teach us that."

"If it's in the books, they'll teach it, I suppose," Lily replied. "Maybe in Charms. But the other kids would learn them, too. We would need something different, something like bogeys flying out of someone's nose."

"Ewww..." Severus smirked. "Or something that makes their toenails grow fast and long. But I don't think spells like that exist. At least there aren't any like that *courses and Countercourses*. We'd have to make them up, I think. That's possible, you know. I read all about it in *Magical Theory*," he said importantly.

Lily giggled. "I read that, too. Yes, we could invent spells like that, with a lot of practise. Just let those boys come and try to hit you," she looked at him affectionately.

"He just shouldn't have made fun of my family..." Severus eyes were tearing up again. He wiped his eyes when he heard the door of the compartment open.

"You're still here?" Sirius had come out of the compartment and scowled threateningly at Severus. "Didn't I tell you to go away?" He paused and took a closer look at Severus. "Oh look, little Sevviekins has been crying for his mummy!"

James, who had followed behind, chuckled. "And look at his big nose, how he's snivelling. You know, instead of Severus, you should be called Snivellus." Sirius laughed. Peter, who was behind James, snickered hysterically.

Severus moved to stand up and once again grabbed his wand, but Sirius pushed him back against the wall. James closed in from the other side and Peter clenched his fists threateningly when Lily stepped between them.

"Leave him alone," she yelled. "Why aren't you ashamed of yourselves, attacking him three against one?"

But before one of the boys could say anything, a new voice rang out, "What's going on here?"

A tall, blond boy of perhaps 15 or 16 years of age scrutinised them critically. He was wearing dark school robes with a shiny badge on his chest. "Having a fight on your first day, are you? Not even sorted yet and you're losing your houses points already," he sneered.

"Says who?" Sirius asked, unabashed.

"Says Lucius Malfoy," the boy replied haughtily. "I'm a prefect, and I can take house points. Who is responsible for this?"

Severus pointed at James, "He insulted my family. Then I hexed him. Then one of them held me, the other one punched my nose."

James looked at him in disgust. "Fast to put the blame on others, aren't you, sneak? That was a Dark spell, it was," he said. "I know about Dark spells. I hate Dark Magic."

"Ah, so much righteous indignation!" Lucius looked intrigued. "Who are you?"

"James Potter," James replied, scowling at Lucius.

"Potter? I've heard that name... Old family, I suppose?"

"Yeah, but it's more likely that you know the name because my father is a war hero. He fought at Dumbledore's side against Grindelwald." James proudly puffed his chest out.

"I see," said Lucius. "Well, Potter, if you want to maintain your goody-two-shoes reputation, you shouldn't let yourself be caught in fights." He smirked. "And you, who are you?" he asked Sirius.

"Sirius Black," Sirius mumbled.

"Ah-- the noble and ancient house of Black," Lucius said, impressed. "Good old name, that. I know two members of your family, Bellatrix and Narcissa Black. Your cousins, I presume?"

Sirius nodded.

"Very handsome girls, both of them. Narcissa is in fourth year. She should be somewhere on the train here." Lucius stared at Sirius thoughtfully. "I think you are in the wrong company, boy. You will likely be sorted into Slytherin, my own house, just like your cousins. Come with me and I will introduce you to some people who can be useful as friends."

"I don't want to be sorted into Slytherin and I think I can choose my own friends," Sirius grumbled with a sideward glance at James.

"Is that so?" Lucius drawled. "Well, well, each to their own then. And now you better go back to your seats. I shall refrain from taking points this time, but I don't want to see you lot in a fight again anytime soon, is that clear?" With that he shoed them back into the compartment.

When the door closed behind the three boys, he looked at Severus again. "So you are familiar with Dark Magic already, boy? That's rather unusual. Who are you?"

"Severus Snape," Severus replied, looking at the blond boy in awe. He was impressed at with how little effort Lucius had put those arrogant gits in their place.

"Snape? I've never heard that name. Is your family British?" Lucius asked.

"My father is a Muggle," Severus explained, "but my mother is a witch, she's a Prince."

"A Half-blood, then," Lucius frowned. "Well, that can happen to the best of us. We even have some in Slytherin. Nothing some good networking and friends in the right places couldn't remedy. My Head of House could be helpful in that regard. It just isn't something you should tell anyone on first acquaintance." He looked thoughtful. "The name Prince does sound familiar. Isn't there a connection to Borgin and Burkes?"

"Yes, my grandmother Prince is the sister of Caradoc Burke. Their father is Caractacus Burke, the founder of the store. He's retired. Uncle Caradoc now runs the store together with Mr. Borgin."

"I see. Good old wizarding stock, that. My father does business with them." He looked Severus up and down again. "You would do well in my own house. Come with me, Severus, I will introduce you to a few people who are less prejudiced against... experimental magic than that lot." He tilted his head towards the compartment and winked. Severus smiled gratefully.

"If he goes to Slytherin, I want to go there, too," Lily chimed in. "Severus is my friend."

Severus grinned at her and Lucius looked amused. "And who are you?"

"I'm Lily Evans, but you wouldn't have heard the name since my parents are both Muggles. And I don't know about all those family connections either." She looked questioningly at Severus who merely shrugged. His mother had made him recite his family ties as soon as he started to talk, much to his father's annoyance.

Lucius frowned. "A Muggle-born. I see. Well, you better look for other friends, then. It is unlikely that you will be sorted into Slytherin."

"That's not for you to decide," Lily said defiantly. "That's the Sorting Hat's job. I've read all about that in *Hogwarts, A History*." She winked at Severus who grinned even more broadly.

"That's correct, the Sorting Hat will decide which house will suit you best." Lucius smirked at her. "However, as you undoubtedly read in *Hogwarts, a History*, too, no Muggle-born was ever sorted into Slytherin, so I very much doubt you will be the first." He turned his back to her dismissively and walked away, beckoning to Severus to follow him.

Lily scowled and watched them walk away.

When the train arrived at its destination, it was already dark. Severus was a bit scared when all the first-years gathered round a giant of a man, although the man seemed friendly enough. The ride over a huge, dark lake in small boats was creepy, even though Severus didn't believe the rumours, which had spread quickly around the first-years, about human sacrifice to a giant squid. Someone shrieked that he had seen tentacles, but Severus was convinced that that was merely an overactive imagination.

No sound could be heard when the impressive silhouette of a fully illuminated Hogwarts Castle appeared through the mist. Awed, the children filed out of the boats and into the castle, where a stern looking witch with rectangular glasses greeted them. She introduced herself as Professor McGonagall and gave them a little speech about the different houses and what was expected of new students. Then she left them until the Sorting Ceremony would begin.

Severus looked around and saw Lily close by. She saw him, too, and ran towards him. "I can't wait to see the enchanted ceiling of the Great Hall," she said. Severus nodded. "And I really hope we get sorted into the same house. I want to be your friend," she smiled shyly.

Severus smiled back. He would like to have her as a friend. She seemed so much like him: the same excitement about magic, the same love for books, and the same ideas about how to hex one's enemies. "I want to be your friend, too," he said.

The loud creaking of a side door being opened interrupted them. A woman in a nurse's uniform led a young boy through the door and sent him to join the other children, close to where Lily and Severus stood. He was an ordinary looking boy with brown hair that flopped in his eyes, but there was an odd, tired wariness about him. Severus couldn't quite put his finger on it, but his curiosity was peaked.

"Why weren't you on the train with the rest of us?" Lily asked curiously.

"I just recovered from a nasty disease," the boy replied. "Headmaster Dumbledore insisted that I see the school nurse before I would be allowed to meet the rest of you." He smiled shyly.

"What kind of disease?" Severus asked.

"Err... spattergroit, a rather severe case," the boy said, looking at Severus wide-eyed.

"Uh... and how did you get here?" Severus continued. He had no idea why, but he could have sworn that the boy was lying.

"Better stay away from that one," the unwelcome voice of James Potter cut Severus' questioning short. "He'll hex you before you know it. Isn't that right, Snivellus?"

Severus glared at him, but before he could retaliate, Professor McGonagall had returned and led all the first-years into the Great Hall. They walked past the four house tables towards the end of the room where the teachers were sitting. Standing in front of the staff table was a stool with a shabby old hat, and the children were queuing up in front of it.

An expectant silence settled over the Great Hall. The Sorting Hat opened a slit just above its rim and burst into song. It sang about the four houses, about what made each house special, and at the end, it was rewarded with polite applause. Then the Sorting began in earnest.

Professor McGonagall called each student by name. They then sat on the stool and put on the hat, which determined the house that would suit them best and announced it to the rest of the school.

"Black, Sirius," caught Severus' attention. It took the hat a long time to decide where to put Sirius, but it finally proclaimed, "Gryffindor!" Now Severus knew where he didn't want to go.

When "Evans, Lily" was called, Severus crossed his fingers and hoped, but the hat didn't take long to decide on "Gryffindor!"

"Lupin, Remus," was the boy who had been sick and wasn't on the train. He was also sorted into Gryffindor. So were "Pettigrew, Peter," and "Potter, James."

"I wonder how Lily will get along with that lot," Severus thought. He hoped fervently that he would be sorted into a different house, even if that meant it would be more difficult to maintain a friendship with Lily. But when it was finally his turn, he looked over to the Gryffindor table and saw James Potter staring at him with a worried look on his face. Maybe being sorted into Gryffindor wouldn't be so bad, after all. He could hex Potter and his cronies all the time and would even have an ally. Severus' eyes started to gleam maliciously, and he winked at James, who looked horrified.

"Revenge isn't a good reason to be sorted into a house, you know," the hat said as soon as it sank down over his head. "You do have enough courage for Gryffindor, though. You also have a clever brain, a thirst for knowledge," the hat continued. "and there is loyalty. Fierce loyalty for those you accept as friends. Quite a bit of cunning, too. As a matter of fact, you could do well in each of the houses." The hat paused. "Maybe Gryffindor wouldn't be a bad choice after all. It could bring out the best in you. Courage and cunning, intelligence and loyalty: you could ground any hot-head of a hero. You could be the one who pulls the strings behind the scenes; an excellent advisor to any leader. Just like Merlin!"

"But I don't want to kiss any leader's boots," Severus thought fiercely. "I want to be the one in charge. I want to be the best!"

"No lack of ambition either," the hat chuckled. "Well, in that case, it can only be Slytherin!"

With a satisfied smirk, Severus joined the Slytherins at their table. They were applauding, some shook his hand, and others patted him on his shoulders. Lucius Malfoy winked at him and smiled.

When the Sorting Ceremony and the Welcoming Feast had ended, all the first-years gathered around their house prefects to be led to their new dormitories. Before they left the Great Hall, Lily ran over to Severus. "We still can be friends, you know. There's no rule against it, I asked around," she whispered. "Gryffindors and Slytherins don't get along very well, though," she added sadly.

Severus smiled at her. "Then we'll just have to be the first who do."

The End.